



Play It By Ear

By Tom Van Vleck

Dalton Jackson plays the guitar by ear. He owns a twelve string harp guitar that is eighty years old. Dalton doesn't know a single note of written music, but he can pick up any song completely by ear in a matter of an hour or so practice. He and his wife, Doris (pictured with Dalton in photo above), used to sing at Osgood, Missouri, when people gathered there for their Saturday night entertainment. After moving to Kirksville, they were given a fifteen-minute show on KIRX radio for several years on Sunday nights.

Dalton has recently made an effort to record several of his songs on paper.

It has taken many years to develop his skill. When he first started singing, his father, Arthur, didn't like it because he thought work was more important.

The first song on tape is "Go Along Mule," which Dalton thinks is about eighty years old. He sang it from memory as he does all of his songs. The next song on the tape is "Golden Slippers," which he thinks is about one hundred years old. He learned both of these songs when he was very young.

The next two songs are "Great Grandad" and "Great Grandma." He believes both of these songs are about seventy years old and he learned them from his uncle.

"The Sweet Bye and Bye" is around one hundred years old according to Dalton. He learned this song from the radio when the Grand Old Opry lasted up to six hours on Saturdays—all the way past midnight.

GREAT GRANDAD & GREAT GRANDMA

Great Grandad, when the West was young
Barred his door with a wagon tongue.
Times were tough and the redskins fought
And he said his prayers with a shotgun cocked.
Great Grandad was a busy man.
Cooked his grub in a frying pan.
Picked his teeth with a hunting knife,
And wore the same suit all his life.
Twenty-one children came to bless
The old man's house in the wilderness.
Twenty-one boys, not one bad,
But they didn't get fresh with ol' Grandad.
For if they had he'd been right glad
To tan their hides with a hickory gad.
He raised them rough, but he raised them well.
When their feet took hold of the road to hell,
He filled them full of the fear of God,
And straightened them out with the old ramrod.

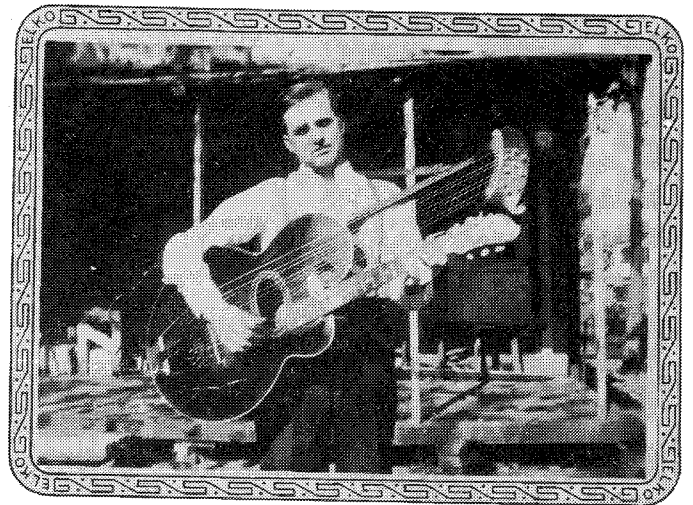
Great Grandma, when the West was new
Wore hoop skirts and a bustle, too.
When the Indians came and things looked bad,
She fought along of great Grandad.
Twenty-one necks she had to scrub,
Wash twenty-one shirts in the old wash tub,
Cooked twenty-one meals three times a day,
There is no wonder her hair turned gray.
She worked all day and slept all night,
Which seems to me is just about right.
With great-grand-daughter it's the other way,
She's up all night, and sleeps all day.



The next tune is an old Spanish song. Dalton can't remember right off where he learned it, but he thinks he learned it from his uncle also.

The last song is "South Bound Freight." He picked up this song from television back in the 1950's.

Note: We think you would enjoy listening to Dalton's recordings. His singing is reminiscent of Burl Ives' style. Along with others, this tape is available to the public. Contact the local history class at the high school.



Dalton Jackson with his harp guitar.

GO ALONG MULE

I bought some biscuits for my dog
I laid them on the shelf,
They got so hard they killed my dog,
So I ate them all myself.

Refrain:

Go along mule, don't you roll them eyes
You may change a fool,
But a doggone mule
Is a mule until he dies.

There was a man so very tall,
But most of him was feet,
When he raised upon his toes,
He measured seven feet. (Repeat Refrain)

I went to see my gal last night,
I sat me down to eat,
But all she put upon my plate
Was a chicken neck to eat. (Repeat Refrain)

I took my gal to New Orleans,
I took her on to supper,
She stubbed her toe on the table leg
And stuck her nose in the butter. (Repeat Refrain)

There was a man in our town
His name was Simon Slick.
And this man, he owned a mule
And how that mule could kick.
When you walked into the barn,
He'd greet you with a smile,
Then he'd lift that right hind leg
And send you half a mile. (Repeat Refrain)