

Traditional Music at Warren Wilson College: Continuing the Legacy

Being a relatively new field of research and having a niche following, traditional music is offered as a course of study by only a handful of colleges. Warren Wilson College stands out not only for being one of these few schools, but also for having a long history of keeping this certain aspect of local heritage alive and well understood. Located in Asheville, Warren Wilson is naturally the perfect spot to learn about music that is variously referred to as old-time music, mountain music, and American vernacular or folk music. The college's traditional music program was borne out of the growing national interest in the rural mountain South and the efforts to preserve a real and fragile local heritage that has been passed down and evolved through the centuries. American vernacular music is seen as an appropriate and worthy area of study and interest in it continues to rise due to the efforts of the college.

The Asheville area has a rich musical heritage. Western North Carolina was a region where many musicians were still making and playing vernacular music, that is, music that had been passed down and evolving for generations through communities. The folk music of the area comes from a wide range of cultures and includes types of music that are just simply American. Such well known music of the area includes ballads, shape note singing, gospel, bluegrass, and old-time string band music, (the roots of bluegrass). Lesser known musical forms of the area included mouthbow players, stumpfiddlers, and even one family in Black Mountain who played four part harmony gospel music on panpipes made out of river cane.¹

¹ A mouthbow is essentially a large jaw harp made from a shooting bow. David Holt said he encountered the stumpfiddle being played in Burnsville, NC, where white and black women were gathered and playing the rhythm instrument at Meals on Wheels delivery location.

Mining the Mountains for Music

There is a long history of both insiders and outsiders embracing the rich folk music of these mountains. In 1908, New Englander Olive Dame Campbell began collecting folk songs while her husband John C. Campbell was working on research on the social conditions of the Appalachian Mountains. Later, she invited an English folklorist, Cecil Sharp, to the southern mountains, where Sharp and Campbell eventually became a team from 1916 to 1918.² Looking specifically for English folk music and dance that had been untainted by foreign influence in the isolated terrain of the Southern mountains, Sharp was delighted to find British ballads in North Carolina, (which were, however, radically different from the ones he collected in England). Sharp had noted Madison County, North Carolina as “The richest pocket of culture in America.”³ One resident, Jane Hicks Gentry, alone had sang seventy songs and ballads, more than anyone else recorded by Sharp.^{4 5} Olive Dame Campbell eventually founded the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina to promote the ways of the Southern mountains.

Bascom Lamar Lunsford (1882-1973), “The Minstrel of Appalachia,” was responsible for making Asheville into the renowned music destination it is today. Since childhood he had been fascinated by traditions of his kinfolk around Mars Hill, north of Asheville, and was determined to learn all of the folk songs and traditions of the mountain people.⁶ An eccentric, Lunsford would be away from home for weeks staying at people’s homes relentlessly gathering music. In

² Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell’s work is the historical basis behind the 2000 film, *Songcatcher*.

³ *Ballad of a Mountain Man: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford*. Directed by David Hoffman. Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1990.

⁴ Melanie Rice, Kira Rogers, and Don Talley. *Along About Sundown ... 1928 - 2002: The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Celebrates 75 Years*. (Asheville: Folk Heritage Committee, 2002), 16.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the Gentry children attended the Dorland-Bell School in Hot Springs, a Presbyterian mission school that eventually merged with the Asheville Farm School.

⁶ Loyal Jones and John M. Forbes. *Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford*. (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1984.) pg 1

1928, Lunsford was asked to present a program of folk dances and music as part of the Rhododendron Festival which was organized by the Asheville Chamber of Commerce to promote tourism.⁷ This eventually became the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, which Lunsford arranged for the rest of his life. It was the first folk festival in the United States and still takes place every August to this day. Lunsford remembered in 1972 (the year before he died), “For forty six years I’ve never had a written program. I knew the people, and I knew what they played, knew how well they did it. The people were my program.” Over fifty years later, David Holt, a man from a very different background but similar motivation, came through the area combing the coves and hollers for any trace of mountain music, eventually becoming the founder of the Appalachian music Program at Warren Wilson College.

A Cultural Shift in Learning Traditional Music

The Civil Rights Act was signed; the Vietnam War raged on; and for the first time ever a human being set foot on the moon. These changing times had a lot of people questioning the value and authenticity of American pop culture and suburban life. Many people were sick of the mass produced. In the 1950s and 1960s the localized aspect of folk music was changing. Interestingly, the first two directors of traditional music at Warren Wilson were not local mountain people, but were from Los Angeles, California. Both David Holt and Wayne Erbsen are products of what is referred to as the “Folk Revival.”

In New York City’s Greenwich Village, Mike Seeger started the New Lost City Ramblers, who wanted to preserve the sound of traditional Southern string band music. They

⁷ “Mountain and Dance Folk Festival,” accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.ncpedia.org/mountain-dance-and-folk-festival>

“refused to sanitize” their sounds for contemporary audiences, unlike The Weavers which Mike’s half brother Pete Seeger started ten years earlier. The New Lost City Ramblers were the first band not from the South that really tried to emulate the sounds of Southern mountain people. They were very influential in getting old-time string band music to the ears of mainstream Americans. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, bluegrass music - a high energy, modern style of string band music - was starting to take off.

In 1960, Wayne Erbsen encountered a Flatt and Scruggs bluegrass album in a record store in Los Angeles. Having some experience with playing guitar, he promptly decided to learn banjo. Less than one year later, he was teaching music classes in his parents’ living room, sometimes with 10-15 people per class. “I was making bank for a teenager,” Wayne remembers. This was the start to a lifelong passion of teaching and playing music. The folk revival was in full swing when the Topanga Banjo and Fiddle Contest was created in Los Angeles in 1961. It was here that David Holt and Wayne Erbsen were both involved. Wayne first entered a contest there in 1962, only after playing banjo for three weeks.⁸

The folk music revival was not only what shed light on “the other America.” Southern mountain folk were also portrayed on television. After the success of *The Real McCoys*, a fictional show about a family that moved from West Virginia to southern California, which aired in 1957, *The Beverly Hillbillies* was released in 1962. The latter had the same plot for the most part but the family instead was said to come from the Ozarks. The theme song was played by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs and by adding the musical “Darling Family,” in 1963, bluegrass

⁸ Wayne Erbsen, interview with author, November 6, 2019

was further brought to the mainstream. Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs were also heard in the 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*.

The 1960s and 1970s were not only exceptional in that hillbillies and bluegrass music were portrayed in the media, but it is when mountain people started to take pride in their roots. They began to question what made the region exceptional and what was essentially their own culture. This pride and sense of place is what started an Appalachian identity. In 1966 the *Foxfire* magazine which documented local folklore was started by a middle school teacher and his students at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in Rabun County, Georgia.⁹ In addition, Appalshop, an organization dedicated to documenting Appalachian culture, formed in 1969 in a small coal mining town of Whitesburg in eastern Kentucky and continues to this day. Also, in 1973, the Augusta Heritage Center was founded in Elkins, West Virginia as a community sponsored workshop program.¹⁰

David Holt, the founder of the Appalachian Music Program at Warren Wilson, recalls being a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1968 and seeing the legendary banjo player Ralph Stanley in concert there. Stanley was a self taught bluegrass picker, but also played a driving clawhammer style that he learned as a kid from his mother, Lucy Stanley. Holt, enthralled by the music he had heard, asked Stanley where he could learn it, to which Stanley replied, “You need to go to Clinch Mountain where I’m from, or Asheville.”¹¹ So, taking Stanley’s advice, during the summer of the Woodstock Festival, Holt drove to Georgia to seek

⁹ Malca Chall, Reviewed Work: “*The Foxfire Book by Eliot Wigginton*” Oxford University Press, 1972, *Forest History Newsletter*, 16, 26

¹⁰ Gerry Milnes, “Passing it On: An Introduction to the Folk Art & Folk Life of West Virginia, and to the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program.” accessed November 26, 2019 <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED376006>

¹¹ David Holt, interview with author, October 31st, 2019

out Southern Appalachian musicians. He went to fiddlers' conventions every weekend starting with the Lavonia Festival in Northern Georgia. It was 1969.

Holt later recalled, "In those days there were real country people in California too. Mountain people. But here [southern Appalachia], there's a whole culture of it. The whole dang place was mountain people ... It blew me away that this existed, ... This is like stumbling across the lost world of the dinosaurs or something, you know. I want to learn more about this."

¹² Although southern Appalachia was a hotspot of traditional music, the younger generation was not picking up traditional music. The clawhammer style of banjo playing, like that of Ralph Stanley's mother, was only in the memories of the oldest generations. The local people were delighted by the fact that someone came all the way from California to learn their old ways and often invited him to stay for weeks. David Holt had made many audio recordings of the banjo players he met. He returned to California to finish college and to practice the banjo religiously trying to remember what their hands looked like.

Wayne Erbsen moves East

In 1972, after being influenced by the back to the land movement, Wayne Erbsen who earned his masters in American History, moved east to Charlotte, North Carolina to teach bluegrass, old-time music history, as well as banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and guitar lessons at Central Piedmont Community College. A strange conflict of interests in the media that can well characterize the Appalachian region, were in Rabun County, Georgia in 1972. It was this year that to Wayne's luck, the controversial and critically acclaimed film *Deliverance* came out.

¹² David Holt, interview with author, October 31st, 2019

Wayne remembers the impact that this film had on the people of Charlotte where “hundreds lined up to learn the banjo.”¹³ While this was going on, *Deliverance* was being criticized by locals for painting the rural mountaineer in an offensive way. This was the same year that the Foxfire books were published, which documented and celebrated the ways and folklore of locals.

David Holt Moves East

Finally moving to Asheville in 1973, David Holt worked as a sign painter while keeping up on the banjo and meeting many of the local old-time musicians. David Holt’s popularity skyrocketed when the local *Asheville Citizen Times* published two full pages about a stranger from California coming to learn mountain music. It was after this that Holt started getting gigs at schools, organizations, and churches. He realized that he loved performing; little did he know, in only two years he would be leading a program of traditional music at Warren Wilson College, the first of its kind in the country. In this program students could not only learn about the rich musical heritage of the area, but learn how to play the music and dance the dances from the local people themselves, “whom oldtime, traditional mountain music has been a lifelong heritage.”¹⁴ This was the beginning of Warren Wilson College’s traditional music program that exists today.

Beginnings of Appalachian Music Study at Warren Wilson College

David Holt was asked by Sam Scoville, the dean of Warren Wilson College, to help start a traditional music program at the school. Holt took the opportunity. Although he did not have a Masters degree, Holt’s enthusiasm, passion, and ability to write grants were exactly what was

¹³ Wayne Erbsen, interview with author, November 5, 2019

¹⁴ 1979 Warren Wilson College Catalogue

needed to start this unprecedented program which was the beginning of the college's traditional music program that exists today. Starting in the Spring semester of 1975, the classes, which were also open to the community, involved a curriculum where students would not be taught by "hot-shot guys" but the "real deal," by local mountain people who learned music from their families and communities. Ballad singers Dellie Norton, Cas Walin, and Sheila Kay Adams came down from Sodom, North Carolina and taught their craft. Bonnie and Gary Burnette taught harmony singing. Bucky Hanks taught flat picking guitar, Liz and Lynn Shaw taught fiddle.¹⁵ Because many of these people had no experience teaching, Holt was a middleman for them and the students.

The semester after David Holt arrived in 1975 and started the Appalachian Music Program, two women were hired to start a folk dancing program. Linda Carlson and Greta Combs had met in Denmark in 1973 at a folk dance exchange program. Linda convinced Greta to come to Warren Wilson and they started in December of 1975, with folk dances open to the community in Bryson Gym. Eventually offering both college classes in country dancing (Anglo, Danish, and Appalachian) and community classes on Friday in Devries.¹⁶ The first concerts were put on by David Holt and included "Peg Leg Sam," an African American blues harmonica player who traveled with medicine shows for over forty years. He amazed the audience by playing the harmonica, not only with his mouth but with his nose. A cajun group also played called the "Louisiana Aces," and Bessie Jones, a "70 year old lady from the Georgia Sea Islands who knows more about black songs, chants, and singing games than anyone else alive today,"

¹⁵ Laura Boosinger, interview with author, November 5, 2019

¹⁶ *The Talon*, 11, no 7 February 1976

performed in Bannerman back when it was an auditorium.¹⁷ David Holt would lead this program from 1975 to 1981.

The first student to take full advantage of the unique curriculum at Warren Wilson College was Laura Boosinger who came to school in January 1976. Since she was taking all the courses offered in the Appalachian Music Program, the chair of the music department at the time suggested she concentrate in it. Although the college did not have a major or minor in traditional music at the time, Laura graduated with a major in music with a concentration in Appalachian Music in 1980, based in part on independent study.¹⁸ Jerry Read Smith is another student whose life was heavily impacted by the traditional music program at Warren Wilson. He first witnessed a hammered dulcimer being played in Gladfelter lounge in his first year at the college. He started making dulcimers in 1976 while in school and was so successful that he dropped out of Warren Wilson to build full time.¹⁹ He was interested in teaching dulcimer at the college. Today he owns the Song of the Wood, a dulcimer shop in Black Mountain.

The Golden Age of Mountain Music at Warren Wilson

With the growing national interest in Appalachia and the dedication of David Holt to the traditional music community, the late 1970s were a golden age of traditional music at Warren Wilson. There was a college clogging team, weekly square dances, a string band, weekly shape note singing, ballad singing, various lessons and concerts supported by The National Endowment for the Arts. The Warren Wilson College clogging team was organized and taught by two

¹⁷ *The Talon*, 11 no 7, February 1976

¹⁸ Laura Boosinger, interview with the author, November 2nd, 2019

¹⁹ *The Talon*, 2 no 3, September 15, 1977

students, Toone Lindsey and Bibi Winstead in 1976.²⁰ Toone had been clogging for eight years and Bibi for two years. Laura Boosinger remembers all involved: Jo Ann Smith, Charlie Talley, Leslie Cowan Shaidnagle, Nancy McGalliard Brattain, Martin Jones, Gil Gillespie, Carmen Castaldi, Bibi Winstead Freer and Toone, most of whom were part of the class of 1979. They danced at homecoming, and Boosinger had organized a trip for the cloggers to go to Germany through her job on the work program. They were accompanied by David Holt, Mike Geiger, and herself in a string band.²¹

The Appalachian Music Program came out of a time when people were interested in the exceptionalism of Appalachia. In 1976, Loyal Jones, (who the Appalachian Center at Berea College is named after), visited Warren Wilson to talk about his work with the literature and culture of the southern Highlands. He performed folk tales and ballads he had collected throughout southern Appalachia. Early in 1977, Holt established a shape note singing school taught by Artus Moser.²² Shape note singing, one of America's first distinct genres of music, has origins in folk melodies brought by early white settlers and four part harmonies written down and taught by itinerant "singing masters." In 1979, a shape note singing workshop was done with Quay Smathers, a shape note singing master from Haywood County.²³

In 1977, David Holt, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, started an official Mountain Music Program Concert Series. The first concert of the series involved five ballad singers, ages ranging from their 20s to their 80s and all from Sodom, Madison County,

²⁰ *The Talon*, 11 no 7, February 1976

²¹ Laura Boosinger, interview with the author, November 10th, 2019

²² *The Talon*, 1 no 12, Feb 17, 1977

This was the father of the school's first Appalachian Studies Professor Joan Moser who came to Warren Wilson College in 1981.

²³ *The Talon*, 5 no 2 September 21, 1979

North Carolina. Sodom is likely the community of which folklorist Cecil Sharp noted in 1916, “I found myself for the first time in my life in a community in which singing was as common and almost as universal as speaking.”²⁴ All lined up on the stage, each singer sang three ballads, some of them having histories stretching back four or five hundred years. “Those were some of the neatest concerts I have ever seen actually,” Holt remembers.²⁵ An annual report for the 1979 - 1980 school year, noted that “the Appalachian music program continued to experience growth in enrollment, and the concerts ‘Guitar Styles’, ‘Black Music’ and ‘Gospel Music’ attracted enthusiastic crowds from the greater community.”²⁶

In 1978, not only was there now endless exposure of traditional music at Warren Wilson, but there was even a student work crew dedicated to recording and documenting the music, dances, and stories of local mountain musicians- what Holt called the “Community Collecting Project.” The purpose was to catch the spirit of the music and preserve it both in the school’s archives and The Library of Congress.²⁷ Students involved would have their room and board tuition paid for by their work on the Community Collecting Project, meeting local musicians and recording them. The work was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Holt requested \$6,500.²⁸ In 1980 when this grant was written again, Holt claimed that he had the addresses of 211 local musicians that would be documented, showing the sheer number of musicians that he knew as well as the richness of music to the area.²⁹ By this year, there had

²⁴ Along About Sundown ... 1928-2002

²⁵ David Holt, interview with the author, October 31st, 2019

²⁶ Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27

²⁷ Sample Letter to be sent to all area musicians explaining Community Collecting Project. WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, Grant Proposal for Archives

²⁸ Grant Application for the National Endowment of the Arts. WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, Grant Proposal for Archives

²⁹ Holt to Hawes, March 4, 1980. WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, Grant Proposal for Archives

already been fifty hours of audio recording and twenty eight hours of video recording done by the work crew.³⁰ After realizing he could make more money than he was making at Warren Wilson, Holt ended his involvement with the school in January of 1981 to perform full time.

After Holt had left the school, there was growing concern for the fate of the traditional music program as it was without a dedicated director for one year. Peter Gott came down to teach for a year, driving from the Tennessee line, but had gotten too busy with other aspirations.

³¹ In a letter from December 7, 1982 it was written that, “Peter has had so many requests for building jobs (log structures) -- including some important museum opportunities -- that he’s not able to swing the one-day-a-week schedule with us.”³² It was Gott that asked Wayne Erbsen if he wanted the job.³³ It is also known by this time there was a concentration in Appalachian Music for music majors and “...had been completed by a few students.”³⁴ Erbsen took the opportunity and in 1983 was hired. Not long after he started directing the program, Erbsen wanting to promote the program, went to the UNCA campus radio and became highly involved, eventually starting his own radio show. He also continued the community collecting project, but was still just an adjunct professor, so the traditional music program at this time was slow. For over a decade, Erbsen led the traditional music program alone and students could focus on Appalachian music as a concentration in the Fine Arts major.³⁵ Wayne Erbsen retired in 2018.

³⁰ WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, Grant Proposal for Archives

³¹ Inspired by the back to the land movement, Gott moved to Madison Co. in 1961.

³² Joan Beebe to Joan Moser and Barbara, December 7, 1982. WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, History and First Policies

³³ Wayne Erbsen, interview with the author, November 25, 2019

³⁴ Joan Beebe to Susie, Jennifer, and Tim, December 11, 1982. WWC Archives, Mountain Music Archives RG 3/2.27, Mountain Music Collection, Fate of, 1982

³⁵ College Catalogues. WWC Archives, 1989 - 1990 school year.

He had been involved in the traditional music program at Warren Wilson for thirty-five years, longer than anyone else.

Phil Jamison was the next person to grace the campus with his knowledge and background in music, but especially southern Appalachian dance. Moving here in 1980, from upstate New York, Jamison was part of a traveling dance troupe, “The Green Grass Cloggers,” from 1980 to 1987. He was familiar with the Warren Wilson community as he had called square dances at Bryson Gym and the old dance hall which was down Warren Wilson Road.

As Sam Scoville had approached David Holt in the 1970s about starting the Appalachian music program, Jamison was approached by Doug Orr in 1991. Guitar player, Doug Orr had just become the president of Warren Wilson and was interested in starting a summer music program. He knew Jamison from various folk festivals and asked Jamison if he could help put together the Swannanoa Gathering.³⁶ The Swannanoa Gathering has been pivotal in connecting persons interested in traditional music and dance and promoting it.

Jamison is one of the leading authorities on southern Appalachian dance in the country. In 1992 and 1993 with a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, he located, filmed, and interviewed over forty “buckdancers” and “flatfoot dancers,” bringing more visibility to the dances that were only known to a certain time and place.³⁷ In the Fall of 1994, after finishing his Masters in Mathematics, he was offered an adjunct position at the school teaching math. This eventually evolved into a full time position and in 1998 he was asked to teach a string band. Later, he was teaching half math and half music classes. Recently he had retired from teaching math and now teaches only music.

³⁶ Phil Jamison, interview with the author, September 18, 2019

³⁷ “Western North Carolina Buckdancers, Flatfooters, and Charleston Dancers (1993)” accessed Nov 24, 2019 <http://www.philjamison.com/dancer-videos#continued>

The 2000 Cohen Brothers film, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou*, sparked the interest of old-time music nationally and internationally. The fictional story featured an award winning soundtrack that included gospel singing, ballads, bluegrass, fiddle, banjo, and blues. David Holt even had a small honorary appearance in it. During this time, Kevin Kerhberg, the next asset to our music program, had been traveling around the country performing in a bluegrass band as a bassist in college.

Kevin Kerhberg is responsible for taking the traditional music curriculum to the next level of academic legitimacy at Warren Wilson. Having a PhD in Musicology from the University of Kentucky, Kerhberg is an individual with a background of much formal training. Continuing the legacy of the music teachers before him, Kerhberg has helped lead the way in taking the music once known only in a certain place and time and promoting it. Arriving at the college in 2010, Kerhberg found that the only private lessons included piano, voice, organ. There were beginning group classes for learning banjo, guitar, fiddle, square dancing, flatfoot dancing, and classes on old-time singing, but no private lessons.

Kerhberg started the traditional music minor in the Fall of 2011, suggesting that it would encourage students to take string band more seriously.³⁸ With the advent of the traditional music minor, there were now applied lessons where students could take private lessons in bass, mandolin, banjo, fiddle, and guitar, ensuring that students could hone their craft and develop as musicians. Kerhberg also pushed for more advanced ensembles. Limiting the bluegrass and old-time bands to instrumentation, there were no longer bands that had eight or nine students in them. Students were also placed in bands by their skill level. In 2016, after seeing a rise in

³⁸ Kevin Kerhberg, interview with author, October 29, 2019

interest in music, the admissions office approached Kehrberg about the creation of the traditional music major.³⁹ Last year, 2018, marked the first year that a traditional music major became available to students.

A new exchange that takes place every year and builds connections between schools with traditional music programs is the Appalachian String Band Summit. This non-competitive exchange started in 2016 when the Warren Wilson College stringband visited ETSU for a weekend and the two schools had a concert and workshops. This past October, The Summit was hosted by Davis and Elkins College and Warren Wilson and West Virginia University were involved. The event built community between the three schools and created a sense of importance in the musical traditions as it coincided with the 29th Annual West Virginia Fiddlers Reunion.

A photograph exists of a string band consisting of two fiddlers, two banjo players, a guitarist, and a cello player, the only known information on it is what it says on the back, “Swannanoa String band, 1895.” Over one hundred years later, string band music of western North Carolina is alive and well, especially at Warren Wilson College. The string band at Warren Wilson has even travelled internationally representing the United States. During the Winter break of 2017, one of the college string bands, “Jenny and the Hog Drovers,” made a trip out to China for a cultural exchange with a Yi ethnic band known as “Manhu.” This was supported by the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and they performed in the Shanghai Concert Hall and the American Center at the U.S. Consulate.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kevin Kehrberg, interview with author, October 29, 2019

⁴⁰ “Trading Traditions in China” accessed December 9, 2019 warren-wilson.edu/programs/music/

Travis Stuart, who started teaching fiddle, banjo and string band at Warren Wilson this semester grew up in nearby Haywood County and comes from a lineage of mountain musicians. Although an adjunct professor, he is the only old-time music teacher at Warren Wilson today who is from the area. For most of his life, he had played banjo and fiddle duets with his twin brother, Trevor, and brings this old form of American music to people across the nation and the world. In high school and in his 20s, he went to square dances at the old dance hall, down Warren Wilson Road, which is now in disrepair.

This dance hall was built for square dances in the 1930s. David Holt recalled, “I hate to see it kinda disintegrate because it had a long history.” David pulled out an old picture of the dance hall during the 1930s which features Walt Davis a professional banjo player from Black Mountain, Clarence Ashley who was from Trade, Tennessee, on guitar and Clarence Green who was from Spruce Pine, North Carolina on fiddle.⁴¹ This building was used intermittently up until the roof collapsed in 1994, when a blizzard dumped two feet of snow. A week later the dances were permanently moved to Bryson Gym. Called the Old Farmer’s Ball, it continues every Thursday. Although some may see the Thursday night dance as a relic of southern Appalachian folklore, they are misinformed. The dances at the Old Farmer’s Ball are contradances, a New England folk dance that has similar origins to square dancing but had evolved independently.

Although times have changed, there are still square dances called around campus during homecoming and students can take a square dancing class that Phil Jamison offers. Kevin Kerhberg and his wife hold a shape note singing every third Sunday of the month like Artus Moser and Quay Smathers once did in the 1970s. The singing is now done from a different book

⁴¹ David Holt, interview with author, October 31, 2019

called the “Sacred Harp,” instead of the “Christian Harmony.” This creates some tension among the purists who argue that the “Christian Harmony” is the more local tradition, whereas the Sacred Harp was historically used primarily in Georgia, Alabama, and East Texas.

The unique program of traditional music at Warren Wilson College predates all other higher level studies of traditional music. The East Tennessee State University website claims that its Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Country Music Studies program is the first of its kind in the country.⁴² It is predated by Warren Wilson’s by seven years. The Berklee School of Music established an American Roots Music Program in 2006.⁴³ Both ETSU and Berklee have a large emphasis on performance and bluegrass, while Warren Wilson has both old-time and bluegrass genres. Warren Wilson College today still stands out for being the place to learn old-time string band music and about the cultures and societies that made it.

Nearing forty-five years since the founding of the Appalachian Music Program, Warren Wilson College has been a leader in endorsing the music styles that have evolved in these mountains and keeping them well understood and appreciated. The Warren Wilson College Traditional Music Program from the very beginning has given great attention and care for the cultural context of this music and the often overlooked musicians, whose diverse styles are reflections of a unique regional history. Without Warren Wilson College, old-time string band music would not have the same academic legitimacy it does today.

⁴² Bluegrass, Old-Time, Celtic, and Country, accessed Nov 5, 2019

<https://www.etsu.edu/cas/das/bluegrass/>

⁴³ A Brief History, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.berklee.edu/about/brief-history>

Primary Sources

Interviews

Email Interviews with author
Wayne Erbsen, Nov 5, 6, 7, and 25, 2019
Laura Boosinger, Nov 5, 10, 2019

Oral Interviews with author
David Holt Oct 31, 2019
Phil Jamison Sep 18, 2019
Kevin Kerhberg Oct 29, 2019

Warren Wilson College Archives

1. Mountain Music Collection RG 3/2.27
2. Music Department Records 1978 - Present
3. College Catalogues 1975 - Present
4. *The Talon*, 1975 - 1979

Secondary Sources

Baker, Bruce E. "Mountain and Dance Folk Festival." Accessed November 18, 2019,
<https://www.ncpedia.org/mountain-dance-and-folk-festival>

"Bluegrass, Old-Time, Celtic and Country" accessed October 12, 2019
<https://www.etsu.edu/cas/das/bluegrass/>

Chall, Malca. Reviewed Work: "*The Foxfire Book by Eliot Wigginton*" Oxford University Press,
Inc. 1972, *Forest History Newsletter*, 16, (1972), 26

David Holt - Full Bio- From the book "12 Notables of Western North Carolina." accessed
November 20, 2019,
<https://www.davidholt.com/about/david-holt-full-bio-from-the-the-book-12-notables-of-western-north-carolina/>

Hoffman, David., David G McCullough, and Bascom Lamar Lunsford. *Ballad of a Mountain Man: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford*. Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1990.

Jamison, Phil, "Western North Carolina Buck Dancers, Flatfooters, and Charleston Dancers (1993)."
accessed November 24, 2019. <http://www.philjamison.com/dancer-videos#continued>

Jones, Loyal and John M. Forbes. *Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford*. Boone, N.C: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1984.

Milnes, Gerry. "Passing it On: An Introduction to the Folk Art & Folk Life of West Virginia, and to the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program." Accessed November 26, 2019
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED376006>

Petrus, Stephen. *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Rice, Melanie, Kira Rogers, and Don Talley. *Along About Sundown ... 1928 - 2002: The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival Celebrates 75 Years*. Asheville, Folk Heritage Committee, 2002.

Traditional Music at Warren Wilson College:
Continuing the Legacy

Reed Whisler
P. Otterness
HIS 4800
Fall 2019