

COVER SHEET

TRANSCRIPTION NUMBER: 5 OF 17

Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, PhD, Independent Contractor
Date of Interview: 7/31/2012
Duration: 29:49 Track 1 (Stored on 1 DVD)
Interviewees: Wayne Andrews
Interviewer: Jesse Wells
Cinematographer: Sean Anderson
Location: Morehead State University
Sponsoring Organization: Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.
Funding: LexArts, Kentucky Oral History Commission

Transcription Notes:

WA: Wayne Andrews

JW: Jesse Wells

RM: Raymond McClain (limited speaking role, primarily performance oriented)

In some cases, words such as "um", "uh", "and", "so" and "yeah" have been excluded.

Time notations have been included at approximately 2-6 minute intervals.

... Indicates pause, delay in conversation, or, weak transition/no transition in themes.

The following names of musical genres have been capitalized: Bluegrass, Old Time, and Clawhammer.

Wood types have been capitalized.

Attempts were made to verify the names of all musicians and geographical locations referenced throughout this interview.

*Additional individuals: Raymond McClain and an unidentified female are occasionally spoken to off camera. Their remarks have been noted throughout.

0:00

JW: Interview with Wayne Andrews for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. July 31st, 2012. Thanks for agreeing to do this.

WA: Jesse, it's a pleasure to be here.

JW: Can you first give us a little bit of the history of your life? Where you were born?

WA: Well I don't know if you want to take five or six hours to do that, but I'll give you the cliff notes version of it.

I was born in Spencer, Massachusetts, a little central Massachusetts town that has a great history in terms of craft and those kinds of traditions and I won't go into all that, but I grew up in a community there that really had high regards for craftspeople. My dad was a craftsman, grandfather, uncles, that type of thing. Went to high school there and then went to a state college in Massachusetts, at Fitchburg State College. I majored in industrial arts education, so I have a strong undergraduate degree in craft and related items, and then I went on to graduate school at West Virginia University and became a little more mainstream with my education and masters and doctoral degrees.

I taught at Illinois State University for 10 years and then at East Tennessee State. I was a faculty member and an administrator there for 17 years before coming to Morehead in January 2005 as President of Morehead State University.

JW: That's wonderful. What are your earliest memories of working with wood in the craft world? Well my dad was one of these renaissance kind of guys. There wasn't anything he wouldn't take on. He would fix anything, or figure anything out, and as a youngster I was around tools so it wasn't uncommon to be helping him repair something or to build something be it kitchen cabinets or toys for the yard. So I remember having tools as a youngster and being free to build whatever I wanted to build. We built playground equipment, toy guns, whatever it was that kids were interested in, I was building it. I didn't build any instruments as a youngster, but my sister is a violinist, a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, so there was always music in our home as kids.

2:21

JW: And your daughter is a musician?

WA: She is. Jill is a graduate of East Tennessee State University. She took coursework in the Bluegrass program there. She studied with Raymond McClain and Jack Tottle, some of those folks. Jill has been very interested in music her whole life. She has had roles in singing since she was a little child. Inspired really in church and singing in church, but then got pretty serious about it in the latter part of her college career. After a few years of working as a social worker she decided to pursue that full-time and she is doing that full-time today. So, she's been kind of an inspiration because she's now living in Nashville. She's a singer and song-writer doing pretty well I think. She plays a variety of instruments and so it's been fun to be around her. Although she never invites me up on stage, Jesse.

JW: Not yet.

WA: Not yet. Right... We gotta keep practicing.

JW: It might be the banjo too...

WA: It could be.

JW: Your instrument is that you prefer to play is the banjo. Could you tell us a little bit about what attracted you to that sound?

WA: Yeah, it's actually a very interesting story because, as I mentioned, Jill was a student at East Tennessee State and she decided early that she was going to play the banjo. She took some lessons from a teacher there in Johnson City, Elizabeth (**uncertain of word**) actually I think, and she was doing quite well on the banjo but I think she decided that the guitar would be more mainstream. So she sat the banjo aside, and she sat it in the house and it sort of sat there. I had always liked the sound of the banjo, so I one day said something to Raymond McClain who was the director of the program there, the Bluegrass and Old Time program, I said, "Raymond, would you consider teaching me some banjo?" and he was very welcoming. I started out on the Bluegrass banjo, you know, the three finger style banjo and played and took lessons for a couple of years doing that.

When I came up here to Morehead I decided that I wanted to learn Old Time style, Clawhammer style, which seems to fit me better for some reason. I can follow the rhythm of it a little better or something. So I've been doing that for the past few years and my teacher, when we get together, is Jesse Wells. A pretty fine teacher, in fact...

4:41

JW: We'll not elaborate on that. So, learning to play the instrument, you then decided to build an open-back banjo?

WA: Yeah, well, you know, I've been a wood worker and a metal worker for a long, long time. I'm a great believer in the head and the heart working together with the hands, and I find great satisfaction in creating things. I've always done that. So, some people like to play golf, some like to softball and all this sort of stuff, and what I like to do when I have time is free time is come out here to the workshop and create something.

When I came up here to Morehead I realized there's such a large community of craftspeople I thought I ought to try to build my own instruments and actually, you and I worked together to build a couple of banjos and then I traveled off from that and got involved in some other instruments, dulcimers and the like, but for me it was about applying traditional wood working skills to an area that I was really not familiar with which was instrument building and we sort of figured it out together. There is plenty of information in books and videos and of course measuring other instruments and seeing what they're about. So we took a stab at it, and that's how we got going.

6:00

JW: Well, I'm really grateful. You helped teach me a lot about wood working and I think, I knew very little about the instrument construction, the pieces and the way they worked together. So, let's see what you came up with.

WA: [WA moves off camera to pick-up banjo] Well, this is a traditional open-back banjo that you would find, I suppose, in the mountains of Kentucky or Tennessee or down South. It's pretty straight forward. What we did was buy some parts and we modified them for our own purposes. The unique parts about this I guess is that we selected some materials that were a little different. The finger boards on banjos tend to be Ebony and Rosewood, those are very common. The particular material on here is a different material that I've been hauling around for years. Do you remember what it was, Jesse?

JW: Purple Heart.

WA: Purple Heart is the wood.

JW: It's a beautiful wood.

WA: It's a really pretty reddish color. It's unusual. It makes a good fingerboard material because it's pretty hard. Then we did some unusual inlay in it. Morehead State University mascot is the eagle, so I put an eagle in here, did a little bit of inlay on the back with the star, few dots around just to jazz it up a little bit. You know, it actually [demonstrates playing] has a fair sound to it.

[JW gestures to WA to remove the mute from his banjo]

WA: Jesse doesn't like my mute, but that's a marriage saver right there!

JW: I want to hear you play!

WA: He told me that, so I built one!

JW: It was a roommate saver for me in college.

WA: Was it? Well, for me it's a marriage saver.

7:40-7:54

[WA performs on banjo]

JW: That sounds much nicer.

WA: Yeah... So, it was kind of a labor of love, and you and I have talked about building more instruments because it's fun to do. I think, I don't consider myself a luthier, I consider myself more of a wood worker, but I love the idea of creating something that we can use. So, build it, and play it, and figure out what works well, modify it maybe the next time, and do it better. So we'll get back on it, but that's what got me inspired. I had basic woodworking skills and then I think I think our relationship, yours and mine and Raymond, to create something that had value was kind of nice.

My wife, interestingly, she had a great friend here who just passed last year, a retired faculty member in the community who taught dulcimer for years and years and years. She said, you know, I'm going to learn to play dulcimer, so she did play dulcimer with Alan Lake for a number of years, so I said to Jesse and some other folks, well shoot, why can't I build some dulcimers? You might remember the old Foxfire

books that were developed back in the 60's as I remember to document a lot about craft in the Appalachian region, in the Highland region, and there was a great series in there about dulcimer building. I thought heck, that doesn't look too complicated. Went down to Berea and kind of poked around down there in the shop of Warren May. Warren was gracious to talk to me about dulcimers and he's built thousands of them. This was sort of my own creation. I took those ideas and, again, from a wood working perspective I'd been hauling around this wood that's on the top here. It's wormy Chestnut. You don't find it anymore. Chestnut blight in 1918 killed Chestnut trees throughout America, but there are lots of old Chestnut logs and buildings and so we cut some Chestnut and book matched it. Walnut for the fingerboard. Book matched the Walnut on the back just to create an instrument that's kind of pretty to look at and it has a wonderful sound.

Now, I don't play the dulcimer, so Jesse, you've got to, if you want to make a little noise with this so we can put this on as part of this... Why don't you just play a little tune?

[WA hands dulcimer to JW]

JW: You did your research because these are the most common woods.

10:27-10:39

[JW performs on dulcimer]

10:41

WA: I love the sound of the dulcimer because I think it has a really nice mountain traditional sound and to hear it as part of a band or something to me is really, really nice.

So I've built two of them. Sitting behind me on the bench back here are parts for another six of them that I'll get around to one of these days. They are good winter projects. They are not terribly complicated, but as you pointed out the selection of the wood, the construction has a lot to do with how they sound. The top wood on that, the wormy Chestnut, has kind of a mellow sound. I built another one that has an Ambrosia Maple top. It's a beautiful top, but it has a much brighter sound. I think it's under the bed upstairs in the house. Sue plays this one, so I didn't take it out, but I'm going to experiment a little bit. I've got some other ideas about woods I want to try and we'll see how it goes. I'll probably build some more dulcimers.

JW: That's very exciting. We were talking about Frank Neat earlier, and you have one of his... that was probably your first nice banjo.

11:47

WA: Well, you know there's a story about that banjo. **[Speaking to Raymond off camera – Raymond, would you walk over and open that case and give it to me?]** So, I was studying Bluegrass banjo with Raymond at East Tennessee State and I had an old banjo, it was a nice banjo. In fact, I think you have it or you gave it to somebody, but I said to Raymond, "You know, I'd really like to have a better banjo." And Sonny Osborne had a banjo at the time, maybe he still does called "The Chief," and it was advertised online, and it was real pretty. Frank Neat, over at Russell Springs, KY., was building those banjos. **[Thank you, Raymond]** I said to Raymond, "I'm gonna buy a Chief banjo," and he said, "Well you

know, it's a nice banjo, Frank does a nice job, but they're all kind of put together the same and have the same look because that's what Sonny designed." He said, "You know, if you want a nice banjo, you're only ever gonna buy one nice banjo, why don't you have Frank build you a banjo." So I thought well, ok. I went over to Russell Springs, I called Frank and I went over to Russell Springs, and I talked to him. His son Ricky was there that day and we went through all the things I could choose. So I chose the Ebony for the fingerboard, I went through his stack of wood for the neck and picked out the prettiest curly Maple that I could find and I believe that's about the nicest piece of hard Maple you'll ever find. Then, if you look at the back of this sound box here that's about as nice a piece of curly quilted Maple with a sunburst finish that you'll find.

And then, Frank said, "What kind of inlay do you want on it?" I said, I don't know, what are the options? So he started showing me... This is actually a Gibson design. I don't remember precisely...

JW: I don't remember the name right now...

WA: It's an older version... [Raymond, do you remember what that design is?]

[Unknown female responds – Is it Florentine?]

WA: Yeah, it's Florentine. That's what it is. I think that's right, I think it's Florentine. And then he did some interesting things with the purfling on the side for me. So, this is a unique instrument, designed just for Wayne. But now, I don't play Bluegrass anymore, so I was going to give this Jesse, but he told me he was going to buy his own. So now I'm going to give it to Raymond. Raymond can have it because Raymond liked Frank.

The wonderful thing about Frank Neat... I want to tell you a story about that. So I go over there to his shop, and I didn't know what to expect because I had never met the fellow. Raymond had told me about the quality of work that he did. Basically, his shop is in a garage next to his house. I was amazed at the way they do their work because most of it is handwork. They have very modest equipment, so I didn't see a lot of big machinery. The reason is they don't mass produce anything. They produce instruments of high quality. A lot of it is very high quality handwork. So going back to, you've got to have the brain and the hands connected. To me, that's the most exciting part.

Once you understand that you can plan to create whatever you want to create, and then create it. And that's Frank Neat, that's the kind of work that he does. This is truly magnificent instrument. It is a better instrument than I deserve because I tend to play... You can play Clawhammer on here. It has a very different sound of course, right?

15:27-16:17

[WA demonstrates on banjo]

WA: It has a nice big sound.

JW: A big beautiful sound.

WA: A big sound. Different than the old-time open back banjo... So, I'm very proud of the instrument. In fact, I like to let students use it. We've got some students in our program here that can really play the banjo. I like to let them use it occasionally because they can really play it and make it sound like it can sound. Now if we'd sat Raymond down and given him some finger picks, Raymond could make this thing wail.

JW: I've heard it.

WA: So, part of what interests me in all this is that our program here in traditional music has multiple parts to it. And some of this has probably been covered, I don't want to repeat any of that, but I'm excited about preserving the traditions of and around traditional music because this is all part of the fabric of who we are as Appalachian people. Music is part of our lives. It emanated from within the homes and close communities when people had to figure out, how do we entertain ourselves because we didn't have radios and televisions and we couldn't get to town. So people built their own instruments and designed it so that on a Saturday night neighbors got together and played and danced and wonderful traditions came out of that. I love that idea that we pass that on.

You [**Referring to JW**], head up our archives here in the Center and some of that music you play it on Sunday afternoons on the radio for us. Some of it is really interesting to listen to. In some ways it's almost crude but, what I remind myself of is that there are just regular folks like me. No training. They haven't been to music school; they haven't been to banjo school. They were just playing on the back porch singing about life and the stuff going... Cluck Old Hen, you know, out there in the yard hens running around, right? And people picking up on the plucky sound on the banjo. So it's really exciting and interesting that we can help pass these traditions on to youngsters in school today as you all do when you go out and visit and bring school children in, and to our students who are studying here in a serious way because they want to learn about the traditions and then they'll go on and build new traditions. The music continues to evolve. It's really exciting.

JW: It's such a rich area of musicians and luthiers I think, because of the strong musicianship we have here in this area, it's created a need for people who build high quality instruments.

18:50-19:30

And I love that idea. One of my dreams is, as part of our Center for Traditional Music here, at some point in time we'll be able to incorporate...

[Interference – trucks passing by...]

19:31

JW: One of the dreams I have for the future is that we might incorporate some of this work as part of what we do at the Center. I've toyed with the idea that, you know, in retirement, maybe I could work with school children and we could build very simple banjos and dulcimers out of kits. Help kids put them together and then teach them how to play chords and things and then turn them loose and let them see what they can learn. Because we want to keep those traditions alive. It's really important for any of us to have some encouragement when we've got some skills. So if I have any skills in woodworking, it's because along the way people have said to me, "Gosh, you do that pretty well." And then, you know, building an instrument when somebody would say, you know, "That actually sounds pretty good, and

it's a good looking instrument." That's the kind of motivation that helps us go on to say, "I think I'm going to build a different one." I mentioned to you earlier, I've looked at some really pretty ukuleles recently and I think I want to build a ukulele. Pretty simple four stringed instrument. Looks like the chords are pretty easy to find. Maybe we will build one of those and try it over the winter. It's an exciting thing to be part of a Center where we are teaching students in a traditional way about our history and our values and the opportunities, but we're reaching back to make sure folks understand the roots of the music, and we're providing opportunities to bring new folks in, youngsters, who may not know a whole lot about it but like the sound. And, gosh, people just love this kind of music. It's so fun.

JW: Absolutely, it's such a big part of our community... Ken and Buddy Ratliff [**Camera shifts to Raymond McClain**].

WA: Oh good, you're going to have Buddy...

JW: Stevie... Steve is real sick.

WA: What's a matter with Steve?

JW: [...unable to discern words due to banjo tuning on video]

21:38

WA: Now see, Raymond tuned it before he played it. I just played it! You didn't teach me very well.

21:49-21:56

[**RM demonstrates**]

RM: That fluid sound, that crystal clear bell-like... [**Demonstrates**]

22:02

RM: That's the hard thing.

JW: That's beautiful.

RM: Isn't that beautiful? Every banjo doesn't have that...

22:08-22:32

[**RM demonstrates**]

22:33

WA: That sounds nice, doesn't it?

JW: Sounds a lot like your six string...

RM: It has something... That low resonance too...

22:48-22:55

[RM demonstrates]

RM: What do you want to sing?

WA: I don't care. What do we know?

RM: Seems like we have a lot of songs!

WA: Seems like we're always singing something, Raymond.

RM: Pick one.

WA: Let's see. I've got to think about this a little bit now... We could sing, "Will the circle be unbroken."

RM: Let's do that.

WA: We like that song.

23:25-27:52

[RM and WA perform "Will the circle be unbroken"]

WA: Doesn't get any better than that... Thank you, Raymond.

RM: Thank you.

JW: That's it.

WA: Appreciate you playing. That sure sounded good. I think you ought to keep that banjo because you know how to play it.

RM: Aww, you know how to play it.

JW: He needs one...

WA: Well I offered it to him, but he said he wouldn't dare fly it on the plane. He was afraid it'd break again.

JW: What a sad story that is...

WA: But that is a pretty... Did you buy a Frank Neat, or are you going to?

JW: I'm going to.

WA: Are you? A custom one?

JW: No, it's just his Kentucky 75.

WA: Well, let's have a look at that...

JW: That's such a pretty back...

WA: Isn't that beautiful.

JW: That's one of the prettiest banjos I've ever seen.

WA: Well I picked out the wood. He let me pick it out... Will you hold that for a second? [**Hands banjo to RM**].

Frank Neat. Got the old "Neat" right on there. Kentucky 75. Well that's Walnut. No, Mahogany.

JW: Yeah, Mahogany.

WA: He tried to talk me into Walnut.

RM: Really?

WA: From a Walnut tree... What's the place where the big banjo festivals used to be...?

RM: Oh, Bean Blossom?

WA: Yeah, Bean Blossom.

RM: He had some...

WA: He said there was a big Walnut tree right there on that property that came down in a storm or something and he said, "Why don't I build that out of Walnut?" And I said, "No, I want curly Maple."

JW: Yeah.

WA: He said, "Alright, well I've got some."

JW: You made the right choice.

RM: You know, I love the warmth of curly Maple.

JW: Yeah, that's pretty.

WA: Well, as you advised me Raymond, I was only ever really going to buy one good banjo.

RM: Well, you really only have to buy one.

WA: Right.

RM: You can buy more, but...

WA: Jesse, he's the poster child for buying more.

RM: Yeah, I know, me too. I'll tell you... This is a beautiful instrument.

WA: I should get back to playing a little bit on this instrument.

RM: Absolutely.

WA: I don't do it that much, but... thank you.

29:46

[Video stops]