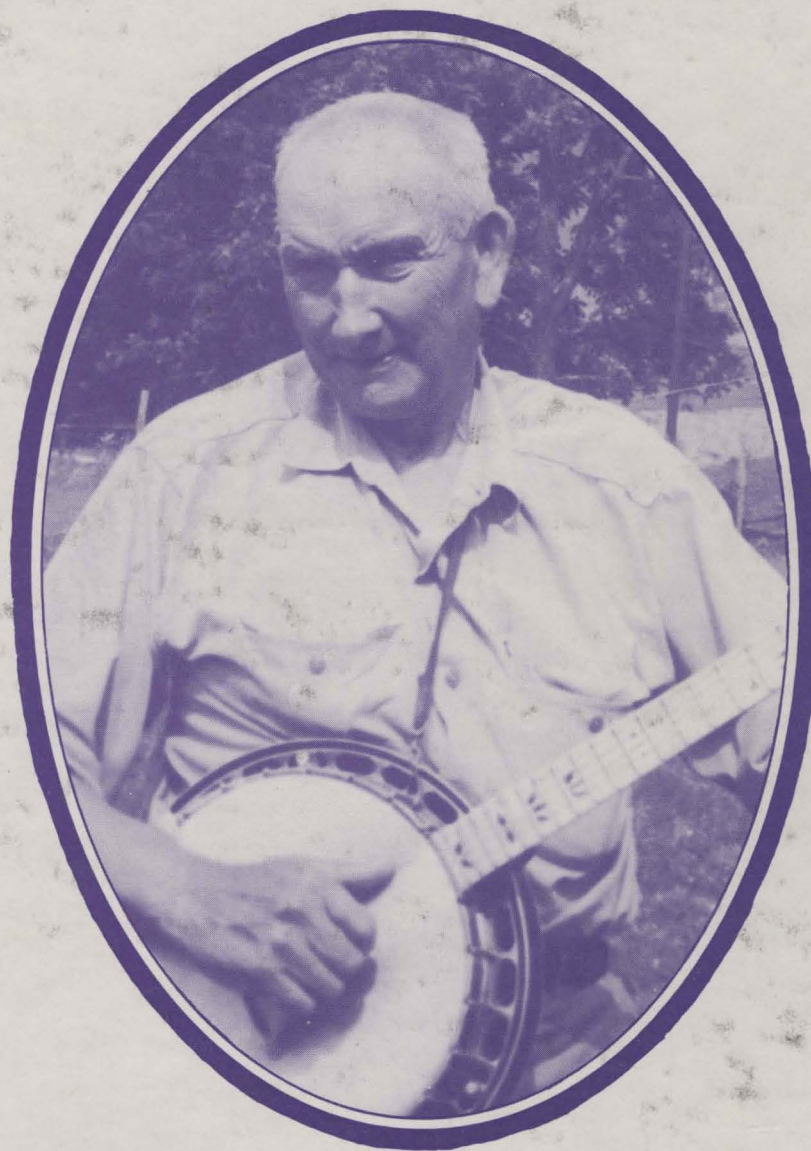


THE MUSIC OF  
**ROSCOE  
HOLCOMB & WADE  
WARD**



OF DAISY, KENTUCKY



OF INDEPENDENCE, VIRGINIA



EDITED BY ERIC DAVIDSON & JOHN COHEN  
FOLKWAYS RECORD FA 2363

Descriptive notes inside pocket

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FOLKLIFE PROGRAM  
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MOONSHINER (UNACCOMPANIED)  
OLD SMOKEY (VOCAL AND BANJO)  
LITTLE GREY MULE (BANJO INSTRUMENTAL)  
LITTLE BIRDIE (BANJO AND VOCAL)  
GRAVEYARD BLUES (GUITAR AND VOCAL)  
MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW (UNACCOMPANIED)  
THE RISING SUN (GUITAR AND VOCAL)  
TROUBLE IN MIND (BANJO AND VOCAL)  
HILLS OF MEXICO (VOCAL AND BANJO)  
TRUE LOVE (VOCAL AND BANJO)  
PEACHBOTTOM CREEK (BANJO)  
UNCLE EEF GOT A COON (BANJO)  
THE MISSISSIPPI SAWYERS (BANJO)

SOURWOOD MOUNTAIN (BANJO)  
CUMBERLAND GAP (BANJO)  
OLD JIMMY SUTTON (BANJO)  
NEW RIVER TRAIN (BANJO)  
LONE PRAIRIE (FIDDLE)  
LITTLE SADIE (FIDDLE)  
THE MISSISSIPPI SAWYERS (FIDDLE)  
ARKANSAS TRAVELLER (BANJO)  
HALF SHAVED (BANJO)  
OLD REUBEN (FIDDLE)  
SALLY ANN (BANJO)  
CLUCK OLD HEN (BOGTROTTERS BAND)  
WATERBOUND (BOGTROTTERS BAND)

The Music Of

# Roscoe Holcomb and Wade Ward

of Daisy, Kentucky

of Independence, Virginia

photo by John Cohen



photo by Eric Davidson



Wade Ward and Roscoe Holcomb play their music primarily for their own enjoyment, with no other motive than to make music. Their music is heard mostly at their homes, or on occasions, in town at auctions, dances, and at some of the other social functions a local musician fulfills in his community.

Both these men have lived their lives close to the land; this is felt very much in their music. Their farming, their speaking, their building and their music all are expressive of their lives. Music has been their recreation. All their life activities are functional constituents of their total makeup, much as leaves and stems are all expressive parts of a plant. Music is the flower.

Both Ward and Holcomb play traditional music, old time songs, dance tunes and ballads. Both use the five string banjo, and both are from the Southern mountains, but here the similarities cease.

The mountains around Ward's farm in Virginia are deep and rolling, spread out over large vistas. The hills of Eastern Kentucky, by Holcomb's house, are ragged and close together, so that you never see very far

in any direction. The musical traditions of Virginia are different from those of Kentucky; determined by when each was settled and from where the settlers came. Ward is from an earlier generation than Holcomb, which has made a difference in the music he heard in his formative years. Taste and styles have changed with increasing rapidity in the mountains.

Holcomb and Ward are upright men with a sense of real dignity about them, mixed together with an earthy wisdom and humor about the world. They are both extremely individualistic and their personalities are very different, as is their musical impact. Ward's development has been to play these old tunes over and over, always refining and smoothing them off 'til now they are like well worn pebbles, or like the rolling hills of Virginia. Holcomb's music is wilder, more strident and intense.

In presenting this record, it is our hope that you will enjoy the differences as well as the similarities to be heard in this music, and mostly, to recognize how individual and how personal this music is to the performers.

## Roscoe Holcomb

This is the second recording made available of the music of Roscoe Holcomb from Daisy, Kentucky. The circumstances of this recording are very different from those of the first, which was done at his home in Ky. either after his day's job as a construction worker, or at home with his family on a Sunday afternoon.

This record was made in New York City when he was here to present his music in person to the city people.

On one hand, Roscoe has been wrenched out of his own ordinary background and thrown into the nervousness which seems to particularize the city - and which brought out this same quality in him.

Yet what are the qualities in his music that have made it so meaningful and pertinent to us in the city?

There is something of ourselves which we feel in his music, and there are qualities and ideas inherent in this music, seldom stated but strongly evident, which give direction and meaning to this which Rossie has done.

He is first, a man who works with his hands - and his music is secondary to his work. Yet his music is intensely personal, so much so that he seems scarcely affected by other music which goes on around him, save that which is immediately meaningful to him.

There is a terrific sense of craftsmanship about his music. It has a simplicity which reveals a directness in involvement and communication which is free from decoration or conscious stylization - and is most disarming in this respect. His work has the care and honesty which are found in the works of true primitive painters, yet there is still another quality which comes with his music, that carries it far beyond any shortcomings of primitivism. American folk art (painting) has little development, and its successes are the result of individual achievements. It has no history. Folk

music, by way of difference, is part of a long growing and changing tradition which is very much a development, and in this sense has a parallel in classical western art, and deserves similar critical consideration.

This tradition of folk music is the environment within which Roscoe has grown up. It has given an unstated order and intelligence to that which has been created within its boundaries.

In Roscoe's singing, there is a sophistication which derives from the unadorned, almost bare quality he brings to each song. In terms of *finisse*, it is full of errors in its lack of refinements, but as a human and artistic statement, it has a brutal reality.

Sometimes, in listening to a man who has such a large collection of songs inside his head, one gets the impression of hearing just that - a large collection of remembrances being reeled off and transmitted on by the singer without disturbance of the material except where memory has failed. But this is not the case with Roscoe, for he has internalized, changed and personalized each song to suit his style and feelings. Nonetheless, the songs remain traditional - for his feelings are so much indicative of the tradition.

Some of the songs have been influenced by his instrumental technique. In some instances, the songs are "ahead" of him - that is, they have not been completely integrated into his style, and in these cases, his effort is to keep up with the demands of the music. Others are completely within his capabilities, and his musical presentation here is more a matter of concern with pushing the material he commands to the furthest degree - in coincidence with that he is trying to express in the song.

Although the words may seem blurred in some songs, this is his way of singing. In New York he was once criticized on the grounds that his words couldn't be understood. He told me later that he felt "The music is saying just the same as I am saying, otherwise what good is it?"

None of the ideas expressed in his songs seem outside his own experience - he seldom talks of ideas and places far away. Although his music is admittedly old-time in feeling, the setting and meaning is always now - not of history. His singing is of things meaningful to him, not as old souvenirs or sentimental memories.

In this way, there is a sense of immediacy about what he sings. The very singing of the song is an act - not a recreation or re-doing. By having it this way, he brings such intensity to each performance. His musical giving is a giving of all - and this is one of the factors which leaves him with such a feeling of exhaustion after the song.

We can understand his attitude of direct communication with each song. Despite the fact that all realize that it is a performance which has been given before by the singer and by many others, there is a personal relationship to the music, or the act of music, which is maintained in a one to one kind of involvement.

At one point during the recording session, he revealed the nature of his relationship to the song. (I submit this to writing with some hesitation, for it is using an intimate glimpse into this man's feelings only to make this point). Rossie preferred not to record the "Man Of Constant Sorrow" and at one moment, he was unable to continue singing it into the microphone. Now this particular song has been around in the mountains for many years (it is referred to in Sharp's collections from 1918, and there are at least four commercial recordings of it from the thirties, forties and fifties) Roscoe admires the way Ralph Stanley sings it, yet when it came to singing it himself, he balked, for he felt it was "too true" - too revealing of his own feelings about himself.

I spent about ten days with Roscoe, and was almost constantly during this journey which started at his



Roscoe Holcomb and John Cohen

home in the ragged hills of Eastern Kentucky, and went by bus and train to the Folk Music Festival at the University of Chicago, then on to New York in its worst snow and frozen water pipes of winter. During this time Rossie played his music in five concerts and on three radio stations, and must have been seen performing by 4,000 people. During this time, I had the opportunity to witness in action, many of the ideas I'd sensed from him several years ago at his home.

Although seldom stated as critical judgements, Roscoe's reactions to the many types of music he heard during this time we were together, gives the impression of a definite set of standards and criteria which he employs in his musical outlook. There are specific qualities in music which he prefers, just as there are definite ways in which he sings his songs.

These are the qualities which have shaped his style, and which can be looked on as the definition of a folk aesthetic.

The existence of a folk aesthetic can give insight into the place which folk music occupies in the life of the folk community, as well as giving us an opportunity for understanding the music in its own terms. In city society, such standards come under the heading of Art, which have a place in concert halls, museums and libraries. The idea of Art seldom manifestests in this manner in the country.

The definition of this folk aesthetic cannot be applied to all folk music from other regions, oftentimes not to other parts of the mountains. (Compare Roscoe's approach to Wade Ward's from Va.) It is a locally developed outlook.

A listing and examination of some of these qualities is given here in an effort to understand this music better, in its own setting. The physical, sociological and geographical environment of this music has been explored in the previous album of Holcomb's music, "Mountain Music of Kentucky" Folkways FA 2317.

Roscoe is looked on by those in his home town as a man who knows the old songs and who can perform them well in a way which fits right in with other local styles. In a sense he is looked on as an artist in the community - whose music is particularly of that community, and not necessarily of any other place. At home, Rossie has been increasingly silent in the face of rock and roll and the commercial music played everywhere around. He has played less and less in the past ten years. Yet all his neighbors know the type of songs he sings and never ask for any other type from him.

It is possible that nationally commercial homogenized and canned music may enter into the consciousness of everyone without destroying the old music - which remains as a more personal affair attached to home and ancestral traditions. The different types of music may co-exist as separate layers in the realms of musical experience.

Roscoe's manner of presentation seems to come from his understanding of the role of a performer. It

is different when he sings the songs for himself. What we hear is just what he means for us to hear.

He sings the songs differently under different conditions when other feelings are upon him. I have heard him sing softly in a way that allows his voice to fade more into the silences at the end of the phrases - yet he never once used this approach during a performance or for a recording. I have heard him sing softly while driving in the car, at home, singing the blues and reviewing and defining a song at the recording studio - yet once the tape was rolling or an audience on hand, he was singing with the full intensity which characterizes his performance.

He sings each song only once, and has strong misgivings about repeating it. In this way, each time is a new unfolding and revelation to him, not a retelling or act of refinement. In this way he can maintain such intensity.

He sings at the top of his vocal range with full tension on his voice. This manner of singing is a locally developed Kentucky tradition. Bill Monroe as well as the Osborn Bros. also from Ky. are known for their high-pitched singing. In Hazard, once I asked someone what they thought of the Carter Family from Va. and the only reply was "They tuned their guitar too low."

Roscoe is tired to the point of exhaustion after two or three songs. In a sense, an LP recording is a deceptive way of hearing him - and the listener should keep this in mind - that it is more natural to be hearing these songs a few at a time, with a rest between.

In every performance, he tries to sing a song exactly the same each time. There are no conscious interpretative changes, yet changes do occur depending on external circumstances - or changes of feeling within him.

Sometimes there are a distinct variety of ways of doing the same song. He has two different tunes for the Moonshiner, and has an 'old time' way of doing Old Smokey as well as a more current one. On this recording he uses the oldest ways he knows. Some songs or stories are interchangeable, and can go with several tunes. Certain banjo tunings are for specific songs. Someone asked him if he sang ballads. He said he'd left his ballad book (with the song words written) at home.

He has a self-styled purist attitude about the banjo, never using a capo to change the key, but using a great variety of tunings. Most often, the banjo accompaniment exactly duplicates the song melody - while stops and pauses are directly a result of the meeting of his style with the limitations of the melody.

In a few cases, especially where the song is learned from other artists or records, his banjo duplicates runs and licks different from the melody. He seems to have learned a few songs and tunings from Doc Boggs who made records in the early thirties. Roscoe recalls as a boy seeing Boggs perform, and he uses those accompaniments from Boggs' songs.

One might ask if Roscoe's singing is influenced by early commercial recordings of mountain music, or if he is singing the same songs from the same tradition. His musically formative years were at the age of twenty, when he learned to play the banjo. He learned 300 songs that year, which would have been around 1932, when a great many early mountain recordings were available.

However, evidence of local traditions are still stronger in his singing. His first introduction to music was in the church, and the influence of Old Baptist singing is very apparent in his style.

He recalls playing on certain musical 'instruments' as a boy: his description of playing on a mouth bow identifies that as the same instrument which Jimmy Driftwood has been presenting in recent years. Roscoe also describes beating with sticks on a

string stretched between pegs on a wall.

At the Univ. of Chicago Folk Festival (1961) where he played to a large audience for the first time, he met the Stanley Brothers backstage, and they exchanged talk about songs. The Stanleys borrowed Roscoe's Baptist Song Book to copy words and review songs which they were soon to record. They listened to his songs and commented on the tunes. Ralph Stanley learned some of the banjo tunings. Roscoe was most appreciative of their singing and seemed to feel a great kinship with Ralph Stanley. He pointed out admiringly, the way Ralph used the fifth string, keeping it ringing throughout a certain tune. He praised the way Ralph turns the high phrases in his singing. Roscoe was also clear to comment when a beat was missed or a rhythm done carelessly.

The Blues has been a great influence on Roscoe's singing. He holds great admiration for the playing and singing of Blind Lemon Jefferson. Although he never saw Lemon, he heard his records up in the mountains when they first came out in the early thirties. It is a subject of conjecture as to how those records got into the mountains back then. Blind Lemon came from Texas and his records were released in Chicago. The most common story is that they were carried by Railroad conductors who bought them for low prices in Chicago and sold them at increased rates along the line. There are not very many Negro people up in the mountains which leads one to assume that blues records had a market amongst the mountain people (at least with the musicians).

Roscoe specifically imitates the way Blind Lemon twists his singing notes, and the irregular way he plays the guitar. His respect for these qualities is as much of an emotional and expressive nature as a technical one.

Roscoe also spoke highly of a Negro fiddler who used to play in fiddle contests around Hazard.

Throughout his singing, Roscoe employs the use of the flatted third which is the blue note of the blues. This flatted note is very much part of his ballad singing as well.

A note on Roscoe's personal history: Physically, he has had a hard life - his hands are out of shape from work in the lumber mill, and his back has been broken in accidents. His work now is manual labor on construction jobs, and keeping his family and subsistence farm going. As a boy he had asthma which was cured by the whooping cough-but which left him weak. He says that he prayed for something which might make up for his weakness - and he figures that the gift of music became his.

About the Recording.

Due to failures in available equipment, inaccessibility of conducive studio space, and inability to locate a proper recording engineer, we found ourselves in New York hoping for the best to present this music, and unable to get anything adequate to record with.

In an atmosphere of resignation, bordering on despair, we finally went to a cheap recording studio right overlooking busy Times Square, and we could hear and see the traffic and fire engines as they roared by while we recorded. This recording studio is most commonly used by Tin Pan Alley song writers to make quick transcriptions of their newly composed concoctions to peddle them to pop singers and song pushers.

The engineer there used some sort of condenser microphone which only took in the sounds right close by it, and which wouldn't show the sounds of the street. He handled the recording like the men in the street stands handled hot dogs. Songs were interrupted in the middle while he changed tapes, and some were ruined by pushing the wrong button at the right time. Strangely, however, this man knew something about Roscoe's kind of music, and as he

told us later, he often makes trips down South himself to sing with touring gospel quartets.

After each exhausting hour recording session, Roscoe and I would take the tapes over to Folkways where Moe Asch would play bits of them, loud as can be, and then we'd wander off into the city, which appeared confusing and high priced to Rossie.

This all seemed as if we were going to have Roscoe's life work or his music at least, preserved and reproduced by some send-a-transcription-of-your-voice-to-the-folks-back-home kind of deal. And yet in a way, there couldn't have been a more fitting way for this recording to be done in this city, for it seemed as if Rossie's personal music could never find its way into the powerful rooms of competitive and commercial record engineering, anyhow.

- John Cohen

Band 1: MOONSHINER..Unaccompanied singing

Roscoe also does this with the banjo, and he has another tune which he often uses for this song. The first time I heard him sing this was back in Kentucky in 1959, and we were driving up to a Holiness Church on Leatherwood creek as it was getting dark.

I have been a moonshiner ever since that I've been born  
I've drunk up all my money and stilled up all of my corn.

I'll go up some dark hollow and put up my moonshine still  
And I'll make you one gallon for a five dollar bill.

I'll go up some dark hollow and get you some booze  
If the revenuers don't get me, no money will I lose

Come all of you moonshiners and stand all in a row  
You look so sad and lonesome, you're lonesome yes,  
I know

God Bless them pretty women, I wish they all were mine  
Their breath smells so sweetly like good old moonshine.

Band 2: OLD SMOKEY..Singing and banjo

This well known song seems to be heard everywhere, and in this version, Roscoe is singing and playing it the old way. Again, he knows other ways of doing it. The banjo tuning is F#ADAD.

All on old Smokey, all covered with snow  
I lost my own true lover by courting too slow

It's courting it is pleasure, and parting is grief  
One false hearted true lover is worse than a thief

They'll hug you, they will kiss you, they'll tell you more lies  
Than the crossties in the railroad or the stars in the skies.

Its ashes to ashes and dust is to dust  
One boy in a hundred that a poor girl can trust

I'll build me a log cabin on top of some rise  
Where the wild geese and the pretty women can hear my sad cry.

Your parents they are against me, they say I'm too poor  
They say I ain't worthy of entering your door

They say I drink whiskey, my money is my own  
And if they don't like me, they can leave me alone.

Band 3: LITTLE GREY MULE..Banjo, instrumental

This tune was made up by Rossie. Years ago, he recalls playing it at a local banjo contest, and in the silence immediately after he finished it, an old man stood up and shouted "That's the first time I've heard 'The Wild Boar' in 40 years", and then the crowd went wild.

Band 4: LITTLE BIRDIE..banjo and voice

The unusual banjo tuning used here (ECGAD) can also be heard as used by Willie Chapman (Mountain Music of Kentucky - Folkways) and by Pete Steele (Folkways) on this same tune. This is the only tune that Rossie plays in this style of picking, which is basically an up-pick followed by a down-strum (like Pete Seegers basic strum) It is curious to note that Ralph Stanley picks this same song, using this same strum, and that it is one of the only tunes he does in this way.

Little birdie, little birdie, sing to me your song,  
Sing it now while I'm with you, I can't hear you when I'm gone

Fly down, fly down, little birdie, and sing to me your song  
Sing it now while I'm with you, for I won't be with you long

If I were some little birdie, never build my nest on the ground  
Build my nest in some pretty girls breast, where the bad boys would never tear it down.

Pretty woman, pretty woman, what makes you act so queer  
Got no cause to worry, got no clothes to wear.

Band 5: GRAVEYARD BLUES..Guitar and voice

I got up this morning with the blues all around my bed (2)  
I had a dream last night, the woman that I love was dead.

Lord I went to the graveyard this morning and I fell down on my knees (2)  
Asked that good old gravedigger to give back my real good man please.

Well that grave digger looked at me, sweet mamma, right squarely in the eye (2)  
Said I'm sorrow, pretty woman, but your man has said his last goodbye

Then I wrung my hands, said I wanted to scream (2)  
I woke up this morning, found it was only a dream.

Band 6: MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW..Unaccompanied singing

This song has been recorded in the past, several times; twice by Emery Arthur, and two or three times by Ralph Stanley. Rossie admires Ralph Stanley's singing of the song, and uses essentially the same words, yet the tune he uses is closer to the Emery Arthur melody, which is an older one. Many of the vocal turns in this performance, are akin to Bluegrass style singing, and also very similar to Baptist church style.

I am a man of constant sorrow, I have seen trouble all my days,  
I bid farewell to old Kentucky, the place where I was born and raised

For six long years, I've been in trouble, No pleasure here on earth I find,  
For in this world I'm bound to ramble, I have no friends to help me now.

Its fare you well my own true lover, I never expect to see you no more,  
For I'm bound to ride that northern railroad, perhaps I'll die upon the train.

You may bury me in some deep valley, for many years  
there I may lay  
Then you can learn to love another, while I am  
sleeping in my grave.

Maybe your friends thinks I'm a stranger, my face you  
never will see no more  
But there is one promise that is given you, I'll meet  
you on God's golden shore.

Band 7: THE RISING SUN..guitar and voice

There is a certain controversy about the origins of  
this song. In recent years it has become quite a  
favorite amongst city singers, and all versions  
there are directly traceable to a compilation which  
Lomax made from various recordings he made of white  
singers. In turn, he taught his version to both -  
Woody Guthrie and Josh White, who made it so popular.  
The only known early recording of this song was done  
by Clarence Ashley back in the late 20's...and it  
probably from Ashley that Roy Acuff learned it.  
Lomax contends that this song is of Negro origin,  
but thus far, there has been no evidence to substan-  
tiate this. Rossie just knows this as an old song,  
and he sings it very much in a blues manner.

Away on down in a-New Orleans, towards the rising sun  
A many poor boy has stretched his arm, and me, Oh  
Lord, for one.

I'll never listen what another girl says, let her  
hair be dark or brown,  
Unless she's on the old scaffold high, saying oh  
boys, and can't come down.

Go and tell my youngest brother not to do as I have  
done,  
Let him shun that house down in New Orleans, that  
they call the Rising Sun.

The only thing that a rambler needs is a suitcase  
or a trunk,  
For the only time that he's satisfied is when he's  
on a drunk.

Look up, look down that lonesome road, hang down  
your head and cry,  
If you love me as I love you, Lord, you'd go with  
me or die.

Band 8: TROUBLE IN MIND..banjo and voice

Trouble in mind, I'm blue, but I won't be blue  
always  
'Cause the sun's gonna shine in my back door some  
day.

CHORUS:

Going down to the railroad, lay my head down on  
the line,  
Let that east bound freight train satisfy my  
worried mind.

Going down to the river, gonna take my rocking  
chair,  
If the blues overtake me, gonna rock away from  
here.

(CHORUS)

Band 9: HILLS OF MEXICO..voice and banjo

This is more of a fragment, than a complete song.

When I was in ---- in eighteen ninety three  
When a Mexican cowboy came stepping up to me,  
Saying how are you, young fellow, how would you  
like to go  
To spend another season with me in Mexico.

Lord, I had no employment and back to him did say  
Tis according to your wages, according to your pay.  
I will pay to you good wages, also to go home  
If you spend another season with me in Mexico.

his wages on the ---- and back to town  
did go  
How the bells they did ring and the whistles they  
did blow  
How the bells they did ring and the whistles they  
did blow  
In that God forsaken ---- in the hills of Mexico.

Band 10: TRUE LOVE..voice and banjo

This same story has been recorded three times over  
the years by the Stanley Brothers under the title  
'Little Glass of Wine'. When the Stanleys heard  
Roscoe singing this backstage at the Univ. of  
Chicago Folk Festival, they said, "Well, at least  
we got the words right". It is also known as  
'Poison In A Glass of Wine', and also found in Old  
English Broadside Tradition.

True love, true love let us get married  
I love you so great, how can you slight me?  
I would work for us both, it is late and its early  
If you're my only little wife will be

True love, true love, let us consider,  
We're both too young for to marry, my dear  
When we get married, we are bound together,  
Let us stay single three more years

Lord, he saw her dancing with another fellow  
And a jealous thought it came on his mind,  
I'll kill that girl, she's my own true lover  
Before another boy shall beat my time.

Well, he went to the barroom and he started to  
drinking,  
And a jealous thought it was still on his mind  
I'll kill that girl, she's my own true lover  
I'll give her poison in a glass of wine.

He went to the window and he called unto her  
She said Willa (Willie) my dear, what do you want  
with me?  
Come and drink with the man who that really loves  
you  
Its better than any other man said he.

Oh, she went to the barroom and she started to  
drinking  
And her red rosey cheeks they had never been told,  
Oh she did not know what that she was a-drinking  
This would lay her in her grave below.

Then she laid her head over on Willa's shoulder  
Said Willa my dear, will you take me home  
Lord the last glass of wine that I have drinken  
It has fled to my head, babe and done me a-wrong.

He laid his head over on her shoulder and he told  
her his love and he read her his mind  
True love, true love, it is hard but its honor  
We will both drink poison on a glass of wine.

He laid his head over on her shoulder  
And he placed his arms all acrost her breast  
Here is two lovers have died together  
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, take them both to rest.

# Wade Ward

by Eric H. Davidson

Wade Ward was sixty-nine years old when the most recent of the accompanying recordings were made at his home on Peachbottom Creek, near the town of Independence in Grayson County, Virginia. Ward inherited his farm from his father and has lived and worked there almost all of his life; at present his main subsistence derives from the daily sales of the milk produced by his several cows. Not long ago a modern cheese factory moved into the Independence region, and its advent has immensely facilitated the commercial disposal of local milk, Wade being among its suppliers. He owns an automobile and the house is equipped with electricity but, on the other hand, it lacks running water. A woodburning stove is still frequently utilized, and in wintertime the main source of vegetables and fruits has remained the great cupboard of home preserves put up each summer by the women of the house, the late Molly Ward, and her lively eighty-three year old mother Granny Porter. As with most of the contemporary rural population in the Southwest Virginia mountains, life in the Ward home is by no means independent of modern technological conveniences such as the automobile and the cheese factory, and even (as of last year) a telephone -- but in countless small ways traditional customs and manners have been retained. Wade, for example, takes snuff, salt cures his home-raised hams, and is frequently to be found indulging his main passion (aside from music) the traditional mountain fox-hunt. It is within such a context that Wade's music has survived, traditional in repertoire and style, embellished and preserved in the hands of an exceptional individual musician, but fundamentally disembodied from the traditionally defined social and cultural mores of which it was originally an integral part, for that way of life has forever disappeared. In the notes accompanying another

Folkways record -- "Traditional Music of Grayson and Carroll counties" (FA3811) a discussion of the traditional role of the old time music in the life of the people of Wade's area may be found; unfortunately space does not permit repetition of that discussion here.

However, Wade's personal experiences throw light on the nature of the old time music of rural Grayson County as well as the changes which have occurred there down through the years, for Wade has been playing continuously since he was ten or eleven years old. He began to pick the banjo at that time, about the same year which his father left the log house where he was born up in the rugged Buck Mountain country a few miles West of Independence and moved his family down to the farm on Peachbottom Creek where Wade has remained ever since. Wade's older brother Davy Crockett Ward was already an accomplished musician and Wade stated that he learned most of what he knows from Crockett. This statement raises the interesting question of how much latitude and variation is permitted the individual performer in a traditionally bound style and repertoire, for Wade's music has a certain unique and individual quality, and yet at the same time it is perfectly representative of a distinct area of Southwestern Virginia banjo and fiddle music. In this connection I once asked Wade whether he had learned his version of "Old Joe Clark" from his brother Crockett. Wade's rendition of "Old Joe Clark" is characterized by three striking slides in the "a" section of the melody, and it is mainly to these slides that the uniqueness of his particular version is due. Wade replied that he had indeed learned "Old Joe Clark" from Crockett, but in response to a further question recalled that he had set the characteristic three slides into the tune himself (Wade's "Old Joe Clark" is not included in this record because it is available on a Library of Congress release).

In about 1906, the year he was fourteen, Wade travelled to Tennessee. There he heard local musicians playing the tune "Chilly Winds" (also

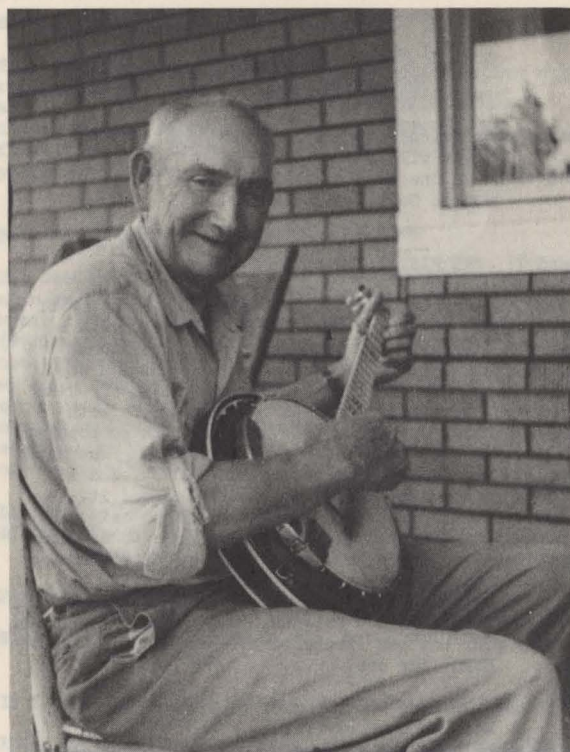


photo by Eric Davidson

available on the Library of Congress release cited above). Wade states that he had never seen "chording" before -- or at least chording above the fifth fret as extensive as that used in "Chilly Winds" -- and he carried the tune and its new technique back to Grayson County with him. But it is unlikely that this contact with the Tennessee style significantly influenced Wade's own music since according to Granny, Wade's banjo and fiddle playing are exactly the same as that of the memorable Grayson County musicians of her own childhood days, and furthermore "Chilly Winds" remains unique in Wade's traditional repertoire with respect to its fancy chording. It was soon after his Tennessee trip, at the age of sixteen or seventeen that Wade took up the fiddle.

"The Buck Mountain Band" was the name given to Wade's first real band, which was composed of Earl Edwards, a friend and guitar player from nearby, Wade and his brother Crockett. (The Buck Mountain Band was briefly recorded for Okeh Records). Times were changing fast, and Wade recalls that in contrast to his father's and grandfather's day when the main occasions for music were events of definite social importance such as log rolling, house raising, corn shucking etc., in his own time the music of his own and other local bands was required primarily at town-based functions such as old soldiers' reunions, Fourth of July dances, auction sales, etc. Various economic and historical factors had in fact already begun to work fundamental alterations on the whole Grayson County region, e.g., the introduction of mills and milltowns and the ensuing development of a non-rural way of life for increasing numbers of people. (For a more detailed account see the notes to the record (FA3811) "Traditional Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties", op cit).

Wade soon became widely known for both his fiddling and his banjo playing. An unfortunate childhood case of whooping cough had robbed him of his singing voice, and it is for this reason that he has never been able to sing with his music. It is an interesting property of the musical traditions of this region that a pure instrumentalist could gain renown as a great local musician. In 1919 Wade had been hired by the Parsons Auction Co. to provide the music for their Saturday sales, and that he has continued to do right down to the present -- last August 19 (1961)

Wade marked his forty-second year playing for Parsons' on Saturdays. It was in the 1930's as the banjo picker for the great Galax string band known as "The Bogtrotters Band" that Wade attained the most exciting successes of his career (Galax is the largest town in this area, and is about twenty miles from Wade's home). The Bogtrotters were led by Doc Davis, a Galax autoharp player (it is interesting in passing to note that Davis regarded the autoharp as "a kind of dulcimer".) There were five Bogtrotters in all: Uncle Alec Dunford, a Galax fiddler of Irish descent; Doc Davis; Wade; his brother Crockett Ward who played fiddle while Wade played banjo -- and it is perhaps germane to recall here that Wade and Crockett had been playing together for almost thirty years by this time -- and the youngest of the group, field Ward, Crockett's son. Field did most of the singing and backed the band on the guitar. With the Bogtrotters Wade played in relatively distant places. At one contest held in Kentucky, the top prize of which was the honor of being recorded for commercial records (the day was won by the famous Coon Creek Girls) the Virginia band was offered \$200 a week to stay on, but were unable to accept. This was a far cry from the days of his boyhood trip to Tennessee, when according to his recollection, Wade and his group had agreed to play a dance for fifteen cents apiece. Later the Bogtrotters played for the campaigning governor of the state down the Shenandoah Valley at Blacksburg, Virginia, and on another occasion they provided the "official" music at the state dedication of a bridge at Hillsville, Virginia. Wade was competing in the widely attended Old Fiddler's Conventions at Galax in the meantime, and was regularly walking off with the first place year after year. 1940 was the highwater mark. Three years previously J. Lomax had recorded Wade and the Bogtrotters for the Library of Congress, and now, through J. and A. Lomax it was arranged for the Bogtrotters to appear on a nationwide CBS radio program, originating in Roanoke, Virginia (January 9, 1940). I was told that when the time came for the program to go on the air everyone in Gayson County near a radio stopped work to listen; in Independence itself the County Courthouse was the scene of a trial that day, and as the program hour approached the Judge temporarily halted the proceedings and called for a radio to be brought into the courtroom.

Wade was the only forty-eight in 1940, but the others -- his brother Crockett, the beloved Uncle Alec Dunford, and old Doc Davis, who in 1935 had given to Wade the magnificent banjo he stills owns -- these men were all considerably older. It was not long after the famous radio broadcast that the Bogtrotters Band perforce broke up due to illness and death amongst them, a period Wade recalls with great sadness. And, in about 1942 Wade himself was suddenly struck down with a severe heart attack. He once told me that for some weeks he believed he'd never walk again, and indeed it was not until much time had elapsed that once more he picked up his familiar instruments. After this many years passed in relative isolation and quietness. Wade played intermittently with the men of the nearby Lundy family (Ellis, W.C., and Roy) and later with the Galax fiddler Charlie Higgins and a younger guitarist named Dale Poe; more often he played alone.

As the decades had passed, the indigenous music of Wade's early years had been overlaid and supplanted with a changing series of newer styles and patterns, ever more mediated through radio and record. When Wade was born guitars were almost unknown in the Grayson County region and their introduction and rapid popularity was followed closely by music such as that of the Carter family -- bringing with it a new, non-local repertoire including blues, sentimental "pop" style tunes (e.g., "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven") and new renditions of old stand by's, frequently played in a manner harmonically distinct from the traditional stylings for these songs. Charlie Poole and his North Carolina Ramblers had also greatly influenced those who bought the first records, and Poole's finger-picking banjo style, of obvious vaudeville origin (Poole had played the blackface circuit himself) proved itself far more adaptable to some of the newer tunes than had been the old time clawhammer style. The Bogtrotters themselves played a reper-

toire which was in the main extremely traditional, but the styling varied with the individual tunes. Consider, for example, the old time version of "Cluck Old Hen" (band 15 on this record) in which Wade uses the traditional banjo style, as compared to the other Bogtrotter piece presented here, "Waterbound" (band 16). In the latter performance Wade plays Charlie Poole-style as he frequently did (and does) when accompanying other instruments. Alone, he plays almost exclusively in the older (clawhammer) style. His fiddle stylings are also purely traditional, except when he is asked to play newer tunes, such as "Orange Blossom Special." After 1945 the rate of change in indigenous mountain music was suddenly accelerated as the blue grass style swept the area. Today only the old timers clawhammer the banjo or fiddle the old fiddle tunes, through on those increasingly seldom occasions when old musicians get together the room is often filled with silent, fascinated youngsters, who perhaps realize that the music they are hearing has a lifespan no greater than that of their grandparents.

In 1956 and 1957 Wade was visited by Michael Seeger and by myself, respectively, and subsequently by several other collectors. Wade had remarried several years before (his first wife had died). Molly Ward had heard Wade playing for the local radio station and decided on the spot that "she'd have to meet that man," according to her own account. Those who have been fortunate enough to have enjoyed the warm hospitality of Molly and Granny and Wade as I have more than once will share my regrets over Molly's death in October of 1961.

It is now appropriate to consider the individual selection on this record:

#### Band 1 Peachbottom Creek (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

This was among Davy Crockett Ward's favorite tunes. Wade learned it from Crockett, but could not recall its proper name, and "Peachbottom Creek," the name of the creek on which Wade's house is located is a name Wade thought appropriate. Wade suspects this tune to have been of local Negro origin, but has never heard it played except by his brother.

#### Band 2 Uncle Eef Got a Coon (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

Wade once recited the following verse to this tune:

"The ugliest man I ever saw  
Came down the road from Arkansas  
His eyes were red and his cheeks were blue  
And he's got a wild turkey in his coat tail too.  
"Uncle Eef got a coon, done gone gone gone gone  
Uncle Eef got a coon, done gone gone gone gone  
And left me lookin' up a tree".

#### Band 3 Mississippi Sawyers (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

An old time favorite in Wade's area and an excellent example of Wade's own style: note the varying use of the thumb in producing interesting rhythmic changes, e.g., the off-beat accents in the "b" part of the tune where the thumb is used on the fifth string for an accented melody note.

#### Band 4 Sourwood Mountain (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

Here the thumb is again used to play a key melody note on the so-called "drone" or fifth string, this time in the "a" part of the tune. Ward, like other banjo players of the old school from the Grayson County area uses his thumb in obtaining lower string runs (rather than using pull-off's and hammer-on's) whenever possible. In fact all left hand work including chording is kept to a minimum in this banjo style. "Sourwood Mountain" is an indigenous dance tune.

Band 5 Cumberland Gap (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

Played in an unusual tuning, this song is not native to the Grayson County region but made its appearance there around the turn of the century.

Band 6 Old Jimmy Sutton (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

Granny says this is an old time "jig dance tune" and it is rhythmically one of Wade's most exciting. It has been in this region as long as any such tune as far as is possible to determine, and seems to inspire all Grayson County musicians to heights of virtuosity.

Band 7 New River Train (rec. April, 1961, Michael Seeger)

The harmonics of this version, which stand in contrast to the more commonly available versions are known only to the older musicians of this area in my experience. According to local sources the song refers to the New River RR branch run up to Fries, Virginia (in Grayson County) when that town was built around the turn of the century.

Band 8 Lone Prairie (rec. August, 1957, M.S.)

Turning to Wade's fiddle music, his haunting "Lone Prairie" illustrates what might be termed the classic traditional fiddle style of this region, characterized by rhythmic, flat notes without lilt or tremolo, and by almost continuous double stops, with the melody working against a movable drone. Wade learned this song from Crockett, and considers it indigenous to his area.

Band 9 Little Sadie (rec. October, 1956, M.S.)

A fragment of an archaic old ballad song, recorded in 1956 when Wade's fiddling was somewhat firmer than at present.

Band 10 Mississippi Sawyers (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

This is the fiddle part to the banjo tune presented above (Band 3).

In the conversation which follows Wade is essentially interviewing himself. The woman's voice is that of Molly Ward and it is she who says, in answer to Wade's comment that the old time songs are about to fade away "Well when they fade away, the best'll then be gone." When Wade states that he "commenced to pick the banjo at about fifty-eight" he meant he had begun fifty-eight years ago (age eleven).

Band 11 Arkansas Traveller (rec. April, 1961, M.S.)

Wade has always known this piece, which is included here because of the fine clawhammer banjo playing. Versions are known from all parts of the country.

Band 12 Half Shaved (rec. October, 1956, M.S.)

This older recording, and the others dated from 1956 to 1957 to follow have been included despite their imperfect fidelity in the interest of presenting Wade's music at a period when it was played more energetically and generally faster than at present. This tune is said to be a dance tune of local Negro origin. Note in the "b" part the continuous brush strokes on each beat, unusual in Ward's music.

Band 13 Old Reuben (rec. July, 1961, EHD)

The low part of this tune is supposed to resemble a train whistle; "Old Reuben" is considered to be of indigenous origin by local musicians. The exciting use of continuous drone fifths bestows

upon this performance a singular bagpipe-like quality.

Band 14 Sally Ann (rec. August, 1957, EHD)

"Sally Ann" remains a nostalgic favorite amongst old timers, and was played by every local band, including the Bogtrotters. This 1957 recording compares well with one dating from 1937, but is significantly more lively than one from 1961.

Band 15 Cluck Old Hen (rec. 1937, Lomax)

From the Library of Congress collection this recording was taken at the Old Fiddler's Convention at Galax, in 1937. Wade is playing banjo, Crockett fiddle and Field Ward is singing. This performance is notable in several respects: the instruments imitate the sound of a hen in an intricate rhythmic interplay; notice the manner in which the thumb-picked banjo runs counter the fiddle, particularly in the last round of the "b" part of the tune. Note also the obvious difference between Field's singing style and the later bluegrass styles, now popular to the exclusion of everything else.

"My old hen is a good old hen  
And she lays eggs for the railroad men  
Sometimes one, and sometimes two  
And sometimes enough for the whole darn crew  
"Now cluck old hen  
Cluck old hen, chickens all gone.

"Cluck old hen, cluck and sing  
Cluck old hen I've got you by the wing"

Band 16 Waterbound (rec. 1937, Lomax)

Here is the full Bogtrotters sound. As noted above, Wade is playing Charlie Poole style with finger-picks.

"Oh chicken's a-crown' in an old pine tree  
Chicken's a-crown' in an old pine tree  
Chicken's a-crown' in an old pine tree  
Way down in North Carolina

"Oh Waterbound and I can't go home  
Waterbound and I can't go home  
Waterbound and I can't go home  
Way down in North Carolina

"The old man's mad and I don't care  
The old man's mad and I don't care  
The old man's mad and I don't care  
Just so I get his daughter

"If you don't give her up I'm gonna run away  
If you don't give her up I'm gonna run away  
If you don't give her up I'm gonna run away  
I'm goin' North Carolina."