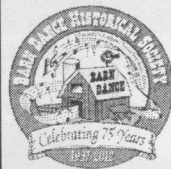


# The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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The Barn Dance Historical Society Inc.



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Spring Edition

1

## ERNIE KING ~ 1929 - 2012

Saying Goodbye in a *'Friendly Kind of Way'*

by Grant Heywood

Ernie King was legendary to anyone who ever met the man with the twinkling smile, and kindest of hearts. But Ernie never took himself that seriously. Ernie King was born in Penetanguishene, Ont. in 1929, and made his debut appearance on the CKNX Barn Dance in 1948 and became the romantic cowboy balladeer front singer for the Ranch Boys. With his shy good looks and smooth singing voice, Ernie King would later on become a household name, once the Ranch Boys became established on the CKNX *Circle 8 Ranch* television show. *Circle 8 Ranch* was as religious to watch as *Bonanza*, *Lassie*, or *Father Knows Best*.

People could identify with Ernie & the Ranch Boys simple & true country sound, and would flock to dances from watching *Circle 8 Ranch* on television every week. I remember Ernie singing 'Tumbling Tumbleweed' with the original Ranch Boys band quartet of, Don Robertson, Ross Mann, and Reg Bitton. There were only a few channels that you could get on your television back in those days and Ernie, Don, Ross, Reg, Cora Roberston, Hughie Elder, and Ron Coulthard soon became celebrities on the longest running show on CKNX TV. Guest singers, Mary Elliott, Sharon Strong, Hank Bedard, Clark Johnson, and others always had a faithful audience. Folks knew Ernie as if he were an Elvis like personality in Western Ont.

When the show ran its course on TV, Ernie had more time to do the things he loved such as being with family, the great outdoors, (especially

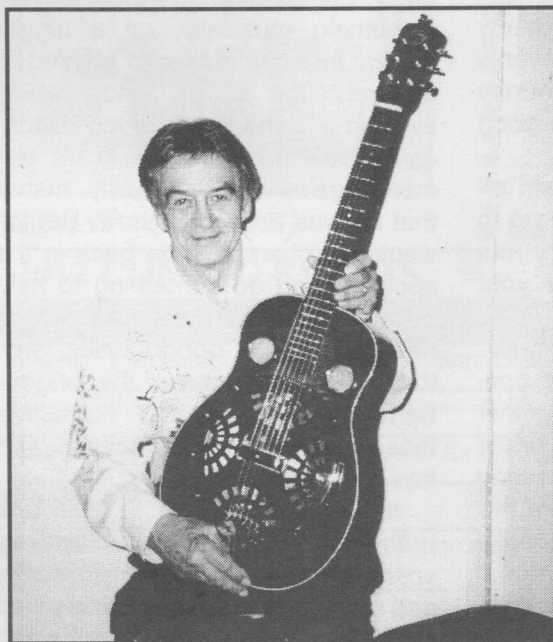
fishing) and starting a new business in Wingham, Ernie King Music. This was the result of Ranch Boy fiddler friend, Rossy Mann, who ran a music store in Bluevale. Ross gave up the business when he became ill, and when he passed on, Ernie decided to carry on the business under Ernie King Music. He ran a small recording studio at the shop and I remember doing many recordings there with Harry Busby at the controls. When it became too much for Ernie, he passed the business on to Dave Wallace and started doing what he really had a passion for .... fixing fiddles, guitars, & mandolins. Ernie soon became a well respected luthier making dobros, mandos, and even a square 'stand up' bass. He was so proud of his work and his

customer satisfaction record was 100%.

Ernie became the musical manager for the Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree Sunday Gospel Show. He was reluctant to performing as he had a hearing problem, but he did make some appearances ... and people just loved him for it. He passed the musical manager role onto his long time friend and performing associate, Mary Elliot. As an advisor for the Barn Dance Historical Society, Ernie was invaluable.

It seems like the end of an era with the passing of Ernie. He was only four days away from his 83d birthday when he died. Ernie King was a musician/entertainer that people admired, or wanted to exemplify. He always looked younger than his age. If he had an ego, he never showed it. He would always put others first. He was kind, considerate, honest, humble, sensitive, had a sense of humour, and rarely spoke out of turn. A handsome man with a big heart, who likely had more friends than he will ever know. But we know, and it's hard to say goodbye to someone who loved his family so much. His wife Darlene and daughter Michelle were troopers till the very end. When the fiddles start the closing song ... 'Down Yonder' ... Ernie King will be smiling from ... 'Up Yonder'.

***They just don't make them like Ernie anymore. We will miss him dearly!!***



ERNIE KING

## The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



It's hard to believe it will be 15 years this May since our first Blyth Campout Barn Dance Jamboree. We've come a long way since the late Wayne Otterbein and others spear-headed the idea at a Barn Dance Historical Society meeting. It has definitely become our major event of the year. This is also the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the original Barn Dance which originated at CKNX Radio in Wingham, Ont. Two anniversary celebrations in one year certainly restores my faith in fans and followers of local, traditional country music.

It is getting tougher to find real traditional country music on commercial radio these days.....unless you're tapped into satellite radio. Events like our Blyth Campout Jamboree are few and far between other than the Trenton Country Reunion event or the Lions Head Countryfest. Oh I'm sure if you surf the internet you will locate a few more, but they are not as plentiful in Ontario as they used to be. Many folks have turned to bluegrass events which also cater to traditional country music enthusiasts, and that is a good thing to see happen.

In conversation with folks I am often times asked where they can go to dance to 'real' traditional country music. Local Legions are usually your best bet, but even they are struggling to keep regular dances...well, regular. I know I've been playing more concert/dance type events in the summer season at trailer park venues where folks love to relax and enjoy hearing good country music played by a live band. Sometimes, a special event like a rodeo or country music weekend concert will come along. But most often the traditional country music gets relegated to an afternoon or morning

show so that the young major recording acts get to play the main stage in prime time. I understand that, and am more than thankful that we are even included in the mix. It kind of makes me feel like I'm on an old-timers hockey team. LOL

Now I know how my dad felt when they no longer played his records on radio and the gigs weren't as plentiful as they once were. But my dad was a resourceful man. When his cowboy days on radio and television ran their course, my dad started a duo with wife Martha and they continued playing fairs, clubs, and concerts, adding a back-up band if necessary. It was about this time that he wrote and recorded the 'Tales of the Donnelly Feud' album, which became his biggest selling album to date. He continued performing music and even magic shows, and eventually got reinstated on CKNX FM Radio with his own country music program.

When the radio show came to an end, he took life a little easier using his handyman skills and helped design a downsized plan for a new house in Wingham. Not long after, both my mom and dad helped in renovations of our own home near Wellesley. This occupied his time for awhile since the playing jobs were fewer. But he still had a desire to do something musically, on a bigger scale. Once the idea was planted to resurrect the Barn Dance which evolved into the Barn Dance Historical Society he was back in his element again. It didn't really matter that he was a lot older now. He just wanted a chance to be back in the spotlight and do something to help other singer/songwriter/musicians have the same opportunities, with the idea of preserving the original Barn Dance idea and honouring those players and entertainers who had 'paved the way'.

It was a bold step to take and both Earl and Martha collectively spent many hours raising money and gaining interest to take this leap of faith. In the end it was well worth it, as the Barn Dance Historical Soci-

## The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum

P.O. Box 68

Wingham, Ontario N0G 2W0

Phone (519) 530-8000

(or leave a message)

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ety today still continues with faithful members and volunteers who are as committed to preserving the concept my mom and dad set out to achieve. These people are the backbone of the organization that give freely of themselves just so all of us can continue to enjoy the traditional country music we love today, and remember and honour those who originally started it all in our Barn Dance Museum in Wingham, Ontario. Let's keep it going. It's been a long journey.....but well worth the investment. See you at the next Barn Dance.

Comments? Please contact:

Grant Heywood

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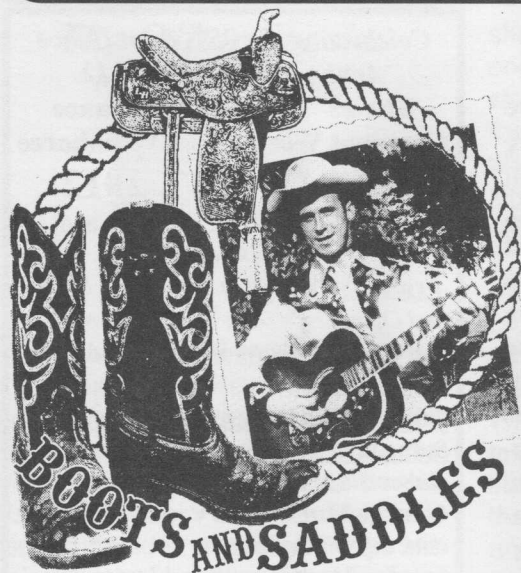
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by Lynn Russwurm

The Barn Dance lost a true legend in the passing of Ernie King. Truly one of a kind, Ernie could have been called "The Man With A Million Friends". He knew everyone within a hundred miles and I've never heard anyone speak a bad word about Ernie King. He touched so many lives throughout his lifetime that his impact cannot be measured. His many years with Circle 8 Ranch and other shows on CKNX allowed Ernie to come into the living rooms of everyone in Southern Ontario, and he was considered a friend by all. His friendly demeanor was something the people found to be genuine and genuine it was.

After his days with the original Barn Dance and CKNX, musicians from all over Ontario came to Ernie King Music to have their problems with their instruments solved, or just to chat with Ernie. He always had the time to give each customer his undivided attention. And you were sure to get an honest deal when you came to Ernie King Music. A man without an ego, Ernie King possessed one of the finest voices that ever sang a country song. The one thing he lacked was the drive to become a major name in Canadian country music, he certainly had the ability.

Ernie loved the outdoor life, he loved creating things as is evident by the showcase cabinets in our Barn Dance Museum. They were designed by Ernie. He loved musical instruments and built some beautiful dobros and mandolins, in fact he couldn't keep up with the demand.

My own personal involvement with Ernie began in 1951. Ernie was relatively new with the Barn Dance and I admired his way with a song. I had recently started writing songs

and when I came up with what I considered my first really good one, I sent it to Ernie at CKNX. To my surprise I got a letter back from Ernie saying that he would be singing it the next Saturday on The Barn Dance. You can imagine the thrill of hearing that song on the radio. The song was "In Our Dreamboat, Let's Pretend". In later years I had Ernie record that song on an album I did with my band, The Jamboree Reunion Band, it can also be heard on "It's The Saturday Night Barn Dance, Vol. 1", as well as on "Best of the Barn Dance".

When Earl Heywood came up with the idea for the Barn Dance Historical Society, Ernie was one of the first supporters of that idea and although he did not want to be on the working board, he was always ready to lend a hand and to put forth ideas, as can be seen with the cabinets in the Museum.

From that first song that Ernie sang for me, eventually there were three more that Ernie featured, all were upgraded by Reg Bitton who with Ernie at the time, was a member of the Ranch Boys. For me that was the first, as many other Barn Dance performers, such as Jack Kingston, Earl Heywood, Larry Mercey, The Mercey Brothers all performed my songs, but Ernie was the first.

It's hard to believe that Ernie won't be around anymore, I treasure all the memories of many chats around Ernie's kitchen table where my wife Shirley and I were always welcomed by Ernie and his charming wife, Darlene, who was a friend of mine from earlier days of working at B.F. Goodrich in Kitchener.

*Rest in peace, old friend.*



Circle 8 Ranch / Barn Dance personalities, Mary Elliott Huyzen and Ron Coulthard will be taking care of business by hosting and entertaining with other guests at the Campout Jamboree Sunday Gospel Show. Ernie King passed the torch to Mary a few years back now and Mary has been doing a superb job of providing folks with 'top notch' religious programming to stir the soul. The Barn Dance Campout Jamboree Gospel Show has truly become a featured event not to be missed. Mary, Ron, The Barn Dance Gospel Band and guest performers will take to the stage on Sunday, May 26<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. and go until noon.



### BARN DANCE JOURNAL ADVERTISING PRICES

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**15<sup>th</sup> Annual Barn Dance  
Campout Jamboree in  
Blyth Ontario.**

*'Plant a seed and it will grow'*

The original idea for the first annual Campout Jamboree in Blyth, was hatched at a 'think tank' board meeting of the Barn Dance Historical Society back around 1996-97. The concept was presented by the late Wayne Otterbein and others contributed their ideas as well. We really weren't sure if this was going to take off like it has over the years, but once 'word of mouth' got around about this event, it just snowballed and got bigger and better every year.

None of this could have happened without the co-operation of the service clubs of Blyth, the Blyth Arena Complex people, and the folks from the Blyth Threshers organization. Others in Blyth were also 'on board' with this project, and if it wasn't for the many, many volunteers who stepped up to give us a hand in creating and building this event, we most certainly would have failed. Thanks so much to everyone ... and I do mean everyone, who has helped in donating their time and labour in making this a success. We owe you a special debt of gratitude.

The reason for spearheading this event was to raise money to help support and maintain the Barn Dance Museum in Wingham, Ontario. The Barn Dance Historical Society is a 'not for profit' organization, and needed to find funding to continue to preserve and foster the Barn Dance Museum. The Campout Jamboree is our biggest event of the year and it is our Barn Dance members and fans of the old Barn Dance era plus lovers of traditional country music who continue to support this event and have a fun filled musical weekend with friends.

This being our 15<sup>th</sup> year for the Jamboree coupled with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barn Dance itself, we have brought back Randy Morrison and the Flatt River Band by popular request, for our Friday night Bluegrass Show. The Saturday night show will feature many who have performed on the Barn Dance Stage over the past 15 years or more, plus a special guest appearance by George Hamilton IV, from Nashville, Tenn. This is going to be a weekend of musical fun and entertainment to remember. You don't want to miss this one.

**WHO WROTE THE SONG?**

*(Release Me)*

One of the most requested country songs written was Eddie Millers 'Release Me'. The inspiration for the song came about when Eddie Miller and his wife got into an argument at a bar. His wife had been annoying Eddie when he suddenly turned around and spouted out the words "Oh please release me, let me go". After thinking over what he had said, and emotionally upset, he went home and wrote a song around this unhappy event. Miller wrote the song in 1946 and was unable to get it recorded, so he recorded it himself in 1953.

Ray Price and Kitty Wells had success with the song in the mid-fifties. But it wasn't until 1967 when Gerry Dorsey, better known as Englebert Humperdink, held the number one spot on the charts with the song for six weeks in the UK, which prevented the Beatles from making Penny Lane a number one hit. 'Release Me' was the biggest selling single in the UK in 1967 and eventually became one of the best selling singles of all time there. The record stayed on the charts for a record fifty-six consecutive weeks.

'Release Me' has been recorded in over 25 languages and at least well over 500 times or more. It has been recorded by Patti Page, The Everly Bros., Elvis, Dolly Parton, rock group Def Leopard and even Canadian country artist George Canyon. This one song put Eddie Miller into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. A major achievement for a song that remains as popular as 'Release Me'.

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

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* **FUND RAISER** \*  
\* **BARN DANCE** \*  
\* **FOR GODERICH** \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

A Benefit program to help raise funds for the planting of new trees in the Town of Goderich since the F3 tornado last year, will be held

**Thurs. Evening,  
July 12  
at the Blyth Arena  
Complex.**

**Tickets \$20 each.**  
*Sponsored by: The Barn Dance Historical Society, Family Campers & RVers, and the Town of Blyth.*

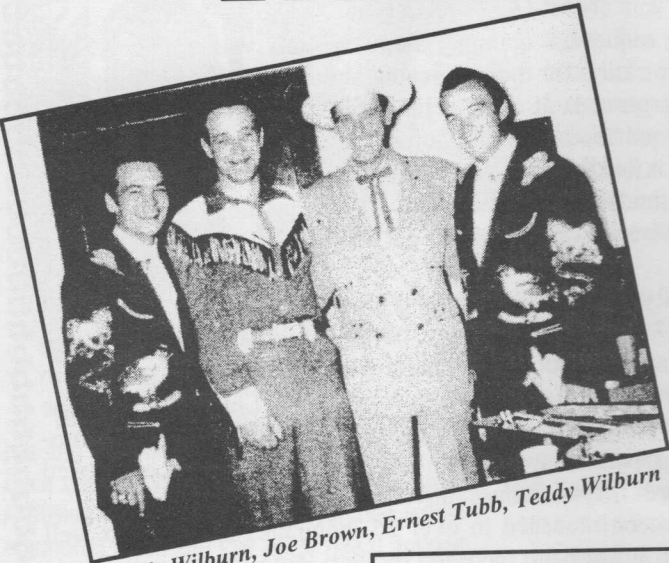
*More details in the spring edition or check our website at:  
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**BARN DANCE  
SOUVENIRS**

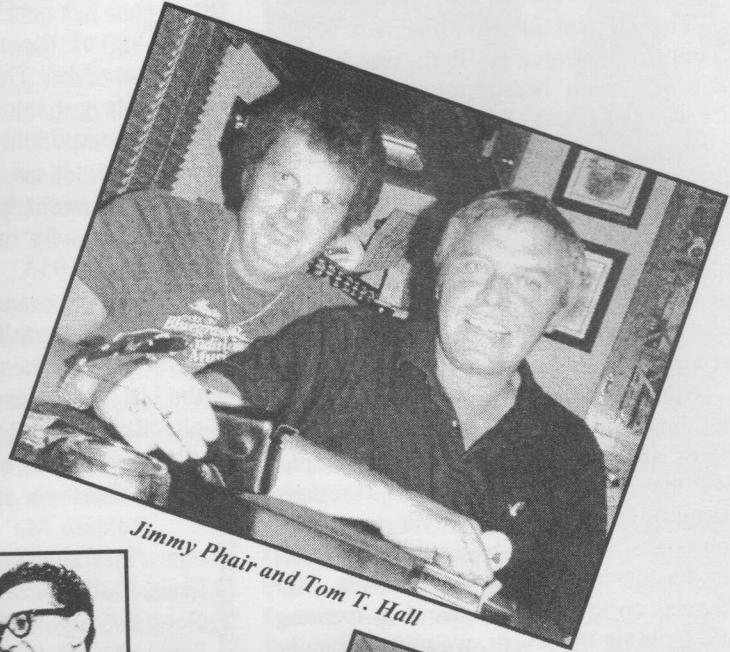
Barn Dance CD's	\$15.00 ea.
Barn Dance Cassettes	\$ 6.00 ea.
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Barn Dance Logo T-Shirts (gold logo on blue only) Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL	\$20.00 ea.
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NEW Al Cherny CD - "Live / The Lost Recordings"	\$15.00 ea.
NEW Eleanor & Graham Townsend CD "The Talented Townsends" (36 unheard recordings)	\$15.00 ea.
Best of The Barn Dance CD	\$15.00 ea.

*All purchases include HST.  
Please include \$3.00 per item for mailing  
or pick up at Ernie King Music.*

# Country Music Memories

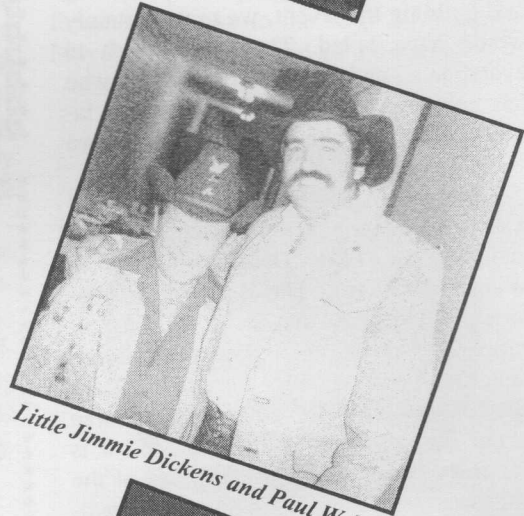


*Doyle Wilburn, Joe Brown, Ernest Tubb, Teddy Wilburn*



*Jimmy Phair and Tom T. Hall*

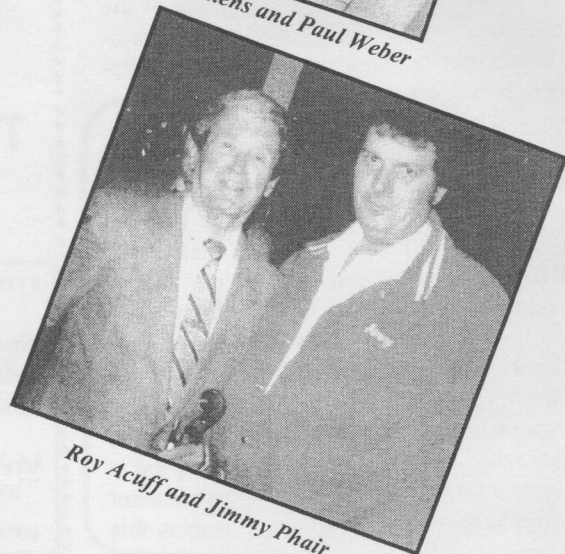
**THE TREMBLEY BROTHERS -**  
*Bob, Gilles and John*



*Little Jimmie Dickens and Paul Weber*



**JAMBOREE REUNION BAND -** Lynn Russwurm,  
Lorne Prince, Victor Pasowisy,  
Lloyd Bank, Randy Menard, on drums.



*Roy Acuff and Jimmy Phair*

## COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

\* **Appearances by Gary Hooper:** May 12 - Lindsay Legion, 7:30 - 11:30; May 18 - Brooklyn Oddfellows Hall, 6:30 - 10:30; June 16 - Dawes Rd. Legion, 8 - 12; June 30 - Lakefield Jam; July 6 & 7 - Cargill, Picking By The Pond; July 21 - Lindsay Legion, 7:30 - 10:30.

\* **Upcoming Appearances by Alan Jackson** - April 19 - Sudbury; April 20 - London; April 21 - Hamilton.

\* **KD Lang** is at the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium, May 8.

\* **Randy Morrison** will be appearing At the Blyth Arena, celebrating a Special 15 Year Anniversary of the Barn Dance Historical Society.

\* **Dottie Kirkpatrick**, of Common Ground will be at ANAF, Barrie, Sun., Mar. 4, 1 to 5. All entertainers welcome, open mike, dancing.

\* **29th Annual Tottenham Bluegrass Festival** - June 15 - 17, 2012. 1-800-866-4566. www.tottenhambluegrass.ca Family \$530 how, featuring performers and youth talent show, workshops, Sunday gospel show. Weekend line up includes: Josh Williams Band, Spinney Bros., Heart Town, Acoustic Blue - Hometown Bluegrass, Rymn 'n' Reason, Ducharme Family Bluegrass, Jan Purcell & Pine Road, Unseen Strangers, Slocan Ramblers, The Tebworth Bros., MC Mike O'Reilly.

\* **Celebrating 75th Anniversary** of Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance and 15th Annual Jamboree Campout Weekend, Blyth & District Community Complex and Campgrounds, May 24, 25, 26 and 27, 2012. Campgrounds open 1 pm on Thursday. Wwww.thebardance.ca 519-530-8000. Hope to see you there.

\* **Robbie Lane and The Disciples**, People's Chicken, 744 Mount Pleasant Rd., Toronto, April 1, May 6, and June 3 at 5 pm.

\* **June 21 - 24** - Kinmount Country Jamboree, Kinmount Fairgrounds. Gates open Thursday. info@kinmountfair.net

www.kinmountjamboree.com 705-488-2372. Musicians and entertainers contact Ambassador Records 905-579-7476. Open Mic begins Thurs. Country music all weekend. Sat. main stage - Tom Mark, Sherry Black, Tianna Woods, Johnny Burke and Gail Gavan. Sun. Gospel Show. Main stage band - Doug Johnson, steel guitar, Doug Deveaux, guitar, Dusty

King Jr., bass guitar, Frank Woodcock, drums.

\* **Sunday, April 15**, 2 pm, (CKNX) The Barn Dance Society returns to Purple Hill. Guests without question.

\* **Sunday, April 29**, 2 pm, Purple Hill Country Opry welcomes special guests - Gerald Davidson and Amberly Beattie, as Loretta Lynn; Eric Shain; Guy Melanson and The Boys of Purple Hill Country Show Band; Tony Leegio; Ashley Gilles www.purplehillcountryhall.com 519-461-0538.

\* **The Utopia Cafes** are held on the last Sunday of the month at the Utopia Community Hall, 8396 the 6th line of Essa.

\* **4th Lindsay Country Jamboree** - July 12 - 15, 354 Angeline St. S., Hwy. 7 @ 35 Hwy. Lindsay. Free shuttle service from grounds to site. Farmer's Market, Open mic Thurs. - Sat. 1 - 5 pm. Fantastic Music. For the line-up, check out their website. www.lindsaycountryjamboree.com or info@lindsaycountryjamboree.com or call 1-800-954-9998 or 705-741-6097.

\* **Appearances by Al Traynor**, Lakefield Fairgrounds, June 28 - July 1. Also a new Jamboree the second week of Aug. in Graf-ton.

\* **Appearances by Todd Nolan**, April 13-14, RCL Hensall Circle, Mississauga, also May 18.

\* **For upcoming appearances**, contact Joe Tucker, Second Wind, joetband@yahoo.ca

\* **Appearances by Sandy MacIntyre and Steeped in Tradition**, at Pogue Mahone,

Toronto - April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, May 6, 13, 20, 27, June 3, 10, 17 and 24. All at 4 pm. Info 77 Bay St., 416-598-3339.

**Upcoming appearances of The Good Bros.:** contact www.thegoodbros.com

\* **Appearances by Doreen Brown:** May 14 Shelburne Jamboree, RCL, 1:00 pm, roast beef dinner available; May 22 Rosemount Jam; May 26, Barn Dance Campout, 15th Anniversary and 75 Year Anniversary for Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance Special Show, Blyth; June 16, Tottenham Bluegrass Children's Show Judging Panel, talent show; June 26, Bond Hill Fiddle Club; Gulleyst, Collingwood Fairgrounds, TBA; June 21 to 24, Kinmount Country Jamboree, Kinmount; July 12 - 15, Lindsay Country Jamboree, Lindsay.

\* **August 12** - Musician's Corn Roast, Paul Wasson, Blackstock.

\* **Appearances by Crystal Gage:** 519-945-7142, www.crystalgage.com or crystal@crystal.com

\* **Baldwin Jamboree**, contact Blair Ravenhill www.baldwinjamboree.com

\* **Havelock Country Jamboree** - Aug. 16 to 19. Line up TBA.

\* Extending heartfelt condolences to family and friends of Ernie King, who passed away Feb. 29, 2012. He will be very sadly missed, a wonderful legend in country music and so well respected, a warm and special person.

*Have a great, fun filled, healthy and happy summer, folks, and hope to see you at our Special 15th Barn Dance Jamboree Campout and celebrating the 75th year of Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance, that so many have and do listen to over the years.*

## 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;  
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**15th Annual Blyth  
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May 25 - 27, 2012**  
*See website for details.*



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## BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

I was recently made aware of an African proverb that states when an old man dies, it is an entire library that burns.

It certainly feels that way with the recent loss of Ernie King.

A friend shared that wisdom with me the other night when I told him the sad news about Ernie. This friend has a profound appreciation for country music and its history. He knows of my fascination and obsession with the Barn Dance. He understood the weight of the loss.

We were tipping pints at The Pilot Tavern, a Toronto watering hole dating back to WW II that claims to still have its original 1944 bar. So close was the subject of our conversation to the history of the establishment, the walls seemed to resonate harmony with the same warmth of an Ernie King made dobro.

Though we were likely the only ones remembering Ernie that night in Yorkville, his name had echoed in The Pilot before. Not too many years earlier Robert Gibbons, Peter Rehak, and I tried

to give flight to a documentary about the Barn Dance in that same tavern.

The "a-ha" moment in those early planning sessions came when we realized the story of The CKNX Barn Dance could best be told through the eyes and experiences of Mr. King. The young heartthrob cowboy balladeer from Penetanguishene, Ontario was the obvious choice, but it took me many months to realize that as I wrestled with how to make the Barn Dance history matter to a contemporary audience.

Ernie King was charismatic and a man of tremendous charm and humor. This was evident even after having only met him half a dozen times. I will always remember how easily we both fell into a conversation about fishing upon first meeting at The Barn Dance Historical Museum.

His warm, squinting eyes alone smiled enough for an entire face, yet when King spoke in that casual, but almost reverential tone, the room always got smaller.

I love the stories of King sucking lemons off stage to cut up the performers on live television broadcasts. I can just see the sweetness of the prank

written across that smirking face, pinched and contorted with the sourness of the lemon.

Which brings to mind another proverb: when life gives you lemons make lemonade.

It's time for the heritage of The CKNX Barn Dance to be preserved formally on film, from its earliest beginnings on Doc Cruickshank's mother's breadboard to today. Ernie King's death reminds me of the urgent need to record and tell that story while there are still those with first hand, eye-witness accounts of its early days.

Not only do we continue to lose beautiful people but we lose their narratives. The past becomes more distant with every goodbye.

We may have work to do, but when I think of Ernie King, I think of some gorgeous Vince Gill lyrics:

*Go rest high on that mountain  
Son your work on earth is done  
Go to heaven a shoutin'  
Love for the Father and the Son*

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