



About Louie Bluie

The Louie Bluie Music and Arts Festival is named in honor of William Howard Taft Armstrong (stage name "Louie Bluie") whose family moved to Campbell County ca. 1912 when Howard was about 3 years old.

A gifted virtuoso, Mr. Armstrong played 22 instruments including the fiddle which he played with nimble fingers using frequent double and triple stops and supersonic long bow strokes. He performed blues, country, spirituals/gospels, jigs and reels, polkas, rags, Hawaiian songs, Tin Pan Alley, hokum, ragtime and more. He sang in the seven languages he taught himself. Suffice to say his repertoire was very broad.

Born in 1909 in Dayton, TN, he grew up in the Furnace Hill community of LaFollette, one of nine children. Howard organized his younger brothers into the Armstrong Brothers Band. They played on the town's street corners, and hiked to coal mining camps playing for "chips in the hat." Segregation laws barred him for competing in any of the nationally recognized annual LaFollette Fiddlers Conventions.

As a teenager, Howard was mentored by a blind fiddler in Knoxville, Roland Martin. He joined Martin's stepbrother, guitarist Carl Martin, and a mandolinist, Ted Bogan, to form a band. After performing on the radio in Knoxville, Armstrong's group made its first recordings there in the historic St. James Hotel sessions of 1930. In an era when record companies released all African American recordings as "race" records, and all white string bands as "hillbilly" records, the groups' recordings (Armstrong's Knox County Stomp, Vine Street Drag, and State Street Rag) were released on Brunswick/Vocalion's "race" label as being played by The Tennessee Chocolate Drops, and on the company's "hillbilly" label as being played by the Tennessee Trio - thus disguising the race of the musicians. These recordings documented and preserved Armstrong's long career.

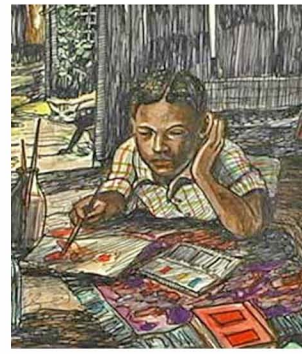
Martin, Bogan and Armstrong spent the Great Depression years rambling around southern Appalachia, winding up in Chicago playing on street corners, doing what Howard called "pulling doors" - that is, boldly stepping into saloons in North Side white immigrant neighborhoods and winning over Polish, Irish, Italians, Germans and Jews with old songs in their native languages. They appeared at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair; and recorded with the blues singers Big Bill Broonzy; Bumble Bee Slim (a.k.a. Amos Easton); Tampa Red; Memphis Minnie; Sonny Boy Williams (a.k.a. John Lee Williamson); James Garner; and Little Son Joe (a.k.a. Ernest Lawlers) - to name a few of the Chicago Blues fraternity to which Martin, Bogan and Armstrong belonged.



Howard Armstrong and his brothers (L to R: L.C. (age 8), F.L. (age 6), Howard (age 16), & Roland (age 12))

Circa 1925:

Howard Armstrong and his brothers. Left to Right: L.C. (age 8), F.L. (age 6), Howard (age 16), and Roland (age 12).

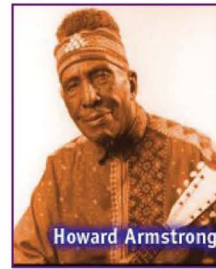


"That was under the house where I lived. I'd pull the hair out of a cat's tail to make a paint brush." Howard Armstrong

A notable visual artist, who as a child made his own brushes and paints and who later studied at an art institute in middle Tennessee, Armstrong designed record album covers for his group and others, painted political signs for Tennessee's Sen. Estes Kefauver, and sold paintings on the street to supplement his income. He said that often when music didn't support him, his art did. He also made iconic jewelry and loved colorful dress styles.

String band music went out of style after WWII, and from 1944 to 1971, Howard worked on the Chrysler assembly line in Detroit. In the 1970's string band music was rediscovered and Martin, Bogan and Armstrong reunited. In his senior years, buoyed by a relationship with Barbara Ward, a performer-artist from Boston whom he later married, Armstrong's career soared to new and wider popularity in performances that took them to Holland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Africa. A 2002 PBS documentary, "Sweet Old Song," focused on the outpouring of art and music produced during their 20-year partnership, and immortalized Howard's homecoming to LaFollette and Knoxville, October 13-15, 2000.

Mr. Armstrong played Carnegie Hall; toured South America on a U.S. State Department-funded project; served as a consultant on the film, "The Color Purple"; became immortalized by comic book illustrator R. Crum; and performed at two World's Fairs nearly 50 years apart - Chicago 1933 and Knoxville 1982. Among countless honors, he was a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship, and the Tennessee Governor's Folk Heritage Award. He frequently attributed the music and language diversity that influenced him to the people, times and experiences of his youth in LaFollette and Knoxville. The last guardian of a vanishing African-American tradition of string-band music, Mr. Armstrong died July 27, 2003 at the age of 94 in Boston



The Campbell Culture Coalition believes that Mr. Armstrong's achievements are an outstanding example of striving for personal achievement against great odds; homage and love of home and roots; pursuit of the richness of art and music; and bringing joy to the audience around us.

The **awesome Louie Bluie Music & Arts Festival 2022**, our 15th event, is proudly produced by the Campbell Culture Coalition, a 501(C)(3) non-profit created in 2006, which has had a measurable impact in our community.

There is a history of accomplished Campbell County musicians whose talents and passions have been consistently passed to upcoming generations. Some have realized national and international fame. Looking around back in 2006, a handful of local citizens saw amazing visual artists whose works were barely recognized out of our area. And writers. And craftsmen - O! the craftsmen. And quilters, whose patterns and hand-me-down skills were rooted in the Old World before the United States became the United States.

All this value quietly and tenaciously conducted - even today - in our back yards and on our front porches.

After weeks of discussion this small core of individuals agreed on a mission to showcase our community. We aimed to uplift and celebrate our people, and by-the-by, invite the rest of the world to come see for themselves.

We launched the **Louie Bluie Music & Arts Festival** in 2007. Frankly, we didn't know what to expect --- and what we didn't expect was the flood of people who attended. What a Wow! factor. Their presence told us something. So we did it again, and we did it better. The Festival has become our mighty mouse. Our Pop! Bang! Pow!

It's based on an amazing man who claimed the culture of Campbell County influenced his course in life. It's for you. And about us. Enjoy! www.louiebluie.org

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Scan with your phone camera

Festival Map/Program

LOUIE BLUIE FESTIVAL FRIENDS:

Our Festival Friends provide a wide variety of tasks related to managing the festival and implementing the planning which results in a safe, harmonious execution on festival day.

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Visit Festival Headquarters Tent

Volunteers 100+

Thank you, All of You! The Festival simply can't happen without you!

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National Public Lands Day is September 24, 2022!

Led by the **National Environmental Education Foundation** in partnership with the National Park Service and other federal agencies, hundreds of thousands of volunteers help restore and preserve public lands of all types and sizes, from iconic national parks and rivers to local urban green spaces and everything in between. For more information, visit the Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail tent at this festival today.