

3-20-1984

Interview with Virgil Anderson (FA 23)

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INFORMANT/FIELDWORKER DATA FORMI. INFORMANT.

Virgil Anderson and his wife Mabel Anderson

NAME [Include fullest possible name - first, middle and/or maiden, last.

For example: John James Smith; Mary Franklin Smith (Mrs. John Smith)

Rocky Branch, Kentucky Phone 8-8778

ADDRESS

PERSONAL DATA:

Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____ Sex: M & F

White

RACE/NATIONALITY/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: [Include education, occupation, places of residence,
religion, etc.)

Farmer

II. COLLECTOR.

Mike Boggs and Kathy Kerr

NAME (Include fullest possible name as described above)

655 East 12th St., Bowling Green, KY 42101

ADDRESS, LOCAL

Rt. 4 Box 186, Kettle, Kentucky 42752

ADDRESS, PERMANENT

fieldworker to informant

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT, SUCH AS COUSIN, FRIEND, BOSS,
ACQUAINTANCE, ETC.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

MARCH 20, 1984
ROCKY BRANCH, KENTUCKY
VIRGIL AND MABLE ANDERSON

Mike Boggs and Kathy Kerr had an appointment to meet with Virgil Anderson at 9:00 AM; however, at 10:15 decided to ask for directions at the second place that morning.

At approximately fifteen minutes until 11:00AM we parked the car and made our way to the fifty foot long swinging bridge. We crossed this and climbed up a small mountain to arrive at Mr. Anderson's house.

As we topped the hill we saw a very neat white house and neatly trimmed yard. Mr. Virgil Anderson, himself met us at the door and welcomed us inside. He was wearing a yellow long sleeved shirt, a copper link bracelet on his right wrist and tan work pants with the cuffs turned up. He was wearing a black belt, brown socks and was sporting a pair of sailor tennis shoes. He was wearing thick, wire framed glasses and this showed how well his blue eyes seemed to sparkle. He had white hair and a bank-aid on his right ear.

His wife, Mable was present and seemed to want to stay in the background. She was wearing a red and white dress with a peach colored sweater. She had on knee-hi panty hose and brown slippers. She wore wire, framed glasses and had a black hair net over her very white hair.

The interview was conducted in the living room with Virgil ^[in] setting a gold colored chair that had a patchwork pillow on it. The living room had many family pictures in it, four different kinds of calendars, a coal stove and many cards that people had sent to them.

The microphone and apparatus was rigged up by using a kitchen chair and tying the microphone to the top of it.

Mike sat to the right of Mr. Anderson and Kathy sat on the couch beside Ms. Anderson.

After about an hour of taping Ms. Anderson went into the kitchen and prepared a lunch fit for a king. We were invited and greatly enjoyed their hospitality. We feasted on fried bologna, fried potatoes, pinto beans, fried apples with homemade biscuits and butter, jelly, honey, crackers and water for our drink.

Interviewer's tape no.: WKU FL, FL & OHA Accession no.:
 Interviewer: Mike Boggs Address: 1229 Chestnut St. B.G.
 Interviewee: Virgil Anderson Address: Rocky Branch, Ky.
 Place of interview: Anderson's home Date: 3-20-84
 Other people present: Mabel Anderson, Kathy Kerr
 Equipment used: Sony stereo cassette recorder
 Reel-to-reel tape: Brand: Size reel: Tape Mil: Speed:
 Cassette: Brand: Scotch AVX 60 C-30/C-60/C-90/C-120 (circle size)
 Amount of tape used: (Side 1) All (Side 2): All

Brief description of interview context and tape contents:
 Interview took place in the living room of Anderson's home. He is accustomed to being interviewed, and enjoyed performing for the tape recorder. He sang several songs, accompanying himself on the banjo, and spoke of his beginnings as a musician and the difference between "educated" and "natural born" music.

ANDERSON: You wanting a song with a meaning to it, a tale to it, I mean ah [strums banjo]

BOGGS: I tell you what. Right here at first let's just you play what you feel like playing.

ANDERSON: Okay, I'll play one of my daddy's old pieces here. [laughs] It'll put ginger in your heels, spunk in your gizzard. [laughs] Now people I kidd you. I'm getting too old to do this.

Rooster in a corn crib, red bird trying to crow,
 Dead man trying to kill himself, blind man trying to sew
 Come along pretty little girl, lay your hand in mine
 You should live a lady so long as the sun shines

Thousand miles away from home, [garbled]
 Laying in bed with another man's wife, the time I was getting away
 [spoken] Yea ha I'm moving on.
 Two old maids playing in the sand, ea
 Each one wishing the other was a man

BOGGS: Thank you. Now what was that last one called?

ANDERSON: "Going Across the Sea"

BOGGS: What are you going to do for us now?

ANDERSON: "Going Around This World Baby Mine." [laughs]

I'm going around this world, baby mine
I'm going across the ocean, baby mine
I'm going across the ocean, if I can't change my notion
I'm going across the ocean, baby mine

I'm going around this world, baby mine
I'm going around this world, baby mine
I'm going around this world with a banjo-picking girl
I'm going around this world, baby mine

I'm going Chattanooga, baby mine
I'm going to Chattanooga, baby mine
I'm going to Chattanooga, from there into Cuba
I'm going around this world, baby mine

If you ain't got no money, baby mine
If you ain't got no money, baby mine
If you ain't got no money better get yourself a honey
Cause I'm going around this world, baby mine

I'm going to Chattanooga, baby mine
I'm going to Chattanooga, baby mine
I'm going to Chattanooga, from there into Cuba
I'm going around this world, baby mine

If I never get back what are you going to do
If I never get back what you going to do
I be thinking of you and flirting with another man too
I'm going around this world, baby mine

M. ANDERSON: There's a man on the phone wanting you.

ANDERSON: Well I'll say, dog gone.

[recorder turned off for about ten minutes]

BOGGS: Let me ask you a couple questions here before you start playing again. How do you feel about all this attention people give you because of your music?

ANDERSON: Well, I've never knew nothing else but attention. They been after me in all logging camps ever since I been, well, I'll say, eighteen years old. Me and my sisters and brother-laws played together music. And, ah, I never knowed nothing else, only a bunch

of people after me to play. So ah, I don't -- I mean it don't, it don't bother me nowhere I'm at. I ain't got that much [garbled, laughs].

mind

BOGGS: Well, what do you --

ANDERSON: It don't bother me.

BOGGS: Well what do you think about these people from schools though wanting to talk to you?

ANDERSON: Well I don't think much about it, because I understand that in this day and time, they are wanting to pick up all this antique stuff I think their can to have something, you know, to make sport and laugh at after we gone. The younger, they looking for the unknown generations, the way I look at it. And I, ah, I'm giving them all -- I'm doing my best to put it out there for them to laugh at me. Always one to be, has to, always has to be something for people to laugh at, may as well be me as anything. So, I'm doing my best.

BOGGS: Now seriously, tell me the truth now, about -- I know -- do you -- how important do you think it is that people capture the style of playing that you do? Do you feel like it's going to be important to have these recordings?

ANDERSON: Well, yes you know it's a good feeling to me, it's important to me to think that they would want to hold me in that way. That, ah, I'm here, everything is just here to be intended to be, I think, from God. And, I can't help being the way I am. And I am glad of it because I way born with this talent. And I had three more in my family was born the same way, but there's two of them dead, so I'm glad to do anything that I can for -- they've got to have -- this -- there won't be old Virgil Anderson, there won't be old so-and-so here always.

And that's what's holding me what for mayor here of this Wildcat Rock City. See these three young women keeps me in for this antique stuff, they're crazy about this antique stuff. And I'm antique. So that keeps me -- they're trying to get me out of my office here, but I'm holding it. I mean to hold it, right along, cause they're going to -- they're trying to get me out of it, but they can't.

So, ah, you know ^{back} in, you want a little, ah, ah, my talk about the back in the early thirties --

BOGGS: Yeah, let me get that in a minute, but I want to ask you one more thing. You said you were born with this talent.

ANDERSON: Oh, yes.

BOGGS: Do you really think it just has to be born, born to you to play?

ANDERSON: You can get educated music, but still you can tell when it starts it won't be long if you're a genius -- if you're a music judge -- it won't be long till you can tell it's more -- I mean it's not ah, ah natural born. You see if it's natural born music, why, then it's different from educated music. Education, we, ah, that's all of it.

I mean education, we wouldn't have went to the moon if it hadn't been for education and me talking to them, too, to put a man on the -- put a woman on the moon man went to her -- if they'd listen to me they'd been there -- they wouldn't been talking all those forty years about it. Some man would have went. That's right, I come to her, you know --
* would've

BOGGS: How did you come to learn to play? Did somebody sit down with you and say, 'Here's a "C" chord and here's a --'

ANDERSON: Well, in a way I didn't have to learn. It's just in me to play -- well, naturally, if you're playing with somebody else you'll pick up theirs, if you want to, if it's what you thinks anything that amounts to anything. I'll play with people that weren't, wasn't nothing, it wouldn't amount to --

You see I think -- I know just about what it takes to get a hold of you. You see, I'm born that way and ~~garbled~~ sharp, nothing like that, but I've got a talent to this music, and I know what it takes to pick you up. And, ah, there's some people will just start in and play anything, whether it's any good or not and just play all day for you. But I know about what you--~~[picks banjo]~~ Now you see I play in different -- now here's a--~~[picks, tunes]~~ I don't have to change my keys in every tune I play, you understand, I play sometimes maybe half a dozen or a dozen in one and turn, in "F" here's I'm turning now in, play you two or three in that. ~~[picks for about ten seconds]~~

You see, I'm a blue boy. I I play a bluesy music all the time. You get one of my albums and you can about tell. You see I'm a blue boy.

BOGGS: Okay.

ANDERSON: And I'm about give up to be the, well not the best, well I'll just say yes, that's what they say, but I can't see myself as a musician or like that. Bob Hope, you know, he's a great comedian. And he talks that I'm the best banjo picker he ever heard. And that's what's running them in here on me. They listen to a man like that. If I say it I'm bragging, I'm ^aboasting. But if somebody else is giving you a boost, why they'll listen at that. ~~[picks]~~

Now I've not got the strings it takes to get the real music for you. I'm going to get some though, I've got to get different strings.

Bye and by, you woman going to cry
Going to hang down your head and cry
You treat me so mean and dirty too
Cause I don't like the way my woman do

So I'm leaving you woman, I'm leaving you now
I'm leaving to throw you off my mind
Cause you treating me so mean and dirty too
Cause I don't like the way my woman do

That's when I leave here, going to hang a crepe on your door
I'm leaving, not coming back here no more
Cause you treating me so mean and dirty too
So I don't like the way my woman do

So it's by and by, you women going to cry
Going to hang down your head and think of me
You're treating me so mean and dirty too
So I don't like the way my woman do

Oh you tell me you love me, you don't love me at all
Your love is all withered and gone
Cause you treat me so mean and dirty too
I don't like the way my woman do

[continues picking banjo]

ANDERSON: I've not got the strings to get it for you right.

BOGGS: It sounds pretty good with those though. [Anderson picks banjo]
Ah, well how old were you when you first started playing the banjo?

ANDERSON: Three years old. Three years old. I don't remember nothing
about it.

BOGGS: How are you big enough to hold a banjo when you're three years
old?

ANDERSON: Lay in the bed when I was a baby, I'd pick it with my arms
up -- wasn't quite as long as they are now, three years old. I'd pick
up here. And, ah, when my dad would come in, my mother would tell him
what I'd been playing that day.

BOGGS: How did you learn a song? How did you learn the chords?

ANDERSON: Born that way. I'm supreme, ^{pure?} peer, with a unique style. [laughs]
Not boasting, but I am.

BOGGS: Well, who did you learn from growing -- I assume you did learn
some songs --

ANDERSON: -- Oh I'd hear other people and play after them but when I
was young -- it didn't take me -- when I heard it I just get it and go
on with it. I mean I can't, you know, I can't tell you myself how.