



## Wherein George Lyon talks to Neil Rosenberg and we get to listen!

*I first met Neil Rosenberg in the summer of 1967, when he was teaching a session at the University of Texas. It was at a party at a professor's house; probably all the folkies who were left in Austin (following the Beatles/Dylan blitz of 1964-65) could fit in that living room. When I got there, he was playing guitar backup to someone's old time country song. At my turn, I played one of those pseudo-Indian raveups many of us were fond of then, using a modified dulcimer tuning on my guitar. I was astounded to look up and see Neil had brought his guitar across the room and was playing along with. I say "astounded" because I really didn't know what I was doing and couldn't imagine that anyone would be able to figure out what I didn't understand myself! This wasn't the blind leading the blind; it was the sighted following the blind! Were there a tape of the evening, I suspect it would show that his seconding was more interesting than my leading.*

## Crack!

*At the end of the summer he invited me to attend the annual conference of the American Folklore Society held that year at Indiana University, from which (as you will see) he was in the process of earning a Ph.D. After that, he was in Newfoundland, and, though we kept touch intermittently, we eventually lost contact. He never did send me a copy of the Homegas disc (some tapes of which he'd played for me during the summer), for which I never forgave him. Nevertheless, I followed his career with interest and admiration, particularly noting the publication in 1985 of *Bluegrass: A History* (U Illinois P), which remains the major work on the subject and, I gather, has become a cultural artifact itself, being used by bluegrass fans as a handy autograph book, carried to festivals for that purpose. A portion of Rosenberg's curriculum vitae is available at <http://www.mun.ca/folklore/faculty/rosenberg.html>.*

*George: This interview was an experiment: we conducted it entirely on email. It began during the year of Pete Seeger's 80th birthday, so I began with questions about Seeger's influence because by now I think of Neil as a banjo player, not a guitarist. Other questions followed, either spurred by his previous responses or by my own interests. Eventually, the material was chopped and reordered, and I realized some new insights were needed, so more questions were put, and round and*

*round it went. I think what you've got is reasonably complete and coherent (though we decided not to repeat aspects of his life and work that are covered elsewhere, sources are given in the text and footnotes). I don't know whether this method of interviewing would work with everyone, but I enjoyed working on it (hope nothing got left out in all the revising and re-sending!); I think you'll enjoy reading it.*

Neil: I was born in 1939 in Washington state; we moved to Berkeley when I was twelve. My dad was working as legal counsel for a research institute in San Francisco, sponsored by the trucking industry. My parents chose to live in Berkeley because of our family's intellectual, arts, and liberal/socialist interests. Many of their friends were University of California ("Cal" to everyone locally) faculty members or connected in other ways to the U.

I attended Berkeley High. At that time (1954-7) it was big, the only public high school in town, and had quite a diverse student body in terms of class, ethnicity, and origins. In some kind of survey in 1956 or '7, it was ranked as one of the top 40 high schools in the US, and I think I got a good education there. And met many neat people.

My folks encouraged me. When I was 14 they let me drop the violin, which I'd been studying since I was seven, but required me to take folk guitar lessons. But I think that the formative thing was that my peer group was into all of this stuff. We were teenage bohemians, hanging out in the Cal campus fringe scene, going to North Beach, having big music parties at a cabin in Redwood Canyon (in the hills behind Oakland) on weekends, playing on the Midnight Special at KPFA, playing folk music in school concerts.

The guitar teacher that I found when my parents insisted that I take lessons after dropping the violin was a woman in her 30s named Laurie Campbell. She taught voice and guitar, and part of what she had me do was compose. I was 14. First I set a bunch of Ogden Nash poems from a volume titled, I think, *Parents Keep Out*, to music.<sup>1</sup> And then I started making my own words. By the time I was 16 I'd done a bunch of songs. My mother took me into a local recording studio and made acetates which were sent to selected relatives for Xmas gifts. My first song was about hot rods, "Foggy Flatz Blues," and my second about teenage partying, "What a Blast We Had Last Night." Then I did hear Guthrie and wrote a few in something like his mode, but this was well before the singer-songwriter thing, which started to happen in the early 60s. I wrote my last song in 1957 during my first semester at Oberlin, about breaking up with my girlfriend back in Berkeley.

After that I got too self-conscious about songwriting. I didn't particularly care for most of the new stuff that was coming out in the revival context. I was into old songs. I did continue to make up tunes and have done so ever since then. Both of the Crooked Stovepipe CDs have instrumentals of mine on them. I've got a lot of my own banjo, guitar, and mandolin tunes that I hope I'll find time to record some day. I sing, though not my own songs, with Crooked Stovepipe and have sung with every other bluegrass band I've been in. I learned a lot working in the various house bands at Bill Monroe's Brown County Jamboree during the 60s.

I was introduced to folk music by my father's older sister Ted (Teya) Newkirk, who was a social worker and what we would have called, back then, a "bohemian". She'd hung out in North Beach in the 30s, had been married to a communist, was a lesbian, and she had a collection of folk records that included the Almanac Singers. As a teenager in Seattle she'd been a literary pal of Mary McCarthy's, and McCarthy wrote a good description of her in one of her last books, an autobiographical essay that first appeared in the *New Yorker*. Once I became aware of it, folk music was all around in Berkeley in the early 1950s in record stores, on KPFA, at parties. My dad played the tenor guitar, (four strings only, like a uke) and at about the same time as I got interested he started learning some sea chanties like "What Shall We Do With A Drunken Sailor."

These days I generally tell people I've been playing banjo for forty years. When I was sixteen or seventeen years old I went to a concert by Pete Seeger in my home town of Berkeley, California. I'd been into folk music 3-4 years, playing the guitar then. (I still play the guitar did a lead break on "Park Avenue Blues" on our second Crooked Stovepipe CD a couple of years ago, for instance.) But I'd only recently learned about the five-string banjo when my classmate and musical partner, Mayne Smith, got an old Stewart 5-string. I remember seeing Seeger's manual on playing the banjo at his house and listening to Seeger's records, all of this before the concert, which was certainly a turning point in my folk music education as it was for many people in the mid-fifties. Prior to that, I had perhaps not even noticed the 5-string banjo, if I heard it, because it didn't sound like a tenor or plectrum, which I would have recognized since we had a few Eddie Peabody records at home.

Mayne came to Berkeley in 1953 when his father, Henry Nash Smith, took over as head of the English Department at Cal. So he'd been raised on folk music, and it was his enthusiasm that fully drew me into the scene. He'd had guitar

lessons from one of Henry's students, Gene Bluestein, and Henry knew the Lomaxes.<sup>2</sup> Mayne had Pete Seeger records. After I began hanging out with Mayne I decided I wanted to quit my violin lessons, and I moved from playing the uke to appropriating my Dad's guitar (a nice old Washburn) and adding the bass strings to it.

Mayne later did an MA in Folklore at Indiana, the first academic study of bluegrass, in 1964, then went to study folklore at UCLA.<sup>3</sup> He dropped out to become a songwriter. In LA he played in bands and sessions with great musicians like Ry Cooder, David Lindley, and Taj Mahal; Linda Rondstadt recorded one of his songs. In the late 60s he moved back to the Bay Area, and he, Mitch Greenhill, and Mark Spoelstra started a country/folk/rock group called Frontier Constabulary. He still plays and records with Mitch, and they've done some Canadian festivals in the past. He plays with a couple of local bands in the Bay Area, singing lead and harmony and picking rhythm guitar in the bluegrass band, Detour, and playing pedal steel in the country-rock band, Moonlight Rodeo. He's been a key figure in maintaining and developing Berkeley's oldest folk performance venue, Freight and Salvage. Mayne remains a close friend; we continue to share intellectual and musical ideas. He's a great editor who's helped me with my writing over the years. Recently we celebrated our 60th birthdays together (we were born five days apart) at a big party at Eric Thompson and Suzie Rothfield's in Berkeley, along with a lot of old friends and acquaintances like Larry Hanks, Jody Stecher, Kate Brislin, Geoff Muldaur, Chris Strachwitz, Scott Hambly, Mitch Greenhill, Rita Weill Bixbe, and many others.<sup>4</sup>

The first really good banjo player I heard was Billy Faier, who came to Berkeley in the summer of 1957. He was playing all the stuff on his classic Riverside album, *The Art of the 5-String Banjo*, that came out in '58, and I was really impressed with his music. He played tunes and songs from all over Europe and North America, not just southern mountain stuff. It's still impressive music.

The mainstream folk revival repertoire of the 50s was multicultural. Everyone from Seeger to the Kingston Trio offered up potpourris of folk stuff from many places. I don't think it's that much different today; eclecticism is a kind of constant, though the content is constantly changing; it's a kind of fashion thing.

So that was where I got on and part of how things worked when I was playing with my peers at hoots and parties and coffeehouses. I was impressed with Faier's banjo-picking but not motivated though to follow his example. But that

is what I'm doing right now, in a sense: in The Bannerman Park Band, a St. John's group, we do all kinds of European stuff.

In the fall of 1957 I started college at Oberlin, in Ohio. Eventually I majored in History. I chose Oberlin largely because (1) Mayne was going there, and we were musical partners and (2) I'd read about the folk music scene there in *Sing Out!* magazine. I was rooming with Mayne, and there were a lot of others on campus who had banjos, so I was immersed in banjo music. This was where I first heard of bluegrass. The Folkways album that Mike Seeger produced, *American Banjo Scruggs Style*, was just out. One of the guys in the dorm was from New York City and talked a lot about the Sunday sessions in Washington Square and the duels between Scruggs pickers Eric Weissberg, Marshall Brickman, and Roger Sprung. Then I heard records of Earl Scruggs and Ralph Stanley, and they really caught my ear. I was still mainly into guitar playing the music of Leadbelly, and blues, and jug band, and my own compositions but I started fooling around with other people's banjos, too.

A crowd of us got into bluegrass, and in the next two years we all spent a lot of time listening to records and trying to play banjo and mandolin and guitar and (eventually) fiddle in the styles of the leading figures of that music. We also were working on the vocal side of bluegrass, learning the repertoire. There was a co-op dorm at Oberlin called Gray Gables where many of us boarded, and we'd jam before and after meals every day in a little downstairs room called Lower Siberia. We'd leave our instruments there, and so by 1959 we'd all learned a bit on the various instruments so we could swap around. One of the guys in this crowd was Chuck Crawford, who now lives in Toronto, he played in the Bluegrass Revival and Silverbirch in the 70s and 80s, and is still active as a singer.

The Pete Seeger manual, in the second edition that Mayne had, didn't have anything useful for learning Scruggs picking. There was a page devoted to it, but it wasn't accurate. So we learned from other musicians. Occasionally good pickers from New York like Paul Prestopino would come to visit, and we'd pick their brains for those elusive right-hand patterns. And we got to know some bluegrass musicians at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio: Jeremy Foster and his wife Alice Gerrard, who was way ahead of us on the banjo.

I still didn't own a banjo. In the winter of 1959 my classmate Sophie Healey loaned me her banjo, and I really got into playing it. It was a difficult time for me as my younger brother had been killed in an auto accident and I believe that

getting into the banjo was my way of coping with that loss. During my years at Oberlin I spent my summers at home in Berkeley, and in the summer of 1959 four of us, Mayne, Scott Hambly, Pete Berg and I, formed a bluegrass band called the Redwood Canyon Ramblers. I was the guitarist. We were the only bluegrass band in the Bay Area, and, as far as I know, the first. We immediately started playing on the folk show at KPFA, the local FM station, and quickly got coffee house gigs around the Berkeley campus.

Just as things were starting to roll, Mayne, who was our banjo picker, came down with the illness we called "mono" (mononucleosis - very common, even trendy, at the time; you rarely hear of it today). The kissing disease! That was our big STD fear back then.

So we were short one banjo picker; Pete switched from bass to guitar, and I took over on banjo. I borrowed a 1954 Gibson Mastertone with Scruggs pegs from an older fellow who'd gotten it on spec in an insurance fire sale in LA, and that was my first experience publicly performing on the banjo. At the end of the summer I bought that Mastertone from him, and I still have it today. It's very much like the legendary two hundred year old axe, that has had three new handles and two new heads, though: the only original piece in it now is the resonator. But that's another story.

If you look closely at the names on that "Map of the World and List of the Population" poster in Baby Let Me Follow You Down, the story of the folk boom in Cambridge by Jim Rooney and Eric von Schmidt, you'll see my name, and Mayne's, and lots of others who were in our network of friends. That was drawn by Rick Shubb, today known as a capo magnate but still a fine banjo picker: he took his first bluegrass banjo lesson from me.

I was originally much more sympathetic to African American music than to hillbilly music. The folk scene in Berkeley and the Bay Area has always been heavier on the African American side of things than the Anglo. Oakland is, after all, a black American cultural center, and Berkeley and Oakland are right next to each other, and then Richmond, which is also a historically black community, is on the other side. I listened to KWBR, a black-owned and operated station in Oakland, all the time. So did many of my classmates. This is during high school. When I heard a record I liked (like "Stackolee" by Archibald, or "Travelling Mood" by Wee Willie Wayne, or "Rib Tips" by the Rufus Gore Orchestra, or "Signifying Monkey" by someone on the Flip label from Memphis) I'd go to Tupper & Reed, the high-toned music shop on Shattuck Avenue, the upscale shopping district then, and order it. I got

to know this one salesman (I think he was a Cal student), and he noticed I liked black music and tried to sell me on a Leadbelly LP, which he considered to be esthetically better than the R&B I was digging. I took the LP into the booth, gave it a listen, and returned it to the counter, telling him that it was "too hillbilly." Within 6 months I did get into Leadbelly and became a big fan. I liked the 12-string guitar. Jesse Fuller (best known for "Frisco Bay Blues") was performing around the area then, and I really dug his music too.

Mayne was more into the southern white stuff than I, and sort of led me in that way: the Tom Paley Elektra 10" album was a favorite, and the Riverside album called Banjo Songs of the Southern Mountains or something like that, with Obray Ramsey these I liked. But I didn't really know much about southern culture then. Rural culture I had some connections in that my Mom's family were from rural parts of Eastern Washington and southern Michigan, but I really didn't think of it in those terms. Until I began living in southern Indiana (1961) and doing graduate work as a folklorist, I really didn't have much involvement in the culture beyond the music itself.

In northern California the pejorative term for hillbillies was "Okies." I remember going to see a double feature at a movie house just off Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, in the UC campus district Grapes of Wrath and Tobacco Road. And then not long after that giving one of the guys who was new to our circle a hard time because he was playing "Okie music." I didn't connect these two things until later.

When I was a senior at Oberlin, Henry Smith came to visit Mayne's sister Janet, who was also studying at Oberlin. We had a meal together. Talk turned to my plans for graduate study. At that point I was undecided: History or Folklore? He advised me to study the thing I was truly and deeply involved in, and mentioned that his friend Richard M. Dorson (they'd both come out of the American Studies program at Harvard) had a folklore program at Indiana. His counsel pushed me over in that direction, although Joe Hickerson, an Oberlin folk music person who was already at IU and had encouraged my interest, also played a part in my decision. Then and now I have a rather mystical belief that if at all possible you should do what you want to do rather than what you think you ought to do; cast your bread on the waters, let the bottom line take care of itself.

At Indiana I wasn't able follow my own intuition, which was to focus on music. Dorson turned me away from an Ethnomusicology minor to a double minor in History, and I was not allowed to choose music topics for either my MA

thesis or my PhD dissertation. I was told that I'd have a better chance of landing a job as a folklorist in a history department Dorson was a historian if I stayed away from music. I've already written a lot about my experiences trying to be an apprentice in two different things - bluegrass music and folklore studies - at the same time. So I won't repeat everything that's in that article, "Picking Myself Apart: A Hoosier Memoir" in the *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995).<sup>5</sup> But at various times I did try to bridge the gap between those two worlds in different ways. One of those times was in 1965 when I went to Dorson, who was my advisor, to discuss the topic for my PhD dissertation.

In my four years there I'd become involved in two weekly jam sessions. One, just outside of Bloomington at the home of a farmer and watch repairman named Jimmy Campbell, was carried on by older men who played together at square dances. Young local "old-timey" musicians, mainly IU students inspired by the New Lost City Ramblers and all that, came there to learn the local traditions. And young men from local families who were into country, bluegrass, and old-time fiddling also were regulars. But Jimmy's fiddle and the old tunes were at the center. The other was over in Brown County, in Marvin Hedrick's radio-tv sales and service shop on the outskirts of Nashville. Here, bluegrass and old-time country reigned. The regulars included some local men who played regularly with Marvin at square dances as The Weedpatch Boys. But it was also frequented by bluegrass people from further afield. One time Bill Monroe came in and brought the Blue Grass Boys! Marvin's tape and record collection was awesome. When Sandy Rothman and Jerry Garcia came to visit me in 1964 they spend several days dubbing Marvin's tapes. But I digress!

I wanted to compare these two weekly rituals, which had many similarities and many differences. Some kind of analysis, I believed, would develop. Dorson responded to this by saying "Great! But don't just concentrate on music, and do just concentrate on Brown County." He reminded me I wasn't doing ethnomusicology and that I needed a topic with a strong historical content. At the time he was writing his history of British folklorists and was enchanted with the Counties Series that The Folklore Society had published. He envisioned me gathering folklore from Brown County and focusing upon official and unofficial local history. I wasn't able to argue about this with him and so ended up trying his suggestion. I got some interesting stuff, but it went nowhere for me.

Not only that, I found that when I went around to history meetings in the winter of 1965-66 looking for some kind of teaching job, it wasn't an easy topic to explain or justify to professional historians. So this was a difficult time for me, and it continued even when I was hired by Indiana University as an administrator at the Folklore Institute. It was great to have a real job, but then I had not only a slowly moving dissertation, but also much less time.

Meanwhile I was having success writing about bluegrass. I began working on my first academic paper about bluegrass, and with much help from Archie Green (who taught me a lot about writing) it was accepted to be read at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in the fall of 1966. Soon after the meetings I received a letter from the editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*, John Greenway, asking me to submit my paper. I did, and it was accepted. I proudly told Dorson about this, and his response was, "Well, it's good you're being published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, but I wish it was on another topic."

By this point I had been working on bluegrass discography since 1962. That was the starting point for my academic research on bluegrass, and by 1966 I had lots of stuff, particularly on Monroe (the Country Music Foundation published that as a book in 1974). In 1965 I started working with the Osborne Brothers on their discography. They were bluegrass's hottest young band at the time. We'd met in 1960 and by 1965 were pretty well acquainted. As I worked on the project I became fascinated with their attitudes about repertoire and music. They came from a mountain family in Eastern Kentucky and musically grew up in musical traditions that were well-studied. And they could play that music some, but their focus was on contemporary country songs. Here was, I thought, a fascinating study of repertoire preferences in context. By the spring of '67, when the bluegrass article was published, I'd had it with Brown County. I went to Dorson, told him I couldn't continue with my dissertation on Brown County folklore, and said I wanted to do a dissertation on a bluegrass band the Osborne Brothers. I told him that I thought I could use my article just about to be published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, as the first chapter. He was against it but allowed me to write a proposal. Then I had to defend that proposal in a meeting of the entire faculty of the Folklore Institute a kind of ad hoc star chamber committee that, as far as I have been able to tell, was only convened for my case. No surprise I lost!

So then I was without a topic. I cast about for a non-musical library project. That summer (1967)

Roger Abrahams was up from Texas teaching summer school. He suggested I take a paper on Rastus jokes (then a widely-known white American genre of racist dialect humor) I'd done a couple of years earlier for an American Studies seminar and build on that a dissertation on White Folklore About Blacks. Which is what I did. Started in the fall of '67, about the same time I started jamming with Peter Aceves.

Peter, who has been my colleague in the Department of Folklore here at Memorial since 1974, took his mother's surname shortly after he moved here: Narvez. He'd come to Indiana to study folklore three years after I started. He'd played in local folk scene, had a jug band, and was into blues in a big way. We'd often shared venues but not until the fall of 1967 when Dave Brock, who played harp, was just ending a long spell (couple years) as part of duo with Peter, did we start jamming on his bluesy stuff. We played his new compositions, which were based on various traditional models but often took novel and complex forms. Although this was acoustic music, we were doing what most people in folk-rock were doing in the late 60s. For me it was a radical move from banjo to mandolin. I'd owned lots of old Gibsons but almost never played in public except at some square dances with Birch Monroe. Peter and I did one gig that fall as The Blues Rejects. Dorson saw the ad and ordered me to "lay off the music." We started again jamming in January '68, with Richard Blaustein. Just jammed 2-3 months, did a gig at the U of Illinois as The Friends of Greasy Greens, and then added a bassist, John Hyslop. He was studying music at Indiana University. In June, right before I left for Texas and Peter left for Maine, we did a demo tape.<sup>6</sup>

I was in Austin that summer, teaching a summer school course in folklore at the University of Texas, when I had a call from Herbert Halpert inviting me to apply for a job at Memorial University of Newfoundland. More about that later; what happened was I came to St. John's in September, 1968, and at the same time Peter moved to Maine.

That fall Vanguard Records told Peter that on the basis of the demo they were interested in hearing us. By some cosmic co-incidence, the American Folklore Society meetings were in Bloomington that fall, and to make a long story short, Peter and I both made it back from up North. This was my first time back to the US from Newfoundland, where I'd only been for a couple of months. The audition was lots of fun, but eventually (after the young DJ-producer who came to hear us went home and came down) we got a Dear John letter from them.

At the same time we got a letter from John Fahey, the avant-garde blues guitarist ("Blind Joe Death"), also a folklore graduate student (at UCLA, studying Charlie Patton) who then was the operator and co-owner of Takoma Records (he was from Takoma, Maryland). Fahey liked everything about us but the name. We recorded for him in April 1969 in Bloomington.

I came early with a draft of my dissertation and met with my supervisor, and then we had a recording session. I spent my pension refund money from Indiana to buy a better mandolin. Peter had written more new songs. We added a second vocalist for the recording: David Satterfield, with whom I'd done a lot of bluegrass gigs earlier. A great singer from Columbus, Indiana, he also recorded with another Bloomington band of the time, Salloom-Sinclair. They did a couple of albums for Cadet, a Chess subsidiary. Anyway, we rehearsed intensely for three days and recorded for two and a half days. Dave Brock played on one track at that recording session.

That summer we learned from Fahey that he liked the material but that he wanted us to record again in a bigger studio, so he could get better separation. In August we met at Peter's place in Maine, rehearsed intensely for three days. Here we added a new harp player, Jim Barden, a conceptual artist from New York with whom Peter had hooked up and was gigging in Maine. He played in the style of Little Walter. Here also is where we got the name. The local bottled-gas proprietor was a company called Homgas. The logo was on a tank at Peter's house; that gave us the idea for Homegas, which Fahey accepted. We then drove down to Cambridge where we stayed at Old Joe Clark, the folk music commune. We recorded for a couple of days at studio in another nearby suburb of Boston.

The record didn't come out for another two years, in 1971. Fahey had problems with our Boston recordings, so in the end only two new numbers were released from them; the rest came from the original recordings. At the same time he released our album, Fahey also released Leo Kottke's first, which ultimately sold 500,000 copies and has recently been reissued on a Rhino CD. Although this musical experience was extremely important in shaping my musical life, Homegas was definitely not a best-seller!

It did sell a few copies here in St. John's. A young local singer-songwriter named Ron Hynes bought one. Recently Ron was telling me about when Peter Narvez first moved to St. John's in the fall of 1974 from Maine. Early on he went into a local nightspot where Ron was playing and was

amazed when he heard two or three of his own songs!

I completed my PhD in July 1970, here in St. John's, with much help by Herbert Halpert. Halpert was my de facto supervisor there at the end. Dorson dropped out after the Osbornes proposal was nixed.<sup>7</sup>

I first met Halpert when he came to IU in 1967 seeking help in setting up a folklore archive at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. One of my administrative jobs at the Folklore Institute was as liaison between the Archives of Traditional Music (where I also worked as a cataloger) and the Archives of the Folklore Institute. Both Dorson and George List, who was director of the Archives of Traditional Music, had found Halpert difficult to deal with, and so I got to spend a lot of time with him consulting about his new archive.

Memorial created the Department of Folklore for Halpert in April 1968, and that summer one of the young folklore specialists he'd brought in from England suddenly decided to return home. Halpert phoned Kenny Goldstein looking for a replacement and learned that I was out of a job (Dorson had, in essence, fired me after I attempted to change my dissertation topic) and teaching summer school in Texas. He offered me a job as Archivist and Lecturer. The Canadian dollar was higher than the American dollar back then, and Memorial made me an offer I couldn't refuse! I was particularly attracted by the challenge of setting up and organizing an archive.

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) has grown considerably since then. I became its director in 1976, and retired from that in 1990. In the Department I've taught many courses, developing courses in such topics as Folklore of Canada and Public Sector Folklore as well as regularly teaching a graduate seminar that used to be called Introduction to Folksong and is now called Music and Song. I wrote about that course, gave the outline, list of readings, and my rationale for it, in 1984 for Bruce Jackson's book *Teaching Folklore*. Recently I taught an undergraduate folksong course for the first time since the early 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1970s I did a lot of field research in the Maritimes and I've published quite a few studies growing out of that work. I've also continued to work on bluegrass studies, and in the past decade I've done more and more on Newfoundland song topics. Since 1969 I've written album notes for about 40 Lps or Cds, and this kind of writing that links sound to print is my favorite medium. I'm particularly proud of having won a Grammy for my contribution to

Smithsonian/Folkways' reissue of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

In "Picking Myself Apart," I wrote that my involvement in music performance set up barriers between myself and other academics when I was a student. I don't believe that this has changed, either in folklore or in ethnomusicology. Some ethnomusicologists believe that performance experience in the culture they study is essential to their research; some don't. When an ethnomusicologist is in a school or department of music, he or she is in a context in which performance is more highly valued than scholarship. Then, if that ethnomusicologist is one of those who places high value on performance experience, he or she may be in an advantageous situation. But really the barriers are still there; it's just that here they are inverted in comparison to most other academic settings. In music schools or departments, performers have higher status than scholars they are more at the center of what the school sees as its mandate. In the Arts and Social Sciences, scholars rule the roost and performers are a frill. For me, writing album notes is one way of bridging that gap.

Throughout my career I've studied vernacular music based in the culture of white European-derived rural and working-class people. This stuff is not exotic enough for most people involved in elite culture here in North America. It's too corny and sentimental for most. These days that fact is reinforced by the ideology of multiculturalism, which is often used to sidestep or downplay issues of class. The serious study of hillbilly and its country music descendants is further handicapped in Canada by their American connections because those Canadians who care about the musical dimensions of national identity typically think of it as oppositional to things American.

Of course, the more closely you look at it, the more complicated the issue seems. First, there are many exotic musics in Canada. It seems to me that some Canadians are into this, especially younger people in places where there are large ethnic communities. So there is some culture-hopping going on amongst adventurous musical enthusiasts, and some interesting scenes as a result. Second, I see a lot of musical national pride in some places. Certainly here in Newfoundland, and in Cape Breton, Acadie, Quebec and so on. So there are places where Canadians do pay a lot of attention to their own music.

And these things are not always separate. For example here in St. John's Gail Tapper plays Newfoundland music on the Paraguayan harp, as well as the Paraguayan repertoire. She's in touch with local scene because she plays music with her

friends here, and with the Paraguayan scene via travel, books, the internet, etc. Lots of that stuff going on. Canadians who are into making their own music put all kinds of things together. It just doesn't get much notice by the majority who are not deeply involved in music.

There's a thriving blues scene here in St. John's, jazz is established in the School of Music at Memorial, and my colleague Peter Narvez has introduced a very popular blues and jazz course that's cross-listed in Folklore and Music. My conclusion is that African American music is just as appealing to the middle-class urban intelligentsia here as in most places. A recent news item in our St. John's Telegram reported that a national survey of musical preferences had found country music to be the most popular form in Newfoundland, but I find little interest in it among my students, and I don't think a course on it here at Memorial would fly. The most popular dance band in rural Newfoundland, Simani, has spawned an entire musical style that mixes country with Newfoundland-style accordion there are many cassettes and CDs by them and others. But one hears people in the local folk music establishment speak disparagingly of such music as "Newfie music" - the equivalent of African Americans calling other African Americans "Uncle Toms." Still, these dichotomies are played out in a population with a very small proportion of people of colour. To me, class remains the key dividing line.

Having said that, I'm pleased to report that my colleague in the School of Music, ethnomusicologist Kati Szego, has gotten seed money and the go-ahead to establish courses in Newfoundland traditional singing, fiddling, and accordion-playing at Memorial. We're watching with interest to see how the students respond to this opportunity.

I have never stopped performing, despite the demands on my time and energy that creates. For me, making music is essential exercise for the inner self. I work in a variety of contexts, formal and informal, long term and pickup. I suppose I'm best known for my work with our bluegrass band, Crooked Stovepipe, especially since we've put out two CDs and were featured in the next-to-last issue of Bluegrass Canada magazine in January of this year. I can't think of much I can add to that article except that I think our performance at the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival last summer was one of our best ever. I'm really enjoying getting to know our new mandolinist Rex Yetman, who's a great musician. He's a Newfoundlander who moved to Ontario as a teenager. Back in the 50s he was a founding member of the York County Boys, Canada's first

(1953) bluegrass band. I'm working with him now, writing an article on the fascinating history of this group.

The Bannerman Park Band is built around the accordion of Art Stoyles. Art, who was the first accordionist with Newfoundland's best-known folk rock band, Figgy Duff, grew up on Gower Street in the east end of downtown St. John's. He started playing when he was eight. In the summers he would go up to nearby Bannerman Park (the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival is now held there each August) and play in the bandstand. In the fifties when he started, Portuguese fishing vessels - "the white fleet," beautiful big white four-masted banking schooners - came regularly into the harbour. The crewmen would come to the park. Through them Art met Portuguese musicians and learned their repertoire. Today his recording of "The Portuguese Waltzes" is played regularly on the radio here, and a lot of other musicians play it as well.

The name of the Bannerman Park Band preserves that connection. It includes Terry Thomson, a fiddler and guitarist. She grew up in the same neighborhood as Art, and her father also played accordion. Bob Rutherford, originally from England, heard Art shortly after he moved here about ten years ago. He became Art's pupil. He plays second accordion in the band. Len Penton, who's from Gander with family connections on Fogo Island, plays guitar and sings a lot of the familiar old Newfoundland songs. The band started about five years ago. I joined two years ago, just as Gail Tapper was leaving the band. At first I played banjo; now I also play mandolin on some numbers.

For me this has been an exercise in learning a new repertoire and musical style. Art and Bob play 3-row button accordions, and the two of them put out a big sound. I love the way the banjo and accordion sound together. Art's a great musician, able to find chords on that button box that elude most people and with a really amazing command of rhythms. We have a very eclectic repertoire lots of Newfoundland stuff, Portuguese, Norwegian, Irish, some Canadian and American. We rehearse weekly in the kitchen at Terry's house, just across the street from the park, and our sound really fills that little kitchen. Very satisfying.

Last July we put together BANT (standing for Bob, Art, Neil and Terry), a spinoff of the Band focusing on the instrumental repertoire, to play several gigs for the Sound Symposium one at the Arts and Culture Centre, the other at the Ship Inn.

For the past three summers I've played in Europe with Richard Blaustein, whom I met in Bloomington and played with in Homegas, in a



two-man band we call Two Old Friends. Richard, a Brooklyn native, lives in Johnson City, Tennessee, and teaches at East Tennessee State University. We've done gigs in Holland and Scotland. Richard plays fiddle and a recreation of a pre-Civil War minstrel banjo; I play banjo and mandolin. We do old-time southern tunes and songs, including a lot of stuff from the Harry Smith Anthology. This year we played three concerts as part of the European World of Bluegrass events. There's one cut by us on the new European World of Bluegrass 2000 CD just released by the Dutch company Strictly Country Records.

Right now Black Auks is looking like my most active group. It's a spontaneous collective improvisation group led by Don Wherry, the former Toronto Symphony Orchestra percussionist who's been running the Sound Symposium, an experimental music festival, and teaching percussion here since the early 1980s. The group was formed in 1992; I joined in 1994. Other members now are Craig Squires who plays soprano sax, lap steel, and various other stuff, and Wallace Hammond, who plays untuned guitar, fiddle, uke and other stuff. I call Wallace "the godfather of Newfoundland punk." He and Craig are into Zappa and Captain Beefheart among other things. We've done two CDs; I'm on the second one, *No Second Takes*, to which I wrote the liner notes.

We invite people to jam with us from time to time. Basically we get together once a week to jam. Start the tape recorder going and whatever happens, happens. When the tape stops, we stop. If we don't tape, then we just play until it feels like the end. We have a web site <http://205.251.249.61:7979/blackauks/> and are planning to do audio broadcasts of our jams as soon as we can get things set up. I play banjo, mandolin, kazoo, a variety of musical toys and noisemakers; in the past I've also played uke and other instruments. The string instruments I re- or un-tune in various ways. This is an exercise in listening and thinking about musical textures; it's play. We do public gigs every month or two. In March we did our first gig outside of Newfoundland, at the No Music Festival in London, Ontario, sponsored by the Nihilist Spasm Band and featuring "noise bands" and similar performers. It was quite an experience: first festival I've been to where they sold earplugs at the door! Our performance there was very successful; our concert will be the first track on the festival's CD.

What was interesting to me was that the young guy doing the sound selected as the CD to play through the sound system as he was setting up was (first night) Dock Boggs and (second night)

Roscoe Holcomb, both from Smithsonian/Folkways CDs. So, Folkways remains in touch with the young avant garde hip. My connection with the Anthology of American Folk Music led to the only "acoustic" jam of the festival which paired me with a performer I'd never heard of before but was well-known to the people who came to this festival, Lee Ranaldo from the band Sonic Youth. Looking at the success of Smithsonian/Folkways and the Anthology, I see a challenge: get these kids to listen to obscure working-class Canadian music. It's all (I say cynically) packaging and hype. The latest trendy "other" music is Cuban, from the recording and the movie Buena Vista Social Club. Where is Canada's Harry Smith or Ry Cooder?

Powerful, unique and moving working-class musicians exist in every region and culture, but there doesn't seem to be a way in Canada for the avant garde in one region or cultural group to buy into the perceptions of another. Emile Benoit had that impact in Newfoundland, I know; but he never became a national icon, as Boggs has.

Barbeau, Creighton, and Fowke, the most prominent Canadian folklorists, operated mainly outside of the academic world, forging their careers in public settings at a time when Canada had no full-time academic folklorists. Their international reputation was built on a national publishing and broadcasting foundation that really doesn't exist in Canada any more; the CBC is being gutted by cutbacks, and the national publishing companies are mostly owned by multi-nationals. So if the current folklore scene is to produce a well-known presence, it will have to happen in a different way. Who knows?

As a folklorist who specializes in the study of vernacular music, I'd like to make Canadians more aware of my perspective. I doubt folklore as a discipline is going to have much luck in getting Canadian universities to create folklore departments. However, there are talented young folklorists at a number of institutions all across the country who are doing good research and teaching in other departments. I'm very impressed with *Ethnologies* (formerly *Canadian Folklore canadien*), the journal of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada it's published a lot of good stuff.

This semester I'm teaching a graduate seminar on Public Sector Folklore. The class project is to come up with a Canadian equivalent to Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music. Each student is supposed to come up with a demo tape and a rationale for constructing a collection of vintage vernacular recordings that represent some or all of Canada's musical traditions. I don't know yet where we'll end up, but it's an exciting project. I'll let you know after we finish what happens.

## Notes:

1 Ogden Nash. *Parents Keep Out: Elderly Poems for Younger Readers*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1951.

2 Henry Nash Smith was a major figure in the study of American literature. His best known work was *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950) it's been reprinted more than once.)

Gene Bluestein first crossed my screen as Seeger-influenced banjo player: it was from an obscure 50s recording by him that I first heard the Qu'becois song, "Ah! Si mon moine voulet dancer," in the public library of Houston, Texas, in the mid60s. He, too, became an English professor; though he did not have Smith's influence, I believe that his *The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory* (Amherst, Mass.: U Massachusetts P, 1972) is still read from time to time. GWL

3 Smith's essay, "An Introduction to Bluegrass" [*Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965): 245-56] is still readable and useful, perhaps not only for newcomers to the field. GWL

4 Songwriting reticence aside, such a guestlist seems to invite the composition of "What a Blast We Had Last Night, Take 2"! GWL

5 "Recently I realized that I didn't tell you about another autobiographical essay that deals with my time at Indiana. In it I talked about my relationship with the IU Folksong Club. It's titled with my name, "Neil V. Rosenberg," *Wasn't That a Time!: Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1995)."

6 *Baby Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years* was first published by Anchor Press/Doubleday in 1979; a second edition came out in 1994 from U Massachusetts P.

7 Richard Dorson's role as the Great Cham of academic folklore came under justified fire following his retirement and death. The most notable is perhaps Ellen J. Stekert's "Autobiography of a Woman Folklorist," *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987). Folklorists acknowledge the value of Dorson's work but question his dominance of the field. GWL

8 Bruce Jackson, ed. *Teaching Folklore*. Rev. ed. Buffalo, N.Y.: Documentary Research, 1989.

### Did You Know?

The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin exchanges copies with other publications, such as:

This Month at the Rogue .....	Vancouver BC
Sing Out! .....	Bethlehem PA
Dance and Music Camps 2001 .....	Haydenville MA
Country dance & Song Society .....	Haydenville MA
International Bluegrass .....	Owensboro KY
The Living Tradition .....	Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland
Bulletin de Liaison de l'AFAS .....	Paris cedex 13
Three Quarter Times .....	Vancouver Folk Song Society
Canadian Musician CM .....	St. Catharines ON
Fiddler Magazine .....	North Sydney NS

*and others*

All of these eventually end up in the CFMB's archives, lovingly watched over by Bill Serjeant in Saskatoon