

Blind Willie McTell (May 5, 1898 – August 19, 1959) was an influential African-American blues musician and songwriter, who sang and accompanied himself on the guitar. He was a twelve-string finger picking Piedmont blues guitarist, and recorded 149 songs between 1927 and 1956.

Born **William Samuel McTier** (or McTear) in Thomson, Georgia, blind in one eye, McTell had lost his remaining vision by late childhood, but became an adept reader of Braille. He showed proficiency in music from an early age and learned to play the six-string guitar as soon as he could. His father left the family when McTell was still young, and when his mother died in the 1920s, he left his hometown and became a wandering busker. He began his recording career in 1927 for Victor Records in Atlanta.

In the years before World War II, he traveled and performed widely, recording for a number of labels under a different name for each one, including Blind Willie McTell (Victor and Decca), Blind Sammie (Columbia), Georgia Bill (Okeh), Hot Shot Willie (Victor), Blind Willie (Vocalion), Red Hot Willie Glaze (Bluebird), Barrelhouse Sammie (Atlantic) and Pig & Whistle Red (Regal). The "Pig 'n Whistle" appellation was a reference to a chain of Atlanta Bar-B-Que restaurants, one of which was located on the south side of East Ponce de Leon between Boulevard and Moreland Avenue. Blind Willie frequently played for tips in the parking lot of this location, which later became the Blue Lantern Lounge. His style was singular: a form of country blues, bridging the gap between the raw blues of the early part of the 20th Century and the more refined East Coast "Piedmont" sound. He took on the less common and more unwieldy 12-string guitar because of its loudness. The style is well documented on John Lomax's 1940 recordings of McTell for the Library of Congress, for which McTell earned ten dollars (the modern equivalent of \$154.25).

McTell is unusual, if not unique, among country bluesmen in his ability to play the guitar in both a complex, fingerpicking ragtime style similar to Blind Blake or Blind Boy Fuller (see, for example, his recording of "Georgia Rag," a cover of Blake's

"Wabash Rag"), and a heavier bottleneck blues style ("Three Women Blues"). His playing in both idioms is masterful, fluid and inventive; based on multiple recordings of the same song (for example, "Broke Down Engine"), he never played a song the same way twice. His style could almost be called "stream of consciousness," as he would vary the bar pattern and sometimes even the rhythm and chord progression from verse to verse. McTell was also an excellent accompanist, and recorded many songs with his longtime musical companion, Curley Weaver; their recordings are some of the most outstanding examples of country blues guitar duets. See, for example, "It's a Good Little Thing," or "You Were Born to Die."

Acoustic Blues Travellers (Jim Bruce and Ken Mayall) play Statesboro Blues by Blind Willie McTell.

In 1934, he married Ruthy Kate Williams (now better known as Kate McTell). She accompanied him on stage and on several recordings, before becoming a nurse in 1939. Most of their marriage from 1942 until his death was spent apart, with her living in Fort Gordon near Augusta, and him working around Atlanta.

Post-war, he recorded for Atlantic Records and Regal Records in 1949, but these recordings met with less commercial success than his previous works. He continued to perform around Atlanta, but his career was cut short by ill health, predominantly diabetes and alcoholism.

In 1956, an Atlanta record store manager, Edward Rhodes, discovered McTell playing in the street for quarters and enticed him into his store with a bottle of corn liquor, where he captured a few final performances on a tape recorder. These were released posthumously on Prestige/Bluesville Records as Last Session.

McTell died in Milledgeville, Georgia, of a stroke in 1959. He was buried at Jones Grove Church, near Thomson, Georgia, his birthplace. A fan paid to have a gravestone erected on his resting place.

He was inducted into the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1981.

Source: wikipedia.org

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