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Practicing Tradition: History and Community in an Appalachian Dance Style

ANNE ELISE THOMAS

Describing cooperative participation in small-scale, semi-intimate networks of relations among people, *community* eludes the objective gaze. *Tradition*, imagined as some knowledge or skill that flows freely through generations, becomes suspect when it becomes self-aware. Both are concepts that served without question for many years; now both are recognized for their potential to conceal as much information as they convey. Who compose the collective termed a community and what does membership in this kind of group entail? How does the label “community” inform and frame the activities of a group and its members? What defines a tradition, and can these criteria even be observed and evaluated? If we call something traditional, does that in effect make it so? These crucially important questions will never be simply answered, and this article makes no attempt to do so. My aim here is to explore the very mechanisms by which *community* and *tradition* come to exist and have meaning for people who participate in activities that they themselves deem community-based and traditional. In this article, I will explore the ways these two concepts are linked through discourse and practice and how they function, in this context, as interdependent components in the articulation of an alternative social model.

CONTESTED TRADITION

Among the dance groups competing in the championship for “traditional clog teams” at the 1975 annual Fiddlers’ Grove Ole Time Fiddlers and Bluegrass Festival in Union Grove, North Carolina, were three clogging teams from area college towns: the Green Grass Cloggers from Greenville, North Carolina, the Apple Chill Cloggers from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and the Hoorah Cloggers from Blacksburg, Virginia. These three groups, made up of free-spirited, college-aged young people, danced in a style completely unlike either of the two most prevalent

competition styles: precision clogging and freestyle clogging. The originators of this new style, the Green Grass Cloggers, had formed four years earlier and had competed at Fiddlers' Grove several times before. In two of the previous four contests, the Green Grass Cloggers had won first place for their eye-catching and energetic performance, which at that time earned them the title "World Champions of Clogging."

This year, however, the criteria for judging the competition had been changed, and the Green Grass style was not favored by the new rules. When the winners were announced, the Green Grass Cloggers were no longer at the top of the list, and the Hoorah Cloggers were dismayed to find out that their group was in last place. Thinking they had performed well, several members of the Blacksburg group asked a contest official why they had scored so poorly. "What you're doing," they were told, "is *not* Southern Appalachian traditional-style clogging."¹ Phil Louer recalls that the group was unsatisfied by this explanation:

I wasn't there for that conversation, actually . . . it was two other dancers, they had the conversation directly, and then they came back and reported to us, and then we all got ruffled, you know. "What do you mean, we're not Southern traditional Appalachian cloggers? Here we are in the South, in the Appalachians, dancing clogging, what's not to be traditional about it?" (Louer, interview)

Today, twenty-five years later, the Hoorahs are still active in Blacksburg, continuing to perform in the same style, and even perform some of the same routines that they brought with them to Fiddlers' Grove that year. Their performances are frequently billed as "traditional Appalachian dance," and while they no longer participate in clogging competitions, there appears to be a lot less controversy in applying the label "traditional" to this dance than there was at Fiddlers Grove in 1975.

What is *tradition*, and where does it come from? In the past, scholars have understood *tradition* as a body of material, the process by which this material changes hands, or, more broadly, as a term that encompasses the entire system of people, practice, and process—perhaps a synonym for "culture." While recent thought has abandoned previous efforts to define *tradition* as a social scientific category, many of us sprinkle our talks and writings quite liberally with references to tradition, traditions, and traditional activities. As difficult as it is to pin down in theory, in practice *tradition* remains a focus of discourse in folklore and related fields.

For performers and practitioners, use of the term *tradition* signifies a history, a way of life, an identity. Scores of musicians, dancers, craftspeople,

and artists use the term “traditional” to identify, authenticate, and advertise their work. At another level, we see the mantle of *tradition* bestowed from above—by academics, arts agencies, and tourist boards—upon those put on stage, documented in writing, identified with, and advocated for. This third-party distribution of *tradition* as cultural capital, in which the word itself becomes a badge of honor, retains vestiges of a more “traditional” tradition, characterized by an individual’s unconscious submission to a transcendent force flowing freely through groups of presumably unmodern people.

Recent times have witnessed fundamental changes both in the ways scholars think about *tradition* and the ways that people—scholars included—live tradition. In contrast to the view that *tradition* must be inherited by birth and is mysteriously replicated through generations, a contemporary perspective suggests that traditions are learned and actively conceptualized as people choose to affiliate with social groups built around traditional activities and lifeways.

Fundamental to the notion of *tradition* is a perceived relationship between a person (or practice) and a past that is made relevant by invoking ancestry, locality, or other interpretive work. Recent work has re-examined conventional understandings of *tradition*, questioning its objective existence as a neutral category of practice (Finnegan 1991), its perceived continuity with the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and the validity of some criterion of “authenticity” that defines *tradition* (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Jolly 1992). Other scholars have suggested new ways to approach the study of *tradition*, locating it in performance (Toelken 1979), in a sense of responsibility (Glassie 1995), and in a personal choice to engage in a particular kind of historical relationship (McDonald 1997).

In an effort to engage theory with practice, I approach *tradition* through its use “on the ground,” among members of the Hoorah Cloggers of Blacksburg, Virginia. By examining how tradition is conceptualized here, I aim to develop a sketch of the notion as it emerges from its practical usage. As a starting point, I recognize that the term *tradition*, as it is employed by the cloggers, can refer to (at least) two related things: (1) the grouping of music and dance practices that are thought to have originated in a particular locale (in this case, the southern Appalachian mountains); and (2) a reified abstraction that describes a core character imagined as common to all traditions. In conversation, *tradition* may refer to either of these semantic categories, or to both simultaneously. The importance of *tradition*, in this context, relies not on

its logical constitution but on its concrete implications. What I will discuss here is an understanding of *tradition* whose defining quality is its embeddedness in a community, in a network of meaningful personal relationships in the present. As such, *tradition* is a resource in the construction of community, just as the existence of a community is integral for the maintenance of a viable *tradition*. In this formulation, *tradition* and *community* are mutually reinforcing ideals that construct as well as represent an alternative value system.

Through an examination of the history of the group and the observations of Hoorah Cloggers, I investigate the ways in which *tradition* and *community* are made meaningful within this group of individuals. Guiding my initial investigation are the following questions: (1) what conditions—historical, geographical, and social—are invoked in the service of defining activity as traditional? and (2) what kinds of representation and interpretation enable the creation and maintenance of a believable tradition? In the final portion of this article, I turn to the role of *community* as it relates to both of these questions.

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted in roughly a year of intermittent involvement with the Hoorah Cloggers during 1999–2000.² During this time I documented rehearsals and performances, interviewed present and former members of the group, and performed with the group on several occasions. Much of the documentation for this project was undertaken as a joint effort with Phil Louer, one of the long-term members of the group who wanted to collect this information for the Hoorah Cloggers's own archive. This project would not have been possible without the compliance and assistance of the group, and I am grateful to them for their support. During all stages of this project, including fieldwork, writing, and editing, I have sought to incorporate feedback from members of the group, striving toward a dialogical research process.³

THE STORY OF A DANCE: GREEN GRASS AND HOORAH CLOGGING

Team clogging performance has roots in several styles of dance that developed in the Appalachian mountains of the southeast United States: individual flatfooting, or buckdancing, as well as square or big circle dances, practiced in a group. The first documented stage performance of team dancing was at the 1928 Rhododendron Festival of Asheville, North Carolina, which featured a revue of local music and dance organized by folk-entrepreneur Bascom Lamar Lunsford. Designed to attract tourists to the town and stimulate local business, the festival included



Dancers form a line across the stage for a closing bow combination. Pictured, from left to right: Chelsea Wright, Jerone Gagliano, Kerry Waite, Bob Wright, Benjamin Lieb, Lily Harvey, and Phil Louer.

competitions for instrumentalists, singers, individual flatfooters, and square dance teams (Jamison 1987:18).

In the decades that followed, both team clogging performance and the competitive festival context became standard features of Appalachian music and dance. By the 1960s there had emerged several distinct styles of group dance performed at festivals: *precision clogging*, featuring synchronized footwork, flashy costumes, and usually performed either in a line or a circle formation, and *freestyle* or *traditional clogging*, characterized by improvised footwork and choreographed in square or circle formations.

In 1971, two students from East Carolina University, Dudley Culp and Toni Jordan (now Williams), went to the Autumn Square-Up festival at Fiddlers' Grove, North Carolina. Immediately taken with the styles of mountain dance that they witnessed, they approached some of the older dancers at the festival and learned what they call "the basic" clogging step. Back at ECU, they joined with a square-dance teacher, Betty Casey, who taught them some of the figures and choreography of Western club-style square dancing. With this new knowledge, they formed a group, the Green Grass Cloggers, and developed their dance style into a unique combination of borrowed and invented figures and footwork. Their steps were synchronized, like precision clogging, but they differed from the precision groups in their homemade costumes, square-dance choreography, and wildly energetic performance style (Jamison 1995:169–171).

From the outset, the Green Grass Cloggers were well aware that their performance diverged from existing styles of clogging. Combining steps learned from the old-timers with their own inventions and aesthetic taste, the Green Grass Cloggers forged a style that, to them, fit in with existing styles without directly imitating them. While many in the team clogging circuit objected to their irreverence toward existing standards (as well as to their anti-establishment attitude and “hippie” appearance), the Green Grassers found approval from the older flatfooters and buck-dancers with whom they worked, including Willard Watson, Hansel Aldridge, and Robert Dotson (Jamison 1988:22). Their rowdy footwork, colorful costumes, and heartfelt enthusiasm for the dance overwhelmed audiences and inspired like-minded youths to start their own teams.

From its college roots, the Green Grass style of clogging has been passed through a predominantly collegiate network. Typically, after a clogging group was established at one university, a member of that group might leave to attend graduate school at another institution and would form a clogging group there. Groups could and did trace a lineage through colleges, as generations of clogging teams emerged, all dancing steps and figures invented by the Green Grass Cloggers, many with little knowledge of where these steps had come from (Jamison 1988:23).

The Blacksburg Hoorah Clogger Jamboree was the product of one such lineage. In 1975, a man named Jim Creede brought this style of clogging to Blacksburg from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he had learned it from a former Green Grass Clogger. Creede organized a weekly music and dance session on Sunday nights, which became hugely successful in a short period of time. Although Creede stayed in Blacksburg only for a year or two, in that time he taught a core group of dancers enough routines to establish a performing dance team. At the same time, there formed a core group of musicians who would play for the Sunday night sessions. Many of these original dancers and musicians have stayed in the area and are still active in Blacksburg’s old-time music and dance scene today.

Through the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Hoorah Cloggers were very visible, performing in local events and attracting considerable crowds to the Sunday-night clogging sessions. During these years, a lively “scene” developed around the performing dance group, the Sunday-night community sessions, and the musicians who played for dances and dance performances. Members of the group bought property together, formed romantic relationships, and entered into professional contracts with one another, bolstering ties of affinity that had formed from music and dance activities.

Interest in clogging started to wane in the mid-1980s, and the Hoorahs were dealt a serious blow in 1987 when the university student center, which had served as the group's rehearsal space, closed for a five-year renovation project. Combined with a disintegration of the original group, whose members had dispersed to start families, and a growing rift between the dancers and the now-distinct old-time music scene, the Hoorah performing group shrank to include at one time only four members. Despite these hardships, their performance was still in demand and the smaller group continued to practice and perform.

Starting in the early to mid-1990s, the group has witnessed another revival of interest and participation, due in part to the establishment of a weekly jam session in a downtown Blacksburg venue. As these Tuesday-night jams have introduced a new generation of college students and recent graduates to old-time music and dance, the Hoorah Cloggers have welcomed a number of young people to their ranks. Recent interest in other forms of social dance, such as swing and contra, has created a climate in which college-aged people are more apt to pursue dance activities. Recruitment of new members has been a priority for the new wave of Hoorahs, and several of the long-term members compare the current situation to the thriving scene of the late 1970s.

APPLYING TRADITION

How does this particular dance, which originated with college students in eastern North Carolina in the early 1970s, come to be known as an Appalachian tradition? For the Hoorah Cloggers, this is accomplished on four levels. The first of these is *place*: the group is based in the southern Appalachians, where flatfooting, square dancing, and old-time and bluegrass music developed and have come to represent the unique heritage of the region to visitors and residents alike. One of the younger cloggers, Melissa Marshall, grew up in Hillsville, Virginia (near Galax, Virginia, famous for its annual fiddlers' convention) and now dances with the Hoorahs as well as with a precision clogging group. I asked her about how this style of clogging fit in with other local music and dance activities practiced in southwest Virginia. Grouping the styles of dance together, she replied,

It's just typically our culture around here. Bluegrass and old-time music is everywhere, around here, in southwest Virginia, and beyond, actually . . . a lot of people are flatfooters around here, but it all converged from . . . the same era. And any event, musical event like that, it just goes right along with

the music, and we're just expected to be seen there, and—it's just our culture, around here, to have that (Marshall, interview).

In a region recognized for its thriving indigenous music and dance scene, the Hoorahs' style, derived from mountain dance but exported to other geographical locations, appears right at home in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Second, in contrast to contemporary popular styles of music and dance, this style of clogging *looks and sounds* like tradition.⁴ The visual, physical nature of a staged dance such as this makes for a powerful medium through which tradition is represented as an immediate and embodied creative form. The visceral experience of seeing live bodies on stage interacting and expressing themselves through vigorous movement unlike contemporary styles of performance provides an attractive and colorful representation of difference. When this difference is articulated as "tradition" in an announcement from the stage or a conversation with a Hoorah Clogger after the show, the classification rings true with what was seen and heard during the performance.

In addition to looking and sounding unlike contemporary dance and music, this style of clogging carries connotations of peaceful opposition to elements of modern life. Visible features of a Hoorah performance carry implications of an alternative ideology set against those encountered in other spheres of contemporary life. Visual representations of communalism (exhibited in the interactive choreography of the dance, discussed in detail later in this article), creativity (performed in the "individual boogies" and the celebration of personal style within the socially interdependent choreography), and an anti-consumerist orientation (expressed through their preference for homemade and thrift-store costumes) suggest the operation of an alternative value-system that, while it may or may not be associated with the past, nonetheless stands in contrast to that of mainstream society. Aurally reinforced by the sound of live string-band music, audible but not amplified instructions from the dancer calling the routine, and the spontaneous whoops and hollers of energized dancers, a Hoorah performance presents an engaging audio-visual representation that easily assimilates the label of *tradition*.

Third, it is associated with, and has emerged along with, other things thought to be traditional: old-time music, square dances, outdoor festivals, and an alternative "back-to-the-land" lifestyle crafted around practices of perceived rural origin. As Whisnant (1983), Becker (1998), and others have documented, Appalachian culture has for centuries been defined by outsiders as "traditional," an interpretive act that "tell[s] us less about the

identified people and their cultures than about their interpreters” (Becker 1998:2). Representing cultural difference as temporal difference, these invocations of *tradition* circumscribed inhabitants of the region as a “folk” group and idealized their lifeways as survivals from a past age.⁵ While the Hoorahs make no claims to be reviving or re-enacting something from the past, they do participate in a discourse in which certain values and practices associated with the past are positively represented and emulated. In this discourse, dance and music are thought to have their roots in the lifestyles of earlier times and thus continue to embody particular social features of that time period. Phil Louer articulates one version of this:

[T]his dance and this music both originated more or less . . . at a time when people . . . really lived and shared the sense of community. . . . In modern society, the various socialized forms that society takes, and the conditioning that we grow up in, takes us out of a real sense of living together in community. People live close to each other in subdivisions and in cities but often don’t really know each other, or don’t really share—it’s not always the case, but more often than not, it is (Louer, interview).

Here, the dance itself seems to be linked by origin to a lifestyle, ascribed to the past but operationalized as an alternative to the modern mainstream. Involvement in these styles of music and dance symbolizes adherence to a value system that stands in contrast with contemporary American society, characterized here by Phil as people living “close to each other . . . in subdivisions and in cities . . . [where they] don’t really know each other.” Members of the group exhibit a preference for grass-roots, cooperative, and time-honored ways of doing things. Many past and present Hoorahs have built or remodeled their own homes; the potluck is the social gathering of choice; several of the women in the group have shared their sewing skills by making and teaching others to make their own costumes. The choice to engage in these activities, rather than embracing modern convenient alternatives, parallels their performance of a “homegrown” style of dance that relies for its success on the presence and participation of a critical mass of musicians and dancers.

Fourth, dancing and hanging out with the Hoorahs *feels like tradition*. From its communally executed choreography, reminiscent of social square dance, to the activities that dancers organize and participate in together, the Hoorahs create and maintain a particular pattern of relationships, concretized as *community*, that is unique in their experience and associated with imagined social patterns of the past. Judy Kaminsky, one of the newer Hoorahs, explains her initial involvement in the group:



Hoorahs twirl in a "partner swing," a standard square dance move, here included as part of a stage routine. L to R: Lily Harvey and Benjamin Lieb; Phil Louer and Chelsea Wright.

I . . . kind of just slid into it, through all the people, I think. I just decided that I'd been here four years, in Appalachia, and never really experienced the culture, and just realized that there was this rich, deep history of music and dance, and that I had . . . been a student for four years, and not paid attention to any of it. . . . Finally I realized that I could be a part of a culture, and part of a history, and actually kind of establish somewhat of a home through dance and music, and . . . become part of a tradition (Kaminsky, interview).

For Judy, part of what inspired her involvement with the Hoorahs was the prospect of experiencing elements of a lifestyle understood as characteristic of the region and its history. A large percentage of the participants in this scene came to the area as college students; many grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. or other metropolitan areas with population turnovers on a regular basis. Involvement in music and dance traditions thus offers these student immigrants the opportunity to belong to a place and a social context more personally fulfilling than the transience of student or suburban life. Similarly, long-time dancer Barbara Wright observes of the group,

We do have our own tradition now for 25 years. The music is the real tradition, the link between all styles and localities. I feel a sense of community

and history shared with people when I dance with them, even people I don't know at a festival (Wright, personal correspondence).

In addition to the instant connection that is felt through participation in music and dance activity itself, dancers who become involved with the Hoorah Cloggers find themselves with the opportunity to become part of a network of close relationships and lasting friendships with ramifications in other spheres of life: business partnerships, romantic relationships, and countless informal networks of interaction and responsibility.

DANCING WITH COMMUNITY

In the above discussion, I have explored how this style of dance is categorized as *tradition*. One of the most important components of the dance's traditionality, I suggest, is its affiliation with a social configuration understood as *community*. How does the Hoorah Cloggers' model of *community* come to have real meaning as an experienced concept? In the following section I explore several processes, operating within the dance performance event as well as in the cultural formations that sustain its practice.

A useful and relevant model of *community* is Etienne Wenger's (1998) "community of practice," a term applied to groups that cohere around activities that produce structure and meaning for their members. These groups are characterized by three related qualities: (1) the mutual engagement of individuals; that is, their involvement in a network of sustained interpersonal relationships, (2) their negotiation of a joint enterprise: that is, their cohesion around an activity that serves as a central focus and reason for the group's existence, and (3) the development of a shared repertoire of activities, symbols, and artifacts that provide resources for the continued production of meaning. Wenger's thesis develops a theory of social learning as occurring within communities of practice. Learning, he suggests, is an ongoing, ubiquitous process, closely intertwined in the development of a person's identity as an individual and as part of a group (1998:5). In a community of practice, individuals acquire and internalize knowledge as they learn to be competent, fully participating members.

The negotiation of meaning, according to Wenger, takes place through the convergence of a pair of processes: participation and reification. "Participation," he explains, "refers to a process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process. It suggests both action and connection" (1998:55). Reification he defines as "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience

into ‘thingness.’ In so doing we create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized” (1998:58). As humans, we engage in continuous cycles of participation and reifications: as we act, we interpret and reflect upon our action; these mental gestures in turn transform our further participation, and so on. In many situations, such as a face-to-face conversation, the two processes combine to a degree that no distinction is perceived—the participation inherent in the encounter and the reification involved in the use of language are collapsed into the same experience. Although different meaning-making episodes will activate differing degrees of each complement, it is through the constant interplay of both processes that we produce meaning in our lives.

Contextualizing the Hoorah Cloggers as a community of practice allows us to clarify ways in which history is collectively negotiated and made meaningful for individuals. In this formulation, the past, reified as *tradition*, is utilized as a resource for, and interpreted in the context of, practical engagement in a present community. In addition, as Wenger notes, a community of practice develops and interprets its own history over time, reinforcing the sense of connection between present practice and past. This connection, however, remains one that is fundamentally activated in the community’s present, and in the presence of other community members. In the Hoorahs’ discourse, the group’s own quarter-century history may be elided with the larger history of music and dance in the region, positioning their experience within a longer period of traditional activity. An individual’s participation in the Hoorah Cloggers is thereby linked to the composite history of the group and the tradition and is invested with meaning through this association.

Featuring couple-based square dance moves and circle formations, one could easily make the claim that *community* is symbolized in the most immediately visible features of the Hoorahs’ dance. The figures performed by the cloggers suggest squares, circles, crosses, and stars by the configurations of the dancers and their paths on the floor. The geometry of these figures is realized only when all the dancers are aware of the group and of their position in relation to the other dancers. Most moves involve holding hands, making eye contact, coordinating body movements, and often embracing other dancers in a swing or lifting the female dancers off the ground.

Each dancer must be comfortable with the giving and receiving of weight that propels a “partner swing,” or a whirling “basket” formation in which the momentum of the eight dancers turning rapidly in a circle allows the women to lift their feet off the ground completely. These



During a routine, Cloggers "weave the basket," square dance figure used as part of their stage routine. Pictured, left to right: Jerone Gagliano, Kerry Waite, Bob Wright, Benjamin Lieb, and Barbara Wright.

figures are particularly crowd-pleasing, as they demonstrate what is possible for a well-coordinated group to accomplish. Synchronized percussive footwork adds an additional element of solidarity, as all the dancers participate in establishing a unison rhythm at high volume and in concert with the accompanying musicians. When this rhythm shifts, as it does when the group performs an "allamo" or the syncopated "synch step," each dancer must be attentive to the tempo and to the particular pattern of the step, as the effect of the rhythmic change will not be convincing to the audience if even one member is out of step. The fast pace and the intricacy of the figures require attentive and supportive dancers to fulfill their own roles in the dance as well as to ensure that others are where they need to be.

Learning the physical movements necessary for performance, a dancer internalizes the sensations of interacting with and responding to others in the group. And in fact, the presence of the group and the (relative) lenience of the dance's time structure (if a move takes an extra measure or two, the caller adjusts the calls to the dance as it progresses) make it easier for new dancers to join the group in performance. Even if they have not memorized all the steps and figures of a routine, if they are paired with experienced partners, new dancers can fake their way through a dance on stage.

Because the cooperative structure of the dance takes a great deal of pressure off the individual as a performer, dancers can more easily relax and enjoy dancing together on stage. Barbara Wright suggests that dancing with a group “is kind of a high form of being social,” and that

at its best, it’s coming together with the people that you’re dancing with, ‘cause you’re interacting with them, and dancing with them, and they’re dancing with you, and you feel that togetherness, and when it’s working, everyone gets very excited (Wright, interview).

The sociability of the dance, even as a stage genre, contributes to its potential to invite transcendence and a feeling of group cohesion in all who are present in the performative moment.

Apart from seeing the group perform on stage, a dancer’s first encounter with the Hoorahs’ version of *community* often comes through efforts to enlist new members. At the Tuesday-night jams and monthly square dances, members of the group attract and cultivate a pool of potential dancers and encourage them to attend the Sunday-night practices. Many of the younger cloggers in the group describe how their initial interest in the music and dance led them to meet (or be met by) group members who urged them to join in other activities. The group’s eagerness to include new faces in their ranks accelerates the formation of bonds of affinity among individuals. Regarding this “recruitment” process, Phil Louer explains,

We encourage people, we look for people who we think exhibit both . . . the understanding or the talent for the timing, and for the footwork, as well as . . . a certain passion for life, and just a generally positive energy response, or a high energy, that they don’t mind letting loose at times (Louer, interview).

The group and its members select each other based on a particular kind of attraction as well as an interest in participating in the kinds of relationships that characterize this group. New cloggers are attracted as much by the particular social group and their cultivation of a certain style of community as by the dance and music.

Likewise, the attention given to teaching and learning the dance reinforces a dancer’s perception of the group as a community. The first hour of a Sunday night practice is customarily spent teaching basic steps and sequences to beginning dancers; Tuesday night jam sessions offer an opportunity for dancers to learn steps as well. In these contexts, even the less-experienced dancers take part in teaching the beginners, and members are encouraged to take on more responsibility in teaching as they

become more experienced dancers. Randy Marchany, who has been involved with the Hoorahs for over twenty years, describes this as “a classic case of apprenticeship”:

The funny thing is that what happens then . . . you start off as a beginner learning from somebody, but now, a year later . . . you find somebody coming in and wants to learn something from you. . . . “No, no, I can’t talk to that guy because I don’t know enough yet. But I’ll talk to you because you’re . . . closer to my level” (Marchany, interview).

This type of learning by apprenticeship involves the participation of each member of the group. Newer dancers, who might be intimidated by the skill of more experienced dancers, are mentored by other dancers at different stages of learning. By involving even the less experienced dancers in the teaching process, the Hoorahs demonstrate an awareness that everyone has something to teach as well as something to learn. In performance, as well, the Hoorah Cloggers include opportunities for audience participation, in which observers are encouraged to learn basic steps and dance a square- or big-circle dance. Through the teaching and learning of the dance, which necessarily happens in face-to-face, physical, interactive exchange, cloggers of every skill level participate in networks of responsibility and responsiveness, in a present exchange of embodied knowledge.

Finally, to present an example of explicit reification within this community of practice, the group’s continued existence over the last twenty-seven years has enabled the formation of what Bellah, et al. in *Habits of the Heart* (1996) identify as a “community of memory.” A community, in this sense, is

one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory (1996:153).

Long-term dancers conceive of the group’s history as a narrative progression, from a time of immense popularity and high activity, through a slow and dry period, into a second heyday that continues to the present. Many of the dancers from the late 1970s and early 1980s are still in the Blacksburg area, and their memories of this time are actively shared and enjoyed among old clogging friends. Audio and video documentation, collected since the early 1980s, serves as a valuable record of choreogra-

phy (which is seldom written down) as well as of the personalities active in the group at a given time. Every couple of years, the group organizes a "Hoorah Clogger Reunion," which is generally well attended and serves to reinforce a consciousness of the group's longevity and continuity over time.

For many of the group's members, the relationships that the Hoorahs cultivate and the histories of these relationships represent the very idea of *community* itself. A telling statement is the following from Jen Pollard, one of the new wave of Hoorahs, during a group interview:

One thing that really impresses me about this community is that you [Hoorahs] have known these people for twenty years! And that just blows me away, being such a transient community as a college town is, to have this group of people that have been together and gone through all sorts of stuff. . . . To me it reminds me of what Appalachian culture is about, is about community and people staying in the same place, and having that history together, and that's what this is right here, and it's hard to find that these days, and I think a lot of people here in this group have come seeking that sense of just settling (Pollard, interview).

Jen's quote suggests that her experience of *community* with the Hoorah Cloggers is precisely that experience she associates with an Appalachian pastness.⁶ By participating in clogging and related social activities, individuals align themselves symbolically with values they perceive as constitutive of a local tradition.

Over the past twenty-five years, the individuals who have been a part of the Hoorah Cloggers have created a viable modern community sustained through participation in a developing tradition. At different points in their history, the Hoorahs have identified themselves and been identified as youth and old-timers; as counter culture and old-fashioned; as innovative and traditional; and as threats to and stewards of local customs. Shifting dynamics of time, place, performance, memory, discourse, and human affinity have synthesized and realized a phenomenon that appears larger than its own history, through which individuals participate in what they view as a classic example of tradition situated within a living and growing human community.

Bill Richardson, musician, former Hoorah Clogger, and organizer of many activities of the New River Old Time community offers a concluding observation on the Blacksburg tradition:

I think the process at work in the Blacksburg scene that is perpetuating our music and dancing is probably new, something that couldn't have

happened in earlier times. It's an extension of tradition because people in a community are learning to play the fiddle music and dance to it, but I think the setting and format is not one that ever happened before. It's not family-based, or based on tight, local communities and local traditions. It's based on openness and love of the music and dancing as things that add richness and value to lives, things that are priceless, that can't be purchased. And there again our reasons for playing and dancing probably aren't much different than why people were playing the music and dancing in prior generations (Richardson, personal correspondence).

Experiencing tradition in the Hoorah Cloggers is an activity that produces, frames, and inspires a community. Through present participation and discourse, history and memory play vital roles in the production of social meaning and the maintenance of a practical tradition.

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NOTES

- 1 As quoted by Phil Louer in an interview with Rodney Sutton, 7 August 1999, Clifftop, West Virginia.
- 2 This paper is based on my master's paper, "Pasts and Presence: Tradition and Community in an Appalachian Dance Style," completed in May of 2000. Among the many people who have contributed their assistance and feedback, I am particularly grateful to Jeff Titon at Brown University, as well as Phil Louer, Phil Jamison, Rodney Sutton, Toni Williams, Anne Rasmussen, Gail Matthews-DeNatale, Bill Richardson, Barbara Wright, and other member of the Hoorah Cloggers and the New River Old-Time Community.
- 3 See Tedlock (1979:395).
- 4 Strengthening the Hoorahs' perceived link to tradition is the observation that it looks and sounds to many people *more* traditional than does the more prevalent style of precision clogging, performed often in flashy costumes to recorded bluegrass, country, and pop music.
- 5 This attitude led to efforts such as the founding of settlement schools and the production of music festivals, intended to preserve what were thought of as wholesome rural customs threatened by the incursions of a sinful modern society. The "charitable" projects of outsider activists were, on the whole, ideologically driven efforts to promote a selective set of practices on the basis of their perceived moral potential.
- 6 For discussion of factors that have contributed to the construction of this Appalachian pastness in the wider American imagination, see Whisnant (1983) and Becker (1998).

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INTERVIEWS

- Judy Kaminsky, with other members of the Hoorah Cloggers. Group video interview with author, 30 March 2000, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- Phil Louer. Interview with author, January 2000, Blacksburg, Virginia.

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Randy Marchany. Interview with author and Phil Louer, 18 August 1999, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Melissa Marshall. Video interview with author, 31 March 2000, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Jen Pollard, with other members of the Hoorah Cloggers. Group video interview with author, 30 March 2000, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Rodney Sutton. Interview with author and Phil Louer, 7 August 1999, Clifftop, West Virginia.

Barbara Wright. Video interview with author, 28 March 2000, Blacksburg, Virginia.