Country Music in the Northeast: Two Careers

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COUNTRY MUSIC IN THE NORTHEAST: TWO CAREERS

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by
Joseph C. Ruff
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COUNTRY MUSIC IN THE NORTHEAST: TWO CAREERS

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If I felt this thesis met the high standards set by the guru of Northeast folklore, I would dedicate the contents to Sandy Ives. I greatly admire his work on folk music of the region, and someday I hope to join him in discussion with Joe Scott, William Yeats, and Herby Rice over a beer. That aside, I am in debt to the members of my committee, both for their advice on this project and for inspiration as people. Thanks also to the wonderful people I met in the course of gathering my materials, especially Dick Curless and Gene Hooper. Finally, to the other folks in the program who shared the highs and lows of the past two years, it's been real, it's been fun, but it ain't been real fun (that's folklore!). And, for April Frantz, a mental hug.
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Although country music and its antecedents have received attention primarily as cultural phenomena of the South, the past twenty years have witnessed a growing scholarly interest in the interplay between commercial country music, vernacular components, and performers within a regional context. The commercial product which has now attained worldwide appeal undoubtedly sustains a significant relationship to the folkways and regional identity of the South; nonetheless, performers and vernacular styles from other areas of the country have contributed to the development of country music. Most important, many areas outside of the South maintain local traditions of country music entertainment. In this thesis, I argue for a broader conception of country music and its sources by examining the careers of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless within the context of country music in Maine. The evidence presented suggests that country music, in its local context, retains a significant link to regional image and identity, as well as maintaining a connection to traditional music style and function.

The acceptance of the "new social history" rests upon the belief that knowledge of everyday people and culture contributes to our understanding of historical processes and periods. The methods of folkloristics complement this perspective and also provide an approach with which to study performance in small group contexts. Much of my information derives from observation of country music culture in Maine and interviews with relevant persons. I have also utilized archival material and scholarship concerning the history of country music and vernacular music
in the Northeast. Within the thesis, I examine theoretical considerations of region and group identity.

Because the scholarly and popular conceptions of country music identify it primarily as a cultural phenomenon of the American South, my examination begins with a summary of historical perspectives on country music and the development of the Southern image connected with it. This discussion is followed by a brief survey of theoretical attitudes toward country music and regional identity within the discipline of folklore. Turning toward country music in the Northeast, I outline the roots of vernacular music there and describe the evolution of a regional country music boom. A detailed description of the careers of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless follows, with particular emphasis on the differing professional contexts of their music. Finally, I return to academic models of country music and region, elaborating on distinctions between the commercial context of the Nashville music industry and the vernacular music of the Northeast.
INTRODUCTION

Scholars of American vernacular music generally agree that distinctions between "popular" and "folk" styles have little basis in objective definition. In *Folk Music in the Modern World*, Philip Bohlman writes, "Stratification is no longer a meaningful designation of folk music as a genre. Separation of musical genres into strata of folk, popular, religious and art or, alternately, into class structures results from aesthetic and political exclusiveness and avoids the empirical considerations of musical change" (1988:139). Associated with this rejection of hierarchical categories, increased attention has been given to interaction and exchange between vernacular and popular music styles. Folklorists and historians have come to recognize that country music, as a form of American popular culture, draws from many sources of music available to its performers and audience. This recognition has given country music a legitimacy as an expressive art form with the potential to provide insight into previously under-represented American culture groups. Country music has been especially useful for understanding rural groups that have been rendered historically mute by scholars who preferred elite culture as the best indicator of important historical processes. Although stratification of cultural expressions has been rejected because it tends to obscure important historical processes at the level of everyday life, most academic and popular conceptions of country music continue to view it in terms of regional and class distinctions—primarily as the musical manifestation of a distinctive Southern culture.

In examining the musical careers of two country music singers from Maine, my primary concern has been the tendency to ignore the performance and process of country
music in a non-Southern regional context. This examination is complicated by the urge to locate folk cultural expressions within a specific geographic region as the distinctive art of an idealized group of people. Along with the rejection of stratification, scholars generally agree that "pure" cultural expressions originating from an isolated folk group are non-existent, and perennial questions about musical origins have proven unsolvable. Nonetheless, most country music scholarship indicates that 1) there has been a significant connection to Southern folk music, and 2) performers and audiences have indeed made very few distinctions between the folk, popular, or even elite sources of their materials. The development of country music, and of people's attitudes toward it, reflect many of the contradictions which additively produce a cultural identity in both the North and the South. Country music then is an important part of regional identity and expression, and also an interesting dialogue between performers and audiences, bounded by both commercial and traditional forms of mediation.

Accepting Bohlman's mandate for rejecting cultural hierarchies clears the path for understanding country music as a significant part of our cultural dialogue, but it also raises questions for discussing this phenomenon. If country music resists categorization as a folk, popular, regional, or class expression, how can techniques of folklore scholarship be applied to this amorphous subject while still reflecting categories common in everyday usage? How does this same genre of music, which now functions symbolically and economically as an international commodity, continue to function as an expression of regional and class identity? How has the commercial product, with a significant connection to Southern folk culture, interacted with specific traditions of other regions to create new options of cultural identity? These questions underlie much of my thesis, in which I argue for a broader conception of the traditional roots of country music as a phenomenon relevant to non-Southern, as well as Southern, regional cultures. In addition, I address the phenomenon of
country music in Maine as an ongoing dialogue between a national, commercial music with unarguable connections to Southern culture as well as to regional folkways and identity in Maine. Two performers in this regional context, Gene Hooper and Dick Curless, receive particular attention as participants in this dialogue.

In the Northeast, a regional music industry evolved out of diverse musical sources during the middle part of the twentieth century. This branch of country music drew much inspiration from commercial recordings and radio broadcasts of Southern artists. Yet, due to a demand for "live" performances, commercial styles were incorporated into an already existing vernacular performance tradition of music sharing folk sources with Southern country music. Local radio shows, personal appearances, and, to a lesser extent, records were the primary media for professionalization of old-time music in the Northeast. Gene Hooper and Dick Curless, two country music performers recognized by fans primarily in the Northeast, have received limited attention in the scholarly literature. These artists absorbed much from the indigenous music of the Northeast, and they were also inspired to perform from hearing recordings of Southern musicians, as well as Nova Scotian Wilf Carter, who was a local favorite. Both Hooper and Curless participated in a thriving regional music industry just after World War II, and they continue to perform for local audiences, each having achieved success outside the region during various parts of their careers. I suggest that biographical portraits of these performers can illuminate the broad historical context of country music.

The acceptance of the "new social history" rests upon the belief that knowledge of everyday people and culture contributes to our understanding of historical processes and periods. Bill C. Malone's *Country Music, U.S.A.* (1968) was a significant part of this movement. The persuasive arguments here include the notion that, while much of country music's origins are lost in the undocumented history of common folk, a viable commercial
industry can be traced to the traditions and dynamics of Southern folk culture. Although a flurry of debate during the 1970s raised questions about the Southern sources of country music, the overall relationship between the South and the country music industry has not been seriously revised. In terms of national historical processes, Malone’s model illuminates much about the dynamics of popular music. However, as Simon Bronner has suggested, "Country music had an independent and continuous development outside of the South. Furthermore, regional characteristics evolved from a selection of commercially disseminated music from contiguous areas in addition to popular sources" (1977:171). Neil Rosenberg adds that "country music is by no means a uniquely Southern nor even uniquely American phenomenon" (1974:76). Declarations of this sort reflect a folkloristic perspective, appropriate for documenting and comparing regional variation because of the folklorist’s interest in communicative interaction within small groups. Folkloristic methods also provide for analyzing country music performance in regional contexts, revealing parallel functions for both commercial country music and the traditional styles from which it derives. The purpose of regional studies should therefore be aimed less at proving the origins of country music than at analyzing the adaptation of a commercial tradition to fit the needs of regional group identities.

Because the scholarly and popular conceptions of country music identify it primarily as a Southern phenomenon, my examination will begin with a summary of historical perspectives on country music and the development of the Southern image connected with it. This discussion will be followed by a survey of theoretical attitudes toward country music and regional identity within the discipline of folklore. Turning toward country music in the Northeast, I will outline the roots of vernacular music there and describe the evolution of a regional country music boom. A detailed description of the careers of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless will follow, based on information from interviews and observations gathered
during a trip to Maine during the summer of 1992. There will be particular emphasis on the differing professional contexts of Gene and Dick’s music. Finally, I will return to academic models of country music and region, elaborating on distinctions between the commercial context of the Nashville music industry and the vernacular music of the Northeast.
CHAPTER I: Sources and Symbols of Country Music

My awareness of the regional dimensions of modern country music stems from the first time I saw Dick Curless perform, in a small high school auditorium in 1986. Though I recognized most of the other names advertised for the "package show" as moderately popular performers of the 1960s, I was unfamiliar with the man advertised as "The Baron of Country Music." From Dick’s opening yodel on Jimmie Rodgers’s "Travelin’ Blues," accompanied only by his own distinctive, flailing style of guitar, I experienced that rare sensation of gratitude for a professional musician who seems to play for the entertainment of a few close friends. The other acts in the show, including the jump-suited, sequin-caped headliner, played with all the spirit of a nine-to-five job. As he sailed through the Delmore Brothers’ "Freight Train Boogie," Dick’s enthusiasm was that of a young man trying to make his first big break. He played his own song too, neglecting the one tune that might have recalled his name to the audience’s 1960s radio memory ("Tombstone Every Mile"). Instead he banged, mumbled, and whooped his way through a solo-guitar showcase, "The Mumble Boogie." Speaking to him after the show, I learned that Dick had been around several times; he had had his hit songs and a major label contract, but he still had to remind new audiences that "we play country music up in Maine, too!"

The event led me to examine my own images of country music which made Dick’s Northern identity an anomaly. I wondered what portions of the country music myth caused me, a doctor’s son from the Midwest whose heritage included precious little in the way of musical aesthetic and even fewer musical skills, to identify with a genre of music generally
disdained by my friends. I further asked myself why Dick's performance stood out as a particularly "authentic" display of country music in comparison to the other, more popular performers of the show. Reflecting on my attraction to this performance, and to country music in general, I recognized romantic notions of a Southern, proletariat music as simple expressions of common folk and their innate goodness. Examining my tendency to reject newer, popular forms of commercial country music, and my fascination with older, "purer" forms of folk music surviving in the present, I realize that my own aesthetic is a complex mixture of the images and commercial processes of country music, as well as a search for self-identity. As I have pursued Dick's identity as a non-Southern country musician, it has become clear that symbol and image play a significant role in the on-going dialogue between performers, audiences, commercial interests, and scholars in defining the dynamic meaning of "country music."

The symbols and images associated with country music and its cultural heritage, both positive and negative, have fueled the commercial and academic engines which have revised and uplifted the subjects, like so much coal dug from Appalachian mines. While commercial interests have often exploited the quaint images of backwardness, folklorists and historians have done much to deconstruct the negative aspects which rendered the South and its music as an American abomination. Archie Green's examination of the images of early country music in "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol" reveals the mixed feelings of performers who adapted stereotyped images to promote their music, much to the disgust of some commentators who could not separate image and aesthetic. We now know that simplistic and ethnocentric critical portraits of hillbilly music and its culture as "illiterate and ignorant, the intelligence of morons, the sing-song, nasal-twanging of a Vernon Dalhart or a Carson Robison on the disks, reciting the banal lyrics of a "Prisoner's Song" or "The Death of Floyd Collins" . . . " resulted from a rural South/urban North dichotomy which
was freely exploited by commercial interests (Green 1965:221). We also know that such a dichotomy has distorted ethnocentric academic views, a dichotomy which fails to explain the complex exchange of musics contributing to the creation of a product relevant to the expressive culture of common Americans. Historian Bill Malone has done much to reveal academic biases against hillbilly or country music; he writes that "an understanding of southern rural music was hampered by the reluctance of both folk scholars and high-art exponents to see it as it really was: that is, a thoroughly hybrid form of music which shared Old World and American traits, and which revealed itself as both commercial and folk expression" (1985:27).

The perception of country music as a particularly Southern phenomenon has deep roots in the cultural stereotypes to which scholars, audiences, performers, and commercial mediators have never proven immune, and which have affected the development of the music. David Whisnant, in his examination of the sources and effects of "the politics of culture" remarks, "It has long been accepted as established truth that the mountains and the rest of the South are laden with cultural traditions. . . . The adoption of southern music, musicians and musical forms by a mainstream starved for rooted cultural imagery has helped shape much of American musical history since World War II" (1983:6-7). Indeed, Malone acknowledges this phenomenon as an even deeper complication for separating image from music style: "The South, both as a set of images and as a source of music ideas, exerted a powerful influence on American popular music long before the region developed musicians with national reputations. . . . American musicians, from the blackface minstrels of the 1830s to the rock singers of our own day, have persistently exploited southern images and have drawn upon southern-derived instrumental and vocal styles" (1979:18).

The growing self-consciousness that symbol and image have contributed to both scholarly and popular attitudes toward folk music has resulted in a rejection of negative
connotations of "the backwards folk" as cultural stereotypes. At the same time, the positive images of Southern folk culture as a special incubator of country music and other folk-derived commercial forms are often accepted at face value. The overwhelming evidence that Southern folk music contributed significantly to our national, commercial music is well-documented in Malone's *Southern Music/American Music*, and, he relates, "The music myth is one that has real substance" (1979:1). Nonetheless, the general truth of this myth continues to complicate descriptions of country music as both a national commercial style and as a folk music with localized dimensions. Unquestioning acceptance of this myth produces generalizations as dangerous as the negative images. One folklorist comments that the commercialization of Southern folk music forms one aspect of a larger pattern in which "an essentially agrarian lifestyle was being exposed to the more industrialized, commercialized ways of the North" (Cogswell 1973:71). Cultural geographers, such as Raymond Gastil, assert that "like Jazz, country and western music could become nationally popular only when persons from the South migrated to form communities in the metropolitan areas of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and California" (1975:88). Though these statements generally ring true, it is not unreasonable to conclude that symbols and images continue to obscure important aspects of both Northern and Southern culture.

Dismissing the negative aspects of country music culture as mere stereotype, scholars have embraced the positive image of a homogeneous, art-producing folk group maintaining an expressive identity in the face of modernization. What remains are the same symbols utilized differently. Instead of being denigrated for shallow attempts at artistic creation, folk groups deserve applause for the production of authentic cultural expression. The applause in the case of much country music still depends on a notion of ruralness in contrast to urban industrialism and modernization. Folklorist D. K. Wilgus observed the dangers of oversimplifying the relationship between the urban North and rural South in the development
of country music, noting, "It neglects almost totally the interrelation between folk and popular music in the North, a development generally neglected in American folk and cultural studies. More important, it misrepresents the kind of isolation that operated in the South and the Southern Appalachians" (1970:158). While the South contributed heavily to the image and sound of country music, the North had its own vernacular music styles which interacted with, absorbed, and reinterpreted the images and sounds of popular music. The images, symbols, and styles of country music have refracted across regions in a bewildering interplay of cultural stereotype. As Anthropologist Victor Turner indicates, our awareness of these cultural stereotypes and an illusion of objective analysis creates an ethnological problem for finding the real image in a "hall of mirrors" (1985: 245). Thus, the images and symbols of country music are addressed below as a "connotative web" of music, performance and presentation, audience, and context which has created confusion and obscured the relationship of country music to non-Southern folk culture.

Part of this reflexive confusion derives from the constant process of revision undergone by academic attitudes toward American folk cultures. Folklorists of an earlier era believed that folklore was dying out (or, even worse, never existed in America) and without documentation and salvaging would become lost to future generations. With time, folklorists realized that folklore changes rather than disappears, and that folk groups continue to thrive in a modern, urban context (Dundes 1969). In a similar pattern of revision, vital folk cultures such as that of Appalachia have been heralded as examples of a unified, pastoral survival within a homogenizing modern nation. The "discovery" of seemingly isolated and homogeneous folk groups provided evidence of diversity and disputed the notion of a monolithic American culture stewed in the melting pot; but regional culture groups were soon recognized under closer inspection to be neither as homogeneous nor monolithic as was initially assumed (Whisnant 1983). Likewise, commercial hillbilly
music was regarded as the bane of traditional British folk ballads, until scholarship revealed a long and intimate relationship between traditional and commercial processes in folk music.

Indeed, this pattern of revision is reflected in the rejection of hillbilly music by scholars. Folklorists and historians alike dismissed the value of American folk and popular music until the cause was taken up by the so-called high-art exponents. In the wave of artistic nationalism inspired by Dvorak's essay "Music in America" (1895), native folk music came to be viewed as a potential wellspring of art, and the image of the Southern folk music reservoir began taking shape. Folklorists of this century have battled to dispel some of Dvorak's mistaken images, primarily the image of Southern music embodied in Stephen Foster's plantation melodies. One revised image, exemplified by the work of Cecil Sharp, Maude Karpeles, and Olive Dame Campbell in the southern Appalachians, portrayed "these mountain valleys" and eventually all of the South, as "far less affected by modern musical influences than the most remote and secluded English village" (Sharp, 1932:xxv). The South, both correctly and incorrectly, retains the image of an isolated, rural culture perpetuating a distinctive music. An early delineation of the unique musical qualities of Southern white folk by Emma Bell Miles conveys the notion by which distinctiveness becomes mysteriously representative. In her nationalist defense of "real American music," Miles complains that the world assumes America to lack a foundation of folk music, but "there is hidden among the mountains of Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas, a people of whose inner nature and its musical expression almost nothing has been said. The music of the Southern mountaineer is not only peculiar, it is peculiarly American" (1904:118).

During the twentieth century, the perception of Southern music as both distinctive and American has variously served the needs of both scholars interested in American folk culture and a growing commercial music industry whose principle of operation was marketability. Folklorists exhibited a bias for artistic expressions of an Anglo-Saxon rural
peasantry and invaded presumed cultural enclaves of the South. Malone summarizes this tendency represented by Sharp's pioneering ballad collection as the "conservative, academic approach to folk music [that] created a false impression about the breadth and scope of southern music which later scholars have never really overcome" (1979:32).

Like the ballad collectors, representatives of the infant radio and recording industries sought out Southern sources, having found a market for "hillbilly" musicians with records by Eck Robertson, Henry Whitter, and "Fiddlin'" John Carson (all Southerners) in 1922 and 1923. Country music historian Charles Wolfe notes that "Tennessee especially benefitted from this image when radio and phonograph records came along; recording sessions were held in Tennessee because the northern recording executives thought old songs could best be found in the mountains, and the founder of the Grand Ole Opry chose Tennessee because he felt that hill country music would be most authentic there" (1977:6). Studies of early commercial representations of "old Southern tunes" have revealed that radio and record promoters experimented with commercial strategies for presenting their products (Green 1965; Wilgus 1970), and the images and strategies which became entrenched were by no means pre-determined by the realities of Southern music performance on early radio and recordings (Wolfe 1973, 1974). Peterson and Dimaggio, examining the program diary of the Grand Ole Opry in 1928, found "the show was more tightly programed [sic] and less casual than usually imagined. There was also more variety and less pure old-time music than usually believed. What is more, the performers were both more professional and less rural than their image" (1973:44). In other words, the portrait of early country music which became accepted—that of Southern mountain music straight from the porches of hillbilly homes—was successfully negotiated by commercial interests.

To a great extent, the images of all forms of tradition-based commercial music derive from an ideology reinforced by commercial interests. These images are often accepted
uncritically by scholars, audiences, and even by musicians themselves. While abundant evidence suggests that white and black musical exchange has been the rule rather than the exception, categories such as "the blues" and "hillbilly music" have attained race-based identities which obscure the real nature of this exchange. It is widely accepted that the prevalent use of banjo and fiddles by black musicians during the nineteenth century declined because of the instruments' associations with blackface minstrelsy and the slave past (Malone 1979:10). Meanwhile, black string band music prevalent into the 1930s and recorded by The Mississippi Sheiks, Joe Evans, Matthew Prater and Nap Hayes, Lonnie Johnson, and the Booker brothers in Kentucky has become an anomaly in our acceptance of the white image of hillbilly music. Black musicians such as Arnold Shultz are now recognized to have had major influence on the white folk music of their region. Blacks were on the early Opry but were eventually phased out because of the commercial images created by the hillbilly industry. Dorris Macon tells of a Memphis recording session in which the best string band available was not allowed to record because they were black (Wolfe 1987). Thus, the perception of African-American music was shaped both by a growing consciousness of identity in the black community and by marketing strategies which defined hillbilly music as a white tradition.

Similarly, the blues played by white musicians became increasingly difficult to market. Early "mountain blues" recordings by Jimmie Tarleton and Frank Hutchison provide evidence that white musicians appropriated black music elements within the hillbilly context. Jimmie Davis's early blues recordings were ignored in the later revision of his commercial and political image. With the growth of audiences for Southern music forms prior to World War II, manipulation by the recording industry defined string band music as white, while the blues became identified as black music. Only Jimmie Rodgers, who successfully utilized African-American music elements, rose above the commercial
exigencies of the time (although his collaboration with Louis Armstrong was not widely advertised). In truth, Rodgers is one in a long line of exchange between Anglo and African musicians and between folk and commercial forms of music. While scholars such as Bill Malone have called attention to this significant exchange, popular notions of hillbilly music continue to identify it as a white Southern phenomenon. Malone writes, "Nowhere is the peculiar love-hate relationship that has prevailed among Southern races more evidenced than in country music" (1985:4). The ideological forces which have obstructed an understanding of this exchange have contributed to a lack of understanding for a similar exchange between North and South.

Thus, two forces operated to create an image of white-performed folk music—what was to become country music—as a product of peculiar transformation undergone only by the Anglo-American folk music of the South. For scholars, the basis of this distinctive transformation lies in the close association between Euro-American music and African-American music in the South. Even before scholars or commercial interests deigned to notice white folk music, the music of African Americans attracted attention as an exotic and "pure" form of folk music. The success of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" convinced music business executives that a market for "race" music existed and opened the door for the commercial exploitation of Southern music. Representatives of recording companies, like early folklorists, then mined the South for more "authentic" and marketable music and also discovered the potential for a "hillbilly" market. But scholars were much more willing to accept commercial music by African Americans as "folk" than they were to bestow the same significance on recorded hillbilly music. Not until D. K. Wilgus's comprehensive review, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (1959), was the relationship between commercial hillbilly and rural Southern folk music given serious consideration.
Arguing for a broader definition of Anglo-American folk music, Wilgus took issue with two arguments used to exclude hillbilly music from scholarly discussions. The first excluded hillbilly music because of its associated commercial context, and the second held that the non-traditional content of recorded hillbilly music banished it from the folk pantheon. The first charge can be dismissed because the nineteenth-century vernacular music and the older European traditions accepted as "folk," both of which contributed to hillbilly music, had never existed as pure products of an isolated peasantry. It became increasingly apparent that ballads long regarded as "folk" had always depended on an interrelationship with print and professional performance. In an analysis of the continuities between style and theme in Anglo-American balladry and country music, Philip Nusbaum remarks that "it can be said that print--and other media--can alter the mode of transmission, but there is nothing inherent in the media that would disrupt the notions on how an aesthetically pleasing song is constructed" (1974:17). The commercial medium of hillbilly music could not be a factor for excluding it as folk music. Commercial performance was part of the continuous development of rural folk music, and Wilgus captures the essence of this continuity, referring to records and radio as "modern broadsides" (1959:258).

The rejection of hillbilly music because of its non-traditional content also fails to maintain a consistent attitude toward folk culture. Folklorists and historians now realize that hillbilly music, like other "folk" music, is perpetuated within a community sharing esoteric values; and, therefore, the process should be more relevant than the content. Repudiating the demand for purity in the folk repertoire, Robert Cogswell suggests that vital folk traditions depend on a process of exchange between commercial and traditional sources. He writes that "description of process in folk art must begin with consideration of the relationship between the individual artist and the tradition as a whole" (1973:66). Bill Malone sketches the outlines of this process and writes, "The musical interchange among the
lower social strata of the South, black and white, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, British and continental European, did not represent solely a folk process. Nor did a cultural vacuum exist. The Southern folk, of whatever description, heard music from both popular and cultivated sources, and such music was sometimes absorbed or reshaped by them" (1979:10). With this exchange process of the South in mind, the question of whether a similar process occurred in the transformation of Northern folk music to resemble commercial country music must be addressed. The definition cited by Wilgus is important for much of this discussion:

**Hillbilly**: 1. Of or pertaining to commercialized folk or folkish songs. . . largely derived from or aimed at white culture of the southern United States, beginning in 1923. 2. Of or pertaining to that style—a blend of Anglo-Irish-Negro folksong and American popular song--on which the commercial tradition was based and developed (1959:433).

Though Wilgus points out in his discussion that such a "tradition" merited attention from folklorists, his first definition reinforces the conception of a unique body of music emanating solely from the peculiar Southern environment. There can be no doubt that an important process of syncretism between many styles of music--folk, popular, and elite--did occur in the South. The most important exchange between white and black musics occurred by a process of borrowing, adapting, and reabsorbing musical elements across regional and class lines. Malone summarizes the process, "Above all, the close and often intimate relationship between Africans and poor white southerners gave 'southern music' a distinctiveness which set it apart from music in other regions of the United States" (1985:418). This distinctiveness and subsequent impact on American music emphasizes the commercial tradition of country music. Malone writes, "British folk culture of course came to all regions of English-speaking North America, and pockets of tradition still persist in such places as rural New England and Canada's Maritime Provinces. It was only in the southern United States, though, that dynamic folk cultural expressions, black and white,
evolved into viable commercial forms in our own time" (1985:1). Thus, the stress on the former portion of Wilgus’s first definition, a reliance on commercial artifacts available for study, and an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Southern society (which, we have seen, was effectively manipulated by commercial interests) has obscured the breadth of syncretism which occurred in other areas of the country. The musical products of other regional folk cultures also served the same contextual function of local, rural entertainment. Wilgus’s second definition suggests the broad, cross-regional manifestations of regional variations which express folk group identity.

Wilgus re-addressed this point in a special issue of the Journal of American Folklore and concludes, "That hillbilly music is a phenomenon solely of the South in general and of the Southern Appalachians in particular is a myth in the best sense of the word. The myth has its factual basis. . . . Its manifestation was of the South; its essence was of rural America" (1965:196). Yet both scholarly and popular notions of the Southern origins of country music have persisted. Billboard magazine applied the agrarian metaphor to describe the phenomenon: "The original roots are in the old country, and were transplanted to the Southern mountains and hills by the early settlers. . . . But these roots found fertile soil in the hills of Tennessee, the Carolinas, Virginia, and Kentucky, and the different European influences were merged with local musical forms and themes, producing a culture truly indigenous or native to the soil" (1963:21). Employing the same metaphor in Country Roots, Douglas Green suggests that modernization from the North altered the folk music of the South: "Particularly in the rugged and inhospitable Appalachians, virtually untouched by passing centuries until the turn of this century, when ‘progress,’ in the mixed blessings of railroads and coal mines, came to the isolated dales and hollows of the mountains" (1976:8). The problem with both of these descriptions of process is the disregard for a similar pattern of transformation in other sections of the country as well.
During the 1970s, a sometimes heated debate addressed the issue of Northern country music without resolution. In upstate New York, Roderick Roberts and Simon Bronner described a country music tradition which, because of the predilection of scholars for Southern music they suggested, had remained "a well-kept secret." Bronner says of his findings, "It was not exactly country music, because the tunes and the styles that the musicians used typically predated the development of country music. It was probably best called old-time music. Indeed, this was the name given to the music by newspapers after the turn of the century" (1987:xiii). For Bronner, this is to say that forms of music which have been attributed primarily to the Southern tradition also had an independent existence in the Northeast. Roberts offers further evidence, "Our field research efforts were revealing an extremely rich musical tradition interwoven with every familial, occupational, and community event. . . . it was laden with items from the country music tradition" (1978:25). In the revised edition of Country Music, U.S.A., Malone acknowledges the "pockets of tradition" of other regions, but he asserts, "While recognizing that commercial country music now has a following around the world and that rural-derived forms of music still show strength in various areas of the nation, I nonetheless remain convinced that country music has always received its most fervent support . . . in the region extending southwestward from Virginia to Texas" (1985:418). Country music scholar Richard Spottswood responded more critically to Bronner and Roberts: "I also question the emphasis on New York state reflected in two other articles, which continue the pattern of looking back over the shoulder to a graduate school and claim (wrongly, I think) that the music of their area is more than a second cousin to country music; it has had no influence beyond its own locale, and there just isn't much reason to take it seriously on aesthetic or artistic grounds" (1978:2).
While Spottswood’s critique seems less than objective, Malone’s contention has merit in that he accepts the continuities of tradition in the Northeast but maintains that country music follows Wilgus’s first definition of hillbilly music as the commercial tradition which developed from folk forms. Where Bronner and Roberts misstep is their failure to indicate clearly that they are addressing a regional tradition, rather than the commercial tradition of country music. They also neglect to account for the very real and influential effects of Southern commercial music on the local music of New York. Although they mention the earlier work conducted by Henry Glassie in the area, they do not refer to evidence presented by Glassie that Southern music affected the traditional style of New York.

Contrasting the country music style of Dorrance Weir with the older, vernacular style of Pop Weir, Glassie tells us, "The Southern musician, Dorrance said, had more leisure time than their New York counterparts and were, therefore, more creative; the first Southern music he heard was very exciting. He feels that he plays and sings in a Southern style" (1970:35). Nonetheless, this exchange with Southern music should not prevent local country music traditions from being taken seriously "on aesthetic or artistic grounds," as Spottswood suggests. The processes of exchange are a regular part of the folk tradition—Northern and Southern—and it is this process which should be examined by folklorists. As Glassie explains, "The Country music which Dorrance and his friends like is not totally unlike the old New York tradition (both share in the regularity of Anglo-American folk music) and, while its texts and tunes are not those of the old tradition, it has been inserted into the same slot in culture: it functions in the same manner providing dance music for young people, entertainment for their elders, an aesthetic outlet for the manly male, and a means to local prestige" (1970:41).

Much of the misunderstanding in this debate arises from two academic problems. The first involves the futility of locating the origins of musical style in place or time.
Malone acknowledges the indeterminate quality of folk sources, stating that "if one looks for purity in the music of the South, the search will be in vain" (1979:4). While examples of the folk repertoire may sometimes be attributed to specific authors, the very conception of folk music as a dynamic process precludes the assignment of stylistic traits to anything but the mythic past. We cannot know anything definite about cultural origins, especially in our "hall of mirrors." Patterns of performance may, however, be examined for clues on which to base educated guesses. As Philip Bohlman writes concerning our need to understand folk music processes, "The persistent pursuit of origins belies the inability to 'know anything definite'" (1988:2). Further study of country music in the Northeast can, therefore, contribute to the understanding of the folk process without claiming that music styles originated among the folk of the region. This concern relates to the second problem facing scholars—the urge to locate folk cultural traits within a distinctive group-place boundary.

Folklore has long been studied, both implicitly and explicitly, in the context of a distinctive social base, and, indeed, the concept of the folk group is inseparable from that of folklore. In the past, folklore was often assumed to arise from a social group’s relationship to a geographic area. In addition to this regional assumption, four other kinds of group identity have been recognized as primary factors in the shaping of folklore—ethnicity, occupation, age, and gender. What has remained rather implicit until recent years is the privileging of one level of identity over another in analyzing folklore. Folk music was studied as an expression of region, ethnicity, or occupation, but rarely as a complex mixture of the five group identities. Furthermore, folk groups were conceived of as unified and homogeneous entities, especially the place-bound folk group which also depended on isolation for the maintenance of traditions and regional identity. Folklore, therefore, changed slowly because relatively little was absorbed from outside of the region. The South, it has been noted, was never an example of this type of idealized folk group, and the
vernacular music of this region developed in fascinating ways. Neil Rosenberg reinforces the notion that no region is either isolated or homogeneous. He comments upon the underlying diversity within an area assumed to be homogeneous: "Outsiders frequently view Atlantic Canada as a homogeneous mixture of settlers from France, England, Ireland, and Scotland. Actually, there are significant differences between provinces, between regions within provinces, and even between communities within regions" (1980:48).

Rosenberg’s observation points to many of the problems confronting folk music research in modern regions. His interest in the folk music of the Canadian Maritimes is especially relevant to issues concerning the manipulation of symbol and image in the construction of regional identity and in academic models of folk regions. Taking note of the parallel images of Atlantic Canada and the southern Appalachians—both as quaint, pure, isolated, and beautiful—Rosenberg reflects, "I became aware of the symbolic uses of folklore and observed how it became a factor in what is called 'regionalism,' but what might as well be called regional nationalism" (1980:47). This folklorist’s approach to regional culture and country music suggests a useful model for analyzing the appropriation of commercial images and musical styles in the creation and maintenance of a regional identity. These identities prove to be complex and dynamic. For much of the history of folk music study, region and folk music were presumed to exist in a one-to-one relationship—the distinctive product of a homogeneous, place-bound group of people. Before Rosenberg’s model can be fully appreciated, a summary of these early approaches to regional folk culture must be undertaken.
CHAPTER II: Folklore and Folklore Regions

Much of the debate over the relationship between country music and regional folk groups arises from entrenched notions that folklore dies out when confronted with changing social conditions. Repeated laments over the demise of traditional music under siege from the modern world can still be heard from country music scholars and fans alike who fear "over-commercialization." Ironically, the same fears were expressed when traditional ballad forms began giving way to recorded hillbilly music in the early part of this century. The English ballads were particularly treasured because they exemplified folklorists' belief that isolated regions had withstood the forces of modernization. These isolated regions were, in turn, valued for their distinctive forms of cultural expression. Conversely, modern social conditions threatened the isolation which perpetuated these distinctive cultural expressions.

In recognizing that folklore does not die, but rather changes or becomes transformed in the modern world, the question facing folklorists is what happens to group identities based on a significant relationship with a geographic place?

From a theoretical standpoint, it is tempting to renounce the assumption that geographically defined culture forms a basis for a distinctive body of folklore. The assumption rests heavily on a belief that folklore is shaped by a group experience in direct contact with a specific geographic location. Following from the assumption, we say that group identity, as expressed in folklore, reflects this "sense of place" (Allen 1990). The inherent ambiguity of the regional concept is a reflexive paradigm in which distinctive folklore delineates a region, and a distinctive geographic region creates a special folklore
(Green 1978). Furthermore, geographic areas prove infinitely divisible by other group-place identities (e.g., ethnicity and sub-regions), and no two cultural traits have equivalent geographic distributions (Jordan 1992). Finally, regional observations without direct comparison to other regional folklore can produce conflicting images of the music of a folk region. Confusion about regional characteristics occurs when folk music scholars codify clever but contradictory observations, such as Alan Lomax's statement that "the South is more British than Britain" (1960:xvi), while also calling attention to the preponderance of British ballads in the Northeast (1960:4).

Nonetheless, the concept of region carries the force of intuitive truth, and its indisputable use in everyday life as a basic social category makes a persuasive case for continuing to employ the region for analyzing folklore. How else can we process the reasonable notion that the South is different from the Northeast? The call for a regional theory of folklore (Dorson 1959; Green 1978) has thus far gone unrealized. The tendency has remained to delineate the products of regional folklore, rather than to examine the processes of interplay between group identities and the folklore of regions. In terms of folk music, the goal in this chapter is to synthesize a reasonable model in which product and process mediate and adapt to dynamic group identities in changing social conditions. This model will be focused focus less upon the notion of a distinctive cultural core than upon dynamic cultural boundaries, where modernization and technology hasten, respond to, and dampen the effects of changing social structures and group identities.

The assumed link between geography and cultural expression has deep roots in the folklore genealogy. Romantic nationalism was inextricably bound to Herder's conception of folklore, a phenomenon which he views "as a spring derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavor from the soil through which it flows, so the ancient characters of nations arose from family traits, from the climate, from the way of life and
education, from the early transactions and deeds peculiar to them” (quoted in Wilson 1973:822). The early conceptions of folklore were decidedly pastoral. The same impulse leading to an idealization of an older, simpler way of life also led to early folk music scholarship from a literary perspective which sought only the remnants of Anglo-Saxon balladry as expressions of this fading way of life. Clearly, regional folklore scholarship lacked a firm basis for explaining the type of cultural exchange which led to the development of country music. While literary folklorists focused on survivals of the European heritage among illiterate transplants as part of an idealized and static folk culture in America, anthropological folklorists turned their attention to the oral traditions of primitive, non-literate peoples. Following Malinowski, anthropologists began to relate the functional significance of folklore to the specific culture and environment in which certain cultural expressions were maintained.

In the case of music, "unsophisticated" music reflected the social structure of "primitive" groups which must remain closed and isolated in order for traditional expressions to be perpetuated. Folk music was not only group-specific, but also place-specific. At the same time, literary folklorists came to recognize that many Euro-American groups were creating their own folk music (most often, the interest lay in American ballads which followed British models). The leap to explaining how this native folk music functioned within isolated Euro-American groups was all that was needed to link folklore to specific regions in America. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century then, folklore scholarship remained bound to the notion that folk music depended upon rural isolation and homogeneity for both its vigor and its distinctiveness (Bohlman 1988:53). Although a great deal of folk music has been collected on a nominally regional basis, the preoccupation with texts, rather than performance, often limited folk music scholarship to a
static view of regions and group identity. Interchange between regional cultures was viewed as destructive of song texts and anathema to folklore regions.

To a great extent, Richard Dorson's call for a theory of regional folklore maintained a pastoral and reactionary tone. While complaining about earlier regional orientations as "provincial" and "motivated chiefly by convenience and emotional identification with a locality," Dorson also speaks of regions as "shadowy pockets" where "all the people share the same folk tradition" (1959:210). Dorson's own emotional identification with isolated culture groups and his narrow view of folklore as creative expressions untainted by modernization leads to his assertion that regional folklore pockets "stand in contrast to the general American mass culture of urbanization, industrialization, and other-direction" (1959:210). Examples of regional folk cultures discussed by Dorson exhibit a further problem of confusing other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, and occupation with region as the basis of group identity (Jones 1976:107).

Under these models of region, country music was regarded as the destroyer of folk traditions. The possible transformation of local music styles in response to cross-regional contact and adaptations of mass media disseminated music were regarded with horror and served as raison d'être for folklorists. David Whisnant describes the efforts of early folk festival organizers who sought to revive the older ballads and maintained that "‘We must learn to discriminate. . . between the cheap hillbilly type and that which has true musical or literary worth’" (quoted in Whisnant 1983:228). Likewise, with this narrow conception of regional folklore, the transformation undergone by traditional music in the Northeast, as it adopted useful elements of Southern country music, could be viewed as the destruction of folk music in the region. Other disciplines have struggled with similar theoretical problems in regard to regionalism. Geographers, linguists, sociologists, historians, and literary scholars have all faced an inability to pin down the concept of region. The problem, as
stated by Merrill Jensen, reporting on an interdisciplinary conference on regionalism, is that "the concept of 'region' meant different things to different academic disciplines, to administrators of state and federal governments, and to executives of great industrial and financial organizations. In other words, the nature of a 'region' varies with the needs, purposes, and standards of those using the concept" (1951:vii). Confronting many of the same problems as those faced by the folklorist, historians and other social scientists trace the concept of region to historical patterns and practical usage by government. Of course, the great division of the country during the Civil War took the shape of a sectional conflict--the "regional" implications of which still dominate the framework for folk music scholars. The development of the federal decennial census based upon subdivisions of the states entrenched the notion of section for planners and government departments. Well into the twentieth century, the link between humans and geography appeared as "a natural division," but the framework remained unsatisfactory for helping scholars and planners to speak about the same thing (Mood 1951).

Such is the background for employment of the regional concept into the middle of the present century. Social sciences, guided by pragmatic uses of the concept in government and economics, explained history and current social conditions according to the perceived natural development of geographically-bound social institutions. Folklorists, inspired by romantic nationalism, sought to find pure artistic expressions of cultural areas according to the perceived natural conditions of a place-bound society, where a homogeneous culture found expression through the various genres of folklore. It was assumed, therefore, that patterns of folk music would reveal a spatial distribution which might be charted as part of a regional folklore map. Origins of musical traits could then be determined according to their concentration and dissemination, and explanations might be offered for the development of regions which influenced the music of other places.
Although folklorists carried the torch of regionalism throughout the middle part of the
century, the existing models proved unsatisfactory as long as folklore depended upon a
homogeneous, place-bound culture. Beginning in the 1930s, regional scholarship took on a
new, interdisciplinary focus. In folk studies, B.A. Botkin mixed politics, folklore, and
artistic license as head of the Federal Writers Project and argued that folklore and
regionalism were ongoing processes in modernity (Hirsch 1987). Howard Odum, a
sociologist inspired by the Agrarian movement in Southern literature, advocated an
interdisciplinary regional approach to public planning as a combative scheme against
sectionalism and localism (Odum and Moore 1938). A 1949 conference at the University
of Wisconsin marked a recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of regional studies and
called attention to many of the contradictions inherent in the concept. In the collection of
essays derived from the conference, the model of region as a concrete and homogeneous
cultural group is dismissed in favor of a dynamic model which accepted regions as
convenient, but abstract, categories containing within them the simultaneous notion of
separation and a unified whole. Also addressed in the essays is the notion that regions and
the self-conscious use of symbols related to them serve as a revolt against a monolithic
American culture (Jensen 1951).

Long a foundation of geography, the regional concept received abundant treatment
during the 1950s and 1960s. With unbounded vigor and new "scientific" methods, cultural
geographers set out to describe the boundaries of American regions, based on the
distribution of cultural traits. Such "formal regions" were quickly discovered to be rather
imprecise and dependent upon the subjective criteria of the researcher (Jordan 1992). Not
to be discouraged, cultural geographers such as Wilbur Zelinsky, devised revolutionary
methods for overcoming academic abstraction and subjectivity by going straight to the
source of the regional models—the folk. These so-called "vernacular regions" depended
upon the "condition of self-awareness on the part of participants" (Zelinsky 1973:112). This recognition of self-consciousness meshed with the folklorist's idea that folklore contained within it an affirmation of group identity. As stated by Zelinsky, the new regional approach insisted "that if self-consciousness is lacking (and it will suffice if it is present only at the subliminal level), then we are examining something other than a genuine culture area" (1973:112-113).

Similar ideas have developed in the realm of folkloristics. The growing interest in material culture studies during the 1960s shifted the view of the region away from the folklore item toward the influence of environment on folklore. Further development of this viewpoint resulted from the concerns of performance and contextual studies in the following decade. This movement culminated in Suzi Jones's landmark essay describing the process of "regionalization." In this model, the relationship between lore and region is not axiomatic, but, occurs rather as a rhetorical strategy for dynamic group identities. While folk groups could be defined by a number of factors, Jones announced, "there are instances where people share a body of folklore because they live in a certain geographical area; their geographical location is the primary basis for a shared identity that is expressed in their lore, and they themselves are conscious of their regional identity" (1976:107). The unresolved problem with "regionalization" is the continued use of a reflexive notion in which a distinctive folklore defines a distinctive region, creating a circular definition. Examining the perception of Appalachia as a unique culture, Allen Batteau suggests that a combination of "shared misunderstandings" creates the special stereotypes and self-consciousness constituting a regional culture. Thus, regional culture must be defined "beyond descriptive uniqueness," with a view of modern culture groups as historically and politically manipulated webs of "negotiated identities" (1980:13).
The past decade has witnessed a growing awareness that any discussion of regional culture must account for the manipulation of individual and group identities. The old model of region, focusing on the expressions of a cultural core, remains relevant only for extremely isolated groups. In regional cultures which Zelinsky has termed "traditional," the foundation of the group identity derived from a cultural core, and isolation kept change originating from boundaries or other cultural cores in check. As Philip Bohlman has summarized, early folk music scholarship could study a situation where "folk music encapsulated the cultural core before society complicated it" (1988:54). The maintenance of theories appropriate for this type of culture has hindered the development of theories which can account for change that accompanies shifting group identities in modern regions. As cultural boundaries have become more permeable, mediated by technology and mass communications, cultural boundaries and change must replace isolated, conservative cultural cores as the focus of folk music scholarship. Bohlman tells us, "Contemporary theory asserts that the identity that shapes groups and generates folklore may be both shared and differential, that is, derived from both core and boundary, similarities and differences" (1988:58). In the end, we may well find that increased contact along cultural borders diminishes the impact of place-bound cultural cores on local music, yet this fact does not diminish the role that folk music plays in maintaining group identity and aiding individual adaptation to the modern world.

Even in cases of relatively conservative place-group local cultures, issues of alternative group-based identities complicate the analysis of folklore and identity. Ellen Badone, in a convincing examination of local identities in rural Brittany, found that group identities co-exist on multiple levels of both vertical and horizontal planes, encompassing both ethnic and regional identities. Within both individuals and the whole area, multiple boundaries distinguish national, regional, and sub-regional identities down to levels of
community, occupation, and family. Badone argues that, "identity needs to be conceptualized in terms of a series of nested local, regional, and national levels" (1987:186). The individual identities available in Brittany interact on a variety of levels in a discourse across group boundaries, reinforcing and redefining certain ethical norms and values through a process of stereotype and contrast (1987:168). Thus, the regional identity is nearly inseparable from multiple identities which interact within the regional context. In a similar manner, John Coggeshall observed the persistence of ethnic identities often at odds with the regional in southern Illinois' Egypt (1990). The question arises then, can we speak of regional folklore as an expression of a distinctive, homogeneous culture apart from other group-related factors? In their collection of essays examining Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life (1991), Stephen Stern and John Cicala suggest a negative answer. In the modern world, the editors contend, group identity is a dynamic and rhetorical personal strategy reflecting diversity rather than homogeneity. Stern writes that "a certain ambiguity exists regarding ethnic versus regional culture, but these two categories of cultural expression need not be mutually exclusive; rather, the separate identities, existing as they do at different levels of organization, are seldom in conflict" (17).

That image and stereotype have vast impacts on regional identities is not surprising to folk music scholars whose subject has long interacted with commercial music. Blues scholar William Ferris asserts that these effects bleed over into scholarship, and many of the images embraced by scholars return to influence cultural categories of everyday life (1992:6). Neil Rosenberg observes further that the extensive interest of folklorists in the regional folksong of the Canadian Maritimes has created an identity and self-consciousness that these provinces are "poorer but prouder" than their continental neighbors (1978:3). In many ways, folklore becomes a commodified expression of group identity, and recent scholars have noted the diverse ways in which symbol and image have shaped regional culture from
inside as well as out (Whisnant 1983; Batteau 1980). Finally, we must account for the interplay of non-academic models of region which affect everyday life--from college athletic conferences to labels of popular music styles. Robert Palmer, whose work on the blues traditions of the South has brought both academic understanding and changes in local attitudes toward the tradition, comments, "When I first got involved in studying the blues in the South, a lot of people of every race were faintly embarrassed by it, and a lot of people in the black community were trying to forget it--it was a music associated with slavery and economic exploitation. Now the blues is a lot more acceptable. . . . It's even become a form of local boosterism" (1992:30).

Because of the profound effects of image and stereotype on regional identity, along with the compound levels of group identity, folk music can no longer be considered in a simple one-to-one relationship with geographic locations. Instead of further reifying the concept of region and attempting to pin down the origins of musical style, I suggest underlining the unavoidable contradictions which accompany any discussion of an abstract category (indeed, this discussion involves the doubly abstract notion of "regional folk music"). What is needed, rather than an additional definition of region, is an approach which aids in comparing cultural expressions across several places. We need a holistic model which accounts for syncretism and acculturation, allowing for both unity and diversity within a culture area. Philip Bohlman's application of dialectics to the study of folk music incorporates many of the best perspectives on the region and folk music, embracing text and context, tradition and change, and the exchanges between cultural cores and boundaries. The following addresses the development of a flexible model for group identity and folk music.

The settling dust of the text/context war which dominated folklore debates of the 1970s did not obscure either of the two fundamental positions. Currently, the importance of
both text and context are recognized as integral aspects of the same abstract concept--folklore. What remains is the tacit assumption that the two qualities exist as a binary pair encompassing stasis and change, product and process, group and individual. As the dynamic quality of folklore has come to be accepted, so must dynamic approaches to music. Bohlman writes, "Dialectic has an essentially dynamic quality, and I mean it here to serve as a metaphor for ongoing and continuous change" (1988:xviii). In this approach, the social base of folklore is less dependent on group-place associations than on a relationship between cultural expressions and group identity. This identity derives from individual and group exchange across cultural cores and boundaries. The interplay between this binary opposition occurs during the process of folklore performance, often mediated by advanced forms of technology. Isolation can no longer be recognized as an essential factor in the maintenance of group identity, and Bohlman compares the exchange of music to the commerce of a Middle Eastern bazaar, where "the musical life of the bazaar continues to allow diverse--one could say disparate--musical behaviors and repertories that persist because of their relation to each other and the context of the urban marketplace. They may continue as subcultures, but not as subcultures dependent on some form of isolation" (1988:123). The local performance of country music is, therefore, both a part of the exchange across cultural boundaries and an expression of aesthetic values and group identity emanating from the cultural core. Shared identity functions to create shared music, but interaction between the core and boundary results in an identity and music style that is constantly in flux. Bohlman says, "The geographic basis of folklore has not disappeared, but it has effectively migrated from rural to urban models, from simple to complex settings" (1988:67).

Because folk music, as much as any form of folklore, depends upon an idealized social base for its perpetuation, the changing context of the modern world has raised questions about its continued existence in the modern world. Ideal social bases are now less
definable as isolated cultural cores which create unified expressions and art. And while
country music has become an acceptable subject of study for folklorists, elevated (or
lowered) to an appropriate cultural level as a folk product, there remains confusion about
how to deal with the processes of change in a decidedly non-folk context. Cultural
geographiers such as Wilbur Zelinsky and Terry Jordan provide a useful vocabulary for
conceptualizing modern regions. In outlining "The Changing Character of North American
Culture Areas," Zelinsky remarks, "My subject thus becomes a set of places, each of
intermediate magnitude and inhabited by a substantial number of persons, occupying a fairly
extensive patch of real estate, each characterized by a real or imagined set of cultural traits
specific to the community that set it apart from other such areas near or far. . . . But I
would add one crucial stipulation: that there be an actual, or at least latent, awareness on the
part of the inhabitants of their peculiar identity" (1992:113).

The ability of a discipline bent on scientific models of spatial distribution to accept the
abstract nature of a concept basic to their study should serve as a model for an
interdisciplinary approach to region. Terry Jordan comments upon this contemporary
approach which, "...for all its shortcomings and potential traps, offers a useful and
valuable way to come to grips with the chaotic world." The traps which must be avoided
are the narrow concerns of folk nationalists. But it is equally a trap to give in to
meaninglessness and say we have no way of speaking of place and culture. Jordan adds that
"classification is one way to combat chaos; by assuming abstract constructs to approximate
reality, we might process an unmanageable amount of information and create avenues for
better understanding. . . . Whatever regional classification you devise must be designed for
a particular purpose. There is no 'best' regional classification" (1992:11, italics his). An
interdisciplinary approach to regional studies, utilizing the methods of folklore, history, and
cultural geography, promises one system of classification which addresses the changing nature of regional folk music.

Although the shortcomings of viewing regional folklore in terms of the rural-homogeneous model have been emphasized earlier in this chapter, it is now time to reveal the certain amount of truth contained within the construct. Zelinsky classifies these older types of regions, where cultures are "relatively self-contained, endogamous, stable, and of long duration" as "traditional regions" (1973:110). For the most part, this accounts for all pre-modern cultures which held the attention of folklorists. Folk music in isolated areas of North America—the type idealized by past folklorists—need not have been completely "pure," but it maintained a relatively fixed nature over an extended time. Zelinsky says, "It would not be unfair to characterize such a traditional region as one based upon blood and soil. In the extreme, it becomes synonymous with a particular tribe or ethnic group" (1973:111). Zelinsky's second type of culture area, "the voluntary region, is still emergent, hence not clearly recognized . . . . Our thesis is that the traditional spatial and social allocation of individuals through the lottery of birth is being replaced gradually by a process of relative self-selection of life style, goals, social niche, and place of residence" (1973:111). This is the context in which we find modern country music. A transitional phase in this model has now been suggested by Zelinsky as a "latter-day traditional region" (1992:116). This type of region provides a model for the social basis in which country music became diffused throughout the nation. I suggest that latter-day traditional cultures obtained in both the South and the Northeast well into the twentieth century. There existed both shared and disparate aspects of each region's folk music. Because of increasing exchange across cultural boundaries, the two regions came to resemble each other in terms of rural music and group identity.
In agreement with the "nested" levels of identity described by Badone, William Lightfoot's approach to regional folksong in the Big Sandy area of eastern Kentucky suggests that folklore must be located within a "crucial sociocultural context" in order to understand its function. Lightfoot writes, "It is sometimes difficult to determine the pertinent sociocultural context of a folkloric event, because it may very well exist within a system of contextual concentric circles" (1983:185). Discovering that certain folk songs "exist" only at certain small group levels of the overlying pattern, Lightfoot recommends that an important step towards understanding exchange is by comparison of repertoires across folk regions. Neil Rosenberg concurs, but he stresses the need to study the shared as well as the unique; he explains, "There is a danger that in seeking to establish regional identity we will fail to see those factors which connect us to other regions. . . . Regionalism is, like ethnicity, only one aspect of an individual's repertoire or self-perception" (1980:49).

By way of explaining the interplay of folk music styles of the South and Northeast, it is necessary to both define the factors which constitute regional self-consciousness and to describe the shared aspects as well as the differential. The next task is to examine the process of adaptation which makes country music--a folk style emanating from a Southern cultural core and absorbed across cultural boundaries in the Northeast--an expression of regional identity in Maine. As Lightfoot encourages, developmental processes of a folk music performance, in this case, country music performance in the Northeast, should be compared in the various regions as manifestations of the same musical style. Thus far, only Rosenberg has offered a truly useful model for addressing the creation, adaptation, and changes of country music styles across cultural boundaries. He indicates five factors which mediate between an indigenous style of country music and the commercial national form that feeds into it:
1) a conservative factor which demands that the country music repertoire be largely familiar in content; 2) preferences for vocal and instrumental styles are derived from or influenced by regional folk performance styles; 3) "live" country music shows reflect regional culture and folklore in their specific content and general structure; 4) new elements of style or repertoire are introduced into the region by local country music celebrities--"stars" and disc jockeys; 5) regional country music not only subsumes local folk repertoire but also adds to it. (1974:77)

Although Rosenberg's model is primarily concerned with country music in the Canadian Maritimes and suggests that exchanges between folk and commercial music there have occurred mainly since 1920, it is highly appropriate for the consideration of music and social developments in the northeastern part of the United States. Many of the same factors have operated in both regions, probably from the time the people there could be considered to have had an indigenous music.
CHAPTER III: Music and Society of the Region

In the previous two chapters, I have reviewed the scholarship on country music as it relates to folk culture and regional identity. Although this scholarship identifies country music as a commercial product derived from Southern folk music, I have suggested that the same processes of cultural exchange operating in the South also transformed the vernacular music of the Northeast. Following Rosenberg and Bohlman, I contend that local music style and repertoire need not have originated in a region in order for it to play a significant role in regional identity. Rosenberg offers a model by which country music maintains a connection to local music traditions while absorbing elements of commercial country music. I now turn to an examination of vernacular music in Maine as part of a dynamic regional culture, constantly shifting within a system of concentric and overlapping areas. In support of my contention that country music maintains a continuing relationship with regional folk culture, I will first compare the regional self-consciousness and social conditions of the Northeast and South. I will then survey Maine's vernacular music culture and outline the development of a local country music industry. With Lightfoot's model of concentric culture areas in mind, I now propose that Maine be considered a special case of rural New England, exhibiting both shared and unique qualities in comparison to other rural regions in the United States.

The cultural area including Maine has long been recognized as a distinctive region, variously known as New England or the Northeast (Peirce 1976:23). From the time of
European settlement, New England represented both the slow change and entrenchment of Old World stock preserving its culture in a new land, as well as the future progress and industrial ferment suggested in the compound name. In many ways, it exemplifies Zelinsky’s "latter-day traditional region," where "New England’s Puritan-Yankee stock remained virtually undiluted, permitting the development of a remarkably homogeneous culture" (Peirce 1976:17). Throughout the Colonial and National periods of the nation, the division of the country into North and South emphasized the Puritan-Yankee as sober and industrious sorts who dedicated precious little of their time to frivolity. But as a seat of worldwide commerce and industry, democratic government, and elite artistic achievement in a young nation, New England also symbolized the progressive and pluralistic region Zelinsky has labeled "voluntary." Beginning in the early nineteenth century, immigration from non-English European countries and from Canada contributed to an image of the Northeast as a melting pot. New England, for many, embodied the fundamental traits of America, and cultural missionaries were sent out from its colleges and universities to enlighten and uplift Appalachia and points west. Here we have the classic irony of cultural distinctiveness in America, whereby uniqueness is symbolically transformed into representativeness. In *American Regionalism*, Odum and Moore write, "For if ever there was a more ‘American’ region than the middle states, it would appear to be the great Northeast, commonly assumed to be the America of the Americas" (1938:492).

Defining the region is no less problematic than defining other regions. Odum and Moore delimited an inclusive area as "The Northeast," reflecting a preoccupation with social planning problems based on state lines and the persistence of a unique culture among the former slave states. For the purposes of folk music scholarship, Odum and Moore’s inclusion of the middle Atlantic states and West Virginia in the Northeast does not match the need for an intermediate region of self-awareness. Cultural geographers and sociologists,
such as Wilbur Zelinsky and Raymond Gastil, have recently tended toward more exclusive conceptions of the Northeast, agreeing on a core of six New England states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) with rural portions of New York and Pennsylvania added as peripheral parts of the region. Neal Peirce’s New England is even more exclusive, with the six states distinguished further according to their rural or urban character (1976:23). Finally, Joel Garreau’s journalistic approach in *The Nine Nations of North America* identifies “New England” as the area from Boston to the Maritime provinces. Wherever scholars choose to draw the boundaries of the Northeast, the region continues to symbolize both distinctiveness and representativeness. The prevailing image of the Yankee described above persists, lately summarized by Garreau as “self-reliance by self-denial” (1981:93). Conversely, Gastil notes, the myth of American origins begins and ends with Colonial New England (1975:150).

As much as in any other region, New England finds its identity in a self-consciousness and sense of place. Gastil comments that “only the South has the sense of regionality that New England has . . .” (154). Peirce quotes a Yale University study which suggests that “in tradition no area of the United States, other than perhaps the Old South, has been better known for uniqueness and self-consciousness” (24). Parallels between the South and the rural Northeast are echoed elsewhere. Simon Bronner shows that many of the social conditions prevalent in the South also obtained in central New York state. Citing Malone’s three cultural conditions which created a distinctive musical environment in the South, Bronner applies the same test to rural New York culture, finding:

1) a rural agricultural population comprised of White Protestant Anglo-Celtic inhabitants. 2) A basic isolation due to geographic factors, deficiencies in education, poverty, and lack of communication. 3) “. . . a commitment to and preservation of traditional cultural values,” summarized as a basic conservatism (1977:171).
Neil Rosenberg notes that the same factors existed in the Canadian Maritimes, adding comparisons of urban migration patterns and class identity as elements which further stimulated the development of rural-based folk music into a commercial performance tradition (1988:139). In general then, much of the Northeast maintained a rural character similar to the South’s foregrounding of basically Protestant British underpinnings (Gastil:138-54). These conditions inevitably resulted in a rural-urban musical exchange and a syncretization of ethnic and regional styles.

The focus of this thesis, rural Maine, provides even further comparisons in the remarks of commentators. The WPA guide to Maine, published in 1937, relates that "The common speech of Maine people is probably as nearly pure, in being free from corruptions and in retaining old forms in tact, as any of this country, with the possible exception of that of the Carolina and Kentucky mountaineers" (Westall 1937:78). In his extensive literary portrayals of rural Mainers, Robert Tristram Coffin declares, "All Kentucky mountaineers are not in Kentucky" (1947:63). In addition to noting that "just as in parts of Appalachia and the Ozarks, clear representations of Elizabethan English could be heard. . ." (367), Neil Peirce writes of Maine’s Washington County, "Together with hundreds of settlements throughout Maine’s ‘outback,’ [it] evidences an extreme frugality and scruffiness more reminiscent of Appalachia than pristine, picture book New England" (364). Finally, Charles Clark remarks in his Maine: A Bicentennial History, "In the rural areas of both, provincialism of speech, dress, and manner hangs on more stubbornly than in most parts of the nation. . . . Both regions are poorer than the nation at large, and both depend upon economies larger than their own, controlled from outside of their regions, for their survival" (1977:151). Though references to "Elizabethan speech" and stereotypes of mountaineers are admittedly crass generalizations, the underlying parallels work as images common in
everyday life. In terms of image and self-consciousness, the rural Northeast and the South have much in common.

In contrast to exoteric images of the Yankee as the puritanical industrialist of a land plagued by urbanization, the rustic Yankee image dominates the esoteric consciousness of New Englanders in both literature and music performance. Indeed, it was the bumpkin Yankee satirized by British loyalists which was taken up in defiance by rebel troops during the American Revolution. Literary portrayals of the nineteenth century captured the Yankee as "a man from the backwoods who applies the folk wisdom (and ignorance) and rude behavior of his native habitat the affairs of state" (Clark:87). Bronner describes many of the parallel images of Yankees and hillbillies in rural music from New York, in addition to an abundance of colloquial terms for the Yankee "bumpkin" and an extensive tradition of jokes depicting the Yankee in themes and motifs similar to the Southern hillbilly (1978:33-34). In Maine, the name "haymaker" indicates the stereotyped, backwards agriculturalist, while the phrase "herring choker" commonly refers to the rustic inhabitants of the coast. Philips H. Lord honored the native simplicity and goodness of rural Mainers on a syndicated radio show of the thirties titled "Sunday Evening at Seth Parker's." At least one local band on Bangor radio stations of the thirties also played upon the rustic Yankee image as a hillbilly of the Northern variety. Uncle Seth's Hillbillies seems to have been an eclectic band similar to those in New York described by Bronner, consisting of trombone, trumpet, fiddle, piano, jews harp, and bass fiddle. Although the hillbilly image did not survive in the developing western orientation of Maine's country music, there are plenty of indications that parallel images and symbols were available and subsequently manipulated in both the North and the South. Clark writes of the bumpkin identity, "Mainers had not only at last discovered their identity; they were enjoying it" (1977:90).
In addition to similarities between the Northeast and the South, distinctive aspects of New England culture surface in Maine as well. Unlike most other areas of the country, Native American groups in Maine were not completely removed or decimated, maintaining a fairly stable, if at times strained, relationship with Old World immigrants. Rural culture has also been steadily modified by elite influence from Boston and a steady influx of European immigrants, so that, until the middle part of this century, many communities remained bilingual. In nineteenth century Maine, the mixture of ethnic groups included not only recently arrived Irish and Scots, but also Swedish, Finnish, Polish, Italian, and Czechoslovakian groups (Westall 1937:75). Most important in distinguishing certain parts of the Northeast, there has been a significant exchange with French culture along the Canadian border. Maine and Vermont have benefitted particularly from this cultural input because the international border remained undefined until the middle of the nineteenth century. Maine’s French culture has expanded from original Acadian settlers in Madawaska on the St. John River, and French Protestants who settled along the Penobscot River, to a large number of French-Canadian laborers who immigrated well into the twentieth century. Zelinsky notes that a primary French-Catholic culture from early settlement distinguishes Maine and Vermont from their New England neighbors. Summarizing the situation, he says, "There is a major erosion of the cultural barrier along a single major segment of our international frontier. . . . There a vigorous demographic and cultural invasion by French Canadians from Quebec and New Brunswick has gone far to eradicating previous international differences" (113).

That the Northeast is both distinctive and representative fits the complex notion of region in the previous chapter. Then too, there exists a temptation to further divide the area into sub-regions. Maine has been recognized as a particularly rural example of New England, with further subdivisions within the state itself (Peirce:362-74). Residents I spoke
to refer to Washington County in the extreme southeast as "going down east," while far-off
Aroostook in the north is simply called "the county." These levels of regional culture
confirm Lightfoot's and Badone's notions of folklore regions as an infinite system of
concentric circles existing on multiple levels. In accepting this model, Maine can be
recognized as one level of Northeast culture and left at that. We should expect to find both
shared and distinctive cultural expressions within the state. In the realm of vernacular
music, there are reasons to classify characteristics with the Northeast, the Canadian
Maritimes, and even with the whole of rural North America. Country music and other
tradition-based popular music forms are little understood in terms of a regional context, and
Maine's country music is the subject of what follows.

Despite the lack of attention given to the region's twentieth century vernacular music,
traditional songs of an earlier period have been well-documented and analyzed. As with the
Southern mountains, early interest in Northeastern folk music centered upon the ballads
brought over from the old world. The collections of Phillips Barry, Fannie Eckstorm, and
Helen Hartness Flanders provide a wealth of evidence that ballad making and ballad singing
had a special place in New England culture. In the narrow search for the poetic heritage of
Anglo-American common folk, a greater variety of British ballads has been found in New
England than in any other area, with Maine leading the list in numbers of coveted Child
ballads (Beck 1962:31). While such data provides valuable insight into a limited portion of
the Northeast folk music foundation, we remain comparatively ignorant with regard to
interactions between the ballad tradition and instrumental, religious, and Tin Pan Alley
music in the Northeast. We are left to a few references, inferences, and outright guesses.

The Anglo-Celtic core of American folksong provides a starting point in which we
find both unity and distinctiveness of regional music. Though this foundation is easily
overemphasized, Zelinsky's "Doctrine of First Effective Establishment," by which cultural
traits develop from a foundation of the original European culture (1973:23), seems to agree with descriptions of folksong east of the Mississippi River. Alan Lomax suggests that much of the United States shares an Anglo-Celtic core of style and content in traditional song (1960:xvi). Likewise, in the area of rural fiddling, the Northeast as well as the South, derives much of its basis from traditional music of the British Isles (Wells 1978:2). Out of the shared cultural heritage developed a musical core which both facilitated exchange and served as a foundation for distinctive regional characteristics to take shape. Lomax’s summation that "the traditional ballads of the North-East are closer to British originals than those of the South, for contact with the British Isles has been constantly refreshed by new waves of immigrants, especially from Scotland and Ireland" (1), confirms a shared basis while also implying a difference.

Much of this expected distinctiveness relates to the unique aspects of Maine’s cultural history and location along a cultural boundary. Lomax writes, "In general, the North was an area of unaccompanied solo singing in a hard, clear tone, less pinched and nasal than that used in the Southern backwoods, and with a harsh unison on the refrains" (1). The nasal and pinched delivery of the Southern singer has long been noted as a characteristic which transferred to commercial, hillbilly music; therefore, the deeper, throaty delivery of the New Englander is a trait we might look for in the country music of the region. Horace Beck has argued that folksong in Maine shows a close affinity to that of the Maritime provinces. In addition to the unaccompanied, clear performance, Beck remarks upon the most distinguishing features of Maine ballad singing: the parlando rubato delivery and the declamando or spoken ending. Thus, cultural and geographic factors contribute to an affinity where ". . . no matter what river the boundary commissioners hit upon as the political limits of Maine, in terms of folksong it is in the Maritime family far more than the
New England one. Its role is that of a contributor rather than participant, donating its own and Canadian songs to the American songbag, while taking few in return" (1962:36).

It would be difficult to discuss folksong in Maine without some mention of occupational traditions which have attracted much attention, and which probably contributed to both assimilation and distinctiveness. Edward D. Ives’s works on the lumbercamp traditions remain unmatched in both thoroughness and theoretical relevance. Constantly reminding us that such things as "tradition" and "style" are convenient abstractions, Ives assures us that, "while most of the stylistic traits are common to all Anglo-American traditional singing, woods camp singing was different" (382). In addition to the unaccompanied, solo tradition with throaty voice, Ives notes three special aspects of woods singing. The first involves the special emphasis on "high voice," a trait which made the woods tradition particularly adaptable to ballad and commercial styles of singing in the South. The second aspect is the marked distinction between singer and audience in the performance situation of the woods camp. Ives remarks, "The singer’s part was to sing then, the audience’s part was to listen" (383). Finally, he suggests that woods singing was part of a male assembly tradition, in contrast to domestic amusements, primarily a female domain, and local assemblies which included both males and females in more refined styles (393-95). In transformation to modern, commercial contexts, these performance aspects have provided continuity with country music in Maine.

The isolated outposts which perpetuated this "tradition" probably maintained as stable a body of song and performance style as is possible into the twentieth century. But there were also examples of popular music and songs infiltrating the tradition, as Joe Scott, the subject of Ives’s best book so forcefully exemplifies. Ives concludes that "Joe drew his models from two sources or traditions, broadside balladry and late-nineteenth-century popular and sentimental song, and both kinds of songs were common in his world" (407).
Nor was woods camp entertainment limited to singing, and Ives notes that dancing and instrumental music were nearly equal components of the performance tradition. Often, anybody who could play or dance contributed to an evening’s relaxation (385). The contributions of various national groups also affected and altered the music of different camps. The Irish singing style was particularly influential, while performers of French heritage often sang in unison, instead of the Anglo solo style. Thus, even as stable a tradition as was woods camp balladry contained within it the seeds of change. As the social context of woods camps became less vital during the twentieth century, so too did the music style of the lumbermen. When country music replaced balladry at local assemblies, the newer styles both continued and diverged from the indigenous music of the woods camps.

In another realm of Northeastern folksong, the songs of the shanteymen, the tradition was neither as stable nor as distinctive, compared to the music of the lumbercamps. Exhaustively described by William Doerflinger, the tradition associated with the vast network of trade and industry on the seas exposed performers to a much larger body of music, and the style and content of many vernacular musics coalesced. While Doerflinger’s survey addresses the broad traditions of the whole northeastern coast, we can assume that Maine’s folk music was significantly affected by interaction along the coast. Most notably, the shantey tradition provided an important link to African and African-American music style in the early nineteenth century. Doerflinger writes that "This intermingling of white folk-song and shantey strains, particularly the English and Irish, with the traditional Negro work singing, greatly stimulated among all sailormen the custom of making and singing shanties, and strongly influenced the tone of shanteying in general from that time on" (1951:xii). Gene Hooper remembers hearing several common songs of this tradition, including "Hanging Johnny," which Doerflinger attributes to African-American sailors.
African-American influence did not end with the cultural exchange along the coast. Though the percentage of blacks in Maine has always been relatively small, there is evidence of influence from African-American music during the nineteenth century. Philips Barry provides substantial indication that camp meetings in the Northeast involved a mixture of black and white worship and music style, similar to the camp meetings of the South. Secular music was also imported from the South by African-Americans. From a fascinating account of a colony established for ex-slaves near Bangor we learn: "There was a mulatto among them, named Bob Williams, who taught the boys in town to yodel. He and Armstead Early were very fond of singing and made visits through the neighborhood to sing to the white people. Their songs were such as "Barb’ry Allen," "Nicodemus the Slave," and a variety of hymns" (Barry 1934:14). An awareness of this type of exchange continues to this day. Richard Orcutt of Jackson, Maine, relates that his mother’s side of the family was very musical: "She was French-Indian and sang beautifully. Her father was a fiddler, and I guess they had a lot of step-dancing back then. And if you’re looking for that Southern connection, his mother was a full-blooded negro--I’m sure there was a lot of music there" (interview, 3 August 1992). While this comment contains assumptions based on the cultural stereotypes common in central Maine, it indicates a possible avenue of syncretism, as well as the important image of modern, rural music as being somehow changed from the pure tradition of Anglo settlers.

During the nineteenth century then, a variety of musical imports contributed to the aural atmosphere, and ultimately changed the basic Anglo-Celtic core of folk music throughout the Northeast. In New York, Simon Bronner believes that rural music traditions were influenced by European ethnic music, as well as benefitting from African-American participation (1987:5-18). Neil Rosenberg also suggests that the Anglo core of music in the Maritimes was neither completely homogeneous nor static (1974). Rosenberg has since
taken a special interest in the employment of European traditional and commercial country
music by Afro-Canadians in the expression of regional and ethnic identities (1988). In
Maine, a variety of traditional ethnic musics have been adapted to a new environment. The
early settlement of certain areas by Irish and French immigrants have long established their
traditional music as sources on which Anglo performers might draw upon and also as
symbols of group identity within the ethnic groups. During the second half of the
nineteenth century, Scandinavian and Eastern European immigrants added to the influx of
musical ingredients. Thus, the traditional music of a variety of cultures has co-existed and
interacted across the boundaries of concentric culture areas for over a century.

To date, few scholars have attempted to explain either the effect that traditional
singing had upon the commercial music which developed in the region, or the process of
change which occurred during the integration of commercial and folk styles. The
explanation most readily offered is that hillbilly music of the South rapidly replaced the
vernacular traditions embedded in the woods and sea coasts (Ives 1978:384; Lomax 1960:1).
To be sure, the demise of local traditions resulted partly from this assimilation, but the
emphasis by scholars on the ballad and song tradition seems to have obscured peripheral,
but no less vernacular, traditions of instrumental and popular music. Maine, like the South,
was awash in a musical sea. From the earliest reports of music in Maine, people enjoyed,
celebrated, mourned, worshipped, and worked with whatever music was available. In such
a context, music styles were bound to mix across ethnic, regional, and class boundaries.

The most extensive study of documents concerning this interaction prior to the advent
of radio and recordings is George Thornton Edwards *Music and Musicians of Maine* ([1928]
1970). Though Edwards’s primary interest in "refined music" of trained musicians obscures
the local or everyday music not reported in diaries and newspapers, there remains a wealth
of primary information relevant to vernacular styles. What is known about colonial music
in Maine confirms our guess about a British core of music, as much of what is reported consists of the lining out of psalms and hymns in the Protestant churches. While more conservative communities limited their music to the type deemed appropriate for meeting houses, the more liberal places enjoyed composers, musicians, and singers of newer, secular songs. Edwards reports that both English ballads and French *complaintes* could be heard in these communities (30). Early histories indicate that French Catholics laid the foundation for written instrumental music while French Protestants perpetuated secular songs and music where they were otherwise frowned upon by Puritan communities. About 1800, a Frenchman constructed a fiddle in Bangor: "The wood was seasoned in the oven . . . the strings were made of the sinews of moose, and spruce gum was used in place of rosin. History does not record its use nor its fate, but it appears quite certain that it was not used in any of the churches of its day" (28).

Singing schools teaching harmony for modern hymns of Isaac Watts and others became widespread during the early nineteenth century. In isolated areas, the singing schools left behind a tradition later disdained by elite travelers. In 1848, Benjamin Foster commented on the "discordant harmony" he heard in a country church where the congregation sang "some old fugue--all male voices in a country style" (1975:111). Dancing schools, often conducted by itinerant musicians also became common throughout the state. Edwards reports that Samuel Longfellow described Portland students of the mid-nineteenth century practicing their playing and dancing to such tunes as "The Battle of Prague," "Washington's March," Henry's Cottage Maid," "Bonnie Doon," "Money Musk," "The Haymakers," and "Fisher's Hornpipes" (34). These tunes remain common in the repertoires of Northeastern fiddlers to this day. Throughout the reports of nineteenth century music in Maine, there is evidence that music and instruments associated with a
trained, European tradition were appropriated by common folk for use in their own assemblies.

Much of the exchange between social levels and ethnic groups extrapolated from Edwards's one-dimensional account, is confirmed in an anthology of recordings and accompanying booklet on "New England Traditional Fiddling," by Paul Wells (1978). To date, the most extensive examination of traditional fiddling and dance in New England, Wells suggests that, although a unilinear development of rural fiddling obtained through the mid-nineteenth century, the increasing influence of ethnic (including African-American) styles and exchange across social levels led to a diverse and dynamic tradition of fiddle music in the Northeast. Thus, by the twentieth century, a variety of styles had developed in the Northeast, but the especially rural forms were recognized as "Yankee fiddling" by both tune and style (6). During the 1920s, a concern for the loss of older, rural fiddle music, added to Henry Ford's crusade against jazz and other modern music, resulted in the growth of old-time fiddle contests. Many New England fiddlers gained recognition through this revival, the most notable being Mellie Dunham, from Norway, Maine. By this time, Wells suggests, the traditional context of Yankee fiddling was moving away from the community dance to performance for the sake of performance. While the revival did result in the few 78 rpm recordings by traditional New England artists, it also began a period of decline for older fiddle styles. Wells writes that social changes and the increasing popularity of commercial country music after World War II effectively transformed New England fiddle music from a rural assembly tradition to an aspect of the urban folk revival (9-10).

Edwards also provides ample evidence that string instruments later associated with country music were abundant in Maine. The town of Mackville (now Blue Hill) seems to have been named for the fiddler Peter McFarland, who was not "skilled in the classics, but his popularity among the frivolously inclined was unequalled in Hancock County" (38).
Several mandolin and guitar clubs were organized during the craze of the 1890s, contributing to the diffusion of these instruments throughout the state and, according to Charles Wolfe, also to the spread of these string instruments to the rural South (1977:19). The popular orientations of these clubs and instruments such as banjos, fiddles, and harmonicas, were regarded by Edwards as "trivial music," yet he performs a service by listing several performers who rose to fame playing them. The wide variety of occupations associated with such performers, from farmers to bankers, suggests that class and regional distinctions remained fairly undefined around the turn of the century. Occasionally, music became a full-time occupation. Included among these performers was Maine's Thomas Glynn, "declared by vaudevillians of his day 'the greatest banjoist in the world.' He learned to play on an old and battered wooden rimmed instrument which had but one string" (174).

The opportunities provided by professional entertainment contributed to the process of change in the music of Maine. Blackface minstrelsy, drawing inspiration from Southern music and symbols, became America's first "pop music," and it contributed its tunes and themes to the music of Maine. Later, vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley music combined vernacular forms to create a commercial, national basis for local performance. In a pattern which seems to have been repeated over and over, popular music became ingrained in vernacular music of both ethnic and regional groups. Thus, Wilf Carter first heard yodeling around 1910 in a vaudeville performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," but he then became identified with a conservative form of commercial vernacular music. Fiddle contests, popular all over during the 1920s, were really playing popular music of a past era in the guise of "old-time music." Edwards reports that at one such contest in Lewiston Maine, "an added attraction was 'Joe' Patterson, banjoist from Eastport, who was an old-time negro minstrel end man had covered more than sixty-four thousand miles in his travels on the road" (316).
Thus while distinctions between rural and urban forms of music could be recognized, performers always sought appealing ways of recombining elements from various traditions and aided in the exchange between regional, class, and ethnic music. Rural forms of music were constantly absorbing popular elements, gradually changing in sound but retaining a necessary thread of tradition which fit the values of the community. In absorbing popular music elements into the indigenous folksong style of Maine, one aspect which remained fairly constant was the desire for songs to "tell a good story." This emphasis on the narrative qualities of song, reflected in the perpetuation of older ballads from Britain and the creation of native ballads based on the British models, made the popular sentimental tunes of Tin Pan Alley especially adaptable to local music in Maine. Ives tells us that Joe Scott (like Andrew Jenkins in the South) successfully blended traditional broadside balladry with late-nineteenth-century sentimental songs to create stories with broad local appeal, precisely because they utilized familiar themes and clichés (407). Horace Beck affirms the hegemony of story over tune, saying, "Frequently someone would remark, 'Now that's a handsome song,' referring always to the fact that it told a powerful story" (1957:245). Early country music in Maine continued to emphasize this aspect of folksong.

In the search for the roots of country music in Maine, an explanation of the instrumental and singing tradition is necessary. As previously noted, traditional folksong performance was typically unaccompanied, while a strong tradition of instrumental dance music co-existed in the Northeast. Wells writes that folksong and dance music remained separate, especially until the rise of local country music performance. Dance instrumentation during the late-nineteenth century ranged from simple fiddle and guitar duets to whole orchestras consisting of "clarinet, flute or cornet, in addition to one or two fiddles, string bass, and piano or organ" (4). The presence of singing groups with string band accompaniment cannot be attributed solely to the spread of commercial hillbilly music from...
the South during the twentieth century. In 1939, Linscott described a pattern and context of
dance assemblies which seems to have persisted since the nineteenth century: "They of
course have singers and callers . . . the orchestra is usually composed of stringed
instruments led by a violin. . . . Though the country dance orchestra of today may include a
guitar, clarinet, piano, banjo, or musical saw, the fiddler reigns supreme" (58-59). Coffin
describes the homes of mountain folk in Maine where "the owners live too lofty for pianos,
and so they have to make guitars and banjos do. And accordions . . . and mouth organs
they have plenty of" (1947:59). He adds that "the mountain people, most of them, take life
hard and sorrowful at the best. They take to melancholy songs the best, the ones about
sweethearts dying of broken hearts right smack on their wedding morn. Quite often they
have good voices. They strum their guitars as they sing" (62).

As with the rest of the country, music in Maine experienced a gradual change from
the original styles of music brought to the country by immigrants. Neil Rosenberg writes
that prior to the era of commercial recordings in the Canadian Maritimes, "Folk
instrumental music and folk singing traditions had been separate; not only was the use of the
guitar a novelty, but the singing style associated with it differed from the unaccompanied
parlando rubato style of folk music" (1974:78). A similar transition in local music occurred
in Maine, but the process of change was itself nothing new. Social levels were important in
obscuring the complex interactions which occurred. Popular music was regarded as a
degenerative form of trained musicianship from the European style, while "country styles"
represented contemptible trivializations of both. Old styles of religious music became
associated with backwards areas as trained musicians most easily took up the newer
innovations in written music. Town orchestras and elite dance parties represented the
appropriate aspirations of Maine’s culture boosters, such as George Edwards. Nonetheless,
at the level of performance, there has been a constant tendency toward assimilation and
syncretism. At times, folklorists and folk alike have lamented this tendency as what we now call "commercialization" and the breakdown of tradition. Revivals then arise to provide reaffirmation of older identities, but, at the same time, elements of popular music are constantly absorbed into local traditions. As Bohlman points out, locally performed music "has not diminished in its symbolic role of distilling and representing a community's social basis; rather it has responded to a changing social basis by changing itself, absorbing different repertories and reflecting a stylistic congeries" (57). Local country music in Maine continues to function in ways similar to both country music in the South and the older traditional music of the Northeast region.

By the 1920s, the transition from older, purely regional and occupational styles of music to diverse vernacular and commercial music was irreversibly underway in Maine. The indigenous music styles adapted commercial traits which "fit" the expectations and values of the regional culture. The result was a syncretic form of music which perhaps remained less distinctive from other regional musics, but still retained a significant link to the regional community in the form of local performers. To be sure, isolated and conservative "nooks and crannies" have continued to offer living examples of "grandfather music" into the present. The haunting problem of periodizing cultural expressions and distinguishing between traditional and commercial music is that generalizations become rules. Old-time fiddlers representing various ethnic styles and singers who know the old woods songs or shanteys provide historians with valuable glimpses into past culture, and they provide communities with an additional source from which to celebrate their identities. But we should not demand that isolated examples stand for the whole. As Henry Glassie states, "In a world of television and cheap print, cultural frontiers are mental rather than geographic" (51). Country music radio stations in Maine now play the top forty hits of the week, recorded in Nashville, and played on most country music stations around the world.
Considering the distinctiveness of older regional music in Maine, we need an explanation of how this situation came into being. This explanation should contribute to our understanding of how local performances straddle the line between local and national identity.

The work of Anne and Norm Cohen, in an article titled "Folk and Hillbilly Music: Further Thoughts On Their Relation" (1977), provides one way of explaining these phenomena. In attempting to account for differing Southern repertoires documented by early hillbilly recordings and folklorists of the same time, the Cohens have hypothesized that "assembly" traditions served the commercial needs of the young recording industry, while a "domestic" tradition was documented by folklorists searching for older aspects of rural culture. The former category included public performances which tended to adapt a variety of styles in order to satisfy a broader audience. The Cohens describe the assembly tradition as "the music which functions in the context of a much expanded audience. . . . In a sense, this public component was the 'hillbilly' tradition long before the advent of hillbilly phonograph records" (52). What constituted "hillbilly music," therefore, was the broad blend of music styles popular throughout much of rural North America. According to the Cohens, "Assembly music was much more responsive to contemporary popular musical developments than was the domestic tradition" (52). In both the South and the Northeast, public performances constantly reshaped the total regional style, and the process of syncretization repeatedly changed the music whenever public performances crossed cultural boundaries.

As in the South, a commercial performance context developed out of a network of assembly music which, in Maine, included house parties, dances in granges and schools, fiddle contests, and the evasive but ubiquitous vaudeville shows. House parties were common among all ethnic groups. Gene Hooper reports on two kinds of gatherings "down East." House parties generally centered on story songs and favorite hymns: "There wasn't
much of a band. Someone usually played guitar, or they played the old pump organ, somebody played bones or spoons, but it was mostly just singing and listening." The second kind of assembly was at a local barn, re-fashioned as a dance hall, where the fiddle led a small band for waltzing and step dancing. Gene's wife Flo, whose French parents moved from Sherborne, Quebec, to Maine in the 1930s, remembers house parties, which they called *battiment des pieds*, as "the best times." One such party found her fiddling father dancing and playing on the stove while the iron covers bounced and clanged to his movements (interview, 1 August 1992). At Richard Orcutt's childhood home in Jackson, gatherings seem to have been more singing oriented. His father was not a singer, but, with the encouragement of alcohol, was fond of reciting the poems of Henry D'Arcy and Robert Service. Orcutt's mother sang sentimental songs to the guitar accompaniment of her brother. In contrast to what the Cohens have described as the pattern in the South, local assembly music in Maine mixed popular, national elements with the local and traditional in a variety of settings.

The music of the grange halls in Maine supports this conclusion. Founded during Reconstruction for the support of agricultural communities, the organization maintained most of its strength in the Northeast. The nucleus of grange hall music was the piano, which provided accompaniment both for singing at formal functions and for fiddles, fifes, and accordions at community dances. In many Maine communities, the grange was truly the center of activity and identity. At formal functions, both traditional and recently composed songs celebrating agricultural life were sung directing community youth to "stay on the farm." The granges also hosted traveling musicians and provided a central location for dances. Traveling musicians played and sang the types of songs that local audiences expected to hear (Music of the Maine Grange, 1992). Though I have not determined the extent to which the grange hosted the ballads which the Cohens categorize as "domestic,"
there is evidence that performers maintained a connection to the story songs and hymns that were an important part of the domestic tradition. Ray Young of North Anson, Maine, told me that "we had all kinds of singers at grange, and it was songs that we all knew--'Jam on Gerry's Rock,' 'Home on the Range,'--things like that" (interview, 31 July 1992).

Furthermore, these assemblies sometimes maintained the kind of distinction between performer and audience that we now think of at modern country music shows. Slim Clark played what he called the "kerosene circuit" during the 1930s, consisting of grange halls within a thirty-mile radius of his home in Springfield, Massachusetts: "Back then, few of the halls had electricity and were lighted by kerosene lanterns, heated by wood stoves. . . . With no microphone, I'd sing for two hours, all alone; there were no other entertainers. The crowds were wonderful audiences--they'd sit and listen" (1990:4). This situation extends the woods camp tradition of separating performers from audience previously described by Ives.

Finally, whether or not they were called "vaudeville shows," both local and traveling performers put on entertainment for rural communities in the absence of national tours. The stages of theaters in larger towns played host to all sorts of entertainment, and local musicians often played during intermissions between live shows and movies. Slim Clark reports that "there'd be local shows and town shows. A few 'cowboy shows,' as we called them back in those days, would come through on occasion and people would ask the show manager to let me get up and sing a song during the evening's entertainment . . ." (1990:5). Gene Hooper tells of the theaters in Machias where "they had vaudeville and movies; when country music shows came in the 1930s, they played the same stages" (interview, 1 August 1992). This mixture of entertainment continued into the days of the drive-in movies when regional performers played on the building housing the projectors. Ann Little says that
"they applauded by blinking their car lights. Sometimes they kept us on instead of showing another feature" (interview 1 August 1992).

The careers of Dick Curless and Gene Hooper will reinforce this notion of an open performance setting for assembly and domestic music in the Northeast. Prior to the mid-1930s, most local performers were amateurs in the true sense of the word—music was played for the love of it, and there was as yet no industry to provide that music to local audiences. Rose Bean, who was born in Waite, Maine in 1925, recalls that when she was little:

You had to make your own music, because there wasn’t anybody to do it for you. Some men sang woods and river songs at the grange, but mostly it was dance music. There was always a piano in the grange, sometimes a harmonica or a fiddle. Of course, everybody sang hymns in church and old folk songs at home. Some of it wasn’t very good, but we loved it. And then the movies came to Calais, and they’d have country music during the intermissions. . . . Country music (which we called ‘cowboy music’) was very popular, and they started having shows at the school in Waite. (interview, 2 August 1992)

The time would come when commercial music from national touring acts could be gotten more easily than gathering community members to make their own, but it came in a trickle. A diary kept by a member of the Blue Ridge Ramblers of a northern tour in 1931 is one of the earliest indications that Southern touring groups did play in Maine (Wolfe 1975). During the 1930s, Bradley Kincaid made appearances in the Northeast (Malone, 1985:55) and Gene Hooper saw Kincaid perform in Machias, Maine, around 1938. By 1940, a show at the Windsor hotel in Lewiston included Tex Ritter along with regional performers, such as Hal Lone Pine. This group also played in the northeastern part of the state. The two names most often associated with non-local music country music for Mainers growing up in the twenties and thirties are Jimmie Rodgers and Wilf Carter (usually identified in Maine by his Canadian name, and not by "Montana Slim," by which he is best known in the lower states). Regional stars, such as Slim Clark, Hal Lone Pine, Gene
Hooper, and Dick Curless, all refer to Rodgers and Carter as the first important music they played on the Victrolas. To some extent, the evidence of Southern music being available in Maine and the impact of Rodgers on the region’s vernacular music can be viewed as an example of Southern music altering the course of country music in Maine. Both Wilf Carter and Hank Snow, another Nova Scotian who became popular with American audiences, attribute their inspiration to sing professionally to Rodgers (Malone 1985:90). Yet the fact that local audiences accepted touring bands and records from the South suggests also that the regional tastes were already similar. The evidence presented earlier shows that the underlying elements of rural music in the North and South, both based on a significant European foundation, made what was to become country music a widely familiar style in both the South and the Northeast.

A regional country music style took shape, one which Rosenberg describes as "... typically relaxed and low-pitched, neither as free or as slow as the unaccompanied folk style but, on the other hand, quite different from the tense and high-pitched style which is an important part of some American music traditions" (1974:78). As we would expect from the similarity between traditional singing in the Maritimes and Maine, a parallel transformation occurred with country music in Maine. In the Northeast, there was a preference for western music, and performers generally played to the image of the lone cowboy. Thus, the western image in Maine combined many of the traditional values of the woods camp ballads with images and symbols available in popular sentimental songs and movies. The performance style was changing in response to exchange across cultural boundaries via records and radio, but it, too, maintained the sparse accompaniment and deep, less nasal singing of traditional music in the Northeast. Gene Hooper and Dick Curless were heirs to this traditional style. As country music became a professional
endeavor in Maine, a commercial form of Maine’s traditional music developed separately from the country music industry of the South.

While Jimmie Rodgers became familiar as "America’s Blue Yodeler," and broadcasts of radio barndances from the South began to reach Maine audiences, a smaller industry developed in the Northeast. The exact beginnings of radio performances by local singers must wait for a thorough examination of newspaper schedules, but by the mid-1930s, Maine had its first country music star in the form of Harold Breau, better known as Hal Lone Pine and "The Lone Pine Mountaineer." He was born in 1916 and grew up near the Penobscot Indian Reservation, learning guitar from his father and singing "home folks songs" and ballads. The story behind his nickname, told in his promotional literature and perpetuated by performers who followed his path, holds that he saved an ice-skating young Indian girl from drowning after she fell through the ice, and he "gained the everlasting gratitude of the Penobscot Council." It is significant that Pine gained his first performing experience at amateur contests held at the Park Theater in Bangor, in 1932. His success with audiences of the region suggests that his music had a pre-existing appeal to local people and that his solo singing performances, inspired by Jimmie Rodgers, were accepted by purely local radio audiences. His "amateur" status also suggests that professional performers were locally available. In 1932, Pine began seven years on Bangor radio, with a noontime show on station WLBZ. Fan mail requesting live appearances by Lone Pine soon led to his going on the road with a small band.

Now known as "The Father of Maine’s Country Music," Lone Pine epitomized the deep, relaxed vocal style of Northeastern singers, accompanied at first only by his guitar and a sparse back-up of fiddle, second guitar or bass fiddle. During the late 1930s, Lone Pine’s traveling shows acquired a variety of performers, including a yodeling specialist and comedian, and they usually picked up local talent--favorites of home town audiences. In
1939, a rising young western singer, who went by the name Betty Cody "The Yodeling Cowgirl," joined Lone Pine's show, and the two were married shortly thereafter. While other radio broadcast gangs, such as Ken MacKenzie’s in Portland and Ray Little's in Lewiston, began to spread out across the state, Lone Pine's show set the pattern for other traveling music shows.

Ann and Ray Little, who travelled the circuits and played radio stations throughout the Northeast and Canada from 1939 to 1962, provide a picture of the tours centered on a base radio station. Often, when they were ready to move on, Ray would pick a radio station off the map, and their show would relocate to that station and "follow the mail" to local performances. They insisted on booking their own shows:

If we wanted to play a town, I'd just get on the phone and call the janitor of the hall. The first three months on a station we had to line up everything, then the sponsors would start catching on and asking us to play--clubs, granges, fairs, churches. Our split was 70-30. But when we wanted to play a town, I'd call the caretaker of the hall and tell him what night we wanted to play there. Then I'd send some posters to all the stores in that area and ask them to put them up. . . . After the show, we'd pay off the hall and book it for a month or two ahead. By the time we came back around, we'd be known and book it, have to book it, for three months. So much of that, and then we had to move on to fresh territory. (Little and Little 1975)

According to both Gene Hooper and Ann Little, country music in Maine always played to the cowboy image. Little says, "It was always simple and clean--the cowboy and his horse. That was what was in the movies and most liked on the radio shows" (interview, 1 August 1992). In addition to radio and personal appearances, country music became entrenched in local music culture through the several music parks which capitalized on the growing tourist industry. In 1934, Tex Ann Nation opened the first country music park in America, located near Portland, Maine. The Little's opened a similar park, the M-Bar-C Ranch, near Bangor in 1941, hosting both local and national performers. But most Mainers
were dependent upon the traveling shows coming to them, and the Littles, as well as Lone
Pine’s gang, covered most of central Maine just before the War.

These were isolated areas, and the people were starved for "live" appearances of the
performers they were hearing on their radios. Ann Little told me that everybody, from
young to old, came out to their shows:

See, the kids didn’t have cars like they do now, even a lot of married people
didn’t have cars. So when a show came into town, everybody went out to see
it. They came from the surrounding towns too; they’d all pile into one car and
away they’d go. We played in Aurora, out on Route 9, several times—we
played a lot of halls that had no electricity back then. We played Aurora when
we broadcasted out of Bangor. We ran our PA system off of a battery, and if
we knew we were playing there, we’d have a couple of batteries charged up
good—they didn’t have the electrical instruments, see, it was acoustic guitar and
acoustic bass—but we needed power for the amplification system. They had the
kerosene lamps for light, and we’d turn our power off during the intermissions
to save our batteries. But we played Aurora the night they turned on the
power . . .

We come into town that night and everybody had every light on in town. It’s a
wonder the system didn’t fail. And we got into town and it was all lit up.
Well, you should have seen the crowd we had that night. We always had a
good crowd there, but that night they came from everywhere to see the lights
come on. (interview, 1 August 1992)

During the decade following World War II, Maine’s country music expanded across
state and national boundaries. Lone Pine and Betty began recording for RCA’s Montreal
division in 1950, and his recording of "Prince Edward Island" brought him national
attention one year later. In 1952, Lone Pine began appearing as a guest on WWVA’s
Jamboree in Wheeling. He and Betty stayed there for three years as members of the show,
and they eventually brought several of their fellow Maine performers down to Wheeling.
Lone Pine returned to the Northeast in 1955 and continued to play on television as well as
making personal appearances, performing the same local brand of country music that was
most popular just after World War II. Shortly after his death, in 1977, most of Maine’s
country music stars gathered for a tribute to Lone Pine on Curly O’Brien’s TV show out of
Bangor. He had pioneered a trail which was followed by both Gene Hooper and Dick Curless. The next chapter is devoted to a description of their careers.
CHAPTER IV: Gene Hooper and Dick Curless

I visited performers and fans of country music in Maine during the summer of 1992 with the goal of finding out how much of the region's identity remained in local country music. Thus, I found myself driving "down east" to Machias through one of those legendary coastal fogs so thick we would call it a drizzle in the Midwest. I rehearsed what I already knew and wanted to ask Gene Hooper in regard to what Ray Young, of North Anson, told me concerning Hooper's dedication to "traditional country music." We met at the Country Duckling crafts shop run by his wife Flo (sister of Betty Cody). Gene is a tall man, often stooping to get through doorframes. Dressed in dark green western pants and jacket, cowboy boots and hat, he referred to his outfit as "casual," as he planned to play golf later that day. Gene, I had been forewarned, likes to talk. If I was not starstruck, I was held at close attention by his distinctive accent, his opinions of modern country radio, and his stories of the early days of country music performance in Maine. He enjoys his semi-retirement almost as much as he enjoys telling about his life as a professional entertainer.

Born in 1923, near Machias, Gene grew up taking part in about everything his father did: farming, hunting, fishing and lobstering, lumber work, and singing. Though house parties were regular activities in the community, Gene's father rarely sang solo at gatherings (he occasionally played harmonica, and an uncle played fife); the whole family joined in on
hymns and "old folk songs." The dance music centered on the fiddle, while guitars and a pump organ provided back-up: "It was mostly what I'd call British and Irish tunes--jigs, reels, and hornpipes. Judging from my experiences, that dance music was all over the North and South, Canada too. And the step dancing we did was the same as what they call clogging down there" (interview, 1 August 1992). In discussing the songs his father sang around the house, Gene makes no distinction between the traditional ballads and sentimental popular songs of Tin Pan Alley. One of his favorites, which he still performs, is the Gussie Davis song, "The Baggage Coach Ahead," which he says is a true story, though he is not sure of the exact circumstances or where the song came from. The singing around the house by his mother and father was usually unaccompanied, and the primary criteria was that a song told a story and appealed to the emotions. Gene remarked, "Really, for us, what makes country music, and what we used to have around the house--instead of television--was the old story songs that had been around for years." This emphasis on the narrative aspects of the songs is clearly a continuation of the regional tradition described by Horace Beck. Gene added:

Country music is not too different from what we sang back home. Those old story songs were quite sad, but true to life. Well, you can't tell that kind of story with this rock music today--even honky tonk music started getting away from it. When they started playing [country music] on the radio, it was songs like "If Brother Jack Were Here" and "Picture Turned Towards the Wall." That was really popular music from the last century, and the taste for story songs was all up in here. (interview, 1 August 1992)

Two events contributed to Gene's desire to become a performer. He heard the recordings of Jimmie Rodgers and he saw Lone Pine play the theater in Machias. In comparing my own interview with one conducted by a University of Maine student in 1980, Gene expresses mixed feelings about the impact of Jimmie Rodgers on his own musical development. On one hand, Gene told me that "everybody was inspired by Jimmie Rodgers. When I heard his records, that's when I knew I wanted to play and sing." Gene
also told me that, while Lone Pine had been influenced by Rodgers, "Pine was an original. He had his own style. . . . I never would have made my start if it hadn’t have been for him. You see, Joe, there was country music up here, we just didn’t have the connection to the industry like they had down South." (telephone conversation, 6 April 1993). Gene revealed the same ambivalence to Joseph Ogando, saying that Lone Pine inspired him to become a professional from hearing his Bangor radio show and seeing him perform in Machias. Gene stated, "Jimmie Rodgers made country music popular, but it was already up here naturally. People made their own music back then, it just wasn’t quite the business they had down there." Nonetheless, it is clear that Rodgers’s influence was profound:

I didn’t learn a lot of songs from records because I didn’t want to sound like anyone else. I wanted to have something a little bit different. I was singing a lot like my father did, except I was more interested in performing. So, I never listened to many records, other than, as a kid, Jimmie Rodgers; and I wound the handles off the Victrolas during those days just to listen to him. If anybody influenced me at all, it would have been Jimmie Rodgers. He just had a unique way of singing a country song. (Hooper 1983)

With inspiration from both local and commercial sources then, Gene undertook to learn the guitar. A clam trader from Jonesport named Lyman Beale taught Gene his first chords. He also took to visiting his cousin’s dance parties held in a barn with a combo called the Smelt Brook Orchestra. With a mail-order guitar, paid for with money from selling salve door-to-door and by digging clams, Gene developed his skills sufficiently to back himself up while singing. His style has changed little in the sixty years since. Like other Northeastern singers, Gene used his deep, unforced voice to tell stories, with fairly simple, full guitar chords played underneath. Experience was gained playing during breaks in the dancing at local house parties. Following the trail of Lone Pine, Gene’s first performances for people outside of his community were at the talent contests held in the Bangor theaters. While he won several contests in Bangor, he became homesick and returned to Machias. In 1940, Gene auditioned for Lone Pine, who gave him a spot on his
radio show on WABI (Bangor). He then joined up with Ray and Ann Little on WGAN (Portland), playing small towns in the southern part of the state. The radio shows were keys to their success, but they were paid little or nothing for them. Gene recalls:

Those first dates with Hal Lone Pine and Betty, sometimes with Ray and Ann Little, that's when I learned the business. I was sixteen at the time I started getting paid for it; course, I'd sung since I was a little kid. Lone Pine had pioneered the traveling country shows up here, and he often helped people like me get started. So, he'd introduce me as "Genial" Gene Hooper, and I'd do a few songs like we'd sung at home. . . . The shows had a little bit of everything, just like vaudeville played in the granges and school houses, except, they called us "cowboy" or "country." But we were big attractions, see, because they were hearing their own people on the radio. (interview, 1 August 1992)

Like Ann Little, Gene describes the method of booking performances which allowed control over their careers but was surely a difficult way to make a living:

What we would do, we'd take a town, take Moncton, New Brunswick for instance. There were so many small towns we could play that were covered by that radio station. Ok, we knew we'd stay there at least six months, so we would get an apartment and do our own cooking. We'd go out each night and play a school auditorium or grange hall and then we had to get back to Moncton every night to do our broadcast the next morning. (interview, 1 August 1992).

Before the war, shows like Lone Pine's, the Little's, and Ken MacKenzie's had begun filling the place of homemade music. Radio barndances from WWVA (Wheeling) and WLS (Chicago) stimulated the demand for similar shows in the Northeast, but the shows maintained a particularly regional flavor. In contrast to local performances in New York state described by Bronner, where the hillbilly image was played upon in a number of ways, the dominant image in Maine's traveling shows was the cowboy, reinforcing and bringing to life the singing cowboys of the silver screen. Gene says that "it was rugged country up there, and the cowboy in a white hat was really a hero" (interview, 1 August 1992). Ann Little, who began performing in Boston with her cousin as "Helen and Ann, the girls from
the Rio Grande," says of the western image, "It was very popular in the Northeast, so you'd pick a western name" (Little and Little, 1975).

Gene performed a few of the popular "western" songs, but his forte was sentimental songs, such as "Picture Turned Towards the Wall," and "We're Just Plain Folks," and ballads like "Jam on Gerry's Rock" and "The Wild Colonial Boy." One of his most requested songs was "Little Blossom," a ballad from the nineteenth century temperance movement which Gene had learned from his mother. Of course, Gene wore the costume of the gentleman cowboy: "Up here, we did the western thing. Where that was popular in the South, they had the hillbilly costumes also. Our audience wanted a western show, and we always had to have somebody yodeling" (interview, 1 August 1992). At this young age, Gene remained a part of shows headlined by Lone Pine or Ray Little. They played mostly in Maine, but they made at least one trip to New Brunswick before the war. It was at this time that Gene met Florence Coté, who occasionally sang on Lone Pine's show with her sister, Betty Cody.

As in the South, World War II temporarily slowed the growing country music industry of Maine. The "News from Old New England" column in the Mountain Broadcast and Prairie Recorder reported that "War cutbacks have slowed down just about all of New England's performers, or taken them away. The Lone Pine Mountaineer has done all he can to keep folks entertained, but rationing has slowed down most of his travelling" (Sept. 1944). Three months later, the column also noted that the Carolina Mountain Boys, the Hollow Willow Ramblers, and the Melody Mesa Boys were playing on WLBZ, Bangor. Georgia Mae was celebrating ten years at WBZ, Boston, where country music also had a strong following (December, 1944). Gene Hooper spent three years in the Army, and he took up where he had left off: "Really, when I got back, things had not changed much. Lone Pine had kept his show going. . . . There was a lot of music that became popular
because of the war, and I had seen a lot of guys from all over singing that kind of music. I got back, and my voice had improved, so I started in with Lone Pine again. I sang a lot of those old war songs."

Following the war, Maine performers became part of a boom in country music. Traveling shows like Lone Pine’s ventured as far as Newfoundland and Massachusetts immediately after the war. Of Canada, Gene says, "We found the exact same audience up there, same audience. Really, country music has always been big up there—you walk into a house and you’re bound to see a fiddle or piano" (interview, 1 August 1992). Gene, along with Lone Pine, Betty Cody, Ann and Ray Little, worked almost as independent agents of the same show. Where these performers would later join the touring WWVA troupes down South and be limited in both their bookings and playing, they retained complete control over their careers during this burgeoning golden age of country music in Maine. They scheduled all of their own performances and played the kinds of shows which they and their audiences were familiar with already. Flo and Gene married in 1948, and the couple often performed together on Lone Pine’s show.

From 1945 to 1953, country music in Maine remained a family oriented form of show business. Lone Pine and Betty Cody, Gene and Flo Hooper, and Ray and Ann Little continued to play from radio bases into outlying towns. Operations were extended throughout the Maritime provinces, and eventually as far west as Alberta, Canada. Two fascinating sets of documents from this period provide rare glimpses into this still regional country music industry. In 1949, Gene was with the Lone Pine Mountaineer show, based in Moncton, New Brunswick. A few trips over to Prince Edward Island necessitated making radio transcriptions to cover their radio show on CKCW, for it would be impossible to make it back in time on the ferry. The transcriptions reveal just how closely these performances remained to vernacular traditions, despite their mediation through technology. First of all,
there was a family basis for listeners, as well as the inclusion of family members in performance. In addition to duets from Lone Pine and Betty, Gene and Flo, and Betty and Flo, segments of the shows were dedicated to showcasing the talents of Pine and Betty's precocious older son, Lennie, along with a children's sing-along led by their younger son Dickie. Secondly, Gene and Pine's performances followed Rosenberg's familiarity pattern in both style and content, and Betty continued to sing French songs mixed with cowgirl yodels. Finally, the shows maintained a pretense of face-to-face interaction between audience and performers. Requests by mail were read and filled on the air, and even sicknesses and birthdays were acknowledged, the latter with a variation of the traditional "Happy Birthday" song.

While the cowboy theme dominates and succeeds in the suspension of disbelief, a small portion of the shows are dedicated to traditional fiddling and accordion music. Interestingly, Gene Hooper suggested that dance music was never really domesticated by the country music industry in the Northeast. In contrast to Southern hillbilly music, the instrumental traditions of Maine's dance music did not transfer to the commercial context of personal appearances and the few recordings that were made. Whether or not this music maintained an appeal to the country music fans is open to speculation, but it seems clear that few of the talented dance musicians of the Northeast had ever been given an opportunity to record (Wells 1978). The country music shows of the region maintained a division between performers and audience, a situation similar to the woods camp entertainment. Another continuation of tradition from the older themes of rugged individualism and romantic independence in the ballads of the woods and sea is evident in the cowboy image of Maine's country music. The sentimental portrayals of the home place and the moralizing tone of the traditional ballads were also a part of the black and white world of the region's western-flavored music.
The second set of important documents available to us are the originals of Gene’s fan club journals from 1948 to 1950. Rose Bean (né McLain) of Waite, Maine, had been listening to early recordings of Jimmie Rodgers, Wilf Carter, Johnny Marvin, and other cowboy singers since she was a child. During World War II, she spent a large amount of her free time writing fan letters and requesting photographs of western performers she heard on New England radio stations, as well as on WWVA in Wheeling. For most of New England, WWVA provided the primary connection to mainstream country music. Through a network of pen pals, Rose gathered support for a Gene Hooper fan club. In 1947, Gene visited Rose from Bangor, where he had a daily show on WLBZ and played with Lone Pine on WABI. From this visit, the Gene Hooper Fan Club garnered members from all over the country, many of whom had never heard Gene perform. *Gene’s Journal* was first published in June, 1948 and shared memberships with several fan clubs of radio performers throughout Canada and the U.S.. By this time, Gene had moved to Moncton, New Brunswick, with Lone Pine’s show, and he therefore had little contact with Rose or the U.S. members. Nonetheless, the fan club provided important benefits to both Gene and his audience. The journal provided a sense of community to people who mostly only heard their favorite performers over the radio, and who frequently had very few outlets for their enthusiasm. The fan club journal often published poems and correspondence of members, encouraging them to keep supporting Gene Hooper and country music in general. Gene, in turn, benefitted from the increased exposure given his name, and Rose Bean says, "When he got to Wheeling, a lot of people already knew who he was because of the fan club" (interview, 2 August 1992).

By 1953, Lone Pine’s successful records were being distributed nationally by RCA, and he and Betty were offered a place on the WWVA Jamboree roster. Gene and Flo, along with Lone Pine and Betty’s three sons and the rest of their Northeastern troupe, joined
them in Wheeling for a regular afternoon show, "The Lone Pine Mountaineer Gang. In 1954, Gene became a member of the Jamboree and stayed there until 1956. Of this period of his career, Gene is uncharacteristically reticent. Revealing his mixed feelings about his chance for national success, Gene says, "It was really the big time down there, very professional, but there was a lot of pressure to follow their rules." According to Gene, their afternoon shows remained much the same as they had been done in the Northeast, but their Jamboree shows became a little restrictive and redundant (telephone conversation, 6 April 1993). The comments of Ann and Ray Little, who came down and shared some guest spots with their fellow Mainers, indicate some of the mixed appeal of "making it" on WWVA. Ray says, "We missed the boat a couple of times," and, although they were asked to stay on as regulars, they decided the rewards did not justify the sacrifices:

Ann: It was a dog-eat-dog existence, and you barely made a living at it. It was just the prestige of being on WWVA, that's all. We could do better up here.

Ray: Too much competition and too many managers. You know, if you made anything it had to go [pause], the way we were, we did everything on our own, and what we made was ours. (Little and Little, 1975)

At the same time, country music was changing in the Northeast, as well as in the rest of the country. The appeal of the cowboy image was diminishing, and the national industry was concentrating more and more on Nashville's recording center. Also, the growing appeal of rock music to the younger generation forced performers to make concessions or quietly continue to make a regional-based form of country music which stood little chance of gaining a broad market. Gene Hooper chose the latter option and, along with Lone Pine, Betty Cody, and the Littles, returned to the smaller pond of the Northeast. To some extent, these performers continued to prosper in the age of local television, but even this medium eventually hastened the demise of their kind of country music as isolated audiences no longer found it necessary to go out to the local music hall to see their favorite performers.
A younger performer from Maine, Dick Curless, successfully negotiated the changing context of regional country music, maintaining a foundation of the local style, but seeking out the broader audience of national country music.

A product of an area particularly rich in music and ethnic diversity, Dick Curless was born on St. Patrick’s Day, 1932, in Fort Fairfield, Maine. Aroostook County, in the extreme northern part of the state, has been settled successively by American Indians, French, Anglo-Scots, Irish, Scandinavians, and Eastern European groups. In this remote part of an isolated state, the economy of a thin strip along the Canadian border and the Saint John River centers upon potato farming. While the lumber camps to the north and south have produced a large body of balladry and song, town centers like Fort Fairfield and Caribou have facilitated musical exchange between various cultures in an assembly context. Dick’s father, Phillip Curless, derived from Scots-Irish roots. A heavy machine operator, Phillip taught his two sons their first music on guitar. Ella Mason Curless, Dick’s mother, emigrated from a French community in New Brunswick, Canada, and sang songs in both French and English.

The primary social activity of the family centered on house parties and grange functions. Dick reports, "We all, come Saturday night, which was a tradition just about everywhere back in those days, they’d get done with their work week and boy they’d just roll up the carpets in the living room, move back the furniture, put down the bare floor for step dancing, and you had your farmhouse-to-farmhouse fun" (interview, 18 March 1992). The instruments serving these occasions consisted of both ad hoc and store bought ones—from the bones, spoons, and Jews harp to guitars, fiddles, and accordions. Another important setting for community music was the local grange hall of the towns and villages in New England. These halls were stable centers of piano and fiddle music and mediated the
combining of all kinds of ethnic and popular music. Ella Mason often accompanied her own father’s fiddle playing at the grange on the piano. Dick learned and listened while the community danced. "My mother was French," he says, "but they played polkas, waltzes, and old parlor songs from sheet music. We had Lithuanian people, Scandinavian, Germans, even Indians would come and dance" (interview 18 March 1992). The context and function of this music clearly resembles that of Southern assembly music which contributed to commercial country music described by Malone (1976:60).

Dick’s exposure to community-based music was supplemented by informal learning at home. He learned to play "Silent Night" from his father by using only two fingers to chord the guitar. Real education began with the family’s move to Gilbertville, Massachusetts, when Dick was eight years old. His Catholic mother enrolled Dick in a parochial school, and he was christened Richard William Patrick Aloysius Curless. A friend of his father’s, Emery Fields, played guitar and taught Dick his first variations on major open chords. He quickly learned "Sunny Side of the Mountain," popularized in the Northeast by Big Slim McAuliffe on WWVA. Dick and his brother Paul were soon entertaining for what he calls "local Vaudeville shows." At this point in his life, there seems to have been a great infusion of commercial music into Dick’s experience. His wider familiarity with nationally popular music of the 1940s may be partially attributed to Dick’s expanding consciousness as he became a teenager, but it is no doubt also associated with what Malone terms "the nationalization of country music," beginning just before World War II. Asked about regional variations, Dick says, "It was all called hillbilly then. You can call it country, folk, hootenanny, whatever, but it came from what people were doing for their own entertainment. When I started hearing it on those old 78s and radio, realizing that people could make a living at it, I knew it was what I wanted to do." Indeed, Dick was listening
to Jimmie Rodgers records brought home by his father, and, he states, "It was different, but it still made sense" (interview, 18 March 1992).

During World War II, WARE, in nearby Ware, Massachusetts, programmed many kinds of music—popular and hillbilly, local and national. "The big names for me were Ernest Tubb, Gene Autry, Wilf Carter, and Hank Snow. Then we had our local favorites—Yodeling Slim Clark, who gave me my first break in the business, and [Hal] Lone Pine. My dad introduced me to Slim Clark, and he let me play on his show at WARE" (interview 18 March 1993). This list of names suggests that the type of Southern music that had appeal in the Northeast was closest to the deeper singing style associated with the region's folksong. The list does not include performers with the "high lonesome sound" more common with Southeastern singers. Certainly bluegrass music, which came out of the Southern string band tradition, had made fewer inroads into Maine's country music during the 1940s. Richard Orcutt, a bluegrass and "traditional country music" fan of Jackson, Maine, comments that:

"Our country music was different from Southern country. They might execute as well up here, but they'll never have that accent or nasal sound. No, people in the Northeast don't sing Southern country music. That's where bluegrass comes from. Now, take Dick Curless, he can execute like Southerners, he's got that soul in his sound like they do. He was traditional country when we were growing up. It's a shame he had to waste his talent in Bangor barrooms."

(interview, 3 August 1992)

Although the ethnic diversity of Gilbertville remained similar to that of Aroostook County, Dick began to be identified with a certain style of music and lifestyle. "I was kind of minority of minorities," he laughs. "If they caught you walking around wearing Levis and carrying a guitar, you were really a strange person. Then to play hillbilly music! . . . But that's what I grew up with in Maine, and I hung to it." It was during high school then that Dick began to develop his own style of music:
I got ahold of some 78 records by Josh White. Started developing a guitar style through ignorance. I didn’t know that Josh wasn’t playing—I learned to play with a straight-pick, kind of flailing at the same time, and it came out real funky—because I thought Josh White—he’s picking like Merle Travis or Chet Atkins in finger style—but I don’t know that, ’cause I’m learning off the records and playing with a straight pick. But it came out okay, and I made it work. It’s a real funky rhythm, through ignorance. (interview, 18 March 1992)

The first opportunity to play professionally, he took. Dick’s last year in high school had been spent juggling time between studies, the basketball team, and his fifteen-minute daily show on WARE as "The Tumbleweed Kid." Inspired partially by the success of Wilf Carter and Hank Snow as yodeling cowboys, but more importantly by local favorite Slim Clark, Dick adopted the cowboy image. Clark, who still performs and was known as the fastest yodeler in the country, offered Dick a spot in his back-up band, The Trail Riders. One week before graduation, Clark asked Dick to join a tour of Maine and New Hampshire, and he jumped at the chance with the blessing of his parents. As part of the show, Dick alternated on rhythm guitar/vocals and "bull fiddle" while the regular bass man, Jimmie Finn, took the microphone. As part of the informal troupe shows pioneered by Lone Pine’s gang, Dick also emceed the shows and usually performed his staple songs, "Sunny Side of the Mountain" and "Tragic Romance," by Grandpa Jones. People seemed to have appreciated the quality of Dick’s developing bass voice very early, although he reports that it was not nearly as low or rich at the time. "I sang pretty straight-forward. I had to stay away from yodeling because of Slim [Clark]. He sang a lot of Wilf Carter—a crackerjack at it too—sounded just like him, but I guess we were all influenced by that sound" (interview, 18 March 1992).

Like the regional groups who preceded them, the Trail Riders played the radio stations and local halls around Bangor. They also continued to play between features at drive-in movies, an interesting mixture of national and local entertainment. Dick says, "They couldn’t see us too good, but they could hear us just fine over those car speakers. . .
"We ate a lot of bugs playing out there" (interview, 14 February 1993). The Trail Riders made their first record for the Standard label in 1951. Recorded in Boston, Dick sang lead and played rhythm guitar, Finn played bass, and Don Calvi played lead guitar on "Coast of Maine" and "Jelly Donuts." To this day, these two songs are remembered by local performers and are played at "picking parties" on request. A month later, they added a fiddle player to record "Ida Red" and some other breakdowns in Bangor, Maine. Dick says that "the fiddle songs were pretty ragged, but its not because there weren't a lot of good fiddlers up there." This second group of songs was never released, but the venture was not a waste. Dick met and married his wife Pauline at this time. In 1952, Dick was drafted and shipped out for Korea. Though a strain on his personal life, the experience turned out to be a boon for his professional career, as had World War II for country music in general. Malone notes that "The intermingling of people from different backgrounds in the armed services was an important factor in the spread of country music" (1985:182). However, the success of Maine's "Rice Paddy Ranger" on the AFKN argues that it was not merely "young southerners" who brought a country music background to the armed forces and abetted this expansion. Dick's new moniker applied to both his disc jockey show on which he played "all the greats of country music for four hours a day," and to the live, daily performances of his own style of country music.

Upon his discharge, Dick tried to settle down in Bangor with his wife and eighteen month-old son, who had been born while Dick was overseas. "I worked for the Bangor Daily News up there. I wanted to settle in and get insurance benefits for my family, but I just couldn't fit in, and I went back to entertaining. There was a big audience up there. I said, 'I can make as much money playing for a night as I could make in a week for the newspaper'" (interview, 18 March 1992). Television was as important for country music in the Northeast as it was for performers in the South. Don Messer, a traditional fiddler from
Newfoundland, had a popular show which was well-received in Maine. Ken MacKenzie successfully translated his radio show to TV during the 1950s and 60s, while Lone Pine and a variety of other radio gangs played at various times for local stations. Dick was playing the local circuit and appeared several times on Lone Pine’s show with Roy Aldridge and the Wagonmasters. This was the standard country band with fiddle, steel guitar, and electric lead played by Lone Pine’s talented son, Lennie Breau. Dick noted that, although he played with drums on a few occasions in the army, these TV appearances and shows at the Silver Dollar Ranch House in Bangor were his first regular performances with drums.

In 1957 Dick appeared for several weeks on Arthur Godfrey’s "National Talent Show," placing first with his rendition of "Nine Pound Hammer." He made his first tour of the western U.S. in 1958, impressing the likes of Wynn Stewart and Cowboy Copas. Although Capitol Records chose not to offer Dick a recording contract, due to a full roster of bass singers on the California-based label, he successfully fit the popular cowboy image and was scheduled to work on the Warner Brother’s movie "The Texans" when Hurricane Donna hit back in Maine. He returned home to assess the damages and chose not to return to California. Instead, he made several recordings for Event Records with his old cronies from Bangor. Event was owned by Al Hawkes, a young man from Westbrook, Maine, who had grown up enjoying both the local stars of the region and the hillbilly music broadcast over WWVA. He felt he could capitalize on the loyalty that people had for their local performers, and he hoped to eventually spread the country music of Maine to southern radio stations. He also recorded his own excellent string band which sounded as Southern as anything else to come out of the region. Hawkes remarked, "Up here, we had as much drawing power as the big stars, that’s because people were there to see a friend, someone they heard on the radio everyday" (Pioneers of Maine, 1991).
With soon-to-be-famous Lennie Breau on lead guitar and Curly Eyles on steel, Dick's recordings for Event reflect both his personal laid-back and low singing style and the influence of American popular music styles. "Lennie was always more of a jazz guitarist, with a real blues feel, and Curly had a coat hanger coming down from his strings, because Bud Issacs had come out with his style on Webb Pierce's records—he used the coat hanger to pull his strings up and down." The songs they recorded included "Foggy, Foggy Dew," "Blues in My Mind," "Midnight Turning Day Blues," and "Nine Pound Hammer," and were intended to capitalize on the boom in "folk music." The sound achieved on these records is a mixture the West Coast country and rockabilly sound, a small jazz combo, the smooth sound of urban folk and Southern country, and the Northeast regional singing style with sparse arrangements.

In many ways, Dick's career began to fall in line with that of other national country musicians: "I started recording for Event records, got to know the people around Bangor and all the different tastes in music. We were different, playing that country music with some rock and roll and some blues. I was tightening my group and learning my craft, but all the time I'm starting to drink a lot more. I became quite an alcoholic. I was a workaholic alcoholic." Nonetheless, his career made headway, due to a productive association with Dan Fulkerson of Oklahoma. A writer working in Bangor, Fulkerson had a talent for churning out songs with regional themes but national appeal. Their first collaboration on "Tombstone Every Mile" proved to be Dick's first national chart hit, climbing to number five on Billboard's country charts in the spring of 1965. The song was recorded in Dick's cellar with some of the same musicians who had played on his Event recordings. Released on their own label, Allagash records, and copyrighted under Aroostook Music (both names refer to the open country of northern Maine), the song warns the trucker hauling potatoes of the treacherous two-lane road which had to be driven out of
northern Maine. As Dick tells it, "We started shipping records out to the DJs, and it sold by the batches. So the people at Capitol, where we were pressing our records, started wondering what we had going on up there. What happened was that truck drivers would carry those records across the country and sell it. Sort of an independent distribution system" (interview, 18 March 1992).

The record had two effects. It led to an invitation to play at Wheeling's WWVA and eventually to Dick signing on with the Buck Owens show and Capitol Records. It also caused him to become identified with two or three other artists who were known for doing "trucking songs" (Malone 1985:320). For two years, Dick worked at the top of the country music business, recording with West Coast session men like Ralph Mooney and James Burton, and releasing four albums of new material by national songwriters. He also acquired his final nickname at this time due to his wearing an eye patch to cover up a wandering eye. He has since been known as "The Baron." Touring with Wynn Stewart, Merle Haggard, and Buck Owens, in 1966 Dick played both the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall, but the hectic pace and an increasing abuse of alcohol led to a physical collapse in 1967. He continued recording for Capitol in the next few years and became more and more identified as a performer of trucking songs. Continued drinking and further physical problems led him to reflect on his priorities. In 1976, Dick renewed his relationship with Christianity and found a more healthy lifestyle. Since then, he has continued producing his own brand of country music, playing a regular schedule with package shows, and always taking time to speak to new fans and stray folklorists.
CHAPTER V: The Changing Context of Country Music

The summer of 1992 found Dick Curless performing daily in the Mel Tillis Theater in Branson, Missouri, while Gene Hooper played several county fairs, private parties, and revival shows in southern Maine. In many ways, this situation reflects the divergent paths these performers have chosen; and their music represents the various levels at which Maine country music finds expression in differing contexts. In comparison, their careers also contain similarities and embody the qualities of a regional country music style according to Rosenberg's model. In both style and repertoire, their music is derivative of traditional music of the Northeast and has changed slowly in the conservative manner of Rosenberg's "familiarity" component. Their performances have reflected regional culture, especially during the heyday of country music in Maine; and their creative input has also contributed to the local music of the region. Finally, they are recognized both consciously and unconsciously as local country music celebrities who mediated the dialogue of regional identity.

There is no question that both Gene and Dick should be regarded as "professional" entertainers. The performance of country music has served as their primary livelihoods and source of identity for nearly half a century, and it is only the level of performance context which has varied. Patricia Averill, in a discussion of "Folk and Popular Elements in Modern Country Music," defines the basic continuity of performance in country music as the male vocalist with guitar, playing for a self-conscious folk group (1974:44). Not only
do Gene and Dick fit Averill's description, they have clearly regarded themselves and been regarded as country musicians by country music fans in Maine. In terms of the Nashville music establishment, they might have been viewed as reasonably talented singers who aspired to break into the mainstream at one time or another. At worst, the industry rejects their music as not fitting the country image, or, as Pauline Curless told me, "They don't want anybody who doesn't fit their categories, and Maine might as well be China as far as Nashville is concerned" (interview, 14 February 1993).

The shared professionalism of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless can also be distinguished according to the model of identity levels of "The Musicians of Nashville" described by Alice M. Gant. She suggests that the levels of achievement for country musicians can be located in stages of "amateurs, apprentices, and professionals" (1972:24-26). In this, Gene and Dick share a pattern of development common to other country music "stars" in Maine. Both began as amateurs, that is, those who perform local music for local folks and are not paid for their performances. The level of apprenticeship can be recognized in their late teenage years of gaining exposure and experience--Gene with Lone Pine, and Dick with Slim Clark and other regional stars, including Gene Hooper. During different phases of this apprentice stage, both achieved some recognition through performances on talent shows. This recognition depended upon their abilities to both represent the familiar music of the region, and also to distinguish themselves as extraordinary interpreters of this tradition. At some point then, Gene and Dick achieved the status of professional performers in their own rights and could in turn affect the development of local country music in the manner which Rosenberg suggests.

Gant's model of performer status also reveals differences between Gene and Dick in the spectrum of regional and national contexts. While both began as performers on a local level, achieving notoriety regionally, and eventually attaining some level of recognition on a
national basis, there is a quantitative difference in their status. Separated by approximately a decade, their professional careers exhibit the dissimilarity of their individual identities and the changing context of country music. Gene’s initial performances at Bangor talent shows exhibit a decidedly regional context, especially with the continuing emphasis on "story songs" in his repertoire. From his success with an audience who would be extremely familiar with his songs and style, Gene went on to travel with Lone Pine, playing for audiences who would be very similar to the ones in Bangor. In contrast, Dick Curless reversed this progression. He performed first on radio while traveling with Slim Clark, and he later expanded his audience on a nationally syndicated talent show. The audience here would have been much less familiar with his style, but he maintained the familiarity element by performing a number which had more currency in the national consciousness than the regional. Country music had become a national phenomenon, and, as such, a professional identity depended on a much larger audience.

The contrast in their professional identities extends to their choices when faced with the decision of pursuing a national audience. While Gene chose to remain a big fish in a small pond, Dick has survived as a relatively smaller fish in the larger ocean of country music. Although Gene tested the larger waters during his stint at WWVA, he insisted on a greater amount of control over his bookings and has always maintained an allegiance to a certain style of country music. He freely admits to a distaste for modern sounds of country music and often says, "The stuff they call country today isn’t what we called country. I don’t know what country they’re talking about, but it isn’t my country." Dick Curless, while expressing some dissatisfaction with compromises he has had to make in his music, image, and lifestyle, chose his vocation and stayed with it. Both his love of the music and of performing led to his pursuit of a national audience: "It really was all I wanted to do, or knew how to do, and I stuck with it. Most of the time, I was sick and couldn’t admit it."
Being a professional means giving up a little bit of yourself. I gave up some of my own sound and my health." In both cases, questions facing these performers were matters of individual identity and artistic integrity, not issues of loyalty to tradition. Their decisions were consistently based on the context of the audience/performer dialogue—a dialogue which varies according to the local, regional, or national level.

While this dialogue remained on the regional level, the style and repertoire of these two performers remained fairly conservative. The change from unaccompanied singing in the older performance traditions in the Northeast to singing accompanied by guitar and other instruments resulted from the increased availability of commercial recordings and radio (Rosenberg 1974). Nonetheless, an identifiable style of rural singing with a deep voice and slow delivery remained fairly entrenched for Northeastern performers until the 1950s. Both Gene and Dick conform to this older style of singing, preferring sparse accompaniment to a loud band sound. In deciding to return to Maine and basically maintaining a regional audience, Gene Hooper was forced to negotiate much less of his style to meet the demands of an expanded, multicultural audience. This small but loyal audience demands a "purer" form of regional country music. As Philip Bohlman suggests, the result of this more inbred dialogue is a conservative tradition which allows only for "discriminatory creativity." In this process, the performer makes his stylistic and repertory decisions more upon the value of a cultural core than upon the external demands emanating from cultural boundaries (1988:78).

According to Bohlman's discussion of audience and performer influences on folk music style and repertoire, as a performer's audience becomes more diverse and removed from the small, local group, creativity and external values become increasingly important for success. Dick Curless's urge for an expanded audience, therefore, results in what Bohlman (following Long) calls "integrative creativity"; this is a process of traditional
creation exemplified by Maine's woodsman-songmaker Joe Scott. In this process, the performer's ability to adapt to external values and contexts results in the combining of "old and new materials in specific ways, so that repertoires and styles are in effect altered, but in ways consistent with the expectations of diverse audiences" (79). This, of course, does not diminish the traditionality of the country music performance; it merely relocates the context from a small group to a large, commercial context. Thus, when Dick Curless expanded his audience from the strictly regional to the wider audience of country music, he adapted to the broader demands placed upon him. Bohlman points out, "when performers who are specialists or professionals successfully meet the contrasting musical demands of these audiences, it is because of their ability to recognize the cultural boundaries, whether delimiting or expansive, and to locate each performance accordingly" (59).

Dick's recorded music reflects the important changes in country music over the past forty years. His initial recordings with the Trail Riders were aimed specifically at a local audience, especially the themes of regionally relevant songs like "Coast of Maine" and "Jelly Donuts." After his return from Korea, his recordings evince the characteristics of a regionally popular professional who adapted to dynamic tastes and trends in the post-War context. Dick explains these changes in audience and style: "See, what was happening around the halls at that time, the places I was performing, you had to do a mixture of music. I had to please a lot of groups of people--lumbermen, farmers, Air Force, railroad men, and I tried to play something for everybody--train songs, rowdy songs, blues, ballads, anything" (interview, 18 March 1992). Although several of his staple songs were hits popular in Southern country music, such as "Tragic Romance," "Sunny Side of the Mountain," and "Nine Pound Hammer"--he played these in a style both derivative of his personal aesthetic and familiar to the local tradition. Instrumentation was generally sparse, his own rhythm guitar provided a solid back-up and even took chorded solo breaks (in a
manner reminiscent of Hank Snow), and he sang in the familiar, deep, full-sounding voice. As noted by Rosenberg, this singing style was particularly characteristic of Northeastern country singers. Although Dick freely admits to the influence and inspiration of Jimmie Rodgers, he strangely never recorded anything from the Rodgers's canon until the 1980s when he was given more complete control over the production. "Midnight Turning Day Blues," one of his early songs on the Event recordings is definitely in the style of a Rodgers recording, even though Dick got it from Josh White.

The sources for Dick's recorded music prior to signing with Capitol Records were evenly split between songs in the public domain, songs written by either him or other local songwriters, and popular numbers from both country radio and Tin Pan Alley. Even songs from sheet music were current in local performance tradition and were recorded in a style which sounds more like Hank Snow than Jimmie Rodgers or Josh White. One example is Dick's recording of the Tin Pan Alley piece, "I Ain't Got Nobody." Dick first heard this song from a wilderness guide on a Maine hunting trip in the mid-1950s. Although the "jazzy" feel of Dick's recording bears some similarity to the popular version by the Texas Playboys (primarily due to the guitar work of Lennie Breau and Sleepy Willis), Dick had never heard a recording of the song himself. Another song that had particular meaning to the region was the traditional song "Tears of Saint Anne," reflecting a local attachment to the patroness of children and health. Dick says, "I was raised Catholic, and I remember seeing a picture of Saint Anne with a tear in her eye in the Boston Daily Record. That was a true story, and I learned the song off a Jimmie Osborne record, an old 78" (interview, 18 March 1992). Finally, a song which indicates the close relationship between community tradition and the individual artist is his own song, "Memories, an Old Picture, and a Ring." Dick's mother had taught him a song about a soldier on foreign soil and memories of his
home; and he returned to this idea while in Korea and wrote this song about a young wife and baby boy whom he had never seen.

During the 1960s, while maintaining his clear singing style, Dick’s repertoire began to both shape an image which would be accessible to more diverse audiences and to be shaped by external values in a pattern discussed by Bohlman. A song Dick recorded in 1958, "Travelin’ Man" romanticized the truck driver as the kind of independent hero familiar to both local tradition and the larger country music audience. Preceding Dave Dudley’s "Six Days on the Road" by half a decade, this recording argues for a common pattern of creation out of familiar themes and style, combining local and commercial traditions, and leading to the image of Dick Curless as a performer of truck-driving songs. The rugged, independent hero celebrated in both Northern and Southern country music by cowboy and trucking songs is also reflected in Dick’s succession of nicknames. His subsequent breakthrough with "Tombstone Every Mile" capitalized on the growing popularity of this occupational song genre, while maintaining a connection to his regional identity through references to local places and images.

When Dick began recording primarily only other people’s songs for Capitol, the principal market for his music was indeed the truck driver and related blue collar audience. However, with a total output of approximately twelve truck driving songs, it seems a too casual dismissal of this performer to classify him solely as an artist of this country music sub-genre. There creeps into this period of Dick’s career a question of control, resulting from his participation in the national process of creating "country music" and from his own inner turmoil and lack of identity. Dick’s reflection on his years with Capitol indicate the complex relationship between the regional or genre identity to the national commercial style of country music:
On those early recordings, I did everything myself. I went out with Buck Owens in 1966, and I really wasn't me. . . . I learned a lot traveling with those guys out there. The Capitol artists were quite big then. We were going first class, but I didn't get my sound. I'll hear my albums from then and say, "boy look at that influence Wynn Stewart had on me, and Haggard too." We all used [Ralph] Mooney on steel, and that sound is definite—the West Coast sound. I recorded that "Long Lonesome Road" album [Tower ST5108], and that's when I became me again. That period before, I had no control, it was all the producers. . . . They wouldn't let me play my guitar on that stuff. If I don't play guitar, I ain't all there. (interview, 18 March 1992)

The careers of Dick Curless and Gene Hooper, from local semi-professional singers to popular country music professionals, supports Simon Bronner's assertion that "certainly, there is the indication that the combination of 'hillbilly' and 'music' was not just a southern phenomenon" (1976:58). Growing up with a variety of traditional regional and ethnic musics providing the soundtrack for community-based entertainment, they absorbed many of the Old World traditions shared by rural peoples all over America and Canada. In the South, this music was transformed into a commercial, nationally viable product of image and style. Undoubtedly, the Southern commercial tradition affected the development of country music in other regions. Both Wilf Carter and Hank Snow in Canada were influenced by Jimmie Rodgers, and this same Southern music played a role in the musical development of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless. Yet, once this product was sent out over the country by record and radio, it was adapted into regional styles and created a new, syncretized form of regional folk music. As Norm and Ann Cohen reveal concerning the absorption of commercial hillbilly music into the Southern folk repertoire, "Where we had folksongs that became hillbilly songs, now we had hillbilly songs that became folksongs" (53). When Malone correctly states that country music "was introduced to the world as a southern phenomenon, and in the sixty or more years since it was first commercialized, it has preserved, to a remarkable degree, the marks of that origin" (1985:1), it must be kept in
mind that he writes of the commercial country music industry. Country music in Maine bears the marks of both its regional traditions and Southern country music.

Maine's country music is the product of an exchange between an indigenous music tradition and the commercial industry that has constantly affected all folk music in the United States. Changes in the music have paralleled social changes in the Northeast. Gene Hooper and Dick Curless participated in these changes, as had Hal Lone Pine, Ray and Ann Little, and Slim Clark. They continue to perform in a style which reflects a participation in exchange across cultural boundaries, and their stories can illuminate much about regional identities, the sources of country music, and the historical changes of people and their music. Gene Hooper chose to remain a large part of the regional country music scene, and his style thus retains strong elements of regional folksong. Like his music, Dick Curless now straddles a line between his roots in the Northeast and the center of commercial country music, maintaining homes in both Bangor and Nashville. His own words say much about the ideas contained in this study:

It was country music that was up in there, but the folks down here weren't aware that it was already up there from the pioneers that moved in from Europe and the Acadian parts of Canada. Also, in Maine, the people loved it. You'd learn your folk songs, the old little ditties that come over from Ireland and Scotland, England, and the rest of Europe. You listen to polka music and it's just like a hoedown. It was all in that area. We loved it, and they loved it down here. It may have been more concentrated down here, but we traded influences. Pickers would get together and say, "How'd you do that lick? I like that song, sing it for me." It's just sharing. Music is a great communicator.
CONCLUSION

Country music remains an integral part of local entertainment in Maine. During my time spent speaking with fans and performers in the state, I recognized many of the continuities in the music tradition which serve to make country music a meaningful part of the regional identity. I witnessed an informal picking party in North Anson where the preference for acoustic music and songs that tell a story speaks to the conservative nature of "traditional country music" fans. My hosts, Ray and Gloria Young have played semi-professionally where they made concessions to the demands of their audience for the latest hits from country radio, but among friends they favor the older music with which they grew up. Ray told me that "we try to keep the tradition alive, and our friends like the older stuff anyway. We think everybody should play some kind of music that connects to the past. That’s why we play traditional country music at these picking parties, we think it’s good for us (interview, 31 July 1992)." In the context of these small group gatherings, both the Hank Williams and Kitty Wells songs out of the commercial country music tradition, and the few Dick Curless songs which are sometimes played, reflect the complex development of country music in its relationship with regional identities. The music here is Maine’s contemporary folk music.

As with other forms of folk music in the United States, Maine’s country music is a syncretic product, combining older vernacular elements with newer commercial styles. This is part of a process which has affected Southern and Northern country music, as well as the
earlier folk musics on which the commercial traditions are based. The evidence I have presented suggests that Bohlman’s dictum concerning the need for scholarship to transcend stratification has long been the principle by which folk performers and audiences have appropriated music which appealed to them. By the same token, categories defined by class, region, and ethnicity play an important role in the music tastes of everyday life. Music is often accepted or rejected on the basis of pre-formed images and cultural categories, as was the case with my initial attraction to Dick Curless’s music. These categories are often compounded by the very scholarship which seeks to explain them and exploited by the commercial interests who have proven adept at capitalizing on the images and stereotypes that reinforce categories of everyday life. Thus, country music is derivative of both traditional styles and traditional stereotypes.

During the course of this thesis, I have striven to illuminate the complex ways in which these styles and stereotypes have interacted in one area. It is my contention that vernacular music in the Northeast shared many traditional stylistic elements with the folk music of the South from which country music derives. At the same time, the regional folk musics of the Northeast and South remained distinctive prior to the development of a commercial music industry based on Southern folk styles. In the past seventy years, much of the Southern folk style has been absorbed into the country music of the Northeast, leading to the development of an industry which Bill Malone says, "has discovered that its best interests lie in the distribution of a package with clouded identity, possessing no regional traits" (1985:369). Nonetheless, I remain convinced that local performance maintains a link to community identity, and an understanding of this link depends upon a recognition of constant exchange across cultural boundaries.

In my attempt to explain a portion of this exchange, I have examined many of the contradictions inherent to the study of folk music. I began with a thorough analysis of the
sources and symbols of country music. While accepting that the commercial industry has
developed primarily from Southern folk sources, I argue that images of Southern culture as
fertile ground for music both backwards and innovative--unique but representative--
contributed significantly to the development of the commercial industry. The scholarship on
folk music has often walked a fine line between idealizing distinctiveness and holding it up
as part of our shared culture. In my description of regional approaches to folklore, I
elaborate on the problems of seeking group identity in unique cultural expressions,
especially in modern contexts, where cultural cores are much less isolated by geographic
factors. Contemporary approaches to regional identity are less dependent upon isolation and
distinctiveness, accepting the indefinite nature of modern regions. An understanding of
shared culture which facilitates exchange across cultural boundaries is now prerequisite for
explaining folk cultural regions. Neil Rosenberg’s model of regional country music was
offered as the best way to examine local country music as a source of community identity.

My presentation of vernacular music in Maine emphasized both the unique aspects of
vernacular music and the shared cultural foundation which encouraged the absorption of
commercial country music. Out of the regional folk music and the commercial tradition
developed a local music industry that continued to reflect regional identity, even as it came
to resemble the national commercial style. The careers of Gene Hooper and Dick Curless
capture many of the aspects of this transformation. Hooper remained closer to the older
elements of the region’s rural music, while Dick Curless strove to gain acceptance from a
broader audience, thereby contributing to the cultural exchange which has brought this
formerly isolated region’s music closer to the national style of country music.

There remains a great deal to learn concerning interactions between local music
traditions and the commercial music industry. I hope that I have established an initial
understanding of the many contradictions inherent in the study of region and folk music.
Thus, while country music did not necessarily have to originate out of the vernacular traditions of the Northeast, there remains an important connection to the regional identity and to earlier vernacular music traditions. And although the regional concept depends less upon a notion of isolation and distinctiveness, the images and symbols of our nation’s regions continue to play a role in the music and identities available to choose from in our contemporary world. The Northeast, and Maine in particular, continues to maintain an identity of which modern country music is one aspect. Throughout our history, folk music has symbolized both distinctiveness and representativeness, and it is this final contradiction which captures the essence of country music in Maine. As D. K. Wilgus succinctly states in an introduction to the study of country music as part of contemporary folk identity, "The history of this music and our attitudes toward it reflect the contradictions in the American character; that is, in the character of the country-western audience, the urban hillbilly" (1970:157).
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**Interviews**


