

2015

The chronicles of agrimusic

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The chronicles of agrimusic

by

Seth Hedquist

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first thank my committee members. Dr. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg has seen this project develop ever since she introduced me to some of the source material when I was an undergraduate. Her guidance and support through the years since have helped me keep a level head through the moments of joy and doubt, and I am very grateful for her leadership. I also thank Dr. Kathleen Hilliard for challenging me to work harder on improving my writing. I find more enjoyment in the practice than I ever did before taking one of her classes. Dr. Bill Simpkins inspired me with his enthusiasm for his subject of expertise when I, a history major, took his environmental science class as an undergraduate. I hope in some way this work returns the favor.

I would also like to thank my seminar professors and fellow graduate students in the Iowa State University History Department. Engaging in class discussions with them and hearing their feedback on my work helped me exercise critical thinking, and pushed me to speak my mind in a room full of peers. I will greatly miss those meetings and peer reviews.

There were a few kind people who graciously contributed information about a family member whom I included in this thesis. I thank Vicki and Bob Anthofer, and Miles Orton for sharing their memories of Thomas (Tom) Mann. I have truly enjoyed meeting and visiting with you, and am very grateful for your generosity.

I have a few musician friends whom I would also like to thank. Jason Danielson and I have worked together on both music and history projects over the years, and I thank him for the teaching and playing opportunities he has extended to me in both passions. Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy has been a bandmate and counselor for several years now, and I thank her for

her ongoing inspiration and friendship. And, James Biehn remains a friend and guiding light as I continue to navigate the wondrous profession of music. I thank him for the many opportunities he has provided me, and overall professional example he sets.

Lastly, I offer thanks to my family. Kathryn Brown has been a true listener, teacher, and companion, and I thank her for helping me trade in notions of the ideal relationship for a real one. I have been missing out. I also thank Zach and Jacob Simmons for showing me brotherly love for many years, and look forward to seeing them celebrate life with their new families in the years ahead. I offer endless thanks to Saul Hedquist for sharing the gift of brotherhood with me. He also inspires me by his passion for his own scholarly work, and his devotion as a loving husband and father to his beautiful family. I thank my dad Paul Hedquist and stepmom Meg Altmix for being ever so supportive of the passions I pursue. I can only look on in amazement at the ways they have embraced life's joys and weathered its hardships. Finally, I would like to thank my mom Nona Meyer. Without her calm spirit and awareness, even in the face of unfavorable circumstances, I do not know where I would be.

ABSTRACT

This thesis tells the story of rural Iowa musicians who played music on behalf of the Iowa Farm Bureau between 1920 and 1937. While their participation may look like a show of support for the organization and its dream for commercial-based agriculture, the Farm Bureau's ability to lure people in by exciting playing opportunities on the radio and at large county pageants suggests they used deception and theatricality to get people singing. Men and women played music for the Farm Bureau, but more out of a genuine desire to make music in their ongoing communities, and to embrace new playing opportunities in the country. All the while, Farm Bureau leaders used local participants to advertise the perceived social benefits of agricultural organization in the country.

Scholars do not know the history of musicians like these. But if folk music is the music of folks, and not just of a few iconic figures, then this story of everyday rural musicians in Iowa is vital to the understanding of social participation and cultural preservation in America. While it is important to celebrate the contributions of people like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, scholars must be careful not to let those names become snares in the quest for a greater understanding of the everyday folks who made America's music.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: "SOME FUN TO LIVEN US UP"

*"Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike... The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which."*¹

George Orwell in *Animal Farm*

*"As a specific lobbying effort, the IFBF [Iowa Farm Bureau Federation] took its place among multiplying ranks of the separate, strong and vocal interest groups making up a pluralistic America."*²

Kimberly Porter in *Striving for a Square Deal: The Roots, Formation, Early Years and Transformation of the Iowa Far Bureau Federation, 1914-1928*

There is a scene in Laura Ingalls Wilder's classic, *Little Town on the Prairie*, where residents of the small town of De Smet, South Dakota get together to form a literary society. Heading the proceedings for the meeting was Mr. Clewett, the schoolteacher, who immediately called attendees to order. He then ran down a list of tasks for the group, including a roll call of members, nominating a temporary chairman, then having the nominee "nominate and ballot for permanent officers."³ Not so surprisingly, some men and women in the room were taken back by Mr. Clewett's task-oriented approach. It was then that Laura recalled her father Charles standing up and saying, "Mr. Clewett and townfolks, what we've come here for is some fun to liven us up. It does not seem necessary to organize anything. From what I've seen," he continued, "the trouble with organizing a thing is that pretty soon

¹ The term "agrimusic," which I use in the title and throughout this thesis, came to me on February 18, 2015; George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, reprint (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1963), 128.

² Kimberly Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal: The Roots, Formation, Early Years and Transformation of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, 1914-1928* (Ann Arbor: A Bell & Howell Company, 1996), 381-82.

³ Wilder, Laura Ingalls, *The Little Town on the Prairie*, Reprint Edition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971), 214.

folks get to paying more attention to the organization than to what they're organized for."⁴

After speaking a little longer Mr. Ingalls clearly had the room's attention and support.

Charles Ingalls played his fiddle throughout the *Little House* series. But whether he just played for the family on a cold winter night, to help the family and neighbors celebrate a wheat harvest, or to augment activities at community gatherings, Ingalls' music was nearly never "organized" music, though he often played with other people. He was purposeful with his playing, but not necessarily political. In fact, it would seem that his true motive in playing was, in fact, to "liven" people up and embrace genuine community participation in the context of his and his neighbors' world: agriculture.

In a starkly different classic literary example, George Orwell's characters in *Animal Farm* learned a song from Old Major, an elder pig and leader of all the animals. In a dream, Old Major recalled the words and melody to *Beasts of England*, a song he learned from his ancestors, which railed against humanity's oppression of animals, and evoked a longing for the day when all farm animals would rise up against their oppressors and run their own cooperative farming establishments. The tune was "something between *Clementine* and *La Cucharacha*," and one verse went as follows: "Soon or late the day is coming, / Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown, / And the fruitful fields of England / Shall be trod by beasts alone."⁵

Old Major's disciples sang *Beasts of England* as a hope-filled message before they took over Mr. Jones' farm, and continued to echo it as a triumphant anthem thereafter. Then, with two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, at the helm, the animals began to organize into a cooperative enterprise, creating committees and education programs, and working

⁴ Ibid, 214-215.

⁵ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 22-23.

incessantly to the point where “they finished the harvest in two days’ less than it had usually taken Jones and his men. Moreover,” wrote Orwell, “it was the biggest harvest that the farm had ever seen.”⁶ All the while, every week Napoleon and Snowball headed meetings where the animals debated and voted on the latest measures for moving their cooperative endeavor forward, and always ended the meetings with a group singing of *Beasts of England*. Though all the animals sang along, there were subtle variations in some characters’ willingness to subscribe to everything the pigs, or “brainworkers,” pronounced as best for the whole group.⁷

It is within this literary framework that this thesis investigates musicians’ participation in the most powerful agricultural organization in Iowa, and perhaps the nation: the Farm Bureau. This is a story about the Iowa Farm Bureau’s early adoption of rural Iowa musicians in the 1920s. Many historians have written about the scientific, economic, and business facets of this transformational age in agriculture, and for good reasons. State agricultural institutions like Iowa State College, and later the Cooperative Extension service, emphasized the integration of science and economics with agriculture in the early 1900s. The Country Life commission praised those early extension efforts and demanded more. Lastly, many people voiced their approval of merging science and farming. Said one Dallas County seed-testing proponent, “If you want good corn you don’t plant popcorn, and if you want good cattle you don’t use popcorn bulls.”⁸

⁶ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 36, quote; 39, in chapter III, Orwell shows how the animals began to organize, creating committees like the “Egg Production Committee” and the “Wild Comrades’ Re-education Committee.”

⁷ Ibid, 42, “We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organization of this farm depend on us.”

⁸ Walter E. Packard quoting his father-in-law, Henry Lee Leonard, an outspoken agriculturalist in Dallas County, interview by Willa K. Baum, *Walter E. Packard: Land*

Within this agricultural framework, there are three primary reasons for delving into the Farm Bureau's efforts in the 1920s to amass the support and talent of rural musicians in its heaviest clientele state. First, the rural picture is simply incomplete without it. As historian Anne Effland wrote, "Agricultural history as a field must broaden to incorporate social and community aspects, subsuming what is now called rural history and integrating our understanding of agriculture as an economic and social experience."⁹ In this case, studying the lives of everyday musicians in the country can only augment the understanding of community and social participation in rural America. Secondly, during this time period an understudied group of people brought their instruments to county fairs and on the radio under the affiliation of the Farm Bureau, though they may not have been members or even farmers. These *agrimusicians* were only amateurs in a vocational sense, which is to say that they could play and/or sing at significant, in some cases even professional skill levels, even if their professions were not in music. They performed well and often toted countywide reputations. As a result, county agents working in conjunction with their county Farm Bureaus called upon such agrimusicians to enhance their institutional events in the country. Finally, with agrimusic in the picture, this essay addresses the irony of how rural folks tried to maintain community ties, even if the Farm Bureau/Extension Service guise under which they played did not always operate in the best interest of farm communities.¹⁰

and Power Development in California, Greece, and Latin America (Berkeley: The University of California, 1970), 45.

⁹ Anne B. W. Effland, "When Rural Does Not Equal Agricultural." *Agricultural History* 74 no. 2 (Spring, 2000), 500.

¹⁰ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 134, "They [the Farm Bureau] constituted a business organization that lobbied

In its first year as a state institution, the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF) totaled just over 100,000 members. Despite such strength in numbers, historian Mary Neth warned, certain factors “make equating [Farm Bureau] membership with full acceptance of their agricultural policies somewhat questionable.”¹¹ Indeed, as a national movement, the Farm Bureau would quickly transform into a political pressure group bent on convincing the rest of the fast-moving, industrial nation that farming still mattered. With strong support coming from shipping companies, banks, and other moneyed powers, the Farm Bureau would end up asserting more authority than genuine influence in the Corn Belt.¹² As part of that transformation, Farm Bureau leaders preached to members and prospective supporters of the importance of approaching farming as a business above all else. “Thou shalt have no other business before farming,” wrote a group Iowa State College students in the first of ten spoof commandments on Moses’ original.¹³ Many agricultural leaders wanted to make America’s collective agricultural sector an economically proficient and competitive industry, even if it came at the cost of community. Farm Bureau leaders were some of the most outspoken among them, and worked to convince their constituency of their *need* for the advice agricultural leaders could provide.

for the preservation of agriculture as an industry, not for the preservation of small farmers or a system of small, family-owned farms.”

¹¹ Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal*, 180-85, membership number is on page 185, and the number totaled 104,192 by the fall of 1919. The pages leading up to that point describe how the IFBF was able to achieve such a high number, and this thesis will discuss it briefly in the first chapter; *Ibid*, 134-35.

¹² Theodore Saloutos and John Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 282, “its [the Farm Bureau’s] professed friendliness with those business and financial groups that many farmers had been taught to view with suspicion and distrust.”

¹³ “A Farmer’s Ten Commandments,” *The Grundy Register*, August 19, 1926, page 8.

Lessons in agricultural science and economics, however, would only arouse the attention of those who would directly benefit from such practices. People continued to leave the country for job alternatives and entertainment in urban scenes. In order to make country life appealing to rural folks, and the rest of the country, leaders and reformers would have to invest in advertising the perceived social benefits of living in America's rural parts. In local music communities, emerging county Farm Bureaus often found ready-made, low-cost advertising forces, which, with alluring playing opportunities before them, and pride-filled, farmer rhetoric, could be persuaded and adopted to perform on behalf of those county organizations.

The Farm Bureau's adoption of rural musicians helps illuminate the difference between people getting together for genuine social intercourse and entertainment, and a programmed people under the direction of certain individuals trying to get a message through to other interested parties. While local music communities went on the radio at Iowa State College and performed at county Farm Bureau pageants to play music in exciting new environments, they also served as window dressing for agricultural leaders who were eager to advertise rural America's vibrant sociocultural picture as the product of organization in agriculture.

CHAPTER 2

“VERY LITTLE JOYOUS SONG THERE”:
COUNTRY LIFE, FARM BUREAUS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRIMUSIC IN
IOWA

“Simplicity is not now the fashion in music.”¹

Liberty Hyde Bailey in *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*, 1919

By the 1910s, many farmers in Iowa could speak of the pioneer age of agriculture in the past tense. The previous generations’ struggles to barely maintain a subsistence living off the land were over. This new age of farmers put their faith in corn, an economically and environmentally stable crop, and used machinery to increase production. All the while, good returns on their yields allowed them a view from farmer paradise, what historians have deemed “The Golden Age of Agriculture.”²

Yet progressive reformers and experts in the emerging fields of agricultural science and economics saw that prosperity had its problems. Namely, Americans’ steady migration from country to city frightened many progressives not only concerned about overcrowded urban areas, but also about how rural America would be able to feed the nation’s growing population. As farmers increasingly began to produce for the national market, experts felt that agriculture needed a national strategy. Reformers hoped that cooperation and organization in the country would allay concerns about competition and individualism. But cooperation hinged on social interaction—a shortfall of country life from their perspective—

¹ Liberty H. Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1919), 212-13, the title and opening quotation both came from Liberty Hyde Bailey.

² Dorothy Schwieder, *75 Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 5.

not just in a business way, but also in regards to social occasions and entertainment in rural America. This first chapter examines reformers' views of the rural social condition in the early 1900s, and their ideas for getting local people involved in creating social activities and entertainment.³

Reformers and agricultural experts were, to a degree, quite successful in manifesting dreams of social and entertainment opportunities for rural residents, and local musicians proved to be valuable assets. They played at farmer's institutes, county fairs, and organizational meetings. Later, the radio and large-scale pageants would allow musicians to contribute in important ways to their communities under the banners of their county Farm Bureaus. But the fact that these musical communities often predated their county organizations leaves one to wonder if rural residents were ever as isolated as reformers presumed. While reformers pushed such ideas in the name of agricultural organization with some urgency, rural residents participated less out of a belief in reform, and more out of a genuine desire for fun with their families and friends. All the while, reformers painted the "music spirit" in the country as a delicate and "dying" entity, while newly developing styles of the town and city were capturing peoples' attention.⁴ By rendering rural music as frail, reformers justified their attempts to create "organized music" that advertised the positive sociocultural effects of organization in agriculture. Without knowing, many rural music communities in Iowa would serve as living propaganda for this effort.

By 1870, men and women of many different European backgrounds had settled Iowa's rural areas, and her environment was, in part, what drew them in. The rich soil offered

³ Ibid, 5.

⁴ Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*, 212-13.

a first chance to sons who held no land titles, a second chance to farmers who had failed further east, and an overall opportunity for tenants who were eager to call a patch of land their own. So, west they came; families originally from Germany, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Denmark, England, and the Netherlands all settled Iowa's rural areas, as did the native born. Farming was the main motivation, but men and women also took to business, artisan work, and coal mining. The 9,516 African Americans living in Iowa by the 1880s generally looked for work in more urban counties.⁵

During the post-Civil War decade, emerging railroad companies expanded into the state and induced Iowa farmers to participate in wider markets. Four major companies including the Chicago North Western and the Union Pacific had expanded into Iowa by 1869, and as historian Dorothy Schwieder wrote, Iowans by and large could "move into a second phase of economic development whereby industries appeared, most of which were agriculturally related."⁶ By 1890 Iowans had completely settled the state's agricultural land. Although early Iowans found potential for a growing a wide array of crops in the state's infancy, by 1870, Iowans to turned to specializing in corn production. The economic reasons are more obvious, but as one corn proponent observed, environment played a role in the decision as well:

This grain [corn] is the indigent farmer's main dependence for without it, I do not see how he could live and support his stock. It affords the means of subsistence to every living thing about his place, particularly during periods of snow, or hard frost; for not only is everything, down to the dog and cat, fond of the grain, in some shape or another, but its very stalks, leaves, and husks afford a valuable fodder for cattle and horses... It is not like other grain easily

⁵ Ibid, 16, reasons for coming to Iowa; Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 97, where families came from, 90, African Americans

⁶ Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 65.

injured; but once ripe, there it stands, setting at defiance rain, frost, snow, and avery [sic] vicissitude of climate, often through great part of winter.⁷

Agricultural experts from land grant colleges further proclaimed the corn gospel, and many more farmers followed suit.

To the credit of corn growers and proponents, the shift to corn and hog production from wheat and other small grains did help many Iowa farmers bear the blow of economic depression in the 1890s. By the turn of the century, Iowa farmers had reason to be optimistic. They saw land values on the rise. “Iowa lands that sold at \$10 to \$30 an acre thirty years before,” wrote historians Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, “were selling in 1908 at \$80 to \$125... Farmers who had been able to hold onto their farms had thus accumulated wealth at a rapid rate.”⁸ Furthermore, farmers across the Midwest received some of the best prices ever for their products. In 1914 a corn farmer received 60 to 70 cents a bushel for his crop, up from 25 to 30 cents twenty years before.⁹

Ultimately, corn proved to be far less fragile than wheat, oats, and barley. What authors like Bogue and Neth claim many farmers did not foresee was that by giving up wheat and other small grain production, they would also be giving up the cultural practices and social integration that came with them. From an environmental standpoint, these authors’ assertions came from the very nature of these crops themselves. Farm people hustled to harvest wheat and other small grains because the crops would otherwise perish quickly in the field. This created a greater need for a ready labor force and borrowing and lending among

⁷ Allan Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*, reprint, 1963 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 10, 129.

⁸ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West* (Madison: Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1951), 23.

⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

settlers. The benefit from such needs was that the wheat and small grain environment created a space for more community involvement and interaction among farm families. By contrast, Bogue made it clear that “corn harvest was not a time of strenuous urgency like the other small grain harvest... The corn ears could remain on the stalks in the field until spring, with little loss in feeding value and, usually, little damage from wildlife.”¹⁰ Corn required little to no community cooperation.

In *Preserving the Family Farm* Mary Neth took the cultural examination further by not only echoing Bogue’s assessment of how the standardization of corn left little in the way of cultural stimulation, but also maintained that the wheat harvest was a social affair for all participants, especially women. Wrote Neth, “Accounts of meals—both their quantity and their quality—enrich harvest folklore,” and “Meals united the work of women to the male work of threshing, and food symbolized community sharing.”¹¹ Furthermore, one of Neth’s greatest contributions was the observation that farm men and women did not just confine themselves to these “male” and “female” roles. As wheat harvest was such a demanding time, women worked in the fields alongside men when someone was injured, if money was tight for hiring, and/or if the labor supply was low.¹²

Yet when Iowans and other Midwesterners began to replace wheat growing with corn and hog production, they essentially endorsed, purposefully or not, the gospel preached by agricultural experts that farmers needed to better understand their “own soils, climate, animal

¹⁰ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 149; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, 133.

¹¹ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 154-155.

¹² *Ibid*, 166.

and plant diseases, markets, and other local facts.”¹³ Experts at agricultural institutions like Iowa State College (ISC) sought to turn farming into a profession of precision, where farmers were business owners producing for wider markets and joining organized groups intent on pushing for legislative action to guarantee fair prices.¹⁴

As Iowa farmers continued to specialize, they also increased the size of their farms. Despite such signs of prosperity, however, agriculturalists and progressive reformers found the increasing physical distance among farmers to be a point of concern. For with greater distance between them, they thought, how would farmers be able to socialize with their neighbors? With these economic and quality-of-life concerns in mind, agricultural experts responded by creating the Cooperative Extension Service, an effort to bring farmers, local and state organizations, and eventually the federal government together in a never-before-seen web of communication on scientific agriculture and rural social practices. Then, in 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission, a group of progressive agricultural experts handpicked by committee chairman Liberty Hyde Bailey, Professor of Agricultural Science at Cornell. The Commission sought to curb the increasing flow of people migrating to cities by making farming more profitable, less strenuous, and rural life in general more attractive. The Commission also wanted to raise the overall

¹³ Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 28-29.

¹⁴ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 134; Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement*, 10, “Agricultural extension work of a well-organized kind is now beginning to come out of the colleges of agriculture, and this must be extended and systematized so that, with other agencies, it may reach every last man on the land.”

economic efficiency of the U.S. agricultural sector and advocated for extension programs at agricultural institutions like Iowa State College.¹⁵

In 1915, the nation sounded a loud call for farmers to maximize production in order to meet the demands of future Allies at war in Europe. Thanks to farmers' relatively prosperous economic situation—increased income, acreage, and new machinery to maximize production—they met these demands with great success. When the U.S. entered the conflict in 1917 Americans felt even more of an obligation to amplify their efforts. To keep production up, and to address common grievances, farmers in various Iowa counties began to meet and lobby for expert help from people who had attended and/or worked in conjunction with land grant colleges like Iowa State. These agricultural agents—also known as extension agents, or county agents—would advise their constituents on the latest tools, methods, and techniques for running a successful farm business, and sometimes help coordinate social activities. Although, several Iowa counties appointed extension agents before the war, the conflict's demands spurred the movement. By the end of World War I every county in Iowa had an extension agent to communicate with farmers and advise them on the latest methods and technology for agriculture. These county organizations made up of farmers, landowners, and extension agents called them selves Farm Bureaus.¹⁶

¹⁵ William A. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1974), 25; Schwieder, *75 Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 12-14; *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, Reprint, 1909 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1917), 29; Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement*, 10, 75-76. All of these pages show Bailey's advocacy of ongoing extension work at agricultural colleges.

¹⁶ Schwieder, *75 Years of Service*, 15, 31-33, 21-22; Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America*, 91, also has a good description of the creation of farm bureaus.

Not so long after the war ended in Europe, farmers in the U.S. sank into an economic depression. During the war the U.S. played “banker” to its Allies across seas, providing financial loans and making good on demands for exports, especially of farm products.¹⁷ But not long after the war, the U.S. put a halt on foreign loans, and developed an enormous surplus of farm products when former allies ceased such demands shortly after the war ended. As Theodore Saloutos explained, even though Europe kept demand up into 1919, farmers saw prices fall sharply by 1920, and with them, land values and purchasing power.¹⁸ By the time many other Americans lamented the stock market crash in 1929, the nation’s farmers were already no strangers to depression.

Despite hard times, the ideological seeds of agricultural organization and cooperation that farmers and county agents planted before and during the war had enough time to take root. It was at this juncture, too, that local and state leaders in Iowa began to mobilize their county Farm Bureaus into the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF) in 1918. The IFBF then played a critical role in the establishment of the American Farm Bureau Federation just one year later. As agricultural leaders deliberated over the direction the young AFBF would take, people like Henry C. Wallace, then Secretary of Agriculture and former member of Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission, were especially vocal in their wish to see the national organization become a strong business institution. “This federation,” he wrote, “must not degenerate into an educational or social institution. It must be made the most powerful

¹⁷ Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), 3-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 4-5.

business institution in the country.”¹⁹ As the AFBF largely adopted Wallace’s model, it alienated itself from other related agricultural forces at work. Country Lifers, for example, who had just incorporated into the National Country Life Association (NCLA) in 1919, wanted to enact ways of making farming as a profession more profitable, but the group of thinkers also deliberated over ways to make life in the country more attractive. In this “social gospel” Country Lifers integrated visions of a revitalized church, improved education, a countryside free of saloons, and generally more rural social opportunities.²⁰ Despite the AFBF and NCLA’s split in ideology, county Farm Bureaus continued to take influence from Country Lifers’ “social gospel,” and relied heavily on local musicians to be the foot soldiers in carrying out those aims in the 1920s.

Historians have already spent considerable time examining reformers’ influence, even control, in rural affairs, and some of the same reformers certainly harbored a vision for rural music. As Nancy Berlage evinced, Farm Bureau-sponsored entertainment did not stem solely from the grassroots efforts of individuals in their own counties, “rather, participants grounded many of these social activities in professionals’ research on the sorts of recreation needed to improve rural life.”²¹ Indeed, fifteen years after the Country Life commission published its report, county Farm Bureaus in Iowa and elsewhere followed their notion of capitalizing on local talent to put on small and large-scale events. When the commission sent out a circular of questions to nearly 550,000 people in the farming sector, they included a question that

¹⁹ Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal*, 149-59, 187; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 266.

²⁰ Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America*, 95, 24; *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 98.

²¹ Nancy Berlage, “Organizing the Farm Bureau: Family, Community, and Professionals, 1914-1928,” *Agricultural History* 75 (October, 2001), 430.

summed up county Farm Bureau cultural efforts in the 1920s: “Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment and social intercourse as much as they should?”²² Judging by the efforts of many county agents, farmers, and musicians in the 1920s, their answer would have been an emphatic “no.”

President Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission made few specific references to the state of music in rural America in their initial report, but the movement’s main spokesperson, Liberty Hyde Bailey, made his sentiments clear ten years later. “The *music spirit* seems to be dying out in the country,” he wrote in *The Country Life Movement*, a follow up to the Country Life Commission’s report of 1909.²³ “I think the lack [of “joyous song”] is in part due to the over-mastering influence of professional town music, and in part to the absence of simple country forms.”²⁴ Bailey was not alone in his disapproval of the evolving musical styles of the day, heard in towns and urban areas. Whether one was a city or country dweller, radio stations and travelling bands spread emerging styles to previously foreign places, and naturally sparked some resistance. One Des Moines resident wrote to station WOI at Iowa State College in Ames praising their Sunday programming selections, while adding, “Why can’t people have more real music? Why persist in filling the air with jazz, especially on a Sunday?”²⁵ But Bailey’s reference to musical styles was no doubt a metaphoric example of the Commission’s vision for rural life in general: a place of simplicity

²² Country Life Commission, *Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), 26-27.

²³ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*, 212-13.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 212-213.

²⁵ W.I. Griffith, “Annual Report (1925-1926),” *WOI Radio and Television Records*, Box 19, Folder 1, page 51.

rather than complexity, and organization as opposed to chaos and unpredictability. In early jazz music, the horn players in the band often improvised simultaneously, interweaving counter melodies that some early listeners might have perceived as chaotic and disorganized, with the players seemingly in their own isolated worlds. Similarly, Bailey and Country Lifers believed “that one of the greatest insufficiencies in country life is its lack of organization or cohesion, both in a social and economic way.”²⁶ By uniting rural people in an organized fashion, Bailey believed that country life might become what he felt its best music already was: “simple,” “direct,” and “as plain and sweet as a bird’s note.”²⁷

Since all was not “plain and sweet” in Bailey’s rural America, reformers sought remedies, and as much as this meant bringing in new programs for social interaction, it also meant rooting out unwanted, corruptive societal elements that threatened to infiltrate the country side. Historian Susan Sessions Rugh wrote of how late nineteenth-century Illinois communities, leery of travelling shows, circuses, and other migratory entertainment groups, put forth initiatives to keep those groups out of their communities, and keep their locals out of saloons. Their fears of such groups and establishments were not altogether misplaced. One woman was sexually assaulted by a man whom locals believed to be the animal trainer for a visiting circus act, but she was, “under the influence of some drug,” and never able to positively identify her abuser.²⁸ Rugh also found stories of men under the influence of alcohol engaging in fisticuffs in saloons and at community gatherings. Such instances galvanized reformers to organize under banners of temperance and women’s rights in rural

²⁶ Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*, 97.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 213.

²⁸ Susan Sessions Rugh, “Civilizing the Countryside: Class, Gender, and Crime in Nineteenth-Century Rural Illinois,” in *Agricultural History* vol. 76, no. 1 (Winter, 2002), 78.

places. Though Rugh offered extreme cases, Country Lifers later adopted the idea of protecting rural inhabitants from potential dangers by stamping out saloons, saying, “drunkenness is often a very serious menace to country life, and... the saloon is an institution that must be banished from at least all country districts and rural towns if our agricultural interests are to develop to the extent to which they are capable.”²⁹ The Commission’s promotion of local (or “native”) sources of entertainment was just as much a strategy for keeping “exotic” forms of entertainment, and potentially dangerous people, out of the countryside, as it was to keep prosperous farmers and healthy social intercourse in.³⁰

A rural detoxification needed to occur, and Bailey and the commission turned to the rural church as a strategic stronghold for improved social conditions in rural America. In the early 1920s Country Lifers saw the rural church deteriorating from its own rigidity and “outworn” doctrine, and viewed it as a place where only old people and women spent any time.³¹ All the while, rural families, they thought, were also becoming entranced by new technologies, like the automobile, that allowed them to take long Sunday drives, attend churches in town, and participate in more social events on the Sabbath. Communities were also coordinating Sunday baseball games and other activities that some church folks found appalling. Despite rural America’s alleged falling out with the church, reformers still believed it could be a beacon for improved social life if they could make the extension agent

²⁹ *Report of the Country Life Commission*, 98.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 75-78; *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 116.

³¹ Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America*, 82.

to his county, what “the pastor is to religious interests,” thereby getting farmers to take their advice for scripture.³²

Reformers’ efforts to draw upon local talent was just as much a means to shield rural America’s youth, as it was to keep adults from getting entranced by the wrong forms of social entertainment. Thus, in addition to a revitalized church, Country Lifers also called for educational reform in rural America. They believed in school consolidation and opening more high schools so youth in need or desire of higher education did not have to go to school in town or the city. They also sought to augment the types of courses available to students. Bailey, for example, promoted nature and cultural studies, in addition to helping students understand the agricultural world they were growing up in. All the while, the Extension Service entered this arena by promoting youth programs and boys and girls clubs.³³

Local musicians were invaluable in both country church and rural education reform. They went on the radio with local ministers and worked with them in coordinating county events, thereby showing a coalition between rural ministers and their local, cultural representatives. Local musicians were also on the front lines of education reform, as they founded, led, and promoted 4-H music groups, and continued to welcome youth into adult orchestras. While county extension and home demonstration agents needed professional training at agricultural colleges to take charge in their respective county Farm Bureau activities, local musicians provided experts with a ready-made, cultural force to make

³² Ibid, 82-84; Thomas J. Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 148-150, 126, 138-39; David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1979), 74.

³³ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1979), 55-56.

agriculture look good at a time when many Americans thought it in desperate need of a makeover.³⁴

In order to test the pulse of an organization, scholars must understand the impulses of its members, not just its leaders. One question that has been difficult for historians to gauge is: Were farmers as isolated in the early 1900s as reformers claimed? An easy assumption to make is that, because many rural men and women followed expert advice in regards to the farm and home, this must lead to the conclusion that reformers were correct in their assertion that rural people at the dawn of the twentieth century were living lonely existences, and in *need* of expert help. Prior to the progressive rural reform movements of the early 1920s, however, men and women, families and neighbors came together for all sorts of occasions. Aside from sharing labor and tools during planting and harvest time, dances and games, and even funerals were all essential avenues for social interaction. In fact, as Mary Neth proclaimed, not only were many Midwestern farm families embedded in community life, when agricultural institutions began dictating the direction of agriculture at large, the result ironically was, in part, what social reformers initially set out to prevent: a class of “isolated but prosperous” farmers.³⁵ Why then, did musicians—cultural representatives and catalysts for community activity—play music on behalf of an organization that did not necessarily hold the best interests of farm communities in mind? Did they participate to fulfill Country Life visions of rural sociability during this time? Did they play on their county Farm Bureau’s behalf because they felt they needed to? Or, were they taking advantage of new playing opportunities that could be likened to modern conveniences of the time? In the case

³⁴ M.C. Burritt, *The County Agent and the Farm Bureau* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 71.

³⁵ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 149, 154-55, 4.

of organizations like the Farm Bureau, scholars must be willing to use tools from the history of consumerism to find the answers.

Take for example, the automobile. In 1905, 1,573 Iowans owned cars; by 1916, one out of every 16 Iowans had registered cars. For rural Iowans, automobiles served utilitarian and recreational purposes. People could make faster and more frequent trips to town for supplies, and go on leisurely country rides with family and friends, particularly on Sundays. It was because of these conveniences, and not necessarily because rural folks lived a secluded existence prior, that many rural people bought cars in the early 1900s. As Mary Neth noted, “Although farm people were rarely isolated, the automobile, nevertheless, enabled farm people to travel greater distances in shorter periods of time, giving them more choices in where they could go to create a social life.”³⁶ But even though cars were new, they were, more often than not, a convenient way for rural residents to participate in the old. Hal Barron illustrated how people used automobiles to “reinforce” social traditions, and how their use, furthermore, “did not necessarily signal an embrace of a new consumer culture and a rejection of older agrarian precepts.”³⁷ Comparatively, rural residents’ choice to participate in organizations did not necessarily translate to a subscription to reformers’ ideas of anti-individualism or in favor of management. The Farm Bureau offered new and exciting ways for communities to interact, and because of this, the organization fit well into members’ lives for a time.

Neth and Barron seem to agree that rural residents were “rarely isolated,” but were they “creating” or “reinforcing” social life by their consumer choices? In a sense, the Farm

³⁶ Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots*, 110, 116; Neth, “Leisure and Generational Change,” 166.

³⁷ Hal Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 209.

Bureau did not “create” social life anymore than someone searching for water created the aquifer below ground. Through music, the people in this story already had social life. As this thesis will show, agricultural institutions were the thirsty seekers, local musicians were the body of water, and the county agent was the apparatus the institutions used to tap into that already-existing resource. The Farm Bureau/county agent team created social programs, not social life.

Historians have further enhanced the consumerism discussion with theories on individual agency and choice. David Blanke creatively showed how agricultural organizations should be brought in to the discussion as another product in the consumerist fold, saying, “From purchasing cooperatives and the country store to the Grange and the Farm Bureau, these institutions were created, used, and frequently discarded by rural consumers in interesting and instructive ways.”³⁸ He further remarked on “the relative ease by which citizens formed, participated within, took meaning from, and abandoned their voluntary associations.”³⁹ True enough, the Farm Bureau’s spike in membership in the early 1920s and subsequent fall through the rest of the decade implicate peoples’ initial excitement over the organization’s early initiatives, as well as the wearing off of that enthusiasm as the depression of the 1920s worsened. But in the Farm Bureau’s case, farmers may not always have been able to come and go with “relative ease.” As Mary Neth has pointed out, “To participate in the larger statewide shipping associations or terminal markets coordinated by government agencies, farmers had to join Farm Bureaus.”⁴⁰ If true, this means that for some

³⁸ David Blanke, “Consumer Choice, Agency, and New Directions in Rural History,” in *Agricultural History* 81, no. 2 (Spring, 2007), 194.

³⁹ *ibid*, 194-95.

⁴⁰ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 135.

farmers, Bureau membership was a mandatory string attached to another opportunity.

Historian Kimberly Porter compounded the argument by uncovering how the IFBF went from an agency of roughly 40,000 members in 1920, to a powerhouse institution of just over 100,000 a year later. When Iowa Governor William L. Howard informed state Farm Bureau representatives of his fear that the National Nonpartisan League (NPL) was looking to Iowa to gain influence in Iowa, the Farm Bureau launched a multi-thousand dollar membership drive in hopes of taking the state first, and they did. Through county campaigns and anti-socialist rhetoric, the state federation built a large clientele, the likes of which no other organization had seen.⁴¹

The membership campaign of 1920 gives rise to the question of whether or not the Farm Bureau's classification as an agrarian pressure group extended beyond the political sense. Until historians have more information on individual consumers' needs and wants, they cannot make broad claims about how much, or little, pressure undecided residents felt from family, neighbors, and other acquaintances who did join the Farm Bureau. Nevertheless, this way of gaining membership through market control and scare tactics reveal how the Farm Bureau may have been strong in numbers, but remained weak in genuine leader/clientele relations. These facts are a reminder that, unlike the automobile and other consumer products, organizations talk.

Historians have not been remiss in their efforts to focus on negative aspects of Extension Service and Farm Bureau operations in rural America. Mary Neth argued that the Farm Bureau "fundamentally countered rural community-based institutions" by top-down

⁴¹ Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal*, 180-88.

organization and linkage to “production-oriented, centralized agriculture.”⁴² In the case of the Farm Bureau’s early development, however, historian Nancy Berlage has painted the organization’s ideas and tactics to be of a more ingenuous nature. While early Farm Bureau members did embrace new scientific farm methods of the day, they still wanted to maintain “an ideology of family farm, family production, and community... They shared labor, investment, and risk, and integrated family and kin into their organizational activities.”⁴³ In effect, both authors were right, but there was clearly a disconnect between what national leaders envisioned for the newly-formed American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) in 1919, and the programs that the county and state Farm Bureaus were already carrying out. Thus historians have revealed two Farm Bureau histories: the history of its state and national organizations, starring prominent leaders and emissaries building on the momentum of high membership and the resulting finances that enabled them to push their dreams forward, and the county-level Farm *Bureaus*, where members participated for various reasons. This thesis will continue to focus on the latter. For while Mary Neth’s Farm Bureau taken by itself reveals a national organization partly responsible for the decline of community in rural America, some members on the local level, perhaps not fully aware of the national organization’s intentions, or naïve about leaders’ promises, still actively participated with their communities in local Farm Bureau social programs.

This study comes to the story of these locals by way of county agents’ records. Beginning in 1917, agents began writing annual narrative and statistical reports. More often than not, county agents are a one-dimensional body in the historiography. Scholars have

⁴² Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 133, 135.

⁴³ Nancy K. Berlage, “Organizing the Farm Bureau,” 420.

rarely given them any persona, and because they were “experts,” critics have often portrayed them as ready and willing proponents of leaders’ agricultural policies. Scholars can look to Great Depression history for the best example of the agent-as-henchman school of thought. After Congress passed President Roosevelt’s Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the administration decided it would be best to place the program in the hands of the Extension Service, which meant that county agents would be distributing subsidy payments to their local constituents. In the South especially, where there were a high number of tenant farmers and sharecroppers, agents and the landowners they served often made a mockery of this practice, providing no benefits to the aforementioned land workers. These cases of corruption caused one man to lament, “The county agent, created for a good and laudable purpose, has been vamped into a tool for politicians... he is in many instances the active competitor of the local elevator, the retail feed dealer, the retail coal merchant and practically every other merchant and enterprise in the community... he is... a rural ward-healer...”⁴⁴ All the while, the Extension Service and Farm Bureau were still associated through the Depression years, with some people referring to the conglomeration as the Extension/Bureau Axis.⁴⁵

One must wonder, then, if county agents ever fulfilled their “laudable” purpose at the dawn of the Extension Service, and worked as genuine helpers of farmers, not just henchmen to program leaders and well-to-do landowners. While more and more counties joined the ranks of those that now had a county agent at the helm, they made an official alliance between the Cooperative Extension service and the Farm Bureau almost inevitable. In a

⁴⁴ Lester M. Salamon, “The Time Dimension in Policy Evaluation: The Case of the New Deal Land-Reform Experiments,” in *Public Policy* 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1979), 142-143; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 490-491.

⁴⁵ Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 491-492.

report issued by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, the organization made their sentiments on forging an alliance with Cooperative Extension, as well as the U.S.D.A. crystal clear, and echoed Country Life gospel from nearly a decade before: “These three cooperating parties are working to a common end, namely... to make the farm business more profitable,... the farm home more comfortable and attractive,...” and “the community a better place in which to live.”⁴⁶ When the U.S. government halted funding to the Extension Service that it had appropriated during the war, the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation launched a major membership drive bringing them to over 100,000 members in their first year. Local Farm Bureaus then appropriated added funds from the 1918 membership drive to the Extension Service to further educational programs. In 1918, the organizations forged ahead with such a fusion that some people had a difficult time recognizing them as two separate institutions, though they were. Additionally, many rural folks mistakenly thought that one had to be a Farm Bureau member in order to benefit from Cooperative Extension services.⁴⁷

A closer look at the county agents’ early days, however, reveals a divergence between agents’ roles at the local level and bureaucratic forces at the top pushing for incorporation at the state and national level. As Mary Neth wrote, prior to World War I, local bureaus “varied in membership and outlook.”⁴⁸ In this capacity, county agents and their local constituents may have been able to act with more autonomy and good faith in their efforts to simply make farming more profitable and farm life more fulfilling in their respective counties. Some agents and Extension Service leaders even denounced the idea of counties mobilizing into

⁴⁶ Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Records, MS 105, Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Box 43, Folder 12, “The Cooperation of the County Farm Bureau With the Iowa State College and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1922,” 1.

⁴⁷ Schwieder, *75 Years of Service*, 36, 43.

⁴⁸ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 132-33.

state organizations, and eventually states into a national Farm Bureau movement, preferring to keep Farm Bureaus as cooperative, county organizations with social and educational aims. Even after the formation of the AFBF and the gradual turn from a cooperative organization to a pluralistic interest group, county organizations continued to fund extension activities. All that said, historians must gain a deeper sense of the relationship between county agents and their local constituents. As this study will show, agents needed to build a rapport with local musicians if they were ever going to call upon them to play on the radio and at pageants, and to add some excitement to otherwise tedious Farm Bureau meetings and other gatherings.⁴⁹

As county Farm Bureaus continued to move forward with some autonomy in the early 1920s, state and national leaders deliberated over the direction the young AFBF would take. By 1923, the Farm Bureau was also beginning to lose members. As experts had advised farmers to ramp up production to aid in the war effort, many farmers blamed the organization, agricultural institutions, and their county agents when such advice, they felt, left them stranded with surplus crops and poor prices, and loans they were unable to pay back on acreage and equipment. Agricultural institutions showed little signs of slowing down, but kept advising. After fifty years of promoting corn, agricultural institutions and leaders like Henry A. Wallace were now advising farmers to grow less corn, and to plant more clover to counter growing surpluses. Clearly, county and state Farm Bureaus needed to unite their constituency if they were to draw other people in. With a continued disparity between local and national initiatives, leaders found them selves in need of a way to get farmers to rally

⁴⁹ Christiana McFadyen Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal: A Study of the Making of National Farm Policy 1933-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 7; Kimberly K. Porter, "Embracing the Pluralist Perspective: The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and the McNary-Haugen Movement," in *Agricultural History* 74 (April, 2000), 381-82.

behind them, and soon found potential in a piece of legislation that would encompass the whole of the AFBF's efforts in the 1920s.⁵⁰

By the mid 1920s, amid early depression, the young AFBF and its state organizations focused their collective energy on pushing prospective legislation through Congress. In 1924, the IFBF publicly endorsed the McNary-Haugen bill, a movement to get farmers better prices for their yields, and to tackle the ongoing surplus problem in agriculture. While other states, and the AFBF soon followed Iowa's lead, it would still be an uphill battle for leading agriculturalists to try to convince government leaders and the populace of the need to improve the agricultural sector's economic standing.⁵¹ Using economics as leverage would only grab the attention of those who benefitted directly from the bill's resulting measures. What incentive did angry farmers have to listen to agricultural leaders whom they already viewed with mistrust? Why would rural folks with a heightening sour taste of life in the country care when opportunities in the city seemed so much more promising? Lastly, why would urbanites pay attention to a bill that they saw as an industrial world apart, rural America's last throw in the face of the rest of the country's inevitable falling out with farming? A purely economic argument would not work for McNary-Haugen proponents. Agricultural leaders needed to dress agriculture up. They needed that cultural element that

⁵⁰ Jenny Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 147n; Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, 132; James H. Shideler, *Farm Crisis, 1919-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 86.

⁵¹ Porter, *Embracing the Pluralist Perspective*, 383; Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal*, 35-38, An interesting note: the McNary-Haugen bill was very similar to the later Agricultural Adjustment Act that the AFBF and President Franklin Roosevelt would work together to pass. Campbell wrote that, "to a marked degree in the McNary-Haugen movement, the A.F.B.F. was rehearsing the role that it would play in the New Deal for agriculture," (35-36). This will be discussed more in Chapter Three.

makes people stop and truly pay attention. They had a message; they just needed people to sing it.

CHAPTER 3

“LET US FARMERS STAND UNITED FOR OUR RIGHTS”:
FARM BUREAU BANDS AND THE MCNARY-HAUGEN YEARS

*When the farm gets legislation
All our griefs will pass away
For the surplus will be handled
In the good old federal way¹*

On September 23, 1926, Jack Dempsey fought Gene Tunney in what is now considered one of the most famous boxing matches in history. The two heavyweights fought for ten rounds in pouring rain before Tunney walked away the decisive victor. A record crowd of 130,000 packed in to Sesquicentennial Stadium in Philadelphia to witness the suspense. Another estimated thirty-nine million people tuned in on “a thirty-one-station nationwide radio network.”² It is difficult to imagine anyone without high stakes in the match’s outcome not being entertained by the sheer scope of the event, except some residents of Grundy County, Iowa, who hoped instead to hear their own Grundy County Farm Bureau broadcast a program from station WOI, at the Iowa State College Campus in Ames that same evening. But due to the “static and interference of the Dempsey-Tunney fight,” wrote the Grundy County agent, the “reception of our listeners was not all that could be desired.”³

¹ Julia Montange, “Let Us Farmers Stand United for Our Rights,” 1926, Papers, 1926-1933, Iowa Women’s Archive. The University of Iowa Libraries. The title and opening quote come from this song. The words are written to the tune of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”

² Bruce J. Evenson, *When Dempsey Fought Tunney: Heroes, Hokum, and Storytelling in the Jazz Age* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 94, ix.

³ “Narrative Annual Report, County Agricultural Agent, Grundy County, December 1, 1925 to November 30, 1926,” in *County Extension Agents Annual narrative reports, 1917-1941*. Microfilm, Parks Library, Iowa State University, S537 I59 Io8ad (Listed hereafter as “Grundy County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926). The county and year will change periodically), 35.

The Grundy County Farm Bureau delegates who went on the air that night were not there to give talks on seed corn testing, livestock raising, or other specific farm topics. Rather, they were a host of rural musicians whom the county Farm Bureau recruited to advertise their presence in Iowa, and to showcase their local talent. Grundy was one of twenty Iowa counties to put on a Farm Bureau radio entertainment program between July of 1926 and July of 1927.⁴ While the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) mobilized into a powerful political interest group in the mid-1920s, people in county Farm Bureaus still managed to create social opportunities. This story is about them, and it explores the irony of how and why people participated in sociocultural aspects of local Farm Bureau programs, even as the AFBF steadily moved away from community building in rural America.

To some historians, entertainment opportunities helped keep county Farm Bureaus “integrally linked to local communities” in the 1920s.⁵ To others, however, the radio and pageantry were “tools of manipulation” agricultural leaders used to enthrall local constituents to stand by the Farm Bureau, or at least to show that they were standing by the Bureau. In such a scenario, leaders could use rural musicians as window dressing to show casual onlookers, critics, and prospective supporters that the Farm Bureau was a united front of farmers and rural folks in support of agricultural organization.⁶ In effect, both sets of historians share the reality. Farmer musicians and other county folk accentuated their ongoing community spirit by playing together, and the radio and county pageants provided them with new vehicles to do just that. On the other hand, county extension agents’ push for

⁴ “Annual Report: Radio Activity of Broadcasting Station WOI, Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 1926 and Closing June 30, 1927,” *WOI Radio and Television Records*. RS 5/6/3, Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Box 19, Folder 3, page 3.

⁵ Berlage, “Organizing the Farm Bureau,” 408.

⁶ Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, 122.

Farm Bureau radio programs and pageants in the mid 1920s clearly coincided with the heated debate in Washington surrounding the McNary-Haugen bill. The bill's co-authors, Senator Charles L. McNary of Oregon and Representative Gilbert N. Haugen of Iowa, and its supporters, sought to help farmers and landowners receive fair prices for their yields, and called for the creation of a government corporation that would purchase production surplus and sell them on foreign markets. In addition to an improved economic standing, agriculturalists used the McNary-Haugen debate to reintroduce concepts of virtuousness in agricultural life, namely Thomas Jefferson's proclamation that farmers were "the chosen people of God."⁷ In the face of rising industrial powers and expanding markets, farmers in support of the legislation hung onto the belief that they were still the lifeblood of the country. As historians Theodore Saloutos and John Hicks explained, farmers from the Midwest "appear to have been the most tenacious in holding to these beliefs and among the least willing to accept a status of inferiority in our economy."⁸ Supporters hoped the McNary-Haugen bill would essentially put agriculture on par with other major U.S. industries, and farmers back in favor with the rest of the country.

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF) supported the McNary-Haugen bill. In fact, it was the first piece of legislation that the organization ever officially endorsed. From 1924 to 1928, agricultural leaders tried pushing variations of the bill through Congress. As the fight proved difficult from the beginning, the IFBF turned increasingly to militant and

⁷ Schwieder, *75 Years of Service*, 66-67; Porter, "Embracing the Pluralist Perspective," 383 (this is also a good description of the McNary-Haugen bill's intent); Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal*, 330.

⁸ Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 562.

agricultural pride-filled rhetoric, even in their music, ultimately to no avail.⁹ Early opponents like Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, were “disinclined to accept schemes which sought to raise prices without attacking the problem of waste.”¹⁰ Calvin Coolidge echoed similar sentiments when, as President, he vetoed two different drafts of the bill.

As farmers and agricultural leaders continued to fight for equal economic footing for agriculture throughout the 1920s, they were also playing a cultural card. No doubt the Extension Service—in charge of leading tours of the Iowa State College Agricultural Experiment Station and scheduling Farm Bureau radio programs—was privy to activities on the Hill. Indeed, while politicians and agricultural leaders were fighting for agriculture’s industrial legitimacy in the McNary-Haugen bill, local Farm Bureaus in cooperation with the Extension Service were trying to do their part to show the rest of America that life in its rural places, particularly a life in agriculture, still promised *culture*.

Despite hard times that ensued for farmers following WWI, the ideological seeds of agricultural organization and cooperation that farmers and county agents planted before and during the war had enough time to take root. It was at this difficult juncture in 1920 that young county Farm Bureaus and the county agents they recruited began a rallying cry for more marketing strategies that improved farm and home, and community events that

⁹ Porter, *Striving for a Square Deal*, 340, 346-47. One McNary-Haugen proponent gave a speech saying, “All our siege guns are to be moved to position. We are to go forward under one command. There is no doubt about our objective. We are no longer to be charged with not knowing what we want. All of the farm organizations of America are to be bridged with other forces in a common offensive.”

¹⁰ Donald L. Winters, *Henry Cantwell Wallace as Secretary of Agriculture, 1921-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 5, 253.

advertised the perceived benefits of cooperation in the country.¹¹ It was in the latter that agents found a most valuable asset: the rural musician.

If the demands of World War I provided incentive for the Cooperative Extension Service and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation to unite under one banner, the ensuing post-war depression in the 1920s made that conglomeration wave their banner high. Some counties expressed an urgency like never before for organization in agriculture. Clay County's agent wrote that "The need for agricultural organization has never been greater and the depression merely emphasizes the need of more economic production in all lines of farm work."¹² Despite difficult economic challenges, the agent expressed optimism in his county's efforts to support organization, and listed cultural aspects like Boys' and Girls' club work among their highest priorities. The Dallas County agent, too, maintained that his county's extension body "is a well established and going institution," and remained so despite the fact that nine banks in the county had closed over the previous eight years.¹³ Such records illustrate the challenges county Farm Bureaus faced in the 1920s, and why they would continually sound the call for local talent to boost entertainment opportunities in their respective counties.

Though the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) in the early 1920s boasted higher membership than any other farm organization in U.S. history—300,000 members, 46 percent of whom were Iowans—individual counties in Iowa were careful not to treat membership as a foregone conclusion. Some counties only narrowly escaped year-end debt,

¹¹ Christiana McFadyen Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal: A Study of the Making of National Farm Policy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 40; Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 133.

¹² "Clay County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): (no cover page), 53.

¹³ *Ibid*, 53; "Dallas County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 38.

if at all. Though Bremer County reported an increase of 106 paid memberships in 1926, they still lost some constituents who “moved out of the county or retired and consequently discontinued their memberships.”¹⁴ Bremer had a total of 761 members by the end of that year. The county’s agent further reported that the organization reduced its ongoing debt by \$1,000 that same year, and was optimistic that they would pay off the remaining sum by 1927, hopefully by reaching the 1,000-member mark.¹⁵

To address the issue of membership county agents preferred to call on the assistance of locals to carry out membership drives, with some considering it defeat to rely on outside solicitation. But garnering local support was not something that agricultural agents always found to be easy. Charles Martin of Greene County expressed considerable difficulty in “securing the hearty co-operation of local people” to help boost membership, but still thought it should “only be a case of extreme emergency when outside paid solicitors would be recommended for this work.”¹⁶ The Bremer County agent, too, seemed adamant about acquiring local support, reporting that his county relied solely on such help in 1926. On the other hand, some counties were less apprehensive about paying an outside solicitor to help boost membership, if that is what the situation required. Agent B.W. Lodwick of Fayette County acknowledged the prevailing thought from his constituents that outside solicitors were expensive indeed, but simply contended that when they took charge, the work “gets

¹⁴ Robert L. Tontz, “Memberships of General Farmers’ Organizations, United States, 1874-1960,” *Agricultural History* 38 (July 1964), 150, 146; “Bremer County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 34.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 107; “Greene County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 23.

done.”¹⁷ Likewise, Lodwick thought it unrealistic to suppose that most townships would actually “organize and put on drives themselves.”¹⁸

Despite the AFBF’s national acclaim and enviable enrollment numbers across the Midwest, county agents shouldered the realities of membership and finance struggles. How could county Farm Bureaus attract outside interest and keep their own members and affiliates active in organizational affairs? County Farm Bureaus saw gradual decreases in membership and sometimes cut it close financially during the agricultural depression of the 1920s. They would need to up their game.

The Country Life Commission envisioned large county pageants as the best way for rural communities to attract the positive attention of rural and urban people alike, and to get all *local* hands on deck in the planning, organization, and execution of such events. The first person to tie pageantry to the Country Life Movement, both ideologically and monetarily, was William Chauncey Langdon, a college professor who worked with the residents of Thetford, Connecticut in 1911 to put on a large-scale historical pageant. As per country life gospel, Langdon featured local talent throughout the program, but also depended on professional help from urban areas to direct the roles that locals would play. Virginia Tanner, a professional dancer based in Boston came in to choreograph the local dancers, and was herself a special feature in the program. James T. Sleeper, a music professor at Columbia University, furnished the arrangements and sheet music for the show, and conducted the orchestra as well. Langdon, his professionals, and the local help they acquired, put on a successful program that covered the history of Thetford. They even included a fictional

¹⁷ “Fayette County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 65.

“future scene” in which a former resident visited Thetford after a long absence. After seeing the many advances the town had made as an agricultural community, he decided to resettle in the town and return to farming.¹⁹

Presumptuous as that “future scene” may have been, rural Iowans fifteen years later could have attested to many scientific advances in agriculture, though the thought of former residents returning to take up farming would have no doubt been wishful thinking. Nevertheless, county Farm Bureaus in Iowa took the reigns in putting on large pageants similar to Thetford’s, and many people found ways to be useful in the organizational work. But there was a catch; the Country Life Commission drew a line that would be hard to keep clear. On one hand, it hoped country folk might profit from the example of recreational organizations in cities, while at the same time cautioning against transplanted forms of entertainment.

In June 1925 the Grundy County Farm Bureau planned a pageant to be held later that year. Their structure was similar to that of Thetford, Connecticut’s, in that planners incorporated a historic theme, complete with scenes depicting the county’s history. Like Thetford, Grundy County administrators called upon expert help, in this case the trained help of the Thurston Theater Company from Chicago to “not only superintend the staging,” but also to “furnish the complete equipment of hundreds of gorgeous costumes, properties, high power lights, stage sets, special score music for the band and other essentials.”²⁰ When they put on the show in September, the newspaper praised the efforts of its 250 local cast

¹⁹ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 88, 83.

²⁰ “Historical Pageant of Grundy County,” *The Grundy Register*, June 4, 1925.

members, as well as the Thurston Company for their efforts, despite rainy weather having soured much of the four-day county fair of which the pageant was a part.

The organization that pageants required offered county Farm Bureaus the chance to tackle multiple social concerns at a time. Not only did the Commission express dissatisfaction in rural folks' reliance on urban forms of entertainment, they were explicit in their desire for agricultural agencies to "relieve the woman of many of her manual burdens on the one hand, and interest her in outside activities on the other."²¹ By 1920, women already felt a new sense of empowerment, having just achieved the right to vote. But in 1923, a group of women led by Sarah Elizabeth Richardson of Mahaska County created the Iowa Farm Bureau Women's Committee (IFBWC), which worked to expand roles for women in the organization throughout the state. Two years later, the IFBWC sought to further educate women on matters outside the home by putting together plans for a course in citizenship wherein women would learn about the functions of state and local governments, and take a more active role in community organization.²²

By May of 1926 the *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger* reported that Farm Bureau women of Dallas County were adopting the IFBWC's course. Each township selected a woman to attend five monthly county board meetings to receive that month's citizenship course lesson plan. Those leaders in turn would conduct a class for women at their respective township meetings and supply all needed lesson materials to their course takers. Dallas

²¹ "Bad Weather Cuts Receipts and Attendance at Fair," *The Grundy Register*, 1, 6; Report of the Country Life Commission, 47.

²² Berlage, "Organizing the Farm Bureau," 423; Jenny Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 15; Jennifer Ellen Barker, *Working for Farm and Home: the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women's Committee, 1921-1974*, master's thesis (Ames: Iowa State University, 2003), 31-32.

County hoped that at least ten women would enroll from each township, but simply taking the course was not enough. They needed something to show for their work in county organization and local governance. At the Iowa State Fair that year graduates displayed a set of fourteen posters for passers by to see, each of them depicting various subjects the course takers studied, including “Loyalty to Nation and State,” “Our Duties as American Citizens,” “which was actually a three-poster set on voting, and the “Value of Farm Home.”²³ But women saved the real grand finale for the annual picnic that August, where they, along with other Farm Bureau leaders put together a massive historical pageant that depicted Dallas County’s purchase from the Sac Indians to the present day. Several committees totaling over one hundred individuals from across the county took part in the planning. It would not be the first pageant of its kind in Iowa, but it would be the largest and most successful to date. And for this outdoor festival, they needed an orchestra to provide the musical canvas for the various scenes that the actors would be depicting.

County agents often listed in their annual reports the names and addresses of musicians and entertainers who made themselves available for Bureau events. First on the Dallas County agent’s list was Charles (Charlie) Cadwell, violinist and orchestra conductor. Cadwell was forty years old in 1926 when the county put on its historical pageant. He epitomized the farmer musician, having come from a family where his father Milford farmed by day but encouraged all of his children to learn to play music. Charlie’s father gave him a trombone when he was about ten, and the young Cadwell demonstrated considerable talent early on. His siblings did too, and in 1897, Milford and his three children began playing as a

²³ “Dallas County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 3-6.

family unit, going by the name of “Cadwell’s Tourists.”²⁴ Charlie’s father was also a catalyst for enlisting local musicians, and the group eventually began playing regularly with family friend Theodore A. Husband. Mr. Cadwell and Mr. Husband soon formed their own nine-piece orchestra comprised of family and friends, and they played their first gig at a local farmers’ institute in 1899. Around this time Charlie decided to learn the violin and studied under a couple of Des Moines instructors over the span of two years. He then started an orchestra under his name in 1904.²⁵

Cadwell’s orchestra served as the musical accompaniment through all nine episodes of the 1926 Historical Pageant, playing songs to match each episode’s theme. During Episode V, the Civil War period, the band played “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Marching Through Georgia,” and “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again.” After the Spanish-American War episode, pageant participants transitioned to agriculture organization rhetoric; the scene was the early 1900s, when “Business and farming interests developed to a great degree of efficiency and prosperity.”²⁶ In the second to last episode, planners wrote the program as follows:

March 1st, 1918, a group of Dallas County farmers met for the purpose of organizing a County Farm Bureau. In this scene the living members are shown re-enacting the original meeting. They elected officers and agreed it was

²⁴ *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010), Adel, Dallas, Iowa; Roll: T625_486; Page 7b; Enumeration District 2; Image 35; “Cadwell Orchestra Means Much to Farm Bureau,” *Dallas County News*, December 3, 1941, 7b.

²⁵ “Cadwell Orchestra Means Much to Farm Bureau,” *Dallas County News*, December 3, 1941, 7b.

²⁶ “Historical Pageant of Dallas County: Building a County, 1842-1926,” in “Dallas County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): this program is inserted into the original report. The information cited is on pages 9, 11, and 12 of the 1926 report. Page 14 is a list of “musical selections.”

necessary to have a trained agricultural man to help them meet their common problems.²⁷

After the founders reenacted their meeting, representatives from twelve different townships drove floats by in parade-like fashion, each with an agricultural title highlighting the Farm Bureau's various causes. The Beaver Township, for example, featured the "Boys' Club Work" float, Spring Valley, the "Better Livestock" float, Linn sported "Call to Co-operative Marketing," and Adams, the "Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication" float. All the while, Cadwell's orchestra played the "Iowa Corn Song" and "The Farm Bureau Song" as a musical backdrop.²⁸

The *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger* lauded both Dallas County's course for women and its historical pageant as organizational successes that other counties should aspire to. "One of the most outstanding projects undertaken by any Iowa Farm Bureau during the present year was the big historical pageant and review which was put on by the Dallas Country Farm Bureau," the Bureau paper reported. Another paper announced it "Proves Greatest Spectacle of Kind Ever Seen in Iowa," noting the 1200 people who participated in the show, and the 17,000 people who gathered at Adel's Riverside Park on August 19 to witness it.²⁹

Though musicians who played on behalf of the Bureau may have welcomed county agents and Farm Bureau initiatives, in many cases they were already embedded in a community of musical peers. In Cadwell's case, the intergroup family and kin connections were apparent almost three decades after he began playing in his father's group in 1899. On

²⁷ "Historical Pageant of Dallas County," in "Dallas County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): page 14 of the pageant program.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 11, 14.

²⁹ H.E. Codlin, "Dallas County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 7.

pageant day, Theodore Husband, co-founder of the 1899 group, played cornet. Husband's son and daughter played trombone and clarinet, respectively. Cadwell's older brother Fred played bass, and Cadwell's brother-in-law Den, also co-chair of the music committee for the pageant and life-long Dallas County resident, played cornet. The Cadwell orchestra exemplified how rural musicians could already be part of a network of family and kin largely built around their avocations in music. They could then conform their musical outfit to different playing situations. Hence, sometimes the group went by "the Cadwell Band," while other times they were the "Cadwell Farm Bureau Orchestra."³⁰ That said, Cadwell and his band showed considerable support for the Farm Bureau itself, as evidenced by the fact that it put all proceeds, if any, in a central fund to buy music or pay "for some special use that benefits the whole organization."³¹ Big and awesome though pageants were, county Bureaus held them once a year, if that often, and agents like H.E. Codlin in Dallas County recognized that they did not have the financial resources to make them happen annually at the 1926 pageant's scale.³²

Inasmuch as county pageants attracted visitors, gave local people a sense of purpose, and gave agents the chance to show off their county's operations, never before had the Farm Bureau and Extension Service wielded a more powerful communication tool than the radio. In 1925 the *Iowa Farm Bureau Messenger* reported Iowa second only to Illinois in the number of farm families who owned radios. The next year, WOI reported that 43,968 Iowa

³⁰ "Celebrate July 4th At Adel," *Dallas County News*, July 1, 1936, 2, "Cadwell Band"; "Cadwell Orchestra Means Much to Farm Bureau," *Dallas County News*, December 3, 1941, 7b, "Cadwell Farm Bureau Orchestra."

³¹ "Cadwell Orchestra Means Much to Farm Bureau," *Dallas County News*, December 3, 1941, 7b.

³² "Dallas County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 30.

farm families had radio sets, one in every 4.79 farm homes. By 1931 that number more than doubled, with 102,315 farm families owning radios, almost half of all Iowa farm families.³³

When rural folks listened to the radio they often did so as a family, and even invited neighbors and friends to share in the enjoyment. While the Farm Bureau and USDA helped launch programs like the “National Farm and Home Hour,” most listeners were enticed by entertainment programs. The “National Farm and Home Hour” was popular, to be sure, but it was broadcast from Chicago and, though listeners heard some music during the 45-minute program, the show also included weather reports and talks on agricultural practices. NBC also scheduled the program for every weekday at noon, a less popular time for neighbors to gather around the radio for entertainment. By contrast WOI generally held its Farm Bureau programs on Monday and Thursday evenings from 1925 to 1928. They scheduled the program for an hour to an hour-and-a-half, and musicians comprised the bulk of the program. Unlike listening to a radio show broadcast from out of state, Iowa listeners heard Iowa talent, and in the best case, heard people they knew.³⁴

Counties often organized for their musicians to perform on WOI while on a previous tour of the Iowa State College (ISC) campus. In June of 1926 enough people from Grundy County went on the college tour to pack forty cars. The WOI station was the last stop they made on campus, and the broadcasting administration “extended an invitation to sometime put on an evenings entertainment,” which they did just three months later.³⁵ Similarly,

³³ “Annual Report,” *WOI Radio and Television Records*, 19. This is a map of Iowa that shows the percentage of farm homes that owned radios per county.

³⁴ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 253; Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 56-57.

³⁵ “Grundy County,” *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 34-35.

Fayette County had a committee book the WOI radio gig on one of the county's earlier ISC expeditions. The radio station gave each county about an hour to an hour-and-a-half to perform, and each program always included a brief talk by a local minister from that county. Otherwise, the musicians owned the time. Fayette County gave nearly its entire radio reign to "the Illyria orchestra and several local farm bureau members" on July 1, 1926. Only a couple of speakers—Ray Anderson, secretary of the county Farm Bureau, and Reverend Ernest J. Starr—gave brief addresses over the airwaves.³⁶ The Extension Service, with county agents, local ministers, and the radio, presented rural musicians in state-of-the-art fashion, but more importantly, they showcased what they wanted listeners to hear as the sounds of agricultural organization. Musicians playing under the Farm Bureau banner gave the semblance of an excited rural constituency standing firmly in their ranks at a critical time for agriculture.

Many agrimusicians, however, were neither farmers nor Farm Bureau members, but had family or kin connections to both, and therefore supported friends regardless of affiliation. Most interesting is the case of Lois Galbraith, a singer who grew up in Grundy County. Her father Malcolm was steward of the county poor farm, and in 1910, after several years of struggling to make a profit, he successfully led the farm into a year-end surplus. By 1920, neither Malcolm Galbraith, nor his wife Emma held jobs, ostensibly because they had retired. Their two daughters, Mae and Lois, did work. Mae, the older sister, was a schoolteacher and Lois was eighteen years old when she took a job as a bookkeeper the Grundy County National Bank in Palermo. Lois also liked to sing; the Grundy County newspaper reported that she studied voice in Italy for a few years in the 1920s. Eventually,

³⁶ "Fayette County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 62; "Radio Program Tonight," *Elgin Echo Newspaper*, July 1, 1926, 1.

she married Lucius Parsons Warren, an insurance underwriter from Illinois, and by 1930 settled with him in Chicago.³⁷

On September 23, 1926, the same day as the Dempsey-Tunney fight, Lois Galbraith was one of a few non-farmer, non-bureau musicians who performed on behalf of their county Farm Bureau. Like many other county radio programs, the Grundy musicians took to the radio in the evening, as part of a larger county tour. First, the county orchestra played, followed by smaller acts of two or three people. Lois Galbraith sang a solo. Some of those other musicians were: pianist Mrs. Arthur Trevillyan, whose husband worked as a clerk at a hardware store, George Robinson, cornet player, who was at one time a cashier at a bank, Dr. Fritz S. Beckman, a dentist, played viola, and John (Lyle) Metzgar, “troubleman” at a garage, played percussion.³⁸

The fact that several non-farmers played at on a Farm Bureau radio program is somewhat suspicious, as the subject of membership is a point at which Farm Bureau critics have voiced considerable disapproval. Samuel Berger, the most outspoken of this group and author of *Dollar Harvest: The Story of the Farm Bureau*, stated that, “The Farm Bureau

³⁷ “County Farm Had Good Year,” *Grundy County Democrat*, January 20, 1910, front page; *1920 United States Federal Census*, Palermo, Grundy, Iowa; Roll: T625_489; Page 8a; Enumeration District 58; Image 528; “Grundy Center Local News,” *Grundy County Dispatch*, December 18, 1918, “Miss Lois Galbraith will be employed in book-keeping work at the Grundy County National Bank”; “Society,” *Grundy Register*, November 6, 1930, Warren-Galbraith marriage announcement with information on her vocal studies in Italy; “Lucius Parsons Warren (1885-1967),” <http://home.olemiss.edu/~mudws/family/lpwarren.html>, obituary.

³⁸ *1920 United States Federal Census*, Palermo, Grundy, Iowa; Roll: T625_489; Page 2a; Enumeration District 58; Image 516; Mrs. Arthur Trevillyan; *1920 United States Federal Census*, Palermo, Grundy, Iowa; Roll: T625_489; Page 17b; Enumeration District 58; Image 547, Beckman; *1920 United States Federal Census*, Palermo, Grundy, Iowa; Roll: T625_489; Page 18b; Enumeration District 58; Image 529, George Robinson; *1920 United States Federal Census*, Palermo, Grundy, Iowa; Roll: T625_489; Page 10b; Enumeration District 58; Image 533.

describes itself as an organization of farmers. But despite the fact that critics have been asking for an occupational breakdown of its membership for years, the national organization has refused to produce one.”³⁹ Berger’s criticism may not be altogether misplaced on question of transparency relative to the organization at large, but on the subject of early social participation at the county level, the issue is of lesser consequence. If the Grundy County performers, for example, were Farm Bureau members, then is little wonder that they participated. If they were not members, it leaves some questions unanswered, yes, but there is enough evidence to support reasons why they participated. In the case of the radio especially, musicians jumped at the opportunity to tour a popular agricultural experiment station in Iowa, and play with their family and friends in a state-of-the-art facility for a radio audience that probably included people they knew back home. Peoples’ acceptance of the radio in rural areas was an invaluable gift that the Country Life Commission could not have foreseen. Radio solidified a place for Farm Bureaus in Iowa to show off the musicians in their counties. At the Extension Service’s Annual Conference in October 1926, WOI even hosted an all-star Farm Bureau program, which featured some of the best musicians they had yet heard from around the state.⁴⁰

The radio and pageants gave county agents noteworthy events to record in their annual reports, and excellent county press. But agents also considered ways in which locals

³⁹ Samuel R. Berger, *Dollar Harvest: The Story of the Farm Bureau* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971), 25.

⁴⁰ “Lectures, Entertainment, etc. broadcast from Station WOI during July, 1926-July, 1927,” *WOI Radio Collection*, box 19, folder 3; “Annual Report: Radio Activities of Broadcasting Station WOI, Fiscal year closing June 30, 1926,” *WOI Radio Collection*, box 19, folder 1, page 14; “Fourteenth Annual Conference, Extension Service,” program insert in the Fayette County Extension Report for 1926,” page 7 of the program schedule: “Visit Radio Station WOI and Special Program by All-Star Farm Bureau Talent.”

could use music to pep up annual meetings and community gatherings. Fayette County's agent was dissatisfied with, and his constituents disinterested in, community meetings "where the County Agent and the moving pictures are all or the greater part of the program."⁴¹ Hence, among other things, he considered "Community singing under the direction of a good leader" as "a valuable part of a meeting and should be encouraged."⁴²

Leaders high up the agricultural chain of command spearheaded the community singing movement. In the early 1920s, agricultural leaders began promoting the idea of having people sing Farm Bureau songs at organizational meetings and gatherings. "We all remember the old singing schools and the good times they furnished," wrote *Wallace's Farmer* early that year.⁴³ "Now would be a good time to revive those good times in our farmers meetings."⁴⁴ Farm Bureau and other agricultural leaders recognized the importance of riding the organization's most cherished beliefs and slogans on catchy rhymes, rhythms, and melodies. Leaders saw community singing as serving a dual purpose, as one Farm Bureau leader wrote, "When interspersed with subject-matter talks or addresses, it both promotes the serious objects of the meeting and enlivens it generally."⁴⁵

The only thing missing was the song. Just as the Civil War brought defining marches like "Battle Hymn of the Republic" to popularity, agriculturalists in the early 1920s felt like the farmer's time had come, that their collective struggle was worthy of an anthem. Thus the

⁴¹ Fayette County Extension Report for 1926, 65.

⁴² *Ibid*, 66.

⁴³ "Wanted—A Farm Bureau Song," *Wallace's Farmer*, Vol. 46 No. 4 (Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections), January 28, 1921, page 11, <http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=WAF19210128.2.31&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----> .

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴⁵ M.C. Burritt, *The Country Agent and the Farm Bureau* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 123.

Farm Bureau in conjunction with *Wallace's Farmer* embarked on a national songwriting contest. The rules were simple: contestants needed to write original, Farm Bureau-promotional lyrics over a “popular or well-known air,” like “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” or they could compose their own melody.⁴⁶ A committee of five men would select the winner, who was to receive a \$50 cash prize, and have his song published in the paper. Those committeemen were: Holmes Cowper, Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Drake University in Des Moines; Tolbert MacRae, Music Department chair at Iowa State College; J.R. Howard, president of the AFBF; C.W. Hunt, IFBF president; and Henry C. Wallace, the newspaper’s editor, and soon to be Secretary of Agriculture under incoming President Warren G. Harding. Contestants had about two months to write their songs and submit them to *Wallace's Farmer's* Farm Bureau editor. The newspaper even promoted the idea of having counties hold contests to determine their frontrunners, probably to limit the number of submissions to the paper.⁴⁷

On April 29, 1921, *Wallace's Farmer* announced Jesse D. Sickler the winner of the contest for his original song, “Boost the Farm Bureau.” Sickler was born in Missouri, but grew up in Iowa. His mother was a musician who taught him violin and piano. Though the paper proclaimed Sickler an amateur musician, he had won other contests before. At age 25, Sickler was also a veteran of World War One, having joined American forces in France during the Battle of Argonne Forest. His song was just the spirited melody and lyrics that agricultural leaders needed: “Rally farmers rally, Come and join our throng / Now’s the time

⁴⁶ “Wanted—A Farm Bureau Song,” *Wallace's Farmer*, January 28, 1921, 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 11, the five committee members; Donald L. Winters, *Henry Cantwell Wallace as Secretary of Agriculture, 1921-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 4-5.

to fall in line and help our cause along. / Cooperate our motto, / Fair play always show /
We'll treat you square / Let's do our share / To Boost the Farm Bureau."⁴⁸

Wallace's Farmer's songwriting exercise caught wind as people in Iowa and elsewhere continued to write Farm Bureau songs after the contest. The organization even set plans in motion for a published AFBF songbook to be used at meetings across the country. However, just over a year after Jesse D. Sickler took home the cash prize for "Boost the Farm Bureau," *Wallace's Farmer* expressed "mild protest" at the quantity of song lyrics that people were writing over the melodies to sacred hymns.⁴⁹ Eager to disassociate itself with such a practice, the newspaper wrote, "it rather grates on our sensibilities when such songs are sung to the tune of one of our national hymns. It cheapens both the hymn and the song."⁵⁰ Though the newspaper was initially open to people using a song like "Battle Hymn of the Republic" for its lively, swinging melody, by August 1922, it had changed its tune. Harkening back to Jesse Sickler's original song in both tune and lyrics, the paper maintained,

⁴⁸ "Boost the Farm Bureau" Wins" *Wallace's Farmer*, Vol. 46, No. 17, April 29, 1921 (Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections), 8, <http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=WAF19210429.2.20&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----> ; "The Winner of the Contest" *Wallace's Farmer*, Vol. 46, No. 17, April 29, 1921 (Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections), 8; "Boost the Farm Bureau," *Wallace's Farmer*, Vol. 46, No. 18, May 6, 1921 (Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections), 8, <http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=WAF19210506.2.20&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----> .

⁴⁹ "Boost the Farm Bureau" Wins" *Wallace's Farmer*, April 29, 1921, page 8, plans for an "American Farm Bureau songbook"; "A Matter of Good Taste," *Wallace's Farmer*, Vol. 47, No. 31, August 4, 1922 (Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections), 5, <http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=WAF19220804.2.15&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----> .

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

“A really good farm song is worthy of a tune of its own, while a poor one should not be allowed to parody a sacred hymn.”⁵¹

While many Iowans continued to try out their songwriting chops, other counties jumped on board with the idea of integrating musical acts into business meetings. Fayette County’s agent booked several musicians to play at the county Farm Bureau’s annual meeting in 1926. Their Illyria Orchestra opened the day’s affairs, and other musicians like Nathan Barr, cornet player, and Mrs. John Walton and her son Richard, both violinists, helped shake up the otherwise common-place proceedings by playing solos and duets. The Clay County Farm Bureau Glee Club led all 500 attendees at the year’s annual meeting in song at various points in the program. They opened the afternoon session leading everyone in “America the Beautiful,” “Boost the Farm Bureau,” and the “Iowa Corn Song.”⁵² Clay County also held three farmer’s institutes in 1926. These were local gatherings in which townspeople and farmers integrated education and entertainment into the program. At the institute in Everly, Iowa, C.A. Deremo, “one of Clay County’s successful poultrymen,” gave a talk, after which attendees watched two short movies on swine sanitation, and heard an expert give a talk on the subject thereafter.⁵³ Then, in the evening, folks transitioned to the entertainment portion of the day, “Community Night,” as it were, where musicians took part in “an old-time fiddlers’ contest.”⁵⁴

While it is not surprising to see that most musical participants of county Farm Bureau activities were not musicians by trade, Bremer County’s all-around song captain, Robert V.

⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

⁵² Ibid, 61; Clay County Extension Report for 1926, 45.

⁵³ Clay County Extension Report for 1926, 49.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 49.

Leach, was an employed musician. At 25 years old he worked under the census-labeled industry of “orchestra” in Charles City, Iowa, while his wife Lucille took a job as a stenographer at a tractor factory. The young couple rented a living space from John and Lizzie Kober. John worked as a machinist, presumably at the same factory as Lucille. By the mid-1920s, with little to no farming background to his name, Leach held a considerable leadership post as a bandmaster in Bremer County.⁵⁵

On June 10, 1926, Leach conducted Waverly’s 16-piece orchestra on the Bremer County Farm Bureau program on WOI. Leach and his musicians added a creative spin to their radio evening by taking their listening audience on an “imaginary automobile tour... through the county,” showcasing “different farms and creameries,” with “dinner and lunch enjoyed at different places.”⁵⁶ Even the county agent joined in an all-male singing quartet for a number, and many other small groups enjoyed their time on the air. One month later, Leach combined the orchestras from the towns of Denver, Tripoli, and Readlyn into one 65-piece orchestra to perform for the annual Bremer County Farm Bureau picnic. According to the agent, about 10,000 people came to see the full day’s events, which included a parade featuring everything from girls’ clubs and a group of Civil War veterans, to a special appearance by Governor John Hamill.⁵⁷

While boys’ and girls’ clubs appeared at many county events, Farm Bureaus needed experienced leaders to help such groups thrive. Robert Leach, already having taken on large-scale conducting jobs, proved a leader for club events as well. On November 18, 1926 he

⁵⁵ *1920 United States Federal Census*, Charles City, Floyd, Iowa; Roll: T625_490; Page 14b; Enumeration District 110; Image 44.

⁵⁶ Bremer County Extension Report for 1926, 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

conducted the community orchestra at the first ever Junior Club Banquet, and was also one of the featured performers. In Clay County the agent addressed club work as one of the county's highest priorities. "The three major projects for 1927," wrote the agent, were "Marketing, Boys' and Girls' club work, and Home Furnishings," which, all combined, would provide "an ample field for the development of leadership."⁵⁸

Robert Leach's story, and that of Lois Galbraith and Charlie Cadwell show three different types of agrimusicians, which in turn, provide multiple possibilities for why rural songsters played under the guise of their respective county Farm Bureaus. Charlie Cadwell, farmer, Bureau member, and trained musician was a catalyst for enlisting musicians from the community. By getting to know Cadwell, Dallas County agent H.E. Codlin tapped into a vibrant, ongoing musical network that was comfortable catering to Farm Bureau events. Galbraith's tie to the Farm Bureau was much more loose, and remains somewhat of a mystery. She held a reputation as a singer, and she was a Grundy County girl. It is only presumable that she grew up in the light of her father's reputation as a successful steward of the Grundy County poor farm, and drew upon his family and kin connections. She also worked at a bank, so she came into contact with many people in her town, and therefore, was a recognizable face. Leach, by contrast to Cadwell and Galbraith, was a professional musician by trade. He conducted everything from large township orchestras and smaller adult groups to 4-H performers. Bremer clearly leaned on his musical expertise to effectively liven their musical events.

⁵⁸ "Bremer County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): Junior Club Banquet program inserted; "Clay County," *Annual Narrative Report*, (1926): 53.

County Farm Bureaus deliberately sought out proficient musicians like Cadwell, Galbraith, and Leach, to enhance their events and operations in the country. The musicians themselves were often members, but not always. If they did not perform solely with reform on their minds, they did so to embrace kin networks, ride the wave of never-before-seen organization in rural America, and for the chance to play in front of wider audiences than they may have ever imagined, all during the economic depression of the 1920s. They found those chances at large outdoor pageants, on the radio, and at Bureau meetings and gatherings.

The questions of how and why such musicians took part in these events points to the larger image of how people continued to form community bonds in an age of community-threatening commercial agriculture practices. For it would not be long before counties no longer put on large-scale pageants like Dallas County's. Farm Bureaus still hosted annual picnics, but did not have the financial resources or the membership to augment such events with special music programs. In the radio spectrum, WOI went from hosting twenty Farm Bureau programs in 1927 to seven in 1928, and the number stayed low. Historian Katherine Jellison showed that "between 1926 and 1930... radio manufacturers had moved from marketing radio as a desirable farm luxury to promoting it as a necessary piece of farm equipment," due to the continuing agricultural depression.⁵⁹ Iowans even showed a slight decrease in the number of farm homes who had radios by the early 1930s, going from one in every 2.09 farm homes to one in every 2.16. Finally, many people left the Farm Bureau as the 1920s dragged on. By 1934, the Farm Bureau reported 25,602 members state wide, down from 61,697 in 1925. All of these trends show that there was a clear rise and a sudden fall of

⁵⁹ Jellison, *Entitled to Power*, 60.

Farm Bureau social programs—not to mention general favorability—in the 1920s, and local musicians played a vital role in making those events successful during that grace period.⁶⁰

Hard times after WWI created the space for a perfect symphony in Iowa, where county agents needed rural musicians to help them amplify their calls for cooperation at a time when Congress debated over crucial farm legislation, and musicians embraced the never-before-seen opportunities to play that the Farm Bureau/Extension Service could organize. Thus, amid the backdrop of the McNary-Haugen fight, county Farm Bureaus, agents, and their rural music makers brought the harmony between organized agriculture and music to a timely crescendo in the mid-1920s. But by 1928, the Farm Bureau was at an impasse. Weakened by the McNary-Haugen defeat and the ongoing surplus problem, betrayed by a Republican president, and bleeding members in Iowa and across the nation, the organization needed someone to turn to. While the Farm Bureau first became successful during a time of economic wartime prosperity, their next wave of fortune came during a period of nation-wide economic disaster.⁶¹ The Great Depression illuminated deficiencies in every sector, and forced officials in government to finally take a closer look at the agricultural realm. Since Republicans had missed their chance to help farmers in the 1920s, the Farm Bureau, under the direction of Edward O'Neal, cast their hopes on Democratic presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt. While on the campaign trail in 1932 Roosevelt proved more amenable to the needs of farmers, and made good on promises to Ed O'Neal and others in his first wave of New Deal legislation. But while O'Neal seemed to have made

⁶⁰ "Annual Report," *WOI Radio and Television Records*, 19, Folder 1. This is a map of Iowa that shows the percentage of farm homes that owned radios per county; *Ibid*, Box 19, Folder 1, membership.

⁶¹ Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal*, 3; Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, 105.

a friend of the Farm Bureau in Roosevelt, he also found an agricultural adversary within the president's own ranks.⁶²

⁶² Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 50.

CHAPTER 4

“DEVIL’S DREAM”:
THE FARM BUREAU’S NEW DEAL ADVERSARY

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”¹

George Orwell in *Animal Farm*

Psychiatrist Murray Bowen wrote, “The anxiety that starts regression appears to be related more to a disharmony between man and nature than to disharmony between man and his fellow man, as in war.”² It is important to appreciate that agriculture was a very contested sector of the economy in the 1920s and 30s that, minus physical combat, featured all the characteristics of war: elimination and removal, deposed leaders, struggles over the efficient use of resources, and dissention within given rank and file. When Edward O’Neal, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) led his organization in convincing President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the farmer’s need for aid, the president responded by creating the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) in 1933. While on the campaign trail, Roosevelt had allegedly promised O’Neal and the nation’s farmers that he would “restore farm prices,” and the AAA largely made good on that promise.³ As farmers were still burdened by enormous surplus, the agency actually paid farmers to take land out of production, and to slaughter excess livestock.⁴ In many ways, the organization’s actions brought some of the effects that the Farm Bureau hoped the McNary-Haugen bill would

¹ The title of this chapter is the name of an old fiddle tune; George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 123, opening quote.

² Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Reprint ed. (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1985), 279.

³ Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 50.

⁴ Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), 70-75.

accomplish. Better still, the Extension Service, still working closely with county agents and their Farm Bureaus in Iowa and elsewhere, led the way in administering subsidy payments and executing other measures of the act.⁵

As effective as this emergency measure was, other agricultural experts within the President's own ranks felt that the AAA's sole attention to immediate symptoms of depression failed to address the deeper issues of long-term, abusive land practices and perpetual neglect of the rural poor. Their attention to the etiology of agricultural dysfunction led them to come up with unconventional planned settlement ideas intended to help America's chronically impoverished farmers. Roosevelt's Resettlement Administration (RA), under the direction of Rexford Tugwell, exemplified these efforts. Tugwell, a former economics professor at Columbia University, immediately went to work building the agency in 1935. One of the RA's major initiatives was to relocate sub-marginal farmers, former miners and lumbermen, and their families onto "land capable of providing a decent standard of living."⁶ While farming on these projects under the expert guidance of a community manager, families would "integrate themselves into existing community life."⁷ But the RA's dream of government-led communities and long-term land-use planning did not meld with the immediate price-adjusting schemes of the Farm Bureau-backed AAA and its benefactors. When Edward O'Neal once heard Tugwell give a talk on ideas of "readjustment of man-land

⁵ Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 472.

⁶ *The Resettlement Administration* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1935), 19.

⁷ *Ibid*, 19.

relations,” and “economic and social planning,” the president of the Farm Bureau thought it necessary to “keep an eye on this unconventional economist.”⁸

Through the mid 1930s agricultural leaders within Roosevelt’s own ranks continued their conflict of interests, but the Farm Bureau would largely walk away the victor, as many middle class and wealthy landowners supported idea of subsidy payments to farmers. The RA, by contrast, was a target for political attack almost from its inception, and thus would not last very long. As Mary Neth lamented, “the most long-lasting [New Deal] programs continued to promote capital-intensive agriculture among the wealthy survivors.”⁹ Her assessment was in line with those of other historians. Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks wrote that some men in FDR’s administration tried to help the rural poor “but no matter how much was attempted or how good the intentions were, what was accomplished was a far cry from the actual needs of this distressed lot.”¹⁰ In 1996 sociologist Jess Gilbert and historian Alice O’Connor wrote that programs like the RA “helped landless farmers become landowners,” but that “the New Deal’s main farm policy” supported “large-farm interests.”¹¹ And much more recently, historian Sarah Phillips wrote how New Dealers’ efforts to protect the rural poor “inspired substantial achievements,” but that by and large, “Planners and policymakers began to wonder whether the very poorest of rural people would be able to

⁸ Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 52.

⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁰ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 510.

¹¹ Jess Gilbert and Alice O’Connor, *Leaving the Land Behind: Struggles for Land Reform in U.S. Federal Policy, 1933-1965* (Madison: Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1996), 1.

compete... with those farmers best able to stay on the land and to expand their operations with government assistance.”¹²

Interestingly, the RA’s short, two-year life span was time enough for the agency to create a music program of its own, and part of its mission was to send ethnomusicologists into rural America to record traditional music that older people knew from growing up in the late nineteenth century. Ironically, this made it possible for one RA musician to travel to Iowa to record the traditional music of a long-time Farm Bureau member in Dallas County, and then catalogue those recordings in the Library of Congress. Though a seemingly microscopic event, this case study of two people—their respective backstories and recording encounter—not only reveals the struggle between their competing agricultural organizations, but also the difference between preserving music, and claiming it for oneself. Ultimately, as this essay will show, even the most unlikely song can still be used for political gain.

Like any conflict, the seeds for the 1930s struggle between the Farm Bureau and the RA dated back many years. As far back as the late 1800s an emerging group of agricultural economists and planned settlement advocates began to attribute the nation’s growing class of tenant farmers and mal-distribution of wealth in the agricultural sector to what some of them saw as the federal government’s lenient nineteenth century land policies. One such spokesman of these sentiments was Elwood Mead, a water engineering authority and planned settlement advocate. In a 1920 publication called *Helping Men Own Farms*, he lamented, “The worst feature of our land policy was that it kept the public from realizing the enduring

¹² Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9-10.

needs of rural life” and “made men restless and migratory.”¹³ “With the Louisiana Purchase,” Mead continued, “plans for its sale and development should... have had all the aid that science and economics could give. But the great opportunity for constructive statesmanship was not grasped.”¹⁴ To Mead, these mistakes made the need for a more systematic approach to land settlement a matter of urgency, and he spent much of his career promoting a greater federal role in planned settlement.

In 1915, Mead returned from Australia where he had spent eight years as an engineering authority helping direct water to federally sponsored settlement projects outside the city of Victoria. Mead returned to the U.S. inspired by the experience and convinced that the federal government would do well by implementing such a settlement strategy in the states. He conceived of an idea in which the government would purchase public land for settlement projects. Then prospective settlers would apply for a home and acreage and, if selected, make a down payment on the land while the government built the house and prepared the acreage for farming. Once settlers moved onto the project they began farming under the guidance of a community manager, who understood the best crops to grow, and best methods for doing so based on soil classification. The heart of Mead’s idea was that the settlers would farm the land under expert guidance until they paid the government back on the mortgage and owned and operated their own farms. All the while, settlers would

¹³ Elwood Mead, *Helping Men Own Farms: A Practical Discussion of Government Aid in Land Settlement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 16-17.

experience enhanced opportunities to socialize with their neighbors, hold dances and organize other public get-togethers.¹⁵

Mead first tried to gain federal footing for his resettlement idea by working with Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane on introducing the idea of planned settlements for returning World War I soldiers to Congress. Regionally, Mead and Lane's plan would have affected the agricultural picture differently, but some of the strongest opposition came from the Midwest, where "Corn Belt agriculturalists desired nothing more than to continue their favored economic position without subsidized rivalry."¹⁶ Ultimately Lane and Mead failed to get their plan, or any variation thereof, through both houses. In California, however, Mead found the state legislature to be more susceptible to his resettlement ideas. They appropriated \$260,000 for a 10,000-acre community called Durham, in Butte County. As Durham got off to a successful start, the legislature provided \$1,000,000 for more planned settlements. They launched a second community called Delhi, specifically for former soldiers. As superintendent at Delhi, Mead appointed Walter E. Packard, a 1907 graduate of Iowa State College whose wife Emma grew up in Waukee, Iowa, just a few miles down the highway from Ortonville, in Dallas County.¹⁷

¹⁵ Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow A New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959), 43. This is the best description of Mead's work in Australia and his vision of how federally funded community settlement would work in the U.S.; Elwood Mead, *Helping Men Own Farms*, 157. Settlers create opportunities for recreation at the Durham colony in California; they built a dancing pavilion and bought a piano.

¹⁶ Bill G. Reid, "Agrarian Opposition to Franklin K. Lane's Proposal for Soldier Settlement, 1918-1921," in *Agricultural History* 41 (April 1967), 177.

¹⁷ Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow A New World*, 47; Bancroft Library, "Collection Overview," in *Guide to the Walter Eugene Packard Papers, 1819-1973 (bulk 1907-1966)*, Online Archive of California, University of California-Berkeley:
<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1p30026f/>

Yet for all their state resources, both the Durham and Delhi communities ran into financial problems in the wake of the 1920s farm crisis and eventually the California legislature cut funding to them altogether. Despite his early failed attempts, Elwood Mead had planted the resettlement seed and some New Dealers a little more than a decade later remained equally concerned by what one historian deemed the “social costs of unguided land development and unrestrictive private exploitation of the nation’s natural resources.”¹⁸ In 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration (RA), a massive agency of over 16,000 employees designed, in part, to resettle poor farmers from sub-marginal land onto planned community projects. But the program almost immediately came under fire, not only from politicians in Washington, but also from county agents, experts at land-grant colleges across the country, and the AFBF. As historian Sidney Baldwin wrote, those opponents were “based on a monopoly of farmers at the local level, and they considered the growing field of activities of new federal action agencies a threat to their political power base.”¹⁹

As tough going as the beginning was for the RA, it did have some allies. When political enemies worked to tear it down, groups like the Farmers’ Union, nemesis of the AFBF, stepped in to support it. In the South especially, the resettlement program’s work put a wrench in the sharecropping status quo by opening up planned settlements to African Americans, who eventually became landowners. Though limiting in that these community projects did keep whites and blacks separate, they still drew much criticism from white Southern landholders. Indeed, the program’s actions made the lines between certain

¹⁸ Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 96-97.

¹⁹ Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 115.

organizations very apparent, with the NAACP, the Farmers' Union, and Southern Tenant Farmers Union backing the Resettlement Administration, and the Farm Bureau trying to tear their efforts down.²⁰

One of the agency's primary regions for operation was Appalachia, where many coal miners moved into resettlement communities in hopes of supplementing their seasonal wage work with part-time farming. Later that year an RA surveyor named Katharine Kellock toured the Appalachian communities and observed that many residents on those projects and outer townships played instruments, and that "project managers and educational supervisors told me of the desperate need for recreation to keep up morale and carry the homesteaders through the present pioneer period. Without exception," Kellock continued, "they regarded musical leadership for the adult homesteaders as the most important assistance that Special Skills could give."²¹ Thus she recommended that the agency at large create a music program to help resettled farmers come together socially around their universal commonality of music. The RA heard Kellock out and appointed musician Charles Seeger to head the program. Seeger went to work appointing professional musicians to live at resettlement communities and strike up music programs among the relocatees and residents in outer townships. He also appropriated a phonograph machine, hoping that he and future employees

²⁰ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 118-119; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 254; Gilbert and O'Connor, *Leaving the Land Behind*, 4.

²¹ Katharine A. Kellock to Charles Seeger, November 15, 1935, *U.S. Farm Security Administration, Special Skills Division, Music Unit, Miscellaneous*, Music Division, Library of Congress, Microfilm, MFM #3124.

would be able to record some of the peoples' traditional music in these tucked away rural places.²²

While Seeger worked in the D.C. office assigning musicians to their posts at Appalachian communities, the phonograph machine sat idle. That is, until Seeger's assistant, a spunky, energetic woman in her mid-thirties named Sidney Robertson, expressed interest in accompanying two veteran song collectors, John A. Lomax and Frank C. Brown, on a two-week excursion to North Carolina and Pennsylvania.²³ Robertson, also a musician, met Seeger the previous year while working to provide musical opportunities to Jewish immigrants at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Seeger let her go with Lomax and Brown, and even managed to escape from the office himself to observe their activities. Robertson not only learned quickly, she had a gift for approaching people and thought even Seeger to be too rigid about finding the so-called right recording circumstances. When Seeger joined the expedition later on he planned to do some recording himself in Asheville, but Robertson observed his timidity, saying, "the machine was never unpacked. Charlie would debate... Shall I? Shan't I? but nothing ever happened."²⁴

²² Janelle Warren-Findlay, "Musicians and Mountaineers: The Resettlement Administration's Music Program in Appalachia, 1935-1937," in *Appalachian Journal* 7 (Autumn-Winter 1979-80), 107; Nolan Porterfield, *The Life and Times of John A. Lomax* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 390-91.

²³ Sidney Robertson, "Report on Two Weeks' Trip to North Carolina, July 15-28, 1936," in *Resettlement Administration Recordings Collection*, AFC 1939/016, Box 1, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 1-4.

²⁴ Catherine Hiebert Kerst, "Outsinging the Gas Tank: Sidney Robertson Cowell and the California Folk Music Project," in *Folklife Center News* 20 (Winter 1998), 7, <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/news/pdf/FCNxx1.pdf>, Henry Street Settlement; Sidney Robertson to Grete Franke on August 20, 1937, Field Work, Resettlement Admin., Correspondence, Etc., 1937 July-Sept, SRCC, Box 6, Folder 12, *The Sidney Robertson Cowell Collection*, Music Division, Library of Congress, regarding Seeger in North Carolina. Hereafter, Sidney Robertson Cowell's collection will be listed as SRCC.

While Sidney Robertson was just getting her foot in the door with song collecting, critics' continued attacks on the agency as a whole left the RA music program, and her job, in jeopardy. RA leaders had placed the music program within the Special Skills division, an arts program that hired professionals in carpentry, weaving, and other crafts. That division was housed in the Resettlement Division, and resettlement was the RA initiative that was under the most fire from politicians and other critics. For one thing, the idea of building new projects for prospective poor farmers came with a high price tag, and opponents abhorred the expenses the agency was tallying up. When the RA's Suburban Resettlement Division began building Greenbelt Towns, suburban housing projects meant to give swelling cities a population reprieve, critics scoffed, especially when the projects ran into financial straits and potential abandonment. "Figuring up the costs of Greenbelt houses," wrote a Dallas County, Iowa, newspaper, "we find them costing \$16,000 a piece, a total expenditure of \$14,227,000... To scrap the whole proposition "as is" would seem expensive. Yet will it not be more expensive to complete them?... So the sooner Uncle Sam gets out of the whole Resettlement business the better he will be."²⁵

RA opponents also used the election year as a time to sharpen attacks on the agency and its initiatives. As historian Sidney Baldwin wrote, "With the election campaign of 1936 looming on the horizon, charges that the leaders of the Resettlement Administration were conspiring to "socialize" the land and "collectivize" the people rose to a crescendo."²⁶ The un-American-ness of the RA became a focal point for critics, as many groups, the AFBF among them, used the RA's arts programs as "targets of convenience," attacking them on the

²⁵ "Tugwell Town" a Joke," With Other Editors, *Dallas County News*, September 22, 1937, 3.

²⁶ Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 106.

grounds that teaching music, carpentry, and basket weaving to relocatees were too socialistic in nature.²⁷ Not even all top-level administrators within the RA stood in favor of the music program or the Special Skills Division as a whole. Will Alexander, assistant under Tugwell, saw little need for “esoteric” experiments in the arts, including folk singing and dancing, in a time of depression.²⁸

Ultimately, the sparring among the RA’s top officials and their opponents did not bode well for its resettlement program. Soon leaders reorganized the RA’s national goals, and cut its arts budget. In July of 1937, Robertson received a letter from Grete Franke, a close friend and fellow Special Skills Division employee: “Dear Sidney, Adrian [Special Skills Division director] wanted to write to you himself but didn’t have time, so he asked me to do it. It’s a letter I hate to write. You will receive (along with a great many others) your letter of termination. I hope this reaches you first.”²⁹

Unfortunately, Robertson received the official letter before Franke’s arrived. Difficult as it was to have her position terminated, and as much as Robertson loved the work of recording, she later confided to Franke that, “Personally I feel relieved, as much as anything... I wouldn’t stay on this region permanently for anything in the world. Among other things, they are so darned disdainful of women in jobs of any responsibility.”³⁰ She would even express discontent with her boss Charles Seeger, on her way out: “I can’t make up my mind about this recording business. I don’t want to make an issue of it with Charlie, but several people have written me to express my resentment at his unwillingness to

²⁷ Ibid, 120.

²⁸ Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 7; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 109.

²⁹ Grete Franke to Sidney Robertson, July 17, 1937, Box 6, Folder 12, *SRCC*, 2.

³⁰ Sidney Robertson to Grete Franke, August 20, 1937, Box 6, Folder 12, *SRCC*, 1.

acknowledge that I had any part in it [recording].”³¹ Despite such frustrations, she received her letter in mid July, and the RA would continue to pay Robertson’s position through to September 7. She had the rest of the summer ahead of her to record more music.

Prior to losing her job, Robertson had been appointed by the Special Skills Division as a regional representative in Minnesota. Being a native of California, she was excited to come to the Midwest and learn about everything “from whittling to cooperative farms.”³² In Austin and Duluth she helped direct furnishings, landscaping projects, and other preparations for the homesteads. Robertson continued to receive continued leave and funding for travel through the Resettlement Division to go out in the field and record. By June 1937 she was mapping out the rest of her summer. In addition to planning an excursion to Wisconsin in July, Robertson wrote Seeger in the D.C. office on July 9, saying:

Just before Aug. 2d I am going to dash down near Des Moines to record the playing of a very fine hammered dulcimer player I just heard of from Mrs. Packard. Other people have mentioned him too... Mrs. Packard’s sister knows how to reach him but I don’t know how to reach her. I want to write him ahead of time... Des Moines is not far from Austin, and my travel includes Iowa. I have dulcimer records of this type from Arkansas and Michigan, but they were recorded during performances in Chicago and are not as good as they might be.³³

³¹ Ibid, 2.

³² John O. Walker to Sidney Robertson, July 15, 1937, SRCC, Box 6, Folder 12, Robertson’s letter of termination, and paying her position through September 7; Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 141, Emma Dusenberry; Sidney Robertson to Adrian Dornbrush, February 21, 1938, Pre-project Correspondence, 21 Sep 1937—31 Mar 1938, *California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties*, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, “from whittling to cooperative farms”; [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cowell:@FIELD\(SOURCE+@band\(afccc+@1\(corre\)\)\):@@@\\$REF\\$](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cowell:@FIELD(SOURCE+@band(afccc+@1(corre))):@@@REF).

³³ Sidney Robertson to Charles (Charlie) Seeger, Box 6, Folder 12, SRCC, 2.

The man whose playing Robertson hoped to record was Thomas B. Mann, a farmer living near the small town of Ortonville, in Dallas County, Iowa. Mann played a rare, trapezoidal-shaped string instrument, the hammered dulcimer, with origins dating back to 15th-century Western Europe. The dulcimer player produced sound by striking the strings with wooden hammers, as opposed to plucking them with his/her fingers. By the mid 1600s, the instrument had become a mainstay in London. People mainly brought the dulcimer to America from England in the 1700s.³⁴ Mann's father, Thomas Sr., migrated with family to the U.S. in the early 1840s. By 1870, they settled in Dallas County, Iowa, where Thomas Sr., now a registered "Show Man" in the federal census, married Harriet (Hattie) Orton and began a family.³⁵ On September 11, 1878, Hattie gave birth to the couple's fifth-born child, Thomas Jr. (Tom). Young Tom demonstrated considerable musical ability fairly early on in his life, beginning on saxophone, before his father eventually taught him how to play and build "the old English dulcimer."³⁶

Tom grew up, married in 1906, and after a brief, failed attempt at dry land farming in Egbert, Wyoming, returned to Dallas County in 1910, where he would live, farm, and make music the rest of his life. While he developed his career as a farmer, he became increasingly known throughout his county for his proficiency on the hammered dulcimer. In 1918 he played at a couple of literaries in Dillon, Iowa. Literaries were occasions in which small-

³⁴ Paul M. Gifford, *The Hammered-Dulcimer: A History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc.), 215, 25, 36, 215, 228.

³⁵ "Some Information about the Mann Family," Vicki Anthofer, Questionnaire and Memoranda, 1; 1870, *United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010), 5.

³⁶ "Services Held For Tom Mann," *The Dallas County News*, April 6, 1955, 9, Tom's birthday; B. A. Botkin, ed., "Liner Notes," in *Play and Dance—Songs and Tunes*. AFS-L9, Audiocassette, Library of Congress, Music Division, 1, http://www.loc.gov/folklife/LP/PlayandDanceL9_opt.pdf.

town and local residents would gather on Friday nights during the winter months and share literature, play games and music, and sing together. The literary organizer wrote in *The Dallas County Record*: “Mr. Tom Mann and his dulcimer have been with us twice. Anyone who has heard his music knows where-of we speak when we commend his playing.”³⁷

Not only was Tom a proficient solo performer, he also loved to play his dulcimer in groups, and once commented, “I have played in an orchestra, and my favorite is a trio consisting of violin, accordion, and dulcimer.”³⁸ That trio consisted of good friends Odessa Llewellyn on accordion, and Charles (Charlie) Cadwell on the violin. The orchestra was the Cadwell Orchestra, which served as a Farm Bureau band throughout the 1920s. Tom, Cadwell, Llewellyn, and many others were part of a persistent group of musical peers, many of whom knew each other before they began taking part in Farm Bureau events. Tom played alto saxophone at the 1926 Dallas County Pageant, and took his hammered dulcimer to Iowa State College to perform traditional music on numerous WOI broadcasts. When ISC hosted an all-star radio performance in October of 1926 at its fourteenth annual meeting, Tom was Dallas County’s lone musical delegate, among other musicians from across the state. No doubt his talent and the rarity of his instrument contributed to his county, and even statewide name recognition. But it was his repertoire that Sidney Robertson would be especially

³⁷ Vicki Anthofer, Memoranda, Spring 2014; “Literary News,” Pucker Brush, *The Dallas County Record*, January 29, 1918; Wilder, Laura Ingalls, *The Little Town on the Prairie*, Reprint Edition (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971), 221-239. This chapter in *LTOTP*, entitled “The Whirl of Gaiety” offers the best description of literaries I have seen. Participants centered on a theme each Friday. For instance, at one literary Pa, Laura, and others who attended just played charades the whole evening. Another Friday, Pa played fiddle while neighbor Gerald Fuller played accordion. Wilder, 221-22.

³⁸ B. A. Botkin, ed., “Liner Notes,” in *Play and Dance—Songs and Tunes*, 1.

pleased to record, and which the Library of Congress would take special interest in some years later.³⁹

Robertson must have been elated to hear about Tom Mann. Though she was still new to the profession, she was, by 1937, Seeger's prize song collector, and knew he not only wanted records of traditional songs for the Library of Congress' growing archive, but if possible, traditional music played on rare instruments. Before that summer, Seeger advised her, "Get tuning of instruments also and some data on them (if unusual, like the hammer dulcimer, of which I want a record very much.)"⁴⁰

Robertson's ability to find Mann came down to a simple case of networking and small-world contacts. From her letter to Seeger about her intention to find and record Tom Mann, one can see how they connected. "Mrs. Packard" (Emma) was the wife of Walter E. Packard, who worked for the Rural Resettlement Division of the RA. Emma was originally from Iowa; she and Walter graduated from Iowa State College in 1907, married and seem to have followed Walter's career moves. After his experience working under Elwood Mead in California, and other work out West during the 1920s, Walter went to work for the AAA under the New Deal, the program which aimed to control production and adjust parity prices back to where they were during the so-called "golden age of agriculture, 1909-1914."⁴¹ The Extension Service helped carry out the business of the AAA, but Packard felt that the New

³⁹ "Personal Mention," *The Dallas County News*, October 13, 1926.

⁴⁰ Janelle Warren-Findley, "Musicians and Mountaineers: The Resettlement Administration's Music Program in Appalachia," in *Appalachian Journal* vol. 7 (Autumn-Winter 1979-80), 107, general description of the RA; Norman Porterfield, *The Life and Times of John A. Lomax* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 390-91, Presto recording machine; Charles Seeger to Sidney Robertson, July 9, 1937, Box 6, Folder 12, *SRCC*, 1.

⁴¹ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 117.

Deal agency “threw too much control in the hands of large operators,”⁴² and in 1935 he went to work as director of the RA’s Rural Resettlement Division, which housed the Special Skills section. While in D.C., Robertson struck up a friendship with the Packards and knew that the couple had family still living in Iowa, hence, “Mrs. Packard’s sister.”⁴³

Sometime during the second week of August 1937, Sidney Robertson, the RA employee, arrived at the home of Tom Mann, Farm Bureau member, and asked if she could record him playing his dulcimer so “that the people that come after us might get first hand information about the tone quality and the other things musicians talk about.”⁴⁴ Mann obliged and recorded several songs for her on one of his handmade dulcimers. He played some old-timey songs native to America such as “Listen to the Mockingbird,” and “Buffalo Girls.” But he also played some tunes of European origins such as “Nancy’s Fancy,” an old English dance tune, and a “German Waltz.”⁴⁵ The latter selections suggest that he remembered some of his English father’s old repertoire, and would be of particular interest to a representative at the Library of Congress several years later. Mann played a total of sixteen songs for

⁴² Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), 49, Extension Service runs the AAA; Walter E. Packard, interview by Willa Klug Baum, *Land and Power Development in California, Greece, and Latin America 2* (Berkeley: University of California Bancroft Library, 1970), 295-96.

⁴³ Bancroft Library, “Collection Overview,” in *Guide to the Walter Eugene Packard Papers, 1819-1973 (bulk 1907-1966)*, Online Archive of California, University of California-Berkeley, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=tf1p30026f&developer=local&style=oac4&s=1&query=collection+overview&x=12&y=14&servlet=view> .

⁴⁴ “Around the Town,” *The Dallas County News*, August 18, 1937, 1.

⁴⁵ Field Recordings (pre-1940), Shelflist, AFS 3262 A1—3658 B3, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Tom Mann’s recordings are 3276 A1—3277 B3; “Listen to the Mockingbird” is 3277 A4, “Buffalo Girls” is 3277 A1, “Nancy’s Fancy” is 3276 B2,” and “German Waltz” is 3277 A3.

Robertson, probably over the span of a few hours. The two musicians then parted ways and likely never saw each other again.

Robertson was not done with Mann's recordings. After her RA time ran out she moved back to her native California where she began an extensive two-year recording project, complete with the help of a W.P.A. staff. She took several of Mann's recordings with her and included them in her California collection "as an illustration of music made on the dulcimer."⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the Library of Congress was hatching plans to create compilations of its many recordings in order to meet demands of enthusiasts and educators who wanted to be able to buy them. "The Archive of Folksong has on its shelves well over 10,000 songs recorded on disc. At present time the Library has no way of making these available to scholars, educational institutions or the general public."⁴⁷ Alan Lomax, curator at the Archive at this time, initiated the production of five albums of different categorizations such as "Work Songs," "Religious Songs," and "Narrative Songs."⁴⁸ By 1943 the wartime curator Benjamin A. Botkin provided further stylistic recommendations for the next wave of compilations. "In planning the albums for 1943 I suggest a breakdown in types."⁴⁹ Among them he listed "Play and Dance songs: Children games and jingles, play-party songs, and

⁴⁶ Sidney Robertson, "Comments on the Thomas Mann Recordings," Performers, California Gold, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, sound recording, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afcchtml/0156.html> .

⁴⁷ Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray to Harold Spivacke, Chief, Division of Music, August 15, 1939, "AAFS Record Series Proposal; 1939-08-15," Memos—Albums—Reissues, ETC., Administrative Files, American Folklife Center, Washington D.C., 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁹ B. A. Botkin, "Recommendations for Folk Music Albums for 1943," January 26, 1943, Memos—Albums—Reissues, ETC., Administrative Files, American Folklife Center, Washington D.C., 1.

square dances.”⁵⁰ That same year he took particular interest in Mann’s recordings because of the “fact that the jigs and reels played by Mr. Mann are a direct link with the traditional dance music of England.”⁵¹ Botkin then contacted the Iowa farmer for additional information.

For all Tom Mann knew, his recordings were sitting on some shelf at the Library of Congress so that his “great great great grandchildren may hear him play.”⁵² He had nearly forgotten about the whole affair until Botkin got in touch with him in 1943 wanting to include some of Mann’s songs on a compilation record. In order to duplicate their recordings the Library needed permission from the performers. In June 1943 Tom accepted a stipend of \$30 so that the Library could duplicate and include his performances on the ninth album of their *Folk Music of the United States* series. On August 3, 1945, eight years after his encounter with Robertson and three days before the U.S. attack on Hiroshima, the Library finished production on *Play and Dance—Songs and Tunes* and sent Mann a copy of the record (which features five of his recordings) with a “nice, blue government check good for thirty dollars.”⁵³ Tom cashed it and took a little more out of the bank to buy a war bond.

The Mann family was a proud bunch the day Tom received his recording. He sent a confirmation slip back to the Library with the inscription: “Thank you very much. I am very

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.

⁵¹ B. A. Botkin, ed., “Liner Notes,” in *Play and Dance—Songs and Tunes*. AFS-L9, Audiocassette, Library of Congress, Music Division, 1.

⁵² “Around the Town” *The Dallas County News*, August 18, 1937, 1.

⁵³ Signed contract from Thomas B. Mann to the Library of Congress, June 16, 1943, Mann, Thomas B. (Corresp.), Administrative Files, *Folk Music of the United States Series*, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

pleased with the record.”⁵⁴ Tom’s granddaughter recalled, “The whole family was extremely proud of him and knew what an honor it was that he was chosen. It was talked about again and again.”⁵⁵ Adel and the surrounding area applauded their farmer musician too, “proud as well that one of their own had been so honored.”⁵⁶ *The Dallas County News* reported that Tom’s 1937 recording was “one of 6,000 examined, from which an album of twelve records were to be reproduced for schools and army camps.”⁵⁷

Tom kept playing music as the years went by, though mainly at less formal occasions than what he experienced all those years ago with the Farm Bureau. He and Charlie Cadwell remained close friends. A family member recalled accompanying his father and Tom the 3/4-mile distance to Cadwell’s house for an informal jam session. Members of the Cadwell Orchestra continued to hold reunions well into the 1940s. Despite all of its success as a Bureau-supporting unit over the years, Cadwell Orchestra musicians continually held picnics and reunions that suggest close, lasting relationships among members beyond formal playing opportunities. One day in 1950 Waukeet resident A.C. Jacobs came home “to find our house surrounded by automobiles and a crowd armed with knives, spoons, coffee pots, ice cream

⁵⁴ “I have received from the Library of Congress **Record No. AAFS 41** of the Folk Music of the United States from records in the Archive of American Folk Song (1943),” in Mann, Thomas B. (Corresp.), Administrative Files, *Folk Music of the United States Series*, American Folklife Center, Washington D.C.; “Makes Dulcimer Record; Gets U.S. Check; Buys Bond,” in *The Dallas County News*, September 1, 1943, Tom’s son Paul was in the Army during World War II.

⁵⁵ Questionnaire response, Vicki Anthofer, Northfield, MN, April 12, 2014.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

⁵⁷ “Makes Dulcimer Record; Gets U.S. Check; Buys Bond,” *The Dallas County News*, September 1, 1943.

and the largest cake (the Odessa Llewellyn variety) that we have yet seen.”⁵⁸ The “crowd” of which Tom, his wife Lucy, Charlie Cadwell and many other joined in was there to throw Jacobs a surprise birthday party. Jacobs further joked, “evidence seems to show our home was properly locked and under FBI rules and regulations until overpowered by the Cadwell orchestra.”⁵⁹

Family members remembered fondly the sounds Tom made on his homemade instruments. When young Miles Orton was growing up across the street from Tom in the 1940s he recalled going over to Tom’s house on multiple occasions, sitting down in the living room, and looking out the window at an old tree while Tom played. The tree seemed to “move with the wind in rhythm to the music Tom was playing.”⁶⁰ Orton was equally fascinated by Tom’s dulcimer building process, and enjoyed seeing the unfinished products and pieces.

He would show me how each was made and to me it was a miracle how all these glued pieces would soon become a highly polished grained instrument. I also remember the hammer pieces and how they looked with the felt cloths on the end... He would hold the hammers... in both hands with the holding ends held in a certain way in his fingers.⁶¹

In the winter of 1950 Tom, Lucy, Charlie Cadwell and his wife Elta Viola took a five-week trip to California, a testament to Tom and Charlie’s enduring friendship. They visited Tom’s younger brother George there and stopped to see a friend in Mesa, Arizona. Then, after a having a heart attack in 1953, Tom began a two-year decline in health. On March 21,

⁵⁸ Miles Orton, E-Mail correspondence with the author, January 27, 2014, jam session at the Cadwell’s; “News of Interest from Waukee and Its Community,” *The Dallas County News*, August 30, 1950, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ Miles Orton, E-Mail correspondence with the author, January 17, 2014.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

1955, he passed away at Methodist Hospital in Des Moines. Among the pallbearers at his funeral was Charlie Cadwell.⁶²

When Tom Mann died he left sixteen songs behind for future generations. His repertoire must be examined like a journal. While there is more of a written record of Tom playing at public Farm Bureau events, the local newspaper was clearly sympathetic with its local Farm Bureau. Therefore, the songs he recorded for Robertson are a sample of his private stock. Just as a journal or diary provides scholars with insights of what people were thinking and writing about, a musician's repertoire can help answer the question: what were they *playing* about?⁶³

Both the Farm Bureau and the RA were interested in the traditional melodies Tom knew. The Farm Bureau, as per Liberty Hyde Bailey's vision for music in the country, and by the work of county agents and local ministers, could use a musician like Tom to help promote a rural image of "wholesome gatherings and recreations" in the country.⁶⁴ The RA came to Tom by a different route, wanting to preserve a particular sound that their Archive of American Folk Music did not yet have an accurate representation of. Benjamin Botkin also handpicked five of Tom's recordings for an important compilation because of their traditional European roots. In the end, neither the Farm Bureau's semblance of music in the

⁶² "News of Interest from Waukee and Its Community," *The Dallas County News*, March 8, 1950, 6, Cadwells and Manns in California; George DeFord Jr., "Recording in Library of Congress," *The Dallas County News*, April 15, 1953, front page; Vicki Anthofer, memoranda, February, 2014, contains pictures of Tom and Lucy's trip to California, and visiting Tom's brother George there; "Services Held For Tom Mann," *The Dallas County News*, April 6, 1955, 9.

⁶³ "Services Held For Tom Mann," *The Dallas County News*, April 6, 1955, 9.

⁶⁴ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution*, 60.

country, nor the RA's primary interest in his European influence, highlighted the full breadth of Tom's stylistic interests.⁶⁵

When Benjamin Botkin asked Tom to comment on his repertoire, the man with the dulcimer wrote, "I consider all types of music as suited to the dulcimer, as I play all types—classical, semi-classical, waltzes, etc..."⁶⁶ For Tom to consider all styles to be "suited to the dulcimer," they had to be suitable to him, the player, first. A close look at his repertoire reveals an eclectic array of European dances and jigs, American folk classics, and even popular hits from the late 1910s and early 1920s that would later be recorded by prominent jazz artists. Tom was, in actuality, quite versatile in his playing, and open minded toward old and contemporary styles of his day.⁶⁷

Though Robertson wanted to get in touch with Tom prior to the recording date, there is little evidence to support that he had much time to prepare for her arrival. The *Dallas County News* reported that Robertson simply "appeared at the Mann home... and made an unusual request."⁶⁸ A musician of Tom's caliber, however, often keeps a memorized repertoire of his/her favorite songs and commonly called standards. These are tunes they could play off the cuff, if company were over and someone asked for a spontaneous performance. The recording experience often brings added pressure, since the song one records is for keeps, as some say. But this pressured circumstance often heightens the musician's sense of memory. When Robertson showed up at Mann's door with a one-and-a-

⁶⁵ B. A. Botkin, ed., "Liner Notes," in *Play and Dance—Songs and Tunes*. AFS-L9, Audiocassette, Library of Congress, Music Division, 1. Botkin picked songs for compilation.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

⁶⁷ Field Recordings (pre-1940), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, all of Tom's records are listed here, 3276 A1 through 3277 B3.

⁶⁸ "Around the Town," *The Dallas County News*, August 18, 1937, front page.

million opportunity to record songs for the Library of Congress, he would have most likely chosen songs he loved, had memorized, and at most, needed just a little time to wipe the dust off, so to speak.

Tom could cater to those listeners who preferred traditional folk music, even as commercial artists began to filter their songs into rural homes via touring, published sheet music, and the radio. Prior to the 1920s, however, “Music was provided by neighborhood musicians, and the dances included the schottische, polka, waltz, square dances, and two-step. These dances were part of folk traditions.”⁶⁹ People learned to play and dance by showing up at the gathering. It was these kinds of events, and these “simple country forms” of music, that leaders like Liberty Hyde Bailey wanted to see continue in rural places.⁷⁰ Tom could fulfill that goal if asked by playing schottisches, jigs, and waltzes, as well as old fiddle tunes like “Nancy’s Fancy,” “Haste to the Wedding, Off She Goes,” “Irish Washerwoman,” and “Pigtown Fling.”⁷¹

Yet for all of his knowledge of “country forms,” around half of the remaining songs Tom recorded were actually “transplanted” urban melodies, “professional town music” that rural folks adopted and made standard, and the likes of which men like Bailey and the Country Life Commission later cautioned against.⁷² “Buffalo Girls” (or “Gals”) is a prime

⁶⁹ Mary Neth, “Leisure and Generational Change: Farm Youths in the Midwest, 1910-1940,” *Agricultural History*, Vol., 67, No., 2 (Spring, 1993), 179.

⁷⁰ Liberty H. Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement*, 212-13.

⁷¹ Field Recordings (pre-1940) SHELFLIST, AFS 3262 A1—3658 B3, Tom played “Schottische,” which is AFS 3276 A2; “Jig” is 3276 B3; “German Waltz” is 3277 A3; “Nancy’s Fancy” is 3276 B2; “Haste to the Wedding; Off She Goes” and another jig” are 3277 B1; “Irish Washerwoman” is 3277 B2; “Pigtown Fling” is 3277 B3.

⁷² Liberty H. Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement*, 212-13; *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 116. The report noted that entertainment in the country should “be

example from Tom's selections. Often thought to be the product of rural music traditions, travelling urban bands actually introduced the song to rural America through Black Face Minstrelsy in the mid 1800s. These were white musicians who colored their faces black and performed in an effort to imitate African Americans. Other nineteenth-century songs Tom played were equally urban in influence. The song "Listen to the Mockingbird" was written by Septimus Winner, a professional songwriter from Philadelphia whose published song sheets sold thousands of copies throughout the U.S and internationally.⁷³

While reformers had a difficult time keeping urban-influenced music out of the country, a song's subject matter could also break Country Life doctrine. Though Tom was an alleged non-drinker, and though the Farm Bureau took influence from Country Life reformers who wanted to stamp out saloons from rural America, he still kept "Little Brown Jug," a drinking song, fresh in his repertoire. Just two years after Tom recorded the song for Sidney Robertson, Glenn Miller, another Iowa musician, recorded it with his jazz orchestra and made it a popular hit.⁷⁴

Tom also played a medley of three popular songs that were the most contemporary of his recorded selections. "Three O' Clock in the Morning" was a popular song written by

developed as far as possible from native sources rather than to be transplanted as a kind of theatricals from exotic sources."

⁷³ Field Recordings (pre-1940) SHELFLIST, AFS 3262 A1—3658 B3, Library of Congress, Tom's recording of "Buffalo Girls" is 3277 A1; Kip Lornell, *The NPR Curious Listener's Guide to American Folk* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2004), 24-25; Michael Remson, *Septimus Winner: Two Lives in Music* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 62-70.

⁷⁴ Remson, *Septimus Winner*, 162-64. "Little Brown Jug" was actually written by Septimus Winner's younger brother Joseph. It was the one song Joseph wrote that actually eclipsed his brother's songs in popularity. George T. Simon, *Glenn Miller and His Orchestra* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974), 150-51, Glenn Miller orchestra's "first swing hit"; 161-62, recorded in April, 1939.

Spanish-born songwriter Julian Robledo, who first published the music in New Orleans in 1919. Paul Whiteman—dubbed the “King of Jazz” by one press agent—and his orchestra recorded a version in 1922 that sold over a million copies.⁷⁵ Tom also recorded “Beautiful Ohio,” written by Robert A. King in 1918, which is now Ohio’s state song. And finally, Tom included a rendition of “Till We Meet Again,” a song written by Richard A. Whiting during WWI, and recorded by tenors Charles H. Hart and Lewis James in Camden, New Jersey in 1918.⁷⁶ Tom’s first exposure to these songs would have most likely been by phonograph record or radio, or musical friends who came by these songs via those channels. Either way, the fact that Tom recorded them demonstrated his interest in knowing and keeping some popular songs in his repertoire.

As a musician, Tom expanded stylistically beyond the limited “simple country” criteria Liberty Hyde Bailey set for rural music, and beyond the traditional melodies Benjamin Botkin later featured on his compilation. In other words, he was not a rigid traditionalist when it came to the music he played. With an instrument dating back to medieval Europe, he showed that he was a musician attuned to traditional songs that he would have most likely learned by ear, as well as open to contemporary songs introduced to rural America by traveling bands, publishing companies, and later, recording artists on the

⁷⁵ Paul Whiteman Orchestra, *Three O’ Clock in the Morning* (Camden, NJ: Victor Talking Machine Co., 1922), 3 min., 4 sec.; 10”; from Library of Congress, *National Jukebox*, MPEG <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/8979/>; Don Rayno, *Paul Whiteman: Pioneer in American Music, Volume I: 1890-1930* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 51.

⁷⁶ Waldorf Astoria Dance Orchestra, *Beautiful Ohio* (Camden, NJ: Victor Talking Machine Co., 1918), 3 min., 12 sec.; 10”; From Library of Congress, *National Jukebox*, MPEG <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6891/>; Charles H. Hart and Lewis James, *Till We Meet Again* (Camden, NJ: Victor Talking Machine Co., 1918), 3 min., 21 sec.; 10”; From Library of Congress, *National Jukebox*, MPEG <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/6949/>.

phonograph and radio. Also noteworthy is that among those selections Tom recorded, there are no religious or patriotic songs, nor songs about farming. This agrimusician was, first and foremost, a musician.

About forty-five seconds into his recording of “Devil’s Dream,” Tom made a mistake. Had Robertson given him another chance to play it, he not only may have corrected that “wrong” note, but he might also have played the song slightly faster, or just a little louder.⁷⁷ Maybe he would have made a mistake in another spot of the same song. Tom Mann’s recording of “Devil’s Dream” is just that: a recording. It is a snapshot of a melody the way Tom played it on that August day in 1937. Whether it is by a slight melodic variation, a faster tempo, or a change in dynamic range, even traditional songs can change, depending on the player, the day, the mood, and any other number of factors.

This was not the way agricultural reformers viewed traditional music, nor what they had in mind when they began to merge ideas of music and social programming in the country with their dream of an industrially efficient agricultural sector. For all their efforts, the Farm Bureau wanted to put the Tom Manns and Charles Ingalls’s of rural America, and their traditional songs, in a frozen image of what rural culture should look like. Their incorporation of traditional music was meant to instill in rural folks and onlookers a sense of innocence, simplicity, predictability, and above all, virtue. But these notions paralleled experts’ gospel of making farming itself a business of calculated, invariable success, thereby creating a powerful agricultural sector. Juxtaposing Liberty Hyde Bailey’s picture of music in the country over experts’ visions for efficient agriculture in America, the scenario played

⁷⁷ Field Recordings (pre-1940) SHELF LIST, AFS 3262 A1—3658 B3, Library of Congress, “Devil’s Dream” is 3276 B1.

out like this: Bailey (agricultural experts) wanted the music (people) of rural America to be “plain” and “sweet” (submissive), in order to manifest that kingdom of efficiency.⁷⁸

That traditional music they wanted to hold onto accompanied an agricultural dream that resulted in racial divides, class stratification, credulous supporters, environmental harms, and suffering rural communities. Local community production gave way to large landholders, as community farming was no longer efficient enough to be justifiable. Efficiency and business were the order of the day, the dream fulfilled. In the 1930s, Farm Bureau-backed programs like the AAA got their foothold, and the constituency and resources to make those programs the status quo. As historian Sidney Baldwin put it best, “The AAA had emerged as a reasonably effective instrument for promoting greater equality between agriculture and the rest of the economy—this had been the goal of the agriculturalists and this they were achieving, but at the cost of inequities *within*.”⁷⁹

The picture reformers and agricultural experts wanted to show of agriculture, what they wanted it to look like, and how they wanted it to stay, was just a picture. But they became entranced by their own dream. When they fulfilled it, they then became entranced by the dream of it staying that way, and were fiercely committed to warding off enemies like the RA that would dare threaten it. Agribusiness was their song, their gospel fulfilled, and there was little room for variations or mistakes. But even a dream realized is so often followed by the dangerously sweet expectation of permanence.

⁷⁸ Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in America*, 212-13.

⁷⁹ Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 84.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: “AND YET THE SONG WAS IRREPRESSIBLE”

“Here were warmth, enchantment, laughter, music. It was Anodyne. It was Lethe. It was Escape. It was the Theatre.”¹

Edna Ferber in *Showboat*, 1926.

Musicians and other participants in organizational events like radio and pageantry may not have fully realized that they were taking part in an act, and under the directorship of a few agricultural leaders. While many musicians participated with the best intentions of community and kinship, leaders were hoping that flashy new organizational phenomena like radio and huge pageants would entrance them to a degree, and draw the attention of those who doubted the legitimacy, efficiency, and even greatness, of American agriculture.

Leaders’ strategies for raising the economic livelihood of rural inhabitants would only capture the attention of so many people. Their goal in broadcasting organized social events was two fold; they needed to show rural America’s enchanting heart, but also show it as something hanging in the balance, something that could be lost if political leaders and the rest of the country did not give agriculture the care and attention it deserved. Liberty Hyde Bailey’s designation of music as “spirit” made it something of pure origin, capable of moving and inspiring, but also fragile and in need of attention.² Bailey merged music with

¹ Edna Ferber, *Show Boat*. Reprint, 1926 (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 105.

² Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*, 212-13; Osho, *Emotional Wellness: Transforming Fear, Anger, and Jealousy into Creative Energy* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2007), 77-79, on the subject of organizations, people often refer to an executive as the “head,” and even workers as “hands,” but organizations never seem to have hearts; Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 42, Orwell also used comparisons between his animal organization and the human body. “We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organization of this farm depend on us.”

rural virtue to suggest that if the former were “dying,” so too was the latter. Systems would thus be needed to create social interaction and community again.

Depression in the 1920s, fledgling membership numbers, and legislation in Washington all led to the Farm Bureau’s efforts to control the pace of rural America’s heart. Radio and pageantry were attempts to set a metronomic rhythm in place of what they saw as an arrhythmic rural social existence. These efforts did allow communities to do positive work in their counties, providing responsibilities to locals of all ages, and leadership opportunities to community standouts. But to Farm Bureau leaders, those communities were a means to an end. County visits to Iowa State College allowed for almost monthly radio performances during the McNary-Haugen years. And the IFBF held up Dallas County’s 1926 pageant as an exemplary effort in organization that other counties should aspire to, thereby attempting to regulate the occurrence of these events. In short, state organizations and the AFBF were not opposed to community, so long as community translated to the economic productivity of the entire agricultural sector. How much participants knew of their subjectivity to these strategies of organizational leaders is difficult to say. But radio and pageantry were most certainly blinding factors: variables that sparked peoples’ immediate curiosity and amazement, while blinding them to the wider intentions behind such opportunities.

Ongoing depression and America’s vote for FDR in the 1930s presented new opportunities for the Farm Bureau. Bitter and beaten up by the defeat of the McNary-Haugen bill, and betrayed by Calvin Coolidge—the Republican president who vetoed it twice—Farm Bureau president Edward O’Neal led his organization in casting its hopes on the New York Democrat in the 1932. Though Franklin D. Roosevelt had promised to be more sympathetic to O’Neal’s needs, others within Roosevelt’s ranks felt that the first wave of New Deal

legislation outright ignored the needs of poor landowners across the country, and did not stymie America's habit of over-production. The Resettlement Administration's dream of long-term land planning did not meld with the Farm Bureau's immediate prescriptions of acreage reduction and fixed prices.

While the Farm Bureau and Resettlement Administration were locked in a bureaucratic struggle for approval from the president and Congress, people failed to realize that leaders had built these organizations on some of the same social premises. Fearing social isolation and poor land practices, both the Farm Bureau and the RA, at least originally, had visions of America's farmers working together to make life in agriculture more acceptable and fulfilling. While the Resettlement Administration had only just developed before political leaders defeated it, the Farm Bureau, over several years had lived out Charles Ingalls' prophetic warning of the downside of organizations, and clearly forgotten what they had organized for.³

Yet the only reason the Farm Bureau was ever able to thrive in any form was because of its people. Prior to the 1930s, when the Extension Services' music program became much more official, county Farm Bureaus relied on musicians to play the songs their families carried forward for decades, with communities they had already formed. They played songs that sometimes had no political motive, songs meant to simply enhance the moment, like those that Mr. Ingalls played on the prairie and in the big woods. In a sense, early county Farm Bureaus were not unlike automobiles; they were new phenomena that allowed people to participate more easily in their social traditions.

³ Porter, "Embracing the Pluralist Perspective," 381-82.

The encounter between Tom Mann and Sidney Robertson was a brief moment of extrication. While leaders at some of the highest ranks of American government and bureaucracy fought over the direction of America's agricultural sector, and forgot why they organized in the first place, Mann and Robertson met far away from those voices in the head, in a two-story farmhouse in rural Iowa. Though the Resettlement Administration had terminated Robertson's position, thus making her an affiliate only by label for a short period, she was no less dedicated to the invaluable work of preserving the America's musical traditions. When it came time to report her travel expenses to her supervisor, she decided to pay for the Iowa trip out of her own pocket.⁴

Mann's dedication to his craft as a musician illuminated his custodial care for his father's old repertoire, but also his enthusiasm for popular radio songs of the day. In essence, Thomas B. Mann's recordings are not just important by themselves; the context behind his recording experience with Robertson sheds light far down the hierarchy of their two organizations and onto some of their deepest heart values. From a historical standpoint, when it comes to organizations, the light does not usually shine that deep. While agricultural leaders made agribusiness their "irrepressible" song, Mann and Robertson, by their shared impulse that no organization could claim, preserved cultural artifacts of American community.⁵ In doing so, they honored the source, not the thought of it, and not the act.

⁴ Robertson to Grete Franke on August 20, 1937, SRCC, 1, "Then I went to Des Moines to see the Packards and to get those hammer dulcimer records had heard of near there and which depended on the Packards to make the contact... I would cheerfully write the Des Moines trip off as personal, since I would drive that far to see the Packards any time."

⁵ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 46.

Systems meant to instill community life and interaction are not the community. If musical participants had one fault in this story, it was this: instead of viewing organizational systems—radio and pageantry events—as optional means for them to take part in their ongoing communities, they mistook organization for the only way to community, thereby forgetting who they already were, and thus making collective identity something they needed to achieve. For a time, this played into the hands of agricultural leaders and reformers who continually tried to deceive rural Americans into thinking that virtue and kinship in the country could be created, and that organization was the answer. In essence, it was as if the brain tried to convince the rest of the body that, with the brain's guidance and logic, the body could have a heart.

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