

Blues Ain't Blind



January is, among other things, "National Eye Care Month." This brought to mind many of the blind blues artists from the past.

It was a tough life for a blind person, especially in the early days of poverty, blatant racism and disease. Many of them, unable to work the only jobs available to them that mainly consisted of manual labor, learned how to play an instrument and became corner blues artists as a means to try and support themselves.

Some ended up being recorded. Names such as Blind Willie Johnson (*pictured*), Blind Willie McTell, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind John Davis, Sonny Terry, Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller,

Blind Teddy Darby, Blind Joe Reynolds, Sleepy John Estes, Blind Joe Taggart, Reverend Gary Davis, and Snooks Eaglin come to mind.

Some were born blind or became very soon after, while some were blinded by accidents (or sadly deliberate), some were blinded by diseases (venereal disease, smallpox, measles, glaucoma, etc.) that had no cure at the time, some were blinded by altercations (gunshot, rocks). Certainly, malnutrition may have played a part. It was a bleak existence for many, so the fact that they actually were recorded and/or signed to a label like Paramount Records is amazing, although that didn't assure them consistent financial gain in the long run and many died in poverty. A few made it big and still influence artists to this day.

A few other more contemporary blues-roots based, blind artists include the late Jeff Healey, and Ray Charles, the soulful Stevie Wonder, and The Blind Boys of Alabama (the majority of whom are or were vision impaired.)

Blues Society News
