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CAROLINA MOUNTAIN HOME:
PLACE, TRADITION, MIGRATION,
AND AN APPALACHIAN MUSICAL FAMILY

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

By

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Abstract

CAROLINA MOUNTAIN HOME: PLACE, TRADITION, MIGRATION, AND AN APPALACHIAN MUSICAL FAMILY

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This thesis examines musical community in southwestern North Carolina and seeks to establish the region as one of the most influential areas of mountain music. Too often do scholars focus their attentions on other regions of Appalachia as being the center of gravity for mountain music while neglecting the under appreciated coves of the southwestern counties of North Carolina.

The Queen family of Jackson County serve as a vehicle to demonstrate the rich musical communities of southwestern North Carolina. Through the Queens, this thesis details important events and people in mountain music from 1900 to the present. The Queen family and their relatives began the century much like other rural southern Appalachian musical families. Music served as entertainment, prayer, and a community builder. In the late 1970s the Queens were increasingly recognized for their contributions to mountain culture, specifically music. This recognition eventually gained a national stage, thus demonstrating the region's important contributions to mountain music.

Transplanted mountain musical communities in the Pacific Northwest further substantiate the claim that southwestern North Carolina and its families played major roles in the perpetuation of mountain music. Beginning around 1900 and continuing through the 1970s, large numbers of people from western North Carolina, including some of the Queens, migrated to Washington state. Most migrants followed the logging industry and settled along the Skagit and Sauk River valleys. Tarheels remained close and developed mountain musical communities similar to the ones they had known in southern Appalachia. Today the Darrington Bluegrass Festival and the Queen family in Skagit County are testaments to the mountain musical influences North Carolinians transmitted to the Pacific Northwest.

Figure 1
Family Tree

Queen First Generation

Albert Queen (banjo)
Ellen Brown Queen (Albert's wife)

Queen Second Generation (Albert
and Ellen's children)

Mary Jane Queen (not to be
confused with Mary Jane Prince
Queen)
Louis Queen (guitar, banjo, Ernest
Queen's father, married Bertie
Prince)
John R. Queen
Claude Queen (guitar, banjo, married
Mary Jane Prince)

Prince First Generation

Jim Prince (banjo, fiddle)
Clearsie Nicholson Prince (gospel and
ballad singer)

Prince Second Generation

Ernest Prince (fiddle)
Early Prince (fiddle)
Holmes Prince (guitar)
Ella Prince (singer, organ)
Bertie Prince (singer, banjo, Ernest
Queen's mother, married Louis Queen)
Shirley Prince (guitar, fiddle, banjo)
Mary Jane Prince (guitar, banjo, singer,
married Claude Queen)
Alvin Prince (banjo)
Marion Prince (banjo)

Third Generation (Claude Queen and
Mary Jane Prince Queen's Children)

Claude Queen Jr. (banjo, guitar)
Dorothy Queen (gospel singer)
Carolyn Queen (gospel singer)
Albert Queen (banjo, guitar, fiddle)
Delbert Queen (guitar, fiddle)
Kathy Queen (guitar, singer)
Henry Queen (banjo, guitar, mandolin)
Jeanette Queen (guitar, bass guitar, autoharp, singer)

Preface

A Note on Oral History and Representation

Historians who rely heavily on oral history often face the difficult task of representing their subjects accurately. Natives of western North Carolina often speak in distinct dialects. Academic standards demand that historians transcribe the manner of speech as accurately as possible. Over the course of this work, I sought to portray local dialect and inflections of speech with accuracy while not lapsing into a stereotypical or patronizing portrayal of southern mountain language that color writers used to imply the isolation and backwardness of the region in the early 1900s.

Leaving words such as “musicianer” and “banjer” unchanged faithfully convey the cultural context of this research, allowing for a more fluid reading of the words of the Queen family and demonstrating common local pronunciations. I am confident that the subjects of my oral histories would have it no other way. Through an accurate transcription of their speech, it was my intention to portray my subjects as the articulate, witty, and artistic people they are. I respect the expressive capability found in the local dialect and trust that it can only enhance the research found herein.

Introduction

“I Guess We’re Pickin’”: Southern Appalachia and Regional Music

I sat quietly cross-legged on the couch just inside the front door. I nodded and smiled at the kind face of the elderly woman seated across from me. I was a guest in her home, and I had come to listen. Just one hour earlier I called Mary Jane Queen on the telephone and asked if it would be alright if I came to her home to visit with her and chat about the ballads and “mountain” songs that she and her family have performed for several generations. As we spoke about her family and her music, several other members of Mary Jane’s family began to emerge from various rooms of her house. Mary Jane introduced me to her son Henry, her daughter Jeanette, and Jeanette’s husband, Dean. Slowly, Henry and Jeanette removed two guitars from their cases and began tuning the strings. Dean ambled into the living room, sat down on the bed to my right and declared, “I guess we’re pickin’” as he cradled a banjo in his lap. Mary Jane looked at me and grinned proudly. Then the “pickin’” began.¹

Since people of European descent began settling the Appalachian backcountry over two centuries ago, mountain music has echoed through its lush forests. These settlers, especially the Scots-Irish, moving southwest along the Great Wagon Road,

¹ This experience came from my first visit to the Queen home. I came simply to introduce myself and ask the Queens’ permission to conduct research on their family. The afternoon soon turned into a family jam session. Between songs, Mary Jane Queen regaled me with stories of her life and her family. I regret not bringing my tape recorder to that first meeting.

brought ballads, Presbyterian hymns, and stringed instruments such as the fiddle to the Appalachian Mountains.² The banjo, an instrument of African origins, also found its way to these southern mountains, as did the musical traditions of German, English, and other settlers. The resulting musical sounds that emerged from this American region were unique. Despite the emergence of a distinctly Appalachian musical tradition, communities and even families carved out their own unique sounds born of long days cultivating the rocky soil of the oldest mountain range in the United States, family gatherings on front porches during Indian summer evenings, and sounds that blended long-established customs with the influence of modernity.³ The mountainous counties of southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina have been labeled as the geographic center of Appalachian music. This area produces many successful musical families, ballad singers, instrumentalists, instrument makers and music festivals. Unfortunately, scholarly focus on this region allowed other Appalachian communities to go underappreciated. One such area worthy of more attention is southwestern North Carolina. It is this part of Appalachia that the Queen family calls home.

The Queen's played a pivotal role in establishing a distinct, vibrant, and important musical tradition in southwestern North Carolina. Because of their long

² Many of the families who dot the landscape in western North Carolina trace their heritage to the Scots-Irish. For further explanation of Scots-Irish settlement in North Carolina see Tyler Blethen and Curtis Wood's *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina* 2^d ed. (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Division of Archives and History, 1998).

³ For a complete history of the banjo in Appalachian folk culture, see Cecelia Conway's *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

legacy of mountain music and eventual recognition as transmitters of cultural heritage, the Queen family became important characters in the musical community of southwestern North Carolina. Trade, migration, and industrialization allowed Appalachian music to travel freely across town, county, and state borders. Appalachian music continues to thrive in this area of southwestern North Carolina, and because of movement to and from this region, the Queens and other musical families helped distribute this kind of music to other regions of the United States. In the early and mid-twentieth century, southerners, especially a large number of western North Carolinians, followed employment opportunities to the Pacific Northwest. Migrants, including members of the Queen family, brought their music with them. By examining the local music traditions of southwestern North Carolina, a larger significance of those traditions become clear.

Mary Jane Queen's house is nestled in the Appalachian Mountains near the head of Johns Creek in Jackson County, North Carolina. Johns Creek eventually feeds into the Tuckasegee River, a wide mountain waterway that cuts through the heart of Jackson County. But near the Queen's home, Johns Creek is a small, babbling brook running through Mary Jane's driveway. Along Johns Creek Road, many of the roadside mailboxes display the Queen surname. On the right lies Queen Cemetery and only a half mile past Mary Jane's house the road dead-ends into Nantahala National Forest at Sam Queen Gap. Mary Jane's ancestors, among the earliest settlers in the area, followed the contours of Rich Mountain from Henderson County southwest into the Johns Creek area over two hundred years ago. At that

time, Johns Creek was still part of Haywood County. Jackson County became the 23d mountain county of North Carolina in 1851 when it was formed from Macon and Haywood counties.⁴

However, without a detailed knowledge of the entire region, exploring a specific area of Appalachia or examining the nuances of its folk cultures means little. Defining the southern Appalachia region and its inhabitants has long occupied the mind of the American public. Two decades after the conclusion of the Civil War, local color writers such as John Fox Jr. and Mary Noailles Murfree fueled public interest in southern Appalachia. Such writings contained descriptions of romantic and rugged mountaineers who led simple yet exotic lives. Even Fox and Murfree were not pioneers of the outrageous tales of Appalachian backwoodsmen, as literature set in the southern mountains predated the Civil War. But for the first time this fiction was widely marketed and became common throughout the United States. These stories, aimed at middle class America and found in popular magazines of the day, emphasized dialects, strange courting rituals, and generally portrayed Appalachia as a backward region. These images seeped into the public mind and Appalachia became the destination for often well meaning Christian missionaries and schoolteachers who sought to “modernize” its inhabitants.⁵

⁴ David Leroy Corbitt, *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1950, fifth printing 1996), 129.

⁵ Cratis D. Williams, “The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1961), 739-883; Henry Dr. Shaprio, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 3-31.

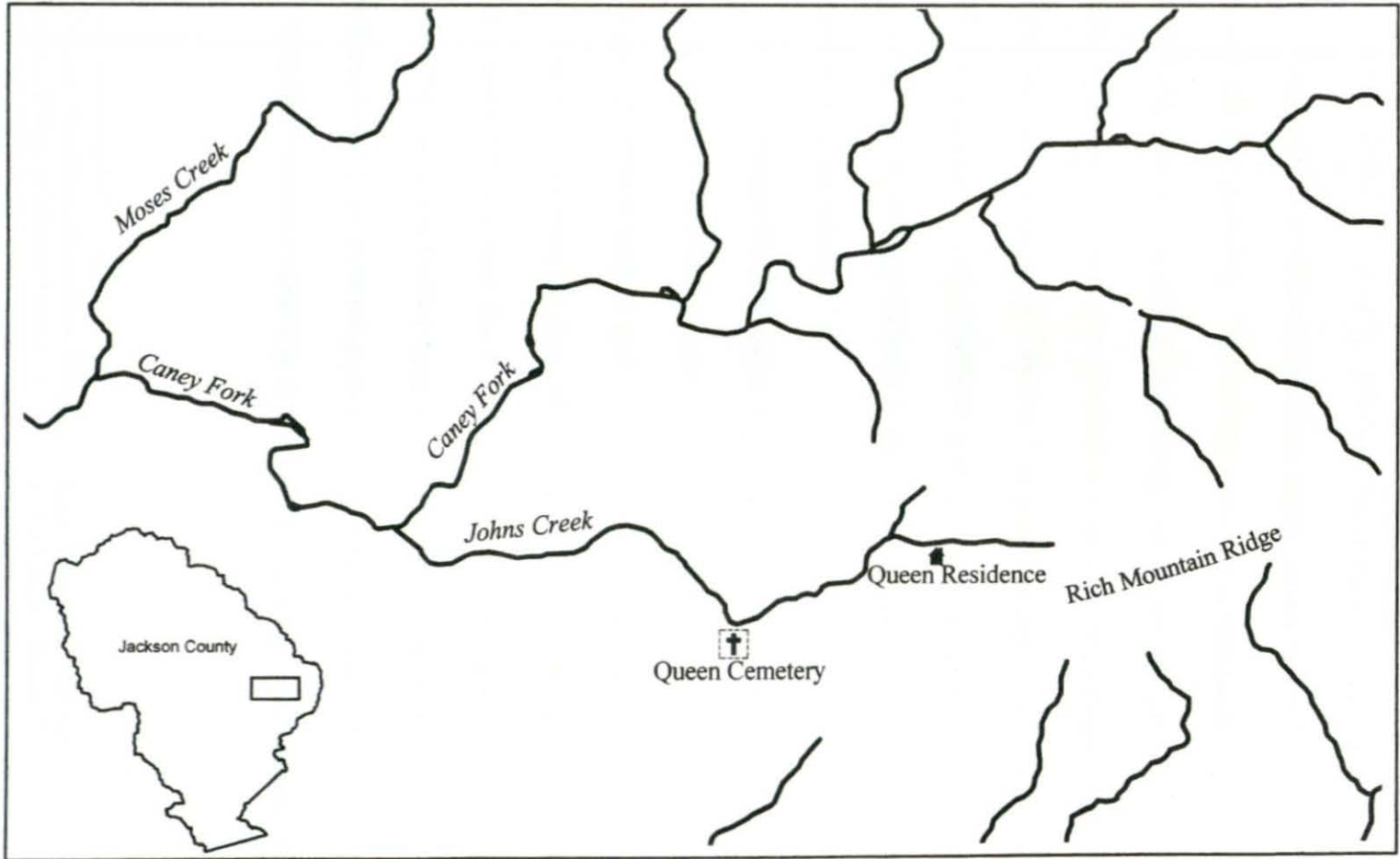


Fig. 2 Johns Creek Community

In 1921, John C. Campbell published what at the time was considered the first serious research on the southern Appalachian region and its people, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. “Let us now come to the Highlands,” Campbell wrote in his forward, an area where “more things are known that are not true than of any part of our country.”⁶ John C. Campbell and his wife Olive Dame Campbell traveled to the region in the early 1900s as “‘cultural workers’ who collected, recorded, photographed, wrote, published, and founded organizations” in the southern Appalachians. Many of these “cultural workers” were drawn to the region because of the writing of Fox and Murfree.⁷

As the secretary of the Southern Highland Division of the Russell Sage Foundation, John C. Campbell traveled to western North Carolina in a service-oriented role. In 1912, Campbell dedicated his life to philanthropy in the southern Appalachians and improving the lives of his new neighbors. This was not the work of a cultural imperialist; it is clear that Campbell considered the people of southern Appalachia his friends and treated them as such. In *The Southern Highlander*, Campbell produced clear, accurate pictures of the lives of southern Appalachian people. Campbell wanted to alleviate their poverty, but at the same instance preserve

⁶ John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), xxi; Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 11-27.

⁷ David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 105.

their many “traditional” ways of life.⁸ After John’s death, Olive Campbell began the John C. Campbell Folk School near Murphy, North Carolina to continue her husband’s goal of helping the highlander. Olive Campbell knew that music played an important role in the region and so she invited English ballad collector Cecil Sharp to her school.

The early height of documentation of Appalachian music came with the publication of Cecil Sharp’s *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. This was not the first published scholarly work on music in the region, but it has become the most important for what historian Benjamin Filene calls Sharp’s “ability to crystallize and extend trends that had been emerging over the previous two decades” in southern Appalachian folk song collecting.⁹ However, it must be understood that Sharp only documented those songs that fit his mold. Only ballads (“narrative song, a short tale in lyric verse”) were included in his study, an approach that largely excluded religious music and instrumental arrangements.¹⁰ Scholars debate Sharp’s motives and methods while in the Appalachians, but the important point here is the influence his work brought to both the music of Appalachia and its people. One of Sharp’s supposed intentions was to bring the southern Appalachian people into the minds of the larger public with the hopes of helping the inhabitants of

⁸ The quotations around “traditional” are included because even the Campbell’s fell into the trap of including or excluding folk traditions as they deemed authentic. This matter is discussed in more detail later in this introduction.

⁹ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

the region in whatever way he could. The publishing of Sharp's book captured the attention of the American public, but it captured more their imaginations than their cognitive minds. By excluding religious and instrumental music from his study, Sharp added fuel to the myths that, by this time, were widespread in America, that Appalachia is a region of preserved antiquated cultures. In addition, excluding religious music purveyed the myth of Appalachia as an untamed, uneducated region. Sharp's work also set the tone for not only ballad collectors who followed him, but anyone who ventured into the mountains to study any type of folk art. Sharp's work is important for several reasons. First, Cecil Sharp fired a critical salvo into the world of ballad collecting. Since Sharp first published his collection, many others have ventured into Appalachia in search of "traditional music." Additionally, Sharp followed the inroads that were largely established for him by Olive Campbell. Subsequent music collectors followed in Sharp's footsteps, often cultivating the same areas of southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina. By contrast, Sharp ignored the counties of southwestern North Carolina, and so did the researchers who followed him.¹¹

Like the local color writers of fifty years earlier, popular culture in the mid-twentieth century interpreted life in southern Appalachia. Television shows like *The Real McCoys*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and *The Andy Griffith Show* perpetuated farcical images of mountain people, the latter featuring reoccurring characters, the

¹¹ Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles, eds., *Ballad Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Darlings. The Darlings, a fictitious hillbilly string band, were the snuff spitting, moonshine making representations of Appalachian musicians. In real life, the Darlings were a string band from Missouri's Ozark Mountains called the Dillardards.¹² The invention of the Darlings perpetuated notions of not only residents of the southern mountains, but also of the region's musicians. Since the Campbell's, scholars and popular culture have sought to define Appalachia by its perceived traditional crafts and customs.¹³

No scholar of southern Appalachia doubts the richness of the region's folk cultures, but most would agree that such cultures do not exist in a vacuum. In *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk 1930-1940*, Jane Becker insists that the consumer market and the pursuit of "authentic folk art" shaped outsiders views of Appalachian people more than any other themes. Becker's research deals mostly with handicrafts, tangible productions from the hands of

¹² Anthony A. Harkins, "The Hillbilly in the Living Room: Television Representations of Southern Mountaineers in Situation Comedies, 1952-1971," *Appalachian Journal* 29 (Fall 2001 – Winter 2002): 98-127.

¹³ More recently, others have attempted to define Appalachia. In 1965, the United States government made an effort to demarcate Appalachia for the first time when it created the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Stretching from Mississippi to New York, the boundaries created by the ARC both confused and simplified the definition of Appalachia. The brainchild of President Kennedy and the eventual centerpiece of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the ARC sought to "develop" Appalachia. This development mostly came in the form of new or improved roads that would connect smaller communities to industrial centers like Charleston, West Virginia and Knoxville, Tennessee. Because being included within the boundaries of Appalachia meant improved roads or, in some cases, ancillary federal funding, politicians of poorer districts lobbied to have their counties included in the ARC's definition. Conversely, Virginia Congressman Richard Poff lobbied to have his district removed from the official boundaries so as not to be stigmatized as a poor area. As a result of such political wrangling, these wide-ranging boundaries are politically charged at best and do little to aid understanding of the region's culture. For further explanation see John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 339-342.

Appalachian people.¹⁴ Music is not quite a handicraft, but it can be understood within Becker's context. Stringed music is an integral part of the region's heritage and identity. This is not to suggest however, that the music being performed in southern Appalachia is some sort of pure, unchanging practice as Cecil Sharp suggested. Such music is as modern as any bluegrass or blues song heard on the radio today. The music of the Queen family represents one aspect of the wide variety of music emanating from southern Appalachia, a region often misunderstood and misrepresented by myths and romantic notions.

This work will explore what is most commonly referred to as "old-time" or "hillbilly" music, a style Sharp and other scholars largely ignored. The phrase "old-time" suggests a music genre that has remained static for an indefinite period, thus transcending time. While this type of music is often passed down through generations because of oral history and folklore, and can remain similar over long periods of time, it is incorrect to state that these are the only two factors contributing to this type of music. "Old-time" is an inadequate label for this research. Linguistic research shows that the term "hillbilly" probably began in the Deep South as a pejorative expression. No one can pinpoint for certain when the phrase was introduced, but "hillbilly" began to show up in American literature around 1900.¹⁵ Despite its understanding as a derogatory term, "hillbilly" became the long accepted

¹⁴ Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 2-10.

¹⁵ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 47-69.

name for this style of music after a string band with members from North Carolina and Virginia recorded for Okeh Records on January 15, 1925. According to country music historian Archie Green, the string band was asked for the group's name during the recording session. Having not given the idea much thought, one musician answered, "We're nothing but a bunch of hillbillies from North Carolina and Virginia. Call us anything."¹⁶ Still, the type of music this study examines is shaped by both people and place. The Queens and others who enter this story call what they play, "mountain music," the best and least pejorative term for this region's sound.

For traditionalists, mountain music is something wholly different from bluegrass music or country music. While true, it would be an overstatement to declare that mountain music is a pure cultural tradition. There are few cultural practices in the world that are not influenced by outside forces. Mountain music is just as significant for its oral tradition as it is for its more recent link with commercial forms. All mountain musicians draw from a myriad of influences. Arguably the strongest influences are family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, but mountain musicians also listen to radio, recorded albums, and watch music performers on television like all other American musicians of any genre. Many mountain banjo players in North Carolina claim to be influenced by Earl Scruggs' bluegrass banjo technique than by any other musician. Mountain banjo pickers learn from Scruggs, himself a native western North Carolinian, through interpersonal contact or simply

¹⁶ Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (July-September 1965): 204-228.

tuning their radio or television dials to the Grand Ole Opry. Such influences demonstrate that Appalachia is a region where wide-ranging influences come together rather than an isolated, insular place.

Most recent scholarship on the Appalachian South focuses on dispelling stereotypes about the region and its inhabitants. Over the years, southern Appalachia was viewed as a backward, violent, poverty-stricken area. Scholars first proposed that these qualities existed because of Appalachia's geographical isolation. As a result of Appalachia's mountainous terrain, scholars posited, modernity had a difficult time creeping its way into Appalachian life. More recently the degree of Appalachian isolation has been challenged. Forces as diverse as the Sears and Roebuck catalog and the railroad made access to the outside world much more prevalent. By the early twentieth century, Southern Appalachian people traveled freely from their rural mountain homes to urban centers for employment opportunities. There is no doubt that improved methods of mobility allowed Appalachian people the opportunity to travel outside of their home region, just as mass consumption and mass media opened up a new way of life for those who welcomed it. Goods could be ordered from catalogs and news and entertainment could be heard nightly from radio and television. But to what extent did the world outside *enter* southern Appalachia? Certainly there were degrees of isolation and some areas of southern Appalachia were more accessible to outsiders than other areas. For example, the relatively open, rolling terrain of southwestern Virginia was far more accessible for people traveling

through Appalachia, than was the rugged hollows and foliage thick terrain of southwestern North Carolina. But in both of these regions, mountain music thrived.

Often mountain musicians resided in or near industrial centers such as the foothills of Georgia, north of Atlanta. This allowed a wider audience to access such music, and provided musicians with the possibility of increased publicity. In a 1965 issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*, Norman Cohen wrote an article chronicling northern Georgia musicians Gid Tanner, Riley Puckett, and Clayton McMichen, better known as the Skillet Lickers. Cohen observed the repertoire and influences of the band as both “traditional” and “popular.” Simply known as the “Hillbilly Issue,” the *JAF* also featured four other country music scholars, including the father of hillbilly music scholarship, Archie Green. The “Hillbilly Issue,” particularly Norm Cohen’s and Archie Green’s articles, touched off a burgeoning trend in country music scholarship to seek out rural Appalachian musicians like the Skillet Lickers.¹⁷

Scholars sought out other versions of the Skillet Lickers to study and scrutinize. Some mountain music performers received attention from scholars because of their popularity outside of the South such as the Carter Family from Virginia and Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, both of whom enjoyed recording careers with national record labels. Other musicians identified by scholars for their contributions to early mountain music include Fiddlin’ John Carson and his daughter “Moonshine Kate” from Georgia, Aunt Samantha Bumgarner from North

¹⁷ Norman Cohen, “The Skillet Lickers: A Study of a Hillbilly String Band and Its Repertoire,” *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (July – Sept. 1965): 229-244.

Carolina, and the Stoneman family from Virginia. As evidenced from the varied geographic origins of these musicians, many areas of southern Appalachia boasted rich mountain musical traditions.

However, despite diverse geographical origins of mountain musicians, scholars of mountain music regularly focus on southwestern Virginia as the birthplace of and most important hub for mountain music. To these scholars, southwestern Virginia typified the rich mountain music emanating from the southern Appalachians. Perhaps the most influential and respected country music historian, Bill C. Malone, states that southwestern Virginia was the “seedbed” of southern religious rural music. Sacred music, especially “shape-note singing,” called such because of each note’s assigned shape on sheet music, became a major influence on mountain string music. This type of southern music was first ignored by ballad collectors such as Cecil Sharp, but to most southern Appalachian inhabitants, secular and sacred music were everyday parts of their lives.¹⁸

Influenced by Malone, historians, folklorists, and musicologists focused additional attention on southwestern Virginia’s mountain music scene. In his book, *All That is Native and Fine*, David E. Whisnant writes that the White Top region of Virginia was the “center of gravity” for mountain music in the 1920s. Whisnant’s third chapter in *All That is Native and Fine* focused on the White Top Folk Festival of the 1930s. As part of the newfound interest in folk music revival, White Top

¹⁸ Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 29-30.

emerged as one of the four largest festivals in southern Appalachia. White Top Mountain sits at the junction of Grayson, Smyth, and Washington counties in southwestern Virginia. Started by Annabel Morris Buchanan, a local mountain music enthusiast, the White Top Folk Festival was an ideal setting for an outdoor festival. While “modernity had already brought mass culture to much of the rest of the country,” Whisnant stated, “the hills and valleys of southwest Virginia were still alive with ballad singers, fiddlers, banjo pickers, and dancers.” To be fair, from its inception, the festival was advertised in three states, thus gaining a large crowd. Besides Virginia, promoters sent word to Tennessee and North Carolina and encouraged musicians from those states to attend and perform. In 1933, the festival received national attention when First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attended and the crowds swelled to over twenty thousand people.¹⁹

Admittedly, Whisnant’s research on the White Top Folk Festival mainly demonstrated how “traditional” music was much more an invention of romantic notions during the folk revival of the 1930s. But it can also serve as a testament to the attention focused on that section of Appalachia. Appalachian studies scholar Paula Hathaway Anderson-Green’s research on musicians and instrument makers of the area is recorded in her book, *A Hot-Bed of Musicians: Traditional Music in the Upper New River Valley – Whitetop Region*. For Anderson-Green, this region encompassed four counties, Carroll and Grayson counties in Virginia and Alleghany and Ashe counties in North Carolina. Like Whisnant, Anderson-Green was

¹⁹ Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 181-252.

convinced of the areas' value in the hierarchy of mountain music. But her focus was on what she might call cultural preservers such as Ola Belle Campbell Reed, Albert Hash, and Dave and Virgil Sturgill.

A native of Ashe County, Ola Belle Campbell Reed was an acclaimed claw-hammer banjoist, ballad singer, and purveyor of mountain music throughout her life. Growing up in the New River Valley of Virginia, Reed learned mountain music at the knees of her relatives and neighbors. Of course, like all Appalachian musicians, Reed was influenced by other mediums such as radio and phonograph. Reed moved from rural southern Appalachia into urban areas of Maryland during the height of her musical career. Soon, Ola Belle Reed was performing for schools, churches, festivals and radio shows, earning her acclaim outside of the New River Valley. Anderson-Green asserts that Reed's cultural heritage in Ashe County provided her with the strength to preserve and bring southern Appalachian musical traditions to the outside world.²⁰

Similarly, Grayson County native Albert Hash, declares Anderson-Green, uses his techniques as a fiddle maker and fiddle performer to sustain the mountain music of his region. More importantly, something else emerges from Anderson-Green's chapter on Hash. Hash asserts that mountain music travels freely from Ashe County, North Carolina to Grayson County, Virginia or from Galax, Virginia to Mount Airy, North Carolina. The Blue Ridge mountains acted, not as a barrier, but

²⁰ Paula Hathaway Anderson-Green, *A Hot-Bed of Musicians: Traditional Music in the Upper New River Valley – Whitetop Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002).10-52.

rather as a corridor where its inhabitants traveled freely from county to county and state to state, toting their musical instruments with them. For this reason, Hash's fiddles experienced regional popularity. Currently, two decades after Albert Hash's death, the "Hash Tradition" of fiddle making continues to live on not only in Grayson County but also every June at the Hash Festival in Alleghany County, North Carolina.²¹

Perhaps the most celebrated and studied musical family from the White Top area is the Carter family of Scott County, Virginia. In *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music*, Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg demonstrate how the Carter family were the most successful of mountain musicians in their time. The Carter family came to symbolize not only mountain music, but also the quintessential family performing group from southern Appalachia. But unlike many of their contemporaries, the Carters never dressed in "hillbilly" or "hayseed" garb and their self described "moral" messages went a long way to defeat erroneous notions of southern Appalachia. Like Ola Belle Campbell Reed, the Carters left Appalachia in search of greener pastures. In 1938, the Carter family relocated near San Antonio, Texas to become regular performers on border radio station XERA, run by another relocated Appalachian native, Dr. John R. Brinkley from Jackson County, North Carolina. The Carter's stay on the airwaves of

²¹ Ibid., 53-83.

XERA was short-lived, but the family continued to sing about their Virginia mountain home.²²

Located east of the White Top area is the city of Galax, Virginia. Galax, spread out over the borders of Carroll and Grayson counties, is often considered the mountain music mecca of the Appalachian South. The Carter family equivalent in the Galax area was the Stoneman family. At the time of the now famous 1927 Bristol, Tennessee recording sessions, the Stonemans were the most celebrated act to grace the studio. The patriarch of the family, Ernest V. "Pop" Stoneman helped his family record sixteen tunes while in Bristol, compared to six for the Carter family and only two from country blues musician Jimmie Rodgers. The Stonemans typified the mountain music coming from Galax. Unfortunately for the Stoneman family, they had the misfortune of becoming famous for their music just before the Great Depression and once the economic downturn settled in, the family lost almost everything. The Stonemans relocated to Washington, DC and were reduced to begging on the street for food.²³

But the importance of the Galax area to mountain music did not die with the downfall of the Stoneman family. Galax boasts more mountain music performers than any other county in Virginia. The city is also home to the annual Galax Old Fiddler's Convention, occurring for almost seventy consecutive years. In 1959,

²² Mark Zwonitzer with Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 1-4.

²³ For a thorough assessment of the life of the musical Stoneman family, see Ivan M. Tribe, *The Stonemans: An Appalachian Family and the Music that Shaped Their Lives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

famed folklorist Alan Lomax chose to include the Mountain Ramblers, a Galax, Virginia band as part of his *Southern Folk Heritage Series* for Atlantic Records.²⁴ Further staking the claim for Galax being the current epicenter for mountain music is the new Blue Ridge Music Center. In June of 2000, a group of local and regional dignitaries broke ground to symbolically begin the construction of the center that will be maintained by the National Park Service as part of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The land, located off the Parkway near Galax, sits just north of the North Carolina border, which made the site more attractive to the Park Service. But many local musicians who attended the ceremony expressed the feeling that Galax's rich history of traditional music made it the most obvious choice.²⁵

Certainly, Virginia boasts a rich heritage of mountain music. Numerous influential mountain musicians hail from Virginia, such as Dock Boggs and A.P. Carter. Likewise, there are almost countless small town venues for mountain music like that of the Friday Night Jamboree in Floyd, Virginia. Located south of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Floyd jamboree touts its "traditional" music and dancing as a "national treasure." Scholars and musicians alike have recognized the importance of mountain music in southwestern Virginia over the years, and rightly so. But what about other areas in southern Appalachia? The counties of southwestern North Carolina, where communities of mountain music thrived, were an often ignored region of similar importance.

²⁴ Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 189.

²⁵ *Winston-Salem Journal*, 11 June 2000.

Like the White Top Folk Festival in Virginia, the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival began during the folk revival of the 1920s and 1930s. Since 1928, Asheville, North Carolina has entertained thousands of spectators each August at this folk festival. Like Annabel Morris Buchanan, the Grayson County native who started the White Top Festival, Bascom Lamar Lunsford began the Asheville festival in his native Buncombe County, North Carolina. However, Buchanan would be the one to follow Lunsford's footsteps since the Asheville festival was the first of its kind. Sarah Gerturde Knott, the founder of the National Folk Festival stated that Lunsford's influence on her was immeasurable. Knott began her festival six years after Lunsford's. In 1928, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce asked Lunsford to start a festival that would compliment the city's annual Rhododendron Festival. Lunsford's event became so popular that within two years it was moved to a separate location and held on a different date from the Rhododendron Festival. During World War II, the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival thrived and kept drawing bigger crowds each year, while the Rhododendron Festival eventually discontinued in 1940. Musicians and song collectors like young Harvard student Pete Seeger and Frank C. Brown from the North Carolina Folklore Society traveled to the festival to hear and learn from these mountain musicians and often to learn folksongs from Lunsford. Since its inception, the festival continues to thrive. It was recently moved from the outdoor venue of McCormick Field to the indoor Diana Wortham Theatre, but the regular line-up of ballads, storytelling, clogging, and mountain music are still performed.²⁶

²⁶ David E. Whisnant, "Finding the Way Between the Old and the New: The Mountain Dance and

From spring to fall, western North Carolina is home to numerous mountain music conventions and festivals such as the Old – Time Fiddlers and Bluegrass Festival in Union Grove, the Bluff Mountain Festival in Hot Springs, and the Ole Time Fiddle Festival in Bryson City. Additionally, every Saturday evening from July through Labor Day, Shindig on the Green takes place in Asheville. However, mountain music festivals and conventions do not make western North Carolina exceptional. Indeed, from Maine to Montana, communities hold old – time music gatherings that would be just as at home in the southern Appalachians. So what makes southwestern North Carolina deserving of more attention to its mountain music contributions?

In his article, “Western North Carolina: Culture Hearth of Bluegrass Music,” cultural geographer George O. Carney studied the contributions of North Carolina musicians to the emergent sound of bluegrass. Carney pointed out the impact of numerous families in western North Carolina that perform mountain music. The Morris Brothers from McDowell County, the Callahan Brothers from Madison County, and the Jenkins family from Rutherford County who produced an amazing lineage of banjoists, are all testament to the family performers originating in southwestern North Carolina. While Carney’s article contained several errors, the argument that the bluegrass sound originated in western North Carolina remains compelling. More importantly however, Carney explains that a social network of

Folk Festival and Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Work as a Citizen,” *Appalachian Journal* 7 (Autumn 1979), 135-154.

homes, schools, churches, music festivals, and fiddle conventions provided western North Carolina musicians with a way to create a reciprocal and thriving community of mountain music.²⁷

Not unlike Carney, scholars often point to the abundance of musical traditions in Virginia as proof of its standing as the most important location for mountain music. Using this model, this thesis will argue that the counties of southwestern North Carolina are just as significant and important to the list of mountain music locations as the Galax and White Top areas of Virginia. Jackson County is no different in its abundance of musical families and shared musical communities. In addition to placing southwestern North Carolina in its proper place in the scholarship of mountain music, the overall scope of this work will also discuss music as a way to examine culture and cultural change in Appalachia and transplanted communities in the Pacific Northwest.

The first chapter will include an annotated family tree of the Prince and Queen families, their musical heritage, and accomplishments such as recorded albums, awards, and local and national performances. Drawing primarily from oral histories, this chapter will establish the Queen family as prominent players in the realm of mountain music. The second chapter will discuss how the Queen family's music migrated intact across America and settled in western Washington. Like many

²⁷ George O. Carney, "Western North Carolina: Culture Hearth of Bluegrass Music," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 16 (Fall/Winter 1996): 65-87. Carney curiously researches musicians within and without the western North Carolina region. A nearly equal number of his major musicians come from the piedmont as they do from the mountains. Carney also erroneously positions the hometown of influential country musician Charlie Poole in the coastal county of Bertie rather than the piedmont county of Rockingham.

Jackson County residents, Ernest Queen, Mary Jane's nephew, moved from southern Appalachia to the Pacific Northwest when the logging industry relocated its center of operations. Their music served as a kind of glue that held relocated communities together in this new environment. This chapter will demonstrate that out-migrants from southwestern North Carolina acted as cultural ambassadors in introducing and popularizing Appalachian music in Washington state. The discussion of the Ernest Queen and other Jackson County natives in Washington will serve as a vehicle to explain the contributions of southwestern North Carolina to mountain music. In sum, this thesis seeks to position southwestern North Carolina in its appropriate place in the study of mountain music among regions like Galax and White Top in Virginia. Similarly, the Queen family, like the Carters and the Stonemans before them, play important roles in introducing and defining the mountain music in southwestern North Carolina.

Chapter One

“I Just Wished You Could’ve Heard ‘em Sing”: The Emergence of the Queen Family from Typicality to Exceptionalism

On Christmas Day in 1935, Claude Queen and Mary Jane Prince were married by Justice of the Peace Albert Brown in the Caney Fork community near Cullowhee, North Carolina. This marriage joined two families possessed of proud musical traditions. Claude Queen’s father, Albert Queen, was a musician who particularly enjoyed the banjo, and his mother, Ellen Brown Queen, was a ballad singer. Mary Jane traced her musical gifts back to her grandfather, John Prince, who came to western North Carolina from a South Carolina plantation where it was thought that he learned some of his skills on the fiddle and banjo from slaves who worked the estate.¹ When Mary Jane was a young girl, she sat at the knees of her grandmothers, Narcissus Prince and Miranda Nicholson, and listened intently to their mountain ballads and traditional sacred songs. Narcissus Prince sang ballads and other secular mountain songs. Miranda Nicholson did most of her singing in Caney Fork Methodist Church, only a few yards from where Johns Creek flows into Caney Fork. “And my grandma Nicholson, my mother’s mother, she could sing high tenor,” stated

¹ Betty Smith, “Mary Jane Queen – Singer and Musician,” *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 49.1 (Spring – Summer 2002): 34.

Mary Jane Queen. "Oh, I wish you could've heard her sing. I could've sit and listen to that woman sing all day long. Oh, it was just beautiful."²

The Princes and the Queens and their ancestors were typical of many families in the southern Appalachian mountains, living lives centered on close-knit, pre-industrial, insular farm communities. "Appalachia on the eve of industrialization," wrote historian Ronald D. Eller, "was a land of scattered, loosely integrated, and self-sufficient island communities." A "sea of ridges" dominated the southern Appalachian region, at the bottom of which, coves and hollows gave shelter to many of these insular communities.³

The Princes and Queens, like their neighbors, lived in the shadow of these ridges. These families were not famous musicians. Before the 1980s, the Queens did not travel around the region performing music or record their songs. They performed on the front porch, at barn dances, and in church or other religious gatherings. Sharing music with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors was an ordinary occurrence in a time when many modern amenities were scarce. The first radio came to Mary Jane Queen's household in the 1940s. Experiences like these made the Queen family representative of many southern Appalachian musical families. Not

² Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina. For the first half of the century, a discussion of the Queen family is intertwined with the story of the Prince family. The two distinct families joined with the marriage of Claude Queen and Mary Jane Prince and since the death of Jim Prince, the Queen side of the family carried on most of the legacy of mountain music. Despite tracing their roots to both the Princes and Queens, the family musicians are known as Queens, thus this discussion refers to the entire family as the Queens while examining the Prince ancestry where appropriate.

³ Ronald D. Eller, "Land and Family: An Historical View of Preindustrial Appalachia," *Appalachian Journal* 6 (Winter 1979): 84-85.

until the late 1970s did the Queens' experience become exceptional. Despite increased recognition by journalists and academics of the importance of what the Queens meant to mountain music, their story was still one of a typical southern Appalachian rural family.

When Mary Jane Queen was young, her toys were mostly fashioned by hand. Similarly, music instruments like the fiddle and the banjo, the two instruments central to mountain music, were handmade. Mary Jane recalled her father's first banjo,

Well, the first banjer that my dad owned was homemade. John Lovedahl made it down here. They lived, my mother and grandmother and dad lived around from where he did, Mr. John Lovedahl. So he told dad, dad was about twelve, thirteen, maybe fourteen years old, and he told dad, he said, "If you'll feed my cattle while I'm going turkey hunting, I'll give you that banjer when I come back." Well dad told him he would and he did. He fed his cattle and when he come back he gave that banjer to dad.⁴

Jim Prince made his next banjo and eventually ordered a third from Sears and Roebuck. Prince garnered a reputation around Jackson County for being a tremendous clawhammer banjo player. Most of Prince's public performances came at barn dances held at a homestead near where Caney Fork meets the Tuckasegee River.⁵ Prince's influences came from all over the community: family, neighbors, co-workers, and church. Prince even attended at least one jam session in Sylva held by the few local African-American musicians. "Oh yes, I've heard dad say that they

⁴ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

⁵ Jackson County Genealogical Society. *Jackson County Heritage – North Carolina, 1992. Vols. 1 & 2* (Cullowhee, North Carolina: Jackson County Genealogical Society in cooperation with Walsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 354.

[African-American musicians] get together and all the banjo playing that you've ever heard and that they did it," Mary Jane Queen recalled. "I think that is one thing that, the reason that he loved the banjo so well, he'd hear them play."⁶

Jim Prince passed down his ability to play mountain music to his nine children including his daughter Mary Jane.

And when I was a growing up, well, you have to wait until your arm gets long enough to reach the neck of the banjo, or the guitar. And I was about thirteen, fourteen. Dad come in, he'd been out somewheres and he'd come in, and I said, "Dad, can I play your banjo?" And he said, "Yes, if you won't drop it." (laughter) I said, "I'll certainly not drop it." I never did and after that he said for me to get it down and practice with it, but he said, "Just be careful and don't drop it." Well, so, I could play the banjo pretty good, you know, when I was just a young girl at home.⁷

All of Mary Jane's eight siblings had similar experiences with mountain music in their household. Mary Jane's older brother, Holmes Prince may have bought the first guitar in Caney Fork. Aside from learning banjo from her father, Mary Jane also learned how to play guitar from her brother Shirley Prince. It was visible and audible in Shirley's music that he inherited his father's talent for music. At a young age, Shirley exhibited a gift for playing guitar, fiddle, and banjo. Of course mountain ballads, many having roots in Great Britain, were also passed down from parent to child and among siblings.

⁶ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

⁷ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

But secular music was not the only music performed by the Princes and Queens. After Claude and Mary Jane married, the two toured area churches with Bertie Queen (Mary Jane's sister), and Mack Queen (Claude's cousin), singing gospel songs accompanied by piano. Decoration Day was another important event in southern Appalachian communities where gospel music was central. One day each year, the communities gathered at the local cemetery to decorate or maintain graves of loved ones, pray, picnic, and sing gospel songs. Decoration Day, or "Homecoming" as it was sometimes called, usually took place in early September. These events likely have roots in southern Appalachian agricultural patterns. The occurrence of Homecoming in early September suggests that the event was held to coincide with the "lay by" season. Between cultivation and harvest crops did not need much attention. This allowed for more time to attend to other endeavors such as gathering and playing music. Singing and playing music was integral to Homecoming. "And we always sung," said Mary Jane, "and performed for 'em."⁸ Gospel songs were just as influential on mountain music as the instrumental tunes of fiddlers and banjoists or the vocal intonations of balladeers. Usually secular music did not enter the church, but the Queens and other southern Appalachian singers performed gospel songs in the home and for other secular functions.

Influences on the Queen's music came from all directions, both private and public: home, church, and even school and work. Mary Jane Queen remembered her

⁸ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

oldest brothers coming home from high school in Cullowhee and singing ballads they had learned that day in class.

My oldest brother went to Cullowhee High School. There was no university, no college, no nothing there, but just the high school. And he learned a lot of the ballads there. I still sing "William Riley," he learned that there. And "Sweet Jane," and "Salt Lake City."⁹

Ballads like "William Riley" and "Barbara Allen" were rooted in the British ballad tradition. It was possible that the teachers in Cullowhee taught their students these ballads as part of a deep rooted oral tradition in the southern Appalachian mountains. Conversely, the ballads could have easily come from other sources such as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by Francis James Child, a book first published in 1882. This book detailed the collection of British ballad collector Child and was popular in the United States. However, ballad collectors did not focus on the southern Appalachian region as an area where unaltered Child ballads existed until after the turn of the century. Ballads like "Salt Lake City" were obviously of later origin, yet these songs became routine numbers in Mary Jane Queen's repertoire.¹⁰

The influx of other musicians into the Cullowhee area to work in the timber industry also influenced the Queens' mountain music. Inexpensive land and cheap labor attracted lumber companies to the southern Appalachians in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Historian Ronald D. Eller adeptly described the influx of the timber

⁹Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

¹⁰ For further explanation of Child ballads and their influence on ballad collecting in the southern Appalachians see David E. Whisnant's *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 51-59, 110-114.

industries between 1880 and 1930. Eller wrote with an impassioned pen when he depicted how big timber companies came to the southern mountains and exploited both land and laborer, leaving a devastating stain on the region by the beginning of the Great Depression. One aspect that Eller chose not to address was the undeniable mark of the sharing of cultural practices in lumber camps and sawmills. Laborers and their families migrated from all over the southeast to take part in the timber boom. During this boom, the Blackwood Lumber Company was an important source of employment and socialization for people in Jackson County's Caney Fork community.¹¹

The Blackwood Lumber Company officially began business in Jackson County on 29 November 1920. Blackwood bought the timber rights to land encircling Caney Fork, including the Johns Creek section. A lumber camp complete with sawmill, stores, offices, and employee housing was set up at the community of East LaPorte where Caney Fork Creek meets the Tuckasegee River.¹² A subsidiary of Blackwood, the Tuckasegee and Southeastern Railway Company, laid tracks from East LaPorte to Sylva so lumber could be shipped in boxcars to the Jackson County seat.¹³ From Sylva, the timber was shipped to Asheville on the Western North

¹¹ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 86-127.

¹² *Jackson County Journal*, 21 July 1922.

¹³ Robert Andrew McCall, "The Timber Industry in Jackson County, North Carolina" (MA Thesis, Western Carolina University, 1984), 36-38.

Carolina Railroad where it was shipped further east or north into Tennessee.¹⁴

Blackwood also built a railway from East LaPorte into Caney Fork, Little Canada, and Johns Creek in order to extract the maximum amount of timber from the area.

Known as the Caney Fork Logging Railway Company, this railway ran directly past the Prince's home. Mary Jane remembered living up-stream from the logging camp at East LaPorte when she was a young girl.

I can just see that train going down and they'd blow three or four times till we knowed they was going down the railroad track, you know, till we could see 'em. The conductor, he learned that my mother loved to hear the whistle blow, you know. Nearly every time he ever went down through this big bottom... he'd blow two or three times, or coming up, either one. And so when they had those big logs on, he blowed for her to see those big logs (laughter). We could see all that was going on down there when we lived on the mountain above 'em all.¹⁵

Blackwood Lumber Company employed Jackson County residents from 1920 until 1945 when the mill at East LaPorte was finally sold for scrap. In July 1945, only a few weeks after the transaction was completed, the sawmill burned to the ground before it was fully dismantled.¹⁶ Within a year of the devastating fire, the Mead Paper Corporation of Ohio bought the timber boundary previously owned by

¹⁴ Cary Franklin Poole, *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina* (Johnson City, Tennessee: The Overmountain Press, 1995), 174-176.

¹⁵ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

¹⁶ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 11 July 1945.

Blackwood.¹⁷ Mead continued to employ men on Caney Fork, but the days of the logging camp at East LaPorte slowly came to an end.

The majority of men who worked for Blackwood Lumber Company were employed full-time, while others supplemented their family farms with part-time employment in the timber industry. Jim Prince was listed in the 1930 census as owning a “general farm,” but he also worked long hours in the timber industry. Many employees of Blackwood, like Jim Prince and his eldest sons, were from Caney Fork. Yet a sizable number came from previously logged areas of southern Appalachia like up-state South Carolina, northern Georgia, eastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia.¹⁸ These men mingled in the lumber camps, in the woods, and in other social settings. Blackwood, like other timber companies, provided social activities such as a semi-professional basketball team and community dances.¹⁹ Events like dances allowed for the sharing of songs and the transference of mountain music within southern Appalachia. Loggers from places like Tennessee or Virginia brought their music with them and swapped songs with North Carolina natives. Many of the songs were the same with different adaptations. “Like up in Virginia,” stated Mary Jane Queen, “the ones that came down and worked for Blackwood, lots of their versions

¹⁷ McCall, “The Timber Industry in Jackson County, North Carolina,” 49.

¹⁸ 1930 Census Data.

¹⁹ *Jackson County Journal*, 23 March 1927; McCall, “The Timber Industry in Jackson County, North Carolina,” 46.

was different to what we sang.”²⁰ Lumbermen also sang in the forests to pass the time while they logged.

I just wished you could’ve heard ‘em sing. They could really sing. That’s where my brothers learned a lot of the songs when they was working with them and when my dad worked with them. When they’d come home, of course, daddy, if he was one of the ones that learned to sing the songs, he would get his banjo down and he’d play it and sing it and that’s how we learned. He sung ‘em the songs that he knew, you see. And they’d learn them and then he learned the ones that they sang. And so, dad only had to hear a song once or twice and he could sing every bit of it. He had a memory that wouldn’t quit. And if you could keep that tune in his mind until he got home and as soon as he got home he’d get his banjo down and play it three or four times and then he never forgot it. No, he never forgot it.²¹

For families like the Queens and Princes, Blackwood Lumber Company opened up their part of the county to new economic and cultural influences. Better modes of transportations and higher paying jobs were only two of the immediate outcomes of the timber industry in Jackson County. Blackwood also opened up Caney Fork to a new world of shared musical communities.²²

²⁰ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

²¹ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

²² Henry Queen, interview by author, 3 March 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

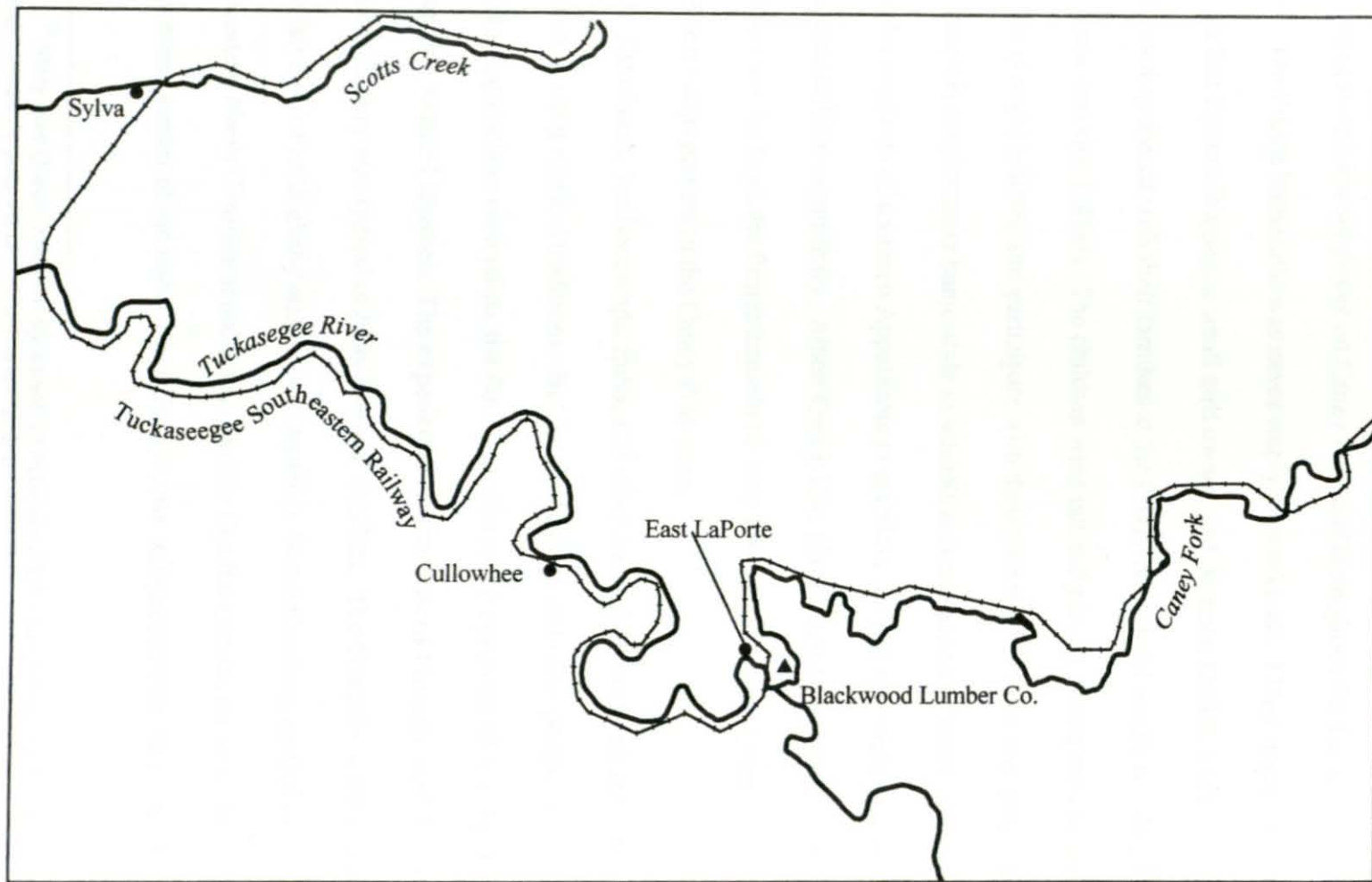


Fig. 3. Blackwood Lumber Company and Tuckasegee Southeastern Railway

Jim Prince not only shared his music with his family and co-workers, but he also shared it with his neighbors on Caney Fork and throughout the Tuckasegee River valley. The Prince household was never empty on weekends. Other musicians from the area like Bynum Watson, a small mill owner, and Norman Drake, a saw filer for Blackwood, gathered with their families at the Prince household on the weekends to pick music and sing ballads. The children went out and played during the day and returned at night to listen and participate with their parents.²³ Prince was also asked to display his clawhammer banjo style in schools around Jackson County. Music was a way for residents of southern Appalachia to entertain themselves while they built and sustained their community. Albert Queen also played mountain music with his neighbors not far from the Prince household. Jim Prince and Albert Queen were two of the best banjo players in the Caney Fork area.

The church, lumber camps, mills, and other social gatherings all acted as modes of sharing musical traditions. But for the Queens and other people in the southern Appalachian mountains, the family remained the epicenter of sharing and maintaining musical legacies. The experiences of the Queens through most of the twentieth century was typical of other musical families. The Sturgills, a mountain music family from Alleghany and Ashe counties in North Carolina, settled in northwestern North Carolina about the same time that the Queens came to the southwestern corner of the state. Dave Sturgill, the self-proclaimed family historian

²³ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

and an accomplished fiddle and banjo player, stated that playing mountain music in his family was something that his family felt that they had to do to carry on tradition. Not because they were forced to, but because it surrounded them and permeated every aspect of their lives. Their ancestors were mountain musicians, and by God, they were mountain musicians too.²⁴ In many ways, the Queens and Sturgills were counterparts. Both shared a keen sense of family, a love for music, and a natural ability to blend both so well.

The Princes and Queens continued to play and share music long after Mary Jane and Claude were married and produced a new generation of musical Queens. Of their eight children, six played guitar, bass guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, or autoharp. All eight of this third generation sang mountain songs. The couple's first child, Claude Queen Jr., took an interest in the banjo and guitar from his mother and father. Junior, as he was known to his family, learned to play banjo in the clawhammer and two-finger or up-picking styles that his parents used. But not long after Junior was old enough to play banjo, he consistently tuned into the Grand Ole Opry on the family radio and quickly became attracted to the three-finger picking style of Earl Scruggs, later known as "bluegrass banjo."

(Junior) was one of the first people in and around this area here that took up the three-finger banjo. You know, listening on the radio and stuff to people like Earl. He was drawn to Earl Scruggs mainly. And he still, you know, his favorite musician would probably be Earl Scruggs when it comes to banjo. So he learned that kind of style.

²⁴ Paula Hathaway Anderson-Green, *A Hot-Bed of Musicians: Traditional Music in the Upper New River Valley – Whitetop Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 84-86.

There really wasn't much three-finger picking in the mountains right around here.²⁵

Junior's interest in Earl Scruggs was important for several reasons. First, the radio provided another source from which southern Appalachian musicians learned songs from other people. Just like his grandfather learned music with neighbors and co-workers, Junior solicited knowledge of music outside of his home. The radio proved to be a bigger influence on musicians than almost any other outlet, other than family. Because of the radio, mountain music was no longer exclusively played in the mountains. The emergence of a new musical phenomenon called "bluegrass" materialized from the commercialization of mountain music, gospel songs, African-American blues, and white country music from the Piedmont. Bill Monroe, a native of central Kentucky, was credited as the father of bluegrass. As members of Monroe's band, Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt were the catalysts behind the emergence of the bluegrass sound. Many of the lyrics were familiar to residents of southern Appalachia, but the instrumentation was much different. Monroe's vocalization, Lester Flatt's guitar licks, and Earl Scruggs' three-finger banjo style helped mold the emerging sounds of bluegrass.²⁶

Secondly, Junior's interest in Earl Scruggs demonstrated how playing styles differed from region to region. Scruggs was not a native Kentuckian like Monroe, but

²⁵ Henry Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

²⁶ Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 25-27, 102. Also see Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 10.

rather from Cleveland County, North Carolina. Cleveland County was considered the piedmont area of North Carolina, and the county's economy was dominated by textile mills. Yet Cleveland and Jackson were separated by less than one hundred miles. Listening to his radio in the late 1940s, Claude Queen Jr. heard the three-finger picking style for the first time, despite the fact that he lived only one hundred miles from where Earl Scruggs learned how to pick the banjo.²⁷

The radio introduced a new style into the Queen family. However, the tradition of mountain music did not end with the induction of bluegrass music to the southern Appalachians. Mountain music continued to grow, evolve, and thrive in the places it always thrived; living rooms, barn dances, and impromptu jam sessions. The Queens continued to perform mountain music on their own. Albert, Delbert and Kathy Queen all followed in Junior's footsteps and picked up the guitar. Albert and Delbert both devoted serious time to practicing the fiddle, an instrument they learned from watching their grandfather, Jim Prince. Mary Jane and Claude's youngest daughter, Jeanette, also learned guitar and autoharp.

Much like his eldest brother, Delbert was greatly influenced by the radio and phonograph too. Junior set his mind to learn how to play the banjo like Earl Scruggs, while several years later, Delbert decided that he would emulate guitar player and country music artist Don Rich. Mary Jane Queen remembered watching her son in the family living room in front of the phonograph trying to imitate Rich.

²⁷ For further explanation of bluegrass innovators in North Carolina, see George O. Carney, "Western North Carolina: Culture Hearth of Bluegrass Music," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 16 (Fall/Winter 1996): 65-87. Despite some egregious geographical errors, Carney provides a compelling argument for North Carolina's significance in the development of bluegrass music.

He'd put them records on; he'd tune his guitar just like him. Don Rich was Buck Owens' handy man. Well, he'd tune his guitar just like that and he sat right there. He may miss a chord or two along, but he sat right there until he learned to play them songs. He sure did.²⁸

Delbert became very good at both the guitar and fiddle and began to perform music outside the home. Delbert followed in his grandfather's footsteps and performed for social dances or in the public schools in Cullowhee, Sylva, Whittier, and Cherokee.

Perhaps the son who did the most with his family's musical talent was Henry Queen. Born on Johns Creek in 1952 on the same land his great-grandfather bought, in the same house his grandfather built, Henry started playing guitar in his early teenage years. When he attended high school, Henry noticed that many of the other people his age could also play the guitar so he aspired to play something else.

I was lucky to have two banjo players as brothers, you know, Albert and J.R., my brothers playing the banjo. So I learned from them a little bit and then picked up some of that old clawhammer stuff from going over to my grandpa's, you know, Daddy and Mother and them.²⁹

Henry's humble nature, jovial disposition, and dexterity on several musical instruments allowed him to fit in with musicians outside of his family. Just after high school, Henry traveled to Pennsylvania with his brother, Junior, to find employment and to see another part of the country for awhile. Henry worked various jobs while in Pennsylvania including one at the Delaware Water Gap Recreation Area and a short

²⁸ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

²⁹ Henry Queen, interview by author, 3 March 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

stint with United Telephone of New Jersey. Henry traveled back and forth for several years, working in Pennsylvania for the summer and fall, and then making the trek back to Johns Creek for the winter and spring. Finally, in the late 1970s, Henry married, and finding a community of bluegrass and mountain musicians in the Pennsylvania area, decided to stay. Soon, Henry came into his own as a musician and learned from immersing himself in a musical community outside of southern Appalachia.³⁰

You now, when I was growing up I figured I'd never hear the "Black Jack David" outside of, you know, Johns Creek here. I thought it was right to this area. But then you get on out and start looking around, they had versions of "Black Jack David" in Arkansas, they had versions of "Black Jack David" in Kansas, and they had 'em all over the country. So it wasn't just here.³¹

Soon Henry moved just over the Pennsylvania border to Clinton, New Jersey, and he became a regular at music clubs and festivals in the area.

In August 1977 the premier bluegrass magazine in the country wrote an article on Henry Queen. Pickin' covered Henry's rise from playing guitar with his family in the "heart of the Smoky Mountains" to the center of the New Jersey bluegrass scene. The article spent a great deal of time on his mountain influences from his grandfather to Doc Watson. The author of the article hoped that Henry's southern Appalachian roots gave him an air of authenticity. But in the end, the article made it clear that

³⁰ Like other Appalachian out-migrants, Henry followed movement patterns previously set in place by migrants from his native region. It is also worth noting that Albert Queen, Mary Jane's fourth child, moved to Corinth, New York. Albert regularly performs in a bluegrass and mountain music band in Corinth.

³¹ Henry Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

Henry's music spoke for itself. "Henry Queen helps put musical events together by simply being there," the author stated, "(w)hether he's at center stage or in the background, his talent is always felt."³² Henry remembered the clubs, the festivals, and the great musicians he met with nostalgia. Particularly at the festivals, Henry mingled with notable bluegrass musicians like Peter Rowan and the Seldom Scene. These artists talked with Henry and told him what to expect if he chose to pursue a career in music. Henry continued to perform music within the ever-widening circle of the bluegrass scene in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Eventually, he returned to his childhood home on Johns Creek in the early 1980s.³³

During Henry's stint in the north, the Queen's musical experience started to change and became less typical of other southern Appalachian families. Around the late 1970s, outsiders visited the Queens at their home to learn about mountain traditions like types of gardening or styles of music. Some folks who visited just wanted to talk about what life was like in the old days. Occasionally Mary Jane or Claude or any of their children who happened to be around were kind enough to teach an earnest student a song on the banjo or guitar. Visitors to the Queen or Prince homes were nothing new. As Mary Jane stated about her father, "he never refused playing for anybody that ever went there and asked him to play a song for him."³⁴

³² Robert Lorenzi, "Henry Queen," Pickin': The Magazine of Bluegrass and Old Time Country Music 4 (August 1977), 40-41.

³³ Henry Queen, interview by author, 3 March 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

³⁴ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

But what was new for the family was the frequency and the wide variety of people who visited their home. The Queens gained a reputation in the Tuckasegee River valley for being keys to the past. Mary Jane and Claude opened up their home to visitors who wanted to learn. Jan Davidson was one of those visitors.

In 1977, Davidson paid a visit to the Queen household for the first time.

Davidson, a native of nearby Murphy, North Carolina, lived in Jackson County and wanted to know who to talk to about local music. Eric Olson, the librarian at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, suggested that Davidson talk to the Queens. Davidson took his tape recorder and drove up to Johns Creek. This was possibly the first time that Mary Jane Queen was ever recorded. A friendship kindled between Davidson and the Queens that developed further when he became the curator of the Mountain Heritage Center on the campus of Western Carolina University in the early 1980s. The Mountain Heritage Center's purpose under Davidson was to celebrate and promote the natural and cultural legacies of the southern Appalachian region. As the supervisor of the center, Davidson visited the Queen's house often to document their music and other folk traditions so it could be housed in the Mountain Heritage Center for future use. Davidson also encountered other people who wanted to learn about mountain music as he had in 1977. Davidson always sent them up to Johns Creek, and Mary Jane Queen welcomed them at the door with a smile and laughter as infectious as her music.³⁵

³⁵ Jan Davidson, interview by author, 5 February 2004, Brasstown, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

Davidson also helped Henry Queen secure a job with the North Carolina Visiting Artist Program from 1986 through 1993. The artists traveled around North Carolina and performed at community colleges, non-profit organizations, and secondary schools and imparted what they knew about their type of music. The program also offered a great deal of down time to create music, pick with like-minded musicians, and perform for prestigious crowds. "There was fifty-eight visiting artists when I was in it," said Henry, and we "even lucked out and got to go to the Kennedy Center as a group."³⁶

The Queen family as a whole also started performing in public more often and for a wider audience. The Mountain Heritage Center sponsored a festival event every September beginning in 1974 called Mountain Heritage Day. In the early 1980s, the Queen family became regular participants and crowd favorites on the main stage. The entire family made an effort to return home for the event. Delbert and Henry lived on Johns Creek, Jeanette in Waynesville, Kathy in Dayton, Ohio, Albert in Corinth, New York, and Carolyn in Lyman, Washington, so it was difficult for them all to return, but the majority of the family was always there.

(They) wanted me to go over there and tell these people what Mountain Heritage Day meant to our family. Well, I said "My family all comes for Mountain Heritage Day," which they do. I said, "It's homecoming at home." But then I said, "This is a second homecoming to 'em down here." Because they all went to school there in Cullowhee. Then each fall when Mountain Heritage Day

³⁶ *Smokey Mountain News*, 12 July 2000; Henry Queen, interview by author, 3 March 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

comes, Albert and Kathy and then all my family here, we all get together down there and play and sing for 'em.³⁷

In 1984, the patriarch of the family, Claude Queen, passed away. After Claude's death, the reality that they were not always going to play together set in, and it was even more important for the family to get home for these "homecomings."

Two years after Claude's death, the Queen family started performing at Asheville's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. Their performance in Asheville marked a big step for the family. The Queens now received recognition on a regional level. However, when the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival moved from the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium to the Diana Wortham Theatre, Mary Jane decided that it was just too crowded to come and perform there year after year. But the family continued to perform for secondary school and collegiate audiences and at regional folk festivals.

In 1985, a man named Scott Eyerly wandered into the Mountain Heritage Center wanting to know about mountain music. As Jan Davidson always did, he referred the man to the Queen family. Davidson accompanied Eyerly up to Johns Creek, and the group chatted about mountain life and played mountain music all day. Eyerly explained that the Philip Morris Companies Incorporated commissioned him to write a musical theater piece to be performed by the Philip Morris Employee Chorale. Throughout the summer of 1985, Eyerly "traveled through Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina" and "visited Philip Morris plants in

³⁷ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

Richmond and Louisville, attended folk festivals, met Southern folk artists and performers, and collected tapes, notes, and folk items.”³⁸ Two years later Philip Morris flew Mary Jane Queen, her daughter, Jeanette, and Jan Davidson to the opening of the musical in New York City. The tobacco company picked them up from the airport in a limousine, provided accommodations at a nice hotel, and paid for their dinner at an up-scale restaurant. The cast included “Mrs. Queen, an elderly widow, Henry Queen, Mrs. Queen’s son, and Jan, the narrator.”³⁹ The musical emphasized the passing of a simple life in the mountains when the timber and coal industries moved in. It was an odd undertaking for a tobacco company. Henry and Jan speculated that Philip Morris had some money to burn and wanted to improve the company’s image. But Mary Jane Queen did not mind one way or the other why it happened. She loved the play and recalled her time in New York fondly.

In 1992, the Charlotte Folk Music Society invited Mary Jane Queen and her family to Central Piedmont Community College to perform a concert. By now, performing for listeners outside of the familiar confines of Johns Creek was nothing new to the Queens. But Mary Jane was particularly proud of the article that *The Charlotte Observer* wrote about her and Henry. The staff writer even made the three hour trip to Johns Creek to interview the Queens before the concert. The article appeared on the front page of the “Living” section with a picture of Henry and Mary Jane in the front yard of their home. *The Charlotte Observer* was kind enough to

³⁸ Scott Eyerly, *On Blue Mountain: An Original Musical* (New York: Philip Morris Companies Inc. 1987), 186.

³⁹ *Ibid.* xvi-xvii.

frame a copy of the picture and present it to the family as a gift. Yet even more important to Mary Jane Queen was her picture on the front page of the newspaper, appearing in the top left corner above a photograph of then President George H.W. Bush. “On up at the top of the paper they put my picture,” Mary Jane proudly stated, “well I said ‘I’m higher up than Mr. (Bush).’”⁴⁰

Beginning in the 1990s, the folk awards rolled in for the Queen family as recognition mounted across the eastern United States. In 1999, the Mountain Heritage Center honored the Queen family for their faithful appearances and cultural and historical preservation of southern Appalachia with the Mountain Heritage Award. In 2001, Mary Jane Queen received perhaps her most prized award, the North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award. The Brown-Hudson Award recognized “the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to the appreciation and continuation of North Carolina folklife.”⁴¹ The North Carolina Folklore Society presented this award at their annual meeting, held in Cullowhee on 20-21 April 2001.

The Queen’s popularity continued to soar and their exceptionalism as a musical family from southern Appalachia became even more extraordinary. On 31 March 2002, an article appeared in *The Boston Globe* on North Carolina’s musical roots. The staff writer traveled “west of Asheville, south of Sylva, east of Cullowhee,

⁴⁰ *The Charlotte Observer*, 20 August 1992; Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

⁴¹ Folklore in the Carolinas: The Newsletter of the North Carolina Folklore Society and the South Carolina Traditional Arts Network 23 (March 2001), 1.

past the wide bends of Caney Fork Creek” to feature the Queens in the article.⁴²

Finally, the Queen family’s musical tradition received national recognition. The admiration and recognition of their musical talent had started very locally, as close as their front porch, and had grown into a much larger venue.

In the summer of 2003, the 36th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival invited the Queen family to perform. Recognized nationally and internationally as the archetypal upper echelon folk festival, there was no greater honor for a folk musician than to be invited to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. But for the first time in her life, Mary Jane Queen suffered a serious health ailment, and the family was unable to make the trip to Washington, DC. The thought of performing without their mother never crossed the minds of Mary Jane’s children. The Queen’s music served a familial function that kept everyone close. If their mother could not perform, neither would the Queen children.

Even while the Queen family gained national recognition, they still took visitors at their home on Johns Creek. Perhaps the best demonstration of the humble nature and extraordinary musical tradition displayed by the Queens was the story of the movie *Songcatcher*. Set around the 1900s, the 2001 film is the fictional account of the “discovery” of Scots-Irish ballads in the southern Appalachian region, much like those Francis J. Child collected in Great Britain. The idea for the movie was the brainchild of Maggie Greenwald, the film’s director. Greenwald first got the idea

⁴² *The Boston Globe*, 31 March 2002.

when she and a companion visited Mary Jane Queen in the late 1990s to talk about mountain music.

Henry and I was here and went out on the, it was warm weather; we went out on the porch and was sitting out there. So Maggie and David both had asked us all kinds of questions, you know. And done an interview kind of like we're doing here now. And she wrote all of this down. Well, and it was about a year I guess before I heard from them again. And she said they was coming back to Cullowhee and could they come back up here. And I said, "Why certainly." Well, they came back and she said that, she said, "Well, you inspired me so much when I was here the other time," she said, "I went home and I wrote a play." She put it as a play then. Well, I said, "Well, I'm glad I helped you out some." Well she said, "If it ever amounts to anything, if it goes as a play," or whatever, well I didn't know they was going to have a movie made out of it, you know. Well then it was about three years before I heard from her anymore. She said that they was gonna try for a movie. And she said, "If it works out," she said, "I'm a gonna have you's and Henry's name put on it because," she said, "You and Henry was the ones that inspired me to write all of this."⁴³

At the filming process, Greenwald asked Henry to come on location to film a close-up of his hands playing the banjo. Partly out of modesty, Henry refused the opportunity. When Mary Jane and Jeanette visited the filming, Greenwald was "delighted" that they were able to meet all the cast and crew. Mary Jane and Henry spoke of the entire experience in glowing terms.

The Queen's importance in mountain music was not just local or even regional. Folklorists, historians and mountain music aficionados recognized the Queen family as an important piece to the mosaic that made up southern Appalachian musical communities. But the Queen's music was not only limited to the east. Just

⁴³ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

as musicians from other parts of southern Appalachia migrated to Caney Fork in the 1920s to work for Blackwood Lumber Company, and like Junior, Albert, and Henry Queen found and cultivated musical communities in New Jersey and New York, other family members followed a larger population shift and migrated from western North Carolina to the Pacific Northwest to work in the booming logging industry in Washington. The Queens that moved westward carried their family's musical tradition with them and created a mountain music community among the lush forests of Washington, three thousand miles from Johns Creek.

Chapter Two

“Anyone Here From Jackson County?”: Mountain Music Migration and the Darrington Bluegrass Festival

In July 1977, Darrington, Washington, a community on the western slope of the northern Cascade Mountains held its first bluegrass festival. Although the residents of this struggling logging town had played bluegrass and mountain music for several decades, a large-scale festival was not organized until the late 1970s. Bluegrass festivals that popped up outside the American South were not unusual occurrences during the 1970s. After all, the biggest bluegrass festival to date, in terms of both attendance and notoriety of performers, began in 1974 in the ski resort community of Telluride, Colorado. The bluegrass festival in Darrington was exceptional for other reasons. With the exception of a few headlining acts, the majority of the performers on stage in Darrington were and continue to be residents of Washington. Yet when many of the bands, in their southern mountain accents, sing of “home,” they are often referring to the gently sloping mountains of southern Appalachia, not the jagged peaks of the northern Cascades.

In 1977, the first annual Darrington Bluegrass Festival was created predominantly by migrants from western North Carolina who settled in the logging communities of the Upper Skagit River Basin in Washington during the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1950, migrants to this area of the Pacific

Northwest consisted of more people from southwestern North Carolina than from any other state.¹ Once settled, most migrants continued their previous occupations as either farmers or loggers. In an era when Americans moved in record number and regions began to become less distinctive, North Carolinians brought important social and cultural practices with them to the Pacific Northwest and kept many of their native traditions alive. The Queen family and other western North Carolinians played a significant role in bringing cultural practices like southern Appalachian music to the communities of the Pacific Northwest. Largely because of the increased number of North Carolinians migrating to Washington between 1940 and 1960 and the tendency for those migrants to settle in areas already inhabited by North Carolinians, mountain musical communities traveled intact to the Skagit River Valley. Additionally, North Carolina migrants not only sustained their musical traditions in Washington, they also built and cultivated music communities in their new surroundings. These new musical communities drew from Appalachian mountain music and from popular bluegrass and country music. Since the beginning of the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, residents of Washington credit migrants from North Carolina with establishing significant mountain music communities in the Pacific Northwest.

In the years following World War II, Americans were on the move like never before. Industry boomed, individuals moved to urban areas for better employment opportunities, families relocated to suburbs, and thanks to the GI Bill, college enrollment increased. Whether it was laborers moving to industrial centers to work in

¹ Woodrow Rexford Clevinger, "The Western Washington Cascades: A Study of Migration and Mountain Settlement" (Ph. D. diss., University of Washington, 1955), 64.

the war industry, southern African-Americans migrating to northern urban centers like Chicago, or even wanderers like Jack Kerouac and the Beats hitchhiking to Denver or San Francisco, Americans relocated in record number during this time period.

Southerners made up a large proportion of people on the move. "Because agricultural conditions continued to deteriorate while opportunities abounded in the war industries," points out historian Neil Fligstein, "black and white migration out of the rural South increased."² Residents of southern Appalachia were among the many demographic groups from the South that migrated during the Great Migration. In overwhelming number, people from Appalachia moved to northern and midwestern urban centers like Chicago or Cincinnati. In the decade between 1940 and 1950, the southern Appalachian region lost 13% of its population to out-migration. In the following decade, Appalachia's population decreased by another 19% for the same reason. In North Carolina alone, 148,000 people migrated out of the state between 1940 and 1960, resulting in a net loss of 13% of the state population.³ Appalachian scholar Phillip J. Obermiller's research on "urban Appalachians" uncovered many common trends among former residents of the region who migrated *en masse* to industrial centers like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. Once out-migrants settled into urban areas in the north or mid-west, they tended to keep many of their native cultural

² Neil Fligstein, *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South, 1900-1950* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 164.

³ James S. Brown and George A. Hillary, Jr., "The Great Migration, 1940-1960" in *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* ed. by Thomas R. Ford (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), 59.

practices like manner of speech and cuisine. Recent Appalachian migrants to these cities also tended to reside in communities made up of other native Appalachians.⁴

Rural to urban patterns of migration dominated the study of southern mountain population shifts. Often overlooked aspects of migration during the 1940s and 1950s were Appalachians who migrated to relatively rural areas in large number. During that time, numerous people from the southern Appalachian mountains migrated to the Pacific Northwest. Many people in the southern Appalachians relied on the timber industry for employment. Most out-migrants traveled to Washington when the bulk of the timber industry shifted from southern Appalachia. When timber began to thin out in the eastern mountains, logging companies commenced to look elsewhere for resources. The lush forests of Oregon and Washington, where a portion of the timber industry was already established, became the center of operations for many companies. Economist Charles F. Mueller attributes “outmigration from states to be related to economic and amenity attributes.”⁵ In other words, better economic opportunities elsewhere often dictated the decision to migrate to another region. In North Carolina, this meant that many people from the counties of the western edge of the state including Jackson County left with the logging companies, settled west of the Cascade Mountains along the Sauk River and Skagit River valleys in Washington. Natives of western North Carolina migrated in such significant numbers that whole

⁴ Kathryn M. Borman and Phillip J. Obermiller, eds. *From Mountains to Metropolis: Appalachian Migrants in American Cities* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1994), xviii.

⁵ Charles F. Mueller, *The Economics of Labor Migration: A Behavioral Analysis* (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 27.

communities of North Carolinians sprouted up along these two rivers. North Carolinians became one of the largest groups of emigrants in towns like Sedro Woolley, Lyman, Hamilton, and Concrete along the Skagit River in Skagit County and Darrington on the Sauk River in Snohomish County. Termed “tarheels” by their neighbors in Washington, these new migrants soon came to dominate these towns in terms of population.⁶

In a 1971 article in the *Tacoma (WA) News Tribune* entitled “Carolina Moon Shines on Darrington,” the author of the article strolled into the Pioneer Tavern in Darrington and confidently posed the question, “Anyone here from Jackson County, N.C.?” Half the patrons at the bar and the owner, Ray Buchanan, nodded their heads. The article claimed that about 85% of the population in and around Darrington had ties to North Carolina, specifically Jackson County. Even the Darrington Chief of Police, Kenneth Bryson, came from Sylva, North Carolina. “Back in Sylva,” added a young tarheel transplant, “he was the first guy who locked me up in jail.”⁷

Tarheels began coming to the Pacific Northwest in large number as early as 1900. Maude Cannon of Dillsboro, North Carolina moved to Skagit County in the early part of the century and married Motz Hamilton in 1905. Motz was the son of William

⁶ The origin of the term “tarheel” as an epithet for residents of North Carolina is uncertain. “Tarheel” dates at least as far back as the Civil War. See Michael W. Taylor, *Tar Heels: How North Carolinians Got Their Name* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Division of Archives and History North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1999), 1-18. Emigrants to Washington often called themselves “tarheels” and the name stuck. The term can also be written as “tar heel.” It is typically written as one word in Washington and two words in North Carolina.

⁷ *Tacoma News Tribune*, 6 June 1971.

Hamilton, the founder of the town of Hamilton, Washington.⁸ In 1912, Avery and Octavia Bryson came to Hamilton from Cullowhee. The Brysons eventually moved to the Darrington area where they could farm when Avery was off from his seasonal employment with the timber industry.⁹ Other tarheels followed and settled along the Skagit River communities. Most of the early migrants came to Lyman or Hamilton, but as roads improved and logging and other employment opportunities developed elsewhere, tarheels also began to populate Concrete, Darrington, and Sedro-Woolley. By the 1940s, tarheels literally dominated the demography in these areas.

In his 1955 study on migration into western Washington, geographer Woodrow Rexford Clevinger documented the huge number of North Carolinians in and around Darrington and the Skagit River. Terming North Carolinians a “local colony” and calling the area “Tarheel Country,” Clevinger acknowledged that not only did tarheels dominate the region, but that these migrants also comprised the majority of the logging industry’s labor force as well.¹⁰ Promised jobs in the logging industry were the biggest lure for tarheels who came to the Sauk and Skagit valleys.

⁸ *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 28 November 1993. In this article, journalist John Parris incorrectly states that Motz Hamilton, not William, was the founder of Hamilton, Washington. Motz was William’s second son, born in 1875, and worked in logging camps all his life. For further explanation of the founding of the town of Hamilton, Washington, see Noel V. Bourasaw, *Skagit River Journal of History and Folklore*, “History of Hamilton on the Skagit river,” [online]; Internet; available from <http://www.stumpranchonline.com/skagitjournal/Upriver/Uto-Conc/Hamilton01-TownIntro.html>; last accessed 5 April 2004.

⁹ Elizabeth S. Poehlman, *Darrington: Mining Town/Timber Town* (Shoreline, Washington: Gold Hill Press, 1979), 12.

¹⁰ Clevinger, “The Western Washington Cascades,” 213.

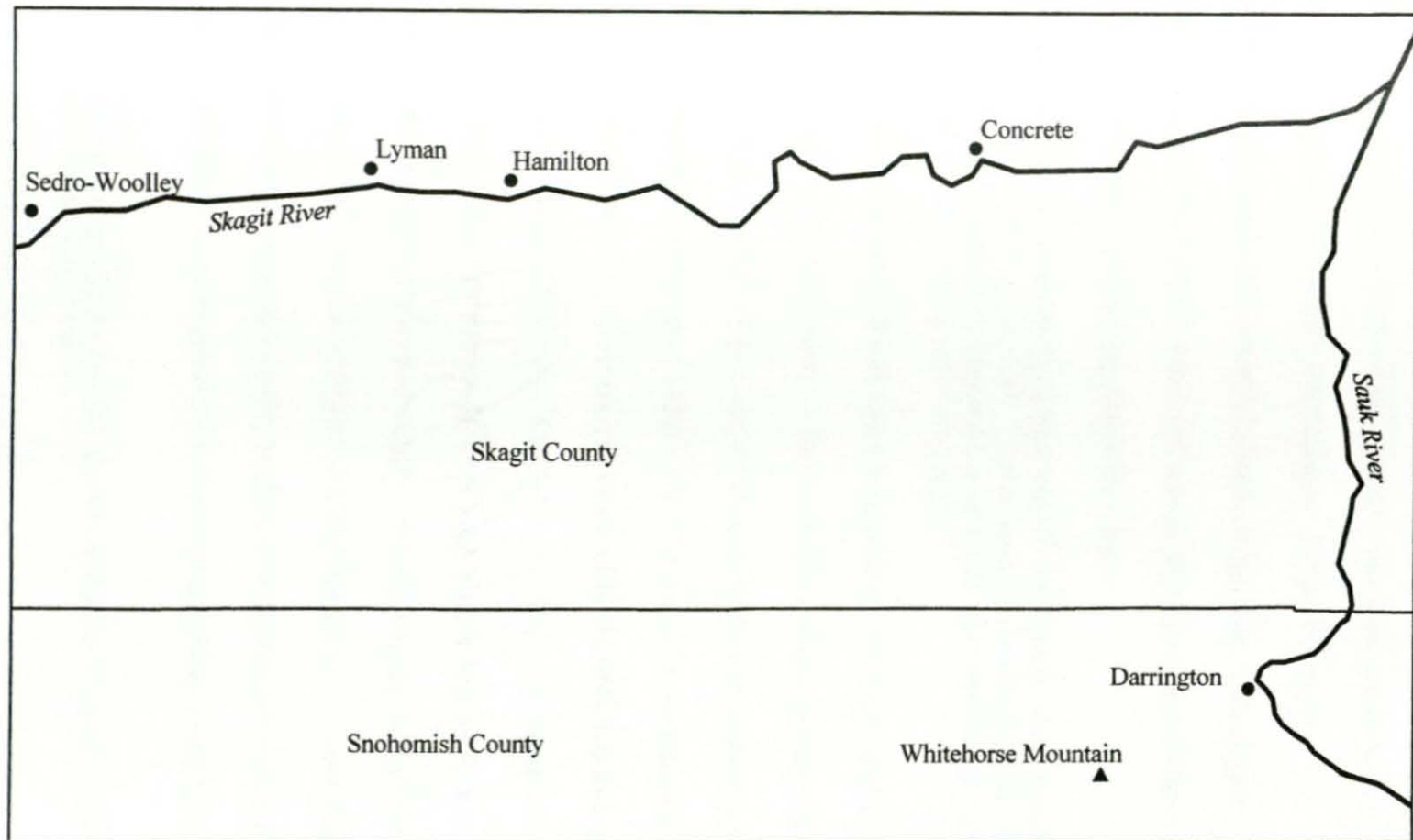


Fig. 4. Skagit and Sauk River Valleys

Migrating in order to gain better employment was a pronounced trend over the entire United States. Many people went into new professions such as auto manufacturing in booming urban centers. Tarheels however, overwhelmingly continued to work for timber companies. "I had to quit school and go to work," said Louie Ashe, a longtime Darrington resident and tarheel transplant from Cullowhee, North Carolina.

Wasn't much work back then, you know? So I came west. I had two uncles that lived here in town. I came west, me and my brother, and my brother stayed for a couple years and then went back home, and I stayed out here. Best move I ever made.¹¹

Family and friends in Washington communicated through letters with those people that stayed in North Carolina. The current availability of jobs in the logging camps was a frequent topic. Beginning in the mid-1940s and continuing for almost a decade, Washington resident and tarheel G.W. Clayton wrote monthly letters to the *Sylva (NC) Herald and Ruralite* to keep folks in western North Carolina updated with happenings in the Pacific Northwest. Tarheels in the Sauk and Skagit valleys subscribed to the weekly Sylva newspaper to keep up with the news from North Carolina and to simply be reminded of home. "Everytime (sic) we get our paper," wrote Clayton in 1947, "we just sit down and read it through."¹² Obviously, tarheels in Washington looked forward to receiving their newspaper from back home. Clayton reciprocated the satisfaction he received by providing a way for family and

¹¹ Louie Ashe, interview by author, 20 July 2003, Darrington, Washington, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

¹² *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 9 January 1947.

friends in North Carolina to feel a little closer to their loved ones thousands of miles away and giving them information about job opportunities in the Pacific Northwest.

Under the heading, "Darrington, Wash. News," Clayton's letters were often mundane and brief. Births, deaths, and holidays were popular topics. In those years, Darrington was a relatively booming logging town and Clayton was obviously proud of his new surroundings. "It is rumored that the state is putting out a pamphlet on Darrington being the most prosperous town of its size in the state," wrote Clayton. "Sounds good to us," he added.¹³

In winter, the letters described the enormous amount of snowfall that Darrington received. Darrington and its residents were no strangers to harsh winter weather. Clayton often bragged that not even Jackson County residents would know what to do in a typical Darrington snowstorm. With the winter weather usually came the closing of logging camps for the season. In 1947, all the sawmills and a shingle mill had to close operations due to twenty-three inches of snowfall.¹⁴ "So if you plan to come out here," advised Clayton, "you might get work and you might not."¹⁵ Clayton knew that many tarheels ventured to the Pacific Northwest only for seasonal work and proclaimed that sometimes they were not convinced to stay until their

¹³ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 16 January 1947.

¹⁴ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 20 February 1947.

¹⁵ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 12 January 1950.

seventh or eighth trip to the Skagit valley.¹⁶ As soon as the snow melted, Clayton's letters to the *Sylva Herald and Ruralite* took a different tone altogether.

There seems to be plenty of jobs here yet. I have never seen so much logging as there is going on now. It must be the biggest log boom the West has ever seen, and there is no let up in sight. New men come in here every week and go to work for \$11.80 per 8-hour day.¹⁷

The biggest boon for the logging industry and for tarheels in the Skagit valley came during the military conflict in Korea. In August of 1950, G.W. Clayton was almost ecstatic in his letter to the *Sylva* newspaper: "(t)he war has put this part of the country in a real boom," wrote Clayton. He continued, "we will lose some of the log men" to the war effort. "We do know, however," Clayton insisted, "that we are going to log and BACK OUR BOYS 100 percent against old Joe Stalin."¹⁸ During the late 1940s and early 1950s, many North Carolinians took advantage of the windfall the Korean conflict created in the logging industry and moved permanently to Washington.

One significant consequence of mass movement in the middle of the century was the sharing of cultural practices and behavior. In Skagit and Snohomish counties, music best demonstrated that cultural dissemination. Many religious songs traveled with tarheels to Washington. Elizabeth S. Poehlman, author of *Darrington: Mining Town / Timber Town*, credits emigrant tarheels with bringing shaped note singing and singing conventions to the region. "Once the church [Darrington First

¹⁶ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 6 February 1947.

¹⁷ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 12 June 1947.

¹⁸ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 17 August 1950.

Baptist] even hired a singing teacher from Franklin, North Carolina,” observed Poehlman, “to come for three or four weeks of workshops in the traditional music of the South.”¹⁹ Singing conventions usually brought choirs and congregations together from several different churches in the area for one Sunday out of each month. The singing conventions were important to G.W. Clayton as well. He must have been writing about the singing teacher from Franklin when he stated “if we could only get that singing leader we have been writing about.” Clayton continued, “you folks back home know how we can sing but we need someone to lead us.”²⁰ The singing conventions served as a major social event for most of the tarheels in the Skagit and Sauk valleys. Poehlman proclaimed that “choirs prepared faithfully for singing conventions, often meeting twice a week.”²¹ After one particular singing convention, Clayton wrote to the Sylva newspaper proclaiming that tarheels came from all over the state to participate in the festivities. “About 800 people with 180 cars were here,” Clayton wrote with exuberance, “and I believe half of them were Tarheels.”²² Similarly, Albert Blanton from Sylva was instrumental in bringing the “fifth Sunday” with him to Washington. When a month contains five Sundays, people gather at a designated church for a gospel singing convention. The “fifth Sundays” are a continuation of southern Appalachian culture. Many families and church

¹⁹ Poehlman, *Darrington*, 122.

²⁰ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 6 March 1947.

²¹ Poehlman, *Darrington*, 122.

²² *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 24 April 1947.

congregations have “fifth Sundays” even now in Jackson County. Usually, “fifth Sundays” consisted of sermons, music, and food.²³

Tarheels’ religious music was not the only sound brought to Skagit and Snohomish counties. Southerners, especially North Carolinians, introduced mountain music to the region. Music was an essential part of the tarheel life in Washington. Logging camps dominated by tarheels were also dominated by the presence of stringed musical instruments. Mamie Mumford, a native of Washington, followed her father to lumber camps and knew the logging songs well. “When they were in the bunkhouse,” said Mumford, speaking of the loggers, “you could hear them playing and singing.” “There would usually be somebody,” Mumford added, “that would have a violin that could play.”²⁴ Outside of the logging camps, neighbors often visited each other and would have “pickin” sessions in each others living rooms. Earl and Grover Jones and Roy Morgan were three such tarheel musicians who gathered every week to entertain each other with music. Particularly in the long winters, bluegrass music became a way to pass away the hours when most people were out of work for the season. In Darrington in the 1950s and 1960s, the bluegrass jam sessions at Earl Jones’ house grew too large for his living room and moved to the community center and eventually to the larger high school auditorium. People began to joke that tarheels should start their own Grand Ole Opry, sentiments that led to the

²³ Ernest Queen, interview by author, 12 February 2004, telephone interview, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

²⁴ Mamie Mumford, interview by Barbara Heacock (January 13, 1978). *Skagit County Oral History Preservation Project*, no. RIII 139: 14-15, transcript, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

first annual Darrington Bluegrass Festival in 1977. What had started as a jam session among three neighbors grew into one of the most popular bluegrass festivals in the Pacific Northwest. Each year, the Darrington Bluegrass Festival draws sell-out crowds from all over Washington, Oregon, Canada, and even as far away as North Carolina. Tarheels, including members of the Queen family, also established a similar festival called the Loggerodeo in Sedro Woolley. That particular summer festival combines bluegrass music, rodeo, and logging competitions. Even today, the majority of the musical performers at both festivals have ties to western North Carolina.

In large part, these festivals were a response to a growing need for economic development in these communities. Much like Asheville's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, the Darrington Bluegrass Festival began as part traditional event, part moneymaking endeavor. Started by Bascom Lamar Lunsford in 1928, the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival began as a musical component to Asheville's Rhododendron Festival. Based largely on tourism and real estate promotional efforts, the Rhododendron Festival was a gaudy mixture of activities that looked out of place in the mountain town of Asheville. The Rhododendron Festival eventually was discontinued, but the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival survived. Folklorist David Whisnant saw Lunsford's festival as a struggle "between the old rural, traditional, community and family-based culture and the emerging urban, industrial, media-

dominated mass culture that swept through the mountains.”²⁵ In addition, Whisnant pointed out that the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was, in many ways, an extension of Lunsford’s persona. “In the long run,” Whisnant stated, the festival “became almost solely the product of his own consciousness, desires, and view of mountain culture.” Thus, Lunsford’s festival became a wholesome, family atmosphere.²⁶

The Darrington Bluegrass Festival began much like Asheville’s festival. When revenues from the timber industry declined, Darrington was forced to look elsewhere for industry. Like so many communities in western North Carolina, Darrington turned to tourism. In part, the Darrington Bluegrass Festival was meant to prime the towns’ failing economic pump. Similarly, if the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was a projection of Lunsford’s vision, the bluegrass festival in Darrington reflected much of the people who helped create it. A wholesome family atmosphere that sought to balance old traditions with new directions in bluegrass music enveloped the Darrington Bluegrass Festival. Bands ranged from “traditional” mountain musical groups who performed songs they learned growing up in the hills of southern Appalachia, gospel groups who performed tunes frequently heard in southern churches, and bluegrass bands who are more influenced by Bill Monroe and less by what their parents sang to them when they were small. Of course many musicians at

²⁵ David E. Whisnant, “Finding the Way Between the Old and the New: The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Work as a Citizen,” *Appalachian Journal* 7 (Autumn 1979): 136.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

the festival, like Mary Jane Queen's relatives, combined all of these styles to create something rooted in tradition, yet very contemporary. The Darrington Bluegrass Festival also grew from a deep sense of identity among tarheels and the culture they brought to the region.

In July 1979, a documentary chronicling Darrington's "colorful cultural heritage" aired on KCTS Seattle, a statewide public television channel. The documentary, entitled "Tarheels of the Northwest," coincided with the third annual Darrington Bluegrass Festival and largely focused on tarheels and their lives in Darrington. Logging, quilting, rodeo, religion, and music accounted for the majority of the film. The documentary's producer, Jean Walkinshaw, chose to concentrate the bulk of her work on tarheel transplant O.C. Helton. Helton, the leader of a local bluegrass band called the "Whitehorse Mountaineers," narrated almost the entire video. Other individuals in the film included other North Carolinians and musicians like Gladys Lewis and members of Helton's "Whitehorse Mountaineers," Bob Cope and Roy Morgan. "All the boys were raised right together," explains Helton, "in and around Sylva, North Carolina." Helton declares that he had his first experience with performing mountain music at five years of age. "I started out playing jew's harp with my dad at the old folk's festival in Asheville, North Carolina," stated Helton. The festival to which Helton referred was probably Lunsford's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. The video depicted music as a way to keep North Carolinians together in their free time. At the time of the video, Morgan worked for the timber industry, Cope built and repaired musical instruments, and Helton was self-employed doing

manual labor.²⁷ “Tarheels of the Northwest” clearly credited North Carolinians with bringing southern Appalachian mountain music to the Pacific Northwest.

In the Sauk and Skagit valleys, tarheels were known as the cultural purveyors of bluegrass music. However, a proclivity for making music was not the only label that tarheels brought with them to the Pacific Northwest. Stereotypes about native North Carolinians abounded in Washington. Some of the stereotypes were not very harmful. Tarheels were known across the state to be tremendous loggers, not just because they dominated the timber business by sheer numbers, but also for their efficiency and knowledge of the industry. Other labels were more offensive. Usually tarheels were referred to as three types of people: musicians, loggers, or moonshiners. The process of making illegal alcohol traveled with the emigrants, and tarheels became infamous, especially near logging camps, for brewing “good old mountain dew.”²⁸

The documentary “Tarheels of the Northwest” portrayed many of these stereotypes. Besides scenes of logging and music making, the video also depicted tarheels drinking moonshine. During a segment of the documentary that focused on Helton’s musical group, members of the band passed around a bottle labeled “Lemon Juice” during a practice session. The bottle presumably contained moonshine. The video also made public the grievances of a couple from Seattle who had recently

²⁷ *Tarheels in the Northwest*, pro. and dir. Jean Walkinshaw, 45 mins., Washington Public Television, 1979, videocassette.

²⁸ A popular euphemism for moonshine in the southern Appalachians, “mountain dew” is also the title of a mountain song performed by the Queen family in North Carolina.

moved to Darrington to open a bar. The couple, Sandy and Richard Bertram, declared that tarheels were extremely clannish and that their bar had been boycotted because they were not southerners. Lastly, another stereotype of southern Appalachian people illustrated in "Tarheels of the Northwest" was that of racism. In a voice-over that seemed to be completely out of context from the scene, Gladys Lewis and O.C. Helton proclaimed that African-Americans were not welcome in Darrington. "Now in Darrington," stated Helton, "we don't have any colored people living here." Helton continued, "I would advise them not to" live in Darrington. "Really there's nothing for Negroes to do up here except work in the woods," added Lewis, "and there's too many tarheels working in the woods."²⁹

Because of scenes that depicted stereotypical and negative images of the inhabitants of Darrington, the documentary became a hot topic of debate in the area. In an article in the *Everett (WA) Herald* entitled "Backwoods Hillbillies?," many of the townspeople voiced their displeasure that the documentary portrayed only a select few and that those few were depicted as racist moonshiners. Several individuals and businesses in Darrington signed a letter of complaint and sent it to the public television station. "Of all the fine and good things they could have said about the people in this community," said Darrington School Board member Ann Rankin, "it centered on the worst aspects." Walkinshaw defended her documentary, proclaiming that the beautiful scenes and wonderful music more than made up for the negative aspects. Yet Walkinshaw added that she was offended by the amount of racism she

²⁹ *Tarheels in the Northwest*, pro. and dir. Jean Walkinshaw, 45 mins., Washington Public Television, 1979, videocassette.

found in Darrington. "I have so much more damaging material on tape that we didn't use because it would jeopardize them," stated Walkinshaw.³⁰

To some extent, stereotypes existed because tarheels tended to reside near one another and often isolated themselves from other Washingtonians. Appalachian scholar William W. Philliber found that in urban centers Appalachians tended to be isolated from other demographic groups, breeding contempt by outsiders. In a survey taken in the 1950s in Detroit, respondents were asked to identify the most undesirable people to have as neighbors. Thirteen percent answered "Negroes," while twenty-one percent answered "hillbillies." "Gangsters and criminals" were the only group less desirable than Appalachians.³¹ This was an extreme case, but in many ways the rhetoric is the same in the Pacific Northwest. In the case of Sandy and Richard Bertram in Darrington, the rhetoric was reversed. Inside tarheel communities, outsiders were looked upon as undesirables. In other communities, tarheels had reputations as rough people. In 1979, the *Sedro Woolley (WA) Courier-Times* carried an article spelling out the level of difficulty African-Americans experienced living in Skagit County. The article stated that verbal and physical threats from "rednecks" and people with "a southern accent" were everyday occurrences for African Americans in the area. Conversely, not all outsiders view tarheels as "rednecks." In a 1977 interview, native Washingtonian and Sedro Woolley resident Orval Fox, spoke highly of the tarheels he encountered along the Skagit River valley. "Well, it

³⁰ *Everett Herald*, 21 July 1979.

³¹ William W. Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy, eds. *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 24.

(Lyman) isn't as rough as people think it is," stated Fox, "I got some very good friends among them."³² However, despite stereotypes, it could be argued that tarheels encountered a much easier transition from western North Carolina to Washington than other migrants experienced. The rural to rural model of migration, the continuity of cultural practices, constant communication with family and friends in North Carolina, and the sheer number of tarheels in the Pacific Northwest allowed for a smooth transition.

The tumult over the "Tarheels in the Northwest" documentary eventually subsided and mountain music along the Skagit and Sauk rivers thrived. After the first Darrington Bluegrass Festival in 1977, the community's population stayed much the same. The influx of tarheels waned, the population plateaued, and it seemed as if no one moved in or out of the area. Yet distinctly tarheel qualities endured in Darrington. A newcomer to the area would notice similarities in terrain between southern Appalachia and the northern Cascades. Overall, the mountains in Washington were more jagged and magnificent than the Appalachians. Grandiose Whitehorse Mountain, snow-capped year-round and rising 6,000 feet above Darrington's main street, provided the town with a beautiful backdrop. The other hills and mountains that surround Whitehorse were marked with the deep cuts of the timber industry, giving them a common characteristic with many of the mountains in

³² Orval A. Fox, interview by Barbara Heacock (October 14, 1977). *Skagit County Oral History Preservation Project*, no. RIII 93: 11, transcript, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

western North Carolina. The towns of Darrington, Concrete, Lyman, and Hamilton were nearly desolate places that, at first glance, contained only churches and mills.

The Queen family and other North Carolinians felt at home in Darrington and the surrounding communities along the Skagit River. Ernest Queen, Mary Jane Queen's nephew, first moved to Washington from Johns Creek in 1955. At the age of twenty-three, Queen came to find employment in the timber industry. He worked his way through the industry and eventually made enough money to buy a ranch and go into the cattle business. Working in logging allowed Queen to find kindred spirits who liked to play mountain music too. Aside from the festivals, musicians also started local bluegrass associations and monthly jam sessions around the Pacific Northwest, including one in Queen's hometown of Sedro Woolley. He became the head of the Skagit Bluegrass and Country Music Association and started a jam session on the first Sunday of every month in Cascade Middle School in Sedro Woolley.

Yea, the one in Sedro Woolley. The Skagit Bluegrass and Country Music, yea, I was one of the ones. There was five of us that started it. And it's been going ever since. It's been going about, I think about, ever since about '82 or '83, something like that.³³

Ernest Queen also made the fifty-mile trek from Sedro Woolley to Darrington to participate in the jam sessions held the second Sunday of every month in the Darrington Community Center. Queen and other tarheels participated in gospel singing around the Skagit Valley as well. North Carolinians like Albert Blanton,

³³ Ernest Queen, interview by author, 12 February 2004, telephone interview, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

another prominent tarheel musician, started an event where every so often, groups traveled around to different churches in the area and shared gospel performances. Carolyn, Mary Jane Queen's daughter and Ernest's cousin, resided in Lyman, Washington and participated in these gospel music gatherings. Ernest and Carolyn were often asked to sing gospel songs at funerals, especially those of tarheels.

Ernest Queen took a leadership role in Washington's bluegrass and mountain music scene partly because of his notoriety as a good musician and all-around genial disposition. But Queen also viewed himself as a preserver of mountain music. Ernest's father played banjo and his mother played banjo and sang. Queen literally learned songs at the knees of his aunts and uncles too. Mary Jane Queen remembers a young Ernest coming to her house for a lesson.

So Ernest is a good musicianer. Let me think, one of his daughters told me, when he was just a young boy, he was learning the guitar. And back then I could play the guitar, but then my hand got something wrong with it. So I can't play it anymore. You have to stretch your fingers, so I can't do that, to catch all the chords. And, but he was down here and he asked me to show him how to play something. I don't remember now what it was. And I got the guitar and I played and sung whatever it was that he wanted me to play and sing. So anyway, one of his daughters was telling me not long ago that he still played the song that I showed him how to play and that's been many, many years ago.³⁴

Ernest's grandfather also cultivated a legacy of mountain music that Ernest Queen wanted to carry on.

I just got started in it and I've liked it all my life. And you know, we grew up playing, I suppose aunt Mary Jane told ya. At grandpa's, we used to go make a lot of music with them, you know, when we was

³⁴ Mary Jane Queen, interview by author, 23 February 2003, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

just young. Matter of fact, that's how I learned. I just watched them and started to learn. I never did take no lessons. But that's just the way I learned it.

I know my grandpa used to tell me about playing for dances and whatever else when he was young. He said he'd play all night long and never play the same tune twice (laughter). They must've had quite a lot of songs. I know a lot of songs myself. But I never learned as many of the old songs, like aunt Mary Jane did. She knows a lot of the old stuff, you know, a lot of the real old stuff. I know some of it, but not as much as she does.³⁵

Queen followed in the musical footsteps of his family and brought mountain music out to the Pacific Northwest. Although Queen believed that his music was something very modern, it was also sourced from deeply rooted cultural traditions.

We used to play music, "mountain music," what we called "mountain music" back in those days. Bill Monroe, he just named it bluegrass. But it's the same music back in the mountain valleys. In the evenings you'd sit on the porch and entertain yourself and relax with the fiddle or guitar or banjo. And it just kept growing and growing into what it is today.³⁶

Queen's role in mountain music eventually made him the president of the Skagit Bluegrass and Country Music Association in Sedro-Woolley. Queen and his bluegrass band, *Queens Bluegrass* were also members of the larger Washington Bluegrass Association that sponsored bluegrass festivals and jam sessions all over the Pacific Northwest. Member bands ranged from eastern Washington, to Port Angeles on the Olympic Peninsula, to British Columbia, Canada. Across the Pacific Northwest, tarheels were largely credited with bringing mountain music to the region

³⁵ Ernest Queen, interview by author, 12 February 2004, telephone interview, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

³⁶ Ernest Queen, interview by author, 20 July 2003, Darrington, Washington, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

and building a cohesive network of musicians and shared musical communities that would make ardent bluegrass supporters in North Carolina jealous.

Sid Simmons, a guitar player and member of *Queens Bluegrass* for sixteen years, came out to Clear Lake, Washington (Skagit County) from Avery County, North Carolina in 1944. Much like Henry Queen back in North Carolina, Simmons remembers his first introductions and influences to country and bluegrass music. As a young boy, Simmons would stay up late to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on the stereo. “You’d get you an old guitar,” remembered Simmons, “and listen to that and you’d get to where you’d want to do some of that stuff and you start picking.”³⁷ For Simmons, the music he heard on his stereo naturally blended with the church hymns he sung on Sunday morning. Often, friends and family would sit on their front porch and pick and sing both types of songs. Simmons also believes that tarheels introduced mountain music to the region.

Yea, it all came out with us. All the bluegrass, all that’s in Washington state anyway, came out with us. Did you read how this originated, this bluegrass festival? They just brought their music out with them. And then I guess Ralph Stanley really brought it back just recently. (Inaudible) Bluegrass is really, really coming back. Well you can tell by looking over this crowd.³⁸

Over the years, Simmons ventured back to North Carolina to visit family and friends and participated in jam sessions near where he grew up. Simmons found similarities to the jam sessions in North Carolina to the ones in Washington.

³⁷ Sid Simmons, interview by author, 20 July 2003, Darrington, Washington, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

³⁸ Ibid.

They'd have a jam session, like they do here at the community center in town. I'd go over to that. I went over there twice, I think, when I was home and picked some with the guys. I used to know 'em years ago. Good pickers. That's about the only picking I did when I was home.³⁹

Simmons viewed himself as a cultural bearer of mountain music. But *Queens Bluegrass* was more than a "traditional" band. When they took the stage, the group wore matching vests and suits that were reminiscent of both Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys and old cowboy performers. As one festival attendee remarked to Simmons, "you guys look pretty spiffy in your Sunday clothes."⁴⁰ Through their music and their stage presence, *Queens Bluegrass* were comfortable conveying old Appalachian traditions, performing the songs of Bill Monroe, and blending both with something very new.

The final founding member of *Queens Bluegrass*, Louie Ashe, ventured out to Washington in 1944. Until he was 16, Ashe lived in an area of Jackson County near Cullowhee called "Little Canada." Quitting school in the sixth grade, Ashe worked in several different industries to earn money. Like many young men, Ashe eventually took to logging and worked in the timber industry when he came to Darrington. But Ashe also helped build the Glenville Dam, one of the most important structures in Jackson County. Beginning on 27 June 1940, laborers like Ashe worked at a break-neck pace to finish the project in just sixteen months. Ashe's job was to haul cement

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

bags the fifteen miles from Sylva to the dam site. “We got the contract for that for five cents a bag,” explained Ashe, “we could haul two hundred bags a load.”⁴¹

A thousand bags would come in by the car load and we had to work until we got it all off. Sometimes two car loads would come in and we had to work around the clock to get it off. We had no cart to roll it on. We’d walk from the car and carry it out one sack at a time and lay it down on the truck. Two hundred bags a truck. And we hired, at five cents a bag, we hired two guys to help us and bought all the gas to get up there and still made money.⁴²

By October of 1941, the Glenville-Thorpe Project was complete, providing electric power to the entire area and to ALCOA aluminum plant in Tennessee. Barely two months later, ALCOA was producing aluminum full time for the American forces in World War II.⁴³

Reminiscent of other tarheels, Ashe visited North Carolina often after his move to the Pacific Northwest. Like Ernest Queen, Ashe’s family connections in Cullowhee remain very strong. Louie’s brother, Berlin Ashe owned and operated the Cullowhee Café just below the campus of Western Carolina University.⁴⁴ In 1947, G.W. Clayton’s column in the *Sylva Herald* noted Berlin Ashe and his family visiting Darrington. Highlighting the importance of music in the area, Clayton added, “we

⁴¹ Louie Ashe, interview by author, 20 July 2003, Darrington, Washington, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Thorpe Plant turns 50: Middle-aged but still full of energy,” *Nantahala Powerline* (1992): 1-9.

⁴⁴ Still a popular spot for students, faculty and other community members on their lunch breaks, the Cullowhee Café is now owned by Louie’s nephew, Arnold Ashe.

hear he is a singer, too.”⁴⁵ Louie Ashe’s first recollections of listening to bluegrass music came from the crank phonograph that played 78 rpm records his family owned when he was very young. The first sound he heard drift out of the phonograph was the high tenor voice of Bill Monroe. By his own admission, Ashe’s first musical interests remained in country music. Bluegrass soon followed, and by the time he came to Darrington at 16, Ashe was playing bluegrass.

Yea, I played a little bit of country music, then I got into bluegrass. But I knew what bluegrass was. It was gnawing at me all the time, you know. There wasn’t any bluegrass pickers out here. I tell you, I played lap steel and then I traded that for a mandolin and I’ve been on that ever since.⁴⁶

For Ashe, playing the tunes of performers like Hank Williams made more sense to him in North Carolina than did playing mountain music, despite growing up in a community where mountain music was common. The influence of popular songs on the radio and phonograph proved to be a bigger influence on Ashe than did his neighbors. Ashe did not gravitate towards mountain music until he came to Washington. Ashe quickly took to the notion of playing mountain music despite his earlier desire to perform country music. This demonstrated the construction of perceptions about tarheels. Not all tarheels who moved to western Washington were mountain musicians, just like some were not loggers, but tarheels gained reputations as both. Yet Ashe perceived himself as a preserver of the musical traditions of North

⁴⁵ *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, 24 April 1947.

⁴⁶ Louie Ashe, interview by author, 20 July 2003, Darrington, Washington, tape recording, in author’s possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

Carolina. This raises interesting questions about what is “traditional” and what it means for tarheels in Washington to perform mountain music.

It has already been established that mountain music, even when Queen, Simmons, and Ashe were growing up in North Carolina, was not “traditional” in the classic sense. In its simplest terms, tradition refers to inherited customs and beliefs.⁴⁷ However, tradition, as anthropologists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin point out is an interpretive process and should not be positioned opposite modernity.⁴⁸ In other words, as historian Eric Hobsbawm surmises, tradition is as much invented as it is inherited. Additionally tradition can be invented by both practitioners and outsiders.⁴⁹ For tarheels living in Darrington, musicians and onlookers perceived *Queens Bluegrass* to have elements of mountain music traditions. There was a certain amount of irony involved when Queen, Simmons, and Ashe performed a southern Appalachian gospel song played in bluegrass style, all while donning cowboy garb on stage. All of these images came naturally to *Queens Bluegrass*. This demonstrated both their legacy of mountain music and their myriad of influences since arriving in Washington over fifty years ago.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.

⁴⁸ Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” *Journal of American Folklore* 97 (1984): 273; see also Charles L. Briggs, “The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the ‘Invention of Tradition,’” *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996): 435.

⁴⁹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

⁵⁰ For further explanation of the invention of tradition, cultural identity, and memory, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 375-406.

Perhaps tarheels continue to play mountain and bluegrass music because it provided an income or perhaps being harbingers of mountain music set them apart from other migrants. Maybe tarheels performed mountain music because it gave them a sense of place or carried on perceived notions of tradition. It was even possible that tarheels played mountain music because it was what they did best and picking with their neighbors gave them a sense of satisfaction. More than likely, it was all these reasons. Yet Ernest Queen, Sid Simmons, and Louie Ashe all understood where it was that they came from. To these men, and so many other tarheels, music was the way to stake a claim on the past and proclaim a certain amount of uniqueness in the present. Although the economics of performing bluegrass are certainly important, it was not the only factor to why they performed year after year. To be sure, all three men used the money they earned from bluegrass performances as a supplemental income when they came upon their retirement years. But more than just simple economics, the Queens were indicative of musical families from southwestern North Carolina who came to the Pacific Northwest and made incredible impacts in cultural and historical ways. Through mountain music, Ernest Queen and others like him created and sustained community on the other side of a nation from where they started. Ernest Queen's proclivity for playing mountain music was nurtured among family and friends in the Johns Creek community in western North Carolina. Years later, Queen continued his familial and regional legacy in the Pacific Northwest with some of those same people who were his friends and neighbors in North Carolina. At the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, when *Queens*

Bluegrass performed the bluegrass number “Carolina Mountain Home” and Ernest nostalgically sang the lyrics “I looked out my window and wondered if everything there looks the same,” everyone knew exactly what he meant.⁵¹

⁵¹ “Carolina Mountain Home” is a bluegrass song originally written by Len Wright and E.L. Scarborough. The tune was made popular by the Stanley Brothers and appeared on the *Queens Bluegrass* album *A Tribute to Brian Hoyle* by *Queens Bluegrass*.

Epilogue

The Circle Remains Unbroken

On the evening of 20 April 2001, the Jackson County branch of the Queen family performed on the campus of Western Carolina University. While Mary Jane sang, Henry picked, and Junior plucked, I stood in the back of the room and videotaped the entire event. It was the first of many performances by the Queens that I was to witness. Some audience members clogged to the rhythm, sang along, or clapped in time. I stood quietly in awe, a feeling inspired not just from their wonderful music but also from the sense of community that the Queens emanated. They laughed when one musician struck a wrong chord, smiled to each other during instrumental solos and to the audience when Mary Jane sang a jovial tune. Several regional musicians joined the Queens for the last song, the gospel standard "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." The circle, an object with no beginning and no end, seemed to me to be the perfect symbol to describe mountain music. The origins of mountain music are embedded too far in the past to trace. Ask any member of the Queen family how long they have been playing mountain music and they are likely to answer with a simple "forever."

Certainly since the earliest white settlement of Jackson County, the Queens and their extended family participated in many of the major events and experiences that shaped the emergence and maintenance of mountain music in southwestern North

Carolina. The musical history of the Queen and Prince families began much like that of any other musical family in southern Appalachia. Songs were shared on porches, in living rooms, at church, and social gatherings. These common, seemingly insignificant occurrences guaranteed the continuation of mountain music in the southern Appalachians. But rarely did a family gain recognition and respectability outside of their own community. That all changed for the Queens when locals began to spread the word to outsiders about the musical talents of the family.

Larger events like Mountain Heritage Day and Asheville's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival provided mountain musicians with a larger sense of community, assured the prolongation of cultural practices, and established southwestern North Carolina as an important region in the development of mountain music. The Queens were major players in these events. Yet despite their emergence as important transmitters of mountain music, the lives of the Queens have not changed much. Most of their food is still grown and canned on their property. Mary Jane and Henry still live in the house on Johns Creek that Henry's grandfather built. Only now, in addition to the old family photographs that adorn the walls, awards and certificates of appreciation for the Queens' contribution to Appalachian, indeed American, culture occupies equal space.

Despite being the inspiration for the movie *Songcatcher*, the Queens received no offer to perform on the soundtrack, or the album released after the soundtrack became popular, called *Songcatcher II: The Tradition that Inspired the Movie*. The first album included popular recording artists like Emmylou Harris and Gillian

Welch. In their own right, the artists attempt to perform the mountain songs as accurately as possible, but why not just include the actual Appalachian musicians who inspired the film? *Songcatcher II* included actual recordings from mountain musicians. However, the list of those artists included Doc Watson, Maybelle Carter, and Dock Boggs. No one denies these musicians' authenticity and contributions to mountain music, but all boasted national reputations and extensive recording contracts. Musicians like the Queens were left out of the final product.

Similarly, the movie never came to the local movie theater in Jackson County. Mary Jane Queen and her daughter drove to Asheville for the showing and had to pay the price of admission just like everyone else. As a gift, someone bought Mary Jane the *Songcatcher* movie poster. It sits without a frame, rolled up in the corner of her living room. But because of their humble nature and appreciation for simply being the inspiration for the movie, the Queens never spoke a word of antipathy about the film or the soundtracks. Judging from several conversations on the topic with Henry and Mary Jane, the thought that they somehow might deserve more never even crossed their minds. They left the assertion that they went under-recognized for their role in the film up to academics like me.

The Queens seemed content not to be included on the nationally distributed soundtrack. So if not for the recognition, why do they continue to play mountain music? The best answer is to let Mary Jane (M) and Henry (H) speak for themselves.

H I like sharing it, you know, or I just love it because...

M Well, I can't explain just what it does for people.

H I can't either.

M It, it just, well, besides relaxing you, it just helps your whole body and spirit.

H Something about art. I don't know, art's hard to explain. Whether it be drawing; like you draw your pictures, mother.

M Oh, yes I know.

H Or anything, any art form.

M Still, anything that we do like that, we do it because we love and enjoy it. So, as long as...

H Just like the ones before us, they seemed to enjoy it all their lives.

M Grandpa Prince, it didn't matter how tired he was, he worked maybe all day, come in and he'd take his banjer down and play four or five tunes before he went to go to bed in the night. Well, he never refused playing for anybody that ever went there and asked him to play a song for him, or asked him to go for school or for an audience anywhere.

H It made him happy to do that.

M It really did. And so it just carries you on somehow (laughs).

R Seems like that's a part of you that's been passed down also. 'Cause I see you all on stage or just sitting in here and you know, laughing and grinning and having a good time.

M Oh yes, yes. It just helps your body and soul I guess.

H Yea, we just have to be thankful that we have a gift and just try to understand that.

M Yes, it's like I've told the children. The Lord just give 'em a talent and it says in the Bible not to hide your talent.¹

¹Mary Jane Queen and Henry Queen, interview by author, 18 November 2002, Cullowhee, North Carolina, tape recording, in author's possession, Sylva, North Carolina.

The Queens finish each others sentences like so many families do. Mary Jane and her son Henry share the same opinions about their music and come to the same conclusions about why they continue to perform mountain music. The same can be said for Ernest Queen and his tarheel neighbors in Washington. That same sense of satisfaction is why tarheel musicians brought mountain music to the Pacific Northwest decades ago.

Today, mountain music in Skagit and Snohomish counties is thriving. Locals hope that bluegrass will help attract tourists and boost the struggling economy. In an interesting twist of fate, the timber industry that moved from the southeast to the northwest has now shifted back to southern forests. Timber trucks still roll through the valleys, and sawmills and logging still accounts for much of the income of the area's inhabitants, but towns like Darrington are increasingly turning to tourism and recreation to boost the economy. With the bluegrass festival, a rodeo, and an archery tournament, Darrington geared its three biggest community events towards attracting tourists.² Well aware of the town's reputation, Darrington residents erected a towering sign that greets people at the Darrington festival grounds. The sign proudly proclaims, "Bluegrass Capital of the Northwest."³

In addition to similar physical aspects, the Skagit and Sauk River valleys have much more in common with southern Appalachia than what the eye can see. Tarheel

² *Seattle Times*, 23 June 1984.

³ *The Weekly*, 17 July 1985.

influence can be detected when chatting with local Darrington residents. Southern mountain accents are in the majority in these areas. Many of the mailboxes along residential streets are printed with familiar Jackson County names like Cogdill, Moody, Shuler, Breedlove, and Bryson. Stop by the Backwoods Café on the edge of the Darrington city limits, and one can order the “tarheel burger basket.” In late July, visitors can enjoy the bluegrass festival approaching its thirtieth anniversary. The festival teems with tarheels, not only on stage but in the audience as well. Nearly everyone who takes the stage performs songs that they “learned growing up in the hills of Carolina.” In the audience, many of the festival goers will comment that their grandmother came from Jackson County, or that they moved from Sylva or Cullowhee to the Pacific Northwest at a young age.⁴

The summer of 2003 found me traveling the roads of Washington, conducting research for this work. The major reason I chose to be in the Pacific Northwest during that specific time was to attend the 27th annual Darrington Bluegrass Festival. It proved to be the highlight of my research trip. Following *Queens Bluegrass* first performance of the festival, I wandered behind the stage and introduced myself to Ernest Queen, Sid Simmons, and Louie Ashe. They all seemed eager to talk to another native North Carolinian, especially one who recently came from “back

⁴ These observations derive from personal experiences and conversations that the author took part in with various people while attending the Darrington Bluegrass Festival on July 18, 19, 20 2003. Among the people whom I met were Bertha Nations, a guitar picking octogenarian from Gastonia, North Carolina who moved to Darrington in 1947; Don and Nancy Mills, members of the musical group the “Master’s Quartet” who moved to Skagit county from Miller Creek, North Carolina and Canton, North Carolina respectively; and one unidentified young man who I befriended while swimming in the Stillaguamish River behind the festival grounds who told me his grandmother was from Sylva or Bryson City, he could not remember which.

home.” I retrieved my tape recorder from my jeep and the four of us sat outside the band’s R.V. and chatted.

The conversation quickly turned to what Jackson County was like these days. I told them how crowded it seemed to be lately, but assured them that a sense of community still existed and that mountain music still acted like a glue to hold these communities together. There was a brief silence, and then Louie leaned back in his chair, took a deep breath, and said he wanted to return to Cullowhee again in the near future. They all nodded in agreement and I began to grasp the nostalgic love these men bore for their native region.

The next day I found a comfortable spot in the grass in front of the festival stage. At eleven in the morning, *Queens Bluegrass* climbed the stage for the last time that weekend. After about forty minutes of mountain, gospel, and bluegrass tunes, Ernest thanked the crowd and announced that the next song would be their last at that year’s festival. I immediately recognized the melody and smiled. *Queens Bluegrass* chose to end their set with “Will the Circle Be Unbroken.” I thought back to the first time I saw the Queens in Jackson County perform and knew the answer to the question. Because of musicians like the Queens, Sid Simmons, and Louie Ashe, the circle of mountain music will remain unbroken.

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