

# Dwight Diller Timeline / Notes

File: 1a - 1b

## 1968

**Dwight Diller**, 17 Aug 46  
Native of Pocahontas County, WVa.

Borrowed banjo & started search for any local musicians who might remember how to play the old music. The power structure had virtually silenced the music by that time. I grew up in rural areas of the county & was totally ignorant of the music.

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## 1969

Met the 2 different Hammons families of Pocahontas Co. Spent most of my free time with them for the next 3 years. Started playing banjo.

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## 1970

Started attending festivals & met other young musicians who were also trying to learn the old music.

Introduced several to the Hammons families. Had a small music gathering in Buckeye, WV that fall which resulted in the Rounder record "**Shaking Down the Acorns.**"

Started teaching; first student.

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## 1971-73

Consultant for Library of Congress release "**The Hammons Family.**"

Stories I had recorded were transcribed for the book, and music & songs were rerecorded for the record album.

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## **1972–73**

Banjo player for Morris Brothers of Ivydale.

Helped organize old-time music festivals under Rockefeller Foundation grant (\*).

Banjo player for **The Hayseed Man (Morris Bros.)** record '73.

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## **1971–77**

Played 5 summers with Black Mountain Bluegrass Band, Mill Point, WVa.

3 albums released.

Fired for singing in '77.

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## **1972–73\* (until?)**

Played a lot of music with Glen Smith, Lee Triplett, & Wilson Douglas.

My style greatly influenced by them.

Found out Edden Hammons had been recorded in the 40's by someone at WVU.

Started searching for recordings.

Taught at Augusta 1975, '81, '82, '83, '85, '86, '89, '90.

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## **1988–present**

Recorded "**Hold On**" album, 1988.

Week-long summer banjo camps in rural Pocahontas Co.

Traveling for concerts, seminars, and banjo instruction workshops.

Played banjo in Glen Smith's "**Say Old Man**" album, 1990.

Completed slide/sync show with recorded & live music, songs, narration, and stories from my years with the Hammons family.

Name of show: **"A Light on the Porch."**

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## Notes at Top

**"JD for Mary? — Does this fit what you were asking for? — Mines have some info in his computer."**

(Handwriting here is particularly difficult and may not be exact.)

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File: 2a - 2c

# BIOGRAPHY / RESUME FORM

**Name:** Dwight Diller

**Address:**

Rt 1 Box 386E  
New Market, Va. 22844

**Date of birth:** 1946

**Where were you born?**

Charleston, WVa.

**Where were you brought up?**

Pocahontas County, WVa.

**(Were you from a large family? Was there anything particularly interesting about your family or home town?)**

No

**Did members of your family play music or make things by hand, etc.?**

No

**What were some early influences which led you to pursue your particular skills?**

A man laying on the sidewalk selling pencils and playing a banjo when I was four years old.

**Were you around older folk artists or musicians as a child? Please tell us something about this.**

No. Nothing to tell.

**What is your approach to teaching, and how did the above influences figure in that?**

Listen & work.

They didn't.

**What kinds of goals would you set for your class to achieve? How will you accomplish this?**

Learn to think about the music as well as learning tunes. Correct right hand technique.

Work.

**In addition to the art form you are teaching, tell us what others you are involved in, also any hobbies, interests, etc. you have, and anything about your family, employment or organizations with which you are involved, that you would like to share with us?**

I'm not involved with anything except at present.

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## Page 2

**Please tell us about any honors, awards, you have received, festivals or juried craft shows you have done, art exhibits (solo and group), etc.**

None

**Were you ever artist-in-residence? Where & when?**

No

**(Musicians): Are you featured on any albums? Please give titles, dates, record company, others on the album, etc.**

A. 3 albums w/ Black Mtn. Bluegrass Boys — '72, '73, '74

B. 1-45 single w/ Morris Bros. — '73

**Where have you taught and what were kinds of classes (private students, single workshop, week-long, semester-long, etc.)?**

Augusta '75, '81, '82, '83, '85

Too many places to remember.

**Is there anyone you have studied with in particular or have been very much influenced by, that you would like to tell us about?**

Lee Hammons, Sherman Hammons, Maggie Hammons Parker, Burl Hammons, Lee Triplett, Wilson Douglas, John Morris, Dave Morris, Odell Mcguire, Kenny Parker, Hamp Carpenter, Ron Mullenex

**Please attach any additional information which would be of interest, such as education, training in your field as well as in other fields of endeavor, bands you have played in, or anything else you would like to add:**

Class will need:

1. Banjo
2. Extra set string[s]
3. Tape recorder
4. Several blank tapes

Much evening and night practice will be expected on the part of the student in order that the week can be put to full use.

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## **Page 3 (additional note)**

Glen Smith (from Elizabeth) and Eugene Ten Brinks

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File: 3a - 3b

## **Old-Time Banjo (Int)**

This class will deal with clawhammer banjo on the intermediate level. Instruction will include (mostly W.Va.) tunes, rhythm, tunings, fiddle backup, vocal accompaniment with banjo, as well as history, context and cross cultural discussion. The pace will be geared to class needs. An intermediate student should be able to play 3 tunes using the basic rhythm in the open G and double C tunings (total of 6). The intermediate student should also be spending a fair amount of time listening to the old fiddlers and banjo players. With a couple of exceptions no emphasis will be placed on musicians born after 1900. Some optional evening listening sessions will be available.

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## Instructor Biography

Dwight Diller, a native son of east central W.Va., first taught at Augusta in 1975. He was the entire teaching staff for the full 5 weeks that year. His childhood neighbors, the Hammons' of Pocahontas County, are credited with discovering **(Note: This is the word but it doesn't seem to make sense)** him in 1969. Their initial influence along with old-time musicians from Clay County, W.Va. and Glen Smith of Elizabeth, W.Va., served him in good stead. His music continues in the spirit of the old music of central W.Va. that can be heard on two Augusta albums, *Say Old Man* and *Banjo Legacy*, as well as five of his own: *Hold On* ('88), *Red Rooster* ('92), *O Death* ('92), *Piney Woods* ('92), and *Papa* ('94).

Perhaps the best comment about Dwight was from the review of his four cassettes in *Highlights Bluegrass Unlimited* (Nov. '93):

"...[He] unselfishly shared his abilities to play traditional old-time music with many aspiring musicians..." and became "one of the most respected younger old-time musicians in the central Appalachians because of his dedication to the old-time tradition and for his style of playing."

## File: 4a - 4i

This is a lengthy document (roughly 8–9 handwritten pages) containing:

- A résumé of Dwight H. Diller
- Employment and performance history
- Education
- Awards and accomplishments
- A detailed course outline for a Folk Music & Literature course
- A personal note to "Scotty"

## Resume of Dwight H. Diller

Box 37  
Cass, W.Va. 24927  
304-456-4007

Born 17 Aug 1946

Married – one stepchild

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 180#

Health: excellent

Relocate – yes

Travel – as necessary

Disabilities – none

## **Education**

Marlinton Graded & High School 1964

Graduate, West Virginia University – B.S. in Hort. 1970

30 hours toward Master Degree in Agriculture, 1973

## **Experience**

### **1. Dec. 73 to present – Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys, Mill Point, W.Va. Bluegrass Band**

Played bass & sang baritone & bass.

Played at Bitter End in N.Y.C. and later went on Bitter End coffeehouse circuit in N.J., N.Y., Penna., Ohio, Del., and W.Va.

Played on all 3 of band's record albums.

### **2. July '74**

Played banjo 5 days at W.Va. Arts & Crafts Fair at Ripley.

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## **Page 2**

### **3. May '73 to Nov. '73 and May '72 to Sept. '72**

Morris Brothers, Ivydale, W.Va.

Helped supervise & coordinate the setting up of 5 old-time music festivals under a Rockefeller grant. The festivals were started in W.Va., Va., N.C. & KY. Also traveled with Morris Bros. to their various playing engagements and played old-time banjo & bass with them on stage.

Played old-time banjo on their 45 rpm record cut in the fall of '73.

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#### **4. Sept. '72 to May '73 – WVU, Morgantown**

Taught 8 people (approx. 10 more people came for a few lessons) to play banjo and/or fiddle free of charge.

I taught everybody one evening a week and then helped individually when they needed it.

Later in school year formed band with these students called **"AA Cutters"** (handwriting is difficult to read) and played at the Holiday Inn, WVU Creative Arts Center, Country Club, and Wesley Foundation.

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#### **5. Apr. '72 – Buffalo State University, N.Y.**

Played all week at the Arts & Crafts Fair held there.

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## **Page 3**

#### **6. Jan.–Mar. '72 – Pocahontas County High School, Dunmore, W.Va.**

Taught adult education course in greenhouse management.

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#### **7. Spring–Summer '73**

Two albums, **"Shaking Down the Acorns"** (Rounder Records) and **"The Hammons Family"** (Library of Congress), were issued.

I had discovered the Hammons and started taping them in summer of 1969. These tapes were used for information and as source of songs for these albums.

I learned many of the songs and banjo & fiddle pieces myself.

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**8. May–Aug. '70 – WVU Extension Service, Marlinton, W.Va.**

Mrs. Betty Rae Weiford (Spelling difficult to figure out), Supervisor.

I worked with the low income people who were receiving food stamps in Pocahontas County.

I went into the homes & taught nutrition as well as how to can, garden, and put out a garden.

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**9. Aug. '69 – May '70 – Folk Literature, WVU**

Dr. Patrick Gainer.

I took Dr. Gainer's 2 folk literature courses and sat in on one seminar.

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## Page 4

**10. Sept. '58 to May '64 – Marlinton Jr. High & High School**

Mr. Sam Brill.

Played trombone in band and dance band.

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**11. Fall '65 to Dec. '73 – Fencing Dept., WVU**

Ms. Mary Jane B. Pearse.

Assisted Ms. Pearse in fencing the years I was in school and in Fall '72 I took over her four classes myself.

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**12.**

Have either won or placed in one of the top four places in every old-time banjo contest I have ever entered except one (approx. 14–15 contests).

# Course Outline for Folk Music & Literature Course

## 1) Banjo & Fiddle Lessons

### A.

Anyone in the class who so desired would be given lessons on how to play the banjo and/or fiddle.

### B.

Different songs from all over the Southern Appalachian Highlands (W.Va., Ky., & N.C.) would be taught on either instrument.

### C.

Instruction would be given as to how to buy instruments, their care, and how to rework them to get the sound desired.

### D.

History and origin of instruments and how they developed.

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## 2) Ballads

### A.

A study of subject, style and singing of the old ballads.

### B.

History, origin and background of ballads, generally and specifically.

### C.

Each person will be required to learn & sing at least one old ballad.

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### **3) Dulcimer, Autoharp, and French Harp or Harmonica**

#### **A.**

Since these instruments are of lesser importance in mountain music there will be less emphasis on them. However, people not wanting to attempt the banjo or fiddle will be required to learn a few songs on one of these instruments.

#### **B.**

History will be given on the origin and development of each of these instruments.

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### **4) Guitar**

#### **A.**

Since the guitar is the instrument responsible for the fall of traditional mountain music, it will be treated with little emphasis in mountain music.

#### **B.**

The development of commercialized or "country" music will be studied with the advent of the guitar (which happened almost simultaneously).

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### **5) Folk Literature**

#### **A. Folk Songs**

1. What comprises a folk song.
2. How songs were passed on.
3. Role instruments play in singing songs.
4. Folk songs in America today.

#### **B. Folk Stories and Tales**

1. How stories were passed in oral tradition.
2. Difference between story and tale.
3. Different types of stories (i.e. hunting, witchcraft, etc.).

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## 6) Day-to-Day Living

### A. Houses

1. Different types of houses.
2. Where usually placed.

### B. Food

1. What was eaten.
  - How people learned what to eat in the mountains.
2. How food was preserved.

### C. Medicine & Cures

1. Medicine and plants for ailments.
2. Beliefs for cures.

### D. Weather

1. Observations on how weather affected animals.
2. Certain omens depicting weather (i.e. woolly worm).

### E.

Superstitions.

### F. Language & Dialect

1. History.
2. Why remained same after it came to America.

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## 7) Commercialization of Mountain Music

### A.

1920s — what happened to music after it was recorded; beginning of "Country Music."

### B.

1930s — further development of music; much experimentation.

**C.**

1940s — main split in commercialized music: Bluegrass & Country.

**D.**

1950s to present — further development of Bluegrass music & Country music into two entirely different realms.

**E.**

Extensive use of old recordings to show development of music and examples of different kinds of music.

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**8)**

Will try to bring into class as many area musicians to perform as much as possible.

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## Personal Note

**Scotty,**

I don't know much about all these resumes, but I hope these fit the bill. If they don't let me know. I'll be in Elkins Friday to play in the radio station with the Black Mountain Boys.

I'll try to give you a call if I get time. We'll be in Elkins sometime between 12 & 2 p.m., but as Batch Perry? (Not sure about this. Handwriting is difficult). says, I'm not for sure. I haven't heard a word from that girl yet.

**Dwight**

## File 6a - 6h

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# **OUTLINE OF FOLK MUSIC & LITERATURE COURSE**

# 1. Banjo & Fiddle Lessons

## A.

Anyone in the class who so desires would be given lessons on how to play the banjo and/or fiddle.

## B.

Different songs from all over the Southern Appalachian Highlands (W.Va., Va., Kent. & N.C.) would be taught on either instrument.

## C.

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# 2. Ballads

## A.

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# 3. Dulcimer, Autoharp, and French Harp or Harmonica

## A.

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## **4. Guitar**

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---

## **5. Folk Literature**

### **A. Folk Songs**

1. What comprises a folk song.
2. How songs were passed on.
3. Role instruments play in singing songs.
4. Folk songs in America today.

### **B. Folk Stories and Tales**

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  2. Difference story & tale.
  3. Different types of stories (i.e. hunting, witchcraft, etc.).
- 

## **6. Day to Day Living**

## **A. Houses**

1. Different types of houses.
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## **B. Food**

1. What was eaten.
  - How people learned what to eat in mountains.
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## **C. Medicine & Cures**

1. Medicine & plants for ailments.
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1. Observations on how weather affected animals.
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## **E.**

Superstitions.

## **F. Language & Dialect**

1. History.
  2. Why remained same after it came to America.
- 

# **7. Commercialization of Mountain Music**

## **A.**

1920's: what happened to music after it was recorded; beginning of "Country Music."

## **B.**

1930's: further development of music; much experimentation.

## **C.**

1940's: Main split in commercialized music; Bluegrass & Country.

## **D.**

1950's to present: further development of Bluegrass music & Country music into two entirely different realms.

## **E.**

Extensive use of old recordings to show development of music and examples of different kinds of music.

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## **8.**

Will try to bring into class as many area musicians to perform as much as possible.

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## **File: 71a**

### **Biography**

Dwight Diller, raised in the mountains of east-central W.Va., became interested in his heritage in the late 60's. His neighbors, the Hammons and others, generously shared their tremendous wealth of stories, songs, and music with him. Dwight was also deeply influenced by Glen Smith of Elizabeth as well as the powerful Clay County fiddlers while playing banjo for the Morris Brothers of Ivydale in the early 70's.

He and Odell McGuire were the founding fathers of the Lexington (Va.) old-time music scene in '70/'71. Dwight released 3 cassettes in '92 and is working on more for '93. The major goal for his classes is to assist his students in discovering the "essence" of each tune selection and then striving to play it. This consists of hand technique, rhythm, soul, [final word unclear].

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### **Notes on uncertain readings**

The biography is very clear overall. A few editorial marks appear in the manuscript:

- "also" is inserted above the line before "deeply influenced."

- "of Ivydale" is inserted above "Morris Brothers."
- "selection" is inserted above "tune."
- The final word after "**hand technique, rhythm, soul,**" appears to have been crossed out or overwritten and is not legible in this scan. It may have been another musical quality or descriptive term, but it cannot be read with confidence.

**Document dates stamped on page:**

- Received: **DEC. 22, 1992**
- Processed: **JAN. 04, 1993**

Files: 8a - 9b

## **Document 1: Employment Résumé (ca. 1981–1982)**

**DWIGHT HAMILTON DILLER**  
Mill Point, West Virginia 24959

### **Employment**

#### **1981–Present**

##### **Highland Stock Farm, Mill Point, WV**

- Studying and working under a private cattle/sheep breeder.

#### **Summers 1981 & 1975**

##### **Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, WV – Augusta Heritage Workshop**

- Banjo instructor.
- College classes of approximately 20 students.
- Under contract for 1982.

#### **1980–1981**

**Natural Bridge Learning Center**  
Natural Bridge Station, Virginia

- Project Supervisor, Virginia Department of Corrections.
- Semi-wilderness program for juvenile wards of the state.
- Implemented treatment plans prescribed by Department of Corrections psychologists.

## **1979–1980**

- Designed and constructed own three-bedroom house.

## **1978–1979**

### **Trimble Painting and Contracting Company**

Buena Vista, Virginia

- Painter.
- Interior and exterior painting and remodeling.

## **1978**

### **Morningstar Produce**

Buena Vista, Virginia

- Owner and manager of wholesale and retail produce business.

## **1978**

### **Horton's Produce Market**

Marlinton, West Virginia

- Salesperson.
- Delivered goods on a 200-mile sales route.

## **1975–1979**

### **Pocahontas County Public School System**

- Substitute teacher for grades 1–12.
- Extended assignments in music and fourth grade.

## **1971–1979**

### **Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys**

- Band member (bass fiddle and banjo).
- Three LP recordings produced.
- Extensive touring, including Bitter End Coffee House circuit and NYC.

- PBS television appearance (1977).

### **Summers 1972 & 1973**

#### **Rockefeller Foundation Grant**

Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia

- Helped establish and manage five old-time music festivals.

### **Summers 1972 & 1973**

#### **The Morris Brothers' Old Time Music Band**

Ivydale, WV

- Banjo player.
- Produced a 45 rpm recording.

### **Summer 1970**

#### **West Virginia University Extension Service**

Pocahontas County, WV

- Nutrition aide.
  - Worked with low-income rural families on nutrition, canning, meal planning, and gardening.
- 

## **Document 2: Special Activities / Volunteer Work**

### **Major Activities**

- Consultant to Senator Robert Byrd regarding Appalachian old-time and bluegrass music materials entered into the Congressional Record (1980).
- Donated personal tapes of Appalachian old-time music and interviews with West Virginia families to the Library of Congress (1980).
- Volunteer musician at Stonewall Jackson Hospital, Lexington, VA (1980–81).
- Horse owner and trainer (1975–81).
- Volunteer teacher for more than 100 banjo and fiddle students (1971–present).
- Volunteer musician and prayer leader at Denmar State Hospital, Hillsboro, WV (1977–78).

- Lay speaker for Church of the Brethren congregations in Pocahontas County (1976–78).
- Performer of old-time music at festivals and colleges (1971–present).
- Introduced and performed at the First Annual West Virginia Department of Arts and Humanities Vandalia Gathering (1976).
- Apprentice blacksmith (1974).
- Consultant on:
  - *The Hammons Family: A Study of a West Virginia Family's Traditions* (Library of Congress archive).
  - Rounder Records' *Shaking Down the Acorns*.

## Education

### West Virginia University

- 30 graduate credits toward Master of Agriculture (1970–73).

### West Virginia University

- B.S. in Horticulture, December 1970.
- 

# Document 3: Augusta Biography / Resume Form (1991)

## Basic Information

**Name:** Dwight Diller

**Place of Birth:** West Virginia

**Year:** 1946

## Years Practicing Art Form

- 23 years

## Age Began

- 21

## Teachers and Influences

Lists:

- Lee Hammons
- Sherman Hammons
- Maggie Hammons Parker
- Burl Hammons
- Lee Triplett
- Glen Smith
- Wilson Douglas
- Frank and Dave Morris
- Bob Dyer
- American Indians

## **Family and Ethnic Influences**

Diller writes that he was raised in rural Pocahontas County among mountain people and that relatives and neighbors—including the Hammons family—shared songs and culture with him.

## **Other Influences**

He notes spending considerable time learning from older people before becoming influenced by the revivalist movement.

## **Other Training**

- Played extensively with Clay County musicians in 1972–73.
- Notes that Glen Smith "took me under his wing" during those years.

## **Honors / Awards**

A characteristically humble response:

"The old people liked my music and also seemed to trust me."

## **Albums Listed**

1. *Hold On*
2. *Say Old Man*
3. *Shaking Down the Acorns*
4. Three albums with the Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys (1972–74)

## **Places Taught**

Includes:

- Morgantown, WV
- Toledo, OH
- Columbia, MD
- Chicago, IL
- etc.

## **Associated Performers**

**Morris Brothers of Ivydale**

## **Style Description**

Difficult handwriting, but appears to read approximately:

Others have used the word "sledgehammer"; some in a complimentary way, some in an uncomplimentary way.

## **Other Occupation**

Appears to read:

"Some think I bugle; other times I've been called an old white-haired Mennonite preacher."

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# **Document 4: Augusta Instructor Information Form**

Notable entries:

## **Name for Catalog and Badge**

**Dwight Diller – Banjo Police**

This appears to be a humorous self-description.

## **UPS Delivery**

He notes UPS would not deliver to his mailing address and requests deliveries be sent to a different road address.

## **Students Under 16**

Handwritten note indicates:

- He generally does not limit students by age.
- Most classes are geared toward adults approximately 25 years and older.

## **Student Contact Information**

- Yes, students may be given his phone number.

## **Promotional Materials**

Requested:

- 6 Augusta catalogs
  - 6 introductory flyers
  - "Absolutely NONE" Dance Augusta flyers
- 

Note from these last documents. This is the first time Dwight uses the word Banjo Police.

### **"Dwight Diller – Banjo Police."**

That phrase later became widely associated with his insistence on preserving authentic West Virginia clawhammer banjo traditions.