

## ABSTRACT

HOWARD, JENNIFER CAMILLE. *Sounds of Silence: How African Americans, Native Americans, and White Women Found Their Voices in Southern Appalachian Music.* (Under the direction of Craig Thompson Friend).

This thesis examines the complex identity of southern Appalachian folk music. One of the most common misconceptions is that southern Appalachian folk music is the realm of white male hillbillies, blissfully ignorant of the modern world surrounding them. Yet, African Americans, Native Americans, and white women also contributed to folk music. Originally, each of their contributions faced forms of silencing. African Americans experienced silencing by scholars and folk music festivals that ignored their contributions to Appalachian music and claimed instead that black musicians had borrowed heavily from whites. The Eastern Band of Cherokee experienced heavy pressure to assimilate into white society, with particular emphasis on abandoning traditional songs and dance in favor of outside music. White women fought against prejudices that depicted female entertainers negatively. All three groups faced different forms of silencing, but each found ways to overcome silencing as well. African Americans' influence on folk music in the southern mountains can be found through the instruments used, songs sung, and folk tales told to scholars, as well as an emergence into folk music festivals. Cherokee musicians reclaimed their voices with the help of national and local figures who organized movements towards understanding traditional culture, even as they found ways to incorporate American culture. White women first found voices through researching and collecting music within and near the southern mountains. By the 1920s they emerged as recording artists while still embracing feminine ideals. Exploring the complexities behind southern Appalachian folk music allows us to better understand regional, racial, and gendered relationships during the early twentieth century.

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Sounds of Silence: How African Americans, Native Americans, and White Women Found  
Their Voices in Southern Appalachian Music

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my Parents- For their love, patience, and good humor for the past twenty-four years, and especially to my sweet Mama, for reading every word of every paper for the past six years, even the boring ones.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Jennifer Howard was born and raised in North Carolina, in the foothills of the southern Appalachians. In 2009, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History Education from North Carolina State University. Upon graduating from North Carolina State University in May 2012 with a Master of Arts degree in History, she plans to further pursue her studies in education and history.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first thank you belongs to the teachers and professors that I have been lucky enough to have since I was five years old. Without their hard work and faith in me, even when I least deserved it, this work would not have been possible. A special thank you to Dr. Friend for his guidance and never-faltering patience in the face of my procrastination and doubt. The staff at D.H. Hill Library, the Southern Historical Collection, and the David M. Rubenstein Library have provided invaluable assistance with my research and deserve mention here.

My family and friends have provided me with unthinkable support for the past two years. My older brother has behaved exactly as a big brother should: supportive, irritating, and protective. My extended family have kept their professional student jokes to a minimum in my presence and feigned interest in my talks about my research; God bless them. I have been lucky enough to have love and laughter from a great set of friends, both old and new. My fellow grad students have provided shoulders to lean on and amusement, both in the classroom and in the bar. Their support from the trenches cannot be thanked enough.

Finally, this work is also for Steve and Beau. This thesis would never have been completed without the help of you two. From fixing supper and making me coffee on many a late night to reading the several drafts and helping me haul library books about town, this work contains just as much of you as it contains of me. The Beauzo may not have been particularly helpful in finishing my work, but his distractions helped keep my sanity and sense of humor in check throughout this process. With you two beside me heading into the future, I fear nothing.

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## INTRODUCTION

So just what exactly is mountain music? Most agree that it is pre-electric, pre-commercial country music, which was the product of insulated, isolated ‘hill people.’ But the music heard in and around Asheville is as forward-looking as it is traditional. Its roots may lie in Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, and Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to folk music in southern Appalachia, misconceptions and confusions abound. Many people jokingly conjure up images from *Deliverance*. The music is generally thought of as bluegrass or country genres with white people taking the lead. Yet, music in this region is remarkably more complex with genres ranging from string band, hillbilly, gospel, blues, and jazz to country and bluegrass. The music does not belong solely to the region’s white inhabitants; African Americans and Native Americans contributed to its development as well. While the southern Appalachians may not have been as culturally diverse as other southern areas such as Louisiana where the complexities of its demographics are reflected in its musical culture, they housed residents from a variety of races and socio-economic classes. Appalachian folk music reflected this diversity.

In his definitive work on country music, Bill C. Malone hypothesized what a “typical” folk musician would have looked like in the 1920s: The musician was a man, as women were not to work as entertainers. His music contained themes of gender relations, including masculine insecurities of being financially unable to provide for his family. The musician was white, generally a mixture of different European nationalities, although he might like to pretend he was partially Indian. He was a

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Flowers, “Going Home to Asheville & Good Old Mountain Music,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 1988, E3.



Protestant Christian, although not necessarily staunchly religious. In Malone's words, "His was a rowdy but God-fearing existence." The musician lived in a rural area, his work varied from agriculture to coal mining. His existence was a folksy one, reiterating the folkways of his imagined Anglo-Saxon ancestry. He also probably served in either World War I or the Spanish-American War. Finally, he was southern. While hillbilly and country music became inundated by the 1940s with musicians from the Midwest, New England, the West, and even Canada, twenty years earlier the Appalachian folk musician was usually from the South.<sup>2</sup>

Malone's characterization is fairly typical, but folk musicians expand beyond his stereotyping. Hundreds of years before white settlers invaded the southern Appalachian mountains, the Cherokee lived in the area. Their music marked the region's first folk sounds in the region. The Cherokee used a variety of instruments in their song and dances, such as different styles of flutes and drums. Their music usually accompanied dances such as the Bear and Eagle Dances in their traditional ceremonies. Unlike other forms of folk music that evolved in southern Appalachia, the Cherokees' music is more closely associated with religious beliefs, often telling traditional religious tales through song and dance. When the Office of Indian Affairs discouraged these songs and dances in the 1920s, it discouraged tribal religious beliefs in the name of encouraging assimilation into a white Protestant culture.

White settlers moved into the mountain region in the eighteenth century, bringing their music—and occasionally their slaves—with them. Their music

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<sup>2</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 28-29.

comprised ballads from their European homelands, usually the British Isles. Centuries later, folklorists such as Cecil Sharp and Francis J. Child still heard traditional English ballads when they scoured the Appalachia mountainside for folk culture, consequently concluding that very little change had occurred between the original English tunes and the Americanized ones. Words may have changed slightly, but the melodies and lyrics remained very similar to the originals.

For white settlers, folk music began with the traditional European fiddle, but they also included the banjo. African slaves brought the banjo to the America's, and they also brought the instrument to the mountains. White musicians learned to play the banjo, and over time it became more closely associated with white folk music than its original African origins. Cherokee inhabitants also began to play the fiddle and the banjo, while singing traditional European hymns and gospel music.

Since the majority of Appalachian citizens—red, white, and black—practiced Christianity, southern gospel also evolved. Shape-note singing and lined-out hymnodies pervaded mountain culture. Lined-out hymnodies originated in British churches and entailed the pastor chanting a line of text followed by the congregation singing it back in unison. This became particularly popular in the southern Appalachians, especially in southeastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia. Shape-note singing originated in Philadelphia in 1801 and comprised “four distinctive note heads to indicate the four syllables denoting tones of a musical scale (fa, so, la and mi) then employed in vocal instruction, making unnecessary the pupil's need to learn and memorize key

signatures.”<sup>3</sup> By the twentieth century, mass-produced publications of religious music became especially popular in the southern Appalachians.

The Appalachians also became home to several pervasive stereotypical images within music. Although minstrel shows originated outside of Appalachia, they eventually became popular in the region with their gross cartoon-like characterizations of blacks. Such stereotypes persisted in the southern mountains, negatively affecting African Americans long after minstrel shows fell out of style. Stereotypes applied to whites as well. In the 1920s and 1930s, it became popular to depict singers of hillbilly and country music as uneducated yokels, with images of women in long dresses, braided hair, and occasionally barefoot. Men were shown wearing overalls and straw hats, and both men and women were encouraged by their music producers to speak with uneducated sounding drawls and lingo.

Technological advancements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century also changed folk music. Musicians recorded their music and songs; playing styles and instruments that may not have changed extensively in one or two centuries began to evolve rapidly. People throughout the country listened to new and different styles of music, and folk music within southern Appalachia reflected these changes. While white musicians adopted to hillbilly and country music, black musicians dominated jazz and the blues (otherwise known as “race records”). Even bluegrass, which evolved in western Kentucky, became associated with Appalachia primarily because regional musicians appropriated it so quickly.

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<sup>3</sup> David Warren Steel, “Shape-Note Singing Schools,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, ed. William Ferris and Charles Reagan Wilson, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

In the second half of the twentieth century, music within Appalachia saw further change with the development of rock and roll, particularly rockabilly. Rockabilly became popular with younger Appalachian citizens who enjoyed its combination of rock with fast-paced country sounds. The folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s brought attention to musicians long forgotten and uncovered musicians who had been ignored. In the 1990s, attention once again centered on traditional folk music, particularly within Appalachia. Record companies re-released traditional music onto compact discs; some even formed for the sole purpose of releasing forgotten music. Old Hat Records in Raleigh, North Carolina formed in 1997 to reissue vintage American music originally recorded in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

So *what* exactly is traditional Appalachian folk music? Is it pre-commercial music, with the heavy twang of banjos? Is it rooted to the land, performed only in the mountain home land, or is folk music still folk music when played at international music festivals? As Malone pointed out, our modern view of “pure” folk music was defined through the lens of outsider folklorists who entered into the region under the auspice of scientific discovery. Charles Flowers offered a definition of folk music that works as a good starting point: “Most agree that it is pre-electric, pre-commercial country music, which was the product of insulated, isolated ‘hill people.’”<sup>5</sup> Yet, “hill people” and their music were not isolated: Their music originated in Cherokee,

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<sup>4</sup> “About Old Hat Records,” <<http://www.oldhatrecords.com/about.html>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Flowers, “Going Home to Asheville & Good Old Mountain Music,” E3.

England, Ireland, Scotland, Spain, and West Africa, and from their folk music a considerable number of musical genres have emerged.

While a cursory history of Appalachian music and the typical Appalachian musician offers a starting point for consideration of the nuances within Appalachian music, we must also consider how others experienced mountain music. African Americans, Native Americans, and white women also participated in this musical culture, but all too often their voices are ignored or silenced in the narrative. White males did not invent or revolutionize Appalachian music in a vacuum, far away from the influences of others. African Americans, Native Americans, and white females were breaking down silences in musical culture during the same decades that Malone's white, Protestant, rural male's songs echoed throughout Appalachia's hilltops and hollers. By fighting against assimilation and cultural extinction, breaking through gender expectations and stereotypes, and developing innovative techniques for instrument playing and new genres of music, all three groups began to find their voices and recognition. Still, for Native Americans, African Americans, and white women, such recognition of their talent often hinged on approval from white and usually male audiences<sup>6</sup>

Exploring silences is largely attributable to the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot who explored the production of silences in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Trouillot proposed that history is simply the story of those in

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<sup>6</sup> The history of Appalachian music can be found within Ted Olson, "Music," *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* < <http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/category.php?rec=53>>(accessed on March 5, 2012); and Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*

power, whether those in power were the original creators of primary sources or the archivists who decided which works were worthy of preservation. Those with power create silences by what they record or what they choose not to record.<sup>7</sup> As they relate to Appalachian musical history, silences occurred in different ways. As folklorists and other scholars wrote about southern Appalachian folk music, they silenced black influence by either excluding or altering black people's contributions. Modern scholars, in turn, encounter silences within these primary sources as they retrieve the historical narratives, and then these silences are reflected in their scholarship. Silencing also occurs in moments of "retrospective significance," such as the festivals that celebrate southern Appalachian folk music as a preservation of authentic Anglo-Saxon folk music. Popular memory today still generally recognizes southern Appalachian folk music as a white monopoly, another manifestation of silencing as retrospective significance.

Trouillot's work also provides inspiration for considering the silencing of Native Americans and white females. Not only did the Cherokee face silencing in the form of assimilation techniques, but they were also literally silenced as they were discouraged to speak in their native tongue. The cultural revival of the Cherokee encouraged a different type of silencing in changing the history they presented to tourists visiting their nation. While the Cherokee still played traditional folk songs within their own population, they embraced the stereotype of the Indian "savage" for white tourist audiences, creating a new historical narrative for popular white culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995).

White females also encountered forms of silencing in working within music. The silencing of women came from gendered stereotypes that frowned upon women in the public entertainment spotlight, as well as a regional Appalachian stereotype associating certain instruments and types of songs as sinful.

Deborah Thompson explores the idea of silenced Appalachian voices in “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music.”<sup>8</sup> Thompson surveys the history of interaction between black and white music populations in the southern Appalachians and offers initial thoughts about the sources of silences. While her work provides historians a good starting place, particularly given her synthesis of the secondary literature, much more can be said. She proposes that ballad collectors such as Olivia Dame Campbell, Cecil Sharp, and Maud Karpeles did not consider black musicians while traveling the Appalachians. However, Thompson does not consider later ballad collectors and scholars who also collected and published works on ballads.<sup>9</sup> These collectors and scholars of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were much more aware of black musicians but actively chose to ignore their influence. Furthermore, Thompson barely covers the rise of folk music festivals, only briefly mentioning the White Top Folk Music Festival and its direction under musician and white supremacist John Powell. Other folk music festivals also arose in the early twentieth century specifically to propagate the Anglo-Saxon mythology of Appalachia. In a different article, Thompson and her co-author Darren Hacquard summarized the silencing of black influence on

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<sup>8</sup> Deborah Thompson, “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music,” *GeoJournal*, Vol. 65, No. 1-2, (2006), 67-78.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Appalachian folk music as “historic (and continuing) discrimination and violence against African Americans in the United States.”<sup>10</sup>

In examining the silencing of the Cherokee, Thompson points out that the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, like other Native American tribes throughout the United States, faced increasing assimilation pressures and techniques.<sup>11</sup> Silencing also occurred less noticeably later in the twentieth century as the Cherokee presented the stereotypical Native American image to white tourists. Yet, Thompson also claims that the Cherokee had little effect on Appalachian folk music: Rather, dominant folk music had a far greater influence on Cherokee folk music. While the Cherokee may have absorbed far more white musical culture, Appalachian folk music substantially also benefited from Cherokee influences, generally in the form of Cherokee men creating innovative ways of playing instruments such as the banjo and fiddle.

Thompson also notes that representation of women in Appalachian music is highly gendered: women are often depicted through “gentler” forms of music such as ballad singing and religious songs, while men are represented with more boisterous and sinful songs and instruments.<sup>12</sup> Thompson continues: “while there are certainly notable exceptions to these ‘rules,’ scholarship that simply points these out does not expose the mechanism behind the gendering of music in Appalachia.”<sup>13</sup> Even though women managed to have their voices heard, they were often required to embrace certain “safe”

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<sup>10</sup> Deborah Thompson and Darren Haquard, “Region, Race, Representation: Observations from Interviews with African American Musicians in Appalachia,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 15 (spring/fall 2009): 127.

<sup>11</sup> Thompson, “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music,” 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



roles. It would be imprudent to think of women such as Samantha Bumgarner and the women in The Carter Family so narrowly, however. Did they have to conform to gender specific ideals in their music? Most certainly, but in playing their music publicly, recording their music, and earning a living in the music industry, these women challenged gendered stereotypes and broke through forces that once kept women silenced.

One of the most important works in studying the African influence on Appalachian music comes from Cecelia Conway in *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*.<sup>14</sup> Conway explores the transmission of the banjo, a traditional African instrument, as it was introduced and developed in southern Appalachia. By studying playing techniques, Conway concluded that the banjo arrived in southern Appalachia far earlier than previous scholars had considered. Yet, Conway did not address the reasons behind why the instrument and African influences were forgotten or ignored. Thompson also critiqued Conway for ignoring gender within the African community and music, an issue largely ignored in other scholarship as well.<sup>15</sup> Research is still desperately needed to uncover the methods in which black females practiced music in the southern mountains.

One way to rethink the silences in early Appalachian folk music is to consider the conclusions that historians have made about another form of entertainment that profited from stereotyping and silencing: the minstrel show. Both W. T. Lhamon, Jr.

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<sup>14</sup> Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, "Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music," 74.

and Eric Lott discuss the impact of minstrel shows on American culture in their respective works. In *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture*, Lhamon recreates the works of famed minstrel performer Thomas D. Rice, while also highlighting white attitudes towards blacks in the antebellum United States.<sup>16</sup> Lhamon points out that Rice first developed his character of Jim Crow under the tutelage of black Americans. Furthermore, “before the concept of ‘Jim Crow’ stood for America’s justly despised segregation laws, it first referred to a very real cross-racial energy and recalcitrant alliance between blacks and lower-class whites. That’s what the trickster Jim Crow organized and represented: a working-class integration.” White elites ensured this integration did not persist. In *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Lott focuses on minstrel shows in New York, and how they captured an antebellum structure of racial feeling.<sup>17</sup> In its heyday, minstrel shows offered an opportunity for cultural exchange between whites and blacks, but it also allowed white working-class men a way to invoke their superiority over their nearly equal black counterparts. Both works demonstrate that black and white musical exchange occurred far prior to the twentieth century, but this exchange and the performances it influenced allowed white working-class citizens a way to engage in acts of superiority over black citizens.

By the late nineteenth century, the racial integration found in minstrelsy devolved as white culture unified in the United States. Racial categorization, buttressed

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<sup>16</sup> W. T. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.

by the science of the era, became an impediment to cross-racial cooperation. Grace Elizabeth Hale explores this development of whiteness in her work, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*.<sup>18</sup> Here, she argues that racial constructs of black and white were created, at the turn of the twentieth century. “Black” culture became associated with an “other,” while “white” culture equated with “American” culture. In the South, blacks were inferior not simply as a result of any scientific exploration, but also because they inhabited inferior spaces. White citizens created these racial divides, but they were also allowed the flexibility to move across these color lines in certain situations, such as during musical interaction. By creating these color lines, white southerners were acting in a way similar to their northern brethren who attended minstrel shows years earlier. Race allowed for the unification of a white citizenry against its black inhabitants.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage echoes Hale’s sentiments in his edited collection of works, *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*.<sup>19</sup> Brundage delves more into the development of a popular culture and the beginning of mass entertainment in the face of increased leisure time. Changing technology coupled with the need for mass entertainment led to the development of segregated recorded music. Despite this segregation within popular culture, white and blacks often worked fluidly together in the creation of new sounds.

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<sup>18</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

As Brundage notes, “No matter how often genteel bigots and virulent white supremacist agreed about the primacy of the nation’s Anglo-Saxon culture, the ascendant popular culture of the twentieth century belied their claims.”<sup>20</sup> Like the rest of the South, Appalachia could not avoid racial interchange of black and white, despite the efforts of many to root the region in its alleged Anglo-Saxon ancestry.

While much attention had been given to black-white relations, no scholars have addressed Cherokee music in southern Appalachia in the twentieth century. Historian John Finger provides the best survey of the eastern Cherokee in *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century*, which begins in the late nineteenth century and ends in the 1980s.<sup>21</sup> During those decades, Cherokee culture evolved in southern Appalachia to accommodate a rising tide of tourism. Anne Mitchell Whisnant has written smaller pieces regarding the Cherokee, paying particular attention to how the development of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park encouraged Cherokees to embrace stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans, including songs and dance from Plains Indians, in order to earn more money from visitors.<sup>22</sup>

Just as minstrelsy framed whites’ views of Black America, however, so too did American popular culture create the idea of the “Indian.” In *Playing Indian*, Philip J. Deloria examines both how white Americans played Indian throughout the history of the United States, as well as how Native Americans engaged in this false image of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>21</sup> John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Anne Mitchell Whisnant, “Parkway Development and the Eastern Band of Cherokees,” *Driving Through Time* <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/overlooks/cherokee-1/>>(accessed on March 5, 2012).

Indians.<sup>23</sup> America had to defeat native populations in order to ensure white freedom, yet white citizens also embraced the image of the Indian when fighting for their freedoms. In *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Deloria continues this examination, exploring the struggles of Native Americans against the popular Indian image and how they attempted to modernize.<sup>24</sup> In his section on music, Deloria delves into Indian attempts to create a universal “Indian” sound of music that popular American culture still recognizes, while in his section on representations of Indians, Deloria notes the involvement of Native Americans in theatrical performances falsely portraying their history. In Cherokee, attempts to modernize with the drive to capture tourism dollars still coincide with the selling of the “Indian” image familiar to the masses.

Popularization of the “Indian” and his music hardly reflected Native Americans’ realities. In *Indian Blues: American Indian and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934*, John William Troutman delves into music among the Western tribes.<sup>25</sup> Troutman argues that music was steeped within politics and was used as an act of resistance towards assimilation, directly inspiring further federal policy initiatives. Music served as a voice of resistance among these nations. The Eastern Band of Cherokee may have used their music as political resistance, as well but their music absolutely reflected the assimilationism.

In contrast to the dearth of scholarship on the Cherokee, no authors have come close to studying women in music at the same level as Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K.

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<sup>23</sup> Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> John William Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indian and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

Oermann in *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music*.<sup>26</sup> Exploring the landscape of white women in country music across the twentieth century, Bufwack and Oermann seek to uncover silenced female voices. They compiled brief glimpses of hundreds of women who entered the world of country music, but failed to provide much analysis on how women managed to break into public music.

Just beyond Appalachia in the North Carolina Piedmont, however, textile mill women contributed to the formation of the country music genre. Patrick Huber explores their contribution in two works, “Mill Mother’s Lament: Ella May Wiggins and the Gastonia Textile Strike of 1929” and *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South*.<sup>27</sup> Ella May Wiggins’s contributions to country music are often forgotten today, but her remarkable story once appeared in national and international papers. Having grown up in the southern mountains, Wiggins and her family settled in the Piedmont, where she began to work at a Gastonia textile mill. When the South erupted into labor strikes in the late 1920s, Wiggins joined and became famous for her ballad compositions that protested the poor working conditions at the mill. Her protest efforts against the union led to her murder months later, while pregnant with her tenth child. Wiggins became a martyr for her efforts. Deborah Thompson points out that women in Appalachian music did not overstep their gender boundaries, but Wiggins’s

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<sup>26</sup> Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Huber, “Mill Mother’s Lament: Ella May Wiggins and the Gastonia Textile Strike of 1929,” *Southern Cultures* 15 (Fall 2009): 81-110; idem, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

story reveals how women not only overstepped but occasionally influenced music through protest.

African Americans' influence on folk music in the southern mountains can be found through the instruments used, songs sung, and folk tales told to scholars, as well as an emergence into folk music festivals. Cherokee musicians reclaimed their voices with the help of national and local figures who organized movements towards understanding traditional culture, even as they found ways to incorporate American culture. White women first found voices through researching and collecting music within and near the southern mountains. By the 1920s they emerged as recording artists while still embracing feminine ideals. Exploring the complexities behind southern Appalachian folk music allows us to better understand regional, racial, and gendered relationships during the early twentieth century.

The general public largely still views Appalachian music as a white, male-dominated enterprise, but scholarship is working to overturn this notion. African Americans, Native Americans, and white women may not have found their voices at the same time or in the same way, but during the first half of the twentieth century, they all contributed to the evolution of Appalachian music and found their voices.

## CHAPTER 1

**Exploring the Silencing of African Americans in Southern Appalachian Folk Music**

Lesley Riddle could be considered just a typical mountain man of the early twentieth century. Born into poverty in 1905 in Burnsville, North Carolina, injuries and amputations at a young age provided him the extra time and opportunity to focus on his music skills. He met A.P. Carter, one of the founding members of the famed country group The Carter Family, in 1927 and rode around with him on song-catching expeditions throughout the southern Appalachians. The songs they recorded and memorized later were published under the Carter name. His style of playing the guitar influenced Maybelle Carter and her own picking style, which became acclaimed and mimicked a few short years later. However, Lesley had one difference that set him apart from his folk-music loving neighbors and friends: he was black. The color of his skin meant that he received no mention in the songs he collected with A.P. and, ultimately, no royalties. It was Maybelle's playing style that was mimicked, not his. And it was The Carter Family that was loved and adored through the ages, not Lesley.<sup>28</sup> It was the color of his skin, like countless other African Americans in the southern region, that led folklorist and folk music festivals to bypass the contributions Riddle and others made to folk music.

Famed musician and folk music festival organizer Bascom Lamar Lunsford is still well known for his influence on folk music in the Appalachians. Better known as the "Minstrel of the Appalachians," Lunsford dedicated his life to the playing and appreciation of folk music. Born in North Carolina's mountains in 1882, Lunsford's parents raised him and

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<sup>28</sup> Janet Hurley, "Rediscovering Riddle," in *Our State: Down Home in North Carolina*, 79 (February 2012): 24-25.



his siblings to appreciate music. Loyal Jones included pieces of Lunsford's memoirs in his biography of the musician which discusses his early childhood musical appreciation, such as his early fascination with his uncle's fiddle.<sup>29</sup> Early in his childhood, Lunsford's father bought him a violin to explore his interest in music further. Lunsford attended Trinity College (now known as Duke University) and received his law degree in 1913, yet he never neglected his love for music. He eventually settled down in Marion, North Carolina, and soon people began to approach Lunsford to ask him to record his music. In 1928, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce asked him to help organize the Rhododendron Festival, which included the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. Lunsford continued to help organize festivals throughout his life, including Carolina Folk Festival in Chapel Hill. Lunsford did not hold blatantly outspoken negative feelings towards African Americans, but he did not escape the racial tension and beliefs that permeated throughout the South during this time. He may have "treated everyone as a peer," but he also lived in the South and still had mixed feelings towards black citizens. He did not allow black musicians to perform songs at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and part of his songs reflected common racial beliefs at the time.<sup>30</sup>

Folk scholars at the same time held many of the same beliefs as Lunsford toward African Americans. One such scholar was Dorothy Scarborough, a professor of English at

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<sup>29</sup> Bascom Lamar Lunsford, "Reminiscences," 4, in Loyal Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1984), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Jones seems to excuse Lunsford for his beliefs. He begins with a discussion of how Lunsford behaved as a gentleman throughout his life and "treated everyone as a peer" and followed the mountain rules that everyone was equal to one another. Jones then continued by saying that Lunsford "was of the South, as well . . . Thus he was addled with many of the provincial fears and prejudices of southern people of his time-suspicion of outsiders and their ideas, and guilt and uneasiness about black-white relations." Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 97.

Columbia University. Born in 1878, Scarborough passed away unexpectedly in 1935 while working on one of her more well-known collections of folk songs, *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains: American Folk Songs of British Ancestry*. Scarborough also published a work specifically on African American music, titled *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*. Scarborough adhered to the same belief as other folklorists and scholars that whites and blacks practiced segregated folk music. Despite meetings with whites who played songs usually associated with the black community, Scarborough failed to conclude that white folk music in the southern Appalachians had been influenced by African Americans, instead arguing that blacks simply borrowed music from whites. In *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, modern readers can recognize Scarborough's patronizing attitude, especially as she recounted spending her childhood on former plantations where she "had the opportunity to know colored people as a race and as individuals" and "how many memories of (her) childhood was associated with loved black faces!"<sup>31</sup> Scarborough also included the tale of when she learned the meaning behind one of the more famous African American songs, "Run, Nigger, Run," and concluded her story with an oddly condescending line, "The darkies sang many amusing songs about the patrols and their experiences in eluding them."<sup>32</sup> Scarborough discussed African Americans as one can imagine an anthropologist describing a newly found aboriginal tribe, with phrases tucked into her work such as "'Mammy' held an honored place in the home, for the children were taught to respect and obey her," and "The

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<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Scarborough and Ola Lee Gullledge, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (1925; reprint, Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, Inc., 1963), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Negro is perhaps in his happiest mood when he is making songs about animals.”<sup>33</sup>

Scarborough’s work is a mixture of the folk songs she collected, as well as information about the people who provided the songs. Her fellow folklorist, Guy B. Johnson, later complained about Scarborough’s work, writing, “Miss Scarborough’s style is at times so chatty and personal as to be annoying. One does not like to hear what Mrs. B \_\_\_\_\_ of Podunk, Texas had to say in her letter when she sent in a song [sic].”<sup>34</sup> However, nearly a century later, the “chatty” style of Scarborough lends a helpful hand to those interested in the history of folk music in the United States.

Although Scarborough deemed African American folk songs important enough to spend years collecting music and traveling throughout the South in order to publish a book, she still held the same opinion of African American folk songs as other folk-song collectors. Scarborough included an entire chapter on this borrowing from whites, which she aptly titled, “The Negro’s Part in Transmitting the Traditional Songs and Ballads.”<sup>35</sup> In this chapter, Scarborough included songs that are traditionally European in origin and discussed how African Americans adapted them. Oddly, Scarborough was not aware that other scholars researched the same topic, as she wrote, “I thought at first that what I found were only exceptions, accidents of folk-song, though I began to look for similar instances.”<sup>36</sup> Scarborough noted that the songs originated from the “Cavaliers and Scotch” who originally settled the South and that in the mountain regions of the South in the early twentieth century

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 144, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Guy B. Johnson, “Recent Contribution to the Study of the American Negro Songs,” Draft Writing, 6, Guy B. Johnson Papers, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

<sup>35</sup> Scarborough and Gullede, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 33-64.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 33.

exhibited a “rarer heritage of English and Scottish folk-songs” than in Great Britain. It was in the plantation homes of the lowland South that slaves heard their masters singing the folk-songs of their ancestors and with the quick memory and “apt musical ear” that African Americans possessed, they learned these songs and passed them down generationally in their oral traditions.<sup>37</sup> Scarborough documented the first time she encountered an African American version of a European folk-song when a young black maid sung to her a song about the hangman’s tree. Scarborough recognized the song as the English ballad, “The Maid Freed from the Gallows.”<sup>38</sup> One popular song that African Americans sang, “Skewball,” became so widely connected with African Americans that some folklorists had begun to document it as being African in origin.<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that Scarborough argued that the majority of folk songs sung by African Americans were simply songs borrowed from whites, she at least acknowledged other forms of African American music independent from their borrowing of white music, such as songs about animals, songs to work to, songs about the railroad. She even included a chapter on the emerging blues.

While traveling through the southern Appalachian Mountains for her work, *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains*, Scarborough came across African American folk-singers, as well as the racial beliefs held by whites regarding black Appalachian citizens. As she trekked through the mountainous areas of Virginia, she accompanied Mrs. Garrard Glenn through her hometown and collected folk songs from Glenn’s former servants, but made no mention in her work as to which songs she received from them. In *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 34-37.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 61.

Scarborough related a story the young maid who sang about the hangman's tree told her about African Americans living in the mountains of North Carolina. According to the maid, "Dey ain't niggers an' dey ain't whites. And yet you can't scarcely say dat dey's mulattoes. Dey is called by a curi's name-Ishies. Dey lives off to demselves an' sho is funny folks [sic]." Scarborough determined that the maid referred to free-issue African Americans, or those people born to free African Americans. Scarborough did not reference meeting any "strange" populations of African Americans while in North Carolina, but she did encounter whites and blacks who shared music with her.<sup>40</sup>

When Scarborough arrived in Asheville, she made a point to meet Lunsford and worked with him hunting down folk-singers and collecting music from them. Scarborough attended the Rhododendron Festival as a guest of Lunsford. Afterwards, some performers of the festival, The Queen Brothers, performed secularized versions of African American spirituals for Scarborough. While in Asheville, Scarborough also met with Carolina Rutledge, who worked in Charleston, South Carolina with the Society for the Preservation of Negro Spirituals. Rutledge shared some songs with Scarborough and introduced her to Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Strikeleather, musicians in the Asheville area. The Strikeleathers provided Scarborough with several African American songs that Mr. Strikeleather had learned from his family's servants as a child, while Mrs. Strikeleather provided a song she learned from her cook. Scarborough's travels throughout the southern Appalachians also illustrate musical interactions between African Americans and whites, as several of the people she met with either knew African American music or knew African Americans who were willing to sing

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<sup>40</sup> Scarborough, *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains*, 21; Scarborough and Gullede, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 35.

folk songs for Scarborough.<sup>41</sup> Even though Scarborough documented white musicians playing songs learned from black musicians, she never acknowledged that Appalachian folk music included contributions from both sects, instead dividing the music into distinct genres of Appalachian folk music and black folk music.

Like Scarborough, Guy B. Johnson studied African American music in North Carolina. Johnson worked as a social science professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1927 until 1969. While studying and writing academic works on the musical ability of African Americans, he especially emphasized that they borrowed a great deal from whites. In 1925, Johnson began to collect the songs of African Americans, paying students from various institutions throughout the South to collect songs from African Americans and mail them to him. One such student was T. H. Pettway, an African American who lived in Townsville, North Carolina. Pettway collected a variety of songs for Johnson, including religious and secular music, although the secular songs were harder to coax from people as “most of the colored people think it is a sin to sing such songs,” a recurring theme in folk music across color lines.<sup>42</sup> As the result of these endeavors of collecting and studying African American music, Johnson wrote *Negro Folk Songs in the South*.

It is in *Negro Folk Songs* that Johnson both exalts and patronizes African American music. According to Johnson, the lack of research on African American music was due to the fact that “the Negro, with his excellent ear for music, was doing rather successfully the

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<sup>41</sup> Scarborough, *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains*, 64-66, 72-73.

<sup>42</sup> T. H. Pettway to Guy B. Johnson, August 14, 1925, Guy B. Johnson Papers. See also, Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 99-100.

prosaic thing of taking on the folk-song of the dominant race.”<sup>43</sup> Johnson continued his theory of African Americans borrowing their music from whites in a section entitled “The Relation of Negro and White Song Tradition.” Johnson wrote,

After all the Negro is thoroughly American . . . His folk songs, music and all, are fundamentally European and American rather than African. There is scarcely a white folk song in the South which has not been sung by Negroes, and many Negro songs have been sung by whites. Naturally there has been borrowing both ways, but the cultural position of the Negro, entailing as it did the loss of his African languages and folk songs, made it inevitable that the Negro do by far the larger part of borrowing.<sup>44</sup>

Johnson believed that as African Americans have been present in the United States since its earliest colonial times, they had shed their African identity and culture and simply adapted white culture. What is most interesting about Johnson’s argument is the fact that he accepted that centuries of living in the United States had stripped African Americans of their original heritage, he does not concede that Europeans who have been living in the United States, particularly in the South with and among Africans and African Americans might have adopted any African cultural characteristics. Furthermore, Johnson made no mention of Europeans outside of Great Britain who migrated to the United States and had to abandon their home culture, thereby placing all Europeans within the same category, distinct and separate from Africans. In Johnson’s perspective, the dominant race of Europeans overtook the weaker race of Africans and absorbed them into European culture.

While Johnson overlooked the major influence of African Americans on white folk music, he does take a surprisingly progressive view of some of the themes in African American music, having wrote that, “the Negro in his songs sometimes takes off his mask

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<sup>43</sup> Guy B. Johnson, *Negro Folk Songs in the South*, 2, Draft Writing, September 7, 1932, Guy B. Johnson Papers.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

and gives us the mean look which he would like to give us oftener if he dared.”<sup>45</sup> Unlike Scarborough, who wrote as if she believed race relations in the South were unhampered by any tension and that African Americans were more than happy to bow to her requests for music, Johnson understood that African Americans were putting on an act of complacency towards whites. Despite giving brief credit to black agency, Johnson ultimately neglected black influence in Appalachian folk music.

Folk-song collector and co-organizer of the White Top Folk Festival Annabel M. Buchanan gained national recognition in the early twentieth century for her work in the folk arts. As she wrote about folk songs, she echoed a similar theme as Scarborough and Johnson as she insisted that African Americans borrowed their music from whites. In an article titled “American Folk Hymnody,” Buchanan lamented, “Negro borrowings from whites sources are encountered continually, in the writer’s experience and that of other collectors.” Buchanan also seemed to agree with Johnson that the United States has only one ancestral heritage despite the many different nationalities present in the nation, and that is of the English, and “consequently our language and traditions are essentially English.” Buchanan differed slightly from Scarborough and Johnson, who conceded that African Americans had their own musical genres, such as spirituals, and instead argued that African Americans borrowed their spirituals from whites, as well. Arguably one of the most famous African American spirituals, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” was actually derived from the ancient Scottish ballad “Land of Rest” according to Buchanan.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>46</sup> Annabel M. Buchanan, “American Folk Hymnody,” 7, Annabel M. Buchanan Papers, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library.



Interestingly, located within Buchanan's papers at the Southern Folklife Collection is a letter written by Edward A. Steiner. Steiner was a professor of Christianity at Grinnell College, as well as a biographer of "Leo Tolstoi [sic]." Steiner discussed the melting pot culture of the United States and wrote "You are right in saying we are most influenced in our inner life, for good or evil by the negro. We dance to his rhythm. His songs are the folksongs of our masses. There is no glee club concert, hardly a program of music, without negro songs [sic]." An accompanying anonymous commentator noted, "I haven't sent this to John Powell . . . I doubt he would believe Dr. Steiner—which I do with reservations. But this is interesting!" Both the anonymous commentator and Steiner referenced John Powell, a noted musician and co-organizer of the White Top Folk Festival. Powell himself held stringent views of African American music, agreeing with fellow scholars that African Americans had borrowed their music, including spirituals, from whites. Powell argued that African American spirituals were adaptations of European music that African Americans heard during white camp meetings and revivals during the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, Buchanan shared the opinions of Steiner with Powell.

Of all of the musicians and folklorists discussed, none reached the levels of racism of composer John Powell. While Powell made no effort to hide his disdain for African Americans and their music, one of his most damning exclamations came from an article in the May 3, 1930 *Musical Courier* titled, "John Powell, Noted Pianist-Composer, Gives Views on Negro Music, Its Use and Discusses His New Piano Concerto." Powell offered one

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<sup>47</sup> Unknown to Annabel M. Buchanan, n.d.; and John Powell, "How America Can Develop a National Music: By Eminent American Pianist and Composer John Powell," *The Etude*, May 1927, 349 both in Annabel M. Buchanan Papers.

damning exclamation after another towards both African Americans and their music. He seemed extremely distressed at the interaction between whites and blacks, stating, “Not only have white composers made a travesty of the music of blacks, but the blacks themselves have been so influenced by white culture, and so spoilt by the much talk about them---creators of jazz, and so on, which they are not---that black and white are rapidly merging, musically speaking, into one.” The gentleman interviewing Powell seemed to take pleasure in goading Powell, causing him to become more annoyed throughout the interview. “What difference does it make?” he asked, which caused Powell to stream into a series of exclamatory remarks regarding African Americans. Powell appeared to believe fully in segregation between the two races, as he replied, “To write about the Negro, one must know about the Negro; to paint him in tone pictures one must paint him as he is, or rather, not as he is but as he was, as he racially was” and could be again free of the influence of white culture.<sup>48</sup>

While Powell discredited African American music as being “barren,” it is interesting to note that Powell understood that whites and blacks now interacted through music, although he seemed to be referencing more popular music, rather than folk songs. He also appeared to have an understanding that a distinction existed between black culture and white culture in the South. One wonders if Buchanan ever discussed the letter sent to her regarding the statements of Steiner to Powell. No doubt Powell would highly disagree with Steiner that white musicians collected a large portion of their music from African Americans. Given Powell’s reaction to his interviewer, one can hardly blame Buchanan if she did not forward

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<sup>48</sup> F. F., “John Powell, Noted Pianist-Composer, Gives Views on Negro Music, Its Use and Discusses His New Piano Concerto,” *Musical Courier*, May 3, 1930, Buchanan Papers.

the letter to Powell.<sup>49</sup> Through the eyes of scholars such as Scarborough and Powell, it appears as though the degree of racism in southern Appalachian varied, reflecting racial trends concurrent with the rest of the nation.

Within the scholarship of folk music in the early twentieth century, scholars often had clear divisions between what they considered white forms of music and what they considered black forms of music, only supporting the idea that blacks borrowed heavily from whites. Outside this scholarship, and far more visible to the public eye, another form of silencing occurred due to the rise in folk music festivals. Folk music festivals organized in the southern Appalachian region in the early twentieth century often used the region's relatively newfound popularity as an Anglo-Saxon promise land to advertise authentic folk music with little to no recognition of black influence.

Folk music festivals in the southern Appalachians played into the region's stereotype of an isolated mountain of Anglo-Saxon descendents when they organized and implemented festivals that denied African Americans the right to play or attend, while also advertising an event that celebrated Anglo-Saxon music and made no mention of African Americans. As noted earlier, in the late nineteenth century, people throughout the United States had begun to study the Appalachian region as a distinct region in the country. Popular culture began to depict whites in the Appalachians as a pure strain of Anglo-Saxons that had yet to pollute their ethnic identity by mixing with foreigners. The American Folklore Society, established in 1889, dedicated a large portion of its existence to studying the unique region. Folk music

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

festival organizers embraced the stereotype of the Appalachians as a unique and isolated region as they depicted their festivals playing as folk music from their English ancestors.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known folk music festival organized in the early twentieth century was the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival (MDFF), an offshoot of the earlier Rhododendron Festival. Located in Asheville, North Carolina, Bascom Lamar Lunsford organized the MDFF in conjunction with the Rhododendron Festival in 1928, but the two separated in 1930 into two different festivals. The Asheville Chamber of Commerce, along with Lunsford, organized the original festival as a way to both honor rural folk music and promote tourism. The Asheville Chamber of Commerce first formulated the idea for the Rhododendron Festival, exhibiting stereotypes of the region's unique image. After the festival failed to thrive following the stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent Depression, festival organizers discontinued the Rhododendron Festival during World War II, while the MDFF continues to thrive to this day.<sup>51</sup>

While organizing the MDFF, Lunsford held very specific ideas as to how the festival should be conducted, adhering to what he considered authentic and respectable mountain folk music. Lunsford did not care much about the economic benefit behind the festival, but rather Lunsford's "business was to draw attention to the fine cultural values of our traditional music and our dancing and the fine honor of our people. I (Lunsford) was trying to perpetuate the real, true cultural worth of the mountain people."<sup>52</sup> Those around him first persuaded

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<sup>50</sup> Nina Silber, "'What Does America Need So Much As Americans?': Race and Northern Reconciliation with Southern Appalachia, 1870-1900," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John Inscoe (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 250.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 42-44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Lunsford to allow electric instruments and dancers to wear toe taps on their shoes, items soon banned from the festival as Lunsford pushed for an authentic experience. For Lunsford, authenticity followed the narrative of folk music as written by his fellow scholars; mountain people of different economic classes, gender, instruments, and styles of dance were welcome, but only if they were white and behaved respectably.<sup>53</sup>

A souvenir book celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the MDFF related the historical narrative of the festival's early days. This narrative claimed that Lunsford worried that "mountain music was dying out" and organized the festival "to give the people back up in coves a chance to be heard." Even in the late 1970s, however, echoes of the popular myth that permeated in earlier years of cultural isolation and racial purity can be seen in the souvenir book: "The songs sung and dances danced that evening were echoes of centuries of Scottish, English, and Irish heritage that had been kept pure in the valleys and coves between the Great Smokies and the Blue Ridge. It was the unwritten musical tradition handed down from generation to generation for centuries."<sup>54</sup> From Lunsford's perspective, mountain music belonged to whites and did not include African Americans or outside white musicians.

Why did Lunsford not allow African Americans to perform at the MDFF? In later years of the 1940s, Lunsford helped organize the Carolina Folk Festival at Chapel Hill and the State Fair Festival held in Raleigh. In both festivals, Lunsford invited African Americans to perform. Yet during the same time, he still did not allow African Americans to perform at

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<sup>53</sup> Scarborough spent time with Lunsford while conducting research for *A Song Catcher in the Southern Mountains*; see Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 98.

<sup>54</sup> "Fifty years of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival," Asheville Chamber of Commerce, 1977, Festival Files, North Carolina, Southern Folklife Collection.

the MDFF.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps Lunsford felt audiences in Asheville would not attend a folk music festival that allowed African American performers. Or perhaps his racial beliefs did not allow him to accept African Americans in his home festival. Perhaps no African Americans agreed to perform in the Appalachian region. The most likely conjecture is that Lunsford did not feel that African Americans performed *true* mountain music. The MDFF celebrated Anglo-Saxon heritage and authentic music, and these beliefs held little room for the acceptance of African Americans. Lunsford was extremely cautious in presenting a realistic festival that held true to mountain folk music. Those who did not depict mountain folk music in an accurate or flattering way were not welcome. Lunsford held no qualms in refusing to allow even celebrated white musicians to perform at the MDFF and was known to ask people to leave the stage if he felt they behaved disrespectfully.<sup>56</sup> With his ideas concerning what constituted authentic mountain folk music, Lunsford helped to place African American folk musicians in the southern Appalachians outside the realm of real mountain music.

As Lunsford organized the MDFF, John Powell and Annabel Buchanan, with the help of business manager John Blakemore, organized a similar festival called the White Top Folk Festival (WTFF) in the western mountains of Virginia. Like the MDFF, the WTFF specialized in highlighting traditional folk music and dancing of the Appalachian region, but it also included literature and folklore. The WTFF rose to national prominence in 1933 when Eleanor Roosevelt attended the festival at the invitation of Buchanan. Unfortunately, the

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<sup>55</sup> Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 98.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66. Jones notes that Lunsford once kicked musician Roger Sprung off the stage with various explanations as to why, such as a middle-class performer mocking lower-class citizens by wearing blue jeans, or the fact that Sprung was a true outsider, hailing from the state of New York. In another instance Lunsford treated musician Mike Seeger “curtly,” and Jones attributes this to Lunsford becoming more weary of outsiders who held what he perceived as radical ideas.

WTFF did not survive through the decades, as lack of appropriate space on the mountain-top and poor road conditions leading to the festival site, as well as disagreements between Buchanan and Blakemore, led to the demise of the festival. By the early 1940s, the festival had closed for good. The festival certainly did not close its doors for lack of advertising effort on the part of Buchanan. Her remaining papers located at the Southern Folklife Collection consist of multiple press releases sent out to news organizations and magazines throughout the East Coast, although her involvement did dwindle following the death of her husband in the late 1930s. In these press releases and articles written about WTFF, the true purpose of the festival as a celebration of Anglo-Saxon heritage comes to light.<sup>57</sup>

While the MDFF may have embraced the mountain's supposed European heritage and ignored any influence African Americans had on folk music, the WTFF depended much more heavily on the advertisement of the festival's focus on Anglo-Saxon heritage, with no mention of black participation. In one of the more elaborate articles detailing the WTFF located within *Holland's: The Magazine of the South*, the writer described the White Top Mountain as "near the center of the region which might be called the heart of the Appalachians Practically all of its inhabitants are pure-blooded Anglo-Saxons, descendents of the original English, Scottish, and Irish settlers."<sup>58</sup> As the music magazine described the citizens surrounding White Top, they were "Wrought out of their lives and religion and that of their ancestors who came from England, Ireland, Scotland, or Wales, some 200 years ago,

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<sup>57</sup> Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers, Southern Folklife Collection, and David E. Whisnant, "The White Top Folk Festival: What We Have (Not) Learned," Presented to the Virginia Highlands Festival, Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Abingdon, Virginia, August 6, 1998, 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers, "A Folk Festival Above the Clouds," in *Holland's: The Magazine of the South*, August 1933, 18.

this ancient folk music is preserved in all of its purity and is held as inviolate as their faith in God. Remaining in the fastness of their beloved mountains, these people are still untouched . . .”<sup>59</sup> In this light, the WTFF is seen as a mecca for white Americans interested in preserving their authentic heritage, which appeared to slowly be fading away in the face of what Buchanan and others considered more lowly forms of music.<sup>60</sup>

Like the MDFF, the WTFF held strict standards regarding the respectability of the music played and those in attendance. According to a press release regarding the WTFF, “the only requirements being that contribution must be traditional, of real-worth (no ‘hill-billy music permitted’), and presented in traditional manner.”<sup>61</sup> No doubt Buchanan echoed Lunsford’s opinion regarding respectable music, writing about folk-music in the United States: “There is a great mass of miscellaneous compositions arising from all over America . . . from our street corners, our coal mines, even from our jails, penitentiaries and slums. . . . Many, perhaps most of these. . . . are vulgar, even degrading in character and are not to be considered in the same class with traditional or semi-traditional folksong.”<sup>62</sup> Part of the image of respectability may have included not allowing any African Americans to perform or attend. One of the main problems with the WTFF (which lasted for roughly a decade) was the effort of Powell in helping to organize it. Here it becomes evident that Powell’s racism

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<sup>59</sup> Article clipping from *Tempo: A Magazine for Music Lovers and For Those Who Want to Know More About Music*, October 1934, Vol. 1, No. 10, 22. Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Buchanan also wrote articles regarding different forms of folk music, often showing disdain for genres such as “railroad songs” and “hill-billy” music.” Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers, “Folk-Music Types in America,” article written by Buchanan, page 7; “National Federation of Music Clubs, Headquarters News Service-Immediate Release, March 15, 1935,” Press Release for the White Top Folk Festival, Southern Folklife Collection.

<sup>61</sup> Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers, “National Federation of Music Clubs,” Press Release, March 15, 1935.

<sup>62</sup> Annabel Morris Buchanan Papers, “Folk-Music Types in America,” article written by Buchanan, 7-8.



extended beyond the world of music. In 1922, Powell formed the “Anglo-Saxon Club of America” in Richmond, Virginia, which allowed limited membership to white males and endorsed Virginia’s Racial Integrity Law of 1923. Similarly, the folk festival allowed only three African Americans to attend: a former family servant of Roosevelt and her two cooks. No black musicians were allowed to perform, despite the fact that surrounding counties near White Top Mountain had a population of around three thousand African Americans. While Powell’s extreme prejudice clearly influenced who was allowed to perform and attend, it does not appear that Buchanan or Blakemore protested against these restrictions.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the efforts of Lunsford, Scarborough, Johnson, Buchanan, and Powell, the black influence on folk music in the southern mountains can be found through the instruments used, songs sung, and folk tales told to scholars. In *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*, Cecelia Conway explores the transmission of the banjo, a traditional African instrument, as it was introduced and developed in the southern Appalachia. By focusing on the method of playing styles and demonstrating how whites adopted the African American version of downstroking, Conway proves that the transmission of the banjo from African American use to white use occurred prior to the Civil War.<sup>64</sup> One prime and well-noted example is the folk song “John Henry,” which became popular in Appalachian folk music and describes a black coal miner in the Appalachians.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> David E. Whisnant, “The White Top Folk Festival: What We Have (Not) Learned,” 5-6 and David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

<sup>64</sup> Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 214-217) and Deborah J. Thompson, “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music,” *GeoJournal* 65, No. 1-2 (2006): 71.

In the 1930s, folklorist Lawrence Gellert traveled throughout southern Appalachian and compiled a work titled “One Time I’shman,” a collection of African American characterizations of the Irish. Through these tales, it becomes evident that African Americans and the Scots-Irish had close interaction with one another. These tales discuss African Americans and Irish working together on the railroad and depict the Irish as haters of England, always intoxicated, unable to read, and nearly social equals with African Americans. Interestingly, it appears that in this collection of folk tales, African Americans labeled the Irish with the same demeaning stereotypes that whites usually reserved for blacks. The tales also include various song lyrics, but it is not clear if African Americans included these songs in their folk tales or if Gellert created the songs for his manuscript.<sup>66</sup>

As Lunsford studied music in the southern Appalachians, he traveled throughout the region and collected music from its inhabitants, including black musicians. Lunsford’s personal papers include songs gathered from African American schools and churches in the mountains and songs that African American children had written for him.<sup>67</sup> Still, while Lunsford may not have exhibited more extreme forms of racial prejudice, he did perpetuate racism throughout his work in folk music. He performed the song “Speaking the Truth” using the word “nigger.”<sup>68</sup> Both “Black Jack Davy” and “The Old Man Lived Under a Hill,” songs sung by Lunsford, have similar stories of a woman, presumably white, whom a black male takes away.

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<sup>66</sup> Lawrence Gellert, “Tales of One Time I’shman: told by Southern Negroes,” Unpublished Manuscript, Lawrence Gellert Collection, Southern Folklife Collection.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> In later years, Lunsford would perform the song without racial slurs. *Ibid.*, 98.

“Black Jack Davy” came riding on his horse and happened upon a beautiful girl of sixteen who was already married to another man. Promised riches, the girl agreed to run away with Black Jack Davy. When her husband discovered his wife has left him, he searched for the couple and, upon finally finding them, appealed to his wife to return home. She refused him, saying “Last night as I slept on long feather bed/Between my husband and baby/But I’ll sleep tonight on the cold, cold, ground/Beside my Black Jack Davy.”<sup>69</sup>

The song “The Old Man Lived Under a Hill” recounts the humorous tale of Satan who comes for the farmer’s wife and takes her back to hell with him. After time spent in hell with the wife, Satan realized he was no match for her as she bashed in the brains of his imps, and he returned her to her husband. In both English and Scottish versions, as well as those found in twentieth-century Appalachia, Satan is the primary character. Lunsford, however, did not refer to Satan directly.<sup>70</sup> Lunsford’s version instead reads “The Old Black Man came creepin up the hill/ Sayin’ ‘One of your family I’m goin to steal.’” While reference to “Old Black Man” could be justified as a reference to the Devil the double meaning was certainly intentional. While “Black Jack Davy” and “The Old Man Lived under a Hill” have far different story lines, both echoed common racial fears of the Jim Crow era: warning white females about abduction by black males and implying the sexual threat.<sup>71</sup> Whether Lunsford

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>71</sup> See Glenda Gilmore for a interesting look into the sexualization of African American males in 1898, Glenda E. Gilmore, “Murder, Memory, and the Flight of the Incubus,” in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, ed. David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 73-93; see also, Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).; Lunsford, 193, 199.

consciously sang these and other songs to intentionally allude to racial tensions is unknown, but he definitely reflected the racial context of his era and southern Appalachia.<sup>72</sup>

It was in the racialized context of Appalachian music that made Lesley Riddle, song-catcher and guitar influence of The Carter Family, all the more notable. In the 1960s, folklorist Mike Seeger tracked down Riddle and studied his work extensively before recording “Step by Step: Lesley Riddle Meets the Carter Family” in 1993.<sup>73</sup> Riddle’s untold story inspired John Doyle to help start the nonprofit Traditional Voices Group in 1976, dedicated to preserving and promoting the arts in North Carolina’s Mitchell and Yancy counties.<sup>74</sup> In 2008, an annual festival began in Burnsville dedicated to highlighting Riddle’s life and music, aptly titled RiddleFest.<sup>75</sup> Although Riddle passed away in 2009, a movement has begun to have him inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame.<sup>76</sup>

More recently, newcomers like the Carolina Chocolate Drops (CCD) have given voice to black folk musicians. Although their musical influence is far more of a Piedmont-style rather than a purely Appalachian style, their music contains inspiration from both

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<sup>72</sup> In its origins, “Black Jack Davy” was sung in England and Scotland with the title “The Gypsy Laddie.” It changed to “Black Jack Davy” in the United States. Cecil Sharp includes versions of the song from the South that specifically allude to an African American male stealing the young wife. Cecil J. Sharpe, collector, and Maud Karpeles, ed., *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1932; reprint, NY: Oxford University Press, 1973), 233, 237. “The Old Man Lived Under a Hill” is commonly referred to as “The Farmer’s Curst Wife.” The version Lunsford sings is the only one that refers to “The Old Black Man” as opposed to the devil. Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 193.

<sup>73</sup> Hurley, “Rediscovering Riddle,” 25.

<sup>74</sup> Toe River Arts Council, <<http://www.toeriverarts.org/index.shtml>> (accessed on February 10, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Traditional Voices Group, <[http://www.tvgn.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=section&id=4&Itemid=27](http://www.tvgn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=4&Itemid=27)> (accessed on February 10, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame, <<http://www.wilkeshheritagemuseum.com/BRMHOF/induction.html>> (accessed on February 10, 2012). So far this movement has been fruitless. At the writing of this paper, only one African American, Etta Baker, has been inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame.

locations. The group formed after meeting during the 2005 Black Banjo Gathering at Appalachian State University in Boone, a conference that focused on celebrating black musicians and educating participants about the history of African Americans in folk music.<sup>77</sup> After only six short years together, the CCD had upstaged veterans and white musicians in order to win a Grammy in the Best Traditional Folk Album category.

African Americans' participation in folk music festivals have forced organizers to enlarge their heritage claims. In celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the MDFF, a pamphlet described the festival as echoing "centuries of Scottish, English, Irish, Cherokee, and African heritage found in the valleys and coves between the Great Smokies and the Blue Ridge Mountains."<sup>78</sup> This declaration, embracing others living in the mountain range besides whites, was a far cry from the glorification of "pure-blooded Anglo-Saxons" found in the fiftieth anniversary material. A more recent addition to the folk music festivals located within southern Appalachia, Merlefest, has included festival guests of multiple races, nationalities, and ethnicities since its inception in 1988.<sup>79</sup> Black musicians routinely participate in folk music festivals, although their numbers remain far less than that of white musicians.

In the early twentieth century, white musicians living in the southern mountains would not have found it unusual to hear black musicians playing similar music. As musicians and scholars such as Lunsford, Scarborough, and Johnson demonstrated, musical interaction between the two races was neither particularly unexpected nor uncommon. Lesley Riddle's

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<sup>77</sup> "Carolina Chocolate Drops," <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>> (accessed on February 10, 2012) and "Black Banjo Gathering," <<http://www.rhisong.com/blackbanjo/gathering.html>> (accessed on April 25, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Pamphlet, 2002, Southern Folklife Collection.

<sup>79</sup> Amber Arnder, Marketing Technician with Wilkes Community College, Message to author.

story highlights how music worked as avenue through which whites and blacks worked together. Still, Riddle's life also exposes how black musicians failed to receive rightful recognition for their accomplishments--how they remained silenced.

## CHAPTER 2

**Civilizing the Savage Native: Silences Within Cherokee Folk Music**

Cherokee medicine man and cultural preserver Walker Calhoun has received numerous awards in his lifetime. In 1988, at the gathering of the Eastern and Western Bands of Cherokee, he received the Sequoyah Award for recognition of his contributions to the Cherokee peoples. In 1990, the North Carolina Arts Council presented Calhoun with the North Carolina Folk Heritage award for teaching and preserving traditional Cherokee heritage of the Eastern Band. Finally, in 1992, he received the National Folk Heritage Award from the National Endowments of the Arts.<sup>80</sup> He has spent his life ensuring that the Eastern Band of Cherokee sustain their traditions. Yet as a child, he faced pressure to embrace the customs and traditions of white culture. While attending school, Calhoun's teachers punished the students if they used the Cherokee language. He quit attending school at the age of nine and, by the 1940s, began his work ensuring that his tribe's customs were not forgotten by future generations.

The Cherokee people are an unique tribe of American Indians. Even prior to their expulsion from the southeast during the 1830s, they had worked to assimilate to American culture, hoping to ensure their survival. During the removal, some Cherokee managed to stay

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<sup>80</sup> "Walker Calhoun," *Cherokee Heritage Trails*, <<http://www.cherokeeheritagetrails.org/elderart/eld02.html>> (accessed on March 5, 2012), "Walker Calhoun," *National Endowment for the Arts*, <[http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/fellow.php?id=1992\\_03&type=bi](http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/fellow.php?id=1992_03&type=bi)> (accessed on March 5, 2012), and Ted Olsen, "Walker Calhoun: Cherokee Song and Dance Man," in *Appalachian Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (fall, 1995), 76. Exact dates regarding Calhoun are conflicting. Some report his year of birth as 1915, while others list 1919. In his interview with Ted Olsen, he states he stopped attending school at the age of nine, while other sources state he started attending school at the age of twelve. "Oral History of the Cherokee," *Indian Country Diaries*, <<http://www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history/oral1.html>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

in the East, forming the Eastern Band in western North Carolina. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Eastern Band worked with federal and state governments to ensure tribal success and survival. Chief Nimrod Jarrett Smith obtained a corporate charter for the tribe in 1889, allowing them to conduct business and take cases to court, giving the tribe greater security. Still, they were not American citizens, remaining unable to vote.<sup>81</sup> In the early twentieth century, this changed as both national tribal leaders, as well as local Cherokee leaders, pushed for further assimilation into white culture. Assimilation in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries threatened Cherokee culture, particularly music and dance.

Beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, tribal councils began to heavily push Indian reform in the form of civilization efforts. One of the greater consequences of the reform efforts was the widespread development of English speaking schools that native children were forced to attend. During the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1884, reformers stated: “The Indian must have a knowledge of the English language, that he may associate with his white neighbors and transact business as they do . . . He must have a Christian education to enable him to perform the duties of the family, the State, and the Church.”<sup>82</sup> The primary goal of educating Indians was to ensure they were independent of the tribe and self-functioning. This independence was based around teaching both academic subjects, as well as manual labor. In a seeming nod to the Protestant work ethic, the superintendent of Indian schools, Estelle Reed, stated, “A civilization without the elements of labor in it rests on a

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<sup>81</sup> Theda Perdue, *Native Carolinians: The Indians of North Carolina* (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, 1993), 43 and John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>82</sup> “Lake Mohonk Conference Proceedings,” 1884, p. 14, in Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, Vol. II (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 687.



foundation of sand.”<sup>83</sup> Around the turn of the twentieth century, education reformers began to push for Native American children to stop attending boarding or reservation schools and enter public schools with white children. Reformers felt this push into public education was the final step for native children in the process of assimilation. This movement died by the 1920s, with low attendance and success rates for Indian children in public schools and education once again centered on isolated native-only schools.<sup>84</sup>

In Cherokee, the mode of education for children was a boarding school, founded in 1884, or attending one of the tribe’s four day schools scattered throughout its area. Following the goal of educating through manual labor, the Cherokee schools spent half of the day with instruction in academic matters and the remainder of the day spent engaging in domestic skills for female students and male students improving their agricultural and industrial skills.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of the skill or subject being taught to the students, the only acceptable language was English. Many Cherokee related tales of the strict discipline at the schools they attended, including the forced use of the English language. Apparent in their recollections is the division in the Cherokee community between families who encouraged the use of English and those who discouraged its use. Many parents forced their children to learn English, either out of the hope their children would have a better chance of success if they knew English or to avoid trouble from those such as Christian pastors in the tribe.<sup>86</sup> Walker Calhoun provided further perspective on the assimilation techniques conducted in Cherokee schools, stating

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<sup>83</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, Vol. II, 814.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 823-825.

<sup>85</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Michael J. Zogry, “Enduring Voices Project,” Interviews with Goingback Chiltoskey, November 3, 1997, Amy Grant Walker, March 12, 1998, and Mabelle McDonald, November 1, 1997.

“Looking back on it now, I think the schools and the schoolteachers were trying to turn us against our old ways . . . The teachers were white people, and they would teach us in English, and before class would start they would lead prayers in English.”<sup>87</sup> This loss of language is especially note-worthy considering it had only been a few short decades earlier that James Mooney had visited the Cherokee as a representative of the Bureau of American Ethnography of the Smithsonian Institute. He published his findings in 1900 on the Cherokee in one of the first comprehensive studies of the tribe, *Myths of the Cherokee*. Here Mooney described the conditions of the Cherokee, including, “In literary ability they may even be said to surpass them, as in addition to the result of nearly twenty years of school work among the younger people, nearly all of the men and women can read and write their own language.”<sup>88</sup>

The assimilation desired through the use of education negatively impacted traditional Cherokee culture, particularly music. The schools did not allow the use of Cherokee language, nor did they allow Cherokee songs or dances to be performed. Yet the loss of tradition goes beyond simply music in many ways. Instruction in schools “included the shunning of tribal affiliations; forbidding the use of tribal languages; dressing and grooming the children to look as “non-Indian” as possible; teaching jingoistic American history; . . . and subsuming their religious life into strict interpretations of Christianity.”<sup>89</sup> Samples of the questions asked to native students at the Albuquerque Indian School in 1911 included “Tell about the voyage of Columbus and why he wished to go,” as well as, “Tell what a good

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<sup>87</sup> Ted Olson, “Walker Calhoun: Cherokee Song and Dance Man,” in *Appalachian Journal* 23, No. 1, (Fall 1995): 76.

<sup>88</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (1900 reprn., NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 181.

<sup>89</sup> John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 4.

citizen is and what he does.”<sup>90</sup> Schools allowed for the teaching of traditional culture such as basket-weaving and other crafts, but this was often done in order to teach sustainable life skills to students in order that they might sell their goods to white citizens.

Throughout the early 1920s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) issued forth declarations discouraging traditional dance. “Circular 1665” stated that “The sundance and all other similar dances and so called religious ceremonies are considered ‘Indian Offenses’ under existing regulations and corrective penalties are provided.” Additional statements to Circular 1665 were sent forth two years later: the dances could not be performed through the months of March, April, June, July, and August, and no one under the age of fifty was allowed to watch or perform. The Commissioner of the Bureau requested that Indians give up the dances of their free will, rather than force the BIA to take up other cautionary measures.<sup>91</sup>

In Cherokee, this loss of some forms of culture such as native language, song and dance, and even traditional garb strike an interesting comparison to the economic development behind other forms of culture. In 1902, the superintendent of education within the BIA posed a query regarding the economic longevity of crafts, such as basketry. The early years of the twentieth century had already seen a dramatic reduction in skills such as spinning and weaving, as tribal members reverted to a money economy and purchased their clothing. The tribe underwent a quick transformation from a diminishing craft knowledge to a burgeoning economic activity with the increased focus on basket and pottery making. With

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<sup>90</sup> Prucha’s footnotes explains the origins of these questions: “These came from an interesting packet of documents dealing with examinations at the schools and with criticism of the questions and of the grading of the answers made by officials of the Indian Office,” OIA, Office File of Hervey B. Pears, entry no. 722 in Prucha, *The Great Father*, Vol. II, Footnote 62, 840.

<sup>91</sup> Sierra Nevada Virtual Museum, “Cultural History: Native Americans,” <<http://www.sierranavadavirtualmuseum.com/docs/galleries/history/culture/native.htm>> (accessed on January 7, 2012).

the opening of Asheville's Grove Park Inn in 1913, which heavily catered to tourists, the Cherokee could sell all of the baskets they made exclusively to the inn and were guaranteed of the item being sold.<sup>92</sup> The Cherokee understood the economic possibilities that selling handicrafts posed to their tribe and as early as 1912, a circular from the Indian Offices began to suggest holding a fair each year to showcase such craftwork. In a short span of years, the fair had outgrown its location in the reservation and the tribe appropriated \$500 to build an exhibition hall.<sup>93</sup>

It is little wonder that the Cherokee found economic profit in selling traditional wares to white tourists. White tourists flocked to the Appalachian region in order to discover an authentic America, filled with pure a Anglo-Saxon heritage that had replaced that of the Cherokee Indians, who had seemingly "vanished".<sup>94</sup> "Authentic" Indian crafts evidenced what had been lost to American expansion. Around the time of the First World War, Americans became fascinated with the ideas of "tradition" and "folk." By the 1930s, around the time when the Great Smoky Mountain National Park was moving from idea to reality, "Americans enthusiastically collected, presented, marketed, and consumed the nation's folkways, past and present."<sup>95</sup> While white Appalachians marketed and sold their "Appalachian heritage," Cherokees also did the same.

For the Cherokee who experienced this new game of commoditization in the early twentieth century, the ramifications extended beyond simple economic growth. Appalachian

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<sup>92</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 31-32.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

residents selling their goods to tourists as “authentic” or “traditional” were themselves influenced by the tourists. Eventually, “mountain craft traditions were shaped not only by local culture, but also by reformers from outside the region, by the government, by the marketplace, and by middle-class consumerism.”<sup>96</sup>

The Cherokee were equally influenced by outside forces. By conducting fairs, the Cherokee interacted more heavily with the world outside of their nation, yet the fair allowed for cultural continuity by sparking renewed interest in native crafts and activities.<sup>97</sup> The silencing of Cherokee folk music is heavily connected to assimilation pressures set forth by the BIA and missionary schools within Cherokee.

The silencing of Cherokee folk music in the Appalachians, therefore, can be linked to two different, yet interrelated factors: First, prior to white tourists descending upon the Eastern Band, political leaders within both the Cherokee tribe, as well as the BIA encouraged the Cherokee to stop their dances and songs as a method of assimilating into white society. Second, with the introduction of white tourism into the area, and especially as the Great Smoky Mountain National Park garnered increased attention, the Cherokee began to seize opportunities to profit from the tourism, including selling the image of the “savage native” to white tourists. While songs and dancing rituals were used to sell the image in the public realm, these ceremonies often held inauthentic elements in order to cater to what white tourists considered “traditional” Native Americanism.

The man most responsible for the revival of Native American culture, particularly in music, is John Collier. Born in 1884 to white parents of Southern and New England

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>97</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 32.

backgrounds, Collier did not begin his life with a profound interest in Native American rights. Throughout his early adult years, he worked in a number of social agencies throughout New York before moving to California, where he discovered the Pueblo Indians, and eventually, began to fight against the BIA's policy of assimilation, including fighting for the rights of the Pueblo to embrace their traditional dances. Collier did not believe in assimilation, arguing instead that it "must be replaced by [policies] that [respect] Indians as human beings with a dignity and culture of their own."<sup>98</sup> With help from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Collier became commissioner of the Bureau in 1933 and, upon his swearing-in, Collier made it clear that he planned "indirect administration" over native tribes to decrease the BIA's paternalism and to extend rights to natives. Only a few short months later, Collier instigated his most controversial reforms. The first order, titled "Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture" dictated the "fullest constitutional liberty, in all matters affecting religion, conscience, and culture exist for all Indians" and declared that an "'affirmative, appreciative attitude' toward native heritage was desired in the Indian Service." The second order directed itself against white missionaries in Native American schools and prohibited mandatory attendance at religious services and allowed for any denomination of religion the right to use the facilities at boarding schools for religious instruction.<sup>99</sup>

Following Collier's declarations, traditional music became more important in tribal culture once again. At the same time traditional Cherokee music became more important,

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<sup>98</sup> Anne Mitchell, "Culture, History, and Development on the Qualla Boundary: The Eastern Cherokees and the Blue Ridge Parkway, 1935-1940," in *Appalachian Journal* 24, No. 2 (Winter 1997): 149-150.

<sup>99</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father Vol. II*, 802-804, and Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1977), 4-25, 113-118, 130-132.

tribal members also began to embrace white folk music, although Cherokee folk music did little to influence white folk music.<sup>100</sup> There is little doubt that the Cherokee experienced heavy influence in their music from white folk music. In the eighteenth century, the Cherokee began to use the fiddle after encountering it from Scottish and English traders in the area.<sup>101</sup>

By the twentieth-century, the instrument was fairly popular in the Indian community. Brothers Osey and Ernest Helton recorded their music in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Born to a Cherokee father and Irish mother in eastern Tennessee, the brothers were separated following the death of their parents. James Patton adopted Ernest and taught him how to play the banjo, guitar, and Hawaiian guitar. Osey learned his skill at the fiddle from a former slave who worked with his father at a whiskey distillery. Ernest eventually reunited with his brother Osey and they moved to western North Carolina in their adult years.<sup>102</sup> They became the most “professionally active” fiddlers of the era, performing at Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, as well as the Old-Time Fiddler’s Convention in Knoxville, Tennessee. In addition to their playing at folk festivals throughout the southeast, they also performed regularly on WWNC-Asheville once the station began to broadcast in 1927.<sup>103</sup> The Helton brothers proved a rarity at Lunsford’s

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<sup>100</sup> Deborah J. Thompson, “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music,” *GeoJournal* 65, No. 1-2, (2006): 70.

<sup>101</sup> “Cherokee Music,” *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, 2012, <<http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/entry.php?rec=51>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>102</sup> Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 49 and “Osey and Ernest Helton: String-Band Musicians,” *Blue Ridge National Heritage Area*, <<http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/osey-and-ernest-helton>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, 49.

festival, as he seldom featured anyone who was not a white folk musician.<sup>104</sup> In the 1940s, the brothers recorded their songs for folklorist Alan Lomax.<sup>105</sup> Osey eventually earned his living as a professional musician, but died in 1942. His brother worked various jobs and died in 1979.<sup>106</sup>

Similar to the Helton brothers, Manco Sneed also became famous for his fiddle playing in western North Carolina. Born in 1885 to half-Cherokee John Sneed and Sarah Lovin Sneed, the Sneed family moved from Graham Country, North Carolina to the Qualla Boundary when Manco was a teenager. According to his daughter, the old time fiddlers in western North Carolina remember him as the “Indian fiddler” and he learned his skill at the fiddle from Dedrick Harris, a noted fiddle player who recorded his tunes in the 1920s.<sup>107</sup> Sneed did not pursue his music professionally like Osey Helton, but he played for the dance teams at the Cherokee fair and was occasionally invited to play at Lunsford’s music festival. His family remembers him for his ability to play the fiddle for hours without repeating a single tune.<sup>108</sup>

The Cherokee also adopted Christian hymns and other gospel songs in their music repertoire, as well. “Amazing Grace” is a particularly popular hymn in the Cherokee nation. Songs such as “Amazing Grace” and other hymns were translated from English into the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>105</sup> Bob Carlin, “Helton Brothers/J.D. Harris Discography,” *The Old Time Herald*, Vol. 10, No. 10, Web Exclusive, <[http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back\\_issues/volume-10/10-10/heltons-discography.html](http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-10/10-10/heltons-discography.html)> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> “Osey and Ernest Helton,” *Blue Ridge National Heritage Area*.

<sup>107</sup> Dakota Brewer, “Manco Sneed,” The Field Recorders’ Collective, <[http://www.fieldrecorder.com/docs/notes/sneed\\_brewer.htm](http://www.fieldrecorder.com/docs/notes/sneed_brewer.htm)> (accessed on March 5, 2012) and Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Brewer, “Manco Sneed,” and “Manco Sneed: Old-Time Fiddler,” Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, <<http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/manco-sneed>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).



Cherokee language. In the late 1990s, Emeline Cucumber and Lucy Riley sang “Away in a Manger” in their native tongue.<sup>109</sup> Although the tribe has experienced a decline in knowledge of the Cherokee language, hymns and gospel songs are often still sung in Cherokee.<sup>110</sup>

The two men most responsible for bringing back Cherokee voices in folk music were Will West Long and Walker Calhoun. Long was born around 1870 to the son of a Cherokee Baptist preacher and the mother of a prominent traditionalist family. His mother’s brother, Swimmer (also known as A’yun’ini), instructed him in tribal lore. Long attended Trinity College and learned to read and write English, as well as Cherokee syllabary.<sup>111</sup> In 1887, James Mooney moved to the tribe and conducted his research for three years, with the help of Swimmer and Long. Swimmer provided Mooney with three-fourths of the material he published in *Myths of the Cherokee*.<sup>112</sup> Mooney also hired Long to work as an interpreter and manuscript copier and he became close friends with Long. At the urging of Mooney, Long continued his studies at the Hampton Institute and lived in various areas of New England for ten years, before returning to Qualla Boundary in 1904.<sup>113</sup>

Upon his return to the Cherokee nation, Long began working in earnest to collect traditional Cherokee culture. Long lived in two different worlds, that of the modern Cherokee who were embracing white culture and that of the traditional Cherokee who rejected change.<sup>114</sup> Long continued to learn the tribe’s traditions, and he shared this tradition with outsiders. His time with Mooney had garnered an appreciation for outsiders, in particular the

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<sup>109</sup> Emeline Cucumber and Lucy Riley interview to Michael J. Zogry, “Enduring Voices Project Collection,” Southern Historical Collection.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, 37.

<sup>111</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 70-71.

<sup>112</sup> Williams, *Appalachia*, 213.

<sup>113</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 70-71.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

scholars that began to visit Qualla Boundary with more frequency in the early twentieth century. Long encouraged his neighbors to perform ancient dance ceremonies for both ethnographers and tourists, and it was thanks to Long that many of these ceremonies have been recorded.<sup>115</sup> Under Long's direction the entirety of Cherokee ceremonial cycle was presented to scholars for study and recording. Many of these rituals had not been performed since the 1880s, as the tribe assimilated into white culture.<sup>116</sup> In addition to teaching Cherokee song and dance to tribal outsiders, Long also transmitted traditional knowledge to the younger generation in Cherokee, including to his nephew Walker Calhoun. Long died in 1947, but at the time of his death, he was still pursuing his work in collecting Cherokee traditions, working on translations of conjurer books with Frank G. Speck, writing a Cherokee dictionary with George Myers Stephens, and conducting research for a large-scale Cherokee ethnobotany study.<sup>117</sup>

Following Long's death, Walker Calhoun began to continue his uncle's work in preserving traditional Cherokee culture that was slipping away. Born circa 1915, Calhoun dropped out of school at an early age and did not become proficient in English until serving in the military in World War II. Calhoun learned Cherokee ceremonial song and dance from his uncle Long, but did not dedicate himself to performing and teaching the dances and songs to Cherokee youth until the 1980s. According to Calhoun, "I began to think about everything I learned from Will West. I knew that no one was performing these songs and dances anymore, and I realized that many Cherokee had never known them. So I decided I should

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 59, 73.

<sup>116</sup> John Whitthoft, "Will West Long: Cherokee Informant," *American Anthropologist* 50, No. 2 (Apr.-Jun. 1948): 358.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 359.

teach the songs and dances to all the kids.”<sup>118</sup> Calhoun then began teaching his ten children, twenty-five grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren the songs and dances he remembered, as well as the other children throughout the tribe. Calhoun considers the youngest children the easiest to teach and he formed the Raven Rock Dancers comprised of the youth.<sup>119</sup> The popularity of Calhoun’s performances spread, and he even taught some of the dances to members of the Western Band of Cherokee from Oklahoma. His songs were eventually recorded for commercial use, including *Where the Ravens Roost* and *Sacred Songs from Medicine Lake*.<sup>120</sup> Today he still leads sacred ceremonies in Cherokee.<sup>121</sup>

Calhoun’s love of music is not limited to Cherokee folk music. Beginning at an early age, he developed a love for folk music outside of traditional Cherokee songs. He recalls first listening to his father play the banjo, including songs such as “Shoo Fly,” but when his father died when he was nine years old, he came to depend on listening to his older brothers play the instrument.<sup>122</sup> As Calhoun states, “Two of my brothers owned banjos, and they kept them hanging on the wall. They didn’t want me to touch their banjos or take them down, but one day while my brothers were at work, I took a chair and stood there and strummed the strings.”<sup>123</sup> His love for the instrument grew, and he often snuck down and played one of the banjos while his brothers were away. Although he learned some tunes from watching his brothers play, he was mainly self-taught on the instrument. The first tune he learned was

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<sup>118</sup> Olsen, “Walker Calhoun,” 75.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>120</sup> “Walker Calhoun,” *DigitalHeritage.org*, <<http://digitalheritage.org/2010/08/walker-calhoun/>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> “Walker Calhoun,” *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/entry.php?rec=44>> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

<sup>122</sup> Walker Calhoun,” *National Endowment for the Arts*.

<sup>123</sup> Olsen, “Walker Calhoun,” 76.

“Cripple Creek,” and he developed a modified three-finger picking style, with an occasional use of a metal pick.<sup>124</sup>

As Calhoun grew older, he began to listen to the records of hillbilly and bluegrass musicians and learned to play the same tunes. He continues to play the banjo and has been invited to play at folk festivals and at the Banjo Institute in Tennessee. Calhoun plays many traditional white folk tunes on his banjo, but he notes that he does not learn the words that accompany the tunes he plays.<sup>125</sup> While Calhoun clearly enjoys playing the banjo, he holds his knowledge and education of traditional Cherokee song and dance sacred. Like his uncle, Calhoun believes in educating people about Cherokee culture, regardless if they are members of the tribe. He has granted multiple interviews, and Cherokee oral culture lives on in his recordings.<sup>126</sup>

The Cherokee have prospered by embracing tourism, which they have done through their annual Cherokee Indian Fair since 1912. This fair catered to white tourists by selling Cherokee wares. Following the opening of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, Cherokees expanded their efforts to capitalize on tourists who visited the region to see the outdoor drama, “Unto These Hills.” The push for an outdoor drama began in 1947 and following a three-year fight for the building of an amphitheater and crucial funds, the play was finally performed in 1950 and quickly became a hit. Written by popular dramatist Kermit Hunter, and financially supported by a white-led Cherokee Historical Association, the

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<sup>124</sup> “Walker Calhoun,” *National Endowment for the Arts*.

<sup>125</sup> Olsen, “Walker Calhoun,” 77.

<sup>126</sup> Calhoun’s stories can be heard in a video published by PBS, as well as a documentary shown on UNC-TV. “Oral History of the Cherokee,” *Indian Country Diaries*, PBS, <<http://www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history/oral1.html>> (accessed on March 5, 2012) and “Cherokee: The Principle People,” Produced and Directed by Ron Ruehl, Script by Dan Smith, and Presented by UNC-TV, 1998.

play depicts early Cherokee history from first contact with Spaniards to the forced exodus during the Trail of Tears. The play is rightly criticized for portraying a grossly stereotypical and watered down version of history. Wayne Hornbuckle explained his grandmother's opinion: "They will just show the good side of it, they ain't going to show the bad side of it. If they showed the truth then everybody would have an understanding about it, but they won't show the truth. . . . And that's what we see today as we go to the drama."<sup>127</sup> "Unto These Hills" is still performed in Cherokee and a pamphlet of events for 2011 described the play in buoyant and glossy language, "The story's pageantry, with live music, ritual dances and authentic Cherokee regalia, creates a spellbinding evening at the starry, musical amphitheater."<sup>128</sup>

The glossing over of history for the sake of tourism also included traditional Cherokee music and headwear. Today the Cherokee perform songs and dance for tourists that actually originated among tribes in the Midwest.<sup>129</sup> There are two ways to consider this playing of Plains song and dance. First, the Cherokee have brought in music and dance from the different cultures that surrounded their tribe, including old-time string band and even rock and roll in more recent years. The Cherokee also learned the music of other nations and incorporated them into their musical repertoire. However, the Cherokee could have also brought in these songs and dances for the mere sake of the tourists; playing songs and performing the ritual dances that the public audience expected to see, rather than authentic Cherokee culture. Publicity images today still show Cherokee men wearing stereotypical

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<sup>127</sup> Wayne Hornbuckle to Michael J. Zogry, June 25, 1998, "Enduring Voiced Project Collection," Southern Historical Collection.

<sup>128</sup> "Unto These Hills: A Retelling," Cherokee Welcome Center Pamphlet.

<sup>129</sup> Amy Grant Walker to Michael J. Zogry, March 12, 1998.

feathered headwear that is not authentically Cherokee. This began in the early twentieth century when the Cherokee realized that tourists had a certain image in mind of American Indians when they came to their tribe. In the 1930s, Amy Grant Walker's father made a living posing for photographs wearing an elaborate headdress.<sup>130</sup> Today the Cherokee make no qualm about this depiction, and the website for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian freely admits that "The Cherokee have never worn headdresses except to please tourists."<sup>131</sup> By embracing images long associated with Native Americans through Wild West Shows and television, the Cherokee ensured their financial success.

The Cherokee today have maintained their tribes' economy by absorbing cultural elements of other tribes and fictional depictions of Native Americans. Yet at one point, their tribe was encouraged to cease their song and dance, as well as their native language, and assimilate into white culture. With the help of individuals such as John Collier, these assimilation techniques ended, and men such as Will West Long and Walker Calhoun advocated the teaching and displaying of Cherokee song and dance. Calhoun still performs and teaches traditional songs and dances today, ensuring that Cherokee customs are not forgotten. While the Cherokee underwent a revival of their traditional heritage, they did not scorn elements of white culture and it was not unusual for Cherokee men to play the fiddle and banjo with traditional mountain tunes, a skill some Cherokee still possess. Although the general public may not consider Cherokee music as part of Appalachian folk music, with the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> "FAQs," Museum Archives, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, <[http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/html/archives\\_FAQb.html](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/html/archives_FAQb.html)> (accessed on March 5, 2012).

help of people like Calhoun, more recognition and acknowledgment is being given to the music that played in Appalachia long before white settlers ventured into the area.

## CHAPTER 3

**Gendered Voices in Appalachian Music: Women and Musical Success**

Modern day country music star Emmylou Harris is no stranger to breaking down fences in the world of music: “She united old-line country conservatives and rock-loving liberals in a common cause and common sound. She gave country music back its pride in its heritage . . . . She wasn’t a coal miner’s daughter, a sharecropper’s wife, an Appalachian waif, or a cotton mill girl. She was a middle-class music enthusiast who found purpose and meaning in the classic country sounds.”<sup>132</sup> Emmylou began her music career in the 1960s in the midst of the folk music revival that swept through the United States and has spent the years since forging a new path for women in country music.

The silencing of women in public entertainment originated long before groups such as The Carter Family, comprised of A.P. Carter, his wife Sara, and her cousin Maybelle, began to record their songs. Prior to the changes swept along with growing capitalism and commercialism in the country, the public shunned women from appearing beyond their households. This was particularly true in entertainment, as society generally viewed women in this public entertainment sphere in a negative light.<sup>133</sup> Within the southern Appalachians, this negative stigma was further perpetuated by strict religious beliefs. Some even theorized that the “disappearance” of traditional ballads in the mountain region can be linked directly to the Calvinistic beliefs of the Baptist churches, especially the Old Regular Baptist Church. These fundamentalist sects did not approve of secular music and members were only allowed

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<sup>132</sup> Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1993), 423.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, x.



to play hymns and psalms.<sup>134</sup> Even the assistant of famed folk music collector Cecil Sharp was not oblivious to the religion influence in the region, as Maud Karpeles made note that the “‘Holiness’ sect thought it was wicked to sing love songs, and dancers at the square had to call their behavior ‘playing’ instead of dancing.”<sup>135</sup> Dorothy Scarborough continued to run against these beliefs when she scoured the southern Appalachians for traditional ballads. Recounting a number of instances with local mountaineers, Scarborough carefully probed their knowledge for ballads, and despite their initial insistence that they could not recall such songs, eventually they remembered one or two for her.<sup>136</sup> While the church held women more stringently to its beliefs regarding what it considered immoral music, even white men were not immune. Folk musician and creator of the Mountain Dance and Folk Music Festival, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, faced many such critiques for his interests, despite being a lawyer and a well-respected member of the community. Preachers condemned Lunsford as a corrupting influence with his music. A small anecdote recalled by Lunsford details that he once agreed to teach a Sunday school class, but had the offer rescinded once the pastor learned of Lunsford’s musical dealings.<sup>137</sup>

While religious leaders may have frowned upon folk music for its secular roots, they also sported long-held prejudices against some of the primary instruments used in folk music

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<sup>134</sup> Rebecca Thomas, “The Cow That’s Ugly Has the Sweetest Milk,” in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 134.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas, “The Cow That’s Ugly Has the Sweetest Milk,” 134.

<sup>136</sup> Dorothy Scarborough, *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains: American Folk Songs of British Ancestry* (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1937), 15, 30.

<sup>137</sup> Loyal Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1984), 99. While church members may have frowned upon Lunsford for his music, Jones is quick to note that they would often push this grudge aside when in need of monetary funds, 100.

and women were especially vulnerable to the criticism. Fiddles and banjos seem to have bore the brunt of the burden. The mother of musician Lily May Ledford frowned upon her daughter's musical interest as "the fiddle has a bad reputation among women in the mountains, as going along with drinking and carousing and all that. [I] think they thought it stimulated certain kinds of feelings in men, you know, that they didn't want them to have."<sup>138</sup> While part of the critique of the fiddle lies with its association with secular music, undercurrents of sexual worry also contributed to its disgrace. Lunsford told a story regarding popular opinion of the instrument:

This man said to a man he'd sold a ham to, "Did that ham have any little black bugs in it?" "Yeah, it had some." "How many?" "Why that ham had more bugs in it than there are fiddlers in hell."<sup>139</sup>

It is little wonder that few women publicly played the fiddle or the banjo for entertainment purposes, as it constituted almost a doubly sexual sin in the eyes of the general public, with the stigma against working in entertainment, as well as the sexual stigma behind the instruments. The banjo did not escape public scrutiny either, "for if the fiddle was once considered 'the devil's box,' the banjo was certainly a son of Satan."<sup>140</sup> Jean Ritchie, a banjo player from Kentucky, admits that, "her family considered the banjo a 'low instrument.'"<sup>141</sup> With so many negative portrayals of both folk music and its associated instruments, the fact

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<sup>138</sup> Barbara Greenlief interview to Lisa J. Yarger, April 27, 1996, Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection.

<sup>139</sup> Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians*, 99.

<sup>140</sup> Susan A. Eacker and Geoff Eacker, "A Banjo on Her Knee-Part I: Appalachian Women and America's Finest Instrument," in *The Old Time Herald* 1, No. 2, (Winter 2002) <[http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back\\_issues/volume-8/8-2/full-banjo-on-her-knee.html](http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-8/8-2/full-banjo-on-her-knee.html)> (accessed on February 10, 2012).

<sup>141</sup> Susan A. Eacker and Geoff Eacker, "Banjo Women in West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky," *Banjo Women of West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky: A Multimedia Exhibit*, <[http://www.marshall.edu/library/speccoll/virtual\\_museum/banjo\\_women/default.asp](http://www.marshall.edu/library/speccoll/virtual_museum/banjo_women/default.asp)> (accessed on February 10, 2012).

that women participated in this musical genre at all comes as a mild surprise. Perhaps because women did not play in public and were not as visible as male musicians, banjo-playing women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century remained invisible and difficult to document.<sup>142</sup>

Fortunately, women did exist in the southern Appalachians who played and participated in folk music, and they laid the groundwork for women to move into the public spotlight in the music industry. Prior to the invention of the radio, records, and the opening years of folk music festivals, women such as Alice Morgan Person, Olive Dame Campbell, and Emma Bell Miles played and collected folk music, and presented their work in public. Each of these counters the “typical” southern mountain woman. Two of the women, Person and Campbell, were not Appalachian natives. In fact, Person never lived in the Appalachian region; instead she and her family resided in the Piedmont of North Carolina. Campbell was born and raised in Medford, Massachusetts, and it was only after her marriage to John C. Campbell that she moved to the southern mountains of North Carolina. Furthermore, Person and Miles never gained considerable fame for their musical ventures. Finally, each of these three women present completely unique experiences, yet they all made contributions to the development of women in folk music.

Born in 1840 in Petersburg, Virginia, Alice Morgan grew up in a relatively affluent family, despite facing financial difficulty. It was highly probable that she was educated,

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<sup>142</sup> Eacker and Eacker, “Banjo Women in West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky,” 4 and Karen Linn, *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

although the specifics of where and by whom are still unknown.<sup>143</sup> In 1857, a seventeen-year old Alice married wealthy forty-two year old Joseph Person and moved to his hometown of Franklinton, North Carolina. In 1884, two months prior to his death, Joseph signed an agreement that allowed Alice to become a “free trader,” meaning she was allowed to conduct her personal business any way she saw fit. Although she dedicated most of her time to the creating and selling of her home remedy, she also dabbled in the world of music. Beginning in the mid 1880s, Alice began to demonstrate pianos at county fairs and state expositions. During this same time, she began to compile and publish music collections. Her first collection, titled *A Collection of Popular Airs as Arranged and Played Only by Mrs. Joe Person at the Southern Exposition*, was followed up by two different editions. Her second and last collection, *A Transcription of the Beautiful Song Blue Alastian Mountains! Also “Down-Town Girls” and “Boatman Dance” as Arranged and Played by Mrs. Joe Person*, reprinted twice.<sup>144</sup>

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the *Popular Airs* published by Person is the fact that many of the songs included were originally blackface minstrelsy songs.<sup>145</sup> Blackface minstrelsy reached its heyday in the South in the 1840s and 1850s, but in the latter half of the nineteenth century, people still remembered and sang the tunes. Person’s published collection is even more interesting due to the time it was originally published. Minstrelsy shows slowly went out of fashion by the late 1850s, and few of the songs were still in print by 1889,

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<sup>143</sup> David Hursh and Chris Goertzen, *Good Medicine and Good Music: A Biography of Mrs. Joe Person, Patent Remedy Entrepreneur and Musician, Including The Complete Test of Her 1903 Autobiography* (Jefferson, N.C., McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 73.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 109, 111.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

although musicians later resurrected the songs in the 1920s under the “hillbilly” genre. Person’s collection puts itself almost neatly into the middle of the musical flux between changing popular music and technology and is as close to a nineteenth century field recording that is available to scholars today.<sup>146</sup> For this reason, her collections are a highlight in the history of popular and folk music, made even more interesting in that they were collected and published by a widowed, middle-aged southern woman.

Around nearly the same time that Person traveled and published her music, Emma Bell Miles was born and began her journey in life writing, giving speeches and poetry readings to wealthy women, and studying Appalachian music. Born in 1879 in Evansville, Indiana, Miles’s childhood had a transient feel to it, moving from Indiana to Kentucky to Tennessee, where her family finally settled. Despite the frequent unsettling relocations, Miles did receive an education, although spotty, and wealthy patrons arranged for her to study art in St. Louis for two years. Her formal studies did not end her desire to return to her mountain home, and in 1901, she married G. Frank Miles, which caused her parents to disown her, as they disapproved of the marriage.<sup>147</sup> She did not live an easy life with Frank, faced with poverty, her husband’s chronic health issues, marital discord, miscarriages and health issues of her own. In order to earn money for the family’s sustenance, Miles read poetry to the wealthy women in Chattanooga, and they also displayed her artwork in their homes and provided her rooms to stay in to visit concerts and lectures. She also painted trinkets to sell to

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 167, 171.

<sup>147</sup> David E. Whisnant, “Introduction to the New Edition,” in Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1905; repr., Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975), xvii-xix and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 2-4.

the tourist who began to flock to the region.<sup>148</sup> Her chronic health issues persisted until 1916, when doctors confirmed tuberculosis. She died in 1919 at the Pine Breeze Sanitarium in Chattanooga.

Despite her many hardships, Miles also explored Appalachian folk music. In 1904 *Harper's Weekly* published an article by Miles titled, "Some Real American Music." This article was the basis for the chapter on music in her work, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, published in 1905. Miles led the way for the beginning of the popular study of Appalachian folk music. Her piece in *Harper's Weekly* was one of the first published pieces of appreciation of Appalachian music in a popular magazine and was certainly one of the first published anywhere. It was three years later when Katharine Pettit published a collection of Appalachian folk songs in *The Journal of American Folklore*, and four years later when William Wells Newell wrote an academic piece on Appalachian music in the same journal.<sup>149</sup> In this sense, both the *Harper's Weekly* publication and *The Spirit of the Mountains* offered Miles's contemporaries their first studied look at popular Appalachian music. Her descriptions of the music were in the same vein of later studies, as she portrayed the music as romanticized Anglo-Saxon tunes, writing, ". . . the mountain people do sing many ballads of old England and Scotland. Their taste in music has no doubt been guided by these, which have come down from their ancestors. Indeed, so closely do they keep to the musical tradition of the ballad form that it is often difficult to distinguish the old from their own more

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<sup>148</sup> Whisnant, "Introduction," xxi-xxii, and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 4

<sup>149</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 5.

modern compositions.”<sup>150</sup> Although many during Miles’s time decried the use of the banjo or fiddle, she did not write of the instruments in a negative light, instead she stated, “The fiddle and the banjo are well treated and beloved among them, like the minstrels of feudal days.”<sup>151</sup> Still, her chapter on music, much like the rest of her book, was filled with a quixotic tone, with idealized phrases such as, “As I write these songs old memories come drifting on their melody—memories of drowsy noons and the tankle-tump-a-tankle of the banjo on the porch, and the thump-chug, thump-chug of the batten as the mother’s shuttle went patiently to and fro . . .”<sup>152</sup> Miles may have depended primarily upon her artistic endeavors to help provide for her family, but she also turned to music. She was well educated on the topic of Appalachian folk music during the early twentieth century. Although *The Spirit of the Mountains* and her subsequent biographies make no mention of her playing music for tourists, it seems likely that she did expose visitors to the Appalachian region to the local folk songs. In later years, scholars turned to her *Harper’s Weekly* article or *The Spirit of the Mountains* to gain a better understanding of this musical genre.

Like Alice Person, Olive Dame Campbell was an outsider to the Appalachian region, and in fact, was an outsider to the entire South. Born in 1882 in Medford, Massachusetts, Olive lived in a relatively affluent lifestyle, receiving a college degree from Tufts College in 1903, upon which time she began to work as a schoolteacher. After working and saving money for three years, she journeyed to the British Isles with her mother and sister. It was on this trip where she met John Campbell, whom she married the following year. After a nine-

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<sup>150</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 147.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 169.

month honeymoon in Sicily, they returned to the United States and John's work studying the southern highlanders and the conditions that affected them.<sup>153</sup> John desired his wife's assistance with this endeavor, as she "may often learn many essential facts from the women teachers and from the women of the mountains which would otherwise not be available."<sup>154</sup> It was during a visit to the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky that Olive first gained an interest in folk music. She described her experience in dreamy terms, writing, "Shall I ever forget it. The blazing fire, the young girl on her low stool before it, the soft strange strumming of the banjo- different from anything I had ever heard before- and then the song! I had been used to singing 'Barbara Allen' as a child, but how far from that gentle tune was this-so strange, so remote, so thrilling."<sup>155</sup> Following this experience, Olive began to write ballads she heard when she visited mountain homes. Shortly afterwards, she met with English folk song collector, Cecil Sharp, and the two agreed to collaborate on a project collecting folks songs in the southern Appalachians. The end result was *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians*, published in 1917.<sup>156</sup> This work, while having a substantial

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<sup>153</sup> Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 254.

<sup>154</sup> "Statement for a Proposed Study Plan of the Southern Highland Section," attached to the letter of May 15, 1908, to Mrs. John C. Glen, Campbell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, in Smith and Wilson, *North Carolina Women*, 254.

<sup>155</sup> ODC Journal, Vol. 3, October 1908-January 1909, Campbell Papers, SHC, in Smith and Wilson, *North Carolina Women*, 254.

<sup>156</sup> Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians: Compromising Two Hundred and Seventy-Four Songs and Ballads with Nine Hundred and Sixty-Eight Tunes, Including Thirty-Nine Tunes Contributed by Olive Dame Campbell*, Edited by Maud Karpeles (1932, repr; NY: Oxford University Press, 1973). Bufwack and Oermann point out that in some states, the number of female folk-singers found by folklorists was nearly double that of male folk singers. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 7.



number of ballads, lacked in other areas and did not include any instrumental music, popular songs, or religious music.<sup>157</sup>

Following the relative success of *English Folk Songs*, Olive continued to pursue her interest in folk songs and folk life. Following her husband's death in 1919, Olive traveled to Denmark in order to study their folk school system, and by 1925, the John C. Campbell Folk School was founded in Brasstown, North Carolina, with intentions to educate mountain peoples with self-sustaining industries instead of moving away to urban colleges and universities.<sup>158</sup> Students could take courses in agriculture and handicrafts, and the school established several cooperatives in order to support itself. Olive continued to work at the school until she retired in 1946. Clearly, Olive felt that folk songs should play a role in people's education at her school. In one article written in 1924, she highlighted the importance of including music in the curriculum, writing, "Of the many other subjects taught, two should have special mention. Song is one of the prominent features of all people's colleges . . . All classes are usually opened, and sometimes closed, with song- hearty, simple, chorus singing from a selected book which contains some of the best of the Danish hymns, folk, national and historical songs, nature songs, etc."<sup>159</sup> Olive's work throughout her lifetime helped bring folk music and folk studies to the limelight.

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<sup>157</sup> David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 119.

<sup>158</sup> "A Unique History," John C. Campbell Folk School, 2012, <[https://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article\\_cat\\_id=21&article\\_id=5](https://www.folkschool.org/index.php?section=articles&article_cat_id=21&article_id=5)> (accessed on February 10, 201).

<sup>159</sup> The People's College in Denmark and What it May Mean to the Highlands, By Mrs. John C. Campbell," in *Adult Education in Scandinavia and America: Two Addresses Delivered at The Conference of Southern Mountain Workers*, Knoxville Tennessee, April 8-10, 1924, John C. Campbell Folk School Papers, SHC.

Each of the three women contributed to the development of women in folk music. Alice Person defied gender stereotypes of what roles a “proper” woman should fill and spent her adult years owning her own business, experimenting with different medical remedies, and collecting and singing popular folk songs. Emma Bell Miles lived a turbulent life and resorted to her artistic skills, including folk music, in order to ensure her family’s survival. Publishing one of the first narratives on folk music, she entered the world of scholarly folk study before many in the country even knew it existed. Olive Dame Campbell’s collection of folk songs helped scholars and musicians alike in exploring the musical genres of the southern Appalachians.<sup>160</sup> She continued to work as an advocate for mountain people until her death in 1954. Although southern mountain women would have broken through the public barrier of folk music without these individuals, there is little doubt that without the contributions of these three women and many others, southern Appalachian women in the 1920s and onwards would have had a far more difficult time in attempting to overcome challenges their gender encountered in the world of music.

Alice Person, Emma Bell Miles, and Olive D. Campbell gave rise to women’s voices in music and women such as Roba Stanley, Samantha Bumgarner, The Carter Family, and Lily May Ledford took the opportunity presented. Some of the women played mixtures of folk and early country music, others gained fame through barn dances, and others faded away into obscurity once their brush with fame ended. By the end of the nineteenth century, popular demand for phonographs led to recordings of popular music, although the technology

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<sup>160</sup> Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 119.

was not designed to record women's higher-pitched voices.<sup>161</sup> Mass production of the radio, allowed women's voices to filter into people's houses. Even though the southern region of the United States held the fewest amount of radios of any region, it was southern musicians who first began to heavily exploit the new technology to gain commercial success.

Before the radio swept through the South, one young girl became the first female to record a solo record. Roba Stanley did not hail from Appalachia, having grown up in Gwinnet County in Georgia, but that certainly did not stop her from learning to play the guitar and popular folk songs. She eventually traveled with her father to his music gigs, often the only girl playing on stage. The family duo hit a sequence of good success when a man running for Congress heard their music and asked them to play for him on his campaign.<sup>162</sup> On August 26, 1924, when Roba was a mere fifteen-years old, she stepped into a temporary recording booth in Atlanta, where she recorded two songs, the first of any solo female country artist.<sup>163</sup> Her career spanned less than a year and consisted of only nine recordings. In the fall of 1925, she married and moved to Florida. Her husband did not approve of her playing music in public and as they lived in Miami and far from the epi-center of recording studios in Atlanta, her career came to a sudden halt and she slipped back into obscurity until

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<sup>161</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 43.

<sup>162</sup> Charles K. Wolfe, "'And No Man Shall Control Me,' The Strange Case of Roba Stanley, Country's First Female Recording Star," in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 134.

<sup>163</sup> Wolfe, "'No Man Shall Control Me,'" 18, 21. Her exact age seems a matter of debate, as Bufwack and Oermann list her as fourteen-years old. At this time, Atlanta was quickly becoming a hotspot for "old-time" music, with recording options and the home of the South's largest fiddling contests. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 67 and Wolfe, "'No Man Shall Control Me,'" 22.

the 1970s, when rediscovered by folklorists.<sup>164</sup> Stanley may not have been a true mountain girl, but her success in country music as a female recording artist, although short-lived, has forever ensured her a place in country music history. In fact, through the 1920s, only four other solo women recorded country music besides Stanley.<sup>165</sup>

One of the most influential country groups in the history of the musical genre is undoubtedly The Carter Family. Aside from the group's enormous musical success before and during the Great Depression, the Carter family still resonates on the country music scene today with the influence of June Carter and her children. The musical group originated in southwest Virginia and consisted of A.P. Carter, his wife Sara, and Sara's cousin Maybelle Carter. Before the act became famous in the new and developing country genre, they were learning folk music from their families and friends in Virginia's rural mountains. All of the members came from musical backgrounds. A.P.'s mother sang hymns as she went about her work, but she was weary of the fiddle as promoting un-Christian behavior. Unfortunately for A.P.'s mother, her grandfather was "Fiddling Billy Bays," and her husband also played the fiddle.<sup>166</sup> A.P. learned to play the fiddle from his father, but a tremor in his hands prevented his playing too often. Instead, he depended upon his voice for music. When Sara was three years old, her mother died, and she and her sister Thursa Mae were sent to live with their aunt and her husband. As a young girl, Sara learned to play the autoharp, banjo, and guitar,

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<sup>164</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 67-68. Wolfe notes that so few knew about Stanley that when folklorists first started to research her, they were informed she was dead. Wolfe, "'No Man Shall Control Me,'" 18.

<sup>165</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 68.

<sup>166</sup> Mark Zwonitzer with Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 24.

and she formed an all-girl musical group with her cousin Madge Addington.<sup>167</sup> A.P. met Sara through his work as a traveling salesman and the two married on June 18, 1915. Maybelle also grew up in a musical family, with her mother as the leader of the Women's Chorus at Fair Oak Methodist Church; Maybelle could play the guitar and was an accomplished singer herself.

The Carter Family did not begin to perform as a group until 1927. A few months earlier in 1926, A.P. convinced Sara to accompany him to nearby Kingsport to sing for a man who was scouting "hillbilly" musicians for Brunswick recording company. This gentleman could not see A.P. and Sara as marketable since Sara sang the lead vocals, something unheard of in hillbilly music.<sup>168</sup> A.P. did not lose hope and in July of 1927, he read an advertisement in the local paper that, "The Victor Co. will have a recording machine in Bristol for 10 days beginning Monday to record records-Inquire at our Store."<sup>169</sup> The group decided to go to Bristol with the addition of Maybelle's guitar skills and harmonizing voice. Victor representative and commercial folklorist Ralph Peer liked what he heard. The trio recorded four songs that evening, all with Sara singing lead vocals. They earned three hundred dollars for their efforts.<sup>170</sup> Slowly, over a series of months, Peer released the family's records, including Sara's solo track "Single Girl" and they soon became stars.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, 38-41 and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 53.

<sup>168</sup> Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, 76-77.

<sup>169</sup> Bristol News Bulletin, July 4, 1927 in Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, 77.

<sup>170</sup> Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, 99-100 and Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 65.

<sup>171</sup> Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone*, 104-105 and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 55.

Through the next sixteen years, The Carter Family performed as a group, joined in later years by the children of Maybelle, who continued to perform even after the original Carter Family disbanded. In the sixteen years of their business, they recorded over three hundred records with five different record labels. Six years after their first recording sessions Sara separated from A.P., and the two eventually divorced in 1936 against A.P.'s wishes. During the first year of separation, the group recorded less, much to the concern of Ralph Peer. A letter written to Sara from his wife, Anita, highlights his concern over the state of his most popular group:

Of course it is really none of my business, but I just wondered if there was anything I could do to help things along. I realize that it would be distinctly awkward for both you and A.P. to work together again, but on the other hand the "Carter Family" has become well known and there is a chance to make some money, even in these days of depression. . . . Is'nt (sic) there someway you can get together and fix up some songs for recording? Would it do any good for me to write to A.P. or Maybelle, and if so, what should I tell them? I'll do anything you suggest to get things organized again. Even if you never live together again you could get together for professional purposes like the movie stars do.<sup>172</sup>

Despite concern from the Peers, the group continued to perform together for ten years. Their long and successful career marks one of the major highlights in the history of country music. Prior to this time, no other recording group was met with the same success as The Carter Family, especially considering that the group consisted of two women, one of whom sang lead vocals, and a man. The group's main success is directly linked to its two female members, who essentially formed a female duet, with occasional back-up from A.P.<sup>173</sup> In addition, Maybelle's style of guitar playing helped bring the instrument to the fore-front of country music. Her thumb-brush technique meant "the thumb picks the melody on the bass

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<sup>172</sup> Letter from Anita Peer to Sara Carter, May 3, 1933, Ed Kahn Collection, SHC.

<sup>173</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 55.

strings while the fingers provide rhythm with a downward stroke of the treble strings.”<sup>174</sup>

After only a few short years, Maybelle’s playing style became the most quickly imitated guitar style in the music industry.<sup>175</sup> Even though The Carter Family helped break barriers for women entering the public role of music, they did so by embracing the family image they projected. Fans never learned of Sara’s divorce from A.P., an event that surely would have scandalized many of their listeners. The original Carter Family member never spoke of the divorce and the children of the members did not discuss it.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the group exhibited a sense of proper dignity and respect in their concert performances. Their performances began with A.P. introducing every song and then the group went to business. Sara and Maybelle rarely deviated from their songs, and played their set without talking, laughing, and rarely smiling. According to June Carter Cash, daughter of Maybelle, “Mama didn’t believe in getting broke up onstage.”<sup>177</sup> The women in The Carter Family no doubt helped to advance their gender in music, but they did so carefully, always keeping a respectable aura about them.<sup>178</sup>

Roba Stanley and The Carter Family led the way for women in the country recording business with help from their backgrounds in Appalachian folk music. Samantha Bumgarner, often accompanied by Eva Davis, was one of the first women who gained commercial success based solely on Appalachian folk music. Bumgarner was born in 1880 in Sylva, North Carolina, where her father had his own local success playing the fiddle, although he

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<sup>174</sup> Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 66.

<sup>175</sup> Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone*, 109.

<sup>176</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 58.

<sup>177</sup> June Carter Cash in Zwonitzer and Hirschberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone*, 115.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas, “The Cow That’s Ugly Has the Sweetest Milk,” 133.

did not allow Bumgarner to play his instrument as a child. Instead, she resorted to teaching herself to play when her father was not at home.<sup>179</sup> Her marriage to Carse Bumgarner did not end her music; instead he encouraged her playing and even bought her the first fiddle she ever owned. Bumgarner's recording success came later in her life. In 1924, she traveled to New York City with her friend Eva Davis where they recorded twelve tunes at Columbia records. However, following these recordings Bumgarner and Davis did not return to the recording studios together. Bumgarner instead chose to travel with her music, including headlining Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Mountain Dance and Folk Music Festival from 1929 to 1959. Davis surely received musical training at some point in her life, but unfortunately, little else is known about her aside from her recordings with Bumgarner.<sup>180</sup>

Contributions from women such as Stanley, the Carters, and Bumgarner paved the way for the success of independent women in the music industry in the 1930s. One such woman to profit from their success was Lily May Ledford. Born in 1917 in Powell County, Kentucky, Ledford quickly became the founder of the first all-female string band music group. Like all of the women previously discussed, Ledford came from a musically inclined family. Her skill with instruments such as the banjo and the fiddle came from her father's talent, one that her mother and grandfather did not entirely approve of, with the opinion that stringed instruments led to idleness and was sinful.<sup>181</sup> Her mother was not entirely opposed to music and taught her children several hymns and ballads, while her neighbors owned radios

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<sup>179</sup> "Samantha Bumgarner/Eva Davis," *Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol*, <[http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/hillbilly/HTML/Biographies/bio\\_BumgarnerDavis.htm](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/hillbilly/HTML/Biographies/bio_BumgarnerDavis.htm)> (accessed on February 10, 2012) and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 71.

<sup>180</sup> "Samantha Bumgarner/Eva Davis," *Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol* and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 73.

<sup>181</sup> Lily May Ledford, *Coon Creek Girl* (1980 repr., Berea, KY: The Berea College Appalachian Center, 1991), 7.



and phonographs and the family listened to the songs of The Carter Family and the Skillet Lickers.<sup>182</sup> Around the same time, radio stations began to air *The National Barn Dance* starting in 1924. This show offered popularized southern culture coast to coast in the United States, playing country music and embracing southern stereotypes. *The National Barn Dance* also differed from other southern barn dances on the radio as it displayed women's skills and hired them in abundance.<sup>183</sup> It was through shows such as *The National Barn Dance* that Ledford became a star.

In 1935, the Ledford siblings were offered a chance to audition for *The National Barn Dance* and Lily May was the only one chosen by WLS, the Chicago radio station that housed the show. Lily May worked for WLS for one year, before signing a five-year contract with John Lair. Lair originally worked as a talent manager for WLS, but he gathered up a group of defectors from WLS and signed them to his newly created *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*. Lair put together a group of women performers who became the first all-female string band and named them the Coon Creek Girls, with Ledford leading the group.<sup>184</sup> While Ledford may have been breaking down barriers placed before women in the music industry, she did so with Lair controlling her every movement, even down to her clothes and language. In her autobiography, Ledford wrote “in the long old-fashioned dress and high-top lace up shoes that Mr. Lair had me wear, I felt like an old lady and not at all pretty. Mr. Lair discouraged my buying clothes, curling my hair, going in for make-up or improving my English.”<sup>185</sup> Lair said to Ledford, “Stay a mountain girl, just like you were when you came here. Be genuine

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 8, 10.

<sup>183</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 82.

<sup>184</sup> Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 119.

<sup>185</sup> Ledford, *Coon Creek Girl*, 16.

and plain at all times.”<sup>186</sup> In the beginning, Ledford did not seem to mind Lair’s management, but she began to resent him when he demanded that she exclusively play the banjo rather than the fiddle, and that she perform in attire depicting her as a mountain woman. Ledford never openly challenged Lair’s direction, but complained to other females in her life about him. She found ways to indirectly challenge his authority, such as refusing to wear her hair in a bun unless on stage.<sup>187</sup> Through the years, the Coon Creek Girls survived events such as the Great Depression, World War II, as well as old members leaving the group, new members joining, marriages and the birth of their children before they finally retired in 1957. One of Ledford’s lasting achievements was her song “Banjo Pickin’ Girl,” which became an anthem for females in the country music industry and can still be heard today.<sup>188</sup>

Today, few think twice about the presence of strong women in country music. Indeed, the music genre seems a fertile ground for women to sing about overcoming oppressive measures in their lives, such as abusive husbands or lack of respect in the workforce. From the 1890s to the 1950s, women in the music industry in the South were the exception to the rules. Early pioneers such as Alice Person, Emma Bell Miles, and Olive D. Campbell embraced Appalachian folk music and spent years of their lives collecting, singing, and teaching others about the mountain music, even making careers of their interests. Their efforts, along with no doubt countless and nameless others paved the way for stars such as Roba Stanley, The Carter Family, Samantha Bumgarner, and Lily May Ledford to find jobs and careers recording Appalachian music on a much more public stage. In order to avoid

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>187</sup> Ledford, *Coon Creek Girl*, 16 and Greenlief Interview to Yarger.

<sup>188</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 105.

negative associations, none of the entertainers lived risqué lives, instead exuding a respectable and happy “down-home” image to their listeners while they broke down gender barriers. Remnants of their influence can still be heard throughout country music and its offshoots even today. Songs and music made famous by The Carter Family and the Coon Creek Girls resonate in folk music festivals throughout southern Appalachia and beyond, while folklorists continue to study that old-time Appalachian folk sound which these women first made famous.

## CONCLUSION

What exactly *is* folk music? With the help of folksong collectors such as Cecil Sharp, folk music meant music played by rural and laboring people, as well as simply traditional music.<sup>189</sup> At the same time Sharp was defining folk music, southern Appalachia was being defined as a haven for Anglo-Saxons, pure and unadulterated from mixtures of outside races. The idea of an isolated Anglo-Saxon region combined with the idea of folk music belonging to rural peoples resulted in the notion that Appalachian folk music was the music of poor white males.

Bill C. Malone may have depicted the typical folk singer as a white rural male, but southern Appalachian folk music underwent transformation as different populations interacted and created unique sounds. White males may have provided the face of folk music, but in the background, the influences of African Americans, Native Americans, and white females allowed for a richer sound. Did this interaction always occur freely and with mutual respect? No. African Americans in the southern mountains still experienced racism that minimized their contributions to musical culture. For the Cherokee assimilation pushed them more quickly into American culture, including its music. White women had to embrace other stereotypes that their patriarchal culture and public audiences deemed acceptable, such as the caring and nurturing wife and mother, or the innocent farm girl.

Southern Appalachia was a region of significant intercultural interaction: black musicians taught white musicians how to play the banjo while white musicians taught black

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<sup>189</sup> Carole Pegg, "Folk music," In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/09933>> (accessed March 5, 2012).

musicians how to play the fiddle. Black musicians took their knowledge of both the fiddle and the banjo and taught it to Cherokee musicians, who later played this outsider folk music at nearby folk music festivals. White females like Maybelle Carter learned guitar skills from African Americans. To claim, as many have done in earlier years, that groups such as African Americans and Native Americans borrowed the music of white people is both a simplified and false assertion.

The sound of Appalachian folk music is one that people today laud as harkening back to a simpler time when both music and the world was less complicated. But that idea is one that ignores the history behind the sound. This music did not transplant itself from ancient England, neither did it survive in the southern Appalachians untouched by the changes that transformed and rocked the rest of the country. Instead, Appalachian music developed through collaboration of different populations residing on the mountainsides. The impact of African Americans, Native Americans, and white women on folk music is one that is easily overlooked, even in the twenty-first century. By upholding the idea that this music takes us back to our roots, we forget where we really came from. Their voices that sing out today remind us of their struggles facing silencing years ago.

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