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<https://scholarship.libraries.rutgers.edu/esploro/outputs/journalArticle/Y-all-come-and-have-fun/991031567548204646/filesAndLinks?index=0>

Lutz, C. (2020). "Y 'all come and have fun": discovering a New Jersey country and western music scene in a box of postcards. *Notes*, 76(3), 365–391. <https://doi.org/10.7282/t3-ydtg-7j70>
Document Version: Version of Record (VoR)

Published Version: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2020.0000>

“Y’ALL COME AND HAVE FUN”: DISCOVERING A NEW JERSEY COUNTRY AND WESTERN MUSIC SCENE IN A BOX OF POSTCARDS

BY CHRISTINE A. LUTZ

In 2015, Rutgers University’s Special Collections and University Archives received a checkbox containing fifty-six postcards. All rather uniform and plain, typed and handwritten, they advertised country and western¹ music shows in venues primarily around northern cities and towns in New Jersey. A New Jersey book dealer acquired the cards at an estate sale in West Virginia, but they never made it into his catalog; he donated them to Rutgers, with whom he has a close and long-standing relationship, after not finding an “angle” for them.² Despite his uncertainty about their worth, the dealer did take the time to list every performer named on the postcards, a fascinating list of well-known country and western and Grand Ole Opry stars, and what I could only assume were local and regional performers. The names that jumped out at me initially included Rose Maddox, Wanda Jackson, Hank Thompson, Faron Young, Slim Whitman, Jean Shepard, Hawkshaw Hawkins, and Elton Britt. More interesting were those names that rang no bells but were intriguing all the same—for example, Kookie Kay and her Drums, Shorty and Smokey Warren, Idaho Ed, Yodeling Hank Garron, and Billy the Kid, to name just a few. And there were the clubs, with nostalgic and evocative names like the Blue Heaven Inn in Edison, the Copa Club in

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1. As Pamela Fox has noted, *Billboard* magazine by 1949 began using the term “Country & Western” to market what they had originally called “Hillbilly” and then “Folk” music. (Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender Race, and Rusticity in Country Music*, 81). The widespread use of the term “country and western” can be credited to Decca recording artist Ernest Tubbs, who in 1948, offended by the term hillbilly, lobbied the label to use a new label. Decca suggested the term cowboy, and after some back and forth Tubbs compromised with the name country and western. This article uses the term country and western throughout as it is the term used on the postcards as well as the term that interviewees primarily used. Occasionally I refer to “traditional,” “cowboy,” or simply “country” music, as interviewees have also used those terms interchangeably, and all should be taken to refer to “country and western.”

2. Robert Petrilla, letter to Ronald Becker, Head of Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, 12 November 2015.

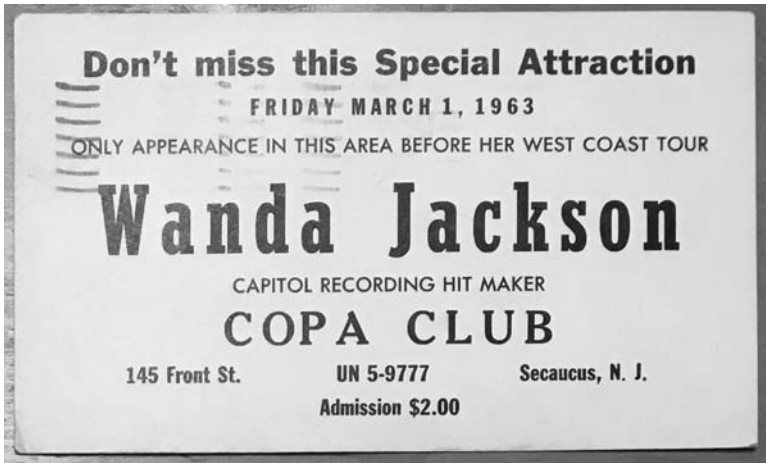


Fig. 1. Wanda Jackson postcard. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.

Secaucus, Harbor Inn Tavern in Newark, Danny's Hideaway in East Hanover, and Stan's Cozy Rest in Passaic.

With these postcards I found my way into the 1950s–early 1970s New Jersey country and western scene located in the northern part of the state and connected with some of its participants. This article explores the role and value of ephemera, in particular music-related ephemera, in archives and special collections and how a small, hyperlocal ephemeral collection, like the postcards, can contribute to a larger narrative history. It then examines elements of a particular node of the scene, brothers Shorty and Smokey Warren and their Copa Club in Secaucus, through accounts and explorations of meanings that include reflections from two scene participants. This article concludes by initiating a discussion of absences hinted at in some of the postcards and in country and western histories. In particular, I look at the roles of women as participants in the male-dominated country and western music scene and a neglect of minority and multicultural participation.

Since an examination of all fifty-six postcards and the venues and artists they promote is beyond the scope of this article, I focus on the handful of cards that announced shows at the Copa Club in Secaucus. It is important to note that participants in the country and western music scene that thrived in the New Jersey of the 1950s through the early 1970s, in particular around the Copa Club are for the most part no longer alive to tell their stories. The history of country and western in this era in New Jersey relies on those remaining few who can share the

memories of and thoughts on their lived experiences and, in one case, the daughter of a musician, whose childhood memories of her mother as a musician, while informative, are understandably limited. The fans that share information, recordings, and memories online in forums and on websites and personal blogs provide valuable resources as well. To date, I have found only limited information available in local newspapers, such as the *Secaucus Home News*, and in historical societies, libraries, and archives.

EPHEMERAL QUESTIONING

As Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers observe, ephemeral objects, or souvenirs, are nearly worthless as physical items. Yet in conducting case studies of music fans, they found their respondents considered ticket stubs “as an essential part of the concert (a token) and as a record of concert particulars (dates, support acts, venue, etc.).” In fact, Bennett and Rogers observe an “excess of signification, importance and remembrance attached to physical souvenirs.”³

Bennett and Rogers’ work speaks to issues around archival collection development and cataloging and discoverability, namely a deemed lack of worth in hyperlocal materials, which might be perceived as items that do not hold scholarly, research, or informational potential. Such material might include printed everyday ephemera that are entertainment focused—for example, concert programs, ticket stubs, and band set lists. Archives and special collections libraries continue to receive donations of this type and many actively collect it, though possibly as a lower priority to, say, manuscripts and rare books. As Julie Anne Lambert asserts, “in assigning a commercial value to it, they [dealers] produce a scale of values that impacts on our judgment of ephemera.”⁴ It is worth noting, then, that the dealer in the case of the New Jersey country and western postcards opted not to assign value, but rather to donate them. While he hoped they could be useful to a researcher, their lack of a monetary representation could have relegated them to a pile of uncataloged, and therefore undiscoverable, ephemera.⁵

3. Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 135.

4. Julie Anne Lambert, “Immortalizing the Mayfly: Permanent Ephemera: An Illusion or a (Virtual) Reality?” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage* 9, no. 1 (2008): 150.

5. Indeed, Georgia B. Barnhill in her 2008 article, “Why Not Ephemera? The Emergence of Ephemera in Libraries,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage* 9, no. 1 (2008) cites a list of ephemera, titled “Miscellaneous Printed Collections” in the Sinclair New Jersey Collection at Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, to which these postcards will belong once processed, with the statement, “They are ephemeral in nature and do not warrant cataloging.” As curator of the Sinclair New Jersey Collection since 2014, I have turned this ephemera, which encompasses material from railroad schedules to business cards to fruit crate labels, into the New Jersey Ephemera Collection. It is represented by a finding aid: <http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/eas/snjc/njephemeraf.html> (accessed 16 October 2019), rendering this material discoverable to researchers.

In “Lessons in Ephemera: Teaching and Learning through Cultural Heritage Collections,” Melissa McMullan and Joanna Copley consider theater and concert program ephemera and argue that their research value is in their localism. In their piece on the research and teaching value of the University of Canterbury’s (UC) theater and concert music program ephemera collection as a portal into the evolution of Christchurch’s theatrical and concert music history, they emphasize the importance of the collection as a rich local historical resource worthy of keeping. The ephemera reflected how British, European, and American cultural practices were infused into colonial Christchurch’s theatrical and concert music scene. The collection also revealed a tradition of UC teachers who, since its establishment in 1873 as Canterbury College, have actively shaped, participated in, and facilitated the development of Christchurch’s theater and concert music heritage.

The authors argue that these materials provide portals to local history and the events themselves, but in a larger context they are an entrée to using heritage collections more generally. Through engaging researchers with ephemera, McMullan and Copley “came to appreciate the value of ephemera for providing a window into local history and local print culture.”⁶

I agree with McMullan and Copley that local ephemera play a valuable role in understanding our local histories, and that we as archivists and curators can use an ephemera collection to inspire researchers and students to dig a little further and think about the potential existence and uses of other hidden or undervalued collections. The New Jersey country and western postcards may not exist elsewhere. They serve as a key entry to a world that may be surprising to New Jerseyans of the twenty-first century more familiar with the Hoboken that birthed Frank Sinatra or the Asbury Park of Bruce Springsteen (who incidentally as of this writing has released a country and western inflected record entitled *Western Stars*, replete with western motifs and imagery in songs with titles like “Somewhere North of Nashville” and “Tucson Train”). I would, though, take their assertion further that “overall, the collection’s research value was its localism”⁷ and argue that much of the value of the country and western postcards lies in the way hyper-local material can direct researchers through a local scene to a national story, demonstrating that a collection of souvenirs can create multiple avenues for exploration of issues and concerns in larger national narratives. Beyond New Jersey,

6. Melissa McMullan and Joanna Copley, “Lessons in Ephemera: Teaching and Learning through Cultural Heritage Collections,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage* 18, no. 2 (2017): 106.

7. McMullan and Copley, 93.

they can help us consider larger issues we are grappling with in special collections and archives now—gaps in the historical record, and whose stories are told.

COUNTRY AND WESTERN OUT EAST

Two books are particularly relevant for examining under-documented country and western scenes: *Yankee Twang: Country and Western Music in New England* by folklorist and ethnographer Clifford Murphy and *Detroit Country Music* by musicians and radio hosts Craig Maki and Keith Cady. The authors look at how the unique characteristics of places like Providence (RI), Bangor (ME), and Detroit (MI) contribute to the particular country scenes in these locales. Murphy examines the “unspoken backdrop to the story of New England country and western.”⁸ That unspoken backdrop includes assumptions that country music was a southern import to New England, and a racialized and multicultural history that gets overlooked in the nostalgic reminiscences of the fans and practitioners. Murphy also reflects on how “New England country and western vibrancy correlates directly with the health and subsequent decline of working-class industry in New England,”⁹ a relevant consideration in examining northern New Jersey cities. In *Detroit Country Music*, Maki and Cady chronicle Southeast Michigan’s country music scene from the 1930s through the 1960s. They interweave biographies of musicians with histories of radio stations and music venues. While Murphy employs a more critical approach along with interviews, the authors of both works consider industry and working-class cultures in their respective regions as important clues in the lives and activities of musicians and fans. Maki and Cady pay particular attention to General Motors as a place of employment for musicians and fans, and view the car culture of Detroit and the region as a unique presence in the country and western scene there. Murphy considers the textile and other mills in New England towns such as Providence. The authors all work from the standpoint that country music is not exclusively southern music, but “fundamentally working class.”¹⁰

Murphy provides an overview of how country music scholarship has evolved, or not, with respect to considerations of country and western regions outside the South; this provides a useful context for a foray into country and western music in New Jersey. In his inimitable *Country Music U.S.A.*, Bill C. Malone laid the foundation for decades of both scholarly

8. Clifford R. Murphy, *Yankee Twang: Country and Western Music in New England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 7.

10. *Ibid.*, 22.

accounts and popular histories of American country music. With his “southern thesis,” he asserted that country music is a form of southern, white music of the folk. Clifford Murphy does not challenge Malone’s foundational southern thesis, but rather views it as incomplete, neglecting many regional variations and successes of country musicians that hail from outside the South. Murphy aligns a bit more with Richard Peterson and Paul DiMaggio’s sociologically based challenge to Malone’s southern thesis by arguing that working class identity was the commonality, more than southernness, in country music. Indeed, Peterson and Di Maggio agreed with Malone that migration is historically important to explain the national distribution of country music post–World War II, but their data demonstrated that it was not necessary or sufficient.¹¹ Radio, for example, as numerous studies have documented, was a major force in nationalizing country music after World War II, and, as this article demonstrates, encouraged those well outside the South to participate in country music as musicians, fans, disc jockeys, and more.

Murphy notes a couple of studies by fellow folklorists that broached the uncharted territory of folk or country music outside the South. Simon Bronner’s 1978 book *Old Time Music Makers of New York State* and James P. Leary’s 1983 article “Ethnic Country Music on Superior’s South Shore” made early headway in this area of study. While important in that they gave voice and agency to country musicians in underexplored regions, they were still up against a prevailing southern focus. However, as Murphy observes, even in his later seminal work *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Richard Peterson¹² places southern musicians at the heart of his study, further equating authenticity with southernness, even if that was not his intention. Murphy also laments the absence of records of country musicians outside the South at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. (Indeed, I contacted the Country Music Hall of Fame’s Frist Library and Archive about Shorty and Smokey Warren and the Copa Club, but their searches of their holdings turned up no documentation.)

Thus, in my foray into New Jersey as a country-music locus, I look to Murphy’s deep work on New England country music, taking cues from his ethnographic and historical approach. I concur with Murphy that “each community has its own ground rules for authentic expressive culture,”¹³ that cannot be defined by Nashville and the country-music indus-

11. Richard A. Peterson and Paul DiMaggio, “From Region to Class, the Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis,” *Social Forces* 53, no. 3 (March 1975): 501.

12. Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

13. Murphy, 23.

try and its southern branding, which has obscured so many regional musicians and stories. Musicians and other participants in the northern New Jersey scene of the 1950s to the early 1970s may be considered as agents in their own regard. They represent historian Patrick Huber's call to consider country artists outside of the South as major actors and agents in the country-music world, even if their stories have been buried by the rise of the Nashville sound and country music's turn toward pop music in the 1970s.¹⁴

GREETINGS FROM NEW JERSEY: THE POSTCARDS

The fifty-six New Jersey country and western postcards now at Rutgers were mailed by performers and promoters to a man named Don Cleary in Fair Lawn, between 1961 and 1964. They reveal an array of what appear to have been thriving country-music venues, as well as jamborees and musical revues, all in northern New Jersey. While this article does not focus on Cleary, for some context it is worth noting that he was a participant in the northern New Jersey country scene of the 1960s and 1970s. A musician, he also ran Palomino Records from Fair Lawn and was the biographer of Canadian yodeler Wilf Carter (known as Montana Slim in the United States). In the 1970s Cleary released at least two records of his own on Palomino, "Don Cleary Sings Traditional Cowboy Songs" and "Palomino Country Jamboree," featuring among others Don Cleary's Saddle River Boys. (Saddle River evokes a western tributary, but it likely refers to the suburban Bergen County town of that name, or the Saddle River, a tributary of the Passaic River, which runs through it.)

In maintaining this collection of postcards, which we can assume held great significance for him, Cleary has allowed us a glimpse into a New Jersey music scene and a time and place that has not been comprehensively documented to date. Handwritten personal notes on the cards, hoping he would come to a jamboree or join in, proved to be important clues to the network of northern New Jersey towns with country and western scenes. That Cleary held onto the cards is a testament to their memory-making value, their strong "signification," to quote Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers. Indeed, in my interviews with participants in the Copa Club "scene," we used these postcards as memory prompts, as we might with musical recordings or photographs. These ephemeral items are inscribed with strong cultural memories, especially as old venues, record stores, radio stations, and costume shops have vanished, and many of the performers have passed on, as is the case in New Jersey.

14. Patrick Huber, "The New York Sound: Citybilly Recording Artists and the Creation of Hillbilly Music," *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (Spring 2014): 140–58.

The array of towns and clubs and the mixes of names (performers, disc jockeys, comedians, hosts, club owners, record producers, and fans) make these souvenirs a particularly rich entry point to the New Jersey country and western music scene and a shared cultural memory.

Even though Newark was the hub of the country and western scene in New Jersey at the time,¹⁵ ongoing mentions of the Copa Club seemed indicative that its influence was longer lasting. That influence could be demonstrated by the fact that of all the cards, the Copa Club featured the largest number of the well-known country and western artists of the era. While there are just six Copa Club postcards in the collection, they promote shows by some of the biggest country music stars of the era, including Wanda Jackson, Hank Thompson and His Brazen [sic] Valley Boys, Rose Maddox, Jean Shepard and Hawkshaw Hawkins, Elton Britt, and Chet Tyler. The Copa Club is also important due to its connection with Shorty and Smokey Warren, New Jersey country and western musician brothers who achieved fame beyond the Garden State. Shorty Warren opened the Copa Club around 1953 and ran it for over a decade until his musician brother Smokey took over in the 1960s. As indicated on the Copa Club postcards, some iteration of their band always played at the shows that featured big-name musicians.

As I began to research the Copa Club and the Warren brothers based on the clues the postcards provided, I thought about who might have gone to the club, what role it played in the community or scene, and the meanings such a place held for those who were involved in the scene, both as fans and participants. Other questions, based on the postcards and the threads I was able to follow from them, were, How and why did country and western music gain popularity in New Jersey in the 1950s and 1960s, and What happened to the scene? I also questioned what place, if any, did this under-documented New Jersey country and western scene have in the larger story of country music.

THE SECAUCUS SCENE

Secaucus is a 5.89 square mile town, actually an island, in Hudson County, New Jersey. Just a few miles from New York City, against the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline, Secaucus sits in the heart of the Meadowlands, which Bruce Springsteen famously referred to as the “swamps of Jersey.”¹⁶ Settlement began by 1733, and by 1875 ninety percent of the

15. Guy Sterling, “When Country Was King,” *Sunday Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ), 2 April 2016.

16. Bruce Springsteen, “Rosalita (Come Out Tonight),” recorded 1973, track 6 on *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, Columbia Records, compact disc.

population consisted of German immigrant farmers.¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, Secaucus was known for its flower and celery farms, and in the first half of the twentieth century, its pig-farming industry. By the early 1950s, when the population was about 12,000, the pig population totaled around 75,000.¹⁸ Given its industry, Secaucus was a major food producer during World War II, and its rendering plants provided employment for locals. One of the town's most colorful citizens was a pig farmer as well as a tavern owner and perennial local, state, and national political candidate, Henry Krajewski. Frustrated with the United States' two-party system, he ran for president in 1952 on the Poor Man's Party (which he founded) ticket, promising a "pig in every pot," and again in 1956 for the American Third Party. He ran his campaigns from his Secaucus tavern, Tammany Hall. The third generation of the Krajewski family continues to operate another Secaucus tavern, Charlie's Corner.¹⁹

In the decades following World War II, the Meadowlands area grew increasingly urbanized and industrialized and, as a result, gained a reputation as a home for landfills and the site of environmental offenses. In Secaucus, pig farming began to wane by the early 1960s, and light industry began to move in, followed by a portion of the New Jersey Turnpike and a commuter rail hub. Secaucus today is considered the most suburban of its surrounding neighbors such as Union City, Jersey City, and Hoboken, serving as a bedroom community for New York City commuters.

SHORTY AND SMOKEY WARREN AND THE COPA CLUB

Country and western musicians Shorty (Andrew Warianka) and Smokey (John Warianka) were born May 15, 1913 and August 12, 1916, respectively, in Jersey City. Information on their early years is scant, and details on Shorty, a fiddler as well as a band leader and songwriter, appear harder to come by than on Smokey, who started out as a harmonica player in a trio and later played guitar and bass. Shorty's East Coast career was also briefer than Smokey's, as he moved to California in 1965 to be near his daughter. Shorty led several iterations of country and western bands, but his outfit Shorty Warren and His Western Rangers, which included Smokey Warren, appears to have been the best known. Theirs was

17. Daniel R. Campbell, "Secaucus," in *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, ed. Maxine N. Lurie and Marc Mappen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 730.

18. Jim Wright, "Candid Candidate: Presidential Pig Farmer Henry Krajewski," *New Jersey Monthly*, 10 February 2016, <https://njmonthly.com/articles/politics-public-affairs/candid-candidate-henry-krajewski>, (accessed 16 October 2019).

19. S. P. Sullivan, "The True Story of the N.J. Pig Farmer Who Ran for President," *NJ.com*, 7 November 2016, https://www.nj.com/politics/2016/11/the_nj_pig_farmer_who_ran_for_president.html (accessed 16 October 2019).

the first country and western band to perform on the first radio western, Death Valley Days, which ran on major stations from 1930 to 1951. Through the 1940s, Shorty Warren and His Western Rangers, or another version of the band, played clubs in New York and appeared on numerous radio broadcasts on New Jersey station WAAT. Based initially in Phoenix, Arizona, the brothers toured and played radio stations out west until the 1940s, when Smokey returned from World War II, and they returned to New Jersey. At this time, the cowboy persona “dominated the country music scene. Musicians everywhere wore cowboy or western-cut costumes, gave themselves cowboy stage names, or otherwise identified with western or ranch-style motifs.”²⁰ The Warren brothers and their band mates embraced the look of the singing cowboys of Hollywood motion pictures. Early photos of their bands showed them decked out in cowboy hats and boots, knotted neck scarves, and shirts with yokes and fringes. They put their western wear on display along with their musical chops in a United Artists short called “Lonesome Road Blues,” made for television, likely in 1949. The Western Rangers’ set included “Yellow Rose of Texas,” “Red River Valley,” and “Lonesome Road Blues.”²¹

According to Jerry Hatton, a musician with whom I spoke, Shorty wrote many of his songs in the style of singing cowboy Gene Autry²² and performed in the style of what by the 1940s was called “western swing.” Both brothers were influenced by this southwestern musical milieu that included fiddle music, Tex Mex, and blues sometimes referred to as “hot dance music” or “Okie jazz.”²³ Fiddler Bob Wills and vocalist Milton Brown, both Texas natives, started performing together in bands in 1930, eventually forming in 1932 what would become the Light Crust Doughboys, a foundational western swing band.²⁴ Brown would go on to lead Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies and Wills to head up Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. According to Bill Malone, “by the end of the 1940s, the honky tonk and dance-hall-inspired styles of the Southwest had found receptive audiences all over the nation”²⁵ due in no small measure to an electrified sound, which had developed among southwestern string bands in the 1930s.²⁶

20. Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 99.

21. Mark Cantor and the Celluloid Improvisations Music Film Archive, “The Video Varieties Shorts,” *Celluloid Improvisations*, <https://www.jazz-on-film.com/video-varieties.html#four> (accessed 16 October 2019).

22. Jerry Hatton, e-mail message to author, 15 May 2019.

23. Bill C. Malone and Tracy E. W. Laird, *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 188.

24. Malone and Laird, 191.

25. *Ibid.*, 206.

26. *Ibid.*, 188.

Shorty and Smokey took their western swing style to Secaucus by the early 1950s, during what country-music scholar Bill Malone terms “The Boom Period” of 1946 to 1953, that postwar era of prosperity and pursuits of entertainment that saw “traditional sounds” merging with commercial growth.²⁷ It may have been around this time that Shorty Warren adopted the moniker “Eastern King of Western Swing,” an obvious nod to Bob Wills, known as the King of Western Swing. Shorty opened the Copa Club right at the end of the boom period, and Smokey managed the club and handled promotion and booking.

Shorty and Smokey operated in a time when listeners around the country tuned in on Saturday nights and lunch hours to hear country-music radio programming that consisted of innumerable shindigs, hoe-downs, jamborees, and barn dances.²⁸ In the mid-1950s, Shorty and Smokey led the Garden State Jamboree on Newark television station WATV. Their work on the program helped spread their reputation and in turn drew regionally and nationally known country and western talent to New Jersey, and to high-visibility shows at the Mosque Theater in Newark, one of the spots, along with local bars, from which the Jamboree was broadcast.²⁹ Influential and colorful disc jockey Barkin’ Don Larkin worked at WATV with the Warrens, and his own radio show, Home Town Frolic, on Newark station WAAT shot him to national prominence. Larkin, like Smokey Warren, was also a promoter and booker and for a time wrote the East Coast column for the national fan magazine *Country Song Roundup*. He featured numerous high-profile national sponsors and visitors like Eddy Arnold, Roy Acuff, and Kitty Wells on his radio show. Larkin maintained a long list of famous national performers he knew and booked and was undoubtedly a powerful connection and ally for the likes of Shorty and Smokey. Shorty and Smokey played regularly, through numerous band iterations, at radio stations, clubs, jamborees, fairs, and military bases through the decades, and, although both Shorty and Smokey had national reputations, we can see in Smokey’s fifty-year career how he parlayed his local fame and connections into a larger country and western network. In fact, after Shorty left Secaucus for the West Coast in 1965, Smokey Warren took over the title Eastern King of Western Swing.³⁰ Smokey covered many traditional country songs, and his repertoire included spirited covers of tunes such as “Wabash Cannonball” and “Lonesome Road Blues,” and weepy laments like “The

27. Ibid., 233.

28. Ibid., 243.

29. Sterling, “When Country Was King.”

30. To date, I have not been able to find information on Shorty Warren after he left Secaucus in 1965, except that he passed away in 2005.

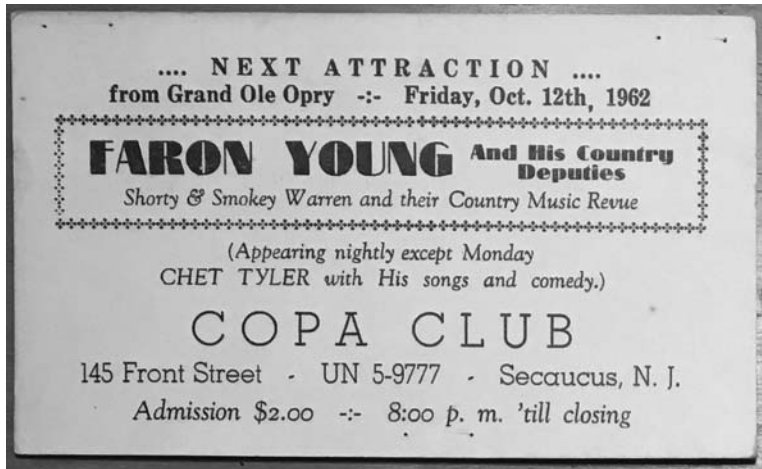


Fig. 2. Faron Young postcard. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.

Prisoner's Dream" and "Letter Edged in Black." He also regularly performed originals including "Jersey Central Special" (wearing an engineer's cap with smoke coming out of it), which Shorty had written to the tune of "Wabash Cannonball," and the instrumental "Smokey's Polka."

Among Smokey's many country and western bona fides beyond New Jersey, his was the only country and western band to appear with Tommy Dorsey, with whom he toured New England and Canada. He played with Jimmie Dean, appeared on the Grand Ole Opry, and on Pee Wee King's Louisville television show. For good measure, he owned a country and western-themed music park in Kentucky. And while Smokey developed his national reputation as a promoter and booking agent who brought major talent into the Copa Club and to the New York metropolitan area, including the stars of the Grand Ole Opry, Smokey was firmly ensconced in New Jersey, working out of the Copa Club into the 1960s, and living with his family in the suburb of Linden, about a half-hour drive from Secaucus. After the Copa Club closed, Smokey helped establish the career of another New Jersey country singer and musician, East Orange-born Eddie Rabbitt, and he continued to record music and perform with his band around the state and region.

In 1992, Smokey Warren was honored as a country music pioneer and for his half century in country music at the Union County Arts Center, near his home in Linden. Smokey himself performed his signature tune, "Jersey Central Special." Friends and colleagues, including Roy Rogers

and Dale Evans, Gene Autry, Dolly Parton, Buck Owens, Ray Price, and Loretta Lynn, called in or sent telegrams of congratulations, as did Shorty Warren.³¹ Shorty Warren passed away on August 12, 2005, Smokey's birthday, and Smokey passed away not long thereafter, on October 30, 2005.

Where the Copa Club once stood at 145 Front Street in Secaucus, there is now the Secaucus Community Center, a rather drab, brown, three-story structure built in 1988. Run by Secaucus Community Services, it houses a teen and child care center. While I have thus far not turned up any exterior images of the club, there is certainly no vestige of a lively country and western club at 145 Front Street. The Secaucus Historical Museum has a very small display that represents the Copa Club, which includes an interior shot that features Shorty and unidentified guests but which does not reveal what the club looked like. Similarly, a photo of Smokey, Shorty, and Gene Autry at the club reveals nothing of the club's interior. A visit to the only extant bar of the era in Secaucus, Charlie's Corner, which opened in 1966 and featured live music seven nights a week, might give some semblance of what the Copa and other area venues looked like. At Charlie's Corner, one walks directly toward a square bar surrounding a tiny stage. Charlie's had been the musical home of local country and western musician Whitey Murphy, and a shrine of photos and news clippings on a wall pays homage to him. Low lighting and colorful garlands set the stage for the country and western bands that were its mainstay until it evolved into more of a karaoke bar. New Jersey country and western musician Mac Sullivan lovingly described the milieu, from bar fights to individual bartender styles, in his twangy paean to the bar, called "Charlie's Corner."

AL AND JERRY

In an attempt to get a lead on the postcards, I initially reached out to Herb Sudzin, who has hosted a country-music show on WRSU Rutgers Radio for nearly forty years. Sudzin put me in touch with fellow disc jockey Al Krtil, who in turn connected me with musician Jerry Hatton. Both now in their eighties, Krtil and Hatton have been deeply involved in the New Jersey country and western scene and in particular the scene around Shorty and Smokey and the Copa Club.

Al Krtil is a long-time country and western disc jockey from the Bronx who spent his career on Wall Street. Al, like Smokey Warren, grew up on a diet of Saturday cowboy movie matinees, and singing cowboys like Roy

31. Jackie Hinczynski and Rob Burrows, "Smokey Warren is Honored for 50 Years in Country Music at the Union County Arts Center," *Country Music News* (March 1992): 39–40.

Rogers and Gene Autry made an impression on him. Indeed, as Craig Maki and Keith Cady observe, “when the cowboy and the country music singer joined forces during the 1930s boom of western musicals on cinema screens, the two images fused together forever.”³² In the early 1950s, Al started listening every day before and after school to Don Larkin’s Home Town Frolic broadcast from Newark. Al pointed out that in the 1930s and 1940s, country music was as big in the Northeast as anywhere else, and that the Southwest and Northeast were the two biggest pockets of country and western music in the nation. When he turned eighteen, Al started going to country and western clubs in New York City and on Long Island, and when he returned from the service and turned twenty-one, the legal drinking age in New Jersey, he entered the New Jersey country-music club scene. Al described Secaucus and other New Jersey cities of the time as having clubs on every corner and noted that fans of country-music had no need to go elsewhere (at least for a time) to hear the music. Unlike Shorty Warren, not all the bar owners were into country music but made a place for it at their venues because it drew people and made money.

While locals dominated the clubs, this is not to say they didn’t draw out-of-towners or, as Al put it, “attract guys from rural areas.”³³ Both Al and Jerry, as well as some locals I met in Secaucus, noted that Yankees Mickey Mantle, an Oklahoma native, and Billy Martin, from California, patronized the Copa Club. Shorty and His Western Rangers even recorded a song called “Mighty Mickey Mantle,” released on Gametime Records out of New York City in the 1950s.

When the neighborhood club scene started to decline in the early 1970s, Al started DJing, in part to keep what he called “traditional country” alive. For Al, the switch from a local New Jersey music scene as he had known it to a smoother, more pop-infused Nashville sound had a very literal and powerful end. One night in 1972 he planned to see “cowboy singer” Elton Britt, possibly best known for his wartime hit “There’s a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere,” at the Rainbows End in nearby Wood-Ridge, New Jersey; unfortunately he learned that Britt had died earlier that day. Al told me on two different occasions that this event, for him, really marked the end of classic country music.

Jerry Hatton is a Nova Scotia-born vocalist, guitarist, and bassist who came to the U.S. in 1964 through a New York booking agent and at the encouragement of his aunt, who was a neighbor of country-music singer

32. Craig Maki and Keith Cady, *Detroit Country Music: Mountaineers, Cowboys, and Rockabillies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 15.

33. Al Krtil in discussion with the author, 23 February 2019.

Jimmy Dean in a northern New Jersey suburb. Jerry had not known that there was a New Jersey country-music scene and at first played with an Irish band in New York. But once he got going, he said he “made pretty good money playing country music in New Jersey.”³⁴ He was less influenced by the Acadian fiddle tunes of Nova Scotia than he was by the “hillbilly music” of Hank Williams, Hank Snow (who also hailed from Nova Scotia), and the Carter Family. Jerry said that he started singing what he referred to as “Texas music” after hearing Texan Ray Price and others on the Wheeling Jamboree radio barn dance out of West Virginia. He bought *Country Song Roundup* to learn the songs.

Jerry got a job playing bass with Smokey Warren after Shorty left the brothers’ band. He played with Smokey on and off for seven years, at the Copa Club and on tours that brought them to regional and national clubs, festivals, military bases, and country and western music parks, one of which, Palisades Park in New Jersey, was a significant site for country musicians and fans alike. He played on two albums with Smokey as well. Jerry, like Al, described New Jersey as having clubs on every corner in the 1960s and early 1970s. After he returned to New Jersey from living in North Carolina and Florida, where the clubs were fewer and where he mostly played places like VFW halls and Moose Lodges, Jerry found that the clubs had pretty much disappeared.

Al is an active member of the Western Music Association and continues to do his traditional country and western program, “Early Morning Trails,” once a month on WRSU, and Jerry and his wife Debbie play local retirement homes from time to time.

WHAT ABOUT NEW JERSEY?

Smokey and Shorty returned to their New Jersey roots to build on the careers they started out West. Jerry Hatton made New Jersey his professional home as a working country and western musician. Al Krtil has for many years left his home at four o’clock in the morning once a month to make the seventy-nine-mile trek to WRSU to play the music he loves, including New Jersey artists. What does all this dedication say about country and western music in New Jersey? Why did Smokey, Jerry, and so many other scene participants not leave New Jersey for Nashville, or country and western hot spots out West?

Al and Jerry said the same thing—they didn’t have to. As Peterson and DiMaggio have observed about a slightly earlier generation of musicians, “amateur performers found it possible to earn a living playing country

34. Jerry Hatton in discussion with the author, 22 February 2019.

music, thanks to the new technologies of radio, phonograph, auto . . . ,” and could play on air and at dances and festivals for free as a way to gain a regional reputation.³⁵

Clifford Murphy observed that “New Englanders who self-identify as country and western or ‘traditional country’ musicians and fans place themselves in opposition to country music in Nashville.” This is significant, Murphy continues, because “it tells us that the region of New England working class no longer sees itself valued in contemporary country music but also because it serves to show that working-class New Englanders have very real criticisms about what this new country appears to value.”³⁶ We see the same attitude in Al and Jerry’s reflections. According to Al, the domination of the Opry almost kept Smokey and Shorty away. In New Jersey, they could carve out a space for themselves in a smaller, but to their thinking, more authentic scene. This sentiment is similar to what Clifford Murphy found in examining lyrics of songs written by New England country artists that expressed a growing backlash in New England “as an act of resistance against (or critique of) nationalizing forces that appear to dictate sites of authenticity and power for country and western music.”³⁷ Al declared in our talk that “Nashville had the people brainwashed.” He continued, talking about a more traditional country and western sound, that “the real stuff is here, up in Maine, and in the southwest.”³⁸ Further, he said that modern-day country voices and songs have evolved into something that is not special or distinctive, and seems to be inauthentically produced.

Indeed, as Clifford Murphy argues, when the Country Music Association was formed in 1958, “country,” more than “western,” became the focus. Murphy contends that the CMA felt that “western” was no longer needed, since the new nationalization obfuscated any need for regional variations. “This is why,” Murphy concludes, “many New England country and western musicians—under the guise of the cowboy—have entrenched themselves so deeply in their stance *against* ‘country’ music and all it represents to them.”³⁹

For the most part, professional musicians in the Northeast put out their own records and did not have to contend with the Nashville machine. People like Smokey Warren and Don Cleary could achieve success and stability in New Jersey because they were performing numerous roles. As Murphy notes, “the key to maintaining a semblance of long-

35. Peterson and DiMaggio, 500.

36. Murphy, 175.

37. Murphy, 169.

38. Al Krtil in discussion with the author, 23 February 2019.

39. Murphy, 170.

term financial stability in country and western music was to diversify one's sources of income beyond just the personal appearance."⁴⁰ Smokey extended his personal appearances to television and radio, by which he could reach a larger, more widespread audience; he booked local and national acts and owned a country and western-themed park. Similarly, Don Cleary played music, ran a record label, and produced records. And, Don Larkin, though primarily known as a disc jockey, also hosted a television show, wrote a country-music magazine column, booked and promoted acts, dabbled in songwriting, and ran a bowling alley that was also a six-hundred-seat music venue.⁴¹

We can also consider the development and structure of the particular building environment as a key to the success of country and western in northeastern cities during the music's heyday. As Al and Jerry noted, there seemed to be a bar on every corner, so there was enough music available to keep people going to hear it in clubs in their towns and neighborhoods. As Jerry said, when he went to North Carolina for a stint, this was not the case. There, he primarily played halls, lodges, and civic clubs. Perhaps taking advantage of the popularity of bowling at the time, Don Larkin connected his 600-seat restaurant and musical venue to the sixty-lane White Horse Bowling Alley, down the New Jersey Turnpike south of Trenton, where he booked the likes of Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, and George Jones. In the *Secaucus Home News* of the 1950s–60s, one will find many more mentions of the Copa Club bowling team, and teams of other bars and clubs, than advertisements for shows at the Copa or elsewhere.

When Al described the Copa Club and similar musical venues in the area, he said they were essentially redneck bars, which I take to mean honky tonks. Pamela Fox describes the honky tonk as a site crucial to identity, community, and belonging, often with a strong link to a specific locality.⁴² The urban honky tonks of the Northeast would have provided a home of sorts, then, in a post-war era “of mingled optimism, bitterness and longing,” and an “affiliation with a distinctly working-class audience at once exhilarated and alienated by modern culture.”⁴³

Historian Patrick Huber asserts that New York musicians created the first mass audience for country music and, in so doing, raised questions about the regional and class origins of “hillbilly” music.⁴⁴ In this context

40. Murphy, 166.

41. “Don Larkin,” *Hillbilly-Music.com*, <http://www.hillbilly-music.com/dj/story/index.php?id=16631>, (accessed 16 October 2019).

42. Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 70.

43. *Ibid.*, 68.

44. Patrick Huber, “The New York Sound: Citybilly Recording Artists and the Creation of Hillbilly Music,” *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (Spring 2014).

it is interesting to note that Al was a businessman in New York City, not working class, yet he immersed himself in music that has been associated with “the folk,” the American working class. Further, it can be challenging to discuss country and western music in New Jersey without mentioning New York City and certainly Al Krtil, a New Jersey transplant from the Bronx, wove his New York City history into our discussions. With its proximity to New York City the Copa Club could be an easy additional destination for established country stars performing in New York, and also draw high-profile fans like Mantle and Martin. But its location would also come to be a challenge, as New York City venues would eventually overshadow New Jersey clubs. Al told the story of his uncle, a New York City police officer, who told Al that all the precincts were tuned into Don Larkin’s Home Town Frolic. Al also noted that his friend, Chicago-based Patsy Montana, recorded first in New York, although she felt dogged by stories that had her first recording in Chicago. Yet, it was also important to Al to point out the deep history of country music in New Jersey and the state’s role in the commercial country music origin story. In August 1927, Camden, New Jersey-based RCA Victor Records talent scout, recording engineer, and producer Ralph Peer recorded Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family at what would come to be known as the Bristol Sessions, having taken place in Bristol, Tennessee. The Carters’ record sold well, and Peer brought them to Camden to record in May 1928. On a return trip to Camden in 1933, the Carters recorded some of their most iconic songs in a two-day session, including “Wildwood Flower,” “Gold Watch and Chain,” and the first version of “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” which became their signature tune.⁴⁵ Later country and western musicians would adapt songs the Carter family recorded into honky tonk interpretations. Hank Thompson would use the tune of their standard, “I’m Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes,” based on a traditional tune, in “The Wild Side of Life” (also recorded by Jerry Hatton), as would Kitty Wells in her answer song, “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels.”

WHY DID THE NEW JERSEY SCENE COLLAPSE?

In reflecting upon my discussions with Al and Jerry, I have begun to see a model emerge around localities and scenes in which New Jersey country music is situated. In Secaucus, we see a network with Smokey and Shorty and the Copa Club as a center around which others revolve: the musicians, like Jerry Hatton, the fans, like Al Krtil, even the bowlers

45. Mark Zwonitzer with Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone? The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 168.

affiliated with individual clubs. Initially, I believed all these venues from the postcards were interconnected and more closely networked, but it seems that each town had its own network, each Smokey Warren had his or her territory. The bowling leagues affiliated with the venues (and seemingly every one had its own bowling team) provide more evidence that each scene was hyperlocal. While some of these scene participants moved in the same circles at times, it appears there were bright lines dividing who performed at what venues. When I mentioned the musician Whitey Murphy, mainstay of Charlie's Corner in Secaucus, Al indicated that he did not run in the Copa Club circles. Jerry had a similar reaction when I mentioned another name from the postcards, singer and drummer Kookie Kay. Jerry played with her on occasion, but said she was not a Copa performer, that she played more jamborees and festivals.

While the overarching narrative remains that Nashville ruined or obscured local country-music scenes, as part of this developing model for the northern New Jersey country and western scene, we can see significant local reasons for its decline and eventual collapse.

Guy Sterling asserts that country and western music in New Jersey was a "victim of economics, changing musical tastes and a swing in demographics."⁴⁶ Indeed, Pamela Fox notes that modernity is "typically deemed the primary culprit of country's demise as an authentic cultural form."⁴⁷ Jerry also blamed the very local reasons of the 1970s drunk driving crackdown and the unsustainable profusion of clubs, as reflected in the postcards, for shuttering bars. As Nashville began to centralize country music on Music Row, it essentially hijacked any local success. But again, New York City also plays a role in obscuring the local scenes. Northern New Jersey benefited and suffered the downfall of its location because it was next door to Manhattan. Al indicated that a young crowd went out to the local clubs, but once they had children and were more settled, they made their night out a trip to see a bigger performer at a bigger venue in the city. It is also likely that rising artist fees that could be met when musicians played in New York could not be matched in the New Jersey clubs.

When the Copa Club closed sometime in the mid-1960s, quite a few northern New Jersey cities had been on the economic decline, changes Guy Sterling alluded to in his overview of country music in northern New Jersey. In 1964, riots occurred in Paterson, which was a country and western hotspot, along with nearby Jersey City and Elizabeth as well as New York City. Uprisings occurred around the United States, including,

46. Sterling, "When Country Was King."

47. Fox, 11.

famously, Newark, in 1967. As Mark Landy reminds us, “predominant cultural trends are not just innocent fads or national nostalgic movements” but possibly “clues to a much deeper social problem.”⁴⁸ In this vein, a collection like the postcards can have a much deeper meaning beyond their cheerful, sunny invitations to country and western clubs and jamborees. By the mid to late 1960s, not all that long after the postcards in the collection were sent, it is possible that Smokey Warren, and others like him, could not hold on in a northern New Jersey undergoing rapid change.

The territorial feelings among bookers and promoters are another potential force in the local decline. Smokey Warren, despite his national reach, seems to have had certain boundaries when it came to bookings closer to home. Again, those bright lines between individual clubs seem to come into play. Jerry told me that Smokey did not want Jerry and his band Tear Talks to play at a shopping mall about twenty miles south of Secaucus because he did not know it; it was not part of his network. When Jerry played the gig anyway, he and Smokey did not speak for a year.⁴⁹

FUTURE PATHS OF RESEARCH

Although an examination of all the country and western postcards in the collection is beyond the scope of this article, an analysis of the cards as a whole could certainly yield deeper findings and paint a broader picture of the northern New Jersey country and western scene. Perhaps more importantly, we can use that archival schism between perceived and actual value and what we as archivists, curators, and librarians decide to collect, preserve, and make available for research and teaching as a space in which to examine the postcards more critically and look to them as pedagogical tools. The postcards do not just tell a story of an overlooked and long-gone musical scene in New Jersey. They present an opportunity to encourage a critical examination of gaps in the historical record. To this end, there are two specific areas that may seem to be hidden but are implicit in the postcards: the roles of women and of ethnic and nonwhite participants in the scene.

In their article “Record Collections as Musical Archives: Gender, Record Collecting, and Whose Music is Heard,” Sophia Maalsen and Jessica McLean consider masculine dominance in record collecting and its implications for whose musical tastes and interests are preserved, often in library and museum collections, and made available for re-

48. Mark Landy, “The Melody of Dislocation,” *New South* (Winter 1971): 132.

49. Jerry Hatton in discussion with the author, 22 February 2019.

search.⁵⁰ They argue that through its dominance, male musical activities and tastes become associated with a quality of seriousness, and that “consequently, the musical heritage being consumed and cataloged in big collections results in an ‘officially’ sanctioned gendered musical heritage,” which in turn should prompt us to consider “whose music is valuable, and whose idea of musical heritage is being canonized to produce the cultural history of music in the process?”⁵¹

We can extend Maalsen and McLean’s examination of whose musical heritage is being consumed and cataloged to the country and western postcards, which primarily reflect a masculine culture. As Al Krtil described the clubs, women did attend, generally in company with men. But importantly, women performed in and also supported the scene. As Jerry told me, his wife always worked, and that enabled him to be a professional musician. That said, she was part of his band Tear Talks, sang duets with him, and played several instruments. Al corroborated that in many instances the musicians’ wives held down jobs and often raised families, so that through their labor they very much enabled the predominantly male scene to thrive.

Women country musicians in the immediate postwar years, including Kitty Wells and Rose Maddox, both of whom played at the Copa Club, worked with their husbands or other male family members, but each eventually began to carve out more independent identities.⁵² A deeper look at the only New Jersey woman who appears on the postcards can provide further insight into the New Jersey country and western scene and women’s roles in it as agents of their own careers and journeys.

The postcards reveal traces of a musician who went by the name Kookie Kay—listed in rosters of “additional” musicians who would play at hootenannies and jamborees. She handwrote notes to Don Cleary expressing the hope that he would be able to come on out for a show. Kookie Kay was the stage name of Ella Marie Rand, who was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1928 and who lived in the suburban central New Jersey town of Sewaren for most of her life. According to her daughter Marilyn Smolynec, as a young woman Kookie worked for singer-songwriter and Grand Ole Opry member Johnny Paycheck and over the years got to know country stars like Paycheck’s fellow outlaw country star Merle Haggard.⁵³

50. Sophia Maalsen and Jessica McLean, “Record Collections as Musical Archives: Gender, Record Collecting, and Whose Music is Heard,” *Journal of Material Culture* 23, no. 1 (March 2018): 41.

51. Maalsen and McLean, 49.

52. Malone and Laird, 257.

53. Marilyn Smolynec, e-mail message to author, 1 May 2019.

As a musician and active creator of her own musical world, she brought men as fellow performers into her musical milieu. She taught herself songs she heard on the radio and also wrote her own songs, or cowrote with male collaborators. One of her regular collaborators was Billy Sage. In the Sage-penned song "Take Your Cotton Pickin' Hands Off My Shoulder," Kookie Kay pushes back on an aggressive suitor with a strong, empowered vocal delivery and a repeated threat that if he keeps it up, "I won't be blamed for what I'm gonna do."⁵⁴

In a number of ways, Kookie's professionalism aligned with that of Smokey Warren, of whom, her daughter said, Kookie thought highly. Like Smokey, Kookie had something of a national reputation, recording in Nashville, and like Smokey, she stayed in New Jersey, raising her family in Sewaren. Marilyn, her daughter, said that her mother told her "she stayed in New Jersey because she did not want to leave family and friends."⁵⁵ Kookie too was an early friend and encourager of Eddie Rabbitt. And like Smokey and Shorty, Kookie kept her family life separate from her professional life. As a woman performer, however, she may have felt a stronger pressure to keep separate the images of her real and performative selves even more so than male musicians. Pamela Fox presents the examples of Kitty Wells and Jean Shepard as wives and mothers who, despite their stardom and popularity, operated in a world of male gatekeeping that sometimes showed more interest and reverence for their roles at home than their musical skills and abilities.⁵⁶ Unlike Kitty Wells and Rose Maddox, who worked the country touring, Kookie worked her own territory, where her family was, from "one end of New Jersey to the other," playing jamborees and radio stations.⁵⁷ It is worth recalling that Jerry remembers Kookie as playing jamborees and hoote-nannies rather than clubs. As alternative homes for male country and western musicians of the era, clubs and honky tonks may have been less hospitable for female musicians, so it is telling if women were indeed more likely to perform outside of them. Women's home places were their literal homes, and musical events outside of venues with bars were perhaps deemed more suitable for women country musicians. Even if that was the case, it is not to say women like Kookie Kay did not have agency. Performing as Kookie Kay and Her Trio, initially she sang and played drums, but she took it upon herself to learn other instruments,

54. "Kookie Kay & Billy Sage-Take Your Cotton Pickin' Hands Off My Shoulder," YouTube video, 2:02, Armadillo Killer, 14 July 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUqyXXR9Boo>, (accessed 16 October 2019).

55. Marilyn Smolynec, e-mail message to author, 2 May 2019.

56. Fox, 102.

57. Marilyn Smolynec, e-mail message to author, 1 May 2019.

namely bass and lead and rhythm guitar. As she told her daughter, this was so that “when she had backup musicians she could know they were playing the notes correctly.”⁵⁸

In the 1960s, Bill Malone declared that the typical hillbilly musician of the 1920s was probably not the Anglo Saxon of nostalgia, as early scholars asserted, but was likely of mixed European descent, and his music would have been an amalgamation of styles and influences, especially African American.⁵⁹ More recently, Patrick Huber reminded us that “city-billy singers and musicians do not fit neatly into the master narrative of country music history. For one thing, many of them were born in New York or in other industrialized northeastern cities. Some of them were immigrants or, more often, the children of immigrants, and several of them were Jewish.”⁶⁰ Clifford Murphy also addresses the strong presence of “ethnic clubs” and neighborhoods and their relations to who owned and patronized country music clubs. Secaucus, for example, had large Italian, German, and Polish populations at the time the Copa Club was thriving. Peterson and DiMaggio observed that Philadelphia natives and south Jersey club owners with “ethnic” names ran country clubs in Philadelphia and its nearby New Jersey suburbs.⁶¹ In assuming western names and postures, and in Americanizing their Polish last name to “Warren,” John and Andrew Warianka, Smokey and Shorty, respectively, and so many others, obscured their ethnic roots.

Much like Clifford Murphy found in his interviews for *Country Twang*, reflections on race were not at the forefront of Al and Jerry’s memories of the scene. In response to a question about his recollections as to who attended shows at the Copa Club, Al did note that the neighborhood clubs were white, and again he described them as “redneck bars.” Indeed, as Cecilia Tichi reminds us, “honky tonk” is black slang for “white shack.”⁶² Al said he saw more “mixed” audiences at bigger shows in New York. Again, these New Jersey clubs attracted white performers and audiences, but they could be examined more critically in light of work by scholars like Geoff Mann, who has explored the cultural politics of nostalgia in an idealized white past of country music, and in the production and reproduction of those who listen to country music.⁶³ Mann employs Gramsci’s concept of a hegemonic culture in arguing that the

58. Marilyn Smolyne, e-mail message to author, 15 May 2019.

59. Malone and Laird, 34.

60. Huber, 142.

61. Peterson and DiMaggio, 502.

62. Cecilia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7.

63. Geoff Mann, “Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008).

country music pose recruits white people to their whiteness. The call to whiteness and its use as an antidote to a complex, unstable world overpowers its intermusical, intermediated history.⁶⁴ Emily Raboteau writes in her *New Yorker* review of a 2017 exhibit, “Black Cowboys” at the Studio Museum in Harlem, about “thousands of African-Americans” who “played a role in settling the Old West.” Raboteau notes, “According to scholars, one in four cowboys working in Texas during the golden age of westward expansion was black; many others were Mexican, mestizo, or Native American—a far more diverse group than Hollywood stereotypes of the cowboy would suggest.”⁶⁵ While an increasing number of scholars like Mann, Patrick Huber, and Diana Pecknold are looking at nonwhite agency in country music,⁶⁶ there is more room for a closer examination of “intermediated” and “intermusical” histories in country music outside the South.

CONCLUSION

The New Jersey country and western postcards I begin to explore here serve multiple purposes. As ephemera they may not appear at the onset to be material of particular value. They are important, however, because they provide evidence of a New Jersey musical phenomenon and entrée into exploring gaps in the historical record, including questions surrounding whose history is told and saved, both locally and nationally. As Clifford Murphy lamented, so much country-music scholarship still today considers only southern commercial success stories and displaced southern musicians. In my research so far on the thriving country and western music scene in New Jersey, I contribute to the ongoing scholarly work of demonstrating that there is not, to use Patrick Huber’s term, a southern “country music exceptionalism.”⁶⁷ The postcards allow us to bring into the narrative those who were not displaced, but hail from areas outside the South, where they successfully played country and western music and created thriving scenes that encompassed not only performers but fans, club owners, disc jockeys, producers, promoters, and booking agents.

As I have described, the postcards are ripe for further exploration and future engagement in critical pedagogy. They may also be used to help foment a feminist turn in archiving, and a critical consideration of overlooked ethnic and racial histories by looking beyond the surface of the

64. Mann, 92.

65. Emily Raboteau, “Black Cowboys, Busting One of America’s Defining Myths,” *New Yorker* (22 January 2017) <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/black-cowboys-busting-one-of-americas-defining-myths>, (accessed 16 October 2019).

66. Diana Pecknold, editor, *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

67. Huber, 148.

collection and related materials of masculine and/or white cultures, of performing, listening, producing, and collecting that appear to promote the status quo. The New Jersey country and western postcards and the stories and agency of actors like Smokey and Shorty Warren and Kookie Kay are puzzle pieces in a larger country musical history, a hidden segment of country-music history in the United States, and the even more hidden roles of those who have been neglected in enshrined musical histories.

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ABSTRACT

Several years ago, Rutgers University's Special Collections and University Archives was given a checkbox containing fifty-six postcards advertising country and western music shows at venues around New Jersey.

The postcards, primarily from the 1960s, promoted shows featuring Grand Ole Opry stars like Wanda Jackson, Hank Thompson, and Elton Britt. Preliminary research revealed that the postcards touted performances by regional and local musicians, as well. A closer look at the cards began to expose how a small, hyper-local ephemeral collection could bring to light and contribute to a larger history; in this case, a once thriving but little explored New Jersey country and western music scene. The research that forms this article focuses on one venue, the Copa Club in the city of Secaucus, and its owners, brothers and musicians Shorty and Smokey Warren, as a specific case study. This collection of postcards, like so much ephemeral material in archives, could have remained undervalued and under-researched. In this case, a close consideration set forth a journey that included research in local archives and interviews with scene participants. As a result, this article explores the past of an important musical genre that evolved along with social changes in the United States. This piece contributes to the scholarship around uses and value of ephemera, as well as scholarship that continues to challenge the southern origin story of country music and examine vital locales of country music outside the South.

