

**Excerpts from an Interview with Henry Rutland, fiddler
November 21, 1995, Moultrie, Georgia
Kristin Olson, Interviewer, MUS 648, Folk and Ethnic Music in the
US, Fall, 1995, Laurie Kay Sommers, instructor**

“I learned to play from my daddy [Henry Green Rutland, Sr.] He was a very good old-time fiddle player. [His daddy, my granddaddy Lawrence Jr., played fiddle also.] Daddy had a younger brother that played professionally in a night club in Dallas, Texas [Robert “Georgia Slim” Rutland]. And I believe I stated earlier this went all the way back to two brother that came to this country from England around 1812, both of those men played fiddle One stayed up in and around the New England state of Vermont, and I believe there is a town named Rutland, Vermont. And the other brother migrated on into the Carolinas and later into Georgia, and that was in fact the brother that our family came from. And one of his sons or grandsons, which was my great grandfather [Lawrence Green Rutland, Sr., from Warrick, Sumpter County, Georgia] was in the Civil War and carried his fiddle with him and played and entertained the troops. And I have this fiddle at home now; naturally it’s been restored several times, and that’s where our side of the family got their fiddle playing from....”

“I might add that I have a first cousin, George Custer [from Salt Springs, FL], that he and I played several years on the festival circuit as a twin fiddle team. And he had spent a little time in Texas and played some with Uncle Bob [Robert “Georgia Slim” Rutland] in his nightclub. And when he retired from the Navy in ’72, I believe it was, he and I would book 8 or 10 festivals a year just as a twin fiddle team and play some of the old twin fiddle numbers. We’d have the bluegrass type backup with the banjo, guitar, mandolin, and bass. We recorded one album and got to work a week at the World’s Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982, just as a twin fiddle team. When we was there, what we done is we put together a good 30 minute show of twin fiddle numbers and we played that show, I think it was seven times. We had seven 30 minute shows a day. And at the end of six days we had just about enough fiddle playing for one week!”

“My Uncle Bob would always tell me, ‘Son, don’t never get on that stage and try to imitate another fiddle player, no matter how good he is because you’re only selling that man’s material; you need to produce and have your own. No

matter you might never be as good as some of those professional people, when you stand up and play well, that's the way Henry Rutland learned to play it, you know and always remember that.' And oh, you'll always add a few of other people's licks and notes here and there all along, but basically you try to build your own tunes down through the years and play your own numbers the way you hear and feel them. And that's what I've tried to do down through the years, is play it my way."



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Left, Henry Rutland with his great-grandfather's fiddle, Thomasville, 1997. Photo by Laurie Kay Sommers.

Right, The Twin Fiddles, cousins Henry Rutland, left, and George Custer, performing at the Hymns and Hoedowns concert, First United Methodist Church, Valdosta, April 7, 2005. Photo by Laurie Kay Sommers