

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Squire's Court in Asheville:  
the Search for Authenticity at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in History

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Asheville, North Carolina  
23 April 2009

At one of the annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festivals in Asheville, North Carolina, festival founder and organizer Bascom Lamar Lunsford threw a New Yorker, Roger Sprung, off of his festival stage. In the 1950s, Roger Sprung had attended the festival wearing blue jeans and a checkered shirt, an outfit associated with mountain stereotypes, such as people who made their livelihood by tilling the soil. However Sprung was a Northerner and member of the middle-class. Lunsford is thought to have believed that Sprung should have dressed better. Lunsford was a man who resented it when outsiders came to his festival dressed up as mountain caricatures.<sup>1</sup> Sprung thought it was his dress that had caused Lunsford to act so rashly.<sup>2</sup> This story was recorded in Loyal Jones biography on Lunsford, *Minstrel of the Appalachian: the Story Bascom Lamar Lunsford*. However, Jones also wrote that Sprung often attended the festival and would join various bands in order to be allowed on stage since Lunsford wanted to primarily showcase the talents of people from western North Carolina. Sprung may have also been removed from the stage by Lunsford due to his political leanings.<sup>3</sup>

Another Mountain Dance and Folk Festival attendee, Pete Seeger, was also rumored to have been thrown off of the festival stage during one of the annual events for either wearing overalls or blue jeans because he came from a similar background as Sprung. This story was published in *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in the Mountain South*, by Richard D. Starnes.<sup>4</sup> Seeger was watched closely the House Un-American Activities Committee for his political activities at the time he was asked to leave.<sup>5</sup> Seeger never performed at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, but occasionally attended as a member of the audience. Seeger was simply asked to leave by Lunsford, who did not want any political controversy associated with his festival.<sup>6</sup> There are numerous stories about Lunsford's disdain for mountaineer and hillbilly stereotypes within the Mountain Dance and Folk

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1 Loyal Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians; the Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1984), 64, 65.

2 Roger Sprung, quoted in Jones, 65.

3 Jones, 64.

4 Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: the University of Alabama Press, 2005), 158.

5 Jones, 64

6 Jerry Israel, telephone interview, April 14, 2009.

Festival, but incidents such as these contribute to the stereotypes by perpetuating a myth with a little bit of truth and differing degrees of fiction.

. The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival contained within it many traditions while discouraging mountain stereotypes. Lunsford and others who helped organize and produce the festival, worked hard to preserve what they viewed as folk music and associated traditions in a quest for authenticity. Throughout the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival's history, discouragement against the infiltration of hillbilly and mountaineer stereotypes into the annual event was constantly reinforced. However, by promoting an emphasis on tradition, the festival also lent credibility to other mountain stereotypes in the various attempts by festival organizers to present an authentic representation of folk culture in western North Carolina.

The best description of the popular image of the hillbilly stereotype comes from “A Judicious Combination of Incident and Psychology: John Fox Jr. and the Southern Mountaineer Motif” by Appalachian apologist Darlene Wilson. Wilson described the typical hillbilly family portrayed in popular culture as:

...a buxom, scantily dressed she-cat and her lazy male relatives clutching either a Revolutionary War-era firearm, a jug of moonshine, a flea-covered hound, or any combination of the three---that would, along with the banjo and outhouse adorned with the quarter-moon...<sup>7</sup>

This was exactly the stereotype that the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival's organizers wanted to avoid encouraging. The discouragement of the stereotypes appears to have been repeatedly reinforced throughout most of the festival's history.

The popularization of mountaineer images in relationship to folk music began long before the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was founded. In his controversial book, *All that is Native and Fine:*

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<sup>7</sup> Darlene Wilson, “A Judicious Combination of Incident and Psychology: John Fox Jr. and the Southern Mountaineer Motif,” in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, eds. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Kentucky: the University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 99.

*the Politics of Culture in an American Region*, David E. Whisnant took a broad survey of different perceptions of the inhabitants of Appalachia throughout most of the twentieth century. He acknowledged the importance of Cecil Sharp's and Olive Dame Campbell's reinforcement of this image. When they conducted the task of collecting English ballads from the Appalachian region, Sharp and Campbell let their previously held assumptions about the region guide their work. Campbell knew that others promoted the mountaineer as a poor person who spoke and dressed in such a way as to cause most outsiders to scorn mountaineers for their lack of sophistication. Sharp had been told many rumors about the region, and had a preconceived image of the mountaineer as a person that was a free-spirited, sometimes violent, ignorant, white person. Although most of these images were not entirely false, the elements of truth within in them were greatly exaggerated. Sharp claimed that the culture in western North Carolina was not inferior his own culture in England because it had a rich musical heritage.<sup>8</sup> According to Appalachian apologist Jeff Biggers, author of *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*, Sharp had an image of what Appalachia was and ignored any evidence that was contrary to his original hypothesis, preferring instead to continue to perpetuate myths concerning the region.<sup>9</sup>

Many books on Anglo-Saxon folk music in America deal with the image of the hillbilly in country, bluegrass, and traditional music. The image of the hillbilly and mountaineer are used interchangeably with those musical genres. Ted Olson and Ajay Karil have examined the origins of the hillbilly stereotype and its relation to folk music and concluded that “hillbilly” was a term primarily used to market commercial music. Radio stations, recording companies, and other businesses related to the music industry were very successful at promoting the image of the hillbilly and the hillbilly's

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8 David E. Whisnant, *All that is Native and Fine: the Politics of Culture in an American Region*, The Fred W. Series in Southern Studies (Chapel: the University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 105, 109, 111, 114, 117.

9 Jeff Biggers, *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America* (United States: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2006), 12, 13.

associated music.<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Lange drew a similar conclusion in *Smile When You Call Me Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954*.<sup>11</sup> Lunsford was one of the few music promoters who tried to avoid the hillbilly stereotype in his festival.

. There is in the mountaineer, a folk hero of a perceived past, and many people wanted to share that heritage. Robert Paul Sessions defended the Appalachian people in “Appalachian and Non-Appalachians: the Common Bond”. He noted that while stereotypes of the region continued to persist, the roots of hillbilly and mountaineer caricatures derived from the fact that outsiders needed the mountaineer as a historical reference point. People wanted to be able to identify with the best qualities that the popular perception of the mountaineer provided, such as communal ties and stability.<sup>12</sup> Reverend Jack Weller, who did field research while he was a missionary in Kentucky, agreed in *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia*.<sup>13</sup> Weller referred repeatedly to mountaineers, but never used the term “hillbilly” when he described the people he studied and tried to lead spiritually.

There have been many books written on folk traditions, but their focus is often so broad that researchers have to carefully examine each page to find relevant material. Ted Olson's *Blue Ridge Folklife*<sup>14</sup> covered all perceived folk traditions along the Blue Ridge Mountains, the mountain range within Appalachia where Asheville is located. Olson wrote extensively about crafts, but very little on music. Michael Ann Williams' *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*<sup>15</sup> and John. B. Rehder, in *Appalachian*

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10 Ted Olson and Ajay Karil, “Appalachian Music: Examining Popular Assumptions,” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: an Introduction to the Region*, eds. Grace Torey Edward, Joann Aust Asbury, Ricky S. Cox (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 166, 168.

11 Jeffrey Lange, *Smile When You Call Me Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens, Georgia: the University of Georgia Press, 2004).

12 Robert Paul Sessions, “Appalachians and Non-Appalachian: The Common Bond,” in *An Appalachian Symposium*, ed. J. W. Williamson (Boone: Appalachian State University Press, 1977), 92-96.

13 Reverend Jack Weller, *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), v. 33.

14 Ted Olson, *Blue Ridge Folklife*, Folklife in the South Series (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998).

15 Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, Folklife in the South Series, ed. William Lynwood Montell, (Jackson Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1995) 26.

*Folkways*<sup>16</sup> were equally broad. Norm Cohen's *Folk Music: a Regional Exploration*<sup>17</sup> and Ronald D. Cohen's *Folk Music: the Basics*<sup>18</sup> are two examples that focused on the folk music in America. Norm Cohen focused on the ballads and music of several large regions within the United States and how the music, even when the songs are similar, vary by region. Ronald D. Cohen's book covered the previous hundred years of folk music. None of these books focused specifically on the folk music of western North Carolina or even the broader region of Appalachia, even though large sections of those books focused on the mountains of the eastern United States. None of these books focused on the region's inhabitants in association with their music or popular stereotypes.

In order to understand why the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival is so important, it is necessary to understand the festival's founder, Bascom Lamar Lunsford. Lunsford was a ballad collector, fiddle player, song collector, festival organizer, and lawyer who retired from practice at a very young age in order to pursue his passion for folk music and specifically to work on the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival all year.<sup>19</sup> Bill Malone, author of several essays and books on country, bluegrass, and folk music, included Lunsford among the commercial hillbilly artists in *Country Music, U. S. A.*<sup>20</sup> Anthony Harkins in *Hillbilly: an American Icon*, acknowledged that Lunsford would occasionally give a nod to stereotypes if Lunsford felt that he could benefit by picking and choosing which aspects of mountain stereotypes he could use to his advantage, such as composing a song dedicated to moonshine.<sup>21</sup> Lunsford did not seem to entirely conform to the mountaineer stereotype. For example, Lunsford received a law degree, which was not at all unusual considering the background of his middle-class family.<sup>22</sup> Author and English Professor Cecilia Conway, in *African Banjo Echoes in*

16 John B. Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

17 Norm Cohen, *Folk Music: a Regional Exploration*, Greenwood Guides to American Roots Music (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005).

18 Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music: the Basics* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006).

19 Loyal Jones, "75<sup>th</sup> Mountain Dance and Folk Festival," speech transcript, 2002, Oral Histories/Quotes folder, Box 19, MDFF.

20 Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U. S. A.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. (Austin: University of Texas, 2002).

21 Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: a Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xii, 91.

22 Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, *Folklife in the South Series*, ed. William Lynwood Montell,

*Appalachia: a Study in Folk Traditions*, appeared resentful of Lunsford in this respect. When she wrote about Lunsford, it appears that she believed that someone from the middle-class cannot accurately preserve folk life because it is something that they cannot fully understand or appreciate. Conway theorized that the richest folk music originated from the lower classes, such as poor people or minorities, because the stories found in their music were often narratives about struggles and hardships. Conway believed that folk music originated from the people and later attracted the interest of those she assumed to have led lives not filled with poverty, misery, depravity, and oppression.<sup>23</sup>

Lunsford was a cultural ambassador from western North Carolina who tried to educate and instill an interest in the musical traditions of the western mountain region of western North Carolina. He wrote songs and gave performances. Lunsford also traveled extensively through the eastern United States. He was often invited to various universities and festivals. He gave lectures throughout the nation. Lunsford also performed at and organized festivals other than the one in Asheville.<sup>24</sup> Passing his knowledge on was only one way Lunsford hoped to preserve his Appalachian heritage.

The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was formed by Bascom Lamar Lunsford primarily to preserve folk customs and traditions, as well as the authenticity of those customs and traditions found within Western North Carolina. In *Asheville: Mountain Majesty*, local writer Lou Harshaw wrote that the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was created by Lunsford to preserve traditional mountain music and associated dancing.<sup>25</sup> Michael Lorant, author of “The Asheville Mountain Dance and Folk Festival,” believed that Lunsford may have thought that image of the hillbilly emasculated the mountain man and that the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was created to eliminate the popular

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(Jackson Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1995 26.

23 Cecilia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: a Study in Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 275, 276.

24 Loyal Jones, *Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Introduction Proposal*, addressed to Leeza Sutton, February 18, 2002, p. 6, MDFF 2002 Notebook, 75<sup>th</sup> MDFF Box.

25 Lou Harshaw, *Asheville: Mountain Majesty* (Fairview, NC: Bright Mountain Books, 2007), 244.

hillbilly stereotype within western North Carolina.<sup>26</sup>

The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival contained several traditions within its long history. Under Lunsford's direction, the festival began “along about sundown”, programs were not present, and post-festival jam sessions continued into the early hours of the morning. Professional performers were usually not invited as their participation threatened the authenticity of the event. Performers were expected to learn the traditions of folk culture by having been immersed in it all of their lives. The banning of hillbilly and mountain caricatures was also a tradition of the festival. Some of these traditions disappeared during Lunsford's lifetime, others discontinued after his death, while others remained, such as the quest for authenticity within the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.

Asheville at the time that Lunsford produced the first Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was a culturally diverse area. The image of the hillbilly was associated with the area as were events entirely unrelated to popular perceptions about Appalachia. The school mascot for the Lee Edwards High school in Asheville was a hillbilly.<sup>27</sup> Later depictions of the Lee Edwards mascot showed him equipped with a rifle, a whiskey jug, and a corncob pipe.<sup>28</sup> However, nearly thirty years prior to the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, one of the earliest music festivals that took place in Asheville featured classical music. People who attended the event in 1900 were able to listen to selections from Ludwig Von Beethoven and Richard Wagner.<sup>29</sup> The image of the hillbilly in association with the Asheville area and the music featured at the 1900 music festival were two very different images found within the same city. Bascom Lamar Lunsford disliked the image of the hillbilly, but he needed a way to preserve the music of the region and founded what became the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.

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26 Michael Lorant, “The Asheville Mountain Dance and Folk Festival,” *The English Speaking World*, March-April 1949, 212.

27 *The Hillbilly*, June 1919.

28 *The Hillbilly* cover, illustration of the school's mascot, 1949.

29 *First Annual Festival: Asheville Music Association*, program, (Asheville: The Asheville Music Association, 1900), Pack Memorial Library, North Carolina Collection.



The first Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in 1928 took on Asheville's Pack Square.<sup>30</sup> There were five dance teams and the event was promoted as being "old-timey".<sup>31</sup> Many of the dances and accompanying music were thought to date to the time of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Some dances, such as the Virginia Reel, were thought to be newer, but were still considered to be relatively old when compared to the length of time between the evolution of those dances and the production of the first Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.<sup>32</sup> According to a local journalist who covered the first festival, "It was a regular backwoods entertainment, joyful but none the less dignified." Prizes were awarded to the best of the five dance teams. The bands which won prizes were at that time called "orchestras." The bands and the teams that played for them were apparently in competition at the same time, but in different categories.<sup>33</sup> The journalists who covered the first festival appeared to promote the authenticity of the first folk festival. However, they also defended it as something that was traditional and not something that should be avoided as undesirable because it was sophisticated in its own way.

A tradition of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was that no one dressed as a hillbilly caricature was encouraged to participate in the competitions, but many people who seemed to fit the hillbilly stereotype often showed up at the annual festival. Newspaper columnist May Kennedy McCord of Missouri planned to attend the 1936 festival. Her nickname was "Queen of the Hillbillies." It appears that McCord was expected to attend the festival as a member of the audience and in connection with her work as a journalist.<sup>34</sup> However, there was no coverage in the local newspapers that indicated that McCord actually attended. The Farmers' Ball dance team performed at the

30 W. J. Davis, "Mountain Dancers Show Old-Time Steps to 5,000: Leicester Group is First on Pack Square," in unknown newspaper, next to an arrow and "1928" written in Lunsford's own hand, p.39, Lunsford Scrapbook, The Appalachian Reading Room, Renfro Library, Mars Hill North Carolina.

31 "A Big Night in the Festival Program," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, June 6, 1928, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

32 "Mountain Songs, Dances Will Draw Visitors Here: McCormick Field Will be Scene of Program July 29 and 30," *The Asheville Citizen*, July 27, 1930, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

33 "Dancing Club of Leicester Wins Contest: Rector's String Band First Among Orchestras in Folk Festival," *The Asheville Times*, June 6, 1928, p.5, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

34 "7 States Represented at Event Here: Program to be Staged at McCormick Field July 23, 24, 25," *The Asheville Citizen*, June 28, 1936, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

nineteenth Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in 1946. The male members of that team dressed in overalls.<sup>35</sup> In 1949, an all female chorus line, The Hillbilly Champions, performed song and dance numbers in cowgirl outfits.<sup>36</sup> While always discouraging mountaineer caricatures and people dressed in western wear, Lunsford was not always able to keep people out of his festival who tried to fit the hillbilly stereotype.

Although the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival focused on traditions presumed to have originated in England, performers did not have to be of primarily Anglo-Saxon descent. The Great Smokies dance team was composed of Cherokee Indians and were one of the two consistently best teams at the festival, the other being the Soco Gap dance team from the same general area in western North Carolina. Lunsford was asked to bring participants to the first National Folk Festival in St. Louis, Missouri in 1936, an event he co-organized. The participants Lunsford picked to represent western North Carolina were the Great Smokies and Soco Gap teams that he worked with at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.<sup>37</sup> At the 1942 Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, an African-American boy, Billy Smith, won the honor of being the best solo dancer for his tap dancing performance. Smith had also performed at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival the previous year.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival's history, performers were expected to be amateurs, participating competitively in areas of traditional dancing and music that they had learned by being immersed in the culture of the Appalachian Mountains. That did not always prevent highly trained performers from entering the competition. The winners of the square dance competition at the 1942 festival were the Plantation team. They were very skilled and performed their dance steps in

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35 Judy Glen Jr. "Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Opens Here," photo with caption in *The Asheville Citizen*, August 8, 1942, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

36 "Dayton's Team 1<sup>st</sup> at Fete," *The Asheville Citizen*, September 24, 1949, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

37 "Lunsford Say Two Groups to Attend Event: Cherokee and Soco Gap Teams Accept Invitation," *The Asheville Citizen*, March 18, 1934, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

38 "Plantation Team Named Square Dance Champions: Dance Band Competition Won by Federation Musicians," *The Asheville Citizen*, August 9, 1942, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

unison. The individual performer's bodily movements, arms, feet, and knees, were in exactly the same position as the body parts of the other team members. The Plantation team won the competition because their precise body movements set them apart from the other dance teams.<sup>39</sup>

Another important tradition of the festival promoted by festival organizers was that under most of Lunsford's tenure as director, the event was unprogrammed. The festival under Lunsford's direction neither began nor ended at an exact time. When Lunsford felt there had been enough excitement for the night, he invited his audience to rejoin him on the remaining night or nights of the festival.<sup>40</sup> The reason for not having a program, according to Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce Publicity Director Bob Lindsey, was that mountain people were too independent to adhere to the rigid structure of an organized event.<sup>41</sup> Lunsford had a very relaxed attitude concerning this feature. At one Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, Lunsford was asked who was going to be the next band to perform and Lunsford answered, "Whoever wants to be."<sup>42</sup>

As part of this relaxed attitude, Lunsford and other Mountain Dance and Folk Festival organizers promoted the tradition that the festival always began "along about sundown".<sup>43</sup> Tickets from the 1963 festival, the earliest year for which tickets have been kept by the Folk Heritage Committee in charge of the festival, only have the dates on them and not the times.<sup>44</sup> Under the direction of Lunsford, "along about sun-down" meant about eight o'clock at night.<sup>45</sup> "Along about

39 "Plantation Team Named Square Dance Champions: Dance Band Competition Won by Federation Musicians," *The Asheville Citizen*, August 9, 1942, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

40 Bob Lindsey, "Mountain Customs Long Established", 1966, press release 1966 folder, MDFF Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

41 Bob Lindsey, "Mountain Festival not for the City Folknic," 1963, p. 2, press release, 1963 folder, MDFF Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

42 Lunsford, quoted in Lewis Green, "Folk Festival Opens to Full House", paper unknown 1967, MDFF, Newspaper Clippings, 40<sup>th</sup> MDFF, 1967.

43 *35 Annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Flyer* (Asheville: Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, 1962), Scanned Brochures, MDFF Box 4, is one such example.

44 "Ticket Scrapsheet for 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festival", 1963 folder, MDFF Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

45 Bob Lindsey, ("Robert H." in some sources), "Mountain Folk Get-Together: The Despair of TV Cameramen", press release for 1963, MDFF, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86), p. 1.

sundown” had not always been a part of the festival. The phrase is not mentioned anywhere in a 1936 brochure, which gave the starting time at specifically eight o'clock for each of the three performance nights that year.<sup>46</sup> Although promoted throughout the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival's history, the first documented instance of “along about sundown” and its association with the festival did not occur until 1953.<sup>47</sup>

*Asheville Times* journalist, John Parris, had a theory that “along about sundown” was created by Lunsford out of an effort to dissuade audience members of popular stereotypes about the region. Lunsford started the festival at a very vague time because he knew that while discouraging performers from wearing western outfits, some of the performers still showed up dressed as cowboys and cowgirls. These were performers that Lunsford considered to be the least authentic representation of Appalachian music and dancing. Lunsford was extremely embarrassed when performers came in cowboy attire and tried to save himself even greater embarrassment by deciding that the festival needed to begin at a very vague time. While the crowd was still very small, Lunsford put the performers who were dressed up as cowboys and cowgirls on at the very beginning of each festival night. When the crowd grew larger, all the performers who came dressed in western wear had already performed. Those who performed later on in the night were considered by Lunsford to be more authentic than the earlier performers.<sup>48</sup> This was only a theory proposed by John Parris, but he did not interview Lunsford or anyone else that helped organize the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival for his article. However, Parris added to the many theories that attempted to explain why no programs or schedules were issued at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival when it was organized by Lunsford.

As part of the informality of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, Lunsford developed a

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46 *Ninth Annual Mountain Dance Contest and Music Festival*, brochure (Asheville: the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, 1936), Box 22, MDFF.

47 Bright Pagditt, “Asheville Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Attracts 500 for Three Day Event”, *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection: Buncombe Co., Volume 55: Files 49.3-50, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

48 John Parris, “Minstrel Guards Music Festival”, *The Asheville Times*, June 31, 1961, microfilm, Pack Memorial Library.

festival tradition in which he devoted the hour preceding the actual festival to auditioning musicians and singers who had not formally been invited to perform. Those who had made a good impression on the director were given opportunities to perform for members of the audience before the main event began each night.<sup>49</sup> Lunsford made himself accessible to any eager musician or ballad singer. It appears that the previously undiscovered musicians and singers who entered the arena before the start of the festival only gave exhibitions and were not allowed to compete against other performers. The task of auditioning additional performers to participate in the Mountain Dance and Folk appears to be one of the many traditions concerning the festival while Lunsford was alive.

Another tradition of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival was that the event officially began when a performer played *The Gray Eagle* on a fiddle.<sup>50</sup> Next to “along about sundown”, this is one of the major traditions promoted throughout the festival's history by its various organizers. Some of the literature promoting the festival states that it always began with the performance of the *Grey Eagle*.<sup>51</sup> This ritual is not an unbroken tradition. In 1941, a performer using the stage-name “Fiddlin' Bill” Hensley, opened the festival by playing *Lady Hamilton*.<sup>52</sup> However, Hensley's favorite tune was the *Grey Eagle*, and as one of the most favorite musicians for Mountain Dance and Folk Festival attendees, he often opened the festival for Lunsford.<sup>53</sup> However, lack of evidence makes it impossible to prove that “Fiddlin' Bill” actually ever opened the festival by playing the *Grey Eagle*. Bob Lindsey, mentioned in a 1965 press release that the festival began with a fiddle tune. He even named some tunes that may be used to open the festival that year, but the *Gray Eagle* was not listed among them.<sup>54</sup> All sources agreed that the opening tune was always played on a fiddle, but disagreed that the tune had to

49 Robert H. Lindsey (“Bob” in some sources), “For 42 Years, he has Kept Mountain Folks Pickin' and Square Dancing”, July 27, 1969, press release, 1969 folder, MDFF, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86), p. 3,

50 Bob Lindsey, “Special to the Asheville Citizen”, Dated July 31, 1974, press release, 1974 folder, MDFF Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

51 “Along About Sundown,” *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 2, 1981, microfilm, Pack Memorial Library.

52 “Enka Team Will Participate in Finals”, *The Asheville Times*, 1941, P. 90, Lunsford Scrapbook.

53 “Fiddlin' Bill Again,” photography with caption, in *The Asheville Citizen*, August 1946, Volume 55: Files 49.3-50.

54 Bob Lindsey, “Special to the Asheville Citizen”, 1965, press release, 1965 folder, MDFF Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

be the *Grey Eagle*.

In the 1960s, Lunsford wanted preserve the authenticity of The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival by allowing only local performers to compete at the event. Limiting competitors to people from the mountain regions had not always been a practice of Lunsford. A list of competitors for the 1960 festival gave the addresses of performers from New York, Massachusetts, Atlanta, and Ohio. These performers were in the minority as most were from Buncombe County, where the festival took place, or from surrounding counties.<sup>55</sup> One band scheduled to play that year was from a foreign country.<sup>56</sup> In 1963, a decision was made by Lunsford to purify his festival of national influence and he stated that national performers could still showcase their talents, but were no longer allowed to enter the event competitively.<sup>57</sup> In Lunsford's words, the festival was for "...our own Mountain people", and it was a localized event.<sup>58</sup> In that same year, Asheville Chamber of Commerce publicity director Bob Lindsey called the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival the "Big-daddy" of folk festivals, an event to be enjoyed by people throughout the nation.<sup>59</sup>

Due to the inaccurate perception that the Appalachian region is inhabited only by white people of Anglo-Saxon descent, the problem of limiting competition at the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival to local performers raised a racial issue in 1964. A doctor from Asheville contacted Lunsford on behalf of a group from Washington that was presumed to be integrated and another group that consisted only of African-Americans because both groups wanted to participate in the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival that year. The doctor had contacted Lunsford only a few days before that year's festival and Lunsford told them they were welcome only as members of the audience because they had given him

<sup>55</sup> "Performers – Mountain Dance and Folk Festival", 1960, 1960 folder, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

<sup>56</sup> Lou Harshaw, "Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Committee Minutes", July 13, 1960 – 2:15p.m., Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Minutes, 1960 folder, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

<sup>57</sup> Bob Lindsey, "Mountain Talent Invited to Annual Folk Dance Festival", 1963. MDFF, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86), 1963 folder.

<sup>58</sup> Lunsford quoted by Lindsey in "Mountain Talent Invited to Annual Folk Dance Festival", press release, 1963 folder, MDFF, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86), 1963.

<sup>59</sup> Bob Lindsey, "The Big-daddy of Folk Music Festivals Plays this Week", for release on July 27, 1963, 1963 folder MDFF, Folk Heritage Committee Papers (1959-86).

