

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA  
Edmond, Oklahoma  
College of Graduate Studies and Research

**Music Heard Deeply: Song and Ethnic Interaction in the  
Cherokee Ozarks**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

By  
J. Justin Castro

Edmond, Oklahoma

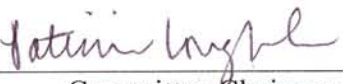
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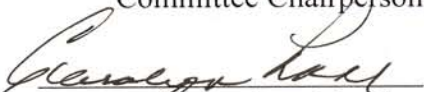
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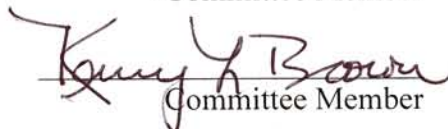
A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

April 28, 2008

By   
Committee Chairperson

  
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Committee Member

**For most of us, there is only the unattended  
Moment, the moment in and out of time,  
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,  
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning  
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts.**

**T. S. Eliot**  
*Four Quartets: The Dry Salvages*

# Acknowledgements

Throughout the process of creating this thesis, from deciding on a topic to revising chapters, Dr. Patricia Loughlin, chair of my thesis committee, was an excellent advisor and mentor. She pushed me forward when I wanted to give up and change topics, gave useful but positive criticism, and spent hours listening to my ideas, reviewing my papers, and helping organize this work. She deserves the utmost recognition for her ability to advise multiple graduate students, while working on important publications, being a civic leader, and teaching a full load of courses.

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Finally, my family has been supportive of my academic endeavors and I have appreciated their encouragement to follow the pursuits that make me happy—history and music. My wife Angela has been wonderful during this process, putting up with my stress and scattered books, papers, and note cards throughout the house. For over ten years she has amazingly tolerated (and sometimes enjoyed) the many music making sessions and journeys involved with being a musician and academic. To my daughter Olivia, who was born while completing this thesis, you inspired me to be a better person and view life with fresh eyes—this study is dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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NAME: J. Justin Castro

TITLE OF THESIS: Music Heard Deeply: Song and Ethnic Interaction in the Cherokee Ozarks

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: Dr. Patricia Loughlin

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ABSTRACT: In the Cherokee Ozarks, music, song, and dance exemplified adaptations of Cherokees to new life ways, while also exhibiting the conservation of their cultural identity. Music was functional as well as entertaining; it brought people together within a community and between societies. The application of music history cannot fully demonstrate societal change, but is an insightful addition to understanding the complete cultural context of the Cherokee people and the Ozarks. Knowledge of this and other developmental crossroads is essential to the complete story of America.

Musical practices provide important insights into the interests, opinions, and beliefs of a study population. While demonstrating the role of music in historical analysis, this work also tells a narrative of the varied people and influences that shaped music and society in the Oklahoma Ozarks, from the arrival of the “Old Settler” Cherokee in 1828 to present day folk roots rockers. The 1800s is the predominant focus of this study; however, forays are made into



previous and following centuries to establish origins of musical practices and the legacies that continue today.

A wide variety of sources were utilized in this research, including periodicals, newspapers, government records, journals, song collections, websites, as well as secondary books and professional articles. The greatest source of primary information was oral histories, which came from the Indian Pioneer History Collection, Oklahoma Slave Narratives, Oklahoma Historical Society Oral History Collections, and my own field recordings and correspondences. Interviews from these compilations were conducted from 1937 until 2007 and the recollections revealed date back as far as 1850.

This assemblage of essays is intended to provide a better understanding of the cultural make up of the Cherokee people and northeastern Oklahoma in general. For many years, Oklahoma historians have ignored the wealth of information music contains that folklorists have been utilizing since the 1930s. In addition to the political, economic, and educational studies already published on the region, Music Heard Deeply: Song and Ethnic Interaction in the Cherokee Ozarks helps provide a fuller summation of Cherokee Ozark history.

Chapter one is a review of literature. Academics whose works were important, whether disputed or as a foundation for my own study, are briefly examined. These authors include historians, geographers, anthropologists, and folklorists. The primary sources most utilized in this study are also presented, as well as influential theories.

Chapter two, “Historical Geography of Music Culture in the Oklahoma Ozarks,” reviews the background of the varied ethnicities and musical practices of the studied realm. It briefly discusses the origins of population migrations to the Oklahoma Ozarks and how the region became a cultural interzone of artistic expression. Besides describing the instruments, songs, and genres used in the past and the legacy left behind, this essay also describes the physical geography of northeastern Oklahoma.

Chapter three reviews the song, music, and dance of the indigenous cultures that were forced into the region before and during the Trail of Tears in the late 1830s. These performing arts have been an essential component of entertainment, stories and traditions, religion and spirituality, games and sports—much of their cultural identity. The Cherokee, and to a lesser extent, the Delaware, influenced other ethnicities of the Oklahoma Ozarks, and indigenous dances are an intricate part of inter-cultural interaction, especially with other Eastern or woodland tribes.

Chapter four discusses the influence of Christian missionaries on music and song of the Oklahoma Ozarks. Among the aspects examined, are hymns, instruments, temperance songs, and play-parties. The role of religion in the music teachings at the Cherokee seminaries is briefly reviewed, as well as in local celebrations. This narrative reveals that Christian music culture was important to assimilation processes and that Christian themes became very popular in the nineteenth century. Although most of the traditions were based in Anglo-

American beliefs, contributions from Cherokee and African Americans were great.

Chapter five is specifically about the African American population in the Cherokee Nation from 1850-1900. The African heritage that influenced these people as well as the surrounding culture, the role of slavery, and the cultural exhibition of freedmen and blacks that moved to the region following the Civil War are all explored. African Americans were given their own chapter because of their unique position in the early settlements of the Oklahoma Ozarks as slaves and their struggle to be incorporated into the greater community after their gained freedom. Much the same as in the other chapters, this piece emphasizes the role of music as a tool for social adaptation while at the same time being a cultural identifier.

The final chapter provides a brief account of the Cherokee fiddling tradition from 1809 to the living performers today. The instrument provides an excellent example of cross-cultural adaptation, and was/is used by all ethnicities in the Cherokee Nation, and throughout much of the world. The fiddle was an important intercultural tool used to comfort guests and a popular form of entertainment within the tribe. In the 1800s, no other instrument, excepting maybe the piano, brought together more people than the fiddle. This instrument's use helped bridge ethnic divides and should be recognized as an important and longtime art form among the Cherokee people, including intermarried whites, and freedmen.

# Introduction

## The Oklahoma Ozarks, the Cherokee Nation, and the Music



The author, Josh Kelley, David Castro, and Autumn Marler in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, summer 2005. Photo taken by Joseph Dale Castro.

Music establishes a bond between the performer and the listener that communicates feelings, beliefs, and commonly, history. The performing arts are not a side note in the story of humanity, but an important facet of interaction between, and descriptions of, individuals and societies. Music and song are universal art forms, and contribute to empathetic understanding through the inquisitive nature and shared experiences of musicians and audiences. In North America, songsters and instrumentalists from Europe, Native America, and Africa have been writing the song of American music since the sixteenth century. With relatively new additions from other cultures being contributed everyday as technological advances making global travel and communication more readily available, these songs exemplify the power of sound in bringing people together. This admixture is also useful to the cultural historian because it displays aspects

of adaptation and preservation of societal identity within a study area. One case of this phenomenon is displayed in Cherokee Nation/Oklahoma Ozark history, a zone of prolific cultural interchange where I was partially raised, played music, and made my home for over a decade.

A common scene in the Oklahoma Ozarks is people playing guitars on crowded porches, in a city park, or by the flowing streams and creeks of the. The region, including the Boston Mountains, is contained within seven counties of Oklahoma: Muskogee, Ottawa, Sequoyah, Cherokee, Delaware, Adair, and Mayes, but mostly within the last five. Although the guitar has become the main instrument of choice, mandolins, fiddles, and banjos are often used for accompaniment. During the 1830s, the Cherokee carried the first of these instruments with them alongside their indigenous rattles, shackles, and drums to Indian Territory across the Trail of Tears. Today this portion of Oklahoma is still home to the Cherokee's western band, but also to a wide variety of people from all lifestyles and corners of the world who have brought with them their own tales and musical traditions.

This story, however, focuses on the Cherokee and cannot be told without briefly examining some of their past. The tribe, which is a confederation of clans, lived predominately in the hills of southern Appalachian in present-day southeastern United States when Europeans first encountered them in the mid-1500s. One hundred years later, the tribe had become trading partners with the recent arrivals and began to incorporate some of these businessmen into their population. This conjunction greatly reshaped the Cherokee, forcing them to adapt

to the changes brought with new people, diseases, tools, and ideas. By the eighteenth century, the devastating affects of European viruses, such as small pox, and warfare with the British, threatened Cherokee belief systems and practiced life ways. Cherokees had captured and adopted people from other tribes to make up for population losses before the arrival of these white-skinned immigrants, but the scale and rapidity of alterations brought about by this interaction was far greater than anything they had previously participated in, hence greater measures were taken by the Cherokee to insure survival.

Europeans became increasingly accepted, though often with ambivalence, as members of Cherokee society, and many of the whites' cultural traits were adopted in order to adapt to shifting times. The first decades of the nineteenth century, brought the Cherokee people more developments and turmoil. They were forcibly removed from their homelands and moved to the Ozarks and surrounding region within Arkansas and Indian Territory, during which thousands died and went through tremendous hardships. Many Cherokee accepted and expanded the use of African American slavery, especially wealthier members who intermarried and assimilated largely with European Americans—especially the Scots, including the Scots-Irish.

Examination of the musical practices of the Oklahoma Ozarks revolves around this emotional history and the subsequent decline and renaissance of Cherokee society. This population should not be looked at as racially homogenous; indeed, the Cherokee Nation of the recent past and present is similar to the larger United States in that it is an amalgamation of different peoples. The

tribe is still coming to terms with its multi-cultural heritage—holding onto ancient indigenous customs while incorporating new practices and ideas from immigrants.



Unknown person, Gabriel Allen, author, and Ben Bantista at a house warming.  
Cookson Hills, Oklahoma.

Music, song, and dance exemplify adaptations of Cherokees to new life ways, while also exhibiting the conservation of their cultural identity. In an environment full of turbulence, music brought people together and eased the tensions created by the constant intermingling of different ethnicities. The application of music history cannot fully demonstrate these changes, but is an insightful addition to understanding the complete cultural context of the Cherokee people and the region of the Oklahoma Ozarks. Knowledge of this and other developmental crossroads is essential to the complete story of America.

Music history in the United States began as a serious academic topic in the mid-1800s but the role of music in connection to greater social and cultural history is greatly lacking. This collection of short essays compiled as a masters thesis is a small but arduous addition to a better understanding of the cultural history of the world. It looks at a small population in a relatively minute region,

but in some aspects, exemplifies a process of cultural interaction common to much of the North American continent.

Chapter one is a review of literature. Academics whose works were important, whether disputed or as a foundation for my own study, are briefly examined. These authors include historians, geographers, anthropologists, and folklorists. The primary sources most utilized in this study are also presented, as well as influential theories.

Chapter two, “Historical Geography of Music Culture in the Oklahoma Ozarks,” reviews the background of the varied ethnicities and musical practices of the studied realm. It briefly discusses the origins of population migrations to the Oklahoma Ozarks and how the region became a cultural interzone of artistic expression. Besides describing the instruments, songs, and genres used in the past and the legacy left behind, this essay also describes the physical geography of northeastern Oklahoma.

“The Old Stomping Grounds: Traditional Music of the Oklahoma Cherokee and Delaware,” reviews the song, music, and dance of the indigenous cultures that were forced into the region before and during the Trail of Tears in the late 1830s. These performing arts have been an essential component of entertainment, stories and traditions, religion and spirituality, games and sports—much of their cultural identity. The Cherokee, and to a lesser extent, the Delaware, influenced other ethnicities of the Oklahoma Ozarks, and indigenous dances are an intricate part of inter-cultural interaction, especially with other Eastern or woodland tribes.



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“Music, Song, and Dance of Black Slaves and Freed People in the Cherokee Nation, 1850-1900,” is specifically about the African American population in the Cherokee Nation from 1850-1900. The African heritage that influenced these people as well as the surrounding culture, the role of slavery, and the cultural exhibition of freedmen and blacks that moved to the region following the Civil War are all explored. African Americans were given their own chapter because of their unique position in the early settlements of the Oklahoma Ozarks as slaves and their struggle to be incorporated into the greater community after their gained freedom. Much the same as in the other chapters, this piece emphasizes the role of music as a tool for social adaptation while at the same time being a cultural identifier.

Chapter six gives a brief account of the Cherokee fiddling tradition from 1809 to the living performers today. The instrument provides an excellent example of cross-cultural adaptation, and was/is used by all ethnicities in the

Cherokee Nation, and throughout much of the world. The fiddle was an important intercultural tool used to comfort guests and a popular form of entertainment within the tribe. In the 1800s, no other instrument brought together more people than the fiddle. This instrument's use helped bridge ethnic divides and should be recognized as an important and longtime art form among the Cherokee people, including intermarried whites, and freedmen.

# Chapter 1

## Review of Literature

The history of American roots music in Oklahoma is relatively short compared to most of the states in the union, but it is a rich and fascinating heritage. The rush of immigrants to the area in the nineteenth century and the wide variety of cultures that coalesced makes the musical arts of the Native State like no other. Textbooks on the region have paid little attention to this important topic, and historical research on Oklahoma music is needed.<sup>1</sup> The subject in general has only been scantily researched and covered by academics and the majority of this study depended on primary materials.

The Cherokee Nation and the Oklahoma Ozarks, the land in which most Cherokees resided during the 1800s, became the topic choice because of a personal familiarity of growing up there, the significant number of musicians produced in the region, and the uniqueness of the culture. The hills of northeastern Oklahoma have long been an ethnic and physical borderland where different music and cultural traditions have often synthesized and resulted in an interesting mixture of songs and techniques. Here, the bluffs meet the plains, and musical genres encompassing Cherokee traditional songs, Western swing, cowboy balladry, hymns, and southeastern string band music infuse.

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<sup>1</sup> James Shannon Buchanan and E. E. Dale, *A History of Oklahoma* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, and Company, 1939); Major General Charles F. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years: A History of the Sooner State and Its People, 1889-1939* (Oklahoma City: The Historical Records Association, 1941); Gene Aldrich and Royce H. Peterson, eds., *Readings in Oklahoma History* (Edmond, OK: Thompson Book and Supply Company, 1970); Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 2ed (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

Secondary literature on Oklahoma music is scant at best; however, works by twentieth and twenty-first century historians, anthropologists, and geographers were of some assistance, especially in understanding the political, economic, and social atmosphere surrounding this story. These sources can be found in my bibliography. A handful of authors do need to be recognized for their direct contribution to the literature on music culture in Oklahoma or my research in particular.

James Mooney's "The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee" (1885-6), and *Myths of the Cherokee* (1901), edited by the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and published by the government printing office, are two of the first and most important works on Cherokee songs, myths, stories, and medical practices.<sup>2</sup> Although the majority of his research was carried out among the Eastern Cherokee of North Carolina, his findings directly relate to the culture of the Western Cherokee of Oklahoma as well. This thesis builds from his findings, especially in the following chapter on Cherokee and Delaware traditional songs. Mooney's works are more collective than argumentative, though he maintained that Cherokee indigenous culture was in danger of extinction and incorrectly stated that Oklahoma Cherokees lost the great majority of their earlier arts and ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Although tribal members of the West

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<sup>2</sup> James Mooney, "The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee," in *The Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, 1885-'86, ed. J. W. Powell (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Press, 1891), 307-95; James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, the *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, ed. J. W. Powell (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Press, 1900).

<sup>3</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 11-3.

increasingly relied on an ethnically mixed and British American influenced governing body, many tribal citizens remained culturally conservative.

Leslie Hewes's many publications including, "Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma" (1942), "The Oklahoma Ozarks as the Land of the Cherokees (1942)," and "Cultural Fault Line in the Cherokee Country" (1943), were useful for population distributions, as well as for explanations of land and economic development and the cultural divide between the Cherokee Nation and its white neighbors to the east.<sup>4</sup> His claim that Cherokee ownership of the Oklahoma Ozarks caused a "retardation" of land development due to a higher rate of conservative values is a good example of incongruities between different ethnic groups in the region, but his studies do not account for the numerous similarities between the populations.<sup>5</sup>

My study builds off some of Hewes's demographic works and disputes his "cultural fault line" theory, which claimed that the Cherokee Ozarks were culturally separated from the rest of the range in Arkansas and Missouri.<sup>6</sup> Hewes's theory does not account for the breadth of reciprocity between the different neighboring geographic regions and ethnic groups as exemplified by musical practices. He also does not account for the vast amount of intermarriage and societal assimilation that had emerged in the Cherokee Nation. The Ozarks had no exact cultural division; the area was a zone of multiculturalism and ethnic

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<sup>4</sup> Leslie Hewes, "Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma," *Economic Geography* 18/4 (October 1942): 401-12; Leslie Hewes, "Cultural Fault Line in the Cherokee Country," *Economic Geography* 19/2 (April 1943): 136-42.

<sup>5</sup> "Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country:"137.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 138-42.

interchange. Overall, his geographical reviews of the Oklahoma Ozarks are the most thorough examination of the development of the region and were extremely useful even if lacking some cultural understandings.

Kathleen Garrett wrote “Music on the Indian Territory Frontier” (1955), published in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. The article is a short but great introductory read into the region’s music outside of Native American indigenous songs.<sup>7</sup> The majority of Garrett’s research focused on the Cherokee Female Seminary and the practice of organ and piano playing. She also spent a great deal of time on the influence of formal music instructors and religious missionaries, especially Samuel A. Worcester. She argued that Cherokee indigenous music played a small role among the Cherokee in Indian Territory but that musical expression was important and carried out through new instruments and genres adapted from European Americans. Her work, however, left out the more prevalent and important traditions of the common residents, especially in regards to string band traditions. Perhaps more importantly, she naively and wrongly came to the conclusion that music traditional to conservative Cherokees had died out, when in fact it continued with regularity.

William W. Savage Jr.’s *Singing Cowboys and All that Jazz: A Short History of Popular Music in Oklahoma* (1983) is the best-written thematic account of the state’s publicly notorious musicians and songsters, but other than his first chapter, “Culture for A Song: Oklahoma’s Musical Environment,” folk

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<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Garrett, “Music on the Indian Territory Frontier,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 33/3 (Fall 1955): 339-49.

traditions are rarely accounted for.<sup>8</sup> Savage argued that Oklahoma texts had largely ignored cultural history, especially popular music originating in Oklahoma, because of a fear of being seen by outsiders as backwards due to national opinions brought about by images of the 1930s dustbowl. Instead, Oklahoma historians focused on the fine and formal arts, when the humanities were mentioned at all.<sup>9</sup> Savage was absolutely correct in his claim, and his attempt to somewhat rectify the problem was admirable. His work possessed a couple of errors; the greatest was the false claim that Tom Petty was from Oklahoma, and on a personal note, that Petty was a less valuable musician than Oklahoma Native Leon Russell.<sup>10</sup>

George O. Carney published numerous articles on the state's musical contributions from a geographic perspective, including one on the song collecting biases carried out in the Ozarks entitled, "The Ozarks: A Reinterpretation Based on Folk Song Materials."<sup>11</sup> He published multiple editions of *The Sounds of People & Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music* (1994), a book that compiled his essays as well as a handful of others from musical geographers across the nation that provided useful data for geographic interpretations.<sup>12</sup> Although this compilation contained multiple topics and authors, the general theme throughout Carney's publications was that "modern society is

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<sup>8</sup> William W. Savage Jr., *Singing Cowboys and all that Jazz: A Short History of Popular Music in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 3-17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, ix-xii.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 130-1.

<sup>11</sup> George O. Carney, ed., "The Ozarks: A Reinterpretation Based on Folk Song Materials," in *The Sounds of People & Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, 3ed., ed. George O. Carney, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 41-55.

<sup>12</sup> George O. Carney, ed. , *The Sounds of People & Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, 3ed. , (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994).

deeply engrossed in music,” and that “...music permeates and affects many facets of our daily lives.” I am in complete agreement.<sup>13</sup>

Another publication he co-authored with Oklahoma scholar Hugh W. Foley Jr. *Oklahoma Music Guide: Biographies, Big Hits, and Annual Events* (2003), gave brief but useful insights into the varied musical artists and practices across the state.<sup>14</sup> His maps and musician distribution figures, though some are growing outdated, were of most use to this study. Carney’s works do, however, contain a major problem—plagiarism. Indeed, he was put to task for the deceit by two writers from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2004.<sup>15</sup>

Mabel Hovdahl Alexander followed Savage in producing a publication covering popular music in Oklahoma history. Her book, *Via Oklahoma: and Still the Music Flows* (2004), delved more deeply into the music of some of the Indian tribes and early cowboy performers and contained an excellent bibliography, but was still far short of being definitive.<sup>16</sup> Much of her findings were a rehashing of Savage’s, though she discussed the fine arts in more detail. Her work’s purpose was to illuminate the reader about the wide variety and talent of musicians that came out of Oklahoma to gain national and international recognition. The text contained little about the common performers of the state and the majority of references about the Oklahoma Ozarks pertained to the Cherokee seminaries.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>14</sup> George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr., *Oklahoma Music Guide: Biographies, Big Hits, and Annual Events* (Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Bartlett and Scott Smallwood, “Four Academic Plagiarists You’ve Never Heard Of: How Many More Are Out There?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 51/17 (December 17, 2004): A8. <http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i17/17a00802.htm>, accessed June 29, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Mabel Hovdahl Alexander, *Via Oklahoma: and Still The Music Flows* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 2004), sleeve, 17-24, 235-262.



John Wooley's *From the Blue Devils to Red Dirt: The Colors of Oklahoma Music* (2006) was the most recent publication on Oklahoma popular music covering the genres of jazz, Western swing, rock n' roll, and red dirt. The book was noteworthy in giving credit to contemporary musicians like the Red Dirt Rangers, Stoney LaRue, Bob Childers, and others who helped create the strongest musical force in present day Oklahoma—red dirt. His work, however, focused on popular artist and trends, and delved little into the origins of these music forms. It was a brief overview of popular artists. Wooley, as well as Alexander and Savage Jr. are good authors to review to gain a basic understanding of Oklahoma popular music. In order to obtain more knowledge on music history, however, it is necessary to read the songs themselves, often compiled by folk and pop collectors.

Folk music in America has been an academic topic since Francis James Child of Harvard University published *English and Scottish Ballads* in 1857-58 and his ten-piece volume-*The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, issued separately between 1882 and 1898.<sup>17</sup> Although Child was only interested in old British ballads, he became extremely influential among scholars who later pursued all aspects of American folk music.<sup>18</sup>

Collectors' works that are particularly of interest to the study of Oklahoma folk songs include Vance Randolph's four-volume set, *Ozark Folksongs* (1980),

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<sup>17</sup> Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, 2ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1860), vii; Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and co., 1898), vii. Francis James Child (1825-1896) was an American scholar and song collector that focused on comparative study of British vernacular ballads. His model of collecting became the model for generations of ballad collectors. The British ballads he collected in America are known as Child ballads.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 15-16.

John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs And Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), B. A. Botkin's *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions and Folkways of the People of the South* (1949), Alan Lomax's *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (1967), Ethel Moore and Chauncey O. Moore's *Ballads and Folk Songs of the Southwest* (1964), Marion Thede's *The Fiddle Book* (1967), and Guy Logsdon's "*The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing*" and *other Songs Cowboys Sing* (1989).<sup>19</sup> The majority of these collections lack a clear thesis and function more as a depository of primary materials, though some editors did change some works slightly. Some of these books contain commentaries on each song's history or meaning, but that is the most common extent of any voice from the compiler. This work builds off these collections and opinions, but provides new materials and insights to a little researched region.

Ethnologists and folklorists have written little to none about the Oklahoma Ozarks, but I have borrowed some theoretical insight. In many ways, I revive the "functionalist" theory that song structure and subject matter reveal methods of adaptation as well as societal and musical evolution. I agree strongly with scholar John F. Szwed's statement "song forms and performances are themselves models

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<sup>19</sup> Vance Randolph, comp. & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol. 1, *British Ballads and Songs* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance, Randolph, comp. & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol.2, *Songs of the South and West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance, Randolph, comp. & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol. 3, *Humorous and Play-Party Songs* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance, Randolph, comp. & ed., *Ozark Folk Songs*, Vol. 4, *Religious Songs and Other Items* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980) John A. Lomax, and Alan Lomax, ed. & comp., *Cowboy Songs: and Other Frontier Ballads*, 3ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938); B. A., Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions and Folkways of the People of the South* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949); Alan Lomax, comp., *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People*, (New York: Oak Publications, 1967); Ethel Moore and Chauncey O. Moore, *Ballads and Folk Songs of the Southwest: More than 600 Titles, Melodies, and Texts Collected in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); Marion Thede, *The Fiddle Book* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967); Guy Logsdon, ed., "*The Whorehouse Bells were Ringing*": *And Other Songs Cowboys Sing* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

of social behavior reflecting strategies of adaptation to human and natural environments.”<sup>20</sup> Folklorists John F. Szwed, Allen Lomax, and B. A. Botkin were prominent figures in this school of thought, which in the 1930s, broke away from the field’s older generation who sought to preserve and collect what they perceived as a vanishing art form. Functionalists, on the other hand, focused on the “role folklore played in society and the process by which it evolved.”<sup>21</sup> In the words of Botkin, “Folklore became germinal rather than vestigial.”<sup>22</sup> No longer was folk music looked at as a static art form, but one that changed with time and was newly created by living performers. Songs can be utilized to understand processes and conflicts, belief systems, and the presented identity of a study population. Today, folk and popular music make up an important facet of American and world studies, not just in aesthetic concerns but also as a dynamic force within cultural history.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis includes a wide variety of primary and secondary sources but much of the writing was derived from recorded interviews. One reason these accounts were widely utilized is that they make up the majority of material that comes directly from musicians; another is because outside of these transcripts few primary accounts of this subject matter exist. Musicians and songsters possess a long history of oral traditions in the Oklahoma Ozarks and more commonly passed along their knowledge through sound and communication rather than

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<sup>20</sup> John F. Szwed, “Musical Adaptation Among Afro-Americans,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 82/324 (April 1969): 113.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 139.

<sup>22</sup> B. A. Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research: ‘Bread and Song’,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3 (March 1939): 14.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Levy and Barbara L. Tischler, “Into the Cultural Mainstream: The Growth of American Music Scholarship,” *American Quarterly* 42/1 (March 1990), 57-8.

written documents.<sup>24</sup> This could also be attributed to the fact that more than a few oral historians were also musical performers themselves. Take for example former University of Central Oklahoma historian Royce Peterson or present Oklahoma Historical Society oral historian Rodger Harris.

Some historians question the use of interviews as reliable historical accounts due to the possibility of accidental or deliberate misinformation from the interviewee.<sup>25</sup> Oral histories have also been criticized, especially in slave accounts, because of the assumption that informants may not have been completely forthcoming if they were uncomfortable with those conducting the interviews.<sup>26</sup> While these are all fair criticisms, that should not disregard their use. Most written sources, whether journals or financial documents, have their share of faulty information, so have newspapers, and published government accounts. This is why multiple sources should be utilized whenever possible, just as different methods are used on archaeological sites to ensure accuracy with dating.

Researching the interviewees can also reveal the relationships those people have with the community. Community members, including Cherokees, whites and blacks, conducted the Works Projects Administration (WPA) interviews that come from the Oklahoma Ozarks, and most informants were comfortable with whom they were speaking—there was no fear of retribution for their revelations. Having spent 2007 working for the Oklahoma Historical Society oral history

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<sup>24</sup> Many interviews of musicians are held in the Oklahoma Historical Society Collections, but there are only a few written memoirs from popular artists, and none from everyday folk performers.

<sup>25</sup> Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *The Journal of American History*, 85/2 (September 1998): 581-95.

<sup>26</sup> John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (Summer 1987): 482-515.

division as a graduate intern, and thoroughly cataloging and examining its contents, I am comfortable with their use and feel most portrayals are as accurate as most primary documents. One should also remember that what one perceives or describes, as the truth, even if not completely accurate, is just as important in understanding the human condition. Another source often used to gather primary materials was newspapers.

The Cherokee had a public press before their forced removal and their news articles have been of great service in finding common hymns, accounts of cultural events, and instances of racial tension and cooperation. Samuel Worcester and Elias Boudinot founded *The Cherokee Phoenix* in February 1828, and its successor *The Cherokee Advocate* was published from 1844 to 1906. The paper was recently re-instituted as the source of tribal press again as *The Cherokee Phoenix and Indian Advocate*, and all versions of the paper are excellent sources. Other regional papers such as *The Tahlequah Daily Press*, *The Current*, and *The Tulsa World* were referenced, as well as outside resources such as *The Oklahoman* and *The New York Times*.

In most aspects, this work is original in its subject matter and relies more on primary than secondary sources. The chapter on the Cherokee fiddling tradition is the first study to make more than a passing statement about the practice, and the music of the Oklahoma Ozarks in general has never previously been the focus of an in depth academic study.

## Chapter 2

### A Historical Geography of the Physical Landscape and Music

#### Culture of the Oklahoma Ozarks

The songs of a people certainly cast a singular light upon the life and culture of that people, and no study of the Ozark hillfolk can possibly be complete without consideration of the Ozarks folk songs.<sup>1</sup>

Bicycle Johnny was the nickname of a cherished resident of Welling, Oklahoma, who rode his bicycle west from his home in the hills the ten or so miles into Tahlequah and back on a regular basis. He did this through his older years until his death in 2007 on the same old beach cruiser bike. In the cyclist's honor, a friend and I agreed to use his name for a local band made up of us and an ever-changing group of musicians. Another title that would have been fitting, but was already taken by a popular 1980s rock act, would have been Motley Crew, because we definitely were an assorted package. I was often called the speckled Spaniard, due to my Hispanic heritage, the other co-founder Gabriel Allen, was Cherokee, Navajo, and an assortment of European bloodlines, and other performers were from German, Kiowa, and Scottish families. The popular and local musical influences brought with the players were even more varied, ranging from heavy metal to ole time string band influences. This mixture of ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1973), 108.

heritages, as well as musical practices, is commonplace in Tahlequah and much of Oklahoma, and prompted a curiosity that led to this study.



Bicycle Johnny at the Cherokee Courthouse 2003: Daniel Milbauer, Ben Bantista, Jason Legg, David Castro, and J. Justin Castro. Photo by Angela Castro.

As mentioned, Oklahoma is a mixed bag. The landscape varies from lush forested hills, to vast open prairies and semi-arid plateaus, and the cultural makeup is an assortment of ethnicities and worldwide influences. The state is home to thirty-nine federally recognized American Indian tribes, who, for the most part, were relocated there in the nineteenth century, and was the last territory opened to non-Indian settlement. Oklahoma is one of the most culturally diverse areas of the world, yet its history as a state is relatively short. 2007 marked the centennial, and the vast majority of people have roots no longer than a hundred to a hundred and fifty years back.

The northeast portion of Oklahoma is home to a small section of the Ozarks, which is unique in both its physical and cultural attributes. Pressured and then forced to move west from a number of present day southeastern states in the

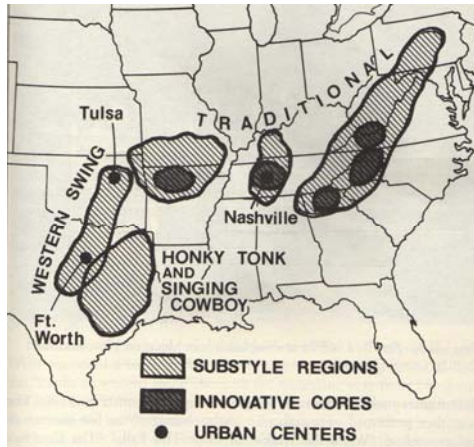
early 1800s by European American settlers, soldiers, and politicians, the Cherokee founded some of the earliest surviving settlements in northeastern Oklahoma. Some of the towns with this history include Tahlequah, Park Hill, Proctor, Webber's Falls, Vian, and Bunch. Cherokee lifeways dominated the cultural landscape of these vicinities until the end of the nineteenth century. Individuals of outside cultural groups intermarried and worked in Cherokee society before leaving the East, and made up substantial and influential minorities in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Ozarks are a historic crossroads of people, and the musical genres they brought with them, such as stomp dances and traditional string band music from the East, and cowboy ballads, Western swing and honky tonk to the west. These practices are important for understanding the cultures of the region, helpful in understanding settlement and migration patterns, and “may contribute to an understanding of the continuum of the changing occupancy of what is often a misunderstood and misrepresented region.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E. Joan Wilson Miller, “The Ozark Culture Region as Revealed by Traditional Materials,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58/1 (March 1968): 51.





Zones of North American country related music genres. Map created by George O. Carney<sup>3</sup>

Jazz too, followed a similar South-North route from New Orleans, through Oklahoma City and Muskogee, up to Kansas City and St. Louis. Surrounded by the greater Ozarks on one side and the rolling plains on the other, the region is a zone where both physical landscapes and multiple ethnicities and life ways collided, resulting in numerous musical traditions in a relatively small population and territory.

The terrain is made up mainly of rugged hills covered with little soil and thick forests, and is full of scattered creeks and rivers. At the western and northern boundaries, the oak, hickory, sycamore, cedar, and pine covered highlands yield to the flatter tall and mixed grass prairies—the wind struck plains famous to the Native State. Physically the Oklahoma Ozarks are similar to the adjacent counties in Arkansas and Missouri and different from the rest of Oklahoma. Unlike other areas of the state, the region is predominately made up of hollers of Mississippian

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<sup>3</sup> George O. Carney, “Music and the South: A Cultural Geography Perspective,” in *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 125. Note that the Oklahoma Ozarks is the crossroads of Western swing and traditional music. The map does have one error; the zone for honky tonk and singing cowboy should also extend well into Oklahoma.

limestones and cherts with abundant sinkholes and caverns.<sup>4</sup> The area also receives more days of rainfall and is slightly cooler in temperature throughout the summer than the state's average.<sup>5</sup>



Local residents swimming at "the secret hole" Spring Creek, Tera Sita, Oklahoma, 1999.  
Photo by author.

Except for small gas deposits in southern Sequoyah County, the Oklahoma Ozarks have few of the oil and gas resources that are abundant to the south and to the west; hence, it lacks the boomtowns and direct influence of those industries.<sup>6</sup> A lack of good farming soils and available grazing land also separates the Ozarks from the western prairies, and though farming and ranching are present, the

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth S. Johnson, "Geomorphic Provinces," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 4-5; Kenneth S. Johnson, "Geologic Formations," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 8-9; Hewes, "The Oklahoma Ozarks as the Land of the Cherokees," 270.

<sup>5</sup> Howard L. Johnson, "Precipitation," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 4-5; Kenneth S. Johnson, "Geologic Formations," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 18-9.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Boyd, "Oil and Gas Production," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 4-5; Kenneth S. Johnson, "Geologic Formations," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 28-9.

practices are commonly carried out on a much smaller scale.<sup>7</sup> Cherokee residence also affected economic growth patterns. Many citizens held a more egalitarian approach of land use, and instead of large-scale operations, a preference for sustenance farming, fishing, and hunting prevailed. Hence, the land was less disturbed than that of neighboring areas of Arkansas and Missouri until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> The area now, however, is home to the largest nurseries in the state and is one of the larger plant-producing regions of the United States.

With the Mississippi River to the east and the Great Plains to the west, the Ozarks have long been a zone of cultural swapping, even among prehistoric peoples—this trend has since continued.<sup>9</sup> During the twentieth century, geographers and anthropologists considered the Oklahoma portion of the range a “cultural fault line,” based on the high percentage of Cherokee residents, and in many cases, that argument has upheld.<sup>10</sup> Whites, however, now make up the majority of the population of northeastern Oklahoma but the region is still home to a large population of Cherokee and other American Indian tribes, and a growing number of other ethnicities, especially Mexicans and other Latinos.

The idea of a “cultural fault line” supports the concept of intercultural inhabitation of the greater Ozarks, but it does not promote an even more important

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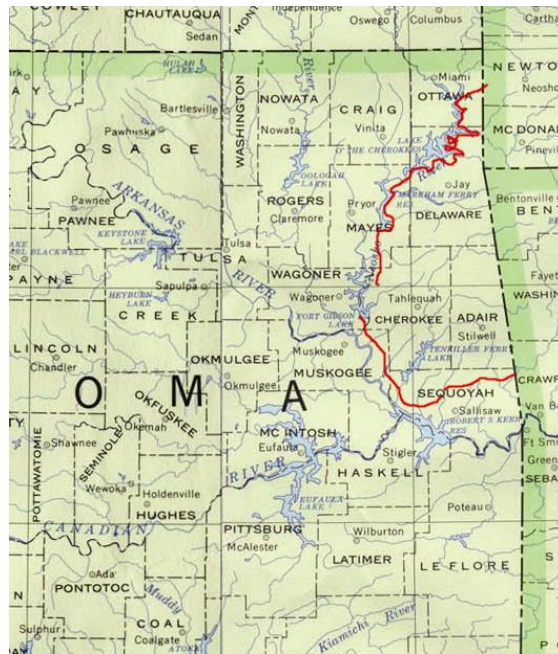
<sup>7</sup> Leslie Hewes, *Occupying the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 403-8.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Hewes, “Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country,” *Economic Geography* 19/2 (April 1943): 137-8; Leslie Hewes, “Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma,” *Economic Geography* 18/4 (October 1942): 405-12.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin E. Tong, Jr., “Cox, an Archaic Site in the Ozarks,” *American Antiquity* 20/2 (October 1954): 124-9.

<sup>10</sup> Hewes, “Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country:” 136-42; Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “The Tribal Population of Eastern Oklahoma,” *Current Anthropology* 9/5 part 2 (December 1968): 510-8; Earl W. Kerston, Jr., “Changing Economy and Landscape in a Missouri Ozarks Area,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 48/4 (December 1958): 398.

aspect of the area—cultural interaction. Although the original Cherokee settlers of the nineteenth century carried many unique ethnic attributes, the “fault line” theory does not account for the numerous similarities between the tribe and non-Indian residents of Oklahoma, and their Arkansas and Missouri neighbors. One of the similarities among all of the Ozarks is the existence of folk songs and musical instruments carried by Cherokees, African Americans, and European Americans to the area from the East.



Oklahoma Ozarks including county names. (Courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey). Oklahoma Ozark border drawn in by author.

Many whites, predominately Scots, married into the Cherokee nation in the eighteenth century, and the realm became home to a mixture of indigenous customs, southern white society, African American traditions, and a twist of New

England religiosity. By the end of the 1830s, the majority of the Cherokee arrived over the Trail of Tears and established Park Hill and Tahlequah, a strong minority of the tribe mirrored their European American partners to the east. They built large wooden homes, male and female seminaries, roads and town structures, trading posts, barns with cattle, chickens, and hogs.<sup>11</sup> Geographer Leslie Hewes argued that a limited tax base caused a lack of community services, but many residents of Tahlequah claimed the town was advanced for a frontier city, and that the community was the first place to receive a phone call west of the Mississippi River; most of the Oklahoma Ozarks, however, did not mirror that kind of rapid development.<sup>12</sup> Corn was the most common crop, though cotton, wheat, tobacco, and various fruiting vegetables were grown.<sup>13</sup> Other foods and most medical remedies came from the wide variety of local plant life.<sup>14</sup> A few of the elite families had plantations and were practitioners of slavery, but the majority lived in the hollers and valleys on small farms.<sup>15</sup>

To many Cherokee residents, traditional tribal dances and rituals were the preferred form of religion and entertainment. After the merger of Delaware with

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Nuttal, *Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory* (Philadelphia: T. H. Palmer, 1821), 137; Cephas Washburn. *Reminiscences of the Indians* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1869), 24; William Boyd, interviewed by Wylie Thornton, July 2, 1937, Indian Pioneer History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) Vol. 36: 311-4, further stated as IPHC.

<sup>12</sup> Hewes, "Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma," 405-12; The claim of Tahlequah receiving the first phone call east of the Mississippi River is made on a marker outside of the Cherokee Court House, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>13</sup> Hewes, "Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country:" 136; Hewes, "The Oklahoma Ozarks as the Land of the Cherokees," 275.

<sup>14</sup>E. T. Pendley, interview by Amelia F. Harris, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, February 25, 1938, IPHC vol. 93: 218.

<sup>15</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 21, 30, 35, 43; Hewes, "Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country:" 138; Wahrhaftig, "Tribal Cherokee Population of Eastern Oklahoma," 517.

the Cherokee after the Civil War, the former tribe's songs became another addition to the indigenous customs; though most Delaware settled outside of the Ozarks.<sup>16</sup> Stomp Dances are common to both tribes and can be attended if invited by a tribal member. Certain Cherokee families, however, are strict on enforcing qualifications for entry and restrict knowledge of sacred ceremonies to outsiders.<sup>17</sup> Stomp Grounds are both spiritual and social places, which are often under the direction of a certain community or clan, but have been held more publicly at times.<sup>18</sup> Accounts of white residents participating in these dances exist, but overall the tradition is reserved for certain Native American groups.<sup>19</sup> Powwows, often inter-tribal, are another form of American Indian music and dance practiced by the Cherokee and Delaware, and the custom has grown since

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Townsend Crow, interview by Dayna Lee, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, June 22, 1994, Oklahoma State Arts Council Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), box 3, Crow, Mary Townsend folder, further stated as OSACC; Edward Thompson, interview by Joe L. Todd, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, February 12, 1984, Oral History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), t84.018 a-b, further stated as OHC; W. W. Newcomb, Jr., "A Note on Cherokee-Delaware Pan-Indianism," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 57/5 (October 1955): 1041-5; Ruth Parks, interview by L. J. Wilson, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 8: 66-75.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly Anquoe, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, e-mail correspondence to J. Justin Castro, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 14, 2007, J. Justin Castro Collection (Oklahoma City: private collection), further stated as JCC; Tommy Wildcat, interview with Rodger Harris, March 11, 1998, east of Keys, Oklahoma, OHC: v98.017; Bill Swim, interview by L. W. Wilson, April 13, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 240-53; Mrs. Sam Sanders, interview by C. C. Davidson, January 25, 1937, IPHC, vol. 9: 154-8; Mary Riley Roberts, "Nowata Settlers," IPHC vol. 8: 426-33; Lenora Alpha Henry (Ross), interview by M. J. Stockton, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 425-8; Minnie Hodge, interview by W. T. Holland, Tulsa, Oklahoma, August 18, 1937, IPHC vol. 29: 242-5; George W. Mayes, interview by Amelia F. Harris, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 10, 1937, IPHC vol. 71: 40-8; Ida Mae Hughes, interview by Robert B. Thomas, Muskogee, Oklahoma, November 15, 1937, IPHC vol. 30: 160-2; William Boyd, interview by Wylie Thornton, July 2, 1937, IPHC vol. 36: 311-4; Lynch Sixkiller, interview by W. A. Bigby, April 19, 1937, IPHC vol. 9: 421-2; Docia Rich, interview by Ruby Wolfenbarger, August 17, 1937, Sentinel, Oklahoma, IPHC vol. 58: 42-5.

<sup>18</sup> Anquoe, correspondence; Wildcat, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Colonel Elsworth Walters, interview by Charles H. Holt, Skeedee, Oklahoma, March 10, 1938, IPHC vol. 95: 315-7; Loretta C. Morgan, interview by Lula Austin, Durant, Oklahoma, May 28, 1937, IPHC vol. 37: 215; Night Hawk Society, photograph, Archives and Manuscript Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), 18474.4; Lenora Alpha Henry (Ross), interview by M. J. Stockton, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 28: 425-8; Pendley, interview: 218; Stella Feedback Rothhammer, interview by Mary D. Doward, Tulsa, Oklahoma, January 18, 1938, IPHC, vol. 43: 120.

the rise of pan-Indianism after World War II. Educational institutions, like the multi-tribal Sequoyah High School in Park Hill, Oklahoma, have also led to more Cherokee powwow practitioners.<sup>20</sup> Another musical practice that brought about ethnic interaction was fiddle playing.

The fiddle was a common artifact brought by people across the Trail of Tears and it is still popularly played in the Oklahoma Ozarks. Picked up from Anglo-Saxon traders, the instrument became popular at social events by the early 1800s.<sup>21</sup> “English Dances,” square dances, barn dances, house-raising dances, and jigs, all became common forms of entertainment among all ethnic groups in the East and in the Oklahoma Ozarks.<sup>22</sup> Some of the most renowned fiddle players have been Cherokee, and the tribe’s name itself was placed in numerous folk ballads, waltzes, hymns, jazz tunes, and bluegrass songs.<sup>23</sup> Hoedowns and Stomp Dances were and are attended by some of the same residents. The fiddle was also used by cowboys who traveled north and south through the Cherokee nation bringing cattle up to shipping posts in Kansas.

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<sup>20</sup> Wildcat, interview.

<sup>21</sup> John Norton, *The Journal of John Norton, 1809-16*, eds. Carl F. Klink and James J. Talman (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1970), 36-52.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 52; James R. Carselowe, “Thomas M. Buffington,” IPHC vol. 79: 116-8; Marion Thede, *The Fiddle Book* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), 141, 159; Andrew L. Rogers, interview by Elle Robinson in Ft. Gibson, OK, July 15, 1937, IPHC vol. 98: 84-5.

<sup>23</sup> Austin E. Fife and Francesca Redden, “The Pseudo-Indian Folksongs of the Anglo-American and French-Canadian,” *Journal of American Folklore* 67/275 (Jul.-Sept. 1954): 239-51; Folk Music Index Chea to Chil, [ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org), formerly [sunsite.unc.edu](http://www.sunsite.unc.edu), formerly [metalab.unc.edu](http://www.metalab.unc.edu), Chapel Hill, North Carolina, U.S.A., <http://www.ibiblio.org/folkindex/c05.htm>, accessed June 05, 2006; Eugene Chadbourne, “Manco Sneed Biography,” *All Music Guide*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/manco-sneed>, accessed November 25, 2006; Bubba Hopkins, “My Bio,” Hopkins Music website, <http://www.hopkinsmusic.net/about.html>, accessed December 27, 2006; David Standingwater, interview by J. Justin Castro, November 28, 2006, JCC; Curley Lewis, interview by Cynthia Taylor, Stigler, Oklahoma, April 2, 1995, OSACC: box 7, Lewis, Curley, file; Sam O’Field, interview by J. Justin Castro, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 04, 2006, JCC; S. E. Ruckman, “More than Tradition: Fiddle is Cherokee Culture,” *The Tulsa World*, June 19, 2006: A1

Songs from southern European American culture became staples of Oklahoma Ozark culture, and contemporary tunes from that region are still often popular in the Native State's eastern hills. "Oh! Susannah," "On Top of Old Smokey," "Good Ol' Mountain Dew," "Leather Breeches," "The Dishearted Ranger," "A Man and a Maid," "Young Johnny Scott," and "Dark as A Dungeon," are but a tiny sample of examples. Outlaw songs have long been popular in the Native State's eastern hill country, which was hailed as one of the favorite criminal hideaways of the nineteenth century. Places like the Cookson Hills became synonymous with robbers and renegades, and songs like "The Ballad of Frank and Jesse James," and "Pretty Boy Floyd," are still popular. Due to the existence of a rich musical heritage and a strong music program at the Cherokee seminaries, fiddles, mandolins, and guitars, were all common instruments in the Cherokee Nation before the outset of the Civil War, and may be the earliest documented centers of such performers in the state, especially of guitar.<sup>24</sup>

Other traditions shared by whites, blacks, and Cherokees in the Oklahoma and greater Ozarks were hymn singing, gospel quartets, temperance songs, play-parties, string bands, and shouts.<sup>25</sup> Christian music became ever more influential as missionaries established themselves and converts settled families. The

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander, *Via Oklahoma*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Henry R. Wilson, letter to Rev. J. W. Moore, Springfield, Ohio, February 2, 1861, in Cephas Washburn's *Reminiscences of the Indians* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1869): 42-9; Charlie Hepner and Clara Clifford, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, IPHC vol. 28: 435; Allen Morris, interviewed by Jas. S. Buchanan, Muskogee, Oklahoma, August 18-9, 1937, IPHC vol. 37: 261; "Old Songs are Heard in Ozarks," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1933: E8; Thomas Trapp, interview by J. Justin Castro, November 2, 2006, JCC; "Country Singers Planning A Big Time at Convention at High School Sunday," *The Tahlequah Citizen*, September 23, 1948: 1; Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 228-31.



translation of hymns and songs created by ministers became commonly utilized in newspapers, books, churches, and other social gatherings. The prevailing instrument of the church and education institutions, the organ, became popular, and songs from play parties held by Christians are now children's games in the vicinity's day cares and public schools. Overall, most church and quartet singing was the same as secular folk songs except in the message that was delivered, and was common in what is now Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma.<sup>26</sup> Hymns became established pieces in Ozark oral folk traditions.

Stomp Dances, string bands, and hymns in the Oklahoma Ozarks were established art forms that came with settlers from Appalachia and the American South, but after the Civil War, new north-south migration patterns developed on the western border of the Ozark Plateau. These migrants brought their own songs and traditions leading to an infusion of new ballads in the 1800s. In the twentieth century the mediums of honky tonk, jazz, and Western swing follow similar paths up from Louisiana and Texas through Oklahoma and up further north. The Shawnee Trail, which passed along the Oklahoma Ozarks, bringing the culture of cowpunchers, wranglers, buckaroos, and the singing cowboy, was the principal cattle path before the Chisholm was established further to the west.<sup>27</sup>

Herders stopped at Fort Gibson before moving on to the east or west fork of the Shawnee. The outpost was just as much a social center of the area as a

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<sup>26</sup> A. D. Horsely, "The Spatial Impact on White Gospel Quartets in the United States," in *The Sounds of People & Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, 3ed., ed. George O. Carney (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 178-88; Milton D. Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>27</sup> John R. Lovett, "Major Cattle Trails, 1866-1889," *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 116-7; Guy Logsdon, col. & ed., *The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing: And Other Songs Cowboys Sing*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1889), xi-xiv.

military structure. Cherokees held traditional dances there, the church band played for balls, and Temperance Society meetings were common.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the later half of the nineteenth century, cowboy ballads worked their way into the Oklahoma Ozark repertoire, such as “The Buffalo Skinners,” and “Chisholm Trail.” The following is a verse from “The Buffalo Skinners:”

Our meat it was buffalo hump and  
Iron wedge bread,  
And all we had to sleep on was a  
Buffalo robe for a bed:  
The fleas and greybacks worked on  
us, O boys, it was not slow,  
I'll tell you there is no worse hell on  
earth than the range of the  
buffalo.<sup>29</sup>

The singers and musicians in the cattle business and the plains were catalysts for new folk songs, and their impact is heard in many American music genres.

Jazz was a genre of playing that took off during the 1920s in various regions of the United States including Oklahoma. Oklahoma City was home to many renowned players such as the various members of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, like William “Count” Basie, Billy King, Buddy Anderson, and Jimmy Rushing. Tulsa, and especially Muskogee, also had thriving jazz scenes, and were

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<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, “Gustavus Loomis: Commandant Fort Gibson and Fort Townson,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 18/3 (September 1940): 221-3; Wildcat interview.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Lomax, comp., Woody Guthrie, notes, and Pete Seeger, ed., “The Buffalo Skinners,” *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), 100-1.

stops on the road to cities like Kansas City, St. Louis and Chicago. Muskogee produced an amazing amount of renowned jazz players for the small size of the city. Clarence Love, Jay McShann, Claude Williams, Samuel Aaron Bell, Barney Kessey, and Terrence Holder all were notorious performers with Muskogee roots.<sup>30</sup>

Although it is somewhat unclear to historians why Muskogee produced so many great black musicians, the history of that community makes some assumptions more notable. The African American communities that came with the “civilized tribes” to Indian Territory had a rich heritage of spiritual music and work songs, and these must have influenced the popular performers who followed. According to statistical data, the vast majority of jazz musicians in the area came from families well versed in music performance.<sup>31</sup>

Although not as well documented as other ethnicities, African Americans produced talented fiddlers, who played in Civil War camps and for family and community events.<sup>32</sup> Claude Williams has exemplified this unique heritage by being one of the few people to play jazz fiddle in twentieth century Oklahoma. The blacks that came with the eastern tribes during their forced removal from their homelands in the 1830s also introduced the banjo, shouts, West African rooted dancing, and bone rattling to the region.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Clarence Love, interview by Joe Todd, Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 01, 1983, OHC; John Wooley, *From the Blue Devils To Red Dirt: The Colors of Oklahoma Music* (Tulsa: Hawk Publishing, 2006), 8-12.

<sup>31</sup> George O. Carney, “General Profile of Oklahoma Jazz Artists: A Biographical Dictionary,” *Oklahoma Folklife Council Newsletter* 4/1 & 2 (Fall & Winter 1992-3): 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Chaney McNair, interview by James Carsalovey, Vinita, OK, May 11, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 442-7; <sup>32</sup> Dennis Vann, interview by Reuben Partridge, March 23, 1937, IPHC vol. 11: 65-9; Garret Garrison, interview by Nannie Burns, April 15, 1938, IPHC vol. 84: 63.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, *Via Oklahoma*, 65.

Starting in the 1920s Jazz became a popular form of black musical expression in Oklahoma. Jazz never became as popular as hillbilly and country music in the rural Ozarks, but there are some jazz players in the region. Northeastern State University has a reputable jazz lab, and some contemporary traditional string band players have strong jazz influences, such as Claude Williams, Herald Aldridge, Thomas Trapp, and Joe Mack.

Jazz had its greatest impact in the urban areas, especially in black communities, and though rarely picked up upon directly in Oklahoma Ozark folk culture, it greatly affected the music of Bob Wills, a Texas born musician who later established himself in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A childhood fan of African American work songs, blues, and dance music, Wills borrowed extensively from his experiences with blacks while on the road to becoming the “patriarch of western-swing.”<sup>34</sup> Wills even performed as a blackface comedian and musician in the 1920s for a touring minstrel show.<sup>35</sup> Wills spent 1934 through 1942, his most admired years, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the close proximity of the new sound, and radio stations to the Oklahoma Ozarks, left a strong and lasting impact on the area.<sup>36</sup>

Eastern Oklahoma residents, such as Sam O’ Field and Curley Lewis, spent portions of their careers touring with western swing acts like Johnny Lee Wills, and Leon McAuliffe and The Cimarron Boys.<sup>37</sup> Western swing also left an impact on Oklahoma Ozark red dirt performers such as Randy Crouch, the

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<sup>34</sup> Savage, Jr., *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*, 13-4.

<sup>35</sup> Wooley, *From the Blue Devils To Red Dirt*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Savage, Jr., *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Curley Lewis, interview by Cynthia Taylor, Stigler, OK, April 2, 1995, OSACC: Box 7, Lewis, Curley, file; O’Field, interview.

members of Coldshot, and Red Eye Gravy, and eclectic groups like The Skillbillies that exists today. Western swing is still common and very popular in the region, and the genre is often intermixed with songs of a more Southern string band style.



Sam O' Field, Robert Bigfeather, and Jerry Bigfeather.  
Langley, Oklahoma, February 18, 2007. Photo by author.

Although the red dirt music scene has predominately been associated with Stillwater and Central Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Ozarks are home to one of its most revered performers—Randy Crouch. Other noted red dirt musicians from the area include Red Eye Gravy, Badwater, Pumpkin Hollow Boys, and Bill Erickson, and numerous acts out of the Tahlequah area have joined the movement. Some historians and writers, after over thirty years of the music's existence, still argue that red dirt is not a specific genre; however, its influence and importance to so many people in Oklahoma establishes that the phenomena does exist, whether one labels it as a genre or not. Much of this contention is because red dirt is hard to define. Its roots definitely include cowboy balladry, Western swing, and some old string band influences, but it also draws from honky

tonk and 1960s and 1970s rock n' roll. Its eclectic nature is exactly what makes it unique, and yet with all this variety it still carries a very Oklahoma feel about it. To some critics the name "red dirt" specifically refers to the clay soil common to much of Oklahoma, and is a geographic label meaning from the Native State. Nevertheless, the style has also spilled over into neighboring states, especially Texas, similar to the way Western swing came from Texas and became popular in Oklahoma.

Besides red dirt, another contemporary mixed style, folk roots rock, has become popular in the Illinois River scene. Although similar to red dirt, and it would be included if red dirt was a mere geographical term (though most of the Oklahoma Ozarks has brown soil), folk roots rock, has less popular country and more traditional, hippie, and new experimental influences. This sound is based out of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, an area that used to be considered conservative, but since the 1970s has grown to be one of, if not, the most liberal small cities in Oklahoma.

A group of Cherokee County residents who make up the band, My-Tea Kind, are present day leaders of this musical trend, which has the feel of southern folk with the addition of experimental rock-based sounds combining electric and acoustic instruments, multiple vocal harmonies, washboards, bullhorns, multiple percussive instruments, and the occasional musical saw and kazoo. The band consists of three sisters, Annie Paine, Sarah Garde, and Bonnie Paine, and a long time friend, James Townsend, whom played music together since childhood. The women of the group grew up rich in the psychedelic rock, red dirt, and string band

traditions of the area, and performed as Randy Crouch’s band for many years before breaking away to start their own career.



Bonnie Paine, Annie Paine, James Townsend, and Sarah Garde—My-Tea Kind, Dogpatch, Arkansas, 2006. Photo courtesy of Angela K. Castro.

The Skillbilles were also apart of this new wave of performers. They listed themselves as playing “bluegrass, jazz, swing, funk, and red dirt,” but their music goes beyond that.<sup>38</sup> Hillbilly, classic rock, and modern jam band songs all have been weaved into this melting pot style. Elephant Revival Concept, which includes Bonnie Paine of My-Tea Kind and some Colorado based friends, has also been very popular along the Ozark Plateau, commonly playing venues in Oklahoma, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Kansas, Arkansas, and Missouri. Other bands and performers that are a part of this scene centered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma include The Shacks, Kelly Anquoe, and Chris Becker, among others.

An amazing facet of music from northeastern Oklahoma is that all of these musical variations still flourish, both in traditional and progressive variations.

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<sup>38</sup> The Skillbillies, performance flyer, Oklahoma City, OK, April 28, 2006, JCC.

Many times, as with Bicycle Johnny, popular music and traditional music are combined together in a multicultural group. The abundance of styles and the contemporary blends of genres exemplify the uniqueness of the area as a zone of cultural interaction and cooperation, and is one of the living traditions that reveal this extraordinary history. The historic east to west movement of the “civilized tribes,” and southerners in general, mixing with the south-north cultures that stemmed from cowboys, western swing, and jazz musicians is most responsible for Oklahoma’s, and more specifically, the Oklahoma Ozark’s musical sound. Popular influences also made major inroads on contemporary trends; especially Austin based honky tonk, classic rock of the 1960s and 1970s, and recent national touring acts in the college and festival scene. Whether popular or folk, and these lines often blur, these merging traditions provide an excellent window into the hearts, minds, and movements of the habitants that play, listen, and dance to the music. One traditional music that is still practiced that was transplanted by the original settlers of much of the present population is the indigenous songs of the Cherokee.



## Chapter 3

### The Old Stomping Grounds: Traditional Music of the Oklahoma Cherokee and Delaware

In 1828, Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee newspaper editor and political figure, optimistically stated that his peoples' cultural "traditions are becoming unpopular, and there are now but a few aged persons amongst us who regard them as our forefathers did."<sup>1</sup> This, however, was the voice of a man who desired to present an acculturated view of his tribe to the white American world. Later, in the 1940s, a Cherokee informant from the Eastern Cherokee would state a different viewpoint, agreeing with researchers that "the principles that insure individual health and social welfare are inculcated in the dances," presenting the value placed on their traditional ceremonies as a cultural identifier.<sup>2</sup> This statement also holds true in regards to many present and past conservative members of the Oklahoma Cherokee. Although a powerful faction of the tribe had become literate, Christian, and "civilized," to the fashion of New England and southern British American planters, many of the Cherokee held onto their traditional values and ancestral religion and rituals—including song and dance.

There is amazingly little written about the music-associated arts of the Cherokee, especially among the residents of northeastern Oklahoma. The lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Elias Boudinot, *Cherokee Phoenix*, July 30, 1828, 2; see also Elias Boudinot, Letter to the editors of the *Boston Recorder and Telegraph*, in *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot*, ed., Theda Purdue (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1983), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 19.

literature on the subject is at least partially because of respect for practices tribal members desire to keep exclusively within the community, and for the sacred nature of certain ceremonies like the Green Corn, but this courtesy does not account for the often publicly viewable events such as flute music, and sometimes, stomp dances. Most people who lived for any substantial time in the Cherokee Ozarks are at least aware of the existence of these events, if they do not participate in them directly. Cherokee culture is interwoven into the area's society, and the inter-ethnic dialogues of many residents have existed since before the tribe established itself around Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation. Although my interests are predominately the string band traditions of the southwest Ozarks, a complete understanding of the region's musical complexity could not be accomplished without at least a brief understanding of Cherokee indigenous music.

This chapter presents a brief survey of traditional Cherokee dance and song in regards to story telling, flute music, stomp dances, and other ceremonial events, and establishes the importance of these arts as a cultural identifier throughout the past and among contemporary tribal members. The songs of the Delaware will also be examined, since they politically merged with the Cherokee in 1867, had members living among the Cherokee beforehand, and make up a small portion of the northern Oklahoma Ozarks population.<sup>3</sup> With some variations, these traditions still exist and have recently gained in popularity.

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<sup>3</sup> Reverend Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1822), 152; Patricia L. Retert, *Cherokee-Anglo Interrelations in Northeastern Oklahoma School Affairs*, (Tahlequah, OK: unknown publisher, 1970), 6, 37, Northeastern State University Special Collections, Tahlequah, OK; Thomas Nuttall, *Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory* (Philadelphia: T. H. Palmer, 1821), 123-36.

Neighboring and intermarried persons of other tribes, as well as some non-Indians, have even become more involved in the arts of Cherokee.<sup>4</sup> On a similar note, the Cherokee language is going through a slow renaissance, with classes taught at the Cherokee Nation complex, northeastern Oklahoma schools and universities, cultural exhibitions at museums, folklife festivals, and on educational tours.

Cherokees have been long admired for singing. James Mooney, the famed ethnologist who worked with the Cherokee for over a decade, stated that their language was musical in itself.<sup>5</sup> Songs play a role in many of the tribe's traditions and are incorporated into the people's understanding of life. Many of their myths, legends, and stories have long included singing parts and are considered essential to oral histories. In 1995, Gary White Deer made the following statement about the musical heritage of American Indian tribes from the Southeast:

Songs touch every facet of Southeastern tribal life. There are songs for healing, songs for witching, songs for ceremony, hunting songs, songs for babies, songs for gathering plants, songs for mourning, songs for war, gaming songs, songs that hold history, songs for courtship, songs for carousing, songs for weddings, and songs for protection.<sup>6</sup>

A multitude of other oral histories confirm White Deer's statement and will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter. Song has long made up a

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<sup>4</sup> The Cherokee Heritage Center in Park Hill hosts a flute circle every third Saturday of the month, and a stomp dance is held nearby every Saturday that is open to guests attending.

<sup>5</sup> James Mooney, *Cherokee History, Myths and Sacred Formulas*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Gary White Deer, "Pretty Shellshakers," in *Remaining Ourselves: Music and Tribal Memory: Traditional Music in Contemporary Societies*, ed. Dayna Bowker Lee (Oklahoma City: State Arts Council of Oklahoma, 1995), 10.

substantial part of Cherokee and Delaware society, and was used to explain many aspects of their environment. That this quote is recent exemplifies that this tradition still continues today.

Many song topics can be lumped together as stories and myths. The origin of Cherokee songs, for example, is often described in the tale of Stone Coat or Stone Man, a mythic scaly creature that shape shifted, and fed on the livers of people. According to legend, he was extremely powerful and knew many secrets of the world. In search for the human organ he fed upon, he disguised himself as an orphan boy. Afterwards, a Cherokee man who had many sons adopted him. Soon the man's children were killed one by one except the orphan boy whom the father and the council finally recognized as Stone Coat, the slayer. They devised a plan and trapped him by luring him to seven nude menstruating women, which caused him to vomit blood and become weak. After his capture, he was burned, and throughout his long slow death he taught the Cherokee songs to cure sickness and songs of the hunt, since the people would now understand them better from their gained knowledge of suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Another popular variation of this tale speaks of an old woman that sung a luring song and abducted people to cut out their liver to feed upon. When this tale was told, the speaker would sing the following chilling but pretty song of U'tlũntã, the "the spear-finger" woman: "uew 'la na ' tisku, liver, I eat it, su 'sa 'sai."<sup>8</sup> She

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<sup>7</sup> This story is common to the hills of northeast Oklahoma, but can be found in Mooney, *Cherokee History, Myths and Sacred Formulas*, 319-20; <sup>7</sup> Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 13-8.

<sup>8</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 316-9; Going Back Chiltoskey, comp., *Myths, Legends, Superstitions of North American Indian Tribes: As Told By Students of Haskell Institute Lawrence, Kansas* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Publications, 1995), 24-6.

too was eventually caught and killed, this time by the help of a chickadee bird. These stories about mythic beings helped explain the origins of their beliefs and practices and many times included singing parts.

Maybe the most common type of origin songs pertained to animals. Stories such as “The Terrapin Escapes from the Wolves,” “The Origin of the Bear,” “The Rabbit Escapes from the Wolves,” “The Mother Bear Song,” “The Bull Frog Lover,” among many others, included singing sections.<sup>9</sup> In “The Origin of the Bear,” a family of Cherokee decided to leave their clan and live in the woods where food was more available. When their fellow neighbors and friends pleaded with them to stay, they noticed that the departing family was covered with thick dark hair. They had turned into bears and claimed that they no longer belonged with their human acquaintances and again related that the forest provided more substance to live on. Before the group left, they told the people words to sing that would call out the bears and that all Cherokees could eat of their flesh and take part of the forest’s abundance.<sup>10</sup>

Relating to these stories, hunting songs were common among both the pre-removal and Western Cherokee and sung before expeditions to bring about more deer, bear, and other wild game.<sup>11</sup> During these ceremonies, the practitioners would wear animal skins and wooden masks mimicking the behavior of their prey while asking supernatural forces to help them in their endeavors.<sup>12</sup> It was also

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<sup>9</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 274, 278-9, 310-1, 325, 400.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 325-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 400, 425; Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1976), 161-2.

<sup>12</sup> Laurence French and Jim Hornbuckle, “The Cherokee—Then and Now: An Historical Glance,” in *The Cherokee Perspective*, eds., Laurence French and Jim Hornbuckle (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1981), 10.

common for the dancers to ask the animal to allow itself to succumb to death at the hands of the hunters in order to feed the needing Cherokee.<sup>13</sup> Song titles include “First Bear Song,” and “Turkey Hunting Song.”<sup>14</sup> One deer song began as follows:

O deer, you stand close by the tree,  
You sweeten your saliva with acorns,  
Now you are standing near,  
You have come where your food rests on the  
ground.<sup>15</sup>

Many of these dances, along with a multitude of other animal-orientated pieces, are now common as social aspects in the middle of a day and night event. These songs can last anywhere between ten to twenty minutes and may include “The Pheasant Dance,” “Ground Hog Dance,” “Eagle Dances,” “Beaver Dance,” “Pigeon Dance,” “Chicken Dance,” “Spring Frog Dance,” “Raccoon Dance,” and the “Gar Fish Dance,” among others.<sup>16</sup>

These songs are intimately connected to the lifeways of many Cherokee. Interested non-Cherokees in the region also borrowed and adapted some of these stories and told them to their friends and children. Inter-tribal song swapping and social gatherings among tribes from the East is a long tradition that has continued in eastern Oklahoma, and dances are often shared and influenced by these

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 87-92.

<sup>15</sup> Mooney, 435.

<sup>16</sup> Tommy Wildcat, interview with Rodger Harris, March 11, 1998, east of Keys, OK, Oral History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society): v98.017, further referenced as OHC; Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 279, 290, 281; Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 23, 69-81.

neighboring tribes.<sup>17</sup> Some stories were even incorporated into Anglo-American string band songs, such as “Rabbit and Otter,” which was recorded by touring performer Dango Rose in 2007 while visiting Cherokee artist Murv Jacobs in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.<sup>18</sup>

Animal songs are also common among the Delaware tribe in northeastern Oklahoma. Although some scholars have claimed that Delaware culture was decimated by European Americans and reduced to “Pan-Indian” ceremonies, such as with the Native American Church, and powwows, this is not entirely the case.<sup>19</sup> The Oklahoma Delaware have a large percentage of intercultural participants at their events, but a couple of Delaware speakers pass on songs to younger generations and animal songs are among the most practiced. The “Cat Dancing Song,” “Owl Song,” and the “Blackbird Song” are known by most culturally adept tribal members, and in 1980s and 1990s, Edward “Leonard” Thompson, a Delaware man, recited the “Rattlesnake Song,” “The Hen Song,” and a story about a summer bird that “sings himself to death,” in multiple interviews for the Oklahoma Historical Society.<sup>20</sup> The “Owl Song,” was sung to quiet children at

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<sup>17</sup>Jason Baird Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” in *Powwow*, eds. Clyde Ellis, Luke Eric Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 179; W. W. Newcomb, Jr., “A Note On Cherokee-Delaware Pan-Indianism,” *American Anthropologist, New Series* 57/5 (October 1955): 1041.

<sup>18</sup>Dango Rose, “Rabbit and Otter,” from website, [www.myspace.com/dangomusic](http://www.myspace.com/dangomusic), accessed March 21, 2007. Rose has played and lived in Tahlequah, OK, off and on since 2005, and recorded the song at the studio of Cherokee artists Murv Jacobs and Debbie Duvall.

<sup>19</sup>Newcomb, Jr., “A Note On Cherokee-Delaware Pan-Indianism: 1041-5.

<sup>20</sup>Dayna Bowker Lee, ed., *Remaining Ourselves: Music and Tribal Memory: Traditional Music in Contemporary Societies*, (Oklahoma City: States Arts Council of Oklahoma, 1995), 44-6; Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interviewed by Dayna B. Lee, June 21, 1994, Dewey, OK, State Arts Council Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) box seven: Edward “Leonard” Thompson file, further stated as SACC; Mr. and Mrs. Edward Thompson, interview by Joe L. Todd, Bartlesville, OK, February 13, 1984, OHC: t84.018 a-b; Lucy Blalock, “Cat Dancing Song,” pamphlet in regards to a public event entitled *Remaining Ourselves: Music and Tribal*

night, telling them that a great horn owl will “eat you if you don’t be good.”<sup>21</sup>

Outside of animal songs, there are a number of other musical traditions associated with Native Americans in northeastern Oklahoma. One of the practices most popular in recent history is flute performance.

Flute playing is common among the Cherokee, though its origin with the tribe is unclear. Scott Ratcliff claims a multi-generational heritage with the instrument, but very few other families have held onto the practice continually. Ratcliff has taught other tribal members at the Cherokee Heritage Center to help revive the tradition, and flute is now one of the most popular of recorded mediums by the nation’s citizens.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Kelly Anquoe, who is of Cherokee and Kiowa descent, claimed that it is a “well known fact” that the Cherokee did not obtain the flute until acquired by plains tribes.<sup>23</sup> Whether the instrument has ancient or relatively new origins, many contemporary Cherokee cherish the flute.

Most of the flutes made in eastern Oklahoma are made from river cane, which takes from two weeks to a month to cure, depending on the time of harvest. Cedar wood has also been commonly used and contemporaries sometimes use poplar.<sup>24</sup> Many of the flutes have five holes but vary somewhat according to the artist’s tastes. Unlike most Cherokee music, playing the flute is often improvised and more emotionally driven than traditionally. Tommy Wildcat, a renowned

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*Memory*, October 7, 1994, Metro Tech Conference Center, Oklahoma City, in association with the State Arts Council of Oklahoma, SACC: traditional music material.

<sup>21</sup> Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interviewed by Dayna B. Lee.

<sup>22</sup> Wildcat, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly Anquoe, Tahlequah, OK, Myspace internet correspondence to author, Oklahoma City, OK, April 14, 2007, J. Justin Castro Collection (Oklahoma City: private collection), further noted as JCC.

<sup>24</sup> Wildcat, interview.



Cherokee musician, stated that playing the flute “comes from the heart,” and individual songs are not always maintained due to a lack of interest.<sup>25</sup> Presently, a flute circle is held at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Park Hill, Oklahoma, every third Friday of the month. Tourists also commonly buy this instrument, and its construction is presented at annual folklife celebrations within the state like the Oklahoma Folklife Festival and the Cherokee National Holiday.

The musical tradition most associated with the Cherokee is stomp dancing. These events are held at ceremonial grounds, which are often cared for by a community that holds a shared ancestry.<sup>26</sup> Before the removal, all of the approximate fifty Cherokee villages had their own dance grounds, and presently multiple sites exist in northeastern Oklahoma and among the Eastern Cherokee.<sup>27</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before continuous intrusions by outsiders, these events were carried out publicly as “the center of the community,” but today are mostly performed in secluded rural areas away from intruders and the main population as a “secretive tradition.”<sup>28</sup> However, according to multiple interviews in the Indian Pioneer History Collection, whites attended these ceremonies with some regularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this trend slowed sometime around World War II.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 174.

<sup>27</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly Anquoe, correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> Colonel Elsworth Walters, interviewed by Charles H. Holt, March 10, 1938, Skeegee, OK, Indian Pioneer History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) vol. 95: 315-7, further stated as IPHC; George W. Mayes, interviewed by Amelia F. Harris, August 10, 1937, Oklahoma City, OK, IPHC vol. 71: 40-8; Sam Sanders, interview by Hummingbird and Bigby, October, 20, 1937, Proctor, OK, IPHC vol. 103: 154; Bill Swim, interviewed by L. W. Wilson, April 13, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 240-53.

One amusing 1937 interview with an old European American cowpuncher related the following story about attending Cherokee dances in the late 1800s: “It was the Indian custom to dance in a circle, and if the cowboy got too near the circle the Indian would snatch his hat off and wear it until the dance was over; then the cowboy would have to pay \$1.00 to get it back.”<sup>30</sup> This was a hefty price considering that the same was asked for an annual permit for non-Indians who resided in the Cherokee Nation.<sup>31</sup>

Most events are held during a ceremonial cycle that lasts from late spring throughout fall, but do presently continue on a limited scale indoors throughout the colder months.<sup>32</sup> Stomp dances are not unique to the Cherokee and are commonly practiced by other eastern-based tribes such as the Delaware, Chickasaw, and Muscogee.<sup>33</sup> As Jason Baird Jackson aptly put it, the practice is an “old and complex social institution that links local communities into larger social networks in which local differences in culture articulate with partially shared regional values, beliefs, and customs.”<sup>34</sup> During the 1960s, the ceremony spread to plains tribes and other non-“woodland” nations as a special festivity, but this trend has since died out.<sup>35</sup> The term “stomp dance” is used as a general phrase that encompasses a large number of different kinds of dances/songs that range from the “Feather Dance” and “Ribbon Dance” of the Green Corn ceremonies, to

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<sup>30</sup> E. T. Pendley, interview by Amelia F. Harris, February 25, 1938, Oklahoma City, OK, IPHC vol. 93: 218.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Dayna Baker Lee, *Native American Music and Dance in Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: State Arts Council of Oklahoma, publish date not listed) 5-6, OSACC.

<sup>33</sup> White Deer, “Pretty Shellshakers,” 11; Minnie Hodge, interviewed by W. T. Holland, August 18, 1937, Tulsa OK, IPHC vol. 29: 242-5.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 172.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 183.

war or victory dances, to “fun songs,” such as the “Old Timers Friendship Dance,” and a myriad of others like the “Duck Dance,” “Alligator Dance,” and the “Stirrup Dance.”<sup>36</sup>

They all hold in common certain ways that the ceremony is led: the circular formation, instruments used, and numerous rituals and practices carried out by leaders. Turtle shell shakers or “shackles,” are essential to these events, and are tied to the ankles of women who create a syncopated rhythm with their dancing.<sup>37</sup> The songs are usually started off and brought to an end by the tremolo shaking of these percussive tortoise anklets.<sup>38</sup> Sometimes drums are used, but this is not necessarily always the case. Rattles are also commonly used, which are often made from gourds and played by the men. Tommy Wildcat, a Cherokee citizen, gave the following example of a dance at his family’s stomp grounds.

In the Circle of Brush Arbors the dance begins with a stomp caller who then summons the leader, followers, and shell shakers out, they dance in a counter clockwise stomping motion around the ceremonial fire, old drum beats, turtle shells, and chants echo throughout the night in the Eastern Hills of Oklahoma.<sup>39</sup>

Although Wildcat’s description does not go into detail, it does give a good basic overview of the ritual. He also mentions counter clockwise movement,

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<sup>36</sup> Wildcat, interview; Lee, *Native American Music and Dance in Oklahoma*, 5; Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 175.

<sup>37</sup> Lee, *Native American Music and Dance in Oklahoma*, 6; Jobe Loui Fields, interview by Cynthia Hughes, June 29, 1991, Tulsa, OK, SACC: Jobe Loui Fields folder; Sam Sanders, interview by C. C. Davidson, January 25, 1937, IPHC vol. 9: 154-8.

<sup>38</sup> Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Tommy Wildcat, “Cherokee Stomp Dance,” inset, recorded song, produced by Tammy and Tommy Wildcat, Parkhill, OK, 1996, OHC.

which is the traditional dance direction, and brush arbors, which have long been constructed at Cherokee ceremonial sites.

A chosen male leads the call and response singing, and men traditionally do the majority, if not all of the calling vocals.<sup>40</sup> There is also a role known as “The Driver,” who keeps order and promotes participation. The male who takes this position is chosen each time an event is held and often changes.<sup>41</sup> Men lead the dances with the women entering behind them in a rhythmic motion. Unlike most powwows, extravagant costumes are not customary to Cherokee stomp dances, and most attire is casual for men and homemade dresses for women. However, some recollections from a century back stated that Cherokee men wore full regalia and paint.<sup>42</sup> Unlike other pan-Indian events, the vast majority of attendees are participants, and the dance commonly takes place around a central fire, which produces the only source of light.<sup>43</sup> Some Cherokee participate in indoor stomp dances that mimic their out door counter parts and add in new changes, such as Masters of Ceremonies and guest speakers.<sup>44</sup>

Another common theme among Cherokee stomp dances is that they last throughout the night, and occasionally days on end. The Green Corn ceremony, traditionally held every fall, was, and is, commonly a three or four day event that includes large feasts with sofke and other corn dishes, turkey, venison, wild game,

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19. <sup>40</sup> Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 177.  
<sup>41</sup> Frank G. Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*,  
<sup>42</sup> George W. Mayes, interview; Bill Swim, interview.  
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 178.  
<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

and, as time passed, pork and beef.<sup>45</sup> One account recalled that the festivities could last up to ten days at the “old Beaver Stomp Ground between Lines and Bunch in what is now Adair County.”<sup>46</sup> Stick ball games and social dances occur during the day, and sacred events at night.<sup>47</sup> One woman who attended Cherokee and Delaware stomp dances in the early twentieth century recalled that baseball was sometimes played in the sun light hours.<sup>48</sup> For some people, stomp dances “were about the only entertainment,” and many residents considered them one of the great features of the region.<sup>49</sup> Stomp dances were, and are, both social and sacred ceremonies, as Jason Baird Jackson put it, an “expression of cultural values.”<sup>50</sup> They are a way in which the Cherokee keep in touch with the life ways of their ancestors, and as such, are one of their strongest cultural identifiers.

Stomp Dances were also a place of spiritual and medical healing for tribal members. Healers of the area possessed a great knowledge of the local plant life, and used many species for medical as well as “charming” and “witching.”<sup>51</sup> One witness of a Cherokee ceremony made the following statement about the practice:

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<sup>45</sup> Bill Swim, interview; Mrs. Sam Sanders, interview by C. C. Davidson, January 25, 1937, IPHC, vol. 9:154-8; Mary Riley Roberts, “Nowata Settlers,” IPHC vol. 8: 426-33; Lenora Alpha Henry (Ross), interview by M. J. Stockton, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 425-8; Minnie Hodge, interview by W. T. Holland, Tulsa, OK, August 18, 1937, IPHC vol. 29: 242-5; George W. Mayes, interview; Ida Mae Hughes, interview by Robert B. Thomas, Muskogee, OK, November 15, 1937, IPHC vol. 30: 160-2; William Boyd, interview by Wylie Thornton, July 2, 1937, IPHC vol. 36: 311-4; E. T. Pendley, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Ida Mae Hughes, interview: 160-2; K. Lee Brown, interview by John F. Daughtery, May 5, 1937, Sulpher, OK, IPHC vol. 66: 40, also stated Green Corn Ceremony lasted over ten days.

<sup>47</sup> Lynch Sixkiller, interview by W. A. Bigby, April 19, 1937, IPHC vol. 9: 421-2; Mayes, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Lenora Alpha Henry (Ross), interview: 428.

<sup>49</sup> Docia Rich, interview by Ruby Wolfenbarger, August 17, 1937, Sentinel, Oklahoma, IPHC vol. 58: 42-5; Sixkiller, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 178.

<sup>51</sup> Chili Barnett, interview by Billie Byrd, July 20, 1937, Weleetka, OK, IPHC vol. 13: 415-7; Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Walden, interview by Joe L. Todd, April 21, 1983, Watts, OK, OHC: t83.089 a-c.

“If the patient is not seriously ill; the excitement of the occasion may induce him to leap from his bed and participate in the dancing, where upon he is declared cured by the medicine.”<sup>52</sup> The same cowboy that recalled the hat snatching occurrences also remembered that the Cherokees would go to a nearby creek, gather herbs, and then boil them down into a “spring tonic,” which they drank before dancing around a big fire.<sup>53</sup> The fire itself is considered sacred, or as Wildcat put it: “fire is medicine, the spiritual center.”<sup>54</sup> Singing was also a regular part of the Cherokee shaman’s rituals whether for ceremonial prayers or invocations, and a reason why early Christian missionaries were considered medicine men and witches.<sup>55</sup>

The Delaware in northeastern Oklahoma practice stomp dances, but lack the formal ancestral congregational style and commonly the daytime activities.<sup>56</sup> Accounts from European American settlers exist that contain invitations to these events in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but little detail was given, and probably known, on the ceremonial specifics.<sup>57</sup> One account recalled a festival along Bird Creek where the men wore “breech clothes,” and women wore their “best clothes” and shells fastened to their ankles.<sup>58</sup> A Delaware woman remembered that most white people of the region believed all “Indian dances” were stomp dances, even though there was a myriad of others, such as the “War Dance,” “Ghost Dance,”

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Riley Roberts, “Nowata Settlers:” 433.

<sup>53</sup> E. T. Pendley, interview: 218.

<sup>54</sup> Wildcat, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 463; Cephas Washburn, *Reminiscences of the Indians* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1869), 140-4.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, “East Meets West On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 175.

<sup>57</sup> Lanville H. Bonham, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, May 10, 1937, Copan OK, IPHC vol. 1: 230-3; Bob Butler, interview by Carl Sherwood, IPHC vol. 1: 445-50; L.A. Bewley, interview by Effies Jackson, January 24, 1938, Tulsa, OK, IPHC vol. 90: 266.

<sup>58</sup> Bewley, interview.

and “Doll Dance.”<sup>59</sup> These rituals were done in a counter clockwise movement, but in more recent intertribal settings, were frequently replaced by a clockwise powwow style.<sup>60</sup>

According to an account by Ruth Parks, the “Ghost Dance” was held in the early spring months, carried out with “tom toms” made from a “deer hide over a clay jar,” and “enjoyed to the utmost.”<sup>61</sup> In this ritual, deer hoofs and beads were also tied as percussive instruments below the men’s knees, and helped keep rhythm as they moved.<sup>62</sup> In past victory dances, scalps of killed victims were displayed in celebration while singing around the sacred fire, but by the time the Delaware were in Oklahoma these events were merely a “mockery of the ones of early days.”<sup>63</sup>

Doll dances were carried out in the fall, included young and old participants, and lasted throughout the night and into the next morning.<sup>64</sup> Attendees feasted on venison and a hominy-like dish, and carried out a “bread ceremony” called “throw up the bread,” come the morning.<sup>65</sup> During the ritual, bread was made into balls and one in the shape of a bear. The latter was covered with certain beads, which was considered an honor to catch. The purpose of this event was to please “the creator,” and end the festivities.<sup>66</sup> Only certain families led the “Doll Dance,” and it has some similarities to the present day American

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<sup>59</sup> Ruth Parks, interview by L. J. Wilson, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 8: 71.

<sup>60</sup> Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interview by, Joann Nichols, June 5, 1991, Dewey, OK, SACC.

<sup>61</sup> Ruth Parks, interview by L. J. Wilson, June 24, 1937, IPHC vol. 8: 71

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 71-2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 70-1; Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interview by, Joann Nichols, June 5, 1991, Dewey, OK, SACC.

<sup>66</sup>Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interview by, Joann Nichols.

practice of thanksgiving. This ceremony also included a deer hide drum that was beat with a large wooden paddle. People in these families had “powerful” dolls that were either passed down to a younger Delaware, or buried with the owner.<sup>67</sup> These events were done in the doll’s honor, for if they were not carried out, bad events were to occur within the family.<sup>68</sup> This ceremony predominately died out sometime between 1925 and 1940.<sup>69</sup>

Although the Delaware succumbed even quicker to the influences of Christianity than the Cherokee, some of their ceremonies, such as the Big House, which stemmed from the tribe’s older Gamwig ceremony, have undergone some attempts of revival.<sup>70</sup> In Copan, Oklahoma, this event lasted for twelve days and was held to give thanks to the “supreme being” and perform prayers for “continued good health, abundance of happiness, and good crops.”<sup>71</sup> According to the best relatively recent Delaware source at the Oklahoma Historical Center, this ceremony remained unused from the mid-1920s or 1930s until the 1990s, and it is doubtful that any continuance of the rituals are done in the same manner as carried out pre-twentieth century.<sup>72</sup>

The Green Corn ceremony was also practiced among the Delaware; however, it is no longer celebrated among the tribe, though some may attend Cherokee festivities. The Native American Church is popular among contemporary Delaware, more so than with the Cherokee, and peyote songs are

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid; Ruth Parks, interview: 72.

<sup>70</sup> Jay Miller, “Old Religion Among the Delawares: The Gamwing (Big House Rite),” *Ethnohistory* 44/1 (Winter 1997): 117-120; Willaim G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth Parks, interview: 70.

<sup>72</sup> Edward “Leonard” Thompson, interview; Ruth Parks, interview: 70-2.



sung among attendees and at funerals of some of their members.<sup>73</sup> It is ordinary to find Delaware and Cherokee together at many of these social events in the region.

Traditional dances have represented the long held worldview among these tribes that there is an important need for balance in the universe, among themselves, and with the surrounding environment. Some practices like the Booger Dance, which mimicked white intruders, were a way to cope with the invasion of their lands by outside ethnic forces, and all of them were, and are, a means of cultural identification.<sup>74</sup> Participating in the stomp dances states one's descendance from the tribes of the East, or more specifically, that one is Cherokee in the traditional sense of the culture.

In a similar fashion, song and dance represent a parallel feeling among the Delaware, which ties them into the area's belief systems. These events are a way in which intercultural socialization occurs, building connections among peoples with similar and sometimes not so similar worldviews and social practices. These musical practices have also influenced Oklahoma blues, jazz, country, and rock n' roll performers; not so much in dance, but in instrumentation, singing stylization, lyrics, and sound. In a more indigenous form, flute music, story telling, and stomp dances are all alive and well in northeastern Oklahoma.

If alive today, Elias Boudinot would likely praise the progressive accomplishments of the Cherokee Nation, but perhaps his view of his tribe's native traditions would be more positive now that the white population does not condemn them and that acculturation is not heavily promoted within the tribe as

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Speck, Bloom, and Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 29-43.

an essential survival philosophy like it was in the nineteenth century. The Cherokee perspective remains a powerful force and knowledge of the region's American Indian songs and dances are essential to understanding the culture. American Indians of the Oklahoma Ozarks have not been confined to indigenous music, however, and songs and dances adapted from European and African Americans have made up a substantial portion of their performing arts. One of these adaptations is the commonplace inclusion of Christian beliefs and rituals.

## Chapter 4

### Amazing Grace: The Influence of Christianity in Nineteenth Century Oklahoma Ozark Music and Society

Music and religion commonly intertwined in the Oklahoma Ozarks. Among the Cherokee and other American Indians in the region, song and dance were essential to sacred ceremonies and divine communication. As one man stated, “The Cherokee had their religious worship in the form of preaching, singing, feasting, and dancing—all combined.”<sup>1</sup> Ministers learned early in their endeavors among eastern Native American tribes that they generally held singing in high esteem, and representatively, hymns were among the first publications translated from English into Cherokee.<sup>2</sup> Christian institutions were important to the diffusion of performed and written works, the inclusion of New England teachers, and as locations for social gatherings. Missionaries were responsible for these introductions and were prolific publicists and trendsetters in the area. The resulting religious culture influenced the instruments used and the games played. The legacies of organ recitation, temperance songs, hymn singing, and play-parties were the most influential of these nineteenth century Christian contributions to Oklahoma Ozark folk music.

Before the Cherokee’s forced removal west, Moravian missionaries made forays into their country as early as 1735, but did not succeed in establishing a

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<sup>1</sup> William Boyd, interview by Wylie Thornton, July 2, 1937, Indian Pioneer History Collection vol. 36 (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society): 311-14, further noted as IPHC.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel A. Worcester, “Poetry,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, February 21, 1828, 2.

mission, a floundering one at that, until the founding of Spring Place in present day northwest Georgia in 1801.<sup>3</sup> Ministers gained power relatively quickly however, as exemplified by Reverend Gideon Blackburn, a Presbyterian minister who came in 1803, established two schools, and promoted the tribal constitution.<sup>4</sup> Powerful opposition to Christianity and white influence existed, especially among Lower Town chiefs, such as Doublehead and Bloody Fellow, as well as followers of White Path and Yâ'nû-gûñ'ski.<sup>5</sup>

These men were all skilled leaders and orators who emphasized traditional Cherokee culture, or at least change on their terms and benefit. Although most of the Cherokee resisted Christianity well into the 1800s, there is little written from the wing of the tribe who opposed missionary work and acculturation with white life ways, because they produced less documentary evidence. The region's printers were all associated with missionaries or missionaries themselves. The Cherokee of the 1820s, after previous land losses, were also in great turmoil and disagreement over how to keep their territory, and powerful minority factions carrying out political relations with the United States government wanted to

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<sup>3</sup> E. C. Routh, "Early Missionaries to the Cherokee," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 15/4 (December 1937): 449-55; Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 15-6, 72; Rowena McClinton, "Indian Mission," *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, online at [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-784](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-784), accessed March 21, 2007; Emmet Star, *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folk Lore* (Oklahoma City: The Warden Company, 1921), 247; James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee," in *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, ed. J. W. Powell (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Press, 1900), 84; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 72; Star, *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folk Lore*, 247.

<sup>5</sup> Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 38; William G. McLoughlin, "Cherokee Anti-Mission Sentiment, 1824-8," *Ethnohistory* 21/4 (Fall 1974): 363-4; McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839*, 42-3.

obtain the favor of white public opinion—becoming, or at least appearing to be Christian, was one way of accomplishing that goal.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time that local leaders of Etowah, a small Cherokee town, petitioned Chiefs Path Killer and Charles R. Hicks to remove the missionaries there, churches and Christian schools were becoming more regularly attended at other locales, where a new tribal elite educated in “Western Civilization” and British American customs strengthened.<sup>7</sup> At first, many Cherokee were more interested in learning how to speak English than in converting religions, but Christianity slowly became an accepted and practiced belief system among students and their families, especially where fathers of the children were white.<sup>8</sup> Most converts considered knowing the religion essential to the survival of the tribe because of the growing power and presence of their European American neighbors; however, a small minority of tribal citizens were true religious converts in the early 1800s.<sup>9</sup>

Communities watched people send their children off to New England schools and come back to leading roles with more power, and occasionally white wives, as with Elias Boudinot and John Ridge.<sup>10</sup> These residents became important diplomats, chiefs, printers, teachers, and missionaries. In 1828, many of the candidates for their tribal council came from “Christian,” ethnically mixed families, such as the Adair’s, Foster’s, Ross’, Ratcliff’s, Hicks’, and Foreman’s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> McLoughlin, “Cherokee Anti-Mission Sentiment:” 361.

<sup>7</sup> Routh, “Early Missionaries to the Cherokee:” 449-55; McLoughlin, “Cherokee Anti-Mission Sentiment:” 361-3.

<sup>8</sup> McClinton, “Indian Missions.”

<sup>9</sup> Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 41-2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40, 75.

<sup>11</sup> “Candidates for Council,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, June 11, 1828, 1.

The “civilizing” process began to make inroads among the Cherokee people as exemplified by a *Cherokee Phoenix* article by Utaletah, a Cherokee liberal, who stated his belief as follows: “Our Nation, as a political body, has reached an important crisis and bids fair for rapid progress on the path of civilization, the arts and sciences...”<sup>12</sup>

While the main contingent of Cherokee was holding elections in the East, thousands of conservative separatists were establishing themselves in the Ozarks. Though these “old settlers” moved west to avoid encroachment, white customs like farming, furnished log houses, fenced livestock, European dress, and Christianity were all commonly accepted practices by 1828.<sup>13</sup> In 1829, Dwight Mission was established in present day Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, under the direction of Reverend Cephas Washburn, Reverend Alfred Finney, James Orr and Jacob Finney.<sup>14</sup> After leading congregants across the Trail of Tears a decade later, Reverend Jesse Bushyhead and Reverend Evan Jones established Baptist Mission just to the northwest.<sup>15</sup> Even though conversions were slow at first, hymns were popular with members of both churches, and were instilled into the social memory after the tribe’s forced removal from their eastern homelands, and after the death of prominent Christian tribal members.<sup>16</sup> Missions, such as the one established by Jones and Bushyhead also became local social centers, which besides acting as

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<sup>12</sup> Utaletah, “Communications,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, May 6, 1828, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Nuttal, *Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory* (Philadelphia: T. H. Palmer, 1821), 137; Cephas Washburn, *Reminiscences of the Indians* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1869), 24.

<sup>14</sup> O. B. Campbell, *Mission to the Cherokees* (Oklahoma City: Metro Press, 1971), 1, 8-14; Washburn, *Reminiscences of the Indians*, 1-25.

<sup>15</sup> Alvin O. Turner, “Religious Traditions and Influences,” in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), eds. Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble: 124-5. Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Glove Morris, interview by W. J. B. Bigby, August 12, 1937, IPHC, vol. 37: 254-5.

Christian service providers were stations for annuities and secular community gatherings; hence, its nickname—Bread Town.<sup>17</sup> Music and song were common aspects of religious services, and allowed an emotional and spiritual outlet accustomed to the Cherokee, while conforming to larger outside social pressures.

Ministers considered the ability to sing and teach choir essential for those who desired to lead a church or educational institution, and a further knowledge of music was recommended.<sup>18</sup> Hymnody was one of the few genres in pre-Revolutionary War New England, and by the end of the eighteenth century, religious songs still dominated in popularity, though with more emphasis on American instead of British authors and compilers.<sup>19</sup> Hymns were popular among Christian Cherokee, and early missionary teachers considered singing a natural talent of congregants.<sup>20</sup> Henry R. Wilson, who came to Dwight Mission in 1829, wrote the following about his welcome:

As I first entered they were singing a Cherokee hymn.  
Never before, did music seem half so sweet to me...an old  
gray headed warrior arose with love and gratitude beaming  
on his face and poured forth his feeling in such a manner  
and with such fervor as I had never witnessed before.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John A. Alberty, interview by W. J. B. Bigby, March 10, 1937, Westville, OK, IPHC vol. 1: 67-9.

<sup>18</sup> "Qualifications for a Missionary Schoolmaster," *The Missionary Herald*, December 1824: 20, 12; American Periodicals Online (APS Online): 386, accessed April 14, 2008; Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 17; Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Park Hill* (Muskogee: The Star Printery, Inc., 1948), 92.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Seeger, "Music and Class Structure in the United States," *American Quarterly* 9/3 (Autumn 1957): 282-4.

<sup>20</sup> "Cherokees," *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, April 1838, 18, 4; APS Online: 94, accessed April 14, 2008; Routh, "Early Missionaries to the Cherokee": 449-61, Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 25-48.

<sup>21</sup> Henry R. Wilson, letter to Rev. J. W. Moore, Springfield, Ohio, February 2, 1861, in Cephas Washburn's *Reminiscences of the Indians* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1869), 42-9.

New to the area, Wilson was full of romantic zeal, but his admiration for the Cherokees' abilities was sincere.

Bushyhead, who led a large group of Christian faithful first to Arkansas, and then to Indian Territory, was praised for his moving sermons and voice. Jones recalled that congregants sang hymns in Cherokee that were common to southern whites, but with "far more correctness, as regards to time, enunciation and effect..."<sup>22</sup> That Jones referred to the liturgy as southern speaks to the fact that religious institutions from that region had made inroads into the area, competing and becoming more successful at gaining converts than the New England Congregationalists.

By the time most of the Cherokee arrived in Indian Territory in 1839, Samuel A. Worcester, who would preach and educate among the Cherokee for thirty years, had dedicated much of his time translating Christian texts to Cherokee, and incorporated notated melodies into his *Cherokee Singing Book*.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after establishing Park Hill mission just south of present day Tahlequah, Worcester published a popular hymnal in the Cherokee language in which 5,000 copies were printed and distributed.<sup>24</sup> He was responsible for a large share of the Christian and classical works that came into the nation, and his granddaughter recalled his desire for missionaries and teachers to be "college graduates from New England ancestry of sterling Christian character, especially gifted in music,

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<sup>22</sup> Routh, "Early Missionaries to the Cherokee," 453.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel A. Worcester, *Cherokee Singing Book*, NSU Special Collections, Tahlequah, OK.

<sup>24</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1843, no. 51: 91, Carolyn Foreman Collection, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) unprocessed collection, Oklahoma Imprints box 3 of 3.



household arts, and with attractive personalities.”<sup>25</sup> Believing music essential to conversion and the religious experience, Worcester brought instruments into the area and provided his children with impressive instruction; in turn, his offspring became important teachers and church performers themselves.<sup>26</sup>

His son, Leonard Worcester, “from childhood gifted in music, playing almost any instrument,” was always in demand for “church choir service and for specials in church music with flute, cornet or violin, as well as organ, piano or voice.”<sup>27</sup> Samuel’s daughter, Ann Elizabeth Worcester, gave instruction on hymns to the Cherokee and Muscogee.<sup>28</sup> Another of his children, Sarah Orr Worcester, taught music at the Female Seminary, which turned out many of the local regions organists.<sup>29</sup> The tribal education system possessed a gifted music program, and when students were not learning religious songs like “Guide Me Jehovah,” they were learning classical pieces by Chopin.<sup>30</sup> Ministers like Worcester brought with them a New England style of religion, politics, and education, to the mix of cultural influences in the Oklahoma Ozarks, and music was one of their greatest propaganda tools.

Outside of church, Worcester organized the regions Temperance Society and, with the help of the Fort Gibson band, provided regular entertainment.<sup>31</sup> In 1844, Gustavus Loomis, the “Christian commander” of the military post, lent out

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<sup>25</sup> Edith Walker, interview by Jas. S. Buchanan, 1937-8, IPHC vol. 11: 117-23. Walker was the granddaughter of Samuel A. Worcester.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *1850-1909 Cherokee National Female Seminary Commencement Calendar*, Archives, (Tahlequah, OK: Northeastern State University).

<sup>31</sup> Walker, interview; C. Foreman, “Gustavus Loomis: Commandant Fort Gibson and Fort Townson:” 223.

“the finest band in the United States Army,” including a choir of nineteen soldiers for Worcester’s gatherings, and in turn, the reverend provided funeral and alcohol abstinence services for the soldiers.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to Reverend David Greene, Worcester stated that the Temperance Society depended on the music provided by friends and soldiers, but in time of need he taught people how to play.<sup>33</sup> Songs like “Father, Dear Father, Come Home with Me Now,” “The Curse of Rum,” “The Little Brown Jug,” were popular following the Civil War, and “The Drunkard’s Doom,” is still played by some regional songsters.<sup>34</sup> Worcester also wrote pieces for the organization such as “Song of the Cold Water Army,” sang to the tune of “On the Road to Boston.”<sup>35</sup> The following is one of the verses:

Children come and join our army,  
Singing Water, sweet cold water;  
'Tis a drink that will not harm you,  
Water, sweet cool water.  
Silly is the lad, though frisky,  
Who has drunk his glass of whiskey;  
But we sing our carol briskly;  
Water, sweet cold water.  
Children, come and join our army,  
Singing, Sweet cold water.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> C. Foreman, “Gustavus Loomis: Commandant Fort Gibson and Fort Townson:” 221-3.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Samuel Worcester to David Greene, July 18, 1844, Park Hill, in Bass’ *Cherokee Messenger*: 228-9.

<sup>34</sup> Vance Randolph. *The Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1931): 210-4.

<sup>35</sup> Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*: 230-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

The Reverend Amory Nelson Chamberlin was another well-known missionary among the Cherokee in the nineteenth century. He preached at Pheasant Hill church in present day Craig County, Oklahoma, and was “instrumental in organizing the First Presbyterian Church in Vinita [Oklahoma] on October 8, 1883.”<sup>37</sup> A remarkable man, he amputated a large portion of his own feet while aiding the Confederates in the Civil War, was fluent in Cherokee, served as superintendent of both the male and female seminaries, translated hymns, and led multiple congregations, some of which, like those at Paw Paw and Catoosa, spoke no English.<sup>38</sup> In his first report to the mission society in New York from Pheasant Hill, Chamberlin stated, “we have wished that the dear lord...would send us a good folding organ and somebody to play it. The Indians are extremely fond of music and are naturally good singers.”<sup>39</sup> Nelson’s letter establishes that organs and players were popular early on, but not necessarily available in fledgling communities. However, many of the churches did eventually obtain the instrument, and missionaries’ children and seminary students were among the most admired performers.<sup>40</sup>

Acquiring an organ was to many a symbol of eastern “civilized” culture, and its use in both the churches and seminaries was seen as a beacon of enlightenment. It was the main instrument of Christian institutions before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, and missionaries went to great lengths to bring them

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<sup>37</sup> Lon H. Eakes, “Rev. Amory Nelson Chamberlin (1821-1894),” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 12/1 (March 1934): 100-2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-101; Leslie Hewes, research notes, Western History Collections (Norman: University of Oklahoma), box 4, folder 33.

<sup>39</sup> Eakes, “Rev. Amory Nelson Chamberlin (1821-1894):” 100.

<sup>40</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 35-6.

into “heathen” lands.<sup>41</sup> Minister and musician Johann Michael Graff ordered the first organ to be shipped into North Carolina in 1762.<sup>42</sup> It came to Easton, Pennsylvania, by wagon, down the Delaware River to Philadelphia, “by sloop” across the Delaware Bay, around Cape Hatteras, Cape Lookout, and Cape Fear to Wilmington, by boat up the Cape Fear River to Spring Hill, and by wagon to Bethabara, the city of its destination.<sup>43</sup> The process took nearly fifty days, and even by the 1840s getting one to the Cherokee capital of Tahlequah in Indian Territory was much more of a feat—this instrument was strongly desired.<sup>44</sup>

Indian Territory residents acquired a reputation for playing and dancing to all sorts of music, and the organ, above all else, was played because it was enjoyed, and secondly, it demonstrated talent and European sophistication.<sup>45</sup> Although more common among wealthy and progressive Cherokee, the organ crossed class and ethnic boundaries. In the late 1800s, Sam Russell, a Cherokee preacher and salesman from the Spavinaw vicinity, sold the majority of his keyboarded and stringed instruments to tribal members, whom he considered to be “great musicians.”<sup>46</sup> Songs originally played at church and seminary were passed along community lines and absorbed into the region’s folk music and oral traditions. “Amazing Grace,” for example, was common before, during, and after

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, ed., “Letters of Cassandra Sawyer Lockwood: Dwight Mission 1834,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 33 (Summer 1955): 202, 207-16.

<sup>42</sup> B. A., Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions and Folkways of the People of the South* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), 700.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Mary Riley Roberts, “Indian Dances,” 1937-8, manuscript, IPHC vol. 8: 432; Josephine Perrington, interview by L. W. Wilson, October 12, 1937, Hulbert, OK, IPHC vol. 39: 384; Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 25, 35; Garrett, “Music on the Indian Territory Frontier:” 253.

<sup>46</sup> Charlie Hepner and Clara Clifford, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, IPHC vol. 28: 435; see also, Allen Morris, interviewed by Jas. S. Buchanan, Muskogee, OK, August 18-9, 1937, IPHC vol. 37: 261.

removal, among conservatives and progressives, in churches, the seminaries, at homes, and campfires, and is still played today in similar fashion.<sup>47</sup> Other pieces common among the Cherokee since the Trail of Tears are “Guide Me Jehovah,” “Anywhere with Jesus,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” “Joseph and Mary,” and “One Drop of Blood.”<sup>48</sup> The following is the a verse from “One Drop of Blood,” which was composed by Cherokees coming across the Trail of Tears:

They have driven us like cattle  
to this land far away from our  
Homeland.  
We die along the way.  
This is our land.  
You, the owner of this land.  
This is your land—you are the owner  
of this land.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> David Standingwater, interview by author, November 28, 2006, J. Justin Castro Collection (Oklahoma City: private collection, further noted as JCC; Walker Calhoun, *Where the Ravens Roost: Traditional Songs of Walker Calhoun*, tape recording (Cullowhee, NC: Mountain Heritage Center, Western Carolina University, 1991); J. Justin Castro, field recordings of Cherokee string band musicians, January 27, 2007, Langley, Oklahoma, unpublished CD and DVD recordings, JCC.

<sup>48</sup> William Rhodes, ed., *Folk Music of the United States from the Archive of Folk Song: Delaware, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek*, record, side A, AFS L37, The Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C.; Worcester, “Poetry,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, 2; Bob Gibbons, “In a State of Grace,” *Tahlequah Daily Press*, September 4, 2005, 1; Mrs. Craig Goetting, interviewed by Thad Smith, Jr., August 12, 1937, Chickasha, OK, IPHC vol. 105: 406; Brian Wagnon, Tahlequah, OK, e-mail correspondence with author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 24, 2007; “Cherokee Hymns,” [www.powersource.com/cocinc/hymns/default.htm](http://www.powersource.com/cocinc/hymns/default.htm), accessed February 3, 2007; Walker Calhoun, “Guide Me Jehovah,” Digital Library of Appalachia, Appalachian College Association, <http://www.aca-dla.org>, accessed November 30, 2006; Wesley L. Forbis, ed., *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 56.

<sup>49</sup> Melinda Miles and Kathy Thomas Longhat, “One Drop of Blood,” in *Remaining Ourselves: Music and Tribal Memory: Traditional Music in Contemporary Societies*, ed. Dayna Bowker Lee (Oklahoma City: States Arts Council of Oklahoma, 1995), 53, further stated as the OSACC.

Hymns, above all else, were the most important contribution of Christian music to the Oklahoma Ozarks. Translated by missionaries, these works were quickly learned and practiced by congregants. Singing was already popular among Cherokees and were included in religious ceremonies and moments of their daily lives. In a similar fashion, religious songs carried the convictions of European American settlers and African American slaves and freedmen. These relatively older pieces have remained more popular than newer ones in the regions folk music, largely because of the longstanding history of the tunes, the similarity of styles, and because there were fewer denominations and hymnals before the Civil War.<sup>50</sup> Hymns were one of the things similar in a world of separated classes, races, and cultures.

Besides the compilations created by local ministers, the *Old Thomas Hymnal* was a common songbook among the nineteenth century Baptist Cherokees.<sup>51</sup> *The Missouri Harmony*, which Abraham Lincoln reportedly favored, was also a popular text in the Midwest, and *Sacred Harp* and *Southern Harmony* were two of the most influential published works from the South.<sup>52</sup> The nineteenth century Oklahoma Ozarks music was influenced by all of these regions and songbooks. Many of the lyrics and melodies incorporated in these texts, and so ingrained in Ozark music, were not originally established denominational

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<sup>50</sup> Wagon, e-mail correspondence, February 24, 2007.

<sup>51</sup> George Washington Tieskie, interview by E. F. Dodson, April 13, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 496-7.

<sup>52</sup> Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), 152-5.

pieces, but were written by American laymen who began this trend during the Second Great Awakening.<sup>53</sup>

Oftentimes these songs were hybridized from eighteenth century British hymnody and folk melodies of colonial America.<sup>54</sup> “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,” “There is a Fountain,” “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks,” and “Holy is the Lord” are but a few examples of these pieces written during the Second Great Awakening and still common in present day religious institutions of Oklahoma.<sup>55</sup> Much like Woody Guthrie would later do during the dust bowl, songwriters took music from one song and changed the lyrics to fit their own surroundings and beliefs.<sup>56</sup> The chords “G,” “C,” “F” and “D” are just as common in old religious sing-alongs as in the contemporary genres of country and bluegrass. Spawning from the promotion of new hymns and a “singing America,” shape note, round note, and “fa so la” singing schools spanned across the South and through the Ozarks to the Oklahoma panhandle.<sup>57</sup>

In the Cherokee Nation, most of the songs came from the East, much like their missionaries and teachers, but there was plenty of room for homespun creativity and Cherokee traditions. Syncretisms were common in the Oklahoma Ozarks during the 1800s in everything from food to dress. Men and women came to church suited in a motley assortment of clothing that included buckskins, calico

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<sup>53</sup> Campbell, “Old Can be Used Instead of New”: 171.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Seeger, “Music and Class Structure in the United States,” *American Quarterly* 9/3 (Autumn 1957): 283-4

<sup>55</sup> Ibid; Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of Southern Folklore*, 700; Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 9; Forbis, ed., *The Baptist Hymnal*, 142, 521, 633, 666.

<sup>56</sup> Woody Guthrie, *Bound For Glory* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1943), 177-8.

<sup>57</sup> Seeger, “Music and Class:”284; Guy W. Logsdon, “Country, Western, and Folk Music,” in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006) ed., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble: 238; Botkin, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore*, 700.

shirts, cotton dresses, wool shawls, and the full regalia of United States soldiers and Cherokee warriors.<sup>58</sup> Hymns like “Poor Old Sarah,” “Sweet Bye and Bye,” and “Keetoowah” were sung in English and Cherokee at churches, schools, Temperance Society meetings, and private gatherings.<sup>59</sup> “Keetoowah” was sung at the openings of the Keetoowah Society meetings and represents another piece contributed by Cherokees.<sup>60</sup> Including the works written by tribal members, the music of the citizens added new life to old Christian songs. One resident recalled, “Their songs in the Indian language were beautiful, the Indians singing all parts in perfect harmony.”<sup>61</sup>

Choral singing was not only confined to the church, its harmonious style was carried over to folk performers. A singing quartet from Ballard Creek became popular in the Oklahoma Ozarks that consisted of George Ta-Ka-Ne-Skee, Taylor Harris, Louis Dragger, and May Ka-Hawk.<sup>62</sup> According to a local, “if there had been any radios in those days they could have sung over any of the broadcasting stations.”<sup>63</sup> Another Cherokee man stated that a well-known singing group based in what is now Adair County consisted of Lewis Bird, Isaac Hummingbird, and

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<sup>58</sup> F. W. Keith, interview by Florence C. Phillips, July 31, 1937, Muskogee, OK, IPHC vol. 32: 90-2.

<sup>59</sup> C. S. Lockwood to Respected Young Ladies, February 9, 1839, Lockwood Letters Collection, private collection of Mrs. Joe Rhodes, IPHC vol. 58: 83-112; Walker, interview by Jas. S. Buchanan; Nick Comingdeer, interview by Gus Hummingbird, Watts, OK, August 18, 1937, IPHC vol. 20: 316; Eliza Palmer, interview by Grace Kelley, Okmulgee, OK, September 10, 1937, IPHC vol. 79: 227; Josephine Parrington, interview by L. W. Wilson, Hulbert, OK, October 12, 1937, IPHC vol. 39: 384.

<sup>60</sup> Comingdeer, interview.

<sup>61</sup> Keith, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Allen Morris, interviewed by Jas. S. Buchanan, Muskogee, OK, August 18-9, 1937, IPHC vol. 37: 261.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



the Hydder boys sung at churches and funerals in the vicinity.<sup>64</sup> This tradition carried over and remained popular well into the twentieth century. After a short period of waning popularity, singing schools, which often used hymnal material, made a huge come back in the Ozarks in the 1930s and remained popular until the 1980s.<sup>65</sup>

Curley Lewis, a renowned Western swing and breakdown fiddler, said that all six of his brothers sung gospel music, and that local groups would be formed outside of church.<sup>66</sup> In 1948, quartettes of Cherokee County singers met at Tahlequah's Central High School and held local singing conventions.<sup>67</sup> The tradition of hymn singing is still robust in eastern Oklahoma in churches like Swimmer Baptist and Piney Baptist Church and at social events in local towns.<sup>68</sup> The Cherokee quickly picked up on Christian religious songs because singing was already ingrained into their oral traditions.<sup>69</sup> The *Cherokee Phoenix* and *Cherokee Advocate* were also strong cultural forces among the people, and the consistent publications of hymns in their native language, along with their popularity at the seminaries and churches, made them an established part of tribal heritage.<sup>70</sup> Whites and blacks who worked for and/or became members of the Cherokee

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<sup>64</sup> Sam Sanders, interview by Hummingbird and Bigby, October 20, 1937, Proctor, OK, IPHC, vol. 103: 154.

<sup>65</sup> "Old Songs are heard in Ozarks," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1933: E8.

<sup>66</sup> Curley Lewis, interview by Cynthia Taylor, Stigler, OK, April 2, 1995, OSACC, box 7, Curley Lewis file.

<sup>67</sup> "Country Singers Planning A Big Time at Convention at High School Sunday," *The Tahlequah Citizen*, September 23, 1948, 1.

<sup>68</sup> David Standingwater, Salina, OK to author, Oklahoma City, OK, e-mail correspondence, January 30, 2007, JCC; field recordings of Cherokee string band musicians, JCC.

<sup>69</sup> Tommy Wildcat, east of Keys, OK, interview with Rodger Harris, east of Keys, OK, March 11, 1998, Oral History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) v98.017; Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 229-261; Mooney, "The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee," 307-95.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Wilkonson, interview by Angie Debo, February 11, 1937, Muskogee, OK, IPHC vol. 11: 406.

Nation were familiar with the majority of these religious tunes, especially ones from the South, and their knowledge was further incorporated into the traditions.

When the Cherokee moved to Indian Territory much of the tribal elite had intermarried and accepted aspects of southern white culture. Many wealthy families approved of the institution of slavery and blacks worked their farms and households. In a letter to James Barbour, Secretary of War, David Brown, an influential “Indian-white Cherokee,” gives the following census of the Eastern Cherokee Nation in 1825:

The census of this division of the Cherokee, (East of the Mississippi) has been thus made—Native Citizens, 13,563, white men married into the nation 147; white women do.73; African slaves 1, 277...white men in the nation enjoy all the immunities and privileges of the Cherokee people...In the computation of the present year, you see there are some Africans among us. They have from time to time been brought into the nation and sold by white men; they are, however, generally treated well, and they prefer living in the nation, to a residence in the United States.<sup>71</sup>

Other censuses differed slightly in numbers, but overall the ratio is relatively similar.<sup>72</sup> According to all accounts far more blacks resided in the pre-removal Cherokee Nation than whites, at least which were not racially mixed with the Cherokee, and reflected the popularity the elite southern lifestyle gained

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<sup>71</sup> Letter from David Brown to James Barbour, December 3, 1825, in J. H. Johnston’s “Documentary Evidence of the Relations of Negroes and Indians,” *The Journal of Negro History* 14/1 (January 1929): 35-6; Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 39-42; James Mooney, *Cherokee History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas*, reproduced work (Cherokee, N.C.: Cherokee Publications, 2006), 112.

<sup>72</sup> Leslie Hewes, *Occupying the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 3-4; Reverend Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1822), 152.

among the population. According to Reverend Jedidiah Morse, in a report to the United States Secretary of War, the plantation system was encouraged, and many of the prominent Cherokee took up the lifestyle.<sup>73</sup>

Most of the African American population in the Cherokee Nation, before and after the Civil War, lived in the districts that were home to the plantation class and Fort Gibson, including Cooweescoowee, Illinois, Tahlequah, and Sequoyah.<sup>74</sup> Much the same as the Cherokee, blacks were praised for their vocal ability and sincere display of emotion. By the 1870s “Negro spirituals” were hailed by missionaries as “America’s only folk music.”<sup>75</sup> In the twentieth century this music would be promoted on “race records” by the emerging music industry of the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup>

Each culture in the Cherokee Nation brought with it unique traditions, but they were constantly influenced by others. Blacks, whites, and Cherokees attended some of the same churches and were neighbors in the community. One white woman recalled going to “camp” and “Negro,” religious meetings by wagon and playing “sweet” violin.<sup>77</sup> In another example, Garret Garrison explained, “We white folks, especially the young men, liked to go and listen to the Negroes sing.” Despite class and ethnic struggles, the community was familiar

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<sup>73</sup> Morse, *A Report to Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs*, 151.

<sup>74</sup> Census, 1867, National Archives Microfilm Publications, *Microcopy M234* (Records of the Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received) roll 101, R183-67; Hewes, “Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma,” 403-4; Danny Goble, “African Americans in Oklahoma and Indian Territories, 1907,” in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds., Charles Robert Goins and Danny Goble (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 138-9.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Armstrong, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, May 19, 1937, IPHC vol. 12: 430-44; Charles Seeger, “Music and Class Structure in the United States,” *American Quarterly* 9/3 (Autumn 1957): 282-4.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 34-8, 115.

<sup>77</sup> Martha Ford, interview by Pearl E. Parker, Cherokee, OK, June 10, 1937, IPHC vol. 24: 124.

with and often fond of each ethnicity's musical traditions. Churches and religious meetings were important in the inter-cultural transmission of songs since different ethnicities often sang together, shared lyrics, and became personally familiar with each other.

Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, some religious families held social gatherings outside of worship called play-parties. Some local parents considered dancing to fiddle music evil, so, they would have home get-togethers where their children would participate in games that included songs more acceptable to their religiosity. Most play-party practices have long histories that span the birth of the United States, and go back to an older European heritage that traveled west to Indian Territory with white settlers. People would traverse miles by foot, wagon, horseback, and later on—a beat up Ford, to get to these social events.<sup>78</sup> Some games included, “Raz-Ma-Taz-A-Ma-Tee,” “Weevily Wheat,” “All Around the May Pole,” “Pop Goes the Weasel,” and “Skip to My Lou.”<sup>79</sup> One of the more popular games in Indian Territory was called “Snap.”<sup>80</sup> Vance Randolph described the game as follows:

A boy and girl face each other, hold hands. And brace themselves so as not to be separated or upset by people running into them. The other players sit around the sides of the room, leaving a clear space about the couple in the center. A boy is usually the first “it,” and he walks about the room, finally snapping his finger in a girl's face. The

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<sup>78</sup> Edward Marn, interview by W. T. Holland, Tulsa, OK, March 28, 1938, IPHC vol. 108: 47; Randolph, “The Ozark Play-Party”: 201-2.

<sup>79</sup> Stella Elmore, interview by Joe L. Todd and Berenice Jackson, Woodward, OK, December 10, 1987, Oral History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), vol. 87: 284; Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, 161; Randolph, “The Ozark Play-Party”: 203-8; B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore*, 706.

<sup>80</sup> B.A. Botkin, “The Play-Party in Oklahoma,” *Texas Folk-Lore Society* 7 (1928): 5-7.

girl who has been “snapped” chases the boy round and round the standing couple with much dodging and twisting and bumping into one another so that it often happens that all four fall in a heap.”<sup>81</sup>

In the majority of games a circle was formed around one or two people in the middle and there was usually a song involved, much like “Ring Around the Roses,” and “Duck, Duck, Goose.” In “All Around the Maypole,” players joined hands and skipped around a couple in the center that acted out the words to the song, “squatting, falling, rising, choosing, and kissing a partner.”<sup>82</sup> Some of the tunes used at these gatherings were also played at other events held by this less religiously inclined, like “Old Joe Clark” and “Captain Jinks.”<sup>83</sup> These pieces were established and liked fiddle tunes at barn dances and saloons by regional performers and patrons.<sup>84</sup>

Occasionally at play-parties young men would hide whiskey outside, and a little “clandestine love-making,” otherwise known as “Tom Cattin” took place.<sup>85</sup> Some get-togethers were more strictly regulated by parents than others, but over all, they were not as indulgent as most contemporary high school and college parties.<sup>86</sup> In general, they were a way for young people to socialize and have fun while compromising with their parents’ moral standards. By the mid-twentieth century this part of American culture had predominately died out; however, some

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<sup>81</sup> Vance Randolph and Nancy Clemens, “Ozark Mountain Party-Games,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 45/193 (July-September 1936): 199.

<sup>82</sup> Botkin, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore*, 706.

<sup>83</sup> Randolph, “The Ozark Play-Party”: 221; “Arts in Action,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 9, 1957, 10-1.

<sup>84</sup> Randolph, “The Ozark Play-Party”: 222.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*: 202.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

of the songs and games are still used in elementary schools to entertain children, and others like “Old Joe Clark,” are still played by traditional string bands at events.<sup>87</sup> Though play-parties did not predominately take place at church and were not necessarily of a “sacred” nature, they were hosted by devout Christians who feared the devil’s influence on their children and were a common part of the culture.

Nineteenth century Christian music in North America greatly influenced the folk traditions of the Oklahoma Ozarks. Songs of the Cherokee and other surrounding tribes were already sacred, and the hymns and spirituals of whites and blacks added to this tradition. Many secular and church songs have the same roots in older folk traditions from the American colonies and Europe, and both types are played around the campfires and living rooms of the region today. Spirituals came from slaves, freedmen, settlers, and “old time” musicians, but the influence of missionaries in the spread of hymnal music cannot be overemphasized. Hymns from this heritage are common today in the eastern hill counties of Oklahoma, and are played by various cultures and age groups. Churches, by far, are the most common place to hear hymnal singing, but the practice is common at other social events, and is a part of most folk musicians’ repertoire.

The organ is also common today in area churches and homes. To a large extent, this is due to the religious background of the instrument, and the families that played it. Though play-parties no longer exist, at least in a similar form as

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<sup>87</sup> Tall Cotton String Band, Myspace Internet correspondence with author, July 2007, JCC; Klondike 5 String Band Myspace Internet correspondence with author, JCC.

during the 1800s and early 1900s, a handful of the games and songs continue in the public education systems, day cares, and country jubilees. The same could be said of temperance songs, excluding schools and nurseries. Hymns, by far, had the greatest lasting impact on folk music traditions. Many of them are still known and passed down orally as folk songs today, and the harmonies established in churches were the first steps in many of Oklahoma's popular singers' careers. In the barest essence, song and dance are about connections—between people—with the past—and with the divine. The religious music in the nineteenth century Oklahoma Ozarks emphasized the latter, but helped establish them all. Its importance and popularity set the foundation for a longstanding inclusion of Christian works in the folk song traditions of the region and is a large part of the region's cultural identity.

## Chapter 5

### Music, Song, and Dance of Black Slaves and Freedmen in the Cherokee Nation, 1850-1900

In 1880, Alfred M. Williams, a white reporter for *Lippincott's Magazine*, came from his comfortable home in Pennsylvania to the wilds of Indian Territory. To Williams's dismay, he found that the Cherokee Nation had large homes, farms, livestock, and a thriving community. Toward the end of his journey he was surprised again when he attended a barbeque enjoyed by a large group blacks, whites, and Indians, who together sung Moravian hymns in Cherokee, and then listened to a "middle aged Arkansas Traveler...saw away" at an old fiddle tune.<sup>1</sup> This multi-cultural interaction was common in the Cherokee hills, however, and picnics, horse races, church meeting, and dances were all common events in which residents participated in, regardless of race.<sup>2</sup> Lucinda Vann, a former slave on one of the region's larger plantations, loved these social outings:

I'd like to go where we used to have picnics down below Webber's Falls. Everybody went—white folks, colored folks. There'd be races and people would have things that they would be sellin', like moccasins and beads. They'd bring whole wagon loads of hams, chickens, cake and

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred M. Williams, "Among the Cherokees," *Lippincott's Magazine*, (February 1881): 195-204, Grant Foreman Collection, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), Box 6 Folder 7; Alfred M. Williams, "The Civilized Indian," *Lippincott's Magazine* (March 1883): 5, American Periodicals Online (APS Online): 271.

<sup>2</sup> Lucinda Vann, "Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation," *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, eds. T. Lindsey Baker and Julie P. Baker (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 435-40, further noted as *Slave Narratives*.



pie...People just go and help themselves, till they couldn't eat no more! Everybody goin' on, races, gamblin', drinkin', eatin', dancin', but it is all behavior, everything all right. Yes, Lord, it was, have mercy on me, yes.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, some plantation owners did not allow their slaves to participate in events similar to those in which Vann did, and very real issues of cruelty, segregation, and discrimination occurred. This study is not, however, about the abuses of slavery or racial discrimination, instead, this work focuses on the importance of song and dance to blacks within the Cherokee Nation, the role these arts played in bringing people together, and how music provides a glimpse at methods of a particular group's societal adaptations and ethnic identity. In doing so, I hope to contribute a better understanding of the cultural atmosphere of Indian Territory in a period of immense social and political change: 1850-1900. The songs from this transitional era reveal their performers' and audiences' aspirations, laments, traditions, and beliefs.

In the years preceding the American Civil War, blacks were quartered in both petite log houses constructed for families and longer cabins built for communal living. These residencies were separated from whites and non-black Cherokees; however, all racial groups still worked and played together.<sup>4</sup> When slavery ended, Cherokees controlling large tracts of land often resorted to renting lands and hiring white and black tenant farmers from within the Cherokee Nation

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 435.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rodgers, *Cherokee Advocate*, September 9, 1876: 3.

and bordering Arkansas.<sup>5</sup> In close contact with each other, these laborers were introduced to each other's music and other cultural attributes.<sup>6</sup> Among these conditions, song and dance played a valuable role in their interaction. These arts eased tensions created by slavery and social discrimination and were a source of great pleasure to blacks, as well as the other ethnicities, within the Cherokee Nation.

Many freedmen of northeastern Oklahoma held ambiguous feelings about their societal condition in the last half of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> They resented being slaves and facing harsh discrimination after their attained freedom, but were often thankful of good times in the region's natural beauty and bonds of friendship with local residents—former slave owners included. These feelings are best exemplified in the plea of Joseph Rodgers, a former slave who petitioned the Cherokee for citizenship after the American Civil War.

Born and raised among these people, I don't want to know  
any other. The green hills and blooming prairies of this

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<sup>5</sup> Leslie Hewes, "Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma," *Economic Geography* 18/4 (October 1942): 410; Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *The Cherokee Freedmen: From Emancipation to American Citizenship* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1978), 51, 165-75.

<sup>6</sup> John S. Otto and Augustus M. Burns, "Black and White Cultural Interaction in the Early Twentieth Century South: Race and Hillbilly Music," *Phylon* 35/4 (Winter 1974): 410.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Rodgers, *Cherokee Advocate*, September 9, 1876: 4; Ed Butler, interviewed by Etta D. Mason, Tushka, Oklahoma, July 17, 1937, IPHC, vol.17: 473-476; Dennis Vann, interviewed by Reuben Partridge, March 23, 1937, IPHC, vol. 11: 65-68; Jim Tomm, interviewed by L.W. Wilson, Muskogee, Oklahoma, April 19-20, 1937, IPHC, vol.112: 277-8; Polly Colbert, interview in *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Guide*, ed. Kaye M. Teall (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 32-3, further referred to as BHO; Mrs. Chaney Richardson, *Slave Narratives*, 350-1; Vann, "Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation," *Slave Narratives*; Aaron Grayson, interview, BHO,76-7; Henry Clay, *Slave Narratives*, 84; Martha Ann Ratliff, interviewed by J. S. Thomas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 25, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 339; Lou Smith, interviewed by Jessie R. Ervin, Platter, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 390; Patsy Perryman, interview, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 1938, *Slave Narratives*, 314; Phyllis Petite, interview, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 316-20; Martha Ann Ratliff, interview by J.S. Thomas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 25, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 338-9.

Nation look like home to me. The rippling of its pebbly bottom brooks made a music that delighted my infancy, and in my ear it has not lost its sweetness. I look around and I see Cherokees who in the early days of my life were my playmates in youth and early manhood, my companions, and now as the decrepitude of age steals upon me, will you not let me lie down and die your fellow citizen?<sup>8</sup>

After the war, Rodgers, like many other blacks, arrived back in the Cherokee Nation too late to receive distinction as a Cherokee freedman and was deprived of the connected rights and benefits. The status of freedmen is still a contested issue within the Cherokee Nation and recently a vote was cast to reject their citizenship status on the argument that they were not Cherokee by blood.<sup>9</sup> Although many descendents of freedmen lack Cherokee lineage, many others do possess Cherokee ancestors.<sup>10</sup> This legislation on “black Cherokees,” exemplifies some of the conflicts that have persisted about blood lineage, race, and the roll freedmen since the end of the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

When the majority of Cherokees, associated whites and blacks included, were forced to relocate to northeastern Indian Territory in 1839 from former Cherokee lands in present day Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama,

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Rodgers, *Cherokee Advocate*, September 9, 1876, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Future Unclear for ‘Freedmen’ Descendants,” *MSNBC*, March 4, 2007, [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17442676/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17442676/), accessed January 17, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Lucinda Vann, “Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation,” *Slave Narratives*; 435-40; Milton Starr, interviewed by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Gibson Station, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 408-9; Cornelius Neely Nave, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 301; Sarah Wilson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 492-9; Patsy Perrryman, interview, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 1938, *Slave Narratives*, 314; Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of An Afro-American Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> see, Circe Strom, *Blood Politics: Race Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), for a recent in depth study of this topic.

all groups were familiar with, and at times, participated in each other's musical traditions.<sup>12</sup> Music was included at gatherings of all sorts: formal ceremonies, picnics, house raisings, religious services, and, of course, dances. Africans who involuntarily immigrated to North America brought with them knowledge of songs, dances, and instruments from multiple cultures. After spending generations on the continent, the musical attributes from the various African societies blended together, as well as with influences from European Americans and various Indian tribes, to create unique performing arts. This syncretism is exemplified in the case of nineteenth century black slave and freed peoples among the Cherokee.

African Americans and Cherokees may have a relationship dating prior to 1600, possibly as early as 1526, when black slaves escaped from a Spanish colony on the Peedee River.<sup>13</sup> However, it is likely that a common relationship between the groups did not develop until the growth of the black population in the English North American colonies in the 1620s, if not after. By 1673, the Cherokee captured black slaves from the English to trade for firearms and other goods from the French, as well as from the French to barter with the English.<sup>14</sup> By the 1730s, tribal members participated in the slave trade extensively and ironically were considered bounty hunters for runaways and harborers of escapees.<sup>15</sup> In 1715, a

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<sup>12</sup> John Norton, *The Journal of John Norton, 1809-16*, eds. Carl F. Klink and James J. Talman (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1970), 41-2, 51-2; Antoine Bonnefoy, *Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy, 1741-2*, in *Travels in the American Colonies*, Newton D. Mereness, ed., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 245-7; Gregory Evans Dowd, "The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina-Cherokee Frontier," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53/3 (July 1996): 538-9, 559.

<sup>13</sup> Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Rudi Halliburton, Jr., *Red Over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977), 7; J. B. Davis, "Slavery in the Cherokee Nation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11/4 (December 1933): 1056-8.

<sup>15</sup> Halliburton, Jr., *Red Over Black*, 7-9; Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 29-30.

company of black men participated in attacks on the Cherokee country and in 1739 white propaganda blamed an outbreak of smallpox among the Cherokee on recently imported slaves.<sup>16</sup>

Many Blacks and Cherokees knew of each other's culture by the nineteenth century, though opinions were likely skewed from attempts of whites to create prejudice between Africans and American Indians. Taking captives and using them for ransom, or to replace family members killed in battle, was not a new practice among the Cherokee. But slave owning, as carried out on European American plantations, did not become a part of their society until the intermarriage of whites into the tribe, and with them, ideals of property, racism, and capitalism. The majority of tribal members never became slave owners; however, by 1809, approximately 580 slaves were in their domain, and the numbers grew to over 1,000 by 1824.<sup>17</sup> By this latter time, African and African Americans constituted nearly one out of every fourteen residents in Cherokee country.<sup>18</sup>

Slavery, though a cruel practice under any circumstance, differed under many situations in the Cherokee Nation from their white neighbors. Historians have often argued whether slavery was less harsh among the Cherokee than with

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<sup>16</sup> Kaye M. Teall, ed., *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Guide*, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie Hewes, *Occupying the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma* (Lincoln, NA: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from David Brown to James Barbour, December 3, 1825, in J. H. Johnston's "Documentary Evidence of the Relations of Negroes and Indians," *The Journal of Negro History* 14/1 (January 1929): 35-6; Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 39-42; James Mooney, *Cherokee History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas*, reproduced work (Cherokee, N.C.: Cherokee Publications, 2006), 112.

Southern whites.<sup>19</sup> The degree of cruelty on plantations in the Oklahoma Ozarks was circumstantial. Research does suggest that most of the time, being a slave in the Cherokee Nation was preferable to being a slave under a white owner in the South.<sup>20</sup>

Some Cherokee plantation owners held more in common with southern whites, than the majority of the tribe, especially true of a few of the wealthier and “racially mixed” families. However, ethnic similarities may have eased tensions between the groups despite ingrained racism. Concepts about kinship were shared in some regards, such as a matrilineal and matrilocal heritage. Other cultural attributes, like the use of gourd utensils, the drum, herbal lore, and a distrust of European Americans, were also shared between the two groups.<sup>21</sup> Many Cherokee also relied on their slaves as translators and mediators in their dealings with European Americans.<sup>22</sup> Some blacks managed to become free and incorporated into the society, and took on many of the cultural attributes of their former “masters.” There is no doubt that African Americans faced discrimination in the Cherokee Nation. Racist remarks were blatantly published in the local

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<sup>19</sup> Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of An Afro-American Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 1-20; Halliburton, Jr., *Red Over Black*, 1-50; Daniel E. Littlefield, Jr., *The Cherokee Freedmen: From Emancipation to American Citizenship* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1978), 1-30.

<sup>20</sup> Martha Ann Ratliff, interviewed by J. S. Thomas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 25, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 339; Lou Smith, interviewed by Jessie R. Ervin, Platter, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 390; Milton Starr, interviewed by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Gibson Station, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 408-9; Patsy Perry, interview, *Slave Narratives*, 1938, 314; Chaney Richardson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 347-51; Betty Robertson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 355; Morris Shepherd, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 375-82.

<sup>21</sup> Peter H. Wood, “Strange New Land, 1619-1776,” in *To Make Our World Anew*, volume 1, *A History of African Americans to 1880*, ed. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85-90; Teall, ed., *Black History in Oklahoma*, 17-20; Mrs. Lou Smith, interviewed by Jessie R. Ervin, Platter, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 394.

<sup>22</sup> Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 96.

newspaper, *The Cherokee Advocate*. The variation among the experiences related by former slaves covers a vast range of a life, from one of relative luxury and happiness, to stories of immense cruelty.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, compared to slavery in the United States South, slaves in the Cherokee Nation were less restricted and held more trusted positions, and hence, their cultural practices were not as prohibited. Following emancipation, the black communities saw strong growth and new opportunities made available through schools and churches. Despite the fact that blacks faced open discrimination, historian Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., was correct when he stated that the thirty years following the Civil War “freedmen developed a lifestyle that most blacks in the South would envy.”<sup>24</sup>

Before and after slavery, music indigenous to Cherokees was included in sacred as well as secular dances. The most common musical rituals were, and are, commonly referred to as stomp dances, a general term for a stylization that encompassed numerous dances carried out for multiple ceremonies and celebrative performances. There is little direct evidence that blacks performed in such rituals; however, adopted African Americans would most likely have participated in these events. The act of adoption itself required musical rituals, as exemplified by a passage from the journal of Antoine Bonnefoy, a Frenchman briefly captured and incorporated into Cherokee society. He states:

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<sup>23</sup> “Social News,” *The Cherokee Advocate*, February 9, 1881, 3; For examples of harsh treatment of slaves in the Cherokee Nation see, Sarah Wilson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 492-9; Phyllis Petite, interview, *BTO*, 35; Charlotte Johnson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 464-6.

<sup>24</sup> Littlefield, Jr., *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 49.

At the first sight of our savages, all the men ran out to the place where we then were, for the ceremony customary among this nation. Our clothes were taken off, and a stock was made for each of us, without, however, putting us in it; they merely put on us our slave's-collar. Then the savages, putting in each one's hand a white stick and a rattle, told us that we must sing, which we did for the space of more than three hours, at different times, singing both French and Indian songs, after which they gave us to eat of all that the women had brought from the village, bread of different sorts, sagamité (corn porridge), buffalo meat, bear meat, rabbit, sweet potatoes, and graumons.<sup>25</sup>

The next day followed with another ceremony:

They made us march in this order, singing, and having, as we had had the evening before, a white stick and a rattle in our hands, to the chief square of the village and march three or four times around a great tree which is in the middle of that place. Then they buried at the foot of the tree a parcel of hair from each one of us, which the savages had preserved for that purpose from the time when they cut our hair off. After this march was finished they brought us into the council-house, where we were each obliged to sing four songs. Then the savages who had adopted us came and took away our collars.<sup>26</sup>

Bonnefoy also mentioned coming across a “negro and a negress who formerly belonged to the widow Saussier, and having been sold in 1739 to a Canadian, deserted when on the Ouabache, on their way to Canada, and were

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<sup>25</sup> Bonnefoy, *Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy, 1741-2*, 245.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 246.



captured by a troop of Cheraquis who brought them to the same village where I found them.”<sup>27</sup> Historian Tiya Miles cites in her book, *Ties That Bind*, a Cherokee Supreme Court case in the late 1820s that involved two former slaves adopted by the Deer Clan of the Cherokee.<sup>28</sup> Music and dance filled rituals would likely have been involved in their incorporation, just as in the case of Bonnefoy.

From the 1860s on, there are many records of whites participating in Cherokee stomp dances, and descendants of Afro-Cherokee families are likely to have partaken, and probably still do, but these events became increasingly private and restricted to certain clan or family members as time passed in the Cherokee Nation West.<sup>29</sup> The sources available to historians are scant on the role of African descendants in Cherokee indigenous music, but documents do reveal the instruments and songs common to slaves and freed peoples in Indian Territory.

Banjoes, drums, gambees (a percussive instrument), and fiddles were played on slave ships for forced captive dances and may be responsible for the spread of African instruments and early syncretics in American music culture.<sup>30</sup> Drums were common to most African music and blacks in Cherokee society likely would have used them.<sup>31</sup> Some blacks sold to Cherokees may have gained experience playing the drum in a colonial militia since slave musicians were in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 247

<sup>28</sup> Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 56-7.

<sup>29</sup> Lenora Alpha Henry (Ross), interview by M. J. Stockton, June 24, 1937, IPHC, vol. 10: 425-8.; Kelly Anquoe, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Myspace internet correspondence to author, Oklahoma City, OK, April 14, 2007, private collection of author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; E. T. Pendley, interview by Amelia F. Harris, February 25, 1938, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, IPHC, vol. 93: 218.

<sup>30</sup> Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 8-17.

<sup>31</sup> Wood, “Strange New Land, 86.

high demand in English colonial North America.<sup>32</sup> Xylophones, or marimbas, and diddley bows were also African instruments that were reconstructed in America, but any use among the Cherokee has gone unrecorded.<sup>33</sup> Another instrument common to the southwest Ozarks, where most of the Cherokee eventually settled, was the banjo. Knowledge of the instrument was brought to the continent by Africans, and the banjo was built by Cherokee owned slaves and blacks in neighboring communities.<sup>34</sup>

Historian Mabel Hovdahl Alexander stated that banjos came to Indian Territory with slaves among the Five Tribes who made them out of scrap wood and metal.<sup>35</sup> The instrument may have originated from a West African instrument called the Akonting, or possibly a handful of other stringed lute like instruments.<sup>36</sup> The banjo was a common component of local string band music in the region and among traveling performers. Blacks played the instrument on Cherokee plantations and small farms, as well as at local outings and dances. The banjo was also performed in nineteenth and twentieth century minstrel shows, such as one in 1880 by

“Eli Gentry, the boss Negro minstrel showman  
[who] gave an exhibition...in his tent Monday and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Otto and Burns, “Black and White Cultural Interaction in the Early Twentieth Century South: Race and Hillbilly Music”: 406; Wood, “Strange New Land, 1619-1776,” 86.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Thompson, “Plantation Music,” *The Critic and Good Literature*, January 12, 1884, 2, APS Online, 20, accessed April 14, 2008; James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>35</sup> Mabel Hovdahl Alexander, *Via Oklahoma: And Still the Music Flows* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Society, 2004), 65.

<sup>36</sup> “Akonting,” internet site, <http://www.myspace.com/akonting>, accessed January 05, 2008; “Banjo Roots,” internet site, <http://www.myspace.com/banjoroots>, accessed January 05, 2008.

Tuesday nights, to a crowded audience each night. Gentry's show is a good one and the laughable programme is not easily excelled by any country show."<sup>37</sup>

The fact that African American minstrels found enthusiastic audiences not only exhibits that banjos were popular but also that black performers were publicly tolerated and even enjoyed in the Cherokee nation.

Lucinda Vann recalled that in the years immediately prior to the Civil War, "Everybody had a good time on old Jim Vann's plantation. After supper the colored folks would get together and talk, and sing, and dance. Someone maybe would be playin' a fiddle or a banjo. Everybody was happy."<sup>38</sup> Another former slave in Choctaw country, who spent considerable time around Webber's Falls and Fort Gibson in the Cherokee Nation, recalled a stanza from a song he knew:

Old man, old man,  
Your hair is getting gray,  
I'd foller you ten thousand miles  
To hear your banjo play.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Social News," *The Cherokee Advocate*, October 6, 1880, 6; Bill Reese, "Thumbnail History of the Banjo," internet source, [www. bluegrassbanjo.org/banhist.html](http://www.bluegrassbanjo.org/banhist.html), accessed September 23, 2007; Peter H. Wood, "Strange New Land, 86; "Banjo Jim is 112 Years Old," *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 11, 1906, 11; "Real Voodoo Man Found in America," *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 22, 1909, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Lucinda Vann, "Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation," *Slave Narratives*, 437.

<sup>39</sup> R. C. Smith, interview by Jessie R. Ervin, Alderson, Oklahoma, December 8, 2007, in *Slave Narratives*, 397.

The popularity of the banjo among the African American population is exemplified to a great extent by the many references to the instrument in song lyrics. One freedmen account refers to a slave who was called Banjo, likely because he played the instrument, and again exemplifies the wide usage of the instrument among Cherokee slaves and freedmen.<sup>40</sup>

The musical artifact most commonly used, before and after the Civil War in the Cherokee Nation, was the fiddle. Also historically called the violin, or “viol,” it was well-known and played when Puritans left England and made sail for North America in the early 1600s. In Africa, people played multiple bowed string instruments, including the violin, during the growth of the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>41</sup> As black people became more abundant in Virginia, as well as other English colonies, they would have again encountered the “Viol.”

Many black fiddlers learned the art from parents and friends, and played at events for men and women of all ethnicities in the Cherokee Nation. Freedman John Thompson, who was a slave at times under Joseph Vann, W. P. Thompson, and Chief Lowery, stated that his father fiddled for Cherokee dances around Fort Gibson and Tahlequah.<sup>42</sup> Former slave Henry Clay proclaimed that after the Civil War he moved back to Indian Territory and worked for his “master”:

On the boat I learned to fiddle, and I can make an old fiddle  
talk. So I done pretty good playing for white dances for a

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<sup>40</sup> Charlotte Johnson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 464-6.

<sup>41</sup> Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-1.

<sup>42</sup> John Thompson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, in *Slave Narratives*, 421.

long time after the War, and they sure had good ones.  
Everything from a waltz to a Schottische I played.  
Sometimes some white people didn't like to have me play,  
but young master, I always called him that till he died,  
would say, "where I go my boy can go too."<sup>43</sup>

Although Clay encountered some resistance to his participation in white events, his statement reveals that African American performers did play for non-black dances, and that many former slaves had strong relationships with their former owners that carried on past the end of slavery. Thompson and Clay's stories also exhibit the ability to adapt to European American music, which aided some slaves and freedmen in making a living and becoming more socially acceptable and important. In turn, it is likely these black artists made additions to their playing style that came from roots in Africa and the slave community.

Other examples of fiddling among former slaves in the Cherokee Nation exist, as well as with those in neighboring Indian lands. Martha Anne Ratliff's father was a slave and musician who braved violent patrollers and harsh punishments to sneak off and play for dances and his daughter.<sup>44</sup> Dennis Vann played the fiddle to fellow black refugees and Union soldiers in Franklin County, Kansas, before returning to Tahlequah in 1866.<sup>45</sup> Even in folktales common to African Americans the fiddle made appearances, as in a Brer Rabbit story called "The Dance of the Little Animals."

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Clay, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 84.

<sup>44</sup> Martha Anne Ratliff, interview by J. S. Thomas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 25, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 339.

<sup>45</sup> Dennis Vann, "The Recollections of a Cherokee Freedman Dennis Vann," IPHC, vol. 11: 66.

De ground was kiver all over wid snow, an' de palin's on de graveyard fence was cracklin; it be so cold...An' I look an' listen...an' I seen a rabbit settin' on top of a grave playin' a fiddle, for God's sake...All kind'er little beasts been runnin' round, dancin'...An' dere was wood rats an' squirrels cuttin' capers wid dey fancy self, and diff'ent kinds of birds an' owl...look like dey was enjoying themselves...Well, I watch an' I see Br'er Rabbit take he fiddle from under his arm an' start to fiddlin' some more...an' Br'er Mockin' Bird jine him an' whistle a chune dat would er made de angels weep.<sup>46</sup>

This representation of the fiddle in African American folklore again exhibits the popularity of string band instruments and large societal gatherings.

Public and private life in the Cherokee Nation was racially mixed and people of all colors and walks of life made up the social atmosphere of the Oklahoma Ozarks. However, social events on large plantations, though enjoyed by all ethnicities, were commonly segregated, as exemplified by the recollection of a former slave woman who lived on Jim Vann's plantation:

There was big parties and dances. In the winter folks danced in the parlor of the big house; in summer they danced on a platform under a great big brush arbor. There was seats all around for folks to watch them dance. Sometimes just white folks danced; sometimes just the black folks.

There was music fine music. The colored folks did most of the fiddlin'. Someone rattled bones. There was a bugler and someone called the dances. When the marster Jim and missus Jennie went away the slaves would have a big dance in the arbor. When the white folks danced, the slaves would sit around and watch. They'd clap their hands and holler. Everybody had a good time. *Lord yes su-er.*

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<sup>46</sup> Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 18-9.

When they gave a party in the big house, everything was fine. Women came in satin dresses, all dressed up, big combs in their hair, lots of rings and bracelets. The cooks would bake hams, turkeys, cakes, and pies and there'd be lots to eat and lots of whiskey for the men folks.<sup>47</sup>

Her narrative, by recalling the use of racial segregation, shows the apparent limits and racial discrimination placed on blacks; however, the overall joyful presentation of the memory promotes the idea that all races and ethnicities in the area genuinely enjoyed dances. The mention of bone rattling establishes that that African tradition was alive and well in the Cherokee Nation alongside the practices of banjo playing, and loud and vibrant shouts and dances. Another noteworthy facet of this statement is that people put a lot of time and preparation into these events. People showed off their finest attire and spent hours preparing food and the event area. During the Christmas season some slaves were given a week to a month off from labor to visit family at neighboring plantations and according to one freedwoman, "slaves would frolic and go to dances."<sup>48</sup> Song and dance were important facets of life in the Cherokee Nation for whites, Cherokee, and blacks.

Dances were often big events. A picture taken by Allison Aylesworth of a freedmen dance during the Dawes commission's allotment distribution of 1899 at Fort Gibson shows women clothed in fine dresses and hats, and the men in clean trousers, nice shirts, suspenders, and jackets. These dances were similar to the

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<sup>47</sup> Lucinda Vann, "Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation," *Slave Narratives*, 438.

<sup>48</sup> Martha Ann Ratliff, interview by J. S. Thomas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 25, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 338-9; Lucinda Vann, "Life on an Old Cherokee Plantation," *Slave Narratives*, 438.

ones held by whites and Cherokees in the area: square dances, jigs, round dances, and various line dances. Most had a violin or multiple stringed instruments, and percussion made by bones or spoons was not uncommon. The inclusion of various percussive instruments, usually made from what was handy, was another addition from African Americans. A caller, who gave the dance instructions, and acted as a master of ceremonies, was also included in some of the more formal dances. Mandolins, guitars, organs, pianos, and brass instruments were all found in numbers in the Cherokee Nation by the 1850s.<sup>49</sup> When instruments were not available, blacks in slavery and after their freedom made their own. Gourd fiddles were common in Choctaw country and likely crossed over the boundary with the Cherokee.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Charlie Hepner and Clara Clifford, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, IPHC vol. 28: 435; Allen Morris, interviewed by Jas. S. Buchanan, Muskogee, Oklahoma, August 18-9, 1937, IPHC vol. 37: 261; Kathleen Garrett, "Music on the Indian Territory Frontier," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 33/3 (Fall 1955): 339-49; Edith Walker, interview by Jas. S. Buchanan, 1937-8, IPHC vol. 11: 117-23.

<sup>50</sup> Charley Williams, interview, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 478.





Cherokee Freedmen dancing at a camp set up at Fort Gibson Oklahoma c. 1899. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society photo archives. Photo by Allison Aylesworth



Cherokee Freed persons at a dance at a camp set up at Fort Gibson Oklahoma c. 1899. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society photo archives. Photo by Allison Aylesworth.

After the Civil War, August 4<sup>th</sup> became a celebrated day for black folks of eastern Oklahoma—it was Emancipation Day. Festivities rejoiced African American freedom from bondage. August 4<sup>th</sup> was not the day blacks were legally

freed from slavery in the United States, but was chosen as a suitable day, one month after American Independence Day celebrations. There were parades, the naming of a “queen,” picnics, preaching, music playing, and dancing.<sup>51</sup> In the Cherokee Nation, festivities often took place on the Four Mile Branch Creek near Fort Gibson, but also in Tahlequah, and along the Grand River. This event attracted hundreds of people and there were many banjos, fiddles, and a lot of singing. Songs were often of a religious nature but participants also sang pieces they related to their emancipation such as “John Brown’s Body,” and “Rally Round the Flag Boys.”<sup>52</sup> The following is an extraction from a variation of “John Brown’s Body”:

John Brown died that the slave  
might be free (3 times)

But his soul goes marching on.

He captured Harpers Ferry with his  
nineteen men so true,

And he frightened old Virginia til  
she trembled through an  
through.

But his soul goes marching on.

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<sup>51</sup> “Local News,” *The Cherokee Advocate*, August 8, 1881, 3; Aaron Grayson, interview by Billie Bird, Okemah, Oklahoma, September, 10, 1937, IPHC, vol. 26: 329-5; Garrett Garrison, interview by Nannie Lee Burns, April 15, 1838, Commerce, Oklahoma, April 15, 1938, IPHC, vol. 84: 63; Littlefield, *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 60-2.

<sup>52</sup> Littlefield, *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 60-2.

Now has come the glorious jubilee (3 times)

When all mankind shall be free.<sup>53</sup>

This song represents a new tone in the sung lyrics sang by African American in the Cherokee Nation and the United States. Freedmen took pride in the sacrifices made for the sake of emancipation, and glorified certain abolitionists who became heroes in the eyes of the black population. “John Brown’s Body,” became a popular tune in churches and with folk musicians of all racial backgrounds.

A number of songs became popular among blacks relating to their freedom obtained after the Civil War. Some of these songs came from black “exodusters” escaping from Southern conditions after the conflict, and many were learned directly from Union and Confederate soldiers. The most noted of these songs in former slave narratives was “Hang Jeff Davis From a Sour Apple Tree.”<sup>54</sup> One account recalled that the song was usually sung to the tune of “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.”<sup>55</sup> Hanging from an apple tree was a common theme in Indian Territory during the Civil War, another song was called “They Hung John Brown on a Sour Apple Tree,” and other variants probably existed.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “John Brown’s Body,” in *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People*, comp. Alan Lomax, notes, Woody Guthrie, trans. and ed. Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), 108-9.

<sup>54</sup> Betty Robertson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, Oklahoma, *Slave Narratives*, 357; J. S. Thomas, interview by Sam Jordan, July 2, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 235; Sarah Wilson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 498.

<sup>55</sup> J. S. Thomas, interview, *Slave Narratives*, 235.

<sup>56</sup> George Conrad, Jr., interview by Bertha P. Tipton, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 18, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 92.

Of course not all songs of the last half of the nineteenth century revolved around the theme of freedom. Just as with all ethnicities, there was a wide range of songs sung during this great era of change. One former slave, Chaney McNair, mentioned the following about his former owner: “Ratcliff’s hobby was to have us little niggers around, sing ‘Polly Put the Kettle On’ and many other old time songs and watch us dance.”<sup>57</sup> One former slave of the nearby Muscogee (Creek) Nation recited a song about food and another with the following lyrics:

Great big nigger, laying ‘hind de log—  
Finger on de trigger and eye on the hawg.  
Click go de trigger and bang go the gun!  
Here come de owner and de buck nigger run!<sup>58</sup>

Songs were about disobeying slave owners, love, their environment, and most anything that could be sung about. Some songs, like “Polly Put the Kettle On,” were not exclusive to blacks but also sung by members of the greater society.

Lou Smith remembered that when she was a child and a slave right before the Civil War, she was responsible for “nussing de younguns,” and among her many duties was the singing of lullabies to babies to ease crying and help them sleep. The two pieces she sang the most were “Rock-a-bye Baby,” and “By-lo

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<sup>57</sup> Chaney McNair, interview by James Carsalowey, Vinita, Oklahoma, May 11, 1937, IPHC, vol. 106: 442-47.

<sup>58</sup> Lucinda Davis, interview by Robert Vinson Lackey, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 108.

Baby Bunting,” the latter contained a line that went “Daddy’s gone a-hunting to get a rabbit skin to wrap baby bunting in.”<sup>59</sup>

The most common and most important songs to many of the black population in the Cherokee Nation were religious songs—spirituals, chants, and hymns. Africans came to America with many different religious beliefs and practices relating to the region of their homeland they came from; however, by the time that the Cherokee had settled the Oklahoma Ozarks and surrounding plains, the blacks in the region were overwhelmingly Christian. Before the Civil War, some slaves attended the churches of their “masters,” while others participated in services held on farms and plantations themselves. Mrs. Chaney Richardson remembered fond times during the slavery days, and recalled that she attended “a church made out of a brush arbor and would sing good songs in Cherokee sometimes.”<sup>60</sup> In her older age, in the early 1900s, she still loved to listen to songs in Cherokee, which reminded her of her childhood living with her former owner Rodgers.<sup>61</sup>

Another similar account by Polly Colbert claimed that at church services held under brush arbors “colored folks” came with whites and Indians, and though segregated, “could take place in the singing and sometimes a colored person would get happy and pray and shout but nobody didn’t think nothing about that.”<sup>62</sup> At the ethnically mixed Post Oak and Cotton Creek churches, a white man

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<sup>59</sup> Lou Smith, interview by Jessie R. Ervin, Platter, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 390.

<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Chaney Richardson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 350-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Polly Colbert, interview in, *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools), 33.

recalled that a black lady named Mary Beck “could certainly sing and shout.”<sup>63</sup> Much of this “shouting,” robust dancing and movement, as well as the call and response form practiced by many blacks came from their West African heritage.<sup>64</sup> Slaves, who attended some of the Cherokee churches or no institution at all, formed their own services after acquiring their freedom.

Beginning in the 1870s, black churches began to hold regular services and organize events.<sup>65</sup> The Reverend Fred Martin, who began preaching in the 1850s, is credited with establishing the Cherokee Nation’s first African American religious institution, Island Ford Baptists Church, along the Grand River in present day Mayes County.<sup>66</sup> Freedmen services were also held at Fort Gibson, nearby Four Mile Branch Creek, and in Webbers Falls.<sup>67</sup> Ministers who commonly preached at these locations included Dennis Barrows and W. C. Brodie.<sup>68</sup> Sarah Wilson, a former slave of African and Cherokee descent, recalled that the first preacher she ever heard was Sam Solomon, a “Creek Negro” man, at Four Mile Church in 1879.<sup>69</sup> Johnson Thompson, another Cherokee freedman, remembered that he “learned something about religion from an old colored

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<sup>63</sup> Henry Armstrong, interview by Arlene D. McDowell, May 19, 1937, IPHC vol. 12: 430-44

<sup>64</sup> Szwed, “Musical Adaptation Among Afro-Americans,” 115.

<sup>65</sup> Littlefield, Jr., *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 58-60.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> “Local News,” *The Cherokee Advocate*, July 25, 1877, 3.

<sup>68</sup> “Local News,” *The Cherokee Advocate*, July 11, 1877, 3. These church services can be found throughout 1877 and other years on the third page of the mentioned newspaper.

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Wilson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 498.

preacher named Tom Vann. He would sing for us, and I'd like to hear them old songs again!"<sup>70</sup>

Songs common to these services included those known to all ethnicities such as "Amazing Grace," and "Sweet Bye and Bye," but also works written by fellow former local slaves and some brought by new African American arrivals. "Uncle" Wallis Willis and "Aunt" Minerva, who worked as slaves and freedmen among the Choctaw, just south of the Cherokee Nation, wrote the immensely popular spirituals "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Steal Away to Jesus." The latter refers to the practice of hiding from owners in order to sing and worship—a reminder that not all "masters" tolerated open gatherings of blacks.<sup>71</sup> Reverend Alexander Reid wrote down these two songs and sent them to the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, who popularized the pieces around the world.<sup>72</sup>

These songs have become popular with many ethnicities and within many countries. Willis and Minerva also wrote "Roll, Jordan, Roll," "I'm a' Rollin', I'm a' Rollin'," and "The Angels are Coming," and the Cherokee freedmen knew these songs by the late 1800s.<sup>73</sup> Other songs included baptismal songs like "Oh, I Wish I Could Find Some Secret Place Where I Could Find My God," and "When

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<sup>70</sup> Johnson Thompson, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937-8, *Slave Narratives*, 420.

<sup>71</sup> Georgia Mae Fortae, Sarah Bee Threadgill, Aretha Louis, Terry Williams, Deborah Deadener, and Cybil Baker, interview by Debbie L. Bennett, Tom, Oklahoma, January 16, 1993, Oklahoma Folklife Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society), unprocessed collection, Fortae et al folder.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid; Savage, *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*, 4-6; Judith Michener, "Willis, Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, online at [www.digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/w/wIo18.html](http://www.digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/w/wIo18.html)

<sup>73</sup> Michener, "Willis, Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva."

I Come to Die I Want to be Ready.”<sup>74</sup> Some pieces performed in present-day churches such as “Sweet Home,” “I’m Running, Running Lord,” “Yes, Jesus Loves Me,” and “Guide Me Over Thy Great Jehovah,” are all claimed to come from the slave days.<sup>75</sup>

Religious and secular African American songs and music show aspects of assimilation and cultural uniqueness within the Cherokee Nation. The syncretism was further exemplified and better documented as recording equipment and the music business became main stays of United States popular culture beginning in the 1920s. Under early recording company policies, blacks often recorded as a single performer or in duets, where as whites played in large groups; however, the instruments used were commonly the same and elements of music from all cultures were influential on each ethnicity.<sup>76</sup> De Ford Baily, who played harmonica for the Grand Ole Opry called the music around him while he grew up “black hillbilly music,” and that fiddles, banjos, and guitars were common in his childhood community.<sup>77</sup> Popular musicians such as Bill Monroe, and in Oklahoma, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Wills, claimed that they were greatly influenced by African American music.<sup>78</sup> Another Oklahoman, fiddler Claude Williams, a black man, played “white” country songs and Jazz riffs for African American audiences, and Jack Teagarden, a white man who played “black” jazz

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<sup>74</sup> Henry Clay, interview by Ethel Wolfe Garrison, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, 1937, *Slave Narratives*, 83.

<sup>75</sup> Fortae et al, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Otto and Burns, “Black and White Cultural Interaction in the Early Twentieth Century South: Race and Hillbilly Music,” 408-9.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Wolfe, “Rural Black String Band Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 10/1 (Spring 1990): 32.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid; Savage, Jr., *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*, 13-14.



tried to imitate sounds heard as a boy from Indian Powwows at the Oklahoma City fairgrounds.<sup>79</sup> Oklahoma music is a mixed bag.

Slavery was a cruel and shameful practice that plagues America's heritage, but its great evils often blind us to stories and traditions of cooperation and enjoyment. Blacks, whites, and Cherokees in Indian Territory delighted in music, song, and dance, and performers and audiences crossed "racial" lines to partake in festivities and ceremonies. Undoubtedly some musicians were bigoted, but narratives establish that artists commonly and willingly crossed tabooed cultural boundaries.

The record of musical arts performed by blacks in the Cherokee Nation, 1850-1900, exemplify that people borrowed extensively from other cultures, as an adaptation strategy, and for enjoyments sake. At the same time, the music of this population provided a sense of cultural identity. The spirituals and chants they wrote, the percussive heritage they brought with them, and the experiences distilled into their words and notes within their music, distinguished them from other ethnicities. These unique aspects feed cultural interchange, each ethnic group's artists inquisitive about new sounds and forms of expression from the other. Over seventy years had passed since Lucinda Vann danced under the brush arbors of the Vann Plantation when she gave her interview to a WPA field worker in 1937. Her favorite memories were of the music.

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<sup>79</sup> Savage, Jr., *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*, 15

## Chapter 6

### From the Tennessee River to Tahlequah: A Brief Account of the Cherokee Fiddling Tradition



Cherokee string musicians February 2007, Langley, Oklahoma.

Andrew Griffin came to the Oklahoma Ozarks on the Trail of Tears and brought his fiddle in a flour sack. Throughout the 1840s he lived with his family farming the rocky soil, but not always able to make ends meet, he played songs to supplement his income.<sup>1</sup> The fiddle was important to the Griffin family; it helped provide income and merriment in the rural countryside where its use upheld a practice that existed among the Cherokee well before their move west. The tradition continued with later generations such as by Griffin's great grandson Louis Griffin, who founded the Keetoowah's annual National Indian Fiddlers Contest in 1973. Fiddle music is a longstanding art form among the tribe that has

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Craig, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, to Joe Mack, Terasita, Oklahoma, September 14, 2006, e-mail correspondence, private collection of J. Justin Castro, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Craig contributes to the Keetoowah press releases and knew Louis Griffin personally.

served as a popular form of entertainment, and its use as an important intercultural communication tool has been overlooked in Ozark, Oklahoma, and Cherokee studies. With a wide array of sources, including primary documents and interviews never before utilized, this narrative traces the history, and shows the importance of the practice to the Cherokee people.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in low populated areas of the southwest Ozarks, fiddlers played to please families and friends, much the same as their neighbors in Arkansas and Missouri. Until the 1970s the region was known for its traditional traits and according to geographer Leslie Hewes, the area of Cherokee residence most so.<sup>2</sup> The less progressive social nature of the Oklahoma hills would have made it a prime place for Vance Randolph and his contemporaries to collect folk songs when the practice was popular in the center of the Ozarks. Randolph specialized in old time music and was the most prolific folk culture writer and collector in the area during the twentieth century. From the 1920s throughout the 1950s, he gathered more songs from those hills than any other person; yet Randolph, as well as other scholars and song collectors, such as Ethel and Chauncey Moore, and John and Alan Lomax, mostly ignored the wealth of material and the importance of this type of music to the Cherokee.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leslie Hewes, "Indian Land in the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma," *Economic Geography* 18/4 (October 1942): 401-12; Leslie Hewes, "Cultural Fault in the Cherokee Country," *Economic Geography* 19/2 (April 1943): 136-42.

<sup>3</sup> Vance Randolph, comp & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol. 1, *British Ballads and Songs* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance Randolph, comp & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol. 2, *Songs of the South and West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance Randolph, comp & ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, Vol. 3, *Humorous and Play-Party Songs* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Vance Randolph, comp & ed., *Ozark Folk Songs*, Vol. 4, *Religious Songs and Other Items* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); John Avery Lomax, compiler. *Cowboy Songs And Other Frontier Ballads*, 3ed (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938); Alan Lomax, comp. *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (New York: Oak

A few authors have written briefly about the topic of “Cherokee fiddle” as a style variation. George O. Carney and Hugh W. Foley, Jr. wrote *Oklahoma Music Guide: Biographies, Big Hits, and Annual Events* (2003), in which they described an “elusive Cherokee fiddle whose minor key tunings exhibit a unique take on traditional Anglo fiddle music of the South.”<sup>4</sup> Another Oklahoma scholar, Rodger Harris, stated that the Cherokee were known for fiddle playing in Indian Territory, and that the phrase “Cherokee fiddle” was given to an original variation that tribal members had produced, and possibly adapted from Anglo styles of long bowing in the Ozarks.<sup>5</sup>

Some Cherokee citizens contend that “Cherokee fiddle” was used to describe tuning variations, but others argued no specific genre applied to the Cherokee, including the often noted fiddler Sam O’Field. The style is supposedly played by a handful of performers today and must in some way be associated with the tribe; however, its origins and use by the Cherokee is unclear. As for minor key tunings, they are probable because fiddling among this group has commonly been passed down by ear and used to accompany indigenous songs, but again, its exact connection to something specifically Cherokee is vague and needs more thorough investigation, if indeed such research is possible.

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Publications, 1967); Ethel Moore and Chauncey More, comp., *Ballads and Folk Songs of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); Guy Logdson, ed., “*The Whorehouse Bells were Ringing*”: *And Other Songs Cowboys Sing* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> George O. Carney, and Hugh W. Foley, Jr., *Oklahoma Music Guide: Biographies, Big Hits, and Annual Events* (Stillwater: New Forums Press, 2003), 105; also see, Hugh W. Foley, Jr., *Just For Kicks: Route 66 Music Guide* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 2005), 60. In 2004, Carney was called out for plagiarism in many of his works

<sup>5</sup> Rodger Harris, “It Was in This Way:” *The Influence of Oral Tradition on Life and Literature of Oklahomans*,” [http://www.okhistory.org/folk/it\\_was\\_in\\_this\\_way.html](http://www.okhistory.org/folk/it_was_in_this_way.html), accessed November 28, 2006.

The fiddle or violin, in application to this paper and most people's usage of the terms, refer to the same instrument. The difference is in stylization, the former "folk" and the latter "classical," though some fiddlers will flatten their bridge to play a double-stop with ease. The instrument's origin may come from an ancient Egyptian variant called the Kithara, but the fiddle took on a form similar to today's in late fourteenth or early fifteenth century Italy.<sup>6</sup> Looked down upon by many of the first Puritan settlers of the North American English colonies, European musicians braved scrutiny and brought the instrument across the Atlantic with them in the early 1600s.

In England, during the period following the humanities renaissance of the Elizabethan era, the "viol," along with predecessors of the contemporary mandolin and guitar, were common in musical concerts, theatre, and local pubs and shops.<sup>7</sup> Arriving in 1619, John Utie was the first documented fiddler in North America, partially paying for his passage from England by entertaining fellow emigrants. Utie would later become a large landowner, member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and accused of being "a fiddling rogue and rascal."<sup>8</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century, there are multiple references to the instruments use by colonial performers and in settlers' wills.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Holman, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), x.

<sup>7</sup> Irving Lowens, *Music in Early America*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Inc., 1964), 17-9; Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years*, vol. 1, *The Beginning to 1790* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), xv, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business*, 171.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Sewall, *Samuel Sewall's Diary*, ed. Mark Van Doren (Marcy-Masius: Publishers, 1927), 60, 74; Gilbert Chase, *America's music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, revised second ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 7-9; Raoul Francois Camus, "Military Music of Colonial Boston," in *Music in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630-1820*, vol. 1, *Music in Public Places: A Conference Held By the Colonial Society of Massachusetts May 17 and 18, 1973* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980): 75-80.

The beginning of this tradition among the Cherokee has not been pinned down to an exact time or place, but sometime before 1700, when European trade goods were becoming more common, is a good hypothesis for an introductory date.<sup>10</sup> The fiddle may have been obtained through early raids on white settlers or given to a tribal member by a friendly European American trader. However, and whenever, it was first acquired, traders and settlers carried the small instrument into the Cherokee Nation where they intermarried and worked with the native residents. Perhaps the exact origins will never be found, but what is relevant is that by the early 1800s, when John Norton wrote down his travels through the country, fiddlers entertained guests and residents, and had weaved their way into the fabric of the culture.



John Norton. Portrait by Thomas Phillips, 1817

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<sup>10</sup> Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 58.

Norton gave the first known written insight into the use and enjoyment of the instrument among the Cherokee during his visit to their nation in 1809-10. Norton was of Scottish and Cherokee ancestry, but adopted by the Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant, who by the end of the eighteenth century was a war chief for that tribe.<sup>11</sup> Also known as Teyoninhokarawen, Norton was one of the leaders of the Five Nations during the War of 1812, and a Major in the British army.<sup>12</sup> He journeyed from the Grand River to the Cherokee country in search of information about his father, who had been taken when a boy from Kuwoki or Keowee, one of the lower towns of the Cherokees, “when that village was burnt by the English.”<sup>13</sup> Norton was welcomed into the homes of many Cherokee residents and introduced to relatives who helped him understand more about his ancestor’s past. Along the way, Norton recorded accounts of cultural rituals, such as stick ball games, traditional dances, and fiddle playing.<sup>14</sup> His first account of the latter took place in what is now Alabama, where he was invited by relatives of one of his company “to a dance and entertainment at their house” on the Tennessee River.<sup>15</sup> The following is Norton’s account:

When night had drawn her sable covering over the face of nature and nothing interrupted the general silence, except the lively chit-chat of the friendly party, the Father of the family exhorted the young people to prepare: -- they began with one of their national dances on the green before the door, -- the Leader singing and dancing in a circle, and the

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<sup>11</sup>John Norton, *The Journal of John Norton, 1809-16*, eds. Carl F. Klink and James J. Talman (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1970), xiv-xxiii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, xx-cxxiv.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 41-2, 51-2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 38.

followers keeping chorus. Afterwards an English Dance was struck up in the house. They now begin to be very fond of these dances, but for want of skilful teachers, none have yet acquired any proficiency in the music; the fiddlers seem only to imitate their own simple notes, which however are sufficient to enable them to dance in cadence. The Entertainment continued with joy, sobriety and decorum, until near day, when all retired to rest.<sup>16</sup>

Possibly, this family picked up the genre from an American who was a tenant on their property or from an English officer that married into the family, but as Norton mentioned, the performers obtained little in the way of formal training, and perhaps they played in accordance to preference.<sup>17</sup> One account from the same period “of the method pursued by Colonel Benjamin Hawkins, under the authority of the government of the United States, to civilize certain tribes of savages...” contradicts Norton’s memoirs.<sup>18</sup> Hawkins reported that he used formal lessons in violin music and related dances to soften and refine Cherokee mannerisms.

Whether formally trained or not, that the music was conducted alongside Cherokee “national dances” and to inspire special guests throughout the night, suggests that fiddle playing and “English dancing” were important forms of pleasure and inter-cultural socialization to the people. In another of Norton’s accounts, he was again entertained with “English dance” by a prominent

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 41-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Original Communications,” *The American Monthly Magazine*, (September 1818), APS Online, accessed April 14, 2008.



Cherokee family, and a large company consisting “of a mixture of Cherokee, half Cherokees and Americans, their Tenants!”<sup>19</sup>

In both of Norton’s recollections, the festivities took place at the residence of relatively wealthy families with European Americans, including Scots, Irish, English, Germans, and French living relatively nearby, some as close friends and renters. With the addition of the other woodland tribes, this “frontier” bunch was a motley crew. Since the previous accounts mentioned more affluent families among the Cherokee, one could assume that this type of music was only an elitist pass time, but this was not the case. The fiddle was a commonplace tool of the people that provided entertainment in a rural society hosting guests from multiple cultures.

David Standingwater, who coordinated the Cherokee Nation Fiddling Contest in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 2004-6, believes the tribe might have acquired the fiddle from early missionaries, which is another practical assumption, since ministers often used singing and music in their services, and transcribed hymns into the Cherokee Language.<sup>20</sup> Hymns like “Amazing Grace” and “One Drop of Blood,” were sung along the Trail of Tears, and were probably accompanied by

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>20</sup> David Standingwater, interview by J. Justin Castro, November 28, 2006, private J. Justin Castro Collection (Oklahoma City: private collection), further noted as JCC; Edith Walker, interview by Jos. S. Buchanan, 1937, Indian Pioneer History Collection (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society) vol. 11 p.107, further noted as IPHC; Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 6, 135; Lon H. Eakes, “Rev. Amory Nelson Chamberlin, 1821-1894,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 12/1 (March 1934): 97-102; Sarah Thomas, “Dwight Mission: A Center for Cherokee Training and Teaching,” *NSU Undergraduate Research Day: A Celebration and Creative Study* (April 19, 2005): 24-30.

fiddles. These tunes are still common at Cherokee churches and among Oklahoma Ozark residents.<sup>21</sup>

Standingwater also mentioned that his ancestor brought a violin along the Trail of Tears and that his grandmother corrected his father on methods of playing.<sup>22</sup> Other prominent Cherokee musicians, such as Louis Griffin and Sam O' Field, claimed their relatives brought the instrument with them from the East, and Glove Morris recalled that in the late 1800s and early 1900s, "there were plenty of musicians in this part of the nation," and there were "many who played the old violin..."<sup>23</sup> Another Cherokee man from the same era told an interviewer that at a fiddle contest an "old Indian woman a hundred and four years old played the fiddle and won first money. She had to be helped to the platform but when she played, she could hardly keep her feet still."<sup>24</sup> Cherrie Adair Moore, a life long resident, emphasized that her father's side of the family, the Adairs, loved to bow the instrument and families such as the Duncans were known as "expert fiddle playing families."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J. Justin Castro, field recordings of Cherokee string band musicians, January 27, 2007, Langley, Oklahoma, unpublished CD and DVD recordings, JCC; Walker Calhoun, *Where the Ravens Roost: Traditional Songs of Walker Calhoun*, tape recording, Cullowhee, North Carolina: Mountain Heritage Center, Western Carolina University, 1991; Melinda Miles, Kathy Thomas, and Rosella Bosin, interview with Cynthia Taylor, Oklahoma City, OK, April 18, 1995, Oklahoma State Arts Council Collection (Oklahoma: Oklahoma Historical Society), Box 4, Miles, Melinda et al., file, further stated as OSACC.

<sup>22</sup> Standingwater, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Sam O'Field, interview by J. Justin Castro, Claremore, OK, December 04, 2006, JCC; S. E. Ruckman, "More than Tradition: Fiddle is Cherokee Culture," *The Tulsa World*, June 19, 2006: A1; Glove Morris, interview by W. I. B., August 18, 1937, IPHC, vol. 37: 261.

<sup>24</sup> William Taylor, interviewed by Arlene D. McDowell, April 12, 1937, IPHC vol. 10: 349.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Garret, "Music on the Indian Territory Frontier," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 33/3 (1955): 347.



David Standingwater, Langley, Oklahoma  
2007.

In northeastern Oklahoma, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the fiddle was similar to the guitar of the late 1900s—not in sound but in popularity. The instrument was the most widely danced to, and the foundation of the majority of string bands. These groups were very popular.<sup>26</sup> There are numerous accounts of Cherokee fiddling shortly after the tribe’s arrival to Indian Territory. In a 1937 essay, James R. Carselowey wrote a wonderful description of the tradition that included the playing and dancing of Chief Thomas M. Buffington.

Back in the early days there was not much amusement in the country, and the natives had to create their own amusements. In our neighborhood, a good old time country dance was given once every week or two, and all the neighbors attended. It was at these country dances that Chief Buffington distinguished himself as

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<sup>26</sup> George O. Carney, “North American Music: A Historical Geographic Overview,” in *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, third edition, ed. George. O. Carney (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994), 14.

a “jig” dancer. He could knock any kind of step that any other man did, and if anyone came along with a new step, he was the first to learn it. He was a “good old time fiddler,” and played the fiddle for the other folks to dance, when he, himself was not on the set. After I grew up and learned how to play I went to my uncle’s home very frequently and played an accompaniment on a guitar for him.<sup>27</sup>

Being the son of one of the original Cherokee immigrants into Indian Territory, Buffington’s talents suggest that the “Old Settlers” may have been accomplished fiddle players before the arrival of the rest of the future Cherokee Nation’s population. The account also further reveals the Scots and Scots-Irish influence on forms of dancing. Another revealing excerpt was from the journal of Captain John Stuart published in a June 1837 *Arkansas Gazette* and reproduced by historian Grant Foreman.

Stuart hailed from Kentucky and served in the United States military from 1814 until his death at Fort Wayne, along the western Arkansas border on the Illinois River, in 1838.<sup>28</sup> Most of his time in the service was spent in Indian Territory at Fort Gibson, Fort Smith, and Fort Coffee.<sup>29</sup> During this period, Stuart became interested in the customs of the Indian inhabitants that surrounded his posts and created a detailed log about their life ways. The passage of most interest stated, “The Cherokee...are fond of amusements, and are naturally gay in their dispositions....The social amusement of the Cherokees consists principally in

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<sup>27</sup> James R. Carselowey, “Thomas M. Buffington,” *IPHC* vol. 79: 116-8.

<sup>28</sup> Grant Foreman, “Captain John Stuart’s Sketch of the Indian,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11/1 (March 1933): 667.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

dancing to the music of the violin, of which they are very fond, and frequently practice.”<sup>30</sup>

Other recorded descriptions have value in establishing the instrument as a common and valued artifact. C.W. Turner, who wrote about his life among the Muscogee (Creek), described the following scene after he had recently entered Indian Territory in 1870:

Aunt Manervia Thorton, a Cherokee woman, was the proprietor of the stage stand on Little Sallisaw Creek at which place we arrived by suppertime...It was a beautiful chilly November night; there were some campers across the creek in the bottom. They had a fiddle. Uncle John heard it and stepping out on the porch, commenced singing and he could sing like a lark; the fiddler put up his fiddle and his bow.<sup>31</sup>

The instrumentalist Turner heard may or may not have been Cherokee, but it was a strong possibility because of the location and population ratio in Indian Territory during that period. Even if not, the statement further establishes that fiddle playing was a prominent cultural practice in the region—the fiddle was a social magnet, no matter ethnicity. In an 1844 *Cherokee Advocate* column celebrating music, a saying was quoted that helps sum up this opinion: the “Old, frail wrecks of humanity, whose dancing days have long since passed away, will beat time with their staff to the sound of the fiddle.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 668-9.

<sup>31</sup> C.W. Turner, “Events Among the Muskogees During Sixty Years,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10/1 (March 1932): 21.

<sup>32</sup> “Music,” *The Cherokee Advocate*, September 26, 1844: 2.

The Cherokee higher education system also promoted music, though more often in a classical tradition than folk. Guitar, mandolin, piano, and fiddle were popular instruments among students. After school, young men wooed their female counterparts by playing fiddle and singing at the bottom of their dorms in hopes of receiving flowers from their muses.<sup>33</sup> Large extravagant celebrations like the 1885 May Day festival, exhibited locals playing music on the fiddle as well as other stringed instruments.<sup>34</sup>



Seminary Hall, Northeastern State University, 2006.  
Originally the Cherokee Female Seminary.

In Marion Thede's *The Fiddle Book*, she mentioned that in eastern Oklahoma, "fiddles accompanied by guitar, banjo, or mandolin, played for special Indian and non-Indian dances," and that "Hoedown type fiddle tunes were

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<sup>33</sup> Mabel Hovdahl Alexander, *Via Oklahoma: And Still the Music Flows* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Society, 2004), 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, May 22, 1885: 2.

enjoyed during intermissions.”<sup>35</sup> During the last half of the nineteenth century, a woman of German and Cherokee descent attended school at Fort Gibson and the Cherokee female seminary and recalled commonly going to dances on Fridays.<sup>36</sup> A Cherokee man who remembered that both fairs and dances were regular events at the Fort Gibson military post, as well as in private stores like one owned by a member of the Bushyhead family.<sup>37</sup> He also recalled that a woman by the name of Sarah Cody ran a famous “eating house and dance hall and sold whiskey.”<sup>38</sup>

The commonality of these practices, among all ethnicities or “races,” in the Cherokee Nation propelled the popularity of fiddling. Most European Americans did not endure the hardship of a forced removal from their homeland, but many whites that neighbored the Cherokee in the East moved adjacent to them in the West, if they did not already live among them, continuing their strong inclination to stringed instruments and dances.<sup>39</sup> African American slaves and citizens made up a large minority within the Cherokee Nation and already possessed strong musical and oral traditions, including fiddle playing. Since the tribe had already accepted the art form, the close approximation of such cultural traits helped propel the music and led to interaction between different ethnic parties. The following paragraphs give examples of some of the variation and social connections created by this musical form.

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<sup>35</sup> Marion Thede, *The Fiddle Book* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), 141, 159.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Mose Anspach, interviewed by unknown person, Muskogee, OK IPHC vol. 1: 135-9.

<sup>37</sup> John M. Adair, interview by, Grant Foreman, February 2, 1937, Muskogee, OK, IPHC vol. 1: 39-43.

<sup>38</sup> John M. Adair, interview.

<sup>39</sup> George O. Carney, “Country Music and the South: A Cultural Geography Perspective, ed., *The Sounds of People & Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, 3ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 117.

In 1937, Andrew L. Rogers, a Cherokee string musician recalled that when he was younger if someone needed help with their property there would be “a-working,” and “all able bodied men for miles around came.”<sup>40</sup> Afterwards, Rogers remembered that the “occasion always closed with a dance [provided by neighborhood fiddlers] and supper at night.”<sup>41</sup> Another man by the name of Sam Sanders of Proctor, Oklahoma, stated that in the late 1800s, one of the Cherokee dances was the “Reel Dance, which was similar to the Square Dance.”<sup>42</sup>

Black slaves and freedmen participated regularly in local dances, nights of music around a warm stove or campfire, and celebrations along the sunny creeks of the Cherokee Nation. African Americans in the Oklahoma Ozarks before and after the Civil War practiced many musical forms—fiddle playing being one of the favored instruments. During the Civil War, Dennis Vann, a black man who may have slaved under Joseph Vann in Webber’s Falls, or a nearby relative, left his former “owner’s” estate and left to the Union camps along side other former slaves and anti-slavery Cherokee.<sup>43</sup> He brought with him his most cherished instrument—his fiddle. He bowed its strings at the army camp, in his travels, and when he later returned to Indian Territory near his former “master’s” plantation.<sup>44</sup> Trade with Arkansas, interaction with soldiers at nearby Fort Gibson, and ethnic variation among residents, all provided occasions where new songs and styles

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew L. Rogers, interview by Elle Robinson in Ft. Gibson, OK, July 15, 1937, IPHC vol. 98: 84-5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>42</sup> Sam Sanders, interviewed by Hummingbird and Bigby, Oct. 20, 1937, Proctor, OK, IPHC vol. 103: 154.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis Vann, interview by Reuben Partridge, March 23, 1937, IPHC vol. 11: 65-9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



were learned and bonds created—music was an amazing and enjoyed tool for inter-socialization.

The interaction between whites of the Appalachians and Ozarks with the Cherokee is also shown by the abundant use of references in American music. In 1787, “Death Song of a Cherokee” was a popular song published in Great Britain and was probably taken from an American folk tune. Between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries many songs that included fiddle were written, such as “Cherokee Rose,” “Cherokee Shuffle,” “Cherokee Gentleman,” “Cherokee Waltz,” “Cherokee Breakdown,” “Cherokee Maiden,” and “Cherokee Fiddle.”<sup>45</sup> The influence that the Cherokees have had on fiddle music goes far beyond affecting the names of songs though; tribe members in the twentieth century were some of the most popular players to spread their talent across the United States and wrote their own songs into the “old time” genre.

Manco Sneed and his daughters Mary and Martha were some of the first performers on the Grand Ole Opry and influenced such greats as John Hartford.<sup>46</sup> Travis Inman, a more recent award winning fiddle player, came from a family steeped in the fiddling tradition, such as John “Doc” Swearingen and Kate Swearingen; the latter was the Oklahoma state champion in the 1920s.<sup>47</sup> Dave Gaylord and Monte Gaylord are two of the contemporary favorites among tribal

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<sup>45</sup> Austin E. Fife and Francesca Redden, “The Pseudo-Indian Folksongs of the Anglo-American and French-Canadian,” *Journal of American Folklore* 67/275 (July-September 1954): 239-51; Folk Music Index Chea to Chil, [ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org), formerly [sunsite.unc.edu](http://sunsite.unc.edu), formerly [metalab.unc.edu](http://metalab.unc.edu), Chapel Hill, North Carolina, U.S.A., <http://www.ibiblio.org/folkindex/c05.htm>, accessed June 05, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Eugene Chadbourne, “Manco Sneed Biography,” *All Music Guide*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/manco-sneed>, accessed November 25, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> “Travis Inman,” Old Time Music Heritage Festival 2006 Performers, <http://www.oldtimemusic.org/travis-inman.html>, accessed Nov. 25, 2006.

members and country fans alike. The former played with Alan Jackson and the latter with Clint Black in the 1990s, and both mentored one of the youngest Cherokee fiddlers to make an influence on the American music scene—Bubba Hopkins of Spavinaw, Oklahoma.<sup>48</sup>

The 2005 Oklahoma State Champion, a two-time Oklahoma Junior State Fiddle Champion, Hopkins, only eighteen years old when this essay was written, also “placed in contests throughout Oklahoma, Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas, Tennessee, Illinois, and Idaho.”<sup>49</sup> He performed at a tribute to Bob Wills on the floor of the House of Representatives at the Oklahoma State Capitol and with the Gaylord Brothers and famed fiddlest Jana Jae.<sup>50</sup> Sam O’Field, who knows classical violin as well as fiddle, played in a well-known Western Swing band with Leon McAuliffe and is known in his own right for his unique style.<sup>51</sup>

Most of the songs played today by Cherokee fiddlers are common to the majority of the Ozarks, like “Arkansas Traveler,” “Danny Boy,” “Orange Blossom Special,” “Ragtime Annie,” “Faded Love,” and “Maiden’s Prayer.” Western swing and bluegrass have both influenced Cherokee fiddling, and performers such as Bob Wills, Bill Monroe, and Merle Travis are among a handful of popular performers emulated by vernacular musicians. Some songs, like “The Tahlequah Stomp,” sound like traditional tunes, but are relatively new

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<sup>48</sup> Standingwater interview; Bubba Hopkins, “My Bio,” Hopkins Music website, <http://www.hopkinsmusic.net/about.html>, accessed Dec. 27, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Hopkins, “My Bio.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> O’Field, interview.

and written by Cherokees.<sup>52</sup> Artists write numerous songs of their own and commonly mix them in with older pieces at social gatherings.

The popularity of fiddle playing never waned over the years, though other instruments have gained in prominence, and the Western Cherokee and the Keetoowah Band of the Cherokee continue to have annual contests. The former holds their competition during weekend festivities every September for the Cherokee National Holiday, and has been a part of the event off and on for the past forty years. Although most of the entries come from northeastern Oklahoma, some tribal members travel from different places across the United States to show the skills they have kept alive and improved upon. People often come to this annual celebration to immerse themselves in their ancestral culture, and with that in mind, shows how much the tradition is regarded by the people.<sup>53</sup>

The Keetoowah's National Indian Fiddlers Contest is important for many of the same reasons, and for the past thirty-three years, elders like Griffin helped to teach and promote the instrument to younger generations.<sup>54</sup> In February 2007, a group of Cherokee fiddle players, including Sam O'Field, Louis Mouse and Johnny Church, came together at the Langley town hall to celebrate and document the passion and heritage of their art, and emphasized the prominent role the instrument played in their lives. Local musicians believe these events are important for insuring the continuation of a music that has been so commonly

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<sup>52</sup> Castro, field recordings of Cherokee string band musicians.

<sup>53</sup> April Stone, "Cherokees Celebrate Living Culture," *Tahlequah Daily Press*, September 5, 2005, 3A

<sup>54</sup> Eddie Glenn, "UKB Hitting High Note with Holiday," *Tahlequah Daily Press*, October 7, 2004, 1A.

played in the region, especially with the increase of more technological forms of entertainment.<sup>55</sup>

The Cherokee have many influential artists, from Wayne Newton to Litefoot, in music as varied as powwows, stomp dances, rock n' roll, blues, and hip hop.<sup>56</sup> The fiddle tradition stands apart from these in that the art has been practiced for much longer, and is more common, than other genres adapted from non-Indian cultures. The survival and promotion of the music has been a part of Cherokee life ways for well over two hundred years and has been important in inter-cultural relations.

Much could be done in regards to research on this topic. Songs and fiddle styles from the tribe's heritage could be compared to other cultures in order to find variations and influences, especially among African Americans, Muscogees, and Choctaws. More interviews need to be conducted in tracing this history, and the role of music as a tool to help ease relationships between families and ethnicities. Lastly, and importantly, because of its long-standing importance, fiddling deserves to be placed among the Cherokee's other well-documented rituals in Ozark, Cherokee, and Oklahoma history and folk studies. The last of the Cherokee Griffin fiddlers died with Louis in 2005, but their family's legacy remains with the multitudes of those they taught and continue to play.

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<sup>55</sup> Eddie Glenn, "Musicians Ready for 'Pickin' in the Park," *Tahlequah Daily Press*, September 26, 2004, 2A.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Simmons, "Litefoot Begins Reach the Rez Tour," *Cherokee Phoenix and Indian Advocate*, (August 2005): 12; "Cherokees Give Kudos to Vegas," *The Current* 1/3 (October 2004): 9.

## Conclusion

In the Cherokee Ozarks, music, song, and dance exemplified adaptations of Cherokees to new life ways, while also exhibiting the conservation of their cultural identity. Music was functional as well as entertaining; it brought people together within a community and between societies. Today when walking the streets of Oklahoma Ozark towns like Tahlequah, Stillwell, Locust Grove, and Vian, the music most often heard comes from the radios of cars and trucks. Rap, hip-hop, country, rock n' roll, and heavy metal all have their consumers. Yet the songs and dances of the nineteenth century did not completely die out.

Many locals still attend stomp dances, fiddling events, house raising hoedowns, downtown jubilees, and rural churches with old hymnbooks. Pickers and gridders still stomp their feet to stringed instruments on old worn out porches. The combination of older traditional music styles with popular influences is an interesting aspect of Cherokee Ozark culture today and has led to a new era of performers and artistic expression. An essay on the syncretisms of folk and pop in the digital age would make a fascinating read and would be a worthwhile endeavor.

At the onset of writing this thesis, my intention was to write a complete and comprehensive study of music in the Oklahoma Ozarks. As is the case of many endeavors by eager graduate students, I bit off more than I could chew (at least within the restraints of a masters thesis). Another hundred pages could easily be written on this topic. Other ideas for chapters included comparing songs in the

Cherokee Nation with neighboring Arkansas and other Indian realms, the influence of the cattle business, and Fort Gibson culture.

Hopefully, this work contributes to the fields of cultural and Oklahoma history a better perspective on the arts within the Cherokee nation, and the role that song and dance played as entertainment, a cultural identifier, and as an adaptation and communication tool. Music helped defeat the loneliness of frontier life, was used to celebrate the construction of homes, and enhanced religious praise and worship. Song and dance brought people together for concerts, at picnics, celebrations, and feasts. When societal conditions were at their worst, music was there to uplift the hearts of Cherokee Nation inhabitants.

Music reflects interaction between people and can be used to exhibit adaptations. This can be seen in the progressive or newer musical attributes within a group. On the other end of the spectrum, conservative values and community identity are often displayed in traditional or indigenous music. In the nineteenth century Oklahoma Ozarks, conservative Cherokees maintained their traditional beliefs and values, and this sect of the society became the keepers and promoters of indigenous songs and dances. The majority however, was becoming apart of a racially and ethnically mixed society, as exhibited by musical practices such as hymn singing and fiddle playing. These arts were adopted from white members of local communities, who in turn acquired some Cherokee attributes and beliefs.

The adaptation of African Americans to Cherokee and European American lifeways was even greater, since they were cut off from their indigenous culture by a vast geographic expanse. Some aspects of West African

culture, such as bone rattling and shouts, managed to survive the black diaspora into America and the Cherokee Nation through close-knit slave and freedmen communities. In turn, African instruments and performance influenced the greater American culture. These cultural attributes are still evident today in the spirituals of the black church, American popular music, and use of the banjo.

The 1800s began with an emotional and turbulent cultural mixing in the Oklahoma Ozarks that has continued with new immigrants to this day. Although this admixture began with the earliest encounters between Cherokees, Europeans, and Africans, the nineteenth century endured the most dramatic societal integration. The music played in the Oklahoma Ozarks was one of the most commonly shared attributes that created bonds within the new social amalgamation, and in doing so, displayed this great cultural collision.

Music, sadly, can rarely, if ever, heal all the differences between members within a society or amid different cultures. Music does, however, bring people together, and besides being amusing, is often used in settings of cultural sharing and cooperation. Musicians themselves are usually on the forefront of racial and cultural reciprocity, since skin color and beliefs are of less importance than the music itself. In understanding the music, musicians often begin to understand the culture. The historian too, can learn much about culture from the songs people sing, the strings people pluck, and the dances people share.

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