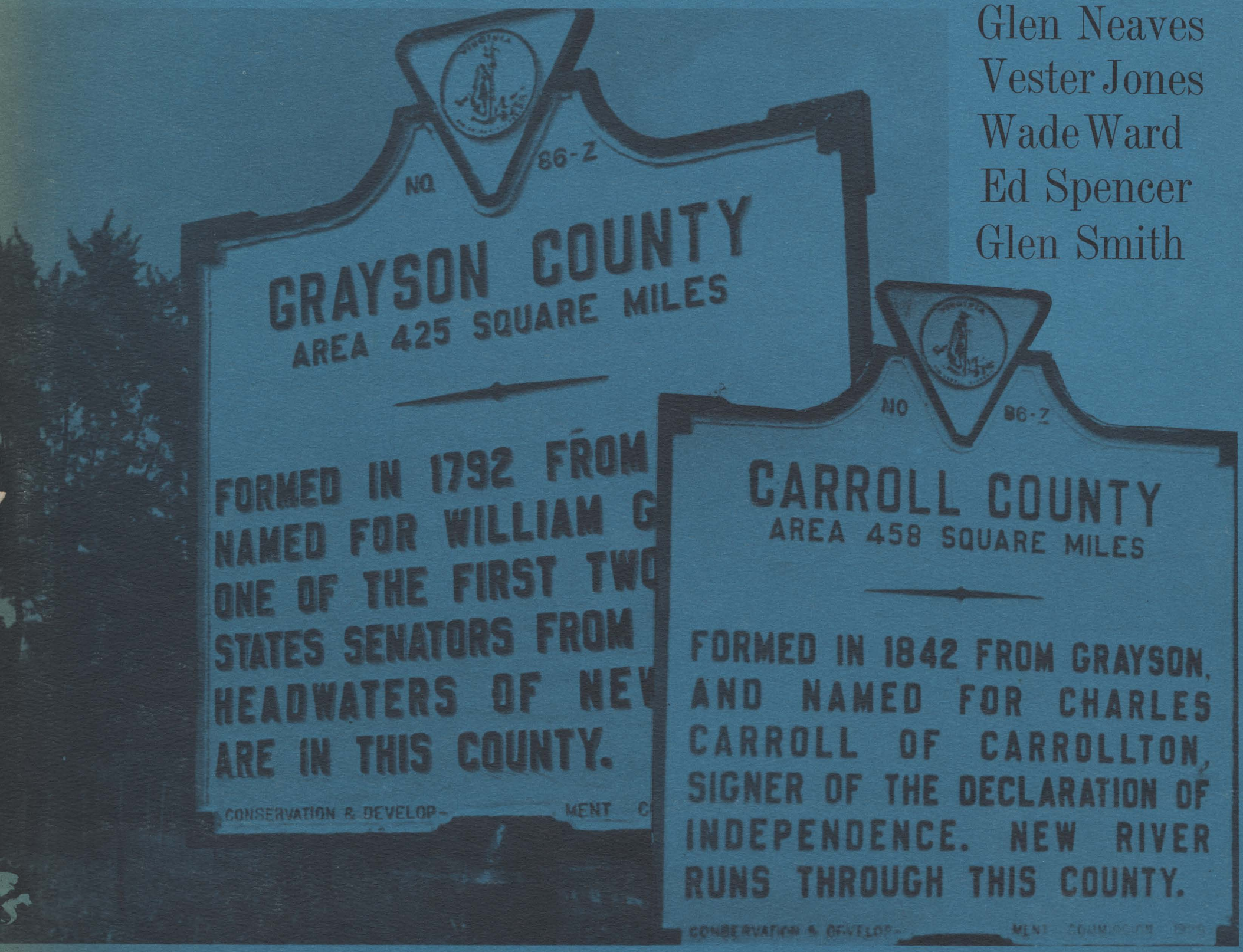
TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM GRAYSON AND CARROLL COUNTIES

Songs, Tunes, with Fiddle, Banjo and Band



Glen Neaves
Vester Jones
Wade Ward
Ed Spencer
Glen Smith

Folkways Records FS 3811

SIDE I

Band 1: CLUCK OLD HEN
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 2: SOLDIER'S JOY
Fiddle—Glen Smith

Band 3: POLLY PUT THE KETTLE ON
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 4: IDA RED
Fiddle—Wade Ward

Band 5: DEV'LISH MARY
Band & Vocal—Glen Neawes & Band

Band 6: OLD JIMMY SUTTON
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 7: FIRE IN THE MOUNTAIN
Fiddle & Guitar—Glen Smith

Band 8: OLD RUBY
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 9: LITTLE LOVE
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 10: SOURWOOD MOUNTAIN
Fiddle—Wade Ward

Band 11: POOR ELLEN SMITH
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 12: MISSISSIPPI SAWYERS
Fiddle & Guitar—Glen Smith

Band 13: PRETTY POLLY
Banjo—Ed Spencer

SIDE II

Band 1: KATY CLINE
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 2: CINDY
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 3: GROUNDHOG
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 4: HELL AMONGS THE YEARLINGS
Fiddle—Glen Smith

Band 5: SUGAR HILL
Banjo—Ed Spencer

Band 6: OLD JOE CLARK
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 7: JOHNSON BOYS
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 8: CRIPPLE CREEK
Fiddle—Wade Ward

Band 9: TOM DOOLEY
Band & Vocal—Glen Neaves & Band

Band 10: FORTUNE
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 11: PRETTY LITTLE WILLOW
Fiddle—Glen Smith

Band 12: SALLY GOODIN
Banjo & Vocal—Vester Jones

Band 13: OLD JIMMY SUTTON
Fretless Banjo—Glen Smith

Band 14: HANDSOME MOLLY
Fiddle, Vocal & Guitar—
Glen Neaves & Roscoe Russell

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

Recorded by Eric Davidson and Paul Newman

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FS 3811

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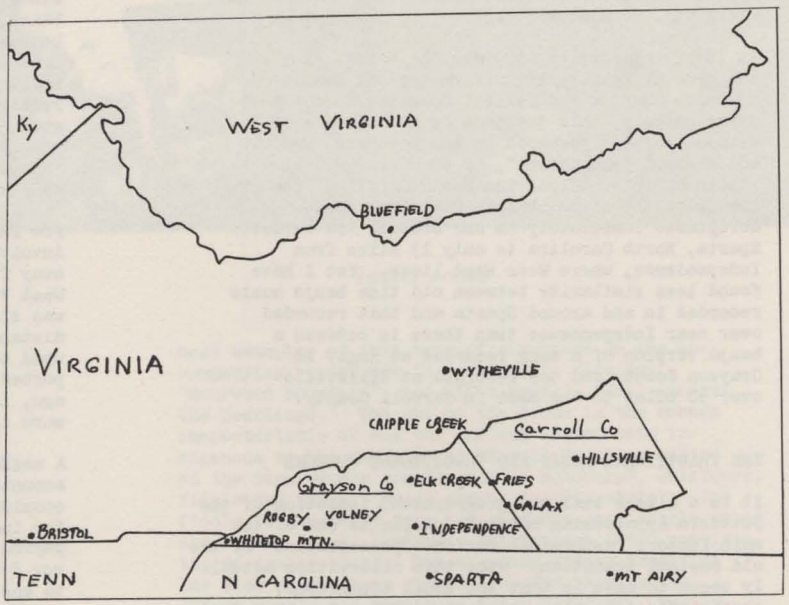


INTRODUCTION

It is by now generally realized that the traditional music of the Southern Appalachians is not the static remnant of an otherwise extinct Elizabethan culture. However, to undertake to reconstruct the actual historical development of this famous musical tradition is a difficult or impossible task. The first simplification of such a problem would be to attempt to distinguish earlier from later styles in the confusing mixture of musical patterns facing the contemporary collector. Lumping together all the available non-commercial music of an area under the title "The Traditional Music of Such-and-Such-a-Place" is a confusing procedure. The material here presented is selected so as to avoid this problem as much as possible. This record contains songs and tunes from the earliest period still directly accessible to the collector. The styles represented here are not, for example, blue-grass imports (aside from one exception noted below) or even imports from the time of the Carter family, but antedate both these later influences. The evidence for this statement is considered below in detail; it depends largely on statements from elderly local informants, who are in unanimous agreement as to the fact that music stylistically similar to that presented here was played in the same way at least as far back as their grandparent's day, while other styles entered the Grayson-Carroll Counties area later. Furthermore, some of the songs regularly played in the style we are considering were found widely distributed over the whole Southern Appalachian area at the very beginning of the recording era. Several of these same songs actually originated in Grayson or Carroll County, according again to local informants.

The music on this record, recorded between 1958 and 1961, is thus music which is believed to be representative of the traditional musical heritage of the Grayson and Carroll Counties area at the time when today's old men were just beginning to learn to play; i.e., around the turn of the century. At this time Grayson and Carroll Counties were almost completely agricultural.

Another great simplification is feasible, aside from the identification of early and late stylistic patterns: escape of the geographical variable by considering only a small region. Styles, and the repertoires of the singers vary widely from region to region. It is desirable to consider only the music of a confined area, in which it is possible to obtain evidence of the existence of a fairly uniform tradition governing instrumental styles, singing styles, and songs. Grayson and Carroll Counties, bordering on each other along the North Carolina line in Southerwestern Virginia constitute such an area. In the course of considerable collecting experience in this region, it has been extremely rare to find a song known in one part of the area and unknown in another, even though often the musicians at the Western end of Grayson county are personally unknown to those in the Eastern part of Carroll county (and vice versa). One of the real earmarks of the Grayson-Carroll Counties musical heritage is the banjo style which flourished there until recently. This style, variously called "Clawhammer", "Flailing the banjo", and "thumbnoting" in the indigenous parlance is to be described in more detail below. Unique and easily recognizable, this stylistic tradition seems to be carried in the form of a certain "basic model" for playing each of the tunes in the banjo repertoire. On the "basic model" for a song the individual performer embroiders and adds according to his taste and ability, but rarely are elements of the "basic model" actually deleted or altered. It is significant that if one hears a certain tune four times within the Grayson and Carroll Counties area by four different musicians, and singles out and pieces together the particular stylistic elements common to all four versions, the resulting synthetic version turns out to resemble that played by the relatively unskillful musicians of the same region - or by skillful musicians attempting to recall the song to memory. Thus the "basic models" for the banjo tunes can be easily identified either analytically or by practice through long familiarity with the various versions available. The fact that such "basic models" can be obtained for the traditional clawhammer banjo tunes of the Grayson and Carroll Counties region, and that the song repertoire is relatively similar everywhere within it indicates that in this region a uniform traditional music pattern existed. Thus in comparing two versions recorded within this area we probably can attribute the differences soley to the personal variations superimposed on the same traditional "basic model" of the tune by the performers. This step represents a major simplification, for to examine the question of the personal latitude allowed in a traditional performance of a given song by compar-

ing a Kentucky and a Virginia banjo player is to compare two different traditional patterns on which are superimposed in turn the mark of the different performers, a confusing attempt at best. The ways in which the instrumentalist does embellish the traditional "basic model" for each tune he plays will be discussed below.

It is of interest to consider the actual size of the area of relatively uniform musical tradition of which Grayson and Carroll Counties were a part. Unfortunately, this question is not answerable without further research on the Northern, Western and Eastern "boundaries", if such research is still possible. Along the North Carolina line on the South the style changes with tremendous abruptness immediately as one crosses the border. Sparta, North Carolina is only 13 miles from Independence, where Wade Ward lives. Yet I have found less similarity between old time banjo music recorded in and around Sparta and that recorded over near Independence than there is between a banjo version of a song recorded at Rugby in Grayson County and one recorded at Hillsville over 50 miles to the East in Carroll County.

THE TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

It is a cliché that the geographical isolation of the Southern Appalachian mountain people is one of the main factors responsible for the "preservation" of the old musical tradition. What this observation actually seems to mean is that the local topography, characterized by tiny one-farm pockets of bottom land and one-dwelling sized hollows represents an internal barrier to the rapid spread of new styles (musical or otherwise). It has acted to decrease the extent to which changing external patterns are likely to influence a high percentage of the population. If four houses lie close together, a radio in one exposes the occupants of all four to an outside influence; that is obviously not the case if the four houses are in four different isolated little valleys, even if the occupants see each other occasionally.

Geographical isolation is by no means the only isolating factor important enough to be considered. Political separatism on the part of the people of the Southern Appalachian Mountains has a long history and the common traditional anti-urban, anti-government, anti-wealth viewpoints exist today in the form of general anti-modern sentiment. Preservation of old ways appears to some mountain folk to be of significance in these terms. We can surmise that separatist factors were similarly operative in earlier times, judging from the well-documented history of animosity between the mountain frontier areas and the colonial capitals and those who created and staffed the governments there. For example, bitterness against the lowland government and the people it represented became so intense in the North Carolina frontier area that in 1770 actual armed conflict flared up (the War of the Regulators). This is not the place to trace the permutations of these early separatist political movements down through the 19th century and into modern times. Suffice it to say that they have existed and it is probably fair to suppose that they have been an important factor tending toward conservation of cultural traditions against external influence.

As has already been pointed out, life in Grayson and Carroll Counties was almost exclusively agricultural in 1900. The largest towns now in the area, Galax and Fries, were non-existent at that date. The information which follows is obtained from local informants, and is first hand.

On the typical (i.e., isolated) farm in the Grayson-Carroll Counties area, in the period 1900 and before, money was almost unused. "The only things we needed money for was to buy coffee and sugar", I was told. Coffee was also made out of burnt rye (and I have spoken to old people who prefer that coffee to the "instant coffee" in common use today). Honey has always been a favorite and probably substituted easily for sugar, except in coffee. Vegetables of every variety were grown, and preserves of every kind of vegetable made in each house, on a huge scale explicable only by the understanding that they were winter staples. Long-term storage of meat for winter was accomplished by salt-curing ham, while in summer food could be kept by storage against great blocks of mountain ice buried in the ground the winter before. Clothes were woven, yarn spun, bread baked, and the whole range of classic "early American" household activities were common until quite recently. That is to say, each family was essentially self-sufficient. However, money was undoubtedly also required for purchase of certain (rarely purchased) goods such as rifles, banjos, dogs and tools. But the main striking fact is the amazing degree of independence of the cash economy accepted so much as a matter of course elsewhere in the U.S.A.

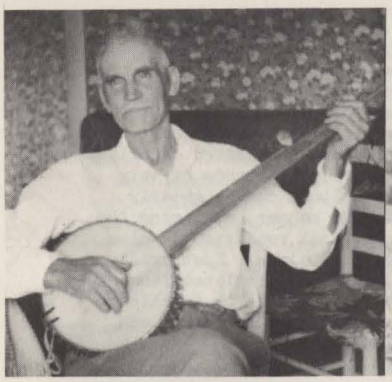
For farm dwellers the sources of cash primarily involved seasonal or other temporary migration away from home, generally to the Bluefield, West Virginia coal mines in the winter when work was slack in the mountains. (This was only a distance of about 50 miles). Some lumbering used to be done, and once wheat was actually exported to Eastern Virginia - but that was long ago, in the days before Midwest wheat could be more cheaply transported anywhere in the country.

A cash economy makes it possible to obtain large amounts of labor in return for money, but a considerable amount of money is then required, for instance to build a house. In old times paying for that sort of labor was neither feasible nor desirable Other social mechanisms existed to ensure adequate labor supply at crucial times to any individual who might require it, and it was in connection with this type of event that much of the traditional music was played. Large scale working forces were required for the following events: house raisings, log rollings, corn shucking, catnip and peppermint strippings, molasses brewing and perhaps others. The problem posed was traditionally met by inviting all the surrounding families to come and join in. I was told that sometimes people would come from within a radius of 5 or 6* miles, a considerable area, and in the evening after the day's work the host would traditionally hold a dance for the assembled workers and their families. For that event there must be banjo and fiddle music. It is important to realize that these gatherings were major events of tremendous effectiveness considering that 50 or 60 families might have attended.

We are able to glimpse something of large significance here: the traditionally imperative involvement of music with those earnest events which demanded the traditional mode of social cooperation. Music and dancing since the appearance of wage-labor and the breakdown of the old culture have become what they are in New York or Roanoke, for instance -- casual recreation. At the time the type of music presented on the accompanying record was widely played, music and dancing were intimately bound up with the functioning of the traditional social machine. All at once this musical tradition became nonviable, when its traditional functional setting was dissolved by the cultural events of the 20th century. Clawhammer banjo, and the accompanying fiddle music, and most of the banjo and fiddle dance tunes, suddenly stopped being learned. No one under 50 in Grayson and Carroll Counties can clawhammer a banjo. Compare the relative hardiness of traditional Southern guitar blues styles, which continue to be learned and relearned one generation after another.

The close involvement of the banjo-fiddle dance music with common and essential cultural functions explains the impressively large number of people who play or played the dance music in the Grayson and Carroll Counties region. The collector is astounded by the information that almost every

*Such a radius would mean an area of about 80 square miles, and the estimate may be too great, but even if divided by 4 a large number of families could be expected.



Glen Smith

Wade Ward

Vester Jones

rural house at one time contained a banjo and/or a fiddle, and someone who could at least play a little. Obviously it was convenient to have one's musicians right in the family, rather than to have to arrange for (or hire) some outside musicians, when the family was host to the community labor force.

Often brothers would form a string band together. If they were unusually able, the band would begin to be hired by other family-hosts, and then at more formal events which called for dance bands and music contests -- wakes, weddings, Fourth of July celebrations. In the winter the bands frequently followed their friends and neighbors over the mountains to the Bluefield mines. Life at Bluefield was tough and violent. "All we did was pick fights and pick banjo" one old timer told me, and according to Vester Jones, "two or three men died in gunfights every payday." A large majority of Grayson and Carroll Counties musicians went to Bluefield in the winter until quite recently and certainly their close contact there with musicians from elsewhere was an important factor in the rapid diffusion of outside musical styles after World War I.

FORM OF THE OLD TIME MUSIC

Banjo and fiddle dance music was a man's music. The ballad literature, on the other hand, was more generally known and sung by women, except for the occasional banjo or fiddle virtuoso who could sing ballads to instrumental accompaniment (Glenn Neaves' "Handsome Molly" is an example of the latter type of performance). Such performers always claim to have learned their ballads from their mothers or wives, and apparently the ballad literature was transmitted primarily through women (some women also played banjo). Frequently the dulcimore was used for accompanying sung ballads, or they were sung without accompaniment. Some of the ballads were of the old Scottish-English literature, some of local manufacture (see notes on "Ellen Smith" and "Tom Dooley" below). In this connection it is interesting to note that the locally made ballads are related to the more ancient ones by similar choices of theme, and by the usage of older traditional phrases throughout the new song. Thus amongst the songs originally brought over from the British Isles were many dealing with what has been called the "murdered girl" theme. When an event such as the murder of a girl by her lover actually occurred in the mountains, a strong tendency to make a ballad about it was manifested. Such newer ballads often incorporated many of the phrases (such as "lily White hand", "cold, cold steel", etc.) and even verses of the older songs. Though old songs were forgotten and new ones made as the decades passed, a great continuity existed in the ballad tradition.

Grayson-Carroll County traditional fiddle music is actually of two types, only one of which is represented on the record. Dance tunes and other songs, as played here by Glenn Smith and Wade Ward, are characterized by the presence of a continuous drone note usually in the relation of a 4th or 5th to the melody line, to give a bagpipe-like sound. The best examples of this type of structure on the accompanying record are in Wade Ward's "Ida Red", "Sourwood Mountain", and Glenn Smith's "Hell Amongst the Yearlings." The use of the drone is the common characteristic of all the musical instruments indigenous to the Grayson and Carroll Counties region at the time we are considering -- autoharp*, dulcimore, fiddle and banjo. Music played in this style on the fiddle is generally fast and rhythmic, and single notes are seldom heard, the whole performance often consisting of double stops. But a second fiddle tradition has also always been present, as far back as the oldest people can remember: Irish fiddling. Easily differentiated from the first, this style is characterized by extended single melody line and continuous syncopation, often in triplets. It lacks the drone and hence the characteristic tonal qualities of the other style. In general the Irish style is similar to the fiddling one can hear in Irish bars in New York, Boston, or elsewhere in the U.S.A. The repertoire of songs played in the Irish style differs from the usual Grayson and Carroll Counties repertoire. It is to be surmised that mixing has most probably occurred, and undoubtedly some of the fiddle tunes now played in the Grayson and Carroll Counties' mountain styling were originally borrowed from the traditional Irish repertoire.

The music which composed the banjo-fiddle repertoire consisted of danceable tunes with words, generally whimsical, and of certain other songs of a topical (but not narrative) nature, here represented by "Old Reuben", "Cluck Old Hen", "Katy Cline", "Groundhog". Typical of Grayson and Carroll Counties' dancing music are fiddle tunes like those played by Glenn Smith: "Hell Amongst the Yearlings", "Soldiers Joy", "Fire in the Mountains", "Pretty Little Willow", and banjo tunes such as Vester Jones' "Old Jimmy Sutton". The dance music was ordinarily played by a banjo and fiddle in concert while the songs were often performed solo. A handfull of the dance tunes have survived to reappear in modern guise periodically; barely recognizeable versions of "Sally Goodin" and "Cripple Creek" are played by modern Grayson and Carroll Counties bluegrass bands. However, by far the greater part of these tunes have been lost, or will have been lost as the generations of present-day grandparents die out. The words which Vester Jones sings to "Old Jim Sutton", for example, have virtually disappeared from local memory, and the tune is fast following suit.

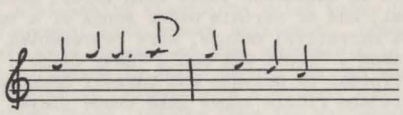
As stated above, it is clear, on the basis of information obtained from old people, that the claw-hammer banjo style is the earliest remembered style. For example, Wade Ward's mother-in-law, Granny Porter, was asked if Wade's style is different from that current at the time of her childhood. Granny is now 85, and in full possession of her very considerable faculties. Her first husband was a very fine banjo player, and her father, Van Sage, a fiddler whose fame still lingers on in Grayson County. She replied that Wade's banjo style is the same that her

*Doc Davis, who played autoharp in a well-known Grayson County band years ago, considered the autoharp "as a kind of dulcimore."

first husband used and the same that he learned when he was a boy. She stated in addition that Wade's fiddling was similar in style to that of Van Sage. At the other end of Carroll County near Hillsville lives Glenn Smith. He is now 76. His fretless banjo versions were learned as a boy, according to him, and exactly resemble the dance music which he heard at that time at cornhuskings, house raisings, etc. (see above). He stated that for many years he played his music at these events, until they no longer were held. Information to the same effect was obtained from Ed Spencer's parents (Ed is now in his 60's), and from many others, in fact from everyone asked.

Grayson and Carroll Counties clawhammer banjo style is characterized by its marvelous cleanness. Only one note is struck at a time, except for accented riffs and deliberate percussion-like chords of 2 or 3 notes used mainly for rhythmic purposes by some players (such as Glenn Smith). Notes are made with the nail and/or tip of the forefinger, while the monotonic drone is played with the thumb. The thumb is also used to play melody, provide upbeats, or add a second drone as rhythmic counter to the first. In playing riffs and chords sometimes other fingers are used than thumb and forefinger. The musical complexity of which this style is capable is perhaps best illustrated with Glenn Smith's fretless banjo renditions of "Old Jimmy Sutton" and "Polly Put the Kettle On". Notes can also be made with the left hand by banging down on or pulling off the string at the appropriate place on the finger board. Vester Jones tends to use the latter technique more than Smith or Spencer, for example. Until 40-60 years ago, there were no fretted banjos in Grayson and Carroll Counties, and old time clawhammer banjo players such as Ward complain that the modern banjo frets are sometimes annoying to them. The reason for this complaint is the common use of the slide on the fingerboard, which can no longer be accomplished with deliberate flatting or sharping of the expected final note.

All these devices - slides, pull-offs, thumb-noting, riffs, etc. - are the building blocks out of which the traditional "basic model" for a tune is constructed. For example, consider "Johnson Boys", an old favorite of Grayson and Carroll Counties banjo players. All versions are played in a kind of "C" tuning" (GCGCD). The melody line begins:



There are two ways in which the consecutive high "G's" of the 1st measure might be played - either by pressing down on the D string at the 5th fret with the left hand and then playing the note with the forefinger, or by thumbing the open 5th string which is usually reserved for use as a drone. All versions of "Johnson Boys" recorded in Grayson and Carroll Counties employ the thumb for this particular phrase, though the alternate way of playing the high G in this tuning is used in other songs. Of a sequence of such specific patterns is the "basic model" of the whole song composed. The results of the existence of this type of tradition-directed structure are a) limitation of the performer's choice of technique in playing a given tune, b) tendency toward conservation of style and tune over long periods of time and in the hands of many musicians, and c) simplification of the problem of learning a new tune, since each tune is literally defined on the instrument, as if in code, by a set series of already familiar stylistic elements (all these features are, of course, characteristic of many types of traditional cultural practice; for example, the production of a traditional type of pottery).

The wonderful thing about the structure of the traditional musical heritage is that for all the conservative limitations it engenders, it allows the gifted individual plenty of room for imaginative innovation and expression of feeling. Only after understanding what is set by tradition can we evaluate the role of the individual performer. Let us return to "Johnson Boys," Glenn Smith's version. The first time or two that he plays the tune through on the recording, it is probably fairly close to the "basic model" "Johnson Boys". Then begin the additions, increasing in complexity. This trait is characteristic of Smith and can be observed clearly in most of his banjo pieces. In the hands of very fine traditional musicians, a tune can be greatly embellished in a very personal manner, acquiring the character of a unique, individual rendition despite the similarity of the starting points. Such traditional cultural patterns, even when isolated from external influences, are far from "dead" or "static" from the viewpoint of the individual performer and his audience within the tradition.

TWENTIETH CENTURY CHANGES IN TRADITIONAL STYLES

It is appropriate at this point to attempt to trace the later history of Grayson and Carroll Counties music, as the twentieth century invaded this agricultural, self-sufficient region. In 1901, a mill was built on the New River, and a mill town to go with it called Fries. A railroad branch was run up by the mill. Shortly thereafter, Galax, Virginia appeared, based on furniture millworks. New sources of employment, capital, cash, a whole new way of life had entered this tradition-bound domain. Startling effects were immediate. The new towns provided an avenue of escape from agricultural life - and traditions - for young people.

Often moving to town to work in the mill was only the first step away. In the summer, even today, one can see many families of mill and factory workers from Florida, Maryland, Ohio and elsewhere returning to visit their mountaineer grandparents. Money became a necessity. The young sons left to make money, and the old people remained with their old time ways. Nowhere in the country is there such a striking discontinuity between the older and the younger generations.

At about the same time that the mills came to Grayson and Carroll Counties, the guitar came. Guitars were unknown there before 1900 according to every local informant asked. The guitar is a chorded instrument played without drone and generally in 1-3-5 chords. Only very skillful guitar players can fit their instrument to traditional Grayson and Carroll Counties banjo and fiddle music. It was simpler to adapt the older music to the attractive, easy-to-learn new instrument, on which one could play not only the old time tunes but vaudeville tunes, blues, popular tunes from the city, etc. Thus music such as that of the Carter family was born. Mountain music was sweetened, and many songs already in the guitar repertoire were brought in. Chording appeared on the banjo soon afterward, along with finger-picking. Wade Ward states that when he was a boy there was no chording and no finger-picking used by Grayson County banjo players. He himself first heard a chording style in Tennessee when he was 14 (1906) and it was similar to that of the famous early recording star, Charlie Poole. Poole's finger-picking style, which was widely imitated by Grayson and Carroll Counties banjo players, is a derivative of vaudeville tenor banjo, and chording and finger-picking conferred a new versatility on the banjo, to match the guitar. Poole was himself a vaudeville entertainer at one time. It was the beginning of a period of rapid change in the traditional music of this region, a change accelerated by the advent of radio, record players, and the Nashville "Country Music" business. Since these things first affected the towns, much of the newer music was played by town-based bands. There was more resistance to change in the back country, but the REA in the 30's did much to end the distinctions between town and back country. Adoption of one or another of the modern 3-finger methods on the banjo, and of high-pitched bluegrass vocal style followed. Traditional South Virginian singing style is more low-pitched (compare Glenn Neaves' and Vester Jones' performances to the standard bluegrass performance). All these developments, of course, meant the end of the old stylistic harmonic traditions, and finally the total loss of the large majority of the traditional repertoire, which is today the exclusive possession of old people.

A great period in Grayson and Carroll Counties music occurred in the 30's, a transition period when change had not yet progressed as far as the bluegrass music of today, but big bands had formed, with one guitar and sometimes two. The prime example was the band called the "Bog Trotters", boasting two fiddles, a guitar, an autoharp, and a clawhammer banjo (played by Wade Ward). This band played much old-time banjo-fiddle music. Today no band can be heard with a banjo played in the old way. When banjo players who can clawhammer are playing with a guitar, they tend to resort to some kind of finger-picking-chording style.

The recordings on this record were made between 1958 and 1961. This is the last decade in which it will be possible to hear and record such music alive; we are near the end of a very long tradition.

THE MUSICIANS

Vester Jones, about 60 years old, was born in a log house right on his present property on Buck Mountain, in the Bridle Creek area of Grayson County. He left home at about 13 years of age to travel to Tennessee where he worked in railroad camps. Already he was able to play and sing. Later, back in Virginia, he learned to weave at the new mill in Fries. At 20 he was married and divorced; eight years later he married again, a girl from Mountain City, Tennessee "where the women will take on a bobcat." For four years Vester led a colorful existence at the West Virginia mines, then he returned to his occupation as weaver and farmer. At present, he lives by farming his remote and spectacular mountain-top property, and by barbering. Jones has won many music contests, and his fame travelled all the way to Maryland, where I first heard of him.

Glenn Smith is now 76 years old, and has lived all his life in and around Hillsville, Virginia, in Carroll County. He was brought up on a farm west of Hillsville. As a young man he recalls the famous Claude Allen affair which occurred at the Hillsville courthouse in 1916, when the powerful Allen clan murderously vented their defiance of an unjust verdict by shooting down the sheriff, judge, and six others in the Hillsville courtroom. Glenn is a great storyteller, and one learns much about the old days talking with him. About 9 years ago, he and his family acquired a farm about two miles east of Hillsville where milk cattle are the main source of income. I first visited Glenn three years ago, when he did not own a banjo and played a fretted instrument I lent him. Returning this last summer, I found that he had obtained an old fretless instrument, on which the remarkable music here recorded was played. The exceptional quality of Smith's performance was not manifested on the earlier recordings made with the fretted banjo.

Wade Ward, 69 years old: No record of the music of Grayson and Carroll Counties is complete without including the music of Wade Ward, the most widely known of Grayson County musicians. A separate Folkways record is in press containing a full selection of Ward's music, and biographical information about him. Suffice it to say here only that Wade has lived all his life on farmland in Grayson County. He has been known for his fine music, on fiddle as well as banjo, for many years in his home country. He is the only one presented on this record who has ever been recorded before (Ward was visited by John Lomax, recording for the Library of Congress in 1937). As of August, 1961, he will have been playing for the Parson's Auction Sales Co. at their Saturday afternoon auctions for 42 consecutive years, and for much longer than that Wade has been clawhammering the banjo and fiddling the old time tunes with his own unique touch. Wade was part of the famous band mentioned above, the "Bog Trotters", and has played in many parts of Virginia. I have known Wade for about five years and am much indebted to him and his family for their warm hospitality, their fund of information, and their cooperative assistance and advice in the course of collecting traditional music nearby.

Ed Spencer, of Volney, Virginia in Grayson County used to play and sing with his brother Cecil. Some of their music was played Charlie Poole style (see above) but Ed's banjo-playing is a good example of the basic style of Grayson and Carroll Counties clawhammer, cleanly played and concise, though melodic. The two brothers now live together on their beautiful mountain farm, where tobacco is their most important crop, but they have both quit playing, as have so many others. Ed's life has been a restless one. He has been all over the country, via freight train and other ways. His mother describes how one morning after a wild drinking party, Ed went up the mountain, supposedly to milk, and just kept going. He didn't come back for two years that time. His descriptions of the great banjo-playing contests at Whitetop Mountain (not far from Volney) indicate the competitive seriousness with which these affairs were regarded in old times.

Glenn Neaves and his band are located at Fries. The band includes Roscoe Russell, guitar player from near Galax, Ivor Melton, mandolin, Warren Brown, bass player from Galax, and Ted Lundy, a 3-finger style banjo player. Lundy comes from Galax, from a family of musicians known in this region for a very long time. He is the youngest of the group (in his 20's) and usually plays with a bluegrass band in Delaware. Russell, while not as old as the other musicians on the record, has been playing Galax band music, dance music, etc., for many years, and with many different groups. Glenn Neaves, the band leader, works at the Fries mill and lives in the town of Fries. He has lived in the Fries area for over 30 years. Although the music of the Neaves band is not stylistically old fashioned as are the other selections presented, they are a good example of the attractive town band music which has developed in this area. The songs they play - "Tom Dooley" and "Dev'lish Mary" - are, however, part of the old traditional literature. Neaves himself is familiar with much of the old ballad repertoire, and can sing with the fiddle in the old time way, as he does here in "Handsome Molly".

SIDE ONE

Vester Jones: "Cluck Old Hen", is typical of the many animal songs in Southern Appalachian Mountain traditional music. This archaic-sounding rendition by Vester Jones has the words:

Cluck Old Hen

That old hen she cackle
She cackled in the lot
The next time she cackled
She was in the pot.

The old hen cackled, she cackled for corn
The old hen cackled when the chickens all gone.

That old hen she's raised on a farm
Now she's in new ground digging up corn.

Repeat (2)

In this piece, traditionally, the instrumental accompaniment is intended to imitate the sound of the hen at certain points, such as where Jones bangs the head of the banjo three times. As with the other Jones selections the introductory comments were unsolicited and are ingenuous.

Glenn Smith: "Soldier's Joy" is an old time fiddler's favorite. I have never heard any words to this in the Grayson and Carroll Counties area. The tune is typical in that it is arranged on the "a-a-b-b" structure with the "a" representing the high part and the "b" the low part of the melody. Practically the whole tune is played in double stops to achieve a constant drone and the continuous harmonic intervals characteristic of pre-guitar fiddle music.

Glenn Smith: "Polly Put the Kettle On." In many ways the fretless banjo music is the most interesting of all. Smith often keeps two or three voices going at once, a harpsichord-like, tinkling, high-pitched

background, a percussive base rhythm line, and the middle register melody. Smith tends to embellish the tune as he goes on as pointed out above, and the latter section in this performance has more notes per bar than the beginning. The instrument is played essentially in the same way as the fretted, ordinary banjo, except that it is played farther up on the neck rather than over the drum head. The melody itself is a dance tune, an old song, and a standby for any Grayson or Carroll County banjo player. I have been unable to find anyone who remembers the words, except for the ditty, "Her face like a coffee pot/ Her nose like a spout/ Her mouth like a fireplace/ All raked out."

Wade Ward: "Ida Red." This exciting fiddle tune is also a well-known dance tune, and a humorous song. Ward's rendition is classic for old time fiddle styling. The use of the drone at 5th interval is evident, as is the driving rhythm. Ward states that this tune was not played in the Grayson and Carroll Counties area until about the time he was learning to play; it was evidently made up elsewhere and imported around the turn of the century.

The Glenn Neaves band: "Dev'lish Mary".

Dev'lish Mary

When I was young and in my prime
Thought I'd never get married
Fell in love with a pretty little girl
And sure 'nough we got married.

CHORUS:
A-rink tum-a-tink-tum-a-dary
Prettiest little girl I ever did see
Her name was dev'lish Mary

She wore some clothes and old soap duds
Her back's all full of stitches
She let me know right on the start
That she's gonna wear the britches

(CHORUS)

We'd been married about two weeks
She got mean as the devil
Every time I'd look into her eyes
She'd hit me in the head with a shovel.

(CHORUS)

Now we'd been married about six months
Decided we'd better be parted
She tore up her little old duds
And down the road she started

(CHORUS)

Now she went around behind the house
I went around behind her
She sat down to button her shoe
And I stood there and mount her

(CHORUS)

If ever I marry the second time
Won't be for love nor riches
I'll marry a girl 'bout three feet high
So she cain't wear my britches

Vester Jones: "The Old Jimmy Sutton." This is a comparatively rare find. While many of the old time banjo players of Grayson and Carroll Counties remember the tune, the words have nearly disappeared. This dance tune, with its unusual rhythm (compare Glenn Smith's "Old Jimmy Sutton" on the fretless banjo) is probably a lot older than the covered wagon days Vester refers to. The musicians call it a "jig" tune, but the rhythm is actually different from that of the Irish jig.

The Old Jimmy Sutton

Bill took the gun
Bill went a-huntin
Bang went the gun
Down fell a mutton, Baa

CHORUS:
If you can't dance that
You can't dance nothin
I wouldn't give a blank
To the old Jimmy Sutton, Baa

Steeley took the wagon
Went after a load of peaches
He run against the gatepost
Tore 'em all to pieces, Baa

(CHORUS)

You can eat the sheep
I'll eat the mutton
I wouldn't give its hock
To the old Jimmy Sutton, Baa

(CHORUS)

Glenn Smith: "Fire in the Mountain." On this old time dance tune, Glenn on the fiddle is accompanied by his son Frank on the guitar. The single note base line backing of the guitar is illustrative of the way in which the better guitar players circumvent the short-comings of the instrument with respect to its use as accompaniment of old time fiddle and banjo music. Difficulty in fitting together the different chord structures of fiddle and guitar music is thus avoided, and chording on the guitar is saved for times when it will fit, and for rhythmic accents.

Vester Jones: "Old Ruby" (Old Reuben). This is an old Southern Virginia train song, which has been conserved in the musical tradition and re-appears over and over in newer renditions. It is now even a bluegrass standard. Its verses are partly, and perhaps totally, derived from other songs, some probably older than it and it belongs with the general group of American train songs. The tune is one of the few traditionally played in D tuning by clawhammer banjo players.

Old Reuben

Well you can count the days I'm gone
You can tell the train I'm on
You can hear that whistle blow a hundred miles.

I told Etta Jones
The morning she left home
Better let those old boys alone.

For they tell you more lies
Than the stars in the sky
She's gone, that old gal of mine.

Now the train spreads a rail
And I can't get no mail
Can't even get a letter from my gal.

Lordy me, Lordy my
Lordy me my darling child
I can't get a letter from my gal.

If my woman said so
I'd railroad no more
I'd sidetrack that train and go home.

You ought to go to town
Watch ole 40 roll down
You could hear that whistle blow a hundred miles.

Glenn Smith: "Little Love." The 76 year old banjo player displays his inventiveness in this treatment of "Little Love". He varies the lead in melody line between top and middle range notes, and he varies the complexity of each of the repetitions of the tune. This piece does not possess the usual a-a-b-b structure of the Grayson and Carroll Counties dance tune; it probably had topical verses at one time.

Wade Ward: "Sourwood Mountain." "Sourwood Mountain" is one of the longer-lived of the traditional banjo-fiddle dance tunes. The Ward fiddle version is played in A tuning on open strings. This is the old time way, according to Ward. Now-a-days the same tune is played in G tuning by using chords. Ward's A tuning is EC#AE.

Vester Jones: "Poor Ellen Smith." The tragedy celebrated in this ballad actually occurred within a few miles of Vester Jones' farm, across the North Carolina line, and the ballad was well known in Grayson and Carroll Counties. All the versions I have heard in this region agree closely (though many are longer) in contrast to versions from elsewhere in the mountains. Mt. Airy, N.C., is near Galax.

Poor Ellen Smith

Aw it's poor Ellen Smith
And its how she was found
Shot through the heart
Lyin' cold on the ground.

Saw her on Monday
Before that sad day
I saw that poor body
Being carried away.

Well I went away to Winston
I prayed all the time
That the man might be found
Who committed the crime.

Sheriff and blood hounds
Said they struck on my trail
Over the mountains
Down through the vale.

Picked up their Winchesters
Hunted me down
But I'd gone away
To that Mt. Airy town.

Repeat (1)

Now that they have me
I know I must die
The truth to you I'll tell
Since I never will lie.

Glenn Smith: "Mississippi Sawyers." Accompanied on the guitar again, Smith is now on the fiddle. This is another of the classic fiddle and banjo tunes of the Grayson and Carroll Counties region. The song is supposed to refer to the sawyers who cut up the logs floated down the Ohio to New Orleans and elsewhere in the early days. It has the usual a-a-b-b construction, and was also danced to, but it has a nostalgic quality perhaps due in part to the fact that it is usually played a little slower than the other dance tunes, and has an unusual chromatic "a" melody line. I have never heard any words to it.

Ed Spencer: "Pretty Polly." This is a good example of the Grayson and Carroll Counties style of banjo-playing as adapted to the fretted banjo. This famous old ballad was very popular in the old days. Versions have been conserved in the bluegrass style to the present day.

SIDE TWO

Vester Jones: "Katy Cline." This song is said locally to have originated in Grayson County. It was very well known to all musicians in the local area. Many Clines live in Grayson County to this day.

Katy Cline

Oh its say that you love me Katy Cline, Katy Cline
Oh its say that you love me darling, do
Oh its say that you love your own true love
Oh its say that you love me Katy Cline.

CHORUS:
Oh its say that you love me Katy Cline, Katy Cline
Oh its say that you love me, honey babe
Oh its say that you love your own true love
Oh its say that you love me darlin do.

I wish that I was a hummin bird
I wish that I was a hummin bird
I'd build my nest in sweet Katy's breast
Where the bad boys wouldn't bother me.

Glenn Smith: "Cindy." The peculiar harpsichord-like quality of Smith's fretless banjo is particularly evident in this selection. Smith's instrument is a very old home-made one which was obtained by his son at a sale nearby. "Cindy" would be played for hours on end at dances, according to Smith's remembrances.

Vester Jones: "Groundhog". Jones' repertory of animal songs continues:

Groundhog

Pick up my gun and whistle to my dog
Pick up my gun and whistle to my dog
Goin up the holler for to catch a groundhog.

CHORUS:
Groundhog.

Old Aunt Nance with a walkin cane
Old Aunt Nance with a walkin cane
Swore she'd had that Groundhog's brains.

(CHORUS)

Two in a tree and one in a log
Two in a tree and one in a log
All I want's a gun and dog.

(CHORUS)

Get a pole and twist him out
Get a pole and twist him out
Good God-a-mighty that Groundhog's stout.

(CHORUS)

Repeat (1)

Glenn Smith: "Hell Amongst the Yearlings." This old time fiddle breakdown not only changes the melody line and the register between the "a" and the "b" parts, but also the key. The tune owes much of its character to this periodic shift in key. As Glenn says, it is indeed "a hot one."

Ed Spencer: "Sugar Hill." Though Ed says he has long since quit playing, he can still evoke nostalgic reactions with his classic old-time banjo stylings. His "Sugar Hill" differs from the better known "Sugar Hill" recorded by Dad Crockett (Brunswick B 1025) which begins "Want to get your eye knocked out/ Want to get your fill," etc.

Vester Jones: "Old Joe Clark." It is said that this song, perhaps the most famous locally of all the old time mountain ditties, was made in Grayson County not far from where Jones lives today. Jones' version is a little unusual instrumentally and possesses the haunting quality of so many of his renditions.

Old Joe Clark

As I went over to Old Joe Clark's
Old Joe wasn't at home
I ate up all the ham meat
I left old Joe the bone.

CHORUS:
Walked and walked to Old Joe Clark's
Goodbye Betsy Brown
Walked and walked to Old Joe Clark's
I'm guine away from town.

I went down to Dinah's
Standin in the door
Shoes and stockins in her hand
Feet down on the floor.

(CHORUS)

Glenn Smith: "Johnson Boys." This is one of the best tunes in the traditional repertoire of Grayson and Carroll Counties, but unfortunately it has been one of the most rapidly forgotten. Words to the song are well known due to early recordings by the Grant Brothers, and the "Bucklebusters." One version concerns the Civil War.

Wade Ward: "Cripple Creek." Another song said to have originated in Grayson County, over at a small community called Cripple Creek. The story goes that once an elk was shot and crippled at a little run subsequently called Elk Creek, and it wandered over to the next creek which was then named Cripple Creek. Elk Creek and Cripple Creek are only a few miles down the road from Wade's farm in Grayson County.

Glenn Neaves' band: "Tom Dooley." The tragedy of Tom Dooley occurred just across the North Carolina line from the Western part of Grayson County, and his famous ballad remains, like "Poor Ellen Smith", a local momento of the violence frequent in old times. Stories about the actual event are common in the region. According to one local source, Tom was a musician, and the "Grayson" referred to was

a fiddler. Tom had peacefully left Laurie Falkner, who was pregnant by him, and was on his way to Tennessee, when he ran across Grayson at Whitetop Mountain on the eve of a dance. Grayson enticed Dooley into playing with him, and in the course of the long evening Dooley got drunk. When the dance ended, he left Whitetop settlement in an alcoholic stupor and made his way back to the North Carolina home of his little Laurie. It was four in the morning, but he lured her out of her cabin and up the mountain, and there murdered her in a peculiarly blood-curdling way. He was then hung within two days to forestall a threatened lynching.

Tom Dooley

1st verse and chorus:
Hang your head Tom Dooley
Hang your head and cry
Killed poor Laurie Falkner
And now you're bound to die.

Took her on the hillside
To make her your wife
Took her on the hillside
And there you took her life.

(CHORUS)

Took her on the hillside
With that to be excuse
Took her on the hillside
And there you did her shoes

(CHORUS)

Dug her grave four feet long
Dug it three feet deep
Throw'd the cold clay over her
And tromped it with my feet.

(CHORUS)

This world and one more
And where d'you reckon I'll be
If it hadn't a-been for Grayson
I'd a-been in Tennessee.

(CHORUS)

Glenn Smith: "Fortune." Again a good example of Smith's ability to develop variations on the rendition as it appears the first time or two around. Here the cleanness of the traditional Grayson and Carroll Counties style is particularly obvious.

Glenn Smith: "Pretty Little Willow," or "Sugarfoot Rag," is also known as a favorite old time dance tune.

Vester Jones: "Sally Goodin." An old time dance tune, replete with some of its original nonsense verses.

Sally Goodin

Raspberry pie and a huckleberry puddin
Give it all away to feed Sally Goodin.

Hello Sal, I lost my money
I'm so tired I can't stand steady.

Look'd on a hillside seen a body comin
Thought to myself I'd kill myself a-runnin.

Repeat (1)

Hello gal I lost my money
I'm so tired I can't stand steady.

Repeat (1)

Hello Sal, I lost my money
I'm so drunk now I can't stand steady.

Glenn Smith: "Old Jimmy Sutton." Glenn's version of "Old Jimmy Sutton" is one of the most unusually interesting single instrumental pieces I have heard in the hills of Grayson and Carroll Counties. It possesses a virtual counterpoint, and utilizes harmonies unusual for this music. These features are Smith's own invention. They illustrate well the extent to which individual variation on a basic common traditional pattern can extend. For example, the near minor interval is actually a deliberately flatted note belonging to the major third of the "basic model" "Old Jimmy Sutton." The flatted note is impossible on a fretted instrument.

Glenn Neaves: "Handsome Molly." An old ballad, or fragment thereof, this fiddle-voice version is an authentic rendition of a traditional style well-known when Grayson and Whitter first recorded so long ago. Glenn on the fiddle, well backed by Roscoe Russell, guitar.

Handsome Molly

1st verse and chorus:
Sailin' around the ocean
Sailin' around the sea
I think of handsome Molly
Wherever she may be.

Her hair as black as a raven
Her eyes as black as a crow
Her cheeks look like lillies
Out in the mornin glow

(CHORUS)

Do you remember Molly
When you give me your right hand
You said if you ever married
That I would be the man.

(CHORUS)

She rode to church on Sunday
And she passed me on by
I saw her mind was a-changin'
By the rovin' of her eye.

(CHORUS)

Oh now you broke your promise
Go home to who you please
While my poor heart is breakin'
And lie at your ease.

About the collectors:

The majority of the present selections were collected and recorded in the field in 1961 by Eric Davidson and Paul Newman, using a Tandberg model 3B tape recorder and Tandberg microphone. Newman is a graduate student in anthropology at present in Nigeria. Beginning with a good background in classical music and some years experience as a jazz musician in his home town of Jacksonville, Florida, Newman became deeply interested in the authentic traditional music of the Southern Appalachians several years ago. He has participated in several collecting trips to locales in Maryland and Southern Virginia. Eric Davidson has been collecting and recording traditional music in Southern Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland since 1957. He has been particularly intrigued with the indigenous Grayson and Carroll counties instrumental styles. Davidson is now a graduate student in biology at the Rockefeller Institute in New York. His interest in field recording dates from early college days when wrangles among would-be banjo-players over which is the "authentic version" convinced him the only thing to do would be to go and see. Davidson is interested in questions such as the former cultural environment and the recent evolution of traditional styles, and has welcomed the opportunity to sketch out some of his findings and ideas in the Notes to this record.

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