

Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

Manuscripts!

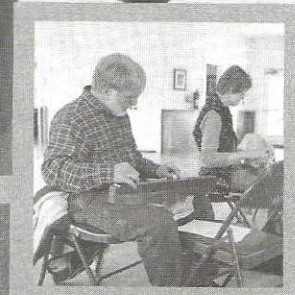
I spend a lot of time looking at copies of musicians' manuscripts and transcriptions of their manuscripts, but nothing can compare with actually holding an old manuscript in one's hand. The connection with the past is immediate, for a musician's manuscript is a personal expression of his or her art, avocation, and sometimes livelihood. In fact, while the adage "we can never truly know the past" is prima facie a truth, a compiled music manuscript is a window into a bygone era. It can be viewed ("read") not only for its musical content, but for what it says about the life, times, and context of the person who transcribed tunes to paper. Musicians' manuscripts provide a realism that is missing in printed collections of the same era, and are a link to music as a lived experience.

While it is very rare to be able to hold actual musicians' manuscripts in our hands, we are very lucky to have available a variety of musicians' manuscript collections digitalized and able to be perused on-line. The time and expense of going to various libraries near and far is, in part, a memory, and, while we don't have the enhancing tactile connection of holding a page that a fiddler of one or two hundred years ago put pen to, we can view the hand-written documents with considerable clarity in their original form. Of course, there are many manuscripts that have not been scanned, or that are under copyright, but we may hope for and expect that more will become available as time goes on.

In the Spring 2013 issue of *Fiddler Magazine*, I suggested that older tunes could be contextualized, and that traditional music could be seen as having layers of meaning depending on the time, place, and role of the player, and that "tune history" was really finding out more about the layers of experience of a melody. I applied a bio-psycho-social model, borrowed from psychology, to help in the contextualizing process. The "bio" or "biology" of the tune is its musical aspects—call it "musical genetics"—and "psycho" is the meaning attached to the melody for the player and audience, while "social" is the tune's role in the local and larger society in which it is played. My focus was on individual traditional tunes.

I was very pleased to have recently read a 2012 doctoral thesis by Stephen Campbell called "Reconsidering and Contextualizing the Vernacular Tradition: Popular Music and British Manuscript Compilations 1650-2000" [<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3902/>] (University of York, Department of Music) that I found not only congruent with my thinking on contextualizing traditional music, but whose author had independently constructed a very learned, thorough, and compelling argument. Campbell's thesis focuses on the meanings to be derived from a music manuscript considered as a collection, or as a sum of its parts. In other words, the individual melodies that make up a manuscript collection each can be contextualized, as can the manuscript as a whole. He calls musicians' manuscript collections "bespoke in nature," meaning that the compiler took the time and effort to assemble the collection

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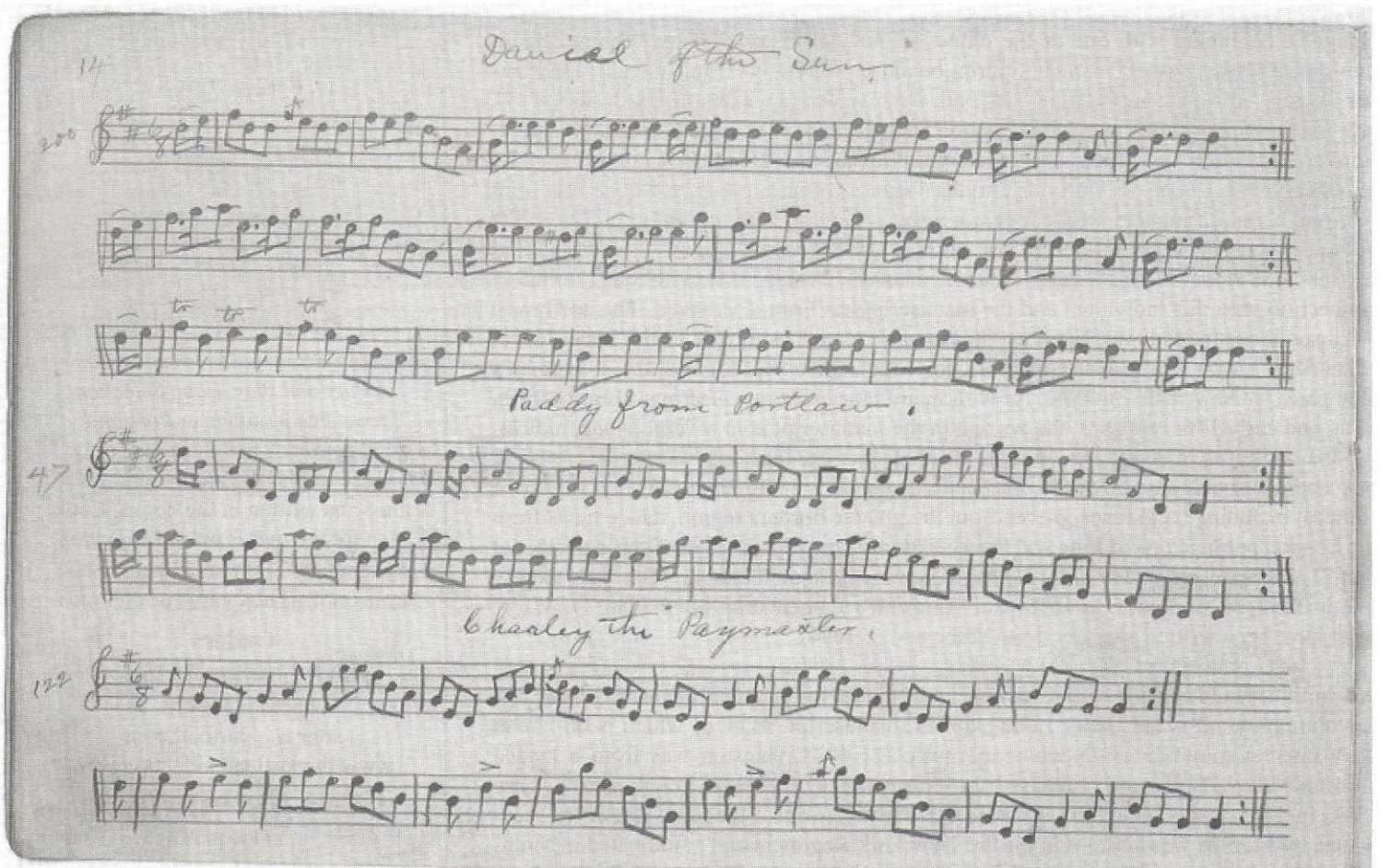
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British control. After the war Henry tended his estate, but also was a surveyor and real estate speculator, an illustrator, and a map-maker, and served as a Justice of the Peace for Dutchess County. He enjoyed writing poetry and playing music, and presumably was a dancer, as he was elected a Manager for the New York Assembly's [i.e. a dance assembly] season of 1774-1775, along with his 3rd cousin, John Jay, later U.S. Chief Justice and Governor of New York.

The Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research [<http://statensmusikverk.se/svensktvisarkiv/?lang=en>] collects, preserves, and publishes materials in the fields of traditional folk and other types of music, and has digitalized several musicians' handwritten manuscript collections. Salomen Carlstedt was a flute player or violinist from Blekinge, Karlskrona, Sweden, whose manuscript dates from 1813 [www.smus.se/earkiv/fmk/browsevol.php?lang=en&by=person&person=Salomon+Carlstedt]. Judging by the sophistication of the notation and high register playing indicated in the music, Carlstedt was a professional musician who had complete mastery of his instrument. Most of the tunes are dance tunes, primarily unnamed quadrille parts ("Cadrill"), with some marches, transcribed at a time in Continental history just after the disaster of the French retreat from Russia, and Napoleon's decline. A few years before Carlstedt began his notebook, Napoleon's former Marshall, Bernadotte, had been invited to fill the vacant position of crown prince, and, as the musician put pen to paper, Sweden had joined the allies in the war against the French ruler. Carlstedt's manuscript can be seen

at www.smus.se/earkiv/fmk/browsevol.php?lang=en&katalogid=M+167&by=datering&datering=1800, but it is well worth perusing many manuscripts to be found at the Centre's site. Unique is the feature that lets one look up pages from manuscripts by various scodatura tunings [www.smus.se/earkiv/fmk/browse.php?lang=en&by=scodatura].

The John Rook manuscript [<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rja14/musicfiles/rook/>] is also from the extreme north of England, from Cumbria County, which is adjacent to Northumberland in England, and The Borders and Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland. Rook has an elaborate frontispiece to his manuscript, which he grandly titles "Multum in Parvo, or a Collection of Old English, Scotch, Irish & Welsh Tunes for the (inserted, a drawing, perhaps by Rook himself, of a table piled with instruments including a bellows-pipe, flute, violin, horn, and perhaps an early accordion or portable keyboard). He claims "Upwards of 1260 airs selected by John Rook," which details his manuscript's title (and perhaps its worth to him), for "Multum in parvo" is a Latin phrase meaning "much in little; a great deal in a small space." Below that he records, "Waverton, Written by the selector, for his amusement in the above instruments,...1840...." It is a massive and important collection that contains a survey of tunes that were in tradition at the time of his writing. Nothing is known of Rook, save what can be gleaned from his title page: he was from the village of Waverton, Cumbria, near Wigton, on the road from the sea to the city of Carlisle, and that he was a multi-instrumentalist. We might infer a sense of pride he had in his talent, as he took the time to depict the



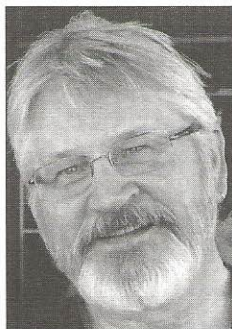
The Dunn manuscript; printed with permission of Ward Irish Music Archives

instruments he played, well enough to “amuse” himself with them (which would seem to indicate some comfortable level of proficiency on them). He also describes the tunes in his manuscript as “old,” indicating they were not his compositions, nor were they recently composed, and we might assume they are representative of a common repertoire that was in currency among amateur musicians in his region in the 1840s. Unfortunately, the original copy of his manuscript has disappeared, but the digital copy is readily accessible.

Turn-of-the-20th-century Chicago was home to Police Chief Francis O’Neill (1848-1936) and the Chicago Music Club, whose members supplied many of the tunes in O’Neill’s renowned *Music of Ireland* (1903) and *Dance Music of Ireland* (1907) collections. A less well-known Irish public servant at the time was musician and instrument maker/repairer Michael J. Dunn (1855-1935), a contemporary of O’Neill who served as a captain of the Milwaukee Fire Department. Dunn came into possession of recordings and documents that had belonged to Francis O’Neill and one of O’Neill’s friends and sources, Chicago Police Sergeant and uilleann piper, James Early, who died in 1914. Surviving were early cylinder recordings made by O’Neill of the playing of musicians whose names pepper the O’Neill collections as sources: Early’s playing partner, the brilliant improvisational (but musically illiterate) fiddler John McFadden, piper and vaudeville performer Patrick “Patsy” Touhey, irascible old Tipperary fiddler Edward Cronin, and O’Neill’s brother-in-law, piper Bernard Delaney. Along with the fragile recordings are numerous music manuscripts in Dunn’s handwriting [http://archives.irishfest.com/dunn-family-collection/Manuscripts.htm] which form an interesting juxtaposition with the O’Neill compendiums. Many of the same tunes to be found in the O’Neill collections are in Dunn’s music manuscripts, perhaps collected from independent sources. However, Dunn also included a large number of Scottish and English tunes as well, and it is obvious his focus was not narrowly only Irish music but encompassed the British Isles expatriate community of Milwaukee of his era.

Do fiddlers still produce handwritten manuscript collections? Of course, I have a few of my own from years ago when I was noting down tunes that struck my fancy and that I wanted to record lest I forget. Most of us, however, have moved onto digital technology, ABC notation, and, more recently various apps for our smartphones and pads. Whereas in days past someone might bring out their fiddlecase manuscript book to be reminded of a tune, nowadays there are smart-phones on the table with apps accessed, or iPads on music stands. Unfortunately, the digital technology is only as durable as the equipment and the file in the cloud; fragile constructions compared to the old manuscripts and a loss for future generations.

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called *Ragged But Right* (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia “*The Fiddlers’ Companion*” (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]



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