



# American Banjo Museum Quarterly

Spring 2018

## ABM opens new exhibit - The Learning Lounge



*Doug Parsons, ABM Board President, helps Elizabeth Eickman, Kirkpatrick Family Fund Director, with instruction on playing a banjo ukulele during the grand opening of The Learning Lounge.*

The American Banjo Museum has opened a new permanent exhibit - The Learning Lounge. Visitors of all ages, youth and adults, with no prior exposure to a banjo are now able to experience for themselves the basics of playing a banjo. It also enables experienced banjo players the opportunity to learn different techniques and styles of playing. Five-string players can experiment playing a four-string and or banjo ukulele and vice versa.

An interactive touch-screen allows museum visitors to watch educational videos on multiple banjo styles, while selecting a banjo and following along.

Instructional videos include:

- Introduction to Clawhammer Style Banjo with John McEuen
- Five-String Banjo Basics with Tony Trischka
- Introduction to Classical Style Banjo with Tony Trischka
- Banjo Ukulele with Doug Parsons
- Introduction to Minstrel Style Banjo with Bob Carlin
- Scruggs Style with Gary Davis
- Melodic Style Banjo with Jens Kruger
- Tenor Banjo with Steve Caddick

Another monitor gives visitors access to information on the Museum's collection and archives, while a library of banjo books is available for research and reference.

The Learning Lounge was made possible in part by a grant from the Kirkpatrick Family Fund.



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9 East Sheridan Ave.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73104  
405-604-2793  
www.AmericanBanjoMuseum.com

## MISSION

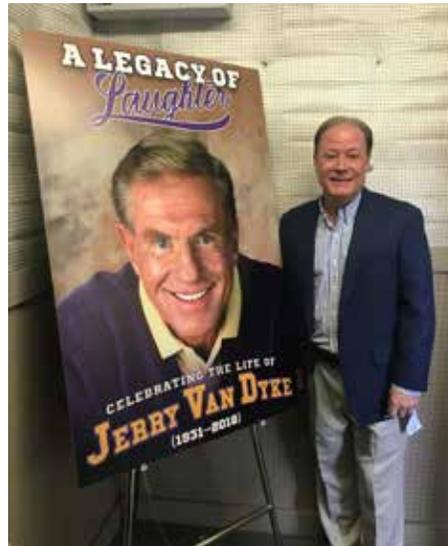
The mission of the American Banjo Museum is to preserve and promote the banjo while expanding appreciation and understanding of its history and music.

## STAFF

Johnny Baier, Executive Director  
Margie Smith-Robbins, Assistant Administrator  
Janet Raines, Sales & Marketing  
Sherril Mitchell, Reception  
Ellie Mowery, Administrative Assistant

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## A Coast-To-Coast Quest For A Famous Frog...

To paraphrase TV's *Pawn Stars*, experience has taught me never to be surprised by what any given day might bring. Not too long ago our friend Lucas Ross called to tell me of an unexpected meet up in OKC with Heather Henson, the daughter of *Muppet* creator, the late Jim Henson. As it turns out, Heather has the banjo which was used to record the soundtrack of *The Rainbow Connection* from 1979's *The Muppet Movie* as well as many of the 120 episodes of *The Muppet Show*. With its historical significance and having been autographed by numerous show business legends from Julie Andrews to Roy Rogers, the "Muppet Banjo" held great interest to our museum. Luckily, Heather Henson felt the same way and soon her "Muppet Banjo" will be on display at the American Banjo Museum. To maximize the impact of that display, I couldn't help but think how cool it would be to have *Kermit* on display as well. Fast-forward to mid February when I received a completely unexpected call holding the honor of inviting me to perform in Hollywood as part of the celebration of life for the late banjo playing comic, Jerry Van Dyke. During my visit to California, I

met with the Jim Henson Company to coordinate plans for both the exhibiting of the banjo as well as our upcoming Hall of Fame honor for Mr. Henson. While it was a great meeting, I was sadly informed that *Kermit* was now owned by Disney and the Henson archives did not have an available vintage Kermit that could be loaned to us for our exhibit. Fast-forward a couple more weeks...while attending the *Keystone Banjo Bash* I had the opportunity to meet with the Jim Henson Company archivist, Karen Falk, in New York to view items which *would* be available for our exhibit. After seeing the banjo and numerous original photos and drawings, Karen opened a rather large box which – to my stunned amazement – contained *Kermit The Frog*. While he needs a little TLC as well as a blessing from Disney before making a trip to OKC, hopefully our museum visitors will soon have a chance to see the "Muppet Banjo" along side the frog that made it all happen. Like I say, you never know what a day might bring...

*Johnny Baier, Executive Director*



## Earl Scruggs' banjo acquired by ABM



No matter what type of banjo or banjo music may be your preference, very few would argue the fact that *Earl Scruggs* is the name with which the public and musician alike have associated with the banjo during the past half century. From his earliest days as an aspiring banjoist in North Carolina to his debut at the Grand Ole Opry, Earl Scruggs was a unique and innovative banjo player. His unspeakable technique coupled with an inventive musical mind never lost sight of its roots, continued to establish new standards in the world of Bluegrass music until his passing in 2012.

During his career, Scruggs owned dozens of banjos, from the most modest which were gifted to him by fans to the ultimate opulence of the gold and silver plated, engraved and hand-painted Gibson "The Earl" model introduced in 2002. Of all those banjos however, Scruggs was closely identified with only a few. Most notable among these are the 1934 Gibson RB-11 which was Scruggs' first banjo; the fabled 1930 Gibson Granada which was his primary performing and recording instrument from 1949 until his death, and; the one-of-a-kind custom DeLuxe Vega banjo which was a predecessor

to the company's line of four *Earl Scruggs Model* banjos in the 1960s.

The *Earl Scruggs Deluxe* five-string banjo made for Scruggs by Vega in 1960 bore a resemblance to their ultra-fancy tenor and plectrum banjos than the five-string banjos typically associated with folk and country musicians. The banjo sported engraved and gold-plated metal parts, engraved mother of pearl position markers on the fingerboard and, most notably, a thin sidewall resonator elaborately decorated in the manner of the company's venerated Vox IV model. Of particular note is the inclusion of a pair of early Scruggs' designed cam "D Tuners" in the center of the peghead. As this installation impeded upon the "Vega" branding in its typical location, the company adapted by placing a metal "Vega" branded metal plate (identical to those fastened to the exterior of Vega banjo cases) near the top of the peghead to facilitate their brand recognition.

Following the presentation to Scruggs of his own unique "Earl Scruggs Model," Vega rolled out the production line model. With Earl's promotion, the Vega "Earl Scruggs



Model" became a best seller in the company's product line. During the period of his endorsement of Vega banjos Scruggs was often seen and photographed with his Vega banjo.

With all this attention and exposure, the public would surmise that his Vega was Earl Scruggs' favorite banjo. Those in the know, however, knew differently. Although the company touted the model as "being made to Earl Scruggs' specifications" and truly is a fine instrument, the model simply didn't live up to what Earl wanted as a musician. As a result, he often retreated to his Gibson Granada for most of his live, radio and recording performances, while dutifully utilizing his Vega for promotions and certain television appearances. In time he played his Gibson exclusively but carried his Vega on his tour bus – purposely fitted with a broken head. When banjo geeks would inquire about

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## Krewe de Banjo Mardi Gras Party



*Shelby Eicher All Star Jazz Band entertain guests at Krewe de Banjo Mardi Gras Party*



*Suzanne Sylvester, Marilyn North, Beth Adams, and Kaye Adams*

The American Banjo Museum held its third annual Mardi Gras event February 10th. The festivities began at 3 pm with museum visitors receiving special ABM Mardi Gras beads and a performance by Paul Poirier, Steve Caddick, and Bob Alexius. Then at 4 pm the Shelby Eicher All Star Jazz Band took the stage to entertain museum visitors before the evening Krewe de Banjo party began.

The sold out evening party kicked off at 6 pm with attendees donning

masks and Mardi Gras beads as the sounds of jazz from the Shelby Eicher All Star Jazz Band filled the museum and attendees enjoyed hurricanes, wine and beer from the cash bar.

The evening Cajun buffet included: jambalaya, Cajun pasta, red beans and rice, crab mac and cheese, rosemary bread, and doberge cake.

A Wine Pull to benefit the Museum was held during the festivities.

Twenty dollars bought participants a cork with a corresponding number on a wine bottle with one bottle containing a \$100 Visa gift card. Donna Jennings was one happy lady when she purchased the cork that matched the bottle with the Visa gift card. Sponsors for the Wine Pull were Put A Cork In It and Catering Oklahoma.

Mark your calendar for next year's Krewe de Banjo Mardi Gras Party to be held March 2, 2019.



*Alma Cochran, Bill Elliott, and Karen Lennox*



*Paul Poirier, Steve Caddick, and Bob Alexius perform for afternoon museum visitors*

## Earl Scruggs' banjo

*continued from page 3*

the Vega, Earl would show it to them and comment, "The head broke so I had to play my Gibson tonight..."

As his role as an iconic elder statesman of the banjo took hold in the 1970s and beyond, many devotees speculated as to the whereabouts of Earl's iconic banjos. His Gibson Granada stayed with him until his passing in 2012 and is now on display at the Country Music Hall of Fame. Rumored sightings of his Gibson RB-11 have been numerous, nobody knows what really happened to that banjo. Then there is his Vega... Over the years speculation has run rampant in regarding the whereabouts of that historic instrument. With no answer forthcoming from Earl or the Scruggs family, most assumed

the instrument had traded hands and was safely, ensconced in an unknown private collection.

Then, to the surprise of almost everyone, it was announced that instruments from the estate of Earl Scruggs would be offered for sale. The excitement among the banjo and bluegrass community was incredible in the days prior to the sale which included Earl's iconic one-of-a-kind Vega DeLuxe banjo. Banjo chat rooms buzzed about that particular instrument with numerous comments alluding to "second mortgages," "winning the lottery," and "raiding the kid's college fund" being bantered about as a means of its acquisition. Additionally, based on modern day Scruggs' fans having only seen the banjo in 1960s era black and white photos, its appearance in the Gruhn sale

marked the first time Earl's Vega banjo was seen "in color" for many.

Based on the press attention and buyer anticipation of the sale, when Gruhn opened for business on January 27th virtually everything from the Scruggs' estate was sold within a couple of hours. Because of their relatively high price points, both Earl's personal Gibson "The Earl" model as well as his special Vega banjo lingered a bit longer. After considering the historic significance of and provenance attached to Earl's Vega DeLuxe banjo being a match to their mission, the board of the American Banjo Museum voted to acquire the instrument to be part of its permanent collection. As a result, Earl Scruggs' fans and devotees may now see – "in color" – this unique and significant piece of American banjo history.

## ABM Membership

The American Banjo Museum wishes to recognize and thank new members and those that have renewed their membership the first quarter of 2018.

### Individual Membership

Nita Kaye Adams  
Bill Brisotti  
Dolores Borrow  
Alma Cochran  
C.B. Elder  
William G. Evans  
George S. Flink  
Roy Hill  
Mike Kerr  
John Mumford

Janice O'Bryan  
Edward J. Owen  
J.T. Scruggs  
John Vonk  
Donelda Wheatley

### Couple Membership

Neil Duresky & Candyce Del Bello  
Edwin & Bernice Evarts  
Bruce & Jo Ewing  
John & Ann Green  
Mike & Deb Hignite  
Jay Shanker & Sara Jane Rose

### Lifetime Membership

Teri Ann Wilkinson Rogers

To become a member, gift a membership, or upgrade your current membership call 405-604-2793.

## Open call for Hall of Fame suggestions

Did you know that members of the American Banjo Museum are eligible to make suggestions for the ABM Hall of Fame? The American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame is open to any individual, group or entity which has made a significant and positive impact upon either the art or industry of the banjo in the following categories: Four-String Performance, Five-String Performance, Design & Manufacture, Instruction & Education, and Promotion.

June 15th is the deadline for submitting a suggestion for the 2019 Hall of Fame. Visit <http://www.americanbanjomuseum.com/hall-of-fame-nomination-election-process> for details on the election process.

Suggestions should be mailed to: Johnny Baier, American Banjo Museum, 9 East Sheridan Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73104



John Huntsberger  
1931-2017

Thanks to the  
Austin Banjo Band  
for their generous  
donation in memory of  
John Huntsberger

## Better know a board member



Don Lewis

**Q: Easy question first, four-string or five-string?**

A: Four-string tenor, also plectrum banjo tuned octave mandolin.

**Q: What's your favorite kind of music?**

A: 40's and older, some light opera, old waltzes & many Harry Warren tunes.

**Q: What are your favorite banjo events?**

A: Banjo Rally Int'l Eureka Springs (was Don Gilbrech's MABE); Brady Hunt's Jazz Banjo event in Guthrie, OK; Cactus Banjo & Ukulele Blast, Tucson, AZ; Houston Banjo Band spring event in Ammansville, TX; All Frets; and NAIBC in Detroit.

**Q: What age did you start playing musical instruments?**

A: I have memories of family singing starting at age four. My mother always would sing old songs while we were cleaning up the kitchen. My father would sing old southern folk songs. We had harmonicas, a ukulele and eventually got a piano.

**Q: I understand you also play the violin. Can you tell us about your years of playing the violin?**

A: My Father made three violins and the start of a fourth. The

first is the best and it was made for me, completed June 1943. I took lessons in '45 & '46, but lessons ended when my father died November 1946. Reading music was very difficult because of my nearsightedness. I would plunk out the selections on the piano until I had learned the piece. Unfortunately, I did not learn all the details like dynamics and other little details. I did play first stand in the Junior High Orchestra and bridged my vision limitations by carefully listening to the Concert Master on my right and learning the selections by ear. High school did not provide a music opportunity since taking college prep courses left no room for electives. I would get the fiddle out each Christmas and play carols but otherwise rarely played. I will explain my renewed interest in music when we moved to Oklahoma in 1962 in the last paragraph of this list.

**Q: You're a skilled wood worker, is there any correlation between that and your music?**

A: I followed in my father's footsteps making small items: inlaid boxes and other items. Since we always had a ukulele at our home I made a nice uke. The neck was wider than plans but fit my large hands and sounded quite good. Tony Chobin of the Houston Banjo Band heard it and convinced me to sell it to him. I obliged and let him have it at a very good price. Tony was blind and loved to play. I soon made another uke and then a Flatiron style mandolin which is not perfect but sounds good and a mountain dulcimer. I have future plans and components for banjos.

**Q: What's your "go to" song you like to play?**

A: There are many! *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, My One and Only Love, Stardust, Desinfinado, Anniversary*

*Song and Ashokan Farewell* and many great songs by Harry Warren and others in that era.

**Q: Where do you see the Museum going in the future?**

A: I expect the museum to continue to embrace all types of banjos and broaden interest and commitment to the museum. I really hope that we can expand our facility and include a nice size performance auditorium that will draw in more people and stimulate interest and support for the museum.

**Q: When did you get introduced to the banjo?**

A: My introduction to the world of banjo came soon after we were transferred to Tulsa. Our boys were in a boys club and some of the other dads liked music and would hold jams. I was invited but was told I must bring and play an instrument. I brought my violin. The host (who became our dentist) played a nice tenor. Roger Hale was there and played a plectrum. I was fascinated with the sound and look of the banjos but really liked the tenor, primarily because it was tuned in fifths – five tones down from my violin. My wife, Janet went to my favorite music store and surprised me one Christmas with a post-war Leedy banjo with a formed aluminum resonator. I took it to the only banjo teacher in Tulsa and he told me it was a plectrum and not suitable for lessons with him. He told me "Get a tenor". I could not afford to buy a tenor banjo so took a piece of walnut, bought a pre-fretted fingerboard and refitted the Leedy to be a tenor. I started lessons with the Leedy but after a year, I bought a new 1960 Gibson TB100 but could not afford a case. The hard case came several years later and I played that banjo until Henry Fries convinced me to have Dale Small make me a custom tenor banjo which is the one I still play.

## Community is enjoying live music at the Museum



February's Celtic Jam Session



Members of the Okie Dokies participated in the Four-String Open Jam Session

Americana Fest, June 23, is the American Banjo Museum's annual family music celebration. This year's event brings an amazing musical line up with Oklahoma's own Kyle Dillingham & Horseshoe Road and Shelby Eicher & Cimarron Swing. In addition to these Oklahoma favorites, the Side Street Steppers from Tennessee will be joining the rotating roster on the second floor of the Museum, while Bill Bond and Wayne Cantwell will be performing on the first floor of the museum. Outdoor activities include kids arts and crafts, summertime treats and a children's stage hosted by KFOR-TV personality Lucas Ross. Door prizes will be given away throughout the day with a Deering Goodtime Banjo drawing at the conclusion of the performances.

Prairie at the Museum while playing banjo, fiddle, and mountain dulcimer. Wayne's selection of old style songs included: Old Bill Jones, Frankie & Johnny, Ground Hog, Arkansas Traveler and more. Wayne will be performing again on April 14 and May 19.

On select Sunday afternoons visitors find Deana Rotramel and Millie Perry in the Your Father's Mustache room playing Scruggs style five-string banjo for museum visitors.

Check out our calendar of events at [americanbanjomuseum.com](http://americanbanjomuseum.com) or follow our events on Facebook.



Wayne Cantwell performing Traditional Music from the Open Prairie

The American Banjo Museum is hosting a variety of jam sessions for the community to participate in and museum visitors to attend. A rotating roster of open jam sessions gives Bluegrass, Four-String, Old Time, Ukulele, and Celtic musicians a place to gather, play and share their music with others. Free admission is offered to those that bring an instrument to participate in the open jams, while museum visitors are encouraged to sit and enjoy the music.

In March, Wayne Cantwell performed Traditional Music from the Open

**AMERICANA FEST**  
**FUN FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY**  
**Saturday - June 23 - 11am-5pm**  
**American Banjo Museum**  
Music by: Kyle Dillingham & Horseshoe Road, Side Street-Steppers, Shelby Eicher & Cimarron Swing, and KAUT's Lucas Ross  
9 East Sheridan Ave  
Bricktown - OKC  
[americanbanjomuseum.com](http://americanbanjomuseum.com)  
**\$10 includes:** shows, prizes, activities & summertime treats  
**children 15 & under are FREE**  
Sponsors:



9 East Sheridan Avenue  
Oklahoma City, OK 73104



Save the date...**BANJO FEST...September 6-8, 2018**

## Upcoming Events...

### April

**SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 1 PM**

#### Bluegrass Open Jam

Join other Bluegrass players for an Open Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate in the Jam Session.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 3 PM**

#### Performance

Wayne Cantwell will perform traditional music of the open prairie on banjo, fiddle, and mountain dulcimer. Performance is free with museum admission.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2 PM**

#### Education

For those that have never played the banjo and wanted to try, come "Learn to Pick a Tune with Lucas". Limited seating, by reservation only!

**SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 1 PM**

#### Celtic Open Jam

Join other players for an Open Celtic Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate in the Jam Session.

### May

**SATURDAY, MAY 5, 1 PM**

#### Ukulele Open Jam

Join other Ukulele players for an Open Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate.

**SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2 PM**

#### Lucas Ross Banjo Farm Live

A family friendly music, puppet, banjo, bee variety show that will take you on a musical journey to the Banjo Farm - the only place where the INSTRUMENTS get to play. Under 16 free, adults half-price.

**SATURDAY, MAY 19, 2 PM**

#### Education

For those that have never played the banjo and wanted to try, come "Learn to Pick a Tune with Lucas". Limited seating, by reservation only!

**SATURDAY, MAY 19, 3 PM**

#### Performance

Wayne Cantwell will perform traditional music of the open prairie on banjo, fiddle, and mountain dulcimer. Performance is free with museum admission.

**SATURDAY, MAY 26, 1 PM**

#### Celtic Open Jam

Join other players for an Open Celtic Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate.

### June

**SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 1 PM**

#### Old Style Open Jam

Join other Old Style players for an Open Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate in the Jam Session.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2 PM**

#### Education

For those that have never played the banjo and wanted to try, come "Learn to Pick a Tune with Lucas". Limited seating, by reservation only!

**SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 11 AM**

#### AMERICANA FEST

Fun for the entire family! Enjoy a day of food, fun, and entertainment for one low price. Adults \$10, 15 & under free w/ accompanying adult.

### July

**SATURDAY, JULY 7, 1 PM**

#### Four-String Open Jam

Join other Four-String players for an Open Jam Session. Free admission when you bring an instrument and participate in the Jam Session.