

WOOD, MICHAEL ALAN, D.M.A. The Hammered Dulcimer in the Southern Appalachian Old Time String Band Music of North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, and West Virginia. (2012)

Directed by Dr. Randy Kohlenberg and Dr. Revell Carr. 89 pp.

The hammered dulcimer, although present since early in American history, has within the past few decades encountered a resurgence of popularity with some players performing the traditional Appalachian string band music known as Old Time. Although present in small pockets in areas such as West Virginia and Randolph and Guilford counties in North Carolina for well over 100 years, the instrument was mostly unknown to the general population.

Although not commonly considered historically authentic by the Old Time community, the hammered dulcimer has been a part of the rural American soundscape for over two centuries. The relative popularity of the instrument, however, waned around the turn of the twentieth century as pianos and guitars became more commonplace. The instrument nearly died out of common usage until the latter part of the folk revival during the 1970s and 1980s when dulcimer construction and playing experienced a rebirth. The instrument underwent significant changes that made it more portable and better in tune.

Old Time music festivals have played an important role in the pedagogy of the genre. Competitions and “jam” sessions at these festivals strengthened the Old Time community by providing a social outlet for learning repertoire and style.

However, hammered dulcimer players were sometimes excluded from these events.

The result of this study showed that hammered dulcimer players learned the Old Time music repertoire separate from the Old Time establishment and perform the genre in bands created outside of the festival experience. Dulcimer players also formed their own instrument-specific festivals that featured classes and performances solely for mountain and hammered dulcimers. These players continue to be a part of the Old Time community. However, their experience differed greatly from more common instruments in the genre such as fiddle, banjo, and guitar.

THE HAMMERED DULCIMER IN THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN OLD TIME
STRING BAND MUSIC OF NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTHWEST
VIRGINIA, AND WEST VIRGINIA

by

Michael Alan Wood

A Dissertation Submitted to
The Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Greensboro
2012

Approved by

Committee Co-Chair

Committee Co-Chair

© 2012 Michael Alan Wood

To my loving wife, Sara...

Thank you for supporting me throughout these past years. You always inspire me to be a better person than I was the day before.

I love you more than words can express.

To my parents and sisters...

Thank you for listening to the many hours of practice and attending the countless concerts over the years. I couldn't have done it without you.

I can never thank you enough for all the love and support you all have given me.

I love you all dearly.

Crystal, I wish you could have been here with us throughout this adventure.

I miss you every day.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Michael Alan Wood has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my committee co-chairs Dr. Randy Kohlenberg and Dr. Revell Carr as well as committee members Dr. Kristopher Keeton and Dr. Dennis Askew for all their guidance throughout my time at UNCG.

I would also like to sincerely thank those interviewed for this paper, Mr. Joe Holbert, Mr. Jeff Sebens, and Mr. Wayne Seymour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Methodology	3
Musicians Interviewed for this Paper	7
What is “Old Time”?	9
Jams	17
Current Literature on Hammered Dulcimer	18
II. HISTORY OF THE HAMMERED DULCIMER	25
Hammered Dulcimer History Prior to Introduction to America	25
Hammered Dulcimer in America	29
Folk Revival: What’s in a Name?	38
Hammered Dulcimer Pedagogy	42
III. OLD TIME COMMUNITY: FESTIVALS AND COMPETITIONS	49
Fiddler’s Grove.....	52
Mt. Airy Old Fiddlers Convention	56
Galax Old Fiddler’s Convention	58
Comparison of Festivals	59
Jams at the Old Time Festivals	61
Swannanoa Gathering	70
The Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival	75
IV. CONCLUSIONS	82
Suggestions for Further Research	85
BIBILOGRAPHY	87

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1. Example of Handout Used at Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival..... 77

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The hammered dulcimer is an instrument with roots dating back until the fifteenth century in Western Europe. Settlers to the fledgling American colonies during the seventeenth century brought the instrument with them and often used the hammered dulcimer as a substitute for the piano or fiddle. Originally introduced into the Massachusetts and New York area, the hammered dulcimer, herein also referred to solely as “dulcimer,” was then transplanted into the Great Lakes region and further south to West Virginia.¹ By the turn of the twentieth century, the dulcimer was found throughout West Virginia and in small pockets of activity in North Carolina around Randolph and Guilford counties.²

During this same period from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, immigrants from the British Isles, including the English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish, brought their traditional folk musics and many settled in the Appalachian Mountains. This repertoire and musical style, coupled with isolation between the various mountain settlements and a strong African

¹ Gifford, Paul. *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History* (Lanham, MD: The

² Gifford, 277.

American influence, created a distinctly American style of music known as Old Time.

The purpose of this study was to determine the spheres of influence between the Old Time music community and hammered dulcimer players. Although never as popular as the fiddle or banjo, the dulcimer has been used as an Old Time instrument for both melodic and chordal accompaniment prior to the 1920s and 1930s when the genre became more standardized. This research sought to understand why the Old Time community is not generally accepting of the dulcimer as an authentic Old Time instrument. This document used field research at festivals to show how the dulcimer was portrayed through the competition categories and through informal “jam” sessions. Interviews with dulcimer players and observations of dulcimer-centric festivals also supported the assertion that the dulcimer was not well received into the mainstream Old Time community.

Furthermore, this research sought to document why dulcimer players performed Old Time music. A survey showed that over seventy percent of respondents incorporated the Old Time music genre into their repertoire showing a clear connection between the instrument and this style of music. Although Old Time music remains a popular genre played by most dulcimer players, no one style of music dominates the repertoire. Class offerings at dulcimer-centric

festivals and teaching materials such as books and online instruction also illustrate a varied approach to learning the hammered dulcimer.

Because the Old Time community has not been accepting of dulcimer players and research showed that most hammered dulcimer players perform Old Time music, this document also sought to explain how the dulcimer players were learning the style and repertoire outside the mainstream Old Time education. This research described the pedagogical system in place for dulcimer players to learn and perform Old Time music and how this differed from the traditional Old Time community.

Research Methodology

This research was confined to the geographic area of western North Carolina, southwest Virginia, and West Virginia. The subject area has been heavily steeped in traditional Appalachian folk music and the hammered dulcimer can be found throughout as a part of the Old Time music genre.

Research for this document consisted of fieldwork at larger Old Time music festivals and smaller dulcimer-centric events, as well as interviews with hammered dulcimer players, teachers and instrument builders. As part of the field research, I attended and observed three large music festivals between 2010 and 2012: Fiddler's Grove in Union Grove, North Carolina, Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, and the Old Fiddler's Convention in

Galax, Virginia. While at these events, I observed various activities related to Old Time music, hammered dulcimer players, vendors, and competitions. These three festivals were the largest and most established Old Time festivals within the subject area.

I had three objectives while attending the festivals. One was to participate in and observe any competitions involving the hammered dulcimer. The second objective was to observe the Old Time band competitions to identify any use of the hammered dulcimer and to personally obtain a better sense of Old Time music as represented through the lens of competition. The final intention was to explore the campground or site of the festival, observing any hammered dulcimer players and vendors. Field recordings and photographs were made of the activities observed while at the festivals. When possible, I also spoke with hammered dulcimer players and vendors. Because the festivals took place on campgrounds that were quite large, I was unable to monitor all activities. However, every attempt was made to see a sampling of the official performances, competitions, and the informal jam sessions.

In addition to the large music festivals, I also attended the Swannanoa Gathering during the “Dulcimer Week” in 2010 that included classes, concerts, and various “jam” session opportunities specifically tailored for the mountain dulcimer and hammered dulcimer. This gathering was held at Warren Wilson College near Asheville, North Carolina. It was one part of a multi-week festival

with different areas of focus, including: Celtic music, Old Time music, Guitar, Fiddle, and Contemporary Folk. I also participated in and observed a local two-day dulcimer festival in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Although similar to the Swannanoa Gathering in content and presentation, this festival was shorter and more typical of other dulcimer festivals commonly found across the country.

Regarding the limitations of this research, I was only able to observe festivals and events in the subject area. Other parts of the country maintain vibrant hammered dulcimer traditions. Michigan, for example, has many of its own styles, tunes, and techniques and dulcimer festivals. Advertising itself as the “World’s Largest Hammered Dulcimer Gathering,” the ODPC (Original Dulcimer Players Club) Funfest in Ewart, Michigan is one of the largest festivals found in the United States.³ Also, the National Hammered Dulcimer Championship as part of the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas provides the dulcimer community with its largest competition.⁴

In addition to the data gathered at these festivals, I sought out and interviewed three musicians who play the hammered dulcimer. With various backgrounds in folk and some classical music, the three informants brought

³ ODPC Funfest, <http://dulcimers.com/festival.html> (accessed November 4, 2012).

⁴ Walnut Valley Festival, <http://www.wvfest.com/> (accessed August 4, 2012).

interesting and varied experiences concerning the hammered dulcimer.⁵ Three individuals were selected who I thought best represented the many players and styles that I heard on the hammered dulcimer. All three are talented musicians on the hammered dulcimer as well as other instruments. They are also all teachers and one is a professional instrument builder. I noted that most hammered dulcimer players also perform on multiple instruments. Typically, hammered dulcimer players are exposed to the instrument later in their musical careers and bring with them a varied musical background as well as experience on other instruments. Although I prepared specific questions for the interviewees, the informants offered their own perspectives on the instrument and what they considered to be important. All three had knowledge of the instrument and its history since the 1970s.

This document used the festival experience and personal interviews to identify and describe the relationship between the Old Time community and the hammered dulcimer community. Old Time music makes up a part of many hammered dulcimer players' repertoire and education, but the style was often learned outside of the mainstream Old Time society.

⁵ A correspondence was sent to the three explaining briefly the purpose of the research and inquiring if each would be willing to be interviewed for this document. Interviews were recorded using a Zoom H2 handheld recorder.

Musicians Interviewed for this Paper

I first met Joe Holbert at the Swannanoa Gathering in 2010 where he was a faculty member for the Dulcimer Week, teaching the beginning hammered dulcimer class. Mr. Holbert originally heard of the hammered dulcimer in 1972 when Guy Carawan performed in Jefferson City, Tennessee. He bought his first hammered dulcimer in 1977 from the instrument maker Phillip Mason of Fort Royal, Virginia. At the time of the interview, Mr. Holbert was a retired choral music teacher who had taught in West Virginia and North Carolina. Mr. Holbert now resides in Black Mountain, North Carolina where he continues to perform and teach. He incorporates traditional Old Time and Celtic repertoire with more modern folk songs and is also an accomplished guitar player. Mr. Holbert also sings while performing on hammered dulcimer, which few players do. I interviewed Joe Holbert at a Quaker meetinghouse in Black Mountain, North Carolina on April 9, 2011.

Jeff Sebens is a hammered dulcimer builder, player, and teacher, living in Cana, Virginia. He first encountered the hammered dulcimer at the North Carolina State Fair, where a vendor had a booth selling the instruments made from plans from the Smithsonian.⁶ At the time, he could not afford to buy an

⁶ Presumably from the same plans written by Sam Rizzetta that were often used as the basis of early hammered dulcimer construction.

instrument, so he built his own out of wood removed from an old piano.⁷ He has been making hammered dulcimers for over thirty years and has constructed thousands of instruments throughout his career. Mr. Sebens was also the owner of a music shop along the Blue Ridge Parkway where he sold his own hand-built instruments as well as other brands of hammered dulcimers. At the time of the interview, he worked primarily from home building a variety of instruments and teaching. According to Mr. Sebens, the majority of the instruments he sells are for the classes he has taught at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Western North Carolina.⁸ There, he facilitated instrument building throughout the week as well as playing instruction. As a performer, he has been touring with Barbara Bates Smith in her one-woman show, providing onstage background music.⁹ I interviewed Jeff Sebens at his home in Cana, Virginia on April 12, 2011.

Wayne Seymour was born in Alabama, but being the son of a Methodist minister, has lived all over the southeastern United States.¹⁰ He resides in Reidsville, North Carolina. As a well-known community musician, Mr. Seymour

⁷ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

⁸ John C Campbell Folk School, <https://classes.folkschool.org> (accessed August 17, 2012).

⁹ Barbara Bates Smith, <http://barbarabatessmith.com> (accessed August 17, 2012).

¹⁰ Dulcimer Sessions, <http://archive.dulcimersessions.com/feb08/seymour.html> (accessed September 10, 2012).

has performed at various festivals and events across North Carolina for many years. Coming from a talented multi-instrumental musical family, he performs mostly on the mountain dulcimer and guitar. His highly energetic and entertaining shows incorporate storytelling, comedy, and theatrics. Having played folk music since he was fifteen years of age, Mr. Seymour learned to play the hammered dulcimer after seeing Frank George perform on an upside down instrument in the 1970s.¹¹ Mr. Seymour, like many hammered dulcimer players, built his first instrument from plans by Sam Rizzetta.¹² Mr. Seymour was interviewed at my home in Greensboro, North Carolina on September 24, 2011.

What is “Old Time”?

Defining the term “Old Time” has been problematic. During the 1920s and 1930s recordings of string bands became popular on a national level. Beginning with Fiddling John Carson and then groups like Al Hopkins and his string band were labeled “hillbilly” to denote the rural pedigree.¹³ Some of the tunes at this time people were already calling “Old Time” since the tunes were old to the

¹¹ This was somewhat common from stories I have heard. Before teaching materials became commonplace, players might not have known the correct orientation of the instrument and played the dulcimer with the small part of the trapezoid closer to the player.

¹² Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011.

¹³ Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music: American Music* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979) 62.

musicians by that point. To further complicate matters, the genre of Old Time music in the 1920s and 1930s referred only to string band music of the Appalachian Mountains. Today, one can commonly hear a Texas waltz¹⁴ or a New England contra dance¹⁵ tune performed by an Old Time band. At its essence, Old Time music served a social function within a community. Old Time music was traditionally dance music. The purpose was not intended for the stage setting with a strict separation between the audience and musicians. A paradigm shift occurred after the popularization of Old Time recordings and the increased usage of amplification.

Mike Seeger, a well-known musician coming out of the folk revival, describes Old Time music as:

Old-time music was the old-time name for real mountain-type folk music. Old-time music is the main foundation for bluegrass music. It is the kind of music that Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, the Stanley Brothers and in fact most rural people prior to the mid nineteen twenties, were raised with. It is the old unaccompanied English ballads like Barbara Allen, new American songs like Wild Bill Jones, old fiddle tunes like Devil's Dream, and newer banjo tunes like Cumberland Gap. It's a rich and varied heritage of music - as rich as the roots music of any country. It was played throughout rural America but was extra strong and distinctive in the Southeast, especially in the mountains. It is sung and played on a variety of acoustic instruments including the guitar and mandolin, which were

¹⁴ Examples include "Westphalia Waltz" or "Yellow Rose of Texas."

¹⁵ A Contra dance is a distinct style of dance and music typically found in the New England region of the United States. Tunes for these dances were typically of Irish, Scottish, or French Canadian descent.

newcomers to it in the early twentieth century. It used to be played by African Americans as well as Anglo, French & Scotch- Irish, etc. Americans. It nearly died out in mid-century but has found new life and is being played, mostly informally, by people all over the country.¹⁶

Since the commercialization of Old Time music in the 1920s and 1930s dance has played less of a role in the genre. Although local dances featuring Old Time music can be found across the subject area of central and western North Carolina, southwest Virginia, and West Virginia, a performance setting without the accompanying dancing is more common to hear. My observations at Old Time festivals supported this as well.

Old Time music refers to the merger of style and repertoire from the British Isles, Germany, France, and other Western European countries, with a strong African American influence. Immigrants from different countries created a unique melting pot as the groups settled around the American colonies. The African American influence also provided a strong rhythmic drive that has been a defining characteristic of Old Time music.¹⁷

The guitar started to gain popularity in the late nineteenth century. As the instrument became more common, harmonization of the melody became more standard. Up until the popularization of the guitar, Old Time musicians would play

¹⁶ Mike Seeger, <http://mikeseeger.info/music.html> (accessed August 15, 2012).

¹⁷ Gifford, 248.

some version of the melody to create heterophony, or a variation of a single melody by multiple voices or instruments within the different melodic lines.¹⁸

Performers did incorporate drones, either with the root, the fifth, or both. Drones have become part of the performance practice primarily on instruments like the fiddle, banjo, and mountain dulcimer. Drones are sounding notes that do not often change throughout the course of a tune and correspond with the given key.

Within the Appalachian Mountains, areas of more dense populations were often separated geographically from neighboring counties, which in many ways allowed the music to evolve independently. Although some tunes were common between the different areas, such as “Soldier’s Joy” and “The Devil’s Dream”, the style and performance practice differed. During the 1920s and 1930s, Old Time music was made popular at a national level by hillbilly and race recordings (the counterpart to hillbilly except with African American musicians). These recordings “...came to be accepted by a large segment of the public as an authentic representation of southern mountain music.”¹⁹ New groups such as the Carter Family began to standardize the instrumentation and style of Old Time groups.

¹⁸ Peter Cooke, "Heterophony." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed November 4, 2012).

¹⁹ David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 184.

What were once isolated pockets of musicians playing what was available to them were then standardized into the typical fiddle, banjo, and guitar.

This was most evident in the different banjo picking styles that existed prior to the popularization of Old Time music. During my research, all of the banjo players I observed performed in the clawhammer style. Most other styles have been lost or only a few players continued. Attempts have been made to preserve some of the alternative banjo picking styles such as the Charlie Poole Music Festival in Eden, North Carolina. Poole's three-finger style was very different than the clawhammer style and served as a precursor to the bluegrass style of three-finger playing.²⁰ This was one example of many banjo styles that have been overshadowed by the dominance of the clawhammer style.

One can organize the rules from the old time band competitions of the three festivals to create another definition of the term "Old Time." These rules standardized the instrumentation for what an Old Time band must include. This created a disconnect between the many varieties of instrumentation that existed in the Appalachian Mountains before the music was recorded and popularized on a national level. This potentially could be problematic. With instruments like the washtub bass, spoons, and the washboard, Old Time musicians sometimes performed on instruments created out of common household items. Similarly, the

²⁰ Charlie Poole Festival, <http://www.charlie-poole.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

hammered dulcimer was used in lieu of a fiddle in some areas of America. By limiting the instrumentation to what was perceived as “traditional,” organizers of the festival were actually excluding performances of Old Time music that did not fit their mold but may in fact have been historically accurate representations of Old Time.

Fiddler’s Grove stated on their website that Old Time bands “must consist of a fiddle, banjo, and at least one other stringed instrument (guitar, mandolin, autoharp, dulcimer, or bass fiddle), but cannot exceed 6 members.”²¹ The rules also described what criteria are being judged in the competition, stating, “Judges usually favor traditional performance over technical performance. Attention to tunes suitable to category and style (Old Time or Bluegrass) was important.”²² For Mt. Airy, “To qualify, a band must consist of at least 3 different string instruments, one being a fiddle or banjo,” and “Only string instruments will be judged.”²³ Similarly for Galax, “To qualify, a band must consist of at least a banjo, a fiddle, and a guitar,” and “Only string instruments will be allowed on stage, and

²¹ Fiddler’s Grove, <http://www.fiddlersgrove.com/> (accessed August 15, 2012).

²² Ibid.

²³ Mt. Airy Fiddler’s Convention, <http://www.mtairyfiddlersconvention.com/> (accessed August 15, 2012).

no more than seven members allowed in band.”²⁴ All three festivals did not allow the use of any electronic instruments.

The rules for the Galax festival further specified a stylistic difference concerning banjo performance practice stating, “No Bluegrass Banjo style picking to be in Old Time Band. No Old Time Banjo style picking to be in Bluegrass Band.”²⁵ The three-finger style created by banjoist Charlie Poole in the 1930s was created prior to bluegrass but also served as precursor to the bluegrass three-finger style in later years. Even though this could be considered a traditional Old Time style, the rules made performing in this manner problematic as it could be judged as bluegrass due to the similarities. I only observed clawhammer style in the Old Time band performances.

The contest rules also described what repertoire could be performed stating, “Individual Contestant must play a verse and chorus of a recognizable song from the public domain”²⁶ This could also be problematic as vast amounts of repertoire might be unknown to many but still constitute part of the Old Time tradition. In my observations, musicians rarely ventured outside the standard repertoire.

²⁴ Galax Old Fiddlers Convention, <http://www.oldfiddlersconvention.com/rules.htm> (accessed August 15, 2012).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Compiling these rules produced a generic definition of what an Old Time band was through the lens of the large festival competition rules: Three to seven string instruments, at least one being a fiddle or banjo, where the banjo plays in a clawhammer style playing a tune that was old enough to be in public domain. Although the previous statement would describe a typical band seen performing outside the festival, many other instruments capable of leading a band were excluded. During the interview, Joe Holbert expanded on this idea in regards to the mandolin:

But gradually in Old Time...the thinking was banjo, guitar and fiddle, I mean primarily banjo and fiddle. Guitar was a latecomer but it made a strong hold onto the Old Time music. And then, that was the instrumentation that just kind of kept on going and then some folks started trying with a mandolin, but then soon as you bring a mandolin "Oh, you're getting too bluegrassy." So mandolin has had an iffy kind of relationship with the Old Time musicians. But there's some wonderful Old Time mandolin musicians who can actually handle it and not bluegrass it.²⁷

Although not specifically excluded from the Old Time band competition, the mandolin was not permitted to be the primary melodic instrument. Through my research, I never observed an Old Time band in competition with a prominent mandolin or hammered dulcimer.

The rules of these competitions have created a problem in representing the essence of what Old Time music is and is not. Because these festivals have

²⁷ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

become a large component of the Old Time community, the rules have helped to continue the tradition, but have also potentially excluded instruments not viewed as standard. Hammered dulcimer players are not well represented at the competitions or informal performances found throughout the festival sites, and therefore are further separated from the mainstream Old Time community.

Jams

Within the Old Time tradition, “jams” have served as a social outlet for many Old Time musicians and function as one of the most important teaching tools for both repertoire and style. Jams are small gatherings of musicians where the participants, mostly without a large audience, perform tunes for one another. For the less experienced participants, jams are a method of learning from more experienced players. For more experienced musicians, these events strengthen the community and allow repertoire to be shared. Small audiences sometimes gathered around these jam sessions, but the purpose of the activity was for the performers involved. Less emphasis was placed on entertaining bystanders. Dancers were also present at some of the jam sessions, but the experience was primarily for those actually playing instruments.

Because these jams have a social component, the musicians within the group decided who was allowed into the jam and how any newcomers were treated. In what seemed to be an unfortunate cycle, hammered dulcimer players

were not generally welcomed into jams because they did not know the etiquette, style, repertoire, or because the other players did not view the dulcimer as an authentic Old Time instrument. The dulcimer players could not learn these required skills due to the lack of participation in the jams. Therefore, hammered dulcimer players often formed their own group apart from the traditional jam setting as Joe Holbert explained:

Again, it was in the late seventies that a lot of the old timers just became so annoyed with the hammered dulcimer because the hammered dulcimer didn't have the sensitivity that they needed to have at that time and the etiquette of the jam was violated many times because that's where the hammered dulcimer players were. That was where bad blood started developing between the two.²⁸

Current Literature on Hammered Dulcimer

Although the hammered dulcimer is a relatively old instrument, documentation concerning its history has been generally lacking. In America, the dulcimer tradition continued strongly from the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the first part of the twentieth century. However, not until the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s did scholars began to look seriously at the hammered dulcimer and to research the antecedents to provide a more definitive background of the instrument. Three documents stood as the primary resources for the majority of hammered dulcimer research, including this document. These

²⁸ Ibid.

were in chronological order of publication date: David Kettlewell's PhD dissertation *The Dulcimer* written in 1976, *The Hammered Dulcimer in America* by Nancy Groce published in 1983, and *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History* written by Paul Gifford in 2001. In general terms, Kettlewell provided the history of the dulcimer's antecedents, specifically in the British Isles. This instrument was likely the direct antecedent of the instrument that appeared in the American colonies. Groce's contribution was adding the history of the hammered dulcimer in America up until the folk revival. Gifford completed the narrative of the hammered dulcimer in America by including research from the folk revival to the turn of the twenty-first century.

Apart from Gifford's book, David Kettlewell's dissertation offered the most complete history prior to the instrument being introduced into America. The dulcimer of the British Isles largely influenced the proliferation of instruments being brought and built in America during the eighteenth century.²⁹

Kettlewell's research, however, suffered from a lack of availability. Before his death in 2011, he was in the process of publishing his dissertation to the Internet. Although a copy of his dissertation was unavailable, I was able to use what was published to his website, the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* article with Kettlewell as the primary author, and citations within Paul Gifford's publication. Kettlewell's dissertation was not widely published and was

²⁹ David Kettlewell, "Dulcimer Players and Their Instruments," <http://dulcimer.new-renaissance.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).

also written before much of the modern boom in hammered dulcimer playing that took place in the U.S. and parts of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Per the online version of Kettlewell's dissertation, he attempted to update the document with newer revisions. Unfortunately, many of the online sections were left unfinished. Most notably absent was that of the hammered dulcimer in America.^{30 31}

Written in 1983 during the resurgence of interest in the instrument, Nancy Groce's *The Hammered Dulcimer in America* was one of the earliest documents to focus on the dulcimer in the United States. The publication followed the relative rise in popularity of the hammered dulcimer in the colonies up to the beginning of the folk revival of the 1970s. Paul Gifford's book, *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History*, referenced Groce's document often in his book written nearly two decades later. Groce's document briefly discussed the early origins of the instrument, and provided an older age and lineage of the dulcimer from Gifford and Kettlewell. Groce dated the first introduction of the instrument in Western Europe to 1100 A.D., about four centuries earlier than Gifford and Kettlewell proposed. Groce also showed a direct lineage to the *qanun* and the influence of the Spanish Moors. Groce's research focused mostly on the instrument during the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century in America. Her research stopped short of the folk revival, devoting less than two pages to the topic.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ David Kettlewell, "Dulcimer," In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).

In many ways, Gifford's research continued where Groce left off. In this regard, Paul Gifford's book, *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History* has been the most complete work documenting the instrument in America and throughout the folk revival. Within its pages, Gifford offered the most comprehensive history of the hammered dulcimer readily available, covering both its antecedents and descendants throughout the world. The second half of the book also went into great length about the history of the instrument in the United States. Within the sections concerning the hammered dulcimer in America, the book was broken down into shorter time periods, giving a snapshot of the hammered dulcimer from the early 1700s through the folk revival and into the current iteration of the instrument. Special attention was also given to the hammered dulcimer's relationship and relative popularity to the mountain dulcimer, as well as construction techniques and trends observed throughout America.

Gifford aptly described the path the instrument builders and players took throughout the history in America, but especially within the past four decades. An emphasis in the book was on highlighting the Michigan style and history. Information was certainly provided concerning the southeastern United States, but Gifford primarily concentrated on a couple of well-known players in various regions and did not necessarily address the instrument in the context of the Old Time music genre specifically. This document seeks to both build off of the base Gifford created and to better understand the instrument in the context of Old

Time music in the subject area of North Carolina, southwest Virginia, and West Virginia. Research for this document also included more interviews and observations of current players. These musicians represented a regional approach to the instrument that is distinct from other strongholds of hammered dulcimer activity such as the Michigan and western New York areas as well as the Texas and Oklahoma areas.

Apart from the more historical research of the aforementioned works, there has also been an increasing interest in Old Time music and folk instruments like the hammered dulcimer in the field of ethnomusicology. One example was Deborah Justice's master's thesis, "A Community, Not a Tradition: The Hammered Dulcimer World of the Eastern United States," which drew on much of the research that Gifford provided in his book on the instrument. Justice's main contribution to the body of research was the survey campaign that accompanied her document. Within the survey, she provided data showing current repertoire, top players, and influential players of the past according to the respondents. This invaluable set of data was the only research of its kind known and easily available. Within this research, one can deduce that Old Time music is still very much a part of the hammered dulcimer tradition. Although her research did not delve extensively into the repertoire aspect of her survey, her research supported many of my own observations from festivals and dulcimer events.

Justice's research was also somewhat problematic. For example, many of her categories for the question, "How would you describe the music that you play?" often overlapped. Listed was a category for "Gospel/hymns" as well as for "sacred." Also, "Old Time" could also be described as "folk", "contra/dance," and even "world" and "ethnic" depending on the background of the respondents. Although some potential overlap existed, general trends could be found. A majority of players performed Celtic music as well as some form of folk music. Surprisingly, over 70% of the respondents said they performed "Old Time" music. This could also highlight the issue of how ambiguous the term "Old Time" has become. Strong evidence, however, was provided to support that Old Time music continues to play an important role for many hammered dulcimer players and teachers.³²

Likewise, the results from the forty-six respondents showed that the "Ten Tunes 'Every' Dulcimer Player Knows" included, with the exception of the hymn "Amazing Grace", all Old Time and Celtic tunes. In addition, almost all of the tunes listed that did not make the top ten also came from Old Time and Celtic traditions. This would also confirm Justice's findings showing a large percentage

³² Deborah Justice, "A Community, Not a Tradition: The Hammered Dulcimer World of the Eastern United States." master's thesis, Wesleyan University, 2005, 136.

of players responding that they perform repertoire from Old Time and Celtic genres.³³

³³ Ibid, 135.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE HAMMERED DULCIMER

Hammered Dulcimer History Prior to Introduction to America

There has been some debate over the true age of the hammered dulcimer in its modern form and where the instrument first originated. Gifford spent considerable time discussing the early instrument as well as analyzing the many sources other scholars used to give the instrument a much older date. Some confusion stems from the use of the term “dulcimer” in the King James translation of the Bible. Daniel 3:5³⁴, 10, and 15 have been used as proof of a dulcimer dating back to the Time of Nebuchadnezzar from 605 to 562 B.C.³⁵

One commonly held position placed the Persian *santur* as the hammered dulcimer’s original antecedent. Kettlewell wrote, “It is often said to have been of Persian origin, but H.G. Farmer adduced considerable negative evidence, pointing out that ‘not one of the great Arabic and Persian treatises on music

³⁴ Daniel 3:4-6 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be case into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

³⁵ Gifford, 7.

contains the slightest reference' to the dulcimer and concluding that 'it seems to have found its way to Iranian ears during the 17th century, perhaps through Turkish influence.'" Kettlewell argued that images often attributed to hammered dulcimers were more likely plucked psalteries that were held and played differently than a dulcimer.³⁶ Gifford supported this by showing the "canon" and "half-canon," which derived from the *qanun*, was in fact popular in Spain, Italy, and France from the thirteenth through fourteenth centuries. However, he argued that "Juan Gil of Zamora mentioned both psaltery and canon, indicating that he regarded them as distinct instruments." Gifford asserted that the half-canon was no longer in use in the fourteenth century while there remained a clearer lineage from psaltery to the dulcimer.³⁷ Both Kettlewell and Gifford agreed that the European hammered dulcimer likely developed independently of outside influence in the fifteenth century. Groce dated the introduction to Western Europe to around 1100 A.D. through direct influence by the Spanish Moors.³⁸

The two instruments thought to be the antecedents of the English version of the dulcimer were quite similar. The two possible candidates were the German *hackbrett* and the *doulcemèr* in what is now northeastern France and Belgium.

³⁶ David Kettlewell, "Dulcimer." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).

³⁷ Gifford, 12-13.

³⁸ Nancy Groce, *The Hammered Dulcimer in America* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983) 11-12.

Both of these instruments developed independently of one other. Gifford argued that the English version of the instrument more likely came from the *doulcemèr*. The French version eventually was transported to Spain, Italy, and England. After coming to the British Isles, the instrument underwent some change in construction. The version of the hammered dulcimer found during the eighteenth century was likely the same instrument design that came to America.³⁹

The *hackbrett* was a small instrument, having a box shape rather than the now commonplace trapezoidal shape. One and sometimes two bridges were used in the construction of the instrument, and the range was typically one to one and half octaves. Like the modern hammered dulcimer, the treble bridge divided the string into a 2:3 ratio making the left side of the bridge a fifth higher than the right. In doing so, the four notes on the right side of the bridge were *do*, *re*, *mi*, and *fa*. The four corresponding notes a fifth higher on the left side of the bridge completed the scale with *sol*, *la*, *ti*, and then a repeated *do* an octave higher.

The *doulcemèr* was constructed as a rectangular box shaped instrument like the German counterpart. Pictorial evidence was less clear about this instrument. Some evidences pointed to a 3:2 ratio, similar to that of the *hackbrett*. Other examples showed no bridge dividing the strings, only open strings.⁴⁰

³⁹ Gifford, 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Although difficult to document with certainty, the *doulcemèr* was the instrument Gifford argued was brought to England sometime in the fifteenth century.

As the instrument grew in popularity in the British Isles, more evidence began to emerge, shedding light onto the history of the hammered dulcimer. The first trapezoidal instrument appeared in the fifteenth century in England. A carving at a cathedral in Manchester, England showed an instrument of about twenty strings with an angel playing with two hammers. These *dusymers*, as they were called, shared similarities in construction to the *doulcemèr*. Both instruments were also mostly played by women, a trend that would follow the instrument to the New World.⁴¹

By the seventeenth century in the Britain, the hammered dulcimer was more commonplace and typically played by the lower socioeconomic class. Because it was not suitable for church services and court, the instrument was featured in the thriving tavern scene of urban Britain.⁴² As the *dusymer* grew in popularity in the British Isles, instruments and instrument designs were being implanted in the newly formed American Colonies.

⁴¹ Ibid, 36.

⁴² Groce, 18.

Hammered Dulcimer in America

The hammered dulcimer in America was never as common as the fiddle or piano.⁴³ The dulcimer's appeal was found largely in rural areas and often as a substitute for fiddle in community social functions due to the relative ease of construction compared to the fiddle. The hammered dulcimer was also an early replacement for the piano as settlers traveled to more rural parts of the colonies, especially in Western New York and then westward to Michigan.⁴⁴

Both Groce and Gifford believed the instrument was likely present as early as the seventeenth century in America, but little evidence supported this. According to Groce, this difficulty in dating and identifying hammered dulcimers was likely due to the nature of the instrument. These early instruments were made in small shops where records were not generally well preserved. Also, many of the raw materials were handmade, as opposed to machined, leaving few ways to identify and date instruments. The first record showed at least one instrument found in 1717 in the Massachusetts home of Rev. Aaron Porter in Medford, Massachusetts. In his diary entry, a judge by the name of Samuel Sewall noted, "To Salem, Meadford, Lodge at Cousin Porter's: See and Hear the Dulcimer."⁴⁵

⁴³ Gifford, 239.

⁴⁴ Groce, 25.

English, Irish, and possibly German immigrants brought the hammered dulcimer to the American Colonies in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries.⁴⁶ The first documented examples were from the northeast region around New York and Massachusetts. In general, both the builders and the players were local to a certain area and were often descendants of English immigrants. Typical performers on the instrument throughout the eighteenth centuries were lower-class professionals and middle class amateurs.⁴⁷ Evidence suggested that the instrument might have also been used as a parlor instrument, suitable for young ladies to learn.⁴⁸ Upper class involvement in the instrument declined due to the rising availability and popularity of pianos.^{49 50} A similar trend occurred for those in lower socioeconomic classes around the latter part of the nineteenth century as the hammered dulcimer was replaced by the piano and guitar.

During the mid-eighteenth century, a notable rise occurred in demand for hammered dulcimers in this area as documented in the rise in manufactured

⁴⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁶ Gifford, 248.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 241.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 242.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 262.

⁵⁰ Groce documented the gender roles reversing in the early part of the twentieth century with mostly men playing the instrument.

parts needed for construction including zither pins and wire for the strings. As residents moved westward into Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio areas, they brought with them a strong dulcimer tradition that still exists in the area.

Gifford also noted that an uptick in production of the instruments in the West Virginia area around the same time likely occurred.⁵¹ As a teacher and hammered dulcimer player in West Virginia for many years, Joe Holbert also described a strong tradition of hammered dulcimer that he witnessed and researched while living in West Virginia:

But the whole idea was that we would get with other people and create little bands. At that point, there was nothing wrong with hammered dulcimers playing in Old Time bands because in West Virginia, that was the traditional, that was tradition...From West Virginia, north, you'll find differences, I mean there would be Old Time music, just played in a completely different way.⁵²

Groce also described the West Virginia style of hammered dulcimer performing in relation to the Michigan and western New York styles:

West Virginia dulcimer players had a fairly straightforward melodic style. They generally used much less arpeggiation than did most players from Michigan, and what they did use tended to be embroidered around a clearly defined melody. Long notes were often sustained by repeated attacks with alternating hammers. Modern West Virginia players seem to have been heavily influenced by syncopated banjo styles—naturally enough, since all those interviewed admitted to being avid fans of country, western,

⁵¹ Gifford, 252.

⁵² Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

and bluegrass music. One player, Russell Fluharty from Mannington, included a much higher proportion of lyric songs and ballads in his repertoire than did dulcimer players from other regions, who usually preferred instrumental dance or fiddle tunes. He is also one of the few players to use the dulcimer to accompany his own singing. It is not known, however, whether this reflects a regional style or was simply a personal preference.⁵³

The oldest surviving known hammered dulcimer found in the United States was from around 1800, built for a family that had recently emigrated from England.⁵⁴ Dulcimers were rarely imported due to tariffs placed on imported goods, including instruments, coming from Europe. As a relatively simple instrument to make and due to the high cost of importing, hammered dulcimers were more often built within the colonies rather than shipped from overseas.⁵⁵ Also, these small colonial manufacturers often did not label their instruments, leading to difficulty in identifying the builder and dating the instruments. Researchers relied on contextual clues such as a comparison of the shape and design of the instrument as well as potential machined metal components.⁵⁶

Gifford used evidence such as ads, tax records, and manufacturing offerings. He listed several advertisements for minstrel shows, circus

⁵³ Groce, 32. This was described elsewhere by interviewee Joe Holbert as the “Tucka” style of playing where long notes were often repeated creating a unique melodic sound.

⁵⁴ Gifford, 243.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

performances, and other performances that hinted at the presence of the dulcimer. Tax records in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also listed the occupation for all citizens in a given area. Gifford was able to match builders to instruments and pieced together a timeline for instruments and builders in various regions. Also, by tracking the machined parts of the instruments, one could find out more about the construction and widespread popularity of the instrument. For example, in 1850, records showed a piano supplier offering hammered dulcimer zither tuning pins. One could deduce that a supplier creating such a specific product implied increased dulcimer construction and demand.⁵⁷

Adding to the difficulty of identifying older instruments was the fact that the hammered dulcimer shared its name with another rather uncommon instrument, the mountain or Appalachian dulcimer. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, both of these instruments were called solely “dulcimer” or some derivation of this name in America. Groce went into great detail about the inherent difficulties in researching the hammered dulcimer prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Without pictures or descriptions of the instruments, one could not say for certain to which instrument these documents were referring.⁵⁸

Hammers play an important role in the overall sound of the hammered dulcimer. Regional differences have existed in hammer construction within the

⁵⁷ Gifford, 253.

⁵⁸ Groce, 1-2.

United States as well as differences in hammered dulcimer-like instruments around the globe. In the Michigan style of playing, the shaft of the hammer is somewhat flexible. Builders used metal or flexible wood to allow the head (striking area) of the hammer to be used with a whipping motion to strike the instrument. This style of hammer is similarly found with hammered dulcimer-like instruments found around the world such as the *cimbalom* from Hungary, the *yangqin* in China, and Southeast Asia with the *khim* and the *đàn tam thập lục*.

Within the subject area, some players used flexible shafts, but the majority of hammers I observed during my research with both players and vendors had a stiff non-flexible wooden shaft. The ends of the hammers were typically bare wood or covered in leather or other material for a softer sound. Double-sided hammers were also commonly found, with one side being bare wood and the other covered in leather. Research into the history of hammers has been insufficient due to the difficulty in dating the hammers with the instruments with which they were found.

Although small builders throughout the eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth century existed, not until the turn of the twentieth century did the instrument rise to its highest popularity. Up until this point, production was predominately small-scale and found mostly in rural communities across America.⁵⁹ Near the end of the nineteenth century, manufacturers including

⁵⁹ Gifford, 251.

Montgomery Ward and then Sears and Roebuck began selling hammered dulcimers through their mail order catalogues.⁶⁰ This increased the availability of instruments across America. Large-scale production ended however in 1906 when Sears and Roebuck discontinued the sale of dulcimers in their catalogue. Montgomery Ward would soon follow suit.

At this same time, the use of other instruments in the folk idiom began to rise. The guitar, mandolin, and piano were increasingly being taught and propagated in America following World War I.⁶¹ As these instruments became more common, they slowly replaced the hammered dulcimer as a melodic instrument in rural communities. Instrument production, however, never completely ended. Once again, the hammered dulcimers were being made in small shops in rural areas in much the same way as those early colonial instruments.

West Virginia has maintained one of the longest traditions of continued hammered dulcimer history. The instrument was used in this region mostly for rural social functions such as “bean stringins, corn shuckins, wood gittins, house warmins, guiltin (sic) partys, and many other community activities.” During the early 1900s the instrument was popular enough to warrant a competition at the

⁶⁰ Ibid, 272.

⁶¹ Groce, 22.

Ritchie County Fair in Pennsboro in 1894⁶². West Virginia, like most areas, still witnessed a decline in players of the hammered dulcimer in the subsequent decades.

In North Carolina, Randolph County native Virgil Craven represented a small but fairly well documented pocket of activity around central North Carolina. Craven was born in 1903 and died in 1980. He was interviewed multiple times and his playing style and repertoire were recorded before his death. Craven, along with North Carolina Harvey Jones born in 1913 played in the piedmont style. This was similar to the West Virginia style except that they players used fewer bass notes and also used less syncopation while chording.⁶³ Mr. Seymour further demonstrated this style in his interview.⁶⁴ Both his father and grandfather played the hammered dulcimer, giving Craven a lineage of players possibly dating back into the late nineteenth century.

In addition to Virgil Craven, Ida May Beard, of Forsyth County, North Carolina, was also documented as observing a hammered dulcimer player when she was younger. Although difficult to know which instrument to which she was referring, Gifford argued that the instrument in question was likely a hammered dulcimer due to its location further from the Appalachian Mountains. In both

⁶² Gifford, 275.

⁶³ Groce, 33.

⁶⁴ Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011.

examples, standard Old Time tunes were noted as being played, including: “Forked Deer”, “Mississippi Sawyer”, and “Dixie.”⁶⁵ Although common folk tunes of the day, these would be considered part of the Old Time genre today.

Throughout the history of the hammered dulcimer both in Europe and in the Americas, the instrument was predominantly used for social gatherings consisting of dances, community events, and beyond. The styles and genres performed reflected the culture of the area. Many tunes from the British Isles, such as jigs, reels, hornpipes and other local styles were represented. Instructional materials were also published in the mid-nineteenth century that included the following common dance tunes:

"Soldier's Joy," "Durang's Hornpipe," "Devil's Dream," "Speed the Plough," "Money Musk," "Haste to the Wedding," and "The Opera Reel." Also included were danceable minstrel songs, like "Boatman's Dance" and "Miss Lucy Long"; popular melodies like "Yankee Doodle," "Hail to the Chief," and "Just Before the Battle, Mother"; and hymns like "Old Hundredth," "Coronation," "St. Martin's," and "Shall We Meet Beyond the River?"⁶⁶

These tunes were a blend of music of the British Isles as well as popular songs, minstrel songs, and hymns that rose in popularity in the mid to late nineteenth century in America. Many of these tunes have become standard repertoire in the Old Time tradition.

⁶⁵ Gifford, 277.

⁶⁶ Groce, 26-27.

From the early twentieth century up until the folk revival, the hammered dulcimer remained relatively unchanged both in construction and popularity. The instrument was still played in many of the same settings although with a steadily decreasing number of players and interest. The dulcimer remained a part of the social scene in small rural towns, being used for dances and gatherings as they had for many decades.⁶⁷ The decline in popularity began to shift during the years following the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s.

Folk Revival: What's in a Name?

The folk revival that occurred in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s brought many instruments to the national stage. The “baby boomer” generation had a renewed interest in all things rural. An emphasis on the authentic drove the market for these lesser-known instruments. The folk revival, however, all but ignored the hammered dulcimer at first. The revival for the hammered dulcimer actually did not reach its height until the 1970s and into the 1980s. The popular folk revival had much more to do with singing with instruments that accompany singing (mainly guitar, banjo, mountain dulcimer, etc.) and less to do with strictly instrumental music that included the hammered dulcimer.

⁶⁷ Groce, 31. “Dulcimers were also played at parties, picnics, town and school board meetings, county fairs, taverns, clubs, and contests—in short, any event at which rural or small-town people were likely to gather.”

Having a common name, the mountain and hammered dulcimer have shared a similar history since the folk revival. As documented by both Gifford and Justice, the mountain dulcimer player Jean Ritchie had much to do with the rise in popularity of the hammered dulcimer.⁶⁸ This was due in part to the confusion between the two in name. Other than being classified as zithers, these two instruments share few similarities in construction and performance technique. The mountain dulcimer is played more like a lap guitar. Players use a plectrum and the mountain dulcimer has frets like a guitar or banjo. However, because the mountain dulcimer rose in popularity, the hammered dulcimer received residual recognition because of the similarities in name.

Sam Rizzetta has been credited with spearheading the design overhaul of the hammered dulcimer during the 1970s. Rizzetta worked at the Smithsonian Institute and modified plans he found in the archives for the construction of a hammered dulcimer.⁶⁹ At the time he began making instruments, no large dulcimer manufacturers remained in the United States. The changes he made have been adopted as standard practice by almost all builders as they made the instrument lighter and more portable without significant sacrifices in terms of volume.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Justice, 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 44.

⁷⁰ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

The main design changes he incorporated involved the construction of the soundboard and how it attached to the frame. Rizzetta began using what is known as a fixed soundboard rather than a floating soundboard. Prior to this, all hammered dulcimers had a soundboard that was not actually attached to the frame of the instrument. This design required that the frame around the soundboard be made much stronger to withhold the stress of the many strings. Along with the reduction of the strings per course, this also reduces the need for as much bracing. A course is defined as a set of strings tuned to the same pitch. Less bracing within the instrument equated to less weight and more portability.⁷¹ This paradigm shift in instrument building affects nearly all of the instruments being built. I observed only one current player still performing on the older style of hammered dulcimer with a floating soundboard and three strings per course. Although some builders continue to make instruments in the older style, portability, ease of tuning, and the sweeter sound have made prior traditional designs all but obsolete.⁷²

Rizzetta also changed the number of strings per course. Multiple strings on the hammered dulcimer provided volume and this same technique was seen in the descendants of the hammered dulcimer, the pianoforte, and the modern piano. Prior to Rizzetta, hammered dulcimers usually had three or more strings

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

per course. Rizzetta lowered the number to two strings per course. Fewer strings also meant less to tune, which helped the intonation of the instrument. Today, almost all of the instruments being manufactured have two strings per course as championed by Rizzetta.⁷³

Coming out of a similar tradition of the mountain dulcimer, early hammered dulcimer players of the folk revival also built their own instruments. In some cases, this was out of necessity, but for many, this process was a right of passage:

If you wanted to become known as a hammered dulcimer player, you had to become a hammered dulcimer maker. Sam Rizzetta, even John McCutcheon was making hammered dulcimers for a while. That was the thing at that time. You had to be in construction and you had to be a player as well. That was the thing to do.⁷⁴

Other early builders followed the standard set by Rizzetta and began building lighter and more portable versions of the instrument. The most prolific of these early instrument makers was Russell Cook of Masterworks Dulcimers. According to the survey outlined in Justice's thesis, the highest number of respondents, or 14%, said they owned a Masterworks instrument.⁷⁵ The

⁷³ Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011.

⁷⁴ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

remainder encompassed the many smaller builders and other large, but less prolific, manufacturers. Today, few players build their own instruments, because there exists a number of quality builders and shops that carry a variety of instruments for players to try out as well. Workshops and companies continue to offer plans and instruction on building hammered dulcimer. As a professional instrument builder, Mr. Sebens, who was interviewed for this project, also facilitates a weeklong class on building and playing the hammered dulcimer at the John C. Campbell Folk School in western North Carolina.⁷⁶

Hammered Dulcimer Pedagogy

When asked about how the informants learned the hammered dulcimer, several early books and other resource materials were referenced. Many of the more common books utilized Old Time repertoire as material for beginners because the melodies are fairly straightforward. Examples of these were the Mel Bay catalogue of books on hammered dulcimer and Linda Lowe's *Hammered Dulcimer Notebook*.⁷⁷ Typical of instruction today in hammered dulcimer, the text

⁷⁵ Responses to six-question survey posted by Brett Ridgeway to the hammered dulcimer email list, hammered_dulcimers@lists.fmp.com. Ridgeway compiled the results in 2001.

⁷⁶ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

⁷⁷ Linda Lowe Thompson, *Hammered Dulcimer Notebook* (Denton, TX: Harvest Time Music, 1998).

accommodated various learning styles by including Western notation, a number tablature system, as well as CD's for aural learning.

Various tablature systems have been used for the hammered dulcimer over the years. Wayne Seymour also discussed the early attempts at teaching hammered dulcimer including why a tablature system was still problematic for the instrument:

Then there were various other attempts at teaching using shape notes... if the head was on this side of the stem then it was on that side of the bridge and if the head was on that side then play on that side of the bridge. I thought, you know, it's easier to do this with notation, then if you want to put an "R" or an "L" for which side of the bridge you're getting, then that's fine, but there were several attempts at teaching methods all of which fell by the way. Mary Faith Rhodes toured West Virginia with the Dobbs Brothers in the 70s and she was and is a great hammered dulcimer player and a character. She particularly though, one of her goals in her elaborate tablature system and everything was not to preserve the tune but was to actually notate precisely what people like Russell Fluharty had done, exactly their hammering pattern. That made sense because she wasn't trying to teach the tune or teach the instrument. She was trying to preserve precisely the way the old guys did this stuff. And so her elaborate notation method was fine. It's not something, I don't think anybody could pick up and read fluently or quickly, not even her.⁷⁸

At issue with the tablature system on hammered dulcimer was the problem of too little information versus too much information. As Mr. Seymour noted, some early tablature systems attempted to replicate every exact sticking of

⁷⁸ Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011.

popular players. On the hammered dulcimer, many notes are duplicated across the instrument in up to three different locations. Stickings, or how the player alternates the hammers to move around the instrument, as well as duplicate notes, create multiple variations of playing a particular musical line. Learning a tune by ear would therefore not necessarily relay the best or most efficient way to play a given passage.

Gifford compiled some standard tunes found in educational and tune books during the nineteenth century. Included were mostly dance tunes, such as Irish reels, jigs, and hornpipes, as well as waltzes, cotillions, and polkas. The first known publication for the teaching of the hammered dulcimer was the 1848 publication *Complete System for the Dulcimer* by C Haight.⁷⁹ These tunes were typical in the New England contra dance tradition as well as represented many of the immigrants' national folk melodies. Also included in the typical repertoire were those from minstrelsy, such as "Oh, Susannah" and "Dandy Jim." These tunes are now part of the Old Time repertoire. Many of the Irish reels, jigs, hornpipes and others such as "Leather Breeches," Fisher's Hornpipe," and "The Devil's Dream" as well as hymns and patriotic marches have also crossed over firmly into the Old Time Appalachian tradition.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Gifford, 256.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 259.

Dulcimer Players News is a major publication for hammered and mountain dulcimer published quarterly. Editions include repertoire for both mountain and hammered dulcimer, articles by teachers and performers, and an accompanying compact disc with recorded tunes submitted by professional and amateur musicians alike. As of 2012, published archives were made available of all the previous issues of the publication online free of charge, making it one of the most comprehensive resources for researching and learning about the dulcimer.⁸¹

Several websites are also devoted to the hammered dulcimer instruction. The site EverythingDulcimer.com is the largest and most popular forum and contains advice for playing, building, shopping, etc., as well as an extensive archive of music in both tablature and standard Western notation for many tunes. Because most of the tunes are of Old Time or Celtic origin, these are all in public domain. Also, it is common in the folk community to share arrangements of tunes and original music versus selling them, so some players have provided copies of their own compositions.

Another website is sponsored by the Mel Bay Publications Inc., which also publishes many instructional books on various instruments including both mountain and hammered dulcimers. Their site, *Dulcimer Sessions*, offers articles and repertoire for dulcimers.⁸² Many of the articles feature literature, arranging,

⁸¹ Dulcimer Players News, <http://www.dpnews.com> (accessed September 1, 2012).

and composing. Tunes are presented in standard notation, number tablature, and often with a recording.

Those interviewed for this project had a somewhat different experience in learning this instrument. When the instrument first became popular, limited resources were available to them. The primary instruction came from one-on-one experiences, some taped instructional material, and some early instruction books. These early books, however, were “mainly just kind of some melodies to play along with a little bit of harmonies, a few little techniques.”⁸³

As more musicians became interested in the instrument, a shift occurred away from the family or community-centric learning environment to a more individualistic learning environment facilitated by books, festivals, and, more recently, the Internet. This also meant a move away from the oral tradition in favor of more notation and class instruction. Perhaps the most important aspect of education that affected the hammered dulcimer was the inclusion of classes at the various dulcimer festivals. For many people, these settings have been their primary learning environment for the instrument.

Those interviewed for this document all came from the folk revival setting. Their instruction was less based on oral transmission. They utilized books and recordings that allowed self-teaching. Mr. Sebens first learned the hammered

⁸² Dulcimer Sessions, <http://dulcimersessions.com> (accessed September 1, 2012).

⁸³ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

dulcimer through a series of tapes and books.⁸⁴ Similarly, Mr. Seymour first learned from Peter Pickow's book, *Hammered Dulcimer*.⁸⁵ Mr. Holbert learned mostly from personal instruction through festivals and private instruction.⁸⁶ In many ways, players currently have similar opportunities but with a wider selection of material at their disposal. Some popular players have offered online instruction through paying per DVD or pre-recorded online lessons. Others have offered live lessons over Skype or other video conferencing services.⁸⁷

Similar to my informants, I had a background on another instrument and used those skills to transfer the musical knowledge to the playing of the hammered dulcimer. For anyone wishing to learn more about the hammered dulcimer, the aforementioned websites and teaching materials offer a balanced and independent approach to the instrument. Although traditional style lessons are available, most players are self-taught simply due to the lack of available teachers. This is contrast to the method used to learn most other instruments today. To learn the hammered dulcimer, one must be able to self-teach through books, videos, and the occasional festival classroom experience.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011.

⁸⁶ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

⁸⁷ Examples of players using online lessons include: Ted Yoder, Ruth Smith, and Karen Ashbrook.

Hammered dulcimer pedagogy has been shown to involve Old Time and Celtic repertoire. Although the means by which players are learning these tunes has been changing, the genre has retained its prominent role in dulcimer education through festivals, instructional books, and online resources. The use of Old Time tunes helps to explain why such a large percentage of dulcimer players reporting playing Old Time music. As this research has also shown, the dulcimer was in use in America prior to the popularization of Old Time music and has continued to play a role in the Old Time community.

CHAPTER III

OLD TIME COMMUNITY: FESTIVALS AND COMPETITIONS

Historically, folk festivals were used as what Sarah Gertrude Knott described as “survival and revival”⁸⁸ of musics from the Appalachian mountain region. Knott started the first National Folk Festival in St. Louis in 1934, one of the earliest folk festivals that presented teaching workshops and classes as well as diverse presentations of many different regions of North America.⁸⁹ Many festivals were created during the 1920s and 1930s by those wishing to preserve a tradition they felt was being lost to commercialization. The folk festival was viewed as a way to “bridge the gap between the esoteric concerns of the scholar-collector and the more popular concerns of the public arena in which both taste and conceptions of traditional culture were formed and nurtured.”⁹⁰ The purpose was to bring these mountain performers to a larger audience, which would then maintain the tradition and also expose audiences to live Old Time performances.

The Old Time festivals I attended have been categorized as “evolving indigenous festivals.” Wilson and Udall define this type of festival as an event

⁸⁸ Wilson, Joe and Lee Udall. *Folk Festivals: A Handbook for Organization and Management* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982) 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

⁹⁰ Whisnant, 184.

involving “adaptations of the material to an aesthetic not wholly of the group, or some commercialization of the event, or both. Examples of such festivals include some powwows, larger fiddler’s conventions, most bluegrass festivals, and many local festivals.”⁹¹ These festivals are welcoming to outsiders and serve to present an interpretation of Old Time music according to the organizers. All three represented the bluegrass genre as well, although all competitions were divided between the two genres.

Festivals continue to play an important role in the Old Time community by providing a sense of fellowship, community, and competition. Over the course of three years between 2010 through 2012, I attended three different festivals, some multiple times. The three festivals I attended and discussed in this document were Fiddler’s Grove in Union Grove, North Carolina, the Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, and the Old Fiddler’s Convention in Galax, Virginia.

Multiple layers of activity occurred simultaneously at these festivals and people attended for different reasons. Events on the main stages entertained large crowds. Meanwhile, around the campground, other performances were occurring simultaneously to much smaller crowds but for a completely different purpose. These were the jam sessions that have defined Old Time music pedagogy and tradition for many years. For young or less experienced players,

⁹¹ Wilson and Udall, 4.

their education in jams began by watching or softly playing on the outskirts of the jam. As their skill and comfort increased over the years, they began to move closer to the inner circle. As discussed by my informants, jams assist in educating players, teaching both style and repertoire through the countless repetitions of a given tune. One common theme among those interviewed and through informal discussions with other players was the notion of jams being somewhat off limits to hammered dulcimer players as well as other instruments not deemed appropriate by the others at the jams.

Performances on the dulcimer happened on the outskirts of the festivals' norms. Of the three large local festivals I attended, only Fiddler's Grove had a specific category for hammered dulcimers to compete. In the three years I had attended, only four entrants total entered the competition. This should not imply that hammered dulcimer players were not present the subject area. Of the three individuals I interviewed through this document and countless others with which I have had informal conversations, competition was not part of the culture with this instrument. Although no central competition exists in the area, several dulcimer clubs throughout the region continue to build a strong sense of community.

In many ways, these festivals served to strengthen the pre-conceived notion of what an Old Time band was and how each should sound, as well as what instruments constitute Old Time music. All three festivals contained an Old Time band category with strict rules that defined instrumentation. Bands had to

consist of at least three players one of which had to be a fiddle or banjo. This prevented any bands that did not have a “traditional” lead instrument. It remains unclear if the Old Time community considers a band without a fiddle or banjo not truly part of the genre.

Fiddler’s Grove

The first festival I attended in 2010 was also the one I have visited the most, having attended in 2010, 2011, and in 2012. According to the competition’s website, this event is the “Oldest Continuous Old Time Fiddler’s Contest in North America.”⁹² The current owner’s father, H.P. Van Hoy, started the festival in 1924. The festival has occurred over three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend every year. On Friday night, various fiddlers, Old Time and bluegrass bands, and cloggers performed. Saturday, the band and individual competitions were held. On Sunday, various musical groups performed and there was also a religious service. This was also the only festival site that was built primarily for the annual festival on the Van Hoy’s land. The remainder of the year, the land was used as a campground.

My research during the initial visits to the festivals in 2010 consisted of three parts. One was to participate in any exclusive hammered dulcimer competitions offered at the larger festivals. The second was to observe the jam

⁹² Fiddler’s Grove, <http://www.fiddlersgrove.com/history-since-1924> (accessed August 4, 2012).

sessions and note any hammered dulcimer players. The final aim was to observe the Old Time band competition and to both look for hammered dulcimer involvement and to get a general understanding of competition aspect of the festivals since this was my first experience at a festival.

Fiddler's Grove was the only festival that had a hammered dulcimer category for the individual competitions. In addition to the hammered dulcimer, other, lesser-known instrument had their own category of competition at the festival. These included: Harmonica (not chromatic), autoharp, mountain/lap dulcimer, bass, fiddle, and dobro. The rules only stated that the performers must play one tune no longer than two and a half minutes. Contestants were allowed one accompanying rhythmic instrument. Although the rules did not explicitly state what style the chosen tune had to be in, all competitors in these categories played some variation of Old Time tunes.⁹³

The different styles of bluegrass and Old Time were separated within the band competitions. The bluegrass and all fiddle competitions took place on the main stage and the Old Time band preliminaries and the individual competition took place at the "Old Time Tent." This was the only festival to have a different location for the different band categories. The setting for the old time bands was much more intimate than a formal stage. The event organizers stated this was intentional to help preserve the traditional Old Time experience.

⁹³ Fiddler's Grove, <http://www.fiddlersgrove.com> (accessed August 4, 2012).

The main sound difference noted between the Old Time and the bluegrass bands was amplification. Typical of most bluegrass performances, every instrument had its own microphone and anyone singing had a separate vocal microphone. The Old Time bands in the preliminary rounds used only two “choir style” hanging condenser microphones. The aim of this, according to the Van Hoys was to give a more authentic sound. Balance within the band was up to the performers and not the sound technician. This idea was also referenced on the site’s rules for competition explaining, “Keeping with the Ole Time traditions, our Old Time bands perform in an intimate setting, unplugged before judges who hear it the way folks did more than 2 centuries ago.”⁹⁴ This style of amplification also served the purpose of getting technology out of the way of the performance. The bands walked up on stage, and once they situated themselves, they were ready to start playing. This also matched the Old Time style of performance where individual instruments did not solo over the rest of the group. The band sound functioned as a complete unit throughout the performance.

In addition to the way the bands were presented, a unique competition called the “Certified Old Time Fiddler” showcased the traditional style of education. According to the contest rules, the contestants must have been over the age of fifty five and older and “Open ONLY to traditional Old Time fiddlers who play by ear and have had no formal violin training.” Because this event took

⁹⁴ Fiddler’s Grove, <http://www.fiddlersgrove.com/> (accessed August 4, 2012).

place on the main stage, I was only able to see the contestants during the final round later in the evening. With traditional methods of learning music changing so rapidly over the last few decades, hearing the music in its most raw form was a unique experience. The performers displayed styles of playing that were representative of generations of music being passed down through the oral tradition going back many decades.

At the 2010 festival, I observed a total of two hammered dulcimer players other than myself. One was also in the individual competition for hammered dulcimer. Although I did not get a chance to speak with him, I did know that he played other instruments including harmonica as he also entered that individual competition category.⁹⁵ I observed the other hammered dulcimer player during a jam session in which she was participating. I spoke with her briefly after the session had come to a close. She lived in the Charlotte area and was a member of the Charlotte Folk Society. I have seen her at subsequent years at Fiddler's Grove as well as the Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival.

⁹⁵ According to the rules, participants could only enter one category of competition for individuals. As the other dulcimer player was set to play for hammered dulcimer competition, the judge brought up the point of rules and the contestant decided to compete in hammered dulcimer only and withdraw from the harmonica competition.

Mt. Airy Old Fiddlers Convention

The second festival attended was the Mt. Airy Fiddlers convention in Mt. Airy, North Carolina. According to the festival's website, the event was first established in 1972 and focused on promoting the Surry county style of Old Time music where Mt. Airy is located. This two-day event held on the first weekend in June featured individual and band competitions in both Old Time and bluegrass categories. Unlike Fiddler's Grove, established bands gave no scheduled concerts. Friday evening and Saturday consisted solely of individual and band competitions.⁹⁶

This festival was more heavily attended than Fiddler's Grove. One aspect affecting this could be the general price of admission. The entire weekend at Fiddler's Grove cost \$50 for tickets at the door and a lower \$35 for advanced tickets. In comparison, the Mt. Airy festival was \$10, which included admission for both days. The Fiddler's Grove festival is for profit and has featured professional music performances outside the competitions. This likely accounted for why the ticket prices were substantially higher than the other festivals.

As compared to the other larger festivals, the Mt. Airy festival fell into the middle of the three Old Time festivals in number of attendants as well as representation from vendors. More vendors were present at Mt. Airy than

⁹⁶ Mt. Airy Fiddler's Convention, <http://www.mtairyfiddlersconvention.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

Fiddler's Grove, but far fewer than at Galax. Galax had more of a fair-like quality and the representation from vendors aided in this perception. An effort was made to attract locals to the Mt. Airy festival by offering discounted ticket prices for those living in the surrounding communities.

Vendors also played a more prominent role at the Mt. Airy Fiddler's Convention. Approximately ten vendors set up booths selling a variety of foods, instruments, and other merchandise. Hammered dulcimers were found at two different vendor tents. One vendor had two instruments on display as well as other instruments and accessories. The other vendor was Jeff Sebens who was interviewed for this project. His booth consisted of mountain dulcimers, hammered dulcimers, and other instruments he made.

Of the three festivals attended, I observed more hammered dulcimers at Mt Airy being played and for sale than at the other two festivals. I also observed two hammered dulcimer players performing in jams around the campsite. Although there could be many reasons for the higher number of dulcimer players, I believe this was due to the lower cost of admission as well as the higher number of participants and spectators. With hammered dulcimer being a small part of the Old Time community, attending would not be cost effective for vendors at the smaller festivals. However, this would not explain why fewer hammered dulcimer players attended the Galax festival versus Mt. Airy and Fiddler's Grove.

Galax Old Fiddler's Convention

The Old Fiddler's Convention was the final festival I attended in August of 2010. According to the festival's website, the competition first began in 1935 as a fundraiser for the local Moose Lodge. Unlike the other two festivals that were weekend events, the Old Fiddler's Convention encompassed an entire week beginning on Monday and running through the following Sunday. I attended the Old Time band competition Friday and Saturday evenings. During the weekdays, individual competitions were held.⁹⁷

Like the Mt. Airy convention and Fiddler's Grove festivals, only one main stage was utilized, and all events took place on the this stage. The main campgrounds were on part of baseball stadium that offered stepped seating as well as a lawn area. As such, this festival had the only permanent seating structure allowing for more spectators.

Overall, the competition at Galax was much larger than the other two festivals. Well over 100 bands performed in the bluegrass and Old Time categories, far more than the other two festivals. The competition started around 6:00 in the evening and ended around 2:00 the next morning. Crowds estimated in the thousands were in attendance for the Friday and Saturday evening competitions including those in the stands and throughout the campground. Like

⁹⁷ Galax Old Fiddlers Convention, <http://www.oldfiddlersconvention.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

the festival at Mt. Airy, no set bands performed and the competitions were the only events on stage.

The only mention of the hammered dulcimer at this festival was a passing reference in the rules of competition stating, “Dulcimer competition is for lap dulcimer only.”⁹⁸ This statement was more of an exclusionary statement due to the confusion over the name. I observed no players or vendors selling/displaying the instrument. In my observations and conversations with performers, hammered dulcimer players tended to favor more intimate gatherings, which was possibly why many eschewed the largest of these festivals. This festival campground area was more condense making the camping experience less conducive to secluded jams where a dulcimer might more readily fit in.

Comparison of Festivals

After attending the three Old Time music festivals, I was able to draw some generalizations about how they compared to the others. Overall, Fiddler’s Grove was the most relaxed and family friendly of the festivals. The campground was much more open than the other two allowing for the campers to congregate as they chose. This created pockets of activity that were separate from the rest. The other festivals were both larger and required more concentrated camping areas that did not allow as much choice and space for camping.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Fiddler's Grove also had the most comprehensive approach to presenting Old Time music as authentically as possible. As referenced earlier, this was the only festival to present the Old Time band competitions in a different manner to intentionally set it apart from the concurrent bluegrass competitions. This was done through the use of a separate "Old Time Tent" that was away from the main stage for much of the competition as well as the use of limited microphone usage to give a more authentic band sound.

In comparison, the Mt. Airy festival was slightly larger than Fiddler's Grove, as more spectators and vendors attended. The campground area was somewhat smaller than Fiddler's Grove but had a much higher concentration of campers. Campers had the opportunity to separate themselves somewhat from the group, but the campsite organization made this more difficult.

Due to the larger number of attendants, I expected to encounter more hammered dulcimer players at the Mt. Airy festival. Although no hammered dulcimer individual competition was offered, quite a few jam opportunities were available that seemed to be welcoming to hammered dulcimer players. This idea was also supported by the fact that two vendors were present selling hammered dulcimers. These vendors likely knew the festival offered a dulcimer friendly atmosphere.

The Galax festival was by far the largest event and took over the small downtown area of Galax. Vendors sold instruments, food, souvenirs, etc. and the

event had more of a fair-like quality. Space was at a premium and all of the campsites and vendor locations were very well organized and close together. Although the festival was a weeklong event and the longest of the festivals, the majority of the crowds came on Friday evening and Saturday to watch the band competitions.

The festival at Galax had a seriousness to the festival that was difficult to describe. The performances were very exacting, the camping sites were very well defined and organized with consistent rows, and even the jam sessions seemed less inviting and more by invitation only. The other festivals had a flowing and more relaxed atmosphere. Neither Fiddler's Grove or Mt. Airy had camping instructions that were as strict and the stages were not as well defined. This atmosphere likely accounted for the lack of hammered dulcimer players represented at the festival.

Jams at the Old Time Festivals

At these larger festivals, jams played an important role for many of the attendees. I observed jams at all three festivals and noted the presence or absence of hammered dulcimer players. At Fiddler's grove I observed two jam sessions where a dulcimer was participating. I observed an equal number at the Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention. In discussing jams with my informants they offered

techniques and advice to introduce a hammered dulcimer into a jam session but also noted the historical acceptance issues within the groups.

One way players could work the hammered dulcimer into a jam was to introduce the dulcimer as a unique instrument only on certain tunes. As Mr. Sebens explained, having the ability to play other instruments allowed him to enter a jam setting with both types of dulcimers, mountain and hammered, and begin by playing the mountain dulcimer. This instrument was quieter in general and was more accepted as a traditional instrument, which allowed him to ease into a jam setting:

Then also a lot of times people bring in a hammered dulcimer, they tend to have to get it all set up and everybody has to tune to them and they've got to get situated. It's not as relaxed a jam instrument as a lot of other instruments where you kind of walk up, "Oh yeah, let's try that" and just jump in a play a tune maybe tweak a little bit of tuning. Yeah, so much kind of centers around it and some people have a harder time accepting that too. So I guess usually I don't even get out the hammered dulcimer unless the lap dulcimer. I find it's easier for me to kind of feel out a jam, because you know I can play it upright and even strapped on and just kind of walk up and see what's going on. And if it's something I feel like I could add something to that and if I have a hammered dulcimer with me, and they say "Oh you play that thing too?." A good way to kind of ease it in too rather than me just pushing it in right away.⁹⁹

Within this passage, Mr. Sebens also offered up advice to the hammered dulcimer player wishing to enter into the jam setting. Etiquette played an important role in how the instrument was accepted.

⁹⁹ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

Another way to enter a jam was to use one of the hammered dulcimer's advantage of being a novelty. In my experience, even if someone did not like the style of music I played, the sound of the instrument was unique and rarely seen and heard live. The instrument had a natural attraction to it that caused many to observe and inquire about the dulcimer. By starting out as the center of attention, the player is able to draw players to themselves rather than having to deal with any acceptance issues at other jam sites.

The other thing is that if you're set up with one or two other folks at an Old Time festival and you're playing the hammered dulcimer it tends to draw people to it. Then it's easier to start a jam around it as people come in. They tend to tune to it too. It's less of a production of bringing it in to a group.¹⁰⁰

Although a hammered dulcimer holds tuning relatively well in comparison with other instruments, with an electronic tuner, the player could show up to a jam setting knowing that their dulcimer was at least tuned with itself. The advent of better and cheaper electronic tuners and the adoption of a fixed pitch allowed for the hammered dulcimer player to always tune to a standard.¹⁰¹ This helped not only the hammered dulcimer players, but also the players of other instruments at a festival or gathering. Their instruments could always be relatively close to the group's tuning before arriving. Upon arrival to a jam, only minute

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Standard tuning in the United States was A4 equals 440 hertz.

tuning changes were needed. With over forty or fifty strings, this helped the hammered dulcimer player most of all.

It's gotten a lot better now that everyone's using electronic tuners because if you tune to a standard and everybody else is tuned to standard that eliminates that problem. That didn't use to be the case. You could be almost a half step up or down and it was just not "have to go through that all again." That has eased that part of it a good bit. As long as you keep it in tune and the folks are trying to join are all in standard pitch then it's not a big deal.¹⁰²

Gradually, the hammered dulcimer can be accepted into the group if the player presents themselves and their instrument appropriately. The other members of the jam must have accepted the fact that the instrument would not disrupt the sound they were trying to create:

They have an idea of how it should sound. And it's not like, it's part of what we call that Old Time groove, and when you've got that groove going, because I've experienced it many, many times, if you've got that groove going, you know, if somebody's not tuned into that groove, it can really kind of be disruptive for your own playing.¹⁰³

Mr. Holbert's further explains that the instrument was part of the tradition in the Old Time history. The dulcimer was not as widely known and certainly not as popular as some instruments, but that should not prevent it from being accepted as an authentic Old Time instrument.

¹⁰² Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

¹⁰³ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

A lot of times when I'm playing, like if I'm going to play with some folks, there are actually some people around here that are wonderful Old Time musicians that will accept me, but we're good friends. So, a lot of times, I might be playing rhythmic backup and not so much with chords, but it's usually like with the tucka tucka or the bum-diddy or just if I'm going to try to play the melody I'll do the tucka tucka just so I can figure out the melody if I'm not that familiar with the tune. It's traditional! What can I say? It's part of the tradition.¹⁰⁴

The dulcimer at certain times and certain locations was active in the Old Time music tradition. Some players, however, might not have accepted the hammered dulcimer as traditional, when it was potentially the other players' own misunderstanding of the Old Time tradition that kept them in this incorrect mindset.

Stokes presented a similar scenario in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. The bouzouki is a Greek instrument that until the folk revival of Irish music in the 1960s was never used in Irish music.¹⁰⁵ A guitar player that showed up to an Irish session was asked to leave because, "the guitar 'wasn't an Irish instrument' and this was an 'Irish session.'"¹⁰⁶ The bouzouki was allowed because those in the group perceived the instrument as traditional even

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ R. Conway Morris, et al. "Bouzouki." In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed November 4, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Martin Stokes. *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 1997) 9.

though it was not. In the same way, many excluded the dulcimer even though in some circumstances the instrument predates the use of the banjo and guitar.

Near the end of the interview with Mr. Holbert, he mentioned, "I'm going over to an Old Time gathering tonight. It'll be interesting to see who I get to play with and who I don't."¹⁰⁷ This struck me as odd that he would go into a musical environment unclear whether the musicians would even allow him to play. This very sentiment of uncertainty about whether or not one would be accepted would be enough to drive many potential players away from the activity altogether.

They kind of just make their own little circle and they just kind of stay within their own little circle. And it can be a big circle but it's like if you're not part of the group per se, a lot of the folks, the lead players will say, "I think it's time for me to take a break" and they just leave. So they're not inclusive, and that's what you run into a lot, sometimes. When that's happened a lot, I've gotten kind of tired of it. I don't think I want to be playing music with some of these folks, and some of the folks are just wonderful, and they're very inclusive, but there are some that, you know, just want to create their own sound and I can understand it.¹⁰⁸

In much the same vein as Gifford's description of the insiders and outsiders, a similar sentiment was being portrayed by modern Old Time musicians in regards to the folk revival where the dulcimer players were considered the outsiders.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gifford, 351.

If you're feeling you're being shut out then, yeah, you're being shut out. It's unfortunate but that's just the way things are with some folks. That's why it's like "Isn't it wonderful that they're not the whole world." Isn't it wonderful that there are folks that are like "Come on in, let's play some front porch music!" And that's why I like to go jam if I'm not teaching at the gathering. I like to go jam at the dulcimer week because it's like, it's like a big party of jammers when it comes to that. There seems to be more of an inclusive nature in the dulcimer world than there is in the Old Time world and I like that better, a whole lot better.¹¹⁰

Because many of the hammered dulcimer players came out of the folk revival tradition of the 1960s and 1970s the concept of music being more accepting was a commonly held belief. In this regard, one could see how the hammered dulcimer players might have a different take on what the jams should be.

If the jam were to be the main vehicle for developing Old Time musicians, how did hammered dulcimer players learn Old Time music? Out of this lack of acceptance or reluctance to participate, hammered dulcimer players have forgone the jam experience and instead opted for a small group setting where the hammered dulcimer could be the main melodic instrument.

"So usually in my experience, the bands evolved from jams and if the hammered dulcimer is not part of the jams, then there's not going to be a hammered dulcimer part in an Old Time group."¹¹¹ As Mr. Holbert explained, if the hammered dulcimers were not part of the community in the jams, dulcimer

¹¹⁰ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

players would also have a more difficult task in working their way into a more formal band setting. “The real Old Time music players and the Celtic, it's like ‘Okay, we don't really want anything to do with those instruments’, and so and I think dulcimer players say ‘Well, we'll just have our own group.’”¹¹²

Both Mr. Holbert and Mr. Sebens also had positive experiences with jams. Mr. Holbert noted that good hammered dulcimer players participated in jams and could be accepted:

I imagine there's still folks out there...Hammered dulcimers might be involved in some Old Time jams like at the Shindig on the Green, there's this one woman that comes out and jams with one of the Old Time jams there. But it's rare. It's a rare commodity and usually you'll find the hammered dulcimer playing by themselves, or they'll have their partner playing a backup instrument like in my case with Karen, my wife, backing me up. So, it's just hard to find a lot of Old Time hammered dulcimer bands anymore.¹¹³

Mr. Sebens also noted that dulcimers could be found at one outside jam session noting, “Not too often there's a mandolin, sometimes there is hammered, [and] lap dulcimer.”¹¹⁴

Concerning the pedagogy of jams, Mr. Sebens offered, “If you can find people to play with, doesn't matter what instruments, just playing music with somebody is what will help you learn. From then on it was all pretty much just

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

jamming with folks.”¹¹⁵ How could the problem of learning Old Time music outside of the jam setting be reconciled? Clearly, jams have the potential to aid the hammered dulcimer’s understanding of the Old Time repertoire and style. Because it could be a difficult undertaking for the individual player, many simply did not involve themselves with jams.

At the dulcimer-centric festivals, Old Time music was taught as an introduction to jams. Through Justice’s survey and my own observations, the majority of hammered dulcimer players demonstrated a base repertoire of primarily Old Time and Celtic tunes. If the players were not learning these tunes through the jams, then they were learning the repertoire and style through other channels.

The repertoire often was available through books, online courses and materials, and of course the festivals that many of the players attended. At the festivals, participants were receiving both repertoire and instruction on style. However, these players were also being exposed to other styles and repertoire not part of the Old Time tradition. Dulcimer players, without a strong genre of their own, have been able to pick and choose what they want to play. The players were not constrained by the dogma of a particular style. Even if the hammered dulcimer players were not true to an authentic Old Time style, the musical experience could still be valuable for the performer and audience. Because many

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

hammered dulcimer players were coming to the instrument later in life, perhaps this better suited their needs and allowed them more musical freedom of expression.

Overall, both the competitions and jams have been shown to exclude dulcimer players from participating. The competitions have rules that effectively forbid the use of a hammered dulcimer as the lead instrument in a band and two of the three festivals did not have a competition category for the dulcimer. Other instrumentalists in the jam sessions have also dismissed dulcimer players from these informal performances. Dulcimer players continue their Old Time education, however, through alternate means, either by forming their own groups or by attending festivals exclusive to the dulcimer. Either way, they are still actively participating in the Old Time genre and are a part of the large community of Old Time musicians.

Swannanoa Gathering

Apart from the Old Time festivals, I also attended two festivals that were solely for dulcimers, both the mountain and hammered dulcimer. These festivals provide much of the educational experiences for many players. Because the community of players remains relatively small, few opportunities exist for dulcimetrists to come together and partake in classes and group lessons from professional dulcimer players.

The Swannanoa Gathering Dulcimer Week was the longest and most intense hammered dulcimer experience in which I had participated. I attended the dulcimer gathering in August of 2010. The Swannanoa Gathering itself is a multi-week educational and entertainment event that takes place at Warren Wilson College in the North Carolina Mountains near Asheville every summer. The festival featured multiple styles and instrument types. I attended the “Dulcimer Week” which incorporated both hammered and mountain dulcimer. Approximately fifty to sixty participants attended the week. Other weeks during the festival included: Traditional Song, Celtic, Old-Time, Guitar, Contemporary Folk, Mandolin and Banjo, and Fiddle.

Although attendees were allowed to stay off campus, the majority lived in the dorms for the duration of the festival. The first day was devoted to registration, getting acquainted with the campus, an introduction for all attendants, and a concert by the faculty that evening. The weekdays were divided into three total classes, two in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Only one class was offered that specifically dealt with the hammered dulcimer in Old Time music, which I attended. Walt Michael, who was an avid performer and teacher in the Maryland area, instructed this class. He was also the founder and executive director for the Common Ground on the Hill festival held in Maryland, which was a similar festival that combined classes and

performances in a wide range of genres.¹¹⁶ His class dealt in large part with learning some common and not so common Old Time tunes. Much of the instruction was based on his published book *Walt Michael's Tunes for Hammered Dulcimer*.¹¹⁷ However, a large portion of the class time was devoted to the Old Time style and creating a driving rhythm that would help strengthen the performance.

Mr. Michael's overall approach to the instrument was rather unique compared to other popular hammered dulcimer players. For instance, Mr. Michael's instrument was unlike any that I had observed. With three strings per course and a floating soundboard, the instrument was much larger and heavier than normal and resembled instruments built prior to the folk revival. He also spoke at length about the building and subsequent rebuilding of the instrument as it had collapsed multiple times due to strain caused by the constant force of the strings.¹¹⁸ He also discussed the use of hammers and striking surface in regards to timbre and tone of the instrument and attack. He was an advocate for using a softer hammer with the striking surface either wrapped in string or covered in

¹¹⁶ Common Ground on the Hill, <http://www.commongroundonthehill.org>, (accessed August 18, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Walt Michael, *Walt Michael: Tunes for Hammered Dulcimer* (New Windsor, MD: Self Published, 1992).

¹¹⁸ This was also a reason given to why one did not find many older instruments. Some instruments will implode under the constant stress of the strings.

leather.¹¹⁹ I found this interesting, because so often the discussion of hammered dulcimer playing did not delve into the timbre and sound quality of the instrument. This aspect of musicianship was certainly important, but not often discussed in the classes that tended to focus more of literature advancement.

After the evening performances by different faculty members, jam sessions were set up for the various instrument and skill levels. A “slow jam” and “fast jam” was offered for both mountain dulcimer and hammered dulcimer. However, participation was open for any instrument that wanted to switch. The first couple of nights, the numbers were roughly equal in the various jam areas, but as the week progressed, more players gravitated to the advanced playing areas. I tried to visit all sites at least once to get a sense of the playing abilities of the various groups.

Like most jams, the participants took turns introducing a tune. Unlike in normal Old Time jams found outside the confines of the dulcimer-centric festivals, the tunes were taught slowly before being played at full speed. At normal Old Time jam sessions, everyone generally knew the tunes or the players unfamiliar learn the tune through the many repetitions. However, the tune was always presented at regular tempo. At Swannanoa, the jams were more educational and used to share repertoire with those who had less jamming experience. Facilitators at the jam sessions, who were also faculty members at the gathering,

¹¹⁹ Walt Michael, <http://www.waltmichael.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

assisted and led the jam sessions. As faculty members and experienced musicians, these instructors often knew the tunes being introduced and helped both the player introduce the tune, and assisted in teaching. They were also stronger players who could be heard over the rest of the group.

Unfortunately, due to low attendance the past few years, the dulcimer week was removed from the Swannanoa gathering schedule. As discussed by long time dulcimer week teacher Ken Kolodner, “As others have pointed out, dulcimer week over the last 7-8 years slowly declined in attendance and the last 3-4 years was totally flat.”¹²⁰ Interestingly, the mountain dulcimer was somewhat adopted by the Old-Time Week with two mountain dulcimer classes being taught this year by Don Pedi.¹²¹ No hammered dulcimer classes were offered in either the Celtic Week or the Old-Time Week, which Kolodner mentioned would likely be the new home for the instrument if any.

¹²⁰ Everything Dulcimer, <http://www.everythingdulcimer.com> (accessed September 1, 2012).

¹²¹ Swannanoa Gathering, <http://www.swangathering.com>, (accessed August 17, 2012).

The Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival

I attended The Winston Salem Dulcimer festival in 2011. The two-day festival was held on May 6 through May 7 of that year at College Park Baptist Church in Winston Salem. The event was a gathering of several hundred people for a weekend of concerts, classes, and fellowship within the local dulcimer community. Like many dulcimer specific gatherings, both mountain and hammered dulcimers were represented.

Friday evening began with registration and open jam sessions, followed by an introduction and welcome from the event organizers. The evening concluded with a performance by different members of the festival faculty performing short sets of music. This was also a time for socialization. Because the dulcimer community was relatively small, many of the performers knew one another. Even in the few festivals I had attended up until this point, I recognized quite a few people from other events.

In total, forty-four classes were offered over four one-hour sessions. After the two morning sessions, participants attended a lunch and a concert by different faculty members. Following dinner, an outside group performed a concert. Between the sessions, attendants could shop at the vendors that were present or could participate in the informal jam sessions.

I participated in three dulcimer classes including a class with Joe Holbert who was interviewed for this document, as well as one mountain dulcimer class

taught by Wayne Seymour who was also interviewed for this document.¹²² Of the classes offered at the festival, only one referenced Old Time music. The class was titled “An Old-Time Tune” and was taught by Joe Holbert who was also interviewed for this project. As with the Swannanoa Gathering, I attended all classes that reference Old Time music. In both cases, only one class was offered. The registration form for the Winston Salem Dulcimer festival offered the following class description: “Learn one of the many Kentucky tunes collected by the fiddler Bruce Greene whose tunes are played in Old-time and dulcimer jams throughout the world.time (sic) and dulcimer jams throughout the world.” As seen in Figure 1, this example of the materials used in festival classes illustrates the same tune presented with standard Western notation as well as a number tablature system.

¹²² As with many hammered dulcimer players, Mr. Seymour performs on both hammered and mountain dulcimer.

Coleman's March
[Arrangement - Joe Holbert]

Collected by
Bruce Greene

5 6 5 4 3 3 4 3 2 3 4

5 5 6 5 3 1 2 3 2 1 7 7 6 5 3 2 1

2 2 3 4 3 2 1 5 6 5 4 1 3 4 5 7

1 1 7 7 1 7 6 5 6 6 7 1 7 6 5 3 2

1 1 7 6 5 3 2 1 2 2 3 4 3 2 1 3 4 5 7 1

Section I **Major**

A. (5 6 5 4) 3 - 3 - 4 - 3 2 3 4

B. 5 - 5 6 5 3 1 - 2 - 3 2 1 - 1 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 3 2 1 -

C. 2 - 2 3 4 3 2 - 1 - [Repeat] - [2nd Time = 1 - 3 4 5 7]

Section II

A. 1 - 1 - 7 - 7 1 7 6 5 - 6 - 6 7 1 7 6 - 5 - 3 2

B. 1 - 1 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 3 2 1 - 2 - 2 3 4 3 2 - 1

Figure 1. Example of Handout Used at Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival¹²³

¹²³ Used by permission from Joe Holbert. Arranged by Joe Holbert. Mr. Holbert advised that Sam Rizzetta created the tablature system.

The class was taught in a style I have found to be common among dulcimer instruction. The music was presented in standard Western notation; above or below was a form of tablature showing the scale degree and the octave¹²⁴ and sometimes a sticking indication was given using an “R” for right hand and “L” for left hand although this was less common due to player preference. Although sheet music was provided in the classes, the tunes were still primarily taught by rote. Depending on the ability level of the class, this usually involved the instructor playing the tune slowly while calling out the scale degree or using solfege syllables. In Joe Holbert’s class, sheet music was provided as seen in Figure 1, but he also taught the class through solfege syllables through both sections and ultimately combined the two sections to complete the piece. Because Mr. Holbert was also an avid shape note singer and teacher, this method of oral transmission was appropriate to his background.

With methods of written and oral transmission, these classes appealed to several different learning styles. If a participant could read music, he or she would be able to use the standard Western notation. If someone were able to read tablature notation, he or she could combine the number system and a rudimentary understanding of standard Western rhythmic notation to piece together the tune. I also observed many that chose to learn the tunes strictly

¹²⁴ This tablature system did not reference which string to play. Most notes are located in two or three locations on a hammered dulcimer. Often this information was ascertained through the performers choice of sticking pattern.

through aural means. Participants commonly had recording devices that they could reference away from the class. Participants also used combinations of two or three of these techniques to learn the tune.

Although informal jam sessions occurred throughout the festival, the one organized jam I attended was geared, like most of the jam sessions at the Swannanoa Gathering, to acclimate dulcimer players to a jam setting. Demonstrating the format and process was emphasized. For example, instruction included an explanation that all participants were to introduce a tune, play for the others, and then everyone would join in. However, a knowledgeable facilitator led most of the performing. In my experience, this has always been a faculty member of the festival. As with the Swannanoa Gathering, the bulk of the repertoire for these jam sessions was primarily of Old Time and Celtic origin.

Although attendants demonstrated different ability and comfort levels with the music, I observed that about half of those at the jam knew the tunes or were familiar with the jam process, and the other half had less familiarity. I concluded that many of these players had a base of Old Time literature, but as it was not their primary musical style, few had the depth of literature to participate in a regular Old Time jam outside the confines of the dulcimer festival. Most knew at least a few Old Time tunes, but as a group, everyone did not have the same core repertoire as one would experience at an outside Old Time jam.

In many ways, both the Swannanoa Gathering and the Winston Salem Dulcimer Festival strove to educate dulcimer players on the issue of jams. Both events held educational jam opportunities for both mountain and hammered dulcimer players. Not only were the jams for teaching music and style, but also a large aspect was simply teaching the etiquette of the jam. Because many players came to the hammered dulcimer later in their lives, they sometimes were not exposed to the jam sessions and etiquette previously. One of the unwritten rules concerned the inner circle as described by Mr. Holbert:

There was an etiquette that if you didn't know the culture, you just didn't know that there was an etiquette that was involved with Old Time, and so the hammered dulcimer would just come right up and get into the inner circle. So some of the old timers just thought they were too intrusive.¹²⁵

Although jams were intended to be social and enjoyable events, rules still governed membership. There exists a proper way of approaching a jam, observing, sometimes asking to join, and remaining on the outside. Jeff Sebens also mentioned a similar situation but also described both physical limitations to the instrument both in size, setup, and tuning that made the hammered dulcimer difficult for jamming:

In the early days, a hammered dulcimer coming into the Old Time here, but it's really only been since the 70s there was much hammered dulcimer played in this region I think. And because the

¹²⁵ Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

early hammered dulcimers...there was a strong contingent down below Greensboro in the Seagrove area and up in West Virginia, up in New York, but here in this area, hammered dulcimer pretty well faded out. So in the 70s folks started coming in, a lot of the players tended to come in just melody and nothing else hard and fast and loud. And that's good for a tune or two but folks got kind of burnt out that, and think "Oh, here comes another one of those noisy hammered dulcimers", and so there's that side of it, set a bad taste in peoples' mouth.¹²⁶

A conscious effort by the organizers for both the dulcimer-centric events was to acclimate the players to the jam setting and giving them the tools to go out and be a part of an Old Time jam if he or she desired. For some of the attendants at these festivals, this was their only jam experience. Because jams were such a valuable teaching tool for learning the genre, this information was crucial for any player that wished to pursue Old Time music beyond the dulcimer-centric events.

The festivals tailored for dulcimers have become the primary social and educational outlet for those dulcimer players interested in learning Old Time music. This research has shown that the larger Old Time music festivals do not serve the dulcimer players within the genre. Only the Fiddler's Grove festival offered any competition opportunity for dulcimists and the jam sessions were generally less welcoming to hammered dulcimer players. Therefore, those players interested in learning Old Time music often had to form their own bands outside the mainstream Old Time community or attend dulcimer-centric festivals, which offer varied content outside of the Old Time genre.

¹²⁶ Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explain the relationship and spheres of influence between the Old Time music genre and the hammered dulcimer. This document has shown the dulcimer was in fact present and involved in many musical settings prior to the rise of Old Time music in the 1920s and 1930s. Although the instrument's popularity waned through much of the twentieth century, the dulcimer once again rose to relative popularity from the 1970s through the 2010s.

Observations of the large Old Time music festivals showed that, according to contest rules, hammered dulcimers were not considered a part of the Old Time community. Fiddler's Grove festival was the only festival that offered an individual category for competition for the hammered dulcimer. The Mt. Airy and Galax festivals both excluded the instrument from competition. These festivals arose out of a need to preserve traditional Appalachian musics from acculturation from the outside influences on these once secluded mountain communities. However, according to Wilson and Udall, "the revived culture may claim to be preserving farmore than it actually is."¹²⁷ Such is the case with the hammered dulcimer at

¹²⁷ Wilson and Udall, 17.

these festivals. Historically, dulcimers have been a part, however small, in traditional Appalachian Old Time music and these festivals do not recognize this contribution.

Much of this research focused on the concept of jams as one of the primary pedagogical tools for learning Old Time music. Dulcimer players and teachers understood the importance of these jams and have devoted considerable effort at the dulcimer-centric festivals to educate and prepare players for the jam experience. In addition, those dulcimer players interviewed for this document also commented on the difficulty in hammered dulcimer players being accepted into jam sessions (both established jam sessions or those found at Old Time music festivals). The dulcimer is becoming more accepted due in part to better built instruments that are more portable and easier to tune as well as a standard tuning reinforced by the proliferation of inexpensive electronic tuners. Dulcimer players are better equipped with the knowledge and ability to introduce themselves and be accepted into jam sessions.

This document also sought to explain why Old Time music was popular in the dulcimer community. A tradition of Old Time involvement, the folk revival, and a continued emphasis on Old Time music in dulcimer pedagogical materials all help to sustain this unique American style of music for dulcimer players. Gifford and Groce both documented how the dulcimer was used from the eighteenth through the twentieth century within the Old Time community. Much of the

teaching materials used in dulcimer education classes and books utilized tunes from the Old Time and Celtic repertoire. This is likely due to the ties the instrument continues to have with these two genres, the fact that the repertoire is in public domain, and that the melodies are easily performed on this diatonic dulcimer.

Lastly, this document sought to understand how dulcimer players were learning the Old Time style if not through the mainstream Old Time music festivals or the jam sessions. This research showed that the dulcimer-centric festivals were one of the primary resources for players learning this style of music. Although few classes specifically in this genre were offered, each had jam opportunities to help learn the repertoire and style. Furthermore, dulcimer players also tended to form their own bands. Due to the lack of acceptance by the Old Time community at large, the dulcimer players have continued its Old Time tradition through alternative means.

There will always be hammered dulcimer players who will strive to be a part of the Old Time community and will continue to attend Old time festivals and jam sessions. However, this research has shown that the majority of hammered dulcimer players are experiencing Old Time music in a very different manner than most other instrumentalists. Dulcimer players are learning of the genre outside the confines of a traditional Old Time pedagogy. They are also performing Old Time music separate from any repertoire limitations self-imposed by Old Time

musicians. Of the two primary genres of music performed by hammered dulcimer players, neither openly accepts the hammered dulcimer into its community. However, this has had little bearing on the musical output of the majority of hammered dulcimer players who frequently incorporate Old Time and Celtic genres with gospel, contemporary, and even jazz. Hammered dulcimer players may choose from many different styles without the burden of tradition that pigeonholes other instruments with similar backgrounds.

Suggestions for Further Research

One of the concerns for the instrument's continued viability is the relative age. As the hammered dulcimer gained popularity during the late 1960s and through the 1970s, the average age of many of the players increased. Although some younger players attended the dulcimer-centric festivals, most of the players were above fifty and likely part of the original boom in popularity during the 1970s and 1980s. At the Swannanoa Gathering, the majority of the participants were over fifty, except myself and another participant who was in attendance for part of the week. This could also be due to the requirements to attend. At a cost of nearly \$1000 to attend and at least a week of free time required, many young professionals may not have been able to attend. Further research is needed to determine if the average age of hammered dulcimer players is increasing and what effect this will have on the dulcimer community.

If the Swannanoa Gathering is any indication, a paradigm shift in the way the dulcimer is taught could occur. Further research into the changing pedagogy of the instrument might yield information of the generational shift to younger players through the Internet and non-standard learning opportunities such as lessons through video conferencing software or pre-recorded lessons.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

- Cooke, Peter. "Heterophony." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed November 4, 2012).
- Gifford, Paul. *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001.
- Groce, Nancy. *The Hammered Dulcimer in America*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983.
- Justice, Deborah, "A Community, Not a Tradition: The Hammered Dulcimer World of the Eastern United States." master's thesis, Wesleyan University, 2005.
- Kettlewell, David. "Dulcimer." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).
- Malone, Bill C. *Southern Music: American Music*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979.
- Michael, Walt, *Walt Michael: Tunes for Hammered Dulcimer*. New Windsor, MD: Self Published, 1992.
- Morris, R. Conway, et al. "Bouzouki." In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed November 4, 2012).
- Stokes, Martin. *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 1997.
- Thompson, Linda Lowe. *Hammered Dulcimer Notebook*, Denton, TX: Harvest Time Music, 1998.

Whisnant, David E. *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983

Wilson, Joe and Lee Udall. *Folk Festivals: A Handbook for Organization and Management*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982.

Personal interviews:

Jeff Sebens, interview by author, Cana, VA, April 12, 2011

Joe Holbert, interview by author, Black Mountain, NC, April 9, 2011.

Wayne Seymour, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, September 24, 2011

Websites:

Barbara Bates Smith <http://barbarabatesmith.com> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Common Ground on the Hill, <http://www.commongroundonthehill.org/index.html>, (accessed August 18, 2012).

Dulcimer Sessions, <http://dulcimersessions.com/> (accessed September 1, 2012).

Everything Dulcimer, <http://www.everythingdulcimer.com> (accessed September 1, 2012).

Fiddler's Grove, <http://www.fiddlersgrove.com/> (accessed August 15, 2012).

Galax Old Fiddlers Convention, <http://www.oldfiddlersconvention.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

Humphrey, Mark, "What is Old-Time Music?", <http://www.oldtimemusic.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).

John C Campbell Folk School, <https://classes.folkschool.org> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Kettlewell, David, "Dulcimer Players and Their Instruments," <http://dulcimer.new-renaissance.com> (accessed September 4, 2012).

Mike Seeger, <http://mikeseeger.info/music.html> (accessed August 15, 2012).

Mt. Airy Fiddler's Convention, <http://www.mtairyfiddlersconvention.com>
(accessed August 15, 2012).

ODPC Funfest, <http://dulcimers.com/festival.html> (accessed November 4, 2012).

Swannanoa Gathering, <http://www.swangathering.com/catalog/ot/classes.html>,
(accessed August 17, 2012).

Walt Michael, <http://www.waltmichael.com/index.html> (accessed August 15,
2012).