

PLAY BOYS

Before settling down to marriage, bands of young guys and an occasional gal roved the country as itinerant musicians, entertaining at theaters, schools, small radio stations. Cookeville's Howard Bryant was one of them in the mid-1940's. Article in the Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

By Charles Denning

October 20, 2002 – Front page.

Mentioned in this article pictured with his band the Tennessee Valley Play Boys' is a man named, Eugene "Gene" Bussell. This man was married to my Mother, Geraldine Loftis Denny in md 8 October 1947, she was only 17 yrs. old. He lived up to his name the 'Play Boy' as he married my mother only to leave her and take up with another woman. My mother was living with his family at the time and never knew why Eugene Bussell left her and no one knew where he was at first. When she found him and he didn't want her she filed for a divorce. Good thing actually or I wouldn't be alive today. Geraldine Loftis got md to my father, Tim Denny, 10 July 1949 and they had their first child, Ronald Timothy Denny on 5 December 1950. Luther Eugene "Gene" Bussell was the son of Edgar Dibrell Bussell and Lou Siller Howell. Audrey J. Denny Lambert: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Tennessee Valley Playboys

When they played country music, they were the 'Tennessee Valley Play Boys'; when they played popular, they were 'The Four Aces and a Deuce,' pictured here on a post card from the mid-1940's in the studios of Radio Station WHUB – from the left, front, Ward Beaty, who also performed as the group's comedian; and Horace Scarlett; and standing, Doyle and Deloy Lewis, the twins; **Eugene "Gene" Bussell** and Howard Bryant.

Luther Eugene Bussell
Purple Heart WWII Veteran
b. 17 January 1924, TN
d. 15 November 2001, Ringo, GA
Buried: Chattanooga National Cemetery
1200 Bailey Avenue,
Chattanooga, TN 37404
Location: Section CCC: Site 414

When he was about 19, in the mid-1940's, Howard Bryant and his cousin, Junior Bradford, had begun to get interested in music, thinking maybe about playing in a band.

They went over to Borden's jewelry store, here in Cookeville, and Howard bought a guitar and Junior a mandolin.

"I could just pick around a little," said Howard.

He kept “picking around” on his new guitar and taught himself to play.

Before long, Howard became one of the Tennessee Valley Play Boys. It was time when young guys were getting together and forming country bands here and there around the county.

In those years, right at the end of World War II, television was a new invention that most people had barely heard of, but smalltown radio stations – such as Cookeville’s WHUB were going strong.

They sought talent for live shows, and folks hungry for “something to do” turned out in crowds for picking-and-singing in school auditoriums and little movie theaters.

“We would book schools and give them half,” said Howard. “We sold pictures of ourselves.”

WHUB was then above Maddux Hardware on the Courthouse Square, and Tom Harris and Stacy Mott, announcing at the station, would put the Play Boys and other bands on the air.

At one point, the Play Boys would appear on the “Farm Show” at noon playing pure down-home bluegrass, said Howard. Then at 3 p.m. they would come back to the studio, change their name from Tennessee Valley Play Boys to “The Four Aces and a Deuce” and fill the airways with popular music.

Only occasionally did Howard sing; one song he remembers doing was, “She’s a Steppin’- out Kind.”

Gospel music? Sure, they did that too.

Advertising was creative then as it is now. One of the Play Boys was Adney Casey who played the piano – he later ran the Triangle Restaurant and Service Station on Cookeville’s Westside.

Adney was also a pilot. They’d print up bundles of circulars announcing a show by the Play Boys and, a few days before the event, he’d fly over – it might be Sparta at the veterans’ building or at the theaters and schools in Gainesboro or Difficult or Livingston or Byrdstown or somewhere else in the region – and he’d shower the town with colored paper drifting down from the sky.

Howard’s cousin, Junior Bradford, that he’d started out with, went on to Dayton, OH, and “got professional like,” said Howard.

For Howard, his days of fame as a member of the Tennessee Valley Play Boys lasted about two years.

For this, as for other bands, marriage would eventually intercede and turn the lives of fancy-free young men in a different direction, putting a bind on traveling around, staying up late at night and getting along on a very few dollars in the pocket.

It began with the Play Boys' Lewis twins, Doyle and Deloy. "One of the twins got married," said Howard, "then the other one – that's the way twins do."

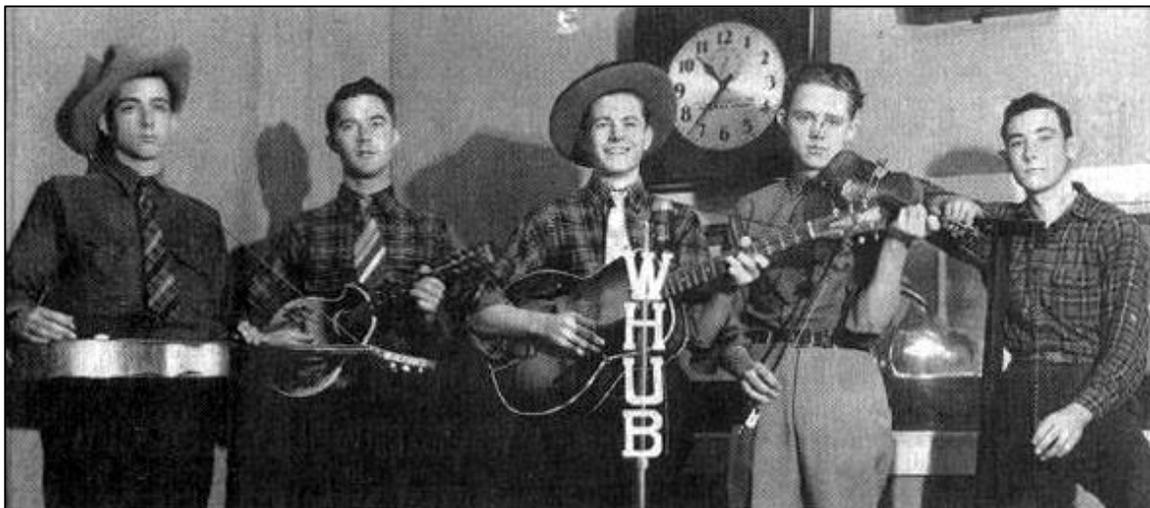
One by one, the band began to break up. Howard got married in 1947. "The I had to go to work," he said. "I wasn't making enough to get by on."

His music-making over, Howard went to work for Billy Whitaker at Cream City in 1951 and stayed there for 40 years. "It was the best ice cream in Tennessee," he said. "W.R., Billy's daddy, made the ice cream and he was really particular about it. We had about five trucks and covered 14 counties."

He recalled when the landmark "Cream City" sign which continues to overlook the Depot Museum area on Cookeville's Westside went up in the early 1950's. At first, the company was called Consumers' Ice Cream.

"When the name was changed they wanted to keep the big 'C' so they called it Cream City.

On special occasions still, the present owners flip a switch, the giant neon sign comes alive and the whole Westside glows in an unchanging electrical sunset.



"Tennessee Wildcats"

In this portrait made by Harding Studio in Cookeville's WHUB radio station on December 16, 1940, are the "Tennessee Wildcats" band, from left, Horace Scarlett, guitar player and their featured singer who modeled his voice after Roy Acuff; Odell Wright, on the mandolin; Dawson Gentry, guitar player who later served as a Cookeville police chief; Eugene "Gene" Bussell; and Roy Parrott who played a washtub bass – a string from a bass fiddle held tight with one hand, attached to the center of a metal washtub and strummed with the fingers of the other hand.



“Dixie Play Boys”

For a time, Howard Bryant also played with the ‘Dixie Play Boys’ – who included a girl, Elise Morgan, who sang and played bass. From left are Howard; Junior Bradford, who went north to Dayton, OH, and became “professional”; and Tom Harris who played piano for the group. The studio engineer, visible to the right behind the glass partition, is unidentified.



Howard Bryant, at left, and Junior Bradford.



Guitarist Haskell Shumake



Cream City Ice Cream
Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN

Source: Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN, 23 March 1944.

The Army maneuvers are over, says the general in charge of the historic military operation that for the last year or so has sent thousands of troops, tanks and other military vehicles rambling over the countryside in 21 Middle Tennessee counties, including Putnam.

The Army announced that 5,000 military engineers are now being moved into the area to repair roads and bridges "as best as they can."

*In Cookeville, a decision was made to keep the USO center open. It's been busy on weekends entertaining hundreds of troops, but there are still hundreds of aviation cadets at Tennessee Polytech and area teens have gotten used to hanging out at the center on weekends.

An Illinois soldier, Pvt. Vernon Zavitz, wrote to say thanks to the women here who worked on Red Cross packages that his unit received this week aboard a troop ship bound for New Zealand.

"In the boat coming over I received one of those apron holders with the toilet articles in it and believe me, it was just what I needed," writes Zavitz.

"A lot of the boys probably will not write, but on behalf of all of them I will thank you for them and myself."

*In other war news this week, letters arrived to kinfolk here from Cpl. Joe L. Quarles, Sgt. Robert Paul Judd, and Maj. A.L. Campbell, all Putnam County men. They say they've arrived safely "somewhere in England" for the big military buildup there.

[And Horace Scarlett is home on leave this week with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Zack Scarlett of the Smithville Road. Horace, a seaman, was wounded in action in the Atlantic and also took part in the recent Italian campaign. \(March 23, 1944\).](#)

Date: October 23, 1998

Publication: Herald-Citizen (Cookeville, TN)

Robert "Bob" Horace Scarlett Obt.

LEBANON - Funeral services for **Robert "Bob" Horace Scarlett**, 75, of Lebanon will be held at 3 p.m. today at Partlow Funeral Chapel in Lebanon. Burial will follow in Wilson County Memorial Park.

[Mr. Scarlett died on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 1998, at University Medical Center in Lebanon.](#)

[He was born on February 27, 1923, in Putnam County to the late **Zack and Eliza Grimes Scarlett**. He served in World War II, was a customer...](#)

(SS Death Index: Name: **SCARLETT, ROBERT H** – Birth: 27 Feb 1923 Death: 21 Oct 1998 - Last Residence (Lebanon, Wilson Co., TN) - Last Benefit: (none specified) – SSN: 411-42-7176, TN).

Source: Judd Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN: Located on Holladay Road about ½ mile southwest off Buffalo Valley Road.

Zack Scarlett

b. 7 May 1883 – d. 5 March 1953 and **Eliza Grimes Scarlett**, b. 5 October 1885 – d. 2 January 1960, both buried in Judd Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN. They are the parents of Robert "Bob" Horace Scarlett (1923-1998).



COOKEVILLE CITY SCHOOL, COOKEVILLE, TN, Class of 1934

Posed here for their class portrait, these are the students in Edyth Gentry's fourth grade at the old Cookeville City School in 1934. They are, from left, front row, Luther Mathis, Walter Ray Allen (deceased), **Horace Scarlett**, (unidentified), Harvey Choate, (unidentified), Clarence Burnett, Emogene Lacy (Flatt), Lucy Whitson, Eleanor Jane Drake (Mitchell); second row, Alfred Boatman, Thomas Luckadoo, Juanita Rodgers, Cordie Roberts (Borden), Ruth Whitehead, Stacey Mott, Robert Parrott, Earl Shipley, Billy Lawson and the teacher, Edyth Gentry (Dowell); third row, Lewis Moss, Joe Nelson Scott, Mary Louise Harley, Beatrice Madewell (Scott), (unidentified), (unidentified), Jennie Akins (?), Nellie Moore and Mary Frances Bullock (Carter).

Source: Heritage of Putnam County Tennessee – 2008 by the Putnam County Heritage Book Committee, pg. 36. Photo submitted by, Mrs. Luther Mathis, photo from the Herald-Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN.