

Jim Farrell - Studio

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

It is a classic American story: Country boy works hard on his music, goes to Nashville and finds success and love. We've seen that movie before. Today, we'll learn about a different version of this story. Instead of a talented musician going from Kansas to Nashville, this musician made the journey from Nashville to Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jim Farrell, sometimes called Tennessee Jim, is the man who made this reverse migration from Nashville. He literally grew up in the music business. Jim was born and raised in a musical family in Nashville. His father had a music ministry and sang in a barbershop quartet. His mother sang with a Nashville Symphony Chorale.

"I grew up with harmony," Jim said. "We would be singing in the car when we went on family trips, and Dad would point at (my sister and I) and tell us to switch parts," Jim said. This musical training came in handy. By the age of 14, he was playing and singing with adult musical groups.

"My teacher was in a southern gospel group and they needed a bass player so I joined in," Jim said. He also took up the keyboard, guitar, bass and percussion. Soon he was doing sessions and backing artists who performed on the Grand Ole Opry.

When Jim was 15, he befriended a new kid who had moved to town. It turned out that the new kid was the son of a music publisher named Ben Hall who had traveled with Elvis Presley and gone on to become one of Nashville's most renowned recording engineers and independent music publishers. Ben Hall recorded such musical icons as Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and Alabama. Jim Farrell started working with Ben Hall and would work with him on and off for the next 20 years.

Jim earned a full scholarship in music at David Lipscomb College in Nashville, and was one of the first students in recording industry management at Middle Tennessee State University. Later he excelled in video production at Davidson School of Business.

Jim became an excellent recording session musician, producer, and music publisher. He also helped Ben Hall build two different recording studios. Ben taught him how to hear and adjust acoustics, know sound frequencies, identify hit songs, and co-write music.

Jim became interested in old-time cowboy songs such as classic westerns from the Sons of the Pioneers, as he had heard his father sing. "I was mesmerized by the intricate harmonies," Jim said.

In the mid-1990s, Jim met a cowboy singer in Nashville named Stu Stuart. The two got together with another man and formed a western singing group of their own but when the third man died of cancer, the group couldn't continue. Stu Stuart decided he needed to move back to be closer to his aging mother who lived in Kansas, and he recruited Jim Farrell to come join him in Wichita. They formed a group now known as the Diamond W Wranglers.

Jim recorded the group's CDs. The singing group developed an avid fan base which followed them on musical tours to such faraway locations as Carnegie Hall and the Great Wall of China. Wow. Jim also met and married Martha, whose First Generation video production business has been previously profiled here.

In 2008, Jim opened a recording studio of his own which he is now remodeling and expanding. The studio is in the rural community of Towanda, population 1,319 people. Now, that's rural.

Clients such as Rex Allen Jr. and Roy Rogers Jr. have traveled hundreds of miles to record with Jim. His work has earned many honors, including Western Producer of the Year. Martha has now relocated First Generation Video to the facility at Towanda, meaning that audio and video services are available under one roof.

For more information, go to www.fgvideo.com or www.jimfstudios.com.

It's like the classic American story of the gifted musician who goes to Nashville, but in this case, the musician came from Nashville to rural Kansas. We thank Stu Stuart and commend Jim and Martha Farrell for making a difference with their creative talents. Nashville's loss was Kansas's gain.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.