



All That Jazz

A Brief Bio of Sylvester "Hooley" Ahola

by Karen Kallio Orlando

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Karen Kallio Orlando is happy to share this glimpse of her cousin Sylvester Ahola, the classic jazz trumpet player who lived from 1902 until 1995. She invites you to learn more about Sylvester via the additional links to his audio interviews and recordings found at the end of this bio.



PHOTO CREDIT: FAMILY-OWNED PHOTO

Sylvester Ahola, second from left. Taken in Boston with one of the many bands he worked with around the 1920s.

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A Brief Bio of Sylvester “Hooley” Ahola

BY KAREN KALLIO ORLANDO

Sylvester Ahola was born and raised in the village of Lanesville in Gloucester, MA. His parents emigrated from Finland around 1895, seeking better economic opportunities. They worked in the quarries and raised dairy cows. As a boy of eight, Sylvester made a bugle from a garden hose and a funnel and began to play the horn. Recognizing that he had talent, his parents got him a cornet and sent him to Boston for lessons. Sylvester soon played trumpet with the local Waino Band and the Workingman’s Band and became well-known for performing with Boston and North Shore dance orchestras.

It wasn’t long before Sylvester was offered positions in Boston and New York with some of the most well-known jazz and dance bands of the time, including Bix Beiderbecke, Paul Specht, and Cass Hagen. In 1927 he went to London to play at the Savoy Hotel and then the Mayfair with Bert Ambrose, where he spent most of the later 1920s. In 1931, Sylvester and his wife Saima returned to New York, where Ahola continued to play and record in New York studios throughout the 1930s.

Over his career, Ahola, known as “Hooley” to his friends, recorded over 4,000 sides of records for about 14 different recording companies. He was sought after for his versatility and purity of tone and was an excellent technical player. However, on many of the records, Sylvester was uncredited or mistaken. Much of his music was rediscovered in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily due to the efforts of British discographer Brian Rust. His biography, *Sylvester Ahola, The Gloucester Gabriel* by Dick Hill, was published in 1993 with a complete discography illustrating his vast talent and musical diversity.

Sylvester had always wanted to return to Gloucester, and in 1940, he and his wife Saima came home to Lanesville for good, taking up residence at the home they called “Shadbush.” In his retirement, Ahola became a well-known ham radio broadcaster and music collector. He continued to play locally and regularly at the Lanesville Congregational Church. He died in 1995 at the age of 92.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more and hear Hooley's voice as he talks about his life, please visit:

Toward An Oral History of Cape Ann – Audio Interview by Linda Brayton

Sawyer Free Library, 1978

<https://www.sawyerfreelibrary.org>

The Cape Ann Museum

Audio Interview, Memorabilia and More

<https://www.capeannmuseum.org/sylvester-ahola/>

Video Interview by Nick Dellow, 1983

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W_8eoQgePI

Music Sample – Sylvester's Home Recordings in Lanesville, 1944

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlxkDXqkbUc>

Biography - *Sylvester Ahola: The Gloucester Gabriel* by Dick Hill

The author shares Sylvester's memories and photographs.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5630566-sylvester-ahola>