

GEOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS OF  
THE FIDDLING TRADITION  
IN OKLAHOMA

By

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## PREFACE

This thesis is a combination of two longstanding interests--geography and fiddling. The background and origin of this unique study was fostered by Dr. Everett Smith, my undergraduate advisor at the University of Oregon, who first encouraged me to pursue a course of study which would combine the two.

Following my graduation of Oregon, I journeyed to Penn State University to attend the first meeting of the emergent Society for a North American Cultural Survey (SNACS) and to meet Dr. George Carney, who had pioneered geographic research in traditional American music. I later joined the graduate program at Oklahoma State University to work under Carney.

While conducting my graduate studies, I received a Youthgrant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish an Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers. This project was begun in the summer of 1976 and completed in the fall of 1977. During this same period of time, I was chosen to serve as "Resident Folk Artist" for the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council. Both of these experiences provided invaluable experience and information concerning music and culture in Oklahoma which became the foundation of this research.

Thanks are due to a great many people. In particular, I wish to thank George Carney for his enduring confidence and support over the years. Thanks also go to my other committee members, Steve Tweedie and John Rooney, for their steadfast assurance.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the fiddlers and pickers, their families, and the many friends of music I've made in Oklahoma who have befriended and helped me. Particular thanks go to Ace and Bert Sewell, Dale and Viva Carothers, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Johnson, Marion Thede, Phil Slowey, and Al and Georgia Williams.

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I am especially grateful to my parents, Art and Norma Renner, for their encouragement and support of my many pursuits. And finally, a very special thanks to my best friend, Susan Day, without whom none of this would have been possible.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background and Purpose

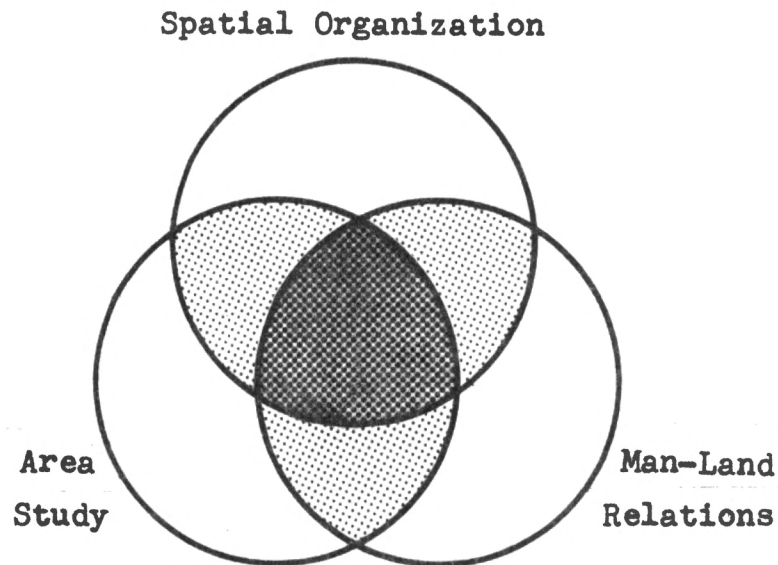
In the area of cultural-historical geography, geographers have studied several topics dealing with material culture, including a variety of structures, religion, and place names (Kniffen, 1965; Mather and Hart, 1954; Zelinsky, 1952, 1967). Of recent, additional attention has been given to areas of non-material culture, such as diet, folk tales, and music (Hilliard, 1969; Wilson-Miller, 1968; Carney, 1974a; Ford, 1971). But geographic studies of non-material culture remain insufficient in comparison to the areas of material culture (Mikesell, 1978). Music is one topic that has been suggested as deserving more geographic research (DeBlij, 1977; Nash, 1975; Zelinsky, 1973). In this study, the fiddling tradition in Oklahoma is given a geographic assessment.

Folklorists approaching this topic might trace the backgrounds of today's fiddle tunes to their antecedents or identify common tune families. A musicologist might research the comparative elements of musical technique. This study, however, evaluates Oklahoma's fiddling tradition for its geographical implications by exploring its

origins, patterns, and processes. As such, it overlaps the interdisciplinary borders of folklife research and cultural-historical geography (Trindell, 1970). Folklorists and geographers have both acknowledged common interests in their respective fields and have suggested that the two disciplines would do well to work together (Balfour, 1924; Buchanan, 1963; Glassie, 1968; Trindell, 1970). Bringing the two disciplines closer together is in fact an underlying goal of this research effort, combining the interests of folklore and geography.

The primary purpose of this paper is to identify integral geographic aspects of fiddle music in Oklahoma utilizing three of geography's four traditions (Pattison, 1964). These three traditions, area study, man-land, and spatial, are used as a framework to evaluate the topic's geographic characteristics. Although each tradition addresses the topic separately, the form of the research is an area study which includes man-land and spatial parameters (Taaffe, 1974). Taaffe's model, depicting the inter-relationships of the three views, illustrates the integrative method undertaken here (Figure 1).

The study answers questions from each area of interest. Is Oklahoma's fiddling tradition unique? Do aspects of this custom differentiate Oklahoma from other areas? Does the study of this tradition help describe or lend a "sense of place" to the area?



Source: Taafe, 1974, p. 2

Figure 1. Taaffe's Three Views of Geography  
After Pattison.

Do man-land implications exist? Is there a sense of place consciousness revealed in music? Are there tunes with Oklahoma place names?

Are there observable characteristics of spatial organization? Is there a spatial distribution of fiddlers or fiddle music in the state? Are paths of spatial movement discernable in the diffusion of the music or in the interaction of its carriers?

As research bordering geography and folklife, this study's goals are twofold. One objective is to add to the literature of folklife offering new insights to a traditional humanities study. The other aim is to contribute to the little researched area of non-material culture in geography

and demonstrate the various ways in which basic geographic concepts may be applied to such an investigation. This paper serves as a possible catalyst for further avenues of research in either discipline.

#### Definition of Terms

This paper is concerned with the fiddling tradition in Oklahoma. In this context, the term "tradition" refers to both the music and musical customs handed down from generation to generation which includes written and popular music. The manner of performance, performance contexts, and repertory are all part of this musical tradition (Spielman, 1975, p. 104). In this sense, "fiddling tradition" is a broad definition which includes both music and performance practices as opposed to the restricted term "traditional fiddling" which refers to a specific body of music coming from oral origins and passed on "by ear".

The fiddle is a violin and differs only in the way it is played and sometimes in how it is adjusted. Fiddlers will hold their instrument and bow in any way they have become accustomed and will often flatted<sup>?</sup> the bridge for greater ease of playing two strings at a time.

Several styles of music and fiddle playing are discussed. "Frontier fiddling" refers to the traditional fiddling which was carried westward with the expansion of the frontier. "Old-Time fiddling" is the current continuation of the frontier fiddling tradition plus certain

influences from commercial media. "Western Swing" is a hybrid form of dance music including elements of frontier fiddling, jazz, blues, and popular musics. "Texas Style" fiddling is a complex contest style derived from frontier fiddling and Western Swing. "Bluegrass" is a form of string band music which originated in the southeastern United States.

The term "Western South" is used to refer to the area of Oklahoma and Texas representing the Western edge of the Southern culture region. This is preferred over the equivocal term "Southwestern" which is frequently applied to the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California.

#### Literature Review

Although there exists a variety of literature on fiddling in other areas of the United States, there has been very little written on fiddle music in Oklahoma (Bayard, 1944; Christeson, 1973; Ford, 1965; Jabbour, 1971; Krassen, 1973; Lowinger, 1974; Mendelson, 1974; Randolph, 1954; Spielman, 1972; Williams, 1972). Only two authors have conducted research dealing directly with Oklahoma fiddling (Thede, 1967; Renner, 1977). The placement of Oklahoma fiddling into some regional classification has been attempted, yet remains something of an enigma (Burman-Hall, 1975; Spielman, 1975).

There are two music collections of Oklahoma fiddling which fall in the area of folklore and social history (Thede, 1967; Renner, 1977). Thede's The Fiddle Book is a collection

of approximately 160 tunes collected from 64 fiddlers in Oklahoma from the 1930s through the 1950s. The collection is a comprehensive representation of Old-Time style fiddling which is accompanied by a text consisting of tune lore and history. Geographic themes are suggested throughout the book including a chapter on place names and another on Oklahoma tunes and tunesters. There is also locational information on where the tune was collected and its occurrence in other regions. Although Thede refers to "western fiddlers" and to fiddlers in "western style" bands, no attempt is made to define or categorize Oklahoma fiddling in respect to a geographic region.

Renner's "Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers" is a collection of field tapes recorded throughout Oklahoma, and a manuscript consisting of biographies, photographs, and supplemental text which documents the current state of the art. The Archive contains over 300 fiddle tunes plus the documentation of the 1977 state fiddle contest. The development of the music, as it has evolved over the last fifty years, is revealed in the seventeen fiddlers' biographies and by the several styles of fiddling recorded.

Two recent studies in the area of musicology have utilized the geographic concept of fiddle style regions and relate Oklahoma to their research (Burman-Hall, 1975; Spielman, 1975). Burman-Hall's research is a comparative study of variation technique to define regional substyles of fiddle music in the southern states. Although her conclusions are based

on 43 versions of just two tunes, she identifies four regional substyles: Blue Ridge style, Southern Appalachian style, Ozark Mountain style, and Western style. Western style being considered principally that of Texas, Oklahoma, and sometimes appearing farther West.

Spielman also conducts a style study, but of a much greater scope taking in all of North America. To undertake his study, Spielman proposes a comprehensive methodology which includes not only musical analysis, but considers the context of each style's historical, geographic, and socio-cultural aspects as well. He then concentrates on areas which are known to have distinctive styles and outlines a number of profiles of regional fiddling traditions of North America, including Midwestern, Ozark, and Texas fiddling. In terms of regional classification, Spielman appears to place Oklahoma in the Midwest (1975, p. 464), but also makes references to a tradition in Texas-Oklahoma fiddling (1975, p. 57).

One other written source has proven helpful in this research. The Oklahoma Fiddler newsletter, started by editor Marion Thede in 1972, has helped document the history of the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association and has provided data on contest locations and tune titles.

#### Procedure

The procedure used to conduct this study consisted primarily of gathering data from field research including



oral sources and field observations. Much of this information was gathered over a two year period while working on a Youthgrant from the National Endowment for the Humanities creating an archive of fiddle music in Oklahoma (Renner, 1977). During this time, numerous interviews, conversations, and observations were made which provided the core for this study. Supplemental data, such as the locations of fiddlers, and annual growth of the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association, were obtained from the files of the Fiddlers Association. The geographic evaluation of this primary research was then organized under the framework of the three traditions for presentation here.

#### Summary and Organization

This research evaluates the geographic implications of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. As a study which borders the interests of folklife and geography, this paper illustrates several approaches to an area of non-material culture using three of geography's four traditions. The form of the research is an area study which includes man-land and spatial parameters.

Chapters are organized in the following manner. Chapter II is a comprehensive history which identifies the elements of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. In following the area study tradition, Chapter III places Oklahoma fiddling in its proper regional perspective. Chapter IV evaluates man-land implications. Spatial organization is examined

in Chapter V. Chapter VI provides summary and conclusions of the research.

Two appendices of audio materials are provided to supplement this paper. Appendix A lists the contents of an accompanying tape giving examples of Oklahoma fiddling taken from the Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers. Appendix B is a selected discography of available phonograph recordings which illustrate the several styles of fiddling discussed in the text.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Introduction

The essential purpose of cultural-historical geography is the understanding of human institutions, or culture, sought through the analysis of their origins and processes (Sauer, 1941). As a companion and preface to this paper's area study, the beginnings and developments of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition are examined to identify the basic elements and factors that have shaped the tradition.

#### Nineteenth Century Beginnings

The history of fiddling in Oklahoma properly begins with the arrival of Anglo-American settlers in the eastern third of the state following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Following the paths of traders into the valleys of the Grand, Illinois, and Kiamichi Rivers, these settlers from Tennessee and Kentucky brought with them their "royal instrument of the frontier" and the sounds of southern "frontier fiddling" (Morgan and Morgan, 1977, p. 20; Townsend, 1976, p. 2, 13).

The creation of Indian Territory and the subsequent resettlement of the Five Civilized Tribes caused these initial pioneers to be removed to Arkansas Territory (Gibson,

1965, pp. 70-71). These movements, however, did not end the presence of fiddling in the area. Members of the Five Tribes, particularly the mixed bloods, had adopted many aspects of White culture including economics and dress (Doran, 1976, p. 49; Morgan and Morgan, 1977, pp. 31-32). When relocation to Oklahoma began, one of the possessions taken along was the fiddle (Renner, 1977, p. 4).

The "Trail of Tears" actually brought three new populations to the area: conservative full blood Indians, acculturated mixed bloods, and blacks--the slaves of mixed blood owners (Doran, 1976; 1978). Fiddling was a trait of each group; a part of southern frontier culture. The kind of fiddle music played by these groups was not unlike the fiddling of the White settlers who had preceded them in that it was dance music of Anglo-Saxon origin. There is some evidence, however, that a body of traditional Indian music was adapted to the fiddle and played in minor Keys (Renner, 1977).

Black fiddlers were common in the Ante-bellum South where playing instruments was condoned, if not considered beneficial, by their masters. A Black fiddler was not only worth more, but provided entertainment for the other slaves as well as his master. The fiddling performed by Blacks consisted of the same frontier fiddle tunes played by White fiddlers (Spielman, 1975, pp. 223-227). Whether or not the slaves in Oklahoma ever played Indian tunes is unknown.

Continuous infusions of Southern White fiddling flowed through Indian Territory prior to the Civil War. Although

the Territory served as an effective political barrier to the national westward expansion of the Upper South, it was a permeable barrier which carried the deflected White populations to Texas. White immigrants passing through eastern Oklahoma on the Texas Road were frequently employed as laborers by mixed blood entrepreneurs. White artisans were permitted to settle in the area by permission of the Tribal government (Doran, 1974).

The aftermath of the Civil War left Indian Territory increasingly open to an invasion of White Southerners. The problem of illegal entry and squatting became so severe by the 1880s that government troops would no longer enforce Indian sovereignty (Doran, 1974, pp. 137-144).

When the floodgates opened for White invasion into the Oklahoma and Indian Territories, the cultural patterns for the future state were established. Oklahoma became a bifurcated region of Southern and Midwestern culture. The southern and eastern portions of the state became dominated by Lower and Upper Southerners. Northern and northwestern Oklahoma became an extension of the Midwest. A transition zone, where the two culture complexes met, stretched through central Oklahoma to its northeastern corner (Doran, 1974).

The styles of fiddling brought into Oklahoma by these migrations reflected their cultural sources. Fiddling from the Midwest was implanted into northern Oklahoma. Fiddling of the Upland South became firmly entrenched in eastern Oklahoma. Southern Oklahoma was the recipient of fiddlers

who migrated from the Lower South.

The diversity of the state's fiddle music was further enhanced by the introduction of European immigrants who settled in various parts of Oklahoma in the latter 1800s and early 1900s. Among these were the Italians and Irish who worked in the southeastern Oklahoma coal fields, the Czechs who settled in central Oklahoma, and the Germans who located in northern Oklahoma (Hale, 1975).

### Twentieth Century Developments

In the early part of the Twentieth Century, Oklahoma fiddling was characterized by the old-time dance music consisting of hoedowns, waltzes, and schottishes. Regional variation in repertory and style represented the dominant culture transplanted by the dramatic suddenness of settlement at the end of the Nineteenth Century.

Regionalism in the music began to breakdown, however, due to new economic and social forces produced by the oil boom, the growth of industrialization, and the movements of rural folk to urban areas. But the most influential agent of change was produced by the revolution in media. The phonograph and radio revolutionized rural existence and musical tastes (Carney, 1974b, p. 19). Fiddlers were "by ear" musicians and were quick to pick up the sounds they heard over record and radio. Regional isolation, which had bred local fiddle styles and repertories, was broken down by the introduction of music broadcast by radio and recorded on discs

from other areas of the country. The adoption of tunes and styles could be expected as fiddlers eagerly listened to the playing of Georgia Slim, Arthur Smith, Howdy Forrester, and Bob Wills.

The effect of media and the resultant transitions in style and repertory were clearly reflected in the change of music played for house dances. As the music introduced by radio and records increased in popularity, the musical preferences of the people included the sounds of blues, ragtime, jazz, and popular music. This introduced new dances, new tunes, and new styles of playing dance music. The variety of dances played at a house dance is revealed by the order of tunes that Oklahoman Woody Guthrie played on such an occasion; an old-time waltz, a two-step, a foxtrot, a square dance, another waltz, a round dance, a ragtime, and another square (Lonesome Valley, 1950).

There was no greater impact of media on Oklahoma fiddling than that which Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys exerted on musical tastes in the state. For 24 years, from 1934 to 1958, Bob and then Johnnie Lee Wills broadcast six days a week over the powerful 50,000 watts of KVOO in Tulsa (Townsend, 1976, p. 93). There has been no more important an element or influence on fiddling in Oklahoma than Bob Wills and his style of music.

When Wills and his organization left Texas and moved to Tulsa in 1934, Oklahomans readily adopted him as one of their own. Wills' daily broadcasts and widespread

appearances introduced his music to all parts of Oklahoma and spread the sounds of Western Swing throughout the state. Other musicians adopted the style and formed such bands as "The Melodiers", "Famous Amos and his Western All-Stars", "Al Leal and his New Night Owls", "Clyde Fox and the Fox-trotters", "The Flint Hill Cowboys", "The Western Troubadors", and "Merl Lindsay and his Oklahoma Nightriders".

Wills' appeal in Oklahoma lay in the fact that the folk could readily identify with him. Al Stricklin, the piano player for Wills during the Tulsa years, felt that this appeal came from his life as a servant of the land and his ability to put the land and life into his music (Stricklin and McConal, 1976, pp. 104-105). Wills' musical background and the forging of Western Swing is symbolic of the musical currents which existed throughout the Western South at the time. Growing up during the jazz age from a tradition of frontier fiddling, Wills combined the multicultural influences of the frontier, blues, jazz, and popular music idioms to produce a heterogeneous style of music which summarized the musical tastes of the people.

That Wills played the fiddle himself and featured it as a lead instrument, had an even more profound effect on Oklahoma's fiddlers. Wills' fiddling not only represented the people, but it symbolized success in the midst of the adversity of the Depression. Wills' dance music offered relief from hard times and his fiddle tunes like "Prosperity Special", "Maiden's Prayer", "San Antonio Rose", and "Faded Love" became



the mainstays of each fiddler's repertory and remain among the most requested of fiddle tunes today.

For 20 years, from the time of Wills' arrival in Tulsa until the Rock and Roll revolution of the mid 1950s, Western Swing fiddling dominated Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. The 1950s, however, marked a decade of decline into which fiddle music subsided into near non-existence. With the onslaught of Rock and Roll and the progressive desires of the musical public, the old-fashioned house dances disappeared and country music bands dropped the fiddle in favor of electric guitars. By the late 50s and early 60s, virtually the only fiddling that could be heard on the radio was either that of Bob Wills, or Tommy Jackson playing with Ray Price (Malone, 1968, p. 279). In homes, the omnipresent television effectively drowned out grandfather's rendition of "Sally Goodin".

When fiddlers were no longer in demand for dances, those who did not quit began looking for another outlet in which to perform. They found that outlet on the contest stage. Contests have long been a part of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition and have offered the fiddler prestige as well as reward. Prior to the 1920s, a contestant would generally play the same tunes he played at a dance, but as competition became keener, special tunes were worked up to meet the challenge. Particularly in north and west Texas, playing in contests became a refined art. Since the 1920s, a style of fiddling developed in that region which is now known as Texas Style.

The Texas Style is a complex approach to fiddling that

modifies many of the traditional tunes with additional bowing and noting, and often expands a tune beyond its basic two part composition to include three, or more parts. Over the years, certain phrases and additional parts have become mandatory elements of the tune which distinguish Texas Style tunes from their counterparts in the southeastern United States. Further distinction has come from incorporating selections out of the ragtime, jazz, swing, and blues repertoires; adoptions due to the region's affinity for Western Swing.

The Texas Style has been a growing influence in Oklahoma since the early 1960s. Prior to that time, there was little awareness in Oklahoma of the quality of Texas contest music until men like Ace Sewell, and Cecil and Herman Johnson, started bringing the new style back with them following visits to Texas contests. Particularly since Herman Johnson began winning National Championships, Oklahoma fiddlers have incorporated more of the sounds of the Texas Style into their fiddling.

Not all fiddlers, however, sought the contest stage. With the disappearance of the house dance, most amateur fiddlers felt they had no place to perform and the majority who had stopped playing in the 1950s were still inactive. It was not until the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association was organized that these fiddlers had a forum from which they could play and be appreciated once again.

The Fiddlers Association was created in late 1971 by a

dozen fiddlers from Central Oklahoma who met on Sunday afternoons for jam sessions. In the interest of regenerating and promoting the diminishing art of Old-Time fiddling, the group organized and opened their meetings to the public in a rented hall. The Sunday meetings proved so successful that fiddlers from other parts of the state began establishing their own regional chapters of the Association. Today the Fiddlers Association has grown to include six regional chapters and boasts hundreds of members. Every Sunday a different regional chapter meets and a Fiddlers Festival is held annually at Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The Association has also begun sponsoring an official State Fiddlers Contest held in conjunction with the Oklahoma State Fair.

The timely creation of the Fiddlers Association virtually saved a large portion of the Old-Time fiddling from extinction. Scores of the older fiddlers who had not touched their instruments in years started playing again. A sense of purpose has developed among the fiddlers as they have striven together for improvement, given encouragement to new members, and made a conscious effort to revive many of the old tunes which were previously forgotten.

The meetings of the Association have also revealed the tremendous wealth of repertory and playing styles in Oklahoma fiddling. When attending a fiddlers meeting, one may hear tunes indigenous to the Southwest, the Southeast, the Midwest, and even an occasional Canadian fiddle tune. Other sources may include the hornpipes and reels of the settlement frontier,

the schottishes, and waltzes from house dances, Bob Wills' two-steps, Texas contest tunes, selections from Tin Pan Alley, and rapid Bluegrass breakdowns.

Bluegrass is the most recent of styles incorporated into Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. Bluegrass music is not indigenous to Oklahoma, rather it was introduced through media and fiddlers have learned the Bluegrass style largely through phonograph recordings. Closely related to Oklahoma's Southern music traditions, Bluegrass was imported from the southeastern United States and easily took root in the traditions of string band music and Old-Time fiddling. Bluegrass music in Oklahoma has experienced a growing popularity since 1969 when the first outdoor Bluegrass festival west of the Mississippi was held in Hugo, Oklahoma (Carney, 1974a, p. 46). Since that time, dozens of semi-professional Oklahoma Bluegrass bands have formed and play at shows and festivals throughout the year. As a featured instrument of the band, Bluegrass fiddle is typified by a bluesy feeling and quick-tempoed breakdowns.

Currently, four categories of fiddlers can be designated according to style and age group. Old-Time style is played mostly by senior fiddlers and represents a continuation of the frontier fiddling tradition. Swing fiddling, or the style evolved from Bob Wills and the music played at country ballroom dances, is played by all groups. The Texas Style is favored by the contest fiddlers who range from young to retirement age. Bluegrass fiddlers are generally a younger

group who prefer the faster tempoes and intensity of a Bluegrass string band.

### Summary

The evolution of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition and the emergence of four styles of fiddle playing are illustrated in Figure 2. From an ancestry of Anglo-Saxon fiddle music, frontier fiddling developed and entered Oklahoma in the Nineteenth Century as the Southern frontier moved West. Frontier fiddling in Oklahoma was played by several different culture groups including Upper and Lower Southern Whites, Indians, Blacks, and finally Midwesterners and European immigrants at the turn of the century. The regional variations in fiddling represented by each group broke down as social and economic changes took place in the Twentieth Century. The most influential agent of change was the media revolution which ushered in new musical styles and added greater diversity to the frontier fiddling tradition. Western Swing music, led by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, was spread throughout Oklahoma during the early stages of media influence and dominated the region's musical tastes for two decades. In the early 1960s, Texas Contest style fiddling entered Oklahoma--a hybrid of frontier fiddling tradition and Western Swing influence. Bluegrass fiddling was adopted by Oklahoma fiddlers in the late 1960s, a modern offshoot of frontier fiddling.

Oklahoma's fiddling tradition is derived from Southern

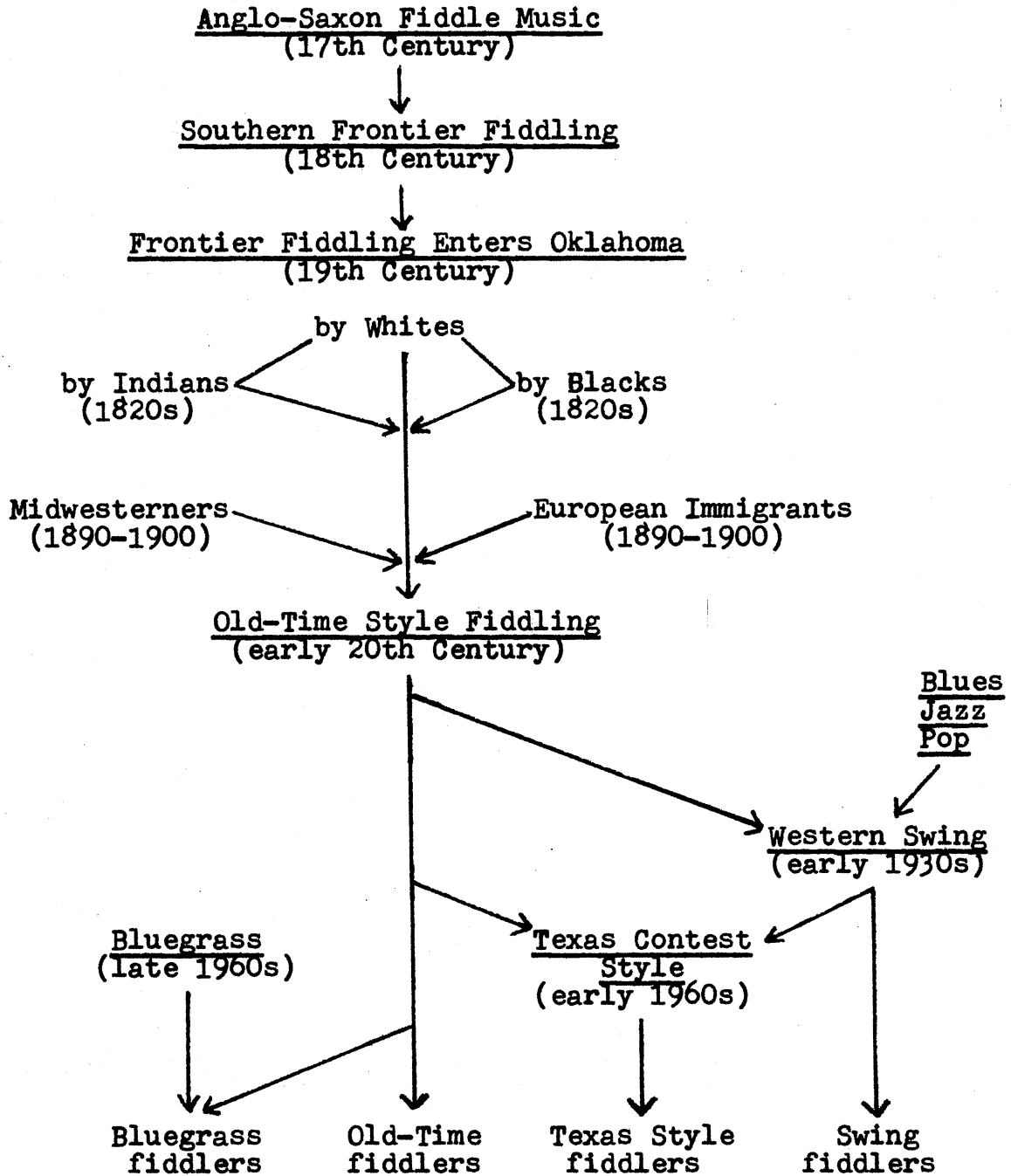


Figure 2. Historical Development of Oklahoma Fiddling

origins. The primary element is Southern frontier fiddling from which current styles and repertory of Western Swing, Texas Contest Style, and Bluegrass have evolved. The only non-Southern fiddling inputs were made by Midwesterners and European immigrants who settled in the northern and central portions of the state around the turn of the century. Initially, these inputs lent a regional flavor to Oklahoma fiddling, but have since become fully absorbed or assimilated into the Southern dominated styles.

The major processes effecting Oklahoma fiddling have been migration and media. Nineteenth Century migrations transplanted fiddling from other regions into Oklahoma. In the Twentieth Century, the migrations of fiddlers to contests, dances, and meetings circulated Western Swing and Texas Contest styles throughout the state.

The impact of media has been the most influential process. Beginning in the 1920s, radio and phonograph recordings broke down regional isolation and exposed fiddlers to new styles and tunes. Bob Wills' music in particular had the greatest influence through media exposure. Media impact continues today, primarily through records and the now ubiquitous cassette tape recorder. Fiddlers who wish to learn a particular style or rendition of a tune frequently study a record they have purchased or a cassette tape they have recorded at some fiddlers gathering.

Oklahoma's fiddling tradition has not evolved into a single regional style. Rather, four closely related styles

have evolved which are all Southern in origin. These include: Old-Time style--a continuation of frontier fiddling, Swing fiddling--evolved from Western Swing music, Texas Style--a contest style of fiddling brought to Oklahoma from north and west Texas, and Bluegrass style--a recent importation from the southeastern states.



## CHAPTER III

### AREA STUDY

#### Introduction

The foundation of the area studies tradition in geography is based on determining the nature of places, their character, and differentiation (Pattison, 1964, p. 213). It is one of the oldest interests and core concepts of the discipline and has been phrased in a variety of ways including regional study, chorology, and areal differentiation (Taaffe, 1974, p. 2). Its methodologies are highly flexible and range from scientific objectivity to the subjective and artistic (Robinson, 1976, p. 544; Taaffe, 1970, pp. 18-19).

This area study concerns Oklahoma and uses a single feature of non-material culture as a descriptive measure of Oklahoma's character and differentiation. As an integral part of the area's folk culture, Oklahoma's fiddling tradition represents a unique dimension of area folkways and thereby provides insights into the state's character.

Chapter II examined the historical origins and processes which have shaped Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. This chapter makes a contemporary assessment of the tradition in terms of a regional perspective and as a mosaic of fiddling styles. Within this context, the questions of uniqueness and

differentiation of Oklahoma fiddling are explored for their contribution toward a better understanding of the state's character.

### Regional Perspective

In recent research analyzing general fiddle style regions, the placement of Oklahoma has been something of an enigma (Burman-Hall, 1975; Spielman, 1975). As yet, no study has focused<sup>s</sup> on Oklahoma alone, but its classification as a region, or subregion, of fiddling style is plausible.

In her research on variation technique in Southern fiddle styles, Burman-Hall concludes that Oklahoma and Texas comprise a "Western" substyle of Southern fiddling. In doing so, she surmizes an important conformity of style between Oklahoma and Texas. A weakness of Burman-Hall's research, however, is that it is based on only 43 versions of two tunes for the entire South. A more detailed investigation using a larger sample needs to be conducted to substantiate her findings.

Spielman's work does not specifically regionalize Oklahoma, but surrounds it with other fiddle style regions. Although he comments once on a common tradition found in "Texas-Oklahoma fiddling", Oklahoma would seem to be sandwiched between Texas, Ozark, and Midwest styles (1975, pp. 57, 459-484).

Spielman describes Texas as an area which has developed a unique and distinctive fiddling style (1975, p. 469). This style which he attributes to all of Texas, however, is the Texas Contest style which developed in a north and west Texas hearth. Texas style, however, has diffused outward to other parts of the country including Oklahoma. To associate this style with Texas alone is erroneous. Some Oklahomans are considered among the best of the Texas style fiddlers, such as Herman Johnson, a four times National Champion.

The mountainous region of Northern Arkansas and Southern Missouri are depicted as having an Ozark style (Spielman, 1975, pp. 459-464). This style is described as being very conservative and has remained closer to the sounds and style of frontier fiddling than have other regions. Much of the Upper South folk culture found in the Ozarks is also existent in Eastern Oklahoma which raises a question of possible similarities in fiddling practices.

Spielman places Oklahoma in a Midwest fiddling region, an area he portrays as extending from Pennsylvania to the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Texas. It is characterized as a "potpourri" which consists of a blending of European, New England, Appalachian, and Southern traditions, plus the commercial influences of Hillbilly, Western Swing, Bluegrass, and Country-Western musics (1975, pp. 464-469). Oklahoma's diversity of fiddling is a product of several of these elements which makes it plausible to include it in Spielman's Midwest region.

It is possible to infer from Spielman's research that Oklahoma's position between the three regions could make it a contact, or transition zone. The patterns of settlement which existed at the turn of the Twentieth Century with Midwesterners in northern Oklahoma, Ozarkians in eastern Oklahoma, and Texans in southern Oklahoma support this contention. The persistence of these patterns seems yet discernable, although they have been obscured by the ascension of modern Southern originated fiddle styles. The degree to which these patterns remain needs to be measured and deserves the attention of folklorists and musicologists.

In terms of classifying Oklahoma as a fiddle style region, the most likely supposition is a combined region with Texas. The two states share several common features in their fiddling traditions. Both have origins in Southern frontier fiddling, but also experienced a multicultural mixing which modified Southern culture predominance and effected musical tradition. Each state has shared in the development of Western Swing music which has produced a common repertory of tunes, a tradition of melodic improvisation, the use of a heavy 2/4 dance beat, and the adoption of a closed chord "sock style" guitar accompaniment. These traits have been carried over and reinforced in the Texas contest style popular in both states.

It is contended that a more meaningful understanding of the area's fiddling would be gained by recognizing a "Western-Southern" or "Tex-Okla" fiddle style region. But until more

research is conducted analyzing the various elements of Oklahoma and Texas fiddling practices, definition of such a fiddle style region will remain an enigma.

### Mosaic of Styles

Perhaps the greatest problem encountered when considering Oklahoma as a potential fiddle style region is that it is not a homogeneous, single style area. Rather, it is a mosaic of four styles. Not unlike Spielman's concept of a Midwest "potpourri", Oklahoma's fiddling tradition is a multiple-style mosaic composed of various patterns.

As revealed in Chapter II, Oklahoma's fiddling tradition has evolved from Southern frontier fiddling origins into four related styles--Old-Time, Western Swing, Texas, and Bluegrass. Each of these styles is distributed throughout the state. The different patterns of each distribution form a multifaceted mosaic. To identify some of these patterns, the locations of recognized Bluegrass, Swing, and Texas style fiddlers are mapped (Figure 3). Determination of a fiddler's style was decided by a consensus of informants and current involvement of the fiddler with a given style. The major problem encountered with labeling fiddlers by style is that some cross stylistic lines. An example would be Ben Lawson of Marlow, Oklahoma who has emulated the Texas style, played Bluegrass fiddle in an Oklahoma Bluegrass group, and now plays Swing fiddle in a dance band. Since his current

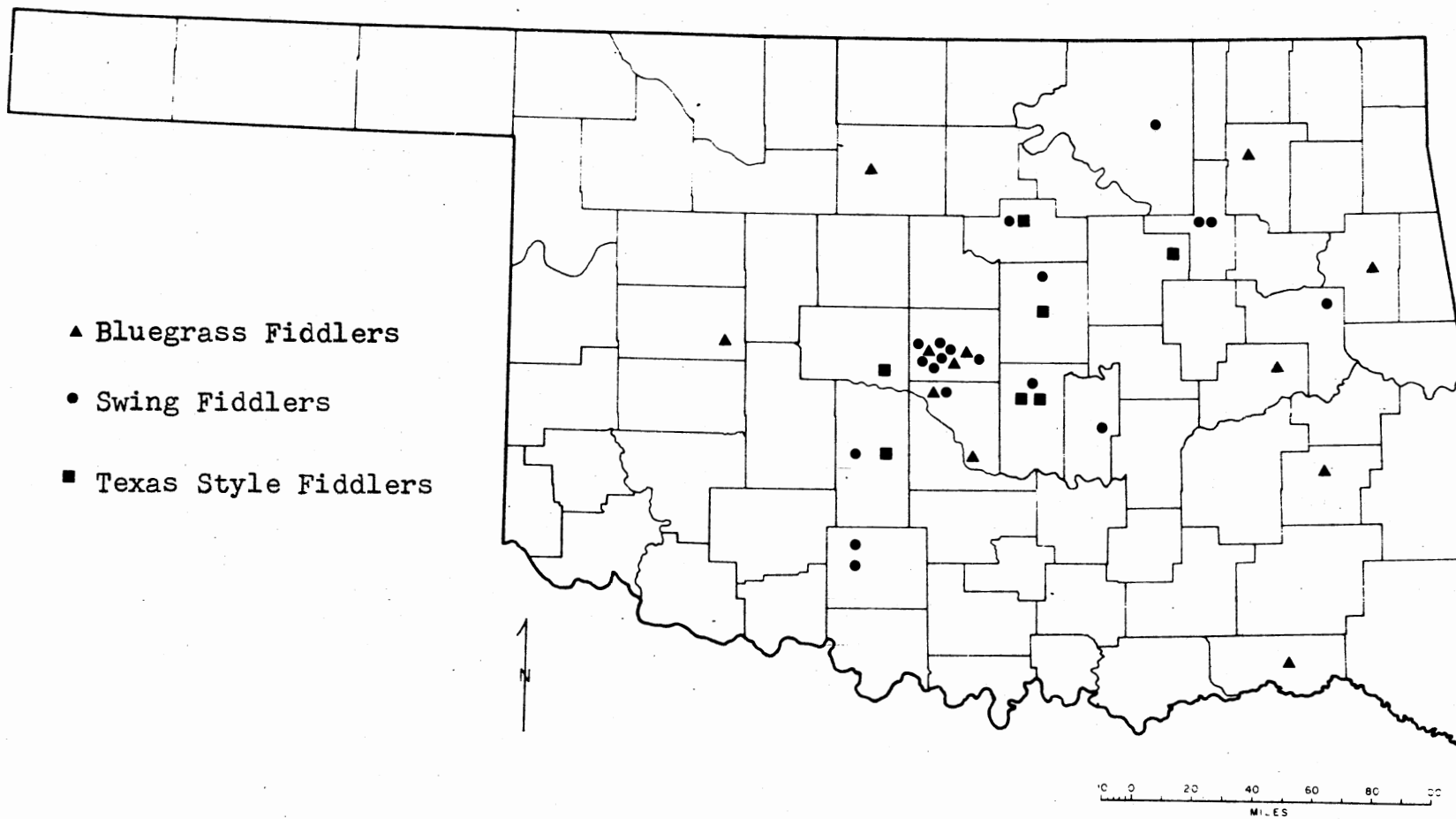


Figure 3. Locations of Fiddlers, by Style

involvement is with Western Swing, he is included in the Swing fiddlers category.

Bluegrass fiddlers are the most dispersed of the three groups. Several are clustered around the Oklahoma City area, but others are widely dispersed, particularly in eastern Oklahoma. The eastern pattern may reflect the growing popularity of Bluegrass and attendance at Bluegrass festivals in that part of the state.

The locations of Swing fiddlers show a definite urban orientation indicative of progressive music tastes of the city. A significant cluster is found around Oklahoma City, while other Swing fiddlers are located in Tulsa, Muskogee, Stillwater, Shawnee, Chickasha, Marlow, and Duncan.

Texas style fiddlers are located mostly in the central portion of the state along an axis from Chickasha to Sapulpa. This pattern conforms with the population density pattern of the state, but is also indicative of a "neighborhood effect" whereby these fiddlers have learned from each other.

Locations of outlets where the three styles may be heard on a regular basis reveals similar patterns to the fiddler's distributions. The outlets for Bluegrass music are seasonal, alternating between outdoor summer festivals and indoor winter shows. The summer festivals are held at privately owned outdoor parks where people camp out for a weekend. Four outdoor festival sites are located in eastern Oklahoma: two in northeastern Mayes County, one near McAlester, and another by Hugo. One festival site is located in western Oklahoma at Cement.

Indoor winter shows are located in urban places and are held in municipal auditoriums. Regular shows are held in Owasso, and Pryor in eastern Oklahoma, and at Shawnee, Midwest City, and Guthrie in central Oklahoma (Figure 4).

Ballrooms and dance halls, where Swing fiddlers may be heard, are all found in association with urban places including Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Muskogee, Enid, Stillwater, Seminole, Ada and Duncan. These locations are determined by a sustaining population which make such a business feasible. The sparsity of population in western Oklahoma may not be able to support such an activity on a regular basis. In the case of southeastern Oklahoma, where religious conservatism condemns dancing and drinking, the lack of outlets is more likely due to social disapproval.

The Fiddlers Association chapters provide an outlet for all styles, but are most often attended by Old-Time and Texas style fiddlers. Chapters are located in Oklahoma City, Inola, Pawhuska, Cushing, Cleo Springs, and Poteau where monthly meetings are held. To some extent the chapters at Cleo Springs, Pawhuska, and Poteau serve areas which do not have outlets for the other styles.

A comparison between Figures 3 and 4 show a concurrence between the locations of fiddlers and outlets which feature their style of fiddling. The location of Bluegrass fiddlers, for instance, coincides to some degree with the locations of indoor shows in central Oklahoma and outdoor festivals in eastern Oklahoma. Swing fiddlers locations concur with the



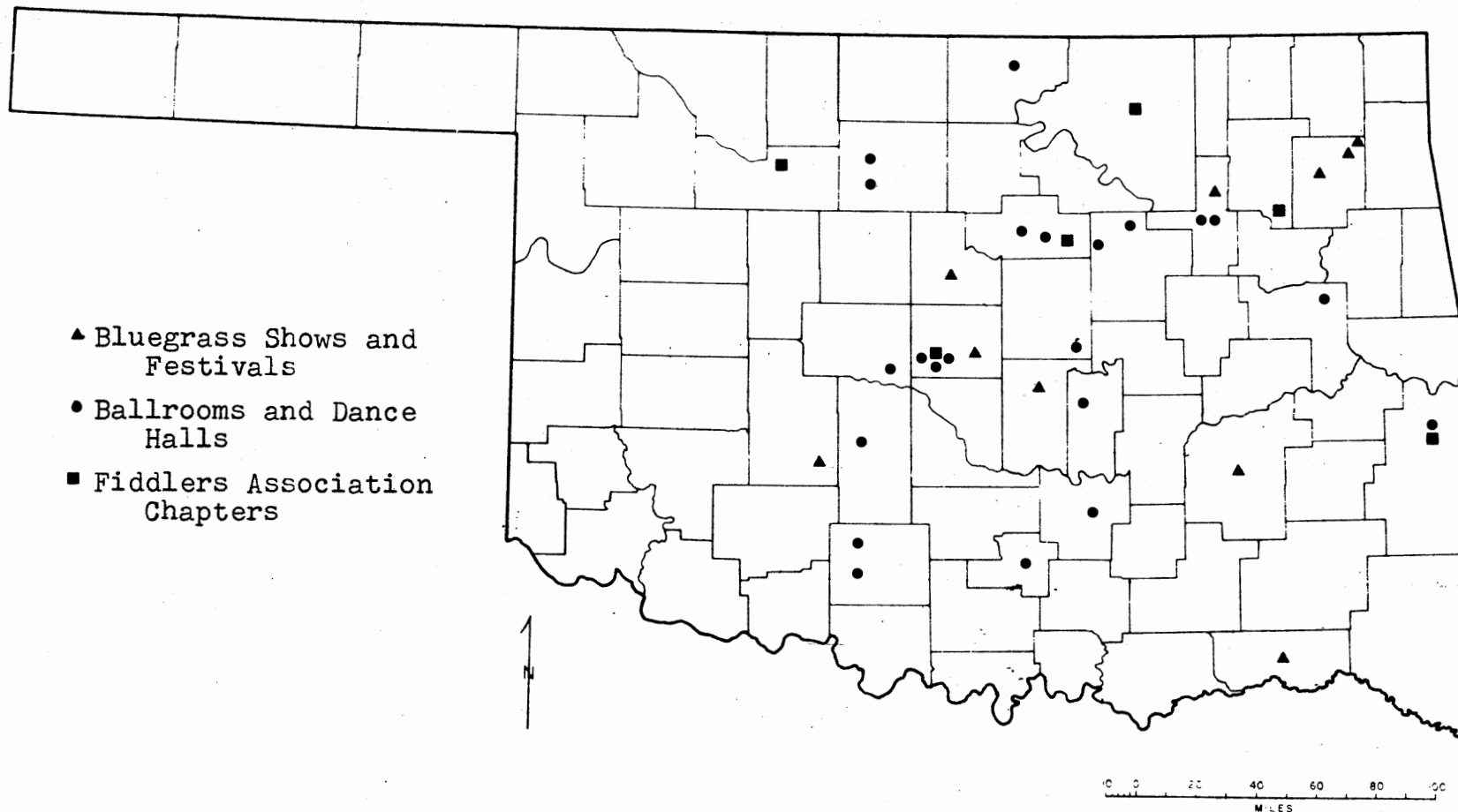


Figure 4. Locations of Music Outlets, by Style

locations of ballrooms and dance halls in urban places. The Oklahoma City chapter of the Fiddlers Association is a central location for jam sessions of the Texas style fiddlers.

### Summary

Several perspectives are possible in considering the regionalization of Oklahoma fiddling. These include dividing the state into three parts--north, east, and south--to reflect settlement patterns and folk culture; combining Oklahoma and Texas into a common region; and considering Oklahoma as a region unique unto itself.

The various kinds of fiddling found in the state compose a mosaic of styles. Patterns in the mosaic include Bluegrass fiddlers clustered around Oklahoma City and dispersed through eastern Oklahoma, Swing fiddlers in larger urban places, and Texas style fiddlers along an axis from Chickasha to Sapulpa. Outlets where these styles of fiddling may be heard coincide to a certain extent with the fiddlers' locations.

Oklahoma's Southern heritage is reflected by its fiddling tradition which is derived from Southern frontier origins. But the state's overall Southernness has been modified by its multicultural milieu which has distinguished it and its fiddling tradition from the eastern South. As one of America's last frontiers, Oklahoma has been imbued with a frontier attitude that has embraced innovation, yet resisted social change. This dualism is depicted in the fiddling tradition where new musical ideas and styles have been adopted

while conservative values of home, family, and church have been upheld. As an enduring folk culture trait, the tradition is in many ways characteristic of the place and exemplifies Oklahoma's unique cultural-historical heritage as a part of the Western South.

## CHAPTER IV

### MAN-LAND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

An interest of long standing to geographers has been the association between man and his environment, a tradition that has evolved through principles of environmental control to current concepts of ecology, or man-land relationships (Taaffe, 1974, p. 3). But as Robinson (1976, p. 527) has remarked, the critical element in man-land relationships is really man's mind. This psychological consideration has endeavored geographers to explore the association of place consciousness, identification with place, and the perception of place (Gould and White, 1974; Tuan, 1974; Ford and Henderson, 1974). Research conducted in the geography of music has also investigated these behavioral relationships with place (Carney, 1974a; Henderson, 1974; Meyer, 1976; Stephenson and Stephenson, 1973). The attitudes and bonds between man and his environment are reflected in the music of an area, but particularly so where man and the land maintain a close relationship. As stated by one geographer, "music expresses the special qualities of a land and life of its folk" (Meyer, 1976, p. 67).

Perhaps better than any other rural derived music form, fiddling best represents the music of rural Oklahoma and its folk. The fiddle was the primary instrument of the Oklahoma frontier and has been the backbone of Oklahoma's instrumental folk music tradition. Whether manufactured or made at home, it was the fiddle that overcame rural solitude and voiced the emotions of the people, the routine of daily life, and the rural environment. The tunes which have been passed down reveal a great deal of rural imagery and reflect a strong sense of place consciousness. The rural imagery, place consciousness, and persistence of the rural character in Oklahoma's fiddling tradition are examined in this chapter.

### Rural Imagery

Fiddle music is genuine "country" music. That is to say, it is the product of the farm and country living. Being a rural music, it reflects an environment consisting of livestock, crops, the land, conservatism, and plain living. Fiddling abounds with rural imagery. It tells of life on the farm and ranch. It speaks of cattle, cotton, and corn. It alludes to wild animals and the excitement of the hunt. And it tells of sitting down to a country dinner of beans and cornbread.

These many themes can be recognized in the titles of fiddle tunes (Table I). For instance, the theme of livestock can be recognized in such titles as "Blue Mule", "Chicken in the Barnyard", "Cattle in the Cane", "Hell

TABLE I  
FIDDLE TUNES IN OKLAHOMA WITH RURAL IMAGERY

---

Benny Eat a Woodchuck	Old Hen, She Cackled
Big Eyed Rabbit	Old Paint
Black Jack Grove	Peas and Cornbread
Blue Mule	Possum Pie
Cacklin' Hen	Possum up the Sycamore Tree
Carve Dat Possum	Rabbit in the Grass
Cattle in the Cane	Raccoon's Tail
Chicken in the Barnyard	River Stay Away From My Door
Chicken Reel	Rocky Ford
Chuck in the Bush	Sharecropper's Blues
Coon Dog	Soppin' the Gravy
Cotton Patch Rag	Spotted Pony
Crazy Creek	Squirley was a Pretty Thing
Flop Eared Mule	Turkey in the Straw
Forkee Deer	Wagon Yard
Gray Eagle	Where the Chicken got the Axe
Great Big Taters in Sandyland	White Bosom Bear
Hell Among the Yearlings	Whoa Mule
Hog on the Mountain	Wolves A-Howlin'
'Lasses Cane	Wrassled with a Wildcat
Lost Goose	Yellow Jacket
Old Gray Mule	

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Data Sources: Renner, "Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers", 1977  
Theude, The Fiddle Book, 1967

Among the Yearlings", "Lost Goose", and Spotted Pony". Crops are the topic in tunes like "Cotton Patch Rag", "Great Big Taters in Sandyland", and Lasses Cane".

Wild animals and hunting are among the favorites of things commemorated by fiddle tunes. Titles here include, "Big Eyed Rabbit", "Coon Dog", "Forkee Deer", "Chuck in the Bush", "Gray Eagle", "Hog on the Mountain", "Possum Up the Sycamore Tree", "Rabbit in the Grass", "Raccoon's Tail", "Squirley was a Pretty Thing", "White Bosom Bear", "Wolves A-Howlin'", and "Wrassled with a Wildcat".

Aspects of the rural diet is another celebrated subject. "Benny Eat A Woodchuck", "Carve Dat Possum", "Peas and Cornbread", "Possum Pie", "Soppin' the Gravy", and "Where the Chicken got the Axe" are titles representing country foodways.

#### Place Consciousness

Affinity for place is another indicator of man-land implications in Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. A strong identity with place, and a certain nostalgia and pride, pervade in Oklahoma fiddling. Many tunes impart an attachment to a place or region, while others show a pride in Oklahoma's heritage.

Oklahoma's Indian heritage is a theme commemorated in several fiddle tunes (Table II). These include "Cherokee Maiden", "Choctaw", "Creek Nation", "Gone Indian", "Kiowa",

TABLE II  
 FIDDLE TUNES WITH INDIAN TITLES  
 AND OKLAHOMA PLACE NAMES

---

Banks of the Caney	Old Purcell
Barnsdall Blues	Okie Boogie
Beaver County Waltz	Oklahoma Breakdown
Broken Bow	Oklahoma Gals
Cherokee Maiden	Oklahoma Hills
Cherokee Shuffle	Oklahoma Rag
Cherokee Strip	Oklahoma Redbird
Cherokee Waltz	Oklahoma Run
Choctaw	Oklahoma Waltz
Creek County	Osage Stomp
Creek County Waltz	Red River Valley
Creek Nation	Rose of Old Pawnee
Delaware County Blues	Spavinaw Bill
Fort Smith	Take Me Back to Tulsa
Gone Indian	Tulsa Hop
Good Indian	Tulsa on Saturday Night
Good Old Oklahoma	Tulsa Rag
Greer County Song	Tulsa Stomp
Indian River Hornpipe	Tulsa Waltz
Kiowa	Verdigris
Little River Stomp	Verdigris Bottom
Lone Indian	Waltz of the Arbuckles

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Data Sources: Renner, "Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers", 1977  
 Thede, The Fiddle Book, 1967  
 Thede, Oklahoma Fiddler Newsletter, 1972-1978.



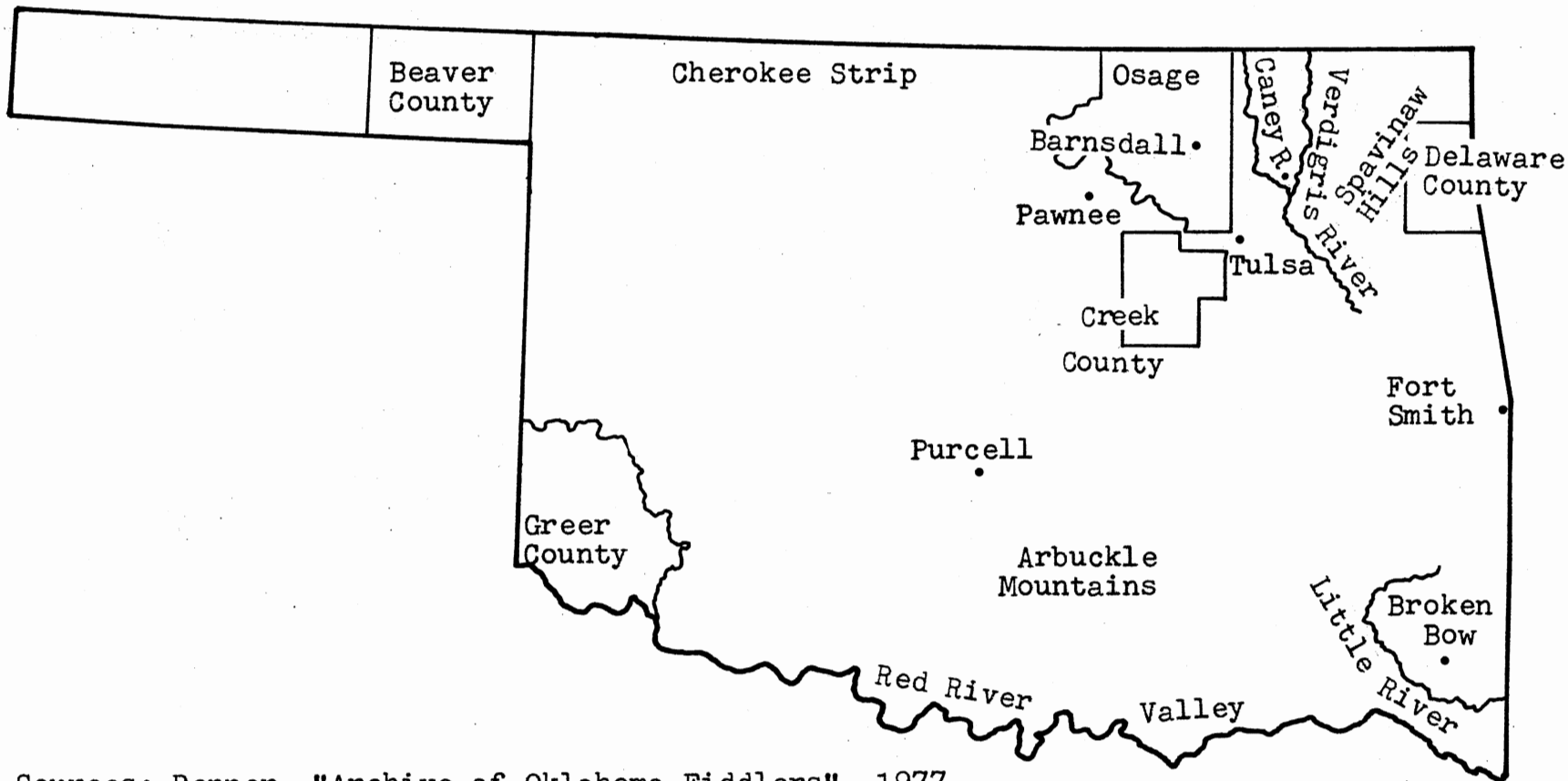
and "Lone Indian". White settlement history is also remembered with tunes like "Oklahoma Run", "Greer County Song", and "Cherokee Strip".

Place consciousness is most apparent in the naming of tunes for physiographic features and place names (Figure 5). Such tunes reveal an identification with place that often include strong emotional bonds. Oklahoma fiddle tunes named after physical landmarks are, "Banks of the Caney", "Verdigris Bottom", "Red River Valley", and "Waltz of the Arbuckles". Tunes with Oklahoma place names include "Barnsdall Blues", "Beaver County Waltz", "Broken Bow", "Creek County", "Delaware County Blues", "Little River Stomp", "Oklahoma Walta", "Osage Stomp", "Rose of Old Pawnee", "Spavinaw Bill", and "Tulsa Waltz".

#### Persistence of Rural Character

Oklahoma's fiddling tradition has demonstrated a firm persistence of its rural character despite the pressures of increasing urbanization. Once a predominantly rural state, 68 percent of its population now live in towns of 2,500 population or more, the dividing line used by the United States Bureau of Census to delineate between rural and urban. An urban majority in Oklahoma is actually a fairly recent development. In 1930, two-thirds of the population was rural and half were still rural in 1950 (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1973, p. 7).

Urban growth in Oklahoma has been implemented by a



Sources: Renner, "Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers", 1977  
 Thede, The Fiddle Book, 1967  
 Thede, The Oklahoma Fiddler Newsletter, 1972-1978

Figure 5. Place Names in Oklahoma Fiddle Tunes

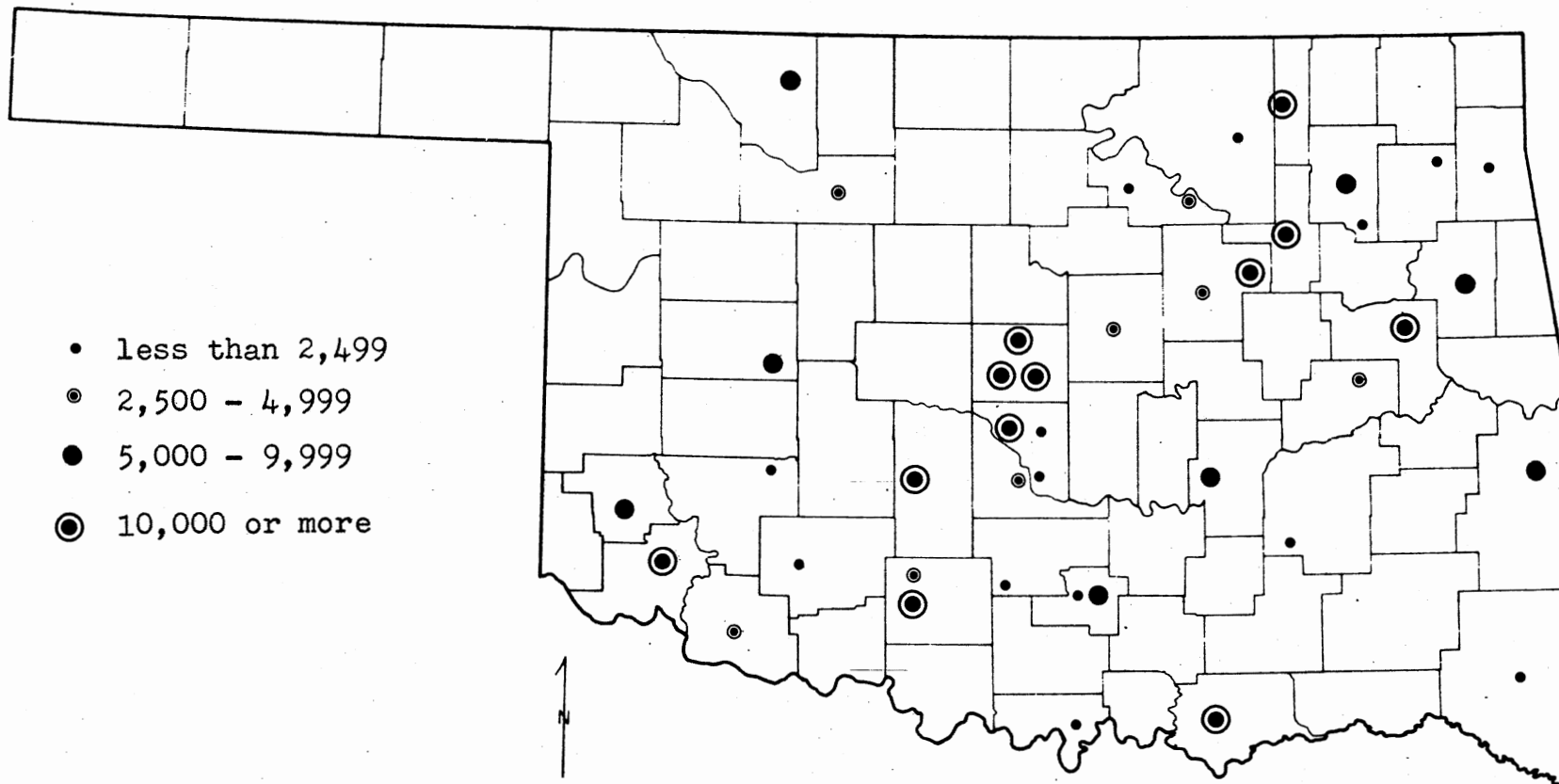
steady migration of rural folk to the cities. Fiddlers, of course, were a part of this migration. Of the 17 fiddlers included in the Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers, all were raised on a farm, but 16 eventually moved to town (Renner, 1977).

The move to town did not mark an end in the music's rural character. It may have, in fact, reinforced the rural ideal and a desire for the former way of life (Stephenson and Stephenson, 1973, pp. 13-14). Fiddle music in town became an affirmation of the rural qualities of life and the desire for the unpressured, healthy, and honest living represented by the rural ideal. Quite simply, the fiddling in the city has remained much more "down home" than "up town".

The persistence of the rural character in Oklahoma fiddling is also observable in the size of places holding fiddle contests. For the most part, fiddle contests are a small town phenomenon. Between 1972 and 1977, one-third of all contest sites were towns of under 2,500 population (Figure 6). One-half of the total number of contest sites were towns under 5,000 population. Also rural in nature, is that many of these contests are held in conjunction with heritage celebrations and county fairs, which are essentially rural events.

#### Summary

Within the man-land tradition of geography, music is



Sources: Thede, The Oklahoma Fiddler Newsletter, 1972-1977  
 U.S. Census, 1970

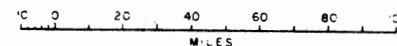


Figure 6. Populations of Towns Holding Fiddle Contests, 1972-1977

seen as a qualitative measure of man's relationship to his environment. Oklahoma's fiddling tradition reflects the music's rural origins with a repertory that abounds with rural imagery. A strong sense of place consciousness is also revealed in the number of tunes named for places in Oklahoma, or for aspects of Oklahoma history. The rural character of the music lives on as a reminder to urban folk of the older ways of life, and is still extremely popular among the rural and small town populace.

CHAPTER V  
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Introduction

The spatial view in geography stems from the art of mapping and the geographer's concern for geometry and movement (Pattison, 1964, p. 212). This basic interest in the location and distribution of phenomena has recently been emphasized in geography as spatial organization expressed as both pattern and process (Taaffe, 1970, p. 6). Within the context of spatial organization, the spatial distributions of static phenomena and the dynamic properties of spatial movements are analyzed to explain pattern.

This chapter examines some contemporary spatial movements within Oklahoma's fiddling tradition in terms of spatial diffusion and spatial interaction (Abler, Adams, and Gould, 1971; Brown, 1968; Gould, 1969). Spatial diffusion is illustrated by the growth and spread of the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association. Spatial interaction is exhibited by the migration of fiddlers to Association meetings and fiddle contests.

Spatial Diffusion

The Oklahoma Fiddlers Association was founded in

November, 1971, by a dozen fiddlers from around central Oklahoma who met for regular jam sessions in Oklahoma City. Hoping to preserve and promote fiddle music in the state, these original members contacted other fiddle enthusiasts and began a process of contagion diffusion which became the primary vehicle for expanding membership (Abler, Adams, and Gould, 1971, pp. 390-392). Carriers of the idea, especially the Association president Jack Luker, paid personal visits to other fiddlers encouraging them to join and organize other chapters in the state. As the number of recruits increased, they in turn contacted their acquaintances to further expand the membership.

The innovative precedent established by the Central chapter of meeting on Sunday afternoons also spread. As regional memberships increased, local chapters were established which met on non-conflicting Sundays. In this manner, fiddlers could visit each others meetings and give a boost to the program. Each new chapter selected an open Sunday until all Sundays were scheduled and the non-conflicting criterion became distance. The order of meetings chosen were: Oklahoma City--first Sunday; Inola (Tulsa)--third Sunday; Pawhuska--second Sunday; Cushing--fourth Sunday; Cleo Springs--fourth Sunday; and Poteau--first Sunday.

The meetings are held in rented halls, such as an American Legion Post, and are open to the public. The growth in membership has been facilitated by these public meetings

where casual visitors enjoy the festivities and join the Association in support. The meetings are social affairs where the audience may visit and enjoy refreshments, and the fiddlers jam together in a warm-up room awaiting their turn on stage.

In 1972, its first year of existence, the Fiddlers Association consisted of 24 members clustered mostly in central Oklahoma (Figure 7). A significant expansion toward Tulsa occurred in 1973 when the Inola chapter was organized and 35 new members were added.

By the end of 1974, an irregular spatial pattern was well established that stretched from central to northeastern Oklahoma (Figure 8). Membership exceeded 90 and additional chapters were located at Pawhuska and Cushing. These new chapters signaled a westward expansion across northern Oklahoma which took place the following year. By 1975, a chapter was organized in northwest Oklahoma at Cleo Springs and membership grew to over 130.

A boom year for growth occurred in 1976 when membership exceeded 250 and several significant concentrations emerged (Figure 9). Oklahoma City and Tulsa remained the largest areas of membership, but significant concentrations were established at Pawhuska, the Cushing area, and Tahlequah. The increases at Pawhuska and Cushing were related to their function as a monthly meeting place. Tahlequah, however, became a unique node of fiddling activity when Northeastern Oklahoma State University became the site of



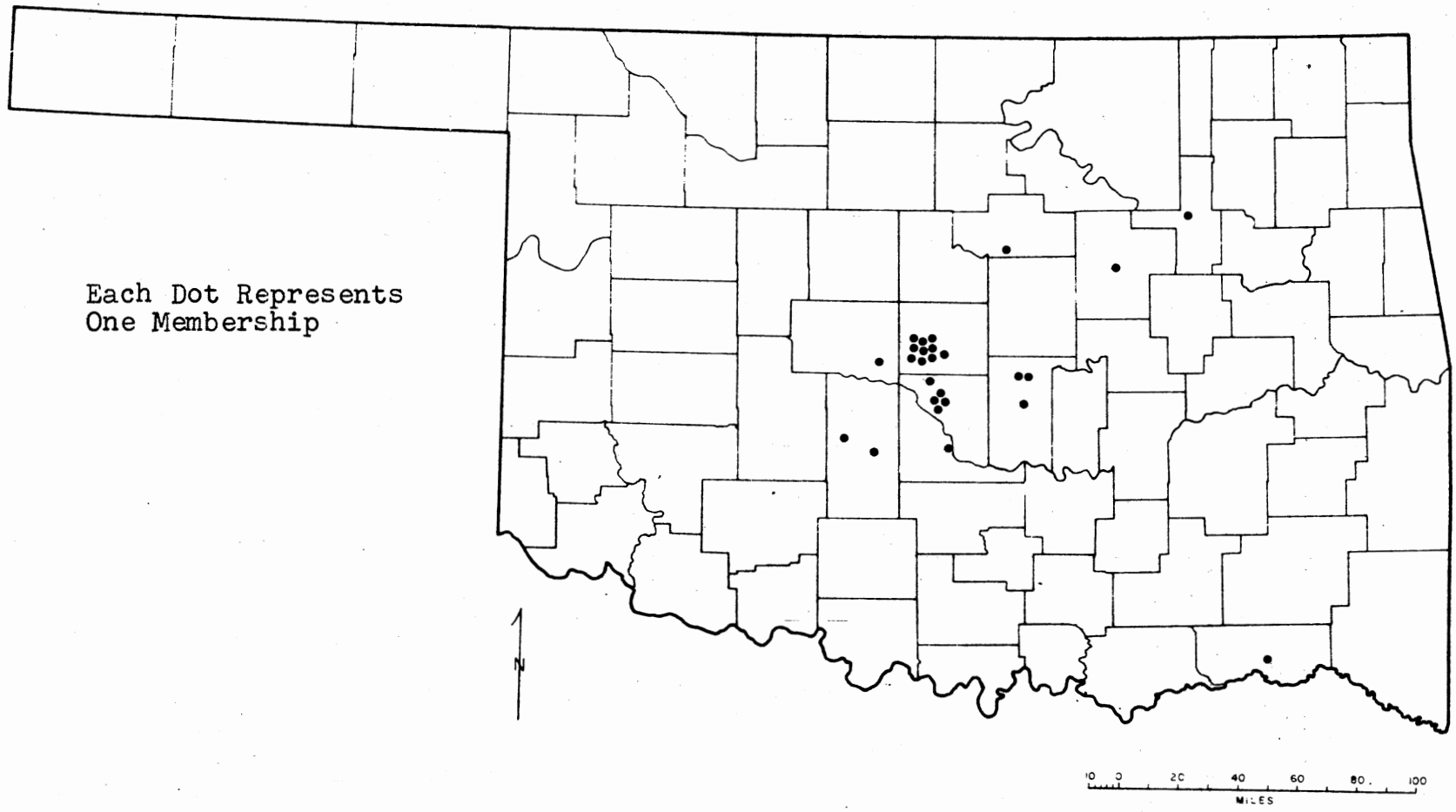


Figure 7. Membership of Oklahoma Fiddlers Association, 1972

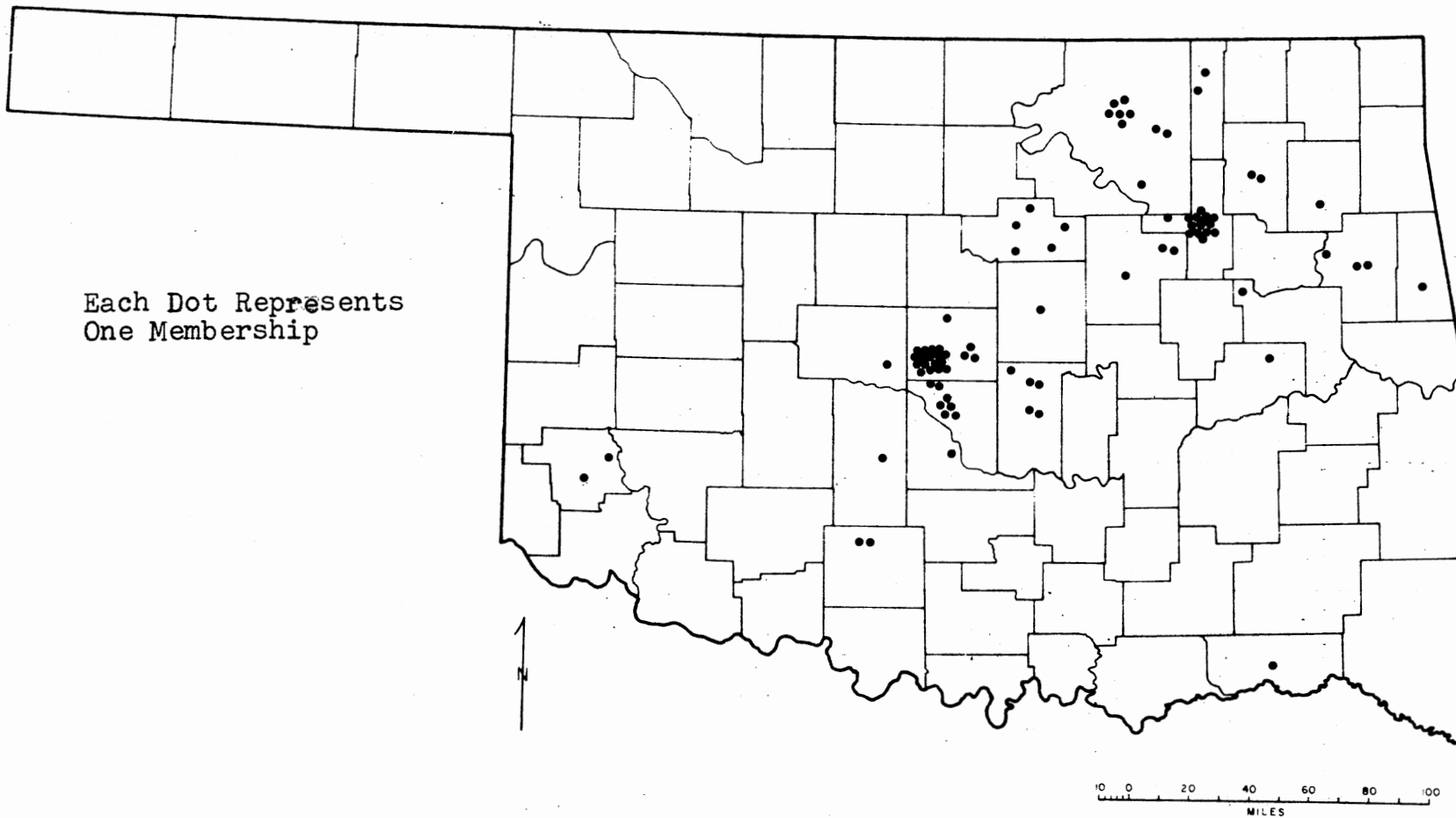


Figure 8. Membership of Oklahoma Fiddlers Association, 1974

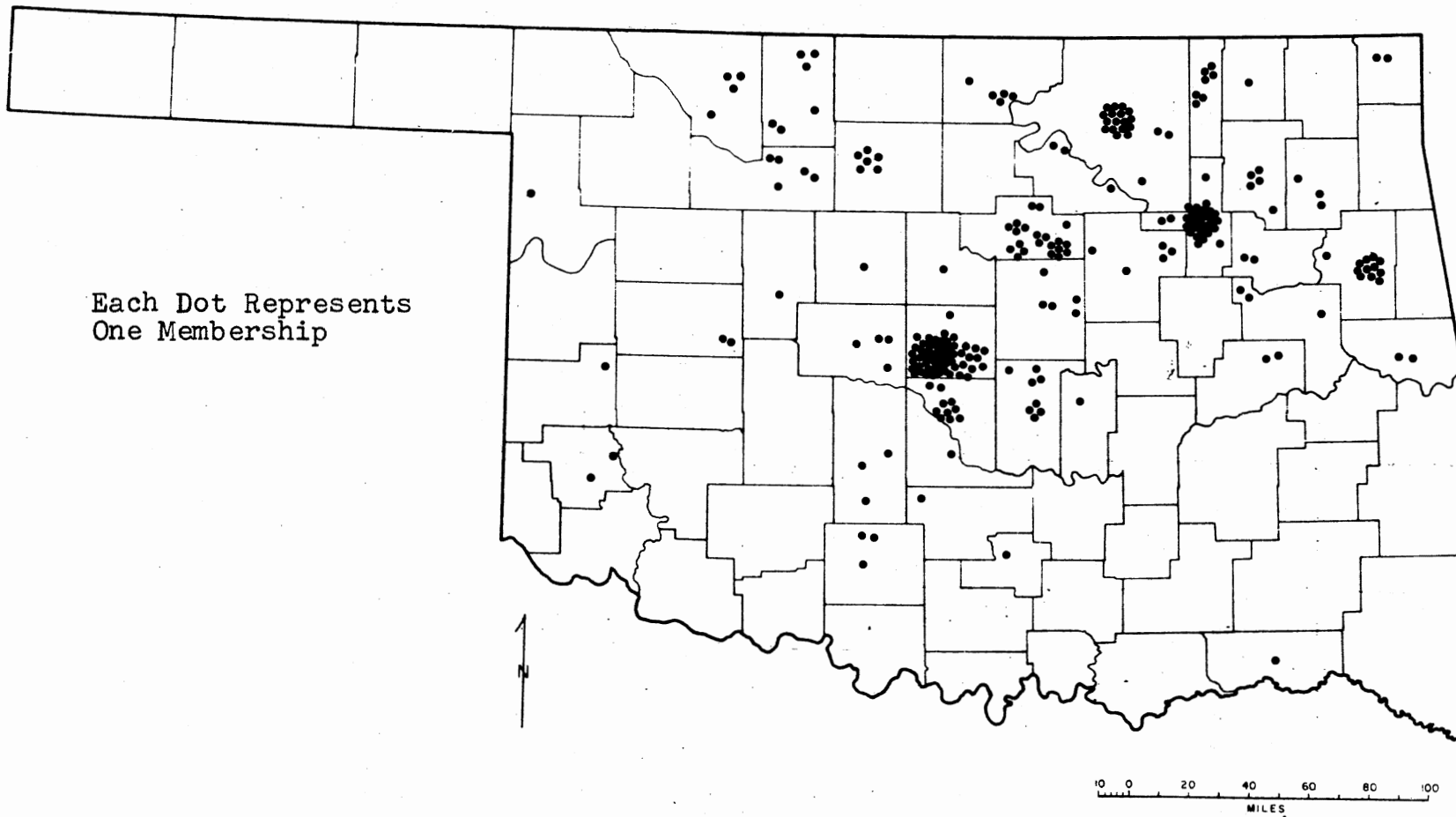


Figure 9. Membership of Oklahoma Fiddlers Association, 1976

the Association's Annual Fiddlers Festival.

Following the Bicentennial year, when public interests' ran high in historical institutions like fiddling, 1977 membership totals reached only 280. Perhaps more significant is the fact that membership did not decrease following the 1976 boom. The fact that membership slightly increased during the post-Bicentennial period indicates the strength of the bond created by the contact experience and the "infectious" nature that fiddling has on Oklahomans.

Increase and expansion continued in 1978 when membership exceeded 300 and a new chapter was founded in Poteau. A certain amount of filling-in also took place as membership began to penetrate the interior portions of southeastern Oklahoma (Figure 10).

The paths of the diffusion process have exhibited a strong linearity in their directions (Figure 11). The first chapter originated in central Oklahoma in 1972 and expanded to northeastern Oklahoma in 1973. The path then turned northwest with the organization of the Pawhuska chapter in 1974, and continued westward in 1975 and 1976 across northern Oklahoma to the northwest chapter at Cleo Springs. Also during 1975 and 1976, an eastern path emerged from the Tulsa node extending to Tahlequah. This eastern path has since deflected southward to Poteau where the newest chapter was established in 1978. A similar deflection Southward occurred near the western border

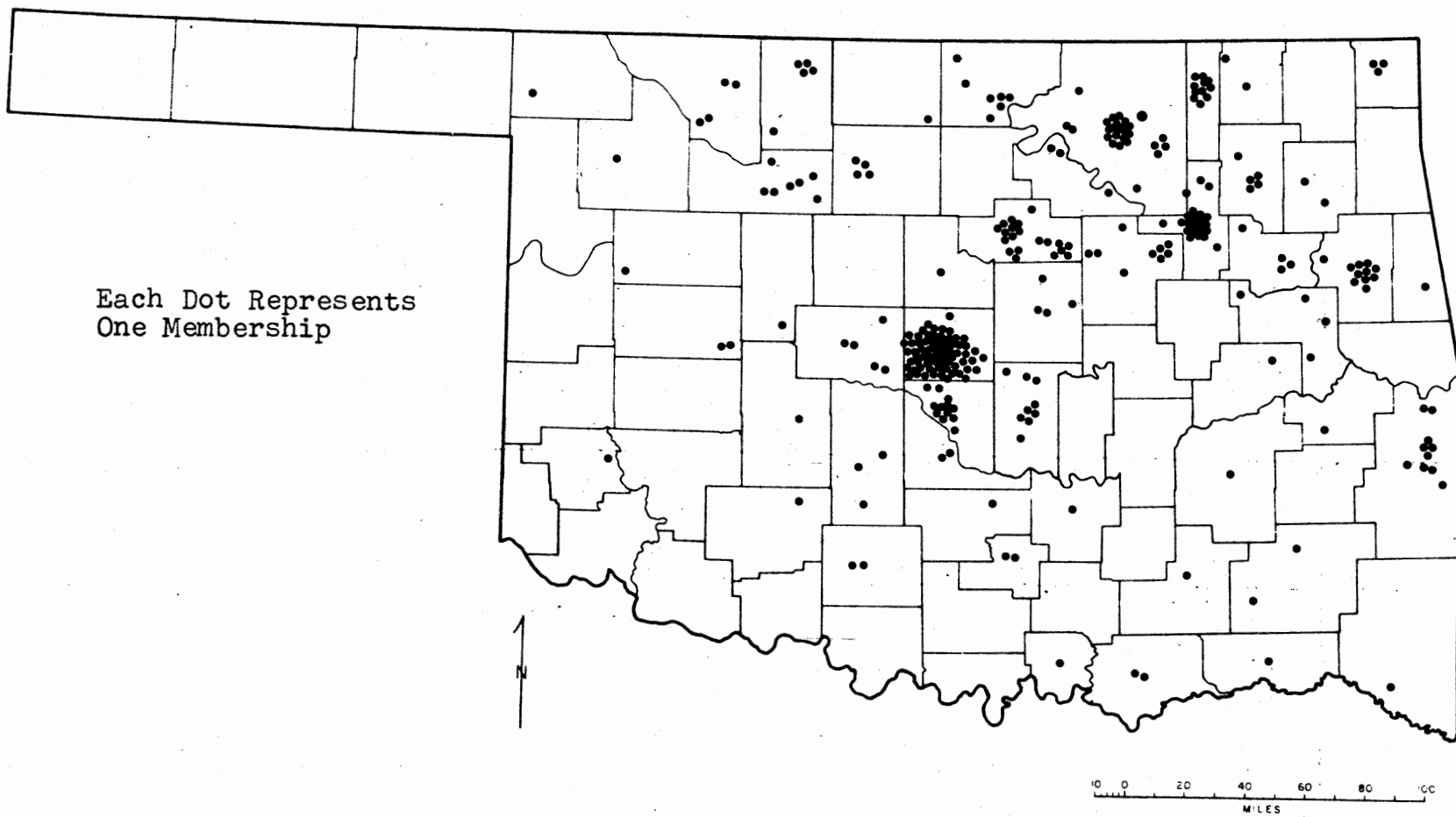


Figure 10. Membership of Oklahoma Fiddlers Association, 1978

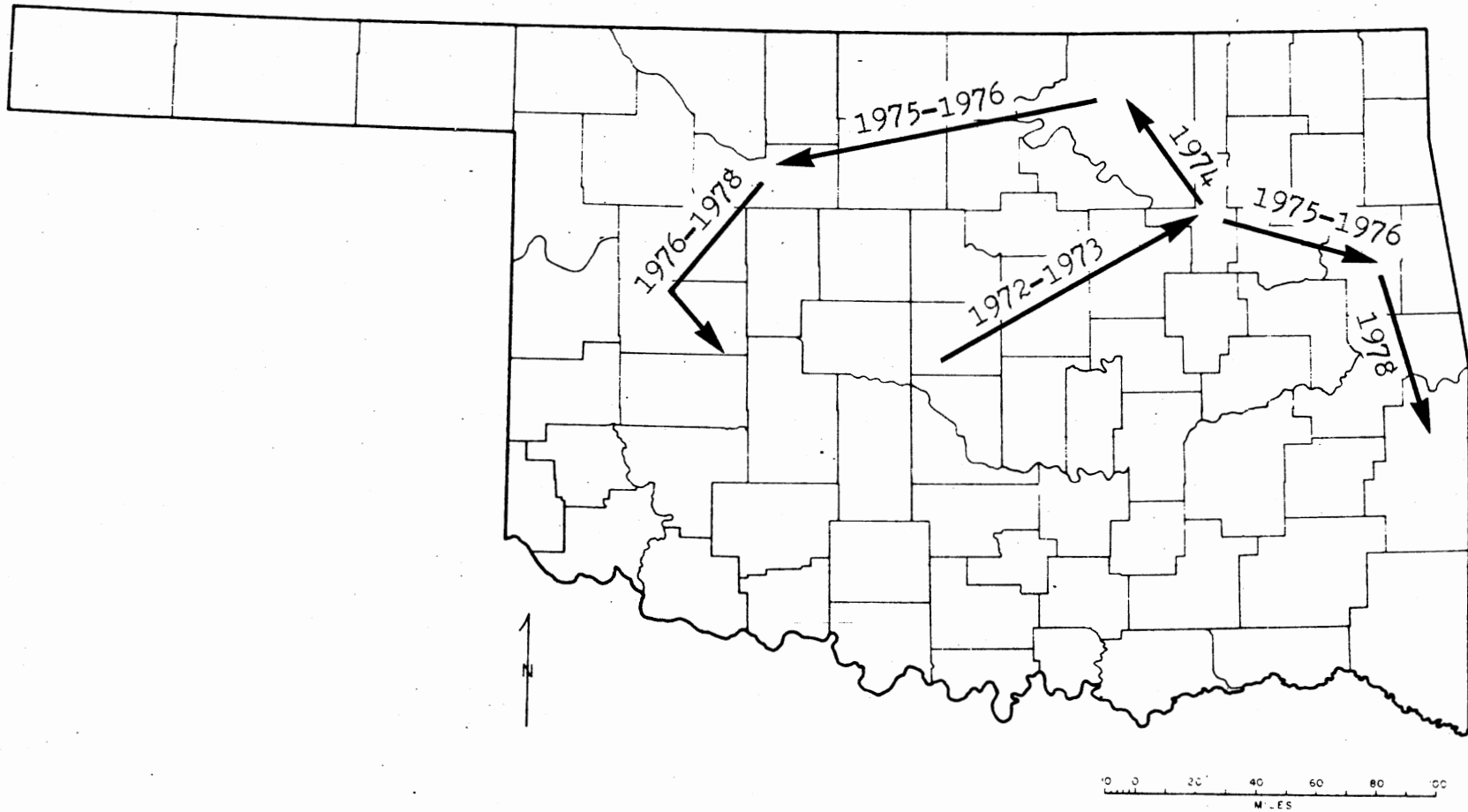


Figure 11. Paths of Diffusion of Oklahoma Fiddlers Association

between 1976 and 1978.

These deflections are attributed to two diffusion barriers represented by the political borders of Arkansas and Texas (Abler, Adams, and Gould, 1971, pp. 397-407). Few members join the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association beyond the immediate boundary in preference to joining their own state association. The Arkansas border exhibits a greater permeability than the Texas border. This is due to several Arkansans joining Oklahoma's association following their attendance at the nearby Tahlequah Fiddlers Festival. In western Oklahoma, a psychological barrier seems to exist around the Elk City area, where a separate fiddlers group called the Elk City Hootenanny has been formed. Their reluctance to join the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association is due to a sense of independence and a perceived distance, or separateness, from fiddling activities in the rest of the state.

Several mechanisms can be identified in the diffusion process. The most important of these has been contagion diffusion through personal contact. Also evident has been the Central chapter's role as a central propagator promoting the growth of the association and assisting in the establishment of new chapters (Carney, 1977, p. 110). Corresponding to the Central chapter's early role as a central propagator is the process of hierarchical diffusion, or the information flow transmitted downward through central place structures (Gould, 1969, p. 5). Hierarchical diffusion has been a

strong mechanism as evidenced by the diffusion paths routing from Oklahoma City to Tulsa, Pawhuska, Cushing, Tahlequah, and downward through the urban hierarchy to the small town populations which are supplying many of the newest members. The late expansion of the Fiddlers Association into Southeastern Oklahoma may be attributed to the diffusion lag of the hierarchical process.

### Spatial Interaction

The attendance of participants at monthly fiddlers meetins reveals patterns of migration fields around each chapter (Figure 12). Each field constitutes a functional region in which participants are tied into a center of activity, or node, represented by a fiddlers' chapter (McDonald, 1972, pp. 29-33). By observing the common attendance of fiddlers journeying to their nearest chapter, distance radiuses were determined to show from what distance they might travel to attend a meeting.

The Central chapter in Oklahoma City has the largest functional region with musicians frequently attending from distances of 50 miles or more, or roughly an area that would extend from Rush Springs to Stillwater. This average migration field, however, does not reflect the true primacy of the Central chapter because it is often visited by persons from all parts of the state.

The chapters at Inola, Pawhuska, and Cleo Springs have smaller functional regions ranging from 30 to 40 miles.



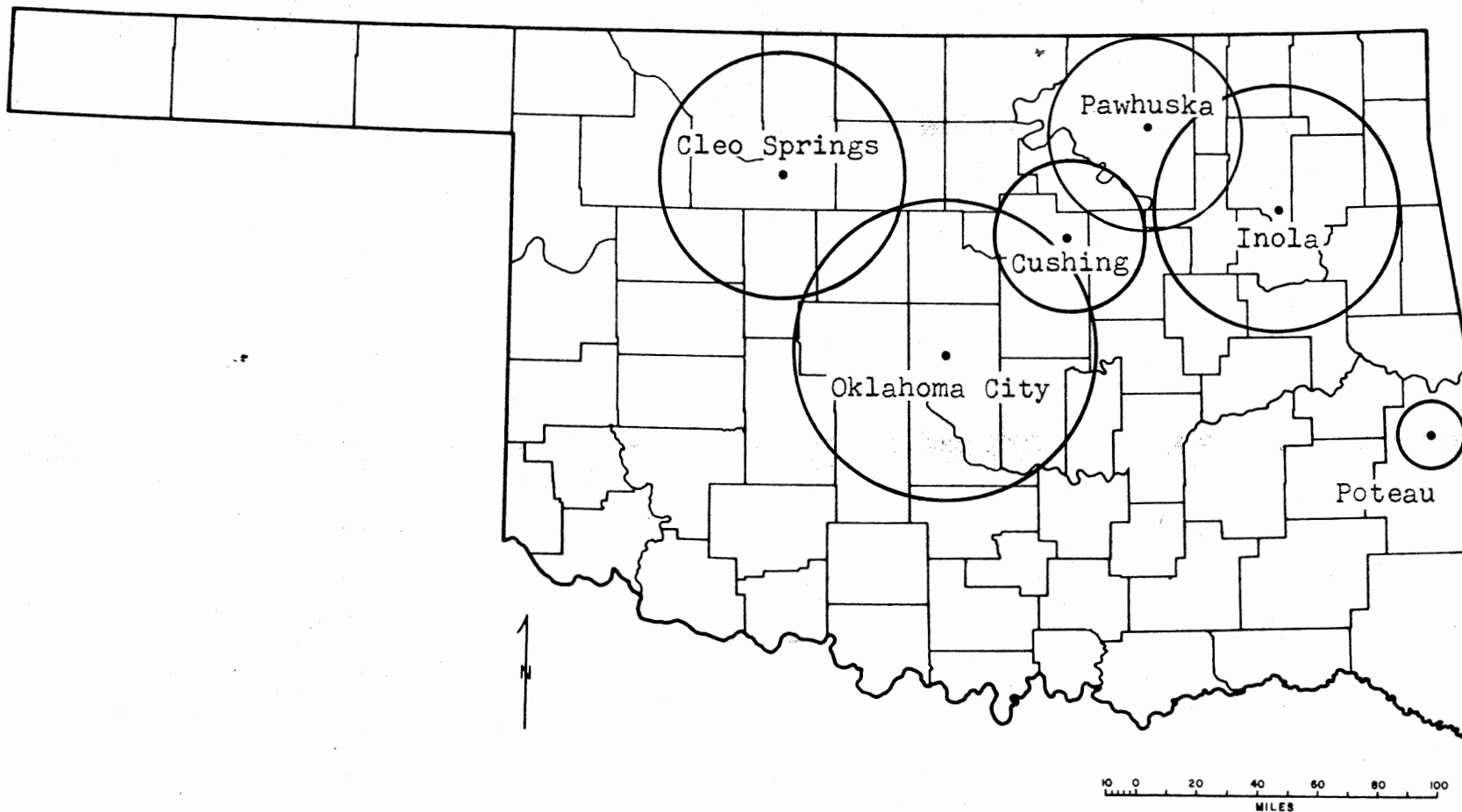


Figure 12. Functional Regions of Association Chapters, 1978

The situation of each chapter thus serves the outlying memberships of places like Tahlequah, and Tulsa, Bartlesville, and Enid.

The chapter in Cushing has a limited region which reaches a 20 mile radius and primarily serves Payne County. The relative position of this chapter, sandwiched between the larger Central, North Central, and Northeastern chapters, which all meet earlier in the month, helps explain the localized migration pattern.

Like an isolated outpost, the new chapter in Poteau has the smallest functional region. Taking in an area of only 10 miles, Poteau's attendance just extends from Spiro to Howe.

Spatial interaction is also revealed in the migration of fiddlers to contests. The greater frequency of contests, the prestige and recognition gained from participation, and the growing influence of contest style fiddling have all contributed to an increase of attendance and the distances traveled by fiddlers to contests.

The contest season begins in spring and extends through fall with fiddle contests held at events including shopping center promotions, pioneer days' celebrations, and county fairs. Processes which influence the patterns of migration include the site's accessibility, the importance of the contest in terms of money or prestige, and the seriousness of the musician to compete.

Four contests of varying size, accessibility, prize

money, and prestige illustrate some contrasting migration patterns to contest locations in 1977. The official State Contest held at the Oklahoma State Fair drew 43 contestants from around the state (Figure 13). Thirty contestants attended from within a 50 mile radius reflecting a factor of the site's accessibility to a majority of entrants. Nine other contestants, however, journeyed from 100 to 200 miles away to attend. With only nominal prize money offered, prestige would have been the primary consideration for this group.

Another prestigious contest, but one offering large sums of money, is the Tulsa State Fair Contest. Conducted since 1972, the Tulsa contest is the longest running of contemporary fiddle contests in Oklahoma. With \$1,000 first prize, it is also one of the richest. Unlike the Oklahoma State Fair contest which is open only to Oklahomans, the Tulsa State Fair contest is open to all fiddlers and attracts some of the finest fiddlers from the surrounding states. Of the 42 fiddlers attending in 1977, eleven were from out-of-state (Figure 14). The presence of the top fiddlers from other states seems to have discouraged some Oklahoma fiddlers from entering the contest--only seven traveled in excess of 100 miles. Half of the Oklahoma fiddlers came from within a 50 mile radius.

The contrast in local contestant origins between the Oklahoma State Fair and the Tulsa State Fair contests reveals the importance of accessibility to some fiddlers.

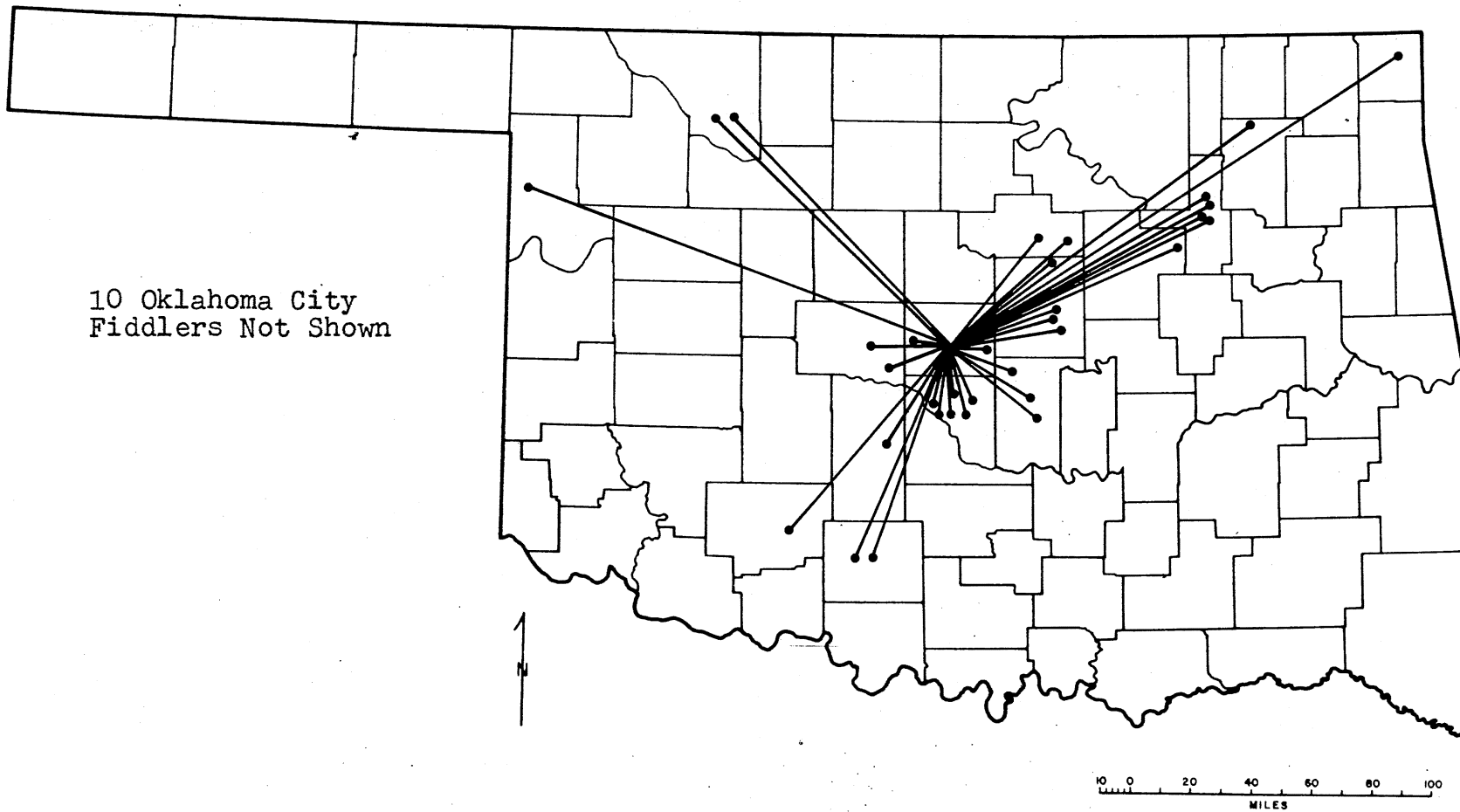


Figure 13. Migration of Fiddlers to Oklahoma State Fair Contest, 1977

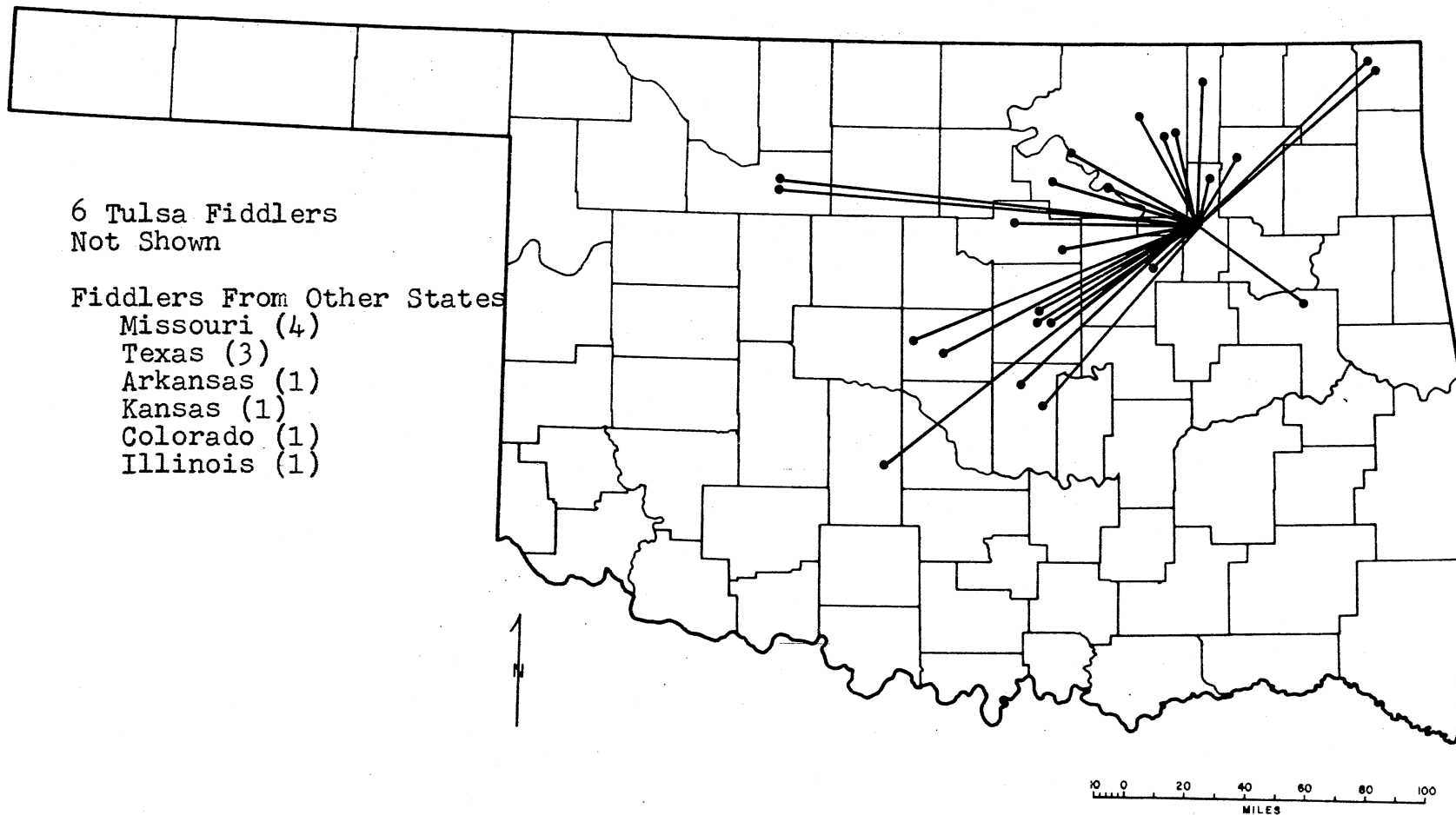


Figure 14. Migration of Fiddlers to Tulsa State Fair Contest, 1977

The absence of north central fiddlers at the Oklahoma State Fair is reversed with their attendance at the Tulsa Contest. Similarly, central Oklahoma fiddlers attended the contest in Oklahoma City, but failed to attend at Tulsa.

The Chickasha contest, though offering a moderate \$200 prize for Grand Champion, was another prestigious contest that drew several out-of-state contestants (Figure 15). Of 23 fiddlers, nine were from out-of-state with seven coming from Texas. Normally, such a large number of Texas fiddlers would not attend an Oklahoma contest of this size, but in this case were invited by their friend Ace Sewell, who was the local contest coordinator. Of the 14 Oklahoma contestants, all but two came from the central part of the state and eight fiddlers attended from within a 50 mile radius. Distance was the critical factor and outweighed prestige for northern and eastern Oklahoma fiddlers.

The contest held at Alva is a unique contrast compared to the others illustrated here (Figure 16). Despite its remoteness and nominal prize money, four of its seven contestants traveled over 100 miles to attend. Such migrations reveal a fiddler's disregard for distance when the desire to play is great enough.

#### Summary

The spatial diffusion of the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association and the spatial interaction of fiddlers migrating to Association meetings and fiddle contest reveal contemporary

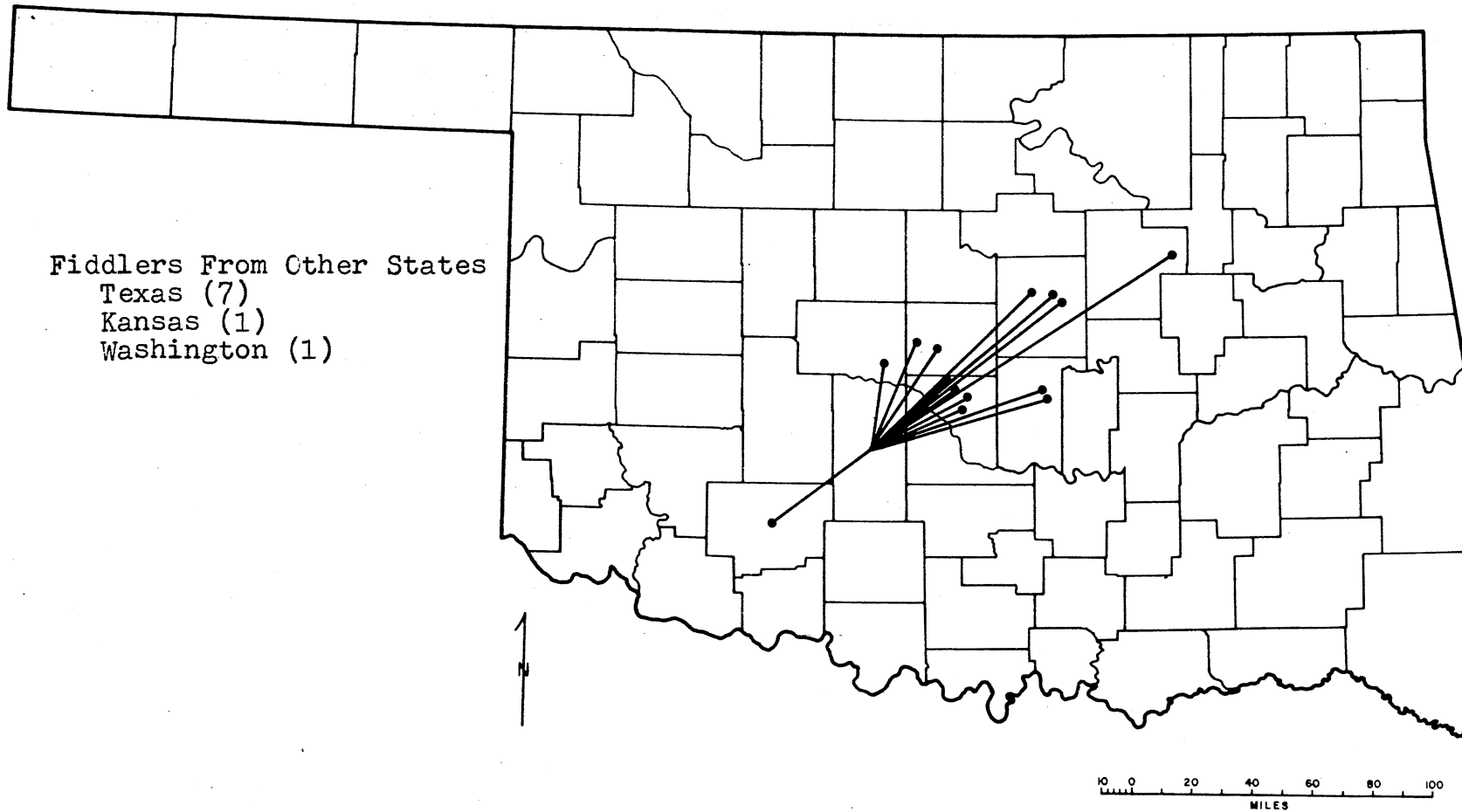


Figure 15. Migration of Fiddlers to Chickasha Contest, 1977

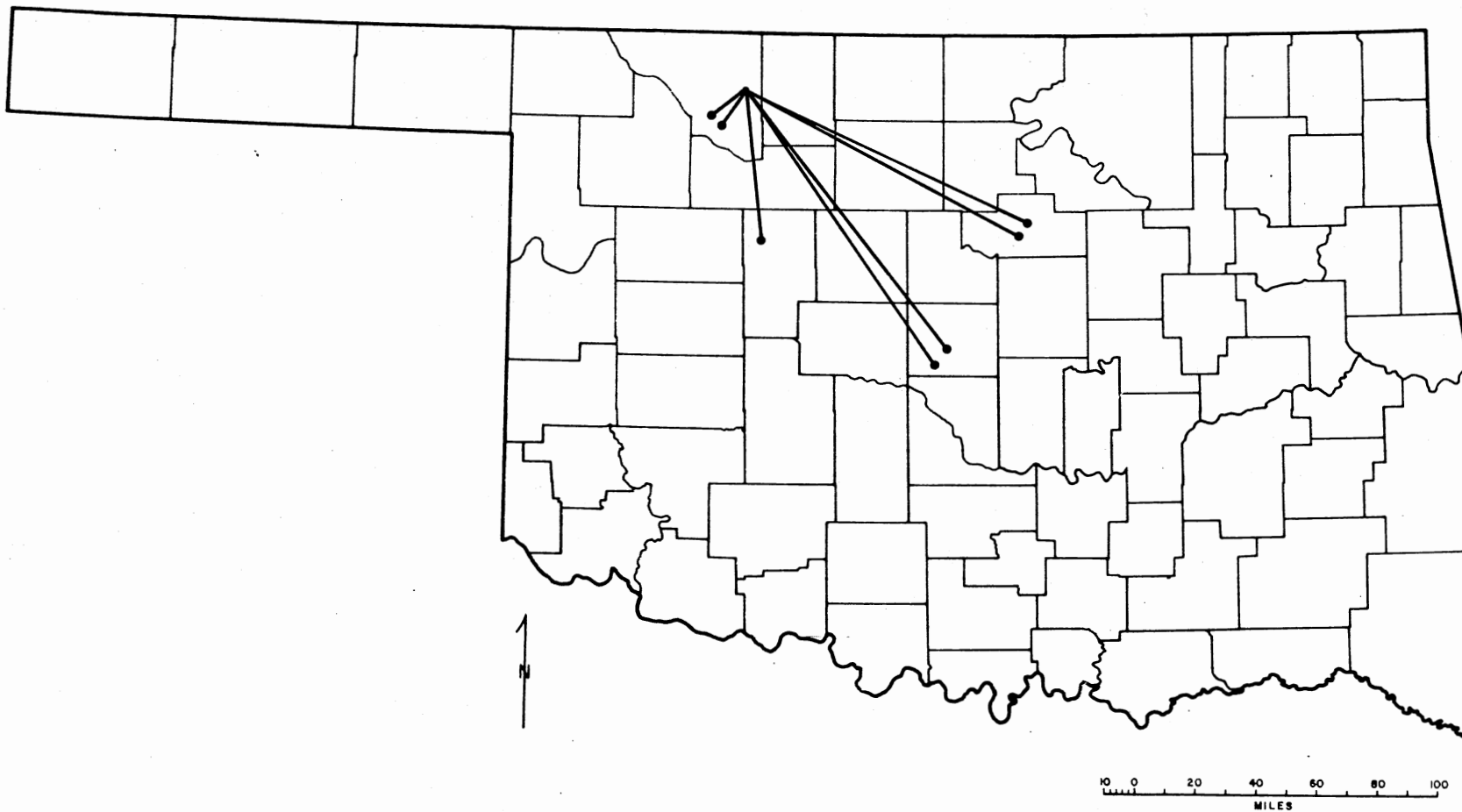


Figure 16. Migration of Fiddlers to Alva Contest, 1977



spatial movements within Oklahoma's fiddling tradition. The diffusion of the Fiddlers Association has expanded primarily through the mechanism of personal contact and has exhibited an irregular, but linear, pattern as it has developed in the northern half of the state. A process of hierarchical diffusion is also evident as membership in the Fiddlers Association and the establishment of regional chapters has moved down through an urban hierarchy. Diffusion barriers exist around the political borders of Arkansas and Texas where people are more likely to join their own state's fiddlers association.

Migrations of fiddlers to meetings and contests are primarily influenced by the proximity of the event as a function of convenience. Many times, however, distance is disregarded when the desire to attend an event is great enough, or when personal invitations have been extended by someone at the contest site.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The geographic implications of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition are evidenced through three of the discipline's viewpoints--the area study, man-land, and spatial traditions. A comprehensive history of Oklahoma fiddling, the first ever written on the topic, traces the origins and processes of the fiddling tradition and reveals the emergence of four playing styles. Within the context of the area study view, a regional perspective of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition shows it to be an enigma in terms of classification as a fiddle style region. The diversity which perplexes such a classification, however, lends the area a unique character as a mosaic of styles. Man-land implications are revealed through the titles of fiddle tunes which impart themes of rural imagery and place consciousness, and through a persistence of rural character despite increasing urbanization in the state. Spatial movements associated with fiddle music activities are explored from the viewpoint of spatial organization. Spatial diffusion of the Oklahoma Fiddlers Association and spatial interaction of fiddlers migrating to Association meetings and fiddle contests demonstrate dynamic spatial properties related to the fiddling tradition.

From its outset, this paper has had a dualistic purpose. One purpose has been to demonstrate how geographic concepts may be applied to a study of non-material culture. The other purpose has sought to bring geography and folklife studies closer together. Cooperative efforts between the two disciplines have a great potential of increasing our understanding of the intricacies of culture, as in the work begun by Kniffen and Glassie (1966), and the current atlas project of the Society for the North American Culture Survey.

By demonstrating to geographers that items of non-material culture, such as studies concerning fiddle music, can be sensibly studied within the discipline's traditions, others will hopefully follow suit. With the assistance of folklorists, cultural geographers should ply their skills to other areas of folk culture including folk beliefs, customs, and practices for additional insights into the nature of place.

For folklorists, this paper has portrayed several ways in which a geographer may perceive and interpret a topic of common interest. Conceivably, the different perspectives presented here could open new avenues of research and/or offer new meaning to current interests in the field.

Additional research on Oklahoma fiddling should be conducted by folklorists and musicologists. The vitality and diversity of Oklahoma's fiddling tradition offers a wealth of possibilities including comparative studies of

style and repertory. This study, and the "Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers" (Renner, 1977), have only scratched the surface of a rich research area.

Further research should focus on the styles of Western Swing and Texas fiddling for they best represent the innovative character of fiddling in the Western South and distinguish it from fiddling traditions found elsewhere. Musical innovation in the Western South is a characteristic of the region's multicultural milieu and the Western frontier experience. The mixing of different musical ideas and a willingness to experiment in a new environment modified the fiddling of Oklahoma and Texas into something different from its Eastern cousins. This difference was apparent in the Old-time fiddling of recording pioneers like Eck Robertson and the East Texas Serenaders and became more distinct as the innovations of jazz permeated the tradition with the development of Western Swing. The Western South was a "land of jazz" and the creation of Western Swing was a powerful regional phenomenon which distinguished the music of Oklahoma and Texas from the rest of the South. The freedom of jazz instituted a practice of melodic variation and embellishment which also fostered the development of the Texas style. Musical innovation has thus become tradition and lends a progressive quality to fiddling in the Western South which distinguishes it from the conservative fiddling traditions of regions like the Ozarks and Appalachia.

Western Swing and Texas style fiddling are deserving of study if only for their regional importance, but they are exceedingly important due to their influence on fiddling beyond the regional limits of the Western South. In particular, Western Swing fiddling and many of the innovations of Western Swing music have had profound effects on the "Nashville Sound" and the development of commercial Country and Western music (Townsend, 1976, pp. 285-291). The flow of southern musical influences has not been a steady stream from Southeast to Southwest, rather a kind of "reverse diffusion" has taken place and major innovations have moved "back East" from "out West". This is evident not only in the emulation of Western Swing fiddling style, but in the incorporation of such innovations and traits as the electrification of string instruments, the development of the steel guitar, the use of drums, reeds, and brass, singing in a relaxed style, and the imposition of a heavy 2/4 dance beat.

Texas style fiddling has also had tremendous influences beyond the Western South. The Texas style has become the most imitated and successful contest style in the nation. The perennial winners at the Nation's major fiddle contests, such as the National Contest held in Weiser, Idaho and the Grand Masters Contest in Nashville, are Texas style fiddlers. Importantly, the Texas style is no longer a regional phenomenon, but has diffused nation-wide as fiddlers have eagerly adopted its stylings and repertory. There are even indications that the impact of the Texas style has engendered the

emergence of a national "super style" of fiddling (Spielman, 1975, p. 289).

Oklahoma's part in the development and spread of Western Swing and Texas fiddle styles is significant. Western Swing, under the leadership of Bob Wills, came to fruition in Tulsa, Oklahoma where it gained national recognition. Texas style fiddling, although it developed later in Oklahoma than in Texas, has numerous standard bearers including Herman Johnson, four times National Champion and winner of the Grand Masters. The current strength and following of these styles in Oklahoma's fiddling tradition would seem to assure Oklahoma a place of continued importance in the development of fiddling both regionally and nationally.

Oklahoma's fiddling tradition is a product of its folk culture and provides a means toward understanding certain qualities of the land and its people. The state's cultural and social development has been characterized by a frontier dualism which embraced innovation, yet resisted social change. This dichotomy is apparent in the fiddling tradition which has excelled in creating new musical styles while maintaining conservative, rural values of home, family, and church. Fiddle music is a medium through which Oklahomans have expressed a progressive individualism while reaffirming traditional social values.

As a measure of culture, the research of music is seen as a meaningful undertaking which has been too long overlooked by geographers. The wealth of musical diversity which

dots the cultural landscape is an untapped resource containing intrinsic qualities of people and place which cannot be gleaned from secondary sources like census data, voting habits, or consumer information. Other localized music studies need to be conducted, either to reaffirm present theories, or to assist in new interpretations of culture and place. Cumulative efforts of this kind will increase our knowledge of the nature of place and provide fresh insights into the complexities of our cultural milieu.

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**APPENDIXES**

## APPENDIX A

### EXAMPLES OF OKLAHOMA FIDDLELING

Below are the contents of an accompanying tape providing examples of Oklahoma fiddling taken from the Archive of Oklahoma Fiddlers (Renner, 1977). Side A is made up of Old-Time fiddling and Side B contains Swing, Texas, and Bluegrass styles. Complete information on the fiddlers and their music may be found in the Special Collections area of the Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University.

#### Old-Time Fiddling

- A1. Black Eyed Susie - Clarence McGraw
- A2. Sally Goodin - Clarence McGraw
- A3. White Bosom Bear - Bessie Wells
- A4. Bohemian Schottish - Bessie Wells
- A5. Six Months - Mack Cummings
- A6. Judge Parker - Bob Kay
- A7. Stony Point - Tony Thomas
- A8. Verdigris - Tony Thomas
- A9. Walk Along John - Austin Johnston
- A10. Beaver County Waltz - Sam Pim
- A11. Possum up the Sycamore Tree - Sam Pim
- A12. Rickett's Hornpipe - Red Johnson
- A13. Coon River Jig - Red Johnson

- A14. Goodnight Waltz - Lake Williamson
- A15. Chicken Reel - Lake Williamson
- A16. Turkey in the Straw - Dale Carothers

#### Swing Fiddling

- B1. Oklahoma Hills - Cliff Trisler
- B2. Spanish Two Step - Cliff Trisler
- B3. The Convict and the Rose - Buster Grass
- B4. Prosperity Special - Buster Grass
- B5. The Kind of Love I Can't Forget - Jack Luker
- B6. Sugar Cane Time - Jack Luker

#### Texas Fiddling

- B7. Sally Goodin - Ace Sewell
- B8. I Don't Love Nobody - Ace Sewell
- B9. Leather Britches - Dick Horton and Cecil Johnson
- B10. Cotton Patch Rag - Dick Horton and Cecil Johnson

#### Bluegrass Fiddling

- B11. Sally Goodin - Gary Wackerly
- B12. Kentucky Waltz - Gary Wackerly



Appendix A  
(magnetic tape)  
in Non-Book Room

## APPENDIX B

### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The following discography comprises a listing of available phonograph recordings which illustrate the different kinds of fiddling discussed in the text. The discography contains five categories--Old-Time fiddling, Texas style, Western Swing, Bluegrass, and recordings by Oklahoma fiddlers. The record label and number are shown in parenthesis.

#### Old-Time Fiddling--Early Recordings

- "American Fiddle Tunes" (Library of Congress AFS-L62)
- "Burnet and Rutherford" (Rounder 1004)
- "Da Costa Woltz's Southern Broadcasters" (County 524)
- "The East Texas Serenders" (County410)
- "The Skillet Lickers" (County 506, County 526, Rounder 1005)
- "The **Stripling** Brothers" (County 501)

#### Old-Time Fiddling--Modern Recordings

- "Cotton Combs" (Johns 107811)
- "Fuzzy Mountain String Band" (Rounder 0010)
- "Highwoods String Band" (Rounder 0023)
- "Hollow Rock String Band" (Kanawha 311, Rounder 0024)
- "Tommy Jarrell" (County 756)
- "Buddy Thomas" (Rounder 0032)

"Tony Thomas" (Takoma A-1013)

Texas Style--Early Recordings

"Master Fiddler, Complete Recordings 1922-1929" - Eck Robertson (Sonyatone STR-201)

"Texas Farewell, Texas Fiddlers Recorded 1922-1930" - Eck Robertson, Red Steeley, Ervin Soloman, Joe Hughes, Oscar Harper (County 517)

Texas Style--Modern Recordings

"A Jam Session with Benny and Jerry Thomasson" (Voyager VRLP-309)

"A Texas Jam Session Featuring Four World Champion Fiddlers" Benny Thomasson, Texas Shorty, Terry Morris, and Mark O'Connor (Mark O'Connor Productions OMAC-1)

"Dick Barrett Albums #1-7" (Dart 1-7)

"Champion Fiddlin" - Herman Johnson (American Heritage Corporation AH-401)

"Championship Fiddlin" - J.C. Broughton (Fiddling FLP-221)

"Country Fiddlin From The Big State" - Benny Thomasson (County 724)

"Country Style Fiddlin" - Cecil Johnson (Johns 687806)

"Fiddle and Flat Top" - Steve Gillian (Davis Unlimited DU-33043)

"Fiddlin and Pickin" - Steve Gillian (Johns 1976001)

"National Champion" - Herman Johnson (Johns 677805)

"Southwest Fiddlin" - Ace Sewell (Voyager VRLP-319-S)

"Texas Fiddle Favorites" - Major Franklin, Lewis Franklin, Norman Soloman (County 707)

"Texas Hoedown" - Benny Thomasson, Vernon Soloman, Bartow Riley (County 703)

Western Swing--Early Recordings

- "Bill Boyd's Cowboy Ramblers" (RCA Bluebird AXM2-5503)  
 "The Bob Wills Anthology" (Columbia KG-32416)  
 "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, The Tiffany Transcriptions" (Tishomingo Tsho-BW01)  
 "Tulsa Swing" - Johnnie Lee Wills (Rounder 1027)  
 "Western Swing Vols. 1, 2, 3" (Old Timey OT-105, OT-116, OT-117)

#### Western Swing--Modern Recordings

- "For The Last Time" - Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys  
 (United Artists UA-LA 216-J2)  
 "Live and Kickin" - Original Texas Playboys (Capitol St-11725)  
 "Reunion" - Johnnie Lee Wills (Flying Fish FFO69)  
 "Today" - Original Texas Playboys (Capitol St-11612)  
 "Tulsa On A Saturday Night" - Benny Kubiak (Homa SV-1006)  
 "Western Swing Okie Style" - Keith Coleman and Jack Stidham  
 (Stidham Label ST-2)

#### Bluegrass Fiddling

- "A Bakers Dozen" - Kenny Baker (County 730)  
 "Chicken Reel" - Curly Ray Cline (Rebel 1498)  
 "Fiddler On The Rocks" - Buck Ryan (Rebel 1529)  
 "Kenny Baker Country" (County 736)  
 "Kenny Baker Plays Bill Monroe" (County 761)

#### Oklahoma Fiddlers

- J.C. Broughton, "Championship Fiddlin" (Fiddling FLP-221)  
 Steve Gillian, "Fiddle and Flat Top" (Davis Unlimited DU-33043)

- Steve Gillian, "Fiddlin and Pickin" (Johns 1976001)
- Cecil Johnson, "Country Style Fiddlin" (Johns 687806)
- Herman Johnson, "Champion Fiddlin" (American Heritage Corporation AH-401)
- Herman Johnson, "National Champion" (Johns 677805)
- Benny Kubiak, "Tulsa On A Saturday Night" (Homa SV-1006)
- Ace Sewell, "Southwest Fiddlin" (Voyager VRLP-319-S)
- Jack Stidham, "Western Swing Okie Style" (Stidham Label ST-2)
- Tony Thomas, "Old Style Texas and Oklahoma Fiddlin" (Takoma A-1013)

VITA<sup>2</sup>

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IN OKLAHOMA

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