

The Barn Dance Opera Country Music Journal

Vol. 14 1997

Summer Edition

Price \$3.95

Barn Dance Still Draws Crowds

After successful **Barn Dances** in Listowel, Lucknow, St. Clements and Brussels, the Board of Directors feels confident that people will come out in numbers to see a professionally presented show with lots of talent and at an affordable price. **The Barn Dance**, presented by the Listowel and Mitchell Rotary Clubs, filled the arena with about a thousand people who shared memories as we paid tribute to one of the **Barn Dance Pioneers**, Reg Bitton. His family was there to receive our Pioneer Award, a copy of which can be seen in our museum. Similarly, a crowd of over five hundred came out to Lucknow, to share the fun, and watch Connie and Harvey Mann perform and receive a Pioneer Award on behalf of their father, Ross Mann. At St. Clements, over one thousand people were thoroughly entertained by our show and dance. Members of the Allen family were there to receive our Pioneer Award in honour of Ward Allen. The Brussels arena was once again filled to capacity, as well over one thousand people reminisced and watched while we presented our Pioneer Award to Cora Robertson in honour of her late husband, Don Robertson. The audience got a real treat as Cora played "Wheels" and the old Ranch Boys theme "Down Yonder" on the piano.

For those of you who have not yet taken in a **Barn Dance**, you're missing a lot. **The CKNX Barn Dance** became the longest running radio show of its kind, because it broadcast a live stage show which rivalled the best in the business. It presented professional entertainers like Bill Munroe and Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, but what tied it to the community was the presentation of

local artists, as we have presented stars present and future like Katie Roth, Tina Turton, and Rick Finnie. Our shows feature more than fifteen performers playing various musical styles, with two bands playing great music for dancing after the concert portion. If you would like to share just such an evening of great entertainment and dancing, be sure to get a ticket for our **CKNX Barn Dance** in Blyth on August 31st (that's Sunday) or Stratford on September 13th. See you there!

*Dave
Wallace*



REG BITTON



DON ROBERTSON



WARDEN A. ALLEN



ROSS MANN

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1996 CONVENTION PLAYERS: Left to Right: Front Row: Wayne Sharpe, Gerry St. Marie, Joe Tiffin, Lloyd Warwick, Eleanor Townsend, Graham Townsend, Gerry Smith. **Back Row:** Wayne Riehl, Victor Pasowisty, Mathew Johnson.
(Melissa Diebold was not present for this photo)

THE EDITOR'S REPORT

by Ron Coulthard

It's been a busy summer - and it's not over yet! As I write this, we've played four of the six 1997 Barn Dances (see page 1) and two are still to go - at the Blyth and District Community Centre on Sunday, August 31st, starting at 7:30 pm, and at the Stratford Fairgrounds Coliseum on Saturday, September 13th, starting at 8:00 pm. These will be great shows; If you haven't been to a "new" Barn Dance yet (or even if you have), don't miss attending one of these last two performances for this season.

Speaking of Blyth, the Blyth Festival folks are repeating their 1996 hit production of Barn Dance Live! This show ran 29 performances and 12,057 people saw it last year. This year's run is from August 26th to September 10th (18 shows). Call the Blyth Festival at (519) 523-9300 for dates, times and prices.

The Barn Dance Show

Is available to anyone wishing to stage
a Live Musical Production

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(519) 291-3174 or
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You'll love this show! (Some of the performers from this production will be guests on our "real" Barn Dance on August 31st.)

After the Barn Dance season ends, on Sunday, October 5th, we're also repeating a hit from last year - our Fiddler's Convention. For those of you who missed it last year, this is not a fiddle contest; it's a fiddle concert, featuring ten or so top fiddlers chosen in advance by our committee. These musicians get to tell us a bit about themselves, and then they play three tunes of their choice, not necessarily the usual waltz, jig and breakdown. Once again we'll be at the Royal Canadian Legion Hall, Victoria Street, Wingham. The show starts at 1:30 p.m., but in the morning at 10:00 a.m., Ernie King is hosting some fiddle workshops, with some guest violin experts - Louis Currah, violin builder, John Schnarr, violin teacher, and Ernie himself on the subject of violin repair. After the concert we'll have a jam session / hoedown / dance party with a couple of bands and whoever would like to perform. (There will be a minimal charge just to cover expenses.)

Hope to see you there - I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself!

The Barn Dance Historical Society

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Earl Heywood

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Don't Miss

THE FIDDLERS' CONVENTION

Sunday, October 5th

at The Royal Canadian Legion Hall
Wingham, Ontario

Fiddle Seminars 10:00 am
Concert at 1:30 pm

(See details in the Editor's Report)

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THE BARN DANCE BAND

The Barn Dance Band was specifically formed to handle back-up chores for the traditional artists that are scheduled to appear, as well as to do individual featured spots on the Barn Dance. Some of these musicians will be no strangers to people who remember the Barn Dance from the past, and others were selected for other reasons.

Leader of The Barn Dance Band is Lynn Russwurm. Lynn appeared on the Barn Dances in the late fifties with his wife, Laura, as Laura & Lynn, The Pine River Sweethearts, and today is the bass player with the group. He's fronted his own groups throughout the years since then, such as The Pine River Troubadours, The Hummingbirds and today, The Jamboree Reunion Band. Lynn is also a song-writer and his songs were featured on the Barn Dance by many artists, including Ernie King, Larry Mercey, Jack Kingston, Hank MacDonald, Earl Heywood and The Mercey Brothers.

Lloyd Bank played steel guitar for the original Barn Dance Gang in the late 40's and early 50's, until he left to join the Mainstreeters on the Main Street Jamboree in Hamilton. Lloyd was often back for the Barn Dance Reunions throughout the years. For many years Lloyd operated a service station near Hamilton, and today in his retirement can often be found playing his steel guitar or dobro at various events.

Another member of the Barn Dance Gang from the same period as Lloyd is Bill Mankiss on the accordion and piano. Manitoba born, Bill worked on the Main Street Jamboree, the King Ganam Show on CTV, did a lot of back-up work on recording sessions, taught the accordion and ran a music store, as well as spending many years as secretary-treasurer of the Chatham Musicians Association.

Victor Pasowisty came from Manitoba and entered and won the Shelburne fiddle contest in 1955. Then followed many years of dances, TV shows, and whatever else came up musically. Victor is as adept on the guitar as on the fiddle and spent a number of years playing at Casa Loma with the Ken Stanley Band. He made a number of guest appearances on the Don Messer Show, as well as being guest on the first two



Left to Right: **Back Row:** Lance Russwurm, Lloyd Mercey, Victor Pasowisty, Bill Mankiss
Front Row: Lloyd Bank, Lynn Russwurm

Country Hoedown shows on CBC-TV. He has literally taught hundreds of our great young fiddlers and is still teaching today.

Lloyd Mercey on drums was a member of the Mercey Brothers throughout their glory years. Lloyd joined Larry and Ray, after their days on the Barn Dance, his harmonies completing the great Mercey Brothers sound which brought them many awards and accolades, which climaxed with their induction into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame. Lloyd has been involved in all facets of the country music industry, such as recording, booking agent, publisher, as well as being one of the top drummers in the business. Today Lloyd works for CKNX-TV in a sales position, as well as doing limited appearances with the original Mercey Brothers.

Lance Russwurm, the youngest member of The Barn Dance Band put in many years with his dad's band, The Hummingbirds, singing and playing lead guitar. Throughout those years, they

played in every smokey country bar within a hundred mile radius of Wingham. After the Hummingbirds, Lance fronted his own band, the Neon Nights for a time until he took a hiatus from the music business to concentrate on his art. He has developed into one of the greatest artists in Canada and has done murals in various areas such as Stratford, New Hamburg, and Baden. His specialty is aviation and his art has been displayed at air shows and museums for a number of years. Now returning to music, you will find his songs a treat to the ears.

So, there you have The Barn Dance Band which will be featured on this year's series of Barn Dances.



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Howdy Folks:

As the founder of the Barn Dance Historical Society, two of the questions I'm most often asked would have to be, "How did you become inspired?" and "What really created your desire to resurrect the Barn Dance?" Here is my answer.

I learned there was a promotional publisher in Cincinnati, Ohio who was printing a colourful map of North America, showing the birthplaces of over 200 United States country music celebrities, and marketing it through radio stations all over the U.S. and Canada. The only Canadian names on this map, which is on display in our museum - do come and see our museum sometime - were Hank Snow, Stu Davis, Merrick Jarrett, and yours truly, Earl Heywood. They did include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and fortunately the CKNX Barn Dance. This was my inspiration that we Canadians should be doing our own publicity here in Canada for our performers.

From that time on I began collecting Barn Dance memorabilia and researching the Barn Dance. The original Barn Dance, founded by the late W.T. "Doc" Cruikshank, is without a doubt an important part of our Canadian history. We must preserve its history and develop it for the sake of future Canadian artists. I also think it has great potential as a tourist attraction.

I have spent more than four decades dreaming of a plan I felt could result in nothing but success. Then, on June 29th, 1993, I had made up my mind to take the bull by the horns, as the saying goes, and do something about it. I called together fifteen Wingham citizens to support my ideas, and together we laid the ground work. This first Board of Directors deserves to be

recognized for establishing the Barn Dance Logo, the Barn Dance Friendship Club, the organization itself now known as the Barn Dance Historical Society, and much more. I do want to thank these first directors; rest assured I will not forget you, and neither must we forget the many many members who are supporting our Society now. The Barn Dance is making history like it never did before. Please always remember that we need your support. The show must go on!

Earl Heywood,
Founder,
Honourary President, Advisor.

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NEWS, NOTES 'N EVENTS

Congratulations to Michael T. Wall, a faithful member of the Barn Dance Friendship Club. The Singin' Newfoundlanders who won the famous Stompin' Tom Award, has a new record, "Red Cadillac", hitting the airwaves, and just won the Newfoundland and Labrador Ambassador Award for promoting his native homeland. Michael has been nominated for the "King Eagle Award" coming up in September, in Nashville.

Congratulations to another one of our members .. Tommy Hunter. London City Hall has announced they have picked the street they plan to rename as the Tommy Hunter Parkway in honour of the hometown "Country Gentleman" marking his 50th anniversary as a professional entertainer.

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Singer, songwriter, Don Gresham from Murwillumbah, Australia recently appeared on the Barn Dance Historical Societies' CKNX Barn Dance at Lucknow. Don and his wife Noela visited with the Heywoods for 12 days and safely made it back to Australia. Thanks again Don for renewing your membership. Great having you appear on the show.

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Our member Lloyd Otterbein from Zurich, Ontario reported another successful Ole Time Fiddle event at the Community Centre in Zurich, Ontario. Keep up the good work Lloyd.

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The Old Railroad Bridge over the Maitland River, in Wingham, has been glorified with brass plaques of the names of a number of it's town citizens. The collection includes the late W.T. "Doc" Cruikshank, (founder of CKNX Radio and Television and the Barn Dance) and celebrities "Cactus Mac", Earl Heywood and the Heywood Family.

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Sunday, June 8th, at the Army, Navy, Airforce Club in Barrie, Ontario. A large group of fiddle fans and musicians from the Barrie - Toronto, Ontario area, staged a support concert for fiddler Graham Townsend, suffering a battle with cancer. Johnnie Brent and Ernie King of the CKNX Barn Dance rounded up 25 Barn Dance Artists to pay a special Tribute to Graham Townsend in the Hepworth Community Centre, on Sunday, July 20th. Both events were an overwhelming success.

