

REUAL THOMAS AND RENFRO VALLEY
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Biography

Reual Omer Thomas was an important figure in the formative years of John Lair's Renfro Valley, particularly after the operation moved to Kentucky in 1939. A native of Clinton County, Kentucky, Thomas was an accomplished quartet singer as well as active rural singing school teacher. His expertise in these areas profoundly shaped many aspects of the sacred music programming and events sponsored by Renfro Valley for over fifteen years during the organization's most successful period. Not only did he lead various quartets that performed on many of Renfro Valley's network radio programs, but he also organized many gospel music events (monthly singings, singing schools, quartet contests, an annual all-night and all-day sing) on the grounds of Renfro Valley that served the surrounding local and regional communities of Kentucky.

Born in 1906/07 near the rural post office of what was then known as Tearcoat in Clinton County, Kentucky,¹ Thomas grew up, in his own words, "under the strict supervision of one of those 'Do-Re-Me' singing school teacher fathers."² In 1950, while filling in for John Lair as emcee for the *Renfro Valley Gatherin'*, Thomas recalled how during his boyhood he was first introduced to the shape-note method that was taught by his father and would later become part of his own livelihood.

During my first years in the rural school, a chum boy came home with me one night, and we were trying to pass away a few hours right after supper, before my mom called bedtime. My dad had already gone to his bed. Lying in bed, he suggested we try learning the musical scale in the old fashioned shaped note system. Of course we were looking for something to do, and we said if he would draw the face of the notes we would learn them. The trade was made, and as a result of that one few minutes spent learning the notes I have learned to sing as well as I have.³

In 1916, at the age of nine, Thomas moved with his family to another unusually-named community in Clinton County called Seventy Six, so named for the majestic Seventy Six Falls located nearby. It was here that he grew into adolescence and began frequently accompanying his father on trips into southeastern Kentucky communities to teach singing schools. On these outings, Thomas's role became that of a "guinea pig" of sorts, serving as an example to these communities that, with a little training and hard work, almost anyone was capable of leading songs. As he once recollected, "When I had finished [directing a song], I would hear some good community leader say, 'If he can do that I can'...thus another leader was born."⁴

During his high school days in Albany, Kentucky, Thomas met his future wife, Flossie Lee Garner, at a choir practice. Flossie, born in nearby Ida, Kentucky, was also in high school in Albany at the time. The two were married after high school, and for a period of time Thomas attended Western Kentucky State College. His focus of study at Western is unclear, but both Thomas and his wife were school teachers in rural south-central Kentucky during the early years of their marriage. It was also during these years that Thomas began his own work as an active shape-note singing school teacher in the area. Thomas's own education in singing school instruction continued after his marriage as well. In 1931 he attended the James D. Vaughan Normal School of Music in

Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and he was also an alumnus of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music in Dallas, Texas.⁵ This continuing education would serve Thomas well as he later relied heavily on these connections for some of his work at Renfro Valley.

It is unclear exactly when Reual and Flossie Thomas decided to form their first gospel quartet, but it was definitely by the mid-1930s. Author, Lynwood Montell writes that the Thomases had formed their group the Crusaders in the mid-30s but did not join Renfro Valley until the show moved to Kentucky.⁶ However, an article in a 1944 issue of the *Renfro Valley Bugle* reports that they were first hired as the leaders of a group called the Kentucky Drifters while John Lair was still at WLW in Cincinnati and that they changed their name, at “Flossie’s suggestion,” to the Crusaders shortly thereafter.⁷

Regardless of their early history, the Crusaders were a regular part of the *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* by December, 1939. From this point forward Thomas became increasingly involved in various capacities at Renfro Valley and maintained a heavy involvement until the mid-1950s. Both Jim Gaskin and Ann Lair Henderson (one of Lair’s daughters) remarked on the extent of Thomas’s work at Renfro Valley. According to Henderson, Thomas was almost like an assistant to her father.



Reual and Flossie Thomas

Reual was very instrumental. He was real close with Dad on a lot of rehearsal time and productions of the shows other than just gospel music. He just had a very good musical background, and Daddy found him very helpful for...conducting rehearsals a lot. And the hymn singing on stage...on Sunday morning and all that, he kind of took all that over. And that was a big help... Dad admired his talents very much... They spent a lot of time in Dad’s office discussing all their plans. He [Thomas] worked with him real close.⁸

Among other things, Thomas was crucial to the early success of the annual “All-Day Singing and Dinner on the Grounds” that began in the early 1940s, an event that consistently broke attendance records at Renfro Valley during his tenure. He also played a major role, both administratively and as a judge, in the national gospel quartet contests held at Renfro Valley during the 40s and 50s. In addition, Thomas worked as an emcee both with traveling shows and for the *Barn Dance* and the *Gatherin’* at times when John Lair was away, and he even helped for a time in booking Renfro Valley road shows and personal appearances in area schoolhouses and theaters.⁹ One particularly telling photograph that perhaps indicates Thomas’s status at Renfro Valley shows him posing contemplatively with the famous 1941 Buick brake drum that has been struck at the conclusion of nearly every *Gatherin’* since its inception in 1943. Resembling a tolling church bell, it was but a short time before that sound came to embody everything special about the *Gatherin’*.



Reual Thomas and 1941 Buick brake drum

In addition to teaching, conducting singing schools, and working at Renfro Valley, Thomas became involved in a number of other business endeavors as well. He purchased an apartment building near Renfro Valley that by 1945 housed a number of Renfro's entertainers including his own family.¹⁰ He had expanded his ventures considerably by 1954, when an August article in the *Bugle* reported that Thomas "owns two farms, considerable business property in Mt. Vernon, Ky., and owns and operates Farmer's Feed

and Supply Co., near Brodhead, Ky."¹¹ Thomas was a successful

businessman and—perhaps unsurprisingly—benevolent and generous with his wealth. Virginia Sutton remembers him offering to loan her money to help purchase a home.¹² His mill sponsored concerts featuring Renfro Valley performers after the organization had been recently dropped from its sponsor.¹³ Pete Stamper writes that Thomas even once loaned John Lair money when the latter was experiencing a period of particularly tight financial constraints.¹⁴

Life for the Thomases became even more active in the fall of 1948 when their only child, Danny Omer Thomas, was born.¹⁵ Although the *Bugle* announced Flossie's retirement from radio so that she could raise her child, by April of the following year she was again singing with Thomas on the *Gatherin'*. As the family entered the 1950s, Thomas was as active as ever at Renfro Valley, performing regularly as a duet with Flossie and also with his quartet, emceeing occasionally on the *Gatherin'*, writing some columns for the *Bugle*, and organizing their All-Night and All-Day Sings as well as a national quartet contest during 1953 and 1954.

It is unclear exactly why the Thomases ceased performing at Renfro Valley. Reual Thomas's quartets had stopped appearing regularly by mid-1951, but he and his wife continued as a popular duo for another four years. However, after mid-1955 the couple virtually disappears from the Renfro Valley programs. The only exceptions are Reual Thomas's starring role in one of the *Renfro Valley Folks* television episodes filmed in 1956 and a couple of random duo appearances on the *Gatherin'* in 1957.

It is quite possible that the loss of General Foods sponsorship for the *Gatherin'* in 1955 played a role. That year, the March issue of the *Bugle* announced the bad news, reporting that the show's national airplay—"between five and seven million listeners in practically every state in the Union"—was in jeopardy.¹⁶ Renfro Valley's performers also took a hit. In the words of Linda Martin, "When [Lair] would lose a sponsor, why, most of the talent would lose a paycheck."¹⁷ The Thomas' financial independence, however, would have likely absorbed the loss without much trouble. Pete Stamper indicates that it was precisely Thomas's other business ventures that ultimately caused him to stop performing at Renfro.¹⁸

Jim Gaskin cited “private reasons” for the Thomases departure, and more than one of the individuals I interviewed recalled that the couple experienced marital struggles in the late-1950s. Flossie died in a car accident near Broadhead, Kentucky in the early 1960s.

Reual Thomas died on March 25, 1959, after a long battle with kidney problems.¹⁹ Linda Martin, who had become a nurse by then, remembers being at the bedside of Thomas in those final days in hospital, “He wanted me to pray with him...He was a good Christian man, he and Flossie both, they were good Christian people. He prayed, and I prayed with him. I’ll never forget it because we had been friends for years. Me and Emory thought a lot of him.”²⁰ As the obituary in the *Bugle* read, “Another Renfro Valley old-timer is gone...old-timer not in years, but in length of time associated with the *Renfro Valley Gatherin’* and *Barndance*.”²¹ Indeed, Reual Thomas was barely into his fifties at his death; however, in light of his many contributions to Renfro Valley and gospel music in Kentucky, his legacy is as rich and full as any.

Singing School Activities

Thomas maintained an active schedule as a singing school teacher throughout his time at Renfro Valley. Thus, in addition to fine quartet music, Thomas provided Lair with a direct connection to the world of singing schools, an American tradition that stretched back centuries and fit in perfectly with Lair’s tapestry of “the valley where time stands still.” Lair wasted no time in weaving Reual’s background into his nostalgic imagery of Renfro Valley. In the first broadcast of his short-lived *Monday Night in Renfro Valley* program on August 5, 1940, Lair promotes a soundscape that he hopes listeners will attach to the singing of Thomas’s Crusaders quartet:

I noticed some folks jest comin’ in... It’s part of the choir frum over at 76, Kentucky, an’ I know they’re gonna sing a song fer us, an’...it’s gonna remind me of the kinda singin’ we usta do right here in Redbud Schoolhouse on Sundasy [*sic*]. As they sing, I’m gonna set here an’ look back over the years an’ see myself—an’ lotsa you other folks here—barefooted kids, settin’ here on split log benches attendin’ regler Sunday services in the old log school-house, which served as a church house on Sunday, an’ I’m gonna live over, fer jest a minnit, a part of my life I’ll never forget... Some night we’ll have a regler old-fashioned singin’ school here in the school house an’ we’ll sing jest about everything in the book.²²

For Lair it made no difference that the song sung by the Crusaders that night—either “I’d Rather Live By the Side of the Road” or “Turn Your Radio On” (both by Albert Brumley)—was written within the last five years and about as contemporary as could be at the time.

Lair also invited Thomas to bring singing school classes and choirs to the Renfro Valley stage. As early as 1943, on one of the first broadcasts of the *Gatherin’*, Lair featured one of Reual’s singing classes from Ottawa Baptist Church (the Thomases home church for several years) in Ottawa, Kentucky, on the opening hymn, emphasizing that the choir “sang frum shape notes in

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the old-time way.”²³ Thomas also closed out Renfro Valley’s very first Red Bud and Music Festival in 1946 with a performance by one of his singing classes.

In 1948, Lair presented another one of Thomas’s singing school classes on the *Gatherin’*. The performance, which survives on a radio transcription disc in the Berea College Sound Archive, features two selections by the Cedar Springs Baptist Church from Casey County, Kentucky, “[Glory Up There](#)” and “[Singing Keeps Me Happy](#).” On the recording, Lair’s introduction implies that such performances on Renfro programs by Thomas’s groups are not uncommon. One can also hear firsthand Lair’s promotion of the group as an “old-fashioned singing school” despite the fact that they are singing newer seven-shape gospel hymns. Also of interest is the choir’s singing of the shapes before the words. Although this is common in older, or “Fasola,” shape-note singing (e.g. “Sacred Harp” singing), it is somewhat rare in seven-shape, or “Doremi,” gospel music performance. It is likely that Lair encouraged Thomas to have the group sing the shapes in order to help give the performance an “old-timey” authenticity more in line with his image of Renfro Valley.

In addition to the benefits Lair received by Thomas’s singing school activities, Thomas no doubt gained as well from the association. His exposure at Renfro Valley surely assisted him in filling up his schedule with teaching engagements, and the performance opportunities he could offer his classes was both good motivation for his students and a nice showcase for his work. One example of such mutual advantage was a singing school sponsored by Renfro Valley in July, 1948. Organized by Thomas, the three-week school brought in instructors that were “among the South’s best” and taught various instruments and even piano repair as well as singing.²⁴ Although the turn out was apparently not as good as expected due to poor road conditions, Lair notes that people from afar had come to participate, with one group from Wayne County, Kentucky, traveling “one hundred and twenty miles by automobile each night, with roads that are none too good at that.”²⁵ With the conclusion of the singing school coinciding with the All-Day Sing, Lair featured Thomas’s student choirs on that morning’s *Gatherin’* broadcast as well as the broadcasted portion of the afternoon sing.

Thomas involvement with local gospel singing seems to have only increased in the late-40s and early 50s. During the summer of 1949, he held monthly sings at Renfro Valley’s big barn, and in the early fifties he would publish announcements of local singings taking place in various area churches and communities in his *Bugle* columns. In August of 1950, he filled in as emcee for the *Gatherin’* and used the opportunity to bring in four different quartets from the local area as guests. In addition, his singing school teaching seems to have been as active as ever, with him announcing several engagements in the *Bugle* during the summers of 1953 and 1954 in such counties as Madison, Rockcastle, and Mercer.

Thomas’s swan song with Renfro Valley came in 1956, when Lair asked him to be a part of the special *Renfro Valley Folks* television series being sponsored by Pillsbury Mills, Inc. The third of thirteen shows completely focused on documenting one of Thomas’s singing schools in action and purportedly “entirely authentic...and just as it is being done today.”²⁶ This was Thomas’s last large-scale involvement with Renfro Valley, a fitting conclusion to his long association with the establishment as its local “old-fashioned music teacher.”²⁷

THE THOMAS QUARTETS

The Crusaders

Reual Thomas's initial ticket into Renfro Valley was his gospel quartet singing. From the late-30s until the early-50s he led various quartets on Lair's programs, and he was also unique in that nearly all of his quartets were not simply aggregations of other Valley cast members. Unlike most quartets throughout Renfro's history, members of his groups were often individuals whose involvement at Renfro Valley went little beyond their work in Thomas's quartet. Such a group did not come along again until perhaps the Jubilee Four in the late-70s. Thomas is by far the most important individual when it comes to gospel quartet singing at Renfro Valley during its first twenty years.



The Crusaders (ca. 1940) From left: Reual Thomas, Flossie Thomas, Leslie Andrews, and Dempsey Rainwater.

Although there is discrepancy as to the circumstances surrounding Thomas's hiring by John Lair (see above), by the end of 1939 his Crusaders quartet was singing regularly at Renfro Valley. The membership of this quartet when it joined likely consisted of Thomas singing lead, his wife Flossie singing alto, and fellow Clinton County residents Marvin York singing bass and Leslie Andrews providing the baritone and guitar accompaniment.²⁸ Although

Andrews remained with the Thomases for a few years, the bass chair was somewhat of a revolving door. Lynwood Montell claims that York left in 1940 and was briefly replaced by Morris Gaskin, although Gaskin must have sung with them for just a very short time, for on August 5, 1940, J.D. Powell is given as the bass singer.²⁹ Regardless, at some point during 1940, Dempsey Rainwater settled in and continued as their bass singer for some time. Rainwater, who was from northern Georgia, appears with the group in a photograph from the *Renfro Valley Keepsake* published in late-1940 and again in another photograph from sometime circa 1942. Renfro Valley cast member Glenn Pennington replaced Rainwater briefly until Thomas replaced both Pennington and Andrews with cousins, Clay and Jeff Colson, probably in 1943. The quartet finally disbanded sometime in early 1944 apparently due to a throat infection which prevented Flossie from singing for several months.

During its existence, the Crusaders sang regularly on the *Barn Dance*, and they were an important aspect to Lair's more subdued, scripted programs such as *Monday Night in Renfro Valley* and the *Gatherin'*. On the *Barn Dance*, Lair often programmed the group after a sponsor advertisement, likely in order to provide an appropriate buffer while transitioning from the raucous country and dance material to a sacred number. Five recordings of this group from early 1941 have been preserved in the Berea College Sound Archive. Due to the dates represented, it is likely that these recordings consist of Andrews and Rainwater as the outside singers.

The style of the Crusaders is not markedly different from a typical southern gospel quartet of the time. As a mixed quartet (both male and female members), they could achieve a sound that was more mild and rounded than all-male groups, which were the majority in Kentucky's gospel quartet scene at the time.³⁰ On the Berea recordings, Andrews provides a simple strum on the guitar to introduce each verse as opposed to the flashier instrumental "turnarounds" featured by some quartets. In this way the Crusaders resemble groups such as the Chuck Wagon Gang, another mixed quartet gaining national popularity at the time, which generally preferred controlled delivery over energetic theatrics. The repertoire represented by both the surviving recordings and preserved scripts shows that Thomas, like many of the quartets of the period, leaned toward performing newer, more recently composed songs that could place them apart from other groups. The group rendered a heavy dose of Albert E. Brumley material, with "I'd Rather Live the Side of the Road" recurring quite often. Although Thomas often programmed selections such as "[Give the World a Smile](#)" that highlighted individual members, on the whole his repertoire seems to achieve a nice balance between restraint and liveliness.

"[I Want to Keep Singing](#)," a more obscure selection, provides glimpse of the Crusaders in fine form. With an arrangement typical of newer material at the time, each member is allowed brief solo spots while the ensemble work is tight and robust. The blend of Flossie's alto with the three male voices is especially audible, and the swifter tempo is representative of the kind of feel Lair preferred for sacred material on the *Barn Dance*. The other four recordings are just as worthy with regard to their quality and execution, but they do not represent much of a departure in terms of material. All are of a similar pace except "[I Feel A Stranger](#)," a mid-tempo song featuring Thomas that experienced marginal popularity after being recorded by Charlie Monroe in the late-1950s. "[I Got a Longing To Go Home](#)" also mostly features Thomas while "[Come On Dear Lord and Get Me](#)," later recorded by the Country Gentleman in the 1970s, is a nice showcase here for Rainwater. "[When I Wake Up in Glory Land](#)" is primarily homorhythmic on the verse, but the chorus displays some interesting contrapuntal qualities.

The Four Tones

After the Crusaders dissolved, Thomas wasted no time in putting together a completely new group. During the early summer of 1944, he was traveling to many radio stations in the South to oversee and judge preliminary quartet contests in preparation for the first of Renfro Valley's national quartet contests of the 40s and 50s. While at station WPTF in Raleigh, North

Carolina, Thomas heard a group called the Four Tones made up of future gospel star Lee Roy Abernathy, Carroll "Shorty" Bradford, Paul "Curley" Kinsey, and "Little" Johnny New. It is unclear exactly why (perhaps Abernathy had left the group), but in September of 1944 Bradford, singing tenor, and Kinsey, a bass, relocated to Renfro Valley to join Thomas in a new version of the Four Tones, and they began being featured regularly. Singing baritone and playing guitar for the group was Howard Steele from Corbin, Kentucky, who had previously worked for a brief time with the Crusaders.³¹



The Four Tones (ca. 1944)

Such a powerhouse group including Bradford, a singer who could amaze audiences with his incredible vocal range, implies that Thomas was hoping to reach a new level of professionalism with this quartet. Unfortunately, this lineup did not last long; by the following January, Kinsey (who would become an original member of Wally Fowler's legendary Oak Ridge Quartet in 1945) and Bradford were back in their home state of Georgia and Steele was back at his day job at the L&N Railroad in Corbin. Thomas desperately tried to keep the quartet alive. Flossie filled in for a time and he recruited some more singers on another trip to the South in early-1945, even securing a 5:30am morning radio show for the group that April. By May, however, the quartet's membership had changed again and was listed in the *Bugle* as the Thomases, Glenn Pennington, Shorty Bradford, and pianist Herschel Collins.³² Three months later the group had lost its morning radio spot and the Thomases were described as a duet and "former" members of the Four Tones.³³ Bradford continued on at Renfro in a solo capacity for some time, but the quartet was effectively finished.

The Four Tones were no doubt a top-notch quartet, especially when they boasted talent like Bradford and Kinsey. However, Thomas soon found the group to be a victim of the rampant personnel turnover that plagued most such quartets at the time. No recordings of the group have surfaced, but from the Renfro Valley scripts it appears that they maintained much of the same repertoire that the Crusaders had performed.

The Seventy Six Quartet

After a brief reunion of the Crusaders in December of 1946, Thomas seems to have realized that he could maintain more stable quartet if he staffed it with local, semi-professional singers who were not interested in being lured away from Renfro Valley. In the following February, he reformed the Crusaders with the Colsons and Flossie under a new name, the Seventy Six Quartet.³⁴ The name change was allegedly bestowed by Lair, but regardless it was a wise move—during the late-1940s two other gospel groups had emerged in south-central Kentucky that went by the name "Crusaders."³⁵

Flossie apparently retired from the Seventy Six Quartet in late-1948 to raise her newborn son, Danny, and although she may have returned for a time she was eventually replaced by Edward Snell, changing the group to an all-male lineup. It was also likely around that time that the Colsons left the group, with Leslie Andrews returning to sing baritone and perhaps replace Thomas on guitar and Morris Gaskin resuming the bass duties. It really was quite a reunion of former Crusaders. A repertoire list for the group survives and contains thirty-one songs. It reveals Thomas's preference for current singing convention favorites mixed in with some newer compositions; over one-fifth of the songs are by composer Albert E. Brumley, with Luther Presley, J.B. Coats, and Vep Ellis also each making strong showings.³⁶

The quartet appears to have been very popular at Renfro Valley from its inception, regularly performing on both the *Barn Dance* and the *Gatherin'*. At one point there was talk of General Foods sponsoring the group on a fifteen-minute daily radio program over CBS, but Gaskin, a reservist, was called back to the service in early-1951. The sponsor was apparently not willing to accept a replacement and rescinded the radio deal, and instead of regrouping, Thomas appears to have thought it best to dissolve the quartet for good.³⁷ He was considerably occupied with other aspects of Renfro Valley, and he and Flossie had become a popular duo on both the *Barn Dance* and *Gatherin'* by that time as well. Perhaps the time was not there to keep the quartet going.

Four recordings of the Seventy Six Quartet survive in Berea's archives, and all are interesting for a variety of reasons. Although some sources say that Gaskin's wife, June,

played piano with the group for a time, all of these recordings feature guitar accompaniment. The earliest, "[I Have Heard about Heaven](#)" from the *Gatherin'* on March 7, 1948, is before Flossie Thomas's reported departure and might feature Thomas playing the guitar. Indeed, the guitar work is different than any of the other Thomas quartet recordings and even includes turnarounds between the verses. The song itself, relatively new in the late-1940s, was apparently still being sung among amateur gospel groups in south-central Kentucky in the 1980s.³⁸ It features a prominent bass lead on the chorus that, due to the voice's timbral similarity with the later recordings, is most likely Morris Gaskin. There is also a version of Albert Brumley's "[Did You Ever Go Sailing?](#)" from the *Gatherin'* sometime in 1948 (likely it is late-1948 due to the absence of Flossie's alto voice). This recording features a second guitarist that ornaments the choruses and plays turnarounds before subsequent verses. "[Did You Ever Go Sailing?](#)" is captured again in one of the last performances by the group at Renfro Valley. Also from the *Gatherin'*, the second version is from March of 1951, and features only a trio. The absence of Morris Gaskin's prominent bass is conspicuous, and it is interesting to compare this trio version with the quartet version from a few years before. Perhaps to offset this loss, the '51 performance boasts a revved-up accompaniment complete with guitar, fiddle, bass, and drums. The end of the group was near—one last appearance during the first week of the following month would mark the end of the Seventy Six Quartet at Renfro Valley.

The one other recording of the group preserved in the archive is from the promotional demo that Lair put together with Tom Wood, Jr., as part of the sales pitch that won them the legendary sponsorship deal with General Foods in 1950. The fact that the Seventy Six Quartet was included among the select group of artists on the demo testifies to their level of popularity and importance to the programs at Renfro Valley. This recording is a short medley featuring two very different songs that had become staples of gospel repertoire by that time. The first, "[The Old Rugged Cross](#)," was written by George Bennard and had been popularized through Billy Sunday's revivals during the early-twentieth century. The second, "[Give the World a Smile](#)," was one of the first songs to become a major hit with gospel audiences after being recorded by the Stamps All-Star Quartet in 1927. This was largely because it was one of the earliest to feature each voice part in the complex antiphonal style that became a hallmark of so much gospel music during the subsequent decades. In the medley, the slow, stately manner of the first song contrasts wonderfully with the quickness and energy of the second, and the Seventy Six Quartet executes each with a refinement that could compete with any professional quartet recording of the time. The quality of the recording also allows one to hear the quartet—whose personnel at the time most likely included Snell, Andrews, and Gaskin—at one of its best moments.

- ¹ See “Ruel and Flossie Thomas,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (August 1954): 1; and “Four Tones,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (December 15, 1944): 3. Unless otherwise noted, much of the Thomases biographical information is culled from these two articles.
- ² Reual Thomas, “Let’s Keep Singing,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (May 1953): 4.
- ³ Program script for the *Renfro Valley Gatherin’*, 26 August 1950, John Lair Papers (JLP), Hutchins Library, Berea College (HLBC)
- ⁴ Thomas, “Let’s Keep Singing,” (May 1953).
- ⁵ Thomas, “Let’s Keep Singing,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (September 1953): 3; and “Singing Along with Reual Thomas,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (June 1954): 4.
- ⁶ William Lynwood Montell, *Singing the Glory Down* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 64.
- ⁷ “Four Tones.”
- ⁸ Ann Lair Henderson, interview with Kevin Kehrberg, 5 July 2007.
- ⁹ See “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (July 15, 1945): 2; and “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (June 1946): 2.
- ¹⁰ “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (Oct. 15, 1945): 2.
- ¹¹ “Reual and Flossie Thomas.”
- ¹² Virginia Sutton, phone interview with Kevin Kehrberg, 18 July 2007.
- ¹³ “Renfro Valley Folks,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (Aug. 1956): 4.
- ¹⁴ Pete Stamper, *It All Happened At Renfro Valley*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 56.
- ¹⁵ See birth announcement in “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (Oct. 1948): 3.
- ¹⁶ “Sunday Morning Getherin’ Loses Sponsor,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (March 1955): 1.
- ¹⁷ Linda Martin, phone interview with Kevin Kehrberg, 16 July 2007.
- ¹⁸ Stamper, 56.
- ¹⁹ “Ruel O. Thomas Dies,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (April 1959): 1.
- ²⁰ Linda Martin, phone interview with Kevin Kehrberg, 16 July 2007.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Program script for *Monday Night at Renfro Valley*, 5 August 1940, JLP, HLBC.
- ²³ Program script for the *Renfro Valley Gatherin’*, 24 Oct. 1943, JLP, HLBC.
- ²⁴ Program script for the *Renfro Valley Gatherin’*, 11 July 1948, JLP, HLBC.
- ²⁵ Program script for the *Renfro Valley Gatherin’*, 25 July 1948, JLP, HLBC.
- ²⁶ Program script for Pillsbury Mills “Renfro Valley Folks – No. 3,” Sept. 1956, JLP, HLBC.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Montell, 64.
- ²⁹ Program script for *Monday Night at Renfro Valley*, 5 August 1940.
- ³⁰ Montell, 60.
- ³¹ “Four Tones.”
- ³² “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (May 15, 1945): 2.
- ³³ “Personals,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (Aug. 15, 1945): 2.
- ³⁴ “Seventy-Six Quartet Back On Air,” *Renfro Valley Bugle* (Feb. 15, 1945): 1.
- ³⁵ Montell, 78.
- ³⁶ Repertoire list for the Seventy Six Quartet, ca. 1950, JLP, HLBC.
- ³⁷ Montell, 64.
- ³⁸ Montell, 229.