

ON THE SET OF "THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS"
by Kate Van Winkle Keller
August 1, 1991



In July 1991, I received a call from Wendy Murray, special assistant to the director of the 20th-century Fox movie production of "The Last of the Mohicans," set during the French and Indian war in upstate New York in 1757. They wanted advice on period music and dance! Apparently, a Sonneck Society colleague in Cooperstown had recommended that they call me. At first it seems as though they would get all they needed out of me on the phone; suggestions that the hammered dulcimer would not be appropriate at an outlying fort on Lake George, that the banjo wasn't really appropriate either; that a 19th century white spiritual had perhaps the right atmosphere, but the text might date it to the 19th-century, and as for dance, yes, dance was appropriate, but in the midst of a dreadful siege, somewhat strange. However, they were persistent and the more I talked the more they realized that they needed someone there during the filming of the scenes.

I suggested that they find some fifers or fiddlers and a drummer and I gave them Jim Morrison's name and number and hoped that he could help them with the specific stuff, especially since I really didn't know much about solo jigs or fiddling. I called Jim and told him all I knew about it and what to expect. Then I forgot about it, assuming that they had reached him and were satisfied with whatever arrangements they had worked out, or had dropped the dancing from the scene, which was one of the possibilities. Bob was moving from here into the new Sonalysts offices on Monday, plus there was a good chance that he was going to be at Savannah River that week, so I was going to supervise the move. Anne and Tony and Elisabeth came up for the weekend, a hot one, and we relaxed a bit before what we figured would be a fairly busy week, but not too harried.

Then late Saturday afternoon the phone rang again. They hadn't been able to reach Jim and thought they wanted me. First, however, they needed to convince the director that I had proper qualifications. Thank goodness Bob's fax machine had not

yet been moved, so we faxed my resume from here within a few minutes, which must have impressed them. The production assistant or “PA” in movie jargon, called back later and said the director could see immediately that he needed me there. They explained that the scenes were night shoots—so the work hours were at night, but they would pay my expenses plus a daily fee. Could I come for two night’s work? I envisioned something on the line of 6 PM to 2 PM Thursday and Friday, and thought I could manage it even if I had to move the office on Monday. So we agreed that I would come down for a couple of days, and they ordered plane tickets. When the ticket arrived the next morning from Los Angeles by Federal Express, I was suddenly struck by the fact that this didn’t seem to be just a local historical society’s effort to gain attention through a remake of an American classic story. It was looking like serious movie making. Bob quickly brought up the big dance index database and made me a printout of all dances we knew of from 1730–1760 so I’d have some information on tunes for the fiddlers that I had recommended they get. I knew I had an interesting contemporary manuscript and when I dug it out of my shelf I found I had a perfect connection: a British soldier came to Saratoga, New York in 1756 with the army, played the fiddle, and kept a journal, including a number of dance and song tunes in it. He probably was involved in the actions described by Cooper in the book! WOW — a chance to have really accurate music and dance in a commercial setting.

Meanwhile, Bob’s trip to South Carolina was put off a week, but he had to go to Waterford, Connecticut on Tuesday for the day. So he supervised the move and got things set up in the new office down on Shady Grove Road near the intersection of 1-270, a beautiful new office complex about 15 minutes from here. I was glad to get the desks and computers and chairs and boxes out of the garage where they had been accumulating for the past month or so. His car had been out on the driveway for several weeks and I couldn’t get mine out unless we moved his down to the street.

Tuesday, I talked again with the PA about the singing and the tune selection for the musicians, and at her request, taped a series of suggestions for the director to listen to, and FedEx’ed the tape and a whole bunch of xeroxed songs and tunes down to the production offices in Asheville, North Carolina. She said the director was really stuck on the spiritual and she had hired the singer (Sheila Barnhill, a local mountain folk-singer, very good and VERY folk) and that she was considering bringing in a New York State band called “Thistledown” [recent tape: The Hills of Lorne]—who specialize in Scots/Irish music, heavy with dulcimer and good fiddling. I had been hoping to have the singer sing “Roslin Castle” which perhaps would have been a little arty, but was a wonderful song, and it was in the manuscript, so it was a perfect setting. I was beginning to suspect that this PA was somewhat disorganized, and it was evident that she was buffeted by the artistic temperaments with which she worked every day, and that things could change rather dramatically from one moment to the next. I clung to my hopes and got ready to travel. Bob came back from Connecticut, and we figured he could hold down the fort while I was away, and I’d be back Saturday evening so he could go off to South Carolina on Sunday.

Thursday I drove out to Dulles airport, put a big red ribbon on the antenna of my car so I could find it if I came back tired, and got on an United Express plane for Asheville, North Carolina, which, I discovered, made a stop in Spartanburg, South Carolina on the way [!]. I was met at the airport by a young blond, heavily made up, who said she worked for the transportation department. I could see she was hoping to be noticed by casting! As we started off down the road from the airport and swung out onto

an interstate highway, I also learned that the set was not in Asheville as I had supposed, but somewhere else. We drove east for an hour and a half, crossing the eastern continental divide, through several ridges of mountains on a sparkling day, driving through a spectacularly beautiful panorama of hills and rivers and lakes. Lisa told me more about the production, and we talked about what she was doing and about life in her home town of Asheville. At last at about 1:30, we pulled off the highway at Morganton, and up to the motel where I was to stay. She helped me check in and told me to wait there until someone called to tell me where to go when. Wendy had told me to get a nap in the afternoon, so I went next door to the Holiday Inn and had a bit of lunch, then came back and turned on the fan in the bathroom to block out hall noises and slept for a couple of hours.

When I woke up I still hadn't heard anything about what to do or where to go, so after reading the entire contents of the local paper and doing the crossword puzzle, I went out to the front desk to ask if any messages had come for me. None, but they would call to see if they could find out something for me. They called Wendy's office number and the people there said Wendy was at a recording studio and they didn't know what I was supposed to do, but that they were picking up extras at the hotel right then, and I might as well just come with them out to the set. So I raced back to my room, grabbed my dance shoes and all my papers, and went to the front door looking for the company van.

It was full of INDIANS — with shaved heads and Mohawk haircuts — the most awesome rough-looking group of people you could expect to meet at 5 o'clock in the afternoon in a tiny southern town in the hills of North Carolina! They were REAL INDIANS, not just made up to look like Indians — I learned later that the company had brought in 300 native Americans from all over the country. Although they tried to use local people for most of their extras, the local Cherokee Indians were a peaceful people and didn't have the strong physique they needed so they had to go to the more physical tribes of the west, the cowboys and such. On a later trip, I talked with a hair technician who was bemoaning that fact that about 150 more Indians were coming in next week — 150 more heads to shave, she groaned — they have to be shaved every three days! Anyway, faced with this new challenge, I gulped, grinned at them, climbed in, and was soon sandwiched between two of them, heading off down the road to the set!

We drove for half an hour, and I could see from the various road signs that we were heading for Lake James. I felt a little as though I needed to remember the route we were taking in case I had to call for rescue! The road got windier and windier, houses turned to rundown trailers, then woods and a lumber mill, and a railroad crossing with the gate down and a train parked across it! Well, we sat there for 45 minutes, and even though most of the fellows were fairly quiet, we all got to talking and it was fun listening to their banter, complaints, plans for the weekend, and to ask a few questions about what this was all about. Finally another train full of coal came through, and the empty train could then go on. I gather it was on a siding. Off we went again and got to a place where it said "Road Closed." On we went through the barricade, the road getting more and more desolate and small. At last I began to see signs that we were nearing the set. We passed a large field marked "Crew and extras parking." There were four Greyhound and several school busses parked there and about 200 cars! Whoa! This spoke of a lot of people!

Finally we pulled up to "base camp" and out we all piled. I asked the driver where I would find some information and he suggested I try at "casting," in one of the three

trailers which were set up as the center of a sizable complex of mammoth tents, house-trailers, storage trailers, and camping trailers, housing the wardrobe, props, makeup, hair, and such, plus a set of nice travel trailers for the principal cast and crew members. Vans and busses were here and there, and there were soldiers and Indians everywhere, each with a rifle which he kept by his side always. I learned later that they were VERY carefully controlled, and if the actor didn't turn in the gun he was issued at the end of each day, he would be in big trouble. They were working guns—one of the fellows reassured me that they only used powder, no balls, but they did shoot them! And there were hundreds of them around!

After a couple of false starts, I finally found Wendy's office, and was greeted by her assistant with a big "Oh, wonderful, you're here—we've been waiting for you—where HAVE you been!" Then I learned about the most vital equipment of all in the movie business—the radios. EVERYONE who has any importance at all wears them, and it seemed that there were about 20 channels on them. In no time at all, the people in the trailer had located Wendy up on the set, and she told them to send me on up. Her assistant and I walked up to the paved road and clambered on one of the omnipresent vans [most were the large 12 passenger kind, apparently given by Ford to the company for promotional purposes], and off we went. The first piece of good news for me was that "my" scene had been delayed by rain, and wouldn't be shot til Friday night, so I could meet everyone and get acclimated tonight, and wouldn't have to worry about working.

We drove about a mile further down the windy road and I spotted such signs as "Extras holding and catering" and "Crew catering," lots of port-a-potties at various central points, and then we got to what appeared to be an old logging road which went up at a 30 degree angle and had a sign "to the Fort." Up we scrambled, straight up what seemed to be the side of a mountain, and after about 1500 feet of this we came around a corner and a massive structure of 2 x 4 scaffolding, with cannons piercing the apertures in the top about 100 feet above. This was the back lot—there were dozens of trucks, derricks, cranes, trailers, piles of lumber of all kinds, an orderly chaos of equipment to support movie-making. As we pulled further up the hill to the parade ground level, more trailers with electrical equipment appeared and behind them, 6 or 7 fabulous, massive Indian war canoes were lined up. By now, it was completely dark, and the scene was lit only by small construction light-bulbs strung here and there like a Christmas tree lot, and by a huge bank of lights high in the sky on a giant crane, which gave general illumination to the entire hill the fort was built on.

There were two of these, one on either side of the fort, and their light was adjustable, from very strong to a moon light effect with to just enough to be able to see around in the dark. It was absolutely beautiful. Kathy and I climbed out and picked our way through the mud and debris of what appeared to be the construction site for a massive building, and entered the under-passages of the fort. Everywhere there were people with radios; people calling back and forth for various needs and communications. Suddenly a call went out from somewhere in the huge complex, echoed by a dozen people on radios all set to the same channel in every corner of the set: "Roll sound, LOCK IT UP, Quiet please!" Everyone froze in their tracks, total silence fell and we waited. Over the radios came the classic commands of the business: "241 take 4 A camera mark" and a click as the striped bar was clapped down; then "B mark" and another click. Silence . . . A few murmurs could be distinguished from the omnipresent radios all tuned to the mikes on the set as the director instructed the cameras or the actor; then suddenly

a gunshot from high above and then we heard “CUT” on the radios, repeated by all the PAs and work began again, saws, generators, vans moving, people talking.

Kathy introduced me to people as we made our way through the lower rooms of the set and finally we reached a wide staircase which appeared to terminate in a moonlight terrace. As we ascended I could see that this was the location of the scene being filmed, as we saw more and more people, most with impressive tools of all kinds hanging from their pockets, belts, backs, and waist-mounted carriers. Tripods, metal film boxes, soft-drink cans and coffee cups, light stands, and massive gels in racks became evident. We stumbled in the half-darkness past some cannon, a couple of large barrels holding a big insulated urn of coffee and a basket of grapes, past some high chairs marked with people’s names, more tripods, more people, small banks of lights behind translucent screens, then a huge sound console, a playback setup, a video playback on a tripod, and suddenly there was Daniel Day-Lewis, sitting in one of the cannon bays at the top of the fort, looking intensely through the sight of a five-foot long rifle out over a beautiful range of North Carolina hills, a lake below, and a real moon as well as the huge artificial light making magic in the night. The cameras were trained on him, fairly close up, and behind them was an intense group of people.

“Roll sound, LOCK IT UP, Quiet please!” We froze and watched. Lewis focused on a distant spot, leaned forward slightly, shot, and lowered the gun, continuing to focus out over the lake with a savage intensity. Then “CUT” and the rampart erupted with bustle. The director said a couple of things to Lewis, and the sound people made some adjustments. A makeup person materialized from the gloom behind and smudged the actor’s cheek a little, and vanished back into the darkness. There seemed to be a number of people here who was just watching, though. I wondered what they all had to do with it and why so many people were needed; the whole space seemed cluttered enough with equipment. But Kathy had spotted Weedy among them and we made our way forward to her.

She greeted me with a warm welcome and immediately took me over to the director to introduce me! I was floored that he would take the time from this intense scene, but I guess he is accustomed to interruptions all the time. Michael Mann was the creator of “Miami Vice.” It is quite evident from what I was to see over the next few days that he specializes in gory detail, yet he was very cordial and welcomed me with a delightfully conspiratorial “now you can see how we get this all done” air. His family was here with him; I met his wife on a later evening and we had several long chats, and his 11 year old daughter participated in the crowd scenes in which the dancing occurred. In contradiction to the usual descriptions of temperamental directors and actors, in the four days I saw him at work I never heard him raise his voice. In fact, although there were a few minor flare-ups between tech crew members, there were no public disputes anywhere. Lurking beneath the surface were some major artistic conflicts, though, which, with the rain, were to impact my stay. But for now, all was businesslike, despite the mud, sand, and rough surfaces of the working space, the plastic sheets which protected equipment from the intermittent thunderstorms which rolled through with increasing regularity, and the narrow set which was totally within the confines of the corner cannon bay area at the top of a reconstructed colonial fort. The working area up here was about 20 by 40 feet and there must have been about 40 people there!

By now, Wendy had told me herself that since this scene had been delayed by the huge rainstorm on Wednesday and Thursday morning, my work wasn’t needed until

Friday evening, so I was free to stay on and watch, or I could go back down to base camp and get a van to drive me back to the motel in Morganton. Needless to say, I wasn't going to give up the opportunity to hang around for this intimate look at movie-making, and I said I'd like to stay, chiefly to get my sea legs on the nighttime working schedule and to learn the drill. Wendy asked if I had had dinner, and when I said no, she introduced me to the other unexpected part of the movie-making business. Near the coffee setup and the grapes which I spotted earlier, was a huge pan of barbecued chicken, more fruit, vegetable sticks and dip, brownies, several coolers of soft drinks and milk, lemonade, iced tea and other juices, napkins and fixings! Later, when the set moved to the parade ground and the actors grew from one to 350, the basic food setup was placed in a lower interior room, but canteen people continually circulated the set with water and cups, coffee, fruit, veggies and dip — it was a masterpiece of organization. The only flaw in the whole setup was a lack of trash containers. Soda cans and paper cups were stowed in every little nook and cranny out of camera range. In fact, as the crew shifted the camera location on the final day of filming the “party” scene, as it came to be called, the director spotted a bunch of trash in one of the carts on the set, out of range from the other angle, but now the camera looked right into the bed of the wagon!

I got a snack from this richness of supply, and we positioned ourselves to watch the activity from a safe spot out of the way. The next two hours were amazing. The routine of locking up the set and shooting the scene continued about every six or eight minutes. This involved not only stopping all vans coming and going up and down the hill but boats on the lake and stopping and restarting the generators that powered saws and drills below as the crew busied themselves preparing various locations within the fort for the next few days' shots. They were getting walls put up, props located and arranged, electrical cables run out for lighting, backgrounds secured and finally a large sign: “HOT SET, keep out” to warn everyone not to touch anything.

They must have filmed that brief gunshot scene 25 times! It was a pretty important moment and had no spoken lines, only tiny movement and psychological intensity on the part of the leading actor who is looking away from the camera—quite a challenge to project to the camera. Finally the director said “print, new deal” which went out over all the radios and was echoed by the PAs and suddenly the whole fort was abustle with activity as this scene was dismantled and the next scheduled scene was prepared—lights, cameras, people all moving to the new location which was set on the parade ground. Lots of Indians and redcoats materialized from every opening in the fort and the space was getting more and more crowded. I told Wendy that I would fend for myself and, checking the direction things seemed to be moving, I found a perch on the upper landing of a staircase, about 20 feet above the ground, overlooking the parade ground.

No sooner did I find a dry spot to sit on than I heard the sharp bark of a sergeant outside the fort. Next thing I knew, marching through the spot I had just vacated below came an awesome company of Grenadiers, with a wiry ex-Marine at their heels, hollering at them. It was my introduction to Capt. Dale Dye. He has been living with this company for the last month, in tents in a replica 18th-century military camp nearby. He drills the men just as though they were 18th-century soldiers, and although they are mostly local boys hired as extras, or reenactors who had the summer to play soldier, they absolutely love Dye and his discipline and the experience of being able to live and perform their parts. Their uniforms are wool, of course, and the Carolina heat has been beastly, but while I was there, they were grateful for the warmth the wool gave them when the rains came.

The Grenadiers marched through the parade ground and took a position in two ranks across the set from the camera, facing away. The director's assistants called for various extras and placed them in the pre-determined blocking patterns. Over the radios, even if the extras were only 15 feet away, Danny Stillman and Michael Waxman would call "give me 5 more colonials" or "I need three redcoats—with the right hair" or "I need three kids over there" and someone would point at the appropriate extras and take them forward. Women extras with buckets and jugs were placed here and there, and Indians in small groups. Apparently the Mohawk Indians allied with the British, so they were in the



fort. Loudspeakers were only used in the final scenes that I worked, which were shot from the ramparts, completely across the whole panorama. All the other communication was by radio and then repeated by the radio owner who was responsible for the lockup of his or her assigned area, chiefly because of the darkness. Out of camera range, the only light came from reflection, or the utility lights inside that were carefully blocked from view. I guess the new low light films make it possible to capture images even in candle-light.

While the cameras for the last scene were on tripods, it soon became evident that this scene would be shot from an incredible crane mounted on a truck which was parked just beneath my porch. It could lower to the ground and be moved by hand, or rise up 30 feet above the ground. The next scene proved to use its low range as the next 6 hours were spent synchronizing the movement of one actor from one end of the parade ground to the other, beginning at the level of the fire and finishing at the actor's face as he passed. The scene was the dismissal of the guards by Heywood, and his walk through their ranks forward to the camera. The only lines were something along the lines of "Greeeer Gaaaar, to shun - - - hu smi" in the usual unintelligible military barked vocables. I think it translated to "Grenadier guards, attention, dismissed" or something along those lines. Once they broke ranks, Heywood walked through the ranks and across the set, ending virtually in the camera lens.

For the next few hours I watched the magic of a creative artist at work. Mann seemed to paint his scene with people, fires, props, light, and movement. His first ideas were altered once he saw through the small lense he carried around his neck that served as a personal camera eye. He would order a wounded soldier put here, a group of Indians there, or some dirt on a shirt or blood on a brow. In fact, the call for dirt and blood,

supplied by the makeup technicians, was continual the entire time I was there. The dirt came in small bags of something like black carbon, or simply dirt from the ground. The blood was a disgusting mixture of corn syrup, food coloring, and a thickening agent and was absolutely shocking in its realism. Several of the soldiers told me that the ants simply loved it and when they had to lie on the ground for a scene, which was most of the time, sometimes it was hard to lie still with ants crawling over their legs and arms and faces. Mann would have extras moving here and there; someone walked across the set at a certain signal, someone else moved several feet and knelt to speak to a sitting person. Once the total effect was studied in the rehearsals he would then change the routes by a foot or two for the next take, or add more movement or take some away.

Then the camera movement had to be determined, or practiced with the main actor's stand in. (There was only one on this shot and he did not usually participate in this part of the working out of the scene, simply because it was so tedious.) It took nearly three hours to rehearse everyone for this scene before filming began. Once it was close to filming, the call went out for "Number 1" which meant the principles, who would then be shown their path. "Number 2" were the stand-ins. Sometimes it was the fires that were moved, over two feet or back three, toned down or stirred up. Luckily the whole parade ground was sand, so fires could be picked up with a shovel or tongs and moved at will. They were under the purview of the special effects crew who used diesel oil to get them flaring when flares were wanted. All the fires for this scene were just wood fires, and proved to be a real nuisance. For the big scenes later, they put propane tanks in kegs and ran copper pipes under the sand to small nozzles in each fire so that they could control the height of each fire from the sidelines, rather than running back and forth spraying them as they did this night. The fire fellows ran off the set just as the take began. Then there were smokers and large hand fans operated by other SPX people, and the call for more smoke here would produce a scurry, another smoker and puffs of incense-smelling smoke that my clothes and hair still retain.

Once the scene was visually ok, and all the "background artists" (as the extras were so courteously called) had their cues and motivations under control, a "rehearsal" was held that was not filmed. Everyone had to learn the synchronization, the camera crew, the smokers, the extras, the actor and the soldiers. The whole scene took less than 2 minutes. Adjustments followed, then another rehearsal. Over and over again until the director was satisfied that the scene projected the emotional or narrative content that he needed to tell the story.

By then it was well past midnight, and stomachs were quietly grumbling all over the set. At last the welcome words came over the radios, and were hollered out by the PA's. "Lunch break, be back in an hour." The soldiers were all formed up and marched out the gate, down to the bottom of the hill and the half mile or so further to the extras catering. The crew piled into the endless vans and shuttled down to crew catering. I think Michael Mann and his assistants stayed on to talk about the scene for a while, but pretty soon, once everyone else was through the lines, they arrived at crew catering too, and continued their consultations during lunch. Wendy materialized at my side and said "come on," and we vanned it down to crew catering, which at first look, was a most unpromising spot with a huge tent and about 6 100 foot rows of tables and folding chairs, set up in a muddy clearing in the woods. Beside the tent was a huge fifth-wheeler trailer that looked like a giant hotdog stand from a sleazy carnival. The only difference was the lettering on the side: "Gala Catering: Serving the Film Industry" which sounded

about as awesome as its appearance was discouraging. Across the driveway was a temporary barn made from portable fences and tarpaulins. Four horses, a couple of oxen, several mules, four goats, five or six sheep and a frisky lamb, and a couple of cows lived here, making the trip up to the set on foot or in wagons as needed for background atmosphere or “ATMO” as they called it.

We got into line, took trays, plastic silverware, napkins and approached the dinner window. A hand-lettered sign on the side proclaimed that we were at “Camp Mohican” and in true camp-chef tradition, the menu was given in local banter. I didn’t understand all the references but the apparent menu was broiled trout, lasagna, wild rice, twice-baked potato, green beans, mixed vegetables, and more that I forgot to notice in my attempt to decipher the jokes the chefs must be playing on us. Jokes, that is, until I reached the window and was served my selection of the most delicious filet of trout, fresh steamed mixed Chinese veggies, and some rice. Then Wendy led me over to the salad and dessert table where there was all kinds of salads, fresh melons, strawberries, and an assortment of desserts. No wonder movie tickets are expensive! The food was five-star! And because of the slime caused by the rain, by Monday the whole tent had a new floor and picnic tables throughout instead of loose chairs. The carpenters worked all week building them, and all weekend putting them up. But for Thursday and Friday, the floor was slimy mud. Wendy had to join the big-wigs in their discussions, so Kathy and I sat nearby and I simply drank in the scene, thinking that by tomorrow I’d be so tired I wouldn’t remember what I saw. I kept wishing I dared get out my camera to record this incredible dream. Finally, I joined others who were filtering back to the vans and reclaimed my spot on the porch to watch the climax of all this brain trust.

Once everyone was back, a few more rehearsals to acclimate the “Number 1,” and at last the order “Roll sound, LOCK IT UP, Quiet please” echoed through the radio network and was re-echoed in his or her local spot by each radio holder, and the shot began. I watched fascinated until about 3 AM when Wendy suggested that we head back to the motel and leave them to finish the work. It was clear that there was plenty of help should something be needed. Wendy wore a radio so could be reached where-ever she was and my yawns were getting larger and larger! She assured me that they would work til dawn! So we drove back up the long windy road and back to Morganton, where she was staying at the Holiday Inn during the period of night filming. We agreed to meet at 4 that afternoon, at her base camp office to discuss the scenes I was to work on. Needless to say, after showering off the mud and sand, I fell into bed with gratitude that I wasn’t living at Fort William Henry in 1757, the night before the French broke through the defenses.

Much to my dismay, I awoke at 8 AM! Only 5 hours of sleep and my body was saying it’s time to be up! But my mind knew I had a long day ahead. Thus began the challenge of the next five days—to sleep on command, not desire. I put myself back to sleep and woke up at 11. Now what? Try food. My inn didn’t have a restaurant, being allied with the Holiday Inn next door, so I went over there and found a lovely restaurant with a lunch buffet from 11 to 2. After lunch I went back to my room to practice the sleep routine again. It worked again for two more hours.

At 2 I called the base camp and asked for a van to pick me up for my meeting. No Indians this time, just me with a delightful driver who filled me in on some of the gossip. By now, I really wanted some exercise and wanted to get some pictures of the fort by daylight, figuring that I would probably be busy the rest of the afternoon and night, and be flying home the next day after the work was done. So the driver took me up to the set. It was virtually deserted and I walked all around and snapped away. Then I began the mile and a half

trek back to base camp. It was lovely until the sky clouded over and it began to sprinkle. By the time I was in Wendy's office I was fairly damp, but feeling refreshed. But it was there that I learned that the weather called for more of the same, faster! As I looked out the windows of the trailer-office, I could see red coats and Indians milling around just as last night. Extras were coming in by the busload. 350 were expected. The night was looking interesting.

At this point we finally got down to talking about what I was going to do. Thistledown had been cancelled, Wendy said, and she had opted to hire two local country fiddlers. She assured me that they played for dancing. As for my hopes for an authentic song, I learned that the reason she had not been available to call me on Thursday was that she was at the sound studio with the folk singer pre-recording the song. Sheila would lip-sync on location. The song was called "Little Dove" which began "As I walked in a lonesome grove." The director had heard it on a Library of Congress recording of Anglo-American folk songs and it was "just what he wanted." Ok, so much for authenticity. When I heard Sheila's tape, it sounded beautiful—although one had to overlook her southern mountain accent and remember that the setting was Lake George in up-state New York, and the sentimental, nineteenth-century text about death taking her soldier-husband and "sweet babe." The tune was clearly adapted from a psalm tune and I suppose could have been sung earlier, but I didn't have the files with me to look it up and I don't really think anyone will complain because it did fit into the scene beautifully. Editing may take out some of the lyrics, and when we finally shot the scene, Sheila hummed some of it, which was lovely. So much for the song. It was out of my hands and I was listed as the choreographer, anyway, not the music consultant.

Next, the fiddle tunes. Wendy played tapes that Thistledown had sent and I listened to the tunes that the director liked. She had told me over the phone that he wanted music with good melody and lots of life. However, although she really didn't know what it really was about the various tunes he liked, I could tell immediately. He was determined to have reels set in the double tonic on the first and second degree, beginning and ending on the 6th. It wasn't the gapped scale that attracted him. It was more 19th-century Irish fiddle tunes. And these tunes are not at all melodic, really. None of the ideas I had brought would fit at all. This was a major challenge. I knew there was no way I could produce the music for such a tune, and there was even less chance the musicians could learn and internalize new music in the 4 hours we had left before we were scheduled to begin working. Melodic music with drive which I had in mind were tunes like "Flowers of Edinburgh" and "Over the Hills" which were in the manuscript, and I knew the fiddlers would know.

Besides that, although the fiddlers were supposed to be there at four, there was no sign of either of them. Whew . . . it became clear that it was wing-it all the way. A dangerous posture when there were going to be nearly 800 people, 2 horses, three goats, 10 guard boats on the lake, an ambulance and medic crew — all standing around waiting for the music and dancing to begin. Where, I wondered, was the director? Why didn't someone think this was important enough to get settled BEFORE we were in front of the cameras! And so far, although I had suggested that she find people who knew how to dance, and particularly try to get some cloggers, I had no idea who was going to dance or what. I really began to get scared that I was in way over my head! But I knew that no one else in this country had the combined knowledge of music and dance that I had except Jim, and he hadn't returned Wendy's calls. So I was on the spot.

A 5:30 rehearsal had been called on the set, which was, again, the parade ground of the fort somewhat rearranged from the configuration of the night before. We flagged down a passing van and hopped aboard. Reaching the set we found that the director was planning to be there but had not yet arrived, and miracle of miracles, there was a fiddler! Theresa, an assistant PA / casting person, who had rounded up the dancers, was also there, and she introduced me to some of them. They were mostly drawn from the local contra dance crowd who had assured her that they “did 18th-century dancing.” She and Wendy had swallowed the claim hook, line and sinker. But the word had passed that extras were being used as dancers, and there were far more than the 12 people listed on the call sheet I had been given. About 50 people gathered around me as I was introduced. OK — let’s get on with it. I asked the fiddle to play “Flowers of Edinburgh” and asked for a large circle, just to get them moving. Too many for one, so I had a smaller circle formed in the middle. First we just moved around to the music, then linked up and circled right and left and set forward and back as I have seen Ralph and Chip do so often. We did one and two-hand turns and stars and I talked about these as a substitute for modern swinging. Then I had a thought. Who can do a reel? Only about 8 hands went up. (Then I KNEW they weren’t 18th-century dancers!) Ok, everyone back and set up for two reels of four. I got very watered-down CDS-style dancing. It quickly was apparent that there were only about 12 people who could dance at all including a Highlander in full “traditional” gear who was an RSCDS teacher [!], and the rest simply wanted to be on camera.

But I had no way of distinguishing between who was legit and who was not once they stopped moving. And I had no inkling of the blocking of the scene. So I carried on, giving them a basic vocabulary of what they could do and what they couldn’t: one- and two-hand turns, circles of three, four, or more, setting, no pointed toes (the Scotsman’s eyes opened a bit), and hands on hips but never behind the back, where most of them went immediately, thinking it was authentic. I had them move to reel, jig and 3/4 time, so we’d be ready no matter what music was chosen and I talked to them about what I thought the scene was going to be and how the dance must come up from the ground through their feet, into their bodies as a release from the awful situation they were in as actors in the show—so it wasn’t to be a joyous party of drinking and frolic but something more basic, more savage in a way. It would almost be like a dance of death, with death and dismemberment all around them. Solo and duo jigs, and reels were the forms I planned; the challenge was to make it happen.

Unnoticed to me, the director had arrived and was watching what we were doing. In retrospect, I wish I had had only the dancers because I could have shown him two-man jigs and a good fierce men’s reel which I think would have been much better than the couple dancing he finally got. It was when I was trying to intensify the movement of the reel that he finally stepped forward. However, Wendy told me later that he was impressed with what I was doing so far. The dancers were dismissed to go for “breakfast” and wardrobe and hair and be back for 8:30 call.

By now, the singer had arrived, and it was beginning to rain! So we all huddled under the overhang near the stables on one side of the fort and began to discuss the tunes. I was pretty panicked because the fiddler didn’t really have any ideas, and although he knew “Flowers” and a few others that I could suggest, Mann didn’t like them particularly. He was set on his dark double tonics. When I tried to tell Bruce what kind of tune we wanted, he didn’t understand the technical terms. He was purely a folk fiddler—perfect for the role, played down on his chest with a lot of life—wonderful music, but no understanding of



what he was playing. Then relief came in the figure of the other fiddler. He limped up and explained that he had been waylaid by the costume people, and he had had a back operation two weeks ago so wasn't moving very fast anywhere, but he was ready to buckle down and get to work. I asked if he knew some O'Carolan tunes—sure, and he was off. Still no good. How about “Irish Lamentation?” It was on the tape I sent and Wendy loved it and was still humming it. How about “Over the Hills and Far away?” He played both, no take. Then I explained the dark, double-tonic thing to him and he light up like a lightbulb. How about “Grumbling Old Man, Cackling old woman?” He dug in and Mann's face light up. Yes, that's it.

By now, the duty drummer extra, who was with the brigade of red-coats had arrived on the set and we corralled him. He was a pimply boy of about 19, all done up with a huge “Amadeus-like” white wig and black queue, his uniform all correct with drummer's lace everywhere. He set about playing along with the fiddlers. It was all John Moon technique, high, tight, fast and off-beat stuff—and he asked if he should play the “Biddy Oats” beating for this tune, he wanted so much to be right and be part of it. I suggested that he keep it very relaxed and loose if he could, almost just keeping time with the fiddlers rather than playing any tune. It was to be more of a pickup thing than a formal performance. He was crestfallen, but a good sport and later as they recorded the shooting track and he was backed further and further from the mike and told to play on the rim, he took it all in good stride. We had tried to convince him to play with his fingers on the drum head to get a softer sound, but he didn't seem to get what we were talking about.

By now it was raining harder, and Mann, the two fiddlers, the drummer and the sound man were all together in a stall. In the next stall his assistant, Sheila and I participated in the discussions, leaning over the body of a dead, stuffed horse! Then another extra who was desperate to be part of the scene, began to play the bones from the stall on the other side. It added a neat touch, so he was permitted into the group. All this time, the head sound man had been setting up his equipment to make the tapes which would be sync'd for the filming. The musicians would be called up in a few weeks to a studio to record the final sound track. All we needed now was another tune for the second dance sequence. Then Sheila piped up: “Cold Frosty Morning.” Fox Watson dug into it and delight spread across the director's face. Just right. Now to get both recorded.

Then disaster struck. It began to POUR! A rush by the technicians who are always close at hand, and we retreated further into the fort, into a room near the stable that only leaked a little. Huge umbrellas protected the sound equipment, and the 15 x 25 space was 2 stories high, so the sound was good, except for the noise of the rain on the plastic tarps that covered the roof in a casual sort of way.

But another crisis was developing. Both fiddle bows was rapidly disintegrating. The horsehairs were stretching from the moisture, and on Bruce's bow, were actually coming out of the frog. The call went out for a hair dryer, and we all went down the hill for "breakfast" while the poor fiddlers waited for the dryer and then applied it to their equipment and tried to salvage the evening. When we came back, Bruce's bow had completely come apart, so he had gotten a thong and tied it around the loose hairs and around the frog; a cork was procured to lift the hairs from the bow, the sound people came back and by 8:30 we had the tapes made. And the rain had tapered off.

The extras began to trickle in. It was spine-tingling to look across the parade ground and see colonial women and children meandering in, groups of soldiers, Highlanders, Indians, grenadiers, frontiersmen—it looked so real. Again, as they did with the Grenadiers scene the night before, the assistant directors began to place people in the first blocking positions. No one thought to ask where the dancing was to be, or who were dancers, and I didn't dare say anything for fear it would look amateurish. If they trusted their instincts, I had to trust mine. I did go out into the set and gather the dancers I could spot together; they were as concerned as I, over what they would do, so they came to me with somewhat desperate looks on their faces. We plotted what they would do and they were game to wing-it too, and I retreated to the sidelines to coach.

When the "number 1s" and Mann arrived, he made a special point of introducing me to each one; I even shook hands with Russell Means! It was a very nice gesture from someone facing an arduous evening. I guess he really did appreciate my being there. It's nice to be an expert in a field that most people know nothing about at all! Once the whole scene was blocked, I realized that it was bigger than I thought. It was simply background to a series of lines spoken by the principles, and filmed from the very stable in which we had taken refuge earlier. What I didn't know then, but learned soon enough, was that while the scene would begin with the sound track, the sound had to be cut off for the speaking parts, and the dancers had to dance on with no music.

The next hour was a fascinating blend of the director's additions and modifications of the enormous scene before us, and my coaching of the six people who finally did the dancing in this sequence. Mann wanted two couples dancing, and they pretty much self selected by location—who managed to get near whom where! They figured out a little routine that they would do, based on our ideas from the afternoon and then after each rehearsal I would go out and encourage, cheer, or modify a little part of each couple's movement. They were great sports—and the Highlandman, whom I had encouraged to do a solo jig, improvised by inviting a nearby girl to join him which looked wonderful. Mann didn't cut it, so I guess he either liked it or never saw it on the camera.

Throughout this whole period rain had begun to fall, and people were getting wetter and wetter. One of the assistant directors saw that I didn't have a rain coat and found a beautiful poncho for me so I was spared getting the sore throat which might have followed a thorough wetting. They pressed on and on till finally the heavens opened. A general announcement for "new deal, cover set" was followed by instructions for all to return to extras holding, to let the 12 kids who were there get some sleep, all to rest, and

wait for further instruction. The crew quickly moved all the equipment into the pre-arranged “cover set” which was always ready in case of rain, and rehearsing and filming continued. I found a quiet corner to sit down, with a group of brawney, tattooed, loin-cloth clad Indians, and we just waited. Midnight came and we went down for “lunch” - filet mignon this time, among other goodies. then back up to the Fort to wait some more and by this time a beautiful moon had appeared and the night was clear, cool and beautiful. But they were in the middle of the cover scene and couldn't move back. So we all waited. And waited. And waited.

Finally at 4 AM the call went down to holding — bring them on up. The soldiers formed up and marched up the hill, and women and children were vanned up; the fires were stoked up and we were all wondering how anything could be done in the hour that remained before the sky would begin to lighten. Then Mann came out and thanked everyone for being so patient, and then divided the set up into five groups by area. He then told everyone to remember where they were and what doing, and would they all please be back here on Monday at 5 PM for wardrobe and makeup, 8:30 on the set. No one was sure why all that couldn't have been said down in the holding tent, but there wasn't too much grumbling. Not knowing exactly what my status was, I sought out someone with a radio who called down to base-camp. Should I stay over, or go home on the scheduled flight on Saturday. They apparently checked with Mann on the cover set and the word came back, please stay if you can. I gratefully groped made my way out to a van and rode down the hill to base camp to find a van going back to Morganton. As it turned out, I had to wait until they wrapped the scene at about 6 AM Saturday, because the vans mostly take technicians and standins, who weren't ready to go until 7, so I fell into my bed at about 7:30 AM, amazed at my ability to stay awake all night.

I think it was that night that the big blowup happened which only circulated in rumors around the set on Monday. The story I got was that the chief camera-man had walked off the set at some point. By Monday, a new English camera-man was in charge, so something happened, but no one really knew what it was.

I woke at about 11, disgusted that my body insisted on living days as well as nights, and again decided to placate it with real food if I could. I got dressed and ventured out the front door to see what was beyond the Holiday Inn, before the highway overpass. “The Country Cubbard” [sic] stood behind a Texaco station next door. I went in and found an assortment of goodies to tide me over the weekend. I knew I was really tired, and I had absolutely nothing to do, and I had three full days to do it in! So I got a quart of milk, a box of raisin bran, some tea, a load of bread, jam and peanut butter, some ham and cheese and a small Styrofoam cooler. I chatted with the owner who gave me a bowl and two plastic forks and a knife. I had asked him for a spoon and didn't notice the forks til I was back in my room. I learned how to eat cereal Chinese style. On the way back I found a local paper with a crossword puzzle. A bowl of good old raisin bran made all of me feel better and I went back to bed and managed to sleep another four hours.

I felt better when I woke up, but it was raining outside, so I decided to call home and ask Bob to FAX me some papers so I could work on the MUSA Core-repertory book proposal for which Wayne had sent another pleading letter just before I left. The hotel soon called and said they had a FAX for me, and at last I had something to do. From then until Monday evening at 5:30 when I got on the bus for the set, I mostly slept, worked on the MUSA proposal, watched TV and walked around the parking lot when I felt woozy from the TV! I managed to watch a baseball game, a football game, the

Phantom of the Opera, Chorus Line, several Discovery programs on gardening and on sharks [!] and one on how to install vent pipes for add-on bathrooms in a house [!!].

At last it was time to go back to work and although I hadn't been able to sleep much on Monday, I thought I could make it through the night. The same routine unfolded — the extras appeared from the fort as though they lived there, the soldiers marched up the hill, and the radios continued to keep the whole organism together and moving forward. Rain continued to threaten, but so far, it looked as though we would get some filming in.

Once the scene was set up, we ran through the rehearsal several times, the number 1 team arrived and took their places and at last we began to get some of it on film. By now the fires were on propane so a little shower here and there didn't matter. We pressed on, changing a little of this here and there and re-shooting. However, the rain got more serious at about 11 and by 11:30 was really pelting down. So they ordered up the vans and took the women and children back to holding, the men marching to the bottom of the hill and getting into big busses for the half-mile ride to holding.

This night I made a mistake and learned why the crew and the extras are kept separately. I decided to go with my new musician friends down the extras holding and have dinner with them. It would be more friendly and I would see what it was like. Well, it was a zoo! Well managed but a zoo, simply because there were 250 Indians, soldiers, and Highlanders all with their full gear, guns and hats and wigs and all, plus about 100 women and children plus quite a few relatives and friends who came to watch.

When lunch was served, we had to go out into the pelting rain to get our food, and on the way back I slipped and fell into the mud, slathering myself up to the waist with clay-like goo. It was a neat fall, so no damage, except to my dignity and my only shoes. My dinner went flying, so I had to go back across the lot for another plate. Dinner wasn't quite up to crew standards, either, although it wasn't bad, consisting of wild-rice stuffed chicken breast, green beans, and other fixings. Perhaps 2 star dining in extras catering. Anyway, in the general hubbub, the soldiers singing and jesting, the kids running around — we finally decided to get a country dance going in one corner, but just as we had cleared the space and lured the fiddlers down, they called for groups A & B to come up to the set.

It was about 3 AM by then, and I didn't think we'd get much done since it was still raining a bit, but off we all went bravely, back up the hill to the Fort and with a lot of hard work and patience, we finally finished that scene from that angle. Dawn was breaking as we clambered back into the vans and I got home at 8:30 Tuesday morning.

Tuesday night we would shoot it from the other angle, and get another scene which was background to the big romantic moment in the film. By this time I was getting good at sleeping during the day and didn't wake up til about 2, and with the experience of the past three nights, the extras were all getting good at obeying orders and setting up. Tuesday night flew by, a soggy damp night but mercifully no serious rain. We shot the same scene from two other locations, and then changed around a bit, adding more death and destruction to the scene. Mann seemed to thrive on blood and gore. One of the soldiers was telling me about a night a week or so ago when they had brought in some makeup artists, or prosthetics people they may be called— anyway, they had done up a big group of soldiers to look blown apart, with eyes and guts hanging out, the whole gory bit. Anyway, this guy and his buddies had been shooting a trenches scene as Frenchies outside the fort. They were tired from having run up and down the hill so

often, and they rolled off the bus into extras holding for some lunch. There, spread out on all the tables and benches were the newly makeup maimed and wounded soldiers. He said he nearly was sick.

We introduced some new dancing in the final scene. This time, although Mann said he wanted three couples dancing, I managed to get three women dancing plus two other couples singly. This was background to the “kiss” on the ramparts. It was a long gooshy kiss filmed from two camera angles, but at least this time the dancers had music all the way through -three times through the 32 bar tune, speeding up at the end — it was pretty dramatic I think. I suggested a little routine for the three ladies of setting, circling and stars, and gave them a motivation of feminine support group, which worked very well. Mann didn't change it, so I guess he liked it.

Most of the “background artists” couldn't see Lewis and Stowe from their positions, but I could. I think they were aiming at another Academy Award with that one! Yet, later on that morning, when I was waiting for the Morganton van to appear, I saw them heading back to their trailers, hand in hand, just as though they were a couple of kids coming back from a date. When she got to her trailer a couple of large bouncy dogs emerged, her attention turned to them, and he just went on to his. They are both very tall and lean—he must be at least 6'5 and she's 5'11 or so. Someone said that he sat down most of the time in “My Left Foot” but I wouldn't know, not being a movie goer. Anyway, we worked until daylight with only one minor glitch when I simply had to get up and correct it when the sound man ran the wrong music! I was scared but I HAD to be sure no more takes were made to that tape. Finally we heard the welcome words “Print, new deal,” a dawn skirmish was set up, and we were released. I waited til the filming was over and about 8 a van was ready to go back to Morganton. While I was waiting, the assistant director happened to be going by, and he particularly came over to me to thank me and compliment my “good work” which made me feel good.

I had asked the travel people to get me a late afternoon flight so I could sleep first, which they did; a van arrived at 5 to take me to Asheville, driven by a most personable black chap named Ron Michaud. I queried him about his heritage and he said his family came originally from New Orleans, which is what I suspected, so he really was more Creole than African in origin. Anyway, he was a delightful conversationalist and willing to talk about racism in the area, mentioning Lenoir, where Anne and Tony had lived, as being a particularly bad area for race-relations. They had sensed that too, and his assessment matched theirs.

My flight home was smooth and it wasn't until I was glancing over the call sheets while I was on the plane that I noticed that my name appeared printed on the call sheet as choreographer! Awesome. And without the good work of the dancers and fiddlers I wouldn't have been able to do a thing. Squashy came right to the door from her usual camp-out spot under the azalea bush when I came in and turned on the light. It was a little hard to get to sleep at 11 PM, but the bed felt good and I was in clean clothes at last.