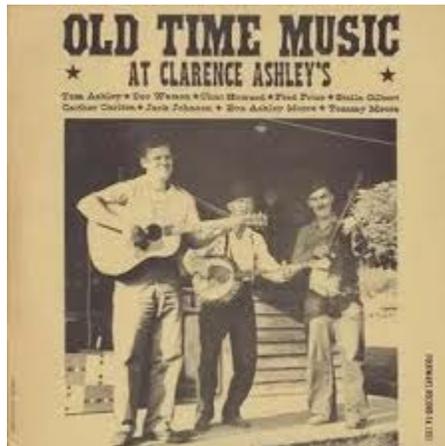


“Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's”--Doc Watson, Clarence Ashley, et.al. (1960-1962)

Added to the National Registry: 2012

Essay by Steve Kaufman (guest post)*



Album cover

In 1960, Smithsonian historian Ralph Rinzler convinced the virtually unknown Clarence “Tom” Ashley, Doc Watson, Gaither Carlton, Jack Johnson, Fred Price and Clint Howard to walk into the studio and record their mountain heritage music. Ralph Rinzler met Clarence at an Old Time Fiddler’s Convention. Ashley hadn’t played banjo for many years, but Ralph convinced him to pick it back up again and record it. Doc Watson didn’t own an acoustic guitar at the time. He had been playing in a rockabilly band playing square dances and the like. Doc honed his instrumental skills playing fiddle tunes on the guitar. Doc told me that the square dance bands he played in did not have a fiddle player so he played the tune as the fiddle would. This combination of Clarence on banjo and Doc on guitar and banjo, along with Fred Price and Gaither Carlton on fiddle, make an old-time band that is authentic and powerful.

Seventeen songs make up this collection, of which T. Clarence Ashley wrote nine. It seems odd that he would credit the song as being by T.C. Ashley. He would credit his singing as Tom Ashley. Doc would credit him as Clarence throughout Doc’s long career. I’ve heard Doc mention Clarence on many occasions.

These are the original tracks to this classic “Old Time” recording. It was recorded in Shouns, Tennessee; Saltville, Virginia; and Deep Gap, North Carolina. There was a second project released of the same title with 20 additional tracks. The importance of this original volume is that these are the tracks that the musicians wanted included and thought most important.

The track list and players:

- A1 “Sally Ann”--Clint Howard, Doc Watson, Fred Price, Jack Johnson, Tommy Moore
- A2 “Old Ruben”--Doc Watson, Gaither Carlton
- A3 “East Tennessee Blues”--Fred Price, Clint Howard (Written by T.C. Ashley)
- A4 “Claude Allen”--Tom Ashley, Doc Watson (Written by T.C. Ashley)

- A5 “Richmond Blues”--Clint Howard, Fred Price (Written by T. C. Ashley)
 A6 “Skillet Good and Greasy”--Doc Watson, Ralph Rinzler
 A7 “The Old Man At The Mill”--Clint Howard, Fred Price, Doc Watson (Written by T.C. Ashley)
 A8 “The Haunted Woods”--Eva Ashley Moore (Written by T. C. Ashley)
 A9 “Footprints in The Snow”--Clint Howard, Fred Price, Doc Watson, Jack Johnson (Written by Carlisle)
- B1 “I'm Going Back to Jericho”--Doc Watson, Gaither Carlton, Ralph Rinzler
 B2 “Maggie Walker Blues”--Clint Howard, Fred Price, Doc Watson (Written by T.C. Ashley)
 B3 “God's Gonna Ease My Troublin' Mind”--Tom Ashley, Doc Watson (Written by T.C. Ashley)
 B4 “Handsome Molly”--Doc Watson, Gaither Carlton
 B5 “The Louisiana Earthquake”--Stella Gilbert (Written by T.C. Ashley)
 B6 “Honey Babe Blues”--Clarence Ashley, Doc Watson, Clint Howard, Fred Price, Jack Johnson (Written by T.C. Ashley)
 B7 “True Lovers”--Tommy Moore, Doc Watson, Clint Howard, Fred Price
 B8 “Pretty Little Pink”--Clint Howard, Doc Watson, Fred Price, Jack Johnson, Tommy Moore

Album Credits:

- Banjo--Doc Watson (tracks: A6, B1, B4)
 Gaither Carlton (tracks: A2, B1)
 Jack Johnson (tracks: A1, A9, B6, B8)
 Fiddle--Fred Price (tracks: A1, A3, A5, A7, A9, B2, B6, B7, B8)
 Gaither Carlton (tracks: B1, B4)
 Guitar--Clint Howard (tracks: A1, A3, A5, A7, A9, B2, B6; B7, B8),
 Doc Watson (tracks: A1, A2, A4, A7, A9, B2, B3, B6, B7),
 Ralph Rinzler (tracks: A6, B1, B4)
 Lead Guitar--Doc Watson (track: B8)
 Washboard--Tommy Moore (tracks: A1, B8)
 Vocals--Tom Ashley (tracks: A4, B3, B6)
 Clint Howard (tracks: A1, A5, A7, A9, B2, B8)
 Doc Watson (tracks: A2, A6, B1, B3, B4)
 Eva Ashley Moore (tracks: A8)
 Stella Gilbert (tracks: B5)
 Vocals (2nd Voice)--Doc Watson (track: B3)

Recorded by Eugene Earle, Ralph Rinzler

There seems to be a mystery singer not listed for B7—“True Lovers.” It sounds like a minor. Possibly the child of one of the musicians.

Here is the history of the key album players up until the recording of “Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's”:

Clarence “Tom” Ashley--September 29, 1895 – June 2, 1967

Born in Tennessee, Clarence Ashley was a singer, songwriter and musician who played guitar and Old Time Banjo. He began performing in the south at the age of 16. He gained notoriety in the late 1920s with the Blue Ridge Mountain Entertainers. He played steadily until the Great Depression at which time he had to take a job in the coal mines of West Virginia to support his wife and two children. In 1937, he started a trucking company that delivered furniture and crops to the Appalachians. Through the next decade, Ashley supported himself as a side man comedian with the Stanley Brothers. He played little shows and venues with various bands until he was rediscovered by Ralph Rinzler at the Union Grove Fiddler's Convention and Rinzler persuaded him to pick up the banjo again. He joined with Doc Watson, Fred Price and Clint Howard to perform the folk circuit and record this album "Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's."

Arthel Lane "Doc" Watson--March 3, 1923 – May 29, 2012

There is a lot of written history on Doc Watson. In researching, I learned that the nickname "Doc" came from an early live radio interview where the announcer said that Arthel was a hard name to say and he needed a nickname. Someone in the audience hollered out "Call him 'Doc'" in reference to Sherlock Holmes's sidekick, Dr. Watson. The name stuck.

Watson proved to be a natural musician and talent. After only a few months of practice he could be found on Deep Gap, NC, street corners performing music by the Delmore Brothers, the Monroe Brothers and the Louvin Brothers. Doc played with square dance bands through the 1950's, playing western swing and country music, but it was his meeting with Ralph Rinzler that convinced him to play folk music on the acoustic guitar and banjo--and off his career went into the folk scene. He soon recorded his first album--"Old Time Music At Clarence Ashley's."

Fred Price--July 16, 1915 - September 13, 1987

Fred was another self-taught musician who began at the age of 15 when his father brought home a fiddle for him to learn to play. Dinner was just about to go on the stove and, by the time it was ready to serve, Fred had learned to scratch out his first fiddle tune—"Little Log Cabin in the Lane."

Fred fiddled through school and during World War II and upon returning home he married Mattie Howard. They had two children, Lois Ann and Kenneth, who both played music and carried on the family tradition. In the 1960s, he met and teamed up with Clarence "Tom" Ashley, Doc Watson and Clint Howard. The rest is history.

Clint Howard--1930 – October, 16, 2011

Clint Howard began playing music at an early age, too. His dad gave him his first guitar at 11 years old. He began playing professionally at the age of 22. He then teamed up with Clarence "Tom" Ashley, Fred Price, and Doc Watson. This group of men performed all over the United States, including the University of California, the Pete Seeger Show, the Newport Folk Festival, and Carnegie Hall in New York City.

The album "Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's" is highly recommended for any fan of old-time music, Doc Watson, Clarence Ashley, Gather, Clint, Fred and the rest. It's a charming collection of tunes and songs played by some of the best and most authentic of old-time musicians.

Steve Kaufman is writer, musician and guitar instructor. He did three major projects with Doc Watson: a DVD called "Flatpicking With Doc" (Homespun Tapes); "The Book Legacy of Doc Watson" (Mel Bay Publications) and a performance DVD titled "Doc's Guitar Jam" with Doc, Tony Rice, Dan Crary, and Jack Lawrence (Vestapol Records). All of which can be found on Kaufman's web site www.Flatpik.com.

*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.