

# ALONG THE OHIO'S SHORES

*Fiddle Music Along a Great River*

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*Produced by  
John Harrod &  
Mark Wilson*

**About this set of recordings:** In this compilation (FRC731), John Harrod and I make available more results from our efforts, in partnership with the late Gus Meade, to document the distinctive folk music of northern Kentucky and southern Ohio. In the main, we have concentrated our attention upon the region's fiddle music, as sampled on this disc, for that tradition has been scantily documented but has remained astonishingly vibrant through the end of the twentieth century (and beyond, for many of the musicians on these discs are actively playing today).

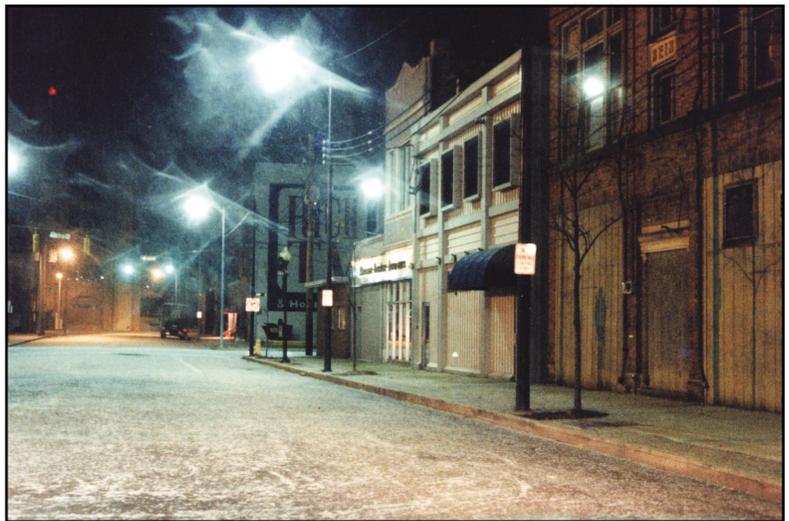
As John explains below, our coverage has been greatly augmented by the fine recordings that Barbara Edwards Kunkle made in the early 1970s. We first met Barbara through our mutual friend Nancy McClellan who then ran the annual Mt. Heritage Folk Festival and has staunchly served as a true supporter of all things Appalachian (indeed, her grandfather, Samuel Turman, contributed songs to the Cox collection). Nancy and Barbara accompanied Gus and me on several of our recording trips and soon Barbara was doing her own taping as well which included many performers we were not able to visit (including the ballad singer Addie Graham who once had a wonderful record available on June Appal). We are happy that we are able to include some of Barbara's recordings here.

For my own part, I'd like to also acknowledge the great help that Roger Cooper has provided in assisting me with some of the newer recordings on this disc.

-Mark Wilson

## Introduction:

The Ohio River was the highway for the successive and diverse streams of immigration that poured into the interior of North America in the eighteenth century. It has long been our contention that the local and regional fiddling styles we encountered in our travels throughout Kentucky in the 1970s and '80s were the product of a complex interplay of factors that included ethnological origin, routes of migration, geographical ambience and individual genius and eccentricity. We also recognize, however, that the difficulty in precisely identifying and tracing



such influences requires caution in the use of the term "regional style." All we can say with certainty is that while traditional fiddlers, learning by sight, ear, and memory, all play in their own unique styles, nevertheless the fiddlers of any given area sound more like each other than fiddlers from another area.

In the collecting we did in the 1970s, it seemed that the regional styles did not extend beyond a two- or three-county area. Therefore we make no claim that this sampling of fiddle music from the Ohio River Valley between Ashland, Kentucky and Madison, Indiana constitutes a distinct "Ohio River style." Unlike the raftsmen in Letcher County fiddler Manon Campbell's story about the tune "Coal

Harbor Bend,” who, drifting down the Kentucky River one night, heard the same tune being played at different square dances along the bank only to discover when the sun rose in the morning that he was caught in a whirlpool, our journey along this stretch of the Ohio River reveals a remarkable diversity of styles and tunes that must reflect the diversity of the early populations who settled in the area.

In our notes to Rounder CDs 0376 and 0377, *Traditional Fiddle Music of Kentucky*, we have reflected on the cosmopolitan character of the Ohio River towns that absorbed German and Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century. We noted as well the possible influence of the earliest French settlements from the nineteenth century in the Ohio

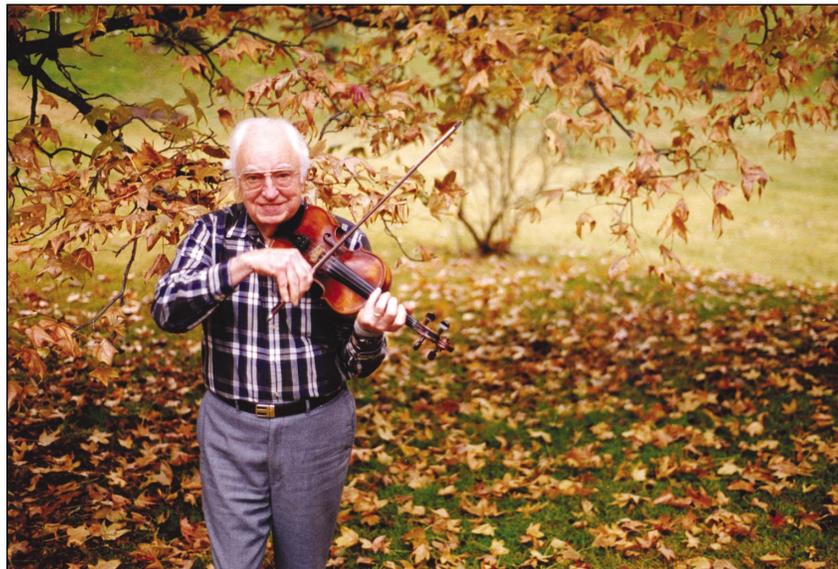
Valley. Mark observes that some of the “European” feel to some of this music can be attributed to the influence of the popular dance music of the Victorian era which is characterized by heavy doses of Germanic chromaticism (tendencies that usually get mollified in southern tradition as in the tune “Birdie”). The playing included in this latest collection shows the same blend of what has been loosely referred to as the Northern and Southern styles of fiddling and is generally more complex in its settings and bowings than the Scots-Irish music that predominated further south.

In particular, *Along the Ohio River* revisits approximately the same area featured on *Traditional Fiddle Music of Kentucky, Volume I*: northern Kentucky and southern Ohio between Ashland and Madison, the area that in our collecting yielded the greatest wealth of traditional players and tunes. Included here are additional pieces by players such as Alfred Bailey, Bob Prater, Buddy Thomas and Charlie Kinney. From Ashland we have the driving style of female fiddler Emma Lee Dickerson. The important Portsmouth, Ohio-Lewis County area is further represented by Ray Hilt, Morris Allen, Roger Cooper, Shirley Cline, Lem Isom, harmonica virtuoso John Lozier, and Forrest Pick. The Cincinnati area is represented by Harold Zimmerman and Hobert Bowling. Northern Kentucky below Cincinnati is represented by two older fiddlers born before 1905, John Kinman and Sam McCord, as well as Tommy Taylor.

As with the previous volumes in this series, the recordings were made by John Harrod, Mark Wilson, and the late Guthrie Meade with the addition in this volume of field recordings made by Barbara Kunkle in the 1970s. Barbara made extensive recordings of both fiddlers and ballad singers in northeastern Kentucky and wrote her master’s thesis on the ballad singers while at Marshall University. Her recordings of Emma Lee Dickerson and Forrest Pick have been essential to our understanding of the music of this region. We are grateful for her permission in presenting these tunes here. Her collection is now housed at Berea College.



# The tunes and their performers:



Harold Zimmerman

**1. Kenny Roth Tune #1** Harold Zimmerman (Fort Thomas, Ky; 11/22/97; JH & MW).

Harold Zimmerman was born in 1916 in Van Wert County, Ohio, an area settled in the early nineteenth century by German farmers. Harold was introduced to the fiddle by his grandfather George Knittle (b. 1860) who lived across the state line in Adams Co., Indiana. According to Harold, George Knittle was a large man who stood 6'4" and weighed 240 lb. He was a farmer, blacksmith, big game hunter, and old-time fiddler.

Harold described their life:

*My grandparents had a lot of land and a lot of kids to do the work. My grandfather used to travel all over this part of the country. He and other fiddlers up home were all well-to-do in those days and so they'd take their wives and go by train to these fiddling contests. Wherever they went to a fiddling contest, they made sure it was close to where there's big game: Pennsylvania, Detroit, Hot Springs, Arkansas, for they were big game hunters. And they'd play the contest and then give their wives their fiddles and send them home. And then they'd spend a week or two hunting. That was quite a life.*

*My grandfather was a big man; in those days he was the biggest man around that part of the country. He held his fiddle down on his chest and played it. He played a lot of hard bow and he played fast but he played awfully good. He played in the third position quite a bit. I don't think he ever missed a note that I remembered.*

*He ran the bellows in a blacksmith shop. One day he said to me, "Let's go into the parlor, Harold. I've got a fiddle tune in my head." So he went in the parlor and he played a tune called "Pine Tops." Then he gave me the fiddle and said, "Here, Harold, you play it," and, in my own way at that time, I played it. That's the first time I ever picked the fiddle up and I played that tune. And he got so excited that he run and got Grandma and all them to come listen to me because I was the only grandchild out of maybe thirty that had ever picked up a fiddle. Then they got on the telephone and they had a big party that night. People from quite a few miles around came in and they all played their music and he had me play that little bit of "Pine Tops." And I kept right along going up to see him and he got me started on some nice tunes.*

Other influences on Harold's playing were Tommy Byrnes from Ft. Wayne, an Irish style fiddler who was a friend of George Knittle's, and Kenny Roth, a farm laborer who sometimes worked on the Knittles' farm.

*This Kenny Roth: I started following him more and learning his style. This was during the Depression. He was a day laborer. Generally, he got a dollar or two a day and he got his meals and, if he worked for the week or two weeks, he'd stay all night although he had his little house where he stayed that was his home. He played a real square dance style. He was into the bow heavy but he never played out of the first position except to get a sliding note and he never used his little finger. But he was the best fiddle player I ever saw, although you'd have to define "fiddle player" correctly. Kenny Roth was a true fiddle player – he could really play old-time fiddle. Now I see kids today that are phenomenal – it's out of this world what they can do at young ages – but I don't know if they'd really qualify as old-time fiddlers or not. They learn the Suzuki system and, if you put twenty of them up and pass from one to the other, you can't tell who's playing – parents can't even recognize their own kid. And it's getting more homogenized all the time. So I don't know if that's old-time fiddling or not.*

*Now I've got a theory about true old-time fiddling. When you play the fiddle with a good accompaniment, if people don't want to clap their hands or snap their fingers or get up and dance, then you really aren't fiddling. When I played the Smithsonian Festival in Washington, all those girls got up and danced in the aisles and that's the way it should be.*

"Kenny Roth Tune #1," a tune Harold could not recall the name of, is one of many tunes Harold learned from Kenny Roth. It is a version of the "Old Towser" tune found in Ira Ford's collection and, as such, belongs to the "Off to California" tune family. Mark notes that the melody also resembles the late minstrel era song "Hi, my Jenny Jenkins" as recorded by Harry C. Browne.

**2. Texas John** Emma Lee Dickerson with Quentin Brickey, guitar (Ashland, Ky.; 1973; BK).



**Emma Lee Dickerson with  
Quentin Brickey**

Emma Lee Dickerson (1923-2001) was born Emma Lee Johnson on Little Fork in Elliott County. Although her father Theophilus Johnson was a fiddler, he died when Emma Lee was three. The family then moved in with her uncle Walter Brickey, who was also a fiddler and the main influence on her style and repertory. As a young girl she played for square dances and house parties in Elliott County. At the age of eighteen she married Wilson Dickerson and moved to Baltimore where he worked in the shipyards during World War II. After the war they moved back to Ashland where she kept a grocery store and continued to play the fiddle for family and friends as well as an occasional contest. Although I was able to meet Emma in the hospital shortly before she died, it is a great tragedy that we had no idea of her whereabouts for many years even though she had continued to fiddle for her own pleasure. Roger Cooper, upon hearing these tapes, commented that Emma captured the quintessence of the old Elliott County mountain sound better than any fiddler he'd ever heard and we agree. It is very fortunate that Barbara Kunkle managed to capture these wonderful performances for posterity.

"Texas John" seems to represent an unusual and up-tempo rendition of a tune more commonly known as "Walk Along, John" (see, among others, the published recordings by Art Galbraith and Cyril Stinnett). On the tape, however, Emma Lee comments (with evident relief that a more civilized title has been found):

*We used to call that "Run, Nigger, Run" in our family but later Quentin found out that it was really "Texas John."*

In fact, Emma Lee's melody seems to represent a blend between the more usual strains of these widely popular tunes which appear as songs in minstrel songsters of the 1840s. Both tunes have been widely collected from a number of fiddlers, but no one has ever played a more driving and danceable version than Emma Lee's. The excellent finger-style guitar accompaniment was provided by her cousin Quentin Brickey. We regret to report that her son Carl, who kindly helped us with her biography, has recently died as well.

### **3. Pumpkin Vine** Forrest Pick (Portsmouth, Oh, 1973, BK).

Forrest Pick was one of the many great fiddlers we have been able to hear from the Portsmouth, Ohio area over the years. Portsmouth, like many other mid-American cities experienced an industrial boom period during and after World War II that drew in families from the rural areas of the surrounding states of Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia. From the evidence of our field recordings as well as the anecdotal accounts of our informants, this stretch of the Ohio Valley centering around Portsmouth (and including Lewis Co. on the Kentucky side) was a crossroads and melting pot for the fiddle styles that were brought into the area by the war-time economy of the 1940s. Ed Haley, Clark Kessinger, and Buddy Thomas all spent some time in Portsmouth. Home recordings of other fiddlers not as well known outside the area, such as Asa Neil and Jimmy Wheeler, suggest that there was much there for a Buddy Thomas to learn from. Others such as Bob Glenn, John Kiebler, and Jess Large, earlier fiddlers known to us only through the stories of our informants, were apparently of equal stature in the eyes of their peers (for further discussion of the Portsmouth fiddling scene, see Rounder CD 0376).

Forrest Pick was a truck mechanic who repaired fiddles on the side. Although the rich, full tone and precise intonation of his playing as well as the sophistication of his melodies suggests violin training, he did not read music. Forrest, with his father Ernest on bass, his uncle Chester on fiddle, banjo, and guitar, along with Jimmy Wheeler and Sam Cox, played for weekly square dances in Forrest's garage in West Portsmouth. He also played for square dances on WSAZ television in Huntington, WV. For many years, he played with Jimmy Wheeler as the "Personality Boys" on radio station WPAY in Portsmouth.

Gus and Mark attempted to record Forrest in 1973 but he had been forewarned that the "folks from the big record company" were coming to visit and this caused him to worry that income from his music would jeopardize his Social Security pension and so he refused to meet with them. Such concerns are entirely unfounded but they remain common to this day.

The Personality Boys were probably responsible for the dissemination of the local tune "Pumpkin Vine" as it was played by Buddy Thomas, Ray Hilt and Alfred Bailey who learned it from their radio performances. The tune is an outstanding exemplar of what we have come to refer to as the "Portsmouth style" with its utilization of the entire G-scale including a subtle slide from C to C# and a dazzling sequence of cascading trills from C down to G in the B-part of the tune as well as the bold slide up to 4th position in the C-part. Compare Buddy Thomas's version on Rounder CD 0376 or Jimmie Wheeler's on the out of print LP *Seems like Romance to Me*.

### **4. Old Flannigan** Tommy Taylor with John Harrod, guitar (Rabbit Hash, Ky.; 8/03/97; JH & MW).

Tommy Taylor is the younger brother of Ballard "Pappy" Taylor (1908-1998) who enjoyed a long and distinguished radio and recording career as songster, comedian, banjo player, and fiddler. The music the Taylors played illustrates the difficulties inherent in tracing and identifying regional styles of fiddling. Ballard Taylor was born in North Carolina, but the family moved to Liberty, Kentucky on the

Green River when he was ten years old. Soon after Tommy was born in 1924, Ballard, who was 16 years older, was already performing in northern Kentucky on radio stations WLW (1928) and later WCKY. In 1934 he joined Uncle Henry's Kentucky Mountaineers, took the stage name "Grandpappy Nerit," and followed them to Chicago where they played on WJJB and WLS until 1945. After a stint in Rome, Georgia with the Blue Ridge Mountain Boys, "Pappy" as he was now known moved back to northern Kentucky and teamed up with his brother Tommy. They performed together with fiddle and banjo or twin fiddle combinations at folk festivals in the area up until Pappy's death in 1998.

With such a background, the Taylors heard and absorbed both the traditional and commercial music of their day, but interestingly, one of their main influences was the music of the Skillet Lickers of Georgia. Clayton McMichen had moved to Louisville after breaking with the band and became a well-known performer in the Louisville-Cincinnati area. Tommy, like most fiddlers we have known in the northern Kentucky area, listened to McMichen on Louisville's WHAS in the 1940s while Pappy knew McMichen from his own work at that station. The Skillet Licker connection was further strengthened when another former Skillet Licker, McMichen's brother-in-law Bert Layne, settled in northern Kentucky. Both through their friendships with McMichen and Layne and through old recordings of the Skillet Lickers that Pappy acquired from Layne, the Taylors absorbed much of the repertory and style of the early Georgia string band.

Today Tommy, who lives near the Ohio River at Rabbit Hash, Ky., plays old-time music with the Rabbit Hash String Band, gospel music with the Gospelway Bluegrass Singers, and bluegrass with Taylor Made; however, he still plays many of the older traditional tunes of the area such as "Old Flannigan."

*The name of this tune is "Old Flannigan."*

*I got it from Frank Miller.*

*He was an old gentleman I used to hear play around here.*

Miller played for a radio program called "McCormicks' Old-Time Fiddlers," which may partially account for the tune's wide local dissemination. Miller's rare Gennett recording of the tune with Ma and Pa McCormick and "Big Foot" Castleman (as "The Blue Ridge Mountaineers") can be heard on the LP *Old Time Fiddle Band Music from Kentucky, Volume 3* (Morning Star 45005). Compare also Clarence Skirvin's version included on Rounder CD 0377. Jimmie Wheeler also played a version of the melody without a title, which he said had come from his dad.



**Tommy Taylor**



Alfred Bailey

**5. Shelvin' Rock** Alfred Bailey (Flemingsburg, Kentucky; 6/26/86; JH).

Alfred Bailey (1918-1996) was one of a large group of excellent traditional fiddlers from Bath County, Kentucky, that also included Tom Riley, Carlton Rawlings, Warner Walton, George Hawkins, the Elzie Stone family, and the Tom York family. The Bath County style showed both the influence of Tom Riley, whose parents had emigrated from Ireland, and northern-style influences to be heard in southern Ohio (both Alfred and George explained their style to us this way). Alfred's "Shelvin' Rock" is not the cross-tuned West Virginia piece nor the tune from the bluegrass region of that title but instead a local tune in the key of G learned from Carlton Rawlings. It resembles the Portsmouth tunes in its melodic contours.

**6. Lead Out** Ray Hilt with Rick Dean, guitar, and Joshua Holtschulte, banjo (Marion, Oh.; 6/27/98; MW).

Ray Hilt (b. 1920) grew up on a farm in Crabtree, Scioto County, Ohio seventeen miles north of Portsmouth. The farming opportunities there were very meager and after World War II Ray moved north to Marion where he worked in the seed business. His father, Fred Hilt (died 1940), had migrated to Ohio from Pennsylvania near the start of the twentieth century. He was the source of many of Ray's older tunes (such as the broadside-derived "Kate's Horn" that appears on volume two of this collection).

*By the time I came along, I was the youngest of eight kids so by the time he did a day's work, he wasn't too much in the mood to play the fiddle. Them old rocky hillsides weren't too kind to you.*

*Up there you could starve to death trying to raise a living out of the place, but we had a million dollar view, for it was pretty out through there. We raised corn and a little bit of wheat. He used to raise sorghum cane and make molasses. My dad was the sorghum maker in the neighborhood, he had the mill.*

*Back in my dad's day they didn't really have guitars so if it was a beat off one way or the other, it didn't matter too much. Music changes generation to generation. My dad didn't care too much about the kind of music that we played because when he grew up, you'd have what they called a lead fiddle, then the second fiddle - he probably played the tenor notes - and then if you were lucky, you'd have a bass fiddle. And you played that bass with a bow, you didn't slap it.*

We have recorded examples of such fiddle and bowed bass ensembles from this area that we hope to include on a future release of home recordings.



Ray Hilt

As a boy, Ray listened devotedly to radio, both the Grand Ole Opry and local shows such as Asa Neil's and Forrest Pick's, and he learned many of the classic Portsmouth area tunes in this manner. He set the fiddle aside for many years, but, on a whim, happened to visit J.P. Fraley's music festival where he soon became a regular.

Generally, Ray plays in a larger group that also includes Joshua Holtschulte's wife Marianne on second fiddle and Bob Lucas on mandolin (Rick Dean, by the way, is Marianne's father and the group formed after Rick had been looking for a fiddle teacher for Marianne and ran into Ray). On *Volume Two* of this collection (0545), the full ensemble can be heard playing "Fox Hunter's Blues," which Ray learned from Asa Neil over the radio. On this record we have concentrated on some of the rarer tunes that only Ray knows.

Ray's "Lead Out" is a unique version of a widely played tune in the "Texas Quickstep" family that was known around Portsmouth as "Rachel" and in Lewis County as "Shamrock" or "Short's Addition." (The title "Lead Out" more commonly attaches to "Too Young to Marry" (Tommy Jackson), but obviously derives its name from its square dance functionality). Ray learned the tune from George Smalley, a Portsmouth friend who was killed by an errant log truck while watching a bicycle race. Ray learned a number of unusual tunes and settings from George.



Hobert Bowling

**7. Blackjack** Hobert Bowling  
(Burlington, Ky; 9/27/97; JH & MW).

The playing of Hobert Bowling represents another anomaly in our survey of Ohio River fiddling. Born in Knox County in the southeastern Kentucky coalfields in 1913, he grew up in adjoining Clay County and worked for the Panama Coal Company. He moved to Cincinnati in 1937 and then back across the river in 1946 to Boone County, Ky., where he has farmed up to the present day. In spite of his long residence in northern Kentucky, his playing adheres to the style of the region where he grew up. He plays a number of the old mountain pieces in solo style including cross-tuned pieces, otherwise rare in the Ohio Valley region of our survey. He describes a gathering of solo style fiddlers when he was growing up:

*They'd settle down and you'll play a tune and I'll play a tune, but you never play two together. And they'd fiddle for half a day there. At that time, they didn't do accompaniment. They'd play by theirselves. One would play, then the other.*

Hobert recalls playing the fiddle and banjo for square dances from the time he was ten years old (for an example of his banjo playing, see “Kentucky Old Time Banjo,” Rounder CD 0344). A favorite tune for the dances was “Blackjack.” Hobert recalls as a young man playing that tune all night long for a dance. He learned it from his father, George Bowling, and John Hicks of Clay County. The fiddle is cross-tuned AEAE, a rarity among Ohio Valley fiddlers at the time of our recordings. Mark comments upon a resemblance to the play party tune “Go Home With the Girls in the Morning” as recorded by Bob Wills on MGM. A fair number of distinct fiddle tunes carry “Blackjack” in their title, such as Walter McNew’s “Blackjack Grove.”

**8. Hell Up the Holler** Sam McCord with L.C. Martin & Clayton Dermon, guitars  
(Milton, Ky, 4/05/97, JH & MW).

Nearly all the fiddlers we have known over the years have been eager to share their music with us. The sole exception was Sam McCord (1905-2000). Sam was a bachelor who lived with an elderly sister in the river town of Milton in Trimble County, Ky. For over a year I trailed him on his rounds between a local restaurant, a grocery store, and his house, trying to set up a time when we could get together to play. Always cordial, but non-committal, he could not be persuaded to get his fiddle and play for me. His reputation in my mind had grown into near-legendary status with the difficulty of the pursuit when one day he sent word to me through another old fiddler, Marvin Tingle, that he would meet me at Marvin’s house, and we would play. After that first remarkable session, he warmed up considerably and never again declined an opportunity to play. Later on we would meet at the Fisherman’s Club, a country music gathering place on the river operated by his nephew Roger McCord, where Sam loved to entertain with the old-time fiddling of which he was the last practitioner in that area.

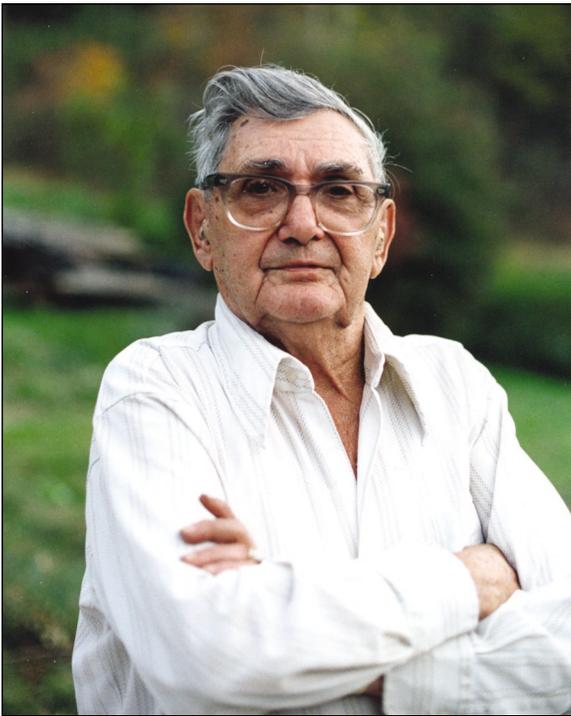
“Hell Up the Holler” is an old tune that came out of Henry County, according to Sam. It bears no evident relationship to the “Hell Up Coal Holler” that Ed Haley performed. Sam learned his version from his father, Charlie McCord. This selection was recorded at a session in 1997 when Sam was still going strong at age ninety-one, shortly after Milton had been engulfed in an Ohio River flood and the grounds were still muddy.



Sam McCord

**9. Portsmouth Hill Winder** John Lozier, harmonica (South Portsmouth, Ky; 10/14/97; MW).

John Lozier, harmonica player par excellence, is appropriately included in our fiddle anthology for his long involvement in the Portsmouth music scene and his extensive knowledge and skill in playing the beautiful, notey old tunes of the Portsmouth area. John lives near South Portsmouth on the Kentucky side of the river. His wife Mary, who died last fall, was one of Barbara Edwards’ sources for old eastern Kentucky ballads (several selections by Mary will appear on *Volume Two* of this collection). The Jenny Wiley Trail, which Mary was instrumental in restoring a few years ago, runs by their home in Kellen Hollow. The Loziers have been great naturalists as well as practitioners of the lost skills of pioneer days along the river. John’s knowledge of the river, along with his memories of Ed Haley, brought him to the attention of John Hartford in the later years of Hartford’s life. They sometimes performed together when Hartford was in the area. As can be seen from Mark’s recordings featured in this anthology,



John Lozier

John Lozier is no novice when it comes to playing the old fiddle tunes. He has always prided himself on being able to keep up with the best old-time fiddlers in a jam session. The original title of this selection was “Nigger Hill Winder,” referring to a section of old Portsmouth, which we have retitled at the request of the record company (Ray Hilt’s “Portsmouth Winder” on Rounder CD 11592, *The Art of Traditional Fiddle*, is similarly bowdlerized, but it represents a relative of the tune “Nine Miles Out of Louisville). John comments that the old-timers used “to tune up their back strings in some way to play this tune.” I believe his “Portsmouth Hill Winder” to be a local variant of the same “Run, Nigger, Run” that serves as the basis of Tommy Taylor’s selection below. Mark, however, notes an affinity with “Pretty Polly Ann,” especially in its older versions (such as Bill Graves on Rounder 0436); it is generally played in AEAC#. A “winder” was an old Kentucky square dance figure.

**10. Chillicothe Beauty** Forrest Pick (Portsmouth, Oh.; 1973; BK).

It was John Lozier who introduced Barbara Kunkle to Forrest Pick. We are extremely fortunate to have the many beautiful tunes that resulted from Barbara’s recording session with Forrest. His “Chillicothe Beauty,” a unique tune likely named for an apple or rose, is one of our favorites. Chillicothe, now the name of a city in southern Ohio, was the name of one of the divisions of the Shawnee Indians. The name designated five different Shawnee towns in Ohio in the 1700s including “Old Chillicothe” where Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton were once held captive by the Shawnee. Roger Cooper has also recorded the tune (learned from Forrest) on Rounder CD 0380. Ray Hilt plays another version under the title “The Whippoorwills are Waltzing” which he learned from his father.

**11. Forked Deer** Bob Prater with Buddy Thomas, guitar (Foxport, Ky, April, 1974, GM & MW).

Bob Prater was a farmer, trapper, and ginseng hunter who lived near Foxport in Lewis County, Ky. His strong, rhythmic bowing, was a common feature of the Lewis County fiddlers we knew and was an important influence on both Buddy Thomas and Roger Cooper. Bob’s playing was as exciting to watch as it was to dance to or listen to. Holding the bow with a thumb-under-the-frog grip and playing mostly with the top third of the bow allowed him to extend his arm and utilize long pulls



Bob, Buddy and Charlie

and circular bowings that gave his playing a compelling rhythm that was unmatched in our experience. His bowing style seemed to have been picked up from his father, John Prater, who played for us once when he was well up in his nineties. Both Mark and Roger Cooper also hear a good deal of Arthur Smith's distinctive tone and drive in Bob's approach, who was, according to Roger, a great admirer of Smith's. Bob, in the company of the banjo player Arthur Breaze, was the most popular square dance player in the region, in an era when dancing to live music was still common.

His treatment of "Forked Deer" shows his tendency to use slurs toward the beginning of an eight-bar section of a tune and then shift to single-note bow strokes, bowing individual sixteenth notes crisply down to the final note of the phrase which he chops off with a resounding emphasis. Noah Kinney described it best: "Bob's got a keen cut with the bow."

**12. Billy in the Lowground** Buddy Thomas with Leona Stamm, guitar (Waldorf, Md.; 12/14/73; GM & MW).

Lewis County fiddler Elwood "Buddy" Thomas was, in my opinion, the greatest Kentucky fiddler of modern times. His immersion in the traditional fiddling of his area, his love of the old-time players and their tunes, his amazing technical skill and creativity in making the older tunes he learned distinctively his own, as well as his unassuming generosity toward his friends and admirers, earned him a considerable reputation among a small circle of musicians and friends in northeastern Kentucky and southern Ohio before his untimely death in 1974 at the age of thirty-nine. Home recordings made over the years by Barbara Kunkle, Nancy McClellan, and Roger Cooper show Buddy's repertory and technique constantly evolving. We can only imagine how the direction of old-time fiddling today might have been different if Buddy had lived to take his place in the current old-time resurgence and interact personally with the new generation of fiddlers. Although Buddy has had some influence on some contemporary players through his Rounder recording (*Kitty Puss*, CD 0032), what we have of Buddy is only a hint of what might have been.

His "Billy in the Lowground" is a tour de force. In the variations and improvisations he incorporates into this standard, one can hear the history of old-time fiddling. The relaxed tempo allows him free reign with the bowing, but unlike modern Texas-style contest fiddling which also adheres to a slower tempo, Buddy's fluent mixing of long-bow and short-bow techniques retains a highly danceable feeling within his playing.

**13. Briarpicker Brown** Morris Allen (South Shore, Ky; April, 1974, GM & MW).

Morris Allen lived at South Shore in Greenup Co., Ky. and was an important influence on both Buddy Thomas and Roger Cooper. He was raised by the Kieblers, a musical family that boasted seven fiddlers. Morris knew the old tunes that had been played by Uncle John Kiebler, as well as other Portsmouth and Lewis Co. tunes, and was Buddy Thomas' source for many of them, including "Briarpicker Brown." A comparison with Buddy's setting of the tune on Rounder 0032 will reveal how Buddy altered the tune he learned from Morris, especially in the fine part. Both Morris's and Buddy's



**Morris Allen**

versions show the relation of the piece to the “Smith’s Reel” family of tunes. In his response to Buddy’s question in the tag at the end, Morris traces the tune to a fiddler in Greenup Co. who was known as “Briarpicker Brown.”

**14. Blackberry Blossom** John Lozier (South Portsmouth, Ky.; 9/26/99; MW).

John Lozier learned “Blackberry Blossom” from Ed Haley, whom he frequently heard playing on the streets of Portsmouth. The local fiddler Asa Neil also played the tune, in a setting close to Haley’s (a home recording of the latter can be found on Rounder CD 1133/4 *Grey Eagle*.) John’s playing incorporates some of the same variations that are heard in the fiddle versions of the tune. This Kentucky “Blackberry Blossom” (or “Garfield’s Blackberry Blossom” as John Hartford called it to distinguish it from the unrelated Arthur Smith favorite) is related melodically to the West Virginia “Yew Piney Mountain” although the latter is played in AEAE cross-tuning (see Wilson Douglas’ version on Rounder CD 0055) while the Kentucky piece is usually set in G Minor in standard tuning. Haley told Snake Chapman that the tune goes back to General (and, briefly, President) James A. Garfield, who, on a march up the Big Sandy River during the Civil War, named the tune after spitting tobacco juice into a blackberry patch that was in full blossom. Similar tales have been told by other fiddlers, including Ed Morrison who recorded an excellent version for the Library of Congress in conjunction with Jean Thomas’ folk festival.

**15. General Lee** Roger Cooper with Paul Smith, guitar (Canada, Ky, 11/27/99; MW).

Roger Cooper (b. 1949) is carrying on the Lewis Co. tradition that he learned from Buddy Thomas. Like Buddy, Roger befriended and followed the older fiddlers of the area who were the last of their generation still playing in local styles that were largely unaffected by modern commercial influences. In this case, however, we witness a newer train of transmission, for Roger acquired “General Lee” from a tape of Texas fiddlers that his friend Junior Aldridge had been given by Kenny Baker! Roger is under the impression that the performers were either the celebrated Solomon family or Major Franklin. Roger adapted a number of these to his own firmly based Lewis County style and employed them in the fiddle contests he would regularly enter in the early ’seventies. The tune itself belongs to the widespread “Old Dubuque”/“Fiddling Phil” family of tunes. Lem Isom knew a different version as “Trouble Down in Georgia” and the melody is also related to the southern Kentucky tune “Nancy Dawson.”



**Roger Cooper**

This particular selection was recorded during a break when Roger was assisting the late Snake Chapman on his final CD. Roger is accompanied by the very accomplished Paul Smith (who has his own CD: Rounder 0409). Another version of “General Lee” can be found on the fine tape that Roger recorded for Berea College some years ago. Roger is currently at work on another full CD of Kentucky tunes for Rounder.

**16. Grecian Bend** Forrest Pick (Portsmouth, Oh.; 1973; BK).

The Portsmouth fiddlers played a number of beautiful jigs that to our ear resemble neither the Scottish nor the Irish jigs that are most familiar to students of fiddle music. A curious ear might detect a French influence in some of these 6/8 melodies, but that is only speculation. Forrest Pick spelled the tune phonetically as “Grease-in-Bend” for both Barbara Kunkle and on an old list of favorite tunes he kept in his fiddle case; he presumably retained no sense of its original meaning. After some serious “fiddle-o-sophising” over the curious title, Steve Green and I had at first decided it might have been a corruption of “Grayson Bend” (perhaps on the Little Sandy River that runs through Grayson, Ky?) when Steve came upon a reference to the “Grecian Bend” which described a popular ladies’ posture that resulted from wearing corsets and bustles in the nineteenth century. Quite independently, Mark Wilson and Kerry Blech framed the same hypothesis. Certainly the beautiful lilt of this favorite tune better suits its reconstructed title. On the basis of both title and internal musical construction, Mark presumes that “Grecian Bend” represents a derivative of the popular dance music circa 1875.

**17. Birdie** Forrest Pick (Portsmouth, Oh.; 1973; BK).

“Birdie” is another tune that was widely played in the area of our collection. This tune most likely derives, with considerable melodic change, from the 1870 parlor weeper “Put Me in My Little Bed” (see the notes to Rounder CD 0037) and can be heard everywhere across the South. It became a show-piece for the best fiddlers in our region as it lends itself to a range of melodic and rhythmic variations. There are renditions of the tune from Clark Kessinger, J.P. Fraley, Jimmy Wheeler, Buddy Thomas, and Kenny Baker, all quite different. Forrest’s setting gives the tune a Portsmouth flavor, especially in the high part with the slides and trills that were a staple of the Portsmouth style.

**18. Susan’s Gone** Emma Lee Dickerson with Quentin Brickey, guitar (Ashland, Ky.; 1973; BK).

“Susan’s Gone,” usually associated with J.W Day (who called it “Sweet Susan”) was once a widely known tune in eastern Kentucky. In addition to Day’s we have heard versions from Morris Allen, Perry Riley, Alva Greene, John Lozier, Thomas Keeton and many others, and a fine setting by Roger Cooper can be heard on his Rounder CD *Going Back To Old Kentucky*. We believe there is hidden treasure in the old adage “No two fiddlers ever play the same tune just alike.” Learning a tune from a single source is likely to result in mere initiation (not a bad practice early in one’s career), but hearing the same tune elaborated by a number of different players opens up a wide world of possibilities from which one may pick and choose while adding one’s own individual touches. The result is what traditional fiddling is all about: individual expression within the recognizable contours of a tradition. The tune is recognizable but so is the individuality of the performer playing the tune in their own way. While other versions of “Susan’s Gone” might suggest that it was a “listening piece,” the sheer straight-ahead drive of Emma Lee Dickerson’s tune is in the tradition of the best dance fiddling. The hell-for-leather approach is that of great eastern Kentucky banjo players such as Rufus Crisp, Pete Steele, Roscoe Holcomb, and George Gibson This is music that could (and did) move a set of dancers around the floor.

**19. Run, Boy, Run** Tommy Taylor with John Harrod, guitar (Rabbit Hash, Ky.; 08/03/97; JH & MW).

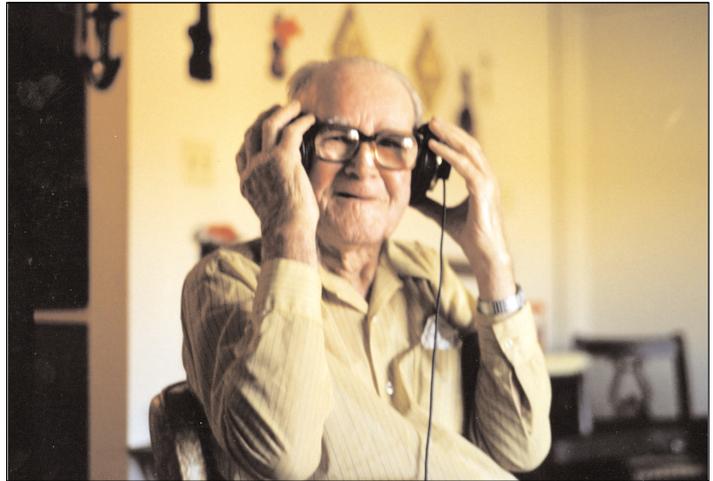
Tommy and Pappy Taylor put together “Run, Boy, Run” as a tribute to the Georgia musicians they came into contact with and admired (it represents a take-off on the Skillet Lickers’ famous Columbia recording of “Run, Nigger, Run”). A home recording of Tommy and Pappy performing this song as a fiddle-and-banjo duet is scheduled for an upcoming anthology of home recordings. Tommy is well-known for his singing with the fiddle tunes he plays in the Rabbit Hash String Band.

**20. Dad's Schottische #2** Ray Hilt (Marion, Oh.; 6/21/99; MW).

Schottisches, once a staple of the traditional fiddler's repertory (see Darley Fulks' comments in this regard on Rounder CD 0377), unfortunately are seldom played by today's fiddlers. One way to reform fiddle contests and rescue them from their stultifying dependence on the clichés of the Texas fiddle style might be to require a schottische in every contest. And this could just be the beginning; the possibility of using the ever popular contest as a way of drawing attention to and reinforcing the neglected power of the tradition to bring individuality back into today's playing is the subject of much discussion by serious followers of traditional fiddling. At any rate, Ray's tune is one of the many beautiful old schottisches we have heard in the area.

**21. Berry Station** John Kinman with Charlie Kinman, guitar (Dry Ridge, Ky.; 8/03/97; JH & MW).

John Kinman (1903-1999) was a farmer in Grant Co., Kentucky. His father William Nelson "Nels" Kinman, who ran a grocery store in Golds Valley where the fiddlers congregated, his brother Ralph, and his son Charlie were all prominent fiddlers in the area. John was a much sought-after dance fiddler and continued to play for Saturday night dances at Goforth, Ky. until 1995 when he was ninety-two years old (!) "Berry Station," another tune that bears



**John Kinman**

some resemblance to "Smith's Reel" was played by all the Grant Co. fiddlers. The tune is named after the town Berry in Harrison Co. that was once known as Berry Station. John was also a good banjo player in the old-fashioned parlor style—see Rounder 0394 for a few selections. His son Charlie, who passed away a few years ago, was a good fiddler player who knew many of his dad's tunes.

**22. Kenny Roth Tune #2** Harold Zimmerman (Fort Thomas, Ky; 11/22/97; JH & MW).

The second unnamed tune in A that Harold Zimmerman learned from Kenny Roth belongs to a class of A-tunes in standard tuning that was much favored through northern Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. One might compare the tunes of Gallatin Co., Ky. fiddlers Jarvie Hall and Clarence Skirvin on Rounder 0377, all in the key of A, and all with a distinct Midwestern flavor to them.

**23. Flannery's Dream** Emma Lee Dickerson with Quentin Brickey, guitar (Ashland, Ky.; 1973; BK).

"Flannery's Dream" was known by many of the older fiddlers in the hill region of northeastern Kentucky and I have heard recordings by Santford Kelly, Buddy Thomas, Roger Cooper, Alva Greene as well as recent recordings by bluegrassers Ricky Skaggs (who renamed the tune "Son of Hobart" much to the chagrin of Alva Greene) and Shawn Lane (with Blue Highway). Most of these versions, except Alva's, probably derive from Kelly; Alva's quite different melody can be heard on Rounder 0076 (John Salyers' great "Flander's Dream" on his Berea tape should also be noted, even though melodically it is, at best, only dimly related). Alva often told a tale of how Wade Flannery beat his uncle Jimmie Greene in a contest to see who knew the most tunes. They had fiddled their way to a stalemate the previous night but this tune then came to Wade in his sleep and permitted him a victory in the morning. Emma Lee Dickerson's treatment casts the tune in a vigorous dance setting that is not attained in the other versions.

**24. Hog Ears** Forrest Pick (Portsmouth, Oh.; 1973; BK).

“Hog Ears,” another of the Portsmouth tunes for which we have no other sources or variants, shows the Portsmouth preference for long notey rolls in the high register.

**25. Charleston #2/Stonewall Jackson** Buddy Thomas (Sandy Hook, Ky; Summer, 1973; GM).

Buddy Thomas, ever in pursuit of all he could absorb of old-time fiddling, learned “Charleston #2” from a stack of old 78s he had collected, probably from the Narmour and Smith original. Many fiddlers have covered their “Charleston #1,” but Buddy is the only one we know to have resurrected “Charleston #2” and given it an articulate interpretation. One might say he has improved the tune. The tune itself is an old hornpipe that Narmour and Smith probably retitled to supply them with a sequel to their “hit.”

“Stonewall Jackson” was a standard of the old-time fiddlers in northeastern Kentucky. The tune is known further east in West Virginia and Virginia as “Richmond” and in central Kentucky and Missouri as “Lay Around the Kitchen ’til the Cook Comes In.”



**Buddy Thomas**

This tune was recorded when Gus took Buddy up to meet Alva Greene one time.

Mark recalls that every time they visited Alva, he would have traded his previous fiddle for something worse, of which he was invariably quite proud. “Oh, this one’s got an awfully keen tone, honey,” he would tell them. Here Buddy is undoubtedly testing one of Alva’s trades.

**26. Medley of Ed Haley Tunes** Ray “Curly” Parker (Russell, Ky; April, 1974; GM & MW).

Bill Nowlin alerted Mark and Gus to Ray’s knowledge of Ed Haley after interviewing him for Rounder’s *Early Days of Bluegrass* series. Ray lived in the Ohio River town of Russell in Greenup County and would often hear Ed playing in the nearby towns. Although Ray’s first instrument was the guitar, he dearly loved Ed’s playing and his friend Bert Garvin recalls Ray’s plans to form a square dance band in the late ‘forties with Ed and himself to play at the local YMCA, although the job never materialized. Ray also reported that the well-known fiddler Georgia Slim Rutland lived in the area for a while: “If he wasn’t around the radio station, you’d go over to Ed Haley’s and he’d be there.” A professional career as a surveyor prevented Ray from pursuing a career as a full-time bluegrass musician, but he played for a considerable period with Pee Wee Lambert in Springfield, Ohio and often played in Bill Monroe’s band when Bill was in the area. Pee Wee and Ray made a number of classic bluegrass 78s for Rich-R-Tone and Fayette, although they paid little attention to record sales. In later years, he formed a band called “Buffalo Creek Express” with several of his sons.

As Ray grew older, his affection for the fiddle grew, along with his fond memories of Ed Haley. His wife Clara wrote me recently:



**Curly Parker**

lived in a little shanty on the Kinney homeplace across a branch of a creek from his brother Noah and Noah's wife Hazel. The Kinneys' barn was a favorite gathering place for local musicians, neighbors, and visitors from far away drawn by stories they had heard about this family of folk artists living in a pristine hollow in northeastern Kentucky. There would assemble Bob Prater, Brooks Mineer, Clarence Rigdon, Tom Sullivan, Shirley Cline, Roger Cooper and the Kinney brothers, all old-style fiddlers who lived within a fifteen-mile radius of each other in this western end of Lewis Co. Rather than the large free-for-all jam sessions that typify old-time music gatherings today, these deeply rooted and individualistic musicians sat in a circle inside the barn on wooden crates, ladder-back chairs, and old truck seats and passed the fiddle around, each one playing four or five of the tunes that they were most known for in that community of fiddlers, who all seemed to value the distinctive qualities of each others' playing. As the fiddle made its rounds, accompaniment would be provided by Bill Prater, Roger Cooper, or Noah Kinney on guitar, and Bob Prater on banjo who played the most adept two-finger style that ever seconded a fiddler. It was one such evening that Brooks Mineer, surveying the collection of fiddlers assembled there, remarked in his high-pitched drawl to no one in particular something that in retrospect stands for us as the classic understatement of all our years following this music: "This here is fiddle country." As such occasions have faded with the decline of our communal and civic life generally and the fiddlers themselves have passed on, we have been compelled to try to understand how and why these golden moments occurred and what, if anything, can be preserved and revitalized

*He loved his fiddle and played it all the time in his later years. He woke me up many a morning, sitting in the dining room playing fiddle tunes.*

Mark and Gus always regretted never making it back to Ray's for a more extended visit, for of all the fiddlers we encountered, Ray had plainly absorbed more of Haley's characteristic sound. These little snippets of Ray's playing are especially valuable because Haley's surviving home recordings (issued on Rounder 1131/2 and 1133/4) are quite muddy, leading some modern devotees to very strange impressions of how Haley played.

### **27. Muddy Road to Charleston**

Charlie Kinney with Noah Kinney, guitar  
(Lewis County, Kentucky; 6/20/78; JH & GM).

Charlie Kinney in addition to being recognized as one of the important old-style fiddlers in Lewis Co. was also a renowned folk artist who received much attention in his later years for his painting, clay sculptures, baskets, and dancing puppets. Charlie, a bachelor,



**Charlie and Noah Kinney**



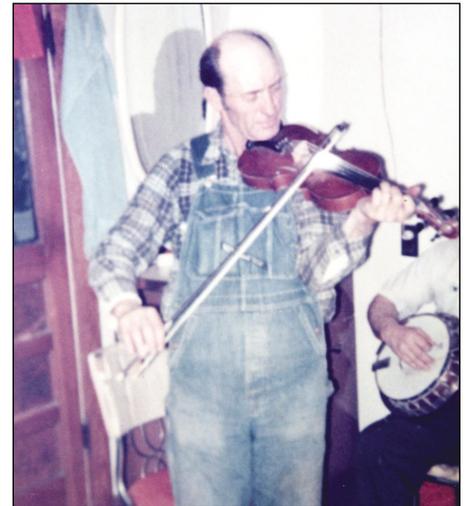
Noah Kinney

in a meaningful way in the modern world. Toward this end we observe that while the context of contemporary fiddling (the festivals, jams, and the availability of sound recordings both commercial and underground in a global marketplace) has tended toward the amalgamation of styles and repertoire, eclipsing the regional and individual styles we have been most interested in, the egalitarian setting of the Kinneys' barn in which each player performed as an individual doubtless helped to preserve the rich and eccentric diversity that moved Brooks Mineer, himself probably the most eccentric of them all, to dub that particular place in time "fiddle country."

Charlie Kinney's "Muddy Road to Charleston" was unique to him; none of the others played it, hence it was one of his signature pieces. It does not seem to be related to Snake Chapman's "Going Down to Charleston" (Rounder CD 0378). Charlie's tune is highlighted by Noah Kinney's idiosyncratic single-note guitar accompaniment that provides the perfect counterpoint to Charlie's melody.

**28. Gray Eagle** Bob Prater with Buddy Thomas, guitar (Foxport, Ky; April, 1974: GM & MW).

"Gray Eagle" was one of Bob Prater's most requested tunes at the Kinney gatherings. While the tune has become a standard of modern contest fiddlers, it is an old tune that was named after a Kentucky race horse who lost two races against a Tennessee horse named Wagner (the origin of another well-known tune "Wagoner") in Louisville in 1839 (for further information, including an early printing, see Rounder 0437). The old-time (pre-bluegrass) versions of the tune show a variety and vitality that is lacking in the hackneyed standardized renditions played by contest fiddlers today. In Bob Prater's setting "Gray Eagle" is revived as the dance tune it must have been in the nineteenth century. Note the A-A-flat-A slide he uses as a variation the second time through the tune in the B-part.



Bob Prater

**29. Cacklin' Hen** Shirley Cline with Bob Prater, banjo (Foxport, Ky; April, 1974: GM & MW).

Shirley was from Mt. Carmel, not too far from Foxport, and was reportedly related to Asa Neil by marriage. Stylistically, he played very much in the old Lewis County style. A quiet man, who was often over at Bob's, no one seems to remember too many particulars of his life, except that he died while square dancing to Bob's music in Maysville during the early 'eighties.

**30. Belvidere Hornpipe** Lem Isom with Steve Isom, guitar (Portsmouth, Oh., April, 1974; GM & MW).

Buddy Thomas took Gus and Mark over to see Lem Isom whose version of "Golden Star

Hornpipe” (more commonly, “Silver Star Hornpipe”) Buddy very much admired. Although Lem played a few local tunes that he had learned from one Alfred Bayes, the great majority of what he liked to play “came from some book I used to have,” which was evidently Cole’s One Thousand Fiddle Tunes (a 1940 reprinting of the bulk of the 1883 Ryan’s Mammouth Collection). Comparatively few collections of fiddle music were readily available in the mid-twentieth century and Coles’ inexpensive printing became quite popular everywhere as a result. Each locality tended to adopt its rather urbane melodies (Ryan’s represented the stock-in-trade of a number of Boston bandleaders) to its own contours, with the result that even so rigid a form as a late Victorian hornpipe can now be heard in amazing variation across North America (Coles’ plainly did much to popularize the form in areas such as Cape Breton, Missouri and Texas). Lem’s “Belvidere” is an excellent case in point, for it represents a surprisingly languid approach that brings out the tune’s beauty in a wholly unexpected way. Some of the eeriness is heightened by the fact that Lem played extremely softly, through an electric pickup. He is here accompanied by his grandson who happened to be visiting that day with a broken leg in a huge cast.



Lem Isom

**31. Hog Skin** Hobert Bowling (Florence, Ky; 10/27/97; JH & MW).

Hobart Bowling’s “Hog Skin” is an old tune he learned in Clay Co. from his grandfather Anse Bowling. Once well known in that part of eastern Kentucky, the tune is mentioned as having been played in a 1919 fiddlers’ contest in Berea by Alec Lunsford of Burning Springs in Clay Co., a contest in which Hobart’s dad also appeared. I recorded another version of the tune in adjacent Owsley Co. from a woman fiddler, Effie Pierson, in 1979.

**32. Old Coon Dog** John Lozier with Roger Cooper, guitar (South Portsmouth, Ky.; 9/26/99; MW).

John Lozier’s “Old Coon Dog” was played by nearly all the older fiddlers in central and eastern Kentucky. Under a bizarre assortment of names, the basic tune is known across the entire South: “Get Out of the Way of the Federals” (Missouri); “Seneca Square Dance” (Midwest); “Shoot the Turkey Buzzard” (this last title was formerly associated in Kentucky with an entirely different tune that was played by Doc Roberts and John V. Walker among others). Asa Martin remembered the verse:

*Somebody stole my old coon dog  
I wish they’d bring him back.  
He run the big ones over the fence  
and the little ones through the crack.*

Buddy Thomas remembered the refrain:

*Best old dog, best old gun,  
Best old dog that ever did run.*

Roger Cooper himself plays an excellent version of the tune which he acquired from Buddy Thomas on his Rounder CD. Indeed, John told Roger at the recording session:

*That tune wasn't worth a plug nickel before,  
but you made a pretty good tune out of it.*

**33. The Lazy Drag** Ray Hilt with Rich Dean, guitar, and Joshua Holtschulte, banjo (Marion, Oh.; 6/27/98; MW).

As he states in the spoken introduction, Ray Hilt learned “The Lazy Drag” from the preeminent Portsmouth fiddler Asa Neil over the radio; Ray never met him in person. Neil was allegedly born in Lewis County on a shanty boat, but spent most of his adult life in Portsmouth.

**34. Old Flannigan** Harold Zimmerman (Fort Thomas, Ky; 11/22/97; JH & MW).

Although Harold is known throughout the region as a contest fiddler, unlike most contest fiddlers, he has a deep love and respect for traditional fiddling and has not adopted the standard repertoire of Texas tunes and licks heard in most contests today. Rather he has adhered to the tunes of the area, adding and embellishing spontaneously and on the spot to give his own unique interpretation of the tune in the manner of the best traditional players:

*Most fiddle players learn a tune and they'll learn it a certain way and they'll play it for thirty years and they won't change a note in it. Well, I never play a tune twice the same way. I'm not really thinking about what I'm playing at the time; I just got an image of what the tune's gonna be and it all comes out. It goes ahead about a chorus or two in my ear, what I'm going to be playing. I don't never think what fingers gonna go where and all that. And if I have to discipline myself and the bow has to go a certain direction, just so far, I'm not there. I will have already left.*

So it is with his “Old Flannigan,” the showpiece tune of northern Kentucky fiddlers. Harold so enjoyed showing us how he would improvise on this tune in our recording session that it was difficult to select which take to include on the record.

*The old fiddler Kenny Roth played the tune and I'm sure he called it “Old Flannigan.” It was a Canadian tune. There were old-time fiddlers around there who strictly played Canadian. Then I met Frank Miller one night and got surprised that we both knew that tune. Now Carl Leming says that Jarvie Hall learned it from a guy that came up from Texas.*

Our deepest respect goes to this most generous and engaging gentlemen who could dare to play this little-known local tune in a modern contest and win!

**35. Chicken Reel** Buddy Thomas with Leona Stamm, guitar (Ashland, Ky; April, 1974, GM & MW).

“Chicken Reel” provides another example of how Buddy would work over a tired old standard and re-create it in his own inimitable style. The moderate tempo that he preferred for playing the old-time tunes allows him to find notes and bowings that elaborate possibilities in the tune that other fiddlers have missed, and yet these variations that he uses so fluently are strictly traditional in the sense that they always fit the melody; he never wanders off into jazz-like improvisations that leave the melody

so far behind that they could just as well fit anywhere in any tune. Buddy's style, while uniquely his own, is also traditional in that someone who has listened to all the fiddlers from the area can also hear elements of his style in the playing of Clark Kessinger, Doc Roberts, Joe Stamper, Jimmy Wheeler, and Bob Prater. Of course, Buddy also absorbed the techniques of the great bluegrass fiddlers of his day which he showed to great advantage with the local bluegrass bands in which he played, but his approach to the old-time tunes is a compendium of all that the local tradition had to offer. Better than any fiddler we ever heard, Buddy exemplified how a master is creative within his tradition.

The tune itself became a popular barnyard cliché after its early twentieth century publication by Joseph Daly; whether his arrangement was derived from folk sources or not is hard to ascertain.

**36. Martha Campbell** Alfred Bailey (Lexington, Ky.; 6/21/95; JH & MW).

We have recorded many interesting versions of "Martha Campbell," the tune that more than any other defines Kentucky fiddling according to the ones who played it. I have long believed that if all Kentucky fiddlers were competing in a contest on just that one tune, Alfred Bailey would win it. Alfred was known for his rendition of the tune and this recording with solo fiddle to my ear captures the essence of "Martha Campbell" better than any other. Note the syncopated single-note string crossings that are essential elements of any respectable version of this tune and the way he slides into the F# note in the B-part. A recording of Alfred Bailey and Carlton Rawlings burning up this tune with twin fiddles will be included in an upcoming anthology of home recordings of Kentucky fiddlers. Doc Roberts' classic recording of this tune is much copied, as is Buddy Thomas' version.

**37. Portsmouth, Ohio Airs** Forrest Pick (Ashland, Ky; 1973; BK).

The beautiful old tune "Portsmouth Airs," in addition to commemorating the center of a once-vibrant fiddle tradition, also exemplifies the Portsmouth style: long, lilting, notey melodies using the entire scale, reminiscent of the dance melodies heard in the ballrooms of riverboats, river towns, and the parlors of well-to-do farm homes in the late nineteenth century. Due to continental influences, the popular dance music of this era is often deeply chromatic in conception, unlike the modal or pentatonic tunes brought over by settlers from the British isles or as developed by African-Americans in the early nineteenth century. This local style perhaps found its purest expression in the music of Forrest Pick, Jimmy Wheeler, and Buddy Thomas. We have heard other versions of the tune from John Lozier, Joe Stamper, and Roger Cooper that vary considerably from each other and from Forrest's version, suggesting that the tune, though widely played, was not standardized in any definitive setting – another sign of a strong living fiddle tradition. Forrest, incidentally, insisted that "Ohio" be inserted in the title, lest the eponymous English city claim the honor of this splendid tune.

**38. Little Liza Jane** Emma Lee Dickerson with Quentin Brickey, guitar (Ashland, Ky.; 1973; BK).

Emma Lee Dickerson's "Little Liza Jane" is the "Liza Jane" in the key of A that was played in northeastern Kentucky (compare J.P. Fraley's version on Rounder CD 0037); the basic tune was popular in minstrel tradition and as a play party and then was adapted by fiddlers. Emma Lee's tune, a good tune both for playing and dancing and relatively easy to learn for apprentice fiddlers, brings us back to the roots of our music. May the great carriers of this tradition who have passed on rest in peace and may their memory live on through this music.

*John Harrod*

December 2003

*Credits:*

Produced by John Harrod and Mark Wilson.

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