

Boblett, Benjamin Photographs of John Jackson

Benjamin Boblett Photographs of John Jackson
1975-1976

Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MSS 16873

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/1737

Unit Date

1975-1976

Unit Date

circa 1983

Mixed Materials

Archival Oversized Box L 5 (Flat_Box)

Container

1 (Oversize_Folder(Within_an_OSBox))

Language

English

Creator

Boblett, Benjamin, M.D.

Extent

.13 Cubic Feet 1 oversized folder

Condition Description

Good

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Benjamin Boblett Photographs of John Jackson was gifted from Benjamin Boblett and accepted by Krystal Appiah on September 07, 2023. It was accessioned by the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library on December 14, 2023.

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Biographical / Historical

Blues artist, songster, and storyteller, John Jackson (February 25, 1924 – January 20, 2002) was the most important black Appalachian musician to come to broad public attention during the mid-1960s. He was born on February 25, 1924, the seventh of fourteen children, in Rappahannock County, VA. His father and mother were tenant farmers, whose children grew up helping out with the farming, cutting timber, herding cows, and doing whatever was needed to support their family.

Jackson's parents and siblings all played some combinations of guitar, banjo, ukulele, mandolin, harmonica, accordion, autoharp, and even homemade penny whistles. Jackson's father was well known in the area and traveled around the county to parties and dances, playing the blues, old mountain songs, and other regional music. His mother played and sang spiritual songs.

Jackson began playing his father's guitar when he was four. He learned how to play from his father, by watching the other musicians he saw performing at local gatherings, and from a man known as Happy, in a month-long series of guitar lessons. Jackson's older sister purchased a guitar for him when he was nine years old. He also learned from phonograph records. He was fond of the music of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Jimmie Rodgers, and Ernest Tubb, as well as a wide range of gospel, ragtime, and country hymns.

Like his father, Jackson performed at house parties, although music was something reserved for evenings and weekends, as he had multiple jobs including working as a cook, butler, chauffeur, general caretaker, and even a gravedigger. Jackson already had a young wife and a family of his own when he left his parents' farm at 25 years old. He moved with his wife and children to Fairfax, Virginia, where he worked on another farm, other occasional jobs such as chopping and hauling firewood and digging graves.

Circumstances led Jackson to give up the house party circuit and retire from public performances for nearly 20 years. But Jackson began his return to playing music in 1962 when he played for children that were playing in his yard, and later when he agreed to giving guitar lessons to his mailman. It was during one of these lessons that took place at the gas station where the mailman worked at night that professor of folklore and English at the University of Virginia, Charles Perdue heard Jackson playing after stopping for gas and asked him to play for him.

Perdue, who was involved with the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, the National Council for the Traditional Arts, and the effort to record and preserve folk music across Virginia introduced Jackson to other blues and folk musicians in the region and across the country. Perdue championed Jackson's playing to help establish him as a professional musician, and help him become thoroughly successful on the folk circuit both at home and around the world

For the next thirty-plus years he was the Virginia/Washington, D.C. area's most prominent traditional artist. He was a festival favorite who also hosted the musical house parties in the region. Jackson toured widely across the United States and abroad, making numerous recordings, playing his distinctive Piedmont guitar

blues, and also performing on the banjo. He is one of the few African American musicians to play the blues on the banjo, which he learned growing up in the rural Piedmont region.

Jackson drew attention to the rich musical traditions of Appalachia and advocated for the quantity and quality of local Virginia artists. However, although Jackson recalled a thriving blues guitar tradition in his home community, few black Virginians were recorded. During the 1920s and 1930s only three musicians produced a significant body of recordings.

John Jackson received the National Heritage Fellowship in 1986 from the National Endowment for the Arts for his role as a teacher and traditional artist, which is America's highest honor in the folk music world. Jackson performed for Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, the US Congress, many European heads of state, and in Carnegie and Royal Albert Hall. He played with famous musicians such as B.B. King, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, and Ricky Scaggs.

Jackson survived his wife, Cora, who died in October 1990, three sons, and one daughter. He performed his last show on New Year's Eve 2002 and died on January 20, 2002.

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Bernstein, A. (2002, January 21). Bluesman John Jackson Dies, Gained World Fame. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/01/22/bluesman-john-jackson-dies/d67f1f35-a38c-4794-aa1c-a0847ddf1e84/>

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Content Description

This collection contains three black and white photographs of musician John Jackson taken by physician and photographer Benjamin Boblett. John Jackson (1924–2002) was an American Piedmont Blues Musician. Jackson played an important role in highlighting the Appalachian musical traditions. The photographs are annotated and signed by the artist. Two studio photographs (16"X20") were taken in approximately 1983. The other performance photograph (8.5"X11") was taken at the Woodlawwn High School performance in 1975, and printed in 1976.

Keywords

African American musicians
Black-and-white photographs
Blues musicians
Blues musicians - Virginia
Jackson, John, 1924-2002

Conservation - Handling and Care

Photographs are in protective sleeves. If they need to be removed, latex or nitrile gloves are required for care and handling.