



EMMETT W. LUNDY

Fiddle Tunes from Grayson County, Virginia

Emmett Lundy was born in Grayson County, Virginia, on May 9, 1864, one of the nine children of Churchwell and Caroline Ward Lundy. From family records we know that the Lundys emigrated from England in 1687, settling first on Pennsylvania lands purchased from William Penn. Emmett's great-grandfather John Lundy moved to Grayson County around 1787 and acquired the land the family still holds near Dalhart, just south of the present town of Galax. During Emmett's early years, the Virginia mountain area around his home was largely an agrarian, traditionally integrated frontier society. As a young man, Emmett became absorbed in the music which he heard around the community at dances, log rollings, pumpkin peelings and other excuses for having a little fiddle music. Evidently there may have been fiddlers in the Lundy family, but no

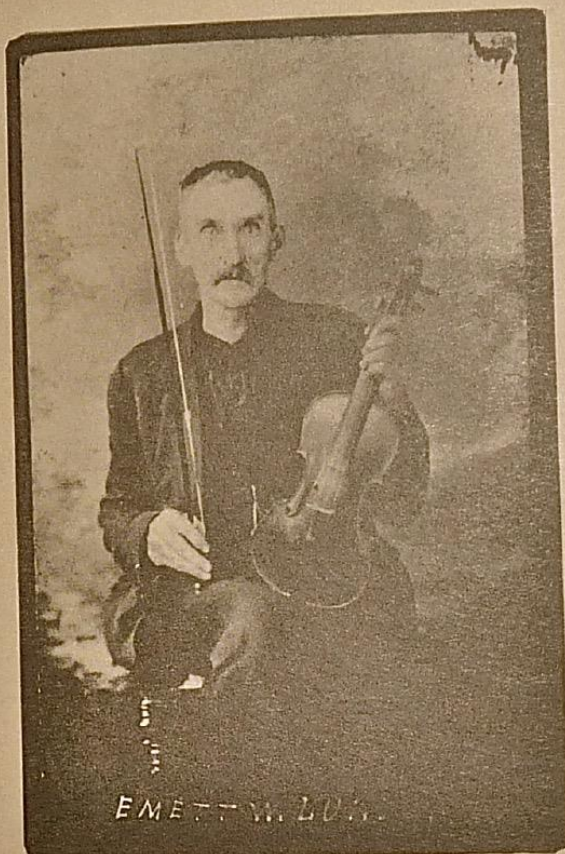
one knows for sure. It's not really important to this story, for young Emmett's main musical influence came from outside his home. In his late teens Lundy started the fiddle (the main instrument found here at this time) and immediately took up with an older fiddler named Green (for Greenberry) Leonard.

Green Leonard lived at Old Town, just a few miles north of the Lundy homelace. Leonard was a pretty old man when Lundy met him, probably born in the early decades of the 19th century, though the exact date and place are unknown (to me). It is a fact, however, that he secured a Grayson County marriage licence in 1833 and from all accounts was thereafter a lifetime resident of the county. Leonard must have been an extraordinary fiddler for most older Grayson County fiddlers, even

Nobody knows exactly when the banjo came to the Grayson area, though existing information seems to point to the years following the Civil War. The style of playing the banjo which predominated here was the "clawhammer" or "frailing" method and some of its greatest practitioners have come from this section of Southwest Virginia. Again, the origins of the style are as obscure as the instrument itself. Two schools of thought on the subject are now current. One sees the "clawhammer" banjo as an indigenous white mountain development; the other finds clawhammer origins among the piedmont black population. Whichever is the case, evidence shows the banjo-fiddle ensemble tradition growing through the later 1800s and perhaps reaching its height of popularity around the turn of the century, when musicians would remark that either the banjo or the fiddle alone was only "half of the music".

Clawhammer banjo itself basically involves a downward, rapping movement with the right hand. The fingernail of the index (or middle) finger strikes down on one of the first four strings while the thumb catches and serves as a drone on the fifth string. Occasionally the thumb is brought over to sound a melody note on either the second or the third string. However, this "double-noting" technique is not mandatory and is often employed rather sparingly. The clawhammer style, as it developed among traditional performers, is mainly an ensemble style characterised by a sparse melody line backed by a regular rhythmic accompaniment. A few virtuoso banjo men of the Southwest Virginia area like Hobart Smith and Fred Cockerham have carried the style to its fullest melodic capabilities. However, most are content to accept the accompaniment role. It was this banjo style that was superimposed on the fiddle tradition to produce the band. Because of its limitations, the banjo style directly influenced the fiddlers.

The ensemble seemed very popular in the Grayson County area. Two instruments were louder than one for dances and it allowed for artistic interaction between instruments, something that obviously excited the musicians. The combination was a good one, except that it placed certain restrictions on the types of tunes that could be



incorporated into it. Relatively simple melodies like "Julie Ann Johnson" (A1), "Sugar Hill" (A6) or other common tunes such as "Sally Ann" fit nicely into the band combination. Notice on these recordings how Geedy Lundy's banjo outlines the basic melody behind the fiddle's lead and at the same time supplies rhythmic support. Yet tunes like "Highlander's Farewell" (A7), "Waves on the Ocean" (B2) and "Belle of Lexington" (B11), which contain a considerable melodic and rhythmic range, are not so easily adaptable and the banjo is conspicuously absent. It's not that Geedy is not technically proficient enough to play these pieces - they simply are not found in the clawhammer repertory. That Geedy plays tunes like "Forky Deer" (A12) and "Fisher's Hornpipe" (A3) is a tribute to his mastery of the instrument, for these are not considered "banjo pieces".

In addition to melodic limitations, the way the banjo was tuned also had its effect on the ensemble. Prominent

area banjo men like Wade Ward, Calvin Cole, Geedy Lundy and Fred Cockerham rarely play clawhammer style in the key of G. For example, of the eight G tunes on this LP, Geedy plays on only three. The G tunes tend to be more complex, but the banjo tuning here is also a factor. Traditional banjo men normally tune their instruments to the desired key. Thus if the fiddle plays in the key of A, the banjo is tuned (from 5th to 1st string) aEAC#E, and for the key of D, aDADE. As you can see, changing between these two keys requires only the changing of two strings. For the key of G, however, the tunings and fingerings which are necessitated by the tunings present more of an obstacle. For G the banjo strings may be dropped a whole tone to gDGBG, a process which takes considerable time. Other tunings, like gDGDA, gEADE or gGADE, while not as complicated, require the player to chord the instrument. It is possible to play in G, yet the banjo men appear not to have done it - at least few recordings have been made, to my knowledge. It follows that if banjo players disliked the G tunes and the popular fashion was the ensemble, then these tunes might be rejected. A good case in point is the music found in the Low Gap-Round Peak region of Surry County, North Carolina. This region, just a few miles from Grayson County, produced perhaps the most complex and unified banjo-fiddle tradition - a tradition exemplified by men such as Ben and Tommy Jarrell, DaCosta Woltz, Fred Cockerham, Kyle Creed and Charlie Lowe. Here, where the ensemble reached its apex, there are just no G tunes. Tommy Jarrell says that his father Ben didn't play in G at all. Tommy himself remarks that he hardly knows how to tune the fiddle for pieces in this key. Thus there seems to be a definite pattern: as the ensemble tradition solidifies, the limitations of the banjo in the group setting help form what might be called the ensemble repertory.

Lundy's music reflects something of both the older fiddle tradition and the newer ensemble idea. His music parallels the growth of the ensemble, yet he was too much involved in the older style to conform fully to the new. In this way, through his music, a pattern of development and change may be seen. Traditions don't always endure unchanged waiting to be inundated by the forces of modernisation; rather, they are constantly in a state of internal adaptation and movement.

Technique

The most important aspect of a fiddler's technique is his bowing. As many a fiddler will remark, bowing distinguishes individual style. Lundy's fiddling cannot simply be categorised as being "short" or "long" bow fiddling. Like all master fiddlers, he consistently employs both techniques to ultimate advantage - emphasising the rhythm with syncopated short bows while gliding over difficult melodic flourishes with a long bow. His style is tied to his repertory and clearly is indicative of the older

"God almighty, bless your soul, I just begin to hear ye."
That's what it was composed from, and called the "Waves on the Ocean". That's all the words I ever heard to it. It's an old timey piece.

B4 DUCKS ON THE MILLPOND (AAFS 4945 A3)

Key of D, fiddle alone, then with guitar and banjo. Perhaps Lundy's most distinctive tune - and a very standard one too! The emphasis placed on the complexity of the melody by the use of the long, smooth bow here is incredible. If Tommy Jarrell's version (Mountain 302) weren't so good this would have to be the definitive version of the tune. Note the variation on the lower or second part, which almost makes the tune appear to have three separate parts.

B5 THE LOST GIRL (AAFS 4940 A1)

Key of G, with guitar.
Another pretty tune that no one plays any more. The Library recorded a version of this from the Kentucky fiddler Luther Strong in 1937 (AAFS 1539 A1).

B6 BONAPARTE'S RETREAT (AAFS 4944 A2)

Fiddle only.
This is the only piece that Lundy returned the fiddle for, in this case to EADD. Halfway through the piece picks up to "double quick" time and turns the retreat into a rout. See Alan Jabbour's exhaustive notes to this tune on "American Fiddle Tunes" (Library of Congress AFS L62).

B7 TALKING ABOUT THE FIDDLE AND THE DEVIL (AAFS 4938 /excerpt/)

- Q: Did you ever, uh, I guess you've heard people say that the fiddle is the instrument of the devil, haven't you?
- A: Yes, I've heard that.
- Q: What do you think about that?
- A: I don't think so. You can make harm with anything, don't care what it is you pick up, if you want to. But if you don't mean no harm with the fiddle, I don't think there's any harm in it. Me and - I'll tell a circumstance, now, and it may interest you. Me and my cousin Fielden Lundy, we used to run about and play the fiddle together, and we'd been up on the river and were coming back in the Hampton settlement, and we heard of the last day of a school over there. An old feller by the name of Avery Jones was teaching the school and we carried our violins over. And they wanted us to play some. And this old log house - the floor wasn't nailed down. And my cousin had on Brogan shoes and he could pat his foot awful heavy, and he got to patten' his foot, and directly the scholars got at it and the house was in a rock. Now this old feller Avery Jones

was a Methodist preacher, and he had a mighty savage look, and he looked all around and he says, "There's no harm in the fiddle, but it puts the devil in the foot. And I want this patten' stopped around here." Well, after that the kids they did stop, but Fielden patted the harder, and it wasn't long before it was in a rock again. And directly the old preacher got to grinnin' and looked around but he didn't say nothin'. It amused me. . . . I quit patten' right when he told me, and Fielden kept it up.

B8 SUSANNA GAL (AAFS 4944 B2)

Key of D, with guitar and banjo, and singing by Kelly. "Western Country" and "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss" are two of many titles for this piece, a very common Southern fiddle tune. Again, note Lundy's emphasis on melody rather than rhythm, especially in the first (low) part. Kelly here sings some good floating verses:

I wish I was in some western country
Sittin' in a rockin' chair
My arm around my whiskey jug
The other around my dear

I wish I had a hog in the pen
Corn to feed him on
Pretty little girl to stay at home
And feed him when I'm gone

Fly around my pretty little miss
Fly around my daisy
Fly around my pretty little miss
You almost run me crazy

(repeat first stanza)

B9 WILD GOOSE CHASE (AAFS 4940 A3)

Key of G, with guitar.
Pretty neat use of harmonics on this piece. Luther Davis once told me that he tried to play this piece but could never make the "goose squawk".

B10 CLEVELAND'S MARCH (AAFS 4946 A3)

Key of G, with guitar and banjo.
Also called "Marching to the White House", this too was a school breaking march and as far as I know there are no other available recordings.

B11 BELLE OF LEXINGTON (AAFS 4938 B2)

Key of D, with guitar.
One of those rare tunes which students of American fiddling constantly search for - a tune with a direct and discernable antecedent in Britain. "Kitty's Wedding", an Irish hornpipe (O'Neill, Dance Music of Ireland no. 846), is undoubtedly the source of this tune. See John Patterson, "Bells of Election" (Heritage V), and Norman Solomon, "Smith's Reel" (County 707).