

Remembering Reece: In honor of Reece friend, supporter John Nix



John Nix with John Cochran: John Nix performed with John Cochran and the Cowhands at the Towns County Historical Society headquarters on Oct. 21, 2019. Pictured here: Jeri Ann King, John Cochran, John Nix and Will Potts. Photo/Submitted

John Nix was a humble man known by most and loved by all, a true artist!

He was the young brick mason who did the original beautiful brickwork on Shady Grove Methodist Church, where he would spend a lot of his life worshipping and singing. Many years later, he was a moving force in starting the Shady Grove Band.

John planted cane in his fields to use at the Sorghum Festival. Although he was a great farmer, he is better known for his singing Classic Country and Gospel music, playing the fiddle, mandolin, and guitar.

Every year, he would play and sing at the Sorghum Festival, the Union County Farmers Market, the Union County Historic Courthouse, Towns County Historical Society, Mountain Home Music, Georgia Mountain Fair and Fairview Baptist Church. He recorded some of his beautiful old hymns for the Owl-town Church of God's 100th-year celebration. John and his brothers, Cranford and Clayton, were inducted into the Georgia Country Music Hall of Fame in 2001.

He was pleased to open the 2019 "Maters and Music Festival" sponsored by the Byron Herbert Reece Society with his fiddle. He said it needed to be lively! At the time, he asked to speak personally about his



John Nix at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm in 2019. Photo by Jerri Gill

friend Byron Herbert Reece, telling of when Reece was a Lay Minister at Shady Grove and Salem Methodist Churches. We had over 200 guests in the pavilion that day listening to the beautiful sounds ringing throughout the Choestoe Valley. He was pleased when I told him that the Byron Herbert Reece Society wanted to bestow upon him an honorary membership.

John was invited to tour the Reece Farm and take some photos for the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald for the upcoming Festival's Press Release. He wanted a picture in the rocking chair on the front porch of the Heritage

Center. He loved playing and singing in the Welcome Center and on the back porch at the Reece Farm.

He was grateful for the opportunity to sing at the Reece Farm, saying it made him feel young again. I don't think he realized that he was the celebrity! Everyone came to hear him play the "Orange Blossom Special" or to sing "I'll Fly Away." He has left behind shoes that cannot be filled. He truly is a legend.

I am thankful for every minute that I have had the pleasure of talking with him. John, your legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of more friends and family than can be counted! I think that Hub Reece would be happy to know that his friend John enjoyed singing at his homeplace. It is our honor and privilege to lovingly "remember our friend John Nix."

***The Byron Herbert Reece Society is appreciative to the publisher of this newspaper for providing the space for "Remembering Reece." We are deeply saddened by the passing of our dear friend and Byron Herbert Reece Society Member John Nix. When we again gather in the pavilion for singing events, John Nix will be very much in our hearts and minds. Godspeed, John! Jerri Duncan Gill, Chair The Byron Herbert Reece Society

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for the jokes they shared and the stories his father told him.

"He was great, he was patient - I'm not, so that worked out pretty good," Jeff said. "He taught me how to curb my temper with some patience. He was always supporting me and put up with me when most people wouldn't have, so I couldn't really ask for more than that.

"Around here, everybody loved him. If the world had more like him, it'd probably be a more peaceful place. His presence will be missed in concerts when they start having them regular again. He was always the face that was around.

"The family will miss him; he always had something good to say, was always cheerful, always happy to help somebody out, was never a burden. We were probably sometimes a burden on him, but he never let it show."

Nix played everything from Bluegrass to Gospel on fiddle, mandolin and guitar, with one of his favorite songs to perform being "The Great Speckled Bird." He was accompanied by an untold number of local musicians over the years, including many who have passed also, like his brothers.

"So many of them have gone on," Nix said in 2016. "That's the sad part, but it's just something that happens. I've got more good memories about my pickin' than anything. When one of them passes on, you miss them, but you've still got good memories, even though they're gone."

In 2012, Nix was honored by the Historical Society, the Sorghum Festival and Shady Grove Methodist Church, with April 29 of that year being designated "John Nix Day."

The 2016 proclamation naming Feb. 6 that year as "John Nix and the Country Cousins Day" by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris recounted the following history of the band in Union County and abroad:

"John Nix and his brothers, Homer, Clayton and Cranford, started the band Country Cousins in the 1950s, with Homer Nix on the guitar, Clayton Nix on the mandolin, John Nix on the fiddle and guitar, and later Cranford with a banjo, replacing Homer.

"The Country Cousins have played music all over the mountain region for the past 65 years, including square dances at Vogel and the Walasi-Yi Inn on Blood Mountain, and Country Cousins played with the world-famous Skillet Lickers at the Gainesville Civic Center in 1956, and they played for Sen. Zell Miller's gubernatorial campaigns. "Country Cousins played



John Nix Photo by Jerri Gill



Former Shady Grove UMC Pastor Winfred Pitts performed music at John Nix's funeral with help from Jimmy Waldroup Oct. 18. Nix was known to play many a funeral himself over the years. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

with Bill Monroe at Young Harris College to kick off the first wagon train to the Bald in the late 1950s, and then played the first wagon train dance on Bald Mountain.

"Country Cousins played for many dances in the Old Masonic Lodge here in Blairsville. They were also the original band to play at the Opry in the Wildwood in the 1960s.

"Country Cousins were the inaugural band for the Blairsville Sorghum Festival and have been the house band for the festival every year for the past 45 years.

"And Country Cousins have played for many street dances on the Blairsville Square, fundraisers, nursing homes, reunions, and benefits, making them well known and respected in the community."

Mountain View Funeral Home had charge of Nix's arrangements, holding a viewing on Saturday and a service on Sunday, with Revs. Winfred Pitts and Rob Rollins officiating inside Mountain

View Chapel. Together, they highlighted Nix's terrific sense of humor, work in life as a brick mason, immeasurable talent as a musician and love of a good meal.

Providing music for the occasion were Pitts and longtime friend Jimmy Waldroup, both on guitar, with piano accompaniment by Angie Burrell of Fairview Baptist Church.

Songs performed were "Who Will Sing for Me," "Blessed Assurance" and "When They Ring Those Golden Bells."

John Maryland Nix is survived by his wife Susan Nix of Spencer, West Virginia; sons Jeff Nix of Blairsville and Andy Cheek of West Virginia; sister Charlotte Collins of Blairsville; grandchildren Sydney Michelle Cheek and Michael Bryan Cheek, also of West Virginia; and many other relatives and friends.

He was interred at Shady Grove Cemetery the afternoon of Oct. 18.

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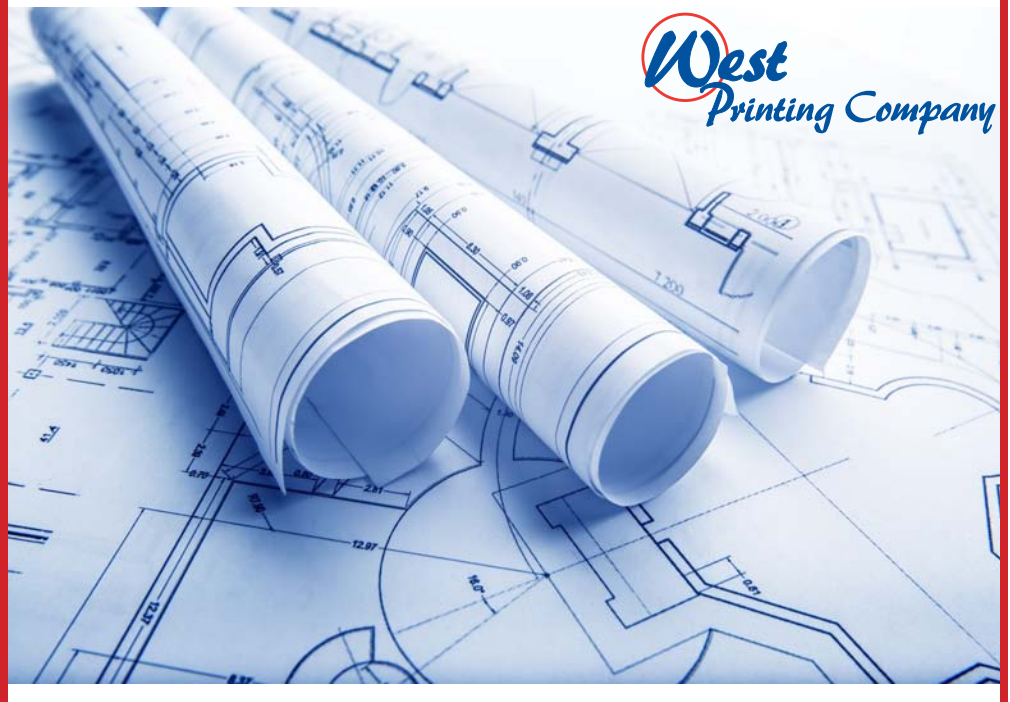
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