

## Great MUSIC ICON DIES at age 94

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Cass County joins the Music Industry in mourning the loss of one of its greatest music icons, Fred Martin, last surviving member of the CASS COUNTY BOYS. “Freddie” -- as he was known to most of his family, fans, and friends -- was born in Linden, Texas on June 22, 1916 to Harry and Ellen Martin. As a young boy, Freddie saw someone playing an accordion and was immediately fascinated. Ordering his own first accordion from the SEARS ROEBUCK catalogue, he taught himself to play. Extremely talented, he quickly began earning money playing at County Fairs and other local events. When Freddie was in his middle teens, it was common for his dad to put him on the train to perform in another town. Linden was then served by Jefferson and Northwest Railway, with a depot on the corner of Houston Street and Smithland (just west of the then brand new Linden Ice House). Mr. Martin would give the train porter a small amount of money to watch over Fred and make sure he got back on the train to Linden!

Unfortunately and very uncommon during this time, Fred’s parents divorced around 1930. Harry remarried, and Ellen moved to Trinity, Texas, to open a restaurant. The four Martin children ended up in various living situations. For a short while Fred worked as the “elevator boy” at the Marshall Hotel in Marshall, Texas, a very posh hotel in those days. He played his accordion and sang for extra money, which made him better known while he continued to polish his instrumental skills.

Fred’s father died on or about December 24, 1932 and Freddie was thereafter legally adopted by Virgil O. Stamps -- founder of the Stamps Baxter Music School and a publisher of songbooks. Fred moved to Abilene, Texas, to live with the Stamps family. Fred sang, played gospel tunes with the quartet, and taught voice lessons in the school after he completed his own school day.

During Fred’s 16<sup>th</sup> year, he was home-schooled after being struck by a car while walking and suffering a serious head injury. Nevertheless, he graduated with his class, earning the second highest GPA from Oak Cliff High School in Dallas. Fred attended Hardin Simmons University for two years, then in 1935 he accepted a very special and lucrative job opportunity at radio station WFAA in the BAKER HOTEL in Dallas.

The instrumental and vocal threesome known as the Cass County Kids started out with Freddie Martin as accordion soloist. In spring of 1938, as Freddie was chinking in a five-minute gap in the WFAA afternoon schedule with his accordion, guitarist Jerry Scoggins came along with his instrument and the two quickly connected. Soon Bert Dodson said goodbye to his slot as bass fiddle with the **Light Crust Doughboys** and became an official member of the up-and-coming Cass County trio – which assumed its final form with accordion, guitar, and rhythm section. The

following year, 1939, publicity director of WFAA Dick Jordan said "*If anything ever grew like Topsy, the Cass County Kids Trio of WFAA Dallas, did.*"

The Cass County Boys were unique in that the three originals stayed together for the entire lifespan of the trio. This period spanned from the 1930s through the mid 1950s. Their signature attire included colorful shirts, neckerchiefs, and ten-gallon hats along with western boots. In the beginning, their repertoire embraced only western and hillbilly tunes, but they were soon playing pop tunes as well. In fact, the musicians and their fans enjoyed popular music so much that the trio began mixing the two genres in about half and half.

It was from Freddie Martin's birthplace in the county seat of Cass County that the trio's name originated, and it was Ralph Nimmons, program director of WFAA, who first began referring to the threesome as the **Cass County Kids**. The popular trio played regularly on *The Early Birds* and other WFAA programs. They also performed for both the *Dr. Pepper-Dixie Network* and the *Texas Quality Network* and made weekly personal appearances around Dallas and surrounding cities. Music life was very eventful indeed during those early magical years.

During WWII **Gene Autry** saw the **Cass County Kids** perform at a Texas Military Base and was so impressed that he made them an offer to come to Hollywood after the war and work directly for him. In 1945 they accepted Autry's offer, changing their group name officially to the **Cass County Boys** in the process. The group performed with Gene Autry on the **Melody Ranch Radio Show** and appeared in several in Gene Autry films and on television. They toured with Mr. Autry about eleven years (until 1956), during which time they also appeared in Western films with Charles Starrett and Tex Ritter.

The group recorded for **Decca** and made transcriptions for the World Broadcasting Service and also for the Snader Company. While Fred was lead vocalist and band leader, Dodson was a superb bass player with a beautiful tenor voice, and therefore also much in demand as a studio musician. Scoggins later sang the lead in the popular "Beverly Hillbillies" TV theme. Of course, the three are remembered most fondly as a Western trio characterized by superb musicianship and smooth harmony. In later decades, the **Cass County Boys** reunited from time to time to perform together. Fred and Jerry Scoggins performed together for the last time on August 23, 1985, at the Pioneer Broadcasters Luncheon at the Sportsmen's Lodge, Studio City, California. There they received the *Golden Boot Award* and Fred made his last professional appearance as a musician. The popular trio were inducted into the **Western Music Association Hall of Fame** in 1996.

In his late 80s and 90s, Fred Martin suffered from Alzheimer's disease and was eventually unable to remain in his own home of 34 years in Northridge, CA. He died of Myocardial Infarction in Walnut Creek, CA, on November 26, 2010. Fortunately, Fred and daughter Lemora were able to spend special time together on Thanksgiving Day.

Fred was the last surviving member of the **Cass County Boys**. His wife of 68 years, Marjorie, died two years earlier, in October, 2008. One loving daughter, Lemora Martin, survives them.

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PHOTOS to distribute with the above text:



**Fred Martin and Virgil Stamps.**

(Front page of a typical Stamps Music Company pamphlet from around 1930. As shown on the image above, these 4-page music publications then sold for 15 cents/copy.)



**Above are the Cass County Boys:**

Bert Dodson on bass, Fred Martin on accordion, and Jerry Scoggins on guitar.



**Gene Autry's MELODY RANCH radio program ran on CBS from 1940 - 1956.**

Celebrating the 12th Anniversary of the show are Autry and his singing group The Cass County Boys. L to R are Bert Dodson, Gene Autry, Fred Martin, Jerry Scoggins.



**Fred Martin, Gene Autry and Jerry Scoggins, year 2000.**

(Photo courtesy of Hank deCato)