Earl Scruggs Museum and Story Map

When initially considering the topic for my paper, my ideas were limited. The name Earl Scruggs was the only historical "topic" within my hometown that has a museum. As the project continued, the topic of Earl Scruggs was not enough, after some conversations with family members who had a more local perspective of Scruggs, I decided to expand my topic by considering the impact Earl Scruggs had on banjo music well into today. Considering my audience all live in the Appalachian area, I was fairly confident my audience had been exposed, at one point or another, to bluegrass music. I wanted to dive deeper into specifics, learning about Scruggs forward roll technique and what exactly that meant. My sources available lied majorly in newspaper clipping uploaded to online databases. Most of these papers covered when Scruggs had visited their college campuses to perform. It was through these newspaper clippings that I was able to learn more about "grass-rock", something I was unaware Scruggs incorporated into his music.[1] With my available sources, I was able to find more information on Scruggs wife, Louise. Though Scruggs has become a common name in the Cleveland-Rutherford County area, Louise was not. After asking relatives, they knew little about her as well, but upon further research Louise Scruggs was a very unique lady who pioneered music management in the fifties.[2] Utilizing all of this information, helped me expand on my topic idea.

My first issue occurred when I realized I had too many slides according to the guidelines, so some heavy editing was required. However, I think the StoryMap itself helped the presentation, as it followed Scruggs career, really highlighting Scruggs' regional travels, primarily staying in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virgina.

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[1] "New Scruggs Brings Grass-Rock", Gardner-Webb University Student Newspaper, September 5, 1974, https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/2015236562/1974-09-05/ed-1/seq-1/#pageinformation

[2] Wade Allen, "Earl Scruggs Center Hosts Standing Her Ground Exhibit", Gaston Gazette, 2020, https://www.gastongazette.com/story/entertainment/music/2020/02/18/earl-scruggs-center-hosts-standin....

The intended argument of my Storymap presentation was that Earl Scruggs, or the 'Banjo Man' was instrumental in popularizing and progressing the bluegrass genre, by pioneering 'Scruggs Style Picking', a style primarily used in Bluegrass today. I wanted this to be my argument for the presentation, because the main message I wanted to send was that Scruggs himself was crucial to the bluegrass genre. I wanted to do this because, although a lot of students around this area have been exposed to some type of bluegrass music, most people do not know a lot about Earl Scruggs, or any history to come out of Cleveland County. By being able to present Earl Scruggs to the class, I was able to demonstrate his banjo playing through the use of StoryMap and inform others about someone from my small county.

My research started when our class was moved to the library to find Storymap sources. From there I utilized the App State library website to just search Earl Scruggs and find secondary sources. I also checked the database JSTOR for any secondary sources about Scruggs impact on bluegrass, so that I could have a fully developed understanding of Scruggs life. After the collection of secondary sources, I started to look at primary source databases like DigitalNC. By using online archives I was able to find newspaper clippings and pictures, many from the Country Music Hall of Fame Archive. I think I was most surprised that the Country Music Hall had so many primary sources about Earl Scruggs, it was through that database I was able to find the most information about Lousie, as well as see many promotional posters from Scruggs time with Monroe, the Foggy Mountain Boys, and the Earl Scruggs Revue. The most helpful of the resources would have been the newspaper clippings. It was useful because the newspapers could be used as primary source pictures on my Storymap while simultaneously I could read the content and see what was being said about Scruggs at the time. It was through the use of newspapers that I was able to learn more about the Earl Scruggs Revue, and the term

'grass-rock', as well as how it was incorporated into the Revue's music.[3] Another resource that was helpful in my research would be both the Earl Scruggs Center website, as well as the Earl Scruggs Center in person. By using the website archive I was able to get good primary source pictures for my StoryMap, while the actual exhibit had lots of great content for me to fully understand Scruggs impact. The museum had an exhibit that featured some writings from Earl Scruggs himself, while I could not find a way to exhibit that in my Story Map presentation, I still thought it was helpful nonetheless.

When completing this project, some of my biggest challenges were technological. StoryMap was a new platform I had not used before, and I am not naturally adapted to technology like many of my peers, because of this I had to mess up my StoryMap many times before I liked the way it presented. Other than technology, I did not have many research obstacles as I was lucky that my topic had a plethora of resources to choose from.

If I had more time to work on my StoryMap presentation I would most likely change two things. I would expand my map to look outward past the regional, looking at more national long term effects. Another thing I would change, in terms of content, is I would have wanted to speak with or conduct an interview with J.T. Scruggs, Earl Scruggs' nephew who ran into a family member of mine, where he learned about this project, and offered (it is a very small town, and he happened to work with my grandfather). J.T.'s father is pictured in my story map presentation with Earl, holding a guitar. Unfortunately this came just two days before the final presentation, when I felt it was too late to make permanent changes to the presentation.

[3] "New Scruggs Brings Grass-Rock", 1974.

Though my topic mainly concerns itself with local history, it is important to the field of public history itself, because one can look past local to national levels. By examining the effects of Earl Scruggs picking patterns on the Bluegrass genre, one can analyze how the genre itself has progressed, as well as its importance in American tradition as it remains prominent throughout the Great American Songbook. One could also also explain the influences in today's folk-country revival, and how Scruggs influence is still being perceived in music today. By drawing links to modern popular culture and Scruggs music history, one could push for more civic engagement.[4]

By looking at international history, the banjo originated in Africa and had to travel to America for Earl Scruggs to play and develop. By looking at these different "historical traces" found in Scruggs' biography, a topic introduced in *Nearby History,* Chapter Three, one is able to understand the importance of this topic, as public historians or interested audience members could expand on this topic from local to international proportions.[5]

In Chapter seven of *Introduction to Public History*, the use of public memory is discussed, mainly referencing attacks on civil rights for minorities during World War II. The text references public memory when referring to uncomfortable history, but one can still examine the public memory when it comes to local history.[6] The Earl Scruggs Center in Shelby, North Carolina was opened in 2014, just two years after the death of Earl Scruggs. The Center was created to honor Scruggs' memory as well as his impact on the Bluegrass genre. The Center

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[4] Cherstin M. Lyon, Elizabeth M. Nix, and Rebecca K. Shrum, Introduction to *Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2017), 120, https://appstate-bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781442272231/epubcfi/6/30[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dx16_914_Ch06]!/4[x16_914_Ch06]/2[_idContainer067]/62/1:599[s%20h%2Cope].

[5] David E. Kyvig, and Marty A. Myron, A Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You, 3rd Edition. (RL Publishing, 2010), 2, https://asulearn.appstate.edu/pluginfile.php/5984293/mod_resource/content/1/nearby%20history%20ch3.pdf.

[6] Lyon, Nix, and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, 33.

itself is an excellent example of public memory as most locals have some "story" about Earl Scruggs.

Something important about Scruggs' is that after his success and leaving North Carolina, Scruggs would come back to his hometown for assorted public or charity events. A lot of the primary and secondary sources found reference to Scruggs dedication to his hometown, that is why, I personally think, there is such a strong public memory for Scruggs as well as such a public dedication to his memory. Today it is easy to find different family folklore throughout the community, claiming to have played some hand in Scruggs success, furthering public memory of Earl Scruggs, so that the next generation can learn and enjoy.

Another reason public memory has held strong, would be the amount of experients today who were alive during the rise of Earl Scruggs music. An experient, according to *Introduction to Public History,* are "community experts who have gained knowledge through their own lived experiences. Experients often have a variety of reactions in public history situations where they encounter historical constructions of events they know well." The amount of experients that still pass on Scruggs memory to the public play a major role in keeping the public and historical memory of Earl Scruggs alive.[7]

Lastly, a major reason Earl Scruggs music is important in the field of Public History, would be the amount of archives the Earl Scruggs Center has, involving Scruggs life.[8] Opening in January 2024 until December 2024, the exhibit "Born of the Broad River: The Life and Career of Earl Scruggs in His Own Words 1924-1945" is displaying direct writings from Scruggs himself about his early life before fame. The exhibit claims "Scotch-Irish, English, German, and African American folk music blended together on the banks of the Broad River before being

[7] Lyon, Nix, and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, 34.
[8] Lyon, Nix, and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, 57.

sped up to a dizzying rate leading to the creation of Bluegrass."[9] The use of archives and other material culture of Scruggs' helps maintain the importance of Scruggs legacy on Bluegrass music as well as his importance to the field of Public History.[10]

[9] Zach Dressel and Tony Trishck, Born of the Broad River: The Life and Career of Earl Scruggs in His Own Words 1924-1945. Earl Scruggs Center, 2024, http://earlscruggscenter.org/past-exhibits/born-of-the-broad-river-the-life-and-career-of-earl-scruggs-in-his-own-words-1924-1945/.

[10] Lyon, Nix, and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, 57, 62.

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