

The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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Fall Edition

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George Lonsbury's Barn Jammin' Legacy - A Family Tradition

by Grant Heywood

Tucked quietly away on a rise, at the edge of Cambridge, is a farm-like setting and a barn like no other. Many musical memories have been made here and it is where the Barn Dance gang practices today. But this barn is like a musical oasis evoking a warm friendly feeling that has a charm and history all it's own. Lonsburys have lived in this area for many years, but it was George Sr. who gave family and friends the opportunity to congregate and perform in such a magical place. Here begins the story.

Built in the 1880's George Lonsbury Sr. bought the property in 1958 as a working chicken farm. His wife, Joyce, candled nearly 800 eggs a day. They raised chickens until 1966, while George worked at the McDougall Foundry for a spell, but he soon gave that up in favour of a long haul truck-driving career for Dexter Lawson Transport. His logbook became a virtual diary, documenting who rode with him, (family mostly) favourite truck-stops, and when and where he bought, or might buy a guitar.

You see, George was a musician. He started playing guitar at age 8 and took his guitar to school just to entertain his classmates. That little white, one room school house still stands today by Pioneer Sportsworld just off the 401. George's dad played guitar, and soon got him started on it too, by playing a lot of gospel music. But for George, he couldn't get enough of Merle Travis, and especially Chet Atkins. He just had to have a Gretsch Country Gentleman guitar like his hero, Chet Atkins. Around the early 60's while on a trucking run to Elk Grove, Illinois, George was talking to one of

the warehouse operators who offered to sell George his dream Gretsch guitar. He told him to take it back to Canada and play it for a while, and when he came back down to the U.S. on another run, he could return it, or pay him \$250. and own it. George beamed, paid him the \$250., and that became his signature guitar.

When he wasn't trucking, George played out with other bands and musicians at the local Legion, the Bridgeport Casino and Leisure Lodge. It was about this time that George had other plans for that old barn. Around 1966, every Sunday and Wednesday night became jam night at the barn. Even after gigs the jams would continue way into the 'wee' hours of the morning.

George soon had the whole family involved and they became known as the Barnyard Stompers, with sister Ruth and Uncle Dave on piano. Uncle Alf on rhythm guitar, Aunt Alice on drums, George Jr. on bass guitar and good old George Sr. on lead guitar. As the jams became more frequent, more people would gather out at the home-stead barn and the list of musicians grew to be a 'who's who' in the area. People like local jazz guitarist, Doug Murch, CKNX T.V. and Barn Dance guitarist, Don Steele, sax player extraordinaire, Jim Wilson, Pat (the organist from CKCO T.V.), and even Al Reuter, the Speaker of the House from Queen's Park came out to play ukulele. The jam nights quickly became legendary, and were always packed with family, friends and musicians of every genre.

The Blair Baptist Church

held their service in the barn one Sunday. George's sons were there, George Jr., Dale and Gary. It just about scared those Lonsbury boys into being saved. In 1977, George Jr. on guitar and his brother Dale on drums, performed live on radio for Hoppy's Search for Talent contest. They were followed by a young singer from Mitchell, Randy Satchell. Who would've guessed that George Jr. would be playing in Randy's band some 20 years later.

In 1978, Rogers Cable T.V. filmed a two hour special "Christmas With the Lonsburys' Show" right there at the barn. It was so popular that the show was repeated on television for a 5 to 6 year run. In the early 80's, Larry Mercey struck up a long lasting friendship with George Sr. and rehearsed his band at the barn. Larry too, has had

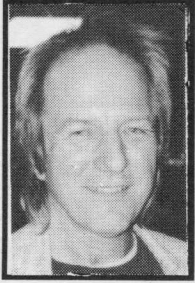
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George Lonsbury with his Gretsch guitar. Taken from the T.V. show "Christmas with The Lonsburys" at the barn. Dec. 13, 1978.

The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



The 2004 Barn Dance season is winding down for another year. We've had a wide variety of guest performers this year, young and old alike. Most significantly, we've had two of our regular musical entertainers expose the humorous side of their talent a little more frequently.

Lloyd Otterbein, a.k.a. "Cousin Opie" in his trademark rainbow suit, has gotten a lot of smiles and chuckles from Barn Dance audiences this past year. Also, performer John Heaman, has appeared with his sidekick, Wilbur, doing a great ventriloquist act. They are both about the same size. Talk about comic relief! Wilbur is as "smart as a whip", which makes it hard to tell which one is the dummy. Ha, Ha.

But seriously folks, this kind of entertainment has certainly been an attraction at Barn Dance shows and makes for a more well rounded entertainment package. As the current Barn Dance evolves it seems almost ironical that it is picking up on a part of what it was always known for. Great family oriented, country music entertainers, musicians, singers and comedians. Live shows like Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance are pretty hard items to find these days.

We've had a lot of "up and coming" young talent on our shows this year as well. Many of these younger artists are extremely talented and may have their dreams set on being a national or international star someday. If I were to give but three words of advice, I'd say, try to be versatile, unique and above all else, be yourself. As a musician or singer it is very gratifying being good at one thing, but if you can also incorporate being a multi-instrumentalist, a dancer, magician, comedian or whatever, then you will certainly be more in demand as an entertainer simply because you are unique. It's wonderful for young singers or musicians to compete in a talent contests, but I think

it's even more satisfying to be on a stage like our Barn Dance shows, performing in front of an audience without the pressure of competition, where you are appreciated by those who love you for just doing what you do best.

I can think of a couple of younger performers who have been on our Barn Dance shows and fall into this category. Matthew Johnson, the step-dancing fiddler from Stratford and Crystal Gauthier, the enthusiastic, yodeling singer/entertainer from Windsor. They have honed their talent, and may have borrowed some ideas from other artists but they have developed their own style to make them unique and keep them in demand.

I appreciate all of the talented guest artists who have appeared on the Barn Dance this year. Doug Dietrich, who is the Barn Dance Musical Director and Talent Co-ordinator, has really done an excellent job in seeking out some of the best talent that the area has to offer. And as Barn Dance emcee, Jim Swan always says, "The future of country music is in good hands with such an abundance of talented young folks." I couldn't agree more.

Hope to see you at the next Barn Dance.

Comments? Please Contact -

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E-mail: heywoods@golden.net



NEWS & NOTES

Special thanks goes out to Michael T. Wall, who performed at The Old Tyme Fiddle & Hayloft Hoedown held at the Wingham Legion on Sept. 26th. Michael was very gracious in donating one of his acoustic guitars to the Barn Dance Hall of Fame. Michael has been asked to perform in Australia early next year at the Country Music Festival and Awards Ceremony in Tamworth, Australia. And speaking of Australia, Bob Richards and Dennis McLachlan of the McLachlan / Richards due, have been getting a fair amount of radio airplay from their latest release "down under" in Australia.

Also: CKNX radio in Wingham, has been running a bluegrass type show over the airwaves, playing a lot more traditional country on their regular programming schedule, and doing live interviews once in a while with musical guests and celebrities.

The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment

Museum

P.O. Box 68

Wingham, Ontario N0G 2W0

Phone (519) 357-2160

(or leave a message)

BARN DANCE WEBSITE:

<http://www.barndance.ca>

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Doreen Brown guested recently on CKNX radio and had some tunes from her recent CD aired as well. They've also been playing the odd cut from the new CD by Dan Mighton of Hanover. Randy Satchell continues to get his songs played over radio as well, and John and Geneva Heaman have had some spins on radio too. Great to hear local talent being broadcast in the area. Thanks to CKNX 920 A.M. in Wingham.

This past July, at Sidewalk Days in Wingham, many of the old Barn Dance gang performed inside, at the North Huron Museum, just upstairs above the Barn Dance Museum. It was almost a full house while the band and guest artists performed. The big highlight was the unveiling of a portrait, of Earl and Martha Heywood to be displayed in the Barn Dance Museum. Thanks to all of those who donated in having this beautiful likeness of Earl and Martha, captured on canvas, by artist Liana Russwurm. It was a big surprise indeed! (see photo on page 5)

It was great to hear Ernie King make a rare guest appearance at the Barn Dance Show at Wiarton's Propeller Club on Sunday, October 3rd. Everyone enjoyed hearing Ernie perform and almost everyone there still remembered him from his days on "Circle 8 Ranch" on CKNX television. Ernie never ages and neither does his smooth sounding voice.

Continued from Page 1

George Jr. play guitar when he performs live. George Sr. sure must have passed along some great 'guitar sensibility' to his son.

That old barn has seen a lot of musicians and singers pass through there more than once. Everyone from Carroll Baker to Jamie Warren, Marie Botrell to the Watchmen gospel group, the Barn Dance gang, young and old, and on and on. It was around the early 90's when young George Jr. and brother Dale started their own very popular country/rock group, "Murphys Law" right there at the barn.

George Sr. started up his own trucking business and set up his sons, George, Dale and Gary to operate it from the farm, even though he was kind of the retired senior overseer. But old George would always be out to the barn like clockwork, just to peek in and see who was rehearsing or jamming. He had that barn set up to make you feel right at home. A kitchen off to the side was always stocked with hot coffee, refreshments and snacks. "Real" wash-room facilities, comfortable couches and chairs for guests, and a grand assortment of instruments, amps, speakers and microphones, all on the main stage separated by an old rail fence with the "Barnyard Stompers" sign nailed to the fence and a yellowed wall mural scene for a backdrop. There's even recording gear next to the stage. Pictures of recording artists, performers and bands from past to present dotted the walls. But George really took a shine to having the Barn Dance musicians rehearse there. You could always tell by the grin on his face that this was

his kind of music. George loved the ambience that came from the one room section of the barn, as much as he loved his family and grandkids. He spent many hours there, as if it were a part of him.

Although he taught George Jr. everything he knew on the guitar, there'd be times when he'd be staring at young George like a hawk, even at some of the live shows, just praying he'd play some of those difficult chords the way he taught him. If there was any 'slip-up', old George would mutter "You're not playing that right". It took a while but George Jr. soon caught on. He hardly ever slips up. Almost never!

George Sr. and I talked out at the barn after many rehearsals. One night he said he thought it would be a good idea to get some of the Barn Dance gang together and take a trip to New York City, just to see the legendary Les Paul play at a small club there. "He still plays you know," said George, "Even though he's gettin' up in age, I'd still like to see him before he's gone," he said.

Ernie King had George as a guest guitarist on the Barn Dance Sunday Gospel Show at the Blyth Jamboree weekend. George was also a guest guitarist with his son George Jr., backing Earl and Martha Heywood on the gospel song "Just a Closer Walk with Thee". Soon to be released on the "Three Generations, Heywood Family" CD. For me, I felt I had known George all my life, he was genuine, modest, kind and lovable. Like a huggable old teddy bear.

Tragically, and suddenly, George

Sr. passed away at his beloved barn, on July 13th, 2004, at the age of 72. His little boy smile, his warm heart, his generosity and love of music when he played guitar, will never be forgotten, and the family tradition of "jamming" at the barn will continue on with the next generation. Thanks for sharing your gift of music with us George. We'll miss you a lot. But your spirit will be with us forever.

Footnote: George's wife, Joyce, passed away on August 21, 2001. Most recently, Aunt Alice, drummer with the family band "The Barnyard Stompers", passed away on October 9th, 2004.

BOOKING THE BARN DANCE

If you are interested in more information about booking the Barn Dance Musical Production, please write to:

*Barn Dance Bookings,
P. O. Box 68,
Wingham, Ont. N0G 2W0;
or call*

*Wayne Otterbein,
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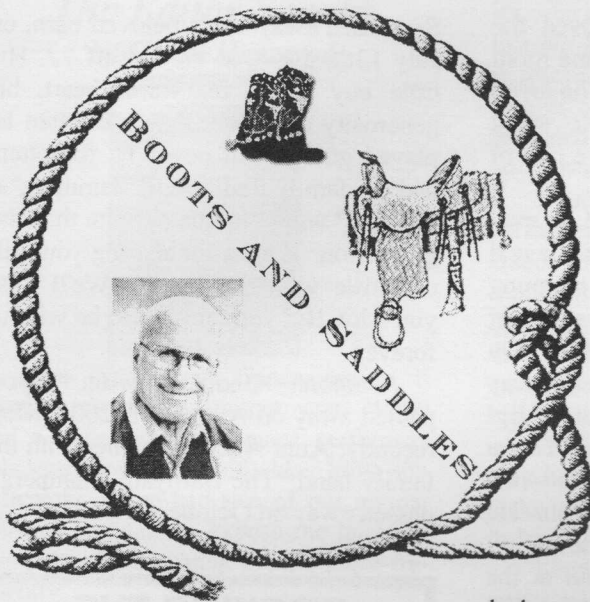
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The Old Tyme Fiddle & Hayloft Hoedown held at the Wingham Legion in September was a great success. Thanks to all who came out and participated. Seen here is fiddler Bert Pepper of Wingham, leading his group of fiddle students on a traditional number.



MY THREE SONS - "The Lonsbury Boys" picture taken at the barn. From L to R: Gary, Dale and George Jr.



By Lynn Russwurm

At one time the Canadian country music mystery man was considered to be Allen Irwin, better known as The Calgary Kid. His story came to light when Country Music News published a 2-part article from research by one of their writers, Doc Rogers.

A much lesser known figure is D. W. (Dick) Funk, The Saskatchewan Roamer. We've managed to come up with some information on him through the efforts of Keith Titterington and myself, so we'll try to piece out some of his story. There has never been anything written about him anywhere, as far as I know. Keith spotted an obituary in a newspaper somewhere in Western Canada, for a Funk that had passed away, and it turned out to be the brother of Dick Funk, with the funeral services conducted by Reverend Ed Funk, another brother. Also surviving is Leslie Funk as well as sister, Helen. Ed and Leslie are also trying to piece together the story of their father, who was pretty much a mystery to them as well. Apparently he would be gone for periods of several months and then suddenly return home, so they never had a chance to really get to know him.

But let's get back to the man himself. Born in Manitoba in 1904, moved to Saskatchewan in 1926, was married and fathered 7 children. He was involved in various occupations but was never really successful at anything. He farmed for a time, I believe he inherited the farm but couldn't make a go of it and lost it in 1934 and moved to Saskatoon. He took up the guitar and became involved in country music, putting on concerts and barnstorming around the prairie provinces. It is known that he was involved with Wilf Carter for a time

and traveled to Montreal to record 8 sides for RCA Victor, which apparently didn't sell very well, they're among the most highly prized among country collectors. I have one in my possession, and have them all on cassette, thanks to Keith Titterington.

Today his sons are trying to figure out where he got the money to make the trip to Montreal to record, as they were very poor and there was never enough money to go around. I've wondered if maybe his friendship with Wilf Carter had anything to do with it, but his family says no. The longest and most stable occupation he

had was when he opened a jewellery store sometime later, at which he seemed to be fairly successful. He passed away in 1965.

My own involvement was in 1970 when I hired a young man by the name of Victor Funk when I started a group called The Hummingbirds, as a guitar player. Victor told me of an ancestor who had been in country music and they used to have a picture of him in his cowboy outfit, but they didn't know what had happened to it. It seems Victor's mother was a niece of this ancestor (she was a Funk who had married a Funk), apparently Funk was a fairly common surname out west.

I would be very interested in hearing from anyone who has more information of D. W. (Dick) Funk who recorded for RCA Bluebird in 1937. Maybe with some help



Dick Funk

DICK FUNK

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An old poster, announcing Dick Funk's upcoming engagement.

we can come up with a complete story on one of Canada's early country music pioneers.

Most people think Wilf Carter and Hank Snow were our only Canadian country artists in the 30's until Earl Heywood started out in the 40's, but along with Dick Funk there were several more. There was Tex Cochrane, who also recorded for RCA Bluebird and sang with Don Messer for a time in the early days. He was discovered a few years back living in retirement in Fredericton, N.B. and his story was told in an issue of Canadian Bluegrass Review, as well as a release on Cattle Records out of Germany of his entire recorded output. He has since passed away. One other that comes to mind is Tex Evans who apparently only recorded one record for RCA Bluebird, him I don't know anything about. Maybe if we all go up in the attic maybe someone can come up with one of these prized discs. Apparently RCA tried to find another artist to duplicate the success they had with Wilf Carter, who was the first, without much luck until Hank, The Yodeling Ranger came along.

Information on these early pioneers is vital if we are to know about our roots in country music and if much more time slips by we'll lose much of our heritage. This is why our Barn Dance Historical Society exists, but we need the help of each and every one of you to help us in our endeavours to preserve what has gone before.



Earl and Martha Heywood were surprised when this portrait of them was unveiled at a special ceremony in July, at the Barn Dance Museum in Wingham. The portrait likeness is quite stunning. Artist, Liana Russwurm, spent many long hours to get it 'just right'. Liana is in her 3rd year at the Ontario College of Art.



When it comes to class, it's pretty hard to outclass Barn Dance Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Jim Swan. He keeps the whole show running smooth, like a Swiss watch ... even if he doesn't own one.

IN MEMORIAM

JOHN RUSSEL SEWERS - Passed away on September 5, 2004 in Wingham, at the age of 88. Older brother of Bob Sewers, who passed away earlier this year. John was part of the Sewers Family who appeared and performed on the CKNX Barn Dance in the early days. Sadly missed by friends and family and remembered by everyone from the Barn Dance Historical Society.



NOTE: A vacant position on The Board of Directors has recently been filled by returning director, Bill Simmermaker. Bill will also be resuming his duties as the Blyth Campout and Jamboree Co-ordinator.

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Johnny Heaman performed with his sidekick, Wilbur, at a couple of Barn Dance shows over the summer. Now let's see ... hmmm ... okay, can you tell which one is Johnny???

They're both kind of cute though, don't you think?



Award winning singer, Marie Bottrell was a guest headliner at a Barn Dance performance in Seaforth this past summer. She still looks and sounds as good as ever.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you would like to volunteer to help out at any of our Barn Dance shows and events throughout the Barn Dance season, please phone (519) 357-2160 or Wayne Otterbein at (519) 235-4783 or (519) 235-0559. It's a labour of love, and we'd love to have you give us a helping hand!!

Country Music Memories

as compiled by Lynn Russwurm



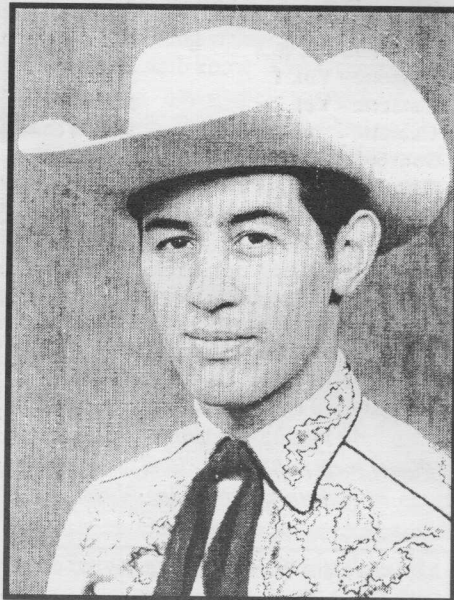
Chuck Stewart of ARC Records.



Ron McLeod - Main Street Jamboree in Hamilton.



Dixie Bill Hilton of the Calgary Range Riders.



Stan Taylor of Country Time CBC - TV



Lynn and Lance Russwurm

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COUNTRY CALENDAR



by **Doreen Brown**
(Toronto and surrounding area)

- * **Oprey Orillia** at Moose Lodge, Oct. 22. Tribute to Hank Williams Sr. Show featuring Anita Perras and Paul Evans on steel guitar.
- * **For Country Music Upcoming Shows**, contact Harold at 905-666-1449 of Harold's Old Time Music.
- * **Bus Trip** to see country legend singer Ray Price in concert Nov. 21, Niagara Falls Arena. Limited seats. Book early. For info call Rod Salisbury at 519-927-9138.
- * **Meaford Legion Jamborees**: Nov. 21, Dec. 12, from 2 to 7 p.m.
- * **Country Music at Shannon Pub** 3747 Lakeshore Blvd. W., Etobicoke. 416-503-2072.
- * **Dundalk Olde Tyme Musical Jamboree** Nov. 13 and 28. For info call 519-923-3406. Hot meal available.
- * **Mapleleaf Country Jamborees** 10 Moose Rd., Lindsay, Oct. 24, Nov. 28 & Dec. 19. Also RCL, 471 Simcoe St. S., Oshawa, Nov. 21.
- * **Jamborees** at Warminster Legion, first and third Sunday of the month 1 to 5; and the fourth Friday 8 to 12. Also at Orillia Legion the fourth Sunday from 1 to 5 with Tex Howard.
- * **Slim Celsie** appears the fourth Sunday of the month at Orillia Army/Navy Club from 2 to 6.
- * **Coldwater Legion** also has a jamboree the fourth Sunday of the month from 1 to 5.
- * **Sandy's Place**, 1848 Weston Rd., Toronto has country music.
- * **Hensall Circle Jamborees** for upcoming dates call 905-277-2902.
- * **Upcoming Old Tyme Jamborees** at

the Shelburne Legion call 905-3800.

* **Country Music**, visit The Newfie Corner, 3051 Lakeshore Blvd. W, 11th St. and Lakeshore.

* **Appearance by Johnny Butts** Oct. 30, Moose Lodge, 3751 Lakeshore Blvd. Toronto.

* **The Country Music Club of Oshawa Jamborees** Kinsmen Hall, corner of McMillan Dr. and Colborne St. Nov. 1, 15, 29; Dec. 13 at 7:00 p.m.

* **Oprey North Venues**: Oct. 30 - Stampede Ranch, Guelph; Nov. 27 - Stampede Corral, Kitchener. Both from 3 to 6 p.m.

* **Penetang Jams** are second Sunday of the month and Elmvale are the third Sunday.

* **Appearances by Dan McVeigh**: Shillings and Stout, 1900 Walker's Line, Burlington, Oct. 29, 9:30 p.m.; Winchester Arms, 171 Broadway Ave., Orangeville, Nov. 13; Brix Coffeehouse, 66 Brock St. W., Uxbridge, Nov. 26, 8 p.m.

* **Erin Legion 3442**, Country Jamboree welcomes all ages of entertainers the fourth Sunday of the month, 12 Dundas St. Roast Beef dinner available. For info 519-833-2212.

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown**: Holland Landing, Oct. 21; Bond Head, Nov. 23; Oprey Orillia, Dec. 11.

* **Army, Navy & Airforce Veterans in Canada** 765 Third Street, Mississauga, 905-274-9981, will now have jamborees the first Sunday of the month featuring Joe Tucker and Second Wind Band. Entertainers welcome for open mic.

* **Appearances by Joe Tucker and Second Wind**: - Oct. 22 - RCL, Branch 582, Hensall Circle, Mississauga, 8 to 12 pm; Newfie Corner, address above, Oct. 23; RCL Branch 31, 1050 Weston Rd., Oct. 29; Oct. 30, Waterdown Legion, 8:30 to 12:30 pm; Nov. 5, Hensall Circle; Nov. 6, ANAF, 760 Brant St., Burlington; Nov. 12, Branch 60 Legion Rd., Toronto; Nov. 20, Moose Lodge, Lakeshore, 9 to 1; Nov. 27, RCL 311, 9 Dawes Rd., 9 to 2 pm; Dec. 3, Hensall Circle 8 to 12; ANAF, 760 Brant St., Burlington, 8 to 12; Dec. 31, Branch 20, Woodbine Ave.

* **Kingside Jammers**, Country Dance and jamboree, Kingside Park, Dean and Wilson Rd., Oshawa. For info call 905-433-8662. Nov. 8, 22, Dec. 6 & 12 at 1 p.m. Pot luck Supper.

Barn Dance Museum

by **Laura Armstrong**,
Summer Student

Summer student is an appropriate title to follow my name, as this summer has been quite the learning experience for me. I'll be honest, when I first got the job here at the museum I knew as much about the Barn Dance Organization as I did about horticulture, slim to none. After a couple of days on the job I knew some of the hard facts.

The Barn Dance was a live radio and traveling show that ran from 1937 to 1963 that could be heard every Saturday night at eight on CKNX radio. I learned of its progression from recorded music, to live local talent, to the large traveling show that it is known for today. Those were the facts I had going into Wingham's Homecoming, and with homecoming came countless people who had countless stories to tell. Stories of The Cleghorn Boys, musicians who performed on the 10BP station were told. Stories of Ross Mann, a gentleman close to the 400 mark on the scale, and the various things he sat on. Stories of Clark Johnston, the singing Irishman, and his shillelagh were told as well as many more.

I strongly encourage you to come to Wingham and view the museum for yourself because I can say with a great amount of certainty that you will come across memorabilia that will have you walking down memory lane. Be sure to bring a friend or five along so they can share in the journey with you.

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HOWDY FOLKS:

Although it just seems like yesterday, it was only a few years ago that Hank Snow passed on. About a year or so before his passing, he contacted me, and Wilf Carter as well, by phone from Nashville, Tenn. He wanted us to donate records, songbooks and other memorabilia for the new Hank Snow Museum in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, Hank's hometown. Hank said he was making this request because we were three of the first Canadian pioneering country singer / songwriters to be signed to the R.C.A. Record label. He thought this was an important Canadian accomplishment and said it

would only be proper to have both Wilf and myself represented in his new museum.

I remember when I first met Hank Snow at a recording session at R.C.A. studios in Toronto. Al Cherny came along too, as he always wanted to meet Hank in person. Hank was also performing in Toronto that week as well. We got to chat quite a bit and sat in on some of the recording session.

During the early 50's I did one of my first country shows with Hank at the Lucan arena. We sat and talked about the music business and what the audience expected from their country star performers. Hank said, "If you're going to put on a show, then you had better dress as a showperson." Hank always wore dazzling cowboy outfits tailored by the likes of Nudie from California and Rodeo Ben from Philadelphia. Hank was true country when he sang, and pure Hollywood in his outfits.

Hank Snow will long be remembered for his contribution as one of Canada's most successful country music artists. It is an honour to be asked

and be included as a part of his museum in Nova Scotia. I hope I get a chance to visit it someday.

Another Canadian country superstar, Anne Murray, also has her museum located in Nova Scotia. I met Anne Murray for a brief moment while changing flights in Dallas, Texas. That was a few years ago now. She was very gracious and I was surprised that she knew me by name. She told me to drop into her museum and check it out if I was ever out east in the Maritimes. Strangely enough, while on a family vacation, we did get a chance to stop by and see Anne's museum ... ah but that's another story.

And Remember - - -

THE SHOW MUST GO ON...

Earl Heywood, Founder,
Honorary President,
Advisor, Museum Curator

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