



Henry Qualls (born July 8, 1934 – died December 7, 2003) was an American Texas and country blues guitarist and singer. He became famous later in his life. He was "discovered" in 1993 by the Dallas Blues Society. He released his only music album in 1994. After that, he travelled around the world, playing at many festivals.

The *Dallas Observer* newspaper reported that Henry Qualls was a purist's dream-come-true, meaning he played the blues in a very traditional and pure way. He played songs by other famous blues artists like Jimmy Reed and Lowell Fulson as well as his own songs. People compared his guitar playing as powerful, like the old blues masters such as Son House.

Henry was born John Henry Miles in the small town of Elmo, about forty miles east of Dallas. When he was a child, his mother married Scottie Moore Qualls. After which, he became known as Henry Lee Qualls.



Henry learned to play the guitar from his grandmother. He even named his guitar Mabelene. At first, he played gospel music in his local church.

As a young man, Emmitt Williams taught him more about guitar. Henry would regularly travel to Dallas to watch famous blues musicians play, artists like Lightnin' Hopkins, Melvin 'Lil' Son' Jackson, and Frankie Lee Sims influenced him in later years.

Family Life and Unique Style

In 1955, Henry married Ethel Mae Cooper. They had eleven children



together. Henry's music career was mostly a part-time job. During the day, he worked on farms around his home in Elmo. Sometimes, mowing lawns in Dallas.

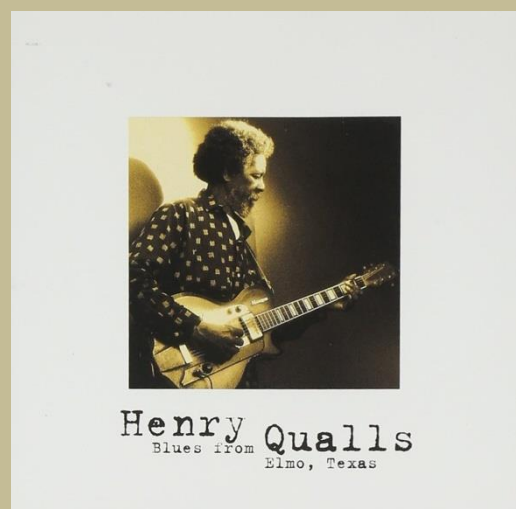
Guitar Player magazine wrote about Henry's special way of playing. He often played his guitar flat on his lap. He used a Tabasco sauce bottle as a slide..

His playing style was sometimes a bit shaky or even faltering which often made his music sound very old-fashioned. It reminded people of the early East Texas country blues sound.

Discovery and Later Career

A person from the Dallas Blues Society heard Henry Qualls playing outside his home. Consequently, Henry at almost sixty years old became a local star, which apparently surprised him as much as everyone else.

Even though he was older, people convinced him to record an album which resulted in *Blues from Elmo, Texas*. This album was released in 1994 and included songs by other artists like Lightnin' Hopkins and Arthur Crudup. It also had Henry's own versions of songs like *Motherless Children* and *I Shall Not Be Moved*. His music also appeared on other albums, like *Blues across America – the Dallas Scene*.



Performing Around the World

Because of his album, Henry got to play at the Utrecht Blues Festival in Europe. *Juke Blues* magazine said he was a big surprise hit there. This led to many more concerts in Europe and the United States.

He played at famous events like the Long Beach Blues Festival (in 1996), the Chicago Blues Festival, and the King Biscuit Blues Festival.



Even with all this new fame, Henry continued to live in his house in Elmo. His house was right next to the Texas and Pacific Railroad tracks.

Occasionally he played in Deep Ellum and Fort Worth, but generally did not like big cities. His quick rise to fame is told in a book called *In Search of the Blues: A Journey to the Soul of Black Texas*.



Final Years

On December 7, 2003, Henry passed, he was 69 years old. He died from problems after surgery. He was buried in Fairview Cemetery in Elmo. He was survived by his wife, Ethel, and nine of his children.