

Searching for Lee Morse

Early in the morning in Rochester, New York on December 16, 1954, Lee Morse walked to her next door neighbor's house to chat over coffee. There she fell to the floor and died.

Later that day this obituary appeared in the New York Times:

LEE MORSE, SINGER, DIES

Appeared on Stage and Radio – Composed Many Songs

ROCHESTER, N.Y., Dec. 16 (AP) – Lee Morse, blues singer of the Nineteen Twenties and Thirties, died today . Her age was 50. She was the wife of Ray Farese, communications operator for the city fire and police bureaus.

Miss Morse starred in “Artists and Models” and “Hitchy Coo” in New York in the Twenties. She started her radio career with “The Blue Grass Boys” an orchestra that included Glenn Miller, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman. She composed many songs including “Shadows on the Wall” and Don't Even Change a Picture on the Wall.”

Also surviving her is Glenn Taylor, a brother, who was formerly the Democratic Senator from Idaho. He ran for Vice President on the Progressive ticket in 1948.

Some of the information is true. Some is close to true. Some isn't true at all. She did compose many songs. She was not a blues singer. She did appear on Broadway in Artists and Models. She did not appear on Broadway in Hitchy Coo. “The Blue Grass Boys” did include Benny Goodman, the Dorseys, and Glenn Miller, but they were not an orchestra. They were her band. She hand picked them for her recording sessions and on the record labels it stated “Miss Lee Morse and Her Blue Grass Boys.” She was not fifty, but fifty seven, when she died.

It also doesn't mention that she had a personal and unique vocal style. Calling it blues singing was just the nearest niche they could shove it into. It could be swinging easy or torch song dirgy. It reached down to low notes that scraped bottom to elevate now long forgotten Tin Pan Alley tunes. Using all of her three octave range she rose to soaring high notes in unexpected delightful places. Unlike any of her peers she often threw in coyote-like yips and also something akin to yodels. Later they began to call less rambunctious things “scat singing.” Her 1924 song with yodels “Mailman Blues” uncannily anticipates Jimmie Rodgers hugely successful “Blue Yodel” records three years later. Her record labels identified her as “Miss Lee Morse” so that she would not be mistaken for a man. The differences between Lee and her peers, including Ruth Etting, Helen Morgan, Libby Holman and others, was not just like night and day, but like she had come from another planet. In her case that was planet Oregon.

When I was in college at the University of Washington in the seventies I became acquainted with the eccentric musician John Holte. He was leading the retro jazz group The New Deal Rhythm Band. It was a smallish version of a big band. Members often performed wearing a pastiche of vintage styles and occasionally all in Hawaiian shirts. Their girl singer Cheryl Bentyne went on to national fame with the Manhattan Transfer.

I barely knew John when he asked me if I owned a record player. That was, he told me, because his record player had broke and he had a tremendous collection of vintage jazz LPs gathering dust. He said I could get a crash course in vintage music by listening and he would be happy to bring the records by. The only thing was he would like to be able to drop in occasionally to listen to something specific he was interested in.

Sure enough John showed up a few days later with a four foot high stack of LPs. They were an absolute treasure chest of famous and obscure jazz performers of the Twenties through the Forties. I learned more and more about jazz. I turned my back on modern music. It was hello to Bix Beiderbecke, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong and goodbye to The Doobie Brothers, Steely Dan, and the Captain and Tennile. The only drawback was that John kept very odd hours and would occasionally knock on my door at three in the morning needing to listen to something by people no one else seemed to care anything about.

Among the records was a three record set put out by Columbia Records in 1964 called **The Original Sound of the Twenties**. It was in its own way a crash course in Twenties music. The cover had a kaleidoscopic picture of thirty performers whose recordings were included. Among them were George Gershwin, Kate Smith, Sophie Tucker, and Louis Armstrong.

Inside the box set was a twenty four page illustrated insert written by Rogers E.M. Whitaker. On its cover was a picture of Lee Morse. Here is how she was described.

“Sophie Tucker is still extant without noticeable alteration in her manner and technique, but Lee Morse, who does the next two numbers on this side, has been somewhat ignored since her death, up to now. In Moanin' Low, another evergreen, she gives the words of agony in very straightforward, uncomplicated fashion, and the band that backs her up (her Blue Grass Boys, who often included Goodman, Bloom, Lang, Nichols, Mole, Kress, Klein and Signorelli in their ranks) hews close to the melodic line. In this recording, as in many others of the era, the words and music were the major consideration. Lee does the next bit, Old Man Sunshine (Little Boy Blue Bird), in a way to make our delight sheer, using a light easy voice, full of come-hither, and adding a spate of yodeling. It is one of the cheeriest recordings of the time.”

Sheer delight? No kidding! Those two songs brought me close to rapture. Having them in a collection with her contemporaries made them stand out even more. Lee sang in a natural way, not without style, but not beholden to stilted norms of the time. It was as if all singers before her were saddled with vestiges of Opera or Broadway shows and she had somehow learned to sing influenced by the sound of running rivers and wind through Douglas Fir trees. Rogers Whitaker said she yodeled. It sounded more to me like Coyote yips. I often went to sleep to coyote calls on our family farm in Yacolt, Washington in the summers growing up. He did notice what he called her “come-hither.” That was because he was too shy to call it sex appeal.

The group behind her blew my mind. They were so famous at the time of The Sound of the Twenties that they didn't need first names. They were Benny Goodman, Rube Bloom, Eddie Lang, Red Nichols, Miff Mole, Carl Kress, Manny Klein, and Frank Signorelli. It didn't mention Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. That would be like a current singer being backed by members of the Alabama Shakes, The Shins, The Decemberists, and with Bruce Springsteen, Justin Beiber and Eddie Vedder thrown in.

Rogers E.M. Whitaker also wrote: "... in popular music, the bands came first, and the singers came in as an afterthought. Oh, there were singers along the vaudeville circuits and nightclubs, but before radio and the "talking picture" arrived, there was no instant national audience for a singer." Most dance band and jazz records of the twenties might say "with vocal" on the label but didn't bother to mention who the vocalist was, although the record buyer knew it would almost always be a male. It was the job of the singer to deliver lyrics clearly so they could be understood. Most records cut in New York featured a small cadre of anonymous singers, a few of which did cut records later under their own names. They included Irving Kaufman, Smith Ballew, Arthur Fields, and many more. It took radio in the mid to late Twenties to create male singing superstars such as Rudy Vallee, and from Spokane, Bing Crosby.

Musically, and in other ways, the 1920's was a revolutionary time. Women got the vote, skirts got shorter, some above the knee, Margaret Sanger offered women birth control, prohibition was driving people to clandestinely drink, movies were showing examples of modern bacchanalian behavior, and automobiles were allowing privacy between men and women that just wasn't available in Victorian times.

Jazz had exploded on the national scene with the first recordings in early 1917 of the Original Dixieland Jass Band. Later that year they changed "Jass" to "Jazz" and the syncopating race was on. America now had an indigenous music form that separated us more from Europe than the Atlantic Ocean. Other Jazz bands rushed into recording studios. Where band music had previously been something written out to be played with strict rules there was now music that could be improvised on the spot with no music stands in sight. F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1922 book "Tales of the Jazz Age" gave a title to the times.

When the New Orleans Rhythm Kings arrived in Chicago to play an engagement the owner of the bar asked them where their sheet music was. The clarinet player Leon Roppolo famously replied "We don't have music. If we used music, how could we play if the lights went out?" Jelly Roll Morton, who claimed that he invented Jazz in 1902, which has not been proved to the contrary, recorded with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings in Richmond, Indiana in 1923.

Bix Beiderbecke in Davenport, Indiana, in 1918 listened to Original Dixieland Jazz Band records including Tiger Rag and Skeleton Jangle. He copied trumpet passages of the ODJB's Nick LaRoca. In 1920 he was playing professionally with bands. He was then challenged by members of the local musicians union for playing without a union card. He was given a sight reading test which he failed and was denied union membership. In 1924 he first recorded with **The Wolverine Orchestra**. They got their name from the Jelly Roll Morton song "Wolverine Blues." He went on to star in the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, often backing up Bing Crosby, before succumbing to alcoholism and death at the age of 28 in 1931. In 1989 the main belt asteroid 23457 Beiderbecke was named in his honor.

Joe "King" Oliver left New Orleans with his band in 1922 and after reaching Chicago in 1923 he brought young Louis Armstrong into the group. Louis soon eclipsed his mentor Joe to become the first superstar of jazz.

Benny Goodman was born in 1909 in Chicago. He took up clarinet at the age of ten. He cited his major influences as being Leon Roppolo, Johnny Dodds and Jimmie Noone. Both Dodds and Noone played with Joe "King" Oliver. At age 16 he was playing professionally. His 1935 big band was the catalyst for the Swing Era and in 1937 he was crowned "The King of Swing." He began accompanying Lee Morse on records in 1929 and continued into 1933.

Being introduced to Lee Morse via the Original Sound of the Twenties I wanted to hear more. Luckily, there in the stack of John Holte LP's was **Benny Goodman Accompanies the Girls** which had been issued in 1972. Lee was included with Ethel Waters, Annette Hanshaw and the Boswell Sisters. All of the selections were from the early Thirties. Again Lee stood out among a talented group of singers. She took "I'm An Unemployed Sweetheart" at a medium tempo with a gently swinging lift. Her "Walking My Baby Back Home" was a little faster, skipping happily along. "It's the Girl" picked the tempo up to a run, with the musicians having fun keeping up with Lee, and vice versa. "I've Got Five Dollars" was a revelation. It was pure jazz singing with Lee altering the melody in a hip way unlike anything I had heard by any other singer of the era.

In 1978 Jim Bedoian launched Take Two Records with the LP **Lee Morse featuring Her Blue Grass Boys including Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Eddie Lange, Manny Klein, Rube Bloom and others 1928-1931**. The liner notes began with this paragraph.

"The 1920's were rife with highly inventive song stylists. High on the list of distinctive singers and entertainers from that flamboyant decade is Lee Morse. Although she left an impressive musical legacy in the course of a prolific recording career, she remains virtually unrecognized today except by the devout fan of the 1920'-1930's sound. This is not too surprising in that little about her life or career is available in print, and few examples of her work have been reissued to date. This album provides and opportunity to hear and enjoy some of the rarest recordings of this truly unique artist."

He also wrote that she was born in Tennessee in 1900 and that she began her recording career in 1924 after appearing on Broadway the year before in **Artists and Models**. In the early Twenties about the only way for a woman to appear on a record was to first appear on Broadway in a musical show. That is the route Sophie Tucker, Helen Morgan, Libby Holman, and Fannie Brice took. Sophie Tucker remained a star for over fifty years. The biopic movie *The Helen Morgan Story* was released in 1957. Libby Holman was a legitimate Broadway star, first appearing in Roger and Hart's "Garrick Gaieties" in 1925, which introduced the great song "Manhattan," and she later appeared in eleven more Broadway shows. Fanny Brice, a Ziegfeld Star, was played by Barbra Streisand in **Funny Girl**. Lee did not have a biopic movie made about her. She did not inspire a Broadway musical. She only appeared on Broadway one time. She was a big time star for under ten years. She did make more records than each of them, and excluding Sophie Tucker, all of the others put together.

Listening to 13 more of her recordings made between 1928 and 1931 only increased my appreciation for her and and saddened me that she was so forgotten. The first cut "I Must Have That Man" was written by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh for the Broadway show **Blackbirds of 1928**, where it was introduced by Adelaide Hall who delivered it in a wracked with pain verging on suicide sort of way. Lee's take of the song was to take it at a medium tempo to bring a knowing gentle wistfulness to the tale of unrequited love. Mannie Klein plays nice muted trumpet behind her vocal with some call and response between her stanzas and also some obbligato directly in back of her. The similar themed "Miss You," also taken at a medium tempo, swings, with a nice clarinet solo by Benny Goodman in the middle instrumental chorus. One of Lee's best qualities was to bring swing, in her relaxed way, to medium tempos.

The other songs on the LP were all outstanding, most good pop songs taken at medium tempos. One of her stylistic devices was to go through a song first with staccato phrasing ,

and then draw out the notes the second time through. Fat's Waller's really good tune "My Fate Is Your Hands" is an example. It also shows how easily she could handle difficult to sing songs. Another example of that is her evocative version of Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo," which in 1931 was normally done as an instrumental. Ellington did not record a vocal version until 1940. Lee almost always sang the verse to each song. A verse was the song's introduction that preceded the chorus. Today in almost all cases of old standard songs only the chorus remains. She sings the verse to "Love Letters in the Sand." It was much later a big hit for Pat Boone in 1957. To hear something new in something thought well known is a pleasantly surprising thing. Lee's version is both different and better than Pat's version. His has an almost military precision heavy handed beat. Lee's swings.

That same year I began singing regularly with the John Holte Big Band. One lesson I took from Lee was that I should trust my own voice and sing like myself. That may seem a simple idea, but I had been surprised to see other nascent singers, doing material from the twenties and thirties, who sounded like they were imitating instead of creating. I would attribute that to the change from learning to sing around a piano to learning to sing by imitating records. Growing up I did a lot of singing by imitating records. I found that learning a song from music and lyrics a much different and liberating thing. A couple of weeks ago I was singing the song "Gloria" in a karaoke bar. When I didn't sing it exactly as done in the famous recording a person chimed behind me in the exact "Them" Van Morrison sort of way, I suppose in an effort to lead me right.

At that time I had come to believe Lee was born in Texas. One of my friends had told me that Lee Morse was his aunt. I accepted that at face value and when he mentioned that "Auntie Lee" was born in Texas I thought I had solid info. We talked about his auntie Lee for years. I was shocked when much later he told me he had no relation to Lee Morse, it was just a joke, but since I had placed so much faith in it, he had been forced to carry it on.

Take Two Records put out a second LP in 1983 with the title **Lee Morse Revisited**. It included the first solid biographic information about Lee. It addressed the mystery of her birthplace this way:

"There is little available information about this remarkable artist and the new data I have been able to uncover for this album is often incomplete, if not conflicting: as for example, an erroneous obituary notice that ran in the New York Times on September 28, 1927 (premature by some 27 years)...Sources differ about her birthplace – some citing Portland Oregon, others Tennessee."

The notes for Lee Morse Revisited for first time said that she grew up just across the border from Oregon in Kooskia, Idaho, and that her birth name was Lena Corrine Taylor. It placed her earliest performances in the state of Washington with a 1917 handbill announcing her appearing in Chewelah, a small town north of Spokane, as extra entertainment in a movie theater:

**Same time. Same place
Ann Murdock in "The Unwanted".
Specialty singing by Mrs. Elmer Morse.
Admission 15c and 25c**

According to Bedoian she married Elmer Morris in Idaho at the age of 16 or 17. After giving birth to a son she resumed performing around the area; accompanying herself on the guitar, which included an appearance at the Davenport Hotel in Spokane.

Her father Pleasant John Taylor was a delegate to the 1920 Democratic Party Convention in San Francisco. He took Lee with him. She took part in an entertainment at the St. Francis Hotel and was discovered by a theatrical promoter. She didn't return home. Instead she did two years vaudeville in the west, going from small time to the Pantages circuit. In 1923 she was on Broadway. In 1924 she began her prolific recording career. By 1926 she was the top female vocalist for Pathe/Perfect Records and was a big hit performing in England.

In 1930 Lee appeared in three movie shorts: **Lee Morse in the The Music Racket**, **A Million Me's** and **Song Service**.

On February 18, 1930 she was to open in the Broadway musical **Simple Simon**. In the part of "Sal" she would introduce the new Rogers and Hart song "Ten Cents A Dance." The night before the opening she showed up drunk at the dress rehearsal and was fired. She was replaced by Ruth Etting. "Ten Cents A Dance" became one of Ruth Etting's greatest hits. I wonder if Lee knew at the time her career had peaked and swift descent was to follow?

The songs on Lee Morse Revisited have a greater range of tempos than the first Take Two LP. It opens with a snappy uptempo "version of "Let A Smile Be Your Umbrella. The song that follows, "Don't Leave Me in the Dark, Bright Eyes" is even faster and a whole lot of fun including an ending of straight scat singing that erupts into inspired yipping. Whenever I listen to "What do I Care What Somebody Said," from 1927, the earliest of her recordings issued so far, the tune goes around in my head for days.

Lee Morse Revisited has several songs that I am sure would also make Roger E.M. Whitaker's delight sheer. Side two opens with the wonderful Walter Donaldson composition "Tain't No Sin to Dance Around in Your Bones." It became one of Lee's signature songs. I had long been a fan of the 1930 song "Swinging In a Hammock" due it to being used in the Betty Boop Cartoon **Any Rags** and was so happy to hear it here in a wonderfully relaxed version with an interesting stop time arrangement. She takes the uninspired 1930 song "Loving You the Way I Do" and elevates it to the sublime. Part of its charm is her easy interaction with the wonderful, doomed guitar player Eddie Lang. He would die of complications from a tonsillectomy at the age of thirty. Rube Bloom, one of my favorite piano players, contributes a brief solo.

Lee Morse's only female musical peer as a recording star in the 1920's was Ruth Etting. Oddly, Ruth Etting did not first appear in a Broadway musical. Her path to the recording studio started with her marriage in 1922 to the gangster Martin "Moe the Gimp" Snyder who managed her career. She began recording for Columbia Records in 1926. Lee moved from Pathe/Perfect to Columbia Records in 1927.

I moved from Seattle to New York in 1995 and was able to find out more about Lee at the New York Public Library. One thing I found was a July 9, 1933 New York Times article titled **Stars of Yesterday: How Fate Has Treated Radio Performers of Other Days --- Some Plan Come-Backs**. She was listed among other radio stars who had disappeared from the air waves. Oddly, included with her was Bing Crosby who was said to have "...returned to California, where he has found a new field for his talents in the talkies." Lee was said to be returning to vaudeville.

In 1996 Take Two records issued the CD **Lee Morse A Musical Portrait**. Jim Bedoian wrote a new biographical sketch which included "Much of Lee's early childhood was spent in Portland, Oregon, where she was born..." He filled in more information on her career before she reached New York. He also had a quote from her brother Glenn Taylor, the future Senator from Idaho, who said that "she had left home when we were barefoot and had the best suite in a Portland hotel when I saw her again."

The selections are a mix of songs included on the first two Take Two LP's plus previously un-reissued

songs. It was first time for me to hear some of her Pathe/Perfect records. 1927 had been a year of major advancement in recording technology. Acoustic recordings were replaced by Electric recordings. For an acoustic recording an artist would play into a large horn. The horn had a mechanical connections to a stylus that cut the master disc. Electric recordings replaced the acoustic horns with microphones which had an electrical connection with stylus that cut the master discs. The acoustic process did not capture as much of the dynamic range that an electric recording did. During the acoustic era bands used tubas and banjos. For electric recordings they changed to string bass and guitars. All of Lee's Pathe records were acoustic and all of her Columbia records were electric.

Only two acoustic records were included. "Want a Little Lovin" (1925) is a straightforward ballad. Lee sings it mostly in her middle register and brings out the best of the modest melody. The band behind her stays out of the way mostly. "He's Still My Baby" is straight Twenties jazz. It is up-tempo with Lee having fun singing with the band that seems to be having fun with her too.

It is clear listening to her earliest records that she later grew as an artist and singer. It is also clear that her basic style was formed at the beginning of her recording career with only minor refinements to follow. Pathe gave her free rein to sing as she wanted. Most of the the Pathe records has an A side that was a Tin Pan Alley tune with the B side a Lee Morse composition. Bedoian wrote in the notes for Lee Morse Revisited that "Many deserving songs were recorded by Morse on Pathe/Perfect but the poor sound quality of that label limited their use here." The earliest electrical recording was "Side by Side" from March 1927. It astonished me. I knew the song from when I was little and my family would sing it on long car trips. For us it was a fun and optimistic song:

Well we ain't got a barrel of money
Maybe we're ragged and funny
But we travel along, singing our song,
Side by side

Lee accompanied herself on guitar in an original arrangement. It is an example of what an accomplished guitar player she was. She slows down the song to reveal the lyrics' darker side which she sings in a defiant wail. She makes us understand that being broke, ragged and funny is tragic and that staying side by side with a lover is not just a choice but a calling but an obligation. For the second chorus she changes to a minor key and then changes back to the major key for the final chorus. She ends with lyrics I believe she wrote herself:

And if he takes him a notion
To jump in and drown in the ocean
It's me and it's him
sink or swim
Side by side

It totally blew me away. It is the sort of thing only an advanced musician could pull off. It made me think of Neil Young in 1970 when he took Don Gibson's 1958 up-tempo cowboy ballad "Oh, Lonesome Me" and slowed it down to a crawl to reveal the longing and pathos in the melody and lyrics. Side by Side by Lee Morse is a signal event her artistry.

In 2003 I did a lecture at the Oregon Historical Society about Lee Morse, Mel Blanc and George

Olsen. Mel Blanc may not be a household name, but people recognize the voice of Bugs Bunny. George Olsen had arguably the most popular band in America in 1925. He was included in *The Original Sound of the Twenties*. Both grew up in Portland before leaving to find greater fame. Lee made it to the big time before either of them.

It was not just drinking and losing the *Simple Simon* show that led to Lee's fading national popularity in the early Thirties. The Depression killed record sales. Some nationally known bands cut records that sold in the hundreds instead of thousands. Many didn't bother to record at all. Nationally record sales dropped from 75 million dollars in 1930 to 1 million in 1933. At the same time Hollywood movies had taken away the audience for Vaudeville. Lee was left with a career as a night club singer. There was no such thing as an oldies circuit.

I found that there was a Lee Morse collection at the University of Idaho. It included a DVD of her movie shorts. Through the University I acquired the DVD from a man in Georgia who had saved the shorts when they were shown on MTV. The films only deepen her mystery. In one she sits in a chair, plays a guitar, and sings. In 1930 women singers stood beside a piano, or in front of a band, and sang. Lee's performance is amazingly contemporary, both direct and intimate. I have never seen a film made earlier, or even within a few years later, of a similar thing. Watching her on film I was struck by how preternaturally hip she was.

In 2006 I was a TBA artist. The project was called *The Portland that Was*. It featured short films from my film archive that were related to specific buildings in Portland. I did research for *Portland Was* at the Portland Public Library. Looking in the *Portland Oregonian* on microfiche I found a nice story about Lee appearing at the Orpheum Theater for a one week engagement in 1927. They called her a Portland girl making a triumphant return. In *The Portland That Was* I featured her for her appearances in Vaudeville at the Orpheum Theater and for radio broadcasts she made from the Multnomah Hotel. The Orpheum Theater was demolished in 1976 to make way for the Nordstrom store on Broadway. The Multnomah Hotel is still in business although it is now called Embassy Suites. It opened in 1912 taking up a whole city block. It was the largest hotel in the city until 1961 and was the site of a remarkable event in 1912. Pioneer aviator Silas Christofferson took off from the roof of the hotel and flew across the Columbia river to Pearson Air Park. In 1995 another aviator repeated the stunt.

Looking for traces of Lee I visited the town of Kooskia Idaho. Lee lived there from the age of eleven. It can be reached from the north via Lewiston on Route 12. Continuing on 12 will eventually take you to Missoula, Montana. From the south it is reached via Grangeville on Route 13. Our route was through Grangeville and onto Lewiston. All of the routes there are very scenic. The town itself has only 650 residents. It has very wide main street in its small business district. The only thing that still connects Lee to the town is the Kooskia Opera House which was built in 1912. The *Kooskia Mountaineer* newspaper reported on November 13, 1914 that she took part in the play *Adventures of a College Bride*. On December 17, 1914 she gave a musical performance. The Opera House is currently for sale.

I also listened to all of her over 200 records. One thing the Times obituary got right was that Lee wrote many songs. In total she wrote over fifty that were published and most of which she recorded. Although the concept didn't exist at the time, she was the first major recording artist we would now recognize as a singer songwriter.

One of the most historically significant of her recordings was "Mail Man Blues" in 1924. It is the first blues song written and performed by a woman accompanying herself on a guitar. The song itself is more of "Vaudeville" Blues than a real twelve bar blues, but just the fact of it being any kind of blues and Lee accompanying herself on guitar puts it in a category all of its own. The only other guitar playing women who did similar things were Memphis Minnie, who first recorded in 1929, and Sister

Rosetta Tharp, who didn't record until 1938.

In 2010 I gave a presentation on Lee Morse at the Pacific Northwest History Conference at the Davenport Hotel in Spokane. It was appropriate since Lee had performed there. We very much enjoyed staying at the Davenport. When it was built in 1914 it was the first United States Hotel with air conditioning. It is also where the "Crab Louis" was invented and first served. It has a graciousness that can't be matched by modern hotels no matter how much effort and money is put into them. It is also very up to date with wonderfully appointed rooms and public areas.

For my presentation at the conference I set up three 16mm projectors. On them I showed film clips of Ruth Etting, Helen Morgan, and Kate Smith. Each sang one complete song. I then showed Lee performing one song on DVD. The result was stark. Seen by themselves Lee's peers can appear talented and charming. Compared to Lee they are relegated to the past. Lee looks like she could appear in a Portland coffeehouse tomorrow. The paper I wrote for the conference, "Miss Lee Morse: The First Recorded Jazz Singer," is on line.

On that trip we also visited the Lee Morse Collection at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. It is comprised of several boxes of Lee's effects that were found in Rochester. On the U of Idaho website you can see 83 of the items. They include many photographs and also pictures of many of her records.

There are other reasons to visit Moscow. It has long been the home of the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, which is sponsored by the University of Idaho. It also has nice bike trails. The Latah Trail is twelve miles long, ending in Troy, Idaho. The Bill Chapman Trail connects U of I with WSU across the border in Pullman, Washington. The Paradise Trail connects the Latah and Bill Chapman trails.

There is now a Lee Morse website, a Lee Morse Wikipedia page, all of her films are available on youtube and all of her records can be heard on line. On the Lee Morse Echoes of a Songbird website put up by Ian House I read his reasoned opinion that she had been born in the tiny town of Cove in Union County, Oregon. He cites a manifest from the ocean liner Leviathan in May, 1927, where Lee wrote that she was 27 years old and was born in 1899 in Cove, Oregon. In truth she was 29, having been born on November 30, 1897.

The Internet Movie Database and her Wikipedia page still list her birthplace as Portland. I believe there is a better chance she was born in Oregon in Summerville, 26 miles by road from Cove. Since she fibbed about her age on the Leviathan manifest it would make sense that she would fib about her birthplace to make it agree with where she was in 1899. Mr. House has copies of a letter written by her mother from Cove in 1899. What intrigues me is an article about Lee and her family published in the Everyweek Magazine in 1932. It states that the family headed for Idaho from Texas in 1895 and upon arrival traveled around the area performing as the Taylor Family Concert Company at mining camps to make money. After two years they settled on a farm in Summerville. That would make it 1897. It would also make sense for them to stop traveling in covered wagons if Mrs. Taylor was close to giving birth.

Summerville is 15 miles from Elgin, Oregon. At the time the Taylor Family was living on the farm near Summerville my great grandfather James Sherman Galloway was operating the only hotel in Elgin. My grandfather Dale Sherman Galloway was born in Touchet, Washington. Sherman Galloway was born on the Oregon Trail and arrived in Oregon in 1865. The wagon train had various other Galloways on it. Some of them stopped in Eastern Oregon. Others pushed on to Portland. Even when I was little I had bunch of relatives living not that far from where I believe Lee to have been born. Earlier this year my wife Anne and I traveled to Eastern Oregon. On the way we passed through Elgin and stopped in Summerville. There isn't much there except a general store also doing business as a post office and a gas station. There is also a Baptist church. The town cemetery shows a more robust past. I tramped among the gravestones for over an hour look for Galloways and Taylors. I didn't find any. That didn't

surprise me. There is still much to discover about the remarkable and important musical artist and Oregonian Miss. Lee Morse.