

Vol. II, No. Eight , September 1, 2012

Northern Rockies Area Singin', Pickin' & Fiddlin'

From Billings, Montana

Roger's

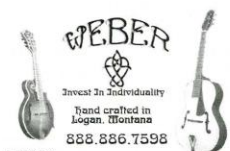
BLUEGRASS

“E” LETTER

Please feel free to forward these e-letters to anyone else who may be interested in bluegrass music.



MT OLD TIME FIDDLERS PROBLEMS IN THIS EDITION



Alcohol Free Family Style Festival

September 14th, 15th, 16th, 2012
Saturday 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. Sunday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Eastern Montana Fairgrounds - Miles City, Montana

for more information call (406) 234-2480 or (406) 853-1678



River City Ramblers



High Plains Tradition



CottonWood



The Waddingtons



Milestown



The WoodPicks

Plenty of parking

OPEN STAGE

Friday Evening - 7 p.m.

**Workshop Saturday
9:00 a.m.**

**Tickets available for
Musical Instrument
Raffle**

Food by First Baptist Church

ADMISSION
**\$15 per day/ \$25 weekend
pass - Adults**
**\$10 per day/ \$15 weekend
pass - Students**
Children Under 12 Free
Camping Available



High Plains Tradition is a bluegrass band based in Denver, Colorado. We style our music after the forefathers of bluegrass, with a little Rocky Mountain flair. High Plains Tradition has performed extensively from the Pacific Coast through the Rocky Mountains to the High Plains all the way to Kentucky. Doug Elrick's fine lead singing and songwriting are at the core of the band's performance. Our shows are filled with original material as well as the best of the music of the masters to include Jimmy Martin, Ralph Stanley, Bill Monroe, Country Gazette and the Country Gentlemen favorites.

Combine high energy and a touch of humor with outstanding musicianship and audiences of all ages are in for a real treat!

THE WOOD PICKS A NORTHERN MINNESOTA BAND

Their enjoyable stage show incorporates strong harmonies and musical style that features their own arrangements of original music and old favorites.

The group came together in 2005 when the band started playing northern Minnesota venues. Their acoustic mix includes Gospel, Bluegrass, Country and Americana music. One of their original arrangements, "Barn Again!" was included in a collection of rural Americana for the Smithsonian Institute. They perform at county fairs, bluegrass festivals, urban and rural venues, and corporate events.

Members of the WoodPicks include Greg Dally, mandolin; Dustin Keller on bass fiddle; Gene Lunsetter, guitar; Milo Ballingrud, banjo; and J.D. Kezar, fiddle, harmonica, jaw harp and guitar. All five contribute vocally to the band. The members have many years of experience playing in various groups throughout the continental United States, Canada and Alaska.

THE RIVER CITY RAMBLERS A WISCONSIN BAND

The River City Ramblers Bluegrass Band was born as the Red Cedar Ramblers in Menomonie, Wisconsin in 1979. The original band was formed when former folk guitarist Jim Ellenson, banjo player Andy Muenich, Jim's brothers, Steve on bass and Dave on rhythm guitar, Jean Swoboda on fiddle and Jim's 12 year old son Jimmy, on mandolin, joined to master the Kentucky bluegrass style originated by Bill Monroe and popularized by such well known favorites as Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, the Stanley Brothers and Roy Acuff, to name a few. The band was well-known in the Dunn, Eau Claire and Chippewa County area until young

Jimmy's marriage and move to California in early 1990 resulted in the band's temporary withdrawal from the public scene.

In the fall of 1990 original band members Jim Ellenson on lead guitar and Andy Muenich on banjo revived the band with new members: rhythm guitar and dobro player Don Willson-Broyles, mandolin, guitar and bass player Jeff Weishaar, bass player, guitarist, concertinist Andy Hable and fiddler Andrea Christopherson to form the new, Eau Claire based, River City Ramblers. While traditional and gospel bluegrass remain the Ramblers' central genre, the band's repertoire includes other styles such as modern folk, cajun, rock and roll and original music by Andy Hable.

THE COTTON WOOD BAND FROM WASHBURN, ND

This North Dakota band is well known in Miles City. The members are Lee Benjamin on banjo, dobro, and guitar, Keith Koch guitar, Dan Foster mandolin or guitar, and the spark in the group is provided by Jill Wiese on bass. All members have vocal skills and use them quite well.

THE WADDINGTONS FROM REGENT, ND

Seth, Hannah, Ethan and Jacob Waddington make up this group. These young folks grew up playing in a family band. They specialize in gospel music which is a reflection of their family life and values.

MILESTOWN THE HOMETOWN FAVORITES

Milestown, a local bluegrass band, will also be performing.

LIVINGSTON BLUEGRASS VENUE THREATENED BY FIRE

The Pine Creek Café has sponsored bluegrass weekly jams for many months. It has become seriously threatened by the Pine Creek fire at the time of this writing, August 31, 2012. As printed in the Billings Gazette, "Marsh and Martin said they know of at least three homes that burned down. Tuscano said it's too early to tell exactly how many houses and buildings burned, although she did say that the Pine Creek school, café and church are still standing." We can only hope that it is still standing when the fire is 100% contained.

YBA JAMS TO RESUME IN LINCOLN BUILDING

The Yellowstone Bluegrass Association has announced that the weekly YBA jams at the Lincoln center will resume on Friday [September 7, 2012](#) at 7:00 PM. Pickers can attend the Friday night jams without paying dues to the association.

Members are also invited to the tenth annual Bluegrass Gospel Service at St. Olaf Church on Sunday [September 9th](#) at 1:00 PM. St Olaf Church is on Red Lodge Creek about 5.5 miles SW of Cooney Reservoir. The service will be followed by a pot-luck lunch and jamming will take place afterward. If you

wish to join the YBA contact secretary Terry Indreland at indreland@mac.com or simply show up at a Lincoln jam and ask.

THERMOPOLIS JAMS FROM ED CAPEN

We had a great jam in Thermopolis last Friday. We had 18 jammers and singers. Our next jam is [September 21](#) at 6pm. Thank you for coming. See you all next month.

Regarding the IBMA World of Bluegrass week:

This year truly might just be the best WOB ever. We'll have **Laurie & Del** hosting the IBMA Awards Show; **Sam and Flux** talking about creative music arrangement; **Rodney Dillard** sharing memories of his brother **Douglas**; **Sierra Hull and Tim Stafford** exploring the territory between traditional and progressive bluegrass, and where they overlap (*with instruments in their hands*); **John McEuen** talking about the 40th anniversary of *Will The Circle Be Unbroken...* and a huge Fan Fest with more than 60 of bluegrass music's brightest stars. Check it out at www.worldofbluegrass.org!

J.D. CROWE RETIRES NEW BAND RESULTS

Crowe began playing the banjo early on and was offered a job with Jimmy Martin's Sunny Mountain Boys in mid 1950s. He cut his first recordings with Jimmy Martin on December 1, 1956 and his last on August 17, 1960, recording a total of 33 songs on Decca Records. In the late 1960s, Crowe formed the Kentucky Mountain Boys, principally performing in the Lexington, Kentucky region. By the early 1970s, Crowe changed the band's name to The New South and included material from rock and country music sources. Crowe's New South band is widely considered one of the most influential bluegrass groups since the 1970s. Many influential musicians have been a part of the band over the years, including Keith Whitley, Ricky Skaggs, Tony Rice, Jerry Douglas, and Doyle Lawson.



New Band Announcement:
High Octane Bluegrass by AMERICAN DRIVE

First Single Release “*Long Haul Trucking Man*” Now Out to Radio

8, 2012) Rural Rhythm Records is proud to announce the formation of the new band **AMERICAN DRIVE**. This high octane bluegrass band includes group members of J.D. Crowe & The New South who are carrying on now that J.D. Crowe has announced his retirement. AMERICAN DRIVE includes the talents of: **Rickey Wasson** (Lead/harmony Vocals, Guitar), **Dwight McCall** (Lead/Harmony Vocals, Mandolin), **Matt DeSpain** (Resonator Guitar) and **Kyle Perkins** (Bass) from The New South, who are joined by **Justin Jenkins** (Banjo) formerly with the bands Grasstowne and Blue Moon Rising.

ROCKY ROAD FOR THE MT OLD TIME FIDDLERS?

The Montana Old Time Fiddlers Association was formed in the 1960's with the first state fiddle contest held in Missoula, MT. The state was broken down into eight “districts” with their own by-laws, officers, and old time dances which they preferred to call “jams.” There were many folks who loved old time dances then, some of them had been born way back in the late 1800's and had grown up with country dances. Over the years, however, times changed and few of the modern population of Americans ever experienced those old time dances. As the enthusiasts passed away or became too feeble with age to participate, the MT Fiddlers began waning as an organization. Districts became inactive or greatly decreased their level of activities, some down to one or two each year. Similarly the state fiddle contest lost nearly all of its older contestants and now features very youthful fiddlers many of who come from Suzuki violin training. This is where fiddle teachers have placed their stress, on teaching the kids to play contest winning tunes. Unfortunately most of these young fiddlers then phase out of the fiddle scene as they cease entering contests. That is too bad as there is a real dearth of bluegrass fiddlers and these youngsters could really help fill that void. Many of them are excellent musicians.

District Four has remained one of the most vibrantly active of the remaining districts. The method of operation of most districts, including District Four, which is centered around Yellowstone County, is to mainly solicit businesses selling alcohol to pay a fee for having a jam-dance usually on Sunday afternoons. These businesses will not continue to do so if they lose money on the deal. Yours truly had noted a problem with participation in 2010 and tried to bring the problem up in the annual District Four meeting that December by asking whether the association should consider any special activities to get more dancers out. I was promptly shut down by both the outgoing and incoming presidents who stated that it is not the fiddler's responsibility to provide dancers, but the towns where the dances were being held. Neither of these gentlemen apparently knew that in earlier years a solid contingent of faithful dancers drove to most of the dances being held. Now, finally, the group appears to have recognized that this is truly a problem. The latest District Four newsletter includes: “. . . we have been having a lot of Jams, but our attendance has not been very well attended, (sic) we would sure like to see more people come out to these jams and help support the Businesses that sponsor us . . . “ **No kidding District Four! You are finally getting the message. Without sponsors, who need to make a profit, the District Four MT Fiddlers will cease to exist just like so many others have done.**

Maybe you will come to realize it is time to recruit new dancers and get more fiddlers as well.

District Four Schedule for Remainder of 2012

8/25/12	Two Bear Tavern	Fromberg, MT	1-5 PM
9/9/12	Homestead Inn	Broadview, MT	2-6 PM
10-7-12	Cozy Corner Annual Pot Luck	Lavina, MT	1-5 PM
10/14/12	Caboose Saloon	Laurel, MT	1-5 PM
12/9/12	Caboose Saloon	Laurel, MT	1-5 PM

MONTANA FIDDLERS AND BLUEGRASS

Several very good old time fiddlers in this region HAVE transitioned into bluegrass bands. One of the most successful contest fiddlers, Isaac Callender, has formed a bluegrass band out of Pendleton, Oregon . Nancy Padilla was in one of our early true bluegrass bands, “Wheel Hoss.” John and Julie Elkins moved on from that group to form “Kanes River.” Jimmy Widner, of Darby, has played for many, many years. Other very good fiddlers include Tom Finnecum and Ed Pierson who have both played in real bluegrass bands. Trevor Krieger is classically trained as a violinist and plays in the Billings Symphony Orchestra. He is also a former MT fiddle champion and plays a variety of fiddle music and is often listed in bluegrass venues with guitarist Jeff Troxel. Of course there are many other fiddlers who have played in other genre of country music in Montana and the other states in this region.

MORE PEOPLE FOR THE OLD TIME DANCES

For many years old time dances were held at the Southside Senior Center in Billings on Tuesday nights. They went from 7 to 9 PM with a break for refreshments at 8 PM. The dancers brought baked goods and coffee, tea and punch were provided. The seniors loved this activity and they fiddlers who played for them. They had us play for other senior functions as well. This was not an official function of the District Four Fiddlers, however it was a fiddle orchestra and most of the musicians were members of District Four. It was played acoustically with no sound system needed in that venue. The reason it came to an end was mainly due to the lack of anyone to open the facility. Death or illness had taken those who had opened it for years including Martin Matovich and Vergil Jones.

The same folks who danced on Tuesdays then followed the fiddlers to their Sunday events. Many of the same vehicles could be seen in the parking lots from one dance to another and there were many familiar faces on the dance floor. Unfortunately there are very few who do that today and that is a major reason why the old time fiddlers are in trouble as an organization.

While it may not be possible to revive the every Tuesday night dances, the organization could consider having an occasional “soda pop” dance at one of the available community centers. A volunteer couple might demonstrate the waltz, two step, schottische, polka, etc. to help newcomers get started. A big problem is that the majority of musicians in the fiddlers are now in the 60 to 80 year category. None of this bades well for the future of the Montana Old Time Fiddlers, fiddle dances in Montana, or those in our surrounding states. It has been nice while it has lasted though. Sadly, all good things must eventually come to an end.

38TH ANNUAL FIDDLERS PICNIC LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Candace and Dave Payne have completed another great event on their property outside Livingston, MT. There were tons of campers from tents to vans to large RVs of every make and model. Below: Robert Grosvner, Jim Dodd, Bill Calovis and friends pick a tune:





Music played on in the old farm outbuilding and the barn all weekend.

Three quarters of the old Elk River Ramblers got together in Livingston.

Where are you Doug Habermann?

Whadda ya mean, “Working?”

Livingston Three Quarter Reunion of Elk River Ramblers



Ramblers Stan and Annie Moser plus Ed Pierson on fiddle. Mike Williams joins in too.

22ND ANNUAL MUSICIANS RENDEZVOUS COLUMBUS

Aaron Strange started it 22 years ago and the picking campout at Columbus is still going strong. Here are a few pix from the 2012 Rendezvous:







The picking continues into the wee hours at the Musician's Rendevous



Master chef Will Calovis grills up some tasty pike while the corn on the cob steams away.

HOT BLUEGRASS CLIPS FROM THE IBMA

These great clips are more reasons for attending the World of Bluegrass in late September. Click on them and enjoy some really great sounds of bluegrass picking.

Of all the sights and sounds at World of Bluegrass in Music City over the years, I would have to say some of my *own* favorite moments have taken place offstage. Of course, I'm talking about the *jam sessions*. Although we are an industry association and World of Bluegrass is an industry event, the live music -- both onstage and off -- makes this event a thousand times more fun and interactive than just about any professional convention!

Around every corner, in every nook and cranny of the Nashville Convention Center and up and down the hallways on jamming floors at the Renaissance Hotel, you'll find spectacular little groups of folks playing some of the hottest bluegrass music you've ever heard. I'll never forget walking around the corner on the way to the *Bluegrass Unlimited* suite, at the first WOB I attended in Owensboro, KY, in 1992, to find Hazel Dickens and Peter Rowan singing a duet in the hallway!

Below is a handpicked selection of jam videos shot in Nashville at World of Bluegrass over the years. They represent a cross-section of our industry -- at all points on the spectrum, from enthusiast to superstar -- getting together to pick a little bluegrass.

2009: Late-Night Jam with Michael Cleveland

<http://youtu.be/FRErjUTOYx8>

2008: Rob Ickes, Andy Leftwich, and Dave Pomeroy

<http://youtu.be/45Gj7PgC6wQ>

2010: Adam Steffey & Turner Hutchens, "Bill Cheatham"

<http://youtu.be/1Wy9yyqtOA0>

2007: Al Hawkes & Trae Buckner, "Rocky Road Blues"

<http://youtu.be/gGaowpOk10>

2010: Hallway Jams!

<http://youtu.be/FZbuK25slOs>

2009: Alex Hargreaves, Joey McKenzie, Drew Phelps

http://youtu.be/8_Gwj7MfkSg

2007: All-Star Jam with Alecia Nugent, Dustin Benson, Thomas Wywrot, Eli Johnston, Rick Faris, & Jason Robertson

<http://youtu.be/Ml8RI2MSfY0>

2008: Old-Time Jam (Thomas Bailey *et. al.*)

<http://youtu.be/nNTHy2nTyjU>

2010: Booth Jam with members of Rockin' Acoustic Circus & Red Wine

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jmBxDzvGVA>

2011: “Down The Road”

<http://youtu.be/0qEnl54NbZU>

2007: Jerry Douglas, Leroy Mack, Mike Witcher and others at the Beard Guitars booth

<http://youtu.be/-daYIMXm4eI>

These are the kinds of experiences and memories that I hope will bring you back to World of Bluegrass this year... memories of the exciting and powerful music that happens when professional bluegrass musicians and industry insiders from all over the world converge in one place.

ROGER'S NOTE: If you are not googling bluegrass bands on youtube.com, bing, etc., you are missing out on a lot of good, free, easy to find, bluegrass music. You can take most any band mentioned on these e-letters and elsewhere and find that they have great promotional music to view and/or listen to. Just google the name of the band and follow the links given. That is how they get many of their performance gigs. Who knows? It may work for your very own local band as well.

THE LUTHIERS'S BENCH

If you feel motivated to build an instrument or two, how can you get started? My personal efforts were both pre-computer and pre-internet and frankly I have not pursued what may be available in the digital age. However back then, I did find several “analog,” AKA printed, sources of inspiration or should I say PERSPIRATION ! One good source would be your local public library. Many of them have “how to” books or DVDs for loan. In Montana all libraries are interconnected so you would have access to materials in any state library. Other states are probably set up this way as well. Another method would be using the internet to search for books to purchase or down load. This photo shows some of the materials I accumulated for my early luthiery efforts: They include materials from the Guild of American Luthiers and are spread on a full size set of plans for an 1882 Jose Ramirez Classical Guitar built in Madrid, Spain. Ramirez was probably the best classical guitar builder of that era. I am not recommending the steel string books pictured below. They are simply what I had access to at that time.



More next time including the Jam Grass version of Progressive Bluegrass.