I conducted research in the Appalachian Sound Archives for one month from May 14 through June 13, 2012. The focus of my study is banjo music from the 1920s which is directly related to my Ph.D. dissertation.

During the time in Berea I became aware of wanting to view my topic as multidimensional: with a focal point in commercial sound recordings from between 1924 and 1932, and a continuum of history, geography, social issues, religion, and musical practices that extends outward from that focal point. I am open to various ideas and directions at this time, for the purpose of gathering information and experience, and with the intention to refine these approaches as necessary and as time progresses.

The collections in the Berea archives that relate most directly to my focus are Buell Kazee (SAA 54) and Bascom Lamar Lunsford (SAA 29).

I listened to recordings of Buell Kazee singing and playing, including the digitized recordings of 78s, from 1927, 1928, and 1929 from the Reuben Powell Collection: **RP-OR-05-196-T2, RP-OR-05-196-T3, RP-OR-05-196-T4, and RP-OR-05-228-T2**. These digitized recordings include 48 of Kazee’s published banjo pieces that are of interest to me from that period. I have transcribed parts of these recordings as part of the process of analyzing aspects of rhythmic, tumbrel, and melodic materials, and technical aspects of performance.

The technical aspects of his performance are illuminated elsewhere in the collection, in both written and audio documents. In file **1/7 SAA 54**, there is a record of correspondence between Buell Kazee and Loyal Jones, in which Kazee indicated his interest in writing a method book for banjo. In the course of this correspondence he then abandons the project after about 6 pages or so, which were later printed in Mark Wilson’s liner notes for Philip Kazee’s CD, *A Family Tradition* (Rounder 0619).

Instead Kazee arranged with Loyal Jones to do an audio recording explaining his approach to various techniques and tunings. This digitized recording (**AC OR 004-018**) is a great resource for my purposes: I’m interested in the sound that was made, and there is a recording of the person who made the sounds describing in detail how he did it. For example there is an idiosyncratic way Buell had of playing with the back of his thumb to get a delicate brush that he explained was a result of not being able to do double-thumbing, though this technique could be understood as an unusual version of double-thumbing. Songs played that correspond to Kazee’s 1920s recordings include *Rocky Island, Lady Gay, Poor Boy Long Ways from Home, and Darling Corey*. 
Further examples of Buell Kazee discussing tunings are found in a recorded interview by John Cohen (AC OR 004-14, AC OR 004-19). He uses fFGCD for *Shady Grove*, and tells Cohen that it was very rare; there were only two tunes he knew of in that tuning. He also demonstrates techniques such as thumb-lead playing, and discusses attitudes and the feeling or mood of the music. He talks generally about the old days, but also gives some specific details about the early recordings and his process, and plays some of the same songs as on those sessions, including *John Hardy*, *East Virginia*, *Darling Cory*, *The Roving Cowboy*, *Lady Gay*, and *Poor Boy Long Ways From Home*.

Other recorded interviews by Loyal Jones give biographical information and insight into social and religious contexts and viewpoints of Buell Kazee on music and other matters. These include the digitized recordings, (AC OR 004-017-A), (AC OR 004-017-B), which have been transcribed, and the cassette tape (AC CT 054-018), which I transcribed for future reference.

I also listened to cassette recordings of sermons by Buell Kazee: (AC CT 054-001), (AC CT 054-005), (AC CT 054-014), and (AC CT 054-015). These audio recordings are of interest not only for the insight into Kazee’s life as a pastor, but also because of the tensions between banjo and the Baptist church in that time and place.

Additionally I looked at the introduction to a book by Buell Kazee, in file (SAA 54, 3/7): *Faith is the Victory: The Secret of Dynamic Living*. I am interested in the possibility of noticing connections or parallels between some of Kazee’s religious thought/belief system, and some ideas in more recent musicological writings by Charles Keil and others, having to do with aesthetics and participatory co-creation.

Recordings of Buell Kazee performing during the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s are of interest because he played many of the same songs in nearly the same way over forty years after the original commercial recordings. There are live concert recordings in Seattle from 1969 (AC OR 004-001, AC OR 004-002, AC OR 004-003, AC OR 004-005, AC OR 004-006). Songs played that correspond to Kazee’s 1920s recordings include *The Wagoner’s Lad*, *The Orphan Girl*, *The Butcher’s Boy*, *Sporting Bachelors*, *Lady Gay*, *Roving Cowboy*, *Little Bessie*, *East Virginia*, *Little Mohee*, *John Hardy*, and *Roll On John*.

There are also recordings from Berea College, both audio and video, from a concert/lecture in 1972 (AC OR 004-010, AC VT 047-001/AC VR 016-001); audio from a lecture/concert in 1976 (AC OR 004-009); and video from a Celebration of Traditional Music in 1975 (AC-VR-001-031). The video from 1972 is of particular interest because of some very good camera angles showing a close up of the right hand as it is picking the banjo. These performances also include background information as Buell introduces the songs, many of which are
also of the group that were recorded in the 1920s, including: Lady Gay, The Orphan Girl, The Wagoner’s Lad, Sporting Bachelors, and John Hardy.

In The Bascom Lamar Lunsford Collection (SAA 29), I used, and will continue to make use of a variety of sources: The Minstrel of The Appalachians, the book by Loyal Jones, with thorough biographical, discographical and other information; the Complete Bascom Lamar Lunsford Story (AC VT 075-001, AC VT 075-002) a video with footage of Lunsford picking the banjo, dancing, and fiddling as well as much background information on local musicians and the festival that Lunsford started in Ashland North Carolina in 1928; audio recordings from Columbia University: Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Memory Collection (AC OR 001-001 through AC OR 001-019); and audio recordings of interviews by Duncan Emrich (AC OR 001-021), Loyal Jones (AC OR 001-022-A, AC OR 001-022-B), and Joan Moser (AC OR 001-023).

The Memory Collection that Lunsford recorded for Columbia University in 1935 contains numerous recordings of Lunsford singing and accompanying himself on the banjo. Many of these songs were also recorded for commercial release by Lunsford in the 1920s.

Some of the most pertinent to me from this collection are Little Margret (AC OR 001-001-13), I’m Going Back to Georgia (AC OR 001-003-03), Shout Lulie, Little Turtle Dove, Reuben (AC OR 001-004-05, -08, -11), The Roving Gambler, Swannanoa Tunnel (AC OR 001-005-03, -17), On a Bright and Summer’s Morning, Georgia Buck (AC OR 001-006-08, -09), That Blue-eyed Girl, Charming Betsy, Red Apple Juice, I Wish I was a Mole in the Ground (AC OR 001-007-08, -11, -13, -18), Some will Come on Saturday Night, Mountain Dew (AC OR 001-008-10, -15), Little Brown Jug, Bye Bye My Darling, Italy (AC OR 001-009-01, 06, 09), Cindy (AC OR 001-010-03), Old Uncle Ned (AC OR 001-012-14), The Old Gray Mare, Groundhog, Sourwood Mountain, Down the Road, Old Jimmy Sutton (AC OR 001-013-05, -06, -10, -12, -13), Jesse James, and Dogget’s Gap (AC OR 001-017-05, -12).

These recordings will be an important part of my research, which will include transcribing and various forms of analysis of selected excerpts.

At this point in my research, transcription is a part of getting to know the material, a process that includes listening and playing the banjo. I am interested in eventually engaging with theoretical ideas around notation, musicological methodologies, and finding ways to analyze this music that are appropriate and useful. For now, transcription is a memory-aid, a ‘note-to-self’.

I think it is likely that using notation will be one way of looking at the music, for instance in being able to visually identify and communicate rhythmic anticipations and syncopations in Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s banjo playing. Additional factors in transcription might include finding ways to indicate minute details in rhythmic
fluctuation, quarter tones or other idiosyncratic pitch characteristics, as well as indications of timbre and articulation including slides, hammer-ons, downstroking, and so on.

The experience of listening and feeling the music is irreplaceable and not best captured on paper, but by listening, picking the banjo, dancing; I am reminded of George Lewis’s call for ‘body-based musical analysis’. How this will get addressed in my dissertation is something I look forward to grappling with in the coming months.

In addition to the primary interest in Buell Kazee and Bascom Lamar Lunsford, I also listened to banjoists who were active during the 1920s and early 1930s, but not necessarily commercially recorded. These include Virgil Anderson (AC OR 005-226, AC OR 005-278, AC OR 005-288, JH CT 002-001, JH CT 002-002), Rufus Crisp (BG CT 231, BG CT 232, BG CT 233, BG CT 234), Roy Stalcup (AC OR 094-005, AC OR 094-006), Banjo Bill Cornett (SC CD 122-001, SC CD 122-002), Morgan Sexton (AC OR 005-422, AC OR 005-445, AC VT 014-026, DW LP 028), Jim Couch (LR OR 037, LR OR 039, LR OR 030, LR OR 033, LR OR 043), Travis Wells (JH VR 011-001, SR CT 067 / 068).

Some good information on “Banjo styles of North Carolina and Virginia” was presented in a videotaped lecture by Kinney Rorrer (AC VT 109-011, AC VT 109-012). Also on these DVDs is some footage of Matokie Slaughter playing with Alice Gerrard; Slaughter’s banjo picking is remarkable and idiosyncratic (AC VT 109-011).

Buell Kazee’s son Philip plays in a very similar style to his father (AC OR 005-023, -043, -219, -228, -240, -538).

Steven Wade discusses banjo styles and pedagogy, performs and interviews banjoists on the TV documentary, Catching the Music (AC VR 025-001). There is some very good footage of Dave Macon, Virgil Anderson, and Wade himself.

These are the materials I worked with; how they impact my work will be revealed as the process continues at home in my dissertation research and in my performance and composition practice. Some aspects of this impact are unknowable at this stage, but I do know that the time in Berea at the archives has provided information and experience that will be central to my dissertation.

This will manifest through transcriptions of banjo recordings, analysis of the transcriptions, my attempts to learn to play in the style of Kazee, Lunsford and others, listening to Kazee describe his method of playing the banjo, and listening to recorded interviews that give details on biography and philosophy. All of these may feed into theoretical discussions on performance, participation, presentation, and co-creation, as well as other issues including colonialism, gender, race, and political economy. I am finishing comprehensive exams this summer, and plan to
spend the autumn refining my focus on the dissertation itself; both of these processes will be informed by the research in Berea.

My bass playing is centered on listening, and it is inevitable that my improvisation practice will be influenced by the music I have heard in the Appalachian Sound Archives. In some way I believe it is in my bass playing that the most meaningful results of my listening will be expressed.

My composing will likely have some more knowable results, as I compose for the Cluttertones, a small ensemble that includes banjo, and also a banjo/voice project that is in early stages, that will be greatly influenced by the techniques and tunings I have learned during my fellowship in Berea. I will keep in touch about any publications or recordings of my work in this area as and when they occur.

With gratitude,
Rob Clutton