ABOUT THE BAND

Jeff Cook, Teddy Gentry, and Randy Owen were born and raised in the mountainous northeast corner of Alabama. They named their band after their home state. Second-cousins Gentry and Owen grew up poor on Lookout Mountain. Gentry grew up on a cotton farm, while Owen’s family produced cotton, corn, hay, and timber. Cook, a distant cousin, came from a middle-class family in nearby Fort Payne, a small mill town labeled by its chamber of commerce the “sock capital of the world.”

All three were raised on country music and attended church, where they learned to sing and play instruments. Growing up in the 1950s and early ’60s, they also absorbed the music of early American rock & roll acts and British invasion groups, such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

In 1968, they held their first band practice and soon shared an apartment in Anniston, Alabama, making ends meet by laying carpet and hanging drywall, keeping evenings open to rehearse music. The band began playing at a popular bar in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, called the Bowery. They spent the next seven spring and summer seasons performing there. The group sharpened their musical skills and developed an identifiable sound and style while entertaining tourists six nights a week. Depending on tips for their livelihood, the band learned to play audience-oriented music, ready to put aside any pretensions to please their listeners.

“We were essentially a country band dropped into an environment that favored R&B and rock & roll,” Owen stated in his memoir. “We became an all-hits-all-the-time bar band, and it turned out to be the best musical education we could have possibly received . . . When we could get our original tunes into the nightly mix, people responded to them, even though they weren’t a hard-country crowd. That told us something—that country music, done in a looser, more energetic way, could appeal to anyone who liked music.”

The band self-financed three albums to sell at shows, then in 1977 they released a single with Nashville-based GRT Records. The group performed at the annual Country Radio Seminar in March of 1980, sharing the bill with Reba McEntire and others. They were signed by RCA Records and grew in popularity. The band went on to score 30 #1 hits and win the Academy of Country Music’s Entertainer of the Year award five consecutive years as well as other Academy of Country Music, Country Music Association, and Grammy awards. They were named artist of the decade for the 1980s by the Academy of Country Music. They were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2005.

MEET ALABAMA

JEFF COOK (born 1949), lead guitarist, fiddler, and harmony vocalist, became proficient on several instruments at a very young age. In his teens, Cook performed with local bands and worked at radio stations in Alabama. He earned a diploma in electronics from Alabama Technical College, leading to a position at Western Electric.

RANDY OWEN (born 1949), a bashful kid whose first love was playing lead guitar, reluctantly became Alabama’s lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist after Cook claimed the band’s lead guitar spot. The oldest child of sharecroppers, Owen helped tend the family’s land. He attended itinerant shape-note singing schools, and his family performed as a traveling gospel group. Owen graduated from Jacksonville State University (Alabama) with a degree in English, which nurtured his love for language and helped develop his songwriting craft.

TEDDY GENTRY (born 1952), was raised by his single mother and maternal grandfather in a house without running water. He and Owen were childhood pals long before they began making music together. Gentry met Cook when the two were in their teens. Before supplying bass guitar and harmony vocals for Alabama, Gentry won a talent contest as a member of the Sand Mountain Chickenpluckers.