

FROM THESE HILLS: THE SPATIAL DIFFUSION  
OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC FESTIVALS, 1965-1995

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A Thesis

by

ERIC WARREN NEEL

Submitted to the Graduate School

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FROM THESE HILLS: THE SPATIAL DIFFUSION  
OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC FESTIVALS, 1965-1995

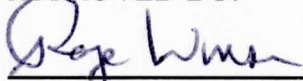
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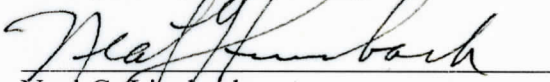
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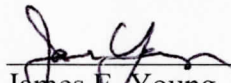
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Roger A. Winsor  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee



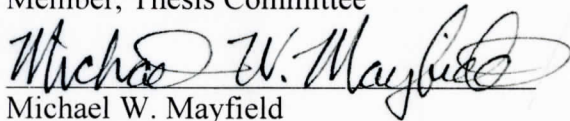
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Neal G. Lineback  
Member, Thesis Committee



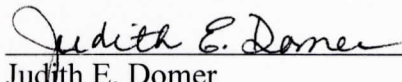
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James E. Young  
Member, Thesis Committee



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Michael W. Mayfield  
Chairperson, Department of Geography and Planning



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Judith E. Damer  
Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

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## ABSTRACT

### FROM THESE HILLS: THE SPATIAL DIFFUSION OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC FESTIVALS

Eric Warren Neel, B.A., University of Tennessee

M.A., Appalachian State University

Thesis Chairperson: Roger A. Winsor

Bluegrass, a specific substyle of country music, evolved in the upland South from traditional folksongs and ballads brought to the continent by the first European settlers. Bill Monroe and his famous band The Blue Grass Boys in the 1940s pioneered the sound that is widely regarded as an original American music form. The first multi-day festival devoted entirely to bluegrass music was held in 1965 in west-central Virginia. Since then, bluegrass festivals have become popular entertainment destinations for people who come to camp, listen, and play music with others.

This study examines the spatial diffusion of bluegrass festivals from 1965 until 1995. Maps of festival distributions for five-year intervals beginning in 1965 are used to illustrate the dynamic nature of festival expansion. Information gathered from relevant bluegrass publications, personal interviews, and academic journals is used to explain the distributions evident on the maps. Bluegrass festival diffusion is viewed as a complex mosaic of factors that supplements and reinforces itself over time and across space.

Evidence indicates that festival diffusion exhibits patterns of contagious, relocation, and hierarchical diffusion at various stages in its evolution. Contagious diffusion is most prevalent in the first years of expansion due to the close proximity of

sites and direct communication between event promoters. This pattern would soon incorporate elements of relocation diffusion as festival activity became more dispersed and moved into areas outside of the hearth region.

Better access to information and recordings fueled an increase in public awareness which, in turn, contributed to the popularity of festivals. The appeal of bluegrass festivals to a more pluralistic audience coupled with stylistic changes in the music itself caused a stratification of festivals that continues today. This variation and specialization had the dual effect of enhancing festival diffusion while at the same time broadening the notion of what constituted a bluegrass festival. Fewer modern festivals resemble the first one held in Virginia in 1965.

Population statistics for festival towns are used to show a pattern of hierarchical diffusion. Over the course of thirty years, bluegrass festivals have moved "up" the urban hierarchy from smaller urban areas to larger ones. This pattern is most pronounced in the first decade of diffusion, with a leveling-off in the 1980s and a subsequent minor drop "down" the urban hierarchy in more recent years.

Bluegrass festivals enjoy greater popularity now than ever before, with events held not just in the United States but throughout Canada, Europe, and elsewhere around the globe. Still, festival activity continues to be most concentrated in the eastern United States and the South in particular where the phenomenon has its roots.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the important contributions of several people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis chairperson, Dr. Roger Winsor, for his endless assistance and encouragement from start to finish. Whether he was bringing new sources to my attention or making suggestions during the editing process, his personal involvement and direction in this endeavor has been invaluable. The other members of my committee, Dr. Neal Lineback and Dr. Jim Young, also were very helpful with the editing of the manuscript and the design of the maps. Dr. Richard Crepeau deserves recognition for his help in the preparation of the statistical samples. I would also like to thank department chairperson Dr. Mike Mayfield for his interest in the topic and appreciation of acoustic music.

The camaraderie of my fellow graduate students has been a source of inspiration and pride. Though it is not possible to acknowledge each and every one of them, I would like to thank them collectively for their friendship and encouragement.

For keeping the computers running, thanks go to Baker Perry and Shannon Mann.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Music has long been thought to be a significant indicator of culture. Sociologists, folklorists, and anthropologists have studied music in the context of their respective disciplines, but geographers have only recently begun to explore its spatial aspects. In The Cultural Geography of the United States, Wilbur Zelinsky points to the dearth of spatial information on social behavior, including folk music, and suggests that it offers “major potential for illuminating basic processes of cultural change through space and time” (Zelinsky 1973: 107-108). By asking the fundamental question, “What is mappable with regard to music?,” geographers can endeavor to explain the spatial ramifications of music on popular culture (Nash and Carney 1996: 70).

This study examines the spatial diffusion of bluegrass music festivals from 1965 until 1995. Maps of festival distributions for five-year intervals beginning in 1965 serve as “snapshots” in the spatial diffusion of bluegrass festivals and are used to discuss changing modes and patterns of festival distribution. Bluegrass festival diffusion is seen as a mosaic of supplemental and interconnected factors, which reinforce themselves over time and across space. As such, maps of festival distributions are explained using information gathered from relevant bluegrass publications, personal interviews, and academic journals.

Empirical evidence alone does not adequately explain the complex diffusion patterns of these cultural phenomena. Oral tradition and personal contact have contributed greatly to the music's acceptance and diffusion, even though their effects have often been underestimated. A recently published book on the history of bluegrass is probably the most comprehensive to date, and gives the reader an appreciation for the myriad interactions, whether documented or merely suggested, that allowed bluegrass music to evolve into a unique form of American music and to spatially diffuse from its Western North Carolina cultural hearth across the United States and beyond (Rosenberg 1985; Carney 1996).

### Explanation of Terms

#### Bluegrass Music

Bluegrass is a form of hillbilly music developed in the 1940's by Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys. It is an amalgamation of Southern musical traditions, including country, blues, jazz, and rock and roll, but ultimately traces its roots back to the old Anglo-Scotch-Irish ballads, fiddle tunes, and folksongs brought to the New World by European settlers. Bluegrass bands typically consist of four to six Southern white males (although increasing numbers of females can be found as well) who each play an acoustic stringed instrument and perform for a predominantly Southern audience. The guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and upright bass comprise a standard ensemble, but other instruments such as the Dobro or drums can sometimes be heard. Songs follow a predictable pattern, with the lead instruments of mandolin, banjo, and fiddle taking turns playing the melody and the guitar and bass providing the steady rhythmic foundation.

Over the years the guitar has assumed a more prominent lead role despite its comparative lack of volume, and the bass has remained in its traditional role as the backbone of the band, seldom featured as a lead instrument. Despite its highly formalized structure and method of delivery, bluegrass music places a great deal of emphasis on the individual talents of the band members, whose “breaks” are often exercises in pure musical improvisation, much like those found in jazz. Although some bluegrass musicians are able to read music or have some sort of formal training (several universities offer majors in bluegrass music performance), many are unable to read printed music and instead rely on their innate sense of timing, style, and imagination (Smith 1965; Hale 1983; Tottle 1998).

The banjo, in particular, has become inextricably linked to what most people think of as bluegrass music. When Earl Scruggs joined Bill Monroe’s band in December of 1945 and added his incredible 3-finger picking style to the sound that Monroe was developing, the capstone was placed on what many would argue was the full realization of a new genre of American music. Although Monroe himself regarded the banjo as a refinement rather than a key element, to many the banjo played in Scruggs’s unique three-finger roll style, whatever the additional instrumentation, constituted bluegrass music (Rosenberg 1988).

Vocal harmony is a distinguishing element of the bluegrass style and can be sung in as many as five parts, built around the triad of the song key. A simple duet consists of a lead and tenor, with the tenor almost always above the lead. A “third” can be sung above the tenor (high tenor), but is usually sung below the lead (baritone). Occasionally a group will employ both a high tenor and a baritone, in addition to the lead and tenor, but

three-part harmony is more commonly heard. Rounding out the vocal ensemble is the bass, which is sung below all the others (Smith 1965; Hale 1983).

Bluegrass singing is high-pitched, sometimes climbing an entire octave above middle “c,” and is peppered with vocal ornamentation in the form of rising attacks, prolonged pitches, and cascading end-notes. The vocals are most often performed in a strained and piercing manner that lends the music a sense of urgency and longing, sometimes referred to as “the high lonesome sound” (Smith 1965).

Rhythmic attributes are fairly straightforward, with the meters of standard 4/4, 2/4, and 3/4 most frequently used. A more distinguishing feature, rather, is the speed at which the music is generally played. Tempos vary between a moderate 160 beats per minute to a blistering 330 beats per minute, at which speed a soloist could be playing over ten individual notes per second. Some have even referred to bluegrass as “folk music in overdrive” (Carney 1996). An emphasis on the offbeat instead of the downbeat, especially by the banjo and mandolin, tends to enhance the impression of speed and give the music a pulsing, driving intensity (Smith 1965; Rosenberg 1985).

### Spatial Diffusion

The process by which cultural ideas and innovations are spread over space and time is referred to as *spatial diffusion*. Geographers find it useful to differentiate between two basic types of diffusion: expansion and relocation. Gould (1969) highlights these two fundamental modes of distribution:

*Expansion diffusion* occurs when an idea or innovation spreads outward from a source region so that the overall area and number of individuals affected becomes greater

over space and time (Figure 1). There are two sub-sets of expansion diffusion differentiated according to the nature of expansion. *Contagious* diffusion relies heavily on close proximity, as its name suggests, and is most often associated with the transmission of disease. Because of its dependence on direct communication or contact, contagious diffusion is highly susceptible to the “frictional effect” of distance (Gould 1969: 5).

The other variety of expansion diffusion is *hierarchical* diffusion, which itself has several sub-varieties but most commonly refers to a “leapfrog” effect where an idea or innovation jumps over intervening space and people, often favoring cities and centers of influence, to trickle down the urban hierarchy into more provincial areas. (Gould 1969; DeBlij and Muller 1997). Figure 2 illustrates the process of hierarchical diffusion.

*Relocation diffusion* is the second primary mode of propagation and occurs when an idea or innovation is carried to another location by an individual or group and diffuses from that new location (Figure 3). Human migration and the subsequent movement of various cultural traits is one of the best examples of this type of diffusion (Gould 1969).

Any medium through which the transport of an idea or innovation is facilitated can be considered to be an *agent of diffusion*. Likewise, any physical or cultural impediment to the diffusion of an idea or innovation can be considered a *barrier to diffusion*.

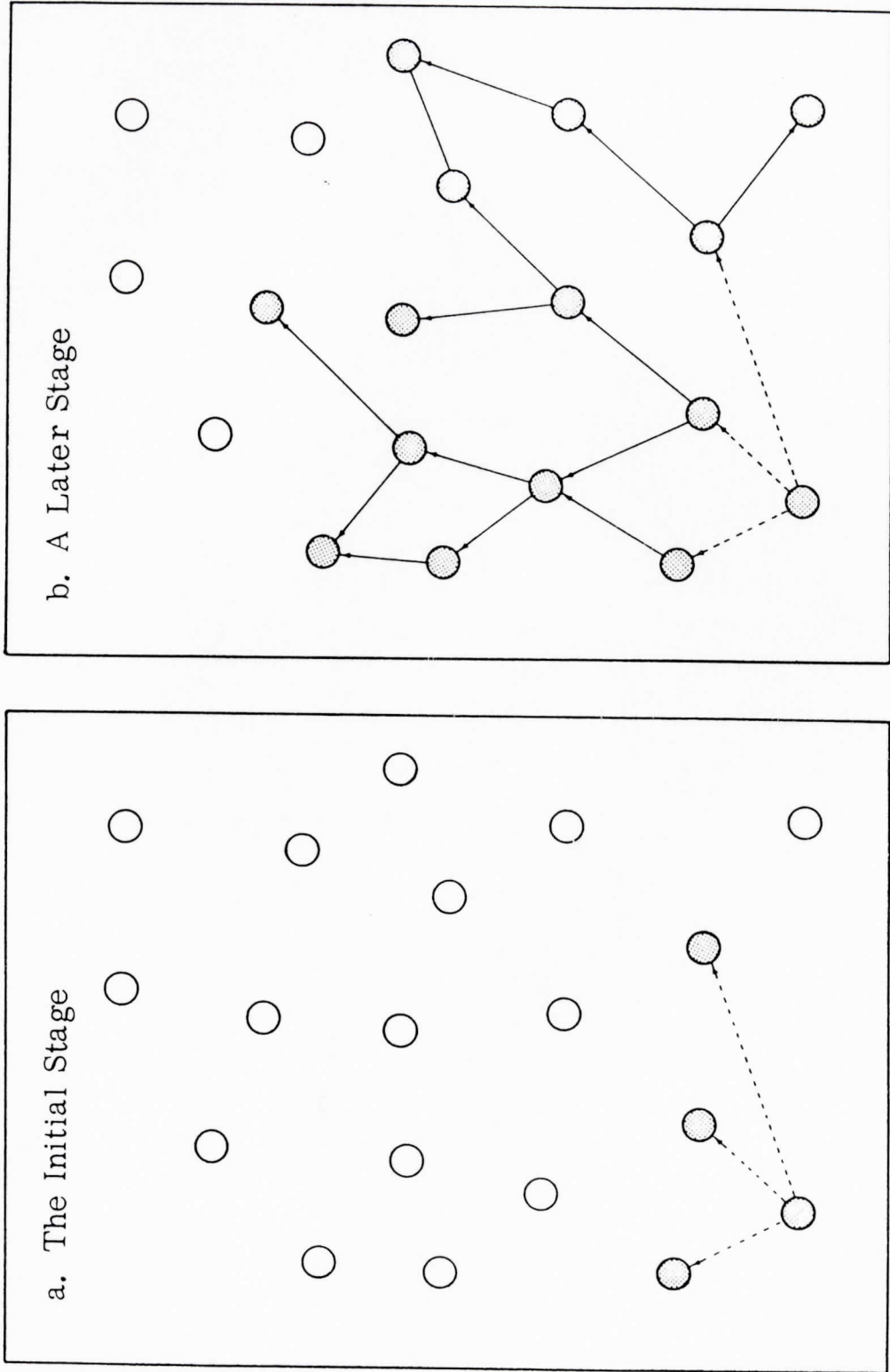


Figure 1: The Process of Expansion Diffusion.  
Source: Gould 1969.

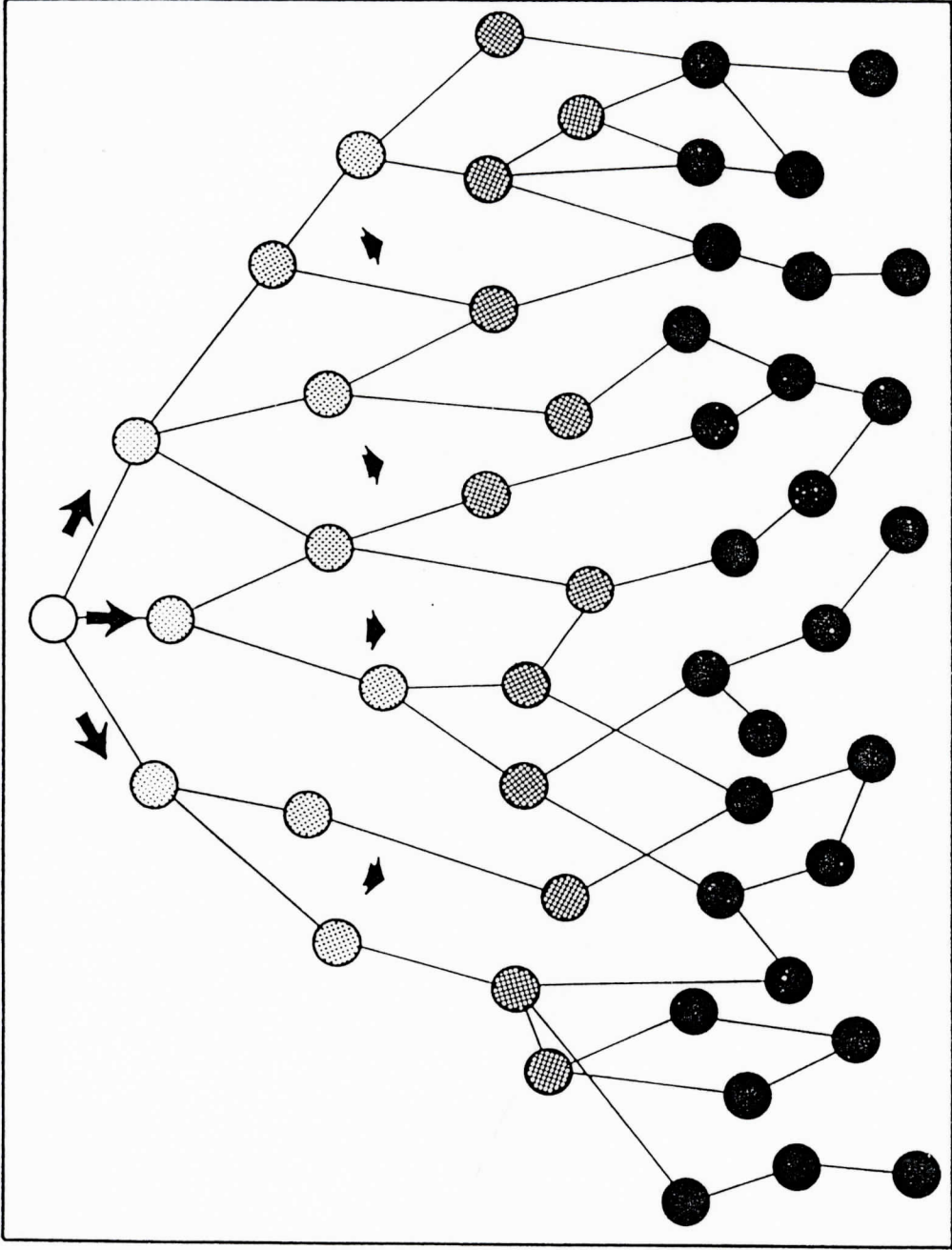


Figure 2: The Process of Hierarchical Diffusion.  
Source: Gould 1969.



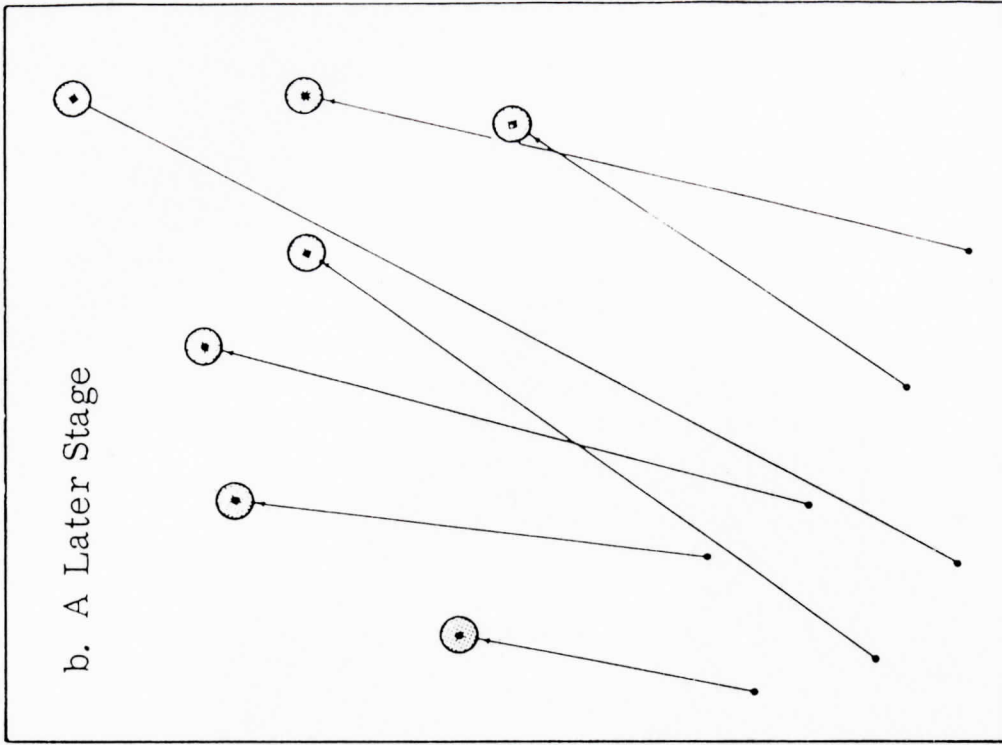
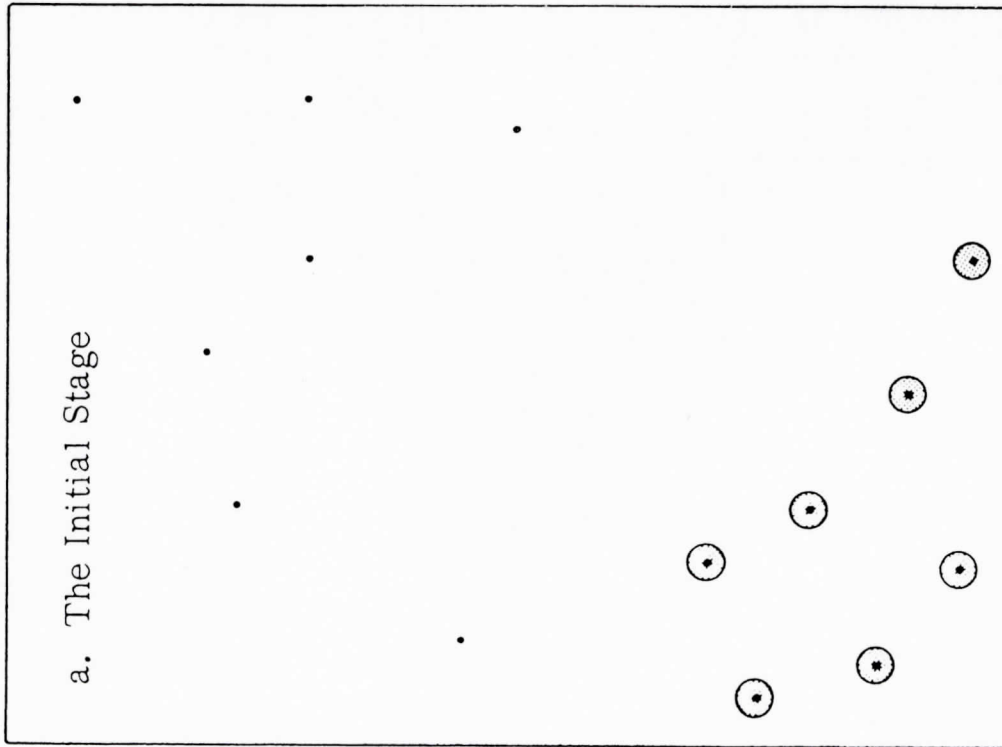


Figure 3: The Process of Relocation Diffusion.  
Source: Gould 1969.

## Methodology

The primary source of data for this study was Bluegrass Unlimited magazine, a monthly publication that has been in operation since 1966. Every year Bluegrass Unlimited, hereafter referred to simply as BU, publishes an annual calendar of the dates and locations of all the known festivals that have “at least a portion of their activities centered around traditional string music and/or bluegrass. Festival data for the contiguous United States were taken for the years 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995. Using the ArcView Geographic Information System software package, a spreadsheet was assembled that listed 966 different festival towns and included information on the number of festivals, if any, occurring at each location for each year in question. Using a 1997 Rand McNally atlas as a reference, each festival town was located and a dot representing the festival was then placed onto the corresponding ArcView basemap. The software automatically gave each dot a geographic coordinate, thereby linking the database, or "attribute" data, to real-world locations. In this fashion it was easy to instantly map festivals according to year. Since many towns hosted more than one festival in a given year, a graduated circle technique was adopted to better illustrate the intensity of local festival activity. Not all of the festival towns listed in BU appear on one or more of the maps: several simply were not listed in the atlas or their locational descriptions were too vague and were therefore omitted.

For each of the years 1970, 1980, and 1990, a ten percent random sample was taken of the towns that had hosted at least one festival that year. Population data from the corresponding census year was gathered for the sample towns and plotted to show

changes in mean population of those communities hosting a festival in order to ascertain if bluegrass festivals have been diffusing “up” the urban hierarchy.

Finally, four interviews were conducted with important people in bluegrass music: 1) Milton Harkey, noted festival promoter; 2) Sherry Boyd, bluegrass disc jockey at radio station WPAQ in Mount Airy, North Carolina; 3) Hoyt Herbert, musician and bluegrass disc jockey at radio station WFMX in Statesville, North Carolina; and 4) Carlton Haney, the person who held the world’s first bluegrass festival. These interviews were undertaken to gain insights into the mechanisms of bluegrass festival diffusion from the perspectives of those who are or have been active in various aspects of bluegrass music.

### Literature Review

Scholarly interest in music dates to at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when musicologists and physicists began to analyze the structure of sound. They believed that sound functioned according to its own set of physical laws, and that an understanding of these parameters would lead them to the ultimate origins of music (Merriam 1964). Anthropologists, on the other hand, shunned the notion of music being merely a phenomenon of sound. Instead, they viewed it as a uniquely human creation which “exists only in terms of social interaction; that is, it is made by people for other people, and it is learned behavior” (Merriam 1964). From these two disparate approaches to the study of music emerged the discipline of ethnomusicology, which examines the structure of music in its cultural context (McAllester 1971).

Increasing awareness of specific musical structures and styles led to the first attempts to map their distributions at various scales. Nettl (1956), utilizing a decidedly musicological approach, delineated three major style areas on the globe from an analysis of scales and harmony. A few years later, Lomax (1959) published an article that approached the notion of musical regions from an anthropological perspective. He used cultural norms of musical performance, such as vocal timbre, as a basis for establishing ten musical style regions around the world. In doing so, he made significant contributions not only to anthropology but to the emerging field of ethnomusicology as well, for he placed music squarely in its cultural context while identifying specific traits unique to certain styles.

### Contributions of Geographers

Myriad aspects of popular culture have captured the attention of geographers, and reflect the diversity in which the discipline prides itself. More traditional areas of research, such as agricultural practices and religious affiliation, now reside in the published literature alongside studies of Southern stock car racing and football (Carney 1995; Lanegran and Palm 1973). The scope of topics awaiting the cultural geographer's perusal is vast and motley indeed.

Geographic interest in music, surprisingly, has a relatively short history and dates only to the late 1960's. Nash's *Music Regions and Regional Music*, published in 1968, studied the broad world distributions of music regions, diffusion centers, areas of influence, and a host of other factors related to the spatial evolution of music from

prehistoric times. Enthusiastically received in scholarly circles, the geography of music was born.

Over the years, a number of subdivisions or themes in music geography have been outlined and reflect the diversity of approach to the subject. Carney (1996: 3) cites eight distinct areas of research: (1) the spatial variation of music (i.e., the place-to-place differences in musical taste and preference); (2) the evolution of a musical style with place (e.g., New Orleans jazz); (3) the origin (cultural hearth) and diffusion of music phenomena; (4) the psychological and symbolic elements of music pertinent to shaping the character of a place (i.e., perception of place via music lyrics); (5) the effect of music on the cultural landscape (e.g., festivals); (6) the spatial organization of music phenomena (e.g., radio stations); (7) the relationship of music to the natural environment (e.g., material used in instrument construction); and (8) the interrelationship of music with other cultural traits in a spatial sense (e.g., religion).

These themes are broad enough to allow for significant geographic research, but none should be studied in a vacuum. After all, geographers pride themselves on seeing the “big picture,” and in order to gain that understanding, the interaction between themes must often be considered.

A significant body of work exists on the origin and diffusion of different musical styles. The first unpublished Master’s thesis on the geography of music was completed by a Penn State graduate student in 1970 and attempted to trace the diffusion of rock and roll music from American urban centers using record chart data from the previous decade (Gordon 1970). Further research on rock and roll offered explanations, if somewhat generalized and lacking empirical evidence, of how black and white musical influences

came together to form the new style, the geographic origins of those influences, and factors contributing to the spatial shifts in activity and innovation (Ford 1971; Francaviglia 1973). The concept of the musical cultural hearth, already a well-established notion in academia, became the starting point for measuring and mapping changes in the musical landscape. The spatial diffusion of other genre of music were soon being examined in a similar fashion. Langille (1975) completed a Bachelor's thesis on the origins and spatial dynamics of the blues in the United States, suggesting that the patterns uncovered in his research can serve as significant indicators of black history and culture. A study of jazz used musician birthplace data to delineate core areas, and then traced their wanderings to show how the major centers for jazz music moved from New Orleans to Chicago and finally to New York (Glasgow 1979).

Of the eight areas of research listed earlier, it is clear from a review of the literature that there are themes that have received considerable attention while others warrant further exploration. Studies of culture hearths and the diffusion of cultural phenomena are well represented, and may even constitute the bulk of available literature on geomusicology. Frequently studies of this sort have also included information on the role of media, especially radio, in their analyses of diffusion patterns. Kellogg (1986), for example, wrote a dissertation that concentrated on the role of radio in the diffusion of popular music. Such a proliferation of literature emphasizing patterns of diffusion is an agreeable arrangement in the context of this study, for it also is oriented around a similar theme, and the opportunity to review other scholarly work provides valuable insights into effective ways of organizing and presenting research.

Song lyrics constitute another area of interest to geographers. References to physiographic regions, stories of personal experience, and the expression of values as told through music have allowed geographers to make observations concerning urban-rural contrasts and the perception of place. Though an overview of some of the relevant material is not included here, the reader is advised to refer to the works of Marsh (1971), Ford and Henderson (1974), Lehr (1983), and Kracht (1989).

Bluegrass, folk, and country music are well represented in the literature, thanks in large part to the work of George O. Carney, Regents Professor at Oklahoma State University. His 1974 paper was the first to examine aspects of bluegrass music from a geographic perspective. He established a culture hearth by mapping musician birthplaces and physical features revealed both in song lyrics and the names of performing bands. To demonstrate a pattern of diffusion he utilized a three-tiered approach. First, he produced a series of dot maps showing the increased incidence of bluegrass festivals from 1965 to 1972. Second, he traced the travel behavior of three popular bluegrass acts in 1972. Third, he mapped the number of venues (i.e., theaters, clubs, etc.) offering bluegrass on a regular basis between 1968 and 1972. Langille (1975) questioned whether Carney provided enough evidence to infer a pattern of diffusion, but it seems apparent that the purpose of the paper was simply to illustrate some of the important concepts the discipline of geography can bring to the study of cultural phenomena. Carney vividly highlighted fundamental themes, such as man-land relationships, diffusion, and sense of place, even if empirical evidence was at times sparse and his methodology less than clear.

Subsequent work by Carney (1996) has explored the culture hearth of bluegrass from a somewhat different perspective. By identifying important innovators in the

evolution of the bluegrass sound and citing evidence of a “music culture infrastructure” that encouraged the exchange of ideas and repertoire and consequent synergies, he argued that the mountain and Piedmont areas of western North Carolina served as the geographic origin of bluegrass music. It should be noted, however, that his conclusions were largely based on secondary sources and personal opinion, not on empirical evidence.

Carney has authored a couple of other articles related to the geographic centers of music phenomena and their patterns of diffusion. A good overview of music in the American South considered the origins of country music’s vocal and instrumental elements, their routes of diffusion, and the evolution of several country music substyles, including bluegrass (1980). The diffusion of country music radio stations was examined in a 1977 study (Carney 1977) uncovering some interesting patterns of contagion and hierarchical diffusion. For example, he suggested that in the 1950’s the diffusion of country music programming was largely the result of dispersed personal appeals, but later was replaced by the centralized efforts of the Country Music Association.

Carney (1990), in his essay on the evolution and future of music geography, pointed to a number of topics that deserved closer scrutiny. Ethnic music and the spatial variation of musical preferences, he suggested, have largely been overlooked by geographers. Also, there was little knowledge of music organizations, clubs, and other services that cater to those who enjoy music. Finally, the field was wide open to research on the relationships between music and the natural environment.

The author is aware of two Master’s theses specifically related to bluegrass music. Smith (1964) offered a detailed definition of bluegrass music, gave a brief history of the music, elaborated on some of the music theory behind the vocal and instrumental



techniques commonly heard in bluegrass, and finally made some personal observations on cultural overtones and the appeal of bluegrass music.

A second thesis compared bluegrass music diffusion in the United States and New Zealand (Hale 1983), focusing on the significant diffusion elements of radio, television, phonograph, instruction books, and personal appearances that had received little scholarly attention. Hale also included a copy of an extensive questionnaire that he distributed to performers in an attempt to gain some insight into their motivations and inspirations for becoming involved in bluegrass music. By examining these additional factors, as well as physical and cultural barriers to diffusion, Hale provided a clearer picture of the mechanisms of distribution, and has expanded on the work done by Carney and others.

#### Justification of Study

This study attempts to address some gaps in the research on what has been referred to as “America’s fastest growing musical type” (Hays 1999). First, there has been no published work on the diffusion of bluegrass music festivals since Carney’s 1974 paper mapped their proliferation from 1965 to 1972 and offered some brief explanations for the pattern mostly in terms of human migration. Secondly, factors such as the roles of key players (e.g. radio disc jockeys and promoters) are not well represented in the literature. Third, beyond Carney’s work, there has been no spatial analysis of festival dynamics. Finally, no one has addressed this issue using a geographic information system.

A persistent problem encountered in music diffusion studies has been a lack of consistent data. The word diffusion implies movement over space and time, and is

therefore of interest to geographers, but obtaining consistent data over time can be difficult. For example, while current data on radio stations programming bluegrass music is available from the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA), no historical data are available because the ways by which stations define bluegrass music have changed over time and the IBMA finds it difficult to keep records on a “moving target.” Even the Bluegrass Unlimited annual festival schedules that are used as the primary data source for the maps presented in this study have one important drawback: the listed festivals are self-described, that is, they have been presented to BU by the organizers as being bluegrass festivals either wholly or in part. Since this information is taken at face value, neither the author nor BU can prove that the information provided in the schedule is accurate.

Bluegrass music has a relatively short history and reliable data have not been collected during its entire history; this makes robust diffusion research more problematic. Hale (1983) makes note of this impediment in his own comparative study. He also pointed to the fact that there was no common methodological approach to existing music diffusion studies, thereby making comparisons between studies more difficult. The problems outlined above are significant limitations of this study.

### History of Bluegrass Music

The mountains of central and southern Appalachia have long been home to old-time music. The first Scotch-Irish settlers to set foot in the beautiful, misty hills over two centuries ago brought with them the old Protestant hymns, ballads, and fiddle tunes that people sang and danced to at weddings and square dances. For folks in the upland areas it

often was difficult just to make a living off what could be grown on the farm. In the unforgiving conditions typical of mountain existence, these joyful tunes offered comfort and a means of social bonding in an uncertain world. Musicians were special people in communities and exceptionally talented ones were virtual local heroes. A good fiddler was often as valuable as a good axe and was frequently called upon to ply his wares at community get-togethers. His repertoire of technically demanding tunes was sometimes physically exhausting when barn raisin's and hoedowns lasted into the wee hours of the night. The job of a local musician could be a difficult job indeed (Artis 1975: 3-5).

The old Irish pipe and fiddle tunes were preserved as they were passed from parent to child in an endless musical tradition, and many of them -- songs such as "Sally Goodin'" or "Devil's Dream"-- still survive and are part of the bluegrass repertoire today. Though this is not as applicable today as it was in the past, many of the older generation of bluegrass musicians learned from their parents, who in turn learned from their parents, thus constituting a form of contagion diffusion that ensured the music's survival through direct inter-generational contact (Artis 1975: 3-7).

The relative isolation of the mountains also helped to preserve the songs and the instruments that played them. Before the introduction of phonograph and radio into most rural households, innovations in musical styles tended to occur gradually and were for the most part an internal phenomenon. Over the course of time, however, regional music styles began to emerge as players incorporated their own individual experiences into the music. A mountain man was a lonely man, tested by adversity, with limited knowledge of the world outside his own window, and his music began to take on a rougher, honest quality that reflected the absolute realities of life. Eventually, some sort of cohesion to

this powerful, emotionally driven style began to evolve, and a distinctly different style from the traditional Irish tunes began to emerge (Artis 1975: 4-5).

With new innovations in the music, other instruments began to be included as well. The fiddle, of course, remained vital to the sound and was always an integral part of any ensemble. The dulcimer was played in some areas, but was not as widely distributed as the fiddle. The comparable size, durability, and the ease with which it could be transported helped make the fiddle the instrument of choice. During the 1840's, the five-string banjo was invented from African antecedents and manufactured on a large scale, but did not become popular with mountain folk until after the Civil War when many young men became familiar with the instrument through blacks who had played it on southern plantations. Afterwards, the banjo's popularity increased as musicians took a liking to the instrument's unique sound and its uncanny compatibility as a backup to the fiddle (Artis 1975: 6).

The guitar and the mandolin, both of southern European origin, found their ways into the string bands of the South around the turn of the century with the latest in shopping convenience -- the mail order catalog. The popularity of the mail-order houses became so immense in rural Appalachia that people were buying all sorts of household goods through them. Along with an order for an artificial limb or a cure for excessive dandruff, one could acquire these amazing new stringed instruments at reasonable prices. Mountain musicians found the guitar and the mandolin to their liking because they made fine back-ups to the fiddle and banjo (Price 1975). The combination of instruments was just about perfect. Even today, this basic ensemble remains virtually unchanged.

### Hillbilly Music Becomes Popular

America during the 1920's and 30's was a nation in the throes of cultural, economic, and technological change. Large numbers of rural dwellers were moving to urban areas, where they hoped to escape the poverty of farm life and pursue better economic opportunities in the towns and cities. On the periphery of Appalachia, the urban centers of Knoxville, Chattanooga, Asheville, and Charlotte were magnets for highland workers seeking employment in the mills and textile factories. Other family members, people from their communities, or just people with similar "back-home" origins were frequently on hand to ease the transition and give the newcomers a social network in which to operate.

Undoubtedly some of these immigrants were musicians, and their relocation allowed them to bring their tastes for old-time music to a new environment, where they were enthusiastically received by the locals and introduced to other musicians in the community. Informal hillbilly bands, singing "brother duets," and gospel quartets sprang up and were quite popular acts, mixing music with comedy in a vaudeville display of theatrics. For the performers, it offered a means of artistic expression and the opportunity to earn a few extra dollars. For the audience, it was entertainment that simultaneously appealed to both secular and religious values. Sad songs spoke of a longing for the old home place, lost loved ones, or heavenly rewards for a life of toil on Earth. Lively fiddle tunes had folks tapping their feet to the sounds of history coming from somewhere deep in the mountains or perhaps from across the oceans. Jokes and the antics of costumed comedians/musicians added an element of joviality that perfectly complemented the more

sentimental aspects of the show. This was more than entertainment, and it was more than business. This was a microcosm of a way of life, and people liked it (Rosenberg 1993).

Direct contact with other musicians had been the traditional means for the diffusion of musical ideas, but in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this pattern was being supplemented by wonders of modern technology. The outside world was creeping into the hidden reaches of the rural South. Radio stations began to dot the landscape and blared country hillbilly music, in all of its regional diversity, into living rooms now lit with electricity. For performers, radio airplay was a crucial means of advertising. Those who were able to secure fifteen-minute slots on the air were allowed to announce the places where they would be making personal appearances and peddle their own songbooks and pictures in exchange for a piece of the resulting profits. A few groups had sponsors who would pay the radio station for the advertising time, so in addition to hawking their own products they would also profess the effectiveness of the sponsor's laxative medicine or tonic. Almost none were paid salaries; just to get the word out was an important opportunity for any musical group. In fact, the increased publicity that radio facilitated allowed many performers to turn a fledgling side occupation into a career (Rosenberg 1993).

Phonograph records were another significant vehicle for the diffusion of early hillbilly and country music. The popularity of rural vernacular music, as evidenced by its sustained presence over the airwaves, caught the attention of record companies looking for new markets. Groups that had established themselves based on successful radio broadcasts and personal appearances were signed up, and savvy record company scouts began to scour the sleepy backwood towns for new talent. Although records had obvious

advertising benefits, much like radio, very few performers realized substantial profits from the sale of albums. Royalties were rarely paid, and musicians seldom had the publishing rights to their own songs (Rosenberg 1993).

The combined effect of radio, record, and personal appearances can not be underestimated. Country and hillbilly music was a smashing success, reaching far and wide into the rural Southeast. From the old-time sounds of Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers in north Georgia to the refined country sounds of “the Singing Brakeman” Jimmy Rogers from Mississippi, a whole new world of musical ideas was now open for discovery, and musicians busied themselves incorporating what they heard on records and radio into their own styles. It was only a matter of time before someone put the pieces together.

The history of bluegrass music is largely a history of Bill Monroe and his famous band the Blue Grass Boys. Born in 1911 and raised on a farm near Rosine, Kentucky, in the western Pennroyal region of the state, he was the youngest of eight children. A shy and introverted youngster with poor eyesight, he was often teased and ostracized by other playmates. “People used to come to this house,” he once explained in an interview, “and since I was cross-eyed, strangers would laugh at me, and I couldn’t see well enough to play ball. After a while when I saw strangers coming down that road, I would go and hide in the barn.” (Willis 1989; 112) Feelings of isolation and a deep mistrust of others instilled the boy with a strong sense of self-determination and a need to create something he could call his own (Willis 1989; Rosenberg 1993).

The sound of music filled the Monroe house at an early stage in the boy’s life. His mother, Malissa, was an accomplished fiddler, accordionist, and singer in the old-time

tradition, and she frequently would play music around the house when the business of raising a family had been tended to. Brothers Birch and Charlie were both musically talented, playing guitar and fiddle, respectively, and the young Bill was soon accompanying them on the instrument that he later would confess he had no interest in: the mandolin. The guitar was his instrument of choice, inspired by the talents of a local black fiddler and blues guitar player named Arnold Schultz, whom he accompanied on guitar at area dances. If he wanted to play with his siblings, however, it had to be on mandolin.

Long days were spent toiling in the fields to help keep the farm running, leaving little room for playtime. His mother died when he was ten, and most of his older siblings moved away to find jobs in the cities, leaving the young Bill alone with his father. When his father died in 1927, he moved in with his uncle, a fine old-time fiddle player named Pendleton Vandiver. Uncle Pen, as he was affectionately called, was a great influence on the teenage Monroe. Bill once recalled, “... and he was a wonderful fiddler. He kept good timing to his music and played that old sound from years and years ago. And I really loved it” (Willis 1989; 113). He lived with his uncle for several years, and during this time he frequently would accompany him on rhythm guitar at square dances that they attended. Monroe credits Pen with teaching him many of the old-time tunes and with developing a strong sense of timing and overall musicianship (Malone 1985). In fact, one of Bill Monroe’s more famous tunes is “Uncle Pen,” written in his memory.

All of the sounds he had heard as a child – religious, secular, black, white -- plus the “new” country sounds coming over the airwaves by the likes of Jimmy Rogers, would soon evolve into his own interpretation of hillbilly music. A gifted instrumentalist, he



quickly mastered the mandolin, moved north to Whiting, Indiana, in 1929 to work for a refinery, and teamed with his brothers to play the first rendition of what would later evolve into bluegrass. The Monroe Brothers, as they were now calling themselves, began playing on Chicago's WLS National Barn Dance, a popular Saturday night radio jamboree. Their success at WLS playing music accompaniment to square dances allowed for a decent living and gave them some exposure. By 1936, they were in Charlotte, North Carolina (without brother Birch), playing on area radio stations (WBT Charlotte, N.C.; WFBC Greenville, S.C.; and WPTF Raleigh, N.C.) to widespread acclaim. Sibling infighting over the direction each of them wanted their music to go, however, began to take a heavy toll, and in 1938 the brothers split up. Bill moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he formed his first band, the Kentuckians. After three months he moved to Atlanta and put together his first lineup of the Blue Grass Boys, named after his home state of Kentucky. The next year his band successfully auditioned for a spot on the Grand Ole Opry, at which time Nashville's WSM station manager George D. Hay told Monroe, "If you ever leave the Opry, it'll be because you've fired yourself" (Willis 1989; Rosenberg 1993: 46; Malone and McCulloh 1975).

WSM's (acronym for We Shield Millions, because the station was owned by an insurance company, or William Smith Monroe, as Monroe himself used to joke) 50,000 watts of "clear channel" power allowed Monroe's music to be broadcast far and wide, reaching perhaps ten million homes per week according to a national radio survey conducted in 1948 (Hurst 1975). Every Saturday night his band's tight vocal harmonies, high-pitched singing, and driving rhythms simply left audiences gasping for more. Monroe had taken elements of popular country music and old string band music

and fused them into a new style that was at once invigorating and modern, yet retain the traditional charm that appealed to so many people.

In addition to the meticulous attention Monroe gave to his sound, he was also careful to avoid the hillbilly stereotype that had pervaded popular culture at the time. The word “hillbilly” itself seems to have come from the name of a popular country band in the 1920’s called Al Hopkins and the Hill Billies, and their name came to describe the gamut of old country styles that were heard on the radio and records. Public perception of a “hillbilly” was amusingly summarized in an article that appeared in the *New York Journal* on April 23, 1900. It reported that “ A Hill-Billie is a free and untrammelled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him” (Green 1965: 204). To distance himself and his music from such an unsavory label and portray a more respectable image, Monroe insisted that his band members wear white shirts, ties, riding boots, and narrow- brimmed Stetson hats (Willis 1989; Rosenberg 1993).

By 1945, Monroe had assembled his most famous band (Earl Scruggs, banjo; Lester Flatt, guitar; Chubby Wise, fiddle; Howard Watts; bass ), and, some would argue, classic bluegrass was born. All of the ingredients were now in place, and according to famed bluegrass singer Jimmy Martin, it was “perfect.” (Liebling 1994) Scruggs’ sensational banjo technique probably did more to elevate the band’s sound to a distinctly different level than anything else, as people roared their approval every time he stepped up to the microphone, but every member was an extremely talented musician in his own right and contributed a crucial element to the band’s refined sound. For the next three

years the band toured almost constantly, filling their tent shows to capacity everywhere they went. They traveled in a Chevrolet stretch limousine called the "Blue Grass Breakdown," and upon pulling into a town would often challenge the local baseball team to a game, which served as a healthy break from the grueling confinement of the car and also helped to attract more people to the show. (Willis 1989; Rosenberg 1993; Malone 1985; Liebling 1994).

In 1948, Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt left the Blue Grass Boys and returned to their respective homes in North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, weary of the constant travel, and perhaps realizing that their fortunes would never be made as sidemen. Soon they had formed their own band, the Foggy Mountain Boys, and began playing on WCYB radio in Bristol, Virginia. There they met the Stanley Brothers (Ralph and Carter), who were employed at the same radio station. Ralph Stanley played banjo in both the traditional two-finger style and a three-finger style he claims he learned from North Carolinian Snuffy Jenkins, but, after listening to Scruggs's impressive technique, began to model his playing after him (Rosenberg 1967; Malone and McCullah 1975).

Monroe's band was a virtual apprenticeship on the road. Players gained invaluable experience by becoming a Blue Grass Boy, and their bandleader was keen to work with them individually to help them achieve their musical potential. Additionally, the exposure that came with being in Monroe's band helped launch the careers of many young musicians. Despite the obvious advantages, however, players came and went for a number of reasons. The pay was not particularly good, and the strain associated with continuous travel in very close quarters proved to be too much for some. Personality

conflicts sometimes erupted with the headstrong Monroe. Others simply wanted to pursue different career paths, musically or otherwise.

For the diffusion of the bluegrass sound, this exodus of musicians was critical. Large numbers of people who had played with Monroe himself and then moved from place to place constituted an important diffusion element, producing a consistency of influence that is reflected in the music.

Rosenberg (1967) suggests that bluegrass music did not become a “style” until others began copying Monroe’s sound, and cites the Stanley Brothers’ recording of “Molly and Tenbrooks” as the first direct evidence that Monroe’s distinct vocal presentation and Scruggs’ banjo technique were being emulated (Malone 1985; Rosenberg 1967: 146). Monroe, for one, apparently was not impressed by his imitators, and even quit recording for Columbia and switched to Decca when they signed the Stanley Brothers. In fact, he at times felt as if his music had been stolen and commercialized by some of his ex-band members, including Flatt and Scruggs. His negative reaction to what were, for the most part, admiring, genuine adherents to the style, probably originated from a perceived economic threat: competition would cut into his share of record sales and performance venues (Rosenberg 1988). Economic considerations aside, the constant shuffling of musicians at this early stage in the history of bluegrass may have helped to ensure its survival. New areas were exposed to the music, networks were created among musicians with a common interest, bands were formed, and a general pattern of clustering evolved as musicians moved from place to place and “set up camp.”

### Festival Evolution

As bluegrass became more popular and new areas of activity began to dot the landscape, the social settings that served as meeting points for the musicians and fans began to take shape. Front porch picking sessions, barn raisins', and Sunday afternoon jams were held in local communities to enthusiastic response. School fund-raising events, cake walks, and other small social functions emphasized the close association to home and endeared the musicians to their listening audience. They became local favorites.

These backyard performances grew in size as word got around and people from all walks of life came to enjoy good music, socialize, and put aside the problems of the day. Soon local civic groups were organizing and promoting live acts at the county fair or some other larger forum, and the stage was set for a movement that would eventually diffuse throughout the United States and beyond.

Fiddle competitions and folk festivals had been around for a number of years and were the predecessors to the outdoor bluegrass festival. The Old-Time Fiddler's Convention in Union Grove, North Carolina, is the longest running event of its kind. Created in 1924 as a fund-raising event, it is the king of all fiddle contests. Over 30 of these competitions existed in North Carolina alone in the 1930s and opened the door for other instrumentalists in the region to gain some exposure and network with other musicians (Mathis 1975). In 1928, an enterprising attorney and folk enthusiast in Asheville named Bascam Lunsford organized the first folk festival in his hometown. He called it the Mountain Folk Festival, and many of the future bluegrass performers began their careers as amateurs at these events (Malone 1985).

The continued success of the Mountain Folk Festival and similar gatherings was the spark that was needed to get the bluegrass festival movement underway. By offering both public entertainment and a venue which permitted local musicians to showcase their talent, festivals became an enduring element on the cultural landscape.

### Elements of a Festival

To better understand the attraction festivals hold for the many who attend them, it is helpful to briefly outline their cultural dimensions. As the name suggests, a festival carries with it the notion of celebration, sometimes in a religious context and perhaps more frequently in a secular one. The purpose of a festival is to highlight aspects of local, regional, or national tradition and culture in a setting that is conducive to “festive” behavior. During the folk revival of the 1950s and 60s, bluegrass music came to be seen by some as an element of traditional culture that was threatened by a perceived unraveling of the social fabric. “Massification” and “assimilation” were terms frequently used to characterize the direction of social change. As a reaction to these trends, organizers within the movement staged various events to publicly present aspects of traditional culture, and festivals were a prominent manifestation of these attempts. The motivations for the staging of such festivals varied from political to economic, or a combination of both, but the end result was an enhanced public awareness of all sorts of folk traditions, including bluegrass music (Rosenberg 1985: 273-274).

Folklorist Roger D. Abrahams has described four types of festive occasions (from Rosenberg 1985: 276): (1) those that feature a performance or set of performances; (2)

those that focus on a contest, game, or sporting event; (3) calendar-oriented festive gatherings; (4) commemorative occasions marking a historical event.

Rosenberg (1985: 276) goes on to point out that the first bluegrass festival put on by Carlton Haney at Fincastle, VA in 1965 had all of the elements that Abraham has described. The concerts represented the performance aspect, the banjo contest represented the game, the Labor Day setting the calendric element, and the “Story of Blue Grass” the observance of historic events.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DIFFUSION OF BLUEGRASS FESTIVALS

Festival diffusion is best understood as a complex interplay of social forces, with events occurring in one sphere of activity having ramifications in another. An understanding of bluegrass history and the appeal of festivals lay a good foundation for an examination of festival diffusion. This chapter, therefore, will present and describe changes in the bluegrass music scene and the impact of these changes on the spatial distribution of bluegrass festivals from 1965 to 1995.

#### The Early Days

Figure 4 shows the location of a single bluegrass festival put on by Carlton Haney on September 3-5, 1965, at Cantrell's Horse Farm in Fincastle, Virginia, eighteen miles north of Roanoke. Although festivals of one sort or another had been popular for years -- a fact that certainly did not escape the attention of business-minded Haney -- he was the first to put together a multi-day event focused entirely on bluegrass music, with particular attention to the pivotal role of Bill Monroe in the music's development. By drawing on elements he had witnessed at other festivals, such as musician workshops, and his own ideas for presenting bluegrass as the brainchild of Bill Monroe, Haney was an innovator



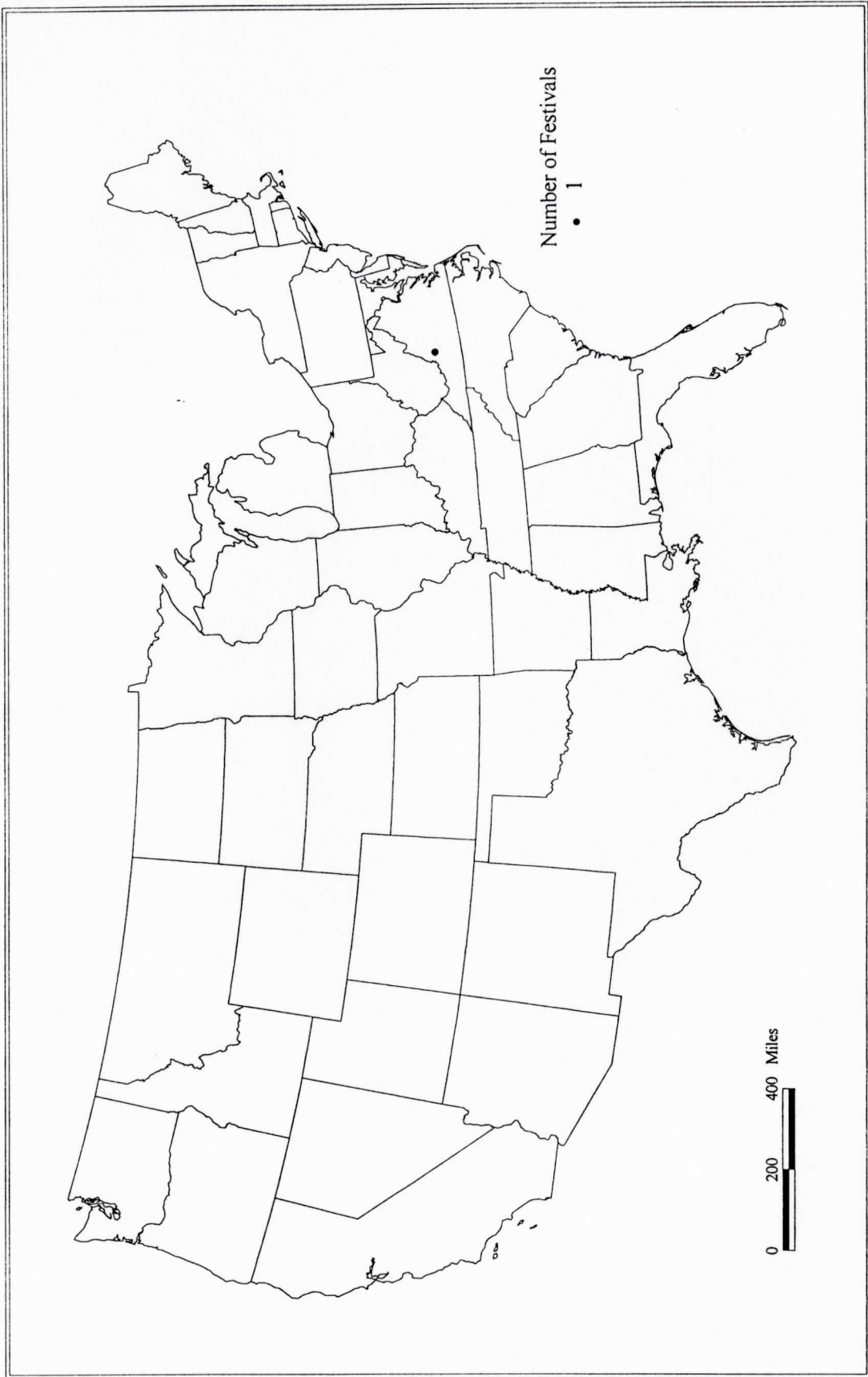


Figure 4: Distribution of Festivals, 1965.  
Source: Rosenberg 1985.

in the emergence of a new type of music festival. He was betting that die-hard listeners of bluegrass would respect his attempts to present the music in its historical context and would pay to see and hear several days of bluegrass music (Rosenberg 1985).

Prior to Fincastle Haney had established many important personal contacts that eventually led to his innovation, the world's first multi-day bluegrass festival. Twelve years before Fincastle, in 1953, he had been introduced to Monroe through Clyde Moody, a guitar player from North Carolina who had previously been one of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys. After successfully booking some local shows for Monroe, Haney was hired as his manager and retained that position for a year and a half. In 1957 he was managing another popular bluegrass act, Reno and Smiley, and was backstage at the Opry after one of their performances. Monroe and his band were present, as well as several former Blue Grass Boys. Haney made a request that Jimmy Martin, singer-guitar player and former Blue Grass Boy, and Bill Monroe do a duet together, with Reno and Smiley backing them up. Although Haney was familiar with Monroe's music (he had, after all, been his manager), something about the way Monroe played rhythm backstage at the Opry that night struck Haney. In recent telephone conversations the author has had with Haney, the issue of "time" would repeatedly come up, with Haney explaining that Monroe's timing was what intrigued him and led to his developing a novel business idea: if he could assemble all or some of Monroe's former bandmates -- those who could play his form of "time"-- and put on a show with Monroe as the centerpiece, then people might pay to see such a thing (Rosenberg 1985; Haney 1999).

After the colorful events backstage at the Opry had planted the seed of putting on a bluegrass show into Carlton Haney's mind, another event on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1961 would help

him see the viability of booking several bluegrass acts for one show. A stockbroker and bluegrass enthusiast from the Washington, D.C., area named Bill Clifton had booked almost all of the “big names” in bluegrass for an all day event he held at the Oak Leaf Park in Luray, Virginia, about 75 miles west of Washington. Jim and Jesse McReynolds, Bill Monroe, the Country Gentlemen, the Stanley Brothers, Mac Wiseman, and Clifton himself all appeared on stage that day in front of an estimated 2000 people. Sitting in the audience was banjo player extraordinaire and former Blue Grass Boy Don Reno and his current manager, Carlton Haney (Rosenberg 1988; Vinicur 1993; liner notes to Jim and Jesse: Bluegrass and More).

If Luray had confirmed the notion of booking numerous bands on a single day, then another New Jersey native named Ralph Rinzler would help Haney crystallize his ideas for a multi-day event honoring the man most responsible for the creation of bluegrass music, Bill Monroe. Rinzler was a college-educated disciple of the folk revival and avid student of folk culture who would eventually “discover” Doc Watson. When Rinzler was working as Monroe's manager in 1963, he was introduced to Haney and the two found that they shared a common interest in the historical aspects of bluegrass music. The following year Rinzler left his position as Monroe's manager to become a field researcher for the Newport Folk Festival Foundation. His job was to identify significant aspects of folk culture that could be supported with proceeds from the Newport Folk Festival. He invited Haney to come to that year's festival to observe some of the activity. What Haney saw there helped him envision the way in which he wanted to organize and present his own bluegrass festival (Rosenberg 1985; Vinicur 1993).

The "First Annual Roanoke Blue Grass Festival" was the crystallization of both Haney's innovative ideas and the cumulative effect of personal contact with other influential players in the arena of folk music and promotion. It is in this fashion that the first bluegrass festival can be seen to have been an innovation that resulted from ideas communicated to Haney through personal, or contagion, channels (Rogers 1962). By accumulating knowledge of bluegrass playing style, its history, as well as festival dynamics through his attendance at Luray and his association with people like Monroe and Rinzler, Haney was acting as the receptor of contagion elements that would manifest themselves in his first festival. The fact that he elaborated on a preexisting phenomenon -- folk festivals -- by tailoring them specifically to the bluegrass genre in a multi-day setting constitutes an important innovation that, in time, would assume a life of its own.

It was no accident that Haney decided to hold his festival in west-central Virginia. The mountain and foothill regions of Appalachia had a long history of bringing traditional music to the public's ears. Many of the most prominent radio stations hosting live bluegrass shows were located within easy driving distance of Fincastle. WCYB in Bristol, Tennessee, for example, began broadcasting on December 13, 1946, with 10,000 watts of power, later boosted to 50,000 watts. The Farm and Fun Time Show featured almost all of the major bluegrass acts at one time or another and could be heard in the five states of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. It was perhaps the most widely heard bluegrass radio show next to WSM's Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Other important stations which assisted in setting the preconditions for the Fincastle festival included: WPAQ (10,000 watts) in Mt. Airy, North Carolina; WPTF (50,000 watts) in Raleigh, North Carolina; WDBJ (wattage unknown) in Roanoke,

Virginia; and WRVA (50,000 watts) in Richmond, Virginia. In fact, eight years prior to Fincastle, in 1957, Carlton Haney bought the rights to the Old Dominion Barn Dance at WRVA in Richmond (for \$1!) and began to broadcast his own bluegrass show on Saturday nights featuring some of the artists who would later play at his festivals (Willis 1989).

The musicians who followed in Bill Monroe's footsteps and popularized his sound found their greatest market in the South. This came as no surprise, for it was the South that had nurtured the sounds of early string music and produced many of its most famous practitioners. The advent of radio, the presence of radio station managers who were sympathetic to the bluegrass sound, and the existence of a receptive audience for bluegrass all coalesced to create a suitable environment for the expansion of the bluegrass phenomenon. It was this sort of environment that provided the preconditions necessary for the acceptance of Carlton Haney's innovation of the festival concept.

Most of the people in attendance at the first festival were devoted fans of the music and had followed it closely through the years. They had listened to live performances on some of the regional radio stations, bought recordings of their favorite artists, or been to see a bluegrass show at one time or another. Everyone knew who Bill Monroe was, of course. Perhaps equally important, everyone was familiar with the music of Ralph and Carter Stanley from southwest Virginia. Everyone knew of Jimmy Martin (the "King of Bluegrass") from Sneedville, Tennessee. The other artists appearing during those three days at Fincastle -- Reno and Smiley, Mac Wiseman, Doc Watson, Clyde Moody, Benny Martin, Chubby Wise, and several others -- were all part of a small group of musicians mostly from the South who collectively made up the bluegrass performing

community at that time. They were the backbone of a musical style with a dedicated legion of followers. These loyal fans were precisely the type of people Haney attempted to attract to Fincastle; they, more than anyone, would relate to the organization of the festival around Bill Monroe, the acknowledged “father” of bluegrass. For them, the chance to see Monroe perform the songs they had grown to love with the very musicians who had played on the original recordings was a wholly satisfying experience. Haney’s “Story of Blue Grass,” hereafter called the “Story,” appealed to people’s sense of the music’s history. With Bill Monroe at the center, this served to justify their feelings that the music was a unique artform that deserved to be glorified (Rosenberg 1985).

Other elements of the festival complemented the “Story.” A gospel concert was held on Sunday morning before the Story and highlighted the religious aspects of the music, which had always been present but never displayed in such a format. Spontaneous jams in the parking lot and campsite area allowed amateur musicians to interact and trade licks in an informal atmosphere. Professional workshops held on the stage were meant to serve as a forum where amateurs could ask questions and see professionals demonstrate various nuances of musical technique. These aspects of the festival encouraged interaction between members of the audience as well as audience-performer interaction, elevated the overall level of satisfaction for many of the attendees, and strengthened the bond between fans and performers. (Rosenberg 1985).

The appearance of the first festival coincided closely with other developments in the bluegrass consumer community that stimulated interest in the music and contributed to the diffusion of festivals. In November of 1965, two months after the Roanoke festival, the first issue of the Bluegrass Bulletin was published for “... the promotion and

preservation of old-time bluegrass music.” It’s editor and publisher, a Floridian named Peter Richardson, wrote his own articles on the differences between country music and bluegrass, included commentary from readers who were eager to share musical experiences, and offered for sale his own instruction courses for banjo and guitar. Although circulation of the Bulletin was never widespread -- perhaps no more than two hundred -- it was one of the first publications to address the need in the bluegrass community for a forum to exchange and disseminate information related to the music (Rosenberg 1985).

The Bulletin ceased publication within two years, but by this time Volume I of Bluegrass Unlimited (BU) had hit the press. In July of 1966, BU started with its mission stated plainly on the front page:

We propose:

- 1) To support bluegrass music on record and in person by all groups, local, national, and international and to encourage the furtherance of this music.
  - 2) To provide an information service for new record releases on national labels and as many small labels as possible and use the purchasing power of the group as an instrument of obtaining same. Discounts will be made available when possible.
  - 3) To publish a newsletter covering record releases, coming events, article, and information of interest.
- dues-----\$3.00 per member annually (Rosenberg 1985).

Unlike the Bluegrass Bulletin, whose format often varied from one issue to the next, BU had a streamlined appearance and its contents were well organized. Towards the back of the issue, people could find information on upcoming shows, bluegrass radio programs, fan clubs, and other related events. It was the first publication to coherently present information of interest to the bluegrass consumer, and would eventually become a magazine that people could count on.

While publications such as Bluegrass Unlimited and the Bluegrass Bulletin were satisfying public interest in bluegrass through the printed word, Dave Freeman, an enterprising young man from New York and avid fan of old-time and bluegrass music, was busy developing his record label, County Records, and its mail-order counterpart, County Sales. Freeman had been collecting rare 78's of pre-World War II country records and trading them through a mail-order auction he was running. The combination of limited availability of old-time albums and the increased interest in such music resulting from the folk revival led Freeman to believe that there may be a market for re-issues. His idea was nothing new; a record company called Origin had done a series of re-issues called Origin Jazz Classics that was composed of material from old pre-war blues 78's. Using selections from his own record collection, Freeman issued his first County album, an anthology of mountain fiddle music (Wolfe 1980; Rosenberg 1985).

Though the first records released under the County label from 1963 to 1964 produced only mediocre sales, Freeman's mail-order service from which one could purchase not only County-issued records, but also records from other labels did quite well. Now, just as publications such as BU were supplying interested consumers with a source of reliable printed information on bluegrass, Freeman was filling a need for a single source of recordings. Additionally, Freeman was knowledgeable of the recordings he offered and published a newsletter (County Sales Newsletter) that contained informed reviews of recordings available either on his label or on someone else's (Rosenberg 1985; Wolfe 1980).

The developments in the first half of the 1960s illustrate an institutionalization of various aspects of the bluegrass phenomenon. Haney's innovation on the festival concept



by booking numerous groups for a multi-day event devoted entirely to bluegrass music, the establishment of publications such as BU, and Dave Freeman's mail-order service all contributed to an increased awareness of bluegrass music and made it more accessible. Within a period of just a few years, a handful of proactive innovators operating in different spheres of the bluegrass movement had created an environment where each of their respective endeavors began to reinforce one another's. The initial expansion diffusion of bluegrass festivals after the first one at Roanoke in 1965 owes much to the cumulative effect of the events of the mid-1960s.

Carlton Haney held the second festival at Fincastle on Labor Day weekend, 1966, reinforcing the calendric element of festivals referred to by Abrahams. In 1967 the festival was moved further north to Berryville, Virginia, to a place called Watermelon Park on the banks of the Shenandoah River. An increase in the fees demanded by the owner of the Fincastle site prompted Haney to search for an alternate location. Through his activities as a promoter he had come to know the owner of Watermelon Park, John Miller. Miller agreed to let Haney use the site and he (Miller) would run the concessions (Willis 1989). For the next two years the Berryville festival was held on Labor Day weekend, with some key improvements and innovations over the first festivals at Fincastle. The workshops were held during the week prior to the festival to better function as an educational tool, and they were held around picnic tables instead of on the stage to lend the sessions a more intimate atmosphere. Unlike the rustic field setting at Fincastle, Watermelon Park was more suited to accommodate festival attendees because of the existence of improved camp sites and sanitation facilities. Also, it was closer to the Washington, D.C / southern Pennsylvania geographic axis that was inhabited by many

Southerners who had migrated North and carried their affinity for bluegrass and old-time music with them.

By 1969 Haney had held four festivals on the Labor Day weekend, with steadily increasing numbers of people in attendance. He had also begun to publish his own newsletter entitled Muleskinner News, a humorous pun on the Jimmy Rogers tune “Mule Skinner Blues” that Bill Monroe adapted and performed at his first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry. Generally enthusiastic reviews of Haney’s festivals had appeared in BU and word was spreading inside and outside the bluegrass community. An estimated 9,000 people were at the 1968 festival at Berryville. Only about 45 miles from Washington, D.C., the site was within easy driving distance for many of the fans who lived in the vicinity (Rosenberg 1985).

Bluegrass music had enjoyed an unusually enthusiastic acceptance in the Washington D.C./ Baltimore, Maryland area. Starting before the beginning of World War II, migrants from the southern Appalachians had been moving into the region, bringing with them their appreciation for hillbilly and old-time music. By the 1950s and 1960s the type of music that some people were calling bluegrass had become a sort of regional mainstay, supported by local institutions such as radio, nightclubs, and even television. The Washington/ Baltimore area came to be known as the “Capital of Bluegrass” because it had not only the grass roots support of southern migrants and their descendants, but also the information infrastructure through which motivated individuals could spread the “word” to people both inside and outside the bluegrass subculture (Rosenberg 1985; McIntyre 1997).

One of these motivated individuals was Connie B. Gay, promoter, disc jockey, and owner of radio and television stations in the D.C. area. Since the late 1940s he had worked to develop urban markets for country music and thought that the refined, polished country sound coming out of Nashville would be the key to urban appeal. Though he focused his efforts primarily on more mainstream artists like Patsy Cline and Roy Clark, he frequently included bluegrass artists on his radio and television shows, giving them much needed exposure at a time when outlets for getting bluegrass on the air were becoming more scarce (Rosenberg 1985; McIntyre 1997).

Washington was fortunate to have produced a number of devoted and knowledgeable disc jockeys who were instrumental in keeping bluegrass on the air when country music stations in other parts of the nation were excluding it from their programming schedules. Perhaps the most influential of them was Don Owens, broadcasting from WARL in Arlington. Owens possessed a unique combination of qualities that were rarely heard in the industry at that time: extensive knowledge of bluegrass history and a flair for presenting it to his audience. The charismatic way in which he was able to convey information on particular recordings or musicians suggested a true devotion to the music that was an instant hit with fans. During the 1950s and early 1960s he regularly spun records of Bill and Charlie Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, Reno and Smiley, the Stanley Brothers, Jim and Jesse, and other important figures in bluegrass and traditional music. By the time he died in an auto accident in 1963 he had set the standard by which other bluegrass music disc jockeys would be compared (McIntyre 1997).

In addition to several opportunities to hear bluegrass on the air, the Washington area also had a well-established network of nightclubs that hosted live performances. It

was in these smoky underground establishments that local bands found a place to play in front of receptive audiences. One of these bands, the Country Gentlemen, would become one of the preeminent bands to emerge from the Washington area bluegrass scene. The Seldom Scene, another local favorite that emerged indirectly from the Country Gentlemen, was composed of local musicians who all had full time jobs but would get together now and then to play on an informal basis -- hence the name Seldom Scene. They went on to become probably the most famous "progressive" bluegrass band of the 1970s, retaining the traditional instrumentation of a bluegrass ensemble (guitar, banjo, mandolin, bass), but adapting the bluegrass playing style to songs popular during the folk revival. This step away from the bluegrass repertoire served a dual purpose: it allowed the artists to experiment with new arrangements and made the music more appealing to young middle class fans.

Sustained and regular appearances by bands, such as the Country Gentlemen and the Seldom Scene, allowed them to build up a regular following of listeners. Almost every Thursday night between 1962 and 1969 at the Shamrock, a nondescript local hangout that had become a reputable bluegrass forum, Charlie Waller and the Country Gentlemen would take the stage. The Red Fox in Bethesda, Maryland, was home to the Seldom Scene. The people who came to see them over the years included not only long-standing followers of the music, but also young members of Washington's middle class who had been exposed to bluegrass through various means. Some had heard bluegrass on the radio; others had become acquainted with it through contact with members of different social classes in high school (Rosenberg 1985).

The increasing number of people in attendance at festivals between 1965 and 1970 also saw a change in the cultural composition of the crowd. While people at the first festivals tended to be ardent followers of the music, many of whom were musicians themselves, by 1970 there were people who came from outside the subculture in attendance. Many of the newcomers were attracted to the more progressive bands, such as the Country Gentlemen, who were incorporating songs from other musical genres into their repertoire. Others were interested more in the merrymaking aspects of festivals that Abrahams points out and less interested in the music that had been the primary draw for the first attendees. Some of the first reports of unruly behavior, including excessive drinking and drug use, began to appear in BU. Worried that bluegrass festivals were in danger of becoming associated with the wilder rock and roll festivals that were also popular at the time, some members of the bluegrass community expressed their desire that promoters stress a family oriented atmosphere. Indeed, the unexpected popularity of bluegrass festivals during their early formative years had created problems in the area of crowd control. This had not gone unnoticed by local authorities. An apparent shift in festival dynamics as they related to maintaining order led some local governments to introduce bills regulating the assembly of large numbers of people. An article entitled "A Threat to Festivals," which appeared in the May, 1971 of BU outlined the extent of the problem for readers:

...The general public knows little or nothing about bluegrass festivals, but it has learned much about rock festivals through the various media, and much of the time the public does not like what it has learned about them. Consequently, the enraged citizenry has started to put pressure on state legislators to do something to stop the influx of long-haired youths who eat weird chemicals and have a fondness for skinny dipping. Unfortunately, legislators do not draw up bills which regulate or prohibit rock festivals per se. Such bills usually refer to "large

gatherings for a 24 hour period.” In this regard, a bill of this nature becomes a threat to the bluegrass and old time string music festivals (Hancock 1971)

During a period when bluegrass was enjoying greater publicity, many feared that the reputation of bluegrass as a type of music that treasured family values and a rural lifestyle was in danger of being compromised. This perceived threat to bluegrass’s reputation was the catalyst for the emergence of several opinion leaders in the fan subculture.

According to Rogers (1962), opinion leadership is the “degree to which an individual is able to informally influence other individuals’ attitudes or overt behavior in a desired way with relative frequency.” The term “informally” implies that these persons usually have no formal position or status within the system, but earn their status through effective communication of innovative ideas. Using newly established publications such as BU and Muleskinner News to express their concerns and suggest solutions, opinion leaders in the bluegrass subculture were attempting to provide information to the readers and influence the actions of promoters such as Carlton Haney who were in a position to implement festival admission restrictions.

The first five years of festival diffusion had seen the phenomenon progress from an individual’s innovative idea to an event that found acceptance first in the bluegrass subculture and shortly afterwards in a larger, more pluralistic community of consumers. Despite early problems with accommodations and crowd control that are not uncommon in any festival environment, they do not appear to have been a significant barrier to expansion diffusion.

### The Expansion and Stratification Period: 1970-1975

The 1970 BU festival schedule listed 57 festivals planned in seventeen states. Curiously, of the 57 events listed, only thirteen contain the word "bluegrass," while eighteen contain the word "folk." Of significance is that BU listed festivals that were presented as devoting at least a portion of their activities to bluegrass, so some of those listed on the schedule were festivals that had been in existence long before Haney held the first multi-day festival devoted entirely to bluegrass music in 1965. Examples in the 1970 schedule would be the 35th Annual Old-Time Fiddler's Convention in Galax, Virginia, and the 24th Annual Virginia Folk Music Festival. Therefore, since Fincastle is taken as the point of departure for this diffusion study, the festivals listed in the BU schedule are not an entirely accurate representation of the festival landscape. However, BU offers the only consistent listing of festivals for the time period of interest, and it was felt that, despite the melding of multi-day bluegrass festivals into the fold of festivals at large, a fairly accurate picture of overall bluegrass festival diffusion could be gleaned from the dataset. All but seven locations that could not be found in an atlas were mapped. Figure 5 illustrates their spatial distribution.

The heaviest concentrations of festivals are in the Ridge and Valley region of Virginia and the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Another significant cluster of festivals can be found in the Washington, D.C. area. With the notable exception of a few festivals west of the Mississippi, in 1970 they were largely confined to the Appalachian region which had historically nurtured the sounds of traditional music. The clusters of festivals around the Chesapeake Bay region are within easy driving distance from the large metropolitan areas of Baltimore and Washington, which contained an unusually

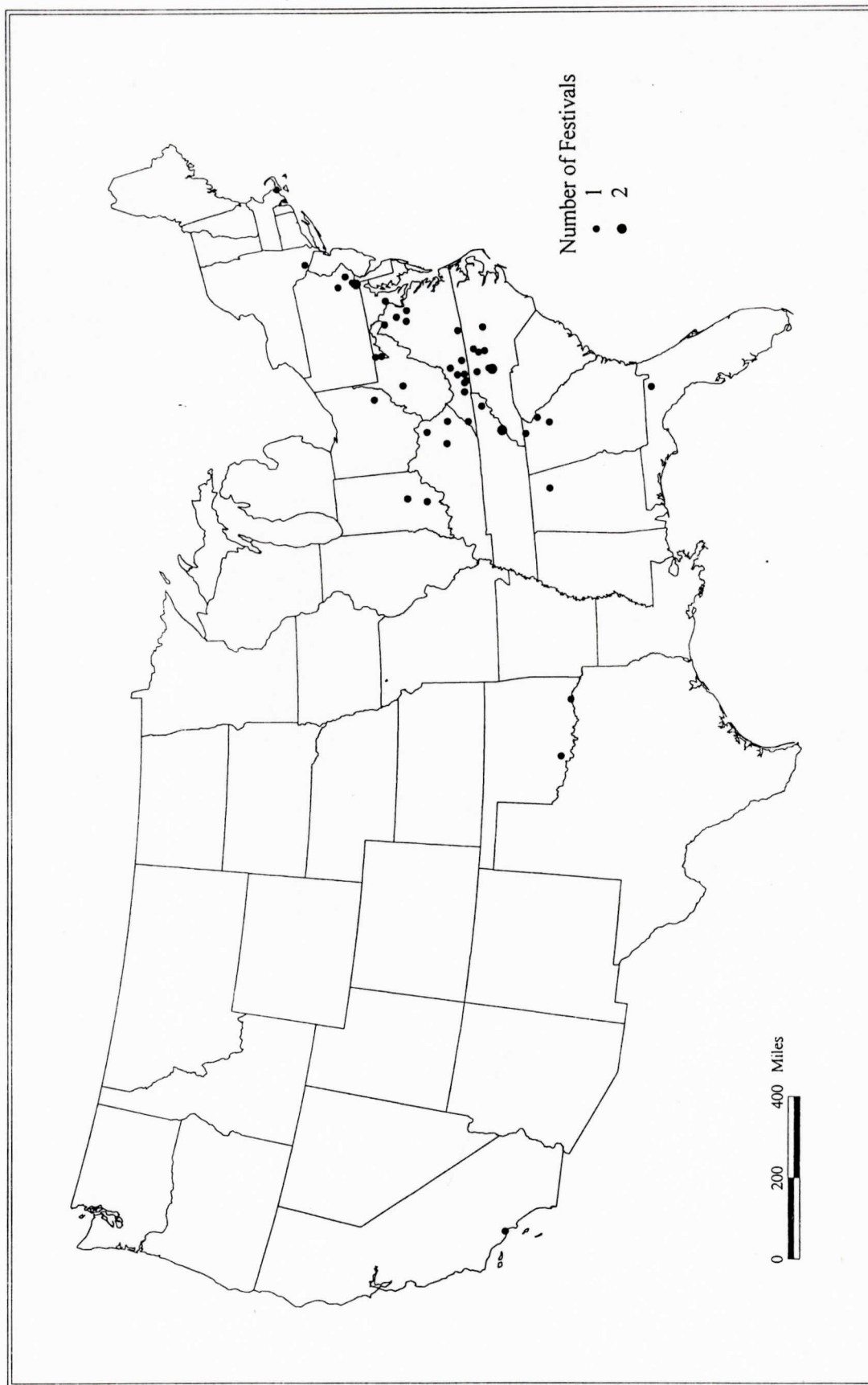


Figure 5: Distribution of Festivals, 1970.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1970.



large number of transplanted Southerners and a well-developed institutional support system. By 1970, Carlton Haney had moved his Labor Day festival to a new site near his home in Reidsville, North Carolina. The 3rd Annual Berryville festival was therefore moved to the 4th of July weekend. Bill Monroe was in the third year of his bluegrass festival at his farm in Bean Blossom, Indiana. He had seen the growing success of Haney's festivals and was interested in promoting a festival under his own name, using his newfound fame as "the father of bluegrass" to his advantage.

The appearance of festivals outside the hearth areas of western Virginia and Piedmont North Carolina are the first evidence of relocation diffusion processes at work. Many of the residents in the four-state area of Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas were the descendants of people who had migrated from the Appalachians. They brought their musical tastes with them, but had moved to areas that needed to develop their own institutional support systems. One of the first institutions of this sort in the Midwest was the Missouri Area Bluegrass Committee (MABC), formed in 1969 in St. Louis by three committed bluegrass fans and musicians who wanted "... to get other people interested in bluegrass -- to promote local bluegrass bands and pickers" (Cardwell 1983). After receiving non-profit status the same year from the Internal Revenue Service, the group began to hold charity benefits and fiddle contests around the area using money donated by some of the local bluegrass talent. In 1971 they convinced a local bakery to sponsor a 30-minute bluegrass radio show on St. Louis's 50,000 watt KXEN and even produced an album featuring several area bluegrass bands. The following year they sponsored a half-hour television show on public education station KETC-TV entitled "Six Strings Plus Five" and began publishing a newsletter to keep members informed of committee activity

and upcoming events (Cardwell 1983; Cole 1972). In a period of three years, the MABC had facilitated the creation of a bluegrass support structure, and bluegrass festival activity in Missouri began to pick up speed. While the BU festival schedule for 1970 lists no events for that year, by 1975 there were nineteen.

Area bluegrass committees in existence elsewhere had played a significant role in streamlining promotional efforts. Ralph Rinzler, the folklorist who had assisted Carlton Haney in his preparations for the first festival at Fincastle, also had founded the Friends of Old-Time Music in New York City in 1961 with two other people. The committee had subsequently worked to present a series of concerts in the Philadelphia / Boston / New York City region. Another group called the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee (TABC) was formed in 1968 to help bring local and national talent to audiences in Canada. The benefits of forming such a committee warranted the publication of article entitled "How to Form an Area Bluegrass Committee" by the chairman of the TABC in the July, 1969 issue of BU. It began with the simple question "Want to inject some life into the bluegrass scene in your town?" and went on to outline the fundamentals of launching a "bluegrass campaign" (Benson 1969: 6-10). Grass-roots efforts undertaken by these area committees were occurring at a time when an organization similar to the Country Music Association (CMA) in Nashville did not yet exist for bluegrass music. The CMA, founded in 1957, was created to represent the interests of promoters, producers, and retailers in a competitive music business environment that seemed to be favoring the newly popular rock and roll style. Even though bluegrass music fell into the same musical family as country music, the CMA was loathe to promote music that continued to be associated with "poor, rural whites of Appalachia" (Ross 1986: 11). The emergence of

the various bluegrass area committees, spearheaded by local opinion leaders, would play a crucial role in the diffusion of festivals by facilitating contact between promoters, musicians, and the media.

The first multi-day bluegrass festival west of the Mississippi was held in Hugo, Oklahoma in 1969. It's promoter, Bill Grant, had attended Bill Monroe's festival in Bean Blossom and thought he might be able to hold a similar event at home. His exposure to the activities at Bean Blossom and his subsequent decision to organize a festival in Oklahoma constitutes a vector of contagion diffusion. By holding his festival in an area well outside the hearth of festival activity, Grant's festival in Hugo appears to be a manifestation of relocation diffusion. With a sizeable number of fans in the region but no place to go to hear live music, Grant was filling a niche in the bluegrass consumer market. An estimated 1,600 people were in attendance at the two day event (Metheny 1989).

#### Festival Popularity and Specialization: 1975-1980

By 1975 the popularity of festivals had reached an all time high (Figure 6). According to Rosenberg (1985), articles on bluegrass festivals had appeared in several mainstream publications, including the Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic Monthly, and Playboy. Crucial television publicity had been afforded to bluegrass when Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs's "The Ballad of Jed Clampett" was used as the soundtrack to The Beverly Hillbillies, a very popular television series which ran from 1963 to 1971. The sitcom became one of the most popular in history and proved that the connection between the "hillbilly" stereotype and bluegrass music could be a profitable one. In this

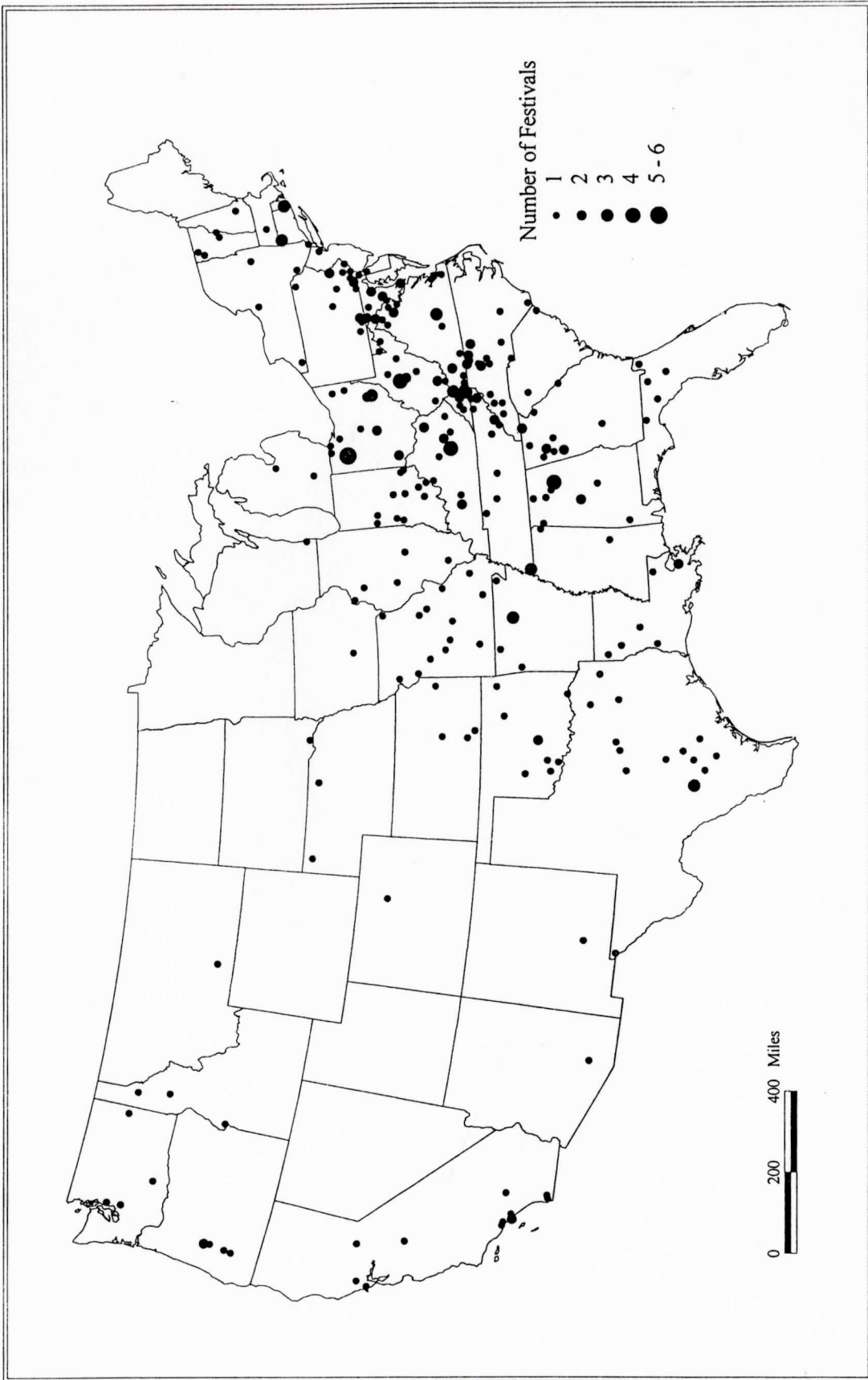


Figure 6: Distribution of Festivals, 1975.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1975.

same era bluegrass music could be heard in two Hollywood films -- Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Deliverance (1972) (Rosenberg 1985).

Greater publicity and the increasing number of annual festivals even caught the attention of the Nashville establishment. Its induction of Bill Monroe into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1970 was a symbolic recognition of bluegrass as a distinct form of country music and lent the music a certain degree of legitimacy (Ross 1986). Better organization at the grass-roots level in the form of area committees sustained local interest by providing printed information, hosting jam sessions, and appealing to radio stations for bluegrass programming on the air. Periodicals such as Bluegrass Unlimited and Muleskinner News, which had been around since shortly after the first festival and were now approaching their tenth year in operation, continued to be the primary sources of information to the fan community. Bill Monroe, while actively promoting his own festivals and touring regularly, still appeared on WSM's nationally broadcast Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night, just as he had done for over thirty years. The effect of these activities in shaping public perception of bluegrass music cannot be underestimated; they contributed to a favorable environment for the continued diffusion of the festival phenomenon.

With the number of festivals held each year rising steadily, variation among festivals became more apparent. Events advertised as bluegrass had little in common with the first festivals put on by Carlton Haney. In some instances, the parking lot picking sessions and professional seminars that had become trademark features at the earlier festivals were nowhere to be found. However, by making the association with a new and popular form of entertainment, festivals stood to draw larger crowds. Organizers began to

feature bands whose sound bore little resemblance to what knowledgeable fans would have called true bluegrass. This trend was alarming to many of the hard-core fans, but they were viewing the situation from a different perspective than the promoter, who saw things from a business perspective. By offering more variety in the musical entertainment, festival organizers were hoping to attract larger audiences. Indeed, the festival phenomenon had caught the attention of the masses, and no longer could the character of festivals remain stagnant. There were diverse constituencies to be catered to.

Part of the reason for the change in the profile of festival attendees is attributable to changes in the music itself. Like any other form of artistic expression, musical styles are subject to individual interpretation; over a period of time, styles can evolve into new derivations of their predecessors. Witness the rise of classic bluegrass from its antecedent hillbilly form, or the emergence of the smooth Nashville sound from its rough-edged country roots. A younger generation of pickers interested in the bluegrass style were taking elements of other styles, such as the blues and rock and roll, and bringing them into the fold of acoustic music. The New Grass Revival, a band formed in 1972 under the leadership of mandolin/fiddle player Sam Bush was just such a group that had a considerable following among the younger, more hippie crowd. With their long hair and habit of plugging their instruments with electric pickups, the New Grass Revival were perhaps the best example of the fusion of contemporary and traditional music styles. For those who appreciated the classic sound of Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, and others, the inclusion of bands such as the New Grass Revival at bluegrass festivals was seen as an affront to tradition. However, the financial success of any festival was dependent on

ticket sales, and younger audiences whose musical preferences favored innovation were now a significant portion of the overall number of people attending festivals.

A Virginia promoter named Jim Clark recognized at an early stage the value of younger audiences. During the early 1970s he had promoted festivals that featured a mixed bag of musical entertainment. At his "Peace-Love-Blues and Blue Grass Festival" at Lake Whippoorwill Park in Warrenton, Virginia, in 1973, the lineup included a variety of performers ranging from the Country Gentlemen to Jerry Garcia (of Grateful Dead fame) (Rosenberg 1985). Clearly the festival phenomenon had become attractive to a larger cross-section of American society, and promoters were keen to capitalize on this popularity.

The unprecedented diffusion of festivals between 1970 and 1975 (from 57 festivals in 1970 to 344 in 1975) was the result of several forces working in tandem. Publications such as BU and Muleskinner News had established themselves as reliable sources of information and had expanded their circulation. The proliferation of area committees led by proactive opinion leaders had filled a valuable need for local organization and promotion in the absence of a national advocacy institution such as the CMA. Innovators such as Carlton Haney had proven the viability of bluegrass festivals, and in the first ten years since Fincastle the phenomenon exploded to fill a largely untapped market in the area of leisure activity. At the same time, festivals were becoming a major source of income for working bands that otherwise may have had to quit the music business.

The increasing density of festivals is also apparent upon examination of the map of festival distribution in 1975 (Figure 6). Many towns were hosting more than one

festival in a season, as indicated by the larger circles on the map. This pattern not only suggests that in some parts of the country there existed a large enough market for several festivals, but also that these festivals were being held at the same site. For example, in Ottawa, Ohio, where six festivals were held in the 1975 season, the Hillbrook Recreation Area remained the chosen site. Of the four festivals held in Stumptown, West Virginia, during the same season, three of them took place at "Aunt Minnie's Farm." The large circle representing Steele, Alabama's four festivals that year does not reveal the fact that all four were held at "Horse Pens 40." A similar pattern of festival site consolidation underlies most of the other larger circles that appear on the map.

There are several possible explanations for holding multiple festivals at a single site within a single year. First, finding a site with adequate camping facilities, parking space, sanitation, access to major roads, and a host of other necessary factors was a difficult job and therefore did not readily lend itself to changes from year to year. Second, there were associated advantages in terms of consistency and predictability with finding a site and sticking with it, for patrons may be less apt to follow a festival to a new location. Third, festivals often benefited local economies by attracting tourist dollars, thus creating fiscal momentum that favors a particular location. Finally, if a promoter did not own a site and had to lease it instead, he or she may have secured a more favorable lease agreement by booking the site for several festivals per year.

At the same time festivals were appearing in ever-increasing numbers on the landscape, a stratification of festivals was also taking place. The existence of a diverse audience revealed niche markets that, in the increasingly competitive environment of festival promotion, meant the difference between making and losing money. While



promoters such as Jim Clark were attempting to attract younger audiences to see the New Grass Revival, the Earl Scruggs Revue, and other progressive bands, other promoters saw the alienation of more traditional followers and focused their efforts on booking bands with a sound more akin to that of classic bluegrass. These promoters were also more likely to advertise their events as “family style,” responding to criticism from opinion leaders within the tradition and reputation-minded bluegrass subculture.

The exploitation of niche markets did not necessarily guarantee success when putting on a festival. With the continued proliferation of events through the 1970s it became increasingly difficult to book the best-known bands. Many promoters featured perhaps one or two nationally known acts, but relied on local talent to fill up their rosters. There were simply too many festivals chasing too few big name bluegrass bands. This competition for well-known bands, as well as the aforementioned existence of a pluralistic audience, played a significant role in the stratification of festivals evident during this time.

It would appear that what motivated most promoters to organize a festival, at least initially, was a genuine appreciation for the music. Several articles appearing in BU featuring interviews with various promoters suggested this, and the author’s interview with a noted promoter in western North Carolina seems to indicate the same (Harkey 1998). However, there is no denying that festivals can be risky business ventures, and the business of arranging festivals had become increasingly complex by 1980. Audience expectations of festivals had risen over the years as fans began to compare and choose future festival destinations based on past experiences. The cost of hiring performers increased from year to year. These forces put pressure on promoters to come up with

imaginative ways to help ensure festival solvency. Some began to hire more local talent that was cheaper.

### Creating Preconditions for Festival Acceptance Outside the Hearth

By 1980, the level of festival activity seemed to have reached a level close to saturation in the East, with an obvious dearth of festival activity in the Great Plains states and in the Southwest (Figure 7). Small clusters of festivals are apparent on the West Coast, mostly around the urban areas of Los Angeles, San Diego, and Sacramento, California. Though far removed from the principal hearth areas back East, sunny California nonetheless developed early on a significant local bluegrass scene that set the stage for the appearance of festivals in the early 1970s. Like states in the Rust Belt North and on the eastern seaboard, it had been a destination state for migrants with Appalachian roots, except that many of these people were moving further west to escape the Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s (Carney 1974). Their affinity for traditional music encouraged the development of a bluegrass community in the state.

The first bluegrass music to be recorded on vinyl in California was orchestrated by a folk and jazz music enthusiast named Jim Dickson. He appreciated the complexity and musicianship evident in the music, likening it to that of jazz. In 1962 he independently produced an album by the Greenbriar Boys, a group from New York City whom Dickson had seen at a live performance at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles. The following year he was working for the Elektra label when he heard another bluegrass band that had recently relocated to California from Missouri, the Dillards. After seeing them perform at the Ash Grove, Dickson's boss gave them a record contract on the

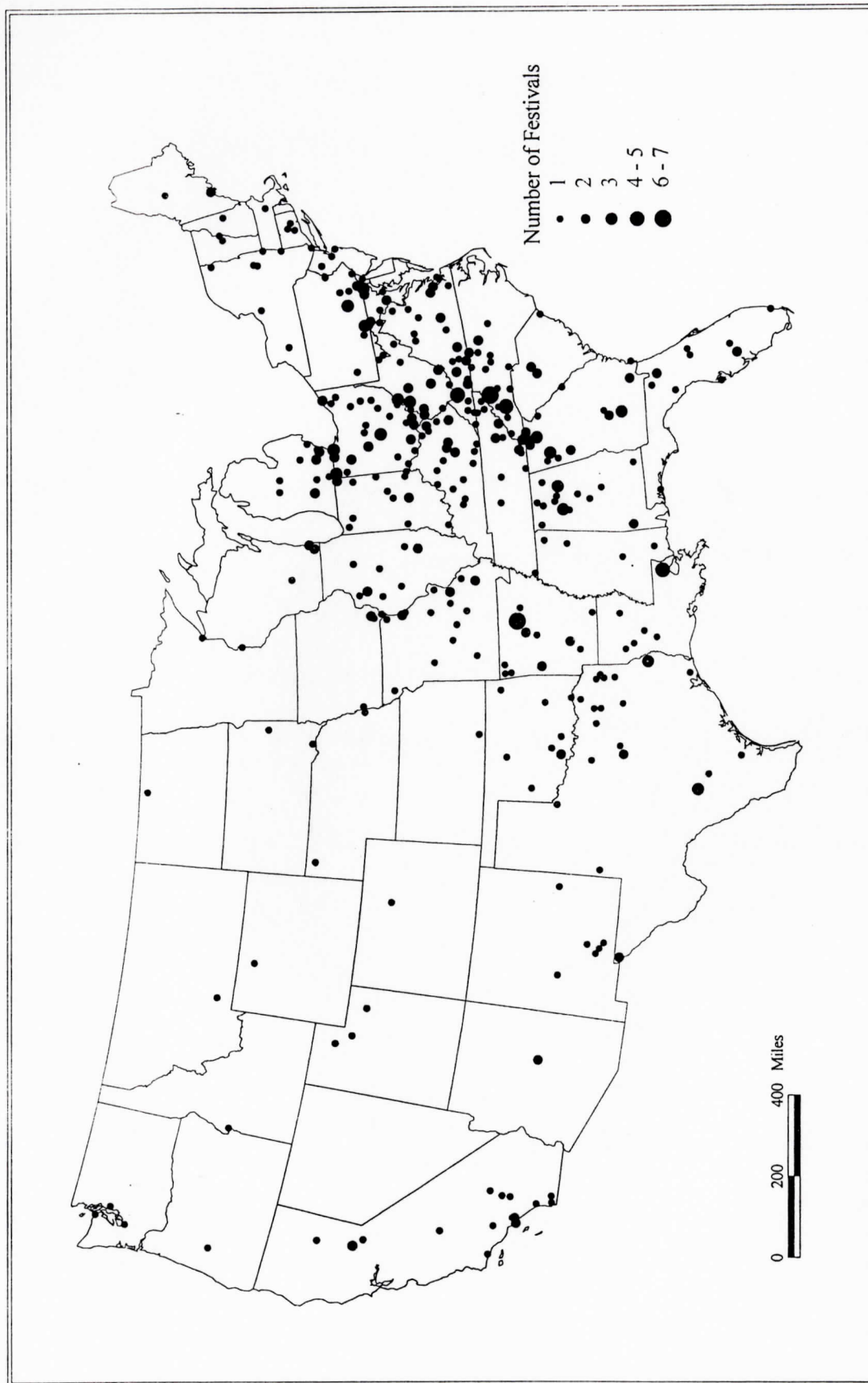


Figure 7: Distribution of Festivals, 1980.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1980.

advice of Ralph Rinzler (also mandolin player for the Greenbriar Boys in the early 1960s). The success of the album caught the attention of the producers of the Andy Griffith Show and soon the Dillardards were making regular appearances as Mayberry's "Darling Boys" on national television (Rosenberg 1985).

While the Dillardards were enjoying commercial success on vinyl as well as on television, Dickson continued to record other bluegrass talent. He produced an instrumental album called "New Dimensions in Banjo and Bluegrass" using the talents of New York bluegrass musicians Eric Weissberg and Marshall Brickman. Joining them were two L.A. area musicians, Gordon Terry (former Blue Grass Boys fiddler) and guitarist Clarence White. White and his brothers Roland and Eric had moved to California from Maine in the 1950s and found their own early commercial exposure playing on one of Los Angeles' country music television shows, Three Little Country Boys. Later they would record a classic bluegrass album entitled "Appalachian Swing" with producer Jim Dickson (Rosenberg 1985).

In February of 1973 the first nationally televised bluegrass show was broadcast from the studios of public television station KCET in Hollywood. Originally intended as a showcase for Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, with a group of L.A. area musicians as the opening act, the schedule had to be altered after Monroe's bus broke down and he was unable to appear. The show proceeded nonetheless, featuring Clarence White (guitar), Peter Rowan (guitar), David Grisman (mandolin), Richard Greene (fiddle), and Bill Keith (banjo). This impromptu band that called itself Muleskinner consisted of three former Blue Grass Boys who had played together in various configurations over the years (Koon 1994).

As a center of the television, recording, and film industries, southern California was uniquely positioned to provide widespread exposure to aspiring bluegrass and country bands during the 1950s and 1960s. With a significant number of residents who had roots back East, the incorporation of bluegrass into the fabric of the southern California music environment was made easier. Timing also played a significant role, for the folk revival had generated an increased acceptance of the music among urban folk music enthusiasts. The existence of a sizable market for various forms of country and folk music, in turn, fueled the efforts of people in the record and film industries eager to include elements of these musical styles in their productions. The movies Deliverance and Bonnie and Clyde as well as the popular sitcom The Beverly Hillbillies are manifestations of Hollywood's interest in bluegrass. In the record industry, important opinion leaders such as producer Jim Dickson proved that bluegrass music was a valid and profitable component of the larger country music scene.

Interestingly, radio seems to have played a relatively small role in the diffusion of bluegrass music in California during the 1950s and 1960s. One explanation for this may be that by the time the music had become an established part of the country music scene in California the popular new television medium had become the medium of choice for obtaining maximum exposure. Radio had been eclipsed by television during the time it took for bluegrass to diffuse to the West Coast. Nonetheless, the combined effect of record production and television appearances exposed an unprecedented number of people to the music. When the bluegrass festival phenomenon leapfrogged to California through the process of hierarchical diffusion, there existed a favorable climate for its acceptance.

Of the bluegrass festivals in California, the oldest appears to be the festival organized by Dick Tyner in Norco, about sixty miles east of Los Angeles. Tyner had an interest in promoting a bluegrass festival in his home state and traveled to Bill Monroe's festival in Bean Blossom, Indiana, to see if Monroe would be interested in performing in Norco. The following year, in 1973, the first Golden West Bluegrass Festival took place. The pattern of festival consolidation mentioned earlier, with several festivals being held in the same town at the same venue continued to be seen.

A crescent of festival activity runs from northern Alabama, along the length of the Appalachians, up to western Virginia, and then across the Ohio Valley into southern Michigan. The emergence of this festival crescent is best explained in its historical context as a region that early on developed an environment that was receptive to hillbilly (later bluegrass) music. By the time the festival movement hit its stride at the start of the 1970s, people living in or around this region had regular exposure to the music through radio and live performances. Festivals naturally flourished in a climate that had a well-developed bluegrass infrastructure.

During the Depression and continuing up through the years of World War II, many Appalachian families migrated north to search for work in the steel and paper mills located in cities such as Cincinnati, Columbus, and Detroit (Schwartz 1968). Like the Southern migrants who had settled along the eastern seaboard from Washington to southern Pennsylvania, they brought with them their taste for old-time and hillbilly music. For an enterprising businessperson willing to capitalize on these musical preferences, there was a market to be accessed through the popular medium of radio.

One of the first stations to broadcast hillbilly music in southwestern Ohio was WPFB in Middletown. Its owner, Paul Braden, was aware that many in the community had moved to the area from Tennessee and Kentucky and suspected that a programming emphasis on traditional music would appeal to them. When the station went on the air in September of 1947, Braden hired a charismatic fiddle player named Smoky Ward to host the show. In a short period of time the program had garnered a substantial listening audience attracted not only to the music, but also the personality of Smoky. The station quickly became a magnet for local and regional musicians wanting to perform on the air. Advertisers came too, attracted to the large listening audience and the chance to have their products hawked on the show (Fisher and Fisher 1985).

From the late 1940s through the mid 1950s, Paul Braden's WPFB served up a healthy dose of old-time and bluegrass music, hosting many of the performers who would later become famous: the Osborne Brothers, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, Jimmy Martin (the King of Bluegrass), J.D. Crowe, and Red Allen, to name a few. A jamboree held on the station grounds every Saturday night during this time also was very popular and further enhanced the station's reputation as one that was friendly to bluegrass music and musicians. One entertainer put it this way:

‘The people at the station were honest to work with. They treated the entertainers fairly. The engineers worked with the talent. That reputation spread by word of mouth and attracted other entertainers. It was a good way to make a living. We didn't make a lot of money, but we had fun’ (Fisher and Fisher 1985: 29).

After an extended period in which the station switched its programming focus to more mainstream commercial music, like so many other stations across the country, WPFB was fortunate to hire another exceptional announcer with a keen interest in

bluegrass. Kentuckian Paul "Moon" Mullins was a fiddle and mandolin player who had worked with the Stanley Brothers in the late 1950s. When he went on the air in 1964 spinning bluegrass from his own personal collection, most of the advertisers quit. However, Mullins proved to be a persistent believer in the potential for a successful bluegrass/country format and was an effective persuader. He called businesses that were owned by people from his home state of Kentucky and others whom he thought might be interested in advertising on his show. Within a couple of months and with the support of the station owner, Paul Braden, Mullins had reassembled a group of benefactors and made his show pay its way. For seventeen years, until 1981, his unique personality and homegrown spin on his advertisers' products made him a regional favorite (Fisher and Fisher 1985: 30-32; Godbey 1991).

Of course, Middletown, Ohio, was not the only place in the Midwest where bluegrass was being played on the air. WLW in Cincinnati, for example, hosted the popular Boone County Jamboree beginning in the 1930s and was one of the "Big Three" hillbilly radio shows along with WSM's Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and WLS Chicago's National Barn Dance (Rosenberg 1985: 53). Another Cincinnati station, WCKY, had consistently programmed bluegrass music during the 1940s and 1950s. Across the Ohio River in Wheeling, West Virginia, the "World's Original Jamboree" had been coming over the AM airwaves on WWVA's 50,000 watt signal since the 1930's. However, WPFB offered a telling example of how the actions and personalities of individuals like Paul Braden, Smoky Ward, and "Moon" Mullins could greatly shape public perception of musical artforms and thereby foster an environment conducive to the acceptance of innovations such as bluegrass festivals. The profusion of festivals in Ohio (38 in 1980,



more than any other state) was attributable to the state's history as a destination for Southern migrants and its unusually well-developed bluegrass support network.

Indeed, there appears to be a strong relationship between festival activity and areas that have a long history of programming bluegrass on the radio. Although this relationship would be hard to prove empirically, anecdotal evidence abounds in trade publications, scholarly journals, interviews, and record liner notes. Rosenberg (1985) suggested one way of visualizing the relationship between festivals and radio: draw a circle with a radius of 400 miles around the four radio stations regularly programming bluegrass music in the 1940's and 1950's - WCKY Cincinnati, WSM Nashville, WWVA Wheeling, and WCYB Bristol - and compare festival distributions with the area encompassed by the circles. The author has constructed a map illustrating approximate radio signal extent using information gathered through personal conversations with station representatives and information found on the Internet (Figure 8).

### The Decline of the Hearth

In contrast to the pattern of expansion evident on the map series through 1980, the areal extent of festival distribution actually contracted and the number of festivals held in the contiguous United States decreased from 469 in 1980 to 357 in 1985 (Figure 9). Perhaps the most noticeable change was the reduction of festival activity in the festival crescent mentioned earlier. With the exception of Ohio, the number of festivals held in West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama declined considerably. One possible explanation could lie in the financial and emotional strain that often accompanies organizing a festival. The vast majority of festivals require enormous

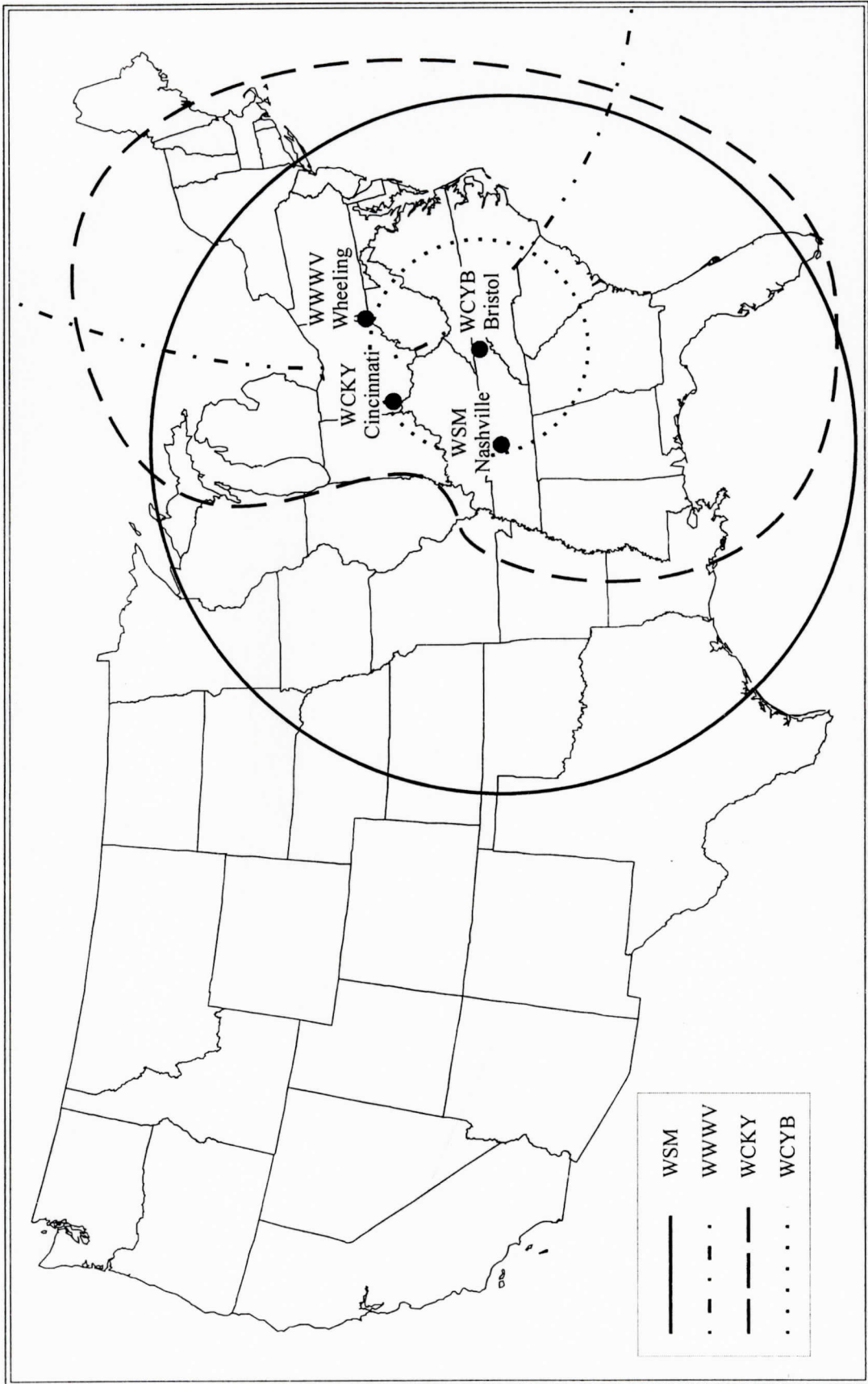


Figure 8: Estimated Signal Range of Selected Bluegrass Radio Stations.  
 Sources: [http://www.olddradio.com/archives/stations\\_w/WWVA.Wheeling.WV;](http://www.olddradio.com/archives/stations_w/WWVA.Wheeling.WV;) Willis 1987; Herman 1999.

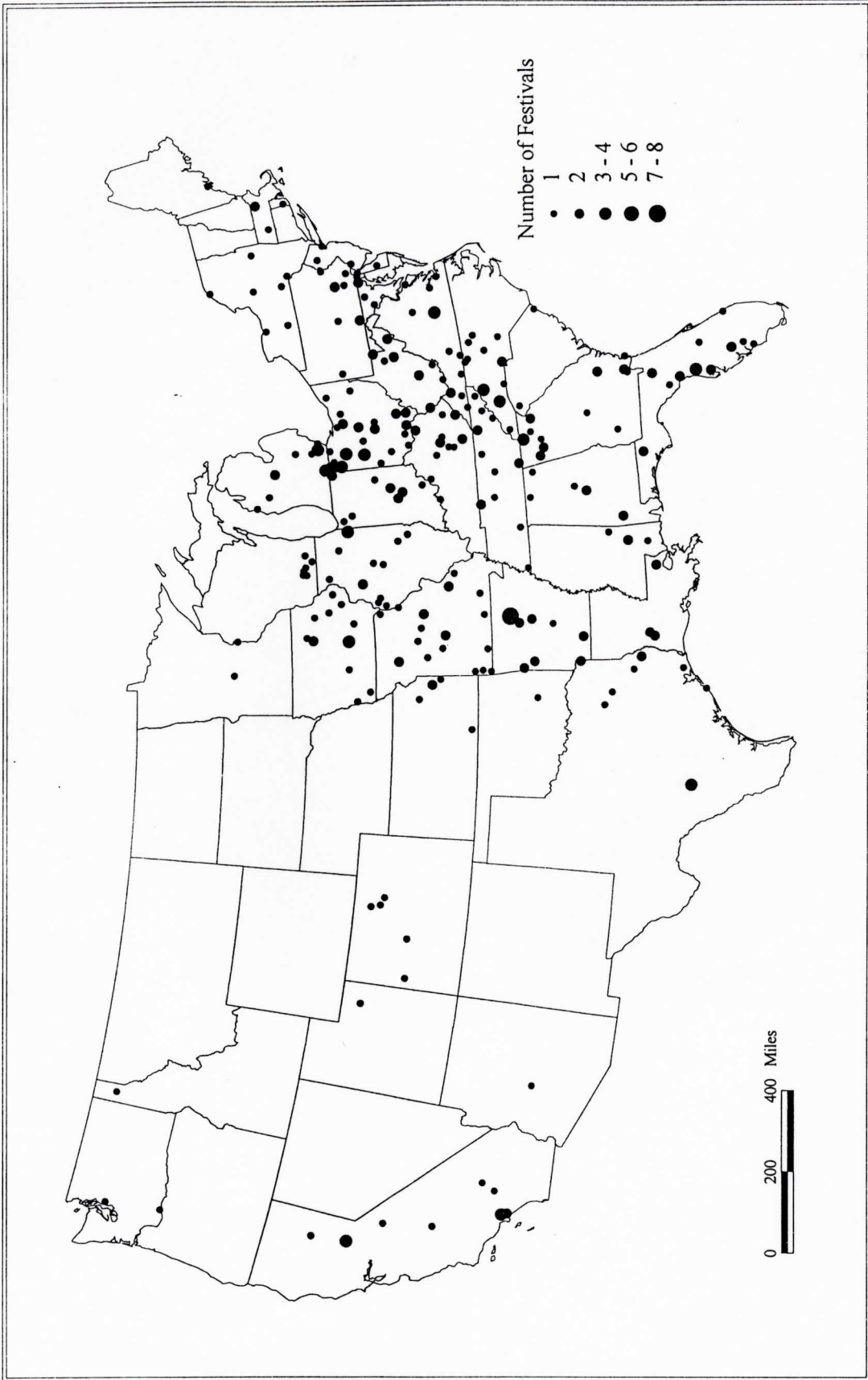


Figure 9: Distribution of Festivals, 1985.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1985.

amounts of volunteer labor from dedicated and detail-oriented people. Profits are seldom substantial and are sometimes non-existent. Uncontrollable events, such as the weather, can reduce attendance levels. A 1981 article that appeared in BU profiled a promoter named Rod Kennedy, who began organizing festivals in 1975 in Kerrville, Texas. Of the first nine events he staged outdoors between 1975 and 1977, six were drenched by several inches of rain, and Kennedy found himself buried under \$200,000 of debt. Still, he continued to present festivals at his Quiet Valley Ranch outside of town (McCorkle 1981).

The sheer concentration of festivals and musicians in the mountainous areas of North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee may have contributed to the reduction in the number of events being held there. With so many festivals being held in a relatively small geographic area, there simply may have been too few consumers to support the continuation of many of those events. In fact, in North Carolina and Virginia, which saw significant reductions in the number of festivals between 1980 and 1985, numerous festivals were scheduled to occur on the same weekend. Promoters in competition with one another for festival attendees probably forced several promoters with limited resources to abandon their efforts. Alternatively, interest in festivals as a form of entertainment had begun to wane in a region that had been the cradle of the festival phenomenon.

In other parts of the country that held fewer festivals and had fewer professional bands, festival activity appears to have either increased or remained at a relatively constant level. The sustained and sometimes increasing number of events taking place in states such as Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, and Florida is interesting in that the focus of

festival activity appears to have shifted from the hearth region to areas on the periphery. This pattern is partly attributable to the efforts of bluegrass area committees, which flourished during this period and played a key role in booking talent, organizing local activities, and distributing information. Rosenberg (1985) points out that area committees existed in at least twenty-seven states between the late 1970s and early 1980s, and many states had several committees working to promote bluegrass in their area. An examination of the 1985 BU festival schedule seems to support this claim. For example, of the twenty-four festivals scheduled to occur in Missouri in 1985, ten of them list the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music Association (SPBGMA) as the contact organization. In Iowa, where fourteen festivals were scheduled for the same year, ten were listed as SPBGMA events.

Festival distribution in 1985 is more diffuse than that of 1980, and many festivals that occurred in the Great Plains and Southwest in 1980 have disappeared by 1985. An exception to this pattern can be found in Colorado, which hosted one festival in 1980, but had five by 1985. Regular bluegrass radio airplay in the Denver area and the efforts of the Colorado Bluegrass Music Society (CBMS) have contributed to its acceptance in the state. The National Public Radio Station KCFR in Denver began airing a three-hour bluegrass program in 1974 entitled "Bluegrass Breakdown." Beginning in 1979, the show was hosted by a law student and disc jockey named Dave Higgs, who was a transplanted Southerner from Nashville. He brought a thorough knowledge of bluegrass history and a unique style of presentation to the show that was appealing to his listening audience. Also active in the CBMS and as an emcee at state festivals, Higgs was an important opinion leader that helped to create a favorable environment for festival diffusion (Gandy 1986).

### An Advocate for the Music: the IBMA

After a period in the mid 1980s where the number of bluegrass festivals held in the contiguous U.S. had reached a low point, by 1990 they had rebounded to a level close to that in the 1970s. BU lists 426 festivals in the contiguous U.S. for the 1990 season, scheduled to occur in all but five states. The most noticeable change between 1985 and 1990 is the reappearance of festivals in the Great Plains and the Southwest.

This apparent resurgence of interest in festivals in the five-year period leading up to the start of the 1990s is partially attributable to the efforts of the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). Chartered in 1985 as a bluegrass trade organization, it filled an important void in the bluegrass community for a nationally recognized advocate for the furtherance of the music. In much the same way as the Country Music Association (CMA) serves as an umbrella organization for country music, the IBMA was formed to promote bluegrass, conduct research on audiences, and facilitate contact between musicians, promoters, disc jockeys, and record company executives (Harkey 1998).

The inception of the IBMA came at a time when the number of festivals held annually was experiencing a downturn. From a high of 469 festivals listed in BU for the contiguous U.S. in 1980, by 1985 the number had dropped to 357. This reduction was indicative of changes taking place in the bluegrass community at large. Since the middle 1960s when the first festival was held, interest in the music had grown steadily, fueled by the popularity of festivals themselves and the efforts of important opinion leaders. However, there were other forces at play that proved to be significant barriers to festival diffusion. The 1980s saw the rise of heavy metal music as a popular form of music

among young listeners, and concerts featuring such performers became the preferred venue for musical entertainment. The large numbers of young people who had frequented festivals in the 1960s and 1970s were not replaced by a new generation of young folk attending festivals in the mid 1980s.

Radio station programming changes also negatively affected the amount of bluegrass being played on the air during the 1980s. Pre-recorded playlists became more and more prevalent as major networks bought up local radio stations. Disc jockeys lost much of the control they previously had over what kinds of music went on the air, and the local flavor of community radio stations was eclipsed by standardized formats that frequently misrepresented local musical tastes.

One of the more noticeable centers of festival activity in Figure 10 is in Arkansas. The largest circle represents Mountain View, which held seventeen weekend festivals between the end of March and the beginning of December, 1990, at the Ozark Folk Center. Since at least 1975 (see Figure 6) the Center had been hosting various forms of traditional entertainment that frequently emphasized specific aspects of music on different weekends. One weekend may have been devoted to hammer dulcimer workshops, while the following weekend might have been a fiddle contest. This separation of festival activities is testament to the changing nature of festivals and raises the question of what really constitutes a festival. While the first festival put on by Carlton Haney at Fincastle in 1965 contained all of the festival elements outlined by Abrahams (Rosenberg 1985) it has become increasingly clear that what was considered a festival at that time does not necessarily constitute one at a later time. Like bluegrass music itself, festivals have evolved over space and time to adapt to changing audience preferences and

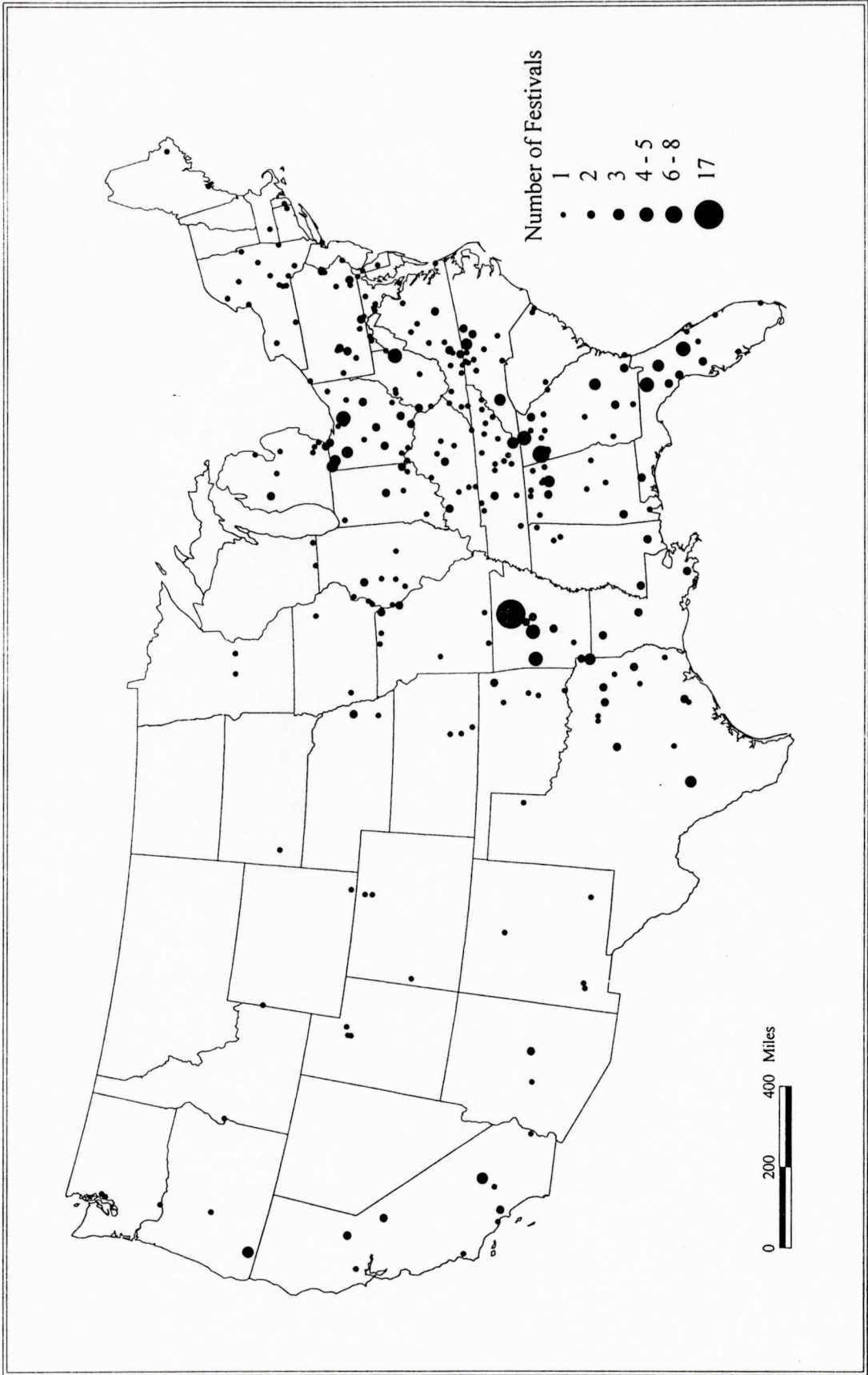


Figure 10: Distribution of Festivals, 1990.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1990.



financial constraints. If the Fincastle festivals were to be taken as the only true bluegrass festivals, then the diffusion patterns seen on the map series would surely look much different. Indeed, one could make a good argument that festival diffusion is largely the result of a more all-encompassing definition of the word “festival.”

A comparison of Figure 9 and Figure 10 reveals a further reduction of the festival crescent that first emerged so vividly in Figure 7. By 1990 the largest clusters of festival activity were located in northern Georgia, northern Florida, northern Ohio, and central Arkansas. The Central Valley of California also had a flurry of activity, as did the Willamette Valley in southern Oregon.

A closer comparison of Figures 9 (1985) and 10 reveals a continuing pattern of festival turnover. While overall festival numbers in the East have not changed dramatically in the five years between 1985 and 1990, the festival distribution shifted. Many towns that held festivals in 1985 did not host a festival in 1990, resulting in a distribution comprised of festivals that had been around for a while and newer festivals that were still in the process of achieving self-sufficiency.

### National and International Expansion

BU listed an incredible 498 festivals planned in the contiguous U.S. for the 1995 season (Figure 11). Also included in the schedule were numerous events in Europe, Australia, Japan, and Russia. The bluegrass festival phenomenon had truly diffused well beyond its origins in the foothills of western Virginia.

Figure 11 shows a marked increase in the intensity of festival activity in the eastern U.S. The dramatic increase in the number of festivals taking place in the upper

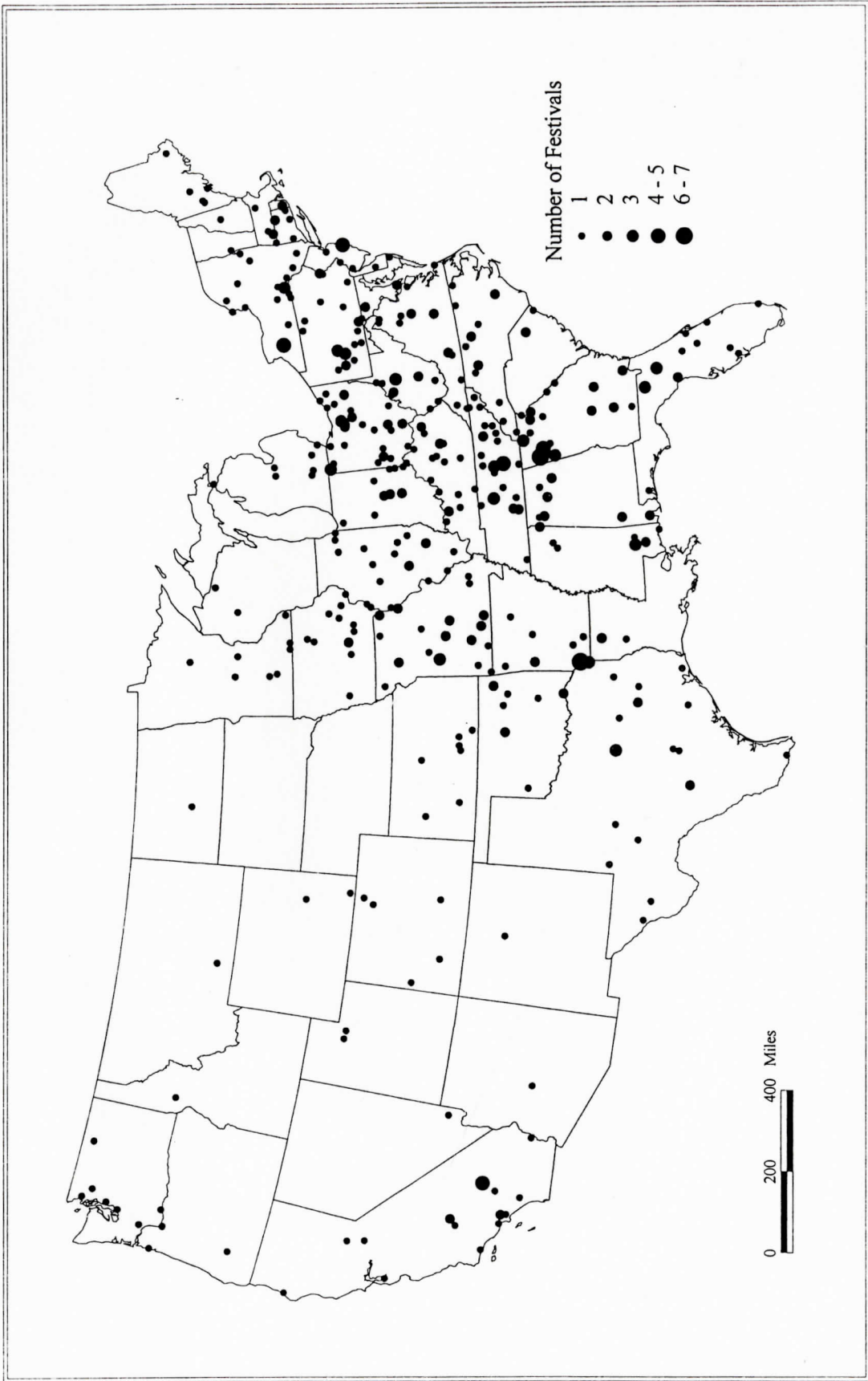


Figure 11: Distribution of Festivals, 1995.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1995.

Northeast is especially visible. New York, for example, which hosted fifteen festivals in 1990, increased its share to twenty-three in 1995. Also noteworthy is the reappearance of festivals in Missouri and Iowa (compare Figure 10 with Figure 11).

Iowa Public Television (IPTV), for example, has played a significant role in promoting bluegrass and old-time music in the state. In 1989 the network began broadcasting a program called "Old-Time Country Music" with the help of festival promoter and musician Bob Everhart. Everhart had approached IPTV about doing remote broadcasts of a festival he had been organizing in Avoca, IA. Due to limited financial resources, IPTV producers decided not to hold on-site coverage. Instead, Everhart proposed that the festival's contest winners come to IPTV studios for special tapings. The success of the first four sessions led to the birth of the "Old Time Country Music Show." A statewide network of translators carries the signal to an estimated 98% of households, affording local and regional musicians unprecedented exposure (McElroy 1994).

Festivals appear to exhibit an element of hierarchical diffusion based on the results of a simple analysis of population data. For each of the census years 1970, 1980, and 1990, a ten percent random sample was taken of towns that had hosted at least one event in that year. The population figures for the towns in each sample were then gathered and summed. Mean population figures for each sample were derived by dividing the sum of the individual population figures by the sample size. Figure 12 illustrates the changes in the average population of festival towns for the selected census years.

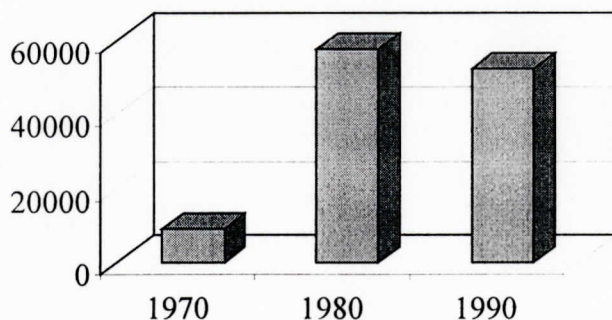


Figure 12: Average Population of Festival Towns for Selected Census Years.  
Source: United States Census Bureau.

Although a generalized measure of changes in festival town population, the graph nonetheless shows a marked increase in average festival town size from 1970 to 1980, then a slight decrease from 1980 to 1990. From an average town size of 9,114 in 1970, by 1980 this figure had jumped to 58,065, an increase of 637%! By 1990 it had retreated less than 1% to 52,290. Based on this information, it appears that festivals have on the whole been diffusing "up" the urban hierarchy from smaller to larger urban areas.

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The study of music from a geographic perspective has enjoyed ever-increasing acceptance over the course of its relatively short history. An examination of the spatial aspects of musical styles, musical regions, and an almost limitless number of other topics related to music can greatly enhance our understanding of cultural phenomena. This study has investigated the diffusion patterns of bluegrass music festivals over a thirty-year period. By drawing on previous studies, especially those of Rosenberg, Carney, and Hale, and using them as a framework around which to organize this study, the author has explained festival distributions and identified significant modes of diffusion that contributed to those distributions.

Maps are powerful visual tools that geographers employ to illustrate spatial data. The map series presented here clearly highlights the virtual explosion of festivals during the first ten years after the event held at Fincastle, Virginia, in 1965. Festivals locations are concentrated in the South, which had a long history of nurturing bluegrass music, but also are found in areas outside of the South that were migratory destinations for Southerners. The appearance of festivals in the Northeast, the Ohio River Valley, and

west of the Mississippi River support the notion that these migrants carried their musical tastes with them as they moved from place to place - an important precondition for the acceptance of festivals. Reinforcing this fundamental precondition were radio station managers and disc jockeys sympathetic to the bluegrass sound, affording musicians critical exposure through live performances and the playing of their records on the air.

The intensification of festival activity in the 1980s produced a festival crescent running roughly from northern Georgia to southern Michigan that subsequently became less defined in the 1990s. A saturated market combined with changing musical tastes and possible poor management appears to have forced many festival organizers to abandon their efforts. At the same time as festival activity was decreasing in the region that Carney (1996) has described as the cultural hearth of bluegrass, the number of events being held in states bordering the Mississippi River remained relatively constant or even increased. The relative dearth of professional performers in peripheral areas, especially West of the Mississippi River, encouraged the formation of bluegrass area committees that were able to sustain interest in the music and organize events.

The overall number of bluegrass festivals being held annually in the United States has remained relatively constant in the 1990s. Clearly the greatest manifestation of expansion diffusion occurred during the formative years between 1965 and 1975. Despite the unprecedented popular appeal that festivals hold today, they continue to be a primarily Eastern phenomenon.

## Conclusions

Festival diffusion is understood as a mosaic of factors that reinforce themselves over time and across space. A long history of bluegrass radio programming coupled with the existence of a substantial network of regional musicians and a sympathetic audience set the preconditions necessary for the appearance of the first multi-day bluegrass festival in southwestern Virginia. The organizer of that event, Carlton Haney, had attended the single-day bluegrass show at Luray, Virginia, in 1961, and the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, incorporating information and ideas gleaned from those experiences into his own unique concept of a festival. His event at Fincastle in 1965 was an innovation inspired in part by his direct contact with Bill Monroe and folk-enthusiast Ralph Rinzler.

In addition to his innovation of the multi-day bluegrass festival, Haney proved to be an adept opinion leader. His Muleskinner News newsletter that began to circulate in 1969 was one of a handful of similar publications that had come into existence in the second half of the 1960s. The Bluegrass Bulletin and Bluegrass Unlimited, by the same token, were headed by ardent bluegrass music opinion leaders who were able to influence perception of the music through the printed word. By featuring advertisements for upcoming events (especially festivals), editorial comment on issues of concern in the bluegrass community, and articles highlighting the careers of key bluegrass performers, these magazines stimulated public interest in the music and served as a vehicle by which fans of bluegrass music knew of new record releases contributed to the popularity of festivals.

The emergence of bluegrass trade publications coincided with the activities of Dave Freeman, founder of County Records and its mail-order counterpart, County Sales.

As an astute businessman, Freeman was able to fill a public need for a reliable source of recordings that most record stores did not carry. Additionally, his County Sales Newsletter offered knowledgeable criticism of the recordings he had in stock.

It is difficult to directly ascertain the effects that opinion leaders such as Carlton Haney, Ralph Rinzler, Dave Freeman, and Pete Kuykendall (of Bluegrass Unlimited) had on bluegrass festival diffusion, but their combined efforts represented an institutionalization of various aspects of the bluegrass community. Access to information and recordings became much easier, thereby elevating the public's awareness of the music and events associated with it.

The first five years of festival diffusion were largely confined to the Ridge and Valley region of the upland South. Events were relatively small and attended mostly by people who had followed the music closely over the years. Many of the promoters who staged festivals during this period had attended one of Haney's first festivals, drawing upon their experiences there to incorporate into their own festivals. This constituted a mode of contagion diffusion, for their presence at these early festivals and possible direct contact with Haney influenced their decision-making process.

In addition to elements of contagious diffusion evident between 1965 and 1970, the expansion of festivals during this time also exhibits elements of relocation diffusion. First, the pattern closely follows the migratory routes of Southerners who had moved to areas in the Ohio River valley, the Northeast, and across the Mississippi River. Second, several of these migrants and their descendants who decided to promote a festival had attended one or several events in other parts of the country, then brought the innovation "back home." We therefore see that the overall process of festival diffusion can involve



more than one mode of diffusion (i.e. contagious diffusion followed by relocation diffusion).

Festivals during the 1970s had become popular recreational destinations for an increasingly diverse audience. Whereas the first events were attended predominantly by folks who had followed the music closely over the years, by 1975 large numbers of people from outside the bluegrass subculture had become familiar with the music and were keen to attend one of the numerous festivals held each year. This change in the cultural composition of attendees, many of whom had musical preferences extending beyond the realm of traditional bluegrass, fueled changes in the kinds of bands that festival promoters booked for their events. There were an increasing number of niche audiences to be catered to. Some promoters focused on attracting a younger, more progressive audience, adjusting their lineup accordingly; others targeted an audience with musical tastes closer to traditional bluegrass. Still others opted for a diverse lineup, hoping to offer something for everyone. The resulting stratification of festivals came about not only because of the existence of a more pluralistic audience but also because of a natural evolution of bluegrass music beyond the sound pioneered by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. There were simply other musical avenues being explored by the performers themselves.

The proliferation of festivals in the 1980s continued to exhibit a strong element of contagious diffusion, especially in the festival crescent where proximity to other festival sites suggests a greater likelihood of direct contact between promoters. Personal interviews with noted promoters Carlton Haney and Milton Harkey seem to support this notion as they spoke of fielding telephone calls from other promoters requesting advice.

However, it also appears that while direct interaction between festival organizers in the East constitutes contagious diffusion, the vector of information exchange has shifted. Publications such as Bluegrass Unlimited and the emergence of the IBMA in 1985 created a secondary source of information accessible to potential promoters. While still a mode of contagious diffusion, festival expansion became increasingly dependent on secondary entities. Hale (1983) has referred to this kind of diffusion as passive diffusion, but he used the term to describe the means by which public awareness of bluegrass music is enhanced, citing personal appearances and the role of television in achieving those goals. In the context of this study, passive contagious diffusion is illustrated by secondary sources of information such as BU and the IBMA. The extent to which these institutions actively promoted festival diffusion is less clear and warrants further investigation. However, the coincidence of a resurgence of festival activity in the 1990s and the activities of the IBMA in particular suggests a strong link. As an advocate for the furtherance of bluegrass music and a repository of information useful to people involved in all aspects of the music, the IBMA certainly is in a position to "help to be successful," according to Dan Hays, the organization's executive director. He cites several examples of IBMA activities that can assist festival organizers:

- consultation, educational seminars, and literature to familiarize promoters with the complexities of such an undertaking.
- an optional event liability insurance plan.
- public relations campaigns to raise awareness.
- advice on building professionalism (Hays 1999)

Additionally, the IBMA has organized a national network of regional representatives to facilitate easier access to organizational resources, and publishes a newsletter to keep members informed of upcoming events and issues of concern to the bluegrass community at large (Hays 1999).

Though it was not possible to compare festival data with other variables over the entire thirty-year period of this study, recent data on Bluegrass Unlimited subscription levels as well as the number of hours radio stations program bluegrass per week was procured and mapped. Figure 13 shows the number of BU subscriptions at the state level while Figure 14 shows the number of hours per week that radio stations program bluegrass music. Clearly, parts of the country that have strong BU subscription levels and regular programming of bluegrass music on the radio also tend to have more festivals. Both patterns reinforce the upland South as the "bluegrass heartland" of eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, central and eastern Tennessee, and southwest Virginia. This pattern is much more clearly discernible on the radio station programming map (Figure 14).

### Suggestions for Future Research

As is often the case with any scholarly endeavor, the thrill of discovery has its own way of reinforcing itself over space and time. Questions answered frequently give rise to other significant questions. Problems encountered during the course of a study can suggest new avenues of research. At the conclusion of this study, the relevance of the old adage "The more you know, the more you want to learn" is stronger than ever before. For

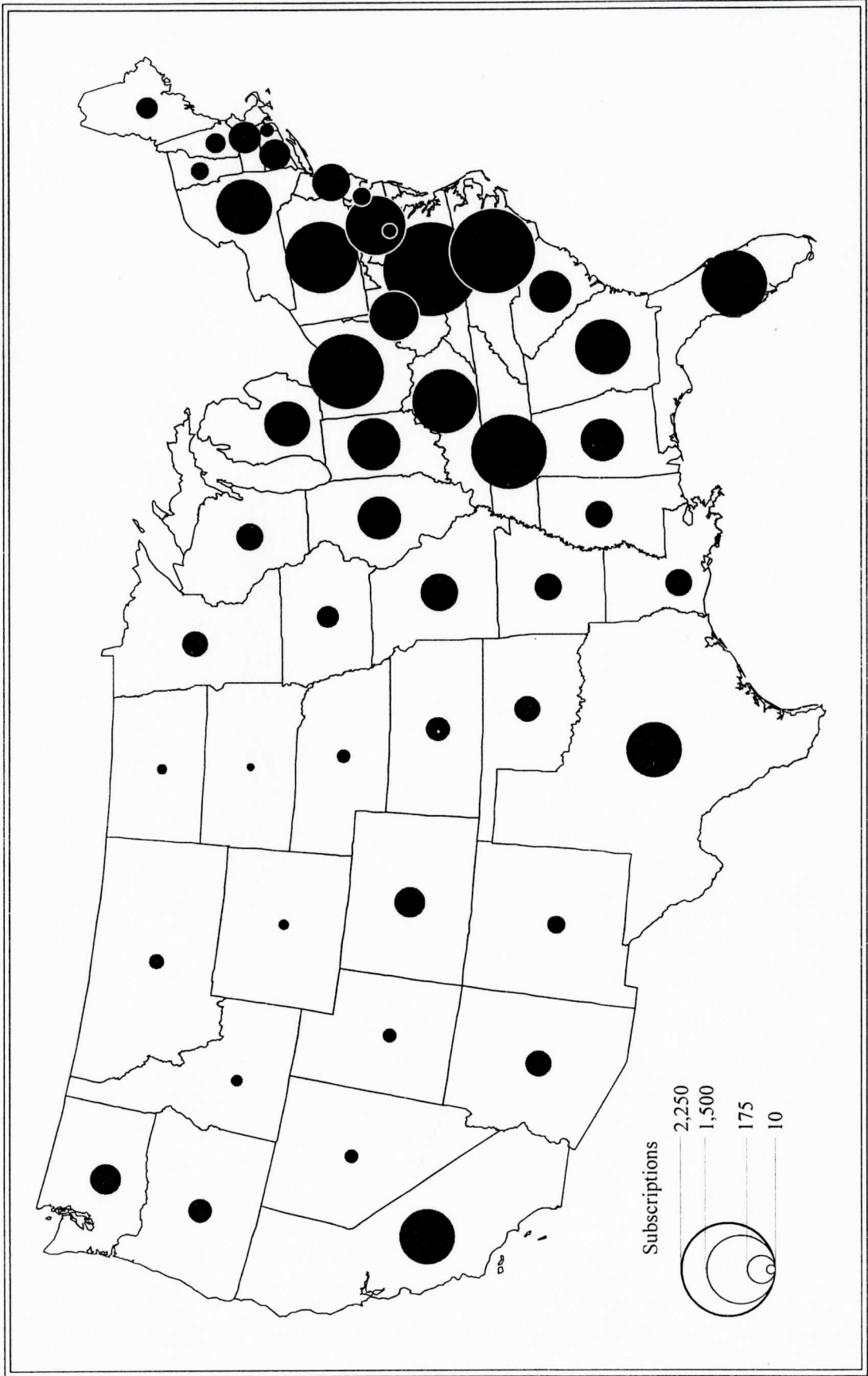


Figure 13: Bluegrass Unlimited Subscriptions by State, 1997.  
Source: Bluegrass Unlimited 1997.

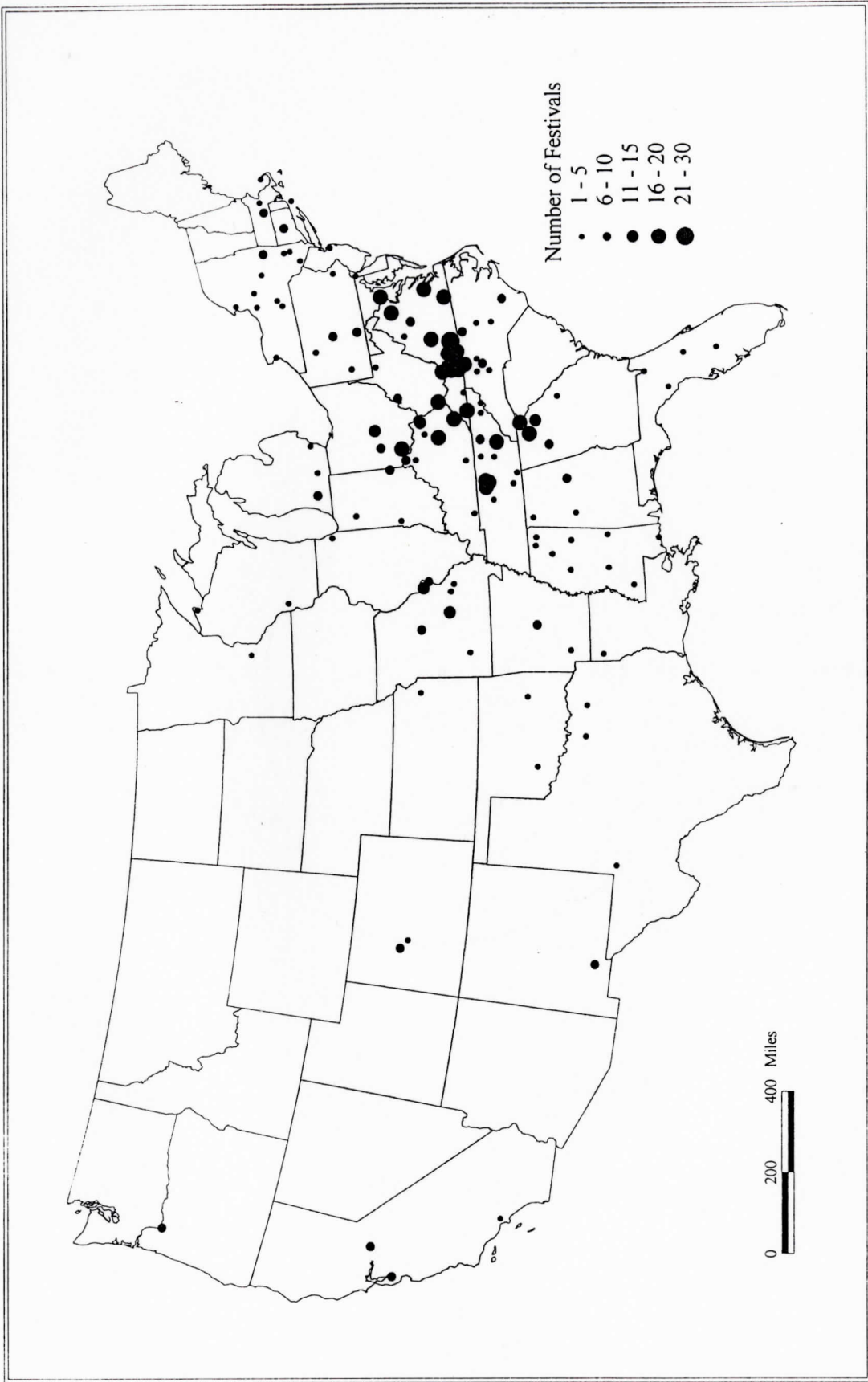


Figure 14: Radio Stations Programming Bluegrass Music, 1996.  
Source: Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 1996.

those interested in expanding on the work presented here, there are numerous areas just waiting to be explored.

One of the original intentions of this study was to spatially correlate data on festivals with other information, such as bluegrass programming on the radio, magazine subscription data, and record sales. However, consistent historical data for variables other than festivals were either unavailable or non-existent, so a reliable comparison of festival distributions with other reinforcing factors was not possible over the thirty-year period used for this study.

The problem of data inconsistency is largely due to the fact that bluegrass music has enjoyed relatively little scholarly attention since its creation in the 1940s. As this situation improves over time, efforts to ensure that available data are consistent and reliable need to be undertaken with renewed vigor. Perhaps the IBMA can play a pivotal role in this endeavor by proposing guidelines for defining bluegrass when it comes to radio stations wishing to program the music. This clarification would make it easier to conduct research over time because it would boost the credibility of the data.

Additionally, available information should be made more accessible to the public and housed in a series of bluegrass "clearinghouses." The IBMA's bluegrass museum in Owensboro is now one such repository, but the museum only houses information and artifacts that are donated or otherwise procured. The future of the music will depend on the continued generosity of people and organizations willing to contribute their time and resources to these bluegrass libraries.

Sometimes making data available to the public does not serve the best business interests of a company. For example, it is understandable how a magazine would closely

guard its mailing list in light of competition from other publications. Bluegrass Unlimited has been especially gracious in their provision of subscription data for this study. Though the data were only at the state level, they nonetheless helped to illustrate that festival distributions do in fact coincide quite well with state subscription levels. The patterns of subscription distributions could have been elaborated on more thoroughly if the data had been provided at the zip code level, and the entire study would have benefited if subscription data at any scale were available over the entire thirty year period.

Geographic analysis of cultural phenomena stands to greatly benefit from the advent of Geographic Information System (GIS). A significant body of demographic data on bluegrass consumers now exists that could be spatially referenced to a coordinate system such as latitude/longitude, a street address, or ZIP code area. Think of the possibilities of having digital coverages of subscriptions, record sales, festival locations, radio stations, along with a host of demographic attribute data, and then overlaying the coverages on top of one another to investigate and identify areas that meet a set of predetermined criteria. One could query the database to find out, for example, which areas have strong bluegrass radio coverage but have low subscription levels for a publication such as BU. This information could feasibly be used to target new subscribers.

If time and resources were unlimited, the author would have liked to travel to a representative sample of festivals to interview performers, organizers, and festival-goers to find out more about the history and evolution of these festivals. Who were the performers then compared to now? Who were the attendees? Where did they come from then? Where are they coming from now? Information derived from such interviews could,

for example, be used to map geographic drawing areas for individual festivals over time. Even a parking lot survey of automobile license plates would yield an overview of the distance people had traveled to get to a particular event.

Perception of place is an area of geographic research that could be investigated as a function of festival activity. It is clear that certain festivals are well known nationally or even internationally. To what degree can the existence of a festival shape a person's perception of a geographic location? What are the modes by which the perception of a particular place diffuses?

The economic success of a festival and the impact it has on the local economy is an area that warrants further study. For some communities that host festivals, the additional income generated from these events can be substantial. In Wilksboro, North Carolina, for example, the 10th annual MerleFest extravaganza in 1998 pumped an estimated \$ 4.5 million into the local economy, with an estimated regional economic impact of \$8.3 million ([www.merleferst.org](http://www.merleferst.org), 1999). The collection and statistical analysis of pertinent financial data related to festival activity can assist community leaders in prioritizing fiscal goals. While MerleFest at its inception in 1988 was a relatively small affair, with a semi truck trailer being used as a makeshift stage, it has evolved into a key money generator for numerous civic organizations, and the town now enjoys international stature in the arena of acoustic music. Has the increasing economic impact of MerleFest influenced the way the town portrays itself to the outside world?

The appeal of bluegrass music outside of its southern hearth is greater today than it has ever been. Festival diffusion is now an international phenomenon, with several events appearing in BU's annual festival schedule. A logical extension of this study would



be an examination of festival diffusion in Europe and the rest of the world. Who promotes bluegrass music abroad? Where can bluegrass be heard on the radio outside of the U.S.? Are there bluegrass trade journals in Europe? Does the Internet play a more significant role in the diffusion of information related to bluegrass overseas? What was the role of military personnel stationed in Europe and Japan in the diffusion of the music there?

Many of the "first generation" of bluegrass performers and promoters are still alive and are virtual goldmines of information. Performers such as Mac Wiseman, Ralph Stanley, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, and Jimmy Martin, and promoters like Carlton Haney undoubtedly have much more to offer the public, and their insights and perspectives need to be documented and preserved. Perhaps the IBMA can sponsor a comprehensive oral history project that employs people to interview the surviving first generation bluegrass folk to ensure that their wisdom and knowledge remain for future generations.

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## VITA

Eric Warren Neel was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama on February 14, 1969. In 1972 he moved to Knoxville, Tennessee with his parents and began grade school. He received his high school diploma from Webb School of Knoxville in May, 1987, and attended Birmingham Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama the following August. Eric returned to Knoxville in 1988 to attend the University of Tennessee, where he double-majored in Geography and German, completing the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree in May of 1992.

Prior to moving to Boone, North Carolina in the summer of 1997 to pursue a Master's degree in the Geography and Planning Department at Appalachian State University, Mr. Neel lived in Nashville and worked for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. While at Appalachian, he worked as a graduate assistant on several departmental projects and taught a lab in remote sensing. In 1998 he was elected to Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges for his academic achievements. Eric earned his degree in August, 1999.

The author's parents are C. Warren Neel and Gloria S. Testerman of Knoxville, Tennessee. He has one brother, Todd, who resides in Saluda, North Carolina, and one sister, Anna, who lives in Nashville, Tennessee. Eric's address is 201-2 South Slope Road, Banner Elk, North Carolina.