

Hillbilly Music Comes to Town

Country and old-time string band music were long-time favorites in Durham's mill villages and rural communities.

Nashville attracted Durham mill-village musicians including John D. Loudermilk (now in the Nashville Songwriters' Hall of Fame), and Don Schlitz, who wrote "The Gambler," made famous by Kenny Rogers.



William F. and Martha Gates Terry family, 1910. The Terry family has been making music in Durham County since at least the early 1900s. (courtesy Tim Terry)

The 1960s Friday night picking sessions at Hollow Rock Store and banjo player Tommy Thompson's home fueled a local old-time string band revival. In 1972 Thompson, Bill Hicks, and Jim Watson formed the now nationally known Red Clay Ramblers.

Hillbilly music continues to flourish with bands like the Swingbillies and the Doc Branch Band, founded by Terry family members in the 1970s.



Tommy Thompson, Mike Craver, Jim Watson, and Bill Hicks perform at the Carter Family Memorial Music Center in southwest Virginia in the mid-1970s. (photo by Susanne Anderson)

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