

Randy Wood, Dot Records founder, dies at 94

Record industry legend popularized songs by Little Richard, Fats Domino

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Randy Wood (right) works at the recording studio with singer, actor and former teen idol Tab Hunter (left) and multi-instrumentalist and orchestra leader Billy Vaughn in 1960s. / Submitted photo

Written by
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Randy Wood, who spread rhythm and blues over the airwaves and from his record store in Gallatin, died on Saturday, April 9.

It was Wood who in 1955 chose the Fats Domino song "Ain't That a Shame" for Pat Boone to record. Boone told the *Los Angeles Times* that Wood was "one of the people I owe my career to."

"My father was the king of the recording business in the glory years of the industry, which was the 1950s," said Wood's son, John Wood, 60.

To be remembered as the man with the golden ear, Randy Wood radically influenced the entertainment industry for more than half a century by founding Randy's Record Shop in Gallatin, where he later established Dot Records, which became the largest mail-order record shop in the world. Randy Wood died Saturday near his home in La Jolla, Calif. He was 94.

Michael Gray, a historian at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, said Randy Wood played a major role in the development of Middle Tennessee's music industry.

"Randy's Record Shop, his mail-order business in Gallatin, became known to R&B fans far and wide through its sponsorship on WLAC," Gray said.

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Born Randolph C. Wood on March 30, 1917 in Morrison, Tenn., he served in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II, after which he settled in Gallatin. He first started an electrical appliance store called Randy's on the corner of North Water Avenue and Franklin Street. As an afterthought, he started carrying records, mostly classical and pop music. Customers, however, requested rhythm and blues records by artists such as Cecil Gant they had heard on WLAC, a radio station based in Nashville and operating at 1510 kHz on the AM dial.

After discovering these records were available, but only in scarce quantity and not in his area, the entrepreneur started a 78RPM mail-order business in 1947. He also sponsored a show on WLAC with DJ Gene Nobles and air personality Bill "Hoss" Allen. Ads ran between the songs telling listeners the records were available at Randy's Record Shop. With WLAC's power of 50,000 watts, the broadcast aired nationwide and reached Jamaica and the Caribbean.

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“We were just flooded with orders,” said Randy Wood’s daughter, Linda Wood, 65. “My mother helped, everyone helped. They had to work around the clock to fill in all the orders.”

Randy Wood used that phenomenal success to establish Dot Records in 1950 out of the shop that growing business volumes had moved to West Main Street. Gallatin ragtime pianist Johnny Maddox was one of the first recording artists of Dot Records with his early ragtime compositions, “The St. Louis Tickle” and “Crazy Bone Rag.”

“He said, ‘I’m gonna use you as a guinea pig,’” said Maddox, who the time packed records at the store, but later reached world fame.

Through Dot Records, Randy Wood discovered pop star Pat Boone, who helped popularize songs by R&B stars Little Richard and Fats Domino. Numerous other famous artists of the time such as Billy Vaughn, Lawrence Welk, Tab Hunter, Debbie Reynolds, the Mills Brothers, Jimmy C. Newton and Leroy Van Dyke were also on the Dot Records label. By 1950, the store was selling 500,000 records a year throughout the United States and in foreign markets. In 1951, the annual sales of \$62,000 became \$16 million a decade later.

“Randy’s Record Shop was the cornerstone of black culture in America for the 20 crucial years of the Civil Rights movement,” John Wood said.

“With Dot Records, Wood founded one of the region’s earliest labels and built it into one of the nation’s leading independent record companies before moving the operation to Hollywood. Although best known for issuing hits by Pat Boone, Dot also released a steady stream of discs by significant acts ranging from gospel greats the Fairfield Four to bluegrass legend Mac Wiseman.”

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