

## Cash's Bicentennial Suit Headed To Dyess Event

RISON - Fresh off an exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, the suit that country music legend Johnny Cash wore during his American Bicentennial concert at Rison in 1976 will be among the pieces on display at the inaugural Johnny Cash Heritage Festival set for next weekend, Oct. 19-21, at the Dyess Colony in Northeast Arkansas.

Wayne Cash, a Cleveland County native who is a relative of Johnny Cash and helps keep track of the suit for the Cleveland County Historical Society, said the black suit emblazoned with dual eagles across the chest and stars around the collar and along the pant legs will be on display inside the Dyess Colony Visitor Center that is associated with Johnny Cash's boyhood home at Dyess.

This will be the first time an event honoring Johnny Cash has been held at Dyess. Previous events celebrating Cash's connection to Northeast Arkansas were held at Jonesboro.

The three-day festival will consist of a symposium on the people, events and music that influenced Cash, as well as a series of concerts from the various genres of music that had an impact on the American music icon.

The symposium featuring one-hour lectures on his life begin at 1 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 19, and at 9 a.m. Friday, Oct. 20. The final presentation at 4 p.m. Friday is entitled "Becoming Johnny Cash," which will look at the influence that his father, Rison native Ray Cash, had on his son.

In addition, there will be demonstrations, tours, food vendors, and arts and crafts vendors on hand.

The festival will climax with a series of concerts on Saturday, Oct. 21, in a field next to Cash's boyhood home at Dyess. His daughter, country music artist Rosanne Cash, and longtime friend Kris Kristofferson will be the featured guests performing at 3 p.m. Other Saturday concerts include Arkansas native Buddy Jewel at 12:15 p.m. and the "Cash Homecoming" featuring Joanne Cash and Tommy Cash at 1:30 p.m.

Wayne Cash said the Cleveland County Historical Society was formed in 1974 and one of its first major projects was to support 1976 Bicentennial activities in the county that included a special day of events when Johnny Cash returned to his birthplace to perform at the Rison High School football field. It was reported that more than 10,000 people took in the concert.

Johnny Cash was born at the Cross Roads community north of Kingsland in 1932. His family moved with 3-year-old Johnny to the Dyess Colony in Mississippi County. His father was part of a Depression-era program to help establish small farms in that part of the state. Johnny Cash grew up and worked on his family's farm until he graduated from Dyess High School in 1950.

Cash's concert at Rison took place on March 20, 1976, as part of Cleveland County's Bi-centennial Celebration. Gov. David Pryor was on hand to help declare the special day of events as Johnny Cash Day in Arkansas.

The day's events started in Kingsland, where a historical marker was dedicated noting Kingsland as the birthplace of Johnny Cash. The dedication included a military color guard and flyover by military helicopters. Johnny, his wife, June, and many of his Cash and Rivers family members from Cleveland County then boarded a special train on the Cotton Belt Railroad for a ride to the county seat at Rison.

There, Johnny served as grand marshal of the parade through downtown Rison, ending at the football field where he and his band performed the concert.



**JOHNNY CASH AT THE CLEVELAND COUNTY BICENTENNIAL PARADE** - Country music icon and Kingsland native Johnny Cash (right) with his wife, June Carter Cash (to Cash's left), waves to the crowd as they ride in a horse-drawn carriage down Main Street in downtown Rison during a parade for the Cleveland County Bicentennial Celebration held in March 1976. The suit that Cash is wearing will be on display at the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival to be held Oct. 19-21 at his boyhood home at Dyess. Pictured to the left is Johnny's father, Rison native Ray Cash. (Photo courtesy of Stan Sadler and the Cleveland County Herald archives)

Most of the major Arkansas news outlets, as well as some national media covered the event. Following the concert, Cash donated one of the Bicentennial suits he wore that day, along with the proceeds raised from the concert, to the Cleveland County Historical Society. Some of those proceeds were used in preserving the historic structures at the Pioneer Village in Rison.

Over the years, the Bicentennial suit was displayed at the Cleveland County Courthouse as well as the Pioneer Village during the annual Pioneer Days Festival. The suit always remained in Cleveland County until last year, when it, along with other Johnny Cash memorabilia, were displayed at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The suit was recently returned to the Historical Society and taken directly to Dyess for the forthcoming festival.

Johnny descends from the family of Reuben and Pheletia (pronounced "Felicia") Cash that included six daughters and six sons, who all moved to the Toledo/Mt. Elba area in 1857 from Elbert County, Ga. Many in the county today descend from this pioneer family.

The Cleveland County Historical Society is currently working on a book about the early history of the Cash Family that will date back to their origin in America in the mid-1600's. The book will include a special section for Johnny Cash and his many return trips to Cleveland County to visit family and friends.



**BICENTENNIAL SUIT ON TOUR** - The suit that Johnny Cash wore while giving a concert at the Rison High School in 1976 sits ready to be displayed at the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival next weekend, Oct. 19-21, at his boyhood home in Dyess. The suit was just recently returned to the Cleveland County Historical Society after being on display at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.