

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: NINETEENTH-CENTURY BANJOS IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CUSTOM AND  
TRADITION IN A MODERN EARLY BANJO  
REVIVAL

Greg C. Adams, M.A., 2012

Directed By: Professor J. Lawrence Witzleben, School of  
Music

This thesis demonstrates how members of a modern music revival use the banjo to create a counter narrative to America's whiteness. Within this revival, nineteenth-century banjos are central to a growing interest in antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era music and culture. As researchers, collectors, musicians, and instrument builders pursue this interest, they explore the dissonances of the legacies surrounding slavery, blackface minstrelsy, and the traumas of the American Civil War. Framing this phenomenon within Eric Hobsbawm's theories of custom and tradition and Thomas Turino's concepts of habits, socialization, and cultural cohort relationships, I argue that this modern revival supports a form of critical ethnography aimed for advocacy on three fronts—advocacy that challenges marginalizing stereotypes, promotes opportunities to rethink the banjo's cultural significance as a national instrument of whiteness, and creates greater infrastructure for the knowledge and material culture amassed by members of the banjo community.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY BANJOS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:  
CUSTOM AND TRADITION IN A MODERN EARLY BANJO REVIVAL

By

Greg C. Adams

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
2012

Advisory Committee:  
Professor J. Lawrence Witzleben, Chair  
Assistant Professor Fernando Rios  
Assistant Professor Patrick Warfield

© Copyright by  
Greg C. Adams  
2012

## Dedication

To my wife, mother,  
family, and friends—  
some of the world's most supportive enablers

To those members of the banjo community  
who tirelessly seek to illuminate  
the banjo's cultural relevance

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee—Dr. J. Lawrence Witzleben, Dr. Fernando Rios, and Dr. Patrick Warfield—whose excellent guidance and feedback have been invaluable in my graduate work and to this thesis. I owe my deepest gratitude to my wife, Maggie, for always being supportive of my pursuit of banjo-related research, and to my mother who raised me in an environment that nurtured my passion for music, education, and opportunity. I am deeply indebted to all who agreed to participate in this study. This work would not have been possible without their willingness to collaborate with me. I offer special thanks to Bob Winans, George Wunderlich, Shlomo Pestcoe, and Barbara Taylor for their friendship, ongoing support, and encouragement. I also wish to acknowledge Jim Bollman, Peter Szego, and everyone else involved with the 5-String Banjo Collectors Gatherings for the important work they do in bringing to light so many critical aspects of banjo history that would otherwise be missed. Thank you.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
<u>Coming to the Early Banjo</u> .....	2
<u>Long-Term Involvement with Advantages and Potential Disadvantages</u> .....	4
<u>Methodology: Critical Ethnography</u> .....	7
<u>Research Design</u> .....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Data Collection Methods.....	10
Ethical Considerations.....	12
Description of Research Population.....	13
Timeframe of Field Research.....	13
<u>Terminology</u> .....	14
Early Banjo.....	14
Early Banjo Activities.....	14
<u>Literature Review</u> .....	15
The “Early” Banjo and Early Banjo Players.....	15
Blackface Minstrelsy.....	18
Music Revivals.....	21
Civil War Reenacting.....	26
<u>Customs and Traditions; Habits, Socialization, and Cultural Cohorts</u> .....	30
<u>Significance and Goals</u> .....	36
<u>Chapter Summary</u> .....	38
Chapter 2: Traditions and Customs of a Modern Early Banjo Revival.....	40
<u>A Genesis of the Twenty-First Century Early Banjo Tradition</u> .....	40
<u>Customs: Exploring the Actions of What People “Do” Online and In-Person</u> .....	41
Online Social Networks.....	42
Online Access to Primary and Secondary Source Material.....	43
In-Person Events.....	50
<u>Tradition: Music, Modern Analysis, and Material Culture as “Paraphernalia”</u> .....	52
Early Banjo Music and Techniques.....	53
Modern Arrangements.....	57
Early Banjo Material Culture.....	60
<u>Chapter Summary</u> .....	63
Chapter 3: Case Studies of Habits, Socialization, and a Cultural Cohort Network....	64
<u>Profile of the Interviewees</u> .....	64
<u>Habits and Socialization of Early Banjo Researchers, Collectors, Musicians, and Builders</u> .....	68
Conducting Research.....	69
Collecting Instruments and Ephemera.....	74

Musicians and Early Banjo Music.....	76
Instrument Builders .....	84
<u>Delineating Deeper Issues in an Early Banjo Cultural Cohort Network</u> .....	88
Chapter Summary.....	101
Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusion .....	103
<u>Critical Ethnography</u> .....	103
<u>Traditions and Customs; Habits, Socialization, and Cultural Cohorts</u> .....	104
<u>(Re)Connecting the Banjo to Issues of Race, Revival, Memory, Trauma, and</u>	
<u>Nationalism</u> .....	106
<u>Conclusion: Inclusively Constructing a Counter Narrative to America's Whiteness</u>	
.....	115
Appendix .....	121
References Cited .....	123

## List of Tables

1.	Interviewees, banjo interests (by decade), and year of first meeting interviewee	65
2.	Interviewees' interest in the banjo and early banjo	68



## List of Figures

1.	Framework applying Hobsbawm's "Customs" and "Traditions" concept to the banjo community	32
2.	Theoretical Model as Applied to People Interested in the Early Banjo	35
3.	Hobsbawm and Turino Combined	36
4.	Comparison between early and modern banjo tuning	55
5.	Banjo Arrangements	56
6.	Tablature versions of period banjo arrangements	58
7.	Original and reproduction Boucher and Ashborn banjos	61
8.	Example of historical image that holds value within the modern early banjo tradition	62
9.	Example of historical textual reference to the banjo and a banjo player	62

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis is to frame an important trend now taking place within one of America's music communities, a trend that includes a revival of interest in mid-nineteenth century banjos, music, and culture. As a member of this community, I examine issues about the impact of generational knowledge, cultural memory, and the ways in which people navigate customs and traditions within various social circles. In this modern context, people are actively taking the opportunity to implicitly and sometimes explicitly confront America's racial past, the legacy of attitudes bound in American popular culture, the baggage of blackface minstrelsy, and the ongoing resonance of the traumas of the American Civil War.

Against the backdrop of America's folk revival and the social movements of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, a small, disparate group of researchers, collectors, musicians, and instrument builders began to examine the early history of the banjo. While most of the banjo community during this time was focused on bluegrass and old-time music, this small group pursued a series of alternate activities. They published articles, distributed their research, built collections, learned repertoire and playing techniques, and produced recordings. Others built reproduction instruments and restored originals, some of which predated the American Civil War. Their work also increased demand for an esoteric, historical form of the banjo from the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War eras. In recent years, this demand—amplified through web-based social networks and online file sharing—suggests that modern interest in the early banjo has reached a critical mass.

### **Coming to the Early Banjo**

In 1995, I began playing banjo for Civil War reenactments and living history events in what was then my home of southwestern Pennsylvania. As one of several founding members of a string band specializing in Civil War era music, I quickly developed a rudimentary understanding of banjo technique with the aid of several books, a series of recordings, and a few lessons in bluegrass and old-time banjo. In addition to playing so-called “folk” songs and religious music at churches, rest homes, retirement communities, and for children, I was determined to learn as many Civil War songs as I could on my 1979 Gibson Mastertone banjo.

In 1996, I received photocopies of four original banjo instruction books from 1855, 1858, 1860, and 1865. These books should have been a rich resource for my group and for my solo performances where I would both play and tell audiences about this original banjo music. Yet, throughout many of the pages, the racial, social, political, ethnic, and gender-based epithets revealed the banjo’s inextricable links to blackface minstrelsy and many widely held racial and social attitudes of the mid-nineteenth century. Excited to learn about the playing techniques, I tried to open the books again and again, but because of the textual content I never stayed in the pages too long.

Our Civil War string band established a habit of altering lyrics of period songs such as “Oh Susannah” and “Kingdom Coming” (changing lyrics like “nigger” and “darkey” into “fellas” or “others”) and we all agreed that we were not interested in reinforcing racist attitudes found in significant portions of period music. Yet, for years I struggled with the disconnect between musicians playing and singing

traditional “folk” songs (many repurposed for use in social causes and as an oral record of rural living) and the ways in which some musicians within Civil War reenactment circles comfortably sang and played period music with that same “folk” spirit, but without altering the racially tinged lyrics. Doing so, they argued, would be giving into political correctness and misrepresenting historical accuracy and honesty.

I have often asked myself questions to explore the cognitive dissonance I felt when hearing other people’s performances and looking at historical materials. If I am playing Civil War music with altered lyrics, or music that twentieth-century commercial recordings are telling me is of “the folk,” then why does the fact that these were songs of blackface minstrelsy continue to bother me? Why weren’t more people talking about these disturbing things? How was I supposed to deal with the contents of these banjo books while learning about the techniques and the music they contained? If I openly shared with our audiences the actual provenance of the songs they so enjoyed, would they refuse to hire our group or, worse, think that I was being racist? People would not hire a musician who asked these questions—they wanted people who could entertain. I was caught in a mental bind in which I was unable to figure out why people were not discussing these issues more openly, while I was too afraid to ask my questions out loud.

My mindset began to change in 2000 when I read the liner notes to Robert Winans’ New World Records release *The Early Minstrel Show*. Winans states:

The negative side of the minstrel show’s impact was its racism. The minstrel show helped create or reinforce negative stereotypes of blacks that have plagued American society ever since. Some of the songs on this recording contain racist lyrics. This might be thought reason enough not to resurrect this material, but anything with so much cultural impact deserves serious study.

We need to listen to this material in its historical perspective and understand that the study of it is not a validation of its racist sentiments. (1985)

Reading Winans' scholarship was one of many turning points in my pursuit of a better understanding of banjo history. Reflecting on many of the privileges I have enjoyed as a member of a generation born after the Civil Rights movement—possessing no living memory of the racial, political, and economic segregation imposed upon millions of Americans—I believe the work that I am presenting today might contribute to further discourse about how people study the past and how we might benefit from its study in the present.

### **Long-Term Involvement with Advantages and Potential Disadvantages**

I became interested in this study based on my own formative experiences as a musician and amateur researcher beginning in 1994. At nineteen, I was captivated by the banjo after watching and listening to Pete Seeger's playing in the documentary *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!* (1981). It also inspired me to reconsider my own preconceptions of and negative stereotypes toward the banjo as a country, hillbilly, or backwoods Appalachian instrument. In addition to emulating Seeger's approach to the instrument, I also sought to recreate the sense of community I perceived in performances by ensembles such as The Weavers.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1994, this fixation on creating local community experiences drove me to play the banjo, learn repertoire, and organize performances for nursing homes and retirement communities, for school concerts, and for local community events. By

---

<sup>1</sup> While I use the word “community” with flexibility, I am aware of recent scholarship that challenges such flexible use, including Kay Kaufman Shelemay's rethinking of collectivity as applied to musical communities (2011).

1997, I enrolled in an undergraduate music program where I received formal music training, studied classical guitar (because I could not major in banjo), and completed my bachelor's degree in music history and literature in December 2001. My focus on the banjo as a research topic was solidified in 2001 when I interacted with a widespread community of researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders at the Five-String Banjo Collectors Gathering in Williamsburg, Virginia. Each year, this group gathered together based on a common interest to discuss, debate, share, trade, and sell original and reproduction nineteenth-century banjos and ephemera.

Additional experiences reinforced and challenged my ideas about what it meant to be a member of multiple communities that were not necessarily connected through any single time or place. Earning a Masters of Library Science from the University of Maryland, College Park (2004) allowed me to enter the workforce as part of a community of archivists and librarians. Trying to address the information management needs of a broader community of banjo researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders allowed me to serve as an advocate for banjo-focused issues through an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant (2009). By self-funding two fieldwork trips to West Africa (2006, 2008) to study the Jola *ekonting*,<sup>2</sup> I became part of a community of tourists who wanted to experience what they thought it meant to explore the banjo's African heritage *in* Africa. Studying the *ngoni* here in the United States as an apprentice to Malian master *ngoni* player and *griot* Cheick Hamala Diabate—through a Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) apprenticeship grant—

---

<sup>2</sup> The Jola *ekonting* is a plucked spike lute that was introduced to the banjo community in 2000 by Gambian researcher Daniel Jatta and Swedish banjo historian Ulf Jägfors.

allowed me to glimpse Diabate's life experience as part of a community of musicians and oral historians. Since August 2011, I have returned to the archival workforce as a processing archivist at the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, becoming more deeply immersed in the music, traditions, and documentary materials that continue to shape how people think about America's musical heritage. My current graduate work in the Ethnomusicology Program at the University of Maryland, College Park and this thesis are an extension of my ongoing involvement with multifaceted and variegated communities of people whose lives and work regularly intersect with my interests in addressing banjo-focused research issues and outreach.

Ultimately, I consider myself as having been a member of the broader banjo community since the mid-1990s. I am also performing formal ethnomusicological fieldwork with the hope that my efforts will help to foreground issues surrounding both banjo history and the modern communities whose members share deep concerns about how that history is understood and represented. In short, I hold multiple roles, and thus need to consider a series of perspectives that include how to account for the advantages and disadvantages of my own long-term involvement.

Anthony Seeger suggests that advantages for the researcher with long-term involvement include an enriched perspective in knowing people who can provide multiple answers to "old questions," knowing how people change over time, and pursuing collaborative opportunities (2008: 10–12). Potential disadvantages for the researcher might consist of a "failure to grow intellectually," a "loss of intensity," becoming too comfortable in the researcher's role, or experiencing stresses that can

result in “conflict between the researcher’s findings and a community’s self-image or understanding” (ibid.: 13–14).

Considering Seeger’s stated advantages and disadvantages in my own work reveal notable comforts in and concerns about this study. On the one hand, with over fifteen years of involvement in the banjo community, I do feel that I hold an enriched perspective, possess an understanding of how certain practices have changed over time, and continue to enjoy many collaborative opportunities. On the other, I also realize that when looking at issues related to race, slavery, appropriation, and representation, people hold a diversity of opinions. One of my general concerns is how to equitably represent and protect the identities and reputations of my collaborators without becoming an apologist, enabler, or supporter of inequitable beliefs toward any individual or group of people. Ideally, by co-constructing the fieldwork experience to the best of my ability with those willing to work with me, I hope to broadly represent what people are willing to share. I hope that this study will contribute to discourse that empowers people to take greater ownership of our highly complex past and its meaning in the present.

### **Methodology: Critical Ethnography**

Critical ethnography provides a lens through which to view my fieldwork and a framework in which to present it. My training as a musician, archivist, and ethnomusicologist provides fundamental support. Yet, I neither pretend to hold a completely objective position in this thesis nor believe that any field researcher can maintain complete objectivity in their work. Because of my long-term involvement in the banjo community and a series of personal factors that shape my identity, I am



motivated to pursue a form of applied ethnomusicology that includes a methodology of critical ethnography. With this applied, critical approach I have done my best to present my work with a transparency that reveals my biases, meets the expectations of academic rigor, and allows readers to use the text as a mirror for reflection upon their own knowledge and experiences.

In *Doing Critical Ethnography*, Jim Thomas suggests that from an ontological perspective, “critical ethnographers begin from a view of ‘what is out there to know’...that furnishes a set of images and metaphors in which various forms of social oppression constitute what is to be known” (1993: 34). In this thesis, “what is out there to know” is present in three areas. First, as people learn about historical evidence covering banjo history, they encounter evidence of the oppression found in America’s racial slavery system and the legacy of blackface minstrelsy. Second, as some of these people become immersed in this content, they grapple with one or more forms of cognitive dissonance that challenge how they think about the past and how they deal with complex historical issues in the present. Third, as people externalize, share, or promote their interest in the early banjo and its links with slavery and minstrelsy, it reveals how people within broader cultural structures respond stigmatically against those who openly express an awareness of the banjo’s racialized history.

Thomas goes on to explain that critical ethnography must include a reflexivity that first “demythologizes the knowledge-production process” by challenging our own authority and, second, interrogates the “so what?” behind the “social implications of our findings and how we present them” (ibid.: 47). As I have

struggled with the cognitive dissonances embedded in the history of the banjo, I have tried to challenge my own authority as a member of an over-privileged white middle-class living in the United States. The “so what?” behind my work includes the intentional deconstruction of how modern interest in the early banjo can help to “illuminate how it occurs and is managed in a given culture” (ibid.: 35). With the residual effect of cultural traumas such as America’s history of slavery and the cultural impact of blackface minstrelsy, my work reflects how racism and racist behavior form “the aggregate set of social factors that give one group power at the expense of another [where] part of this asymmetrical power process includes the symbols denoting and connoting racial meanings” (ibid.: 55).

This thesis discusses some of the ways people are working to better understand the asymmetries of power reflected in the historical record and the types of power structures that affect how we understand, use, and apply that knowledge today. My ultimate goal in performing this ethnographic work is to fashion an inclusive approach to discussing history. The banjo is a quintessential symbol of America’s complex racial past and its study can contribute to a process that promotes self-interrogation and a means to invite people to positively and constructively change how they treat one another.

### **Research Design**

The research design of this study builds on D. Soyini Madison’s framework for organizing a critical ethnography (2005: 22). It consists of: 1) a statement of the question or problem; 2) a description of the data collection methods, interviews, data logging techniques, coding, and analysis and interpretation framework; 3) delineated

ethical methods; 4) descriptions of the research population; and 5) outlining the timeframe in which the research process was completed (ibid.). In the following subsections, I outline the ways in which my work reflects these criteria.

### **Research Questions**

In my Institutional Review Board application (IRB), I stated that the purpose of the research project was to “understand the use and function of nineteenth century banjos, their music, and their history in American revival music communities” (see Appendix 1 for the consent form). Two questions guided my research:

1. What are the ways in which people create and maintain habits and socialization practices centered on an interest in antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era banjos?
2. How do members of this revival community grapple with the dissonances of slavery’s legacy, blackface minstrelsy, and the traumas of the American Civil War?

### **Data Collection Methods**

My data collection methods include compiling content related to historical banjo-related materials, describing the essential contexts in which people explore the early banjo with primary and secondary source material, and conducting interviews with key individuals. In my field research, some of the places where this phenomenon occurred included locations where people meet in person—such as Civil War reenactments, living history events, old-time music venues, festivals, and academic and non-academic conferences and meetings—or online through social networking sites, YouTube, and listservs.

As part of my field research, I also conducted a series of interviews. I asked questions that focused on the interviewees' life experiences and their willingness to explain concepts, personal observations, and the relevance of the banjo to their lives. Each interview was open ended, but generally began with the asking of four questions found on the IRB consent form:

- How has your involvement and interest in the banjo changed from year to year?
- What does the banjo represent (e.g., historically, in the last 40 years, and today)?
- What types of sources, information, and people helped shape your work?
- How do you believe your work in particular (e.g., as a musician, researcher, or collector) has shaped wider public understanding about banjo history (e.g., through performance, publications, recordings, interaction online)?

Throughout each interview, I continued to ask questions to make sure that focus always returned to the banjo, especially as it related to the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era versions of the instrument. My field journal and data-logging techniques reflected how I began each interview asking the interviewee if they had any questions or concerns about the IRB consent form and if I could have their permission to audio-record our conversations. All interviewees were agreeable to being recorded. In addition to using audio technology, I also took handwritten notes to document concepts and content as the interview unfolded. After completing the interview phase of my research, I transcribed and coded all of the interviews. Once I incorporated relevant content into the thesis, I shared a final draft of the thesis with each interviewee in order to verify that my representation of each person was reliable and accurate in his view.

## **Ethical Considerations**

All of my interviewees gave permission to use their actual names and comments in this thesis. By openly identifying each person and their comments, I felt even greater responsibility to protect them from potential embarrassment or discomfort. Most of the people I interviewed have public personas as researchers, collectors, musicians, or builders. Yet, certain segments of the banjo community are rather small and I asked participants to share opinions and personal experiences regarding complex and sometimes contentious issues. As a result, some participants asked me to withhold using certain comments because of concerns about potential embarrassment or diminished reputations, or because they felt awkward about sharing something that in hindsight they wished to omit.

As a researcher, I had the option to use the interviewees' actual names or use pseudonyms. I was aware that choosing to use their actual names could lead to less candid responses and affect my ability to discuss openly the contentious parts of the topic at hand (e.g., racism, slavery, minstrelsy, or the traumas of war). While the use of pseudonyms might have allowed me to include greater breadth of content, the choice to include each interviewee's actual name was a conscious decision on my part, based on each interviewee's willingness to be identified by name. The strength of using actual names, first, allows members of the community to take ownership of their own hard work, involvement, and dedication to the banjo. Second, as members of the banjo community read this document, it allows them to read how their colleagues communicate important concepts and issues about the history, function, and use of the banjo. Third, as other scholars read this document, it allows them to

recreate my approach to research and perform actual follow-up activities with my collaborators. Ultimately, I felt that the strengths in using actual names outweighed any possible reasons for using pseudonyms.

### **Description of Research Population**

The research population includes those with an interest in the early banjo. They range from relative newcomers to those with five and six decades of experience and knowledge. With age ranges from teens to senior citizens, some pursue their interest in relatively singular and low-profile ways. Others are more publicly or openly involved in online social networks, establishing websites that provide access to and interpretations of primary and secondary source materials, and sharing audio and video recordings. Still others are meeting in person by participating in events that feature or incorporate the early banjo. While this study is focused on a population situated in the United States, evidence covering international interest in the early banjo, banjo history, and nineteenth-century banjo culture can be found online.

### **Timeframe of Field Research**

I began planning for this study upon returning to graduate school in Fall 2009. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval in spring 2011, I conducted the sixteen formal interviews between April and August 2011. Transcription and coding of all interviews was completed in Fall 2011.

## **Terminology**

### **Early Banjo**

The Civil War era marks a type of ending point of the earliest documented time period of banjo history, which begins with references to the instrument in the seventeenth-century Caribbean basin. Thus, the phrase “early banjo” is meant to represent the timeframe covering the earliest references in the Americas through the American Civil War era. Yet, within the banjo community, phrases like “antebellum banjo,” “minstrel banjo,” and “Civil War banjo” are often used interchangeably with the term “early banjo” as a descriptor for the banjo’s vernacular and commercial use through the mid-nineteenth century. Hereafter, I will use the phrase “early banjo” in a sense that combines the terms “antebellum,” “early minstrel,” and “Civil War era.” This use is with full acknowledgement of a broader early history that includes the banjo’s African heritage, Caribbean development, and North American transmission.

### **Early Banjo Activities**

In my study, the activities that people generally pursue in one or more combinations include 1) some type of personal or professional research; 2) collecting material culture objects, ephemera, and historical references; 3) playing, studying, recording, and/or performing period music on original or reproduction instruments; and 4) the building of instruments that are meant to be facsimiles of extant banjos, “reproductions” of a particular kind of period instrument, or restorations of original instruments.

## **Literature Review**

### **The “Early” Banjo and Early Banjo Players**

Dena Epstein’s systematic examination of Caribbean and North American sources from the colonial and antebellum periods reveals important information about African and African American musical expression, including the early history and development of the banjo (1973, 1975, 2003). Epstein provides incontestable evidence about the nature of the banjo’s seventeenth-century emergence in the Caribbean and subsequent transmission to and transformation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North America. She states, “assumptions, speculations and theories have been offered, with only a few isolated sources to support them.... What is needed is a whole series of documents demonstrating the continuous presence of the banjo in the New World over an extended period of time and in various areas” (1975: 347). Through her work with historical documents, printed matter, and images, Epstein provides links to the banjo’s African American provenance as well as a milestone shaping modern awareness of the banjo’s documentary history.

Robert Winans’ scholarship (1976, 1979, 1990, 1993, 1996) includes research into early banjo instruction books, historical references to African American and blackface minstrel performance, and field research with a number of musicians. He produced, performed on, and wrote liner notes for the New World Records album *The Early Minstrel Show* (Winans 1985). He also coauthored an article with banjo scholar Eli Kaufman about the interchange between minstrel and classic-era banjo traditions in the United States and England (Winans and Kaufman 1994). Together, these works place Winans in the center of any discussion that deals with the early banjo or with



the legacy and retention of those traditions in modern music circles. Winans' 1976 article, "The Folk, the Stage, and the Five-String Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," with its study of "the early minstrel banjo playing style, here fully explained for the first time in this century" (1976: 435), is one of several catalysts for modern interest in the early banjo today.

Cecilia Conway's *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* explains her exploration of how "the white mountain music traditions...were only part of the story of old-time music" and "our white cultural framework did not fit but tended to deafen...what [she] was hearing and seeing" in her research (1995: 38). Following this theme, the liner notes to Conway's *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia* (co-produced with J. Scott Odell in 1998) and her subsequent "Black Banjo Songsters" article (2003) explore additional themes of the banjos retentions within and beyond African American music making circles. Also building on the interchanges between the banjo's documented heritage and living tradition, Conway's research continues to resonate with researchers and musicians alike. Similar to Winans and Epstein, Conway also provides an analytical view into the banjo's development and dissemination, a view that continues to hold relevance today.

Phil Gura and James Bollman's collaboration in *America's Instrument: The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Gura and Bollman 1999) provide detail into the banjo as a physical object with its varied contexts, commercialization, and evolution over a broader period of the nineteenth century. Building on the "current state of knowledge about the origin of the banjo," Gura and Bollman discuss how "by the 1840s the instrument and its music were transformed by white, working-class

musicians who made the banjo integral to a new popular entertainment, the minstrel show” (ibid: 2). *America’s Instrument* establishes not only the importance of banjo-focused research, but also the activity of bringing together material culture objects that are found largely in private collections.

Although Karen Linn published *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* in 1991, in some ways it functions as a bookend to the Gura-Bollman book. Her focus on generational memory, commercialization, and the banjo’s varied promotion establishes how the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of the banjo transformed it from an instrument of blackness into an instrument of whiteness. Her points about this generational memory, which I revisit later, are particularly well suited to modern discussions about early banjo history and why current generations of people think about the banjo in such stereotypical ways.

The more recent publications by Bob Carlin, in his *Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy* (2007), and Lowell Schreyer, in his *Banjo Entertainers: From Roots to Ragtime* (2007), represent important additions to the ongoing research surrounding the archival record for both the instrument and the musicians who played them. Carlin explains how “[w]hen the banjo did finally move out of the rural south to join circus and theatrical blackface presentations, it spread like wildfire throughout America,” and Joel Walker Sweeney was “the man primarily responsible for this phenomenon” (2007: 1). Schreyer’s documentation of hundreds of early banjo performers through the ragtime era emphasizes “the professionals, both famous and little known, who worked as banjo entertainers popularizing the five-string instrument in this country and beyond” (2007: xi).

Exhibit catalogs and books such as MIT's *Ring the Banjar* (Webb 1984), Katonah Museum's *Birth of the Banjo* (Shaw, Szego, and Wunderlich 2003), and Leo Mazow's *Picturing the Banjo* (2005) represent yet another small body of work that places the banjo's material culture on display with scholarly interpretation. Together, these and other sources are some of the scholarly access points that more and more people are exploring as they play the banjo in multiple music scenes.

### **Blackface Minstrelsy**

A portion of the body of literature on blackface minstrelsy is also relevant to the ways in which people are coming to research, collect, play, and build nineteenth-century banjos, especially for those who are associated with the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War eras. This relevance ties expressly to the ways in which people access scholarly literature, derive meaning from it, and incorporate that knowledge into their music communities. Some of this literature frames the diverse ways and means through which blackface minstrelsy commanded great impact in the nineteenth century and remains vital to this day.

Hans Nathan's 1962 *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* has been an important source for people learning about the music associated with Dan Emmett. In his preface, Nathan explains that scholarship from the 1930s treated minstrelsy as "something more than witless," and he also charges that ethnomusicologists and musicologists have understandably "remained aloof" to this type of study (1962: v). Nathan's book, in and of itself, is actually a preface to subsequent research that works to correct the lack of scholarly involvement and diversify explanations about minstrelsy's many influences.

William Mahar's 1999 *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* explains how minstrelsy contains many more layers than the mere application of burnt cork and the perpetuation of misrepresentations of African American identity. Archival research reveals significant primary source materials that link the phenomenon to English, Italian, and French dramatic and literary works, a syncretic relationship between African American and European American expression, and a well-developed and flexible network for performing, commodifying, and disseminating blackface performance. For Mahar, in order to understand how minstrelsy highlighted issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, it is important to "identify the materials of minstrelsy more carefully, clarify the role of the African and European American styles that entered mainstream pop culture, interrogate texts whose surface meanings are all too easily lost [and] bring a music historian's point of view to the subject" (1999: 8).

As part of that scope of influences Mahar examines, Dale Cockrell's 1997 *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Their World* argues that the contexts and identities in early blackface performance (ca. 1829-43) are more complicated than previous scholarship has reported. Before minstrelsy became an entire evening's entertainment in 1843, court papers, newspaper reports, and playbills highlighted how early theatrical productions and their audiences were exposed to varying degrees of "blackness" both on the stage and in the streets. Explorations of other period "folk" theatrics establish occasional crossroads between European Americans and African Americans in the form of belsnickeling, mumming,

callithumpian parades, Pinkster celebrations, charivari, and New Year's Day festivals (1997: 231). Cockrell's drive for this work reflects his deep belief "in a constant, ongoing, and enriching dialogue between the present and the past" (ibid: 12).

In his book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995), Eric Lott describes how the American working class began to emulate and appropriate African American identity as part of blackface minstrelsy. But Lott also challenges his readers when he says, "If at this juncture we are to understand anything more about popular racial feeling in the United States, we must no longer be satisfied merely to condemn the terrible pleasures of cultural material such as minstrelsy, for their legacy is all around us" (1995: 11). Basically, the scholarship on blackface minstrelsy, while providing a strong paper trail of evidence, also challenges its readers to think and react more critically.

Howard and Judith Sacks' *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem* (1993) frames how the banjo "perfectly symbolizes" how culture is "built selectively" and "what is discarded tells just as much as what is kept" (1993: 16). They argue that the banjo is "a genuine African American musical instrument...[that] is yet to be salvaged from its abuse as a demeaning stereotype on the minstrel stage" (ibid.: 16). The idea that a black family, the Snowdens, share historical links with Dan Emmett's popularization of the song "Dixie" in 1859 should get readers to take pause in how they think about the racial categories that are often supplied and perpetuated in popular culture over time.

One recent line of discourse in minstrelsy research includes musicologist Christopher Smith's essay on black and white cultural interchange as a form of

“creolization” between African- and Irish-American musicians and musical expression on the frontier and river regions. Compellingly making the past more relevant in the present, Smith outlines six conclusions:

First: riverine and maritime environments on the frontiers were precisely the contexts in which African Americans and Irish Americans came together in contact and cultural exchange. Second: the degree, dispersal, and intensity of Caribbean cultural influence in all these environments was much wider and deeper than has been understood, and much more fundamental to minstrelsy’s creole synthesis. Third: a “creolization” of American popular music was already occurring in these contexts well before the first theatrical blackface performances of the late 1830s. Fourth: these contexts were available and familiar to the first architects of minstrelsy, because they toured and performed near the same harbor and frontier cities. Fifth: despite claims of earlier scholarship, the early minstrel performers were not providing an incompetent imitation of an “unadulterated” southern black idiom, but rather a closely observed, remarkably precise replication of an existing creole performance idiom. Sixth: minstrelsy’s swift and extensive mass-cultural appeal to working-class audiences resulted not from the idiom’s “novelty” (in the sense of “unfamiliarity”) but from the “pleasurable shock” of seeing a beloved street-performance idiom translated to the legitimate stage. (2011: 99)

Here in the twenty-first century, perhaps because of minstrelsy’s charged nature and the largely unpublicized historical references, the broader public has not been given the opportunity to more fully investigate and interpret this past. Yet, viewing the impact and legacy of these phenomena through a lens that includes how people represent the past within essential music circles, such as music revivals, reveals key concepts that provide valuable tools for analysis.

### **Music Revivals**

Within a notable body of literature about music revivals, I was particularly interested in seeing how scholars represent the American folk revival, European early music revival, and music in Civil War reenacting. Since many of my interviewees self-identified their cultural affiliations with the folk revival of the 1950s and ‘60s, I

wanted to see how their involvement with the early banjo might add to this body of literature. Alternately, some of my interviewees who specialize in the early banjo are either members of a reenactment or living history community or work to satisfy those communities' interests and demand for access to original and reproduction materials.

Tamara Livingston defines revivals within various music cultures as “social movements” that serve as “cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture” and seek to use revivalist perceptions as a means to “improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity” (1999: 68).

Contributing factors to this phenomenon include “core revivalists” aligning themselves with “revival informants and/or original sources,” an ideological discourse in which followers support the movement through formally organized activities, and engagement in “commercial enterprises” such as non-profit organizations (ibid: 69).

Malcolm Chapman suggests a conceptual framework to parse the revivalist invention of “Celtic music” into “four relevant processes” (1997: 36). To paraphrase, these processes include the following:

- 1) The idea of self vs. other and its parallels in classifying groups as dominant vs. non-dominant.
- 2) The progression of “fashion” or fads from the center of any group toward a “periphery.” This phenomenon is mostly “indifferent to boundaries” but, basically, suggests that the activities of any group should not be viewed as static, though they often are.
- 3) The dominant culture, group, or “self” actively “constructs” or creates a “perceived” idea about the other, which is often inaccurate, anecdotal, and suggests that the non-dominant group is “inconstant, unreliable, irrational, colourful, dramatic, given to excess and inadequacy.”
- 4) Combinations of the first three steps that can result in a type of constructed, glamorized, and romanticized view of the other (ibid.: 36–37)

Erik Cohen's work with "Oriental Jewish groups in Israel" resulted in a schema outlining a "typology of stylistic dynamics" (1983: 236). Cohen offers influencing elements that consist of: 1) *perpetuation vs. innovation* (the reproduction of "already existing stylistic elements" vs. the introduction of novelties); 2) *orthogenesis vs. heterogenesis* (ethnic music made, replicated, or developed under "new conditions" vs. being "combined with extraneous elements to create new, original musical styles"); 3) *internal vs. external audience* ("the musician's own ethnic group" vs. those beyond the musicians immediate ethnic group); and 4) *spontaneous vs. sponsored musical production* (situations "where ethnic cultural events often do not occur wholly spontaneously" vs. "sponsor[ship] by a variety of outsiders or public and national institutions") (ibid.: 237).

Chris Goertzen examines the issue of who controls the broader perceptions of what is taking place within a revival context. Goertzen's research into Norwegian folk revivals of recent decades surfaces in his questions about who should maintain control of public relations for certain music traditions. Goertzen asks:

Who ought to control the Norwegian folk revival, the most direct heirs of its founders, or a broader group reflecting the revival's modern constituency? On what ideological principles should power in the revival depend? How ought ideology interact with the cultural raw material of the revival—music and dance—and with natural processes of change? (1998: 99)

In the case of the Norwegian perceptions of Gammeldan music, its heritage is linked to both pan-European musics of the nineteenth century and potentially older oral traditions maintained by amateur musicians (ibid.: 99). In this environment, revival demography, national, group and individual ideology, and institutional organizations



(such as Norway's National Fiddlers Organization [NFO]) inform arguments that shape who controls public perspectives about the music (ibid.: 123). These arguments include debates over which musics "deserve" or "need" sponsorship as well as which version of the history receives support—those linked to an organizational history (such as the NFO) or those outside of the organization (ibid.: 107).

Ronald D. Cohen describes America's "folk revival" of the twentieth century as something that derived greater meaning "especially since the advent of nonfolk urban folk singers in the 1920s and 1930s and the urban folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s" (Cohen 1995: vii). Cohen describes how "[t]his broadening definition comprises material ranging from folk music and performers who fully satisfy old academic definitions to composed materials of urban folksingers, and along substantial borderlines with pop music, country music, blues, jazz, and rock" (ibid.).

Neil V. Rosenberg pushes a line of argument similar to other scholars in other geographic areas mentioned above. He states, "The issues of who speaks for 'the folk' can be debated only with great difficulty when the scholars disagree about who are and who are not the folk. What appears as unbiased advocacy, in this situation, can actually be a case of aesthetic selection by one elite in competition with another" (1993: 181).

Other forms of discourse have also run a similar course in classical music spheres when it comes to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century revival of medieval, renaissance, and baroque music. Some of this literature can be more broadly applied in this thesis. For example, according to Harry Haskell, discourse covering the revival of "early music" within a Western music tradition has "been expanded to a point

where almost anything from an ancient Greek hymn to a modern Broadway musical can qualify as early music—that is, music for which a historically appropriate style of performance must be reconstructed on the basis of surviving instruments, treatises and other evidence” (1996: 9). When it comes, then, to the actual revival of any music form, Haskell asks a series of questions that hold relevance to this study:

To what extent is it possible or indeed desirable to present music of another era as its creators intended it to be heard? Is ‘authenticity’ a meaningful and legitimate criterion for evaluating a performance? Is musical revivalism...a symptom of cultural decadence, as some would have it, or simply another manifestation of the yearning for roots that characterizes our deracinated society? Does the modern early music craze reflect genuine interest in the music itself, or merely a captivation with novel instruments and unfamiliar sounds? Is the concept of the ‘standard’ concert repertoire outmoded? And what does all of this tell us about the state of contemporary musical culture? (Ibid.: 10)

Explaining his own motivations for researching the early music revival, Haskell makes two important points. First, he states that “the lessons [studying the revival] has to teach us have, by and large, been taken to heart by ‘mainstream’ performers and scholars” (ibid). Second, early musicians, who are “less and less inclined to see themselves as belonging to a distinct movement segregated from the dominant musical culture,” are merely asking, “to be judged by the same criteria as everyone else” (ibid). Is it possible that the recent decades of interest in the early banjo may show some parallels to what Haskell identifies?

Along the same lines of the European early music revival, John Butt describes the impact of “historically informed performance” practice (HIP) since the 1950s. He states that while “[m]uch that was profound or challenging may well have been lost in the process,” we must acknowledge that “it is impossible for us to know what we

have lost” (2002: 5). Butt refers to Richard Taruskin’s arguments of the 1980s where Taruskin claimed:

very little historical performance is, or can be, truly historical—much has to be invented; that the actual styles of historical performance we hear accord most strikingly with modern taste; and that the movement as a whole has all the symptoms of twentieth-century modernism. (Ibid.: 14)

Reconciling modern taste with conceptions of the past cannot help but reinforce that “what is lost” is likely never going to be fully attained. As a result, the idea that people “invent” necessary components of a tradition in some type of accordance with modern taste is typical of the times in which we live. It is always the case.

### **Civil War Reenacting**

John Butt also discusses historically-informed performance with the nineteenth century rise of the “open-air museum” and the ways in which America “provided the major commercial impetus” in the twentieth century with Colonial Williamsburg and Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village (2002: 180). Butt states that America’s contribution to the “heritage industry” includes “a pattern of reaction to trauma and a reaction to the changes wrought by an all-too-rapid modernization of the urban landscape, together with an ecological mistrust of infinite progress” (ibid: 182). It is in this context that Butt believes “the restoration of a sparser history blends with the creation of a history that it never had” (ibid).

According to Rory Turner, Civil War reenacting as a hobby “has its origins in the 1950s, just about the time when the last people who could remember the Civil War were passing on” (1990: 123). Coupling the phenomenon with actual geographic locations, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett theorizes that historic villages and

reenactments are part of a “value added” industry where participants “transport tourists from a now that signifies hereness to a then that signifies thereness” (1995: 370). As a result, the physical locations where individuals reenact take on a “second life as exhibits of themselves,” and the heritage enacted there becomes commodified and is then “exported” to potential tourists who then become the “imports” to the reenactors’ experience (ibid.: 371-373). Similarly, Vanessa Agnew argues that reenacting and other forms of “historical representation” are, in actuality, “characterized by conjectural interpretations of the past, the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect” (2007: 299).

Stephen Hunt looks at the social components of what makes Civil War reenacting a fashionable pastime. He shows how reenacting “includes aspects of male camaraderie, and friendship...[where] [i]nformal networks of companionship and association stretch across the country. The social element takes off in earnest when the public has left and...[p]eriod songs (as well as more contemporary ones), cameos, games and other activities add to the rich attraction of ‘living history’” (2004: 398–399).

This sense of community allows reenacting to become an attractive tourist phenomenon that Wendy Wilhelm describes as “hundreds of 2-3 day weekend re-enactment events...[where] various accounts indicate that up to 500,000 spectators may have turned out to watch 20,000-50,000 individuals re-enact Civil War battles in each of the last several years [based on studies from 1998, 2000, and 2001]” (2005: 28). Social trends within sub-cultures of “re-enactors (participants) and [their]

spectators (audience)” show that these groups are willing to “travel up to 200 miles to events and spend 3-5 days in an area, frequently with their families” (ibid.).

Yet, the stakes behind reenacting become even more complex when issues of race, historical memory, and national pride become intertwined with ideological positions of participants. For example, looking at issues of race, reenacting, and southern historical memory, Robert Cook voices caution about too quickly analyzing the positions held in “white Southern memory” and “black counter-memory” regarding reactions of the last sixty years including the response to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Movement, and, in particular, the Civil War Centennial of 1961 through 1965 (2002: 879–882). By the time of the centennial, Cook suggests that the hegemonic views about the Civil War at that time consisted of “...lore, history textbooks, and numerous forms of popular culture [that] taught white southerners that slavery was a benign institution, that secession had been a last resort..., and that Confederates had struggled bravely for four years to sustain their [state’s] rights but finally had been beaten by a materially superior foe” (ibid.: 881).

Colleen Marquis’ investigation of a Northern view of reenacting finds that “[t]he Historical Re-enactment is the most controversial and bewildering event of public remembrance” (2008: 1). It is a mix of popular culture and popular history where ideas about national identity are blended with “the individual’s history” and the “importance placed on the experience of the veteran” (ibid: 2). Marquis argues that the effects of this phenomenon included groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R) “whitewashing” the war by “making remembering safe and

forgetting believable,” affecting reconciliation and reconstruction, and allowing people to “remember the war with nostalgia” (ibid: 15).

While battle sites are often the location of some reenactments, tourist locations such as plantation sites reflect other realities of the Civil War era that do not always represent for visitors the harsh realities of the times for African Americans. Rather, these histories are “marginalized,” as Christine Buzinde suggests, by the dominant collective memory that relegates the minority histories—those that make tourists uncomfortable—as footnotes in the “socially constructed master narratives that selectively and seductively shape the past into embraceable and restorative national legacies” (2008: 470).

Caroline Moseley looks at attitudes toward African Americans and suggests that “the attitudes toward blacks conveyed in nineteenth-century song are as confused, contradictory, and ambivalent...[and were] almost universally negative, although that negativity may be expressed in different ways” (1984: 3). Beyond song, slavery’s role in creating post-war memories resulted in a collective dismissal from public memory. For example, James Weeks argues that since the Civil War, the racial components of reenacting, commemorative events, and social “play” in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania all “contributed to the exclusion of African Americans from the war’s larger meaning” (2004: 176).

Notably, while much of the referenced literature reveals the broader layers behind reenacting, it does not discuss the role and impact of music at these events. For example, Robert Lee Hadden’s *Reliving the Civil War: A Reenactor’s Handbook* only offers a passing reference to music’s role in the reenactment experience. He

states, “[a] good crowd draw is a Civil War ball, with a reenactor band using antique or reproduction period musical instruments” (1999: 129). Even more absent from this literature is the role of the banjo. While the current body of scholarly literature on the banjo’s use in Civil War reenacting exhibits notable deficiencies, it is helpful to see that scholars are clearly paying more attention to the overall reenacting phenomenon. But the reality is that many of the group and individual performers of Civil War era music are largely self-directed in how they interpret repertoire, acquire instruments, and filter historical and modern sentiments into their performances. All of these points have yet to be more fully applied to the banjo and banjo history as a new generation of scholarship seeks to more deeply understand historical and modern cultural complexities.

### **Customs and Traditions; Habits, Socialization, and Cultural Cohorts**

In applying this literature to the banjo community, it is important to understand what people are doing with the instrument and how they are learning about, sharing, and creating multiple frameworks in which to maintain their interests. My analysis benefits from two interlocking theories. The first borrows from Eric Hobsbawm’s writing about customs and traditions as part of an “invented tradition” (1983). The second is Thomas Turino’s discussion of how “habits” and “socialization” contribute to the creation of “cultural (or identity) cohort” relationships (2008). Hobsbawm’s definition of an “invented tradition” is one that includes,

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour [sic] by repetition, which automatically implies continuity

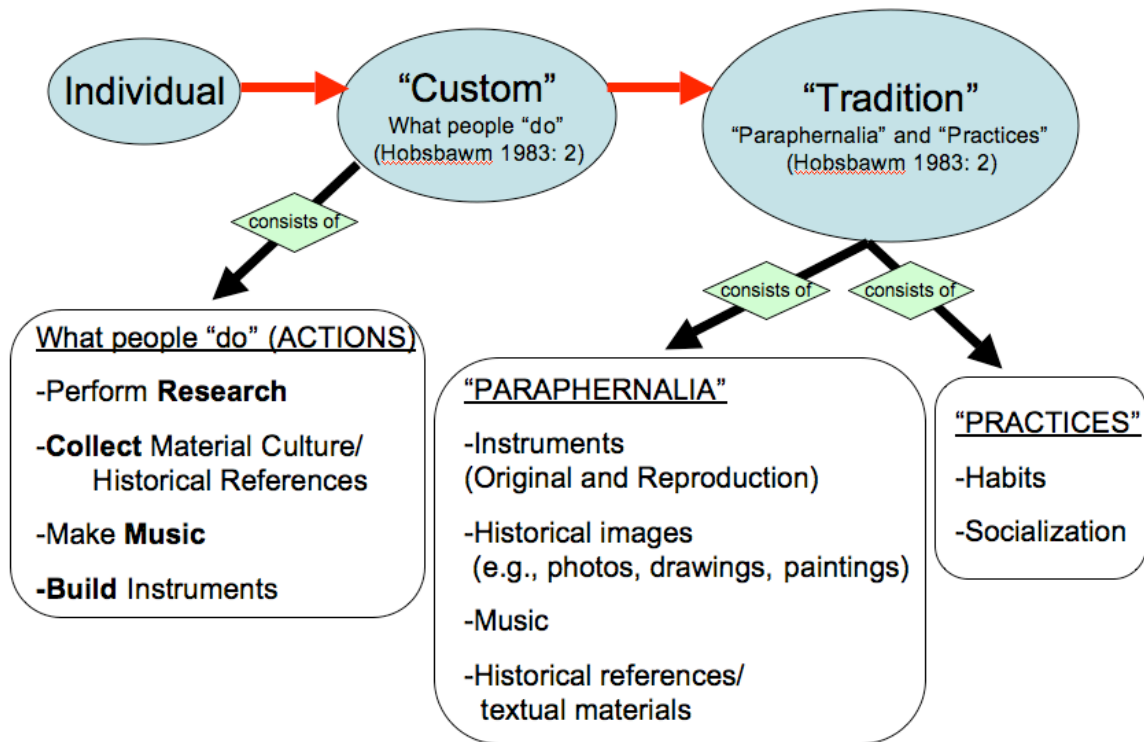
with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (1983: 1)

Within the concept of an invented tradition, Hobsbawm defines customs and traditions based upon actions and the materials associated with those actions. Using the example of a judge, Hobsbawm explains that a custom is “what judges do” in the act of judging, while the tradition “is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding their substantial action” (ibid.: 2–3). This “custom” of what people “do” and the “tradition” of an early banjo revival is found in the provenance of the instruments, ephemera, and historical references “surrounding their substantial action.” Hobsbawm goes on to explain that with certain social practices, people will “develop a set of conventions and routines, which may be de facto [based in fact] or de jure [by claim or by right] formalized for the purposes of imparting the practice to new practitioners” (ibid.: 3).

In my work, as people become more involved with the early banjo, their activities (what they do) are influenced in part by the materials they use. Figure 1 is a visual representation of how Hobsbawm’s terms and definitions might be applied to the modern interest in the nineteenth-century banjo. Essentially, as people perform research, collect materials, make music, or build instruments, the individual will contribute to the maintenance of a custom (the actions of what people do) and contribute to an evolving tradition of using early banjo material culture and music (“paraphernalia”) within a set of conventions or routines (“practices” that include habits and socialization) that are “formalized for the purposes of imparting the practice to new practitioners” (ibid. 3).



**Figure 1: Framework applying Hobsbawm’s “Customs” and “Traditions” concept to the banjo community**



Hobsbawm further distinguishes between three types of traditions: 1) those that are *genuine* where the old ways continue to be “alive,” 2) those that are *invented*, which “implies continuity with the past,” and 3) those that are *revived* where the tradition is maintained after a break in continuity (ibid.: 8). For those that are invented, Hobsbawm suggests three additional breakdowns: “a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour [sic]” (ibid: 9). This framework is not intended to suggest that all people involved with the banjo are necessarily working collectively toward a single end. Whether or not people believe their

involvement contributes to a genuine, invented, or revived banjo tradition, their participation is not necessarily going to automatically fit into the genuine, invented, or revived categories; the same applies to whether or not the individual believes that his or her actions contribute to social cohesion, legitimizing institutions, or inculcating specific types of behavior.

Relationally, Hobsbawm's identification of rules, rituals, behavioral repetition, and continuity with the past holds a theoretical kinship with Thomas Turino's definitions of *habits*, *socialization*, and *cultural cohort*. Turino describes habits as "a tendency toward the repetition of any particular behavior, thought, or reaction in similar circumstances or in reaction to similar stimuli in the present and future based on such repetitions in the past" (2008: 95). He describes socialization as "the attainment of habits that is realized through active learning from, as well as through the imitation of, those around us at different levels of focal awareness" (ibid.). He describes cultural cohort relationships as the "shared habits [that] bind people into social groups according to specific aspects of the self (gender, class, age, occupation, interests, etc.)" (ibid.).

Along with Hobsbawm's definitions of what people "do" as custom and the "paraphernalia and practices" as tradition, Turino's three definitions of habits and socialization point toward the types of cohort relationships people are establishing with their interests in the nineteenth-century banjo. Turino couches these three terms within a larger framework of social practice than I am investigating here, but his case study warrants further explanation. Turino provides a framework that situates habits, socialization, and cultural cohorts as part of a series of inter-related terms and

definitions. While I am focused most specifically on habits, socialization, and cultural cohorts in the present investigation, I seek to adopt Turino's basic definitions of *self*, *identity*, and *culture* as well as those of *habit*, *socialization*, *cohort*, and *formation* as key concepts in my long-term work as follows:

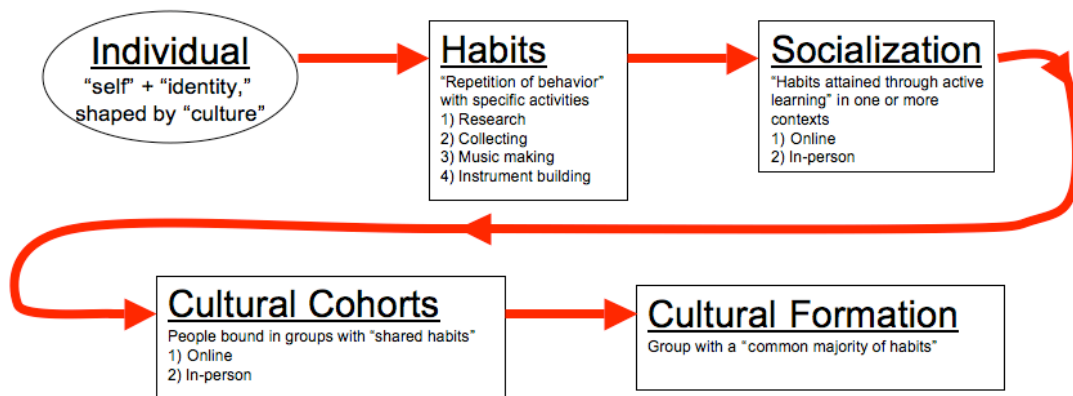
- **Self:** "comprising a body plus the *total sets* of habits specific to an individual that develop through the ongoing interchanges of the individual with her physical and social surroundings" (ibid.: 95).
- **Identity:** "the *partial* selection of habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to others by oneself and by others" (ibid.).
- **Culture:** "the habits of thought and practice that are shared among individuals" (ibid.).
- **Habit:** "a tendency toward the repetition of any particular behavior, thought, or reaction in similar circumstances or in reaction to similar stimuli in the present and future based on such repetitions in the past" (ibid.).
- **Socialization:** "the attainment of habits that is realized through active learning from, as well as through the imitation of, those around us at different levels of focal awareness" (ibid.).
- **Cultural (or Identity) Cohorts:** "shared habits [that] bind people into social groups according to specific aspects of the self (gender, class, age, occupation, interests, etc.)..." (ibid.).
- **Cultural Formation:** "a group of people who have in common a majority of habits that constitute most parts of each individual member's self" (ibid: 113).

Looking specifically at Turino's cohort-formation theories in my work will 1) help me understand how people negotiate and learn about the banjo in general; 2) capture essential meanings that surface as part of the recent (modern) function and use of the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era banjos; and 3) allow me to explore how people correlate historical evidence with their conceptions of banjo history as related to African American musical expression, blackface minstrelsy, the preservation of material culture, and public discourse about America's racial and social history.

Figure 2 applies Turino's concepts to the research population that I engaged with in my fieldwork. It begins with the individual and links to the types of habits

they exhibit and the socialization contexts they inhabit. These link to one or more types of relationships (cohorts) and suggest the possibility of formation where “a majority of habits” represent a shared interest in the early banjo.

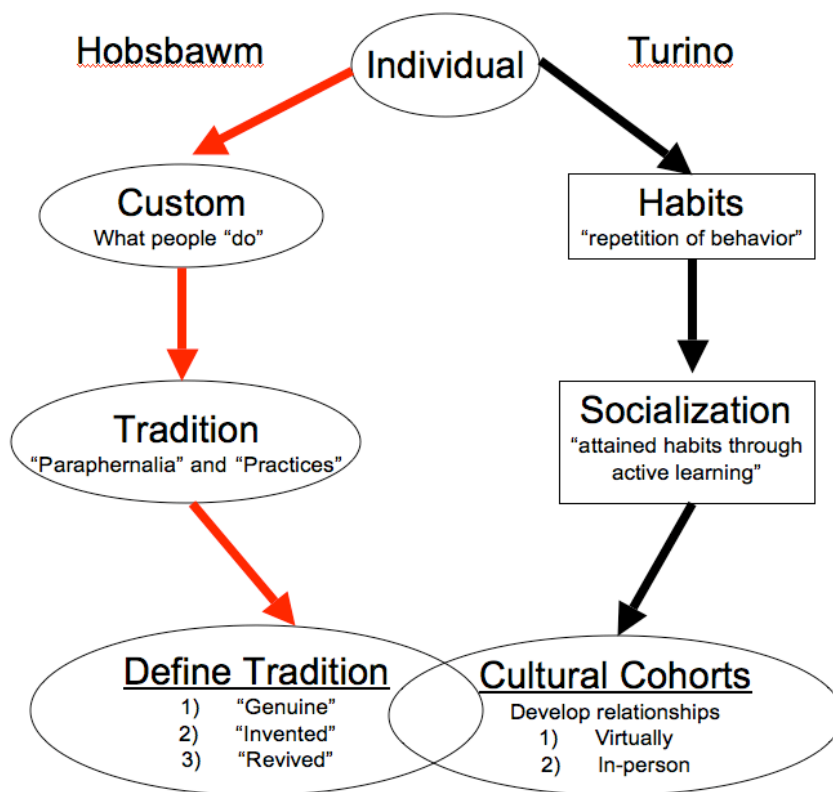
**Figure 2: Theoretical Model as Applied to People Interested in the Early Banjo**



I believe that by using concepts and definitions from Hobsbawm and Turino, I place my work within a meaningful descriptive framework that allows me to account for what people do, the things they use, how they develop habits, and the way they communicate with others who share one or more common interests. Figure 3 outlines how Hobsbawm and Turino’s key terms run parallel to one another. The theories overlap conceptually as people develop relationships as part of a banjo tradition with attributes that might be genuine, invented, or revived. For example, if an individual is inspired to learn to play the banjo, he or she will develop specific habits (through “repetition of behavior”) according to personal thoughts on what people do as part of a custom of banjo playing. As the individual continues to actively pursue this interest, he or she will “attain specific habits through active learning” and acquire specific types of instruments and accoutrement (“paraphernalia”) and put those things into

“practice.” With these practices, the individual “develops relationships” with others who share common interests (cultural cohorts) either virtually or in-person. He or she will then seek to define their involvement and participation as part of a tradition that may be “genuine,” “invented,” or “revived.”

**Figure 3: Hobsbawm and Turino combined**



### **Significance and Goals**

I do not want my field research and long-term involvement from within the banjo community to result in a mere exercise of documenting custom, tradition, habits, and socialization practices. Rather, I wish that it ultimately be tied to a broader purpose, one that will be relevant not only to ethnomusicologists, but also to those

interested in larger social and cultural issues. I believe that this work provides the type of evidence that Hobsbawm describes as beneficial to the academic community where it serves as “[an indicator] of problems which might not otherwise be recognized” and the work put forth “cannot be separated from the wider study of the history of society” (1983: 12). With this study, I seek to approach difficult topics in the way that Turino juxtaposes the music and political movements of Nazi Germany with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States where “Nazi Germany is one of the darkest moments in human history [and] the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States is one of the brightest” (2008: 210). Studying the impact of banjo history highlights the problems that still need to be recognized in our society. We cannot move forward unless we are able to take ownership of both the darkest and brightest moments of that history.

The significance of this study for the discipline of ethnomusicology relates to its changing perceptions of “the field,” especially in the last fifty years. For example, Helen Myers refers to fieldwork as having been considered a “rite of passage” where the “student is expected to immerse himself...in the totality of a foreign culture, usually for a year or more” (1992: 22). Bruno Nettl clarifies how the mid-1980s brought even greater change as researchers began to “look increasingly at their own musical culture” as part of an “urban” or “popular music” ethnomusicology (2005:186-188). And now, in the twenty-first century, Timothy Cooley and Gregory Barz tell us, “no musical genre, tradition, or related activity is off limits for contemporary ethnomusicologists” (2008: 15). Understanding these homeward shifts in the ethnomusicological gaze verifies the importance of shaping new discourse that

includes the banjo and its various designations over time, including as a national instrument or as an instrument of “low prestige.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it emphasizes a discourse that legitimizes the deeper issues surrounding banjo history.

The goals of my research are to bring new information into the academic literature and to document the impact of modern scholarship, since the 1950s, about early banjo history and blackface minstrelsy. I seek to begin filling some of the gaps in the literature covering the banjo’s use in various revival contexts and literature on Civil War reenacting. I also aim to be critical of the ways in which people typically think about the banjo. I wish to challenge assumptions and invite people to consider new associations with the instrument. Lastly, I wish to use this thesis to frame the need for advocacy in establishing greater infrastructure within the banjo community. This type of advocacy is to preserve a documentary heritage that shapes the ways in which we remember the identities of those tied to the banjo’s early history—from Africa, to the Americas, and to the rest of the world.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have described how my long-term involvement as a member of the banjo community and my current work within the academic community have contributed to producing a type of critical ethnography with a research design that aligns with several relevant bodies of literature. From this, I have presented a

---

<sup>3</sup> See the literature review in chapter 1 and the analysis section of chapter 4 for a discussion about the banjo as a national instrument. The statement about the banjo being a “low prestige” instrument is in reference to an SEM-L listserv thread where scholars discussed a variety of stigmatized music instruments, some of which deserved reconsideration. See Brunt, Shelley, [shellstar@hotmail.com] “Instruments of Low-Prestige” in SEM-L. [SEM-L@LISTSERV.INDIANA.EDU] 6 October 2009; Internet (accessed 1 November 2010)

conceptual framework that will allow me to provide information about the customs, traditions, habits, and socialization practices of a group of people whose interests are centered on what I believe is a modern day early banjo revival. The following chapters will present some of the ways in which the customs, traditions, habits, socialization practices, and cohort relationships are unfolding (Chapters 2 and 3) and offer an analysis with concluding thoughts (Chapter 4).



## **Chapter 2: Traditions and Customs of a Modern Early Banjo Revival**

This chapter covers some of the essential phenomena surrounding modern interest in the early banjo and begins with a brief history. Based on Hobsbawm's definitions of tradition and custom, it includes both the customs of what people "do" when performing research, collecting, music making, and instrument building, and the music and material culture (or "paraphernalia") components of the tradition that people incorporate into their "practices."

### **A Genesis of the Twenty-First Century Early Banjo Tradition**

In 2006, Peter Szego, a noted collector, author, and early banjo scholar, published a historiography about key individuals he believed were integral to the banjo community's increased understanding of early banjo history since at least the 1950s and 1960s (Szego 2006: 23). In a two-part article for the *Old Time Herald*, Szego describes how "Searching for the Roots of the Banjo" is not restricted to any single individual, community, or social group, but is open to a widening stakeholder network. He discusses the work of researchers, collectors, musicians, and instrument builders who study and interpret the historical record, make connections with West African music traditions (e.g., the Bamana *ngoni* and the Jola *ekonting*), and document the increasingly commercialized form of the banjo beginning in the nineteenth century. He states: "While much of the early research was conducted and reported by professional academics, some of the most insightful and enriching contributions have come from nonprofessional scholars, a few of whom have directly

identified with participants in early banjo history through race, class, or region” (2006: 15).

Of the dozens of individuals, dates, and activities Szego references, at least half of the people described in the article are integral to the current lineage of recent interest in antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era banjo music and material culture. Szego identifies the published research of scholars like Cecelia Conway, Dena Epstein, Phil Gura, Hans Nathan, and Robert Winans; the music, ephemera, and instrument collections of Jim Bollman, Eli Kaufman, and Roddy Moore; audio recordings by Joe Ayers, Clarke Buehling, and Bob Carlin;<sup>4</sup> and the building (and design) activities of Ed Britt, Scott Didlake, Bob Flesher, Jim Hartel, Pete Ross, and George Wunderlich. Nearly all of these people continue to be involved with the nineteenth-century banjo. Their works are the collective catalysts for this growing interest. More recently, a growing number of newcomers are involved in activities that are taking place in vibrant ways, both online and in-person at gatherings and events.

### **Customs: Exploring the Actions of What People “Do” Online and In-Person**

Members of the early banjo community range in age from teens to senior citizens. Some are established players and scholars while others are newcomers. As a group, they actively participate in online social networks, establish websites providing access to primary and secondary source materials, and share audio and video recordings. They also meet in person by attending events that feature the

---

<sup>4</sup> See the Selected Discography in the reference section for a list of relevant recordings.

nineteenth-century banjo. The people that I mention by name in this section include: 1) those I interviewed during my formal field research period (April through August 2011); 2) people that I know personally; and 3) people with a strong public presence that can be easily identified through a basic Google keyword search.

### **Online Social Networks**

Since at least 2003, online discussion sites and listservs have captured some of the growing interest in the early banjo.<sup>5</sup> For example, some members of the Black Banjo Then and Now Listserv (Black Banjo-L) regularly discuss the historical implications of blackface minstrelsy as well as the playing of early minstrel-era songs on the banjo.<sup>6</sup> Members of the banjo listserv Banjo-L have also referenced early banjo history, minstrelsy, and interest in playing period music on original and reproduction instruments.<sup>7</sup>

One of the earliest, substantive discussion forums dedicated to “minstrel” banjo playing as a modern music-making activity was the “Tom Briggs” Google group listserv, named after the famed nineteenth-century banjoist Thomas F. Briggs (1824-1854) (<http://groups.google.com/group/Tom-Briggs>). With its first post on October 20, 2004, the Tom Briggs site sustained a growing interest for the early

---

<sup>5</sup> One of the earlier listservs to focus on the banjo, Banjo-L, has been in existence since 1996. However, when the host for the list was moved in 2003, all of the content going back to 1996 was lost. Although they were likely to have occurred, it is uncertain as to whether or not discussions covering this thesis were present on the list back then.

<sup>6</sup> Founded in April 2004 by Tony Thomas, The *Black Banjo Then and Now* listserv regularly includes discussions discussing the impact of blackface minstrelsy, nineteenth century banjo techniques, and their retentions in multiple twentieth and twenty-first century music communities (<http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/BlackBanjo/>) (accessed 22 February 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Banjo-L’s url can be found at <http://zeppmusic.com/banjo/>.

minstrel era banjo for 227 group members (<http://groups.google.com/group/tom-briggs/about>). In fall 2008, the Tom Briggs listserv was superseded by the creation of a Minstrel Banjo social networking site powered through <http://Ning.com>. Although the Tom Briggs site continued to receive a few posts through 2010, the robust nature of the Ning site essentially made the Tom Briggs site obsolete.

With over 500 members, the Ning Minstrel Banjo social networking site ([www.minstrelbanjo.ning.com](http://www.minstrelbanjo.ning.com)) is presented as: “A resource and gathering site for people interested in playing and constructing early banjos, and the history of minstrel music in America” (Ning Minstrel Banjo [“homepage”]). While the Ning site holds continuations of many of the same types of discussions found on the Tom Briggs list, it provides easier access to ongoing discussions, blog posts, and events, serves as a resource and documentation center, and functions as a place to upload photos and videos of peoples’ activities and interests in the nineteenth-century banjo. To date, several members of the Ning site have also been active in sharing their interests on other websites such as Banjo Hangout (BHO), the “Authentic Campaigner” website, and the “Civil War Reenactors Forum.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Online Access to Primary and Secondary Source Material**

A number of websites provide access to primary and secondary source materials. Some feature databases with content made freely available for download.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Minstrel banjo” on Banjo Hangout (<http://www.banjohangout.org/group/minstrelbanjo>); Music discussions on “Authentic Campaigner” (<http://www.authentic-campaigner.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?14-Music-of-the-Civil-War>); Search for “banjo” on the “Civil War Reenactors Forum” (<http://www.cwreenactors.com/forum/index.php>).

Some are personal websites with free content and materials available for purchase. Still other materials are available for purchase through retailers.

Databases: A series of university and college libraries as well as large institutions make digitized materials available to users. One of the more notable sites is Johns Hopkins University's Lester Levy Collection (<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/>) featuring "over 29,000 pieces of American popular music" published between 1780 and 1980 (Johns Hopkins University). Other websites that have attracted a following include the Library of Congress' American Sheet Music and Civil War Sheet Music Collections, Duke University's Historic American Sheet Music Collection, and Hamilton College's Nineteenth Century Banjo Instruction Manuals.<sup>9</sup>

Personal Websites: For newcomers, established players, and scholars, the web serves as place for sharing what people do and what they have to contribute to the early banjo community as both hobbyists and as professionals. Researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders create and maintain these websites, which can represent months, years, or decades of dedication to the banjo. Researcher websites include those set up by people who have both academic and non-academic careers that include the banjo. For example, in 2009 banjo scholar Bob Winans (Professor Emeritus of Gettysburg College) created a Google site to serve "as a repository of

---

<sup>9</sup> Library of Congress American Sheet Music (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/mussmhtml/mussmhome.html>); Civil War Sheet Music (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ahas/html/civilwar/civilwar-home.html>), Duke University Historic American Sheet Music (<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm/>), Hamilton College Nineteenth Century Banjo Instruction Manuals ([http://elib.hamilton.edu/hc/hc-main.php?id=col\\_spe-ban&c=spe\\_ban](http://elib.hamilton.edu/hc/hc-main.php?id=col_spe-ban&c=spe_ban))

articles (and, gradually, other materials) I have written about the history of the banjo and about topics in which the banjo has figured prominently, such as blackface minstrelsy and African American musical traditions” (Winans 2009). Banjo historian and musician Joe Ayers currently uses several websites to represent his long-term involvement as a “musician, historian, lecturer, musicologist, classical guitarist, blues expert, performing artist, and author” (2011: “Biography”). In addition to a personal website, he uses two blogs (Wordpress and Blogspot) and a Tumblr music account that features tracks from several of his audio recordings.<sup>10</sup>

Collector Websites: Some banjo collectors also organize portions of their collections on websites while others (including myself) collect and share data about early instruments. Bill Michal’s “Banjo on my Knee” website features “5 string banjos, the vast majority of which were made between 1875 and 1915 in Boston” (Michal), but also features at least six pre-1870s instruments as well as a series of early photographs that include banjos.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, William Destler published a website that also features a number of pre-1870s banjos (one made by William E. Boucher, circa 1848 and several unmarked instruments dating to the Civil War era).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Joe Ayers’ sites include a website (<http://web.me.com/mtcove1/TuckahoeMusic/Home.html>), a Wordpress blog (<http://joeayers.wordpress.com/>), a Blogspot blog (<http://joeayers.blogspot.com/>), and a Tumblr page with audio (<http://joeayers.tumblr.com/>). All of these sites were last accessed on January 22, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Michal’s website (<http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/>) includes pages for instruments (<http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/ws12.html>) and photographs (<http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/wsbi.html>). Michal’s site was last accessed on January 22, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> William Destler’s website (<http://www.billsbanjos.com/index.html>), entitled “Bill’s Banjos” also includes references to banjo’s he previously owned. Destler is currently the president of the Rochester Institute of Technology and was formerly provost at University of Maryland. Destler’s website was last accessed on January 22, 2012.

Working in conjunction with the dozens of private collectors and accessing instruments in public collections, banjo historian and instrument builder George Wunderlich and I have been collaborating since 2002 on developing a database concept to maintain information about all early banjos. In 2006, I launched a prototype database that currently only exhibits a “browse” feature presenting a sample of the large amount of data that I maintain about the early banjo.<sup>13</sup> As part of an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant for which I served as project director for the “Vernacular Music Material Culture” project, I reported that the largest number of extant instruments were in private collections and

if researchers wish to conduct an analysis of extant early banjos, they must receive a personal invitation from one of at least 55 private collectors who maintain 181 of the 207 known earliest surviving instruments. The development of a readily-accessible, comprehensive, and socially-interactive website and database of banjo history will not only present what is currently known about the early banjo, but also promote the continued investigation of this iconic instrument and its importance to America’s musical, cultural, and historical landscape (Adams 2010: 4)

These sites and others are useful because they make previously inaccessible materials available so that people can appreciate, learn about, and discuss them. They also serve as a type of virtual inventory for builders looking for new ideas in old materials as well as specific information about period instruments.

Musician websites: Musicians with banjo-related websites include those who have been playing and recording mid-nineteenth-century banjo music since the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s and those who have become more involved in the 2000s. In addition to Bob Winans and Joe Ayers (mentioned above), Clarke Buehling and Bob Flesher

---

<sup>13</sup> The link for the “browse” feature is found at <http://banjodatabase.org/BrowseMenu.asp> (accessed January 12, 2012).

(who both also build replica and reproduction early banjos) have been highly influential in generating interest in the early banjo instruction books and the music they contain. Their websites reflect their long-term involvement. Buehling's website reflects his performances as a soloist and in collaboration with ensembles, including *Clarke Buehling and the Skirtlifters* and the *Old 78s*.<sup>14</sup> Flesher's website primarily features his custom banjo-building activities (for old time, bluegrass, and minstrel banjo players), as well as content about his involvement with early banjo music, recordings, and instructional publications.<sup>15</sup>

A more recent generation of people who have become immersed in nineteenth-century banjo music and history build websites, as well as create accounts on Facebook, Myspace, and YouTube in order to establish a stronger web presence for the music that they play. Banjo researcher and musician Joel Hooks' website features his music and research, an online store of banjo "thimbles" (picks) and tailpieces, and digitized nineteenth-century documents and publications.<sup>16</sup> Joe Ewers and Tom DiGiuseppe are two of the featured banjoists on the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina String Band website.<sup>17</sup> Other musicians use combinations of Facebook, Myspace, and YouTube to share their music. Banjoist Dave Culgan of the Camptown Shakers is the

---

<sup>14</sup> Clarke Buehling's website with the Skirtlifters is located at <http://www.theskirtlifters.com/> (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Bob Flesher's website includes information about minstrel era banjo reproductions (<http://www.flesherbanjo.com/minstrel.html>), recordings (<http://www.drhorsehair.com/recordings.html>), and books (<http://www.drhorsehair.com/bookbag.html>) (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Joel Hooks website is located at <http://thejoelhooks.com> (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina String Band website is located at <http://civilwarband.com/about/> (accessed January 22, 2012).



featured banjoist on the group's Myspace and Facebook pages.<sup>18</sup> Other banjoists like Tim Twiss and Carl Anderton have established a strong presence among early banjo players because of YouTube.<sup>19</sup>

Builder Websites: In addition to Bob Flesher's website, which elaborates on the great variety of five-string banjos that he builds (including Civil War era reproductions), a number of other builders maintain websites featuring early banjo reproductions they produce. Instrument maker Jim Hartel of Franklin, New York presents six types of mid-nineteenth century banjos that he specializes in building, while builder Jay Moschella of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, constructs instruments based on a wide variety of design possibilities.<sup>20</sup> Two other builders making inroads into the early banjo and old time music communities are Eric Prust of Sequim, Washington and Terry Bell of Michigan.<sup>21</sup> Both Prust and Bell's instruments are relatively affordable compared to those of other builders. Although he is no longer taking orders and has removed his website, George Wunderlich (mentioned above), formerly had a long-running website at [www.wunderbanjo.com](http://www.wunderbanjo.com).

Similarly, within the early banjo and old time music communities, gourd-bodied banjos have become important fixtures. Gourd banjo builder David Hyatt, on

---

<sup>18</sup> The Camptown Shakers Myspace page is located at <http://www.myspace.com/camptownshakers> and its Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Camptown-Shakers/259036346623> (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Twiss' Youtube page is <http://www.youtube.com/giggletoot> and Anderton's is <http://www.youtube.com/user/oldcremona> (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Jim Hartel's website is found at [www.minstrelbanjo.com](http://www.minstrelbanjo.com) while Jay Moschella's is found at <http://jaymoschella.com/> (accessed January 22, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Eric Prust's website is found at <http://www.chloesgarden.com/Banjos%20on%20Web/Banjos.htm> while Terry Bell's site is <http://bell.20m.com/banjos.html> (accessed January 22, 2012).

his website [www.dhyatt.com](http://www.dhyatt.com), identifies other key builders as part of a gourd banjo tradition. They include Pete Ross (<http://www.banjopete.com/>), Jeff Menzies (<http://www.jeffreymenzies.com/>), Clarke Buehling (mentioned above), Scott Didlake (who died in 1994, but was a key mentor to a number of other builders including Pete Ross), and Bob Thornburg (<http://www.gourdbanjo.com/>). Another gourd banjo builder, Paul Sedgwick of Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, incorporates multiple gourd-bodied instruments into his one-man theater piece, “The Banjo Lesson,” which dramatically explores the history of the banjo.<sup>22</sup>

Materials for Purchase: A number of the people mentioned above also sell early banjo materials through their websites. Some buy, sell, and trade original materials while others sell books they authored, instruments they built, and recordings of music that they perform and produce. Commercial websites also provide access to materials that satisfy some of the demand for early banjo materials. While some collectors and enthusiasts vie for materials on eBay, others acquire materials from retailers such as Elderly Instruments of Lansing, Michigan, Bernunzio Uptown Music of Rochester, New York, Gruhn Guitars of Nashville, Tennessee, and Musurgia Fine, Rare & Peculiar Musical Instruments of Brooklyn, New York who offer nineteenth-century instruments with some regularity.

Audio and Video Sharing: Because the geographic spread of participants is so wide, YouTube has become a platform for musicians to share their interpretations of nineteenth-century repertoire. Dozens of people post videos demonstrating their interest in the early banjo, repertoire, and playing techniques. One of the more notable

---

<sup>22</sup> Paul Sedgwick’s website is found at <http://paulsedgwick.com/home.html> (accessed January 22, 2012).

people in this YouTube generation of early banjo players is classical, rock, jazz, and blues guitarist Tim Twiss (mentioned above) who has only been playing the banjo since 2005. Having no previous interest in the banjo, Tim was affinity-struck by the sound of reproduction nineteenth-century banjos and has become a technical tour de force of nineteenth century banjo technique as outlined in period instruction books. While a number of people are deeply familiar with the breadth of these materials, Tim is distinguished because he has single-handedly created an aural record of a large body of this nineteenth-century banjo music. He has posted over 850 YouTube videos and produced two studio recordings of this music. A visit to any number of social networking sites such as the Ning Minstrel banjo site or Facebook and Myspace will reveal the large numbers of videos embedded by both the video creators and people following specific types of videos that include performances of early banjo music.

### **In-Person Events**

While much of the activity surrounding modern interest in the early banjo is taking place online, the phenomenon significantly predates web-based activities. Museum exhibits, banjo camps, music festivals, gatherings, and regional events have been important rallying points that raise awareness of the early banjo. In recent decades, museum exhibits and their corresponding public events have afforded opportunities for key scholars, collectors, and musicians to meet and share their knowledge of the early banjo with one another and the public. Some of these exhibits include the 1984 “Ring the Banjar” exhibit at Massachusetts Institute of Technology Museum (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the 1993 banjo exhibit at the Blue Ridge Institute in Ferrum, Virginia, the 2000-01 “The Banjo: The People and the

Sounds of America's Folk Instrument" exhibit at the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, Massachusetts, the 2003 "Birth of the Banjo" exhibit at the Katonah Museum of Art in Katonah, New York, the 2005 "Picturing the Banjo" exhibit held at the Corcoran Gallery and Palmer Museums in Washington D.C. and University Park, Pennsylvania, and the 2006 "The Banjo: From Africa to America and Beyond" exhibit held at the Frank H. McClung Museum in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Similarly, some of the people who are interested in the music and material culture of the early banjo have been attending banjo camps and music festivals in recent decades. While the general focus of many banjo camps tends to be on either old-time or bluegrass music, camp settings of the Tennessee Banjo Institute (TBI) (held in 1988, 1990, and 1992), the Maryland Banjo Academy (MBA) (1997-2002), and various events held at the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins, West Virginia in the 1990s included knowledgeable researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders who were present to share their work. More recently, camps such as Suwannee Banjo Camp, Banjo Camp North, and Midwest Banjo Camp have varyingly featured faculty who possessed knowledge about the early banjo and its music. Music festivals such as those held each year in Clifftop, West Virginia include campers with significant amounts of knowledge about the early banjo and its repertoire.

A small but growing number of events are also creating opportunities for people to meet, buy, sell, trade, debate, and collaborate with one another based on their shared interests in the nineteenth-century banjo. One of the most important annual events is Jim Bollman and Peter Szego's Five-String Banjo Collectors Gathering, now in its fifteenth year. Another notable gathering place included

Appalachian State University's 2005 and 2010 Black Banjo Gatherings, which was the event where the original members of the Grammy-winning string band The Carolina Chocolate Drops first met. Both of these events have received attention within and beyond the banjo community.

Other regional events that are smaller in scope allow for more nuanced and focused emphasis on specific areas of early banjo history. One such event is banjo historian and instrument builder George Wunderlich's Early American Banjo Conference (2006, 2007, 2010, 2011), held at the Pry House Farm on Antietam National Battlefield and sponsored through the National Museum for Civil War Medicine where Wunderlich is the Executive Director. I have also been in the position to organize events in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia through the National Park Service and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association. In May 2010, I collaborated with early banjo player Tim Twiss to create the "Harpers Ferry Early Banjo Workshop Weekend," and in November 2011 I collaborated with violinist and researcher Charles Krepley and rhythm bones expert Rowan Corbett to create the "Harpers Ferry Violin, Bones, and Banjo Workshop Weekend." These events and others are attracting an increasingly diverse range of people.

### **Tradition: Music, Modern Analysis, and Material Culture as "Paraphernalia"**

The music, modern analysis, and material culture of the banjo are essential to what people seek as they contribute to an evolving early banjo tradition. People actively combine both primary and secondary source materials into their activities, acquire historical music, instruments, images, and references, and consume modern scholarship and commercial resources, which shape how they interpret music.

## Early Banjo Music and Techniques

Some of the techniques people use to play early banjo music come from sources outlined in the wider breadth of nineteenth-century banjo instruction books as well as modern arrangements of banjo tablature. These approaches provide people with a means to understanding how the banjo was popularly (but not necessarily universally) used in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these banjo sources, people within the early banjo community are also interested in a wider body of printed music, songsters, and content from manuscript collections.

Period banjo music was largely published using a slightly modified standard music notation. The primary way of playing the banjo outlined in these period sources beginning in 1855 consists of a downstroke technique and, increasingly over time, a plucked finger-style technique associated with the guitar. The downstroke technique—essentially the commercialization of an African American playing technique—will appear to careful observers as visually similar to a “brushless” clawhammer or frailing technique as found in the present day old-time music scene.<sup>24</sup>

Evidence about finger-style playing is increasingly present in the nineteenth-century banjo books, beginning with page 31 of the Briggs 1855 banjo instructor where the author invites the music learner to play “Annie Lawrie” and other vocal pieces by using “either the Banjo fingering [downstroke playing], or snap the first, second, and third strings with the first, second, and third fingers of the right hand, as in playing the Guitar” (1855: 31). Subsequent banjo tutors (e.g., Rice 1858: 10;

---

<sup>23</sup> These materials do not fully represent all of the ways the banjo was being played in the nineteenth century, but how the commercial ventures of music publishing were promoting technique and repertoire.

<sup>24</sup> See Winans 1976 for an essential analysis of the technique.

Buckley 1860: 7) caution the player against using finger-style playing while Frank Converse, in one of his two 1865 banjo books, devotes an entire section to applying finger-style picking principles to the banjo (1865[a]).

Throughout the history of its popular use, the banjo has largely been a transposing instrument, where the physical form in which someone plays is not necessarily tied to instrument's tuning in a particular key.<sup>25</sup> Depending on the context, the banjo could be retuned to meet other vocal or instrumental needs in almost any desired key for the singer or the ensemble.<sup>26</sup> In comparison to the present-day listener's awareness of the banjo in bluegrass and old-time music, the primary tunings described in nineteenth-century sources present a darker, mellower growl, as the banjo was generally pitched as low as a third, fourth, or fifth below the twanging metallic sound associated with the modern banjo's prominently used "open G" tuning (see Figure 4). One of these tunings—a "D" and/or "G" tuning (dGDF#A)—is pitched a fourth below modern tunings in which the third and fifth strings (Ds played an octave apart) are balanced with the fourth string (the bass string), which was generally tuned to a low "G" or up a whole step to "A." This tuning is one of the two predominant tunings people use for their banjos in our modern revival context—the

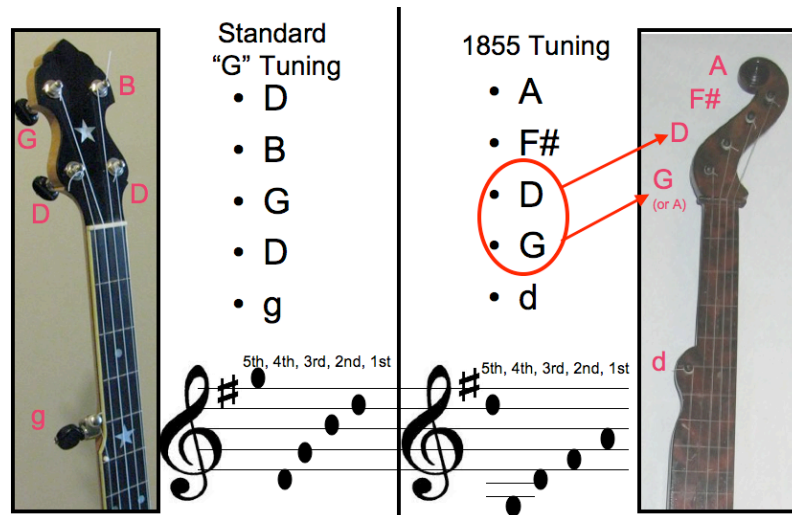
---

<sup>25</sup> As an aside, for modern publications that use the standard "open-G" or "low bass-C" tuning, the banjo, as is also the case in guitar music, sounds an octave below what is written on a standard treble staff.

<sup>26</sup> For example, on page 30 of Briggs' 1855 banjo instruction book, the author describes how the banjo can be retuned to play in almost any key by retuning the third string to the desired key (e.g., the pitch of "E") and then moving to "tune the Second String a third above it [G#]; the First String a fifth above it [B]; the Fourth String a fifth below it [A]; and the Fifth String an Octave above it [e], in the same manner as in the Natural Keys (G and D) of the instrument."

second being an “E” and/or “A” tuning (eAEG#B).<sup>27</sup> With a little remapping on the fingerboard, musicians who play old time music can arrange familiar melodies as well as Civil War era music into arrangements that not only sound familiar to modern listeners, but also reflect a type of aural exoticism in this lower tuning. With these tunings, they are also learning to play period music from period sources.

**Figure 4: Comparison between early and modern banjo tuning**



Tunes like the Thomas F. Briggs 1855 rendering of “Old Dan Tucker” (from *Briggs Banjo Instructor*) provide rudiments, while pieces like “Japanese Grand March” from 1860, published by James Buckley (from *Buckley’s New Banjo Method*), take the technique to elevated levels for mid-nineteenth-century banjo music (see Figure 5).<sup>28</sup> In “Old Dan Tucker,” measure 1, the “F” below the measure represents the right hand index finger striking down through the string toward the sound table with the fingernail. The “X,” alternately, highlights the notes the thumb will pluck as part of the general hand motion. While the music notation represents a

<sup>27</sup> The lowest described pitch for the banjo occurred in the 1851 Gumbo Chaff banjo book, which describes a tuning of “cFCEG” (Chaff 1851: 2).

<sup>28</sup> Modern scholarship and a number of commercial publications and websites offer substantive explanations of this downstroke technique (see below).



standard European music notation, it does exhibit some idiosyncrasies for the banjo, namely the high “D” that includes a second stem (again in measure 1), which denotes the banjo’s short, high-pitched thumb string. Although the “Japanese Grand March” in Buckley’s 1860 does not include specific fingerings as the Briggs version of “Old Dan Tucker,” it does include the same double-stemmed note (in this case a high “E”) to signal the short fifth string.

### Figure 5: Banjo Arrangements:

Briggs 1855 “Old Dan Tucker” (left); Buckley 1860 “Japanese Grand March” (right)



Banjo Instruction Books: The Briggs (1855), Buckley (1860), and Converse (1865[a]) books are three of the five period books published from 1855 through 1865 that have received the most attention and become a standard for enthusiasts, new learners, and accomplished players of mid-nineteenth-century banjo music. This quintet also includes *Phil. Rice's Method for the Banjo* (1858) and *Frank Converse's Banjo Without a Master* (1865[b]). While dozens of banjo instruction books were

published throughout the nineteenth century, beginning as early as 1848,<sup>29</sup> these five of the earliest published books have received the most attention from members of the community because four of the five titles have been most accessible through reprints published by banjo scholar Joe Ayers of Bremono Bluff, Virginia.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to these five titles, people also use a secondary body of additional mid- to late nineteenth-century banjo books as they can acquire them. Some of these titles include *Winner's New Primer for the Banjo* (1864), *Buckley's Banjo Guide* (1868), *Dobson's New System for the Banjo* (1872), and *Frank B. Converse's Analytical Banjo Method* (1886/1887). Of these, the Converse book is gaining increased attention, in part because of the breadth of the explanatory material, music, and techniques described. Many of the banjo instruction books published after the Civil War build on and expand upon techniques described in earlier books.

### **Modern Arrangements**

The growing interest in early banjo music through Joe Ayers' 1990s reprints resulted in other authors publishing books that use tablature to explain the technique to new learners. Since not all people easily read standard music notation, this body of

---

<sup>29</sup> Elias Howe's *Complete Preceptor for the Banjo* (Boston: Oliver Ditson) was first published in 1848 although the only extant copy I have seen to date is an 1851 version of the book.

<sup>30</sup> Joe Ayers of Tuckahoe music in Bremono Bluff, Virginia is responsible for publishing reprints of the Briggs, Rice, Buckley, and Converse (*Method for the Banjo with or without a Master*). Ayers' body of work consists of a series of recordings of mid-nineteenth century banjo music, the self-published music journal *Tuckahoe Review*, reprints (facsimiles) of four early banjo instruction books (with introductory comments), and film credits in several movies and television broadcasts. See Chapter 3 for additional information about Joe Ayers' involvement with this phenomenon.

commercial and personal tablature arrangements become useful access points to the music (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Tablature versions of period banjo arrangements:** Tablature arrangement of “Old Dan Tucker” (top) based on the 1855 version found on page 11 of the 1855 *Briggs’ Banjo Instructor* (bottom). “F” represents the lead finger hitting the strings with a downstroke motion with the back of the fingernail and the “X” represents the notes that the thumb plays. The fingerings presented here align precisely with the original notation. (Tablature courtesy of Tim Twiss)

**Old Dan Tucker** Briggs' 1855

**OLD DAN TUCKER.**

Two individuals who helped shape this trend include Joseph Weidlich and Bob Flesher.<sup>31</sup> Weidlich’s books—*Minstrel Banjo* (1997), *More Minstrel Banjo* (1999), and *The Early Minstrel Banjo* (2004)—regularly accompany some of the people who attend events such as the Antietam Early Banjo Gathering (mentioned above). The same is the case with several of Flesher’s books including *The Minstrel*

<sup>31</sup> I am basing these claims on all my years of experience in the Civil War reenactment and old-time music community. Since becoming formally involved in 2006 with events centered on the early banjo, I have observed attendees regularly using Weidlich and Flesher’s books.

*Banjo Stroke Style* (1994) and *Learning Minstrel Banjo* (n.d.). Some of this tablature attempts to fully represent all of the elements found in the original instruction books.

In addition to Weidlich and Flesher, other authors have created tablature-based books to provide explanations of early banjo technique. For example, banjo researcher, musician, and instrument builder Pete Ross self-published an early banjo tablature book in 1997. Musician, teacher, and author Ken Perlman also includes content about early banjo music in at least one of his books *Everything You Wanted to Know about Clawhammer Banjo* (2004). One of the earliest twentieth-century books to include notation and tablature based on early banjo music that I have discovered outside of the academic literature is Norris M. Charles' *Uncle En's 5-Selector 4 5-Stringer* banjo book (1971), which includes notation and tablature for five jigs, five hornpipes, five clogs, five reels, and five polkas. Still more recent authors such as Daniel Partner and Ed Simms have taken the additional step of publishing a book that includes modern banjo arrangements using period techniques for Stephen Foster songs in *With a Banjo on My Knee: The Minstrel Songs of Stephen Foster* (2008).

Players are not restricting their early banjo playing exclusively to period banjo sources. They also seek content found in other period music, such as in period piano and violin sheet music and instruction books as well in flute, fife and drum, accordion, and guitar music. People are also pulling lyric content from period songsters, some of whose songs can be found at the Library of Congress and other regional repositories.

Still, another resource that adds depth to the musical outputs is the use of manuscript collections by nineteenth-century musicians and tune collectors. Dan

Emmett and William Sidney Mount are two of the more widely referenced people. For example, Hans Nathan's book *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (1962) contains most of the pieces found in Emmett's original "Notebook of Jigs" while excerpts from Mount's vast tune collection are of interest to some early banjo players.

### **Early Banjo Material Culture**

The material culture surrounding modern interest in the early banjo includes original and reproduction instruments, historical images, and banjo references in early textual materials. Whereas original and reproduction instruments would not have been the norm at music festivals in the 1960s or '70s, by the 1980s and '90s more musicians and collectors were surfacing with early instruments, leading the way for builders to construct replicas and reproduction instruments. Figure 7 includes key examples of original and reproduction instruments.

Paintings, photographs, drawings, and other visual media are also an important part of the ways in which people look at and understand the historical use and function of the early banjo (see Figure 8). Historical references to instruments, people, and the different contexts of the banjo's use—printed matter such as newspapers, books, diaries, and manuscripts—are also significant to learners of early banjo customs and traditions (see Figure 9). These types of material culture objects and historical references are increasingly prized and collectively valued as important parts of an evolving tradition. Yet, these primary source materials and reproduction instruments are not the only sources that have gained importance.

**Figure 7: Original and reproduction Boucher and Ashborn banjos** (photographs by Greg C. Adams). Top to bottom: original William E. Boucher, Jr. banjo (with single ogee at fifth string) from Baltimore, MD, circa 1850s (from a private collection); reproduction Boucher banjo (with double ogee at fifth string) built by George Wunderlich, 2005; original James Ashborn banjo, circa late 1850s, inscribed “C. Gleason” on heel (without strings, tailpiece, bridge, and tuning pegs) (Edmund J. Britt collection); reproduction Ashborn banjo built by Jim Hartel, April 2006.





**Figure 8: Example of historical image that holds value within the modern early banjo tradition:** Left: Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* (oil on canvas, 1859); Right: detail of banjo and banjo player (which is depicting a Boucher style banjo with the lateral scroll peg head and ornate double ogee by the short thumb string)



**Figure 9: Example of historical textual reference to the banjo and a banjo player:** Obituary for banjoist Joel Walker Sweeney (1810-1860), *The Sun* (Baltimore) November 1, 1860.

**DEATH OF "OLD JOE SWEENEY"**—The original banjoist, "Old Joe Sweeney," died at the late residence of his father, in Appomattox co., Va., on the 27th ult., at about the age of forty-five years. He had traveled extensively in Europe and almost entirely over the United States, and enjoyed probably a greater reputation than any other man as a banjoist, having been the first white man to introduce the banjo to the public.

With this modern focus on the early banjo, secondary source materials of modern scholarship are also finding their way into the traditions of the early banjo community. Both academic and non-academic analyses are increasingly part of the growing interest in the early banjo. For example, "Appendix C: Song Text Frequency in selected Antebellum Songsters" from William Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork*

*Mask* (1999), is part of one of the forum discussions on the Ning Minstrel Banjo site (Twiss 2012). Essentially, these modern early banjo customs and traditions are serving as conduits in a cultural crossroads between the different modes of approaching historical materials and the ways in which those materials are given meaning by both newcomers and those with significant experience. All of the authors mentioned in the literature review on the early banjo and minstrelsy (see Chapter 1) are commonly referenced online and in conversations when people meet to share their interests in the early banjo.

### **Chapter Summary**

This brief history of the modern early banjo revival and glimpse into the customs and traditions that accompany the phenomena set the stage for presenting some of the voices of people who were part of its development and those who are now moving in new directions. While I explore what people do and the paraphernalia that is put into practice in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I look at the experiences of sixteen individuals who conduct research, collect instruments and ephemera, make music, and build instruments. This discussion includes, in particular, the types of habits people develop and the social circles that allow cultural cohort networks to shape this modern early banjo revival.



### **Chapter 3: Case Studies of Habits, Socialization, and a Cultural Cohort Network**

In this chapter I present content from interviews I conducted with sixteen people about their life experiences relating to the banjo in general and the early banjo in particular. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a snapshot of people's habits, socialization practices, and the ways they give voice to the deeper concerns of looking at banjo history as part of a cultural cohort network. While I might not fully agree with all of the things each interviewee had to say (and they might not agree with me or with one another), I approached each person for this study because I knew something about their pioneering efforts and that they all generally exhibited a willingness to discuss deeper issues. That said, in my years of being involved in the banjo community, navigating reenactment circles, and engaging with the general public, I have met people who do harbor harsh racial attitudes and pursue historical music with an overt maliciousness. Those are not the people I have chosen to engage with in this study. Thus, in the following sections, I present a general profile of this group of interviewees, highlight their habits and socialization practices as related to the banjo, and discuss some of their deeper concerns about the complexities of banjo history that link them together as part of a network of cultural cohorts.

#### **Profile of the Interviewees**

My interviewees are people I have known personally and collaborated or maintained friendships with from as early as 1997. The environments in which I became acquainted with them generally included banjo-focused gatherings, conferences, and camps, Civil War reenactments and living history events, and web-

based social networking sites. Since all of my interviewees agreed to be identified, Table 1 includes the names of the interviewees, their self-reported dates of developing an interest in the banjo (by decade), and the years in which I recall meeting them as part of my own developing social network.

**TABLE 1: Interviewees, banjo interests (by decade), and year of first meeting interviewee:** Arranged alphabetically by interviewee last name.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Developed interest in banjo (by decade)</b>	<b>Year of first meeting interviewee</b>
Carl Anderton	1970s	2006
Joseph Ayers	1970s	2011 (brief introduction in 2006)
James Bollman	1960s	2001
Ed Britt	1960s	2001
Clarke Buehling	1960s	2002
Bob Carlin	1960s	2001
Joe Ewers	1960s	1999
Jim Hartel	1960s	2003
Eli Kaufman	1950s	2001
Charles Levy	1970s	2007
Jay Moschella	2000s	2006
Paul Sedgwick	1970s	2005
Peter Szego	1960s	2001
Tim Twiss	2000s	2006
Robert Winans	1960s	2001
George Wunderlich	1990s	1997

All of my interviewees are white men of largely European ancestry who range in age from mid-thirties to mid-seventies. They currently live in the United States mid-Atlantic (4), midwest (1), northeast (4), or south (7). However, most are relatively well traveled within the continental United States and have lived in other parts of the country and, for some, abroad for brief periods. They all consider themselves to be musicians, and at least four are professional musicians in that they regularly perform or depend on performances for part of their income (as opposed to playing music as a pastime or hobby). Similarly, all interviewees consider themselves

as having conducted some type of self-driven, banjo-focused research to help them better understand the instruments they collect, play, or build. Some have had their writings published in professional, peer-reviewed publications, while others actively pursue self-publication or informally share personal research with their peers. Only five consider themselves to be banjo builders (or capable of building a banjo) at a professional level of accomplishment. While all interviewees collect instruments, ephemera, and historical references to satisfy a personal interest in the banjo, at least seven of them have also pursued a form of collecting that moves beyond hobbyist and toward a professional level, based on personal knowledge and financial means.

All of my interviewees are acquainted with one another, at least by name, and most maintain collegial relationships within the broader banjo community. In varying combinations, all of my interviewees maintain at least one personal friendship with one another or me. While the interviews do reveal an occasional professional competitiveness with one another, almost all generally share a similar sense of mission about how the banjo is viewed by the public, a deeper sense of purpose about its history, and the legacy of their personal involvement through commitments of time, money, and personal reputation. All participants spoke about their influences, learning to play their instruments, and evaluating the quality, knowledge, and musicianship of their peers as well as themselves. They commented on the types of relationships they developed and how they worked, competed, and collaborated with one another (and continue to do so). Some became so interconnected through their interests that they built social, business, and information-sharing networks, and at times sacrificed personal relationships in order to pursue their banjo-related interests.

During the interview coding process, it became clear that the habits and socialization experiences of my interviewees reflect the skills, knowledge, and cohort networks connecting them with key events, primary and secondary source materials, and lessons learned as part of a larger process of information discovery. People's habits generally include individual learning processes, accessing historical references, ephemera, and material culture (usually instruments), developing playing techniques, and performing. With these habits, they socialize by developing relationships with those whose interests overlap in tangible ways as cultural cohorts. Their agreement to work with me on this field research gives greater voice to multiple generations of banjo-focused individuals whose collective work has yet to be more centrally located in broader understandings of American history.

Based on my interviews, I learned that each person developed an interest in the banjo from as early as the 1950s to as recently as the last ten years. Nine of the interviewees reported developing a focus on the "early banjo" within a decade of becoming interested in the banjo in general. Four became interested in the "early banjo" within twenty years. Three became interested within thirty years of their initial interest in the banjo (See Table 2).

**TABLE 2: Interviewees’ interest in the banjo and early banjo:** Arranged chronologically by the decade in which they reported an interest in the banjo.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Developed interest in banjo (by decade)</b>	<b>Developed interest in “early banjo” (by decade)</b>
Eli Kaufman	1950s	1950s
James Bollman	1960s	1960s
Ed Britt	1960s	1970s
Clarke Buehling	1960s	1960s
Bob Carlin	1960s	1980s
Joe Ewers	1960s	1990s
Jim Hartel	1960s	1990s
Peter Szego	1960s	1980s
Robert Winans	1960s	1970s
Carl Anderton	1970s	2000s
Joseph Ayers	1970s	1970s
Charles Levy	1970s	1990s
Paul Sedgwick	1970s	1990s
George Wunderlich	1990s	1990s
Jay Moschella	2000s	2000s
Tim Twiss	2000s	2000s

**Habits and Socialization of Early Banjo Researchers, Collectors, Musicians, and Builders**

Most of my interviewees who came of age in the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s generally cited cohort networks found in the folk and blues revival, groups like Peter Paul & Mary and the Kingston Trio, and bluegrass and old-time music scenes as the primary motivators for becoming actively interested in the banjo. Many cited Pete Seeger’s *How To Play the 5 String Banjo* (1948), followed by Earl Scruggs’ *Five String Banjo Book* (1968), as formative in their development. Others mentioned groups such as the New Lost City Ramblers and recordings by rural traditional musicians as catalysts for deeper personal investigations. But what is notably unique about many of these individuals is how they made decisions to seek out specific aspects of banjo history that moved beyond the popular perceptions of the time. With

these decisions, they developed personal habits that shaped how they conducted research, collected materials, made music, and built instruments.

### **Conducting Research**

Among my sixteen interviewees, Eli Kaufman's experiences represent the earliest involvement of interest in the banjo and a personal focus on its early history. During our interview, Kaufman described how his interest in banjo history became a part of his social life and public outreach. Kaufman described one of his earliest formal lectures, in 1966, at the Huntington Avenue YMCA in Boston, Massachusetts. Even though he had been studying the banjo and classic finger-style music since the 1950s, he emphasized how this public presentation included his research into the early banjo tutors and the downstroke playing technique found within their pages. Reading from documentation he kept about the event, he said,

Friday, April 29, 1966, "The American Banjo, from Origins to Jazz: The Banjo Prior to Folk and Bluegrass with Dr. Eli Kaufman. Program will be augmented with illustrated instances of various playing styles, tapes of early recordings, both a demonstration of the early Edison cylinder recording by Sandy Sheehan, 8:30pm at the YMCA, Huntington Ave." (Interview, 2011)

Beginning in the 1950s, Kaufman recalled being inspired to pursue the banjo upon "hearing a recording of Olly Oakley playing 'Whistling Rufus' and the flip side [of the recording] was 'Queen of the Burlesque'" (interview, 2011). He began doing "the old academic thing" by visiting the Harvard Library and the New York Public Library to gain access to a variety of banjo method books, including some of the earliest methods (ibid.). A semi-retired doctor of pediatric dentistry, Kaufman applied his music-reading skills to studying many of the banjo instruction books and

repertoire spanning the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He states with an almost comical sincerity:

My involvement is I'm not a good musician.... I don't memorize well. But I can sight read like a fiend because that's how I learned to read.... I just put all these *A*-[notation] methods in front of me and played through them. (Ibid.)

With his analyses, Kaufman's immersion into large amounts of music allowed him to find outlets for his work. For example, as a member of the American Banjo Fraternity (ABF), Kaufman became editor of its publication, *The Five-Stringer*, and since 1973 has published summaries of large bodies of banjo music, including many of the early banjo books from the 1850s and shortly thereafter. Through his research habits and long-term connections in the banjo community, he also coauthored an article with banjo scholar Robert Winans in a 1994 article, "Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections" (Winans and Kaufman 1994).

When Robert Winans became interested in the banjo by the 1960s and into the 1970s, his habits of conducting research, collecting, and music making became part of an effort to identify "greater authenticity" in the music. While initially following an interest in groups like the Kingston Trio, he then started listening to the New Lost City Ramblers and Pete Seeger:

[W]hat the New Lost City Ramblers were doing was they had created their own collection of old 78 recordings of performers from the 20s and 30s and they were essentially recreating that music. What they had was, even though they were also revivalists, what they had to my ear was authenticity, which the Kingston Trio didn't have. And I listened to Pete Seeger also. Gave me a better sense of authenticity, but I would say that New Lost City Ramblers came across with greater authenticity than Pete Seeger did. (Interview, 2011)

With his growing interest in the banjo, Winans also commented on the habits he developed during the 1970s, which would lead to his subsequent research into

blackface minstrelsy, compiling documentary evidence about the early banjo (e.g., eighteenth- and nineteenth-century runaway slave ads and references in the WPA ex-slave narratives), and fieldwork with African American banjo players and other traditional musicians. He suggested that his research habits were, by extension, part of an ongoing pursuit into the *idea* of authenticity. He states:

Actually as I'm thinking about that, I think that [authenticity] is a thread that runs through all of this for me. I mean... the research into banjo history, into the minstrel banjo stuff, starts with a question, how did those guys play the banjo? Because as far as you would have known from looking at films, Hollywood films from say the 1940s and 1950s, there are a number of them that have minstrel show elements in them, that you put on minstrel show performances and here are these guys chucking along on tenor banjos [with 4 strings instead of 5]. So you've got a seriously wrong impression being generated, disseminated about what minstrel banjo was all about. So part of my motivation was to go find out, "What was it really all about?" (Ibid.)

For Winans, that research question of "how did those guys play" was sparked during what he describes as a "watershed period" during the mid-1970s (ibid.). In addition to winning his first banjo contest, improving his playing technique, and attending his first American Banjo Fraternity Rally, he described one of the turning points that led him to ask the question about how early blackface minstrels were playing the banjo:

And...in 1974, fall semester, I decided that I needed to take a leave of absence...from Wayne State [as a professor], because I needed to do research that I was already involved in, but I needed to pursue it intensely so that I could start publishing and eventually get tenure.... (Ibid.)

As part of his leave, Winans decided to also look for information about the early banjo after auditing an American music history class from his University of Michigan colleague Richard Crawford. Seeing images of people playing banjos in Crawford's discussions on blackface minstrelsy, Winans decided he needed to learn



more about how they were playing the instruments during that period. Knowing that he'd be visiting a number of east coast libraries such as the New York Public Library, the Boston Public Library, and other major collections on the East Coast, Winans accessed a significant number book catalogs and rare book collections.

And so I decided, "Well, I'm going to the East Coast to all these libraries. Let me see what I can find about the early banjo stuff"...while I'm there doing the thing that I'm really supposed to be doing. And that's when I discovered the early tutors. ... So I had selected materials from those early tutors that I acquired during those research trips and then set off learning how to play the stuff as it was laid out in the books. And that leads to the first banjo-related article that I wrote in 1976, which lays out what that minstrel banjo style was and shows how it's connected to old time frailing or clawhammer style. (Ibid.)

While some banjo researchers may take the traditional route of going to libraries and archives to do research, Edmund Britt used his research and design skills to gain an enriched understanding of instrument construction. Following his interest in the banjo since the 1960s, Britt states:

The thing I bring to the party is I'm a product designer. I know how things are made. I design how to make things. ... I spent over 7 years in local history museums researching, learning, demonstrating, and interpreting traditional crafts, common from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.... I have a pretty decent idea of how old tools were used. (Interview, 2011)

Britt's work with design, detail, and instrument construction makes him uniquely qualified to understand those things he sees in front of him, whether an instrument, image, or description in a written text. One turning point that reinforced his interest in the early banjo was when he was selected to participate in a Museum Design and Planning program between The Metropolitan Museum and The Museums at Stony Brook in the mid-1970s. Britt had access to William Sidney Mount's iconic 1856 painting *The Banjo Player*. He recalls:

The best thing was, by being with this group...in the morning the museum was not technically open...and we had some free time to explore the collections and exhibits up close. Because I had my badge on, I was able to walk up to the Mount painting at that point—this was back in 1976 or 77—and look at the guard and say, “Do you mind if I step behind the rope?” And he said, “Yeah, go ahead.” I was nose to nose with the Mount painting. (Ibid.)

While studying the Mount painting, Britt realized that the banjo depicted in the painting had all the essential constructs of one of the earliest commercial banjo manufacturers—William E. Boucher, Jr. of Baltimore, Maryland (albeit with certain artistic details and design modifications such as the tailpiece and peg head shapes added by Mount). By combining his knowledge of design, historical images, and handling several extant Boucher banjos, Britt was well positioned to draw plans for building reproduction and replica instruments. For example, instrument builder Bob Flesher created one of the earliest modern reproductions of a Boucher banjo, based in part on an original Boucher banjo Bob Winans brought to the 1988 Tennessee Banjo Institute (TBI). At the 1988 event, Britt accurately measured and traced Winans’ Boucher and later created the measured detail drawings, which Flesher was then able to use to create the instrument.

Because of his knowledge as a designer and his growing connections as an instrument collector and researcher, Britt also became an information broker of sorts.<sup>32</sup>

I started becoming known by way of Jim [Bollman] in particular and other people...who would keep calling me up for information, saying, “What do you know about...?” (I had a great memory once upon a time.) ... [The reason being] I have all these insights into what that object [does], the reason that object was made, [and answering] “What are the possible reasons for this...?” (Ibid.)

---

<sup>32</sup> In late-1988 Britt met Chuck Ogsbury of OME banjos and began a relationship as a design consultant and advisor to OME that continues to this day.

## **Collecting Instruments and Ephemera**

As one of the premier collectors of nineteenth-century banjos and ephemera in the United States, James Bollman, who began collecting by the mid-to-late 1960s, discussed the turn of events that shaped his habits for acquiring instruments and ephemera. He recounted his formative years as a collector and discussed how the relationship between instruments and ephemera was extremely important. After several years of focus on instruments, Bollman moved into collecting ephemera and decided,

Well, that's the way to learn about the history of the banjo...looking for any kind of nineteenth century banjo periodicals, tutors and songsters, [and] catalogs. And then at some point I started collecting photographs too. I was at that same market where I bought the Stewart Piccolo banjo and there was a Civil War dealer there...and I asked him if he ever gets any old banjos since he carried Civil War stuff. And he said, "Well I never had any old banjos from the Civil War, but lots of weapons and this and that, but a photography dealer has this wonderful daguerreotype of a banjo player, actually two boys playing a banjo." I ended up buying it from him and that set me off buying photographs. (Interview, 2011)

Bollman also discussed the development of his connoisseurship through these collecting habits and recalled that it was a learning process:

Somewhere along the line I found what later turned out to be a Boucher banjo, which I bought for a hundred bucks at a flea market in...an altered condition. I really didn't have much of an appreciation for the early minstrel banjos for a couple of years. I sort of bought one or two things, but I didn't really understand them. I thought they would be important for the banjo history. If I was going to have a collection I should be showing, I should have some of those things. But I had no ideas to the rarity or relative values.... All these things were cheap. ... They weren't that prized. (Ibid.)

And as part of the process of learning, Bollman also recounted selling several instruments without fully understanding their intrinsic value at the time. He spoke about a fretted James Ashborn banjo—fretted banjos being an extreme rarity during

the antebellum and early minstrel era—he sold in order to get another instrument.

Noting the fact that the instrument was fretted, Bollman wondered why someone other than the builder would have fretted the instrument. He said:

That’s really silly. I wonder why he did that. I thought, “Well I’ll just sell the banjo and I’ll get a proper fretless one someday.” And then I realized years later that that was original when I saw a few more. ... So it’s sort of going from a period of being totally naïve to somewhat sophisticated. (Ibid.)

Through several decades of intensive collecting, Bollman’s refined habits resulted in his amassing one of the most important collections of nineteenth-century instruments and ephemera.

Peter Szego, another widely acknowledged collector of nineteenth-century banjos, spoke about how his professional background in design and architecture shaped his collecting habits:

First of all, one thing that I think is particularly strong within me is the banjo as object, aesthetic object, sculptural object, cultural object.... [A]nd I think part of that has to do with my being trained as a designer and an architect, so I see these very much as sculptural forms. (Interview, 2011)

Yet, Szego’s interest in the antebellum banjo also tied into his background in music and dance, his growing appreciation of the banjo’s iconic nature, and the instrument’s African and African American heritage:

So I got the first one twenty-one years ago [in 1990] and did my very best over the next several years to collect them. They spoke to me—each one just wonderfully evocative—and I did it very aggressively. I just decided that no one else was really chasing after them and it was an opportunity to as resourcefully as I could track them down. ... What was magical to me about them socially or culturally was the African roots, was the whole sort of origins of minstrelsy, and I had discovered [Hans Nathan’s 1962 book on Dan Emmett] when I was tap dancing. And then there’s another book called *Jazz Dance*.... And between those two books, there was just this mystique and extraordinary appeal of the African roots of so much of American music and the banjo symbolized that whole thing to me as did jazz tap dance. So both of them emotionally were very intertwined for me. (Ibid.)

## Musicians and Early Banjo Music

Research and collecting habits shaped by education, affinity, and access are not the only themes mentioned in my interviewees' discussions of their interests in the early banjo. Robert Winans recorded some of the earliest modern interpretations of early banjo music with a track, "The Grapevine Twist," on *Old-Time Banjo In America* (Kicking Mule 204; 1978) and an entire album of music with the recording *The Early Minstrel Show* (New World Records 80338; 1985). His habit of exploring early banjo music based on his research marks a milestone that other musicians also began exploring in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. See the references cited section for a selected discography of recordings that include interpretations of period music performed on original or reproduction banjos.

Of my sixteen interviewees, Clarke Buehling, Joseph Ayers, and Bob Carlin are three other individuals whose music-making habits marked important milestones of modern interest in the early banjo during this time period.<sup>33</sup> Clarke Buehling, who began playing banjo by the mid-1960s, found that he wanted to focus on music and repertoire that was not as mainstream as other forms of banjo playing:

At that time...I was looking for a musical outlet. I had played music already—piano, clarinet, drums, tried to teach myself to play harmonica, chromatic harmonica, classical guitar, and various things. But the banjo—while it was clinched by hearing Hobart Smith, I went and got a banjo—I had to have one. (Interview, 2011)

---

<sup>33</sup> Another person, not formally interviewed as part of this thesis but deserving notable mention is Bob Flesher. I did contact Flesher, and he was willing to be interviewed, but I failed to make the time to schedule the interview, which I deeply regret. Flesher is a key individual for any study of modern music making as related to the early banjo. His lack of formal inclusion in this thesis is an unfortunate oversight on my part.

Because Buehling knew how to read music, his musical habits included studying different types of music from both oral and written sources. As a performer working to make a living in music, he found that this allowed him to distinguish how he presented himself publicly. He states:

Behind it was an idea of avoiding those things that were really popular. In doing that, I found...because of the way I moved from here to there, it put me in places where I ran across certain styles. (Ibid.)

By diversifying how and what he plays, any single Clarke Buehling performance might include repertoire and techniques found in the early banjo instruction books, late nineteenth-century classic banjo and ragtime finger-style playing, or old-time music.

Joseph Ayers, who is most widely recognized for his reprints of early banjo instruction books and studio recordings of early banjo music, began to focus his interests on the early banjo based in part on a sense of regional identity, and in part on his performance experience playing blues and classical guitar music. Like Buehling, having the ability to read music notation supported his interest in studying music associated with the early banjo. Describing his approach to the history of the banjo and early banjo music, Ayers comments:

As both a historian and performer of “period” music, my approach has long been focused on the chronological development of musical eras, their popular instrumentations, and musical styles. The most intriguing bits are found in the continuities and contingencies existing in between, in questions like: who got what from whom, and when? The [Joel Walker] Sweeney story and blackface minstrelsy are plush examples of this process in action. Moving from marginal folk obscurity into classical registration is a big moment for any musical instrument. Sweeney was the initiator of this process in banjo, and the early banjo methods were the indicators. In fact, it was one of the most rapidly encapsulated documentations of a musical instrument making this transition I know of, and right in my back yard, and I didn’t need Italian and Spanish

dictionaries to comprehend the text. This was a perfect alignment of conditions. (Interview, 2011)

Combining his musical background in blues and classical guitar, his study of guitar history, and an increasingly strong sense of the banjo's regional heritage in Virginia, Ayers' habits of research and performance were based on a personal passion for American music history and how people learn about that history:

I'm a disciple of Carter G. Woodson, so I'm an advocate for a full integration in the telling of U.S. history. Antebellum history and full comprehension of the contributions of African Americans during this time are the most fractured and segregated parts of U.S. history. It's been broken off and frozen in an abstract ideological context that obstructs an accurate and realistic assessment of the historical legacy of the period and its people. This dysfunctional state, characterized by an obvious break in the continuity progression of U.S. music history, annoys my historic sensibility. Quite naturally I am motivated to address the issue through primary resource documentation as a means of helping to distinguish partisan myth and ideological fabrication from accurate and useful history. Musically I'm a hardcore classical methodologist in analytic pursuit of the American banjo's ultimate technique, its platonic form. (You'd be surprised how that idea annoys some people.) It may be ancient or first codified by Sweeney. But either way, it's there. (Ibid.)

Bob Carlin's habits as a researcher, collector, musician, and producer gave him skills where he synthesized both oral and written traditions and felt a strong desire to share what he and others were learning with the public. One of Carlin's habits is responding to a personal sense of responsibility by publicly sharing information about what he learns in his research. Discussing his scholarship on Joel Walker Sweeney in particular, he comments:

Well, once you've figured it out then, you felt like it was your duty to put it out there. Certainly, I wasn't looking for affirmation from the public, although you do. You always want to throw something against the wall and see what [the] knowledgeable will say about it...or flush out some things you missed. ... I guess even with Joe Sweeney I feel a certain obligation to him. If you find out something of his true story that hasn't been told before then you really owe it to him to let people know the story. (Interview, 2011)

As a musician and music producer, Carlin has made a habit of “putting it out there.” His 1994 Rounder release, *Minstrel Banjo Style*, demonstrated his ability to bring together performances of important purveyors of early banjo music—Joe Ayers, Clarke Buehling, Bob Flesher, Tony Trischka, and Bob Winans. Carlin said that he “felt that with that CD I was giving them a platform to be heard by a wider audience” (ibid.).

Other musicians who became involved with the early banjo by the 1990s—Joe Ewers, Chuck Levy, and Paul Sedgwick—developed habits that were first situated in bluegrass and old-time banjo circles in the 1960s and ‘70s. Joe Ewers, the primary banjo player for the Civil War era music ensemble the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina String Band, began playing bluegrass banjo in the 1960s after he was inspired to become a banjoist during his senior year in high school. As he became more involved in Civil War reenacting as an adult, music became an increasingly important part of the experience. After more than two decades of playing bluegrass, Ewers moved from playing with a three-finger up-picking style typical in bluegrass music to learning how to play with a downstroke as explained in the period banjo books. He describes getting a more period-accurate instrument, learning technique, and altering his music-making habits.

...it was in ‘92 that one of the guys in the unit, Company I, Second South Carolina, he made a [fretless] tackhead banjo for me as a wedding gift when I was getting married.... He gave it to me in December of ‘92. ... Well one of the things that I found really interesting about the quote unquote minstrel banjo was the natural [way] of tuning and the note placement when you would start to play...many of the standards of that minstrel era, from the...mid-[18]40s through the early [18]60s, especially the Stephen Foster. It’s like he wrote it on a banjo. The notes...there’s no hunting for them. They are right there. In my early years and most of the time that I was playing bluegrass banjo, I learned that stuff by rote. ... The notation for so many of those songs,



especially the easy stuff, the Stephen Foster especially and Dan Emmett to a large degree, they're right off of the neck of the banjo. There's nothing mysterious going on there. (Interview, 2011)

Chuck Levy, who has been studying the banjo since the late 1970s, settled on playing old-time music and learning “clawhammer” technique—a form of downstroke playing common in the old-time music scene. Learning clawhammer and eventually learning repertoire out of the early banjo instruction books by the 1990s, Levy's habits as a musician equipped him to study the Jola *ekonting* during his two visits to the Senegambian region of West Africa. After his first exposure to learning bluegrass, Levy recalls that by 1978 or 1979 he “kind of dived into what was clawhammer banjo” (interview, 2011). After years of playing and eventually going through medical school, by the early 1990s Levy continued to stay involved in learning more about old-time banjo and its corresponding traditions and expanding into the early banjo, including the early banjo books. Attending music events at an Augusta Heritage Week in Elkins, West Virginia, Levy learned about early banjo playing technique from Bob Flesher, who was teaching banjo building and doing presentations on minstrel banjo music. Levy recounts his desire to expand his technique with early banjo music:

Bob Flesher was the course instructor and Bob was doing minstrel stuff and when I heard him...I was blown away. It just amazed me that there were these triplet rhythms coming out of clawhammer. I had just never imagined that you could do that stuff. And I particularly liked how the rolls, what's sometimes called the Round Peak lick or the Galax lick.... And I loved the jigs. I had heard contemporary clawhammerists do Irish jigs and it never moved me that much. They seemed a little sterile. It wasn't something that inspired me. But when I heard minstrel jigs, it was so cool and I felt totally re-enlivened and was motivated to follow that music [as] there wasn't a lot of it around yet. (Ibid.)

Maintaining a personal habit of constantly learning and expanding his own educational possibilities, Levy, like a number of other American and European members of the banjo community, had been pursuing a better understanding of the banjo's African heritage. In 2007 and 2008, Levy traveled to The Gambia and the Casamance region of southern Senegal to learn to play the Jola *ekonting*. On his first trip, he commented on how his knowledge of playing American banjo music in a downstroke technique prepared him to study the *ekonting* where Jola musicians use the same fundamental attack to play the instrument:

[Y]ear one I went alone and I approached the *ekonting* the way I'd approach the banjo. First you learn how to play "Big Eyed Rabbit" and then later you sing "Big Eyed Rabbit." ... But when I came back [from Africa] and...tried to show people what I had learned, it seemed really like I was not communicating what I had learned and I concluded that the problem was I hadn't learned to sing and that the music was a sung music. And so I felt like...either I'm going to put up or shut up and I didn't want to quit so I felt like I needed to go back [to Africa]. (Ibid.)

Another banjo player, Paul Sedgwick, also developed similar habits with his banjo playing. In addition to becoming an accomplished bluegrass banjoist, Sedgwick also learned how to play clawhammer banjo and then early banjo music from Joe Ayers' reprint of the Briggs 1855 banjo instructor as well as from the more recent tablature versions published by Joseph Weidlich, Bob Flesher, and others.

Up until 1992 or [1993], yeah I was primarily a bluegrass player. Although, not true, the second teacher I had who worked at the music store, New Expression, he also was a clawhammer player. I took banjo and guitar lessons with him and learned some clawhammer from him too, but I was mainly focused on bluegrass. (Interview, 2011)

In addition to bluegrass and clawhammer banjo, Sedgwick also became an instrument builder, which included building gourd banjos. As an educator in the Boston public school system, Sedgwick's habits included combining his background in drama and

his passion for the banjo with educational opportunities through the school system. He talks about getting funding to travel to West Africa to study the Jola *ekonting* after receiving a postcard about a “Fund for Teachers” grant for up to \$5000.

I just decided right there in that moment looking at that postcard that that’s what I was going to be doing. I had already had contact with Ulf [Jägfors] because he contacted me...looking for a gourd banjo...[as] he was getting ready to appear on Nashville Network, one of those cable shows concerning the history of the banjo, and that had to be in 2003. (Ibid.)

As the first American to travel to The Gambia and Senegal to study the *ekonting* in 2004, Sedgwick, like Chuck Levy, developed a nuanced and highly composite understanding of not only banjo history, but also the ways in which people were willing to explore the banjo’s African heritage. For Sedgwick, these habits culminated in the creation of “The Banjo Lesson,” a one-man theatrical piece exploring the history of the banjo:

Once I started pondering—seriously pondering—a solo theater piece on the history of the banjo and then thinking about what I wanted to have in there to present to an audience that knows nothing about the history of the banjo, I realized I needed to have a classic banjo.... I needed to have a stroke style minstrel era banjo. I needed to be able to play some songs. And so I acquired those instruments and started learning the music as part of my preparation for my history show that I was creating. So I have an S.S. Stewart Thoroughbred that I got at the Music Emporium.... I got a Boucher copy by Jim Hartel. And I used those instruments to work out some of those songs. (Ibid.)

Outside of the old time and bluegrass music community, early banjo players are also increasingly present at Civil War reenactments and living history events. Another early banjo player, Carl Anderton, began playing bluegrass banjo in the 1970s, but did not start playing early banjo music on a reproduction instrument until 2000. Anderton’s habits and memories of learning to play the early banjo reflect his growing involvement with the reenactment community. He says, “I put all my focus

on my right hand stroke style because that's the more historic" (interview, 2011).

Recalling how he started playing early banjo music and establishing the technique,

Anderton commented:

As a matter of fact, I remember the date exactly because it was October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2000 and I had been messing around at this point, just barely, with clawhammer.... I started Civil War reenacting and bringing my bluegrass banjo and playing it there and having people tell me that...I could probably stand to do a little research. So I did and...I started with a copy of Joseph Weidlich's tablature of the Briggs' Banjo Instructor. Man, and I remember thinking that on Halloween night, the wife and kids out trick or treating, and just messing around with the tab. I've always been a huge...tablature user. That's "poo-pooed" a lot with the 19<sup>th</sup> century banjo enthusiasts. But for me personally, it is great. And I know that reading notes is important, but I love tab and it's very helpful to me. It's limited, but it's helpful. And so from messing around these tabs playing "Kemo Kimo," all of a sudden it hit me that I could do this and that this was real nineteenth century banjo music. It hit me like a ton of bricks. (Ibid.)

The impact that early banjo music had on Anderton was not necessarily that different for another musician, Tim Twiss, who began playing the banjo in 2005 (see Chapter 2 for more information on Twiss' background). Twiss' habits as a musician, business owner, and artist allowed him to take the music forms found in early banjo music and compose new music according to the historical techniques described in the nineteenth-century instruction books. Twiss, who lives in Michigan, recalls being selected for two artist-in-residence programs to go to Walden Woods to compose:

Well, I had an artist-in-residence program that I did where you didn't get any money for it, but they let you use this facility. Generously, for two weeks they put you in this cabin and give you all your firewood and you had to give them a proposal about what you were going to create and had to do with the Porcupine Mountains. So somehow it had to tie into that so I did that for two years and wrote music for that. ... Well the first year I composed a suite of instrumental tunes. There was I think 8 or 9 of them. And I went all instrumental and I tried to copy the style of nineteenth century banjo instrumental music and named them after landmarks that were on the property.... So that's why I had the "Escarpment Waltz [and other tunes]. I used pretty pure nineteenth century banjo stylings with titles that reflected the

Upper Peninsula landscape as opposed to the southern landscapes. ...[A]nd then the next year when I went up I did vocal tunes. And they had a huge mining and logging and shipping culture up there and a lot of European integration of different, of immigrants that were working in the mines up there and what that meant to everybody interacting there and the different musical styles that would have interacted there and just tried to use that as a backdrop for nineteenth century music as opposed to plantation settings. (Interview, 2011)

Overall, Twiss' habits keep him focused on "digging deeper into what was un-mined music back then" (ibid.). He says

There's just so much that once you realize the source of what it was, there's indefinite amounts of material that have yet to be discovered and arranged and appropriately set for nineteenth century fretless banjo as well as composing in that style.... If you stay true to the stylistic points that were inherent in that music, you can't stretch it too far rhythmically or harmonically. You've got to respect that, but with that I think that you can do a lot of things that are appropriate for that style. (Ibid.)

### **Instrument Builders**

With all of the people performing research, collecting materials, and making music, the habits of instrument builders play another key role in the modern revival of interest in the early banjo. Three of my other interviewees, Jim Hartel, George Wunderlich, and Jay Moschella, are just some of the people filling an important niche in this phenomenon based on the skills they developed and the impact they continue to have on the early banjo community. Jim Hartel became interested in the banjo as a Fine Art major in the early 1970s and spent much of his career as a sculptor, museum administrator, and art educator. Hartel's first banjo-building project was converting a four-string banjo into a five-string back in 1972 to play in a jug band for a group project in a folk music class taught by William Tallmadge at Buffalo State College. But it was not until the mid-1990s that he began digging more deeply into building reproduction mid-nineteenth century instruments. Based on his background in

sculpting, and his interest in traditional music and the banjo, he started building fretless instruments, which led to more research, and refining his building habits:

I had heard a fretless banjo and I decided, “Well, I want to make a fretless banjo.” ... I never realized that banjos might have been fretless. I thought the only fretless banjos I came across at that time were the ones that people pulled the frets out...to play Round Peak style music. So I was doing that and I thought, “Wow, there’re some really interesting banjos.” ... I came across this Boucher and I was struck by how beautiful it was and I thought I want to build one of those and I just built one from pictures. It didn’t come out very good. I still got this one. It was totally off...it just didn’t work. So then I got interested in the banjo itself and I started doing a lot of research and I was able to get a hold of some real ones and visit some people [who owned original instruments]. (Interview, 2011)

But Hartel’s view of building reproduction banjos is as an art and not so much as a business. As a builder, he believes that for himself, “the process is the most important thing, not the product...” (ibid.). Having spent time studying stone carving as an apprentice in India in 2002 and having a deep appreciation for the history of the craftsman’s trade in the United States, Hartel described what building banjos meant to him:

I’m not a banjo builder in the sense that I’m a businessman. I approach every banjo like an art piece and I work it as an art piece [as] I don’t know how long it takes me to do it. ... I’m more interested in doing them as a project. I go after each banjo almost like...this is an improvement on the last one. How can I make this one better...? I have the leisure to do that. If I didn’t have the leisure, I wouldn’t even want to do it. (Ibid.)

Also during the 1990s, banjo builder and historian George Wunderlich developed a strong sense of purpose in building reproduction banjos and eventually doing conservation and preservation work on original instruments. Wunderlich describes three influences that shaped his desire to pursue the banjo, the first of which was listening to his father and grandfather’s early jazz recordings that included 4-string banjo accompaniments (interview, 2011). The second influence of exposure

was listening to bluegrass music and reading books like the *Foxfire Book* series about traditional Appalachian culture and musicians (ibid.). It was the third influence that “hooked” Wunderlich into the realms of early banjo music and banjo building when he was nearly 30 years old:

The third influence didn’t happen until 1992 and that’s when I was introduced to the sound of the fretless stroke style banjo by Jon Isaacson. And his introduction to me was actually the recording put out by Joe Ayers of *Old Dan Tucker*. And suddenly those other two worlds [jazz recordings and bluegrass-Appalachian music and tradition] came crashing together.... (Ibid.)

Wunderlich’s habits of instrument building also grew out of his intense interest in American history, reenacting, and the public’s growing awareness of banjo history. He organized a workspace where he could build instruments using nineteenth-century techniques. He also developed the habit of learning from people with greater experience, including Ed Britt who taught him how to really look at the design of early instruments during a 1997 banjo conference in Charlottesville, Virginia. Wunderlich began visiting private collectors and looking at the Smithsonian’s banjo collection in the National Museum of American History. He also began collecting data on every instrument he encountered. He commented:

...that’s really when I went from an amateur builder who was trying to make a living...to where I am now, to where I could actually go back to the Smithsonian and say, okay, I missed all this. And that’s when I developed my banjo datasheet. That’s the reason exactly. That information sheet was the result of that meeting in 1997 [with Ed Britt]. And I went back [to the Smithsonian] in 1998 and I went back to Jim Bollman’s collection...and I went to Peter Szego’s collection and that’s when...I really started looking at it and I thought about it.... That’s when I started to trace banjos. That’s when I started to make those full size templates that you see where I said okay, it’s one thing to have a photograph, but how do I translate that photograph into an actual banjo neck and that’s when I started tracing peg heads and tracing the banjo necks and laying them out and really getting some detailed photographs for what I am seeing. (Interview, 2011)

In contrast to Jim Hartel and George Wunderlich, Jay Moschella's work as a banjo builder was based on persistence and a significant amount of trial and error:

I just started building them all the time. It wasn't like in the traditional way where you are around people making banjos and you learn from them and they tell you. No, it was just like 100 percent mistakes and then learning from the mistakes. There was no guide. Whatever I did wrong was how I learned to do this stuff right. I didn't have any essential wood working skills. My father was a carpenter...but I was interested in the opposite of whatever my parents were interested in.... I just made more and more banjos and that's all that I'd talk about and that's all that I was reading about. (Interview, 2011)

In addition to building banjos as early as 2001, Moschella's background as a history major also factored into his habits of how he thought about the early banjo and maintained his interest in building instruments:

I was a history major. I was interested in history so that was obviously something that was appealing too. ... But I think also of the historical aspects and the way that it ties in with so many ideas about America and the kind of way that every historical moment and...the history of this country at least to me seemed that there was something good and something terrible about it at the same time. So you had that banjo music, which was really beautiful and at the same time...minstrelsy, which was like to [our] modern standards...kind of the most vile images and imagery that you could possibly think of. So that was...an interesting dichotomy that I think immediately was something that drew me in. ... The way it was so tied in with African American culture and not with the country music world of *Deliverance* [the movie]. So it was interesting to be able to explore something that had this complete unknown side story to it. (Ibid.)

Each interviewee's habits and social experiences are, in some ways, "side stories" to the larger phenomenon of modern interest in the early banjo. Yet, they all contribute to an increasingly central story that relates to what Thomas Turino describes as cultural (or identity) cohort relationships. Turino defines these cohort relationships as the "shared habits [that] bind people into social groups according to specific aspects of the self (gender, class, age, occupation, interests, etc.)..." (2008: 95). By learning about each person's habits and social experiences as cultural or



identity cohorts—as researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders—I got to know how the banjo fits into the lives of these individuals. As a member of the banjo community grappling with dissonant legacies of slavery, blackface minstrelsy, and other cultural traumas such as the American Civil War, I view my opportunity to work with these community members as a key contributing factor to a form of discourse unavailable to me when I first became involved with the banjo in the mid-1990s (see Chapter 1). As a result of these interviews, I learned how each person’s work might contribute to a broader network of deeper issues that reveal an underlying “so what?” about the banjo’s cultural significance in the twenty-first century.

### ***Delineating Deeper Issues in an Early Banjo Cultural Cohort Network***

The purpose of this section is to present some of the ways in which my sixteen interviewees are part an evolving cultural cohort network. I apply the word *network* to Turino’s concept of cultural cohort relationships for two reasons. First, it is through the process of networking within the banjo community that I was able to bring together the viewpoints that follow. Second, it is my hope that through such willingness to openly share individual perspectives, we might create a stronger network of cohorts with a common interest in exploring the banjo’s broader cultural relevance beyond the banjo community.

Through these interviews I learned that some members of the banjo community have a strong desire to unpack topics related to the history of slavery, minstrelsy and American popular music, and want to find ways to speak openly about those histories. As part of this unpacking process, some also pursue activities that nurture discourse, provide public outreach, and vitally embrace the banjo’s

multicultural heritage in tangible and meaningful ways. I must present a caveat, however. Just because each person is willing to acknowledge complex issues, does not mean that he is fully equipped to unpack those issues on his own, within the broader community, in performance, or before an American public that still responds viscerally to the repercussions of such cultural phenomena as blackface minstrelsy.

In the paragraphs that follow, my sixteen interviewees provided many quotes related to the deeper issues that are at the center of this thesis. Some of them are uncomfortable and at times provocative. This is not necessarily because the interviewee harbors racist sentiments. Instead, these quotes are the individual's attempts to unpack complex issues during our personal discussions. Unpacking these issues is a messy process fraught with the dangers of offense, misinterpretation, and disagreement. These individuals have entrusted me to represent them fairly and honestly and I have done my best to deserve their trust. These quotes are included here to act as a springboard to larger discussions.

With well over fifty years of his life now dedicated to the banjo and banjo history, Eli Kaufman emphasizes that during the time period in which he gave his 1966 banjo presentation, "there was nothing about it anywhere else, absolutely nothing" (interview, 2011). And with all of his life experience, Kaufman expresses how generational knowledge can shape the cognitive dissonances of banjo history, which are present, for example, in the first thing that most people see in period song titles and lyrics—words like "nigger" and "darkey." Kaufman described how the dissonances of these historical realities are less visible as people alter titles and lyrics to avoid confrontations about the historical record. Kaufman commented that this is

“a real problem” that exists both within the banjo community as well as in academia (ibid.). As part of a discussion about banjo repertoire, Kaufman talked about nineteenth century songs such as those by Stephen Foster and referred to banjoist and composer Joe Morley’s banjo piece, “Niggertown” (circa 1916), which some people now call “Banjo Town.” So as to not call attention to the racism intrinsic within the banjo’s cultural heritage, Kaufman explained:

Well, you know it’s a real problem because, as a matter of fact, I know 3 or 4 different names [people use] for “Niggertown.” ... The other problem is that although we have a generation that’s losing this, people know these songs so well [referring to Stephen Foster] that even if you sing it with changing [lyrics], everybody [of the older generation] knows what the original verse is and that’s a problem too. (Ibid.)

As one of the several key figures influencing modern interest in the early banjo, Robert Winans also had to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between twentieth-century revival and folk music practices with minstrelsy’s overt racism. Like other researchers he decided that the historical importance of the music outweighed his discomfort. He said:

I always had mixed feelings about delving into [blackface] because of the racist content in the minstrel material, but it seemed to me it was just too important to let that stand in the way, musically it was too important. Its impact, both musically and culturally, both the positive and negative impact of it, was too important. (Interview, 2011)

James Bollman offered similar sentiment about how difficult minstrelsy has been as a research topic:

Blackface minstrelsy has been an anathema to most people, including historians. They don’t want to talk about it. It’s a loaded subject. It’s a very, very difficult subject and I think in just the last few years, starting with the [1997] Charlottesville [Antebellum Banjo] Conference...it’s now getting out on the table and people are dealing with it. And it’s sort of high time. ... I think some of these taboos are breaking down as people get...more

knowledgeable and maybe that's a way for the banjo to ride that wave of understanding.... I'd like to think...that will happen at some point. (Ibid.)

Speaking about the growing awareness and peoples' willingness to engage the topic, Bollman states, "I think it's true among the musicologists and in academia. I think it's become more *au courant*...with some of those fields" (ibid.).

Bollman's emphasis on the 1997 Charlottesville conference also marks some of the social environments where people have been increasingly willing to explore the instrument and its history. Co-coordinating the Five String Banjo Collectors Gathering with Bollman beginning in 1998, Peter Szego places a similar emphasis on the types of events that allow such conversations to take place in social settings by putting the topic "on the table." Referencing specifically the Five-String Banjo Collectors Gathering, Szego explains, "[T]he banjo gathering has always served as a forum for exploring anything that people felt was warranted regarding the nineteenth century banjo. ... And some of the things have taken hold and have grabbed people's imagination and interest..." (interview, 2011).

Bob Carlin points to other environments where social networks were nurtured as people developed relationships and became cohorts, such as the three Tennessee Banjo Institutes (TBI) that took place in 1988, 1990, and 1992. Noting the timeliness of the Tennessee events, Carlin describes part of the reason more people within the banjo community are now willing to look more deeply at banjo history:

Things happen when it's right for them to happen and...the three Tennessee Banjo Institutes laid the groundwork for minstrel, clawhammer, three-finger, and classic [banjo people to be] in the same room, and also for people to talk about the instruments and the history.... It really stirred up the ferment and brought a number of people together who then went off and said, "Hmm, Tennessee Banjo Institute is done. We'd like to do something like this. How about the Maryland Banjo Academy? How about Banjo Camp North?" ...

Which then spawned [Ken] Perlman going off and doing his camps. [These camps were] certainly creating the atmosphere in which the [Five-String Banjo] Collectors meetings started. (Interview, 2011)

Ed Britt also identifies the Tennessee Banjo Institute as a major turning point in the ways that different members of banjo community engage one another. Britt describes how:

All of the different banjo “food groups” being at the Tennessee Banjo Institute was so eye opening to possibilities and it was such a great encyclopedia of the styles. ... So there’s no question that that 88 Tennessee Banjo Institute was an absolute watershed event for everybody involved. (Interview, 2011)

Yet, even with these watershed events and gatherings, some members of the banjo community have experienced notable challenges in their public outreach and professional work, especially as it relates to their interest in the early banjo in general and the early minstrel era banjo in particular. Bob Carlin spoke about the 1994 *Minstrel Banjo Style* CD that he produced (see above). Even as a successful historian, author, performer, and producer, Carlin’s work with blackface minstrel topics and the banjo have been difficult to project to the wider public. Referring specifically to the 1994 recording, Carlin commented:

I just felt like I was trying to break it out into a wider audience and tried to figure out a way to get past the whole PC bias against anything associated at all with blackface minstrelsy and it just didn’t work. It just never sold worth a damn. It didn’t break into that wider audience.... (Interview, 2011)

He went on to say:

What I always try to do with that style of music [minstrel music] is to try to make the connection for people between West Africa and early African American players and then the white banjo tradition. Still to most people that’s totally an unknown. And so you are constantly trying to put it in context to just describe how the whole thing happened in somewhat simplistic terms. And honestly, when I’m performing, I just want to play the minstrel stuff as best as I can, to present it as music. But that’s what you do with any sort of music. You try to make it as musical as you can. And...especially to play

period instruments [original and reproduction banjos] is to show people that might have a stereotypical view of the instrument that there really are other ways in which it was played. (Ibid.)

As a performer, researcher, instrument builder, and collector of music, Clarke Buehling described similar experiences. Even as a distinguished artist with his specialized background in nineteenth-century popular music, Buehling's diversification still makes him an outlier to the banjo community and the old-time music scene. Reflecting once again on his musical background and experiences, Buehling comments:

Well, my community at that time was mostly in old-time music because there weren't really a lot of people interested in what I was doing. I maintained contact with old-time musicians all through then. ... My goal was to present music that other groups aren't playing and have forgotten, like music from my sheet music collection. Part of my understanding of how it's played is reading through the instruction books and reading through the accompaniments that are included with them. (Interview, 2011)

Yet, even with his virtuosic skills, knowledge, and stage presence, Buehling described some of the perils of being a professional musician specializing in nineteenth-century banjo music. He provided examples of the difficulty he's experienced in making inroads into the banjo camp scene, whether in the United States, or abroad, in places like Germany. When he does have the opportunity to teach in these contexts, he explained that the experience is somewhat narrowed, as he has to tailor what he does to even make the music accessible. Whether teaching the downstroke or finger-style techniques found in early repertoire, he stated that he had to reduce his offerings by staying "mostly centered around the music":

What I end up [doing is]...they usually put me in teaching...beginning classic banjo or I've been counted more as old-time fingerstyle. Then I'll have everyone play the "Spanish Fandango," the "Rattlesnake Jig"—simple things with C and G chords, maybe an F chord. ... I seldom put any in the advanced

position. Mostly in Germany, the clawhammer people were more advanced and expected a higher level than that. They [the camps] don't have me teach minstrel stuff. I try to offer it. They keep telling me no one's asked to include minstrel this year so we're not going to hire you. I think because people don't request [it], they've not got people to make the class. They are waiting for people to request it rather than offering it. (Ibid.)

Moving beyond the banjo camp scene, Joe Ewers, the principle banjo player of the Second South Carolina String Band, describes how within Civil War reenactment and living history circles many people debate the position of keeping or altering original lyrics. Talking about songs by people like Stephen Foster and Dan Emmett, Ewers provides an example of how things unfold:

For a while a few years ago I heard an awful lot about... a number of arguments over what constitutes authentic minstrel music and what didn't. And that also gets into the so called principle, "Do we sing the exact lyrics or do we tailor it...do we take out the inflammatory stuff?" I don't have too much patience with that debate either. It's like, we're even having this conversation? [Singing the original lyrics] doesn't bring anything to the party. The music is fun, the melodies are good, there's no need to put that stuff in it. Find a way around it. (Interview, 2011)

Based on these debates, Ewers recounts the challenge of the arguments:

You try to talk about the stuff in terms of history and you have somebody say, "This stuff isn't even worth wasting our breath on [because] it's racist fundamentally." But I say, "It's history." "But I don't care about history," they say, "It's racist. It's better off forgotten." (Ibid.)

By outlining some of his previous experiences, Ewers' explanation reinforces the complex interplay between performing historical music and trying to respond to the accompanying dissonances when presenting information about the historical contexts in which the music was created.

Carl Anderton, who self-identifies with the recordings, books, and performance practices of "trailblazers" such as Joe Ayers, Clark Buehling, Bob Winans, and Joseph Wiedlich, describes how he has been "emulating these folks and

intellectually digesting all that they have to offer” (interview, 2011). With his growing experience and knowledge about the early banjo, Anderton also describes a sense of responsibility he feels to present some of the complexities of banjo history during his performances. Yet, in doing so he finds it difficult to facilitate conversations about issues of race and the baggage of blackface minstrelsy, even as they are so embedded in Civil War reenacting and living history circles. Referring to some of his performances, Anderton expressed frustration in the challenge of presenting vital information about the banjo’s African American heritage at Civil War reenactments and other public events:

I usually like to start with the construction of [the banjo] and how it differs [from the modern banjo] and how it’s executed. And then, to a certain extent, I like to work in the social factors, too. That’s a little touchier area. I don’t always know how to approach that. I try to make it known that the African American contribution is vital and that without [them] the banjo wouldn’t exist.... I might talk about specific players or specific episodes where I knew music took place in the area. ... It’s been a problem. It mirrors the problems we have in this country. There’s so much great music in this country, [but] [y]ou have to be willing to discuss the bad things too, which is just as important. So that’s where we run into these problems. Some people don’t want to acknowledge the bad part. (Ibid.)

Joe Ayers’ experiences echo some of the points that Kaufman, Winans, Bollman, Szego, Carlin, Britt, Buehling, Ewers, and Anderton emphasize. By the 1980s, Ayers’ focus on the early banjo became deeply intertwined with the cultural significance of early blackface minstrelsy, the historical interaction between African- and European-American music traditions, and the impact and traumas rendered by the American Civil War. Recalling his involvement in the Civil War reenactment community of the 1980s, Ayers described a desire to respond to inaccurate musical



portrayals of Civil War era music and how it was being presented before other reenactors and the general public.

In the fall of 1985, I was working on the set of a TV miniseries, “North and South,” as Confederate fifer [and] banjoist. Reenactment fever was beginning to sweep the country and all the talk on set between reenactor extras was about the upcoming 125th [anniversary of the American Civil War]. Delighted to encounter a popular groundswell of interest in a history subject, I investigated and soon discovered that the string band music of the [Civil War] era was not being very accurately portrayed. This was a gap that I was qualified to fill and got busy. (Interview, 2011)

It was during this time that Ayers and his family band began shifting from musical performances focused on European Renaissance music to music centered on cultural issues represented in the history of antebellum America, including music of the minstrel stage:

I told the family band, “We’re gonna move from early European to early American music,” and by New Year’s Eve we were doing our first quasi-minstrel show routine at First Night Charlottesville. We weren’t blacking up. We presented only non-vulgar lyrics, no “N” word, and focused in our presentation on the Americana nature of this music. We were never asked back, even though we had been playing there since the event’s inception five years earlier. (Ibid.)

Knowing that a musical study of minstrelsy and public outreach on the topic had its social perils, Ayers was still driven to follow this line of research. Part of the reason for his persistence was based on a personal conclusion he realized about minstrelsy’s historical significance and the cultural intersections between African- and European-American music traditions over time:

[Minstrelsy] is the origin of American pop music—the very medium through which every musical form originating in the African American community entered the national mainstream. It is most significant that it had at its very inception an African American persona center stage [the character of Jim Crow]. Yet this prophetic symbolism, foretelling of all to come after, remains segregated, misrepresented, and misunderstood [in our society today]. (Ibid.)

With this approach and thinking, Ayers also recounts the warnings he received from friends and acquaintances about pursuing such a line of research. Even so, Ayers was determined to explore connections between early minstrelsy, the Civil War era, and the ways in which people interpret the past:

I knew it was a challenging topic to present, and that suited me. Friends advised that I would ruin my music career. I'd explain that I wasn't planning on blacking up, just presenting the music in appropriate settings. What actually happened was we had an astounding professional success, which in turn triggered a response from a particular partisan ideological sector quite satisfied with the notion that the Civil War was fought [merely] to "save the Union and free the slaves." I could soon see that attempts to humanize early blackface and to suggest that we've been viewing it through a tainted window would be met with renewed efforts to super vilify it. This ideology is elitist moral supremacy at its base, considering minstrelsy a lowbrow and vulgar entertainment form "of the people." (Ibid.)

Ayers went on to express another aspect of his point of view, one that foregrounds how African American musical expression is persistently marginalized through such elitist and supremacist moral attitudes:

Every African American music genre that has ever emerged to become nationally popular in the U.S. is condemned by this mindset [of elitist moral supremacy], and attention to the details reveals that the fundamental objection stems from its originating in black communities. It's acceptable that blacks imitate whites but it's always a problem to be scorned if young whites begin to imitate the music of blacks. Continued open-minded research on this phenomenon will begin to offer a serious challenge to the current views about reasons and purposes of the Civil War. Currently, objective, realistic views of blackface minstrelsy are buried beneath the rubble and recriminations of a violent, fratricidal war, still the most traumatic part of our history. (Ibid.)

Ayers believes that an open exploration of minstrelsy has the power to unite people as opposed to perpetuating cultural divisions. He described how studying the traumas of slavery and the American Civil War as well as the history of American music and early blackface minstrelsy in particular provided him with critical opportunities to rethink how people remember the past.

But I prefer to regard the power of music in America as paramount in the positive making of “we the people.” Our music has time and again obliterated the barriers that the power of brute military force has only served to create and reinforce. [Early minstrelsy’s portrayal of] the image of a poor and lowly black man overcoming the odds with his comic wit, his music, his dance, clever enough to turn an entire nation of whites toward his imitation, even as they remain smugly confident of their supposed superiority to him, is to me the most powerful symbol of irrepressible freedom in America. (Ibid.)

Based upon what he had to say, it is clear that Ayers believes that if people would openly discuss minstrelsy, see through and accept the topic’s provocative nature, and use the nature of the topic as a springboard for greater discussion, a process of healing—which he feels has never happened—could begin.

Some of my other interviewees also found minstrelsy to be an important topic as part of their public outreach about the history of American music and culture. For Paul Sedgwick, digging more deeply into banjo history as part of his sense of social responsibility and public outreach meant taking the initiative to make it happen. Describing his personal drive to do more to affect how people thought about the history of the banjo, Sedgwick explains:

I was never satisfied that those little thumbnail sketches in the backs of [the Pete Seeger and Earl Scruggs] books...were enough. And also I was amazed that people...wouldn’t even know anything about it, wouldn’t even know there was an African connection to the banjo. And I used to always feel like that wasn’t right...[that] this is the instrument we consider *the* American instrument and people don’t have the most basic concept of what that is and...the more I became aware of that, the more that had an impact on me, [and] the more I that I wanted to try to correct it. (Interview, 2011)

It was that drive that pushed Sedgwick to take a sabbatical from his job teaching drama in the Boston public school system in order to create a one man show about banjo history, “The Banjo Lesson.” He states, “I always thought it would be a great topic for a really concise solo theater piece for a general audience. And I just

held on to that idea and that desire to want to create that for...years. I never let go” (ibid.) Describing how he would feel success in his one-man show, Sedgwick explains, “I would love it if a general audience just knew...[the] basic facts and that the banjo had this long, long history...” (ibid.). Explaining how he broaches the impact of minstrelsy, Sedgwick does a partial “blackening up” as part of the stage performance. He explains why understanding minstrelsy is so important and that people should feel uncomfortable...

...[o]wing to our personal American history of the blackface minstrel show where that style of performance was used to denigrate and not done in a very respectful manner. So, it’s a very touchy subject in popular culture here in the United States. (Ibid.)

Part of the fact that openly talking about minstrelsy can be a “touchy subject” aligns with a comment that Chuck Levy makes when describing the social ramifications of the banjo’s associations with both the folk revival of the twentieth century and blackface minstrelsy in the nineteenth century:

So one of the riddles of the banjo to me is how in a Pete Seeger’s hands [the banjo is] an instrument of international liberation and not just in political terms...but just a really affirming, unifying instrument. But then if you look at it through the “minstrel eyes,” it’s kind of the anti-Seeger. It’s the same essential instrument but used in such different purposes. (Interview, 2011)

Reacting to a musician’s ability to affect listeners with early banjo music in a performance setting, Tim Twiss explained how the music, lyrics, and techniques found in nineteenth-century banjo instruction books challenged his own awareness of America’s musical history:

Well, I come from a classical background and a rock and jazz background from the guitar. ... And I’m an educator so I teach and perform still. When I came across the early banjo music I was just stunned to find out there was something that I hadn’t heard of yet. I knew nothing about it. I’d never seen it. Never heard it. It was like something completely new under the sun.... So I

dug into it just without going backwards from the modern banjo because I hate banjo truthfully. I just don't like it, don't listen to it, I'm not in that world. But...there was something about [the early banjo] that compelled me. It was completely different. And it came from going into the back door of an appreciation of the Civil War through researching my own relatives. And that's how it happened. (Interview, 2011)

Regarding the complexities of the banjo's cultural history as an African American instrument and trying to find a way to equitably deal with blackface minstrelsy, Twiss commented that "I'm mucking my way through this like everybody else is and it just seems impossible to find a direction without talking with everybody in the community about what they're doing with it" (ibid.). Twiss also asks questions about the quality of the music that can transcend its use in Civil War reenacting or as part of a revival context:

I mean is there a difference between reenacting and playing nineteenth century banjo? And I pose that question; can the music be experienced with your eyes shut? Is this a fashion show or is it music? ... What is the music? Is the music served well by what you just did with it? Or is there more to it? (Ibid.)

Jim Hartel's work in learning about banjo history and building reproduction banjos reflects the ways in which people look at and play period music and match that music to historically relevant forms of the instrument. As part of his building process as artist, sculptor, and craftsman, Hartel explains: "There was a time when the banjo's quality depended more upon the craftsman than the machines" and that for him, "the process is the most important thing" (interview, 2011). Part of that process Hartel describes includes coming to grips with all aspects of banjo history. For him, building reproduction instruments became "a big history lesson" that was "a venue into a whole rich cultural background that I didn't know anything about.... It became the venue for me to go in and find out all of this wonderful craftsmanship, all this

wonderful history, all this wonderful musical heritage, from all different cultures.... [I]t instilled a real intellectual curiosity in me to find out why I am so interested in this instrument” (ibid.).

Jay Moschella describes a similar sentiment in which growing interest and curiosity underscore the changing dynamic of awareness about the banjo and its early history. He explains that it is “suddenly like a much more known quantity [and] it’s a little bit less esoteric. ... But now...you hear stories, there are NPR shorts that happen, and there are exhibits around, and I feel like it’s a little less of an unknown quantity” (interview, 2011). Distilling the essence of all of the recent interest in the early banjo, George Wunderlich comments on how recent discourse of the last ten years in particular includes multiple social networks bringing forth conversations, some of which are only taking place for the first time:

And now all of a sudden we have different communities and varied communities.... [W]e have the historical reenactment community, we have a living history community, we have the banjo collectors community, we have the...African roots community, we have the performance community...we have all these intersecting circles. And now the thing has its own life. And I’m not sure where it’s gonna go from here. ... What I see coming about now, how do you talk about the minstrel banjo if you don’t know where it went...where it came from...? I think it’s beginning to come full circle. (Interview, 2011)

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented how my interviewees’ habit choices place them in social situations where they engage with other like-minded individuals. As researchers, collectors, musicians, and instrument builders, they offer an important access point into a cohort network with a central interest in the early banjo. Most notably, these conversations reveal each person’s individual awareness of deeper issues surrounding banjo history and the legacies of slavery, minstrelsy, the traumas

of war, and the banjo's actual African and African American multicultural heritage. While these interviews provide a glimpse into individual habits and socialization experiences within a broader cohort network, they also punctuate how a relatively small community maintains its localized knowledge and material culture. In order to bring the points my interviewees discussed into a wider public view, Chapter 4 will provide an analysis and conclusion to this phase of my research.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of this modern interest in the early banjo. Here I relate my fieldwork to critical ethnography and the theoretical concepts described by Hobsbawm and Turino. I also highlight how the banjo needs to be more closely aligned with broader issues of race, revival, memory, trauma, and nationalism. With this alignment to broader issues, I provide a conclusion that focuses on using the banjo to construct an inclusive counter narrative to America's whiteness.

### **Critical Ethnography**

John W. Creswell provides a definition of critical ethnography as “a study of the shared patterns of a marginalized group with the aim of advocacy” (2005: 438). In my work, I am interested in advocacy on three fronts. First, I want to challenge marginalizing stereotypes that people hold about the banjo, and argue that those stereotypes must be vitally reconsidered in the face of ongoing and increasingly visible research now taking place within academic and non-academic circles. Broader public discourse and knowledge-sharing about banjo history can be a functional tool for empowering an increasingly diverse American public to better understand the legacy of America's deeply entrenched racial, social, economic, and political categories.

Second, by foregrounding those deeply entrenched categories, we are able to acknowledge what Jim Thomas describes as “the aggregate set of social factors that give one group power at the expense of another” (1993: 55). As pertains to the banjo, we can explore with greater precision how early banjo history provides insight into



the identities of people who were both beneficiaries and victims of America's social structures, and into the commercial demands inherent in blackface minstrelsy and other forms of American popular music.

Third, with the efforts that so many individuals have placed on the documentation and interpretation of early banjo history, much of the knowledge gained since the 1950s is maintained, at best, in a state of generational fragility in private collections, personal papers, and individual minds. Now, in the twenty-first century, unsustainable infrastructure issues adversely affect the banjo community's collective knowledge, care, and preservation of privately amassed material culture. It is difficult to estimate the percentage of instruments, historical images, or period descriptions inaccessible in private collections or in repositories that are unable to make their materials available online. It remains to be seen if and when a genuine archive for the banjo will be realized.

As an advocate for these banjo-related issues, my use of critical ethnography is intended to demonstrate why this work is crucial. In order to push these three agendas forward, it is important to understand the people who are helping to shape the trends of awareness and establish the initiative to take action. Applying the theoretical lenses found in the works of Eric Hobsbawm and Thomas Turino provided a framework in which to analyze what is taking place in the field and in the lives of specific individuals.

### **Traditions and Customs; Habits, Socialization, and Cultural Cohorts**

Hobsbawm's distinctions between genuine, invented, and revived traditions need not be applied in singular ways to this modern interest in the early banjo. Rather,

all three actually help frame how this phenomenon fits into a larger view. First, the banjo represents a *genuine* tradition with a continuously documented history since at least the seventeenth century. Second, modern interest in the early banjo—specifically the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War eras—is part of a *revival* in which present-day interest in the early banjo instruction books and tutors correspond with a revitalization of original instruments from this earlier era. Third, members of the early banjo community have *invented* a tradition in which the paraphernalia of the historical tradition is linked with the modern customs of doing research, collecting, music making, and instrument building.

Evidence of how this interest in the early banjo is part of the genuine, revived, and invented tradition is clearly present in the habits and socialization practices of my interviewees, linking this case study to Turino's Cohort-Formation theory. All of my interviewees' personal habits were developed as part of "a tendency toward the repetition of any particular behavior, thought, or reaction" while the ongoing forms of socialization include "the attainment of habits...realized through active learning from, as well as through the imitation of, those around us at different levels of focal awareness" (2008: 95). Through their individuality, the identity aspects they select, the music-cultures in which they live, the habits they form, and the socialization opportunities they enjoy, my interviewees, like me, further identify with one another as cultural (or identity) cohorts with "shared habits" that bind us "into social groups according to specific aspects of the self" (ibid: 95, 112). But I stop short of calling this phenomenon a cultural formation, because all of these people do not necessarily

“have in common a majority of habits that constitute most parts of each individual member’s self” (ibid.: 112).

As evinced in both Chapter 2 (the customs and traditions of the modern early banjo revival) and Chapter 3 (habits, socialization, and cultural cohorts relationships), many of the people are still defining the essential issues because, as Tim Twiss suggests, we are all still “mucking [our] way through this like everybody else is, and it just seems impossible to find a direction without talking with everybody in the community about what they’re doing with it” (interview, 2011). Yet, all of these points tie the banjo, its history, and modern interest in the instrument into larger issues that deserve to be re-centralized, re-represented, and re-connected with broader issues. The fact that the phenomenon outlined in this study is occurring at this point in time suggests that a growing number of people within America’s music communities are willing to look at different facets of American history in a variety of critical ways. If some members of the banjo community are willing to acknowledge and try to address these deeper issues, then perhaps so too is an increasingly diverse American public. In order for this to occur, collective knowledge about banjo history needs to be aligned with distant and recent history, especially as it relates to issues of race, how people revive and remember the past, and how they address the traumas that accompany any cultural heritage.

### **(Re)Connecting the Banjo to Issues of Race, Revival, Memory, Trauma, and Nationalism**

In *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture*, Karen Linn describes one of the banjo’s more recent representational shifts as

becoming an instrument of whiteness where people “created new meanings to revive an old instrument in the national popular culture” (1991: 118). These “new meanings” in the United States helped place the banjo in various music camps and festivals, in multiple roots music and music revival communities, and on the stage, in the studio, and on the road with performance artists. She states:

By the late twentieth century, most Americans thought of the banjo as Southern, rural, and white, and...associated it with the southern Appalachian mountains. The [blackface minstrel] plantation setting for the banjo had nearly disappeared in the popular media by the 1950s, and the association of blacks with the banjo continually lessened in the minds of Americans; this was especially true for young people. (Ibid.)

These shifting representations of the banjo’s racial, social, and cultural history need to be harnessed in order to promote a form of public discourse appropriate for an increasingly diverse public. In order for banjo-focused research to successfully engage the public in the twenty-first century, the public needs more opportunities to deconstruct how the banjo has been represented over time and how the instrument, especially since the 1950s, has been used, commemorated, and varyingly remembered as more than a mere object of *blackness* or *whiteness*.

In his 2005 book *Picturing the Banjo*, Leo Mazow states that the “overlap” between the banjo’s exceptional, occasional use in high-art contexts and its ordinary ubiquity in everyday life simultaneously signifies the banjo as part of an “all-but-forgotten yesterday and a hypermodern right-now” (2005: 11). Because of the instrument’s African-ness, it is “at once all-American and inexplicably Other” (ibid). Within the contexts of American musical revival movements since the 1950s and America’s constantly evolving racial attitudes, Mazow’s statements about the banjo’s contradictory representations suggest how a deeper understanding of banjo history

might reshape people's thinking about other cultural objects and traditions beyond the banjo.

Even with increasing awareness of documentary materials, the banjo's popular use by musicians and revivalists, and its occasional function as a scholarly research topic, banjo history is still a widely contested topic where few people, if any, maintain a single, comprehensive understanding of the instrument's broader history. The literature analyzing and deconstructing the generational impact of, for example, the folk revival of the 1950s and '60s and related phenomena is written by participants from within that generation. Joe Hickerson uses the phrase "solar flare" to describe the ways people diversified and specialized their skills during the revival. Like the sun bursting forth concentrated ribbons of energy from its surface with an eruptive blast, a variety of song types, practices, and styles of playing were "springing from the underground folk revival into the mainstream of popular culture" (1995: 15). Pointing to groups like the Weavers or musics like skiffle and calypso as examples, Hickerson describes how this phenomenon "has occurred more than once in the past fifty years" [i.e., between 1945 and 1995] (ibid).

Building on the analogy of the solar flare, one of the recent flares of banjo-focused activity (since at least the 1950s) is centered on the scholarship by authors conducting explorations into the instrument's West African heritage, Caribbean birth and development, North American transmission, and wider function and use on the international stage. The published work of authors such as Hans Nathan (1962), Dena Epstein (1975, 1977), Robert B. Winans (1976, 1979, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996), Cecelia Conway (1995, 2003), Phil Gura and Jim Bollman (1999), Bob Carlin (2007),

Lowell Schreyer (2007), and others has inspired researchers, musicians, collectors, and builders to explore banjo music and history beyond the narrower conceptions of so-called “folk music” as practiced since the 1950s and ‘60s. This current solar flare of looking at the earlier periods of banjo history illuminates how the banjo is inextricably linked to parts of American history that are often difficult for people to engage—those relating to racism, ethnocentricity, slavery, misogyny, and politics. These factors often run counter to the popular affinities people hold for the banjo’s evocative, twangy representations associated with the folk revival, old-time, bluegrass, and country music.

As more people seek to satisfy their initial interests in the banjo, they inevitably become more aware of the documentary evidence supporting the instrument’s history. With this, they might develop a special interest in one or more specific chapters of that history and, in the end, want to share what they know with others. Along these lines, Richard Blaustein describes a phenomenon in which “the multiplicity of special interest groups” often creates “voluntary associations devoted to the active preservation and perpetuation of traditional cultures...” (1993: 272). Blaustein’s comments are relevant because with “the advent of new communications media,” these special interest groups are “actively producing their own media networks in response to the sensed inadequacy of mass culture” (ibid). While it is unclear whether or not all of the people involved in community music performance or banjo research are responding to such inadequacies, it is much clearer that, with the advent of web-based social networks, people are increasingly using communications media to rapidly share their work and interests. This is also the case for those

interested in antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era banjo history, material culture, and music.

Exploring various music and research communities as part of broader cultural revival and revitalization movements, Alan Jabbour warns that within these contexts it can be “harder to say just what is being ‘revived’” or how the movement “consciously selects and intensifies certain cultural values while casting its present endeavors within the framework of the traditions of the past” (1993: xii-xiii). As researchers, collectors, musicians, and builders engage with banjo-related material spanning the broader history of the instrument, what is being revived can vary from person to person. If the attitudes of my interviewees are representative of the larger banjo community, then people will reflect on how their selections reveal what is important to them, what is intensified by the value placed on an object, reference, or piece of music, and how the present compares to conceptions of a traditional past. In the case of this study, what is being revived is inextricably linked to the legacies of slavery, blackface minstrelsy, and the traumas of the American Civil War.

With reference to issues surrounding the banjo’s nearly four hundred year history, I see the solar flare analogy (Hickerson 1995), special interest groups (Blaustein 1993), and revived/revitalizing aspects of our American past (Jabbour 1993), functioning as signs representing culturally constructed activities built around specific aspects of that history. The broader significance of these activities for an increasingly diverse American public, beyond those in the banjo community, resides in the opportunity to apply banjo history as a tool to (re)discover and address socio-cultural issues in a way that previous generations could not. It is within this narrow

but increasingly well-lit space that we might explore, define, and redefine how these specialized flares of activity function within a broader discourse.

By juxtaposing banjo history and community practices with larger cultural threads of America's racialized past and present, it will be possible to more critically deconstruct (as opposed to narrowly reinforce) how people engage with America's own cultural traumas and varying cultural memories. For example, through their research into representations of slavery, race, and ideology in 122 plantation museums in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana, Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small created "a typology of four primary representational/discursive strategies used to discuss slavery and African Americans (both enslaved and legally free)" (2002: 10). Moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, this typology includes 1) ignoring or providing minimal acknowledgement through *symbolic annihilation and erasure* of racial bondage; 2) minimizing the historical presence of slavery through gestures of *trivialization and deflection*; 3) providing individual tours that separate or segregate content through the *segregation and marginalization of knowledge*; and 4) integrating topics through *relative incorporation*, which both informs and challenges "dominant themes" about the "positive construction of whiteness" in relation to the historical realities of racial slavery in the United States (ibid: 10-11). This typology for the construction (and defense) of cultural memory offers insights into how people remember and varyingly acknowledge cultural trauma. Presenting a spectrum of potential responses—ignoring, minimizing, segregating, or fully incorporating into broader issues—creates a space in which people will be able to reconsider any perceptions they may hold of the banjo as an instrument of *whiteness*.



Recent work by scholars such as Douglas A. Blackmon goes even further to argue how the specter of American racial slavery persisted into the twentieth century—through World War II—when tens of thousands of essentially re-enslaved African Americans were forced to work in factories, mines, farms, and labor camps, a phenomenon that “poured the equivalent of tens of millions of dollars into the treasuries of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and South Carolina” (2008: 8). Blackmon argues that this history is largely unknown and under-acknowledged because “unlike victims of the Jewish Holocaust, who were on the whole literate, comparatively wealthy, and positioned to record for history the horror that enveloped them, [many African Americans] had virtually no capacity to preserve their memories or document their destruction” in the one-hundred years between the Civil War and the growing Civil Rights Movement (ibid: 9). This means that for many Americans, the end of World War II and the subsequent Civil Rights Movement were two of the primary turning points that brought an end to a form of racial slavery that had plagued North America since the seventeenth century. With the recentness of such cultural traumas, it is not surprising that it has only been in the last ten years that an increasingly visible number of African American musicians are actively and publicly reconsidering the banjo as part of a shared cultural heritage.<sup>34</sup>

Even within this recent social change, public discourse on this topic remains

---

<sup>34</sup> Examples include the *Black Banjo Gathering, Then and Now* conferences held at Appalachian State University (2005 and 2010), and African American musicians and ensembles like the Carolina Chocolate Drops who feature instruments such as the banjo, bones, and fiddle on their Grammy-winning album *Genuine Negro Jig* (see [http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/news/show/grammy\\_for\\_best\\_traditional\\_folk\\_album/](http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/news/show/grammy_for_best_traditional_folk_album/) (accessed May 6, 2011))

difficult. James Oliver Horton explains how a public history component of facing America's racial past and the history of racial slavery presents notable perils. Horton says: "The history of slavery and its role in the formation of the American experience is one of the most sensitive and difficult subjects to present in a public setting" because everyone involved is "called upon to deal with this critical and uncomfortable topic..." (1999: 20). Thus, when reacting to what has essentially been a persistent cultural trauma, it is important to take pause, invite people to think reflexively, and consider what it means to look at, revive, and attempt to reframe the banjo's use and function in American popular music.

In accord with the academic reflexivity produced by scholars looking at the "paradoxical aesthetics of the blues revival," Peter Narváez states:

Whites who have become participating, active bearers of black cultural traits have assumed one or more of the following revival postures: (1) ignoring or not acknowledging issues of race and culture; (2) dismissing racial differences as a secondary matter and concentrating on culture as 'style'; (3) accepting the black past as part of an 'American' or 'Southern' heritage; (4) viewing traditional black expressions as vital aspects of the human drama of which they are a part. (1993: 246)

The potential for people (including myself) to "ignore or not acknowledge" deeper racial and cultural issues makes banjo studies an even more relevant topic for discussion. Because of the banjo's cross-cultural uses, it is important to move beyond narrowly considering the banjo as a uniquely "American" or "Southern" instrument. The reality is that *any* expression (black, white, or whatever else) holds value as one of the "vital aspects of the human drama."

Karen Linn's assessment of late twentieth-century popular awareness and representation of the banjo as a southern, white, Appalachian instrument (mentioned

above) aligns with modern associations of the banjo in country, old-time, and bluegrass circles as well as with popular conceptions of the banjo as a national instrument or “America’s Instrument.”<sup>35</sup> In order to deconstruct these associations, Thomas Turino uses Peircean semiotics as a way to clarify the banjo’s designation as an “American” instrument. Turino suggests that “[g]iven its winding history and various associations in different times and places, the banjo *is* ‘the American Instrument,’ insofar as it is a useful index of our musical and social history” (Turino 2008: 165). Unfortunately, current vernacular knowledge about banjo history is not always equitably represented in the way that Turino describes. In line with the general public’s need to make new associations about the banjo and its history, ethnomusicologist Barbara Taylor signals an important point for consideration:

...in an America in which white citizens are Americans and black citizens are African-Americans, the common popular understanding of the banjo as “America’s Instrument” reflects and reinforces the hegemony of whiteness and, intentionally or not, colludes with a larger erasure of black musical and cultural history that stretches back to the earliest days of European colonial expansion. (2009: 2-3)

One way to counter the type of erasure Taylor references is to look to the nineteenth century as the banjo became popularly commodified in early minstrelsy. This commodification of the banjo leads to later nineteenth efforts to “nationalize” the instrument, shifting its music and provenance away from its actual African American heritage. For example, S. S. Stewart sought to disconnect the banjo from its African American provenance and link it to Egypt while at the same time distancing the instrument from minstrelsy. He stated:

---

<sup>35</sup> My use of the phrase “America’s Instrument” is in relation to Philip F. Gura and James F. Bollman’s *America’s Instrument: the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

The modern Banjo is purely an American Instrument, although the idea of its conception is said by some to have been Egyptian. The instrument has been associated with negro minstrelsy for some years past, and for that reason, many persons still ignore it as a musical instrument. (1880: 3)

While changes to the banjo's ethnic associations shaped how people thought about the instrument, this gesture toward nationalizing the banjo is not unique when compared to phenomena taking place around the world. On the international stage, other instruments also hold varying designations as national or nationalized instruments. Examples include the *piping* traditions in Scotland and Ireland (Chapman 1997), the *balalaika* in Russia (Kiszko 1995), the *mbira* in Zimbabwe (Jones 2008), or the *charango* in Bolivia (Rios 2010). In order for people to become more engaged with the deeper issues of the banjo (or any cultural implement or issues, for that matter), they must be willing to address head-on how to consider their own involvement in America's recent history before they can consider the distant past. The question is, who has the power to document, retain, and influence how people learn about vital issues?

### **Conclusion: Inclusively Constructing a Counter Narrative to America's Whiteness**

As the literature covering revivals in Chapter 1 describes, many revival contexts can become places of struggle.<sup>36</sup> For the banjo, the cultural struggle includes shifting between associations as a black instrument, a white instrument, and as America's national instrument. With ties to the cultural traumas of slavery, war, and

---

<sup>36</sup> This section of the literature included revivals as social movements (Livingston 1999), the invention of "Celtic music" (Chapman 1997), the creation of typologies (Cohen 1983), Norwegian folk revivals (Goertzen 1998), the American "folk revival" (Cohen 1995), and the medieval, renaissance, and baroque music revival (Haskell 1996; Butt 2002).

minstrelsy's legacy in the dominant culture of American popular music, the banjo becomes analogous with the type of whitewashing Colleen Marquis describes when she looks at the effects created by Civil War reenacting. Only this time, with the revival of interest in the early banjo—namely from the antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War eras—the challenge is to avoid a similar type of whitewashing that “mak[es] remembering safe and forgetting believable” (2008: 15).

One functional step to counter any whitewashing of banjo history is to bring together inclusive positions that demonstrate how vitally interconnected we are with one another. This includes incorporating Peter Narváez comments about “viewing traditional black expressions as vital aspects of the human drama of which they are a part” (1993: 246), and Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small's call to integrate topics through *relative incorporation*, which both informs and challenges “dominant themes” about the “positive construction of whiteness” in relation to the historical realities in the United States (2002: 10-11).

What the banjo requires, now in the twenty-first century—as do other instruments, traditions, and music cultures—are people willing to tell the stories, make the arguments, and take a position. Scholar, curator, and banjo historian Rex Ellis, for example, takes a critical approach to discussing the recent history of the black banjo tradition since the 1960s and '70s. Writing in the preface to his book *With a Banjo on My Knee: A Musical Journey from Slavery to Freedom* (2001), Ellis describes how:

Most African-Americans who play the banjo currently do so as a result of coaxing from an increasing number of scholars. Most of these scholars are not members of the community they seek to ‘honor,’ but who have cajoled,

encouraged, and convinced African-American banjo players that the instrument is indeed important and significant. (2001: 8)

With this coaxing, Ellis explains that these African American musicians were placed in a cultural foreground to represent a black banjo tradition. They were featured by “many of these scholars and their associates [on] compact discs, tapes, anthologies, and all types of publications” and, as a result, these scholars achieved a type of authority where “many have enjoyed serving as spokespeople for that tradition” (ibid.) Now, eleven years later, Ellis’ words have an even more resonant effect when reflecting on the dynamics of the cultural struggle to understand and interpret banjo history and associated living traditions. Ellis challenges—and then concedes—an important point as he describes one of the effects these scholars had in framing a black banjo tradition. He states that their efforts:

...have not resulted in folk music’s acceptance in the African-American community. It is still seen [as of 2001] as too one-dimensional, nostalgic, self-serving, insignificant, and patronizing. In all honesty, however, if the research of these contemporary scholars had not taken place, much of what is understood about the banjo and its roots would not be known today. (Ibid.: 8-9)

Now, in 2012, as more people desire to vitally unpack the “darkest” and “brightest” parts of our shared cultural history (Turino 2008: 210), we need additional ways to move forward.

One way of broadly addressing the issues framed in this study is by providing new opportunities for people to inclusively contextualize historical references so that they can utilize their own power to imagine the past, as they compare historical perspectives with their own knowledge, experience, and memories. For example, one of the most famous historical figures frequently associated with banjo history is

blackface musician and banjoist Joel Walker Sweeney (ca. 1810-60) of Appomattox, Virginia, whose first documented public performance with the banjo was November 12, 1836 (Carlin 2007: 163). Building on the instrument's historical associations with African and African American musical expression, Sweeney's rise as a banjoist was memorialized in the annals of history even at the point of his death:

Death of "Old Joe Sweeney"—The original banjoist, "Old Joe Sweeney," died at the late residence of his father, in Appomattox co., Va, on the 27<sup>th</sup> ult., at about the age of forty five years. He had traveled extensively in Europe and almost entirely over the United States, and enjoyed probably a greater reputation than any other man as a banjoist, having been the first white man to introduce the banjo to the public.

—*Sun* (Baltimore) 11/01/1860

Contextualizing this reference to Sweeney is significant for at least three reasons. First, when used in conjunction with other historical evidence, it further triangulates the banjo's chronological and geographic provenance. 1836 is exactly one hundred years after what is currently the earliest known reference to the banjo in North America—in New York City—and over two hundred years after one of the earliest references linking a West African plucked lute tradition with enslaved Africans in the Caribbean basin in Cartagena, Colombia.<sup>37</sup> Second, the idea that Sweeney was the "original banjoist" who "introduce[d] the banjo to the public" can

---

<sup>37</sup> See *New-York Weekly Journal*, March 7, 1736 for references to a black "banger" player who was depicted as having used a banjo in conjunction with dancers and percussionists during an Easter Monday holiday event in New York City. See also Pestcoe and Adams, "Zenger's 'Banger': Contextualizing the Banjo in Early New York City, 1736" (forthcoming). See also Alonso Sandoval, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (Seville, 1627), reprinted in the abridged *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De instauranda Aethiopum salute, Edited and Translated, with an Introduction*, by Nicole von Germeten (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008), Book 1, 27-28. I became familiar with these two references based on the desk research of Shlomo Pestcoe of Brooklyn, NY.

be examined by what is only partially acknowledged. This passage suggests that a period reader would have likely possessed knowledge about the banjo being a *non-white* instrument (i.e., a “black” instrument), but it is unclear as to how much if any genuine exposure this same reader would have had to the banjo’s actual use and function within African American contexts before that time. Third, if the public were to read this in relation to their own lived experiences within the recent past, it would need to be followed by a prompt challenging the reader to (re)consider to what degree they might ascribe similar meanings to the instrument. How encoded are each individual’s associations of the banjo with a broader and deeper multifaceted history? We are only one or two generations removed from the Civil Rights Movement, over a century removed from the implementation of the Jim Crow laws, and nearly 200 years removed from the time when T. D. Rice first “jumped Jim Crow” on the minstrel stage.

Through this approach, people will collectively connect more facets of the banjo’s broader history into a continuum of constantly changing social landscapes. A person’s previous knowledge about the banjo will likely fall into a spectrum framing what is historical with what is familiar and what is less familiar, and what it means to critically deconstruct as opposed to narrowly reinforce. Using the history of the banjo as a functional tool allows people to juxtapose race, slavery, appropriation, and commodification with community building, collaboration, cultural preservation, and musical expression.

Ultimately, this thesis asks the reader to (re)consider his or her conceptions about the banjo, its provenance, and how we apply meaning to an instrument with a



contested history. This phenomenon is clearly not restricted to any single individual, group, or social network. Rather, as the World Wide Web increasingly provides unprecedented access to information, images, video, and data about material culture, these questions take on rapidly evolving meanings with no clearly defined answers. Perhaps, as this quickening of data makes its way to our hard drives, social circles, and the media, we will reach a plateau that allows larger groups of people to acknowledge and unpack historical realities.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Institutional Review Board Approved Consent Form

Page 1 of 2	<b>University of Maryland College Park</b> Initials _____ Date _____
<b>Project Title</b>	Representation and function of nineteenth-century banjos in American revival music culture
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<i>This research is being conducted by Greg C. Adams, under the guidance of Dr. J. Lawrence Witzleben, at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because of your proven success, deep appreciation, and/or professional status as a musician, researcher, and/or collector who associates himself/herself with nineteenth century banjos. The purpose of this research project is to understand the use and function of nineteenth century banjos, their music, and their history in American revival music communities.</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<p><i>You will be interviewed in sessions lasting not more than one and a half hours, by Greg C. Adams. The interview will be audio-recorded, unless you decline as indicated by your signature and date here: _____ . If you would like to continue discussing these topics with the researcher, follow-up interviews may be arranged at your convenience.</i></p> <p><i>Though this interview will be free-form with questions that will focus on your past and current experience in the performance, research, and/or collecting of nineteenth-century banjos as part of your participation and contribution to American revival music and culture. Questions may include the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How has your involvement and interest in the banjo changed from year to year?</i></li> <li>• <i>What does the banjo represent (e.g., historically, in the last 40 years, and today)?</i></li> <li>• <i>What types of sources, information, and people helped shape your work?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do believe your work in particular (e.g., as a musician, researcher, or collector) has shaped wider public understanding about banjo history (e.g., through performances, publications, recordings, interaction online)?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>You may refuse to answer any questions and you may withdraw from the interview without penalty. Even if you have given your consent for audio recording, you may indicate times at which audio-recording is inappropriate.</i></p>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<i>There may be a small possibility of risk. For example, if my computer were stolen and the data compromised. To prevent this, your information will be respected and protected under my password-protected computer. If at any time you feel discomfort during the project, the subject, topic, or conversation can be immediately terminated and we can move onto a more comfortable dialogue.</i>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<i>The benefits to you include an open discussion about your life as it relates to your work with the banjo, your understanding of its history, and how it relates to our culture. Freedom of expression and discussing thoughts about your work may inspire you to explore additional areas of consideration (e.g., music, research, collecting). We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how the banjo represents multiple cultural ideas.</i>

**University of Maryland College Park**

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>A password-protected computer with password-protected documents will minimize any potential loss of confidentiality. Since most musicians want their names to be acknowledged, I will use your real name in my thesis and publications, <u>unless you request that I do not reveal your actual identity as indicated by your signature and date here:</u></p> <p>_____. If you would like to continue discussing this issue with the researcher, follow-up may be arranged at your convenience. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>	
<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the student investigator, <b>Greg C. Adams</b> at: <b>18022 Chalet Dr, Apt 102, Germantown, MD 20874 Cell: 301-514-8633 Email: <a href="mailto:gregcadams@gmail.com">gregcadams@gmail.com</a></b>.</p>	
<b>Participant Rights</b>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park</b>  <b>Institutional Review Board Office</b>  <b>0101 Lee Building</b>  <b>College Park, Maryland, 20742</b>  <b>E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a></b>  <b>Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

IRB APPROVED  
EXPIRES ON

FEB 22 2014

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
COLLEGE PARK

## References Cited

- Adams, Greg. 2010. NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Program (Grant HD-50572 White Paper): "Vernacular Music Material Culture in Space and Time." <http://www.neh.gov/ODH/Default.aspx?tabid=111&id=101> (accessed January 22, 2012).
- Agnew, Vanessa. 2007. "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present." *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3 (September): 299-312.
- Ayers, Joseph. 2011. "Biography." <http://web.me.com/mtcove1/TuckahoeMusic/About.html> (accessed January 22, 2012)
- . 2011. "Recordings, Publications, Film Credits." [http://web.me.com/mtcove1/TuckahoeMusic/Body\\_of\\_Work.html](http://web.me.com/mtcove1/TuckahoeMusic/Body_of_Work.html) (accessed January 22, 2012)
- Barz, Gregory and Timothy Cooley, ed. 2008. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Blackmon, Douglas A. 2008. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Blaustein, Richard. 1993. "Rethinking Folk Revivalism: Grass-roots Preservationism and Folk Romanticism." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, edited by Neil V. Rosenberg. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Briggs, Thomas F. 1855. *Briggs' Banjo Instructor*. Boston: Oliver Ditson and Co.
- Buckley, James. 1860. *Buckley's New Banjo Book*. Boston: Oliver Ditson.
- . 1868. *Buckley's Banjo Guide*. Boston: Oliver Ditson.
- Butt, John. 2002. *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buzinde, Christine N., and Carla Almeida Santos. 2008. "Representations of Slavery." *Annals of Tourism Research* 35, no. 2: 469-88.
- Carlin, Bob. 2007. *The Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc.

- Carnegie, Elizabeth, and Scott McCabe. 2008. "Re-enactment Events and Tourism: Meaning, Authenticity, and Identity." *Current Issues in Tourism* 11, no. 4: 349-368.
- Chaff, Gumbo, A.M.A. [Elias Howe]. 1851. *The Complete Preceptor for the Banjo*. Boston: Oliver Ditson.
- Charles, Norris M. 1971. *Uncle En's 5-Selector 4 5-Stringer*. Martinsburg, WV: Uncle En.
- Chapman, Malcolm. 1997. Thoughts on Celtic Music." In *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, edited by Martin Stokes, 29-44. New York: Berg Publishers.
- Chronis, Athinodoros. 2005. "Coconstructing Heritage at the Gettysburg Storyscape." *Annals of Tourism Research* 32, no. 2: 386-406.
- Cockrell, Dale. 1997. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Their World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, Erik. 1983. The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel. *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 2 (May): 227-252
- Cohen, Ronald D., ed. 1995. *"Wasn't That a Time!": Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Converse, Frank B. 1865[a]. *Frank B. Converse's New and Complete Method for the Banjo With or Without a Master*. New York: S.T. Gordon.
- . 1865[b]. *Frank Converse's Banjo Without a Master*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald.
- Conway, Cecelia. 1995. *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- . 2003. "Black Banjo Songsters in Appalachia," *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (Spring-Autumn): 149-166.
- Conway, Cecelia and J. Scott Odell. 1998. Liner Notes to *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*. Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40079
- Cook, Robert. 2002. "(Un)Furl That Banner: The Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965." *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 4 (November): 879-912.



- Creswell, John W. 2005. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- “Death of ‘Old Joe Sweeney,’” *The Sun*, November 1, 1860.
- Decker, Stephanie K. 2009. “Being Period: An Examination of Bridging Discourse in a Historical Reenactment Group.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* XX(X): 1-24.
- Eichstedt, Jennifer L. and Stephen Small. 2002. *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- Ellis, Rex. 2001. *With a Banjo on My Knee: A Musical Journey from Slavery to Freedom*. Hampton, Va: Franklin Watts.
- Epstein, Dena J. 1973. African Music in British and French America. *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no 1 (January): 61-91.
- . 1975. “The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History.” *Ethnomusicology* 19, no. 3 (September): 347-371.
- . 2003. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Flesher, Bob. n.d. *Learning Minstrel Banjo*. Peachtree City, Ga: Dr. Horsehair’s Music Co.
- . 1994. *The Minstrel Banjo Stroke Style*. Peachtree City, Ga: Dr. Horsehair’s Music Co.
- Goertzen, Chris. 1998. “The Norwegian Folk Revival and the Gammeldans Controversy.” *Ethnomusicology* 42, no. 1 (Winter): 99-127.
- Gura, Philip F. and James F. Bollman. 1999. *America’s Instrument: the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hadden, R. Lee. 1999. *Reliving the Civil War: A Reenactor’s Handbook*. Second edition. Mechanicsburg, Penn.: Stackpole Books.
- Hall, Dennis. 1994. “Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of History.” *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 3: 7-11.
- Haskell, Harry. 1996. *The Early Music Revival: A History*. Mineola, NY: Dover.

- Hickerson, Joe. 1995. "Overviews 1." In *"Wasn't That a Time!": Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival*. Ronald D. Cohen, ed. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horton, James Oliver. 1999. "Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America's Racial Story," *The Public Historian* 21, no. 4 (Autumn): 19-38.
- Hunt, Stephen J. 2004. "Acting the Part: 'Living History' as a Serious Leisure Pursuit." *Leisure Studies* 23, no. 4 (October): 387-403.
- Jabbour, Alan. 1993. "Forward." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, edited by Neil V. Rosenberg. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Johns Hopkins University. n.d. "The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music. History of the Collection." <http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/levy-about.html> (accessed January 22, 2012).
- Jones, Claire. 2008. "Shona Women Mbira Players: Gender, Tradition and Nation in Zimbabwe." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17, no. 1 (June): 125-149.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1995. "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 3 (Autumn): 367-380.
- Kiszko, Martin. 1995. "The Balalaika—A Reappraisal." *The Galpin Society Journal* 48, (March): 130-155.
- Linn, Karen. 1991. *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Livingston, Tamara E. 1999. "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory." *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter): 66-85.
- Lott, Eric. 1995. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Madison, D. Soyini. 2005. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Mahar, William J. 1999. *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Marquis, Colleen. 2008. "A History of History: The Origins of War Re-enacting in America." *McNair Chronicles* 1, no. 1: 1-15.
- Mazow, Leo G. 2005. *Picturing the Banjo*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Michal, Bill. [n.d.]. "Bill Michal [www.banjoonmyknee.com](http://www.banjoonmyknee.com)." <http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/index.html> (accessed January 22, 2012).
- Moseley, Caroline. 1984. "'When Will Dis Cruel War Be Ober?': Attitudes Toward Blacks in Popular Song of the Civil War." *American Music* 2, no. 3 (Autumn): 1-26.
- Myers, Helen, ed. 1992. *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Narváez, Peter. 1993. "Living Blues Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, edited by Neil V. Rosenberg. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Nathan, Hans. 1962. *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Nettl, Bruno. 2005. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*. New Edition. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Ning Minstrel Banjo. 2011. "Websites" <http://minstrelbanjo.ning.com/page/websites> (accessed January 23, 2012).
- . ["homepage"] <http://minstrelbanjo.ning.com/> (accessed January 23, 2012).
- Partner, Daniel, and Ed Simms. 2008. *With a Banjo on My Knee: The Minstrel Song of Stephen Foster*. Anaheim Hills, CA: Centerstream.
- Perlman, Ken. 2004. *Everything You Wanted to Know about Clawhammer Banjo*. Pacific, Mo.: Mel Bay.
- Rice, Phil. 1858. *Phil. Rice's Correct Method for The Banjo: With or Without a Master*. Boston: Oliver Ditson and Co.
- Rios, Fernando. 2010. "Bolero Trios, Mestizo Panpipe Ensembles, and Bolivia's 1952 Revolution: Urban La Paz Musicians and the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement." *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (Spring/Summer): 281-317.



- Rosenberg, Neil V., ed. 1993. "Named-Systems Revivals." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Ross, Pete. 1997. *Civil War Era Banjo Instructor: Complete Lessons in Stroke Style Minstrel Banjo...Presented in Tablature*. Baltimore, Md.: [Antebellum Banjo Music].
- Sacks, Howard L., and Judith Rose Sacks. 1993. *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Sandoval, Alonso de. 2008. *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De instauranda Aethiopum salute, Edited and Translated, with an Introduction, by Nicole von Germeten*. Book 1. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. This is an abridged reprint of *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (Seville, 1627).
- Schreyer, Lowell H. 2007. *The Banjo Entertainers, Roots to Ragtime: A Banjo History*. Mankato: Minnesota Heritage.
- Scruggs, Earl. 1968. *Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo*. New York: Peer International Corp.
- Seeger, Anthony, 2008. "Long-Term Field Research in Ethnomusicology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" *Em Pauta*, Porto Alegre, v. 19, n. 32/33, 3-20, janeiro a dezembro
- Seeger, Pete. 1948. *How to Play the 5-String Banjo*. New York: Peoples' Songs, Inc.
- Shaw, Robert, Peter Szego, and George Wunderlich, guest curators. 2003. *The Birth of the Banjo: Katonah Museum of Art, November 9, 2003-February 1, 2004*. Katonah, NY: Katonah Museum of Art, 2003.
- Shelemay, Kay Kafuman. 2011. "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer): 349-390.
- Smith, Christopher. 2011. "Blacks and Irish on the Riverine Frontiers: The Roots of American Popular Music." *Southern Cultures* (Spring): 75-102.
- Stewart, Samuel S. 1880. *The Banjo Players' Hand Book and Complete Instructor*. Philadelphia: S.S. Stewart.
- Szego, Peter. 2006. "Searching for the Roots of the Banjo-Part I." *Old Time Herald* 10, no. 4 (April-May), 14-23.
- . 2006. "Searching for the Roots of the Banjo-Part II." *Old Time Herald* 10,

no. 5 (June-July) 10-20.

- Taylor, Barbara. 2009. "The Ninth Life of the Banjo: The Black String-band Revival and Remapping America's Racial Terrain." Master's Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Thomas, Jim. 1993. *Doing Critical Ethnography: Qualitative Research Methods*. Series 26. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Turino, Thomas. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, Rory. 1990. "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted." *The Drama Review* 34, no. 4 (Winter): 123-136.
- Twiss, Tim. "Mahar and Early Minstrel Tune List" in Ning Minstrel Banjo. [http://minstrelbanjo.ning.com/forum/topics/mahar-and-early-minstrel-tune-list] (accessed 16 January 2012).
- Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!, The*. 1981. Directed by Jim Brown. United States: Jim Brown Productions, George Stoney Associates, and Harold Leventhal Management.
- Webb, Robert Lloyd. 1984. *Ring the Banjar! The Banjo in America from Folklore to Factory*. 2<sup>d</sup> ed. Anaheim Hills, Calif.: Centerstream Publishing.
- Weeks, James P. 2004. "A Different View of Gettysburg: Play, Memory, and Race at the Civil War's Greatest Shrine." *Civil War History* 50, no. 2: 175-191.
- Weidlich, Joseph. 1997. *Minstrel Banjo*. Anaheim Hills, Calif.: Centerstream.
- . 1999. *More Minstrel Banjo*. Anaheim Hills, Calif.: Centerstream.
- . 2004. *The Early Minstrel Banjo*. Anaheim Hills, Calif.: Centerstream.
- Wilhelm, Wendy Bryce. 2005. "An Empirical Study of the Motivations and Consumption Behaviors of Civil War Re-Enactors: Implications for Re-Enactment Tourism." *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing* 12, no 4: 27-56.
- Winans, Robert B. 1976. "The Folk, the Stage, and the Five-String Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 89, no. 354 (October-December): 407-437.
- . 1979. "Black Banjo Tradition in Virginia and West Virginia," *Folklore and Folklife in Virginia: Journal of the Virginia Folklore Society*, 1: 7-30.

- . 1985. Liner Notes to *The Early Minstrel Show*. New World Records 80338.
- . 1990. "Black Instrumental Music Traditions in the Ex-Slave Narratives." *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring): 43-53.
- . 1993. "The Banjo: From Africa to Virginia and Beyond" In *Instruments of the Blue Ridge and Their Makers*. Ferrum, Va.: Blue Ridge Institute.
- . 1996. "Early Minstrel Show Music, 1843-1852." In *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2009. Home. <https://sites.google.com/a/wildblue.net/winansbanjo/Home/> (accessed January 22, 2012)
- Winans, Robert, and Elias Kaufman. "Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections." *American Music*, 12 (1994): 1-30.
- Winner, Septimus. 1864. *Winner's New Primer for the Banjo*. New York: Wm. A. Pond and Co.

Work, Henry C. 1862. *Kingdom Coming Song and Chorus*. Chicago: Root and Cady.

### **Personal Interviews**

- Anderton, Carl. 2011. Telephone interview. April 23.
- Ayers, Joseph. 2011. Personal interview. Bremono Bluff, Virginia, August 2.
- Bollman, James. 2011. Telephone interview. July 12.
- Britt, Edmund. 2011. Telephone interview. June 17.
- Buehling, Clarke. 2011. Telephone interview. April 23.
- Carlin, Bob. 2011. Telephone interview. July 21.
- Ewers, Joseph. 2011. Telephone interview. April 15.
- Hartel, James. 2011. Telephone interview. July 17.
- Kaufman, Eli. 2011. Telephone interview. July 13.
- Levy, Charles. 2011. Personal interview. Washington, D.C., August 18.

- Moschella, Jay. 2011. Telephone interview. April 19.
- Sedgwick, Paul. 2011. Telephone interview. August 5.
- Szego, Peter. 2011. Telephone interview. April 17.
- Twiss, Tim. 2011. Telephone interview. July 18.
- Winans, Robert. 2011. Personal interview. Hampstead, Md., April 7.
- Wunderlich, George. 2011. Personal interview. Frederick, Md., July 20.

### **Selected Discography**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina String Band. 1991. *Tenting Tonight*. Palmetto Productions. Cassette.
- . 1993. *We are a Band of Brothers*. Palmetto Productions. Cassette.
- . 1997. *Southern Soldier*. Palmetto Productions. CD.
- . 2000. *Hard Road*. Palmetto Productions. CD.
- . 2000. *Far, Far From Home: Music and Camp Scenes of the War Between the States*. Directed by Kevin Hershberger. Richmond, VA: Lion Heart Film Works Video.
- . 2002. *In High Cotton*. Palmetto Productions. CD.
- . 2006. *Dulcem Melodies*. Palmetto Productions. CD.
- . 2008. *Lightning in a Jar*. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Palmetto Productions. CD.
- Ayers, Joseph. 1985. *Lynchburg Town-1786-1986*. Tuckahoe Music. LP.
- . 1986. *Ring, Ring de Banjo*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1987. *Green Fields of America*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1988. *Banjos, Bones & Boatmen*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1989. *Old Dan Tucker*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1990. *Volume I-James Buckley and Songs-1860*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.

- . 1991. *Volume II-Tom Briggs-1855*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1992. *Volume III-Frank B. Converse-1865*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- . 1996. *Volume IV-Phil Rice-The Banjo in 1858*. Tuckahoe Music. Cassette.
- Buehling, Clarke. 2007. *Out of His Gourd: Early American Gourd Banjo Instrumentals and Songs*. Clarke Buehling. CD.
- Buehling, Clarke, and the Skirtlifters. 2004. *Ragtime Episode*. The Skirtlifters. CD.
- Camp Lincoln String Band. 2003. *Counting Stitches*. Camp Lincoln String Band. CD.
- Camptown Shakers. 2000. *Camptown Shakers*. Camptown Shakers. CD.
- . 2002. *Tooth and Nail*. Camptown Shakers. CD.
- . 2006. *Shakedown*. Camptown Shakers. CD.
- Canebrake Minstrels. 2003. *Finer than Frog Hair*. The Canebrake Minstrels. CD.
- Carlin, Bob, producer. 1994. *Minstrel Banjo Style*, Joe Ayers, Clarke Buehling, Bob Carlin, Bob Flesher, Tony Trischka, Bob Winans. Rounder Select #321. CD.
- Diabate, Cheick Hamala and Bob Carlin. 2007. *From Mali to America*. 5-String Productions. CD.
- Flesher, Bob. n.d. [a] *Civil War Banjo*. Horsehair #402. CD.
- . n.d. [b] *Minstrel Banjo by Bob Flesher*. Horsehair #403. CD.
- Freestaters. 2007. *Watch the Ring Tailed Monkey Dance*. Freestaters. CD.
- Hudson, Jr. Carson. 2003. *I Come From Old Virginny! Early Virginia Banjo Music 1790-1860*, Carson Hudson Jr. Carson Hudson, Jr. CD.
- Miller, Amy and Carson Hudson, Jr. 2007. *Hard Times: Stephen Foster Remembered*. Amy Miller and Carson Hudson, Jr. CD.
- Old 78s, The. 2008. *Old Time Fiddle Rags, Classic and Minstrel Banjo*. The Old 78s. CD.
- Rosenbaum, Art, prod. 1978. *Old-Time Banjo In America*. Kicking Mule #204. LP.
- Twiss, Tim. 2007. *Early Banjo Volume One*, Tim Twiss. Tim Twiss. CD.

———. 2008. *The Grape Vine Twist*, Tim Twiss. Tim Twiss. CD.

Winans, Robert B. 1985, 1998. *The Early Minstrel Show*. New World Records #80338. CD.