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POLITICS, POWER, AND AUTHENTICITY

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TRADITIONALIZATION AT THE NATIONAL OLDTIME FIDDLERS' CONTEST: POLITICS, POWER, AND AUTHENTICITY

by

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ABSTRACT

TRADITIONALIZATION AT THE NATIONAL OLDTIME FIDDLERS' CONTEST: POLITICS, POWER, AND AUTHENTICITY

by

Sharon Poulson Graf

This dissertation is an historic and ethnographic study of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest held annually the third week of June in Weiser, Idaho. It is an examination of the creation of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest (NOTFC) that illuminates the role of the politics of culture in the construction and maintenance of a tradition of oldtime fiddling. These politics incorporate a culturally constructed concept of fiddle music as an authentic piece of heritage worthy of preservation into the production of the NOTFC. The NOTFC festival provides an arena where fiddlers can converge to renegotiate and renew their identity as oldtime fiddlers, to experience individual power as creators and learners not available to them in their everyday lives, and to play a role in deciding what music will be featured on the national contest stage. Through the negotiation process scholars refer to as traditionalization, NOTFC fiddlers not only maintain models of oldtime fiddling from the past, they constantly reinterpret these models through group and individual creativity and innovation.

I have collected data as a participant observer in the annual NOTFC contests held each third week of June for four consecutive years, 1995 through 1998. My ability to perform on the fiddle has enabled me to meet musicians, learn musical selections from participants' repertory, and converse and participate in informal jam sessions with numerous contestants and non-

competing musicians. My role as an ethnographer and participant observer has allowed me to experience two different extremes of National Oldtime Fiddling, participatory jams and staged competition. My study of oldtime fiddling at the NOTFC incorporates my experience as an active negotiator of the fiddler identity rather than merely reporting on the experience of others. It is this perspective that helps shed light on the process of converting the old to the new at the NOTFC, on the process of traditionalizing oldtime fiddle music.

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I would like to thank all of the people who made it possible for me to carry out this study. I would like to express my appreciation to my dissertation committee chair Michael Largey who encouraged me to pursue my area of interest, fiddling, and provided valuable feedback after reading many rough drafts of all stages of this document. I would also like to thank members of the committee under whose direction this dissertation was prepared: Mark Sullivan, whose interest in and feedback on my research has been helpful and stimulating, Dale Bonge, who has offered useful advice and insight throughout my doctoral program at Michigan State University, and Rosalie Schellhous, who was not able to serve on the committee to the completion of the dissertation, but who played an important role in the development of this project. I am indebted to my parents, Alyce Jean and Richard Poulson who have encouraged and supported my scholarly endeavors throughout my life, and who both read this manuscript before publication. I owe gratitude to Jennifer Payne for taking time from her busy schedule to read and copy-edit this manuscript.

I would like to thank the many friends I have made while participating in the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest and related events since the time I first attended the Wyoming State Fiddle Championship in Shoshoni, Wyoming in 1984. Not only have they provided me with interviews, letters, and other information contained in this work, they have offered fiddling, fellowship, and interest in my research. In particular I would like to thank fiddlers Donna Reuter, Gary and Mary Lee Huntington, Leslie Beck, Liane and David Lemons, Frank

Wagner, Tony and Jay Dean Ludiker, Trish Ostoff, Vern and Barbara Billingsly, Dick and Char Wild, Bob and Martha Burghdoff, Duane and Marie Allerding, Denny and Irene Scott, Don Gish, Les Wagner, Tillie and the late Bunky Mcfee, Kent and Carolyn Craig, Eileen Witler, Peg Willis, Pete Willis, Andy Emert, Rod Anderson, Mabel and Siegfried Vogt, Roberta Pearce, Terry Ludiker, Starr McMullen, Bob Mathews, Dennis Coehlo, Chris and Andy Doering, and Tony and Jay Dean Ludiker. In addition I owe gratitude to all of the fiddlers and oldtime fiddle enthusiasts who have helped me during the course of this study and I regret that space here does not permit me to list them all by name.

I would like to extend special thanks to the Weiser Chamber of Commerce for allowing me to review historic documents pertaining to the creation of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest. Members of the Fiddle Committee Bruce and Cindy Campbell, and Layna Hafer who have not hesitated to provide me with any information I have requested. I would like to offer special thanks to Elise Walker of the Chamber of Commerce for helping me to obtain copies of the numerous Fiddle Committee files, and to Elise's family Jon, Zach, Ashley, and Bonnie Walker for welcoming me into their home while I was working with documents and conducting interviews in the Weiser, Idaho area.

Portions of this study were funded by a Graduate Merit Fellowship granted by the Michigan State University College of Arts and Letters and by a Dissertation Completion Fellowship awarded by the Michigan State University Graduate School.

The remainder of the financial burden of this project has been shouldered by my husband Michael Graf, whose constant moral support for this project far outweighs his substantial material investment. He has helped me through all stages of my doctoral program, especially with my research on oldtime fiddling. Here are a few of the many projects he has assisted with: attending jam sessions, buying recording equipment, setting up computer applications, making field recordings, and coaching my fiddle tune preparation before contest performances. Of all the people who helped me conduct this study, it was he who really made its completion possible.

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INTRODUCTION

In the absence of once popular community square dances, fiddle jamborees and contests have become the main performance venue of contemporary oldtime fiddlers. In the U.S. and Canada, the largest event held to declare and affirm emergent values of oldtime fiddlers is held in Weiser, Idaho and is known as the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest (NOTFC). As this contest has grown in popularity among fiddlers, its uniqueness as a tourist destination has been promoted by the organizer, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce. Here I explore changes in structure, contest, and social significance of national oldtime contest fiddling performed over the forty-five year course of this event. The central question I address is both specific to the study of traditional fiddle music and relevant to the wider areas of cultural tourism and commoditization, and cultural change and interaction in festival and ritual: How does the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest maintain the meaningfulness of the cultural product that it puts on display, oldtime fiddling? My study examines NOTFC's significance to the inhabitants of Weiser, to the tourists attracted by the Chamber of Commerce advertisements, and to the fiddlers themselves.

In the latter half of the twentieth century scholars of ethnomusicology and folklore shifted the focus of their inquiry from texts to contexts. In 1987, Timothy Rice outlined a general research question to summarize the kinds of information ethnomusicologists now agree are important in the study of music as culture: "How do people historically construct, socially maintain, and individually create

and experience music?"[1] This question is at the root of my study in which I use historical and ethnographic methodologies to determine how fiddlers construct, maintain, and create oldtime fiddle music. In addition I address specific questions identified by scholars as important in the fields of ethnomusicology and folklore: the politics of culture, issues of authenticity, and traditionalization. Examination of the creation of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest illuminates the role that the politics of culture have played in the construction and maintenance of oldtime fiddling. These politics incorporate a constructed concept of the authenticity of fiddle music as a piece of heritage worthy of preservation and promotion. Finally, through the process of traditionalization fiddlers not only maintain models of oldtime fiddling from the past, they constantly reinterpret these models through group and individual creativity and innovation.

I begin in Chapter One by putting the NOTFC in historical context. Traditional fiddling has been performed for community dances and occasionally for contests in North America since the Colonial period. Fiddlers in various geographic regions have been adapting European dance repertories to their own dancing and musical preferences, and as a result American fiddling has developed a variety of regional styles. For example, the fiddle playing style of the southern region of the U.S. is distinctive for the African American musical characteristics it has assimilated, while the Northwestern U.S. repertory includes a large number of tunes contributed by Scandinavians. As interest in playing

[1] Timothy Rice, "Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology," *Ethnomusicology* 31 no.

oldtime fiddle music has declined in the wake of new entertainment venues made possible by technology including the electronic media and the automobile, the distinctive regional repertories continue to change as fiddlers adapt to new performance venues, in particular to the contest stage.

I review the history of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest from its first presentation in 1953 in Chapter Two. I argue that the contest history chronicles the "authentication" process in which a new performance venue, the annual contest, was created in an effort to preserve an older tradition of oldtime fiddling that is perceived to be authentic. In the early 1950s Weiser Chamber of Commerce Secretary Blaine Stubblefield encouraged community interest in staging a fiddle contest. Effecting what David Whisnant has called "systematic cultural intervention," Stubblefield and the Weiser Chamber of Commerce consciously cultivated a new performance situation for oldtime fiddling with the intent of preserving the form.[2] Stubblefield was successful in presenting an appealing argument for staging the contest to community members, fiddlers, and visitors from neighboring communities through discourse about authenticity. The first contest was held in April 1953 and in the space of ten years grew to take on the national status in 1963. Here I examine the discourse that generated this interest (which continues at the NOTFC today) and link it to the larger issue of the politics of culture.[3]

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3 (1987): 473.

[2] David Whisnant, *All that is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (London: University of Chapel Hill Press, 1983): 13.

[3] See Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the*

In Chapter Three I look at the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest as a week-long festival during which a variety of fiddling activities take place. Fiddlers who attend the event undergo a frame shift from everyday life to one that empowers them through relationships with other fiddlers. These relationships are developed through informal activities of camping and jamming in the town of Weiser during "fiddle" week. A major portion of festival space is devoted to camping areas for fiddlers and other instrumentalists and their families, who set up camp in preferred areas according to what kind of music they like to play. A subset of fiddlers undergo a second frame shift from this informal atmosphere to the highly formal staged contest arena. On this stage, authentic oldtime fiddling is showcased by the Weiser Chamber of Commerce who has set up a strict set of rules and regulations both to preserve the form and to present the fiddle repertory in an organized manner. Finally, the organization promotes the fiddle as an icon that is historically connected with pioneers and cowboys. As a result, NOTFC is a festival where fiddlers and tourist spectators have the opportunity to experience the toughness and independence of the American West through what they perceive as authentic musical and geographic connections.

I explore emergent interpretations of what it means to be an oldtime fiddler and how individuals and subgroups express and negotiate these values annually at the NOTFC in Chapter Four. There are two main groups

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Politics of Culture in Quebec (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago

of fiddlers at NOTFC, fiddlers who prefer participatory contexts for music making and fiddlers who prefer to play in staged contest contexts. Each group has separate ideas of what oldtime fiddling is, and while their arguments usually center around issues of text, that is performance practice of fiddle tunes, the essence of the dispute demands a consideration of their preferred performance contexts. While the older group of fiddlers prefers participatory-oriented performances, the younger group enjoys competition on the contest stage. In this chapter I look at a number of individuals who belong to each group and identify similarities and differences in their concepts of "oldtime fiddling." Both groups adapt models from the past to formulate their present social identity, a process scholars have described as "traditionalization."[4] My investigation shows that despite the two groups' rhetoric of difference, they still share a body of ideas from the past about fiddling that they agree is important.

Scholarly Study of Fiddling in North America

The earliest studies of fiddle music in North America did not appear until the 1940s, twenty-some years after Cecil Sharp's well known collection of

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Press, 1997); Neil V. Rosenberg, ed., *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993; Whisnant, 1983).

[4] See Dell Hymes, "Folklore's Nature and Sun's Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975): 353; Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," *Journal of American Folklore* 97 (1984): 276; Dan Ben-Amos, "The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies," *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, nos. 2/3 (May-December 1984): 116; Richard Bauman, "Contextualization, tradition, and the dialogue of genres: Icelandic legends of the kraftaskáld," *In Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, ed. by Allessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 135-7.

English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians.[5] Sharp's collection represents one of the earliest major efforts to document and preserve traditional American folk music, however Sharp recorded but a few fiddle tunes and then decided to omit them from the first edition. He and his assistant Maud Karpales belonged to a group of collectors mainly interested in ballads, a musical genre that had been canonized by Francis J. Child.[6] Consequently they were not interested in collecting the other genres they encountered such as religious music, recently composed ballads, or instrumental music such as fiddling, so our knowledge of this tradition relies on efforts of later scholars.

Since 1940 several musicologists, folklorists, historians, and scholars of various other disciplines have contributed information on traditional fiddling. Their studies utilize as many different research strategies and goals as authors. In addition to historical documentation, scholars have put forth information on fiddling as a sonic event, a social movement, a folkloric means of communication, and as a creative process. A number of researchers[7] have emphasized the British origins of fiddle tunes in America, and others[8] have made substantial contributions to our knowledge of the history of fiddling by

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[5] Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians,* two vols. ed. by Maud Karpales, (London, 1917); Greatly enlarged second edition, 1932; Reprint edition with two vols. in one, New York, Oxford University Press, 1960.

[6] See Whisnant, 115.

[7] See, for example Linda C. Burman Hall, "Southern American Folk Fiddling: Context and Style" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1974); and Alan Jabbour, *American Fiddle Tunes from the Archive of Folk Song,* liner notes to accompany Archive of Folk Song LP no. AFS L62 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1971.)

[8] See Richard Blaustein, "Traditional Music and Social Change: The Old Time Fiddlers' Association Movement in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975); Joyce H. Cauthen, *With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama* (London: The University of Alabama Press, 1989); Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk*

documenting the role played by African-Americans in the development of the American fiddling tradition since colonial times.

The scholar widely recognized as the first to devote extensive attention to instrumental folk music was folklorist Samuel P. Bayard, author of *Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music of Southwestern Pennsylvania.*[9] Bayard's collection includes ninety-five tunes, the majority of which are fiddle tunes. Bayard transcribed these tunes at the time they were performed for him by informants. The collection is accompanied by an introduction and annotations that contain an abundance of information including concise biographies of fiddlers interviewed, notes on performance practices in southwestern Pennsylvania fiddling, alternate tune titles, and tune cross-references with other printed sources. This initial work has served as a standard reference for scholars of traditional fiddle music who followed Bayard.

Musicologists David Bennet,[10] Malvin Artley,[11] Linda Burman Hall,[12] Earl Spielman,[13] and Dixie Zenger[14] have concentrated on fiddle music as a sonic event. In each of their works transcription and analysis of fiddle tunes are used to describe and map regional styles of fiddling by documenting repertories and

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Music to the Civil War (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981); and Roger D. Abrahams and John F. Szwed, eds. *After Africa* (London: Yale University Press, 1983).

[9] Samuel P. Bayard, *Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music of Southern Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1944).

[10] David Parker Bennett, "A Study in Fiddle Tunes from Western North Carolina" (M.A. thesis, Department of Music, Chapel Hill, University of NorthCarolina,1940).

[11] Malvin Newton Artley, "The West Virginia Country Fiddler: An Aspect of the Folk Music Tradition," (D.F.A. diss., Chicago Musical College (Roosevelt University), August, 1955).

[12] Burman Hall 1974.

[13] Earl V. Spielman, "Traditional North American Fiddling: a Methodology for the Historical and Comparative Analytical Style Study of Instrumental Musical Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1975).

tune variants. In addition, these scholars, in particular Burman Hall and Spielman, have contributed valuable historical accounts of traditional fiddling in North America.

Burt Feintuch,[15] Gene Wiggins,[16] and Colin Quigley,[17] in separate folkloristic studies, have described fiddling in terms of its meaning to individual fiddlers. Feintuch offers insight into cognitive and social processes involved in the folkloric performance of fiddler Pop Ziegler, and Wiggins interprets the meaning of Fiddlin' John Carson's music, particularly song texts, on both personal and socio-cultural levels. Quigley's work focuses on the creative compositional processes in French-Newfoundland fiddle music as evidenced by the performance of fiddler Emile Benoit. Quigley presents the life story, musical career, and musical worldview of Benoit; the contexts in which he performs; and a detailed analysis of Benoit's musical knowledge and the processes by which he composes.

In addition to musicology and folklore, scholars of various other disciplines including history have recently contributed biographies, discographies, and social histories of specific fiddlers and fiddling regions. Charles Townsend's monograph on the life and music of Bob Wills,[18] Bill

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[14] Dixie Robinson Zenger, "Violin Techniques and Traditions Useful in Identifying and Playing North American Fiddle Styles" (D.M.A. diss., Standford, 1980).

[15] Burt Feintuch, "Pop Ziegler, Fiddler: A Study of Folkloric Performance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975).

[16] Gene Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy: Fiddlin' John Carson, His Real World, and the World of His Songs* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[17] Colin Harding Quigley, *Music from the Heart: Compositions of a Folk Fiddler* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

[18] Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills*, with a discography and Filmusicography by Bob Pinson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

Malone's *Country Music U.S.A.*,[19] and Charles Wolfe's *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling*[20] are rich sources of references to fiddlers in commercial country music. Joyce Cauthen has contributed a substantial social history of oldtime fiddling in Alabama,[21] Craig Mishler has documented Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada,[22] and fiddling traditions of the rural midwest have been presented by Philip Martin in *Farmhouse Fiddlers*.[23] In addition, organizations such as state folklife programs have sponsored documentation projects resulting in published recordings and biographies of oldtime fiddlers.[24]

Traditional fiddling in North America is a rich topic as the broad spectrum of scholarly approaches to the subject illustrated above. My study contributes along with this body of literature to our limited knowledge of the human values and cultural processes manifested in oldtime fiddling musical behavior in the United States. My exploration of the structure, content, and social significance of contest fiddling as performed in the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest addresses the question of how NOTFC has provided a site for the negotiation of

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[19] Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, revised edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

[20] Charles Wolfe, *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling*, foreword by Mark O'Connor (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997).

[21] Cauthen, 1989.

[22] Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[23] Philip Martin, *Music and Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (Mount Horeb, WI: Midwest Traditions, 1994).

[24] See for example: *Seems Like Romance to Me: Traditional Fiddling in Ohio*, produced by the Gambier Folklore Society, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1985; The Washington Traditional Fiddlers Project, *Old Time Dance Fiddlers of Washington*, produced by Northwest Folklife with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Northwest Folklife and the Washington State Arts Commission, 1993; and *Lonesome Homesteader: Old-time Fiddling in*

cultural and musical meanings of staged contest fiddling and participatory fiddling. This is a significant development as the contest is now attracting a new generation to what many people consider an antiquated avocation.

Fieldwork and Data Collection

I have collected data as a participant observer in the annual NOTFC contests held June 18-24, 1995; June 16-22, 1996; June 15-21, 1997; and June 21-27, 1998. My ability to perform on the fiddle has enabled me to meet musicians, learn musical selections from participants' repertory, and converse and participate in informal jam sessions with numerous contestants and non-competing musicians. I have collected documentation including video recordings of contest activities; formal tape-recorded interviews and field notes on informal interviews with contestants, judges, accompanists, fiddle instructors, NOTFC committee members, audience members, and other event participants; xerox copies of historical contest documents; and copies of historic recordings of previous contests. I have also formally interviewed key contacts outside of the festival week.

My interest in oldtime fiddling was aroused during my senior year in high school when I heard a local fiddler, Bob Mathews, perform in the public library. I had been trained in classical piano, trumpet, and viola, but when I began fiddle lessons I was suddenly aware that performance practice rules for fiddling were quite different than those for classical music. This discovery prompted me to seek an understanding of yet other musical and cultural systems. While

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Wyoming, published and distributed by the Wyoming Arts Foundation with support from the

studying in Oldenburg Germany as an exchange student I studied Persian violin music with a fellow foreign student from Iran. Later I enrolled in the graduate program at Kent State University where I completed a master's thesis on Ohio fiddler Denny Jones and earned an M.A. in ethnomusicology. I taught world music appreciation at Kent State and participated in world music seminars and ensembles including Southeast Asian music and the Thai Classical ensemble. While I seriously considered travelling to Thailand to conduct doctoral research, I instead submitted to an urge to keep learning about traditional fiddling in North America. This dissertation represents the completion of a full circle of inquiry that has acquainted me with variations of musical thought around the world. Curiously, the person who first mentioned the word "ethnomusicology" to me was Bob Mathews, the fiddler I heard in the library, a Wyoming State Champion oldtime fiddler who also took me to my first National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest in June of 1986.

My role as an ethnographer and participant observer has allowed me to experience two different extremes of National Oldtime Fiddling Contest behavior, participatory jam sessions and staged contest performances. This perspective is crucial to the study because it incorporates my experience of these extremes and my interactions with other fiddlers who also move between extremes into my analysis. My study of oldtime fiddling at the NOTFC incorporates my experience as an active negotiator of the fiddler identity rather than merely reporting on the experience of others. It is this perspective that helps shed light

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National Endowment for the Arts and the Mountain Bell Foundation, 1987.

on the process of converting the old to the new at the NOTFC, on the process of traditionalizing oldtime fiddle music.

CHAPTER ONE

BRIEF HISTORY OF FIDDLING IN THE UNITED STATES

Traditional fiddling has been an important element of lives of numerous North Americans since the earliest documented professional "fidler" John Utie, arrived in Virginia in 1620 on the *Francis Bonaventure* with the first wave of British immigrants.[1] In the hands of skilled musicians, the fiddle thrived in both literate and oral musical traditions providing entertainment for a range of dancing activity from balls to barn dances. The violin was a popular instrument in seventeenth-century England and the earliest fiddlers either brought their instruments to America, or after arriving they requested that instruments be sent from home, or they made their own out of available materials.[2] Since the colonial era pioneer fiddlers have carried their craft with them, adapting European dance repertories to dancing and musical preferences of various geographic regions. The result is an American tradition that consists of a number of regional styles. For example, the fiddle playing style of the southern region of the U.S. is distinctive for the African-American musical characteristics it has

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[1] Spielman, 191.

[2] Eloise Linscott observed in 1939 that "For generations the fiddle has been the main accompaniment at country dances all over New England, and many of the fiddles were homemade, local products and used in families for a long time," in *Folk Songs of Old New England* (New York, 1939, 2nd. edition, London: Archon Books, 1962): 57-61, paraphrased by Ray M. Lawless in *Folksingers and Folksong in America* (N.Y., 1960, new revised edition with special supplement, N.Y., Meredith Press, 1968): 252. On Homemade fiddles including cigar-box fiddles see also Joyce Cauthen, *With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow,* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1989): 50-55. The practice of making fiddles is common today among older musicians. Mannie Shaw, founder of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association, documented his collection of over one-hundred fiddles in a scrapbook that his granddaughter Leslie Beck allowed me to examine. Many of Shaw's fiddles were handmade by someone he knew, including one made by Charles Kinney of Fairfield, Idaho that Shaw reported to be his favorite in his Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association

assimilated, while the Northwestern U.S. repertory includes a large number of tunes contributed by Scandinavians. Interest in playing oldtime fiddle music has declined in the wake of new entertainment venues made possible by electronic media and the automobile. Radios, television, computers, and "high tech" hobbies have replaced community dances as a main entertainment and socializing events. As fiddlers adapt to new performance venues, in particular to the contest stage, distinctive regional repertories continue to thrive as well as to change.

Colonial Fiddling in America

Scholars have traced fiddling in the United States back to colonial times when fiddlers from England, Ireland, and Scotland immigrated, along with other colonists, to North America. Musicians such as Utie mentioned earlier brought with them a repertory of dance tunes that were popular in their homeland. Early in the seventeenth-century many of these tunes had been adopted by England from France under the auspices of the English Restoration court of Charles II who preferred the French style of social dance.[3] The French tunes and manner spread aurally throughout the British Isles assimilating local elements of British folk culture (including ancient folk melodies) as well as stylistic characteristics of Baroque violin. Through the eighteenth century this mixing process gradually generated a new class of tunes. According to Alan Jabbour:

> This class of tunes proved to be so popular and so tenacious that it absorbed and survived dozens of subsequent dance and instrumental vogues through the nineteenth and well into the

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autobiography (*Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers*, 1963). This fiddle was "made of straight grain maple from a threshing machine axle and native spruce cut from a tree north of Fairfield."

[3] Burman-Hall 1984, 149.

> twentieth century, creating in the meanwhile thousands of tunes patterned on the early models.[4]

In addition to the oral tradition carried to the new world by practicing fiddlers, some of them carried John Playford's dance-book, *English Dancing Master.* Playford's book, a Puritan publication issued in 1651 while the young commonwealth was involved in its first wars. According to Damon, it published

> the gay simple native dances with their traditional tunes, to fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of the imported, complicated dances favored by the court. In the ballroom as on the battlefield, the people routed the crown.[5]

These dances were not only national, they were also democratic and community oriented.

The English country dance was a form of socializing that was flexible enough to accommodate any number of dancers at varying levels of skill. In the "longways" dance, couples formed two lines facing each other, and danced figures prescribed by Playford that allowed them to interact with all of the other dancers, regardless of rank. It was possible for any couple to join the dance by taking a place at the foot of the line at any time. By watching the other couples dance at the head of the line, the newcomers were able to perform the dance figures when it was their turn to dance the lead. The book proved popular, for by 1728 *The Dancing Master* had reached its eighteenth edition and included 918 dances.[6] As demonstrated by the number of editions, the collection was a success, and soon country dancing became so popular in the late seventeenth

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[4] Jabbour, 1.

[5] S. Foster Damon, "The History of Square Dancing," *Proceedings of The American Antiquarian Society* 62 (April-October 1952): 64.

century, that by the eighteenth century dancing masters and music teachers were traveling throughout Europe and America, teaching country dance and its musical accompaniment, fiddling.[7]

After the English restored the throne to Charles II, the English country dance became internationally fashionable. It was a form of socializing that was flexible enough to accommodate any number of dancers at varying levels of skill, and everyone's participation was emphasized over the spotlighting of the skill of a few individuals. Over the course of his many editions, Playford developed versions of the longways formation suitable for formal occasions that allowed higher ranking individuals to remain higher in line throughout the dance. According to Playford, "the longways thus became *the* dance of both high and low society."[8]

As in Europe, both formal French dances and English country dancing were popular in the New World. In contrast to the English dance, French "square" or "cotillon" dances generally required dancers to memorize figures before taking part in the dance and were considered highly elegant. Diary entries made by William Byrd, an American-born member of the King's Council in Virginia in the first half of the eighteenth-century indicate that Byrd enjoyed both formal French dances such as cotillions or minuets, and less formal English "country dances" danced in lines:

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[6] John Playford, *The English Dancing Master* (London,1651; reprint ed. London: Hugh Mellor and Leslie Bridgewater, 1933).

[7] Blaustein 1975, 12; Richard Nevell, *A Time to Dance: American Country Dancing from Hornpipes to Hothash*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977, 24-26. Examples of tunes published by Playford that remain favorites in today's fiddle repertory are "Irish Washerwoman," which appeared in the first edition as "Sedanny, or Dargason", and "Greensleeves" which appeared in the fourth edition of 1670.

> Feb. 6, 1711 About 7 o'clock the company went in coaches from the Governor's house to the capitol where the Governor opened the ball with a French dance with my wife. Then I danced with Mrs. Russell and then several others and among the rest Colonel Smith's son, who made a sad freak. Then we danced country dances for an hour and the company was carried into another room where there was a very fine collation of sweetmeats.[9]
>
> Nov. 2, 1711. In the meantime the Doctor secured two fiddlers and candles were sent to the capitol and then the company followed and we had a ball and danced till about 12 o'clock at night.[10]

Fondness for dancing was not confined to Virginia, as this example from 1792 Albany, New York suggests:

> The ball opened with a minuet, and a country dance was immediately called. They succeeded each other till supper, which was a good one, but plain. A few cotillions were then danced, with one or two reels and the whole closed with a set of country dances. Broke up about three, and each retired with his partner.[11]

Testimony to the continuing popularity of social dance among the American public and to the literacy of a subgroup of fiddlers are the thirty dance instruction books which were published in the United States between 1794 and 1800. Several dancing masters published their own manuals consisting of notated music and instructions for reels, jigs, and contradances, French cotillions and quadrilles, and for the newest contemporary fad, waltzes.[12] A notable

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[8] Damon, 68.

[9] Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1941), 2; quoted in Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983): 68.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Damon, 73.

[12] Blaustein 1975, 15. Several tunes popular among today's favorites, "Fisher's Hornpipe," was printed in the 1788 American publication by John Griffith, *A Collection of the newest and most fashionable Country Dances and Cotillions.* In addition, tunes familiar to a fiddler in the 1990s which were published in such collections include "Money Musk," "Speed the Plough," "Durang's Hornpipe," "Soldier's Joy," "College Hornpipe," "Ally Croaker," and "Opera Reel." The names of the composers of the majority of these tunes, have been lost as the music passed into oral tradition. One exception is "Durang's Hornpipe." John Durang, the eighteenth-century American Dancer, wrote in his memoirs: "While I was in New York I took lessons on the

example is Thomas Wilson's *The Complete System of English Country Dancing*, designed to teach what he described as a less codified system than Playford's. While Playford's system made dances uniform by setting a particular collection of figures to a specific tune, one could use Wilson's system to call any number of figures to any given tune.[13]

Fiddle Contests

By the time of the American Revolution another fiddling context, the fiddle contest, had been established. In contrast to the country-dance setting in which all participants were actively dancing, calling, or playing music, the contest situation singled out the fiddler as an active individual on display for a passive audience. The earliest documented fiddle contest in colonial America was advertised in 1736 in the *Virginia Gazette*, a Williamsburg newspaper. The contest was to be held in association with other activities, and the grand prize constituted a "fine Cremona Fiddle."[14] Since this early date, fiddle contests have been associated with fairs, festivals, and other social events for over two-hundred years in the U. S., although documentation of contests before World War II is sparse. Fiddle contests and jamborees (in which fiddlers take turns performing on stage, but lack a competitive element) continue to be popular among fiddlers today, and will be discussed in detail later in this work.

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violin of Mr. Phile, and of Mr. Hoffmaster, a dwarf, a man about 3 foot, large head, hands and feet; his wife of the same stature. A good musician, he composed the following hompipe expressly for me, which is become well known in America, for I have since heard it play'd the other side of the Blue Mountains as well as in the cities." John Durang, *The Memoir of John Durang, American Actor, 1785-1816* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966): 22: quoted in Hamm, 73.

[13]Thomas Wilson's *The Complete System of English Country Dancing* (London: Sherwood, Neely & Jones, 1821); referenced in Nevell, 26.

[14] Spielman, 207-8.

Americanization of Dancing and Fiddling

Following the turn of the nineteenth century, two important developments occurred in American dancing.[15] First, the French cotillion was Americanized after the War of 1812 had created anti-British sentiment among urban Americans. The change in the dance was largely a matter of simplification and resulted in a reduction of the number of figures a dancer had to learn. To make up for the eliminated figures, sequential "changes" such as the "grand-right" or "left" were added, and later the addition of "swing your partner." The second important American innovation was the invention of "calling." With this development, the fiddlers exchanged the former role of dance accompanist, developed in conjunction with Playford's English *Dancing Master,* for that of dance creator.[16] A dancer interviewed by S. Foster Damon remembered the first dance he attended that was directed by a caller:

> At this dance I heard, for the first time, the local professional fiddler, old Daddy Fairbanks . . . . His Queer 'Calls' and his 'York State' accent filled us all with delight. 'Ally man left' 'Chassay by your pardners' 'Dozy Do' were some of the phrases he used as he played 'Honest John' and 'Haste to the Wedding'. At times he sang his calls in high nasal chant, 'First lady lead to the right, deedle, deedle dum dum gent foller after dally deedle do do three hands around,' and everybody laughed with frank enjoyment of his word and action."[17]

The popularity of callers and new additions to dances such as the "immoral" swing motivated the etiquette conscious dancing masters to form the National Association of Masters of Dancing in 1883. Dancers performed the swing by joining left hands and placing right hands on opposite right shoulders. The two

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[15] Spielman, 215-216; Damon, 80-83.
[16] Damon, 81; Nevell, 32-39, 50-58.

dancers leaned away from each other in order to get the full advantage of centrifugal force, placing the right feet outside each other, the little toes almost touching. "Then one revolved on the right foot, using the left to propel one much as a kid on a scooter."[18] This position was similar to the closed waltz position and in fact in some areas the latter was preferred for revolving during the swing. The possibility of intimate contact and the dizzying movement effected by both waltzing and swinging seemed to invite corruption, as was expressed in this poem from a Vermont songster of 1815

> What! the Girl I adore, by another embraced?
> What! the balm of her lip shall another man taste?
> What! touch'd in the twirl, by another Man's knee?
> What! panting recline, on another than me?
> —Sir she's yours—from the Grape you have press'd the soft blue.
> From the Rose, you have shaken the tremulous dew.
> What you've *touch'd* you may *take*!—Pretty Waltzer__Adieu.[19]

The dancing masters' efforts to discourage swinging and calling were futile, however, and by the turn of the twentieth century most of the country's square dances were led by singing callers, who very often doubled as fiddlers.

African Culture and Fiddling in the U.S.

Not only had dancing become Americanized after two centuries in the New World, but the music played by the fiddler had changed too. Interaction between members of African and European cultures on antebellum plantations resulted in new African interpretations of European dance music.[20] The outcome was a fiddle tradition distinctive to the South in which the fiddler prefers the

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[17] Damon, 91.
[18] *Ibid.*, 90.
[19] *Songster's Companion* (Brattleborough, 1815): 213; quoted in Damon, 89.
[20] Cauthen 1989, 12.

pentatonic mode, use of drone strings, rhythmic variation, and a more nasal tone quality.

As early as 1619 Africans began to arrive in North America. Captured in their native lands by European entrepreneurs, transported by ship to the Americas and sold in north, south and central America and the West Indies as slaves, Africans brought with them a musical heritage vastly different from what, at that time Europeans defined and accepted as "music." The African musical aesthetic was central to the development of American folk and popular music, particularly in the South and was a major contributing factor to the gradual transformation of "British," "Irish," "Scotch," and "French," fiddling into a new "American" style of fiddling.

European period writings such as diaries and travel accounts contain reports dating well before 1700 of African slaves playing European instruments, especially the fiddle.[21] These writings express European stereotypes prevalent at the time, including the belief that "the slaves were a happy, childlike people who loved their work" and that they were capable of learning "culture," meaning European practices. The participatory musical practices common to Africans--for example, work songs and all night dances or "plays"--aided the European misconception or rationalization that slaves were content with their lives of bondage. Often Europeans judged aspects of the African musical aesthetic such as complex rhythms and different pitch systems as primitive or inferior in comparison to their own musical sensibilities. A common belief was that

[21] Epstein, 147.

Africans could be reformed musically and trained in Western practice, for many slaves did learn to play European melodies on European instruments.

Examination of early accounts of African musical practice in America is necessary for the purpose of learning more about African contributions to American fiddling. To circumvent the stereotypes embedded in these accounts, one must incorporate knowledge that has been acquired through ethnographic studies conducted since then to achieve a more accurate perspective of historic black cultural practices. In contrast to contemporary observers' reactions ranging from fascination to disgust at slave musical practices, current scholarship recognizes that African musical aesthetic values emphasize group participation, improvisation, and experimentation with rhythm, and with vocal and instrumental timbres. As the following historic accounts are presented, these contrasting perspectives become apparent.

Slave owners encouraged certain slaves who were interested in European dance music to learn to play instruments including the fiddle. Thomas Jefferson, for example, recognized "musical ability" in slaves, though like other slave owners he judged them only in terms of how well they could learn European music. Jefferson commented in his *Notes on Virginia* that "In music they (blacks) are generally more gifted than whites, with accurate ears for tunes and time. . . ."[22] Much as other slaves were taught skills such as bricklaying and carpentry,[23] those thought to have a talent for learning European music were sent to professional musicians for instruction, although most slave fiddlers played

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[22] John Rublowsky, *Music in America* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 196): 63; quoted in Spielman, 224.

by ear. In less formal situations, a slave was provided an instrument and encouraged to learn by imitating other fiddlers (black or white). There is little documentation on the music learning process of slave fiddlers save for one account from Saint Domingue (Haiti).

> The good ears of the Negroes give them the first qualification of a musician. . . many are good violinists. That is the instrument they prefer. Many certainly play it only by rote, that is they learn by themselves, imitating the sounds of a tune, or they are taught by another Negro, who explains only the position of the strings and the fingers, with no thought of notes. They learn very quickly, for example, that *Si* is on the third string where the first finger is used, and in hearing a melody, remember what they have learned. This method is used by country fiddlers, and those of France cannot outdo them for volume of sound, capacity for drinking, or the ability to sleep without interrupting their playing.[24]

This excerpt demonstrates the observer's fascination with the oral participatory process of learning as opposed to the process of becoming musically literate. Moreover, it appears that the observer is somewhat astounded by the length of time the fiddlers are able to play. All night parties or "plays" are central to the African concept of music as a social event, although the eyewitness exaggerates this practice by reporting that the musicians could sleep while they were performing.

Once he had learned to play, the slave would be expected to perform cotillions and minuets for formal dancing, country dance tunes such as reels, jigs, hornpipes, and waltzes, polkas, marches and other types of music which were called for by the dance master. Thus the slave owner could call on his fiddler to

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[23] Cauthen 1989, 4.

[24] Moreau de Saint-Méry, Médéric Louis Élie. *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle SaintDomingue,* vol. 1(Philadelphia: Chez l'Auteur, 1797): 51, trans. by Dena J. Epstein; quoted in Epstein, 116.

provide dance music for family and social entertainment at any time. In addition, the slave owner collected any fees which might be earned by his fiddler for performances on neighboring plantations or elsewhere.

Slaves who played fiddle often expressed musical aesthetics preferred by Africans through this new instrument. Caroline Howard Gilman, wife of the Unitarian minister of Charleston, gave an account that alludes to these practices as she compares them to European practices she thought were "more civilized."

> We possessed the usual plantation luxury of a fiddler. I do not feel bound to say how many tunes Diggory played, nor how well a few visits to town had initiated his quick eye and ear into the tunes and figures of some newly-introduced cotillons. . . . Diggory, alas! In his musical science and dancing oratory was but a specimen of our city ball-room performers. Unacquainted with the science of music, though gifted with decided musical powers, they play antics with the "high heaven of sound," while sawing violins. . . . The South is certainly far, far behind the civilized world in music of this character, and there seems little hope of a remedy.[25]

Gilman's views were common among Europeans as further accounts from the West Indies demonstrate. For example, less gracious reports like the following give us information on how Africans in the West Indies made use of the fiddle and other European instruments in their own celebrations while illustrating the typical European view that African practices were primitive and uncivilized:

> The negroes ideas of pleasure are rude and indistinct: They seem chiefly to consist in throwing off restraint and spending two or three days in rambling and drinking. Aniseed is generally used on this occasion with which the women often debauch.
>
> The confusion occasioned by the rattling of chains and slings from the wharves, the mock-driving of hoops by the coopers, winding the postmens horns, beating militia and negroe drums, the sound of the pipe and tabor, negroe flutes, gombas and jaw-bones,

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[25] Caroline Howard Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 76-77; quoted in Epstein, 150.

> scraping on the violin, and singing of men women and children, with other incidental noises, make Kingston at this time [Christmas] a very disagreeable residence.[26]

Alexander Barclay, Commissioner of emigration, Jamaica, gave an account of blacks and whites dancing together to European dance forms. His writing exemplifies the European assertion that blacks could only imitate the civilized custom of dancing and playing reels, and that they did so was an indication that they were progressing beyond their own rude customs. The excerpt typically denies African musical agency in innovation or composition in European music, and this was not the case as will be shown shortly.

> . . . The day on which the last of the canes are cut down upon a sugar plantation, flags are displayed in the field, and all is merriment. A quart of sugar, and a quart of rum, are allowed to each Negro on the occasion, to hold what is called CROP-OVER, or harvest home. In the evening they assemble in their master's or manager's house, and as a matter of course, take possession of the largest room, bringing with them a fiddle and a tambourine. Here all authority and all distinction of colour ceases; black and white, overseer and book-keeper, mingle together in the dance. About twenty years ago, it was common on occasions of this kind, to see the different African tribes forming each a distinct party, singing and dancing to the *gumbay*, after the rude manners of their native Africa; but this custom is now extinct. The fiddle is now the leading instrument with them, as with the white people, whom they imitate; they dance Scotch reels, and some of the better sort (who have been house servants) country-dances. . . .[27]

James Stewart makes similar assumptions about the "civilization" of slave music through the process of creolization. His concluding remarks suggest, however, that he thinks slaves' efforts to adopt the customs of their masters were futile:

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[26] Anonymous, "Characteristic Traits of the Creolian and African Negroes in Jamaica, &c. &c." *Colombian Magazine*, April-October 1797, reprinted in 1976, Barry Higman, ed. (Mona, Jamaica: Caldwell Press, 1976), 22-23; quoted in Abrahams and Szwed, 234.

[27] Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies,* (London, 1826): 10; quoted in Abrahams and Szwed, 83.

> Plays, or dances, very frequently take place on Saturday nights, when the slaves on the neighbouring plantations assemble together to enjoy this amusement. It is contrary to the law for the slaves to beat their drums after ten o'clock at night; but this law they pay little regard to. Their music is very rude; it consists of the *goombay* or drum, several rattles, and the voices of the female slaves, which by the by, is the best part of the music, though altogether it is very rude. The drums of the Africans vary in shape, size, &c. according to the different countries, as does also their vocal music. In a few years it is probable that the rude music here described will be altogether exploded among the creole negroes, who show a decided preference for European music. Its instruments, its tunes, its dances, are now pretty generally adopted by these young creoles, who indeed sedulously copy their masters and mistresses in every thing. A sort of subscription balls [*sic.*] are set on foot, and parties of both sexes assemble and dance country dances to the music of a violin, tambarine, &c. But this improvement of taste is in a great measure confined to those who are, or have been, domestics about the houses of the whites, and have in consequence imbibed a fondness for their amusements, and some skill in the performance. They affect, too, the language, manners, and conversation of the whites: those who have it in their power have at times their convivial parties, when they will endeavor to mimic their masters in their drinking, their songs, and their toasts; and it is laughable to see with what awkward minuteness they aim at such imitations.[28]

Some slaves became famous for their fiddling such as Simeon Gilliat, who was known as the best fiddler in Virginia and was called on frequently to perform at the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg. The demand for good fiddlers was so great that some Southern planters would resort to kidnapping in order to be entertained by the best possible musicians. Such was the fate of a freeman living in New York, Solomon Northup, who was kidnapped in 1841 and spent the

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[28] James Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1823): 269-273; quoted in Abrahams and Szwed, 300-301.

following twelve years in the South as a slave-fiddler.[29] Northup was finally rescued by Northern friends in 1853. Later Northup recalled:

> My master often received letters, sometimes from a distance of ten miles, requesting him to send me to play at a ball or festival of the whites. He received his compensations, and usually I also returned with many picayunes jingling in my pockets. . .
>
> Alas! Had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses—relieved me of many days' labor in the field—supplied me with conveniences for my cabin—with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes. . . . It heralded my name round the country—made me friends, who otherwise would not have noticed me—gave me an honored seat at the yearly feasts, and secured the loudest and heartiest welcome of them all at the Christmas dance.[30]

A runaway slave who played the fiddle had a ready means for employment in his musical ability, but also a means of being identified. "Fiddle-playing" was a recognizable characteristic that appeared regularly in advertisements for the capture of runaways in the *Virginia Gazette* from the 1730s on.[31]

In addition to learning to play European instruments, slaves improvised instruments of their own such as the banjo and played them together with the fiddle.[32] The African preference for complex polyrhythm over simple European meters led to the adoption of an unusual array of items for use as percussion instruments as described by Thomas Jefferson who mentions the "banjer" in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1781. Scrapers, clackers, and other percussion

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[29] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* [an autobiography] (New York and Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853); quoted in Hamm, 123.

[30] Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*; quoted in Epstein, 150.

[31] See Epstein, p. 113 for several excerpts from these ads.

instruments like the jaw-bone, blacksmith's rasp, horse bits, and the castanet-like "bones," as well as "body music" in the form of foot-stamping, hand clapping and the complex syncopated body-slapping technique known as "patting Juba" were noted.[33] Captain J. E. Alexander observed fiddlers (and possibly a banjo judging from the song text) performing with African derived percussion instruments in Barbados:

> One evening whilst sitting on the marble verandah at Ermore, and listening to the ceaseless hum of the insects and the gentle rustling of the trees, and thinking of again venturing on the treacherous deep, I heard the lively sound of a drum at some distance, and immediately repaired to where the negores were amusing themselves under the mild rays of the Cythian queen. On a level spot, surrounded by small houses of coloured and black people, was a bench, on which seated two negro fiddlers and a thin fellow beating a drum; behind stood a man shaking violently a calabash filled with small stones and reeds, and singing with contortions an African air. The crowd formed a ring, and those who wished to dance the Joan-Johnny stepped forward, presented the leader of the band with a bit, and he
>
> "Bid the fiddle to the banjar speak,
> The banjar to the calabash without,"
>
> and a couple would twist their bodies, thump the ground with their heels, and circle round one another to the inspiring strains. The little black urchins, as usual, were sitting to one another on the outskirts of the admiring crowd, or kneeling down behind their elders, who would be pushed over admist shouts of laughter, or mimicking the actions of the white lookers on.[34]

It is likely that the practice of accompanying fiddles by "beating straws" is an African innovation. Beating straws is the custom of having an accompanist strike a rhythm with two broom straws on two strings of the fiddle while the fiddler

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[32] The claim that the "banjer" (what we know as the "banjo" today) is of African origin has been sustained by documentation; Epstein, 6-38.

[33] Blaustein 1975, 13.

[34] Captain J. E. Alexander, *Transatlantic Sketches, Comprising Visits to the Most Interesting Scenes in North and South America, and the West Indies* (London, 1833); quoted in Abrahams and Szwed, 303.

bows a melody on the opposite two strings. Accounts of this practice appear in the historical record in the mid-nineteenth century,[35] and it was documented in the field as late as 1939 by Herbert Halpert and Albert Ferris, folklore fieldworkers for the Federal Writers' Project.[36]

As slave musicians merged African with European musical customs, dancers integrated African and European dance styles as well. One case reported by ex-slaves alludes to such integration:

> My young master himself could shake a desperate foot at the fiddle; there was nobody that could face him at a 'Congo Minuet.'[37]

The term 'Congo Minuet' likely refers to a dance that was performed in Congo Square in New Orleans. An 1817 law restricted black dancing to Sundays before sundown and only in areas approved by the Mayor Augustin Macarty, who allowed dancing to take place only at Congo Square under police supervision.[38] If the "Congo minuet" was danced by the ex-slave's master in Congo Square, it is likely that this dance incorporated both Minuet movements and African dance.

> Us danced plenty, too. Some o' de men clogged and pigeoned, but when us had the dances dey was real cotillions, lak de white folks had. . . . Long after the war was over de white folks would 'gage me

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[35] Blaustein 1975, 20-21.

[36] Tom Rankin and Gary Stanton, "Documenting a People's Music: The Fiddlers and the Tunes," *Great Big Yam Potatoes: Anglo-American Fiddle Music from Mississippi,* notes to accompany recording, LP AH-002, (University, Miss.: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1985), 9.

[37] Lynne F. Emery, Black Dance in the United States 1619-1970 (Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1972): 26; quoted in Nevell, 46.

[38] This was Congo Square, at Ramparts and Orleans streets, originally known as Circus Square, and today called Beauregard Square. The city directory for 1822 noted: "The Circus *public square* is planted with trees, and inclosed, and is very noted on account of its being the place where the Congo, and other negroes, *dance, carouse and debauch on the Sabbath*, to the great injury of the morals of the rising generation; it is a foolish custom, that elicits the ridicule of most respectable persons who visit the city." Paxton, *Directory*, p. 40; Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 227; quoted in Abrahams and Szwed, 386.

> to come 'round' wid de band an' call de figgers at all de big dances. Dey always paid me well.[39]

The second ex-slave refers to clogging and pigeoning as dance forms that are familiar to and associated with African-Americans, and he draws attention to the fact that they know how to dance "real" (European) cotillions as well. The ex-slave's reference to "real" dances echoes the European value judgements cited above that European dances were of more worth than African. Without knowing the audience the ex-slave gave this account to, it is impossible to know if he stressed the value of knowing European dances for the sake of the audience (a European interviewer perhaps), or if he believed this himself. The following example indicates that slaves were quite conscious of what type of music was appropriate for certain audiences:

> . . .The amusements of the native African are much of the same kind as those of the creole negro; but they dance their own African dance to the drum, while the creole negroes consider a fiddle genteeler; though of an evening among themselves, they will often sing, dance, and beat the drum, yet they would not produce this instrument at a grand party. Fiddles and tamborines, with triangles, are essential there.

While most of our information on the musical interaction between Americans of European descent and Americans of African descent comes to us by way of accounts made by literate Europeans, there is no reason to assume, as the travel account authors above have, that culture flowed only from Europeans to Africans. If we had a written testimony of the slave experience to equal that of the Europeans, our understanding of that experience would be greatly improved. There are some accounts, though, that provide insights on

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[39] Emery, 100; quoted in Nevell, 46.

culture flow from Africans to Europeans. As we have seen in the above example of the "Congo minuet," people of European descent are known to have directly participated in music with people of African descent. A reference to Thomas Jefferson's brother Randolf made by a Monticello slave is another example of such interaction. The slave's reference is interpreted by Epstein in this example:

> A tantalizing cameo of the African strain in colonial culture is provided by the contrast between Thomas Jefferson and his brother Randolph. Thomas Jefferson, who regarded European music as "a delightful recreation for the hours of respite from the cares of the day,"[40] who played the violin and stressed music in the education of his daughters and his granddaughters, "seemed not the least bit curious about or interested in" the music of the black people by whom he was surrounded throughout his life.[41] In his voluminous correspondence and other writings, he mentioned the music of the blacks only once, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. On the other hand, his brother Randolph, about whom we know almost nothing, was described by the former Monticello slave, Isaac, as "a mighty simple man: used to come out among black people, play the fiddle and dance half the night."[42] Randolph, with no pretensions to be anything but a country gentleman, was able to relax and enjoy the company of black people, while his brother Thomas, with greater intellectual pretensions and more refined tastes, never recognized the distinctive qualities of the black music all around him.[43]

In Epstein's words, Thomas Jefferson is presented as somehow more "refined" than his brother Randolph. A more sensitive interpretation posits that it was unusual for educated whites (like Thomas Jefferson) desirous of respect among their same kind to associate with slaves on an informal basis, and rarely did they write flattering passages about native African musical behavior. Yet there were others who did enjoy the company of slaves, like Randolph, and unfortunately

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[40] Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, Mar. 14, 1818, quoted in Epstein, 122.
[41] Cripe, *Jefferson and Music*, p. 92, quoted by Epstein.
[42] "Memoirs of a Monticello Slave," in Bear, ed., *Jefferson at Monticello*, p. 22; quoted in Epstein, 122.
[43] Epstein, 122.

heir testimonies, along with those of slaves, is sorely absent from our written ecords.

Further examples illustrating the ongoing interchange of musical ideas etween African and European cultures in America are Ed Kilman and D. Dix Hollis. Ed Kilman was mentioned in an article entitled "Old Fiddlers Make Their Last Stand":

> Ed Kilman reports that a Reverent [*sic.*] A. McGary, who was born in 1846, had "learned to fiddle from a Negro slave belonging to my grandfather."[44]

D. Dix Hollis was a country doctor by profession who learned to fiddle from a former slave in the 1870s.[45]

In the 1830s the music of African-American slaves began to be publicly performed by European Americans dressed as blackface minstrels. These performers masked their fascination with black musical culture by portraying blacks as bumbling buffoons. One of these performers, Dan Emmett, became popular in the 1840s for his quartet of black impersonators who played fiddle, banjo, bones, and tambourine. According to Cauthen,

> Dan Emmett, in particular, was careful that his tunes faithfully rendered the character and tradition of the southern slave. He and other showmen collected folk tunes, such as "Jump, Jim Crow" and "Possum up a Gum Stump," on plantations and riverboats, added words, published them as sheet music, and performed them on the minstrel stage. They appropriated the British reels, jigs, and hornpipes that black musicians were playing at the time and used them during the finale of each performance, which, according to

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[44] *Houston Post-Dispatch*, 4 April 1926; quoted in Spielman, 225.

[45] Joyce Cauthen, *Possum up a Gum Stump*, brochure to accompany Alabama Traditions LP 102 (Brierfield, Alabama: Brierfield Ironworks Park Foundation, 1988), 11. Cauthen mentions that recordings of D. Dix Hollis (1861-1927) are among the oldest commercial fiddle records produced, and this brings us a step closer to imagining how the fiddling of Hollis' teacher, a former slave in the 1870s, might have sounded.

Carl Wittke, represented a "'hoe-down' in which every member of the company did a dance at the center stage, while the others sang and vigorously clapped their hands to emphasize the rhythm."[46]

Eric Lott argues that the minstrel show, the most popular American

ntertainment form in the antebellum decades was

> a principle site of struggle in and over the culture of black people. This struggle took place largely among antebellum whites, of course, and it finally divested black people of control over elements of their culture and over their own cultural representation generally.

Lott's study reveals

> in early blackface minstrelsy the dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy, moments of domination and moments of liberation, counterfeit and currency at others gesturing toward a specific king of political or sexual danger, and all constituting a peculiarly American construction of racial feeling.[47]

Lott's work forces us to realize that whites' appropriation of black culture in the theater (like Dan Emmett's troupe) is a more complicated issue than simply one of racism. European performers and spectators expressed competing emotions about blacks through blackface minstrelsy in the years prior to and after the Civil war. At times they were envious of blacks, and at others disgusted, and they were sympathetic as often as they were fearful. The minstrel stage was a forum for exploring such conflicting emotions. At the same time it was a performance venue through which white and black minstrels spread the African fiddler's music to regions where there were few or no slaves.[48]

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[46] Cauthen 1989, 13.

[47] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 18.

[48] See also Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

After the Civil War, African-Americans continued to fiddle as free men. Many travelled in minstrel shows, replacing the blackface minstrels formerly played by the whites who parodied black mannerisms. By the early 1930s, however, most African-American fiddlers had put down their fiddles in favor of horns used by jazz musicians, guitars played by blues musicians, and pianos which were preferred for playing ragtime music.[49] The Southern fiddle repertory perpetuated into the twentieth century by minstrel musicians includes tunes such as "Old Joe Clark," "Sourwood Mountain," "Cripple Creek," "Cumberland Gap," "The Hog-Eyed Man," "Bonaparte's Retreat," "Buffalo Girls," "Cluck Old Hen," "Arkansas Traveller," "Turkey in the Straw," "Boatman's Dance," "Cindy," "Liza Jane," "Whoa Mule," "Year of Jubilo," "Climbing up the Golden Stairs," "Golden Slippers," and "Give the Fiddler a Dram." Southern highlands' European-African brand of step dancing (accompanied by fiddling), known by a variety of names including "buck-dancing," "flat-foot dancing," "hoedown dancing," "breakdown dancing," and "clogging;" was introduced to the larger North American public through minstrelsy as well.

The Nineteenth-Century Fiddler

In sum, the fiddler was a valuable resource in pioneer and rural communities, for he provided the essential music for dancing, which in turn promoted close physical contact between young adults. Drinking was also associated with such events as John Hermundstad (b. 1882) points out:

[49] Cauthen 1988, 2.

> You danced. You got drunk. You got into a fight. You got killed.
> And the violin got the blame for all of it.[50]

The Great Revival of the early nineteenth century looked down on these behaviors as sinful, and it equated fiddling with laziness and therefore sin. The thought of going to hell where the "fiddlers were so thick they couldn't move their bows back and forth"[51] caused many fiddlers to give up their art. Not wishing to destroy their beloved instruments, many found hiding places for them inside the walls or under the floorboards in their homes. [52] Fortunately there were communities that welcomed the fiddler such as those in Middle Tennessee where James Gamble fiddled in the 1790s. A. W. Putnam reported that Gamble "read his Bible, and fiddled; he prayed, and he fiddled; asked a silent blessing on his meals, gave thanks, and fiddled; went to meetings, sang the songs of Zion, joined in all the devotional services, went home, and fiddled. He sometimes fiddled in bed, but always fiddled when he got up."[53] Virginia Pierce Bedford (1791-1882) of Missouri wrote of her community's fondness for dancing to her father's fiddling. Her family viewed the fiddle as a positive asset that attracted business to the father's mill and provided courting music for Virginia and her sisters who met their husbands at dances in their home:

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[50] John Hermundstad, interview with Philip Martin. Quoted in Philip Martin, *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music and Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin: Midwest Traditions, 1994): 34.

[51] Charles Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977): 17; and Delores "Fiddling De" DeRyke, "So Hell is Full of Fiddlers—Bet it Won't Be Crowded!," *Western Folklore* 23-3 (July 1983): 181-186.

[52] See Wolfe 1977, 17. Phillip Martin, however, collected stories of fiddles being "cast into fires, smashed into tiny fragments, or buried in the woods," p. 34. Cauthen reports that many Alabama fiddlers simply refrained from playing on Sunday, or they converted fiddle tunes to sacred songs by adding religious words to them (p. 204).

[53] A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennesse* (Nashville, 1859); quoted in Wolf 1977, 18.

> There were, as there are now, some church ministers, narrow men, who ranted against the playing of the violin and all social meeting that included dancing. But such opposition is grounded in gross ignorance and envy and we believed most firmly that such persons deserved our pity.[54]

Fiddlers usually played for dances unaccompanied except in early instances of African "banjer" accompaniment. The fiddle with guitar and/or banjo accompaniment does not begin to appear regularly in photo documentation until the 1870s. As a solo performer, the fiddler was responsible for playing a melody, creating a danceable rhythm and perhaps some harmony too, all at the same time. In addition, the fiddler relieved the tediousness of playing for long dances by working out variations on the original melody. The results were personalized fiddle-tune variations, several of which have been described in detail.[55] Before attaining this creative level of performance skill, however, the fiddler began by learning basic bowings and fingerings of well-known melodies. Once a general level of proficiency was attained the fiddler concentrated on expanding his repertory rather than level of technical skill.[56] While there were many fiddlers who could play a dozen or so tunes, the highly sought fiddlers were the ones who knew a night's worth of tunes. Being able to play through the night without repeating a tune was a skill and a mark of experience that a fiddler could be

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[54] From the writings of Virginia Pierce Bedford (1791-1882). Quoted in Joseph Wilson, "The Devil's Box," *Masters of the Folk Violin, 1989* (Washington D.C.: National Council for the Traditional Arts, 1989), program booklet to accompany tour of same name, p. 5.

[55] See Linda Burman Hall, "The Technique of Variation in an American Fiddle Tune," *Ethnomusicology* 12 no. 1 (1968): 48-71; "Southern American Folk Fiddling: Context and Style," 1974; "Southern American Folk Fiddle Styles," *Ethnomusicology* 19-1 (1975): 47-65; "American Traditional Fiddling," 1984.

[56] Samuel P. Bayard, "Some Folk Fiddlers' Habits and Styles in Western Pennsylvania," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 3 (1956): 17.

proud of. Selmer Halvorsen (b. 1900) recalls such a night when he fiddled for his first big wedding:

> It was my first big wedding, on a farm down in Beaver Crick. I was seventeen years old. They had a spring-fed pond there, and they had over 40 barrels of beer sunk in that spring. It was a big wedding.
>
> When we started to play for the dance [in the barn], the sun was going down and shining through the cracks. . . right in our eyes.
>
> And when we finished, the sun was shining through the cracks. . . in the wall behind us.
>
> And we never played the same tune twice.[56]

Because his art was essential for dancing, a fiddler was held in high regard and afforded special treatment. Sometimes this was cash, but more often it was food, drink, and prestige, as Sam McGee reported about a dance in Middle Tennessee in about 1910:

> They always held them in someone's home. . . . They'd just dance on whatever kind of floor it was. When they got ready to dance, they'd dance. I've seen 'em put sawdust and meal down on the floor to dance on—it made the feet easy to slide. We'd have to play on these dances probably all night long. . . until just about day or maybe even day. We were paid—three figures would be called a set and they'd charge them, have a man go around and take up money from all three of them. We'd play one tune for twenty minutes without stopping. . . . They'd treat you like you were a king. About 12 O'clock they'd always have a lot of stuff cooked up and you could go in and eat or drink anything you wanted to, and the first thing you know, they were lined up and going again. Knocking dust. . .They'd have us up on a platform in the corner, and that dust would come up--your eyes would look like two burnt holes in a blanket.[57]

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[56] Selmer Halvorsen, personal interview with Philip Martin, quoted in Philip Martin, *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music and Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin: Midwest Traditions, 1994): 26-28.

[57] Sam McGee, vetran Grand Ole Opry star; quoted in Wolf 1977, 18.

Sometimes such popularity became unwelcome when requests for music were so numerous that they were more work than fun. Elmer Gald (b. 1896) took a break from fiddling when he began to raise his family:

> After I got married, I gave it up. Farming is too much work to be out late, and coming home in the morning and having to go out and do the chores.
>
> My wife would get out of bed to answer the phone, and she'd come back--"It's for you. They want you to get your fiddle and get over there!"[58]

Being a good fiddler was not the only reason to have been stirred from one's slumber by dancing merrymakers. If you lived in a house with a good dance floor folks wanting to dance might well waken you. Laurie Sommers' research on Beaver Island, Michigan produced interesting descriptions of impromptu house parties where people would congregate at certain houses known for "a good wooden dance floor, a piano, or perhaps a ready supply of liquor."[59] There were enough fiddlers in the area to support as many as three dances simultaneously in small houses. As one house was, filled folks expanded to the next, and such parties often would start after the household members had already retired.

String Bands and Home Music

String bands made up of some combination of fiddle, banjo, guitar, and rhythm instruments are known to have existed at least since the 1870s.[60] These bands echoed the instrumental format of contemporary minstrel shows. In contrast to professionally staged minstrel shows, string bands were made up of

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[58] Elmer Gald, personal interview with Philip Martin; quoted in Martin, 26.

[59] Laurie Sommers, *Beaver Island House Party* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1996): 18.

[60] Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, revised edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985): 24.

local musicians who played at home with neighbors mainly for entertainment, relaxation, and socializing. Instruments, method books, and recordings were available by mail order in the early 1900s and provided inhabitants of isolated rural communities with a variety of musical options. Home musical groups took the opportunity to provide music for the larger community when social functions such as barn dances, ice-cream socials, pie suppers, corn shuckings, and political gatherings were scheduled. Such functions were places to meet new musicians as well.

Richard Blaustein conveys a vivid picture of the fiddler's social context at the turn of the twentieth century:

> Despite all the changes that had taken place in music and dance styles since colonial days, the fiddler's position in the social life of rural North America was not essentially different from what it had been in earlier times. In 1900, despite the industrial boom that had been mounting since the end of the Civil War, sixty percent of the population of the United States was still rural, living in communities and neighborhoods delimited by muscle power, animal or human. The world-views and life-styles of these communities reflected limited mobility and limited access to external cultural influences; to be sure, railroads and telegraph lines blanketed the continent but the automobile was still a rich man's toy, and tractors, rural electrification, and all the other twentieth-century technological achievements that have done so much to eradicate the distinctions between rural and urban life and culture had yet to penetrate into the hinterlands.[61]

Blaustein examined the 1910 edition of the Sears "Dream Book" mail order catalog and found evidence that home music remained popular in the early twentieth century.[62] Forty-two pages were devoted to the most popular rural instruments: violins and accessories, banjos, guitars, mandolins, autoharps,

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[61] Blaustein 1975, 25-26.
[62] *Ibid.*, 27-28.

button accordions, zithers, cellos, banjo-mandolins, double basses, triangles, tambourines, upright pianos, parlor pump organs, and harmonicas.

Changes in American life since then have resulted in deterioration of the custom of making music at home with one's own friends and family. Jake Hughes, a retired farmer born in a small northwest Missouri community in 1900 commented on these changes in 1974:

> That's the reason you ain't got the musicians you used to have. They used to go out and work ten, twelve hours; come in. There wasn't a picture show to go to. You didn't have no way to go to it, except horseback or in a buggy, and you didn't go. And to have some entertainment, why, you went over to the neighbors and had some music or they came over to your house and had some music. And every night or two you picked up your old banjo or fiddle, and if nobody came in you'd practice, and if somebody came in, well, you played an hour or two and they all went home to go to bed to get up and work the next morning.
>
> Now they've got an automobile. They can go downtown, run around and hoot at the gals, drink some beer; raise hell thataway. That's a different way of life. If you didn't have any televisions to watch or radios to listen to, there'd be a heck of a lot more musicians in the country. They'd have time on their hands.
>
> But that's all gone. They don't have to do that. They can get in a car and go somewhere. Run around. Drive.[63]

By the mid-1920s, public attention was turned away from fiddling in the home by more than just developments in transportation. For the first time in U.S. history, the urban population had grown to exceed the rural population. Within the urban context there were opportunities for entertainment that had previously been out of reach. Moreover, the perfection of the phonograph and the growth of

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[63] Jake Hughes, personal interview by Richard Blaustein, 7 June 1971; quoted in Blaustein 1975, 30-31.

the recording industry resulted in major changes in both urban and rural music traditions in America. According to Spielman:

> It is safe to assume that by the early 1920s, phonographs and private record collections were in the homes of practically all Americans who could afford them.[64]

Since the advent of sound recording technology the traditional repertory of dance and popular music shared by fiddlers has been complemented by a number of tunes that became well known through commercial recordings. Two of today's popular "oldtime" string-band tunes that entered the fiddlers' national repertory in the 1920's are "Redwing" and "Down Yonder." "Redwing" was composed by Kerry Mills in 1907 and recorded in the mid-1920s by the Blue Ridge Highballers and by Riley Puckett and Carson Robinson, and "Down Yonder" was composed by L. Wolfe Gilbert in 1921 and recorded by the Skillet Lickers ca. 1926-31.[65] Before oldtime fiddle recordings were available in 1923, a fiddler had recordings of cornet solos, operatic arias, presidential speeches, and military band marches to choose from.[66] Out of this limited selection, fiddlers may have been most motivated to learn marches, and this could well have been the time when "Under the Double Eagle" entered the repertory. Cauthen suggests that Columbia's recording of John Y. Atlee whistling "Listen to the Mockingbird" may have struck fiddlers as a "showy piece for fiddle contests" and so they learned it. Arkansas Traveler's standard status earned through minstrel

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[64] Spielman, 236.

[65] Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 166 and 169. Other showy tunes such as these four, "Under the Double Eagle," "Listen to the Mockingbird," "Arkansas Traveler," and "Orange Blossom Special," have become standard pieces in most fiddlers' repertories.

[66] Cauthen 1989, 20.

shows could only have been intensified with the availability of the recording "Arkansaw Traveller" [*sic.*] complete with witty responses to the interruptions of a traveler offered in the 1905 Sears and Roebuck catalog.[67]

In 1920 people began receiving live public radio broadcasts in their homes, and radio soon surpassed the phonograph in the amount of new material, musical and otherwise, it brought into the home from an external source.

Though the recording industry was initially disinterested in rural music, the success of local radio programs featuring live fiddle performances created a demand for recordings of fiddling, and the 1920s saw the first oldtime fiddlers recorded and distributed commercially. A legend in the history of "hillbilly"[68] music, Fiddlin' John Carson was the first[69] fiddler whose recordings sold successfully. Much of Carson's popularity may be attributed to the grass roots movement which was forming in response to the "jazz age."[70] Jazz was perceived by critics to be symbolic of moral corruption induced by urban environments, while music played by rural musicians were championed as symbolic of a more pristine, intact set of morals.

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[67] *Ibid.*

[68] According to Archie Green who has researched the origin of the term "hillbilly" and its identification with rural music, the term has been used in print since at least 1900 as a catch-all designation for the southern backwoods inhabitants. Employment of "hillbilly" as a generic term for the commercial country music of the South may be traced to a January 15, 1925 recording session in the Okeh studios in New York City; Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore* 78 no.309 (July-September 1965): 205-208; discussed in Malone, 39.

[69] Fiddlin' Eck Robertson is widely recognized as the first country musician to have made recordings which were commercially released in 1922, several years earlier than Carson. Robertson's recordings were not as popular with the buying public because he lacked the celebrity Carson had achieved through radio broadcasts.

[70] See Blaustein 1975, 41-52.

As mechanical and electronic communications media suddenly took up the role formerly embodied by printed and oral traditions, the modern age that we think of as the "Roaring Twenties" had arrived. Old-school, white Americans were disturbed by these changes, and their reactions have been described by Arnold Rice:

> The 1920s meant "modernism." And "modernism: among other things meant the waning of church influence, particularly over younger people, the breaking down of parental control, the discarding of the old-fashioned moral code in favor of a freer or "looser" personal one, which manifested itself in such activities as purchasing and drinking contraband liquor, participating in ultra-frank conversations between the sexes, wearing skirts close to the knees, engaging in various extreme forms of dancing in smoke-filled roadhouses, and petting in parked cars.[71]

A large segment of American society singled out jazz music as an example of music as the cause of these ills. Allen P. Merriam mentioned this reaction to jazz as an example of music as a social symbol in his book *Anthropology of Music*, in this case, a symbol of social disintegration. Merriam cited reactions to jazz published in a series of newspaper articles, and showed that during a period from approximately 1920 to 1940 jazz was under constant attack by the public press as the source of almost unmitigated evil.[72]

In response to the jazz movement Henry Ford launched a major old-time music and dance revival. Fords's action is an example of what David Whisnant has identified as "systematic cultural intervention," a dimension in the politics of culture in which "someone (or some institution) consciously and programmatically

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[71] Arnold Rice, cited in Seymour M. Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); quoted in Blaustein 1975, 32-33.

[72] Allen P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964): 241-244.

takes action within a culture with the intent of affecting it in some specific way that the intervenor thinks desirable."[73] Intervention can range from small acts like starting an archive or museum, or larger ones like Ford's effort to revitalize and preserve oldtime music and dance. Whisnant cites an example of a systematic cultural revitalization effort concerning dance customs in Martinique in 1694. A French monk missionary found the African dances performed among the slaves to be "indecent and lascivious" and suggested that they be replaced by the minuet and the courante, "which would satisfy their love of dancing in an innocent way."[74] The missionary's ideals fit the stereotypes Europeans held about African culture discussed earlier, and his recommendation assumed that the slaves would become more civilized when they adopted European customs.

Ford's recommendations parallel earlier efforts such as the French monk's to substitute cultural behavior that he considered moral and civilized for immoral practices. Ford had been reared on a Michigan farm and this experience enculturated him with strong conservative family values. These values included

> the music and dance traditions that New Englanders had transplanted to Michigan and the Great Lakes region.
>
> But the Anglo-American dance tradition was petering out by the early 1900s and giving way to the erotic and atomistic character of the Charleston, the Black Bottom, and that wicked jazz.[75]

A fiddler himself, Ford was not willing to stand on the sideline and let jazz subsume his musical and moral heritage. He viewed the "pestiferous growth" of urban areas as unhealthy compared to an agrarian lifestyle, for in the city life was

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[73] Whisnant, 13.
[74] Epstein, 30; quoted in Whisnant, 14.
[75] Blaustein 1975, 36-37.

"unnatural," "twisted," and "cooped up" in contrast to what he felt were the virtues of agrarian life: "wholesomeness," "independence," and "sterling honesty."[76] According to Ford, jazz music fostered problems stemming from alcohol, tobacco use, and sexual license in the cities. The parties he held ultimately responsible for these ills were "foreigners," African-Americans, recent immigrants, and particularly what Ford termed the "international Jew."[77] Many of these views he expressed in his publication the *Dearborn Independent*, in which he, for example, featured an anti-Semitic campaign dealing with issues such as "Jewish Jazz Becomes Our National Music" and "How the Jewish Song Trust Makes You Sing."[78]

Ford organized an intervention effort in the form of a nation-wide revival of oldtime music and dance which began with the publication of a dance instruction book:

> In 1925 Ford announced that he would lead a crusade to bring old-fashioned dances back into public favor. He enrolled 200 Michigan and Ohio dance instructors to Dearborn to learn the oldtime steps, and he published a guidebook with the long and declamatory title "'Good Morning': After a Sleep of Twenty-Five Years Old-Fashioned Dancing Is Being Revived by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford." Besides illustrating the appropriate moves for square dances, it condemned as promiscuous the newer jazz dances such as the Charleston and the associated flapper lifestyle.[79]

Ford's efforts included the purchase of the Wayside Inn in Massachusetts where organizing tasks and dances took place. Ford solicited the nation for the best oldtime fiddlers and invited them to his home in Dearborn, Michigan, to play for

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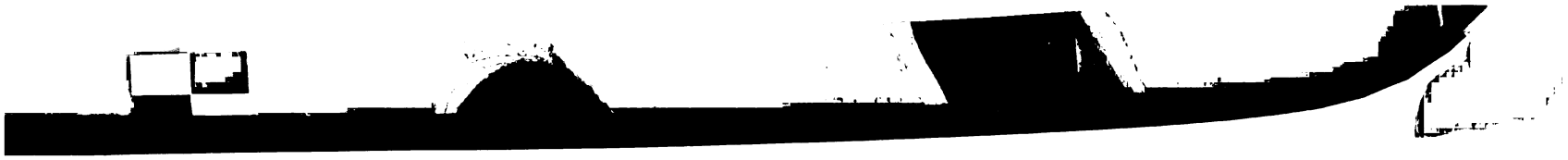
[76] Peterson, 59.
[77] *Ibid.*, 60.
[78] Seymour M. Lipset and Earl Rabb,136-138, quoted in Blaustein 1975, 40.
[79] Peterson, 60.



him. Ford bestowed gifts upon these fiddlers and sent some of them to his friend Thomas A. Edison who recorded their performances. Ford sponsored numerous oldtime dances and fiddle contests on a national level. Ironically many of the contest winners were not the models of moral perfection that Ford had envisioned. He finally found a fiddler in Norway, Maine, Allison Mellen "Mellie" Dunham, who fit Ford's moral standards and could be featured for special publicity:

> Dunham, seventy-two years old and the maker of the snowshoes that Admiral Robert Peary wore on his expedition to the North Pole, was a dedicated, modest, morally upstanding, and photogenic gentleman. Observing the dress and the deportment of Dunham and his wife, the *Boston Herald* noted, "their manners are naïve, straightforward and honest. Their minds are those of kindly, sequestered country folk somewhat past their prime, and their clothes are just their "Sunday suits," not costumes devised to attract attention. The reporter concluded, "Both the Dunhams are real".[80]

Peterson observes that even though Dunham was perceived by revivalists as "the real thing" that they were trying to perpetuate, Dunham lived in the real world where he had to earn a living. After experiencing Ford's high publicity he concluded, as other "Ford discoveries" before him had, that he should be making money rather than simply collecting honor for his talent as an old-time fiddler. He subsequently was hired by the Keith Albee vaudeville circuit where he earned as much as $1500 weekly.[81]

In addition to sponsoring contests and recordings, Ford supported instruction courses in oldtime fiddling, dances at schools and universities, and

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[80] *Ibid.*, 61.

[81] David L. Lewis, "The Square Dancing Master," *American Heritage* 23 no. 2 (1972): 51, quoted in Blaustein 1975, 47.

the publication of subsequent dance instruction books. An article published in the *Literary Digest* at the height of Ford's oldtime dance revival in 1926 gave an account of Ford's preservation activities, and as Blaustein points out, "show the connection with the WASP preservatism of the *Dearborn Independent*:"[82]

> One of the astonishing features of the autumn and early winter has been the wide-spread revival of the old American dances. After long neglect they are now discovered to be the very thing that a jaded generation has been looking for. The old music, the neighborly mingling of people in the square dances, the rollicking jigs and joyous jigs, together with the vocal harmony of the calls, are all found to impart a pleasure which the more sophisticated of the manufactured dances and the synthetic music of Tin Pan Alley (N.Y.) can not give.
>
> Twenty years ago the arrival of the new fad in dancing drove tens of thousands of mature dancers from the floor, and the more promiscuous methods adopted for public dancing drove the more reticent away altogether. Now, however the older and more American dances return with a novelty that they could hardly have had except for this rest of two decades. They come again as new, to both the old and the young. To the young they are, of course, all novelty, "the very latest." The play spirit, which the young have vainly sought in the newer forms, has been abundantly found in the classics of the other generations. The great triumph of the old American dances is that they have so overwhelmingly approved themselves to the younger American generation. This shows that both the dances and the youth are good at heart. More than that, it increases the sum of pleasure in this land, of which we have never had too much. We have learned to work, but we have neglected the equally important part of play. We are learning to play in the large-hearted, social and wholesome way of those whose characters and traditions shape this nation.
>
> Tho the dance has somewhat departed from our practise these recent years, it can not be said to have departed from our art, literature and music. It was never completely absent from our national thought of merriment and play. Its return argues a better balancing of life in other respects as well.[83]

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[82] Blaustein, 45.
[83] *Literary Digest* (2 Jan 1926): 34; quoted in Blaustein 1975, 45-46.

Ford was successful in creating a national rage for oldtime fiddling and dancing, but the fad was short lived and began dying out after 1927.

Fiddle Contests

Fiddle contests have historically been staged events designed to show off fiddlers normally taken for granted in their more familiar dance contexts. As staged events designed to attract an audience, organizers have always had to make decisions about the appropriateness of the material presented on the stage. Issues of spectator satisfaction, fiddler satisfaction, and one of practicality for organizers have determined the shape of contests and the public image of fiddle contests over time.

Descriptions of fiddle contests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America are the earliest we have with exception of the one held in Virginia in 1736 mentioned earlier, and a few other isolated examples such as one held in 1870 in connection with the Atlanta fair. In each case, organizers of contests sought out fiddlers who were valuable resources to their community to pit against prized fiddlers of other communities. Other affairs seem to have been merely an excuse to socialize, as the contest held in the Smoky Mountains in 1909 described by folklorist Louise Rand Bascom:

> The convention is essentially an affair of the people, and is usually held in a stuffy little schoolhouse, lighted by one or two evil-smelling lamps, and provided with a rude, temporary stage. On this the fifteen fiddlers and 'follerers of banjo pickin' sit, their coats and hats hung conveniently on pegs above their heads, their faces inscrutable. To all appearances they do not care to whom the prize is awarded, for the winner will undoubtedly treat. Also, they are not bothered by the note-taking of the zealous judges, as these gentlemen are not appointed until after each contestant has finished his allotted 'three pieces.'

> To one unused to mountain tunes, the business of selecting the best player would not be unlike telling which snail had eaten the rhododendron leaf, for execution and technique differ little with the individual performers, and the tune no matter what it may be called, always sounds the same. It is composed of practically two bars which are repeated over and over and over again until the fiddler or banjo picker, as the case may be, stops abruptly from sheer fatigue.... The tunes are played at all the dances, whistled and sung by men and boys everywhere. The mountaineer who cannot draw music from the violin, the banjo, or the 'French harp' is probably non-existent. . . . The women are also endowed with musical talent; but they regard it as the men's prerogative, and rarely touch an instrument when their husbands are present.[84]

Larger contests that were held at the county seats offered a fiddler the chance to win the title of "best in the county." The county contest was indeed a meaningful event and title, for travel was difficult in this hilly country and often a fiddler had to cover a day's distance to reach the county seat. Josiah Combs observed in the Southern Highlands in 1925:

> The fiddler is much in demand at dances, weddings, Christmas parties, etc. That one who is "give up" (admitted) to be the "best fiddler in the county" is indeed no insignificant personage. Most of the highland counties have what are called old fiddlers' contest, once or oftener each year. They are held usually in the courthouses, at the sessions of the quarterly circuit courts. At these meetings one may see as many as six to a dozen fiddlers, playing such favorites as: "The Arkansas Traveler," "Sourwood Mountain," "Old Kentucky River," "Cluck Old Hen," "Give the Fiddler a Dram," "Old Joe Clark," "Sally Goodin'," "Soldier's Joy," etc.[85]

According to Combs, the young and the old fiddlers competed against each other. He compares the attitude of the older fiddlers toward the young with "the dignity of an old English minstrel in 1594":

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[84] Louse Rand Bascom, "Ballads and songs of Western North Carolina," *Journal of American Folklore*, 22-74 (April-June, 1909); quoted in Wolfe, 19-20.

I have been a minstrell these thirtie yeares,
And tickled more strings than thou haires.[86]

Other contests that carried more prestige for both organizers and participants were sponsored by even larger towns in conjunction with holiday activities such as Fourth of July and Labor Day celebrations. Wolf gives an account from the Knoxville *Tribune* of August 30, 1891 which lists the fiddling contest as part of the "Amusement Program," which included a mule race, a tug of war, a typesetting contest, and "toddy tail-pulling." (He notes that that the fiddling prize was $3.00 where the prize for typesetting was $10.00.) Further, the *Tribune* article is an early example of fiddling linked to the concept of the "good old days" with its comment that fiddle contestants "might have been called to bewitch the soul of that merry monarch of song, Jolly Old King Cole, and each played the sweet old tunes of by gone time with charmed bow string."[87]

As the popularity of fiddle contests grew, fiddlers had more chances to exchange lore about their fiddles and fiddling. Much of this was presented as part of the staged performance of a contestant. Many older fiddlers made their own violins from special hand picked materials ranging from cigar boxes or wagon tongues to hand selected curly maple and spruce woods. Some of them had collections of fiddles each with a unique story behind it. Fiddlers enjoyed swapping tune histories, as they still do today. For example, "Billy in the Lowground" refers to a fiddler named Billy who fell in a sinkhole and signaled for

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[85] Josiah H. Combs, "The Highlander's Music," chapter of doctoral dissertation "*Folk Songs du Midi des États-Unis*," Sorbonne, 1925, trans. and reprinted in *Kentucky Folklore Record* 6 no. 4 (October-December, 1959): 116.

[86] Lily, *Mother Bombi;* quoted in Combs, 116.

[87] Knoxville *Tribune* (30 August 1891); quoted in Wolfe 1981, 22.

help by playing his fiddle.[88] Legend has it that a less well known tune "Wild Rose of the Mountain" was written for a beautiful girl who strayed from one man to the next at local dances, and that the popular "Eighth of January" commemorates Andrew Jackson's victory in the battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.

The Atlanta Fiddlers' Convention was held annually between 1913 and 1935, and was sponsored by the Georgia Fiddlers' Association. Guthrie Mead has traced contests back to the 1880s in Atlanta,[89] but the contest that inspired the long Atlanta run was held on the Fourth of July, 1912 in nearby Lawrenceville. Six-thousand people attended the fiddle contest in scorching heat. They ate one-thousand watermelons and used palmetto fans given out by a local business to help survive the heat. Gene Wiggins speculates that this contest inspired the Atlanta contests because the most publicized fiddlers in 1912 served one year later on the executive committee of the first Georgia Fiddlers' Association.[90]

As fiddling entered the Atlanta contest limelight as a major staged performance activity, disputes arose over the type of playing styles that should be performed as entertainment and which were actually competition-worthy. Newspaper accounts report that there was an argument over whether "straw beating" should be allowed in contest performances, and the executive committee decided in 1916 that straw beating would be allowed "for exhibition

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[88] See Wolf 1981, p. 19 for other stories.

[89] Guthrie T. Meade, "Fiddle Contests and Conventions," *1968 Festival of American Folklife,* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1968): 33; referenced in Spielman, 209.

[90] Gene Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987): 46.

purposes but was not to count in the medal contest."[91] Newspapers made all they could out of such disputes, emphasizing the backwardness of the "straw-beaters" who reportedly came to Atlanta from their homes deep in the mountains. In other words, these fiddlers were the most rustic and antiquated of the contest assortment. Rural fiddlers who participated in the Atlanta contests and were later to record commercially include Fiddlin' John Carson and Gid Tanner.

The 1914 convention, held in the Atlanta City auditorium, had over one-hundred participating fiddlers and was attended by over five thousand people every day for an entire week.[92] Fiddlin' John Carson won the contest this year and provided an opportunity for journalists to produce much creative writing about his somewhat comical character. A favorite theme the newsmen enjoyed developing was the Blue Ridge "mountain" man's dog:

> On the last night of all the prizes were to be awarded to the best of all "fiddlers." "Fiddlin'" John started for the Auditorium in the early afternoon of that day, wit many a pause to view the sights of the city. His beloved fiddle was tucked under his arm in pillow slip, and at his heels, tugging at a bit of plow-line, trotted "Trail," the sorriest looking hound that ever bayed at the moon.
>
> "No dogs allowed," said the janitor at the Auditorium, curtly.
>
> "This ain't no common dawg," retorted "Fiddlin'" John, pulling "Trail" closer into view. "That there houn' is the best tribble singer in Gawgy. Ain't you, 'Trail'? Speak up now."
>
> By this time the custodian of the building, who knew of "Fiddlin'" John's fame, had reached the door. He admitted the "fiddler" and his dog, and that night the mountain Kubelik played while old "Trail" sang. His song was the echo of a fox chase under a Georgia moon, then a memory of the biggest coon ever treed. As he warmed to his work his master's playing became gradually a mere *obbligato* to his solo.
>
> When he paused "Fiddlin'" John laid down his violin and the audience cheered. The Judges withdrew and "Fiddlin'" John sang

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[91] *Atlanta Georgian*, (26 Jan. 1916,): 2; quoted in Wiggins 1987, 48.

[92] Linton K. Starr, "Georgia's Unwritten Airs Played by Old 'Fiddlers' for Atlanta Prizes," *Musical America* (21 March 1914): 14; referenced in Spielman.

> "Run, Nigger, Run, Pateroll'll Ketch You," while they made up their decision.
>
> "Fiddlin'" John then was declared the best of Georgia fiddlers, with "Shorty Harper" as next best, and the convention adjourned.[93]

A significant element of the magazine's report is that Carson is depicted as a mountain man, whereas he had lived most of his life in Atlanta and worked in the city's modern cotton mill. He was born near the Blue Ridge Mountains and this was enough to earn his character representation of "mountain man." By the 1924 Atlanta contest, the news coverage of the convention had cast the general character of the fiddler firmly as an old man and a dying breed. The difficulty in 1924 was that the man who beat the defending champion, Fiddlin' John Carson, was twenty-two-year-old Marcus Lowe Stokes who played "Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia." The defeat ran so contrary to the *Atlanta Journal's* usual pattern of presenting the contest to the public, that after a series of usual articles covering the contest week, they published no story at all the final day when Stokes was announced the winner. The *Sunday American* printed the following, although not in all editions:

> Youth will be served—even in the fields attributed and set aside for age.
>
> Thus it was Saturday night when 22-year-old Marcus Lowe Stokes, of Cartersville, out-fiddled Georgia's best fiddlers and walked home with the sidemeat, so to speak, in the contest held before some 3,000 men and women at the Auditorium-Armory.
>
> Pitted against young Stokes were about 50 of the best known fiddlers in the state, including the nationally known fiddler, John Carson—Fiddlin' John.[94]

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[93] Linton K. Starr, "Georgia's Unwritten Airs Played by Old 'Fiddlers' for Atlanta Prizes," *Musical America* (March 21, 1914): 23; quoted in Wiggins 1987, 52.

[94] *Sunday American (9* November 1924); quoted in Wiggins 1987, 89.

The *New York Times* carried a more detailed account than the Atlanta papers, and apparently this (or a *Literary Digest* reprint) is where Stephen Vincent Benét picked up the story upon which he based his poem "The Mountain Whippoorwill"[95] (see Appendix for complete poem). This poem is widely known, though few people today know that it was inspired by the showdown between Carson and Stokes. The narrator of the poem, Hillbilly Jim, is also the young fiddle player who wins the contest over the famous Old Dan Wheeling in an imaginary Georgia county. Hillbilly Jim gives a romantic account of his unspoiled life in the mountains and how this experience is the essential component of his winning fiddling. As Stokes won by audience applause, so did the boy in the "The Mountain Whippoorwill."

According to Richard Peterson:

> Like the newspaper accounts, the poem strained to make the age anomaly understandable by having the youthful victor (the product of the union of a fiddle made of mountain-laurel wood and a whippoorwill) come from even farther back in the aboriginal Appalachian forest.[96] Thus the best music was seen to be carried by a pure youth newly come from a more remote mountain region . . . Clearly the idea of a place uncontaminated by urban-industrial society and peopled by unchanging descendants of Daniel Boone-like old-time folk was lodged firmly in the American imagination.[97]

As it happened, rather than handing his fiddle over to the young fiddler who'd beat him as in the poem, Carson was angry about Stokes' victory.

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[95] Wiggins provides a detailed analysis of Benét's poem that shows correlation between it and published accounts of the 1924 Atlanta contest. See Eugene Wiggins, "Benét's 'Mountain Whippoorwill: Folklore Atop Folklore," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* 41 (Sept. 1975): 105.

[96] Throughout the nation's history the West has been the prime locus of the imagined unspoiled land, but for the fifty years following 1880 the Appalachian region rivaled the West for this honor. See Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); referenced in Peterson, 247.

[97] Peterson, 58.

Wiggins speculates that Stokes' association with Carson's "right-hand man" may have been partly behind the reaction. Another factor according to Wiggins was the existence of a new fiddlers' association since 1921. This new group of fiddlers felt that the old association was "too much dominated by slapdash showmen like John [Carson] and Gid Tanner."[98] Formed by Clayton McMichen and Bud Silvey, friends of Stokes', the association was supposed to give younger and more serious players a "fair shake." Perhaps Carson thought it was this faction who somehow lured the audience to its side to ensure that Stokes would be declared the champion.

Promoters and organizers elsewhere in the U.S. were also sponsoring contests. The 1925 fiddler's convention in Mountain City, Tennessee and the 1928 old fiddlers' contest on the Sears Roebuck barn dance radio program are two examples of promoters' experiments with new ways of presenting fiddlers. The Tennessee contest was sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan and combined a "package" show of professional radio and recording musicians with a contest for local and regional fiddlers and attracted an "overflow" crowd.[99] Sears Roebuck provided $100 worth of prizes for their contest in St. Louis that was attended by over one-hundred contestants whose fiddling was judged by KMBC broadcast listeners.

As Bill Shull has pointed out, newspaper accounts of the St. Louis event strove to paint an antiquated picture of fiddle music similar to the tone generated

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[98] Wiggins 1987, 92.

[99] Joe Wilson, *A Fiddlers' Convention in Mountain City, Tennessee*, liner notes for the County Records album 525, n.d.; referenced in Spielman, 210.

by the Atlanta contests.[100] The headline reports that "Tunes of "High-Bicycle Era Live Anew in Bows of Oldtime Fiddlers," and the photo caption, "Old Style Music Floats from Modern Radio Station." Moreover, the text states, "What a contrast between the ancient rhythm produced by those 'scrapers of the catgut,' as Mr. Shakespeare expressed it, and the smart environment of the Aladdin hotel!"[101] Elsewhere in the article contestants are caricatured as rural inhabitants somewhat bemused by the modernisms of city-life, much as Hillbilly Jim was portrayed in Benét's poem. Upon closer examination of the group photograph of convention attendees, the contestants are dressed in suit coats and ties (the few women in dresses) look as modern as any in 1928.

The Stoughton Fiddlers' Contest was sponsored annually by the Amercian Legion chapter in south-central Wisconsin from 1926 until the mid-1950s. Accounts contain a sense of strong ethnic regional flavor. The first in 1926 was held in March before the spring planting season started, and many of the contestants who entered were Norwegian immigrant musicians who had previously won prizes at contests held in the Old Country. Their music spoke to their countrymen:

> Their smooth, sweet waltzes tumbled and glittered like mountain waterfalls. Melancholy modes tugged at the heartstrings of compatriots in the audience. Many an eye glistened after a rendition of an old herder's melody or a lively *springdans*.[102]

The American favorite at this contest was Jack Robertson who performed traditional favorites and trick fiddling. The local paper reported that he "could do

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[100] Bill Shull, unpublished paper read at American Folklore Society meeting, Portland, Oregon, October 31, 1998.

[101] *Kansas City Journal* (Friday, 23 March 1928); quoted in Shull.

as many things with a violin as a Ford owner with a screwdriver."[103] Another contestant with his own brand of showmanship won the audience's favor by pretending to be intoxicated to the point he required assistance from friends as he took the stage. After several false starts he suddenly surprised everyone by ripping off a blazing hoedown, much to the delight of all the spectators. The contest program also included a range of performers other than fiddlers:

> squeezebox accordionists and hillbilly songsters, ragtime pianists and Swiss yodelers, mandolin strummers and harmonica blowers, ukelele ensembles and Hawaiian guitarists, cloggers and jig dancers.[104]

For the 1926 Stoughton contest there was a variety of prize categories for which one might win merchandise from local businesses after a days worth of music-making:

> Best All-Around Fiddler
> Best Own Selection
> Most Different Positions (trick fiddling)
> Best-Looking Fiddler
> Oldest Fiddler
> Funniest Fiddler
> Best Girl Fiddler
> Youngest Girl Fiddler
> Laziest Fiddler
> Best "Turkey in the Straw"
> Best "Listen to the Mockingbird"
> Best Norwegian Selection
> Best "*Saeters Jenters Sondag*"
> ("The Herding Girls' Sunday," a Norwegian favorite composed by Ole Bull)
> Best Left-Handed Fiddler
> Best Jig
> Best Clog Dance[105]

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[102] Martin, 98.
[103] *Stoughton Courier-Hub*, quoted in Martin, 100.
[104] Martin, 100.
[105] *Stoughton Courier-Hub*, 1926; quoted in Martin, 100-101.

The length of this list indicates that various forms of participation were valued in this community and encouraged by offering a range of awards.

Commercial Country Music

Beginning in 1927 the music of the Carter family glutted the commercial market, making it hard for fiddlers to compete with their musical style, which did not feature the fiddle as a lead instrument. The Carter family was recorded by Ralph Peer who was also responsible for the first recordings of Jimmie Rodgers. Richard Peterson reasons that Peer probably acted on music industry market preditions. "Music industry analysts in 1925 saw in the unprecedented nationwide popularity of oldtime songs a harbinger of the end of the 'jazz fad' and a return to a taste for ballads and sentimental love songs of the sort they were geared to produce."[106] An unsigned editorial in the *Talking Machine World* of December 15, 1925 suggested that "solo numbers with minor accompaniment" were popular sellers and that artists who performed such music should be sought for recordings.[107] The Carter family's songs with a minimum of instruments and arrangement emphasized the values which had governed rural and small-town lifestyles for centuries. Between 1927 and 1941 they recorded over three-hundred sides for several companies of songs drawn from traditional sources as well as composed by themselves. Fiddlers would soon adapt by learning to play the repertory of singing stars such as the Carters and Jimmie Rodgers.

Rural values were changing rapidly, and the songs of the Carters evoked fond memories of stable family life that seemed to have existed only in the past.

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[106] Peterson, 40.
[107] *Ibid.*

The popularity of the Carter family set a trend for rich solo and duet vocals on old-sounding ballads and love songs with a minimum of accompaniment in commercial country music among their contemporaries. In contrast to the earliest hillbilly recordings, which were dominated by instrumental music with incidental singing, the Carter family emphasized vocals. The Carter's accompanied themselves on banjo, guitar, and autoharp and contributed characteristic instrumental techniques to modern country music, however it was their singing, the power of their voices and the strength of their song lyrics that delineated their musical style.

Another exceptional country music artist recorded by Peer in the late 1920s was Jimmie Rodgers, often referred to as the "father of modern country music."[108] Rodgers was in command of a repertory which he had drawn from a multitude of sources including African-American railroad workers, hillbilly musicians, vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, and other American popular music genres. He usually performed alone and accompanied himself on the guitar. The "blue-yodel" is an invention for which Rodgers is famous and supposedly represents the fusion of blues and Tyrolian yodeling. In his short recording career of seven years (Rodgers died of tuberculosis in 1933, seven years after his first recording session in 1927), Jimmie Rodgers recorded one-hundred-eleven songs and "introduced new techniques and styles [to country music] and inspired a legion of followers who sought to emulate their master."[109]

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[108] Malone, 77.
[109] *Ibid.*

The popularity of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers drastically changed the role of the fiddle in rural string bands. The emphasis these artists placed on singing reduced the importance of the fiddle as a lead instrument. The Carters and Rodgers provided role models for amateur and aspiring professional musicians who followed their example and either eliminated the fiddle or reduced it to an accompaniment role. At the same time, square dance fiddlers were being replaced by phonograph recordings at dances. The result of these developments was the virtual extinction of traditional, familiar contexts in which the fiddler could perform. Fiddle contests and conventions disappeared as well by 1935 in the shadow of the more popular string bands fronted by vocalists.

New Contexts for Fiddling

About this time, two new styles of music developed which featured the fiddle not only as backup, but also as lead. As western swing and bluegrass music became nationally recognized through the electronic media, they provided new performance contexts for traditional fiddle music.

Western swing resulted from the mixture of cultural and historical influences present in Texas in the 1930s. As described by Earl V. Spielman:

> The Texas style was comprised of the sound of hillbilly and country music mixed together with traditional Louisiana jazz, Mexican mariachi, and Tin Pan Alley. In addition, the big band or "swing" style of jazz which had become nationally popular by the early 1930s in some respects served as a model for the structure which the new musical style was to take, i.e., set arrangements of tunes and songs with improvised solos.[110]

Texan Bob Wills is responsible for popularizing this style in the Southwest. As both fiddler and band leader Wills placed importance on the fiddle in his band.

The prominence of the fiddle and its repertory was a determining factor in Wills' overall musical style. Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys were an extremely popular ensemble with dancers in ballrooms from Cain's Dancing Academy in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Spade Cooley's ballroom in Santa Monica, California. Bob Wills' contributions to modern country music are numerous. Among them are the use of a jazz band style drum-set, consistent use of electric instruments, especially the steel guitar, repertory, flashy cowboy costumes, and Hollywood appearances. His contribution to the repertory of today's fiddlers include original compositions "Faded Love," "Maiden's Prayer," and "San Antonio Rose" along with many others.

The second nationally recognized style to develop out of rural string band traditions was bluegrass. Bill Monroe, known as the "father of bluegrass," assembled a band which consisted of a five-string banjo, a fiddle, a guitar, string bass, and a mandolin. The music played by Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys combined high technical skill on each instrument with gospel quartet singing, traditional ballads and dance music, hillbilly styles, western swing and jazz influence, and African-American country blues. Though it is similar to western swing in its amalgamation of stylistic influences, bluegrass musicians have resisted the introduction and use of electric instruments. Bluegrass music combines the use of acoustic instruments with conscious conservation of the "tangy flavor"[111] of rural music in the southeastern United States. In addition to

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[110] Spielman, 262.
[111] Term used by Bill Malone, 121.

these characteristics, the fact that bluegrass is not intended as dance music distinguishes it from western swing and modern country music.

The acoustic quality maintained by Bill Monroe appealed to people of rural origin who were confronted with new music such as rock and roll when they moved to the city. According to Neil Rosenberg, Monroe's music remained innovative yet non-threatening, especially due to its retention of "down home" acoustic string instrumentation:

> While other country performers responded to the challenge of rock and roll by adopting some of its instrumental features ("changing styles to get airplay"), particularly drums, and by dropping the more blatantly "country" aspects of the backup such as the fiddle, Monroe's response through his and the Stanley Brothers' recordings was to emphasize instruments already in use by bluegrass musicians, in new roles and combinations, fitted to new concepts of rhythm and structural arrangement.[112]

Bluegrass is presently popular among both rural audiences and urbanites who have not lived in the country, many of whom choose to identify with the grass roots nature of bluegrass, i.e., traditional music played on traditional instruments. Today bluegrass persists as a purely acoustic music.[113]

Twentieth century fiddlers across the country adopted many tunes from the Bill Monroe Band repertory. Monroes' compositions "Kentucky Waltz" and "Gold Rush" are favorites, as is Bluegrass Boys' Kenny Baker's "Festival Waltz," and the virtuosic "Orange Blossom Special" entered the fiddlers' standard

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[112] Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History,* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985): 122.

[113] With the exception of the electric bass, which is used occasionally.

repertory via performances and recordings originally made by Tommy Magness who began playing with Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys in 1939.[114]

The Revivalist Movement

Groups of folk music enthusiasts whose interests center on ballad singing have been in existence nationwide since the 1920s. According to Rosenberg,

> Since the twenties a growing number of academics and amateur enthusiasts had been collecting and publishing folksongs. Some of these people also brought such songs to the concert stage; others organized annual "folk festivals." Young middle-class people, particularly those of urban backgrounds with a college education and an interest in the arts, were the consumers of folksong books, concerts, and festivals.[115]

In the early forties Pete Seeger introduced these enthusiasts to the five-string banjo through concerts and records. In the post-World War II era, the American folksong revival expanded to include bluegrass music. For example, in response to revivalist interest in bluegrass music, Pete Seeger added a section on Earl Scruggs to his banjo instruction book in 1954. In the fall of that year Scruggs was met regularly at the stage door of a short-running Broadway show he and Flatt were a part of by a group of banjo enthusiasts who regularly met to play in revival concerts in Washington Square. Bluegrass bands were invited to perform at universities and folk festivals alike. Through this exposure bluegrass became even more associated with rural traditions, even though it was a relatively new form of music. Young urban middle class revivalists began to seek out both old-time and bluegrass musicians in order to learn an art form that was perceived to

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[114] The tune was co-composed in the mid-thirties by Robert R. ("Chubby") Wise and Ervin Rouse and several verses were later composed by Rouse and his brother Jack; see Rosenburg, 51. Johnny Cash made the lyrics popular in a 1960s recording; see Mishler, 172.

[115] Rosenberg, 144.

be an organic expression of cultural heritage. Some enthusiasts learned for personal enrichment, and others felt they were doing a service to society by preserving this music. Today the interests of these enthusiasts, known as "revivalists," endure in numerous cliques, and most of them focus on a particular genre and style.

Oldtime Fiddle Associations

The accessibility of mass-produced automobiles, of recordings, and of radio since the 1920s has resulted in serious consequences for fiddling as it once was practiced. Yet fiddling has proven to be both tenacious and flexible as evidenced by the numerous contexts in which it exists today. A wake of efforts to keep fiddling alive followed Henry Ford's national revival attempt. One such movement has been described by Richard Blaustein in his Ph.D. dissertation on the Oldtime Fiddlers' Association Movement in the United States. His study presents an historical overview of the formation of old time fiddling organizations since Henry Ford's effort. According to Blaustein, the core of these associations is made up of fiddlers who learned to play as youths. These fiddlers

> underwent deprivation of this particular mode of gratification at approximately the same time [that they learned], and informal communication of their desire to preserve the music with which they identified led to the establishment of formal organizations that would provide that tradition with a new context of maintenance and transmission.[116]

Many of these fiddlers who lived in the area surrounding Weiser, Idaho were called together to organize a fiddle contest by fiddling enthusiast and Chamber of Commerce member Blaine Stubblefield.

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[116] Blaustein 1975, 98.

In contrast to Henry Ford's revival efforts, Secretary of the Weiser Chamber of Commerce, Blaine Stubblefield was successful in producing a fiddling event with staying power when he planted the idea to hold a fiddle contest in the minds and hearts of his community. Although Stubblefield passed away three years before the contest he founded in his home town of Weiser, Idaho became the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest, the fruit of his efforts are with us today in the week-long National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest held every third week of June. Blaustein suggests:

> If Weiser is not in fact the center from which the Old Time Fiddlers' Association movement has disseminated, it has served at the very least as an important meeting ground for lovers of traditional instrumental music in Idaho and the other Pacific Northwest states. With the growth of the Weiser contest from local to regional and then to national significance, the fiddling association concept has been spread to other parts of the country both through the direct exposure of outsiders to the organizations represented there and through the national publicity that association activities have received. There are individuals in other sections of the country who have played important roles in developing and promoting the growth of this movement . . . but it is in Idaho that the first of the current wave of Old Time Fiddlers Associations was set up, and it is generally conceded in Idaho that the individual primarily responsible was a rancher and vivacious fiddler named Mannie Shaw.[117]

Shaw began his involvement with the Weiser contest as an adviser to the Chamber of Commerce fiddle contest committee. The rancher from Corral, Idaho was enthusiastic about establishing Idaho as the home of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest in honor of the state's territorial centennial celebration. While state officials were originally uninterested in Shaw's proposal, his

[117] Blaustein 1975, 63-4.

unswerving persistence resulted in both a national contest, and the first state fiddlers' association in the country, the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association.

As Blaustein explained, fiddlers who attended the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest (NOTFC) became aware of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association (IOTFA) and returned home to form similar organizations in their own states. In 1961 Jake and Lena Hughes attended the yet regional contest in Weiser and returned home to found the Missouri OTFA. In 1963, the year the IOTFA was formally chartered, Montana fiddlers founded a state organization as well. In 1964 state fiddling associations were formed in Washington, Oregon, Nebraska, and Vermont; and in 1966 the states Alabama, California, Illinois and Kansas established fiddling associations. Between 1967 and 1972 Sacramento, California, New Mexico, and Wyoming had fiddling organizations as well. Since Blaustein's study, many states have formed new fiddling associations such as Kentucky, Texas, and Michigan which now has two, and regional organizations within states such as the Blue Mountain Oldtime Fiddlers' Association in Oregon and the Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers' Association are currently active fiddling groups.

Performance contexts sponsored by fiddle organizations include contests, conventions, and jamborees, and these contexts always feature the fiddler in the leading role. This role is associated with the "old time"--prior to the fiddler's demotion to vocal accompanist in the commercial forms of music which emerged in the 1920s. The rate of participation of youths in many of these associations has been high suggesting that the oldtime fiddlers' associations goal of

preserving oldtime music is being achieved. However, new performance goals amongst young fiddlers has created conflict with some older members of fiddling organizations such as the IOTFA, and this phenomenon will be explored in depth in later chapters of this study.

Summary

Fiddling has been a part of American life since the Colonial period. Colonists of rich and poor means danced to fiddle music which was played by both black and white musicians. The fiddle accompanied the daring pioneers who ventured West as it was small enough to transport without causing hardships. With the passage of time in the new and diverse land, the fiddle adapted itself to the needs of tobacco planters, sheep herders, cowboys, and farmers providing music for dance, contest, socializing, pacifying livestock, and as a remedy for boredom and loneliness. The fiddle carried with it a repertory that consisted of old tunes dating back to British origins, new tunes conceived in the American experience including those of African-Americans and American Indians,[118] and mixtures of both old and new musical material. In the 1920s, ritual home and community activities which had centered around the fiddle for centuries were suddenly shattered by changes in social values and home life--the result of technological developments in transportation and communications. Yet the art of fiddling has persisted and adapted to modern lifestyles, and fiddling exists in a number of contexts today. In the ensuing chapters, description and analysis of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest shed light on contemporary

meanings of "oldtime fiddling," and how and why this seemingly antiquated pastime endures.

[118] Outside of Mishler 1993 and Michael Loukinen's video "Medicine Fiddle" (Marquette, Michigan: Up North Films n.d.) research on fiddling traditions of American Indians is as of yet sparse. These two works, however, suggest that this is a rich area for inquiry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CREATION OF THE NATIONAL OLDTIME FIDDLERS' CONTEST: DEFINING "OLDTIME"

Blaine Stubblefield's idea to sponsor a fiddle contest in Weiser, Idaho was conceived partly as a possible event that his community could take pride in sponsoring, and partly in response to what he perceived as a dwindling number of performance venues for folk fiddlers. While these two goals seem compatible at first glance, the consequent discourse created between oldtime fiddlers and contest organizers has been highly charged. This discourse centers around three main issues. The first is the question of how oldtime fiddling can be connected to an audience. Stubblefield and later the Chamber of Commerce's improvements on the contest events have been based on the experience of each year's show. Particular aspects of the contest that people have liked are retained and those that have not have been dropped. The second issue debated throughout the history of the contest is one of how and what elements of oldtime fiddling should be preserved in the contest. Most often this question has taken this form: "what is 'trick' or 'fancy' fiddling in comparison to 'real' or 'danceable' oldtime fiddling?" Finally, a related question was debated in the early stages of the contest's history: "should professional musicians be allowed to compete with amateurs?" The interest in the issue of professional versus amateur dwindled as fiddlers acquired advanced technical skills, and the Chamber of Commerce saw

this as an asset to their production. The question inherent in each of these three issues is one of authenticity.

Stubblefield's attempt to preserve "authentic" fiddling included writing a letter to a university professor of folkore, whom he asked for guidelines on how to determine what was genuinely authentic and worth preserving. Stubblefield's appeal to Patrick Gainer, English professor at West Virginia University exemplifies the role scholarly discourse on authenticity has played in normalizing common sense ideas of what is authentic. Folklorists today are becoming aware of how their "theories enter the cultural fabric and how disciplinary practices of authentication practiced among folklorists have been appropriated by individuals and social groups."[1] This study gives us information on one way former scholarly ideals of authenticity have been at the same time reified and reinterpreted in the creation of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest.

Stubblefield's role in the creation of the NOTFC is one that David Whisnant describes as a "systematic cultural intervenor."[2] As mentioned earlier, according to Whisnant systematic cultural intervention means "that someone (or some institution) consciously and programmatically takes action within a culture with the intent of affecting it in some specific way that the intervenor thinks desirable."[3] In contrast to Henry Ford's intervention efforts discussed earlier which dictated moral reform, Stubblefield sponsored opportunites for parties interested in fiddling (including fiddlers, civic groups, businessmen, and other community members) to meet with one another and take part in shaping the form

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[1] See Bendix, 217.
[2] Whisnant, 13.

of the event. Inspired by Stubblefield, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce has constructed an event over the course of forty-five years that is currently recognized by fiddlers all over the United States and Canada. The reputation they have built is not only beneficial to the community of Weiser, but to the State of Idaho. Accordingly, the issues central to the discourse between contest organizers and fiddlers are related to wider issues of the politics of culture.

There are two main reasons that the NOTFC has become so popular that it attracts fiddlers from throughout the U.S. and Canada. The first reason is that the process of organizing the contest inspired a revitalization effort that resulted in a new performance context as former regular venues dwindled. Blaustein has described this transformation as "one way in which individuals committed to the perpetuation of a traditional art can adapt to the changes that industrialization and modernization have brought about."[4] The Weiser Chamber of Commerce has provided a strong model for fiddlers and contest organizers in surrounding states. The contest provides an opportunity to meet and play music with other fiddlers and to test one's fiddling abilities. The NOTFC's certification policy rewards local contestants of certified contests with special recognition at the national level, and this helps to maintain the interest of fiddlers from throughout the nation.

The second reason is related to the first in that the organizers of the new performance venue have taken pride in their role as preservers of an American tradition, and they have convinced a wider public that the fiddling activities they

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[3] Whisnant, 14.

have been preserving are worthy of attention. The politics involved in attracting an audience to the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest are related to Handler and Linnekin's argument that "tradition is a model of the past and inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present."[5] In this case the Weiser Chamber of Commerce has provided a forum in the form of the contest and festival where tradition has been constantly reinterpreted and presented to the public as a regional, and later, a national treasure. In this chapter I examine the relationship between discourse about authenticity to social and political context from the earliest contests in Weiser until 1963, when the regional contest officially became the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest.

The first recorded fiddle contest in Weiser, Idaho was held in 1914 at the Wheaton Theater. Similar to such events elsewhere in the country, the contest was held in conjunction with another attraction, a military band performance. The first place fiddler, Weiser's own Jimmy Jeffreys[6], was awarded twenty dollars, and he and the other winners provided music for the dance that followed the contest.[7] Apparently the contest was a success for it was repeated the next year, 1915, and it was won by a man named Field Grooms.

Weiser was incorporated as a town in 1887, and by 1915 it was still in its youth as a pioneer settlement. With this in mind, Betty Derig's description of the winner of the 1915 contest, Field Grooms, as a "pioneer fiddler" might well be applied to all of the participating fiddlers. These fiddlers were accustomed to

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[4] See Blaustein, 1975 for an analysis of the formation of Oldtime Fiddlers Associations as a revitalization movement. Citation is from p. 168.

[5] Handler and Linnekin, 273-290. See also Handler, 1988.

[6] Northwest Oldtime Fiddlers Contest program, 1961.

playing for school house dances, and enjoying music making sessions at home. As mentioned earlier, new entertainment venues such as the phonograph, radio, movies, as well as improvements in transportation began drawing spotlight attention away from fiddling as a main source of recreation and socializing in the following years. Though many contests were held sporadically in surrounding towns,[8] enthusiasm for fiddle contests waned in Weiser, and they were not resumed until the second half of the century.

It was in the early 1950s that Weiser Chamber of Commerce secretary Blaine Stubblefield began working to revive interest in fiddling in his community. Stubblefield had been reared in the Hell's Canyon area of Idaho near Weiser. He later spent time collecting folk music for the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk Song in the wake of the Lomax expeditions. Stubblefield's work included recording fiddlers who lived in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee. He refers to his time in the East in a letter to a photographer interested in documenting the first contest in 1953:

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[7] Betty Derig, *Weiser, The Way it Was* (Weiser, Idaho: Rambler Press, 1987), 195.

[8] Arthur Woten mentions having won a contest in Torrington, Wyomingon July 4th, 1932 playing a Guy R. Hall violin in a pamphlet advertising "Guy R. Hall, Dealer in All String Instruments, Caldwell, Idaho," correspondence file, 1953, Weiser Chamber of Commerce documents; Pearle Woodruff Beale's daughter Bea Thomas reported that her mother had won first in the Old Time Fiddler's Contest July 3, 1949 in Baker Oregon, one in Prineville, Oregon in August 1948, one in the High School Auditorium in Bend, Oregon in November 1942, "and years ago she won contests in Nevada, one at Redding, California, in Colorado, and several in Canada," in a letter to Blaine Stubblefield 13 April 1955; Dad Roberts is said to have won the annual contest in Grangeville, Idaho ten times in a row before taking first place at the first Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' contest in 1953; and Clarence Kemble (age 42) reported that he had won an old fiddlers' contest "as a kid" in McCall, Idaho, caption under photo of Kemsble in "Huge Square Dance Festival and Fiddle Contest Ready to Roll this Saturday," *Weiser Signal American* 13 April, 1953.

> Lived in the east many years and am a music fan, including all kinds from Brahms to Boise and would like to help keep the fiddling art alive. Some of them are real thrilling.[9]

Stubblefield's dream of hosting a fiddle contest depended on rousing the community interest. Before a contest could take place, fiddlers had to be identified and contacted, and community members had to be convinced that the idea was a good one. Stubblefield and Kenneth Steck sent out a memo on 12 September 1952 addressed to "all civic" clubs announcing a contest to be held at the end of October of the same year. Stubblefield and Steck, who was the fiddle contest chairman, contributed ideas for the contest which they summed up in a press release. This article announces plans to conduct a survey of fiddlers who might participate, connects plans to commercial "hillbilly music" as a way of validating the "hayloft concert idea," and specifies the region that is expected to participate—Boise, Idaho, Spokane, Washington, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Pendleton, Oregon:

> A super-northwest mountain fiddlers festival is being considered by the Chamber of Commerce for Weiser this fall.
>
> A preliminary inquiry will be conducted to determine whether a dozen to thirty top string-and-bowmen would be available for a hayloft concert.
>
> Hillbilly music continues [to be] tremendously popular and the Chamber believes that a well-planned contest would provide a good time for a big crowd and for the fiddlers themselves.
>
> Tentatively, the idea is to invite all towns in the mountain region—Boise -Spokane-Salt Lake-Pendleton—to send their best hoedown bowmen to compete for prizes.
>
> Admission to the show could be free, with a call for contributions in the hat, to be distributed among two to six winners. It is estimated nearly all of the customers would toss in from two bits to a dollar, or more if the performance is hot. Or, a gate toll of fifty cents to a dollar could be collected.

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[9] Blaine Stubblefield, letter to Cal Bernstein, Photographer, 9 October 1952, Weiser Chamber of Commerce Mountain Fiddlers' Contest Files.

> Whatever talent might show up in the way of clog dancing and folk song could be thrown in for good measure.
>
> Probably towns sponsoring a musician would pay his transportation; others might pay their own. Those who did not wish to pay for their own accommodations in Weiser might be farmed out among local residents who would volunteer to put up one or more for a day or two.
>
> No doubt the show would be sound-taped and edited for extensive radio broadcast, especially if a skilled MC could be secured for the job.
>
> The Chamber is seeking information and suggestions while it considers the proposal.[10]

The concluding call for information and suggestions set the plan in motion, for responses to the query were positive.

The Weiser Chamber of Commerce goals in organizing a fiddle contest were related to the goals of larger American society's fascination with folk culture. According to Neil Rosenberg, folk festivals such as the one envisioned by Weiser businessmen took their present shape during the 1920s. An early example of such a production where regional, ethnic, or national identity celebrations were linked to commercial public relations was a series of major folk festivals held at the Canadian Pacific Railroad's company hotels between 1927 and 1930. Not only did these events showcase Canada's rich ethnic resources, they also drew tourists to the Railroad's hotels.[11] Wilson and Udall mention Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival held in Asheville, North Carolina in 1928. This festival celebrated Appalachian music and dance and was similar to the Atlanta Fiddlers' convention described earlier. Wilson and Udall interpret Lundsford's use of the term "folk festival" in place of "convention" as a conscious

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[10] Weiser Chamber of Commerce Fiddle Contest File.

[11] Neil Rosenberg, "Introduction," in *Transforming Tradition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 6.

effort to attract tourists and to create a greater appreciation for local music and dance traditions.[12] Sarah Gertrude Knott produced the first annual National Folk Festival in St. Louis in 1934, and with this a network of festival performers and organizers had begun to form.[13] Stubblefield might have been aware of these and similar events, having worked for the Library of Congress. Such knowledge would have fueled his drive for putting his fiddle contest idea into action, and his proposal as we will see, was somewhat prophetic. The Weiser Chamber of Commerce's plan to stage a fiddle contest was enthusiastically received by fiddlers and the larger community, and when carried out this contest was to eventually grow into the largest fiddle contest in the country.

From the outset, Stubblefield and Steck envisioned a program with the dual purpose of preserving a tradition, fiddling, that they felt was dying out, and to entertain people. Stubblefield wrote "What we want, says Mr. Steck, is a good time for a lot of people, and we aim to save mountain music as a genuine part of the old West, same as they save grand opera every winter."[14] Press releases announcing the contest idea were sent out to newspapers in Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Utah, and other western states. Fiddlers, spectators, and newspaper and magazine reporters responded with requests for more information.

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[12] Joe Wilson an Lee Udall, *Folk Festivals: A Handbook for Organization and Management* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982): 6.
[13] Rosenberg 1993, 6; Wilson and Udall, 6-8.
[14] Blaine Stubblefield, memo sent to civic clubs in Weiser, Idaho, 12 September 1952.

One response to the Chamber's advertising came from a violin maker in Caldwell, Idaho, Guy R. Hall. Hall was in contact with many fiddlers in the area for whom he did repair work.

> Caldwell Idaho, October 13, 1952
> Chamber of Commerce, Weiser, Idaho
>
> Dear Sirs,
> As I have been reading the Caldwell paper and saw you were going to have a meeting of old fiddlers some time this month, thought I would write you as to particulars as there are several old fiddlers from here that are interested in an old fiddlers contest or carnival and asked me to get some of the particulars as they are raising to go. I might put on a demonstration of how a fine violin is really made as I have over 40 or 50 years of violin construction [experience]. Hoping to hear from you soon. Remain yours truly,
>
> Guy R. Hall
> 2904 Illinois Ave.
> Caldwell, Idaho

Stubblefield replied and requested the names of the fiddlers who were "raising to go" to the contest. He encouraged Hall to come and give a demonstration. Hall responded with a number of names, and regretfully wrote that he had been ill and would not be able to put on the program that he had proposed.

In a press release dated 23 October 1952, Stubblefield reported that nearly two dozen fiddlers had responded to the first call for fiddlers. A date had yet to be set for the "mountain fiddlers' contest," though, because not enough fiddlers had been contacted. Stubblefield included Steck's views on the plan's progress in the release, including an explanation of why the committee had delayed setting the contest date. Their releases were geared toward getting the largely agrarian community excited about the contest. Informal language is used both to attract working people including fiddlers, and to detract attention from the

length of time it was taking to organize the contest. The readers are encouraged to feel proud of their community talent by the announcement that it has attracted the interest of a "slick" magazine and that it is good enough to be broadcast to city folk with a few minor edits:

> We started out to have a little fun, but it looks so good now, that we are taking time to put on the trimmings.
> One writing man sent word he wants first in on a story for a slick magazine, and a radio man says he will trim the corn out of the program and pipe it to the city folks.

Catchy phrases in the release described the fiddlers who had already expressed interest in the contest:

> A hoedown Paganini in Pendleton fiddles left handed, and that puts his G string on the off side, but he still qualifies. Another one writes that he operates mostly in six-eight time and proud of it. We have advised him to whip it up or some obscure artist from Dead Ox Flat or Cul de Sac is likely to beat him out by hitting eight to the bar.

Appearing here as well was the idea prevalent among festival planners of the time, to preserve heritage and promote the town's resources without sacrificing entertainment value. The dual purpose stated here of preserving and entertaining seems simple enough at first glance, but it has since been the topic of numerous debates about authenticity.

> We want to help keep this branch of music alive and going, and have a pleasant time doing it. We'll will include some square dance calling and some clog dancing and whatever the boys can do without busting a ham string. All the money we take in, over a few expenses, will be awarded in prizes.

Stubblefield and Steck were encouraged by responses from fiddlers that continued to trickle in, and to keep the flow moving Steck advised fiddlers who

hadn't yet made themselves known to do so: "We want to hear from fiddlers far and near who will come and join in on a tall Saturday night."[15]

The proposed contest date was postponed monthly as the list of possible fiddlers continued to grow slowly. As of March 1953, fiddlers names were still being collected, and newspapers continued to carry Stubblefield's updates. The following letter is one reaction to the idea of participating in or attending a fiddle contest. The thought of playing again lit a spark in some older fiddlers' hearts who had not had an excuse to play their fiddles for some time, as it did for William Moore:

> Chamber of Commerce
> Washington Hotel
> Weiser, Idaho March 24/53
>
> Dear Sirs: We received your letter of March 20/53. Mrs. C. J. Jones, the one that has written you is my daughter.
>
> Back in the '90s I played for about all of the old time square dances, my wife died in '19 and left me with 10 children. Then I had to leave off my talent the old square dance music.
>
> The kids has bin wanting me to practice up again and play in this contest, is why I am writing this letter.
>
> I have a home and about one acre I have a garden and some fruit at times I have no other income. But the kids help.
>
> I would like to come meet with the old fiddlers, it would be fun for me.
>
> I would like for you to write and tell me what my entrance would be as a visitor.
>
> I made me a fiddle out and out last summer and it plays not bad.
>
> Trusting I may hear from you soon,
> William Moore
> Hermiston, Oregon
> Route 2

Stubblefield's reply was encouraging:

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[15] Blaine Stubblefield, press release, 23 October 1952, Weiser Chamber of Commerce Mountain Fiddlers' Contest files.

Mr. William Moore
Route #2
Hermiston, Oregon

Dear Mr. Moore:
We want you to be here for the fiddlers contest.
We have wired Hermiston Chamber of Commerce suggesting they thumb a ride for you, and we will put you up here as our guest.[16]
Hope you make it.

Yours very truly,
Blaine Stubblefield, Mgr.

The date for the fiddle contest was finally established to coincide with the Fifth Annual Weiser square dance festival and arrangements were made to ensure fiddlers were able to attend. Stubblefield and his assistants wrote Western Union Nite Letters to the hometown Chamber of Commerce of each of the responding fiddlers to encourage support of their local musicians. Two versions of the note were sent out:

1) Advertise your town by sending [name of oldtime fiddler] to
OR
2) Request you contact old-time fiddlers about attending

Mountain Fiddlers Contest here Saturday night April 18th, conjunction square dance festival. Strictly amateur, big time, three prizes. Send him, or carload of you come along. Kindly advise us collect.

Spencer Davies, President
Weiser Chamber of Commerce

Entry RSVP cards were sent to each fiddler who had expressed interest in attending. Special letters were sent to individuals the chamber particularly wanted to hear such as the one sent to Jimmie Widner:

[16] Unfortunately this approach backfired in this instance. A note likely made by Stubblefield after the contest mentioned that one of Moore's relatives was angry about the charity offered to the fiddler. The note suggests that help only be offered to those who request it, and it mentions another fiddler, 'Dad' Roberts, who "would receive help of no kind whatever."

Jimmie Widner
General Delivery
Sand Point, Idaho

Especially invite you boys to big fiddlers contest here Saturday night April 18. Your dad's in [Wesley (Si) Widner] and hopes you join him. Says he will finance if you're short. Kindly wire collect.

Chamber of Commerce
Weiser, Idaho

In fact, Jimmie Widner's father Wesley (Si) Widner was featured in a news release mailed to ten different newspapers: The Idaho Daily Statesman, The Denver Post, The Lewiston Tribune, The Idaho State Journal, the Deseret News, The Spokesman Review, The East Oregonian, The Oregonian, The Post Intelligencer, and the Weiser Signal American. The article included a photo of Widner playing his fiddle. The article sums up not only the character of this Weiser fiddler, but also the author Stubblefield's excitement in anticipation of the event he had been dreaming about that was soon to materialize:

> When he's in the groove, Wesley Widner can play hoedown for dances all night without repeating a tune.
>
> He and about fifty other barnloft bowmen will try for gold-cup prizes in the Northwest Mountain Fiddlers Contest here Saturday April 18th. Civic groups here are putting on the contest mostly to have a big time but in back of their minds many old timers want to help preserve a native art that is being squeezed out by disc and radio.
>
> It is expected the competition, in connection with Weiser's annual square dance festival, will bring fiddlers from Salt Lake and Portland. One signed up from Albany Oregon. One is only nine years old. A mountain maestro from Payette plays left-handed, with his G string on the off side of the bridge. Nearly everybody in the act will be hitting eight to the bar.
>
> Mr. Widner, of Weiser, says he was given a fiddle by his dad at the age of 9, when they lived in New Mexico. He got his first pay from square dancers when he was fifteen. For a while he took violin lessons but the printed score cramped his style so he went ahead on his ear.

> The most pay he ever got was one hundred dollars for a night's bowing at Durango, Colorado, and he had to split that with his partner on the piano. His biggest audience was 200 people in an all-night swing to the doe-see-doe. Fiddling was always an avocation with Widner, for chicken money in the crown of a hat, and gay doings 'till the dawn's early light. He made his living in the daytime.
>
> How many nights did he play? Well, figuring three-four a week for years, they add up to thousands. What's his favorite tune? Buffalo Gals, with Old Joe Clark, Durang's Hornpipe, and Sourwood Mountain running close.

By March 31st, most of the practical matters concerning the contest had been considered by the Mountain Fiddlers Committee and specific tasks had been assigned to subcommittees. The schedule of the contest consisted of a preliminary playoff in the afternoon followed by refreshments for contestants. This playoff singled out the top twelve fiddlers who were to appear at the evening contest. The semifinal round began at 7:30 and concluded at 8:30, preceding the square dancing. The top six of these twelve fiddlers were to appear during the square dance intermission. The three winners emerging from the finals would be awarded trophy cups and some travel expense money, depending on the amount of income gained through admission sales.

The fiddlers were not required to pay a registration fee, rather a 25 cent admission was collected from the audience for the playoffs. Tickets for the evening show cost 75 cents for those who participated in the square dance, and only 50 cents for spectators. Fiddlers and their accompanists received complimentary admission tickets, but spouses (stated as "wives" in the meeting minutes, though there were women fiddlers planning to compete including

Gladys Frazier who was one of the 12 finalists) and "other company" were expected to pay for tickets.

Rules for the contest were few outside of a three-minute time limit and a limit of two accompanists. The time limit was established after the committee was advised that without one some fiddlers were known to play "until the cows come home."[17] The limited number of accompanists discouraged fiddlers who played regularly with larger orchestras from bringing extra musicians on stage who might compete with or cover the fiddler's playing making it difficult for judges to assess his/her abilities. Fiddlers could play without accompanists if they desired. Mrs. Fanny Chandler volunteered to play piano for those needing accompaniment, and "she agreed to invite Leo Elsworth to play string bass"[18] as a second backup instrument.

The committee considered using an applause meter to judge the contest, but decided against it in favor of three judges with not more than one of them hailing from Weiser. Moreover, these judges would be instructed not to give any special favor to Weiser fiddlers. They were to consider tempo, pitch, tune, and showmanship, but "not any tricks,"[19] and a fiddler was allowed to "play in any key."[20] A fiddler might be disqualified for playing with an "attached microphone amplification."

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[17] Don Obee, letter to Harry N. Nelson regarding the Northwest old time fiddlers contest, 23 March 1953. Mr. Obee also recommended having the elimination round in the afternoon before the official Square Dance Festival to avoid running into "the wee small hours of the night."

[18] Fiddlers' Committee Meeting Minutes, 7 April 1953, Washington Hotel.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

Local fiddlers were invited to attend the April 7th committee meeting to give input on contest organization. Lonzo Riley of Payette wrote a letter of acceptance to the invitation, however he does not appear in the photo of attendees that was published in the Weiser Signal American on April 13th. Left-handed fiddler Clarence Kemble of Payette and his wife came to the meeting, as did fiddlers Bobby Stelling, age 8, of Ontario, Oregon, Mr. and Mrs. Marion Smith of Emmett, Idaho, Lawrence Page of Cambridge, Idaho, and Rudy Rudger also of Cambridge. The fiddlers enjoyed playing music after the meeting. This event earned a newspaper report similar to examples given earlier for contests in Atlanta and St. Louis that stressed the stereotypical fiddler as a backward sort: "After the meeting was over, five of the bow scratchers took their turn at the fiddle and all had a toe-tapping good time."[21]

Much of the April 10th committee meeting was spent assigning people telephone calls to radio stations, square dance bands, stores in other towns, more fiddler contacts, and other last minute arrangements and confirmations. Stage decorations were discussed including a mountain scene for background and a papier mache horse and one-horned bull for rural flare. It was mentioned that some of the fiddlers in the area felt like the contest was going to be "too much bigtime for them," and consequently they did not plan to enter. This no doubt concerned contest organizers, for as of April 4th, there were only thirty-four fiddlers signed up, and the committee had been advertising that 50 to 100 fiddlers would be on display on the 18th of April. This situation inspired the

[21] "Huge Square Dance Festival and Fiddle Contest Ready to Roll This Saturday," *Weiser Signal American*, 13 April 1953.

committee to appoint John Routson to solicit registrations for the contest from local fiddlers as reported in the Weiser Signal American newspaper article of 13 April 1953:

> **Come Out, Wherever You Are ----**
> **Fiddlers on "Wanted" List As Huge Contest Nears Zero Hour**
>
> Over hill and dale, up alleys and byways and down the highways John Routson is riding this week. Routson is routin' out fiddlers for the big fiddlin' contest to be held Saturday afternoon and Saturday night at the East Side Gymnasium.
>
> Routson was armed with entry blanks and all kinds of blarney Friday night of last week, designed to convince every bow scraper in this neck of the woods that they should be on the platform when the contesting begins at 2 p.m. Saturday. Routson doesn't care whether the fiddlers are bashful, boastful, or beautiful, just so they can come forth and compete in the big doings.

That fiddlers had to be encouraged and convinced to come and play is an indication that the venue was an unfamiliar and uncomfortable one for some. Mrs. Martha Mortimore of Ontario, Oregon recommended to the Chamber that they contact Mr. Claude Derrick (age, "over 65") in hopes that he might be convinced to take place in the contest.

> [He] and his wife Mrs. Callie Derrick accompanist have played for <u>many</u> dances and similar affairs in and near Ironside, Oregon and also Mathew City in years gone by. They are exceptionally <u>good</u> musicians. Its in their <u>systems</u>. He is very timid and backward about going out among the public, lately and while their <u>many friends urge</u> them to enter the contest with a big chance to win, it maybe we can't get him to accept the challange [*sic.*][22]

Mrs. Mortimore listed additional references for Mr. Derrick, and the Chamber located his mailing address. Derrick was not among the fiddlers who finally entered the contest, however.

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[22] Letter from Mrs. Martha Mortimore, Ontario Oregon, to Weiser Chamber of Commerce, 16 April 1953.

On the morning of Saturday April 18th, fiddlers gathered in Weiser Saturday morning for registration and rehearsals with the accompanist. Elsewhere a caravan to nearby towns had been arranged announcing the Weiser schedule and playing square dance music over a P.A. system to rally up spectators. By 2 p.m. the preliminary fiddle contest round was under way with twenty-eight contestants competing. Of these contestants there were two brothers, Joe (age 27) and Jay (age 30) Simmons who took turns playing fiddle and accompanying each other; and a grandpa, Charles Moore (age 75) whose granddaughter Bonny Holt (age 11) also fiddled in the competition. Sam Emmons, 81, competed playing a tune he composed himself, "Weiser Special," dedicating it to the Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' Contest, and Bobby Stelling won the youngest fiddler award at age 8 playing "Pop Goes the Weasel." Fred Haun, 55, earned a high score for "crowd appeal" for the Kosack Dance he played from his homeland, Russia, which he left when he was 14 years old. Father and son Carl, 62 and Tom Carnegie, 28 performed in the prelims as did Todd Fincher. Mr. Fincher qualified for the semi-finals but had to return home before the evening show. William Moore, 77, whose letter is cited above, was able to take part in the contest, as did W.S. Turnipseed whose favorite tunes included "Red Wing," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," and a French minuet. Stanley Clelland, 17, fiddled "Whistlin' Rufus" with his accompanist Rudy Rudger, and E. A. Collins, 70, played "Lop-eared Mule" in two keys with accompanist Fred H. Gibson. Francis Jackson, 45, performed "In My Merry Oldsmobile" and Marion Smith, 58, fiddled "Settin' the Woods on Fire." Finally, Payette fiddler Lon

Riley, 62, contributed his rendition of "Turkey in the Straw" to the contest activities.

Meanwhile, downtown Weiser businesses displayed banners that stated "Welcome Fiddlers and Dancers," while more announcements and square dance records were played on the street over a P.A. system. Weiser residents and other participants donned western attire or square dance clothing to show their spirit of participation. At 6 p.m. fiddle contestants were treated to a buffet supper, and the public was invited to attend the meal for 75 cents admission.

The Fifth Annual Spring Square Dance Festival set the evening stage for the first Northwest Mountain Fiddlers Contest finals. The opening ceremony consisted of the presentation of colors by a Weiser Boy Scout Troop and the national anthem followed by the fiddling semi-finals. The dance program consisted of eighteen square dances interspersed with six round dances, and each square dance was directed by a different caller. The first intermission featured two specialty numbers: a trio from Payette, "Two Flats and a Sharp," and an Exhibition Square Dance performed by Weiser teen-agers. During the second intermission the six finalist fiddlers competed and awards were given. The square dance was sponsored by the Weiser Recreation Commission in cooperation with civic and square dance clubs, and all proceeds of the festival went toward the purchase of equipment for use in the recreation program

Before the evening program began, the initial group of twenty-eight fiddlers had been thinned to semifinalist group of twelve by four judges, Bill Messensmith of Weiser, Mrs. Driscoll of Payette, Mrs. Sargent of Weiser, and

John Lloyd of Weiser. The judges consulted with each other and agreed upon a score between 0 and 50 for each of two categories: "1) *Crowd Appeal* Includes appearance, showmanship, etc., although the scoresheet states that "tricks don't count"; and 2) *Performance* , which included consideration of "quality of playing, rhythm, pitch (in tune), musicianship." The two scores were added together to arrive at the final score for each round. The top twelve to compete in the 7:30 p.m. semifinals were:

FINALIST	HOMETOWN	SCORE(S)	TUNE(S)
Carl Carnegie, 63	Newbridge, Oregon	92,78	Wagoner [not stated]
Joe Simmons, 27	Haines, Oregon	91,92,93	Ragtime Annie Spanish Polka
Leonard Green, 46	La Grand, Idaho	90,96,96	Ragtime Annie Soldier's Joy Whistling Rufus
Frank Sprague, 77	Fruitland, Idaho	90	[not stated]
Glenn Miller, 57	Meadows, Idaho	90,75	Cotton Eyed Joe Mother Says You Mustn't
Clarence Kemble, 42	McCall, Idaho	89,92,94	Whistlin' Rufus Wagoner Gettin' Out of the Sand
Hicks Towell, 47	Midvale, Idaho	88,92	Marjorie [not stated]
Millard Roberts, 84	Grangeville, Idaho	88,92,97	Leather Britches Devil's Dream Suki Am
Donald Keckler, 23	Council, Idaho	86,90,95	Cripple Creek Walkin' Up Town [not stated]
Gladys Frazier, 64	Kamiah, Idaho	85,75	Devil's Dream Dublin' Bay

J. W. Cunnington, 90[23]	Nampa, Idaho	85, 70	Turkey in the Straw Girl From Iowa
Guy R. Hall, 73[24]	Caldwell, Idaho	82	Dixie Doll

The winner of the contest was Millard "Dad" Robert who earned the highest score in the last round playing "Suki Am," unaccompanied. He received a trophy cup and $19.40. The second prize, and trophy and $10.00, was given to Leonard Green after he scored 96 on his final tune, "Whistling Rufus." If winners were determined by the score of the last round only, it appears from the original score sheets that Donald Keckler should have been third with a score of 95. However, local favorite Clarence Kemble was named third place winner with a score of 94 and awarded $5.00 and a trophy, while Keckler received only honorable mention. If the judging committee added the scores from the semi-finals and the finals together for the winning scores, this would explain why Kemble was placed third with a cumulative score of 186 over Keckler's 185. It is unlikely that the scores were added together, though, because such an adding system would have put Green's score of 192 over Robert's 189. Moreover, the semi-finals scores are distinctly crossed out on each of the finalists' registration sheets. Perhaps a copy error occurred when taking down Keckler's final score, or the mistake was simply an oversight.

It is possible that the oversight was motivated by the fact that Keckler was twenty-three years old, and putting him in fourth was meant to help keep the "old fiddlers' contest" 'old.' This possibility deserves consideration in light of the high

[23] Comment on score sheet: "Old time. Tone not too good. Crowd appeal extra good."
[24] Comment on score sheet: "Really old. Time very very good."

regard for "old fiddlers" that organizations had in staging such events. Take for example the 1924 Atlanta Fiddlers' Convention for which newspaper coverage neglected to mention that twenty-two-year-old Marcus Lowe Stokes had won the contest over the icon of 'old' oldtime fiddling, Fiddlin' John Carson. Similarly the Weiser Chamber of Commerce's planning started with discussion about having an "old fiddlers' contest," and Kemble (though only 42), with his left-handed playing style surely fit the model of a favorite local fiddler character better than did young Keckler. At least one contestant felt that final scores were calculated unjustly. Lonzo Riley wrote the Weiser Chamber of Commerce a letter expressing that not only did he feel that he was not judged fairly, but he thought Keckler should have placed higher too:

April 14 - 54
Payette, Idaho

Chamber of Commerce
Washington Hotel
Weiser, Idaho

Dear Sir,
The way the Northwest fiddlers contest was judged last year [*sic.*]. I do not think it is worth my time and gas to come up there. For I consider myself a very good violinest [*sic.*] and others that has heard my playing. I all ways [*sic.*] thought that it was the best that was to get first prize. And that boy from Council [Keckler] should of got second. There was sure a lot of dissatisfied people that attended last year the way the judging went. So do not look for me.

Yours Respectfully,

Lonzo Riley
Payette, Idaho

On the whole, however, most people were satisfied with the first Mountain Fiddlers Contest. Riley's letter was the only complaint among many other letters

of satisfaction regarding the 1953 contest in the correspondence file, and even Riley resumed participation in the contests a few years later.

At the conclusion of the contest, the President of the Weiser Chamber of Commerce Spencer Davies expressed excitement in anticipation of the next year's contest. He wrote a form thank-you letter to sponsors that included a solicitation for ideas for the next year's contest:

> Next year we will put on a big playoff for winners from previous contests in other localities. We plan also to have a jam session before the preliminaries so that fiddlers can get warmed up and more at their ease.
>
> If you have suggestions how we can do it better, please send them. [25]

Chairman of the Weiser Recreation Commission, Lowell Stoddard expressed his plans to hold the contest again in 1954 in a similar letter. He gave special thanks to Blaine Stubblefield and the Chamber of Commerce and politely requested their help again for the next year.[26]

A number of suggestions were assembled from community members and fiddlers for consideration in planning the 1954 contest. These included hiring non-Weiser residents to judge so that the local fiddlers would not be judged so harshly, having a jam session before the start of the contest to allow fiddlers to warm-up, and allowing fiddlers to play one warm-up tune before performing the contest tune to "compensate for stage fright." It was discovered that a large amount of admission money was collected compared to the cost of prizes, so more divisions were proposed in which more prizes might be awarded. A theme

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[25] Spencer Davies, letter to organizations who supported contest, 1 May 1953.

[26] Lowell Stoddard, Chairman of the Weiser Recreation Commission, letter to organizations who supported contest, 28 May 1953.

that was to be debated and developed in the succeeding years was whether these divisions were to be age group divisions or professional/amateur categories. In addition, it was proposed that more honorable mentions be awarded to encourage fiddlers. To ensure that all fiddlers who participated would feel welcome and appreciated (and therefore would participate again) the Chamber of Commerce decided to send each one a letter of thanks. Included with the letter were five postcards containing contest information that the contestant could share with other fiddler acquaintances.

Determined to make the fiddle contest an annual event, yet unaware of the long-life and renown it would eventually achieve on its own, the committee recommended that:

> Square Dance Festival and Fiddlers' Contest definitely be coordinated as one event, because in long haul, town can't support two such events separately - Make recreation commission responsible.

Another reason the planning committee chose to keep the contest with the square dance festival was their feeling that spectators had been attracted to the first contest by the fact that a photographer from Life magazine was on site in 1953. Without such national media attention the committee recognized the possibility that the event may not be as popular in years to come:

> Fiddlers' Contest got part of the crowd from the fact that we had a Life photographer and reporter. For a year or two Fiddlers' Contest could stand on its own - but over long period, square dancers will swell the attendance materially.

1954

The Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' Contest was successful in 1954 for three main reasons. First, Blaine Stubblefield remained active in perpetuating

the publicity gained the first year's contest to entice people to return for a second fiddler show. Second, organization of the event was improved by implemented suggestions from committee members and from fiddlers themselves. And third, Chamber Secretary Stubblefield proposed and carried through with an invitation to the winner of the "National Old Time Fiddle Contest" in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, Frank McCraw to attend the Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' contest, widening the regional scope of interest in the contest.

To maintain fiddlers' interest and to solicit suggestions from them Stubblefield wrote them a letter of invitation explaining when to arrive in Weiser for the contest, the price of hotel rooms, and that the Weiser Chamber of Commerce would make reservations at the fiddler's request. He also offered the Chamber's services in finding free rooms for fiddlers with local families. Stubblefield requested fiddlers to pass this information to other fiddlers, and to submit their names to him to include on the next mailings. Last but not least, this letter announced the fiddler's jam session to be held on April 23, where fiddlers could "help plan and make suggestions for the big Northwest Fiddle Contest, May 7 and 8th."

In a letter to the newspaper of his alma mater, the University of Idaho, Stubblefield provided information on the previous year's and the upcoming 1954 contest, inquiring if there might be some university music students interested in participating. Here he also expressed his interest in cultivating an appreciation of fiddling as a folk art and attracting young people to begin to learn oldtime fiddling:

> Fiddle playing is a major branch of folk music, and is immensely enjoyed by many people. You know for a dozen years

> now we have had a renaissance in folk song, with Burl Ives at the top and many as good. I think we might have a revival of fiddling too. Young people still learn folk songs, but they don't learn fiddling. I don't know why. We wish they would. That is one purpose of our annual contest here. And we do have a few kids in the contest.[27]

It is not surprising to learn from this letter that Stubblefield was a columnist, Kioty Bill, for the University of Idaho newspaper in 1923 and 1927, for letter and press release writing seem to have been second nature to Stubblefield.

After some persistence, Stubblefield finally tracked down the photographer who took photos for Life magazine in 1953, Bert Glinn. Glinn sent the Weiser Chamber of Commerce about 70 photos. The committee made handsome display posters with the photos, fifty of which were hung in the windows of local businesses. Among them were photos of quintessential fiddler and 1953 Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' Contest winner Millard "Dad" Roberts.

Press releases by Stubblefield made use of the idea of the real "oldtime fiddler" as personified by Millard "Dad" Roberts who won the Northwest contest the previous year. Roberts was already a well known fiddler in his community having won the Grangeville fiddle contest ten times in a row. He had relatives in California whom he visited occasionally and while there he entered California contests as well. His easy-going personality made him a character that the public could easily like, and his long white beard made him photogenic. In fact, it was reported in the newspaper that when he won the first Northwest contest, his picture was taken over one-hundred times. Sadly Roberts was drowned in a boating accident, shortly before the 1954 contest:

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[27] Letter from Stubblefield to *The Argonaut,* University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 21 April

> It'll be another hot time in the old town (named for Sergeant Peter Weiser, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition), but there'll be wistful memories for old Dad Roberts, the stooped little man from Grangeville, who took last year's show for his own, with his small plaintive tunes, and went home on the bus with the tallest gold cup in his hand. Only weeks ago Dad Roberts was drowned in the Clearwater River, near his cabin on the east bank.
>
> So somebody will take the old man's crown this time.

One of Stubblefield's major efforts to promote the contest was the many letters he wrote to institutions and powerful individuals personally inviting them to the contest. He invited the governor of Oregon, Paul L. Patterson, and the governor of Idaho, Len Jordan. Unfortunately they had other commitments and wrote with their regrets. Jordan expressed his support for the preservationist effort of the contest committee: "You are to be commended in keeping alive some of the finest traditions of the old West."[28] Though unable to attend, as a result of Stubblefield's efforts, state officials were aware of the contest and regarded the Weiser Chamber Secretary's preservation efforts warmly. Stubblefield also wrote to the Union Pacific Railroad in Boise asking to advertise the contest in their "pink bulletin" publication. Though they were not able to run the ad, the General agent replied suggesting several fiddlers to contact including Curly Lewin, the "fiddling mayor of Vale Oregon." National news magazines contacted by Stubblefield with an invitation to feature the contest included *Time* and *Business Weekly*, who incidentally both politely declined.[29]

1954.

[28] Letter to Blaine Stubblefield from Len Jordan, 3 May 1954.

[29] Stubblefield noted later that he should have begun soliciting the larger magazines much earlier because most of them were already in press for that month when they received his letters.

A meeting was called for fiddlers and committee members several weeks[30] before the contest was to take place, at which the rules for the 1954 contest were proposed and discussed. At this meeting fiddlers were encouraged to play early in the Friday night preliminaries so that there would be enough time for each to play a full five minutes. Although it would be possible for fiddlers to arrive on Saturday morning and "try-out," the organizers hoped that both the promise of a longer performance and the free dinner provided would attract fiddlers for the Friday night performance. Also at the meeting, the contest committee proposed a division for professional fiddlers ("one who mainly earns his living by oldtime fiddle playing") who would compete for a first prize medal. According to a newspaper report, fiddlers were uneasy with this classification and suggested that the designation be relaxed somewhat. The rule as originally stated barred any professional musician from playing in the amateur division.

> Several [fiddlers] pointed out that playing in an orchestra will not help a contestant, unless it is an old-time orchestra, of which there are few if any in the northwest. An accomplished violinist does not make an accomplished mountain fiddler, they stated.[31]

Fiddlers at the meeting discussed whether or not judges should reward musicianship over showmanship. All fiddlers were given the opportunity to express their opinion on the matter, at which time one fiddler commented, "After all, this is a fiddlers' contest not a showmanship contest."[32] The consensus was that showmanship should not win over musicianship, and toward this end the total judging points for musicianship were increased from 50 to 75 points while at

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[30] 23 April 1954 at the Hotel Washington. All fiddlers were invited.
[31] "Change Rules for Fiddlers At Contest," *Weiser Signal American* 26 April 1954.
[32] *Ibid.*

the same time showmanship points were decreased from 50 to 25. "Musicianship" points were earned by producing musical qualities such as, good intonation, good tone quality, and danceable rhythm, while "showmanship" points were based on how well the fiddler's stage appearance and charisma appealed to the audience. Other rules agreed upon included that fiddlers would be allowed to perform one or more tunes within the space of three minutes accompanied by not more than two other instrumentalists.

By the time the many new ideas had been incorporated, the 1954 Northwest Mountain Fiddlers Contest and Annual Square Dance Festival had expanded to two days of fiddle contest activities, and was held in conjunction with the Weiser Auto Show. Fiddlers registered on Friday, May 7th in the Washington Hotel Lobby, finishing in time to watch the Horseless Carriage parade beginning at 2 p.m. Fiddlers and accompanists enjoyed a free buffet dinner that was also open to the public for 75 cents. At 7:30 p.m. the preliminary fiddling playoffs were held, spectator admission was 50 cents. The playoffs resumed on Saturday morning at 10 am and ended in time for the 12:30 barbecue at which "1000 pounds beef, 3000 buns, coffee and ice cream" were served free, sponsored by local auto dealers. Barbecue entertainment included exhibition fiddle tunes performed by willing contestants, and at 2 p.m. "Sundance and Tiny" of a civic club from a neighboring community performed their "famous escape act." As an added incentive for visitors to stay and shop in downtown Weiser, merchants gave raffle tickets to customers who made purchases, and at 3 p.m. the holder of the winning ticket won a free automobile, also provided by a

local auto dealer. Fiddlers who had not yet registered for the contest were given a final opportunity to do so with an audition at 4:00 p.m., and at 4:30 a jam session/rehearsal was planned for fiddlers during which they prepared to perform a tune as a group for a dance at the evening program called by Ross Crispino.

As in the previous year, 1954 fiddle semi-finals took place during the intermissions in the annual Square Dance Festival. The first three places were awarded a trophy and money to pay for transportation from and to the contestant's home. The winner of the contest was Clarence Kemble who donated his travel money back to the contest fund, Donald Keckler took second and was paid $10 for travel expenses from Council, and F.N. Sprague (age 78) took third with $5 for travel expenses from Fruitland. Novelty awards were made for best group performance, youngest and oldest fiddlers, trick fiddling, and the player who traveled the furthest distance to reach Weiser.

The highlight of the evening was the playoff between Northwest Champion Clarence Kemble with National Champion Frank McCraw of Macomb, Oklahoma, winner of National Old Time Fiddlers Contest/Ralph Edwards NBC radio contest at Truth or Consequences, NM, April 4, 1954. His title represented the ten southwest states that competed there. He was billed as the main entertainment on Friday night along with the preliminaries, and being from the Southwest was not eligible to enter the Northwest contest. McCraw however challenged the winner (at Stubblefield's original suggestion) to the playoff, saying that the winner of that contest would be the national champion. Newspapers had a field day with the impending playoff stating that "Fiddlers from throughout the

nation have filed their intention of competing in the contest and nearly 40 are expected to register,"[33] and warning that if "United States Champion Mountain Fiddler" McCraw should happen to lose the playoff his title would go to the Northwest fiddler who beat him.[34] Clarence Kemble lost the championship with Frank McCraw by only 4 points.

Judges for the 1954 contest were Rudy Rudger, Betty Meyer, and Leon B. Rosa. Their judging styles varied. For example, Rudger, who participated in the contest the previous year gave generous scores (low = 55 (only 2 scores were below 60); and high = 100) compared to Betty Meyer, "of Greif's Music store in Payette" (low = 7 (19 scores were below 60); and high = 90). When 71 year old Pete McConnell played "Ain't Gonna Rain No More," Rudger wrote on the scoresheet "modern" and scored it a total of 75 points, which was in the lower third of the scores Rudgers gave altogether. However, Meyer gave McConnell a total of 87 points for this tune, and this was one of the highest scores that she gave. This discrepancy in rating based on the "modernness" vs. "musical ability" of a tune is representative of many that were to come between "oldtime fiddlers" and "violinists," and between "professional radio fiddling" and "amateur fiddling."

After the contest, Frank McCraw and Blaine Stubblefield maintained contact. McCraw had been treated to his first airplane trip on United Airlines from Oklahoma City to Boise by the Weiser Chamber of Commerce so that he would be able to take part in the fiddle contest. Upon his return, Frank McCraw

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[33] Unsigned article clipped from the *Weiser Signal American* "Weiser Readies Dance Event, Fiddlers' Meet," 6 May 1954.

[34] Unsigned article "Everything Ready for Fiddlers and big Dance Festival," *Signal* 6 May 1954.

wrote Stubblefield a letter explaining the delays in his return trip, and expressing that he had enjoyed the contest. One of his main concerns was that Betty Meyer had returned the guitar pick to the man who had loaned it to McCraw. Stubblefield's response to McCraw reveals friendliness and his interest in keeping in contact with a fiddler who was an asset to the Weiser contest. A main concern of Stubblefield was how the judging process might be improved:

May 20/54

Dear Frank:

We haven't seen Bette Meyer yet but she is a very conscientious person and probably has already delivered the guitar pick to the owner. First time we see her we will check up and if the thing is not done we will do it.

You were our biggest help in putting on a successful fiddle show here. Everyone enjoyed your music very much and many are still talking about it. I am glad that you had a good time too.

Your airplane ride will be one thing to remember in connection with your trip here. I can tell from your letter that you enjoyed that too.

We are already planning our next fiddlers contest. I think we may adopt the hidden-judge plan. We learned many things from you; particularly you inspired me to help preserve the real old-time fiddle playing. Many do not understand that. The younger players who grow up with radio fiddling don't understand it. Don Keckler was in here the other day. I am trying to make him understand what the fiddle festivals are driving at.

We are looking forward to having you come here again. Our plan is to approach some big national advertising sponsor, or some network or television system, and get them to sponsor us, so that we can bring in the best fiddlers from all the west.

Again thanks to you from Verna and me, and from the Chamber of Commerce, and all the people of Weiser who enjoyed your playing so much. We hope to see your son in Boise to thank him too.

Sincerely,

Blaine Stubblefield

We are mailing your medal [for participation] today.

After the 1954 contest was over, Blaine Stubblefield continued to explore possibilities for future contests. The issue how much spotlight should be allotted to professional radio fiddlers vs. amateur hoedown players at the contest plagued him. An article by Charles Harper on the "West Virginia Folk Festival--They Make Mountain Music." about a folk festival organized by Patrick Gainer caught his eye in the *Ford Magazine*.[35] Gainer was an English professor at WV University, and a collector and singer of ballads. Gainer was a critic of hillbilly music made popular through the radio: Because of this influence "we've become a nation of listeners. Mothers who once sang as they went about their work now turn on the radio instead." In an effort to counteract this "regrettable state of affairs" Gainer founded an annual one-day folk festival featuring musicians, craftsmen, and devotees. The article mentions highlights from the 1953 festival and announces that the 1954 contest will be held on July 1, 1954 in Glenville, WV. Stubblefield wrote to Gainer with the questions he had been contemplating for several years:

[35] Date missing from copy of article in Weiser Chamber of Commerce correspondence file.

June 9, 1954

Dr. Patrick W. Gainer
West Virginia University
Morgantown, West Virginia

Dear Dr. Gainer Ref: Ford Magazine Article

Next year we will have our third annual Northwest Mountain Fiddler's Contest. It is very successful.

If you have a brochure of some kind on your Folk Festival, we would like to have it.

One of our troubles is the skilled hillbilly or radio fiddler, as against the real old-time hoedown art.

The public likes the radio fiddling and it is difficult to award prizes to the genuine old-style fiddler against audience preference.

We have trouble finding judges who understand the difference between genuine folk music and grand-ole-opery stuff.

We hope that a cult can be started in the U.S. to preserve folk fiddling - just as folk songs have been helped by leaders like Ives, Susan Reid, Bennet, and others. Do you think it can be done? How?

Is there any central leadership for the preservation of the fiddle art?

We of course must recognize and capitalize the commercial value of crowds in our town. We think nearly all such festivals do. But we want to do as much good as we can at the same time.

Any material or advice you care to give us will be much appreciated.

Yours very truly,

Blaine Stubblefield
Manager

As mentioned earlier, Stubblefield's appeal to the expertise of Patrick Gainer was an attempt to resolve the issue of deciding the direction the preservation effort

should take. Stubblefield seems to have created an event in the model of others he had witnessed, and now after drawing others' interest in fiddling he felt he needed help in judging what the event should include. Hence he wrote a letter to Gainer, a respected individual who Stubblefield perceived to have an institutional power and obligation to advise him on what "authenticity" was. Stubblefield's community continued to look to him for advice on contest organization. The chain of authority described here illustrates the complexity of the process of cultural intervention. David Whisnant argues that it is important to recognize organizational efforts such as Stubblefield's as intervention efforts which result in the publication, staging, and hence preservation of selected aspects of culture:

> Cultural intervention is a complex process which has taken many forms and whose results are subject to a variety of interpretations. We will begin to understand these episodes only when we look at them in detail *as* intervention, and not as benign incidents which produced a collection of slave songs, or a revival of handweaving, or a colorful festival. In short, we must begin to understand the politics of culture—especially the role of formal institutions and forceful individuals in defining and shaping perspectives, values, tastes and agendas for cultural change.[36]

Stubblefield's actions and decisions in the 1950s were critical in determining the shape that fiddling would later take on the NOTFC stage.

Although Stubblefield was concerned about distinguishing "true" oldtime fiddling from radio fiddling, he was aware that oldtime fiddlers didn't mind incorporating new material from outside sources into their "authentic" oral tradition. He explained this in a press release advertising the 1954 contest:

> Coon on a Pine Stump, Wind that Shakes the Barley, Buffalo Gals, and many originals of American folk music will rouse the rhythm in youngsters and take the old timers back to the haybarn dance. And

[36] Whisnant, 15.

> some tunes that used to be sheet music, like Red Wing, Casey Jones, and Home on the Range are now folk music. [37]

Drawing from information prospective contestants had sent to the Chamber, Stubblefield continued by enthusiastically announcing that violinists would be amongst the fiddle contestants in yet another article for the *Statesman*:

> You'll see kid fiddlers, old fiddlers, male and female. There's a left-handed canyon concert master who moves his G string to the upper side and turns his bridge around; another one leaves his G alone and takes it on the high side. Meet also the violinist from Julliard School of Music in New York, who can do a turn with Paganini or Sour Wood Mountain, at the drop of a half tone.

These examples show the conflict Stubblefield refers to in his letter to Gainer between his desire to preserve and support the "genuine old-style fiddler," and to capitalize on the public's preference for slick radio performers and for finely-tuned violinist/fiddlers. It is no wonder that Stubblefield was perplexed for he was experiencing first hand what folklorists only began to acknowledge in the 1970s: that the unreflective use of the concepts "tradition" and "authenticity" was inadequate to deal with what folklorists were discovering about processes of acculturation and the politics of culture.[38] No return letter from Gainer is on file at the Weiser Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps it is just as well, for folklorists began shortly thereafter "considering agency, and turning to 'new and more self-conscious expressions of traditions and on new self-publicizing modes of performance,'" whereby they "would no longer have to 'fear contamination.'"[39] The process of further developing the fiddle contest documented below shows

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[37] For the *Idaho Statesman*, n.d.
[38] See Bendix, 207.
[39] Bendix, 209.

that issues of motivation, intent, and political purpose also turned out to be more important to Stubblefield than issues of preserving forms dictated by outside authorities. He and the committee continued to consider authentic oldtime fiddling as a key community attraction, but their concentration was regularly pulled back to practical issues of maintaining fiddlers' interest in participating in the contest, and maintaining the interest of the audience.

1955

At the conclusion of the 1954 contest, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce continued to enthusiastically collect fiddlers names for the next year's. Among those to play for the first time in 1955 was Mannie Shaw who later played a major role in organizing the first National contest in Weiser and the state Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association. The invitation Shaw first received was addressed to Miss Minnie Shaw, but all the same he responded with a polite correction and became a major liaison between fiddlers and the Weiser Chamber of Commerce.

Characteristically, the committee processed suggestions from fiddlers and from its own members for improving the contest. It was agreed that experts, that is people who had been successful in organizing similar contests, would be contacted to discuss what rules should be used for judging. Stubblefield volunteered to write to organizations such as the Library of Congress Folk Music Department, the Truth or Consequences Contest in New Mexico, and the Pappy Shaw Folk Dance and Music School in Colorado Springs Colorado. His goals were to :

> Try to determine whether our objective should be to preserve the old style fiddling; whether it is worthwhile; can judges be

> found to interpret the difference between that and modern or radio fiddling. Should we set up two contest groups - one amateur and one professional - or one old style and one modern. Continued success of the contest may depend on correct answers.

Stubblefield, as usual, was thinking ahead about the practical issue of major sponsorship for the contest:

> Big Time Show: Begin now an effort to find a sponsor, like a big advertiser, big radio station, or other. If we cannot get a national radio hookup we might get a western play. Try for television coverage, try for color movies for news reel. If we get a radio outlet it should go through our local station.

Committee member Maxine Smith suggested giving the spectators more for their money by collecting information on hobbies and occupations on entry forms. She added that the fiddlers should be given plenty of time to fill them out so more information would be available for the emcee announcing the fiddler. Smith also noted that the committee should seriously consider separating the fiddle contest from the square dance. Adding to Stubblefield's thoughts on publicity, the chairman of this department, John McNelly, submitted suggestions which, while not altogether new, continued to be important issues for contest organizers:

> Editors are always grateful for something in the human interest line or on the unusual side and the fiddlers contest is a natural in that respect. The idea appeals to readers. The news agencies might go for a story angled on the search for more young fiddlers or for more women fiddlers. Maybe the 1955 winner or somebody else could be egged into issuing a challenge to all comers. Maybe some contestant will turn up who has a weird way of playing the fiddle or who is unusual in himself or herself.[40]

[40] "Suggestions for Publicity for the 1956 Northwest Mountain Fiddlers Contest and Square Dance Festival," submitted by John McNelly, Publicity, 1955.

McNelly's mention of a search for more young or more women fiddlers both challenged and reinforced the "old man" fiddler stereotype by acknowledging young fiddlers and women fiddlers, while at the same time stating that they were "unusual."

The committee adopted a new rule that stated fiddlers must play a waltz, a hoedown, and a tune of their choice in an effort to increase the variety of tunes heard by the audience. The blind judging system reported by Frank McCraw to be in use at the National Contest in Truth or Consequences New Mexico was adopted. And finally, the rules stated that a fiddler, if he or she wished, would be allowed to play the same tunes in preliminaries, semi-finals, and finals.

Out of forty-seven total contestants, the winners of the 1955 contest included Mannie Shaw, third prize of $50, Francis Kolb, second of $75, and the first prize of $100 was awarded to Jimmy Widner. Kolb also took home the "Best Woman Fiddler" trophy while Mrs. Susan Ashby and Mrs. Verna Hensley won the "Best Trick Fiddling" award. The oldest fiddler trophy went to J.M. Clevenger who was "past 81" years old, and the trophy for the youngest fiddler to Bobby Stelling who was ten years old. The committee added these novelty prizes to the contest in order to distribute more prizes amongst fiddlers and keep their interest in the contest, and to make the spectacle more exciting for the audience.

Widner won playing "Ragtime Annie," "Soldier's Joy," and "Flop Eared Mule." One complaint was logged over his win because of the fact though he resided in Montana, he was formerly from the town of Weiser and therefore had

an unfair advantage. Responding to a newspaper article that mentioned Widner "was among friends" in Weiser, a bewildered onlooker wrote:

> Old Fiddlers Contest/Joke
>
> Dear Sirs,
>
> You can sure say this for sure [that Widner "was among friends"]. A little too friendly. We of the upper country believe.
> 1. This man should not have been allowed to play at all. Plays for his living.
> 2. Never could tell what he was trying to play[41]
> 3. No. 2 winner last year [?] was refused first for the same kind of music.
>
> It's a good thing you listed his tunes or we'd never have reconized [*sic.*] them. The girl [Francis Kolb, 2nd place] played the same tunes, so much better.
>
> You had a contestant out from San Diego California which is further away than any town in Utah.
>
> I believe you are a bunch of Stinkers and will never boost you again.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Valeria Rudger
>
> P.S. They all are supposed to play by ear. This <u>was</u> one of your rules [in response to the article's mention that Widner never had a lesson in his life].

Not only was Widner perceived to have a local advantage, but the letter also brings up the question that had been bothering Stubblefield for some time, how was one to assign a fiddler like Widner, who played in a part time band, to either a "professional" or "amateur" category. The answer was not an easy one, as we see by not only Stubblefield's concern, but also by this spectator's reaction.

On a more positive note, the 1955 contest brought cheer to a woman who had never been in good enough health to actually attend the Weiser event. Pearl Woodruff Beale of New Bridge, Oregon had received an invitation to compete in

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[41] Widner characteristically played technical variations of his tunes with added introductions and endings. I observed this while listening to tapes made by Mannie Shaw of the 1956-9 contests.

each of the three annual Weiser contests. Each year her daughter Bea Thomas wrote the Chamber with her mother's regrets, and she included information on contests that Mrs. Beale had won in earlier years. Though again unable to attend in 1955, Pearl Beale wrote a poem about fiddling and dedicated it to the officials and contestants of the 1955 Old Time Fiddlers Contest at Weiser, Idaho:

The Old Violin

We little know the thoughts that sweep.
Each heaving human breast.
As on life's toilsome march they hear
The sounds they once loved best.

The cricket with his shrill refrain.
The thrush at close of day.
The cowbell swinging in the lane.
Sheep bleating far away.

The Partridge drumming on his log.
The Treetoad in his tree.
The Yellowhammer's first Spring note.
The humming of the Bee.

The moaning Wind, the beating rain.
The sift of drifting snow.
All these are sound's that bring again
The thoughts of long ago.

But of them all each one but brings.
Some part of life's young riddle.
While none calls back so many things.
As one old, well tuned fiddle.[42]

At a meeting held the summer following the third annual contest, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce voted in a resolution that a separate committee be formed to oversee the organization and implementation of the Fiddle Contest

[42] 1995 Weiser Chamber of Commerce Fiddle Contest File.

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and Square Dance festival. With forty-seven entries the 1955 contest had been a glowing success, and at the same time an enormous amount of work for its organizers. The fiddle and square dance committee provided the political organization and power needed for perpetuating the contest without infringing upon the regular duties of members of the Chamber of Commerce. The resolution was adopted on June 24, 1955 at a Chamber meeting at the Hotel Washington. The fiddle committee was allotted half of the money made at the 1955 contest, and was promised the same amount for forthcoming contests.

1956

As Stubblefield had promised the previous year, he had written to the Truth or Consequences Chamber of Commerce to learn more about how their fiddle contest was organized. He received a reply from Helga Latham who explained that the first contest in T or C was held in 1953 (as the first in Weiser had been). The first year the contest was "won by a woman from Kansas, the second winner was from Oklahoma [Frank McCraw], and in 1955 the winner was from Carlsbad, New Mexico."[43] The purpose of the organization, she wrote, "is to have each state in the union hold a state contest, the winner to go to the national contest."[44] She also offered remarks on the contest's policy for distinguishing between professional and amateur performers:

> Regarding the rather intangible line between professional and amateur performers, we are of the opinion that members of a musicians union would be classed as professionals. Please understand that we are not against unions by any means, but we do believe old time fiddlers should remain on an amateur basis.

[43] Letter from Helga M. Latham, Secretary-Manager Chamber of Commerce, Truth or Consequences, NM to Blaine Stubblefield, 9 May 1955.

[44] *Ibid.*

> Should someone in your community play occasionally for your community dances, and receive part of the gate for his services, we would not consider this a professional act, and we feel that a person should be eligible to enter our Old Time Fiddlers Contest...or any other.[45]

The third place winner of the 1955 Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' contest, Mannie Shaw jumped at the chance to represent Idaho in the 1956 Truth or Consequences National Oldtime Fiddlers contest. The contest was held in connection with the Truth or Consequences Fiesta rodeo and parade, and the Ralph Edwards (weekly) Broadcast on NBC which featured the contest winner in a national broadcast. Blaine Stubblefield had suggested to the contest chairman, W. B. Huckabee that the first three places in the Northwest Regionals receive special invitations to the National Contest. The chairman approved of this idea and sent the invitations, for it was harmonious with his goal of assembling as many fiddlers as possible for the fiddle contest.

Mannie Shaw reported that there were thirty contestants in the National Contest representing the states of New Mexico, Louisiana, Texas, Kansas, Arizona, Idaho (Shaw), Oklahoma, and Arkansas in 1956. First place prize of $100 went to Don Johnson of Arizona, second prize of $50 to Benny Thomason of Texas, and third prize of $40 to Junior Daugherty of New Mexico, and Shaw tied for fourth place. According to Shaw, the Fiesta was a three day event with jeep races, rodeo, a beauty contest, and fiddlers. The thirty contestants were cut

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[45] *Ibid.*

to 13 in the afternoon preliminary.[46] Each fiddler was allowed a warm-up tune on stage, and then s/he played the tune they wished to be judged. Several of the contestants waived the warm-up tune and played only the contest tune. From thirteen semi-finalists, three were chosen to play against each other for the top three prizes. These contestants were allowed to play the same tune over in the final rounds if they wished. Shaw stated that relative to the publicity that the fiddlers received, the fiddle contest was rushed and fiddlers played a comparatively small part in the overall event.

In 1956 with the help of the newly formed fiddle committee, the contest became larger and more publicized than ever, Bill Yohey, Lloyd Wanzer, and Grant Ader, three fiddlers who were to become favorites in the Weiser contest entered for the first time this year. With the growing number of contestants it was decided that there should be a separate division for local fiddlers. This would allow the contest to continue to grow and attract winners from other contests without discouraging the participation of local fiddlers. If a fiddler was a resident of the areas surrounding Malheur and Baker counties in Oregon, or Boise, Washington, Ada, Canyon, Payette, Owyhee, Valley, Gem, Idaho, and Adams counties in Idaho they were eligible to enter the Southwest Idaho and Eastern Oregon Fiddlers contest. These contestants were also eligible to compete in the Northwest Regionals contest which was open to "all fiddlers living west of the Mississippi River."[47] Except for the region of residence and entry fee amount ($3.00 for local fiddlers, $10.00 for Northwest Regional), both contests used the

[46] This information is from the log I made of the reel-to-reel tape Shaw made while attending the contest.

same set of rules. The Northwest contest offered twice the dollar amount for each place prize than the regional contest: first $250 and $125, second $100 and $50, third $50 and $25, fourth through seventh $25 and $12.50.

Fiddlers' hoedowns were held on Wednesday 28 March and on Wednesday 4 April 1956. These seem to be the predecessors to the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association Jam Sessions. Callers Lester Panike and Ross Crispino were booked for these events, and KWEI radio made recordings of fiddling and calling to use in promoting the contest. During the first jam there was a fiddlers meeting in which the rules for the fiddle contest were discussed.

Stubblefield and the Fiddle Committee's persistence in advertising and organizing the contest over three years was began to pay off in 1956. Outside observers began to draw attention to the contest as something deeper than a schedule and a set of winners. The two articles that follow stressed the antiquity of the ideals represented in the fiddlers' contest. They encourage people to come because fiddling is a part of their own local heritage that is worthy of celebration. The first article is from the state-wide paper the *Idaho Statesman*:

> *Old Time Fiddlers*
>
> Sponsors of Weiser's Old Time Fiddlers' contest, who are preparing now for the fourth annual staging of the event have been particularly well advised in their choice of this special community festival.
>
> That's because it's in keeping with the traditions of one of Idaho's older settlements in whose earlier days the old time fiddler had a prominent part whenever the early settlers got together for a social occasion. Equally appropriate to the Wood River country where the old time fiddlers contests now are unhappily discontinued in that area.
>
> There's a particular flavor and rightness about a community festival springing from that community's history and traditions. In

[47] Northwest Oldtime Fiddlers Contest entry blank, 14 April 1956.

such an event there is provided an element that would be sadly missing in the case, if for instance, one of Idaho's younger communities were to require its residents to grow whiskers for an occasion when everybody knows the first settlers in that region were provided with safety or blade razors, and used them regularly.

So the Weiser Old Time Fiddlers' contest fulfills the requirements from that point of view, as well as it meets so admirably the qualifications for an outstanding community get-together with an unique and thoroughly enjoyable program of entertainment.

The contest is to be held this year next Friday and Saturday. It will bring together as participants in the featured events some of the outstanding fiddlers of the locality and of the Pacific Northwest, including several champions.

It's an event that reflects credit on the host community, and it's an asset to the state and region. Its invitation is open to everybody. It should be widely accepted.[48]

The second article was published in the Weiser paper:

Festival is Worthy of Everyone's Support

Every once in a while somebody gets a good idea and it grows into something really big like the New Orleans Mardi Gras or the Pendleton Roundup. Whether the Championship Old Time Fiddlers Contest idea, which Blaine Stubblefield proposed a little over four years ago, is in that category will be pretty well established a week from today.

The big contest comes off on Friday and Saturday of this week and how successful it is will depend on how many fiddlers take part and how good they are. It'll depend, too, on how many people come to see the contests on Friday and Saturday nights. Also to some extent on the support of square dancers of the region on Saturday night.

Each year until now, the number of fiddlers has increased and they've come from farther away. If that is true this year and if people of this region give it their support with their presence, you can be pretty sure it is on its way toward becoming a Northwest institution.

It's the type of event that has more than usual merit, because its idealistic purpose is to help preserve old folk music as well as to stage a show that is entertaining, colorful and enjoyable. For this reason, if for no other, it deserves everyone's encouragement and everyone's interest...with everybody boosting it in every way they can.[49]

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[48] Unsigned article clipped from the *Idaho Statesman*, 11 April 1956.
[49] Unsigned article clipped from the *Weiser Signal American*, 9 April 1956.

These articles are consistent with the ideas prevalent in the contest organization since its inception in 1953. It is significant that here Weiser receives public praise and support in print for its success at preserving authenticity from someone other than the publicity chair of the fiddle committee.

1957-8

The 1957 contest included improvements in prizes, prize presentation, and judging over the previous year's event. In 1957 judges were scattered in the audience where they could see the contestants and hear their names announced.[50] Miss Washington County was on hand to present winning fiddlers with prizes including a new handmade violin by W.C. Palmer to the first place contestant in the Northwest division. The violin was valued at $650 and was donated by Palmer as "his contribution to the perpetuation of the music he loves."[51]

The first place winner was not the only one to receive a fiddle at this year's contest. Ten year old Bobby Stelling of Ontario, Oregon, who had participated in each annual contest playing a borrowed fiddle, was given a "Maginni fiddle with a catalogue value of $4,000" by C. C. Mitchell of Florence, Oregon. "Oldtime fiddler and retired speculator" Mitchell heard the emcee announce that Bobby's fiddle was borrowed and felt that he should have one of his own to play.

> Mitchell said he had come to Weiser to enter the contest himself, but that he is a Seventh Day Adventist and his belief prevents his playing on Saturday, the Adventists' Sabbath. In a voice choken with emotion, he told the audience he has never known an old fiddler that

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[50] I didn't find any notes about why the blind judging was abandoned.

[51] Stated in the 1960 Northwest Championship Oldtime Fiddlers Festival program, "History of Contests."

> did not have a good heart, and that he was giving the Maginni to Bobby so that he might develop the talent which God had given him.[52]

Perhaps it was acts such as this one that prompted the authors of the 1956 newspaper articles cited above to describe fiddling as a wholesome activity that was good for the community.[53]

At the conclusion of the 1957 Northwest Championship Stubblefield noted suggestions to himself that included finding a larger location for the event. The contest had been held again in conjunction with the Square Dance festival, but this connection was growing weaker as the fiddler's show began to overshadow the square dancing event, attracting a larger crowd in 1975 than ever before. Stubblefield wrote:

> Due to the growing decline in small rodeos—old-time fiddler's contest should eventually replace the Hell's Canyon Rodeo. With combined efforts, the fiddler's contest could be held at rodeo-time and in the Memorial Park. A good sound system could fill the park with sound. More people could be accommodated. Drawback: possibility of rain.
>
> This last contest was the best local show ever seen. It is going to get bigger and better—and Weiser needs to get bigger with it.[54]

News of the Idaho contest was spread in May when an article about the 1957 contest was published in the *Feature Square Dancer*.[55] The article contained photographs of fiddlers including Clarence Kemble and Mannie Shaw,

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[52] "$4,000 Fiddle Given Youth: Bobby Stelling of Ontario accepts from C. C. Mitchell of Florence, Oregon, a Maginni fiddle with a catalogue value of $4,000." Newspaper article in *Northwest Fiddlers' Scrapbook 1954-1963*, presented to Fiddler's Hall of Fame by Delvin Watkins 26 June 1971.

[53] "Oldtime Fiddling" in *Idaho Statesman*, 11 April 1956, and "Festival Worthy of Everyone's Support" in *Weiser Signal American*, 9 April 1956.

[54] Stubblefield's notes shared with committee, 27 April 1957. The town of Weiser later constructed an ampitheater in Memorial Park for this purpose.

and of DeWayne Wear, smallest fiddler, and Big Jim DeNoon, the largest. Terry Golden, author of the article, amplified the folk image of the fiddle event by including a legend about how Hell's Canyon, a geologic wonder located near Weiser, was created when Paul Bunyon drug his ax along behind him after becoming tired of carrying it on his shoulder. Golden reported that several fiddlers had told him this contest was better than the National Contest in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.

DeNoon as described by Golden exemplifies the type of fiddler that challenged the notion of "authentic oldtime fiddler" in the discourse between fiddlers and organizers. Big Jim DeNoon won the Friday night Regional contest in 1957, beating the winner of the bigger Saturday night Northwest Contest, Lloyd Wanzer. According to Golden, "This was an interesting turn of events, however, because Big Jim competed against the same top contenders, Wanzer, Widner, and young DeWayne Wear and this time took fourth after tying with both Widner and Wear for second. The contenders were closely matched to say the least."[56]

Shortly after DeNoon's regional contest win, the Weiser contest rules were changed, barring professional musicians from entering the Regional contest. Big Jim DeNoon was a professional musician from Boise who had made a number of recordings, some of which, wrote Golden, were well known to square dance callers. DeNoon also had made recordings that Golden distinguished as "strictly in the line of modern hillbilly music, purely for listening

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[55] Terry Golden, "Fiddling Around in Idaho," *Feature Square Dancer* 1 no. 12, Norfolk, Nebraska (Convention Issue May 1957): 4-5.

entertainment rather than in the strictly square dance line. They feature hot guitar, electric-steel guitar, and the special effects these instruments have given to the 'country music' development in the last fifteen years."[57] DeNoon returned the next year after having moved to California, and entered and won the Northwest contest.

Contestants competing in the Northwest contest played specialty tunes such as "Orange Blossom Special" and "Listen to the Mockingbird" as their choice tunes. Several of them opted to play these tunes over in the second elimination which made for some monotonous listening.[58] Later the Fiddle Committee voted that for the next year's contest fiddlers must play different tunes for each appearance so that the winner will have performed nine different tunes by the end of the contest. In addition, rather than giving the contestant the choice of any tune for the third selection, the fiddler was now to choose from a polka or a schottische in an effort to cut down on the non-traditional trick tunes being played. These rules were instituted after the committee voted down a proposal to have fiddlers draw blind tunes to play in an effort to put more variety into the program.

Publicity from newspaper articles and word of mouth spread to fiddlers outside of the Northwest Region, such as S. E. Neff of Council Grove, Kansas. On 9 September 1957 he wrote to the Weiser Chamber of Commerce and sent an article about the contest he organized in Kansas. Neff offered his services as

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[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*, 4.

[58] Information is from a log I made of a reel-to-reel tape of the contest made by Mannie Shaw.

an experienced MC and mentioned that he would be glad to exchange fiddler name lists with Weiser. Stubblefield's reply indicates that he is unsure if these fiddlers would be eligible to compete in their contest because of their location, concluding with "we'll see." However, looking at the entry blank for the contest in 1957 rule #8 states that "contest is open to all fiddlers," and Stubblefield's concern about the geographic are a fiddler came from was not as long-lived as his concern about whether or not professional fiddlers should be allowed to compete.

1959

In February of 1959 the Fiddle Committee called a meeting with fiddlers for the purpose of developing a more efficient score card for judging the fiddle contest. The system was to reward oldtime fiddling over trick and fancy fiddling and state specific criteria to be judged. Mannie Shaw explained that the National Contest had two categories on their scorecard, "oldtime tune," whether the tune "oldtime" or "modern hillbilly"; and "callability," or how suitable the tune was for calling a square dance. Participants in the meeting decided that the Northwest scorecard would have four categories: 1) Tone Quality worth 35 points, 2) Oldtimeyness for 25 points, 3) Technique of bowing and fingering for 20 points, and 4) Timing for a possible 20 points. It was agreed that the "oldtimeyness" category would eliminate violinists because the contestants would either receive all 25 points for this characteristic or no points at all. The "artistry" category that had been used in the past was voted down, and it was decided that the judges should not be violinists or music teachers as had also been done in the past.

Participants decided that for fairness to each fiddler, the emcee should ask the audience to hold their applause until the end of each tune. Finally, it was decided that the committee should meet with the judges before the contest to explain the scoring procedure.

Outside of the scoring system, organization of the contest was smooth by 1959. The regional contest was expanded from twelve counties to include a third, Wallowa in Oregon. More significant was the addition of the Junior division for fiddlers between 4 and 12. All rules were the same for this division as for the Regional except the age limit and entry fee of only $1.50 instead of $3. The first place received a trophy and $5, and second and third places received trophies only.

1960

As the contest continued to grow, the committee decided to pare contestants in the regional and Northwest contests and pad the Junior competition that had been added the previous year. To accomplish this, rule #8 was changed from "open to all contestants" to "Contestants must have passed their eighteenth birthday," and juniors might enter from any region. The parents of DeWayne Wear, who was fourteen in 1960 and who had been placing high in the Northwest contest for the last several years, wrote to the chamber notifying them that they would not return to the contest if their son was not allowed to compete in the weightier divisions.

The fiddle committee added a "Trick Fiddling" division in 1960 and offered three prizes, first $75, second $50, and third $25. The fiddle contest was now

separate from the square dance festival and there was ample time in the evening program to offer such specialty entertainment while scores were being tallied. Not to mention, standard "trick" tunes such as "Orange Blossom Special" and "Listen to the Mockingbird" were no longer heard during the contest as fiddlers were required to play a hoedown, a waltz, and a polka or schottische, none of which included the trick tunes mentioned above. Blaine Stubblefield himself performed folk songs as a specialty act during the Saturday evening show.

1961

Blaine Stubblefield passed away in December of 1960, but the legacy he left in the Northwest Mountain Fiddlers' Contest was still going strong. It was about to undergo a major metamorphosis as the Fiddle Committee began to make plans for staging a National Oldtime Fiddlers contest for the 1963 Idaho Territorial Centennial. The idea of a national contest was brought up first at the Feb 16 meeting of the fiddle committee. Mannie Shaw had proposed the idea so the committee arranged a meeting with him to discuss the matter. On 9 March it was announced to committee members that the legislature did not appropriate funds for the Centennial Commission's fiddle contest proposal. However, the determined fiddle committee voted to go ahead with the plans on their own. The Chamber of Commerce agreed to contribute its half of the fiddle funds collected at the 1961-3 contests to help with the expense in planning and advertising the National 1963 contest. At this time it was suggested that the national contest be incorporated and patented, and this was officially done in 1964.[59]

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[59] The fiddle committee had already become defensive about their right to exclusive use of "Northwest Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest" when the city of Lewiston used the same name for their

By March 16 the Chamber of Commerce accumulated representatives from civic organizations, community clubs, recreation commission, the Fiddler's Council, as well as special member Mannie Shaw for its Centennial Committee and began planning for the 1963 National contest. It was announced that Weiser would have the National Fiddle Contest in 1963, and the coming event was publicized at the 1961 contest.[60] In addition, the Treasure Valley Chamber of Commerce offered their approval and support for the Weiser National Fiddle Contest for the Centennial, stating that the seventeen towns in this organization would work to support each other rather than compete with each other. Among the various events supported by the Treasure Valley Chamber of Commerce were the Boise Trade show, Emmett Cherry Blossom Festival, and Payette's Apple Blossom festival.

In anticipation of the 1963 contest, the Weiser Booster's Committee began sponsoring the Vigilante characters in 1961. Their original job was to promote the fiddle festivities by enforcing the Western Dress code. Mock arrests and trials for people who did not wear western attire were carried out by the Vigilantes. This rowdy group also accompanied the Caravan that traveled to neighboring cities announcing the fiddle contest events. Armed with black powder blanks and bull whips the Vigilantes attracted the attention of prospective contest visitors as well as entrants.

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contest. A committee member, McGinnis, was appointed to write to Lewiston to discuss the matter, (Fiddle Committee Minutes, Feb. 9, 1961).

[60] In fact, the announcement for the 1963 contest in the 1961 program is in such large print I have routinely mistaken the program as an item belonging with 1963 contest information.

Several connections were made with the Pendleton Round-Up Association through Pendleton, Oregon businessman Del Brown, who was hired to judge the 1961 fiddle contest in Weiser. The Pendleton Round-up had grown from its first small rodeo in 1910 to a four-day event in 1961 advertising itself as the "Mardi Gras of the West." The Round-up offered the three winners of the 1961 competition to attend the Round-up rodeo as paid performers. They were to play on the same stage as entertainers such as Roy Rogers or Sons of pioneers who were regularly hired for publicity and entertainment . Bob Chambers, the professional rodeo announcer for this event volunteered to emcee the fiddle contest, although Bill Brummett had already been hired. With Brummett's approval, Weiser officials invited Chambers to join Brummett in the festival announcing. For a finishing touch, the Main Street Cowboys of the Pendleton Round-up announced their plans to attend the Saturday festivities in Weiser. Upon hearing that the Main Street Cowboys were planning to attend, the Weiser Vigilantes issued them a warning that they would be safer if they stayed out of town. This only increased the Cowboys interest in attending, and they replied that they were planning to annex Weiser to Pendleton and claim the fiddle contest along with it. Evidently the Weiser Vigilantes were successful in defending their city's resources, for the contest is still held in Weiser.

The contest in 1961 was again an unquestioned success, with Lloyd Wanzer of Caldwell, Idaho winning for the third time.[61] Wanzer went home with a pair of handmade western boots donated by fiddle judge and shoemaker Del Brown and Wanzer was the first time recipient of the Blaine Stubblefield

Memorial Traveling Trophy. Wanzer was awarded the trophy to keep, upon winning it for the third time in 1967.[62] According to a new rule added in 1961, Wanzer was not allowed to enter the Regional contest again after having won the Northwest Championship.

While most of the present-day's contest format had been fleshed out by the first National contest in 1963, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce Fiddle Committee continues to revise rules and procedures based largely on input from participating fiddlers. For example, in 1972 the Junior-Junior division was added for fiddlers under the age of thirteen "so that pre-teeners would not have to compete with teen-agers."[63] The age groups were narrowed again in 1983 with the addition of the Small Fry category for fiddlers under nine years of age. When older fiddlers began to feel that they needed their own age division to compensate for handicaps common to the elderly, the senior-senior age group was adopted in 1991 for fiddlers aged 70 and older. The same year, the contest committee responded to both women fiddlers' suggestions and a growing national pressure for equal opportunities for women by eliminating the Mens' and Ladies' Divisions and replacing them with the age based divisions Young Adult (ages 18-36) and Adult (ages 37 to 59).

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[61] Wanzer won the Northwest contest in 1957 and 1959

[62] The second time was in 1963, the first National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest held in Weiser, Idaho.

[63] *46th Annual Northwest, 36th Annual National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest Souvenir Program and Information Guide*, 22-27June 1998, Weiser, Idaho.

CHAPTER THREE

ISSUES OF POWER AND AUTHENTICITY AT THE NATIONAL OLDTIME FIDDLERS' CONTEST

Scholars of festival behavior have been concerned with the shared experience of the social group and multiple interpretations of that experience, and how festival provides the specialized frame for communicating these interpretations. Many scholars have identified conventional behaviors common to most festivals[1], and these categories are useful tools for analysis. Others have stressed that festival is highly tailored to the specialized needs of a particular culture and therefore cannot be studied and compared on purely structural criteria.[2] This study proceeds beyond the identification of conventions by considering the NOTFC as a festival that provides a stage for the exercise of power on several different levels.

My analysis of NOTFC as festival makes use of the model for the study of ritual genres proposed by Beverly Stoeltje. For this model she identifies "three

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[1] See Robert J. Smith, "Festivals and Celebrations," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. by Richard Dorson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972): 159-171; Beverly J. Stoeltje "Festival in America," in *Handbook of American Folklore*, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1983): 239-246, and "Festival," *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: a communications-centered handbook,* Richard Bauman, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 249-260; Rory Turner and Phillip H. McArthur, "Cultural Performances: Public Display Events and Festival," *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trickster Press, 1990): 83-93.

[2] See Stanley Brandes, *Power and Persuasion: Fiesta and Social Control in Rural Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Sylvia Rodriquez, "Fiesta Time and Plaza Space: Resistance and Accommodation in a Tourist Town," *Journal of American Folklore* 111(439): 39-56; Barre Toelken, "Ethnic Selection and Intensification in the Native American Powwow," in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life,* ed. by Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala, (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991): 137-156; Thomas Turino, *Moving Away From Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 94.

sources of power to be considered separately: that of discourse, that of form, and that of production."[3] In her studies of two ritual genres, American Rodeo[4] and Beauty Queen Contests[5] she has demonstrated how analysis of the three separate domains, discourse, form and production provides access to the mysteries of power in performance. Her work is characterized by Michel Foucault's conception of power as "something that circulates, and of individuals as the vehicles through whom power passes."[6] Because ritual genres are complex events, scholars who have studied have often alluded to power relationships and transformations in ritual without making specific reference to them. This consideration of power relationships within the NOTFC addresses the question of agency in both participation in and production of the national fiddle contest. Use of Stoeltje's model makes it possible to recognize the creativity of power in relationship to the inequality of social relationships in the NOTFC.

As shown in the previous chapter, the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest emerged in response to diminished performance venues for oldtime fiddlers. By a process David Whisnant calls systematic cultural intervention,[7] Blaine Stubblefield and the Weiser Chamber of Commerce consciously cultivated a new performance situation for oldtime fiddling with the intent of preserving the form. By its own definition:

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[3] Beverly Stoeltje, "Power in the Ritual Genres," *Western Folklore* 52 (April 1993): 135-56.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Beverly Stoeltje, "The Snake Charmer Queen: Ritual, Competition, and Signification in American Festival," in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contest, and Power,* ed. by Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje (London: Routledge, 1996): 13-30.

[6] *Ibid.*, 135.

[7] Whisnant, 13.

> The original and continuing purpose of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest is to help perpetuate the oldtime fiddling of pioneer America; to help develop a more genuine audience appreciation; to preserve the oldtime fiddling tunes; to develop and encourage local, regional and state fiddlers' jam sessions and contests; to permanently record and display the history, relics and mementos of past oldtime fiddlers' art; and to acknowledge the present day oldtime fiddlers who are helping to preserve the traditional expressions.[8]

As with any preservation effort, the Chamber of Commerce's efforts inherently include an ongoing discourse about what should be preserved, or in other words which stuff is "authentic" and worthy of preservation, and which stuff is "inauthentic" and not worthy of preserving. In addition to the goal of preservation the Weiser Chamber of Commerce has a second agendum, that of producing a show that is consumable by tourists including fiddlers themselves. Satisfaction of this second agendum necessitates compromises in the first, that is, presenting fiddling in a new context has drastically changed the form of the fiddle music being preserved. Scholars[9] critical of notions of static traditions argue that concepts of "tradition" and of "authenticity" are interpretations of models of the past that are rooted in present discourse about identity. The National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest as festival provides a forum for fiddlers to claim agency in discourse about authenticity and identity, whether or not they actually enter the contest.

Participation in the NOTFC challenges the disappearance of earlier major performance settings for fiddle music in the shadow of electronic media and

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[8] National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest, promotional flyer, Chamber of Commerce, 8 East Idaho, Weiser, Idaho 83672, n.d.

[9] See Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," *Journal of American Folklore* 97 no. 385: 273-290; Bendix 1997; Whisnant 1983; and Peterson 1997.

entertainment industry. This assertion is consistent with Terence Turner's theory that ritual behavior develops in response to uncertainties such as transition, ambiguity, conflict, or uncontrollable elements that might threaten a given structure of relations, explicitly or implicitly.[10] This participation involves a frame shift from everyday life to one where fiddlers have the opportunity to assert their identity as a fiddler, and to make political commentary on what that identity should be. Participants in the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest experience two different levels of frame shifting during the week of competition. The first shift is made when the fiddler travels to Weiser and sets up camp or checks into a motel room in the new environment. The second is the actual performance on the contest stage.

The Weiser Frame

The focus of the first frame shift for fiddlers is a time and place they call "Weiser." Weiser is not just a town, its an event at which one reunites with fiddling acquaintances and plays music. When a fiddler arrives in Weiser s/he can expect that their special identity of "fiddler" will be recognized by other fiddlers and by spectators. A fiddler expects and looks forward to this frame shift taking place each and every third week of June, when the small agricultural town of Weiser stirs from its normal weekly schedule to host the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest. Over three-hundred fiddlers come to town to compete in the contest, and at least as many musicians come to accompany them or simply to play music in the campgrounds. With this many musicians in town, Weiser

[10] Terence Turner, "Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence: A Reformulation of Van Genup's Model of the Structure of Rites de Passage," in *Secular Ritual*, S Moore and B.

assumes a festival atmosphere for the week the locals affectionately refer to as "fiddle" week.

Arguably the most important step in the process of learning to fiddle is to immerse oneself in the music. Fiddling technique and repertory must be absorbed before one can develop a personal style. The NOTFC is a week-long event to which some fiddlers come strictly to hear and play with other fiddlers and others come to prove their fiddling abilities in a contest setting. Like many fiddlers, Seattle native Marc O'Connor's only contact with other fiddlers was summer contests.

> I would never play fiddle at school. They would have laughed. The one thing I really regret is not being in an environment where that would have been appreciated. There are areas where that would have been well accepted. We couldn't afford another school. It was all we could do to travel to contests in the summer.[11]

Donna Jones Reuter was reared in Spokane, Washington where she was a member of the youth fiddlers' group, the Junior Jammers. Her best friends also belonged to this group, and every year they traveled together to Weiser to meet and compete with other fiddlers their age, and to see the National Grand Championship contest. Reuter, now in her thirties, still travels to Weiser annually for the same reasons.

Playing with other fiddlers and tape-recording their performances for later review are two methods of absorbing contest fiddling technique. Matt Hartz learns to incorporate nuances heard in other fiddler's performances in the following manner:

Myerhoff eds., (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977).

[11] Stacy Phillips, *Contest Fiddling* (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 1991): 11.

> I don't try to get only the bowings and the notes, I try to make myself sound like the person I'm trying to emulate. By doing that you can crawl inside that person. You try to learn what that person is thinking while they are playing; to make the colors and the textures of the notes exactly the same.[12]

The spatial and temporal dimensions are defining characteristics of the NOTFC. First, it is a meeting place for fiddlers who travel often hundreds of miles to share meaningful musical experiences with other fiddlers. In this respect the NOTFC resembles other fiddle jamborees or contests, but it is exceptional in that participants are drawn from a wide range of geographic areas. Second, it is the yearly focal point for many fiddlers and fiddling organizations nationwide, but especially in the northwestern U. S. This is the largest fiddle contest in the country lasting one full week and showcasing over three-hundred contestants. According to Marc O'Connor,

> [Many people] make it their yearly focus. For me it was almost as if I had grown up there--playing in front of your own people. It was such a huge, auspicious fiddling occasion, like a fiddle heaven.[13]

When fiddlers arrive in Weiser to participate in the NOTFC, the first priority is to set up home base, whether it be a motel room, a camping space, or a room with a Weiser family. For regular attendees, the home base is usually the same each year. The campground at the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest is like a small town that recreates itself each year. In 1998 as I was driving to Weiser, my excitement intensified as I thought of claiming "my" regular camping spot or "street address." I had been assigned to this place for three years in a row, probably because my camper is small and my "regular" space has a guy wire

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[12] Stephen F. Davis, "Music from the Hartz: The fiddling of Matt and Danita Hartz," *The Devil's Box* 29 no.1 (Spring 1995): 6.

that takes up some room. Many fiddlers camped around me request "their" spot every year, so that others can find them by "street address." This makes the campground check-in an important event, and often people arrive a few days early to stake out desired camping spaces. Many fiddlers stay all week in Weiser, so it is important that they set up camp in the proper place at the outset.

The people who arrive and set up on the football field early (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday) enjoy watching for familiar cars and RV's rolling into the high school grounds. If they see someone they know, they will go and greet them and assist them in parking their rig which usually includes backing into the small assigned space. Though I am usually tired when I arrive, the enthusiasm of the greeters is restorative, and after some food and a little rest, a newly arrived fiddler like myself is ready to reap the rewards of the long drive, that, is to join a field full of fiddlers and other instrumentalists in the enjoyment of playing fiddle music.

While the football field is administered by the Weiser Chamber of Commerce Fiddle Committee, the areas outlying the school grounds are privately organized campgrounds. These areas are like separate villages in the Weiser fiddle festival municipality, and people camped here have often purposefully distanced themselves from the central school grounds where contest activities take place. Kent Ryden's observations on geographic borders are relevant in this case when looking at boundaries between campgrounds during fiddle week. He notes:

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[13] Philips 1991, 31.

> The ground on either side of a border seems to mean different things--each such demarcated piece of land is under a different jurisdiction, has seen a different history. In a subtle and totally subjective way, each side of the border feels different; in the space of a few feet we pass from one geographical entity to another which looks exactly the same but is unique, has a different name, is in many ways a completely separate world from the one we just left. [14]

One such boundary is the west boundary of the high school property which is marked by an irrigation ditch. Upon crossing this ditch one enters an area known as the "Institute" in reference to the old Intermountain Institute buildings that stand there. When one crosses this border a noticeable change in atmosphere occurs. First, the campers are arranged haphazardly in contrast to the neat tight rows of the football field campground. Second, little "contest" or "oldtime" style fiddle music is heard here, rather one hears bluegrass and swing music. Because this area lies outside of the jurisdiction of the high school grounds, it embodies a relaxed feeling that contrasts with the high level of organization that school officials and Chamber of Commerce Fiddle committee members achieve in their area. It has even become associated with a number of nicknames which reinforce the place's status as a geographical entity "separate" from the "official" contest grounds.

Most fiddlers who attend Weiser know some of the history behind the large imposing set of buildings known as the "Institute." These structures date back to an educational endeavor carried out by E. A. Paddock at the turn of the century. The Institute encompassed farmland that was later donated to Weiser Public Schools. The high school was built on a portion of this property in 1967,

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[14] Kent C. Ryden, "Prologue: Reading the Border," in *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993): 1.

and in 1977 the remaining land and buildings were sold to a local group of private individuals. Landowners now rent out camping sites to any interested parties on a first-come first-served basis around these buildings during Fiddle Week. Campers can buy passes for showers located inside one of the Institute buildings. The building known as Hooker Hall became the Snake River Heritage Museum, but much of it was burned recently in a fire and has not yet been repaired. The auditorium is still intact in this building and instructors including Greg Baker and Paul Anastasio conduct fiddle and guitar workshops here, an activity that has come to be expected by fiddlers who attend Weiser regularly.

A craft fair is set up in front of the Intermountain Institute alongside the variety of campers and tents. The "Thin Man" string shop is always here and is a favorite visiting and shopping place for fiddlers looking for instruments and accessories. One finds T-shirt and food booths here too. People often refer to this area as "Hookerville." An invitation to go to Hookerville may come as a shock to the uninitiated, but it simply refers to the area around Hooker Hall. Campers around southwest side of the institute buildings tend to favor bluegrass music while campers on the northwest side play "swing music." The northwest camp is known as "Swingville," and in addition to fiddles and guitars, trumpet and sax players join jam sessions here as well as snare drummers and vocalists. The guitar players who jam here know a wide variety of jazz chords and rhythms.

A number of fiddlers come to mind when I think of Swingville. Bruce Lites, for example comes to Weiser every year specifically to camp and play in Swingville. He enters the contest just for fun, never planning to win. After he

plays his round on Monday he retreats to camp at the Institute/Swingville and plays music all week without returning to the contest area. Paul Anastasio is another person one is likely to hear playing in Swingville. When he is not jamming or selling his recordings he is giving workshops in the auditorium. Gary Lee Moore, winner of the 1997 Adult Division, has camped in Swingville for as long as he can remember, perhaps even before it became so-named. Moore remembers being kicked off of this spot by the police many years ago. This memory is shared by Vivian and Phil Williams. The police apparently did not recognize them as fiddlers, rather they mistook them for some of the hippies that were hanging around "making a nuisance of themselves."

The first time I attended the NOTFC in 1986, Hookerville was saturated with bikers. Their motorcycles were lined up in row after row, and a good number of the people milling around there wore black leather motor-biking attire. Much of the remaining crowd at that time was far less conservative than today's, and it was this quality that led to the area's second nickname, "Hippieville." This has become a part of the area's folklore, for I still hear people (even young children) call the Institute grounds "Hippieville," though hippies are by and large no longer to be found there.

While campers on the east side of the Institute enjoy green grass, shade from tall maple trees, and wind shelter from the large buildings, a hardier group lives on the west side in what is known as "Stickerville." Moving from the "Institute" to Stickerville we cross yet another physical boundary into another area under different jurisdiction. I did not understand the full meaning of this

nickname until I went with another fiddler who was walking his dog there. The dog started to limp and when we looked we found several large, tack-like stickers in her foot. My friend, a Nebraska farmer and fiddler, had three different names for the menacing weed: goathead, mexican sandburr, and punctureweed, and he said it normally grows in abandoned parking lots or around old buildings. I looked at my own boot and found several jammed like nails into the hard black sole, and they were so tightly driven in it was difficult to remove them. While I had formerly assumed that "Stickerville" referred to the dry prairie in general behind the Institute, this experience gave me a specific nasty "sticker" to associate the area's name with.

Aside from the stickers, sights and sounds again change drastically when entering Stickerville. The majority of campers stay in tents here, although there are a few RV's too. A large double-wide mobile home serves as the registration office and houses restroom and shower facilities. Individual camps tend to be spread out and isolated from one another here, probably because there is enough room for this to be possible in comparison with the number of people who like to stay back here. One rarely hears contest tunes played in this camp, rather the sound of southeastern Appalachian fiddle tunes fills the air. Contest fiddlers visiting Stickerville seem to agree that the atmosphere behind the Institute is not unfriendly, rather, for these "Contest Nazis"[15] coming over from "Tin Town"[16] it seems unfamiliar and uninviting. The fiddle tunes heard here are

[15] Nickname used by residents of Swingville and Stickerville for fiddle contestants who camp in the football field.

[16] Nickname used by residents of Swingville and Stickerville for the football field camp which is by and large filled with RVs as opposed to more tents in the other camps.

described as "modal," "monotonous," and "simple" by contest fiddlers unaccustomed to Southern style fiddling.

A property owner organized a jam session in Stickerville that I attended one year with some Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association members. We were seated on wood benches and camp chairs around the fire, and we played oldtime music until a big gusty wind came and broke up the session. This experience seems to confirm my thought that those who stay in this camping area are really "roughing it." There is no lawn or lighting, just sagebrush, weeds, sparse prairie grass, a few trees, stickers, and wind.

It seems that the out-of-the-way location of Stickerville inhabitants is in itself a statement about these fiddlers' identity. According to Alan Kagan, many members of this group are from Portland and Seattle and specialize in playing a narrow repertoire of Southern Appalachian similar to that of nationally recognized revivalist performer Bruce Molsky.[17] Performers of this repertory whom I have spoken with[18] are not concerned with competing with one another, rather they enjoy the pleasure of participation in musical interaction within the group. While the subject of participatory music versus performance style will be addressed in more detail in another chapter, I mention it here briefly because it is such an important issue for "Stickerville" fiddlers that they create separate a geographic community for themselves within the larger fiddle week set-up. Kagan finds it

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[17] Alan Kagan, "Never the Twain Shall Meet: Cultural Disjunction, Denial and "Other" Construction in Revival and Contest Fiddling," paper presented at Society for Ethnomusicology National Meeting, Bloomington Indiana, October 23, 1998, 5.

[18] The fiddlers with whom I've had the deepest conversations about this style of music which are still ongoing are Henry the Fiddler, who has played at Weiser and other contests for the last twenty years; Dan Levenson of Bidwell, Ohio; Anita Dolen of Boulder, Colorado; and Lucy Long of Bowling Green Ohio.

> [s]trange behavior, is it not, for these northwest coast revivalists of southeastern music to make this annual pilgrimage to the shrine of a southwestern tradition, and then to ignore its presence. The act itself would seem to be a symbolic protest, except for the isolation and privacy of the behavior which remains unnoticed.[19]

While some might find it strange behavior, the important issue here is that the space they have claimed at Weiser is under their jurisdiction. They have essentially put themselves on display on their own terms in the space called "Stickerville." Therefore I disagree that their symbolic protest remains unnoticed, for if this were so neither Kagan, nor I, nor the fiddlers mentioned earlier who occasionally stroll into their unfamiliar territory would know anything at all about the place called "Stickerville."

The Taylor's camping ground is located about one-quarter mile south of Stickerville. This private residence is on the southwest corner diagonally across the street from the Weiser Senior High School (Indianhead and 7th St.). One notices the boundary of this area when walking off of the main street and entering the Taylor's large back yard, known to most fiddlers as "Taylorville." A sign in their front yard proudly announces their name over a decorative pair of fiddles. The Taylors rent out spaces for campers and provide fresh water for RV's to tap via their underground sprinkler system. Most people who camp here know the Taylors personally, and need only to call before coming to Weiser to ensure that their camping space is reserved. Some of the largest and nicest RV's in attendance at Weiser are parked behind the Taylor's home. Restroom facilities are located in their unattached garage. This garage is often the gathering place for musicians wishing to jam, and it is large enough for an

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[19] *Ibid.*

audience to seat themselves in lawn chairs indoors with the jamming musicians. The music I have most often heard here is western swing by players such as Dick Barrett, Vern Bachman, and some of their young guests like Billy Contreras and Regina Mathews. Hughey Lewis, frequent Senior national champion, always camps at the Taylors, and Phil and Vivian Williams have camped here for years in their big square army-style tent next to the garage under shade trees. They are often to be found playing a variety of contra dance fiddle tunes and bluegrass songs in or outside of their tent, or in the garage. In 1998 the Taylors hosted Shane Cook in their home, a young fiddler from Canada. This was Cook's first time in Weiser and he made arrangements with the Taylors through the Chamber of Commerce. He won fifth place in the national grand championship, so I suspect since he was in top condition to achieve this that he was well cared for by the Taylors.

A remote campground is available for people who are strictly tourists and not musicians. The Pioneer School is located several blocks south of the Taylors on 7th Street, and is not really a place of interest for musicians since it mainly functions to host spectators. The Chamber of Commerce administers this camping area as an overflow for tourists when the Fiddlers' campground at the high school is full. This geographic space is ideal for visitors who prefer not to be kept awake all night by music.

As for motels, a fiddler should plan to book a room in one of Weiser's three motels for "fiddle week" over a year in advance. Even then the procedure is to be placed on a long waiting list for cancellations. There are motels available

in nearby towns such as Ontario, Oregon (a twenty minute drive). Many fiddlers have met Weiser families with whom they stay during the festival week.

In sum, to experience Weiser during the third week of June during the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest is take part in ritual bonding through the hearing and playing of familiar music. Any day in Weiser outside of this special week would be like a day in the fiddlers' home town: a day when one fiddler would have a small chance of meeting another fiddler on the street, or anywhere for that matter. In contrast, a Weiser day during fiddle week is filled with the sound of fiddling. With over three-hundred contestants in attendance plus hundreds more fiddlers and musicians who attend without competing, fiddle music can be heard while falling asleep, upon waking, and of course throughout the daytime hours. Professionals create this music alongside amateurs, and in Weiser one meets fiddlers from far and from near. To my surprise, one year I met two fiddlers there whom I knew from Michigan. Dick and Char Wild's travel plans were unknown to me until I saw them in the campground, and it was a pleasant reunion. Many fiddlers feel the best part about Weiser is the grand amount of fiddling and fellowship that is there for the sharing. At the same time it is an escape from the everyday for there are no home chores to be done, and relatively few appointments to be kept.

Contest Production: Preservation of "Authenticity"

Ironically, efforts to preserve oldtime fiddling have transformed it into a new "contest" style in which individual fiddlers constantly emulate earlier "authentic" role models while showing creativity, originality, and technical

mastery to increase chances of winning . Richard Peterson has observed similar demands faced by commercial country musicians, and he calls the resultant process of meeting these demands the "fabrication of authenticity:"

> What is taken to be authentic does not remain static but is continually renewed over the years. The changing meaning of authenticity is not random, but is renegotiated in a continual political struggle in which the goal of each contending interest is to naturalize a particular construction of authenticity. [20]

In the case of the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest two groups, fiddlers and the Weiser Chamber of Commerce, are political participants in the fabrication of authenticity, and their efforts are sustained and gratified in part by a third party, the paying public.

The Chamber of Commerce maintains control over the production of the contest event by administering a strict set of rules and regulations. These rules serve both of the Chamber's agenda: first, there are specific rules to assure that only authentic tune types and performance practice will be preserved, and second, there are rules that assure organization so that the show runs smoothly, accommodates the highest number of fiddlers possible, and satisfies a large number of expectant spectators. At the same time the Chamber must maintain the interest of fiddlers to insure the future of their contest. To that end, fiddlers' ideas are given consideration. Fiddlers often telephone or write directly to the contest director with ideas, they file formal petitions for change, and they express their opinions during meetings scheduled by the Chamber for that purpose. This format assures that in addition to the commercial interests of the sponsor, the event is grounded in the needs of the fiddling community.

The most effective way that NOTFC accomplishes preservation and perpetuation of "authentic" oldtime fiddling is by maintaining a dance tune repertory reminiscent of the frontier Saturday night dance. Each contestant is required to play three fiddle tunes. Two of these tunes must be specified dance types: the first must be a hoedown (a tune thirty-two bars in length and appropriate for traditional line and square dance calls), and the second must be a waltz (a tune in triple meter and played at a slower tempo than the hoedown). The third tune is known as the "tune of choice," and any tune such as a rag, polka, schottische, two-step, or jig may be played at this time, as long as the fiddler does not incorporate novelty techniques considered "trick or fancy fiddling."

While the Weiser Chamber of Commerce relies on suggestions from fiddlers on all aspects of the contest, fiddlers, especially judges and past contest winners, have the last word on what is considered appropriate repertory and performance style. These rules and judges expectations are discussed annually in a meeting between contestants and judges on Sunday afternoon prior to the first contest event on Monday morning. Most fiddlers agree that the rule that prohibits "trick or fancy fiddling" is necessary to filter out performance of "non-oldtime" tunes such as "Orange Blossom Special," which consists mainly of an improvised train imitation coupled with a section of double-shuffle bowing patterns also imitating train sounds. Audiences never fail to be entertained by accurate portrayals of train whistles, steam engines, clanking wheels on the track, the Doppler effect, and screeching brakes. Most fiddlers, however, think

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[20] Peterson, 220.

that sound effects do not accurately represent a fiddler's skill, and that the ability to perform more "authentic" dance tune types is necessary to win a contest.

Another fiddlers' need that the contest committee has continually addressed is that of providing level "playing field" for fiddle contestants of various ages. Currently NOTFC rules specify seven different age-based contest divisions: Small Fry (less than 9 years of age), Junior-Junior (less than 13 years of age), Junior (less than 18 years of age), Young Adult (18 to 36 years of age), Adult (37 to 59 years of age), Senior (60 to 69 years of age), and Senior-Senior (at least 70 years of age). The very old and very young are judged in separate groups based on physical limitations, while separate groupings of the middle age categories take into account that older fiddlers generally play a more conservative style than younger innovators, a division that will be examined more closely in the following chapter. Any age is eligible to enter the competition for the National Grand Champion title, but by doing so one forfeits the opportunity to compete against one's age cohorts.

The format for each contest division is essentially the same. The order in which contestants perform on stage is randomly selected by computer, and fiddlers performances of three dance tunes are evaluated by judges who listen from a remote location. Judges are not allowed to see the contestants because fiddlers are to be judged solely on the basis of the music they produce rather than on their appearance. This stipulation supports a new contest-induced emphasis on the actual sound of the fiddle music produced, separate from the fiddler who produced it. Whereas previously fiddling was heard and "judged" by

active dancers; the contest audience, especially judges, is composed strictly of listeners. Removing the fiddle tune from its former participatory context and placing it on the stage has put pressure on fiddlers to become more technically proficient on their instrument than in years past, and to give less attention to interaction with the audience.[21] Blind judging has become a highly revered feature of the NOTFC tradition, perhaps because people think unknown fiddlers stand a better chance against proven fiddlers when the judges cannot see who is performing.

The order of presentation of fiddlers is strictly administered by the contest committee. Throughout the entire "Weiser" week competition begins at 8 a.m. and contestants are scheduled at five-minute intervals, each having four minutes to perform on the stage. If a contestant misses their scheduled performance time, they are prohibited from entering the next year's contest, and their contestant's badge and guest's badge are revoked for the remainder of the current year's competition. After the last contestant in a division has performed, the stage is occupied by novelty performers, often comic and/or virtuosic, while scores are tallied. After this task has been completed, the novelty performers are ushered off the stage to make room for more contestants or for the award ceremony. Contest activities usually conclude around 11 p.m. with the exception of Saturday's National Grand Champion finals which usually draws to a close around midnight.

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[21] Tamara Livingston has observed a similar contrast in value systems between paticipatory music and staged performances in her study of the Brazilian Choro, "Brazilian Choro as Participatory Music" a paper presented at the Midwest Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology meeting in Bowling Green, Ohio, 18 April 1998.

While the three-tune repertory rule ensures the preservation of dance tune types historically associated with fiddling, and age divisions level the playing field for age cohorts, the four-minute time limit was adopted to accommodate the large number of fiddlers wishing to compete. The only requirement to enter this contest is payment of an entrance fee so it is possible for virtually any fiddler to sign up for their own moment of glory or terror on the national contest stage. Each year for the last four years that I have attended the contest over three-hundred contestants have entered the NOTFC and performed on stage during the one-week time frame of the event.

In organizing the contest this way, the Weiser Chamber of Commerce supports the grass roots nature of fiddling at the contest, while also supporting its own economic interest in attracting as many fiddlers as possible to the contest. Fiddlers who feel welcome in Weiser will stay a while and spend money in the city's restaurants, shops, craft fair, and even at yard sales. Moreover, the chance is good that satisfied fiddlers will return the following year to compete and at the same time contribute to Weiser's economy. This is a profitable reason for squeezing as many fiddlers as possible into the contest, not to mention the additional perk of maintaining the NOTFC's reputation as the largest fiddle contest in North America.

The Weiser Chamber of Commerce's goal of hosting a big contest is simultaneously compatible with and contrary to fiddlers' concepts of "authentic" performances. Historically the fiddle has been associated with social events, and it has always had a strong oral tradition. The square dance was a good

opportunity to learn repertory from another fiddler because single tunes were repeated several times during the course of one dance. As mentioned earlier in this work, homemade music also emphasized the social aspect of music-making, and oral learning from one another was the center of the social activity. The NOTFC is a place where social-musical experiences are welcome and encouraged, and these experiences are perceived by most fiddlers to be part of what oldtime fiddlers have always done, thereby making them authentic. Conversely, the Chamber of Commerce has imposed a four-minute time limit on the staged portion of the contest. Contrasting with to the square dance session, the homemade music session, or today's parking lot jam session, the stage time is barely enough time for a square dance fiddler to get one tune flowing, let alone three tunes. This aspect of NOTFC is considered by critics (who are oldtime fiddlers) to be incompatible with the traditional participatory nature of fiddling.

The Contest Frame

The fiddlers and their accompanists who enter as contestants in the NOTFC experience a second ritual frame shift from the Weiser festival atmosphere to the contest stage inside the Weiser High School Gymnasium.

Concurring with observations of secular ritual made by Moore and Myerhoff, in this contest arena ordered behavior is the dominant mode and it is "exaggeratedly precise."[22] Each contestant who takes this stage is expected to enact a strictly defined set of performance criteria, as the fiddler before her has and the fiddler after her will. These criteria are repeatedly enacted throughout

[22] Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff eds., *Secular Ritual*, (Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977).

the contest by fiddlers of all ages, and such repetition serves to authenticate the behavior being repeated.

This second frame shift moves the fiddler from the carefree environment of campground or motel room jam sessions to an environment where the range of allowed behaviors is far more limited as the performer assumes the role of an actor. Marc O'Connor, National Grand Champion in 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1984, compared the contest stage with a television studio:

> Stacy Phillips, interviewer (SP): How did you prepare just before you went on stage?
>
> Marc O'Connor (MO): It was a difficult situation. The warm-up room was madness--all kinds of fiddlers going on at the same time--very loud. While one fiddler was on stage, the next was escorted to the locker room. It's really echoey, colder and quiet. From there you went out to the stage.
>
> SP: You'd play right up to the moment you competed?
>
> MO: Yeah. Until I heard the applause for the fiddlers before me. The stage is in the center of the gymnasium, and people are seated all around. The microphone comes from the top. It's difficult to play. You can hear a pin drop. You don't hear the sound system. The closest thing to it is playing on the set of a TV show--like a hospital, a sterile atmosphere.[23]

Upon entering the gymnasium during contest activity as a contestant or an audience member, one becomes engulfed by an intense, rigidly ordered atmosphere. Audience members are instructed in a friendly tone by the announcer not to use flashes for photographs until the contestant has played the last note of their last tune so that the fiddler might maintain optimum concentration.

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[23] Stacy Phillips, *Contest Fiddling*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 1991), 24.

This high degree of staged, ordered fiddle performance only occurs during "fiddle" week in the Weiser High School Gymnasium,[24] a characteristic that sets the gymnasium apart from activities in its immediate surroundings. The contest arena is a fixed center point around which numerous types of contrasting informal activity occurs. Thirty fiddlers might be playing individually with their accompanists in the warm-up room (the high school cafeteria), creating what sounds like fiddling cacophony to both the casual observer and the sensitive fiddler trying to hear the chords the guitar accompanists is playing. Others may be conversing with each other or browsing the recording and fiddle book sales stand in the gymnasium lobby. At the same time, contestants who camp on school grounds make use of the locker room showers adjoining the gymnasium. Although the entry to the gym from the locker rooms is barricaded with an office-type moveable wall, one can hear the competition while showering. From the gymnasium it is only a short stroll to the campground on the high school football field where numerous jam sessions are taking place. Many participants in such sessions never enter the gymnasium to see and hear the competition. They are more comfortable with the outside, informal atmosphere that surrounds the official competition.

Fiddlers who are considering entering the NOTFC for their first time are encouraged to make this second frame shift from informal to formal by a fiddling social network. Five minutes on NOTFC stage is a personal moment in the

[24] An exception occurred in the 1980s when the NOTFC ran two contest stages at once for a few years. The second stage was the high school auditorium. This practice was discontinued because two sets of judges had to be hired at once, which was too complicated and costly.

"spotlight" that every fiddler who knows three tunes and can pay a small entry fee is eligible to claim. Every registrant is guaranteed a performance in the first round of the competition, regardless of ability, appearance, or any other factor. Those who claim this moment for the first time must gather the courage to go on stage, and the social support of fiddling friends, relatives, teachers, and accompanists is essential in making this first stage appearance possible. After having taken the stage, no matter if the performance was excellent or a disaster, the support of the fiddler's social network is still strong when a fiddler leaves the stage.

When a fiddler takes the contest stage for the first time, a reference point is created. The reference point is the staged experience, an experience shared only by fiddlers who are contestants, and an experience that extends beyond the participatory frame common to the larger group of NOTFC participants. The four-minute on-stage experience becomes useful in conversation with everyone involved in the contest. Taking the contest stage distinguishes a contestant as a member of a special group of fiddlers who have stepped out of the egalitarian relationships shared in the first frame shift, and have been transformed into a ranked hierarchy of fiddlers by means of the second frame shift, the competitive performance. As a member of this second group one may talk about how the performance went, how it felt to be on stage, which tunes were played, who the accompanists were and how well they played, and what the judges wrote on the contestant's score sheet. One may be offered praise or empathy from those who

observed the performance, and this is a positive form of attention for an individual who mustered the courage to claim the spotlight.

Such feedback usually encourages a fiddler to take the contest stage again, often with the desire of improving their score. Subsequent performances generate more data to converse about such as how much one's score improved or declined over the last performance and in relation to other fiddlers' scores. Fiddlers usually interpret these scores through discussions about individual judges and what is known about their judging styles, and by specific contest tendencies, e.g. does the contest promote the "old time" or the "progressive" style more aggressively. Such discussions provide knowledge and incentive for improving one's performing ability for the next contest, and for recognizing why good performances are sometimes interpreted otherwise by certain judges. Participation in discourse about fiddling at a particular contest is a reason to enter the contest, even if a fiddler is not interested in winning or improving. Most fiddlers reach a point where they no longer improve drastically over their previous scores, and many who reach such a plateau do not strive to earn higher scores. For these fiddlers, taking the contest stage is a way of stating one's membership in the social group as a whole. When asked "How did your round go?" such a fiddler is able to participate in discussions about the contest, regardless of the quality of her performance.

These discussions about participation in the NOTFC extend beyond contest boundaries to the fiddler's every day communication at home with non-fiddlers. By making the statement "I've just returned from Weiser, Idaho where I

competed in the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest" a fiddler claims power by making a positive statement about herself. The national group of fiddlers is still small enough that by entering the NOTFC a fiddler can be identified and receive a high ranking in a national context. For example, there is an average of thirty contestants who normally enter the National Adult Division, so even the lowest placing individual can return home and report that he won "thirtieth" in the nation. Occasionally a fiddler will take this one step further and enter the National Grand Championship, knowing that there will be fewer entrants (usually twelve to fifteen) and consequently even the last place in this division would be higher than the last in the Adult Division. For most, simply stating that one competed nationally conveys the message that "I am an important fiddler."

The practical advantages of entering the NOTFC must not be overlooked. Any fiddler who enters and plays in the contest receives a badge that doubles as an admission pass to all contest performances excluding only the Grand National Championship held on Saturday night. A fiddle contestant receives a second badge that entitles one guest to the same privileges. Finally, contestants entered in the contest receive the advantage of low cost and conveniently located camping on the high school football field not available to non-contestants. Fiddlers who take the fiddle contest seriously compete for prize money (the first place premium for the Grand National division is $1400), trophies, and self satisfaction and prestige associated with winning the top prizes. As a fiddler improves in ability, his/her goals in attending the contest may change, as Marc O'Connor's did:

> When I competed in the Open I realized I could win, and that started to be my purpose for going. Before that it was to learn more. When I was a kid the emphasis was equally on doing well in the contest, but equal to that was learning from older fiddlers, being a kid, and getting a vacation out of the deal. Later, when I was 17-19 I took it more seriously.[25]

Fiddlers who have developed their own style and have done well in competitions are admired by both aspiring and competing fiddlers. This admiration inspires emulation, as described above by Hartz. Respect for role models in the contest atmosphere can be profound as exemplified by Hartz's comments:

> The other very important thing that happened at that time is that I met Terry Morris in Reading, California in 1984. Terry was an influence on so many young fiddlers. I think he was so influential because he took what Orville [Burns], and Benny [Thomason], and Major Franklin, and Norman and Vernon Solomon, and Bryant Houston – all the great Texas fiddle players –took what they had developed and rolled it up into a super version of Texas fiddling. I feel that he took breakdown playing to a new level. When I met him it was like meeting Christ in church.[26]

Similarly Marc O'Connor describes Benny Thomason's playing:

> He was a natural player. His bowing was the smoothest ever and his phrasing--I think Benny's fiddle phrasing is like George Jones' vocal phrasing. Every time George Jones opens his mouth, you might as well write it in stone. It's not going to get much better than that. Everything he does is classic. He [Thomasson] saw that I had the ability to make up my own variations, even though I thought that everything he played was exactly what I wanted to do[27]

Another example is two contemporary innovators who often competed with one another, Benny Thomason and Major Franklin, who respected and

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[25] Stacy Phillips, *Contest Fiddling* (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 1991), 13.
[26] Davis, 5.
[27] Philips 1991, 16.

acknowledged each other as outstanding fiddlers. According to Benny Thomason,

> Major was my worst competitor. You had to be careful what you were doing when you got up there (laughs). He was a great old fiddler.[28]

> I knew Major like a book. I used to visit him all the time. I only live about 100 miles from him. I went to his house and he said I want you to meet some neighbors, and he said, "I want to tell you something. This is the best fiddler in the world - in the world!" It kind of knocked me for a roll. He never bragged on anybody. That sounded awful good to me coming from him because he said exactly what was in his mind. When he went to fiddling he wanted everyone to fiddle just right, not to be sidewinding nowhere.[29]

With the exception of Marc O'Connor, none of these musicians so highly valued within the contest fiddling community have accumulated prestige in the commercial country music world outside of the contest fiddling circuit. O'Connor is now a studio musician in Nashville, but not because of his contest reputation. He claims:

> When I came to Nashville, I was more known for playing with *The Dregs* [a rock band that emphasized fast-paced, technical instrumental solos] than my contest things. They made such an impact here when they played, though the gig was with their other fiddler, Alan Sloan. They thought that anyone who played in that group must be good.[30]

So, while a successful contest record may help one to succeed in the larger commercial music world, it is not the sole basis for entry.

Prestige attached to contest winning is much better estimated in the context of the fiddle contest community. For example, judges for the NOTFC are previous winners of contests including the NOTFC. This practice acknowledges

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[28] *Ibid.*, 33.
[29] *Ibid.*, 31.

winning fiddlers as experts and gives them the power to make decisions that will affect the direction contest fiddling will take in the future. Six judges are hired each year, five of whom are judging at any given time while the sixth goes on break. For fairness, the highest and lowest scores of the five are omitted from the tally of each round, and through this process judges as a group are important and influential in the process of preservation and innovation of the form. While judges usually perform their job conscientiously, there are always contestants who do not agree with the results. Some become discouraged, but more accept the contest results as a necessary dramatic component of this social event. Often, as was the case with Marc O'Connor, when a fiddler has developed her own style of playing and has won several contests, s/he moves on to another phase of her career. Her picture is displayed in the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Hall of Fame to commemorate her achievements and inspire younger fiddlers, and her new focus is on another aspect of performing or living. Many fiddlers continue to attend the NOTFC and remain out of the competition in order to concentrate on their students' accomplishments, or to act as judges. For example, after winning several fiddle contests including the National Men's title at the NOTFC, Dale Morris decided to devote less energy to winning fiddle contests and more to teaching, performing, composing, and recording professionally. When asked to explain his change of heart in an interview he responded:

> Well, the contests, have you ever watched a rodeo? Have you ever wondered why one rider can score an 85 and another rodeo rider that rode a tougher bull scored 75. Well, these guys get names. They get notoriety and that has a lot to do with who gets first place. In the contest world, since it is subjective, you can't see the first

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[30] *Ibid.*, 15.

> place winner pull ahead of the pack. You can't see them break a tape when they cross the finish line like a horse race. It's really subjective and people get tired of the place. I mean this guy's better because of so and so. They justify it, but one person doesn't stay at the top of the pack forever. I got out of fiddling contests, not because I wasn't winning or placing, but because I couldn't make a living just out of contests. They were okay as long as I had a day job.[31]

We have seen how individuals claim power by entering the NOTFC regardless if they are competing for first place or not.

It is the assembly of individual fiddlers that ensures that individuals continue to have this four-minute window of opportunity. When one considers the contest as a ritual event that has enabled fiddlers as a whole to maintain the power to attract and please an audience, the early goal of preserving a dying art form takes on a new and positive meaning beyond preserving a distinctive musical performance practice. Any fiddler who attends the NOTFC as spectator or contestant is empowered by their association with the collective whole of fiddlers participating in the contest, and it is this sense of solidarity that is in effect being preserved. Though conflict is inevitable, new ideas and inspiration for playing is gained by fiddlers attending the NOTFC, and a sense of unity with other fiddlers is achieved that is not possible in the everyday world.

Tourist Activities

The Weiser Chamber of Commerce caters to contemporary tourism and hobbyism trends. Richard Blaustein cites the "development of the interstate highway system and the attendant growth of the recreational vehicle industry"[32]

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[31] Glenna Kiker, "An Interview with Dale Morris," *The Devil's Box* 28-3 (Fall 1994), 10.

[32] Richard Blaustein, "Rethinking Folk Revivalism," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 261.

as having "encouraged the emergence of various types of temporary mobile communities."[33] The Weiser Chamber of commerce regularly advertises the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest in travel and tourism magazines in order to attract these mobile spectators from across the nation, and to bring their dollars with them as the fiddlers mentioned above do. Many of the tourists and fiddlers who travel to Weiser are middle-aged and elderly skilled blue-collar and self-employed business people of rural background. Blaustein accurately observes that these people now have "increased disposable income and leisure time"[34] which they prefer to spend at contest gatherings in response to the "continuing deterioration of the traditional rural social institutions that once provided outlets for fiddlers."[35] Many people belonging to younger generations from both large and small towns attend Weiser annually for their family vacation, as do members of older generations who have only recently begun to fiddle or to enjoy watching fiddle contests.

The rigid order of fiddling competition is softened for spectators by a number of "padding events." Woven into the evening shows, the main attraction for tourists, are displays of support by public officials including local clergy, politicians, and Miss Western Idaho. The monotony of highly structured repetitive competition is relieved between rounds by informal, often comic, vocal or instrumental music, usually based on Western Cowboy themes. Evening shows conclude with dramatic announcements of the day's contest division winners and trophies and prize money are presented by the festival royalty, a city

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[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.*

official, or the businessman who donated the prize. Daytime alternate activities include craft fairs, scheduled jam sessions at local businesses, workshops, food booths, a shuttle to downtown shopping, and a carnival midway.

On Saturday contesting takes place only in the evening. During the day festive activities are scheduled for fiddlers and tourists that include a sky-diving demonstration by the US Navy Seal Parachute Team followed by a parade featuring "oldtime" and "pioneer" floats prepared and staffed by fiddlers and other civic organizations. Concurrent with the parade on Saturday morning is the annual fiddlers' golf tournament in which fiddlers and their family and friends take a break from musical competition and engage in another type of contest on the green. Following the parade one can dine on "authentic" cowboy-style barbecued beef in the city park while being entertained by western vocal groups, volunteer fiddle groups, and western clog dancers.[36] A typical Saturday afternoon event is the jam session held at the National Fiddlers' Hall of Fame which is housed in the Weiser Community Hall. Here fiddlers and tourists have the opportunity to play tunes with old and new friends, and to browse the collection of photos of previous contest winners, scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings and memorabilia, and various other fiddle mementos. Saturday evening's show is the climax of the entire contest week, the National

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[35] *Ibid.*

[36] A local women's group usually performs belly dancing here too. The Chamber of Commerce has received some complaints that this type of dancing is inappropriate for family audiences. Most of the spectators seem to enjoy the dancing which is neither lewd nor distasteful. I think the real source of the complaint is that the dance form is perceived by some as "exotic" and inappropriate in a celebration of pioneer heritage. The group is invited to return every year, however, and thus serves as another example of how the Chamber of Commerce continually negotiates its two competing agenda, that of preserving heritage on the one hand, and of entertaining a paying public on the other.

Grand Champion Finals. Because this competition features cut-throat competition for the national title, this event promises spectators exciting entertainment and tickets usually sell out.

Tourists and fiddlers alike are attracted to Weiser every year by an idea central to NOTFC, the idea that its participants are carrying on an "authentic" tradition as old as the nation, particularly the West. The NOTFC logo depicts a old man in a cowboy hat and western attire. He is shown from the waist up so that the fiddle he plays is clearly accentuated. The Weiser Chamber of Commerce has from the outset used this type of romanticized notion of "old fiddlers" to draw attention to their yearly event. Advertising for the NOTFC promises tourists including fiddlers that:

> Even though this is the '90s, there's an annual event that can take you back 150 years. Back when the wagon trains followed the Oregon Trail westward. The vast migration not only brought people with new hope and frontiers, but a form of entertainment like no other–the fiddle. And the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser is like no other contest.[37]

Yet the old men in cowboy hats are not winning the contest any more. Young men or women with classical violin training are coming out on top. The president of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association, a man in early retirement who wears a cowboy hat himself, is outraged that such high degree of technical mastery of the instrument is required to win a contest today. He is disappointed that the variety of tunes in the fiddle repertory has been drastically reduced in favor of a limited number of "progressive" contest tunes. And he is concerned that older fiddlers, intimidated by young virtuosos trained to win contests, are not

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[37] Idaho Travel Council, 1992.

willing to reach out to kids who might be interested in learning their more informal style of fiddling. While many oldtimers know hundreds of tunes, it is not uncommon for winning contest fiddlers to know only about twenty tunes--enough to get them through six contest rounds. Contest winners see no need to defend themselves because the contest provides them a venue where their efforts at technical mastery of their instrument and invention of new tune versions pays off. Besides, many have told me that they see no reason to be considered "inauthentic" because "We can play that easy stuff [the "authentic" stuff] too!"

Cowboy and fiddle icons at the NOTFC invoke visions of an untamed land, the West, and an untainted music, oldtime fiddling. Elliot West notes the irony in western popular myth of the cowboy hero who defeats outlaws, clearing a path for civilization, and thereby contributing to his own demise. Though ironic, this myth continues to be embraced by a "national culture full of deeply ambivalent attitudes toward past and future, tradition and progress. It speaks for a public that celebrates conquest of the wild places while mourning their passing, a society that takes as its heroes men who destroy what has made them heroic."[38] Comparatively it is ironic that the national contest style emerging from each annual contest becomes yet another year removed from the style it seeks to preserve, and that those who are thought to do the most toward preservation, the contest winners, are responsible for the most drastic changes.

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[38] Elliot West, "Selling the Myth: Western Images in Advertising." In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, ed. by Richard Aquila, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 288.

NOTFC's incorporation of the western myth offers one solution to this complex ironic problem. The effort to preserve pioneer fiddling provides the opportunity for oldtime fiddlers to gather annually to declare and affirm the value of what appears to outsiders as an antiquated and therefore "authentic" avocation. Fiddlers take this opportunity to contribute to the discourse about "authenticity" through participation in festival and ritual performance at the NOTFC, and any fiddler who attends as spectator or contestant is empowered by this association. Though conflict is inevitable, new ideas and inspiration for playing is gained by attending, and a sense of solidarity with other fiddlers is achieved that are not possible in the everyday world of most fiddlers. At the same time, the NOTFC is a place where a tourist can experience first hand the toughness and independence of the American West through what the Chamber of Commerce portrays as authentic musical and geographic connections. Booking the contest as a tourist attraction consistent with contemporary discourse emphasizing competition and survival of the fittest (like football and tennis etc.) underwrites an effort to preserve oldtime fiddling. In short, Weiser, Idaho--population 4,571--is a remote western get-away where every third week of June a link between past and future, and between tradition and progress is fabricated in the perceived authenticity of national oldtime fiddling.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONALIZATION: THE OLD BECOMES THE NEW AT THE NATIONAL OLDTIME FIDDLERS' CONTEST

This chapter explores emergent interpretations of what it means to be an oldtime fiddler and how individuals and subgroups express and negotiate these values annually at the NOTFC. Two main outspoken subgroups of fiddlers attend the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest regularly: older aged fiddlers whose main performance venues have been dances and jamborees, and younger fiddlers who have mainly performed on the contest stage and for staged group performances. The two groups have separate ideas of what oldtime fiddling is, and while their arguments usually center around issues of text, that is performance practice of fiddle tunes, the essence of the dispute demands a consideration of preferred performance contexts.

As a result of staged contest performances promoted by the NOTFC and other contests, an older less virtuosic style of fiddling played by state fiddling organizations such as the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association is considered obsolete by a new generation of contest fiddlers. At the same time senior fiddlers think that though younger contestants *say* they play "oldtime fiddle" it sounds to them as different from oldtime fiddling as rock music does. Both groups defend their interpretations by constructing connections that link present performances of oldtime fiddle tunes with a meaningful past, a process scholars have identified as "traditionalization."[1] There are two major different

[1] See Hymes, 353; Handler and Linnekin, 276; Ben-Amos, 116; Bauman 1992, 135-7.

interpretations of the meaning of "oldtime fiddling" that are constantly renegotiated in the context of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest. While many older musicians value a setting that allows many performers to play at the same time and a repertory suitable for stimulating dancers, many younger fiddlers prefer to perform solo and their repertory consists of polished tunes suitable for earning high scores in short amounts of contest stage time. The ideologies of each of these groups is exemplified by the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association and the Fiddle Teacher & Student Association. Each group prefers a performance setting that occupies a different place on the continuum between participatory and staged music proposed by Livingston:

> On one end is the ideal participatory event in which there is no separation between artists and audience and in which the goal is maximum participation. Mediated musics are placed under the rubric of "presentational" indicating the separation of artist and audience and the resulting focus on the musical product over the process of music-making. The references to human agency decrease as we move from staged concerts to "high fidelity" recordings, to studio art in which there is no reference to a live performance in the sound product.[2]

While members of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association judge the quality of the performance on the degree of participation that is inspired, members of the Fiddle Teacher and Student Association favor a presentational performance format in which the musical product is judged over the music making process.

Although the two groups disagree on the goals of performance of fiddle tunes, their discourses overlap in the process of traditionalization. Each group selects models from the past including persons, repertory, significant places, and

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[2] Tamara Livingston, "Brazilian Choro as Participatory Music," paper presented at the Midwest Chapter Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Bowling Green, Ohio, 18 April

meaningful experiences to authenticate their claim that they are oldtime fiddlers. Younger fiddlers insert new places and experiences into the model discourse passed to them by the older fiddlers. As we shall see, the formula used by the latter group to authenticate performance practice is similar to that of the former, and it is this characteristic that links the discourse between all fiddlers participating in NOTFC and related contests. Livingston's model is useful for illustrating such similarities between the two groups because individual members can be placed separately along the continuum.

The first ten annual contests in Weiser featured mainly fiddlers from the Idaho, Oregon, and Washington regions whose repertory and performance style resembles that preferred by the IOTFA today.[3] When the contest became a national event in 1963 word spread around the country and fiddlers from all over the country began to compete. Among these fiddlers were many from Texas, a region where contest fiddling was popular, and where fierce competition had motivated fiddlers to dress up their tunes with innovative variations. The blind system of judging used by NOTFC and its certified contests has favored Texas Style fiddling over dance oriented fiddle music for its complexity and listening interest. Chris Goertzen has accurately observed that:

> The most basic recent change in fiddling at large has been that performances have become quite virtuosic. Technical and conceptual standards are high and are widely agreed upon within each of several contemporary styles. Performances are brief...but contain a great deal of carefully shaped variation, often relating

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1998: 3-4.

[3] I have participated in many jam sessions with IOTFA members and am familiar with much of their current repertory. I observed that a large portion of this repertory coincided with early contests as I listened to, logged, and made DAT copies of reel-to-reel recordings of the 1956-63 contests in Weiser made by Mannie Shaw, founder of the IOTFA.

> strains in sophisticated ways and producing rounded forms. [Benny] Thomasson and other players have mentioned that they are influenced by jazz fiddlers.[4]

One of the most outspoken critics of the contest style of fiddle music featured at National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest is the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association (IOTFA), an organization that was created simultaneously with the NOTFC in 1963. In conjunction with Idaho's Territorial Centennial observances in 1963, the state Centennial Commision appointed Mannie Shaw of Corral, Idaho to establish the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association. Official by-laws were drawn up and the Association is recognized by the State of Idaho as a non-profit organization. The IOTFA currently has several-hundred members belonging to twelve different districts statewide, and a few out of state members.[5] Dues and donations are used by the districts and the state association to "fund contests, shows, and needed equipment for staging events such as parade floats, etc."[6] In 1963 IOTFA described itself as

> dedicated to reviving and furthering the Old Time tunes and fiddling techniques and to the passing on of this traditional form of entertainment to the younger generations. Ranging in age from six to 91 they travel at their own expense to just about any event where there is going to be some fiddlin' done. Conservatively speaking, tens of thousands of folks in the hospitals, homes for the aged, at conventions, lodges, community functions, mountain picnics, rodeos and county fairs have tapped their toes or done a fancy docey-do to the music of this enthusiastic group. "Just stick your head outatha winder and holler—maybe you 'spect six and about 40 show up" . . . Public "Jam Sessions" are their meat—they'll drive clean across the state, fiddle all night and still be to work on time the next day! They practice all year, drive hundreds of miles to

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[4] Chris Goertzen, "The Transformation of American Contest Fiddling," *The Journal of Musicology* 6-1 (Winter 1988): 116-119.

[5] Of which the author is one.

[6] *The Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers*, 4th ed., published by the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association, 1994, 10.

> a contest and maybe get to play three tunes—but that doesn't seem to dampen their spirits—they'll be back next year, and when the centennial is over the Idaho Fiddlers will keep right on fiddlin'.[7]

As in 1963, current IOTFA members continue to drive "hundreds of miles" to participatory jam sessions, and to perform for community events. They welcome any interested fiddlers to take part in their performances, and often when they expect six players to show up the number may be forty.[8] The converse occurs less frequently.

I began playing in jam sessions with IOTFA members the first time I attended NOTFC in 1986. In addition to parking lot sessions, I sat in on a performance at a nursing home in Weiser, and I played with the fiddlers on the float in the Saturday parade. When I returned to the contest in 1995, many of the IOTFA members recognized me and again made me feel at home at their jam sessions.

In 1998 I observed an exchange that illustrates the conflict between older participatory oriented fiddlers and younger contest style fiddlers. I was playing in a jam session with several IOTFA members and a young Canadian fiddler whom I had invited to join us. The young man was attending NOTFC for his first time, and I asked him why he had played Texas contest style tunes in the championship competition rather than Canadian style. He replied that he had heard through the fiddling grapevine that it would be necessary to perform Texas

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[7] *The Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers*, published by the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association for Idaho's Territorial Centennial Year, 1963: 3.

[8] In 1996 I was in Pullman Washington and I telephoned Les Wagner who was the IOTFA district chairman for the Lewiston, Idaho area. His son Frank, a guitarist whom I met at the NOTFC had given me the number, and although I had never met Les Wagner he enthusiastically invited me to play at a district performance to be held the following day. Such an invitation is typical of IOTFA functions, for the main goal of the organization is participation rather than staged

Style fiddle tunes to place in this contest.[9] The vice president of the IOTFA Kathryn Bonn was present, and as she listened to this conversation she responded with a pointed question: "Why should he be playing either of those types of music here, Texas or Canadian, when the contest is specifically named the National *Oldtime* Fiddle Contest?" Bonn elaborated: "Weiser should bill the contest as a National Championship of "Progressive" music or even "Texas Style" music, but calling it "oldtime fiddling" is an inappropriate description of the music that the contest features." Bonn favors a plainer oldtime style that she learned as a child over the more elaborate and difficult versions associated with the Texas style. Her version of oldtime tunes lend themselves to group participation and therefore are more aesthetically satifying, as Livingston too observed with participatory forms of Brazilian choro.

Members of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association as a whole value jam sessions that inspire a high degree of participation during every tune. If a fiddler or an accompanist does not know the tune being played by the group it is acceptable—even desired—behavior to play along quietly in order to learn the tune and remain participatory. Marion Moore's camp on the high school grounds during Weiser fiddle week illustrates a type of performance setting valued highly by this group. Moore's camp is noticeable for his big box-like green RV, for his large, home-made wood stove fireplace, for the tarps he hangs around the playing area as a windbreak and to maintain the heat from the stove, and

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perfection.

[4] He obtained a copy of Stacy Phillips' transcriptions of Mark O'Connor's contest performances and learned to play them. Later, Shane Cook placed fifth in the Grand National Championship. It seems that he consulted the right grapevine.

especially for the music that is always being played there. One can expect to find his rig parked on the southeast end of the football field alongside Dick Steiner's RV. They each park on opposite edges of their allotted spaces so that they can share the remaining space between the rigs as a "yard" area for jamming. Probably everyone who stays at the contest for a period of time has lingered at least a moment to listen to the continuous jam session that is taking place there. Moore runs an egalitarian jam session in a soft-spoken manner by giving everyone who sits in the circle a chance to choose a tune that the group will play. Moore quietly keeps control of the circle by calling on fiddlers to choose tunes in a clockwise direction and adding good fiddling to the jam himself when it is his turn to choose. The players in this group are often seniors, but youngsters are welcome to play as long as they follow this format. Many of the people who play here are from Idaho and jam with Marion regularly at other camps and contests in the region.

At the root of the IOTFA's dissatisfaction with contest style fiddling is that it requires increased technical ability which many of them do not have the time or interest in acquiring. They value community participation more highly than spotlighted virtuosity and find it problematic that young fiddlers are not able to participate in jam sessions like the one just described because such are accustomed to performing either solo or with others who have learned the same routine for staged performances. While older, participatory-oriented fiddlers are adept at listening to others play and learning new tunes by softly playing along, I have witnessed many contest fiddlers with little jamming experience become

confused while playing in a large group. Such fiddlers have explained that the participatory context is uncomfortable because the hum of different versions of the tune and various chord accompaniments around them makes it difficult to hear themselves while performing a technically intricate contest tune. Moreover, it is difficult for older members of the group to play along with the contest tune because they often do not recognize innovative variations being performed by the contest fiddler.

In an effort to draw the spotlight back to their preferred participatory style of performance, in 1997 the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association organized their state contest so that their conception of oldtime music would be given judging preference over the contest style. The definition of "oldtime fiddling" that they published in their contest program lays out this intention clearly:

> Oldtime Fiddling is dedicated to simple, recognizable melodies, many of them date back 100 years or more and are passed down through the generations being played by "ear." Oldtime Fiddlers do not fill their music with "jazz or swing licks," or a lot of vibrato.
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> The drive or "beat" of the music is carried by the fiddler and not the back-up or accompaniment. The music should be pleasing to the ear. A talented oldtime fiddler plays in tune with good tone keeping the melody intact and the song danceable.[10]

This emergent definition specifies what oldtime fiddling is "not," discouraging players of oldtime music from obscuring melodies by adding extra notes, jazz or swing idioms, or fast vibrato, all factors perceived to be favored by contest fiddlers. IOTFA members feel that the fiddler should be in charge of the dance

[10] Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association, 36th Annual State Contest Program, Buhl, Idaho, April 18, 1998: 4.

rhythm and should not have to compete with heavy accompaniment filled with complex chord progressions.

According to Gary Huntington, president of the IOTFA,

> If you are an oldtime fiddler, there is no way in the world that you are going to win [the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest]. They have lost a lot of the oldtime traditional style of playing. It just isn't here. In the state contest this year was probably the biggest effort that we have ever had to go back to oldtime, traditional oldtime fiddle playing. The main reason for that, the main thing that helped that take place was the judges were oldtime--judges that played oldtime music and judges that were judging oldtime music.[11]

The Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association officials decided that the best way to support what they call oldtime style would be to award points in the "oldtime music ability" category on the scorecard only to people who truly played oldtime. Huntington says:

> So some people who did play progressive and normally win, did play progressive and didn't win, and were very upset about it. But they knew when they came that it was going to be back to the original intent of the oldtime fiddlers' association as promoting oldtime style fiddle music, that that was what it was going to be based on, and they were very upset about it. They called the judges no-good and the judges were judging the way they were told.[12]

Hoss Blackman, an Arizona Oldtime fiddler and friend of Huntington adds:

> Another thing that happens, and Gary brings this out all the time is that when you get people who are playing for $1500 worth of prize money, you get a lot of violinists and people who are not fiddlers and they'll come along and learn fiddle tunes and they'll play them in a violin style, so a lot of progressive stuff goes into it, and they're in there for the money--period. And you guys didn't have any big prize money at your state contest this year.[13]

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[11] Gary Huntington, Hoss Blackman, Marion Moore, Dick Steiner (Idaho Oldtime Fiddle Association members); audio tape-recorded interview with author, June 16, 1997.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

Huntington agreed that the IOTFA had cut back the amount of prize money offered in an effort to encourage oldtime style fiddlers and discourage contest fiddlers interested mainly in claiming cash. Members of the IOTFA felt that true oldtime fiddlers would be motivated to compete for the honor and prestige among fellow fiddlers through state level recognition in contrast to Texas style fiddlers who would not. The IOTFA prepared an engraved silver belt buckle to recognize the state champions, but only a small amount of money was awarded with the intent that it be put toward travel expenses. Contest organizers felt that by cutting back in prize money, oldtime style fiddlers would have less competition from professional contest players, and there would be more money left in the organization's treasury for group activities scheduled throughout the year. These activities include workshops, dances, and promotional programs. Members of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association feel that this concentrated effort to restore their style of music and a feeling of community to the state contest was successful.

In reaction to the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' movement to restore the "old" to oldtime music in the State competition, the new generation of contest fiddlers organized their own governing body in the form of a non-profit organization called the "Fiddle Teacher Student & Parent Organization" (FTSPA). Leslie Beck, co-founder of the organization, is the granddaughter of Mannie Shaw, the fiddler largely responsible for founding the IOTFA. These are the goals expressed in their mission statement:

> The FTSPA is a support organization for teachers, students, parents, and individuals who wish to preserve, foster, and advance the art of fiddle

> music within the local community. The FTSPA will sponsor workshops, contests and community service such as entertaining and performing for healthcare facilities, retirement-living centers and senior citizen centers.[14]

The FTSPA sponsored a contest called the Idaho Open which featured contest style fiddlers. The Idaho Open provided the opportunity for students to compete with each other in their own state and to prepare for competition in the NOTFC.

At the core of this dispute over performance practice is the difference in aesthetic values each age group associates with participatory music versus staged performances. The oldtime fiddlers who prefer an older less ornamented style are for the most part self-taught, over the age of forty, and value musical experiences according to the degree of participation that they inspire. Gary Huntington was attracted to old time as an adult when he heard Mannie Shaw play. Shaw was a rancher well known in Idaho and the surrounding states for his fiddling abilities and enthusiasm and his efforts in founding the NOTFC and IOTFA. Shaw helped Huntington pick out a fiddle, showed him how to play several tunes, and suggested that he join the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association. Here Huntington was introduced to a plethora of oldtime tunes--more than one could learn in a lifetime, and fiddlers who enjoyed playing music in group situations including jam sessions and dances. Huntington now travels regularly to jamborees, conventions, bluegrass festivals, and contests to play familiar tunes and to learn new tunes in the company of other fiddlers and oldtime musicians.

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[14] Leslie Beck. Email communication with Sharon Stippich, 25 February 1998. Used with permission.

Like Huntington, the majority of senior fiddlers are self-taught. That is, someone showed them the basics and then they continued to teach themselves like Marion Moore did:

> For about twenty years there I had two fiddles that I picked up in my earlier years, that were down in the basement of my store,[15] and that's where they sat, you know, until we got busy trying to raise a family. And a guy came by and was talking about fiddling and I said, "Hey, I've got a couple of old fiddles." And I went down and got them, and one had mouse poop in it, and the other one [breaks off, laughs]. Anyway, he said "Let me have them fiddles." And he took them out and knew how to set them up. And from that day on, you know, it sparked something in me. A light came on. It took me a while to figure it out [how to play it].[16]

Satisfaction for these fiddlers comes from both the personal challenge of figuring out how to play the instrument and by learning tunes to share with others in social settings like dances or jam sessions. The establishment of state oldtime fiddling organizations (of which the Idaho association was the first in 1963) provided new learning and performing environments for experienced as well as novice fiddlers. For example, Hoss Blackman was exposed to music lessons as a teenager but didn't have the opportunity to learn to play the fiddle until he joined the Arizona Oldtime Fiddlers' Association at the age of forty-nine.

> When I was sixteen my mother said that you had to play a musical instrument if you were going to be popular—to get invited to parties and all that. And she wanted me to play the piano. So I took piano lessons for about four years, and they had this little cardboard thing that went on the back of the keys, you know the little white and black things? And I could play the piano fine as long as the cardboard was there, but I couldn't play a thing without it. And she said, "Well, you have to play a musical instrument." And I said, "I'd like to learn to play the violin." And she said "Oh, I can't stand those squeaky things."

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[15] Moore ran a country store and gas station while his wife operated a beauty shop.
[16] Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers group interview, 16 June 1997.

> Well, that shot me down so bad it took me from age sixteen to age forty-nine before I finally got around to having enough—well my mother wasn't around anymore—well she was still alive, but she wasn't watching over me that I had to sneak a fiddle in here and there and practice this. But you see, when I was a kid living in Vermont my grandfather had a little farm up there. He used to get out every Saturday night and sit on the front porch and he would play the fiddle and all the people would come around and bring lawn chairs and apple crates and whatever they had, and they would come around and listen to him. And we used to listen to him play the fiddle there all the time. And he would play "Golden Slippers" and "Old Joe Clark" and all those good oldtimey ones, you know. And that kind of got me interested in it, and I always liked country and western and everything. [17]

Many fiddlers share memories of early frustrating first attempts at music lessons similar to Blackman's, or memories wishing to play like a family member or other respected individual. For many, such experience planted a seed of interest that would develop later in their life, as it did with Blackman. Similarly, the spark of desire to play the fiddle that Marion Moore described above dated back to his memories of family music sessions:

> I can remember when my mom played the fiddle and my dad played the steel guitar and a lot of accompaniment, and my uncle played the fiddle and I had aunts who played the piano. And I'd just been exposed to that.[18]

Self taught fiddlers have come up with their own solutions to problems of holding the fiddle and the bow, string crossings, vibrato, remembering tunes, keeping steady danceable rhythms, melodic variations, increasing repertory, and playing notes in tune. The majority of older fiddlers I have met in Idaho and elsewhere have been exceptionally concerned with these and even finer points of fiddling. When an individual is unable to work out their own solution to a

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[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*

problem, it is not unusual to turn to fellow fiddlers for help. They also compete amongst each other informally, striving to learn new tunes and techniques introduced by close friends. Blackman met Huntington when they both lived in Arizona, a time when Huntington had not yet begun learning to play the fiddle. Huntington began to fiddle after moving to Idaho, and now usually sees Blackman at oldtime music events. Blackman is complimentary when he talks about his friend's progress:

> This guy's amazing, absolutely amazing. When I first heard him, I went to a concert he had, and I was in there listening to him for a half-hour or so, and I had enough fiddling for a year. Now, after he's been playing for ten or eleven years and after about the first three or four years he really took off. He does quite well, and you know, it's actually a pleasure to sit down with him—I look forward to coming here and sitting down [to play] with him.
>
> [One of the women in the group interview interjects at this point with "Oh my gosh, it's getting deep in here now!"]
>
> And he knows a magnitude of different tunes. I mean he pulls ones I never heard of out of a hat. What's that one you learned down there in the Cajun place? That new one?
>
> [Mary Lee Huntington, Gary's wife, responds: "Reminisce."]
>
> That was beautiful, and you did a good job on that too. Now I'm going to have to record that and learn it, see? If I would have stayed at home, I would have been saved this, but now I have to get my brain started again and try and remember how to do this [learn tunes]. No, he really does well, and he's got a good old-timey style too.[19]

The fiddlers described, Gary Huntington, Hoss Blackman, and Marion Moore conceptualize their ideal of oldtime fiddling on models they had heard before they started fiddling, and on the people who showed them how to fiddle.

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[19] *Ibid.*

As these examples show, the degree to which the participation is inspired is a major component of this group's conservative definition of what oldtime music is.

Thomas Turino has observed a music-making value system among the Conimeños of the Peruvian Altiplano that is similar to the participatory values shared by IOTFA members. According to Turino:

> Conimeños recognize different levels of ability in musical performance and composition. In private conversations with me, people were happy to discuss the special abilities and knowledge of particular individuals in their communities, although they generally did not speak about such things in group settings. Conimeños explained that performance skills were accessible to anyone. If some men were better players than others, it was because they had a greater interest in, and dedication to, musical matter, and because they participated regularly; advanced age and long experience were also advantages. Performance skill, then was described largely as a matter of personal choice and inclination; the idea of talent did not seem to enter in.
>
> In the realm of composition, however, special abilities are recognized that seemed to parallel Western notions of innate talent. Certain people are known for being able to produce original musical ideas ("he takes them from his head"), whereas others, even seasoned players, told me that they are simply unable to do this. Like instrument makers, individuals with the ability to create original musical ideas are highly regarded in their community.[20]

Virtually the same values described by Turino are shared by IOTFA members. Ideal oldtime fiddling for them is something that anyone can learn at any age, as long as one acquires a basic repertory and enjoys playing with the group. Fiddlers as a social group support the learning and improving process of individuals as opposed to promoting individual virtuosity. As Blackman mentioned, a large repertory is an admirable characteristic of an individual's playing, and is consistent with participatory goals of being able to play along with

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[20] Thomas Turino, *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the*

every selection.[21] Similar to the Conimeños recognition of creative individuals within the group, IOTFA members recognize each other for particularly well worked-out versions of tunes. Oldtime fiddlers acquire different tune renditions through varied individual learning styles and environments, and through individual creative impulses. However, to receive group recognition for individual abilities, a performer must have the skill to blend the rendition into a group performance.

While many seniors enjoy participatory jam sessions such as Marion Moore's described above, there are a number of younger fiddlers who play in them as well, especially those who began their fiddling careers by learning from older musicians. Donna Johnson Reuter began fiddling in 1972 at the age of twelve, inspired by her grandfather, Dan Johnson. Reuter's father was also a fiddler and he inherited his father's fiddle and passed it on to her. Reuter's parents wanted Donna to become a violinist, but they could not afford to pay for private lessons. Reuter's older cousin John Francis, who was at that time the National Junior Champion Fiddler at the NOTFC, showed her how to play several tunes suitable for a fiddle contest. Her interest and enthusiasm for oldtime music kindled, she began playing with the Washington Oldtime Fiddlers Association and learned new tunes and techniques by taking part in the hour-long participatory jam session that always preceded the staged section of the event. She acquired experience in performing for an audience at these jams by taking a turn at playing three of her favorite tunes on stage. Although Reuter has since

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Experience of Urban Migration, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993): 59.

[21] One acquires this virtue over time, giving older fiddlers an advantage, as with the

won regional championships and placed in the top four of the National Ladies Competition for four consecutive years, the reason she currently attends contests is for the informal jam sessions.

When Reuter was fifteen, she started teaching fellow members of junior high orchestra class in Spokane how to fiddle. Enough youths were interested in fiddling that they began playing regularly together in a group they called the "Jr. Hoedowners." They performed for public and private events, jammed at the Washington Oldtime Fiddlers Association meetings, and traveled to contests together including the NOTFC. Some of her best friends went on to become highly competitive in the state and national competition, but Reuter felt strongly connected to the music she had inherited from her grandfather and father and was reluctant to adopt the contest style.

In a 1989 interview with newspaper reporter Polly Timberman, 27 year-old Reuter explained the differences between three styles of fiddling, oldtime, Canadian, and Texas:

> Oldtime is "what my grandpa played." While he liked her to play the Shenandoah Waltz," the tune she remembers him playing is "The Toothache Song." He learned from a man who wrote it when he had a toothache.
>
> Donna says Canadian fiddling is "really snappy and clean. They play jigs," she says. "You hardly hear those anymore."
>
> Her brow clouds as she discusses Texas fiddling, which has become almost synonymous with contest fiddling, she says. It's a more complicated style, using more notes and actually more difficult to play. "But when you hear a lot of it, it all starts sounding the same . . . It's not the kind of music people identify with."

Conimeños.

> "The only time you really hear it is when you go to fiddling contests. It's getting hard to win unless you play that style. I decided that rather than switch, I'd retire."
>
> Texas style upsets old-time fiddlers, she says.
>
> "They say, 'this stuff isn't danceable.' You can dance to it, just not a waltz or a square dance."
>
> In her "retirement," Donna continues to learn new fiddle tunes. While she reads music, she prefers to learn by ear, listening to tapes two or three times before trying the tunes.
>
> Her grandfather would approve of that method, she says.
>
> "Grandpa used to tell me, if you can whistle a tune, you can play it on your fiddle.[22]

Reuter's comments on Texas style fiddling are similar to those expressed above by members of the Idaho and Arizona Oldtime Fiddlers Associations. However, nine years later Reuter commented on the article:

> Please note that this article was written nine years ago and some of my opinions about Texas style fiddling have mellowed since then, and as you know my "retirement" was short lived.[23]

Reuter's new philosophy is "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."[24] She realized that by restricting herself to only older style tunes, she was placing lower each year in the competitions she normally attends. This inspired her to begin learning the Texas style and now she is not only maintaining her ranking in competition with her peers, and she now thinks that it "makes the oldtime tunes more interesting." According to Reuter, "fiddling is going through a transformation" and having acknowledged this she no longer feels that she would dishonor her family by

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[22] Polly Timberman, "Old-time music and grandpa's fiddle are traditions for Donna Reuter," *Hood River News* (Hood River Oregon, Wednesday, 21 June 1989): 11.

[23] Donna Reuter, personal letter to author, 22 September 1998.

[24] Donna Reuter, telephone conversation with author, 9 September 1998.

playing a new style because without the change, performance venues and motivation may vanish for her altogether. Now as a performer and instructor she is an advocate for both oldtime and contest style music.

As we have seen, Reuter's concept of oldtime fiddling has gradually changed over the years, and her experience is exemplary of the process of traditionalization. As a young fiddler Reuter aspired to play like her grandfather and her father. She learned their repertory of tunes and manner of performing them, and she in turn encouraged her classmates to join her in the fiddling experience. Some fiddlers her age decided earlier than she to pursue a more technical style of fiddling because they considered it challenging and motivating. However, Reuter's commitment to traditional models kept her from changing the way she performed fiddle music. It wasn't until she felt that her relationships with fiddlers her own age were deteriorating that she considered reinterpreting her grandfather's and father's legacy to fit her own needs by learning contest style tunes. Yet, Reuter has maintained a link with her past models by constructing meaningful connections to that past through her present performances of oldtime fiddle tunes. She continues to perform older style tunes in entertainment settings such as the certified division of the NOTFC and in informal jam sessions, while at the same time she prepares contest style tunes to play in competition.

Reuter's enactment of the process of traditionalization is not unlike that of Huntington, Blackman, and Moore. The latter three were inspired to play music related to past experiences and individuals, but they later looked to the state fiddling organization for opportunities to expand their repertory and have

more performance opportunities. Reuter too was inspired by relatives and joined the state organization for fiddling opportunities. Where the emergent definitions diverge is at the point Reuter decided that technically advanced, staged performances of fiddle tunes would be something worth pursuing in addition to more entertainment and participatory oriented jam sessions. In this respect Reuter shares with Blackman and Moore the idea that entering contests supports oldtime fiddling as a whole, even if the chances of winning are not high. In contrast she has decided to devote energy to improving her staged performances by playing more complicated music. Huntington on the other hand decided at the 1998 NOTFC that he would rather devote all of his musical energy to participatory jam sessions rather than to expend it on staged performances, and he did not enter the NOTFC.

Hard Core Competition

Tony and Jay Dean Ludiker[25] were co-members of the Jr. Hoedowners with Reuter. Shortly after Tony had begun learning to play the violin in the fifth grade, Tony's family moved into a house in Spokane located next door to a member of the Washington Oldtime Fiddlers' Association (WOTFA), Ray Wright. Wright's daughter, Sheila was the reigning National Junior Champion at the NOTFC that year, and Tony took music lessons from her. She helped him with his school music assignments, and she also taught him fiddle tunes and introduced him to the WOTFA. He decided in high school that he wanted to

[25] Information on the Ludiker Family was obtained during an audio tape-recorded interview with Tony, Jay Dean, Kimber, and Dennis by the author on 14 June 1997.

concentrate on fiddling so he quit playing classical music. Ludiker won the Northwest Regional Junior division contest in 1979 at the age of 17. Ludiker won the Washington State Championship for the first time in 1982, and he went on to win that title eleven times in a row.[26] With his last win in 1992 he decided to retire from the state contest and give others a chance.

Ludiker has won the NOTFC championship five times, in 1983, 1989, 1991, 1992, and in 1994, and it is clear that perfection of staged fiddle tune performances is one of his top priorities. In contrast to Reuter, who is a close friend of Ludiker, he wanted a career and a family that would revolve around fiddling in some way. He accomplished this by working in a music store repairing stringed instruments, giving private lessons, and by marrying one of the best fiddling competitors in his age group, Jay Dean Warner Ludiker, who also learned to play fiddle in the WOTFA and the Jr. Hoedowners. Ludiker admits that he spends a lot of time perfecting his playing, a characteristic that he shares with his daughter Kimber:

> Kimber and I are alike because we both work hard, and in the end, we'll end up beating the natural musicians who are lazy.[27]

Jay Dean Ludiker has made a career giving private and group fiddle lessons. Her main clients are children, but she encourages parents to learn to fiddle too. In fact, she suggests that parents get a fiddle and start taking lessons when the child complains that mom has been "hogging" the fiddle. She teaches

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[26] For fairness, Ludiker won three consecutive times ('83-5) and then sat out of the contest in '86 when his wife, Jay Dean, won it. He repeated his three-year feat by winning consecutively in 1987, 1988, and 1989. After sitting out in 1990 when his brother Terry won, Ludiker again won the contest in 1991 and 1992

[27] Ludiker interview, 14 June 1997.

individual or group lessons. The group lessons allow parents to save money by having two or three children take their lesson in a group. Ludiker uses music books that she and Tony have written to teach oldtime fiddle tunes to students. Their books contain contest repertory acquired by the Ludikers over time as they attended various contests including the NOTFC, as Jay Dean explains:

> We had to go out and seek whatever we could find for tunes and music, and ask and beg. There weren't really any fiddle teachers. It wasn't really a thing to do. There was no such thing, really. And nowadays kids just start taking lessons and expect the teachers to come up with all the tunes and all the versions and—
> [Tony Ludiker interjects:] Spoon feed them
>
> JDL: Yeah, spoon feed them.[28]

Tony Ludiker has learned many of his best tunes from "underground recordings":

> As we've gotten to know people we have become privy to these underground recordings that float around of Benny [Thomasson] and Major [Franklin] and Orville [Burns], and you name it, all these old guys—stuff that's floating around, Terry Morris, and people like that where if you know someone that has it and they like you, they share. And some of the recordings are really old and crumby. They've been around awhile.

While the Ludikers had to train themselves to play fiddle by searching out models both live and recorded, a new generation of lesson-taking fiddlers has new goals. Many students who take lessons from the Ludikers expect to learn to play fiddle tunes well enough that they will place high in a contest, and sometimes this idea is informed by parents' desire to see their children perform well. Both students wishing to compete seriously and those more drawn to fun activities planned by the Ludikers expect to be taught how to play fiddle tunes note-for-note, the process described above as "spoon feeding."

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[28] *Ibid.*

The learning system for youngsters interested in fiddling is much different than that of the older self-taught musicians. Most young people who compete at NOTFC were brought into the oldtime fiddling scene by instructors like the Ludikers who taught them proper technique and a basic repertory of the oldtime tunes. While groups of students often perform these tunes for local events such as parades, festivals, or school assemblies, the student quickly moves on to learn an advanced repertory suitable for competition.

Roberta Pearce of Nampa, Idaho is another instructor who began her fiddling career with a state fiddling organization and has since trained many successful fiddlers including the first woman to win the National Championship, Danita Rast Hartz. Pearce began fiddling with the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association in 1971 when she was fifteen years old. She was inspired when she heard IOTFA founder Mannie Shaw play the fiddle. She was further motivated to learn to fiddle when her father told her that her grandfather was a former Rocky Mountain State Champion fiddler of Nebraska. After winning the 1975 Junior State Championship she went on to win the state Ladies and Open Division Championships, and she placed in the top five in the National Ladies' Division in Weiser. She began giving private lessons at age twenty, and currently she teaches seventy-five students many of whom perform regularly as the Junior Jammers.

Pearce considered a career in classical music, attending Boise State University for three years as a piano and violin major. She discovered during this time that fiddling was her passion over classical music, and she turned her

attention from her Boise State instructors in to the well-known contest fiddler, Herman Johnson. Studying with Johnson in Shawnee, Oklahoma in 1978, Pearce perfected her fiddle contest repertory. The next year Johnson won the National Grand Championship in Weiser. Pearce teaches her students a combination of her experience with the oldtime fiddlers and with a national champion.

Each year Pearce organizes "The Country Harvest Hoedown," a staged benefit concert featuring the Junior Jammers playing oldtime tunes interspersed with hillbilly humor reminiscent of the Nashville stage and with novelty country acts. The young fiddlers don western outfits and play on a stage set up with barnyard props. This performing group has won honors, the most notable being the performance they put on in Washington D.C. for President Bush's Inaugural Gala in 1989.

Pearce served as the Idaho State Contest Chairman from 1988 to 1993. During this time the rift between older fiddlers and Pearce and her students began to widen. Older fiddlers felt that when Pearce's students attended their jamborees they tended to demand spotlight attention rather than blend in with the crowd. Younger fiddlers were shocked and surprised to be the subject of harsh criticism by older fiddlers and were not easily convinced to return to the IOTFA events. Consequently Pearce no longer participates regularly in IOTFA functions, rather she devotes time to organizing events including jam sessions for her and other area teachers' students.

In contrast to the learning environment experienced by oldtimers, younger fiddlers learn Western Classical musical aesthetic standards of pitch, timbre, body position, overall musical complexity, and staged performance practice from an instructor such as Pearce or one of the Ludikers. One of the main goals of such study is to develop skills necessary to compete in fiddle contests. This kind of learning requires large amounts of dedicated practice time and a capital investment in instruction and an instrument. Not only is prestige an incentive for learning the contest style, but the prize money referred to earlier pays back a small portion of the initial capital investment.

On the other hand, older fiddlers exchange the experience of being together as payment for helping others to learn. Oldtime fiddlers who favor participatory environments for music making feel that paid instructors take the "heart" out of learning to play the fiddle. Gary Huntington thinks that this difference has a direct effect upon the style of music a person learns to play:

> I don't begrudge [teachers] for making their living or anything off of oldtime fiddling. But you'll find that people who are teaching the music and are not making their living from teaching this type of music, and they don't ask for any payment for it, they are teaching from the heart. And they just ask that the member participate with them when they go to someplace like a nursing home or where they play at the dance, you'll find that across the board, those students right there are the ones that are going to play oldtime music.[29]

Huntington and Moore cite examples of youths who enjoy playing participatory oldtime music with older musicians, yet who have also learned to play contest tunes with their peers showing that it is reasonable to expect young fiddlers to do both. Marion Moore explains:

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[29] Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers interview, 16 June 1997.

I think in my past fifteen years I have promoted oldtime music about as much as anyone and I put a lot of my grandkids through the steps of learning to play fiddle. And I'm proud of every one of them. I have one that does real good, she was the state champion a couple of times. And we played at the high school and did some different things.

Gary Huntington: You see that's what I am talking about. You didn't charge them or anything, and you taught them oldtime music and everything. This is family, you know.

Marion Moore: No, we did it because it was fun.

Dick Steiner: Yeah, and they can get up and play a dance.

Gary Huntington: And this is the way it's been all along. Family taught their kids to play and it just went from family to family, right on down the line. And that's what promoted oldtime fiddling.[30]

Gary Huntington views the IOTFA learning environment as comparable to family setting, and for him this makes experiences within this organization more authentic than those that students gain by learning from instructors. It was mentioned earlier that Huntington did not learn to fiddle from his family, rather from experience playing with members of the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association. It is again the participatory component of the experience that he places value on when he advocates the agency of older fiddlers to influence younger fiddlers. As a participatory environment, IOTFA functions continue to foster interest in oldtime fiddle among young people and older folks alike, though its members often feel threatened by professional instructors who have largely subsumed their role as models for young fiddlers. For example, some of Moore's grandchildren are playing the fiddle, and others who remember listening to their grandpa or his friends play may be motivated at a later age to learn to fiddle, as Moore did.

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[30] *Ibid.*

Grandfathers who play the fiddle have become the minority, and youths interested in fiddling have had to adopt new models, as Jay Dean and Tony Ludiker explain:

> Jay Dean Ludiker: The thing is, oldtime fiddling is what everybody's grandpa used to play, and everybody's grandpa used to play the fiddle in the 20s, 30s, 40s. Well, now that the generations are expanding, and fiddle music isn't so popular anymore, those of us who don't have grandpas who play the fiddle—we have to adopt them.
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> Tony Ludiker: Yeah, and Eck Robertson's 1923 recording of Sally Goodin'—He's my grandpa.
>
> Jay Dean Ludiker: And so we adopt Benny Thomasson, Eck Robertson, you know...We're still playing the old tunes.
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> Tony Ludiker: Yeah, my grandpa, I just found out, supposedly played the fiddle. He died when my dad was young and I don't know him, I never met him, and I don't know what he did. So I didn't have a grandpa to listen to and emulate, so I listen to what I like, and it's older guys. Benny Thomasson was an old guy and he did a lot of the old stuff.[31]

This shift from living, breathing, family role models for learning music to an emphasis on chosen "grandfathers' recordings" as role models mirrors a shift in value from participatory to staged musical aesthetic values. The practice of seeking out recordings of exceptional fiddlers to emulate has emerged with the advent of recording technology. Recordings have made virtuoso fiddlers' music accessible to fiddlers over a wide geographic area whereas formerly models existed within the immediate community surroundings. The combination of a new performance venue, the contest, with new technology, recordings, has emphasized the evaluation of fiddle music as a sonic event as opposed to a community event.

Even though fiddlers like the Ludikers freely admit that their "grandfathers" are recordings, the pressure seems to be high for contest style fiddlers to justify their learning methods by linking them to earlier models of tradition: "learning from older musicians." The process of traditionalization maintains the social identity for individuals as "fiddlers" in relation to past models, even though those models are chosen based on criteria unrelated to personal heritage. For example, the Ludikers cite Benny Thomason as an *old* oldtime fiddler model that they emulate because he was an innovator, and they contrast their ideal of a worthy *old* model with the ideal they perceive to be held by many IOTFA members:

> Benny Thomasson was an old guy and he did a lot of the old stuff.
>
> You see he was an older guy and he wasn't all stuck in this "we have to do it just the way that the guys who came through town did." That's how he ended up learning songs. They all did. Somebody, a fiddler, would come through town and play some stuff and they would have to listen to it as close as they could and go home and learn it before they forgot it with no recordings or nothing. But Benny would "round the tunes out" and add variations in different positions—my understanding is that the tune "Canebrake" was supposedly some kind of classical tune, a non-fiddly tune. One verse starts in D and the second starts in Bb, and it never had a G part. But one jam session the guitar players went to G and Benny just went with them. So here you've got—it's the same thing as the Bb part, just in G—so here it is now, a standard part of the tune. You would not think to play just that first and second part, you always play three parts. Why say, "Oh no, you can't play that part in G—I have the original sheet music here." Some of these guys [critics of contest style fiddling] are so set in their ways that you can sit there and play a tune like "Redwing," and you won't follow the meter of the words, or where the changes come. . .you know, the exact phrasing—"Ooh, that's not the way the tune goes because you are not following the words." Now you are not only responsible for playing the tunes they like to play, but

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[31] Ludiker interview, 14 June 1997.

you have to follow the lyrical patterns of the words.[32]

Past models are important to both groups of fiddlers. The difference between their processes of selection these models once again emerges as an issue of participatory versus staged performance values. Fiddlers who like to maintain lyrical rhythms in "Redwing" want to maintain a tune version accessible to everyone, while technically advanced fiddlers like Ludiker enjoy the challenge of innovation over the participatory context. Ludiker enjoys jam sessions with his own age group, however, because their technical skills are more similar to his than those of the IOTFA members.

Contest fiddlers want to maintain a link with the past or they wouldn't emphasize, as Jay Dean Ludiker did, that they are "still playing the old tunes." For young fiddlers oldtime tunes function similar to the way they function for older fiddlers: oldtime tunes function as social glue. The oldtime tunes preferred by state organizations like the IOTFA provide a core repertory for beginning students and for performing groups organized by instructors such as Roberta Pearce's "Junior Jammers" or the Ludiker's "Fiddle Sticks" groups. Once a student learns the core repertory, a mental link between the mechanics of fiddle playing and the perception of fiddling as a valuable heritage has been established. Audiences for performing groups reinforce this link by showing enthusiasm and support for the fiddling performance. At the same time, by learning the oldtime repertory young fiddlers become connected with both other students and oldtimers who are all familiar with the repertory.

The Ludikers' students enjoy socializing with one another because their

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[32] *Ibid.*

teachers plan events such as workshops that emphasize social interaction. Participation in workshops provides opportunities for students to form bonds similar to the ones shared by IOTFA members According to Jay Dean:

> When [the workshop] is in our home we work from 9 a.m. until about 4 p.m. and then they have to put their fiddles away. And then we take them to water slides and we rent out the whole roller skating rink, and we play a baseball game, and by the time the kids leave, they are bawling and crying and exchanging addresses. And so you've done something more than just teaching them fiddle. *And now they're a fiddler because it's more of a social thing than anything else*. [Italics mine.]
>
> One guy who came and brought his kids and camped in our backyard and saw the whole thing said, "We need to do this where I live. The kids need to be that close." So we're going down there and he's sponsoring it, you know, he's doing all the water slides and roller park and so we're coming and teaching it, but we're going to do the whole thing. It's the whole thing because fiddling friendships are just as important as [fiddling].
>
> When I was growing up, Donna [Reuter] was the oldest of our generation here, and then Gary Shuh is the oldest of the next little generation here. . . . Gary Shuh's generation--there's about fifteen of them who still meet and have parties, and jam; and just as long as you are a fiddler you're cool and you're in, and it's just a really neat neat situation.[33]

Workshops for fiddle students exemplify the process of traditionalization because they are present day reinterpretations of past models of oldtime fiddling as a social activity.

A vital element at the heart of oldtime fiddling for older fiddlers is community service. A common activity for state fiddling associations is playing at nursing homes and senior centers. This venue is a main source of pleasure for many older fiddlers, as several IOTFA members describe:

Marion Moore: It hasn't been very long ago we were playing at a

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[33] *Ibid.*

rest home or a senior center, and some older lady wanted someone to play the "Old Spinning Wheel." It's an old standard tune, but not all fiddlers can play it. Well, anyway, I got to fooling around playing it, and she appreciated it. And when I went out she said, "I just want to thank you for playing that tune." She said, "It brought back so many memories." And by golly, that's a pretty good reward, you know.

Mary Williams: To go along with that same type of thing there was a woman at one of the nursing homes who didn't speak, and when the fiddlers started playing she started mouthing the words to the song they were playing And, I mean, I think that's kind of neat.

Marion Moore: It was kind of touching.

Dick Steiner: Yes, up on the hill there some of them will come up and say "We're sure glad you come, we sure enjoyed it." When I played at the state contest, I didn't win anything, but when I went out there, several people, they sure did like my playing. It makes you feel pretty good.[34]

Though members of the IOTFA frequently state that by charging money instructors compromise this type of meaning embedded in oldtime fiddle music, they often overlook instructors' efforts to organize similar venues for their students. Matt and Danita Hartz of Meridian, Idaho organize musical events for care centers to give their students opportunities to perform for students who have yet to play in a contest or who are not interested in competing. Pearce regularly schedules Jr. Jammer performances for church and social service benefits as a service to the larger community. Mable Vogt, a three-time National Ladies' Champion fiddler, organized a group of northwestern Idaho youths also called the "Junior Jammers." These young fiddlers seem to appreciate the opportunity to perform for an appreciative audience as much as the older fiddlers do:

"It's especially neat when we play at nursing homes," says Junior Jammer Anna Vogt, whose mother formed the popular music

[34] Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers interview, 16 June 1997.

group in 1981. "You see a special appreciation."

"And it's fun to see them react to our songs," adds Jammer President Amy Gilliam.

"Some get tears in their eyes," says Anna. "They hear our music and some may not be showing emotions, but they're following along. One lady was banging on the table while we played and we all wondered if there was something wrong. Later, she told us that her hands hurt her when she clapped, but she just couldn't help following along."[35]

At the same time the new generation of contest fiddlers is aware that concepts of "best sounding" in the National competition have changed over the years. Many contest fiddlers have described their music as a growing art form and consider the "old man" image an outdated and uncomplimentary icon of what is means to be a fiddler. Chris Doering explains:

> People that have never even heard Texas fiddling immediately figure, when the stereotype comes into play, 'oh, she's a fiddle player, therefore she must not bathe or have front teeth or play well. Most of the time, with my fiddle students, by the time they're learning some fiddle tunes, their parents have heard me play and other students who have been doing them well for a while. So it's not frightening. They know their child is not going to turn into a hillbilly or something.[36]

From this perspective it is difficult for the new generation of contest fiddlers to sympathize with the senior fiddlers' concerns and efforts toward preserving the participatory oldtime style. Rather, new fiddlers want to be recognized for the improvements they have brought to the art. According to Starr McMullen:

> Oldtime fiddling has become so much more than it was before--back when lots of people played and they didn't have time to practice so they never really got any good. And it's too bad that

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[35] Barbara Coyner, "Junior Jammers Potlatch, Idaho: Not Just Fiddlin' Around," magazine article sent to author by Frank Wagner of Spokane, Washington. Name of magazine unknown.

[36] Chris Doering, personal interview with Andrew Doering 18 January 1994; quoted in Andrew Doering, "The Communication of Change Within a Musical Culture: The Marketing of Texas Style Fiddling."(M.H. Thesis, University of Colorado, 1995), 68.

> fiddling has this bad stereotype stuck to it: "Old people who don't play very well." Most violin teachers have this concept of oldtime fiddling, and they don't want their students to become involved in it. It really deserves more attention as a developing art form that has moved way beyond its humble beginnings.[37]

Fiddler Dale Morris has observed the emergent emphasis on improving technique in Texas Style contest fiddling compared to other regional styles:

> Yes, Texas Style is harder to play than other styles. I would say it is. Why it requires at least third position in a lot of things. To win contests it better get out of first position or it's not gonna win. The sound quality has to be better. It has to be more in tune, I think now. Finally, I think they're getting used to hearing it in tune. And for a long time the sound of a fiddle was slightly out of tune. I haven't wanted to admit that, but it's the truth. Just close to it. That was just about it. It was on the verge of in tune, wasn't really completely out of tune, just almost right and flat sounding. Now I think its got more educated.[38]

Contest fiddlers feel that in order to get musical satisfaction from fiddling they must meet the terms of their own generation's musical values. These values are heavily informed by a multi-mediated network of standardized concepts of pitch, rhythm, timbre, technique, form, variation, and body posture that are ubiquitous in the daily lives of contemporary fiddlers. According to Matt Hartz, classical violin and fiddling share basic standards of technique:

> The fundamentals, no matter how you play the violin, should be the same. You should have good posture, hold the instrument correctly, you should have good tone and intonation. That all should be there, no matter what. There's the similarity. It doesn't matter what you're playing, it ought to be fundamentally sound.[39]

Andrew Doering has proposed that because contest style fiddling shares musical traits that young people are already familiar with, they are more easily attracted

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[37] Starr McMullen. Audio-taped interview with author, 13 August 1998.

[38] Dale Morris, telephone interview with Andrew Doering, 29 December 1993, quoted in Doering 1995, 62.

to the new form of music than the old. Furthermore, fiddle instructor Chris Doering explains that the relationship of Texas style fiddling to classical violin technique makes it easier for parents to legitimize spending money to learn it.[40]

To a degree, emphasis on technique and perfection has homogenized musical aspects of contest fiddling. Tony Ludiker, five-time national champion freely admits, "The only thing you can cut down contests for is the fact that people want to win and so they tend to copy the top players and that sort of homogenizes it."[41] This institutionalization of contest fiddling shares with other mass-mediated discourses the criticism that the text (in this case the fiddle tune) has become homogenized at the expense of diverse regionalism, and the performers have become passive consumers rather than active creators. According to this argument, just as TV viewers passively soak up programming without having the chance to respond, contest fiddlers wishing to compete are denied creative input and obliged to imitate rigid models of the popular winning fiddle style programmed into them by recordings and instructors' fiddle tablature.

Peter Manuel addresses this criticism in his study of cassette culture in North India by showing how:

> the mass media can and often do enrich as well as alienate, exposing audiences to a broader awareness of ideas, art forms, and culture in general. If the peasant from an isolated hamlet becomes disenchanted with the crude and unpretentious folk music of his area, he may also apply the higher technical standards of the professional music he hears on the radio to improving his own traditions. Moreover, the media can immensely broaden the worldview and learning of audiences otherwise limited by the proverbial "idiocy of village life." Such an alienation is not without

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[39] Doering, 63.
[40] Doering, 62-3.
[41] Ludiker interview, 14 June 1997.

> its positive side, which at least partially justifies the spread of modern technology, urbanization, and development in general. The expense, of course, is the destruction of insular, cohesive traditional societies.[42]

Manuel argues that the degree of positive and negative effects of the dissemination of mass media is related to the amount of power the consumer of cassette culture has in the production of the cassette. Richard Blaustein has posited a similar argument:

> Modernization does not inevitably lead toward cultural homogeneity; instead, pressures toward hegemony generate regional, ethnic, and nationalistic separatism. The emergence of voluntary associations devoted to the active preservation and perpetuation of traditional cultures is a commonplace in the modern world. Similarly, the advent of new communications media does not necessarily result in "cultural grey-out," marginal cultures being eclipsed by the mainstream. Instead, we see a multiplicity of special interest groups actively producing their own media networks in response to the sensed inadequacy of mass culture.[43]

Fiddlers are active agents in their own media network, making private recordings of each other, recordings for public sale, and in searching for and exchanging rare historical tapes. After a fiddler has learned a basic repertory from an instructor, the fiddler has control over what tapes they collect and learn from. The experience of making a recording for public sale has become a meaningful part of the fiddling experience as well. Colt Tipton of Red Bluff, California, winner of the Grand National Fiddle Championship in Weiser in 1995, was moved to express his feelings about his music and the people it brought him together with after making his first recording in 1993:

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[42] Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993): 8.

[43] Richard Blaustein, "Rethinking Folk Revivalism: Grass-roots Preservationism and Folk Romanticism," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. by Neil V.

> It seems like such a long time ago, when I used to sit and practice, wondering where music would take me. I now realize that music is a vital part of life which provides rewards throughout one's existence.
>
> Last summer, I travelled to Texas with a desire to make a tape which I would be proud of. Not only did I do this, but I shared great times with people I admire. It was early one morning, about 2:30 a.m., during the recording of "Going Home", when I realized something unusual. I discovered that I had created a kind of music which I'd always dreamed of. A poetic type of music from within my soul. I did this with the help of Matt [Hartz], who opened a door to another realm of music for me. By this, he will always be one of my best friends.
>
> Throughout my life, music has cured my pains, brought new friends, and touched my heart. It is an aspect of life which people must experience. I hope you enjoy and relish this tape as it is not only an example of my hard work, but it is also a piece of my heart.[44]

Tipton's interests are not limited to music. The year after he won the National Championship in Weiser he began pre-medical undergraduate training, and was no longer able to practice the long hours necessary to win the championship. Yet his fiddling experiences and friends remain meaningful to him in a way that supercedes criticism that contest fiddling is a passive consumer-oriented avocation. In fact, his realizations about his attachment to his music are not unlike fiddlers Mannie Shaw and Jake Hughes a few generations before him:

> Mannie Shaw: It's true, it's true. All right, so I think probably that I can explain it. It's in your soul; it's part of you and you have to do it. This music to us, us fellows, . . . you cannot take it from us. It's impossible.[45]
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> Jake Hughes: Well,, I've always said this: that a man that didn't like music and flowers and beautiful women, he has just never lived

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Rosenberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 272.

[44] Colt Tipton, *Going Home to Texas*, liner notes to accompany Cassette CWT-1, recorded at Big Dad Studios, Huntsville, Texas, July 1993.

[45] Mannie Shaw, interview with Richard Blaustein, Weiser, Idaho, 24 June 1971; quoted in Blaustein 1975, 165.

> and just might as well have never lived. He doesn't appreciate beauty of any kind. He's got flowers that are beautiful; they've got a beautiful smell to them. And music has a soothing effect; it's got an exciting effect. Makes you want to dance, and sometimes . . . it makes you want to cry. And if you don't care for any one of the three, why, you haven't lived! For me, you've got to be able to appreciate beauty and love – an appreciation of music . . . it all ties in and makes it a wonderful world to live in.[46]

Fifty-six-year-old Peg Willis, a fiddle instructor in Pendleton, Oregon, recognizes both positive and negative aspects of contest fiddling. She feels that improvisation is an essential component of fiddling and who holds the "belief that there are lots of 'right' ways to do a thing." She participated in square dances and folk dances in her youth, and she learned to play the fiddle by watching her children's Suzuki violin lessons. Her comments on contest fiddling are even-handed and insightful, noting both positive and negative aspects of mass mediated discourse in contest fiddling:

> I'm really sad about the turn fiddling has taken recently which has almost formalized the memorization of tunes, note for note, *a la* Mark O'Connor or Tony Ludiker or Luke Bulla [all former National Grand Champions]. Young people who follow this "method" are often times amazingly good at what they do, but they have lost that spontaneity which so characterized fiddling in the past.
>
> Contests, I feel, have been both a boon and a detriment to the furtherance of old time fiddling. Because of the contests, a new audience has heard the music and become interested in pursuing it. But the contest mind-set has also destroyed some of the folk tradition – replacing it with an "accepted" style, high pressure (high stakes) and parents who are desperate to find their own fulfillment in their children's successes.[47]

Similar to Manuel's observation that the mass media enriches as well as alienates, Willis notes that the attractive packaging and publicity of contest

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[46] Jake Hughes, interview with Richard Blaustein, Ludlow, Missouri, June 6, 1971; quoted in Blaustein 1975, 165-6.

fiddling has created a new audience and attracted new participants to oldtime fiddling, but its been at the expense of local forms of music-making.

The National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest is a setting where many different groups of fiddlers converge, and each of these groups consist of individuals who constantly negotiate and renegotiate what it means to be an oldtime fiddler. Richard Bauman argues that context consists of more than collective, institutional, conventional dimensions, and that attention to individual agency in the performance of folklore texts, in this case fiddle tunes, makes it possible to "index dimensions of context as the narrator himself forges links of contextualization to give shape and meaning to his expression."[48] Bauman proposes that identifying the steps that an individual takes to put his/her performance in context will move us closer to a balanced understanding of that most fundamental of all anthropological problems; the dynamic interplay of the social and the individual, the ready-made and the emergent, in human life.[49] The NOTFC provides the opportunity to express a fiddler's current interpretations of their fiddling identity. For example, Tony Ludiker feels that the widespread copying at NOTFC mentioned above makes it important to him to be creative: "I do whatever I can for myself to not be in this thing with everyone copying. . . What makes it fun is finding something that's new and fresh and exciting."[50] At the same time the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers Association asserts its own wide

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[47] Peg Willis, written responses to questions submitted by author, 31 October 1998.

[48] Richard Bauman, "Contextualization, tradition, and the dialogue of genres: Icelandic legends of the *kraftaskáld*," in *Rethinking Context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*, ed. by Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1992), 142.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Ludiker interview,14 June 1998.

repertory of tunes not favored by contest style fiddlers by playing them in the NOTFC contest and campground and by featuring them in the NOTFC-certified state contest. Yet other fiddlers take the NOTFC stage or a section of the campground, and play fiddle styles and tunes that do not belong to either of the two groups' repertories.

Some instructors like Peg Willis are working to provide and validate on an organizational level even broader experiences for fiddlers by incorporating old and new characteristics into fiddling events. When asked how she envisioned the "ideal" contest Willis replied:

> If I could design my own contest, I'd allow and encourage the current Texas style fad (Tony Ludiker clones) because those students who follow this road develop some real technical ability. But I would give top dollar to those who exhibit two qualities which are generally lacking in the progressive fiddling: danceablitiy and personal improvisation. I would make sure that those who demonstrate a real knowledge of the tunes (as opposed to note for note memorization) would be honored and that their style of playing would be considered desirable so that young people would find it worth learning.
>
> In order to accomplish this, some new divisions would have to be instituted. The regular "old time" fiddle contest standard would once again be "old time." But new divisions for those who prefer progressive or Texas style would also be included.
>
> This is what we are trying to do at LaGrande. It's so funny! The old timers are having conniptions because we're allowing Texas style, and the folks who are used to certified contests are all tied in knots because they can't win in the "old time" division. Sigh! I guess they'd rather fight with each other than play music.[51]

Despite fiddlers' rhetoric of difference, fiddlers share many common values about their music. Richard Blaustein argues that "transformations of oldtime fiddling do not merely negate the ongoing tradition; they are extensions

of tradition which need to be understood in their own terms."[52] An examination of this core set of values shared by oldtime fiddlers illuminates an active process of traditionalization, tradition being extended from the old to the new, at work among oldtime fiddlers.

The most obvious correlation is that both groups of fiddlers are interpreting a similar set of texts: danceable oldtime fiddle tunes. Regardless of the divergent, emergent interpretations of these tunes, two generations of fiddlers share a sense of solidarity in the fact that they play a core set of tunes on the same instrument. The tunes that both age groups play are perceived to have been handed down to each of them from ancestors, and consequently there is a rich variety of associations with heritage connected to them. An example of this association is the recent recording by John Lardinois Jr., a top ten national competitor. The cover of the CD entitled *Cowboy Legacy* states:

> The cowboy's solitary life was brightened by hard-driving fiddle tunes and graceful waltzes, which are presented here as a lasting heritage of yesterday's working cowboys and their square-dance socials.[53]

This shared heritage is a theme prevalent at most oldtime fiddling events, most notably the NOTFC whose logo is an old man in boots and cowboy attire playing a fiddle. The opening statement in their promotional flyer declares that:

> Even though this is the '90s, there's an annual event that can take you back 150 years. Back when the wagon trains followed the Oregon Trail westward. The vast migration not only brought people

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[51] Peg Willis, 31 October 1998.

[52] Richard Blaustein, "Rethinking the Invention of Tradition: The Case of the Old Time Fiddlers Association Movement in the United States" working abstract for national Society for Ethnomusicology Meeting, March 1998.

[53] Fiddlin' Johnny (John Lardinois, Jr.), *Cowboy Legacy*, CD CR0144D, Makoche Music, 1997.

with new hope and frontiers, but a form of entertainment like no other–the fiddle.[54]

The mutual regard for the importance of perpetuating this particular thread of the past distinguishes fiddlers from any other social group they may also belong to. It is significant that even though some fiddlers find the stereotypical fiddler–the old man in the well-worn cowboy hat–derogatory, he continues to be symbolic of the craft. Though the old man no longer appears as a trophy, his trophy image dominates the liner notes of the official CD recordings of the 1996 and 1997 recordings.[55]

The sense of membership in a distinct fiddling community at the NOTFC is so strong that though the seniors may claim year after year that they will not return to the NOTFC because they don't approve of the winning style, most of them do return each year. They cannot resist the opportunity to take part with other fiddlers in the active negotiation of what it means to be an oldtime fiddler. Phil Nusbaum has observed at bluegrass festivals that: "divisiveness traditionalizes relationships among the participants by providing recurrent subject matter and recurrent roles (being "for" or "against" one style of bluegrass vs. another)."[56] I have observed such recurrent themes at NOTFC as well. The issue of oldtime style fiddling vs. contest style is presently so commonplace at the national contest that it contributes to the comfortable feeling a fiddler has, old

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[54] National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest, promotional flyer, Idaho Travel Council, 1992.

[55] *National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest: The Grand National Championship 1996*, Compact Disc, CR0145D, Chairmaker's Rush, 1996; *National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest: The Grand National Championship 1997*, Compact Disc CR058D, Chairmaker's Rush, 1998.

[56] Philip Nusbaum, "Bluegrass and the Folk Revival: Structural Similarities and Experienced Differences," in *Transforming Tradition*, ed. Neil Rosenberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 208.

or young, when attending the NOTFC. Here one has the opportunity to discuss the matter with others who are informed and interested in the subject.

A second characteristic of oldtime fiddling that has been extended from the old to the new is the informal setting in which fiddling is performed. Although structure and interpretation of the participatory "jam session" concept varies between these age groups, an attractive trait of oldtime fiddling is that it can be performed practically anywhere--as one fiddler remarked "without a music stand!" This freedom to perform in kitchens and backyards, at barbecues and potlucks, in campgrounds or motel rooms, is a virtue of oldtime fiddling treasured by children, teens, parents, and grandparents alike. Because of differing aesthetics discussed above older and younger fiddlers are sometimes not able to all jam in one circle, but at the NOTFC they do share the experience of jamming in one contest campground at the same time.

Finally, perhaps the most important extension of oldtime fiddling tradition to present fiddlers is that the socio-musical context continues to encourage individuality and creativity. While at first glance this diversity may seem lost in contest fiddling, it has been shown that contest fiddling is also a creative genre. Whereas a senior fiddlers' unique rendition may be a result of how he taught himself a tune, contest fiddlers learn a standardized set of techniques before they begin creating their own renditions of tunes. Thereafter they are encouraged to develop personal versions of the standard contest repertory, and to search out less well-known tunes stylistically compatible with the existing ones and add them to the known body of tunes. Just as in the senior fiddling group, fiddlers

who become thoroughly indoctrinated into the contest-style tradition begin contributing newly composed tunes to the shared body of musical knowledge. One of the most frequently given reasons for playing the instrument by fiddlers of all ages is that individual creativity is allowed, even admired. For example, when asked what she likes best about fiddling, Eileen Witler replied, "you can have goals, you can be creative, it's a form of expression, you can do it individually or socially, and it's a good excuse to travel."[57] Similarly, Peg Willis responded, "The thing I like the most about fiddling is the freedom to improvise and the belief that there are a lot of "right" ways to do a thing.[58] Donna Reuter explained, "I like the fact that you can make your own interpretations up. You get to add some of your own personality to it."[59] Finally, Vern Billingsly likes to exclaim "There's a reason they call it fiddlin'—you get to fiddle around [with the music]."[60]

The other most common reason given for fiddling is also inherent in both discourses: the enjoyment of being amongst friends. A member of the Utah Oldtime Fiddlers' Association, Becky Wright was inspired to think deeply about what it means to be an oldtime fiddler when another member announced his resignation from the organization because he had "grown out of it." He claimed that his playing had grown more progressive and that the group no longer met his needs. For Wright who also works to improve her technique, resignation was not an option she felt she could consider as her abilities improved:

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[57] Eileen Witler, email response to questions submitted by the author, 19 September 1998.

[58] Willis, 24 October 1998.

[59] Reuter, telephone conversation with author, 9 September 1998.

[60] Vern Billingsly, personal communication with author, 9 July 1998, and he's said this in numerous other jams and converations with the author.

> When I play with the [Utah Oldtime Fiddlers Association], I play oldtime style. When I want to do something else, I play a solo, or I play with another group. But I always come back to my friends and family in the Utah Oldtime Fiddlers. I cannot grow out of my friendships. And, if I become a really great player, I owe it to the people who came before me, and those who will follow, to keep the traditions and pass them on.[61]

Although some fiddlers who want to make technical advances feel that they must break away from groups they have musically outgrown, social relationships continue to be a vital part of the tradition. Later these same fiddlers will either have developed new social relationships amongst fiddlers with similar abilities, or they will find, as Wright did, that belonging to a group of fiddlers means more than just playing the notes, it's also a tradition of socializing and lending one another support.

[61] Becky Wright, Letter to the Editor, *National Oldtime Fiddler*: The official publication of the National Oldtime Fiddlers Association 15-9 (September 1998), 3.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have used both historical and ethnographic methods of research to outline the process of traditionalization at the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest that has maintained the practice of oldtime fiddling. Fiddling has been an important thread in America's social fabric since the colonial era, and today it remains an icon of pioneering efforts to tame the West at the NOTFC. New technologies including the automobile and the electronic media challenged the survival of oldtime fiddling by making new forms of entertainment accessible. NOTFC's organizers and dedicated fiddlers have been persuasive politicians for the preservation of fiddling culture. However, organizers' creation of new contexts for fiddle music to thrive in has necessarily brought about changes in performance practice.

A study of an ongoing process such as traditionalization must necessarily be incomplete. The NOTFC is a multi-faceted event that involves people from a broad geographic distribution. The insight I have been able to gain through participant observation has been limited by my gender, my fiddling ability, and by limited time available for interacting with over one-thousand musicians (not to mention spectators) who participate in the Weiser fiddle week activities. I have exceptional rapport with older men who prefer participatory music. Many of the wives of older fiddlers attend to household duties in camp while their husbands fiddle in participatory jam sessions, but I have always felt welcome among the musicians because I am skilled at and enjoy learning tunes by ear, and because I

am able to introduce new tunes to the group. As discussed earlier, these traits are valued by this group of fiddlers over flashy exhibitions of individual technical skill common to contest style fiddlers' jam sessions as well as stage performances. However, the fiddlers of equal or greater technical ability than mine that I have formed personal relationships with have been virtually all women. Men who compete in contests tend to form their own social groups and continue the competitive staged behavior in campground jam sessions, while women often watch these sessions or talk with one another, or tend to cooking, cleaning or child care while men's jamming is taking place. Therefore I am unable to comment firsthand on many issues important to competitive fiddlers, most of whom are men at NOTFC. A study that incorporated a more technically advanced fiddler participant-observer would complement the work I have presented here, and if the researcher were male it would broaden our perspective even more.

Another avenue of inquiry worth pursuing is the relationship of occupation and economic status to interest and participation in oldtime fiddling. Delores DeRyke concluded after surveying many oldtime fiddlers that most were not wealthy, rather they worked hard to earn a living, and still found time to enjoy fiddling:

> Strangely, few fiddlers are rated as wealthy. "Well-to-do" or "comfortably situated" possibly, but not wealthy. In the hundreds of fiddlers the author has met or been told about, only a couple were even rumored to be wealthy. Many fiddlers are electronics repairmen, cabinetmakers, butchers, white collar workers, but by

> and large the majority of fiddlers have been or are occupied with agriculture and live in rural communities or on farms.[1]

The number of contest style fiddlers in non-agricultural occupations is high. I know fiddlers at the NOTFC whose occupations include economics professor, title agent, real estate broker, German professor, fireman, general contractor, lawyer, investment broker, physical therapist, and orthopedic physician. It would be useful to examine occupations of contest fiddlers for relationships with values associated with oldtime fiddling as the tradition continues to be renegotiated to fit practical needs.

An examination of specific fiddlers' renditions of tunes would give us information on creative processes at work in oldtime fiddling. Transcriptions of tune renditions would show musical practices associated with regional styles, age, performance contexts, individuals, and perhaps gender.

Though it is regularly cited as the largest fiddle contest in North America by regular attendees, there are other contests that boast national attendance such as the World Championship of Fiddling held annually in Crockett, Texas, the Galax Fiddling Convention in Galax, Virginia, the Grand Masters Fiddle Championship in Nashville, Tennessee, and the National Indian Fiddler's Contest held in Muskogee, Tahlequah, Oklahoma restricted to American Indians from any tribe. Study of these contests would bring perspective to this study of traditionalizing processes at the NOTFC by contributing information on the range and effects of organizational methods used to stage other contests.

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[1] Delores "Fiddling De" DeRyke, "So Hell is Full of Fiddlers—Bet it won't be Crowded!" *Western Folklore* 23-3 (July 1983): 182.

My research shows that the power relationships that shape the fiddler's experience at the NOTFC are important factors that keep fiddlers coming to the NOTFC. Oldtime fiddlers who participate in the NOTFC represent a variety of personalities and playing styles, yet in Weiser atmosphere they experience power in numbers with others who share a repertory of tunes and the fiddler identity. The NOTFC festival is an opportunity for them to come together to renegotiate and renew that identity, and also to experience individual power as creators and learners not available to them in their everyday lives. Finally, although the Weiser Chamber of Commerce has control over the rules of the contest, fiddlers play a role in deciding what music will be featured on the national contest stage through discussions with fiddle committee members, by attending the yearly meeting with the judges, and by selecting what they will perform on stage.

We have seen groups with contrasting musical values: older fiddlers preferring group participatory performance contexts and younger fiddlers more interested in individual staged performances associated with the new contest performance context. My analysis shows that though these performance paradigms seem on the surface to be incompatible, there are deeply felt overarching values that fiddlers share, and these values are rooted in past models of oldtime fiddling. The establishment of new contexts for fiddling such as the contest and the statewide fiddling organization has made it possible for fiddlers to continue performing a repertory of tunes perceived to be linked with fiddlers who came before. The constructed value of authenticity attached to this

repertory not only attracts new fiddlers, it serves as a powerful tool for attracting an enthusiastic audience to the art of traditional fiddling.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

THE MOUNTIAN WHIPPOORWILL

OR, HOW HILL-BILLY JIM WON THE GREAT FIDDLERS' PRIZE
(A Georgia Romance)

by

Stephen Vincent Benét

Up in the mountains, it's lonesome all the time,
(Sof' win' slewin' thu' the sweet-potato vine).

Up in the mountains, it's lonesome for a child,
(Whippoorwills a-callin' when the sap runs wild.)

Up in the mountains, never raised a pet,
Don't want nuthin' an' never got it yet.

Born in the mountains, lonesome-born,
Raised runnin' ragged thu' the cockleburrs and corn.

Never knew my pappy, mebbe never should.
Think he was a fiddle made of mountain laurel-wood.

Never had a mammy to teach me pretty-please.
Think she was a whippoorwill, a-skitin' thu' the trees.

Never had a brother ner a whole pair of pants,
But when I start to fiddle, why, yuh got to start to dance!

Listen to my fiddle—Kingdom Come—Kingdom Come!
Hear the frogs a-chunkin' "Jug o' rum, Jug o' rum!"
Hear that mountain-whippoorwill be lonesome in the air,
An' I'll tell yuh how I traveled to the Essex County Fair.

Essex County has a mighty pretty fair,
All the smarty fiddlers from the South come there.

Elbows flyin' as they rosin up the bow
For the First Prize Contest in the Georgia Fiddlers' Show.

Old Dan Wheeling, with his whiskers in his ears,
King-pin-fiddler for nearly twenty years.

Big Tom Sargent, with his blue wall-eye,
An' Little Jimmy Weezer that can make a fiddle cry.

All sittin' roun', spittn' high an' struttn' proud,
(Listen, little whippoorwill, yuh better bug yor eyes!)
Tun-a-tun-a-tunin' while the jedges told the crowd
Them that got the mostest claps'd win the bestest prize.

Everybody waitin' for the first tweedle-dee,
When in comes a-stumblin'—hill-billy me!

Bowed right pretty to the jedges an' the rest,
Took a silver dollar from a hole inside my vest,

Plunked it on the table an' said, "There's my callin' card!"
An' anyone that licks me—well, he's got to fiddle hard!"

Old Dan Wheeling, he was laughin' fit to holler,
Little Jimmy Weezer said, "There's one dead dollar!"

Big Tom Sargent had a yaller-toothy grin,
But I tucked my little whippoorwill spang underneath my chin,
An' petted it an' tuned it till the jedges said, "Begin!"

Big Tom Sargent was the first in line;
He could fiddle all the bugs off a sweet-potato vine.

He could fiddle down a possum from a mile-high tree.
He could fiddle up a whale from the bottom of the sea.

Yuh could hear hands spankin' till they spanked each other raw,
When he finished variations on "Turkey in the Straw."

Little Jimmy Weezer was the next to play;
He could fiddle all night, he could fiddle all day.

He could fiddle chills, he could fiddle fever,
He could make a fiddle rustle like a lowland river.

He could make a fiddle croon like a lovin' woman.
An' they clapped like thunder when he'd finished strummin'.

Then came the ruck of the bob-tailed fiddlers,
The let's go-easies, the fair-to-middlers.

They got their claps an' they lost their bicker,
An' settled back for some more corn-licker.

An' the crowd was tired of their no-count squealing,
When out in the center steps Old Dan Wheeling.

He fiddled high and he fiddled low,
(Listen, little whippoorwill; yuh got to spread yore wings!)
He fiddled with a cherrywod bow.
(Old Dan Wheeling's got bee-honey in his strings.)

He fiddled the wind by the lonesome moon,
He fiddled a most almighty tune.

He started fiddling like a ghost,
He ended fiddling like a host.

He fiddled north an' he fiddled south,
He fiddled the heart right out of yore mouth.

He fiddled here an' he fiddled there.
He fiddled salvation everywhere.

When he was finished, the crowd cut loose.
(Whippoorwill, they's rain on your breast.)
An' I sat there wonderin', "What's the use?"
(Whippoorwill, fly home to your nest.)

But I stood up pert an' I took my bow,
An' my fiddle went to my shoulder, so.

An'—they wasn't no crowd to get me fazed—
But I was alone where I was raised.

Up in the mountains, so still it makes yuh skeered.
Where God lies sleepin' in his big white beard.

An' I heard the sound of the squirrel in the pine,
An' I heard the earth a-breathin' thu' the long night-time.

They've fiddled the rose, an' they've fiddled the thorn,
But they haven't fiddled the mountain-corn.

They've fiddled sinful an' fiddled moral,
But they haven't fiddled the breshwood-laurel.

They've fiddled loud, an' they've fiddled still,
But they haven't fiddled the whippoorwill.

I started off with a *dump-diddle-dump,*
(Oh, hell's broke loose in Georgia!)
Skunk-cabbage growin' by the bee-gum stump,
(Whippoorwill yo're singin' now!)

Oh, Georgia booze is mighty fine booze,
The best yuh ever poured yuh,
But it eats the soles right offen yore shoes,
For Hell's broke loose in Georgia.

My mother was a whippoorwill pert,
My father, he was lazy,
But I'm Hell broke loose in a new store shirt
To fiddle all Georgia crazy.

Swing yore partners—up an' down the middle!
Sashay now—oh, listen to that fiddle!
Flapjacks flippin' on a red-hot griddle,
An' hell broke loose,
Hell broke loose,
Fire on the mountains—snakes in the grass.
Go down Moses, set my people free,
Pop goes the weasel thu' the old Red Sea!
Jonah sittin' on a hickory-bough,
Up jumps a whale—an' where's yore prophet now?
Rabbit in the pea-patch, possum in a pot,
Try an' stop my fiddle, now my fiddle's getting' hot!
Whippoorwill, singin' thu' the mountain hush,
Whippoorwill, shoutin' from the burnin' bush,
Whippoorwill, cryin' in the stable-door,
Sing to-night as yuh never sang before!
Hell's broke loose like a stompin' mountain-shoat,
Sing till yuh bust the gold in yore throat!
Hell's broke loose for forty miles aroun'
Bound to stop yore music if yuh don't sing it down.
Sing on the mountains, little whippoorwill,
For I'm struttin' high as an eagle's quill,
An' Hell's broke loose,
Hell's broke loose,
Hell's broke loose in Georgia!

They wasn't a sound when I stopped bowin',
(*Whippoorwill, yuh can sing no more.)*
But, somewhere or other, the dawn was growin',
(Oh, mountain whippoorwill!)

An' I thought, "I've fiddled all night an' lost.
Yo're a good hill-billy, but yuh've been bossed."

So I went to congratulate old man Dan,
—But he put his fiddle into my han'—
An' then the noise of the crowd began.

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