the 37th OLD-TIME FIDDLERS CONVENTION
AT UNION GROVE, NORTH CAROLINA
SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY H. P. VAN HOY
BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM-UNCLE CHARLIE HIGGINS
INSTRUMENTAL-THE OLD TIMERS
OLD RICHMOND-A. L. HALL BAND
RIVER STAY AWAY FROM MY DOOR-CHARLIE KNIGHT AND HIS COUNTRY MUSIC BOYS
LOST JOHN-RED PARHAM AND THE HAYWOOD COUNTY RAMBLERS
HITCHIKER'S BLUES-BRUSHY MOUNTAIN BOYS
WHOA MULE-YADKIN COUNTY RAMBLERS
MAY I SLEEP IN YOUR BARN TONIGHT, MISTER?-GRANDMA DAVIS FROM ROARING RIVER
I SHALL NOT BE MOVED-LAUREL RIVER BAND
SALLY ANN-THE OLD TIMERS
DANCE ALL NIGHT-KENNETH EDWARDS AND THE SUNNY MOUNTAIN BOYS
TWINKLE LITTLE STAR-MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS
RUBEN-BLUE GRASS MOUNTAIN BOYS
BILLY IN THE LOWGROUND-LONESOME STRANGERS
WHISKEY TOOK MY DADDY AWAY-LOUISE EDMONDS
TEARDROPS IN MY EYES-FRIENDLY CITY PLAYBOYS
GREY EAGLE-DELMER STARLING AND ESKER HUTCHINS, SURRY COUNTY RAMBLERS
FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN-DIXIE RAMBLERS
BACK UP AND PUSH-FRIENDLY CITY PLAYBOYS
SALLY ANN-MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS
SOME CLOSING REMARKS BY H. P. VAN HOY

Descriptive Notes are inside pocket.
THE 37th OLD TIME FIDDLER'S CONVENTION
AT UNION GROVE NORTH CAROLINA
Recorded by Mike Seeger and Lisa Chiera

The Oldtimers - waiting to play at Gymnasium

SIDE I

1. Some introductory Remarks by H.P. Van Boy
2. Blackberry Blossom - Uncle Charlie Higgins
3. Instrumental - The Old Timers
4. Old Richmond - A.L. Hall Band
5. River Stay Away From My Door
   - Charlie Knight and His Country Music Boys
6. Lost John-Red Parham and the Haywood County Ramblers
7. Hitchiker's Blues - Brush Mountain Boys
8. Whoa Male - Yadkin County Ramblers
9. May I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight, Mister?
   - Grandma Davis From Roaring River
10. I Shall Not Be Moved - Laurel River Band
11. Sally Ann - The Old Timers
12. Dance All Night - Kenneth Edwards and the Sunny Mountain Boys

SIDE II

1. Twinkle Little Star - Mountain Ramblers
2. Ruben - Blue Grass Mountain Boys
3. Billy in the Lovground-Lonesome Strangers
4. Whiskey Took My Daddy Away - Louise Edmonds
5. Teardrops in my Eyes - Friendly City Playboys
6. Grey Eagle-Delmer Starling and Eaker Hutchins, Surry County Ramblers
7. Fire on the Mountain - Dixie Ramblers
8. Back Up and Push-Friendly City Playboys
9. Sally Ann - Mountain Ramblers
10. Some Closing Remarks by H.P. Van Boy

Time: First side, 21:45
      Second side, 17:06

All photos by JOHN COHEN
OLD-TIME FIDDLERS

Hosts at Country-Music Get-Together
Reward Banjoist From the City

BY ROBERT SHELTON

UNION GROVE, N. C. — private parties and school dances. The non-amplified old-time and Bluegrass bands, of which there were many excellent examples, were mostly amateur or semi-professional.

Members of one of the best Bluegrass bands, the Mountain Ramblers, are perhaps typical in their vocational status. Coming from the furniture-making town of Galax, two members of the band are upholsterers, one a furniture finisher, another a student and the banjoist is just out of work. They dream of making music their profession.

The strongest contrast to be seen was between the country fiddler who won the fiddling competition and the city banjo-jigger who got a purple ribbon for the second time in two years. "Lost John," the country fiddler, appeared with an exciting seven-member band called the Bounty, Mountain Boys, from North Wilkesboro.

"Lost John doesn't know enough to get out of the rain," a friend said, "but put a fiddle in his hand and off he goes." He is 64, shorn-eyed with an amiable, wise-looked grin.

IN EARLY BAND — Johnnies Bumary, above the conductor, and Kenneth Smith, a soloist, appear in "Easter" on Wednesday.

A L. Hall, fiddler

The Lonesome Strangers, John Herad, guitar; Buddy Pendleton, fiddle; Bob Yeclin, 5-string banjo.

1924, and A. L. Ball, fiddler (with hat) and another fiddler.
Introduction

The old axiom, "Necessity Is The Mother Of Invention," certainly holds true in the case of the founding of the Old Time Fiddlers Convention. At this time, public education was in its early stages. Iredell County had only four State supported high schools, outside the cities of Iredell County. At this time, the only requirement for those in the teaching profession was to be able to pass a written examination given by the Superintendent of County Schools; while still later the requirements were raised to require one year's credit from an accredited High School. Under the old requirements, the local people were able to qualify for those positions in the teaching profession. This new ruling, therefore, meant that the local Citizenry had one of two choices: build a High School of their own, or send their students away to one of the four boarding High Schools in the County. If Union Grove were to have a High School of their own, it meant that they had to bear all the expenses to support such a plan. It is important to point out here that at this time there was no State support for public education. So the question of finance was of paramount importance. It is natural that the question arose, "how will we pay for our buildings, teacher salaries, Library, Science equipment, and other necessary equipment for the successful operation of High School for Union Grove.

The community was fortunate to have on its faculty a young man with a vision, a man dedicated to the cause of better education, and a man who had a deep abiding love and understanding for country people. Because of these deep convictions for the likes and dislikes of country people, and his own love and appreciation for country music, the idea to stage an old time Fiddlers Convention was proposed by H.P. Van Hoy. It was his belief that if you could get the local musicians together in friendly competition, the local citizenry together to enjoy the good music and fellowship, the people would then be in the proper spirit to accept the community education improvement project, and at the same time make a little money to start the program off.

In the beginning, 1924, the first Old Time Fiddlers Convention was held on the Saturday night before Easter, and through the thirty-seven consecutive years of its history that has been the annual date. There were only six local bands participating in the first convention, playing to an audience of around two hundred people from the local community. As an indication of the success of the convention from a standpoint of acceptability both by the Musicians and the public, it is interesting to note that we had 52 bands from five different states and as far away as New York City to our North, and from as far west as Indiana. As for audience participation, last year we held all available seats filled and all standing room available taken up. The crowd was estimated at over 2500 people inside, we have literally outgrown any possibility of being able to take care of the public not to mention the musicians. In the opinion of the founder and lifelong manager, Mr. H.P. Van Hoy, the policy of dividing the proceeds from the net gate receipts equally with the Musicians and the School has been a big factor in insuring the convention with the finest Country music possible. Being a musician himself, and the experience gained by participating in conventions, were invaluable assets which he freely gave and incorporated into

Mountain Ramblers

Fiddler - Brock Lawson

Bob Shelton, N.Y. Times
the successful organization and coordination of a
convention unmatched and unequaled anywhere in
the country.

- Harper A. Van Hoy

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Mike Seeger

The Fiddler's Contest, or Convention, is an old
tradition in the South and is important to the status
of amateur and professional country music today.
It gives all country musicians a chance to get to­
together, play, and compete, and as a yearly event,
it is often anticipated by considerable preparation.
For the audience, it is a chance to hear more
different kinds of music and entertainment than any­
where else, as well as an opportunity to root for
their special favorites and have a good time.
Some onlookers prefer listening to musicians warm­
ing up in the field or, as at Union Grove, in the
Classrooms, where some of the best music is played,
away from the excitement of the stage.

There are a number of different ways of running these
Conventions and the Union Grove Old Time Fiddlers'
Convention is traditional in most respects. The
leader of each band registers at a desk, giving his
name, the name of the band, the number of pieces in
the band, and their hometown. They are assigned a
number and a classroom in which to warm up and
when their time comes to perform (determined by the
order in which they register), they go to the small
auditorium seating about 300 people, are announced
by the M.C., and play two songs. From there they
go to the gymnasium and play again for a crowd of
about two thousand. Then the musicians either watch
the remainder of the show or return to their warm-up
room to play. After the last band performs, at about
midnight, the judges get together and compare their
ratings of each band the performer. During this
time some people go to the cafeteria, where good fried
chicken and home-cooked pies and cakes are served
all evening, and some wait in the auditorium where
bands return to play, awaiting the judges' decision.
Then all the musicians gather in the auditorium for
a talk by H. P. Van Hoy and for the award of the
prizes. It is at this point when all the contestants
meet together, that this Convention is different from
all others. In his talk Mr. Van Hoy discusses the
running of the Convention and refers many issues to
a vote by the participating musicians. Even more
unusual is the practice of dividing half of the in­
come from the Convention equally among the
contestants so that all receive a share to help with
their travel expenses.

There are probably as many other ways of running
Contests as there are events. According to one
account of an old Convention, the 75 contestants
played Arkansas Traveller together at the beginning
of the evening and were allowed to warm up on stage
before playing the piece in which they wanted to be
judged. According to Sam McGee, in some events
the musician had a sheet or screen between him and
the audience, so that only his music would be judged.
This tended to minimize the popularity of perform­
ances by young children, characters, or local
favorites whose appeal was occasionally other than
musical. Even favorites whose appeal was occasion­
ally other than musical. Even now some contests
require entrants not to talk on stage, some require
them to pull a number from a hat to determine the
order in which they appear, and some allow each
contestant to be in only one category (banjo, fiddle,
etc.) other than band. At the Galax, Virginia, Old Fiddlers' Convention and at some others, categories have been added for vocalists, guitar pickers and miscellaneous. At some, entrants in the fiddle and banjo categories must play without accompaniment.

The problems of judging contest are often apparent and there will probably always be complaints by some contestants that they were judged unfairly, or that there was some "understanding" between judge and a given contestant. For this reason identity of judges is sometimes secret and sometimes a musician is penalized for trying to contact judges. One of the most familiar complaints is that contests are not judged by musicians. But on the whole the atmosphere is one of friendly competition.

In earlier days, many of the outstanding commercially recorded country musicians regularly competed in Conventions and were sometimes beaten by local musicians. Such old-timers as Uncle Dave Macon, Henry Whitter, Fiddling John Carson, and Samantha Bumgarder appeared at similar events around 30 years ago. Of course, this was before the days of the professional Country Musician. Nowadays it would usually be considered improper for him to enter such a contest. Ernest V. Stoneman tells of being hired, along with Charlie Poole to play contests set up by their employer. He paid them a salary and required them to turn over their winnings to him. Stoneman didn't stay with him very long. According to Earl Scruggs, such practices helped cause a decline in the popularity of Fiddlers' Conventions, but they are beginning to come back again, mostly at schools, fairs, and firehouses.

During the past three years, several country musicians who recorded commercially in the 20's and 30's have attended this Convention. In 1959 Doc Walsh of the original Carolina Tar Heels, played a song from one of his early Victor records, Charlie Bowman of the Buckle Busters attended in 1960, Bascom Lamar Lunsford who recorded some 30 years ago for Brunswick and Columbia, appeared this year and is on this disc, Tony Alderman, also of the old Buckle Busters band recorded the previous two conventions on his stereo machine, and Tom Ashley, who recorded on Columbia, Victor, Vocalion, and many other labels in the late twenties was discovered in 1960 by Ralph Rinzler. And no doubt many more early recording artists have been present along with the many fine old time musicians who have never gotten the chance to record.

There were many different types music at the Convention this year, including a one man band, an unaccompanied banjo picker, a solo fiddler, several oldtime string bands, many string bands with electric guitars, a Harmonicat-type group, a lone little girl playing piano, many Blue Grass - style bands, three groups with members from the folk music circles of the North, and a fair number of popular style country music groups, several of which were quite competent.

This record, however, features the oldtime music that was to be heard at the Union Grove Old Time Fiddlers' Convention in 1961.

Additional Background - John Cohen

According to Tony Aldermen who was part of the original Al Hopkins Billhillies Band, fiddler conventions played an important role in their travels in the early 1930's. They would do a few shows en route to New York from Virginia for recording sessions, then they would go down south and "work" the fiddler conventions for several months. Evidently, there were enough of these conventions to keep them going for several months.

Roscoe Holcomb of Daisy, Kentucky, tells of a man who came through Hazard, and advertised a fiddlers contest with a job for the winners. This job consisted of a trip to California, in a covered wagon driven by oxen, (in 1930-40). The job would be to play music to attract people to sell them flour or medicine. Roscoe tells that he and a negro fiddler won the contest in Hazard, but that Roscoe declined the job. The fiddler went, and returned after a few weeks when the whole deal collapsed on the way.

According to an old man near Oak Ridge, North Carolina, fiddler's conventions were a place for all the home musicians to come out and hear what the others had been playing in their homes, during the year.

E. V. Stoneman told of two old guys who came out of the hills, and beat Charlie Poole at one fiddler's convention. According to Stoneman, these men played fiddle and banjo, and their music was so well worked out that every note played on the fiddle was also played on the banjo. He said that he never heard this done so perfectly as that time, and that those men must have played together a great deal.

According to one account of an old convention in the early part of this century, the 75 contestants played Arkansas Traveller together at the beginning of the evening. Although they were judged on one minute of playing, they were allowed to warm up on stage just prior to this. Some would fiddle into shape for as much as three minutes before the moment of judging commenced, and they would get so wound up that they could hardly be stopped once their time had elapsed.

Miscellaneous Notes

The music on this record was edited from about six hours of music recorded at the 1961 Convention. Selection was made on a basis of many elements, including:

documentary interest to people concerned with folk music

variety of music on this record

quality of performance

balance of instruments around microphone

A number of excellent bands and musicians do not appear on this record due to one flaw or another in the recording. None of the musicians came to the Convention knowing that it was to be recorded.

Side 1 includes earlier sounding country bands; Side 2 the more modern

Miscellaneous comments and introductions have been included where possible to illustrate the informal nature of the Convention.

All bands have kindly given permission for their music to appear on this record and all proceeds will go to the Union Grove School.

Cover photo is of Uncle Charlie Higgins, taken as he performed in the gymnasium during the evening competition.

Mike Seeger
Notes on the Contestants

Charlie Higgins of Galax, Virginia is 83 years old and often takes first prize as fiddler at the Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention. He plays regularly with Wade Ward and Dale Poe at the auction sales in the Galax area.

The Old Timers of Hillsville Virginia, like Charlie Higgins play excellent old time style and here the banjo and fiddle double most of the time and the guitar is in the background. Leader: Norman Edmonds

A. L. Hall Band, old sounding band from Trinity, North Carolina. The leader and fiddler, A. L. Hall, played a number of old reels and fiddle tunes, and there were a couple of young boys in their early teens in the band.

Charlie Knight and his Country Music Boys of Lenoir, North Carolina.

Red Parham and the Haywood County Ramblers of Leicester, North Carolina. Red Parham is one of the best mouth-harp players around and has been recorded by Riverside and other labels. On the record, Harper-Van Boy is referring to Mr. Parham's practise of playing the mouth-harp by putting one end of it in his mouth and playing it with his tongue and cheeks while accompanying himself on guitar.

Brushy Mountain Boys of North Wilkesboro, N. C., Wayne Johnson, leader. One of the wilder bands and the winner of this year's band contest at Union Grove. Wash-tub bass is played by Johnson's young son.

Yadkin County Ramblers, Yadkinville, North Carolina. Leonard Hicks, leader.

Grandma Davis from Roaring River, North Carolina, accompanied by her grand-daughter who also sings. Mrs. Davis was a fan of Fiddling John Carson.

Yadkin County Ramblers, Yadkinville, North Carolina. Leonard Hicks, leader.

Grandma Davis from Roaring River, North Carolina, accompanied by her grand-daughter who also sings. Mrs. Davis was a fan of Fiddling John Carson and appeared at the White Top Festival in the Thirties. She now is in her 70's.

Laurel River Band - The leader of this band, Bascom Lamar Lunsford has one of the largest repertoires of folk songs in the country and is well known as a folk-singer throughout the country.


Mountain Ramblers are from Galax, Virginia and are the winners of last years band contest. They are also well known for their music on the Atlantic album of Blue Ridge Mountain Music. Leader: James Lindsay.

Blue Grass Mountain Boys of Kannapolis, N. C. Two 5-string banjos, one playing harmony to the other. Leader: Dewey Farmer.

Lonesome Strangers of New York City, John Herald, Leader. This is one of the many bands formed on the spot at the Convention. John Herald and Bob Yellin met Buddy Pendleton, of Stuart, Va. for the first time here and Buddy later moved to New York for awhile and recorded an LP along with the other Greensbriar boy, Ralph Rinzler. Bob Yellin has been taking banjo prizes at Union Grove since he started there three years ago.

Louise Edmonds - Sang when the afternoon session was over and was not a contestant.

Friendly City Playboys are from Kernersville, N. C. When this band competed several years ago at the Galax Convention the singing was being done by three young girls in a trio style on songs such as Molly and Tenbrooks, and Sitting on Top of the World. Leader: Warren Pinnix.

Delmer Starling and Esker Hutchins - Surry County Ramblers - Mount Airy, N. C.

Dixie Ramblers - Mount Airy, North Carolina. Leader: Brock Lawson