Dirt Eating
First Mondays
Arthur P. Hudson, folklorist
Charles Thomas Smith, fiddler
Delta Boys in the 20's
Mississippi Folklife

Dirt Eating,
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and Delta Boys in the 20's

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Arthur Palmer Hudson. Photo courtesy Special Collections, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi.
Sling Shoe. Illustration by Miss M. Butler and Ashley M. Ferris
A Conversation with a Dirt Eater

by Dennis A. Frate

The practice of eating dirt, for generations a way for some Southerners to supplement their diets, has declined in the past thirty years. But the practice continues in the memories and on the table of people such as this Mississippi woman.

It was a hot, humid mid-July day in rural Mississippi. Driving down the dirt road you could see the heat rising from the surface. This was not a new experience for me; I have driven down these dirt roads here for over 25 years. Today, my research team and I were "scouting out" this area locating households to be interviewed for our study on environmental health risks. This area was deliberately selected through a procedure called cluster sampling. This survey research technique randomly selects geographic areas where household clusters are located. Today, we were in a mile square grid off "River Bottom Road." Sitting up the area, we located seven households. While turning around in the driveway of the final house located in this mile-square grid, I turned and noticed a sight I had not seen for about 10 years, an active and recently used dirt site.

This term "dirt site" probably needs some clarification. In 1971, I conducted a field study on the practice of geophagy here in rural Mississippi. Geophagy is the conscious and deliberate consumption of soils; it is a practice that historically has been observed worldwide. My study determined that geophagy was not a physiologic response to dietary deficiencies but rather was, like all foods, a dietary practice with cultural underpinnings and was a learned behavior. The practice among African Americans here had strong ties to West Africa as it "survived" the translocation of the population during slavery. Even though clay particles are consumed, the local vernacular refers to the substance as dirt. The study conducted during 1971 determined: who consumed the soils (adult females and young children); what soils they consumed (clay particles); how the soils were consumed (prepared by baking and at times with additives used for flavor); the chemical analysis of the soils (no heavy metals); and, the health outcome (no discernable effects on blood hemoglobin). In 1971, the practice was so widespread that it was not unusual in the evenings to see women sitting on the front porch conversing while they were passing around and sharing a container of dirt. After a rain you could drive out to a "popular" dirt site and find a number of cars lined up to extract the clays. It actually reminded me of a drive-in fast food restaurant. A person would eat their car, go to the dirt site, extract some clay and leave. Each car would move up a spot to wait their turn.

Approximately 15 years later I conducted an update of the practice. Based on the results of that study, I was somewhat surprised to find how dramatically the practice had changed. First and foremost, it was dying out. Few women were now actively consuming soils. Some women shifted from clays to geohagi cal substitutes, such as laundry starch and baking soda, commercially produced products that apparently have less of a stigma attached to it but have a similar texture as the clays. Basically, no longer could you walk down
A Mississippi dirt site. PHOTO BY DENNIS FRATE

A residential area and find women sitting on the front porch eating dirt, a very common sight in 1971. Now, you had to contact previously known dirt eaters to find anyone still practicing geophagy. This region had undergone rapid acculturation between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, and geophagy appeared to be a victim of the adoption of mainstream culture. If the rate of change continued, I speculated, that in another 10 years the practice would truly disappear. I felt compelled to find out more about who was using this dirt site I found, I later returned to River Bottom Road. The following is an ethnographic account of my encounter with the individual using the site, Mrs. Ann Stevens (pseudonym).

One thing I learned in 1971 is the location of a dirt site is not necessarily a key to who uses it. It is not always used by residents of the home nearest to the site. But, it was a startling point. So I began to make inquires about who was using the site at the nearest house.

At the first house contacted, I asked an older woman, about 70 years old, if she knew who was using the dirt site. She was quite convincing in telling me that it was not her. She used to eat dirt as a young woman, but had not consumed any for about 20 years. She did, though, know who was using the site—her neighbor, Mrs. Ann Stevens. I thanked her and walked down the road to Mrs. Ann Stevens' residence. I knocked, she answered, and I introduced myself and explained my curiosity about the dirt site. Mrs. Stevens was about 50 years old, without hesitation she said, "Oh yes, that's my site. I just got back from getting some." I asked if she had some time to talk and she did. The following discussion was reconstructed from my notes and recall, I intentionally do not use a tape recorder in the field. The following narrative is presented as continuous dialogue but in reality was, of course, peppered with numerous questions from me.

"When I was a little girl, my mother used to give me some dirt to eat while she was having some herself. She ate dirt most of her life. She passed away about two years ago. My Grandmother used to eat it too when I was young. I remember playing around them on the porch and they would give me some if I asked for a taste. My Mother used to bake her dirt for about one hour before eating it. She would spread it on a cookie sheet and put it in the stove, which at that time was wood burning. Every now and then, but not every time, she would sprinkle some vinegar on it before she put it in the oven. That gave it a real nice sour taste. We didn't live here when I was a little girl. We lived over in Johnstown, that's a little church community a couple of miles from here. She used a couple of different places to get her dirt. One place was pretty close to our house. Sometimes she would walk over to it to get some dirt and other times she would send me or my sisters to go. Didn't seem to matter when; I guess just when she felt like eating some dirt. We would usually gather a shoe box full and bring it home. She had another place too that she got dirt from; it was further away and she didn't use that one too often. I'm not sure why she had two sites. Maybe they just tasted different. I was too young, about four years old, so I don't exactly recall. I don't remember eating dirt after I was 4 or 5. I started having some again when I got to be about 12 or so. About that time I moved to Chicago to live with my Auntie. Being in Chicago we didn't eat any of that dirt up there. I do remember though now and then my mother would mail up a box of dirt from back home. It was a real treat."

"I went back to Mississippi in the summers but I didn't really start eating it regularly until I got married. I had just finished high school and moved back for good and then I married Sam. I had known him since I was a little girl. His family had this land here and so we got married. I started to use this dirt site about that time. It tasted pretty much like the dirt I had as a little girl. I do bake it like my mother used to, although I think I use more vinegar on it than she did, but that's how I like it. I have four children, three girls and one boy. They all used to have a taste when they were young, but none of the girls wanted to eat it once they grew up. One girl, Mary, lives up in Chicago and every now and then she will eat some Argo starch. I don't think she does it too often though sometimes I think it's kind of sad that my girls don't do it. I mean their Mama eats it; their Grandmother and their Great Grandmother ate it. For all I know it goes back to slavery and beyond. Pretty much a family tradition. But now-a-days traditions don't mean as much to the younger generation. I don't really know too many young people who eat dirt now. I guess it's disappearing. Pretty much like hog killing. Those were the days when a family would butcher a hog and the whole community would come over to eat. You don't see much of that now either. Times change."

"I often wondered if dirt-eating was good for you. But my Grandmother and Mother lived into their 70's so I guess it can't be too bad. I've heard lots of stories how some people say that dirt-eating makes you sick, but I really never saw anyone get sick from it. Like they say, 'You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die.' I sure have eaten my peck. My husband still asks me why I eat it and I just tell him, 'I like it and it's women's dish.' I'm a woman so I guess I was born to eat it. I don't eat a whole lot of it, probably about a handful or so a day. Sometimes though after a rain and everything smells so sweet, I really have a craving for some dirt. I usually like to have some then. They say you are born of dust - when you die you go to dust - I guess I just filled in the middle with dust too."

"Not many grown women my age around here eat dirt now. Like I said before, times change. It used to be sort of a social thing - sitting around the porch on a warm night talking to your neighbors, eating some dirt. Every now and then when I am in a store, I see a woman buy some Argo (laundry starch). I'll bet they are taking it home to eat, but I really don't know for sure. My grandchildren will probably never do it - I guess. I do hope my daughters tell them about it though. It was a family tradition, but like I said, 'Times change. '"

During our conversation Ms. Stevens crumbled some dirt on to a baking pan. She sprinkled some white vinegar on it and placed it in the oven. After our conversation she took the pan out of the oven. I tried some; she was right, it did have a nice sour taste. I was happy to have had this opportunity to talk to Ms. Stevens. As an anthropologist, I was happy to archive a disappearing cultural practice. Like Ms. Stevens said, 'Times Change.'

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END NOTES
1. This study was partially supported by the Earthwatch Institute.
The First Monday Sale and Trade Days (usually referred to as "First Monday") has been part of community life in Ripley, Mississippi since 1893. Originally held on the first Monday of every month, it now takes place on the weekend before the first Monday. It boasts hundreds of vendors, who sell a wide variety of merchandise, new and used. Some of the vendors are professionals who visit Ripley, the seat of Tippah County, in the northeastern part of the state, as a regular part of their travels on the Southern flea market circuit. Others are amateurs who participate more for fun than profit; most of this latter group sells only at Ripley. The town normally has a population of about 5000, but thousands more flock to Ripley on First Monday weekends, eager to trade, buy, talk, and gossip. They come from throughout the deep South and often from much farther away. On July 31, 1999 there were cars from Texas, Missouri, Ohio, Arizona, Indiana, and New York in the parking lot, as well as from Mississippi and surrounding states.

The standard wisdom is that you can find anything you want at First Monday (and a lot you don't want but might buy anyway). Items available for sale or trade include sunglasses, guinea fowl, videotapes, baby strollers, sweet potatoes, bumper stickers, shotguns, porch swings, farm implements, dolls, microwave ovens, dogs, T-shirts, artificial floral arrangements, and just about anything else.

Originally held on Ripley's courthouse square, First Monday has changed locations several times over the years. At first, it enjoyed the support of both the town's business community and local government. Hoping to profit from rural people coming to town on Trade Day, Ripley's merchants designated the first Monday of the month a special "Grand Bargain Day." The county pitched in by having the sheriff's office hold auctions of stray livestock and other unclaimed property from the courthouse steps. Before long, though, the congestion caused by the monthly influx of people, animals, and wagons began to outweigh what the merchants saw as Trade Day's advantages, and sometime during the 1910s, First Monday relocated to a site a few blocks off the square. In the 1940s, because of noise and sanitation concerns, the event moved out of Ripley's business district altogether, to the intersection of Highways 4 and 15, about a quarter of a mile from the square. In the early 1950s, First Monday relocated again, this time to the Tippah County Fairgrounds, about a mile south on Highway 15. It moved to its present location, even farther south on Highway 15, in 1978.

First Monday now takes place about two miles south of downtown Ripley, at what was once a drive-in movie theater on the east side of Highway 15. The unpaved parking lot is right next to the highway. Local teens collect $1.50 from those who want to park there. (Some people prefer to park for free on the highway's
western shoulder, despite the possibility of being towed.) On the other side of the parking lot are the sales grounds—about fifty acres worth of booths arranged in irregular rows. The ground is covered with a light-colored gravel, that makes the site dusty when it's dry and glaringly bright in the summer sun, but it also keeps the place from getting too muddy when it rains. The aisles between the rows of booths are often crowded: couples, cruising teenagers, families, gangs of children, tourists, working people, and retirees roam from booth to booth, always looking, sometimes stopping to talk or bargain with vendors, occasionally buying something. Scattered throughout are refreshment stands where you can get such all-American standards as hamburgers, corn dogs, sausage-on-a-stick, french fries, popcorn, ice cream, and soft drinks. (No alcoholic beverages are served at First Monday.) Foods with a more Southern flavor include pork rinds, boiled peanuts, fried pies, sweet tea, and freshly-squeezed lemonade. For those who prefer to get in out of the weather, there is the Trader's Inn, a cafeteria-style restaurant that serves hearty breakfasts, as well as "dinner" (served in the middle of the day) and supper in the plate lunch "eat & three" tradition. As with any long-standing tradition, First Monday has changed over the years. At first, it was almost exclusively a "trade day"—"an old hound dog for an old single barrel shotgun or plow tools for a mule,"
Opposite: Michael Crawford had bought his new dog Rocky just an hour or so before this picture was taken. Top: Elmer Rinks, who lives near the Shiloh battlefield in Tennessee, travels the Mid-South buying used clothing. After laundering and repairing it, he and his wife sell the best pieces at First Monday. Bottom: Roger Foster, from Lawrence County, Tennessee, raises rabbits to sell at First Monday. Photos by David Whisenhunt
as one life-long resident of Ripley put it—at which little or no money changed hands. This was largely out of necessity, since most turn-of-the-century farmers in northeast Mississippi were cash-poor in the extreme. Such “trading” is now pretty much a thing of the past at First Monday, though as recently as the 1960s and 70s, some old-timers disdained cash sales for the more subtle art of barter. One Ripley native recalls trying to buy a shotgun at First Monday from a man who was willing to trade but wouldn’t even consider taking cash. Another person remembers an elderly farmer wandering the grounds with a large pipe wrench over his head shouting, “Who will trade me a billy goat for this pipe wrench? I need a good billy goat, who needs a good pipe wrench?” There is also an old First Monday story, probably apocryphal, about a man who went to First Monday with a shotgun to trade. Early in the day, he traded it for a hunting dog; a little while later, he traded the dog for a sewing machine. After several more trades, he wound up with a shotgun. Only after getting home did he realize it was the same shotgun he had started the day with. True or not, this story hints at the passion among some at First Monday for trading. Today, even though price is sometimes open to negotiation, nearly all First Monday business is transacted in cash. Some people mourn this change, believing it has turned First Monday into “just another flea market” that has lost connection with its rural past. Whether such critics are right or not, on a busy summer weekend—when tens of thousands of people descend on Ripley—First Monday is still a sight to behold.

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EDITOR'S NOTE
In 1999, at the suggestion of U.S. Senator Thad Cochran and with financial support from a Mississippi Humanities Council mini-grant, a team from The University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture documented First Monday for inclusion in the Library of Congress' Bicentennial "Local Legacies" project. David Wharton, director of documentary projects and assistant professor of Southern Studies at the Center, along with oral historian and folklorist Wiley Prewitt, Jr. and graduate assistant Donna Bussard, visited Ripley repeatedly to record the sights and sounds of First Monday. Thirty of the photographs and twelve taped interviews were donated to the Library of Congress, and "First Monday in Ripley" is one of the projects featured on the Library of Congress' Local Legacies website (http://loc.gov/locamericana/projpage/MS/MSn_c Cochran1.html). In addition, sixty-nine of the photographs, along with quotes from the interviews, have become a permanent exhibition at Ripley's Tippah County Museum.

All photographs ©1999 by David Wharton.

Above: A hot summer morning at First Monday. Opposite: Dogs, hunting gear, and camouflage clothing are always in abundance at First Monday. Here, two men inspect a selection of hunting knives. Photos by David Wharton.
Arthur Palmer Hudson
Mississippi Folklorist

by Bonnie J. Krause

Atala County native Arthur P. Hudson brought his passion for collecting folk songs and stories to The University of Mississippi in the 1920s and The University of North Carolina in the 1930s.

He helped organize the Mississippi Folk-Lore Society in 1927 and helped reinsure it in 1967.

Arthur Palmer Hudson is considered one of the first collectors and recorders of Mississippi folklore. In 1928 in the introduction to Specimen of Mississippi Folklore entitled "Significance of Mississippi Folklore," Arthur Palmer Hudson notes, "Mississippi Folks-Lore as representative of a body of traditions which...have been almost completely obscured...are...more genuinely and vitally characteristic of our people...than the legend of the Old South."

This theme dominated Arthur Palmer Hudson's long career and occupation with Mississippi and American folklore. A native Mississippi, born in Atalaya County, May 14, 1892, Arthur Palmer Hudson was raised in a little frame house on a small farm of 180 acres. His parents were "children of the reconstructed South...both were poor." Hudson's great-grandfather, Hastings Dejourn Palmer, of Scotch-Irish ancestry, moved from South Carolina to Georgia to Atalaya County, Mississippi, in 1844. He settled ten miles north of Kosciusko and built a large two-story house with the help of slaves. Hudson's maternal grandmother was a Harrison from a Mississippi plantation whose father came from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The Hudson line of the family was probably originally from South Carolina.3

In his "An Atalaya Boyhood" written for the Journal of Mississippi History, Hudson recounted his family history and episodes recollected from his youth. This included his father as justice of the peace, roads and creeks, neighbors, and community businesses such as the blacksmith, the store, post office, and school. He discussed farming, childhood games, going to town, and other personal memories including sights, sounds, and smells.2

Hudson attended the University of Mississippi from 1909 to 1913 where he was a classmate of Congressman Wall Doxey, Latin American writer Muna Lee and Congressman- judge Thomas Webber Wilson. In his junior year he was managing editor of The Mississippian, and in his senior year he became editor-in-chief, initiating his lifetime writing career. During his college years he wrote verse such as "The Slave Graveyard" and the 1910 University of Mississippi Magazine.4

When his "To an Indian Arrowhead" for the 1913 Ole Miss Annual, Hudson recalled picking up arrowheads on a bend on the Archer Creek on the family farm near an Indian mound which may have been a village. This early verse illustrated his growing interest in cultural traditions. He would later say of his early poetry, often done while on vacation, that it was "an expression of real emotional experiences normal to a youth and young man."4

He graduated from the University of Mississippi with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1913. He became Principal of Gulfport High School from 1913 through 1918, then joined the faculty of the Gulf Coast Military Academy. In 1919 he returned to Oxford, Mississippi, to become the Superintendent of Oxford Schools. While in Oxford he completed his Master's Degree at the University in 1920 and joined the University English Department faculty. Between 1920 and 1930, working as Assistant Professor, he advanced in the Department, while acquiring another Master's Degree during the summers of 1923-24-5 at the University of Chicago.6

In 1923, while teaching an English course on English and Scottish ballads, Hudson began to consider a course on folklore. Students reported local citizens they knew who recalled old ballads and songs. In 1925, Hudson, with a student, visited Mrs. G. V. Easley in Calhoun County who remembered and sang for them over 25 ballads. In 1926, Hudson proposed a separate course on Mississippi folklore to be taught in the English department. It would be organized on a seminar basis, based on field collecting by students, with four to six hours credit.7 It would cover eleven areas of folklore: anecdotes, ballads, characters, charms, dialect, epics, fables, legends, games, riddles, and superstitions. This course was successful.

Eight students participated with six completing their own folklore collection.8

In 1926 Hudson published "Ballads and Songs from Mississippi in The Journal of American Folk-Lore. He credited the 1686 poet, isolated, who recorded the songs (often his students), where, and how it was recorded. In addition, he used major folk song collection references to place the individual ballads and songs within the American framework. The folk songs included traditional songs and ballads including "Edward," four versions of "Barbara Allen," three versions of "Paper of Pins," "Sally Goodin," "Wife of Usher's Well," among others.9

Another class was formed from 1927 to 1928. Over 1,000 songs and ballads and 1,500 pages of text were compiled. In 1928 Hudson published the collections as Specimen of Mississippi Folks-Lore. The collected content came mostly from six north Mississippi counties: Lafayette, Pontotoc, Panola, Lee, Calhoun, and Yalobusha with the majority of materials from Calhoun, 139 items, Yalobusha, 89 items, and Lafayette, 101 items. The volume covered four folklore subjects: ballads and songs, folk games, folk beliefs and customs, and folk tales.10

The ballads and songs section collected by students covered seven areas: English and Scottish, other imported, American origin, the West, outlaws-criminals and vagrants, Civil War, Negro spirituals and workaday, and miscellaneous, numbers included in the collection based on the following text: 1. existence independent of printed, oral transmission from person to person; 2. retention of vitality through a fair period of time; and 3. Loss by the stingers of all sense of authorship and provenience (sic).11


The section of folk games included play party games—games played in a group gathered for a party. This included "Chickama Game铜: Chickama, chickama, crowny crow: I went to the well to wash my toe. When I got back my black-eyed chicken was gone. What time is it, Old Witch?"

This game consisted of clockwise marching hens and chickens which the winds attempted to catch by telling time. Captured fowl were penned and the game continued until all the fowl are caught. The first caught is the witch for the next game.13

Other games included "William Come Tumble Toe:"

William come tumble toe:

He's a good fisherman, all of us know.
Catches hens, puts 'em in peas.
Some lay eggs, some lay none.
Wire, Brier, limb, hoop.
Three gone in a flock.
One flew east and one flew west.
And one flew over the cuckoo's nest.
O U T T - spells out and go.
You dirty dish rag V O U L."

Additional games were "Molly Brightly:" a chasing game with another witch, "Brother I am Bob:" a sort of blind man's bluff, "Honey Cup:" guessing the number of fingers, "Card Fish:" kissing fawns off a column of fawns, "Pecan Game:" guessing the number of nuts in an opponent's hand, "Tar Baby:" balls placed in hats and then thrown at players, and counting-out, hide-and-seek, handclasp dropping, and rope skipping rhymes.14
Singing games included "Marching Round the Lreeve," "Had a Big Fight in Mexico," "King William," "Little Sally Walker," "Needle's Eye," "Threading the Needle," and "Frog Went a-Courtin'." Play parties recorded were based on square dancing and promenades such as "Hog Downers," "Rally Boys Rally," "Skip to My Lou," "The Jolly Miller," and "Coffee Grows on White Oak Trees." Specimens also offered a variety of riddles: Crooked at a rainbow, teeth like a cat Guess all your lifetime and you can't guess that. (A briar)

Round as a saucer, deeper than a cup All the king's horses can't pull it up. (a well)

Big at the bottom and little at the top; In the middle it goes Rippery-Rip. (a churn)

Little Nan Etticaot
In a White petticoat
With a red nose;
The longer she stands
The shorter she grows. (a candle)

Over hills and over hollows;
Eats, but never swallows. (rust)

A little white force that's always wet, But never has been rained on yet. (teeth)

Under "Beliefs and Customs," Specimens considered snakes and their bites. Snake bites should be treated with a freshly killed young chicken which will turn black when the poison is out. Or a snakebite could be treated with whiskey, tobacco, or Carolina. The Hoop snake, which grabbed its tail in its mouth, rolled down a hill and when it hit a tree it killed it with its infamous fang. The chicken snake swallowed eggs. Another snake drank cows dry of milk. Other beliefs and customs covered May Day, love and marriage, weather lore, signs and omens, leeches, and the madiston. Stories and folk tales in Specimens included "The Bell Witch," "The Doe with the Charmed Life," "The Greyhound Poxum," and "Swift Peter."

In May 1927, Hudson with a group of others founded the Mississippi Folk-Lore Society. Its goal was to collect, study and publish Mississippi folklore. With Hudson as president and T. A. Bickerson as secretary-treasurer, the original group included David H. Bishop (chair of the English department), G. E. Bynum, A. R. Eild, Calvin S. Brown, and Lois Wombles. They met in the Peabody building at the University of Mississippi. It was through the Mississippi Folk-Lore Society that Hudson published Specimens of Mississippi Folk-Lore. The collection of folk songs and folklore drew Hudson into speculation of their wider importance. In a 1929 letter to Stark Young, playwright and theater critic, he stated:

It is my theory, (a part of it, at least), that though folklore and other forms of folk lore had their seat of power among the humble folk they touched the inner life of the aristocracy as well and served as a sort of least common denomination between two classes whose interests (economic and political) were poles apart. Hudson was absent from 1930 on the University of Mississippi, working toward his Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina, when Theodore Bilbo, a controversial governor who dismissed professors, made his indelible mark on the state of Mississippi. Hudson had a telephone call from Dr. Alfred Hume in Jackson "notifying me that the head of my department...had been dismissed from the faculty and that I had been elected head of the department." Hudson later stated: "I had not been a 'bilbo man' and was innocent..." Hudson left the University of Mississippi in 1930 after "the Bilbo earthquake" when he was appointed to an administrative position "which I could not retain without making myself a party to the forces which had devastated the higher institutions of learning." He fled to the University of North Carolina where he completed his Ph.D. that same year. His dissertation was Folk Songs of Mississippi, and he joined the faculty.

Probably influenced by the work of Frederick Koch, a colleague at North Carolina, Hudson created a database based on folk tales. Hudson wrote the play Get Up an' Bar the Door based on the folk song between 1929 and 1930 and produced the play in 1930-31. Frederick Koch, the editor of The Carolina Play-Book, in his introduction calls "Get Up an' Bar the Door" a "delightful face of Mississippi hill-country folk." which was based on a ballad. The play was originally produced by the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in November 1930.

The play included Burris Stubbs, a farmer, Jenny, his wife, Rett Starnes, a neighbor, and Funk, Tol, and Jack Armstrong who were a gang of criminals. Rett came to visit Jenny saying he had news. The Armstrong boys robbed Dick Stagg of his $200 cotton money, then tied him on his horse backwards. Jenny was out of firewood from rendering laid all day, and the kitchen was cold. The kitchen door latch was also broken, although she had remitted Burris repeatedly to fix it. As Rett left, Burris stumbled in drunk and Jenny reminded him to feed the stock and bring in wood. After Burris cut the firewood, Jenny complained about the broken door latch. Burris gave her a comb as a peace offering. Jenny wanted the door fixed. They argued, and then agreed that whoever talked first would lose the argument. As they sat down to eat, the dog barked; it was the Armstrongs. Neither Jenny nor Burris responded to the Armstrongs who tied them up and then ate their dinner. The Armstrongs could not shut the door. They cut Burris's beard and tried to kiss Jenny. Burris got their gun and Jenny still did not say a word. As Burris fell down, Jenny scalped the Armstrongs with boiling water. The Armstrongs escaped. Jenny said that Burris had lost the game because he yelled at the Armstrongs and she told him to "Get Up an' Bar the Door."

The Blue Bear, a Negro folk tale from Mississippi, Hudson wrote into a short story and eventually a three act drama for the Carolina Playmakers in 1930. The Blue Bear was created from several folk stories collected from different areas in the state; the central counties and the Mississippi Delta. The tale concerned Chloe, a 16 year old quadroon, who was being pursued by "Tiger Cat" Parker, a mulatto with an automatic pistol. Mose, Chloe's father, worked on Bob Chilton's plantation as a sharecropper, taking care of the hogs which included a "shaggy blue-black tusked boar." The boar was separated from the other hogs because of his wild and aggressive nature. Mose was suspicious of Tiger Cat's intentions and, when at the store to buy tobacco, Tiger Cat invited Mose and Chloe to his barbecue and threateningly suggested Mose bring the hog to barbecue. Mose asked Tiger Cat to help him catch the boar that night. The next morning Bob Chilton and his hunting party discovered Tiger Cat dead in the bear's pen, an ax laying near him. They held court and, as Mose was about to confess, the hunting party found the carcass of the bear guarding the tomb of Tiger Cat who was about to steal him. This story by Hudson was a collection of folk culture and history including references to a honey-suckle basket, crazy quilt, hickory splinter rocker, a porch hound dog, the "Home Canning Club Girl's Manual," the tin dipper as a carrier of disease, "Egyptian Straight" cigarettes, the Volstead Act, and the plantation bell call for those in the cabins to come to the "big house."

In that same year Hudson also created the three act play The Bell Witch. The story of the devil, Bell, his daughter Mary, and a hired overseer living in Mississippi, Bell killed the overseer supposedly in self-defense, for mistreating the Negroes. After major crop failures and farming disasters, Bell moved his family to Tennessee. However, strange happenings followed the family. A servant proclaimed it was the "husband of the overseer." During this time, supposedly, Andrew Jackson visited the family and was also attacked by the "witch." Milk disappeared, food flew from cabinets, wheels fell off wagons, horses and mules became sick. The witch began to show interest in Mary. The family decided to return to Panola County in Mississippi and again the witch followed them.
demanded to marry Mary and make her famous for her marriage to a ghost. John Bell refused. Mary became ill and died, horrified by the witch's proposal. The coffin was followed by a black bird similar to a buzzard. The bird finally disappeared after circling the grave.

It was this same tale that had been included in *Specimens of Mississippi Folk-Lore* and originally collected in Water Valley, Lafayette County, and in Panola County. In 1934, with Pete Kyle McCarter, Hudson wrote "The Bell Witch of Tennessee and Mississippi: A Folk Legend" in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*. B. A. Botkin included Hudson's version in his *A Treasury of Southern Folklore* in 1949. Hudson published his *Folk Songs of Mississippi and Their Background* in 1936. Also in 1936, Hudson edited *Humor of the Old Deep South* which he had researched over the previous two years at the Library of Congress through a fellowship in the humanities from the Rockefeller Foundation. *Humor of the Old Deep South* was a collection of humor and writings from Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Hudson used travel books, histories, historical materials, biographical writings, poems, almanacs, newspapers, and magazines. He divided the materials into chapters that roughly define the "drama:"

"Prologue, Scene, Props, Antecedents." Then he moved to chapters based on the main characters including "Indian: Hunters and Fishermen; Doctors, Lawyers, Judges," and many more. He completed the volume with "The Fourth Estate" and "Moody's the Wear" to include the miscellaneous. Donald Davidson in a review in the *American Review* called it "one of the most valuable and delightful miscellanies" noting that the tales were heard by most Southerners during their upbringing.

**UNIVERSITY LECTURE**

**First of a Series of University Folk Lectures.**

**A PATCH OF MISSISSIPPI BALLADRY**

By Professor A. F. Hudson

Mrs. David Nelson will sing some of these old-time ballads.

**Students will play song-plays.**

**THURSDAY, 7:30, CHAPEL**

Oxford people invited. Admission free.

Flyer for a University of Mississippi lecture, 1936. PHOTO COURTESY A. F. HUDSON PAPERS, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, JOHN D. WILLIAMS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI.

He compared Hudson to Walter Scott "gathering up a border minstrelsy."[19] Stark Young in his review in *The New Republic* remarked on Hudson's "astonishing range" of resources from a 1699 account of DeSoto to local contemporary newspaper stories. Young noted that Hudson had edited about 250 entries. He believed the importance of the collection lay in the story-telling and tall tales and he linked them to Mark Twain's writings.[20]

In 1937, through the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, Hudson published *Folk Tales from Mississippi* with the melodies and texts of songs not included in his past works. These were songs from his original collecting in the 1920s in Mississippi and credited the singer and location. The second edition included a preface by Ellen S. Woodward, a federal WPA administrator originally from Mississippi.

As a professor at Chapel Hill, Hudson continued his extensive research, writing, publishing, editing, and activities in folklore and folklore societies of North Carolina and the South. In 1963 Lois Dollhohre, professor of English at the University of Mississippi, wrote an article "Mississippi Folklore Neglected Since Hudson" in the *Jackson, Mississippi, Clarion Ledger*. After 40 years of inactivity, the Mississippi Folklore Society was revitalized in 1967 with 107 members and began publication of the Mississippi Folklore Register which continued until 1994 when it was renamed *Mississippi Folklore*. The Society included Dr. Arthur Palmer Hudson as honorary president, Dr. George Boswell, an English professor at the University of Mississippi, as president and W. Jack Crocker at Mississippi State College for Women, as secretary-treasurer. The Executive Council in 1967 included Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander from Jackson State College, Dr. Louis Dollhohre at Mississippi College, A.S.M. Zahuraliqa from Alcorn A & M College, Diane McPhail of East Central Junior College, and Jack Smith of the University of Southern Mississippi. The first issue of the Register included greetings from Arthur Palmer Hudson.[21]

Arthur Palmer Hudson retired from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1965. In 1965 he created the "Arthur Palmer Hudson Mississippian Collection" at the University of Mississippi's J. D. Williams Library Special Collections. He also organized an additional collection of North Carolina folklore in the Chapel Hill library. He died April 26, 1978.[22]

Arthur Palmer Hudson spent less than ten years of his professional life collecting Mississippi folklore within the state. But he continued throughout his life to publish from those early collecting years. Hudson planted the roots and encouraged the growth of the academic and popular field of Mississippi folklore and folklore which continues to flourish today.

**BONNIE J. KRAUSE** is the Director of the University Museums at The University of Mississippi.

**ENDNOTES**

4. Hudson Collection 76-3-14.
5. Ibid.
6. Hudson Collection 76-3-1-5, 76-3-1-13.
8. Hudson Collection 76-3-3-5.
10. Specimen was mimeographed under the auspices of the Mississippi Folklore Society, the copyright was in Hudson's name with credit given to his students; Hudson, *Specimen*, "Contents."
12. Ibid., 2-108.
13. Ibid., 112.
15. Ibid., 114-148.
16. Ibid., 123-29.
17. Ibid., 131-32.
18. Ibid., 141-44.
19. Ibid., 157-64.
20. Ibid., 158-160.
21. Arthur Palmer Hudson to Stark Young, Dec. 12, 1929, Hudson Collection 76-3-3-3.
22. Hudson Collection 76-3-1-10. A different interpretation of Theodore Bilbo's influence on Mississippi higher education can be found in David G. Sansing, *Making Hate Slowly: The Troubled History of Higher Education in Mississippi* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 91-110.
24. Hudson Collection 76-3-3-7.
25. Hudson Collection 76-3-1-3.
26. Ibid.
28. Hudson Collection 76-3-1-18.
29. Hudson Collection 76-3-1-9.
30. Hudson, Specimen, 158-60.
38. Hudson Collection 76-3-2-11.
Charles Thomas Smith
A MISSISSIPPI FIDDLER

by Norman Mellin

Webster County's Charles T. Smith learned to play the fiddle as a child. In this interview he tells the story of his life as an old-time fiddler.

Charles T. Smith began playing the fiddle as a child, and he continues to play at local musical gatherings and at home with friends. His music represents the older generation of fiddlers in Mississippi who were self-taught and learned by ear. This interview, which took place at his Webster County home on March 30, 1991, traces his life as an old-time fiddler.

Charles Smith's playing, a blend of old-time fiddling, bluegrass, swing and the popular music of his day, has old-time characteristics that distinguish it from the more modern forms of bluegrass and contest fiddling. Old-time fiddling is more for dancing, while bluegrass fiddling and contest fiddling are more for listening. In old-time fiddling, a rhythmic bow arm using short strokes is more prominent than the left-hand notes. This rhythm accentuates the feeling of the dance steps. In bluegrass and contest fiddling, a highly polished smooth bow arm is used, and the listener's ear is focused on the left-hand notes.

Charles T. Smith can trace his family back to his grandfather, Lorenzo Dow Smith, a farmer who was born in Ohio and moved to Missouri after the Civil War. He served in the Union Army as a private in the 152nd Regiment of the Indiana Infantry. His great uncle on his mother's side fought for the Confederacy. "My grandfather was a horse rancher. He had a ranch near St. Joseph, Missouri. Then he sold that and moved to the southern part of Missouri near Ironon and died in Salem." Charles's father was born in Ironon in 1879. He farmed near Kansas City and then moved to Oklahoma City. He later worked in the Chickasha, Oklahoma post office before moving to Cumbeland, Mississippi in 1920.

"My father was a farmer here in Cumbeland. He had three or four different acreages. The largest I think was about 40 acres. Back then they farmed with mules. You couldn't handle a big farm. He raised cotton, sorghum, corn, cattle and other livestock, but mostly cotton. Cotton was the money crop. This was all during the Depression. He also worked at a planer mill in Cumbeland. It was a good sized little town at one time when they had the Bay & Slade Lumber Company. They had what they called 'dummy lines.' Those little railroads that were built all through these woods. The trains would haul logs to the planer mill. It was a big operation. There were twelve or more stores in Cumbeland in the old days. Now there's one store and a schoolhouse and that's it."

LIVING, WORKING, MILITARY SERVICE, AND RETIURING
"I was born on July 31st, 1922, in Webster County. Right across that road over there. There should be a big marker up there but there's no road between Cumbeland and Maben. I lived in the Delta a long time; then I lived in Greenwood, about fourteen or fifteen years. After that I lived in Greenville until moved back to the Cumbeland area in 1968.

"The first thing I did was carpentry work when I quit high school in the eleventh grade. I met my wife in 1942 while I was doing carpentry work in Greenwood. I was building houses and then we started building air bases and military installations. I was a third year apprentice carpenter working for J.A. Jones Construction Company at that time when they were building Camp McCain in Grenada. We didn't know each other longer than three months before we got married on November 8, 1942.

Six months after I got married I was inducted into the service on May 8, 1943 and discharged December 10, 1945. I did my basic training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I was in the Third Army attached to the 4th Armored Division, under General Patton. It was the 512th Field Army Military Police Battalion which was like a highway patrol in a battle zone. It was the first of its kind. I was in traffic control directing supplies, troops, and equipment back and forth from the front lines. During the war I played with an accordion player in my unit named Don Gooding from Frankton, Indiana. We wrote a song together that I still play.

"They transferred me over to the 380th M.P. battalion and that's where I got to know Grandpa Jones. He was in it. We played together at times. He's an old claw-hammer style banjo player. He had a little program on the radio in Munich after the war ended. He and I both played on the radio program but not together.

Later, I worked on a farm for a while and ran a dairy one year. I didn't like that. Those cows didn't know Sunday from Monday! Then I got into mechanic work for several years and got to be assistant shop foreman at International Harvester in Greenville where I worked for seven years. I did maintenance work for a while and that's where I got into machine work and liked it a lot.
First Fiddle: Learning to Play

"My father was an old-time fiddler, but he hadn't played for a long time. In 1929, when I was seven years old, he planted a bunch of sugar cane. Those were hard times. Dollars looked like wagon wheels back then! I believe he sold his molasses for about 25 cents a gallon and a bucket cost either a nickel or a dime. He planted a bunch of cane that year but people didn't have any money to buy it, so they traded whatever they had for it.

"My half brothers and twelve years older than me and they were big enough to begin to play the fiddle. They found a fellow who had a fiddle and a guitar that were all broken into pieces. Dad could fix anything, so he traded his molasses for the fiddle and the guitar. That's how I got started. My mother could play guitar a little, so Dad patched them together and started saving on that old fiddle. He never played a whole lot. He had been a good fiddler back in his younger days, but he hadn't played for so long that he never really got back into it."

"I would sit and listen to him, keeping the fiddle and playing it. One day, I heard Dad tuning that old fiddle and I could tell when it was in tune. We didn't have a case for it. It was hanging up on a nail on the wall, out of my reach. I started begged for that fiddle. Mother said, 'Well if you sit right down in the middle of the floor now, I'll let you hold it a little while.' I said, 'All right.' It was out of tune so I started to tune it and boy, I got in trouble! She jumped all over me for that. I finally convinced her to let me tune it. Before the evening was over, I could play a tune. It was called the 'Prisoner's Song.' It's that old song about how I wish I had wings like an eagle, over these prison walls I'd fly. Mother said, 'Let me put it back up now, it's about time for them to come in.' I was tickled to death. After supper we were all sitting around the fire and she got that fiddle and handed it to me and said, 'Show them what you learned today.' It scared me to death! I thought they were going to get all over me for fooling with that fiddle. I sawed through that tune where you could tell what it was. My brother said, 'Well, I'll tell you one thing, he can beat me right now, so he can have it!' That's how I got my first fiddle.

"I started saving on it with Dad giving me a few pointers. About two years later my brothers went to a country dance one night and brought a fellow home with them named Jim High. He was about thirty-five and a good fiddler! He was the one who got me interested. I learned 'The Eight of January' from him."

Phonographs and Radio

"We had an old record player, but I never did learn much fiddle music from it. Most of what I picked up was by hearing someone else play. That's probably the reason most of what I play I don't play right. I'd hear it and have to wait until I get home to play it. When I couldn't remember it all, I'd have to fill in the gaps.

"We didn't have radio when I started to play. I imagine I was probably twelve or thirteen before we ever got one and then the old batteries were dead about half the time. I think it had about five batteries. Back then you had an A, B, and C battery to power it."

"We couldn't pick up many radio stations back then. The first I can remember was The Barn Dance from somewhere up north. It may have been Chicago. They didn't call it the Grand Ole Opry. Back then old battery radios had a good range. We had a big outside antenna way up high. There weren't many stations so you could pick up a clear signal. There would usually be one radio in the community that was working and everybody would gather at that house on Saturday night and listen. I think that's one reason so many people played back in those days. They didn't have anything else to do. People would meet at somebody's house and play two or three nights a week.

"I got a chance to play over the radio myself in 1940 on station WJPR in Greenville, Mississippi. I played with Uncle Par and The Sunshine Playboys out of Clarksdale."

Playing for Dances

"I started playing for country dances, when I was about eleven or twelve. My two half brothers wanted to dance, so they took me there to play. They'd have them at somebody's house. They'd just move all the furniture out of one room, and have a dance. Back then, times were rough. Men were working out in the fields for 75 cents a day. I'd go to a country dance, and make two or
three dollars in one night. They'd toss those dimes and nickels in your hat if you'd quit playing.

"Many times at those square dances you wouldn't have any accompaniment. But somebody would be there that could beat drums. A lot of folks used knitting needles or coarse dry grass. It takes the place of having a guitar or a banjo behind the fiddle. I have done that a lot but I was never too partial to it. I'd rather have a good guitar behind me, but if you didn't have it, that was a good substitute. Someone would beat spoons and another would play the rub-board. They raked that thimble up and down that board to the beat."

EARLY FIDDLER CONTESTS AND THE BLACKWOOD BROTHERS

"The first contest I ever entered was in 1934 when I was twelve years old. That was at the Greenwood Centennial. I had to play against every fiddler since I was too old to play against the younger ones. I think I came in third place. James Blackwood and Ron, his brother, were about thirteen and fifteen years old at the time they had a fiddling contest at Hohen Linden. They were singing at that contest. They were raised down below Tom Nolan. Those boys would go to the fields and work all day and when they came in at night and after supper, they would start practicing. You talk about some harmony, they had it! A fiddling contest back in those days was a musical contest that anybody could enter. It could be just about anything. They had a prize for everything. It wasn't much but they had something. They had a prize for quartets, duets, fiddles, guitars, and banjos.

"I went up to the contest at Hohen Linden when I was about twelve years old. No one had a car back then since those were hard times. When something was going on, a school bus or flatbed truck would carry everybody to it. Len Stallings drove the school bus around back then you furnished your own bus... I think we paid about a dime to ride up to the contest. That truck didn't even have a cab on it, just a windshield. We were going up there on a gravel road that day and there was a bad bridge ahead. He didn't notice it until he was right on it and then he hit the brakes. It just fell like a stack of dominoes! Everybody fell forward that was standing up. My cousin was standing right behind my half-brother Dale Duckworth, who was ten years older than me. He didn't have any case for his guitar, and I had my fiddle in a pillow slip. My cousin fell on that guitar and his knee cracked right through the back of it!

"We went up on there with the back out of the guitar and didn't know what we were going to do. We decided to tune it up and see if it would hold and it did. That night Ron Blackwood and James Blackwood were up there. James was about my age and Ron was just a little older. They got up there and sang a duet, 'Rocking Over the Ocean Waves.' They won first place in the duets. Well, when the fiddling came around, I won third place. Years went by and I hadn't seen them. They had been in the music business and made many recordings. One day a friend of mine introduced us after all those years. I said, 'You hadn't seen me in almost fifty years. Do you remember singing with your brother at Hohen Linden one time at a music contest?' He looked at me and said, 'I sure do. You're talking in the thirties.' I said, 'Yeah.' He says, 'I sure do. I remember that very well. Were you there?' I said, 'Yeah, I played in the fiddle contest.' He said, 'I believe I remember you. What did you win?' I said, 'A five cell flashlight, a muddle of meat, and a five pound sack of sugar.' He said, 'I won a ham and a sack of flour and a pound of coffee.' That's all the prizes they had. Nobody had any money. The merchants would just donate things to give as prizes."

SOME OLD-TIME FIDDLERS

"There used to be a real good fiddler that lived in Marion when I was a kid. He was blind. He would win every contest he went to. His name was Bill Parrish. His son would back him up on the guitar. He was an old man when I was just a kid. I learned a lot of tunes by just listening to him when I was growing up. He had a style all his own. He played that old Indian War Hoop that Hoyt Ming played and recorded. He played another one called the 'Fox Chase.' I never heard anybody play a fox chase on a fiddle. He was the only fiddler I ever heard do it and he could make those dogs bark!

"Bill Parrish was mostly a low-down fiddler. I never heard him play a lot of Waltzes. He knew how to get a crowd's attention. He had a lot of Uncle Dave Macon's tricks about him. He'd do a lot of stunt fiddling. Playing that fiddle on top of his head and under his arm. I could do a little of that myself. Fiddle contests had stunt fiddling as a separate category. I'd play it on top of my head and under my arm, behind my back, behind my legs, and then I'd place the bow between my knees, holding the fiddle down in front of it and saw on the fiddle. I played some cross-tuned fiddle tunes but I can't recall their names. 'Pop Goes the Weasel' was one of the stunt tunes, but you didn't need to cross-tune your fiddle. You'd pick it with your left hand and that would give you time to positions. I got good at that at one time and then I just let it go. It got where there was no demand for it, and they stopped having it in the contests.

"Georgia Slim and Bob McCaslin who played with old Howdy Forrester came to the school house here in Cumberland around 1936 or '37. I believe I was about fourteen or fifteen years old at that time. Howdy, Slim and several of those Grand Old Opry stars came with them. They did some stunt fiddling that was something else. Old Howdy and Slim were playing fiddles, and when the guitar took a break they came back in with Slim pulling the bow on Howdy's fiddle while Howdy was notting his fiddle and vice-versa. They were twin fiddling. They didn't miss a lick. That beat anything I saw in my life! They didn't even have a P.A. system or electricity then in that old school. They had old kerosene lamps hanging on the wall.

"I knew dell Smith long after he had quit playing. He would come over and borrow my squire dog and hunt. He was living in Greenwood at that time. I knew Wllie Norman since he would come by my house when I was liv-

BANDS AND CONTESTS

"Since I have moved back to Cumberland, I played in several bands with local musicians: The Cumberland Boys, The Chocow Bluegrass, and Cumberland Gap in Starkville. In 1986 the folks down in Chester started a get-together at the Chester Community Center. They would have a pot-luck supper and folks would come from all over to play music, so we formed a band. We called it The Chester Bluegrass. During that time, I still went to fiddle contests. I won first place in the Jackson State Fair fiddling contest in 1986, 1988, and won sec-

NORMAN MELLIN lives in Starkville, Mississippi. The author has recorded 124 fiddle tunes and songs in Charles Smith's repertoire. These recordings are preserved on five CDs that the author recorded and produced. Copies of these CDs are $16 each and are available by writing to Charles T. Smith, Route 2, Box 427, Maben, MS 39750.
The Ingenuity of Delta Boys in the 'Twenties

by Abbott L. Ferriss

with illustrations by Mos M. Butler and Ashley M. Ferriss

Combining personal memories with drawings and analysis helps to document the home-made ways Delta boys enjoyed themselves in the 1920s.

It was not that Delta boys didn't have store-bought playthings. They had bicycles, electric trains, scooters, Erector sets, movie and lantern slide projectors, and many others. Rather, they thrived on making things themselves. Like older boys did. Things we could hunt with or make noise with, petter our teachers with or merely to show off cleverness. Kites were the things to make when the March winds blew strong enough to carry them high across the cotton fields. A bow and arrow, a slingshot, a tin tip were in vogue in fall when thoughts turned to hunting. Halloween brought on the idea of rat-tat-tat to annoy our teachers and any time a pea-shooter came handy to pop a girl in the back of the head as she headed home from school. What store-bought treasures afforded delights such as these?

"Delta boys" consist of that cohort of lads who grew up in the Mississippi Delta during the 1920s. Some called the times the "Roaring Twenties" but to Delta boys those years brought fascinating discoveries, growth and expanding limits. While the radio and automobile were becoming commonplace, the culture had not yet become so complex that lads could not meet it on their own terms and find delight in mastery. Some of them helped me recall the ingenuities reported here. They were Mos M. Butler, Seeley Barrett Wise, Robert Carlton Shelby, and James Alcorn Russell. You'd think such notable Delta family names would suffice, but, not. They were affectionately known as Snoopy, Busby, Pete, and Jim. I often responded to Skinny or Doc.

"You learn by doing," say educators, but Delta boys were just having fun, merely playing, making things. Formal learning was something forced on them at school. Without understanding it, they were engaging important laws of physics and other sciences. Adding lengths of their tails to splinter stumps, they were inventing kites in a high wind. A flat kite would fly better if its side tips were tied together to face the kite into an arc. A stick on a string would burn better when the edges were beveled so as to slice the wind like an airplane propeller. The notes of a Peter Pan Pipe could be altered by changing the diameter of the cane and its length and adjusted to a cascading scale.

These bits of wisdom they shared among themselves and later passed on to younger brothers. They became the skills and interests they were to build upon in college and later years—interests that brought them face to face with life and evolved into competencies of engineers, lawyers, teachers, farmers, pharmacists, Army air pilots and other professions.

One for the money
Two for the show
Three to get ready
And four to go.

Sound

Peter Pan Pipes

Delta boys made music whistling, with paper and comb, with the mouth harp and sometimes with conventional instruments. Peter Pan Pipes, perhaps, were their most sophisticated crafted instruments. The musical note came from the strength of the draft of air across the mouth of the pipe, and from the diameter and length of the cane.

Cane "brushes" had been common in the swampy Delta. Although less common in the 'Twenties, they still could be found. Delta boys looked for growth to the required diameter and sawed the cane to graduated lengths. Each pipe is closed at the bottom by the natural joint of the cane. They sanded or whistled the mouth of the pipes, so their lips might press comfortably upon them. Then they had them in graduated sequence and bound them tightly with a copper wire or stout string. The more pipes the greater the range of notes.

What to do with a scale of seven or more notes? Only the ear attuned to music of the town could tell, and by trial and error tunes came forth to the delight of the innovator and the applause of mothers and fathers. Jean-Pierre Rampal the Delta boys were not, but they made music to the delight of all.

Rattler

To annoy teachers on Halloween or other spooky nights, or to annoy even girls anytime, nothing was better than a rattler. A thin board (10" x 1") was beveled so it would wedge under the clapboard siding of a house. A stout string was secured through a hole in the bottom of the board. The string had to be tendered taunt with resin. How long should the string be? How far away from the teacher's house should you be when you rubbed the string to produce a vibration of the wedge against the house? Usually 20 or 30 yards was sufficient. Perhaps you could hide behind an azalea bush or hedge, and then you would not be seen when the teacher came to investigate the rat-tat-tat.

Burling Stick or Bullroarer

The Burling Stick was an innocent looking board, deceptive clean and guiltless, but it could create a mighty roar. The bullroarer is found among peoples worldwide, being used in sacred rites to simulate thunder, etc., but Delta boys were unmindful of this. They enjoyed the roar. It emanates from the beveled stick swirling through the air, increasing in volume as it increased in velocity. Onlookers turned to wonder what caused the mighty roar. Construction was simple. A 10" x 2" thin board was beveled along the edges like an airplane propeller. A strong string or leather cord was introduced through a hole in the board. The 3 or 4 foot cord was strung through another short board, or handle. When twirled, the Burling Stick set up a moaning that created a periodic wave of sound impulses that attracted attention, frightened chickens, and brought all wandering hunting dogs to the fold.
CIGAR BOX BANJO

Banjo picking fascinated Delta boys. Minstrels show that traveled the South in the fall, when cotton picking brought money to the land, featured banjo pickers. Banjos gave rhythm to the melody. Not everyone could boast of a banjo, but a ukelele-style one could be made. A cigar box attached to an arm, a round hole cut in the middle for resonance, tapered holes and plugs for the handle to turn the strings, a bridge, and “plunk-plunk,” the Delta boy had a banjo of sorts. Steel strings or gut, for guitars, were sold in stores. No sophisticated tonal quality could be promised, but with trial and adjustment and trial again, the Delta boy could approximate a scale and strum away while singing blues or a game song or might imitate a dizzy heard on the radio.

One, two, buckle my shoe,
Three, four, shut the door,
Five, six, pick up sticks,
Seven, eight, lay them straight
Nine, Ten, a big fat hen.

HEIGHT EXTENDERS
STILTS OR TOM WALKERS

In the Twenties, the dark, deep hardwood forest of the Delta still was being harvested. Trainloads of oak, hickory, ash and sweet gum chugged to the sawmills of Memphis. The white of smaller sawmills, also, could be

head in towns near forests and railroads. These sawmills cast off strips that Delta boys found useful. They made strips into stilts to make a lad stand tall and display his skill in balance, motion and endurance. The height of the foot block, could be one foot above ground or as high as four feet. A leather or cloth strip helped secure the foot in the stirrup. Mounting the higher stilts could be done by stepping into them from a bench or stump. Once mounted, motion forward assured a smoother balance; standing stationary made balancing wobbly and uncertain. Stills were not merely to demonstrate balance and motion. Delta lads competed with one another, the object of one Tom Walker being to show or should another Tom Walker to unbalance and topple him to the ground. A favorite tactic was to stand on one still and with the other strike the stilts of the opponent until he fell. Great fun! Somehow the larger boys usually won the contest.

TIN CAN WALKERS

Growing children looked forward to being taller. Parents urged them on each anniversary by marking their height on the wall to show growth since last year. What glee, then, came from instantly adding five or six inches with Tin Can Walkers. Delta boys punched opposing small holes in the bottommostnot the openeren of the can. A stout string through these holes had to be long enough to hold in the hand. After mounting, the feet are held snug to the can by the strings. Thus elevat-

ed the boy, or girl, may walk about at a height that he or she will not actually achieve for a year or two. Instant growth!

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Sugar is sweet,
And so are you.

PROJECTILES

PEA SHOOTER

A peashooter was a marvelous toy with which boys annoyed others, especially girls. The joint of a bamboo cane, found in the swamps of the Delta, needed to be six or eight inches in length and the plunger, a whirled stick molded to fit precisely, made of wood, or a dowel. To fit into the shooter, boys searched for green chinaberry trees. The plunger was placed into the near, or mouth, end of the shooter, the lips tightened around the shooter, and with a deep breath, a sudden puff of wind from the lungs sent the missile toward its target. The pea shooter was especially useful for pestering girls walking home from school, but in the schoolroom, it had to be craftily concealed, for teachers loved to hoard them in their desk drawers.

RUBBER BAND SHOOTER

Imitating cowboys of the movies Delta boys fashioned Rubber Band Shooters, frightened their mothers’ hearts with fear that an eye would be zapped. But, what joy boys took in the simulated fight, the delight in hitting the tail of a fleeting “Indian,” and the pride of marksmanship! These accomplishments, however, were seldom achieved, for the rubber band seldom went the distance. Delta boys sawed or hewed a pine board to resemble a pistol or gun. A cloth band at the handle served as a trigger release. The rubber band was stretched from the notched front to the clothes pin. When released it darted forward toward its target. The distance depended upon the length of the shooter and the strength of the rubber band. The “Indians” were fairly safe from the cowboy sharpshooters.

TAP STICK

Small game, birds, rabbit, squirrel, raccoon and the like found homes in the woods and thickets surrounding the fields of cotton and corn of the Delta. To hunt them, some boys received their shotgun on their twelfth birthday while others had to wait until their sixteenth. Christmas, also, was a time to look forward to receiving hunting gear. Until those happy ages arrived, play at hunting with B B gun, bow and arrow, and tap stick substituted. For hunting (and fishing) were part of the recreational subculture of Delta boys.

A twelve to eighteen inch shaft from a sapling or a discarded broom handle was whirled at one end to fit the hole of a large nut. Hardware stores sold the nuts, or they might be found along the railroad track, cast off by the maintenance gang. The nut was pounded until it fits snugly on the shaft. Then, any excess wood protruding from the nut was sawed off. When thrown the tap-end, being heavier, would become the head of the weapon. Lucky would be the boy quick enough to throw it at a rabbit unlucky enough to be “kicked up” in a field. Birds were almost impossible and squirrel much too quick. It was not a very effective weapon for hunting, but it was a weapon to extend the boy’s dominance.
SLING SHOT
A boy could chop a "Y" branch from a hardwood tree, preferably oak, hickory, ash, saw, to make the Y symmetrical and the stock about three inches long. With a pocketknife, he notched one-quarter inch below the tip of the two arms over which he stretched the rubber from inner tubes and tied with a string. The pouch for the rock could be of heavy cloth but leather or rawhide was best. Alternately, the Y of the stock could be carved from a discarded piece of hardwood (not pine or other brittle wood). The two arms formed a U, rather than a Y. Practice, practice, practice was required to master sighting, to pull the elastic back the proper distance, to consider the trajectory, the target and the motion of the hand holding the stock. The weight of the missile, also, had to be taken into account. Altogether, skill in hitting a target, such as a tin can on a fence post, only came from much practice and competition with other boys.

The type of slingshot with which David slew Goliath consisted merely of a leather pouch attached to a heavy cord. When "loaded" with a rock, the sling was twirled in a circle at a high speed and one string released to eject the missile. The trajectory was tangent to the circle by the twirling. This type of slingshot was less popular because of the extreme skill required to master the release point for the bulls-eye. Some Delta boys never mastered it. David, however, practiced enough to subdue Goliath.

BOW AND ARROW
Visits to the movie theater at the county seat were enjoyed only on Friday or Saturday. "Robin Hood" or a cowboys and Indians thrillers turned Delta Boys in the "Twenties into Sherwood Forest men or cowboys and Indians. Cap pistols and bows and arrows led to mighty battles behind hedges and woodpiles. The bow and arrow could do little damage, for seldom were the bow-sticks seasoned adequately and the arrows fell lamely to the ground short of their intended target. A properly seasoned hardwood needed to be tapered from the middle to the ends and notched at the ends to secure the bowstring. Arrows required a feather to insure straight passage. These necessities, however, were seldom observed by Delta boys in their gleeful rush to enact the frightful battles of the movies. After a day or two the enthusiasm of the movie battle died and another enthusiasm would replace it.

CAPTURING THEM ALIVE
TRAPS
Delta boys made traps that caught animals alive and unharmed. They often released the catch back into the wild. After setting the trap with grain to attract birds, they might watch from a blind with a string linked to the trigger. Using a box for a trap led to trouble, for the box concealed what animal might be caught inside. A wire lid for the box solved this problem, and so did a lattice-style pyramid. In both the problem remained of capturing the prize without being peeked or scratched or bitten, since leather gloves were not always handy.

The three sticks comprising the trigger had to be skillfully crafted so that when the bait on the inside arm of the "4" was pecked by the bird or squirrel, the lever would fall and topple the box, enclosing the animal. Other problems arose when the poor creature, finding itself restrained, would batter its head against the sides in futile attempts to gain freedom. Sometimes the Delta boy found an exhausted animal with a bloody head, so precious is liberty to those pent up.

WIND MASTER
KITES
Without realizing it, Delta boys engaged principles of aerodynamics in constructing, adjusting, and flying kites. They could purchase kites in the stores, of course, but who would want a store-bought kite when so much fun could be had making them? Light pinewood was commonly used. Shafts 1/4" x 3/8" were best for the main strut. At the cross-points a string bound the sticks together. Balance has importance and distances from the focal point to the end had to balance. Delta boys notched the ends of the struts to secure the outline string. Once fashioned, the kite came into being with tissue paper or newspaper, cut with a one-inch overlap. The overlap was carefully folded over the string and glued. The hanger was strung on the paper-side of the frame, first at the crossing, which required a small hole in the paper, then at the bottom. Delta boys made the final adjustment to the kite by tying a string between the ends of the crossbow stick, giving the bow a curvature of some 2 1/2" to 3" at the center. Depending upon the flexibility of the wood, the arc of the crossbow sometimes had to be adjusted. The final touch was the tail, typically fashioned from one of mother's discarded sheets. Extra yardage needed to be handy, for, depending upon the strength of the wind, more or less tail might be required. The box kite, shown in the illustration, required much greater skill in construction, and patience, bun, when aloft, became the proudest of the Delta boys' attainments.

Once airborne the kite might receive a "message" up its line. A hole is made in a piece of paper, say 3" x 8", or light cardboard, and the kite's lead line passed through the hole. The Delta boy would swirl the paper to send it fluttering up the line toward the kite.

Delta boys did not have bills from which to launch kites. But in March and some fall months the wind swept freely across the wide cottonfields. They were careful to avoid trees and power lines and telephone lines. Delta boys, also, were careful to avoid flying their kites during a storm, for the kites might attract electricity, as Benjamin Franklin proved. While the aerodynamic principles that make flight possible could come to Delta boys in later physics classes and aviation school, in launching their kites, they, already, had mastered the simple concepts of flight.

I wish I had a little red box
To put my chewing-gum in
I'd take it out — smash, smash, smash
And put it back a-gin.
OTHER SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

The ingenuity of Delta boys extended to many small, less significant things. Chalk pocketed while reciting at the blackboard became the means of inscribing a hopscotch latricle on the side walk for a contest on route home from school. A rock or chip of wood served as the block, to be tossed into a square, hopped to, and retrieved while standing on one leg, and hopped back to the beginning. . . . Boys also drew the checkerboard maze on heavy cardboard, or wood, and blackened in the alternate squares with shoe polish. Checkers were soda bottle caps, with exterior top for one player and the interior for the other. They made musical sounds with a comb rapped in tissue paper, placed over the mouth. By humming the tune, the comb-tissue paper magnified the sounds. . . . A loop of string between two deaf hands became the means of construction of the Jacob’s ladder, cat’s cradle, or other ingenious string structures. They were a source of endless fascination to both boy and onlooker. . . . Practicing the art of origami led Delta boys to perfect paper airplanes that darted across unsupervised classrooms, and to fold paper into useful cups for a taste of water. They did not cultivate the paper-folding craft further, however, as the Japanese have done. . . . By disassembling a skate and screwing the wheels to a 2 x 4, the boys constructed a crude scooter, on up which providing “handle-bars” to guide it in .

Delta Boys’ failures were not uncommon but they were quickly abandoned for more promising prospects. Constructing a performing stage, with curtains (of mother’s sheets) became an all-day team effort. When ready for a shadow show, the audience may have been called home to supper. . . . Wearing a string seat for a chair, also a tedious undertaking, sometimes kept hopelessly entangled midway and abandoned in disgust. . . . Whitting a figurine in wood, working with wood that splintered with a knife unsatisfactorily, often led to reviving the figures nose or head, and an abandoned project. . . . More technical attempts also failed, such as an effort to construct a crystal radio receiver destined never to pick up WMC-Memphis. While Delta Boys always gave the failure another try, they sometimes abandoned the effort in favor of more certain successes.

The lesson all this offers to morons and duds of the new millennium: See that they have the materials to make it themselves. Designing and constructing project shovs elect and set for themselves, when successful, will spur them to another attempt, and another success. 14

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ASHLEY MITCHELL FERRIS is a student at Emory University, and draws as a hobby.

MОСS MARCELLUS BUTLER, qualified as an engineer, lawyer, and planter, has retired from a near-lifetime of farming in the Mississippi Delta.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most M. Butler, Jones town, MS – Delta planter, engineer, lawyer, and educational policymaker – drew the illustrations of Delta boys’ ingenuities. Ashley Mitchell Ferris – a student of psychology and economics, Emory University – added the animated portrayal of the boys in action. Steven Wade, Hattiesville, MD. – writer, folklorist, banjo musician and performer – suggested the addition of the animated figures. Ted Owrey – editor, writer, and folklorist – gave valuable advice on the manuscript. And, Maggie Stephens – Office Manager of the Department of Sociology, Emory University, and friend – cast the final typescript. To each, my hearty thanks. – Abbott L. Ferris.

REFERENCES


Richard Wright is best known for his fictional and autobiographical insights into the life of the individual in his classics Native Son (1940) and Black Boy (1945). His 1941 work, 12 Million Black Voices, though often overlooked both by Wright scholars and by students of depression-era documentary works, contains intriguing insights into both the Mississippi native’s perspective as a writer and the broader issue of the political implications of folk studies.

The book lacks the penetrating psychological insights into individual alienation that are so important in Black Boy or Native Son. And it has elicited few comparisons to depression-era documentary studies such as those by Charles Johnson, James Agee and Walker Evans, Horace Powdermaker, or Zora Neale Hurston, perhaps because it offers no new documentary evidence. But we should read the book in part as Richard Wright’s meditation on the concept of the African American folk. The tide, subtitle, forward, and virtually every page announce the book as a discussion of the folk. Dramatically different from Wright’s better known works, 12 Million Black Voices consistently discusses what we do and think, and by “we,” Wright meant the mass of African Americans with roots in the rural South. Dozens of Farm Security Administration photographs by Dorothea Lange, Marion Post, Russell Lee, Jack Delano and others do not merely illustrate the text; they dramatize it with the suggestion that 12 million people had shared similar experiences.

Most of the book discusses the lives of African Americans in the South. Wright describes and interprets Jim Crow segregation and violence against African Americans. In poetic language, he gives a searing description of the sharecropping system: “we plow, plant, chop, and pick the cotton, working always toward a dark, mercurial goal” (49). The “folk” responded by developing group ways of surviving. Readers who know the frustration Wright showed in Black Boy with older African Americans who learned to live with poverty and segregation may be surprised by the tender sympathy he shows for the language, religion, music, and family lives of sharecropping people.

“We proceeded to build our language in inflections of voice, through tonal variety, by hurried speech, in honeyed crawls, by rolling our eyes, by flourishing our hands, by assigning to common, simple words new meanings, meanings which enabled us to speak of revolt in the actual presence of the Lords of the Land without their being aware.” (40)
Reviews of Recent Books


For me, Maude Schuyler Clay's Delta Land evokes thirty-five years of memories spent traveling in and out of the Delta. While the images she captures with her camera took hundreds of years to create, they evoke memories as fresh as yesterday, like "Flooded Fields," where I once waded in the mud and ruined a pair of tennis shoes. When I see the broken rail on the "Tallahatchie Bridge," I recall leaping a 22 rifle on that same bridge, taking careful aim at an out-of-season mallard, then firing a pot shot that splashed ten feet away.

There are also more contemporary memories. Clay’s church pictures, "Two Spired Church," "Field Church," and "Cotton Field Church" take me back to the afternoon I spent last summer at a five congregation, fifth Sunday singing at a small Black church near Tunica. The roof was raised! Clay’s images, however, do not just capture memories of a mispent youth and hope of salvation. Many of them are as frightening as tomorrow. Cemetery pictures "Wire Gate," "Gone But Not Forgotten," "Abbie Bank and Cotton Field," and "Mound Cemetery" remind everyone that regardless of race, class, sex, or gender, we all have a debt to pay. Many of Clay’s pictures are filled with that stark sense of reality, one that evokes personal images and stirs up deep feelings.

"Wooden House and Tree" brings back the same profound sense of loss I always feel when I look at an abandoned but still standing house. Instead of seeing "what it," I always hear "what was." "The Leaning Tower of Hit Spurr Plantation" evokes another strong memory from my boyhood days. I'm sure it is a Southern images we all share. I remember old men sitting on front porches of similar stores, telling stories and carving on...
whistling sticks, occasionally playing guitars and banjos. While they played, old women bought big bags of flour and small cuts of unchoke meat, and children played out back. They eventually stopped their games long enough to look longingly at candy safely housed behind glass panes—too expensive for the change in their pockets. Sately that was what happened around this store. I feel it in Clay's pictures.

In his compelling introduction, Lewis Nordman mentions the "weird beauty of decay" (21), in Clay's work. While Clay's vision does seem to include that element, I see it more as a sense of unfulfilled promise than decay. "To the Memory of Emmett Till" shows us a dark place that led to a dark time, and the caption of Till's "endlessly dreaming of what could have been" (9) certainly represents the most compelling unfulfilled promise—life cut short for speaking a few words that violated the Delta social code. Till's fate, while a historical tragedy, can also be seen as a metaphor for today; the cotton gin ton tied around his neck weighed him down, the same way the Delta is weighed down; critical resources misspent maintaining an illusion of the past (powerfully suggested in "Riverside Elevator") at the expense of the present. While this leaves me with a sense of loss, it also offers a tremendous sense of promise, much like a pregnant woman who is waiting for her time to pass until her child is born; Clay's work, which chronicles the historically difficult, and inordinately long pregnancy of the Delta, also offers a tremendous sense of hope. By sharing such a clear vision of what was, she allows for the possibilities of what can be—some day.

At the same time, however, there is a competing theme of the power of the land to outlast and eventually overcome humanity. These images are found throughout the book. "Kudzu House Spring" and "Vine House" show a period of transition, demonstrating that any structure built by man will eventually be overcome by the explosive growth in the Delta. "Abandoned Gas Pump" and "Super Bowl" leave us with the idea that traditional commerce never really caught on. "Bledsoe Swamp," "Primordial Swamp," and "Swamp" show the final outcome of the process of decay Nodary chronicles in his essay. But I believe it goes beyond decay into reclamation; these pictures show that nothing built by man can withstand the power of nature to reclaim what was taken away when Clay's ancestors stepped off the boat in the 1840s. Her pictures, and each succeeding flood, show that the Mississippi Delta, where nature rules, will, if it wishes, eventually reclaim the land.

These themes lead to the eventual statement Clay makes with the animals and people we see in the book. As Nordman remarks, there are many dogs running playfully, even joyfully throughout these pages. In addition to the dogs, there are also geese, pigs, horses, and people. A woman and child cross the street in "Lewis Killum Grocery" and Clay's own child, in "Sophia Maudie McAllen Clay," steps bravely into the world she has inherited. I think these fleeting glimpses make a powerful statement about the Mississippi Delta: it is a strange and wonderful, even magical place that will suit only a few people, most of whom were born to the land, and, like the land, they like the place they inhabit, are filled with paradoxes and contradictions.

Maude Schuyler Clay is one of those people; she is a photographer of the region's posters. Her eye is flawless and her use of light and mood are impeccable. The resulting work, like that of all great artists, evokes and suggests as much as it shows or tells. She has an innate understanding of both time and place that allows her to stand with two feet on solid ground, which is no easy task in the Delta.

Randall Norrie first came to the Mississippi Delta in 1969 to attend a friend's wedding. A writer and humanities scholar, he teaches creative writing at Sauk Valley Community College in Dixon, Illinois.

Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). The forthcoming-looking fifth section, "The Future of Folk Culture," examines the impact of resort hotels and tourism on the centuries-old African American folk culture of the South Carolina Lowcountry, the story, the civil rights movement, and Gullah speech and other Sea Islands folk traditions. More than half of the essays have appeared before, many of them in edited collections. From the same tradition, but all of them except "Guilty of Holiest Crime: The Passion of John Brown" have been revised for inclusion in this volume. The essays in Shared Traditions are divided into five thematic sections. The book opens with an introductory essay that discusses the importance of folk culture and surveys several of its major forms in the South. Two sections of the book, "The Old South" and "The New South," illustrate the relevance of folk culture to understanding Southern history, while a third section, "Folklore and History: A Dialogue," demonstrates how history contributes to understanding folk culture.

"Three Historiographical Essays" critiques significant studies by three scholars: David Porter's seminal "The Enigma of the South" (1961); David Hackett Fischer's controversial Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America (Oxford University Press, 1989); and, oddly for a collection about the South, Henry Glassie's Passing the Time in Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture.

Charles Joyner.


Charles Joyner, best known for his award-winning study, Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community (University of Illinois Press, 1984), builds two documentary portraits—one in history from the University of South Carolina, the other in folklore and folk-life from the University of Pennsylvania. Now, he combines his long-standing interests in both fields in this collection of his essays that examine "the relationship between history and culture" (ix). The sixteen essays cover a broad range of topics, including antebellum slavery, John Brown's execution, a South Carolina Jewish community, and jazz, blues, and country music. Other essays consider the Appalachian dulcimer, a South Carolina lowcountry ghost story, the civil rights movement, and Gullah speech and other Sea Islands folk traditions. More than half of the essays have appeared before, many of them in edited collections. From the same tradition, but all of them except "Guilty of Holiest Crime: The Passion of John Brown" have been revised for inclusion in this volume. The essays in Shared Traditions are divided into five thematic sections. The book opens with an introductory essay that discusses the importance of folk culture and surveys several of its major forms in the South. Two sections of the book, "The Old South" and "The New South," illustrate the relevance of folk culture to understanding Southern history, while a third section, "Folklore and History: A Dialogue," demonstrates how history contributes to understanding folk culture. "Three Historiographical Essays" critiques significant studies by three scholars: David Porter's seminal "The Enigma of the South" (1961); David Hackett Fischer's controversial Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America (Oxford University Press, 1989); and, oddly for a collection about the South, Henry Glassie's Passing the Time in Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture.

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and women previously ignored by mainstream historical scholarship (2-3) and why "folklorists need history to help them understand the process of change in folk culture" (emphasis in original), 271-272). While far from ground-breaking, "Shared Traditions" has an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the South that folklorists and historians in the field of Southern studies will appreciate.

"Patrick Huber teaches History at Central Missouri State University.

SINGING IN ZION: MUSIC AND SONG IN THE LIFE OF AN ARKANSAS FAMILY.


Singing in Zion is folklorist Robert Cochran's lively exploration of one family's intimate encounter with music. Cochran, Director of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies and Professor of English at the University of Arkansas, wrote this intriguing book after he was invited into the musical world of the Gilbert family by his 1989 folklore student. William Meek, a native of Zion, a small community seven miles from Fayetteville.

"We sing a lot of these songs you've been playing and lecturing about," (xiii) she said, offering up a notebook filled with a personal collection of 225 popular, folk, and gospel songs she and her two sisters—Alma (Billie) Allen and Helen Pulz—had for over thirty years been performing and collecting. The Gilbert sisters had begun the "songbook" in 1959 as a gift to hand down to their children and grandchildren.

The presentation of the songbook proved to be a beginning, a "demonstration of trust" (27) and a door onto a Gilbert family drama. Almost thirty years earlier, Mary Celestia Parker (married to Ozark folklorist Vance Randolph—the subject of an earlier study by Cochran), had organized concerts featuring regional folk singers, one of whom was Phyllidia Hogan. Between 1960 and 1961, Parker recorded Hogan on three occasions—a family tree, and a cultural map of one sister's recollections of Zion builds a multi-layered understanding of place.

In Appendix A, which comprises more than half the text, the song lyrics appear in the order in which they are discussed. After each entry—many with musical scores—the reader finds notes written by the sisters as they compiled their songbook, sometimes over several sittings, and across three decades. About "My Horses Ain't Hungry," Billie Allen writes, "I listen and in my mind I can see Mama or Dad...and I know exactly how they sound. I mean the way their voices went up and down, how the old-time tunes wavered, they had a kind of quaver you know..." (112). Complementing the sisters' personal reflections are the author's interpretive annotations utilizing historical and musical sources. "Dirty Faced Bran," Cochran argues, has not been found in any other songbook or folk song collection.

Cochran presumes that not everyone will share his enthusiasm. "Nobody outside this community, I remind readers, cares all that much about these people or the lives they made. But I do, and I am moved, a man of fifty with a boy's pleasure, lost in a work that is at its best" (30). The moment may make some readers uncomfortable, but it is precisely Cochran's personal immersion that makes his study worth reading, for what we learn about this ethnographer opens us up to listening with our hearts as well as our minds. "Only deep interest, borderline obsession, attachment or animus or a mixture thereof," he confesses, "motivates long-term study." (9).

Singing in Zion is a rare study that reflects the author's willingness to trust in his subject, in the ever-evolving ethnographic process, and in his unerring respect and appreciation for Phyllidia Hogan and her sisters who, Cochran says, "made me feel like an honorary Gilbert" (28). One might wish the University of Arkansas Press were releasing an accompanying Gilbert Family compact disc. Until then, grab a glass of sweet tea, settle down into your favorite reading chair, and enjoy.

Sally Graham taught ethnography and anthropology at Palau Community College and now works for CNN in Atlanta.

THE HAIRSTONS: AN AMERICAN FAMILY IN BLACK AND WHITE.


Perceptive writers from research, scholars, and journalists have for the last decade revealed the records behind the common-sense assumption that same-named European Americans and African Americans from antebellum plantation culture in many cases share the same ancestors. Wieneck, in his book The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White takes this work a step farther and documents with scrupulous archival and oral history research the tangled, twisted and tortured family tree of one such family, the Hairstons, of North Carolina, Virginia, and Mississippi.

Equally skilled as an interpreter and as a writer as he is a research scholar, Wieneck writes the narrative of his own search for knowledge of the Hairston family, weaves it with his own conjectures and inferences as they are proven or disconfirmed, steadily judges the historical moral fibre of the United States as he exposes "the evil of slavery" and the near-slavery of subsequent sharecropper farming. Jim Crow law and custom, and the denial of the humanity of black people down through the 1960s. He tells the epic-like stories of the black and white families of the Hairstons, with honesty, clear-sightedness, integrity and sometimes even a poetic beauty.

Throughout the Hairston saga, Wieneck draws biblical references to the Pharaoh and the Hebrew slaves, familiar through white and black generations of Hairstons. The moral he draws from the families' tale is biblical, too, for he argues that though the black Hairstons know most tellingly the abuses of their forebears by the slaveowners and the stories of white parentage of many of them, they have forgiven and redeemed that past.

Wieneck ends the book as it begins it, featuring two Hairston men, one white and one black, at Cooleemee Plantation near the Yadkin River in North Carolina. Peter Wilson Hairston, the white current owner of the plantation mansion at Cooleemee, and Squire Hairston, a black man living nearby and descended from Cooleemee slaves. The white Hairston is a judge, having practiced law in North Carolina after he and his wife inherited Cooleemee and out of family duty came from Baltimore to run it. Squire is the first name of the black Hairston man whose grandfather had been born a slave on Cooleemee Plantation and whose father had been a sharecropper there.

At their first meeting, Wieneck is startled that the white descendent of the slaveholder would invite the black son of slave offspring to his house and would shake hands with him cordially, obviously the two of them at peace with their conflicting history. Divided even by the pronunciation of their joint name, the black family using the spelling pronunciation and the whites using the Scottish "Harston," Judge Peter Hairston and Squire Hairston nevertheless acknowledged their shared plantation bond.

At the end of the book, Wieneck reports attending Squire Hairston's funeral and Judge Hairston, now ill and wheelchair-bound, breaks down sobbing during the service. Wieneck realizes the depth of love between the men, love generated by forgiveness of the black people of the sin of the white people's forefathers, not the unacknowledged probability, that each man had denied in fact, that they had a mutual grandfather.

Over his seven years' research between his first meeting with the two Hairston representatives and...
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Squire's funeral and in the more than 300 pages of his book, Wienieck attends family reunions of black Hairstons and follows leads to archives, libraries, and people. At one library, met with hostility, he learns quietly from an eavesdropper of the only existing copy of a Virginia "cohabitation register" mandated by post-Civil War law to legitimizing pre-war slave marriages, thus recording couples and their children, and discovers many Hairstons.

The snared Hairston history gradually yields much: one white Hairston man drowned his mulatto child in a well rather than admitting paternity; another in Mississippi tried on his deathbed to leave all his property, including slaves, to his daughter Chirills who had a black mother and the white family practiced subterfuge, keeping the mulatto daughter and all the others in slavery; some Hairston slave owners punished slaves simply to exert authority. There were many Hairstons—a black Union soldier; white Confederate ones; both whites and blacks suffering during Reconstruction, blacks beginning to prosper, many whites living in poverty in plantation houses; a black Hairston World War II hero; a light-skinned black Hairston leader of school desegregation in the civil rights movement; a famous black Hairston entertainer.

Near the end of his search, Wienieck finds a picture of a light-skinned black Hairston Baptist preacher and believes he sees a family likeness with Coolenese white male relatives' portraits, believes him to be a descendent of the lost Chirills who had been bought by an earlier Peter and thus would be an ancestor of both Judge Peter and Squire. Both men failed to see a family likeness.

In the end, the black Hairstons like the white Hairstons were drawn back to the plantation, they out of slavery like the Hebrews claimed their ancestral blood in the soil of the land. When Squire Hairston died, black Hairstons claimed their rightful place for their ashes to be scattered on the river that flows through their land. And Judge Hairston wept.

GAYLE GRAHAM YATES teaches American Studies at the University of Minnesota.
The third annual Southern Foodways Symposium will be held October 20-22, 2000 on the campus of the University of Mississippi. This year's theme is "Travelin' On: Southern Food En Route," an examination of what happens when Southerners—and Southern foods—travel north, and west, and across the Atlantic.

As was the case with previous symposia, this event will provide an opportunity for cooks, chefs, food writers, and inquisitive eaters alike to come to a better understanding of Southern cuisine and, in turn, Southern culture. Lectures, to be held in Barnard Observatory, the restored ausweiss headquarters of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, will be complemented by a series of informal lunches, served in the auburn grove at the heart of the Ole Miss campus.

Featured foods will include "dueling gumbo" prepared by New Orleans restaurateur Leah Chase, Fritz Blank of Dress Cheminées in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Johnny Faulk of Grand Lake, Louisiana, bass player for the Grammy-nominated Cajun band the Hackberry Ramblers. Friday lunch will feature a sampling of more modern Southern fare from chef Neal Langerman of Georgia Brown's restaurant in Washington, D.C.

Evening events include author readings, regional food drink tastings, a barbecue, a catfish dinner with appetizers from chefs Karen Carr, Jimmy Kennedy, and Louis Osteen, and a street dance hosted by the Hackberry Ramblers. Activities close with a dinner on the grounds.

Host for the event is the Southern Foodways Alliance at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Contributing sponsors include the American Center for Wine, Food, and the Arts, Butcher's Bakery, City Grocer, Fat Possum Records, the Oxford Tourism Council, and Viking Range. Supporting sponsors are Southern Comfort and The Caffin Institute.

A MISSISSIPPI PORTRAIT: Photographs of the Farm Security Administration, 1935-1940

A CD-ROM by Karen Glynn and Tom Rankin

A MISSISSIPPI PORTRAIT is a collection of 1230 photographs, assembled together for the first time, of Mississippi during the Great Depression. These black and white photographs were made in 31 counties by some of the best documentary photographers of the era, including Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange.

The photographs in A MISSISSIPPI PORTRAIT will be screened at a publication party at the Southern Culture Heritage Foundation in Vicksburg on Saturday, August 12. People familiar with the places in the photographs will describe the images and educators will present lesson plans that demonstrate the value of A MISSISSIPPI PORTRAIT in the classroom.

EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWERS:

Such a wonderful piece of work. It will be useful and important for political historians, social historians, art historians, and I can imagine, fiction writers.

Patti Carr Black

...it is a wonderful resource that captures a critical moment in the transformation of Southern agriculture.

William Glass, Mississippi University for Women

...the format is very attractive and the possibilities for instructional use are many and varied.

Dorothy Shawhan, Delta State University

This is a wonderful resource that can be used in a wide variety of contexts, in universities but also in cities and towns all around the state.

David Crosby, Alcorn State University

This is one of the most important documents we have of Mississippi in the 1930s, right there alongside the great novels and memoirs and WPA murals.

Jay Watson, University of Mississippi

EVENT DATE AND LOCATION:

A MISSISSIPPI PORTRAIT
PUBLICATION PARTY

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As part of its attempts to strengthen the network of people active in the folk and traditional arts of the state, the Mississippi Arts Commission has created an email discussion group to serve you.

For more information, contact Larry Montana at the Mississippi Arts Commission at 662-359-6095 or martsarts.state.ms.us.
Mississippi Folklife, formerly the Mississippi Folklore Register, publishes articles, photographic essays and reviews about the diversity of folklife and culture in Mississippi and adjoining regions. To subscribe and join the Mississippi Folklore Society, please fill out this form and mail it to the address below.

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