



Bluegrassin'

Volume 11, Issue 2

Mar-Apr 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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Ed Note: The MRBA Board voted to cancel our membership in the International Bluegrass Music Association. IBMA membership fee was raised from \$150 to \$200 per year. The board decided the money could be better used to support local bluegrass activities.

Upcoming Bluegrass Events

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. Check out the write up in this issue.

May 22-25—Conroy's Memorial Day Campout, Little West Fork Campground. Take the West Fork Road out of Darby, turn right on Nez Perce Road to the campground.

May 24-31—Pasture Pickin', 5502 Pipe Creek Road, Libby, MT. For more information contact Dale or Dorothy Berg, 406-293-6608.

June 12-14—Sacajawea Bluegrass Festival and Dutch Oven Cookoff, Pasco, WA. For more information visit www.sacajaweabluegrass.org or contact Reade Obern at 509-492-1555

June 19-21—Jack Piippo is hosting the Haven Campout at Seeley Lake, MT. More information in the next issue.

June 26-28—Garrison Junction Campout. More information in next issue.

July 10-12—National Folk Festival, Butte, MT. First presented in 1934, the National is the oldest multicultural festival in the nation. Visit www.nationalfolkfestival.com or call 406-497-6464 for more information.

July 11—Jam at Dallas Olson's house. More information in next issue.

July 17-19—Kootenai River Bluegrass Festival, Troy, MT. More information in next issue.

July 17-19—Darrington Bluegrass Festival. For more information visit www.glacierviewe.net/bluegrass or call Diana Morgan at 360-436-1179.

July 24-26—Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival, 10 miles south of Hamilton off Highway 93. See the ad later in this issue.

August 7-9—MRBA Campout, Forrest Flats, Clinton, MT. More information in upcoming issues.

Recurring Show and Jams

- ♦ MISSOULA—Tuesdays, Top Hat Jam Jam at 7pm, Pinegrass plays at 9pm.
- ♦ 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

We are well into our MRBA winter bluegrass activities. The MRBA jams in both January and February were well attended. Beside the great music provided by the pickers, we enjoyed delicious potluck suppers and the opportunity to visit with friends and make some new ones. We continue to express our appreciation to Ruby's Inn and Convention Center, and to Ruby Erck personally, for allowing us to have our meetings at this great facility. Don't miss our next jam at Ruby's which is scheduled for March 14th. It will be our last MRBA winter jam for this year. All you pickers can use this as a tune up for the MRBA festival.

The MRBA annual festival will be held on April 18th. Check out the article later in this issue. Once again this year Mike and Tari Conroy have put together a great program. Some of the best bluegrass bands in the northwest will be playing at the festival. We want to thank in advance all the musicians who donate their time, talent and expenses to play at the festival. We also need volunteers to help make this a good event. Help will be needed throughout the day at the admissions table, kitchen, and merchandise table. Sign up sheets will be available at the March jam. You can also contact Mike and Tari Conroy or sign up the day of the festival. Many hands make light work.

Maintaining the membership of the MRBA is an ongoing process. It is our members who make bluegrass music possible. It makes all our work easier if members pay their dues on time. Lois Malikie does a great job in keeping track of the membership. The date your membership is due for renewal is shown on your address label. Members who do not renew will be dropped from the rolls. We also need your help in bringing in new members. If you know someone who is interested in bluegrass, invite them to join. A membership application is included in each newsletter and is available on the MRBA website.

Thanks to Phyllis Erck, our updated website is up and running. We have had quite a few posts to the blog. Phyllis has made it easy to post bluegrass related information. We are also working to post the newsletter on the website as soon as it is published. Send an email to mrba@mtbluegrass.com if you prefer to read the newsletter on the website. This will help the association by reducing the reproduction and postage costs of the newsletter.

We have prepared some business cards to help provide information about the MRBA. These cards will be available to members at the March jam.

I'm sorry to report the loss of another MRBA member. Jerry Swafford passed away in February. He was a singer, banjo player and good friend. We will all miss Jerry. A memorial is included later in this issue of the newsletter.

We have lots of bluegrass activities on the schedule. I hope to see you at some of these events.

Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association

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(406) 549-2444

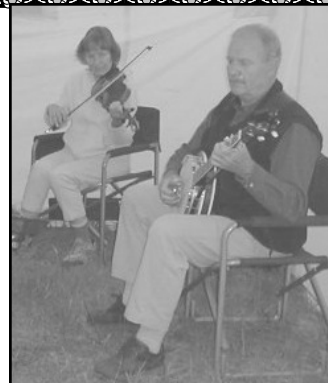
Website: www.mtbluegrass.com email: mrba@mtbluegrass.com**President** – Dallas Olson**Vice President** – Mike Conroy**Secretary/Treasurer** – Lois Malikie, (406) 549-2444**Board Members**—Tari Conroy, Ben Essary, Brian Herbel, Ted Lowe**Merchandise Manager**—Lela Schafer (406) 207-6564**Newsletter Editor**—Ben Essary (406) 777-7028**MRBA Webmaster**—Phyllis Erck mrba@mtbluegrass.com

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

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

Jerry Swafford 1942-2009



Maryett and Jerry

Once more we must say goodbye to one of our members. Jerry Swafford passed away suddenly at his home on February 4th, 2009. Jerry and Maryett attended many of the MRBA and other bluegrass events over the past few years. Jerry sang and played banjo. He was born in Heyburn, Idaho and in his early years was a cowboy, trapper, musician, sheepherder, and mountain man and worked for the Forest Service as a firefighter. Jerry married Maryett in 1968. He was a chiropractor and had served his patients since 1976. He and Maryett lived in the Bitterroot Valley since 1980. He was a proud father and grandpa, best friend and partner to his wife and family. We will all miss his friendly presence. Our condolences go out to Maryett and the rest of the family. A full obituary is available at www.missoulia.com. At the right is a photo of family and friends at Jerry's Memorial held at the Victor Grange Hall. I'm sure Jerry would have loved to have been there with his banjo.



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) _____

Jam Photos

We've had some good jams in January and February. Here are some photos. January 10th Jam at Ruby's is first.



Ron Snyder
taking a break



Charley Erck fresh
in from Hawaii!



Richard and Dick Darne and Phyllis Erck

These are the from the
jam on February 14th



More JAMS



Hot Jam!



Lela and Lois



Potluck!



Another hot jam!

Deer Lodge Jam

Mike and Tari Conroy

The Deer Lodge jam was held January 24-25 at Bill Anderson's house in Deer Lodge. It was well attended and there was lots of pickin and grinnin. Many of the MRBA pickers were there including James, Ted, Caleb, Bill, Jeff C, Rodger, Forest, Phyllis, Curtis, Gary and Ken, to name a few. Tari and I got to see Derrick Hofer from Helena. We first met Derrick when he was about 15 years old. He, with his uncle and dad, would come to Montana State Fiddle Contest in Polson. Back then, Polson was THE big yearly pickin fest. Most all the jammers would jam down by the lake into the wee hours, often til daylight the next morning. Derrick was just started flat picking a guitar and he just loved Steve Ralston's guitar pickin. He and Steve would sneak off and Steve would show him his 'secret guitar licks' when no one was looking. It is pretty cool to see what a fine flat picker Derrick has become. We also got to meet Paisley Gray, who is Phyllis Erck's sister from Seattle. She is a fine singer and bass and guitar player, and lot of fun to play with. Phyllis and Paisley also have a brother named Charlie, who we got to jam with at the Christmas party last December. He is also a fine singer and Dobro picker. It's quite a talented family. Jeff Trask was there, as was our guitar pickin friend and legal advisor Bruce Lee (not the marshal arts guy). We jammed up stairs, down stairs and out in the heated garage and had a nice Gospel jam Sunday morning. Thanks Bill and Mike for all the fun and the great hospitality. Looking forward to next year.



Bill Anderson threw a great party!



*Curtis
You play those
minor & 7th
chords and horns
grow out your
head!!!*



Big jam in the garage



Roger and Paisley Gray



Derrick Hofer taking a break

Deer Lodge (cont)



Ken & Forrest



Jeff & Roger



James Dodd taking the lead



Jeff Trask



Gary Moore



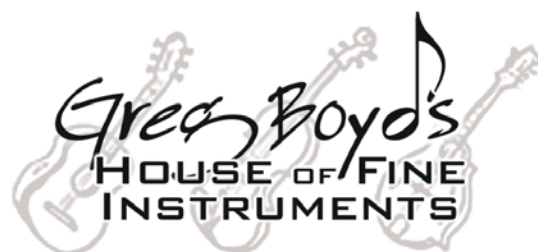
Pickin' in the basement

Tenth Annual MRBA Oldtime Bluegrass Festival

The 10th Annual Oldtime Bluegrass Festival will be held April 18th at the Stevensville Junior High multi-purpose room. We have a full slate of great bands. So come on out and hear lots of good bluegrass music. There will be space for lots of jams. The Festival starts at noon and goes until 11 pm. Food will be available at the festival and MRBA merchandise will be on sale. There will be extra parking behind the school (watch for signs). As in years past, people who would like to help by bringing food to the festival should bring desserts. Anyone who would like to help out at the festival should call Tari or Mike Conroy at 406-821-3777, or volunteer when you get to the festival. Here is the lineup of bands.

12:00-12:30 Kids In Bluegrass
12:35-1:05 Ken Benson Band
1:10-1:40 Three Rivers Bluegrass
1:45-2:15 Salmon Valley String Band
2:20-2:50 Black Mountain
2:55-3:25 Bill And Verna Molenda Band
3:30-4:00 Blue To The Bone
4:05-4:35 Bonnie Bliss And Stan Hall Band
4:40-5:10 Acousticals
5:15-5:45 Ramblin Rose
5:50-6:20 Will Williams And Gravel Road
6:25-6:55 Bill Anderson And Jeff Trask Band
7:00-7:30 Fred And Emily Frank
7:35-8:05 Gravely Mountain
8:10-8:40 Mike And Tari Conroy Band
8:45-9:15 Pinegrass
9:20-9:50 LGSR Band
9:55-10:25 Spring Thaw

This year the MRBA has again rented the American Legion Hall for the folks who would like to park over night and/or jam and visit after the festival (late Saturday night). Sunday morning we will do a free biscuits and gravy at the American Legion Hall at 10 am for folks before they head home. To get to the American Legion, drive south from the front of the Stevensville Junior High School. At the FIRST stop sign, turn LEFT on Middle Burnt Fork Road. Proceed up Middle Burnt Fork Road three MILES. The American Legion is on the LEFT. There is a sign for the Legion and it has lots of flags flying!!!



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BLUEGRASS HISTORY

*(TAKEN FROM BLUEGRASS, A HISTORY
BY NEIL ROSENBERG)*

- * *THE TERM "BLUEGRASS" DID COME INTO WIDE-SPREAD USE UNTIL THE 1960S. UNTIL THEN BLUEGRASS WAS LOOKED UPON AS COUNTRY OR "HILLBILLY" MUSIC*
- * *THE FIRST BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL WAS HELD IN ROANOKE, VIRGINIA IN SEPTEMBER 1965. IT WAS ORGANIZED BY CARLTON HANEY WHO BECAME AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN THE FESTIVAL*
- * *WHEN BLUEGRASS MUSIC WANED IN POPULARITY AFTER THE GROWTH OF ROCK AND ROLL AND ROCKABILLY, IT WAS "CITYBILLIES" IN THE LARGE CITIES OF THE NORTHEAST AND CALIFORNIA WHO HELPED PRESERVE THE MUSIC. THEIR SUPPORT WAS CRITICAL IN HELPING PROFESSIONAL BLUEGRASS MUSICIANS BE ABLE TO CONTINUE THEIR CAREERS. SOME OF THESE "CITYBILLY" MUSICIANS BECAME IMPORTANT FIGURES IN BLUEGRASS MUSIC*

Montana Bluegrass Pioneers

By Mike Conroy

Howdy folks. In this issue I called up Dick Darne from Alberton, Montana for an interview. I believe Dick is a Montana treasure who exemplifies authentic Virginia style Bluegrass. He was kind enough to send me his story. Hope you enjoy it as much as I did.



I was born in the Southland, 69 years ago actually the hospital was in Washington, DC, it being the closest one to my little home in Virginia. I grew up listening to WSM (when it came in), Nashville, Tennessee, WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia, and WCKY, Cincinnati, Ohio. Of course there was plenty of pickers around, including my Uncle Dinks.

They didn't call any music "bluegrass" back then. The term hadn't been invented yet and it was just "hillbilly music." There appeared to be little difference in the different types of hillbilly music. It seems like Bill Monroe, Stanley Brothers, Hank (Snow, Williams, Thompson etc) Mac Wiseman and Lefty Frizzell ruled the airwaves. Mac Wiseman was among the best entertainers; he was my mother's favorite and was "the voice with a heart". A lot of the songs I still do are ones she made me learn.

I worked in a filling station almost next door to the number one radio station in DC— WARL, hosted by Don Owens. The radio station had annual lawn parties, I remember one year, the temperature was in the high nineties. Bill Monroe

and the Bluegrass Boys were playing at the lawn party and Bill's boys all wore suits and ties. No casual dress for them.

A lot of today's bluegrass heroes came to D.C. to "winter it out." including Red Allen, Sonny and Bob Osborne, Don Reno, Red Smiley. There was an amazing amount of live music in small venues. I should have paid more attention. But being young and dumb, and in to rock & roll and I don't know what all, I missed a lot that is now gone forever.

What actually gave me the biggest boost to pursue the music which was now starting to be called "bluegrass" was a group playing at the Admiral Grille, in Bailey's Crossroads, Virginia, a suburb of DC. It was the very late fifties. I wasn't twenty one, so I had to use my fake draft card to get in the club. The group playing was the Country Gentlemen. I'll have to say, I had never seen such picking in my life. You could almost cut the testosterone with a knife. These guys were good and they knew it. In their early days they did most of the old songs I grew up with, so they became a big influence on me, especially Charlie Waller.

He showed up at a little gathering of the McKeon boys, who played with me back then. Their sister was a friend of his. We were picking for her when Charlie came in. We were flabbergasted beyond anything picking and singing in his presence, so I offered my old Harmony guitar to Charlie. After a few attempts at tuning to his high standards, he handed it back, handed one of the boys a set of keys and said: "go down to the parking lot and get the Martin out of the trunk of my Cadillac." Charlie tuned up that pre-war Martin with his name in the fingerboard and politely offered it to me, saying: "see how you like this one." Well, having one of the world's finest Martins in my hands didn't help. I could barely hold onto the pick, much less pick anything. So, I slowly strummed a G chord a few times and handed it back, whispering in a very low tone: "wow, wow, oh man, oh man." Charlie then put his foot up on a stool and played for hours, songs I didn't even know he knew, including about everything Hank Snow did. He said Hank Snow was one of his heroes, so by extension, Hank became one of mine. No matter how successful he became he always picked his own guitar. When Charlie bought a D-35, I went out and bought one too, still have it today.

One of the McKeon boys, Johnny Mac, was my singing partner for quite a while. We picked through our drinking days and kept a Sears Roebuck \$29.95 guitar stashed in the tavern we frequented. We'd sing love songs to the old ladies and they would buy us a beer. The same for someone crying in his beer and a sad song would do the trick.

Later after we quit the foolishness about 1968, we put together a half decent band, the New Sky Boys, but with my growing family responsibilities I had to leave and let them move on. Bluegrass festivals were just coming into their own and all my kids' earliest memories are at bluegrass festivals and some of it must have soaked in.

I moved to Alberton in '79 and formed a little band here, the Petty Creek Band. We played at Chet's bar for a few years. When we got an actual paying job, we would get Tim Ishler to join us. That all petered out and I didn't play much until the festivals at Hamilton started.

I went with #4 son, Kevin. Afterwards, he talked me out of my mandolin and proceeded to learn how to play it. We tried out our new duo at the Top Hat. Unfortunately, Kevin moved to Portland to pursue a career in heavy metal. He has since made a recovery and had a bluegrass band, the Stragglers, until recently.

Sometime around 1999, someone, Mike Conroy, I think, suggested I team up with Ron Snyder, whose band, the Poodles, had disbanded. In my musical life, that was the best thing that ever happened. We tried a few songs, I left a few on tape with him and just like singing in the shower, Ron serenaded all the little fishes in the hatchery where he works while perfecting his tenor singing. We performed at the first MRBA show and annually since then.

In the meantime, #5 son, Richard was secretly learning the banjo and to my complete surprise, all of my songs. He sprung this on me up at the pasture picking in Libby. Ron couldn't make it so I remarked to Rich: "I guess you'll have to sing tenor." And he did. After apprenticing awhile and tutelage from Jeff Campfield, he became a regular Gravelly Mountain Boy.

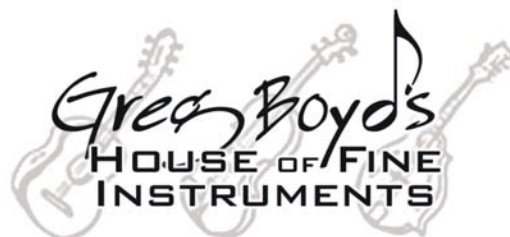
As far as the singing goes, I've got it made. Either Ron or Richard can sing any part. Even if I sing off-key, they can still harmonize. Each is a good singer in his own right and even better is the two of them singing together, especially on the "classic Del McCoury" songs. With the addition of Erin Snyder on the fiddle, I feel that for this old hillbilly, it doesn't get any better than this. We have rounded out the group from time to time with some of the area's best pickers—John Joyner, Brian Hall, Bill Anderson, Jeff Trask, Mike Conroy and others.

My only regrets are that I am the only one who has quit his day job. The others actually have lives and I've got a whole bunch of songs I'd like to do before the 'ritis boys catch me—(arthur and larrin g.) or my memory totally fails (senility).

Some curmudgeonly criticism: acoustic does not mean bluegrass. Lots of silly chords does not make bluegrass. Songs from outside bluegrass are fine if done properly. What you hear from modern studios today is not necessarily what it is. You are either in time or not. You are either in tune or not. Timing is everything. Musical perfection with no soul is not music at all. As Ron Thomason, Dry Branch Fire Squad, says "there is a fine line between singing real old timey music and not being able to sing at all." A flawless performance is not necessarily entertainment. Don't borrow your material second or third hand, listen to the original. Just because Bill Monroe sang it in a particular key does not mean that key is your key.

Thanks for your indulgence.

Dick Darne



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So Called Jokes

What's the difference between a fiddler and a dog?

The dog knows when to stop scratching.

What do you call a beautiful woman on the arm of a banjo player?

A tattoo.



Shook Mountain Productions, LLC (Mike & Tari Conroy) Present:

HARDTIMES BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

July 24,25,26, 2009

Featuring:

Gravelly Mountain from Alberton, MT

No Part Of Nothin' from Newport, WA

Fred & Emily Frank from Idaho Falls, ID

Darby Sireens reunion tour

Spring Thaw from Missoula, MT

Bill & Verna Molenda from Darby, MT

Mike & Tari Conroy from Conner, MT

Will Williams & Gravel Road from Grangeville, ID

More bands to be announced

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Fiddlin' Jimmy Widner, Darby, MT

Forrest Clark, Clinton, MT

Dale Berg, Libby, Mt

Location: 10 miles South of Hamilton, mile marker 37, The Thomas Ranch on Forest Hill Road

Admission: Adults-\$10.00 for weekend, Children under 12- \$5.00 for weekend

Dry Camping- \$10.00 for weekend

For more information call 1-406-821-3777 or email tariconroy@webtv.net



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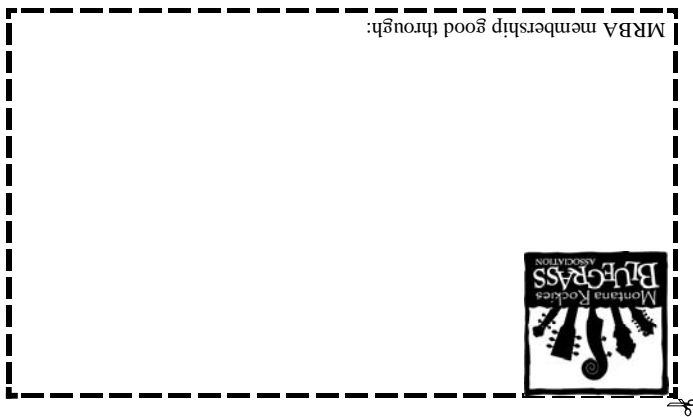
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We have set up the address label on your newsletter to be your membership card, please clip it out and use it for proof of your membership to the MRBA.



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