

PLAYING IN THE DIRT:
STILLWATER AND THE EMERGENCE OF
RED DIRT MUSIC

By

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RED DIRT MUSIC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Red Dirt Music has become a phenomenon in the music scenes of Oklahoma and Texas during the past decade. However, the beginnings of Red Dirt Music stretch back to Stillwater of the 1970s. While the term Red Dirt became associated with Oklahoma music in the 1970s, its foundation was laid by such musical giants as Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills. Though neither man had ties to Stillwater, it was in the clubs, farmhouses, and fields of Stillwater that their influenced made itself known to a new group of musicians.

To date, only one author has attempted to provide a history of Red Dirt Music. In his book From the Blue Devils to Red Dirt: The Colors of Oklahoma Music, John Wooley dedicates one chapter to the subject. His research largely drawn upon interviews conducted while a reporter for the Tulsa World. This limited focus has left out the contributions of a number of women in the Red Dirt community and with the limited space allotted, did not attempt to provide much background information on the locations and musicians important to the Red Dirt music movement.

This study seeks to build on the work resulting from Wooley's personal relationship with the musicians by incorporating an analysis of the environment surrounding Stillwater and examining the men and women involved with the movement. The author agrees with Wooley that the unique environment in Stillwater melded a new style of musical expression that is directly tied to the location. Supportive venues in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and unique places like The Farm and The Yellow House nurtured the development of a new "genre" of music. Like any other genre, Red Dirt evolved and expanded. It now encompasses many who may not have had a personal tie to Stillwater, yet have experienced that sense of belonging by accepting the influence of those who came before. With the exodus of many Stillwater musicians to Texas, especially the Austin area, the sense of community developed in the Red Dirt Community is spreading to the Texas Country genre of music. The synthesis of these two styles has caused the lines between the two to blur to the point that the two groups are often referred to as Texas Red Dirt Country. In addition to the expanding community, the members of Stillwater's Red Dirt Music Community have also driven change in music. Garth Brooks changed the face of Nashville's brand of Country Music and bands like Cross Canadian Ragweed are breaking the norm in their record deals to maintain creative control and ownership of their music.

This study too will rely heavily on the experiences of those involved with Red Dirt music. Surveys and interviews combined with other primary source material provide the majority of research material. For the surveys and interviews, the Red Dirt Rangers were identified as first source of information. Through their website and interviews, an

increased population was identified for inclusion in the study. At each phase of research, subjects identified more individuals who were included in the process.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND

As in many college towns, the music scene in Stillwater, Oklahoma has ebbed and flowed, but has always been on the cutting edge of musical expression. Stillwater's brand of music, known as Red Dirt, has only lately begun to gain national exposure through the works of bands like Cross Canadian Ragweed and Stoney LaRue & the Arsenals. While the attention may be new, the Red Dirt movement has been a hallmark of the Stillwater music scene for nearly four decades. Many bands have been labeled as members of the Red Dirt "genre" of music. However, this is a misnomer. The "genre" of Red Dirt features many different styles of music. Included under the Red Dirt umbrella are bands that have strong influences in country music, rock & roll, bluegrass, the blues, folk, and even reggae. Many of the bands combine a number of genres to create original music. To avoid the label of genre that is often applied to Red Dirt music, one only needs to look to the definition provided by John Cooper of the Red Dirt Rangers. "Red Dirt is more a community than a music. It spans about a thirty-year timeframe, maybe forty years. The beautiful thing about it is it is still evolving. The beauty is you really can't

say what it is.”¹ In a 2009 interview, Red Dirt artist Brandon Jenkins shares a similar viewpoint. “Maybe my view's a little different, but I think more of the Red Dirt scene less about the music and more about the community. I think it's more of a social community that is based from Stillwater. ... Because if you look at me or if you look at Bob Childers, or Cross Canadian Ragweed or Steve Ripley or any of those guys, they're all Red Dirt but there's a really big jump between what their musical styles are.”²

Jay Falkner of the band South 40 describes Red Dirt Music differently: “I really think Red Dirt is more a state of mind and a mentality, than it is a form of music. And I think that is kind of the separate form, because if you look at the Red Dirt music genre it encompasses everything.”³ Philip Zoellner offers yet another description, “I've always said that Red Dirt Music was more of a regional and cultural description than a [s]tyle of music. Red Dirt music is a cultural community based on simple songs and progressions that often rhyme, mid-tempo rurally influenced, with the majority of instrumentation relying mostly [on] those used in country music.”⁴ However, on one thing most agree: Red Dirt is more than just a genre of music, and it was born from the unique environment of Stillwater.

Stillwater has had a rich history in music. Music was already a part of the local culture when Oklahoma A&M instituted its first band program in 1905. In addition to

¹ John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007.

² Gene Triplett, “Brandon Jenkins,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 15, 2009.

³ Jay Falkner, interview by author, Poteau, OK, November 15, 2007.

⁴ Philip Zoellner, E-Mail message to author, November 12, 2007.

this early influence provided by the college's music program, the nature of the college and town has also shaped the development of music.⁵

The agricultural influence of Oklahoma A&M (later Oklahoma State University) also contributed to the music produced in Stillwater. In describing the Stillwater music scene, Jay Falkner remarks, "because of its roots ... there's a lot of that small town values, a lot of real organic soul."⁶ In addition to these small town values, the agrarian nature of the college also provided a strong connection to the lyrical emphasis of country music; a connection that would have a strong influence on the complexion of the songs written by Stillwater artists. The proximity of Stillwater to larger cities, including Oklahoma City and Tulsa, attracts an urban population to the college as well. By drawing students from both urban and rural areas, "you're liable to have a guy who's grown up on George Strait, or I suppose these days grown up on Tim McGraw, rooming with some guy from the city who's been listening to death metal or hard rock or something. These guys get together and one of them listens to the other one's music, and they start sharing this music, and that's how ... a new kind of music happens."⁷

Jesse Ed Davis may have been the first person in Oklahoma to use the term Red Dirt in reference to a style of music. His song "Red Dirt Boogie, Brother" was released in 1972 on his album *Ululu*.⁸ However, the first use of the term Red Dirt applied to Stillwater music was in relation to an album released by the band Moses in 1974. Red

⁵ Alpha Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi, "OSU Bands History," Alpha Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi, <http://www.orgs.okstate.edu/kkp/osubandhistory.htm> (accessed November 1, 2007).

⁶ Jay Falkner, interview by author, Poteau, OK, November 15, 2007.

⁷ John Wooley, interview by author, Tulsa, October 15, 2007; John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007.

⁸ George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr., *Oklahoma Music Guide* (Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003), 410.

Dirt pioneer and founding member of the Grammy Award winning band the Tractors, Steve Ripley was a member of Moses and founded Red Dirt Records to promote the release of their debut record. The liner notes for the album *Moses Live*, written by Jim Dugan, provide the first glimpse into what would become Red Dirt music. According to Dugan, “Red Dirt is a record company. It is also the color of the earth surrounding Enid and nearby Stillwater, Moses’ home base. More important, Red Dirt is a hue of funk, a shade of sound, a basic spirit embodied in Moses’ Music”⁹

The mixing of musical styles described by Dugan has become a hallmark of the Red Dirt movement. The impetus for this mix, in part, was due to the blending of rural and urban cultures among students at Oklahoma State University. However, the college was not the only place that musicians came together to share their musical ideas.

The 1960s and 1970s saw an explosion of local bands in Stillwater, many of whom were experimenting with different styles of music and were writing their own songs. According to Phil Hyde who played in the band “U” while a student at OSU in the 1970s: “It was a loose scene in Stillwater with lots of bands: acoustic, women singers, etc. It was a real burgeoning scene.”¹⁰ A number of these bands in the local laid the foundation for a unique styling of music. Prior to the release of Ripley’s Moses title, another local band released a self-titled album in 1968, Marble Phrogg. Reflecting on the Stillwater scene at the time, John Wooley remembers “The first time I ever saw psychedelic lights - that was Marble Phrogg. They were playing off the back of a flat bed truck, and they had the strobe lights; it was like the craziest thing I had ever seen in my

⁹ John Wooley, *From the Blue Devils to Red Dirt: The Colors of Oklahoma Music* (Tulsa: Hawk Publishing, 2007), 138; “Tomorrow Night at the Jail Saloon,” advertisement, *Daily O’Collegian*, February 11, 1975, 12.

¹⁰ Phil Hyde, telephone interview by author, November 15, 2007.

life.”¹¹ Joel Everett, former Executive Director of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, was another OSU student who experienced the early days of the development of Red Dirt Music in Stillwater:

The social scene was fragmented in Stillwater - hippies or heads, frats and sorority gals, aggies and cowboys/cowgirls, internationals, etc. It was a reflection of everything else, I guess, and the edges overlapped. Even in the frat house ‘75, ‘76 you could hear anything. Jessi Colter and outlaw music to Dibango’s makossa music¹²

Trying to classify Red Dirt Music as a genre like country or rock-and-roll proves to be problematic. As mentioned in a number of the definitions above, Red Dirt Music encompasses all styles of music. The unifying element of the music is its honesty, a hallmark it draws from Oklahoma artist Woody Guthrie. Guthrie’s social conscience influenced generations of Oklahoma musicians, and especially those centered on Stillwater, Oklahoma in the 1970s. In addition to Guthrie, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys are a strong influence on the music of Red Dirt. Wills was a pioneer in the art of combining multiple styles of music to craft his own sounds; his band was known for merging western music, fiddle music, and jazz. This attribute, as well as high energy performances, and a good rapport with fans are important components of Red Dirt music. With this in mind, Red Dirt music can be described as a community of musicians with ties to the folk traditions of Woody Guthrie, but expressed in any number of styles as previously explored by Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. In addition to the influence of Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills, Red Dirt musicians are also bound to the

¹¹ John Wooley, interview by author, Tulsa, OK, October 15, 2007.

¹² Joel Everett, E-Mail message to author, October 2, 2007.

Stillwater area, even though the “genre” has now grown to encompass many musicians outside Stillwater.

CHAPTER III

LOCATIONS

Location has provided significant influence on the evolution of what has become Red Dirt Music. In addition to the metropolitan and agrarian influences of a college town, many of the local venues and homes impacted the way the musical community developed. The performance venues in Stillwater supported local music and provided outlets for musical expression for a continual flow of local musicians. Outside the performance venues, musician's homes often became points of congregation for musicians allowing the exchange of ideas and fostering a spirit of collaboration and founding a community not found in most "genres."

The Strip

The Strip, an area in Stillwater laid out along South Washington Street bounded on the north by University Avenue and on the south by Sixth Street, has long been the performance center of Stillwater. Its proximity to the Oklahoma State University campus and the fraternity and sorority houses on Greek Row has allowed the Strip to maintain its central position in the music community. Like any developed area, the businesses that call the Strip home have changed over the years, including shopping outlets, restaurants,



Figure 1. Map of The Strip

and a number of bars. While both the restaurants and bars provided local venues for musicians, it is the bars that provided the most opportunities for musicians.

Local newspapers from the early 1970s are lacking in information concerning local music and the commercial makeup of the Strip. However, a picture of bars and restaurants on the Strip can be reconstructed from a number of city directories and the recollections of musicians of the time. The following chart illustrates the various businesses that provided performance opportunities to local musicians during the first five years of the use of the term Red Dirt in regards to Stillwater music..

	1974	1975	1976	1978
Street Number				
215		Lafferty's	Lafferty's	
219	The Golden Whaler	The Golden Whaler	The Golden Whaler	
305		The Depot	Tetley's Pub	Tetley's Pub
306		Question Mark Bar	Question Mark Bar	Question Mark Bar
319	The Coachman	The Coachman	The Coachman	
320	The Other Place	The Other Place	The Other Place	The Other Place
322			Wild Willie's	
323		The Acme Bar	The Acme Bar	The Acme Bar
421	The Jail Saloon	Jail West	Jail West	
512 ½		The Mason Jar	The Mason Jar	The Mason Jar

Table 1. Performance venues on the Strip 1974-1978¹

¹ *Stillwater City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1974); *Stillwater City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1975); *Stillwater City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1976); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1978).

The Figure above illustrates the viability of the strip as a performance center for area musicians. With an average of seven performances venues operating per year during the period shown, opportunities were available for local musicians to find a creative outlet in the hotspot of Stillwater's nightlife.

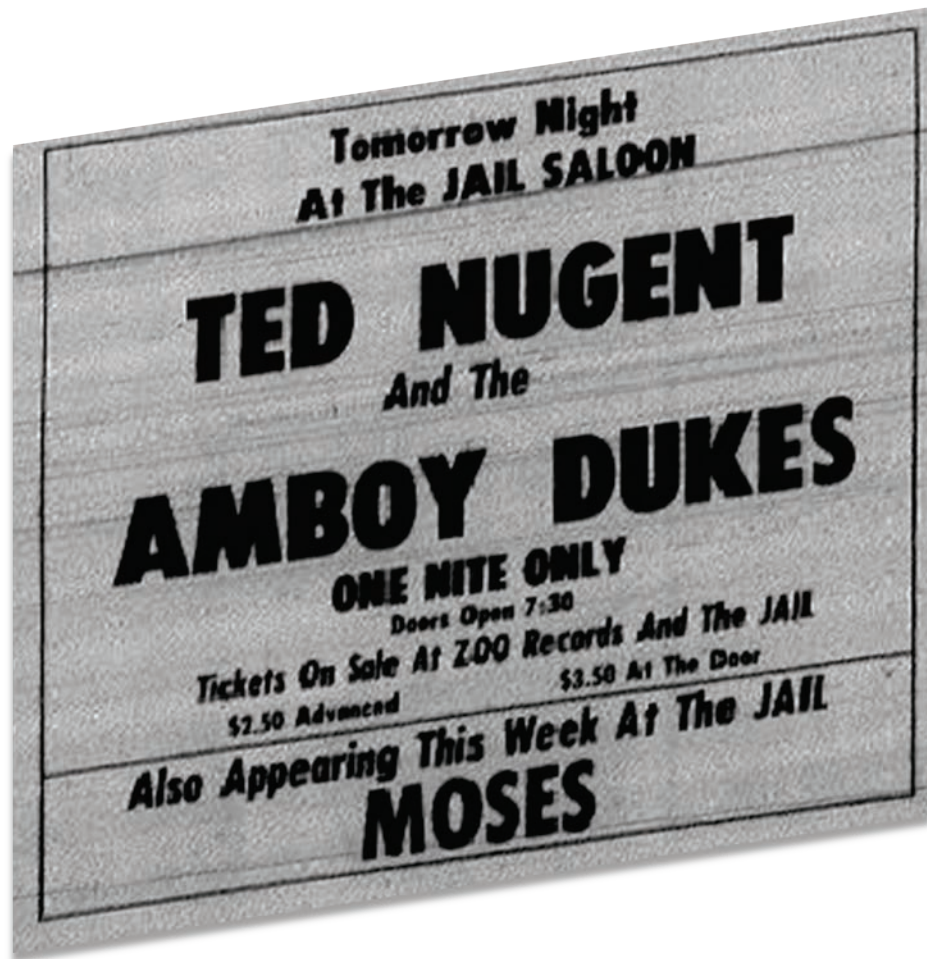


Figure 2. Advertisement for Ted Nugent and Red Dirt band Moses²

² "Tomorrow Night at the Jail Saloon." advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, February 11, 1975, 12.

The Golden Whaler was located in the shopping area south of the Wesley Center that is the northern boundary of the Strip. The “Whaler” mostly featured acoustic acts. In later years, the building became the home of the Wormy Dog Saloon which was an important venue for the Red Dirt scene of the 1990s.³

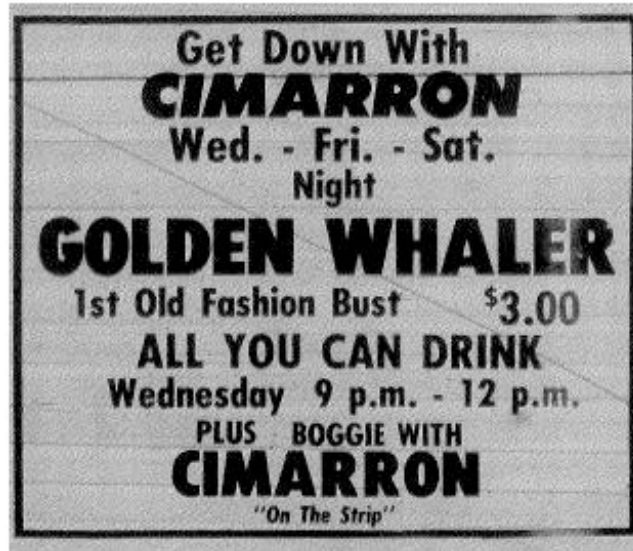


Figure 3. Advertisement for Cimarron at the Golden Whaler⁴

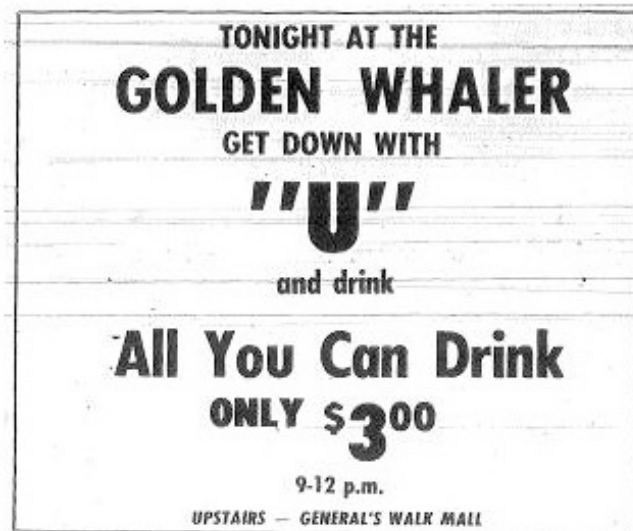


Figure 4. Advertisement for "U" at the Golden Whaler.⁵

³ John Cooper, telephone interview by author, April 23, 2009.

⁴ "Get Down with Cimarron," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, March 18, 1975, 9.

The Acme Bar was located on the corner of Fourth and Washington where Willie's Saloon is located today. While the Acme was mostly a biker bar, they did feature a wide variety of music. Many different types of bands played in this venue, including Red Dirt pioneer Chuck Dunlap.⁶



Figure 5. Advertisement for Chuck Dunlap performing at the Acme Bar⁷

The building that played home to the Jail West has been a long-standing venue for local music on the Strip. The Jail was one of the Strip's largest venues and played host to a wide variety of bands. Local Red Dirt bands like Moses and Jimmy LaFave & Night Tribe played there. However, Jail West's claim to fame was a performance by Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes in 1975.⁸ In later years, this location was the home of the Wormy Dog Concert Hall and Dirty's Tavern.

⁵ "Tonight at the Golden Whaler," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, April 2, 1975, 8.

⁶ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009.

⁷ "The Acme Bar proudly presents Chuck Dunlap," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, November 19, 1975, 9.

⁸ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009; Steve Ripley, interview by author, May 5, 2009; "Tomorrow Night at the Jail Saloon."

THE JAIL WEST

NAME *College Kool Joe* COLLEGE DRINKING CLASS *All*

TRIAL STUDY - THE JAIL WEST MAJOR *GOOD TIME* DATE *Jan. 22, 1974*

List hours you cannot attend class in this space *"LIVE MUSIC" 6 NITES EVERY WEEK 7 PM - MIDNITE*

DAY OF WEEK	DEPARTMENT	BLDG.
MONDAY	<i>No Cover Charge</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>
TUESDAY	<i>No Cover Charge</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>
WEDNESDAY	<i>All the brew you can drink Brews \$2.50 Sales \$1.50</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>
THURSDAY	<i>No Cover Charge Pitchers 1.00 all night</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>
FRIDAY	<i>Pitchers \$1.50 Cover \$1.00 per person</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>
SATURDAY	<i>Pitchers \$1.50 Covers \$1.00 per person.</i>	<i>421 S. Wash.</i>

Signature of Advisor *Rock R. Bell*

Figure 6. Jail West Advertisement⁹

The Mason Jar was one of the most stable venues on the Strip in terms of years in operation. For over ten years during the 1970s and 1980s, the Mason Jar featured live music regularly. Located in the strip mall on the corner of Fifth and Washington, the Mason Jar was one of the venues on the southern edge of the Strip. Known for serving their beer in mason jars, owners Jon Wagner and John Shiflet added to the musical diversity of the Strip by employing a number of good bands who played on a regular basis at the bar.¹⁰

⁹ "The Jail West," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, January 22, 1974, 12.

¹⁰ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009; Brad Piccolo, telephone interview with author, May 5, 2009; *Stillwater City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1975); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1985).

	1980	1983	1985	1989
Street Number				
211		Rag Time Annie's		
217			Taj Mahal	
219	The Attic	The Turning Point	The Press Box	
219	The Loft	Vaqueros		
306		Lighthouse	Lighthouse	J.R. Muphy's
323	The Brewery	Wild Willie's Club	Willie's Saloon	Willie's Saloon
414		Fast Eddies	Sports Line	
416		Prophet Elrod's		
418		Bronco Billy's	Chicago's	Chicago's
421		Outlaws	The Turning Point	
512 ½	The Mason Jar	The Mason Jar	The Mason Jar	

Table 2. Performance venues on the Strip 1980-1989¹¹

During this early phase of Red Dirt's musical development, Oklahoma's liquor laws allowed 3.2 beer to be purchased by those eighteen years old and older. In 1984, state laws changed the legal drinking age for all alcoholic beverages and subsequently the make-up of the Strip's patrons. Title 37 of the Oklahoma State Codes published in 1981 deals with the subject of intoxicating liquors.

§ 246. Minors prohibited from consuming non-intoxicating beverages in public places

¹¹ *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1980); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1983); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1985); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: US West Marketing Services, 1989).

No person under the age of eighteen (18) years shall consume nonintoxicating beverages, as defined in Title 37 O.S. Section 163.1, in any public place. Any person violating this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and punished by a fine not to exceed One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) or by appropriated community service not to exceed twenty (20) hours. Prosecutions under this act shall be exempted from juvenile proceedings in the same manner as are violations of traffic statutes under the Juvenile Code, Sections 1101 et seq. of Title 10 of the Oklahoma Statutes. If a person under the age of eighteen (18) habitually violates the provisions of this section, juvenile proceedings may be brought to determine if the person is a delinquent child.¹²

It defined, intoxicating beverages as: “beverages containing more than three and two-fifths percent (3.2%) alcohol by weight.”¹³ All other beverages fell under the non-intoxicating label applied in 37 O.S. § 246 above. Nonintoxicating beverages were further defined in 37 O.S. § 163.2 as “beverages containing more than one-half of one percent (1/2 of 1%) alcohol by volume, and not more than three and two-fifths percent (3.2%) alcohol by weight.”¹⁴

In 1983, the Oklahoma Legislature made substantial changes to Title 37. Of the changes made, the strongest impact on the viability of the Strip as a center for local music was the revision of Section 246. It read:

No person under twenty-one (21) years of age shall consume nonintoxicating beverages, as defined in Section 163.2 of this title, in any public place. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall be guilty, upon conviction, of a misdemeanor and punished by a fine not to exceed One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) or by appropriate community service not to exceed twenty (20) hours. Provided the provisions of this section shall not apply when such persons are under the direct supervision of their parent or guardian, but in no instance shall this exception be

¹² 37 O.S. § 246 (1981)

¹³ 37 O.S. § 163.1 (1981)

¹⁴ 37 O.S. § 163.2 (1981)

interpreted to allow such persons to consume such beverages in any place licensed to dispense beer as provided in section 163.11 of this title.¹⁵

As most college students are over eighteen years old, they naturally gravitated to the cluster of bars on the Strip. Prior to this change, this large population of students helped build and maintain the Strip's importance to the community of Stillwater and to local music. When the liquor laws changed, local bars faced a potential loss of as much as three-fourths of their student clientele due to increasing the legal drinking age (solely as it applied to 3.2% beer) from eighteen to twenty-one years of age. As illustrated in Table 3, the number of performance venues on the Strip peaked in the same year the Oklahoma Legislature amended Section 246 raising the legal drinking age. The years following the change showed a decline in the number of performance venues. However, the Strip still hosted some of its best talent during these years. During the early 1980s, every Wednesday to Saturday night there were four to five bands playing on the Strip. Even though the names of the venues may have changed, in the early part of the 1980s, venues were located in many of the same places as others had been in the 1970s.

Established in 1974, Willie's Wild West Saloon was originally in a location on the west side of the Strip; the bar did not move to its present location until the 1980s.¹⁶ By the 1980s, Willie's Saloon had become an important location for the development of Red Dirt music. According to John Cooper of the Red Dirt Rangers; "Everybody played Willie's. Since the early 70s; if there was one main Red Dirt Bar, I'd say it was Willie's. Not everybody played the Wormy Dog. Garth was at Willie's every Wednesday for two

¹⁵ 37 O.S. § 246 (1983)

¹⁶ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009; *Stillwater City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1976); *Stillwater, Oklahoma City Directory*. (Loveland, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1983).

years.”¹⁷ Garth Brooks was not the only one to hone his craft at Willie’s, Jimmy LaFave and Night Tribe were regular performers as well. Jimmy LaFave was one of the first Red Dirt artists to take Red Dirt music outside the Stillwater area. In 1985/6, Jimmy LaFave took Red Dirt south to Austin and the following year, Garth Brooks and Santa Fe went east to Nashville. In 1988, LaFave released a self-produced cassette tape entitled *Highway Angels... Full Moon Rain*. This album won the *Austin Chronicle*’s Reader’s Poll “Tape of the Year” Award, which ultimately resulted in a recording contract with an independent label for LaFave. Also in 1988, Garth Brooks signed his contract with Capitol Records. The Red Dirt Rangers were another band that called Willie’s home. One of the band’s earliest shows was at Willies, and they still play there regularly.¹⁸



Figure 7. Advertisement for Garth Brooks at Willie’s¹⁹

¹⁷ John Cooper, interview, October 15, 2007.

¹⁸ “Jimmy LaFave – Biography,” Jimmy LaFave, <http://www.jimmylafave.com/biography/bio.html> (accessed November 17, 2007); ¹⁸ Matt O’Meilia, *Garth Brooks: Out of Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 192; Brad Piccolo, interview, May 5, 2009.

¹⁹ “Garth Brooks every Wednesday,” advertisement, *Daily O’Collegian*, January 30, 1985, 12.

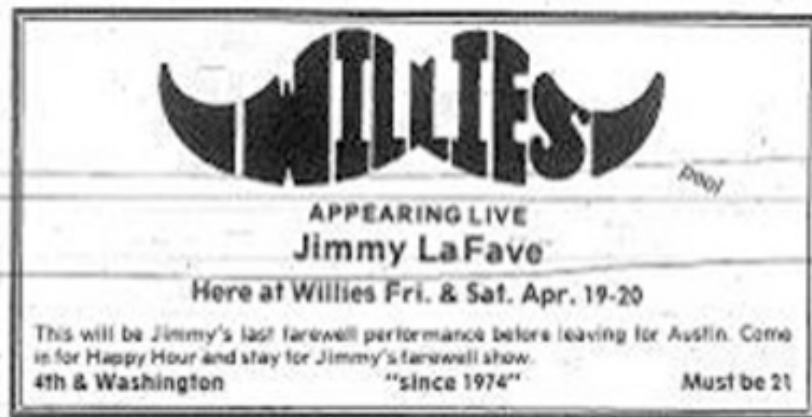


Figure 8. Advertisement for Jimmy LaFave at Willie's²⁰

Rag Time Annie's was not what one would expect as a performance venue. This sometimes music venue was actually a second-hand clothing store. While there were occasional acoustic performances at Rag Time Annie's, the store's true contribution to the development of Red Dirt music was its employees. Many of the employees were the wives or girlfriends of local musicians, including the wife of the "Godfather of Red Dirt", Bob Childers.²¹

Different from many of the other performance venues on the Strip, Vaqueros, a Mexican restaurant, offered music on a weekly basis. As can be seen from the advertisement below, noted Red Dirt music icons like Garth Brooks and Greg Jacobs performed at the restaurant.

²⁰ "Jimmy LaFave's Farewell Performance," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, April 19, 1985, 17.

²¹ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009.



Figure 9. Advertisement for live music at Vaquero's²²

The Lighthouse was another location on the Strip that supported local music for a number of years. During the 1970s, the building was the home of the Question Mark Bar. According to John Cooper of the Red Dirt Rangers, the Question Mark “was definitely a live music venue.” By the mid-1980s, the name had changed to the Lighthouse, but the musical atmosphere remained the same. Many local Red Dirt bands/artists including Gene Williams, Jimmy LaFave & Night Tribe, and Brad Piccolo’s (Red Dirt Rangers) band Low Skys played at The Lighthouse.²³

²² “Garth Brooks and Greg Jacobs at Vaqueros,” advertisement, *Daily O’Collegian*, February 10, 1983, 14.

²³ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009.

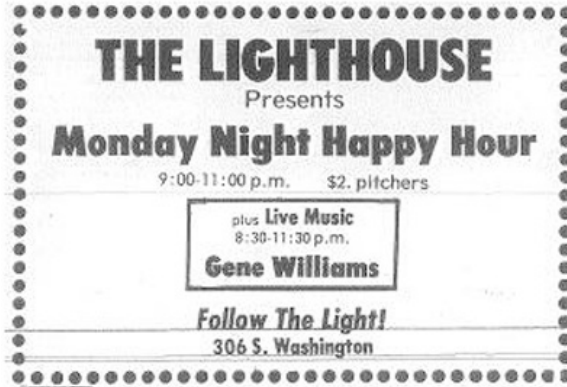


Figure 10. Advertisement for Gene Williams at The Lighthouse²⁴



Figure 11. Advertisement for Jimmy LaFave and Night Tribe at The Lighthouse²⁵

While many of the venues on the Strip catered to the Rock and Roll crowd, Chicago's offered a smoother side. Jazz was featured weekly, but Chicago's welcomed many different styles of music, including a number of the early incarnations of Red Dirt bands.²⁶ Brad Piccolo recalls that it was at Chicago's he first started playing solo acoustic shows, and eventually secured a weekly performance.²⁷

²⁴ "Gene Williams at the Lighthouse," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, April 9, 1983.

²⁵ "Jimmy LaFave and Night Tribe at the Lighthouse," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, April 8, 1983, 23.

²⁶ John Cooper, interview, April 23, 2009.

²⁷ Brad Piccolo, interview, May 5, 2009.



Figure 12. Advertisement for Chicago's²⁸

	1995	1996
Street Number		
219	Wormy Dog Saloon	Wormy Dog Saloon
306	J.R. Murphy's	J.R. Murphy's
319		Bull Pin Sports Bar & Grill
323	Willie's Saloon	Willie's Saloon

Table 3. Performance venues on the Strip 1995-96²⁹

²⁸ "Live Jazz every Wednesday at Chicago's," advertisement, *Daily O'Collegian*, January 26, 1985, 11.

²⁹ 1995 *Polk Cross Reference Directory for Stillwater, Oklahoma*. (Detroit: R.L. Polk & Company, 1995); 1996 *Stillwater City Directory*. (Belmond, IA: City Directory Inc., 1996).

Like Willie's in the 1970s and 1980s, the Wormy Dog Saloon was the Red Dirt venue of the 1990s. In the same location on the upper floor of 219 S. Washington that had been the home of the Golden Whaler and the Attic, the Wormy Dog operated from 1992 through 2004. While most of the bands in the Red Dirt scene got their start and continued playing at Willie's, during the 1990s, the Wormy Dog helped launch the careers of a second generation of Red Dirt artists including Cross Canadian Ragweed, Jason Boland & the Stragglers, and Stoney LaRue. Originally opened by Chuck Thomson and Chip Glennon, the Wormy Dog changed hands in 1998 when Eric Wooley bought out Thomson. A second Wormy Dog opened in the Bricktown district of Oklahoma City in August 2003 and continues to be one of the premier Red Dirt venues in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City location is owned by the members of Cross Canadian Ragweed.³⁰ Though the original Wormy Dog closed its doors in 2004 and the building is currently used as apartments, the logos and signatures on the walls are preserved by clauses in the lease agreement that state that they cannot be damaged.³¹

Though not a performance venue, Coney Island has been a consistent part of Stillwater's musical experience for over thirty years. The late hours of the restaurant have always drawn bar patrons for a late night snack. Musicians have also made Coney Island an integral part of their performance experience, as illustrated by the pictures of the numerous bands' pictures adorning the walls of the restaurant. Before a concert or on a set break, musicians performing on the Strip would congregate at the Coney Island.

³⁰ Monty Peliti, E-Mail message to author, October 23, 2007; Stan Moffat, E-Mail message to author, November 7, 2007; Bo Phillips, E-Mail message to author, October 29, 2007; Kodey Toney, E-Mail message to author, November 13, 2007; Joshua Quillin, E-Mail message to author, November 13, 2007; "Wormy Dog – About Me," Wormy Dog Saloon, <http://www.myspace.com/wormydogsaloon> (accessed November 25, 2007); Aimee Hoffman, "Wormy Dog Celebrating Six Years," *The Daily O'Collegian*, August 19, 1998; Josh Crutchmer, "Americana Mecca," *The Daily O'Collegian*, April 11, 2001.

³¹ Joshua Quillin, E-Mail message to author, November 13, 2007.

Other Venues / Studios

While the Strip may have been the musical center of Stillwater, there were a number of other area venues where local musicians presented their talents. In his book *Garth Brooks: the Road out of Santa Fe*, Matt O’Meilia provides a look at many of the places around Stillwater frequented by Garth’s band in the mid-1980s. Outside of the Strip, the venues most commonly mentioned are Aunt Molly’s (a coffeehouse stage in the OSU Student Union), a downtown dancehall called Binks, and the Tumbleweed Ballroom.³² Brad Piccolo and John Wooley recalled the names of some of the other Stillwater venues their bands played: Spav’s and the Ramada Inn Lounge.³³

The Bar Ditch was another popular venue in Stillwater that was not on the Strip. Located on the north side of Cowboy Mall, “it was a beer bar with 50 pound burlap sacks of roasted peanuts sitting around.”³⁴ Popular Oklahoma and Texas artists played there regularly, including Alvin Crow and Willis Alan Ramsey. Randy Crouch recalled playing the Bar Ditch with his band Home Brew, “it was a real cool place, everyone was used to goin’ there, and havin’ a real good time.”³⁵ Each of these locations played a role in the creation of Stillwater’s original music scene, but there were other locations that led to today’s Red Dirt music.

While live performances are the mainstay of most bands, recorded music is what allows the music to reach a wider audience. This led to the development of a number of

³² Matt O’Meilia, *Garth Brooks: Out of Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 8, 29.

³³ John Wooley. interview with the author, October 15, 2007; Brad Piccolo, E-Mail to the author, November 19, 2007.

³⁴ Joel Everett, E-Mail message to author, October 2, 2007.

³⁵ Randy Crouch, undated interview with paynecountyline.com.

recording studios in the Stillwater area. While Moses recorded their live record in Enid, the equipment used belonged to Steve Ripley and was brought over from his Stillwater Sound studio in the back of a pickup truck to record the live record.³⁶ Ripley continued his studio in Stillwater until leaving the area, but eventually purchased the legendary Church Studio in Tulsa that had once been home to Leon Russell's Shelter Records.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Mike Hufford's Lamb Recording became a hallmark of the Stillwater scene. Installed in an old chicken coop and barn, Hufford's studio was located about five miles outside of Stillwater. According to Chuck Dunlap, "Bob Childers had the first album out of Lamb with *I Ain't No Jukebox*. I had the second with *Daze Gone By* and Leo Miller and Jimmy LaFave both put out albums soon after."³⁷ Charles Hollis was a Stillwater musician in the 1970s before moving on to operating his own recording studio. He recalls the following about Lambs Recording: "It was awfully cool to get called in for a session. We shared musicians and met lots of other wayfaring strangers: Leo Miller, Chuck Dunlap, Kevin Smith, Bruce Hueston (now I remember him as the drummer for Moses), Don Mitchel (who eventually invented the Kicker speaker system out of Stillwater Designs), Rick Peale, and Brett Franzman. You could almost have called it a production company. I must say, for my own part, that between the recording sessions and the outdoor concerts out at Lamb, the very roots of the Red Dirt movement were just beginning to form."³⁸ Mike Hufford and Lamb Recording allowed local musicians the opportunity to make affordable recordings without having to sacrifice ownership of creativity to Nashville or Los Angeles record companies.

³⁶ Steve Irby, interview with the author, Stillwater, OK, April 2, 2010

³⁷ Chuck Dunlap, E-Mail to the author, April 16, 2010.

³⁸ Charles Hollis, E-Mail to the author, April 3, 2010.

By 1980, Charles Hollis had begun experimenting with four track recorders and mastering decks to record local musicians. However, his involvement with the Stillwater music scene stretched back to 1970. Hollis played in a number of bands including Falkner, Hollis, Beckel and Hyde, which later became the band “U.” While rehearsing with this band, Hollis would use a reel-to-reel recorder with sound on sound and tape echo features to record the band in their house on Duncan Street. Hollis’s first real test at the console came during a live recording of Randy Crouch’s Flying Horse Orchestra at Smiling Jack’s on the Strip in August 1981.³⁹

Like others in the Stillwater music community, Hollis relocated to Austin during the early part of the 1980s. While there, he established the Mid Austin Recording Studio (MARS) in the garage of his home. This location was also important to the development and expansion of Red Dirt Music. Hollis’s MARS studio recorded albums for Jimmy LaFave, Bob Childers, Randy Crouch, and Brad Piccolo.⁴⁰

Another studio of importance in Stillwater was the Cimarron Sound Lab. By the 1990s, Jeff Parker operated a local studio that saw frequent use. Parker’s recording biography reads like a Who’s Who of Stillwater musicians including: Cross Canadian Ragweed, Jason Boland & the Stragglers, Tom Skinner, Bob Childers, and The Farm Couple.⁴¹ Originally located in Parker’s home in Stillwater, the studio now has a facility in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

³⁹Jay Falkner, interview by author, Poteau, OK, November 15, 2007; Charles Hollis, E-Mail to author, April 25, 2010.

⁴⁰Brad Piccolo, interview with author, June 9, 2010; Gene Williams, interview with author, June 3, 2010.

⁴¹<http://www.cimsound.com/jparker.html> accessed May 4, 2010

The Farm

Perhaps the most important Stillwater location in Red Dirt lore is known simply as The Farm. On April 22, 1889, the Unassigned Lands in present day Oklahoma were opened for settlement by land run. Though the area was opened for legal settlement in 1889, the Stillwater valley had seen initial settlement in 1884. Located on Stillwater Creek, The Farm was a 160-acre land run claim just west of the present day campus of Oklahoma State University. Though the property has changed hands several times during the one hundred twenty one years since the run, the acreage remains virtually intact.

By 1979, the property lay abandoned when the cost of updating the buildings to meet commercial code was simply too great. However, it was at this time that The Farm became an important part in the musical history of Oklahoma. That year, John Cooper and Danny Pierce⁴² began renting The Farm. In an interview, John Cooper summed up the importance of this location to Red Dirt Music; referring to The Farm as “the Red Dirt music school.”⁴³ Local musicians gravitated to The Farm after the local bars closed to continue the party and keep playing music. In the twenty years that The Farm was the center of Red Dirt Music, most of the major names in the movement were there honing their performing and songwriting skills. Jam sessions started on the porch, in the yard, in the farmhouse, and in the Gypsy Café (an unattached garage which Bob Childers converted to a performance hall). Among the musicians and songwriters to study at The Farm were John Cooper (Red Dirt Rangers), Randy Crouch, Bob Childers, Monica

⁴² Cooper was a full time resident of The Farm from 1979 to 1986. He continued living there part-time until 1989. Pierce received a PhD from OSU in 1999.

⁴³ Thomas Conner. “Getting Along: Woody Guthrie and Oklahoma’s Red Dirt Musicians.” In *Alternative Oklahoma: Contrarian views of the Sooner State*. ed. Davis D. Joyce. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007, 98.

Taylor, Scott Evans, Mike McClure, Cody Canada (Cross Canadian Ragweed) and Jason Boland (Jason Boland & the Stragglers).

When Cooper and Pierce first began renting the farm, neither was involved in the music scene of Stillwater; in fact, neither played an instrument at the time. Like many college student residences, the scene at The Farm revolved around the party. As musicians began to join in the after-hours parties at The Farm, the unofficial jam sessions soon followed. In no time, music was an integral part of life at The Farm. Another reason for the influx of musicians at The Farm was the arrival of Bob Childers. Childers moved his trailer to a space behind a small unattached garage that he converted into the Gypsy Café, a small venue to sponsor the jam sessions at The Farm. While music was still made on the porch of the old farmhouse or around the campfire in the yard, the Gypsy Café became the symbol of The Farm. With its door facing the south, the Gypsy Café allowed bands to use amplifiers without the sound traveling into town; instead it covered empty fields and Highway 51.

Reminiscent of communal living of the 1960s, the musical focus of The Farm contributed bountifully to the sense of community seen amongst Red Dirt musicians. In fact, bands were often formed from associations at The Farm. For example, Jason Boland first met Roger Ray at The Farm. This association formed the nucleus of what would become the core of the Stragglers.

The end of The Farm era of Red Dirt music began in 1999. That year, Bob Childers's trailer burnt to the ground in an electrical fire and he moved off The Farm. The same year, Danny Pierce completed his PhD at Oklahoma State University. His

twenty-year tenure as the proprietor of The Farm came to an end. Now an Associate Professor at Maryville College in Kentucky, Pierce still holds a significant place of honor to the musicians who resided at The Farm. Without his welcoming nature and being the person who collected the money for rent, The Farm would not have provided the haven and education for a generation of Stillwater musicians. That same year, the land was sold to the First United Methodist Church of Stillwater. The church retained ownership, but never began construction of a new church. In 2005, the land was purchased by Hikea, LLC. Though the land changed hands several times during the Red Dirt era, Bruce Demuth has leased the land and outbuildings since 1986. Demuth is another alumnus of Oklahoma State University, but has never been involved in the Stillwater music scene. He describes the residents of The Farm as good neighbors who always let him know if he had a calf in trouble or were willing to help wire the barn. As recent as 2008, Demuth granted permission for a Red Dirt Reunion honoring Bob Childers to be held at The Farm.⁴⁴

A documentary on Red Dirt music began filming in 2002, with several scenes shot at The Farm. However, the movie was never completed. One segment of the film was aired at the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony for Bob Childers in 2008. The old farmhouse, which had been home to many Red Dirt musicians over the years, burnt to the ground in 2003.⁴⁵ Many residents of The Farm recall that it was the people not necessarily the location that made The Farm special. Stoney LaRue summed

⁴⁴ Bruce Demuth, telephone interview by author, June 10, 2010.

⁴⁵ George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003; John Wooley, interview by author, Tulsa, October 15, 2007; John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007.

up the experience of The Farm: “It was like a small tribe of elders and a bunch of young warriors.”⁴⁶

The Yellow House

The Yellow House was another location of importance. While The Farm was outside of town, The Yellow House centered itself right in the heart of the Oklahoma State University community, lying on the western edge of campus. Located on University Circle, with only a parking lot separating it from the Oklahoma State University dormitories, The Yellow House was home to Jason Boland, Cody Canada of Cross Canadian Ragweed, and others in the Red Dirt community.

The Yellow House’s connection to Red Dirt began in the summer of 1996 when a group of five Oklahoma State University students began renting the house from the McClollom family. That summer, Casey Helm located the house for her brother Matt and a group of his high school friends from Harrah, Oklahoma. Included in this group were Matt Helm, Jason Boland, Paul Ross, Neil Freeman, and Ryan Stanbeck. When they first moved in to the house, the group played poker to determine choice of rooms. Boland ended up winning that hand and secured the largest room on the second floor.

That same summer, Boland began pursuing the idea of playing music. Around this time Boland began playing shows at Key Midwest, another Stillwater venue, and also met Cody Canada. That fall, Canada and Boland both played acoustic shows at Stillwater bars. As they became better known, people began congregating at The Yellow House.

⁴⁶ Chris Parker. “After years of roadwork, Stoney LaRue is finally ready for his second studio album.” *Oklahoma Gazette*, February 24, 2010.

During the 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 school years, Boland continued to play solo acoustic shows and had not yet formed a band. Canada, meanwhile, had formed Cross Canadian Ragweed with Randy Ragsdale, Grady Cross, and Matt Weedeman.

The residents of the house were constantly in flux. Many of the original residents traded out with other people from Harrah. When Canada and his girlfriend split up, he became a resident of The Yellow House, taking over the basement. Others, like Jeremy Plato and Jim “Red” Wilhelm claimed couches for their own and kept clothes on the living room floor.

From the founding of the band in 1998 until 2001, The Yellow House was the official home of Jason Boland & the Stragglers. According to Roger Ray, “the band’s first official practice took place in The Yellow House in September 1998.” The Yellow House continued the “music school” mentality of The Farm, and its open door policy allowed a large number of musicians to come into contact with one another to share ideas. Another aspect of the open door policy was to allow college students to have frequent access to members of any number of Red Dirt bands. This one on one connection with students allowed the music to spread more fully across campus.⁴⁷

Oklahoma State University

The role of the university in the development and longevity of Red Dirt music is one that cannot be ignored. Many of the musicians in the Red Dirt community relocated to Stillwater in order to attend college at Oklahoma State University. Likewise, it was

⁴⁷ Roger Ray. “Tales from The Yellow House.” *Mavrik Magazine*. New Braunfels, Texas: Gruene Music Publishing, November/December 2005; Steve Rice, interview by author, Stillwater, October 29, 2007; Brandon Jackson, interview by author, Stillwater, October 29, 2007; Allyson Helm, Telephone interview by author, April 14, 2010; Jason Boland, undated interview with texastroubadours.com

the student population of Stillwater that provided the earliest fan base for the groups. Events like the annual Bennett Jam and open-mic nights at Aunt Molly's in the OSU Student Union provided additional performance opportunities for students. Though Aunt Molly's is no longer in operation, the Bennett Jam continues to bring music to the campus.

CHAPTER IV

THE PEOPLE

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the musical framework for Red Dirt music was laid in the venues of Stillwater and at The Farm. However, the spirit behind the music also deserves examination. Both John Cooper and John Wooley list Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills as major influences to the song writing and sensibilities of Red Dirt artists. According to Wooley, “I think in a general sense; it is music that combines the abandon of Bob Wills with the social conscience of Woody Guthrie.”¹ This social conscience and honesty in Guthrie’s music continues to be a strong influence on Red Dirt songwriters. According to Brandon Jenkins, “We’re all inspired by Woody in that way, by his music and his being here in Oklahoma.”² While Woody Guthrie directly influenced the early Stillwater scene, the Stillwater groups that came out of the 1990s gained their connection to Woody Guthrie through the older Stillwater musicians at The Farm. In addition to Wills and Guthrie, John Cooper adds a third person to this list of early Oklahoma

¹ John Wooley. interview by author, Tulsa, October 15, 2007

² Thomas Conner. “Getting Along: Woody Guthrie and Oklahoma’s Red Dirt Musicians.” In *Alternative Oklahoma: Contrarian views of the Sooner State*. ed. Davis D. Joyce. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007, 90.

influences in the person of Will Rogers. “It was Will Rogers’s everyman-ness even though he wasn’t a musician. He was more in to people than government.”¹ Wills’ connection to his fans and innovative music have become central components of the “genre” of Red Dirt.

While these three Oklahoma icons contribute much to the energy and social conscience present in much of the music associated with the Red Dirt music movement, it is important to look at those men and women who had a direct hand in shaping those elements into the musical framework of country, folk, rock-and-roll, and other genres that comprise Red Dirt Music. The individuals and bands presented below are examined in chronological order to their emergence in Red Dirt. In the sections below, the term generation is used to describe different period of evolution of Red Dirt music. The first generation encompasses the years 1974-1987. This group of musicians laid the foundations of the “genre” and continues to be strong influences on the later generations of Red Dirt musicians. The second generation covers the period 1987-1996. The third generation continues from 1996 to the present.

Moses

Known for supplying the name Red Dirt to the original music of the Stillwater area, the band Moses also contributed greatly to the drive of other local musicians by demonstrating that it was possible to record and release a record without the support of a major label. The members of Moses had been together since the mid-1960s, undergoing a number of changes in personnel, as well as a name change. The group was originally

¹ John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007.

known as the Inn-Keepers when Steve Ripley joined the band as a bass player and the name eventually changed to Steve Ripley and the Inn-Keepers. By 1968 or 1969, the band had been rebranded Moses with Ripley (lead guitar and vocals), Steve Irby (keyboards and vocals), Bruce Hueston (drums and vocals), and Robert Hatfield (bass and vocals). The band recorded *Moses: Live in Enid at the Fillin' Station* and Ripley mixed the recording at his Stillwater Sound Studio. By 1976, Ripley had left Stillwater to pursue a career in music. His career led him to work in the studio of Leon Russell, as a guitarist for Bob Dylan, a guitar maker for Eddie Van Halen, and eventually to opening his own studio in the former home of Leon Russell's Shelter Records. He also fronted the Grammy nominated band The Tractors. The Church Studio brought Ripley back into contact with the Red Dirt scene by recording bands like the Red Dirt Rangers.²

Steve Irby, another member of the group Moses ultimately explored a route in the music business beyond performance. When Irby first joined a rock band, he and his father built a custom amp following directions in a book checked out of the Oklahoma State University Library. By 1973, Irby and his former college roommate, Keith Frazier opened Stillwater Designs. The earliest work of the company consisted of installing PA systems for churches, bands, and clubs. The focus of the company shifted in 1980 when Irby was asked to design a speaker enclosure that would fit in the small space behind the seat of a pickup truck. That small speaker cabinet built for a friend launched the Kicker

² "Steve Irby, Livin' Loud: Alum turns his dream into an international success." *State Magazine*, Fall 2009, 36-37; George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003; Steve Ripley, "All About the Tractors," The Tractors, <http://www.thetractors.com/bios.php> (accessed July 8, 2010).

line of car audio products. Stillwater Designs still operates out of Stillwater, Oklahoma and remains on the front lines of innovation in the car audio industry.³

Chuck Dunlap

Arriving in Stillwater in 1972, Chuck Dunlap has been involved in the Red Dirt music movement since its very beginning. By 1973, he was playing solo acoustic shows on the Strip and formed the band Cimmaron. This band influenced Dunlap to choose the acoustic guitar over the electric as his primary instrument. Typical of the eclectic nature of Red Dirt, Cimarron was an early Stillwater band that incorporated many styles into its performances. According to Dunlap: “This band opened my eyes that you didn't have to lock into one style to be successful, in fact it worked better if you mixed up the styles throughout the night or even within a set.”⁴ This has become a hallmark of the writing and performances of many of the Red Dirt bands.

Bob Childers

Born in West Virginia, Bob Childers is often credited as the “Godfather of Red Dirt” music. Childers’s family relocated to the Ponca City area when he was a child, yet he left the area for California, ultimately studying music at the University of California, Berkley. On a return trip to the Stillwater area in 1972, Childers saw a performance by Chuck Dunlap and decided that he needed to stay and see what produced songwriters of that caliber. This is no small compliment to Dunlap, as Childers had associated with members of the Grateful Dead while in California. Childers honed his songwriting skills

³ “Steve Irby, Livin’ Loud: Alum turns his dream into an international success.” *State Magazine*, Fall 2009, 36-37.

⁴ Chuck Dunlap, E-mail to the author, March 3, 2010.

over the next few years and released his first record in 1979. The previous year, Childers developed a longstanding friendship with Jimmy LaFave who helped him record his first album. In 1982, Childers's second record and the nuclear protest movement led to Childers performing on the Capitol steps in Washington D.C. Following these two experiences, Childers moved to Nashville in 1986 to pursue a music career in the home of country music. Childers's presence in Nashville later helped Garth Brooks develop the contacts in the Nashville music industry to secure a publishing deal that ultimately led to commercial success as an artist. When asked to describe Childers, Brooks replied, "Good man...he was just trying to make it...and anybody else who was trying to make it was his friend. He never met a stranger and always...ALWAYS had a good outlook on things....that is so important. He was a legend in Stillwater, like Jimmy LaFave or Dub Cross. He was always good to the little guys like me." ⁵

Between time in Nashville and Austin, Childers returned to Stillwater in 1995 and took up residence in a travel trailer located at The Farm. On his return to Stillwater, Childers maintained the bohemian lifestyle that was common during his time at Berkeley. A classic example of this refusal to let adversity get him down involves a story pertaining to the occasion of his trailer burning to the ground. Childers remarked to Mike McClure that "God said it's time to move."⁶ Childers did move to a new trailer outside Stillwater and continued to write songs and influence songwriters in the Red Dirt scene. According to Brandon Jenkins, "throughout my recording career I have always taken pride in doing my own songs, the only writers I have ever covered on record are John Lennon and Bob

⁵ Garth Brooks, E-mail to the author, July 12, 2010.

⁶ Mike McClure. "more bobness," Mike McClure Band, entry posted April 23, 2008, <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=39123011&blogID=383861254> (accessed May 30, 2010).

Childers.”⁷ This is but one example of the esteem in which Childers is held within the Red Dirt community. Childers passed away in his home near Stillwater on April 22, 2008. His influence still remains in his music and in the respect of the Red Dirt community. Immediately following his death, a number of benefit concerts were held to honor Childers, his life, and his music. The memorial concerts continue to be held every spring in his honor. The accolades of the Red Dirt community are not the only ones accorded Childers. On November 8, 2008, he was inducted into the songwriter’s category of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in recognition of his vast influence over several generations of songwriters and his catalog of over 1500 songs. Childers’s son Zach was present at the induction ceremony and accepted the award on his father’s behalf following a musical tribute by the Red Dirt Rangers.⁸

Jimmy LaFave

Jimmy LaFave, originally from Wills Point, Texas, finished his secondary school education in Stillwater and became immersed in the Stillwater music scene. By the late 1970s, LaFave was running his own bar in Stillwater called the Rathskeller that was located just off the Strip. Operating a performance venue allowed him to perform on a regular basis and to have other songwriters around. Charles Hollis recalls meeting LaFave at the Rathskeller at the time both were working on recording projects at Lamb Studio. LaFave released two records recorded in Stillwater: *Down Under* and *Broken*

⁷ Brandon Jenkins. “Bob Childers,” Brandon Jenkins, entry posted April 23, 2008, <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=33682269&blogId=383858090> (accessed June 8, 2010).

⁸ George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 411-12; Oklahoma Rock; Matt O’Meilia, *Garth Brooks: Out of Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); “Oklahoma Music HOF Inductees Announced,” [Oklahomarock.com](http://www.oklahomarock.com), entry posted August 7, 2008, <http://www.oklahomarock.com/blog/?p=1136> (accessed May 11, 2010); Oklahoma Rock. “Bob Childers Dead at 61,” [Oklahomarock.com](http://www.oklahomarock.com), entry posted April 23, 2008, <http://www.oklahomarock.com/blog/?p=923> (accessed May 11, 2010).

Line, both of which were recorded at Lamb Studios. In the early 1980s, LaFave was playing regular Friday and Saturday night shows at Willies Saloon on the Strip. In 1986, he took Red Dirt south to Austin and became a fixture of the local music scene there, much as he had in Stillwater. In 1988, LaFave released a self-produced cassette tape entitled *Highway Angels...Full Moon Rain*. This album won the Austin Chronicle's Reader's Poll Tape of the Year Award, which led to a recording contract with Tomato Records for LaFave. The recording deal with Tomato Records never panned out, and LaFave was unable to release any material during the five-year commitment of his deal. In 1992, his self-produced album, *Austin Skyline*, opened the door for LaFave's publishing contract with Polygram Music. LaFave quickly recorded two more albums in 1994 and 1995. The following year, LaFave began his long running association with the family of Woody Guthrie. Nora Guthrie invited LaFave to be a part of the Woody Guthrie tribute at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and since that time LaFave has been an outspoken advocate for Guthrie's music. LaFave rounded out the 1990s by releasing a two-disc set of bootlegs and live recordings that covered a fifteen year period. Since that time, LaFave has released three more studio albums, two of which were released by Red House Records. Following his second release on Red House, LaFave partnered with studio engineer Fred Remmert and businessman Kelcy Warren to open Music Road Records in 2007. The company owns two recording facilities, including Cedar Creek Recording in Austin. This facility has recorded a number of Red Dirt artists as well as other artists like Stevie Ray Vaughn and the Dixie Chicks. Like many musicians, LaFave's style has changed over time, from blues and rock influenced early records to his present more folk centric recordings.⁹

⁹ "Jimmy LaFave – Biography," Jimmy LaFave, <http://www.jimmylafave.com/biography/bio.html>

Randy Crouch

The son of a Methodist preacher, Randy Crouch grew up in West Texas and was introduced to music at an early age. His parent's valued music and made sure Crouch was involved in piano lessons. He eventually learned ukulele and guitar. Always one to pick up new instruments, Crouch even taught himself how to play the fiddle from a book on how to play the mandolin. Since entering high school, Crouch has been performing music. Since the mid-1970s he has been performing throughout Oklahoma and the surrounding region.

Like many in the Red Dirt community, Randy Crouch is also associated with other styles of music. During the height of the Tulsa Sound movement of the 1970s, Crouch had his own well-respected band in Tulsa. Like Bob Childers, Crouch was involved with the nuclear protest movement surrounding the proposed Black Fox nuclear power plants. Crouch and his wife Liz estimate that they participated in over fifty Black Fox protest events throughout Oklahoma. Nearly forty years later, Crouch still incorporates social consciousness into his music. Crouch's music is hard to pigeon-hole into any specific style as it incorporates many different instruments and styles.

A prolific songwriter in his own right, Crouch released his first solo album in 1978 and has since sporadically released a number of others. One of his best-known works is his own rock-opera called the *Flying Horse Opera*. In addition to his own recordings, Jason Boland & the Stragglers, South 40, and Gary P. Nunn have featured Crouch's music on their recordings. Crouch's songwriting is not the only thing that

(accessed November 17, 2007; "Jimmy LaFave: Interview by Jim Catalano," Jim Catalano, <http://www.steamiron.com/twangin/int-lafave.html> (accessed June 8, 2010); George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 297-98.

draws listeners and other musicians to his circle. He is also well known as an outstanding musician on fiddle, guitar, steel guitar, and keyboards. He has often been referred to as Hendrix on the fiddle.

In addition to having music featured on albums of other Red Dirt musicians, Crouch has been a central figure of Red Dirt Music, emerging shortly after the Black Fox protests. After being black-listed in the Tulsa area for his involvement in the protests, Crouch gravitated to the Stillwater music scene and eventually to The Farm. As a regular at the late night jams at The Farm, Crouch established his place among the first generation of Red Dirt musicians, a generation that has and continues to provide support and camaraderie to newer groups. Crouch continues to perform with his own group, the Flying Horse Orchestra, in addition to being a regular member of the Red Dirt Rangers.¹⁰

Skinner Brothers

Tom Skinner moved from Bristow, Oklahoma to Stillwater in 1972 to attend Oklahoma State University. After a few semesters with little to show for his academic education except learning to play the guitar, Skinner joined the United States Air Force and spent the next four years at Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco, California. While in the Air Force, Skinner continued plying guitar and singing as often as he could. When his enlistment ended in 1978, Tom Skinner returned to Stillwater and once again enrolled at Oklahoma State University. While Tom was in the service, his brothers Mike

¹⁰ Chris B. Critter, "The 'green' beginnings of red dirt", *The Current*, December 2008, 68; "Jimmy LaFave – Biography," Jimmy LaFave, <http://www.jimmylafave.com/biography/bio.html> (accessed November 17, 2007); "the Texas Troubadors interview with Randy Crouch," <http://randycrouch.blogspot.com/2007/09/texas-troubadors-interview-with-randy.html> (accessed June 16, 2010); "Randy Crouch: About This Artist," Randy Crouch, http://www.reverbnation.com/randycrouch#/page_object/page_object_bio/artist_177931 (accessed June 16, 2010); "Randy Crouch – Bio," Randy Crouch, <http://www.randycrouch.net/Bio.php> (accessed June 16, 2010); Chris Becker, "Established Artist Spotlight – Randy Crouch," *The Current*, December 2007, 12-13.

and Craig each began to play instruments. Mike played the guitar and fiddle and Craig played the bass. When Tom returned to Stillwater, his brothers joined him there and they performed as the Skinner Brothers.

The Skinner Brothers quickly found themselves amongst the best known Stillwater bands of the time. Ron Beckel, who had also played with the bands “U”, Little Nemo, and many others, was the drummer for the Skinner Brothers for part of the band’s run. The Skinner Brothers gained a reputation as a group that was willing to share the stage with anybody. It was not uncommon for them to play a couple sets and then close out the night by becoming a backing band for other people in the audience. According to brother Craig, the group shared the stage with Red Dirt luminaries Jimmy LaFave, Bob Childers, and Chuck Dunlap on a number of occasions. In 1980, the group won a contest and the prize was studio time in Tulsa at Roy Clark’s Studio. The Skinner Brothers utilized the studio time and completed a nine sound demo. Toward the end of their run as The Skinner Brothers, they also performed off-and-on for several months as the backing band for a young Garth Brooks. At the time, Brooks was playing only solo acoustic performances and had not yet begun playing regularly with a band. However, while working with the Skinner Brothers, he recruited them as a studio band to record a demo to take to Nashville. As the circulation of their own demo failed to bring the recognition of the music industry, The Skinner Brothers broke up and each members went on to perform with other groups. Two of the Skinners turned up a short time later as members of the band Santa Fe that included Garth Brooks on vocals.¹¹ According to Brooks,

¹¹ Craig Skinner, interview with the author, May 2010; Craig Skinner, email to the author, February 23, 2010; George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 411-12.

“[t]he Skinner Brothers were the perfect example of Red Dirt music. Talented as hell and yet, still local. The Skinner Brothers were the kind of guys that could play with the best of bands all over the world and afterward, sit and talk to you like they have known you their whole lives...real guys.”¹²

Tom Skinner

After Santa Fe broke up, Tom Skinner returned to Oklahoma until his wife’s job took the family to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. During his two years in Baton Rouge, Skinner was approached by Binky Records and signed a solo record deal with the small independent label. Skinner returned to Oklahoma in 1996 and released the first of four records for Binky.

In addition to his acoustic performances, Tom Skinner created a new center of attention for Red Dirt Music in Tulsa. His weekly Wednesday Night Science Project features a “who’s who” of Red Dirt and Tulsa musicians and regularly features guest appearances from a wide variety of local artists. This weekly performance continues the tradition of sharing the stage and experience of the older members of the Red Dirt community with the up and coming musicians that was a hallmark of time spent at The Farm. In addition to his other projects, Tom Skinner has also been the bass player for the Mike McClure Band since the mid-2000s.¹³

¹² Garth Brooks, E-mail to author, July 12, 2010.

¹³ George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 411-12; Gene Williams, interview with author, June 3, 2010; Binky Records. "Tom Skinner." Binky Records. <http://www.binkyrecords.com/artists/skinner/index.html> (accessed November 18, 2009).

Brad Piccolo

Brad Piccolo moved to Stillwater in 1979 to attend Oklahoma State University. While driving into town, he heard a song on Stillwater radio station KSPI by local artist Chuck Dunlap. That first exposure to local music inspired Piccolo to become active in the Stillwater music scene. His first group in Stillwater was the short-lived Foggy Vision Boys. Each year the Bennett Residence Hall on campus stages the Bennett Jam. Piccolo's next outing was a band with Stan Woodward that was put together for the annual festival. Over the next couple of years, Piccolo continued to perform with a variety of new groups. Another Oklahoma State University music event was held in the Student Union at Aunt Molly's Coffee Shop. The duo Piccolo and Bob featured Brad Piccolo and future Red Dirt Rangers bassist/vocalist Bob Wiles. At their first appearance at Aunt Molly's in 1980, they were joined onstage by John Cooper another founding member of the Red Dirt Rangers. After that performance, Piccolo would see Cooper at jam session even though at the time Cooper was not a musician. To encourage his friend to participate in jam sessions, Piccolo gave a cheap mandolin to Cooper and taught him three chords. According to Piccolo, "[f]rom that day on we've been jamming together."¹⁴

Influenced by Jimmy LaFave, Piccolo relocated to Austin, Texas in the late 1980s. When he first arrived, Piccolo performed as a part of the Dickie Lee Erwin Band that was touring the United States. At nearly the same time, the Red Dirt Rangers came together as a band and Piccolo would travel back to Stillwater to play bass. With a music career spanning two states, Piccolo managed to find time to play on and co-produce the Red Dirt Rangers' first album *Cimarron Soul*, while recording his own album *Welcome*

¹⁴ Brad Piccolo, phone interview with author, June 9, 2010.

to the Worldwide Roadside in Austin at Charlie Hollis's MARS studio. Many of the songs on Piccolo's debut album were co-written by Bob Childers. Even after relocating to Texas, the Stillwater music community remained close and worked on each other's projects as evidenced by the Stillwater camp that recorded at Hollis studio in Austin including Piccolo, Bob Childers, and Jimmy LaFave. Piccolo moved back to the Stillwater area after a year of returning for Red Dirt Rangers gigs.¹⁵

Garth Brooks and Santa Fe

While many of the younger members of the Red Dirt community may not consider Garth Brooks one of their own; many of the previous generations consider him a member of the Red Dirt family. Not only did Brooks' band Santa Fe include the Skinner Brothers, but his music and performance contained the same social consciousness and reckless abandon that has been established as a trademark of Red Dirt Music. Troyal Garth Brooks was born in 1962, and grew up in Yukon, Oklahoma. His mother Colleen had been a featured singer on a weekly television show, and had previously had her own recording contract. Thus, Brooks was raised in an environment that included music even though it was discouraged as a career choice. An athlete throughout his time in public schools, Brooks enrolled at Oklahoma State University in 1980. While there, he competed on the OSU track team and threw the javelin. A four-year letterman, Brooks earned a partial scholarship during his sophomore year. In addition to academics and athletics, Brooks played music as often as possible and was a regular at Wild Willie's on the Strip.

¹⁵ Brad Piccolo, phone interview with author, June 9, 2010.

After graduating with a degree in Marketing in 1984, a degree that Brooks felt would allow him to get work as a jingle writer/singer if his dream of making it in country music did not work out, Brooks worked at Dupree's Sporting Goods on the Strip and served as a bouncer at the Tumbleweed Dance Hall west of town. It was at the second of these jobs that he met his first wife Sandy. While breaking up a fight in the women's restroom, Brooks saw Sandy Mahr with her fist stuck in the sheetrock when her punch missed her opponent. The two quickly hit it off and started dating. In the summer of 1985, Brooks decided it was time to pursue his music career. After a large going away party at Willie's, he set out for Nashville leaving his family and girlfriend at home. During a meeting with ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) Vice-President Merlin Littlefield, Brooks was disheartened as the critique of his ability was less than flattering. His dreams were further crushed when a songwriter whose name he recognized came in to ask Littlefield for a five-hundred dollar loan to pay his bills. The next day, Brooks left Nashville. Too embarrassed to return to Stillwater after the big send off he had received, he first returned to Yukon. After a short time, he returned to Stillwater and his job at Dupree's. Brooks also began playing at Willie's again and gained a regular Tuesday night slot.

In March 1986, Brooks decided to try working regularly with a band instead of as an acoustic artist. He began recruiting a band which included Tom Skinner on bass, Jed Lindsey on guitar, and Matt O'Meilias on drums. Each member of the band brought something different to the musical sound of the band. Brooks was a fan of the songwriting of Dan Fogelberg and James Taylor, Skinner brought a solid musical background and experience in a number of genres along with impeccable harmony

vocals, Lindsey had moved from rock bands to touring with Mel McDaniel and Rocking Horse (which also featured Ronnie Dunn, later of Brooks & Dunn fame), and O’Meilla came directly from a hard-rock/heavy metal band. After only one full band rehearsal, the group, now known as Santa Fe, played the first of the regular house band shows at a new bar in downtown Stillwater called Binks. In addition to the regular shows at Binks, the band performed as much as they could at other venues. The constant performing and perfectionism of its members allowed Santa Fe to become very tight musically.

According to O’Meilla, they often played songs for the first time on stage and the audience was unaware that they had never played the song before. To fill a hole in the band’s sound, Mike Skinner was soon added on fiddle. According to Brooks, “[w]e made a pact not to play anything anyone of us didn’t like...and we all knew so much music, we could have played for days before we got close to that line.”¹⁶

By November 1986, the band progressed to the point that Brooks was once again ready to make the move to Nashville. Each member of the band agreed to go, except O’Meilla. Throughout the rest of the year, Santa Fe looked for a replacement drummer, eventually hiring Troy Jones. However, before Jones joined the band, Santa Fe recorded *Oklahoma Christmas* at Mike Hufford’s Lamb Studios. *Oklahoma Christmas* was co-written by Brooks, who hoped to get Oklahoma radio stations to play the song during the Christmas season. Jones began his tenure with Santa Fe in January 1987. That May, the band moved to Nashville.

Brooks and Lindsey made the initial trip to Nashville to find a place for the band to live. During their first week there, the pair roomed with Bob Childers, another

¹⁶ Garth Brooks, E-mail to the author, July 12, 2010.

Stillwater songwriter. Childers put Brooks in touch with a songwriter named Stephanie Brown who recorded a demo of Brooks singing one of Childers's songs. After the first week, the rest of the band and their families moved in to the house that Brooks and Lindsey had found. In addition to working on original music and performing whenever possible, the members of the group found jobs to pay their bills. When Santa Fe's performances began to drift back toward playing covers instead of originals, the dynamic of the band began to shift. It was not long before Tom Skinner decided to quit and his brother Mike soon followed. With the Skinner Brothers gone, Santa Fe ceased to be a functioning band. While the band was performing, and in the months following the breakup, Brooks and Tom Skinner both occasionally played songwriter showcases around Nashville. It was at one of these that Brooks met Bob Doyle through Stephanie Brown. Doyle recognized Brooks' ability and left ASCAP to start his own publishing company with Stephanie Brown. The duos first client was Garth Brooks. A relatively short time later, Brooks signed a recording contract with Capital Records. Brooks released his first album in April 1989. That debut album, entitled *Garth Brooks*, yielded four hit singles that quickly made a name for Brooks in Country Music. By 1991, Brooks recorded a second album and received a number of honors from the music industry, including being named Entertainer of the Year by the Academy of Country Music (ACM) and the Country Music Association. The same year, Brooks' *Ropin the Wind* became the first album to debut at number one on Billboard's Country Music Chart and their Top 200 Chart.

Brooks retired from touring in 1998 to spend time with his family. His final studio album for Capital was released in November 2001 and debuted at the top of both

charts again. Shortly after retiring from touring, Brooks and his wife Sandy divorced but remained close to one another to raise their children. Brooks married longtime duet partner Trisha Yearwood in 2005.

Also in 2005, Brooks shocked the music industry by partnering with Wal-Mart as the exclusive distributor of a box set of his recordings including a CD of previously unreleased material. The Wal-Mart partnership allowed Brooks to maintain control of his music and distribution in a way that was previously unheard of in the music industry. Though he has been named the top selling solo artist in United States history, Brooks once again tied himself to the Red Dirt community by becoming an independent artist. Though Brooks is a mega-star in Country Music, his roots lie in the Red Dirt sound he absorbed during his time in Stillwater. In an interview with the Tulsa World, Brooks pays tribute to his Red Dirt roots: “I’m very proud to take my place as an Oklahoma artist; I don’t think we would have had this sound anywhere else. And if I hadn’t run in to the Skinner Brothers, I don’t think you would’ve heard the sound we had.”¹⁷ Brooks remarked further on Red Dirt and its impact on his music, “I wouldn’t have a career without Stillwater. It is the birth of my music...red dirt music. From the earth...what you do with it after that is up to you...but Stillwater gave me everything I needed to know about music. My music is what it is on the outside, but I believe with all my heart that Red Dirt music is the backbone of my body of music.”¹⁸

¹⁷ “John Wooley, Blame it on the Skinners” Tulsa World

¹⁸ Garth Brooks, E-mail to author, July 12, 2010.

By the 1980s, Red Dirt music was well on its way. By 1987, with Garth Brooks in Nashville and Jimmy LaFave in Austin, Red Dirt music had spread beyond Oklahoma.¹⁹ At nearly the same time, Stillwater was preparing for a new wave of Red Dirt bands. The members of the Red Dirt Rangers had been playing together for some time at The Farm, but officially formed a band in 1989. Within the next two years, the Red Dirt jam band the Medicine Show began performing. Add The Great Divide, which was formed in 1992, to these two bands, and the nucleus of the modern influence on Red Dirt music emerges. Each featured strong songwriters who showed the influences of Woody Guthrie and their time living and playing at The Farm. While each was a Red Dirt group, they exhibited the diversity of the “genre” by incorporating different styles of music.

Red Dirt Rangers

While other Red Dirt bands have come and gone, the Red Dirt Rangers are still going strong. The three core members of the Rangers, John Cooper, Brad Piccolo and Ben Han, have been together for the entirety of the band’s existence, a period of over twenty years. Since first coming together at The Farm, the trio wrote and performed original music, and by doing so, influenced a new generation of Red Dirt artists. Like other bands in the Red Dirt community, the Rangers experienced a number of personnel changes. The group initially featured two accordion players: K.C. Moon on lead and Charles Peaden on rhythm. By the time the group recorded *Cimarron Soul*, Piccolo had moved to rhythm guitar and Bob Wiles took over the duties of bassist. The original lineup was rounded out with guitarist Dave Clark, who would also switch out on bass with

¹⁹ Matt O’Meilia, *Garth Brooks: Out of Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 192; Craig Skinner, interview with the author, May 2010; Craig Skinner, email to the author, February 23, 2010; Michael McCall, *Garth Brooks* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 66-73, 411-12

Bob Wiles during certain songs. This instrumentation strongly influenced the style of music played by the band during this early period. The Red Dirt Rangers released their first album in 1992, a cassette called *Cimarron Soul*. That name has since become the name of their publishing company and record label. That same year, the accordions were dropped when Moon and Peaden decided to pursue careers in education. Even with the change in lineup, The Red Dirt Rangers quickly returned to the studio and recorded a second album, *Red Dirt Music*, in Tulsa.

By 1994, the band added fiddler and steel-guitarist Benny Craig to the lineup and recorded a CD entitled *Oklahoma Territory* with producer Lloyd Maines. The band returned to the studio with Maines in 1999 to record *Rangers Command*, which was released by Texas based Lazy SOB Records. This record increased the popularity of the band with an appearance in the top 25 on the Americana charts. In Spring 2002, the Red Dirt Rangers took a break from touring to record a new record, this time with Steve Ripley at the Church Studio in Tulsa. Harkening back to Cooper's days teaching public school, the group released an album for children in 2003 entitled *Blue Shoe: Music for Kids of All Ages*.

As the membership of the band changed, so did the sound. In 2003, Bob Wiles left the group leaving Piccolo and Cooper with the majority of the lead vocal duties. While most of the songs the band recorded have been written by the band, or co-written with other musicians, the Red Dirt Rangers have embraced multiple styles of music and made them their own. The Red Dirt Rangers incorporate elements of folk, rock, blues, bluegrass and country to create their distinctive brand of Red Dirt.

In June 2004, Piccolo, Cooper, and Han were onboard a helicopter that crashed near Cushing, Oklahoma. The pilot and the other passenger aboard the aircraft died in the crash, but the three band members, who were in the back seat, survived. All three sustained injuries, but Piccolo managed to get both Cooper and Han out of the helicopter and help them get on top of the fuselage before the helicopter sank in the Cimarron River. As medical expenses mounted for the trio, a number of benefit concerts were arranged throughout Oklahoma. The Blue Door in Oklahoma City hosted the largest of these on July 11, 2004. This all day acoustic concert featured performances by Jimmy LaFave, Bob Wiles (former member of the Red Dirt Rangers), Ray Wylie Hubbard, Bob Childers, Tom Skinner, Chuck Dunlap, Greg Jacobs, Terry “Buffalo” Ware, and many others. This element of support afforded by other members of the Red Dirt community is a hallmark of the movement. The multi-generational gathering at the benefits illustrates the sense of community that has developed in those that embrace the Red Dirt mantle, as well as, the level of respect that is held for the Red Dirt Rangers.²⁰

As of 2010, the band consists of the three remaining founding members, with other musicians added to the mix such as Jimmy Karstein on drums, Randy Crouch on fiddle and guitar, and Don Morris on bass.

²⁰ John Wooley, “Rangers Rise; Red Dirt Rangers Return to Cain’s For Christmas; New Tulsa Band Plays Memphis’ Bluestock” *Tulsa World*, December 18, 1997; Matt Elliot, “Keeping it in the Family: Red Dirt Christmas Rounds Up All the Usual suspects for Extraordinary Cheer,” *Tulsa World*, December 15, 2006; Monty Peliti, “Red Dirt Rangers Benefits,” Galleywinter.com, entry posted July 1, 2004, <http://www.galleywinter.com/main/Forums/viewtopic/p=411713.html> (accessed November 26, 2007); Piccolo, interview June 9, 2010; George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 413-19.

The influence of this band is evident by the many Rangers-penned songs covered by other Red Dirt artists. When asked about the nature of Red Dirt artists covering one another's songs, John Cooper replied,

“The new guys picked up on that vibe. Like Stoney and Jason recording Childers and Crouch. They choose to do songs from the older guys in the scene. And they don't have to do that, but they think it's important to pay that tribute. When we were that age we tried to record Childers and Skinner tunes and other people that came before us. It is a respect thing. You'd be hard to find another scene like this one.”²¹

This mutual respect is nowhere more evident than in the careers of the Red Dirt Rangers. Since 1996, the Rangers have hosted the “Red Dirt Christmas” at the Cain's Ballroom. The concert features several prominent Stillwater Red Dirt bands, and until his death in 2008 often ended with a jam session led by Bob Childers. The Red Dirt Christmas show continues to allow the Red Dirt Rangers the opportunity to introduce new audiences to the older members of the Red Dirt community while helping to further the careers of the younger members of the community. The first two editions of the concert featured the Red Dirt Rangers, Medicine Show, and Whirligig. The 2005 to 2007 shows featured the Red Dirt Rangers, Stoney LaRue, and Cross Canadian Ragweed. As of 2009, Cross Canadian Ragweed has remained a mainstay of the Red Dirt Christmas concert series along with the Red Dirt Rangers.

Monica Taylor

From nearby Perkins, Oklahoma, Monica Taylor became a fixture of the Red Dirt Community when, like others, she enrolled in classes at Oklahoma State University. As a member of the bluegrass group The Wayfaring Strangers, Taylor was first welcomed into

²¹ John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007.

the Red Dirt family by Bob Childers before her performance at one of Jimmy LaFave's musicians reunions at Willie's Saloon. For two years she left Oklahoma behind to enjoy life by living in the mountains of Telluride, Colorado. But in 1994, she returned to Stillwater and took up residence at The Farm. A lasting friendship and musical partnership was forged with guitarist Patrick Williams at the Winfield (Kansas) Bluegrass Festival in 1996. Soon after, the two began performing as The Farm Couple. In 2008, after releasing three CDs together, the two decided to pursue solo careers, but still perform together on occasion. In addition to her Farm Couple recordings, and her own solo albums, Taylor has made appearance on recordings by Cross Canadian Ragweed, Greg Jacobs, Tom Skinner and many more.²²

The Medicine Show

By the early 1990s, the members of The Medicine Show gravitated toward Stillwater and became immersed in the blossoming music scene. The original lineup of the group featured Donnie Wood (bass and vocals), Brad James (guitar and vocals), Scott Evans (guitar and vocals), and Kenny Early (drums). The group's sound was soon rounded out by the addition of Corey Mauser on keyboards. The band's name was the suggestion of guitarist Brad James who named it after The Band's song "W.S. Walcott's Medicine Show." Guitarist Scott Evans designed the group's logo. According to Evans, The Medicine Show was originally a concerted effort of its members to sound like the Allman Brothers, the Grateful Dead, or Little Feat. These jam bands, and others like them contributed greatly to the performance and writing styles of the group. Likewise,

²² "Monica Taylor – About Monica," Monica Taylor, <http://www.monicataylormusic.com/about.html> (accessed June 14, 2010); "Monica Taylor – Monica's Music," Monica Taylor, <http://www.monicataylormusic.com/monicaMusic.html> (accessed June 14, 2010).

the longevity and talent of The Medicine Show helped fuel the jam band ethos into the coming generation of Red Dirt bands. Like most bands, The Medicine Show also experienced its share of lineup changes during its nine-year tenure. Kenny Early came and went two different times to be replaced by Eric Hansen (who has also been a member of Jimmy LaFave & Night Tribe and the Mike McClure Band), and Jimmy Karstein (who has also recorded with the Red Dirt Rangers, JJ Cale, and Leon Russell). Corey Mauser left the group and moved to Austin to pursue other options, as did percussionist Steve Anderson who had joined the group on congas. With their departure, the group added Tulsan Steve Littleton (now a member of Stoney LaRue & the Arsenals) on Hammond B-3 organ and keys. After nine years, Brad James decided to leave the group and a short time later the group dissolved. In mid-2000, after spending some time as a sideman in a number of other groups, James formed a new group with bassist Donnie Wood called Brad James and the Organic Boogie Band. The group was similar in style to The Medicine Show and eventually evolved into Stoney LaRue's backing band when he decided to pursue shows with a full band. James and Wood were both instrumental in the production of LaRue's first album *Downtown* that was tracked live at the Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa. Wood now plays bass for the Dustin Pittsley Band, and James is a regular member of Tom Skinner's Wednesday Night Science Project.²³

Brandon Jenkins

Brandon Jenkins came to Stillwater from Tulsa in 1987 to attend Oklahoma State University. While in Stillwater, he became enmeshed in the Red Dirt community and

²³ Chris B. Critter, "Red dirt's bluegrass foundation", *The Current*, February 2009, 26; John Wooley, "Former Medicine Show singer forms Organic Boogie Band", *Tulsa World*, June 7, 2000; Eric Hansen, E-mail to author, March 9, 2010.

was another “student” at The Farm. After graduating OSU in 1992, Jenkins continued his songwriting and performing, ultimately resulting in a record deal with Birmingham based Raney Records. The same year, he released his first album, *Tough Times Don’t Last*. After a year of touring, Jenkins left Raney Records to regain some creative control over his image and music. From Alabama, the next stop for Jenkins was Nashville. There he met much of the same resistance he had found with his previous label and decided to strike out on his own. The result has been another six independently released records. Jenkins is no stranger to others in the Red Dirt community. He has written songs with John Cooper of the Red Dirt Rangers and Stoney LaRue; and Texas artist Bleu Edmondson released a cover of Jenkins’ “Finger on the Trigger” on his 2007 album *Lost Boy*. Now residing in Austin, Texas, Jenkins’ music has evolved from a Nashville influenced country sound to an Austin influenced blues sound.²⁴

The Great Divide

From 1993 to 2007, The Great Divide was a central part of the Red Dirt sound coming out of Stillwater. Their music combined rock and country music and was often categorized as Alt-Country. Originally brought together to record demos written by the band’s front man, Mike McClure, the group featured Scotte Lester on guitar, J.J. Lester on drums and Kelly Green on bass. Two years later, the group released an independent album, *Goin’ for Broke*. The original music of The Great Divide caught on with audiences quickly, and the band grew in popularity in Oklahoma and Texas, opening for

²⁴ Cass Rains, “Finally Fitting In: With His Own Label and Progressive Sound, Brandon Jenkins is Finally Making His Music,” *The Daily O’Collegian*, August 26, 2004; “Brandon Jenkins – Bio,” Brandon Jenkins, <http://www.brandonjenkins.com/bjbio.htm> (accessed November 26, 2007); “Brandon Jenkins – Fact Sheet,” Brandon Jenkins, <http://www.brandonjenkins.com/factsheet.htm> (accessed November 26, 2007); Bleu Edmondson, *Lost Boy*, Smith Entertainment (CD), 2007.

such acts as the Dixie Chicks, Willie Nelson, and Chris LeDoux. After Garth Brooks and Jimmy LaFave, The Great Divide was the next band to take Red Dirt to a national stage. After releasing two records on their own label, The Great Divide signed with Atlantic Records who re-released The Great Divide's album *Break in the Storm* in 1998. The group released another record on the Atlantic label in 1999 before leaving the major label music scene in 2000. Though no longer on a major label, the Great Divide released two more albums before singer and guitarist McClure decided to leave the band to pursue a solo career. McClure's last show with The Great Divide occurred March 28, 2003 at the Tumbleweed Dance Hall in Stillwater; he had released a solo album of material that did not fit the sound of The Great Divide the previous fall. *Twelve Pieces*, McClure's solo project, foreshadowed the more rock influenced music of his future band. McClure's final show with The Great Divide was recorded on the outdoor stage and released as a two-part live album. While searching for a new lead singer, J.J. Lester took time off to produce the debut record for Stillwater band No Justice, on which he also played drums. That fall, the group returned to the stage with new member Micah Aills. After recording two albums with Aills, the members of the Great Divide decided to leave the music industry and return to their roots in Stillwater.²⁵

Mike McClure

After leaving The Great Divide, McClure set out initially in support of his acoustic album *Twelve Pieces*. However, it was not long before McClure put together a

²⁵ John Cooper, telephone interview by author, October 15, 2007; Thomas Conner, "Brad James Plants a New Seed," *Tulsa World*, April 30, 1999; "Albums/CD's – The Great Divide.com," The Great Divide, <http://www.thegreatdivide.com/albums.asp> (accessed November 20, 2007); The Great Divide, "The Great Divide Disbanding," The Great Divide blog, entry posted March 4, 2007, <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=40904304&blogId=237133705> (accessed June 8, 2010).

new band to deliver his now rock influenced music. Like many other bands, the Mike McClure Band has undergone a number of lineup changes before settling into its current form. Originally featuring Jamie Kelly on bass (previously played with the Burtschi Brother), Rodney Pyeatt on guitar (Selena, Rick Trevino), and Eric Hansen on drums (Jimmy LaFave & Night Tribe, Medicine Show) the group recorded three EP's (extended play recordings) of original McClure songs. The sound of the Mike McClure Band was an astounding departure from the sound of McClure's former band. In an effort to further distance himself from the Great Divide, McClure played very few songs from the Great Divide's catalog with his new band. McClure's sound further evolved with the addition of Tom Skinner on bass guitar and backing vocals. Now working as a trio, McClure, Hansen, and Skinner have defined the Red Dirt rock sound of the Mike McClure Band.

In addition to his talents as a singer, songwriter, and guitarist, McClure has also become a highly respected producer. In addition to his own albums, McClure has worked with Cross Canadian Ragweed, Jason Boland & the Stragglers, Stoney LaRue, and many others. Through working with Cross Canadian Ragweed, McClure was introduced to engineer and producer Joe Hardy. In early 2010, McClure released his eighth album since leaving The Great Divide, *Zero Dark 30*. McClure has brought all of his talents to the sound of Red Dirt Music and has influenced a new generation of musicians.

With the next generation of influence taking the stage in Stillwater, an influx of new talent began to enter the area. The popularity of bands like The Medicine Show and The Great Divide expanded the sphere of influence of Stillwater music and encouraged younger musicians to make the move to Stillwater. It was at this time that Jason Boland

and Cody Canada moved to Stillwater. At the same time, the cycle of music venues of the Strip closing and new ones opening continued.

Cross Canadian Ragweed

Cross Canadian Ragweed was formed in 1994 in Yukon, Oklahoma, and each of its four members moved to Stillwater over the period of 1993 to 1996. The name of the band is drawn from the four founding members of the group: Grady Cross, Cody Canada, Randy Ragsdale, and Matt Weedeman. Current bassist Jeremy Plato replaced Weedeman shortly after the band relocated to Stillwater. In Stillwater, the group continued to work on their own sound. Lead singer and guitarist Cody Canada was influenced heavily by The Great Divide's Mike McClure and was introduced to The Farm by McClure. During the early-mid 1990s, McClure held a regular Monday night acoustic gig at the Wormy Dog. After their friendship was established, McClure invited Cody Canada to join him onstage for the shows. This exposure for Canada resulted in his own Tuesday night acoustic slot at the Wormy Dog. While both McClure and Canada had their own shows at the Wormy Dog, they often sat in on the other's night. This camaraderie between the two remains evident. McClure has produced or co-produced every Cross Canadian Ragweed studio album since *Highway 377*, including five albums on Nashville based label Universal-South, which signed Cross Canadian Ragweed in 2002. Though signed to a country label, Cross Canadian Ragweed continues to record music more akin to southern rock than that recorded by other Nashville artists.

Cross Canadian Ragweed recorded their first album, *Carney*, in 1998 at Jeff Parker's Cimarron Sound and featured appearances by Brad James, Monica Taylor and

other Stillwater musicians. Two years later, the band capitalized on their growing popularity and recorded *Live and Loud at the Wormy Dog Saloon*. That album featured a recording of Gene Collier's the "Boys from Oklahoma" which has become one of their signature songs. It wasn't long before the band was ready to return to the studio. This time, the group left Oklahoma and recorded at Reel Time Audio in Denton, Texas. Mike McClure and J.J. Lester of the Great Divide co-produced the album *Highway 377*. In support of that album, the band released their first video in 2001 for the song "Look at Me".

The following year, the band recorded *Live and Loud at Billy Bob's Texas* as part of the *Live at Billy Bob's* series which includes albums by Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Stoney LaRue and No Justice. In addition to releasing four albums in four years, Cross Canadian Ragweed maintained a steady touring schedule that kept them on the road. Even with the constant touring, the band returned to Reel Time Audio in Denton to record a new album. Once again working with producer Mike McClure, the band was joined by engineer Eric Delegard whose work had been featured on Grammy winning recordings. While in the studio recording *Cross Canadian Ragweed* (more commonly known as *Purple*), the group was being courted by Tim DuBois and Tony Brown. Their label, Universal South, wanted to re-release *Highway 377*, but signed the band and released *Purple* as the band initially recorded it. For a newly signed group to maintain enough creative control to prevent label edits of an album is uncommon in the country music industry. This single fact demonstrates both the bargaining power of the band and the level of interest that Universal South executives had in both Cross Canadian Ragweed and Red Dirt music.

Since *Purple*, Cross Canadian Ragweed has released four more studio albums and one live album. In July 2006, a two night concert series at Tulsa's Cain's Ballroom was recorded and filmed for a Live Concert CD/DVD. Each of the studio recordings has been done in a different studio, with the last two being recorded in California. According to the band, the unfamiliar environment of the new studio forces the creative energy of the band to increase as they work to become comfortable in the new surroundings. This expanded energy has allowed Cross Canadian Ragweed to add new elements to their music and encouraged them to experiment more in the recording process.²⁶

Jason Boland & the Stragglers

Jason Boland & the Stragglers is another Red Dirt band that followed a similar pattern. Boland moved to Stillwater from Harrah, Oklahoma in 1993 to attend Oklahoma State University. He had been in a number of bands, primarily rock-and-roll cover bands, in Harrah and continued playing guitar while in Stillwater. However, once relocating to Stillwater his music became more in line with traditional country. As with Cody Canada, Mike McClure directed Boland to the songwriting of the previous generation of Red Dirt artists, including Tom Skinner and Bob Childers. By 1996, Boland had decided to pursue his interest in music. Within the year, he and Cody Canada were close friends, with Boland playing during Canada's set breaks at the Wormy Dog. By 1998, the two were living at The Yellow House on University Circle. After an acoustic show at Key Midwest, Canada encouraged Boland to go out to The Farm. It was during visits to The

²⁶ Tony Allen, "Cody Canada Shrugs Off Superstar Similarities," *The Daily O'Collegian*, May 6, 1997; George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 129-131; Universal South Records, "Cross Canadian Ragweed," Universal South Records, <http://www.universal-south.com/artists/cross.asp> (accessed November 26, 2007); Cross Canadian Ragweed, *Happiness and all the Other Things*, Universal Records South (CD), 2009.

Farm that Boland met Roger Ray. During this time, friends were urging Boland to put a band together. When the time came, he called on his Farm acquaintance Ray (guitar and steel guitar) to join the new group. With Ray came another Vian musician, Grant Tracy (bass). The addition of Brad Rice (drums), a fraternity brother of Boland's, rounded out the Stragglers. A little over a month from their first rehearsal in September, the Stragglers played their first show on October 31, 1998 at the Wormy Dog on the Strip. The group quickly put together enough material to record an album, and through the efforts of The Great Divide enlisted Lloyd Maines²⁷ to produce their debut *Pearl Snaps*. In 2001, the group returned to the studio, this time with Mike McClure as producer, to record *Truckstop Diaries*. Shortly after *Truckstop Diaries* was released, Boland and fiddler Dana Hazzard were involved in a one-car accident while leaving a concert at Roxie's Roost in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Boland was sidelined for 3 months for physical therapy for a broken hip sustained in the crash. The popularity of Jason Boland and the Stragglers led to a live record in the *Live at Billy Bob's* series in 2002. By the time of the Billy Bob's show, Jeremy Watkins had replaced Hazzard on fiddle. The record also featured a guest appearance by guitarist Travis Linville of the Burtschi Brothers. The same year, the group relocated from Stillwater to the Austin, Texas area. Austin is well known for its music scene and support of original music. It has been the home-away-from-home for many Stillwater musicians. By 2004, the Stragglers had released another record, *Somewhere in the Middle*, once again with producer Lloyd Maines on board. The following October, Boland checked himself into a Sierra Tucson rehab clinic to deal with his alcohol addiction. Prior to Boland entering rehab, the group recorded their fourth

²⁷ Maines produced the first three records for The Great Divide and has also worked with the Red Dirt Rangers.

studio album, *The Bourbon Legend*. For this record, the group recorded in California with producer Pete Anderson. Anderson is best known for his work with Dwight Yoakum and imparted a lot of his sound on the arrangements on the record. Once back on the road, fans were treated to a stronger version of the Stragglers. With Boland no longer drinking, there were no more performances where he forgot words to his own songs. According to Boland, “Our strengths are always our weaknesses. Music was one of the things that was a catalyst for what was killing me, and it was a catalyst to bring me back, too. I found out it was something I still really do care about. When I'm playing now, people are like, 'You smile a lot more.' Really, it was just because I was so happy that I knew that I loved to play. I was relieved.”²⁸ The revitalized group returned to their heavy touring schedule, yet managed to find time to record *Comal County Blue*, which was released in August 2008. Long a part of The Music Fest in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, Jason Boland and the Stragglers seized the opportunity in January 2010 to record their second live album, *High in the Rockies*, which was released at an April 16, 2010 show at the Cain’s Ballroom in Tulsa.²⁹

Stoney LaRue

The third resident of The Yellow House to make an impact on the Red Dirt scene is Stoney LaRue (Phillips). Although born in Taft, Texas, LaRue spent much of his

²⁸ David Dawson. Dave's Diary - 29 August 2007 - Jason Boland, http://www.nucountry.com.au/articles/diary/august2007/290807_jasonboland.htm (accessed May 20, 2010).

²⁹ Jason Boland, undated interview with texasroutadours.com; George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003, 55-57; Joey Guerra. “on a new high and sober: Kicking booze was scary to Jason Boland but not anymore.” *Houston Chronicle*, June 15, 2007; Allyson Helm, telephone interview by author, April 14, 2010.

youth near Chickasha, Oklahoma. At age fifteen, LaRue relocated to Stillwater to be closer to the thriving music scene. According to an interview with Stan Moffat at Payne County Line Promotions, LaRue first met Cody Canada and Jason Boland at parties around Stillwater before Canada began playing acoustic gigs with Mike McClure. After graduating from Stillwater High School, LaRue enlisted in the army to have money for college. Once his enlistment was up, he returned to Stillwater to find both Canada and Boland playing acoustic shows at the Wormy Dog. The pair called LaRue onstage to sing a song shortly after he turned twenty-one, and that night the owner offered him a job. After the Medicine Show broke up, former members Brad James and Donnie Wood started a new group called Brad James and the Organic Boogie Band in 2000. By 2001, the Organic Boogie Band was backing Stoney LaRue. After four years of playing acoustic shows at the Wormy Dog, LaRue played his first full band show there on October 27, 2001. The next year saw the debut album of Stoney LaRue and the Organic Boogie Band. Recorded at Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa, *Downtown* caught the attention of many Red Dirt music fans, and even reached as high as number five on the bestseller list for Lonestarmusic.com, a popular online outlet for music by Texas and Oklahoma artists. After moving to New Braunfels, Texas, LaRue began touring once again as an acoustic act. In 2005, LaRue returned to the studio with a new band and recorded *The Red Dirt Album* with Mike McClure as producer. During its debut week, the album sold enough copies to make the Billboard Sales Chart. This album was followed by the 2006 release of Stoney LaRue's *Live at Billy Bob's*. This album boasted a single that spent four weeks at the top of the Texas Music Chart, the Mike Hosty penned "Oklahoma Breakdown." Since recording the *Live at Billy Bob's* album, Larue's band, the Arsenals, have

undergone a series of lineup changes. Rodney Pyeatt, left the band to be replaced by Kevin Webb, formerly of the Burtschi Brothers. Before joining the Arsenals, Pyeatt had been a member of the Mike McClure Band, played for seven years with Selena, and with Rick Trevino. In March 2009, LaRue recorded a live acoustic CD which is only available through his website. Early 2010 saw LaRue back in the studio working on a new album, this time in Nashville.³⁰

No Justice

The most recent Stillwater band to join the Red Dirt success story is No Justice. Founded in 2001 by Steve Rice, Jerry Payne, and Tony Payne, the group continued in the collaborative nature of Stillwater's Red Dirt scene. Rice arrived in Stillwater in 1999 to attend college and quickly met Jason Boland and Stoney LaRue. After being called onstage to sing at one of the duo's acoustic shows, Rice was offered his own weekly performance. In 2001, he was approached by brothers Jerry and Tony Payne who were looking to start a band and asked Rice to audition. Learning from the likes of Jason Boland, Cody Canada, and Stoney LaRue, the members of No Justice wrote or co-wrote every song on their 2003 debut record except for one song penned by Bob Childers. In addition to the influences of Childers, Canada, Boland, and LaRue, the band called on The Great Divide's drummer J.J. Lester to play drums and produce *Far From Everything*. Soon after the release of the record, Armando Lopez joined the band as the full-time

³⁰ "LaRue Debuts New band to Local bar's Crowd," *The Daily O'Collegian*, October 26, 2001; Stoney LaRue, undated interview with texastroubadors.com; "Stoney Larue – Bio," Stoney LaRue, <http://www.stoneylarue.com/bio.html> (accessed November 13, 2007); Stoney LaRue, *The Red Dirt Album*, Smith Entertainment 7043 (CD), 2005; Rodney Pyeatt. Rodney's No BS Bio. <http://www.guitarrod.com/Bio2.htm> (accessed May 21, 2010); *Sold Out Merch - Detail*. <http://soldoutmerch.com/detail.aspx?ID=179> (accessed May 21, 2010); *Stoney LaRue – Press*. <http://www.stoneylarue.com/press.html> (access May 21, 2010); Chris Parker. "After years of roadwork, Stoney LaRue is finally ready for his second studio album." *Oklahoma Gazette*, February 24, 2010.

drummer and Lester returned to his duties with The Great Divide. While trying to find their own sound, No Justice went through a period of adding different instruments and musicians to the mix. The balance the group was looking for arrived in guitarist and vocalist Brandon Jackson in October 2004. Jackson and Steve Rice had been playing regular Monday night acoustic shows together on the Strip for several years. With this experience, Jackson integrated seamlessly into the band by virtue of already knowing the entire No Justice repertoire and with the established chemistry between him and Steve Rice. By the end of 2005, the rejuvenated line-up was back in the studio with producers J.J. Lester and Eric DeLegard to work on their self-titled record. The year 2007 saw another line-up change for the band when bass player Tony Payne stepped down to spend more time with family. Veteran Red Dirt bassist Joey Trevino, who had worked with Brandon Jenkins for several years, soon filled the position. Around the same time, Billy Bob's Texas invited the band to record a live CD for the *Live at Billy Bob's* series at an April 2007 concert. No Justice released their *Live at Billy Bob's* CD in September of the same year. Since the release of their *Live at Billy Bob's* CD, No Justice experienced another lineup change when Brandon Jackson left the group in September 2009 to pursue a solo career. Jackson was soon replaced by lead guitarist Cody Patton. In February 2010, No Justice signed their first record deal with Nashville based Carved Records and began recording *2nd Avenue*, their debut record for the label, which was released July 6, 2010.³¹

³¹ "New Independent Label, Carved Records, Opens Doors: Diverse roster emerging following first Country artist signing, No Justice," Carved Records, <http://www.carvedrecords.com/?pg=news&newsId=17> (accessed May 17, 2010); "No Justice – Band," No Justice, <http://nojustice.com/?pg=band> (accessed May 17, 2010); Steve Rice, E-Mail to the author, June 15, 2010; Brandon Jackson, E-mail to the author, June 30, 2010.

Each of the musicians and groups listed above are tied to the Stillwater foundations of Red Dirt music. Most of them originally relocated to Stillwater to attend Oklahoma State University and were drawn into the local music scene. Through associations with other members of the Red Dirt community, the familial nature of this “genre” has continued to spread to the newer bands. As each group has added their own influence to the music, Red Dirt has incorporated the attributes of other genres. This blending of styles has made Red Dirt attractive to other musicians in the region and encouraged its migration and longevity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A spirit of unity is a trademark of Red Dirt music. As described by the bands themselves, the unique environment of Stillwater, Oklahoma has been the determining force in the creation of Red Dirt music. From the draw of a large university to venues on the Strip and impromptu jams at The Farm, the sense of community fostered by the small town is evidenced in the music and in the bands themselves. The nature of the community has provided for the continuing influence of previous generations of musicians back to Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills. Even as the bands move on from Stillwater, they return often to recapture some of the environment that developed their sound and their community. In this way, the environment experienced in Stillwater continues to provide an active influence on the music made by the members of the Red Dirt community.

It is not uncommon for a locale based musical genre to flourish. For example, Seattle, Washington; Athens, Georgia; and Austin, Texas all have strong local based musical camps that have made their way to the mainstream stage through the success of a number of musicians from those locations. However, the majority are known for

specific style of music: Pop for Athens, Grunge for Seattle, and Blues for Austin.

Stillwater, and Red Dirt, in contrast, is better known for a blending of many styles. The Red Dirt Music scene centered on Stillwater also has another prominent distinction. The majority of music markets are known for their cut-throat, business centered ethic. Red Dirt, by contrast, is known for the welcoming nature of its musicians and the community of mutual support that they foster.

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APPENDICES

As was previously stated, there is no clear cut definition as to what constitutes Red Dirt Music. Below you will find a number of definitions that were offered in interviews and response to questionnaires.

John Cooper (Red Dirt Rangers)

That question kind of spurred the red dirt music scene. We started using that as a definition instead of listing all the different styles of music we played. It is music that is from the heart and soul; made by a certain group of people during a certain period of time. I don't think it is up to me to define it.

It is more of a community than a music. Spans about a 30 year timeframe. Maybe 40 years. Beautiful thing about it is it is still evolving. Beauty is you can't really say what it is.

Brad Piccolo (Red Dirt Rangers)

Okie Rock & Roll. And by saying that it says a lot to me because Rock & Roll is like a gumbo of American music. It's a more personal Oklahoma version of Rock

Roll. Keep in mind when I say Rock & Roll; a big part is country, blues, folk. I know it's Okie Rock & Roll but I like it.

Garth Brooks

Real music, comes from the earth, comes from Oklahoma...common sense music. The common man's music...if it relates to you as an artist and you are an "ordinary Joe", it should relate to others. The music business tried to take it commercial ten years ago with "Americana" or "Southwest" music, but Red Dirt doesn't do well when you take it out of its element. Red Dirt Music is honest, and "honesty" is not that pretty under the bright lights of commercialism. That is why the biggest stars and the biggest movies are covered with make-up and special effects...the 'realness' of red dirt is hardly ever a sweet pill to swallow. It's gritty.

Eric Hansen (The Medicine Show, Jimmy LaFave & Night Tribe, Mike McClure Band)

To me the name "red dirt" just referred to a region. "Oklahoma music" is synonymous

Craig Skinner (Skinner Brothers)

Music that was not made to make money, it was made because there was no money.

Roger Ray (Jason Boland & the Stragglers)

Red Dirt Music: a lyric-driven form of music originating in Oklahoma. Once inspired primarily by folk, blues and bluegrass forms, Red Dirt Music now incorporates a broad spectrum of sounds, borrowing heavily from traditional country music, as well as classic rock-and-roll.

Gene Williams

Music that evolved from the Stillwater music scene of the 70's and 80's onward.

Jesse Aycock (musician)

I think it's more of an attitude, and approach to playing and performing than the music itself.

Josh Quillin

It is hard to put a definition as you will likely hear 20 different ones. I would say more than anything it is a brotherhood or fraternity. The bands are almost all friends and look out for one another. They respect each other and like to just hang out. There is no particular genre as it can vary from jam band to rock n roll, southern rock, country or a mixture of all these and more. It isn't uncommon for a band that is finding success to help an up-and-coming band by offering advice and even opening act opportunities. The one common factor is that it is usually in some way tied to Stillwater. Even the Texas music bands, which is a term that is often interchangeable with red dirt, will tell stories of how they played the Wormy Dog or dreamed of playing it.

Chuck Dunlap

A cross section of all the music that we were exposed to in Oklahoma. If it appealed to us we incorporated it into our style of writing and playing. The biggest piece of the red dirt music pie in its early days was the attitude that there weren't many separate entities competing, but rather we were all in one big band that sent its representatives out to play on the weekends.

It was our way of asserting our musical independence by refusing to be classified as only one style of music. Doing this gave us the ability to use all styles from country and rock to jazz, folk and even gospel in our own style of writing. Many times you can hear this within a single song or set. All in all it always does two things, tells a story and sets you feet to tapping.

Jim "Red" Wilhelm (Yellow House resident)

It's easier to define red dirt music by what its not than what it is. Red Dirt is a mélange of music influences which many attribute to the fact that many styles of music converged in Oklahoma by virtue of Route 66. Those influences were blended together by Oklahomans to forge the sound. Red Dirt music also has varieties that range from "Rock n Roll" to purely acoustic styles. The "red dirtness" that ties these sounds together lays in the lyrics of the songs. Red Dirt music is heavily agrarian, working class and rural in its content. Quite simply, if you grew up in a small town in Oklahoma and you don't "get" the song...its probably not red dirt.

Kevin Miller

It is definitely hard to define. Obviously Geography has a lot to do with it. I would say that it does cross genre's... As long as the music is honest, true, and has some soul in it. It doesn't matter whether it's rock, country, folk, or blues, as long as it's honest.

Kodey Toney (South 40)

A melting pot of musical genre's that were developed through time. Country, rock, jazz, blues, bluegrass; you name it, it's in there. Kinda like a musical stew.

David Percefull (Yellow Dog Studio)

Red Dirt Music is a blending of musical genres and is probably more a state of mind than an actual sub-genre. Red Dirt is fearless and experimental, yet calculated and well cultivated.

Lyle Deiter (South 40)

Musically, it seems to be a mixture of many different types of music including country, folk, rock, blues, and jazz, with roots stretching back to Woody Guthrie, Bob Wills, and J.J. Cale. But it also seems to encompass an attitude of being floating-down-the-river laid back with a beer.

Jeff Parker (Cimmaron Sound Lab)

Singer/Songwriter Roots Country & Rock from Oklahoma/Texas

Steve Rice (No Justice)

Red Dirt to me is not genre based at all. It is the closeness and interaction between the bands and fans that are a part of the scene. It is more of the environment that encompasses the title and the camaraderie.

Lee Merrifield

I've heard it defined as music from a particular geographic location rather than a particular sound. For me it has to do with a laid-back attitude, humility, and charisma of the people who were drawn together at the same place and time to make music.

Joe Mack (musician)

Geographically centered in the heart of the US, red dirt was born out of the influences of nearly every form of American roots music - jazz, rock 'n roll, blues, Western swing, Zydeco, etc. - and seemingly has an epicenter located in Oklahoma, where all the biggest names in the so called "sub-genre" emerge.

Jared Webster (fan)

When I think of Red Dirt Music, I think of rock-country. I have often heard of country-rock (i.e. Grams Parsons, etc.), but Red Dirt Music to me is more rock than country, etc. So, I will say music grounded in a society raised by 'country' music, but containing a 'rock' ethos.

Ben Bennett (Marshallcity, South 40)

A movement of the southern resident's soul. It is about joy, pain and the unique perspective that only life in Oklahoma/Texas can give someone.

Gabe Hill (fan)

The concept of Red Dirt Music is not unique to the history of our region, but it is unique to our region. I personally see Red Dirt music as being a rebirth of the business model of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. The idea behind Bob Wills' music was that he had to cater to the musical tastes of a variety of audiences based on both the traditional music of their heritage and also the music that was becoming popular due to radio play.

He needed music that would serve both tastes in his audiences and a band that could play both styles.

Terri Mikel (Fan)

Independent country music with a rock-n-roll sound.

Rocky Marlow (fan)

Red Dirt music is Oklahoma Music. It's the music of my generation of Oklahomans. It's country and western music penned by people who come from the same background as me. It's real, it's raw, it's funny and it's true.

Randy Pease

Music whose seeds were planted and nurtured and incubated in central Oklahoma from the early '80s on.

Sarah Barker Huhn

Red Dirt music is not easy to categorize, but I believe it all began in Stillwater, OK with Bob Childers and his contemporaries. It's a little bit folk, a little bit country, a little bit rock, and all original.

Brandon Jackson

It's really hard to define what Red Dirt Music really is. To be technical, Red Dirt is a mixture of Rock & Country with some Blues sprinkled in. It is a sound that originated from Oklahoma (hence the name "Red Dirt"), and to be honest is a musical movement that just gets into your soul and infects you the minute you experience it.

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, February 15, 2010
IRB Application No AS109
Proposal Title: Stillwater and the Red Dirt Music Movement

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/14/2011

Principal Investigator(s):

Aaron M. Moore
700 S. Wicklow Apt. 1002
Stillwater, OK 74074

Bill Bryans
525 LSW
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

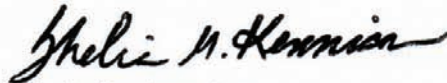
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Aaron M. Moore

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: PLAYING IN THE DIRT: STILLWATER AND THE EMERGENCE OF RED
DIRT MUSIC

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Business in Telecommunications Management at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in May, 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Education in History at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in December, 1998.

Name: Aaron M. Moore

Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: Playing in the Dirt: Stillwater and the Emergence of Red Dirt Music

Pages in Study: 88

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: History

Scope and Method of Study: The thesis provides a background on the evolution of Red Dirt music from 1974-2010. Incorporated in the study is a look at the location and people that have influenced the Red Dirt community and allowed it to flourish for four decades. Based on interviews with the artists themselves, the information provided in the study provides an inside account of what exactly Red Dirt music is. A shotgun based method of identification was used to select the subjects for the interviews.

Findings and Conclusions: Though in existence as a “genre” since 1974, Red Dirt defies easy categorization. Though each artist brings their own personal definition, there is enough similarity to craft a suitable definition. Red Dirt music can be described as a community of musicians with ties to the folk traditions of Woody Guthrie, but expressed in any number of styles as previously explored by Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. In addition to the influence of Woody Guthrie and Bob Wills, Red Dirt musicians are also bound to the Stillwater area, even though the “genre” has now grown to encompass many musicians outside Stillwater. Stillwater locations including Oklahoma State University, the Strip, The Farm, and The Yellow House play a prominent role in the evolution of the musical component of Red Dirt and are examined in the course of the paper.

ADVISER’S APPROVAL: Dr. Bill Bryans
