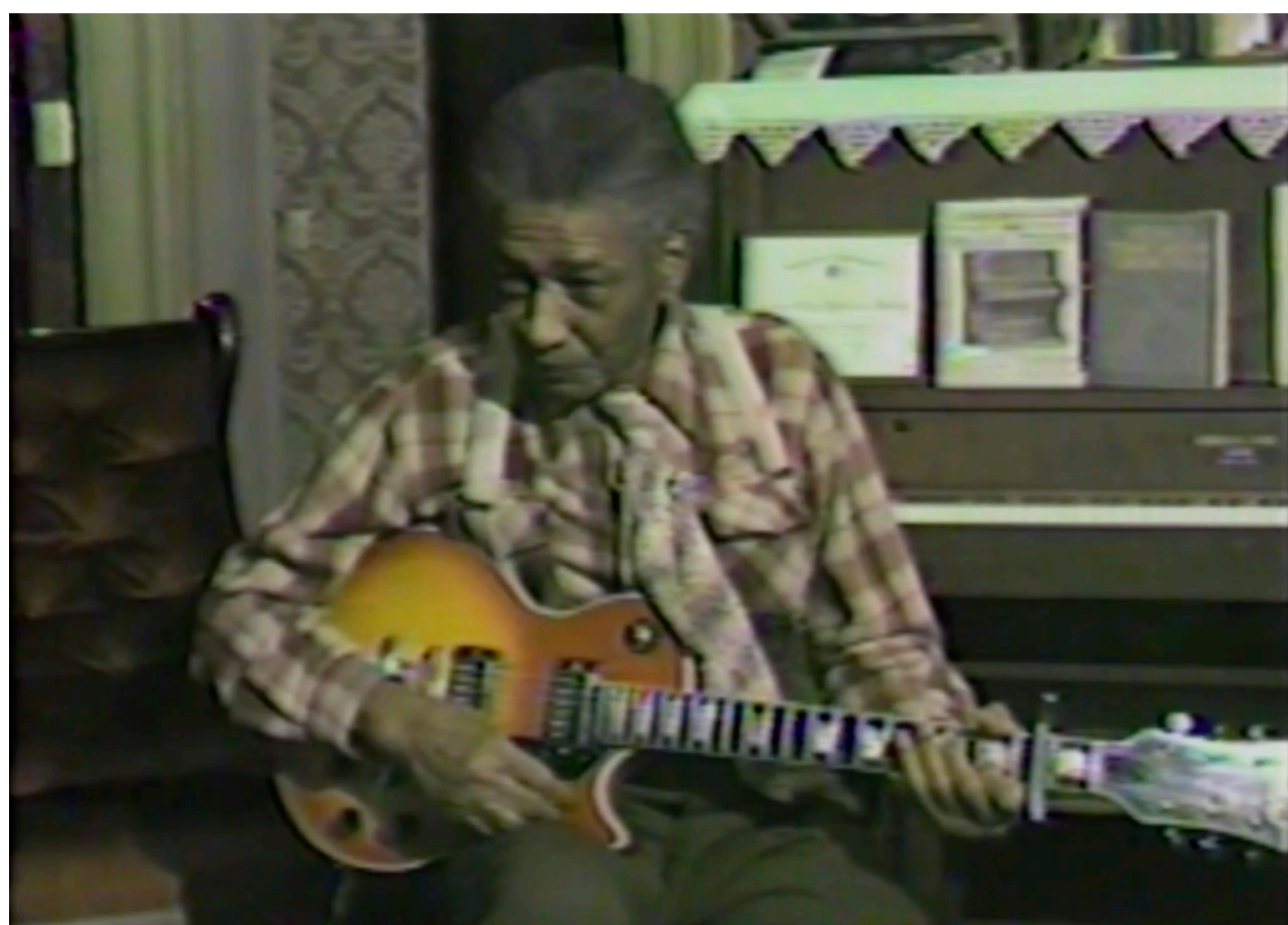


Living Legend

Eddie Bowles's Later Years

During the Blues Revival, the term “Living Legend” was often used to refer to rediscovered blues artists who recorded songs on 78s in the 1930s and began performing again in the 1950s and 1960s. The same term was used to describe Eddie Bowles when he became a regular performer at the annual Cedar Falls Folk Convention in the 1970s, and when he was the subject of several public radio show episodes in the 1980s.

Part of what made the term “Living Legend” apply to Eddie Bowles was that in the 1970s and 1980s (when Eddie was in his 80s and 90s), he still regularly played



guitar, and his unique story caught the attention of interviewers and musicians. However, the term also applies because his guitar style had been established during his years in New Orleans. Because he stopped playing for over 25 years, when Eddie returned to the guitar, he resumed a classic finger picking style of guitar playing that hadn't changed in response to evolving fads or trends. Eddie Bowles became known for his smooth, unique style of guitar playing that remained consistent, and perhaps legendary, over time.

Well into his 90s, Bowles continued to play at nursing homes in the area and mentored local musicians and students. Even children in Eddie's neighborhood noticed the kindhearted man and looked forward

“I get along with anyone that gets along with people”

to meeting him on the streets just as much as he loved seeing them. His last recorded interview and performance occurred for Cedar Falls Channel 15 in 1982 when an episode of “Our City Cedar Falls” was devoted to Eddie Bowles's years in the the area. At the end of the interview, he was persuaded to bring out his guitar (see left) for an instrumental version of “Memories” (scan below).

On April 10, 1984, Eddie Bowles turned 100 years old, an event that was celebrated by friends and admirers and covered in local newspapers. At the party in his honor, Eddie shared fond memories with guests, noting that “I get along with anyone that gets along with people.” People from all over the area came to pay tribute to the legend of guitar picking. Eddie Bowles passed away later that year in October, but his memory continues to live on for the many people whose lives he touched.



Scan here to listen to a performance of “Memories” from 1982, when Eddie Bowles was 98 years old (2:39).