

NOBLE MELTOW

PT "How did you get started to teach young people this music?"
 NM "Well, I didn't. I didn't quite realize that I was teaching people as it's been brought out, but I s'pose I was. Uh, I started playing the fiddle when I was about 17 years old, I guess. And ~~and~~ I played for several years and then I got a job here in Indianapolis. ~~So~~ ~~at~~, I kinda put the fiddle on the shelf more or less, as far as playing anything steady. So I thought when I retired that I would start playing again, and I did. Got involved with a lot of people, I guess, I guess mostly what they knew would be songs, some traditional, and some weren't. Uh since it's been brought out I guess they didn't really know a lot of fiddle tunes. Perhaps I have taught ~~to~~ a lot of people unknowingly a lot of fiddle tunes. But uh, I've learned a lot myself. Actually, I've learned more tunes since I, retired and started playing actively again, than I knew before uh I didn't really know a, a lot of good fiddle tunes. But I've learned a lot since then. It's been a real pleasure, to me, to play with people like Mack & Terry and some ~~of~~ of the members of the Dulcimer Society that we play with. They've promoted me a lot. Mack talked about all the calls I get to play ~~in~~ all the opportunities I get to play, but I've been promoted by a lot of people, and ~~and~~ its, its been a great pleasure for me."

PT "How long have you been playing with your son?"
 NM "Well, uh Don has played off and on, he's uh, he's never played steady. But he plays the guitar for a while and then he quits for a while and then he'll take it up again for a while. But he plays 3 or 4 instruments."

PT "And fiddle's not one of them?"

NM "No, No he never tried the fiddle, I don't think."

DM "I never really tried to play fiddle."

PT "What else do you play?"

DM "Well from time to time we've had mandolins & banjos. And I play a little bit on the piano. ~~played~~ ^{studied trumpet} for several yrs."

PT "Uh-huh"

DM "I kinda. I didn't really stay with the music. I kinda like it. And kinda get back in once in a while and start playing. My goodness, he's picked up enough fiddle tunes in the last, what, 4 years. I think I'd heard a few tunes. I keep hearing more all the time. I don't know where he gets 'em."

PT "Do you learn any of the melodies from him?"

DM "Not the fiddle tunes. They're, they're pretty hard to play. They're. There's not too many instrumentalists that really handle those too well."

PT "I think maybe you'd try them on the mandolin or something like that."

DM "No, I, I'm not really that good. No, I think that'd take a lot of work. You've heard people do them, you know. Certainly bluegrass players are pretty good with those instruments. They must really study them."

PT "Yeh... So you 1st learned to play in Crawford Co, Ind."

NM "Yeh, I learned from a lot of. Well there were several old-time fiddlers down there. The uh, period of time that I was growing up, string bands & string music was very popular. And they had, they didn't call 'em fiddle bands then but since then, they're, they're known as fiddle bands. A fiddle played the lead part. A fiddle played the tune and every one else accompanied. And, uh, I started out as a part of a band. I was a fiddler in a band. We played regular for a square dance every saturday night. We had a fiddle and a, and a tenor banjo, and a, sometimes a piano, and a guitar, and sometimes we had a set of drums, on various instruments."

PT "You mentioned a steel guitar."

NM "Had a steel guitar. One band I played in had a steel guitar. And"

TB "4 string banjo."

NM "Yeh, 4 string banjo. They're really good for accompaniment."

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NM "And I, and I learned a lot of tunes. ^{from} There were several old-time fiddlers that were good, real good. I learned a lot of tunes off of them. My uncle was an old-time fiddler, and he played a lot of tunes before I learned to play of course. ~~And~~ I just took up the fiddle as a sort of experiment to see what I could do with it. And I found out that I could make a tune on it. So I proceeded to learn a little bit about music so that I'd know what key I was playing in, and, and uh so forth. And within about 2 yrs time from the time I started, in about 2 yrs, I was playing in a band for square dances. I learned a lot of tunes there and I learned tunes on the radio from fiddlers like Clayton McMichen and the Grand Ole Opry, fiddlers on the Grand Ole Opry."

PT "What kind tunes did you use for square dances was it breakdowns."

NM "Just the break downs like Flop-eared mule and Tennessee Wagner, and Soldiers Joy & Ragtime Annie."

PT "Did you have a regular caller with the band?"

NM "No we didn't have a caller with the band. They, the people that put on the square dance always had the caller. They furnished the caller and they hired us to play the music. Well we did, I think that one of the fellows in our band did have a partnership in this dance hall for a while and furnished. He furnished the caller. But usually the people that owned the dance hall and sponsored the dance would furnish the caller."

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NM. "But since I've, since I've started again since my retirement, I've organized 3 bands, part, I was partly an organizer of the White River Bottom band. I guess I helped to get it started. But I organized 2 bands of my own. And like Mack says they sorta like birds that fly the nest. After they learn a little bit, they want to go out on their own. So I have to get another group. But I've played with

Mack & Terry a lot. Off and on. I wish. I wish that we could have a band of our own. But of course, I can't, ~~but~~ You know, I'm not available when they need me and they're not available when I need them. We just play when we can get together."

PT "How often do you perform now. Play out in public?"

NM "Well, in the summertime, all every week, every weekend."

PT "Every Saturday & Sunday & sometimes thru the week."

PT "Festivals?"

NM "Festivals, and square dances."

MB "Last winter we had square dances all winter long and Noble played once a month for those."

NM "But I played. I think I played somewhere this summer every Saturday and a lot of Sunday afternoons & evening. And uh we've had several engagements thru the week. Nights, you know. Actually."

TB

NM "Actually, I have more opportunities to play than I can play. I turn down some good offers, to play."

PT "How often did your fiddle band play back in the early ^{days?}"

NM "In the early days? Every Saturday night."

PT "Dance halls? Not barn dances but regular dance halls?"

NM "Well, old barn dances. Same thing. Square dances..."

PT "Ieh, but I mean was it in somebody's barn?"

NM "No, it was a regular dance hall."

PT "Umm. Then you said you started to go thru some violin methods and learn ^{to read notes?}"

NM "Well I learned to read music ^{well enough} that I can, can learn a tune out of a book or off a sheet music, and learn to play it. It's a great help to a musician. You can learn a tune a lot quicker and learn it a lot better."

PT "What was the name of the method that you used?"

NM "Well I, I went thru several books from the library I think. I think the course that I studied in quite a bit was one by Leopold Auer. He was a teacher and a violinist. Course I don't play classical music

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NM which he taught. He was a teacher of classical music, but uh. Basically you have to use some of the bowing & some of the notating and some of the methods style some of the methods that a classical violinist uses. You're, you're breakdowns are shorter & all that. But they still have some of the same type of bowing and same kind of fingering and all, all like that.

PT "Couple more questions. You told me before that you, you have something else in your retirement ~~that~~ besides fiddling that you devote ~~something else to~~ your time to and that..."

NM "Well, I have a small church out in the country, a rural church in a farm district. ^{that} I serve as their minister, which, I preach for 'em twice a month. Take care of their weddings, their events where they need a minister. Uh doesn't keep me too busy. because, ~~you know~~, they just, you know, they just have a service, worship service twice a month, and on the other 2 sundays I'm not there they have Sunday school and uh, and uh communion. ... But uh, I go down there twice a month and conduct their service for them. Preach the sermon."

PT "What work were you in before you retired?"

NM "I worked in the UniRoyal plant here in town. Make uh, it's a rubber manufacturing firm. They have since sold their plant. To a business man here in town."

PT "How long have you lived in Indianapolis?"

NM "Let's see, ³⁰ little over 30, years I guess. 4 no."

PT "You came..."

NM "Little over 40 yrs, ~~I guess~~."

PT "So you — your family."

NM "Yeh, it's been a little over 40 years. I don't know exactly."

PT "You were probably born here?"

DM "I think it was 1935 I was down in Southern Indiana down in Crawford County. I think 1936 we were up here."

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PT "Oh yeh. I was just informed you won a fiddle contest." Plane

PT "English is the county seat of Crawford County?"

NM "That's the little town that almost got washed away."

PT "That's right."

NM "And it's about 6 miles from where I was born & raised. And uh, I'd been, I guess I'd just started playing for dances about 2 years after I learned to play the fiddle. ~~that~~ I won a fiddler's contest there at English."

PT "Yeh."

NM "The prize was a rocking chair... I don't know where it is anymore. I should've tied a ribbon on it."

PT "How old were you, again, when you started to fiddle?"
~~And that~~

NM "About 17."

PT "And that was in the 20's... I'm just trying to get a time."

NM "Uhh..."

PT "Well, It's yeh. It was around 1930, I guess. Somewhere around. I'm 66 yrs old if that's what your..."

PT "All right, I'll do my math and figure out when it was."

NM "I thought that's what you were running up to. I'm 66 years old."

PT "I wasn't trying to figure out your age I was trying to figure out when you started to fiddle."

NM "I don't... yeh. I was about 18, 17, 19 years old when I started... and that was around 1930."

PT "Are you glad to be retired and able to fiddle more?"

NM "Oh yes, yeh. Uh I'm glad for retirement."

MACK C. TERRY BELNOR
NOBLE MELTON

PT "Now, Noble Melton seems to be a teacher of old-time music, more or less. How does that work?"

TB "The Gray Fox, they call him."

MB "Silver, Silver, Silver Fox."

TB "Silver Fox. I'm sorry, Silver Fox."

MB "How's it work, well see. Here's N.M. who kind of came on the scene, our scene, anyway, 3 or 4 years ago, see, he's been around all this time, but a whole bunch of us didn't know he was around. And then, what happened is, he came on and started playing old-time music and so like some of us had never played old-time music at all. I had not until I 1st played with him at Battleground. Over these last, I'd say, 3, 3 1/2 years, Noble has put together different groups, because he's had, in these last 3 years, you've had umpteen million opportunities to play music, haven't you Noble. Because the more he plays the more people hear him, the more they ask him to come and play someplace or play for a square dance or play for, at a festival or concert or something. He's played at the Hyatt Regency, last year and this year for different things, you know. People just call him up. Well, so he has to have a back up group. Well, from time to time he's known different people that he's put together as a back up group. He's had 3 groups now. And what happens every time is that, that, they, we all tend to learn old-time music, all these fiddle tunes from Noble, and then people get all excited about learning to. You know it's not just rhythm anymore. They want to play themselves. You know mandolin, or guitar, or banjo or whatever. So then they move on out of the fiddle band and go do their own thing. And Noble picks up somebody else some other novice and brings him along and teaches him. And so he's taught gee, I couldn't even number how many people have caught on to and got involved with in traditional fiddle tunes from N.M. in ^{over} just the last in just the 3 years that I've known him. It's been amazing.

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