I, Nathan McGee, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

It is entitled:
*Sounds Like Home: Bluegrass Music and Appalachian Migration in American Cities, 1945-1980*

Student’s name: **Nathan McGee**

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: David Stradling, Ph.D.

Committee member: Wayne Burrill, Ph.D.

Committee member: Tracy Teslow, Ph.D.

Committee member: Curtis W. Ellison, Ph.D.

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History of the College of Arts and Sciences

By

Nathan McGee

M.A., University of Cincinnati, 2011

B.A., Eastern Kentucky University, 2006

Committee Chair: David Stradling
Abstract


By Nathan McGee

Bluegrass music has long had strong associations with rural America and the Appalachian mountains in particular. The music itself, while often based on an idealized vision of rural America, developed in the urban milieu of the post World War II era. White Appalachians joined millions of other southerners in flooding north into urban cities in the 20th century. They brought with them some general cultural traits that often became exacerbated in the urban communities they joined. In short, as mountain migrants came north they often became more “southern” and more “Appalachian” as these character traits became identified by various urban groups. When migrants settled in cities, musical communities emerged that provided a sort of uplift for migrants and became a cultural marker for Appalachian-ness in many instances.

This process did not develop in a vacuum, but rather the identification of the music with Appalachia became often a conscious choice by musicians, fans, reformers, and general residents in the urban communities. Cities like Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington D.C. all struggled to come to grips with what it mean to have these new mountain folk living in their midst. The first exposure to Appalachian identity for many urban residents occurred through the musical sounds associated with the mountains. In the midst of backlash against Appalachian culture, migrant communities continued to develop their own culture
and lifestyles in the cities. Cities became bluegrass laboratories where migrants and musical enthusiasts from around the country met and mingled in new settings. As the music grew in popularity, fans and musicians alike both consciously and unconsciously pushed the music back into the mountains and developed it as an Appalachian sound.

This dissertation examines how this process occurred in these cities. The intermingling of urban reform work, musical performance, migration, and an interest in the broad “folk” led by a younger generation all helped develop the popularity of the music. The renewed interest in the mountain “folk” generally and the idea of Appalachia specifically developed within the broader folk revival of the 1960s. These developments provided a mechanism for a new generation of musicians and revivalists to tie themselves to a sometimes-fictive past. This work shows how bluegrass music operated at the center of these developments and became a predominately urban genre of music despite the rural associations. My work follows in the tradition of examinations of Appalachian history, in particular the relationship between the idea and the reality of the “peculiar” American region.
Acknowledgements

Crafting a dissertation can be a daunting and occasionally lonely process. I have been fortunate for support and assistance from various people in all my walks of life on the journey to crafting this work. This dissertation would not have been possible without the continued verbal, spiritual and financial aid from family, friends, colleagues, archivists and librarians, professors, and mentors. I am lucky to have such wide-ranging support from so many people and institutions along the way and this work is a testament to their involvement to this whole process.

David Stradling has been essential to the writing and editing process. I am blessed to have a fantastic historian, ideal mentor, and good friend to help guide this work from its infancy. His advice and commentary provided the push the work needed as it developed and always lent a helping word of advice when I felt stuck. An act of serendipity placed me on a panel with Curtis Ellison at an Appalachian Studies Conference in Johnson City, Tennessee when the idea for this dissertation was first coming to fruition. Dr. Ellison provided helpful feedback from that moment forward and has been a strong advocate for this work ever since. His insights have helped me think about the subject of this dissertation in new ways.

Thanks are also due to Tracy Teslow and Wayne Durrill for serving on this committee, pushing the claims the work makes, and for all the insights you provided during my time at UC.

Outside of the committee, a number of scholars at both Eastern Kentucky University and the University of Cincinnati helped provide some of the spiritual and intellectual foundation for this work. As an undergraduate at EKU, Tom Appleton
first taught me the value in studying Kentucky history in particular and the rich past the bluegrass state has to offer. The faculty of the History Department and the Honors Program there also molded my young mind and pushed the boundaries of what I knew I was capable of. Willard Sutherland taught my first graduate school class at UC and his influence on my thinking about history has come to bear in all my work. What became this project was born in the wonderful graduate research seminars at UC and the guidance of Maura O’Connor, Sigrun Haude, and Steve Porter all helped craft my work in exciting and useful ways. I would like to also recognize John Alexander, Mark Lause, Chris Phillips, Tom Lorman, Wendy Kline, Fritz Casey-Leininger, and the influence their various teaching and writing styles had on my own thoughts and work. The late Zane Miller provided encouraging words at a time when I reached an academic crossroads and helped push my work forward as well. Isaac Campos deserves recognition for his words of encouragement as I first set off to write in earnest. I’m happy to say that starting at the beginning helped me reach the end. I also need to thank Hope Earls for all that she did to aid my graduate school career.

Various outside groups and fellowships provided financial assistance, without which my work would not have been possible. The Southern Appalachian Archives at Berea College offered me a one-month residency to perform a deep dive into their rich and wonderful collection and helped cultivate my academic interests. Shannon Wilson and Harry Rice provided great assistance to a young scholar who was occasionally lost in the weeds of their collection. The archivists around the country do much of the “dirty work” for others and without their behind the scenes
contributions are invaluable. The staff at the Enoch Pratt Free Public Library, the Langsdale Library at the University of Baltimore and Kevin Grace and Suzanne Maggard at the Blegen Library at UC provided important assistance. The staff at the Frist Library and Archive at the Country Music Hall of Fame helps keep this kind of research feasible and encourages new directions. A special thanks to John Rumble for helping guide me through the collection and for encouraging me to do oral history. Additional thanks are due to Michael Maloney and the members of the Urban Appalachian Council and Cincinnati Human Relations Commission for their trust in me to help organize much of their holdings. I received additional funding along the way to help with my own research. Thanks to the Department of History and Zane Miller and Roger Daniels for supporting graduate work. Thanks to the Graduate Student Governance Association for continuing to fight for money for graduate research at UC and providing various forms of assistance along the way.

Graduate school maintained its collegiate feel thanks to the attitudes and conversations of the group of individuals I am happy to call colleagues and friends. The academic and social relationships I made with a number of people at UC made my time there both memorable and enjoyable. Thanks to Matt Stanley, Jessica Biddlestone, Charlie Lester, and Zach Garrison for taking a young graduate student under your guiding wings. Thanks to Alyssa McClanahan, Vanessa de los Reyes, Bela Kashyap, Angela Stiefbold, and Anne Steinert for your critical contributions to my work and your friendship. My friendships outside of the world of academia helped keep my work grounded. A special thanks my best friends since elementary school,
Andrew and Charlie, who have always encouraged my passions and provided the
good-natured ribbing an academic often needs.

The vibrant bluegrass music communities in the cities in which I worked and
researched also deserve recognition. Individuals invited me into their homes, their
places of work, and happily conversed with a stranger about their time in the music
industry and their lives generally. The continued passion for the playing of the
music, and their willingness to talk about it, was invaluable.

My family has also helped make this journey a useful and fruitful venture. My
parents, John and Anita McGee, forced the sound of the banjo upon me as a boy and
encouraged bluegrass music to replicate in my DNA. I am blessed to have grown up
in a household filled with love and music and conversation that indulged my critical
thinking alongside my passion for folk music and history. My dad, in particular,
helped foster a love of bluegrass music at a time in my life when I was receptive to it
and encouraged me to pick up a guitar alongside my history books at a young age.
This certainly helped me find a path to mixing these two great interests. My
siblings, Ian, Robin, and Cassie have encouraged me along every step of my
academic journey as well.

Most importantly, I must thank my wife, Samantha. She met me at a time
when I first had a notion of going to graduate school to pursue an advanced degree.
She has been a rock upon which this dissertation has been built ever since. Her
belief in me and my work never wavered, even at times when I occasionally doubted
myself. Without your love, support, encouragement, and help none of this would
have been possible. I am forever grateful for that undying confidence.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements v
Introduction 1

Chapter One Bluegrass Roots: Radio and the Presentation of Early Country and Hillbilly Music 15

Chapter Two ‘Worse Than Being Hungry:’ The Hillbilly Stereotype and Migrant Communities 48

Chapter Three Playing It By Ear: The Growth of Urban Bluegrass in the 1950s 92

Chapter Four Homespun and Old-Fashioned’ Bluegrass: Constructing Urban Authenticity 129

Chapter Five “Our History is Music”: Appalachian Advocacy and Bluegrass Identity 184

Conclusion What’s New is Old Again 223

Bibliography 228
Introduction

I first reckoned with the sound of the banjo as a child in the backseat of my parents’ minivan. We spent our autumn and winter Sundays with extended family enjoying dinner at the home of my dad’s brother. Those gatherings gradually gave way to the evening and the seemingly interminable drive home along Turkeyfoot Road. Invariably, my parents tuned the radio to Music From the Hills of Home, a bluegrass program broadcast from WNKU. The banjo kept me awake on those car rides with the twanging and tinny sound of the three finger pickers piercing my young ears. My siblings and I almost always objected to the music while my father customarily responded by turning the radio volume up. I remember having a minor crisis of identity during these rides, listening to this program and thinking this was not music; this was noise. I do not recall exactly how I made the association, but I knew from the moment I heard that sound this was the din and clatter of backwards people from a strange land. We were not mountain folk. How my parents felt a connection to the music, the high-pitched southern twang of the singers and the Tennessee drawl of Katie Laur as the host, I had no idea. We lived in Kentucky but in the area of the state more Cincinnati suburb than southern small town; a heavily German area full more of bratwursts than banjos; a proper city that was far more metropolis than mountain. How then did my parents come to this music and make it a ritualistic part of our family’s customs?

My parents’ discerning ears came to bluegrass music not out of a direct cultural connection, but rather through the post-World War II macro processes that brought the music to millions of new listeners. The music, associated with the
mountains, actually grew in popularity in cities during my parents’ political and socially formative years, and as a result the music that seemed so anathema to my youth and my upbringing was a key feature of the live music scene in metropolises around the country. As historian David Whisnant observed, the “politics of culture” almost always come to bear when considering our understanding of Appalachia in particular, and my young ears had already begun to associate the banjo with the hillbilly stereotype before I had even formed a basic comprehension of either. The popular perception of mountain culture, in this case music, is always political, manipulated by systems with a “fixation upon a romantically conceived” image of mountain history.¹ This is not to state historical actors’ motivations as malicious or wholly selfish, however. Sometimes, actors infected the image of Appalachia, and other cultures more generally, with their own vision and did so from a place of goodwill or even unwittingly. These manipulations, however, also have had historical staying power. This romantic fixation on Appalachia occurred in myriad aspects of early research into mountain life and culture. Some writers and thinkers saw speech patterns that linked the mountain twang to Shakespeare and others latched onto the post-Civil War racial politics that placed the white mountaineer as the vanguard of a real America.²

² There is a long tradition of romantic Appalachian literature dating to the nineteenth century local color writers and moving into the modern era. Other groups continue to promote this image of Appalachia, captured in the “Wild and Wonderful West Virginia” tourist motto, the continued use of the hillbilly imagery in advertising, film, and television, and in the popular imagery associated with bluegrass and country music. See Emily Satterwhite, Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction Since 1878 (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011).
These same processes produced the modern form of bluegrass music as romantically tied to the mountains, even as its growth and success occurred in areas seemingly far removed from Appalachia proper. Cities became the bluegrass laboratories where migrants and music enthusiasts first met and developed its modern sound. Urban radio stations hosted bluegrass and country music programs and published songbooks and promotional material with carefully crafted band names and attire. The decision to place the music as part of Appalachia was in fact just that: a decision made by radio DJs and stations owners, promotional agents, and a somewhat cyclical American trend of interest in the primitive rather than a natural outgrowth of the music's history. Songs that emphasized the themes of moving, leaving home, and the struggles of assimilation into city life became key elements of the bluegrass canon, even as musicians whose origins belied the musical sentiments penned the words and music.

“Sounds Like Home” chronicles these processes at work in the urban settings of Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. These places were not the only cities that championed bluegrass music’s rise, but they had similarities in the arrival of migrant populations and the growth of native folk music scenes that helped bring the genre to the forefront. All of the cities experienced a tremendous rush of migration in the World War II era due to their proximity to the mountains, their existence along popular road and rail lines out of the South, and the patterns inherent in chain migration. Each developed a significant population of

---

Appalachians within their confines in the decades surrounding the war. The first generation often experienced the backlash associated with the traditional view of the mountain people, while their children occasionally reaped the benefits of the move and proved responsible for generating new ideas about what it meant to be Appalachian. This work further tracks the ways in which popular conceptions of Appalachia in these cities and across the country dovetailed with the concurrent emergence of bluegrass music to produce the genre’s sound.

The developments in post-World War II America, like so much in history, were not essentially new. David Whisnant, Henry Shapiro, and other historians and chroniclers of the region noted these same processes at work regarding Appalachia at the turn of the twentieth century. During this era, early folklorists, urban reformers, and Christian missionaries all brought their own ideas about mountain people and life to bear on the region as they invented some of the many myths that are still maintained in current popular understandings of Appalachia. These reformers saw in the region what a new generation found nearly a century later: authenticity. The word itself carries a load of baggage, but understanding how individuals conceived of what it meant to be authentic in disparate eras is key to understanding the growth and the emergence of bluegrass. William Goodell Frost, the president of Berea College in the early twentieth century, recognized the people of Appalachia as “our contemporary ancestors.”4 He plotted a point on a continuum that presents bluegrass music as rooted in an authentic mountain past and continues to use the hillbilly archetype as a stand-in for life generally in the region.

---

The myth of bluegrass music, as a rural musical form rooted in the white, mountain past, is itself a product of this invention of Appalachia in the late nineteenth century and the goal of finding authentic American roots in the region.

Whisnant noted how in the post-World War II era, Southern music and popular understandings about it developed out of a “mainstream starved for rooted cultural energy and authenticity” in their own lives.\(^5\) As America became more uniform, its popular culture more regionally undifferentiated, the baby boom generation sought authentic music that rooted their lives in something other than the capitalist trappings of the era. Country music historians have noted a similar process. As more Southerners moved North in the mid-twentieth century, Southern culture became nationalized. This did not just happened through sheer force of numbers, but rather much of the popularity of Southern music came as a result of a need for an authentic American cultural idea in the racial, cultural, and political turmoil of the decades after the war. Doug Rossinow, writing about the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, notes how “the search for authenticity lay at the heart” of that movement.\(^6\) As this generation of young people felt alienated from their roots and their country, they took to activism as a means of finding their own authentic selves. Embracing the culture of Appalachia and involving oneself in that work, as I argue here, became one of many ways for this generation to find this authenticity.

A certain irony lay at the heart of this process in American cities. As a postwar generation of Americans struggled to define their authentic selves, they

---


looked increasingly into the past and into rural America. “Back-to-the-land” movements of the 1960s, a War on Poverty focus on rural America, and the environmental movement of the same era all represented points on this continuum of attention focused on rural America. Fans, migrants, musicians, and critics often found rural bluegrass music first in the urban live music scene. The rural associations of the music were likely immediate because of speech patterns, dress, and instrumentation inherent in the genre and thus became a mechanism of connecting oneself with the country. By actively or passively participating in the live bluegrass music scene in these cities, individuals worked to blur the line between city and country.

For this dissertation, “authentic” bluegrass music is defined through a rather broad lens, but contains some universal elements. First, and perhaps most importantly, the music needs to be old. This is a relative term as well and loaded in its own way, but when musicians and music fans refer to authentic music it is most often old music, with roots in the past, or music at the very least performed in that old or traditional style.7 When the first folk ballad collectors entered the mountains at the turn of the century, men like Cecil Sharp, they searched for the real connections to the British Isles that could still be found in this untouched region of America. Sharp in particular made political choices about which ballads and which lyrics and styles he chronicled. In doing so, he exercised the cultural politics that dominated understanding of the region. Later folk collectors used similar practices,

---

7 Old, and age generally, is certainly relative as well. Authentic rock music is not as “old” as authentic Dixieland or jazz, but when musicians, writers, and fans speak of this authenticity is in relation to the particular genre’s origin.
keeping what fit the model of their own version of authenticity while rejecting what did not. For bluegrass music, songs that laid claim to proto-bluegrass roots, in the folk songs and ballads of rural America, were the first to be considered authentic. Over time, this changed, however, as authenticity became a moving target. New songs written by first generation bluegrass musicians also claimed authenticity, while songs that were simply covers of other rock or folk songs took longer to gain acceptance in the canon. Modern bluegrass musicians by the 1970s could be considered authentic if they performed in a manner stylistically consistent to original acts. Still, some diehard fans might argue that any music created after the 1950s should not be considered authentic and this debate continues to simmer within the bluegrass music community.

Origins provide a second element important to demonstrating authentic bluegrass. Direct mountain connections are the most common, whether a performer was a migrant or a second generation Appalachian. When musicians could draw connections and provide roots to the music, they often emphasized these aspects of their character and upbringing. While the origins became an important part of musicians coming to bluegrass, it also became a stylistic choice that could provide another element of authenticity to one’s music. To claim status from nondescript rural sounding locales like Peewee Valley or Crab Orchard, Kentucky alleged a greater authenticity than to claim Louisville or Cincinnati as one’s home. Writing about American cities, Sharon Zukin notes, “a city is authentic if it can create the experience of origins” through the preservation of aspects of the
city that might feel old.\textsuperscript{8} This includes small shops and restaurants and elements that link current neighborhoods and districts to a cultural past. These same aspects ring true for bluegrass music as it developed in the city. The music created its own authenticity through the origins of its performers. As musicians avowed their connections to Appalachia specifically or the South more generally they created this authentic image. They accomplished this most often through biography, the story of their family past and the bluegrass music connections they made along the way.

At the same time, the space where the music was performed provided another claim to authenticity. Here again, Zukin’s argument about the “experience” remains important. A performance in a seedy dive bar in a predominately Appalachian neighborhood was deemed truer to the genre’s roots than the same music performed in a slick suburban strip mall, a hotel lobby, or a professional theater. Still more, a return to a rural setting potentially offered an even more authentic show, even as these musicians initially honed their craft in the urban environs. The first generation of migrants, who came of age as the music struggled to gain a following and popularity in cities, often played in these migrant neighborhood taverns and bars. As a result, these places laid special claim to the music and nostalgia for these spaces slowly developed as they underwent changes often consistent with the general reformations of city life. Bars where whisky flowed readily, bottles smashed regularly, guns were displayed frequently, and chicken wire protected the musicians from the rabble maintained special status as authentic bluegrass venues. As the music became more popular, and the cities less

populated amid the urban crisis, these venues disappeared but the memory of the sites as the origins of urban bluegrass remained.

As bluegrass music fans searched for the music in cities, these issues of what constituted authentic music played a role in discovering the genre and embracing the myth of bluegrass. Some fans sought authentic musicians. To see a bluegrass legend, like Ralph Stanley or Bill Monroe, provided an inherent authentic connection to the genre. These musicians physically represented the origins, so whether they performed at a VFW Hall, a tavern, a restaurant, or in an arena they intrinsically embodied an authentic version of the music. Some fans sought authenticity through the venue in particular. The seedy enclaves and bars in rundown neighborhoods are remembered most fondly as the representation of true bluegrass performances. Still others just sought the music. This is probably true for the majority of casual bluegrass fans who did not give great thought to the origins and legitimacy of musicians and avoided the editorial battles in the pages of trade magazines like *Bluegrass Unlimited*. For these fans, hearing a high tenor voice, driving mandolin, and the five-string banjo was enough to dub the genre true bluegrass regardless of the band members’ origins or background. In urban America, bluegrass musicians worked to accommodate all of the desires of fans, casual and hardcore, while recognizing that developing a sense of their own authenticity afforded them greater prestige and cache within the industry itself.

As the music grew in popularity, social workers and advocates for Southern and Appalachian people began to embrace the music as a means of showcasing some of the better aspects of Southern life and using this path of activism to authenticity.
The music and the relationship to the culture associated with this music brought activists back to supposed American roots. This had the effect of pushing the music back into the South and the mountains as the now urban residents became further identified and self-identified with their roots rather than their current homes.

“Sounds Like Home” shows how this process occurred within bluegrass music over the course of the mid to late twentieth century. Chapter One examines the long roots of the country music-urban center connection through two proto-bluegrass figures. Bradley Kincaid and John Lair both played pivotal roles in popularizing early country and hillbilly music and embraced the iconography and imagery that came to be associated with this and later bluegrass music. They embraced their rural roots, Lair through his creation of the fictive Renfro Valley community and Kincaid as “Kentucky’s Mountain Boy,” while they relied on urban audiences and radio stations to showcase and sell their products. They helped set a pattern by which bluegrass musicians later followed to varying degrees of success.

Chapter Two examines the experience of early migrants to the cities under consideration. The backlash against southern whites in the period around World War II became a visceral part of the migrant experience and helped cement the importance of Southern culture as a means of binding the migrant group together and establishing migrants as subjugated outsiders. Early urban advocates sought to help ease the transition for this group, but in the process embraced some of the very words and images to which many residents objected. Southern migrants then found ways to help themselves, and this often occurred in the cultural centers that developed on the ground and through the practice of playing and listening to music.
in particular. Chapter Three looks at how these cultural centers developed in the 1950s. Migrants formed communities within cities while they often found themselves outside of the cultural mainstream. This led some of the early baby boom generation to take notice and as a result, the migrants and their music became an early part of the counter cultural scene post-World War II.

Chapter Four looks at the way the urban bluegrass music scene developed around the figure of Earl Taylor. Taylor, a migrant who moved about the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic, never developed a strong national following but carved out a career as a bluegrass musician by embracing the genre’s newfound urban popularity. One of the key features of his urban appeal, however, proved to be Taylor’s ability to play the role of the hillbilly archetype and epitomize the authentic image of a bluegrass musician. The chapter examines his life and his travels through the memories of musicians with whom he played and the life in the venues that featured his style of music.

Chapter Five examines the ways in which bluegrass music and formal Appalachian advocacy mixed to cement the image of the genre as one rooted in the mountains and the past. For decades, Appalachian advocates had struggled to find the means of advocating for and on behalf of mountain migrants. By the 1970s, advocates found a welcome aid in the struggle through an open embrace of rural music and mountain culture. In Cincinnati, the most successful Appalachian advocacy group in the country developed and found success through an embrace of the cultural identity of Appalachians. This occasionally meant dipping into stereotype about the region, but it came from a more benevolent and welcoming
origin than the political activism of two decades prior. Identity politics and ideas that permeated through the Great Society played a role in developing this new found sense of Appalachian-ness, even as Appalachians themselves were often confused by these new signifiers. The brief conclusion carries the story forward into the 1980s as cities began to embrace their own bluegrass histories in meaningful ways for the first time.

Bluegrass music has long fascinated scholars for a variety of reasons. The vast scholarship has played a vital role in my own thinking about the genre and a few important notes of consideration are important. The genre has often proved hard to define despite the proliferation of musicians, trade magazines, festivals, and albums over the last half-century. When asked, I often paraphrase the words of Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart who set an official obscenity standard through the oft-cited phrase, “I know it when I see it.” When it comes to bluegrass music “I know it when I hear it.” This does not suffice for an official definition, but constitutes the amorphous ways the music can be interpreted and understood. In this work, the strict definition of the music is not as important then as understanding how historical actors interpreted and defined the genre. For these reasons, there remains prominent crossover between genres variously referred to as bluegrass, hillbilly, country, and old-time music. In all instances, the key

---

9 The most agreed upon modern definition of the genre is any acoustic music, that may be played with or without the help of amplifiers, that contains some combination of guitar, mandolin, bass, fiddle, dobro, and most importantly banjo. The banjo must be performed in three-finger or Scruggs style to be considered bluegrass, though even the official definitions for general awards purposes and record classifications do not always hold true to this rule.
referential point is the association with the mountains and Appalachia by the historical actors, both musicians and listeners.

For much of this work I have relied on oral histories and interviews conducted by myself, other scholars, and in published works. That memory can be unreliable has been reiterated to almost the point of cliche but remains an undeniable truth and a potential pitfall in historical works. In particular, individuals often enhance their own positions in the past or the roles they may have played in certain events. I have relied on the words of others not as historical truths about the past, but rather as a means of capturing sentiments about particular eras and their own experiences within the broader past. Many of the musicians and fans I interviewed expressed sentiments about their era as the high point of bluegrass music in the country, and while this can certainly be seen as a product of this self-aggrandizement it is also reflected in the general history of the genre as it exploded in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. Their memories of performing and experiencing the music in these decades also provide an important cultural slice of what the experience of seeing, playing, and hearing bluegrass music was like in these cities.

Those long Sunday car rides with the driving banjo proved my first reckoning with the sound and style of bluegrass music. I pushed it away as something anathema to my person, something not of me nor my family. Millions of others had a visceral reaction to the sound upon first hearing it as well, recognizing it as something strange and foreign, but often enticing. I came to realize over time that the sound of the banjo is not so strange to the city, but rather as much of the fabric
of urban life as the crowded streets, the sidewalk cafes, and the craning necks of pedestrians gazing up at skyscrapers. Bluegrass music may have been birthed in the mountains, but like the many migrants who came to play and enjoy its music, it came of age in American cities.
Chapter One: Bluegrass Roots: Radio and the Presentation of Early Country and Hillbilly Music

In the hills of old Kentucky
Where the birds sing merrily,
And the Southern breeze is blowing thru the trees,
That is where I long to be.
   - "In the Hills of Old Kentucky"

In the summer of 1929, Bill Monroe left his small town of Rosine, Kentucky to head north for work with two of his older brothers at the Sinclair Oil Refinery outside of Chicago. Monroe, at just 18 years old, had lived in the long shadows of his brothers Birch and Charlie and the combination of job prospects, opportunity, and simple chain migration brought Monroe to the same plant where his brothers had found employment a few months earlier. Bill was a bit surprised at how hard it proved to find work at the plant before he eventually moved into the Barrel House on the factory grounds full time. Of that time he recalled, “[m]any’s a day I stacked a thousand barrels—two thousand barrels. We could unload a freight car in forty-five minutes....Some of them weighed one hundred and fifty pounds. That was some hard work I’ll tell you.” The physical labor, and low pay, just forty cents an hour to start, made Bill question whether or not the trip to Chicago and his new life was worth it. “I worked every day for five years and all I got out of it was I spent forty dollars for a mandolin and I got a couple of suits of clothes. I’ve often wondered if I

---

was doing the right thing.” Bill’s priorities in Chicago were telling. The forty-dollar mandolin ultimately became his ticket out of the refinery, out of Chicago, and to worldwide acclaim as the “Father of Bluegrass Music.” The fateful trip to Chicago opened up the possibility for that eventuality, as he became part of a massive movement of people out of the South and into the North in the period between the two world wars.

The music did not come easy at first, but Chicago offered some of the only opportunities for people like Monroe and his brothers. Their family’s musical background, along with important contacts with musicians around their neighborhood, made them strong candidates for work in the emerging hillbilly music scene. Monroe recalled, “At that time you couldn’t hardly get a job playing music that paid any money. WLS in Chicago was about the only place up there that really paid any good money.” The three Monroe brothers eventually joined a travelling act run by radio station WLS that sent them to cities and towns around the region and earned quite a bit more than the menial pay for the heavy labor at the refinery. “They paid twenty-two dollars and a half a week. Per man,” Monroe recalled. “Of course that far back you could get a room for seventy-five cents—a good room. You could get a steak for thirty-five cents. So it was pretty good money.” Monroe’s music career was born in this environment where an urban radio station found a market catering to thousands of listeners who moved from the South or lived in the rural greater Chicago hinterlands. The move from Rosine did

not pay off with a great blue or white collar job in the big city, but it proved integral in paving the way for Bill Monroe’s career.

Across the country, traditionally southern music took over radio airwaves in the 1920s. A growing barn dance movement that provided men like Monroe with their first opportunities in the professional music business spurred this development. Nearly every major metropolitan area in the country created a barn dance program of some kind, though they varied greatly in both the types of programming they offered and their success. The barn dance name, ubiquitous in nearly all of the programs’ titles, became a stylistic marker for the supposed rural or southern traditions and distinguished the musical types from ballroom dancing or other classical forms that also proliferated on the radio in these early years. The varied types of programs all used nascent forms of country music to appeal to rural and migrant audiences, though they differed in their designations of the musical types. Country music had not yet become an official style in these early radio years and the variety offered on these programs became variously referred to as “hillbilly,” “folk,” “mountain.” The most popular of these programs came out of Chicago in the 1920s on WLS. The National Barn Dance debuted in April of 1924 and arguably set the standard for the numerous copycat transmissions that followed in its wake. These barn dance programs and the messages, both overt and indirect in

\begin{footnote}
Numerous historians and scholars have made the contention that southern music is American music. Folk scholars dating back to the early part of the revival said as much and the nationalization of sounds like jazz and what became country music attest to this fact. For an examination of this process see Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music/American Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), Jack Temple Kirby, *Media Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), and Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). The music became national in scope because of the intermingling of radio and migration in the period under consideration in this chapter.
\end{footnote}
their programming, also provided the basic instrumental and stylistic basis for bluegrass music that followed decades later, as key figures like Bill Monroe cut their musical teeth in this environment. The instruments showcased on barn dance programs, in particular the banjo, mandolin, and acoustic guitar of early string bands, became staples of the genre and to a great extent associated with nascent country music. In some cases, the association with barn dance productions worked to belie the actual origins of the instruments but rather equated them with a rural, white past.\(^{16}\) The songs and repertoire for bluegrass largely came from these broadcasts and, on occasion, so did many of the players.\(^{17}\) Just as importantly, the model for crossover appeal to northerners and southerners that became an integral part of the success of the bluegrass music genre was born from this migration.

Rural music on the radio before World War II helped create nostalgia for a fictive American rural idyll that maintained itself over the course of the twentieth century in myriad cultural forms. Bluegrass music became a product of this nostalgic longing as it transitioned into postwar America.

The wave of barn dances also dovetailed chronologically with a burgeoning interest in American folk culture. On occasion, representatives and station managers implicitly recognized these connections. George Biggar, an early director of the WLS program, even emphasized the term “folk” because of his dislike for the

---

\(^{16}\) This is particularly the case for the circuitous route to mainstream popularity taken by the banjo. See Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

\(^{17}\) I will explore some of these connections in future chapters. For the connection between early radio performances and first generation bluegrass performers, most importantly Bill Monroe, see chapter one, “Hillbilly Music and the Monroe Brothers,” in Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
use of hillbilly to describe his program. The interest in folk music emerged in the decades prior, rooted in the work of individuals like Cecil Sharp who compiled ballads as he traveled around America with a concentration in Appalachia. Sharp, and others like him, contributed to a growing interest in the history of ordinary people and helped establish ideas about this music as rooted in white, Anglo traditions. This ballad collecting and emphasis on the folk in Appalachia also helped establish the “myth of the white ballad singer” as the heir of America’s true folk traditions, a condition that continued through the next decades of the folk boom in the United States. Many of the most popular acts on WLS and other shows fell into this motif. A single white man, usually playing guitar, who sang old songs often passed down through generations has long been a staple image of this mythic authentic past. The hillbilly, or “lonesome cowboy” image, as Richard Peterson writes, denotes “a self-reliant (most often male) child of nature, unfettered by the constraints of urban society” that dates back to some of America’s cultural foundations. This image had staying power in the country and later bluegrass music industry as well; many of the genre’s most popular acts embodied these characteristics and associated lifestyle. On occasion, ballad singers also acted as

18 Jeffrey J. Lange, Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 27.
20 Filene, 27. The mainstream aspects of the folk boom have almost always had the white ballad singer, or a derivative thereof, at the forefront. Kincaid, who is discussed here, was perhaps the first but men like Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan certainly borrowed from this tradition and found popularity because of its utility in the folk music canon.
collectors on their own who traveled into rural areas and discovered the music of their ancestors that had been supposedly untouched by commercial sensibilities.

In addition, the Great Depression that quickly followed the onslaught of radio interest cemented new ideas about the “folk” in Americans’ mindsets. The interest in “ordinary people” and songs from outside the commercial mainstream grew to include the popular rhetoric and a reinvigorated interest in the “common man.” This supplemented the earlier “discovery” of Appalachia and a renewed interest in the ethnic music of various Southern cultures. Men like John and Alan Lomax also continued the tradition of collecting folk music in their travels across the South and West and through the publication of various songbooks. The father and son team trekked across the South and West they actively sought songs and performers viewed as the most distant from commercial tastes.\textsuperscript{22} They visited prisons, where on one such trip in 1933 in Louisiana they discovered Huddie Ledbetter, better known as “Leadbelly,” and made him a folk star when they brought him to New York City.\textsuperscript{23} The Lomaxes became important figures for the entirety of the folk revival period from the 1920s through the early 1970s. The family was integral in developing what historian Benjamin Filene has referred to as a “cult of authenticity” surrounding the music.\textsuperscript{24} As massive figures in the folk music scene, the Lomaxes work dominated the field for decades. Alan Lomax’s name appeared in various forms in some capacity in nearly every decade and maintained involvement in the folk, and later bluegrass, music world for his entire life.

\textsuperscript{22} John Lomax’s first publication was a 1910 songbook titled \textit{Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads} in which he shifted folk emphasis from the mountains to other rural work forms.
\textsuperscript{23} Filene, 51.
\textsuperscript{24} Filene, 47.
This revival, born in the early 1900s and aided by the growing popularity of radio, helped invigorate passion for colloquial music, particularly Southern “hillbilly” styles that came to dominate airwaves in many American cities. While ballad collectors emphasized the rural and non-commercial elements of the music that they had “found” in the prairies and mountains across America they belied certain truths about the reality of the music. The folk music revival, from its beginnings in this radio era was decidedly an urban movement, led by urban men and women who brought the music to the country’s ears by moving to and performing on radio stations that catered to urban listeners. An inability to demonstrate this crossover appeal, or veer too much into the world of hillbilly music, could mean commercial success but often cut artists off from performances and a growing listenership around the United States. For these reasons, artists and promoters, like Biggar at WLS, carefully managed their programs and the language they used to describe it. While historians have often left this hillbilly era out of the folk music scene proper, the later emergence of artists within the revival's postwar years demonstrates their importance to the development of ideas about folk and country music. Important offshoots of the folk revival in later decades, including bluegrass music in the post-World War II era, developed out of this same urban milieu that raised men like Bill Monroe and other barn dance performers.

“Hillbilly” music gained popularity with the massive population shifts of the Great Migration between the First and Second World War. While blacks and whites migrated out of the South in search of factory jobs and opportunities in northern cities like Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, and Cincinnati, some—like the Monroe
brothers—aspired to the cultural opportunities afforded by these urban environments. Popular developments in jazz music were largely fueled by the shift of musicians out of New Orleans and to places like Chicago’s Black Belt and New York City’s Harlem. Musicians who sought to become professional country musicians followed similar paths. Would-be artists like Monroe found that in order to perform and be paid a living wage for performing, finding work at a popular radio station in a city was key. Itinerant musicians who moved from the South or the mountains to Northern cities offered an authentic representation of their former region to a new audience. At the same time, much of their popularity was rooted in connections they fostered with fellow migrants, as numerous letters from listeners and fans attest. In addition, the very medium of radio afforded a new means of representing the music of the South to a broad audience. Listeners did not necessarily have to physically come and see performances, but rather could tune in from home or a local community gathering place and purchase photos and songbooks to visually supplement their aural experiences. Two important figures in Kentucky music history, Bradley Kincaid and John Lair, later helped popularize the sounds that would become bluegrass and serve as models for this larger process.

Lair and Kincaid were contemporaries to each other and to Monroe, who came of age in the 1920s as radio was rapidly becoming the important medium for

---

25 This authenticity was not an inherent fact of their lives by any means, but rather something created by both the folk and nascent country music industries as a means to sell radio shows, records, song books, and innumerable other products associated with the musicians. In addition, fans themselves had shifting definitions of authenticity and popular whims dictated these definitions as well. The entire genre of music was in fact “invented” over the course of many years as a means of establishing the genre as a commercial success. One important aspect of this authenticity, however, was and continues to be strong and real ties to the American South or the Appalachian Mountains, depending on the audience to which one tries to appeal. See Peterson, Creating Country Music.
cultural dissemination across the country. While their direct impact on bluegrass music is debatable, their use of the medium of radio and their biographies during this period help track the roots of the sound and the themes that came to dominate the music in later years. Lair and Kincaid both embraced what came to be known as “old-time” music or some of the first folk music in America, as defined by men like Cecil Sharp. Kincaid in particular offered a crossover appeal for hillbilly and folk music fans because of his song selections, his style, and his apparent authentic approach to the music of his home. Songs that became staples of the radio shows for both men, like “Pretty Polly,” “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane,” “Footprints in the Snow,” and “Old Joe Clark” became bluegrass staples in due time. Other songs, like “In the Hills of Old Kentucky” and “My Little Home in Tennessee” were later done in bluegrass fashion but perhaps more importantly established the themes that came to dominate classic bluegrass tunes in the decades that followed.

The two men helped establish ideas about Appalachia and authentic folk music at the same time they became active products of a growing interest in these ideas. Terms like “folk revival” are often bandied about in studies of these genres, but the themes that pervaded this rather amorphous idea spread through nearly every generation. To say the revival began in the postwar period would be to ignore the interest and impact of individuals like Lair and Kincaid and even Cecil Sharp before them. To argue the revival died when Bob Dylan plugged his guitar in at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island in 1965 ignores the impact of musicians and acts that followed. In each generation, artists and fans of the music searched for an authenticity that they believed musicians, radio programmers, or other personas
provided them. The themes, in short, became recycled even as the individuals presenting the music and culture changed.

Both Lair and Kincaid professed a profound love for a fictive rural lifestyle they espoused quite readily in their song selections, origin stories, and public characterizations. These characterizations, however, belied the urban creation of the two personas. As a result, their era as popular figures stands at the nexus of both another generation engaging in the revival spirit and the importance of the urban musical scene to that same generation. Kincaid made a career as an itinerant musician, a sort of mountain minstrel who traveled about the Midwest and Northeast bringing the music and culture of Appalachia with him wherever he went. Lair, while he eventually moved his radio operations back to his hometown in Kentucky, also recognized the importance of urban residents and a rural past to his own popularity. Furthermore, he spent his life as a shrewd businessman quite removed from the soft-spoken radio persona out of which he made a career. The careers of the two men, and their approach to radio and the mountain music ideal, act as a synecdoche for larger trends that came to dominate hillbilly, country, bluegrass, and folk music over the course of the twentieth century and helped establish some of the content and imagery that came to be cornerstones of the bluegrass and folk genre.

Kincaid, Kentucky’s “Mountain Boy” as he later came to be known, was born in 1895 in Garrard County in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains “at the head
of a holler, where the boulevard dwindles down to a squirrel’s path.” The fifth of nine children, Kincaid received little formal schooling but worked a fair number of odd jobs after completing the fifth grade. He worked at a wheel factory in Louisville for ten cents an hour and later tried his hand at tobacco farming in the rich Kentucky bluegrass. He joined a church in the small town of Fairview and seriously began considering a return to more schooling, at 19 years of age. He moved to Berea, Kentucky and re-enrolled in the sixth grade in the Foundation School. Kincaid remembered the social and educational struggles of that time. “I remember how timid I was about going to that first class,” he recounted, “because I was almost six feet tall and going in with little sixth graders.” He finished three grades in two years at the school before World War I interrupted his education.

Two years in the service and time in France gave him some additional worldly experience but he remained determined to finish his education. He graduated high school in three years, and in 1922 he married his music teacher at Berea, Irma Foreman. Soon after, he took a job working for the Kentucky YMCA that afforded him an opportunity to further broaden his horizons. He and his young wife moved from Kentucky to Chicago where Kincaid continued his education in college under the umbrella of the YMCA. He took a position singing in a quartet and soon

---

26 Loyal Jones, *Radio’s ‘Kentucky Mountain Boy’ Bradley Kincaid*, (Berea, KY: The Appalachian Center, 1980), 9. The “mountain” moniker is perhaps a misnomer, as others have noted he lived far closer to the more traditionally “southern” and aristocratic bluegrass region than the Appalachians. His description of his home though no doubt furthered the motif established about his own origins.

27 The Foundation School operated as a secondary school under the umbrella of the college from 1911 to 1968. Its mission dovetailed with the broader mission of the school under the leadership of President William Goodell Frost who pushed the college to cater more strongly to their mountain neighbors. It catered specifically to students like Kincaid who lacked schooling and were at too advanced an age to return to what would likely have been one-room schoolhouses in their hometowns and counties.

had an audition on radio station WLS, home of the National Barn Dance. He had to borrow a guitar for that audition, but he recounted how the executives “were so impressed that they asked me to be on their regular staff for $15 every Saturday night.” He quickly became a fan favorite among an all-star cast that made up the National Barn Dance program. George Biggar, who conceived of the show, credited Kincaid with introducing the nation to the music of Appalachia. Kincaid recognized the importance of his appeal and the fact that his identification as a “hillbilly from Kentucky” that knew old folk songs played a key role in both getting the job on WLS and in broadening his appeal across the country. Kincaid’s story, though elaborated during his time on the program, also helped lend an air of authenticity to the program and to his music. WLS promoted him as “a mountain boy who came to the city and made good” in some of their material and others noted that his life read like a “Horatio Alger style classic.” In time, he used this authenticity to craft himself as a homespun musician, but in reality he was thoroughly a product of modern and urban civilization. The opportunity to perform the mountain ballads and music of his childhood would have never come to fruition had the move to Chicago, seemingly worlds away from the mountains of home, not taken place. Kincaid went on to use this authentic appeal in his own self-promotion in the years that followed.

29 Jones, "Who is Bradley Kincaid," 124.
30 John Lair and Bradley Kincaid interview by Loyal Jones, 20 Nov 1971, Bradley Kincaid Papers (BK), SAA, Box 1, Folder 9.
31 WLS Family Album, 1930 in KC, SAA, Box 1, Folder 2 and Farm Loan News April 1949 in BK, SAA, Box 1, Folder 1.
Kincaid left WLS in 1930 and moved to Cincinnati and station WLW. Musicians commonly hopped from city to city and station to station to broaden their appeal and expand their fanbases. Much of the money that actually made playing music a livelihood came not from contracts with stations (musicians often played on air for free) but rather from live performances with admission charges. Appearing on the radio, however, was instrumental in promoting these performances and securing a regional following. These radio appearances also served as an opportunity to present a version of Southern and Appalachian life to urban listeners, to provide an opportunity for fellow migrants to find a kindred spirit in performers like Kincaid, and a means to reconnect with their former homes.

Kincaid proved to be a musical icon unlike few before him. His biographer and friend, Loyal Jones, describes Kincaid’s following as an early and somewhat more “decorous” version of the reception later rock stars like Elvis Presley received. As he traveled about the Midwest performing, he received numerous letters from fans around the country who appreciated his act and the ways in which he helped them reconnect to home. During his years at WLS, he received 300,000 fan letters and in his first month at WLW, 50,000 listeners wrote to him directly. Many of these fans saw some of themselves in Kincaid, a fellow migrant who brought a piece of the mountains with him and into their homes via radio with each

32 Kincaid in fact asked for no salary from WLW and followed this pattern as he bounced around radio stations. He moved about for the next decade, spending time in Pittsburgh, Schenectady, New York, New York City, and Boston before returning to Cincinnati in 1942.
33 Jones, Kentucky’s Mountain Boy, 35.
of his performances. For others, he was a first exposure to mountain life and through his work helped introduce ideas about Appalachia into listeners' minds.

Migrants found a kindred spirit in Bradley Kincaid and often wrote from their new homes to convey these feelings. Radio offered an unprecedented medium of communication to this point and also served to develop intimate feelings among listeners. A fan from Illinois penned Kincaid in 1932, “I often hear you sing over the radio and I feel as though I am acquainted with you...I was raised in West Virginia and you are from old Kentucky. So please let me hear from you.”35 Other fans in Chicago echoed similar feelings saying, “Dear Bradley, May I call you Bradley, I feel like I know you so well? I am an old Kentuckian.”36 This personal connection also helped to bring listeners back to their former residences as they struggled to acquaint themselves in their new environment. A 60 year old woman from Crescent City, Illinois wrote to “acknolige [sic] that your old time songs give me back my childhood days” while another from the same state similarly noted “[w]e are from Kentucky and have always enjoyed your mountain ballads over the radio very much.”37

Others who hadn't left the region recognized the positive impact that the mountain troubadour could have for the local population. Hugh Foster, a listener from Fleming, Kentucky, in the northeastern part of the state on the edge of the

35 Letter from D.W. Alderman to Bradley Kincaid, 4 Mar 1932, BK, SAA, Box 3, Folder 1.
36 Letter from Mr. and Mrs. O.D. Applegate, Chicago, IL to Bradley Kincaid, May 1932, KC, SAA, Box 3, Folder 2.
37 Letter from Mrs. J. Frohling to Bradley Kincaid, 3 Apr 1932, BK, SAA, Box 3, Folder 2 and Letter from Mrs. Agnes Dougherty to Bradley Kincaid, 27 Aug 1932, BK, SAA, Box 3, Folder 3.
Appalachian Mountains, hoped that Kincaid’s presence on the radio could draw attention to problems in the region, particularly during the Depression. He wrote:

You being a mountain boy no doubt you have some idea how the drought and business depression have left the mountain farmers and coal miners in a destitute condition. I’m right in the center of the worst...I feel it my calling to be here striving as I am toward relieving and aiding so many in such a serious and helpless condition...As I am the chairman on three different relief committees I am striving in every way to give aid and decided I would gather and send you several old mountain song ballads and see if you would send us a small donation for our relief fund. Perhaps some of the others there at WLW would be glad to aid in such a noble cause.38

The man’s letter speaks to the myriad problems confronting both the Appalachian region and the nation at large during the Depression, but the medium of radio and the regional connection listeners like Foster felt encouraged him to write the letter and hope that a fellow “mountain boy” could lead the charge in bringing aid to the area.

The connection often seemed so strong between musician and listener that very personal appearances were requested. A family from Somerset, Ohio made numerous requests for Kincaid to join them for dinner.39 The conversational tone in these, and other letters from fans, indicates this intensely personal connection that the radio programming and Kincaid’s earnestness in performance fostered. One

---

38 Letter from Hugh Foster to Kincaid, 12 May 1931, BK, SAA, Box 2, Folder 2. Numerous other listeners wrote to Kincaid with similar sentiments, often hoping that their own poems or copies of mountain ballads would be met with some form of compensation or eventually make it on the air. It would be easy to dismiss these communications as crass attempts at making money, but there is a certain sincerity in the prose of radio listeners in particular that suggests that the connection was beyond the hope for a simple economic exchange but rather something personal to these individuals. For other examples of this personal connection see Kristine McClusker, “Dear Radio Friend:’ Listener Mail and the National Barn Dance, 1931-1941,” in American Studies Vol. 39 (July 1998) and Jason Loviglio, Radio’s Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). It is also worth noting that Kincaid nearly universally responded with polite declines to purchase poems or to perform them on the air.

39 Letter from F.W. Arnold to Kincaid, 24 Jun 1931, BK, SAA, Box 2, Folder 2.
woman expressed the deepest gratitude to Kincaid upon receiving a songbook and being able to follow along with Kincaid’s broadcasts. “I am real proud of [the book],” she wrote. “I [wouldn’t] take a farm in Georgia for it. I would stop any of my work just to hear you sing. I would rather hear you than to eat when I am hungry.” While the language was no doubt somewhat hyperbolic, it nonetheless conveyed this powerful connection that radio afforded.

Kincaid enjoyed this type of reception from his fans as he moved about the country. In addition to operating as a kindred spirit to some of his Depression-era listeners, he also provided an introduction to the mountain South for others. While in Chicago, Kincaid did a series of broadcasts designed to introduce listeners to the people and culture of Appalachia. In one of his first addresses, delivered on WLS in the late 1920s, Kincaid delivered a program titled “Close-Up of the Mountaineers.” His delivery sought to correct some of the misunderstandings about the region, while at the same time he relied on certain stereotypes to engage his listeners. For much of his career, Kincaid openly resented the “hillbilly” moniker, despite its use in bookings and promotional material for his performances and preferred to emphasize the old-fashioned morality of the fictive mountain folk. This made him

---

40 Letter from Alice Furrow to Kincaid, 21 Jul 1931, BK, SAA, Box 2, Folder 2.
41 Radio Address, “A Close Up of the Mountaineers,” in BK, SAA, Box 1, Folder 6. Kincaid was not the first to indulge in this sort of talk about the Appalachian people, and the very fact that this segment of the population deserved a “close up” in a radio special likely helped contribute to the “othering” process that had been going on for at least a generation prior. Henry Shapiro chronicled this process in the late 19th century in Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1890 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). Shapiro contends that local-color writers and northern industrialists introduced the concept of an isolated and backwards people in the southern mountains, “in but not of America.” While this is certainly true and echoed strongly in scholarship since, radio only served to exacerbate this trend as it reached far more people on a regular basis than the short stories and novels chronicled by Shapiro.
an advocacy figure in line with some of the common thinking about rural mountain folk and Appalachians in particular in the 1920s.

Kincaid noted how the people in Appalachia were in fact diverse and should be “thought in groups” like the rest of America. There was no universal Appalachian character, but rather, “[s]ome are wealthy, highly educated, progressive; others are poor, are not well informed, show little evidence of progress from year to year, and are out of touch with the great currents of thought which at present affect mankind so profoundly.”43 His thoughts went on as he included songs between each of his mini-monologues on the mountain character. Women from the Berea College Glee Club accompanied his tunes on this program, and while discussing the songs and the performers Kincaid slipped into some stereotypes that came to define the region and the song styles. He noted that women in the mountains generally “love to sing” because “it drives away lonesomeness” and they performed “naturally” compared to other types of musicians.44 These tropes have become important definitions of both mountain music, and later bluegrass music, and Kincaid used the pulpit of the radio to help establish these in the minds of neophyte listeners. Kincaid of course was simply operating with definitions of the region and people that did, and to a great extent still do, define the region. It should not be considered unusual by any stretch to see this language present here, but the important aspect to note is that his power as the “Kentucky Mountain Boy” meant that his words and descriptions of the

43 “A Close Up of the Mountaineers”
44 “A Close Up of the Mountaineers.” The idea of Appalachian or country women as more “natural” artists and musicians, singers in particular, than other gender or groups has its own complicated history best chronicled in Pamela Fox, Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).
people and region had an impact. While it is difficult if not impossible to state how profound of an impact, the sincerity of his connection to his listeners meant that his words certainly mattered.

This program, titled a “A Close Up of the Mountaineers,” went on to describe living conditions, jobs, and the general character of the people. Kincaid, for the most part, described Appalachia as a place like anywhere else in America but certainly home to more of the “folk” traditions than one would find in an American city or even in the plains of the Midwest. He addressed other stereotypes, about the mountain penchant for violence or feuding (a legacy not far removed from the generation enjoying his radio programs) and argued that the “tendency to use the revolver at the bat of an eye” could not “be further from the truth.” The legacy of feuds, according to Kincaid, are overblown and usually “confined to a limited area” and not the main thrust of mountain life. He used the closing segment of this program to enlist help for those in the mountains suffering from poverty and to promote the mission of his alma mater, Berea College. Berea, Kincaid argued, served as one of the only institutions reaching into the mountains to help with issues of poverty and education. The institution helped pay “a portion of the debt which America owes to the people of the Mountains, and of pointing a way out and up to the youth who come under its influence.” His language reflected the general feelings of decades of missionaries to the region and borrowed from the mission of Berea College itself. Kincaid’s words both reinforced these ideas and provided a way to contend with them.

45 “A Close Up of the Mountaineers”
46 “A Close Up of the Mountaineers”
Through song performance and radio addresses like the one described above, Kincaid became a leading advocate for traditional music and for the Appalachian region. His itinerant lifestyle and local reception at his numerous stops along the way created a sense his music, and subsequently the image he fostered, carried weight for his audience. He both followed in the footsteps of others like him and set a general standard for what Appalachian advocacy might look like, especially as it tied to cultural ideas about the place. For many Americans, the introduction to the mountains came through knowledge of men like Kincaid and perhaps more importantly through their own advocacy of folk culture and mountain music in particular. Other radio programs worked to similar effect, painting a picture of mountain culture that derived much of its potency from folk imagery and a manufactured authenticity. None more so than the efforts by a contemporary who followed a similar career path to Kincaid in this “golden age” of radio, but operated more heavily from the production side. This introduction helped pave the way for traditional music sounds to be associated with the mountains and helped establish the themes that came to dominate bluegrass music and Appalachian culture in future decades.

John Lair was born just a few years and miles from Kincaid; less than 50 miles south on Dixie Highway from Garrard County and still in the foothills of the Appalachians. Lair came into the world in 1894, one-year prior to his contemporary. Like Kincaid, he served in World War I though he never ventured overseas. After the war, he joined the Great Migration and moved to Chicago where he took a job as an insurance agent. Lair traveled about the Northeast and Midwest as a claims
agent and medical director for the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. His arrival in the Windy City proved quite serendipitous. According to Lair, it was “quite by accident” that his transition to radio occurred.\textsuperscript{47} He began hearing a familiar hometown sound being broadcast on WLS and felt an opportunity to get some of his own songs on the radio. His artistic and dramatic pursuits were always his first passion, and he had finally found a new outlet for those urges. Lair was not a musician, but he had an active enthusiasm for music and folk culture and saw the radio as an opportunity to develop those interests in addition to making a little money. The big city was not so kind to him, as musicians and management at WLS initially rebuffed his efforts. Lair was not discouraged, however. He soon began to recruit talented individuals from his hometown and brought them to Chicago for auditions.\textsuperscript{48} He spent time at the station during the height of Kincaid’s popularity there and the two became friends who worked together sporadically for much of the rest of their careers.

In Chicago, Lair spent time as a talent recruit, manager, songwriter, and radio announcer. He contacted individuals from his hometown of Mount Vernon, Kentucky and promised them a career in radio if they could make it to Chicago.\textsuperscript{49} Lair eventually became the music director at WLS and an amateur music historian for the station. He penned a column on folksongs in the station’s official publication, \textit{Stand By!}\textsuperscript{50} By 1936, Lair had recruited nationally renowned talent in Red Foley and

\textsuperscript{47} John Lair Papers, Box 1, Interviews with Lair, April 30, 1974.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Pete Stamper, \textit{It Happened in Renfro Valley} (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky), 1999, 8.
the Coon Creek Girls, all of whom became fixtures on the WLS National Barn Dance. The popular acts also formed their own variety shows on the station. As a radio personality, Lair always emphasized his eastern Kentucky roots and began promoting the nostalgia and longing for a bygone past that would become staples of his Renfro Valley show. Typical songs included direct references to his roots including Lair’s own popular ballad “Take Me Back to Renfro Valley.”

In late 1936 Lair left WLS and took his recruited talent to Cincinnati to begin work as a radio promoter there. He always had his eye on a return to his roots in Renfro Valley, and he hoped Cincinnati would be a short layover on his trip home. While in Cincinnati, Lair sold to WLW the Renfro Valley Barn Dance, among other radio shows, complete with sponsors. The professionalization of music on country music radio shows was lacking at WLW, and Lair’s programs fulfilled a need in the Cincinnati area. The station came on the air a decade prior, a product of station owner Powel Crosley’s innovation and desire to sell his manufacturing company’s crystal radio set. Entrepreneur he was, he created both the radio product and the demand for the product through the ownership of the station. Cincinnati’s proximity to Kentucky brought it into regular contact with the official “South,” sometimes to the chagrin of city residents, but also provided a nearby market for country music programming. When Garner “Pop” Eckler debuted on the station in

---

52 The return to Renfro Valley was always on his mind and probably part of his plans from the beginning. When he brought individuals to Chicago or Cincinnati he often encouraged them to not sign contracts with the station itself and to work exclusively for him. There is some debate about the paternalism inherent in this practice, but a musician’s relationship with Lair was almost always on a personal basis. Many, like Lily May Ledford of the Coon Creek Girls, stayed with Lair for nearly their entire careers. Others, like Red Foley, felt hamstrung by Lair’s contract system and went on to achieve greater fame and fortune elsewhere.
the 1930s as a member of the Yodeling Twins, his show received over 37,000 pieces of fan mail in its first week. This all suggested that a market existed for the programming in and around the city. Perhaps recognizing this market, WLW leadership brought in individuals like Lair and George Biggar one year later. This country music venture in Cincinnati was otherwise “opportune” as WLW proclaimed itself the “nation’s station” with an unmatched 500,000 watt radio signal “so powerful you didn’t need a radio receiver to hear it.” The strong signal, and WLW’s membership in the NBC consortium, made acts on the program national stars or cemented status they first earned in Chicago. While this unrivaled power was not lasting, the broadcast reach of WLW was key to increasing the listenership of Lair’s programming. Lair’s music also led the charge to increase country music programming on the station. By the late 1930s WLW broadcast more than a dozen hours of country music a week. There was also some recognition of the role that southern migrants played in the increasing popularity of the country music programming.

Cincinnati, like Chicago, was an important destination for these migrants and WLW made an effort to reach the demand for the kind of programming that this new population sought. Lair, like Kincaid, relied on these migrants to pack the local events in addition to tuning in via radio. Another cause for the rise of country radio may have been the Great Depression that was still a chronic problem in urban and

53 Lessie Bailey, “’Hoe Down King' Sho' Can Sing!” *Rural Radio*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Feb 1939), 11. Bailey reports that the group lasted just one week on the station, partly due to Eckler’s failing voice at the time, though he did maintain a long career as an itinerant radio artist like Kincaid.

54 Dick Perry, *Not Just a Sound: The Story of WLW* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), 2. The “superpower” period of WLW’s history lasted from May of 1934 until the FCC discontinued its allowance in March of 1939. Lair was at WLW for the height of this period, and it was likely important in expanding his audience.
rural America. While the 1920s witnessed the official rise of predominately urban America and a new popular culture that promoted the freewheeling, party atmosphere that accompanied it, many believed that the Depression was a logical outcome of these changes. Programs like Lair's helped listeners to form “imagined but meaningful relationships with radio voices.” Nostalgia for a simpler past, even if it was fictive, grew during this era and helped to drive some of radio’s popularity. The romanticized, imaginary past was also central to Lair’s persona as a radio emcee. As a result of all of these factors, the audience for Lair’s programs began to expand.

On October 9, 1937 the Renfro Valley Barn Dance first hit the airwaves. Lair initially staged the show in historic Music Hall near downtown Cincinnati, but later moved north to Dayton, Ohio. All the while, the acts on the Barn Dance toured local theaters and schools where they sometimes earned as much as $5,000 for a single performance. By 1939, Lair estimated that more than half a million paying customers had attended the show. Even before his layover in southern Ohio, Lair began making plans for what would become the Renfro Valley complex. He squirreled away income from WLW and the Cincinnati area performances, and he borrowed additional funds for the construction of the iconic Renfro Valley barn. In November of 1939, Lair and his players moved to the real Renfro Valley in southeastern Kentucky. The site included the original barn, some cabins for lodging, and a local restaurant. To prove the veracity of the new site, Lair offered to send a

---


56 Williams, Staging Tradition, 51.
picture to his listeners displaying the location and makeup of his new residence. He estimated that over a quarter-million people responded. By the spring of 1940, a sensation was alive in the mountains as the place attracted crowds so large that “you couldn’t park a car” on the grounds.57

Lair’s programs took the messages that Kincaid had emphasized in his songs and radio addresses a step further. By moving his program to a fictive mountain hamlet, Lair added an additional layer of authenticity to his programming. In addition to the music, the grounds at Renfro Valley promised visitors a return to a rural past complete with buildings reminiscent of that setting. A rural post office, a school house modeled on one from Lair’s own childhood, a trading post, and other assorted log buildings.58 In addition, Lair moved beyond programming music rooted in ideas about rural life but also provided listeners with other slices of that culture. He broadcast shows from a live possum hunt, took listeners to a local creek to listen to the frogs, and even gave an intimate description of a quilt being made in a no doubt riveting hour of radio.59

Listeners responded to Lair’s work just as they did Kincaid. His appeal worked on those who had left the region and as an introduction to Appalachia and the mountains for others.60 Lair offered a version of mountain life that seemed

57 Lair interview, April 30, 1974, p. 11.
58 Williams, Staging Tradition, 74-76.
59 “Monday Night in Renfro Valley” Scripts, 24 Mar 1941 and 31 Mar 1941, JLP, SAA, Box 41, Folder 9. The Monday Night in Renfro Valley show showcased Lair’s innovative approach to radio which combined his rural setting with these broadcast novelties to make for very unusual radio programs. The program only lasted a short while, but showed the commitment to moving beyond just showcasing the region and people through music.
60 For further analysis of Lair’s impact on migrants and their responses to his programs see Nathan McGee, “If You Can’t Go Home Take Some of it With You: Twentieth Century Appalachian Migration
quaint to urban listeners and certainly rooted itself in popular conceptions about the region. He also followed many of the barn dance tropes including massive sing-alongs, a live show broadcast on Saturday nights, and players dressed in outfits that might seem typical to the area.61

When he moved the broadcast of his program to WHAS in Louisville shortly after taking the physical setup to Renfro Valley, Lair participated in a hearing regarding the station’s clear channel status. Lair recognized the importance his radio programs played as the number of urban residents increased steadily during his years on the air. His programs allowed rural folk to hold onto some of their history and values in an increasingly urban nation. John Lair had been affiliated with WHAS for five years in 1946 and was another example of some homegrown Kentucky talent that the station offered. Lair’s testimony was different in that he was neither a full-time WHAS employee nor an obvious advocate for the educational programming that was a staple of the station’s argument. In 1941 WHAS brought Lair’s programs “home” to Kentucky and aired them through their CBS network affiliation.62 The physical location of his broadcasts provided Lair with a unique perspective on the various effects that radio broadcasts could have on the life of current and former rural residents and the perceived impact of the traditional music on listeners. Many came to know Lair as the folksy host of his radio shows, but in his testimony he made some of the most prescient comments about the value of and the Music of Renfro Valley,” in Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, (Autumn 2014): 589-611.

61 Perhaps his most famous group, the Coon Creek Girls, almost always performed and appeared in promotional material in traditional gingham dresses while Lair had devised a fictional hometown of “Pinchem Tight Hollow” to add to their persona. While this was all highly fictive, it was important to the authenticity of the group and the way Lair promoted his performers and his show generally.

62 “Renfro Valley Comes to WHAS,” Broadcasting, 9 Jun 1941, 2.
radio and his programs to those living in rural Kentucky and rural America generally.

Lair saw his programs for their value in preserving the past and educating listeners about a few of its better aspects. The Renfro Valley project was a direct result of his “wish to keep alive the best of the very old songs and ballads as well as social customs of pioneer America.”63 This thinking was generally in line with the overall mission of WHAS in bringing attention to the cultural value of mountain residents, but Lair saw his project going even further. He explained how he had arrived in the world of radio broadcasting and interspersed in his remarks before the committee some thoughts on his own childhood in the Renfro Valley area. While Lair was in Chicago in the 1920s he found these connections to home. “I was struck with the fact that many people – in fact, most people – were tinged with a farm or small town background,” he recalled, “and I found that remembering the old days at home and the people they knew then afforded them their greatest pleasure.”64 Lair stated how he “noticed that every time an old song was sung it called up memories through its association with some person or place and I got the idea that music was as universal as language.”65 This nostalgic vision of the past had its roots in the demographic changes occurring in the United States at midcentury. As the country became urbanized at an unprecedented pace, the values many had associated with their own pasts became more important. Rural ways of life were disappearing

63 Testimony of John Lair, WHAS Clear Channel Hearing, WHAS Radio Listening Center Reference Collection, SAA, Box 2, B-1.
64 Testimony of John Lair, B-1
65 Testimony of John Lair, B-1
according to this vision, and work like Lair’s allowed a means for many to hang onto that past in another way.

For Lair, music was also a democratizing experience for the masses, and presenting folk music in his manner allowed everyday individuals access to music and culture that represented what he perceived as universal values. He went on to express that “[s]ociety has no right to call a thing music or decide it isn’t music if it is music to the individual. A man following the plow, a woman rocking a cradle, can hum over an old tune even if its (sic) off key and musically incorrect.”

Lair’s vision here further coincided with the overall goals of WHAS and its efforts to promote and bolster American understandings of mountain and rural culture. His programs were democratic, giving the people’s music back to the people in any form with which they might be familiar. His ideas also reflected popular notions about the music being “natural” and untainted by commercialism as it derived its spirit directly from the individuals performances. These became important conceptions of the sound of bluegrass over time as well. Furthermore, he described the relative popularity of his programs and the national attention afforded some of his acts. He boasted that, in less than ten years of work in Renfro Valley, visitors from every state in the union had attended shows and that even listeners from the “African desert” had written

---

66 Testimony of John Lair, B:2
67 Lair’s version of what constituted folk music, or the music of the people, often directly contradicted the more academic or accepted versions of folk as well. For a notable example see the description of Alan Lomax’s attendance at Lair’s Ohio Valley Folk Festival in 1938 described in Williams, *Staging Tradition*, 53-55. Lomax saw a major difference between “hillbilly” and “folk,” but like most definitions these were highly amorphous and tenuous at best.
him in appreciation of his programs.68 The surely boastful statement nonetheless showed the broad impact that his music and ideas had on listeners far and wide.

Lair said the music was just “bait to attract attention while we are putting in a few words about old-fashioned honesty and hard work and community spirit and things of that sort.”69 Lair’s motives were clearly about preserving the whole breadth of what he viewed as folk culture, and the music was the most commercially and emotionally viable means of accomplishing this task. According to Lair, the social mores, religious values, discipline, and lifestyles of the past were rapidly vanishing. His programs were a reminder to “present generations of what those before them had to contend with. We try to hold up to them the best phases of the American way of life.”70 He was actively preserving a way of life that no longer existed in reality and presenting it to listeners around the country. He was also aware of a broader impact, that his shows “drag in many an urban listener who finds himself remembering his own days on the farm and the simple, honest, loyal folks that used to make up every community where neighbor had to help neighbor or they both went under.”71 Here Lair established his most important view on the value of his programs. The nation was in conflict with itself as cities continued to attract more people and convert them from the simpler ways of life in the country. Implicit in his statement was the assumption that the rural way of life was the benchmark replete with the most important features of virtuous living. Rural inhabitants were “simple” and “honest,” values that were in direct opposition to the problems and

---

68 Testimony of John Lair, B-3
69 Testimony of John Lair, B-3
70 Testimony of John Lair, B-3.
71 Testimony of John Lair, B-4
vices long associated with life in urban areas. The programs attempted “to give the restless mountain kid a better conception of their homeland and their race” and to get “kids to stay at home and not go chasing off to the cities to grow up on a diet of juke box and tin pan alley pseudo musical culture.”

His remarks proved prescient in some regard though, especially as a generation born in the folk boom era grew up and came to embrace the old-time sounds that his radio broadcasts promoted. Rather than embracing the commercial music of the day, many of this subsequent generation came to embrace the old-time sounds that his radio show pioneered and transitioned this music into an urban art form as the bluegrass and old-time music repertoires became essential parts of the folk boom.

He closed his statement by remarking how “[t]here has been very little change in the mountain homes in the last ten years. In the more remote sections we can say that what change there has been is due to radio.” For rural listeners, radio provided access to the outside and redemption for their way of life through programs like Lair’s. He spoke for the “inarticulate” residents of Appalachia, who were “more dependent upon (radio) than any other people in America.” It was “up to radio to take to them what they should have.” His vision dovetailed nearly perfectly with the mission of WHAS in this regard, while simultaneously fitting in with his personal interests in preserving and portraying folk life. Programs like Lair’s also provided important avenues for spurring the interest in Appalachian

---

72 Testimony of John Lair, B-4.
73 Testimony of John Lair, B-4.
74 Testimony of John Lair B-5.
culture. And, as we shall see in chapter two, the growth of radio opened important opportunities for people to leave the region.

Lair’s shows were dynamic and capitalized on certain public understandings about what folk culture meant to the changing American demographic. He worked amid the growing folk boom in the United States, but to a great extent still operated outside of it as the “hillbilly” nature of his programs precluded access to the inner circles of those leading the folk revival. Lair’s interest went beyond the music and was still central to the feeling that many had of a “divided identity” during the era. He embraced the hillbilly image, while at the same time he worked actively against the negative stereotypes that image developed. Lair himself was the epitome of this sentiment and the feeling became one that all bluegrass artists struggled with as the music became more mainstream in later decades.

Lair and Kincaid both recognized that much of what they produced was certainly a fictive version of life in Appalachia. The authenticity came in their straightforward appeal even as their actions sometimes belied real traditions. Some listeners saw through this ruse, as a letter from a fan in Hamilton, Ohio attests. She wrote with some disgust about the way Kincaid presented himself to the local audience. She noted how many people that had settled in Hamilton had Kentucky roots and he owed “to each Kentuckian an apology for [his] dress on stage” for “people that come from the hills of Kentucky to see you and hear you sing went in the theater jubilant and came out heart broken.” Kincaid recognized the stereotypes in his appearance and thought enough of the criticism to respond with a letter.

---

where he remarked that his costuming represented “what theatre people everywhere demand” and epitomized “their conception of what the average mountain boy would look like.” Given personal choice, he would have worn a “nice new suit.”

Kincaid’s presentation may have been rooted in stereotypes on occasion and he also took some liberties with the authenticity of his music. A listener from Cleveland, Ohio was not unique in sending Kincaid some of his own work and hoping that Kincaid would purchase and play the song on the air, but was unique in that Kincaid accepted the song. The new ballad, “Maud Bryson,” became part of Kincaid’s repertoire for a time. He did not find the song in his traditional ballad collecting trips, but nonetheless used it because “it is the nearest to old-time mountain ballads of any of the new songs I have heard.”

The authenticity so central to his appeal relied mostly on presentation, as it would through the folk revival and emergence of bluegrass music, rather than actual roots in mountain, Southern, or Appalachian traditions.

Lair thrived on many of these same pretenses, including the very makeup of his Renfro Valley complex. While the idea of Renfro Valley existed firmly in Lair’s mind and in the minds of listeners, it did not become a real place until he invented it in the 1930s. For Lair though, as attested in his testimony on the importance of his place and his programming, the idea was what was most important. It mattered not that the trappings of his show were by and large a creation of his own mind, because much of what they professed had already come and gone in American history. His

---

76 Letter from Emma Akeman to Kincaid, 9 Apr 1931, BK, SAA, Box 2, Folder 2.
77 Letter from Bradley Kincaid to Arthur Thomas, 29 Mar 1945, BK, SAA, Box 3, Folder 7.
ability to foster a connection with listeners, bring people back home to the hills and introduce others to its music and culture, stood out as the most important features of the Renfro Valley programming.

Lair’s programs, in short, served as introductions to life in the hills of Kentucky and more broadly Appalachia. When listeners planned trips through the area, Lair’s descriptive prose often served as their guidebook. A family from Illinois wrote Lair after a trip to Renfro Valley with a happy note of the place’s ability to showcase the trappings of “older traditions” to their teenage son. For migrants who had left or other listeners who had never been to eastern Kentucky, Lair painted a picture for them that relied on the popular understanding of the region established a generation earlier and that he sought to create in reality in the construction of the community on the grounds.

Together, John Lair and Bradley Kincaid represented an important era in American musical history and one that laid the foundations for later understandings of country music, what it should look and sound like, and to whom it would appeal. While they both emphasized the rural roots of the music and at times bordered on caricatures of their home state and mountain region, the two served as important ambassadors for the music for thousands of listeners across the country. Both became swept up in the vast rural to urban migration of the era before World War II and recognized that since they were not alone in this movement, there was mass appeal to be had by bringing some of the past, even if it was fictive, with them along their respective journeys. These sorts of appeals stood the test of time in country

---

78 Mr. and Mrs. Arlin Crampton to John Lair, October 6, 1951, Box 73, JLP, SAA. For more examples of this connection see McGee, “If You Can’t Go Home.”
music and became an important hallmark of bluegrass when it emerged as an official genre after 1945. This urban connection provided by their respective radio programs figured mightily in the music’s creation.

Late in life, Kincaid and Lair sat down for an interview with folk scholar Loyal Jones and talked about their contributions to the folk and country music scenes. At the time of the interview, in 1971, the folk revival was on its last legs, but bluegrass music maintained a steady and perhaps growing interest because of a burgeoning festival scene. Lair and Kincaid noted that the folk revival did not represent true folk music, for them, because folk music required the passage of time before it could join the official canon. They also rejected some of the urban nature of the later revival, despite the importance that cities had played in their own success. Lair argued “these kids in Chicago and New York now that are writing what they say are folk songs, you, you can’t do that, you can’t turn them out that quick.” Jones asked Lair and Kincaid what they thought about this music and its contribution to the genre that they had helped pioneer. Lair saw bluegrass music as “nothing in the world but the old band, old mountain band: the fiddle, banjo and guitar.” While he may have underestimated some of its dynamics, he saw the same familiar sound, and just more importantly the same familiar tunes, in the relatively new genre. Kincaid, just as presciently, noted how music of the past always comes back around as he had built a career doing precisely just that. Bluegrass, to him, was a trend and like all musical trends he asked, they “seem to go in cycles, don’t they?”

79 John Lair and Bradley Kincaid interview by Loyal Jones, 20 Nov 1971, BK, SAA, Box 1, Folder 9.
80 John Lair and Bradley Kincaid interview by Loyal Jones, 20 Nov 1971, Bradley Kincaid Collection, SAA, Box 1, Folder 9.
Chapter Two: 'Worse Than Being Hungry:' The Hillbilly Stereotype and Migrant Communities

I'm going down this road feeling bad, lord, lord
And I ain't a-gonna be treated this a-way

- “Lonesome Road Blues” (traditional, 1924)

Ernest Stoneman garnered moderate celebrity from the release of his ballad, “The Titanic,” in 1924. The song followed in the long tradition of early country music tragedy ballads and included the popular refrain “it was sad when that great ship went down.” While his hit did not borrow from the most contemporary of catastrophe examples, the song proved relatively popular. His limited fame followed in the wake of interest in this Southern music made by the barn dance radio programs and national stars like Bradley Kincaid. The upswing in the cyclical nature folk music interest did not prove as fruitful for Stoneman on his first foray into the genre. While he continued to play, and violated his record contract by working for as many labels as possible, he maintained employment as a carpenter on the side to make a living. The Depression furthered his and his family’s struggles and in 1932 he made the fateful decision to leave Galax, Virginia for the hope of a better life in Washington, D.C.

One of Stoneman’s daughters, Grace, recalled the persecution she faced when she attended school for the first time in her adopted city in the 1930s. “Fourteen in the fourth grade,” she recounted, “I was the most uncomfortable, self-conscious person in school. I did not have suitable clothes, was made fun of, called ‘hillbilly,’ told to get the hayseed out of my hair…I think that hurt me worse than being
hungry.”\textsuperscript{81} Her father’s limited notoriety as a popular singer did not save Grace from the persecution that proved so common for migrants as they left the South and settled in cities like Washington. The Stonemans moved about the Washington area in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and the family recalled petitions being circulated in their neighborhood that attempted to kick them out.\textsuperscript{82} The ramshackle house, built by hand by Stoneman, and the large number of children affirmed the worst aspects of mountain culture. Typical images of Appalachians had a long history, dating back to at least the late-19th century and the descriptions cast by local color writers and journalists like John Fox, Jr. A lack of education, ignorance of modern technology and advances, abject poverty, a violent disposition, and isolation proved to be among the tropes with the most staying power. In short, William Goodell Frost’s depiction of Appalachians as full of America’s “contemporary ancestors” remained a portrayal that proved all but impossible to escape.\textsuperscript{83} While the music of the Stonemans and their like gained popularity in the early 20th century, many individuals objected to these new urban residents because of these old depictions of the population. The stereotypes gained additional power as well, as migrants became the scapegoat for myriad problems brought on by the interwar migration and this persecution picked up steam as the war economy brought thousands more people to fill factory jobs. The dulcet tones that had made Kincaid and Lair so popular on the airwaves did not translate to a welcome presence when migrants physically settled in next door to their urban fans.

\textsuperscript{82} Tribe, 114.
\textsuperscript{83} Frost, “Our Contemporary Ancestors”
Bradley Kincaid’s apt note about the cyclical nature of folk music interest proved perceptive at the time he said it and in the development of the bluegrass sound generally. The Great Migration brought thousands of blacks and whites to northern cities, and the trend renewed interest in folk music while it concurrently resulted in signs of reaction against migrants. For all the work that people like Kincaid and John Lair did to dispel certain myths about the hillbilly stereotypes, they also leaned into them in their shows in various ways. When individuals from the South began showing up in northern cities in greater numbers, a backlash ensued. As the protagonist of the traditional song and bluegrass staple “Lonesome Road Blues,” lamented, the road made travelers weary and urban reactions to migrants no doubt exacerbated some of these weary feelings. City residents had fears rooted in long-term stereotypes but possibly exacerbated by the growth of the hillbilly comic fool trope that became key part of Barn Dance radio and traveling show acts. It was one thing to hear the music over the radio but quite another to have individuals moving in next door. Much of the mythology of bluegrass places the musical development as something firmly planted in the nostalgia of the mountains, but the reality is that the music was created out of this vast urban migration that began in the 1920s and picked up steam with the labor demands and the crucible of World War II.

This wartime migration proved exceptionally important to the development of bluegrass music generally and the creation of an awareness of problems that

---

84 Anthony Harkins notes that John Lair in particular may have been the most influential radio personality in explicitly tying country music to the mountains. See Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 81-83.
accompanied migrants and the Appalachian region generally. The physical presence of these migrants in cities like Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Cincinnati led city leadership to deal with the perceived migration problem in earnest. The reactions, however, manifested themselves in diverse ways. For some, this meant a negative response to an unwashed and uncultured mass that plagued relief rolls and brought filth to the city. For city residents, this often amounted to a case of “narcissism of small differences.” Urban citizens recognized the worst of themselves and their environment in Appalachian migrants and the backlash increased as a result of this belief and the need to place the blame for urban troubles upon someone. For others, it meant the development of preliminary advocacy organizations aimed at the perceived problem of migration. The persecution also contributed to the formation of group solidarity. As mountain migrants came to be defined as outsiders with certain attributes, almost all of them negative, their solidarity as a community grew in predictable ways. This included, in part, an embrace of the loaded “hillbilly” term, if not all of its iconography. Cultural concerns about the city and the migrants cut across the whole of this great transition. Reformers saw the potential of redeeming the migrants through “cultural” approaches that attempted to convince them to

---

86 Sigmund Freud, “The Taboo of Virginity,” 1917. Emily Satterwhite, “Imagining Home, Nation, World: Appalachia on the Mall” in Journal of American Folklore Vol. 121, 47 (Winter 2008): 10-34. Henry Shapiro, Appalachia on Our Minds, Nina Silber, “What Does America Need So Much as Americans?: Race and Northern Reconciliation with Southern Appalachia, 1870-1900.” In Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation, edited by John Inscoe, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001): 245-258. This notion is a key feature of Appalachian history generally. With its “discovery” in the post-Civil War era, writers and thinkers viewed the region and its people as backwards or rooted in the past. Scholars have argued elsewhere how this had a mixed effect on perception of Appalachia generally. The otherness redeemed the people for the steadfast way they held onto core American values of individualism and the pioneer spirit quite literally seen in what was viewed as a primitive lifestyle. Nearly concurrently, however, a belief developed on the need to modernize the mountaineers through economic and spiritual uplift. Urban Americans used Appalachia as a foil to explain American history in contexts best suited to the times and the needs, emphasizing difference and sameness when appropriate.
abandon what they had left behind. Migrants themselves attempted, on a limited basis, to recreate some of their past in their new neighborhoods, though urban reformers relied on tired stereotypes and generalizations about the population in crafting reform ideas. Through it all, some sounds of the South permeated these new environs and proved important in crafting the physical and spiritual elements of bluegrass music.

The backlash evident in these cities manifested itself in various ways. Newspaper searches in online databases reveal a stark uptick in the use of the term “hillbilly” in their coverage in the years before World War II. For the Baltimore Sun, the term made just three appearances in the entire decade of the 1920s. As migration numbers ticked upwards, however, the use of the term followed along. In the 1930s, the usage increased exponentially to 229 separate occurrences with nearly three-quarters of those occurring in the final two years of the decade. By the 1940s, the term began to appear in the paper on a daily basis, with 848 discrete uses of the word.87 In the Washington Post a similar pattern emerged with only three uses of the word in the 1920s before rising to 265 in the 1930s and 661 appearances in the 1940s.88 In both papers, a slight uptick occurred in the 1950s, before a downward trend in the next decade despite the popular introduction of the hillbilly figure on television and in movies at that time.

87 Data taken from a newspaper database search in proquest for the Baltimore Sun conducted 12 October 2015. The methodology is not without its flaws as it relies on optical character recognition software developed by the digitizing companies to produce these results. The trends, however, are so stark that the stark relief in the numbers overshadows any omissions or false positives from the general searches.

88 Data taken from a newspaper database search in proquest for the Washington post conducted 10 December 2015.
Taken independently, one might guess that “hillbilly” came into common usage in the late 1930s as part of the general lexicon. The term, however, predates that time by a number of decades and had some general use by the turn of the 20th century. Its ubiquity then can be seen as an accompaniment to the general demographic changes that occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s as the wartime economy picked up speed and these cities became important destinations for individuals who fit the “hillbilly” stereotype. The term is certainly loaded with connotations and meaning and part of its increased usage occurred because of the increase in hillbilly music as a term generally. Anthony Harkins notes how the term has held double meaning for insider and outsider groups, but the its usage increased as Americans began to conceive people from the mountains as “simultaneously menacing threats and backward clowns.”89 At the same time men like John Lair, Bradley Kincaid, and even Ernest Stoneman embraced the cultural and commercial cache of the term while they may have disparaged its usage in plain language. The increase in its presence in the newspapers at the time, however, generally reflects these trends.

The use of the term “hillbilly” figures centrally in individual migrant memories of the time period as well, not just for the Stonemans. Prior to World War II, many urbanites characterized southern migrants using the stereotypes associated with migrants generally. Appalachian migrants were not unique in this difference; viewed as lazy, job stealers, practicing strange religions, backwards, and practicing unique outside cultural habits that would not mesh with more urbane

89 Harkins, Hillbilly, 64.
society. Historians have further noted its ubiquity within the migrant experience. Chad Berry's extensive interviews with migrants reveal a typical pattern in the migration process. Migrants made the extremely difficult decision to leave home, found discrimination in their new northern environs and gradually became accepted. The acceptance came over generations, however, and took time. Even during the height of World War II, when demand for labor often meant active recruiting of Southerners to fill open factory jobs, the backlash still remained apparent.90

Some migrants in Baltimore recalled the experience in the Hampden neighborhood, in the northern part of the city, where work in the various flour and cotton mills provided jobs to migrant labor. Mill workers sometimes resented the newcomers for taking jobs in the mills that long time residents coveted. On occasion, the discrimination could be more direct. Mary Hall Proctor came to Baltimore from Warrenton, Virginia at the end of World War I, during the tail end of the Spanish influenza epidemic that plagued the country. Mary recalled sneaking into an onion patch late one night, using the colloquial and homeopathic farmers' knowledge and eating raw onions to stave off infection. She never fell ill.91

She did not, however, possess a folk remedy for her own unpopular rural condition to ward against the city and neighborhood residents. Mary felt the general backlash that accompanied many people like her to Baltimore. She recounted, “when I got here to Baltimore they did talk about and knock the Virginia

90 See Chad Berry, Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), particularly pp. 82-101 on wartime migration.
91 Mary Hall Proctor interview with Bill Harvey, Langsdale Library (LL), Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project (BNHP) Collection, Box 2, Series II, no. 70, 18 Apr 1979.
people. They called them hillbillies and I didn’t know what they were talking about at first. I asked somebody. I said, ‘what’s a hillbilly?’ I heard some awful mistreatment of people...they cussed them and called them all kinds of names with them and in arguments.”

Her memories dovetail with the anecdotal notes about the usage of the term, which she apparently had not heard prior to her arrival, as well as its rise accompanied the transition of people like Mary into American cities. The treatment the Stonemans and the friends and family of Mary Hall Proctor received was by no means unique and created a potentially explosive situation in many cities around the country.

Carrie Bowers had a similar experience in the Hampden mills. She came from a long line of mill workers; her family had been employed in the area for generations, but noticed how life changed for some with the influx of new individuals from the South. She recalled, “some of these real old hands, they wanted to run they place so they’d have a lot to say [about migrants].” For Carrie, their language echoed the typical objections to migrants in new places. She remembered conversations where people would “find faults, you know? Why did they come here and work for us, why don’t they stay where they belong? Things like that.”

Critics like Carrie’s coworkers bemoaned the loss of jobs to the newcomers, and especially objected to the lifestyle of their new neighbors.

For some in Baltimore, the new war workers all fell under the umbrella of “hillbilly” whatever their origins. In the late 1930s, the city of Baltimore took up a

---

92 Mary Hall Proctor Interview with Bill Harvey.
93 Carrie Bowers interview with Susan Hawes, 22 Aug 1979, LL, BNHP Collection, Box 3, Series 2, no. 137.
bill that required three-year residence in the city before individuals or families
could apply for relief money.\textsuperscript{94} Chad Berry documented the typicality kind of
practice in the Midwest as a response to the numbers of migrants in the Depression
Era.\textsuperscript{95} A New Yorker wrote to the paper critical of this practice and felt it lumped
him, and others, in with “undesirable” hillbillies looking for a free ride in the city. H.
Palmer Richardson recounted his credentials as a New York homeowner who
“moved in good social circles” and maintained membership in the Sons of the
American Revolution, which proved his patriotic bonafides. The problem, he noted,
was simply that “the people of Baltimore considered me only as a war worker...a
hillbilly—an undesirable individual who is not good enough to rent an apartment in
a good section of town.”\textsuperscript{96} As a war worker, Richardson claimed he suffered the
same discrimination on the street and in his searches for housing that a typical
“hillbilly” would have experienced. While Mr. Richardson objected to the
characterization of \textit{himself} as part of the hillbilly contingent in the city, he did not
openly object to the characterization generally insomuch as it inflicted self-harm.
The stereotype was too hard to overcome outright.

The stories were part of a general trend in Baltimore that became so
apparent before American entry into the war. Residents of the city went so far as to
use hillbilly imagery and labels to advocate against the influx of southern labor
directly. Historian Kenneth Durr notes how prior to the war, amidst the Depression
naturally, union workers used flyers that “condemned ‘plow jockeys and bean-

\textsuperscript{94} “Relief Residence Issue Up to Council,” \textit{Baltimore Evening Sun}, 14 Jun 1939, 5.
\textsuperscript{95} Berry, \textit{Southern Migrants}, 50-52.
\textsuperscript{96} “A War Worker, Who is Neither A Marylander Nor A Hillbilly, Offers A Comment,” \textit{Baltimore
Evening Sun}, 4 Apr 1943, 14.
pickers’ willing to toil for low wages.” The objections mirrored centuries-old complaints about migrants generally. Baltimoreans also noted how parts of the city had become a “Kentucky colony.” Louis Azrael, a long time reporter in the city, ventured into some of these residences in 1941 in a long profile of the new and apparently strange population. Azrael identified the population occupying neighborhoods near South Charles Street, just west of the inner harbor, but in reality the pocket he found there was simply part of a larger trend across the city. A walk through this neighborhood, according to Azrael, took you to place that “you don’t associate with Baltimore.” Storefront houses, dilapidated furniture, “children in vast numbers, and the women you’d expect to find in crude cabins in the mountains” occupied much of the space.

Azrael identified push and pull factors that brought these “mountaineers” to the Charm City. Declining work availability in the mines played a role, but most were enticed northward by newspaper advertisements that promised jobs. In five homes in the area, he counted “well over 100 persons” claiming residence there and landlords who had to teach the residents how to live properly in the city. On each floor of one house, signs read “Don’t throw garbage into the sink” and occasionally other residents and police had to instruct migrants to “dress with urban modesty.” Nearly every room had been converted into a dual-purpose bedroom. The crowded nature of the area was emblematic of the city generally and provided the greatest

---

overall criticism of the migrants. The other problems mentioned followed some of the traditional stereotypes related to the “hillbilly” motif.

The federal government recognized the potential crisis that the mass migration to American cities might mean. In 1941, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) conducted surveys around the country in an attempt to garner information about wartime migration; who was coming to these cities, and the destinations’ ability to cope with the population influx. The results lent weight to the individual migrant experience and that the same time revealed a few surprises in the numbers and types of people moving around the country.

In September 1941, the WPA survey found about 16,000 workers had come to Baltimore County in just the past year in search of employment, with nearly one-third of that population coming from rural places. While the workers recognized a broad pattern of interurban migration, particularly from the nearby cities of New York and Philadelphia, by far more people came from the surrounding rural hinterlands. Roughly one-third of the people that came to the city also came unemployed or from the agricultural sector showing both the continued grips of the Depression and the rural nature of the new arrivals. Over half of the arrivals were single men as well, who as other historians have noted, likely viewed their stay in Baltimore as temporary.

WPA surveys for other cities found similar patterns of migration. In Washington, D.C., 36,000 families arrived during the wartime crunch for

---

99 Works Progress Administration Memo, “Recent Migration into Baltimore, Maryland,” 14 Nov 1941, 1, Langsdale Library, Maryland Council of Churches Collection, Series I, Box 33. For the purposes of the survey, the conductors defined a rural place as having less than 2,500 people.

100 Chad Berry, Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles. James Gregory, The Southern Diaspora
employment, though only 15% of the population came from a rural environment.\textsuperscript{101} They also did not possess the same agricultural backgrounds and the WPA report reflected the disparate nature of migrants. Workers noted, “both before and after migration, Washington migrants were engaged predominately in white-collar occupations. There were few craftsmen or operatives among the migrants and the number of unskilled workers was exceptionally small.”\textsuperscript{102} This pattern continued through the later decades and had a strong influence over the type of musical culture that developed in the city, especially as it related to bluegrass and country music preferences. The pattern reflected the demand for labor as well. Baltimore provided more opportunities for lower skilled jobs, so it came as no surprise that the numbers reflected this pattern.

In Cincinnati, the analysis of migrants went beyond statistical compilations of the newcomers. The new migrants presented a real possibility of a racial conflict according to city leaders. When Detroit erupted in a race riot in 1943, urban leaders around the country were quick to find ways to prevent the potentially volatile situation from replicating itself in their own backyards. Queen City leadership saw white southern migrants as a new potential source of racial trouble. Municipal officials and others formed the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Commission (MFRC) in late 1943 in an effort to prevent incidents like Detroit from occurring there. The organization recognized the potential for disaster in the city as new cultural groups mixed in greater numbers. They viewed Cincinnati as “a border city with a slightly larger percentage of Negro population than the national average; housing conditions

\textsuperscript{101} WPA Memo, “Recent Migration to Washington, D.C.,” 5 January 1942, 1, LL, MCC, Series I, Box 33, 102 Ibid., 3.
among the poorest in the country; a growing migration of workers from the rural areas of the South, molded in the Southern pattern of segregation.”\textsuperscript{103} Despite later evidence to the contrary, Cincinnatians and others imagined that the influx of white southerners, with their supposed racist proclivities and backgrounds, amid a growing black population meant almost inevitable racial clashes.\textsuperscript{104}

The WPA studies also identified the racial composition of the city migrants. Roughly ten percent, on average, of the migrants to Baltimore and Washington D.C. were black and the numbers reflected the demographic origins of the migrants rather than the racial composition of where they settled.\textsuperscript{105} The demographic composition of the migrants also reflected the general racial attitudes of the nation and the areas in which migrants settled. City residents and Northerners considered Southern white migrants southern first and white second while they identified black migrants racially first. Historian James Gregory notes, however, how the associations with backwardness, maladjustment to Northern and urban norms, and associations with being “dangerous” figured prominently in popular conceptions of migrants of both races.\textsuperscript{106} The “hillbilly” image, however, remained predominately a white stereotype despite some of the occasional crossover in the general attitude towards migrants of both races.

\textsuperscript{103} Janet Smith, “The First Five Years of the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Committee,” 1, Cincinnati Human Relations Commission Records (CHRC), US-15-01, Box 10, Folder 1, Archives and Rare Books Library (ARB), University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1. For more on the experience of white southern migrants and the relationship to racial animosity see James Gregory, \textit{The Southern Diaspora}, 283-320.


\textsuperscript{105} The WPA surveys found blacks constituted 11% of migrants to Baltimore and 7% of migrants to Washington D.C. By this time, blacks already constituted roughly one-fifth of the Baltimore population and over one-quarter of the population in Washington D.C.

\textsuperscript{106} Gregory, \textit{The Southern Diaspora}, 72-77.
In Cincinnati, the MFRC tasked themselves with generally trying to resolve racial issues before they arose. The group incorporated a number of religious, political and business leaders under its umbrella as they worked, as the name suggests, directly under the auspices of the Mayor and in an office within City Hall. Subcommittees within the group attempted to deal with the major issues of housing and jobs and tried to work towards integration within the workforce and to ensure adequate housing stock for the various populations in the city. To promote the positive industrial relations in the city, the organization surveyed businesses that had integrated workforces and published a pamphlet titled “They Do Work Together in Cincinnati.” MFRC subsequently distributed this pamphlet to other businesses and industry leaders in the city to show the possibility of integration.\(^\text{107}\) Education workers within the organization promoted a series of films on race relations and pressed school principals to “re-emphasize intercultural relations in the classroom” and even successfully pushed to have the first fully integrated school in the city in 1948.\(^\text{108}\) When an association named the Southern Guild attempted to organize white southern migrants within the city, MFRC quickly investigated the group and with the help of police, ceased its operations.\(^\text{109}\) MFRC also pressed the athletic

---

\(^{107}\) Janet Smith, “The First Five Years,” 7.

\(^{108}\) Janet Smith, “The First Five Years,” 8, 11.

\(^{109}\) “New Organization for Southerners Launched in City” Cincinnatian Enquirer (CE), 7 Jun 1945, 2. “Southern Guild in Drive for 30,000 Membership,” CE, 8 Jun 1945, 10. Janet Smith, “The First Five Years,” 9. The organization promoted itself as a migrant aid society, but given the timing and the already present racial tensions within the city and country generally the city could not risk a racialized group existing. The racial elements were also openly present within the organization, but its Southern nature was part of a pattern of blaming that region for the city’s racial problems while downplaying already present issues.
department at the University of Cincinnati to cease scheduling games with southern schools in which black athletes were expected to not compete.110

While Civil Rights and municipal societies viewed the creation of MFRC as an extremely progressive step for a city, the language of their organization implicitly placed the potential for blame on the shoulders of the thousands of southern migrants who came to the city. In many instances these policies did have an effect of pushing back against racially prejudiced practices, they also singled out “the South” as the sole source, or at least as the greatest contributor, to racial tension in the city. The implied placement of blame constituted part of a pattern of blaming these newcomers for racial, and other urban problems, which continued over the next decades. MFRC did help weather a turbulent period in the mid-1940s, even taking credit for stopping a potential riot in 1946. Postwar, a belief among many developed that migrants, black and white, might return home and the tension overall could be eased without further intervention.

Contrary to expectations of cities and many migrants, however, the flow of people out of the South did not stop with the end of the war and neither did the discrimination. In fact, after World War II migrants began leaving the mountains and the South in even greater numbers while the attitudes of city dwellers changed little and perhaps worsened. Cities grappled with these changes in unique ways. Almost universally, however, officials adopted a cultural approach to working with migrants as they attempted to better integrate them into the city. The general suggestion, developed by leading sociologists, academics, and civic leaders centered

---

on the idea that if urban reformers could just help migrants culturally adjust and change their general social mores, their transition to proper urban life could be handled more easily.\textsuperscript{111}

In Dayton, just north of Cincinnati, these overt fears did not follow the Miami River upstream but the city did recognize the potential problems migrants might pose. In early 1959, the Community Welfare Council in the city developed a committee to investigate the problems of “dependency, delinquency, and illiteracy” among its new Appalachian citizens.\textsuperscript{112} This committee development was an outgrowth of their participation in the workshops offered in Berea, Kentucky and attended by city leaders around the country. Unsurprisingly, representatives of those cities in attendance also pushed to develop a communications network to exchange information about problems and approaches to the migrant issues. The broader committees hoped to assemble documents that both explained life in these Northern cities and outlined what migrants might need in order to be adequately prepared for life there. In 1961, the Council of the Southern Mountains compiled a document that stressed what “papers” migrants needed to bring with them as they prepared their move. The list of fifteen important documents included basics like birth and marriage certificates, vaccination records, school records of children, and

\textsuperscript{111}A litany of service organizations and studies regarding Southern outmigration emerged in the years after World War II. Most importantly, the Council of the Southern Mountains commissioned numerous studies and devoted additional resources to examining the problems that led to migration and commissioned other workshops and group events discussed later in this piece. It should be noted that nearly all of these studies and workshops began from the position that migrants needed and were entitled to help with adjustment to their new surroundings. See Chad Berry, \textit{Southern Migrants}, 180-186.\textsuperscript{112} William A. Heck, “City Moves Ahead on Three Fronts to Aid Migrants, \textit{Dayton Journal Herald (DJH)}, 12 Jan 1959.
social security cards and a reminder to not "move to the city until you have these papers. It is hard to get them by mail."\textsuperscript{113}

The document adopted an almost condescending tone, certainly by modern standards and likely at the time, suggesting some of the same general sentiments of degradation that Appalachian migrants might have heard in the urban newspapers and rhetoric of the time. The CSM document went even a step further, openly engaging with the violent stereotypes of migrants by pointing out the illegality of deadly weapons in most of these new cities and states. The list of items not to bring is therefore telling. "You cannot carry shot guns, rifled guns, revolvers, pistols, daggers, straight-edged razors, knucks, black jacks or switch blade knives."\textsuperscript{114} The list is a litany of items possibly associated with a gun and hunting culture, but also suggesting weapons more associated with street gangs and violence of an illicit nature. The stereotypes and fears expressed by urban leadership were confirmed in this outreach document and likely not lost on its recipients either.

Baltimore engaged in an all-encompassing approach in dealing with its migrant population. In the late 1950s, the Citizens’ Planning and Housing Authority (CPHA) began investigations into problems created by southern migrants in particular. CPHA held workshops in the city to help social workers, educators, and city officials deal with the unique problems that Southerners and more specifically “mountaineers” presented to their community. These workshops provide a window into some of the general thinking in Baltimore about how to deal with the perceived

\textsuperscript{113} Council of the Southern Mountains, “Thinking of Moving to the City,” Urban Appalachian Council (UAC) Collection, SAA, Box 1, Folder 1.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
migrant crisis and the role that culture played in helping the transition of these newcomers.

In 1957, CPHA’s workshop addressed “The New Urbanites’ Challenge to Education.” Ward Porter, a trained sociologist specializing in rural America, played the role of expert in this discussion based on his eight years spent in the mountains of West Virginia studying the lives of residents. Porter, surprisingly, had an approach to the problem that was more far reaching that what would come later and what cities generally implemented. Porter expressed a degree of respect for the complicated nature of Appalachia not often found during this era and certainly avoided placing the sole onus of blame on the shoulders of mountain migrants. Though he was asked to the meeting to address the problems presented by rural migrants, he admitted that the very nature of the subject required “a degree of generalization that is extremely difficult in view of the heterogeneity of the group in question.” Porter noted how unlike in earlier eras, “the stereotype of the ‘mountaineer’ is much less of an approximation of reality than many of us realize.”

He gave a broad history of the region with special attention to the changes wrought by industrialization and a declining coal industry and emphasized the role mechanization had in the declining job availability in Appalachia. He also moved beyond the stereotype of Appalachians as feuding Scotch-Irish descendants and noted the importance of various ethnic groups, even African-Americans and European immigrants, in developing the region’s culture.

---

Despite the nuanced address at the start of the workshop, Porter still bought into the problems raised by the cultural attributes common to the mountain region. He noted the “rugged individualism of the mountaineer,” their intense family loyalties best expressed through feuds, and the “lack of leadership skills” among the population as key characteristics that inhibited Appalachian development in the city.\footnote{Ibid., 3} He explained how formal education had low prestige in the mountains, echoing the long historical concern about the appeals of culture expressed by a seeing “Paree” for the first time.\footnote{The popular World War I era song, “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Paree)” captured the hearts and minds of many listeners and became a metaphor for the Great Migration in some respects. Whether or not the music was cause or effect of this transition is certainly up for debate, but much of the discussion about rural population loss over the subsequent decades followed the same general model expressed in the tune. The farmer’s lament in the subsequent quote certainly follows this example.} A farmer from Tennessee, quoted by Porter, bemoaned, “after the school has taught ‘em all it know, they ain’t fittin’ for nothin’ any more. You couldn’t git one of ‘em in twenty feet of a plow.”\footnote{Ward Porter, “The New Urbanites’ Challenge,” 4} This quote, expressing a common lament, likely played to the teachers in the workshop audience and helped to culturally explain attendance and learning gaps compared to other traditional urban students. The recorded stylistic elements of the farmer’s speech patterns also probably helped give the quote a sense of realism to the audience in attendance at the meeting. To Porter, the educational gaps tied directly into health concerns found in Appalachia. The lack of doctors and adequate health facilities in the mountains represented the “major deterrent to good health practices” and the major cause of “defective teeth and malnutrition.” Furthermore, in perhaps an anticipation of Jack Weller who would make this trait so synonymous
with the Appalachian people, Porter noted the “common tendency to accept illness with an air of resignation.”

For Porter, all of these negative attributes were culturally determined by the historic and “natural” isolation of the mountain people. This helped lead to a deep-seated individualism that amounted to a “less sophisticated approach to interpersonal relations than that of the urbanite.” How exactly urban Baltimoreans expressed this sophistication is unclear, but the demeaning nature used to describe the new residents would seem to decidedly not be part of the expression Porter meant here. The major inhibition to proper integration presented, however, centered on the provincial outlook of Appalachians and their “deep-seated love of homeland.” According to popular thought at the time, Appalachians, by and large, viewed their stay in the city as temporary and as a result would never fully transition into the urban fabric until they truly began to see cities like Baltimore as home.

While Porter reflected some of the nuance of the Appalachian struggle for assimilation, CPHA and other organizations quickly abandoned this for a doubling down on the typical migrant aid approach. Later lectures and events in the series resorted to far more stereotypical approaches. A 1958 workshop on “The New Urbanite” organized by CPHA argued that illiteracy and ignoring “modern methods of sanitation such as bathtubs, toilets, and garbage cans” had become the most

---

119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
“recurrent” problems among the migrants.121 The workshop still offered a rebuke to Baltimoreans, however, in reiterating Porter’s point that one of the largest challenges came from new residents simply being “overwhelmed by the hostility of the older residents” towards their language, cultural habits, and lack of education.122

Migrants offered a potential scapegoat to the innumerable problems facing Baltimore in the aftermath of World War II. The housing crunch that led to the development of slum-like conditions within the city before the war continued through the next decades. City officials, in addition to addressing the migrant problem on a personal and cultural level, hoped that the panacea of urban renewal would offer additional relief to the city’s ills. Baltimore officials established a housing court at the end of the war to address these issues and under these auspices, and with the help of CPHA, they attempted to find solutions to the housing issues. The group noted “of the seven largest cities of the United States, Baltimore has the largest percentage of dwelling units needing major repairs, has the largest percentage of shared toilets, and has the highest tuberculosis rate among the ten largest cities.”123 The situation reached a full-blown crisis with the words of an unnamed sociologist who noted, “I have never seen such concentrated and such extensive slums. In many ways this experience seems to overshadow my visits in the slums of Central Europe, London, or Birmingham, as well as my personal experience as a settlement worker in New York and Chicago.”124

121 CPHA and the New Urbanite, June 1958, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Migrant Labor Folder, Vertical Files.
122 Ibid., 2
124 Ibid.
rhetoric left no doubt about the extent of the housing crisis with references to the industrial revolution and allusions of the paupers and grime of stories by Charles Dickens.

Dayton, Ohio directly enlisted the help of the CSM in solving its housing problems. In 1968, the city moved to apply for federal funding to construct a migrant “halfway house.” The complex proposed to combine housing, social services, and other accommodations in a plan described as unique in the country and in many ways a throwback to the migrant aid settlement houses of the early twentieth century. The plans, however, never came to fruition amid internal debate about the viability of the complex. Industrial backers, initially interested because of the prospects of combining housing with employment opportunities, retreated from the plans because of funding requirements. Concerns about the culture of the migrants, particularly in regards to their overly transient nature, also contributed to the failure of the plan.126

The local newspapers also conducted a survey of the situation in the mid-1950s. The editors concluded slums were perhaps an “inevitable” part of urban development “as old as poverty and sloth.” While they did not blame any person or persons outright, the language reflected some of the coded words used to describe migrant groups. “Shifting populations. Selfish, careless landlords. Shiftless, irresponsible tenants. Human frailties. Ignorance...the catalogue is thick,” the editorial board noted.127 Readers likely did not have to make too far of an

125 Ann Heller, “Housing for Migrants Could Start This Summer,” DJH, 3 Apr 1968.
127 BS, 12 September 1954.
intellectual leap to know on whom to place the blame for the housing situation in Baltimore.

In Cincinnati, housing issues manifested themselves in similar ways. City leadership, as in Baltimore, viewed slum clearance as a development strategy for urban renewal though lawsuits and World War II impeded this strategy from fully developing until the 1950s. By the 1950s, the city attempted a more all-encompassing approach that dealt with the individual needs of the disparate groups that had settled in the city. A conference in 1954, organized under the auspices of the MFRC sought to develop a comprehensive approach for dealing with the issues the migrant population presented. To head the commission, MFRC and the social services agencies involved noted academic Roscoe Giffin. Giffin worked as a sociology professor at Berea College and lent the proceedings an air of respectability and authenticity that might not have been present without an expert from within the field. Giffin largely created the idea of the urban Appalachian as a population subgroup in his work and visited numerous cities during his career as he helped areas grapple with the migrant crisis. He earned his Ph.D. in economics at the University of Illinois in the 1940s and taught sociology in an academic setting, first at the University of Arkansas and later in Berea, from the 1940s until his untimely death in 1962. In the 1950s he became the leading expert on Appalachian migration based on his research in southeastern Kentucky and his appointment at Berea, long the flagship school for Appalachian work. In addition to heading the workshop in

---

Cincinnati in 1954, he addressed city leadership in Chicago on the issue of Appalachian migration in 1959 and that same year played a key role in a workshop held in Berea, Kentucky that invited city officials from a half dozen urban centers around the country.\textsuperscript{130}

The 1954 workshop in Cincinnati served in many ways as a model for the urban method of tackling the problems presented by southern and Appalachian migrants. Marshall Bragdon, the director of MFRC, penned the introduction to the publication that grew out of the workshop and in it addressed the concerns and rationale particular to the city of Cincinnati. At the same time he reflected on a broader universal urban appeal the lessons of the conference could hold. The meeting itself broadened MFRC’s commitment to its goals of diversity and tolerance within the city with a tacit acknowledgement of the Appalachian population as a valid minority. Bragdon hoped this conference would offer solutions for the city and aid migrants as they adjusted to their new environs. At the same time he believed that “pooling local experience and sociological data can reduce our ignorance and stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{131} For Bragdon, and others, ignorance pervaded on each side of the issue and the conference offered an opportunity to bridge some of that divide. The workshop also proved unique in drawing out connections between the local situation and the national trends as well as the individual critiques that various participants offered. The publication of the general proceedings proved important

\textsuperscript{130} Tucker, “Transforming Mountain Folk,” 71.
\textsuperscript{131} “The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati” introduction, UC, ARB, CHRC, US-77-04, Box 68, Folder 5.
in broadly disseminating the ideas contained in the meetings and helping city agencies prescribe ideas to the problems presented by migrants.

Giffin addressed the group first with a broad history of migration and a focus on “the culturally determined patterns of behavior which the Southern Mountaineers bring with them” when they came to Cincinnati.\textsuperscript{132} He also offered his bona fide credentials for the audience, though like Ward Porter, recognized the limitations of talking about people from the Southern Appalachians in broad swaths. “I must depend for my depictions upon impressions I have gained from numerous novelists,” he noted, “from lengthy discussions with Southern Mountaineers, from my own research and that of others, and from five years of daily contact with the mountain people” at Berea.\textsuperscript{133} One of these observations concerned the notion of “familism,” which served as a softer and more sociological appropriate term for the “clannishness” that defined the group in former times.\textsuperscript{134} For Giffin, as others argued before him, this behavior kept migrants from adequately joining the urban milieu and prevented true adoption of cities as new homes. He hoped that an appeal to the younger generation and work to “prepare children to leave home, so that they are not emotionally scarred” when they separate from their families for the first

\textsuperscript{132} “The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati,” 1.
\textsuperscript{133} “The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati,” 3.
time would provide a path to urban integration.\textsuperscript{135} This dovetailed with work by other migration scholars who have explained that transition into new environments usually found more success among second generation migrants.\textsuperscript{136} Of course, the analysis was also tinged with elements of that “clannish” appeal and the usual view of Appalachians as overly obsessed with “home.”\textsuperscript{137}

Giffin’s analysis continued to deal most heavily in standard tropes about the mountain population, including their large family size compared to urban groups, the lack of attention to education, and a more religious nature. He nuanced some of these arguments along class lines, for example noting how lower class Appalachians were more likely to be members of Holiness or Pentecostal churches while upper class migrants could be found in orthodox Baptist churches that had longer traditions within the cities and did not seem so out of place.\textsuperscript{138} He embraced the idea of fatalism as well, noting that migrants tended to “take life pretty much as it

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{135} “The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati,” 4.
\textsuperscript{136} Tucker notes Giffin worked within the espoused theories of Oscar Handlin, who pioneered the field of immigration history in the 1950s most notably in his work \textit{The Uprooted}. Immigration and migration history has evolved like all fields since then, but the notion that migration is as much about future generations as much as changing the prospects of the generation that partakes in the move still largely holds true in studies and in anecdotal evidence. Moving within the country is also certainly a different endeavor entirely from moving abroad, but for many migrants the experience was nonetheless similar including the encounter of new cultures, language and social barriers, and adjusting to new practices.
\textsuperscript{137} The concept of home has played an important role in Appalachian history and literature generally and figures very prominently in music rooted in the region. In popular culture, this was displayed in myriad ways including programs like \textit{The Beverly Hillbillies}, where the Clampett family, despite moving to new upper class environs, continued to hold onto their speech and dress patterns. Going back further, the protagonists in John Fox novels, like Chad in \textit{The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come}, are not easily pried from their mountain homes and when they do leave its often begrudgingly. In academic work, literature on Appalachia also continues to stress the importance of place in the history of the region. Even more contemporary works by popular authors like Silas House stress the importance of place as a major theme. This is a trend not uncommon in literature and regional presentation generally, but taken to a logical conclusion by sociologists at midcentury the emphasis on home became problematic for urban transition.
\textsuperscript{138} ”The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati,” 9.
\end{flushright}
comes” with little motivation to change one’s lot. This assessment again
discounted the very notion behind the decision to migrate, but nonetheless has had
staying power in popular critiques of migrants. The judgment also became a key
point of debate in the decades that followed, and observed by Ward Porter, as other
publications about Appalachians and the idea of a “culture of poverty” began to
permeate the fields of sociology and social work.

After Giffin’s address, the workshop broke into smaller groups in which
attendees tried to identify some of the general characteristics of the migrant
community and how they might go about addressing their perceived problems. The
sessions, however, revealed the problems and limitations of the exercise and of
determining the configuration and troubles presented by the migrant community
generally. When respondents were asked about the most difficult issues of
adjustment for migrants, workshop organizers noted how the responses often
appeared “in direct contrast or opposition to others, depending upon the experience
and preconceptions and viewpoint of the person who made them.” For example,
in a discussion of employment attendees noted migrants appeared “ambitious and
cooperative” and “quick to learn” while at the same time they “lack drive” and were
“not receptive to extensive training.” They responded with similarly

140 Jack Weller, Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia (Lexington: University Press of
Kentucky, 1965) and Ruby Payne, A Framework for Understanding Poverty (Highlands, TX: Aha!
Process, 2003). The culture of poverty idea grew out of sociology in the 1960s/70s and has
remained controversial since. The approach by Giffin and others of his era has been largely
debunked by sociologists and historians as bad “blaming the victim” practice. See Michael Katz, The
Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare, (New York: Pantheon Books,
1989).
contradictory sentiments regarding education, home life, health, and leisure. The discussion results became so broad and often paradoxical as to be almost meaningless in creating a coherent assessment of the Appalachian character. Giffin noted that the discussions should not presume to be scientific, nor representative, but the publication of this information, in addition to extensive discussions about these issues, may have left contributors confused and with little clarity on what the limitations of the migrant communities actually looked like.

The discussion sessions did, however, offer some nuance to the role of migrants in urban life that the stereotypical keynote addresses often lacked. The contradictory experiences of attendees offered a chance to suggest a more comprehensive approach to the perceived problem of migration that moved away from a universalizing cultural assessment. This made it all the more disappointing and surprising for Giffin to boil the group’s essence back down to a bundle of stereotypes in his remarks. He reiterated the lack of motivation apparent in the group, the dominant family ties, the refusal to accept municipal authority, and a total lack of preparation for urban living. He went on to discuss the “liabilities” of mountain migrants. Again, though, these attributes often proved contradictory to prior statements and accepted understandings of mountain culture. Giffin noted how many believed migrants became “too reliant” on social welfare, but this stood in stark contrast to the accepted belief of a highly individualistic, pioneer spirit supposedly inherent to the character.
He did, however, deliver some thoughts on the “assets” of mountaineers and almost all of these centered around the idea of community.143 Appalachian migrants in Cincinnati had settled in communities, which Giffin believed gave them “certain protection against the multitude of disorganizing experiences which newcomers” to cities often experienced and offered a “valuable antidote for the disease of loneliness.”144 The music communities, and the popularity of bluegrass and country music in these cities certainly provided some sense of respite and even employment opportunities for these migrants, though Giffin did not explicitly cite this. Peculiarly, the talk of Appalachian musical characteristics and culture, which seemed so ubiquitous in the presentation of radio programs, was absent in nearly all of these early discussions of mountain migrant issues. This may have partly been because the music still struggled to gain popular acceptance and had associations with seedy parts of the city.

In closing, Giffin addressed what role older Cincinnati residents may have had in the problems accompanying the migrants. While he noted migrants bore their own share of discrimination at the hands of employers and residents, this was often based on their own lack of qualifications. Giffin concluded migrants’ “problems are largely a consequence of the various handicaps they bring with them to Cincinnati” and while they “are undoubtedly faced with prejudice because of their group membership...it strikes me that it is manifested mainly in the form of name-calling and in the feeling on the part of the mountaineers that they are rejected.”145

143 “The Southern Mountaineer in Cincinnati,” 40.
His summation of discrimination amounted to a rephrasing of an old children’s rhyme about “sticks and stones.” The workshop and Giffin himself may have been but a footnote in the story of Appalachian migration were it not for the outsized role that the city of Cincinnati and Roscoe Giffin himself had in thinking about Appalachian migrants as a category. Giffin, as noted, built a national reputation and career out of his work with migrants and became the leading voice for the scientific and empirical approach in dealing with migrants.

In January 1959, CPHA organized yet another event in Baltimore to deal with the twin problems of housing and migration. Roscoe Giffin helped coordinate this event in a similar fashion to the conference in Cincinnati five years prior. He reiterated many of the same plans he proposed in Cincinnati and CPHA credited his vision with helping to refocus attention on the problems in Baltimore.\footnote{146 “CPHA and The New Urbanites,” June 1960, Pratt Library Vertical Files, Migration Folder, 1.} This workshop diverged slightly from previous iterations as Giffin presented a shift in the focus towards Appalachia proper. He noted how increased federal aid to “depressed areas” like West Virginia could help stem the migrant flow and stem the source of urban problems.\footnote{147 “CPHA and The New Urbanites,” 2.} Short of this deviation, however, the meeting offered similar solutions to prior events in Baltimore and around the nation. Giffin reiterated the need he presented in Cincinnati to “bridge the child’s present urban world to his rural past” in hopes that children could grow into proper urban citizens.\footnote{148 “CPHA and The New Urbanites,” 2. It should be noted as well that newspaper editors in the city recognized the complexity of the perceived problem. In their announcement about the conference, the editors noted that the issue proved more complex than even this meeting let on, as determining who or what constituted a mountaineer or “hillbilly” could not be figured on basic, generic cultural
that involved community members helping provide services for newcomers to the city.\textsuperscript{149} All agreed, despite decades of continued migration and years of discussing the “problem” on the need for more actual data on where people came from, actual numbers of migrants, income, education, morbidity rates and other sociological markers that could better help plan responses for the migrants. This included answering the all-important question, “[h]ow long does it take them to adjust to city living?”\textsuperscript{150} How data would help answer this open-ended and subjective question, Giffin and others did not clearly articulate.

The workshops carried out through the 1950s worked mostly on a theoretical and administrative level. City leaders and social workers attended and were expected to bring the advice and knowledge back to the on the ground operations in their respective communities. While groups like the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) and magazines like \textit{Mountain Life and Work}, operated through this period, few if any municipal organizations emerged to deal with mountain migrants directly.\textsuperscript{151} Instead, early reforms played out along the periphery of various other urban operations. This included a tacit recognition of the

---

\textsuperscript{149} “CPHA and The New Urbanites,” 2. The reference was of course a call back to the turn of the century programs that helped new immigrants to adjust to life in the United States during waves of migration prior to World War I. Hull House in Chicago is among the most famous examples, but most urban communities developed similar institutions to aid immigrants. For the most part, these types of societies did not exist during these latter waves of migrations though community organizations and churches did play a role in providing goods and services to migrants. The Baltimore proposal included working with churches as part of the infrastructure though it is unclear whether or not a settlement type program developed or it remained a hodgepodge of services offered in various communities.

\textsuperscript{150} “CPHA and The New Urbanites,” 2.

\textsuperscript{151} Giffin actually played a substantial role in the magazine, contributing to articles on numerous occasions. For the most important work he penned on urban Appalachians see “From Cinder Hollow to Cincinnati,” \textit{Mountain Life and Work}, 32 (Winter 1956): 11-20.
migrant problem through the work of MFRC in Cincinnati, though no substantial direct action on the “problems” they noted from a city government level. Migrant aid societies worked within existing frameworks rather than developing new operations built to tackle the problem directly. In Baltimore, the migrant experience became wrapped inside complex urban renewal programs in the 1950s and 1960s. City leaders targeted the Mount Royal-Fremont neighborhood for urban renewal in the 1950s and unsurprisingly this area had become a well-known stopping ground for southern migrants, black and white, and leaders saw the housing stock deteriorating in this once posh section of the city.

Mount Royal sits slightly north of Baltimore’s urban core, atop the hills that slope gently down into the city’s Inner Harbor and financial district. Citizens first settled this section of the city prior to the Civil War, but after the conflict the neighborhood grew in earnest. It quickly became recognized as a home for upper class white city residents and immersed in a postwar “speculative building rush” in which large single-family residences rapidly sprouted. Construction largely stagnated and as a result by the 1950s the building stock still mainly dated to the late 19th century. In those boom decades, a large number of Jewish families moved into the neighborhood before streetcar lines facilitated their migration into outer suburbs. By 1910, a small black section of the neighborhood developed and urban renewal specialists of the 1950s marked this era as the beginning of its decline.

Wilbur Hunter, tasked with penning a history of the neighborhood in the midst of the urban renewal period, noted the area’s decline proved quite “unusual for

---

Baltimore” as it grew rapidly and declined equally quickly “in terms of economic and social criteria.”153 The large houses, designed for single families with a cast of servants, became crowded tenements because of the availability of space. Though the houses were not designed to accommodate multiple families, they proved spacious enough to do so for individuals coming to Baltimore in the midst of a housing crisis and employment boom at midcentury. Sociologists and city officials suggested that the postwar migration resulted in a creation of a “cultural island” in Mount Royal and hoped that urban renewal efforts would provide the needed rehabilitation to the area and the people.154

In order to earn federal money for the redevelopment of the neighborhood, the Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Authority (BURHA) conducted an extensive survey of the residents to gauge the makeup of the population and their needs. As with many urban renewal projects, city leaders had to walk a fine line in reshaping the neighborhood’s character. Many residents prized the architectural features of the old housing stock, including the large Queen Anne and Georgian Revival style homes. The main objections amounted to the common critiques often hidden in the guise of urban renewal; what would be rehabilitated and what would simply be razed and replaced? While the neighborhood had a mixed population, it was still starkly racially divided. Madison Avenue bisected the black and white sections of Mount Royal and presented starkly different visions of the neighborhood proper. 97% of the nonwhite population in the area lived on the west side of this

153 Wilbur Hunter, “History of the Mount Royal Neighborhood.”
BURHA surveyed 2,300 residents in the district and found that a majority of the population living in Mount Royal had migrated from southern states and less than one in three inhabitants was born in Baltimore. Furthermore, while the neighborhood remained a majority black, with 51,000 of the 64,000 people there listed as “nonwhite,” there was also an Appalachian element, within this minority contingent as well, that had increasingly become a part of the population. From 1950 to 1954, 43% of the people who moved to Mount Royal came from either Virginia or West Virginia, though that number declined in the latter part of the decade. Tellingly, none of the residents who had moved to the neighborhood from West Virginia in the ten years prior to the survey owned their home. The majority of residents also moved about the neighborhood steadily, with over 50% responding that they moved to their current home from a different residence in Mount Royal.

This particular urban renewal project did not target Appalachians explicitly in its plans. The project made no mention of the word or the any affiliated words like mountaineer, hillbilly or the like in any of its survey or population profiles. Race and class nonetheless pervaded the city’s understanding of this once prosperous neighborhood now seen as blight on the urban core. These feelings coupled with the general phenomena understood by city leadership to have caused the housing problems and blight to begin with. Curiously, a sense of pride still existed in the

155 “The Residents of the Mount Royal-Fremont Urban Renewal Area,” LL, Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Authority Records (BURHA), Box 5, Folder 29, 10.
156 “The Residents of the Mount Royal-Fremont Urban Renewal Area,” 5.
157 “The Residents of the Mount Royal-Fremont Urban Renewal Area,” 51.
158 “The Residents of the Mount Royal-Fremont Urban Renewal Area,” 46.
neighborhood, as much as can be gleaned from the survey at least, despite the massive problems perceived in the area. The largest percentages of individuals who objected to the status of the area and the people living there were white homeowners, while a majority of white renters and a vast majority of black tenants had no real objections to their residences or neighbors. These renters usually had been relatively new arrivals to Baltimore. The survey naturally found that “the proportion of owners who considered their neighbors undesirable increased with the length of residence.”¹⁵⁹ Most of the people who chose to settle in Mount Royal in the period after World War II had done so primarily because of a lack of housing elsewhere. Mount Royal had a considerable migrant population, but the extent to which a real community based around shared values, culture, or communal migrant experience there lacked clear evidence in this instance.

Urban renewal projects played one role in dealing with the blight brought by Appalachian populations. Reformers blamed the culture of the migrants and their failure or inability to adjust to city life and properly integrate into urban society. Whole cloth solutions then, like slum clearance or an attitude of blaming the victims for their own conditions, seemed to offer the best remedy for solving the growing urban crisis. Men like Roscoe Giffin lent their voices to the concurrent development of migrant profiles in major newspapers across the country in the 1950s as reform efforts and renewal projects were sold to the public. In a throwback of sorts to the local color writing of a half-century earlier, a new literature of poverty developed in this time period and the Appalachian population in America became popular fodder

¹⁵⁹ “The Residents of the Mount Royal-Fremont Urban Renewal Area,” 59.
yet again. The use of credentialed experts in the field like Giffin, and later Harry Caudill and Jack Weller, gave these pieces a slightly different tone but they still fell into some of the common literary tropes that have led to criticism of this genre as a different form of exploitation. In the late 1950s and early 1960s this methodology of exposing the nation’s ills became reinvigorated. The roots of the trope go back to at least Jacob Riis’s famous examination of Manhattan’s Lower Eastside in *How the Other Half Lives*, but certainly apply to much of Appalachia’s history as well. In the post-WWII era, Appalachia became a popular source for these images and reports for myriad reasons. Increased strip mining in the region exposed new problems in the mining industry and more outmigration from Appalachia forced city leaders to grapple with the problems of poverty in their environs. In addition, the Appalachian image provided a white face in the midst of a growing Civil Rights movement and exposés of racial inequality in American cities. The nascent urban crisis increasingly took on racial overtones as well and a focus on the white poverty in cities helped broaden the appeal of urban renewal and revitalization efforts.

---

160 This genre of writing has sometimes been derided as “poverty porn” or “development porn” for the way it uses images and interviews with individuals for shock value. This criticism is mostly focused on depictions of areas more broadly perceived as impoverished and applies to more popular media such as television and film., Appalachia gained this impoverished association in mid-century America due to the works by men like Caudill and Weller. Whether these sorts of exposes work to increase positive attention and aid to the region or have more insidious, indelible effects on long term associations with the region is a matter of debate. This idea has become a feature of Appalachian studies generally in recent years as media works continue to elicit a variety of reactions from residents, scholars, and critics. For a contemporary example of this controversial trope see Bruce Gilden, “Two Days in Appalachia,” in *Vice*, 8 July 2015.


These newspaper series not only brought the public into the conversation in greater numbers than the workshops and meetings, but also disseminated the popular methodology of dealing with urban problems. The 1960 series in Baltimore, titled “Bald Knob to Baltimore,” followed in the wake of the 1959 meeting headed by Giffin. The six part series opened with a drawing that put into stark relief the issues presented by Giffin. In the picture, a man and woman, presumably husband and wife, stand on a Baltimore sidewalk in tattered clothing. Their vehicle sits illegally parked and in disrepair with wooden slats haphazardly hammered into place to form a makeshift truck bed. That bed is packed full with five children, all shoeless and half-naked, with an additional two children in the grasp of the mother. The only possession in sight is of an old crank washing machine; a visible suggestion of the impoverished and folk culture of the family and region writ-large. The gaze of nearly every family member is upwards and into the distance, suggesting awe at his or her arrival in the big city. In the background, a policeman with a nightstick tucked under his left arm approaches the truck.\textsuperscript{163} Readers did not have to examine one word of the accompanying article to understand the thrust of the problem at hand. More than likely they recognized the family on the page, from other popular images that served as the inspiration for more mainstream pop culture hillbillies in the following years. The opening piece of the series, penned entirely by J. Anthony Lukas, dove into the discussion started in the prior decade if not earlier. Again, he

lamented the lack of reliable data but culled interesting census figures about how to estimate the number of “southern mountaineers” (his suggested proper term) in the city. He also interviewed outreach organizations directly, giving some insight into how charitable and urban organizations grappled with the problem. A Salvation Army representative noted how the previous year her organization was “besieged” by daily carloads of migrants asking for help. In total she estimated the group handled as many as 5,000 cases.\textsuperscript{164} The city’s Traveler’s Aid Society expressed similar experiences, noting how many migrant families came expecting high paying mill and shipyard jobs that were actually in rapid decline in the city. Furthermore, union representatives provided reasons for their lack of employment and even suggested they drove down wages in the city by flooding nonunion occupations with cheap labor.

The series continued in this vein for the week that followed. Lukas gave quotes from individuals that provided explanations for the migrants’ resistance to assimilation. The isolation of the mountains, according to interviewees such as historians and social workers, helped to explain “their fierce pride and independence, illustrated by their apparent distaste for charity.”\textsuperscript{165} That stood in stark relief, however, from the alleged siege these migrants wrought upon groups like the Salvation Army, but then again aid groups and city dwellers proved no stranger to writing off apparent contradictions in the mountain character. Lukas also connected the migrant problem to the urban renewal issues in the city in one

\textsuperscript{165} J. Anthony Lukas, “Bald Knob to Baltimore: ‘Them’s City Folks In there; We Don’t Mix With Them,” BS, 6 Jun 1960.
piece in the series. Landlords naturally complained about the shiftless nature of these tenants while city officials recognized some of these areas, as in Mount Royal, as full of “the worst slum homes they have seen in Baltimore.” For both groups, the fatalism so characteristic of mountain migrants made them resistant to any total renewal efforts in these areas. Edgar Ewing, the assistant director of renewal operations in the city, argued “of all groups we encounter in slums, the mountaineer has the lowest aspirations as far as housing and neighborhoods are concerned.” This, of course, was tied to the legacy of ramshackle housing in the mountains and just part and parcel to the mountain character. The fatalism also proved, for leaders in the area, to be the death knell for organizational efforts. James Gilliam, a community organizer in Mount Royal, noticed “mountaineers are very friendly as long as you keep it on a person-to-person basis. But as soon as you try to put it on an organizational level, they stiffen up.” The comprehensive hope of urban renewal thus encountered a roadblock in these areas because of the supposed resistance, albeit a very passive one apparently, in the lazy, shiftless mountaineers.

In the final installment in Lukas’s series, he profiled a pair of mountaineer families who came to Baltimore over the course of the previous decades. He contrasted two families from West Virginia who found vastly different economic success in the city. Lukas noted, “There can be no simple explanation for the vast gulf” between the two families’ economic and social place in the city. Again, however, the “gulf” in this instance worked against the very narrow definitions of

---

167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
migrants that series like this attempted to illuminate. Giffin’s analysis informed this
final installment as well, as he suggested migrants who were “pushed” out of the
mountains often fared worse in the city than migrants who were “‘pulled’ by the
vision of a better life.” Lukas closed by outlining the aid packages available in
Baltimore and in other cities working under the burden of Southern migration. He
concluded that what was available for the migrant population was “too small,
inadequately financed and virtually uncoordinated.” Faced with the dilemmas of
migration, migrants too often had to fend for themselves.

These sorts of series ran in almost every major city that saw an influx of
Appalachian migrants and, as aforementioned, the ubiquitous presence of academic
figures like Roscoe Giffin lending an air of credibility to the journalism made the
format and content of the series very similar across the country. In Dayton, Ohio,
a profile of migrants noted a gradually disappearing “undercurrent of hostility”
against migrant groups as social welfare agencies and churches opened arms in
ways that had only previously been provided by “neon-lighted areas...easy credit
business places, and restaurants offering Southern cooking.” By 1960, migrants
and their children accounted for nearly twenty percent of the city’s population,
suggesting a steadily growing minority within the city and a need to take the needs
of the population seriously. Even still, however, the accepting community blamed

170 Ibid.
171 See the following start dates for various cities’ urban Appalachian profiles. CE, 14 Jul 1957, Chicago Tribune, 3 Mar 1957, and Dayton Daily News (DDN), 22 Feb 1960. These series covered multiple days in each instance and often met backlash from some readers via the editorial pages. Curiously, there was little negative response to the Baltimore articles in this instance.
the victim for failure to adjust. A survey of Montgomery County residents still found that integration, largely based on religious differences, accounted for the “most serious adjustment” migrants still needed to make in order to integrate properly with the urban population.

They largely ignored the fact, however, cited by Chad Berry and other migrant historians that for the most part white Southern migrants found success in their moves. They certainly had racial advantages in an era of Jim Crowism and despite appeals against mountain migrants in job hiring practices they were more likely to find work and gainful employment than many traditional migrants and immigrants.173

The overall attention paid to urban migrants at this time was part and parcel to the general revitalization of anti-poverty initiatives across the country. The efforts to alleviate Appalachian poverty reached their head with Lyndon Johnson’s tour of Appalachia in the spring of 1964. He drew increased attention to the region and made Appalachian uplift a key part of the public image of his War on Poverty. As a result Appalachia received a special program for infrastructure development under the terms of the Economic Opportunity Act and perhaps some undue focus as a region stricken with exceptional poverty.174 This image, while part of a long tradition of thinking about the region, dovetailed with the urban migrant efforts to perpetuate images of Appalachia as archaic and backwards. While the overall intent of the programs, just like the newspaper series and urban workshops, was to

achieve positive ends they often had the net effect of perpetuating negative stereotypes.

This trend towards uplift continued through the 1960s and programs like Volunteers in Service to America helped couple counterculture interests with Appalachian service. This link proved important in connecting urban groups and bluegrass music in the following decades. Those connections, however, most often came from grassroots, on the ground action rather than from a uniformly developed policy that attempted to utilize this more acceptable and popular association with Southern and Appalachian culture towards urban integrationist ends. In fact, the formal and politically viable approaches towards southern migrants may have had a net opposite effect from its intentions on actual group formation within the cities. While urban leadership, sociologists, and politicians attempted to define the Appalachian character, they began from a negative position and established the mountain disposition as a problem. They did so, often, even as information contradicted or often outright refuted the validity of this approach. As a result, Southern migrants and others busied themselves creating a self-definition of their culture and its musical associations inside of grubby bars, recording studios, and on records spinning in jukeboxes in various American cities. Being cast as an out-group within the urban fabric in some ways broadened the growing niche appeal of Appalachian culture. For grassroots migrant activists, if culture was the problem then culture could also provide the solution. These musicians and activists, however, began not with trying to solve the problem of Appalachian culture, but rather by affirming some of the positive traits their image of the culture offered.
Within this movement, Appalachian migrant enclaves emerged within American cities that played host to the musical development. This included picking parties at home, bars and clubs with hillbilly jukeboxes, live acts at local clubs and larger venues, and attendance of national acts and radio shows.
Chapter Three: Playing It By Ear: The Growth of Urban Bluegrass in the 1950s

I wandered again to my home in the mountain
Where in youth’s early dawn I was happy and free
I looked for my friends but I could never find them
I found they were all rank strangers to me

Stanley Brothers, “Rank Stranger,” (1960), original lyrics by Alfred Brumley

Ray Pennington’s family began its long transition from Appalachian to urban Appalachian in the crucible of World War II. Pennington’s father trekked his family back and forth between his employment in factory work in the Cincinnati war machine and seasonal sharecropping back home in Clay County, Kentucky. Ray recalled this seasonal migration as a formative facet of his childhood; he was not yet a teenager during this era, moving regularly, back and forth between the urban and rural environs. This sort of half in, half out migration was common among migrants who moved north for work, but maintained emotional and financial attachments to people and work at home in the mountains. The Penningtons made the permanent move to Cincinnati amid the aforementioned mass migration of Appalachians and became part of an expatriate community in the city. By 1952 they had become rather permanent residents of the city. In Cincinnati, the family found numerous kindred spirits, working-class migrants and a general population with a growing passion for the music of the South and the mountains. The family settled in the neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine, one of a handful of neighborhoods in the city with a growing Appalachian population. “It was pretty much working class people,” Ray recalled of the area at the time. “They all worked in factories or construction work.
We were poor as church mice, but we didn’t know the difference because everyone around us was in the same shape.”

The Over-the-Rhine neighborhood remained predominately working class through the following decades but also retained its historic role as a major entertainment district in the city. Neighborhood bars and music venues dotted the area, often in the storefronts of tenements that housed thousands of migrants and others in the city. This too melded with Pennington’s background, albeit in a wholly different way from life in Clay County. “Penningtons always seemed to sing” he noted, though life in Appalachia offered little opportunity to professionalize this passion and church provided the only regular outlet for their voices. The musical opportunities made available by the move proved fruitful for Ray who made a career in the country and bluegrass music business and whose initiation into this world was made possible by the movement of his family from Clay County to Cincinnati.

As Pennington grew older he continued to embrace his cultural upbringing to carve out a profession in the music industry. He played music in the nightclubs of Cincinnati through the 1950s, meeting other locals and music insiders until one night he happened upon Chuck Seitz, a manager at the local Jimmie Skinner Music Store and an engineer at King Records. This meeting led him to a job as a record producer and songwriter with King, including a modest hit, “Three Hearts in a Tangle,” which he released under the name Ray Starr. He also produced some of King’s more famous bluegrass acts such as the Stanley Brothers in his time with the

---

175 Ray Pennington, telephone interview with the author, 30 January 2014.
176 Ibid.
company. His steady employment lasted until the mid-1960s when he moved to Nashville permanently. “I didn’t have any plan,” he recalled. “Just played everything by ear.” In the cultural world, playing, learning, and developing the music by ear was how most people found the music and carved out a niche for bluegrass in the 1950s.

While urban reformers and city leadership focused on analyzing and explaining the problem of Appalachian migrants, some migrants busied themselves with the process of cultural development within these same cities. The musical culture of migrant families and individuals also struck a chord with interested segments of the population looking for an escape from the mainstream popular culture of the 1950s and forward. Families like the Penningtons engaged in their own form of community building, often centered on a shared love of guitar, five-string banjo and musical lyrics that expressed the feelings of loss that accompanied the transition out of the mountains and the South. These developments remained largely detached from the political issues of the day, at least in this early period, and often became subject to similar criticisms from the population who occasionally viewed the music as another negative extension of the Appalachian character generally. These criticisms, however, had the inverse effect of broadening the music’s countercultural appeal. As urban leaders identified Appalachians as outsiders to the urban fabric, associations with their culture came to be seen as authentic representations of an urban counterculture for youth, scholars, music fans, and hipsters who looked outside the cultural mainstream. Bluegrass music

177 Ray Pennington telephone interview with the author, 30 January 2014.
came of age as an official genre in this cultural milieu and became an important hallmark of the migrant population during the 1950s. In the early part of the decade, migrants and fans in the cities formed nascent communities that centered on finding and learning the music. These communities gradually grew and by the end of the decade the urban environment welcomed hipsters, college students, and activists to the migrant group. The groups had to first learn to overcome, ignore, or in some cases embrace the stigma associated with the people of Appalachia in order to allow the musical growth. In fact, as the culture of Appalachia with bluegrass music, fans and musicians within the genre led the charge towards greater acceptance of Appalachian people more generally. Like others that had come before them, musicians and fans leaned into some of the stereotypes associated with the music and embraced the outsider status as a marker of difference. The music, as it grew in popularity, helped develop positive associations with the genre, particularly among the postwar, baby-boom generation who came of age amid the migration out of the South and the movement of bluegrass into mainstream popular culture.

Importantly, much of this growth occurred within the cities and the opportunities they afforded, such as clubs, record studios, and radio stations. In that vein, these musicians followed similar paths as those forged by men like Bradley Kincaid and John Lair in the decades prior. The fans followed a similar path as well, as they enjoyed the music, frequented establishments, bought records, and lobbied on behalf of the derided migrant population.

The process of cultural retention in the face of discrimination and movement into a new environment has its own long history. The backlash faced by
Appalachians upon their entry into the city had the unintended effect of spurring some cultural solidarity in various ways. Musical heritage emerged as a common thread connecting these migrant groups to the people and places they had left. George Sanchez, writing of the Mexican immigrant experience notes, "[e]thnicity was not a fixed set of customs...but rather a collective identity that emerged from daily experience in the United States." While Appalachians did not face the same barriers as immigrants from foreign nations, they nonetheless faced overt discrimination and treatment similar to immigrant groups who entered the country from far off places. The crucible of a perceived urban crisis as it related to Appalachians provided the language in which part of a new Appalachian identity was forged. Urban leadership accepted Appalachians as a peculiar and distinct ethnicity and a process of self-identification began nearly concurrently, though the language of that self-identification did not fully develop for a decade. Like other immigrant groups, they settled in enclaves within cities, brought cultural attributes with them and attempted to replicate these practices in their new environment. Also like other migrant groups, they found solidarity in these cultural practices and in the everyday interactions between fellow migrants and the broader cultural world. These enclaves, in time, also became tourist sites for cultural outsiders who used the musical venues, the neighborhoods, and their own cultural baggage to create and reinforce ideas about Appalachian identity.

In his ethnographic study of migrant folk culture in Cincinnati, John Williams found numerous ways in which a cultural approach reinforced the ethnic identity of

---

migrants in the city. Rather than seeing straight cultural holdovers, however, he, like Sanchez, noted how migrants in the urban centers “adapted their folklore to fit their needs.” The need could be one of self-affirmation, community building, or as a means of presenting oneself to outsiders or unfamiliar people. Bill Malone noted the presentation of Appalachian-ness, or mountain identity, often included playing a role, but noted ways in which “stage roles can also become cultural statements.” Choosing to dress a certain way, to pick up a guitar or banjo, or play a song on a jukebox could become a political or cultural statement about one’s identity in a new urban environment. This sentiment rang true for Appalachians and non-Appalachians venturing into this culture alike. Appalachian identity, then, did not remain a static entity brought from the mountains and replicated in the cities as reformers often posited, but rather became part of a dynamic process forged and remade in a new environment. A musical culture, long identified as one of the more “acceptable” traits of Appalachians, became a central attribute of this new population. At the same time, bluegrass music became fundamental to the culture of these American cities.

181 Here I mean to detach the term political from any overt ideological leanings. The cultural associations practiced and identified by Appalachians and non-Appalachians did not necessarily tie to any straight ideology, but was rather a part of a general criticism of consensus culture of the 1950s. Non-Appalachians in particular, I think, engaged in a “politics of authenticity” as defined by Doug Rossinow. These young people in particular saw Appalachians as a repository of an authentic culture and that proved to be a main feature of the draw. Ideological politics would come to be associated with the music, drawing on both sides of the coin in fact, but that became clearer as the lines that demarcated the new left and consensus culture coalesced around other issues in the 1960s. See Doug Rossinow, The Politics of Authenticity.
In his summation of the long role of urbanization on American musical folkways, scholar D.K. Wilgus notes the “shock” of urbanization had greater influence on music than arguably any other development.\textsuperscript{182} The role of urbanization proved multifaceted, but Wilgus notes one of the greatest impacts came from increased exposure due to technology. “Phonograph records and radio did not invent hillbilly music, but without them the tradition might have withered.”\textsuperscript{183} The same sentiment proved true for bluegrass music in the 1950s. The clubs and small record labels that emerged in cities with large migrant populations did not invent the music, but these venues combined with the displacement of millions of people into the urban milieu helped keep the songs alive and mold its particular sound. Additionally, the trends began by men like John Lair and Bradley Kincaid on the radio airwaves in Chicago became heightened as southern music composed an increasing proportion of airtime on radio stations in American cities and occupied an increasing amount of physical space on the streets.

Historian Neil Rosenberg has noted how in the 1950s, the music had not yet taken on the name “bluegrass.” As a result, writers, fans, and musicians themselves often conflated the music with other forms such as country, hillbilly, or even western. In fact, through the 1950s bluegrass music remained mostly a professional act performed by a small contingent of musicians who branched out from Bill Monroe’s musical family tree. This process occurred gradually and no official date marks the formal introduction of “bluegrass” as a genre in the modern lexicon,

\textsuperscript{183} Wilgus, “Country-Western Music,” 161.
though historians have tried and narrowed down its origins. Urbanization and the outgrowth of the music from Bill Monroe’s original band proved to be the most important in the naming of the genre. Bluegrass lore has it that the name of the genre was not originally attributed to Bill Monroe himself. After 1947, when Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs left Monroe’s band, fans at concerts and other live appearances requested the men play songs in the “bluegrass style.” This request referred to their former connections to Monroe as members of his Bluegrass Boys. Gradually, the name stuck and by the end of the 1950s began to refer to a variety of musicians and groups who imitated not only Monroe, but also Scruggs style banjo. Urban areas proved important in this process because they became the primary venues for concerts, recordings, advertisements, and for the dissemination of the music over the powerful radio airwaves centered in the cities. The bluegrass sound may have been different, but the instrumentation remained largely similar to the string band groups that gained radio popularity in the decades before.

In Cincinnati, this new urban environment developed in the entertainment district of Over-the-Rhine and other areas where Appalachian populations settled. Two editorials from Cincinnati papers in 1951 illustrated these broader trends. Columnist Magee Adams noted an increasing tendency among unnamed “eastern journals” denigrating Cincinnati as the home of “hayseeds” and “Kentucky cowboys.” Country music programming bellowed, or in some cases yodeled, from stations like WCKY and WLW and for many this sound became a representation of the city overall. Leadership in Cincinnati politics remarked upon these trends in a different

---

184 See Rosenberg, Bluegrass: A History and Chapter 4, “Naming the Genre” for more in particular on the origins and development of the bluegrass name.
way the decade prior. In the process of forming the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Committee (MFRC) in 1943, city leaders emphasized the geographic location of Cincinnati along the border with the South as a potential influence in the character of the city generally. Adams noted how Cincinnatians now engaged in “indignant denials” about the nature of the city’s musical heritage amid the growing popularity of these Southern sounds. For these residents, the emphasis on country music belied the other musical trademarks of the city that included historic German singing societies, which dated to the 19th century, and the renowned summer opera series. The popularity, increasing amount, and clear channel signals of these radio shows undid the more staid traditions that many Cincinnati locals wished to emphasize.185

The music of the South became popular by other means as well. Ed Seitz, reporting on the growing industry in Cincinnati, reflected how “gradually, almost insidiously” country music had grown in the city. “This music is compounded of moaning guitars, twanging mandolins and screeching fiddles” he wrote, in no uncertain terms expressing his opinion of the genre and its associations. He went on to explain that Cincinnati was fast becoming the Mecca for hillbilly music. Like Adams, Seitz blamed the radio for much of this development but also saw influence in the form of King Records, a local operation that recorded various country artists including Hank Williams, Grandpa Jones, and Cowboy Copas in the early 1950s. These, and other hillbilly records, were readily available at Jimmie Skinner’s record shop in downtown Cincinnati and performed regularly in the storefront. He also

observed the growing nightclub scene in Over-the-Rhine and how one might find
“hillbilly musicians living and working right here in Cincinnati...in almost any café
along Vine and Main Streets beyond Central Parkway.” In short, country music
offered a full frontal assault on some of the traditions in the city and became one of
the more popular entertainment choices within the city as well.

Writers and observers noticed similar trends occurring in working-class
Baltimore. Across the county, “large entertainment spots, catering to hillbilly and
western swing music exclusively have sprung up” noted the Baltimore Sun. These
developments in the Charm City were met with responses similar to the cultural
critics of Cincinnati. They observed the hillbilly music as “ugly, dull music
accompanied by poorly written and naïve lyrics” and thus echoed the notion of the
“screeching guitars” observed in Cincinnati. In addition, some of these
neighborhoods emphasized this heritage as part of their image and actively adopted
some of the symbols of this musical folk life. As areas developed a reputation for
being Appalachian or hillbilly, groups within these neighborhoods could adopt
associated cultural symbols as a source of pride or to aid in the commercial
development. In the Brooklyn neighborhood, to the south of downtown, in the
1950s, a large number of bars opened and appealed to the migrant population. A
popular nightclub spot that had undergone numerous changes over the prior years
finally settled on the moniker “The Hillbilly Niteclub” in the 1950s. The
entertainment section of the local community paper, furthermore, regularly

---

188 Ibid.
featured a country music archetype in typical apparel, including a checkered shirt and a barrel reminiscent of an old country store or whisky making. The imagery was likely not lost on residents and non-residents alike, and expressed the ways the charms of the neighborhood were deeply entwined with the ever-softening hillbilly archetype.

In Washington D.C., the opinions of many residents towards the music of the South had been changing over the course of the preceding decades. A survey conducted by George Washington University students in 1938 found 40% of respondents had a favorable opinion of the broadly undefined “hillbilly music.” The high number surprised even some of the survey conductors and belied the image of Washington as a “cosmopolitan town.” The trends continued into the latter decades, heralded by a growth in country music programming and a new set of stars, including the Stoneman family who had been so denigrated on their arrival, emerging out of the region. Even the staid traditions of the city, as noted in Cincinnati and Baltimore, came under some attack in the nation’s capital. In 1948, the Daughters of the American Revolution opened their Constitution Hall to weekly “hillbilly” programs in the nation’s capital. Every Saturday night guests could be greeted to “three hours for hillbilly lovers to clap and stomp to the strumming of the ‘geetar,’ mandolin, banjo, and the squeak of the fiddle” in the site where the conservative organization had infamously disallowed the opera singing of Marian

\[189\] Durr, *Behind the Backlash*, 67.

Anderson just a decade prior. The conservative group’s foray into the genre displayed just how the music was moving up the social ladder in the city, though the papers still jokingly opined on the “unsettled question of whether washtub beating will be allowed” in the performances.

These urban areas became increasingly associated with country music, as well, because of the power of the local radio stations. In Washington, Connie Gay, a popular country music host of Town and Country Time emceed the weekly performances at Constitution Hall. In Cincinnati, powerful 50,000-watt stations broadcast shows and advertisements for stars and records and helped create a real connection between the city and the music coming over the airwaves. “Colonel” Jim Wilson earned a job in the music business with King Records in Cincinnati after he moved from his small Kentucky home and illustrated the possibilities available. He was born in Crittenden County, Kentucky, in the western part of the state not far from the area the Monroe family called home. His father moved the family to Detroit in the 1930s and as a result, Wilson spent his formative years in the Motor City. Like many migrant families, the Wilsons returned home quite often for vacations and holidays “at the old farm place” and his father still controlled some farmland there. Wilson spent a short stint in the U.S. Maritime Service during World War II and came back to Detroit upon being discharged. The interest in music came from his family, “all in the family, all those out in the country, could pick a few chords on the guitar or play a few notes on the fiddle or that kind of thing” he

191 “Hillbillies Take Over Saturdays At D.A.R.’s Hall In Washington,” BS, 8 Apr 1948.
192 Ibid.
remembered. “No one seriously pursued music in my family, although we were always singing in church.”193

At the end of the 1940s, Wilson broke that family streak and pursued his musical interests beyond just a hobby. He began running a music and appliance store for a serendipitously monikered friend, Johnny Harmony. They called the store Harmony Shop. In addition, the Detroit store sold a small supply major label records to accompany the radio and record players offered in store. Smaller shops around town specialized in race records or hillbilly records, but akin to vintage record shops today these were often exclusive to parts of town where the interested population might live. Wilson also recalled that even in Detroit, where a fast growing southern and migrant population made an important part of the city overall, residents often tuned into farther off stations to find the music they liked.” In the late 1940s, he noted, one had to “remember two stations that were powerful 50,000 watt stations, one located in Wheeling, West Virginia and one located in Cincinnati, Ohio.”194 Both stations came in rather clear for listeners that far north and “by far ... WCKY-Cincinnati sold more hillbilly records than any other single vehicle...the influence of WCKY on country music was phenomenal.”195 Listeners and record dealers quickly associated these two in their minds and in the music industry in general. These sorts of associations became at least part of the impetus

for high cultural influences and newspaper editors to express disdain for the country music influence in Cincinnati and other like cities.

WCKY became an important cultural marker for the city and the migrant populations in the urban north because even in Detroit, as Wilson recalled, the signal “used to come in loud and clear, as though the transmitter was next door to you.”196 In the early 1950s, early bluegrass music made up an important part of the overall format of the station as well despite the fact the father of the genre continued to ply his trade on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Wilson reflected the importance of the stations for other first generation bluegrass musicians like Don Reno and Red Smiley. “They maybe guest on the Opry,” he recalled. “I can’t remember that. But their exposure off of WSM was nothing” for the Detroit and urban north markets at least. “The airplay they had off of WWVA or WCKY created a demand for their records.”197 The Cincinnati connection deepened through Wilson’s growing association with King Records in 1949. Record salesmen from various companies frequented the Harmony Shop and his store, “located in an area that had a great amount of migratory workers who had moved from the South, always stocked a lot of country.” King produced a lot of country records in the late 1940s, too, “so the King salesman was always welcomed as much as the Victor or Columbia or anybody else in that particular store.”198 Around this time, King Records adopted the phrase “If it’s a King, it’s a Hillbilly,” which in no uncertain terms reflected their

product and their market. A casual conversation with one of these salesmen led Wilson to an interview and eventual a job as a wholesaler from the record company. He became the representative for the company in the Detroit and Toledo area, reaching out to record stores and selling the hillbilly and race records offered by the Cincinnati outfit. He stayed in the business, minus a few periodic sabbaticals, until 1965 or about the time King ceased its operations. Wilson served as an example, however, of the importance of these urban operations to discovering and distributing this early country and bluegrass music. Artists, too, had long recognized the importance of finding a job in these urban markets and on the airwaves towards promoting their sound and selling their records.

Elsewhere in Baltimore, the music of supposed Appalachian roots proved important in forming small communities. In 1954, Hazel Dickens moved to Baltimore, along with her entire family including eleven siblings, from Mercer County, West Virginia. Hazel was in her late teens at the time of the transition, and she remembered the move away from the mountains as a meaningful, if not melancholy experience. “In the beginning, I don’t think we were thinking of getting out of there, you know. I don’t think we knew what ‘getting out of there’ meant. I don’t think we had anything to compare it to.” Like the experience of many families in the mid-1950s, a declining coal industry had made jobs in the region scarce. Though her father, Hilary, did not work directly in the coal industry, the

---

199 For a more comprehensive history of King Records see Jon Hartley Fox, *King of the Queen City: The Story of King Records* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
decline in the mines no doubt led to some increased pressure on him for some of the remaining limited work. In addition, a heart condition prevented Hilary from taking employment that required heavy lifting or manual labor. The Dickens family was pushed out the region as a result, and Hazel made the best of the situation. “I wanted to go ‘cause I wanted to get a job,” she remembered.202 She also echoed the same sentiment of Ray Pennington upon his move out of the mountains recalling how “we were poor as church mice.”

The family traveled, not unlike the Penningtons in Cincinnati, in piecemeal back and forth from Baltimore to West Virginia over time, with relatives making return visits and heading back north before Hazel finally boarded a Greyhound bus and made her own journey to the city. She recalled the arrival with some of the same melancholy as her departure. “I guess I expected a lot of things to be different. But there were just plain old apartments, old row houses. It was not any grand thing. I don’t know what I thought. I was just thinking, you know, go and make a lot of money, and buy all these nice clothes, and everything.” She viewed the trip as more than likely temporary, hopefully making enough money to help out the remaining family at home. The visits grew scarcer, however, and the adjustment to the city tougher. “I remember not having a coat one winter and having to stay in the house. It was stuff like that. I had to quit school ‘cause I didn’t have clothes to wear. So it was a matter of staying there with nothing or going to get a job and having, having clothes to wear, get a guitar, buy my guitar—which I did.”203

202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
The adjustment to city life necessities proved more difficult than she imagined, but her short list of her hierarchy of needs is no doubt telling. The necessity of a winter coat was equaled only by the need for a guitar to help curb some of the loneliness. “I had a pretty hard time adjusting and just trying to figure everything out. I was terribly shy and very, very unsocialized. I don’t think there was anybody that I could think of that was as unprepared as I was to go to a big city.” The neighborhood loneliness was hardly saved by the fact that she was surrounded by family. She lived with her sister, at first, and other migrants. In some ways the consolidated population made the stereotyping worse. “It was sort of like a hillbilly ghetto. We didn’t know anybody outside of the people that came from back there [in the mountains]. And they moved up there [to Baltimore] like we did.”204 In short, the sense of community bound by shared experience was limited for Dickens.

A few years after Dickens’ arrival, another individual with a musical background arrived in Baltimore, and helped build this nascent community among the local population. Mike Seeger came to the Charm City in 1954 as part of the public service requirement he needed to avoid service in the Korean War. Seeger sought conscientious objector status to avoid enlistment and the draft board provided him a list of acceptable alternatives. He eventually settled on an appointment at Mount Wilson Tuberculosis Hospital northwest of Baltimore.205 Seeger came from a musical background and from his youth was grounded in a strong folk music tradition. His father Charles was a musicologist who taught at

---

204 Ibid.
some of the preeminent institutions around the United States, including California Berkeley and Juilliard. Pete Seeger, the infamous folk musician and leftist cultural icon, was Mike’s half-brother and the two inherited a shared interest in American folk music though their own collaborations remained limited. Mike’s interest in the music carried over from this musical tradition and in time he made a name for himself in the industry as well though importantly he remained far less politically outspoken than his half-brother. The move to Baltimore was essential to this process.

While working at the Hospital his musical inclinations quickly became part of his reputation in the facility. Upon the recommendation of a coworker at that hospital Mike met Robert Dickens, one of the eleven Dickens children who moved from West Virginia to Baltimore in the years prior to Seeger’s arrival.206 The meeting with Robert eventually led Mike to Hazel and a relationship that fostered the growing bluegrass interest of both parties and the city generally. Mike saw in Hazel a genuine representation of bluegrass roots. She had a voice straight out of the mountains and provided an authentic source of the songs and music of Appalachia. Conversely, Dickens found an outlet for some of the melancholy feelings she had about living in Baltimore in a “hillbilly ghetto.” “Mike validated my culture,” she later said, raising a sentiment that would prove of the utmost importance for the development of bluegrass music and the elevation of Appalachian folk culture.207 The story echoes elements of a fairy tale, with the impoverished Dickens as the Cinderella figure rescued from her abject circumstances by Seeger’s “Prince

206 Malone, True Vine, 55.
207 Malone, True Vine, 56.
Charming.” The relationship was not necessarily romantic, but is a reminder of the importance of “high culture” to elevate the circumstances of Appalachians.

Dickens and Seeger both became engaged in a newly invigorated jam session scene in and around Baltimore. In addition to the music being played at the “hillbilly” bars, these venues provided important introductions for individuals with an interest in bluegrass music. Russ Hooper, a longtime Baltimore resident and career musician, became involved early on in these sessions and recalled their informality. “There used to be little gatherings, there were some brownstone places over on Calvert Street, and Charles Street, and St. Paul Street and, you know, you’d walk in at seven o’clock at night and walk out and it’s daylight. Just play all night long.” These brownstone parties occurred at numerous homes and grew as the membership and attendance at the events grew. Hooper explained how the community grew by extension from these gatherings. “One would visit the other’s place and they’d have another jam session and if you were invited to that, you’d play that.” The informal nature revealed a few important aspects of the bluegrass community in Baltimore, and other cities, at this time. First, the music was still largely in its embryonic form. Outside of a few popular artists, bluegrass music was as recognizable as the old adage about properly raised children; rarely seen and seldom heard. The musicians at these jam sessions found each other and were by no means professional; few professional bluegrass musicians existed in the 1950s, but they built their interest, skills, and repertoire out of these early meetings.

Secondly, the genre had already become somewhat fashionable among certain

---

208 Russ Hooper telephone interview with the author, 2 Nov 2014.
209 Russ Hooper telephone interview with the author, 2 Nov 2014.
segments of the population, not far removed from the interest of young people of the beat generation. Scholar Rachel Clare Donaldson notes, “rural folk music provided the same type of respite from mainstream music and mainstream society that urban jazz did” only here rural folk music began to appear in the urban milieu.\textsuperscript{210} The academic elements of the folk music appeal were clearly visible by the sheer presence of Seeger’s last name. The outside appeal came from the attachment to another identified disparate group of people outside the mainstream in the form of Appalachian migrants. These connections, though limited in the 1950s, became an important part of the music’s growth as the folk boom picked up speed in the later part of the decade and into the early 1960s.

Russ Hooper also worked to bridge some of these elements of the nascent bluegrass era. Hooper came to Baltimore, like Hazel Dickens, as a teenager. He had far less distance to travel, however, as he came just a short way north from Washington D.C. where he was born. “I had grandparents that lived here and who were sick,” he recalled. “So I came over to help take care of them.”\textsuperscript{211} While he did not come to Baltimore for the reasons associated with many Appalachian migrants, he likened his experience as similar. “It’s just like riding the turnip truck…it stops, you get off and you’re here the rest of your life.”\textsuperscript{212} The experience in reality was far different as Hooper’s background differed from the life of the Dickens family and the stereotypical portrait of migrants that began to populate Baltimore in that decade,

\textsuperscript{211} Russ Hooper interview with Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta, Baltimore Bluegrass Meetup, n.d., \url{http://www.meetup.com/Baltimore-Bluegrass/pages/Russ_Hooper_-_Part_1/} accessed 10 January 2016
\textsuperscript{212} Hooper interview with Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta.
but Hooper claimed some connection to those Appalachian roots. His introduction
to music, let alone anything of the country and bluegrass variety, came as a nine
year old on a visit to some family that lived on the periphery of Appalachia in
DeKalb County, Alabama.213 His uncle “had an old guitar lying in the corner, it must
have had three strings on it,” he remembered. “I think the whole time I was down
there, I was just inseparable from that thing.”214 As with many budding musicians,
the siren song of an instrument provided the initial spark to a relationship that came
to span a lifetime.

When Hooper returned to Washington D.C. after that family visit, he found
radio stations that played country music and allowed him to develop his fascination
and passion with the early genre. Stations did not necessarily program genre
specific in the late 1940s and early 1950s, so listeners had to educate themselves,
often through program listings in newspapers or word of mouth, and find which
broadcasters could reach them and at what times to find the sounds of their liking.
Hooper recalled these stations and the times to tune in to find artists and music that
appealed to him. The area around Washington D.C. and Baltimore was rich with
broadcasters, owing to the large and growing population, and rich with various
country music shows owing to the influx of Southerners into the region. Hooper
tuned into WEAM out of Washington and “Cactus Matt” in the evenings, and at other
times to WDON out of Wheaton, Maryland or WGAY from Silver Springs. One

213 DeKalb County is technically considered a part of Appalachia proper, as defined by the
Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). This definition of the region is largely academic and
political, however, having as much to do with funding possibilities as anything else. Alabama is far
removed from the popular image of Appalachia, but should also be considered part of the region
geographically and culturally because of this designation.
214 Russ Hooper telephone interview with the author, 2 Nov 2014.
station, WARL in Arlington, Virginia, played almost strictly country music and
became a regular listen for Hooper as a young man. These stations figured
prominently in developing his musical interests. “The more exposure I got to that
style of music,” he noted, “the more I figured out that his was pretty much what I
liked.” All of these stations, as Hooper remembered, mixed some bluegrass music
like Flatt and Scruggs in with what is now defined as “classic country.”

The traditional six-string guitar, despite that initial experience in Alabama,
did not come to define Hooper’s career. Hooper staked his craft in the genre from
the 1950s forward based on his prowess on the Dobro which is often the first
instrument left out of a traditional bluegrass lineup. That fact, however, opened up
lots of avenues for performance for Hooper and prevented his abilities from being
found redundant in numerous bands. He acquired his first lap steel at about the age
of twelve when he received a Rickenbacker guitar as a Christmas gift. He
purchased his first Dobro three years later, in Baltimore, from a local shop called
Ted’s Used Instruments. The purchase was a point of pride for Hooper. The Dobro
was a prewar (manufactured before World War II) model and sold at an affordable
price for the then teenager. He parlayed his growing prowess into regular

Hooper telephone interview with the author, 2 Nov 2014.
Like many country music fans, Hooper felt it necessary to emphasize his apologist nature for the
music. Sometime in the 1960s or 1970s, “country” music as it was originally conceived shifted to
what traditionally seen as a more star driven, slicker Nashville sound that has continued to this
present day. The sentiment is somewhat captured by the popular, ribald, and offensive joke “I’d
rather hear a fat girl fart, than a pretty boy sing.”
Hooper telephone interview with the author, 2 Nov 2014. The term Dobro has become a generic
term referring to a resonator guitar over the past decades. The proper name, however, is attributed
to a specific type of guitar manufactured by the Dopyera brothers. Its usage as a common term is
akin to referring to tissues as Kleenex today.
invitations to these jam sessions where he integrated himself into the early bluegrass music community.

Musical communities developed out of these urban record and instrument shops as well. Hooper formed his first group based on some chance encounters in a music store run by a man named Fred Walker. “The way Fred was, you could go up there on a Saturday and pick anything out of the case and sit and play it all day long and he didn’t care,” Hooper remembered. “So I met two guys up there....Bob Arney...and Dickie Rittler. Dickie was playing banjo and Bob was playing guitar.” Hooper’s first semi-professional experience in bluegrass grew out of this chance meeting. “The three of us started playing some of these little things. There was this thing called Roadies Revue where they’d take you out on a chartered bus and go to nursing homes or schools....There were dancers and singers and more.” This limited exposure opened Hooper and his mates up to other musicians and friendships. Danny Curtis, a mandolin player, joined the group after meeting in the Roadies Revue and soon after Hooper and the others met Marvin Howell while playing on local television. Howell had his own group and the two intersected at parties, festivals, and in the clubs over the following years. In the small world of bluegrass in the late 1950s, it was easy to become immersed in a local scene because so few musicians had interest or ability to play the genre.

In Washington D.C., bluegrass first came to prominence out of the migrant experience as well. Events like the Constitution Hall performance increased exposure to the hillbilly musical archetypes, but bluegrass came from more specific

---

218 Hooper interview with Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta.
219 Hooper interview with Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta.
individuals as occurred in Baltimore. Residents and musicians in the nation’s capital trace the broad influence on the music back to a small circle of people including Bernard Busbice, better known as Buzz Busby. Busby came to the city from Louisiana in 1951, as a seventeen year old. He showed academic prominence as a young man, graduated as valedictorian of his high school class, and as a result was recruited by the FBI into a training program for a job as a fingerprint technician with the agency.\textsuperscript{220} He took the job, in part, to help alleviate the poverty that his family had found itself in after Busby's father died. Busby had experience playing music in high school, he modeled his mandolin style after Bill Monroe, and his move to Washington opened up opportunities to find others with similar interests. One of the first people Busby met was a man by the name of Pete Pike, who had already been working as a semi-professional musician playing a mix of country and bluegrass. The two formed an early duo and found a regular gig at the Pine Tavern, located in northwest Washington D.C. on Massachusetts Avenue.\textsuperscript{221} There, they plied their trade in front of locals and migrants in the city and brought their sound to a regular radio gig on WGY; the station that had proven so influential for a number of country and bluegrass music fans in the city.

In 1954, after the radio gig, Busby and Pike were offered a television show by WRC-TV in Washington. Station employees discovered Busby when they attended a country music contest in Warrenton, Virginia. Busby and Pike took first prize, so the station bet on this award as a show of their skill and potential popularity.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{221} Tom Mindte telephone interview with the author, 16 Dec 2014.
\textsuperscript{222} Tom Mindte telephone interview with the author, 16 Dec 2014.
Bluegrass players in the region recalled the influence of this show on fostering the musical development in Washington. Tom Mindte came later to the music, but developed a friendship with Busby in time. Mindte’s father became an avid Busby fan, taking in shows at the Pine Tavern and tuning in religiously to the new television show. The show “was more than just people up there playing music because they had Bob Hope’s producer working at the station then. He knew how to do a bunch of special effects and things that were new to television then. A lot of people watched it just because it was interesting. But because of that TV show, a whole lot of people, especially young people, high school age at the time, became interested in bluegrass music. That is what really got the ball rolling in DC.”

Programs like the Busby television show became integral to expanding the fandom of country and bluegrass music. In 1957, the city launched the Jimmy Dean show with a network contract on CBS and a national audience for the locally produced program. Dean, a Texas musician, had seen his profile steadily rise in the decade and upon the launch of his show quickly became popular on the basis of his “remarkably winning personality” on the show. Bill Malone notes the show offered a “format for real country music, while also helping introduce newer entertainers” and stood in stark contrast to later network shows the became “overproduced, slickly professional, and only marginally ‘country.’” In these early years, many in the Washington area, and eventually nationally, became exposed to country music through Dean’s shows. Similar programs developed in other cities around the country in the 1950s and 1960s including the Midwestern Hayride in Cincinnati.

---

223 Tom Mindte telephone interview with the author, 16 Dec 2014.
That program grew out of the radio show of the same name, which was itself a lower cost replacement for the Renfro Valley programs that were first inaugurated in Cincinnati by John Lair. The television medium became a new important venue for Southern musicians and characters generally in the 1960s, especially as these programs were picked up by networks and aired nationally.\footnote{225 For more on the influence of television see Anthony Harkins, \textit{Hillbilly}, especially chapter six "The Hillbilly in the Living Room: Television Representation, 1952-1971," 173-205.}

The local shows influenced a national network of fans around the genre, but if specific artists in bluegrass had a national presence in the 1950s, however, it remained limited. The stories of local musicians in areas like Cincinnati and Baltimore finding the music largely reflects this fact, but so do the memories of some of the more popular musicians of the era. Ralph Stanley started in bluegrass music with his brother, Carter, and the two formed one of the most memorable and popular original bluegrass acts in the 1950s.\footnote{226 For a history of the Stanley Brothers time together see David W. Johnson, \textit{Lonesome Melodies: The Lives and Music of the Stanley Brothers} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013) and Dr. Ralph Stanley and Eddie Dean, \textit{Man of Constant Sorrow: My Life and Times} (New York: Gotham Books, 2009).} Their partnership began before the genre had earned a separate name in the music business. In what has now become a legendary moment in bluegrass history, Ralph Stanley recalled how upset Bill Monroe became when the Stanley Brothers became one of the first acts to “steal” his new sound. Ralph and Carter both became avid listeners of the Grand Ole Opry in the 1940s and heard Bill Monroe perform "Molly and Tenbrooks” one night on the show. They liked the song so much, in fact, that they beat Monroe to issuing a record of the tune and spurred a light rivalry with the would-be “Father of
Bluegrass.” Neil Rosenberg marks this moment as the emergence of a bluegrass sound as the imitation of the Monroe tune in the 1947 Rich-R-Tone recording stands as the first direct evidence of other musicians imitating the Bluegrass Boys sound.

Ralph Stanley credited his Appalachian upbringing for most of his musical career. Ralph’s mother first generated his interest in music by singing old ballads and playing the banjo in his company. Like many from the mountains, he also remembered singing a cappella in his Primitive Baptist church and the impact these moments would have on developing his musical interests. His brother, Carter, made an all too short career out of writing songs about leaving home and missing the mountains and this feeling became an important part of the Stanley, and eventually the bluegrass, sound. Ralph came of age in the mountains, however, during the time of mass exodus, and he saw a musical path as a ticket out. He noted, “I wanted the banjo for my tool instead of a pick and shovel, so I could stay out of those mines.”

He witnessed the mass exodus out of his home in Dickenson County, as a new “Wilderness Trail” along the “Hillbilly Highway” of U.S. Route 23. The road took thousands of mountaineers out of the Appalachia to points west and north including Cincinnati and Detroit. The work mentality adopted by Stanley became an important hallmark of the music as it developed in blue collar, migrant neighborhoods in cities and musicians became immersed in the long travel requirements necessary to find and keep regular work.

---
227 This story is recounted in biographies of all of the men. See Richard D. Smith, Can’t You Hear Me Callin’, 92-93, Dr. Ralph Stanley and Eddie Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 135-7, and David W. Johnson, Lonesome Melodies, 70.
228 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 46.
229 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 172.
Stanley recognized this migration and blue-collar mentality as important to some of his early success. Cincinnati also became an important stop on the touring circuit and for recording purposes. In 1958, the brothers signed a record deal with King Records when company founder Syd Nathan allowed them “the freedom to make music at a time when Nashville had shut the door” as Stanley recalled. Ray Pennington, a fellow displaced Appalachian, served as a producer on many of these recording sessions. In Cincinnati, they’d often record and shoot promotional and album photos during the day and play in the bars and clubs around the city at night. They found both fellow migrants and college students in the clubs, and in particular the Ken-Mill Café where “a few nights booked...felt like playing for friends and family.” His memory of the area reflects both the relatively small, close-knit nature of the bluegrass community during this era and the sense of community that displaced Appalachians and others had built in these cities. The Baltimore and Washington area, he recalled, became important spots because of the mass migration of mountaineers. “They worked for the government in Washington and for the big factories in Baltimore. They loved hillbilly music, and they really loved the Stanley Brothers.” The bars and clubs frequented by the Stanley Brothers in the late 1940s and early 1950s were often the same places that local musicians came to find one another. Stanley came to understand that while he did not enjoy these venues as necessarily his favorite places to play, he recognized the necessity of the sites towards keeping their viability as musicians alive. The venues, however,

---

230 Staanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 201.
231 Ray Pennington, telephone interview with the author, 30 January 2014.
232 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 261.
233 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 185.
were quite often “the kind of taverns where you were lucky to get out with your life.” As a result of these niche communities and venues, music largely remained available solely on the radio and records for most listeners and in the mid-1950s became even scarcer because, according to Stanley, “Elvis just about starved us out.”

While the Stanleys gained some notoriety by the mid-1950s and weathered the rock n’ roll era, other professional musicians used the migration patterns and the opportunities afforded by their urban environments to generate professional careers. Harley “Red” Allen came to Dayton following a short stint in the Marines after World War II. Like so many, he saw the job prospects of his hometown, outside of Hazard, Kentucky, dwindling and followed the migration patterns from eastern Kentucky to southwestern Ohio. Allen came from a rather large family with five sisters and one brother, none of whom seemed to possess the musical talent or interest of Red. His interest in bluegrass music, like many subsequent artists, came from that family background and listening religiously to programs like the Grand Ole Opry. By 1951, Allen earned a modest living playing nightclubs and saloons in and around Dayton and Middletown, Ohio. From there he took a brief stint on the Kentucky Barn Dance on WVLK in Versailles, Kentucky. The pay was minimal here, but the radio circuit job did offer opportunities to meet other mainstays in the

---

234 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 213.
235 Stanley and Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 184. The growth of rock n’ roll music in the mid 1950s became an important part of the bluegrass story and also reflected the ways in which the genres borrowed from one another. An important example occurred in 1954 when Bill Monroe heard a recording of Elvis Presley doing a version of his song “Blue Moon of Kentucky.” These were the “lean years” in bluegrass, and Monroe saw an opportunity to make money by releasing his own updated version of the song. He sped up the waltz and introduced a 2/4 time signature later in the song and crafted one of the hits for which he is most known. For more on the story see Richard D. Smith, Can’t You Hear Me Callin’, 132-3.
bluegrass genre including Platt and Scruggs and the Stanley Brothers. After roughly a year on the program, he made a return to Ohio. Upon this subsequent trip to Dayton in 1952, he met Frank Wakefield, a mandolin virtuoso and the child of another migrant family that came to Dayton from Tennessee. The two formed a band and by 1952 played regularly in the entertainment district along Fifth Street in the city’s downtown. The growing community in the region opened new opportunities for Allen and his band, the Blue Ridge Mountain Boys, and they cut a first record with the Kentucky label out of Cincinnati. This second stint in Dayton also introduced Red Allen to the Osborne family. In 1953, Allen had a regular gig on WONE in Dayton and while there he met a thirteen year-old banjo prodigy named Sonny Osborne. Allen, Sonny, and Sonny’s older brother Bobby eventually teamed up as a group for a number of years and earned a record contract with MGM out of Nashville.

These chance meetings in the early 1950s still displayed migrants’ access to the music as a means of generating careers in the industry. Bobby and Sonny Osborne were born six years apart, 1931 and 1937 respectively, in rural Leslie County, Kentucky. They came to Dayton quite young with their family and were introduced to the professional music in that city. Sonny Osborne became one of the early clones of Earl Scruggs when he recorded with Bill Monroe at just fourteen years of age. That Monroe plucked a migrant out of Dayton, Ohio to fill in at the all-important banjo spot at this point in his career shows both the spread of the music

---

from its Nashville and mountain roots and the limited number of true bluegrass style banjo pickers available at the time.238

On the city streets, much crossover in this mix of entertainment came about as well. Jimmie Skinner broadcast a radio show from his storefront, the Jimmie Skinner Music Center, which aired via WNOP in Covington, Kentucky just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. Skinner himself was a migrant, born in Madison County, Kentucky in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains near the hometowns of numerous other artists, including Bradley Kincaid, Red Foley, and John Lair. He began playing banjo from around age six, influenced by his family and the rich musical traditions that surrounded his country home. In his late teens, his family moved north to Hamilton, Ohio like so many from his region. Skinner used some of his musical talents to stakeout an amateur music career, traveling to local areas to do some recording and performing at local dances. A 1940s recording of an original banjo tune, “Doin’ My Time,” found its way into bluegrass styling by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs in a Mercury Recording and eventually as a bluegrass standard.

Skinner worked the radio circuit across the Midwest and South for a time before returning to Cincinnati and meeting manager Lou Epstein. Epstein and Skinner embarked on numerous ventures together, including a record label and the aforementioned store. Skinner provided the recognizable name and Epstein the managerial experience that made the store the major mail-order warehouse for

---

238 A quick glance at the number of bluegrass musicians who came in and out of Monroe’s circle over the course of his career is astounding. Nearly every member of the first or second generation of the music came into contact with Monroe at some point and by extension brought others within one removal of the “father” of bluegrass.
innumerable records.\textsuperscript{239} One of the store employees, Chuck Seitz, went on to have a lucrative career as a producer for King Records.\textsuperscript{240} He also proved instrumental in the formation of King offshoots, the Gateway and Kentucky labels, which served as some of the first labels to record bluegrass acts like the aforementioned Osborne Brothers. The Jimmie Skinner store became the physical presence for fans across the country to acquire popular and obscure country and bluegrass records. Russell MacDavitt, a bluegrass fan from north of Cincinnati, recalled how stops at the store became regular parts of his visits to Cincinnati. When he and his brother would head to the city to take in a Cincinnati Reds baseball game or a film at the cinema, they might also work in a trip to the Music Center. “I’d drive my car to Hamilton (about 25 miles north of Cincinnati) and we’d catch a bus,” he recalled. “When we’d catch the bus, Jimmie Skinner would be riding the bus. He lived in Hamilton, he rode the bus down there every morning to the Music Center and he’d get off the bus at five minutes to nine (o’clock), go over, tune his guitar, and go on at nine o’clock. There’d be a lot of people in the store and if there’d be an artist coming into town he’d have them on as guests.”\textsuperscript{241} Ads for the Music Center ran on stations around the city, including WCKY with its wide reach across the region. The store regularly published ads for its wares in trade magazines for country musicians and fans.\textsuperscript{242} The combination further cemented the place of Cincinnati in the development of the music in the minds of listeners across the region. Neil Rosenberg also credits the

\textsuperscript{240} Rosenberg, \textit{Bluegrass}, 102-3.
\textsuperscript{241} Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 August 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
\textsuperscript{242} Rosenberg, \textit{Bluegrass}, 108.
store with helping to popularize the bluegrass term. In a 1957 ad for the store, the term “Blue Grass” was first used to advertise some of the outfit’s collection.243

For those interested in engaging in bluegrass culture, then, southwestern Ohio area offered numerous opportunities in the 1950s. Fans of the genre came to rely on the trappings of the urban environments just as the musicians themselves did. Russell “Mac” MacDavitt grew up in rural Preble County, Ohio, just west of Dayton on the Indiana border. He had no Appalachian roots, but in the 1940s his rural county remained full of mostly farmers and related industry. “I went to school out there in a school that had about 200 kids in all twelve grades,” he recalled. “I was on a farm, grew up on a farm and when I got to probably seventh grade I got extremely bored with the popular music of the day and started looking for something different.”244 The new sounds of bluegrass music, for MacDavitt, had sonic and lyrical connections to the older country sounds, which had been the major appeal to him as a young man. He remembered, “country music got too uptown to play anything that had a banjo and fiddle in it” so bluegrass picked up the pieces, and the fans, as a result.245 Bluegrass also had a modish appeal to listeners like MacDavitt. Its limited popularity and, at the time of his discovery of the music in the late 1940s, its lack of a recognizable genre lent fans an element of obscurity that has long held appeal for music fans.246 Being able to “discover” new music and present

243 Rosenberg, Bluegrass, 114.
244 Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
245 Ibid.
246 The relationship between hipness, popularity, and obscurity has long been the subject of sociologists, musicologists, and pop culture historians. John Leland defines “hip” as a form of rebellion and an attachment to the obscure or countercultural elements has long been an important part of this overall feeling. Bluegrass, for outsiders at least, fit this aspect of an outsider nature and this became an important part of its appeal as it transitioned into folk music as a subgenre, or new
the sounds to friends and relatives has long been an important marker for music fans, and in this instance MacDavitt maintained only a small social circle of interested followers. “In high school, me and three other guys listened to country and bluegrass. Everyone else turned their nose up at it,” as MacDavitt recalled. If others in his area tuned into radio shows or bought records at this time, MacDavitt argues “they weren’t admitting it.” The other young people in and around MacDavitt’s home followed the pop shows, he says, like “a heard of sheep. This is what everyone’s listening to, I gotta listen to it.” For many residents in the Cincinnati and Dayton areas, music associated with hillbilly culture was anathema to proud Ohioans who sought to distance themselves from the tropes associated with migrants and Appalachian residents. At the same time the music offered a modicum of countercultural appeal to fans of the genre because of its obscurity and its authenticity. The families in and around this section of rural Ohio assumed as much as well, partially from their experiences working with migrants. Appalachians who came to Ohio did not just find work in factories, but also settled in the rural hinterlands and became hired hands on farms. On the MacDavitt farm, Appalachian families came and went quite often as temporary employees in the fields. “They were invariably from Kentucky and Tennessee,” Russell recalled, and his dad “just

---

247 Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
248 Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio. The quote certainly further reflects the hip-chicness MacDavitt saw in bluegrass music, with the sheep reference an obvious call to the countercultural elements inherent to his vision of bluegrass music.
249 Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
hated them.” Whether or not the popular imagery influenced this opinion is impossible to ascertain, but his objections stemmed from the notoriously common complaints of laziness and bringing too large of a family, sometimes as many as ten children, to reside in the tenant house. An association then with hillbilly music in this time and place could undoubtedly lead to an association with all of the accompanying stereotypes.

Urban residents too became attracted to the music because of its counterculture elements. Jim Tarbell was a lifelong Cincinnatian, though raised in the affluent Hyde Park suburb northeast of downtown. He had no Appalachian or southern connections of note, but found himself drawn to the music for the aforementioned reasons. As a young man, he often tuned into WCKY late at night on one of his first radio sets in his bedroom. He remembered late at night you could find music “that you couldn’t get during the daytime so they weren’t really in the average person’s vocabulary. I started hearing country music, and it was different...I liked it.”250 When he was a bit older, he and his friends often frequented the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood because of its Appalachian scene and entertainment opportunities. “1958, we were [in Over-the-Rhine] with a vengeance,” he described. “You could hear great music and cheap, very seldom was there any admission, and cheap beer and you could get served, which you couldn't in Hyde Park. And see a fight. Frequently you’d see a good fight. And what’s not to like?”251 Tarbell’s comment reflects a certain amount of privilege tourism within the city limits, as the Appalachian neighborhood became attractive for its exoticism as

250 Jim Tarbell interview with the author, 19 Nov 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio
251 Jim Tarbell interview with the author, 19 Nov 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio
much as anything else. The sentiment behind the comment though can be interpreted as not far removed from Mike Seeger’s attraction to Hazel Dickens at roughly the same time. Both Dickens and the Appalachian neighborhood provided an authentic representation of life and music that many young people began searching for in this decade as the early counterculture elements began to coalesce around common ideas and feelings.

This nuanced yet more popular appeal of some aspects of the hillbilly aesthetic gained traction among migrant organizations as well. Some native, grassroots organizations adopted and emphasized these palatable elements of the culture that urban reformers tended to neglect through the 1950s. In 1959, a group of civic leaders, headed by Stanley Dezarn from Clay County, Kentucky, organized in Hamilton, Ohio (roughly halfway between Cincinnati and Dayton). That year they sponsored the first annual Kentucky Homecoming event at nearby Crawford Park. The event provided “an opportunity for people with similar cultural and environmental backgrounds to renew old acquaintances.”252 The organization, dubbed the “O’Tucks,” an abbreviated version of Ohioans from Kentucky, attempted to bring together the numerous migrants that had settled in the surrounding areas including Hamilton, Cincinnati, and Dayton while at the same time generating a program that provided a broader appeal. For the first event, the leadership of the group recognized the power a folk festival could hold in generating interest and

252 “Kentucky Homecoming, Folk Festival Scheduled at Crawford Park Oct. 4th,” Hamilton Journal, 26 Sep 1959. The O’Tucks were but one of myriad organizations designed to organize Appalachian migrants in urban areas. The Cincinnati area has perhaps the strongest tradition of said organizations, but they existed in various forms around the country from the 1950s up to the present day. See Thomas E. Wagner and Philip J. Obermiller, “Going Home Without the Trip: Appalachian Migrant Organizations, in Appalachian Odyssey, ed. Obermiller et al., 215-230.
bringing these migrant groups together. The committee charged with organizing the event hoped that the “country folk festival” idea would help preserve “the sectional and cultural qualities of folk songs and [bring] about a better understanding of the folklore and the ways of life in the Kentucky hills.” The event also attempted to incorporate other interested parties, not just migrants, as a means of presenting some of the better aspects of migrant culture. For these reasons, the homecomings often relied on a broad interpretation of Appalachian culture that tried to soften the image in the minds of older inhabitants, capitalize on a growing folk and counterculture interest in Appalachia, and present a notion of pride to the migrants who experienced backlash from city leadership and residents. These references often relied on the quaint imagery that could occasionally be subject to derision in the mainstream criticisms of Appalachia as well. For an example, beyond the folk music presentation in 1959, the centerpiece of the O’Tuck reunion in 1961 was a log cabin recreation meant to evoke some associations with Abraham Lincoln (a non-Appalachian) on the centennial of the Civil War.

While traditional urban leadership continued to rely on the base interpretations of Appalachian culture and examined economic and cultural solutions to the perceived problem, many Appalachians themselves found some release through the music associated with their culture. The fact that Appalachians had been pushed to the margins by broader society had the inverse effect of broadening their appeal among countercultural elements of the urban fabric. At the

---

same time, the music grew in popularity as it entered cities and became a more commercially available and acceptable form of music for residents and listeners and viewers over the radio and television broadcasts. Migrants tried to recreate some aspects of their lost lives through this musical aesthetic and offered an authentic representation for urban residents of a cultural form that was rapidly disappearing and offered an escape from the more mainstream elements of American music and culture. This connection grew in the 1960s and forward as the folk music boom emerged in full force across the country and, like bluegrass, developed out of these urban environments and the venues in which this authentic music was played took on mythic proportions.
Chapter Four: ‘Homespun and Old-Fashioned’ Bluegrass: Constructing Urban Authenticity

In the spring of 1959, Alan Lomax conceived and carried out a concert that has cemented itself in the annals of both folk and bluegrass music history. The event, “Folksong ’59,” brought musicians from various walks of life to the main stage at New York City’s Carnegie Hall and presented these various groups to an academic and enthusiastic audience in a new way. The concert represented both the culmination of an urban folk movement and a new, more overtly recognized and popular direction within that movement. Lomax had long been a central figure in the American folk music world, going back to the days of traveling and recording across the South with his father John. The pair traveled across the country in the 1930s, with research focused on the South and West in particular, collected songs and recording artists in an attempt to catalog the varied folk music of the United States. The Folksong ’59 concert became a marquee event for Lomax since it came quickly after his return from self-exile to the United Kingdom for the decade prior. The concert also helped to showcase New York City’s role in the revival. The event dovetailed with the growing grassroots action occurring in the city, most notably in Greenwich Village’s coffee houses.

The Carnegie Hall concert hailed Lomax’s return to the United States and worked as a showcase for various folk acts from around the country. Enlisted performers included urban folk revivalists Mike and Pete Seeger, gospel groups including the Selah Jubilee Singers, and blues artists Muddy Waters and Memphis Slim. While in Europe, Lomax kept his ears close to the ground regarding folk music
and stayed attuned to developments in bluegrass music. The genre had become attractive to a growing “citybilly” movement in urban centers and though Lomax remained somewhat critical of the idea of urban folk music as authentic, musicians and revivalists pushed him to expand his mind on the subject.255 John Cohen, a member of the Mike Seeger led revival band The New Lost City Ramblers, in particular urged Lomax to recognize these urban performances of rural songs as a legitimate folk form. He argued these new folk musicians looked for authenticity in their versions of the music and “the effort is focused more on a search for real and human values. We are not looking for someone to lead us. We are looking within ourselves.”256 In no uncertain terms, bluegrass provided an authenticity that folk revivalists believed lacking in most modern, popular music forms.

Folksong ’59 also provided a coming out party of sorts for bluegrass music on the national stage. The genre had not yet achieved mainstream recognition outside of migrant pockets in some larger cities and in the limited folk music aficionado crowd of many of these same urban areas. Folksong ’59, however, put the bluegrass on the main stage at one of the nation’s most prestigious music venues. Lomax came to recognize bluegrass as a form of folk music upon his return to the United States in 1958. In 1959, shortly after the Carnegie Hall show, Lomax dubbed bluegrass “folk music in overdrive,” and gave the sound a moniker that proved to have staying power as workable shorthand for the genre’s unique style. Lomax’s addition of a

256 John Cohen quoted in Szwed, Alan Lomax, 308.
bluegrass band, Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys, to the festival lineup came at the behest of Mike Seeger. Seeger discovered the band performing in Baltimore and recognized the group’s sound as an authentic representation of bluegrass and something close to the work of Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. The band also fit Lomax’s stated goal of fleshing out a folk concert made almost strictly of urban music. Lomax did not at first pick Taylor’s band, however. He made overtures towards Monroe, but Monroe declined the invitation at least in part due to Lomax’s politics. Monroe thought that it might hurt his business and brand for the Nashville musician to associate openly with a New York “Red.” The window thus opened for Taylor.

In early 1959, upon Seeger’s recommendation, Lomax accepted an invitation to see the Stoney Mountain Boys perform at the 79 Club, a seedy bar in downtown Baltimore just west of the Inner Harbor. Russ Hooper, who played the club in the 1960s, remembered the place and customers as rather rough. He even witnessed a murder in the club one night. These sorts of clubs were important in connecting the music to the sense of urban authenticity that the migrants and many of the original musicians like Taylor provided. Lomax’s notes on a later album he recorded are a telling indicator of his impression of the band. He wrote, “there may be somewhat more accomplished players in other groups, there may be smoother orchestrations, but to my ear, nothing quite matches the wild, free, rambunctious

---

257 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 310.
258 Richard Smith, Can’t You Hear Me Callin’, 148.
259 Earl Taylor offered representative bluegrass as well because, like Monroe, he played mandolin and sang in the tenor or “high lonesome” sound so associated with the genre. Taylor and Monroe were also not the lead singers in their bands over the years, yet their voices and instruments became recognized as the key features of their particular sound.
260 Hooper interview with Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta.
rant of the Stoneys” and referred to them as “the mad young gooneybirds of bluegrass.” As he reflected on the band, he engaged in the emerging dialogue about authenticity related to bluegrass as it established itself as a legitimate genre and as a branch of folk music. “Each one of the Stoney Mountain Boys is a natural who has played since childhood and who cares for nothing so much as making music on his chosen instrument,” he wrote. He then recounted the mythic siren’s call to the genre to which each musician succumbed as he escaped his rural life. These stories became common tropes for musicians and fans as they discovered the music.

Both critics and fans celebrated Taylor’s performance at Carnegie Hall. Reporters described the event as another in line with Lomax’s previous efforts to present relatively obscure music to a broader audience. While Lomax purposefully identified bands and genres that fit the new urban folk movement, and even intimated how surprised he was to hear the music of some of the acts in the festival emanating from juke boxes around the city, a newspaper critic for the New York Times disagreed. According to the reviewer, the event “produced an array of artists who gave a fascinating display of the source material that the juke boxes have diluted and distorted.” This, in many ways, presented the exact opposite argument of what Lomax sought to present. Lomax explicitly brought in modern versions of the folk traditions that he found or had been turned onto in cities, but that still possessed the rural authenticity associated with “real” folk music. The

261 Liner notes to Alan Lomax Presents Folk Songs From The Bluegrass, Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys, United Artists, UAL 3049, Vinyl, 1959. The liner notes also included a short history of bluegrass music to this point in history before the introduction of the band. He noted the importance of Monroe and the partnership with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs in these notes and in this regard made an early public attempt to establish the broader history of the genre and unique sound.
262 Liner notes to, Alan Lomax Presents, 1959.
263 John Wilson, “Program Given By Alan Lomax,” NYT, 4 Apr 1959.
review's description of the Stoney Mountain Boys, furthermore, posited their roots in the "hills of Virginia," rather than from urban Baltimore where the band formed and made a name for itself. The reporting became but another in a long line of assumptions about the nature of bluegrass music and its roots.

The performance, as Taylor remembered it, was perhaps the height of Taylor’s national fame.

Whenever Alan Lomax called us, whenever he said, ‘Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys—the first bluegrass band to ever be at Carnegie Hall,’ you could have counted the ‘hand-plaus’ that we got. But whenever that bluegrass hit them microphones in that Carnegie Hall, that beat anything I ever seen in my life. When we would end a number, I know that it would take five minutes before we could go into another one—that was how much roarin’ and screamin’ and hair pullin’ there was.

Lomax offered to organize a European tour for the band in the following year, but lineup shakeups due at least in part to Taylor’s irascible personality led to no developments on that front. The reception in New York, however, showed the ways in which individuals in other urban areas had come to accept bluegrass as an atypical hillbilly sound.

In presenting bluegrass music to a national audience for arguably the first time, Lomax searched for an authentic representation of the genre. When more popular acts spurned him, Earl Taylor’s band became a universal stand-in for the musical style. The appeal of the music, as Taylor and others remember it that night, came about from a variety of factors, not the least of which was the apparent

---

264 Ibid. Whether the author of the review relied on an assumption about the band, the band’s self-introduction, or the words of Lomax for their origins is not known. Given Lomax’s stated goal, however, and the academic introductions he gave in the evening it would seem odd for him to have presented the band in this way. Positing their origins in the “hills,” however, rather than Baltimore would have certainly been in keeping with the language typically associated with authentic folk music.

authenticity the bluegrass sound offered. The supposed long roots of the bluegrass, in the hills of Appalachia, brought in younger and younger audiences and fans during the folk revival period as they searched for a variety of authentic experiences in many aspects of their lives. This search manifested itself in numerous ways including back to the land movements, the emergence of the New Left, and identity politics. All of these topics tied into thinking about Appalachia in the era as well. Folk music played a role in politics in overt and subtle ways. While bluegrass music, for the most part, remained overtly apolitical, the new generation of fans' attachment to it overlapped with the general push towards an authentic existence that developed during this period. Doug Rossinow notes how “the quest for authenticity and the vision of a downtrodden historical agent...animated the new left.”266 The hillbilly archetype epitomized the downtrodden American in many ways and an interest in bluegrass music seemed an accessible entry point into this world. Of course attaching oneself to the work of Lomax or Pete Seeger was quite overtly political, but embracing the authenticity associated with a softening hillbilly stereotype could prove equally powerful for what it said about one individually and in relation to broader society. Furthermore, this younger generation sought not just to engage passively with the music, but also to seek out authentic models of this lifestyle and thereby engage with the music's past and present more directly. As Robert Cantwell argues, the “revivalist's nostalgia is not for the music alone, but for the way of life it represents.”267 Urban residents who found themselves wrapped up

266 Doug Rossinow, Politics of Authenticity, 253.
in bluegrass’s growing popularity thus used the early generation’s presence in the
city as a means of connecting to an authentic and anti-modern way of life
represented by bluegrass music.

Authenticity has held differing meanings for people over time, but often
centered on similar general ideas. To be authentic, something, music in this case,
needed to prove itself as original and also possess a degree of hipness or scarcity.
Authenticity implies a certain amount of uncommonness in its very nature. If
everything is authentic, then nothing is. To a degree, authenticity has also been a
commodity dealt mostly through transactions around nostalgia and hipness as new
generations searched for connections to a past that may or may not have actually
existed. John Lair, while witnessing the folk revival, found the music being churned
out in cities to be inauthentic and bluegrass in particular to be derivative of the
music he had championed on his radio programs for decades. At the same time, he
neglected or denied the way he manufactured his own radio image out of a fictive
past and presented these ideas to his audience in ways that often hid the reality
behind the presentation. This was not dissimilar to the process by which many
products are presented to consumers. Numerous individuals came to bluegrass
music in this folk revival environment of the cities and from popular entertainment
like the Beverly Hillbillies television show. Authenticity acts as a moving target in
many respects, defined by what historian Daniel Walkowitz has termed the “folk


268 See Michael Ann Williams, Staging Tradition for more on the manufactured Lair image. This
debate overall is borne out in numerous works on country music history, in particular Richard A.
Peterson, Creating Country Music. Other takes deal with the common language trope of differing
“real” country music with the more “manufactured” Nashville approach. For an ethnography of
Walkowitz’s idea in action see Aaron A. Fox, Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class
process.” He argues the process “is one in which local community cultures give each tradition its own inflection, and its history.” Each generation thus champions its own definition of authenticity, even if it derives from similar notions raised in the past. National popularity of bluegrass music played a role, and its attachment to the folk revival no doubt aided this popularity. In the cities on the local level, however, connections to musicians and places that played and housed “true” bluegrass music became the most important factors for defining the genre and its relationship to the past and present. For bluegrass fans in the folk revival, this meant finding artists who represented the tie to Appalachia supposedly inherent in the music and discovering venues that seemed to embrace much of the hillbilly archetype.

Earl Taylor provides an interesting case study for examining the on the ground the transition of bluegrass from supposed rural curiosity to urban art form. Tracing his movements around the Midwest, his journeys between Baltimore and Cincinnati, and the memories of members who played with him across generations further illuminates the transition from the rural focus of the music and its players to a true urban genre with younger groups becoming the harbingers of a polished and modern bluegrass sound. The 1950s saw the arrival of bluegrass music as an official genre of music outside of the country mainstream, culminating in the Folksong ’59 performance. The 1960s and 1970s bore witness to its full-fledged annexation into the folk world and its appropriation by a new generation of musicians who helped push the music into prominence. This annexation fueled a debate in the following decades over what constituted bluegrass music. Taylor’s career as an urban artist,

---

one who reflected the traditional definition of bluegrass music and helped spawn progressive trends, illustrates the entrenchment of bluegrass music in American cities and the appeal of authentic hillbilly imagery in helping to secure the genre’s presence in cities. Over the course of the decade, bluegrass further cemented itself as a unique urban music form as college students and folk music enthusiasts flocked to the sound and it spread across the country via continued migration and airwaves.

Earl Taylor’s life began in 1930 in the small town of Rose Hill, amidst fruitful cradle of bluegrass music of far southwestern Virginia. He often referred to the area as “that last part of old Virginia,” further embedding his legacy into the very founding era of American history. In this same region, other bluegrass legends like the Stanley family first cut their teeth on the genre. Taylor’s family surrounded him with music from an early age. He had four brothers who played clawhammer banjo and a mother who nurtured some of Taylor’s own latent talent. He first stumbled upon bluegrass as a child, hearing Bill Monroe on the radio, and came to idolize Monroe’s musical styling and his mandolin playing in particular. Like so many musicians, this interest quickly developed into an obsession. He recalled, “I’d come in at twelve o’clock of a day and swallow my lunch as fast as I could and pick [on the mandolin] just a little bit. And then [my brothers would] make me go back to the fields to keep me from picking.” Shortly thereafter, he also picked up the harmonica for which he later came to be known and found it to his liking for its portability.

---

270 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio
At the age of 17, Taylor moved to Michigan, following a path blazed north by an acquaintance from Rose Hill. Detroit was an emerging country music haven thanks to the thousands of migrants who populated the postwar auto factories. Taylor won a talent competition in the area and earned a job with a local band. The western swing style of his first band did not suit his ear and he recruited two musicians from Cincinnati, and brought them to the Detroit area to form the first incarnation of the Stoney Mountain Boys. The band lasted just a short while, however, and Taylor soon moved back east to Rockville, Maryland. In Rockville, as in other suburbs of the Washington and Baltimore metropolitan area, picking parties among migrant groups became common. At one of these gatherings, Taylor met Vernon “Boatwhistle” McIntyre and the two began a musical partnership. Taylor reformed his Stoney Mountain Boys with all new members and joined the local musical scene as a popular group. In 1953, the band moved to Baltimore proper in hopes of finding steady work and Taylor recruited a fiddler he met on the street.

The new band did not immediately find work and Taylor had not performed outside of parties and gatherings since his short stint in Michigan. He promised his new band that the streets of Baltimore might prove more profitable, but club owners rebuffed their efforts at nearly every turn. He had a part-time job hanging dry wall alongside fellow musician Charlie Waller, later of the Country Gentlemen. One afternoon, the work crew sat in Waller’s car on the way home from a day’s labor.

---

when they happened upon some bluegrass music on the radio. The two listened for a time before Earl looked around the car and said “boys, what those boys need is a tenor singer and a mandolin player. I won’t be in to work tomorrow.” He subsequently showed up at the radio station and joined the house band.\(^{273}\) Taylor’s group quickly transitioned into nightly work in clubs around the city, sometimes working as many as nine gigs a week.\(^{274}\) This pattern lasted for approximately two years before Taylor and banjo player Sam Hutchins left Baltimore for Detroit. The decision to leave a city often echoed the work of the radio stars of an earlier generation. Artists would play an area, on the airwaves in an earlier generation, before it became “played out” and then move onto a new region. It’s certainly possible that a similar decision came into Taylor’s mind during this era as he moved to new cities hoping for bigger paydays. The relatively small number and close network of bluegrass musicians also encouraged some of this moving about.

As they arrived in Detroit, Jimmy Martin’s collaboration with the Osborne Brothers had recently ended and Martin needed a band. He hired Hutchins and Taylor after a one-night audition at a club and the two became important members in some of Martin’s most popular recordings, including “Hit Parade of Love.”\(^{275}\) Taylor proved to be an important part of Martin’s success during this time and the

\(^{273}\) Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio

\(^{274}\) This work pattern would not have been uncommon for bands relying on club and bar venues for employment. Typically they would play every night of the week and afternoon or matinee shows on the weekends as well.

collaboration resulted in a once removed tie to his childhood idol in Bill Monroe.\footnote{Jimmy Martin played guitar and sang with Bill Monroe in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For more on Martin’s career see Tom Piazza, \textit{True Adventures With the King of Bluegrass: Jimmy Martin} (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).}

This band lasted just a few years as well, however, before Taylor came back to Baltimore. He reformed his own group, this time hiring Walter Hensley to play banjo. Hensley, a fellow migrant from the coalmines of Grundy, Virginia, came to Baltimore in 1956. This new iteration of the Stoney Mountain Boys made an appearance on Mike Seeger’s Folkways album and Hensley came to epitomize the fast paced, “hard-drivin’,” urban banjo style eventually associated with Baltimore. Alan Lomax described Hensley as “intense, randy, and ironic” and commented how “there was true folk music in every note he plays.”\footnote{Liner notes to \textit{Alan Lomax Presents}, 1959.} Lomax observed and hired this iteration of the band for his New York event.

Following the Carnegie Hall performance, the band traveled about the Midwest looking to expand their brand and find steady work. Most of their forays did not end well; brief stays in Kansas City and Chicago left them wanting for jobs. In 1961, they came to Cincinnati and found steady work in venues around the city. The bluegrass presence had been strong in prior decades with people around the country associating the city with popular recordings and radio programs, but residents still found it difficult to hear a true bluegrass band in a club on a regular basis. The demand in the city remained strong enough to keep them regularly employed. Eventually, they found a six night a week job at a local watering hole, the Ken-Mill Café in the Walnut Hills neighborhood of Cincinnati, just northeast of downtown. Band members also found a kindred spirit in the club owner, Stu
Salmons, who came to Cincinnati from West Virginia after World War II. Over the early part of the decade, the club earned a reputation for its rowdiness, due in part to the clientele frequently in attendance and Salmons’s rough personality. Memories of the Ken-Mill are often tied directly to the owner’s character. He reportedly kept a loaded weapon near the cash register, as a crowd-control device, and allegedly band members also often carried their own weapons into the club. In addition, others believed Salmons operated a prostitution ring out of the club to pair with the other illicit activities. Another rumor persisted that Salmons had done time in prison for murder, but scant evidence substantiates that fact. John Morgan summed up his experiences in a profile of Walter Hensley. “Drunken fights were fairly common. Usually one just had to step back and avoid any thrown bottles. Once, however, as I nobly protected a young lady from the pushing and shoving of a fight, I realized the dark object being waved near my head by one of the fighters was a revolver. I stayed away for at least a month after that.”

Together, though, the underlying gossip about all of the criminal activity and ideas surrounding the club owner only added to feelings of authenticity and the idea of the Ken-Mill as a place to see tried and true bluegrass music. The band and the owner, in short, seemed to live up—or down as the case may be—to the various stereotypes developed about Appalachians during the prior years. Despite negative attributes that became associated with the place, those who attended regularly remember it fondly. Salmons relied on recent migrants, but the music also drew in

---

278 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky. The rumor is nonetheless telling about the overall nature of Salmons and the club in general as a cultural artifact of its time and place.
students from the nearby universities and the band showcased some of the slight changes occurring within bluegrass.

Harry Sparks epitomized these changes that occurred in society and bluegrass music in particular. Sparks had a largely upper-middle class upbringing, raised as the son of a Murray State University professor and later administrator in far western Kentucky on the periphery of Nashville, Tennessee. In the early 1950s, as a high school teenager, he viewed the area and its musical tastes with a skepticism and ear attuned to the more nondescript and rougher versions of the hillbilly archetype. He and his friends in a hot-rod automobile club used to frequent the local drive-in theater, which became popular destinations for traveling country and bluegrass acts at this time, to harass bands that came through town on weekends.280 One evening, his group of friends planned their usual routine only to find Sparks thrown for a loop by the musicians that appeared on stage. “We went up front and got ready to catcall and aggravate and be a nuisance,” he recalled, “what we were told was a hillbilly band.” Moments after they made their way to the front of the crowd, however, “Earl Scruggs stuck his banjo in the microphone and I was paralyzed.” He thought to himself, “that’s about the most wonderful thing I ever heard in my life. The night of his initial exposure to bluegrass banjo proved memorable in forming his long career in the genre.”281

While Sparks lived in the area around Nashville for a number of years after this incident, the memory of that bluegrass sound largely stayed on the outer edges of his mind during those days. He continued to engage in music on the side, but

---

280 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
281 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
stayed more interested in cars and auto-tinkering which helped lead him to a dual interest pursuing studies in art and engineering and later architecture at the University of Cincinnati (UC) at the end of the 1950s. He remembered, “by this time I’m playing folk music with a guitar and tinkering around with stuff and a fellow named Paul Jones and I started a band called the Tradewinds around the UC campus.”282 This first foray into semi-professional music came as the nationwide folk boom picked up steam in the late 1950s. Sparks had been listening intently to the new, “typical folk music stuff” like the Kingston Trio, but had largely been removed from the bluegrass music that so captured his attention a few years prior.283 Sparks might have remained in this popular pocket of folk interest had it not been for a group of citybillies at the university who rekindled his interest. “I went to this party,” with a group of students from the Design, Art, and Architecture College at Cincinnati he recalled, “and somebody put on a record of Flatt and Scruggs and I said ‘holy crap!’ That’s it! What is that? Who is that!?.” The other students in attendance enlightened him and Sparks immediately recalled the incident in Murray and was swept back into the world of bluegrass music.284

His relationship to the genre grew steadily from this point as he actively sought out the music and in time began performing it around the region. “There

282 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
283 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky. The Kingston Trio has largely been credited with popularizing the folk revival and taking the music mainstream with hits like “Tom Dooley” (based on an Appalachian murder ballad) and “Sloop John B.” While hardcore revivalists later rejected groups like the Kingston Trio as too clean cut and college oriented, they proved an important transition band for people like Sparks who engaged in folk music. Even Arthel ‘Doc’ Watson credits the group with sparking his interest in the genre. The role of the Kingston Trio in folk music’s history is rather well documented by historians and folklorists. See Ronald Cohen, Rainbow Quest.
284 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
was a band playing down on Walnut Street at the time,” he remembered. “And in
the band was Jim McCall, Earl Taylor playing mandolin, Walter Hensley playing
banjo and Vernon McIntyre, Sr., nicknamed ‘Boatwhistle’ playing bass.”

The band offered an authentic representation of the genre. A short time later, the band found
its steady work at the Ken-Mill that helped further that interest in the music. Sparks
witnessed some of the occasional brawling and fighting that the club became so
known for, but this early experience generally filled him with a sense of wonder and
trepidation about the music generally. “I was just really enchanted by all of this and
didn't know what to do about it other than go listen to it for a little while.”

Others at the University of Cincinnati recalled a similar experience as they
ventured into the world of bluegrass music. Much of this curiosity centered on this
core group, of which Sparks was a member, of industrial design and architecture
students at the college and some happenstance that brought many of them together.
Randy Wakefield remembered “an observed activity in those stair landings” of the
Design, Art and Architecture building “was a group of industrial designers playing a
form of music I had no clue ever existed. The presence of this music was pretty hard
to escape with all the acoustically live surfaces bouncing the guitar-banjo—and
often fiddle music” around the building. The music, particularly that emanating
from the banjo, “sorta resembled country or folk music while seeming a lot more
authentic.”

The impromptu hallway jam sessions slowly became more formalized

285 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
286 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
287 Randy Wakefield, “Strings: A recollection of the founding and times of The Rabbithash Ramblers,”
288 Randy Wakefield, “Strings.”
around Wakefield, Sparks and other individuals in the program. In time, the group
dubbed themselves the Rabbit Hash Ramblers after a small town across the Ohio
River in Kentucky. Sparks recalled the name was an improvised development,
spurred on by a need at a particular moment.

A man named Charlie Hotchkiss decided to have the first annual, turned out
to be the last as well, the first annual Rabbit Hash Folk Festival. He hired our
bluegrass band to play. By this time we were getting paid, I mean we were
pretty amazing. We were standing in the living room of the house, the porch
was the stage and everybody was out in the front yard, looking out [at] the
Ohio River. Charlie went out and stood at the microphone, stumbled around
a minute, said 'just a minute' and went back in the house and said 'what the
hell's the name of your band?' Said we don't have a name. He said 'you got a
band, you need to have a name. I need a name so I can announce ya.' I said
what's the name of this town again? He said 'Rabbit Hash, Kentucky.' I said,
go tell 'em we're the Rabbit Hash Ramblers. That stuck for years.\footnote{289}

The band's name was a play on a commonly used bluegrass and old-time music
band names and also directly tied the group to the folk revival and Mike Seeger's
own New Lost City Ramblers. The name is also a callback to other iterations of the
"rambling" archetype, personified in the whiskey consuming, wandering,
freewheeling-male existence associated with numerous country music stars over
the years.\footnote{290} Various groups over the years have added the "rambler" moniker to
the group's name to add this element of authenticity to the band.\footnote{291}

\footnote{289} Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
\footnote{290} Bill C. Malone notes how various stars embraced this rambler archetype in the industry, including
extremely popular artists ranging from Jimmie Rodgers to Hank Williams. The image is created most
often through song lyrics, but occasionally through lifestyle and/or rumors about artists as well.
\footnote{291} In addition, the name Rabbit Hash no doubt had some authentic appeal to the band mates and
listeners. The town has garnered some limited national acclaim with a small historic community
recognized around its general store and its infamous dog mayor. In early 2016, the general store on
the National Register of Historic Places burned to the ground in a fire. The outpouring of local
support for the loss signified the meaning that the town, and hence the name, had for a number of
people in the area.
While Sparks and his compatriots began to create their own music, they also invested in the more traditional bluegrass scene in Cincinnati. He and friends continued to frequent the Ken-Mill to hear and learn the craft of bluegrass music. For Sparks, this venue was the only place to hear what he termed “authentic bluegrass musicians…the real deal.”

Despite the folk backgrounds of the growing collegiate constituency in the audience, Sparks found little trouble immersing himself alongside these “authentic” musicians. He attributed the lack of trouble to his background.

When I was a young man in Murray, most of my summer jobs were on farms and construction where I was actually a laborer. So I was fairly used to working with guys, blue collar. And my father always raised me that there were no dishonorable jobs. They were all honorable jobs if you did them well and that you treated everybody with respect. It was important that when we met all these guys, they could tell, I think, that I was genuinely impressed with what they were as they were taken aback by the fact that I was an architect or gonna be one. And I was perfectly happy with being their buddy.

Sparks viewed the musicians through this lens of a labor identity and in some ways apprenticed himself alongside these foundational musicians as a way of forwarding his own progress in the business. The observation is one of hindsight, but also prescient in showing the importance that bluegrass as a commercial entity had for the generations of individuals involved in the practice and the origins of the music as a commercial genre from its inception. He recognized their work as their livelihood and one in which he could also engage for profit.

---

292 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
293 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
The economics of the industry, however, showed themselves in stark relief in the world that surrounded the Ken-Mill and the emerging bluegrass scene around the university. A college neighborhood bar, Hoagy’s Candlelight Café, began offering bluegrass music in the late 1960s to the growing contingent of fans on campus and in the Cincinnati area. The free market of the nightly music scene was on full display and allowed the ownership to look past some of the more radical elements associated with the decade. Sparks recalled, “Hoagy,” the bar’s namesake, “was a John Bircher. He had a hard time hiring us because he knew we were a bunch of liberal college students. But we brought in the drinkers and it seemed like the more racket we made the more they drank, so he turned his head and enjoyed it.”

The nightly gigs proved lucrative for both sides as well. “It was no skin off his back because we got paid at the door and we were making two hundred dollars a night for the band...it was big money for us. We had co-op jobs and we were making more in one night playing music than we would make in a week in our co-op jobs. Our co-op employers tried to threaten us; don’t [quit], it will be embarrassing.” The money issue proved somewhat embarrassing when contrasted with the work done by Taylor and others at the Ken-Mill. After they formed a working friendship, Sparks occasionally invited Taylor or other musicians to join them. When their mandolin player was out sick, the band approached Taylor to fill in. “We got three nights,” Sparks recalled of a gig. “[Taylor] said ‘how much do we get a night?’ I said thirty-five bucks. And he said ‘how much of that do I get?’ We almost cried.”

---

294 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
295 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
296 Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.
absurdity of the pay scale was not lost on Sparks’s band, but revealed some of the limitations of the music in the era. Sparks continued, “I said Earl, that’s how much you make. That’s your wage. Every man in the band makes thirty-five dollars. The look on his face, he just couldn’t believe it. That’s why we didn’t want to do it for a living.”\footnote{Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.} The conversation no doubt revealed an inequity in the business, but one without an easy remedy.

For his part, Sparks did not believe the authentic musicians were exploited in any meaningful way. Taylor himself proved responsible, at least in part, for his lack of adequate pay over the years because of poor business decisions and an unwillingness to change his sound to reach a broader audience. Ironically, this of course became a large part of his appeal and authenticity, as he possessed the traits of the stereotypical lazy hillbilly. Places like the Ken-Mill and Hoagy’s Café also simply differed on their approach to live music as well. Sparks noted “the saloons [Earl’s bands] were playing in didn’t make much money. They were full of hillbillies. There was some nights somebody come in [with] a ten-dollar bill. Unless you charge him a cover charge he won’t break it. Sit there and drink water and wonder why the saloon keeper’s not happy with the band.” The meager pay was also part and parcel to Taylor’s lifestyle. “It was a sad situation all around,” Sparks remembered. “Go over to his house, he had two television sets. He got ‘em both from Goodwill or something free. One of them the tube worked and the other the sound worked, so he put one on top of the other and he had a TV he could hear!”\footnote{Harry Sparks interview with the author, 5 Mar 2014, Covington, Kentucky.}
Others who played with Taylor recalled similar aspects of his character. In addition to the attribute of laziness, Taylor never learned to adequately read or write and thus possessed another common hillbilly trope. Gary Bushorn played bass in Taylor’s band in the 1970s and recalled how his functional illiteracy certainly impacted his ability to find adequately paying shows and to possibly negotiate fairer contracts. Furthermore, Taylor’s wife served as his booking agent and band members recalled a lack of general initiative on her part to try to broaden both the base of support and the pay. Bushorn’s memory of a trip to a show booked in Hamilton, Ohio is telling:

Ellen, his wife, did the booking. Well one of the few jobs she ever got us, Earl called up and said we’re gonna play Friday and Saturday night in Hamilton, [Ohio] at the Auto Club. What was AAA maybe having something, I didn’t know. So I go up to Earl’s house...Earl had a station wagon, we all loaded up in there...we’re just crammed in there. We go into Hamilton looking for the Auto Club, and Earl’s got these directions that his wife had wrote, they don’t make any sense at all. They go these streets you’re supposed to turn on and this other street, and the street didn’t exist. Can’t find the place. Don’t have a phone number, can’t call. Finally we pull off a street, somebody, [banjo player] Jeff Roberts or somebody said pull over see if we can look at a city map. I think we had one of those. So he pulls over and while we’re waiting, Jeff and I are looking at the map, he says, ‘well here it is right here. We’re right in front of it.’ And it’s Otto’s Café, O-T-T-O-S. We’re looking for the Auto Club, A-U-T-O.299

Taylor, perhaps unwittingly, played the role of the country rube or hillbilly archetype that many associated with true bluegrass music. The role had the double-edged effect of both broadening his appeal as an authentic musician and limiting his prospects within the market. His identity continued to attract younger musicians to his band over the remainder of his career.

299 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio
Around 1965, Earl left Cincinnati again to rejoin Jimmy Martin for a brief time. After just two months touring and recording, however, he enlisted with Flatt and Scruggs for a short stint in their group. The touring circuit often meant shared driving stints due to the high volume of shows bands often packed into short periods between steady radio gigs. Earl recalled that he spent three-quarters of his time with the band on the road; a grueling schedule rivaled only perhaps by the nine playing gigs a week in Baltimore. An admittedly perhaps apocryphal story about this time touring is again telling to notions about Taylor’s authenticity and identity as a bluegrass archetype. Wayne Clyburn recalled a locally popular tale about Taylor and this time on the road. After an evening on the Grand Ole Opry, the band traveled a standard route to a Sunday event in West Virginia. The drive normally took all night because the bus needed to take the long route around the mountains rather than heading through a tunnel that they believed could not accommodate the bus. Paul Warren, fiddler with the band, asked Taylor to take his shift driving because he was too tired to take the wheel that evening. Earl, wanting to curry good favor with the new band, agreed to take the shift and believed he knew the route already.

So, they let Earl drive and they’re all sleeping and they’re supposed to go to a school and play some gospel show on Sunday morning and in the middle of the night Lester Flatt woke up and the bus was parked in a little town. He wakes up and looks out and goes ‘what the hell’s going on?’ You know, we’re supposed to be driving around the mountain. So he goes and he wakes up Paul Warren and Warren says, ‘well, I got Earl to drive for us.’ So they go and they wake up Earl and he says what the hell’s going on, you’re supposed to be driving. Earl says ‘what do you mean,’ [Flatt] says ‘well we gotta get to that such and such a town’ and Earl goes ‘we’re here.’ [Flatt] says, ‘what do you

mean we’re here, it takes all night to drive around the mountain?’ [Taylor] says ‘well, why would you drive around the mountain, I just went through the tunnel.’ Lester Flatt goes and looks out the window and he sees the little school. Earl couldn’t read the sign on the tunnel and it turned out the bus was low enough to go through the tunnel. So Lester just had a fit he said ‘good God we’ve been driving around that mountain for ten years!’ But that’s kinda the way Earl went through life.301

Taylor found his time on the road with Flatt and Scruggs enjoyable. He remembered the band as “the greatest fellers in the world to work for” and that he “never was on a bus with a jollier bunch of fellows” in his life.302 The short time with Flatt and Scruggs proved basically Taylor’s last shot at big-time, touring bluegrass.

He returned to Cincinnati, reformed his Stoney Mountain Boys, and resumed the regular shows at the Ken-Mill. Students and neighborhood residents continued to frequent the bar to catch his one of a kind in Cincinnati shows, but already noticeable changes had taken hold of the city’s bluegrass scene. The bluegrass music in and around the University of Cincinnati that had woven itself into Taylor’s band also remained intimately tied to the folk music scene.

In 1963, a group of students at the university formed the Queen City Balladeers on campus to champion the folk revival spirit. The Balladeers held regular meetings at what they dubbed Leo’s Coffeehouse, in the basement of the campus YMCA located, conveniently, directly across the street from Hoagy’s Café. These same years, incidentally, saw the national folk “establishment” scene arrive in the greater Cincinnati area as Sarah Gertrude Knott held her National Folk Festival in the region in back-to-back years.303 The folk presence in Cincinnati had a long

301 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
303 Michael Ann Williams, Staging Tradition, 131-4.
history, going back to the early radio programs and numerous appearances by John Jacob Niles playing dulcimer, but the revival spirit grew steadily in the 1960s because of events and groups like these. While some bluegrass artists did not directly affiliate with the Balladeer group, they nonetheless operated in concentric circles around one another.

Erich Sylvester, an architecture student whose parents immigrated to the United States from Austria in 1947, experienced some of this overlap. When he enrolled at the University of Cincinnati in the mid-1960s, he had had very little experience with traditional country music and only passing knowledge of the local radio and television shows. He remembered the early Balladeer “weekly coffeehouse shows resembled the popular folk music revival of the era...the models were Joan Baez, Kingston Trio, Peter, Paul and Mary, Ian and Sylvia, Dave van Ronk” and acts of that ilk.304 The Balladeers did not engage with true traditional music save for through the layered experience of the folk revival. “Most of us probably heard our first bluegrass style from the *Beverly Hillbillies* theme on TV, and eventually saw the Flatt and Scruggs band on the show,” he remembered.305 Only when Harry Sparks and his wife attended shows in its early going did country music really capture attention the group. “They were likely the first performers of more authentic, trad[itional] country, she playing autoharp and singing like Maybelle

---

304 Erich Sylvester email correspondence with the author, 19 Oct 2013. Sylvester was born Erich Zwertschek, but later changed his name for professional reasons.
305 The *Beverly Hillbillies* reference is a telling one. Not only did the show serve as an introduction to bluegrass music, it also introduced (or reintroduced) the hillbilly stereotype to a mass audience on a never before seen scale. When would-be musicians or residents thus sought out bluegrass acts, this frame of reference likely informed some of their opinions on both the music and the people playing it.
Carter,” Sylvester noted. Out of these sessions, various early members of the Rabbit Hash Ramblers developed and Sylvester even played Dobro with the group for a time. “Once the bluegrass ball got rolling,” he noted, “it was a very popular style among the [Balladeers], and more bands were formed.” Sparks provided the foray into the style, but Sylvester still emphasized the point of seeing authentic music. “Part of my bluegrass education was going to the Ken-Mill Bar with Sparks and others to hear the great band there [Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys].” He also reiterated some of the common feelings about the place, remembering “the shotgun behind the bar and a pistol in Earl Taylor’s back pocket on stage.” The authenticity of Taylor’s band and the Ken-Mill Café provided would be bluegrass musicians like Sylvester an opportunity to expand beyond the popular and Hollywood notions of the genre. Sylvester noted how this engagement with perceived authentic musicians proved highly important in the overall “education” of players. Taylor, thus, provided the important link between true bluegrass for these would be musicians and the folk music world.

The Balladeers also claimed responsibility for engaging some of the greater public in folk and bluegrass music. The group often held events in Cincinnati’s Eden Park that showcased local musicians performing a variety of music. In addition to these events, the popularity of the music in and around campus helped spur a Bluegrass Club in the city. Don Parker, a math professor and mandolin player at UC, led the charge towards founding a club that promoted the music. The campus

---

306 Erich Sylvester email correspondence with the author, 19 Oct 2013.
307 Erich Sylvester email correspondence with the author, 19 Oct 2013.
308 Erich Sylvester email correspondence with the author, 19 Oct 2013.
Bluegrass Club helped bring national acts to perform at the university and Parker used the connections to forge friendships with bluegrass musicians. Students in the club also reaped the rewards. After shows, Parker would often invite bands to his home for a late night dinner and picking party. Wayne Clyburn never missed a chance to attend these parties. “There’d be a big jam session and a lot of times guys in the professional bands would jam with the amateurs and that was a big kick for all the guys that were learning to play,” he recalled. “His wife was a fabulous cook and she’d always have a big spread of food and they’d go ‘til the wee hours of the morning...[Parker] was, in a lot of ways, the center of what was going on those days in Cincinnati.”

The popular and the emerging scene crossed paths regularly as a result of this club the proved responsible for growing the music in this era. In the 1960s and 1970s the Bluegrass Club brought numerous acts onto campus including the New Grass Revival, J.D. Crowe, and Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys. Record labels and promoters recognized the university’s importance as well and purchased advertising for shows and albums. In one promotion for Flatt and Scruggs album “Final Fling,” the ad tagline read, “If you dig where Dylan is going, dig where Flatt and Scruggs have been.” While the university’s importance in building a fan base grew, the music in the bars continued to be significant. This fact remained even as shake-ups around the Stoney Mountain Boys regularly occurred.

Taylor’s band underwent several changes, including his own aforementioned departure, in its time performing six nights a week at the Ken-Mill. Walter Hensley

---

309 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
311 UCNR, 23 Jan 1970.
left in 1964, to record an album for Capitol Records and shortly thereafter returned to Baltimore. Vernon McIntyre, Jr., “Boatwhistle’s” sixteen-year-old son, replaced Hensley in the band. “Junior,” as he came to be known in Cincinnati for a time, had found his own circuitous route to the music before he began playing at the Ken-Mill. His family lived in the Baltimore area through much of his childhood, notably during the time his father played the 79 Club and the other urban bars and clubs, though his father did not bring the music home to the family. He discovered the music by luck and accident, like so many others, though it’s difficult to imagine he eventually would not have learned about it in time. “I was about ten years old,” he remembered, “and this old guy’d pick us up in the old station wagon [to go to school], a Ford Hudson with the wooden sides on it. And he’d have on the Flatt and Scruggs show every morning. At the time, we didn’t have no radio but if we was in a car. No TV. And you could listen to different stuff. So I asked him what that was and he said, ‘it’s a banjer.’ Not a banjo. ‘That’s a banjer boy,’ he said. ‘Flatt and Scruggs, it comes out of Nashville, Tennessee every morning. They're stars of the Grand Ole Opry.’”312 As with so many others, the sound of the instrument provided his initial draw to the music.

On occasion, the elder McIntyre would also take some of the children into town on nights they played music. McIntyre, Jr. was then too young to be allowed into the bar, so before drifting off to sleep in the car, he would engineer ways to hear what was happening inside. “I’d hang on the street sign out in front around the corner of the alley where this club was,” he said. “The door would open and I could

312 Vernon McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
hear the music, but I couldn’t see ‘em through the glass. That’s how I got started playing bluegrass.” Potential issues of child neglect aside, the story symbolizes the ways in which McIntyre, Jr. was reared in a bluegrass family and raised around the music to a great extent. His interest in becoming a professional then, came as something natural and perhaps almost expected.

The younger McIntyre represented another bridge between the growing folk audience and the more traditional bluegrass scene. He had the legitimate makeup and family name of a traditional artist, but his youth connected him to the folk scene in ways the older generation might not have necessarily related. He came to Cincinnati after a couple of less than successful endeavors with other bands. He ran away from home at age fifteen to meet up with a bluegrass band out of Saratoga, New York that had a steady, paying job in New York City. As to why he left Baltimore, he remembered:

It was getting out of poverty. I wanted to play music and I seen it was a way to get out of poverty and to make money. I mean in them days I was bailing hay, laying sod. When I was fifteen years old, right before I left me and my brother in law unloaded eighty-two tons of one-hundred pound bags of peat moss a day. A whole boxcar. He was probably nineteen and here I’m not even fifteen and one-hundred pound bags stacked higher than this room in a boxcar. All day long. You get there, sometimes early would be five [o’clock], late would be six-thirty. You get there at five in the morning and work ‘til ten o’clock at night unloading them trucks. After a couple weeks I didn’t think I’d ever walk again. When I went home you’d just kinda hobble up the steps and make just wherever you were gonna sleep. Get up the next morning, hadn’t changed clothes, and do it again. I made thirty-five cents and hour. Thirty-five cents an hour.314

---

313 Vern McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
314 Vern McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
The work with the initial New York band did not last long before he teamed with Frank Wakefield for a time. That arrangement did not last either, because according to McIntyre, “Frank, he was drunk all the time, and I couldn't hardly stand him, to stay with him.” He briefly joined a gospel group that traveled the Midwest, based out of Middletown, Ohio, and this finally brought him back closer to family. When he returned to the Midwest, he contacted his parents once more. “Called my dad up one day,” McIntyre recalled, “he said 'come down so I can hear you pick.' I said 'I know you’re gonna kill me.' He said, 'no just come down and see your mom and you can go back up there, do whatever you’re going to do.' So I come to the Ken-Mill Café, went in, my mom was there. They got me up there and said 'man you really did learn how to play.'”

McIntyre’s playing became the model and inspiration for a new generation of banjo players in many respects. He became known for his fast pace and hard style, partly due to education at the hands of Walter Hensley, and people in attendance often remarked that he played the banjo louder than almost anyone else. Much like the electric guitar in the 1950s, the banjo became an extension of masculinity for many players in the mid-twentieth century. Bluegrass remained by and large a male dominated musical genre through the 1970s, though women played important roles in bands and in developing the sound and repertoire. One need look no further than Hazel Dickens move to Baltimore to see the influence women had on

---

315 Vernon McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio
316 Vernon McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
the genre and increasing its connections across the musical world. Nonetheless, early definitions of the genre centered on this male dominated notion, aided by the fact that many of the most popular early bands were headlined by male duos and often brothers. The musical prowess, especially on the banjo during this time, offered a form of authentic masculinity during the uncertain 1960s and thus generated part of the appeal of the genre. The driving sound, the need for proficiency on the chosen instrument, and the competition inherent in the rotating solo style of the genre also imbued the genre with some images of a masculine ideal.

All of these factors helped draw crowds into the Ken-Mill on any given night, even after McIntyre replaced the legend Walter Hensley on bluegrass’s most important instrument. Young people came to the venue in steady numbers to find the more authentic bluegrass in the city. Wayne Clyburn’s first trip came after McIntyre had joined the band:

I had a friend that I went to high school with that worked for a guy in Cincinnati that serviced jukeboxes and pinball machines and that kind of stuff. And I had mentioned to him that I had heard somebody play the banjo on TV and I really liked the sound and he said ‘well, one of our locations has got a country band that has a banjo player…we’ll go down there sometime.’ So one summer when I was home from college, we were sitting at a bar in Madeira trying to think of what we wanted to do, and I said ‘what about that hillbilly place?’ and he said ‘yeah let’s do that, let’s go down there.’ And then during vacations from school, and in the summertime, I think maybe the following summer, I went back to the Ken-Mill, but it was not very long after

Recent work has attempted to place the influence of women on the genre back into the discussion of bluegrass. See Murphy Henry Hicks, Pretty Good for a Girl: Women in Bluegrass (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013) for a biographical approach to women’s influence on the genre. Henry also served as the editor of the newsletter, Women in Bluegrass, and consistently published articles in trade journals like Bluegrass Unlimited that showcased and argued for a stronger role for women in the genre than historians traditionally gave them credit for. The point raised here is not to combat any of Henry’s work, but rather to establish part of the contemporary appeal of the psyche of fans and listeners in the era under consideration.
that it went away. They sold it, I don’t know what happened to it. It was no longer a place where that music was being played.319

The Ken-Mill Café did not survive the 1960s. The bar became caught up in the social and cultural issues that dominated American politics and urban life in the latter half of the decade and a changing neighborhood landscape.320 Various opinions on the place and the ownership stayed in people’s memories. Ralph Stanley recalled the place as your average, run of the mill urban club. “Some of the boys gave it the nickname the Gin Mill, but it wasn’t a rough or rowdy place,” he wrote. “Just an old brick building with a neon sign on a run-down street.” He remembered Salmons in particular as “an honest, no-nonsense fellow and a big bluegrass fan” who along with his wife “ran a class operation.”321 Some fans in attendance had differing opinions though. Russell MacDavitt felt like a fish out of water, though that did not stop him from frequenting the venue on his trips into Cincinnati in the 1960s. “They played really good bluegrass,” he remembered, “and that was another place you didn’t want to be talking to anybody’s woman.”322 John Morgan saw a similar atmosphere of unease in the place, but often over race. He wrote:

Occasionally, [sic] a black resident of the neighborhood would enter the place (usually by mistake) and the threatening looks and remarks would

---

319 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
320 Again, various stories about the clubs demise exist. One rumor stated the club became a target in the 1968 riots in the city following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. including mention of a Molotov cocktail being thrown through the window. Given Salmons’s character and the treatment apparently received by minorities in the bar, it is certainly a plausible idea. Others simply note Salmons moved his operation to another part of town to avoid violence rather than as a result of being caught up in it explicitly. There is no doubt the neighborhood had transitioned by this point in time, so any opinion on this range of outcomes seems possible.
321 Ralph Stanley and Eddie Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 260.
322 Russell MacDavitt interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
begin. The band once played a concert at a professional repertory theatre nearby and some members of the actors’ group (integrated) returned the compliment and came to the bar. They were refused service. A few of us then resolved the moral dilemma by returning with some black friends and informing the owner that Cincinnati law forbade refusal of service. We won the somewhat questionable victory, although we (the whites) were threatened with bodily harm if we ever returned.\footnote{John P. Morgan, M.D., “Walter Hensley,” 19.}

National acts experienced some of these same incidents. Josh “Buck” Graves, the longtime Dobro player with Flatt and Scruggs, played with the Stoney Mountain Boys for a time at the Ken-Mill. He recalled a lone member in attendance who looked to stir up trouble, “how a drunk will do.” He agreed to take the dispute outside only to be confronted with the man and some friends. The band eventually joined Graves in the confrontation, but avoided a fight when a “tough little dude” who had been learning Dobro stepped in with a chain to scare off the would-be assailants.\footnote{Josh Graves, \textit{Bluegrass Bluesman: Josh Graves, A Memoir} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 40.} The violence could cut both ways between performers and audience. Despite the mixed legacy that memories of the place provided individuals’ feelings centered on the fond recollections of Earl Taylor’s house band. Taylor’s music did not die with the Ken-Mill, nor did bluegrass music disappear in the urban environment with its closure. Rather, the music continued to grow and evolve in this setting as more posh locales opened venues and house bands incorporated younger members.

Outside of Cincinnati the appeal of places similar the Ken-Mill proved important to the music’s development. In Baltimore, venues like the 79 Club became legendary, of course, as the place that Taylor and his group had been
“discovered.” At the same time numerous similar clubs offered some of this authentic appeal. Tom Knowles, who played fiddle for a number of years in various bands, recalled the appeal of a club near Baltimore, the Beltsville Tavern. “There was a fight in there every night,” he remembered. “I mean sometimes it was like a bloodbath. I played down in southern Maryland [as well], it’d be thirty, forty miles out of town in these little old places. There was one place that even had chicken wire on stage. You know, just women fighting with each other, people breaking beer bottles and trying to cut people. It was real rough.”

Knowles’s note about chicken wire on the stage is especially telling. This story recurs in numerous memories people had about various bluegrass clubs in these cities. Russ Hooper remembered chicken wire on the stage at Marty’s Bar KY, another downtown Baltimore establishment. In Washington D.C., the Shamrock Club in the posh Georgetown neighborhood provided the authentic locale for bluegrass music. The place became known, according to Neil Rosenberg, “not on a name that telegraphed ‘bluegrass’ to attract outsiders” but rather drew “fans old and new who shared the secret of this anomalous working-class bar” in the “fancy” part of town. Again, the rundown and rather “hidden” nature of these establishments helped add some of that essential element of hipness, not unlike visiting a speakeasy, to the locales and drew in a variety of listeners and would be fans.

Earl Taylor’s band did not simply embrace the authentic appeal after the closure of the Ken-Mill, but rather looked to expand their horizons somewhat and

---

325 Tom Knowles telephone interview with the author, 10 Sep 2014.
tap into some of the new, popular and hip nature of the music. Taylor briefly moved to Los Angeles in a misguided venture that lasted roughly one year. McIntyre, Jr. and Jim McCall did not make the westward trip; McCall likely had one of his series of falling-outs with Taylor and joined Walter Hensley in Nashville for a time. Taylor picked up a Californian, young Sandy Rothman, to replace Hensley on the banjo. Rothman represented yet another young bluegrass joining the ranks of the old guard. Prior to playing with Taylor, Rothman played banjo with Jerry Garcia who went on, of course, to form the Grateful Dead and the quintessential “hippie-grass” band Old and In the Way. While in the Golden State, Rothman penned a promotional screed for Bluegrass Unlimited to solicit work for the band. His work included a brief history of Taylor’s career and the attachment he had to popular bands in the genre. The effort was a rather overt attempt to attach Taylor, and by extension those playing with him, to authentic bluegrass in a region that had a dearth of it. Nonetheless, the stay did not last. The traditions evoked in the Ken-Mill then moved to a new spot in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. In the 1970s, the neighborhood still maintained some of its Appalachian identity with storefront churches, Appalachian and Southern themed diners and a wealth of social service agencies in the area catering to the more destitute populations of Cincinnati. This in turn, along with its traditional history as the city’s entertainment district, helped draw music and interested parties to the bars and clubs of the area.

The Terrace Café, at 1207 Main Street, remained a mostly nondescript bar amid myriad late-nineteenth century buildings designed in that era’s popular

Italianate style. In 1970, Taylor’s band began regular gigs at this new venue with Rothman, who made the trip from California now playing banjo, and the McIntyre father and son on bass and guitar respectively. The new spot brought in a similar crowd, but slowly began to incorporate more and more people traveling in from the universities in the city or the suburbs. Still, Taylor’s band provided an authentic attraction for musicians especially those who wished to make their way in bluegrass music. The volatile nature of Taylor’s band members offered numerous opportunities for musicians of all types, like Rothman, to find an opportunity to play as well. Shortly after the move into the locale, Taylor rekindled his partnership with Jim McCall and the two names both received top billing for publicity at the bar.328 Nearly concurrently, the venue also underwent a name change to Aunt Maudie’s Country Garden, or often Maudie’s for short. The name now provided potential clientele with more overt information about the bar’s offerings. Lou Ukelson, who had partnered with Jimmie Skinner in the record store and ran the local Vetco record label—which produced numerous local and regional bluegrass acts like Taylor—became involved in the ownership of the bar. The name came from a Jerry Reed tune, “Aunt Maudie’s Fun Garden.” The song contains some rather ribald lyrics and coded references to marijuana smoking, so the appeal cut across generations. The obscure origins were perhaps lost on anyone but diehard fans, however, and the place did become known for its rather wild atmosphere even amid the nightclubs of the neighborhood.

328 Promotional notes in local ads and in trade magazines began to refer to the band as Earl Taylor, Jim McCall and the Stoney Mountain Boys for a time during this iteration. The change reflected the rocky partnership between the two and an attempt to reconcile some of those problems by putting each of their names in the band. “Bluegrass in the Clubs,” *BU*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (Apr 1971), 19.
The name change also reflected a general change in the atmosphere surrounding bluegrass music. As young people flocked to the music in larger numbers, associations with youth culture had an occasionally dispiriting effect on the genre. In 1970, southern states including Florida, Georgia and North Carolina introduced legislation to ban outdoor music festivals because of their association with drug use and drunkenness. Club names embraced the trend, adopting more clever titles that better illustrated their offerings. The No Fish Today club in downtown Baltimore embraced the “working class and Bohemian” attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s. In the decade it became the “haven for the avant-garde of Baltimore’s counterculture types,” the kind of place where patrons and police might share in drug use, and regularly hosted bluegrass music. The most explicit example of this change came from Washington D.C., where a venue named The Bong Works began offering bluegrass in 1973. The crossover perhaps reached its apex the prior year with the release of the album Will the Circle Be Unbroken. The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, a country folk-rock band from Los Angeles, collaborated with numerous popular bluegrass and country music artists including Earl Scruggs and Jimmy Martin. Bill Monroe was asked, but again refused to participate because of the potential associations with left-leaning culture. The album produced one of the more popular records of the year as it reached number four on Billboard’s country

---

331 Chaplin, “There’s nothing wrong with liking things grungy,” BS, 11 Feb 1977 and “Flashback.”
music charts. Dirt Band member Jeff Hanna remarked, “what came out of those sessions was that there were these two gaps that were bridged: a generation gap and also a cultural gap. You know it was peace marches and Nixon, the country was divided. Imagine that. A lot looked at it and thought, ‘this is really illogical that these guys are playing together.’” The unease still pervaded both sides as Hanna remembered the recording sessions came at roughly the same time the film Easy Rider arrived in theaters. He remembered thinking at the time, “man, the guys that shot Peter Fonda look just like those guys we’re going to Nashville to record with.” While Monroe refused overtures from the younger crowds attracted to bluegrass, the new generation had some of their own misgivings about working with the older crowd.

The crowds attracted to Aunt Maudie’s began to incorporate more and more young people and “tourists” from the suburbs frequented the establishment. This often meant that the feelings of outsider status, which many remembered having at the Ken-Mill, gradually fell by the wayside inside of Aunt Maudie’s. Wayne Clyburn, a regular in attendance at Aunt Maudie’s, recalled the transition:

I had heard that Earl Taylor was playing at this place downtown, turned out to be the Terrace. And I went down there and there was hardly anybody there and [the band was] on break. And I had long hair then and wire rim glasses, and I was kinda looking around cause I stood out. This guy about my size comes out, and he’s got wire-rim glasses on, he’s got kinda kinky, curly hair, and obviously he didn’t belong there either. And so he comes up to the bar and gets something to drink, stood there for a little bit, and I thought at

---

335 Ibid.
least there’s somebody else here that doesn’t belong. Then Earl Taylor walks up on stage and he looks up and turns around and makes a beeline for the stage, gets up, picks up the banjo and gets up on stage with Earl. Well, it turned out to be Sandy Rothman, who’s a guy from San Francisco. Tremendous musician...an awful lot of city guys ended up playing bluegrass. He was of that ilk. Just happened to be somebody that was extremely talented musically. That was like ‘whoa!’ you know cause I looked at him and thought, you know, he’s somebody like me that’s a tourist. He wasn’t. He was a guy.336

Taylor’s name and fame still provided an element of authenticity to the band and the establishment, but clearly the addition of new musicians to the fold foretold the ever-changing nature of the genre.

Others recalled a similar experience. Gary Bushorn had played bluegrass, though not seriously, for a few years learning guitar and bass. One night his band had been hired to perform at a high school dance at Cincinnati’s Music Hall, just a few short blocks from Aunt Maudie’s. After the dance, banjo player Jeff Campbell suggested the group go to the club to see Taylor’s band and experience some true bluegrass. Bushorn agreed and they ventured to the bar. He recalled the experience:

We go down to Aunt Maudie’s...on the corner there was a furniture company and they had a pretty good size parking lot right on the corner...The mandolins I had been around were always little tinky instruments and [others] had to play real soft so you could hear them. We got out of the car in that parking lot and I could hear Earl’s mandolin from Aunt Maudie’s. Thought, ’damn, I got to get down there. I gotta see what this is all about.’ So we went in there, the place was packed you know, the place was full of college kids, and I just stood there with my mouth hanging open listening to him play. And I knew right then that he was special. He was one of the originals. Came out of the hills, no training or anything. Learned off the radio. I knew I had to be part of that.337

---

336 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
337 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio
A new generation of bluegrass players emerged by this time, sometimes steeped in the music from childhood and attached to both the history of migration and the folk revival scene in the cities. Jeff Roberts’s life typifies this example. Born in the small town of Crab Orchard, Kentucky in the Appalachian foothills, Roberts’s family moved to northern Kentucky when he was a child. His father worked in the police department for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and moved North as part of a transfer. They settled in Covington, Kentucky around 1957 when Roberts was four or five years old. He credited the “roots” in Crab Orchard though with his musical foundation. “You go back, you visit the grandparents,” he remembered, “and I think as far as the music goes, my parents had [music] in them. Especially my mom.” In addition to this family element, Roberts’s spiritual family provided an important part of his musical development. “Church was background for me too. A lot of singing in church. That’s where harmony comes in, harmony singing.” It was common practice for children to find singers in church with their vocal range and learn to sing by finding their voice this way. His mother introduced him to banjo music at an early age as she tuned into a daily radio program with “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” as a theme when he was a child still at home. “And I remember this show, being that young, and hearing the sound of the banjo,” he

338 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky. The comment reflects the trend in bluegrass and old-time music to see women as key parts of the family “band” in many ways, but not involved in the public performance of the music. This is a common thread in the genre’s history and at the same time a stereotype that many women sought to escape and have since tried to recover in the music’s history.
339 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
340 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
recalled. “[It] just really struck a nerve with me. Even at that age it was an exciting sound.”

As an urban youth, Roberts first turned his musical talent and interest towards rock n’ roll and other popular forms of the era. The banjo interest “kind of left me...like a lot of teenagers in the sixties,” he remembered. “By the time I was fourteen, and I had an older sister and she was a big influence on me. We listened to music and I would listen to the stuff she would listen to. I saw the Beatles when I was fourteen years old, so I got into that kind of music...I started playing the drums.” For some children of migrants, raised in the country music culture of the South and Appalachia, the more popular music of the sixties proved more exotic than the familiar twang of a five-string banjo. This of course proved true for teenagers around the country, but the brief foray into rock interest for Roberts also belied some of these commonly held perceptions about the natural interest of Southerners in country music. At the same time, this flirtation did not last. Roberts recalled, “After about a year I went back to listening to the same stuff I liked originally, the bluegrass genre. And the banjo. Dad bought me a cheap banjo, sold the drums, and never looked back.”

Roberts’s comment comes without real hyperbole as well. He made playing banjo his only career option and one that has lasted five decades playing in small to moderately popular bands in the Cincinnati area.

---

341 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
342 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
343 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
As an urban resident, Roberts and others like him did not have to travel far to seek out live performances of the music that attracted their interest. He had an early band in high school and played music briefly with other students during a self-described “glitch” in his high school life when his family briefly moved to eastern Kentucky. After high school, around 1972, he began taking the music seriously as a professional career option. He traveled to another university bar, King’s Row, near the University of Cincinnati campus and found a band, the Appalachian Grass, fronted by Vernon McIntyre Jr. and Jim McCall playing nightly gigs there. He recalled, “I just *stayed* there. I wanted to know as much about the business, as much about the music and the people that played and learning as much material as I could. Sit in with bands when they’d let me sit in and learn as much banjo as I could. I was totally consumed with the music. *Totally.* To where I didn’t want to do anything else.”

These visits soon paid dividends in the form of full time jobs.

In addition to his self-described living at King’s Row, Roberts also visited Aunt Maudie’s to see Earl Taylor play. “I was going to Aunt Maudie’s, listening to him play and his band and I got to know his banjo player Jeff Campbell,” Roberts said. “Jeff quit and Earl asked me if I wanted to play banjo with him, and I did.”

With this setup in 1975 Roberts noted he finally “felt like I got a *real* bluegrass gig playing the banjo with a bluegrass guy, that people knew, they knew his name. He was kind of a bluegrass legend...he was a real name, that was a big step for me, playing with Earl Taylor.”

---

344 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
345 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
346 Jeff Roberts interview with the author, 23 October 2013, Park Hills, Kentucky.
Taylor cemented himself as a true bluegrass player. Roberts’s path to the music also shows the circuitous route that even migrants could take to the genre. Nothing inherent in his upbringing necessarily directed him towards bluegrass, but rather the discovery, appreciation, and eventual attachment to the genre came about from circumstances inherent in his living situation and the availability to actualize that interest in meaningful ways.

Others came to the music through similar paths. Katie Laur (nee Haley), like Roberts and McIntyre, left her rural roots when her family sought work. In 1949, when she was a child, her father brought the family from Tennessee to Detroit, Michigan. Her college-educated father did not have the same blue collar background as many migrants, though he did work in the auto industry. The family followed other traditional patterns including chain migration and bringing the extended family along with them. Laur remembered the transition as “wild times” with the family, including aunts and uncles, making the trip. She recalled, “you wouldn’t have just left your people.” She experienced many of the same situations that typical migrants had in their new environs. At school, she remembered being laughed at by other children for her accent and the trouble her mother had with shopping at a supermarket and not trusting “meat that was wrapped in cellophane.” Her musical family contributed to her appreciation of country music and she even formed a makeshift group with her sisters where they sang together “more or less professionally.” The sisters performed in venues around the city, doing musical

347 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
348 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
349 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
comedy and Rodgers and Hammerstein type music as the family dressed them up in “Cinderella” like outfits. While she enjoyed these events, the siren call of the country sound still resonated most strongly for her. She and the family often tuned into WSM and the Grand Ole Opry. Listening to the program, Laur recalled, “that was home. That really felt like home. That pull was so strong.” The family returned to her hometown in the Nashville area frequently, nearly every summer. At age thirteen, Laur’s family left Detroit for Huntsville, Alabama when her father took a job working in the space program. Despite the move back to the South, she recalled a real difference in the feeling of the community in Detroit and her life in Alabama. Though the city was “much more Southern, there wasn’t much country music,” or as she recalled, “at least I was too much of a snob to listen to it.” A necessary sense of pride perhaps diminished with the move closer to home in some ways. The foreign nature of the city also felt quite different. “Lotta Germans there,” she remembered. ”We had street signs that were in two languages. I’d never seen anything like that before. It was its own place.” She graduated high school in Alabama and attended the University of Missouri, hoping to become a journalist. There she met her first husband, had a child, and divorced soon after. She later met her second husband, Jack Laur, an engineer from New York, in Huntsville not long after her divorce. Around 1965 he took a job with General Electric in Cincinnati and encouraged her to move to Ohio with him.

350 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
351 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
352 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
Laur arrived in Cincinnati that same year, but felt lost in her new environs. The city was large and foreign, despite the fact that she spent time as a child in Detroit, and her new role as a housewife did not dovetail well with her personal ambitions. She left the world of music for a time at the request of her husband. She tried to play the role her husband asked of her, but it did not suit her personality. “Once I got (to Cincinnati) I wanted to find something to sustain me. My husband didn’t like music particularly. He was a General Electric hotshot, middle management. And I’m trying to be middle management wife and I just couldn’t do it. I just didn’t have it.”

She remembered an incident that, for her, epitomized her failures as a stereotypical housewife. “One night I was making a Southern dinner, and I made these mashed potatoes, and they fell on the floor and I looked around and thought nobody was looking and I put them back in the pot. Only somebody was looking. So I was ruined!”

Her time away from music was difficult and her husband discouraged her from playing the “hillbilly music” of her past. “There was some things he liked me playing and other things he didn’t. And so it took me a while, maybe three years to get back into music.”

Try as she might, the absence of music from her life created a void that she needed filled. “It seems so strange, but to remember, it’s a scramble; that scramble to be sustained. It’s like you need food. But then you really, really need cultural sustainment too.”

Laur found that cultural sustainment in Aunt Maudie’s.

---

355 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
356 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
357 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
358 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
One weekend evening when Laur was feeling especially down, she and a friend went to Over-the-Rhine to hear music. Laur recounted the experience as one that changed the trajectory of her life. On this night, Vernon McIntyre’s band, Appalachian Grass, performed on stage when Laur first set foot in the venue. “I just went berserk,” she recounted. “I felt like I had been hit on the head by, I don’t know, you always hear bluegrass people say this, it was like being hit on the head or having a road to Damascus experience. It was just that profound. So me, when I got to Aunt Maudie’s I just didn’t stop going.”

This sort of moment of conversion came for many would be bluegrass musicians and became part of the lore associated with how one found the genre. Earl Taylor as a child in the hills of Virginia, happening upon the radio. Harry Sparks at the drive in theatre when Flatt and Scruggs showed up as an atypical hillbilly band. David Cox, who played mandolin with Earl Taylor and later Katie Laur, started out as a rock musician before converting. His epiphany, recounted by friend Gary Bushorn, came later in life. “He was the guy that was playing rock n’ roll in a bar somewhere, and they were on a break and a bluegrass song came on the jukebox. They said he went up on stage, got his electric guitar, took it out on the sidewalk and busted it to smithereens. Never played rock n’ roll again.”

These sorts of epiphany stories add to some of the mythology around the genre as a true calling with the conversion experiences as powerful moments in people’s memories. The feeling of bluegrass music as a calling also connects with the feelings of the music as authentic. If one is called to

---

359 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
360 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
the genre then the desire and ability to play is almost something inherent in one’s blood and not necessarily a rational or economic choice.

Laur’s recounting of this bluegrass discovery is telling on numerous cultural levels, however, and not just a straightforward conversion tale. Her story is layered with some of the “quiet desperation” that riddled the lives of many women in the mid-twentieth century as she tried to play the cultural role that society thought best suited her but remained unfulfilled. Her music experience as a child played a rich part in finding the important “cultural sustenance” necessary to find the good life in Cincinnati, and in time this proto-feminism and her breaking of cultural norms overlapped more overtly. Laur soon found a steady job performing with McIntyre’s band singing and later playing some rhythm guitar. She recalled this iteration of the band first performed at King’s Row, but the manager said, “you can’t come without the girl.”361 This came at a time when, for the most part, it still remained culturally unacceptable for women to perform bluegrass music. The addition of Laur to the band, and the mandate to have her perform at the college bar, speaks to the progressive nature of the music by the early 1970s. To further break the traditional mold, she fronted her own band—the Katie Laur Band—beginning in 1975 and formed one of the first female-led bluegrass groups in the country. She did not shy away from the controversy associated with being a bluegrass player during this time period, either. While many fans still hewed closely to the traditional definition of the genre, Laur emerged as part of an expanding musical style that had grown out of these traditional urban venues.

361 Katie Laur interview with the author, 30 Aug 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
The success as a musician did not come without struggles, particularly over her sex. On being a woman in bluegrass she recounted it was “Hard. Very hard. I think the primary reason is because at first men thought my career was sort of a frivolous thing. It’s not that people weren’t nice to me, they were. I just didn’t get a lot of respect professionally.” At the same time, she did not actively embrace her femininity as a marketing tool or a way to receive special treatment. She argued:

What I’d like to see is for the whole sex bit not to be that important. It is right now, but someday I hope it’s something people accept. But there’s no way to get around that being a female does change the whole sound of bluegrass. But I don’t know that everybody who has done bluegrass since Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs hasn’t changed the sound of it. Everybody changes the sound a little. Everybody makes his own contribution and it’s all different.

Her comments reflected a battle that emerged with the recognition of bluegrass as an urban music, led by the likes of bands like Earl Taylor’s and all of the various musicians whose careers he helped spawn. At the same time, her opinions still proved controversial in a field where the music seemed so strongly rooted in this traditional conception of a sound and a people stuck in the past.

Laur’s first foray into recorded bluegrass reflected these generally progressive trends. A Bluegrass Unlimited reviewer noted how “[p]opular music has been having considerable impact on bluegrass music lately...with varying degrees of success.” The Appalachian Grass, defined as “a group of former hard-line bluegrassers” developed a new sound unique to the Cincinnati scene in the 1970s and adding Laur to the band helped to “tie the group together,” something

---

echoed in the story of booking their regular appearances, as her voice added “a sensuousness that an all male group doing the same arrangements wouldn’t be able to manage.”365 The reviewer did not take the hardline approach to defining bluegrass, coming to agreement with Laur’s own later definition of the genre, but still could not escape some of the gendered terms that defined the genre.

Nearly concurrent to these developments other groups in the urban setting emerged with this progressive sound and perhaps influenced the likes of the Appalachian Grass and other younger groups in cities around the country. Arguably the most popular group, the Seldom Scene came out of Washington D.C. Ralph Stanley credited the band for expanding the bluegrass audience and developing “more respect for bluegrass outside the country music crowd, with the college fans and the city people.”366 In reality, they capitalized on and further popularized a process that had already been underway as urban folk discovered the authentic bluegrass in and around their cities. The Scene, as they came to be known, simply came to epitomize this new progressive bluegrass music, referred to by Bill Malone as “the vanguard of the newgrass movement.”367

The Seldom Scene proved more remarkable for their makeup and origins, though the circuitous path that led this eclectic group to bluegrass music did follow some of the same patterns that occurred in Cincinnati around Earl Taylor. The wordplay band name’s came from a remark by John Duffey, a singer with the band,

---
366 Ralph Stanley and Eddie Dean, Man of Constant Sorrow, 371.
367 Bill C. Malone, Country Music U.S.A., 361. Newgrass is an oft-used term to describe the generation of musicians that came into the genre during and after the folk revival. Most notably, they changed the repertoire traditionally associated with the music, incorporation more folk and rock songs, and used amplifiers for their instruments.
who came up with the name as a comment on the rare public performances of the group. The band itself came about as an offshoot of the popular Country Gentlemen, also based out of the Washington D.C. area. All of the members of the group, despite their growing popularity, continued to work day jobs that were not particularly associated with bluegrass artists. John Duffey was a musical instrument repairman, but the others had more traditional white collar jobs; guitarist John Starling was a trained physician, bassist Tom Gray a cartographer, Dobro player Mike Auldridge a graphic artist, and Ben Eldridge, on banjo, a mathematician. These suburban, educated, part-time musicians became famous for their performances not in the seedy clubs of the urban Appalachian enclaves but rather for their weekly performances at the Red Fox Inn in Bethesda, Maryland and later the Birchmere in Alexandria, Virginia. Neil Rosenberg notes this progressive sound was based out of Washington, and partly helped develop the area’s bluegrass culture, but in actuality the popularity reflected national trends occurring in urban areas. In some ways, the makeup of the Seldom Scene itself became the active face of the new fandom of bluegrass music generally.

In an interview, the band credited guitarist John Starling with leading the charge towards the more expanded repertoire on which they built their fame. Starling noted, “I would rather hear a good song and decide for myself if we can do it” than adhere to strict rules about a bluegrass canon. Tom Gray attributed bluegrass’s staying power to the willingness to expand beyond the traditional set

---

368 Neil Rosenberg, Bluegrass, 329. See chapter 11, “But Is It Bluegrass?” for a longer general discussion of this new progressive nature of bluegrass.

369 Pat Mahoney, “The Seldom Scene as Heard,” BU, Vol. 8, No. 12 (June 1974), 16.
lists. Genres like Dixieland, according to Gray and his band mates, never evolved and generated new music, which inhibited the growth of their fan bases. “They’ve [Dixieland bands] not had any new songs in the last twenty-five years. I think that’s what has gotten bluegrass off the ground—new material. And the people are willing to sing songs from other sources of music and not feel like a fool when they do it. Ten years ago if somebody got up there and sang a rock song, everyone would scream, foul.” Starling hinted at the tension inherent in the genre between the first generation musicians and the music as it developed after the folk boom took hold of the genre.

In Cincinnati, this tension played out inside of the bluegrass clubs in the city. Vernon McIntyre Jr.’s partnership with Jim McCall produced more progressive sounds within the city than the traditional work that Earl Taylor had relied on. The Appalachian Grass’s second album included a rendition of the “Banana Boat” song done in a bluegrass style. McIntyre recalled how the band’s live act pushed the genre even further. “Hell I had a drummer, a trumpet. Had a saxophone,” McIntyre recalled. “Had an electric piano. It was eight or nine, ten people there. This was roughly the same the time Earl Scruggs Revue (another progressive bluegrass band) was out. We were playing, it would get us some bigger jobs. Whole new market opened up. I wonder what the hell we were doing.” The sound worked for a time in the college bar that catered to the audience with a less traditional approach to hearing and appreciating bluegrass music.

---

370 Pat Mahoney, “Seldom Scene as Heard,” 18.
371 Vernon McIntyre Jr. interview with the author, 22 Jul 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Taylor’s band continued to perform nightly at Aunt Maudie’s and maintained his more traditional definition of the music. Asked about the differing approaches to bluegrass music that bands began taking in the mid-1970s, Earl put his opinion rather succinctly. “What Jim and [McIntyre] Junior are doin’ now at King’s Row, well that’s their business….I’m goin’ to stick with Blue Grass.”372 Jim McCall returned the feeling, noting that the more authentic feel of Aunt Maudie’s helped draw a distinction between the crowds. “The majority of fans stick with one kind of music or the other. The clientele at King’s Row is of a different caliber altogether. More of the down-home people go to Maudie’s. They like Maudie’s because it isn’t nice and plush and comfortable.”373 The debate over what constituted “true” bluegrass music thus stayed generational in many ways. As it shifted from an ideal rural focus, the authenticity question became an even more important topic for bluegrass fans.

Access to Taylor, as the vanguard of urban authenticity, proved to be one of the most important ways for a musician to earn status within the musical community. Similarly, those who did not play with Taylor might have felt like they missed out on a chance to learn more about the genre. Wayne Clyburn played banjo for multiple bands from the 1960s forward, but never as a regular Stoney Mountain Boy. “That’s always something I regret,” he remembered. “Never having the opportunity to play with Earl. I played with him a couple of times when he needed someone in a pinch, but I never really was aggressive about trying to get a job playing banjo with him on a regular basis. And in retrospect it was a mistake

because I could have learned a lot. I think early on I didn’t really appreciate what a legendary character he was. I don’t know how to describe him. He wasn’t particularly ambitious…I was more interested in people who were kind of taking a little bit of what then was a progressive approach to the music and he was just completely in the Flatt and Scruggs, Bill Monroe kind of stuff.”374 This approach by and towards Taylor, helped cement his status as a legend within the Cincinnati bluegrass community, but it did little to push his national popularity.

In 1980, Taylor’s music career all but ended after a stroke limited his abilities to play regularly. He died four years later. His obituary, reflecting on his career in these cities, proclaimed if he “didn’t make a million dollars…his music stirred at least that many hearts.”375 The mournful hyperbole aside, the notice offers a sense of the impact he had on the music scene within Cincinnati and the impact figures like him had on the development of urban bluegrass. His strict adherence to becoming a Bill Monroe-like clone, without any of the real national ambition, trapped Taylor between two worlds of the expanding bluegrass genre. As a living example of the traditional hillbilly, and by extension the bluegrass archetype, he represented the authenticity associated with bluegrass music even as those pulled into his orbit began to subtly and not so subtly change the genre. Gary Bushorn succinctly summed his feelings about spending roughly five years learning and playing bluegrass with Taylor. “I loved the guy,” he said. “I really did. He had a special talent for music and he also had a way with people. I don’t know what a psychologist would say about him, but he had a way of handling his band. He always

374 Wayne Clyburn interview with the author, 9 Nov 2013, Union, Kentucky.
made everyone in his band feel good. Good about themselves, good about what they were doing. He knew his way around with people.” This “way with people” equated to the essential notions about Southern charm and Appalachian niceness; the inverse but equally powerful image of the hot-tempered hillbilly. Taylor could stand in as both of these models at the same time as a real-life example of the ambiguous cultural figure. His country-rube personality, his functional illiteracy, his apparent penchant for violence, and his “way with people” are all part of the authentic hillbilly image that simultaneously draws and repels people to the character. His persona, like that of the hillbilly archetype generally, was an urban creation, forged in the country bars of Baltimore, Detroit, and Cincinnati. He helped spawn another generation because an authentic attraction to him developed within this milieu.

Alan Lomax recognized that genuine nature in the late 1950s and others continued to see it through the course of Taylor’s career. Taylor represented the popular opinions about bluegrass music, as a form of folk music in overdrive, that became associated with some of the same fictions put upon Appalachian migrants in cities. His representation as a true bluegrass artist made would be musicians want to play with him and drew fans in from around the region. Conversely, the progressive nature of the groups formed by former Taylor protégés and band mates represented a logical next step in the genre, which itself was forged amid a growing commercial country music marketplace by professional musicians.

---

376 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
This contradictory approach did not stop fans of the genre from, and still, engaging in an approach to the music that firmly rooted it in the past.\textsuperscript{377} In 1975, a reader of \textit{Bluegrass Unlimited} from Cincinnati put forward this argument rather directly.

Bluegrass music is something homespun and old-fashioned and I am disappointed to find it becoming a part of modern ‘progressive’ living. Its mountain origin is what makes it what it is, as does any such thing whether it be a craft, a dance or whatever. If you ‘upgrade’ bluegrass to fit space-age living and make it popular over large areas, which seems to be the current trend, bluegrass as such will be absorbed. College students, Engineers, Lawyers, etc. are not the people who made bluegrass what it is, and if people keep on, its authenticity will be lost. The picking style will be there, but it will only be a shell. Let’s keep bluegrass conservative.\textsuperscript{378}

Despite the growing body of evidence of the urban nature of the genre, many listeners who erred on this side of the “conservative” nature of bluegrass music continued to buy into the mountain origin story. The genre’s genesis, despite the legacy of the rube archetype in the urban setting, is firmly entrenched in the technological and musical developments of the mid-twentieth century that helped put Bill Monroe and subsequent artists on the airwaves. The folk revival, rather than an outgrowth of the natural professional and urban history of bluegrass, seemed an anomaly to a genre that reflected “homespun” traditions. Promoters, fans, and musicians continued to promote this view of the music. The myth became a means of selling records and maintaining an origin that rooted the genre in a rural past. At

\textsuperscript{377} Most early editions of the \textit{Bluegrass Unlimited} trade magazine helped perpetuate this seemingly endless debate. The “Letters to the Editor” sections of the magazine as well as articles continually broached this subject and the traditional versus progressive language also worked its way into reviews of albums by local and nationally popular bands. The magazine itself was a product of the folk boom, and its Washington D.C. base and focus helped it lean towards the more progressive definition of the genre.

the same time urban advocacy organizations moved to root Appalachia in this fictive past and found a faithful ally in a popular music that encouraged these sentiments.
Chapter Five: “Our History is Music”: Appalachian Advocacy and Bluegrass Identity

“Appalachian.' What in the hell is ‘apple?’ I could never say it no how” – Lucy Peterson, Cincinnati

“I ain’t from nowhere…but it’s closest to Highland Avenue.” – unidentified migrant child in Baltimore

While Aunt Maudie’s and other similar venues in the urban bluegrass scene represented the pinnacle of authenticity for many who sought traditional music, others looked upon these developments with skepticism. Dave Banks, an Appalachian migrant and Over-the-Rhine resident, remembered the bar differently than the musicians and avid fans who placed the venue as the center of bluegrass music in Cincinnati. Banks recalled, “hardly any Appalachian folks goes in there much, ‘cause one thing you got a two-dollar cover charge which people don’t believe you have to pay just to go hear music. Another thing, they don’t allow no dancin’.”

Where others saw a recreation of the Appalachian and mountain traditions, Banks saw the opposite. “All you have in there is your jet setters from Mount Adams that come down and think it’s so groovy to hear a little bluegrass, or you get some of the college babies...And you can’t hear the music half the time in ‘er. ‘Cause they’re all hootin’ an’ hollerin’ an’ then they think they gotta stomp their foot, and it’s almost insultin’ to ya if ya really enjoy the music.”

Even when friends from Harlan County, Kentucky came to visit, Banks might suggest a trip to Maudie’s only to see

379 Dave Banks interview with John R. Williams in “ Appalachian Migrants in Cincinnati, Ohio: The Role of Folklore in the Reinforcement of Ethnic Identity,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1985), 207.
382 Ibid., 181.
their disappointment. "They didn’t like it at all. Fact, they want to leave...they said, ‘Who’s all these people all fancy dressed up come in here with disco dress and three piece suits on and silk shirts and stuff?” Banks sensed a definitive difference between the expectations of the local crowd made up of residents and the tourists who came in from the outside to hear bluegrass music.

Banks recognized the musicians inside of Maudie’s as “authentic bands,” however, and he objected most strongly to the crowds who came in with these unrealistic expectations of the music and the culture of the people in attendance. His comments regarding the venue speak to the crisis of identity that reached Appalachians as a result of the move to the city and the question of what it meant to be from the mountains—a region increasingly known and formally defined as Appalachia from the 1960s forward. Migrants discovered in their midst representations of their culture and advocates who helped define what it meant to be from the mountains as they settled in cities. At the same time, popular knowledge of Appalachians and bluegrass music and the like was built largely on the awareness of local groups and venues as well as the music’s appearance in Hollywood productions like the Beverly Hillbillies (1962), Deliverance (1972), and Bonnie and Clyde (1967). The driving banjo music that was so important to providing a siren call for many young men to the genre became the dominant feature of the acts.

---

383 Ibid. 181.
384 Use of the google Google ngram too, which tracks word or phrase usage in published works in the English language from 1800 forward graphically illustrates this trend. While Appalachia as a term existed long before the postwar era, a serious spike in its usage occurred around 1962 and peaked in 1973. There are myriad causes for this general trend, too many for proper illumination here, but the federal government’s increased interest in the region’s problems, the sociological works by individuals like Harry Caudill, and the general growth of post-secondary education and studies in this period are all contributing factors. See Ron Eller, Uneven Ground as well.
While individuals continued to enjoy the music, it could sometimes border on self-parody to be almost mocking. Popular entertainer Steve Martin captured these sentiments in his now oft repeated comment from his 1977 comedy album, “you can’t play a depressing song on the banjo.” As a result, the sounds inside Aunt Maudie’s in the late 1970s included mostly rousing fiddle and banjo numbers like Orange Blossom Special or other fast paced tunes and avoided the “tear-jerkers” or the kind of music “we like best” as Banks recalled. Banks’s comments came towards the end of Maudie’s run of existence as the urban bluegrass scene began to fade slightly, but nonetheless reflected the general tension between the expectations and reality of bluegrass music and its relationship to Appalachia. Urban Appalachian advocates attempted to sublimate these tensions through the 1970s, using the popularity of bluegrass music, the nascent identity politics of the white Appalachian population, and the general political moment to develop an Appalachian identity far removed from the wholly outsider status of experienced by the first generation of migrants. Musicians like Earl Taylor represented the authentic bluegrass and Appalachian figure for many during his time on stage, but that image became distorted and whittled down to a few basic stereotypes over time. Banks’s brief comments about the state of the music show how far bluegrass had deviated, for some, from its supposed roots. Furthermore, the influx of bluegrass music into popular culture made the music hip in many circles. The urban cowboy chic emerged in this decade as well and offered white Americans especially a chance to

---

embrace authentic roots. Urban reformers, who still attempted to deal with the problem of Appalachian migration and urban assimilation, used some of this newfound interest to their advantage as they began to construct other methods of advocacy and activism on the population’s behalf. A decade earlier, Hazel Dickens noted how it took the progressive vision of Mike Seeger, and his love for the music of the mountains, to “validate” an Appalachian culture that she hardly recognized as redeemable and one she did not fully embrace on her own. The urban reformers attempted to replicate this form of “validation” to push Appalachian identity into an even more mainstream and acceptable quality.

The Appalachian people who had moved to urban centers in the years after World War II often struggled to move out of the decaying urban cores and to assimilate wholly into the urban middle class culture. While some undoubtedly found success, a new generation of urban reformers continued to try to tackle the general problems of poverty and poor education in the urban core. These new advocates and activists took a cultural approach more in tune with the general thrust of the Cold War zeitgeist and the identity politics of that era. As the baby boom generation searched for authenticity removed from the perceived vapid and bland 1950s and outside the overt capitalistic excesses of the Cold War, a broad movement towards the embrace of one’s roots and identity came to the fore. This developed into a search for cultural affirmation, using the trappings of general understandings about America’s various “melting pot” cultures as a means of

political or cultural affirmation.\textsuperscript{387} For Appalachians, this often meant embracing the renewed interest in the region and its people that had been spurred by bluegrass music’s addition to the general urban folk revival.\textsuperscript{388} In Cincinnati, the nascent advocacy group that emerged out of the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Commission (MFRC), renamed the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission (CHRC) in 1965, steadily grew in size in the 1960s and 1970s. Reformers within the group worked with other outsiders to provide services to the urban Appalachian population in the city. In doing so, they established a new model for Appalachian advocacy that served as a corrective to the culture of poverty approach that so dominated the sociological and political thinking of the previous decades. These new advocates, often younger, college educated, and migrants themselves, occasionally embraced New Left cultural, if not political ideals, especially the notion of identity politics. As a result, they tried to establish a new positive sense of Appalachian-ness as the means of pulling urban migrant groups out of poverty. They often found themselves in the folk music scene as well, reflecting the general overlap of music and activism that emerged in this time period and the intersection of culture and activism that emerged in this process. In doing so, they embraced many of the common tropes associated with the authentic Appalachian ideal that drew legions of followers to Earl Taylor and others like him.

\textsuperscript{387} For an exploration of these ideas see Bruce Schulman, \textit{The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics} (New York: Free Press, 2001) and Doug Rosssinow, \textit{The Politics of Authenticity}.

\textsuperscript{388} See Ron Eller, \textit{Uneven Ground} for a concise and general exploration of the postwar renewed interest in Appalachia. Of particular note is the Ford Foundation survey of the region in 1962, the growth of Appalachian Studies organizations at regional universities, the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the development of the Appalachian Volunteers (AVs), and a general renewed interest in what Eller terms “poverty knowledge.”
The Appalachian aid efforts proved strongest and most organized in Cincinnati, though the model did replicate elsewhere to varying degrees of success. In Cincinnati, the movement coalesced around disparate groups that possessed the same basic belief: developing a positive identity for Appalachian culture through self-affirmation of migrants and cultural outreach showcasing more positive aspects of Appalachians. Mike Maloney, a migrant who came to Cincinnati from Breathitt County, Kentucky to study at Xavier University, involved himself in these efforts from nearly the beginning of his time in the city. As a student at Xavier, Maloney worked in various War on Poverty initiatives in the city in addition to pursuing his work in sociology. He recalled around 1966, “I got a part time job as a community organizer in Walnut Hills [the neighborhood home of the Ken-Mill]. They wanted an Appalachian on the staff because there was still some Appalachians living in Walnut Hills at the time.”

Maloney’s move into activism occurred concurrent with other new initiatives around the city. Ernie Mynatt, a fellow migrant from Harlan County, Kentucky, began teaching in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in 1960. Maloney referred to him as the “patriarch and founder of the movement” in the city and much of what developed in the subsequent years came through Mynatt’s connection to both influential people and citizens living in the city. In Cincinnati, Mynatt met Stuart Faber, whose father established the Appalachian Fund to aid migrants who worked in his Formica plant. Faber assumed control of the fund in 1956 and the group sought leadership in the city to help organize the heavy Appalachian population. Mynatt fit that need. Faber noted how Mynatt “sensitized many people

---

389 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
390 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
to the culture and unique problems of Appalachian people” and used an approach less critical in nature and attempted to provide more positive uplift for the population.391

Mynatt practiced his outreach through evangelism. He walked the streets of the neighborhood, gradually developed name recognition and personal relationships with the local population, and eventually residents began to approach him to talk about issues in their homes and lives. Faber recalled this listening aspect practiced by Mynatt as quite revolutionary for the time, and far removed from the top-down assimilation attempts in the years prior. Mynatt established the Main Street Bible Center in the neighborhood as well in 1964. The center attempted to mimic the storefront churches migrants had established on their own on the city’s streets. Workers in the Bible Center did proselytize and attempt to convert residents, but also recognized the need for additional social services among the poor population and immersed itself in this work as well.392 The Center took an ecumenical approach, not solely Catholic oriented, to social work. Maloney remembered, “Ernie got most of his volunteer troops from seminarians, ex-seminarians, nuns, ex-nuns. One of his key volunteers was Quaker so there [were] others involved. And there were Lutherans doing GED work and that sort of thing.”393 Mynatt remembered the Center, which lasted until 1972, as the beginning of centralized efforts to help Appalachians in the area.

---

392 This acceptance was not far removed from liberation theology, which developed nearly concurrently to this outreach in Cincinnati’s urban core. The focus on outreach to the poor is especially relevant.
393 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Mynatt went on to organize and found a program called Hub Services based in Over-the-Rhine that provided a more secular approach to aid. Maloney recalled, “it was a multiservice agency funded with antipoverty funds and Ernie recruited me to be the outreach director of that program.” 394 This was the first step for Maloney in the process of becoming one of Mynatt’s main “lieutenants,” as he put it. 395 Hub became a one-stop shop for all the social service needs of Appalachian people and other residents in the neighborhood. This reflected the general attempts to organize the vast breadth of War on Poverty programs that had proliferated through the decade and to provide easy access to help for a neighborhood deemed to be in dire need of it.

While these efforts generally used a universal approach to the problems of poverty, Maloney recognized the need for individually tailored outreach programs and organizations. Appalachians, who possessed a unique culture, needed services that were designed to meet their specific needs and the general life changes that this group of people underwent during the migration and settlement process. This mindset dovetailed with the growing ethnic political sentiment in the late 1960s. Maloney recalled his experience within the Civil Rights movement as the major impetus in changing his ideological approach. “As a community organizer working with both blacks and Appalachians, it eventually became clear that we needed to do some special work with Appalachians,” Maloney recalled. “As one of my black friends put it, ‘Mike you can’t tag along on the Civil Rights movement. You need to do some work with your own people.’ And that fit my experience cause I would take

---

394 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
395 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
white Appalachians to black rallies, and [they would respond] ‘what is going on here?!’ This was the period of riots and turmoil in inner city America and our folks just didn’t know what to make of that. You just couldn’t get them to the second meeting.”

His memory likely softened some of the racial animosity apparent and inherent in the tension between white southern migrants, and white city residents more generally, and black urban residents, but also showcased this movement towards self-actualization among seemingly subjugated populations. What activists valued was finding an authentic appeal to those they serviced and this often meant approaches specifically tailored to meet ethnic, cultural, and other individual needs.

The move spurred some changes in the Appalachian outreach in the city.

In November 1968, the first formalized Appalachian advocacy group, United Appalachian Cincinnati, coalesced around these loosely connected initial efforts. The scholars and activists involved in this group purported to speak for the Appalachian population in the city, and to develop a positive identity for the migrant group. Historian Bruce Tucker notes how from the beginning “these activists claimed a public identity for urban Appalachians and the power to tell other Cincinnatians who they were and what they needed as a consequence of who they were.”

In addition to exposing the general population to the culture and needs of Appalachians, the activists in the group also worked to specifically teach Appalachians about themselves. This process proved central for many groups

---

396 Mike Maloney interview with the author, 23 Apr 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
immerses in the identity politics of the era and it came as no surprise that to a great degree the activists piggybacked on already present knowledge about the people and the region. Tucker argues these urban reformers largely invented the identity and ethnicity of Appalachian. They created not a wholly new invention, but rather borrowed from some already comfortable notions about the Appalachian people and a softened image rooted in the early twentieth century knowledge about folk culture.

In 1970, the group led a multipronged approach towards teaching the city, and Appalachians, about the Appalachian population. In March, they opened the Appalachian Identity Center (AIC) in the same Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. Mynatt hoped for an improved version of the approaches he had undertaken with his work in the Bible Center. The AIC emphasized this positive vision of Appalachian-ness from the beginning. “Other approaches in working with Appalachian youth have largely failed,” Mynatt wrote in a letter describing his mission. “It is time to try something new. The culture of the southern mountaineer has a lot to offer. Renewed contact with it should be a part of the emergence of Appalachians into urban society as strong, free, and open individuals.”398 His letter reveals the extent to which identity played a key role in this thinking. Migrants in the city had lost touch with their roots, and rather than helping them assimilate this had been a cause in the continued issues related to crime, poverty, and education in Appalachian sections of the city. The leadership in places like the AIC then had to find ways to provide “renewed contact” with those roots, build self-esteem, and aid

398 Letter from Ernie Mynatt to Jeanne Powell, undated, ARB, UAC, Folder 11.
in the broader assimilation process. The idea seemed almost the inverse of older methods of abandoning heritage in the name of acceptance. In order to accomplish this acceptance, the group challenged itself to present these aspects of Appalachian culture that city residents and the population at large would find palatable and familiar.

To little surprise, Appalachian leadership searched for methods of presenting a positive Appalachian identity they reached back into the past, however fictive, to present an approachable and acceptable image. This acceptable image presented itself in the foot-stomping jet-setters who frequented places like Aunt Maudie’s and found for themselves an agreeable version of authentic Appalachian culture. United Appalachian Cincinnati and its offshoots worked to identify urban Appalachians as a specific group to be targeted by the federal money flowing into agencies combating the growing urban crisis. The need then became to create a vision and definition of what being Appalachian meant. Furthermore, Maloney recognized how the sense of “consciousness” among Appalachians was not on par with groups like the black power movement that helped spur moments of disparate thoughts like in his Civil Rights rally experiences.399

In the spring of 1970, the city of Cincinnati hosted its first Appalachian Festival, an event that subsequently became an annual springtime tradition in the city. The festival was a culmination of work by an active advocacy group on behalf of the migrant Appalachian population and a steadily growing regional and national interest in Appalachian culture and bluegrass music more specifically. The music

399 Wagner and Obermiller, Valuing Our Past, 33.
drove a reconsideration of Appalachia and operated as the single most visible aspect of a supposed Appalachian culture in the everyday lives of urban residents. The festivals came to reflect this new vision of Appalachian-ness, far removed from the sentiments of the 1950s and early 1960s, which posited the Appalachian character as something in need of redemption and even further removed from the urban migration of an earlier generation that had spawned the music's creation. Instead, positive cultural traits became the showcase of the folk festivals, even when they sometimes bordered on caricature, and set a new tone for thinking about Appalachian culture and its relationship to the city. This tone, rather than reinventing Appalachian-ness, simply recast the image to become more in line with the first wave of reformers who sought a more positive and uplifting image of Appalachia and its people. This led to a reemphasis of the Appalachian folk culture, already on display for urban residents in bluegrass music, and all of its attendant possibilities.

The Appalachian festival developed concurrent with a growing bluegrass festival scene nationally. By the early 1970s, bluegrass festivals became staples in nearly every state across the country and even reached abroad into Japan, Canada, and Western Europe by the end of the decade. In general, these events embraced the Appalachian roots of the music as a key aspect of their appeal to audiences. The Appalachian Festival in Cincinnati became an extension of this general shift in the

---

400 Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass*, 341. Rosenberg notes, importantly, these years also introduced the first scholarship around bluegrass music itself as the music shifted from a niche phenomenon to established genre. This era also witnessed the rapid rise of bluegrass clubs and at least three separate trade journals devoted to the genre. See specifically the role of the Carlton Haney festival and the elevation of Bill Monroe's status to the father of bluegrass at the beginning of this period.
way popular bluegrass music was promoted and sold. While the Cincinnati festival did not rely wholly on bluegrass as its sole feature, the promotion of the music increasingly became part of the festival’s appeal and the equating of bluegrass and Appalachian culture only strengthened as a result. This relationship solidified as the festivals grew and legendary bluegrass musicians hosted events in or near their hometowns. Gary Bushorn recalled an experience at a festival on Ralph Stanley’s homestead in Virginia. Here, an authentic Appalachian experience in the mountains surrounded the musicians. The grounds opened for the musicians and fans in attendance (though the festivals had grown remarkably by comparison they still remained relatively small events) including some of the more secluded areas. One night, Bushorn and some friends wandered into Stanley family cemetery where the family matriarch was buried. “Beside the grave there,” he remembered, “there’s a little table and a blue telephone on it and a little hand printed sign that said ‘Jesus called.’” For Bushorn and others, venues like the Stanley farm met the expectations of Appalachia as the “strange land,” home to “peculiar people.”

By the 1970s, even Renfro Valley joined the popular bluegrass festival circuit. While John Lair may have objected to the notions of bluegrass music as a traditional form, he certainly set aside those objections when the music reached a popularity that allowed his complex to turn a profit. Mac Wiseman, another among the bluegrass legends, ran the festival at Renfro Valley and drew perhaps 10,000 people or so to its events. Wiseman used his bluegrass music connections to bring in the most popular acts of the day and Lair set aside his jealousy over bluegrass’s

401 Gary Bushorn interview with the author, 17 Feb 2014, Cincinnati, Ohio.
popularity as the grounds became a hotbed for college students and young people engaging with the music. As the folk revival left Lair’s vision of traditional music behind, he found a way to maintain relevance and present his own version of Appalachia in the Renfro Valley compound, complete with his own recreation of turn of the century life, through these bluegrass festivals. Furthermore, his vision of the traditional mountain past, complete with the folk craft village and the old barn that housed the radio shows, now became equated directly with bluegrass music. This only served to strengthen the relationship between the white, rural American past and this contemporary music.

In 1971, the Appalachian Festival moved into Over-the-Rhine inside Cincinnati’s historic Music Hall; ironically, the site where the “hillbillies” had first invaded the city in 1937 as part of John Lair’s first Renfro Valley Barn Dance program. They also borrowed a page from the Renfro Valley playbook by emphasizing arts and crafts at the festival. The leadership redubbed the festival the “Handcraft Exposition,” emphasizing this welcome nature of the Appalachian character, and invited craftspeople from seven states in the Appalachian region to participate, showcase, and sell their wares. Cincinnati leadership revived the equation of Appalachia with a native craft tradition, a notion about Appalachia with roots in the early twentieth century and that has since been steadily maintained. The festival served as the culmination of an Appalachian Week in Cincinnati and

---

403 A craft village was a key part of Lair’s Renfro Valley complex, though Lair borrowed some of this from other popular notions about Appalachian authenticity. The equation of Appalachian people with handcrafted goods dates to at least the late 19th century and the Industrial Revolution. See Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind.*
included various programs that focused on these positive cultural aspects of the mountain people. On the popular 50-50 Club television show, which reached a national audience, craftsmen from Vest, Kentucky showcased traditional works. Local churches incorporated traditional Appalachian music in some of their midweek services. Television station WLWT aired a program titled “An Appalachian Heritage,” discussing migration to Cincinnati and of course showcasing music. Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys headlined the festival program along with popular Grand Ole Opry star Roy Acuff.\textsuperscript{404} In addition to the headliners, musicians also held individual sessions and workshops at the two-day festival to demonstrate traditional styles and songs. All of these efforts worked together to present an image of Appalachia rooted in the nineteenth century ideal that led writers to dub the people living there “our contemporary ancestors” upon the region’s first “discovery.” The process also further pushed bluegrass music backwards in time, removed from its urban development and growth in the two decades prior as musicians at the festival performed alongside basket weavers, quilt makers, and crafts people dressed in gingham dresses and other traditional garb. Of equal if not greater importance, this version of Appalachia remained far removed from the downtrodden, shoeless, violent, and backwards image the city had heard about in prior decades.

Through the 1970s, the Appalachian festival in Cincinnati continued to emphasize these themes as it grew in size and recognition. The 1974 edition of the event promised “handcrafts, mountain music and down-home food” to attendees as

\textsuperscript{404} Program of Events, Appalachian Handcraft Exhibition, 1971, ARB, UAC, Folder 14.
the festival moved into the city's convention center. Over seventy exhibitors from nine states came to sell and display their homemade products. Various groups from Cincinnati also contributed, though curiously it remained the only urban area outside of Appalachia proper to sponsor exhibits. Musical performances and demonstrations remained constant through the festival’s five days, with the dulcimer and self-described bluegrass music dominating the program and many of the musicians hailing from Cincinnati itself. In a mixing of cultural metaphors that might have suggested more confusion than understanding for attendees, the first night of the festival was dubbed “Mountain Mardi Gras.” The majority of the day’s events still reflected the traditional understanding of Appalachia, though the day promised a “parade” through the 100 craft booths and a fashion show presumably of traditional mountain styles.

While the festival proved popular, particular aspects led to some objections from attendees. In a response to the 1972 festival, Kathleen Sowders, a Cincinnati city worker and migrant from Whitley County, Kentucky, listed some of these problematic elements. Overall she found the event “interesting and alive with activity” and particularly enjoyed “the quilters, the weaving loom, and the music, which was good ole foot-pattin’ bluegrass.” Other elements, however, did not fall in line with her expectations or the reality of her roots in southeastern Kentucky. In particular, some of the traditionally designed patchwork clothing looked more like “a new fashion for the affluent society” rather than anything “most folks where [she came] from would have considered wearing.” She also found some of the attempted

---

405 Appalachian Festival Program of Events, 1974, UAC Collection, SAA, Box 50, Folder 7.
humorous elements, like hillbilly dictionaries for sale, to not be in line with the broader concerns of the Appalachian advocacy in general.\textsuperscript{406} The sale, and Sowders’s objections to it, denoted of some of the cognitive dissonance in the approach to Appalachian advocacy and the general difficulty in separating the perceived truth from popular fiction. Less than one year later, Stuart Faber penned a letter to Scripps Howard Newspaper Company objecting to the continued publication of the “Li’l Abner” comic strip in the local \textit{Cincinnati Post and Times-Star} newspaper. Faber particularly felt the strip, and other popular depictions of the “hillbilly” lifestyle, “whatever [the] redeeming qualities, is a significant means of perpetuating stereotyped views of the Appalachian people.”\textsuperscript{407} When the sale of a popular hillbilly culture benefitted the advocacy agency or the craft vendors, it was likely overlooked. If the depiction came from the outside, however, it became objectionable. The stereotypes persisted and persist, however, and often enabled the promotion of work supposedly on behalf of the Appalachian population.

Other bluegrass music festivals emphasized these often-stereotypical Appalachian connections in the words and images that accompanied their publicity, and in the reality of their events. An advertisement for a bluegrass festival at Aunt Minnie’s Farm and Country Roads Park outside of Charleston, West Virginia in 1977 is telling. The three day festival promised “Peace, Love, and Bluegrass,” for all those in attendance as well as a panoply of traditional mountain events to accompany the music. Hay rides, fishing, horseback riding and perhaps most importantly “clean


\textsuperscript{407} Letter from Stuart Faber to Jack Howard, 1 Nov 1973, SAA, UAC Collection, Box 1, Folder 8.
rest rooms.” In addition, “Aunt Minnie” herself provided the food and West Virginia style true home cooking.\textsuperscript{408} Other festivals in the Washington D.C. and Baltimore areas continued to emphasize these themes in promotion. They used the image of the check-shirted fiddler, the bearded hillbilly, and other common tropes including country cooking and crafts that became so integral to the Cincinnati Appalachian Festival over the years.\textsuperscript{409} The hillbilly as a commodity remained an important marker of the musical and overall experience at these festivals.

The bands themselves also began to represent this new bluegrass experience. As this new generation of musicians came into their own in the genre in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they adopted the tropes associated with Appalachia and the previous generation of musicians when they may have lacked the authentic connections to those lives and lifestyle. While musicians still searched for opportunity to play with authentic musicians when possible, they substituted a more manufactured authenticity or identity in line with the popularity of Appalachian culture generally when they could. This often included adopting traditional sounding band names that played with Appalachian and mountain music conventions. In Washington D.C., the band Country Ham provided an example. Formed in 1972, the band hailed from different parts of the country including California, Pennsylvania, and the Washington D.C. area. Carl Pragter, the banjo player, discovered bluegrass in the Navy and began playing banjo there while Judie Cox, on the autoharp, came to the music more traditionally through singing in

\textsuperscript{408} Peace, Love and Bluegrass festival advertisement, \textit{Unicorn Times}, May 1977, 7.
\textsuperscript{409} Advertisements for these festivals appear in numerous publications and bluegrass trade magazines during the height of the festival seasons through the 1970s. See \textit{Unicorn Times}, Jun 1979 in particular for other telling examples.
church in her Allegheny Mountain hometown. A 1979 profile of the band in *Bluegrass Unlimited* placed them as an important bridge across the country as they brought some of the east coast with them to their new setting in California. Their posed photo, naturally, included all members in cowboy shirts, hats, and sitting atop a tractor in front of a nondescript barn. The imagery fell in line with both the wordplay in their name and the expectation of the band’s sound.410

In Dayton, the Hotmud Family came together with a similar throwback idea in mind. Their curious name came from the amalgamation of old and new. The band consisted of various members over the years, but stalwarts included Suzanne and David Edmundson on guitar and fiddle respectively and Rick Good playing banjo. When they devised their band name, they knew they wanted to be a “family” in the style of the early twentieth century bands like the Carters and the Stonemans. In a very new age way they mixed in the combination of the elements of their astrological signs. The combination of fire, earth, and water produced, naturally, hot mud.411 Like Country Ham, the group rode the wave of bluegrass popularity but promoted themselves as a mix of old-time and bluegrass music. The latter moniker came about to account for a different instrumentation and often the use of a frailing or claw-hammer banjo style instead of the popular Scruggs style. In a world increasingly saturated with virtuoso banjoists, the old-time sound could often stand out while still fitting in with the same general culture that attracted so many to the music. The Hotmud Family took an approach to the old-time sounds not unlike

---

411 Jon Harley Fox, liner notes to *The Complete Vetco Recordings by The Hotmud Family*, no label, no number, 2010.
what groups like the Seldom Scene did for bluegrass. They imitated the sound and appeal of the Carter Family as they wrote or covered newer songs in that style. Robert Cantwell, the bluegrass historian, penned the first profile of the band for *Bluegrass Unlimited*. He admitted his high praise for the act, as a group where “many different kinds of music meet...and out them a flower at once exotic and familiar blooms.”412 They expressed elements of “old-time music with strains of urbanity, gentility, and ardor woven into it.” Despite this high praise, he was initially put off by the band because of their perceived upstart approach, their “ridiculous name and [he] supposed that whoever it was that listed them as an old-time band simply hadn’t known what he was talking about.”413 All of that changed, however, as the authenticity of the traditional sound trumped the more contrived band name.

Appalachian activists continued to work in other ways beyond the festival scene and the overt musical cultural connections to emphasize the positive aspects of the mountain character. In 1972, the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission (CHRC) added Michael Maloney to its staff as an Appalachian specialist. Despite the efforts of the myriad groups operating in and around the city, Appalachians had not been taken seriously as an ethnic minority within the city government. The move to add an Appalachian specialist noted a considerable change in approach for CHRC and for proper recognition of Appalachians more specifically.

The serious treatment of Appalachian issues and the tireless efforts of activists to bring recognition to the plight of Appalachians as a distinct ethnic group

became new goals within the CHRC. Maloney’s specific roles at the commission included “researching inner-city needs and conditions, coordinating activities to improve Appalachian life, and serving as a liaison between Appalachian communities and City administration.” Maloney hoped that his time would especially help actualize and reverse the common “feeling against being known as an Appalachian.” Maloney’s move to CHRC came after a brief sabbatical to the University of North Carolina, where he furthered his own education in the interest of bettering his own understanding of the particular problems confronting Appalachian migrants. His return and joining with CHRC reflected his continuing mission to provide direct services to the Appalachian population, the “work with his own people,” though this still occurred under the broader umbrella of a human rights organization.

Maloney immediately set out to develop an approach to advocacy in line with the cultural undertakings the nascent group had used. In addition to fundraising, which may have been the most important goal of the group, he organized a number of new practices. He helped establish a research library in honor of Dr. Frank Foster, another tireless Appalachian activist, began a newsletter, “The Appalachian Advocate,” under the umbrella of CHRC, and organized regular potluck dinners and square dances. All of this was in keeping with the general positive outreach and

---

415 Ibid.
cultural affirmation that had dominated the thinking through the previous
decade.\textsuperscript{416}

The outreach also continued in more direct form as the establishment of
Appalachian identity in Cincinnati took on a highly formal tone. In 1970, advocates
sought to include Hamilton County, home of Cincinnati, under the broad umbrella of
the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The ARC formed in piecemeal fashion
beginning in the early 1960s as another large component of the general War on
Poverty programs. Trips to the region, by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and
Robert Kennedy four years later, helped focus national attention on the issues of
poverty in the region and pressed the public on the need for greater intervention
and aid. The original conception sought to bring together disparate local, state, and
private initiatives into a new agency that would encourage greater collaboration.\textsuperscript{417}
Legislation passed in 1965 formally created the federal agency focused on issues of
development within the region. The formal definition of the Appalachian region
thus came through a series of political that set boundaries and provided the region
set boundaries and opened possibilities for federal funds.

The inclusion in the formal ARC boundaries would have opened up their
programs to new funding sources previously earmarked for the geographically
defined Appalachia and been a boom to their notions of Cincinnati as an
Appalachian city. Their argument for inclusion worked several threads at once.

Neighbors Clermont County, just to the east, had already been included as a part


\textsuperscript{417} Eller, \textit{Uneven Ground}, 80.
of Appalachia, which helped diminish the physical location as an issue. Stuart Faber argued the inclusion would help advocates cross these arbitrary lines. “The people dealing with these Appalachians need to become aware of or recognize that they have specific cultural characteristics to which they continue to adhere. Some concentrated effort should be made in regard to enabling them to maintain their sense of identity, pride, self-esteem, etc., among those who have always looked down upon them as being humorous, hillbillyish, and uncapable [sic].” The inclusion under the ARC umbrella would have opened up a dialogue with the broader city about what it meant to be Appalachian and the role of Cincinnati as a member in this group. One can envision the promotional boom it would have made to these advocacy groups as well in addition to the dialogue it may have spurred.

Bud Haupt, of the Model Cities program in Cincinnati, took a different tact in advocating for inclusion. He noted, “There are a significant number of Appalachians in Cincinnati. The services available in Cincinnati are beneficial not only to the Appalachians here, but to Appalachia itself.” Haupt envisioned a win-win situation for the city and the ARC as the two entities and organizations within could work to ease issues of migration and develop stronger connections between migrants and their former residences. Faber traveled to Washington D.C. shortly after this initial meeting to advocate further. The ARC resisted the idea, however, largely because they objected to the already limited resources leaving the Appalachian region when so many infrastructure projects remained in dire need.

---

418 Appalachian Regional Commission Meeting with Mayor Eugene P. Ruehlman, 13 Aug 1970, ARB, UAC Collection, Folder 3.
419 Ibid.
The idea thus never came to fruition, and Cincinnati remained Appalachian only unofficially but proved integral to the general thinking of the urban advocacy core.

This vision of a broader definition of Appalachian intersected with the interest of some advocates for an authentic political and cultural movement, even if they entered as outsiders. Mike Henson first engaged with Appalachian advocacy in the late 1960s, as the movement began to pick up speed. He came to Cincinnati, from a family with roots in the Deep South, to study at Xavier University. Like many individuals who came to bluegrass in that decade, he found himself in Appalachian work because of the politics of the era. “I got into Appalachian volunteer stuff and it spoke to me and I realized those are my roots too. It wasn’t mountains, but this was what I could relate to. My mother was an Irish Catholic from Massachusetts, she was very proud of her [roots], but my dad, I had to dig to find that side of myself.”

The need to find his own authentic roots dovetailed with the broader search for authenticity of the era and the approach taken by Appalachian advocates in Cincinnati during the 1960s and 1970s. He recalled, “I first came [to Over-the-Rhine] in 1968 and it was teeming [with people]. A lot more people occupying a lot more buildings....It was all just straight up to the sky families. Most of them were white Appalachian, from east Kentucky and West Virginia, and a lot of displaced coal miners, and a lot of musicians. So, one of the things I was doing at that time was trying to find musicians.”

Henson’s interest in the neighborhood and in the music stemmed partly from a general interest in folk music and culture. “My grandpa was

---

420 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
421 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
a musician,” he said. “He sang the pre-bluegrass stuff. He was my idol growing up.”

Henson quickly immersed himself in the official and unofficial musical scene in the neighborhood. “Sometimes sittin’ out there on Orchard Street, I’d just bring my guitar out on the front...stoop and a neighbor would show up with his fiddle. And this guy, you know, back in his younger days had played on the radio down home with bands and we’d pick for an hour. Or it might be two guitars.” Henson focused on these ideas about culture and music role as he took on greater roles within the Appalachian advocacy groups. In addition, he wrote fictional works based on his experiences living and working in Over-the-Rhine during this time, drawing examples from the real life people of the neighborhood. One family, headed by Roscoe Morgan, had a profound influence. “I started out as a folky,” he recalled, “and after I met Roscoe I wanted to play [bluegrass].” The Morgan family also provided some of the impetus for the cultural outreach directed by the Appalachian groups more broadly.

Henson recognized the appeal the musical aspect of Appalachia could have to residents of all ages. In conducting direct youth outreach, he often found reaching some of the younger population difficult. The interest in music offered a crossover appeal though. He recalled, “Lester Flatt came to Music Hall and I got a bunch of tickets and I cleaned up Main Street, took a bunch of kids there. They were ‘Lester

---

422 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
423 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
424 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio. See examples of Henson’s work in the short story collection Small Room With Trouble on My Mind and Other Stories, (Minneapolis: West End Press, 1983) and the novel Ransack (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 1987).
While the younger generation may have had difficulty grasping some of the more ethereal cultural notions and the political outreach conducted by the Appalachian workers, staff could often find value in their continued cultural approach as a means of getting people into the room and start the conversation. As a result, the cultural movement took center stage in other advocacy efforts.

In 1973, the Appalachian Committee within CHRC submitted a proposal and plans to the broader organization and the city’s Junior League to design and construct an Appalachian Heritage Room. The Heritage Room became another tangible entity that embodied these broader goals of identifying positive traits of Appalachians, promoting a more constructive self-image of the city’s migrant population, and educating migrants and the broader public on the unique nature of Appalachian identity. The proposal placed this room inside of the Washington Park School in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood; an area the Committee identified as 70% Appalachian white at the time of the proposal. Despite its high poverty rate, leadership within the Appalachian Committee believed that “the people of the neighborhood [had] many strengths” and “develop[ing] a sense of community” among the population would be the first step in enabling those strengths. In particular, the group found the middle class focus of typical public school curriculum lacking for the educational needs of the poor Appalachian population in the area. The authors recognized how “children who are subjected to name-calling

---

425 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
(e.g. ‘hillbilly’) and ridicule have a lower self-concept.”

This in turn contributed to high dropout rates among the Appalachian population and a self-fulfilling prophecy of low achievement. The proposal emphasized a cultural approach to helping the resident Appalachian population reach higher levels of achievement at both the school and in the city generally. The stated goal of the project, “to foster the mutual respect and understanding of the different cultural backgrounds at [the school]: Appalachian, Southern Migrant, and urban patterns of culture.”

The workers and volunteers within the Heritage Room program adopted a variety of activities to encourage youth to embrace their cultural roots. This ranged from low-level work like cutting out shapes of the Appalachian states from which the students and their families hailed, writing letters to Appalachian state representatives, quilting, and woodcarving, to more in depth discussions about coal mining, geography, and mountain history. The general thrust of all of the activities remained the same, however: showcasing Appalachian culture in a variety of forms in an effort to instill pride in the attendees. As the project coalesced and took shape, leadership anticipated community wide benefits developing within the program. The students learned about their own culture and built self-esteem. Parents, “by being transmitters of lived experience” also developed a sense of self-worth and found a way to positively involve themselves in the community. Teachers at the school received an educational experience as well, and in time

---

427 Ibid.
428 Ibid.
429 Heritage Room: An Instructional Pac for Volunteers, Project Plan, March 1973, SAA, UAC Collection, Box 12, Folder 20.
would “realize that their students have something to teach them.” The Appalachian leadership also saw citywide benefits as the knowledge and practices within the Heritage Room expanded into other communities around the city and region.

Mike Henson served as one of the first directors of the Heritage Room. In the instructions to volunteers and employees who worked the project, leadership outlined their plans for the approach to Appalachian culture. “Parent volunteers will present different aspects of Appalachian culture to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students.” The discussions covered the gamut of traditional notions about the region including corn and tobacco farming, mountain music, folk tales and quilting. The overall goal became to “provide an environment in which students and parents can express and celebrate their cultural heritage.” The project fit in line with other efforts by the groups. Teaching Appalachians about their heritage was part and parcel to the overall efforts of teaching the migrants about themselves. One of the mottos adopted by the center and used in the community relations became “Be Proud of Who You Are,” a recognition of the importance of overcoming stereotypes and embracing the cultural attributes that most city residents could find agreeable. In order to teach pride, they first had to teach these students who they were, however. In doing so, they reached back into many of the generic tropes about

---

430 Cultural Heritage Project Proposal, August 1975, SAA, UAC Collection, Box 12, Folder 21.
431 Heritage Room: An Instructional Pac for Volunteers, Project Plan, March 1973, SAA, UAC Collection, Box 12, Folder 20.
432 Heritage Room and Appalachian Festival, 1976, Memo, Michael Henson to Appalachian Community Development Association, 11 Jun 1976, SAA, UAC Files
the migrant population; the same basic premises of that first discovery and the palatable elements regularly on display at the Appalachian festivals.

The Heritage Room made efforts to bring in authentic examples of these various cultural activities. At the same time, they worked with popular artists and others in the city in presenting the culture. “We did a lot of jamming at the Heritage Room,” Henson recalled. “It was kind of a mix between folkies [and] bluegrass. So there [was] this kind of anonymous level of people that they’d just show up. You just never knew.” The Heritage Room proved effective in drawing some interest in the Appalachian community and among the population at large, but did so by reimagining what it meant to be an authentic Appalachian in ways that were likely already familiar to the general population. The room also attracted people who may have been interested solely in the music. The University of Cincinnati Bluegrass Club attempted to establish a relationship with Henson at the room, and other growing regional acts came and often participated in these informal jam sessions and programs.

Henson recalled his friends and members of Company’s Comin’, an old-time and bluegrass band in the vein of the Hotmud Family and other acts, quickly became one of the main groups to frequent the venue. Russ Childers, bass player with the band, initially played in a bluegrass band, the Licking Valley Boys headed by a fellow child of migrants Gary Strong, for a time. Strong injured his hand, however, in 1976 in a serious industrial accident that inhibited his ability to play. Childers then joined Company’s Comin’ and played with the band until they broke up in the early 1980s.

---

433 Mike Henson interview with the author, 13 Dec 2013, Cincinnati, Ohio.
434 “Cultural Task Group Meeting Minutes, UAC, 18 Feb 1974, UAC Collection, ARB, Folder 8.
Like many, he came to the music from an interest in rock and then folk, but quickly found his roots when the bluegrass and traditional sound became more popular. Childers recalled his musical interest “stemmed from home.” As a child, however, playing bluegrass or traditional music, he recalled, “was the furthest thing from my mind.” He, like many of the baby-boomer generation who came to the music, embraced the “hippies, and the flower children and all of the British invasion music.”435 As the son of two Appalachian migrants from the Lee County, Kentucky area he thought the music “was in there just waiting to come out. I would hear it at family reunions...my mother would sing. She and her sisters at family reunions would get together...And I mean, the sister and brother harmonies are so knocked out anyhow that when the four of them got together (I thought), ‘this is my family singing like that? Wow!'”436 His attitude about his own Appalachian identity certainly meshed with the general promotion by the city’s advocates and the mission of the Heritage Room more specifically.

Gary Strong, too, recognized how a combination of circumstance and opportunity allowed second-generation migrants like himself to pursue their interest in the music and openly embrace their roots as part of their identity. Similar to those who entered the circle surrounding Earl Taylor, Strong and other musicians embraced the newfound appreciation of the Appalachian culture as a means of developing their own musical abilities. Strong’s parents came to Newport, Kentucky in the 1950s from Breathitt County. His parents, especially his father, raised Strong around bluegrass music from an early age, even taking him to

---

performances and jam sessions at local venues and eventually to festivals eventually as he became older. This immersion was the first step into a career as a musician, promoter and disc jockey in the bluegrass business. Strong likened his attachment to the music as something that just came natural to people of his background and generation. “I was just always around it,” he recalled. “Some people play baseball, some people play basketball. We worked and played music.”437 This pride, instilled seemingly naturally in musicians these musicians, became the rallying call for much of the Appalachian advocacy.

The Heritage Room lasted inside of the school for roughly two years, sharing quarters with the nurse’s office, before growing into its own space in the neighborhood. In those two years, the operation shifted from an all-volunteer run program to four staff members including Henson. The mission of the room shifted as the Appalachian advocacy branched off as well. In 1974, the groups that comprised the AIC and the CHRC Appalachian Committee formed the Urban Appalachian Council (UAC), a standalone organization with a dedicated mission of Appalachian advocacy. Mike Maloney recognized that his mission of a single-minded advocacy for Appalachian people had finally come to fruition and the organization stepped in to run the projects began before the merger.438 The group continued to work on the cultural side of advocacy as well. In 1977, the UAC purchased a building, across the street from the Washington Park School to house an expanded Heritage Room. This signaled not only the perceived success of the room itself, but also its ever-expanding mission. It requested $4,500.00 from the

---

437 Gary Strong interview with the author, 17 Dec 2012, Florence, Kentucky.
438 See Wagner and Obermiller, Valuing Our Past, 85-88.
Greater Cincinnati Foundation, a nonprofit group within the city, to add to over $10,000 in already donated money to complete the purchase and renovation of the building. The proposal noted the “purchase of the building will enable the Urban Appalachian Council to assure continued service” to the neighborhood and the city in addition to providing some general upkeep to the area. The purchase would “provide badly needed housing, bring the project a small income, protect the property...and strengthen our ties to the neighborhood.” The plans included painting a mural on the outside of the building that emphasized the neighborhood’s heritage and would “enhance the neighborhood image.”

Henson noted the new standalone operation allowed for these expanded roles that now included youth counseling, community referrals to local services, a meeting spot for tenant associations and the like, and a general community education center. He still maintained, however, “the thread that holds all this diverse programming together is cultural affirmation. We provide the physical base for cultural celebration. But we also stand by with a constant message of pride and respect, a sense that whatever we do at the Heritage Room comes not from a misplaced charity, but from a shared sense of pride in who we are, where we have come from, and a conviction that we can move forward from there.” Clearly, these ideas about identity predominated the thinking within the cultural programs and within the advocacy more generally.

---

439 Heritage Room Facility Purchase Proposal – August 1977, SAA, UAC Files, Box 12, Folder 23.
440 Cultural Heritage Project Proposal – Heritage Room 21 October 1976, SAA, UAC Files, Box 12, Folder 22.
Students in the local schools also continued to work Appalachian heritage into their programs as a means of further developing and affirming these notions of identity. For the 1972 city festival, students at the Washington Park and Rothenberg Schools, both located in Over-the-Rhine, prepared an anthology on “Appalachian Talk.” Students in creative writing and social studies classes at the schools gathered sayings, superstitions, and other philosophical thoughts from the young minds and compiled them in book form. The collection reinforced some popular notions about Appalachia through the focus on folk culture. Even the name, “Mountain Talk,” served as a reminder the peculiar way of speaking in the region. The work also revealed to some extent the scope of learning about the region occurring in the school and the community. The topic of coal mining revealed a wide range of thoughts in particular. One young girl noted, “I don’t want to be a coal miner because of black lung disease. The best thing of it is the machinery does most of the work...This is another reason I wouldn’t want to be a coal miner because of the tearing up of the grass...it takes years for the grass and trees to grow back after you have mined.”441 While one cannot be certain how this student learned about the complex issues surround coal, the nuance presented in the child’s response suggests some work either in the home or in school had occurred on the subject. It is also possible that there had been general discussion on the issue, as it became popularly raised in the documentary Harlan County, USA just a few years later. For a subsequent festival in the 1970s, the students at Washington Park compiled another book, “Recipes from Down Home.” The recipes all came from family members of the

441 “Mountain Talk,” UAC Collection, SAA, Box 1, Folder 6.
fifth and sixth grade students as the introduction, penned by a child, stated “we haven’t been getting them from cook books so get that out of your mines write now. But the recipes in this book are from natural born hillbelys.” Whether or not the wordplay was coincidence or aided by the hand of a teacher or editor is unclear, but the implication of the book was unmistakable; the food to be prepared was to be celebrated by the culture of the students’ families.

Similar cultural programs of these Appalachian advocacy groups could be mutually beneficial to musicians as well. The Katie Laur Band used connections to the Appalachian organizations to stay busy during the slower months of the festival off-season. Laur recounted, “One of the first things (our band) did was to get a government grant to play in the Cincinnati Appalachian district schools. I went to the Urban Appalachian Council...and we thought it desperately needed to be done in Cincinnati. We got the grant and hooked up with the PTAs to sponsor us.” Laur and company were somewhat surprised by the lack of knowledge among the children in local Appalachian schools, but nonetheless used the grant to expose students to some of their own cultural background. “We explained the history of the instruments and were big on letting the kids touch them and then we did little programs. We did mostly old time and Appalachian things like ‘Pawn You My Gold Watch and Chain,’ ‘You Are My Flower,’ ‘Froggy Went a Courtin,’ and ‘Wreck of the Old ‘97’ and always ‘Banks of the Ohio.’ The program lasted a few months in the winter and then we started doing PTA programs with the whole band and that

---

442 “Recipes From Down Home,” UAC Collection, ARB, Folder 19.
helped us financially through the winter.” Like the UAC and other organizations more broadly, musicians served as a cultural introduction as much as they did enrichment for the students and families in the schools.

The Cincinnati advocacy worked as a model for other regional and urban programs, though none had the success or the longevity of advocacy in the Queen City. In Dayton, a small group named Our Common Heritage (OCH) sought to replicate the success and model of the Appalachian advocacy in Cincinnati. The group organized officially in 1971, just as the nascent Appalachian movements in Cincinnati began to unite. The main objective of the organization, outlined in the group’s bylaws and promotional materials, stated the need to “erase the negative image many people have of Appalachians. We have much to proud of and it is time to promote it.” To these ends, the group, like in Cincinnati, used “educational programs and culture-enriched entertainment” to help Appalachian migrants become “aware and proud of their land, history, traditions, folklore and their contributions to national heritage.” The group initially organized as the Kentucky Mountain Club, a reflection of the origins of many migrants, but a name likely to colloquial for an evolving official mission. Similarly to elsewhere around the country, the major annual event of the group was a festival. In Dayton, this was initially dubbed the Kentucky Mountain Day before being changed to the Appalachian Festival in the mid-1970s. The change reflected the broader general Appalachian initiatives and the goal of using this title as a more formal recognition of the ethnic group for which they advocated.

444 Ibid.
445 Our Common Heritage Appalachian Pride Pamphlet, SAA, UAC, Box 87, Folder 14.
The group also reached out into the bluegrass music world to promote the organization and to accomplish their mission. An OCH member developed an Appalachian culture curriculum for use within schools and the Dayton Board of Education adopted the program in 1974. OCH employed Hotmud Family in the educational mission, going around to schools, teaching about instruments, and playing songs in the same way the Katie Laur Band worked with the UAC in Cincinnati. OCH even promoted itself in Bluegrass literature, as advocates endorsed the organization and its relationship to music in the pages of Bluegrass Unlimited. A review of a crafts event organized by the group in the summer of 1972 showcased the various bluegrass groups, including Daytonian Red Allen, who performed at the event. The reviewer noted the “it was a different type of festival” from the normal bluegrass showcase, “a festival of people, rather than music,” but the music nonetheless provided a particular draw for interested parties and reinforced the connection between the mountains and the music.

In some promotional material for the year 1977, the UAC used a slogan more prescient than they probably initially realized describing their work and their relationship to what it meant to be an Appalachian. The brochure’s front page proclaimed in bold letters, “Appalachian culture: it’s there, people know it, it’s just near impossible to wrap words around.” The UAC, OCH, and other groups attempted to define this indelible entity of Appalachian-ness through the 1970s as they hoped that a new policy of positive advocacy and a constructive vision of the

---

446 Our Common Heritage Update 1974, SAA, UAC, Box 87, Folder 14.
448 Appalachian Culture Brochure, UAC, SAA, Box 87, Folder 14.
Appalachian character could provide the needed uplift to urban residents. This new advocacy’s roots emerged in the immediate post-World War II era, when urban citizens began to recognize a massive influx of Appalachians and Southerners in their midst. Cities responded to this influx in various ways, mostly through denigration and a reliance on stereotypes about a backwards people, contemporary ancestors still stuck in a world of the past that had long since modernized. The efforts then focused on finding ways to bring Appalachians into the urban fabric and to modernize individuals. This new advocacy, however, sought to meet some of the same end goals but through self-actualizing experiences for the migrant population. Urban Appalachian advocates moved away from the “culture of poverty” idea that dominated thinking in the 1950s and early 1960s and approached their advocacy efforts from a view focused on finding positive ways to redeem the mountain culture. Historian Bruce Tucker notes, much of this advocacy actually involved “the development of a group identity among urban Appalachians.”449 The culture of poverty approach failed to bring Appalachians into the urban fabric, at least in part, because few positive traits rooted these migrants into their culture. The new approach created a positive identity as the inverse to the negative attributes that dominated the earlier social science thinking. Both approaches began with an assumption of fundamental difference about the Appalachian people, but the new methods found a reliable ally in the folk music revival culture that had been actively redeeming the Appalachian character in its own way. The bluegrass festival scene, coupled with a growing movement to celebrate Appalachian culture in the urban

environment, helped further cement ideas about the essential nature of the people and the music.

These conceptions of what it meant to be an authentic Appalachian and what authentic Appalachian culture looked like began to blend in ways that followed the concurrent trajectory of bluegrass music. Furthermore, the two processes began to reinforce one another. Essential notions about culture, in short, dovetailed with essential notions about “true” bluegrass to the point that the concepts more than overlapped through much of the decade of the 1970s. While the folk revival helped to plant authentic bluegrass within the mountains, the Appalachian advocacy in the urban environment rode the wave of the revival spirit to help build a case for a stronger, and more positive image of Appalachian-ness. In doing so, however, they relied on and reinforced some of the same common cultural tropes that Appalachian advocates had worked for decades, if not a century, to escape.

The final Cincinnati Appalachian festival of the 1970s made these connections even more explicit. The motto in that year’s festival program, “our history is music,” made the most overt connection between the entertainment at the event and the story of Appalachia itself, giving a plain and simple definition to the impossible to define culture of two years prior. What became unclear in this process, however, was how much the tail had begun to wag the dog. While many city residents and bluegrass fans around the country had long associated the sound with the mountains, the music’s growth and prosperity largely occurred outside of that region. Appalachian advocates, capitalizing on the popularity of the musical

---

450 1979 Appalachian Festival Program, UAC Collection, ARB, Folder 18.
genre, worked hard to drive the sound back up the mountains and root their people within the music itself. The people became extensions of these popular cultural notions; a problem which persisted in the questions about identity from Lucy Peterson and migrant children in urban schools. They may not have been able to define, or even pronounce Appalachia, but by the end of the 1970s there would have been little doubt that it sounded something like bluegrass music.
Conclusion - What’s New is Old Again

In April 1989 the Dayton area organization Cityfolk, a group that continues to promote the urban folk traditions of the city, put on a bluegrass reunion show to celebrate the history of the genre in Dayton. The organization invited numerous musicians with local ties, including the Osborne Brothers and the Hotmud Family, as well as other younger bluegrass bands to perform at the event. Historian Neil Rosenberg penned a brief essay in the program, titled “Industrial Strength Bluegrass.” In it, he recounted the history of the music, from its birth in Nashville to Bill Monroe’s first trip to Dayton, to its gradual spread across the rest of America. The program became a celebration for the over forty years of history the music, proudly noted Ohio’s claim to the largest numbers of Bluegrass Unlimited subscriptions, leading bluegrass festivals, the region’s steady allegiance to the music, and its continued importance as a “wellspring” of bluegrass activity.\(^\text{451}\) Rosenberg credited Dayton with helping to craft “a new urban folk music, nurtured and shaped by...the industrial setting” as the music played in the city continued because of its ability to “make a personal statement about life in Dayton.”\(^\text{452}\) The brief words captured the great transition that cities like Dayton had undergone through the decades since World War II. The banjo and fiddle, once a symbol of the downtrodden, problematic, backwards citizens who proved to be a bane on the relief rolls, housing crises, and overall health of these American cities became something to be celebrated. They became a reminder of America’s folk past, as an

\(^{451}\) Neil Rosenberg “Industrial Strength Bluegrass,” in Cityfolk presents: The Dayton Bluegrass Reunion, 3.

\(^{452}\) Neil Rosenberg “Industrial Strength Bluegrass,” 6.
authentic representation of an historic America and one that developed within these cities in their own unique fashion.

Of the myriad impacts bluegrass music had on American culture and society, the urban embrace of Appalachian ethnicity as a heritage to celebrate stands among the most important. As Rosenberg stated in his Dayton profile, “this combination of old and new was a perfect metaphor” for the history of the individuals who had not only come to the city, but played this old-style music. The mix of old and new portended not only the history of the music, but also the history of the people most associated with it. Gradual appreciation of the music dovetailed directly with a gradual reassessment of the people who originated the sound. The reflection in the late 1980s also reflected the cyclical nature of interest in the music and folk culture generally.

The “discovery” of Appalachia in the late 1800s heralded this first generation of interest. Writers and scholars celebrated the Appalachian people as the bastion of an America that modernization was quickly leaving behind. Decades later, ballad collectors spurred by the development of the radio repeated many of the tropes associated with the people and the culture. Hillbilly music programs and artists became among the most popular on the new medium of radio and allowed an even greater, national reach. Post-World War II migration brought additional contact and a more overt backlash against mountain folk, but also a genuine if somewhat misguided interest in studying and helping them. The migration also inspired additional popular culture depictions of the hillbilly archetype, emphasizing many of

---

453 Neil Rosenberg “Industrial Strength Bluegrass,” 5.
the same themes present in earlier generations but exposing the culture in a human form as well. The baby boom generation, raised in these more mixed environments, saw Appalachians as a representation of something more authentic in American history and pushed bluegrass music to the fore as the hallmark of that authenticity.

As each generation brought the music and culture forward, however, the same group of people conversely worked to push the sound and the people back into the past. For the most recent generation, a popular renaissance of bluegrass and old-time music was spurred by the success of the O Brother Where Art Thou? film soundtrack. Ralph Stanley, who saw unprecedented popularity in his late age as a result of the film, noted, “Well, the harvest came when O Brother hit... The change came in the people; they were ready for this music now.”\footnote{Stanley, \textit{Man of Constant Sorrow}, 431.} His words reiterated some of the same thoughts his forebears of the folk revival spirit tapped into. Bradley Kincaid and John Lair who generated and capitalized on interest in Appalachian and mountain culture two generations earlier relied on the cyclical nature, the waxing and waning of interest, to secure their success. The process undoubtedly continues as demand for folk, Americana, bluegrass, old-time, and myriad new labels develop as a way of marketing the new as something old and the old as something new.

These developments would not have been possible without the important crucible of the American urban environment. Bluegrass rose to prominence in the decades following its birth in Nashville, Tennessee on the backs of a small cadre of professional musicians. The musicians, led by Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs,
the Stanley Brothers and more, infused a mix of country and traditional music with a thoroughly modern sound. Radio stations, headquartered in these urban environments, opened the ears of musicians to the influences and eventually to the bluegrass sound itself. As the music developed, however, it gradually became thoroughly rooted in a fictive mountain past and associated with a rural idyll even as the musicians worked to integrate themselves into the urban milieu. Political and commercial considerations drove much of this process and bluegrass and traditional music helped reinforce a change in the conception of the hillbilly in American culture. The country rube stereotype, riddled with overly negative associations for most of the first half of the twentieth century, gradually developed into a countercultural figure of sorts as the folk boom took bluegrass under its ever-broadening umbrella. The contact between rural and urban musicians provided the impetus for this to occur. The banjo not only proved integral to the bluegrass sound, but became an instrument of development for a new Appalachian identity where the hard work of scholars, sociologists, and politicians sometimes fell short. That identity, like popular conception bluegrass music, developed out of nostalgia for a mountain past that existed only in the music and handcraft that became so associated with the Appalachian region. The nostalgia for the past existed largely because the city where the music was played provided a useful foil for the country.

When millions of mountaineers left the Appalachian region in the period after World War II they encountered an urban scene that associated them, and often not positively, with traditional music. While initially the banjos, guitars, and mandolins symbolized the unrefined archetype of America’s past, migrants used this
association as a means of access to interested academics, to younger crowds, and as a way to find work in an environment that gradually developed a greater appreciation for what this mountain culture had to offer. Naturally, the music itself, as it developed in the city, became even further tinged with nostalgia for what was left behind. Fans and producers demanded songs that captured the rural idyll associated with the mountains and the process of removal from the home region, whether by push or pull factors, often led to a stronger, more wistful associations with the mountain past; migrants looked back through dogwood blossom tinted glasses.

Bluegrass music thus became a coping mechanism for the changes associated with migration and a way for a new generation to tie themselves to the past. As Appalachian advocates worked to provide direct aid to mountain migrants who still struggled with urban assimilation, they capitalized on this nostalgia and authentic connections to a world left behind. Ernie Mynatt recognized the wistful nature of identity as it pertained to migrants. “Appalachian culture in the inner city is in the person’s soul,” he recounted. “It has to do with the way a person feels, the way he talks, the way he loves.” Bluegrass music in all its iterations captured these ethereal feelings as it provided a direct connection from the past to the present and helped usher along a new understanding of Appalachian identity. Like bluegrass, this identity was conceived as something new and developed in the cities by advocates, but firmly rooted in the popular conceptions of the past.

---

Bibliography

Archives

Baltimore, Maryland

Langsdale Library (LL), University of Baltimore
- Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project (BNHP)
- Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Authority Records (BURHA)
- Citizens Planning and Housing Association Records (CPHA)
- Greater Baltimore Committee Records (GBCR)
- Maryland Council of Churches (MCC)

Enoch Pratt Free Library
- Vertical Files

Berea, Kentucky

Southern Appalachian Archives (SAA), Hutchins, Library, Berea College
- John Lair Papers (JLP)
- Bradley Kincaid Papers (BK)
- Urban Appalachian Council Records (UAC)

Cincinnati, Ohio

Archives and Rare Books (ARB), Blegen Library, University of Cincinnati
- Urban Appalachian Council Records (UAC)
- Cincinnati Human Relations Commission Records (CHRC)

Nashville, Tennessee

Frist Library and Archive, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum
- Country Music Foundation Oral History Project

Interviews

BBM – Available from the Baltimore Bluegrass Meetup, Baltimore, Maryland.
BNHP – Available from the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project, Langsdale Library, Baltimore, Maryland
CMF – Available from the Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, Nashville, Tennessee
NG – Available at nativeground.com
NM – Recordings and/or transcripts in author’s possession

Bowers, Carrie. By Susan Hawes. August 22, 1979. BNHP
Childers, Russ. By Nathan McGee. October 21, 2013. NM
Hooper, Russ. By Bud Dickens and Tony Bonta. n.d. BBM
Maloney, Mike. By Nathan McGee. Cincinnati, Ohio. April 23, 2013. NM
Proctor, Mary Hall. By Bill Harvey. April 18, 1979. BNHP
Sparks, Harry. By Nathan McGee. Covington, Ky. March 5, 2014. NM
Sylvester, Erich. By Nathan McGee. October 19, 2013. NM

Note: personal interviews conducted without a location were done via telephone or email with the interviewee.

**Primary Sources**


**Newspapers and Periodicals**

_Acoustic Guitar_
_Atlantic Monthly_
_Baltimore City Paper_
_Baltimore Evening Sun_
_Baltimore News Post_
_Baltimore Sun_
_Billboard_
_Bluegrass Unlimited_
_Broadcasting_
_Chicago Tribune_
_Cincinnati Enquirer_
_Dayton Daily News_
_Dayton Journal Herald_
_Hamilton Journal_

229
John Edwards Music Foundation Quarterly
Mountain Life and Work
Muleskinner News
New York Times
Pickin’
Rural Radio
Unicorn Times
University of Cincinnati News Record
Vice
Washington City Paper
Washington Post

Dissertations and Theses


Sound Recordings

Alan Lomax Presents Folk Songs From The Bluegrass, Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys, United Artists, UAL 3049, Vinyl, 1959.


The Complete Vetco Recordings by The Hotmud Family, no label, no number, 2010.

Books


________. *Small Room With Trouble on My Mind and Other Stories*. Minneapolis: West End Press, 1983.


Lange, Jeffrey J. *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music and the Struggle*


Williamson, J.W. *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the


Articles


