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THE AMERICAN BANJO FRATERNITY

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FALL 2007 RALLY REPORT PARKE HUNTER RALLY

We had an excellent turnout for the October 2007 ABF Rally in Punxsutawney, Pa. By late Thursday, twenty-six were in attendance, about half players. Drew Frech was able to start rehearsing the orchestra that evening. Drew's new arrangement of Parke Hunter's Levanto Polka went off very nicely.

As anyone who has tried playing it knows, the music of Hunter is not easy. But people did very well. Drew, his pupil Dan Colombo, and Gail Verbridge did an excellent job in two great recitals. This was Dan's first Rally, and his playing was really impressive. His father Rich Colombo was along for the ride. Paul Heilman, another of Drew's pupils, continues to play some excellent numbers. Paul also enjoys setting music on his computer and did the orchestra parts for Levanto.

It was great to have Charlie and Carol Stim back after missing a few. Carol is recovering nicely from her stroke. Charlie and Doug Kiessling, regular practice partners, did some nifty duets. Chuck Haydn has been a Rally regular for the past few years; he always comes up with some fine performances. His friend Emily Walker joined up at the Rally. Jack Werner traveled all the way from Michigan and displayed some nimble fingering on numbers often tickled by our late president Lloyd Longacre.

On the distaff side, Becky Schneider and Ruth Westlake played their usual clean solos and accompaniments. They were also the power in the first banjo section of the orchestra. Gail Verbridge, as usual, was our masterful accompanist on cello banjo and piano. How would we stay together without Gail? Bob Bell played some fine pieces for our informal sessions and joined in the group numbers. Norm Azinger and Joan Dickerson rippled off some duets and solos. Newly joined member Mark Shenker enjoyed his first Rally. Unfortunately, Bob Spadoni had to leave early. George Bucher, our binder twine sculptor, played some of his

(Continued on Page 4.)

AMERICAN BANJO FRATERNITY SPRING RALLY May 15, 16, 17, 2008.

The 2008 Spring Rally will be held at the Genetti Hotel, 200 West Fourth Street, Williamsport, Pennsylvania on May 15, 16, 17, 2008. Their phone is (800) 321-1388 or (570) 326-6600.

The hotel is heavily booked, especially for Saturday, but there may be some rooms left in our ABF reserved block. If you call, be sure to say you are with the American Banjo Fraternity. If they say they are fully booked, ask to speak to a manager and check to see if there are any rooms left in our block. There are a number of other hotels/motels in the area, all less than a 10 minute drive away.

The theme for the Rally is Walter Jacobs Music. Jacobs was a composer and a major publisher of banjo and other fretted instrument music. The ABF Orchestra will play three new arrangements: That Banjo Rag by A. J. Weidt, Carolina Tar Heel by Dan Sullivan, and Thomas Armstrong's On Guard March. Drew Frech is organizing programs of the music of Thomas Allen. Drew and Dan Colombo will be presenting Friday and Saturday recitals. For information or music, please contact Mary Smith or Eli Kaufman.



FALL 2008 RALLY IMPORTANT NOTICE Error in Date of Fall 2008 RALLY.

*The notice card sent out last month is **WRONG**.*

**The Fall 2008 RALLY will be
October 23, 24, 25, 2008**

**at the Pantall Hotel, Punxsutawney, PA
Please make a note of this on your calendar.**

2008 is the 100th anniversary of S. S. Stewart's death and we will be featuring the music of Stewart. The orchestra will play Hemlock Schottische, Limited Mail Galop, and Excelsior Medley. We may even try to squeeze in Lights and Shadows. October is also the 60th anniversary of the ABF.

ABF website: www.abfbanjo.org

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 CLARKE BUEHLING, TIM MAINLAND,
 Orchestra Directors

 The SPRING RALLY WILL BE HELD
 MAY 17, 18, 19, 2008
 IN WILLIAMSPORT, PENNSYLVANIA

THE FALL RALLY WILL BE HELD
OCTOBER 23, 24, 25, 2008
 IN PUNXSUTAWNEY, PENNSYLVANIA

Is your information correct in the ABF
 Membership Directory we mailed out
 recently?

Also remember to keep us posted if your
 mailing address or email address changes.

NEW MEMBERS

Greg Adams, 18022 Chalet Dr., apt. 102
 Germantown, MD 20874
 Dennis Boutsikaris, 3 Lavetta Pl.
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 Geoff Weaver, 44 Crosby Rd.
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NOTES FROM MEMBERS

Derek Lilywhite needed some sheet music for "Eileen" and he needed "Eileen" for his accompanist of the same name. But "sadly she broke her arm so we could not do the Phil Barker Banjo Sonata that we had intended. Happily she has recovered well, but then I reacted badly to a flu injection and have spent the last couple of months coughing me guts up. I have now started to improve."

Rich and **Alex Usher** have found that "life is certainly delightfully leisurely for us these days ... Rich's knee replacement is doing well and we're both enjoying nearby Elderhostels where we serve as hosts and I give concerts. My current programs are a mixture of funny folk songs, solo autoharp pieces and other nonsense."

PETER PARDEE wrote to tell us that the first annual California Banjo Gathering is scheduled at the Doubletree Hotel in Sacramento Oct.17-19. This will embrace the banjo in all its forms through its rich history, with workshops, master classes, demonstrations, vendors, collectors, and a great lineup for a concert. Clarke Buehling will represent the classic, fingerstyle banjo. Others recruited include Pat Cloud, Bill Keith, Taj Mahal, Mick Maloney, Gordy Ohliger, Tom and Patric Stauber, Mike and Peggy Seeger, Sammy Shelor, and Buddy Wachter. The concert is planned for Sunday the 19th. This is a for-profit venture whose goals are:

- A greater integration of the community of banjo devotees.
- Involving more people, especially youth, in music making.
- Bettering the public image of the banjo in all its manifestations through an arduous advance publicity/marketing/media campaign, and the concert.
- Equipping players from neophyte/hobbyist to professional to further the art.

You can keep posted on this event by going to Peter's website: www.thebanjoman.com



AMERICAN BANJO FRATERNITY FALL RALLY OCTOBER 2007 PUNXSUTAWNEY, PA

Top Row: Bob Bell, Paul Heilman, Doug Kiessling, Gail Verbridge, Virginia Nardone, George Bucher, Norm Azinger.
 Middle Row: Jack Werner, Wayne Adams, Molly Culbertson, Joan Dickerson, Emily Walker, Ruth Westlake, Carol & Charlie Stim,
 John Kentner.
 Front: Becky Schneider, Dan Colombo, Drew Frech, Chuck Hayden, Madeleine Kaufman, JoAnn Azinger, Eli Kaufman.

ABF BANJO ORCHESTRA



FALL 2007 RALLY REPORT (Cont. from pg. 1)
 compositions on his unique homemade banjos. Wayne Adams, our Canadian tremolo and Ossman specialist, played a wide range of solos as well as banjeaurine in the orchestra.

And, of course, we were glad to see people like Molly Culbertson, Jon Perry, and Eileen Rowland, not to mention JoAnn Azinger, our former treasurer, who just come to listen and enjoy. President Bill Kentner's grandson John and daughter Virginia were also most welcome.

Following are lists of attendees and music played at our formal sessions.

Rally Attendees Fall 2007

Wayne Adams
 Norm and Joann Azinger
 Bob Bell
 George Bucher
 Dan and Rich Colombo
 Molly Culbertson
 Joan Dickerson
 Drew Frech
 Chuck Hayden
 Paul and Rosemary Heilman
 Elias and Madeleine Kaufman
 John Kentner
 Doug Kiessling
 Virginia Nardone
 Jon Perry
 Eileen Rowland
 Becky Schneider
 Mark Shenker
 Bob Spadoni
 Charlie and Carol Stim
 Gail and Gary Verbridge
 Emily Walker
 Jack Werner
 Ruth Westlake

Parke Hunter Recital—Part I

Friday Afternoon October 26, 2007

Drew Frech, acc. by Gail Verbridge and Dan Colombo.
 Fun on the Wabash
 Ruby Waltz
 Eversholt March
 The Jay Hawk Two-Step (A Ragged Rag)
 Goblin Dance
 Snap Dragon, Galop
 Impromptu, Andante and Waltz
 Cretan Patrol

Friday Evening Round-Robin Oct. 26, 2007

Group: Berkeley March, Sunflower Dance, Ladbroke M.
 Eli Kaufman, acc. Frech: Brooklyn Belle, Liberty Bell M.
 Charlie Stim, acc. Kiessling: Clifton Bank
 Doug Kiessling: Avenue Parade
 Ruth Westlake, acc. Verbridge, Schneider: Faust Waltz, Take
 My Life and Let It Be
 Norm Azinger, acc. Dickerson: Carolina Capers, Kaloola
 Joan Dickerson: Honolulu Cake Walk
 Group: Whistling Rufus, Dance California, Transatlantique

George Bucher: Maytag Rag, Riverboat Tune
 Wayne Adams, acc. Verbridge: Shuffle Along, Banjo
 Spring Song
 Paul Heilman, acc. Frech: Flower Queen, Tender Glances
 Dan Colombo, acc. Frech: Alhambra March, Concert Polka

Round-Robin Saturday Afternoon Oct 27

Group: Berkeley March, Dance California
 Drew Frech, acc. Verbridge: Arabesque Promenade,
 Polonaise No. 2
 Dan Colombo, acc. Frech, Verbridge: Banjo Regimental,
 Darktown Parade
 Paul Heilman, acc. Frech: Espinata, Banjos in the
 Cornfield
 Chuck Haydn, acc. Schneider, Westlake: Imperiator
 Jack Werner: Dance of the Fairies, Clarinet Polka
 Wayne Adams: Tango Mi Hijo, Tremolo Melody
 Joan Dickerson: Just Like That, Old Fashioned Breakdown
 Norm Azinger, acc. Dickerson: Biff Bang
 Group: Whistling Rufus, Sunflower Dance
 Ruth Westlake, acc. Scheider, Verbridge: Erin Fantasy,
 Precious Lord
 George Bucher: Latino Casino, Punxy. Promenade Parade
 Dough Kiessling, acc. Stim: Kingdom Comin'
 Doug Kiessling: The Gold Diggers
 Eli Kaufman, acc. Verbridge: Indiana Echoes, Gypsy Dance
 Group: Ladbroke March, Mill Dam Galop

Parke Hunter Recital—Part II

Drew Frech, acc. by Gail Verbridge and Dan Colombo
 Pensacola, Polka-March
 Violet du Bois, Mazurka
 Navajo March
 Merry Andrew Jig
 Romance
 Darkies Spring Song (Van Alstyne, arr. Hunter)
 Rosebud, Barn Dance
 Zingara, Polka March

ABF Banjo Orchestra

Leader: Drew Frech
 Banjeaurines: Frech, Heilman, Adams
 1st banjo: Schneider, Hayden, Westlake
 2nd banjo: Colombo, Dickerson, Kiessling, Stim
 Piccolo Banjo: Smith, Kaufman
 Cello: Verbridge, Azinger
 Celebrated Newport Galop (Jennings) arr. Buehling
 Levanto Polka (Paroletti/Hunter) arr. Frech
 Lights and Shadows (Stewart) arr. Buehling

RALLY SNAPS



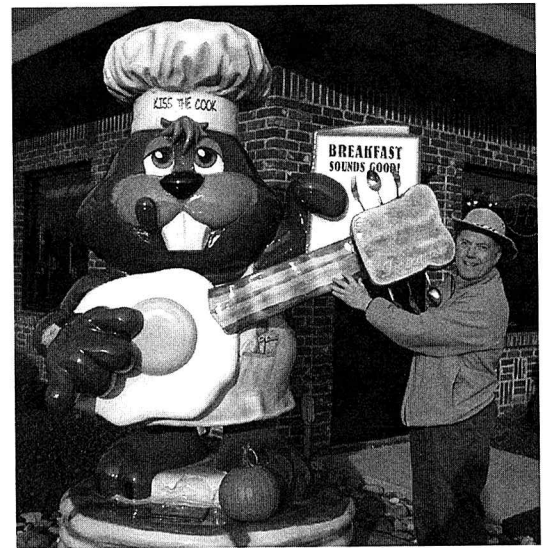
Left top to bottom:

Late night jamming: Doug Keissling, Ruth Westlake, and Dan Colombo.

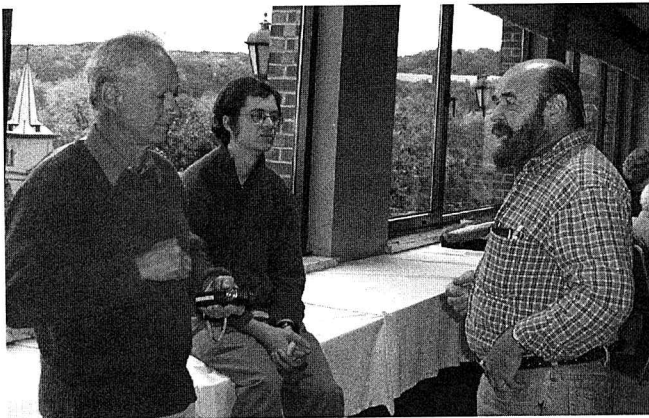
Chuck Hayden, Becky Schneider, Ruth Westlake.
 Rich and Dan Colombo, George Bucher.
 Joan Dickerson, Norm Azinger.

Right top to bottom:

Eli K. gives Punxsutawney Phil a hand with his banjo.
 Doug Kiessling and Charlie Stim.
 Dan Colombo, first time in the "hot seat"



RALLY SNAPS FALL 2007



THE BANJO ENTERTAINERS by Lowell Schreyer.

Reviewed by Jack Werner

Without a doubt, this is a first-class book. There are six solid chapters on Joel Walker Sweeney, and that's not counting the obligatory first chapter ("Out of Africa"), which is actually about Sweeney in the sense that it is about the Banjo World before Sweeney. Then Sam Sweeney is covered in chapter 14 ("The Banjo in the Civil War"), and Sweeney returns in chapter 21 ("Henning and the Sweeney Banjo"). Depending on how you sharpen your pencil, the book is 25 to 38 percent about Sweeney, and adding the chapters on other banjoists of the Sweeney era: pioneers Emmett, Ferguson, Whitlock, etc., you might even say that half the book is about Sweeney and his contemporary players and music.

The book as a whole is a history of the banjo and its players in nineteenth-century America starting with the Stedman banjo, Sweeney, Whitlock, Emmett, and Ferguson, players of the 1840s, 1850s, banjoists on the showboat, Civil War banjoists, post Civil War banjoists, black minstrel banjoists, lady banjoists, banjo artists, classic era banjoists, ragtime banjoists; it concludes with a mini history of the "Fraternity of Five-String Banjoists of America" (that's us, before we became the ABF) in its early years. Then follow four appendices (Frank Converse's Ratings of Contemporary Banjoists, Lesser-Known Banjoists between 1850 and the Civil War, Reconstruction Period Banjoists, and Medicine Show Banjoists of the 1890s). They are followed by a banjo players index; a minstrel and medicine companies, circuses, and acts index; a performing venues index; a music index; a general index; and a great bibliography. An added plus is that the book is a study in how to do footnotes—all packed into 269 pages. If you want to study a nineteenth-century banjoist, this is the place to start. It's an incredible resource.

The author's bona fides include being a triple threat banjo player. Lowell was known to members of the ABF as a really good classic five-string player, but those who were familiar with his banjo other life as a semi-professional tenor and plectrum player often claim that the five-string was a hobby and that as a performer on tenor/plectrum, he was "electric." His "plum job, dream gig" was as a fill-in banjoist on the Delta and Mississippi

Queen riverboats. His profession (day job) before he retired was as a journalist, which probably has more than a little to do with the book being such an interesting read in spite of its almost encyclopedic structure. There is a lot of information packed into just 269 pages, so the writing had to be concise (just the facts, ma'am). This he managed very adequately without being dry. Lowell joined the Fraternity in the early 1960s, and his interest in banjo history can be traced back to at least as far as sometime before 1984 in past 5-Stringers. His interest in ragtime was referred to as "academic" when he attended his first rally in 1965. This book, then, is a product of something close to 25 years of research by a highly qualified banjo performer and writer.

The first chapter ("Out of Africa") sets the stage for the history to follow. It is unlike most of the rest of the book in that Lowell isn't the researcher gathering the "data" from nineteenth-century newspapers, journals, playbills, etc., rather, he returns to his roots and "reports" the story of the banjo as told by other contemporary researchers. He starts out with the Stedman banjo of the late 1700s (using our 5-Stringer editors, the Kaufmans), the African Halams and Akontings (modern research based on oral history), followed by accounts of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century slave banjoists in the U.S. Lowell then explores accounts of some possible white performers before the early 1830s, but concludes: "However, any such banjo playing by Graupner, Dixon, and Williamson made no particular impact in spreading interest in the slave's instrument to American society," and follows up with: "Then along came Joel Sweeney." Lowell cuts to the chase.

The Sweeney biography is Lowell at his best. To my mind, he literally touches the stars. He figured out (quite a few years ago) that Joel Walker Sweeney could be chased through contemporary newspapers. When I first heard about Lowell's work, I was struck by the absolute simplicity of the idea. I was also aware that no one else was doing it (at least for banjoists). The really amazing part of the story was that Lowell crossed the vast chasm between what you *can* do to what you actually *do* do. There is a story in circulation that Lowell did his Sweeney research at stops the

(Continued next page)

steamboats made while he was playing his banjo gigs. Had I given it a thought, I should have wondered where there was a pilot who could navigate the boats through all the snags and shoal water between Pittsburgh, New York, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia.

Although not quite as exciting, I suspect a good deal of research was done on a microfilm reader at home, a machine that was probably running pretty hot by the time the research was completed. Lowell's Sweeney Performance Chronology that is printed in Bob Carlin's book *Birth of the Banjo* is only a small part of this research. I thought Lowell was pretty generous in giving Carlin, a competitor, his chronology, but after chasing all sorts of footnotes, I realize that perhaps he blew a little smoke and just politely gave Carlin only what he asked for. What Carlin got was a small part of the research picture. The chronology doesn't say a word about the sources Lowell used or include copies of the information he found. By itself, it is only a part of a treasure map without an X to mark the spot where the real treasure is buried. However in *The Banjo Entertainers* Lowell tells all, and "the facts tell the stories." Newspaper ads, news items, and show bills illustrate the chapters, and the text contains quote after quote from his research. The chapters on Sweeney and his contemporaries are a triumph of diligence and determination, and they read very well.

Chapter 4 ("Ferguson Before Sweeney?") introduces another angle on historical research. In Lowell's words: "Much about Sweeney's career can be documented from advertisements and news items about him in newspapers and show bills of the 1830's, 40's, and 50's. However this was not the case with Ferguson." Ferguson was rumored to be the banjoist who taught Dan Emmett how to play, and this story was all the information that banjo historians had about this elusive early player. Although the footnotes I quote below are not in strict chronological order, the following reads like a chess match, and you might want to wait and have the book in hand before you tackle this paragraph; I will let the footnotes tell the story. The letter by C. J. Rodgers, former Cincinnati Circus Manager, was first printed in the New York Clipper (June 20, 1874). The story is about an itinerant banjo player hired to play banjo and handle canvas who teaches Emmett how to play

banjo in 1840 (footnotes 1 & 2). The Ferguson letter was printed (page 111) in Hans Nathan's book *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, although Lowell might have found it himself while reading the Clipper. Lowell compares the Cincinnati Circus route of 1840 to the details in the Roger's letter and finds a match (footnotes 3 & 4). From the New Orleans Daily Picayune, Oct. 20, 1841, Lowell reproduces an advertisement for musicians hired and wishing to apply for employment to meet at the St. Charles Theatre on Thursday Oct. 21 (footnote 5). Ferguson was not on the roster of the Fogg and Stickney Circus that appeared in New Orleans, April 1841 (footnote 6). Ferguson was the first act on the bill (Lowell reports "top of the bill," which implies Ferguson was THE headliner, which he wasn't, he was the warm-up act) in an advertisement for the St. Charles Theatre in the New Orleans Daily Picayune, Oct. 26, 1841 (footnote 7). Footnotes 8 and 9 contain incidental information. Lowell finds Ferguson in the 1842 New Orleans City Directory under "victims of the yellow fever epidemic of 1841." He died Nov. 1, 1841 (footnote 10). The musician Archibald Ferguson, aged 22, from Virginia, is buried Nov. 22, 1841 in the Lafayette Cemetery: from Lafayette Cemetery records on microfilm in the New Orleans Public Library (footnote 11). Finally, Lowell concludes by finding a family with a son Archibald from Buckingham County, Virginia that could be A. Ferguson's. Although the order of the foregoing is not strictly chronological, it does give some idea of what was involved with chasing Ferguson down 150 plus years after the events transpired. It would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall in the Schreyer household while this research was unfolding. Was it, as Sherlock Holmes would say: "Elementary my dear Watson"? Whatever it took, or however long it took, it was a nice piece of detective work.

For the period of the mid 1850s, Lowell starts using the entertainment newspaper The New York Clipper as a contemporary primary source—as opposed to early histories and reminiscences written years after the events. The list of known banjoists has grown to the point where it is not really possible to even come close to writing about

(Continued on page 8)

THE BANJO ENTERTAINERS (Ctd. from page 7)

all of them as was possible in the 1840s. In chapter 10 ("The 1850's—A Pugilistic Banjo Age") is found subdivisions entitled: "Frank Converse and Contemporaries," "Go West, Young Banjo Player," "Taking the Banjo Abroad," and "The First Banjo Contest." All these demonstrate the considerable growth of the banjo-playing public. This is further borne out in chapter 11 ("1850's Banjo Instruction and Construction"). The Briggs, Rice, Buckley, and the two early 1860s methods by Converse further confirm the growth of banjo playing as a profession, as well as amateur activity. The Dobsons also enter the fray with the "short handle banjo" and a simple banjo method written in tablature. Converse, in his reminiscences, recalled makers Clarke, Wilson, and Morrell—without a mention of Bucher or Ashborn—as well as Dobson, possibly implying that it was these three makers who were recognized by the professional trade. Lowell notes in his conclusions to chapter 10 that all the aforementioned growth would fade as the Civil War commenced, without mentioning that his work on the 1850s banjo world pretty well documents that it was the banjo that spread the banjo and not the Civil War. It was a fait accompli by the time the first shots were fired.

Chapter 12 ("The Showboat Banjo") was the one chapter that fell short of my expectations. The irony is that Lowell, who actually played banjo on the Delta Queen, would have been hands down my nomination for the person to write it. His work on the showboat banjo is good, but there just isn't enough of it. There were many showboats, including some that used minstrel venues. Philip Graham's book *Showboats* (Lowell even quotes from this book) actually has quite a few references to banjo playing on the rivers, canals, and oceans. This could probably be extended to other forms of transportation, including stagecoaches and railroads. I've seen stagecoach stops in Michigan and Ohio that had ballrooms and were the local center for entertainment (and alcohol) in the communities that hosted them. I'm sure Lowell also wanted a larger chapter but was unable to find the hard evidence by press time.

Chapter 13 ("The Banjo in the Civil War") is terrific. The Sam Sweeney story gets more press in other accounts than here. Although it is interesting as a banjo, minstrel, and music story, it does not reflect well

on the flamboyant J. E. B. Stuart, who was accused of paying too much attention to things not exactly related to his duties: he went riding with his men on a foraging expedition on his own hook instead of being the eyes and ears of Lee's army (the *raison d'être* of cavalry), which left Lee blind to the positions and size of the enemy that faced him for the critical first days of Gettysburg. The Burke Davis article on the Swinging Sweeneys actually gives the best coverage of Stuart's detractors, but his personal use of the musicians was perhaps not the banjo's finest hour. Lowell, however, edited Sweeney's story not so much for this reason as he just needed the space for the numerous other known Civil War banjoists, of which there were many. Lowell has collected a goodly number of the veterans and their records and puts them all in one place in an excellent chapter about the banjo in this period.

In chapters 15-19 ("After the War Was Over," "Converse vs. the Dobsons," "The Black Banjoists of Minstrelsy," "Banjo Laydies of the 80's," and "The Banjo Pioneers Bow Out"), the use of the New York Clipper as a source increases almost to the point of being the only source. I want to say this is not good history (and it isn't), but you can't have it both ways, and I make this criticism and then tell my hopefully gentle readers that Lowell probably picked the entire run of the Clipper for its banjo fruit. High fruit, low fruit, green fruit, rotten fruit, drops; I can't say for sure, but I'll bet that orchard's picked almost clean of any banjo gleanings. Then, of course, he cross referenced it in Appendices 2, 3, and 4. Also note in Appendix 2 ("Lesser-Known Banjoists between 1850 and the Civil War") that Lowell lists the lesser-known banjoists year by year from 1859 through 1860, because of the great influx of banjoists till the year 1861, when the number of new banjoists drops, which he reports. It is possible that the Clipper might have given up on watching this growth so closely in favor of reporting the big news stories. The real point is that the banjo had caught on by the Civil War, which Lowell documents without fanfare.

Chapters 20-22 ("The Banjo Goes Artistic," "Henning and the Sweeney Banjo," and "Classic Banjo at its Peak") then reflect the use of some new source material, the banjo journals. These were trade and enthusiast journals written for the rising crop of professional and amateur players intent on elevating the banjo into a real musical instrument. Lowell defines "artistic" and "elevating" in footnote 7, chapter 20: "The terms 'artistic' and 'elevating' as applied to the banjo in this period implied a more sophisticated level of technique and repertoire based on European music standards than had been the case in earlier minstrel banjo playing." These changes are also the hallmarks of

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manufacturing as well as playing. The folk instrument evolves and its popularity grows with its adoption by a culture that now has "leisure time." This generation worked hard and played even harder.

Chapter 23 ("The Banjo and Ragtime") introduces another innovation, the phonograph—now the discography becomes a research subject and banjoists do their part to support the fledgling phonograph industry. The ragtime era was a banjoist's dream (if they could play the music), and it definitely was the top of the toboggan run for the five-string banjo as we know it. The era of expansion was over and an era of decline soon begins for the beloved classic five-string. Lowell's work again demonstrates another, perhaps unstated, facet of the banjo story and that is the problem of using the words "tradition" or "traditional" to describe the instrument and its players in the nineteenth century. The instrument, players, and its music didn't seem to sit still long enough to be called traditional. Something more akin to avant-garde is in order.

Given that Lowell pays homage to Edw. Le Roy Rice's *Monarchs of Minstrelsy* in his Preface and quotes from it often, I was surprised that he didn't catalogue Rice's banjoists. In a few cases, Rice mentions some details that would suggest a little more research is in order (example: Lowell missed one of Rice's Graupner sightings on September 4, 1809). Also, after comparing Rice's account of Frank Converse to Lowell's, I noticed some similarity in sentences here and there. The explanation is that both of them were probably using the same source, The New York Clipper. An interesting study would be to list Rice's banjoists and compare that list to Lowell's. They probably look similar. Of the two authors, Lowell unquestionably is the more thorough. The *Entertainers* is not a rewrite or update of Rice. It has similarities in spirit, but it stands on its own and presents a lot more information—and the footnoting is flawless.

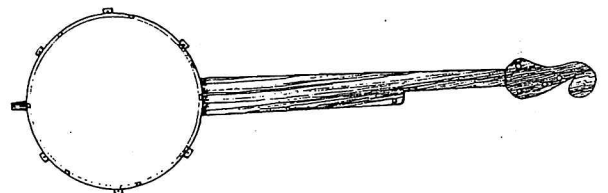
Rice did make this interesting contemporary comment at the start of his Converse account: "The name of Frank Converse is indissolubly associated with all that is great in banjo playing." Converse would be my first choice for father of "classic five-string banjo." (James Buckley and G. S. Buckley would be possible competitors, but not close.) Lowell used Converse almost as a primary source for early banjoists. As a result, Converse's biography got dispersed through the last half of the book, which reduces Converse's importance as a pivotal banjoist.

The few errors that are more substantive in *Banjo Entertainers* are generally errors of omission. More than a few players aren't here that should be. On Sweeney, I purposefully tried not to compare Schreyer to Carlin. Imagine, two biographies of a banjo player in one year! Both are good biographies and are well worth

reading. If you really want to know all about Sweeney, you will have to read both books, as both authors have areas that the other didn't cover and their opinions differ on numerous details. The use of the Clipper was mentioned before. Reminiscences can also be problematic. Often a source slips up on dates, places, names, puffs his personal contributions, and/or uses reminiscences to settle old scores. As an example, Converse mentioned that he tilted with George Coes without mentioning he was a partner of Coes in Purdey, Coes, and Converse's Minstrels in 1867. The partnership was short (a fallout? hard feelings?). Lowell mostly lets his facts speak for themselves, and in a few cases, throws in some remarkable pieces of documentation without comment. To his credit, Lowell never makes the mistake of building a case of rational-sounding alternatives with an equally rational-sounding judgment on what the subject *might* have done in the circumstances.

This is a great book. My review copy is already suffering from much hard use. It is a tremendous reference work, and the Appendices and Indexes are really useful. Lowell wrote a good Sweeney biography, rescued Archibald Ferguson from oblivion, distilled the entire run of the New York Clipper for its banjo gleanings and indexed them, wrote the biographies of a large share of the nineteenth-century's professional banjoists, and wove their stories together, illustrated with show bills, photographs, advertisements, music, contemporary news accounts, and reminiscences, into a concisely well-written book of modest size. On craftsmanship in writing, Lowell walks away with the blue ribbon. As mentioned before, *The Banjo Entertainers* is a book with 25 plus years of research behind it, which really isn't that unusual, especially for good histories. That he will be memorialized in hundreds of future footnotes doesn't even require mentioning. That this book represents the last word on the subject, no, the subject is too big. Lowell, however, has "elevated" the bar for banjo research quite a bit higher, and he will in many ways be a very hard act to follow.

The Banjo Entertainers: Roots to Ragtime can be purchased from M. Schreyer, 55807 River Fort Drive, Mankato, MN 56001. The price is \$35.00 plus \$5.00 shipping in the USA; \$9.00 Canada; \$11.00 Europe (check or money order). We will have copies for sale at the May Rally.



WHISTLING RUFUS

Full Version* (4 strains)

Banjo Solo

KERRY MILLS

INTRO

A 10B-----, 5B-----, 10B-----, 8P 5PB 5B-----, 10B-----, 8P 5PB

10PB 5B-----, 10B-----, 8PB

10B-----, 1. 2. Last time *Fine*

B 6P-----, 1PB-----, 5B-----, 1. 2.

A' 5B-----, 10B-----, 8P 5PB 5B-----, 10B-----, 8P 5PB

*This arrangement corresponds to the original 1899 Piano version. It includes the 4th strain, which is the 2nd strain in the key of the Trio,

Whistling Rufus - Banjo Solo - Full 4 Strain Version pg. 2

10PB 5B 10B 8PB

10B

C 5P 10P 10PB

5PB 5P 10P

10PB 1. 2.

D 10PB 7P 11P

5P 10PB 6P

5P 1. 5P 2. 10PB

D.S. al Fine

BANJO VIDEOS ON THE WEB

In case you have not noticed, the digital age has brought some remarkable things into our homes via computer. For example, YouTube (www.youtube.com) is a video sharing website. Started in February 2005, it currently hosts about 8 million videos, with about 50,000 being added each day.

While the system is not exactly overrun with classic banjo, there are some really fine clips available. Go to YouTube and enter "classic banjo" and you will get about 850 hits, most of which have nothing to do with classic five-string banjo. They range from a video game, Banjo Tooie, to bluegrass and tenor banjo. So we suggest you be a little more discriminating. Enter "Doug Back classic banjo" and find videos of Doug playing The Finale to the William Tell Overture and Chopin's Waltz Op. 64 No. 2. But you have to enter "Doug Banjo Hungarian" to see his rendition of Parke Hunter's arrangement of Liszt's Second Hungarian Rhapsody. The most popular of these videos is the William Tell, which actually is posted twice and has been viewed almost 5,000 times. Doug, a trained classical guitarist, has been playing banjo for over a decade and does a remarkable job with these finger busters, harkening back to the virtuoso renditions of a century or so ago by Hunter and Alfred Farland.

Searching with "Buehling banjo" gets you 6 great videos of Clarke playing with Curly Miller and Carole Anne Rose as the group The Old 78's, as well as 3 of Clarke with The Skirtlifters. The Skirtlifters play Fire Bell Galop, The St. Louis Tickle, and In a Dixie Dell (Jaques). All very spirited, professional performances.

The same Old 78's videos can be seen with slightly better quality by going to Curly and Carole Anne's website <http://theold78s.co> Clarke plays Too, Utterly Too as a cello banjo solo. The trio plays Thunder and Blazes, Russian Rag, Sleigh Ride Galop, and Cat Rag. Cat Rag has Curly on fiddle with Clarke on cello banjo and Carole Anne on a 6-string banjo (5 long and a short thumb string). Curly has the lead on Russian Rag. Far South Medley is a stroke-style piece (Converse 1887), with Curly accompanying Clarke on cello banjo. Far South is one of the most complex stroke-style pieces ever published, with tricky rests, triplets, quintuplets etc. The Trio of Thunder and Blazes (by Fuick) is familiar as the circus march Entry of the Gladiators. On this, Curly does some fancy work on the prototype Gold Tone cello banjo. (See the article on the Gold Tone CEB5 cello elsewhere in this issue.) At The Old 78's website, you can order three of Curly and Carole Anne's CDs, but only Camp Meeting has significant banjo content. They are currently working on a new recording that will have much more classic banjo.

You can access The Skirtlifters web page at <http://www.playprettyproductions.com/skirtlifters.htm>

where you will find information about Clarke and the group and links to places where you can purchase Skirtlifters CDs.

Getting back to YouTube, "Evans classic banjo" gets you to a nifty rendition of Paul Eno's Ragtime Episode by Bill Evans. Better known as a professional bluegrass banjoist, Bill plays this on a nylon-strung Cole Eclipse and even gives the ABF a plug.

There is classic banjo playing in France. Go to "Nice Banjo Orchestra" and you get eight numbers played in concert by this group led by ABF member Eric Stefanelli. As a trio, they play Honolulu Cakewalk, St. Louis Tickle, and The Entertainer, with banjeaurine, banjo, and cello banjo. As a quartet, they play Washington Post March, Skeleton Dance, Tickled to Death, Calliope Rag, and Transatlantique. The quartet was recorded at a church concert and includes a banjo mandolin. You will notice that all of these numbers are old ABF favorites. Unlike the ABF orchestra, they do not use a piccolo banjo, but except for the mandolin banjo, all the instruments are finger played. The Nice Orchestra does an excellent job and is well worth viewing.

When you call up the Nice Banjo Orchestra, you will also see "After Halloween Preview." This is a video showing an illustrated children's book of that title. But the video features a soundtrack by the New Criterion Banjo Orchestra playing Dill Pickles Rag. This is presumably taken from the NCBO's website <http://www.ncbo.net> where you can listen to five of the NCBO's numbers (no video). Their rendition of Eno's Jackstraws Polka is particularly worthwhile.

Some very nice early Frank Converse banjo pieces can be heard by going to "Recently discovered archival banjo footage." These three videos *purport* to be newly unearthed films of banjo player Hezekiah Erastus Anderton, filmed in the Edison Black Maria Studio in June of 1893. The image is flickering and old-looking, though the sound for Leaning on the Garden Gate, The Vassar Galop, and the Lone Star Quickstep is remarkably clear. Similar videos, Hot Foot Ike and The Riverside Schottische, can be seen by looking at other clips posted by Old Cremona on YouTube. You will have to search around a bit, some of the videos are minstrel stroke-style performances. The perpetrator himself can be seen by going to "Carl Anderton/Early Banjo Gathering."

An interesting video of a Japanese duo playing Morley's Japanese Patrol, can be seen by going to "Banjo duo Japanese Patrol." Ken Aoki and Satoshi Hara play using fingerpicks on steel-strung zither banjos. Aoki often uses his thumb pick like a plectrum. It does fit the piece, as this number has long movements to be played strumming up and down. They do not do the

(Continued on page 13)

BANJO VIDEOS ON THE WEB (Cont. from pg. 12)

beginning with its dynamics to indicate the approaching patrol, but they do fade nicely at the end.

Inspired by John Bullard and Bela Fleck, many bluegrass players have begun to play Bach on the banjo. You can see some snippets of Fleck by going to "Bela Fleck Bach" and "Bela Fleck classical." These search terms will also turn up other players of varied ability playing Bach on the banjo. Sadly, we can find no videos of John Bullard on YouTube.

The video incorporates frailing (clawhammer), but "Joe Bethancourt Malaguena" on YouTube is worth seeing for his banjo showmanship. You might also want to go to Joe's website: www.whitetreeaz.com Click on the "musical humor" button to see Banjo: A Vicious Habit and other banjo humor. The "old photographs" section has a lot of fretted instrument images taken off the web.

How was the West won? Why with a banjo of course (at least in the Italian version). On YouTube go to "Sabata—Banjo." And after that, you can peek at "Oro Sangriento."

There is much wonderful fretted instrument music available on YouTube alongside the banjo clips. The finger-played Russian balalaika has only three strings, and there are balalaika techniques such as strumming, using an open hand when picking with the RH thumb.

and pressing on the string below the bridge to get vibrato, that are not commonly used on the banjo. But the musicianship, tone, and effects possible on the balalaika are astounding. The Russians take the instrument seriously and teach it in conservatories along with violin, piano, etc. Go to "balalaika wonderful" on YouTube to see Oleg Gitlin in a breathtaking mini concert in Israel. If you Google "Oleg Gitlin," you can get information on Gitlin and his CDs on CD Baby and other sites. There are many other fine balalaika performances; we call your attention to "Balalaika-Arkhipovsky." These videos show the amazing technique and showmanship of Aleksei Arkhipovsky.

Classical guitar videos are legion on YouTube. But the four young Chinese women, pupils of Chen Zhi and known as the Four Angels, are especially noteworthy. Go to "Su Meng Paganini" to see her playing Paganini's 24th Caprice. Her seemingly effortless playing, which includes difficult harmonic, muted string, and other virtuoso techniques, is amazing.

Finally, if you need some amusement, or know someone who needs cheering up, go to YouTube "Guitar and Marionette." Where else can you see three blocks of foam rubber and a marshmallow out-acting most Oscar winners!

Anyway, do enjoy some of this web music. But don't let it eat in to your banjo practice time! EK

Billy Wilson's Clog

The musical score for "Billy Wilson's Clog" is presented on five staves. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The first staff starts with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tempo marking of *Vivo*. The notation includes a variety of note values, rests, and articulations. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1 through 4 above the notes. Specific technique markings are used throughout: "9P" (likely a pull-off or pinch), "5B" (likely a backbeat or bow), and "7B" (likely a backbeat or bow). The score includes several triplet markings (e.g., "3" over a group of notes) and slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

This is a variant of Harvest Home Hornpipe from Bickford's *Banjo Players Favorite* 1918

THE LAST CHORD

WILLIAM C. KENTNER of Columbus, Ohio, honorary president of the ABF, died March 14, 2008 at the age of 101. He was born July 21, 1906 in Akron, Ohio. His family moved to Cleveland when he was three. Bill graduated from Ohio Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio with a bachelors degree in chemistry. It took many years, as he had to take time off to work in the steel mills to pay his tuition. In March 1935, he married Beatrice Logan, and they moved to Columbus. Bill was Technical Director at the Dean and Barry Paint Co., where he remained employed until his retirement in 1971. The Kentners had four children.

Bill played the banjo as a boy and studied with J. G. Liddicoat, a well-known composer, teacher, and conductor in Cleveland. Bill told of having met Fred Bacon when Fred gave a recital at his high school. Bill also played classical guitar. He learned of the ABF through the British journal B.M.G., and joined when he attended the October 1961 Rally in Lewistown. Bill became a Rally regular and was elected executive secretary in October 1963. He held this position for 23 years. Bill's running of the ABF bridged the gap between the original organization, with its retired professionals, and a newer generation of classical banjo enthusiasts.

Bill's wit was obvious from the start. At a Rally he noted: "It's funny, but I don't have the trouble talking to you folks that I have playing the banjo for you. I guess it's because my voice don't sweat." Bill was something of an anarchist and would always remind us that the purpose of the Rallies was to play the banjo and not waste time at meetings. He encouraged people to enjoy the banjo and let the officers worry about the details. But details were just what he loved, especially if he could pull someone's leg with them—did you know that "the Russians invented the banjo"? Newcomers could be forgiven for not seeing immediately how erudite and funny this big man from the Midwest could be.

Bill wrote many articles on promoting the classic five-string banjo. He was also interested in banjo technique and wrote about "finger form" and how guitar technique might be applied to the banjo; he developed finger studies for the banjo. He also arranged Bach and classical guitar pieces for our instrument. One of his specialties was his banjo arrangement of the famous tremolo solo *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Tarrega. He gave several presentations at Rallies on what he called "philosophical" aspects of the banjo, including technique and arranging.

Bill wore bifocals and was bothered at having to bob his head to go back and forth from the music to the fingerboard. So he had a pair of bifocals made with the separation on the diagonal. The left side covered the fingerboard and the right his music.

Bill liked to play with other people and in 1966 organized a "mail order" trio with Mary Koons and Fred Haywood. They played trios arranged by Bill, as well as some by Zahr Myron Bickford. At the Fall 1974 Rally, the trio, Eli Kaufman replacing Fred, played *Triumph March* with Bill on banjeaurine, Mary on banjo, and Eli on piccolo banjo. This was the first time the two smaller banjos were used at the ABF, and possibly the first time such an arrangement was played anywhere in 50 years. When Clarke Buehling and Bill Morris put together the full ABF banjo orchestra, Bill K. played the first banjo obbligato parts.

Bill's support of the ABF extended to his family. Bea Kentner, who attended almost every Rally with Bill, was our treasurer from 1976 until her passing in 1983. As Bill noted when we honored him at the Spring 1987 Rally, Bea was probably his greatest contribution to the ABF. Their son Robert, a fine banjo player, has been a member since 1968. Kentner sons David and Donald and their families have attended several Rallies. On occasion, Bill was accused of packing the audience with family. Daughter Virginia Nardone Belfiglio joined in 1983 and is a Rally regular. Recently, Bill's grandson John Kentner has taken an interest and attended the last two Rallies.

Bill last came to a Rally in the Fall of 1998 for our 50th anniversary celebration. Although he kept up his interest in banjo, he told us that his hands would not work right and even easy pieces did not seem easy enough. He also had a serious automobile accident and was not able to walk for the past half dozen years. But he frequently wrote to your editors, and we had a grand time visiting with him in the summer of 2006, reminiscing about past Rallies and our members. His greetings to the ABF at that time bear repeating: "To friends I used to see twice a year at the Rallies, and friends who have never seen me, but know me as a sort of historical figure who for a year or two sort of kept things going until we got a few more members and the present organism became possible and I stepped out."

Bill Kentner was made honorary vice-president in 1992 and honorary president last year. It is fitting to close with this excerpt from the certificate presented to Bill at the Spring 1987 Rally when we honored Bill for his 23 years of service: (His) "hard work, devotion, and wit have served us well, and in doing so, he has promoted and enhanced the cause of the classic five-string banjo."

Our condolences to his four children, ten grandchildren, 13 great grandchildren, other relatives, and many friends.



THE LAST CHORD

NORMAN LEVINE of Kensington, Maryland died December 7, 2007 at the age of 77. He was internationally known for his support of the classical mandolin and was a friend to fretted instrumentalists throughout the world.

Norman grew up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn and began playing the mandolin as a boy. He briefly studied mandolin in group lessons at an afterschool Hebrew School. His teacher, Mr. Cooper, was a pupil of Luigi Paperello. He learned that the Workman's Circle, a large Yiddish cultural and political association, had a mandolin orchestra. At a Circle concert, he first heard the virtuoso Homo Freierman, who later took the stage name of Howard Fry. His group lessons had ended and Norman was inspired to travel by subway to Coney Island to study with Paperello. He later became close friends with Freierman and made many sacrifices as his manager to promote Howard Fry's professional career.

Norman got a job in Paris in 1967 working for the magazine French Prevention. Fry died that December. Norman was very discouraged, feeling that the loss of this great virtuoso could only diminish interest in the classical mandolin in America. He also believed there was little mandolin interest in Europe. In 1980, Norman took a job in Brussels, Belgium. In 1981, he saw a TV program featuring the mandolin orchestra of Malmedy, Belgium. He contacted the conductor Alain Collard, who introduced him to the Australian mandolin virtuoso Keith Harris. Through Harris, he learned of the large German mandolin community. This inspired him to think of trying to invigorate interest in the mandolin back in the U.S. On a trip to the states in 1982, Norman met Neil Gladd and agreed to publish some of his mandolin compositions. Norman thus came to be the first publisher of classical mandolin music in the U.S. in decades. He also met the mandolin-guitar duo of Marilyn Mair and Mark Davis. They gave Norman more hope about promoting the mandolin in the U.S. At a festival in Germany, Norman suggested a gathering in the U.S. Mair-Davis organized one the following summer at their home in Providence, RI.

In 1984 Norman issued a L.P. of Howard Fry from tapes made some 30 years earlier. He devoted his energies to trying to organize mandolin activity. He brought Keith Harris to the U.S. to teach, and in 1986 founded the Classical Mandolin Society of America as a non-profit organization. He managed to get 125 members the first year. The CMSA continues to this day. He also went on to form the Plucked String Foundation, a fund raising group for mandolin activities and scholarships. He also started the Mandolin Quarterly, a journal devoted to promoting the classical mandolin.

Norman Levine was named the Person of the Century by the CMSA. This was by vote of the members for the person they believed did the most to advance the cause of the mandolin in America during the 20th century.

Norman was an ABF member for almost 20 years and came to the ABF 50th Anniversary Rally in October 1988. He also attended the Spring 1990 Rally. Norman was a great friend of ABF Honorary Vice-President Walter Kaye Bauer. In 1988, he published Walter's *A Century of Musical Humor and Show Business Wit* under his Plucked String Label. Norm wrote a wonderful editor's preface for this little book. He also wrote a biography "Howard Fry and Me."

Norman was in very poor health the past few years and sadly unable to travel to mandolin events. Our condolences to his family and many friends throughout the world.

(Much of the information in this obituary is taken from Howard Graybill's article from the March/April 2008 issue of All Frets published by the Fretted Instrument Guild of America.)



EDWARD LEE BISHOP of Prescott, Arizona died on November 11, 2006 at the age of 91. He was born October 23, 1915 and raised and educated in Wareham, Massachusetts. Ed bought his instrument of choice, the tenor banjo, seventy or so years ago in a pawn shop. He was self-taught and played many fretted instruments including guitar, mandolin, and five-string banjo.

During World War II, Ed was an electrician aboard the USS Gantner. In May of 1945, when his ship docked in New York City, he and his good ship friend, Jason Fennamore, took their banjos to the New York City Music Hall and recorded all the music they could in one hour—it was costing them \$100 for the session. They were called Fenn & Bish aboard ship and always had their banjos with them.

Ed was first married to Edna Stewart. They had two children, Geoffrey Bishop of Danville, California and Judith Giffin of Prescott. The family moved to Fresno, California in 1960, and to Chico in 1989. Ed worked as an electrician in civilian life and retired as Chief Electrical Inspector of San Jose, California. Edna died in 1994.

In California, Ed played with several banjo groups including the Golden Oldies of Chico. He also was in a mandolin orchestra of over one hundred players. His main instrument was the tenor banjo, and he loved to play both popular and classical music. He taught classical guitar at the Peninsula Conservatory of Music in Burlingame, California and appeared with James F. Benson, an amateur classic guitar maker in San Carlos, California, on the College of San Mateo television music program "Vibrations." Ed Bishop joined the ABF in 1970 and was a loyal supporter for 36 years. He regretted that he was never able to attend a Rally.

Ed moved with his daughter, Judith Giffin, to Prescott in 2000. When he moved to Arizona, he played with the Banjo Buddies. Like the Golden Oldies, they played in RV parks and for nursing homes.

Ed married Carol L. Callahan in March 2002. They met at the Villages at Lynx Creek in Dewey, Az. when he was playing in the Banjo Buddies. Carol, a singer, tells us that they had a lot of fun with music. For the past few years, Ed suffered from the effects of a stroke and was unable to play his instruments.

Our condolences to Carol, his family, and many friends.



THE LAST CHORD

LOWELL H. SCHREYER of Mankato, Minnesota, American Banjo Fraternity honorary vice-president, died on November 7, 2007 at the age of 78. He was born September 10, 1929 in New Ulm, Minn. After graduating from New Ulm High School in 1947, he attended Gustavus Adolphus College for a year and then transferred to Mankato State University for another year. He took a break from college to work as a reporter for the New Ulm Review, and also began his musical career performing on radio as "Hector and his Banjo" with the KNUJ Trail Riders. Lowell served with the Minnesota Army National Guard during the Korean War, 1950-52. He then performed with groups in Missouri and Arkansas before retuning to Mankato State. He received his B.S. in December 1956 and went to work for the Mankato Free Press. In 1970 he became director of the Mankato State University News Service, a position he held until his retirement in 1992. Lowell married Margaret Woods on July 18, 1959. They have two sons, Tim and Ted, and two daughters, Debbie and Dori.

Lowell was involved with many banjo organizations and extremely active in the banjo world. The following is his own Banjo Autobiography, written last year.

The sound of the plectrum banjo first caught my ear when I heard the instrument played by Eddie Peabody on the old WLS National Barn Dance radio show out of Chicago in the early 1940s.

In my ignorance about banjos, I promptly went to the local music store in my hometown of New Ulm, Minnesota, bought a secondhand tenor banjo for \$10, and started taking lessons from the proprietor, Bill Brown, Sr., a good violinist who did a fair double on tenor banjo. Through four years of lessons on the tenor banjo during high school, I wondered how long it would take to sound like that banjo on WLS. It wasn't until the Frankie Yankovich polka band came to town that I found out from Yankovich's banjoist, who played a banjo with a neck longer than the one on my tenor, that more than one kind of banjo existed in the music world—and the sound I was after was that of the plectrum banjo.

I ran home, retuned my tenor to plectrum, started from the peghead teaching myself all the basic chords up and down the neck by ear, and then, when I thought I had the new tuning under my fingers, ordered a plectrum banjo from the Gibson Company. That was my introduction into an area, then almost unknown to me, which I now like to call the Banjo World.

Another milestone for me was discovering BMG, the British publication for banjo, mandolin, and guitar, which made me aware of the international scope of the banjo. Then came exposure to five-string banjo—minstrel, classic, and bluegrass—and I tried to pick up as much as I could about those styles.

So my education on the banjo came in halting steps, as I stumbled onto more and more new information about it. However, this led to an appreciation of the instrument that I might not have had otherwise. As a result, some of my favorites here and abroad on the various types—tenor, plectrum, and five-string—include celebrities Eddie Peabody, Harry Reser, Jose Silva, Perry Bechtel, Tarrant Bailey, Jr., Freddie Morgan, Vess Ossman, Fred Van Eps, Rex Schepp, Ken Harvey, Georgette Twain, and Earl Scruggs and today's younger players such as Buddy Wachter, Howard Alden, Chris Sands, Geoff Freed, Doug Mattocks, Brad Roth, Skip DeVol, Cynthia Sayer, Frank Vignola, Tony Trischka, Bela Fleck, Johnny Baier, Paul Erickson, Cathy Reilly, Drew Frech, Douglas Back, Greg Adams, and Debbie Schreyer.

My banjo has given me a variety of performing settings ranging from cowboy and polka bands to dixieland/ragtime groups and symphony orchestras. They included: in country/western—Gib Schreyer's KNUJ Trail Riders, Rod Morris and his Missourians, and Cotton Nixon and the Boll Weevils; in polka bands—the Roamers, Elmer Scheid, the Katzenjamers, Ernie Stumpf, and Whoopee Norm; and in dixieland and ragtime—the Marigold Dixielanders, Clyde McCoy, Les Fields' Turkey River All-Stars, the Blue Ox Jazz Babies, Jim Field's Mouldy Figs, and Michael's Minstrels. One of the symphony performances was with the Minnesota Orchestra under guest conductor Arthur Fiedler.

The banjo has also been like a travel pass, giving me opportunities to perform on the Delta Queen and Mississippi Queen riverboats and in various parts of the United States and Europe. My daughter, Debbie, and I toured Germany as banjo duetists with the 1988 International Banjo Festival concert group. In the 1990s, the banjo gave me several more trips to Germany, playing with the USAir Old South Dixieland Band. It also gave me tours around the United States on the community concerts circuit with the Riverboat Ragtime Revue. More recently, daughter Debbie and I participated in the Grand Excursion 2004 on the upper Mississippi as banjoists aboard the Anson Northrup boat of the Padelford Boat Company of St. Paul.

Performing as Schreyer Banjos, daughter Debbie, son Ted, and I have made one recording, *Showboat to New Orleans*, available in cassette and CD. I also did several numbers with daughter Debbie's trio on their *Banjo on the Boardwalk* cassette and CD, recorded at Atlantic City.

As much as I have enjoyed playing the banjo as a
(Continued next page)

diversion to my day job in journalism, I have found myself drawn increasingly to the historical research and writing side of banjo activities. This has led to my contributing articles to BMG, writing my own "Banjo World" column for the FIGA publication of the Fretted Instrument Guild of America, contributing a chapter on "The Banjo in Ragtime" for the 1985 book, *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music*, and contributing a chapter on "The Banjo in Phonograph Recording History" for the 1993 banjo discography book, *The Banjo on Record*. In 2000, I self-published a banjo biography, *The Eddie Peabody Story*. This research has also given me material for presentations on the history of the banjo. Locally, I combined this background with my jazz records for a weekly traditional jazz music show that I did on KMSU, the Mankato State University public radio station, for several years. Most recently I wrote *The Banjo Entertainers: Roots to Ragtime*, a history of the banjo from minstrelsy to ragtime published in 2007.

I keep in touch with other banjoists through membership in the Fretted Instrument Guild of America (FIGA) and the American Banjo Fraternity (ABF). I also attempt to attend their regular gatherings, as well as those of the Midwest Banjo Club at LaCrosse, Wis. and the Banjo Collectors group.

In recognition of writing, research, and performance on the banjo, I have been inducted into both the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame and the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame.

Although the banjo has been before the public professionally for more than a century-and-a-half, the academic music community—particularly at the college and university level—still knows very little about its history, its music literature, and its potential. I would like to help remedy that.

Lowell learned of the ABF through BMG. He and Margaret drove over 1,000 miles to attend the October 1973 Rally in Lewistown, Pa. At that time, editor Lew Green wrote: "Lowell brought an old J. B. Schall banjo that he was trying to make playable. He remarked that he was just starting to play the 5 string banjo. Well. He is either the most apt pupil, or the best leg-puller in the Frat. In the Saturday evening concert, he knocked off the difficult 'Grizzly Bear Rag' with the poise and precision of an old pro. His 'beat' on the old rags is just about perfect. We discovered that Lowell does play the plectrum professionally, which accounts for the left hand—but that right hand!"

Over the last 35 years, Lowell attended many Rallies, always impressing us with his modest demeanor and wonderful ragtime playing. He was in

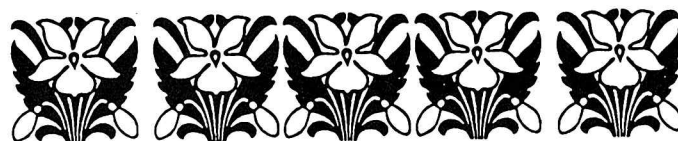
great demand as a duet partner and recently, he played banjeaurine lead in the ABF orchestra. Although Lowell only played five-string banjo at our Rallies, your editor had the pleasure of hearing him perform on plectrum at other events. It was always amazing to me to see the quiet, unassuming, off-stage Lowell converted into a magnetic, ebullient performer of spectacular pieces. To me it was like Clark Kent going into a phone booth, and suddenly there was Superman (or at least super banjo man), exploding onto the stage.

While Lowell was touring or traveling to banjo and other events (including his stints on the riverboats), he would always spend time in local libraries researching old newspapers, looking for mentions of traveling banjoists and minstrel shows. He thus compiled much of the data that went into *The Banjo Entertainers*. This book (see the review in this issue) presents a wealth of detailed information and will be a basic reference on banjo history for decades to come.

A week before his passing, Lowell left the hospital to travel to Philadelphia for the 19th-Century Banjo Collectors Gathering. Although he was very weak, Lowell mesmerized the gathering with the story of how he was able to discover the fate of the elusive Ferguson, the man who may have taught Dan Emmett to play the banjo in 1840 when they were traveling together with a circus. Lowell unearthed a newspaper advertisement for Archibald Ferguson's appearance in a theater in New Orleans in 1841. Realizing that Ferguson may have died in one of the epidemics that ravaged the city at that time, but unable to access death records (only relatives are allowed to see these), Lowell followed a tip and went through cemetery records to unearth the fact that Ferguson had died of yellow fever shortly after performing.

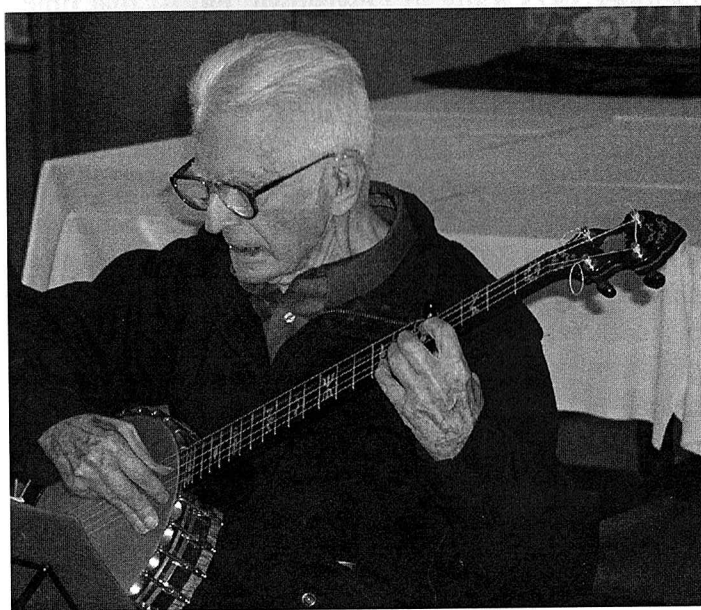
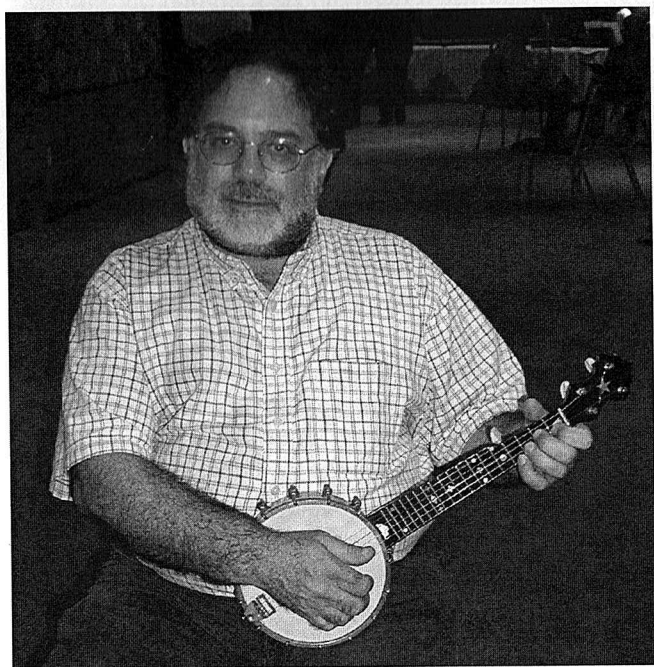
Lowell was made honorary vice-president of the ABF in 2007. He has left us a wonderful legacy of his music and writings. We will all miss him. Our condolences to Margaret, his children, his eight grandchildren, other family, and his many friends through out the world. May he rest in peace.

More information regarding Lowell can be found at the Schreyer website: <http://members.aol.com/schreyer/>





**RALLY SNAPS
FALL 2007**



CELLO BANJO

The 5-string cello banjo became an important part of many banjo clubs and orchestras some 120 years ago. S. S. Stewart claimed to have "originated" this instrument, but this is hard to substantiate. There were large banjos before Stewart's time. In *A Thousand and One Banjos from the Tsumura Collection* there are 4 English banjos probably made between 1850 and 1870 as large as cello banjos. One had a 14½ inch diameter head, the other three have drums about 17" in diameter.

But Stewart may well have been the one to introduce the cello banjo into the banjo orchestra in the late 1880s. For one thing, Stewart probably helped to create the *banjo* orchestra. Groups such as the Boston Ideals originally used banjos, guitars, and mandolins; banjo orchestras needed more kinds of banjo. Stewart invented/developed the banjeaurine to play lead in clubs in 1885. And this higher pitched 5-string banjo rapidly became popular as a lead instrument. As a next step, Stewart began making cello banjos and introducing them to Philadelphia organizations around 1888-1889.

As conceived by Stewart, the cello banjo had a 16" diameter drum and a scale length of 29 inches. Other manufacturers also got into the act. Fairbanks seems to have made their cellos in a 14" x 28" size. However, these instruments are very rare and most cellos that we have seen are Stewarts. We have reproduced in miniature a Stewart cello banjo ad from c. 1896. By going to <http://theold78s.com> you can see and hear Clarke Buehling playing a fingerstyle solo "Too Utterly, Too" on a Stewart cello banjo.

The 5-string cello banjo is tuned an octave below the regular banjo. It is played fingerstyle and can read from banjo accompaniments or parts specially written for it. The banjo tuning means that anyone who reads banjo music will not have to learn a new staff to play the cello. Also, the instrument is held like a regular banjo.

Stewart also referred to this instrument as a bass banjo. There were some contra bass banjos made. These were huge standup instruments. Tom Cary used one in his banjo act—a Washburn built by Lyon and Healy for the Columbian Exposition in 1893. The head was 24 inches in diameter. It stood 72 inches tall and weighed 41 pounds. A Fairbanks-Vega ad from about 1909 showed a similar instrument. These are extremely rare and may have been used mainly as novelties.

Late in the first decade of the 20th century as the mandolin orchestra became more popular and plectrum playing came into being, cello banjos were made with 4 strings. In England, Clifford Essex made 4-string bass banjos and 3-string contra bass banjos. These had round wooden sounding boards instead of calf skin. They used floor pins, but were held at an angle rather than vertically like a bowed cello or bass. The wooden heads seem to be about 16 and 24 inches in diameter.

In recent times, no one regularly manufactured a cello

banjo, though some were produced as custom items. Both Norm Azinger and Tim Mainland made cello banjos that have been played in the ABF orchestra. In 2006, Drew Frech had Wayne Fairchild make a 28" scale neck for a 16" Weymann rim, which he tunes an octave lower than a banjeaurine.

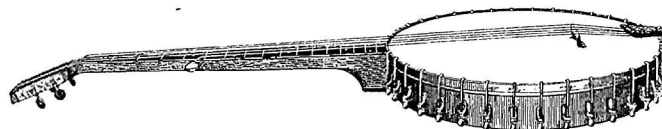
However, we just learned that Gold Tone Banjos in Titusville, Florida is making a 5-string cello banjo. They were inspired by the playing of Marcy Mercer (who works with Cathy Fink) and designed a 4-string cello banjo that is a copy of the style of the Gibsons made in the 1920s. This plectrum-played banjo has a 14" head and a 24¾" scale. After hearing the group The Old 78's (Clarke Buehling, Curly Miller, and Carole Anne Rose), Gold Tone decided to make a 5-string cello. But in order not to have to retool, they are making it with the same dimensions as the 4-string (14" x 24¾"). With their smaller heads and looser strings (because of the short scale), these instruments will not have the power of the Stewart cellos. The prototype Gold Tone 5-string cello was loaned to The Old 78's, and Curly can be heard playing it at their web site <http://theold78s.com> on Fuick's Thunder and Blazes (aka the circus march Entry of the Gladiators). There were some problems with the prototype: the nut was not cut right for the wider strings and the bridge was low. Even so, Curly does a wonderful job with it.

A short scale is used by some modern frailers, as they tune, with elevated bass, up to an A chord, which enables them to play more easily in fiddle keys. Such banjoists may appreciate that the company is pushing their new 5-string as good for regular banjo playing as well as for tuning down to cello pitch (covering their bets?). The Gold Tone CEB5 lists for \$1095. We understand that they are planning to produce only 100 of these instruments. You can see details of the CEB5 Cello at <http://www.goldtone.com/> EK

S. S. STEWART'S BASS OR CELLO BANJO

FOR BANJO CLUBS

THE BASS BANJO IS TO THE BANJO CLUB WHAT THE DOUBLE BASS IS TO THE ORCHESTRA.



The Stewart Bass Banjo answers to the following description: Rim made of maple, covered with nickel-plated German silver, sixteen inches in diameter and nearly three inches deep. Neck eighteen inches long, made of a fine quality of cherry wood, with ebony top strip. Machine screw head (as this is more convenient for turning the thick strings), raised frets, thirty-six nickel plated brackets, nickel-plated hoop with hooks set into notches in the hoop.

The Bass banjo is headed with a good drumhead, and is strung with five strings in the same manner as the ordinary Banjo, except that the strings are as thick as those used on the violincello, and a covered string is used for the third string instead of a solid gut string.

The Bass Banjo is pitched in C, an octave below the ordinary Banjo.

Price, - - - - \$35.00.

LEATHER CASES TO FIT THE BASS BANJO, - - - - - \$8.00

EVERY FULLY ORGANIZED BANJO CLUB SHOULD HAVE ONE OF THESE INSTRUMENTS.

🐉 RALLY SNAPS FALL 2007

Left top to bottom:

Ruth Westlake and her Silverbell.

Dan Colombo & Drew Frech, Sat. evening program.

New member Mark Shenker tries out a piccolo banjo.

Right top to bottom:

Drew Frech and Paul Heilman, dueling Silverbells.

George Bucher and his home made banjo.

Wayne Adams, tremolo on a CE Concert Grand.

BANJO ON CD

TWO NEW WILLIAM BALL CDS

JUST WILLIAM (1991) Contents- Morley: Georgia Walk Round, Keynotes Rag, Monkeytrix, Water Nymphs, Moonlight Revels, Nuts and Wine, Shuffle Along, Popinjay Polka, London Club Parade, Boston Walk Round, Bouree. **Ball:** Twilight Caprice. **Eno:** Ragtime Episode. **Tarrant Bailey Jr.:** All's Well. **Grimshaw:** The Banshee. **Kirby:** Joy Dance. **Bassett:** The Bushrangers.

MORE WILLIAM (1994) Contents - Morley: Butterfly, Circus Parade, Donkey Laugh, Crackerjack, Minuet, Canadian's Parade, Jovial Huntsman, Zarana. **Grimshaw:** Return of the Regiment, Mister Jollyboy, You and a Canoe, A Footlight Favourite. **Cammeyer:** Handy Jack, Minature 3. **Wm. Hunter:** College Rag.

Fred Determann, William Ball's son, has released two new CDs of his father's playing taken from recordings that William made in 1991 and 1994. Most were previously released on cassette tapes in the mid 1990s as Classic 5 String Banjo 1991 and Classic 5 String Banjo 1994. The pieces were recorded in Rochester by Jerry Schneider and are of excellent quality. Bill plays to piano accompaniments that he himself had previously recorded. He was very proud of the fact that he could play both the banjo solos and the accompaniments.

Bill Ball may have been at his peak in 1991. Ball was always worth hearing, but at that time his phrasing and musicality, as well as his wonderful banjo technique, all came together. The 1994 recordings were made after he had suffered some cardiac problems. The interpretations here are bit more introspective. Also included on More William is his playing of Zarana with a full orchestra on the program Opportunity Knocks: the quality of the recording is thus a bit inferior. I can't say I love the orchestration, but it is worth hearing and pretty exciting.

Ball's earlier CDs, **Humoresque** and **Pompadour**, are also now available. Fred Determann has sent us copies of all four CDs, and we will have them for sale at the May Rally for \$15 each. We will also sell these by mail (to the US only) for \$15 each plus postage. The postage is \$2 for one to four CDs.

To order from outside the US contact:

fred@determann.freeseve.co.uk

You can go to: <http://www.williamjball.co.uk/> to see an excellent Ball biography.



BANJO CLASSICS: 1899-1924

There have been several reissues of very old banjo recordings, but one of the very best, **Banjo Classics: 1899-1924**, is available at a bargain price and is the work of Phil Stewart of Battle Creek, Michigan. Phil is the editor of *In The Groove*, the journal of the Michigan Antique Phonograph Society. He also used to do a show on KERS-FM and later on cable television called Phil's

Junkshop and is an expert in cleaning up these old cylinders and discs. Don't expect modern noiseless music, but the pops, scratches, and other noises are minimal and the sound is full and very enjoyable. The CD features some really great numbers by Ossman, Van Eps, and Bacon.

The one odd piece is by Polk Miller and his quartet. Virginia-born Miller (1844-1913) played the banjo as a boy. In the 1880s, he began performing with banjo, singing and telling dialect stories of the old south. About 1884, he is quoted as saying, "the younger negroes of the day do not play the banjo because they think it looks too much like slavery times; and if the old style of banjo playing is to be perpetuated, it will have to be done by the white man." He has received a lot of attention lately, partially because the white Miller performed with a black quartet. Miller recorded 7 cylinders for Edison circa 1909. The one on this disc is the only one with banjo (the others use guitar). The banjo playing is very disappointing, it is just the rough strumming of chords. A CD of Miller's performances along with later recordings by the quartette is available. Your editor plans to purchase one and will probably have something to say about it in a future issue. You can hear six of these recordings by going to:

<http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?query=polk+miller&queryType=%40attr+1%3D1> It is probably just easier to "Google" Polk Miller and see the links in the Wikipedia article. But again, despite all the hype concerning his authentic old-south music, the banjo is very disappointing.

However, to return to Banjo Classics, the other 21 fingerstyle solos are great. You can order the CD from Phil's Junkshop, 60 Central St., Battle Creek, MI 49017. The price is \$12 postpaid in the US. Make check or money order payable to Phil's Junkshop or to Phil Stewart. The contents of the CD are:

Vess L. Ossman: The Darkie's Patrol (1899), A Bunch of Rags (1901), Way Down South (1904), Turkey in the Straw (1905), Maple Leaf Rag (1907), Sunflower Dance (1908), St. Louis Tickle (1/1911). **Fred Van Eps:** Silver Heels—One Step (1909), Rag Pickings (1911), Darkies Dream & Awakening (1912), The White Wash Man (1912), My Sumurun Girl Medley (1912), Alexander's Ragtime Band Medley (1913), I Wish I Was in Michigan (1914), Chinese Picnic & Oriental Dance (1914), Dixie Medley (10/1914) Keep Off the Grass (4/4/1919). Medley of Southern Melodies (4/1923). **Fred J. Bacon:** Massa's in Cold, Cold Ground (1916), Old Black Joe (1916), Medley of Southern Airs (4/1917). **Polk Miller & Old South Quartet:** Bonnie Blue Flag (1909).

