Chapter 2

Woodland Indian Fiddles and Jigs

Program 2 Performances

1. Fred Allery and Mike Keplin, "Soldier's Joy." 2. Lawrence Flett, "The Devil's Reel." 3. Dick Gravelle, "French Tune." 4. Waupoose Brothers, "Potawatomi Jig." 5. Joe Cloud, "Devil's Dream." 6. Waupoose Brothers, Fiddle tune. 7. Coleman Trudeau, "Tahquamenon River Breakdown." 8. Fred Allery and Mike Keplin, "Red River Jig." 9. Joe Cloud, "Squaw Dance." 10. Louis Webster, "Growling Old Man, Grumbling Old Woman." 11. Waupoose Brothers, "Wedding Chant."

Métis Music

The mostly male French and Anglo-Celtic immigrants who brought the fur trade to Canada and the northern United States in the 1600s also carried fiddles in their arms and dance steps in their feet. More than a few married Indians and a mixed blood, or Métis, culture emerged, blending elements of the native with the European. Beadwork—in which imported glass beads were stitched in patterns formerly executed in porcupine quills—is one such blend. Indian fiddling and step dancing is another (Lederman 1988; Mishler 1987).

Today Indian fiddlers and step dancers can be found along the American-Canadian border almost from the Atlantic to the Pacific. On the European side they are mostly French, but also Irish and Scottish. On the native side, they are Athabaskans, Crees, Menominees, Ojibwas, Odawas, and Potawatomis. Their playing combines European melodies with Indian phrasing, while their dances mingle old country jigs with the steps new world hunters have adopted in imitation of animals. Mike Page of North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Ojibwa band recalls his father telling of buffalo hunts where successful hunters, paralleling the song compositions and festive dances of Plains peoples, celebrated by making up new fiddle tunes and jigging through the night (Vrooman 1992).

From Fur Trade to Lumber Camp

Fiddling and dancing exchanges between European and Indian peoples in the Upper Midwest accelerated in the lumber camps of the nineteenth century as many Woodland peoples found work as sawyers, top loaders, and log drivers. In 1938 folklorist Alan Lomax visited the Bad River Indian reservation at Odanah, Wisconsin, where Ojibwas logged and worked in a lumber mill. There he recorded fiddler Joe Cloud, dubbing him a "Wisconsin lumberjack" in field notes and emphasizing that "the blood of Chippewa Indians is flowing in his veins" (Lomax 1938).

The bulk of this essay was condensed from J. P. Leary, 1992, "Sawdust and Devils: Indian Fiddling in the Western Great Lakes Region," in Medicine Fiddle, *ed. J. P. Leary (Bismarck: North Dakota Humanities Council). With permission.*

Born in 1885 in Hollow Lake, Wisconsin, Cloud was one of seventeen children. His father, Menogwaniosh Anakwad or George Cloud (1849–1911), was also a fiddler. Besides Anglo-Celtic classics like "Ragtime Annie" and "Devil's Dream," Joe Cloud's repertoire included that French-derived trademark of Métis fiddlers, "Red River Jig," and several "squaw dances." (This potentially pejorative term is used less frequently nowadays by Woodland Indians, although the dance persists. Usually accompanied by the big drum, it involves a dignified toe-heel circular promenade during which dancers maintain contact with the earth, in contrast to the varied movement of men's mimetic war and hunting dances.)

Alan Lomax also recorded the Rindlisbacher Group of Rice Lake, Wisconsin, in 1938. Its leader, Otto Rindlisbacher, recognized "Indian" fiddle tunes, along with those of the French, Irish, and Norwegians. Rindlisbacher played with French-Indian fiddlers like Regis Belille of the Lac Court Oreilles reservation many times, learning such "Indian" tunes as "Couderay Jig," "Couderay Reel," "Hounds in the Woods," "Indian War Whoop," and "Red Cliff Jig."

Ernest "Pea Soup" Guibord, an Ojibwa, who placed third in a Rindlisbacher-organized fiddlers contest in 1927, recalled Belille (ca. 1865–1935) as a man who made a little money picking berries, working in the woods, and playing music.

> Did you ever hear a really good fiddler play? Well, Regis had them all beat. Hands down. . . . Regis, he didn't read music, didn't know one note from another. But he taught himself to play in any key. . . . I don't know how many keys there are, but Regis played them all, from A to Z. (Guibord 1979 I)

Guibord himself was born in 1903 at Reserve, Wisconsin, on the Lac Court Oreilles reservation. His father, Joseph, was half French, half Ojibwa, and his mother was a three-quarter blood Ojibwa. His paternal grandfather, Joseph Toussaint Guibord (ca. 1840–1912) was born in Montreal. Old Toussaint traded with the Ojibwas up and down the Mississippi, traveling in a bateau, and married an Ojibwa. He was a fiddler, as were his sons Joseph and Ernest, and his grandson Ernest, otherwise called "Pea Soup" after the fondness of French Canadians for that dish. As a young man, Pea Soup worked and played the fiddle in lumber camps. He also recalled dances at four different "boweries" (covered outdoor dance halls) on the reservation. Commonly held in keeping with seasonal and national events, like New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July, these affairs combined jigging and square dancing to fiddles with such pan-Indian couple dances as the Rabbit Dance and the Forty-nine Dance performed to drumbeats: "they had `war dances' and square dances. When they got tired of one kind of dancing, they switched" (ibid.).

The story of Everett "Butch" Waupoose exhibits a similar pattern of French-Indian ancestry, work in the woods, and syncretism between native and European traditions. Born on northeastern Wisconsin's Menominee reservation in 1938, Butch recalls that his grandfather, Wanawat,

> only had one name. And he had eight brothers. They come from that Michigan country up there, and they brought a lot of that [fiddle music] down with them. So it finally came down to us, this generation, the fourth generation. (E. Waupoose 1989 I)

Wanawat worked in nineteenth-century lumber camps with French Canadians, as did his son Dave, who married a Métis from the Frechette family. Dave Waupoose would leave the reservation in the winter to work as a chopper in the woods. In the spring he came home with a store of fiddle tunes. By the time Dave's son, Alex (1903–1972), began working in the woods, the Menominees had their own sawmill and logging operations. Modifying his fiddle with "Indian

Joe Cloud and Anna Anderson with their children (L–R: Harriet, George, and Clarence), Odanah, ca. 1916 ***Courtesy Virginia Cloud Carrington***

Coleman Trudeau, Ojibwa/Ottawa/French fiddler, Macmillan, Mich., 1983
Photo: Michael Loukinen

medicine" (deer bones and porcupine quills), Alex fiddled in Menominee camps, and for reservation square dances that sometimes included calls in the Menominee language. He also played for German neighbors at doings that included the Fourth of July, threshing parties, and the county fair.

Bob Andresen (1978) encountered the same sort of intermingling while documenting fiddlers in the early 1970s around Danbury, just across the St. Croix River from Minnesota. An unusual neutral ground where Sioux and Ojibwa intermarried rather than feuded, Burnett County was also a place where European and native peoples practiced harmony. Among them was Benjamin Connor, a fiddling homesteader of Irish-French ancestry, who had originally come to the region in 1852 to set up a fur trading post for John Jacob Astor at Fond du Lac, Minnesota. He married an Ojibwa, Odaygawmequay or "shore woman" (Winton 1976). The oldest and youngest of their nine children, William and Darius, were fine fiddlers. Darius (1873–1947) worked in the woods as a timber cruiser prior to serving as Burnett County's surveyor for thirty years. Often teaming up with Anglo fiddler Jesse Gattin and a pair of "half-breed" brothers, Gus and Alex Cadotte, Darius Connor played for numerous square dances that involved the entire community (Gattin 1973, 1974 I).

The ubiquity and legacy of Indian fiddlers in the Upper Midwest have been obscured in recent years as native peoples, quite understandably, seek to assert the distinctly Indian, and not the mixed, aspects of their cultural heritage. And yet cultural blending or syncretism is pervasive. Even the powwow, symbol of the renascence of American Indian traditions, draws upon the Euro-American structure of nineteenth-century Wild West show pageantry. When the musical story of Woodland Indian peoples is fully told, the fiddle and the step dance will take their place alongside traditional dances and the big drum.