

"Some Real American Music"  
John Lusk  
and His Rural Black String Band



by  
Linda L. Henry

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GribbleLuskandYork.org

Updated Lusk Family Tree Appendix, 2024



"I am now satisfied," he said to me, "that the future of music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States. When I first came here last year I was impressed with this idea and it has developed into a settled conviction. These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American."

(An excerpt from a *New York Herald* interview of the Director of the National Conservatory of Music, Sunday, May 21, 1893,)

A while ago I suggested that inspiration for truly national music might be derived from the negro melodies or Indian chants. I was led to take this view partly by the fact that the so-called plantation songs are indeed the most striking and appealing melodies that have yet been found on this side of the water, but largely by the observation that this seems to be recognized, though often unconsciously, by most Americans.

(Antonín Dvořák, "Music in America", *Harper's New Monthly*, February, 1895)

Dvořák and a few other composers have indeed made use of negro themes, and the aboriginal Indian music has been seriously treated more than once. But these compositions, however excellent, are no expression of American life and character; they fall as strangely on our ears as any foreign product.

(Emma Bell Miles, "Some Real American Music", *Harper's Monthly*, June, 1904)

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## Preface

This book is an expansion of a 2018 Master's project for the American Studies Graduate Program at UMass Boston. In the Fall of 2017, I drove to Chattanooga hoping to find the names of other black fiddlers who played with the black ragtime fiddler, Andrew Baxter in the early 1900s. After two days of unfruitful and frustrating research, I was getting discouraged. I only had one day left before I needed to return to Massachusetts, and remembered that John Lusk, the black fiddler who brought us the tune, "Altamont," was from Campaign in Warren County. The Magness Library in McMinnville was a little over sixty miles from where I was staying in Chattanooga, so on my last day, I had nothing to lose. After arriving at the library, I made my way to the Genealogy Room, where I was greeted by Cheryl Watson Mingle, the in-house genealogist. She had never heard of John Lusk playing music, but she did know his relatives. She also knew Wayne Wolford, Sr., a local black historian. Within an hour, Wayne was in the library, and had called John Lusk's grandson Charlie so I could speak with him. Cheryl then called John Lusk's niece, Jurrel, who gave me the phone number of her brother, Marschel, who happened to live in Chattanooga. And so it began, a collaboration and friendship with Cheryl Watson Mingle, with Charlie and Georgia Lusk, as well as with my dear friend Theresa Smith, all of whom welcomed me and opened doors to next steps. During the 2017-2018 year of graduate school, I made five trips from Massachusetts to McMinnville. Clare Milliner and Walt Kokan not only provided me with lodging in my travels, they provided me with encouragement and support as to the importance of this project. Holcombe Grier and Hannah Kinney, as well as Mike and Kathy Roguska also provided lodging,

encouragement, and pep talks, as well as more than a few nights of music. Thank you all so much for feeding me and making this project fun!

Special thanks to my UMass professors for believing in me, a retired nurse and old-time fiddler, with no background in American Studies: Judy Smith who always supported me and was determined to make me a better writer; my advisor Rachel Rubin who gave me space, said my project was historically important, and that it was ok that it was different; Jeff Melnick who listened to me in class and never doubted I would succeed; Bonnie Miller who wouldn't let me quit: and Aaron Lecklider who changed my way of thinking.

Thank-you to all the Lusks, the Gribbles, and the Yorks who helped me with this project: Sylvia Lusk, Frances Lusk-McKinley, Harold and Louise Lusk, Jurrel Lusk-Wood, Bertha Gribble-Simpson, Quintina Reed-Smith, Curtis and Rhonda Lusk, and Robert Bonner. I consider you all part of my extended family. Wayne Wolford, thank-you for your advice, "Remember, nobody goes by their real name, and everyone was married twice." Joe Kuhn, thank you for the greatest quote ever, "John Lusk was honest, well thought of, and a good man." Thank-you, Lew Stern, Tim Rowell, and John Reddick for believing in me.

Thank-you to my sons, Ian and Sean Flannery for your love and support. Thank-you to my partner Jerry Dallal for the research assist, tech support and all the intangibles. I couldn't have done it without you.

Linda L. Henry

## Introduction

This project is framed by an argument between Tennessee poet, writer, and artist, Emma Bell Miles and Czechoslovakian composer Antonín Dvořák. In 1892, Dvořák was hired as the Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. As Director, he advocated for the admission of black Americans to the Conservatory because he believed “the future of music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies.”<sup>1</sup> He also wrote, “These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American.”<sup>2</sup> Professor Dvořák continued this line of argument in *Harper's New Monthly* in 1895, in his article, “Music in America.” It was most likely this article that inspired Miles to write her 1904 rebuttal, “Some Real American Music.” Published in *Harper's Monthly*, Miles argued:

Dvorák and a few other composers have indeed made use of negro themes, and the aboriginal Indian music has been seriously treated more than once. But these compositions, however excellent, are no expression of American life and character; they fall as strangely on our ears as any foreign product.<sup>3</sup>

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1. “Real Value of Negro Melodies: Dr. Dvořák Finds In Them the Basis for an American School of Music,” *New York Herald*, May 21, 1893, 28.

2. Ibid.

3. Emma Bell Miles, “Some Real American Music,” *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, June 1904, 118.



African American music historians Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright took note of this article, recognizing that the “[d]iscussion focuses on the argument that genuine American folk music is represented by songs of the white mountaineers from the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee, that black folk songs and Indian music are not representative of the ‘true’ American character.”<sup>4</sup> Miles’ 1905 book, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, included her *Harper’s* article as one of the chapters. Although her book had limited circulation, others who agreed with Miles repeated her argument. For example, Horace Kephart’s 1913 book, *Our Southern Highlanders*, not only cited Miles, but also, like her, promoted the mountaineer and mountain music as white.<sup>5</sup> Race in Appalachia historian John Inscoe wrote critically about Miles’ perspective. Inscoe argued, “Miles displayed remarkable little sense of history in her description of southern mountain life. It seems especially odd that someone who spent so much of her life in and around Chattanooga would have no more sense of the Civil War’s impact than Miles demonstrated in her book...”<sup>6</sup>

Emma Bell Miles was active in circulating the widespread myth that all mountain music is white. The goal of this research is to preserve a piece of African American

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4. Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright, *African-American Traditions in Song, Sermon, Tale, and Dance, 1600s-1920: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature, Collections, and Artworks* (New York-Westport, Connecticut-London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 252.

5. Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and a Study of Life Among the Mountaineers*, New and Enlarged Edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 351.

6. John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 266.

culture that was nearly erased from the rural Appalachian community where it was born. This project explores a group of young African American musicians who lived sixty-five miles northwest of Emma Bell Miles, in Warren County at the western-most edge of the Cumberland Plateau, where they contributed to a rich but nearly forgotten American legacy of rural black string band music.

I have been able to trace the young musicians back to white slaveowners, William Lusk, Thomas Gribble, and Uriah York, who lived on neighboring farms in Warren County. The first “musicianer,”<sup>7</sup> Jeff Lusk, was born into slavery, most likely around 1820 on the farm of William Lusk. Joe “Lewis” Lusk and Mary Mollie Lusk were two of Jeff’s seven known children. “Lewis” was the father of next generation musicians John Lusk and Albert York. Mary Mollie Lusk was the mother of their musical partner, Murphy Gribble.<sup>8</sup> John Lusk on fiddle, Murphy Gribble on banjo, and Albert York on guitar formed the group now known as Gribble, Lusk, and York. These musicians and their string band music were part of the McMinnville musical culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, the history of this group’s “real American music” first began when their enslaved grandfather Jeff Lusk was sent to New Orleans to learn to play fiddle.

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7. Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, 351. Kephart refers to “musicianer” as an example of “mountain dialect”; Paul A Cimballa, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom: An Exploration of an African-American Folk Elite and Cultural Continuity in the Nineteenth-Century Rural South,” *The Journal of Negro History* 80 (1995), 25: Cimballa uses “musicianer” to focus on instrumentalists, rather than the broader term “musician” that includes vocalists.

8. Refer to the “Lusk Family Tree” in the Appendix.

Jeff's grandchildren, Gribble, Lusk, and York, played their distinctive form of square dance music every Saturday for close to thirty years on the same street-corner, busking for white passersby in front of the First National Bank in downtown McMinnville. Some of their street corner repertoire was recorded by Margot Mayo and Stuart Jamieson in 1946 for the Library of Congress. Oneida Simpson-Petit, postmaster and great aunt of Stuart Jamieson, lived in Campaign, the hometown of John Lusk.<sup>9</sup> She had arranged for the recording session for what she called "the best square dance band in that part of the state."<sup>10</sup> Since there was no electricity in Campaign, they recorded at a store near the train depot. No pictures were taken. We only have Jamieson's descriptions of the event. The white men in the audience "were dressed in the usual faded 'dashboard' bib overalls and work shirts tightly buttoned around wrist and neck, and old battered heavy ankle-high workshoes."<sup>11</sup> Describing the musicians, Jamieson continued:

Finally three figures entered, same uniforms on, but more weathered, if possible, soft-brimmed old fedora hats hiding faces bent toward the floor. Dark hands clutched musical instruments; the band was indisputably 'colored.' The first figure was solidly built with a burly frame, of just over medium height; he held an old factory-made banjo with a time-

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9. Walter Womack, *McMinnville at a Milestone, 1810-1960* (McMinnville, Tennessee: Standard Publishing Co. and Womack Printing Co., 1960), 172.

10. Robert S. Jamieson, "Gribble, Lusk and York: Recording a Black Tennessee Stringband," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, 53 (1987): 45.

11. *Ibid.*, 47.

browned skin head. A figure of medium height and frame held a cheap guitar; in the rear a man with a slighter frame and quicker movements than the other two carried a good-looking fiddle.<sup>12</sup>

The music Oneida Simpson-Petit knew, and Jamieson and Mayo recorded, was Gribble, Lusk, and York's public music, the music they played on the street corner to entertain white audiences. The group kept separate "that old stuff," "the way the old folks played," and the tunes known as "sukey jumps." These tunes were played for "black occasions such as kitchen dances, weddings, etc..<sup>13</sup> This kind of music was hidden from "white" ears -- that is, until Stuart Jamieson returned in 1949 and recorded "Easy Rider." In 1964, while doing field work for the Newport Folk Festival, folk music collector Ralph Rinzler recorded more of "that old stuff" when he recorded John Lusk and his son Duncan. On the recording John can be heard attributing some of these tunes to "Murph's father," Will Gribble.<sup>14</sup>

How did three generations of African American musicians and their music survive slavery, survive the failure of Reconstruction, and survive the Jim Crow South? What was distinct about their music? What can we learn from their music and their stories? To

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12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 53; Charles Wolfe & Kip Lornell, *The Life & Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 18.

14. John Lusk, *Rinzler Fieldwork: John Lusk & The Old timers, McMinnville, Tenn; John Lusk & son Duncan, Rock Island, Tenn., 1964*, FP-RINZ-RR-0325.

answer these questions, I will first look at the historiography and culture of Warren County, Tennessee. I will locate these musicians and their families within this local culture, beginning with their enslaved ancestors, and follow them until John Lusk's death in 1969. Then I will look at the history of the largely forgotten southern rural black string band music, and how it was shaped by segregation. I will place Gribble, Lusk, and York within this historical context and discuss their distinct musical contributions. I argue that the music of John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, and Albert York was not only a sustaining source of cultural survival, it was also a representation of what Miles called, "an expression of American life and character."<sup>15</sup> Their music helps dispel the Jim Crow account that only white mountain music was "real" American music. Their music undermines the notion of "racial purity" in Appalachian music, a narrative circulated by white supremacists in the Mountain South that most likely began long before the Civil War ended.

The black musical culture in this history will travel from slavery to sharecropping and tenant farming, from street performing to all-day music parties and Saturday square dances, from moonshine to winemaking, and to manual labor for Walker's Lumber Company. This historical account of the music will by necessity include the struggle for survival for these black Americans who contended with poverty, with marginal literacy, and with the constraints of Jim Crow segregation.

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15. Miles, "Some Real American Music," 118.

Part I: The History  
Early Warren County

The ancestors of William Lusk were Scots-Irish. They emigrated from Ulster, Ireland to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania around 1730. Following the Great Road south down the Blue Ridge Mountains, they eventually settled in Washington County, Virginia, the heart of the Cumberland Mountains in Appalachia. William Loury Lusk (or William Lusk, III), born in 1774, moved with his wife and family to Warren County, Tennessee between 1800 and 1810.<sup>16</sup> The ancestors of Thomas Gribble were also Scots-Irish. They emigrated from Devon, England to Pennsylvania, then south to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Thomas Gribble, born in 1776, along with his wife Hannah and their children, moved to Warren County, Tennessee in 1814.<sup>17</sup> William Lusk and Thomas Gribble were Presbyterians and were both buried in Cumberland Presbyterian Church's Shiloh Cemetery in Rock Island, not far from where both families lived.

According to the 1820 United States Federal Census, Thomas Gribble owned three slaves. According to the 1850 and 1860 U. S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules, two of Thomas Gribble's children, John (Carmack) Gribble and Andrew (Jack) Jackson Gribble,

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16. Penelope Johnson Allen, "Leaves from Family Tree - Lusk," *William Joseph Lusk Family Papers* (Chattanooga: Tenn. Society D. A. R., April 22, 1934); "Goodspeed's History of Warren County," Warren County, TNGenWeb, last modified January 19, 2018. <http://tngenweb.org/warren/goodspeeds-history-of-warren-county/>.

17. Thomas Gray Webb, "The Gribble Family of Warren County Tennessee," in *Early Virginia Settlers with Middle Tennessee Connections* (Smithville, Tennessee: Justin Porter Library, 2009) 257-271.

were slave owners, as well. Carmack had a “slave family” and was Murphy Gribble’s white grandfather; Jack’s son John Morgan Gribble was Georgia Gribble’s white father. Georgia Gribble-Lusk was both the sister-in-law of John Martin Lusk, and the grandmother of the Charles K. Wolfe’s informant, Maggie Belle Gribble-Woods.<sup>18</sup>

According to the same 1820 United States Federal Census, William Lusk owned two slaves. By the 1840 Census, he owned eleven slaves. Three of these enslaved males were between the ages of ten and thirty-five. Jeff Lusk was most likely one of these slaves. Country music historian Charles K. Wolfe’s 1977 interviews with both John Lusk’s grandniece Maggie Belle and his son Duncan suggested that Lusk’s grandfather, the slave we now know as Jeff Lusk, was sent to New Orleans during the 1840s to learn to play fiddle. Wolfe commented that, “This appears to have been a common practice in the region.”<sup>19</sup> In 1845, roundtrip passenger steamboat travel via the Cumberland River from Nashville to New Orleans took fifteen days.<sup>20</sup> The Caney Fork River in Middle Tennessee is a major tributary of the Cumberland River and runs close-by Warren County.

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18. Ibid.; Refer to the “Lusk Family Tree” in the Appendix.

19. Charles Wolfe, *Altamont: Black Stringband Music from the Library of Congress*, record insert (Cambridge: Rounder Records Corp., 1989); Charles K. Wolfe, “Davy Crockett’s Dance and Old Hickory’s Fandango,” *The Devil’s Box*, September 1982, 40.

20. Byrd Douglas, *Steamboatin’ on the Cumberland* (Nashville: Tennessee Book Company, 1961) 68.

Southern Appalachia historian Wilma Dunaway described the living conditions of the mountain slaves as far worse than other Southern slaves, with higher incidences of malnutrition, chronic hunger, and overcrowding. Poor sanitary conditions resulted in barefoot enslaved children playing in feces-contaminated dirt leading to infestations of worms and parasites.<sup>21</sup> Living conditions were only part of the story. Dunaway also found that “Mountain masters meted out the two most severe forms of punishment to slaves much more frequently than their counterparts in other Southern regions.”<sup>22</sup>

These punishments included the practices of selling family members and the use of excessive corporal punishment.<sup>23</sup> African American literary critic and cultural historian Saidiya V. Hartman uncovered another practice used for controlling a group of slaves: “Innocent amusements were designed to promote gaiety by prudent means, ameliorate the harsh conditions of slavery, make the body more productive and tractable, and secure the submission of the enslaved by the successful harnessing of the body.”<sup>24</sup>

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21. Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93, 109.

22. Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 241-242.

23. Ibid., 242.

24. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43.



Whatever the intentions of the slaveowners, for the enslaved Jeff Lusk, playing fiddle offered the hope of better treatment and better living conditions. American South historian Paul Cimbala explains:

...musicians enjoyed more freedom of movement than the average slave, because they received passes to travel to and perform at various white social functions. While performing their art, they escaped constant white supervision, earned a steady if small source of income, gained confidence and self-respect, and generally loosened their personal bonds of slavery.<sup>25</sup>

A fiddler was important to the slave culture and community, on small as well as large farms. Most of the slaveowners in Warren County were small planters; that is, they had fewer than twenty slaves. They needed to use slave labor to compete in the commercial marketplace, a step up from subsistence agriculture.<sup>26</sup> They wanted to have fiddle music available for their own entertainment, and to have some control over slave amusements. Eileen Southern found an 1851 article in *DuBow's Review*, "Management of Negroes," that quoted a wealthy planter: "I have a good fiddler, and keep him well supplied with catgut, and I make it his duty to play for the Negroes every Saturday night until

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25. Cimbala, "Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom," 16.

26. John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, Susan H. Armitage, *Out Of Many: A History of the American People*, Combined Volume – Eighth Edition. (Boston, Columbus, etc.: Pearson Education, Inc., 2016), 216.

twelve o'clock....'"<sup>27</sup> Southern also found evidence that small planters made use of fiddlers: "A 'small planter' admits to having 'a fiddle in my quarters, and though some of my good old brethren in church would think hard of me, yet I allow dancing; ay, I buy the fiddle and encourage it....'"<sup>28</sup> An ex-slave from Sparta in neighboring White County remembered, "Yes, I have danced many a reel. We would have fiddles and banjos [*sic*]. We had a big time then. The Christian folks would have suppers. They wouldn't dance."<sup>29</sup> Another slave narrative documented Saturday night music and dancing in the mountain South: "In Warren County, Tennessee, the black community had 'some kind of doin's every Saturday night.'"<sup>30</sup>

#### The Frolic

"Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present."<sup>31</sup>

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27. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 167

28. Ibid.

29. Ophelia Settle Egypt, *Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Accounts of Negro Ex-slaves*, NCR Microcard Editions (Nashville, Washington: Fisk University, Social Science Institute, 1968), 110.

30. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 213.

31. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

The enslaved from Africa brought with them many separate traditions, as well as many separate languages.<sup>32</sup> Separated from their homes and families, these slaves were able to create their own surprisingly unified culture, a culture that became an agent for survival. The frolic was an integral part of this culture. Saturday was the designated day of recreation for the enslaved, and the frolic was the acceptable slave-community activity throughout the rural South.<sup>33</sup> The frolic consisted of the “musicianers” (also called “secular ministers”), the dancers, and the audience.<sup>34</sup> Much like the preacher was the leader of the congregation, the musicianers were the leaders of the frolic, sometimes using a “make-shift stage that allowed them to be heard and seen above the crowd.”<sup>35</sup> This elevated stage became a platform that encouraged the musicians to perfect their musical and performance skills. The frolic, in the form of a “fish fry,” continued to exist in Warren County well into the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> The tradition of the Saturday

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32. Ibid., 3.

33. Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through songs, sermons and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 47.

34. Cimbala, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom, 15.

35. Ibid. 17

36. Theresa Wood-Smith, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Family Friend of Murph Gribble*, Telephonic, November 28, 2017; Theresa Wood-Smith, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Family Friend of Murph Gribble*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 5, 2018; Robert “Bob” Bonner, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Step-grandson of Lucius “Coon” Gribble*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 6, 2018; Jurrel Lusk-Wood, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Niece of John Lusk, Daughter of William “Bud” Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 6, 2018; Cimbala, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom,” 15.

“fish fry,” a setting where music could flourish, took place at Murphy Gribble’s home in the community of Shady Rest.<sup>37</sup>

After emancipation, the frolic (or “fish fry”) continued to be a community building activity. Frolics lasted all day on Saturdays. Cimbala’s research revealed that “[e]x- slaves and their children gathered to gossip, feast, play ball, listen to and make speeches, and of course, dance to the tunes of their musicianers.”<sup>38</sup> The frolic also provided a venue for the musicianers to teach the next generation their fiddle, banjo, and guitar skills. Cimballa wrote:

The practice of an older generation of musicians passing on their skills and songs to a younger one certainly outlived the last slave musicianer. Rural black musicians continued to teach their children, grandchildren, and friends, serving as a repository for the community’s musical tradition well into the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

The Lusk family exemplified this practice. The art of fiddling, and possibly “trick fiddling,” passed through three generations in Warren County: From Jeff Lusk, to his son Lewis Lusk, most likely to his future son-in-law Will Gribble and to Will’s brother Andrew; then from Lewis and Will to their sons, John Lusk and Murphy Gribble.<sup>40</sup>

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37. Bertha Gribble-Simpson, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Granddaughter of Murphy Gribble*, Telephonic, January 28, 2018.

38. Cimbala, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom,” 22.

39. Ibid.

During the Charles Wolfe interviews, Duncan Lusk revealed that his “daddy” John Lusk was a “trick fiddler,” “he’d put the fiddle up over his head and play as good as an’thing right there, put it behind him and play it like that. I never seen nothin’ like it.”<sup>41</sup> According to Maggie Belle, referring to John and his siblings (Nora, Bud, Floyd, and Beulah), “Every one of them could play a musical instrument...the whole family, I mean the girls wasn’t left out, all of ‘em could play somethin’, some of ‘em played banjo, some of ‘em guitar, some of ‘em fiddle.”<sup>42</sup> According to Duncan, his father played fiddle, banjo and guitar; his uncle Murph played both fiddle and banjo. Duncan reflected, “When one got tired of playing fiddle they would switch off.”<sup>43</sup> In a recent interview, octogenarians Theresa Smith and Robert Bonner recalled that Murph’s brothers, Coon and Jessie,

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40. Duncan Lusk, son of John Lusk, interview by Charles K. Wolfe, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*, Campaign, TN, 1977; John Lusk, *Rinzler Fieldwork: John Lusk, alone and with Duncan*, 1964 FP-RINZ-RR-0326; Thomas G. Webb, “John Gribble,” *The Gribble Family of Warren County, Tennessee* (Smithville, Tennessee, 1991), 6-7.

41. D. Lusk, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

42. Maggie Belle Gribble-Woods, Grandniece of John Lusk, interview by Charles K. Wolfe, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*, Campaign, TN, 1977.

43. D. Lusk, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

also played music at the Saturday “fish fry.”<sup>44</sup> Albert York, John’s half-brother, played both guitar and banjo, as he demonstrated on the 1946 and 1949 recordings.<sup>45</sup>

### The Church

Sunday church services were the spiritual counterpart to the Saturday frolic. Cimbala tells us that for the most part, they peacefully coexisted.<sup>46</sup> And without exception, the Lusks, the Gribbles, and the Yorks all have ties, both past and present, to the Church of Christ, a fundamentalist religion that believed in immersion, with local roots in the Old Philadelphia Church in McMinnville. Established in 1810, this early church accepted the enslaved when they attended worship with their slave-owners. However, after 1865, and for the next thirty years, the freedmen, freedwomen and their children were denied admission.<sup>47</sup>

McMinnville was in the direct path of the Second Great Awakening, as well as the Restoration Movement of Presbyterian Barton Stone and Christian Baptist Alexander

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44. Bonner, *Step-grandson of Lucius “Coon” Gribble*; Wood-Smith, *Family Friend of Murph Gribble*, 2018.

45. John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, Albert York. *Jamieson-Mayo Library of Congress Recordings of the John Lusk Band*, 1946; Gribble, Lusk, and York, *Robert Stuart Jamieson Wire Collection*, 1949.

46. Cimbala, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom,” 15-16.

47. James A. Dillon, Jr., “Old Philadelphia Church,” *History of the Restoration Movement*, April 25, 1986, [http://www.therestorationmovement.com/\\_states/tennessee/oldphilhist.htm](http://www.therestorationmovement.com/_states/tennessee/oldphilhist.htm); Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee: 1791-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press in Cooperation with The Tennessee Historical Commission, 1981), 167.

Campbell in the early 1830s. The Second Great Awakening was responsible for camp meeting revivals, with week-long preaching and hymn singing. The Restoration Movement touted a mission to “restore” the New Testament church. Stone and Campbell eventually split; the more primitive Campbell group became the Church of Christ. These churches were more conservative than the Old Philadelphia Church. They were “non-institutional,” meaning they did not use church funds to support missionary societies, and they were “non-instrumental,” meaning they did not accompany hymn-singing in their worship services with an organ or piano.<sup>48</sup>

When the Civil War ended, blacks established their own “safe” places for worship.<sup>49</sup> African American historian Wali Kharif explained further, “With few public accommodations available to rural African Americans, churches filled that communal void. Churches proved significant because, in most cases, they were the only institution wholly under black control.”<sup>50</sup> The black church was the center of fellowship, as well as the support community for the Lusk, Gribble and York families well into the mid-twentieth

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48. Larry Whiteaker, “Saints, Sinners, and Dinners on the Grounds: The Religious Legacy of the Upper Cumberland,” in *Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland*, eds. Michael E. Birdwell and W. Calvin Dickinson (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 57-58; Paul K. Conkin, “Evangelicals, Fugitives, and Hillbillies: Tennessee’s Impact on American National Culture,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54 (1995): 253.

49. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 44-45.

50. Wali R. Kharif, “Slavery, Freedom, and Citizenship: African American Contributions to the Upper Cumberland,” in *Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland*, eds. Michael E. Birdwell and W. Calvin Dickinson (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004) 113.

century and beyond. The influence of the acapella church music can be seen in the all-secular repertoire of Gribble, Lusk, and York.

### The Economy

Economic circumstances were dire for the emancipated slaves of Warren County. One historian wrote about a single father who left his children alone in a mud shack to look for work, returning after several weeks with only two sacks of food he had stolen. Another historian recounted how an ex-slave was forced to work off payment for the clothes he was wearing when he was emancipated. If children were abandoned, the Freedman's Bureau forced them into a kind of indentured servitude.<sup>51</sup> To avoid starvation and to keep their families together, many ex-slaves had no choice but to return to their former owners to work as sharecroppers or if they could pay rent, as tenant farmers.

The 1880 census did not distinguish between these types of farming. Some continued working as servants. Jeff and Lewis Lusk were listed as "farmers"; Will Gribble, who lived with his father, the former slaveowner John Carmack Gribble, was listed as a "servant." John Carmack Gribble died in 1894.<sup>52</sup> The 1900 census listed Will

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51. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 222-225; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Updated Edition (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-New Delhi-Auckland: HarperPerennial ModernClassics, 2014), 131.

52. Webb, "John Gribble," *The Gribble Family of Warren County, Tennessee*.



Gribble's occupation as "farm labor." John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, and Albert York continued the farming tradition throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In 1946, the year of their first recording, Lusk and York each lived in a 16x24 sharecropper's shack; John Lusk lived with his family, Albert York lived alone.<sup>53</sup> Murphy Gribble owned his own land.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1870s, Warren County's farms produced a variety of crops for consumption and sale, and other crops for local manufacture. In J. B. Killebrew's *Resources of Tennessee*, Warren County's 1,372 farms produced crops such as corn ("the leading crop"),<sup>55</sup> wheat, potatoes, oats, seeds, sorghum, and tobacco; dairy products such as milk, cheese, and butter; orchards with as many as thirty-two varieties of apples; and nurseries for exporting flowers and plants. One 1874 account emphasized the local specialty: "The wild muscadine (grape) grows luxuriantly and yields an abundant harvest."<sup>56</sup> Warren County also exported brandy and whiskey; sheets of cotton fabric, linens, and jeans; leather from five different tanneries; flour from six different mills; and lumber.

By the time of the national economic collapse of 1893, the Warren County mills began to close, and the exportation of spirits started to decline. Local historian Walter

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53. Jamieson, "Gribble, Lusk and York," 51.

54. Gribble-Simpson, *Granddaughter of Murph Gribble*.

55. J. B. Killebrew, *Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville, Tenn: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1874), 966.

56. Ibid.

Womack argued, “The spread of insects and disease in the orchards, together with ‘the moral standards of the people of Warren county’ resulted in the termination of the brandy industry long before the days of prohibition.”<sup>57</sup> National prohibition, passed in 1920, created new local demand for alcohol. After returning from WWI, Murphy Gribble used this opportunity to make his own contribution to the local economy. He used his land in “Dogtown,” also called the community of Shady Rest, for his home distilleries. He specialized in moonshine, as well as muscadine and apple wines, all made without electricity and without running water.<sup>58</sup> White southerners from the area knew they might be able to find illegal alcohol across the color line. The African American journalist and author Carl T. Rowan, who grew up in McMinnville, offered his perspective looking back from 1943, “Jim Crow was all I had known. For all the years that I had lived in the shadow of the Cumberland Mountains, two things were always certain: racial segregation and a steady stream of moonshine liquor out of the hills.”<sup>59</sup>

#### The Politics

“The Negro is the Mordecai who constantly reminds them of their defeat, and of what they call a ‘just, but lost cause.’ And the sight of him in the enjoyment of freedom is a constant source of irritation.”<sup>60</sup>

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57. Womack, *McMinnville at a Milestone*, 284.

58. Jamieson, “Gribble, Lusk and York,” 51-52; Theresa Wood-Smith interview, 2018; Bertha Gribble-Simpson interview, 2018.

59. Carl T. Rowan, *South of Freedom* (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 7.

60. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, First Free Press Edition (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: The Free Press, 1998), 574. Du Bois used this quote from the Report of the *Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, published in 1866.

Warren County, made up of small to medium-sized farms with comparatively few slaves, sat between the Union sympathizers close to the mountains to the East, and the Confederate sympathizers to the West. Because Tennessee had become Union-occupied before the Emancipation Proclamation, it was excluded from the Proclamation's provisions. Tennessee's own emancipation statute was passed in 1865 when the Civil War ended.<sup>61</sup> The town of McMinnville had divided loyalties, but the Confederate loyalists were by far in the majority. One local historian observed, "Those who remained loyal to the Union endeavored to 'take over and operate' the town and county, but they were so small in number that their weight was ineffective."<sup>62</sup> In his 306-page *McMinnville at a Milestone: 1810-1960*, Walter Womack referred to Negro slaves four times. Otherwise, Warren County African Americans did not appear in his historical account. It's not surprising that the music of the Lusks, the Gribbles, and Albert York disappeared from the county history, as well.

Historian Eric Foner noted that the white supremacy social club, the Ku Klux Klan, was founded in Tennessee. The Klan spread from Tennessee to every southern state, launching a "reign of terror" against Republican leaders, black and white.<sup>63</sup> Its mission was to keep blacks out of politics and schools, and encourage permanent second-class status by keeping black labor limited to sharecropping or tenant farming. Between 1866 and 1869,

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61. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 12-13, 43-44.

62. Womack, *McMinnville at a Milestone*, 273.

63. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 342.

the Klan harassed and intimidated black rural Tennessee families, serving as the military enforcement arm of white supremacy and the Democratic party.<sup>64</sup> In 1868, Rev. William Baker claimed in his booklet, *A Concise Description of Middle Tennessee*, "Such a thing as the Ku Klux Klan is not known here."<sup>65</sup> Local historian Larry C. Boyd portrayed a different scenario in his essay on the Klan in *The Warren County Story*:

The so-called reconstruction era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was an unhappy one for McMinnville and the rest of the South not only because of Yankee economics and political policy, but also because of indigenous varmints who preyed upon the weak. These bullies gained courage by being part of the mob. Some of them excused their crimes by attending church services. But it is doubtful they read much of the Book, which says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." The Klansmen brought shame on their community and churches as they brought dishonor upon themselves.<sup>66</sup>

Warren County was not among the more violent counties in the state. However, after Republican Governor William Brownlow resigned in 1869 to serve in Washington, what little protections had existed for the newly freed slaves was no longer available.<sup>67</sup> The increase in racial

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64. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 39.

65. Rev. William Baker, *A Concise Description of Middle Tennessee* (McMinnville, Tenn: Wm. Baker & Son Printers, 1868) 7.

66. Eugene M. Wiseman, *The Warren County Story* (Franklin, NC: Genealogy Publishing Service, 1995) 25.

67. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 425, 439-440.

terror designed to establish and police the color line made the work of the black musicians even more important. Once again, as during slavery, the “musicianers” played a subversive role,” when they actively nurtured resistance to the white domination of the black soul.”<sup>68</sup>

Lynchings were rare in Warren County, much like other agricultural communities. Sociologist and Anthropologist Robert P. Stuckert reported that in the Mountain South, as opposed to urban areas, “the larger the black proportion of the population, the *lower* the rate of lynching.”<sup>69</sup> The hanging of York Douglas on April 17, 1896, was the only documented lynching in McMinnville, as well as the entirety of Warren County.<sup>70</sup> Still, the United Klans of America continued to list a chapter in McMinnville, even as late as 2017. John Lusk’s grandson, Charlie Lusk, was aware of the Klan’s presence.<sup>71</sup> The reestablishment of the color line left generations of black residents excluded from good schooling and economic opportunities beyond agricultural labor. Even after WWII, Carl T. Rowan remembered:

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68. Cimbala, “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom,” 20.

69. Robert P. Stuckert, “Racial Violence in Southern Appalachia, 1880-1940,” *Appalachian Heritage* 20 (1992): 38.

70. NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States: 1889-1918*. pamphlet (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919), 93.

71. Natalie Allison, “Southern Poverty Law Center: These are 38 hate groups that operate in Tennessee,” *Tennessean*, August 14, 2017, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2017/08/14/tennessee-home-38-white-nationalist-neo-nazi-kkk-and-hate-groups-according-splc/566459001/>; Charles Lusk, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Grandson of John Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, November 9, 2017.

And McMinnville Negroes still do not go to the tax-supported public library, ask for a book, and sit down and read. If Negro pupils want books, their teachers must go get the books and bring them out to the pupils. Skating is still something Negroes do on sidewalks or not at all. And when a street is blocked off for square dancing, Negroes watch from a distance.<sup>72</sup>

Still, local black citizens learned what they could, sometimes informally and from each other. According to the 1930 United States Federal Census, Albert York never attended school, but he could read and write. According to the 1940 United States Federal Census records, John Lusk completed the fourth grade, Murphy Gribble completed the second grade. All three musicians were identified as “farmers” or “farm labor.” For all three, busking on the street corner by the First National Bank every Saturday, as well as playing for white square dances, provided needed supplemental income.

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72. Rowan, *South of Freedom*, 26.

## Part II: The Music

### The Rural Black String Band

“A great number of young people met together with a fiddle and banjo played by two Negroes, with Plenty of Toddy, which both Men and Woman seemed very fond of. I believe they have danced and drunk till there are few sober people amongst them.”<sup>73</sup>

This observation from a twenty-four-year-old British man, Nicholas Cresswell, provided the first documented account of black string band music in the colonies, describing music he heard while traveling along the St. Mary's River in Maryland in 1774. As early as 1799, black street performers with instruments started to appear on Sundays at Congo Square in New Orleans. At first there were slaves and free blacks with fiddles and fifes, later banjos and an assortment of other instruments appeared.<sup>74</sup> Col. James R. Creecy reported during his 1834 visit to New Orleans, “Groups of fifties and hundreds may be seen in different sections of the square, with banjos, tom-toms, violins, jawbones, triangles, and various other instruments from which harsh or dulcet sounds may be extracted.”<sup>75</sup> By 1851, the Sunday music in Congo Square was gone, but not before Jeff Lusk arrived in the 1840s to learn to play fiddle.

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73. Nicholas Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell: 1774-1777* (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), 30.

74. Joseph R. Roach, “Deep Skin: Reconstructing Congo Square,” in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, eds. David Krasner, Jr. and Harry J. Elam (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101-113; Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 229; James R. Creecy, *Scenes in the South and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1860), 18-23.

75. Creecy, *Scenes in the South, and Other Miscellaneous Pieces*, 20-21.

The enslaved Africans brought the knowledge of some form of both fiddle and banjo with them from West Africa.<sup>76</sup> Musicologist Dena Epstein found documentation of slaves fiddling for dances in Virginia as early as the 1690s;<sup>77</sup> she cited references to the “banjer” in runaway slave notices found in Virginia as early as 1754.<sup>78</sup> Cresswell was the first to document the two instruments being played together by black musicians for a dance. A fiddle could either be hand-made from pine board or a gourd;<sup>79</sup> or sometimes a European violin was provided by the slaveowner. A banjo was fretless at that time, and could be hand-made from a gourd or “a piece of timber fashioned like a cheesebox.”<sup>80</sup> A guitar had frets and was not easily handmade.<sup>81</sup> Accounting for the lack of guitars in early Appalachia, Mike Seeger explained, “The 19<sup>th</sup>-century guitar was more expensive, fragile, and needed to be professionally made.”<sup>82</sup>

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76. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia written in 1781* (Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832), 147; Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “The (Mis) Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10 (2016): 13.

77. Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Music to the Civil War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 80.

78. Ibid. 34.

79. John Minton, “West African Fiddles in Deep East Texas,” in *Juneteenth Texas: Essays in African American Folklore*, eds. Patrick B. Mullen, Alan B. Govenar, Francis E. Abernathy (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 295; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 172.

80. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 172

81. Mike Seeger, *Early Southern Guitar Sounds*, compact disc booklet (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2007), 10.

82. Ibid., 11.



Banjo historian Robert B. Winans summarized and graphed, "References to Musical Instruments in the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives." This set of data was collected in the 1930s; the informants were ex-slaves who were born between 1830 and 1860. In Tennessee, there were four mentions of a fiddle (compared with 205 in total throughout the fifteen southern states), five mentions of a banjo (compared with 106 in total), three mentions of a jew's harp (compared with 6 in total), two mentions of percussion (compared with 75 in total), one mention of quills/panpipes (compared with 30 in total), and one mention of musical bow (compared with 2 in total). There were no mentions of a guitar in Tennessee (compared with 15 in total). Fiddle had the most overall mentions, with banjo second, and percussion third.<sup>83</sup> Winans pointed out, "Percussion, as a general category, includes the references to patting (as distinguished from mere clapping), drum-like instruments (usually tin pans and buckets), bones, actual drums, tambourine, and jawbone."<sup>84</sup>

White string bands in the Upper Cumberland before the turn of the twentieth century consisted of "the fiddler." After 1900, the fiddle was joined by a banjo, a guitar and/or sometimes a mandolin.<sup>85</sup> Old-time music discographer Chris Durman provided a picture of the traditional black string band that also included a lone fiddler: "Solo performers are more likely to play for dancers, as might banjo duos, guitar and fiddle

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83. Robert B. Winans, "Black Instrumental Music Traditions in the Ex-slave Narratives," *Black Music Research Journal* 10 (1990): 43-44.

84. *Ibid.*, 43.

85. Charles K. Wolfe, "'Old Cumberland Land': The Musical Legacy of the Upper Cumberland," in *Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland*, 288.

duos, groups comprised of a fiddle and one or more percussionists, or groups comprised of a banjo and one or more percussionists.”<sup>86</sup> Percussion and the syncopated rhythm is what set apart the black string band from its white counterpart.<sup>87</sup> W. C. Handy, the son of slaves and sometimes called the *Father of the Blues*, related a slave story told by his grandfather in rural Alabama, “A boy would stand behind the fiddler with a pair of knitting needles in his hands. From this position the youngster would reach around the fiddler’s left shoulder and beat on the strings in the manner of a snare drummer.”<sup>88</sup>

Eileen Southern explained the percussive and syncopated patting, or “pattin’ juba,” as “foot tapping, hand clapping, and thigh slapping, all in precise rhythm,”<sup>89</sup> to provide dance music when the fiddler needed a rest. Sometimes the fiddlers and the banjo players would provide percussion by stomping their feet in concert with the audience “pattin’ juba.”<sup>90</sup> Syncopation also found its way to the bowing patterns of black fiddlers, and ultimately influenced southern white fiddling.<sup>91</sup> Based on his research,

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86. Chris LH Durman, “African American Old-Time String Band Music: A Selective Discography,” *Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, June 2008), [http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_musipubs/5](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_musipubs/5), 799.

87. Ibid.

88. W. C. Handy, *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1941), 5.

89. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 168.

90. Ibid., 315.

91. Paul F. Wells, “Fiddling as an Avenue of Black-White Musical Interchange,” *Black Music Research Journal* 23 (2003): 145

folklorist and fiddle tune historian Alan Jabbour argued, “The syncopated (bowing) patterns are an African American contribution to folk fiddling---and ultimately through fiddling, to the popular music idiom of the civilization at large.”<sup>92</sup> As cities and urban centers grew in the late 1800s to early 1900s, rural black string band music began to fade, giving rise to blues fiddle (if only for a brief period), blues guitar, and ragtime piano.<sup>93</sup> It was during this period that John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, and Albert York, with their square dance tunes, street performing, and Saturday frolics in rural Warren County, were just getting started.

With Rural Free Delivery and the mail-order catalogue, guitars, as well as factory-made banjos, fiddles, and an assortment of other instruments, became affordable and accessible.<sup>94</sup> A guitar with a spruce top and steel strings sold for \$1.89 in the 1908 *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue*; the cost of a banjo started at \$2.25; and the price for a Maggini-style fiddle, much like the one John Lusk played for sixty years (Fig. 1), was \$4.25. This price included case, bow, rosin, instruction book, fingerboard chart, and an extra set of steel strings.<sup>95</sup>

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92 Alan Jabbour, “Fiddle Music,” in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Harold Brunvand (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 255.

93. Wells, “Fiddling as an Avenue of Black-White Musical Interchange,” 145; Marshall Wyatt, *Violin, Sing The Blues For Me: African-American Fiddlers 1926-1949*, compact disc booklet (Raleigh: Old Hat Records, 1999).

94. Dennis R. Davis, “Guitars,” *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, updated March 1, 1986, <http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/entry.php?rec=103>.

95. Sears, Roebuck & Co., 1908 *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2015), 152-160.

Gribble, Lusk, and York

“That music doesn’t sound like anything I’ve ever heard.”<sup>96</sup>

Gribble, Lusk, and York were never commercially recorded. They were isolated by economics, by geography, and by race. Record companies in the 1920s had reorganized not only the categories of popular music, but also the public’s perception of the music. “Race records” were marketed to blacks and were primarily blues and rag-time. Black artists were not allowed to record cross-over tunes and songs that were recorded by white old-time string bands.<sup>97</sup> “Old-time records” featured dance music, played by white musicians. According to Charles Wolfe, this included “fiddle bands, banjo tunes, sentimental songs, and a few religious pieces.”<sup>98</sup> There was little room in the recording industry for a black square dance band. Furthermore, the recording companies gave local retailers the option of which records to advertise, thus maintaining the Jim Crow color line in the South.<sup>99</sup>

Old-time music came before bluegrass. In bluegrass, each instrument takes a solo “break,” much like in jazz; in old-time, all the instruments play at the same time, with the

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96. Charles Wolfe, “Black String Bands: A Few Notes on a Lost Cause,” *The Old-Time Herald*, Fall 1987, 15. Wolfe quoted C. F. Lyons, a record producer from Chicago. When Lyons was asked by Uncle Dave Macon to give a black string band the opportunity to record, Lyons said, “No,” for the reason quoted.

97. Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 188.

98. Charles Wolfe, “Rural Black String Band Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 10 (1990): 33.

99. Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 206-207.

fiddles and banjos playing in unison while the guitar and other instruments play rhythm. Stuart Jamieson, recorder of the Gribble, Lusk, and York band in '46 and '49, described the "traditional" southern old-time sound:

In America the fiddle had come first, playing all alone for dances. It concentrated on playing the tune, adding sliding two-note "double-stop" sounds and often intricate embroiderings of vocal-style decorations. The banjo joined later, constrained by its right-hand patterns to playing the strong melody notes, hinting at the others with its off-beat clang chunk-a chords, rhythmically reiterated thumb string notes, gratuitous non-melodic notes filling in the spaces. But it followed the melody, and stayed with it; the melody was its guideline. Later, when guitars joined in they used bass note-chord patterns too, sometimes playing a run of bass notes to change from one chord to another, but they too stayed strictly on the beat. In this tradition the tune was the twin rails that led the bands around the tracks; the crossties of the beat were spaced evenly.<sup>100</sup>

Then, Jamieson began to describe the music of Gribble, Lusk, and York. Neither Jamieson nor Margot Mayo had ever heard music like this before. This is the only first-hand description of the group's music:

The fiddle did not always lead the melody, but passed it to the banjo, like runners passing the baton. Half the time the melody was played by the

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100. Jamieson, "Gribble, Lusk and York," 49.

banjo, the fiddle moaning low rhythmic chords, over and over. Suddenly, at the second part of the tune, the fiddle would leap into an upper octave, with a wild cry, and take over the burden of the tune. The banjo would then play a loose and free polyphonic obbligato around a rudimentary suggestion of the melody, ranging far away melodically, omitting strong downbeats, dancing a different step rhythmically—and this was most radical of all for banjo—not hitting all the upbeats and downbeats, with sudden startling gaps and hesitations. Even when the banjo took over the lower-octave half of the tune, and its wildness was somewhat subdued by the demands of the melody, it produced a rolling syncopation like a jazz beat. Down below all, the guitar produced steady deep heartbeats, like the throb of a great engine in the bowels of a ship, laying down the full chords that defined the threshing floor upon which fiddle and banjo leaped and soared.<sup>101</sup>

### John Lusk

John Lusk never called himself the leader of the group, but usually the fiddler is the leader and calls the tunes. Black fiddling has been described as “‘rough,’ ‘scraping,’ ‘sawing,’ and ‘jerky,’ which was distinct from ‘smooth,’ ‘clear,’ or ‘notey’ to describe fiddling identified with whites.”<sup>102</sup> Lusk was a virtuoso and fell somewhere between

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101. Ibid.

102. Dje Dje, “The (Mis) Representation of African American Music,” 13.

these two descriptions. His son Duncan said “it was a gift.”<sup>103</sup> When Charles Wolfe asked John Lusk’s grandniece Maggie Belle if Lusk played blues, Maggie Belle said, “No, no-no-no, strictly old-time music.”<sup>104</sup> When Wolfe questioned Duncan, Duncan said, “Yeah, he played blues on the fiddle, he could play anything.”<sup>105</sup>

John Lusk assigned names for his different fiddle tunings. For example, “Sambo” was not only the name of a tune, but also a way of tuning his fiddle. Standard violin tuning is GDAE (low to high strings). “Sambo” tuning is AEAE, also called “high bass, high counter,” or the key of “A.” This tuning is also called “cross A” tuning and was brought to the colonies from Scotland. The Scottish called it “drone” or “bagpipe” tuning. The version of “Sambo” recorded in 1946 was a different and more archaic sounding tune than the version recorded in 1949. This later version, also called “Sambo,” is the tune commonly known as “Old Time Fire on the Mountain.” Perhaps Lusk called this later version “Sambo” because he played it in the “Sambo” tuning. Another example of Lusk’s use of “scordatura tuning,” that is tuning other than standard, is “Apple Blossom” tuning. This tuning, ADAE, also called “high bass” tuning or the key of “D,” was used to play the tunes, “Apple Blossom,” “Across the Sea,” and “Eighth of January.”<sup>106</sup> It is

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103. D. Lusk, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

104. Gribble-Woods, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

105. D. Lusk, *646 Interviews about John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

106. John Lusk, Murph Gribble, Albert York, *Jamieson-Mayo Library of Congress Recordings of the John Lusk Band, 1946: 8510A; Gribble, Lusk, and York, Robert Stuart Jamieson Wire Collection, 1949: AFC 1977/001*.

important to remember, that no one in the band used a tuner. So, the tunings, whether standard or scordatura, were relative. Most of their tunes were played in standard tuning, in the keys we know as “G” or “C.”

### Murphy Gribble

Murphy Gribble described his own banjo style as “broke-legged rhythm.”<sup>107</sup> Gribble said he had “been playing that style since before 1914, and said that was the way black folks always played.”<sup>108</sup> Banjoist and old-time music historian Walt Koken gives his assessment of Gribble’s playing:

He's playing a three-finger style with some indexfinger lead on the lower part, very similar to what Earl Scruggs’s right hand is doing at the beginning of “Foggy Mountain Breakdown.” On the high part he's doing some thumb lead rolls with the lead starting on the fifth string. Sort of a pre-bluegrass old-time finger picking style. On the other cuts it's pretty hard to decipher his playing. I suspect it's finger style, although some cuts could be frailing. In any case, his playing is very complementary to the fiddle tunes.<sup>109</sup>

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107. Jamieson, “Gribble, Lusk and York,” 55

108. Robert Stuart Jamieson, “Letter to Joseph C. Hickerson, Head of Archive of Folk Song, The Library of Congress,” *Robert Stuart Jamieson Wire Collection*, Washington, D. C.: Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, 1977, 1.

109. Walt Koken, email to Linda L. Henry, April 29, 2018.



The three-finger style Koken was referring to uses the thumb and two fingers; and “frailing” is similar to “clawhammer” banjo. Murphy Gribble’s style predates the “Scruggs style” by at least twenty years.

### Albert York

Albert York “held up the universe” with his guitar.<sup>110</sup> Documentation on his style is woefully absent. If you listen to “Smoke behind the Clouds,” you can hear York playing the bass, or root, note with an occasional short bass run. He seems to be playing a “boom-chuck” rhythm. Interestingly, York also seems to be playing only the “root” chord throughout this tune, but it works, and his rhythm is impeccable.<sup>111</sup> Most likely he used a flat pick. Albert York also provided texture to the group. In the ’46 recording by Jamieson and Mayo, he played banjo and sang “Song like Smoke Behind the Clouds,” as labeled by Stuart Jamieson. Walt Koken reminds us that the song was actually “Here Rattler Here,” “an old standard with floating verses interchangeable with dozens of songs.”<sup>112</sup> Regarding York’s banjo style, Koken continues:

It is difficult to determine if he is picking down in the stroke, thimble, down-picking, frailing, or clawhammer style, or if he is playing in what is sometimes

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110. Anecdotally, this phrase describing the role of the old-time guitar player has been attributed to Bennett Hammond.

111. The root chord for a tune played in the key of “G” would be the “G” chord. The root note would be a “G” note.

112. Walt Koken, email message to author, October 2, 2018

called “stillhand” style, in which a player would pick the first note upwards, and then brush downward with one or more fingers, followed by a “lick” on the fifth string with the thumb, making the typical “bum-ditty” rhythm, the same notes as in the stroke style. He also occasionally does a strum followed by an actual downbeat on the fifth string by the thumb, a technique from minstrel days, played by such old timers as Tom “Clarence” Ashley, and sometimes referred to by modern players as the “Galax” lick.<sup>113</sup>

During the ‘49 recording, Albert York showed more of his musical diversity by playing a solo finger-picking rag-time guitar on “Easy Rider.”<sup>114</sup>

### Their Repertoire

Much of the group’s public repertoire mirrored white string band music: “Across the Sea,” “Apple Blossom,” “Billy in the Low Ground,” “Broken-Legged Chicken,” “Chinese Breakdown,” “Christmas Eve,” “Cincinnati,” “Cripple Creek,” “Eighth of January,” “Hen Cackled,” “Ida Red,” “New Five Cents,” “Old Time Breakdown” (aka “Give the Fiddler a Dram” or “Dance All Night”), “Smoke Behind the Clouds,” “Sourwood Mountain,” “Tennessee Wagoner,” and “Turkey in the Straw.” With their distinct versions, Gribble, Lusk, and York made these tunes their own. Other tunes reflected a more personal black string band tradition: “Altamont,” “Easy Rider,” “Jenny

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113. Ibid.

114. Gribble, Lusk, and York, *Robert Stuart Jamieson Wire Collection*.

Eat the Wood Hen," "Johnson's Girl," "Old Joe, Where'd You Get Your Religion," "Old Sage Friend," "Pateroller'll Catch You," "Rabbit in the Brush," "Rolling River," and "Running in the White Oaks."<sup>115</sup>

After Murphy Gribble died in 1950, and Albert York in 1953, John Lusk continued to play for square dances on Saturdays with his son Duncan on guitar.<sup>116</sup> Duncan, who worked for Walker's Lumber Company during the week, oftentimes played with the larger group, developing a guitar style much like that of Albert York's. The duo played most of the old repertoire. In 1964, Ralph Rinzler was able to record additional tunes, that included "Blue Eyes," several unnamed tunes, and three tunes that John Lusk said he learned from "Murph's father." One of these tunes was a tune that Murph's father called "A Feelin' Piece," which has a syncopated, almost blues sound to it. Another one of these tunes was "Old Sage Friend," possibly the oldest family tune that both the larger group and the duo played.<sup>117</sup> Not only did John Lusk learn "Old Sage Friend" from Murph's father, Will Gribble, it was also said to be a "signature piece" played by John Lusk's grandfather, Jeff Lusk.<sup>118</sup>

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115. John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, Albert York, *Jamieson-Mayo Library of Congress Recordings of the John Lusk Band*; Gribble, Lusk, and York, *Robert Stuart Jamieson Wire Collection*; J. Lusk, *Rinzler Fieldwork: John Lusk & The Old Timers* and *John Lusk & son Duncan*; Gribble-Woods, *646 Interviews About John Lusk and Murph Gribble*; D. Lusk, *646 Interviews About John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.

116. C. Lusk, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Grandson of John Lusk*, Telephonic, October 6, 2017; C. Lusk, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Grandson of John Lusk*, Telephonic, November 29, 2017.

117. J. Lusk, *Rinzler Fieldwork*.

118. Wolfe, *Altamont: Black Stringband Music from the Library of Congress*.

## Conclusion

### We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, And  
mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise, In  
counting all our tears and sighs? Nay,  
let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.<sup>119</sup>

John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, and Albert York were family. As band members, they never played alone after Murphy Gribble returned from WWI, and they never let down their guard.<sup>120</sup> During the recording session in 1946, all three wore hats that hid their faces. Stuart Jamieson noticed that the hats remained in place throughout the session. He was concerned for them because not one person in the white audience was wearing a hat. Then it “hit” Jamieson that “they were not making themselves at home!”<sup>121</sup> Jamieson thought they “were pretending they were not really there.”<sup>122</sup> He may have been right. But, was their mask the fedora hats, or was it the music?

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119. Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), 167.

120. Jamieson, “Gribble, Lusk and York,” 54.

121. Ibid, 48.

122. Ibid.

Through primary research that included oral histories and observations, as well as secondary research that included raw audio recordings, interviews, compact disc and record liner notes, scholarly works, local historiography, and public documents, I found that music was not only an agent and sustaining source of cultural survival for three generations of African Americans, it was also their protection. I was able to put names on the enslaved ancestors of John Lusk, Murphy Gribble, and Albert York, and I was able to find that the three musicians shared one grandfather, a man named Jeff, who was born into slavery. Jeff Lusk started a Lusk-Gribble-York family tradition of fiddling and string band music, a tradition that exemplified what Emma Bell Miles called, "American life and character."<sup>123</sup> I worked with John Lusk's grandchildren, Charlie, Frances, Sylvia, Harold, and Curtis, as well as Murphy Gribble's granddaughter, Bertha, to begin the unmasking process of uncovering the family history. They had never heard the Library of Congress recordings of their grandfather. John Lusk's nephew Marschel, his niece Jurrel, and octogenarians Theresa Smith and Robert Bonner, along with Murph's granddaughter, Bertha, helped uncover details about the music and the memories of the Saturday square dance, the "fish fry," and the moonshine. Albert York's great-grandniece Quintina Reed-Smith filled in the picture of the York-Gribble survival, with Albert York's sister Syotha, Murphy Gribble's cousin Marty, and Albert York's son William, following the Great Migration to the coal mines of Kentucky and West Virginia.<sup>124</sup>

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123. Miles, "Some Real American Music," 118.

124. Quintina Reed-Smith, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Great-grandniece of Albert York*, Telephonic, January 21, 2018

John Lusk's fiddle (Fig. 1) has become emblematic of the Americanness of this family. Continued research may uncover Murphy Gribble's banjo and Albert York's guitar, as well as unlock more keys to their histories. Recently, John Lusk's grandson, Harold Lusk, shared a memory of his father Duncan playing music informally around the house with his grandfather. At the request of Harold's mother, Ada Rosena Lusk, John and Duncan would play one of Ada's favorites, "Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor."<sup>125</sup> Continued research may uncover additional tunes played informally by John Lusk, adding insight to the "private" music played by the last African American square dance fiddler in Warren County.

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125. Harold Lusk, interview with Linda L. Henry, *Grandson of John Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, March 17, 2018.



Fig. 1

The label inside this fiddle reads, “Henri Farny 1908.” Beginning around 1908, the Wurlitzer Company started importing medium grade violins from Europe, placing the “Henri Farny” label inside, then selling them through the *Sears, Roebuck & Company Catalogue*.<sup>126</sup> This is John Lusk’s fiddle that John’s son James hung on his wall after John died. After James died, his brother Robert locked it in his attic for safe keeping. Robert’s daughter Sylvia is now the keeper of the fiddle.<sup>127</sup>

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126. Mathew Fritz, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Director of Sales and Acquisitions at Carriage House Violins*, Telephonic, November 14, 2017.

127. C. Lusk, *Grandson of John Lusk*, November 9, 2017; Sylvia Lusk, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Granddaughter of John Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, November 10, 2018.

## Appendix: Lusk Family Tree

Updated March 1, 2024. A special thank you to Cheryl Watson-Mingle and Paul Kirk Jr.

- All births, marriages, and deaths are in and around Warren County, Tennessee, unless otherwise stated.
- \*\* or \*\*\* indicates the name appears again in more detail.
- **The musicians are in bold.**
- *CKW Informant*: Charles K. Wolfe from his 1977 taped interview.
- *LLH Informant*: Linda L. Henry from her 2017-2018 interviews.

**J. L. (Jeff) Lusk** (b. 1820, d. 1891) [Most likely enslaved by William Loury Lusk (b. 1819, d. 1871)<sup>128</sup>, and most likely sent to New Orleans to learn to play fiddle]

m. Mary (Lottie) Higginbottom-Lusk (b. 1830, d. 1910) [Deeded from Martin Earls to Samuel E. Higginbotham in 1849]<sup>129</sup>

**I. Lewis (Joe Lewis) Lusk (Lush, Luck, Lurk)** (b. 1854, d. 1937) [lived in Van Buren County in 1880, Warren County in 1900] "Played music," according to Marschel Lusk, who was told by his mother, Annie Ester Fuston-Lusk.

m. (1880) Mary Malissa (Lizzie) Woods-Lusk (Lurk) (b. 1862, d. 1920)

**I. Lenora Belle (Lena Bella, Lena Belle) "Nora", "Belle"**<sup>130</sup>  
**Lusk-Gribble** (b. 1876, d. 1942)

m. (1911) **Murphy Gribble** (b. 1892, d. 1950)

Manella (Manilla) Mae (May) Lusk-Shockley  
(b. 1906, d. 1951) [Murphy's stepdaughter]

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128. According to the 1860 U.S. Federal Census-Slave Schedules, W. L. Lusk in Warren County enumerated a thirty-year-old male slave.

129. According to the 1860 U.S. Federal Census-Slave Schedules, Aaron Higginbottom (son of Samuel E. Higginbottom or Higginbotham) enumerated a twenty-year-old female slave, most likely Mary. In the Appendix: Land Transfers, p. 407 of Wiseman's Warren County Story, "Deed from Martin Earls to Samuel E. Higginbotham dated Feb. 14, 1949 for 542 acres on the Collins river; along with three negroes: Mary, Abram and King; six horses; one wagon; and various livestock and household goods."

130. Gribble-Woods, *646 Interviews About John Lusk and Murph Gribble*.



**II. William T. (W. T., Wm.) “Bud”<sup>131</sup> Lusk** (b. 1870, d. 1946)

m. (1900) Minnie Mai (Mammie) Martin-Lusk (b. 1878, d. 1931)

m. (1932) Anna (Annie) Ester Fuston-Lusk (b. 1901, d. 1969)

1. John Lewis Lusk (b. 1933, d. 1977)

2. Cora Lusk-Clark (b. 1936)

3. Marschel Lusk (b. 1938) (Vietnam Vet)<sup>132</sup> *LLH Informant*

4. Jurrel (Jewel, Jarrel) Dean Lusk-Wood  
(b. 1942) *LLH Informant*

Theresa Wood-Smith (b. 1931) [Jurrel’s  
sister-in-law] *LLH Informant*

**III. Allen Floyd (Floid) Lusk** (b. 1883, d. 1939)

m. (1909) Georgia E. Annabelle Gribble-Lusk (b. 1885, d. 1957)

nm. Frank Sparkman (b. 1874, d. 1936)

Collie Gribble (b. 1901, d. 1942)

m. (1937) Virginia (Jenny, Jennye)  
Starkey-Gribble-Wright (b. 1910, d. 1950)

1. Maggie Belle Gribble-Woods  
(b. 1938, d. 2009) *CKW Informant*

2. Larry Quinton Gribble  
(b. 1940, d. 1983)

**IV. Beulah Etta Lusk-Carr** (b. 1884, d. 1941)

m. (1913) Will Carr (b. 1882, d. 1971)

**V. John Martin Lusk** (b. 1889, d. 1969) \*\*

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131. Ibid.

132. Welford, Sr., *Through Wolf’s Eyes*, 27.

**Lewis (Joe Lewis) Lusk (Lush, Luck, Lurk)** (b. 1854, d. 1937)  
[lived in Van Buren County in 1880, Warren County in 1900]

nm. Siotha Viola York-Herd (Heard) (b. 1863) [lived in  
Van Buren County in 1880, Warren County in 1900.  
m. Henry Heard (Herd) 1897]

VI. **Albert York** (Herd) (b. 1884, d. 1953)

m. (1915) Lena Woods-York (b. 1895, d. 1929)

William J. "Cateye"<sup>133</sup> York (b. 1917, d. 1991) In  
1940, lived in Big Creek, McDowell, WV. Died in  
Cleveland, OH.

m. Elizabeth Harris-York (b. 1920 in  
WV, d. 1970 in Mercer County, WV)

William York Junior (William,  
James William, or James W York)  
(b. 1938 in Hartwell, McDowell,  
WV, d. 1997 in Baltimore, MD)

m. (1929) Flora Grayson-York-Woods (b. 1913, d. 1957)

VII. **James (Jim) York** (Herd) (b. 1890 or 1896, d. 1918) (WWI  
Casualty)<sup>134</sup>

m. (1917) Octa (Octie) Woods-Gribble-Martin-York  
(b. 1892)

VIII. **Syotha** (Siotha, Ciotha, Sythia, Syother, Syothy, Sciotha)  
York (Herd)-Gribble (b. 1894, d. 1964 in Cleveland, Ohio)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

m. (1906) Martin (Mart, Marty, Martie, Martie) Gribble  
(b. 1888, d. 1944 in McDowell, WV)

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133. Reed-Smith, *Great-grandniece of Albert York*. Quintina Smith reports William was called "Cateye" because "his eyes were so light you could see through them."

134. Welford, Sr., *Through Wolf's Eyes*, 33.

**J.L. (Jeff) Lusk** (b. 1820, d. bef 1900)

m. Mary (Lottie) Higginbottom-Lusk (b. 1830, d. bef 1920)

I. **I.ewis (Joe Lewis) Lusk (Lush, Luck, Lurk)** (b. 1854, d. 1937)

II. Mary Mollie (Mallie, Kuher) Lusk (Lush, Luck, Lurk)- Gribble  
(b. 1866, d. 1930)

(1897) **Will (Bill, Wilse, William L., Will L.D., W.L.D., W.L., Illy,  
Illie) Gribble** (b. 1853, d. 1900)<sup>135</sup>

I. Willis P. Gribble (b. 1883)

m. (1908) Octa Woods-Gribble (b. 1892)

II. **Murphy Gribble** (Gribble) (b.1892, d. 1950) (WWI Vet)<sup>136</sup>

m. (1911) **Lenora Belle (Lena Bella, Lena Belle, Nora)  
Lusk-Gribble** (b. 1876, d. 1942)

Manella (Manilla) Mae (May) Lusk-Shockley  
(b. 1906, d. 1951) [Murphy's stepdaughter]

nm. Mary Elizabeth "Dovie" Hunter-Gribble (b. 1905,  
d. 1993)

Millie Mildred Gribble-Faulk-Hambrick  
(b. 1943, d. 2013)

Bertha Gribble-Simpson (b. 1968) *LLH  
Informant*

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135. Webb, *The Gribble Family of Warren County, Tennessee*, 266. Both **William "Wilse"** and his brother **Andrew "Gilley"** (b. 1852) played fiddle. They were two of the five enslaved children fathered by the white slaver John "Carmack" Gribble (son of Thomas, brother of A. J. - see note 141). Wilse and Gilley taught John Carmack's son **Hollis "Holly"** (b. 1858, d. 1940) to play fiddle. According to the 1870 U. S. census, William (black) and Andrew (mulatto) lived with their father John Carmack as servants. In 1880, William was still listed as a servant in that home. Andrew no longer appeared on any census role.

136. Wolford, Sr., *Through Wolf's Eyes*, 25.

III. **Louis (Loise, Lucius) E. "Coon"**<sup>137</sup> **Gribble** (b. 1893, d. 1944)

m. (1905) Ida Ramsey-Bonner-Gribble (1<sup>st</sup> husband Pope Bonner d. 1910)

Thomas Harrison Bonner (b. 1903, d. 1940)

m. Frances Martin-Bonner (b. 1905, d. 2001)

Robert Edward Bonner (b. 1931, d. 2021) *LLH Informant*

IV. **Jessie (Jess, Jesse) Gribble** (b. 1902, d. 1945)

m. (1922) Retha (Eautha) Hunter (b. 1905)

**\*\* John Martin Lusk (Lurk, Luck)** (b. 1889, d. 1969)

m. (1911) Missie (Mary M.) Bartley (b. 1890, d. 1914)

I. Allie Mae Bartley-Cline (Kline)<sup>138</sup> (b. 1910, d. 1980)

m. (1929) (Roy) Herbert Cline (Kline)<sup>139</sup> (b. 1907, d. 1999)

II. Willie Etta (Etter) (Willetta) Lusk-Carr (b. 1914, d. 1953)

m. (1935) Jesse (Jessie, Jess) Carr (b. 1906, d. 1986)

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137. Robert "Bub" Bonner, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Step-grandson of Lucius "Coon" Gribble*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 6, 2018. Robert Bonner reports he only knew his step-grandfather as "Coon" Gribble.

138. Sylvia Lusk, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Granddaughter of John Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 6, 2018.

139. Ibid.

**III. Frank Duncan Lusk** (b. 1915, d. 1993), *CKW Informant*

m. (1936) Ada Rosena Starkey-Lusk (b. 1914, d. 2008)

1. Howard Franklin "Sampson" Lusk<sup>140</sup> (b. 1937, d. 2002)
2. Vera Lusk-Thomas (b. 1939, d. 2018)
3. Johnnie Lusk-Dillard (b. 1942)
4. Juanita Lusk-Taylor (b. 1944), *CKW Informant*
5. James Leonard "Flint" Lusk<sup>141</sup> (b. 1945, d. 2015)
6. Charles Sr. "Charlie" Lusk (b. 1948) Vietnam Vet<sup>142</sup> *LLH Informant*

Pam King (co-author "Turning Bad Times into Good Times")

m. Georgia Strode-Lusk, *LLH Informant*

Charles Jr. (C.J.)

7. **Harold Buford Lusk** (b. 1951), *LLH Informant*
8. Donald Lennis Lusk (b. 1954, d. 2006)
9. **Jerry E. Lusk** (b. 1955)
10. **Curtis Eugene Lusk** (b. 1957), *LLH Informant*

m. (1923) Lena (Lener) Evelyn Martin-Lusk (b. 1905, d. 1973)

**IV. Sarah (Sally) Frances Lusk-Cline** (b. 1926, d. 2007)

m. Johnnie (John H.) Cline (Kline) (b. 1917, d. 1999)

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140. Wolford, Sr., *Through Wolf's Eyes*, 327

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid. 27.

V. Velma Ruth Lusk-Williams (b. 1937, d. 2015)

nm. Larry Quinton Gribble (b. 1940, d. 1983)

Martha Frances Lusk-McKinley (b. 1964) *LLH Informant*

m. Bartow Williams (b. 1933, d. 2014)

VI. Robert Kewen Lusk (Luck), Sr. (b. 1941, d. 2013) Vietnam Vet<sup>143</sup>

m. (1964) Linda Gale Martin-Lusk (Luck) (b. 1945, d. 2017)

1. Robert Lusk, Jr. (b. 1965)

2. Roderick (b. 1967)

3. Chandler (b.1977)

4. Sylvia Lusk (b. 1979) *LLH Informant*

5. Tristan (b. 1983)

VII. James Eldridge Lusk (b. 1944, d. 2009) Vietnam Vet<sup>144</sup>

m. (1968) Peggy Ann Darter-Lusk (b. 1944, d. 2000)

\*\*\* Nancy Gribble (b. 1840 or 1880) [most likely enslaved by Andrew Jackson Gribble]

Lucinda (Lusindy, Cinda, Loucinda, Lusie, Rinda, Sindy) Gribble-Looper (Loofer)  
(b. 1861-1963, d. after 1940 in Big Creek, McDowell, WV) [m. Granville Looper,  
1903]

nm. John Morgan Gribble (b. 1862)<sup>145</sup>

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143. Ibid.

144. Ibid.

145. Reed-Smith, *Great-grandniece of Albert York*. Quintina Smith reports the father of Georgia and Marty was white and from a slave-owning family. According to census records, there was a John Morgan Gribble in Warren County (b. 1862, d. 1921), whose father was Andrew Jackson (A. J.) Gribble, owner of two female slaves, ages thirty and four, as listed on the 1860 Slave-Schedules. Marty Gribble's death record listed a John Gribble as his father, Lucinda Looper as his mother.

I. Georgia Gribble-Lusk (b. 1885, d. 1957)  
[m. (1909) Allen Floyd (Floid) Lusk, b. 1883, d. 1939]<sup>146</sup>

nm. Frank Sparkman (b. 1874, d. 1936)

Collie Gribble (b. 1901, d. 1942)

m. (1937) Virginia (Jenny, Jennye) Starkey-Gribble-  
Wright (b. 1910, d. 1950)

1. Maggie Belle Gribble-Woods (b. 1938,  
d. 2009) *CKW Informant*

2. Larry Quinton Gribble (b. 1940,  
d. 1983)

nm. Velma Lusk (b. 1938, d. 2015)

Martha Frances Lusk-McKinley (b.  
1964) *LLH Informant*.

II. Martin (Mart, Marty, Martie, Marttie) Gribble (b. 1888, d. 1942 in  
Big Creek, McDowell, WV)<sup>147</sup>

m. (1906) Syotha (Siotha, Ciotha, Sythia, Syother, Syothy,  
Sciotha) York (Herd)-Gribble (b. 1894 or 1894, d. 1964 in  
Cleveland, Ohio)

Martelia (Matelia) Gribble-Reed (b. 1909, d. 1947 in Big  
Creek, McDowell, WV)

Lovie Reed (b. 1930 in Big Creek, WV)

Quintina Reed-Smith (b. 1965) *LLH  
Informant*

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146. Frances Lusk-McKinley, interview by Linda L. Henry, *Granddaughter of John Lusk*, McMinnville, Tennessee, January 6, 2018. Frances McKinley reports Georgia “raised” Maggie Belle and Larry Quinton Gribble.

147. Reed-Smith, *Great-grandniece of Albert York*. Quintina Smith reports that Marty was very light-skinned and “passed” for white, which allowed him to live in and manage a company house for the coal company.



Fig. 2

circa 1950: John Lusk, Velma Lusk, Sally Cline, Johnnie Cline (back), Lena Lusk  
Courtesy of Martha Frances Lusk-McKinley



Fig. 3

circa 1967: Martha Frances Lusk, John Lusk, Robert Lusk, Jr.  
Courtesy of Silvia Lusk





Fig. 4

circa 1968: John Lusk  
Courtesy of Martha Frances Lusk-McKinley

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