5-2017

Fiddle Me This: A History and Discussion of Old-Time Fiddle Tunes in Western New York

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Fiddle Me This: A History and Discussion of Old-Time Fiddle Tunes in Western New York

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE
IN MUSEUM STUDIES

DEPARTMENTS OF PERFORMING ARTS AND VISUAL CULTURE AND HISTORY

BY

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May 2017

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Abstract

This thesis documents the history of fiddle tunes in Western New York from their introduction to the area in the mid-seventeenth century to the present day. Using a wide array of both primary sources and scholarly articles, I demonstrate the importance of this musical tradition. In addition, the thesis presents new primary and secondary sources created by the author in the spring of 2017, including the recording of interviews and performances and their presentation online. The primary research included interviews with three musicians, whom I ask, "How do these fiddle tunes continue to influence people today?" In these sessions with the musicians, I also recorded performances of songs that were particularly popular here in New York. The interviews and recordings are enhanced by the addition of other related media, all of which is curated and shared via podcast at www.rochesterfiddlers.wordpress.com. The purpose of this thesis and its associated web-based project is to preserve this music for later generations and to educate listeners about the rich history and renewed popularity of fiddle tunes today.

Introduction

The violin as an instrument has a long history. For hundreds of years this musical tool has remained incredibly popular. However, when one thinks of violin music, an image of large and stuffy concert halls comes to mind, along with haughty musicians and elitist listeners. But just as there are two sides to every coin, so too are there two sides to the violin. The fiddle is literally the exact same instrument as a violin, with the only difference being the style of music played on it. Where a violin is at home playing the music of great classical composers, the fiddle is in its element surrounded by the common folk—people having a good time, playing upbeat jigs and reels or slow, somber ballads.

Making its way into America with the European settlers in the mid-1600s, the fiddle quickly became a way to entertain people, especially in a time when there was little other music from their home country to be heard. New York had its fair share of fiddle music as well, with residents of Western New York playing a large role in creating musical traditions. As the tradition of fiddle music became more entrenched in the culture of the area, conventions that were specific to the region began to develop. I investigate these traditions as well as the people that had a hand in fostering them.

In conjunction with this paper, I am recording a short series of interviews with fiddle players in Western New York.[1] I interviewed the fiddlers about their connection to the music, their personal association to the musical traditions, and its future with younger generations of

[1] According to the *Genesee Country Magazine*'s Travel Guide, Western New York encompasses the 17 counties of: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Erie, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Niagara, Ontario, Orleans, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates.

musicians. I also recorded the interviewees playing some fiddle tunes as a way of showing that this tradition is still alive and well in Western New York.

Literature Review

Before one can jump into the world of fiddle tunes, it is a good idea to get acquainted with its vocabulary. An excellent source for this is the Henry Reed Collection at the Library of Congress.[2] This is a collection of digitized archival material from Appalachian fiddler Henry Reed, originally compiled in 1966 and 1967 by Alan Jabbour, a folklorist and ethnomusicologist. To understand a bit more about the context of this research and Jabbour's approach, we can look to the Society for Ethnomusicology, which defines their work as "the study of music in its cultural context. Ethnomusicologists approach music as a social process in order to understand not only *what* music is but *why* it is."[3] Thus, Jabbour approaches the history of fiddle music through its cultural context. And while this collection does not specifically address the tradition in New York at all, Jabbour's research and the Library of Congress site can act as a primer for the beginner interested in the diverse history of fiddle music.

The finding aid for the Reed Collection goes through some of the more basic and common musical terminology, like scale and key, to the genre-specific words like jigs and reels (see Table 1). Indeed, the term "fiddle tune" is even given the broad definition and description of "tunes played on and in many cases designed for the fiddle. Most fiddle tunes are dance tunes,

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[2] Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection, is a large collection of mainly southern songs that were played by fiddler Henry Reed. A full description as well as the audio from the recordings can be found at https://www.loc.gov/collections/henry-reed-fiddle-tunes/, accessed March 04, 2017.
[3] Society for Ethnomusicology, "What is Ethnomusicology?" accessed March 04, 2017, http://www.ethnomusicology.org/?page=whatisethnomusicol.

but some are played purely for auditory appreciation, and some are slower airs adapted from vocal melodies."[4] While the Library of Congress provides resources that addresses the broad range of fiddle music, The New York Folklore Society[5] provides excellent sources for learning about the New York tradition of fiddle music in its journal *New York Folklore*, which issued a focus issue, "Folk and Traditional Music in New York State" in 1988.[6] This volume has fifteen articles highlighting different aspects of traditional, Anglo-American music in New York. Surprisingly, not all of these articles deal with old time music. The material covered ranges from old time music to the music of Greek immigrants and even rap. As such, not every piece of writing is useful to the aspiring chronicler of fiddle music, however there are still many that contain pertinent information.

The introduction of the journal, written by Ray Allen and Nancy Groce, is an interesting look at the background of traditional music that points out the ethnic diversity of the people, and by extension the music, of New York State. From Native Americans to the Dutch settlers to later migrations of people from Europe and the traditions of African Americans, there are an incredible amount of distinct cultural influences in this state. Though it is only an introduction, it sets the scene very well and provides some quick information on just how this music has spread, citing the Erie Canal's completion in 1825 as a key factor. Towns such as Utica, Syracuse, and Ithaca sprang up in proximity to the newly built canal, which encouraged the spread of not only goods and materials, but also cultural ideas like music.

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[4] Library of Congress, "Related Resources - Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection," accessed January 27, 2017, https://www.loc.gov/collections/henry-reed-fiddle-tunes/about-this-collection/related-resources/.
[5] The New York Folklore Society (NYFS) began in 1944 with its journal *New York Folklore Quarterly*. The NYSF made the shift into a more academic style as folklore was increasingly becoming the subject of scholarly attention throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1974 publication of their journal halted, though in recent years it has begun again under the new name of *Voices: Journal of New York Folklore*.
[6] "Folk and Traditional Music in New York State," *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 (1988). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395857.pdf

In “The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York State” by Simon Bronner, another notable folklorist and ethnomusicologist, Bronner argues that as the music traveled, it evolved.[7] Focusing on the fiddle in New York State, Bronner argues that the bulk of the songs did come from mostly English sources but that the American traditions changed them slightly, smoothing out the beat and adding “a bounciness in place of the drones common in many British tunes.”[8] He also mentions that there were slight changes made to the melody if it was repeated—perhaps an origin of today’s way of improvising over the melody while playing multiple times through the same tune. During dances, fiddlers would both play music and shout the calls, calling out the instructions to the dance. A variety of tunes might be played at a dance. Bronner gives a short list of various hornpipes, reels, jigs and quadrilles (again, songs that are simply played with different rhythms) as well as several other well-known fiddle tunes, some personal favorites of mine from his list being “Devil’s Dream” and “Girl I Left Behind Me.” He also uses many photographs of various fiddlers as well as inserting the sheet music for three different fiddle tunes (“Hull's Victory,” “Belcher's Reel,” and “Rickett's Hornpipe”) into the piece.[9]

Bronner also goes into detail about certain specific fiddlers in the old-time tradition. But the main strength of his article is in the discussion of different popular songs and reasons they were played. It gives many examples of songs that were popular in New York and explains why some popular fiddle tunes would not have been played in the area. Specifically, Bronner cites

[7] Simon J. Bronner is the coordinator of the American Studies Doctoral Program, director of the Doctoral American Studies Program as well as a professor in American Studies and Folklore at Penn State Harrisburg. He has a Ph.D. in Folklore and American Studies and is the editor of the Encyclopedia of American Studies. His long list of academic credentials can be found at: https://harrisburg.psu.edu/faculty-and-staff/simon-bronner-phd, accessed May 09. 2017.
[8] Simon Bronner, “The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York,” *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 26 (1988). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395857.pdf
[9] Simon Bronner, “The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York,” *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 23-36 (1988). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395857.pdf

well known Southern tunes like "Orange Blossom Special" as being looked down upon by many of the older musicians for their "cluttered style and scurrying tempo."[10] Finally, this article also discusses how important the fiddle was to dances of all types, which ties in nicely with another article in this journal, one written by James Kimball, titled "Country Dancing in Central and Western New York."

Kimball is a well-known authority on old time music and dancing in New York State. He is a professor of music at State University of New York Geneseo, a noted ethnomusicologist, and a skilled fiddler in his own right. His article in *New York Folklore* deals mainly with dances as the title would suggest. This piece is interesting because of the number of primary sources that he includes. He has many quotations from different musicians playing music for these dances, images of dance cards and programs, newspapers clippings, advertisements and illustrations. These ground the words that Kimball is saying in reality, showing that these dances and songs were real things that had significant impacts on people.[11] Many of Kimball's sources are also directly from the people that had experienced these dances and this music first hand. Looking at his citations reveals many phone interviews, things he discussed with people at square dances, personal interviews and, again, a plethora of primary sources. This approach to research is especially useful in a field of study like this, as much of the tradition is an oral tradition, and one that is largely handed down by older men to the next generation. As such, an oral history of sorts is also a part of this project. The recording of the interview is its own form of an oral tradition and with it continues the tradition of fiddle tunes, albeit in a digital form.

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[10] Simon Bronner, "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 32 (1988).
[11] James Kimball, "Country Dancing in Central and Western New York," *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 71-88 (1988). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395857.pdf

Finally, a third article appearing in this issue of *New York Folklore* is "Anglo-American Folksong Collecting and Singing Traditions in Rural New York State*"* by Vaughn Ramsey Ward which focuses on songs that were written in the years after fiddle music was in the realm of popularity. Despite this fact, I have been able to use it as a way to gather a bit more background information on my subject.[12]

Ward discusses how these ballads came from both Anglo-Americans that moved from New England to New York and European immigrants coming from the British Isles. He also writes about how some early scholars, most notably a professor from Harvard named Francis James Child who was working in the mid to late 1800s, had started collecting these songs instead of letting them be lost to time. Between 1882 and 1898 Child published a five-volume set of books titled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* which contained 305 ballads.[13] These were not just ballads found in New York, but some from the area were used by Child. Though much of the work done seems to be from this period, there are also other studies published closer to the modern day. In 1940, Harold Thompson of Albany Teachers' College compiled a book with the help of his students titled *Body, Boots & Britches,* which contained ballads from New York[14]. It is because of people like Child and Thompson that these songs were preserved in written form, as they were otherwise mainly spread by oral tradition. Ward also makes the important point that most of the ballads found in New York (in the modern era) are not from Britain but from New York. He briefly discusses the origins of these songs in his piece.

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[12] Vaughn Ramsey Ward, "Anglo-American Folksong Collecting in Rural New York," *New York Folklore* 14, no. 3-4 164-174 (1988). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395857.pdf
[13] Francis James Child, "*The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*," (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin And Company, 1882-1898).
[14] Harold Thompson, "*Body, Boots & Britches*," (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1939).

Ward also explains that the ballads, which he defines as "folk songs differentiated from lyric songs for their story telling function," and which are more thought of as being Appalachian in origin, are also found in New York in plenty of places. The rest of the piece, as one may expect, talks about these popular New York ballads. Ward's weakest spot in his article is that he fails to list many specific titles of ballads. He does give the names of some ballads at the beginning of his piece, listing "Sir John Randall" and "Gypsy Davy" as old songs (presumably ones that came to America with immigrants) and "Jam at Gerry's Rock" and "Jack Haggerty" as more recent ballads from New York but that is largely it. Ward also makes the point that though these songs do have authors, that name is generally forgotten as the songs take on lives of their own.[15]

In addition to the peer-reviewed publications through their journal *New York Folklore,* the New York Folklore Society also publishes articles on their website. As noted above, there is one article in particular, titled "Old-Time Dance Music in Western New York" which was written by James Kimball in 2003 that has proven to be quite useful. Kimball classifies "old-time" as simply "the music and dance of old-timers, especially those who grew up going to local rural 'round and square' dances."[16] Old-timers in this case refers to those that lived in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century. As the title suggests, the article takes a look at dances and dance music that was played in Western New York in the nineteenth century. Focusing on old time music, he discusses how the tunes that were played at square dances today would not have

[15] There are eleven other articles found in this edition of the journal *New York Folklore*, put out by the group of the same name. However, they cover other forms of music. Native American music, rap, as well as Puerto Rican music in New York are just some of the topics that are covered. The Society appears to celebrate not just America's European roots, but our shared culture.

[16] James Kimball, "Old-Time Dance Music in Western New York," New York Folklore Society, accessed October 2, 2016, http://nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic29-1-2/oldtime.html.

been totally out of place to a person attending such an event in the 1800s. He makes his points by using various primary sources such as diaries, newspapers and dance cards as well as using what he calls "the recollections of aging tradition bearers." Using these various sources, Kimball claims to be able to get a peek into both the social and business transactions that took place in this age.[17]

As stated above, Kimball uses primary sources to give us a look into the time. A personal favorite of mine is the newspaper article advertising a dance taking place in Canaseraga (a small town in Allegany County in Western New York) called the Fat Men's Ball, where the lowest weight limit for entry is 200 lbs. Much of the article is focused on these dances and he references several different local musicians that would have been calling and playing these songs. He then looks at how some of these dances, called quadrilles, are constructed. Songs like "Rickett's Hornpipes," "Turkey in the Straw," "Soldier's Joy," and "Alabama Jubilee" are mentioned by name. This article, though rich in information about dances, does not focus intently on the tunes themselves, nor does it go very deep into detail about any specific form of dance (aside from a paragraph detailing how a quadrille is constructed). Many different forms of dance are mentioned, but it seems to be more of a broad overview rather than going deep into one or two of the most important dances in Western New York.

As mentioned earlier, Simon Bronner, the author of "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York State*"* in *New York Folklore* has also written a book that involves fiddle music in New York State. Titled "*Old-Time Music Makers of New York State,"* it is not only a

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[17] Ibid.

history but also a collection of some excellent primary sources. Bronner has included the sheet music for forty-five different fiddle tunes and a collection of different illustrations. He has certainly assembled an impressive assortment of material.[18] What really sets Bronner's book apart from all the others, however, is the interviews that he has published. While it is obviously very useful to have all of the sheet music to different songs in one place, the interviews really stand out. These are first-hand accounts with the people that know about this music in New York. It is not only musicians that are interviewed either. There are also just people who have grown up having the music around that feature in the book. Right on the first page of the preface, there is a good indication as to how important these accounts are. An unnamed woman in Cooperstown, NY said to Bronner when asked about fiddlers "they're a well-kept secret, I guess. Most folks think the only fiddlers are in Nashville, but we had 'em here as long as I can remember. Times are different now, but you can still hear them old-time music makers if you know where to look."[19]

Bronner also gives an important definition of old-time music, one that is more specific that Kimball's: "It was not exactly folk music… many of the songs were from commercial recordings or sheet music. It was not exactly country music… typically predate[ing] the development of commercial country music." He goes on to say, "Old-time music combined Anglo-Celtic fiddle tunes, square dance numbers, play-party tunes, Victorian parlor songs, native American and British ballads, sacred songs, and minstrel songs."[20] Given the syncretic nature of old time music, having a book that has so many good interviews with all sorts of people involved in many different aspects of this form of music is precious indeed. Bronner interviews well

[18] Simon J. Bronner, *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987).
[19] Simon J. Bronner, *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State,* xiii.
[20] Ibid.

known fiddlers like Floyd Woodhull, whose music is readily available on the internet, and provides musical transcriptions of his arrangements of some tunes. Aside from the interviews, Bronner also provides as scholarly and insightful look into the world of these tunes.

New York Folklore Society's website holds a great many articles by people that are making efforts to preserve old-time fiddle music in different ways. One such piece is titled "Bringing Old-Time Fiddling into the Twenty-First Century" by Jackie Hobbs, the curator at the New York State Old Tyme Fiddler's Hall of Fame and Museum. It documents Alice Clemens, a celebrated fiddler who died in 1999, and her family's involvement in the tradition of fiddle playing. Hobbs also writes about how many of the old fiddlers are finally being recorded so that their music will live on.[21]

This piece is of some use, if only to lead me to other sources to seek out. It does discuss how the tradition of fiddling is kept alive today, something that is quite important to this project as that too is in a way my goal. However, Hobbs's article is quite short and focuses on how the Fidder's Museum, where she was the curator, is recording and preserving the music rather than how the music is being brought to people.

Outside of literature, a key resource is the New York State Old Tyme Fiddler's Hall of Fame and Museum itself, which is run by the New York State Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association. Located north of Syracuse in the town of Redfield, NY, the museum has a wide collection of not only fiddles, but of all sorts of instrumentation and memorabilia that would be included in the old-time tradition. The website describes the site as both "a place to do research" and "a place to meet fiddlers and jam." What started as a small museum in 1976 has continued to grow and be a

[21] Jackie Hobbs, "Bringing Old-Time Fiddling into the Twenty-First Century" New York Folklore Society, 2011 accessed November 3, 2016, http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic37-1-2/fiddling.html.

place where people come to play this time-honored tradition. There is little information on the history of the organization, but today it is a place that tries its best "to preserve such music in its most original Northern and rural New York forms" while keeping aware that it is an "always evolving, musical tradition which naturally adopts and adapts to new generations of players and styles."[22]

There is also a hall of fame attached to the museum. This provides a list of some of what are considered the best fiddlers in this tradition that reside in both New York and North America as a whole. Their nomination form cites the criteria for being inducted into the hall of fame as a person who is: "an advanced fiddler who is known to have contributed to the preservation, perpetuation, and promotion of the tradition of Old Tyme Fiddling; a North American recognized fiddler; living or deceased" and "involved in performing and/or teaching activities."[23] Not only is it quite comprehensive, going back to 1979, but it is also an excellent way to learn who is still playing this music and provides a list of names of possible people to reach out to for interviews or even potentially to record for this project. The hall of fame also has a separate section for exceptional fiddlers in North America as well. Both of these have regular inductions, about one or two a year. Unfortunately, a great many of the earlier inductees have since passed away, making the preservation of this musical tradition that much more timely.

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[22] New York State Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association. Redfield, NY, accessed October 5, 2016, http://www.nysotfa.com/index.html.
[23] New York State Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association, "Inductee Nomination Form," http://www.nysotfa.com/NAFHOF_-_NY_INDUCTEE_NOMINATION_FORM.pdf.

The Fiddle Tradition in New York

The fiddle was one of if not the most popular instrument that was played in America from the end of the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. After the British took control of the colony of New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1660, many British settlers began moving into Upstate New York, bringing with them their music and culture. Jumping forward 165 years to the completion of the Erie Canal, towns and cities sprung up alongside it. This helped to facilitate the spread of this music even more.[24]

What was originally music in the British tradition was adapted into music that was wholly American. Simon Bronner writes of some songbook companies that had released music books containing both new and old songs; "in 1807, for example, *A Selection of Cotillions & Country-Dances* offered the 'Federal Cotillion' along with the old 'Money Musk'. That same year, *Collection of the Most Celebrated Figures of Cotillions and Contra Dances* included 'Humors of Boston,' 'Jefferson and Liberty,' 'American Fair,' 'Democratic Rage,' and 'Independence.'"[25] It is plain to see simply by reading the titles of these tunes that the new American identity was taking shape.

These tunes were originally played during dances, also called Cotillions or Contra Dances, which are just parts of the larger category called Country Dances. Cotillions, a French style of a square dance, was introduced into America after the Revolution and was a break from the English style of dancing which is much more rigid and offers little variation in the music. They featured a more "improvisational" way of dancing to tunes and thus needed a caller, or person shouting out instructions to the dancers as the music was being played. Neither the French

[24] Ray Allen and Nancy Groce, "Introduction: Folk and Traditional Music in New York State," 2.
[25] Simon Bronner, "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," 23.

nor the British would have a caller at their dances, but by 1820 it was standard fare for Americans and can still be found in old time dances in the modern day, though square dances are not as popular as they once were.[26]

However, all of this is not to say that the tunes found in England, Scotland, and Ireland disappeared from the American repertoire. These tunes were generally short, had clear melody and were well known by many people. In addition to this, many British tunes did not utilize much syncopation, or different rhythms used in unexpected ways, making them ideal to play for a room full of dancers.[27]

There are many types of fiddle tunes, but in New York the popular ones seemed to be quadrilles and jigs, which were commonly in 6/8 time (six beats to a measure with the eighth note getting the beat) and hornpipes and reels in 4/4 time (four beats to a measure with a quarter note getting the beat). Structurally, fiddles tunes are largely the same. They are broken into two parts, commonly called the A part and the B part. A tune is played featuring two A parts followed by two B parts before repeating, meaning they have the "shape" of AABBAABB… and so on. This structure makes them easy to repeat over and over, and as such they were the perfect tunes to have playing during a dance. Bronner says of some of the most popular fiddles tunes in New York:

> Although names for tunes are notorious variable, they offer an idea of the traditional Anglo-American fiddle-tune repertoire. Among the hornpipes, one commonly hears Durang's, Sailor's, Fisher's, Lamplighter's, Hull's Victory, and Rickett's; among the reels, one hears McLeod's, Opera, Virginia, and Chicken; among the quadrilles and jigs, there are Larry O'Gaff, Haste to the Wedding, Irish Washerwoman, and Blackberry. Other standards of the fiddle-tune repertoire include Soldier's Joy, Turkey in the Straw, Devil's Dream, Girl I Left Behind Me, Money Musk, Arkansas Traveler, Wilson's Clog, Rakes of Mallow, Wind that

[26] James Kimball, "Country Dancing in Central and Western New York State," 72-73.
[27] Simon Bronner, "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," 23.

> Shakes the Barley, Buffalo Gals, Black Cat, Flop-Eared Mule, and Wake Up Susan.[28]

Some of these tunes would not be out of place in a square dance or jam today. In fact, many of these tunes have been reused or repurposed. "Sailor's Hornpipe" can be found in old Popeye cartoons and "Turkey in the Straw" might be better known today as the children's song "Do Your Ears Hang Low?"

As time went on, the American fiddle tradition deviated further away from its roots. Though many of the tunes may have been of British origin, the American fiddlers would alter them to their liking. The beats became bouncier, the beats more regularized and British ornamentation to the melodies was stripped away. Slight variations in the melody would have been common should it be played multiple times, but Bronner makes sure to point out that "repetition and refinement rather than improvisation and elaboration became watchwords of the Anglo-American aesthetic."[29]

According to an interview with ethnomusicologist James Kimball, the person doing the calling would be another musician playing chords and backing the fiddle player, who would be playing the melody. However, part of the New York fiddle tradition that seems to have not developed elsewhere as commonly is having the fiddler be the one calling the dance. This results in the calls being more musical and sing-songy. Kimball talks about a recording that he found from 1940 in which the caller "half sings it." He also cites a newspaper clipping talking about a black fiddler in the town of Geneseo, NY, who sings his calls and that this set him apart from the others. Another man, "Happy" Bill Daniels in Dryden, New York was also known to do this. Kimball says that people were doing this well before 1900. He also says that certain tunes were

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[28] Simon Bronner, "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," 25.
[29] Ibid., 26.

known as tunes with singing calls, using "The Girl I Left Behind Me" as an example of a tune that was even published in a song book with the option to add a singing call.[30]

This is further proved by a quote found in Bronner's article from writer Hamlin Garland:

> At this dance I heard, for the first time, the local professional fiddler, old Daddy Fairbanks. His queer 'Calls' and his 'York State' accent filled us all with delight. *'Ally* man left,' 'Chassay *by* your pardners,' 'Dozy-*do*' were some of the phrases he used as he played *Honest John* and *Haste to the Wedding*. At times he sang his calls in a high nasal chant….[31]

The melodies that were played by these fiddlers in New York were generally more simple arrangements of tunes. Players like John McDermott from Cortland, New York had a technique which was representative of many other musicians in the area. This style of playing would "use long and short bowing strokes to punch out an uncluttered and unhurried melody."[32] The techniques that were used would really shine when there was another instrument involved; the most popular being the piano, though both harmonicas and accordions would also be common.

The early 1900s saw a boom in the popularity of these tunes. People would leave their rural homes and come to cities and towns, bringing their musical traditions with them. As these were songs that were meant to be danced to, old-time fiddling was found more and more in dance halls with large crowds. As the crowds increased in size, so too did the need to have a bigger and louder sound. Instruments like tenor banjos (a banjo with four strings as opposed to the five-string style found in bluegrass bands), guitars and basses all helped to fill in the music.

As more modern music was being recorded in the early twentieth century, these fiddle bands would be known to dress as hillbillies while playing. According to Bronner, this may be

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[30] James Kimball, Interview with Author, Geneseo, NY, November 4, 2016.
[31] Simon Bronner, "The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," 26.
[32] Ibid., 28.

because "in the eyes of a modern age the tunes were increasingly cast as rustic and 'old time.'"[33] According to Floyd Woodhull, a musician popular in the 1930's who was based out of Elmira, New York, all of the fiddle bands dressed as what even he referred to as hillbillies, even going as far as wearing fake beards on stage, and using more rural stage names. Woodhull says that this was done as a connection to the older farmers around the hills of New York, not the rural south.[34] Bronner seems to think that "the hillbilly look was a kind of dialect joke made visual. The popularity of the dialect joke seems to be a twentieth-century phenomenon, born of the tide of second-generation children poking fun at the broken English and bumpkin ways of their parents in the cosmopolitan setting of America… but while separating himself from the backward sounding immigrant, the teller also connects himself to an ethnic tradition. The satirical humor encases a certain pride."[35] The modern generation of players have eschewed this type of dress for more modern styles. Certainly, within Rochester's own fiddle communities people have stopped this tradition, perhaps because they are so far removed from those children of immigrants.

Methodology

This project revolves around the interviewing and recording of Western New York fiddlers and in essence, the creation of an oral history. The Oral History Association, or OHA, is a group of people who aim to educate and spread support for oral history. According to the OHA, "Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the

[33] Simon Bronner, The Anglo-American Fiddle Tradition in New York," 30.
[34] Simon J. Bronner, *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State,* 55
[35] Simon J. Bronner, *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State,* 55-56

product of that process."[36] The people that they serve include professionals, such as archivists, librarians and curators, as well as laypeople like students and filmmakers. Because so much of this project is built around completing oral histories of my own, the OHA has had a strong impact on it. They provide a comprehensive list of not only the best practices that an oral historian should follow, but also of the principles of oral history.[37]

According to the OHA, the interviews conducted by oral historians should be treated as historical documents that are to be kept and made available to both the academic and public listener. The OHA believes that there are multiple methods of preservation and they also recognize the assistance that technology can provide for the preserver.[38] In order to make my recordings available to both scholars and the general public, I decided to host the podcast on the popular website SoundCloud. This is a site that receives a high amount of traffic, which could theoretically increase the number of listeners that these histories receive.

Podcasting as a form of disseminating oral history is also championed by the people at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The accessibility factor of the podcast is one of the biggest reasons for this. Anybody can download it as long as they have any sort of internet capable device, which is becoming more and more common as time goes on. The IMLS gives a useful breakdown on how exactly do produce a podcast. From starting out with just the basic concept to creating a workflow, they offer support for the fledgling podcaster getting their feet wet.[39]

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[36] Oral History Association, "Principles and Best Practices,", http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/#intro, accessed March 08, 2017.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Doug Boyd, et al. "What Endures," Oral History in the Digital Age, http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/what-endures/, accessed March 06, 2017.

The podcasting format differs in simply uploading the raw audio files of an entire interview by providing curated and digestible content for the listener. Instead of having a multi-hour piece of audio to listen to, which may cover a large amount of content that is not specifically pertinent to the listener's interests, a podcast is edited to fit within a short amount of time and have carefully selected pieces of information that directly relate to the topic at hand. Thus, formatting oral histories into a podcast makes them incredibly accessible for anybody interested. Full interviews are also uploaded alongside the podcast for any researcher that wishes to dig deeper into the content. Having both ways of presenting these primary sources is an important step to increasing the spread of the information that was gathered.

Before one can begin the actual recording process, it is important to know the intricacies of the literal recording process. What is the best way to capture audio, where should the microphone be placed to get the best sound from instruments (in this case the fiddle), and which settings are optimal for the specific type of recording intended are all questions that need to be answered. Here, we can turn to the musician Josh Turner.[40] He has a series of videos that explain in detail all that there is needed to know about recording vocals and instruments. The recording device that he uses in his examples is the same one that is being used for this project, a Zoom H2.

Turner has split these videos into three parts. Part 1 has Turner giving a general overview and discusses some of the ideal settings that should be used while recording. He gives a breakdown of what exactly a portable recorder is and how it differs from a microphone, choosing

[40] Turner is a YouTube musician with a following of 127,932 subscribers at the time of writing this paper. He plays both original songs and covers from a wide array of genres, including old time and bluegrass (though he is not so much a fiddler). His second YouTube channel includes the tutorials that will be discussed. Here is his main channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/200000028/featured and here is his second channel which features the videos discussed here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiUuvUInZEgnaaw6btKuFGg, accessed May 9, 2017.

the correct configuration and how to select the right file format. Turner points out that the particular model that he is using to demonstrate with, the Zoom H2, is an older model, roughly eight years old. So, anything that he is saying in this video is more than likely to apply to all but the newest of devices. [41]

In Part 2, he discusses placement of the device, which he believes to be the most crucial part of the entire recording process. Turner believes the way to get the best sound from an instrument, guitar in his case, is to have it in the 90-degree polar pattern with an X Y configuration, citing other audio engineers. He also provides a small image which describes exactly what that means. Turner also discusses the dynamics of what he calls "natural mixing." He stresses that while some things can be changed in the computer during post-production, there is nothing that can replace a well-done recording. Finally, Turner goes over how to use the one recording device to record a large group of people. This is something that will come in very handy for my project.[42]

Part 3 is focused on post-production, what to do after everything has been recorded and the files are on your computer. This part is often the most daunting part of recording. However, true to form, Turner does an excellent job of giving a brief and easily understandable breakdown of some of the basic things that can take a recording to the next level in virtually no time at all. He gives two examples of songs, one an instrumental and one with words, and shows what to do

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[41] "Getting the Most Out of a Portable Recorder – Pt 1," directed by Josh Turner, performed by Josh Turner (March 7, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lMZP0F79Fk, accessed October 19, 2016.
[42] "Getting the Most Out of a Portable Recorder – Pt 2," directed by Josh Turner, performed by Josh Turner (March 7, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4NZoqZA4zM, accessed October 19, 2016.

in the case of either. Turner effectively shows how a minimal amount of editing can really make a huge difference in the end product.[43]

The files were cut up using the free program Audacity and made into a short, listenable format, they were posted to the website SoundCloud. A popular place to host audio files, SoundCloud serves millions of people that wish to upload and share their music. Once the podcast episodes had made it to SoundCloud, they were then shared on a WordPress site titled Fiddlers of Rochester; this serves as a place to house all the interviews in context. Alongside the interviews are posted photographs of my time with the fiddlers as well as any other relevant information. The keys to both SoundCloud and WordPress is that they are free and simple ways to share large amounts of information with as many people as possible. With tools like these, anybody is able to be a web designer and they remove the roadblocks of entering the virtual space that there may have been beforehand. In a way, the choice of sites that were used in the curation of my interviews reflects the themes that were discussed in them. Sharing music with as many people as possible is a hallmark of these fiddlers, spreading the happiness that their music brings them is one way that they aim to help those around them. I believe that using these sites that are so accessible is right in line with the spirit of Rochester fiddling.

Findings

The interviews that accompany this paper were done with three major fiddlers in the Rochester fiddle community. Musicologist and professor James Kimball, whose research was also used for this project, gave one interview, Dick Bolt, a well-known fiddler in Rochester's

[43] "Getting the Most Out of a Portable Recorder – Pt 3," directed by Josh Turner, performed by Josh Turner (March 7, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xD95-SfQ6f, accessed October 19, 2016.

Irish music scene gave another, and Bill Henrie, a popular fiddler who can be seen and heard at many sessions in the area provided the third.

Kimball lends an academic air to the project, as his entire professional life has been dedicated to recording and preserving musical traditions all over the world. In his interview, he discusses how he began recording and working with folk music in Germany and Poland before coming to settle down in Geneseo, NY, where he still lives and teaches as a lecturer of music. Since coming to Western New York he has become an important person in the community of fiddlers.

Bolt, while not an academic, is a common sight at many of the Irish jams in Rochester. Yet what he lacks in an academic viewpoint toward the music, he more than makes up for in both knowledge of the repertoire as well as skill on the instrument. He is a multi-instrumentalist, classically trained violinist, teacher, and a tradition bearer.

Henrie is a member of the band The Henrie Brothers and has been fiddling since the early 1970's. By far the most technically skilled fiddler of the three, he largely draws on the standards and traditions of the old-time music of the American South. In 1976, he won the prestigious first place award at the Old Fiddler's Convention in Galax, Virginia. Henrie has a clear love for playing fiddle and he plays music from all genres. In our discussion, he talked about his love for old-time tunes, but also of his enjoyment of classical and jazz music, especially jazz pioneer Charlie Parker.

From these interviews, we can gather a sense of what is so unique about the fiddling tradition in Western New York. Bolt says that one particularly interesting thing is just how many Irish musicians and sessions there are in Rochester. According to data from the 2011 census published by the United States Census Bureau, almost 120,000 people in Monroe County (the

county that holds Rochester) claim Irish ancestry.[44] He claims that this city has one of the highest percentages of people playing Irish fiddle tunes in the country, with only larger cities such as New York City and Boston beating Rochester out. The musicians are so numerous in the city that should a fiddler choose to, they could visit a different Irish session every night of the week. He also says that another unique part of the community is in fact, James Kimball, who Bolt has had the opportunity to work with on many occasions at different living history museums such as Genesee Country Village in Western New York as well as the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, New York, playing period music. Bolt believes that because Kimball is an academic and a researcher, he is able to make a difference in the community.[45] His scholarly take on fiddler tunes lends an air of authenticity to the performances. When they play at community events that ask for tunes relating to a specific era, like at Genesee Country Village for example, Kimball is able to give a true representation of what the music of a given time period in New York truly would have sounded like.

Kimball maintains that one thing that makes fiddling in Western New York unique is the repertoire. The square dance scene was also very popular in what he simply called "the old days." Tunes like "Marching Through Georgia" or "Pistol Packin' Mama" were frequently played and called at those dances. These songs are not strictly New York tunes; for example, the educated listener may hear "Marching Through Georgia" played throughout the Ken Burns PBS documentary *The Civil War*. Visiting with the musicians after the dances would reveal sets of fiddle tunes that truly were unique to the area. He cites fiddlers like Ken Bonner from Fulton,

[44] Justin Murphy, "For Some, Rochester's Irish heritage beckons," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), June 25, 2013. http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/local/2013/06/24/for-some-rochesters-irish-heritage-beckons-/2453609/

[45] Dick Bolt, Interview with Author, Rochester, NY, February 2017.

New York who would seemingly make up fiddle tunes on the spot. One of his tunes, simply called "The Ken Bonner Shuffle" can be heard being played by Dick Bolt in his interview on the Fiddlers of Rochester website. As time went on and the dances became faster, Kimball says that the old timers and fiddlers began retreating from that scene and started favoring more relaxed events; picnics in Osceola, New York where the Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association has their headquarters were a favorite spot. "There weren't many fiddlers anymore that were playing that, but if you went to the picnics like up in Osceola, that's where the fiddlers were. They stopped being part of the regular square dance scene." [46]

As Kimball stated, the square dance tradition has been slowly dying out, as rural towns lose population: "they're fewer than there used to be. The granges have mostly closed down or shrunk altogether, it's an aging phenomenon. Fire halls find other ways to raise their money, I've gone to a lot of fire hall dances in the past but there are few of those dances, firehall and grange dances." He began the Geneseo String Band at the college and continues to lead it. The band still puts on square dances in the community and according to him, they are generally well attended, estimating around 150-200 people.[47]

Friendship and a sense of community is on both of these musicians' minds when asked about why they connected to this music so much. Bolt says, "One of the differences in traditional music, or downhome or back porch or kitchen music and how it differs from classical is that traditional music tends to be more accessible, a little more informal and is more social… part of a social network."[48] Both Bolt and Kimball talked about how this traditional music would have been music that was made simply to entertain people in the pub. People would bring their

[46] James Kimball, Interview with Author, Rochester, NY, March 2017.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Dick Bolt, Interview with Author.

instruments and play, but they would also spend time talking and socializing with each other. It is informal and there is a general sense of relaxation and playing tunes for the sake of playing tunes. “If I’ve got a little bit of a neck ache from arthritis, well I forget that all together. You know playing music, aches and pains and sniffles and everything go away, they’re not there.” Kimball also gave the simple answer of “Because I like it,” when asked why he enjoys this music. What seems like a simple and perhaps not committal answer may have more to it. This music is meant to be enjoyed; it is music for the people.

When asked about where they see the future of fiddle tunes in the area, both Bolt and Henrie believes that there will be a greater amount of blending of styles. “I think one of the things is that there’s more crossover… there’s bands in town who do old timey and bluegrass; or it’s a fusion, they cross styles,” he states during his interview. He attributes this to the fact that there is more traveling now as compared to when he was even starting out playing in the 1950’s. All of this traveling has resulted in many different styles being blended together and a blurring of genre lines. Henrie observed that the musicians playing today have a looser sense of sticking to a specific genre. He cites people such as famous mandolin player Chris Thile, who is equally at home blazing through old-time fiddle tunes and Bluegrass standards as he is playing a Bach sonata or partita.

Each fiddler was asked to play tunes that they thought represented the Western New York fiddle tradition the most. This resulted in a wide array of different tunes being played, as each person came from a distinct tradition. For Henrie, this meant popular tunes from the larger American old-time tradition as this was the music that he had grown up on. Tunes like Goin’ Down the Road Feeling Bad, June Apple, and Old Joe Clark were played, which would not be out of place in a modern Bluegrass or Old-time jam. To Bolt, Western New York tunes revolved

around music that is found in the Irish tradition. Moonlight in Mayo, The Merry Blacksmith, and The Pretty Maid Milking Her Cow are all tunes that Bolt played. He also played two versions of the Ken Bonner Shuffle, a tune written by Ken Bonner, a fiddler from Fulton, New York. James Kimball focused his selection of tunes on largely New York tunes, choosing pieces that he learned from now deceased fiddler Mark Hamilton. These tunes are largely unnamed, being referred to simply as Breakdown in D or Quadrille in D/G. Others are named after the people that wrote the tunes like Theodore Wagner's First Change, which would have been the first piece of music in a series.

It became very clear from talking to these men that this music is still played today because of the community. However, this community does not seem to have been embraced by the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, perhaps a result of distinct musical communities developing in the same area. While Eastman does hold lessons open to the public in Bluegrass as well as a string band which plays American folk tunes, this is where the similarities end. They appear to focus on more formal styles of music and have not joined the large group of informal musicians playing in restaurants and bars. Each of the people interviewed listed off other forms of music that they enjoyed, from Bluegrass to Classical as well as folk tunes from cultures all over; these musicians first and foremost seem to just like "good music." All of these men gave the sense that while they truly love the songs that they play, it is not strictly those songs that keep them coming back, but the people they play with. I'm reminded of a lyric by the band The Avett Brothers in their song St. Joseph's: "It's not where I am, it's who I'm with."

Content Curation

Interviewing these fiddlers was simply the first step in this process. After the interviews with the three subjects (Dick Bolt, James Kimball, and Bill Henrie) the project turned toward the curation of the content and its dissemination online. The podcast, titled "Fiddlers of Rochester," has been hosted on SoundCloud as stated earlier. These individual episodes have been placed onto WordPress, a popular blogging service and can be found by going to https://www.rochesterfiddlers.wordpress.com. In addition to the interviews, this site also features photographs from the interview and fiddle sessions, as well as any other related media that is relevant to the project.

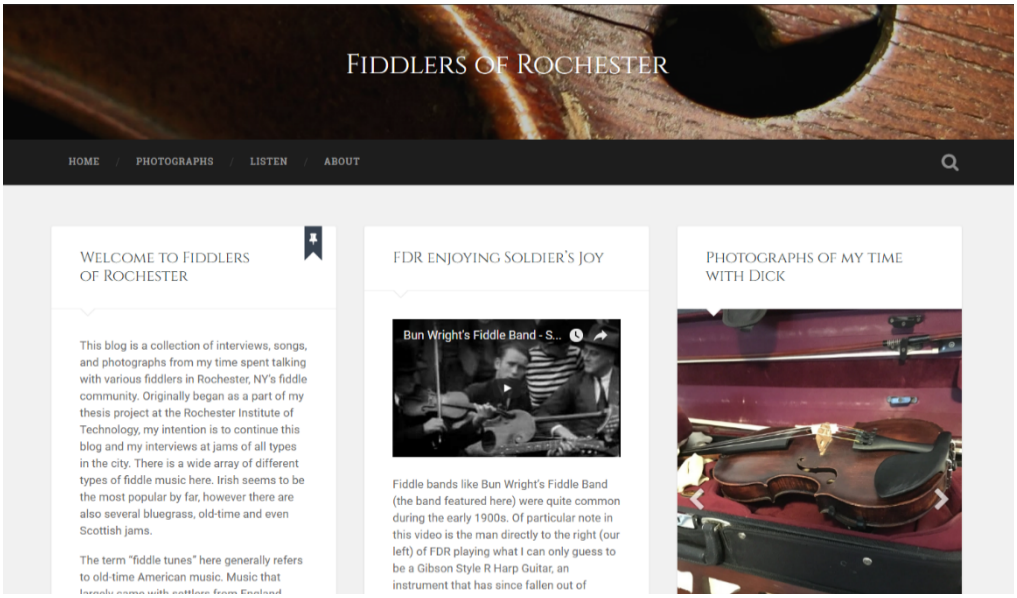

Figure 1: Screenshot of www.Rochesterfiddlers.wordpress.com.

The interviews themselves were very free flowing in nature. General questions such as "What got you into music?" or "What connection do you have to the music that you play now?" were asked as to elicit as free of as a response as the interviewee was willing to give

(See Figure 2). They ranged in time, with the shortest being roughly forty minutes and the longest being in excess of three hours. This posed issues when it came time to create the actual podcast, as most but the most intrepid fans or researchers of fiddle tunes in Western New York would be enticed to listen to an interview of that length. Slowly going through the entire recorded interview and picking the most pertinent information to each question asked was the key to cutting them down to roughly twenty minutes each, with another five to ten minutes at the end being dedicated to playing tunes that the individuals thought represented the tradition best. Audacity was the audio editor for this project. It's simple to use interface and wealth of readily available help online made it a great choice for one who has a somewhat limited skillset when it comes to editing and cutting of audio files.

Aside from the podcasts that have been uploaded, the full-length interviews were also posted to the WordPress for either researchers or those that are interested enough to dig deeper. Alongside those, playlists of just tunes have been included, broken up by who played them. There are a great many New York tunes that were played for these podcasts and specifically highlighting and sharing them without the interviews is an important way to spread the music. In addition to the various audio elements, visuals in the form of photographs taken during interviews are also added. Photographs of not only the fiddlers, but also the instruments (some of which have interesting and well documented histories), and interview spaces are added. This lends deeper insight into who the interviewee is. Bolt's space reflects his position in the community as a teacher and tradition bearer whereas Kimball's space reflects his role as a collector of tunes.

Conclusion

In summary, Fiddlers of Rochester is the culmination of a year of research and knowledge gained. Although the tunes that are native to the area are largely disappearing due to a shying away from the public eye, the fiddle community in Western New York, especially those playing traditional Irish tunes, is vibrant and alive. These people play not for money or for fame, but for a sense of belonging and friendship. In the time spent with these musicians, I have made friendships and bonds that will not soon be forgotten. While fiddle tunes certainly have fallen out of popular culture, their influence can still be felt on the people that play them today. Music that was played in the mid-seventeenth century is still being played all across Rochester in bars and pubs such as Johnny's Irish Pub, Greenhouse Café, and Colie's. When attending these sessions, it is plain to see that what the fiddlers interviewed said is true, this is a tradition that is very much about spending time with friends. There is just as much storytelling, laughing, and sharing as there is music playing. In its current form, Fiddlers of Rochester only contains the content that has been described in this work, however there are ample opportunities to expand upon that in the future. As long as there are people who still believe in preserving this tradition in Western New York, there will be an online space for them to talk and tell their stories.

Appendix

Air	Tunes. Generally, these are played at a slow pace.
Double Stop	A musical technique commonly played on the fiddle where the musician plays two notes at once on two different strings.
Drone	A single note that is sounded continuously.
Hornpipe	A type of dance tune. Normally found in 4/4 time and played at a slower pace, the melodies can be complex and heavily arpeggiated.
Jig	A type of dance tune. Normally found in 6/8 time.
Reel	A type of dance tune. Can be played in either 2/4 time or 4/4 time. Played at a fast tempo.

Table 1. Glossary of Musical Terms. Created by Author. Based on the Related Resources accompanying the Library of Congress, "Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: Henry Reed Collection," https://www.loc.gov/collections/henry-reed-fiddle-tunes/about-this-collection/related-resources/.

Question Guide

1) Brief introduction?
2) When did you develop a general musical interest?
3) Where did you first learn to fiddle? What started you down this path?
4) What does this music mean to you? Does it elicit any particular memories?
5) What is the connection between music and place? What are the customs and traditions specific to this region?
6) What are some of your favorite tunes to play?
7) Anything else that you would like to discuss?

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