

Reed, Ola Belle Campbell ^[1]

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Ola Belle Campbell Reed was a trailblazing pioneer for women in the oldtime and bluegrass music traditions.

Ola Belle Reed was born in 1915 at Grassy Creek in Ashe County, N.C., located in the New River Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina, to Arthur Harrison Campbell and Ella Mae Osborne. One of thirteen children, she came from a musical family and learned to play both guitar and clawhammer banjo at as a young child. Suffering the effects of the Depression, her father moved the family out of the Blue Ridge and settled near Rising Sun, Md., just south of the Mason-Dixon Line on the Maryland-Pennsylvania border.

While still a teenager, Reed began performing with her brother Alex Campbell and with an early version of the North Carolina Ridge Runners. Performing old time and country music around their home in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Reed and her brother paired up again after he returned from World War II. For many years, they could be heard live and in syndication over much of the country on a variety of stations, including WWVA in Wheeling, W.Va. During the early 1960s their weekly show, "Campbell's Corner," broadcast live from their country store in Oxford, Pa., of the same name, was heard over much of the eastern United States.

In 1949, Ola Belle married Bud Reed, himself a noted country musician, and with Alex they formed the New River Gang. Together they opened and operated New River Ranch, a popular country music park near Rising Sun. In the early 1960s, they closed New River and moved their operation north on US Route 1 to Sunset Park near Jennersville, Pa., where they performed regularly for the next 26 years. During the 1970s, the Reed family, now including sons David Reed and Ralph Reed, found enthusiastic audiences at many folk festivals, including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1972 and the Brandywine Mountain Music Convention. In 1986, Ola Belle Reed was recognized for her contributions to American folk music and culture when she was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship. A prolific songwriter, her best-known songs are "I've Endured," "The Springtime of Life," and especially "High on a Mountain." Del McCoury, a regular performer at Sunset Park, made "High on a Mountain" a bluegrass standard. Many others recorded the tune, including Nashville musician Marty Stuart.

In the late 1980s, Reed suffered a severe stroke that abruptly ended her career as a performer and songwriter. Ola Belle Reed died on August 16, 2002 in Rising Sun.

Additional Resources:

Reed, Ola Belle Collection 1960-1979, #20010, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/20010/> ^[2](accessed September 18, 2017).

Blueridge National Heritage Area. "Ola Belle Reed." <http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/ola-belle-...> ^[3](accessed September 18, 2017).

Henry, Murphy. 2013. *Pretty good for a girl women in bluegrass* Urbana: University of Illinois Press. <https://search.worldcat.org/title/856802959> ^[4]

Reed, Ola Belle, Henry H. Glassie, Steven Lance Ledbetter, Clifford R. Murphy, and Douglas Dowling Peach. 2015. *Ola Belle Reed and southern mountain music on the Mason-Dixon line*. Atlanta, Georgia: Dust to Digital. <https://search.worldcat.org/title/940650182> ^[5]

Winick, Stephen. "On Ola Belle Reed." September 2, 2015. Folklife Today [blog], American Folklife Center & Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. <https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2015/09/on-ola-belle-reed/> ^[6] (accessed September 18, 2017).

Henry Glassie's field research with Ola Belle Reed. Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University. <https://libraries.indiana.edu/glassie-reed> ^[7]

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