

Michigan Fiddling: Who Ignored It and What It Looks Like

by A. Trae McMaken

Fiddling and folk music was a ubiquitous aspect of life in Michigan and the Great Lakes. This fiddling was multi-ethnic and creolized, deeply enriched by European, Eastern-European, Nordic, Native American, and other people groups. Further, the folk music of the Great Lakes thrived in the presence of industry. But one might never suspect anything like the above by hearing what most people say or reading what prominent scholars have written about the folk music of America.

The first few pages of prominent Country Music scholar Bill C. Malone's work *Country Music U.S.A.* are dedicated to a wide-sweeping prejudice that must be read to be fully appreciated. With broad strokes, Malone paints a dualist picture of American folk music where the South is the rural, agrarian preserver of musical traditions – "Anglo-Celtic" emphasized – and the North is the spouse of industrialization and tradition-effacing prosperity.¹ Malone begins by stating that,

Hillbilly music . . . developed out of the reservoir of folksongs and ballad brought to North America by the Anglo-Celtic immigrants and gradually absorbed influences from other musical sources . . . Yet, to explain country music solely in terms of its British background is to take a limited and incomplete approach for, after all, the settlers of prerevolutionary America, from Maine to Georgia, came out of essentially the same ethnic and social backgrounds.²

The problem that Malone goes on to describe is that, obviously to him, Maine and the North did not preserve traditional music (which he narrowly describes in his first pages fairly exclusively as vocal).

To explain this, Malone espouses a simplistic isolationist theory based in part on antebellum slavery-

based hostilities. Malone writes that "traditions which had once been the common property of

¹ Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 3-5.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

Americans therefore endured in the South long after they had ceased to be important elsewhere. Although British ballads and folksongs were perpetuated in all areas of early America, only in the South did they contribute to the creation of a lasting regional music."³ After all, Malone writes that ". . . southerners—through both necessity and choice—committed their region to a course of arrested development in a nation that was rapidly surrendering to the blandishment of urbanism and industrialization."⁴

Malone is an important scholar and worthy of much praise for his significant work. And granted, his overview of what could be called the old time traditions or American folk music are not really the focus of his work. That said, his first two pages in what is considered a foundational work of country music scholarship are almost enough to make an otherwise mild-mannered Midwesterner throw the book against the wall. Unfortunately, Malone is not done espousing traditional folk music prejudice after those pages. He writes that "it is reasonably clear that one powerful factor that has worked toward the perpetuation of folk communities is cultural isolation,"⁵ though how a region he defines as massively as "the socially ingrown rural South, from the tidewater of Virginia to the pine barrens of East Texas"⁶ could be considered isolated is curious. After all, the North, with its ample rurality, cannot be said to be so isolated, or so Malone thinks:

Here [in the north], as had been the case with the traditional British folksongs, factors came into play which served to destroy the simpler traditional music of the past. The growth of cities, economic prosperity, urban-continental-Nordic immigration, and European musical influences alienated the northerners from the more primitive rural music style.⁷

Speaking more specifically of the Midwest, Malone at one point states that "the inclusion of old-fashioned pop music [on WLS] was perhaps natural in that, to most midwesterners, such songs as 'Down By the Old Mill Stream' were the closest approximations of folk music that they knew."⁸ This

3 Ibid., 4.

4 Ibid., 4.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Ibid., 5.

7 Ibid., 16.

8 Ibid., 69.

promotes the dualism of North and South as Industrial vs. Agricultural, Mixed vs. Pure, Metropolitan vs. Isolated, Traditionless vs. Tradition Bearers. Unfortunately, such erroneous assertions persist to this day.

Malone's view of traditional American folk music is cliché, and one wonders how a scholar can proceed so confidently and boldly when an exploration of the state of folk music in the north could have served to powerfully contradict his assumptions. Malone is so focused on the South that prejudice seems to have promoted or incubated a significant ignorance of non-Southern traditions to accompany it. To his credit, when Malone moved to Madison, Wisconsin, he seems to have engaged with the folk music of that region, and it may have altered some of his perceptions.⁹ Further, in his later 2002 work, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*, Malone steers away from ethnic issues and apparently focuses on class issues, though his perspective is clearly and perhaps even more strongly the reinforcement and championing of the South,¹⁰ and as will be seen, it is still rife with prejudice.

But, in *Don't Get Above Your Raisin's*, Malone does address the slight improvements in scholarship and awareness that have brought northern traditions into the dialogue since *Country Music U.S.A.*, but he does a decent job of writing it off. In my first few months of living in the South, I found myself in Dahlonega, Georgia, speaking in a pub with a scholar and folklorist whose work on a topic related to American folk music is well recognized. In reaction to my dialogue about northern traditional music, she replied with a statement close to the following: "The reason I think that Appalachian fiddling is so much more interesting than other types is because of the African rhythms." Even when speaking to a practitioner of northern fiddling styles, the supposed dominance of Appalachian styles was unquestioned. It was not her concept that Appalachian rhythms were influential, but that Appalachian fiddling as more interesting was a given. Oddly enough, this is the same track taken by

9 James P. Leary, *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158.

10 Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), vii-xvi.

Malone. He writes that "No one need doubt any longer that rural music was a pervasive phenomenon in the United States and Canada at the time of country music's commercial birth, or that such music shared some basic similarities whether performed in upstate New York, Canada's Maritime Provinces, Indiana, or Georgia."¹¹ Malone acknowledges that "Phonograph recording companies, however, chose to record the rural musicians of Georgia and other southern states, and devoted little attention to the performers from other regions."¹² Malone's analysis of this phenomenon will be discussed later on, but like the scholar I met upon moving to the South, he writes, "Above all, they [recording and broadcasting industries] discovered that this music was both different and more interesting than the rural musical forms of the North . . . Although insufficiently understood or recognized at the time, the fusion of African American and Anglo American elements also made the music distinctive and intriguing."¹³

Unfortunately, it is not just Malone who operates under an assumed "South only" or "the South is more interesting" perception of folk music. Charles Wolfe in 1977 in his work *Tennessee Strings: the Story of Country Music in Tennessee* continues in the tradition. For example, it is not New York born Michigan fiddler Jasper "Jep" Bisbee (b. 1843)¹⁴ who "represent[s] probably the oldest fiddling styles preserved on wax," it was Uncle Am Stuart, born "1856 or 1857,"¹⁵ though Bisbee recorded in 1923 on 78 RPM and represents the earliest born fiddler to record,¹⁶ even beating out Scotland's Scott Skinner (b. 1843)¹⁷ by six days and a second Michigander, John A. Pattee (b. 1844),¹⁸ by almost a year. All three of these fiddlers recorded. As for the Michiganders, their fiddling likely represents older styles than Am

11 Ibid., 15-16.

12 Ibid., 16.

13 Ibid., 16.

14 Paul Gifford, "Jasper E. 'Jep' Bisbee: Old-Time Michigan Dance Fiddler," *The Old Time Herald* 9 no. 6, http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-9/9-6/jasper-bisbee.html (accessed November 9, 2010).

15 Charles K. Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: the Story of Country Music in Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 28.

16 Paul Gifford, "Jasper E. 'Jep' Bisbee: Old-Time Michigan Dance Fiddler."

17 University of Aberdeen Historic Collections, "Biography," The Music of James Scott Skinner, the 'Strathspey King,' <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/scottskinner/biography.shtml> (accessed October 14, 2011).

18 Patti Greenman and Glenn Hendrix, *Michigan Jamboree: Fiddle Tunes for Round and Square Dances*, volume 1, 2nd ed., (Big Rapids and East Grand Rapids, MI: Patti Greenman and Glenn Hendrix, 2008), 11.

Stuart. And while Wolfe claims that Uncle Am's June 1924 broadcast in New York represents "probably the first mountain fiddler to be heard over radio in the Northeast,"¹⁹ that might not be such a big deal. John A. Pattee, Michigander fiddler and vaudeville performer, passed away the same year and left this obituary behind in the New York Times²⁰:

Colonel John A. Pattee, old soldier fiddler and favorite of WEAFF's radio audience, will never stand before a microphone again. This unfortunate news came with word of his death which canceled his radio barn dance from WEAFF scheduled for Saturday evening, Dec. 20.

Colonel Pattee was 80 years of age and a Civil War veteran, having served in the Twenty-fourth Michigan Volunteer Infantry, called the "Iron Brigade," which opened the Battle of Gettysburg. On numerous occasions he has appeared on WEAFF's program's, playing the old dance tunes on his fiddle just as he played them before the Civil War days. His voice, calling out each tune in the fashion of the country fiddler won for him a warm spot in the hearts of radio listeners.²¹

But such slight prejudice is not surprising from a scholar who could write a sentence such as, "Hay began telling people that he was thinking of starting a program in Nashville like the National Barn Dance in Chicago; such a program would be more authentic in Nashville because it could draw on genuine folk performers from the nearby Tennessee hills."²² It is unclear whether this was Hay's prejudice or Wolfe's, but lacking any citations in Wolfe's book, it is not easy to find out. It does seem odd that Wolfe can, in the paragraph directly following the assertion, launch into an account of Michigander Henry Ford and fiddle contests. Wolfe did record in print that "Alton [Delmore] recalled: 'The people in the North accepted country and western music much sooner than people in the South. There are too many 'Southern aristocrats' in the South. They would listen to the 'Grand Ole Opry' on the sly and pretend to their friends of the upper bracket that they didn't listen at all.'"²³ But that, of course, does not indicate the presence of "genuine folk performers."

19 Charles K. Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: the Story of Country Music in Tennessee*, 28.

20 Rob Richardson, "John A. Pattee," The 24th Michigan Infantry Regimental Website, accessed through archive, http://www.oocities.com/24th_michigan/jpattee.html (accessed December 13, 2010).

21 This obituary quoted from the following website: Rob Richardson, "John A. Pattee," The 24th Michigan Infantry Regimental Website, accessed through archive, http://www.oocities.com/24th_michigan/jpattee.html (accessed December 13, 2010).

22 Charles K. Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: the Story of Country Music in Tennessee*, 58.

23 *Ibid.*, 67.

These are excellent cases of anti-northern prejudice as found in respected Country Music scholarship in the United States, not just because of their typical disregard for Northern tradition and history, but because they have been perpetrated by some of Country Music's most respected and widely known scholars. It is unfortunate that the topic of this discussion makes Malone's and Wolfe's failings the focus, rather than their many strengths, but they serve as apt examples of Southern bias in scholarship. Malone's and Wolfe's contributions to Country Music Scholarship are significant and it is unfortunate to have to critique them in such a way. It is also unfortunate that such significant contributions to American folk music scholarship are also dreadfully flawed, propagating a problematic ethos of folk music that will be examined further below. In the meantime, an exploration of northern traditions, here exemplified by the state of Michigan, can serve to illustrate just how provincial traditional country music scholarship has been.

The following exploration will begin with a look at a general historical overview of Michigan's fiddling history and move on to specific stylistic analysis. Though Michigan is used as a case study here, it must be kept in mind that similar case studies could be made (and in some cases such as Wisconsin and New York, have already been made) for essentially every section of the north, both the United States and Canada, east of the Mississippi and probably also to the west, factoring in relative settlement periods.

It is my personal opinion that only through an aggregate of many stories from the lives of individual yet interrelated folk musicians can a tradition truly be established to the outside as existing. Over the past few years, I have learned many of these stories. At the same time, this project hopes to provide an overview of Michigan folk music, and a more analytical approach is necessary. Still, I have attempted to use story as much as possible, as I still believe it the most effective method of communication about folk music.

The first known direct European contact with the land and waters now known as Michigan

came through French explorers and traders in the 17th centuries. The French had spread out down the St. Lawrence Seaway and initially came into contact with the Great Lakes through a northerly river and lake route leading onto Lake Huron – not in fact by way of Lakes Ontario and Eerie. Expeditions at the time were primarily concerned with exploration towards the orient, the development and protection of fur trading with the Native peoples of the area and further afield, and Catholic missions.²⁴

The French were and are musical people often known for their stirring *chansons*. The fiddle accompanied traders in birch-bark canoes along the northern waterways. The French traders and paddlemen – *courrier de bois* and *voyageurs*, as they were known – far from their places of birth, intermarried with aboriginal people. This led to the rise of a part European and part Native American culture known as the Métis.²⁵

The French introduced the fiddle to their "half breed" children – Métis literally means "mixed-blood." They also introduced, somewhere down the line, the *podorhythmie* or foot percussion typical of Franco-Canadian and Métis fiddling, today. The fur trade left a whole style and tradition of fiddling, replete with its own sounds and styles. The tradition goes under the names Métis or sometimes Metchif fiddling in the Northern United and Canada.²⁶ This tradition had significant influence on Michigan, with players like Coleman Trudeau, a Canadian born Ojibwe man who worked the U.P. (Upper Peninsula) lumber camps in the 20th century.²⁷ Michael Loukinen from Northern Michigan University produced a wonderful documentary about the Métis fiddle entitled, "Medicine Fiddle" that is available for free viewing from Folks Streams.net.²⁸

24 Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Michigan, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 34-37; Bruce Catton, *Michigan: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 3-5.

25 Writers' Program, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*; Bruce Catton, *Michigan: A Bicentennial History*; Michael Loukinen, *Medicine Fiddle*, Northern Michigan University, Up North Films, Copyright, Michael Loukinen, 1991, Streaming video via FolkStreams. <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,178> (accessed December 13, 2010); Up North Films, *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*, ed. Michael Loukinen (Marquette: Northern Michigan University, 1992), 6.

26 Michael Loukinen, *Medicine Fiddle*; Up North Films, *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*, ed. Michael Loukinen, 5.

27 Ibid.

28 The information for the above three paragraphs derives from a mixture of the following sources: Writers' Program, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*; Bruce Catton, *Michigan: A Bicentennial History*; Michael Loukinen, *Medicine Fiddle*, Northern Michigan University, Up North Films, Copyright, Michael Loukinen, 1991, Streaming video

The French comprised the most numerous ethnicity in Michigan through 1820, though the population was small and "the opening of the Erie canal in 1825, rapidly submerged them."²⁹ Towards the end of the 19th century another wave of Quebecois immigration brought a new influx of French into the state to work in logging camps and other industry.³⁰

William Willcox Shoepac, a native of Detroit born in 1823, wrote a book entitled *Shoepac Recollections: A Way-Side Glimpse of American Life*. This book was a "fictionalized autobiography,"³¹ but this does not invalidate the descriptions of Detroit at the time. His intent may have been to depict the environment through the use of a fictionalized character. He wrote this typical depiction of French music-making:

. . . witness the fiddling and dancing on Sunday evenings (and pleasant Sunday evenings they were deemed by us, in our dreadful ignorance), wherever there was any little neighborhood of French people - on the great wide porch, or beneath the trees on the grass; or, if in the house, with the doors and windows thrown wide open. And there were the prettiest and most mischievous-eyed French girls, dancing away for dear life with the good-looking, frank-mannered voyageurs, or courreurs de bois, in their red, yellow, or green sashes, long black hair, and blue calico shirts.³²

But, with the Erie Canal and Michigan receiving statehood in 1837, other people groups began heavy immigration to the area, working their way northward over the next century. Other traditions of fiddling arrived: Canadian, Irish, Scottish, Polish, Scandinavian, Finno-Ugric, and more. These styles, not isolated but thriving and melding, still managed to create different stylistic areas within the state of Michigan itself, depending on regional influences. In the Thumb of Michigan, Canadian influence had a part to play.³³ One Michigan guidebook says that "In 1926, 1929, and 1930, Michigan ranked second

via FolkStreams. <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,178> (accessed December 13, 2010); Up North Films, *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*, various authors, ed. Michael Loukinen (Marquette: Northern Michigan University, 1992).

29 John P. DuLong, *French Canadians in Michigan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 13.

30 John P. DuLong, *French Canadians in Michigan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 15-23.

31 Clarke Historical Library, "Orlando Shoepac Recollections 1823," Central Michigan University, http://clarke.cmich.edu/resource_tab/information_and_exhibits/i_arrived_at_detroit/orlando_willcox.html (accessed October 13, 2011).

32 Ibid.

33 Paul M. Gifford, "Fiddling and Instrumental Folk Music in Michigan," in *Michigan Folklife Reader* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 200.

to New York as the immigrant's specified destination."³⁴

The same guidebook prepared by the "Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Michigan," provides a table of some of the top ethnic groups in Michigan according to the 1930 census. "Michigan's cultural heritage," the guidebook reads, "and current trends can be understood only in relation to the diversity of its 47 per cent of foreign racial stock." Leading the top of the ethnic list are the "Canadians (non-French)" far in the lead of the various ethnic groups with 411,091 being either "foreign-born" or "native-born having one or both parents foreign born." Canadians are fiddling people. The next group is German at 365,263, followed by Polish at 320,534, English at 165,848, Netherland Dutch at 106,426, Italian at 98,048, French-Canadian at 87,911, Russian at 75,656, Finnish at 74,229, Swedish at 68,577, Scotch at 65,990 and so on down a long list of ethnicities comprising 47 percent of the Michigan population in their first or second generation immigrant status.³⁵ All these groups likely brought traditions of folk music that mixed in with already prominent traditions of folk music.

As an example of such influence on the tradition, consider Aloysius D. Demski, known as "Lewis." Lewis Demski was born in Midland, Michigan in 1911 and died there in 1998. Lewis was born into a Polish family that had settled in the Midland area. His grandfather had been born in "Garzylowa, Debica, Poland" and considering his marriage in Poland in 1872, immigrated sometime after that date, barring the possibility of a return to be married on his native soil.³⁶ Lewis "taught himself how to play the fiddle and played for many weddings, house parties, and barn dances during the 1930's and 1940's."³⁷ Lewis Demski corresponded with esteemed Michigan fiddler Les "Red" Raber in the 1990s by sending him tunes,³⁸ and it is through Les Raber's playing that the tune, "Lewis

34 Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Michigan, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*, 112.

35 *Ibid.*, iii, 112.

36 Cheryl J. Speaker, "Descendants of John Demskie," Family Search, <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/s/p/e/Cheryl-J-Speaker/FILE/0001text.txt> (accessed October 13, 2011).

37 Cheryl J. Speaker, "Descendants of John Demskie," Family Search, <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/s/p/e/Cheryl-J-Speaker/FILE/0001text.txt> (accessed October 13, 2011).

38 Glenn Hendrix, e-mail message to author, January 27, 2011.

Demski" came to be found on the CD accompanying this project.

On Beaver Island, an island in Lake Michigan, shipping and sailing on the Lakes and an Irish community on the island had a significant influence on fiddler Patrick Bonner (b. 1882)³⁹ whom Alan Lomax recorded on his 1938 trip through Michigan and Wisconsin. In the Upper Peninsula, ethnic mining communities, mixed lumbercamps, and a Native American and Métis population gave rise to a great diversity of traditional fiddling. The same 1940s guidebook wrote of first or second generation foreigners enrolled in the 1930 census that "Keweenaw County in the mining range has the largest proportion, 82.2 per cent."⁴⁰

In southern Michigan, a rural agricultural and small-town landscape and one of the longest settled areas in the state gave rise to a strong tradition of square dancing and, like other places, the preservation of a variety of dance-types into the 20th century – quadrilles, schottisches, polkas, jigs and round dances. Reels of course were also played, but the term "hoedown" appears to not have entered the scene until relatively late.⁴¹ This area of Michigan developed one of the most cohesive styles of fiddling in the state, possibly due to its more staid community and less frontier-like environs. With older communities, grange halls, and dance pavilions, lower Michigan saw a fairly common tradition indicated by a common stylistic sensibility in Southern and Central Michigan fiddlers. Stewart Carmichael from Mecosta County amazingly played for 94 dances the "summer before I was married" ca. 1926.⁴² "This" Carmichael said, "was the entertainment at that time."⁴³ Unfortunately, lefty fiddler Stewart Carmichael is no longer with us, otherwise it might be possible to ask just how long summer was. Presumably for a Michigan fiddler, it is not too long. But giving a generous definition of summer

39 Glenn Hendrix, *An Island of Fiddlers: Fiddle Tunes of Patrick Bonner: Beaver Island, Michigan*, 2nd printing, (East Grand Rapids, MI: Glenn Hendrix, 2010), v.

40 Writers Program, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*, 103.

41 *Come Dance With Me: Original Fiddle Compositions and Favorite Tunes of Les Raber*, ed. Judy Raber Burns and Jim McKinney, 4th ed. (Judy Raber Burns and Jim McKinney, 2008), 20-31.

42 Original Michigan Fiddlers Association, *Original Michigan Fiddlers 1986*, ed. Rosemary Raber (Ann Arbor: McNaughton & Gunn, 1986), 124.

43 *Ibid.*, 124.

in Michigan as April 15 – September 15, that equals about a dance every 1.6 days. And that is the schedule of just one fiddler. Of course, I have seen a significant snowstorm well after April 15, and September 15 might be squarely planted in the fall.

The region in Northern Michigan in the area now known as Harbor Springs saw farm settlement in the 1870s and the 1880s.⁴⁴ In a state with many excellent literary settlers' accounts, perhaps the most outstanding settlers' account is U.P. Hedrick's *The Land of the Crooked Tree*. Through recounting the story of his early life in memoir, Hedrick vividly and memorably depicts the settlement of the area around Harbor Springs (originally an area known by the French as *L'Arbre Croche*, translated by the book as "Land of the Crooked Tree"). Hedrick lived at a time when he could experience the vestiges of French *voyageur* culture, the aftermath of violent conflict on Beaver Island, and the weighty struggles of the Native Americans in that region. Hedrick was a remarkably observant individual whose apparent love of food provides in-depth and highly appetizing descriptions of all sorts of dietary phenomena of the time. The well-drawn characters and the action of his account firmly place this historical memoir in the realm of literary merit.

Yet what makes Hedrick's account even more memorable as a researcher of Michigan fiddling are the descriptions of fiddling and dances. It is likely no coincidence that one of the first OMFA jamborees was held in this area of Michigan, the stomping grounds of the jamboree's hosts, fiddler Danny Johnston and his wife Sherrie.⁴⁵ Apparently, in the Land of the Crooked Tree in the late 19th century, fiddlers were not hard to come by, and Hedrick's account can serve as an introduction to early rural Michigan fiddling.

In a description of the logging bees held by the settlers, Hedrick writes:

At night after a logging bee there was a square dance. The fiddlers, two or three of them, did

44 U.P. Hedrick, *The Land of the Crooked Tree* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), vii.

45 OMFA, *Original Michigan Fiddlers 1986*, 7.

not come until supper, since no one could log all day and have hands in shape to fiddle at night. The Canadians were the best dancers and amazed us all with the capers they cut, the ditties they sang in calling off, and the kisses they stole from their partners. The small fry at the bee were sent to bed about midnight; most of the men went to the barn and 'hit the hay' for an hour or two between darkness and dawn.⁴⁶

This thrilling description of the festivities is just a short interlude in Hedrick's passages about the dangers and rigors of frontier logging and life. The Canadians here likely refer to French Canadians, sometimes referred to as "Canadiens" or "peasoupers"⁴⁷ – notoriously lively. The working bee of various kinds, whether it be maple sugaring, barn raising, cloth shrinking, or any number of rural tasks, was traditionally accompanied by some kind of dance or musical festivity in the Upper Midwest; because of the importance of community help, music and dance were ingrained in the patterns of rural life.⁴⁸

Fiddling in the north has long been associated with the lumbercamps. In fact, most traditions of Michigan folklore have been associated with the lumber camps. Situations when groups of men, often from a wide range of ethnicities, sequestered themselves in camps in sections of remote territory for the winters seemed ripe for the sharing and indulging of traditional pastimes. Photographs and accounts of fiddling and folk music in the lumbercamps are plentiful. Dancing and storytelling also found a home in these settings. Hedrick wrote of one or more lumbercamps, "On the tables, when they were not in use for card playing, lay two or three fiddles, an accordion, and an array of harmonicas--a lumberjack must have music. For reading matter, there were ancient weekly papers, copies of the Police Gazette, and dime novels in plenty."⁴⁹ This account of numerous musicians is not unusual. Hedrick continues:

Supper over, the men whiled away an hour or two mending garments or playing cards or checkers. A few read; others listened to the fiddles and watched a jig, a hornpipe, a fling, a double shuffle, or a breakdown, dances popular in all lumber camps. Jokes, raillery, and repartee passed around freely. Some nodded over tedious twice-told tales, each to be capped

46 U.P. Hedrick, *The Land of the Crooked Tree* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 72-73.

47 Richard M. Dorson, *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers: Folk Traditions of Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 69.

48 Philip Martin, *Farmhouse Fiddlers; Music & Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (Mount Horeb, WI: Midwest Traditions, 1994), 16-21.

49 Hedrick, 248.

by that of another romancer. Only a laureate was ever asked to tell a story; others began when they could break in. Visitors were hospitably welcomed. No minister ever went away empty-handed.⁵⁰

Do not be mistaken; it does not seem, reading Hedrick's entire account, that he paid particular attention to music and dance. Rather, he mentions these elements like he mentions many different aspects of life, and compared to work and food, he seems far less interested and expert in music. This just goes to show Hedrick's skill in writing and gift for description. But even the small town of Hedrick's childhood indulged in music, and his account reflects the typical kinds of scenes that show up in accounts of rural and small community life.

Above the store was a barnlike hall used for church services, Sunday school, lodge meetings, political gatherings, oyster suppers, and dances. The room was lighted by kerosene lamps fastened to the walls around the sides, above each of which smoke-blackened areas showed on the timbered ceiling. At one end was a raised platform, which served as a pulpit for preachers, a rostrum for speakers, and upon which the musicians sat as they fiddled for dances. It was a place of torture for children who were called upon to speak pieces at socials and school exercises.

Out of all these activities, the dances come to mind most clearly now, though they were events at which as a child I could be but an onlooker. The orchestra was composed of a first and second violin and a bass viol. The shining floor was thronged with dancers, swinging and whirling, jigging and bowing, to the old-time quadrilles, polkas, and schottisches; the waltz in our community was not quite respectable. Invariably dances ended with the Virginia reel. Never since have I seen dancers more liberal with hands and feet; never since have I heard music more exhilarating.⁵¹

This lengthy description provides a vivid scene of the kind of events that took place in Michigan.

In Michigan, as well as in many places throughout the country, an "orchestra" was a term used in a much wider sense than today. An old-time music dance band could and often did employ the term orchestra. Further, the presence of a bass viol and a "first and second violin" is also typical of many old-time dance bands. Photographic evidence for this type of band abounds and may represent a pre-guitar, pre-amplification situation.⁵²

Violin here does not necessarily refer to a classical tradition either. French-Canadian fiddlers, for example, can employ the word *violon*. In many cases, old-time fiddlers around the country used the

50 Ibid., 249.

51 Hedrick, 261.

52 For a look at some of these bands, see Philip Martin's work.

term violin to refer to their instruments. Today's specificity between "fiddle" and "violin" may be a later development. For an example of a southern fiddler, even Doc Watson's father-in-law, fiddler Gaither Carlton, referred to the instrument as a "violin."⁵³

Though he describes above his respect for the music of fiddles, Hedrick was deeply impressed by his first experience of the piano and describes it with great relish. But one of the paragraphs from this passage particularly stands out to a fiddler.

No one would believe that a person now living, born and bred in civilization, could come to his fifteenth year without having seen or heard a piano. Yet, not until I went to high school and began to know the families of my schoolmates had I ever seen any other musical instruments than organs, accordions, and fiddles, nor had I heard music other than sacred music, the lively tunes of country dances, and the scraping of fiddles by our hired men. When I began high school, there were two pianos in the harbor village.⁵⁴

Here it is apparent that the hired men who worked for Hedricks' family also indulged in the fiddling pastime. Further, pianos have appeared. In a study of the myriad sources for traditional music history in Michigan, it becomes quickly apparent that the pump organ served as a traditional accompaniment instrument, later becoming replaced by the piano. I once asked Danny Johnson, a fiddler born in Harbor Springs approximately fifty-five years after the scenes described by Hedricks, if he had ever played the pump organ.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "But I prefer to play the piano." He went on to add. "You know why they used to play those pump organs, don't you? The damn things stayed in tune."⁵⁵

It seems, from Danny's words, that the challenge of keeping a piano in tune in northern climes year-round may have been a difficult undertaking in days when the wood stove served as the standard heat source. But pump organs were also manufactured in Michigan and were light weight. There are accounts in the upper Midwest of pump organs being moved by automobile – "We used to tie the pump organ to the running board of the old Ford—to take it up to the Overberg farm when we played up there

53 Gaither Carlton can be heard referencing the instrument as a violin repeatedly on a recording soon to be released in the Watson Family Milestones collection.

54 Hedrick, 282.

55 This conversation or an approximate version of it took place in May of 2011 at an OMFA Jamboree in Northern Michigan.

for house parties."⁵⁶

Using Hedrick's account for the above section is simply a shorthand way of condensing voluminous amounts of descriptions of music in the lumbercamps, farm communities, towns, and also cities of Michigan. It is not the purpose of this paper to make an exhaustive account, but to give an idea of the variety of tradition found in Michigan and, indeed, the other states of the region. As companion to this paper, see the map produced containing information about the fiddlers from the OMFA 1986 membership book.

Border Fiddling

Much of Michigan could be described as a border region. Even though most of Michigan is bordered by water, the Lakes did not represent an impassible barrier but in fact an avenue of cultural exchange. But the three narrows or rivers – the St. Mary's, the St. Clair, and the Detroit – that bring Canada and Michigan close represent a heightened level of exchange. The Bluewater Area, centered on Sarnia and Port Huron, can serve as an example of the cultural meaning of the border. These days, festivals and sessions in Ontario draw musicians from across southeastern Michigan to cross the border. Goderich, Ontario in particular has drawn musicians from the Irish music communities. I once sat on the Canadian side of the Sarnia - Port Huron crossing and looked over to see Irish music superstars Kevin Burke and John Carty sitting in a car in the next row, all of us departing Ontario at the end of the Goderich Celtic Roots Festival. We waved before heading to our respective interrogations. Regulations and the political climate have increased the difficulties of crossing the border – a passport is now required, further dividing us from our Canadian neighbors with whom our region has strong familial, cultural, and economic ties. Throughout the history of the St. Clair River region, any attempt at drawing a hard and fast line between the peoples on either side of the river would be a mistake. Along the border, it is not unusual to see the American and Canadian flags flown together at equal height.

⁵⁶ Philip Martin, *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music & Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (Mount Horeb, WI: Midwest Traditions, 1994), 51.

Though the river now represents an international border, it had a long history prior to that condition. Though passports are now required for crossing, Canadians and Americans still live less than a mile away from each other and interact continuously. Quebec-born Frenchman Louis Joliet has gone down in history in part for being the first European explorer of the St. Clair River in 1669⁵⁷ In 1686, three hundred years before my birth, the French built the first fort where Port Huron now lies,⁵⁸ and though the French fort's lifespan was short, French occupation or claimed ownership of the region was not. It is important to remember that Michigan was once part of France's active holdings and that the region spent considerable time under the claim of the French and the British prior to United States claim. The influence of these other cultures did not stop with the change of titular authority. When the American side of the St. Clair River near Port Huron began to see permanent civilian settlement by Europeans and Euro-Americans at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, those living on the American side of the river bore names such as Francois Lerviere, Baptiste Levois, Duchien, Jervais, Corneais, Deschamps, and Moreau⁵⁹ Well into the 19th century, the French formed the largest European people group in Michigan.⁶⁰ At the beginning of the 20th century, more work-stimulated French-Canadian immigration put that ethnicity at the fourth largest in the state, and speaking of Canadians in a broader category, "about 75% of Canadian immigrants going to Michigan were lumberjacks."⁶¹

By the end of the 1830s, the Patriot War brought conflict and bloodshed between British loyalists and radical revolutionaries from the U.S. side who planned to invade Canada and "liberate" it from British rule. A series of battles and skirmishes were fought, and the St. Clair River did not rest

57 Bruce Catton, *Michigan: A Bicentennial History*, 13; Emelyn Jenks Crampton, *History of the Saint Clair River written for the centennial of the founding of St. Clair County on May 8, 1821*, (St. Clair, MI: *St. Clair Republican*, 1921), 5, via Open Library, id ID# OL6666874M (accessed October 13, 2011).

58 Emelyn Jenks Crampton, *History of the Saint Clair River*, 8.

59 William Lee Jenks, *St. Clair County, Michigan, Its History and Its People: A Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress and Its Principal Interest (1912)*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 140, via Open Library, id ID# OL23454898M (accessed October 13, 2011).

60 DuLong, 13.

61 DuLong, 21,16.

easy.⁶² Later in the century, the sister cities of Sarnia and Port Huron would serve as ports of sailing culture. When Dr. Ivan Walton collected throughout the Lakes to preserve the songs of the sailors in the early 20th century, Port Huron and St. Clair proved to be important and rich sources in the collecting process; classic ballads such as "the Bigler" and the "E.C. Roberts" were found in these river towns.⁶³ In fact, one of the later owners of the schooner E.C. Roberts lived in the town of St. Clair, and at least a couple of its crew members throughout the years settled on the St. Clair River.⁶⁴

In the 1920s, the Prohibition Era brought about a romantic golden age, of sorts, in commerce across the river. One statistic suggests 75% of the bootleg to enter the U.S. came through the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, and Detroit River window.⁶⁵ The bootleg legends are rich with amusement. Money and product (especially, one might assume, alcohol) are not likely to be exchanged without some culture tagging along for the ride. Incidentally, the lower drinking age in Canada continues an alcohol-based border relationship as nineteen-year-olds cross the border for their first drinks. In turn, one Canadian fiddler told me, Canadians over twenty-one cross to the United States to take advantage of cheaper beer on our side of the river.

Evelyn Johnson Roe was "born on a farm east of Jeddo, Michigan in 1920." Besides playing the piano by ear, she wrote, "I also learned the guitar playing in the theatres in Pt. Huron and Sarnia and sang comical songs and took first place in both shows. I got \$5 at each place; that was big money then." Evelyn also wrote, "At 5 my father started me on the piano as he played the violin." Remember, the piano or pump organ is often the most traditional accompaniment instrument for fiddling in the north, and many old-timers did not use the terms violin and fiddle with the same connotations common today. Evelyn writes that "His grandfather wrote music. I had an older brother who played the mouth organ

62 William Lee Jenks, *St. Clair County, Michigan, Its History and Its People: A Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress and Its Principal Interest (1912)*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 101, via Open Library, id ID# OL23454898M (accessed October 13, 2011);

63 Ivan H. Walton and Joe Grimm, *Windjammers: Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 12-17, 267-268.

64 Walton and Grimm, 119.

65 Jenny Nolan, "How Prohibition Made Detroit a Bootleggers Dream Town," *The Detroit News*, June 15, 1999, <http://apps.detnews.com/apps/history/index.php?id=181> (accessed October 13, 2011).

and piano.” The mouth organ here is the harmonica. This is a quick picture of one of the old music-making families of the area. Though Evelyn was not a fiddler, herself, she indicates she accompanied dance music and her participation in competitions both in Port Huron and Sarnia reveals the connection these cities had. Evelyn later married a square dance caller.⁶⁶

The second and third decades of the 20th century transformed fiddling across North America in a dramatic way. Nothing would ever be the same once the radio began influencing the way fiddlers played by introducing sounds from outside their communities. Before this point, records, traveling minstrel shows, and vaudeville helped circulate tunes between communities through in-person performances and by record purchases. But radio would allow tunes from great distances to easily find their way into homes on a scale unprecedented in history. For fiddlers from the borders of Vermont to the borders of Michigan and well beyond, CBC star-fiddler Don Messer's (1909-1973) influence can hardly be calculated. His tunes ended up in the repertoires of fiddlers like Cyril Stinnett in Missouri and Jehile Kirkhuff in Pennsylvania. While a cowboy, hillbilly, polka, and Upper Midwestern mix blasted out of WLS in Chicago,⁶⁷ the Grand Ole Opry blasted its signal from Nashville, Tennessee. Don Messer countered from "down east" in Canada, XERA mega-blasted from Mexico⁶⁸ and other more local stations weighed in with different flavors of old time, polka, and popular music.⁶⁹ Michigan, as well as much of the rest of North America, felt the crossfire.

It is no surprise then, that an Old Timer in Charlevoix Michigan could walk into a pub and recognize Canadian fiddle style, saying to me, "Someone's been spending time in Canada." Nor is it surprising to hear another old timer in Hillsdale, Michigan come up to tell me that he liked my playing and that it reminded him of hearing fiddling from a small Ontario town's radio station many years ago.⁷⁰ A native of the St. Clair River, I learned to fiddle primarily in Canada.

66 OMFA, *Original Michigan Fiddlers 1986*, 88.

67 Leary, 33-34; Martin, 93-94.

68 Leary, 56-57.

69 *Ibid.*, 33-34, 118.

70 Both incidents occurred in the summer of 2011.

Some of Messer's tunes were not just coming from his "Down East" coast Canadian broadcast, they were actually coming from the St. Clair River's own prolific tune composer and fiddler, Johnny Durocher (1934-1989).⁷¹ Durocher wrote hundreds of fiddle tunes in his life.⁷² He met Don Messer at an eventful performance in Sarnia (just after a tornado). Durocher provided Messer with tunes that were broadcast and recorded and consequently distributed all over the continent and probably beyond.⁷³ Consequently, fiddlers and audiences along the St. Clair River heard tunes broadcast from the east coast of Canada that actually had local origins. One of my favorite tunes, "Blind River Breakdown," comes from Johnny Durocher, and it still has play among fiddlers in Canada, including grand master champion fiddler Pierre Schryer, a Franco-Ontarian.

But the American side of the river did not just feel Canadian influence through the radio waves; there were also real bodies crossing the water. Paul Gifford in his foundational essay on Michigan fiddling notes that the Thumb region was settled by many people from Canada – a factor which he says influenced the music. Tunes like "Little Burnt Potato" got play in this part of Michigan, Gifford writes. "Little Burnt Potato" also got play by Don Messer and was collected in Vermont where folklorist and fiddle scholar Richard Blaustein learned it from a local fiddler who boasted a significant collection of Messer records, among other artists.⁷⁴

In the early 20th century, Michigan represented a lively ethnic mix. But, according to a map depicting those claiming French ancestry in Michigan on the 1990 census, St. Clair County is one of the densest counties in the state – while many of the counties of the Thumb to the north are much more sparse, as is much of the U.P..⁷⁵ But, the amount that can be determined based on what folks marked on the census is questionable, and it is not possible to determine from the map what proportion of these

71 The Fiddlers Companion, "The Television Reel," ed. Andrew Kunst, <http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/TE.htm> (accessed October 14, 2011).

72 Pat Hegarty, personal correspondence with author, e-mail, 2011.

73 The Fiddlers Companion, "The Television Reel," ed. Andrew Kunst, <http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/TE.htm> (accessed October 14, 2011).

74 According to a conversation with Richard Blaustein in the winter of 2010-11.

75 DuLong, 23.

claims are based on original 18th century French settlement or later 19th and 20th century French Canadian immigration (or European-French ancestry), factors that could make a big difference in regards to music. Yet, the strong stylistic commonalities between Ontario Old Time and Michigan Old Time fiddling as they exist today indicate a fairly related historical experience.

Keweenaw Fiddling

In July 2011, On the shore of Lake Superior on the Keweenaw Peninsula of the U.P., in Lutheran Camp Lahti built from an old farm, a gathering of musicians and numerous members of the Finnish Council of Finlandia University gathered in a small chapel and dining hall. It was the first Finnish Folk Music Camp sponsored by the Finnish Council, and this was the closing ceremony. Carl Rahkonen stood at the front of the audience and posthumously presented an award to the Finnish fiddler Ed Laulumäki. Here were his own people, in his own land, presenting the award. His wife, Elsie, accepted the award in honor of her deceased husband. I had been sitting on the floor in the back, but I stood up in order to watch this moment. The next day, one of my fiddler friends went and visited her at the Laulumäki farm on the banks of the Snake River, easily located by anyone in the region who felt like dropping by to speak about the old Finn couple's life and Ed's music. But my friend was an old acquaintance from years past in the Keweenaw.

Ed Laulumäki was not the only Finn fiddler. Helmer Töyräs advanced in age, could be seen that very weekend fiddling his mélange of tunes at the Aura Jamboree. Other young fiddlers associated with the Premo family, an Aura Jamboree institution, could be seen on stage that weekend tearing up old polkas and schottisches as the packed dance hall swirled.

One Finnish fiddler, Aarre K. Lahti, a member of the OMFA, wrote in his OMFA 1986 biography, "I was born in Helsinki, Finland in 1908. Finland was a country where it was assumed that you would play a violin."⁷⁶ In the interest of belaboring the point "violin" is not an indicator of classical

⁷⁶ OMFA, *Original Michigan Fiddlers 1986*, 158.

tradition – those from a non-Anglophone language background do not necessarily make such distinctions as "fiddle" and violin," which were not universal in the past.

Similarly, fiddling was extremely common among Norwegians, Swedes, and many other European peoples and they continued to maintain this folk music in America.⁷⁷ So much fieldwork exists on this fact from scholars such as Leary and Martin that it would be interesting to see a comparable quantity produced in a Southern locale for Southern fiddlers. The numerous immigrants from these regions mixed their repertoire with the French, the Irish, and anyone else who was handy and played music.⁷⁸

African American Fiddling

The repertoire mix came from many directions. Michigan took its place on the Underground Railroad, with Detroit as a passage into Canada.⁷⁹ The Canadian side of the border near the Detroit River historically housed black communities,⁸⁰ and these communities produced fiddlers.⁸¹ Some people who passed through these communities on the Underground Railroad settled in then remote

⁷⁷ As can be seen in the entirety of Leary's *Polkabilly* and Martin's *Farmhouse Fiddlers*.

⁷⁸ Leary, 13-19.

⁷⁹ Catton, 166.

⁸⁰ William Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, INC, 1966), 220-229.

⁸¹ Paul M. Gifford, "Henry Frod's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests; Myth and Reality," *Journal of the Society for American Music* (2010): 318.

areas of central Lower Michigan around the counties of Isabella, Mecosta, and Montcalm. This region, particularly Mecosta County, is notable for the number of fiddlers it produced. The region is also notable for its early strides in racial integration.⁸²

Born October 14, 1868 in Mecosta County, Jim Scott would marry a woman named Mary. Jim and Mary created the string band and tent-show seen in the picture, though another picture exists with outlandish costumes. On the 1880⁸³ census, Jim and his parents were listed as "Mulatto." This is what the Old Settlers Reunion site has to say about Jim's parents: "Robert Scott was born in Missouri on August 1, 1844. He met and married Martha Guy on October 1, 1865. Martha was the daughter of James and Ann Guy and was born on May 27, 1851."⁸⁴ The 1880 census⁸⁵ gives her birthplace as Ohio, which makes sense according to the Old Settlers Reunion site's history of the settlement of Mecosta county; many of the residents came from a black community in Ohio. Further, the Old Settlers Reunion site gives the following: "Jim Scott and his wife Mary had a vaudeville (tent) show and traveled all over the U.S."⁸⁶

It is unclear whether the show then had an outdoor or tented basis or whether it performed in theaters. To my mind, a "tent show" brings the image of the traveling medicine tent show -- and the costumed picture could easily represent that kind of performance with no fear of anachronism -- but the medicine-show hypothesis may be wrong. At either rate, Jim Scott and co. represent an inter-racial example of not only Michigan fiddling, but vaudevillian Michigan fiddling at around the turn of the 20th century. Further, it represents an inter-gender string band from the same period.

House Parties

No examination of Michigan fiddling could go without a look at the house party. At the tail end

82 Old Settlers Reunion, "History," <http://www.oldsettlersreunion.com/history.htm> (accessed October 16, 2011).

83 Accessed through FamilySearch.org, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

84 Old Settlers Reunion, "History," <http://www.oldsettlersreunion.com/history.htm> (accessed October 16, 2011).

85 Accessed through FamilySearch.org, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

86 Old Settlers Reunion, "History," <http://www.oldsettlersreunion.com/history.htm> (accessed October 16, 2011); Old Settlers Reunion, "Robert Scott," <http://www.oldsettlersreunion.com/RobertScott.html> (accessed October 16, 2011).

of the flurry of the 1980s Michigan fiddle preservation projects, the Port Huron Museum under the direction of Stephen Williams participated in an avenue of work dealing with house parties and musicians in Michigan. In Williams' article, he lays out a description of the events that were typical of Michigan. In the evening, neighbors would come to a house and play music and dance until around midnight, when a meal was eaten. Music and dancing continued, often until morning farm chores.⁸⁷ Which neighbor's house the event was held at generally changed from week to week, and the winter, a slow agricultural season, was generally prime time for such parties. It seems that one party a week is a typical number in accounts of house parties.⁸⁸

Philip Martin's book *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music & Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* excellently depicts the history, social integration, and interview-based story of house parties. His book focuses mostly on Wisconsin, but he was also aware of Williams' work and cited it in his own book. But the fascinating aspect of Martin's work is the extent of his field research. Wisconsin and Michigan have a fair amount in common, though they only share a land border on the western edge of the U.P., a fairly remote region. Martin shows that fiddling was rampant in the Midwest – or perhaps more appropriately, deeply embedded and central to social life. One passage of Martin's book reads as follows.

Another senior fiddler, Selmer Halvorsen, kept a similar list tucked away in his piano bench. Drawing on his personal experience, the sheets of paper listed all the fiddlers who had lived and fiddled in a five- or ten-mile radius of his farm home in Lakes Coulee, near Blair in west-central Wisconsin. The handwritten list named eighty-six fiddlers. That included his own name, proudly written at the top of his list.⁸⁹

This is a large but believable number to someone who has delved into the fiddling life of a particular area. What is surprising is that such a list existed. Certainly it is a treasure of information.

The house party served a large part in a rural area's socialization. As has already been mentioned, working bees (logging, barn raising, threshing, etc.), weddings, and other events were also

⁸⁷ Williams, 236-237.

⁸⁸ Martin, 43-53; Williams 236-237. These two accounts provide this general description of a house party.

⁸⁹ Martin, 10.

often accompanied by dance and music.⁹⁰ In some cases, it was necessary, as in the case of a Quaker mentioned in Martin's book: "One Ohio farmer, a pious Quaker, discovered his neighbors 'expected a dance and refreshments' for such undertakings and had to put aside his dislike of dancing and music to allow such amusements in order to recruit the needed workforce."⁹¹

Certainly, the house party was a time of fun and community recreation that left vivid memories in many. This is the point of many of the firsthand accounts in Martin's book, and for those interested, good work exists on this tradition where local music found a local audience for so long.

Martin contends well that it was the automobile that brought about the downfall of house parties. He asserts that once people began to attend dance halls, dance pavilions, and other such venues with their newfound freedom of movement, the house party suffered. When the dance halls became the employers of professional bands, not necessarily the neighborhood musicians, the tradition suffered further. The changeover to public, charging venues with paid professional bands allowed for the influence of developing popular music trends to eventually replace the old-time music in public dancing venues.⁹² Ironically, even as Michigan's Henry Ford sought to preserve old-time dance, his own invention perhaps did more damage to the tradition than any other.

Public Dances

One example of a public dance band in Michigan was the Thumb band Nick and His Cornhuskers.⁹³ Nick and His Corn Huskers was led, at least for a time, by Clare Nichols, a farmer of Caledonia Township who would hand over much of the farm work to his son due to the demands of performance.⁹⁴ From at least 1947, and 1949-1951 (the range of articles cited below), Nick and His

90 Martin, 16-21.

91 Martin, 19.

92 Martin, 84-95.

93 All the *Cass City Chronicle* articles regarding Nick and His Cornhuskers originally came into my possession by being downloaded from the internet as PDFs provided by the Rawson Memorial Library of Cass City, Michigan, <http://www2.rawson.lib.mi.us/>

94 Carl Tossey, "Youthful Caledonia Hog Farmer Builds His Own Labor Savors," *The Owosso (Mich.) Argus-Press*, August 23, 1950, via Google News (accessed October 15, 2011).

Cornhuskers were promoted in the *Cass City Chronicle*. One typical promotion says, "Dance to Nick and His Cornhuskers every Saturday night at the Sportsman and V.F.W. Club House, Sebewaing, Mich.--Adv. tf."⁹⁵ At another time, a notice is given that "these dances will continue through the Lenten season."⁹⁶ And as a "Special feature for St. Patrick's" was the "Return engagement by request of Charline Wallace, the 'Singing Cow Girl.'"⁹⁷ Other venues for Nick and His Cornhuskers include a roller rink, a rodeo, and the Akron homecoming, at all of which were dances.⁹⁸ Another advertisement reads "Modern and Old Time Dance with Nick and his Cornhuskers Listen to the direct broadcast from our stage 7:30 p. m. over WKNX (1210)."⁹⁹ Another advertises Nick and His Cornhuskers as "MICHIGAN'S MOST POPULAR DANCE BAND" and "Popular and Old Time Music."¹⁰⁰ Other dances mentioned in the *Cass City Chronicle* involve Scotch dancing at a "MacLean Clan in Family Reunion"¹⁰¹ as well as a dance (of unknown kind) at a wedding, and an "Anniversary Dance" which was "sponsored by the Polish National Alliance" and held at "The Polish American Hall."¹⁰² The November 25, 1949 *Cass City Chronicle* advertises three dances side by side, (schedule for December 2, December 1, and November 26, respectively) one "Modern and old time" at the Legion Hall with music by "the Jolly Gang from Arcadia Ballroom," one "show and dance" by Nick and His Cornhuskers at the Bad Axe Roller Rink, and one "modern and old time" dance, "the last dance before Advent at the Arcadia Ballroom" by "Johnny Maloziec's polka band of Detroit."¹⁰³

More notices of Nick and his Cornhuskers' activities as well as others are found in newspapers, but this selection of the kinds of activities give a picture of how one dance band looked, at least in press, in Michigan prior to the folk revival, at a time when people had a taste not only for the old time

95 "Dance," *Cass City Chronicle* vol. 45, no. 39, January 19, 1951.

96 "Dance," *Cass City Chronicle* vol. 45, no. 43, February 16, 1951.

97 "Dance," *Cass City Chronicle* vol. 45, no. 47, March 16, 1951.

98 *Cass City Chronicle*, varied announcements, May 13th, 1949; June 20th, 1947; June 15th, 1951.

99 "Modern and Old Time Dance," *Cass City Chronicle*, vol. 44 no. 10, July 1, 1949.

100 "Pre-Season's Dance," *Cass City Chronicle*, September 15, 1950.

101 "MacLean Clan in Family Reunion," *Cass City Chronicle*, vol. 44 no. 10, July 1, 1949; "Miss Brown Marries Clayton Hubbel," *Cass City Chronicle*, vol. 44 no. 9, June 24, 1949.

102 "Anniversary Dance," *Cass City Chronicle*, September 29, 1950.

103 "American Legion Dance," *Cass City Chronicle*, November 25, 1949; "Show and Dance," *Cass City Chronicle*, November 25, 1949; "Don't Miss," *Cass City Chronicle*, November 25, 1949.

dances but mixed it up as well and probably did not feel unauthentic for doing so. At this period, through looking at issues of the *Cass City Chronicle*, it is easy to see that dancing was a regular community activity in Michigan.

The Michigan Fiddlers Associations

In 1976, fiddlers around the state of Michigan banded together under the leadership of a few in order to preserve and promote Michigan fiddling. Under the auspices of the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association and the Michigan Fiddlers Association, this work continues today. At its formation, the membership age-range of the fiddlers stretched back into at least the 1890s. In 1986, the OMFA published a book of member biographies and photographs. This book is a wealth of history, as most of the members describe at least a little of how they learned to fiddle and of the community where they learned. Much of this information has been made into “mash-up” map as part of this project and is available at <http://www.michiganfiddle.com> as a visual aid and further support for this paper. Again, in 2001, the OMFA published a book of members and memories. Both books are valuable resources, and what becomes apparent in the books is a significant number of fiddlers and a tremendous historical traditional music community in Michigan, particularly focusing on old-time square dance. The author is a proud member of the OMFA.

Further, three collections of Michigan fiddle repertoire have been printed beginning in 2001 by folks in the state, including *Michigan Jamboree: Fiddle Tunes for Round and Square Dances Volume 1* by Glenn Hendrix and Patti Greenman, *An Island of Fiddlers: Fiddle Tunes of Patrick Bonner, Beaver Island Michigan* by Glenn Hendrix, and *Come Dance With Me: Original Fiddle Compositions and Favorite Tunes of Les Raber* by Judy Raber Burns and Jim McKinney. These three collections contain hundreds of tunes from the Michigan tradition although they do not begin to be an exhaustive account of Michigan repertoire.

It may also be worth mentioning that the OMFA and MFA originated as something like a spin-

off of the Original Dulcimer Player's Club.¹⁰⁴ Earl Clifton Beck, in the introduction to *Lore in the Lumber Camps*, wrote "Folklorists have been reported as saying that dulcimers were found only in the Appalachians and the Ozarks. It is their mistake. They have not been among the shanty boys of the Great Lakes states. For example, that group of old-time woods entertainers known as the Michigan lumberjacks has had four dulcimer players, all making their own instruments."¹⁰⁵ The hammered dulcimer, an instrument often traditionally used to accompany fiddling in Michigan, has a long history in the state and, according to *the Hammered Dulcimer: a History* by Michigander scholar Paul Gifford, "the tradition of dulcimer playing was relatively strong in the state of Michigan" in the period from 1900-1975.¹⁰⁶ Further, the state was central to the hammered dulcimer revival and still forms a hub for the playing of the hammered dulcimer.¹⁰⁷

104OMFA, *Original Michigan Fiddlers 1986*, 6-8.

105Earl Clifton Beck, *Lore of the Lumber Camps* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1948), 7.

106Paul M. Gifford, *The Hammered Dulcimer: a History* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 315.

107Gifford, *The Hammered Dulcimer: a History*, 358-364.