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STEVE BLACKWELL: A FLORIDA FOLK MUSICIAN

by

BRIAN GARRISON HAYMANS
B.M.E. Florida Southern College, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Music in the Department of Music in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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This study investigates the life of Steve Blackwell (1947-2006), a Florida folk singer/songwriter from Punta Gorda, FL, located where the Peace River meets the Gulf of Mexico. The study examines his biographical history, his performance career, musical output, and the impact he and his music had on the surrounding community. The first part of the study documents Blackwell’s history and the major events that shaped his life while, at the same time, describing what kind of person Steve Blackwell was. The second part of the study examines Blackwell’s career as a musical performer, the bands he played with, how those bands came to be or changed over time, what types of music they performed, and any albums he recorded. The third part of the paper looks at Blackwell as a songwriter. How Blackwell decided on his lyrical topics, his musical style, and compositional process are discussed. The final part of the study examines the impact of Blackwell and his music. Consideration is given to Steve Blackwell’s closest social networks, as well as to the social implications he, his music, and his networking had on his local community.
Research for this study was done through immersion mixed with a close study of Steve Blackwell's personal documents. A number of personal interviews and correspondences were conducted with Steve Blackwell’s family, friends, former band members, and a number of other unrelated patrons. Primary sources for this study include a number of Blackwell’s own documents, such as his letters, journal entries, sketches, working copies of songs, and recording sessions, etc., which were made available with the gracious permission of the Blackwell family. Few secondary sources were found, save for a few magazine and newspaper articles. After these materials were gathered, a portrait of Steve Blackwell emerged.

Evidence was found that supports the idea that Steve Blackwell's music was not stylistically unique, although competently made and enjoyed by a wide audience. Nevertheless, he was special for the community by what he was able to accomplish through his music and extroverted personality. This is not a definitive summation of Steve Blackwell’s life, but rather a starting point for any further research on Blackwell or any research in the significance of local musicians for social communities.
To my father
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After reviewing my notes and thinking back on the venture of writing this thesis, I would like to take a moment to give mention and thanks to the various individuals whose assistance made completion of my thesis possible. So many of these people lent me their time to answer questions, tell stories, recite memories, and assist with the location of documents, no matter how obscure they may have seemed. Other various individuals, through their generosity, allowed my visits to the area to remain as extended as possible. I would also like to give thanks to those individuals whose counsel and insight helped me with the formalization of this thesis.

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Frank Desguin, Kelly Mulhollan, Donna Stjerna, Parks Reece, and those unnamed others. A special thanks to Michael and Dawn Haymans, for being instrumental in acting as a gateway for the community to me.

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INTRODUCTION

For people who live outside the Charlotte Harbor region, there is no significance in the name Steve Blackwell. When talking about American music we see, far too often, a concern only for those composers who wrote for the concert hall, silver screen, or for a stage in front of thousands; a type of music that contains a commercial influence. Steve Blackwell was not one of those people. Blackwell's music was a different kind of American music; rather, Steve wrote music for his family, his friends, and the relatively few members of society who attend local folk music festivals throughout the state, while by day, Steve worked at the local high school in Punta Gorda, Florida. Blackwell wrote for a constituency, which puts great value in genuine creativity. While he was still alive, Steve would create after-school activities to help his students do better in their classes. His music brought the people of Punta Gorda out of their homes. Through this action, new connections were established and able to grow into friendships. Steve helped bring the community around him together.
There is not much to suggest that Blackwell's music was characteristically innovative in style or revolutionary by nature, in terms of its formal or harmonic structure, yet his music still had the power and ability to draw people to him. Steve's ability to pull in listeners with his music was so strong, until his death in 2006, that he was instrumental with several ventures in creating events and programs throughout his community, which sparked a wealth of social capital. Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, believes social capital refers to the collective value of all 'social networks' and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. In his book, Putnam goes on to describe how social capital is a key component to building and maintaining democracy.¹ Furthermore, Putnam discusses how society in the United States was beginning to fragment which was in direct relation to how much social capital a community produced. Even now in 2010, four years after his death, Steve

Blackwell’s legacy lives on. Much of what Steve was involved with and helped to create continues to thrive and is still growing in size. Even now, several new events have formed from the wish to honor the memory of this local treasure, who was lost to them through untimely illness.

It is my goal to illuminate who Steve Blackwell was, not only his biography, but also who he was as a songwriter, family man, teacher, and performer. I will also discuss evidence found that supports the idea that a wealth of social capital sparked within the communities of Charlotte Harbor, Florida, was directly influenced by Steve Blackwell and the music he wrote. ²

² Ibid.
CHAPTER 1: STEVE BLACKWELL

As I approached Steve Blackwell's history, I quickly realized that there were several major elements that when put together paint the portrait that was his life. I focus first on the period of Steve Blackwell's life that took place before entering the communities of Charlotte Harbor. Then I look closely at what the community is like in
Charlotte Harbor, more specifically Punta Gorda, Florida. I then return my focus toward Steve's life while keeping Steve Blackwell's community in context.

**Steve's years in Indiana**

Like so many Floridians, Steve Blackwell was not born in Florida, but rather in Indiana on April 18, 1947. The son of Bob and Berry Blackwell, then residing in the town of Lebanon, he would be just the first of three children. It was in Indiana that Blackwell would live during his childhood, adolescent years, and early adulthood. Music was no stranger to the Blackwell family. Steve Blackwell's grandfather, Wallace Estel Blackwell (1898-1973), had been a vaudeville performer in his earlier years. 'Pawpa' Blackwell, as Steve called him, proved a very powerful influence on the young Blackwell. When Steve was eight years old, Wallace Blackwell gave him his first musical

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3 Much of the information in this chapter has been gathered through a number of interviews with the Blackwell family (Sue, Phebe, Japhy and Carrie) and many of Steve Blackwell's close friends.
instrument, a 1942 Gibson guitar.\textsuperscript{4} There was no direct evidence that Blackwell's grandfather taught Steve how to play the guitar. Wallace Blackwell acted instead as an encouraging figure during Steve's earliest musical endeavors.

While Blackwell was growing up and going to school, Steve lived a good life. He was a good student and was on his high school's wrestling team. During the year 1966, Steve proposed to his sweetheart, Margie (Sue) Percifield at a local county fair and they were soon after married.\textsuperscript{5} After graduating high school Steve and Sue moved to Terra Haute, Indiana, so Steve could work on his college degree at Indiana State University.\textsuperscript{6} He decided he wanted to be an English teacher. After his graduation in 1970, Steve and Sue picked up stakes again and moved across the state to

\textsuperscript{4} Phebe Blackwell Westby and Japhy Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 January 2010).

\textsuperscript{5} Steve Blackwell's, widow's legal first name is Margie. She often however, is referred to as Sue and is referenced as thus throughout this paper.

\textsuperscript{6} Margie (Sue) Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
Lynn, Indiana. It would be there in Lynn that Sue would give birth to their first child and daughter, Phebe Blackwell followed by the birth of their second child and son, Japhy Blackwell. They would remain in Lynn for only two years until they moved again. Their next move however, would take them much farther away than their previous relocations. Steve took a position teaching English and as the assistant wrestling coach for a high school in the small South Florida community of Punta Gorda.\(^7\) Unknown to Steve and Sue during that time, but this was to be the last major move for the Blackwell family.

**Punta Gorda**

It is important, so one can better understand Steve's story, to understand what type of people live in Punta Gorda, Florida, and that community's history.\(^8\) Nestled deep within the second largest bay on the western coast of Florida, Punta Gorda sits at the point where the Peace

\(^7\) Michael Haymans, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 21 February 2010)

River meets the Gulf of Mexico. The location was named by Spanish explorers in the early part of the 16th century and later settled and developed in 1882; Punta Gorda literally translates as Fat Point. Originally, the community served as the southernmost stop on the South Florida Railroad.

Due to its geographical location, the town's ability for any quick, substantial population growth was limited. To the West was the Gulf of Mexico, to the South was the Everglades, and to the North and East was agriculture. Another factor to Punta Gorda's stunted growth was because it was at the railhead. In early Florida, if the railroad companies would not build through a region, then fewer settlers would come to the area. Life in early Florida was not easy and many of the settlers knew that if the railroad company had not been to an area, then that area's land was not easily workable or good for livestock. These facts also bring with them a certain level of seclusion. That would explain why Punta Gorda became a popular destination for some people who may have had trouble following the law. Punta Gorda reported over forty documented murders between the years of 1890 and 1904. This number has significance when during that time Punta Gorda was still a small fishing
town with a population of approximately two to three thousand at most. These contributing factors alongside the proximity to the Tampa Bay region, one of the largest commercial ports in the state, Punta Gorda remained relatively small in size and population. Even today, Punta Gorda only has a population of around 17,000 residents.\(^9\)

Yet, this small community does take great pride in its local history and culture. The athletics programs at the local high school, Charlotte High, are strongly supported by the community. There is a stronger feeling of connection within the community than one would find in a larger town or city. There are venues for music, poetry, art, and more for its citizens. Unlike in the days of its founding as a frontier town, engulfed in crime, the population now consists greatly (just under 50%) of an elderly demographic (65+). This age group began to increase considerably since the mid 1970s, with the aging of the Baby Boomers and flood of retirees. The next largest group is made up of people forty years of age or

\(^9\) Ibid.
younger. This was the community in which Steve Blackwell took a teaching position in the summer of 1972.

**Steve's years in Florida**

After accepting the combined position at Charlotte High School as the new English teacher and assistant wrestling coach, Steve, Sue, Phebe, and Japhy settled on the northern shores of the Peace River delta in Harbor Heights. Just across the bay on the adjacent shore was Punta Gorda. Steve would make many new friends in the area through his teaching, music making, and as the local wrestling coach. There Steve and Sue had their daughter Carrie, to complete their family.

As an English teacher, Steve was innovative to say the least. Known for having his students write papers about historical figures from around the area, Blackwell thought it was important for his students to embrace their local history. While covering poetry Steve was known to recite

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10 Margie (Sue) Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
the works of Bob Dylan and even bring in his guitar to sing to the students. Already he was demonstrating his knowledge of how the creativeness of poetry helped lead to the creation of musical lyrics. While in charge of the wrestling team, he taught his students the value of self-control and discipline. He was a "hands on" kind of coach, often opting to get on the mats and go at it with the students during practice.

In 1990, Steve, and close friend Gary Helinski, decided to get their Masters degrees in library sciences together. They attended University of South Florida and carpooled up Interstate seventy-five to Tampa for night classes. After they graduated with the degrees, Steve changed positions from a classroom English teach to a high school media specialist. Steve did not even have to transfer schools. He remained at Charlotte High and made it his mission to

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13 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).
help build the school's technology department. Over the course of several years in the early nineties, Steve helped to make Charlotte High School's Audio/Visual Department the best in the region.

In the fall of 2004 Hurricane Charley, a category five storm, devastated the Punta Gorda area. The eye of the storm system went right up the mouth of Charlotte Harbor leaving much of the surrounding area in shambles. The Blackwell home was no exception. After the storm passed, their home had to be rebuilt. During this time, Sue and Steve went to live in a cottage owned by a good friend across the river in Punta Gorda. While living in Punta Gorda, Steve learned from his doctors that they were diagnosing him with cancer. He had melanoma on his back and immediately started chemotherapy treatments. For his treatments, Steve had to have a special mask made that fit over his face.\textsuperscript{14} To show what kind of spirit Steve had, even in this taxing time, he would put the mask on and chase his grandchildren around the house. The treatments

\textsuperscript{14} Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, 7 February, 2010).
proved unsuccessful however, and during treatment, the cancer began to spread up his back and into his brain. Steve underwent brain surgery to try one last time to stop the cancer, but still, the doctors were not successful in removing the tumor. During the time between Steve starting chemotherapy treatment and brain surgery, Steve began to forget the lyrics to some of his songs. During an intimate discussion with his son, Steve explained to Japhy how losing the ability to remember the lyrics to his songs was one of the only things he came to regret about how the cancer was affecting him.15

If anything can be said as to how those around Steve knew and loved him, you should know about the last few days he was alive. By this point, Steve was in the hospital and everyone knew he only had a few weeks if not days left. So, there was a strong sense of urgency coming from those close to him to try and bring him home for his last moments. His house, just rebuilt from the devastation left in the wake of hurricane Charley, was empty and the family

15 Japhy Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
had not yet moved back in. Many of Steve's friends worked together and organized a day when people would help move the family into their new home.

On the day Steve was released from the hospital, Sue received a call saying the move-in team was at the storage facility to begin gathering their things for the move. Literally, almost everything the Blackwell family owned was at the storage facility. Within an hour, Sue received another call informing her that everything was loaded up and on the way. Once they arrived, Sue beheld a small caravan of trucks and other vehicles loaded with her belongings and more people than she could have imagined. People came from all around to help, friends, extended family, the high school football and wrestling team, and more. The family had to do nothing. Instead, the move-in team brought in and unpacked everything so Sue and the rest of the family could be in the master bedroom with Steve. They were so quiet that the family rarely recalled hearing
They were done in time for several of them to carefully carry Steve out onto his back porch so he could watch the sunset from his new house. He passed three days later, on Sunday, September 3, 2006.

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16 Phebe Blackwell Westby, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 January, 2010).
CHAPTER 2: STEVE BLACKWELL AS A PERFORMING MUSICIAN

Steve Blackwell was a father, a teacher, a coach, and as we will discuss in this chapter, a musician.\(^\text{17}\) Steve first played an instrument when his grandfather Wallace Blackwell gave him a 1942 Gibson guitar as a present for his eighth birthday. Steve never enrolled in a band, orchestra, or choir during his years in school and thus, did not learn how to read music. Even in his last days, Steve could not read musical notation, as we know it in western civilization. Blackwell could not read a musical staff or even a tablature. Instead, he played what he thought sounded good to him and then asked other musicians what exactly he was playing. It was from these inquiries that provided Blackwell with knowledge of what he was doing musically.

Steve Blackwell's performing career spans the majority of his life mostly with bands and a few times by himself.

\(^{17}\) As before, the information in this chapter has been compiled from personal interviews and correspondences between myself, the Blackwell family and some of Steve Blackwell's close friend and ex-band members.
Steve performed with a number of groups: The Chessmen, Nashville Image, The Armadillo Brothers, Steve Blackwell and Friends, and The Peace Creek Revival. Now we will look at Steve's participation with each band. We will examine when he was with each group, look into what genre of music the groups played and what venues they would go to as well as any other relevant information that has been gathered about this aspect of Steve Blackwell's life up to this point.

The Chessmen

The only band that Steve was in while living in Indiana was during high school with The Chessmen, a honky-tonk cover band. Honky Tonk is a style of popular music first played by country-music bands in Texas during the 1930s. It was loud and had a heavy beat, the bands using electric instruments. The music was associated with uprooted rural people, and the lyrics dealt chiefly with the social problems of their newly adopted urban life: job insecurity,
marital stress and family dissolution. At the time, the band needed a bass player. Blackwell told them he knew how to play, even though he did not. Steve learned how to play the bass guitar as he went, and the band played mostly at local bars and other private functions. After Steve graduated high school and went on to college, he had to leave the band. Blackwell’s next time with a band would not be for several years, until after he moved down to Florida.


19 Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February, 2010).

20 Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the band's specifics in regards to financial compensation. What is known already gives a preview to Steve's future. He shows his eagerness to learn when he took the bass position before learning how to play the instrument. This is evidence as well of Steve's ability to learn music by rote.
The second band that Steve Blackwell was a part of was Nashville Image. He joined this honky-tonk cover group in the latter half of the 1970s in Punta Gorda, Florida, as
their new bass player.\textsuperscript{21} Blackwell performed at local bars and other private events with Nashville Image. The band would split the compensation among its members and saved some for equipment upkeep.

Steve Blackwell's departure from Nashville Image came sometime in 1980s. During his time with the band, Steve performed in Florida for the first time. It was with this group that Steve had his first experience playing for people of southwest Florida.\textsuperscript{22} Nashville Image also gave Steve his first real experience on a major stage once they became the opening set for the Bellamy Brothers. This would prove that the band was a legitimate musical force.


\textsuperscript{22} Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
The next group Steve played in was the Armadillo Brothers. Steve’s tenure with the group lasted for ten years starting in 1982, when he and fellow Nashville Image member, Tom Ward, obtained the services of J.R. Davis on drums, and
Mike Davie on guitar. According to band members, the name of the group came from Blackwell's interest in environmental causes. As before with his other bands, Steve was the bass player for this honky-tonk cover band, which played for the local bars and at other private events in the surrounding area until he left the group in 1992. The interesting thing to note is that the Armadillo Brothers was to be the last cover band that Steve Blackwell would perform.

Steve Blackwell and Friends

Steve Blackwell and Friends actually started out as just Steve Blackwell. Sometime in the early 1990s, approximately the spring of 1992, not long after his departure from the Armadillo Brothers, did Steve start writing his own songs. Not too long afterwards, in 1994

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23 Paige Schector, "Armadillo Brothers recall country rock group's early days, solo gigs," The Sun Herald, 19 June, 1992. Page number was not found because source was a clipping in one of the many folders found in Steve Blackwell's office.

Steve completed *Listen Here*, his first album which he dedicated to his grandfather, Wallace Blackwell.\(^{25}\)

For the recording, Steve included several friends and fellow musicians, Les and Mary Caraher, to accompany him on complimentary instruments such as fiddle, banjo, mandolin, and vocals. Unfortunately, soon after the recording was finished, Les and Mary moved out of state.

![Image of the front cover of Listen Here](image)

*Figure 4: Listen Here, front cover.*

This put Steve in a predicament without musicians and performances booked at several upcoming music festivals. After some discussion, two of Steve's friends, Dan Leach and Gary Helinski agreed to help out and play with Steve at the festivals. When they began discussing what they were going to call themselves, they did not want to change their name too much. Officials for music festivals tend to look poorly upon performers who frequently change their stage name. Finally, they decided that the group would perform as Steve Blackwell and Friends.
Later that year the band grew with the addition of Dan Leach's son, Andy Leach, on upright and electric bass, and with the addition of Steve's youngest daughter, Carrie Blackwell, for vocal support. In 1996, the group debuted their first album, *More Than it Seems*. Although dominated

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by songs by Blackwell, their album did not exclusively contain songs by Steve. Rather, it consisted of songs by Blackwell as well as "Medicine Woman", for which Irene Butler already wrote the lyrics, which Steve then set to music. More Than it Seems also contained "Florida Roots", by Dan Leach and "Don't Find Fort Ogden", by Gary Helinski. Unlike Steve's previous groups, Steve Blackwell and Friends did not play as a cover group. The band decided to perform their own works at music festivals and local venues ranging from town block parties to fundraisers throughout the area.  

27 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).
Figure 6: The Difference You Make, back cover. From left to right: Dan Leach, Andy Leach, Carrie Blackwell Hussey, Steve Blackwell, and Gary Helinski.

Four years later in 2000, the band released their second album, The Difference You Make. Unlike their previous album, several of the songs featured Steve's daughter Carrie as lead vocals for approximately one third of the album. The band also included Steve's son, Japhy

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Blackwell, as a permanent member of the ensemble on saxophone in 2003, with the release of And So it Grows, their third album. Carrie's vocal skills were featured on almost half of the selected tracks for the recording. This would be the last album Steve Blackwell and Friends would record before Steve's death in 2006.

![And So It Grows, back cover. From left to right: Dan Leach, Carrie Blackwell Hussey, Steve Blackwell, Andy Leach, Gary Helinski, and Japhy Blackwell.](image)

29 Steve Blackwell and Friends, And so it Grows, CD, Peace Creek Productions (2003).
During its time, Steve Blackwell and Friends started from humble beginnings and grew in popularity with those who were exposed to their music. This is easily seen with the expansion of the bands geographical performance radius from Punta Gorda. They performed all over the state of Florida at numerous music festivals. Steve would volunteer the band to play at schools, and events. Occasionally, the venue may have paid the fuel to get there, but Steve did not care. Steve would often explain to the other band members, "Well, they asked us to play, and it is a good cause." Steve Blackwell and Friends played for the Cancer Walk, the library, art festivals, nursing homes, coffee houses, graduation parties, birthday parties, Arcadia antique festivals, Cow-pie plop festivals. If three people sat in a circle, Steve felt it was important to get their message out. Other in-state venues the group performed at include the Will McLean Festival, Gamble Rogers Festival, South Florida Folk Festival, and the Suwannee Springfest.
Nevertheless, their performances were not limited to Florida. Twice, Steve Blackwell and Friends performed in the Philadelphia Folk Festival.

In early 2005 Gary Helinski, long time friend and a co-founder of Steve Blackwell and Friends, left the band in order to be able to spend more time with his family. Some evidence may suggest however, that other motives may have been at work as well. The band's musical direction was changing from what it was originally. One could assume these musical differences may have helped to expedite Gary Helinski's departure from the group. Regardless of however true this account may be, Helinski's departure from the group carried with it the possibility of bad blood between him and Steve. Nevertheless, the friendship shared between Gary Helinski and Steve Blackwell lasted until Steve's passing in 2006. After Gary Helinski's departure in 2005,

30 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).

31 Helinski's leaving Steve Blackwell and Friends was a delicate time for the band. The main reason for his departure was to spend more time with his family before his children left home for college, but from
the band continued to perform until illness made it no longer possible for Steve to perform.

**Peace Creek Revival**

The Peace Creek Revival was the last group to form with Steve Blackwell as one of its members. The group consisted of members from Steve Blackwell and Friends (Steve Blackwell, Dan Leach, Carrie Blackwell Hussey, and Andy Leach on occasion), performing as a gospel trio. They wanted the group to be a side project that ran concurrently alongside Steve Blackwell and Friends. They would sometimes bring Andy Leach in to provide a supporting bass line, but the group primarily consisted of mandolin, played by Dan Leach, Steve on vocals and guitar, and Carrie on vocals. They would perform their own arrangements of well-known hymns for local churches. Dan Leach often recorded their live performances with a single condenser microphone.

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Evidence gathered in this study, I do not feel that this was the only reason that influenced the decision to leave. I believe there were several factors that, in conjunction, led to Helinski's departure in 2005.

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32 Carrie Blackwell Hussey, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 October, 2009).
Their next project was to make a studio recording for a gospel album. Unfortunately, first Dan, then Steve became sick and they were never able to begin the project. After Steve's death, with the help of Ron Litschauer and Tiffiny Coffey, and the financial help of Charlotte Harbor Trinity Methodist Church, Dan Leach was able to compile and produce *Peace Creek Revival Live* from their previously recorded
live performances in late 2006.\textsuperscript{33} Although never an official member of the band, Andy Leach accompanies the group on bass for every song selected for the album. This would be the last album made with Steve Blackwell as well as the only album Steve was a part of, which contains an instrumental-only track. As with Steve Blackwell and Friends, Steve performed with this group until his illness made it impossible to continue performing. An important difference to note is that this group accepted payment for their performances. The group's payment would normally be the collection from that day's service.\textsuperscript{34} The notion of playing music for pay was something Steve had not done since his days with the Armadillo Brothers.


\textsuperscript{34} Phebe Blackwell Westby and Japhy Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 January, 2010).
CHAPTER 3: STEVE BLACKWELL AS A SONGWRITER

Steve Blackwell was more than just a musical performer. He was also a songwriter.\(^{35}\) Even until his death in 2006, Steve Blackwell did not know how to read musical notation. Steve only knew how to read a lead sheet. He learned to play the guitar and the electric bass by ear. Steve never learned how to read music because he did not have to. Blackwell experimented with fingerings and played what sounded acceptable to him.\(^{36}\) Only after asking other musicians did Blackwell know about what chords and pitches he was playing. Being musically illiterate would be a difficult situation for any performing musician. Nevertheless, Blackwell understood how his instrument functioned. He knew what pitches the strings sounded and understood whole and half steps. With his knowledge of harmonic relationships, Steve was able to do what was

\(^{35}\) As before, the information in this chapter has been compiled from personal interviews and correspondences between the Blackwell family, and myself as well as several of Steve Blackwell's close friend and ex-band members.

\(^{36}\) Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
necessary of him. Blackwell did not need to be a virtuoso, because he played as harmonic support to the melody.

In this chapter, we will look at the history of Steve's musical output. Then we will go on to examine Blackwell's musical style, where his creativeness tended to focus, and finally, examine Steve's compositional process in conjunction with a detailed look at some of Blackwell's notes for "Goin' Back South" to help gain a better idea of how Steve composed. Throughout this chapter, several audio files of Steve Blackwell's songs are linked to their corresponding titles. Those links will allow you to hear selected songs of Steve Blackwell's published works to help you gain a better understanding of how his music sounded.

An Early History

Unlike his performing career, which spanned the majority of his life, Steve Blackwell spent significantly less time

37 Audio samples have been compiled from Steve Blackwell's published albums and other unpublished recordings made available by the Blackwell family with the gracious permission from the Blackwell estate as well as the band members from Steve Blackwell and Friends (See Appendix A).
writing his own songs. Steve always made his own little jingles, such as when he would roam into his children's bedrooms playing his guitar singing for them to wake up and get ready for school.\textsuperscript{38} Blackwell did not begin to write music seriously however, until the early 1990s, most likely around the spring of 1992. Before Steve Blackwell wrote his first true song, he was a performing musician and a poet. Steve was an active member in a local poetry group that met in Punta Gorda. Called YRI, the poetry group would meet and recite original works to each other. About the same time, Steve had recently become a librarian and was expanding the school's collection of text concerning Florida history. Blackwell had also recently stopped performing with the Armadillo Brothers.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Phebe Blackwell Westby and Japhy Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 January 2010).

\textsuperscript{39} Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).
During the spring of 1992, Steve and Sue went to the Florida Folk Festival in White Springs, Florida. Frank Thomas, a Florida folk singer/songwriter, ran the Gazebo Stage for the festival. Located just off the shores of the Suwannee River, that particular stage was dedicated to Florida singer/songwriters. Steve took a special interest in this venue and listened to the performers sing about Florida's history, beauty, and local characters. Steve fell in love with the performers' music and later that day, once the stage had been cleared and everyone left, he got out his guitar, sat down on stage and began to play. There was no audience, Steve just played. Something had changed about him that day. Something clicked. Many of Blackwell's friends note that he was different after that weekend. They commented how he came back to Punta Gorda knowing what he wanted to do.

Several weeks later, Steve visited his close friend, Gary Helinski, and played his first two songs for Gary,

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40 Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010).
41 Ibid.
"Grandpa's Den" and "Goodbye Columbus Day", on his back porch. Steve explained how, for his first song, he felt he needed to write about something that resonated deep inside him and so he chose to write "Grandpa's Den". His second song, "Goodbye Columbus Day", Steve geared it more toward the idea that people need to realize that people were living in North America before 1492 and the landing of Christopher Columbus. This topic would not be a great surprise for anyone close enough to Blackwell to know his rebellious side. Steve wrote "Goodbye Columbus Day" the year of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing. It would be several weeks later until Steve finished his third song, "Osceola".

Osceola (1804 –1838) led a small band of warriors (never more than 100) in the Seminole resistance during the Second Seminole War, also known as the Florida War, after the United States tried to remove the Seminoles from their lands in central Florida. An influential leader, Osceola exercised a great deal of influence on Micanopy, the
highest-ranking chief of the Seminoles. Steve explained to Gary Helinski how there are many heroes out in the world, but for him, there was Osceola. He would later use that very explanation as a preface for when he performed that piece. A key point of interest about this song is that it was Steve Blackwell's first Florida history song.

Once Steve Blackwell and Friends formed, Steve was able to write music at a much higher frequency than previously. With the help of Dan Leach, Blackwell began to gain insight into what was going on within the music. Dan could listen, see what Steve was doing on the guitar, and then explain what was happening to the group so they could complement the melodic lines. Dan's son Andy also had a good ear and was a talented bass player at a relatively young age. Not to imply that Blackwell's compositions were becoming a collaborative effort, but rather, Steve would come to the group with an already formulated song.


43 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).
What Blackwell would bring to the group was a basic musical idea, and by that he would already have the song constructed within his head and then would practice it with the band. They would then work together to find the best avenues for adding different colors and timbres to Blackwell's ideas, once they began to realize their own countermelodies or harmonic changes. Though Steve Blackwell's published albums are dominated by his music, not all the songs published were by Blackwell. Steve would add in occasional songs by others, such as Dan Leach or Gary Helinski. "Medicine Woman", from More Than it Seems, was Steve setting the preexisting text, by Irene Butler, to his own music. "Rattlesnake Johnson" was one of the rare songs that was written in a collaborative effort which included Steve Blackwell and Gary Helinski.44

Sometimes Steve would write a song within weeks and other times it could take him months or years. On a large scale, Blackwell's method of songwriting was unorganized at best.

44 Ibid.
Bins at his house would contain unlabeled folders with notes in them or other newspaper clippings. At first glance one could think that it was a pile of old bills or other sort of trash. Nevertheless, as you go deeper into the notes, one can see how methodical Blackwell was with his research. Once he knew what he was working on, Steve would make files to put any research or other work on the project into its corresponding file. He did not get a chance to record several of his last songs. Recorded and published after his death, "Beluthahatchee" and "Charley" were just a few of Blackwell's later works that he was unable to publish before his illness rendered him incapable of doing so.45

**Steve's Style**

To understand Steve Blackwell's musical style, we first need to be aware of what music he listened to and what his influences were. To look through Steve Blackwell's music

45 Carrie Blackwell Hussy and Phebe Blackwell Westby, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 October 2009). Steve did finish both of these songs before his passing. Steve even went to perform "Beluthahatchee" for Stetson Kennedy at his home in Jacksonville, FL.
collection is as if you were browsing a music store. One would find a collection of compact discs including the music of Bob Dylan, the Allman Brothers, Gram Parsons, the Beatles, and many other well-known artists, which ranged across a wide spectrum of musical genres from country western, country rock, singer/songwriter, Soca, blues, gospel, and more.46

The music Steve Blackwell wrote is best described as a mixture of several styles that include rockabilly, traditional, blues, folk, country rock, and jazz. His early works show signs of heavy influences from Bob Dylan. Blackwell would focus much of his music on civil rights and environmental issues. Also like Dylan, much of Blackwell's early works consisted of just Steve playing guitar and harmonica and would "sing-talk" his lyrics rather than

46 Sue Blackwell, Japhy Blackwell, and Carrie Hussy Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February 2010). While Steve Blackwell and Gary Helinski were enrolled at the University of South Florida for their graduate work, Steve was reportedly obsessed with Soca music. Soca music is an upbeat, fast tempo style that originates from the Caribbean islands. During that time and would play recordings of that style at house parties or in his car.
singing them straightforward. Mix that in with an occasional blues feeling, all played by a folk ensemble instrumentation (guitar, mandolin, bass, recorder, harmonica, and the occasional violin or banjo), and then you will have an idea of what early Blackwell sounded like. As years passed, Steve began to add flute and saxophone to the ensemble, and as the instrumentation shifted, so did his style. Over the years, Steve's musical style grew and changed. His music began to drift away from the traditional folk sound as Steve's list of repertoire expanded. As his style progressed, Blackwell's songs maintained a sound rooted in the traditional folk sound, but his music began to take on more characteristics of a more popular country rock style. Electric instruments as well as modern woodwinds, such as flute and saxophone, were introduced as Steve's style progressed. Hints of jazz even

\[47\] In regards to what folk music is, there has been great discussion on that very topic. "Folk" implies "of the folk" or "of the people" which has led to the great diversity in styles from proclaimed folk musicians. For this study, "folk" refers to that music which originates from the southern Appalachian mountains of North America. This style shares its origins with Bluegrass as well. Acoustic instruments such as the guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and dulcimer dominate this musical style.
found their way into Steve's music as supporting saxophone runs were introduced. As these additions were made other instruments began to fade away into the background, such as the recorder. The mandolin began to take more of a soloist's approach with the melody rather than remaining as harmonic support.

Blackwell began to shift away from the style that constituted most of his musical output, and more towards a gospel feel as he neared the end of his life. He enjoyed playing and writing gospel music and one might assume that he would have continued down that path if it were not for his premature death.

Blackwell's Lyrical Influences

I have broken Blackwell's lyrical influences into several, categories: family, environmentalist, Florida civil rights activist and other historical figures throughout Florida,

\footnote{Sue Blackwell, personal email, 18 February 2010.}
local characters, and spiritual (which often overlaps with family).

Some of the more obvious sources of inspiration for Steve were the local characters and culture of the Punta Gorda area. "The Legend of Arthur Barnhill" is about a local in Port Charlotte who would drink, become intoxicated, and then wander onto US highway 41 and pretend to direct traffic. Another one of Steve's earlier songs was "Whompus". Harold Wagoner, Blackwell's inspiration for the song, goes by that name in some social circles and has somewhat of a questionable reputation in Punta Gorda, Florida. A lifelong resident of the Charlotte Harbor area, Wagoner was local angler for part of his life and even ran for city council. "Swamp Cabbage" is about the cabbage palm tree. During the pioneering days of Florida,

49 Harold Wagoner was admittedly eaten manatee, held a fellow student out the window from the second floor of Charlotte High School by his ankles, ran for elected office, and lived on an uninhabited island, Crow Key, just south of Charlotte Harbor.

50 Rodney Crouther, "Wagoner pulls few punches," Sarasota Herald Tribune, 11 January 1996, 3B.
cracker cow-hunters would harvest the heart from the palm and use it in food the same way rice is used today. ⁵¹ Some Floridians still harvest the heart of the tree and use it in cooking. ⁵² Blackwell makes sure to add in a touch of humor as well. ⁵³

One of Steve's primary lyrical foci was toward his historically based songs. Although Blackwell was from Indiana, he felt it was important to know one's local history and he did just that with many of his songs. An

⁵¹ Dana Ste Claire, *Cracker: The Cracker Culture in Florida History* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), 19-22. A Florida Cracker, is referencing to someone who's ancestors were settlers in Florida during its pioneer days. Many native Floridians with this lineage take pride in the fact that their ancestors lived of the Florida land without modern day amenities.


⁵³ Swamp cabbage is known by those who eat it, for having the rapid ability to make the consumer very gassy. In "Swamp Cabbage" Blackwell mentions sings, "Oh that good swamp cabbage, I eat it in a bowl, And oh, that good swamp cabbage, it sure does take its toll, It'll get your motor started with the sound of a vroom, And once you get all cranked up, You could surely clear a room..."
important point of interest is how many of Steve's songs were historical narrations which tended to place Steve in the time period of the subject matter. For example, Steve sings about how he drove cattle with a famous Florida cow hunter in, "Me and Bone Mizell", yet he remains historically accurate throughout the rest of the song.\textsuperscript{54} The librarian and teacher in him brought this out of him through his music.\textsuperscript{55} If Steve thought a verse was historically inaccurate, he would throw it out. He seldom performed "How Can You Call Yourself a Florida Folksinger" because of a verse in which Blackwell stated that he helped

\textsuperscript{54} Jim Bob Tinsley, \textit{Florida Cow Hunter: The Life and Times of Bone Mizell} (Orlando, Florida: University of Central Florida Press, 1990), 4-16. Cow hunter is a term for the cowboys of Florida in the late 19th century. They would heard the cattle with whips, not lassoes and use dogs to help manage the heard.

\textsuperscript{55} Steve Blackwell did not just attempt to remain accurate with major historical events, but rather he would demonstrate his research throughout his songs. In "Me and Bone Mizell" Steve wrote about how Bone Mizell would light cigars with dollar bills. During that time (1970s-1890s), a dollar was worth much more than it does today in 2010. Many Florida cattle-men traded with the Spanish and were paid with Spanish gold doubloons and became very wealthy in this trade. An indicator as to how much money some Florida cattle make is the fact that many did use dollar bills as kindling.
the Seminole tribe with Major Dade.⁵⁶ Steve would go on to say how he felt he had gone too far in support of one side and did not stay as objective as he should.⁵⁷

Blackwell spoke out against racism and bigotry with his words. Some of his songs in this category include "Stetson Kennedy", "Harry T. Moore", and "The Night They Burned Rosewood Down". However much Blackwell wanted his music to remain objective, his topics never hid the fact that he had a leftist point of view when it came to most things.⁵⁸

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⁵⁶ Joe Knetsch, Florida's Seminole Wars, 1817-1858 [2003] (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 70-73. Francis Langhorne Dade (1793-Dec. 28, 1835) was a Major in the 4th Infantry Regiment, United States Army, during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). Also known as the Florida War, it began because the Seminole Indian Tribe resisted their forced relocation out West to Oklahoma. For fear of an uprising, the army made efforts to strengthen their outpost. On December 23, 110 men under the command of Major Dade left Fort Brooke for Fort King. After five days of shadowing the soldiers, the Seminoles ambushed the federal troops. Of the 110 men, only three survived the attack that became known as "The Dade Massacre".

⁵⁷ Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January, 2010).

his letters to civil rights activist, Stetson Kennedy, Steve refers to himself as a recovering Republican.

This leads up to Blackwell's next area of focus, environmentalism. Punta Gorda sits on the edge of the Everglades. In the past forty years, the glades have been a powder keg for environment conservation battles between large corporations and those who wish to preserve the area's natural habitat. "Song for Marjory" talks about Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Her book The Everglades: River of Grass was the first significant published literature about conservation of the glades that caught the public's attention. "Plumes" focuses on the old Florida plume industry and the murder of game warden Guy Bradley, the first martyr of Florida conservation.

and Ralph Lee Smith (The Scarecrow Press: Lanham, Maryland, 2000), 34-36. In this book, Reuss discusses how folk musicians began speaking out against big business with their music. This same trend was duplicated by Steve Blackwell.


Blackwell wrote music often for his family. "Heartbeat" is a love song he wrote for his wife Sue. The lyrics talk about remembering the county fair where he proposed to her. "Phebe's Song" spawned from a request to Blackwell from his eldest daughter. Steve had written poems for Japhy and Carrie, but not Phebe. When he asked Phebe what she would like him to do for her, she told him to write her a song. Many of Blackwell's songs about his family also overlap with another of Steve's focuses, his spirituality.

Steve was a very spiritual man. Steve Blackwell believed in a God and a set of morals that were instilled in him by his family as a child. To Steve, people represented God's life force on this earth.  

In his journal Steve wrote,

> Deep inside we know that an important part of our job is to help God bless other people by blessing

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61 Susan, Blackwell, program notes, SteveFest Music Festival, 2 June 2007, 3.
them ourselves. It's just a matter of reaching out with the deepest part of ourselves.\footnote{Located in the personal documents of Steve Blackwell at his home in Harbor Heights, FL.}

Blackwell, being an open-minded individual, was fascinated by religions throughout his life, even studying world religions while in college. Upon a visit to the Blackwell home, one would find not only a cross, but a statue of Buddha and Vishnu as well. Steve would pray every day. Friends would joke that once you got onto Steve's prayer list, you would never get off. Near the end of his life, after the tumor began affecting his memory, Steve had Sue write down for whom he prayed so he would not forget. He told her he was around halfway down the list once she hit page seven. "\textit{Pawpa's Blessing}" was Steve simply wishing the best for his grandson Eli Westby. The most introspective song by Blackwell would have to be, \textit{"The Line"}. In this song, Blackwell sings about how he pictured all the spirits of his ancestors standing in a line and how he, would eventually be in that line. It truly takes on a new meaning now, since he sang "The Line" on his second
album *More Than it Seems*, and then had his youngest daughter, Carrie, sing it on *The Difference You Make*. In a way, Steve was passing his song on to the next generation of his own line.

Many of Steve's remaining songs, which are classified as spiritual, involve his work with the Peace Creek Revival. Unlike most of his other songs, these were almost exclusively none of his own works, but rather arrangements of well-known hymns for the group. When Steve arranged "*Amazing Grace*", he set the text to the melody of "House of the Rising Sun." It is important to note that these arrangements were made for the intention of payment for their performances. *Peace Creek Revival Live* was also a new point for Blackwell's published works. Although the last album to be published that would include Steve Blackwell, it was the first to contain a purely instrumental track of any kind.⁶³

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Steve Blackwell's Compositional Process

With almost everyone, when composing the question often raised is, "What comes first, the music or the lyrics?"
For Steve, his music conveyed its message through the words. All but one track on Blackwell's albums contain lyrics. The one track that does not is an instrumental version of "Amazing Grace" on Peace Creek Revival Live, which was compiled and released after Blackwell's death.\(^64\)

As was previous discussed, Steve Blackwell was a poet before he became a songwriter.\(^65\) That is important to note since all but one of Blackwell's published works are songs.

The librarian in Steve came out in him even before he wrote down his first words for a new song. Blackwell wanted to be as objective as possible and thus, he would go to great

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\(^65\) Much of the information from this section of Chapter 3 has come from files and notes found in the Blackwell home. Appendix C and Appendix D contain reference materials pertaining to this portion of the study.
lengths to avoid taking too much "poetic license". For the level of historical accuracy Steve wanted, he would refer back to the research he would have done prior to beginning writing. This initial research would provide Steve with the raw materials he needed to make a song. Now we will look at various sketches and drafts of Steve Blackwell's "Goin Back South" so we may gain a better picture of how Steve composed.

Steve began writing "Goin Back South" while on vacation with his family and family friends. Steve Blackwell's influence for "Goin Back South" was from a Thursday night tradition of playing music in Gilchrest Park in Punta Gorda, Florida. Although his inspiration required little to no research on his part since he was writing about an aspect of his life, which at the time he could not wait to return.

66 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Fort Ogden, FL: 30 January 2010).

67 A great deal of this section in Chapter 4 refers directly to Appendix C, which contains several series of notes found in their song files at the Blackwell home. Some of the notes have been lost or damaged from the wake of destruction of Hurricane Charley.
Blackwell's drive to keep his research well organized was his redeeming quality as a songwriter. If it were not for Steve's song folder catalog, it would have been a nightmare to keep up with his notes. Some lyricists are very methodical and have a designated workspace and time of day or night that they often compose. This was the portion of the compositional process when Steve started to become less organized. Blackwell did not have a scheduled time for writing his songs. Most of his surviving notes exist on an assortment of notepad paper, napkins, scrap paper, and even brochures obtained from tourist spots while on vacation.

This case study is no exception to the standard that Steve wrote whenever he struck a creative chord. The file entitled "Goin Back South" was procured in the home of Steve Blackwell located in Punta Gorda, Florida. Containing a pile of notes by Steve, one could read Blackwell's handwriting on an assortment of notebook pages, napkins, notepads, and even a brochure to a tourist
Due to water damage however, from Hurricane Charley in 2004, several of the notes contained within the file were unusable as examples. Many other files have similar damage to a portion of their contents. After reviewing his research (if there was any needed), Steve would start writing. Evidence suggests that the song's lyrics always came first. The song's key and chord changes typically do not appear until the later drafts, after the song began to take a more recognizable form.

For Steve the song would begin with the words. His beginning notes almost resemble scratch paper for a poet rather than a composer. He would write down words or phrases that help to paint a picture for the listeners. Examples include "the sun drowns in the water and brightens the sky reflecting," "the laughter, the freedom no money could buy," "sailors, artists, all of its more than it seems," or "circle round." After more ideas have been

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68 Steve Blackwell, personal song files (Punta Gorda, FL), located in the home of Steve Blackwell.

69 As seen on the top half of the first page of "Goin' Back South" in Appendix C.
written down Blackwell would manipulate, edit, and combine his phrases until eventually he had unit of several lines such as "the sun drowns in water and colors the sky, the sea breeze, the mangroves, the night birds that cry, the laughter the freedom, no money could buy." Evidence is shown in this beginning stage already, that Steve was revising his text, even on this fundamental level of individual phrases. He shows us he used a rhyming word bank on the first page of the song notes for "Goin' Back South" (in Appendix C), which indicates a knowledge of yet another tool for helping the writer combine individual phrases into larger units which could act as verses.

Further into Blackwell's notes shows the beginnings of a formal structure for work. In verse-chorus form, larger text units are coming together at this point to finish the first verses. The fourth page of Blackwell's notes shows for the first time, any evidence of the songs key. Up to this point of the process, music had not been a part of Blackwell's notes. Only now after extensive research and

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70 As seen at the bottom of the first page for "Goin' Back South" in Appendix C.
writing did Steve bring music into the mix. Steve Blackwell was not a virtuoso guitar player, but he was a very good rhythm guitar player. This skill gap could easily explain why music had not appeared until now. In the key of G, the harmonic progression was I-IV-I-V-I-IV-I.
The last page of Steve's notes for "Goin Back South," shows a more completed version of the song. Although there are no chord changes on this document, the text is closer to the final version on More Than it Seems than the previous document. Steve would get writer's block occasionally while writing a verse. So, to help him get over his block, Blackwell began writing down words or small phrases onto small pieces of scrap paper, and then refer to them as "thought seeds."71

Steve would often remove verses that he felt were unnecessary or did not fit well with the rest of the song as the composition progressed. All of Steve's songs are in the keys of G, E, A, D, and a few in C. After completion, 71 These "thought seeds" are found in almost every surviving song file in the home of Steve Blackwell.
the music would then be enhanced with the addition of the other members of the band all working together. No major section of the work would be altered, but instead, supplemental and supportive lines would be added to the template that Steve would bring to the group. Therefore, the original integrity of the work would remain the same and still be Steve's song.
CHAPTER 4: A LASTING IMPACT

After looking at Steve Blackwell in detail concerning his own personal history as well as his musical career, our focus will now shift towards Steve Blackwell's legacy. Using his music Blackwell had a special ability to bring people together. That skill in combination with his outward personality formed a powerful force that fed itself. Steve's music helped bring people into his life, which in turn, gave him inspiration for more songs, and so the cycle continued. However, there was another element to the equation. Steve was already connected to a large social community of his own. Something of a modern day tribal community formed whose work together helped to spark a wealth of cultural, social events, and civic activities. This is what chapter four of this study sets out to examine. What this study found was surprising.
The Tribe

To understand Steve Blackwell and his music is to understand the Tribe. One could say that Steve's songs were a reflection of the Tribe. Even his own band, Steve Blackwell and Friends formed completely from members of the Tribe. As discussed earlier, much of Steve's music was directly inspired by a group of people who called themselves the Tribe. So, who is the Tribe?

The Tribe is a group of people, who share common cultural similarities and often travel together on vacations or other holidays. The Tribe started out as four families to be exact, who over the years has grown into extended families of several generations, and friends who are welcomed in amongst the ranks. The Tribe began to converge in 1972 when Steve, Sue, and Phebe moved to Punta Gorda, Florida. Steve's time in Punta Gorda is one filled with countless friendships, but one of the first friendships Sue and Steve made after moving into town was with John and

Much of this chapter comes from personal interviews and my own observations while visiting with the tribe.
Nancy Westby. The Westby's, along with their children, Denny and Disa, were close friends of the Blackwell family. After years of camping, fishing, and friendship, they became family after Phebe Blackwell married Denny Westby. Phebe and Denny are the parents of Eli and Bette Lou Westby who are Steve, Sue, John, and Nancy's grandchildren. Nancy and her sister Carol are Sowards, a pioneer family in Charlotte County, Florida. Carol's husband, Denis Goff, is from a commercial fishing family. Those family forbearers tied the Blackwell family deep into the local history and characters of the Peace River Valley. Gary "Gee" and Cindy Helinski and their kids, along with Dan and Robin Leach and their kids, particularly the eldest son Andy, make up a band of extended family. Even Steve's parents came to enter into the Tribe as well as a host of unnamed friends that make up the core of the Tribe.

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73 Nancy Westby, personal interview (Port Charlotte, FL: 28 February 2010).


75 Ibid.
I never truly began to understand what the Tribe was until after I joined them for a Thanksgiving weekend. After making first contact with the Blackwell family, they invited me to join the Tribe for their Thanksgiving camping trip. One of the members of the Tribe brings everyone onto their own property, just north of Port Charlotte on Horse Creek, a tributary to the Peace River. The Tribe was going to be spending that 2009 Thanksgiving weekend on the property.

After I arrived, I was expecting to see the Blackwell family and a few friends. What I found instead was nothing short of a surprise. It was as if there was a small community living back on the property. I was told that at the prayer for the meal there were approximately 90 people in attendance. I quickly realized that this was no ordinary camping trip. There were canoes and kayaks pulled up on shore near the banks of the creek. There was a fully furnished cooking station filled, with not only butane camping stoves, but also full range stoves, and a professional quality smoker grill. There was a fire pit in the center of camp, all while a combination of campers and tents outlined the perimeter, along with the few tents
scattered out from the main camp among the native palmetto bushes. During the day, the children would run and play. Family and friends would take the canoes for a short trip up the creek that was next to the main camp. The adults would talk and play games, such as ladder golf, or tend to their cooking. The Tribe would always eat as one, save for the few who would wander the cooking area looking for something light to eat. Different families would pitch in to make enough food to feed the whole group. Four or five of the elder, "mother" figures, would tend to the stoves while Denny Westby would tend to the smoker. Others would bring crock pots or chips from their campers for the group. Overall, the camp was quiet for most of the day, aside from the occasional group of three or four people talking and laughing, or hearing children calling to one another as they played out in the palmetto.

Once darkness falls and the temperature drops however, the camp drastically changes. John Westby, one of the reigning patriarchs of the Tribe, begins to build the fire up to the point that the flames will consistently be six feet high. The Tribe began to gather around the fire and converse. Several people brought instruments along and began singing
songs. A majority of the people did not sing however, opting rather to converse with those around them while enjoying the live music and the warmth of the ever-growing fire. As more people came to join the social ring around the fire, the musicians began taking turns, the right to perform would go round the circle. Sometimes the performing musician would play solo guitar or mandolin and sing while at other times it seemed as if anyone with an instrument had joined in the fun. Every once in a while, as several musicians joined in with the playing, other Tribe members would start to get up and dance around the fire. On the second night, one of the Tribe members brought out a book entitled *Steve's Songs*. That night the performers picked songs written by Steve and sang them with those around them. At certain points of the songs, I noticed the mood was less of a party and more of a celebration. For the Tribe, singing Steve's songs is just one of their tributes to his memory.

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76 An unpublished collection of lead sheets for Steve Blackwell's published songs. See Appendix D.
I saw how the Tribe had been a strong influence for Steve when he began writing music. With the Tribe, on the other hand, it was easy to see how much of a strong influence Steve was for those around him. During his life, Steve was essential to the creation of the Tribe. Blackwell was clearly the Tribe's primary entertainer and storyteller for when it was time around the campfire. Blackwell was a modern day bard for a modern day tribe. During his life, the Tribe followed Steve and supported his musical career, whether he was playing in the local Punta Gorda Block Party, folk festivals around the state, or around the campfire. Where Steve went the Tribe was sure to follow. Blackwell was their musical champion; they loved his music, and were instrumental with helping Steve with much of what was to come.

**Punta Gorda Guitar Army**

As discussed earlier, Steve Blackwell seriously began to write his own compositions in the early 1990s. It was during this same time that the Punta Gorda Guitar Army was
beginning to grow with Steve’s help.\textsuperscript{77} However, background information about the Punta Gorda Guitar Army is needed before we can discuss how Steve helped them. First, we need to understand who the Punta Gorda Guitar Army is and how they started.

Around 1992, my cousin, Michael Haymans, a lawyer at a local law firm, began to learn how to play the guitar and practiced at home with several friends. Mike’s wife at the time, Debbie, told him he had to start practicing somewhere else because she was sick of hearing the same songs repeatedly. Therefore, Mike and his friends began meeting and practicing every Wednesday night in the gazebo at Gilchrest Park, a local facility in Punta Gorda located on the shore of Charlotte Harbor just down river from US 41. As time passed and their instrumental skills improved, people began to stop and listen to them while they took turns playing what they had worked on. Eventually they

\textsuperscript{77} Michael P. Haymans, personal interview (Punta Gorda FL: 14 February, 2010).
started to invite their friends to come and join in with them.\textsuperscript{78}

Around the same time this was going on, Robin Leach, Dan Leach’s wife and Mike were working together with a local poetry group called YRI. Steve Blackwell, being an English teacher at the time, was involved with the poetry group and many members of the Tribe were normally in attendance. Mike, having been a friend of Steve since 1972, invited him out to the parks, but Steve’s attendance was rare due to an after-hours study program that he ran Wednesday nights at Charlotte High School.\textsuperscript{79} Therefore, to try to make the night more accessible for other people to come out and join the night was changed from Wednesday to Thursday night. Once the night was changed, Blackwell was more available to come out to the park and enjoy the music making. With Steve came the Tribe. By this point in time, the Tribe had been in existence for about twenty years. Families had

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February, 2010).
already become close friends and the children were growing up and beginning lives of their own, but they still came out to listen to the music. They would bring their own families and friends to, as Steve would say, “To listen and sing in that park by the bay...”.

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Figure 9: Punta Gorda Guitar Army. Various patrons and performers from the Punta Gorda Guitar Army [Date Unknown], located in the home of Steve Blackwell.

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80 "To listen and sing in that park by the bay, the laughter, the people the music they play... of legends and locals and things that they say, a patchwork of voices to close out the day." -Steve Blackwell. "Goin' Back South".
Over time, Thursday nights at the park became a common occurrence for Steve and the Tribe, but it was not limited to this close network of friends and extended family. They would invite others from their work, their friends, and so on the network grew. They came to call themselves the Punta Gorda Guitar Army, though Steve often called them the “Neo-Beatnik Revolutionary Ensemble” because one night of every week the park would fill with musicians; who came to play their music and attain their chance for the spotlight; and not for money or any great level of fame. As people gathered, musicians and listeners alike, circles would form. More circles would form as the numbers grew. Often, several musicians who wanted to play more would wonder off to another spot in the park and start playing and then that circle will begin to grow. As the number of jam circles grew, so did the musical selection for the listener. One circle may play blues for the majority of the time while another circle is playing traditional folk style songs. By the night's peak, several well-established jam circles along with other, smaller circles could be scattered throughout the park.
Music at the park had several distinct similarities to the campfire jam sessions over Thanksgiving break with the Tribe. The jam circles formed and grew as people came out. The singers would take turns performing their songs, or reciting their poems. Just as before with the Tribe's campfire jam sessions over Thanksgiving break, some songs were left to solo performers. Other songs however, would find the addition of several other performers, maybe even all the other performers in the circle, would join in with the music.

Figure 10: Guitar Army bad weather notice. Posted at the gazebo in Gilchrest Park in Punta Gorda FL.
The Punta Gorda Guitar Army still meets every Thursday night at the gazebo where it all started. On a cool autumn night, after the snowbirds have come down to Florida escaping the cold, you may see a range of approximately five hundred to one thousand people at the park, musicians and listeners combined. Other nights when the weather is rough or too cold, someone would often have sign posted, as seen in figure 10, giving directions to an indoor alternative location.

The Punta Gorda Guitar Army was not a creation of Steve Blackwell, but it was not until Blackwell began attending that it really started to grow and develop. They pay homage to their roots too. In 2007, members of the group dedicated a plaque in the gazebo in memory to Steve. They helped to inspire much of Steve’s songs. Some even say that the Punta Gorda Guitar Army helped inspire Steve to begin writing his own music. Regardless, this unofficial group of "Neo-Beatniks" gives credit to Steve as one of its first members, a fallen friend, and a source of inspiration.
After Steve Blackwell’s death in 2006, the members of Steve Blackwell and Friends had to address the big question, “What now?” The first part of that question was if they were going to continue to perform. Steve’s daughter Carrie admitted to me that at first, the thought of going on stage and continuing to sing her father's songs made her feel sick since it would be a constant reminder to her about who was missing. Nevertheless, the group decided to keep performing. Not long afterwards, the band members needed to decide what they were going to call themselves. Obviously, they could not continue to perform as Steve Blackwell and Friends, so they chose instead, to perform as Still Friends. With the addition of long time friend Tiffiny Coffey, the ensemble was complete. Tiffiny would fill the gap and play guitar, accordion, and sing supportive vocals.

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81 Carrie Blackwell Hussey, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 29 January 2010).
Questions could be asked as to how anything other than Steve Blackwell’s death contributed to the formation of Still Friends. I would have to answer that question by referring back to how the Steve Blackwell and Friends formed. When Gary Helinski and Dan Leach decided to perform with Steve, they did so with the understanding that they were there primarily to help enhance Steve’s music. If the primary reason for the formation of Steve Blackwell
and Friends was to help enhance Steve’s music, then logically the band would have disbanded upon Steve’s passing. After playing in the band with Steve through the years however, the band members had grown to be close friends and had a platonic love for each other that lasted long after Steve's death. If it were not for Steve Blackwell, the members of Still Friends would very likely not have ever become friends and by taking on that name, they give thanks to Steve for his influence and legacy. The band released their first album, *Rise Up*, in 2009, which featured Steve’s last two songs "Beluthahatchee", and "Charley". Steve was not able to publish them himself before his passing.

*SteveFest*

The most recent event to form from the memory of Steve Blackwell and the idea that his music touched those around would have to be the Tribe’s largest endeavor yet, SteveFest. Since Blackwell’s death in 2006, the Tribe has organized an annual local music festival, honoring the

---

memories of Steve and his music. The first two festivals were one-day events where local performers could highlight their music. The final event each year to close out the festival, and as an act of remembrance to Steve, performers would join on stage and take turns leading one of Steve's songs.

The Tribe’s efforts were so successful that in February of 2010, they expanded the festival from one day to three days. Vendors of all sorts were at the event. Patrons could find food ranging from slow cooked, falling-off the bone barbeque and fresh made smoothies, to hotdogs and funnel cakes with a mountain of choices in between. Local craftwork and artisanship was also on display. You could browse handmade jewelry, receive a ten-minute massage, or buy a body paint tattoo for your kids. Unlike the SteveFest in the previous two years, the festival was held at the Charlotte County Fair Grounds rather than in a smaller municipal park. For the first time, camping was offered to patrons if they wished to stay the night and the

83 Gary Helinski, personal interview (Port Charlotte, FL: 28 February, 2010).
festival expanded from one stage to three. The Tribe was able to do all of this under their official name "2009-2010 SteveFest Incorporated" with the help of sponsorships from local business and other private individuals.

The three stages were filled with performers from the surrounding areas of Southwest Florida as well as other musicians from throughout the country. The music was not limited to the folk genre either. At SteveFest 2010, patrons would hear a mixture of folk, rock, bluegrass, country, blues and more. This diversity in sound is a direct reflection of who Steve was. Blackwell was inexorably diverse in his musical taste. Every musician performing knew Steve one way or another.

Kelly Mulhollan and Donna Stjerna, the duo who makes up the group Still on the Hill, told me about the time they heard Steve was sick and taking a turn for the worse. They immediately dropped what they were doing to buy plane tickets to go see him and say their final goodbyes. They arrived at Blackwell’s home six hours too late. They stayed with the Blackwell family until the day before the Steve's memorial service, when they had to leave for their
home back in Arkansas."84 The family played "Dream of the Sweetest Dream", a song they had written in honor of Steve at the service.

Others knew him only as a performer. Several patrons who talked with me explained the different ways each of them knew Steve. One patron from Montana talked to me about how he never had a chance to meet Blackwell, but wished he had a chance to have met him. He told me how he was friends with many of Steve’s associates and had heard stories about Blackwell, stating, “I know too many good people (pointing to several groups of volunteers) who looked up to Steve and I wish I had met him before he passed”.85

Once darkness fell over the festival and the stages cleared, as with so many other nights, the Tribe would join to sing, drink, dance, and have an all around have a good time. This was especially a time for the people to unwind

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84 Kelly Mulhollan, personal interview (Port Charlotte, FL: 28 February, 2010).

85 Clive [A patron at SteveFest 2010 who only gave me his first name], personal interview (Port Charlotte, FL: 27 February 2010).
and mingle, since many of them were working throughout the day with the running of the festival. If the members of the Tribe were not volunteering for the festival, they would line the stages to support the performers. Many of those performers would then join in to the campfire jam session and play along with the rest of the Tribe.

Recordings of the performing artist were available for purchase. Almost all of the recordings were of the artists' own compositions. The recordings were of good quality and professionalism, but did not show any evidence of commercial influence. Almost unanimously, the albums were made by small, self-owned recording businesses. For example, Peace Creek Productions always produced Steve's music, but the Blackwell family started Peace Creek Productions. This allowed the family with a safety net should they ever have to defend against any possible lawsuit. This also allowed the artists to be more genuine in regards to how the album turned out as a finished product. Being self-published, one could easily conclude

86 Sue Blackwell, personal interview (Punta Gorda, FL: 7 February, 2010).
that what they were hearing was what the artists wanted on the album and free from commercial influence. It was also at this table that you could purchase any shirts or hats containing the new logo for the festival.

The festival reached out to the community, not only for festival publicity, but also but also to provide performance and showcase opportunities for young, budding, artists enrolled in the area high schools. One project was with the local high schools to help with finding a new logo. The assignment was for students to make an adaptation of the original logo that emphasized the local history and/or ecology of the surrounding area. The submissions were sent in and a winner chosen. The winner's artwork was to be the new logo for the festival and printed on all the shirts, hats, and programs for that year. The second tack the festival gave to the local high school students was to write an original song. Once the submissions were in and the winner decided, the festival was going to reward that person with the chance to perform
the winning song on the main stage of the festival.\textsuperscript{87} This was interesting because it assisted the Tribe with quickly spreading information about the festival through the local schools. More importantly however, this helped keep the Tribe in touch with the student body. Steve kept his students engaged and always encouraged them to grow their creativity.\textsuperscript{88} Through the art and composition projects, every student who submitted either a song or artwork used the festival for their own creative inspiration.

It was through their love for Blackwell that the Tribe found their motivation to put so much work into an annual event, where keeping the memory of Steve alive was its driving force. Not only was the festival a dedication to the memory of Steve and his music, but an honoring of his life and the impact he had on the lives of so many people. Those individuals who were touched by his music made the festival’s music, and the festival reached out to the


\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
schools, something that the teacher in Steve would have probably done himself.
CONCLUSIONS

After looking into Steve Blackwell's life, his performing career, musical output, and the impact he and his music had on his community, one can easily see the importance of the local folk musician. Steve Blackwell was not from the Peace River Valley, but once he settled there, he took it upon himself to learn about the history and culture of the local area. Through Steve's music, a wealth of social capital formed around he and his family. From Steve's extroverted conduct sprouted social strength that benefited the area in such a manner that otherwise would probably not have been possible.

Blackwell acted as a true troubadour for his surrounding area. His poetic lyrics would tell a story, whether it be around a campfire or on center stage. Rather than just singing what came easily to him, Steve would paint a

89 Here I reference to the importance of all folk musicians for a society. Steve Blackwell was an ideal subject for examination due of the level potential a folk singer could achieve while continuing a separate work life. Steve Blackwell personifies the role of the modern day folk musician.
picture that would inform the listeners about historical characters who were involved with numerous events throughout the history of Florida. Making sure not to stray too far from the facts, Blackwell truly entertained while educating at the same time. If he wanted to, Steve probably could have lived as a performing musician. Unlike the stereotypical popular music singer, Steve was a competent craftsman for his art. He wrote his own music and never lip synced at a performance. Blackwell would take his time composing songs, and work hard to make sure the topics were something that resonated within him. Steve Blackwell was not "fake". The Tribe that formed around him inspired his poetic and musical creativity. With the Tribe's help, the Punta Gorda Guitar Army began and is still making music down in Gilchrest Park every Thursday night. SteveFest is gaining local support and is becoming one of Florida's fastest growing music festivals. All of these things are examples of social capital.

Research has shown that in the latter half of the twentieth century that society in the United States was beginning to
fragment, which was in direct relation to how much social capital a community produced.\textsuperscript{90} As society would become more fragmented, the amount of social capital would drop. This relationship was not the only one to change as social capital dropped in a community. Violent crimes would also rise as the amount of social capital fell.\textsuperscript{91} Therefore, as the level of social capital rises in a community the crime rate also lowers. This is not to suggest that Steve's music directly lowered the crime rate, but rather, that the crime rate is an indicator for the community's level of social capital. If people are involved with different organizations, they are less likely to partake in criminal behavior.

Through his music, Steve Blackwell acted as a beacon through which social capital was created. While he was still alive, Steve would create after-school activities to help his students do better in their classes. His music


\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
brought the people of Punta Gorda out of their homes. Through this action, new connections were established and able to grow into friendships. Steve helped bring the community around him together.

Not to imply that all the local residents attended these events, but rather, Steve extended a hand to those around him and many reached out to meet him. A common remark from those who attended Steve's memorial service was in regards to how many people from all walks of life came to pay their respects. Steve Blackwell was truly a local treasure for the residents of the Punta Gorda area.

Steve's death in 2006 marked the end of an era for the Tribe and the beginning of a new era for the community of Punta Gorda. Blackwell's words are not forgotten and his absence left a void hearts of those who knew and were close to him. The Tribe continues to keep his memory alive and well. It is from the work of those individuals, which is what spreads Steve Blackwell's message of remembrance of history, reverence for nature, and love for his fellow man.
Dear Sue:

I am completing my thesis for a master's degree at the University of Central Florida entitled "Steve Blackwell: Florida Folk Musician." I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:


More Than it Seems. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 1996.


Peace Creek Revival Live. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 2006.


The excerpts to be reproduced are so: I will be able to embed short clips of selected audio and visual recordings into my thesis document as evidence to help support my topic, demonstrate Steve's stylistic change over time, and provide the reader with the opportunity to actually hear and see Steve Blackwell singing his own music.

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Hayman

---

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: 
Susan Blackwell
Manager
Date: 3/9/10
1044 Abell Circle
Oviedo, FL 32765

Monday, March 1, 2010

Gary Helinski
8278 SW Reese Street
Arcadia, FL 34269

Dear Gary:

I am completing my thesis for a master’s degree at the University of Central Florida entitled “Steve Blackwell: Florida Folk Musician.” I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Hayman

---

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By: Gary Helinski

Date: 3/5/10
1044 Abell Circle
Oviedo, FL 32765

Monday, March 1, 2010

Japhy Blackwell
3513 Island View Drive
Punta Gorda, FL 33950

Dear Japhy:

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Hayman

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: [Signature]

Japhy Blackwell

Date: 3-8-2010
1044 Abell Circle
Oviedo, FL 32765

Monday, March 1, 2010

Carrie Blackwell Hussey
33 Sao Paulo Drive
Funta Gorda, FL 33983

Dear Carrie:

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Haymans

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By:  
Carrie Blackwell Hussey

Date: 3/5/10
1044 Abell Circle  
Oviedo, FL 32765

Monday, March 1, 2010

Dan Leach  
1345 Fireside Street  
Port Charlotte, FL 33952

Dear Dan:

I am completing my thesis for a master’s degree at the University of Central Florida entitled "Steve Blackwell: Florida Folk Musician." I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

More Than it Seems. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 1996.
Peace Creek Revival Live. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 2006.

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Hayman

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: ________
    Dan Leach

Date: 3/7/10
1044 Abell Circle  
Oviedo, FL 32765

Monday, March 1, 2010

Andrew Leach  
1345 Fireside Street  
Port Charlotte, FL 33952

Dear Andy:

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Sincerely,

Brian G. Haymans

______________________________

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By: __________________________
    Andrew Leach

Date: 3-7-94
APPENDIX B: SELECTED LIST OF STEVE BLACKWELL'S SONGS
This is a list of published songs by Steve Blackwell. The list was located on the computer at the home of Steve Blackwell, but is incomplete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Porch, A Marsh, A River</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry T. Moore</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He's Our Clown to Kick Around</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery Tree</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumes</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stetson Kennedy</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You For Teaching Us</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukelele Madness</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Played Music for Two Dogs Before He Died</td>
<td>And So It Grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad of Arthur Barnhill</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodbye Columbus Day (You Weren’t the First to be Here)</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandpa’s Den</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me &amp; Bone Mizell</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River of Peace</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting Star</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Night They Burned Rosewood Down</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Without a Net</td>
<td>Listen Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goin’ Back South</td>
<td>More Than It Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Must Be Told</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine Woman</td>
<td>More Than It Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>More Than It Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Billy Rockin’</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Line</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Memory</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Store Is Closed</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tootch Brown</td>
<td>More than it Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wampus</td>
<td>More Than It Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will McLean Talkin’ Blues</td>
<td>More Than It Seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backyard Revolution #1</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Live on a Gravel Road</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaw’s Blessing</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phebe’s Song</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rattlesnake Johnson</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right Before our Eyes</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song for Marjory</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swamp Cabbage</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Measure</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Devils Parade as Angels of Light</td>
<td>The Difference You Make</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF BLACKWELL'S COMPOSITIONAL NOTES
This is a collection of selected compositional notes from Steve Blackwell's personal files from his home in Punta Gorda, Florida. This list contains both published and unpublished works by Blackwell. They are ordered in developmental order (beginning moving on towards the end of the compositional process). This is to help one gain a better picture of how a song appeared as Steve wrote it. One can also see verses Blackwell opted to drop from the songs, or last minute insertions of text. All of these materials are located at the home of Steve Blackwell in Punta Gorda, Florida.
"The Line"

I think of all my ancestors standing in a line. Would I recognize them? Know that they're mine?

Sometimes I think that it's a shame I'll be gone but I know how hard I'll be missed.

I put these thoughts back in the shelf. Soon I'll be in that line myself. Who will remember me?

I don't mind dying. Soul flies. Body rotted. The deepest. The part I dread. The real fear. I just don't want to be forgotten.

Don't forget me.

I broke this air and saw the sunsets that blessed my soul. Don't forget me.

I sang and prayed and longed. My family and friends made me whole.
Don't forget me

I did most things right - some things wrong
I've known love in many forms
Some more I knew amiss
Cried at the beauty of a song
Don't forget me

Fleeting fleeting moments to catch
To appreciate
Preciousness, the perfumes profound
Thankful Appreciative Consciousness
Waves, passion, heart swelling
Embracing - possessing in
gentle love thoughts.

A prayer for the ancestors -
A prayer of thanksgiving for our lives - those who came before us
Ghosts in a chain
I won't forget you
I won't forget you
The line
Am I all C would
I know my ancestors stood in a line Am
And each generation recognize the line that they're wise Am
Sometimes I think I think it's a shame Am
How few people I'll know how few I could have
My line is where I come from every place can
Lived up in heaven's fields as far as you see Am
I put these thoughts way back in the shelf Am
Because I'll be in that line myself Am
I didn't forget you though I don't know where you are your face Am
I've once breathed this air I lived in this place Am
I've once viewed the sunsets that blessed your soul Am
I've sung you prayed to friends and family
Friends make whole Am
In love is My answered
A love won't be denied Am
Ifspoke for the old one Am
All standing in line Am
Oh I won't forget you I'll see you plan to one day Am
I won't forget you they won't forget me
The Line

If all my ancestors would stand in a line
Who would I recognize & know that they're mine?
Sometimes I think... I think it's a shame
How few I would know - how few I could name

My line of ghosts that push on me
Lined up in heaven's fields as far as you can see
I put these thoughts way back in the shelf
Cause soon I'll be in that line myself

I didn't forget you though, I don't know your face
You once breathed this air & lived in this place
You once viewed the sunsets that blessed your soul
You sang & you prayed - friends & family made you whole

In love it is answered - a love rare & fine
A prayer for the old ones all standing in a line
Oh, I won't forget you - it's plain to see
I won't forget you - & you won't forget me

How can I thank you - all links in a chain
Oh, you ancient ones unknown & unnamed
More precious than gold & jewels & fine wine
Are the ones from the past - all standing in a line
(repeat last 2 lines - out)
"Swamp Cabbage"

SC oh how I love the taste
SC not a mouthful would I waste
I get so damn excited
It is hard to stay calm
When I eat these tasty morsels that are the hearts of palm
in your car or pickup truck
Driving on the back roads in those old Florida lanes
Always on scene of the perfect cabbage palm scene
And oh when I eat it my God what a sight
Carved, I know I'll be eaten some Swamp cabbage tonight

On that god be I eat a big bowl
And oh that god be it sure does take its toll
It's something that we want to any kind of bliss
You eat too much Swamp cabbage
You surely will have gas

So keep a close eye on it
You don't want to lose it
Recipes all over - some easy and some hard
Just don't cut a Swamp cabbage
If it is in your yard
You neighbor

Driving through the back roads next to a Palman
Always on scene of the perfect cabbage palm
"Goin' Back South"

Where mangroves & water reflect
Sunsets

The sun drowns in the water & colors the sky
And mangroves & the smells of
The smells of gulf sea & buy
Seas breezes & mangroves & night seas that cry & lie un
The longer, the freer,
No money could buy

The sun drowns in water & colors the sky
The sea breezes & mangroves & night seas that cry & lie
The longer, the freer,
No money could buy
The music's homegrown legends

Old ones, young ones,
teachers, tellers of dreams
Doctors, sailors, artists
All of it's more than it seems

Old folks, young kids,
teachers, tellers of dreams
Workers, mothers, fathers
All of it's more than it seems

Old folks, young kids,
sit here, sing out your dreams

Circle, circle round
I'm going back south where the sand meets the sea
where friends get together to play & be free
A smile & a song turns the lock like a key
There's no other place in this world I should be

To listen & sing in that park by the bay
The laughter, the friendship, the music they play
Tell the stories of the sea & the sun's rays
Inventing themselves in a poetic way

Locals, characters
Kids & sailors, artists abound
Teachers & sellers of dreams
Poets & lawyers & doctors come down
All of it's more than it seems

To tell
Let me think it & feel it & love it & speak it
And share all the joys in a full heart that swells
My cup it runs over - you've filled it so well
Let me think it & feel it & live it & speak it & tell

Locals & characters
People places rivers
Nature animals
Western past
Spirits & ghosts
A parade of voices & music & sound

Of dreams & locales & things that they say
Are made every day
C
G
I'm going back south where the sun meets the sea
Where farmers get together to play to be free
A smile + a song turn the world like a key
There's no other place in this world I should be

G

C

see

set me free

my eyes like a level
on so clear
white & blue
where water reflects clocks + sing like a mirror
And palm trees + mangoes + boats are so clear
let me see it all eyes like a bank on so clear

G

To bear to the top of the story

G

C

let me think it + feel it + love it so much
and share all the joys with a full heart + soul
My cup it runs over - you've filled it so well

G

tribal

tribal

Gypsy's tribe

This appreciation for Fellowship + for Community
full-filling etc.
Gary Robinson 1-203-875-2024

I'm going back south where the sand meets the sea
Where friends get together to play and be free
A smile and a song turns the beach like a key
There's no other place in this world I should be

To listen and sing in that place by the bay
The laughter, the friendship, the music they play
Of cowboys and locals and things that they say
A patchwork of voices to close out the day

Listeners and Singers
Poets and writers of dreams
A circle that lingers
All of it more than it seems

The sun dawns in water
And colors the sky
The sea breeze and mangrove
And night birds that cry
The laughter, the freedom
No woman could say

Cooters and Shrimpers

"Grandpa's Den"

Grandpa's Den

1. There's a special place that I still go sometimes in my dreams. Back there to my childhood days before I was a teen. On Fridays we would often stay at Grandma & Grandpa's house and grandpa's den, that magic place, is where my mind will roam.

2. He kept books on magic, there are secret herbal cures, there were beads and rocks and antique clocks & some wild animal fur's. A trunk with props & masks & costumes from his vaudeville days, enough fascinating objects to keep a boy amazed.

3. Guitar, banjo, cornet, and his old vaudeville trunk. A Morris chair, some antique guns, drunks, and other junk, old tools, books, & Indian rugs & pictures of our kin. All the mysteries of life seemed to be in Grandpa's den.

4. Sometimes we'd get out the vaudeville hats & false beards and then we'd pose. Or Grandpa & I would go downtown to the "Shoot 'Em Up - Bang 'Em Up" Shows. We'd watch the good guys save the day at the movie house then we'd head on back for a bedtime story there in Grandpa's den.

Chorus:

5. He had a ventriloquist dummy - Oscar was his name. Sometimes he would try to scare us, but that was part of the game. There was a small hole play if we were good. I can still hear Grandpa's clear sweet voice sing, "Come to the Churn in the Wild Wood."

Chorus:
"Goodbye Columbus Day"

(You Weren't the First To Be Here)

It was in the year 1992
Columbus sailed the ocean blue
I was taught that he sailed for you and me
Home of the brave, land of the free

Columbus, let me make one point clear
I know that without you I might not be here
But history's taught from your point of view
And we need to hear the other side, too

Chorus

You weren't the first to be here
You weren't the first to love this land dear
So Christopher Columbus, let me write it clear
You weren't the first to be here

Explorers became conquerors they say
Killing native people if they got in their way
People who lived here before you
Living before the red and white and blue
For reasons sacred or profane
I guess that they didn't complain

In 1492 they kicked the Jews out of Spain
While heroes out exploring other lands
They were making slaves out of Africans

These heroes have purchased history's page
With the blood and suffering - the Indian's rage
But you know the Indian won't have a say
As for me it's Goodbye Columbus Day
"Plumes"

They call me 2-gun Johnson
down here in the Glades.
I fish a little, hunt some birds.
I'm a jack of all trades.

Grew up in Flamingo,
Down around Cuthbert lake.
With a rifle or a boat,
It's a living I must make.

Look, I've scouted out some rookeries
where the snowy egrets nest.
And after the eggs are hatched,
you know, their feathers are the best.

Feathers for the ladies' hats
Is what they're still for I'm told.
And at $35 for an ounce of them,
you know, they're worth their weight in gold.

Plumes - bright explosions of wings,
Once I shoot those crazy birds,
I can buy all kinds of things.

They'll just sit right there,
Can you imagine that?
Trying to protect their young,
Still pester their feathers in a hat.
They're just
Said he was a game warden
As his blue eyes glinted sadly
I'm not proud to say this but
I'm the man who killed Guy Bradley
I'm the man who killed Guy Bradley

Plumes - bright explosions of wings
Once I shot those crazy birds
I can buy all kinds of things
(Instrumental)

I guess I've known Guy Bradley
nearly all my life
Sat together in Miss Hattie's School
Carved a desk up with a knife
   a decent
He played fiddle with
    Old Uncle John's String Band
They'd play at Old Man Lyman's Store
   or they'd play right in the sand

But I've got to feed my babies
So I shot without a word
Crumpled in the bottom of his sailing skiff
You know he looked like a bloody bird
He's
They buried him behind a coconut grove
out there on East Cape
Sending him to protect them birds
Was a terrible mistake
"Whompus"

Legends —
guy was datin a black

told he

Vietnam Vet

Frank —
Frank + Eugene W /
Selling Drugs

His dad was Dr. R. Phillips
Wango is a friendly, easy-going kind of guy. But hard to believe he held a bird by his ankles out the window of Charlotte High.

Why he's a loose-limbed dancer, long-haired, bearded.
Fully alive
w/ dancing eyes

Pirate w/ holy tennis shoes

At home on the Bronx docks
at the Park or City Wall

Wampus - named for a Cast
& a cool cast he is too
Wampus - you thank us taking the
time to sit & enjoy the view

All the time in the world
Loose Limbed

Clue Knew View

Wampus smiling so
free & true
gerulous smile

A black belt in martial karate
Patron saint of
Wampers has a shrimp boat that gives the city fits.

See

Also maybe the only guy I know that’s ever eaten manatee.

Wampers has a shrimp boat that the city wants removed.

His

half sunset shrimp boat

The city forced to open a case.

They took him to the courthouse.

He best them every time.
There's a man who lives in our town
everyone should know.

He's tried to simplify his life
like Henry David Thoreau.

He's not much for possessions,
But he shines with style and grace.
The gift he gives we like the most
is the smile upon his face.

Now this cat's name is Wampus.

Now this just now:

Wampus—names for a cat
and a cool cat he is.

Wampus—there's a
smile on his face, and to his
town he's five, five.
He's a proud native cracker
but he's not arrogant
or pompous
Harold be his name
But we all call him Wayusus
A Waterman from way up back fish for mullet, shad, or crabs
City Council Watchdog
He's done lots of cool stuff
Once he even drove a cab
He'll hunt the City Council
in the courtroom, street lamp posts, he'll stand tall
He knows legal history & he'll feel it wants it all
A friend to cops & lawyers, judges, kids & teachers, too
The Steve Blackburn Museum & Research Center
Wayus knows his history & he'll feel it right & you
"Backbar Mirror" (Unpublished)

1. I came in here for the atmosphere
   To feed the jukebox and have a beer
   I look at life from this special place
   My barstool view of the human race

2. Behind the bar is a big, glass mirror
   Reflecting visions that are all too clear
   My own dim eyes stare till they ache
   A lonely boatman on a mirror-lake

   Backbar mirror, backbar mirror so truthful, so sincere
   I see your reflection, you're my main connection
   To a life that to me is so dear

   Backbar mirror, backbar mirror where my dreams disappear
   Hire a four-cornered goddess, ever faithful, ever honest
   A honkytonk dreamer and a backbar mirror

3. I see people hurt by love whose hearts are broke
   They try to ease the pain with a rum and coke
   What felt so right now feels so wrong
   Their lives summed up in a cowboy song

4. I see people who are proud and happy in life
   Faithful husband and loving wife
   Silently I just sit and observe
   The flesh and the spirit; the mind and the nerve

5. In the glossy darkness and smoky air
   Time is the fire where we burn our cares
   Observing life from an old bar stool
   Not the role of a saint or the role of a fool
"Barbed Wire for Heart" (Unpublished)

Barbed Wire of Your Heart

You've known it all along
But I fell for your old song
Its time has had me dancing near the edge
But love's not just a game
And I'll never be the same

A victim of the barbed wire of your heart
All torn of love

We danced and laughed till dawn
Oh, how we carried on
The volume of our lives turned up full blast
Our love had come of age
But I woke up in a cage
All tangled in the barbed wire of your heart

But the bars of your love, they keep me fast
Put all of what we had into the past
But before I can go on and love another
Untangle this old heart for me at last

I'll get over you some day
That's what my friends all say
But I close my eyes and still smell your sweet perfume
I still hear your song
Though I know I don't belong
All tangled in the barbed wire of your heart
"Lord Andrew" (Unpublished)

Lord Andrew

It was in August back in '92
When we all bowed down to Lord Andrew
No Doppler Radar or Simpson Scale
Could predict that Savage Wanton Gale
Plywood, tape and supplies in vain
Didn't slow down that hurricane

Oh, Andrew
Oh, Andrew
Now there's blood in the water, pain in the wind
The children were crying - Lord Andrew grinned
Oh, Andrew

Praying in closets, together like glue
The windows popped out and off the roof flew
Imagine the horror as God would cry
To watch their world shutter, to see their dreams die
Honest jobs and homes were lost
When Homestead had their Holocaust

Catholics, Moslems, Protestant and Jew
All bent their knees for Lord Andrew
Now there's dogs in the rubble, stench in the air
Twisted parts of things strewn everywhere
It brought out the worst, it brought out the best
Looters and saviors put to the test

For some who thought they would be brave
A cherished home became a grave
The struggle for shelter, water and food
Some people were kind, some people were rude
Right on the heels of the hurricane's tracks
It was like Armageddon or a scene from Mad Max
APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE LEAD SHEETS OF BLACKWELL'S SONGS
This appendix consists of a selection of song lead sheets from *Steve's Songs*, an unpublished collection of lead sheets. This collection was made as an effort to catalog Steve Blackwell's music. It is incomplete, only containing what published songs have yet to be transcribed to paper. The listed composition dates are not reliable or accurate. All of the other data is accurate. *Steve's Songs* is located at the home of Steve Blackwell in Punta Gorda, FL.
Goodbye Columbus Day (You Weren’t the First to be Here)
Words & Music by Steve Blackwell 1994
Played in G on “Listen Here”

G   C   G   Em   C   D   G

G   C   G
It was in the year 1492,
G   D
Columbus sailed the ocean blue,
G   C   G
I was taught that he sailed for you and me,
G   D   G
Home of the brave, land of the free.

G   C   G
Now Columbus let me make one point clear,
G   D
I know that without you, I might not be here,
G   C   G
But history’s taught from your point of view,
G   D   G
And we need to hear the other side, too, ‘cause

CHORUS
G   C   G
You weren’t the first to be here,
G   D
You weren’t the first to hold this land dear,
G   C   G   Em
So Christopher Columbus, let’s make it clear that
C   D   G
You weren’t the first to be here.

G   C   G
Now these heroes became conquerors they say,
G   D
Killing native people when they got in the way,
G   C   G
People who were here before you,
G   D   G
Before the red and white and blue.
G C G
Now for reasons sacred or profane,
G D
In 1492 they kicked the Jews out of Spain,
G C G
While heroes out exploring other lands,
G D G
They were makin' slaves of Africans, no,

CHORUS

Instr.
G C G G D
G C G Em C D G
G C G
Now these heroes they have purchased history's page,
G D
With the blood and suffering, and the Indians' rage,
G C G
But you know the conquered they won't have a say,
G D G
And as for me, it's goodbye Columbus Day, 'cause

CHORUS (once, then straight into next)

G C G
You weren't the first to be here,
G D
You weren't the first to hold this land dear
G C G Em
So Christopher Columbus, you can kiss my rear, 'cause
C D G
You weren't the first to be here.
Goin' Back South
Words & music by Steve Blackwell 1998
Played in G on the CD “More Than It Seems”

C – D –Bm – Em – C – D – G
G C G
I’m goin’ back south where the sand meets the sea,
Em
Where friends get together to play and be free,
Am D
A smile and a song turns a lock like a key,
G C G
There’s no other place in this world I should be.

G C G
To listen and sing in that park by the bay,
Em
The laughter, the people, the music they play,
Am D
Of legends and locals, and things that they say,
G C G
A patchwork of voices to close out the day.

CHORUS
C D Bm Em
A circle of faces,
C D G
Sing of their past and their dreams,
C D Bm Em
Their hearts leave traces,
C D
All of it’s more than it seems.

The sun drowns in water and colors the sky,
As waves lap the sea wall, the wind whispers by,
The palms and the mangroves, the night birds that cry,
A tribal shared glory that let’s spirits fly.
CHORUS

Instr. Verse

I’m goin’ back south where the sand meets the sea,
Where friends get together to play and be free,
A smile and a song turns a lock like a key,
There’s no other place in this world I should be.
There’s no other place in this world I should be.
Grandpa's Den
Words & Music by Steve Blackwell 1994
Played in D on “Listen Here”

D
There's a certain place that I still go
G A D
Sometimes in my dreams,

G A
Back into my childhood days,
Before I was a teen,

D
On Friday nights we'd often stay
G A D
At Grandma and Grandpa's home,
G D
And Grandpa's den, that special place,
A D
Is where my mind will roam.

D
He kept some books on magic there,
And secret herbal cures,
There were beads and rocks and antique clocks,
And some wild animals' furs,
A trunk with props and masks and costumes,
From his Vaudeville days,
Enough fascinating objects
To keep a boy amazed.

CHORUS
Bm D
Guitars, banjos, arrowheads,
G A D
In his old Vaudeville trunk,
Bm D
A Morris chair, some antique guns,
G A
Driftwood and other junk,
Bm D
Old tools, books, and Indian rugs,
G A D
And pictures of our kin,

\[ G \quad D \]

All the mysteries of life

\[ A \quad D \]

Seemed to be in Grandpa's den.

Sometimes we'd get out the Vaudeville hats,
And make beards, and then we'd pose,
Or Grandpa and I would go downtown
To shoot-em-up, bang-em-up shows,
We'd watch the good guys save the day
At the movie house and then,
We'd head on back for a bedtime story
There in Grandpa's den.

\textbf{CHORUS}

\textit{Instr.}

He had a ventriloquist dummy,
Oscar was his name,
Sometimes he'd try to scare us,
But that was just part of the game,
He had an old piano
He'd play if we were good,
I can still hear Grandpa's clear, sweet voice,
Singin' "Come to the Church in the Wild Wood".

\textbf{CHORUS}

\textit{All the mysteries of life}

\textit{Seemed to be in Grandpa's den.}
Me & Bone Mizell  
Words & Music by Steve Blackwell 1994  
Played in G on “Listen Here”

C-G
G C D
Won’t you gather ‘round and listen,
G
And if you’ll buy me just one beer,
C
I’ll tell you of an old cow hunter,
D
Who was tough as any steer.
C D
Though his name was kind of fancy,
G Em
Morgan Bonaparte Mizell,
C D
Well we all called him “Bone”,
G C-D
And it seemed to suit him well.

Tennessee’s got Davy Crockett,  
Kentucky’s got old Daniel Boone,  
But Florida’s got Bone Mizell,  
That man would howl right at the moon.  
More than just a cracker cowboy,  
Who rode to Hell and back,  
If he was anything less than a legend,  
Was Bunyan just a lumberjack?

CHORUS
G Bm
I used to ride with Bone Mizell,  
Em
And I was right there by his side,  
A
I was even at the station  
D
In Fort Ogden when he died.
C D
You know legend and truth,
\[G - Em\]
They don’t always get along.
\[C\]
\[D\]
But I know he’s right beside me
\[G\]
Every time I sing this song.

He’d yell “Wake up and bite a biscuit,
Get yourselves out of that sack,
We got miles and miles to ride.”
Then he’d give his whip a crack.
From Fort Ogden we would ride,
Seven days to Tampa town,
Get them cattle to the stockyards,
Then have a look around.

Bone would ride right to a tavern,
As a matter of course,
He’d ride right up to the bar,
Sit drinkin’ on his horse.
Drinkin’ old Blind Tiger moonshine,
And sometimes just for thrills,
Sit around and light cigars,
Usin’ dollar bills.

**CHORUS**
Yeah I know he’s right beside me
And he’s been there all along.
Swamp Cabbage

Words & music by Steve Blackwell 2000
Played in D on the CD “The Difference You Make”

Swamp cabbage!
D              G              D
Drivin’ Florida backroads, out in the breeze and balm,
E              A
Always in search of that perfect cabbage palm,
D              G              D
And when I find it, my God, what a sight,
D              A              D
I know that I’ll be eatin’ some swamp cabbage tonight.

Chorus
D              G              D
Swamp cabbage, oh how I love the taste,
E              A
Swamp cabbage, not a mouthful will I waste,
D              G              D
I get so damned excited, it’s so hard to be calm,
A              D
When I eat those tasty morsels made from the hearts of palm.

So keep a sharp axe handy to cut your cabbage palm,
You can learn to fix it, no matter where you’re from,
Recipes all over, some easy and some hard,
Just don’t cut a swamp cabbage if it’s in your neighbor’s yard.

Chorus

Instr. Verse

Oh, that good swamp cabbage, I eat it in a bowl,
And oh, that good swamp cabbage, it sure does take its toll,
It’ll get your motor started with the sound of a varoom,
And once you get all cranked up, you can surely clear a room.

Chorus

When I eat those tasty morsels made from the hearts of palm.
Swamp cabbage!
The Line
Words & music by Steve Blackwell 1998
Played open in C on the CD “More than it Seems”

F – G - Am
   C          Am
If all my ancestors would stand in a line,
   C          Am
Who would I recognize and know that they are mine,
    F        Am
Oh sometimes I think, I think it’s a shame,
  F      G    Am
How few I would know, how few I could name.

My line of ghosts, that push on me,
Lined up in Heaven’s fields as far as you can see,
Oh I put these thoughts back on the shelf,
‘Cause soon I will be in that line myself.

Instr.

Oh I won’t forget you, though I don’t know your face,
You once breathed this air and lived in this place,
You once viewed the sunsets that blessed your soul,
You sang and you prayed, friends and family made you whole.

In love it is answered, a love rare and fine,
A prayer to the old ones, all standing in a line,
Oh I won’t forget you, and it’s plain to see,
I won’t forget you, you won’t forget me.

Oh how can I thank you, all links in a chain,
Oh you ancient ones, unknown and unnamed,
More precious than gold, jewels and fine wine,
Are the ones from the past, all standin’ in a line,
More precious than gold, jewels and fine wine,
Are the ones from the past, all standin’ in a line.
Wampus
Words and Music by Steve Blackwell 1998

Played in C on 2nd fret on the CD “More Than It Seems”

C – G - C
C
G
C
There’s a man who lives in our town, everyone should know,
F
C
G
He simplified his life, but he’s no Henry David Thoreau,
F
C
Am
He’s not much for possessions, but he shares with style and grace,
C
G
C
The gift he gives we like the most, is the smile upon his face.

C
G
C
Now he’s a native cracker, not arrogant or pompous,
F
C
G
His real name is Harold, but we all call him Wampus,
F
C
Am
He’ll hound the city council, in the courtroom he’ll stand tall,
C
G
C
He knows his local history, and he’ll tell it, warts and all.

CHORUS:
Am
Wampus (Wampus, Wampus),
F
G
C
Yeah, a name for a cat, and a cool cat he is, too,
Am
Wampus (Wampus, Wampus),
F
G
Yeah, this ol’ boy, he just might have a clue.

C
G
C
His half-sunken shrimp boat, the city thinks a crime,
F
C
G
They’ll take it to the court room, Wampus beats ’em every time,
F
C
Am
He beats ’em every time, and his eyes dance, and then he’ll grin,
C
G
C
‘Cause he knows it won’t be long, he’ll have to do it all again.
CHORUS

C       G       C
A water man from way back, fished for mullet, shrimp, or crab,
F       C       G
He worked for Johnson's race team, and he even drove a cab,
F       C       Am
He served his time in 'Nam and he once lived out on Crow Key,
C       G       C
He's the only guy I know who's ever eaten manatee.

CHORUS

C       G       C
Now he's a loose-limbed dancer, barefoot, long-haired, bearded guy,
F       C       G
Once held a kid by his ankles out the window of Charlotte High,
F       C       Am
But he's a local treasure, and we're glad that he's so free,
C       G       C
There's a little bit of Wampus in you and in me.

CHORUS

G       C
Yeah, he just might have a clue.
How Can You Call Yourself a Florida Folksinger If You Never Met Will McLean Talkin' Blues

Words & Music by Steve Blackwell 1998
Played in G on the 2nd fret on “More Than It Seems”

G – C – D – G – C – D – G
    G           C
Folk singers around Florida can hardly be seen
    D
Without some mention of Will McLean,
    G           C
This songwriter, you can’t ignore,
    D
Was Florida’s greatest troubadour,
    G
And a whole lot more.

Songs like “Hold Back the Water” and “Florida Sand”
Show his love and respect for this flowered land,
And for people like Tate, Cush, and Acre Foot, too,
Will could paint the picture like no one else could do.

But I can’t help but think old Will would just grin
At his ever-growing number of very best friends,
And some of those folkies’ll brag a bit, too,
As if to say “You know Will liked me better’n he liked you”,
Woo-woo.

I’ll confess to you now that we never met,
Though it’s not something I hold in such deep regret,
Never even seen his ghost around a campfire jam,
Not that I think Will would really give a damn,
I guess we’re both kinda skeptical.

Now they say confession is good for the soul,
And as I dig myself deeper into this here hole,
I’ll say here in Florida half my life I’ve spent
I was born in Indiana, but it was an accident,
Just ask my parents.

Instr.

Or we’d a been swappin’ songs and eatin’ beans from a can,
And sharin’ our love for this flowered land,
But we never met, but there’s reasons, you see,
If you listen it’ll be plain as plain can be.
See, I was out with Woody Guthrie on the railroad tracks,
And thumbin’ rides with Jack Kerouac,
I was runnin’ liquor with Al Capone and his gangsters,
And ridin’ the bus with Kesey and the merry pranksters,
I was busy.

On the back of old Acre Foot, I sat in the seat,
While he delivered the mail in his bare feet,
I was writin’ with Hemingway down in Key West,
And drinkin’ Margaritas as Jimmy Buffet’s special guest,
Yeah, real busy.

I was with Bone Mizell drivin’ cows,
On stage with Bob Dylan takin’ bows,
I was with Marjory Douglas in the Everglades,
I was helpin’ the Seminoles with Major Dade.

With Zora Neale Hurston I was writin’ books,
And fishin’ with Totch Brown, in charge of the hooks,
Playin’ trains with Flagler made me weary,
So I dropped some acid with Timothy Leary,
Here comes a flashback.

Instr

Now these reasons I’m givin’ to you today
More or less prove that when there’s a Will, there’s a way,
I’d like to settle the matter, and put it to rest,
See if Will had met me, he’d of liked me best.
LIST OF REFERENCES

Published Recordings (Listed Chronologically)


More Than it Seems. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 1996.


Peace Creek Revival Live. CD, Peace Creek Productions, 2006.


Unpublished Recordings (Listed Chronologically)


Correspondence and Documents

Punta Gorda. Florida. Home of Susan Blackwell. [Files containing emails and notes by Steve Blackwell to various recipients].

------------. [Personal Interviews with family members of Steve Blackwell as well as the members of Still Friends in the Punta Gorda area between 29 January 2010, and 20 February 2010].

Websites

"City of Punta Gorda."

Books or Articles


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