
Dave Laing

Resource notes

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British Archive of Country Music¹

A purpose-built one-storey building just outside the English south coast port of Dover houses the largest collection of country music records, books and memorabilia outside the USA. There are over 50,000 45 rpm singles and EPs, 7,000 78 rpm discs and many thousands of vinyl LPS, plus CDs and VHS videocassettes. Printed items include sheet music, photographs, song books, magazines and over 800 books.

The archive originated in the record collection of one man, Dave Barnes. He started buying 78s by such artists as Wilf Carter, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry from the HMV store in Oxford Street, London as a young teenager in 1951. By the end of the 1980s, Barnes was winding down his art restoration and sales business and devoting more and more time to his hobby. But his record collection was already way out of hand—he had gone from buying single 78s to 500 albums at one time. He told Martin Hawkins:

I gathered more and more records until the house was too small to hold them all, so I built an extension, and that got too small, so I had to put up another building where we are now, and even this is bursting at the seams. I've always been interested in the country of the time—kept up with it. It's only the last twenty years that I've gone back to the era where I started and even further beyond. I'm just a hoarder. I kept everything over the years. All the correspondence too.

In the late 1980s Barnes turned his collection into a formal archive, the British Archive of Country Music (BACM). This is a non-profit organization with the aims of preserving the Barnes collection and items donated by others, and to catalogue records, sheet music, photographs, film and books so that they might be of use to

1. By permission of the author, this article incorporates material from an unpublished paper on BACM by Martin Hawkins, originally commissioned by the *Journal of Country Music*.

researchers, record companies, radio and television presenters and producers, and students. The archive takes material in any format and is not limited to preserving something in its original version. The aim is preserve the music and the memories for posterity, whether they come in the form of original cylinders, 78s or transcriptions, or whether they are LPs, CDs, DVDs, magazines and correspondence, photocopies or reproductions.

BACM is also a record label, devoted to reissues on CD of vintage country music tracks that are out of copyright in Europe. Barnes founded the label ten years ago and there are now over 300 titles in its catalogue. The emphasis is on work by lesser known artists of the period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s, all of which have not previously appeared on CD. The first BACM release was by Big Bill Campbell, a Canadian-born singer who lived and worked in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. The most recent titles include a compilation of lesser known tracks issued on the Dot label and music by western swing bandleader Dave Stogner. Full details of all BACM releases can be found on the BACM website.

One feature of the BACM that I found of particular interest is its collection of fanzines and small magazines published in Britain. The earliest was *The Hillbilly—Folk Record Review*, started in 1954. This was followed by others such as *Country-Western Express*, *Country News and Views* and Dave Barnes's own publication *Country and Western Record Review*, which listed all releases in the US and UK and included information about the music and the artists.

Dave Barnes and his colleagues have catalogued the BACM collection of recordings. Their database, which is not yet available online, contains details of 30,000 bands and musicians plus 450,000 song titles.

Barnes welcomes visitors to the archive by appointment and can be contacted at dave@bacountrymusic.fsnet.co.uk

The address of the BACM website is <http://www.bacm-cds.co.uk>