

# Folklore Journal

## North Carolina

57.2 Fall-Winter 2010



# North Carolina Folklore Journal

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# North Carolina Folklore Journal

## Volume 57, Number 2 (Fall-Winter 2010)

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Front cover: Decorated grave at Cochran Cemetery in Alarka, NC. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour. Back cover: Another decorated grave at Cochran Cemetery in Alarka. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.



## Editor's Foreword

By Philip E. "Ted" Coyle

The North Carolina Folklore Society's 2010 annual meeting was held March 27th on the beautiful campus of the University of North Carolina Asheville. Erica Abrams Locklear, Assistant Professor of English at UNCA, and an active and valued member of the Editorial Board of this journal, served as our local host for the meeting. The meeting was coordinated by NCFS Board-member Christine Whittington, who is Director of Library Services at Greensboro College. Many other NCFS members contributed to make the meeting a success, one in a series of very strong annual meetings for our Society in recent years.

The weather for the meeting was clear and cool, with daffodils flowering below the wall-length window and balcony of the Owens Conference Center. From the balcony Mount Pisgah was visible on the horizon to the south through bare oak tree branches. Attendance was strong, with about 75 people coming and going during the day. The room was pleasantly crowded for the afternoon awards ceremony. Several awards were presented in each category, and this helped to draw friends and families of the awardees for what turned out to be a memorable and moving event. The award ceremony included performances and presentations by awardees, as well as a stage-setting slide-show of images of the lives and work of each of the awardees, put together by NCFS Board members Janet Hoshour and

*Frame photo: A large audience takes in the North Carolina Folklore Society's 2010 Awards presentation at the University of North Carolina Asheville. Photo by Michael Taylor.*

Steve Kruger. Some of these images are included in this issue of the *Journal*, along with the citations for the each of the individuals and organizations who were presented with awards at the meeting. The theme for the meeting was "Sustaining Traditions: A Celebration of Western North Carolina Folklife in the 21st Century."

In addition to the awards, the meeting included a morning of panel and poster presentations focused on the western North Carolina region. These included a presentation about the Craft Revival Project by Brown-Hudson Award winner M. Anna Fariello, whose work is featured in this issue, as well as a presentation by Lillian Blomeley on ballad themes in contemporary literature, which was published as "Defying Gender Roles and Challenging Stereotypes: British-Appalachian Ballads and their Literary Adaptations," in our last issue. The morning's presentations culminated with a keynote address by Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, who made the trip down from Washington, D.C. to talk about their work documenting the folk heritage of cemetery decoration in the western North Carolina area (and beyond). They also previewed their magnificently illustrated UNC Press book, *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians*, and presented a Community Traditions Award to North Shore Historical Association representatives Helen Vance and her sister Mildred Johnson, who are also featured in the book. Alan Jabbour's citation for this organization is published here, and Karen Singer Jabbour's photographs of cemeteries decorated as part of this community tradition grace the covers of this issue.



## 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

# Eric Ellis: Wilkes County Banjo Player, Bearer of Bluegrass Traditions, and Teacher

By Lisa Baldwin, Leila Weinstein,  
and Emily Schaad

Eric Ellis was inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame in 2009—the same year that saw the inductions of Ralph and Carter Stanley, Mike Seeger, and Arthur “Guitar Boogie” Smith—and today the North Carolina Folklore Society honors him with its Brown-Hudson Folklore Award, an award again shared by a roster of notable folk artists and community scholars. His career represents well the dynamic of family, local community, and wider national contexts that contribute to the development of old-time and bluegrass musicians.

A musicians’ musician, Eric Ellis is one of the best exemplars of a musical style that began in our state: Scruggs-style banjo playing. His new compact disc, *Every Night Before Breakfast*, produced through

*The authors of Mr. Ellis’ citation are graduates of the M.A. program in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University. Lisa Baldwin nominated him for the Brown-Hudson Folklore Award, and Leila Weinstein and Emily Schaad worked on the N.C. Arts Council grant which produced Ellis’s compact disc Every Night Before Breakfast. Weinstein and Thomas McGowan read this citation at the Society’s annual meeting, 27 March 2010, at the University of North Carolina Asheville.*

*Frame photo: Eric Ellis plays at CD recording session. Star Recording Studio, Millers Creek, NC. 9 February 2008. Photo by Dave Haney.*



Eric Ellis receives his Brown-Hudson Folklore Award from Thomas McGowan. WKBC's Hometown Opry, Main St. Music and Loan, North Wilkesboro, NC. 6 April 2010. Photo by Rebecca Jones.

a grant from the Folklife Program of the North Carolina Arts Council, provides us with an opportunity to hear Eric's playing, but many of us have heard Eric representing Earl Scruggs' playing and backing up Jim Shumate at our state's Heritage Awards in Raleigh. In 2004, Eric became the first Doc Watson Artist in Residence in Appalachian State University's Center for Appalachian Studies, and throughout his career he has supported local venues and players in Wilkes County.

Born into a musical family in North Wilkesboro in 1958, Eric Ellis grew up on western North Carolina's rich bluegrass tradition. Both of his grandfathers, Chelsie Ellis and Ed Pierce, played banjo. His uncle, Bill Johnson of Millers Creek, helped make his first banjo, and his cousin David Johnson (who plays fiddle on Eric's new compact disc) is a well-known multi-instrumentalist studio musician. In his youth he visited local fiddlers' conventions, and his father, Jesse Ellis, who played guitar, took him to concerts by bands such as the Stanley Brothers, the Osborne Brothers, and Flatt and Scruggs. After spending years learning the banjo through trial and error, Eric met professionals such as Ben Eldridge, Kenny Ingram, and James Bailey, who took the time to sit down and show him their techniques face to face.

Eric has gone on to win several banjo contests and has played and recorded with an impressive number of important bluegrass

musicians. He won our state's banjo title at the North Carolina State Fiddlers' Convention in Cool Springs in 1976 and 1978, best banjo at the Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention in 1981, and another state title at the Mountain State Fair in Asheville in 2004. He has also played and recorded with a large number of historically important bluegrass musicians and bands including Jim Shumate, Charlie Monroe, Chubby Wise, and Wes Golding and Surefire. He also stood in for Bela Fleck when the Tony Rice Unit played with Jim Buchanan at the Birchmere (a renowned venue in Alexandria, Virginia) in 1985, and was a member of the Bluegrass Times (with Steve Kilby) and Wells Fargo, as well as a founding member of Ric-O-Chet.

One of the things that makes Ellis' playing so good is that he has tone, taste, and timing, and he also knows how to play very tastefully behind singers so that the vocals on a song sound good. Ellis plays mostly in a slightly embellished Scruggs-style, but is also familiar with the playing styles of many other influential bluegrass banjo players. As a musician, Eric Ellis has been extremely important to the preservation and perpetuation of a regional musical tradition that stretches back to the very beginnings of bluegrass music, and his example, support of local players, and recent compact disc have promoted a high level of regional bluegrass banjo playing in the Wilkes County area and beyond.

Eric Ellis' musical prowess has earned him accolades and recognition from many in the bluegrass world. *Bluegrass Unlimited* has referred to him as "one of the area's premier banjo players" (Brown 33), and David Haney points out that:

the general bluegrass public outside of this area, probably doesn't know who Eric Ellis is. But I can guarantee you, J.D. Crowe knows who Eric Ellis is, Tony Rice knows who Eric Ellis is, Herschel Sizemore knows who he is, Del McCoury knows, the Seldom Scene, all the important bluegrass bands know who he is, because he's so good...People who really know traditional bluegrass banjo will hear Eric play [and] say, "That's the real thing."

As a musician, Eric Ellis has been extremely important to the preservation and perpetuation of a regional musical tradition that stretches back to the very beginnings of bluegrass music. He has been teaching around Wilkes County for decades, counting among

his former students the banjoist Ramona Church. In fall of 2007, as an artist-in-residence at Appalachian State University, he assisted Dave Haney in his Appalachian Studies class, "Bluegrass Traditions." Ellis added an invaluable dimension to this graduate/undergraduate course with his first-hand experience as a bluegrass musician, as well as his encyclopedic knowledge of bluegrass history.

We recognize Eric Ellis today because he is "one of the best exemplars of a kind of banjo playing that was invented in North Carolina" (Haney), because he has continued playing in local Wilkes County contexts beside his notable performances in national bluegrass settings, and because he has shared his art and knowledge with his neighbors, young musicians, and students at Appalachian State University.

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## 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

# M. Anna Fariello: Folklife Researcher and Museum Curator

By Marie T. Cochran

Anna Fariello grew up in a small New Jersey town where her first encounter with folklife was as a participant in Italian-American traditions that were part of everyday life. “For the first decade and a half, my life revolved within a small circle of activity even though I lived a stone’s throw from the bustle of Manhattan. The routine of endless days of family, school, and chores was punctuated by a weekly pilgrimage to Church.” There, she experienced pageantry (girls strewing rose petals in advance of a procession), ritual (the sign of the cross made with ashes), and foodways (nine-fish dinners on Christmas Eve). But it was the material culture that caught her attention. Color, majesty and mystery permeated Saint Vincent’s, a sumptuous neo-Gothic structure. While still a young child, she became fascinated with historic architecture through frequent visits to church and the town’s library.

*Born and raised in Toccoa, GA in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, Marie Cochran received degrees from the University of Georgia (BFA, 1985) and the School of the Art Institute, Chicago, IL (MFA 1992). She is an artist and arts advocate who collaborates with diverse audiences. Currently she is at work on the Appalachian Artist’s Project which celebrates the work of visual artists of African descent in the region.*

*Frame photo: Anna Fariello has photographed roadside shrines, cemetery markers, quirky signage, and rural homesites as evidence of human creativity and expression. Valladolid, Mexico, 2010.*



Anna Fariello (right) examines a rivercane basket with Tonya Carroll at Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc. in Cherokee, NC.

As an undergraduate, Fariello studied Art History and Graphic Arts at Rutgers University. As an artist and teacher, she began to put together exhibits, which led her to earn a Master's degree in Museum Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University. After working at two accredited museums in Richmond, she became the founding director of the Radford University Museum; as a member of the faculty, she developed a museum studies curriculum that included cataloging, interpretation, exhibitions, and collections care. She completed an M.F.A. at James Madison University combining photography and ceramics. At Radford, Fariello organized a wide variety of exhibitions, from Andy Warhol and Christo, to folk and indigenous art. She curated a number of exhibitions that explored cultural identity and diversity—*Visual Storytellers* (1991), *Defining Ourselves* (1995), and *African American Presence* (1998)—as well as a number of traveling exhibitions that traced historic precedents of pottery traditions.

In 1998, Fariello left Radford to join the faculty at Virginia Tech as a member of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies. As part of

Virginia Tech's outreach efforts, she worked closely with the Christiansburg Institute to help revitalize the former African American school. Interviewing alumni and establishing a timeline of school history from extant documents, she contributed to a plan for the building's renovation as the Christiansburg Institute Museum and Archive, a research center on segregation-era education. Serving as CI's consulting curator for five years, she curated and organized *Christiansburg Institute and Educational Change* in Virginia, an exhibition that toured to a number of historically black colleges and to the National Civil Rights Museum, and directed the Virtual Christiansburg Institute ([www.christiansburginstitute.org](http://www.christiansburginstitute.org)).

Fariello was named a Senior Research Fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Archives of American Art where she began to look into the craft revival, a movement that brought national attention to the region's traditions. In 2003 she worked with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife, leading a curatorial team to identify material traditions for the 2003 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. In conjunction with the festival, she produced the exhibition and catalog, *Movers & Makers: Doris Ulmann's Portrait of the Craft Revival* (2003). She was editor of the art section of the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (2006) and contributed a chapter to the *Handbook of Appalachia* (2006).

Before leaving Virginia for Western North Carolina, Fariello completed a number of projects, including a cultural inventory of a 22-county region in rural southwest Virginia. The information gathered was provided to local governments to assist with developing a plan for enhancing heritage tourism. Also as a result of this project, Fariello produced *Blue Ridge Roadways: A Virginia Field Guide to Cultural Sites* (2006):

I tried to approach the built environment as a professional curator, looking at a particular site as a place of layered history. Each layer, peeled off decade-by-decade, revealed information about the past. The challenge lay in weaving these isolated bits of information together to form a coherent story that helps visitors appreciate a sense of place.

That "sense of place" infused Fariello's work. She completed a number of other photo-documentary projects including the *Arcadia Series*, an exhibition that traveled as part of the Virginia Museum

of Fine Arts exhibition service. “*Arcadia* began as a silent protest in the face of a not-so-dignified end to an antebellum homestead that disappeared one day without a trace.” With the realization that the cultural landscape was changing rapidly, Fariello began to capture the fading presence of the rural roadside eclipsed by a facade of fast-food franchises and suburban tract houses. Working with photography, video, and projected imagery, she produced and presented a dozen collaborative performances, including *Women, Word & Image* (1997), *Visions: Earth Requiem* (1998), and the *Last Words of Christ* (2000). In 1997, Opera Roanoke hired her to create a scenic layer of visual imagery for their production of *The Magic Flute*.

In the late 1990s, Fariello had begun to look more closely at indigenous traditions. Working with the state Department of Historic Resources, she negotiated the long-term loan of Woodland-era archaeological artifacts from storage in Richmond to site them on view in the New River Valley (1997). For the Virginia Museum Statewide Exhibitions program and Radford’s permanent collection, she organized *Huichol Tablas* (1998), work by native artisans of the Sierra Madre. In 2000, as a Fulbright Scholar, Fariello taught museology in Panama where she visited and photographed the Eberá and Kuna Indian tribes. Her interest in folk traditions includes contemporary folk art forms as well; she created a photo-essay on Panama City’s colorful painted buses, and cemetery monuments in Mexico and the American South. She continues to work with the Fulbright Commission as a Museology Specialist Peer Reviewer.

In 2005 Fariello came to Western Carolina University’s Hunter Library as Associate Research Professor and began building the Craft Revival Digital Collection. The online database holds over 4,000 digital items, accessible through the interpretive website, *Craft Revival: Shaping Western North Carolina Past & Present* (<http://craftrevival.wcu.edu>). The project aimed to tell the story of the revival while providing public access to the collections of seven regional partners: John C. Campbell Folk School, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Penland School of Crafts, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, and the Southern Highland Craft Guild. University partners included the Mountain Heritage Center and Hunter’s own Special Collections. Her article “The Folklorist’s Digital Toolkit,” published in the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* (2006) described the project’s use of digital tools applied to folklife fieldwork and heritage preservation.

In 2008 Fariello initiated *From the Hands of our Elders*, a new Hunter Library initiative Working closely with Cherokee organiza-

tions, she documented 20th century Cherokee material culture and worked on long-term preservation strategies for local collections. Her book, *Cherokee Basketry: From the Hands of our Elders* (2009), describes the craft's forms, functions, and methods, and records the tradition's celebrated makers. *Cherokee Pottery*, second in the *From the Hands of our Elders* series, is due out in 2011.

Throughout her professional career, Fariello's research interest has focused on 19th and 20th century material culture with an emphasis on the impulse to create and implications for America's culture and work ethic. She is co-author of the textbook, *Objects and Meaning*, author of 50 articles and conference presentations, and curator of over 40 exhibitions.



## 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

# Alice Gerrard: Traditional Musician and Music Scholar

By Sara Jane Bell

*It's not just a question of keeping the music alive, but of integrating it into our own lives, and of its having meaning alongside of the way we live now.*  
*Alice Gerrard in Homemade American Music*

Alice Gerrard has devoted a lifetime to documenting, learning, performing, and celebrating the music of traditional American musicians. Even before she settled in North Carolina in 1989 she had already made myriad journeys into our state, traveling back roads and mountain paths to seek out the fiddlers, banjo players, singers, and dancers whose music had inspired her for decades. She returned again and again, logging countless hours in living rooms and on front porches picking tunes, listening to stories, and patiently absorbing and recording individual techniques and styles. She is more than just an inquisitive visitor with a guitar and a tape-recorder; for

*Sara Bell graduated from N.C. State University in 1992 with a B.A. in History and a minor in Russian Studies. She entered the UNC Folklore program in 2009 after many years performing and recording with numerous musicians as a singer, songwriter, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. She received a FLAS Fellowship in 2010, and was able to research music in Southern Italy as a recipient of the D.K. Wilgus Fellowship.*

*Frame photo: Tom Davis and horse. Galax, Virginia circa 1986. Photo by Alice Gerrard.*

many of these men and women, some of whom ventured outside their home counties only rarely, she became a loyal friend.

She has been an inspiration and a role model to legions of old-time music fans ever since the first recordings she made with Hazel Dickens were released on Folkways Records in the mid 1960s. Young women were particularly encouraged by their example, and by the way they integrated empowered and conscientious female songwriting into their repertoire. Before Hazel and Alice few women were performing their brand of raw, true bluegrass duets in the vein of the Louvin Brothers and Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs, and Emmylou Harris, the Judds, Molly O'Brien and many others who followed credit their style and adopted their unique arrangements. As a part of the thriving bluegrass and old-time music scene that flourished around Washington, D.C. and Baltimore in the 1950s and 1960s, she helped to cultivate a convivial musical community that recognized the valuable musical traditions being interpreted by legendary players like Bill Monroe and Ralph and Carter Stanley, who regularly toured the clubs and festivals around the nation's capital and befriended this new generation of dedicated music fans.

Alice Gerrard was born in Seattle and raised in northern California. Her parents were classically trained musicians whose house was filled with friends and music making, and Alice created the same atmosphere wherever she made her home. She moved east to attend Antioch College in Ohio, where she met her first husband, Jeremy Foster, and where she was first introduced to Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* and similar recordings on the 78s that she eagerly collected. She describes that experience as being "a huge thing for me and a lot of people," and that hearing those sounds for the first time was transformative. "We reveled in the hard edged sound, the close-to-the-bone feelings, and the way old-time and bluegrass music put us in touch with a missing piece of our lives." She had a co-op job in Washington, D.C. as a student and found the city, being in such proximity to the mountains of Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina, where the musicians making these records lived, an ideal place in which to cultivate her enthusiasm for the music she loved.

She continued to pursue her musical interests despite profoundly challenging circumstances. Those first powerful recordings with Hazel Dickens were made while she was mourning her husband, who was killed in an automobile accident, and raising their four young children. She credits her tight-knit community of friends and



Elizabeth Cotten and Hazel Dickens. Photo by Alice Gerard.

musicians with making it possible for her to tour and manage her home life and music career. She composed her own moving songs, like “Quiero Decir Gracias,” about a childhood friendship with a Mexican cowboy named Mateo, and “Mama’s Going to Stay,” which captures a bittersweet moment of home life. She participated in the Southern Folk Festival tours as part of Anne Romaine and Bernice Johnson Reagan’s *Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project*, which brought white and black musicians together in the midst of the Civil Rights struggles to share songs and perform with one another in concerts throughout the South, highlighting the ways in which artists of African, European, and Native American descent have long borrowed from each other’s traditions and collaborated to create unique American styles that resist racial barriers.



Luther Davis. Galax, Virginia circa 1984. Photo by Alice Gerrard.

She and longtime friend Mike Seeger eventually married, and the two continued to perform together and seek out the players they admired, documenting their songs and individual techniques, logging interviews and promoting their artistry to larger, appreciative audiences. Through Seeger she met and played with Elizabeth Cotten, the cherished Carrboro instrumentalist, songwriter, and singer, who may have never returned to a life of music if happenstance had not led her to work as a domestic in the musical Seeger home. In the film *Homemade American Music* by Yasha and Carrie Aginsky (1980, available at [www.folkstreams.net/film,153](http://www.folkstreams.net/film,153)), which beautifully documents Alice's and Mike Seeger's work with traditional musicians,

Cotten describes how the Seeger siblings and their friends would do her housework so that she could be free to play her songs while they recorded them.

The film also focuses on Gerrard's trips to Toast, NC, in Surry County, to visit Tommy Jarrell, with whom she forged a deep friendship. Jarrell was an innovative and elegant fiddle player and was known for his remarkable ability to simultaneously sing and play intricate melodies on his fiddle. He also perfected a clawhammer banjo style that was unique to the Round Peak community, near Mount Airy, where he grew up. With her friends Les Blank and Cece Conway she further documented Jarrell's life and music in *Sprout Wings and Fly*, a film which was released in 1983. She moved to southwestern Virginia, just over the North Carolina border near Galax, in 1981, and from there she had further opportunity to befriend and chronicle scores of other North Carolina musicians, among them Bertie Mae Dickens of Ennice, Lauchlin Shaw of Harnett County and his partner A.C. Overton of Apex, and Joe and Odell Thompson of Alamance and northern Orange Counties.

While in Galax Gerrard formed the Blue Ridge Music Association with a group of other local musicians, and true to their motto—"Musicians for the Preservation of Traditional Music and Dance of the Blue Ridge"—they were active in organizing free monthly concerts in order to give area musicians an arena in which to perform outside of the competitive atmosphere of fiddler's conventions and picking contests. This was of special advantage to older musicians and those who were not regulars on the performance circuit. Alice created a newsletter to promote these shows and convey other pertinent information to old time music fans, and this, she says, was what inspired her to found *The Old-Time Herald* in 1987. It soon became clear that the magazine would benefit from being centered in an area with access to more resources, and she moved herself and her operation to Durham in 1989. She formed the Old Time Music Group, Inc. to oversee its publication, and the magazine continues to thrive as one of the most important chronicles of current and archival traditional music.

Alice Gerrard is now well into her 70s and shows no signs of slowing her pace. Though she stepped down as editor of *The Old-Time Herald* in 2003 she remains active on its board. In the spring of 2009 she served as Lehman Brady Visiting Joint Chair Professor of Documentary Studies at Duke and UNC, where she taught a course in documenting traditional music to a new generation of folklorists

and organized a concert which surveyed her storied career. She is working on a book of photography that will cull from among the thousands of photographs she took in the 1950s on through the 1990s, which capture old-time musicians at home and at gatherings across the United States, and will showcase her additional talents as a visual artist. She continues to play and has plans to make more records, both of her own music and as a curator of other's tunes which she has recorded over the years. She still tours, performing solo and with various groups, and participates in workshops at bluegrass festivals around the country.

For her tireless advocacy and devoted promotion of traditional American music, Alice Gerrard is a national treasure. She has done as much as any native to shine a spotlight on the riches of North Carolina's exceptional musical heritage, and we are tremendously privileged to claim her.

#### NOTE

In addition to those noted, quotations come from personal communication and the essay Alice Gerrard wrote as part of the liner notes for the 1996 Smithsonian/Folkways release *Pioneering Women of Bluegrass*.



## 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

### Jerry Wolfe: Cherokee Elder

By Roseanna S. Belt

Jerry Wolfe is a respected elder of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. He is a storyteller who recounts traditional Cherokee legends and stories about his experiences growing up in Cherokee. He shares his experience of attending the Cherokee boarding school and his knowledge of Cherokee stickball. He is a fluent Cherokee speaker.

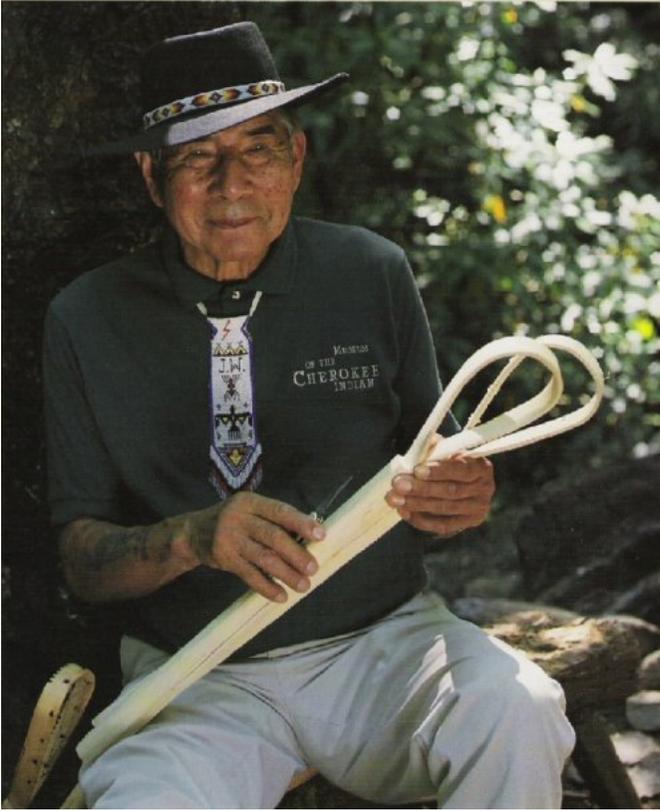
He will explain that the Cherokee stories are not legends, they really happened:

There really was a giant frog that sat above the family home on Sherrill Cove, flicking its tongue out and eating bears. There really are giant inch-worms masquerading as oak trees. At any time they can bend over and eat an unsuspecting person walking by.

He has served as an ambassador between Cherokee people and outsiders for years, recently speaking at the dedications of the Blue Ridge Parkway's Waterrock Knob Visitor's Center and Regional Destination Center and is featured as the "storyteller" in the film that is

*A native of Cherokee, N.C., and an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), Roseanna S. Belt has been director of Western Carolina University's Cherokee Center since 2001.*

*Frame photo: Jerry Wolfe at a peach tree near his former homeplace on what is now the Blue Ridge Parkway. Photo by Ted Coyle.*



Jerry Wolfe representing the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Cherokee, North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Roseanna Belt.

the centerpiece of that Destination Center. Presently, he works in the Outreach Program of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian where he greets visitors with his friendly, welcoming presence. He also worked tirelessly during the completion of the *Cherokee Heritage Trails Project*. Additionally, he has presented programs on Cherokee culture at High Point, Thomasville, Winston-Salem, Fort Bragg, and other North Carolina communities.

Jerry Wolfe was born in September 1924 in the Sherrill Cove community, which was eventually displaced by the development of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Throughout his lifetime he has seen not only the coming of the Parkway to his mountain home but many other changes as well. He grew up listening to the stories of his parents, Owen and Lucyann Wolfe. He attended the Cherokee Boarding School through the tenth grade, then enlisted in the Navy dur-

ing World War II. He served for six years and participated in the D-Day landing on Normandy Beach. When he returned to Cherokee he married his wife Juanita and began learning building trades, including stone masonry. He taught building trades to young people for twenty years with the federal Oconoluftee Job Corps. After his retirement, he began traveling with Methodist mission teams to do building projects in Jamaica, Barbados, Haiti, and South Africa.

His wife Juanita was a highly skilled weaver of Cherokee baskets and he accompanied her as she exhibited her fine art. Jerry learned to carve Cherokee ball sticks as a young man when he played the traditional game and is often in demand still as a “caller” or announcer during ball games during the Cherokee Indian Fair.

At age 85 he is also still in demand for story-telling. He has a boundless knowledge of Cherokee culture. He shares this knowledge often at a variety of locations. Recently he was invited to Purdue University to speak with faculty and students about the importance of preserving Cherokee language. He has received the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award.

Jerry Wolfe is a pillar to the entire Cherokee community. He provides a strong connection to the past as he lives comfortably in the modern world. He is cherished by his family. One of his daughters eloquently summarized her thoughts about him:

Jerry knows his home. He has walked many of the trails that circle the nearby mountains. His head swims with stories of Uk-te-nuh, Kanoti, and the great leech. He has spent many hours walking the trails to gather delicacies such as wishee and ramps, medicines and dyes, teas and ginseng. From the river he catches fish while he watches the waters for other wildlife. He notices small things such as the mama Canadian goose sitting on a nest, a rare loon diving the depths for dinner, and a blue heron standing stock still, blending into the riverside. Jerry will seek out the new: a newborn elk, baby geese and ducks, a young deer trying shaky just-born legs. These are the sights that move him—the simple beauty and continuity of nature and life.



## 2010 Community Traditions Award

# Helen Cable Vance and the North Shore Historical Association

By Alan Jabbour

Together with my wife, Karen Singer Jabbour, and two colleagues, Philip E. Coyle of Western Carolina University and Paul Webb of TRC Environmental Corporation, I undertook a study in 2004 of the cultural tradition of cemetery decoration, sometimes known as Decoration Day. The study focused on the North Carolina counties close to Great Smoky Mountains National Park (particularly Swain, Jackson, and Graham Counties) and on the North Shore region of the Park itself, comprising the North Carolina region of the park north of Fontana Lake. The study report became part of the North Shore Road Environmental Impact Statement, which explored the environmental and cultural impacts of building a proposed road through the North Shore region of the park.

*Alan Jabbour is a folklorist who has documented North Carolina folk cultural traditions since the 1960s, when he was a graduate student at Duke University. He and his wife, Karen Singer Jabbour, have been studying the traditions of cemetery decoration, as well as the cemeteries in which the decorations take place, since 2004. Their book *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) has not ended their fascination with these important cultural traditions.*

*Frame photo: Helen Cable Vance addresses the congregants, with Carrie Laney at her side, during the Cable Cemetery Decoration in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.*

The study led to the report being published separately in 2005 and as part of the larger Environmental Impact Statement in 2006. But my wife and I continued to pursue the topic, and in the spring of 2010 The University of North Carolina Press published our fully illustrated book *Decoration Day in the Mountains*. The report and book represent the first full-length documentation and analysis of a cultural tradition that is to this day a cultural mainstay of Appalachian North Carolina and that extends across the Upland South from Virginia and North Carolina west and southwest to the Ozarks.

The folk custom of Decoration Day became the cultural underpinning for a major protest in the 1970s. A large number of families had been removed from the area that came to be known as the North Shore in 1943 when Fontana Dam was completed. Some were directly impacted by the rising waters of Fontana Lake. Others were indirectly impacted, since the lake covered most of a road that had run along the north side of the Little Tennessee River before the dam was built. But a formal agreement arrived at by the U.S. Department of the Interior (on behalf of the National Park Service), the Tennessee Valley Authority, the State of North Carolina, and Swain County provided that after World War II had concluded, a new road would be built through the region, which was now becoming part of the national park. The new road would provide, for the people removed from their homes, access again to the old homesites.

What is more, it would provide access to 27 cemeteries that, according to their cultural traditions, should be properly cleaned and decorated annually and visited by relatives and friends of the deceased in a religious service in the cemetery known as a decoration (or Decoration Day). In the years after the war, portions of the promised road were indeed built. But by the 1960s the construction ceased at a point just beyond a tunnel under a mountain ridge. This struck many people as odd, and someone named it the Road to Nowhere. The name has stuck ever since.

On Sunday, October 17, 1976, a reunion of former North Shore residents was organized at the Deep Creek Campground, just inside the park boundary not far from Bryson City. *The Smoky Mountain Times* reported that “450 former Fontana Dam area residents” gathered for this first reunion, and “plans were being made for a follow-up reunion next year, according to organizers Helen C. Vance and Ruth V. Hicks.” At the reunion, conversation reportedly turned to the fact that no decorations had been held in most North Shore cemeteries since the expulsion in 1943 and 1944. By the spring of

1978, the impulse turned to a reality. Helen Vance and her sister Mildred Johnson, with the help of some friends, organized a decoration at Cable Cemetery, and they arranged for four small boats to transport people across Fontana Lake.

Henry Posey joined Helen Vance and her sisters as a key member of the core group. The first North Shore decoration, at Cable Cemetery, was a great success; so was the second, which went to Proctor Cemetery on Hazel Creek. Hundreds of people participated, and there was intense media coverage. Thus was a cultural movement born. The leaders soon found themselves negotiating with Boyd Evison, the park superintendent, on a variety of major issues. A schedule was devised for decorations at various North Shore cemeteries, and the park agreed to provide boats to transport the visitors for a full summer of Sunday decorations. Pushed some more, the park began supplying vehicles to transport participants—especially the elderly and infirm—up the long trails that lay ahead once participants had debarked on the North Shore. Park staff became active in maintaining the cemeteries, which had suddenly come into the public limelight.

The original reunion at Deep Creek took place in the year of the nation's Bicentennial celebrations, when much attention was being given to the historical and cultural roots of American communities. Helen Vance has said that the Bicentennial, despite its emphasis on local history and culture, was not a direct influence on the North Shore cemetery decoration movement. But Eddie Marlowe, who attended the early decorations on the North Shore, offered an observation revealing how much the idea of celebrating one's roots was in the air: "I think that it's important for people to know your heritage. I remember about that same time, maybe a little bit later, Alex Haley come up with the book *Roots*, and how he traced his ancestors back to Africa and how that opened up so much for him, and it did the same for us here in the Smoky Mountains."

In 1978 the public stir about the new decorations on the North Shore led the North Carolina Humanities Committee (now the North Carolina Humanities Council) to fund public presentations on North Shore cemeteries and cemetery decorations, with the stipulation that there be a non-profit organization to receive the funds. So the movement created a formal organization called the North Shore Cemetery Association, choosing for its name a new term representing the entire region north of Fontana Lake.



Helen Cable Vance and her sister, Mildred Cable Johnson, after the award ceremony at the North Carolina Folklore Society meeting, March 27, 2010. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.

The movement matured in the 1980s. Its name oscillated between “North Shore Cemetery Association” and “North Shore Historical Association,” reflecting the broadening context in which it saw its labors. In 1986 it launched a newsletter called *Fontana*, edited by Ruth Chandler (joined later by Willa Mae Trull), which explored facets of North Shore family and community history, including personal memoirs of North Shore life. According to Helen Vance, the number of North Shore cemeteries being decorated grew till about 1980, when it reached a level that has been maintained with little change up to the present day. Another sign of the maturing of the movement was the creation of the North Shore Road Association, which under Linda Hogue’s leadership has focused on advocacy for building the long-sought-after road.

The annual schedule for North Shore decorations is widely distributed throughout the region, and decorations are attended both by immediate family members and by friends, well-wishers, and others from the region and beyond. A core group of active members at-

tends multiple decorations, including not only organizers like Helen Vance and her sisters Mildred Johnson and Eleanor Rhinehart but also several long-term movement organizers and a regular group of musicians. Helen Vance's husband Harry Vance, a Baptist minister, sometimes attends and delivers the message.

Helen Cable Vance since 1977 has been a shaping and guiding force of the North Shore Revolution. That revolution has in turn reshaped the history of western North Carolina in a number of ways. The most visible accomplishment of the revolution has been the elaborate system the National Park Service arranged for shuttling pilgrims across Fontana Lake to the various debarking points on the North Shore, enabling the pilgrims to decorate the graves of their ancestors and relatives. But the impact of the revolution may be traceable in broader cultural ways. The tradition of cemetery decoration is diffused across a wide swath of the Upland South, but the tradition seems to be practiced more widely, more conservatively, and with greater devotion in the areas of western North Carolina just east of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. There is evidence that the involvement of the tradition in a regionally (and indeed nationally) visible protest movement has helped reinforce the region's sense of the contemporary relevance and importance of this folk tradition to life in the region.

The North Shore Revolution has been a collective effort of many people. Like many other leaders, Helen Vance has always envisioned and presented the effort as a collective effort, and she has taken care to involve many people in the work at every stage. Thus when one attends a North Shore decoration, it seems that the stages of the event unfold effortlessly by collective cooperation and assent. But someone had to invite a speaker to offer the religious message for a Decoration Day event. Someone had to be sure that there were plenty of extra flowers so that some other participant could be enlisted to distribute flowers on every grave. Someone had to make sure that musicians could attend with instruments and that hymn books were brought along. Someone had to make advance plans to take care of the service at the second cemetery when there were two cemeteries on the same decoration trip. Someone had to work with the National Park Service regarding any problems or special requests that might have arisen. And someone had to help newcomers, from the Jabours at the 2004 Proctor decoration to members of the press writing or filming a feature on the North Shore decorations. Generally

speaking, for the last thirty years the person orchestrating the collective effort has been Helen Vance.

Helen Cable Vance was born in Proctor on the North Shore in 1926. She thus was a teenager when the North Shore removal was set into motion in 1942-43, and she has many clear recollections about those days, including memories of meetings between her father and Tennessee Valley Authority representatives to discuss the removal. Her father worked for Ritter Lumber Company, and her mother was a schoolteacher. The Cable family is widespread in the area and has connections to Cades Cove on the Tennessee side of the Smokies, from which many pioneer families crossed the mountain into North Carolina after the Cherokee removal in the early 19th century. The North Shore cemetery with which the family had the closest associations is Cable Cemetery. Two younger sisters have been helpers in the work of the North Shore Cemetery Association, Mildred Cable Johnson and Eleanor Cable Rhinehart. Mildred has made a particularly important contribution by serving as the movement's resident photographer. Her important photographs document thirty years of the work of the North Shore Cemetery Association.

The North Shore movement has taken the form of a short revolution followed by a long consolidation. The revolution took about three years (roughly 1977-79), after which the remaining major innovation was the launching of the North Shore Cemetery Association's newsletter, *Fontana*, in 1986. The consolidation period has lasted for the remainder of the thirty-year history. When the revolution was complete, some opponents hinted that as soon as the revolutionaries—namely, the generation who were born on the North Shore—passed away, the movement would subside. But the North Shore decorations are packed with people of all ages, including children and young adults in great numbers, and there are many signs that the movement has succeeded in transferring energy to the next generations, who were not born on the North Shore but nevertheless have acquired a deep feeling of connection to it.

Leading a revolution calls for different skills from consolidating it into a stable, ongoing enterprise. Leading the revolution demands radical thinking that imagines the unimaginable, unshakable self-confidence, and the knack for making everyone see and embrace what you envision. Consolidating the revolution into an ongoing enterprise with staying power, on the other hand, takes a steady hand and a sense of what will prove a balanced and productive course, along with diplomatic skills to manage a thousand daily issues with

movement allies, adversaries, and powerful institutions like the National Park Service. A key reason for the successes of the movement is that Helen Vance possesses all these leadership skills.

Helen Vance, together with all the others who have helped lead the North Shore movement, are expressions of a larger tradition of cemetery heroes woven deeply into the cultural fabric of western North Carolina. She and her sister Mildred Johnson led the first decoration on the North Shore, and more than thirty years later they are still organizing and managing the effort. The magnitude of the accomplishment tempts us to regard it as unique in the history of western North Carolina—and in certain respects it is unique. But it takes nothing away from the accomplishment to say that Helen Vance belongs in the pantheon of cemetery and Decoration Day heroes who have arisen as visionary caretakers of the rural community cemeteries—governed and managed by no formal organizations or legal structures but simply by voluntary community consent and spiritual investment—that are so culturally characteristic of western North Carolina.



## 2010 Community Traditions Award

# Etowah Christian Harmony Singing

By Irene Moser

Now in its 103rd year of celebrating the “sacred harp” of the human voice, the Etowah community in Henderson County remains a pivotal inspiration to the singers of western North Carolina. Participating in a tradition of reading music in shaped notes, extending at least to the English Renaissance, these singers continue to sound the American arrangements gathered and noted by the Spartanburg, South Carolina singing master William Walker in the mid-1800s. Through multiple venues, varying numbers of participants, and regardless of weather, these active tradition bearers have remained enthusiastic participants across generations in a unique and continuous musical tradition.

Even as a child in the 1940s and 50s, I loved this event. My joy was not entirely due to the multiple versions of chocolate cake, all of which had to be sampled, at the covered dish “dinner on the grounds,” where the participants in the all day singing rested and enjoyed another form of community celebration. My main pleasure was from the singing itself, so unlike the subdued and sedate hymn

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*Frame photo: Etowah Christian Harmony Singing. Photo courtesy of Scott Swanton.*



Irene Moser (center right) stands with Etowah Christian Harmony Singers and their North Carolina Folklore Society 2010 Community Traditions Award at the University of North Carolina Asheville. Photo by Michael Taylor.

singing I usually attended. Here even a small group of ordinary people, some without formal musical training, powerfully filled the space with striking harmonies, spirited fugues, “high-lonesome” minor tones, and volumes that might have carried across the ridges, like the vocal “hollers” of pioneer forbearers. For all the members of my family, Etowah has always been a place where one can really sing.

We were introduced to this singing by my father, Artus Moser, a frequent participant who recorded some sessions. Like several of the older singers in the group at that time, my father read music only if the notes had shapes. Assigning shapes, e.g. squares, triangles, half circles, etc., to the notes of the musical scale was intended to facilitate sight-reading by making tonal relationships easily identifiable. Earliest shaped-note systems used three or four tones: fa, sol, la, and sometimes mi. William Walker’s system uses seven shapes and appeared in his first edition of *The Christian Harmony* in 1866. This is the system ordinarily used at Etowah.

This system of reading music was easily portable, since it requires only a pitch and a few books or manuscripts to start the singing. The late 1700s saw the development of singing schools in the Northeast,



Etowah Christian Harmony Singers enjoy a communal meal. Photo courtesy of Scott Swanton.

and then the songbooks moved west with the settlers and south with the itinerant singing school masters.

The small group who met at Floyd Nicholson's house in the community of Etowah in the first decade of the twentieth century included children of Patton Moffitt, a singing school teacher. Orr, Lance, and Allen were family names of other singers at the beginning. As the number of singers grew with visits by neighbors, distant relatives, friends, noted singers from other states like South Carolina and Georgia, and later folklorists, the group moved to larger quarters—first a small brick church; then in 1952 the Etowah Elemen-

tary School offered its hospitality. On the Saturdays before the first Sundays in May and September the celebrants continue to gather. In recent years the number has dwindled to an average of about 25 regular participants and the venues have shifted again. Last fall they met at the Cummings Memorial Methodist Church in Horseshoe, and this May they are scheduled to return to their first venue—now the home of the Etowah United Methodist Church. Wherever they meet, the commitment of fine singers, whether descended in genes or in spirit from the group's founders, remains strong.

Family connections, as well as individual tradition bearers, have often been crucial to the continuation of folk traditions and so it is in this instance. In her article in the Spring, 1974 *Appalachian Journal*, Mabel Moser (my mother) quoted Ross Gilstrap, resident of Greenville, S.C., who spoke at one singing of his family's music:

I'd like to say something here...I'm a newcomer here, myself, but this old book, *Christian Harmony*, is my family song book. About the turn of the century my folks lived over beyond Rosman. My grandpa, Will Aiken, and my grandma had seventeen children. No radio or TV in those days. My mother said that every day after the evening meal—not just on Sunday—... when the meal was finished and the dishes were cleared away, Grandfather would push his chair back from the table and say, 'Now some of you children git the books.' The books included several copies of the old *Christian Harmony*. They would sing until it would get so dark they couldn't see anymore. Several of the songs...we have sung this morning. And that's the reason I love 'em. (267-268)

Gilstraps were still participating in the first years of the twenty-first century. As it was a hundred years ago, Allens are leaders and officers of the group. The minutes, published online since 2003, attest to the consistency of participation.

The influence of the Etowah singings is not limited to the 2,766 residents (as noted in the 2000 census) of this small community. Those singings are an important part of a network of shaped-note singings across and beyond Western North Carolina. Individual supporters have played key roles in that widespread network: Quay Smathers, recipient of the 1991 N.C. Arts Council's N.C. Heritage

Award, was noted as a “tireless advocate” of shaped-note singing, especially at Morning Star Methodist Church in Canton and at Etowah. Secretary Jennedie Blythe, along with Jimmie Cantrell and now Scott Swanton have been devoted organizers. A number of Etowah singers participate in other singings. Scott Swanton, Dan Huger, Mary Baummeister, and Ernest Gilstrap sing in Brevard and at the Swannanoa Gathering, to name a few examples. Etowah remains an inspiration to song leaders, such as my sister Joan and her former student, Laura Boosinger, in local occasional sings and in splinter groups, and for folklorists, teachers, and in the public sector. Remarkably appropriate for a mobile society, this centuries old art form remains imminently portable—the traveler should remember to take along a hymnal, for shaped note singings are reported now in 42 states.

The online Christian Harmony NC schedule for 2010 identified 31 possible events in NC and neighboring states. That schedule includes the May Etowah community sing, led by Scott Swanton at the Etowah United Methodist Church. Thanks to the Etowah singers, we are still sounding the ancient modal tunes and lively fugues, voicing the four-part harmonies where each part is almost a tune in itself, and rendering again the poetry of title and stanza in “The Lone Pilgrim,” “Unclouded Day,” “Idumea,” “Samanthra,” “Pisgah,” “French Broad,” “Green Fields,” “Northfield,” “Sweet Rivers,” “Thorny Desert,” “Angel Band,” “Watchman” (early gospel), “Jerusalem,” “Babylon is Fallen,” “Webster,” “David’s Lamentation,” and always ending with the fare-thee-well of “Parting Hand.”



## 2010 Community Traditions Award

# The Folk Heritage Committee

By Laura Boosinger

Western North Carolina has a rich history in the traditional arts. While Marguerite Butler and Olive Dame Campbell were beginning the work of the John C. Campbell Folk School and Cecil Sharp was searching the Southern Mountains for English ballads, Madison County's own Bascom Lamar Lunsford was combing his native land searching for fiddle tunes and folk songs, ballads and banjo pieces, and square dance calls and figures. His "Memory Collection," over three hundred musical examples of the culture of his Southern Appalachian people, was preserved by The Library of Congress. In 1928 the City of Asheville invited Lunsford to bring a group of musicians and dancers to the town square to provide a Mountain Music and Folk Song Festival. The *Asheville Citizen* reported the next morning that 5,000 people had attended the program on Pack Square. They crowded around the dance platform, clustered on the monument to Zebulon Vance and were hanging from office windows on the square shouting appreciation for the music. The *Citizen* went on to say that the scene suggested "a permanent thing, something that might be continued from year to year as a festival of Western North Carolina."

*Laura Boosinger is an award-winning performer and recording artist whose primary focus is the interpretation of traditional music from the Southern Appalachian region.*

*Frame photo: Bascom Lamar Lunsford watches dancers at the Mountain Music and Folk Song Festival. Photo courtesy of the Folk Heritage Committee.*



Green Grass Cloggers at Shindig on the Green. Photo by Tony Martin.

This year marks the 83rd year of the longest continuing folk festival in America but more so a celebration of western North Carolina.

In 1967 volunteers from the community recreated that first outdoor festival by inviting musicians and dancers back downtown to the City-County Plaza, to the “green.” This created a gathering place for young and old musicians, audience members and dancers, to mingle under a dogwood tree and a summer sky. Each Saturday night during the summer season, this Shindig on the Green brings a crowd of over 3,000 home folks, visitors, and participants from at least four states and several foreign countries to Asheville's downtown. Asheville is a cultural destination for many visitors and Shindig on the Green is part of that destination. But most importantly Shindig provides an opportunity for young people to learn from masters and maintain this community of traditions in western North Carolina.

Today, both of these events remain relevant through the efforts of The Folk Heritage Committee. This group of dedicated volunteers belongs to no city or county office. They receive no funding from government organizations. They solicit donations from busi-

nesses in the community to support the production of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and The Shindig on the Green. The Festival is a ticketed event, but the eight Saturday nights of Shindig are free and open to the public. The committee sets up the park for this mini-festival and the musicians and dancers provide the entertainment for free. Shindig on the Green has been a breeding ground for young musicians and dancers, a showcase for local talent and a place for families to gather on a Saturday night. There are family values all around, in the best sense of that phrase, with families sitting on blankets enjoying a picnic supper, families dancing together, and families picking and singing as they always have here in the Blue Ridge. I am proud to write this citation for The Folk Heritage Committee, but I will let members of the community of these events speak to their importance:

Shindig on the Green just might be the most important season-long series in western North Carolina with regards to delivering Appalachian styles to audiences that are both newcomers to and long-time supporters of these traditions. WNCW listeners frequently call us to ask for details about the upcoming Shindigs and the artists that perform there. Sure, there are plenty of folk concerts and festivals throughout the state; but perpetuating one that is both long-standing *and* doesn't require a charge to patrons (which no doubt reduces the chances of newcomers to discover these traditions) is crucial. I see Shindig as also a great marketing boon for western North Carolina, thanks to the numerous tourists who discover it while visiting Asheville. The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival is a real jewel in the crown for all of North Carolina. The *nation's* longest running folk festival? That alone makes it worth supporting!

Martin Anderson  
Music Director and Morning Host  
WNCW-FM, Spindale, NC

I remember the very first Shindig. It used to face the courthouse with the big stone behind the band. (The stone was really big then because I was only 10 or 11



Stoney Creek Boys playing at Shindig on the Green. Photo by Tony Martin.

years old.) My father (Bob Lindsey) and Jerry Israel rushed about setting up the stage and hooking up extension cords. I remember looking up and seeing those in jail looking down at the festivities and thinking what a highlight it must have been for them. Year after year it continued with regulars coming with their chairs and blankets. My brothers and I sold cider and oatmeal cookies. The show was great but the highlight was afterwards with the small groups gathering under every tree to pick. You could hear the music wafting from far away.

Toone Lapham, Daughter of Bob Lindsey  
Dancer, Cider, and Cookie Seller  
Asheville, NC

I can think of no better example of celebrating North Carolina's folklife than Shindig on the Green! When I last lived in Asheville, Shindig was new and fun, a small little event that featured local talent. When I



Crowd takes in the cloggers at Shindig on the Green. Photo by Tony Martin.

returned to the area ten years ago, I was amazed at Shindig's growth and the energy it generated in the region. We have had the opportunity to take visitors from around the country and the world. The reaction is always the same: They feel as if they have learned and experienced the richness of the region's culture. To see children dancing, hear the stories that Glen Bannerman and the other emcees weave into their introductions, to watch cloggers, hear bluegrass, folk, country music, blues, all in one evening is amazing. The organizers bring an event to the people that crosses all demographic lines.

Jeannie C. Douglas  
Audience Member  
Greeneville, TN

I began attending the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in the 1980s and it had a profound effect on me.

It exposed me to the music of folks who lived in my Western North Carolina community and motivated me to learn more about the culture here and my heritage. Shindig has also been a regular event for me over the years and has done much to bring the music of our area and beyond to the locals and to visitors from around the world, giving them the opportunity to experience live music and performances. Both are signature events for North Carolina.

Tim Barnwell  
Photographer and Author  
Asheville, NC

I love taking out of town guests to Shindig on the Green. I have never experienced anything quite like it elsewhere. Such a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere is created. And all that music makes you want to dance! I have also told stories there and appreciate the continuing support of the traditional arts. The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival deserves praise for its longevity. I remember the excitement, especially in the early days, seeing what seemed like hundreds of people back stage, from young children to elders, all waiting for their chance to go on stage and shine.

Connie Regan-Blake  
National Storytelling Organization  
Asheville, NC

Having recently moved back to western North Carolina after living away for 45 years, I find the Shindig on the Green to be a treasure trove for reconnecting with musicians and dancers I previously knew and getting exposure to new talent. I was a member of the Canton YMCA Clogging Square Dance Team for six years in the 1950s and danced at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival every year, and my dad and his band, Luke Smathers String Band, played at the Festival for many years. Along about sundown on the

first weekend in August has and always will be the time to enjoy the best music and dance in this region.

Linda Smathers  
Audience Member/Former Dancer  
Asheville, NC

The Shindig on the Green is one of the main reasons that traditional music is still a strong force in western North Carolina. Shindig has provided a public meeting place for performing and jamming for decades. As a young musician in Asheville, I was able to meet and play with some of my musical heroes. And today, forty years later, young musicians can still find friendly jam sessions to hone their skills and even have a chance to perform on stage with musical veterans before an enthusiastic audience. For me, Shindig on the Green remains one of the foundations of a strong mountain music tradition in western North Carolina.

David Holt  
Asheville, NC

I married into the western North Carolina mountain music scene via the Smathers family. Although we lived away from the Asheville area for many years, we returned for regular visits and always included enjoying local music as part of those visits. We attended Shindig and Mountain Dance and Folk Festival to see favorite groups, as well as experiencing new up-and-coming musical and dance groups. It has been gratifying to see young participants join family and other groups, maturing and carrying on the traditions. These are terrific resources, nurtured by our local Folk Heritage Committee, and very worthy of recognition by the North Carolina Folklore Society.

Samuel Speciale  
Asheville, NC



## Cherokee Rivercane Baskets

By M. Anna Fariello

When the first European explorers ventured into Cherokee territory, they were amazed—and somewhat dismayed—to encounter impenetrable stands of tall willowy plants that lined the banks of the region’s rivers and streams. In the early 1700s, naturalist Mark Catesby recorded his impressions, noting that the region’s riverbanks were “covered with spacious tracts of cane.” A half century later, William Bartram wrote a poetic and detailed description of rivercane and its habitat:

Perhaps, the most extensive canebrake that is to be seen on the face of the whole earth...[with] no bound but the skies...The canes are ten to twelve feet in height, and as thick as an ordinary walking-staff; they grow so close together there is no penetrating them. (Gettys 58)

A 1784 map of the Appalachian portion of Kentucky is marked to indicate particularly notable stands of cane. “Fine Cane” the map

*Anna Fariello received a 2010 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award from the North Carolina Folklore Society (see citation, this issue). This article is excerpted from Cherokee Basketry: From the Hands of our Elders, published by The History Press in 2009. The book evolved from a collaboration between Western Carolina University’s Hunter Library, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.*

*Frame photo: Singleweave rivercane basket by Lottie Stamper (detail). Photo courtesy of Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.*

reads in a flowing cursive hand. Other sites are marked “Fine Cane Land” and “Abundance of Cane.” Recorded so prominently on a map, cane was of obvious interest to newcomers to the region. Once plentiful, canebreaks covered large areas of the southeastern United States, but less than two percent of the original cover remains today (Cozzo). Even in this diminished state, cane still grows along many rivers, including the Little Tennessee, Oconaluftee, and Tuckasegee. Besides its use as an artisan resource today, cane is valued for its ability to enhance stream bank stabilization and protect wetlands during a flood. Its densely matted roots hold soils in place, inhibiting erosion. Rivercane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) is sometimes confused with its larger cousin, bamboo, an introduced species. Cane stalks are not as thick as bamboo, nor as tall. As Bartram wrote, cane grows “thick as an ordinary walking-staff.”

No matter what its material, the making of a basket is time-consuming. The process begins with harvesting materials. When cane “sticks” reach eight feet and are as big around as your thumb, they are ready for harvest. Cane reaching this size is about two years old. Cherokee basket weaver Eva Wolfe recalled a typical harvest:

A whole party of family and friends would start out early in the morning, walk perhaps five miles or further to where cane could be found, and spend the entire day whacking down the stalks with a heavy bush knife. After they got their load they would walk home, and later process the cane for weaving. (Million 3C)

Earlier in the century, craft workers carried harvested cane on their backs. After the availability of automobiles, they cut cane by the truckload, stockpiling enough to last several months and loading it onto a pickup. “If you cut the cane too young, it will be too brittle. If it’s too old, it’s hard on the hands,” recalled master basket weaver Rowena Bradley (Arnow 22).

### Preparing the cane

Preparing the cane for a basket involves several steps—cutting, splitting, peeling/stripping, trimming, and dyeing. All of this must be completed before weaving can begin. The process of making a basket may be a matter of days or weeks, depending on the pace of the maker and the assistance that she may have. While family

members help gather and prepare materials, the actual weaving of a basket is traditionally in the hands of Cherokee women.

After harvesting and removing the foliage, the cane stalk is split lengthwise into four pieces and scraped to leave the lustrous outer layer. A 1940s-era government study described the process:

They first selected the cane about as large as one's finger or perhaps a bit larger and split them up into several pieces, after which they stripped the outside bark from each. This was known as "stripping the cane" and it was usually done in the canebrake itself, the stripped cane being afterward made into bundles and carried home. (Swanton 602)

Traditional Cherokee basketry uses the shiny outer surface of the cane, the coarse, inner fiber having been scraped away. Over



Rivercane, with its small stalk (at left in this photograph) is sometimes confused with its larger cousin, bamboo (at right). Photo by Adam Griffith and Revitalization of Traditional Cherokee Artisan Resources.

three hundred years ago, Englishman John Lawson noted cane prepared in this way. Making notes during an expedition through the Carolinas, he described the use of “the outward shining part of the cane,” confirming the longevity of this practice. The tradition of using only the outer surface of the cane was consistent through history. The custom was noted again in 1907 with the following detail: “The splits were shaved from the rind of the cane. This gave a smooth glossy surface on one side which was turned outward in weaving” (Swanton 605). The basket weaver then trimmed the cane to produce long, thin, even strips used for weaving the basket. The edges of these are razor sharp, and trimming the cane is not an easy task. Eva Wolfe used a bush knife for cutting and prepping the cane and, to protect her hands, padded the knife handle with tape. Many basket weavers work with a piece of leather or thick cloth on their lap.

### Dyeing

Before weaving a basket, its maker must first dye the weaving materials, unless of course she is making a basket without any added color. Harvesting and preparing native roots and bark is a separate process that requires an extensive knowledge of plants and their habitats. The dyeing of a basket’s materials is an integral part of the authentic process, so much so that master weaver Lottie Stamper (1970) once remarked, “A basket isn’t worth it if you don’t make your own dye.” Stamper liked to use white or black walnut as dyes. Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) produces the brown color commonly found on Cherokee rivercane baskets. The deep brown from walnut provides ample contrast to the natural pale yellow color of the cane, enabling a basket weaver to create distinctive patterns.

Three other plants are used by the Cherokee. Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) produces a pale orange color. Yellowroot makes a brighter yellow, and butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) leaves a deep black. Basket weaver Emma Taylor explained the preparation of dyestuffs:

Yellowroot...can be found by the riverbank. After you have all the yellowroot sticks that you need, you scrape the outer bark off of the root. Then they are placed into a clean pot with...water...and add some salt to it.

This is to keep the splints from fading after they are dyed. The bloodroot that we use grows in the woods, too. (French and Hornbuckle 177)

In the hands of Cherokee basket weavers, these four plants provide endless variation. They are used in different combinations and on different materials to form baskets of differing shapes and sizes. On a finished basket, this natural color palette is a characteristic that makes their baskets stand out as authentically Cherokee.



Rowena Bradley with rivercane prepared for basket weaving. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.; Indian Arts and Crafts Board photograph.

Most basket weavers dye their weaving materials out-of-doors. They use a large, metal washbasin in which to soak the prepared dye plants along with the weaving splints. The lengths of basket material are tied into loose bundles before submersion in the dye bath. Emma Taylor explained the process of using walnut bark to darken white oak splints:

You take the walnut bark from the tree and place it in a big tub with the splints that you want to dye. You fill the tub with water. Then build a fire so the splints can boil. You let the splints boil from eight to nine hours. The fire must be kept going all the time. After they are dyed I take them out of the tub and rinse them in cold water and dry them off. They are now ready to use. (French and Hornbuckle 177)

The same process is used to dye rivercane, honeysuckle, or maple. Lottie Stamper typically used a seven-gallon tub set by a stream bank to give her access to water from the creek. The amount of time it takes for the basket material to absorb the color depends on the concentration of the dye:

Fill [the tub] half of roots and the rest water and, when the water boils away, you've got to add more water. That's what you have to watch. If it boils away, you burn the cane. Just like cooking food... If it's strong enough, and you don't put too much material in there, you ought to color it in about six hours. [The dye bath produces a] deep brown and dark black according to how long its been boiling. (Stamper 1970)

### Weaving

The Cherokee primarily use three types of weaving in their baskets, depending on the material and purpose of the basket. These are twilling (rivercane), checkerwork (white oak), and wickerwork (honeysuckle). It takes about one hundred strips of prepared rivercane to weave a single basket. In photographs of the process, weavers with baskets in their laps are obscured by lengths of rivercane shooting up like sparklers. Watching the process, one wonders how a weaver kept track of so many lengths of cane, each



Emma Taylor removes walnut bark to use as basket dye.  
Photo courtesy of Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.

having its proper place in the pattern. In watching Rowena Bradley make a basket, journalist John Parris described her work in this way:

Working from memory, she forms the strips into patterns and then into baskets of all shapes and sizes. Early in the process of a doubleweave pattern, literally scores of withes seem to fly out in all directions.

The Cherokee make two types of rivercane baskets: the singleweave and the doubleweave. The method of weaving either type begins in the same way. In a singleweave basket, the maker begins at the base and weaves upward to the rim. Like fabric weaving, the weave structure of a basket has a warp and a weft. In basketry, the



Emma Taylor immerses white oak in a dye bath. Photo courtesy of Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.

warp is stationary and sometimes rigid. The weft splints—sometimes called “weavers”—are active and move over and under the warp. The traditional method of rivercane weaving is twilling, a particular type of warp/weft weaving in which the weft passes over two or more warp elements. Twilling produces a weave on the diagonal, a characteristic of Cherokee rivercane basketry.

In beginning a basket, the base starts out as a square. As the weaving continues upward, the basket shape becomes round, terminating at a circular rim. A white oak hoop is added to the rim to serve as reinforcement, significantly strengthening the upper edge basket. As far back as 1913, Frank Speck observed that the rim of a rivercane Cherokee basket was lashed to the body of the basket with a strip of hickory. Speck (59) thought this to be a distinctive characteristic, calling the use of hickory “an earmark of Cherokee basketry.”

A doubleweave is actually two baskets, one woven inside the other. To make this distinctive item, a basket is begun at its base and woven upward to its rim. There, the cane is turned downward,

and the basket weaver works on the outside of the basket, from its rim to base. Observing a finished basket, John Adair concluded that the “two [were] joined atop by some strong cement.” Woven in one continuous weave, the inside and outside surfaces are constructed independently of each other. The beauty and complexity of the process led Adair to call them the “handsomest baskets I ever saw” (Swanton 604). The inside and outside patterns of a doubleweave basket can be different, a trait that sometimes confounds the viewer. The water resistance of a tightly woven doubleweave basket contributed to the opinion that the Cherokee were an “esteemed” people, because making such baskets demonstrated a high degree of skill (Swanton 604).



Eva Wolfe. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.; Indian Arts and Crafts Board photograph.



Doubleweave rivercane basket by Eva Wolfe. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.

### Revitalization

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century concerns about the impact of tourism led to the development of a number of programs aimed to counteract its negative effects and maximize its potential. In 1935, Congress established the Indian Arts and Craft Board (IACB), what some have called the “Indian New Deal.” With a mandate to expand “the market for the products of Indian art and craftsmanship,” initially the IACB focused on work with western tribes. Its full effect on Eastern Band Cherokees would be felt in the next decade. Home economics specialist Gertrude Flanagan had moved from Oklahoma to teach school in Cherokee. While she was busy with her home ec classes, Flanagan received a letter asking her to add courses in arts and crafts. At first dismayed, Flanagan recalled that “arts and crafts didn’t mean anything to me.” This may have been an advantage to the development of the nascent craft program in Cherokee, as Flanagan was forced to depend on native artisans to make the program work. “All I know I learned from the ground up, from the Indians,” she recalled in a later interview. In 1937, Flanagan



Singleweave rivercane basket by Lottie Stamper. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.

and high school principal Sam Gilliam approached basket weaver Lottie Stamper about teaching basketry at the Cherokee boarding school. Stamper had learned basket weaving from her mother in the traditional Cherokee way, and her marriage into a basket weaving family further augmented her skills. She taught basketry from 1937 until 1966.

In 1940, Flanagan again approached Stamper. This time she requested that Stamper learn to make a doubleweave rivercane basket, a tradition known only to a few Cherokee basket weavers. In 1920, when Frank Speck penned his observations about Cherokee basketry, he concluded that the doubleweave was “almost abandoned among the eastern Cherokee.” Even earlier, James Mooney (179) claimed that the “last old woman who preserved the art of making double-walled baskets” died in 1897. While his statement may not be true, at the time, Stamper knew of just two women who were masters of the doubleweave technique: Rebecca Toineeta and Nancy Bradley. Neither of them were willing teachers. Nancy Bradley’s daughter, Rowena, eventually learned the doubleweave from her mother; still, her comments support Stamper’s (1970) recollection of the time:

At the time my mother was teaching me how to weave the doubleweave baskets, there were only two people I knew of who could do this type of basketry. Mother and a very old lady by the name of Toineeta who lived way up in the Soco community.

Stamper approached Mrs. Toineeta:

I was made to learn the famous doubleweave myself from old lady Mrs. Toineeta who lived on Swimmer



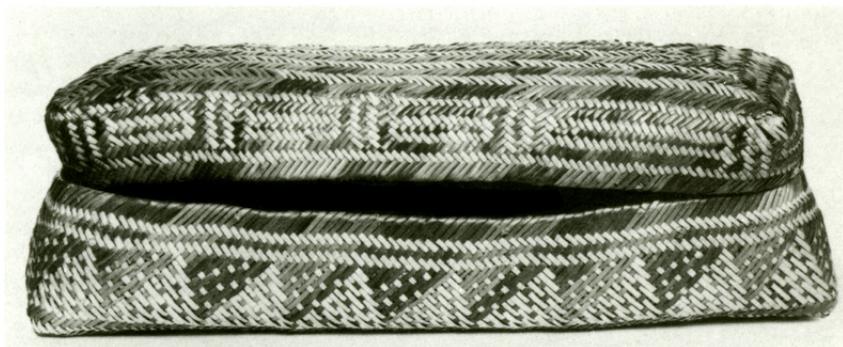
Lottie Stamper making a doubleweave rivercane basket. Southern Highland Craft Guild. Photograph by Clemens Kalischer.

Branch. She didn't much want to [teach me,] but I bothered her until she showed and told me a little bit about it. She said... "Bring it back to check, and don't come back any more." (Bookout 106)

That bit of instruction was enough to get Stamper started.

A real breakthrough came when someone gave Stamper a photograph of a pre-Removal basket that was in the collection of the British Museum (Freeman-Witthoft 17–27). This basket was actually a pair, one basket fitted over the other as a lid. These were collected by Francis Nicholson, colonial governor of South Carolina, and taken to London in 1725 on return from his appointment. With a well-documented provenance ("From Coll. Nicholson, Governor of SC, whence he brought them"), a listing of this basket is described on a period inventory in this way:

A large Carolina basket, made by the Indians of splitt canes, some parts of them being dyed red... and black...will keep anything in them from being wetted by the rain...Strips of cane of two thicknesses are used in the weaving, thereby allowing different patterns to be formed on the inside and outside. The



This large doubleweave basket, in the collection of the British Museum, was brought from the Carolinas to London in 1725 by Francis Nicholson. It was the model for a twentieth-century revitalization of the technique. Frank H. McClung Museum, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.



This basket by Lottie Stamper was modeled after the Nicholson basket in the British Museum. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.; Indian Arts and Crafts Board photograph.

two distinct parts of the basket are interwoven for a distance of some two inches from the edge, causing it to be more rigid and firm. (Bushnell 678–79)

The “two thicknesses” of weaving indicates that the basket was a doubleweave. With the photograph in hand, Stamper laid out cane splints and began “counting the numbers.” She painstakingly worked out the patterns and charted them on graph paper, a technique she would use throughout her teaching career. After more than three hundred years, the high opinion of doubleweave basketry was still evident in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Stephen Richmond, writing of Rowena Bradley’s work, hailed it as a “new dimension of technical and aesthetic achievement” (Indian Arts and Crafts Board). Cherokee students in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to learn the complex technique and remained amazed at its design. One of Lottie Stamper’s students (Stamper 1965) wrote that the “unusual and intricate” weave required a person with “magic in their fingertips.”

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## A Review of Recent Plays by Gary Carden

By Dot Jackson

In the dusty cellars of Carolina’s old courthouses lie the roots of some of our most revered stories—legal papers in faded ink penned in a decorous hand, records of crimes and penalties that live on, today, as folklore.

It was the telling and re-telling, honed and embellished by early biases and then by storytelling art, that kept such accounts alive. Wolves howled, at a rocked-up cave; a head rolled from a hollow stump—right at the sheriff’s feet! An illiterate murderess wrote reams of repentant, awful poetry. Still, the bones of the stories stayed with us.

Possibly, most who revel in these tales have no idea that these things really happened, a century or so ago, though somewhat less romantically than “as seen on TV.” Yes, Tom Dula *did* hang down his head, from the gallows at Statesville in 1868, for the murder of Laura Foster—though some of us still think he took the rap for his girlfriend.

Yes indeed, the sad little life of Frankie Silver was cut short, in Morganton, in 1832, for chopping her man Charlie up like kindling. But did she act alone? Nah, if she did it at all. Nonetheless, her dad-

*Dot Jackson, a survivor of 45 years in newspapers, grew up in a family where the old people sat on the porch, with quilts over their knees, and talked up their part in the Civil War. Now 78, she lives in Pickens County, South Carolina, where she is director of community services for the Birchwood Center for Arts and Folklife.*

*Frame image: Learning to Ride a Leopard, detail of a painting by Gary Carden. Gary Carden’s paintings, and links to his other works, are available at his website: [www.tannerywhistle.net](http://www.tannerywhistle.net)*

dy told her as the noose settled around her neck, "Die with it in ye, Frankie." And she did—but probably not while reciting bad verse.

There were some in which guilt was never much in doubt. The accused either claimed the crime outright—as in the case of Lewis Redmond, renowned bootlegger and killer of a federal marshal, or never denied it, as happened with Nance Dude, who chose to say nothing in her own defense, when charged in the early 1900s abandonment death of her toddler grandchild Roberta.

Sylva playwright Gary Neil Carden has staged these last two stories, with extraordinary results. Both are monologues, with superb actors. And both are now available as videos.

Carden has the distinct advantage of knowing the territory from birth, and by heart. His play, *The Prince of Dark Corners*, based on the life and crimes of the outlaw hero Lewis Redmond, predictably draws crowds in what, in the 1870s, amounted to Redmond's moonshine kingdom, in the interwoven ridges and towns of the western Carolinas border country.

The playwright's instinct for good theater also led him to select the charismatic Burnsville actor Milton Higgins as his outlaw, and to tune the lines, as they were written, to Higgins's impeccable native speech—also a gift of birth and neighborhood. Often asked by fans how he became so "believable" in the role, Higgins answers simply, "I *am* Lewis Redmond." Theater-goers never doubt it, often rising at the play's end in a standing ovation.

*The Prince of Dark Corners* follows Redmond's exploits from a childhood marked by the loss of two brothers in the Confederate Army, and the death of his father in jail as a suspected maker of blockade whiskey. The old man's crime was not, incidentally, making likker, but refusal to pay a federal tax of more than half of the going price per gallon, leaving the distiller to pay for his corn and his demijohns, his still, firewood and labor – making the enterprise almost certainly free of profit for anyone but the government.

At his father's death, being the only son left, Lewis became provider and caretaker for an invalid mother and two sisters, one of them handicapped. Reconstruction-era harassment by officials was a way of life for poor mountain people. When his one-time friend Al Ducworth, who'd become a U.S. Marshal, halted Lewis on a remote road, and ordered him to get down off the wagon, Lewis saw trouble coming. He also saw the future of his mother and sisters, with no provider and no protection. So he shot his tormentor, and became an outlaw, for real.

Neighbors rallied, throughout the countryside, and protected Lewis, as he fired up a hugely successful likker business, and shared his non-tax-paid profits with those in need. An army of adventurers rode with him, humiliating The Law. Soon after his best friend Amos Ladd was murdered, in a raid aimed at Redmond, Lewis married Amos's sister Adaline in a huge public wedding to which many dignitaries were invited, and many came.

Ultimately, assassins mowed Lewis down while he hoed in his own corn field, and left him for dead. Adaline, by that time mother of three small children, cleaned him up, dug out bullets, sewed up his chest where a lung was exposed, and doctored his injuries with new raw whiskey. He was about to get well when the feds got word that he lived, and they came again, and dragged him off to jail. But after three years in prison, he called in old friendships, and U.S. Senator Wade Hampton got President Chester A. Arthur, to write Lewis a pardon.

Lewis Redmond finished out his life running the government distillery, for pay, in Oconee County, SC. At the time of his serene and natural death, in 1906, he was the father of nine, all of whom grew up nicely, the offspring of a duly appointed government official.

The video of *The Prince of Dark Corners*, by Sucker Punch Pictures of Raleigh, N.C. stars Milton Higgins as Lewis Redmond, and has been shown many times on public television.

While Carden has done a little embroidery of his own, in these tellings, his blood connection to the culture may afford the purest access to what really may have happened—in spirit if not in concrete fact.

Far more quiet and more introspective is his vision of Nance Dude, a sweet old Haywood County granny who served a term in prison for the murder of her grandbaby a century ago, on a desolate craggy mountain, in a time of desperation.

A recording of *Nance Dude* was made at a performance in June of 2009, by Time Capsule Video of Highlands, with Elizabeth Westall, an astonishing actress, as Nance. The long theater partnership of Mrs. Westall, who is blind, with Gary Carden, who is deaf, and now both up in years, reaches the sublime, in this production.

Such comparisons may be trite and tacky, but Elizabeth Westall, in her old apron, is the Jessica Tandy of *Foxfire*, talking real, unstudied mountain dialect. In the yard of the dirt-floor shack where “Nance”

chops kindling for "Floridie people," the tranquil ex-con tells the story she never would share with the court.

It is a story some would find too mean to believe, yet such things are recorded in books like Cormac McCarthy's early, mountain-shadowed novels, such as *Outer Dark*, and Mildred Haun's *The Hawk's Done Gone*. It is one that many of us old folks have seen up-close and horrifying.

Nance grew up in the harsh, torn time of the Civil War, when few families came through with men still alive and ambulatory. Her daddy died, and seeing no future but hunger and sorrow she married, while still a child, to a neighbor she considered a dunce. Still does. And then, feeling spent in her mid-thirties, she finds a little excitement with a ne'er-do-well named Dude Hannah. Kicked out by the Dunces, she lives with Dude for 10 years, has a little girl, and wakes one day to find Dude gone.

One misery leads to another. Hungry and homeless, she and her daughter wander, doing chores for anybody who will let them in. A low-down sharecropper lets them stay with him, to do the dirty work, with his eye on the budding daughter, who soon has to marry him. And when the little girl is born, and gets big enough to get in his way, he decides she's not his, and exiles her, with Nance, and no provisions.

Nobody helps for long. Not even preachers. So Nance and baby are starving, freezing, stranded on a mountain trail when Nance wraps the child in a coat, puts her in a cleft in the hillside, bids her to be still till Granny comes back to get her, rocks up the entrance and stumbles off to beg her son-in-law for mercy. When searchers find the baby, there is not much left. Put on trial, Nance tells nothing. She is already stooped and old when she is sentenced to hard labor, on a rockpile, where a dam is being built.

Freed in her 80s to make her living, she's made a place, where we find her, at peace, recounting her never-told story, with an occasional twinkle for the good times – sparse though they might be. It is the place where Nance Dude is found dead, beside her ax and kindling block, in 1952. She was 104.

Copies of *The Prince of Dark Corners* and *Nance Dude* are available from Gary Carden at 109-D Mountain Oaks Lane, Sylva, NC 28779. The videos are \$20 each, plus \$3 mailing.



*Give My Poor Heart Ease:  
Voices of the Mississippi Blues,  
By William Ferris*

By Jared W. Gallamore

When folklorist William Ferris set out in the 1960s and 70s to record African American blues music in his home state of Mississippi, he ended up with far more than he had originally intended. Interviews, sound recordings, photographs, and film collected during field sessions yielded an endless volume of material regarding many aspects of African American culture in Mississippi. Through his research, Ferris takes the reader on a “blues tour” of Mississippi, exploring the roots of blues music, and important blues towns and cities. He also takes a look back at the blues through the eyes of two renowned blues musicians, and explores the sacred and secular worlds of the blues.

“Blues Roots,” the first of four sections that divide the book, is a trek back to the early origins of the blues, exploring the relationships between blues and gospel music, outlining the instruments which helped to solidify and define the sound of the blues, and illustrating the manner in which blues music is reflected through field songs and prison work chants. Small town Mississippi communities such as

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*Frame photo: Detail of the front cover of William Ferris’ Give My Poor Heart Ease. Courtesy of University of North Carolina Press.*

Rose Hill, Lorman, and Gravel Springs served as living depictions of a thriving African American culture throughout the 1960s and 70s.

In “Blues Roots,” we are introduced to influential neighborhood leaders like Mary Gordon—a granddaughter of slaves, and resident of the Rose Hill community—who recounts the religious visions she experienced as a young woman, how they shaped her spiritual life, and eventually led her to join the Rose Hill Church. The Rose Hill Church, already in existence for some hundred and fifty years at the time of Ferris’ fieldwork, served the needs of a dedicated and lively religious community. According to Gordon, participating churchgoers would “get the spirit,” and proceed to jump, holler, and even weep at times in praise. Gordon talks of how spiritual hymns found their way into her everyday life, and notes that she has found herself singing them in church, while tending her garden, or in completing everyday housework. Gordon, exposing a humorous side to her persona, also delivers a “parody of preachers,” asking kindly that her pastor not hear of it.

Further on down the road, we run into Louis Dotson of Lorman, Mississippi, who recounts how, in his younger days he fashioned a one-strand guitar from a broom wire. By attaching the wire to the side of his house, and picking the wire with a metal object while sliding a castor oil bottle up and down in order to change the pitch, Dotson was able to learn an array of musical tunes. Listening to the radio, Dotson picked up on popular tunes like “Sitting on Top of the World,” “Forty-Four Blues,” and “When the Saints Go Marching In.” At times, he just made up his own. On occasion, Dotson mentions, folks from the neighborhood would gather around and dance to the music. In an age when times were hard and money scarce, Louis Dotson, along with other musicians from within the Lorman community, provided a much-needed form of neighborhood entertainment.

Arriving at the community of Gravel Springs, Mississippi, we meet Otha Turner, a truly unique individual, whose musical style is representative of a distinct and rich aspect of African American musical culture—the fife and drum blues tradition. A self-taught cane-fife maker and drum player, Turner notes that, before he got married he was a real blues singer, recalling that people would wake up and light their lamps in the middle of the night to listen to him sing the blues as he was out riding his horse through the night. Turner recounts for Ferris about the picnics he likes to throw—full-scale affairs complete with music, dancing, barbecue, and moonshine liquor—which over the years, he became quite famous for. Ferris notes that during

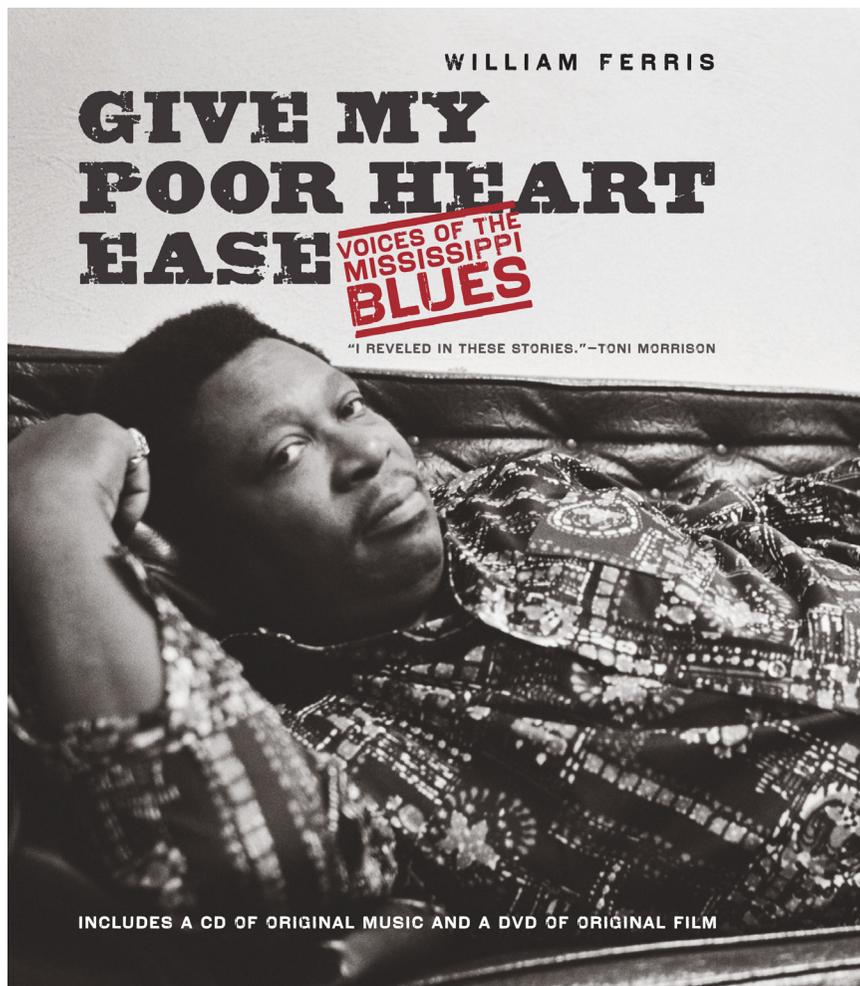
slavery, drums were prohibited throughout much of the South, a testament to the incredible resilience of the African American fife and drum blues tradition.

Prison work chants are yet another medium by which the blues may be personified. In the late 1960s to early 70s, Ferris made several visits to Parchman Penitentiary—an 18,000-acre correctional farm situated right in the middle of the Mississippi Delta—with the intent to capture audio and visual examples of these work chants. Recorded chants demonstrate the intentional rhythmic timing of prison workers chopping wood to the cadence of work songs. Verses told an assortment of tales, ranging from prison escapes, to beautiful women, abuse, hard living, and rebellion. Ferris notes that, for these inmates, music served as a means of escape from the bleak environment of the world in which they found themselves living.

“Blues Towns and Cities,” the second stop on the reader’s journey, addresses the ways in which the blues developed outside of rural Mississippi communities. In addition to providing better economic opportunities, delta towns such as Leland and Clarksdale, Mississippi, and cities like Memphis, Tennessee, served as “breeding grounds” where blues musicians cultivated, and refined their musical prowess. In these urban locales, blues music could be heard on local radio stations, as well as in neighborhood shops, thus becoming an increasing part of everyday life.

In the town of Leland, Mississippi, we are introduced to James “Son Ford” Thomas—a guitar playing blues singer, sculptor, storyteller, and gravedigger. Thomas recalls learning guitar chords from an uncle at around 8 or 9 years of age, and how at age 16, he picked cotton to earn the money to buy his first guitar—an \$8.50 Gene Austry model from the Sears and Roebuck catalog. As a child, Thomas would slip off to dances and house parties to listen to old-time blues songs, and recalls how the music could be heard on a Saturday evening, and on through the night, from three miles away. As an adult, Thomas and the surrounding family of blues musicians in Leland, played their own Saturday night house parties—complete with sandwiches and corn whiskey—held in the back room of a friend’s home.

Clarksdale, Mississippi, often cited as the “birthplace of the blues” (there are several contenders), has been home at one time or another to residents such as Muddy Waters, Sam Cooke, Howling Wolf, and Ike Turner, and was a stop on the performing circuit for artists like Bessie Smith, BB. King, and Robert Johnson—who, as lo-



Front cover of William Ferris' *Give My Poor Heart Ease*. Image courtesy of University of North Carolina Press.

cal legend tells, allegedly sold his soul to the devil for musical skill at the intersection of highways 61 and 49, also known as the “Crossroads.” Clarksdale native and storyteller Jasper Love—whose grandparents were originally brought to the Clarksdale area as slaves—recalls his personal encounters with racism as a child, and talks of how “the blues” often carried some negative connotations with it at times. Love tells of the common belief that the blues was considered to be the devil’s music, and should someone die while singing the blues, they were certain of hellfire. If on the other hand, one happened

to be singing a religious hymn, they were surely bound for peace in heaven.

The city of Memphis, Tennessee is home to an important pillar of the blues tradition—Beale Street. As early as the 1920s, Memphis became the first destination for African Americans looking to break free of the Mississippi Delta, and Beale Street was an esteemed center for blues music and the nightlife scene. Robert Shaw, a salesman at Beale Street's Lansky Brothers clothing store, reminisces of selling blues legend B.B. King his first pair of tailor made pants, and recalls that, early on, Lansky's swiftly became provider of the high-style fashions for local entertainers, including a young Elvis Presley. Shaw declares that Beale Street is where it all began, and that the "blues" is a universal thing that people of all races and cultures are subject to.

The third section of Ferris' anthology, titled "Looking Back," is indeed a look back at blues history through the eyes of two highly esteemed bluesmen: Willie Dixon and B.B. King. Dixon, who grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi, was already composing blues songs in his teens, but it was not until his 1927 move to the city of Chicago that he would embark upon a full-fledged career as a blues artist and writer. For Dixon, the philosophy of the blues was something that, in a way, was inherited; they were inspired by the traditional work songs that served to help people simply make it through the strenuous living of an already hard day. Glancing back, B.B. King suggests, much in the same vein as Dixon, that the blues sprang from slavery—chanting and singing coming from a people feeling forsaken by God, who often relayed hidden messages to one another by way of song. Both Dixon and King allude to ideas that the blues do not always have to be about sadness or oppression. For Dixon, the blues are a source of inspiration, and often bring a smile to his face. King cites the blues as a combination of life, love, and, with any luck, laughter.

The final destination on Ferris' blues pilgrimage, titled "Sacred and Secular Worlds," explores the unique, yet entangled, connections, between the church and juke joint venues. Ferris documents the similarities held between a Rose Hill Church service and a Clarksdale house party. Each venue sustains a captive and participating audience, and speaks directly to the needs of their respective followers. In addition, each gathering meets at a prescribed time—Sunday morning, for the Rose Hill Church service, and Saturday evening with respect to the Clarksdale house party. Leaders are essential to both assemblies—the church requires a pastor, as the house party requires a performer. Furthermore, as Ferris points out, each forum

consists of a diverse assortment of song, the telling of tales, and an actively engaged audience. While the worlds of blues and sacred music may—in terms of thematic substance—appear to be on opposing sides, serving as some would claim, completely different masters, both speak to the common human needs of self-expression, community interaction, and the necessity for a form of release.

*Give My Poor Heart Ease* is an intimate chronicle of African American culture in 1960s and 70s-era Mississippi. Throughout the text, Ferris eloquently captures the hearts of Mississippi artists, forever preserving their voices by way of manuscript, photography, video, and sound recordings. Ferris takes the reader right into the heart of Mississippi, providing a look back into the origins of the blues, and reveals how the blues shaped the lives of those living around it. The importance and contributions of American blues music cannot be overstated. As Ferris notes, “Blues are the key to the cultural and intellectual history of the black, the southern, and the American experience” (Ferris 258).

#### WORK CITED

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## Carlton Haney (1928-2011)

By Jack Bernhardt

Carlton Haney, a member of the International Bluegrass Music Association Hall of Fame, died Wednesday, March 16, 2011, at Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was 82. The cause was complications from a stroke he suffered on February 24.

Born September 19, 1928, in Rockingham County, Haney enjoyed a colorful career as a country and bluegrass music manager, promoter, record producer, and songwriter. Among bluegrass fans, he is best known for organizing the first multiple day bluegrass festival on Cantrell's horse farm near Fincastle, Virginia, over Labor Day weekend in 1965.

A brilliant eccentric, Haney conceived of the three-day festival as an opportunity to honor Bill Monroe who, from 1938 to 1945, had developed bluegrass music with his band, the Blue Grass Boys, which Monroe named for his native Kentucky.

By 1965, bluegrass was still a relatively obscure branch of country music, which enjoyed a much wider commercial appeal through radio, records, and Saturday night broadcasts of the "Grand Ole Opry." Inspired by a conversation with Smithsonian Institution folklorist Ralph Rinzler, it was Haney's genius to invite Monroe and for-

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*Frame Photo: Carlton Haney, courtesy of the International Bluegrass Music Association.*

# A CARLTON HANEY FESTIVAL

## **CREATES HISTORY. Be a part of it!**

APRIL 12 - 13 - 14  
2nd NEW GRASS FESTIVAL  
Blue Grass Park, Camp Springs, N. C.

MAY 24 - 25 - 26  
1st TRADITIONAL GRASS FESTIVAL  
Blue Grass Park, Camp Springs, N. C.

JUNE 21 - 22 - 23  
4th COUNTRY GENTLEMEN'S  
BLUE GRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL  
Stepping Stone Ranch, Escoheag, R. I.

JULY 4 - 5 - 6  
8th BERRYVILLE FESTIVAL  
Watermelon Park, Berryville, Va.

AUGUST 16 - 17 - 18  
8th GETTYSBURG FESTIVAL  
Crazy Horse Campgrounds, Gettysburg, Pa.

AUGUST 23 - 24 - 25  
BREAKFAST SPECIAL FESTIVAL  
Stepping Stone Ranch, Escoheag, R. I.

New Festival at Berryville, Va.  
AUGUST 30 - 31 - SEPTEMBER 1  
TRADITIONAL GRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL  
Watermelon Park  
Berryville, Va.

AUGUST 29 - 30 - 11 - SEPTEMBER 1  
10th ORIGINAL BLUE GRASS MUSIC  
FESTIVAL  
Blue Grass Park, Camp Springs, N. C.

SEPTEMBER 27 - 28 - 29  
BLUE GRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL  
Lake Norman Music Hall  
Terrell, N. C.

BLUE GRASS PARK, CAMP SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA  
"THE HOME OF BLUE GRASS MUSIC FESTIVALS"

This festival ad appeared in a 1974 edition of *Grasshound*, one of the two bluegrass magazines Carlton published. Image courtesy of the International Bluegrass Music Association.

mer members of the Blue Grass Boys to the festival to present what Haney called "The Blue Grass Story."

With Haney as emcee, a steady stream of musicians approached the microphone to answer questions and comment about their experiences as members of the Blue Grass Boys and, importantly, to affirm Monroe's status as the "Father of Bluegrass Music." Jimmy Mar-

tin, Don Reno, Mac Wiseman, Sonny Osborne, Carter Stanley, and others paid homage to Monroe, and named the recordings they had played on and the years they had served in Monroe's band. This provided an oral discography, imparting historical significance to Monroe and to the music associated with his name. In a 1971 interview, Haney told Fred Bartenstein, "My only reason to put on a bluegrass festival was to let the world know that it all came from Bill Monroe."

In subsequent years, Haney moved his festival to Berryville, Virginia, and Camp Springs, near his home in Reidsville, North Carolina, where he presented traditional acts along with younger, rock-influenced ones. A passionate supporter of music he believed was good and honest, Haney was among the first to give exposure and credibility to "progressive," or "newgrass" acts such as J.D. Crowe and the New South, Newgrass Revival, and North Carolina's New Deal String Band.

Haney's gatherings, which featured workshops patterned on those Rinzler helped develop at the Newport Folk Festival, sowed the seeds and became the template for the hundreds of festivals held throughout the U.S. each year.

\* \* \*

Haney was working in an automobile battery factory in Reidsville in 1955 when he was introduced to Monroe by Clyde Moody, a native of Cherokee, North Carolina, who had performed and recorded with Monroe in the 1940s. Monroe asked Haney to book some shows, and Haney began his musical career as a booking agent.

From 1956 until 1965, Haney managed bluegrassers Don Reno and Red Smiley and the Tennessee Cut-Ups, for whom he penned such memorable songs as "Jimmy Caught the Dickens (Pushing Ernest in the Tub)." He produced his first country music package show, in the Winston Salem Coliseum, featuring Ray Price, Porter Wagoner, and Kitty Wells. From 1957 through 1964, Haney managed the Old Dominion Barn Dance, broadcast over Richmond, Virginia's WRVA, and from 1969 until 1975 he published the influential monthly bluegrass magazine, *Muleskinner News*.

Haney aided the careers of several country artists, including Conway Twitty, Loretta Lynn, and Merle Haggard. His voice can be heard introducing Haggard on Haggard's live albums, *Okie from Muskogee* (1969) and *The Fightin' Side of Me* (1970). He also performed a recitation with Twitty on *Papa Sing Me a Song* (1969).

But it was his contributions to bluegrass music that earned Haney the International Bluegrass Music Association's 1990 Distinguished Achievement Award, and enshrinement in their Hall of Fame in 1998.

Today's bluegrass festivals are a major source of employment for bluegrass musicians, in stark contrast to the bleak opportunities available in 1965. "Most of the stuff we did was in bars," recalls National Heritage Fellow and bluegrass bandleader Doyle Lawson. "The majority of us had to work second jobs." With J.D. Crowe, Lawson performed at Haney's festival in Camp Springs in 1968. For the past 30 years, Lawson has hosted his own three-day festival in Denton, an event which traces its heritage to Haney's vision of 1965.

"Had it not been for Carlton, I don't think the bluegrass world would be anything like it is today," Lawson says. "Carlton never outgrew his love for the music. I think the world of bluegrass owes a debt of gratitude to Carlton. Without him, I don't know if we'd be on the map at all. I don't think we'll see somebody like Carlton come along again. He was one of a kind."



*Featuring*

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