



To: Kentucky Arts Council

Frankfort KY

From: Dr. John M. Ramsay

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Re: Folk Heritage Award, Letter of Recommendation

Lewis and Donna Lamb

Lewis and Donna Lamb personify the best of Kentucky tradition. When I first began to work with them in 1973, they were tobacco farmers. Lewis had taught himself to fiddle and Donna was learning to back him up on her guitar. They had approached Ethel Capps, Director of Recreation Extension at Berea College, about playing for her programs a few years earlier. Both Lewis and

Donna were born in Kentucky near Paint Lick. That was their world. We were to find out what a wonderful world it was as they employed it and shared it around the world.

Of first importance is their sterling character. They are honest, loyal, unselfish, and creative. These are traits they drew from the rich cultural soil of Kentucky. For example, when I bought an old school bus for the Berea College Country Dancers, Lewis and Donna, yes, and Donna, not only overhauled the ailing motor but found reclining seats on a junked Greyhound Bus, removed them and installed them in our bus along with the luggage racks and reading lights. On the road, they were our drivers, mechanics, and then our musicians as they laid down wrenches and took up bow and picks. Such resourcefulness came naturally to those who had learned to be self-sufficient.

Traveling with the Country Dancers required steady nerves. Lewis and Donna could always be depended upon. I remember waiting for our turn to perform at the Guild Hall in Newcastle On Tyne in northern England. We were all dead tired, yet the program managers kept putting us off again and again and I, faced with mutiny among the dancers, despaired of being able to put on a creditable show when we were finally called on stage. Lewis came to the rescue. He was as tired as anybody or even more-so since he was driver of one of our mini-vans—on the left in England, itself a challenge. Lewis struck up his fiddle with such energy that the dancers were startled, propelled by his music, and inspired by his example. We were invited back!

Other talents began to surface as time went on. Lewis and Donna began to play for more dance numbers than just the hoedown type of Kentucky Set Running. The new tunes were always filtered, however, through the Kentucky style. I recall one Christmas School when we had the Lambs play Margaret's Waltz "by ear" and contrasted it with Margaret's Waltz played from the musical score by a classically trained musician. Margaret's Waltz was composed by Patrick Shuldam-Shaw and I had spent two weeks with him touring Kentucky schools. He ended his tour at Levi Jackson State Park where Lewis and Donna were part of our house band. Shaw later composed the now popular tune, Levi Jackson Rag; listen to that tune and you can hear the Lambs influence on this talented Scotsman.

Donna began to show talent in clog dancing which had simply been bred into her bones. Then she started singing in her sure Kentucky voice. Lewis added his dancing dolls to our programs and his broom dobro. Both Lewis and Donna began teaching their skills in classes. A year was spent traveling all over Kentucky teaching in schools and 4-H camps under a folk artist grant from the Manpower Development Training Act.

When rheumatoid arthritis attacked Donna's joints, Lewis and Donna continued to play but turned to wood carving as a possible alternative. Lewis turned out delightful carvings and Donna dressed them up with her equally delightful acrylic paint style. Each carving has a story behind it. Someday you may want to hear about the man wearing a blue suit and carrying a cane; or how it was that Lewis carved the devil himself. Lewis is a fine raconteur, if you are interested. He contributed a couple of stories to my collection, Dog Tales, first published by Kentuckee Imprints and later translated into German.

Lewis, Donna, and Rose put their barter skills to work and have assembled an amazing collection of Kentucky antiques. They buy a box, sell enough to pay for the box, find a few valuable items, fix them, and display them in Rose's home. They even had to build on an extra room to house the collection. Lewis told my sister that when he had a million pieces, he would sell them for \$1 each.

Lewis and Donna accompanied the Berea College Country Dancers on trips all over the United States and to England, Scotland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Mexico, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. The scary experience behind the Iron Curtain made that their last overseas trip; Lewis had no desire to see more and was glad to go back home to Kentucky. On our first trip to England, Lewis fished in his back pocket and pulled out a large roll of dollars secured with a rubber band. "Lewis," I exclaimed, "why didn't you get traveler's checks?" He responded, "I just wanted to be sure that I could get back home."

Lewis and Donna Lamb have taken the best of their Kentucky traditions, shared them around the world and, naturally, at home.

