

# The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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**Summer Edition**

**1**

## Amberley Beatty ~ Canada's Best Kept Secret

by Lynn Russwurm

Making waves recently with her appearances on The Largest Traveling Barn Dance, Amberley has been stealing the show, whenever she appears. If you were fortunate enough to catch her on one of her appearances with the Barn Dance, in Palmerston, The Commercial in Maryhill, or at Purple Hills, you know what I'm talking about. In her tribute shows to Patsy Cline, or Loretta Lynn, it's obvious that Amberley has done her homework well, be it in mannerisms, speech accents (whoever heard of anybody from Elmira having a southern drawl), or dress. Many others have done tributes to Patsy Cline, but none have done both Patsy and Loretta Lynn, especially with such perfection.

It seems Amberley has kept a low profile in her home town of Elmira but has been travelling to far points to ply her trade. In fact, she went to school with one of my

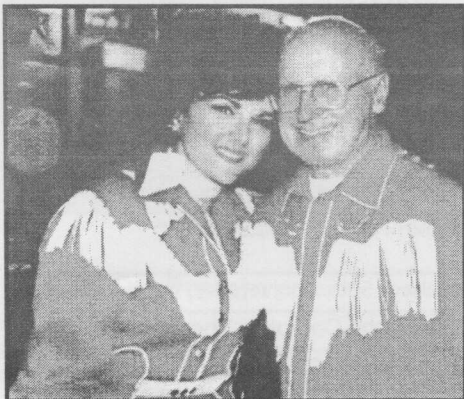
sons, and married one of his best friends. And I only found out about her singing career about a year ago. And not only does Amberley do her tribute shows, this young lady has a great voice as Amberley Beatty, and Larry Delaney of Country Music News described her as Canada's next superstar.

Born and raised in Elmira, Amberley is juggling three careers at the present time, as an entertainer, a housewife and mother, (she has two little girls) and hairdresser.

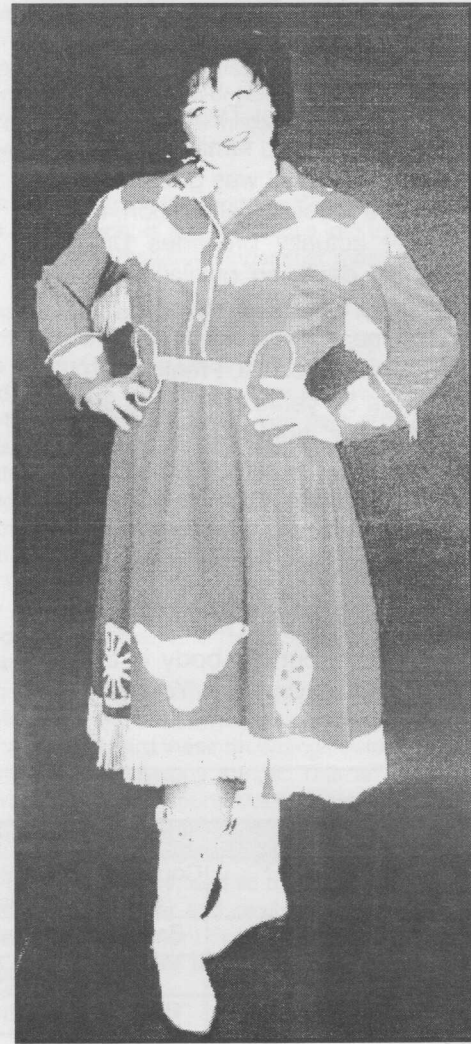
To date Amberley has only one CD to her credit, and that's as a duet with Allen Karl, from across the border. Originally, Allen's partner was to be Helen Cornelius, but somehow that fell through and he asked Amberley to come over and do the duet CD, after he heard her sing.

Amberley always liked to sing and act, she performed in many Little Theatre Productions which even included a role as Marilla in "Anne of Green Gables". She started going to karaoke sings, and taking part, from there it was a short step to singing live wherever she could. Last summer, I asked Amberley to take part in one of our Sunday Night Showcase Concerts in Elmira and there she met Doug Dietrich, Musical

Director for The Barn Dance and was invited to be on some of the shows. To date she's stolen the show whenever she's been on, now that's been her tribute shows, but wait until she starts to make a name for herself as Amberley Beatty, this story has just begun.



Amberley with fan Lynn Russwurm.



Amberley Beatty

## The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



Thanks to everyone who attended or helped out at our 14<sup>th</sup> annual Blyth Campout Jamboree recently in May. The weather wasn't perfect but it wasn't too bad considering all the rain we've had this past spring. Next year will be the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Barn Dance Blyth Campout Jamboree and we are already working on making this one a special event celebration.

Speaking of celebrating, I got so caught up in my day to day routine that I almost forgot I had a milestone birthday this year. We celebrated Barn Dance music director/steel player, Doug Dietrich's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday recently at the Commercial Tavern in Maryhill. Many of Doug's family and friends were there and it was great to honour Doug in a musical celebration. My 60<sup>th</sup> birthday actually precedes Doug by about 10 days, so officially I'm older than him, and he is always quick to remind me of it too.

When I turned 50, I really didn't feel like I was 50 years old, it just seemed like another number. Now that I'm turning 60, I'm beginning to realize that my mindset is a little different and all of those aches and pains have become magnified over time and 8 hours sleep really does make a whole lot of sense. Oh, my mind still has delusions of grandeur, but my body is taking a stand and saying ... 'You're gonna pay for this'.

As I've been in the music business a long time now, I'm starting to see many of my musical friends and colleagues wind down by semi-retiring, retiring, or worse, checking out altogether. In this business you garner a lot of friends and they can be from 15 to 90 so it is no wonder that so many of them pass on, and sometimes way too soon. Several of my musical buddies never made it past 45 or even 21, and they never abused themselves. I'm just glad to be alive and still have family and friends to surround me on my musical journey. Good health certainly makes a difference as well, in getting through life with a smile. At 60, I hope that I can continue to entertain people by performing and singing like my dad did, right up to the ripe old age of 89. Music has been a joy in my life. As Earl always said, '*The Show Must Go On*'.

Hope to see you at the next Barn Dance.

Comments? Please contact:

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## CAMPOUT DRAW WINNERS ~

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*Carol Richardson,  
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*Congratulations to all!!*

## 2011 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
Sat., July 9	Country Classics Breakfast, with Paul Weber and Naomi Bristow - 10 to 11:30 a.m.	Holstein Rodeo, Holstein
Sat., Sept. 3	Barn Dance Show and Dance - 8:00 p.m.	Pioneer Threshers 50th Anniversary, Blyth
Sun., Oct. 30	Barn Dance Show - 2:30 p.m.	Southwold Keystone Complex, Sheddon
Thurs., Nov. 18	Barn Dance Christmas Show - 8:00 p.m.	Norgan Theater, Palmerston
Sun., Nov. 28	Barn Dance Christmas Show - 2:00 p.m.	Bijou Theatre, Chesley

# WHO WROTE THE SONG?

*(Panhandle Rag)*

Leon McAuliffe, steel guitarist for the Bob Wills Band, was one of the first recognized steel players on the country music scene. He wrote an instrumental number, especially suited for the steel guitar and called it 'Panhandle Rag'.

McAuliffe was a Texan and named the twisty little tune after the famous Texas Panhandle. Nelson King, a well known disc jockey, worked an all night country music show out of WCKY Cincinnati. He liked the song so much that he used it as the theme song for his radio program. The song actually acquired a set of lyrics written by country star, Webb Pierce.

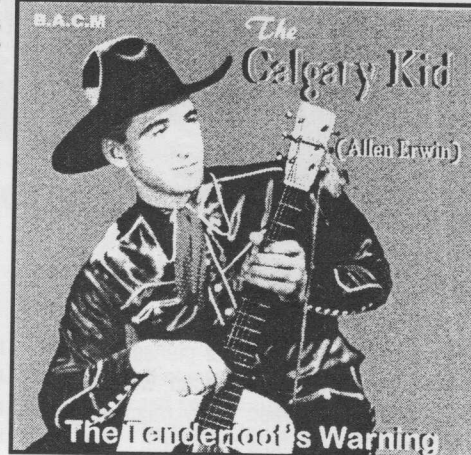
Over time, Panhandle Rag became a staple in the repertoire of many steel guitar players. Today it is more often heard as a fiddle tune and has become quite popular with many fiddlers. Nowadays you hardly ever hear instrumental tunes on the radio but the Panhandle Rag certainly was a popular tune on the airwaves in its day and can still be heard by bands that like to play it at dances.

*... And now you know who wrote the song.*

## FEATURE C. D. REVIEW

### The Calgary Kid ~ The Tenderfoot's Warning

Who was that mysterious cowboy anyway? The Calgary Kid, (Allen Erwin), is not a name that is familiar with most folks who appreciate old time cowboy country music. Kudos to Lynn Russwurm, for researching material on the late Calgary Kid. I'm sure it wasn't an easy task.



The Calgary Kid was born in Saskatchewan in 1911. He participated in many events at the Calgary Stampede, hence the name Calgary Kid. In fact he had many occupations, but mainly worked as a cowpuncher, cowboy singer/songwriter, and cowboy movie actor. He moved around all over North America which made it hard for Lynn to track down the history on him. Songbooks and albums weren't easy to attain for Lynn, which is his stock in trade.

The Kid's original recordings sold alongside Wilf Carter and Hank Snow. This CD compilation, is a rare glimpse into the colourful life of an early Canadian cowboy singer that most of us never knew.

The CD showcases The Calgary Kid performing with only voice and guitar on many of the cuts, or just as a cowboy would have done out on the range. He has a voice that harkens back to early Gene Autry and his range and vocal ability work well with his steady guitar rhythm and picking. When you hear cuts like The Tenderfoot's Warning, Move On, Little Dogies, Move On, and Out On The Western Range, you know this guy has lived the life he sings about. He's genuine, that's for sure.

When he sings the lamenting ballad, Don't Leave Me Heartbroken Alone, I could almost hear my dad (Earl Heywood) singing this song, and at times his haunting voice sounds as if it was one with the Calgary Kid. This is the kind of cowboy music that my dad (Earl Heywood), Wilf Carter, and Hank Snow, emulated in their early careers as well.

These recordings were originally done from 1941 to 1947 and they certainly reflect the era of the country cowboy singer, guitar player. Since I've never heard these recordings before, it's like listening to some new/old cowboy songs. This is a real treasure trove of cowboy songs that sound like they came out of a time capsule. I commend Lynn Russwurm for bringing it to the forefront. I really like this CD, and you will too, if you remember Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, Jimmy Wakely, and so many others from the golden age of the cowboy singer and cowboy movies. The Calgary Kid was certainly in his element during this time period, and these 22 songs are a testament to that bygone era. The cowboy spirit lives! Yee hah!

### BARN DANCE JOURNAL ADVERTISING PRICES

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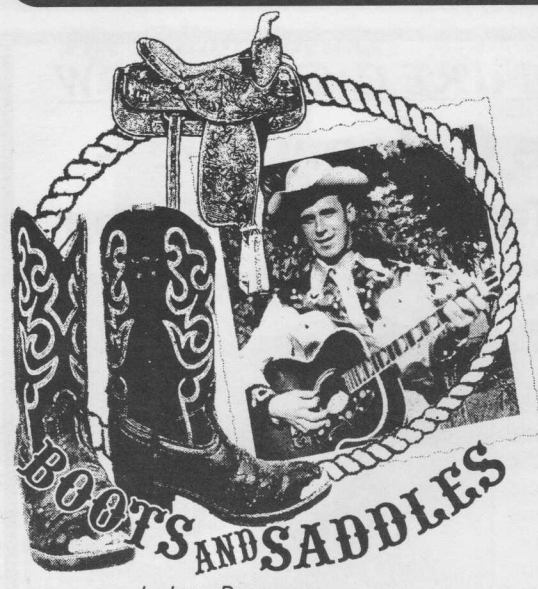
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by Lynn Russwurm

It's amazing how much our pioneer country artists are revered across the pond, when in our own country they've been pretty much forgotten. A case in point is how the people in Europe have issued CDs on our artists and here in our own country they are by and large neglected. About the only one to do anything here in Canada is Jack Boswell, through his Rosedale Music. Jack is leasing many of the old Rodeo artists, and releasing on his Rosedale label, as well as newer material from whatever source he may find it. Through Rosedale, we had a CD from legendary fiddler, Mike Slauenwhite, before he lost his battle with cancer. Mike was around for many years, playing with various bands such as the Silver Bar Ranch Boys, the Barn Dance Band, never to receive the lasting credit for his talent, until his CD was released, now we can hear this amazingly talented fiddler on CD. Just recently, released through Rosedale is Bobby Tremblay's dobro CD, another talent brought to light through Rosedale. Others that come to mind are Jimmy Phair, Al Widmeyer and Crossover Junction.

Meanwhile, in England, the British Archives have issued archival material on Earl Heywood, Jack Kingston, Stu Davis, Charlie Herald as part of their ongoing efforts to keep the great old music available. Coming up in the near future is a CD on Allen Erwin, The Calgary Kid. Now that is a legendary name in the annals of Canadian country music. I've always been fascinated by the Calgary Kid, since the time I discovered one of his song books at a neighbour's farm. The song book was a little short on hard facts about The Calgary Kid, but it was published by a company in California and this was a Canadian artist. There were several more song books, and I learned that he had appeared in a number of movies in Hollywood. Eventually, I found him in several Monte Hale

movies where he had one line as a ranch hand, or just appeared on screen without any lines. Among my prized treasures I also have several pieces of sheet music with The Calgary Kid pictured on the cover.

One of his song books was a co-effort with Hank Snow and apparently when Hank went to Hollywood, before making the big time, it was the Calgary Kid who showed him around. In this songbook are many pictures with Hollywood cowboys such as Rocky Lane, Roy Rogers, etc. Somewhere along the way, Allen Erwin had worked in a rodeo with Gene Autry and Hoot Gibson and it was Gene Autry who advised him to give up his rough life of bronc busting and concentrate on his music. Also in my youth, I used to see lists of his 78 RPM records in Eaton's catalogue and still I really didn't know anything about him. His records were very elusive and many record collectors had been trying to find them. Through my connections with collectors across Canada, I've managed to get copies of all but one of his recordings, and I find there was a slight similarity in his voice to Gene Autry, especially in his later cuts. He was a fairly good guitarist but sometimes a bit sloppy with his introductions, but what the heck, he was a pioneer of the genre.

Just recently a lot of information has surfaced on Allen Erwin on the internet, and a few years back there was a two-part article in Country Music News, where I learned he had in fact spent some time with Abbie Andrews in St. Catharines, Ontario. Here was the shocker for me, of course The Calgary Kid came from western Canada, but now I find his name Erwin was derived from Ernewein and his great grandfather was born in Culross Township, in Bruce County in Ontario and in fact was married in Formosa which is only a few miles from my hometown of Carlsruhe. Ernewein is still a fairly common name in the area.

Apparently Allen Erwin tried his hand at many trades including a stint in the Mounties, as a trapper, a brakesman and later in life turned to writing as a biographer. He researched and published a book on the life of John Horton Slaughter, cattleman and sheriff which was re-issued in 1997. He also researched the life of Johnny Ringo but was discouraged by opposition from some of Ringo's sliving relative, so he abandoned that project.

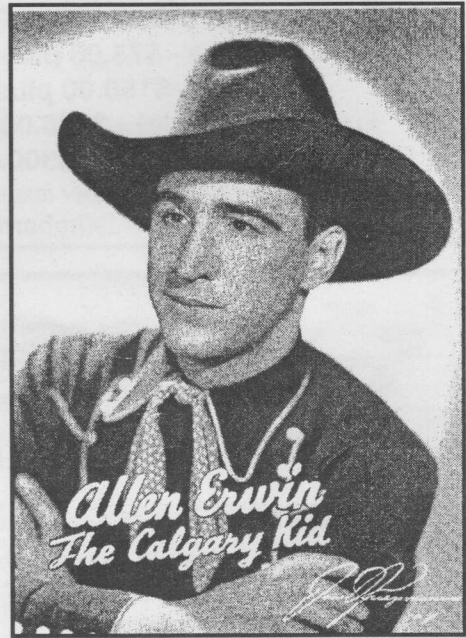
He trained a trick horse Shawnee, who was part of his show, but sold Shawnee to



Allen Erwin - The Calgary Kid Music Sheet. Song was copyright 1943.

Hank Snow, who used Shawnee for many years. It's rumoured that there was a bitter split between Allen and Hank, but this doesn't show in Hank's own book, where he speaks highly of Allen Erwin.

From the time of his birth on November 11, 1911 until his death on May 9, 1979, it seems that Allen Erwin was always a leader, not a follower, a man who followed his own instincts and blazed trails for others to follow. I have to give credit to record collectors who have been instrumental in piecing out the life of Allen Erwin, they are namely Keith Titterington, Roy Forbes, Fred Isenor and Jim Dean and the folks over in England at the British Archives who will be issuing the Calgary Kid on CD in the near future, a project that is dear to my heart.



Allen Erwin - The Calgary Kid

## DOWN YONDER – The Barn Dance Theme Song

By Ron Coulthard

Every Barn Dance show or dance begins and ends with 'Down Yonder'. This tune was the Ranch Boys theme song, and nearly every fiddler in Ontario plays it the way Ross and Archie Mann played it for many years at shows, dances and on radio and TV – not exactly the way Wolfe Gilbert originally wrote it, way back in 1921. We always play it instrumentally, but it does have words:

*Down yonder someone beckons to me,  
Down yonder someone reckons on me.*

*I seem to see a race in memory, between the  
Natchez and the Robert E. Lee.*

*Swanee shore, I miss you more and more.*

*Ev'ry day my mammy land, you're simply grand.*

*Down yonder when the folks get the news,*

*Don't wonder at the hullabaloo.*

*There's daddy and mammy, there's Ephraim and  
Sammy, waitin' down yonder for me."*

Surely this is a genuine song of the south, written by someone born and raised somewhere way down below that Mason-Dixon line? Well ... not exactly.

Louis Wolfe Gilbert was born in Odessa, Russia in 1886, and he died in Los Angeles in 1970. He came to the U.S.A. at an early age, and toured in vaudeville. In 1912 he had his first songwriting hit, 'Waitin' For The Robert E. Lee', and by 1915

he was established in Hollywood, writing for films and radio shows. One of Tin Pan Alley's most prolific writers, 'Ramona', 'My Mother's Eyes', and 'Jeanine, I Dream of Lilac Time' are among the standards he left us.

When he wrote 'Down Yonder' in 1921, he included in it that line about 'Ephraim and Sammy' near the end. This bit is a direct steal from his former song (tune & words), 'Waitin' For The Robert E. Lee', his first big hit. Nothing wrong with that, of course, he was stealing his own stuff! The Ranch Boys version changed that line a bit, but when you hear me play 'Down Yonder' as a piano number, I sometimes follow the local Ross Mann tradition, but often I do play it Mr. Gilbert's original way.

Either way, it's a great theme song. I liked it before I knew it's name, and the Ranch Boys rendition always gave me a thrill. Later, I played it with them twice every week for ten seasons on the Circle 8 Ranch TV show, and at countless other shows and dances over the years, and I still enjoy it every time I hear it or play it. Until the Lord takes us 'Up Yonder', I'm sure we'll keep playing 'Down Yonder', down here!

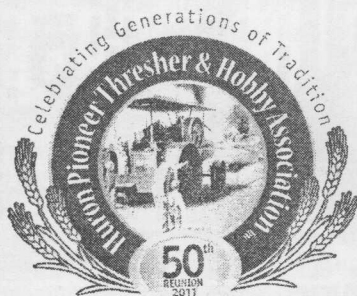
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## EARLY CELEBRATION TO KICK-OFF

# 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Show

Campers are invited to come early to attend  
Canada's Largest Traveling Barn Dance and Dinner (optional) on

**Saturday, Sept. 3, 2011**

at the Arena Complex located at Threshers' Campground in Blyth, Ontario.

**You may arrive as early as Fri. Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup>, and stay all week to take in our  
50<sup>th</sup> SHOW September 9, 10, and 11. Reserve by August 1, 2011.**

Numerous self driving Day Trips, within a short distance, are planned all week to capture your interests. Some of these included ~ tractor and machinery collections displayed within a 1950's dealership setting; antique car and truck collection at a 'Supertest Garage' back-drop; ploughing demonstration with steam engines; antique tractors and horses; and a tour of local flour mill to name a few.

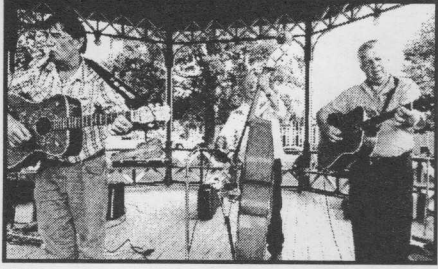
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**Saturday, Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>** will see a large downtown parade. Enter a float if you wish.

Visit our website for Camping and Dinner Reservations and also for Parade Entry Forms.

**[www.blythsteamshow.on.ca](http://www.blythsteamshow.on.ca)**

# Country Music Memories



Al Heiser, Lynn Russwurm, Larry Mercey



Bobby Trembleay, Ron Coulthard



A surprise 60th birthday celebration was held for Barn Dance Musical Director / Steel guitar player, Doug Dietrich at the Commercial Tavern in Maryhill. Doug is seen here holding a portrait of himself done by artist, Lance Russwurm.



Grammy winner, Walter Ostanek and country music legend, Jimmy Phair, received the Barn Dance Pioneer Award as emcee Jim Swan officiated the ceremony on the Saturday night Barn Dance Show in Blyth.

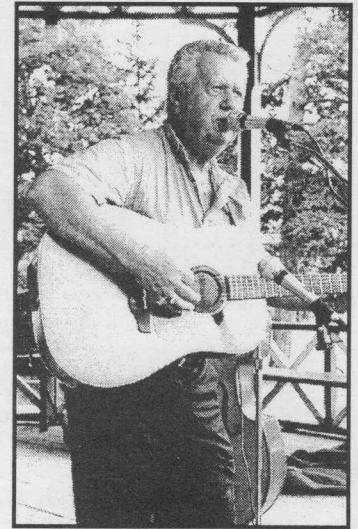
*Summer Get-Togethers are better with Good Friends and GREAT Music!!*



Al Heiser



Lynn Russwurm



Larry Mercey



Ron Coulthard



Young singing sensation, Naomi Bristow was a real crowd pleaser at the 14th Annual Barn Dance Blyth Campout Jamboree.



Barn Dance sound engineer, Wayne Greve is responsible for making each and every performer sound their best. Scott Taylor (not seen) also handles stage sound and lighting.

## COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

\* **Upcoming appearances by Grant Carson Band** - visit [www.grantcarsonband.on.ca](http://www.grantcarsonband.on.ca) or call 905-680-4244.

\* **Honeygrass** - will be at Tottenham Bluegrass June 17 to 19; July 17 River Valley Bluegrass Festival.

\* **Country, Bluegrass and Maritime Music:** July 1 to 3 Marysville 613-306-1372; July 1 to 3 Holyrood 613-967-9551; July 8 to 10 Napanee 613-396-2626; July 7 14 to 17 Lindsay 1-800-954-9998; July 28 to 31 Classic Country Music Reunion, Trenton 705-878-1302; July 28 to 31 Flinton 613-336-8354; July 8 to 10 Preston Springs Country Jamboree, Hastings 705-696-2268; July 7 to 10 Renfrew Valley Bluegrass Fest 613-623-8545.

\* **Cargill Pickin By the Pond:** Country and Bluegrass Festival July 1 to 3. Visit [www.cargillcdef.com](http://www.cargillcdef.com) or email [pikinbythepond@gmail.com](mailto:pikinbythepond@gmail.com) July 7 to 10 Country Roads Music Fest with Don Cockrane, Ginny McIlmoyle, Brian Cosby, Dennis Whitty, Shirley Baker, Dean Rowatt, Paige Romboough, Garry Woodcox. Open mic during the weekend. Contact Todd at 613-396-2626. email [dwhitty@cangig.ca](mailto:dwhitty@cangig.ca). Location Napanee Fair Grounds, 160 York St., Napanee. MC's for open mic on Thurs. Fred Brown and Fri. Al Traynor.

\* **June 30 to July 3**, Sally Creek Music Festival at the Dorchester Fairgrounds, 4939 Hamilton Rd., RR 3, Dorchester. 3 mins. off 40L, Exit 203. Tickets 888-288-4423. Bring your lawn chairs. Presented by Thames Valley Bluegrass Music Association.

\* **July 21 to 24** - Palmer Rapids Twin Music Fest - 31st annual Bluegrass; 25th annual country fest. Separate stages on the banks of the Madawaska River. Contact Alan Schutt, RR 2, Palmer Rapids. email [alschutt@rogers.com](mailto:alschutt@rogers.com)

\* **Appearances by Doreen Brown:** Lindsay Country Jamboree July 14 - 17; Classic Country Music Reunion, 20th year Celebration, Trenton July 29 - 31; Auction Barn Jamboree, Keeler Centre, Colborne Sept 2 -

4; Warminster Jamboree with Tex Howard, RCL Aug. 14; Johnny Popper Days (John Deere) by Upper Canada Two Cylinder Club, Drayton July 23 - 24.

\* **Upcoming Appearances by Walter Ostanek**, [www.walterostanekband.com](http://www.walterostanekband.com) 905-584-3215.

\* **August 8**, Musician's Corn Roast, Blackstock 905-985-9990.

\* **August 28** - 1st annual Rural Roots Country Jamboree, Orono Fairgrounds in the Arena, Station Street.

\* **Appearances by Naomi Bristow**, July 9 - Holstein Rodeo; July 18 - Shawville Country Jamboree; Aug. 6 - Manitoulin Country Jamboree, Little Current; Aug. 19 - Kipawa Country Fest, Eagle Village First Nations, Ball Park, Kipawa; Sept. 2 - Auction Barn Jamboree, Colborne; Sept. 3 - Pioneer Thresher Show, Blyth.

\* **Aug. 12 - 14:** Conestoga Trail Bluegrass and Gospel Fest, Princeton. Joe Mullins and The Radio Ramblers, The Stevens Family, Ernie Evans and the Florida State Bluegrass Band; Rick Prater and the Midnight Travellers; Lonesome Meadow; Concession 23; Bill White and White Pine; The Tebworth Brothers. MCs Dan Bieman, CKNX Wingham AM 920 and Dan Joseph CKWR Waterloo FM 95.5. Contact Gerry and Fran Morgan 519-458-4515. email [gerrfram@sympatic.ca](mailto:gerrfram@sympatic.ca) or [www.conestogatrailbluegrass.ca](http://www.conestogatrailbluegrass.ca)

\* **For Upcoming Shows**, contact Purple Hill Country Hall phone 519-461-0538 or [www.purplehillcountryhall.com](http://www.purplehillcountryhall.com)

\* **Sept. 9 to 11**, Huron Pioneer Thresher and Hobby Assoc. celebrating 50 years, Threshers Campgrounds, Blyth. [www.blythsteamshow.on.ca](http://www.blythsteamshow.on.ca)

\* **Barn Dance Shows** - Sept 3 - Huron Threshers Assoc. Show and Dance, Blyth; Oct. 30 - Show at 2:30 p.m., Southwold Keystone Complex, Shedden.

*Welcome to all new supporters of The Barn Dance Campout, and all who support all events.*

*Have a wonderful and safe summer.*

## 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 ~ (519) 530-8000*

*E-mail: [webmaster@thebardance.ca](mailto:webmaster@thebardance.ca)*

## IN MEMORIAM



**Terry Sumsion** - Country music legend passed away at age 64, on Mar. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, at the Stedman Community Hospice. Loving husband and best friend of Jeannie. Proud father of Tammy & Chuck Norris, and Jeff & Judy. Cherished papa of Codi, Matt, Dylan, MacKenzie, Faith, Montana, and Myles. Son of Jack & the late Jean Sumsion. Terry will be sadly missed by his brothers, and families, friends, fellow musicians and fans. Interment was at the Harley Cemetery in Burford.

*\*Note: Terry had just released a new c.d. of original songs and was known for such hits as 'Our Lovin' Place' and 'Wake Me Up I'm Dreamin'. The 2011 fall issue of the Barn Dance Opera Journal will be featuring a story on Terry Sumsion and his career.*

**Henry 'Hank' Bedard** - passed away peacefully at Victoria Hospital, London, at age 74, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. Beloved husband of Betty Silva. Dear father of Larry (Debbie) Bernard, Ramona (Kevin) Grandy, Angie (Sam) Stewart, and Sherry (Blake) Hutchison, and stepfather of David (Katherine) Silva. Dear grandfather of Dayna Bernard, Shannon, Kraig & Kyle Grandy, Matthew Stewart, Erin & Mitchell Hutchison, and Hannah Silva. Predeceased by his grandson Stephen Stewart. Dear great grandfather of Brody. Dear brother of Ann, Margaret, Isadore, Nettie, and Elaine. Predeceased by 8 brothers and sisters. Cremation and interment was at the Glanworth Cemetery. Hank was a country music singer and performed with the Ranch Boys on Circle 8 Ranch on CKNX as well as the CKNX Barn Dance.

**Janette Bird** - peacefully at home at age 47, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Loving mother to Jamie & Travis Bird of Vanastra. Mama of Tyson. Missed by parents Dorothy & Joe Freeman, and Sandy & Marilyn Brown. Grand-daughter of Elizabeth Rutledge. Sister of Brenda Brown, Lisa & Paul Gorel, and Paul. Special aunt of Amanda, Kurt and Chad. Missed by 8 step-brothers and sisters. Predeceased by her son John in infancy. *\*Note: This is a great loss for Dorothy & Joe Freeman who have been loyal volunteers of the Barn Dance.*

*Terry Sumsion, Hank Bedard, and Janette Bird, will be missed by family & friends and we at the Barn Dance Historical Society extend our condolences to the families of those that are gone. They will be fondly remembered by family, friends, and all of us who are part of the Barn Dance.*

## BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

Cowboys are still kings in my house. At least as far as the discerning musical ears of my two boys are concerned.

Albeit, their combined age isn't even seven, the boys do have outlaw tendencies. I guess that should be expected given my wife and I named them Cole and Jesse.

The first question out of my youngest son Jesse's mouth when hearing a song, accompanied with a plaintive and pleading nod of the head, is, "cowboy?" To curry his favor a singer must be a cowboy hat clad artist; lose the hat and you lose the toddler. My Tracy Byrd collection currently has his attention for two reasons. The first being he can reach that portion of my alphabetized CD collection with his curious and chubby two-and-a-half-year old hands. The second is that Byrd almost always wears a Resistol in his album covers. More diverse art-

ists on the same shelf such as Paul Burch and Matraca Berg have been passed over for the sins of not looking the part or, gasp, being a woman.

This little focus group of two provides quite the window into budding musical tastes. Whereas the youngest loves the costumes, Cole, the oldest, is drawn to the songs content. The four-and-a-half year-old loves to know what every song he hears is about. I love the challenge of reducing a two minute song into a two word description understandable to a child. I would maintain his favorite songwriter – hands-down -- is Fred Eaglesmith. Cole loves to listen to songs about trucks, tractors and motorcycles as much as Eaglesmith loves to crank them out. Given Toby Keith's fondness for Eaglesmith's writing as well, it follows that Cole's favorite album of late seems to be Toby Keith's *Bullets in the Gun*. Inappropriate? Perhaps. Intriguing? Certainly. Is it coincidence Keith dons a cowboy cap on the jacket cover?

I recall that my entry into country

music passed through the same door of fascination with all things western. I have tried to be directive with their interests and guide them directly to the classics. I thought my Marty Robbins gunslinger albums would both satisfy their curiosity and my own sense of musical responsibility, but Mr. Tear drop's ballads left them cold. They would rather howl along with Ronnie Dunn and Kix Brooks and answer the duo's call to "Play Something Country" while jumping wildly on my bed. While critics would scoff at comparing Marty Robbins to Brooks & Dunn, my kids have cast their votes with their smiles and happy feet.

As a father and country music fan, I am just happy to be able to joyously share any aspect of the country music canon with them. I know the time will come when they will loathe and resent anything their old man listens to. But I also know that they will remember.

It is my job to leave the light on in the hall and make sure the door is always open to that memory.

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