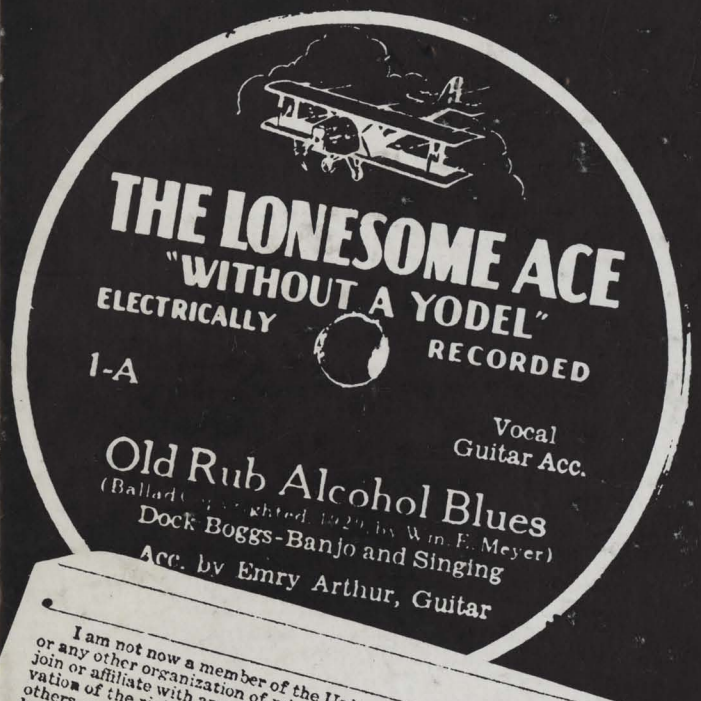
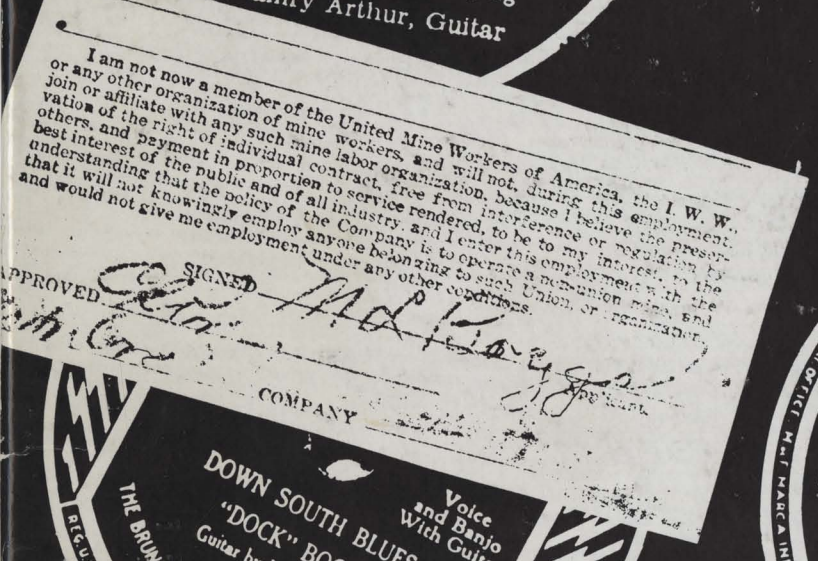
FOLKWAYS RECORDS

DOCK BOGGS' original records

RBF 654





I am not now a member of the United Mine Workers of America, the I. W. W. or any other organization of mine workers, and will not, during this employment join or affiliate with any such mine labor organization, because I believe the preservation of the right of individual contract, free from interference or regulation by others, and payment in proportion to service rendered, to be to my interest, to the best interest of the public and of all industry, and I enter this employment with the understanding that the policy of the Company is to operate a nonunion mines and that it will not knowingly employ anyone belonging to such Union, or organization, and would not give me employment under any other conditions.

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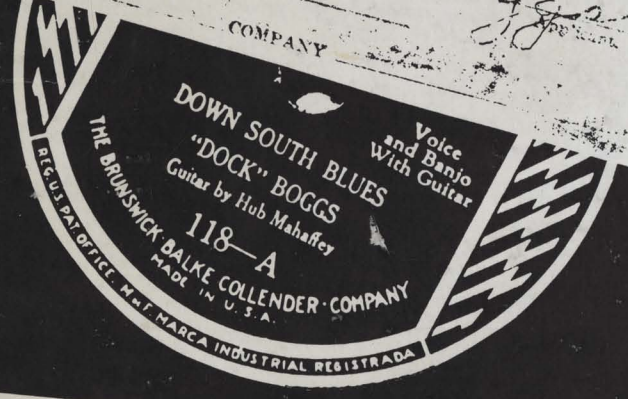
SIGNED

COMPANY



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THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO.

...nd DOCK BOGGS,

...y ...rdwood W. K. Hyer, of Richlands, Va.,

...filed contract with the 3rd day of ...

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIANS PLAY FOR PHONOGRAPH RECORDS IN NEW YORK

'Fiddlin'' John Dykes on the Violin, Doc Boggs on the Banjo, and Preacher Johnson Play for Brunswick Company

BIG STONE GAP, Va., March 23—Southwest Virginia will again be in the limelight and the name of Wise County will again be brought to the lips of the public when the six records made in New York this week for the Brunswick Blake Collender Company of the folk songs of the mountains in this section, played on stringed instruments such as the violin, guitar, banjo and autoharp by th mountain folk, and recorded mountain people of Southwest V ginia, are released within a weeks.

These records were made by Dykes known throughout this tion as "Fiddlin" Dykes whe has worked at the mines in chester, Josephine and other for a number of years and sidered one of the best o musicians anywhere. He fi perfection all the old tu for the dances at the homes which are so vi trayed in the novels of Jr., when his characte the big "shin-digs" f time is usually date corn huskings, annual

Company might select the best for recording the Music of the Mountains.

Mr. Dykes was assisted in New York by Miss Myrtle Vermillion of Gate City and G. H. Mahaffey of Abingdon who with Mr. Dykes famous "Magic City

Cordially yours

BRUNSWICK RECORDING LABORATORIES

JO'K:LA

James O'Keefe

FOLKWAYS RECORDS

RBF 654

DOCK BOGGS

His Twelve original recordings

SIDE A

1. Down South Blues. Hub Mahaffey, guitar.
2. Sugar Baby. Hub Mahaffey, guitar.
3. Country Blues.
4. Sammie, Where Have You Been So Long. Hub Mahaffey, guitar.
5. Danville Girl.
6. Pretty Polly.

SIDE B

1. New Prisoner's Song. Hub Mahaffey, guitar.
2. Hard Luck Blues. Hub Mahaffey, guitar.
3. False Hearted Lover's Blues. Emry Arthur, guitar.
4. Old Rub Alcohol Blues. Emry Arthur, guitar.
5. Will Sweethearts Know Each Other There. Emry Arthur, guitar.
6. Lost Love Blues. Emry Arthur, guitar.

Cover Design by A. Doyle Moore.
Re-mastering by Peter Bartok and Mike Seeger.
Booklet and notes by Barry O'Connell.
Co-produced by Mike Seeger and Barry O'Connell.

This is the first release on long playing record of Dock Boggs' recordings from the 1920's. Included is a special booklet with a full account of his life and musical career, along with notes to the songs.

RBF 654
FOLKWAYS RECORDS

DOCK BOGGS
His Original Recordings

Produced by Mike Seeger.

Notes and Booklet by Barry O'Connell.

RBF Records Album No. RF 54

Introduction

"Let us now praise famous men." Dock Boggs belongs among them. Most of his life was lived in the obscurity celebrated in this Biblical passage. He deserves fame for his struggles to live true to what he believed his God expected of him. His was never a conventional life but one shaped by extraordinary gifts. Among them was an almost instinctive capacity to see and hear the events of his world newly. Dock worked forty-five years in coal mines; only for a short period was he able even to imagine he might have any other kind of life. Like many miners he refused to be a company man, a particularly courageous stance in the days when the coal companies held tyrannical power. He spoke out, resisted, named his own course, and followed it. From the early pre-World War I days he was a believer in union, in the United Mine Workers, quick to educate his fellows in the early 1930's about a company attempt to thwart the creation of a UMW local by offering a company union in its stead. "Emmet," Dock told the miner promoting the company union, "that paper you got ain't worth a dime. Anything the company's head of and rules and runs, why it isn't gonna do the men very much good." He survived all the years underground without suffering either injury to his limbs or to his spirit, a feat which bespeaks luck and brilliant skill. He never bowed to the subtle arts or flagrant acts of the powerful, of the "authorities" who owned his work world, the communities he lived in, and the political structure.

His music tangibly registers Dock's gift for impressing his own design upon experience, his refusal to accept anything simply as it was given to him. The musical talent was not, I think, like a graft setting apart an otherwise ordinary man. It was, instead, integral to all his ways of being. It was also an achievement both taken from him and renounced. And so his music must have been a haunting and frustrating and puzzling possibility for him during the almost thirty-five years he lived without playing or singing.

Dock Boggs became "famous" in the conventional sense twice in his life--became known, that is, to a public beyond his home precincts of Wise County, Virginia and Letcher County, Kentucky. In 1927 he recorded eight songs for the Brunswick recording company in New York City and, a few years later, four songs for Lonesome Ace in Chicago, a one-man company which went under in 1929, shortly after the recordings were made. Dock's hopes for a recording career went with it. He was initially discovered exactly as most important mountain musicians were. Recording executives, in this case from Brunswick, travelled through the Southern mountains auditioning talent to create recordings for a whole new musical market of country dwellers and rural migrants to the cities. Their tastes and interests were being discovered and catered to by the new recording industry and by radio, beginning in the mid-Twenties and reaching a peak in the first years of the Depression. The Brunswick people came to Norton, Virginia, to set up at the Hotel, and of some seventy-five musicians who came forward Dock was among the few banjo players. His distinctive sound apparently caught the talent scouts from his first notes. They needed to hear him play only a few bars of his "Country Blues," a rearrangement of a traditional song entitled "Hustlin' Gamblers," and of "Down South Blues," a song he had adapted to his voice and the banjo from a black blues record. His being recorded constitutes an important chapter in the documentation by commercial record companies of the history of the Anglo, Afro, and ethnic American musical traditions.

The first musical career was short despite Dock's several efforts to record more and to make his music his source of livelihood. His second encounter with the world's fame was longer, though it did not occur until the 1960's, the last decade of his life. Several of his Brunswick sides enjoyed an underground reputation among students of American country music, a small group at first but one aware of the cultural riches available on early commercial recordings. Charles Seeger, John and Alan Lomax, the painter Thomas Hart Benton, Robert Gordon, and Harry Smith were among the members of a group who kept alive Dock Boggs's music in a cultural world distant from the rural cultures which generated and continued to sustain such music. The popular folk revival of the 1960's depended upon these collectors and appreciators. In turn, the revival generated new collectors who searched out practitioners of the "authentic" music of white and black Americans: new musicians never before recorded were brought before the college-age and urban audiences that supported the revival, and many musicians, known only through older recordings or lore, were located and again brought to performance before an audience--though one made up of people very different from the rural folk and working-class city dwellers whose music this actually was. So it was that Dock Boggs's second career began. Mike Seeger found where Dock was living and met him in June 1963 at his home in Norton, Virginia. Three weeks later Dock made the first of what would be many festival appearances in the next seven years by playing and singing at the American Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. These seven years also included three Folkways albums of his music (FA 2351, FA 2392, AH 3903), far more than had been recorded in the late Twenties, and an album of excerpts from Seeger's interviews with Dock (FH 5458).

The songs on this album return us to the beginning of Dock Boggs's musical career. Here, for the first time, are all of the original recordings Dock made in 1927 and 1929. Along with the 49 songs recorded between 1963 and 1968 and released by Folkways, this album provides an unusually complete documentation of a traditional musician's repertory.

This essay draws upon another valuable and extensive survey of Dock Boggs's career: nearly forty hours of tapes made by Mike Seeger. The tapes record a range of situations and reflections: Dock's and Mike's first meetings; the first festival appearances and Dock's nervous introductions to his songs, as well as his later, personally and musically more assured, performances; times at his home in Norton, Virginia chatting casually over meals or in cars en route to one or another musical event; reminiscences about his life and the sources for his songs and his style; and several intense, intimate, troubled talks with Mike Seeger, the man Dock came to see as his closest friend after their

unexpected meeting in June 1963. These have been the primary sources for the following chronology and interpretation of Dock Boggs's life and music.

Dock often roughly estimated occurrences and would suggest that a particular event happened "twenty-five years ago," or "twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty years ago." It has not always been possible to establish exact dates or the correct spellings of place and people's names, but in several instances I have been able to do so either by reconciling material in several interviews or from independent sources. Two such dates: Dock worked his last shift in the coal mines on April 29, 1954. It is more difficult to verify an exact date when Dock pawned his banjo to a friend and thus gave up the means of making his music. In the 1960's he repeatedly commented that he had not played for twenty-five years and spoke of having just begun to play again shortly before Mike Seeger appeared. Twenty-five years before 1963 would have been 1938, but Dock had ceased being an active musician a good while before that year.

The evidence for a specific date is fragmentary, but one explicit statement by Dock suggests that he pawned his banjo during a "bank holiday" in the midst of the Depression. He needed cash desperately, he remembered, and none of the banks were open. The bank holiday may well have been the one of the early spring in 1933, just before F.D.R.'s inauguration, when virtually every bank in the country had closed to prevent runs on their funds. An earlier date in the Depression is also a possibility, since bank holidays were declared as local and state conditions dictated. Circumstances were so straitened in the Southern mountains by early 1930 that Dock was unable to continue playing for money. People simply had no cash, let alone surplus funds to support buying tickets for dances. Recordings were even a greater luxury. After Dock recorded four sides for the Lonesome Ace Company in late 1929 he was able to sell them locally only for a short time. By June 1930 he was forced to return his stock to Lonesome Ace for a credit of $70, the cost at wholesale of some 140 recordings.

This disappointment might well have discouraged most people. Dock, however, seems to have persisted in hoping for the continuance of his recording career. He wrote letters to a number of record companies notifying them of his interest in recording for them. RCA Victor, as perhaps did others, responded with interest and a specific recording time in June 1931. For two weeks Dock tried every avenue to make or borrow the funds to travel to Louisville for the session. No one could spare the money and he had to cancel. One assumes that he had kept his banjo until at least this date.

His many references years later to when he gave up playing indicate how slowly his hopes died. It may well not have been until sometime around 1938, the "twenty-five years ago" of 1963, that Dock finally resigned himself to a life in the mines. The banjo, temporarily pawned to a friend in 1933 in expectation that such hard times could not last much longer, would not be his again until retirement. By then Dock could only believe playing it would be a means of recovering the memories of a time when he hoped for a different life. It is not clear how long before Mike Seeger's visit he had retrieved the instrument he had not played for almost thirty years. Sometimes he said it had been only a few weeks earlier, at others that he had been practicing for about six months. His recovery of his astounding technique and of many of his songs so that he could record and perform immediately after meeting Seeger was, in any case, a remarkable feat. It attests to both will and a superb musical talent. A musician of such quality might conceivably, after so many years, bring back his music with a few months' intensive practice, but I would guess that Dock in fact had labored longer, perhaps from 1956, the second year of his retirement.

Recollection has its own rhythms, times when details and textures flood the mind and times when it seems parched, barely able to trace the simplest chronologies. The mind turns back upon itself differently in response to another's questions than it does to its own apparently directionless ruminations. The early interviews with Dock are more directed by Mike Seeger's questions and his efforts to reconstruct a basic outline of the biography; as time passed and the relationship between the two men deepened, Dock seemed to return to what most concerned him: the rupture in his musical career and its causes; his religious beliefs and practices, particularly in terms of whether his playing music was sinful, as some of his community insisted; and his anxieties about the return to active music-making. This essay takes its focus from these recurring elements in Dock Boggs's and Mike Seeger's conversations over six years.

Some Patterns and Context

American history as written remains partial to the rich and powerful who move on the national stage. Just as the hierarchies of privilege get reproduced in historians' versions of the past, so, too, with the values embodied in the term "fine art" and its implicit contrast either to the absence of art itself or to cruder forms. Artists like Dock Boggs or Robert Johnson, Molly O'Day or Blind Lemon Jefferson have no place in the discourse, and their artistic and cultural significance are not even acknowledged by it. A coal miner like Dock might be recognized by a few cultural "authorities" as a "folk" artist, a naif remarkable for his unsophisticated artfulness. The folk designation obscures, however, his actual role as an innovator in a complex musical tradition at least as old as the first white settlement in America.

Dock's life as a coal miner has an historical importance equal not only to his musical achievement but also to that of any of the powerful and famous who are named in history books. To explore and to celebrate his role in the common life of his fellow workers and neighbors proposes standards of value which violate those taught to most Americans in school, enforced at work, and played out in the media. It is only from the materials of lives such as his that we might learn the full dimensions of American history. Incarnated in them are the dilemmas and promises of a democratic society still struggling to realize itself. Dock's were the struggles carried on by working-class Americans: to discover and possess a measure of dignity, to earn a living in an economy which denies steady and de-

cent work to most, to hold a marriage together against the strains and humiliations, to leave something of worth in and for the children.

Dock worked the mines from the time he was 12 until he was 56, 1910 to 1954. In those forty-four years he and his fellows knew brief periods of prosperity. What requires respect and comprehension is their capacity to sustain themselves in a constantly disrupted economic world. For a while, jobs would be plentiful and the pay good, as in the years just prior to and following World War I, enough so that many were able to unionize, itself a sign of stability and of workers' economic independence. At other times jobs would be scarce, the union destroyed or weakened, the pay barely enough, conditions so bad that in times like the early Depression miners who had work were compelled, in return for starvation wages, to accept near feudal dominance by the coal operators. The second War brought prosperity again for seven to ten years, then mechanization threw almost three-quarters of the miners permanently out of the industry. By the time of Dock's retirement he lived in one of the most economically depressed regions in the United States. The young and able-bodied migrated out to find work, the aged and the injured--an especially large group in coal communities--remained, often in terrible poverty and loneliness.

He was a churchgoer in middle age, perhaps originally in deference to Sara, his wife, but an outcome also to be expected in a local culture serious about Christianity and spiritual experience, supported by those forces when earthly consolations proved more elusive and less dependable than those of the Lord. Dock experienced conversion in 1942 and for eight or ten years lived a regenerate life. He was ordained a deacon of the church, supervised the Sunday school at Hemphill, Kentucky where he then lived, and sought generally to live a Christian life of faith and good works: "I lived a pretty straight life for eight or ten years. . . . Attended church regular. And was a worker in the community for the betterment of living and getting along and to help people." ". . . my mind was more on heavenly things or the Bible . . . or doing something for my fellow man . . . than it is ever been before, you see. I didn't pull away money I had maybe I would have spent for whiskey, why I would give it to someone that needed it worse than I did. Many a time me and John Miller . . . we'd take carloads of stuff to people's houses where maybe the man was down sick and didn't have no wage, wasn't drawing no Social Security, wasn't drawing anything you see. And probably he maybe hadn't worked in the mines in years for to have anything."

Times of blessed assurance come rarely, and there was much in Dock's personal history and in the suffering so abundant around him in the 1950's to undermine assurance. Whiskey had brought relief many times in his life, easing his nervousness about being on stage or recording, relaxing some of the persistent tension of a worklife exposed daily to great and unpredictable danger, and offering recreation and camaraderie in an environment Dock often characterized as "savage." It was hard to keep off it. His worklife ended abruptly, not a retirement so much as permanent unemployment, and this must have caused many worries, especially in the first few years when he had no pension because he was only 56. He was dependent on Sara and her vegetable garden and whatever savings they had. Had he wanted to work, he could not have. He spoke little about these nine years in his conversations with Mike Seeger. Sometime during them he decided to gamble that he could recover his music and that someone might care to hear him again. Time may well have weighed on him and led him to the music as a way to pass it. The motive was deeper, I suspect: his memories had time to take shape and bring him an acutely felt regret about the course of his life. His Christian faith held, but not his sense of peace. He struggled until his death with depression, puzzled by his own backsliding, ambitious for his music and its immortality, wondering if his passionate re-engagement with music explained his loss of the felt presence of his God.

His was a history--but for his art--like the histories of most working-class Americans. Struggles and victories were experienced in fragments and uncertainties; material competence was so hard won as to make much else in life luxurious or plainly unimaginable. Owning and keeping some self-respect were precarious acts. Dock once explained that he had stayed a coal miner because "That was the only kind of work I was qualified for and understood and I could get the best jobs they had in the mines. . . . They never cursed me." His pride in his skill was made irrelevant when the mines mechanized; the record he had earned became a matter of indifference apart from a work world that no longer had need of him. Never having been cursed was what was left, knowing you had been one of the few to draw a modest line limiting the power of those who would expropriate even a man's self-respect. And there was his music, or at least the memory of a turning in his life that might somehow be repaired, switched, an entrance into a world with different standards of regard and respect.

The usual fate is to live with pain and unhappiness, brief fulfillments, self-doubt, the terrible patternless slipping away of our days in discrete unrelated moments and acts. Outwardly Dock's life passed like most others, though his manifest independence and his refusal to acquiesce to the coal operators mark him as exceptional and as a man who would be so whatever the occupation or class. Through his music he transmuted the everyday into something more beautiful and startling and acute than we are usually able to feel. His music held the daily, marked its depths, and through the harshness and passion intensely present in his voice, gave it shape:

> Said all I can say, I've done all I can do
> And I can't make a living with you,
> Can't make a living with you.

Musical Influences and Social Changes

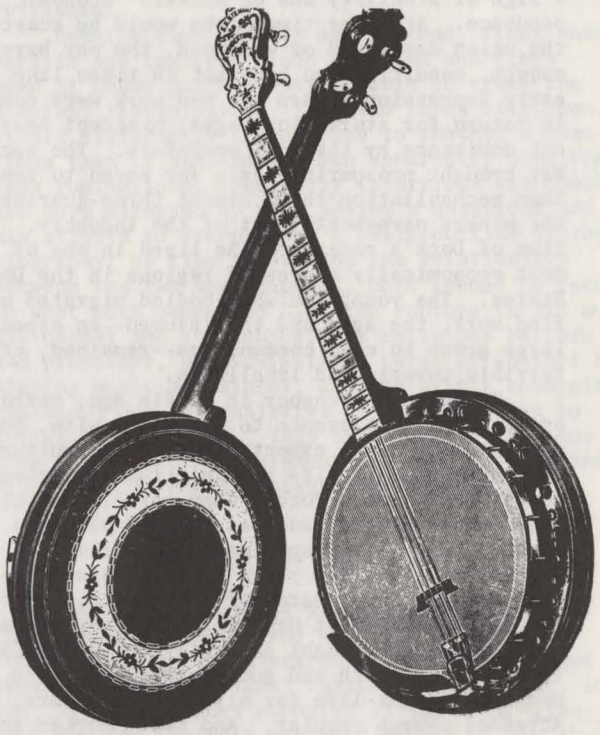
Speculations about what impels artists rarely do justice either to their art or to the wonderfully perplexing human mystery of it. But it can be valuable to reconstruct the process by which a particular artist acquires the craft basis for his expression. And one can note the pursuit and learn something of the person from how he moves. Musical biography of a figure like Dock Boggs has other merits. Not enough is yet understood about the history of American country music, its evolution, or the specific innovations within its tradition

which steadily reshaped the music from the late nineteenth century to the present. While many traditional musicians have some distinguishing stylistic signature, few are consistent innovators or inventors who build upon and extend significantly the expressive range of the music they inherited. Dock was one of these few.

Dock Boggs lived in a place and time of particularly intense and fast change. Youngest of ten children, he was born on February 7, 1898 in West Norton, Virginia, a railroad and mining center not yet a decade old. The motive and shape of economic change in the region were already settled by his birth. His was to be a world of industrial capitalist enterprise dominated by a single industry, one in which owners directly pitted themselves against workers. The region would have few other enterprises to complicate or soften the starkness of the conflict in the coal fields. His older siblings would have known well a sharply contrasted way of life. They were children when the senior Boggses were nearly self-sufficient farmers in the relative isolation of the Southern mountains before the railroads were built to develop the timber and coal in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Before Dock's birth the Southern mountains protected an economy slowly being integrated into a regional market economy. Cash was scarce, and people's ways and expectations and relations were relatively steady and sustained over long stretches of time. Dock's father bore the brunt of transition from a settled and agrarian life to earning wages and living in a small industrial city. The senior Boggs, born in 1849, moved from farming to blacksmithing and carpentry, two useful skills in a railroad and mining town. The oldest children must have shared some of the shocks of the many changes: the abandonment of three farms, each one successively smaller than the last; accommodation to the rhythms and authority structures of industrial work; the adjustment to an urban environment populated by blacks and foreigners as well as mountaineers from different locales; and the chaos of new settlements that were unpredictable and trying and dangerous.

By the time Dock was born the family possessed only the remnants of an agrarian past. Unlike theirs, Dock's experiences were shaped entirely within the rawness of the new industrial world. The pace of change was fierce. When he went into the mines in 1910 the coal industry was on the verge of one of its periodic surges of expansion. New rail lines were being rapidly built, more coal camps and mines opened up throughout the mountains, and more blacks and immigrants came to the region in large numbers to provide the labor. The boom was particularly strong in the bordering counties of eastern Kentucky and south-western Virginia where Dock lived, and it would not abate until 1921-22 when a minor depression, prelude to the greater one, took its place.

The traditional musical culture was changing as much as the economic and social structures. Here Dock worked both as a progenitor of change and as a transmitter of the traditional. Music was an important part of his family's daily activities. At least three of his older brothers played the banjo and sang: John, the oldest son, Dave, and Roscoe. His sister, Jane, the oldest child, also sang and played the banjo. And Dock recalled his sisters Annie and Laura as memorable singers. His father was also a fine singer. He played no instruments but he "could sing by note," that is, he could read music, an ability to be remarked in any traditional musical culture because people normally learned and played by ear. Lee Hunsucker, Laura's husband and a Holiness preacher, was also an important musical influence, teaching Dock many of the sacred songs in his repertory.



All of the musical members of the family sang in styles that had persisted for at least several generations and, in some cases, for as long as a century or more. The instrument they played, the banjo, had been incorporated into the traditions of white mountain music more recently. Originally a black instrument, it entered the white musical world through the minstrel show and probably reached the mountains around the time of the Civil War. The modal tunes common to mountain fiddle and ballad music could readily be accompanied by the banjo. Except for Roscoe, all the Boggses played banjo in a style that had been stable for at least a generation. The banjo was frailed in the "knockdown" or "clawhammer" style, two common phrases for it. Banjo and fiddle were joined to make a kind of string band though the sole banjo was generally the instrument used if songs were accompanied. Many of the songs were sung unaccompanied in the old ballad style. The oldest songs in Dock's repertory, the ones longest in tradition, were the ones he learned from his family: "Pretty Polly," "Poor Ellen Smith," "John Hardy," "Cumberland Gap," "Little Ommie Wise," "Danville Girl," "Cripple Creek," "Ruben's Train." Some derived

from English ballads, others from American broadsides, a few--like "Ruben's Train"--date from the late nineteenth century and so would have been "new" tunes to Dock's much older siblings.

The family's music had a place in the occasions and rhythms of the old agrarian way of life. Songs passed the time and were forms of storytelling to divert and to amuse children and elders. They may also have given women, the primary carriers of the ballad traditions, company and solace through the long workday. Banjo and fiddle entertained large family and community gatherings. Play parties and dances usually followed cornshuckings, bean-stringings, molasses stirrings, house and barn raisings: "[Brother John] used to just, maybe they'd have a dance or a bean-stringing, or a gathering where there'd be a bunch of young people to gather in and maybe there'd be six or eight or ten couples to dance . . . and a lot of times I remember it commencin' nine or ten o'clock in the night and dancing plum 'til after daylight. And maybe not having anything to dance by--just an old banjo. Played three or four old-time banjo players to death nearly, they'd be near plum out for 'em to shake their foot by. . . ." These were gatherings of familiars, the music makers distinguished only by their taking one of several roles in the whole affair. Even after the Boggs family settled in Norton, portions of the old life remained available in the rural areas nearby and in the loyalties of the former rural folk in Norton and other coal towns, themselves no more than one generation away from everything these musical occasions represented.

Although Dock played for people in such communal settings it was during his most musically active years, in the Twenties, when the context of music-making began to change for good. People became "audiences" expecting a "performance" for which they paid. Records and radio depended for their success on the anonymities implied by these terms while deliberately appealing to uprooted rural dwellers' need for the familiarities of a waning traditional way of life. The first commercial country musicians were dressed as hayseeds, called Hillbillies, and "barn dances" soon became a staple of radio entertainment. These were complex symbols in their nostalgic recall of agrarian life through forms that also ridiculed it. Audience though they were, Dock's auditors, and those who bought his records in the 1920's, shared a common cultural and occupational world with him. Its members were miners, occasionally other industrial workers, and those still trying to live on the land, though for most of them farming provided only a part-time alternation with a wage-paying job. Dock's music recognizably belonged to the musical tradition within which white mountaineers grew up.

In the 1960's, his appreciators were college students and professionals in towns and cities far from the coalfields. He sometimes wondered, pleased though he was that they valued his music, what grounded their interest. This change in his audience represented almost as deep a shift in cultural context and history as the movement to music-making as a professional or near-professional activity. For Dock it was also a more disorienting change than the earlier one, demanding and frightening as that had been. His place as a musician in his own working-class culture had been lost to his long years away from music. During those thirty years new musicians innovated and moved the tradition beyond where he had taken it. Bluegrass and country-and-western styles, and rock-and-roll, all based on the traditional music, were in the 1960's the popular idioms, as Dock's style had once been in the 1920's and 1930's.

Dock's capacity to move across such different settings and groups testifies not only to his having greater musical gifts than his siblings but also to his having acquired his music in a cultural environment different from theirs. Crucial musical influence though it was, his family had entered by the time of Dock's birth an emerging society characterized by the interaction of different cultural groups: blacks from different parts of the South, Hungarians, Italians, Greeks, Poles, Ukrainians, and others. Each of course carried a variety of cultural and musical traditions. Adding to the mixture was the presence of people from other parts of the Southern mountains who brought rich local stylistic traditions, different songs, and alternative verses to familiar ones. It was as though a world of bounded and comprehensible sounds had erupted. Some traditional mountain musicians found the "strangers'" music only cacophonous, but every musician, whatever his or her cultural group, could not help picking up something from at least one of the others. The interchanges were not equal in frequency or quality. Mountain musicians exchanged most with those from other parts of the mountains simply because less translation was required. The ear and pulse did not have to be reoriented. Blacks and native-born whites also influenced each other greatly in the new milieu. The non-English speaking immigrants seem gradually to have absorbed the "American" music far more than they affected it. While they maintained many of their own musical traditions for at least a generation, they seem never to have much influenced the rapidly evolving musical scene in the Southern mountains. (Elsewhere, as in Louisiana and Texas, various European ethnic musics intermingled freely with the Anglo- and Afro-American traditions, and out of them all a distinctive synthesis was eventually created.)

The presence of so many culture groups and sub-groups created a rich and exhilarating musical world. The explosive combinations of styles, instruments, and new songs that resulted constituted an expressive feast and one of the great periods of creativity in American musical history arose from it. New social constructions and the coming of a fully industrialized capitalist economy also meant that every mode of expression was being tested and pressed by experiences requiring new form and eliciting powerful feeling. Innovation and synthesis were promoted and accelerated by the needs of commercial radio and records, themselves institutions of the new.

Early in his musical development Dock Boggs was drawn to black music and to styles and songs brought to his region by white musicians travelling up from Tennessee and from other sections of Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Sound recordings became an additional source. We know that recordings provided at least one of the routes through which black blues reached and moved Dock. They also promoted a more rapid exchange of styles and songs among Anglo-Americans within the region. He

learned "Railroad Tramp" from a record, probably from the version made by Ernest Stoneman in 1927, and he knew Riley Puckett's singing only through records. It was his fascination with black music that most distinguished his music, however, and stimulated his creation of a banjo style which combined elements of black and white instrumental styles.

Dock's reminiscences evoke a small boy entranced by music and with an ear already sharp and original enough by the age of nine or ten to seek new sounds beyond the family world. Although he was not yet playing the banjo, he had learned from his family songs like "Hook and Line" and "Poor Ellen Smith." This is unremarkable--certainly in comparison to his memory of learning "Hard Luck Blues" (sometimes called "Brother Jim Got Shot"), a song he recorded in 1927. In 1907 or 1908 he heard the song played by The Linebach Family. As they were singing it, he struggled to hold every note and verse in his mind. When he began to play the banjo a few years later, he worked it out as a banjo piece.

Two of Dock's stories about his early musical experiences have an especially magical quality. Both involve black music and musicians and signify the intensity and particularity of his attraction to them. In one he remembers back, perhaps to quite early childhood, to one of his first hearings of "John Henry." "There's a negro used to walk from Dorchester to Sutherland, and on weekends he'd take his guitar and be walkin' up the track . . . where I lived . . . I'd get out and follow him . . . his name was Go Lightening. And he was very nice and kind and I'd beg him--I was just a little boy, of course music always thrilled me when I was a boy. Seemed like I just could hear a piece, a sad piece, a lonesome piece, why it'd thrill me from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. And so, I'd walk along after him, I didn't have no nickels and dimes to give him . . . course he picked and he'd take up a collection . . . but I'd beg him to sit on the end of the ties, and I'd follow him plumb from Needmore . . . to Sutherland a lot of times to get to hear him play two, three, four pieces and I a lot of times heard him play "John Henry" and I learnt it partly, learnt some of the words from him." Other white mountain musicians of this generation tell similar stories about the first time they heard a black musician; the vividness of their recollection suggests how striking the unfamiliar music was.

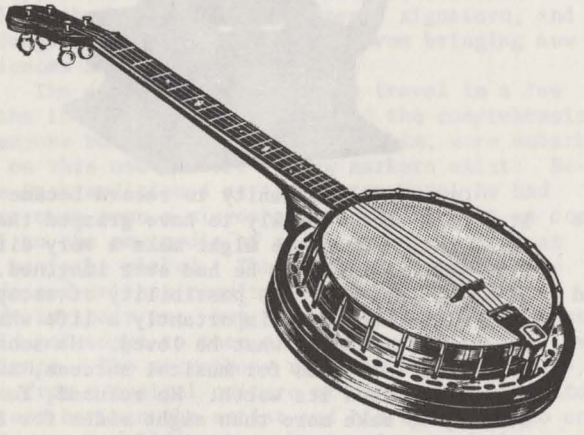
Dock's other story about black music locates specifically the primary influence on his banjo style. It probably occurred at about the time Dock started working in the coal mines. Though he was only twelve, the fact of his working full-time would have given him the kind of freedom and the knowledge to "play hooky," as he put it, at night and go from Norton to Dorchester, the mostly black neighboring coal town. Dorchester, a ghost town by the 1960's, had about three thousand black residents just before World War I. Most worked the coke ovens, jobs so dangerous and unpleasant that they often were reserved for blacks and immigrants. One night Dock decided to go over to hear a black string band playing a dance. The instrumental combination, familiar now to any bluegrass fan, was then unusual and striking: a mandolin, banjo, guitar, and fiddle. In several different versions of the story Dock portrays himself hovering at the edges of a crowd of black dancers and listeners or as hiding outside and overhearing. He most noticed the banjo player: "I heard this fellow play the banjo. . . . And I said to myself--I didn't tell anybody else--if I ever, I want to learn how to play the banjo kinda like that fellow does. I don't want to play like my sister and my brother. I am gonna learn just how to pick with my fingers. . . . It was several years before I got hold of a [banjo]."

At about the same time one of his brothers brought another Dorchester black musician to the Boggs's house. Jim White was a blue-eyed black man who played in a brass band. But he also played banjo and picked the tunes note by note, the style Dock was already drawn to in contrast to the knock-down frailing style used by Jane and John, his two oldest siblings. Dock's rendition of "Turkey in the Straw," itself a tune in black tradition, followed closely what he remembered of Jim White's way of playing it.

Even before large numbers of black people settled in the coal counties of central Appalachia, blacks had travelled through parts of the mountains leaving traces of their music in the practice of some white musicians. Some were peddlers, others exclusively wandering minstrels, some were early railroad workers. Black folk music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries influenced white country music profoundly. Neither proximity to black musicians nor the coincidence of hearing the music itself, however, explains why some white musicians responded directly to this world of sound and rhythm and others did not. Blacks and whites throughout the South had been exchanging music for at least two centuries. The distance

that once separated the original tonalities, rhythmic structures, and lyrical patterns of West Africans and of colonial whites had been bridged in numerous ways, making these crossings between two different but related traditions.

Dock's engagement with black music remains distinctive in its intensity and particularity. He often said he wished he had been a guitar player and if he had, he would have wanted to play in Mississippi John Hurt's style. He may have played the banjo simply because that was the available instrument on which he could learn. But he observed several times, as though in explanation, that when he was growing up only black people played the guitar --implying there was an unspoken racial prohibition. Although the coal counties were not as segregated as the rest of Virginia--blacks and whites worked together in the mines--the lines between the races were bitter and strong. In fact the guitar was also associated with a tradition of white Victorian parlor music and with young ladies. Numbers of Dock's white contemporaries from Wise County took up the guitar, notably Byrd Moore and Clintwood Johnson. Dock's sense of prohibition may simply have been idiosyncratic. Whatever its causes, he found a splendid compensation by creating a banjo style deeply indebted to black music.



Until he got his first banjo Dock played on Roscoe's. Roscoe taught him "Cuba" and was, it appears, musically and personally closer than his much older brother John. Roscoe's banjo-playing may have shaped Dock's, since he also favored picking the notes: "Brother Roscoe, he didn't pick the 'knockdown' way but he just picked with one finger and a thumb . . . and some pieces he picked pretty well." Homer Crawford provided the other identifiable formative influence. He was an itinerant musician and photographer from Tennessee who taught Dock "Hustlin' Gambler," the basis for "Country Blues," and who also showed Dock some more of the D tunings Dock liked. Other musicians were also sources but most came after Dock had established his basic style: Jim Begley who taught him "Scottische Time," Byrd Moore with whom Dock played on and off for fifteen years and from whom Dock learned parts of his version of "Careless Love." Each had in common a banjo style (though Moore usually played the guitar) that emphasized picking instead of frailing, the tune of a song instead of the accompanying chords.

For Dock his serious playing did not begin until he was married in 1918: "Commenced playin', I played for parties, bean stringin's, first one thing and another where they'd have a party in the country. . . . I was just a'playing for the fun of it. . . ." Sometimes he played alone, at other times with a guitarist like Byrd Moore or Gus Underwood, a fellow miner, or Charlie Powers, one of the musicians of The Powers Family. It may also have been sometime in the almost ten years before he recorded that Dock had a small band with two fellow miners, a father and son named Holland. The father played the fiddle left-handed and the boy the guitar.

The years from 1918 to 1927 were hard ones. Dock and his wife Sara were struggling to make a life together. At first they had the most economically prosperous time of their life. Dock had a contract job in the mines in 1918, an arrangement through which part of a mine was in effect leased to him. He gave it up, however, because Sara wanted to be with her family. Hard times followed both for the Boggses and for the whole area when the market for coal became depressed after World War I. He and Sara moved several times back and forth between southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky, wherever there were jobs in coal. Times got hard enough so that Dock couldn't make a living mining coal and went into the bootleg business. It was a common remedy mountain people had used for years to cushion economic depression, but it was also a rough business: "You know I never was bloodthirsty, wanting just to kill somebody. But I come awful near to gettin' killed and killing people myself. But back then you had to be [ready] to stand firm on what you was. If people thought they could walk on you, they'd absolutely do it."

The dangers of bootlegging were, however, only a part of the strained social and economic fabric of a region which had been rapidly developed. Population had increased enormously within a generation through the immigration of people of very different cultures. A traditional agrarian culture had been replaced by an industrial order. People had to create new social forms to organize their lives and their capacity to do so was at least checked by the persistent boom and bust cycle of the coal industry, forcing them to move again and again in search of work or to endure working conditions of such savagery that few social restraints could hold. Violence filled the Boggs's lives in these years. Dock himself engaged in several gun battles, was ambushed, his life threatened by a local sheriff. He also fought bloody and often drunken battles that left him or his opponents disabled for days. In one he broke a finger so badly that he couldn't load coal for a month.

The violence was not, as some commentators would have it, some inexorable element of "mountaineer" character. The conditions for stable human relations did not exist because of the governing political economy. These were years when the operators uprooted the United Mine Workers wherever they had achieved organization and repressed any attempt at unionization. The men and their families were unprotected. Miners were forced to work long days for low wages. Injury and death were common. The coal owners often openly disregarded the well-being of the miners and this contributed to the other factors subverting people's expecta-

tions of life. There was too much death. "There's so many of my buddies and my friends that I worked with that are dead, and gone, done dead and gone, so many of them killed in the mines, several that's been shot and killed."

Dock's married life had its own difficulties. He and Sara discovered, early in the 1920's, that she could not have children. He drank, played music, bootlegged, and otherwise carried on like a "rambling man," the admiring and damning term used in the traditional culture for any musician. Sara strongly objected to at least some of these activities, the music especially. And Dock did not get along with her family. Matters were tense enough that at one time Dock badly beat one of his brothers-in-law and, at another, he feared being killed by his wife's relatives.

Music played no clear role either in sustaining or enmeshing Dock in these days. His recollections about most of the Twenties rarely focused on it. He continued to play, adding slowly to his stock of songs, perhaps even practicing with some regularity. No evidence exists to indicate that he had any great ambitions for his music. When Dock told and retold the story of his audition for the Brunswick people in 1927, its central element was a tone of surprise and naiveté--as though the whole experience had just "happened" to an untutored country boy who was somehow blessed with musical talent and skill.

Talent scouts were just beginning to comb the Southern mountains for prospects, so Dock may well have not thought about making records (though I suspect he knew about such possibilities and hoped to persuade someone to record his music). The eight songs he recorded, however, are sung and played with the kind of power only available to a musician deeply involved in his art. Everything we know about Dock's musical life from young boyhood on indicates he was persistently engaged in it and ambitious. He once commented that his brothers and sisters "were limited to just a few pieces, four, five, six maybe ten, twelve pieces is all they could play. And after I got me a banjo of my own I commenced trying to reach out and learn other pieces." In a chaotic decade music may not have proved a stable center for Dock, but it seems to have supported the hope, however inchoate, of escaping the worst of his life while it gave him the means to express some of the exactions and terrible beauties of his daily experience.

Music as a Livelihood

The audition at the Norton Hotel in late 1926 or early 1927 changed Dock's life. Coincidence, not any conscious intention, seems to have brought Dock into Norton that day. It was happenstance also that he should have learned about the audition from an insistent friend who knew Dock well enough to overcome his anxieties about his ability to perform at an audition. Dock did not have his own banjo with him and had to borrow a cheap one from a local music store. Later in life Dock described the audition as though he was fully aware that it marked a divide: before it he commonly "pitched out money" to "fellows playing music. . . . I always liked music and thought they was way ahead of me." "I was just a'playing for the fun of it. . . ." His words hint at the changes in his consciousness once he took the step of auditioning and obtained a recording contract. It meant recognizing his own musical skill and seriousness; it also entailed a shift in his sense of relationship to the people to and for whom he played. Playing "for the fun of it" in response to friends' and neighbors' invitations to dances and other communal activities was very different from making records and playing wherever one could make money. Dock, having successfully auditioned, in effect entered a new cultural situation which separated him from merely local performers and defined him as a professional able to entertain an "audience" of people who did not necessarily know him personally.

Once the opportunity to record became a reality, Dock seems quickly to have grasped that through this means he might make a very different life for himself than he had ever imagined. At stake was not only the possibility of escaping the coal mines, but more importantly a life which might be devoted to doing what he loved. He soon became intensely ambitious for musical success, aware of his ability and its worth. He refused, for instance, to make more than eight sides for Brunswick at the first recording sessions in New York in 1927. He thought he was not being paid enough and decided to put the company off until he could demand more money. He was, nonetheless, offered contracts for two additional sessions and the freedom of choosing his own musicians for them. His action tells a great deal about Dock's complex sense of himself, of his music, and of his chances for commercial success. The other musicians Brunswick had brought to New York from the Norton area, Hub Mahaffey, a guitar player, Miss Vermillion, an autoharpist, and "Old" John Dykes, a fiddler, were not asked to make more than a few sides or to return to make more. Dock himself had not only never been to New York City before, he had never even been outside the small part of the Southern mountains in which he was born. Only a few months before, at the audition, he saw himself as one of the least skilled musicians in the group. What enabled him to risk bargaining with Brunswick and gave him confidence that he would not be dismissed as just another country musician?

His boldness is the more impressive when one knows something of the anxiety and uncertainty Dock

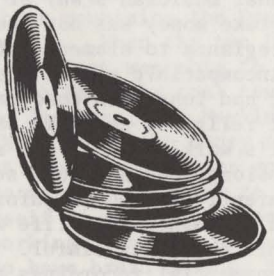
felt. He became so tense before auditioning and again before the recording session that he needed whiskey to relax. The tension came, he explained, because he "didn't have hardly enough nerve to try out myself" and "felt like 30¢ of scrip with a hole punched in it." Few things were worth less, but his scrip metaphor only apparently explains his tension. He may already have understood what the opportunity could bring him: "Well I felt this way kindly, I thought that I might get started, that I might . . . happen to put out a record that would make a hit, that I might [get] to where I have an opportunity, I maybe never have to work in the mines no more. . . . I figured . . . I could make it makin' music and I wouldn't have to work in the mines anymore."

Dock had, I think, developed a sense of possibility very different from what his local culture readily made available. His mind was not simply a quick and tough one, it was also powerfully imaginative. He was a nearly inveterate musical inventor. These gifts included the capacity to grasp new situations and project himself into them. Radio and records were only beginning to offer the bases for commercial success for musicians like Dock. The concept of being a "professional" did not have any real meaning in his cultural territory. Success for musicians like him required more than adaptability; it also involved shrewdness, a musical style with a recognizable personal signature, and an imagination for reaching and even bringing new audiences into being.

The distance Dock began to travel in a few months in 1927 is probably beyond the comprehension of anyone but musicians who, like him, were embarking on this new career. A few markers exist. Before Dock auditioned at the Norton Hotel he had never even seen a microphone, an instrument as central to the new media of radio and of records as the banjo he picked. The early microphones were crude and neither required nor responded to much craft in their use, but many traditional musicians could not adapt to them or to the absence of a live audience. The microphone represented the transition from a musical culture of direct and intimate contact between the artist and his community to one built upon amplification, projection, and the continual shaping of an audience one might never directly encounter.

When Dock went to a Norton clothing store before the New York trip and asked its owner to help him dress so he wouldn't look "too country," he registered both another dimension of the change and his ability to anticipate its requirements. Dock's awareness of how city folk might regard him could simply have been a gesture of insecurity; it was also at least a sign of some sophistication about the differences between urban and rural cultural practices: "Well I don't know what hardly to think. I was kindly uneasy about making the trip, afraid that I would--well I was so countrified. I'd never been anywhere. Naturally I was kindly uneasy I wouldn't act right or couldn't--wouldn't--get by hardly." "Old" John Dykes embarrassed Dock on the train trip and with the Brunswick people by acting the stereotypical country bumpkin. Dock's wish to separate himself from such behavior was not an acknowledgement of the superiority of city ways, but one more instance of his openness to change and his capacity to mediate between old and new within himself.

When he returned to Virginia from the recording session, he went back to the mines. For a short time life on the surface went much as it had for the past decade. The Brunswick records were issued, four in all, with two songs on each. They sold especially well in southwestern Virginia and the near counties of Kentucky. Dock had been in demand as a musician before this time, but the records spread his reputation further in the region and conferred a new status on him among both old and new admirers. More people asked him to play, and he spent many nights playing late. He played by himself or found someone in the audience who could back him on the guitar. His transformation into a full-time musician was not complete. He did not ask for money when he played, although the hat may have been passed on some occasions. "I would have been ashamed to . . ., I used to feel, to take money for playing" reflects the persistence of some of his traditional assumptions. Contracts and managers, radio shows and one night stands, and the creation of a band instead of making do with pick-up accompanists may all have been on Dock's mind in late 1927, but he had yet to integrate them into the whole of his musical activity.



He was, however, reaching towards making music his livelihood. He began to play schools, a new setting for country musicians, one that developed after they began making records. People wanted to come out in the evening or on a Saturday afternoon to hear musicians whose records they had heard or who they knew had recorded. Schools provided a space that was neither a setting exclusively for kin and neighbors nor yet the fully anonymous public auditorium characteristic of later country music. Dock also began experimenting with gathering a band. He played with guitarist Clintwood Johnson, a friend and fellow coal miner. Shortly after the New York trip Dock played a school date near Gates City, Tennessee with Hub Mahaffey, "Old" John Dykes, and Miss Vermillion. Discussions about making this a permanent group collapsed over Dykes's insistence that only a fiddle and banjo duo was acceptable. Dock, more responsive to the newest developments in country music, wanted the "better sound" possible with a fiddle, banjo, and guitar.

These steps accompanied others necessary to success as a commercial musician. He practiced more than he once had: "I was more precise in making my notes, I didn't make as many mistakes." He also realized he needed to expand his repertory. He set out, quite self-consciously, to learn more songs. It may have been between 1927 and 1929 when his brother-in-law, Lee Hunsucker, taught Dock so many of his songs. The "Preacher" provided two resources for his relative. He sang religious songs

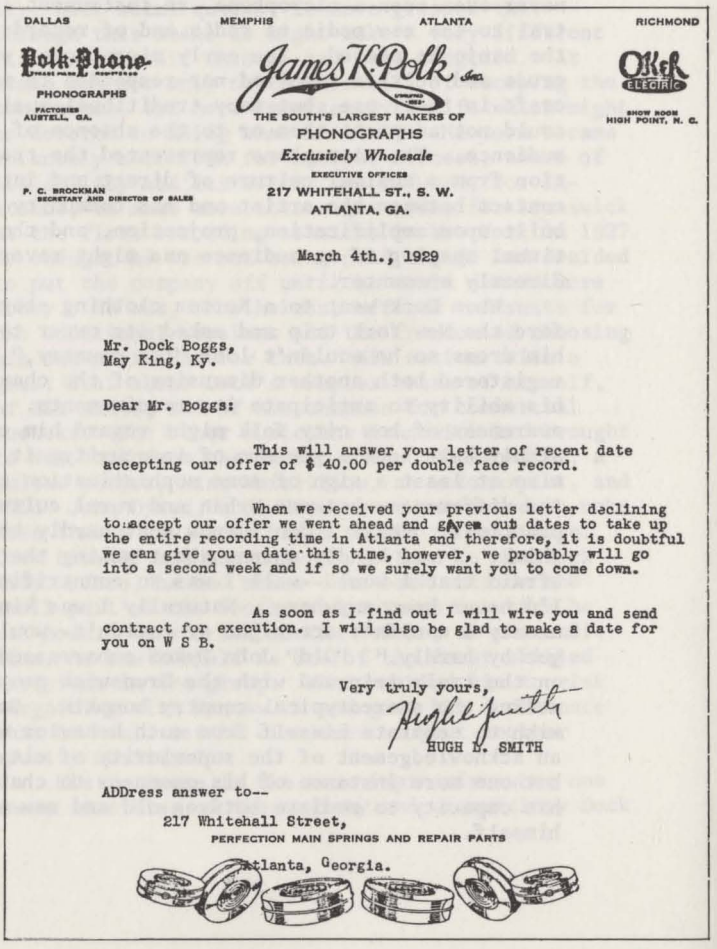
from the Holiness tradition and from the quite different Old Regular Baptist tradition. About a fifth of Dock's repertory was learned from his brother-in-law's treasury of sacred songs. Lee also owned a collection of some 300 records and a record player, something Dock never acquired for himself until the 1950's. It seems likely that Dock at this time began deliberately to learn songs off records he had heard at Lee's house.

Like A. P. Carter and E. V. Stoneman, two of the most successful traditional musicians to make the transition to commercial radio and recording careers, Dock turned to another source to expand his stock of songs. He began to collect "ballets," lyrics of songs written down on paper. Neighbors and friends offered them to him, sometimes with a tune they could sing or hum, at others with a request that Dock make a tune for them: "whenever I heard anything I liked I'd write it down." He didn't take every song he was offered, instead he had a clear sense of his "kinds" of songs, those that "touched my heart." He had, this is to say, by sometime around 1928 an achieved awareness of his own musical personality.

These actions, decisive though they were, did not mean Dock was able to embrace wholeheartedly a professional musician's way of life. His reluctance to take money was not the only manifestation of an allegiance to elements of his traditional culture incompatible with a musical career. Secular music had long been condemned by several of the important religious sects in the mountains. It was the devil's work, worldly and sensual. His own parents belonged to one such sect, and although they apparently failed to enforce this tenet, Dock struggled throughout his life with the issue of whether his music was sinful. Even before the advent of commercial recordings and radio, especially gifted musicians were suspect in mountain culture (and elsewhere) as "rambling men," unreliable, always moving on, too loose about the forms of family and economic life that held and justified most people's days. The coal mines and railroads had already undermined these stabilities by Dock's time, but the unsettled conditions exposed musicians to temptations beyond the conventional ones. Whorehouses, speakeasies, gambling dens, and dance halls were important sources of income for mountain musicians as well as the schools, restaurants, family gatherings, and other respectable settings. To make a living musicians had to be on the move. Their hours were irregular, drinking the norm, stable family and work lives hard to maintain.

In the months after the New York recording session Dock entered this musical life. He continued to work in the mines regularly enough so he could proudly recollect that "[I] never lost a job over my music or [for] being absent for my music." Music had become, however, his absorbing passion. It was his wife, Sara, who spoke against its claims and risks, a role she was to take throughout their life together. Dock sometimes bitterly resented her resistance but she articulated, I think, not only her own opposition, but also uneasiness Dock in some measure shared. The life was difficult in its irregularities; for someone who cared for the music as much as Dock, performing was exhausting; and while the money could be good, it was undependable. Drinking and brawling were common, and Dock's attraction to both was great enough that Sara worried about his survival. She apparently kept at Dock, for he resolved to quit to silence her. His resolution came in late 1927 or early 1928. It was to be a short retirement, but it anticipated the longer one that would last until 1963: ". . . my wife she didn't want me to play, didn't want me to record anymore, didn't want me to be out and gone or go to dances, anything like that and I got me really annoyed and decided I'd just quit playing. I'll not play anymore."

They moved to Mayking, Kentucky, Dock seemingly having made up his mind to be a coal miner for good. Spite proved too small a motive to keep Dock from the music for very long. His ebullience about his own creativity and musical opportunities was too great to allow him to abandon his hopes after only a short trial. His ambitions were not long in finding occasions. Charley Powers, an old friend and experienced guitarist with his family's band, came to Mayking to work in the mines. Soon he and Dock were playing together. And, as Dock later told it, people soon found where he was and began writing him to ask him to play. The invitations came so frequently and with them, Dock having come to accept money for playing, such an abundance of cash that Dock had to choose between mining and music. He went to the superintendent of the mine at Mayking: "'Henry, we're just going to have to quit, quit one or the other, making music or quit the mines.' I said, 'We're making a lot more money making music than we make in the mines anyhow.' He says, 'I think you're a damn fool in the first place for even coming back in the mines after you had a start like you and made records and people do like the way you play.' I said, 'I wouldn't take my head in the mines if I could do that.' 'I don't guess we'll be back anymore.'"



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Mr. Dock Boggs,
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Dear Mr. Boggs:

This will answer your letter of recent date accepting our offer of $ 40.00 per double face record.

When we received your previous letter declining to accept our offer we went ahead and gave out dates to take up the entire recording time in Atlanta and therefore, it is doubtful we can give you a date this time, however, we probably will go into a second week and if so we surely want you to come down.

As soon as I find out I will wire you and send contract for execution. I will also be glad to make a date for you on W S B.

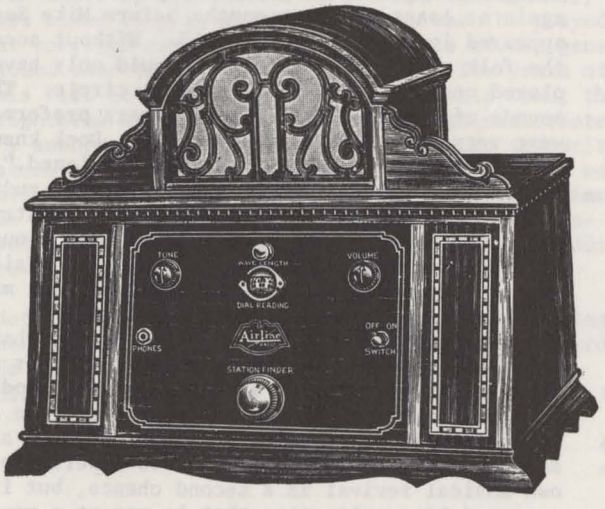
Very truly yours,
Hugh H. Smith
HUGH H. SMITH

ADDress answer to--
217 Whitehall Street,
Atlanta, Georgia.

PERFECTION MAIN SPRINGS AND REPAIR PARTS

Dock bought a Gibson in 1928, the best banjo made. He also quickly formed a band, "Dock Boggs and His Cumberland Mountain Entertainers." The musicians were all from Dock's home region: Scott Boatwright on guitar from Scott County, Virginia; Melvin Robinette, a prize-winning fiddler and, like Dock, from Wise County, Virginia; and Charley Powers, also a native Virginian, on guitar. There was some dispute about who should be the headliner, but Dock's greater reputation because of his recordings settled the matter. Their high hopes and seriousness were evident in Dock's decision to hire a manager--Steve Blair, a young lawyer in Whitesburg, Kentucky, devoted to Dock's music and willing to take on the work of finding bookings and managing the receipts. Crowds came to country theaters, schools, and stores, in significant part because of Dock's reputation as a recording artist. The band did well, often taking in between three and four hundred dollars a week.

The talents of each individual promised a kind of blend out of which great ensembles can come. Scott Boatwright was an excellent guitar player with a pleasant, smooth-sounding voice; Charley Powers had been performing in a band since his boyhood; and Melvin Robinette was one of the outstanding fiddlers of his day as well as a skillful singer. These gifts combined with Dock's unique sound on the banjo and the raw intensity of his singing ought to have given the band an extensive repertoire and a distinctive style. Everyone in the band was an experienced entertainer, and it is not surprising that people still remember some of the comic routines. Dock and Melvin seem to have been especially inventive in this regard. Dock and Scott also danced. And Dock did two routines with special appeal to the many coal miners who came to hear the band. He developed a kind of dance imitating coke workers pulling the coke, and another mimicking his own occupation of many years, coal loading. These, too, were audience favorites. The band only stayed together for the first half of 1929. Its break-up, though a disappointment to Dock, does not seem to have caused or resulted from much animosity. The four never quite became a group. There were minor personality differences but the chief problem seems to have been the differing ambitions of each of the men. Dock and Scott continued to play together for the rest of that year. Charley Powers retired altogether from music and soon left the area. Melvin Robinette soon followed him into retirement.



The flush times were coming to an end. Dock could not have known how dependent his expansive sense of opportunity was on the now fatal final boom of an inflated economy. The three years, 1927 to 1929, during which he moved towards a musical career were the most prosperous ones of the decade, even in the coalfields. National companies like Brunswick, RCA Victor, Vocalion, and Okeh competed for new musicians, customers, and markets. Radio stations came into existence with hours of airtime to fill. People like Dock's neighbors had a little surplus to spare for an occasional record or a ticket to an evening of music at the local school. When Dock went to Chicago sometime in the summer of 1929 to record for Lonesome Ace, he reasonably assumed this would be but one of many recording sessions to come. He had been promised more sessions by Brunswick and other companies had expressed interest. In October the collapse came.

The effects were gradual for many Americans, but in the Southern mountains the Depression came swiftly and severely. When the two Lonesome Ace records were issued Dock was able to sell about a hundred through the Kentucky coal towns of Neon, Fleming, Haymen, Jackhorn, and Mayking, but within a few months "there wasn't no money to buy, even if they wanted that [music]." "Times got to be so tight that there wasn't any money to borrow expenses for yourself to go anywhere and you couldn't draw no money working. One day a week in the mines you done good to have bread on your table to eat." The Depression had reached all around.

Dock kept his musical life for some time after these events. He wrote to several record companies, offering to record, and was either put off or given no answer. It was probably late in 1929 that he decided to go to Atlanta. There was no work in the coalfields and someone had told him the Atlanta police force was hiring. He considered applying. He also knew that P. C. Brockman, the Okeh A & R man, was headquartered in Atlanta, and the police job may have given him a legitimate reason to make what turned out to be the last venture to rescue his musical career. He contacted Brockman and was offered a half hour Saturday night live audition on WSB, Atlanta's country music station and a major station for the whole region. Dock's desperation can be gauged by what happened. He froze before the mike so badly that he could barely force his voice to sound. People who knew him heard the broadcast and were not sure it was his voice or playing. He returned to Kentucky, went back into the mines, and eventually pawned his banjo.

He may never have fully understood what wrecked his chances. Talking with Mike Seeger he sometimes seemed clear about the impact of the Depression, but at others he implied his musical career stopped because not enough people wanted to hear his music. Sometimes bitterly and sometimes lovingly he blamed his wife. Even in the loving accounts his metaphors expressed how much he valued what he had lost: "Whenever my wife turned my damper down, it is either her or my music, why I

thought more of her than I did my music. And I didn't give up as much as King George did when I gave up my music. He gave up the throne for Wallis Simpson. I figured I wasn't giving up no more than what had been given up many times." Blaming Sara, whatever the tone, may at least have provided Dock with a sense of control, a feeling that he had chosen to renounce his musical career for love or out of weariness with domestic wrangles. Even the risk of marital bitterness might seem preferable to the kind of helplessness and confusion that was one of the worst and most devious afflictions of the Depression.

Some musicians weathered these years. Knowing this, Dock took personal responsibility for his failure to persist, returning in memory again and again to the first years of the Depression in an attempt to understand what he ought to have done. It may simply have been bad luck that kept him from being one of the survivors. Had he made more records before the Crash, had the band stayed intact, or had he, perhaps most importantly of all, established himself on radio, he might have made it. It is also possible that his music was finally too intense ever to meet the requirements of wide popularity imposed by the economic stringencies of the Depression: "I put so much of myself into some pieces that I very nearly broke down emotionally." Only musicians with a more dispassionate address to their music could survive the intensely competitive conditions that followed the Crash. Dock, on the evidence of the Lonesome Ace sides, may have been moving towards such a smoother and more "professional" style, but he achieved it unluckily too late.

Revival and Rediscovery

People dream about second chances as a redemption for disappointment and failure. Life never quite lends itself to exact repetition, and so no one ever experiences the second chance of his dreams. Dock may have come as close as anyone can. If he ever gave up hope completely during his thirty-five years in the mines, he recovered it enough to begin working seriously on the banjo again at least eighteen months before Mike Seeger appeared in Norton in June 1963. Without access to the folk revival circuit, Dock could only have played occasionally and to a small circle. The sounds of country music his neighbors preferred were very different from his music. Dock knew his once "new" music now sounded "old-fashioned." He could not, I think, have known there were audiences hungry for such music elsewhere in the country. Only someone like Mike Seeger could have brought him to these audiences and given him the musical support and appreciation without which Dock might not have been able to perform for them.

Dock found a kind of satisfaction, perhaps even a kind of redemption at moments, in his second musical career. It was a chance to make good some commitments he had thought he might never be able to meet. His expressed wish to be 35 years old again registered the temptation to experience his own musical revival as a second chance, but it also conveyed his realization that he was at a new turn. "Don't care about music as much as I did. If I had, I would have kept it up. I wouldn't lay it down for nothing. I don't think I should have laid it

down when I did. I feel I made a mistake. I'm pleased to get a chance even to put them old songs back on. I want to put on all the old songs I've got. I'd love to put them on so that when I'm gone why the young people they can have them in memory of me." Something haunting, less than redemptive, begins to surface in these lines. Dock's old capacity to read an audience returned to him along with his musical facility. The more he played the college and folk festival circuit, the more he emphasized his role as a preservationist, a kind of living museum for an otherwise defunct music. He stressed his playing in an "old" style "original" tunes other musicians, country and bluegrass stylists perhaps, twisted and got wrong.

He loved singing and performing again. A kind of peace sometimes came with it. But though he became more polished in his introductions, more able to appear relaxed in performance, he never felt free with the folk revival audiences. He sensed, even when he perhaps could not articulate it, his status as an object. He was proud of earning enough money from the music to buy his first new car. Other satisfactions eluded him, and he probed painfully to locate the sources of his discontent. His friendship with Mike Seeger softened the loneliness Dock felt. He trusted him in part as a fellow musician, someone who understood Dock's need to make new songs and to be recognized as a living musician instead of one who rehearsed something dying.

There were other stresses--of remembering verses from songs he hadn't sung in years and of wondering if his fingers would be nimble enough every night to do their intricate picking. There was also Dock's own vital rediscovery of his music. Listening to the records he made in the 1960s is to encounter a music made anew, marvelously unlike the singing and playing of anyone else. At his best he might have been singing to his own soul. It is possible that Dock had never been as good as he was in these last years. Had such an assurance been available to him, it might not have mattered much. His deepest struggle may have been with the sense of permanent displacement. This was not his time or these his people. He once joked about how bad the music in his church was and how infrequently he was asked to play at church. Even when he played at colleges near his home, few people of his generation came to hear him. In the last few years of his life he could not resolve his doubts about the rightness of his playing music, doubts exacerbated by anonymous letters from members of the community accusing him of sinning through his music. He was drinking again, failing in health, and every time he played perhaps wondering what might have happened had he kept on in 1929 against all the odds, re-figuring his life in each song.

To the end he was extraordinary. He let nothing important rest, thinking about and making new as much as he could of what he felt and heard. He died February 7, 1971. It was his birthday. His music remains.

The Songs

SIDE A

Band 1: *Down South Blues*

Released with *Sugar Baby* as Brunswick 118 in 1927. Hub Mahaffey on guitar. Dock learned the song from a black blues recording in his brother-in-law's collection. The recording, he thought, was by a Sara Martin and he learned the song around 1923, perhaps earlier. He may, in fact, have learned it from one of two recordings under this title, both of which were out in 1923: Paramount 12036 with Alberta Hunter the vocalist, or from Vocalion 14635, Rosa Henderson the vocalist and Fletcher Henderson on piano. The Henderson recording seems the most likely source since Dock remembered a piano on the record from which he took the song. Alberta Hunter is backed only by Joe Smith on cornet. Dock's 1963 version of *Down South Blues* (Folkways FA 2351) differs somewhat from this, the original Brunswick recording.

I'm a-going to the station,
Going to catch the fastest train that goes;
I'm a-going back South
Where the weather suits my clothes.

Oh love's like water,
It is turned off and on.
When you think you've got 'em,
Oh they are turned off and gone.

I was reared in a country
Where the snow it never fell.
I'm a-going back South,
If I don't do so well.

I'm a-going back South,
If I wear out ninety-nine pair of shoes;
'Cause I'm broken-hearted;
I've got those down South blues.

Oh my daddy told me,
And my mama told me too;
"Don't you go off, honey,
Let the man make a fool out of you."

Band 2: *Sugar Baby*

Hub Mahaffey on guitar. John Boggs, Dock's oldest brother, taught him this and Dock kept his brother's tuning. The song is fairly common in the Southern mountains and may derive from the old ballad, *The Lass of Roch Royal* (Child 76), with which it shares the verse "Who'll rock the cradle / Who'll sing the song? / Who'll call you honey / When I'm gone?" Since the two songs share no other common elements they are, at best, distant relations. Both Frank Profitt and Clarence Ashley sang songs close in word and tune to Dock's.

Oh I've got no sugar baby now;
It's all I can do for to see peace with you,
And I can't get along this-a-way,
Can't get along this-a-way.

Done all I can do, I've said all I can say;
I will send you to your mama next payday,
Send you to your mama next payday.

Got no use for the red rockin' chair,
I've got no honey baby now,
Got no sugar baby now.

Who'll rock the cradle, who'll sing the song,
Who'll rock the cradle when I'm gone,
Who'll rock the cradle when I'm gone.

Done all I can do, I've said all I can say,
I will send you to your mama next payday.

Laid her in the shade, give her every dime I made;
What more could a poor boy do,
What more could a poor boy do.

Oh I've got no honey baby now;
Got no sugar baby now.

Said all I can say, I've done all I can do,
And I can't make a living with you,
Can't make a living with you.

Band 3: *Country Blues*

Issued as Brunswick 131 in 1927 with *Sammie, Where Have You Been So Long?* on the other side. Homer Crawford, the itinerant photographer and musician from Tennessee, taught the song to Dock as *Hustling Gamblers*, probably around 1914. Dock added verses of his own both for this recording and later, in 1963, when he recorded it again on Folkways FA 2351. *Hustling Gamblers* and *Darling Cory* (or *Corey*) belong to the same lyric and tune family, one that has been around in the Southern mountains for over a century. The family of tunes probably originates late in the 19th century and belongs to the then developing tradition of white blues ballads. Dock's tune differs from the common versions.

Come all you good, kind people,
While I've got money to spend;
Tomorrow might be Monday,
And I neither have a dollar nor a friend.

When I had plenty of money, good people,
My friends were all standing around;
Just as soon as my pocketbook was empty,
Not a friend on earth to be found.

Last time I seen my little woman, good people,
She had a wine glass in her hand;
She was drinking down her troubles
With a low-down, sorry man.

Oh my daddy taught me a-plenty, good people;
I told her I was in jail;
She wrote me back an answer,
Saying, "Honey I'm a-coming to go your bail."

All around this old jailhouse is ha'nted, good people,
Forty dollars won't pay my fine;
Corn whiskey has surrounded my body, poor boy,
Pretty women is a-troubling my mind.

Give me corn bread when I'm hungry, good people,
Corn whiskey when I'm dry;
Pretty women a-standing around me,
Sweet heaven when I die.

If I'd a-listened to my mama, good people,
I wouldn't have been here today;
But a-drinking and a-shooting and a-gambling,
At home I cannot stay.

Go dig a hole in the meadow, good people,
Go dig a hole in the ground;
Come around all you good people,
And see this poor rounder go down.

When I am dead and buried,
My pale face turned to the sun,
You can come around and mourn, little woman,
And think the way you have done.

Band 4: *Sammie, Where Have You Been So Long?*

Hub Mahaffey on guitar. The song belongs to a family of songs which share the refrain "And it's 'Where have you been so long?'" Brown, *North Carolina Folklore*, III, 215, describes one of these songs, the familiar *Mole in the Ground*, to which this song is clearly related. Brown suggests this song family originated either among river roustabouts or from a minstrel show medley.

Oh Sammie where you been so long?
Oh Sammie where you been so long?
I've been to the West and I'm going back, I guess;
Oh honey, let me beg you, please don't go.

Oh honey, let me beg you, please don't go.
I've been to the West and I'm going back, I guess;
Oh honey, let me beg you, please don't go.

See me coming in with my twenty dollar bill;
Yes, Sammie where you been so long?
Oh Sammie where you been so long?
I've been to the West and I'm going back, I guess;
Oh honey let me beg you, please don't go,
Oh honey let me beg you, please don't go.

Oh my whiskey bill is due,
And my board bill is too,
And my last gold dollar done and gone,
And my last gold dollar done and gone.
Oh my whiskey bill is due,
And my board bill is too,
And my last gold dollar done and gone.

Band 5: *Danville Girl*

Released as Brunswick 132 with *Pretty Polly* in 1927. The song belongs with a group which shares several verses: *Wild and Reckless Hobo, Waiting for a Train*, and *Danville Girl* itself. The song was probably composed around 1870 or 1880 and many recordings document one or another version under the above titles. Norm Cohen, *Long Steel Rail* has a comprehensive and extended discussion of the song and its history.

. . . I went down to Danville,
Got stuck on a Danville girl;
Oh, you bet your life she's out of sight,
She wears those Danville curls.

She wears her hair on the back of her head
Like all high-toned people do;
The very first train that leaves this town,
Going to bid that girl adieu.

I don't see why I love that girl,
For she never cared for me;
But still my mind is on that girl,
Wherever she may be.

It's forty mile through the rock,
It's sixty through the sand,
Oh I relate to you the life
Of a many poor married man.

Oh, standing by the railroad track,
A-resting my poor tired feet;
Nine-hundred miles away from home,
And not a bite to eat.

A-walking about on the old platform,
A-smoking very cheap cigar;
A-waiting for a local,
To catch an empty car.

I don't see why I love that girl,
For she never cared for me;
But still my mind is on that girl,
Wherever she may be.

Look up, look down this lonesome road;
Hang down your head and cry;
The best of friends have to part some times,
And why can't you and I.

Band 6: *Pretty Polly*

This was one of the very first songs Dock ever learned and one of the oldest in tradition among the songs in his repertory. Caution is required handling variants of the song since at least five quite different songs share the same title (Laws, American Balladry, 101). See Josiah H. Combs, Folk-Songs of the Southern United States, 144, for a very different song than the one Dock sings. Dock's version of *Pretty Polly* derives from the British broadside The Cruel Ship's Carpenter (sometimes called The Gosport Tragedy) itself the source of many variants (see Laws, American Balladry, P36B). Its subject--a young woman betrayed and murdered by her lover--may well be the most common one in the Anglo-American ballad tradition. An interesting but different version of the song Dock sings is in Leonard Roberts, Sang Branch Settlers, 102-104. Brown, North Carolina Folklore, II, 234-40, has several variants of the *Pretty Polly* family from which Dock's version comes.

I used to be a rambler, I stayed around in town;
I used to be a rambler, I stayed around in town;
I courted pretty Polly, and her beauty has never been found.

Oh where is pretty Polly, oh yonder she stands;
Oh where is pretty Polly, oh yonder she stands;
With rings on her fingers, her lily-white hands.

"Pretty Polly, pretty Polly come take a walk with me;
Pretty Polly, pretty Polly come take a walk with me;
When we get married some pleasure to see."

He led her over hills and valleys so deep;
He led her over hills and valleys so deep;
At length pretty Polly, she begin to weep.

"Oh Willie, oh Willie I'm 'fraid of your way;
Oh Willie, oh Willie I'm 'fraid of your way;
Your mind is to ramble and lead me astray."

"Pretty Polly, pretty Polly you're guessing about right;
Pretty Polly, pretty Polly you're guessing about right;
I dug on your grave two-thirds of last night."

They went on a piece farther and what did they spy?
Went on a piece farther and what did they spy?
A new dug grave and a spade lying by.

She threw her arms around him and began to weep;
She threw her arms around him and began to weep;
At length pretty Polly she fell asleep.

He threw the dirt over her and turned away to go;
Threw the dirt over her and turned away to go;
Down to the river where the deep waters flow.

SIDE B

Band 1: *New Prisoners Song*

Hub Mahaffey accompanies on guitar, and on its companion, *Hard Luck Blues*, issued as Brunswick 133 in 1927. This song, nearly identical to *Seven Long Years* (see Brown, North Carolina Folklore, III, 416-17) was in the repertory of the older Boggs children and Dock recalled learning it from one of his sisters. Under the name *Seven Long Years* it has been collected in places as widely separated as Nova Scotia and Ohio.

Sitting alone, and all alone,
Sitting in my cell all alone;
A-thinking of those good times gone by me,
Knowing that I once had a home. (Chorus)

For seven long years I've been in prison,
For seven long more I have to stay;
Just for knocking a man down in the alley,
Taking his gold watch away.

(Chorus)

Oh, once I had a sister and a brother;
Wonder if they ever think of me.
Oh, once I had a father and a mother;
She lived in a cottage near the sea.

(Chorus)

Band 2: *Hard Luck Blues*

This song was one of the earliest Dock taught himself. He heard the Linebach Family play it in 1907 and painstakingly committed it to memory, later adapting it to the banjo when he began to play. The lyrics would seem to be migrants from two very different songs but I do not know whether Dock combined them or remembered only these lyrics from the Linebach's version.

Me and my brother, Jim, went into a restaurant one night;
Through some other parties we got into a fight.

Shot all the way through me, they killed my brother Jim;
Shot all the way through me, they killed my brother Jim.

Hard luck, hard luck, placed me on the spot;
Jury said it wasn't me, my brother Jim got shot. (Chorus)

Well, my wife she had a mouth big enough for both;
She got frightened in her sleep one night and a mouse ran down her throat.

(Chorus)

Got me a cat and a piece of cheese, I placed it on her chin;
Wife got frightened in her sleep one night, she took the rat, cat and cheese all in.

(Chorus)

Bands 3-6:

The lyrics for these four songs were all composed by W. E. Myers, a variety store owner in Richlands, Virginia. Myers started his own record company, Lonesome Ace, shortly before the Depression which doomed it to a brief life. Myers wrote ballets and apparently sent them to musicians whose records he liked. Among them were Mississippi John Hurt and Emry Arthur, himself the guitarist on the four sides Dock made in response to one such mail appeal from Myers. Myers left it to the musicians to select or compose the tunes they "put with" his words, though he suggested tunes he liked. He urged Dock to use the tune to *Country Blues* for *False Hearted Lover's Blues*, the only one of Myers' recommendations Dock followed. Dock chose an interesting diversity of tunes to set the ballets. The four songs were issued in 1929 as LA 21403/21404 and LA 21405/21406. Myers planned on Dock's recording more of his compositions and some of Dock's own as well. After the Chicago session when these sides were made, the two men continued to correspond until Myers' bankruptcy in late 1930 ended all possibility of partnership.

Band 3: *False Hearted Lover's Blues*

False hearts have been my downfall,
Pretty women have been my craze;
I'm sure my false hearted lover,
Will drive me to my lonesome grave.

They'll bite the hand that feeds them,
Spend all the money you can save;
From your heartstrings weave silk garters,
Build their dog house on your grave.

When my earthly stay is over,
Sink my dead body in the sea;
Just tell my false hearted lover,
That the whales will fuss over me. (Chorus)

Ragged clothes droppin' from my body,
The wolf howlin' round my door;
The man who won my darling girl,
Feel the bite of my forty-four.

Corn whiskey has wrecked my body,
A false lover is bearin' on my mind;
I've roamed the whole world over,
Pleasure on earth I cannot find.

(Chorus)

If I meet my darling girl again,
I'll tell her all about my troubles;
Give her the false-hearted lover's blues,
And leave her standin' on the pebbles.

All men take this timely warning,
Which is for both young and old;
Don't try to buy a woman's love,
With the last dollar of your gold.

Take warning you fair young ladies,
If your love and honor you've sold;
The men will have no use for you,
When your dark hair turns to gold.

(Chorus)

Band 4: *Old Rub Alcohol Blues*

The tune used here is in D, like *Country Blues*, the tune Dock used to record *False Hearted Lover's Blues*. This may be a unique tune. I have not been able to identify it or to place it in any tune family.

Troubles up and down the road,
And trials all the way around;
Never knew what trouble was,
Till my darling threw me down.

With nothing but old ragged clothes,
My heart strings broken to shreds;
Blues creepin' over my body,
Queer notions flyin' to my head.

If I ever meet that girl again,
Our troubles will all be o'er;
I'll steal her out away from home,
We will sail for some foreign shore.

When my worldly trials are over,
And my last goodbye I've said;
Bury me near my darling's doorstep,
Where the roses bloom and fade. (Chorus)

My pockets are all empty,
Like they've often been before;
If I ever reach my home again,
I'll walk these ties no more.

The easiest thing I ever done,
Was lovin' and drinkin' wine;
The hardest thing I ever done,
Was workin' out a judge's fine.

The cheapest thing I ever done,
Was sleepin' out amongst the pines;
The hardest thing I ever tried,
Was keeping pork chops off of my mind.

Have never worked for pleasure,
Peace on earth I cannot find;
The only thing I surely own,
Is a worried and troubled mind.

If wine and women don't kill me,
There's one more plan to find;
Soak up the old rub alcohol,
Ease all troubles off my mind.

(Chorus)

Band 5: *Will Sweethearts Know Each Other?*

The tune comes from *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down*.

Sweetheart, we may live lonely here,
While on earth we have to stay;
But there'll come a time, my darling,
When our souls will sail away.

Let us live just for each other,
During life's weary struggle here;
For our souls will be together,
Then we'll know each other there.

Your smile on earth I may never see,
Nor your kind words ever hear;
If you'll smile on me in Heaven,
I am sure I'll know you there. (Chorus)

Hope to find a spot in Heaven,
Set aside for you and me;
We must do right on earth, dear,
So the angels we will see.

We have many friends in Heaven,
Who have gone on long before;
May we meet them and each other,
On that blissful golden shore.

If you enter that heavenly clime,
Before my stay on earth is o'er;
Keep the faith by watchin' and waiting,
For sweet Heaven is my only goal.

Should I reach the glory land,
Before your body in clay is lain;
May God ever be with you,
Till we meet each other again.

(Chorus)

Band 6: *Lost Love Blues*

The tune is a melodic waltz, a kind of tune Dock rarely chose to play. The tune itself is from the family of *More Pretty Girls Than One*.

I lost you darling true love,
And now I'm growing old;
My pockets are all empty,
Of both silver and gold.

While my money lasted,
You gave my heart ease;
But since I have nothing,
You court who you please.

I am heart broken and lonely,
No one can take your place;
Everywhere I chance to look,
I can see your smiling face.

Darling, Oh darling sweetheart,
Your name I'll never tell;
If you don't change your cruel ways,
My soul is doomed for hell.

Don't shed a tear my darling,
As the daisy o'er me grows;
Just decorate my lonesome grave,
With the withered faded rose. (Chorus)

If I had a pass to glory,
And it did not read for two;
I'd trade it off for your true love,
And stay on earth with you.

Your eyes they shine like diamonds,
Your cheeks are like the rose;
The way I love you darling girl,
Great God in heaven knows.

Lost love, lost love, my darling,
How can you treat me so;
To leave your own true lover,
And with a false one go.

Many times over you I've pondered,
Happy hours with you I've spent;
You have won my heart forever,
While your own was only lent.

There'll come a time darling,
In just a few short more days;
You'll hang your head in sorrow,
As I'm lowered in my grave.

Keep all the little tokens,
I have so fondly gave;
Just grant to me my last request,
Take them with you to your grave.

(Chorus)

Credit is due many people without whom this record, the booklet, and notes could not have been done. A. Doyle Moore designed the cover. Richard Spottswood provided the Lonesome Ace sides, Joe Bussard one of the Brunswick sides. Peter Bartok and Mike Seeger remastered the originals. Mike Seeger conducted the interviews with Dock Boggs on which the booklet is based. Ralph Rinzler, Richard Derbyshire, and Gary Floyd of the Folklife Program, Smithsonian Institution, supported the project with tapes and time, advice and training for Barry O'Connell. Gary Floyd deserves special thanks for duplicating all the interview tapes. Madeline Casey, English Department, Amherst College, transcribed several of the tapes. Barry O'Connell of the Folklife Program at the Smithsonian and the English Department, Amherst College, prepared the booklet and song notes. Barry O'Connell and Mike Seeger co-produced the album.