Field School for Cultural Documentation
For the American Music Archives

Researcher’s name: E. Nelson Griffin
Event: interview with Ed Dye
Place: his house, Oxford, Lafayette County, Mississippi
Date: May 21, 2007
Co-workers present: Thom Copeland, sound engineer

This tape log consists material from the interview with Ed Dye at his house, which is north of Oxford, Mississippi in rural Lafayette County, Mississippi near a community known as Coontown Landing. Mr. Dye has been a musician for a number of years and he was interviewed for a project between the Library of Congress’ Fieldschool, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, and also the American Music Archive, which will also be housed a the university. Most of the information concerns Mr. Dye’s musical experience over the course of his life and also his experience with the Oxford music scene since he moved here around 1995.

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[Side One of Tape 1]

--Edwin Dye III, who goes by Ed and will hereafter noted as ED, was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1936. His dad was a trumpet player and bandleader and his mom was singer in a boogie-woogie type band in the early 1930s. His dad worked at a local theatre in Montgomery and he died in early 1938 of spinal meningitis. His mother was left with him and his sister who was a year younger. They moved in with his grandmother and music was a big part of the house. He grew up thinking that everyone played the piano. His house was very liberal and there were mostly women in it. He also inherited his dad record collection, which was very eclectic but had lots of Cuban and Latin music in it. ED remembered seeing the transition from horse and buggy to the automobile. ED loved Hank Williams and got to meet him and listen to him on a regular basis. His parents hated country music like Hank.

--ED noted that his mother was in a group called the Kimball Sisters, which was like the Andrew Sisters, a three-part harmony-singing group that traveled around the country. He noted that this was very influential on his own tastes. ED then went into a dialogue about music and how it is not a common denominator but it is the rhythm [he demonstrated this by singing].

[8:18]
“I still like all kind of stuff---anything with rhythm in it. Because I have always maintained that music is not the common denominator---they say music hooks up all man. That is an axiom that is not true. Chinese music is [makes noises]---which I dig. I was over there and I was fascinated with all that like [makes more noise] but to our ear it is different. But the heartbeat and the rhythm that is a different thing that I think
everyone can identify with---anyway that is just my feeling that music is not the universal language at all.”

[9:29]

--ED didn’t start playing until he was 25 years old. He first played the piano but not very well. He then described growing up and how things are different now. There were no men in his house so it was liberal and he could do what he wanted to. ED also talked about how he got to “defend” the ladies of the house.

[13:09]

--ED also learned to play the ukulele at home, but really learned to play the guitar in the early 1960s. He worked on the back stages of the Ed Sullivan show and others in New York after being in the Navy. ED discussed a little about the TV industry and how he had time during work to learn the guitar. He also named some of the Hillbilly shows that he worked on and mentioned the Louvin Brothers. [dogs are running around] ED talked about going on to Nashville from Alabama.

[17:48]

--ED learned then to play the banjo and later the Dobro and he discussed this path. He then moved on to California and got involved in the “flower power” scene playing bluegrass type music in San Francisco. Many of places he played were beatnik coffee houses. ED also discussed his guitar style called “High Nashville.” He then discussed his first use of the Dobro in clubs in San Francisco. He also learned a lot about the Dobro from Uncle Josh, who was the dobro player for Flatt & Scruggs, and he really influenced the band that ED was playing. [showed us a picture of a banjo player in his band] A lot of the discussion centered around his bluegrass roots.

[26:13]

--ED got into a very detailed description of what a dobro is and how it makes music. The account was very detailed and informative. [used his hands to imitate playing a dobro] ED even knew some of the history of the company that made them. He also talked about the transition to the steel pedal guitar and its confusion with the dobro.

[31:30]

*--ED talked about his move to Oxford and the music scene at the time. He started talking about how many of the blues artists were still alive, but also some of them were dying out too. He noted that Oxford is the worst place in terms of audiences. ED talked about the difference between playing acoustic and electric musicianship. He prefers to play acoustic. He also talked about older clubs around Oxford. [ED got really into his discussion about playing in Oxford and made noises and raised his hands frequently]
“The worst audiences of any place I have ever been has been Oxford, Mississippi because these guys—I guess they are coming out of the Delta or coming out of a place and they have never been trained to what you do when an artist is up there playing—you listen! The guys like—Guy Clark. I have heard him have to admonish an audience and say, ‘Hell I don’t need to be here.’ I saw Mose Allison and it had a high ticket or whatever would be a high ticket nowadays and you would think that the riff raff who stay out and he came out and usually there is applause and there was a smattering of applause and they had put chairs up to the stage there in Larry’s and all these people yakking and he started and they kept yakking—made me crazy—and you couldn’t hear him. And they never did pay any attention to him—the little core that was sitting in those chairs got to hear him—I’ve seen that happen here more than once. The best place to play is somewhere like Taylor {Grocery} where at least someone will listen to you.”

--ED talked about good places to play in Oxford, especially a place called the Harvest. ED worked at Bottletree Bakery and ran into Bela Fleck and Sam Bush and played with them in Oxford. He went into the whole story and he ended up singing on stage with them at a sold out show. This incident got ED known around town in the music scene.

--ED as we flipped the tape we continued to talk about the moment where ED played with Sam Bush and Bela Fleck. ED discussed his move to Nashville, Tennessee and the bands that we “commandeered and [he] would be the traffic cop and the quarterback.” He also talked about the importance of timing in music.

--ED discussed his current musical project called Jang-a-Lang [sp?]. This project is involved in a radio show and plays shows around Mississippi and Alabama. ED played some with Bill Ferris and also local weddings and for the University of Mississippi. ED then mentioned some of the local musicians here in Oxford that he appreciates.

--ED discussed the CD that he gave me. It is called the Nashville Jug Band. He briefly talked about his days as a road manager for Woody Herman. He then mentioned some groups that he worked with and some of the recorded music that he has made over the year. He talked about how he does not archive his material.

--ED talked about the musicianship of players in the bluegrass scene. He decided that he did not want to mention some of the magazines and books on his table that he showed
me. ED very briefly mentioned some of the world famous musicians he met through his world travels. He also talked once again about the importance of live music.

[14:50]

--ED went into a dialogue about music in a metaphysical sense. He was very philosophical about music and its future. This is something that he feels very strong about. He also talked about his expectations when he is in charge of a band. He gave a funny example of someone getting fired from a studio he was in. He then asked if we could turn off the tape recorder.

[End of the Interview]