

Two Recreate Sounds From Bygone Days

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BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.)** —

When our forefathers fled persecution, they forged the Atlantic yearning to set foot on the American soil of freedom. People from France, Holland, Ireland, England, and Germany brought what they could to survive — seeds, scythes, hammers, and hoes, their cultures, customs, languages, and music. America's melting pot looked more like a good hearty stew filled with ingredients each rich in their own flavor.

But through time, flavors blend and the search for a direct line back to our ancestors becomes less distinct.

The same is true for music. The words of the Old World English ballads, which were brought to America, soon lost their meaning for the common man surviving the harsh elements of Appalachia. But the music survived. And the instruments adapted.

In Appalachia, folks sang their songs on instrument whose ancestors came from the Old World. African slaves brought stringed gourd instruments — an early rendition of the Appalachian banjo. The German "scheitholt," possibly the dulcimer's ancestor, appealed to the large Scotch-Irish settlements in Appalachia because of its bagpipe sound. They took the rectangular-shaped instrument and added curved sides, usually teardrop or hourglass shaped, and added a fret board.

For a while, the tree-covered hills and hollows of Appalachia muffled the coming sound of modernization and folks met on their porch to visit and sing. When "progress" finally fingered its way back through the valleys, the dulcimer, unique to Appalachia, was set aside and ceased to evolve.

Today, two men from Reedsville, Mifflin County, have picked up the dulcimer again. Upon their laps lay an instrument they enjoy

for its soft-spoken sound and history. But Glenn Selfridge and Rev. Ken Longfield, take their interest one step further — they make their own instruments.

"I've always been interested in folk music. My first real encounter with the dulcimer was the summer I worked at Shenandoah National Park," Ken reflects. "A woman was playing it and I thought it'd be fun. That was the beginning."

Since then, Ken has made 7½ dulcimers, each producing a unique sound. His first dulcimer, with Rosewood back and sides, a walnut fingerboard and sitka spruce top remains his favorite because of its resonance. Other dulcimers are made from marine-grade mahogany, imported from Holland, and a walnut laminate. Now he is making one out of American chestnut from the Maitland Church of the Brethren, which was torn down.

To purchase these exotic woods, Ken has had the good fortune of finding two music supply stores, one in Baltimore and the other in New York. "I was visiting Albert Constantine and Sons in New York. They carried a dulcimer in their catalog for a while then discontinued it. I had been looking around the store and didn't see anything, but walking out the door, I looked down and saw a box of dulcimer pieces. So I found two sides, a back and top, and a fret board. I took the pieces to the counter and had the guy ring it up and I think it was \$4.32. Later on I wondered why I didn't buy the whole box! So I probably built this dulcimer for under \$15 — maybe even under \$10."

Glenn remembers hearing Ken speak about dulcimers at church. His interest grew after playing a friend's dulcimer. Then at Christmas, his wife Dolores gave him a dulcimer kit.

The kit served as a good guide and Glenn went on to make six more dulcimers "from scratch," five from walnut, one from "wormy" chestnut. "I have at least 60 hours in on the first one. Maybe less on the others," Glenn estimates.

While scanning the catalogs for strings and metal parts they couldn't make themselves, both Glenn and Ken discovered other Appalachian instruments. Glenn saw plans for the original Mountain Banjo in a Foxfire book. Starting from scratch again, he created out of wood, the smaller, more compact relative of the modern banjo.

Ken made a courting dulcimer. "That's a dulcimer that has two fret boards and two people sit knee to knee and play it. In the mountains, when a young man was courting a young woman at her home, the father could give them the dulcimer to sit on the front porch and play. As long as he heard music, there was no cause to go out and see what was going on," Ken laughs.

As for making other instruments, Ken has already started what he calls an autoharp-like instrument since Autoharp is a registered trademark. Both, though, laugh a little self-consciously at thinking big. Glenn would like to make a concert harp and calls it a "big undertakin." Ken wants to make a harpsichord, but it is not a "compact instrument to carry around!"

No matter what the instrument, the best reward after making one is playing it. "I never really had a book," Glenn remarks. "I just sort



When time slows to an old-fashioned leisurely pace, Rev. Ken Longfield, right, reaches for his favorite dulcimer to pick a tune with fellow woodworker Glenn Selfridge. Here, Selfridge is playing the mountain banjo he made.



Sights and sounds from bygone days rest against the old shop wall, like Appalachian dulcimers, mountain banjos, and old wagon wheels.



Summer and porch sitting are two luxuries to look forward to after a blustery winter. Rev. Ken Longfield (left) and Glenn Selfridge, both of Reedsville, Mifflin County, spend some free moments making music on Appalachian dulcimers — ones they made themselves.

of picked it up on my own."

Whether learning from a book or playing by ear, both Ken and Glenn like to share at arts festivals or other gatherings their favorite songs: "Go Tell Aunt Nancy," "Amazing Grace," "Rollin' In My Sweet Baby's Arms," "You Are My Sunshine," "Oh Danny Boy,"

or "Boil That Cabbage Down."

Ken and Glenn re-create instruments reminiscent of a simple lifestyle that is almost gone. But sometimes they pick up their dulcimers and head for the porch, to pick a few songs, to fellowship, to harmonize, or sometimes simply — to enjoy.

Weight Management Classes

YORK (York Co.) — Probably the most popular New Year's resolution is to lose those extra pounds. You can take the first step to permanent weight loss by enrolling in Penn State Cooperative Extension's "My New Weigh of Life" management program. This program developed by nutrition specialists at Penn State University, is based on the most current research into theories of obesity, weight loss, and relapse management.

The 12-week program emphasizes permanent lifestyle changes you decide to make to reach and maintain desired weight.

Mondays Feb. 28 through May 16 - 1:00-3:00 p.m. - Adams Electric Building on Route 616 just south of Route 30 or 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Penn State

Cooperative Extension, 112 Pleasant Acres Road, York, Pa.

Tuesdays March 1 through May 17 - 7:00-9:00 p.m. - Spring Grove Sr. High School (please register through Spring Grove Adults Education Program, Hanover & Jackson St., Spring Grove, PA 17362 Phone: Nancy Curtis, 225-5711).

Thursdays March 3 through May 19 - 7:00-9:00 p.m. - Northern High School (please register through Northern Adult Education Program, 149 S. Baltimore Street, Dillsburg, PA 17019 Phone: 432-8691 ext. 279).

Advanced registration is required. Call Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717) 757-9657 for a registration brochure.

Free Home-Related Programs Offered

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — Dr. Robert J. Thee, Penn State Extension agent for housing and environment, has planned several free Wednesday evening programs to be offered at Chester County Extension, Government Services Center, Suite 370, 601 Westtown Road, West Chester

(610) 696-3500, 7:30-9:30 p.m. "Refinancing Your Home Mortgage" is scheduled for January 26; "Lead Poisoning Prevention" is scheduled for February 16; and "Inspecting the Home Electrical System" is scheduled for February 23.