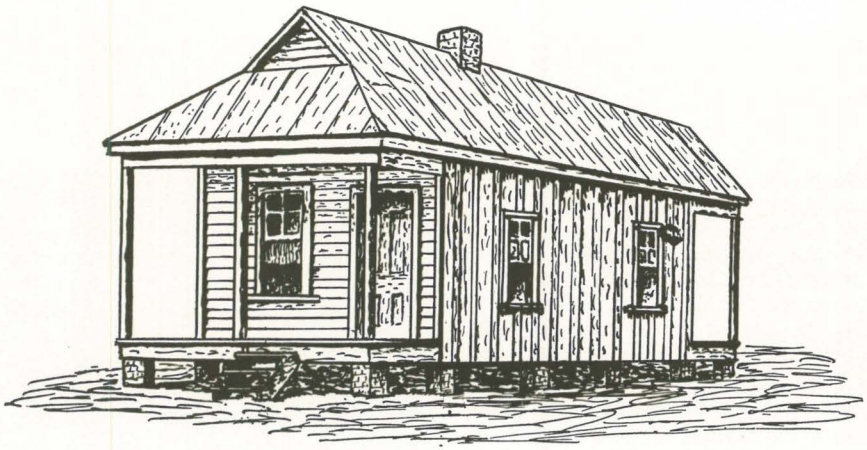


Shotgun House—drawn from Afro-American origins, brought to New Orleans at the beginning of the 19th century, it is a strong indicator of the regional impact of cultural migration.

It provided that region with a new "democratic" image for housing and the temple form house is still a clear index of northern folk culture.

The South possesses a number of house types: one- and two-story Georgian houses, I-houses, hall-and-parlor houses, "dog-trots." The most wide-spread building is also the one most commonly found in rural areas. It is a one-story, two-room house with two front doors. Known to scholars as a *double-pen house,* this dwelling type evolved from the *single-pen cabins* of the mountain and coastal settlements. This developmental link is underscored by the fact that during the slave era double-pen structures were used on plantations to house two families. This simple rectangular house often has a large front porch, a shed-roofed kitchen across the back, and other additional storage sheds attached to the rear of the building. Most double-pen houses are built of frame and today are commonly covered with a brownish yellow tar paper patterned with imitation bricks. These simple houses are one of the legacies of the plantation system and can serve the knowledgeable traveler as a cultural sign post that he has reached the Lowland South.

While most regions encompass rather large areas, the regional concept can also be applied to tightly confined zones such as the rivers of America's heartlands. The banks of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers are noteworthy for the presence of *shotgun houses*. Every town from New Orleans to St. Louis has an aggregation of these thin, narrow buildings. If we then turn east and move up the Ohio, we will find shotgun houses well beyond Cincinnati. In like manner we can also trace these house types along the Missouri as far as St. Joseph. The shotgun house was brought to New Orleans at the beginning of the 19th century from Haiti by free black refugees. River travel was at that time the primary mode of migration and hence the diffusion of cultural influences from Louisiana follow the meandering path of the Mississippi. While the shotgun is of major importance because of its Afro-American origins, it is also a prime indicator of the regional impact of cultural migration.

Since architecture is the totality of a built environment, it comprises many different kinds of structures and uses of space including bridges, fences, outbuildings, town plans, and even garden plots and fields. The variety in each of these categories could help us to delineate different cultural regions. The examples already given should be enough proof that it is important to observe carefully the ordinary architecture around us. Then as we cruise along some interstate highway, we might know where we are culturally, as well as when we'll reach the next Howard Johnson's.

Earl Collins: Hoedown Fiddler Takes the Lead

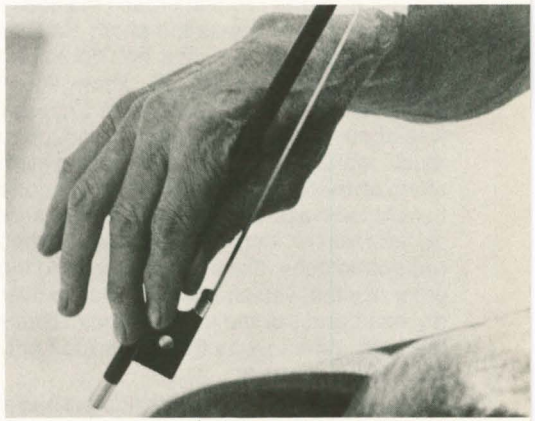
Barbara LaPan Rahm, editor

He was a man of his generation, of his time, and of his region, and his life story follows a classic pattern.

Earl Collins was born in Douglass County, Missouri in 1911. In 1917 his family moved to Oaklahoma, where they share-cropped and Earl augmented their income by playing fiddle at square dances through the bitter early years of the depression. He married in 1931 and he and his wife moved to Los Angeles, California in 1935 where Earl turned his hand to any job he could get: hod carrier, truck driver, trash hauler, machinist, welder, mechanic. He retired in 1969 because of his always fragile health. For years he tried to convert his skill as a fiddler into a money-making occupation. He never made it, and in 1949, he put his fiddle away and did not play again until 1965, when his sons persuaded him to take it up again. Earl's extraordinary technique and musicianship made him a star on the old time fiddler's circuit in California; almost every weekend until his death in 1975 he played at one or another local contest or jam session. In the following, Earl tells his story in his own words, which have been excerpted from a series of taped interviews conducted by Barbara LaPan Rahm.

My grandfather fiddled, and his father fiddled. There's been fiddling through the Collins's since . . . I don't know how far the generation goes back. In the summertime my father always went out on the front porch and sat in a chair. I've heard people tell him, "We heard you play fiddle last night, and we could tell just exactly what you was playing." And they lived two miles away. That's how far a fiddle would carry. Nice clear climate, you know.

Those springs in Missouri that come out of the hills are colder than the ice cubes you get out of that box. That water is so cold that you can't walk in it. Clean pure. You know, the water's so clear down there that it can be 25 feet deep, you can throw a nickel in and tell which is up, heads or tails. But it's mostly just hills and rocks. Just rolling hills. Just up one hill and down, up another and down. You know, Missouri is made out of rocks. I don't care what kind of rock you want, what size, you can find it. Rocks seemed to grow up out of the ground. We'd



"It's a touch on the strings and smooth bowing that makes a fiddler."

load them in the wagon and haul them off so that we could farm the land next year, and next year there's the rocks back up there again. If you could find five acres that you could put a little corn on or a little wheat or something, why, you were doing pretty good. They don't farm any more down there.

When I was seven, like I said, we moved to Wynnewood, Oklahoma, stayed there a year and went to Shawnee. Shawnee's an awful poor country. If it wasn't for that Tinker Air Base up there, Shawnee would fold up the sidewalks and quit. See, they just farmed Oklahoma to death. Cotton and corn, cotton and corn, cotton and corn. The first thing you knew there was no fertile ground and you couldn't make cotton or corn either. I picked cotton, hon. I would

Barbara LaPan Rahm *came from California to the Folklife Festival as Program Coordinator of Regional America. She has her M.A. in Anthropology from California State University at Northridge where she specialized in folklore studies.*

drag a sack 20 foot before I could find a boll of cotton; we'd be lucky if we got ¼ of a bale an acre. That was before Roosevelt—'32. You know how much I got? I got one day a month—$2.40. And that's all the money I could make outside of this old fiddle. I'd play a square dance—play six or eight hours—and make 50 cents. I'd give Dad every bit of it but a dime and I'd go get me a soda pop and a candy bar.

I started trying to play when I was about three or four. But I couldn't reach the fiddle, you know; my arm was too short. So Dad glued up this little old cigar box fiddle and made the little cut-outs, you know. And I played that for four or five years. I guess I was about seven when I got big enough to reach, make a true note. I was making them sharp all the time. And I had a good ear and I could tell I wasn't reaching high enough; my arm wasn't long enough. See, I was a two pound baby. Clark[1] was telling you the other day that you could turn a teacup over my head and put me in a shoebox. That's the truth. When I was five years old I only weighed 15 pounds.

Anyway, going back to this fiddle, I had a full sized bow, but I had this little bitty old fiddle. Then I started stealing my father's fiddle. He kept it under his bed. Boy, he'd spank my butt with a razor strop when he'd catch me playing his fiddle. (It didn't hurt but it popped, you know, it was double; it had the leather finish on one side and fiber on the other. They always rough it up on one side and strop it the other way.)

Mother always watched for him. She'd say, "I see Daddy coming, and you can put the fiddle up." So one day I looked up, and Dad's standing in the door. I was about seven. Oh, I was just fiddling the hell out of "Eighth of January" or something, I don't know what it was. Oh boy, sure going to get it now. He said, "You're playing pretty good; well, come on to dinner." So I was so scared and shaky I could hardly eat, but he started talking to me at the table, said, "You really like the fiddle, don't you?" I said, "Oh, I really love that fiddle." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give it to you if you won't fool it away." And he said, "Why I been spanking you with that razor strop is to *get* you to play. Usually if you try to make a kid play, he won't. Just like a hog, if he thinks you want him in the pen, he won't go in." And that' just the way he put it to me. And that's the way I started playing the fiddle.

I used to hold my Daddy's arm while he fiddled when I was two or three years old. I just kept it loose and tried not to bother him. Oh, he had some of the awfullest bowing you ever heard, he could do licks that no one else could. "Wrassle With A Wild Cat"—Miss Buchanan[2] couldn't even write it; he'd make so many notes that she couldn't get them in there and she'd write it just the best she could. He had quit playing for about 25 or 30 years till that WPA project came along and he needed the money. You know, they paid those fellas, they got a check regular; Roosevelt give them a check. They just played, dances or anything that come up. And Miss Buchanan taught them every day, this whole class of about 50 or 60 of them. Each of them, she'd tell them what it was going to be and she had her little motions, you know. And each one of them would turn to that page and she'd give—like Spade Cooley—one, two, three, and everybody'd start. And they'd all play the same thing. Over and over. She taught them to read music, see. My father was the lead of the whole bunch. I'll put him up at the top of the world. Not prejudiced because he was my father, but Clayton McMichen or Tanner or Eck Robertson, Georgia Slim—they couldn't none of them beat him. In fact, I think he had them all topped.

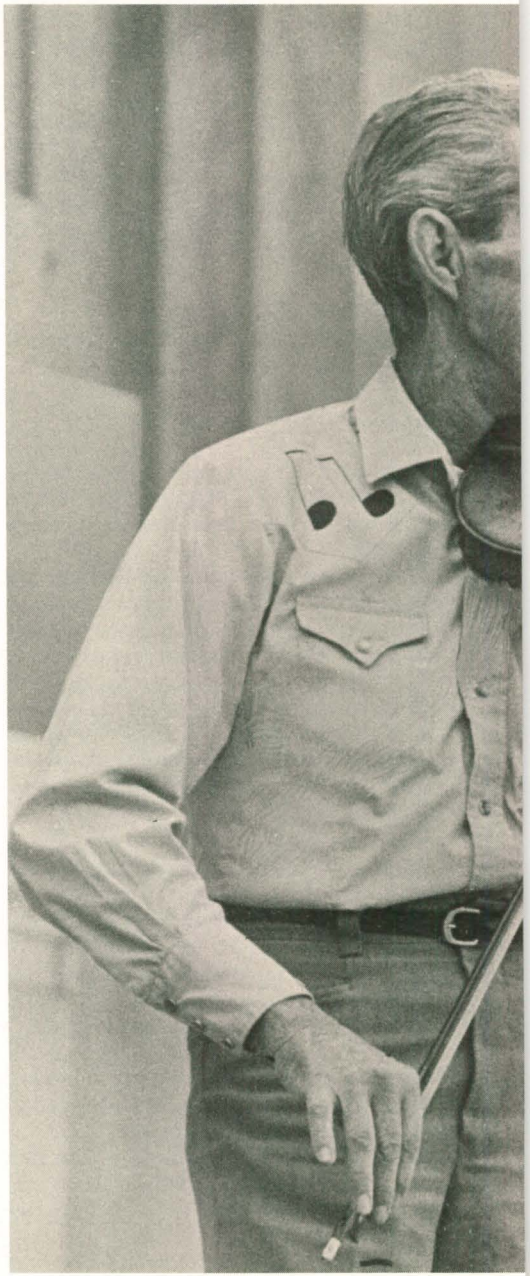
We could have had a family like the Carter Family. There was four girls and five boys, and every one of them musicians. The girls could have played anything they would have tried. They had guitars and sang. Dad used to sing quite a few of those old hoedowns like "Wolves A Howling" when he'd play. I remember one line:

Don't you hear those wolves a-howlin',
Howlin' round my pretty little darlin'
Six on the hillside, seven on the holler
And they'll get her, I'll bet you a dollar. . . .

But Max[3] and I is the two that really teamed up. I set him on an apple box when he was six and showed him "G" chord, and he never made a bobble. He was my guitar man, and right today, I'll take him above anybody.

I stopped fiddling in 1950. I tried everything in the world. I tried every little gimmick that come along. I've been beat out of so much and cheated. Like I played the first television show that ever come to L.A. in the western field—KFI. I played six weeks down there and never got one penny. Rehearsed three or four nights a week and then go down there and play thirty minutes. And a guy collected all the money and run off. And me and my brother, we was both working machine shop six days a week and playing two and three nights a week, sometimes four. We both just quit.

I give both my two boys fiddles—I've had fiddles, guitars, banjos, mandolins—and I wanted one of them, both of them actually, to make a hoedown fiddler, follow in my old Dad's tracks and in my tracks. But neither one of them was interested. Too busy. Running around doing something else, see. But in 1965 they come in to me one afternoon when I got home from work, said, "Dad, we're going to learn to play rhythm on the banjo and the guitar." I said, "Aw no, you don't." They said, "Yes, we do." So that's how it come that I take the fiddle back. I got the banjo and the guitar and the fiddle out, tuned them all up and then I'd play a tune. I'd show them the chords on the banjo and then show them the chords on the guitar. Then we'd pick up all three and we'd



The story of Earl Collins, is not only the story of a fiddler, but of a love that has been and continues to be expressed thru music.

Photo by John Melville Bishop

try.

You know, I love old jam sessions better than I do anything. Just setting around someone's house, and you play what you want to as long as you want to—this and that. I play a while and you play a while, then someone else will play. Then I'll go back, and I'll play some and you play some. . . .

Sheet music looks like puppy tracks to me. Scales won't mean nothing to you in hoedowns, won't mean a doggone thing. You just pick up the fiddle, get a tune in your mind, and you work on that tune and you play it. You've got it in your mind and you know just exactly how it goes. That's memory. But if you go to school and they teach you notes, you're not going to play hoedown, you're going to play violin. It's hard to get an old hoedown fiddler's tone. There's not too many around that has the old fiddler's tone to me. It's a touch on the strings and smooth bowing that makes a fiddler. It's the beauty that you get out of a fiddle. As long as you're in the chord, making your true notes, runnin' your smooth bow—you're playin' the *fiddle*. . . .

[1]Clark Collins, Earl's older brother

[2]Old lady Buchanan, Marion Buchanan Thede, Director, Music Project, WPA, Potowatamie County, Oklahoma.

[3]Max Collins, one of Earl's younger brothers.

Bibliography

Abbott, E. G. (Teddy Blue) and H. H. Smith. *We Pointed Them North. Oklahoma:* University of Oaklahoma Press, Norman, 1954.

Blegen, Theodore. *Grass Roots History.* Kennikat Press, Port Washington, New York: 1969 (Reprint of a work originally issued in 1947).

Dorson, Richard. *American Folklore.* Chicago, Illinois: 1959. University of Chicago Press.

Durham, Philip and Everett L. Jones. *The Negro Cowboys.* New York: 1965. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York.

Greenway, John. *Folklore of the Great West.* Palo Alto, California: 1969. American West Publishing Company.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men.* Westport, Connecticut: 1970. Negro Universities Press, (Reprint of a work originally issued in 1935).

Jones, Louis C. *Things That Go Bump in the Night.* New York, New York: 1959. Hill and Wang.

Lomax, Alan. *Folk Songs Of North America in the English Language.* Garden City, New York: 1960. Doubleday and Company, Inc.

Paredes, Americo. *With His Pistol in His Hand.* Austin, Texas: 1958. University of Texas Press.

Ritchie, Jean. *Singing Family of the Cumberlands.* New York, New York: 1955. Oxford University Press.

Thede, Marion. *The Fiddle Book.* New York, New York: 1967. Quick Fox.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. *The Cultural Geography of the United States.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1973. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Journal of American Folklore—The oldest folklore journal in the United States was founded in 1888. Although originally devoted primarily to American folklore it is now much broader in scope and deals with folklore throughout the world. Nevertheless articles on regional American folklore often appear in its pages.

Southern Folklore Quarterly—When first published in 1937 this journal was primarily devoted to the folklore of the southern United States but it now deals with folklore internationally. Nevertheless it still contains a great deal of material on southern folklore.

Western Folklore—An international folklore journal based in California. Originally known as *California Folklore* it has on several occasions since the name change in 1945 devoted issues to the folklore of various western states.

Pennsylvania Folklife—Begun in 1949 as a weekly publication this is now a quarterly journal devoted to the folklore of the Pennsylvania Germans.

New York Folklore Quarterly—Founded in 1945 this journal has remained primarily devoted to the folklore of New York State although it does occasionally contain articles with a more international flavor.

Indiana Folklore—The most recent title for the now defunct *Midwest Folklore.* Although more concerned with the Hoosier State than its predecessor it also includes, from time to time, articles on the folklore of the states surrounding Indiana.

Publications of the Texas Folklore Society—Unlike other state organizations the Texas Folklore Society issues a yearly book rather than a journal. The first volume appeared in 1916.

The Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song has over the past few decades issued more than sixty LPs of American folk music. In addition to a listing of these recordings—which are available for purchase—lists of state and regional festivals, local folklore organizations, and folkmusic bibliography are also available FREE upon request. Anyone interested should write the following address: Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 20540.

Walter Osborne of Prineville, Oregon, a Regional American participant during Week 7 (The Pacific Northwest, July 28-August 1) carved this logger with a chain saw. Photo by Suzi Jones, Area Coordinator, Regional America