

ORAL HISTORY

ALWAYS ON THE SUNNY SIDE

VOICES FROM THE CARTER FAMILY FOLD

In 2009, SFA oral historian Amy Evans traveled to Hiltons, Virginia, to interview the women who run the Carter Family Fold. At the Fold, live music shares the bill with homemade Appalachian fare like soup beans, cornbread, and chili dogs.

IN 1927, A.P. CARTER, his wife Sara, and Sara's cousin Maybelle (who was married to A.P.'s brother) made the thirty-mile trek from their home in Hiltons, Virginia, to Bristol, Tennessee, to record a few songs.




The resulting Bristol Sessions came to be known as the “Big Bang” of country music.

Almost fifty years after those recordings, Janette Carter, daughter of A.P. and Sara, established the Carter Family Fold. In keeping with her father’s dying wish, Janette opened the small concert hall to celebrate her family and its contribution to country music, as well as the rich musical traditions of Appalachia. Janette played host to music fans every Saturday night for more than thirty years, opening shows with her brother Joe and son Dale and singing songs made famous by her parents, such as “Keep on the Sunny Side” and “Wildwood Flower.”

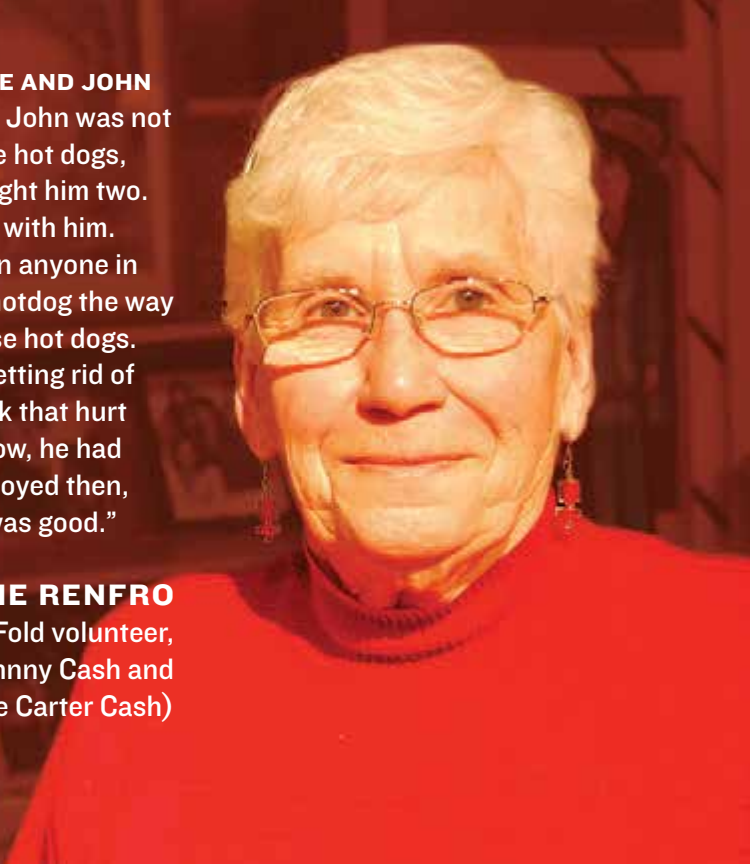
When Janette passed in 2006, her daughter Rita Forrester took over the Fold. Rita sits in with the band each Saturday night to welcome the crowd and pay tribute to her family. Before the music even starts, Rita, her family, and her friends prepare the food to serve that night. In addition to soup beans and cornbread, Fold concessions include egg salad, made from Janette’s recipe, and a menagerie of cakes baked by community women. Together, these women work to ensure that the Carter Family circle remains unbroken.





“GRANDMA CARTER WAS KNOWN for her molasses stack cakes. She would make them as high as thirteen, fourteen layers. You roll the layers out real thin, and molasses is what you use to sweeten them. And then in the middle, you fill it with homemade apple butter. You talk about good with a glass of milk. It doesn’t get better than that.”

— RITA FORRESTER
(granddaughter of A.P.
and Sara Carter)



“ONE NIGHT JUNE AND JOHN WERE HERE, and John was not supposed to have hot dogs, but Janette brought him two. He had his nurse with him. You’ve never seen anyone in your life cram a hotdog the way he crammed those hot dogs. I mean, he was getting rid of them! I don’t think that hurt him a bit. You know, he had something he enjoyed then, and I think that was good.”

— CHICKIE RENFRO
(30-year Fold volunteer,
speaking of Johnny Cash and
his wife June Carter Cash)



“**OUR COLESLAW** has a cooked vinegar dressing. We did that for two reasons. First of all, it’s really, really good with soup beans. Second, in the heat of August, you don’t have to worry about mayonnaise spoiling and poisoning people—which we certainly don’t want to do.”

— **PEGGY HENSLEY**
(Carter family cousin)



“**THERE ARE PEOPLE** who want to keep the old recipes alive, so I don’t think they’ll ever completely die out. Hopefully there will be a revival and more people will cook the old-fashioned way and play the old-fashioned music and keep our roots and our history alive.”

— **MARIANNA ROBERTS**
(Carter family cousin)