



A Publication of Your
Nashville Old-Time
String Band Association

ASSOCIATION
EVENTS

1st Thursday Jam
December 7
Slow & Regular Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Two Rivers
Mansion



2nd Thursday Jam
December 14
Regular Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Buchanan
Log House



3rd Thursday Jam
December 21
Slow & Regular Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Two Rivers
Mansion



4th Thursday
December 28
Performance Group
Rehearsal
& Singing
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Buchanan Log House



4th-Sunday Jam
NOTE: Since the
4th Sunday
falls on
Christmas Eve,
No 4th-Sunday Jam
will be held in
December.

The Old-Time Times

DECEMBER 2006

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**The submission deadline for January's newsletter is Wednesday,
December 27. □**

Breakin' Up Winter Is Just Around the Corner

~Pat Gill

Well, maybe not quite, but it will be here before you know it. Although in some respects it seems as if we just finished with last year's event, it has already been eight months ago. In the meantime there have been several meetings of the committee to work out the details for next year's event, and we are happy to announce that this year's performers will include Dan Gellert, Clyde Davenport, and hopefully Charlie Acuff, if his health permits him to make the journey.

For those of you who are not familiar with Dan Gellert, he hails from the North. The following is an excerpt from a *Fiddler Magazine* article about Dan, which was written by Adam Tanner in 2003:

"Dan Gellert is a legend in the field of old-time American music. As a result of the folk music revival of the 1960s and records he heard growing up in New Jersey, he began to master the banjo, guitar, and fiddle, and sing. At an early age he discovered the importance of taking the time to understand the music in a complete and detailed way, as if it were a language. Dan has given a lot of thought to what it takes to make the music sound and feel like the field recordings and old 78 rpm records he has listened to. While Dan is playing, one gets the sense he has entered another world, one that combines all of his influences, yet it is his playfulness and improvisational sensibilities that make his style powerful and instantly recognizable. Dan's fiddling is bluesy and rhythmic and without regard for modern standards of pitch and tone. In other words, he follows his muse, which makes his music stand alone in a world of timid imitators. Not for the faint of heart, Dan Gellert is a commanding and uncompromising talent."

In addition to Dan, we will be having Clyde Davenport from just over the northeastern Tennessee state line in Kentucky. Below is a biography of Clyde written by Jeff Titon, the noted author of *Old-Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes*:

"Clyde Davenport, old-time fiddler and banjo player, was born October 21, 1921, and was raised back in the mountains in the Blue Hole Hollow, near Mt. Pisgah on the Cumberland Plateau, not far from the
(Continued on page 2)

Tennessee line, in south-central Kentucky.

Clyde had five brothers and three sisters. Three of his brothers played the fiddle. So did his father, Will Davenport, and his grandfather, Francis Marion Davenport. Will Davenport played banjo as well. I asked if any of his sisters or aunts played. Clyde said the only girl musician in the family was a double second cousin who played fiddle and banjo.

Many tunes in Clyde's repertoire came from his father, but many others came from people he heard along the way, from radio, and from records. Unless the tune was one his father played, Clyde can seldom identify the source.

Starting in his mid-teens, Clyde played for dances in the Mt. Pisgah region, traveling in the mountains to play at some person's home for a square dance every Saturday night. Often he went with his brothers and because none of them played banjo, the job of banjo-playing fell to Clyde.

Clyde's first fiddle was something he made for himself at age nine. He says he just picked up the fiddle and played it. Nobody taught Clyde to play. He believes, therefore, that his ability on the fiddle is a gift.

Clyde has built fiddles throughout his life. He built his first real fiddle as a teenager and swapped it for an army saddle. He loves to trade. He will trade a better fiddle for a worse, just for the sake of trading. He built his first banjo when he was sixteen. In the 1970s, he had a shop and repaired fiddles. Today, he doesn't own a single fiddle that he built. He sold or traded them or gave them all away. He does own four fiddles, however, and he believes that one of them is an Amati violin.

After he left the army at age 24, he stayed on his dad's farm for a couple of years. Then at age 26 or 27, he went to Indiana where he worked in a Chrysler plant in Newcastle.

At the same time, he was playing the fiddle semiprofessionally. He had a daily 15-minute radio show in nearby Muncie. Although he thought he had sufficient talent, he decided not to become a professional musician. It just didn't seem like work. 'I wouldn't never have had to work no more, but I wanted to work. I was stout and able to work then. Well, I was

raised to work. Worked ever since I was big enough to pick up a hoe. Love to work. I had a brother'd work day and night if he could get to it. It was all of us wanted to work all the time, and me too. Was never late, was never fired off a job in my life, never laid off of one.' He earned \$107 per week at the car factory, which was a lot of money for him. He never thought of himself as a professional fiddler and never tried to have a career.

Clyde stopped playing fiddle and banjo altogether from about the age of 35 until he was 52, and he thinks he has lost much of his touch on the fiddle and many of his tunes. 'I used to be a fiddler. Boy, it was just like it was greased, man.'

For the fan of old-time fiddling, however, Clyde's 'arrested development' was a stroke of luck. If he had decided to continue playing professionally and perhaps tour with a band, he would most likely have become a Bluegrass fiddler or a Nashville session musician, and his aesthetics probably would have changed. He might well have abandoned his older repertoire and thought badly of it. This, of course, is what happened to the vast majority of professional fiddlers in Clyde's generation.

In late 1960s or early 1970s, Clyde and his wife Lorene moved back to Wayne County, Kentucky, and bought a house in Monticello. He worked for a while as a custodian, then as a fiddle repairman. In the mid-1970s, folklorist Charles Wolfe recorded two albums on which Clyde played banjo behind the fiddling of W.L. Gregory, a veterinarian. Clyde also worked as a helper to the vet. Later in the 1970s, folklorist Bobby Fulcher, a banjo player, began visiting Clyde and recording him extensively. Other folklorists and many fiddlers and banjo players including Guthrie Meade, Ray Alden, Alice Gerrard, and Andy Cahan visited Clyde, recording and learning some of his tunes."

There is probably no need to introduce anyone to Charlie Acuff, with his incredible left-handed fiddling and large tune repertoire. He is a man who doesn't know a stranger, and once he is introduced to you, he is your friend.

He has been coming to BUW since its inception and is a landmark for our event. We are all hoping that his health will permit him to come and join us for not just another year but another several years at least!!

So, here's a heads up about the coming attractions for 2007. Make plans now to attend BUW 12 the 2nd through the 4th of March at Cedars of Lebanon State Park near Lebanon, Tennessee. We hope to send the flyers out by mid-December so be on the lookout for them!! If you don't receive a flyer and want to read it, go to www.nashvilleoldtime.org after we've had time to post it there. □

The President's Corner

~Jim Hornsby

It is good to see so many new players at our jams. Some are discovering the joy of playing old-time music for the first time, and others are returning to it after having set it aside in the past. Whatever your situation—welcome! Beyond promoting community understanding and support for old-time music, a major goal of our organization is to encourage people to join in and play the music.

There are lots of good reasons for joining in the fun, but I think the main reason is just that—it's fun. It is the nature of the music that if you listen, you want to participate. Whether you sing, dance, clap your hands, or tap your feet, it's hard to resist. But, to me, the most fun you can have with this music is to pick up an instrument and play it.

Learning to play old-time is mostly a matter of having the courage to begin playing with other people and sticking with it. It takes a little time, but the journey toward improvement is fun all along the way. There are frustration and embarrassment factors to overcome, but as a fiddler said to me early on, "We all got started sitting in your chair." It is comforting to remember that everybody begins with those same uncomfortable feelings.

Although playing with other people may be awkward at first, old-time players are remarkably encouraging, and you'll soon feel right at home. And while it is good—nay

necessary—to practice by yourself at home, it is playing with others that brings the experience to life.

When you practice at home, you can retain the warmth of being part of a group by playing along with CDs. I am occasionally asked to recommend a practice CD for beginners, and although there are lots of good CDs available, recommending one is difficult. Tastes and skill levels vary, and there are so many good players who have recordings available that recommending one would inadvertently slight other excellent recordings. However, because I have been asked, I am going to go out on a limb and recommend a group from the Seminole, Florida, area called The Pleasant Family Old-Time String Band.

They have two CD's: *The Pleasant Family* and *The Family Album*. You can hear some of the cuts at their Web site, www.thepleasantfamily.com. They have a basic, straight-forward style that is easy to follow and play along with, and most of their instrumentals are right off our tune list and in the keys we use. Some of the tunes are entry-level and others are more technically difficult to play, but their no-frills style consistently keeps the melodies prominent and approachable.

If you aren't playing old-time music, you should be. It has a history of providing enjoyment and fellowship, and those qualities have not changed with time. It's good for what ails you, and while it would be enough if playing were just a fun thing to do, you gain the additional benefit of knowing that by playing, you become closer akin to the rich heritage that defines the music and the musicians who have made it great.

See you at the jams. □

Upcoming Events at The Deering Showroom

~Todd Wright

I want to let you all know about a couple of events that will held at the Deering Showroom in December.

On Tuesday, December 5, at 6:30 PM, Leroy Troy will conduct a workshop and performance. He will explain his style of

clawhammer. As we all know, Leroy is a great player and is always entertaining. The cost for the evening is \$20

On Tuesday, December 19, at 6 PM, The Deering Showroom will host an open house/potluck dinner and jam. There is no charge to attend, and a dish is not required, but if it's convenient, bring something to share, and of course, bring your instruments.

For more information, call me, Todd Wright, at 619-840-8739 or 1-800-332-2656 or e-mail me at todd@deeringbanjos.com.

Payment for Leroy Troy's event can be sent to PO Box 290007, Nashville, TN 37229-0007. You can pay at the door, but preregistration is suggested. Attendance is limited to 20 people so register early.

Editor's Note: Yes, that area code is "619," not "615." □

4th-Sunday Jams for 2007

~Phil Sparks

Keep in mind that folks are now signing up for 2007's 4th-Sunday Jams, and we want to encourage more of our newer members to host one.

The months of May, June, July, August, September, and October are still open. To sign up for one of these jams, contact Darlyne Kent by phone (615-868-9951), or by e-mail (dkent@davidsonacademy.com). □

The Bowling Green Jam

~Darlyne Kent

What's better than a loaded pizza on a cold Saturday night? Why, it's jamming with great Kentucky friends, that's what! Bowling Green's Bread and Bagel eatery is a venue for old-time jamming on certain Saturday nights from 6 to 9 PM. Now, don't get me wrong, the pizza was fantastic and well worth the drive, but the music was ROCKIN', or should I say, JAMMIN' in old-time lingo!

Organizers and newlyweds Christie Burns and Butch Ross were there to play host, as well as Notsba members David Carpenter (on mandolin) and Fred Siewers (on banjo), dulcimer and guitarist Chuck Flaim, and fiddler Ouida Meier. Don and I played along and ate our fill of great pizza!

If you have a chance to come up on a Saturday night, be sure to check out the eatery located at Exit 22 off of I-65, just a few miles past the mall area. It's about 50 minutes from our house. It's easy to find and very enjoyable to participate.

By the way, these same folks will hopefully grace our next 4th-Sunday Jam as we travel to their neck of the woods for the 4th-Sunday Jam in January. Make plans now to join us at the log cabin on the campus of Western Kentucky University. David Carpenter will be host of that event, and you won't want to miss it!

In the meantime, check your e-mail for a reminder of when the next Saturday-night, Bread and Bagel jammin' time may come around. They're pretty good about announcing their next Saturday-night jam. □

The Jam at Jackson

~Phil Sparks

Thursday afternoon, the 16th of November, I headed for Jackson, Tennessee. I was taking advantage of a longstanding invitation to join up with my friends in The Jackson Area Plectral Society for their weekly Thursday-night Jam. Melbon Plunk and his wife Margie had agreed to put me up overnight so I could jam late into the evening instead of rushing off to drive home.

First, a word or two about The Jackson Area Plectral Society: It is an organization with around 150 members, and it embraces old-time, Bluegrass, and country music. Almost anything goes, as long as the instruments are acoustical. Don Horne is the president, Coley Graves is the vice-president, and Marilyn Graves edits their monthly newsletter.

After a two-hour drive, I landed at Melbon and Margie's beautiful new home. Melbon and I spent the remainder of the afternoon picking and comparing instruments. After a delicious dinner, the three of us drove to the Sunday school building of a large Baptist Church. The Plectral Society rents this building for their jams.

Inside, I found a large central room with eight or ten classrooms opening from it. One group of pickers was jamming in the central

room and other groups had gathered in the classrooms.

First, Melbon led me to a room where old-time music was being played. This jam looked just about like one of ours, people sitting in a circle, chatting and taking turns calling the tunes. Before too long, we were joined by a superb fiddler named David Killingsworth. He knew all the tunes and played beautifully. Soon, another fine fiddler, Michael Homes, came in. I tried, but I couldn't keep up with either one of them. Still, I wasn't complaining. It's not often we have a chance to hear such fine music up close.

While in the room with the old-time music, I met Ellis Truett, an interesting man who has been playing old-time music and collecting instruments for over seventy years. He is a retired school teacher from Lizzard Lick, Tennessee, and I'm told that his home is a virtual museum of old-time instruments.

After a while, I began to wander from room to room, determined to pick a little with everyone. Man, did I see and hear some fine pickers!

Around 10 PM, the jam at the church began to break up, so Melbon and Margie dragged me off to the Ihop where we continued picking with Dennis Baumgardner, Colie and Marilyn Graves, and a bunch more nice folks until about midnight. Those guys can play just about any type of music, but I could tell that they were concentrating on old-time for my sake.

The next morning, Melbon and Margie fed me a big breakfast, and I headed back to White Bluff, grinning all the way.

I had a wonderful time, and everyone was so nice to me. Not for one moment did I feel less than welcome. I look forward to going back sometime, and maybe some of you would like to join me. □

The Holiday Jam in Memphis

~Lee Cagle

Don't forget, Monday, December 4, from 7 to 8:30 PM, The Memphis Dulcimer Gathering will hold its Holiday Jam at

Singleton Community Center, 7266 Third Road.

All acoustic instruments are welcome. Bring your friends. Listeners are welcome too!

Directions to Singleton Community Center are available on my Web site, www.leecagledulcimers.com. For more information, call me at 901-372-0510. □

An Interesting Web Site

~Phil Sparks

One of my favorite tunes is "Needle Case," I first heard it played by Bob Hightower and later learned it from Leo McDermot's Web site, www.fiddletunes.net. The other day, I began to wonder where the tune came from, so I Googled it.

Soon I was looking at www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers. It's called *The Fiddler's Companion*, and it's run by Andrew Kuntz. It describes itself as "A descriptive index of North American and British Isles music for the folk violin and other instruments." It was started in 1987 and is a work in progress. It offers "a resource for those interested in the body of traditional music usually associated with the violin, generically called fiddle tunes."

I searched *The Fiddler's Companion* for "Needle Case" and soon learned that the tune comes from southwestern Alabama, is in the key of D, and is usually played in standard tuning.

It was first recorded as a banjo tune by Sam McGee of Tennessee. Later, it was recorded as a fiddle tune by Pete Sutherland of Vermont.

I was delighted. The next time you wonder about some tune's origin, you might give this Web site a try. □

A Report from the Fiddlers' Contest in Murray, Kentucky

On November 3 and 4, the First Annual Murray, Kentucky, Regional Fiddle Festival was held on the campus of Murray State University.

The weather was bit chilly, but the event was held indoors. The competitions took place on a huge stage, the Lovett Auditorium. Adjoining the auditorium is the university's

music building. Its hallways and practice rooms provided plenty of room for practicing and jamming.

The judging was “blind” in that the judges could not see the performers, nor were the performers’ names announced. When I had a chance to watch the performances, I thought the judges’ decisions were perfect. (At too many events, I find myself wondering which distant planet the judges came from. Then again, I try to keep in mind that most judges are just well-meaning volunteers doing a thankless job.)

Our friend Susie Colman won the singing competition, and Rob Percy took 1st in Old-Time Banjo. Dennis Baumgardner and friends won 3rd in Old-Time Band. Our own Bill Jones took 2nd in Junior Fiddle (17 to 50) and 2nd in the Fiddle-Off. Loraine Porter won 3rd in Senior Fiddle. □

New Notsba Members

We extend a warm welcome to three new members:

Joanne Murphy of
Saluda, North Carolina
Joe Lipman and his wife Gail Doss
of Nashville

We thank you for joining us and for supporting old-time music. We hope each of you will be an active member and will participate in our jams, our performances, and our festival, Breakin’ Up Winter. □

Directions to the Jams at Buchanan Log House

From more or less the center of Nashville, take I-40 East. From I-40 East, take the Donelson Pike Exit (Exit 216C), and merge onto Donelson Pike. Go about 0.4 mile on Donelson Pike, and turn right onto Elm Hill Pike.

Go 0.5 mile on Elm Hill Pike to the Buchanan Log House, on the left at 2910 Elm Hill Pike. □

Direction to the Jams at Two Rivers Mansion

From the south or east of Nashville, take I-40 East to Briley Parkway North.

Go about 3.6 miles on Briley Parkway and take the Two Rivers Parkway Exit. (Expect delays. This area of Briley Parkway is under construction.) Follow Two Rivers Parkway East for about 0.7 mile to McGavock Pike, and turn left (north).

Go about 0.4 mile on McGavock Pike, past McGavock High School, to Two Rivers Mansion at 3130 McGavock Pike. It’s the second drive on the left past the high school. A large sign and two stone pillars mark the entrance.

From I-65 North, take Briley Parkway East for 5 or 6 miles. (Expect delays. This area of Briley Parkway is under construction.) Exit at Two Rivers Parkway. Then follow the directions given above. □

Directions to the 4th-Sunday Jam

Because December’s 4th-Sunday falls on Christmas Eve, no 4th-Sunday Jam will be held this month. □

Hosts Needed for 2007 4th-Sunday Jams

Please contact Darlyne Kent (615-868-9951 or dkent@davidsonacademy.com) to schedule your home for a 2007 4th-Sunday Jam. The months of May, June, July, August, September, and October are still open. □

A Penny Learned: Ironing a Bowed Fiddle Bridge

~Phil Sparks

While I was at Clifftop, a Canadian I had met noticed that the bridge on my fiddle was bowing forward. When he brought it to my attention, I said that I knew the bridge was bad and was looking for enough free time to cut and shape a new one.

“That isn’t necessary,” he said, “all you have to do is iron it flat.” He then told me to take my bridge off the fiddle, run some cold water over it, put it on a flat surface, cover it with a layer or two of damp cotton cloth, and

press it flat with an everyday steam iron. Not only would the bridge be flat again, he promised, it would be less likely to bow in the future.

I came home and followed his instructions. After I ironed the bridge flat, I put it between two planks and clamped it flat for a day or two. Then I let it lie by itself on my desk for a week to make sure it dried out completely. Then back on my fiddle it went—no sanding, no shaping, no fuss.

Today, a few months later, the bridge is still in place, and it's standing as straight as a plumb line. □

Please Contribute to Your Newsletter!

If you have information you want to submit, or if you have ideas for improving the newsletter, contact Phil Sparks.

If you are willing to review a CD or a book, contact Phil Sparks.

If you have a tidbit on picking, learning tunes, caring for instruments, etc, please submit it for the "A Penny Learned" article.

The submission deadline for January's newsletter is Wednesday, December 27. □

General Contact Information for the Nashville Old-Time String Band Association:

E-mails for All Members

friends@nashvilleoldtime.org

Jim Hornsby, President

friends@nashvilleoldtime.org

615-650-2328

Ed Gregory, Web Master

edgregory@comcast.net

615-889-5566

HELP!!!!

If you know about an upcoming old-time music event, don't assume that we already know about it. If it's not posted on our Web site (www.nashvilleoldtime.org), we need the information desperately. *Please help us keep our old-time community informed.* □

You can reach Phil Sparks, the editor of this newsletter at:

kpsparks@msn.com

or

615-797-4356

or

2020 Claylick Road

White Bluff, TN 37187

Classified Ads

STRING BAND MUSICIANS FOR HIRE

Notsba members are willing to perform for the public for a small fee. All of our earnings go to the organization, none to the pickers. If you know of someone who might make use of our services, contact Don Kent at www.nashvilleoldtime.org, or call him at 615-868-9951. □