

**Ephemeral and Enduring –
The Culture of Folk Music in the Northern
Appalachians**

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Abstract

This study considers the influence of class bias and academic criticism on the collecting of ballads in America with particular attention to the impact of collectors Francis James Child, Cecil Sharp, and Helen Flanders. It argues that the Northern Appalachians had as vital a British-American ballad tradition as did the Southern Highlands but that Progressive Era interests intensified attention on the Southern Appalachian population. The present vitality of folk music in rural New England is underscored, with a particular focus on the importance of this unique artistic expression to the life of the towns of Cornwall, Connecticut, and Westfield, Vermont.

Keywords: New England Ballads, Place Studies, Autoethnography, Politics of Culture

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Introduction

The tenacity of the texts and tunes, and the timeless human themes of folk music, given voice by academically unschooled musicians, continues to be misunderstood and undervalued by mainstream Americans a century after English folk song collector, Cecil Sharp, began his fieldwork in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. I intend to demonstrate that class bias and academic criticism have prevented acceptance, appreciation, and sometimes even simple recognition of this sturdy yet ephemeral form of creative musical expression that remains rooted and powerful. I will further demonstrate that this music existed in the Northern as well as in the Southern reaches of the Appalachian Mountains at the time of Cecil Sharp's fieldwork, (1915 – 1918), and that it remains relevant to the lives of rural New Englanders today.

The culture of rural New England nurtures a tradition of folk music that is itself drawn from the rural culture of the British Isles. I will introduce the rural community of Cornwall in the Connecticut Berkshires, my childhood home, using tenets of the relatively recent research on the importance of place--the physical, cultural and economic factors that define a particular environment and make it unique. This body of work has helped me illustrate in vivid detail how folk music is inextricably linked to place. Lucy Lippard, in her book *The Lure of the Local*, makes it clear how critical it is to examine the life beneath the map of people and places we wish to study:

A map is a composite of places, and like a place, it hides as much as it

reveals. It is also a composite of times, blandly laying out on a single surface the results of billions of years of activity by nature and humanity.⁴

The study of Place emerged in the 1970s from the broader discipline of Humanistic Geography and integrates a study of human communities and interactions with the study of a physical location. It is an approach that moves far beyond the conventional understanding of mapping a town.

I am a folk musician. My involvement in roots and revival music, both as a participant and an observer, will provide the connective tissue for this study. A lifetime New Englander, my credentials as a folk musician are deeply embedded in my rural Northern Appalachian childhood. I was born and raised in the Connecticut Berkshires, and the rural community of Cornwall helped to shape my own musically expressive life. I draw from the simple musical roots of my own childhood experience – the voice of Oscar Degreenia (1878 – 1957) singing the old songs and ballads as he rocked on his porch in the evening, the twang of Marshall Dean’s homemade lap guitar and Comfort Starr’s soaring fiddle – interwoven with the hymns of the Second Congregational church and the soulful sound of Patsy Cline on the school bus radio during the long rides home.

The mix of my personal soundtrack changed with the passing years. My parents were not formally schooled in music but they encouraged me to sing and I remember positive support for my singing at school and church. I was one of those kids who could pull a tune out of any instrument I put my hands on. By high school I had discovered the Music Mountain summer series of Chamber Music concerts in

nearby Falls Village. I ushered there, mesmerized by the sound of string quartets. At home after midnight I picked up the signal from WCKY in Cincinnati, Ohio and WWVA from Wheeling, West Virginia and listened to bluegrass and country music on the radio. I loved it all.

When the folk revival of the nineteen fifties began, recordings of traditional Kentucky ballad singer and dulcimer player Jean Ritchie and North Carolina traditional banjo picker Obray Ramsay became available on independent record labels and I listened eagerly. I was playing mandolin and banjo by ear and jamming with high school friends and old timers alike. But I was uncomfortable with Joan Baez's soprano vibrato and the honeyed tones of Judy Collins. I found their voices incongruous with the old songs and ballads that I was accustomed to hearing sung with a classically untrained and often quite rough sounding voice.

Google my name today and you will discover a catalog of my recordings, some of traditional music and some of the music I have composed myself. I regularly draw on the oral tradition that I grew up with as I create curricula and learning environments for students from preschoolers through adults. In a typical year my activities range from teaching folk harp, banjo or dulcimer at the John C. Campbell Folk School in the mountains of North Carolina to performing at a dulcimer festival in Texas, or offering lectures on Trans Atlantic ballads at the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. And because my own life is so deeply informed by the music that is the subject of my thesis, I have chosen to write an autoethnographic study.

Like folklore, autoethnography is rooted in cultural anthropology. The current

Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of ethnography is: “the study and systematic recording of human cultures.”ⁱⁱ Autoethnography has evolved within the discipline of ethnography to address the presence and influence of the observer in the culture she observes.

In a moving essay “Anthropology that Breaks the Heart”ⁱⁱⁱ anthropologist Ruth Behar considers the contemporary shift in both the function and the perception of anthropology. Behar suggests that anthropology no longer has an exclusive claim to the study of culture. Rather, the study of culture is woven into a multitude of disciplines. In academia anthropology has always “stood at the border of humanities and science”.^{iv} She observes that within anthropology there now exists both a strong scientific element and at the same time a movement toward autoethnography and activist art.

I recognize that I am both an insider/participant in the primarily working class music that is my subject here, and an outsider/observer because of my recent academic distance and the broadening of my own musical experience through the years. The personal and cultural biases that collectors bring to their fieldwork have a profound influence on how the materials they collect and the populations they collect from are presented and perceived in the broader culture.^v It is essential that we continually examine our own place in this cultural exchange, and I undertake that task here.

I have included my personal experiences in this study as a way to understand the culture of folk music in rural New England. Autoethnography differs from autobiography because autoethnography entails an intentional effort to reflect on a

cultural community, not just oneself. In *Autoethnography as Method* Professor Heewong Chang defines the discipline:

The autoethnography that I promote in this book combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative detail. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling.^{iv}

The definition that pleases me most is by Holman Jones in his chapter, “Autoethnography” in the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Jones suggests that, “Autoethnography works to hold self and culture together.”^{vii} It is in this sense that I have chosen to take an autoethnographic approach here.

This study of folk music in New England integrates auto-ethnography and folklore. The study of folklore has helped me identify and understand the music I grew up playing and singing. The words folklore and folklife are often used interchangeably. In 1976 the American Folklife Center was established as part of the Library of Congress. The Center’s definition of folklife at that time read, in part: “community life and values, artfully expressed in myriad forms and interactions.”^{viii} Encouraging an appreciation of this artful expression is the task of the public sector folklorist. It is through this lens that I view my subject.

English scholar Ambrose Merton, pseudonym for John Thoms, first coined the word folklore in 1846 and the English model for the study of folklore has deeply influenced our own in the United States. An American folklorist Jan Brunvand, in his excellent text *The Study of American Folklore, An Introduction*^v offered a 1948 definition by folklorist Archie Taylor that I still find useful sixty years later for

understanding this academic offshoot of cultural anthropology: (Folklore is...) “material that is handed on by tradition either by word of mouth or by custom and practice.”^x I understand Taylor’s phrase ‘word of mouth’ to include recordings in addition to person-to-person transmission of ballads, songs and tunes.

At a time when the world was changing rapidly from a rural to an industrialized society,^{xi} ballad collectors in the Southern Appalachians as well as their counterparts in New England came from backgrounds of financial and academic advantage. Englishman Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell from Medford, Massachusetts were both part of a newly mobile middle class that emerged with the rise of industrialism.^{xii} Helen Flanders, trained as a classical pianist, began her folksong collecting in Vermont in the early 1930s just over a decade after the conclusion of Sharp’s Southern Appalachian visits. Her father was the president of a successful Springfield, Vermont mill and served a term as governor of that state.^{xiii}

These privileged people sought and often romanticized a connection with the old ways and the old songs.^{xiv} Western society had become industrialized and urbanized and increasingly complex. Members of the middle and upper classes often superimposed a wistful vision of simplicity and purity on rural life. They anticipated finding songs that would support this view, a view that overlooked the grinding poverty and limited options that bounded the lives of many tradition bearers. The song collectors experienced the world very differently from their informants. Singers rarely left their home communities throughout their lifetime except in search of work while Campbell, Sharp and Flanders traveled freely. The Appalachian singers, north and south, were often illiterate. Campbell, Sharp and Flanders were well educated and not

dependent on their own physical labor for day-to-day survival.

Much as the collectors romanticized the lives of their informants, decades later mainstream American culture has romanticized the story of the collectors as evidenced in director Maggie Greenwald's 2000 movie release "Songcatcher"³³ based very loosely on the story of Olive Dame Campbell's years in North Carolina. The popularity of this fictionalized tale and the success of the Coen Brothers' film "O, Brother, Where Art Thou?"³⁴ released the same year attests to a contemporary interest in the musical history of Southern Appalachian culture.

I will challenge the misapprehension that this music existed only in the isolation of the Southern Appalachians by extending the story to New England. I will demonstrate that folk music in New England continues to be, drawing on the American Folklife Center definition, "artfully expressed in myriad forms and interactions" today.

The work of Harvard Professor Francis James Child and English folksong collector Cecil Sharp is important to this study not only because it preserved a large body of English language songs and ballads in print, but also because it informed a perception of the criteria whereby only some music drawn from oral tradition was deemed worthy of preservation. I believe their influence still contributes to the difficulty that mainstream Americans have in recognizing and valuing their living folk music. The story of Vermont folksong collector Helen Flanders' 1949 and 1954 visits with ballad singer Oscar Degreenia in Cornwall, Connecticut, as told to me by his daughter Dolly Teer, will help to illustrate how the criteria has been perpetuated.

The terms *traditional* and/or *roots* are increasingly being used in place of *folk*

to distinguish older non-commercial music from more highly produced and commercial popular genres. But I believe the definition of folk music needs to include all of these forms. My definition of folk music aligns well with what University of North Carolina public historian Benjamin Filene terms *vernacular* music. In his absorbing study *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* ^{xvii} Filene suggests that *vernacular* music includes music that is “popular, current and manipulable by ordinary people.” ^{xviii} The phrase “manipulable by ordinary people” is the single most important defining characteristic of folk music.

Finally, I will offer stories of current music gatherings in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and in Cornwall, Connecticut, where this study both begins and ends as examples of how folk music is currently expressed in New England Communities. Kent C. Ryden observes in *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place*:

Folklore becomes our means of understanding the world and the medium through which we make our understandings available and legible to others. We recreate and vivify geography through our traditional comments upon it. There never is a world for us except the one we sing and, singing, make. ^{xix}

Chapter one begins with the singing of a place, Cornwall Connecticut. I wrote the song to describe an experience that will be familiar to anyone who grew up on a farm in the Appalachians, north or south.

Chapter 1 – Placing Cornwall

Haying Time

1. The field mice run for cover

And the kids run everywhere.

Leave off what you're doin' and come on,

The co-op mower's here.

“That machine could turn a stone deaf,”

Said the old man with a smile.

He's been cracking that joke at haying time

Since my father was a child.

Chorus:

And the old man read the evening sky

For a sign it was time to begin,

Then we worked like the devil and prayed for the sun

'Til all of the hay was in.

2. The hard work started when the mower moved on

To the next farm down the road.

In the heat of the day we were pitching hay

And my dad set the baler to go.
That baler dumped wire all over the field
If you looked at it crooked, I swear.
He coaxed and cussed and somehow
Kept it running for another year.

Chorus

3. At four o'clock we went back to the barn.
Milking and chores don't wait.
Spoke of mowers and scythes at supper
And kept an eye on the weather as we ate.
When it's cut and drying in the field
That rain'll turn the whole crop sour.
We worked as the shadows lengthened
And the bales grew heavier by the hour.

Chorus

4. I slept late and when I woke dark clouds
Were sweeping up the sky.
The old man said, "Let it rain for days
'Cause the hay is safe and dry."
But I guess us kids looked worried,
And he added with a grin
That by the time the carnival came to town
That sun would be back again.

Chorus

5. I've been thinkin' about the old man lately,
Don't know exactly why.
I put down my evening paper
And went out to read the evening sky.
But the streetlights, they outshine the stars
When you live in the heart of town.
Think I'll take tomorrow off and drive to the country,
Just see if the old man's around.

Chorus:

And the old man read the evening sky
For a sign it was time to begin,
Then we worked like the devil and prayed for the sun
'Til all of the hay was in.

Haying Time © 1981, Lorraine Lee Hammond, *Snowy Egret Music*, BMI

The hayfield in the song is in Cornwall, Connecticut, the old man in the song is Grandpa Smith and it is I who return from the city time and again to 'just see if the old man's around.'

John H. Arnold suggests in *History: A Very Short Introduction*:

People do things for reasons and within circumstances linked to their own present. But the things that they do cause ripples, spreading

outward beyond their own moment, interacting with ripples from a million other lives. Somewhere in the patterns caused by these colliding waves, history happens.^{xv}

In my study these waves of history collide with place. The place is Cornwall, Connecticut in the Berkshire region of the Northern Appalachian mountain chain, my childhood home. Contemporary philosopher Edward S. Casey offers a précis of philosophical historiography in his essay “How To Get From Space To Place In A Fairly Short Stretch Of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena:” “As Hegel insisted, a concrete universal is operative in contingent circumstances and has no life apart from those circumstances.”^{xvi} Put more simply, place comes into existence as it is experienced.

Casey is eloquent about the interaction of place and human body: “The lived body integrates itself with its immediate environment – that is to say its concrete place...We need to recognize the crucial interaction between body, place and motion.”^{xvii}

He is equally eloquent about the interaction between place and memory:

And last, places also keep such un-body-like entities as thoughts and memories. When I revisit my hometown of Topeka, Kansas I find this place more or less securely holding memories for me. In my presence, it releases these memories, which belong as much to the place as to my brain or body.^{xviii}

Casey’s observation about the role of place and memory is consonant with my

own experience. Observation is at the very heart of the study of place, observation of both the external environment and of one's relationship and response to it. When I revisit Cornwall Connecticut the place releases memories and triggers thoughts. The writing that follows introduces my Cornwall. Understanding the place, the culture and the history of Cornwall provides a context for understanding how place and folk music resonate together.

My husband Bennett and I drove through a lazy snowstorm of dandelion fluff on a hot, sunny June afternoon in 2007. The air was thick with tiny white parachutes riding the wind. Dame's Rocket bloomed in glorious stands of purple, pink and white. A foot and a half, even two feet high, the plants clustered by the hundreds edging the roads and fields. These escapees from Colonial New England gardens are as well established now as The National Society of Colonial Dames of America, but more playful. They swayed softly in the south wind that danced dandelion fluff through them, around them and above them. The locust trees, tall and straight, were draped with ivory bloom and the sweetness of summer in rural New England was everywhere.

The Dame's Rocket reminded me of the short, unruly pink Bouncing Bet that will, in its turn, bloom profusely next month and of my mom's Bouncing Bet story. She guessed she was four or five years old and riding on the buckboard with Grandpa Smith the first time she noticed the banks of the pink blooms. The pair were delivering eggs to the Cornwall Bridge train station by the Housatonic River for shipment to New York City. One hot July day she noticed a profusion of those pink

blossoms. Grandpa Smith named them for my mom as, a lifetime later, she named them for me.

Driving the four miles south on route seven from West Cornwall to Cornwall Bridge, Bennett and I were returning to Cornwall to visit friends. On the day following my high school graduation in 1962, at age seventeen, I had begun my journey away from Cornwall into a world of firsts; first ride on a commercial bus, first airplane flight, first time leaving the country, first person in my family to attend college. But I always return to Cornwall.

On our right a cataract, emboldened by late spring waters, leapt and tumbled down Sharon Mountain. Granite restrained it before it disappeared beneath the highway to be reconstituted as river on the opposite side. The Housatonic River is roughly one hundred and fifty miles long. It rises in Berkshire County, MA and flows southward to empty into Long Island Sound near Stratford, Conn.^{xxiv} Here on the stretch between West Cornwall and Cornwall Bridge the highway parallels the Housatonic most of the way.

The direct route for the buckboard from the farm to Cornwall Bridge and the railroad station was via Smith Hill Road and then south along this same section of River hugging highway. Named for my Mom's beloved Grandpa Smith, Smith Hill Road is even now paved along only part of its length, then abruptly reverts to dirt and still hurtles down the same steep slope graced by the cataract that it did when my mother was a child. This is not a drive for the faint of heart, and it must have been a heart stopper in the buckboard filled with eggs for market.

We drove south in our comfortable minivan with the river on our left. After

descending Sharon Mountain from the farm via Smith Hill Road, Grandpa Smith and my mother, young Eleanor, would have taken the same route. The old white horse would have drawn the buckboard along a level roadbed that followed the curves and straight-aways dictated by rock and water, by Sharon mountain granite outcrops and the bed of the Housatonic River.

My mom, Eleanor Bertha Mathews, was born in 1916 and grew up on her step-grandfather's small farm on the Housatonic River side of Sharon Mountain. The West Cornwall school, church and stores were miles closer to the farm than the ones in Sharon, and so despite a Sharon, Connecticut address the settlement of West Cornwall became her hometown and, later, mine.

Eleanor knew the woods north and south of the cataract like a street kid knows the 'hood'. As a schoolgirl in the 1920s she headed down the mountainside on foot, walked through the red wooden covered bridge that crossed the Housatonic, Hart's Bridge. Then she turned right on River Road and walked the short distance to the district 15 two room schoolhouse. Caulkinstown Road climbed down Sharon Mountain to West Cornwall but the road wound round and round before making a final straight descent to the covered bridge. Walking the road more than doubled the three quarters of a mile through the woods.

None of that "when I was your age" tone ever entered my mom's narratives about her schoolgirl days. She did not complain about that long walk to and from school. She loved those woods. But she told a hair-raising tale about a time when the covered bridge was being repaired. The entire span of the covered bridge, built in the 1860s, rests on a single stone pier. One morning she walked down the mountain and

discovered that the bridge was being dismantled for repairs. The single lane bridge was reduced to broad boards with a rope hold. Instead of declaring a holiday and turning around to go back home, as I am sure I would have done, she crossed the 242-foot span above the Housatonic River on those boards back and forth from school that day. She remembers the work crew encouraging her every step of the way and cheering her when she safely set foot on land again. This was in 1925. She was nine years old.

Years after we had left the farm she still brought me and my older sister Joanne with her each spring to wander up the Housatonic side of Sharon mountain in search of the elusive trailing arbutus, fringed gentians, wild columbine, hepaticas, the red and white trillium and pink and yellow lady slippers that she remembered from her own childhood rambles.

The arbutus disappeared first. One year it was lush and healthy, the next year it was gone. Then it was the gentians, and somehow I miss their gentle blue the most. They had grown quite close to the roadbed and we suspected the winter salt destroyed them. Our luck held with the hepaticas, trillium and lady slippers and fifty years later they still grace the Sharon Mountain slopes by the cataract. So do the delicate red tipped columbines.

In the winter we climbed back up into those woods to harvest large sweeps of ground pine; *Lycopodium*. We knew where to find both the running pine and the more elegant princess pine, with its golden spore stalk. We made plump beautiful Christmas wreaths to sell and we always made one for our own for the front door as well. The kitchen was transformed into a woodland workshop filled with the scent of

fresh resin from the pinecones we had gathered for decorating the wreathes. We opened the burlap sacks and pulled out fistfuls of greens to snip and then tie into bundles. The ground pines looked like miniature evergreen trees.

My Mom formed the frames for the wreaths by bending wire coat hangers into circles; very handy because the hook was already in place for hanging the finished wreath later, but very hard on the hands. We tied the plump green bundles with string, then wired them to the frame, more and more bunches, thicker and thicker. Next we decorated the wreaths with the pinecones and red alder berries we had gathered. What a glorious mess! The pungent pine resin from the freshly gathered cones clung to our skin, resisted soap and water, turned brown and stained our fingers for days.

At first we pulled up the ground pines rhizome and all, believing that there would always be more. We didn't equate the ground pine with the wildflowers, which we already understood were increasingly rare. When we started to notice that the ground pine too was disappearing we made the wreaths mostly of hemlock bows snipped and tied into bunches, then decorated them with bits of princess pine that we snipped carefully rather than pulling up the plant when we went back to gather it from the familiar but diminishing patches.

Now we are driving past the fields where Camp Cross, one of the first Civilian Conservation Corps, (CCC) camps in the United States, was built in 1933, as we approach the settlement of Cornwall Bridge. The CCC was part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal effort to pull the country free of the Great Depression by offering conservation work to unemployed young men in rural settings throughout the

United States.^{xv} This peacetime army eventually numbered in the millions and for my father, leaving a New Britain Connecticut orphanage after his high school graduation, it provided a welcome and necessary job.

Today nothing marks the site – nothing remains of the tent platforms or the cookhouse, the workshops or rec hall. But I have my father’s stories. When my Dad, Joseph Henry Choiniere, joined the CCC in 1934, at age eighteen, he was stationed at Camp Cross. He was assigned to a work crew that built a fire access road up the Housatonic side of Sharon Mountain, built it right through my Mother’s woods and on beyond the farm boundary.

I know where that road began. After a summer picnic at the old Camp Cross site when I was a child my sister and I wandered through what was left of the clearings and into the woods as my Dad described how the Camp was laid out and laughingly retold the story of how he built a road up Sharon Mountain, my mother’s mountain, and there she was, waiting for him at the top.

The town of Cornwall is about 1000 feet above sea level with a land area of forty-six square miles. It is surrounded by the rise of ancient Appalachians where the mountain chain has been worn to a nubbin through the wear and tear of millenia. And Cornwall is a complex rural place comprised of Cornwall Plains and Cornwall Hollow, North Cornwall and East Cornwall and West Cornwall and Cornwall Bridge, Cream Hill and Yelping Hill, Dark Entry and Dudleytown. Each place has its own character and history and still that one place, Cornwall, embraces them all.

Humanistic geographer Tim Cresswell, in his 2004 work *Place: A Short Introduction*,^{xvi} suggests that “Place provides a template for practice -- an unstable

stage for performance.”^{xxvii} He offers “a meaningful location” as a basic working definition of place, and then develops the concept with a survey of sources and thinkers.

Cresswell presents Edwards Soja’s concept of ‘trialectics of spaciality’, the awareness of ‘firstspace’, which is concrete, the hills and rivers, for example, ‘secondspace’, which is mental and involves the overlay of personal perception, and ‘thirdspace’, which is personal, place as lived and practiced.^{xxviii}

People can perceive and experience the same place very differently. I am singing my Cornwall to prepare for the story of Vermont ballad collector Helen Hartness Flanders who visited Cornwall in 1949 and again in 1954. Flanders came to record singer Oscar Degreenia, who had moved to Cornwall from the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in 1932. Helen Flanders’s extensive work collecting New England traditional songs and ballads was informed by the earlier work of both Francis James Child at Harvard and English folksong collector Cecil Sharp. To understand the circumstances that brought her to Cornwall we must first examine the work and influence of these two men.

2 – The Quest for Child Ballads.

Mary Alling

1. 'Twas in the springtime of the year, the flowers they was blooming.

A young man on his dying bed, in love with Mary Alling.

2. Slowly she rose, slowly she rose. Slowly she came nigh him.

When she got there, "Young man," she said, "I really think you're dying."

3. "A dying man I never should be. One kiss from you would save me."

"One kiss from me you never shall have, if your heart was really a-breaking."

4. "Don't you remember to your father's hall, to a place called Dwelling?

You shared the wine with all the rest, and slighted Mary Alling."

5. "Don't you remember to the music hall, with all them ladies a-dancing?

You danced around with all the rest and slighted Mary Alling."

6. "Look to the head of my bed, there is a napkin hanging,

And in it is my gold watch and chain. It's all for Mary Alling."

7. "Look to the foot of my bed. There is a basin standing.

It quite o'erflows with my heart's blood I shed for Mary Alling."

8. As she was standing by her father's gate she heard the death bell tolling

And every note that death bell tolled 'Cruel Hearted Mary Alling.'

9. As she was standing by her father's gate she saw the hearse come rolling.

"Take down, take down that cold, cold corpse that I may gaze upon him."

10. The more she gazed the more she scorned. The more she gazed upon him.

'Til all the girls did all cry out a shame on Mary Alling.

11. "O mother, mother, go make my bed. Go make it long and narrow.

My true love died for me today and I shall die tomorrow."

12. "O father, father, go dig my grave. Go dig it long and narrow.

My true love died for me today and I shall die of sorrow."

13. And from her grave grew a red, red rose and out of his a brier.

Traditional from the singing of Oscar DeGreenia of West Cornwall, Connecticut
Child #84, Barbara Allen

It is the early 1950s, and here in the Connecticut Berkshires I am a blue-eyed girl with long brown braids trailing down her back. I am sitting on the floor of the porch with my dungareed knees drawn up before me, arms wrapped around them. There is the steady drone of the Housatonic River below the house and the soft flow of women's voices from the kitchen; my mother is visiting with Oscar's wife Etta and their daughters Elva and Dolly. They are cooking together. On the porch Oscar Degreenia sits in his rocker with his unlit pipe in his hand and sings. I am a silent, enraptured audience of one. It will be years before my family owns a television set but Oscar's songs fill my head with images of broadswords and damsels, pirates and rogues.

Oscar was born in Sheffield, Vermont in 1878 and worked as a farmhand in the region until he moved to Cornwall in 1932 with his wife Etta and Etta's father and brother. They came to work as tenant farmers on the long established Gold farm on Cream Hill. He learned his songs from his mother Zoya LaClair when he was growing up in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.^{xxix} After Oscar's death Etta moved into the tiny cottage behind my parents' own small house and long after I had moved away from Cornwall I still joined my mom on visits with Etta and Elva.

Oscar's *Mary Alling* was his version of *Barbara Allen*, arguably the most widely known English language ballad in the world. Oscar's version is distinctive. It carries phrases and images that are unique to him and his family. The language is personalized in some places e.g. in verse four where he describes the father's hall as a "place called Dwelling." It is an interesting and important version that maintains the

grisly detail of the basin that “quite o’erflows with my heart’s blood.”

Scottish folklorist Margaret Bennett observed that this sort of graphic physical element was purged in the British Isles by polite Victorian society. When she and I sang our respective versions of *Barbara Allen* for a seminar on comparative ballads at the School for Scottish Studies in Edinburgh her version from the Isle of Skye omitted that unseemly basin of blood.^{xxx} She suggested that Oscar’s family probably brought his version to America before the mid-1800s. It may have been well before.

Margaret Bennett’s observation about the influence of Victorian sensibilities on the texts of ballads applies also to the bowdlerization of ballads by collectors and publishers. Class distinctions played a large part in this practice. There was no place in the middle class urban drawing room for barnyard humor.

The church also frowned on what they believed was the immorality of certain songs and ballads. In the late 1960s I visited with the late Rev. Buell Kazee (1900-1976) several times at his home in Lexington, Kentucky. Raised in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky, he was a fine ballad singer and banjo player with a large repertoire and it was a privilege to be made welcome and share some music together. He recorded extensively on the Brunswick Label in the 1920s. We traded songs and tunes back and forth. But when I asked him whether he could sing a version of *Little Matty Groves* he refused. He had learned it as a child but as a Baptist preacher he disapproved of the ballad because it concerned adultery. He never sang it. A great wealth of traditional music has been lost to censorship.

In the United States the singing of a ballad like *Barbara Allen* is generally associated with the Southern Appalachians rather than New England. Olive Dame

Campbell remarked on the beauty of a version she heard sung at the newly founded settlement school in Hindman, Kentucky, in 1907. In December of that year she and her husband John visited the school. There Olive heard a student named Ada Smith sing *Barbara Allen* and later wrote:

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 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. I was lost almost from the first note, and the pleasant room faded from sight; the singer only a voice. I saw again the long road over which we had come, the dark hills, the rocky streams bordered by tall hemlocks and hollies, the lonely cabins distinguishable at night only by the firelight flaring from their chimneys. Then these, too, faded, and I seemed to be borne along into a still more dim and distant past, of which I myself was a part.^{xxx}

Olive Campbell was one of the first to recognize that lyrics taught by academics at the turn of the last century as literary ballads, were being sung in the United States in an active oral tradition. Olive became a ballad collector. It was she who invited English folksong revivalist Cecil Sharp to come to the Southern Appalachians to collect extant versions of traditional English language songs, tunes and ballads. Together the two shaped popular perceptions of Appalachian music and culture for generations.^{xxxii}

But Oscar Degreenia, singer of the version of *Barbara Allen* that begins this chapter, was from the Northern Appalachians. He lived in New England all of his life. My own childhood in the Berkshires in the 1940s and 50s was very like the childhood experiences of kids growing up in Southern Appalachia at the same time. We had self-sufficient small farmsteads, barn dances, ballads and rural poverty in common. And we had it in common with people in the White Mountains, the Green Mountains, the Adirondacks and the Catskills.

Here is a description of mountain life in rural New England at the close of the nineteenth century written by John C. Campbell who later married Olive Dame. Campbell was a student at Williams College in the Massachusetts Berkshires at the time:

On a "mountain day" expedition to the top of Greylock (Mt. Greylock, at 3,491 feet, is the highest mountain in Massachusetts), the return trail had been lost in a gathering storm. Forced to seek shelter, we finally made our way to the door of a log cabin, such a cabin as one may see today nestling near the foot of Graybeard or Grandfather in the Carolina Blue Ridge. Given a cordial welcome by the young mother within, we sought to establish friendly relations with the little daughter cuddled, in fear of the storm and in shyness of strangers, in her mother's arms. The fire lighted up the room furnished with a simplicity one might duplicate in many a mountain cabin in the South. With the passing of the storm came a halloo from the stalwart young husband, as he returned from the clearing with axe gleaming over his

shoulder.^{xxxiii}

Campbell goes on to make the argument that:

Physiographic and other natural causes will explain why in our Southern Highlands these scenes persist along lingering segments of that frontier line; and why they are found only at isolated points in the Highlands of the North. Although we must limit ourselves to a discussion of the Southern Highlands, it is well to keep in mind that Southern and Northern Highlands together constitute a whole, a great upland realm extending twelve hundred miles or more from northeast to southwest.^{xxxiv}

But by the 1920s it was widely believed that the settlers in the Southern Appalachian Mountains were the keepers of the old songs and the old ways, and little attention was paid to the traditional culture of rural New England. In his study of influences that have shaped how Americans perceive their musical roots, *Romancing the Folk*, Benjamin Filene suggests that a major reason the culture of the Southern Appalachians emerged into prominence was a deep American conviction, as the First World War approached, that these Southern mountaineers were Anglo-Saxons. It was believed that their songs and stories proved them to be of sturdy English peasant stock. They represented a racial purity in the minds of those who were seeking it.^{xxxv}

In fact the people who settled in the mountains of northern New England were not that different from those who settled the southern length of the chain. Jennifer C. Post's 2004 book, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life; 1870-1940* describes the population:

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the principal rural residents of northern New England were descendants of Irish, English and Scottish settlers. They were farming families who came directly from their homelands, or moved up from southern New England or down from Canada, or returned east from settlements in the West.^{xxxvi}

And there was precedent for a strong musical tradition. In *Folksongs of North America*^{xxxvii} Alan Lomax wrote that oral tradition and the singing of British origin songs and ballads enjoyed a vibrant life in early New England, contrary to a widely held modern notion of a colorless and repressively puritanical culture. He suggested that constant contact with new floods of immigrants provided an ongoing source of topical British ballads, and the singing of unaccompanied ballads was a welcome diversion in rural areas from colonial times into the mid-nineteen hundreds.

According to Lomax, New England songs and ballads ran the gamut from sea chanteys to children's games, nonsense songs to tragic ballads, British ballads altered by the American experience (*The Boston Burglar*), and new songs and ballads based on the unique American experience (*Brave Wolfe* and *Katy Cruel*). Hymns sung with harmony developed independently from the unison singing of the early Puritans. Harmony singing was perpetuated by singing schools that flourished throughout New England until the mid eighteen hundreds.

By then a growing interest in European music began to dominate New England urban areas. It was promoted by what folklorist James Pullen Jackson referred to as the “better music boys” in his study of shape note hymns, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*.^{xxxviii} Examples of the breadth of New England

traditional repertoire are included in Eloise Hubbard Linscott's collection *Folksongs of Old New England* published in 1939.^{xxix}

It is commonly understood that John and Olive Campbell were the first Americans to study and consider implementing the ideas of the Danish Folk School model as a way to address rural poverty in the Southern Appalachians. But a larger story predates the Campbell's introduction to the concept of Scandinavian Folk Schools and also sheds some light on why the Southern rather than the Northern reaches of the Appalachians were the ones who received this particular attention.

Henry D. Shapiro, writing in *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*,^{xi} described the emerging awareness of Scandinavian Folk Schools in the American agrarian movement of the time.

In the late 1890s American Agriculturalist Philander Claxton, then head of Secondary Education at the University of Tennessee, visited Scandinavia and studied the folk schools there. When he later became director of the U.S. Bureau of Education he sent Bureau agents to Scandinavia to study the system. One of these men, Harold W. Foght, later contacted John C. Campbell to request some of the statistics on life in Southern Appalachia that Campbell had collected for the Russell Sage Foundation. This connection, Shapiro suggests, may have been how Campbell first heard about the folk school model for rural education:

Like Denmark in the 1870s, Appalachia in 1913 was an area of depressed agricultural conditions. So however were other sections of the nation, especially northern New York and western Massachusetts,

those other Appalachians.^{xii}

Shapiro goes on to suggest that to present the ‘folk school’ model to address northern rural poverty might have deeply offended “powerful figures in agricultural education, Liberty Hyde Bailey and Kenyon Butterfield, of the New York and Massachusetts state colleges, respectively.”^{xiii}

When the academics finally did take notice of traditional music in New England their work, like that of Englishman Cecil Sharp in the Southern Appalachians, was strongly influenced by one American scholar, Francis James Child.^{xiiii} Professor Child (1825-1896) launched an American search for ballads that has had far-reaching musical consequences. Child was a Harvard professor who laid the groundwork for Harvard’s Department of Oral Literary Studies.^{xiv} His ten-volume compilation, *English and Scottish Traditional Ballads*,^{xv} was published over a number of years (1882-1898). For these volumes Child selected 305 traditional ballads from British manuscripts as the ones he considered the finest examples of their kind.

Working only from written sources made available to him by a network of colleagues in the British Isles, Child acquired many original ballad books and manuscripts for Harvard University. He arranged for copies to be made when he could not acquire an original. Benjamin Filene tells us that Child tried to limit the ballads in his collection to those that he believed were being sung in the British Isles before printing first arrived in Britain in 1475, thus to ensure the purity of the versions.^{xvi}

Child offered a complete listing of sources, both manuscripts and books, in his final volume. In a 1996 essay by folklorist Mary Ellen Brown, “The Mechanism of

the Ancient Ballad: William Motherwell's Explanation", Brown observes:

Child was particularly taken with [Motherwell's] texts and his lengthy headnotes...One of the first manuscripts that (Child) had copied was Motherwell's, and his final edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* contains some 225 versions of 108 ballads, many from the manuscript that he had proclaimed [Child, 1882] 'of hitherto unused materials, much the most important.'" ^{xlvii}

Another source for Child was Bishop Thomas Percy's (1729-1811), *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* first published in London in 1765. The collection included songs from an anonymous manuscript that Percy claimed he rescued from his maid who was using pages to light the fire. Folklorist David Harker tells us that Bishop Percy greatly manipulated his texts and in 1794 admitted, through his nephew, "a scrupulous adherence to their wretched readings would only have exhibited unintelligible nonsense, or such poor meager stuff, as neither came from bard or was worthy of the press."^{xlviii}

When originals were not available, replicas were made for the Harvard University archive. Child built an exceptional collection for his department while at the same time culling these manuscripts for what he considered to be the finest examples of English language balladry.^{xlix}

In 1849 Child traveled to Germany to meet the famous brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. There he studied Germanic philology and classical antiquity for two years in Berlin and also at the University of Göttingen. While in Berlin he attended lectures presented by the Grimms, and corresponded with them extensively

upon his return to Cambridge.ⁱ

Child was not the first to publish English language ballads. Several collections of ballad texts had already been published in Great Britain in the last half of the nineteenth century, and he drew on many of them for his collection in addition to hand written manuscripts and some printed broadsides.ⁱⁱ But it was Child's vast work that established what is now referred to as the 'Child canon' of 305 ideal examples of traditional ballad lyrics, all selected from English and Scottish written sources.ⁱⁱⁱ

People sing ballads. In oral tradition ballad texts are paired with ballad tunes. Child was aware that music existed for the texts that he collected. The final volume of *English and Scottish Ballads* included some fifty melodies drawn from the text manuscripts. Scottish scholar William Walker of Aberdeen, who worked closely with Child, indexed the ballad tunes, providing several of them himself. Still the overwhelming impression of the presentation is of ballad as text.

In his 1976 work *The Singing Tradition Of Child's Popular Ballads*, Professor Bertrand Bronson observes:

Although Child did not see the music as an essential part of his editorial responsibility...it is mere justice to recognize that he did take the requisite first step by instigating the gathering of all existing evidence of tune records.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Child's texts were all from British written sources, but there was already a growing interest among American academics in locating American variants of these academically prized ballads. Child supported that goal. He was the first president of

the American Folklore Society, founded in 1888 at Harvard University.

The American Folklore Society was established seven years after the creation of the English Folklore Society. The study of folklore emerged at this time from the broader discipline of anthropology. Academic interest in understanding and preserving the old ways was growing. Folklorist Jan Brunvand observes that modern folklore study makes “eclectic use of theoretical and methodological approaches from anthropology, linguistics, communications, psychology and other relevant areas.”^{iv}

From the start the American Folklore Society had a broader mandate than its English counterpart. The interests of its founders ranged beyond English language ballads.^{iv} In April of 2007 I interviewed David Brose, folklorist at the John C. Campbell Folk School in his Brasstown, North Carolina office.^{iv} He spoke about the role of the American Folklore Society:

However when the American Folklore Society was founded it was founded for two things. Because of the loss, so here again they were thinking in an antiquarian way, they were thinking let's capture this before it's gone. But what they were looking at was quote unquote Negro folklore and American Indian folklore, so even when the American Folklore Society started they weren't just looking at the proud holdovers of our English language ballads they were looking at American Indian and African American folklore. And you know how the ballad collecting was too. So often they were just looking at text and not tune. It really was Cecil Sharp and Olive Campbell that came

along and said the tune is as important as the text. And let's collect both because each one informs the other.

Supporting the study of American Indian and African American folklore was a stated intention of the newly formed American Folklore Society, but interest in collecting Anglo-American ballads was growing quickly. By the time of Sharp's final field trip to the Southern Appalachians in 1918, there were active Folklore Societies in North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia.^{lvi}

Alphonso Smith founded the Virginia Folklore Society in 1913. Under his guidance as the societies' first President, and later as Vice-President and Archivist, early members of the Society concentrated on collecting oral versions of the classic English and Scottish ballads as identified by Francis James Child in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, published between 1882 and 1898. The following item from the Virginia Folklore Society historical record illustrates the intensity of the search for Anglo-American versions of the Child ballads at the time:

In the *Bulletin* for the third annual meeting held November 26, 1915 at the John Marshall High School in Richmond, Smith reported on progress toward the Society's goal of obtaining at least 50 Child ballads in the State and he thanked "all those who have co-operated with us in the effort made to restore our lyric past, and to make it a part of our lyric present."^{lviii}

Filene suggests that the myth of the importance of the Child canon held sway well into the 1920s despite John Lomax's groundbreaking collection, *Cowboy Songs and Frontier Ballads*, first published in 1918, and with no appreciation for the

musical contribution of African Americans beyond a careful interest in African American spirituals.^{ix}

As interest in collecting traditional songs and ballads grew, the need to archive this collected material likewise grew. The American Folklore Society and local folklore societies established archives for the use of their members. The music of ordinary working people was becoming the property of academics.

How accurately did these collections reflect the sound of the informant? Before the introduction of audio recording, the notation of traditional tunes, songs and ballads relied on the skill of the collectors to hear and document with accuracy. But the musical notation skills of collectors were inconsistent. When creating a collection for publication, collectors both in the British Isles and the United States often 'arranged' the music to increase its appeal for amateur performers. For example the 1796 Bunting collection of Irish traditional harp tunes includes piano arrangements for much of the music, as do many early collections of Scottish traditional tunes.^x These arrangements tend to regularize pitch and rhythmic variations that might have been present when the music was performed in the field.

Even without the added complication of creating an arrangement, it is likely that collectors sometimes heard what they wanted or expected to hear as they listened to an informant and noted down the music in standard Western musical notation. The often flowing and flexible phrasing and pitch of traditional musicians very likely sounded incorrect to upper class academic collectors who believed that their informants were of a social class that did not really know how to sing a proper melody. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl spoke to the difficulty of transcribing folk

music. Writing in *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents* he discusses the challenge of notating the musical nuances of field performers:

Of course, the important thing in transcribing is to be objective, to write down what actually occurs and not what the transcriber with his ear used to a particular musical idiom (usually the Western one), may think he hears. And make no mistake about this: What you hear is conditioned not only by what sound is actually produced, but also by what sound your mind is attuned to and expects. Consequently, transcribing is a process that requires hearing and re-hearing a piece; a minute of music may take two hours to transcribe.^{lxi}

Olive Dame Campbell played a very significant role in the collecting of ballads in the Southern Appalachians. A year after hearing Ada Smith sing *Barbara Allen* at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, Massachusetts born Olive Dame Campbell, a graduate of Tufts University, and her husband John, a graduate of Williams College and now a Congregational minister, began a four-year survey of the Southern Highlands. They had been hired by the newly formed philanthropic organization, the Russell Sage Foundation in New York, to investigate conditions in the Southern Appalachians at the turn of the last century. The Russell Sage Foundation was established in 1907 for "the improvement of social and living conditions in the United States."^{lxii}

The Campbells traveled much of the time by covered wagon, interviewing rural families about their lives and needs. Olive now took a particular interest in the

songs and ballads that the mountaineers were singing. She began to note down tunes and lyrics that she collected during her visits with mountaineers.^{ixiii}

Aware of the importance of this ephemeral and undocumented source of music, Olive contacted English musician and acclaimed folk revivalist Cecil Sharp. Sharp was the guest of New England philanthropist Mrs. James Storrow in Lincoln, MA, in June of 1915. Mrs. Storrow was very active in the popularizing of English Country Dancing in the Boston area, and she was a patron of Sharp's. He had traveled to New England to work on the production of a pageant to be produced in nearby Wellesley. Olive Dame Campbell visited Sharp at Storrow's home in Lincoln, bringing with her the texts and tunes of some seventy songs she had collected in the Southern Appalachians since first hearing Ada Smith at Hindman in 1907. Campbell knew of his work with English traditional music and hoped to interest him in her discoveries.^{ixiv}

Sharp immediately recognized the significance of what she had brought to him. He appreciated this evidence of the vitality of English traditional songs and ballads among the people of the isolated highland communities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Like Campbell, he valued the Child 'canon' and saw great literary worth in these songs and ballads. Campbell offered to introduce him to her sources, and to provide guidance were he to visit the Southern Appalachians on a collecting expedition. Sharp accepted her offer.

Between 1915 and 1918, with private funding, Sharp made four ballad-collecting trips into the Southern Appalachians. He collected over 1500 songs and ballads from the Scots-Irish who had originally settled in those remote areas in the

late 1700s. The Campbells offered Sharp guidance, and suggested singers that he might collect from. Sharp co-authored his first collection, *English Folk Songs From the Southern Appalachians*, with Olive Campbell.^{lxv} It was published in 1917. Henry D. Shapiro, writing in *Appalachia on Our Mind*, does a convincing job of presenting Sharp as the man who galvanized America's perception of the Southern Highlanders:

Since the mountaineers were well acknowledged as 'our contemporary ancestors,' the conservators of both pioneer virtue and pioneer vice, moreover, folksong was by definition American folksong. In addition, the existence of a persisting folk culture in Appalachia and the apparent English origins of this folk culture, offered an obvious solution to the problem of Appalachian otherness as it had emerged out of the debate on child labor during the earlier twentieth century in the legitimation it provided for the peculiarities of mountain life.^{lxvi}

Cecil Sharp came at the invitation of Olive Dame Campbell. Many of the informants he collected from were singers she had met when she and her husband John were traveling through the mountains for the Russell Sage Foundation. Sharp collected only in isolated rural areas, and he sought out singers he believed to be of English descent. He avoided large settlements where the musical influences might have been far broader, and he was not interested in the music of African Americans.^{lxvii}

Concerning Sharp's work in the Southern Appalachians, folklorist David Whisnant suggests:

... a different itinerary might have produced a substantially different collection -- one more congruous, in fact, with both his own broader politics and the cultural past and present of the mountain people.^{lxviii}

In New England, Helen Flanders ultimately collected nearly three times as many ballads, songs and tunes as Cecil Sharp. Sharp collected approximately 1500 between 1915 and 1918 during his four visits to the Southern Appalachians. On his final collecting trip he noted in his diary:

I am getting some splendid songs here, many of them well above the average but of course I do not now hear anything absolutely new. The number of duplicates is increasing very much so that I feel that with this year's work I shall have completed the major part of the work and if, as seems probable, I shall be unable to attack it again next year I shall not break my heart over the disappointment. I shall have taken down by the time this trip is done about 1600 tunes and they I believe will represent pretty accurately the songs that are sung in the Appalachians. There are no doubt still some good variants to be discovered but the labour in getting them would scarcely be worthwhile.^{lxix}

Olive Campbell and Cecil Sharp transcribed all of their fieldwork by hand. By the time Helen Flanders began to collect in New England in the 1930s she had the use of recording equipment. Although we would see these recorders as primitive by modern standards, the development of audio recording greatly altered the process of collecting folk music.

The development of audio recording technologies, beginning with wax cylinders and evolving to our current standard of recording digitally seemed to solve the problem of transcriber inaccuracies and flawed notation systems. Audio recording and subsequently audio-visual documentation of a field performance offered the possibility of greater accuracy than hand transcription. But audio recording, like hand transcription, was still an intervention. The informant often became self-conscious in the presence of the equipment in addition to any awkwardness that arose from the need to relate to the collector. The resulting performance still fell short of truly representing the musician, the music and the musical context.

Along with concerns that field recordings might later be buried in inaccessible archives new concerns arose about the possible commercial misuse of multi-media materials. The integrity of an informant could be compromised by an out-of-context use of audio-visual materials. The archiving of original source recordings and the question of who has access to that material and how the material will be used remains a largely unacknowledged part of the story of ballad collecting.

Flanders collected nearly 4500 traditional songs and tunes in New England between 1930 and 1958, impressive evidence that traditional music was flourishing in the northern reaches of the Appalachian chain.¹³³ In 1949 Vermont song collector Helen Hartness Flanders (1890-1972) of Springfield, Vermont first traveled to Cornwall, Connecticut to record ballad singer Oscar Degreenia. As a ballad singer he was not unique in New England, but despite

the impressive body of collected material, the story of tradition bearers and their repertoires in the Northern Appalachians is less well known than that of their Southern Appalachian counterparts.

The ancient Appalachian Mountain chain runs from Maine to Georgia and Scots Irish settled throughout its length.

The Scotch-Irish and Irish immigration, which began on a large scale after 1713 and continued past the American Revolution, was more evenly distributed [than German settlement in the middle colonies].

By 1750 both Scotch-Irish and Irish could be found in the western portions of nearly every colony.^{lxxi}

Had Cecil Sharp arrived in the Berkshires rather than in Asheville, NC to collect folksongs in 1917, I believe he would easily have found as many.

3 – Flanders and Middlebury

Mary On The Wild Moor

1. 'Twas on one cold winter's night
When the wind blew across the wild moor,
Poor Mary came wandering home with her babe
Safely clutched in its poor mother's arms.

2. Oh, father, dear father, she cried
Come down and open the door
Or this babe in my arms, it will perish and die
By the winds that blow 'cross the wild moor.

3. But the old man was deaf to hear her cry
Not a word from her lips reached his ear.
The watch dog did howl and the village bell tolled
And the winds blew across the wild moor.

4. Oh, how the old man must have felt
When he came to the door in the morn'
Poor Mary was dead, but the babe was alive
Safely clutched in its poor mother's arms.

5. Half frantic he tore his gray hair
And the tears down his cheeks they did pour
That cold winter's night, they had perished and died
By the wind that blows 'cross the wild moor.

6. The old man in grief passed away
And the babe to its mother went soon
And no one they say, has lived there to this day
And the cottage to ruins has gone.

7. And the villagers point to the spot
Where the willows hang over the door
Saying, "There Mary died, once a gay village bride,
By the winds that blow across the wild moor."

Traditional from the singing of Oscar Degreenia, and broadside sources.

Mary on the Wild Moor is one of the songs I remember hearing Oscar Degreenia sing. It is also the song that first brought him to the attention of Vermont folksong collector Helen Flanders. Helen Flanders never recorded Oscar's version of *Mary on the Wild Moor*. It did not have the cachet of being a Child ballad. But *Mary on the Wild Moor* is an important folksong that remains in oral tradition today. Without my early memory of his singing it, and my subsequent conversations with his

daughter Dolly, we would not know that it was one of the songs Oscar learned when he was growing up in the Vermont's Northeast Kingdom and continued to sing throughout his life

An early printed source for *Mary on the Wild Moor* is a Scottish broadside from the mid-eighteen hundreds.^{lxxii} But often songs and ballads were in oral circulation long before they found their way onto a broadside sheet.^{lxxiii} Therefore we can't be sure precisely how old *Mary on the Wild Moor* is. The story is sentimental - sad and puzzling. Why was the old man deaf to hear her cry? Was it the wind or was he rejecting her and her baby? Had she run away from home and now returned hoping for forgiveness? Was the child illegitimate? These are the sorts of themes that keep the old songs relevant. Part of the experience of singing these songs informally includes the chance to speculate with others about the characters and to try and make sense of the story by relating it to some event in one's own life.

Mary on the Wild Moor has always reminded me of my mother's story about a young woman and her baby who perished in a blizzard on Sharon Mountain. I thought she was telling me a cautionary tale designed to remind me to bundle up when I went out into the snow. Recently, however, I found an entry in Starr's *History of Cornwall* for 1782, "A woman and her child were found frozen to death on a road in Sharon."^{lxxiv}

The song is still in circulation. *Mary on the Wild Moor* was recorded by the popular 1950s country duo the Louvin Brothers. Johnny Cash recorded it as *Mary of the Wild Moor* in 2002. Alternative Rocker Papa M currently has a version up on YouTube. The story of *Mary on the Wild Moor* is so powerful that, like many

traditional songs and ballads, it continues to be sung.

Oscar was illiterate, but several of his songs found their way into print during his lifetime.^{ixv} The story of his experience with Vermont ballad collector Helen Flanders and the subsequent archiving and publication of his songs raises questions both about the interaction of collectors and informants and about the rights of academic institutions regarding the use of collected material.

It is not likely that Oscar ever even saw the book his songs were printed in. After his death his family tried unsuccessfully for decades to acquire a copy of the songs that Helen Flanders had recorded. It is easy to suggest that notifying informants of publication was too difficult and time consuming, easy to suggest that the cost of copying a recording for the family was too costly. But these excuses underline the insignificance of the informants to collectors and academics.

When Oscar and his wife Etta left their tenancy on the Gold farm on Cream Hill they moved into a rental house near the Housatonic River in West Cornwall. Later Oscar worked with my parents for several years on our chicken farm on Smith Hill Road on the West Cornwall side of Sharon Mountain. Our families remained friends when my parents moved from the Sharon Mountain farm to Cemetery Hill Road in Cornwall in 1949.

My mother used to say that the first snow of the year was thickening into a blizzard on that November afternoon in 1944. My father was ready to drive her from our little mountain farm to the Sharon hospital to give birth to me, her second daughter. She loved to tell me each year on my birthday how, as she was getting into the car, Oscar Degreenia broke from his chores and walked over to wish her well,

carefully balancing two wire baskets full of eggs.

I love that story. Oscar sang as he went about the chores on the farm on Sharon Mountain. Some years ago I discovered that as a young man Oscar worked on the next farm down the road from where my Vermont fiddling friend and poet Burt Porter in Glover, Vermont. Burt moved to his old farmhouse in 1966. Daisy Dopp had been born on and later inherited the neighboring property. When she and Burt found that they shared an interest in the old songs, Burt loaned her his copy of Helen Hartness Flander's *Ballads Migrant In New England*.

Burt re-shelved the borrowed book when Daisy returned it. Many years later I chanced to notice it when I was visiting. As I leafed through I found a note Daisy had written to Burt. Daisy Dopp had recognized Oscar Degreenia's name in *Ballads Migrant In New England* and in the note she told Burt that Oscar was a hired hand on her family's farm when she was a child. She remembered Oscar singing old songs as he went about his chores back in the 1920s.^{lxvii}

Since the 1970s the Glover, Vermont farm where Oscar once worked has been home to Peter and Elke Schuman and Bread and Puppet Theatre. The old barn now houses their haunting art museum. I have visited there often through the decades and I savor the connection of shared place.

In 1930 Helen Flanders, a classical pianist and poet from Springfield, Vermont, was invited by a member of the Vermont Commission on Country Life to document the folk music in the state for a year. At the conclusion of that year she continued to do fieldwork, now at her own expense, eventually collecting songs in oral tradition from informants in all of the New England states.^{lxviii}

Flanders, like Sharp, sought out examples of the Child canon when she began her fieldwork:

Helen Flanders' primary interest between 1930 and 1939 was in finding Child ballads for her archive. There is a proportionately large number of Child ballads on cylinders...Some of her earliest recordings on disc were made with Alan Lomax in November 1939 when they collected over 150 songs, stories and fiddle tunes. It was through her contact with Alan Lomax and through the influence of the curator of the collection from 1941-1960, Marguerite Olney, that the scope of the field recordings expanded beyond the traditional Child ballads and selected British and American broadside ballads to include also recordings of religious songs, children's songs, 19th century American popular songs and dance tunes, as well as folktales.^{lxxviii}

Flanders's early emphasis on Child ballads was likely due in part to the encouragement she received from folklorist Phillips Barry (1880 – 1937) who was himself a part of the Child legacy of ballad scholarship at Harvard. Barry attended Harvard both as an undergraduate and graduate student and studied there under Child's Harvard protégé Professor George Lyman Kittredge (1860 – 1941). Upon Child's death in 1896 Kittredge succeeded him and continued Child's work. Kittredge completed the final volume of *English and Scottish Traditional Ballads*, published in 1898 and was beginning to emphasize the importance of combining music and lyric in the study of ballads.^{lxxix}

Barry advocated the pairing of text and tune. At a time when many scholars

still approached the ballad as literature he argued that ballad texts and tunes deserved equal attention “(Barry) asserted then what has now become a commonplace in folklore scholarship – that “the words constitute but one half of a folksong; the air is no less an essential part.” was also interested in broadening the search for Anglo-American ballads beyond the Southern Appalachian Mountains.^{lxxx} He collected and published ballads from New England and the Maritimes himself.

In her quest for traditional New England singers Flanders wrote a column about old songs in her local Springfield, Vermont newspaper:

Flanders shared her songs with the public through weekly newspaper articles published in a variety of New England newspapers in the early 1930s and again in the 1940s. She published in the *Springfield Republican* in Massachusetts, the *Narragansett Times* in Rhode Island, the *Springfield Reporter* in Vermont, the *Waterbury Republican* in Connecticut, and the *Bangor Daily News*, in Maine.^{lxxxi}

In 1949 Oscar Degreenia’s teenage daughter Dolly read a column in the *Waterbury Republican* asking for words to the broadside ballad *Mary on the Wild Moor*. Dolly recognized it as one that her father sang. She offered to write down the words and send them in to Mrs. Flanders if Oscar would dictate them. I learned the details of the story when Dolly agreed to talk with me about her father’s music.

Although I had not seen Dolly for more than four decades a phone call in the spring of 2007 reconnected us comfortably and led to two subsequent visits. She was pleased to talk about what she could recall of Flanders’s visits to West Cornwall.

When I made that first call I identified myself as Joe and Eleanor's girl Lorraine, and forty-five distancing years effervesced into a shared present. She brought me immediately into her life, told me she moved to the trailer from a fourteen-room farmhouse that was still heated with wood. Said she finally found all that chopping and hauling was just too hard.

Dolly, now seventy-five, was spunky. She had been using a cane since she fell on the ice while trying to navigate the slippery slope from her aging trailer to the mailbox some weeks back. It made it hard to do housework, and the trash bags had been piling up on the back porch for awhile. In the depth of winter everything stays frozen. In the summertime the pile-up would present a serious problem.

Her trailer sits just above a state highway outside the little town of Madison, New York, some twenty-five miles south and west of Utica. Now I was coming to interview her. I had been studying up. I understood the difference between an interview and a conversation. I had learned to operate my new digital recorder. I had made a list of topics I hoped to discuss with her and I had bought along Jeremy Brecher's pictorial history of the town of Cornwall^{lxxxii} to jog her memory.

Her five-year old granddaughter Samantha was with her on that first visit, sent home from school with pink eye and waiting for her mother to get out of work and take her home. At first Samantha was at the other end of the long living room watching t.v. But she became interested in our conversation at the kitchen table and soon drew closer. Nine-year-old Rena, Samantha's big sister, came in from the bus a short while later. The girls enjoyed seeing the photograph of the two-room West Cornwall schoolhouse Dolly attended as a little girl, the same one my mother attended

fifteen years before her.

But Dolly was a tough “consultant”, the contemporary word that Sims and Stephens suggest to replace the older and somewhat awkward term of “informant”.^{lxxxiii} She enjoys reminiscing, no doubt about it, but her topics are far ranging and I remember one of folklorist Millie Rahn’s pointers about fieldwork:

“Decide what you hope will be the outcome – what information you want to get. Then be open to hearing something quite different.”^{lxxxiv}

It is the afternoon of Friday, November 30, 2007. I turn on the recorder and we begin a conversation that yields as much information about Oscar himself as about his music:

Hammond- And we’re both thinking about West Cornwall a long, long time ago.

Teer - Yeah – fifty years.

Hammond - Dolly say your name please.

Teer - My last name is now Teer

Hammond - It’s Dolly’s father Oscar who sang the old songs. Did Etta (her mother) ever sing any?

Teer - I can’t remember any of the words

Hammond - But I bet if I started singing *Mary on the Wild Moor* you’d remember a little bit.

Teer - Not too much. I mean you’d be surprised how little I can remember. I can remember Dad singing ‘em. I can remember him sitting on the porch in his rocker – with his umpteen cats.

Hammond - I remember the cats.

Teer - Do you remember? (I nod) Okay, it was a Whitney –Louise?

Old Asa Whitney, the plumber's sister. I don't remember what her name was but anyway she lived down past where Oval (Dolly's older brother) lived. She had cats and she'd call "Come and get these cats so your father can drown 'em." She'd put 'em in a bread sack and I'd take 'em home. Only trouble my father never drowned 'em, we kept 'em. That's why we had 30 some odd cats. And he'd go the store and buy a big thing of oatmeal and every morning he cooked a pot of oatmeal for those cats.^{lxxxv}

Following her father's death in 1957 Dolly and other members of the family became interested in hearing copies of the recordings that Flanders had made of the family songs. Oscar's widow Etta cleaned house for West Cornwall resident and Wellesley College graduate Helen Trowbridge. To help Etta, Mrs. Trowbridge contacted ballad scholar and Wellesley English Professor Evelyn K. Wells. At Trowbridge's request Ms. Wells wrote to the curator of the Flanders Collection at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont where all of Helen Flanders's recordings and documents were housed. Prof. Wells requested copies of the thirteen Degreenia songs in the archive. In the early 1970s Oscar's oldest daughter Elva gave me a copy of that letter. She said that Professor Wells's request had been turned down. The fact that Elva had kept the copy of that letter for more than a decade attested to the importance the family placed on hearing the songs.

The family tried on several more occasions to acquire a copy of those songs

from the Flanders Collection. And at Elva's request I wrote to and then visited the archive in the 1970s after she had showed me the Wells letter. I was told that although I could listen to a copy of the recording while I was in the library I could not have an audio copy of the songs to bring to Oscar's family because people had been using the material for commercial gain and so they were no longer making copies available.

During my second interview with Dolly Degreenia Teer at her home in Madison, New York on November 30, 2007, I asked her about her efforts to acquire a copy of her father's songs from the Flanders Archive:

Hammond: You went, one time, didn't you, to Middlebury and asked about --can you remember anything about doing that and why they wouldn't give you a copy?

Teer: They just told me they were property of Middlebury College. That was it.

And I teased and I cajoled and I says, "Well let me, if you don't want to let me tape, let me copy 'em." You know, I mean I says, "After all it's my Dad. I says, " By rights, they belong to me." (Dolly mutters, "Nothin'. Been there and nothin' worked.")

Hammond: The way it changed, it's been six years now since there's been a new curator in charge of the collection... and they took all the music from the Flanders Collection and moved it to the Music and Art Building and the Music and Art guy isn't the official curator and he made me a copy and he just gave 'it to me.

Teer: But you know she (curator) just was just plain miserable. And then my niece Pat she went up and tried to get 'em.

Hammond: I didn't realize that. Was that in the eighties? The seventies?

Teer: Sometime or other. I couldn't tell you that. She was married, her and Bob were married. And then my oldest daughter went to Vermont on her honeymoon and she went in there and she tried!

Hammond: Come on - give me a rough guess when. I'm just really interested.

Teer: Now she was oh. Let me stop and think how old her daughter is. Her daughter was born in seventy-nine so it had to be in seventy-eight when she went up. And they wouldn't let her.

Hammond: I wrote to them in seventy-four because I was spending time with Elva [Dolly's older sister] and we were trying to figure out how to get them... They told me that they felt that people would make money off of the songs.

Teer: But why would his family? You know. I mean really. You know, it was sentimental why we wanted 'em. Because it was Daddy, it was Aunt Meadie. It was for our own.

Hammond: Well you finally got 'em. We fought 'em and we won!

Teer: We figured it was our heritage and we should have it. You know that was what it was.

Since the 1970s there has been a change in the handling of the Flanders archive that reflects a change in folk music archives around the country.^{lxxxvi} On October 15, 2007 I interviewed Andrew Wentink, present curator of the Flanders Collection. He assumed that post in 2001. We met in the Special Collections wing of the main Middlebury College Library. Unlike his predecessors Wentink made it clear that he is interested in offering full access to the Flanders Collection:

...maximum access to all of our archival materials is one of our major goals here in Special Collections. So I would say that we would like to provide as much access as possible to the Flanders collection.

Umm. I think that this is a relatively new approach to archival management and I think that apparently from what you told me, that for many years I suppose it was difficult to get a hold of copies of this material.

He speculated:

I'm not quite sure what the concerns – they might have been copyright concerns. It might have been that the people who were curating the collection at the time felt that they would lose control of the content somehow without proper credit to the college. But I do know that Mrs. Flanders's original will, in giving this collection to the college, was that it be used for teaching and research. And obviously there's no way to provide teaching and research unless you provide access to scholars and folklorists and performers who avail themselves of the material in this collection – who are not right here in Middlebury it

would be very difficult for them to benefit from that material if we didn't provide copies of the material for them, unh, with the proper stipulations for use and whatever of course. But there certainly is no policy to prevent access to these materials.

And so I acquired a copy of the original 1949 and 1954 Flanders recordings of Oscar Degreenia in October of 2007 on a sunny Vermont day brilliant with autumn color. It was my CD to copy and share freely with his family and with Cornwall musicians who would like to learn his songs. Says Wentink:

One of the first jobs I had when I came back to Middlebury was to reorganize the Flanders papers... But my goal is to provide access to Mrs. Flanders's personal collection, her papers, and which chronicle and document the whole process by which she set up all these meetings and how she conferred with all leading folklorists in America and even in Britain during her career in building this collection. And also she - there are transcripts of all the field recordings - every single variation of all the songs. So there are literally thousands of these transcriptions.

Some of these curatorial changes are the direct result of recent massive building and renovation projects on the Middlebury College campus. Now the Flanders Collection recordings are housed in the music library, located in the Performing Arts Center. The manuscripts are housed in Special Collections in the main library building down the street. Before my interview with Andrew Wentink, and at his suggestion, I contacted Robert Frostman at the music library and sent him a

list of the Flanders catalog numbers of the Degreenia songs. When I arrived on the Middlebury College campus a few weeks later he had a CD ready for me, nothing to sign, nothing to pay. It was in my hands and I was elated.

Moments after the interview with Andrew Wentink was finished I popped the recording into the CD player in the car and Oscar was singing *Fie Diddle O Day*, a funny old Child Ballad, Child 278, also called *The Farmer's Curst Wife*. Flanders recorded this one in 1954 on her second trip to West Cornwall. He didn't sing the whole song, just said, after a few verses, "That's all. That's all I can do." The sound of his voice made me smile and I smile now as I write this memory. He really liked that song about a wife so sharp-tongued that even the devil wouldn't have her. The joke is centuries old.

I continued to listen and suddenly he was singing the first verse of *Fair Fannie Moore*, a ballad so scary and sad that I have never even tried to learn it. Not part of the Child canon, *Fair Fannie Moore* was classified by 20th century American ballad scholar G. Malcolm Laws as British in origin (Laws O 38).

Six weeks later, on November 30, 2007, I was bringing Dolly a copy of the Degreenia songs from the Flanders Archive. I had acquired them only a month earlier at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont after decades of trying unsuccessfully to have a recording of the music released for the use of the family after Oscar's death. Dolly and I listened to her father singing *Back of Yonder Mountain* on the CD and she was moved to tears. She had not heard his voice for fifty years.

These were the songs Helen Flanders's recorded during her 1949 and 1954 visits to Oscar in West Cornwall. I was looking forward to listening to the recording

with Dolly. I hoped the songs would trigger fresh memories about her father's music and about the experience of being recorded by Helen Flanders so many years ago.

Hammond: Will you tell me again about *Mary on the Wild Moor* (a broadside ballad that Oscar sang)? Because somebody saw Helen Flanders's column in the *Waterbury Republican*. Is that right?

Teer: I did. And I read it to Dad and that's what started him singin' for 'em. And that was one trip, to sit there. And Dad sat, you know, we sat down at the table so I'd have a place to write. And he'd sing it and I had to write it down. You have to sing it real slow and he kept losing his place.

Hammond: It's a long song.

Teer: We finally got it down but it was hard to do that and send it in. Because she wrote they needed the rest of the words to it. And I think they had maybe four lines or, five lines in the paper. And we thought, oh heck, we'll send that. It's no biggy. 'Tweren't two weeks she was at the door.

Helen Flanders described her first encounter with Oscar Degreenia in *Ballads Migrant in New England*:

I found a house beside the river at a turn in the road where lived a correspondent, Mr. Oscar Degreenia. He was leaning back against the house in a Windsor chair, quite as if the sound of the stream were flowing steadily through him. I introduced myself, telling him I'd like to live within the sound of a river. "You'd git tired of it," he remarked

succinctly.^{lxxxvii}

Flanders's anecdote makes a good story and I enjoy telling it. But I don't remember any Windsor chair. Rather I remember a beat up woven rocker. Etta took in washing and Oscar took whatever job was available for a man who knew how to farm but could neither read nor write. Dolly recalled that they raised chickens in nearby Goshen, Connecticut at some point and also remembered that for a while Oscar was hired by the railroad to walk the West Cornwall tracks looking for burning cinders after trains came through. But there is no description of the pithy details of working class hardships in her. The importance of the songs in Oscar's own life is not considered. There is no observation about resting and singing for comfort at the end of a working day or perhaps singing as a distraction from tedious chores. For Oscar the songs may have offered a deep connection with his home place in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom but we do not know.

Oscar lost interest in singing for Helen Flanders. Dolly said that her father decided Flanders must be making money from the songs he was singing for her:

Some of those songs his sister sang with him – she come down from Derby Line Vermont, Almeda, and she sang some with him. That was just before Dad said not any more to that woman (Helen Flanders). 'I don't know any more – I don't know any more'. She kept bugging him and he said (raises her voice), 'Didn't you hear me?'^{lxxxviii}

The Cleveland family in New York State's Upper Hudson Valley is currently trying to acquire copies of archived recordings of family songs from the

Library of Congress. Sara Cleveland (1905 – 1987) had an exceptionally large repertoire of songs. Her son Jim became aware the importance of those songs when he grew interested in the music of the folk revival in the 1960s. Sara’s family had come to New York State from Ireland and Scotland in the late 1800s. Sara sang all of her mother’s songs and also wrote them down in a chapbook.^{lxxxix}

Both Sandy Paton of Folk Legacy Records and folklorist and collector Kenneth Goldstein (1927–1995) of the University of Pennsylvania became interested in Sara and her songs. Folk Legacy released a collection of Sara’s music recorded by Sandy Paton in 1966; *Sara Cleveland, Ballads and Songs of the Upper Hudson Valley*.^x

Kenneth Goldstein also recorded Sara singing and subsequently placed the collection with the Library of Congress. Now, decades later, the family will only be able to acquire an audio copy of the songs in that collection if they pay a substantial fee for that copy to be made.

Goldstein wrote of the rich legacy of singing that remains in Sara’s family in the Folk Legacy liner notes for *Sara Cleveland, Ballads and Songs of the Upper Hudson Valley*. Sara’s son Jim, now a retired woodsman and construction worker, and her granddaughter Colleen are singers^{xi}

The preservation of these songs in the pages of manuscript songbooks is only one of the ways in which these songs will be passed on to present and future generations. Today, Sara lives with one of her sons, Jim (who is an excellent but exceedingly bashful singer), in Brant Lake, New York, where her granddaughter, Colleen, comes under her

daily influence. Those of us who have heard Colleen sing her grandmother's ballads can attest that she is a first rate singer who will see to it that Sara's songs are not forgotten. And until some collector comes along a couple of decades from now and 'discovers' Colleen, we are fortunate in having this fine recording of a small sampling of Sara's repertoire sung by Sara herself.

Colleen has continued to sing her grandmother's songs. Acquiring copies of Goldstein's recordings from the Library of Congress cost more than the family feels it can afford. It will be expensive to transfer the music from the original tapes to digital recordings and the Library is not prepared to assume the cost. There is no policy in place to provide families of those archived with a copy of family songs. In a recent conversation Colleen told me she regrets that the family didn't ask Goldstein for copies at the time.^{xvii} But neither did Goldstein, the academic 'rescuing' these songs, assume that the family should receive a copy for their own use although that would be a meaningful way to keep the music circulating in oral tradition.

As far as Colleen knows Sara never signed any kind of release for her material and Colleen has no idea why Kenneth Goldstein placed the collection in the Library of Congress. He and Sara Cleveland became friends, but as an academic his act of recording and 'preserving' her songs has placed them in an archival limbo.

Who owns the archived music of traditional singers? Who should own it? Dolly Degreenia Teer reports being told by Middlebury College that the college owned her father's songs. Even Wellesley College ballad scholar Evelyn G. Wells' request for a copy of the recordings for the widow was denied. Colleen Cleveland is

a singer who cannot acquire copies of recordings of her grandmother's songs archived in the Library of Congress. Despite some recent changes in archiving policy the rights of the families of singers to have access to recorded and archived materials is clearly not a priority.

Chapter 4 – Hard Times in the Country

Highway Crew

1. Pennies from heaven, when the snow started falling
The jokers at the general store teased the highway crew.
Like my father, you might find it hard to join the laughter
After you had done battle with a blizzard or two.
The grey sky was thickening. Darkness fell early.
Needed lights in the barn when milking time came.
Broke ice on the water for the goats and the chickens,
Then ran back to the kitchen to warm up again.

Chorus:

- Pennies from heaven, don't you smell the snow coming?
Did you look up last night and see haze on the moon?
Pennies from heaven, a blizzard by morning.
Mount the plows, load the sanders. It'll be snowing soon.
2. That night through my dreaming the telephone rang
Calling my father down to the highway barn.
I heard him speak softly, my mother made coffee.
The wind stole his words as he stepped into the storm.
A slippery drive down to the highway barn,

Storm's moving fast, there's a job to be done.
The plows are lined up like mounts waiting riders,
Drivers climb to the cabs and move out one by one.

3. They remember the old days when two men with shovels
Pitched sand from the truck, the gloves froze to their hands.
Each was locked in a corner as the truck bed was tilting,
Just a few boards away from a ton of shifting sands.
Now it's spreaders, not shovels. They lay off your partner.
It's lonely and dangerous out on the road.
Eyes straining, explaining a shape in the distance,
There's a tree down, a power line arcs blue in the snow.

Chorus

4. No school in the morning, there's no power in the county,
But plenty of chores since my father is gone.
All the grey day the storm lanterns sputter,
Snow falls as heavy at twilight as it did at dawn.
Twenty four hours since the crew was first called
I am lulled into sleep by a plow's distant drone.
My dreams turn that snow into dimes and then dollars,
Daddy scoops 'em all up and carries them home.

Chorus

5. My father comes home now, grey with exhaustion.
Says not to worry, he's feeling just fine.
Help him unlace his boots, his hands stiff with cold.
He has weathered that wild winter storm one more time.
Country people are used to hard work and low wages,
For the crew every storm means a chance for more pay.
But the true cost of 'pennies from heaven' is frozen
In lines on their faces that will not melt away.
6. Pennies from heaven, when the snow started falling
The jokers at the general store teased the highway crew.
Like my father, you might find it hard to join the laughter
After you had done battle with a blizzard or two.

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Folklorist Henry Glassie describes individual social classes as "... reasonable from within, strange from without, silent at a distance." By telling the story of my father's work I am telling 'history from below,'^{xviii} to offer insight into the often invisible, 'silent', experience of working class life in rural New England.

Soja's concept of 'thirdspace'; the personal experience of place as lived and practiced, is a concept that Glassie describes eloquently in his deep ethnographic exploration of a community in rural Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, *Passing the*

Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community:^{xciiv}

Society is not peaked like a pyramid or layered like a cake. It is composed of communities simultaneously occupying space and time at the same human level. Some are composed of upper-class foxhunters, some of middle-class scholars, some of poor farmers. All seem reasonable from within, strange from without, silent at a distance.^{xcv}

The multiple communities of my 1950s Cornwall childhood closely resembled those identified by Glassie in rural Northern Ireland in the 1970s. In Cornwall the upper-class ‘fox-hunters’ were playing tennis at the The Cream Hill Lake Association Clubhouse. The middle-class scholars summered at Yelping Hill in a community established in 1921 by Yale and Vassar faculty families who bought an isolated old farmstead with extensive land some of which they held in common.^{xcvi} Glassie’s poor farmers were people like my family, the Degreenias and others in the town who earned their living by manual labor.

These interwoven communities had emerged over a period of two hundred years of settlement. The town of Cornwall was established in 1745 on land first purchased by speculators at auction from the State of Connecticut in 1738 and gradually settled by farmers. Early settlers of this forty-six square mile tract were primarily Yankee descendents of the English Puritans who had settled in more accessible parts of New England a hundred years earlier. Within a little over a decade the town was firmly established. Rev. Solomon Palmer, a Branford, Connecticut native and Yale graduate, took the pulpit in Cornwall in 1741. Starr draws on Palmer as a source when writing:

The people of 1750 had become comfortably situated after their early hardships. They were farmers with a cow or two per family, a few other cattle, one or two horses and as many pigs. ...On Sunday they who were able 'went to meeting' in a fireless building open to the roof and only sided with clapboards. ...On the Green at the Center along with church and tavern were the stocks and whipping post, and later the town pound... They worked six days of every week. Visiting was the chief recreation, and its special opportunity was when the 'Sabbath' ended at Sunday's sunset.^{xcvii}

Hymns were sung in early Cornwall and so were traditional songs and ballads. Cornwall historian Theodore Gold in his 1904 work, *Historical Records of the Town of Cornwall, Litchfield County, Connecticut* mentions the music of the Wilcox family. The family patriarch Samuel was born in Simsbury, Connecticut in 1727. He moved to Cornwall perhaps as early as 1747. Gold tells us that Samuel's eldest son Zadok sang sentimental songs and old ballads. Gold even includes a bit of one, a British humorous ballad, as an example:

There was an old woman lived in our town as I have heard it tell
Who loved her husband dearly but another man quite as well^{xcviii}

The early town was farm centered and gradually small, scattered villages were established, each serving a farming population that grew up around suitable farmland. Water powered mills and manufacturing emerged in the early 1800s and the forests yielded charcoal.

The building of the railroad began in 1840, connecting Cornwall with New

Haven and New York. Not surprisingly, the town population increased significantly at that time. It was largest in 1850 with a total of 2,041. Seventy years later in 1920 there were only 834 residents. Today Cornwall's population is around 1500 people.^{xix} In his *History Of Cornwall, Connecticut* Rev. E. C. Starr speculates that although the arrival of the railroad in the 1840s opened up the prospects for developing and shipping the town's resources, including farm produce and manufactured goods, it also carried away much of the population. As the power source for industry shifted from wood and water to coal and then electricity, manufacturing gradually disappeared. Cornwall was once more a small farm-centered community.

If the railroad carried away some of the population in search of greater economic opportunity in urban factories and on the beckoning farmlands of the Midwest, it also opened Cornwall to an influx of 'summer people' from New York and New Haven. As early as the 1800s Cornwall had become a haven for summer boarders and then increasingly urban dwellers purchased homes that they occupied in the summer. By the 1950s it seemed to us 'townies' that the town population doubled in the summertime even though that was certainly not the case.

My father arrived at Camp Cross in Cornwall Bridge in 1933. Camp Cross had recently been established by the newly-founded Civilian Conservation Corps. My father was eighteen years old. When he finished his CCC enlistment he worked first as a farmer, then briefly for the Connecticut State Parks Department and finally for the State Highway Department on the road crew. For his entire working life he supplemented his income with yard work and gardening and seasonal labor at the Mohawk Mountain Ski Area. He continued to work as a gardener after his retirement

from the highway crew. My mother cooked and cleaned for Cornwall families.

I only began to understand how very hard my father's work life was in the early 1980s. I was already nearly forty and my father was still working on the highway crew. I was spending a winter weekend with friends in Cornwall and went out for a solitary walk in the stillness of a late night snowstorm. Large lazy flakes fell slowly at first, but soon the snowfall thickened, the wind rose. This was rapidly developing into a nor'easter. Turning back towards the house I heard the sound of a distant plow. Was that my father working alone on the Canaan road? As I walked toward light and warmth and friends I began writing the song that opens this chapter.

Once I had finished *Highway Crew* I wanted to sing it for my father before I performed it in public. In a sense I had written his song. I was unsure how he would respond. We working class folks are particular about keeping up appearances and here I was describing my father, "grey with exhaustion".

My parents were mystified by my music for the most part. They always seemed pleased when I arrived with a new recording for them, but I sincerely doubted that they ever listened to it after I left. I had learned my music from people in the community rather than from my parents. Raised as orphans, neither had grown up with family music. I bought my first instruments, a banjo and mandolin when I was in high school and paid for them with babysitting money. My parents attended only one of my concerts. That was in nearby Litchfield, Conn. in the late 1970s. They brought Oscar's eldest daughter Elva, my Mom's friend, with them to hear me.

But Daddy loved the *Highway Crew* song. Sitting in that little kitchen with my Dad and singing him the song I had written about him, and for him, seems, as I

look back now, to have been the start of a new love and trust between us. That love and trust made it possible for me to hold him safely in my arms, two decades later, through his dying.

Jeremy Brecher, a labor historian and my friend since childhood, still lives in Cornwall. In 1990 he interviewed my Dad for a Connecticut Public Radio Studs Terkel-style series on work. He based the first segment with my dad on my song *Highway Crew* shown above. He interviewed me and my dad separately, then wove speech and song into a fifteen-minute show.

Joe Choiniere:

By the time we got away from the garage we could hardly manage to travel at all. We had our plows on and we couldn't plow out our roads because the reports kept coming into the (highway) barn from every direction we went - trees were down, power lines were down, and it was really quite devastating...it was rough. Oh yeah, those storms can be tough.

Lorraine: "(My) strongest memories have to do with my being a little girl who's already been put to bed and can't get up...I wanted to be part of it. It felt exciting."

Joe:

And many, many of the fellows had time on the road when they simply were unsafe, but they kept on out there. But there were times when you had to put chains on all four wheels...and time when you were cleaning off a corner and simply got bogged down with a truck - the truck got anchored in the deep snow. And you were out there shoveling in that awful situation...no communication with anyone.

The fact that the men then were able to get enough money to pay their bills lent itself to the saying that when it began to snow, for the guys on the highway it was pennies from heaven. And while it was literally pennies, because the pay, as I said, was so low in those days for those old-timers, it did help. The men went along with it – they were glad to get the pennies, although coming from heaven, they certainly had to work for it.^{ci}

Jeremy's second show with my dad was also the last because the memories Daddy was dredging up were so painful for him that he would not, could not continue. I see now that he tried to keep a safe emotional distance by describing the experiences in the third person in both interviews. But they were first person experiences. Finally it was the memory of scything on the road crew that made him put an end to the interview.

In the 1950s the Connecticut State Highway crew still scythed the roadsides by hand:

Joe Choiniere:

...starting with six or ten men, and they would use scythes to mow roadsides back, or, as much as fifty feet from the edge of the highway down these slopes. And they would be standing in a parallel line, perhaps five feet separating each man, one behind the other. They'd go along non-stop no matter what the weather. On a hot day, they could be seen rounding a curve and you could stand and before you'd get across the road watching them come from one direction – you'd see they'd be out of sight going on up through. If a fellow was to slow down as he went along he had to watch out he didn't get

his heels clipped by the one behind him.^{ci}

Only when I was an adult did my father tell me how miserable that work was: a full mile of hot, dangerous, sweaty scything in the beating sun and then a single scoop of drinking water from the bucket in the back of the bosses' pickup truck. After a five minute break the crew boss jumped back into the cab, drove another mile, parked in the shade and sat and waited for the men to scythe their way through the high grass and low brush on the roadside verge for their next drink of water. The memory enraged him.

Born in 1915, my dad he was the fourth child of his Irish born mother, Madge O'Brien and his French Canadian father, Joseph Choiniere Sr. Joseph Sr. found work in the steel mills of Bristol, Connecticut. When he was about four years old his mother died. Daddy spoke of a hot summer day. Someone gave him the pennies for an ice cream cone and he ran back to share it with his mother – pushed past the adults and climbed on the bed to comfort her with the treat. Hands lifted him away. She had just died.

Fathers rarely raised children by themselves in the 1920s. There were cultural taboos and further it was a time of fierce economic hardship in the mill towns of New England. After a short time in a Worcester, Massachusetts convent orphanage where Daddy spoke only French, his father brought him to the Klingberg Children's Home, (now Klingberg Family Centers), an orphanage in New Britain, Connecticut. There the French was teased out of him. There he was reunited with his older sisters Anne and Madge, and there he lived until his high school graduation.

Upon graduation my father left the orphanage with no resources but a suit and a suitcase. It was 1933. He often said that he wished he could have gone on to college but he had no idea how to do that. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps program was starting up and my father signed on. Camp Cross, at Housatonic Meadows State Park in Cornwall Bridge, was founded in June of 1933, at the very time Daddy graduated from high school. He was assigned there and in short order he fell in love with my mother and with Cornwall. He remained true to them both for the rest of his life.

In *The Vulnerable Observer*,^{iv} anthropologist Ruth Behar writes of the conflict she experienced when traveling in 1987 on a long awaited journey to Santa Maria, in Northern Spain. The chapter title is "Death and Memory." She travels to Santa Maria to study customs associated with dying and all the while she grieves because she is so far from her own beloved grandfather who is dying in Miami.

She explores the 'death of memory', and I am moved by how the phrase conveys my own mother's dementia near the end of her life. But when she considers 'death of place' my experience is very different from what she describes. Santa Maria is a moribund rural village. The farms have failed and the few houses still maintained are summer retreats for former villagers or are lived in by a steadily declining population of elders.

But my Cornwall has a remarkable tenacity. The town still has working farms, some that I remember from the 1950s and others are new. Family names that go back into the town's early history mix in the phone book with names I do not recognize. The red one lane covered bridge that my mother walked through on her

way to the two room West Cornwall schoolhouse still spans the Housatonic River, iconic now with the demise of so many other covered bridges in New England.

It is when an informant of Behar's, a woman in her sixties, describes her mother's quiet death at home that I recognize how my own parent's deaths have brought me home to Cornwall. Cornwall also figured magnificently in the story of my mother's death, but I am telling my dad's story here.

Raised in an orphanage, my dad was not willing to go back into an institution when he was ready to die. He wanted to die in his own little house in Cornwall. He spoke with me about coming home to take care of him when it was time. And my brother-in-law Mark called when that time approached. "Joe says he's tired now," were Mark's words.

My father lived and died a man of the New England weather. A fifty year ice storm descended on the Northeast as my husband Bennett and I made the long drive to Cornwall in mid-November, 2002 from a Cape Cod weekend of concerts. As we approached the Berkshires conditions worsened. We skirted around fallen power lines and eased the car up and down impossibly slippery slopes. We arrived at the little house on Cemetery Hill Road just as the electricity failed. Our plan was to relieve a home health aide who had been caring for my dad until we arrived, but there was no way she could drive home on the treacherous roads. Her English was poor and our Lithuanian even poorer, but our rapport was immediate. We shared a very, very long night.

The house was soon pitch dark. With one failing flashlight from the car and a carefully placed lit candle we connected a small portable oxygen tank. We tucked

Daddy, frail and barely conscious, into a cocoon made from layer upon layer of blankets. Already the house was losing heat.

The phone still worked though and my first call was to the Rescue Squad. I identified myself as Joe Choiniere's daughter Lorraine. I had been on a bus out of town the day after I graduated from high school forty years earlier. I had no idea at all who was working on the Cornwall Rescue Squad and was concerned that I might be pressured to bring Daddy to an emergency room. I knew he didn't want that. I also knew we needed help with the oxygen supply until the electricity came on again.

"Hi Lorraine, good to hear your voice", came the response. "You remember me. I'm Brian O'Neil. You used to baby-sit for me and my brothers. I'll be right there with more portable oxygen." And there he was, offering to take Daddy to the hospital in the ambulance and understanding when we declined his offer. He said he would be back in the morning to check in on us.

That was the start of an extraordinary few days when the town of Cornwall rallied around my father, rallied around us. The State Police couldn't locate a spare generator anywhere and the power company anticipated that it would be two days before we would have electricity again. But as I called anyone I could think of who might have access to a generator, those people extended the search themselves and very late that night a call came that the Heddon brothers, Steven and Donald, had found an old working generator at the Mohawk Ski Area. They brought it down on the back of a pickup truck. They hitched the generator to the furnace and one wall outlet ,and we were warm again and could find our way around. We drowsed off to the sound of the generator, woke to its steady heartbeat. Steven Heddon and I

attended school together from first grade through high school graduation. I hadn't seen him since.

The nearest neighbors came the next day with food and battery lamps, moving carefully over the ice to get to the house. They understood that my father was choosing to die at home, and was dying now. They would miss him. The Lithuanian nurse drove cautiously away on the sanded, salted road.

Two nights later my father died in my arms, with my sisters nearby. In the next room Bennett was playing the beautiful Bahamian funeral song, *And I Bid You Goodnight*, on the guitar. When I hear that song now I weep. And I remember.

*For Joseph Henry Choiniere
March 30, 1915 – November 19, 2002*

Sound the solemn bells.
Licking wounds
And crowding for comfort,
The animals gather
To assess the damage to the pack.

Look. There is a severed limb
That was once both support and burden.

Look. Here is my own broken heart.

His last tender breath was so like all the rest.

Lorraine Lee Hammond 03.14.07

My father struggled all his working life to meet his basic needs and the needs

of his family. His fellow workers on the state highway crew understood the struggle perfectly. The people he gardened and handy-manned for did not. In her remarkable dissertation on the lives of people raised with inherited wealth sociologist Joanie Bronfman observes:

In addition, children of wealthy parents are given direct misinformation. For example they may be told that people like to live 'that way' (in poverty) and that poor and working class people could do better if they wanted to. Such explanations ignore the reality of classism and the emotional costs of racism and poverty.⁴⁴

I suggested in the introduction that class bias has prevented acceptance, appreciation and sometimes even simple recognition of the music of poor and working class people. As the experiences of working class people are overlooked, undervalued or taken for granted by members of the upper class, so is their music.

Chapter 5 – Wednesday in Westfield

Heart for a Song

1. Old John was a fiddler in his younger days, played for the dances at the Grange.
He remembers when a dozen sets circled the floor, but times and people change.
Now it's Nashville live on the satellite dish, they never play a single note wrong.
And it's Saturday night in a pick-up band and he'll give you his heart for a song,
He'll give you his heart for a song.

2. Fair Ellen's been working down at the plant, quit school when she turned sixteen.
Two long years now on the line in the shadow of an old machine.
She says with a smile her dreams are free, might come true before long
She sits near the band on Saturday night and she'll give you her heart for a song,
She'll give you her heart for a song.

3. Sweet Willie's a financial man. He does it well, learned to roll the dice as a kid.
Now he drives a Cadillac, dresses in style, knows the odds, never blows a bid.
He still visits his folks down on the farm and his love of the land is strong.
Wears cowboy boots every Saturday night and he'll give you his heart for a song,
He'll give you his heart for a song.

4. Let the band play, dobro weep, I want to hear country songs all night.

Me and my man come here to unwind. We're gonna feel all right.

The kids are home with a sitter, we've been working hard all week long.

We come here to lose our weary blues and we'll give you our hearts for a song,

We'll give you our hearts for a song.

©1978, 2008, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, BMI

Folklorist Henry Glassie's description of individual social classes as "... reasonable from within, strange from without, silent at a distance," quoted in the last chapter can be extended to describe how musical styles are experienced.

When I attend a performance of the Boston Symphony Orchestra I expect the ticket to be costly. I understand the cost of the infrastructure required to sustain the institution. I expect to dress 'nicely' and be in the company of others who are similarly outfitted. I know when to applaud and when to withhold my applause during the concert. It all seems reasonable to me.

This is an experience for Glassie's "upper-class foxhunters and middle-class scholars. To a person who struggles just to generate enough income to meet expenses year after year and is unfamiliar both with classical music and urban ways my experience seems "strange". It makes no sense to spend that kind of money for a concert, the music is unfamiliar and uninteresting and the environment stifling.

For an understanding of "silent at a distance" we need look no further than the caricature of classical musicians in the popular imagination. The wild haired baton-

yielding tuxedoed conductor is a classical music icon.

Conversely the natural voice of pickers and singers who heard accessible music all of their lives and sang or played along on whatever instrument came to hand fits the same Glassie criteria. Not limited to Glassie's "poor farmers" still it is often a rural phenomenon. The middle class scholars are also welcome here, folk music revivalists who are deep fans of both the repertoire and the experience of making music spontaneously with others.

All this seems very strange to people who expect musicians to have formal musical training. Where are the music stands and scores? Who decides on the arrangement? Why is that old woman with the shaky voice allowed to sing at all when there are clearly better singers in the room? As for "silent at a distance," this time the caricatures are hillbillies with blacked out teeth, whiskey jugs and banjos.

This informal music was the music of my own childhood and it continues to be the musical experience of many children who are growing up in rural working class families. The music learned by ear in these New England households and communities remains a mix of accessible commercial country songs, traditional songs and dance tunes. This has been the case since the emergence of commercial country music in the 1920s.

There is a significant and subtle interface between music learned through oral tradition in family and community and music learned through oral tradition from live broadcasts and recordings. Recognition of this interface is important to a full understanding of the evolution of folk music in New England. Radio and recordings added a new dimension to the dissemination of traditional music. Early performers

like the Carter Family and Bradley Kincaid (1895-1989) came from traditional music backgrounds and had grown up singing the old songs and ballads and playing the old tunes. They included these in their repertoires in addition to writing their own songs in a style that sounded traditional.

In 1924 the Chicago radio station WLS introduced The WLS Barn Dance, marking the beginning of live country music radio shows that “would proliferate throughout the country in the 1930s.”^{cv} The earliest country music recording sessions were in New York City. Rural musicians from the South made the long journey to the big city on the chance that they would be able to record and perhaps become commercially successful. Then in 1927 Ralph Peer, a producer for Victor Records, set up a recording studio in Bristol Tennessee and advertised for local musicians to come and play. The Bristol Sessions drew both Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. Rodgers and the Carters became the most popular recording stars and stage performers of the era.^{cv}

In *Romancing the Folk*^{cvi} Benjamin Filene suggests that Ralph Peer was conducting fieldwork and through Filene’s eyes I saw folk music fieldwork in a new light. “In the late 1920s companies did field work in 13 states.”^{cvi} Filene draws attention to the role the record companies played in the shaping of popular American taste and musical perception. But of course the record companies sent their agents into the South with recording equipment and then made decisions about what material to use. They based those decisions solely on what they believed would be commercially viable.

Jennifer Post observed in *Music in Rural New England Family and*

Community Life; 1870-1940 Revisited:

Family and community members learned songs that originated in both the oral and printed media throughout the period. Sources for their songs included other family members, itinerant workers, teachers, neighbors and coworkers, but also the radio, phonograph records, sheet music, hymnbooks, broadsides, and songsters, all of which played an increasing role in people's lives. Songs were also remembered and transmitted orally within a family or community context, or individuals and families used copybooks to preserve them... We therefore must recognize first that early collectors and their historical collections provide us with a limited view of song transmission.^{cix}

Post also notes the influence of radio in the 1930s and 40s observing that the collectors only wanted songs learned from family or community and weren't interested in anything learned from media sources. For that reason the process of popular music entering into oral tradition was not documented by the collectors.^{cx}

Oscar Degreenia loved to sing a funny old song about a Ford Motor Car, to a tune vaguely resembling *Old MacDonald's Farm*. That song would not likely have interested Helen Flanders and Oscar knew it.

When I first interviewed Dolly Degreenia Teer I asked her to tell me about any songs she remembered her father singing:

Dolly Teer - "*Redwing* – see when he died he gave me his windup Victrola and that was the last song he listened to and I have that record.

Hammond - Was that, "There once was an Indian maid?" [I sing a little of

the song.]

Dolly – “Yeah that was it. It was a Victrola with a big horn, was tall. Well I got a cabinet-darn thing’s full of records. Now there’s another one “*Cut Down The Old Pine Tree* – that’s on a 78.”^{ca}

Bradley Kincaid, raised in rural Kentucky, recorded versions of *Barbara Allen* and *Paper of Pins*. Both songs were in Oscar Degreenia’s New England repertoire long before Kentuckian Kincaid entered a recording studio, but the new ‘fieldwork’ of the recording companies was conducted in the Southern Appalachians, not in New England. Cecil Sharp’s work had firmly established that region as a source for homegrown music making. Recording in the Southern Appalachians reinforced the national perception that the rural South was the only home of traditional American music.

Although newly available recordings and a growing number of radio programs featured Southern performers, rural musicians all around the country listened to the broadcasts, bought recordings and began learning the new ‘commercial’ music. Much of what they heard and learned to play was deeply rooted in the traditional music of the British Isles and much of that music went on to become the national popular music of America.

Jennifer Post observes in *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life; 1870-1940* that the repertoire of Northern New England singers in the early 1900s was shifting to include:

... World War I popular songs (that) popular songs were sung along with the older ballads and songs in many communities. At the same

time, the popularity of early country songs, in the form of hillbilly music, and versions of the old ballads popularized by (radio) singers like Bradley Kincaid provided opportunities for listeners to connect simultaneously with the older traditions yet move easily into contemporary country music performances.^{cxii}

The word “hillbilly” was already in use by the close of the nineteenth century. Anthony Harkins, writing in *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, traces the complex web of meanings attached to the word. In his opening chapter Harkins observes:

...the pre-twentieth-century literary and visual antecedents of the hillbilly representation in America through the separate but overlapping traditions of the New England rustic yokel, the poor white of the southern backcountry and the mythic frontiersman of Appalachia and Arkansas.^{cxiii}

Thus the antecedents of the “hillbilly representation” included the New England “rustic yokel” stereotype.

But during the early twentieth century the negative “hillbilly” image became increasingly associated primarily with people living in the Southern Appalachians. The reasons for this were much the same as those for the growing perception of the Southern Appalachians as the repository of America’s traditional folk music. Progressive Era reformers were drawn to the Southern Appalachians by the perceived and increasingly publicized need of these “hillbillies” for social change and they were at the same time

captivated by a presumed Anglo-Saxon purity of the southern mountaineers. The mountaineers of the Northern Appalachians did not come under the same scrutiny and this accounts in large part for the fact that their story was not often told.

Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand states that: "Credit for the first instance of the word 'hillbilly' in music goes to Al Hopkins and the Hillbillies, who recorded in 1925."^{exiv} Ronald Cohen writing in *Folk Music, the Basics* quotes music historian Bill Malone, "The early hillbilly musicians were, for the most part, folk performers who stood in transition between the traditional milieu that had nourished them and the larger popular arena which beckoned."^{exv}

The influence of these early transitional musicians was profound. Vance Barney is a lifelong Northern Vermont farmer now in his seventies. He grew up in a rural household filled with folk music. I first met Vance and his wife Peggy at a music gathering in Westfield, Vermont. He plays guitar and he and Peggy sing old country and gospel songs, some from the late eighteen hundreds, others as recent as the 1930s. They sing simply and beautifully.

In a conversation with Vance in August, 2008 he mentioned that he had loved listening to Bradley Kincaid's music when he was a kid. Vance has a very gentle guitar and singing style that remind me of Bradley Kincaid's sound and I hadn't been surprised to hear about that influence on his music. Understanding the importance of Kincaid as a transitional musician of the twenties and thirties I was full of questions. Vance agreed to an interview. When I returned to Vermont in September we met at Martha's Diner in Coventry, Vermont September 25, 2008 for lunch and conversation:

Vance Barney - The music that you hear when you're young, some children hear different music. We heard a lot of cowboy songs. My mother's favorite singers like The Arkansas Woodchopper, Carl Sprague, Montana Slim. I grew up with that, with their songs, and I still have them today.

My folks had a lot of 78s. My aunt and uncle had a lot of records. And we used to visit them. We had farms. That was quite a ways to go from our farm to their farm thirty, forty miles away. But we did it. They had a lot of records. I had an aunt from North Carolina. She was used to country music. She could sing and play the guitar and she used to go up there all the time to see her and she used to always play for us.

We were young then. My mother had a guitar. She could play and sing. She hasn't done it for years. She gave it up. She bought her guitar during the war, a beautiful Kay guitar, a beautiful jumbo Kay guitar. She paid probably 35 dollars for it. That was a lot of money then. But my aunt in Cambridge (Vermont) had a nice arch top and she could sing and she could yodel. She comes from an area down there (North Carolina) where they did it and I loved to hear her sing. I used to go and hear her play and that encouraged me to buy my guitar. I bought one when I was about 13 years old. I paid about a dollar and a half for it. I didn't have a case for it. My parents wouldn't give me the other dollar. It came in a cardboard box.

Used to take a 78 rpm record and we'd play over and over and so we could write the song down. We did it all the time that's what we'd do. My sister did too, my other sister. My mother had a songbook and she wrote the songs down when she was young. She still has that thing. She still has it today, and I learned a lot of songs from that songbook. If I didn't have the record she would sing it for me or hum it for me and tell me how it went. And those were the songs I would sing when I was young. She had Gene Autrey songs back when he was first starting out --Bradley Kincaid, The Arkansas Woodchopper, Montana Slim, and so many others. Carl Sprague.^{cxvi}

The core of players who gather at the music session in Westfield Vermont on Wednesday mornings where I first met Vance and Peggy share musical backgrounds much like Vance's own. Many are retirement age now. They grew up with the same transitional mix of traditional and early commercial musical influences that were part of Vance's experience, "hillbilly music." In *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* Anthony Harkins states:

The enormous success of commercially recorded rural white music, today commonly labeled "country music," played a central role in putting the word hillbilly and its image squarely on the national cultural map. Country music's identity was so completely entwined with the "hillbilly" concept that between its commercial origins in the early 1920s and its emergence as a major cultural force in the 1950s it

was nearly universally known as “hillbilly music.”^{cxvii}

The music here is “manipulable by ordinary people,” in the words of Benjamin Filene.^{cxviii} It draws a core of some forty people together week after week into an intentional community. Filene used that phrase to define the modifier ‘vernacular’ for this music. I prefer to use ‘folk music’ as the descriptor believing that it has always been a vernacular form and we do not to make the distinction. Folk music flourishes at these Westfield gatherings. My husband Bennett and I attend whenever we can free up the time in our schedule. We timed our visit to Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom in late September of 2008 so that we could attend the Wednesday morning gathering. What follows describes that experience, the experience of making folk music these days in New England:

I was up at six to put on the coffee and then stepped out into the frosty September morning to breathe the sharp air, watch mist rising on the pond and assess changes in the color of the foliage. A calf bawled across the way, a rooster crowed and cacophonous jays quarreled nearby. We were staying at the log cabin that is our rental home away from home. We were in Lowell, in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom about twenty miles south of the Canadian border. Coming from Brookline, Mass. this was a great treat. Usually we manage a summertime week or two here. Now we had come up especially to attend the weekly Wednesday morning gathering of the Bobbin Mill Players on September 24, 2008, and to interview some of the musicians about the music they love.

But first, breakfast. Sharing breakfast is an important part of the Bobbin Mill

Players experience and history. Heading north on route 100 we drove past the site of the original Bobbin Mill. A modern house sits on a now level lot. Only a few years ago an old wooden mill still stood on the property. The Old Bobbin Mill Restaurant was housed in the lower part of the rambling structure. When the mill had been operational a water wheel brought power from the brook to run lathes for making the wooden bobbins used in Vermont woolen mills.

Fiddler Burt Porter tells the story about the origin of the Bobbin Mill Players and the Wednesday morning music session:

Hammond – You are one of the Bobbin Mill Players. Were you in from the beginning? It's been about ten years now?

Porter - No it started a couple of years before I came in. Let's see.

Ron Sanville and Leon Coocher and Paul Daniels were having breakfast at the old Bobbin Mill restaurant when one of them said let's bring our fiddles in and play. And they did. And then people started coming to join 'em and of course it's Wednesday morning so I never got around to coming up here until after I retired in '99. So I've only been doin' it for about nine years now. Leon Coocher died a few years ago, Ron and Paul are still part of the original Bobbin Mill Players.^{cxix}

Word got out and more and more local musicians both from Vermont and across the border in Canada began to show up and play together during Wednesday morning at The Old Bobbin Mill. As popularity grew people came increasingly early to eat and then lingered to hear the music. The session ended at eleven only because the waitresses had to reset the tables to serve lunch. A core group of regulars took the

name Bobbin Mill Players and began to perform locally for fairs and festivals, nursing homes and schools.

Milder winters in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom have taken an economic toll. The skiing industry has suffered and finally even the Bobbin Mill Restaurant couldn't afford to stay in business. The restaurant was torn down and the new house rose on the history laden lot. But the musical group had cohered by now and the Bobbin Mill Players weren't homeless for long. They soon worked out an arrangement with the Westfield Community Center and the Wednesday morning music goes on.

Now many of the regulars gather at seven for breakfast at the 101 Restaurant in nearby Troy before driving the few miles to Westfield for the music. Bennett and I have found a friendly welcome when we can join them. This morning we were the second couple to arrive and we seated ourselves midway down the length of the long table assembled in the center of the room for the anticipated crowd. Soon Lawrence and Pearl joined us. They sat to our left and two men we knew by sight from other jams who sat to our right. More tables were pulled up to make room for Burt and Rick who drove over from Glover and Ray and his wife who pulled up in their shiny black (1932) Ford Coupe. A guitar player who usually comes with his wife arrived alone. His wife was having surgery that morning and he would be going back to be with her. Lawrence and Pearl's daughter Becky completed the group.

Health and music are the big topics of conversation at these gatherings. Those of us in our fifties and early sixties are the kids here. These friends are suffering the depredations of aging with courage and companionship. Some of them had played together the night before and they were all looking forward to the annual picking

party at Brownie and Margaret's on Monday. We were invited immediately and Lawrence described how he cooks twenty-pound turkeys in metal trash barrels buried in hot coals to feed the crowd. Six minutes to the pound and the best tasting turkey you ever had. It's a technique he learned from some campers at a bluegrass festival in Maine a few years ago.

There's talk about country singer George Jones, there are discussions about instruments and RFD TV, a satellite channel that runs replays of old Porter Wagoner country music shows from the 1970s, There's easy joking with the waitress and then the gradual move to cars and the short drive south on route 100 to the Westfield Community Center.

We had noticed Richard and Clarice Farrar's van in the parking lot when we passed on our way to breakfast. They come early every week to help set up the room and they provide the sound system. There are others who work behind the scenes to help make sure that everything runs smoothly. An ongoing event like this doesn't happen spontaneously.

This September morning fragile emotions are closer to the surface than I have observed in the past. I can see how important the people in the group are to one another and I appreciate how they welcome and include us. They welcome and include everyone who comes. We are a little late (it's just after eight now) and there is no room left for us in the backup band. Instead we sit to one side and play along as others are doing here and there around the room.

The session has already begun. Anybody who wants to play can have a turn to do two songs. I had expected to see fewer people in late September than during the

summer. Perhaps there are fewer spectators but no fewer performers and I recognize most of them from past visits.

A woman I have seen there before takes the microphone and tells the group about the twelve-year old grandson of someone who has been attending for years. The boy is dying of cancer. She wonders if we can make a contribution to buy a gas card as a gift to help the family. The group decides to donate whatever amount is in the contribution box on the table by the door when the music session ends. At the end of the morning we learn we have collected more than \$300.00.

Throughout the morning those of us who didn't pack ourselves full of breakfast at the 101 Restaurant are helping themselves to coffee and donuts, deviled eggs and other homemade goodies. People are snacking and visiting out in the warm autumn sun, playing or singing or listening. A birthday is announced and the celebrant is sung to. There is an announcement of upcoming surgery for the wife of one of the players and a get-well card is circulated for all of us to sign.

The man I sat next to at breakfast has also been sitting next to me at throughout the session. We've had a great time singing along in harmony with all the performers. Now he takes his turn at the mike with his old Martin guitar and sings a country song about a mother's love. When he finishes he wipes away tears and I see other people in the room doing the same. There are tears several times during the morning. *Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain* brings them again and people near me talk of the death of children, siblings, spouses. The music is very powerful here today.

Millie's mom Evelyn is ninety-eight now. She played harmonica when we were last at the gathering on a Wednesday morning in early August. Soon afterwards

she underwent gall bladder surgery. Now, six weeks later, she is in a nursing home in Newport. The day after the Westfield gathering we happen to meet Richard Farrar at a Newport grocery store. He tells us that he and some friends played recently at Evelyn's nursing home and Evelyn joined them taking the lead on three harmonica tunes.

Today the room seems full of hard stories at first. And then as the morning unfolds spirits are lifted. In the back of the room the dancers begin to step out. One of the high steppers is ninety. Near the end of the morning he joins his mandolin-picking son to perform their two songs. He plays *Irish Washerwoman* on harmonica and then sings a funny old set of lyrics about bedbugs to the same tune.

Most of the songs this morning are old country songs. Sometimes there is a lyric sheet to help the singer, but the pickers just keep winging it. The morning ends with an elderly fiddler leading two French Canadian tunes that have the dancers up and moving and the audience cheering. It is eleven thirty. People have been making music here since eight and nobody is ready to leave.

Michael Yates writes of Maud Karpeles's return visit from England to the Southern Appalachian Mountains in 1951. Karpeles had accompanied Sharp to the Southern Appalachians as his assistant and devoted her life to collecting and promoting folksong and folk dance. Yates writes:

In a short article Karpeles commented that there were far fewer singers left and that mountain life had been completely revolutionized since Sharp had visited America. Electricity, good roads and education had entered the mountains and most homes contained a radio, 'the arch-

enemy, except in certain favoured circumstances, of folk song'.^{xx}

In the twenty-first century we can add the presence of television sets and computers to the radios that Karpeles found in rural households. But when the radio arrived in these households in the 1900s it was not the 'arch-enemy.' Radio, recordings and increasingly the internet are integrated into the living and ephemeral folk process. They are sources that reinforce and strengthen oral tradition.

The Bobbin Mill players learn contemporary and traditional songs from each other and also from recorded and printed sources. They continually breathe new life into their repertoire. They share their repertoire with an active community of players and singers every Wednesday morning in Westfield Vermont. Jazz and blues players and folk musicians, urban and rural, are similarly drawn to jam together. These players also gather around particular repertoires. In Westfield an evolving mix of music from traditional and recorded sources that might be termed "hillbilly" or perhaps "early country music" remains rooted and powerful in the present day.

Chapter 6 – Coming Home

Comfort Starr

1. Wild columbine bloomed all around.
The air was filled with the high lonesome sound
Of Comfort Starr's fiddle, his old shack stood
In a rough-cut clearing at the edge of the woods.

Chorus:

Ragtime Annie, Hole in the Wall,
Bach and Rachmaninoff, he played 'em all.
The birds sang high, the wind blew low
And the woods bore witness to Comfort Starr's soul.

2. "Don't you go near him," the old folks said.
"He's not quite right in the head.
With his wine and his fiddling he can get wild."
Just the words to encourage a curious child.
So we dared each other to sneak down the track
That ended up at his tarpaper shack.
We heard him playing --tried to peek in.
He stared right back at us and we ran like the wind.

Chorus

3. But the sound of that fiddle kept calling to me.
I crept back and hid in some red cedar trees
To hear his music, as dark and as sweet
As the fruit of the blackberry vines at my feet.
"He's amounted to nothing," my dad used to say.
"Don't you go wasting your own life that way."
But in this world full of gimme, with so little give
It sure seems to me there are worse ways to live.

Chorus:

'Ragtime Annie', 'Hole in the Wall',
Bach and Rachmaninoff, he played 'em all.
The birds sang high, the wind blew low
And the woods bore witness to Comfort Starr's soul.

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In his study of a rural community in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, Henry Glassie devotes a chapter to a consideration of the creative artists he calls 'stars'.^{cxvi} In the rural community of my Cornwall childhood Comfort was also a star in Glassie's sense of that word. "Genius is wrapped in poverty," he wrote. " Unsuccessful in the material world, unrecognized by the world at large, but glowing bright within, the star is the extreme personification of the community: poor, apparently dull, brilliant."^{cxvii}

Comfort's grandfather Reverend Edward Comfort Starr was a native of Guilford, Connecticut and a Yale graduate who moved to Cornwall in 1888 to become minister of the Congregational church. He retired twenty-eight years later in 1915. In 1926 Reverend Starr published *A History Of Cornwall, Connecticut, A Typical New England Town*.^{cxviii} The Starr family remained in Cornwall and his granddaughters, the 'Starr girls,' sisters Charlotte and Phyllis, were neighbors and schoolmates.

We kids were in awe of Comfort Starr. He was a recluse and, our parents said, a drunk. And he was a fiddler. I would sneak across the road and tiptoe as close as I dared to his tarpaper shack to hear him play. Rhubarb grew near the door, and

the red and yellow columbine native to Northwest Connecticut thrived where the trampled earth of the dooryard went to weed.

Was I eight years old? Nine? Crouched and hiding in tall grass and burdock, I bit the tiny flower tips and sipped the miniature beads of columbine nectar as I listened. Comfort's playing was wild – classical riffs and fiddle tunes flowed from his bow and combined and recombined in the swirling soundtrack of my childhood. My legs ached and trembled when I finally stood up, brushed myself off and headed home.

Phillip Bohlman observes that folk songs “are anachronistic, connected primarily to a previous era, but they live in the present, shaped by and responsive to contemporary events.”^{xxiv} He presents folksong as metaphor. It is connection, temporal and spatial, temporal because of narrative that gives a cultural context and spatial because it is rooted in place. For me that place is Cornwall. Comfort Starr's music was part of the soundtrack of my Cornwall childhood. It was ephemeral. I recognized classical themes and familiar dance tunes in his playing but I don't know whether he ever learned to read music. I would guess that he learned entirely from radio and recordings and other players. Although Comfort Starr left no written or recorded legacy of his music it is indelibly part of my own music today.

I created the song *Comfort Starr* with a musical sensibility informed by a lifetime of playing and singing and a deep connection with place. The chorus invites listeners to actively participate in the creation of music. As people learn the song and sing it for their own pleasure then it will become a folksong and enter into oral tradition. The strength of traditional songs and ballads in North American culture lies

in some combination of the timeless human interest of the stories being sung and the accessibility of the musical form for singers and instrumentalists. *Comfort Starr* is musically accessible.

But there is an essential problem with this culturally embedded phrase to ‘write’ a song. Did I actually write the song *Comfort Starr*? I only wrote down the lyrics and notation long after I had completed it in my mind. Even now I sing it with vocal nuance that does not precisely match the equal-tempered pitches of a well-tuned piano keyboard. I created *Comfort Starr* in my head. I allowed musical phrases to rush and tumble and dance with words until there was, finally, a complete song. I made the song, I did not write the song. There is a sense in which I simply gave voice to the song.

Long before I learned to write down notes and understand the largely mathematical and philosophical theory that supports and sustains Western musical expression I was making songs. I have apologized time and again to the musicians around me who wanted a written copy and arrangement. I did not know how to ‘write’ music and without notation they were unable to play. I was often made to feel out of step by formally trained musicians. I might have simply become defensive. Instead I was motivated to learn the rules. Now I teach music theory to adults many of whom are ashamed of not being musically literate. These people are often superb musicians but they have been excluded, ignored or upbraided because they did not share the vocabulary of the classical musical culture. Like me they were ultimately motivated to learn the rules because they wanted to broaden their musical understanding and experience. They were weary of being faulted for their presumed

ignorance and they did not realize how extraordinary their musical skills really were.

I was dismayed by the nervous laughter that greeted me recently when I sang an unaccompanied ballad verse. I was teaching an adult education beginning voice class and contrasting the spare rather strained mountain voice I grew up hearing with the lush vibrato-rich *bel canto* operatic trained singing style. The non-Western sounds of the vocal slides and the straightforward power of the lyrics unsettled my students.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts my students are often urban young adults who are big fans of pop culture. They all watch the competitive performance-oriented television show *American Idol*. My singing style was unfamiliar and the elastic meter of ballad singing did not fit the metric convention they expected. In unaccompanied singing phrases speed up and slow down according to the inner rhythms of the singer and the song.

When unfamiliar music is associated with the culture of some distant country it is called World Music. American listeners may not like or understand the sound but they accept it. When working-class Americans raised in a rural American culture sing and play in ways that are not familiar to mainstream listeners the music is called 'hillbilly' and 'God-awful.' American listeners who do not like or understand the sound hear it as a flawed version of the music they are accustomed to. The singers are 'sharp' or 'flat' and the beat is 'off.'

Some of these musicians would have eagerly pursued a classical music career but there was no support or understanding of that possibility at home and no money for musical instruments and private lessons and travel. Bluesman Silas Hubbard Jr.

once told me with a rueful laugh that when he was a boy if there had been a piano in the house they were so poor they would have eaten it. And always there was a compelling need for time and energy to help support the household. But most of the players were never interested in pursuing a classical career. They just wanted to play the music they knew and loved, the music they grew up with.

This split between the musically literate and non-literate is so deeply embedded in the United States and so poorly understood that we must look far beyond our Western cultural hegemony for useful insights. Anthropologist Steven Feld lived with and studied the Kalali people of Bosavi in Papua, New Guinea.^{cxxv} He explored the songmaking traditions there and applied the concept of acoustemology to the way that the Kalili integrate music and environment:

Acoustemology means an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth. This seems particularly relevant to understanding the interplay of sound and felt balance in the sense and sensuality of emplacement, of making place. For places are as potentially reverberant as they are reflective, and one's embodied experiences and memories of them may draw significantly on the interplay of that resoundingness and reflectiveness.^{cxxvi}

Folk music is embodied in this way. I draw deeply on place in my songmaking. Always a New Englander, Brookline Massachusetts has been my home for the past few decades. When I wanted to write a song about Mistress Hibbins who owned a plantation here in the 1600s and was hanged as

a witch on Boston Common I went out into my back yard and stretched out on the ground and breathed myself into place and began to find the song.

Musicians playing together breathe themselves into a shared musical place and participate in a shared act of musical creation.

Feld tells us there has been a move away from traditional singing and song making since Christian conversions in Bosavi in the early 1970s. Males are increasingly involved as workers in a cash economy and now only sing for Independence Day ceremonies. Now only the women are singers. He writes of the singer Ulahi who says singing is like water and composing a song is like a waterfall in your head. The songs are as paths moving as water moves. ^{cxvii}

As a musician and songmaker I understand exactly what she is describing. I have experienced those rushing streams and waterfalls. There is a way in which both musical and verbal phrases flow through my mind. As I resonate with them the song begins to sparkle and shine and flows into being. And like Ulahi my songs happen in my head.

The word ‘songwriting’ binds the words ‘song’ and ‘write’ in a totally Eurocentric way. But the power that drives folk music in the United States and around the world is far deeper and more ancient than the music that has occupied Western academics of the past two centuries. Writing in *Music: A Very Short Introduction* ethnomusicologist Nicholas Cook suggests that when studying academic writing about Western music in the past you could expect the following assumptions:

... high art or ‘art music’ meant the notation based traditions of the leisured classes and above all the great repertory of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

Low art meant everything else, that is to say the non-notated – and hence historically irretrievable – musical traditions.^{cxviii}

Throughout this fine little volume Cook is making the argument that we need to move forward from the stultifying Western classical music system that we have inherited through the past several centuries. He is trying to shake up the way we think about and interact with our own creative environment.

With some careful detective work we can trace the history of the separation of classical (notated) and folk (non-notated) music in the United States.

Ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger, father of folk musicians Pete, Peggy and Mike, wrote thoughtfully about the subject in 1957. In “Music and Class Structure in the United States” published in *American Quarterly*^{cxix} Seeger takes a thoughtful look at the effort to ‘make America musical’ that emerged in the early 1800s.

Seeger describes two elite groups that were forming. The first group was comprised of a small urban population that promoted “the best in European tradition.” The second was a growing group of supporters of “the finer things in life.” This they understood in terms of popular art as represented by the sentimental songs of the music hall stage. Both groups turned against the untutored music makers as bad:

Thus the two elite groups were at loggerheads with respect to what was good, [popular or classical] but in agreement upon one thing that was bad, the folk art with its repertory of the Anglo-American ballad, love song, game song and fiddle tune, a style of singing employing the ‘natural’ voice and devoid of exhibitory stage techniques.^{cxx}

The split between classical and folk music that Charles Seeger identified is still

firmly in place. In *Music: A Very Short Introduction* Nicholas Cook suggests that we have inherited the concepts of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art music from the nineteenth century.

When studying academic writing about music one finds the following assumptions:

... high art or ‘art music’ meant the notation based traditions of the leisured classes and above all the great repertory of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

Low art meant everything else, that is to say the non-notated – and hence historically irretrievable – musical traditions.^{cxvii}

The piano occupies an interesting place in New England music. In *The Reshaping of Everyday Live, 1790-1840* Jack Larkin traces the arrival and significance of the pianoforte in America in the early 1800s. At first affordable only by the very wealthy it became a “badge of gentility.”^{cxviii}

The great majority of American households were never graced by a pianoforte. Yet it came to symbolize the material and social ambitions of many families. Half in envy, half in admiration, they expanded their range of aspiration.^{cxviii}

As pianos became increasingly available in rural New England they were used to showcase the talents of the young ladies of a household for purposes of courtship. Pianos were used for the study and performance of classical music. But folk players also welcomed the piano. Playing ‘by ear’ these they introduced the piano for dances, often accompanying a fiddler. And so the instrument that epitomizes classical Western musical values was also welcomed at folk gatherings and continues to be used in jam sessions by musicians who play the instrument without any written music or formal

musical training. Similarly the violin has a separate folk identity as a fiddle. In both cases the difference is in the music played and the style of playing. In addition folk players and classical players seek different acoustic qualities in their respective instruments to most effectively express their distinctive musical voice.

Bill Ivey, former chairman of the National Endowment For The Arts recently published a challenging study, *Arts, Inc., How Greed and Neglect Have Spoiled Our Cultural Life*.^{cxxiv} In it he considers the separation of art by social class. He is a folklorist with a deep appreciation of both folk and classical forms of art. Ivey questions the assumed superiority of fine arts to other aesthetic experiences naming Boston as the place where Classical and Popular forms of art became separated by social class:

It was in Boston where, as Paul DiMaggio tells us, the long-term marriage between classical music and social elites was consummated and classical music was pulled away from it's 'popular' fellow travelers.

Concerning the emergence of upper class cultural organizations in 19th century America, Di Maggio further states in *Non Profit Enterprise in the Arts: Studies in Mission and Constraint*.^{cxxv}

The creation of the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts], the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra] and similar organizations throughout the United States formed a base through which the ideal of high culture could be give institutional flesh. The alliance between class

and culture that emerged was defined by, and thus inseparable from, its organizational mediation.

To illustrate the rancor of those who continue to criticize an egalitarian approach to defining cultural arts I quote conservative columnist George Wills from a 2001 *Pittsburgh Tribune* column entitled “NEA and ‘Cultural Bill of Rights.’” Not surprisingly Wills himself quotes right wing fascist poet Allan Tate:

What government should do first is define culture, for policy purposes, the way critic Allen Tate did, as ‘the study of perfection, and the constant effort to achieve it.’ The question, unanswered 36 years after the endowments [National Endowments for Arts and Humanities] were created, is whether this democracy is capable of a cultural policy unapologetically oriented toward excellence. Neither the studying nor the achieving of that is something to which everyone has equal access.^{cxxxvi}

Wills doesn’t even consider the possibility that democracy must include and honor all forms of artistic expression, even non-notated ones, even those that would give voice to otherwise unheard individuals and communities like working class rural New Englanders. Bill Ivey and I champion the importance of a much broader artistic vision.

Recently I joined another jam session that models the ongoing strength of folk music in New England, this one in my hometown of Cornwall. It was a crisp clear autumn night and the black Cornwall sky was brilliant with stars and a gibbous moon. Bennett and I had driven through a landscape of cornstalks and pumpkins to join the

weekly Monday night jam session. The drive was long – close to four hours from our home near Boston when you include the necessary stops for coffee. We left the city and moved steadily west from the Boston coastal plain. The land rose gradually as we drove through the Worcester hills and on into the Berkshire range of the Northern Appalachians. A footbridge lifts the Appalachian Trail over the Massachusetts Turnpike in Lee. That same trail winds through Cornwall.

We were heading to a jam session that was established in 2003. It was in part initiated because of a concert that my husband and I performed in Cornwall during the summer of that year. After receiving great kindness and support from the town at the time of my father's death, I wanted to express my gratitude. Bennett and I offered to perform a concert as a fund-raiser for the Cornwall library. It would be a program of music I had learned while growing up in Cornwall and music I have since written about the town and people.

Because I learned so much of my own music from friends and elders in jam sessions when I was a Cornwall kid, I suggested that the press release include an invitation to people were to bring their instruments and voices for a jam session when the Sunday afternoon concert was finished. They did. We jammed for hours. People took turns suggesting and leading songs. Some of the players met that afternoon for the first time or for the first time discovered a shared interest in music. They exchanged phone numbers and emails at the end of the evening on the chance that they might meet together to play again.

The Monday night sessions followed. Anyone who wishes to participate is welcome. At first the session was held at the town hall, site of our original concert,

but more recently has moved across the green to the sanctuary of the white-spined United Church of Christ sanctuary. I had not been inside that church since my parents' funerals; first my Dad's in November, 2002 and four months later my Mom's in March of 2003.

Jay Clark and Rachel Gall arrived first. Rachel is a fine fiddler with a classical music background who loves every kind of music. She helped to organize the original gathering. In 2006 I mentored Rachel with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, teaching her some of the old Cornwall songs and tunes and ballads. Her husband Jay is the grandson of Bill Clark who worked on the Highway Crew with my dad. Jay took up fiddling only a few years ago and is already playing very well.

It was a wonderful evening. We were made very welcome as we played tunes and shared songs with a dozen or so Cornwall folks who continue to make the time to make music together. The youngest players were two teenage girls who are learning to fiddle. Bennett and I were among the elders, the few of us in our sixties. People took turns choosing songs and tunes.

It didn't sound much like the Westfield Vermont Wednesday morning jam. But we sang a few old country songs. The beautiful *Tennessee Waltz* was one of them. There were five fiddlers, three guitarists, a mandolin player, a piano player, a marimba player, a washtub bassist and occasional hand percussionists. It makes me smile just to write the assortment down. We played mostly dance tunes. People played mostly by ear. Some read from music when they had it available. Rachel and I sang *Paper of Pins*, one of Oscar's songs. I had learned most of the fiddle tunes as a

kid but a few were recently composed and new to me. Several of the players have also formed a band to play for local dances. That probably accounted for the preponderance of fiddle tunes. The jam broke up in yawns and laughter before ten.

Folk music still has a home in Cornwall. In *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* Phillip Bohlman remarks, "I believe it essential also to understand how folk music appears in the modern world if we are to avoid demoting it to the status of an archaic genre."^{cxvii} I increasingly encounter the terms *traditional* and *roots* used in place of folk music to distinguish it from more popular genres. But where folk music flourishes it is also the popular music of the community. In Cornwall Connecticut and in Westfield Vermont folk music remains a flexible mix of traditional and contemporary music played by ear and informally.

Scottish folklorist Hamish Henderson (1919 – 2002) observed in his essay "Enemies of Folk-Song" that the two principle means of killing folk-song are, "declaring it already dead (therefore undeserving of either attention or nurture, financial or otherwise) and capturing it as a pet of the elite arts."^{cxviii} Neither strategy has succeeded in killing folk-song but both have played a role in the public perception of folk music.

Hamish Henderson's first means of killing folk-song by, "declaring it already dead" is modeled by George Will's quest for "excellence" (cited above) in any music worthy of support by the National Endowment for the Arts. Another approach is to insist upon academic text restrictions by suggesting only ballads from the Child canon are genuine folk music.

Henderson's concern about folk music becoming the "pet of the elite arts" is also well founded. Early collectors in England and later in the Southern Appalachians believed that the songs would be improved and more broadly popular if they were published with full arrangement for keyboard. Benjamin Britten in England and Charles Ives and Aaron Copeland in the United States were well known for their classical arrangements of folk themes. This music was performed by trained singers on the concert stage and continues to be included in classical programs.

During the American Folk Revival of the 1960s and 1970s traditional music was staged and arranged and marketed far from the back porches and kitchen tables where the singers first sang for the visiting folklorists. Says Ronald Cohen, in *Folk Music, the Basics*:

The end of the 1950s saw the emergence of The Kingston Trio followed soon after by Peter Paul and Mary and other clean-cut groups performing largely traditional repertoire that was arranged for mass audiences.^{cxxxix}

In a 1966 essay folklorist Ellen Steckert observed:

Today "folksong" to most young urban people is almost completely equated to personal protest song and with pop professional entertainment. Folksong to the scholar is a matter of oral tradition, change and generally non-professional transmission. We are in a humpty-dumpty age of ambivalent and misapplied words and although it is not our province to dictate usage, at the very least we can clarify what is happening.^{cxl}

Phillip Bohlman speaks to this point in “Historiographies of Disjuncture,” published in a 2003 collection of essays *The Cultural Study of Music*. Here he astutely observed that, “Any music can function within any cultural context if, of course, it is in the interest of the producers and the consumers to make it do so.”^{exi} “Elite” performances of folk music are at a vast remove from the kitchens and back porches of the informants who once allowed their own deeply personal voice to be captured by the pencil and microphone of the collector. But in the kitchens and on the back porches in New England the music making goes on.

Conclusion

I have argued that folk music is a sturdy yet ephemeral form of creative musical expression that remains rooted and powerful. Benjamin Filene, in *Romancing the Folk*, prefers the modifier *vernacular* to the word folk. He feels it is a way to address whether a particular piece of music or version is authentic. He suggests that the word *vernacular* broadens the definition to include music that is “popular, current and manipulable by ordinary people.”^{exiii} I believe Filene is simply and effectively defining folk music.

Music that is, in Filene’s words, “manipulable by ordinary people” continues to flourish in New England. This music existed in the Northern as well as the Southern reaches of the Appalachian Mountains at the time of Cecil Sharp’s 1915 – 1918 fieldwork and it remains relevant to the lives of

rural New Englanders today. Folk music in New England derives from the British Isles texts and tunes brought by immigrants to the rural isolation of the Northern Appalachians. Starting early in the twentieth century it was modified by the integration of music from live radio programs and recordings.

The gatherings in Westfield, Vermont and Cornwall, Connecticut are unapologetic examples of New Englanders drawn together by a shared interest in a common repertoire and the simple pleasure of making music with others. These players and singers rarely know how to read from standard musical notation. They have acquired their repertoire by ear from other musicians and/or from recorded sources.

Folk music is linked to place and the folk music of New England is deeply linked to rural place. This rural connection, whether actual, remembered, or wished for is shared by folk musicians currently playing in New England. It is carried in the repertoire. My own music is linked to my childhood home in Cornwall Connecticut – that physical and mental and emotional place are present in all of my musical expression. The music of Oscar Degreenia was linked to his childhood home in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. He brought his music, resonant with that place, to Cornwall.

Anglo-American traditional music has long been associated only with the Southern Appalachians in the American consciousness. I have illustrated that the entire Appalachian Mountain range from Georgia into the Northern reaches of New England was home to the same wealth of balladry at the time

Cecil Sharp came from England to collect Anglo-American songs and ballads in the Southern Appalachian mountains in the early 1900s.

Educated outsiders first drew attention to the music of the Southern Appalachians when attempts were underway to 'improve' that culture. Emphasis on the traditional music of the Southern Appalachians was further reinforced by the early recording industry. The rise of live radio shows like the WLS Barn Dance featured southern musicians. But early radio performers like the Carter Family and Bradley Kincaid (1895-1989) who came from traditional music backgrounds in the South had grown up singing many of the same old songs and ballads that their Northern Appalachian counterparts were also singing at that time.

Academic constraints have long influenced the definition of folk music and decisions about what should constitute folk repertoire in the United States. Like most collectors through the middle of the 1900s Helen Flanders in New England and before her Cecil Sharp in the Southern Appalachians were strongly influenced by Harvard University scholar Francis James Child. Because of the academic value placed on the ballads that Child selected in the late 1800s, these so-called 'Child ballads' in turn became highly valued by collectors. The balance of a singer's repertoire was ignored. The singers themselves were also largely ignored except as a source for valuable material.

Once the songs were acquired they were archived for preservation and further academic study. There have been improvements in arrangements for public access to this material, particularly with the increased digitizing of

recordings for distribution via the internet. But the rights of families of the recorded musicians to obtain copies for their personal use are still not a priority.

Issues of class overlap with issues of academic appropriation. Collectors, seeking only what they considered valuable overlooked much of the music that their informants enjoyed singing and believed to be important. A study of archived collections in the present day does not provide insight into the broader repertoire of the singers at the time of collecting. This is because much of that repertoire did not fit any acceptable academic criteria.

Folklorist Jennifer Post makes a nice point about our natural tendency to view the songs that collectors found as current for the singers when those songs were collected. In fact the singers themselves were often singing songs for the collectors that were already old and out of circulation. Perhaps they hadn't sung or even heard a particular Child ballad sung since their own childhood. They realized however that the collector wished to record only a very specialized subset of the songs they knew and were currently singing:

The old songs preserved by nineteenth and early twentieth century collectors were generally also old songs when they were gathered; they constituted the repertoires of those residents who likewise relied primarily on memories of the old times. Scholars often use these old songs to better understand the cultural expression of the period, ignoring the fact that both old and new songs were part of many residents' repertoires.^{cxliii}

David Harker speaks vividly of the class discrepancy between informant and collector when describing the work of Cecil Sharp's colleague and predecessor in England, Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924):

Baring-Gould did go out to collect from oral sources, but there existed a great cultural distance between the squarson-magistrate (squarson was title for the combined positions of squire and parson) and those country people he still called 'peasants' well into the 1890s. In front of his own drawing-room fire, or that of a neighbouring vicar or gentleman, with Baring-Gould at the piano, differences of social status, comparative affluence and the fact of class must have operated to affect any relationship which the clergyman thought he might be establishing.^{extiv}

The interaction between collector and informant was not one between social equals in Baring-Gould's England nor was it one between social equals in the Northern and Southern Appalachians decades later. Further, academic and upper class bias favors Western Classical music; music notated and played by the rules of conventional music theory and practice. In America this bias, which can be traced to changes in musical standards in New England in the early 1800s, remains in place today. It has created a gulf between those who are musically literate and those who are not, a gulf between those who consider the music of the equal-tempered Western scale to be the only correct musical frame of reference in American culture and those who do not--a gulf between 'elite' musicians and folk musicians. It manifests itself in deeply embedded ways like the assumed superiority of the 'violin' to the 'fiddle.'

The folk music of New England is primarily the music of a working class rural population and working class New Englanders continue to gather to sing and play. In response to my question about how he would define folk music Vermont fiddler Burt Porter responded:

Well I guess it's mostly music that's done. It's not so much to me what kind of music it's more to me the way it's done. It might be some sort of commercial tune like *Mockingbird Hill* or *Tennessee Waltz* but if people are playing it in a non-professional setting and for the enjoyment of their friends and so on that seems to me it's folk music. I mean most of the people around here don't make any distinction between playing *Soldier's Joy* [traditional] and *Tennessee Waltz* [composed by Reed Stuart and Pee Wee King in 1947]. They

don't see it as different music.^{cxiv}

How does folk music sound? I've heard it called scratchy and repetitive. The sound is spontaneously created time and again by individuals or groups of players. Perhaps all the players know the song being played. As often though, many of them aren't familiar with the specific song but they know the musical style and after listening for a bit they join in. This kind of informal session is recreated time and again by blues, bluegrass, old-time, and jazz players as well. The New England folk sessions draw a bit from all those genres with a preponderance of early country songs in the mix. There is no formal musical arrangement and players do not read from standard notation. The song or tune may sometimes be hundreds of years old, but the recreation of it is eternally new. The repertoire includes traditional songs of unknown authorship and newer songs that have entered oral tradition.

Old texts and tunes are sometimes reconfigured in new ways that update their appeal and re-enter the folk repertoire. Bob Dylan's *Girl From the North Country* is an excellent example of a new song that draws from the sensibility of an old ballad, in this case from *Scarborough Fair*. The chord progression is basic and accessible to most players. The commercialized revival repertoire that includes songs like *Girl From the North Country* is being given new life by the baby boomers who once put their music aside to raise families and tend to their jobs. Now they are picking up guitars and banjos and fiddles once more and singing and playing with and for one another. Bob Dylan's *Girl From the North Country*, sung from memory in an informal non-commercial session, is folk music.

Rural New England sessions combine new and old songs and tunes in endless

reconfigurations that change with the combinations of players and instruments.

Please refer to the discography for a listing of some recorded sources of less familiar and more traditional New England music. The music is always on a human scale. It is not the slickly produced popular sound of the American mainstream. It has not been commercially sweetened or arranged for a mass audience. In spite or perhaps because of this it survives and thrives.

Notes

Introduction

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- ⁱ Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 82.
- ⁱⁱ Encyclopædia Britannica, *Ultimate Reference Suite* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
- ^{iv} Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 161.
- ^v See Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British "Folksong" 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).
- ^{vi} Heewong Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek California: Left Coast Press, 2008), 46.
- ^{vii} Holman Jones, "Autoethnography" in *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 764.
- ^{viii} Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore, an Introduction*. 4th edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 1998.
- ^{ix} Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 17.
- ^x *ibid*, 5.
- ^{xi} Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent, The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America – 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), intro.
- ^{xii} For some background on Cecil Sharp see Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music, the Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 20. For some background on Olive Dame Campbell see David E. Whisnant, *All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 106.
- ^{xiii} Sally Johnson, "A Legacy of Music: Helen Hartness Flanders Preserved Vermont's Folk Music Traditions," *Vermont Life*, Spring 1991, <http://www.deborahflanders.net/VTLIFEHHF.html>
- ^{xiv} Charles O. Frake, "Pleasant Places, Past Times and Sheltered Identity in Rural East Anglia", in *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso eds., (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 230.
- ^{xv} *The Songcatcher*, dir. Maggie Greenwald, 109 min., ErgoArts, 2000, DVD.
- ^{xvi} *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, dir. The Coen Brothers, 106 min., Bevan, Felliner, Coen and Coen, 2000, DVD.
- ^{xvii} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
- ^{xviii} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 5.
- ^{xix} Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993), 58.
- ^{xx} John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2000), 93.

^{xxi} Edward S. Casey, “How To Get From Space To Place In A Fairly Short Stretch Of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena” in *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso eds., (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 29.

^{xxii} Casey, “How To Get From Space To Place In A Fairly Short Stretch Of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” 23.

^{xxiii} Casey, “How To Get From Space To Place,” 25.

^{xxiv} Detailed information about the river is available from the Housatonic River Museum Website, http://housatonicrivermuseum.com/?page_id=2

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- ^{xi} Henry D, Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 236.
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- ^{xiv} David E. Bynum, "Four Generations of Oral Literary Studies at Harvard University Child's Legacy Enlarged: Oral Literary Studies at Harvard Since 1856." <http://chs119.harvard.edu/mpc/about/bynum.html>
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- ^{xviii} David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong' 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), 21, **also read the online facsimile introduction to *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, Vol. II*, published in 1868 for a sense of Percy's presentation of the ballads in the 18th century: <http://www.archive.org/stream/bishoppercysfoli02perc>**
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- ⁱ David E. Bynum, <http://chs119.harvard.edu/mpc/about/bynum.html>
- ⁱⁱ Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music, the Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 16.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Singing Tradition Of Child's Popular Ballads* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), xxii.
- ^{iv} Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore, an Introduction*. 4th edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 25.
- ^{iv} Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 5.
- ^{vi} David Brose, Folklorist, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C., April 24, 2007, interview conducted by Lorraine Lee Hammond.
- ^{vii} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 17.
- ^{viii} Virginia Folklore Society Online, *Bulletin* for November 1915, <http://faculty.virginia.edu/vafolk/archive.htm#retro>
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- ^{xii} The Russell Sage Foundation, *About the Foundation*, <http://www.russellsage.org/> (May, 2007).
- ^{xiii} John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander And His Homeland*, xxx.
- ^{xiv} Henry D, Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 254.
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^{lxvii} Michael Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America - Collecting in the Appalachians" *Musical Traditions Magazine Online*: December, 1999, <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp.htm>

^{lxviii} David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 127.

^{lxix} Michael Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America - Collecting in the Appalachians" quoting from Cecil Sharp's 1918 diary: "Sharp diary, 24.9.18.146." *Musical Traditions Magazine Online*: December, 1999, <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp.htm>

^{lxx} Middlebury College Special Collections online, http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/lis/about/library_info/special_collections/collections/flanders/field_recordings/

^{lxxi} "United States," *Encyclopedia Britannica, Ultimate Reference Suite* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2008).

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^{lxxii} The National Library of Scotland broadside collection contains an early version of this song listed as "Poor Mary of the Wild Moor, probable period of publication: 1850-1870", <http://www.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/14837/transcript/1>.

^{lxxiii} Jennifer C. Post, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life; 1870-1940* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 32. Post disputes the frequent claim that Child ballads were necessarily older than broadsides.

^{lxxiv} Edward C. Starr, *A History Of Cornwall, Connecticut, A Typical New England Town* (Torrington, CT: Rainbow Press, 1982, New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1926), 55.

^{lxxv} Helen Hartness Flanders and Marguerite Olney, *Ballads Migrant in New England* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1953).

^{lxxvi} Lorraine Hammond interview with Burt Porter in Lowell, VT, September 25, 2008.

^{lxxvii} Sally Johnson. "A Legacy of Music, Helen Hartness Flanders." *Vermont Life*, Spring 1991. <http://www.deborahflanders.net/VTLIFEHHF.html>

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^{lxxix} David E. Bynum, "Four Generations of Oral Literary Studies at Harvard University. Child's Legacy Enlarged: Oral Literary Studies at Harvard Since 1856," <http://chs119.harvard.edu/mpc/about/bynum.html>

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- ^{lxxxiv} Millie Rahn, "Introduction to Oral History: Preserving Our Past for the Future", Workshop presentation, Arlington, MA, March 24, 2007.
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- ^{lxxxix} Folk Legacy Records website, <http://www.folk-legacy.com/store/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=64>
- ^{xc} Sara Cleveland, *Ballads and Songs of the Upper Hudson Valley*, Folk Legacy Records, PO Box 1148, Sharon, CT 06069.
- ^{xc1} *North Country Public Radio Online*, "Meet the Masters, Jim and Colleen Cleveland, Ballad Singers." <http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/upnorth/masters/cleveland/cleveland.php>
- ^{xcii} Lorraine Hammond conversation with Colleen Cleveland, October 19, 2008, Ellenville, NY. Used with permission.

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- ^{xciii} See Jeremy Brecher, *History From Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association or Union* (New Haven, CT: Advocate Press, 1986) as a model for this approach.
- ^{xciv} Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community* (Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).
- ^{xcv} Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, 86.
- ^{xcvi} Jeremy Brecher, *Cornwall in Pictures: A Visual Reminiscence, 1868-1941* (Cornwall, CT: Cornwall Historical Society, 2001), 108.
- ^{xcvii} Starr, Edward C., *A History Of Cornwall, Connecticut, A Typical New England Town* (Torrington, CT: Rainbow Press, 1982, New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1926), 45.
- ^{xcviii} Theodore Gold, *Historical Records of the Town of Cornwall, Litchfield County Connecticut* (Hartford, CT: The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1904), 191.
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Connecticut Public Radio.

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Connecticut Public Radio.

^{ciii} Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 40.

^{civ} Joanie Bronfman, "The Experience of Inherited Wealth: A Social-Psychological Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1987), 66.

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^{cvi} Dave Winship, "In the Summer of 1927," Birthplace of Country Music Website, <http://www.birthplaceofcountrymusic.org/node/29>

^{cvi} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

^{cvi} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 35.

^{cix} Jennifer C. Post, *Music in Rural New England*, 21.

^{cx} *ibid.*

^{cx} Hammond interview with Dolly DeGreenia Teer, Madison, NY, April 26, 2007.

^{cxii} Jennifer C. Post, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life; 1870-1940* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 58.

^{cxiii} Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

^{cxiv} Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore, An Introduction*. 4th edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 350.

^{cxv} Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music, the Basics*, 29.

^{cxvi} Hammond interview with Vance Barney, Coventry, VT, September 25, 2008.

^{cxvii} Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 71.

^{cxviii} Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 5.

^{cxix} Hammond interview with Burt Porter, Lowell, VT, September 25, 2008.

^{cxx} Michael Yates, "Cecil Sharp in America - Collecting in the Appalachians" *Musical Traditions Magazine Online*: December, 1999, <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp.htm>

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- ^{cxixv} *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith Basso, "Waterfalls of Song, An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi New Guinea" (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996).
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- ^{cxixix} Charles Seeger, "Music and Class Structure in the United States", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Autumn, 1957).
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http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/opinion/columnists/will/s_37802.html
- ^{cxixxxvii} Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), xvii.
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- ^{cxixxxix} Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music, the Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 157.
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- ^{cxlii} Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, eds., *The Cultural Study of Music* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 53.
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- ^{cxliiii} Jennifer C. Post, *Music in Rural New England Family and Community*

Life; 1870-1940 (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 12.

^{cxiv} David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British "Folksong" 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), 159.

^{cxv} Lorraine Hammond interview with Burt Porter, Lowell, VT, September 25, 2008.

Discography

Below is a list of sources for recordings of New England folk music including dance tunes, folk songs and ballads and re-releases of early country music recordings. The songs of The Carter Family, Hank Williams and Jimmy Rogers are perennial New England jam session favorites along with a repertoire of dance tunes that includes *Ragtime Annie*, *Soldier's Joy*, *Red Haired Boy*, *Arkansas Traveler* and *La Bastringue*.

Recordings of some of the artists mentioned by Vance Barney in his Chapter 5 interview are available at this website of CDs compiled from old 78rpm recordings:
<http://www.venerablemusic.com/>

A wide range of early country music re-releases are offered at:
<http://www.countysales.com/>

Rounder Records has an archive section of re-released material and also a catalog of newer artists performing in the old style:
<http://www.rounderarchive.com/>

Arhoolie's 'Masters Of' series includes a great sampling of contemporary players of traditional music:
<http://www.arhoolie.com/titles/9027.shtml>

For examples of great playing and traditional New England dance tune repertoire:
<http://www.greatmeadowmusic.com/>

Margaret MacArthur (1928-2006) was a vital singer of New England traditional songs and ballad. Her recordings remain available through The Vermont Folklife Center: <http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/>

Ethnomusicologist Jennifer Post's *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life*^{cd} includes a CD of some of the traditional New England musicians she writes about. It also contains printed versions of some fine songs and tunes. The book and CD will provide some new repertoire for contemporary singers and help to keep some old songs alive.

My own recordings, including several of Oscar Degreenia's ballads, are available at: www.greatacoustics.org

Annotated Bibliography

American Folklore Society, Mershon Center, The Ohio State University, 1501 Neil Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. <http://www.afsnet.org/sitemap.cfm>

Founded in 1888 the Society remains at the forefront of the study of folklore in America. Membership includes a subscription to the *American Folklore Society Journal* and online access to all past journals. It is an invaluable resource as a research tool and for an understanding of contemporary folklore study.

Arnold, John H. *History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Arnold defines history as “a true story of something that happened long ago, retold in the present.” He is a fine storyteller and his presentation of the evolution of Western history from the early Greeks to modern day is both concise and highly readable.

Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

The Vulnerable Observer is a collection of autoethnographic essays that beautifully addresses issues of compassionate interviewing and examines the place of autobiography in ethnographic anthropology. Behar has done us the great favor of modeling this emerging anthropological discipline at its very best and I consider this required reading for anyone interested in autoethnography.

Bohlman, Philip V., *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988.

Bohlman takes a dialectical approach to the study of folk music. He juxtaposes product and process, text and context, core and boundary as they apply to folk music in both Western and non-Western societies. And he tells us that change is a constant. Performance alters the music itself, the canon [community repertoire] and changes as the community changes. He argues eloquently for the continuing vitality of folk music.

Bradsher, James Gregory, ed. *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

The archiving of collected folksong has been an important part of this study. For background on archiving I turned to *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*. James Bradsher, editor, addresses professional archivists and the general reader alike. His particular concern is the training of future archivists, and

this volume offers a thorough introduction to and overview of the profession.

Bronson, Bertrand Harris, *The Singing Tradition Of Child's Popular Ballads*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

This collection of texts and tunes to the Child 'canon' is an abridgement of four large volumes by Bertrand Bronson published as *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*. The great strength of Bronson's work is his inclusion of texts and tunes both from the British Isles and America so that it becomes possible to compare variations among versions. Currently out of print it is worth seeking out for a thorough ballad reference work.

Cresswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2004.

Place: A Short Introduction, documents a field that emerged in the 1970s from the broader study of humanistic geography. Cresswell offers "a meaningful location" (p.7) as a basic working definition of place, and then develops the concept with a survey of sources and thinkers. This book offers a solid grounding in this emerging discipline and I found it invaluable as I integrated place into my study.

Feld, Steven and Keith H. Basso eds., *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.

Senses of Place is a collection of essays by philosophers and anthropologists chosen to balance ethnographic interpretations of place with theoretical explorations of the relationship of space and place. By the time I had finished the book I had begun to consider the possibility that embodiment studies are essentially a further dimension and expression of the study of place. This work is deeply grounded in the study of communities of people who still experience a strong sense of place. Although published in the late nineties the ethnographic studies are based on fieldwork done in the 1970s and 1980s. The collection offers a solid base for understanding the philosophy and experience of place and rootedness.

Filene, Benjamin. *Romancing the Folk*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Benjamin Filene was inspired to investigate American folk music and folk musicians after hearing about the remarkable folksong collecting road trip that John Lomax and his son Alan took in the summer of 1933. He discusses the elements that have shaped our perception of our own music as a nation. This is essential reading because it offers important details and insights about the interface between folk musicians and the commercial interests of the 1950s folk revival.

Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community*, (Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

In February of 2008 I attended a day-long workshop, “The Tools and Techniques of Community Ethnography” at the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury. The folklorists there sent a chapter from *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* in advance of the session and recommended the book highly. This is a superb example of ethnographic research conducted by a community outsider. If I needed to choose only one book to model community ethnography at its best *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* would be the one.

Harker, D. *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British "Folksong" 1700 to the Present Day*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985.

David Harker’s *Fakesong* is an essential but controversial work in the contemporary study of folksong; essential because he presents a Marxist view of the history of collecting folksongs in England that is little represented elsewhere and controversial because serious doubts have been recently cast on the accuracy of its scholarship. I have cited him with care in my thesis fully aware of the need to support his concepts with other sources.

Harker and I agree that issues of class have figured prominently in the history of folksong collecting in modern Western culture. Only in the past few decades have folklorists begun to address the influence of class differences on the body of work collected and the further use of the collected material.

It is no surprise that it has taken so long for the politics of culture to become part of the critiquing of folksong collecting. Until the 1930s when Marx and Engels began to change the way history is recorded^{cxiv} we were accustomed to reading only the history of ‘great men.’ The move to place the telling of history in the context of society and economics only gradually evolved into the ‘modern history’ perspective that we largely take for granted now.

Harker’s book was published two years after David Whisnant’s groundbreaking study of the politicization of Appalachian culture *All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*.^{cxiv} In a trilogy with Benjamin Filene’s *Romancing the Folk*^{cxiv} we find three authors devoted to taking a critical look at the popular and romantic notions surrounding the collecting and public presentation of folksongs from the late nineteenth through the folk revivals of the twentieth century.

But in a 2002 essay, “Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Reflections on the Work of David Harker,” published in the English magazine *Folklore*^{cxiv} English folklorist C.J. Bearman critiques Harker’s statistics and focus. It is a thoughtful and well documented critique and, like Harker, Bearman makes his own political point of view very clear although it is buried rather deeply in the paper. Writes Bearman, “To accept without question the opinion of a Trotskyite about Sharp and his work is rather like taking one’s view of the Communist Manifesto from a member of the British National Party.”^{cxiv}

English folklorist Michael Yates offered helpful insights about the controversy in a thoughtful 2003 essay, “Jumping to Conclusions.”^{cxiv} Yates points out that if Harker’s work is indeed as flawed as Bearman suggests that post-Harker English folksong critiques using Harker’s work as a starting point are likewise flawed. I suggest that Harker’s book should not be ignored in the study of folksong but rather read with an awareness of its limitations and a willingness to consult original sources as necessary.

Post, Jennifer C. *Music in Rural New England Family and Community Life; 1870 - 1940*. Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004.

Post’s informants for this study are primarily family members of singers Flanders collected from in the 1930s. Post, an ethnomusicologist, was longtime curator of the Flanders collection at Middlebury College. She offers helpful insights into the roles of men and women music maker. A helpful CD of traditional New England singers is included.

Starr, Edward C., *A History Of Cornwall, Connecticut, A Typical New England Town*. New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1926.

This book is a delightful read for insight into the background of the town that features so prominently in this study. Written from a ‘history of great men’ perspective by a retired Congregational minister, the writing has a kind of openness and charm that made me favor it over Gold’s history of the town.^{cxiv}

David E. Whisnant, *All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 106.

At the start of the twentieth century popular stereotypes of Southern Appalachian mountaineers often presented a culturally deprived and economically beleaguered population. Here Whisnant considers the culture of that population and some of the ways it was perceived, influenced and promoted by non-members. He studies three major cultural interventions that occurred during this time; the establishment of the Hindman Settlement School in Eastern Kentucky, the arrival of English folk revivalist Cecil Sharp in 1916 and the impact of the White Top Folk Festival organized in 1930. This book contributes to an understanding of the layers of intentional and unintentional manipulation that one cultural group may perpetuate upon another.

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