



Bluegrassin'

Volume 11, Issue 1

January—February 2009

The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association is a non-profit association dedicated to promoting preserving and sharing our love of bluegrass music in a spirit of family and friendship.

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Upcoming Bluegrass Events

It may be winter in Montana but there is plenty of bluegrass around. Check out some of these events.

January 9-11—Rivercity Bluegrass Festival, Oregon Convention Center, Portland, OR. Lots of top name bluegrass bands, jamming and workshops. For more information visit www.rivercitybluegrass.com or calls 503-282-0877.

January 10—MRBA first winter jam of 2009, Ruby's Inn Missoula. Jamming starts at 1:00, potluck at 5:00, jamming 'til its over.

January 24—Deer Lodge Jam. This has been a good one! The jam will be held at Bill Anderson's house, 604 Washington Street, Deer Lodge. Plenty of room for three jams. Jamming starts at noon with a spaghetti feed later at \$5.00 a plate. Contact Sharf's Motel (406-846-2810) or Western Big Sky In (406-846-2590) for reservations. Breakfast on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. Call Bill at 406-498-6621 or email at bluegrassbill62@yahoo.com. All lovers of bluegrass music invited.

February 14—Celebrate Valentine's day with your sweetie at the MRBA jam at Ruby's Inn, Missoula. Jamming starts at 1:00, potluck at 5:00, jamming 'til its over.

February 19-22—Winterfest, Tacoma, WA. Concerts, workshops and jams held at several venues around Tacoma. Several top bands on the schedule.

March 14—MRBA's last winter jam at Ruby's Inn, Missoula. You can use this as a warm up for the spring festival. Jamming starts at 1:00, potluck at 5:00, jamming 'til its over.

April 18—MRBA's spring festival, Stevensville, MT. More information in the next issue but put this one on your calendar now!

Recurring Show and Jams

- ♦ MISSOULA – Tuesdays, TopHat (134 W. Front St) - Bluegrass jam. 7pm.
- ♦ MISSOULA – Tuesdays, TopHat – Pinegrass plays around 10pm.
- ♦ MISSOULA – Tuesdays, Wheat Montana – Moozoola Opry 6pm 'til 8pm the Black Mountain Boys play. Admission is free, the band asks that you buy a sandwich or soup from the fine folks at Wheat Montana as you sit back and enjoy an evening of music.
- ♦ GREAT FALLS – 1st and 3rd Thursdays, Bert & Ernie's 300 1st Ave South) 7pm. Call 453-8003 for info.
- ♦ NORRIS HOT SPRINGS – Sunday evenings 7-10pm, Thermalgrass plays, The band includes Tom Murphy, Quentin King, and Ian Fleming

President's Corner

By Dallas Olson



Happy New Year! Boy, are we going to have a good one. How could it be bad when we all have a song in our heart. Bluegrass music washes away a lot of troubles.

We had a good annual meeting. We had good attendance, delicious food at the pot luck and some hot jams. A report on the meeting is included in this issue. I was elected president at the meeting and look forward to serving all of you. I would like to hear suggestions of how we can continue to improve the MRBA and bring more enjoyment to all our members. You can contact me by email at mrba@mtbluegrass.com or give me a call.

We are getting off to a good start this year. Check out all the upcoming activities but especially the MRBA jams and local bluegrass activities. We will have lots more information on the MRBA spring festival in the next issue. This is our biggest event of the year and key to the future success of the MRBA. I ask that you see how you can be a part of the festival.

You can also look forward to some important changes to our MRBA website. Phyllis Erck is updating the website so it will have more features and be much more interactive. More information is available in this issue.

I want thank the outgoing president and two outgoing members of the board. Curtis Rathburn, the outgoing president, led the MRBA for the last two years. Caroline Keys was a member of the board and was also the newsletter editor for the last two years. Phyllis Erck is leaving the board but will continue to be the webmaster for the MRBA website. We all appreciate their work in keeping the MRBA as an important regional influence in preserving bluegrass music.

Two new members were elected to the board. Ben Essary, a past president and past newsletter editor, was elected to the board and will take over as editor of the newsletter. Ted Lowe is also joining the board. Ted is a great bluegrass musician and brings some good ideas on improving the MRBA.

I also want to thank Ruby Erck for all her generosity in making the Ruby's Inn facilities available for our annual meeting and the winter jams. We sure have the living room feel there. How can you beat it!

Last, I want to mention the passing of John Swigert. John was member of the western Montana bluegrass scene for many years and we will miss him and his banjo. Seems we are saying goodbye to too many bluegrass friends too soon this past year.

I look forward to meeting all the members and working together to keep bluegrass music alive and well.

IMPORTANT NOTE!

With the revision of the MRBA website, the newsletter will be uploaded to the site as soon as it is published. If you wish to receive the newsletter on the website instead of receiving it in the mail, please email mrba@mtbluegrass.com. This will help reduce costs for the MRBA. Thanks.

Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association

PO Box 1306, Missoula, MT 59806
(406) 363-4055

Website: www.mtbluegrass.com

email: mrba@mtbluegrass.com

President – Dallas Olson

Vice President – Mike Conroy

Secretary/Treasurer – Lois Malikie, (406) 549-2444

Board Members –, Tari Conroy, Ben Essary, Brian Herbel, Ted Lowe

Merchandise Manager—Lela Schafer (406) 207-6564

Newsletter Editor – Ben Essary (406) 777-7028

Bluegrassin' is a bi-monthly publication of the **Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association**

Information printed in **Bluegrassin'** is at the discretion of the **Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association**

Minutes of 2008 Annual Meeting

The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association annual meeting was held at Ruby's Inn and Convention Center in Missoula, Mt. on Dec. 6th 2008 with Curtis Rathburn, President presiding.

The financial statement was presented by Lois Jean Malikie, Sec./Treas., with a beginning balance of \$3,020.89. There was income of \$5,841.54 and expenses of \$6,417.43 leaving an ending balance of \$2445.00. A report breakdown of Florence shows and jams as well as merchandise program were also presented. CD expenses, a complete breakdown of the April festival cost and income and cost of newsletter were presented. Finally a breakdown of number of members both new and renewals was given. Members approved the report.

It was decided to remove the association CDs out of the music stores and only sell them at MRBA functions.

A discussion was held about selling club merchandise at other festivals. However, due to staffing of a booth and other expenses it was decided not to pursue this venue. We plan to continue selling the merchandise: shirts, hats, jackets, pins, bumper stickers and CD's at our local jams. Lela Schaffer is in charge of the merchandise.

A committee will be formed to pursue the idea of having a small local festival to offset the loss of the Hamilton festival.

It was decided that the money from the Wages family as a memorial to Ken Wages would be used at a future function of the Association in his name.

Jams for January, February, and March 2009 will be held at Ruby's Inn and Convention Center, North Reserve in Missoula, Montana.

Officers were elected for 2009. They are as follows:

President—Dallas Olson

Vice President---Mike Conroy

Sec. / Treas.--- Lois Jean Malikie

Board Members---Ben Essary, Ted Lowe, Tari Conroy, and Brian Herbel.

Ben Essary volunteered to take over the newsletter from Caroline Keys as she needed to retire from the position.

Phyllis Erck gave a demonstration of the new interactive web-site that she is developing for the association. It will have the newsletter, links to member bands, and may contain postings from any of our members as soon as they receive authoring permission on the site. The updated site should be operational in early 2009.

Meeting was adjourned. Potluck dinner and jam was held afterward.

Lois Jean Malikie, Secretary/Treasurer

Membership Application
MONTANA ROCKIES BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION
PO Box 1306, Missoula, MT 59806

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____ Phone No. _____

E-mail _____ Individual (\$10.00) _____ Family (\$15.00) _____

2008 Annual Meeting

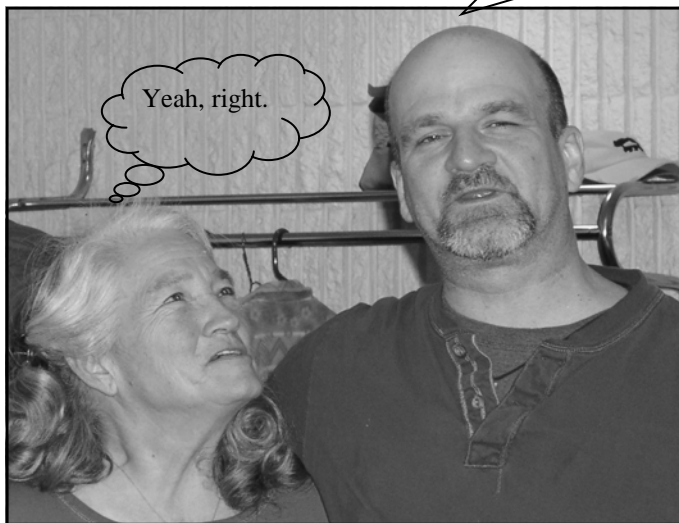
We had a great time at the annual meeting. Here are some photographs to help preserve the memories!



We had a great potluck meal. No one could complain of leaving hungry!



Forrest showing Mary Jane the way home!



*Dallas Olson, Incoming President
Curtis Rathburn, Outgoing President*

No, no, Dallas. Being president hardly takes any effort at all!!!!

Yeah, right.



*HOT JAM TWO!!!!!!
Arlene, Brian, Pat and Ted*



*HOT JAM!!!!!!
From the left, Jeff, Caleb, Wes, Mike, Tari, Fred and Emily*



*Ted Lowe, newly
elected board
member*

*You've got to start
with top quality
materials or they'll
sound "tinny"*



*Caleb, Jesse and Wes
carrying on the tradition*

*I don't think I can
stand another blue-
grass song*

Me either!



Cookie and Emily taking a break



*Forrest Clark,
maker of grade
A-1
gut buckets*



Fred

*Where's my
banjo?*



*The new newsletter
editor hard at work*

MRBA WEBSITE GETS TURBOCHARGED

By: Phyllis Erck, MRBA Webmaster

We've been hard at work updating the MRBA website. It's still at www.mtbluegrass.com. You'll see that we kept the same information we had before, like links to Member's websites and event listings. In addition, members can Log In and post bluegrass related messages including pictures and videos. This will help our scattered bluegrass family stay connected between get-togethers.

To get started, go to the site and click on the **Register** link on the right-hand column of the screen. You will need to provide your email address to register. Your email address is kept private and never posted on the site.



Once you're registered and received your password, Log In and start sharing bluegrass related jokes, songs you're working on, new bands you've heard, questions or anything else related to our bluegrass community. See you online.

A screenshot of the MRBA website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: Home | Events | Music | Members | About | Contact Us. Below this is a banner image of a mountain range with a bluegrass logo that says "Montana Rockies BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION". To the right of the banner is a green box with the text "Dedicated to performing, promoting and preserving Bluegrass Music" and a musical note icon. The main content area features a blog post titled "Welcome to our BLOG" dated April 14, 2008, posted by phylliserck. The post includes tags for various instruments and genres, a list of tags, and a comment count. Below the post is a section for "2008 Winter Jam Series" with details on location, time, and cost. To the right of the blog post is a sidebar with "MRBA online" links (Flickr, Myspace, YouTube Channel), "Recent Posts" (Banks of the Ohio, Guitar strumming, etc.), a search bar, and "Categories". At the bottom of the main content area is another blog post titled "Banks of the Ohio" dated November 13, 2008, posted by phylliserck, with tags and a comment count.

John Swigert (1938-2008)

John Swigert, an MRBA member, passed away in Missoula on Friday, November 28, 2008. John was born in Victor and spent most of his life in Montana. He was a veteran and was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1962. John took up music at an early age and was an important member of the Montana bluegrass community for many years. He was best known as a banjo player but also played the guitar, fiddle, bass and mandolin. A member of many bands over the years, he spent the last few years as the banjo player for the Black Mountain Boys. John leaves behind a large family and many friends. John's memorial, with military honors, was held in Stevensville on December 4th. The Black Mountain Boys played at the memorial service and gave John a good bluegrass goodbye. A full obituary is available at www.missoulain.com. We'll miss you John.



Pegram Jam Chord Book

So let's say you're trying to learn that old fiddle tune and just can't work out the chords. While there are lots of resources to help, you should check out the Pegram Jam website (www.peggramjam.com). The Pegram jam, which is held in Pegram, Tennessee has been around since 2001. Members of the jam have a website and have also put together a jam chord book which contains chord for hundreds of fiddle tunes. The book is regularly updated (it's presently on Version 42). The jam makes the book available to all on the website. As we all know, there are many regional variations and ways to play the tunes so the chord book is a place to start.

Got Something to sell? Advertise in **Bluegrassin'**

Full Page – \$25.00, 1/2 Page – \$15.00, 1/4 Page – \$10.00 Classified – \$5.00

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!!

We are always in need of information for the newsletter. If you know of an upcoming bluegrass concert or jam please send it to us so it can be included in the newsletter. If you are in a bluegrass band, give us details of your gigs and we will publicize them. We are also in need of bluegrass related articles. If want to share a hot break, tab it out and we will put it in the next issue. Submit your information to mrba@mtbluegrass.com.

Montana Bluegrass Pioneers

By Mike Conroy

I thought it would be fun to interview some early pioneer bluegrassers in Montana. This interview is with Chuck and Jeanne Burruss from Corvallis Montana. They were a huge influence on me and really got me into bluegrass music. I hope you enjoy it.

M: Chuck, when did you first hear bluegrass?

C: It wasn't called bluegrass then, it was called hillbilly music. When I was in high school, I used to listen to those high powered Mexican stations. This is back in maybe 1951 or 1952.

M: This was in Virginia or Hamilton?

C: This was in Hamilton. I started hearing some songs, I didn't know who they were at first, but they were Mac Wiseman, some Flatt & Scruggs and Bill Monroe. I thought boy that's neat music.

M: Your folks were from Virginia?

C: Yes, but I grew up in Hamilton. That was probably the first time I heard bluegrass music. Then, a year or two later, my folks moved up to Pennsylvania. I was out of high school then so I moved up to Pennsylvania also. There I used to listen to a country music show out of New York. A DJ named Guy Larkin played a lot of Bill Monroe and Mac Wiseman stuff. Still it was just called hillbilly music. Then my folks moved to Maryland. There was lots of hillbilly music on the radio, Jimmy Dean had a TV show on Saturday night and he had Reno and Smiley on his show a lot.

M: Was that when you used to record all that bluegrass on your reel to reel recorder?

C: Yes, and Stanley Brothers, they played a lot of Stanley Brothers also. A lot of folks don't realize that most of those old music programs were about half Gospel music.

M: Yeah, I don't think a lot of people realize that. So how often were you back in Hamilton?

C: Oh, I was running around a lot back then. I used to spend summers in Hamilton and winters in Maryland.

M: So when did they start calling it Bluegrass music?

C: In January 1959 I went in the service and was sent to Fort Ord. I listened to Kern County Country Time and the guy was calling it bluegrass music.

M: I don't know if you remember this, but when I was in Jr. High or so, I used to try to play music with a friend named Dan Reeves from Corvallis. One day he said there was a guy that lived out of Corvallis and he had a "real Martin guitar and a Gibson banjo". and he would probably let us look at them. He called you up and to your house we went. You let us hold them and fool around with them. That day probably started my love for Martin guitars and old Gibson banjos.

C: I don't even remember that.

M: That was a long time ago. So when did you get that old D-18 Martin and that old RB100 Gibson banjo?

C: I bought the Gibson banjo in the late 50's at a pawn shop in DC.

M: Tell me again the story of you and your friend Cal Samsel both buying old RB100 banjos and putting bluegrass tone rings in them.

C: Cal was a packer who packed mules out of the Powel Ranger Station. We decided we needed to buy arch top tone rings to get that bluegrass sound. (Gibson RB100 banjos didn't come with tone rings). Well, I set up my table saw up with the blade just right and took endless time fitting that tone ring on there. Cal whittled his banjo out with his pocket knife while he was back in camp with the mules.



M: Which one sounded better?

C: They both sounded the same.

M: And I understand, with the D-18 Martin, a guy came into the bar you were playing at and said he wanted to sell it to you, and would \$15.00 be too much?

C: Yeah, Cal said he had never seen anyone write a check that fast!

M: How about Jeannes' D-76 Martin guitar? How did you get that?

C: I traded my beer can collection for it. I had collected about 260 kinds of steel beer cans, a guy offered me \$2.50 each for the collection. I paid about \$.25 for each one and I got to drink the beer. Every can was opened on the bottom because I liked to drink my beer upside down. I thought it was cleaner somehow.

M: How did you get your second banjo?

C: It's an Ode Style D banjo, I bought it with old comic books. I had about three apple boxes full of old Walt Disney comic. I found an old comic book collector and we negotiated for weeks about the price. I finally sold the comic books for just enough to order the banjo sight unseen, through the mail.

M: That's too cool. Jeanne, when did you two meet?

J: We met May 2, 1958.

C: And we got married December 1958.

J: And we met at a party up at Lake Como. They had a huge bon fire going at the lake and Charlie and Dean Porter were playing. After the party, some of my girlfriends and I climbed in the back of Charlie's car to head home. I asked Charlie if I could play his guitar, he said sure. He thought "Oh boy, a girl that can play guitar!"

M: Jeanne, when did you start playing guitar?

J: I learned three chords when I was just a kid. My mom used to play guitar and piano. I could play three chords but I never new how to change chords. When I was pregnant with Gary, I would go in the back room and be singing away and strumming and by accident I changed chords at the right time. I thought, "that sounded pretty good, let's do it again". Then it started to make sense to me.

M: When did you guys start the Western Gospel Messengers band?

J: About 1962. We were playing at the little Grantsdale Community Church. They also had Sandy Ingersol, the artist, drawing pictures and Pastor Harvey Pounds was in the audience. We all got together and decided to start a group. Harvey at the time was going to a church in Missoula. He said there's a guy down in Missoula who plays and he's darn good. It was Bill Ralston. Bill's son Steve was just a little shaver, 9,10 or 11 years old, and he wanted to play so bad. I said, "you guys let that kid play in the background". Charlie would show Steve a lick on the guitar and the next time we would see him he would have it down pat. During that period we made our first record over in Spokane. Steve was just starting to pick real good, and our daughter Sandy was playing the bass.

M: You've made five records?

C: Yes, the first record was everyone playing live to one track. There was no patchin' or fixin'. If someone made a mistake, we all had to start over.

J: It was very stressful.

M: These days, what are you guys doing in music?

C: We're just coasting. We don't travel anymore playing the Gospel music. I still play banjo a little bit when the need arises for banjo pickin' on some of our Gospel. Jeanne is learning to play the Dobro, so I play guitar with the Dobro. Anymore, I mostly like to sing the old songs and play guitar. That's my favorite thing now.

M: We need to get together more often and pick them old songs.

C&J: Yes we do!





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We have set up the address label on your newsletter to be your membership card, please clip it out and use it for proof of your membership to the MRBA.

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\$12.95*
PER MONTH

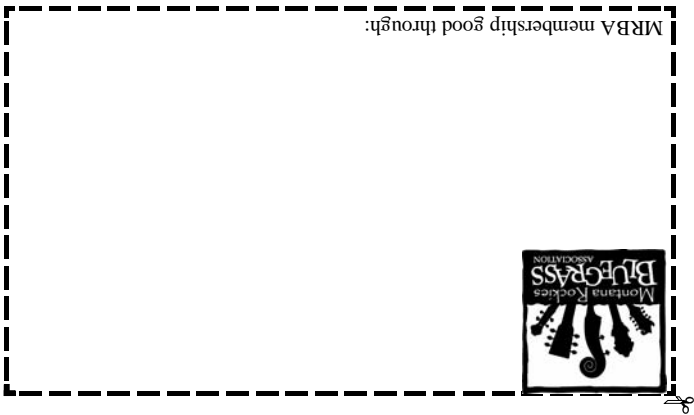
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