



# American Legends: The Life of Hank Williams

*Charles River Editors*

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“You have to have smelt a lot of mule manure before you can sing like a hillbilly.” – Hank Williams

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history’s most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors’ American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America’s most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

One of the most enduring and consistently popular singers and songwriters in the history of country music, Hank Williams is considered by many to be the first American superstar of the genre and the “father” of modern country music. In the post-World War II era, at a time when country music was an insulated and regionalized cottage industry, Williams almost personally oversaw its transition into a national mania that would be later taken up by such figures as Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley, even as the musicians remained loyal to the genre’s older, rural roots. But unlike the wave of greats that followed his brief but stellar career, Williams remained distinctly and unapologetically Southern, thereby avoiding adoption by the larger pop world even as his remarkable sense of phrasing and authentic texts fascinated pop artists across the country. Among his most enduring hits are “Cold, Cold Heart,” “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” “Hey, Good-Lookin’,” “I’ll Never Get Out of This Life Alive,” “Lost Highway”, and his signature hit, “Lovesick Blues.”

At his zenith in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s, Nashville had begun to shake off its hillbilly image and orient itself toward becoming a more universal, commercialized industry, welcoming cross-over artists from other styles. Had Williams lived, it’s unclear whether he could have or would have fully adapted to the transformation initiated by country music’s capital. However, the man dubbed as “the hillbilly Shakespeare,” “Harm” (because his first name was Hiram), and “Herky” or “Skeets” by his friends, reached the larger national audience in a way that none had before, and as he once put it, “I don’t know what you mean by country music. I just make music the way I know how.” Williams’ appeal extended even beyond that of the famous Carter family, whose members preserved the hill country tradition in both musical and presentational terms, and he has been likened to artists of the early era like Jimmie Rodgers, Bob Wills and Bill Monroe, but few others from that era could match his distinctiveness and natural gift for songwriting.

American Legends: The Life of Hank Williams examines the life and career of one of America’s most famous country music stars. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Hank Williams like never before, in no time at all.

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