

of Maine Bluegrass Express

a publication of the Bluegrass Music Association of Maine

OFFICIAL NOTICE:BMAM ANNUAL MEETING

The Bluegrass Music Association of Maine's Annual Meeting will be held virtually this year on the Zoom platform, October 21, 2020 at 6:00 P.M.

We understand that not everyone has computer access but decided that, given the pandemic, at least we could offer our members with computer access the opportunity to safely attend the Annual Meeting via Zoom.

Note that a full reporting of the Annual Meeting and the announcement of the newly elected President and Board Members will be in the Winter Newsletter, posted on BMAM's website, and facebook page.

If you want to attend the Zoom Annual Meeting, please send contact information to Nellie Kennedy, Secretary, to request the logon information and link. Please send an email to bmam.secretary@gmail .com at least 48 hours before the meeting to assure you receive the link on time.

All members are always welcome to attend any of our Board meetings as a guest. Please email bmam.secretary@gmail.com, or contact Chairman Joe Kennedy at jkennedy@mainebluegrass.org (207) 277-3733, or any BMAM officer/board members (contact info is in this newsletter). We would value any input you can offer.



GENE RUMERY

We are sorry to hear that Gene Rumery has passed away. A founding member of the original Misty Mountaineers, he was active in the Maine bluegrass community for over 40 years.

Gene served on the BMAM Board of Directors for many years, and he was very involved in bluegrass education through the Kids Academy at Blistered Fingers.

Gene ran the instrument loan program for BMAM for a long while, and helped many young bluegrass musicians get started by providing them with a playable instrument. He will be missed.

We'd like to attach this tribute to Gene, posted on Facebook by his friend and ex-bandmate,
Wilf Clark . . .



It's been 45 years since this man approached myself and Bob Fletcher at our St. Albans Mountain camp about jamming some Bluegrass. Shortly thereafter we formed a little band and named it The Misty Mountaineers. Therefore I attribute the formation of the band that lasted till 2018 to my Friend Gene Rumery. Gene passed earlier this morning after a long battle with many health issues. I was fortunate to know this man and call him a FRIEND.

I had the opportunity to visit him a couple days ago and we had a good chat. I am thankful for that. Gene left the group after a few years but stayed around the Bluegrass scene right up to the time his health began failing. He enjoyed kids picking it up. His Grandson Matthew Rumery took up the banjo a number of years ago now. Gene assisted with the Kids Academy at Blistered Fingers for years. I will miss him but hope to see him again someday. W.C.



Gene Rumery, and the Misty Mountaineers, about 1970 L to R: Gene Rumery, Wilf Clark, Nellie Fletcher, Bob Fletcher.



Gene Rumery in an on-stage jam: L-R: Perley Curtis, Gene Rumery, Fred Pike, Sam Tidwell, Bob Fletcher

PRESIDENT'S LETTER SEPTEMBER 2020

Hello Bluegrass Friends,

I hope this President's letter finds everyone healthy. Wow, have we all experienced probably the most unusual summer or what? Spring normally would consist of preparing RVs or camping equipment and planning to attend as many bluegrass festivals as possible. But in the spring, we were all just waiting and watching each of our beloved festivals cancelled one by one, leaving us to wonder if we would be playing and listening to bluegrass this summer at all. A few folks got together in small picks, and there have been many bands playing online, but what a change it has been. And now as the weather turns and fall is upon us we realize how strong we really are and that we can indeed endure.

Of course, we are missing the live music, seeing and playing with our friends and our thoughts go out to Maine's festival promoters and bands, who we look forward to enjoying and supporting when normal activities return. For those who have turned to the internet for entertainment, don't forget to look for our local bands, and hit that paypal or venmo link if you can.

Your BMAM Board of Directors and Officers have learned fast how to become internet savvy as we now hold Board Meetings on the internet using the video conference program Zoom. It seems to be working well for us, besides saving us a bit of travel time and gas. But personally, I miss the camaraderie of going to Governor's Restaurant and informally catching up with the gang after the meetings.

Unfortunately, BMAM will NOT be sponsoring any monthly Jams for the foreseeable future. It is not feasible to meet at North Yarmouth Academy or the Brewer Grange. Both venues and BMAM hosts have been so very good to us over the years and we appreciate the situation they are in as well. BMAM holds the health and safety of all our members and guests in the highest of priorities. Knowing that we will eventually come together to play is what keeps this organization going.

We are entertaining ideas of how to utilize our website and facebook page better, and are open to any ideas or folks to help volunteer their time in such an endeavor.

And we encourage people to renew their memberships, which most folks normally do at our festival booths. It is now easy to pay online on our website: mainebluegrass.org, using the Paypal link or just printing off a registration form and send it along with a check. Frankly, we have lost revenue by not being at festivals this season, and yet still have a business to run, i.e. website, insurance, etc.

Soon you will be getting your BMAM Election Ballots in the mail. Please send them back promptly. We appreciate your participation, as always.

Stay healthy and keep on pickin'!!

Yours in Bluegrass, Mama Beth Revels

FOX BANJO 2020 - 2021

Bob and Grace French were important early participants in the New England Bluegrass music scene. Bob was one of the first New England Scruggs-style banjo pickers; starting in the mid-1950's he taught himself from available recordings in a time when other instructional materials were simply not available.

Bob and Grace lived much of their early lives in Massachusetts, but eventually he and Grace settled in Cambridge, Maine

Bob and Grace French played all over New England with their own band, the Rainbow Valley Boys. In addition, Bob was also one of the original members of Joe Val's New England Bluegrass Boys.



Like many Banjo players, Bob tinkered with his instruments. What banjo player can resist tweaking a few of those nuts or bolts, or sometimes swapping out some factory parts for a hot new tone ring, all to get that killer tone? But Bob did more than tinker; he is known to have made or assembled probably a dozen or more instruments.

Bob usually started with a "factory second" banjo neck from Jim Cox's shop; these would typically be a neck with cosmetic or other defects that Jim did not intend to put on one of his own models. Bob would change the lettering on the headstock, substituting an "F" for the "C" in the Cox logo on the headstock. Bob acquired other banjo parts from various sources; some might come from Jim Cox directly, with other parts perhaps from Stew Mac or other vendors. Other parts may have originated on other instruments that Bob had previously owned.

After Bob's passing in 2016, Grace donated two of Bob's "Fox" banjos to BMAM; the first was raffled in 2017; the winner was BMAM member Steve Davis. The second banjo was rougher and had less "curb Appeal"; this banjo was included in the BMAM Instrument Loan program, which has terminated in late 2019.

Our last "Fox" banjo, has excellent "bones", but it also has some substantial appearance issues. The neck is very rough, with issues in the finish and binding. But it is from a beautiful piece of highly-figured tiger maple, with the "Hearts & Flowers" inlay pattern on an ebony fingerboard, and it is straight. The resonator, also highly-figured maple, has some buckle rash.

The Fox banjo's rim, resonator, tone ring, and other Cox parts are all topquality standard stock from Jim Cox's shop; other parts from other sources are also first rate. The tuning pegs, with dark amber buttons, are unusual and very attractive.

The instrument clearly has been heavily played; the metal patina and 'buckle rash' are a dead giveaway to heavy use. Bob is known to have had other high-valued banjos, but this Fox Banjo was certainly played on many occasions.

BMAM expects to sell this instrument in 2021. We hope it will find a buyer whose interest in the instrument is enhanced by its history as an instrument made and played by one of the founders of New England Bluegrass music.

Further information will be posted on our Website and in our subsequent News Letters.

Bob Bergesch

**Bob Bergesch*

2020 has been a strange and difficult year for bluegrass musicians and fans everywhere. Here in Maine, we've been relatively fortunate. It's true that we had no festivals this year, and no organized jams for the last 6 months, and none likely for the next few months. Some of us have had some limited opportunities to pick, and maybe even sing, with a few close friends or relatives in the privacy of our homes. Many of us have no doubt done a lot of practicing on our instruments, alone but hopeful for better days when we could play and sing again with our friends and bandmates.

Most bands have been completely inactive since mid-March when events started canceling in earnest, and music venues began closing to the public. A few performers, especially solos and duos, have figured out how to air virtual concerts; sometimes virtual tip jars have allowed these performers to make a little money. Occasionally, venues have paid performers to do virtual concerts.

All-in-all, though, bluegrass music, along with other genres, has ground to a halt. There's been very little of it in any public places, virtual or otherwise.

But at least, in Maine, most of us have felt relatively safe from the COVID virus. Even our hospitals have remained relatively safe places. (I can attest to this, having spent a week in a large hospital in August, where I was told by my surgeon, "I don't think there's a single confirmed case of COVID-19 in this hospital right now.")

With no public bluegrass performances, jams, or festivals for the last six months, and probably a few more months in the future, I was at a loss for ideas about what kind of story to feature in the Bluegrass Express this fall. Finally, I came up with this idea: how about taking a few minutes to reflect upon my 39 years of bluegrass experiences in Maine? Maybe it will trigger some pleasant and meaningful memories of a few of our readers; I hope so. I was a little reticent to talk about myself, but, honestly, as a result of 8 months of severe bluegrass inactivity in Maine and everywhere else, I was at a real loss for ideas for this issue. Stan

THIRTY NINE YEARS OF MAINE BLUEGRASS MEMORIES

When Liz and I moved to Maine, in February 1981, we had been playing in an excellent band in the New Haven, CT area. The bandleader, fiddler Bud Morrisroe, had told us, "Look up Sam Tidwell when you get to Maine." Sam, along with Fred Pike, had fronted the Kennebec Valley Boys during the mid-to-late 1970s, and they'd enjoyed considerable success and acclaim. However, Sam and Fred had had a little falling out, and the band had just disbanded when we moved to Maine.

We looked up Sam as soon as we got here, and it turned out that he was looking to start a new band. In fact, he later confided to me that he had gotten so discouraged with the difficulties of holding a band together that he had been considering retiring from music until we showed up on his doorstep. We practiced a few times with Sam and within 4 or 5 weeks, were playing as Sam Tidwell and the Kennebec Valley Folks, with 16-year-old phenom Bill Smith on banjo.

Just before our first gig with Sam and Bill, Liz and I attended our first ever Maine bluegrass festival; it was Fred Pike's Salty Dog Festival, and it was held in Greenville, on a hill overlooking Moosehead Lake. We watched Sam perform with Cheryl Lovely's band, North County Bluegrass; we saw Fred Pike, Smoky Greene, Dick Bowden and the Fort Knox Volunteers, Simon St. Pierre, and many other great Maine bluegrassers. I remember picking in the field there in Greenville with Bobby St. Pierre for the first time; Bobby and I have played together many times since.

Over the years since 1981, Liz and I have also been on stage with Fred, Smokey, Cheryl, Simon, and many other Maine greats that we began idolizing when we first saw them at the Salty Dog Festival.

One of my biggest thrills, as a fan, at that festival was seeing Yodelin' Slim Clark, who I'd known about all my life.

After his first set, I went up to him and shyly said, "Slim, when I was a little boy, too young to read the record label, we had a record of you singing 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' and 'She Taught Me To Yodel.' After that, I spent many years trying to imitate and learn 'She Taught Me To Yodel'."

I was in my mid-thirties, but when Yodelin' Slim (then 64) went on for his second set, he (playfully, I hope) insulted me by saying, "You One of my biggest thrills, as a fan, at that festival was seeing Yodelin' Slim Clark, who I'd known about all my life. After his first set, I went up to him and shyly said, "Slim, when I was a little boy, too young to read the record label, we had a record of you singing 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' and 'She Taught Me To Yodel.' After that, I spent many years trying to imitate and learn 'She Taught Me To Yodel'."

know, I get sick and tired of these middle-aged men coming up to me and saying they listened to my records when they were little boys."

We played, it seems in retrospect, a frantic schedule with Sam for about 4 years, until he moved back to Rhode Island. When Bill Smith left to attend Berklee School of Music for a semester, the great Jimmy Cox played banjo for a while with us.

Sam's son, Bill Thibodeau, played mandolin with us for a summer and when he was on leave from the Air Force. After that, we played for a year or two as a trio. It's odd, but some of the most vivid memories I have from those days are those of driving most of the night after a gig, ending up at Sam's farm in Cambridge where Sam's wife Edie would put together a gourmet meal before Liz and I left at around dawn to head home to Rome.

Another lasting memory is our radio program. We landed a 15-minute radio show in Dover-Foxcroft.

THIRTY NINE YEARS OF MAINE BLUEGRASS MEMORIES

Continued from page 3.

Sam used to drive down to our house in Rome, where we'd record three or four 15-minute shows in our living room on a cassette deck on cheap cassettes Sam brought off the shelf from his little Dexter music store, Strings and Things. Then Sam would drop the cassettes off at the radio station.

After Sam left Maine, Liz and I started playing regularly with Bud Godsoe and Ron Sicina as the Sandy River Ramblers. As of 2020, the Ramblers have been playing steadily for about 35 years, making us the longest continuously-playing bluegrass band in Maine. Carrol Johnston, Bill Smith, Ellen Bowman, Dave Clapp, have all been in the Ramblers at one time or another; more recent Ramblers have included: Dan Simons, Julie Davenport, Dana Reynolds, Jay Smith, Max Silverstein, and Finn Woodruff.



Kennebec Valley Folks -L to R: Sam Tidwell, Liz Keach, Stan Keach

As members of the Kennebec Valley Folks, we played some great Maine bluegrass festivals, including Sam's own Cambridge festival, a festival we put on in Houlton, the Moscow bluegrass festival, the Thomas Point festival, and also Smoky Green's festival in New York state. As Sandy River Ramblers, we've played the Salty Dog festival, Breakneck Mountain, Blistered Fingers, White's Beach, Thomas Point, the Katahdin Festival in East Millinockett, Happy Horseshoes campground festival, Oxford Valley festival, and probably a couple that I've forgotten, and we've built more memories and made more bluegrass friends than we could possibly count.

Outside of playing at bluegrass festivals, Liz and I have had some bluegrass experiences in Maine that make me feel extraordinarily blessed. We've shared the stage at concerts with Simon St. Pierre, Orrin Starr and Gary Mehalick, Banjo Dan and the Midnight Plowboys, Tim Farrell, Joyce Anderson, Fiddlin' Frank Farrel, the Kitty Wells Show, and Dick Curless.

In the summer of 2003, Liz and I got to play for a season with Wilf Clark and the Misty Mountaineers — it was a down year for the Sandy River Ramblers, who were between musicians, and only had a handful of gigs — and we jumped at the chance.

We'd always enjoyed Wilf's music, and we had a great time with him that year. Our daughter Carrie and Jay Smith (whose dad, Jim Smith, was also in the Mistys that summer) joined the band for a fiddle tune or two at a few shows; that was shortly before Jay joined the Misty Mountaineers full-time, but he was showing signs of being a special fiddler even then.

It was also during that same slow period for the Sandy River Ramblers that I found myself teaching gifted/talented kids at Maranacook Middle School and High School, and I started the Maranacook String Band, a youth bluegrass band.

The group featured some very talented young musicians, including Lee Stetson, who now fronts his own professional country-rock band, and Julie Davenport, who has since graduated to become the full-time bass player (after Liz retired) for the Sandy River Ramblers.

The String Band started playing paid gigs within 3 months of our first practice and played some high profile gigs including the Blistered Fingers Bluegrass Festival, the Kingfield POPs Festival, and several dual concerts with some top-flight Canadian Celtic bands.

As a matter of fact, the String Band really was responsible for a rejuvenation of the Sandy River Ramblers. We put on several double-bill concerts that featured both bands, and the excitement of those shows really lit a fire under the "grownup band." Dan Simons (a Maranacook HS graduate) and Jay Smith, two stellar young pickers, also became key members of the Maranacook String Band.

Among my biggest thrills in bluegrass are moments when I've sat in the audience at Maine bluegrass festivals while some of my bluegrass idols

"from away" — James King, Danny Paisley, Audie Blaylock, and Ralph Stanley II — have performed songs that I've written or co-written.

But as a bluegrass fan, I've also had many thrills just listening to and watching some absolutely wonderful Maine singers and musicians light up the stage with their music. I'll list just a few of the great Maine musicians and bands that I haven't mentioned somewhere above: Al Hawks, Bob and Grace French, Bluegrass Supply Company, North Star, the Union River Band, Anna Mae Mitchell and Rising Tide, the Katahdin Valley Boys, Alan McHale and the Old Time Radio Gang, Smoky Val, Brian Mason, Gary Pomerleau, the Danville Junction Boys, Evergreen, Erica Brown (Shipman), Blistered Fingers, the Jerks of Grass, the Northern Valley Boys; I need to add White Mountain Bluegrass, as well, who are based just on the other side of the Kittery Bridge, but who have featured Maine residents on their roster. I know I'm leaving a lot of great musicians out; their names will come to me as soon as I send this to press, I'm sure!

I've been kind of rambling on, and I'll bring it to a close for now. That's just a glimpse of 39 years of memories of Bluegrass music in Maine. I'm looking forward to more, as soon as this pandemic stops interfering . . . the sooner, the better!

Stan Keach



BMAM NEW & RENEWED MEMBERSHIPS

06/01/20 to 08/31/20

RENEWED MEMBERS

Please Check Your Membership Status, Thanks!

Dean Henderson

Richard Doucette

Pamela Wentworth

Mike Petrakovich

David Streeter

Todd & Cori Ketcham

Richard (Red) Feld

John Sparrow

Bill Walsh

Denise Hervieux

Steve Davis

Bill & Cathy Pollari

Bill Umbel

Jeanne Hulit

Richard Craven

Pat McHugh

Raymond Paradis

Brewster & Janice Bassett

Michael Harris

Ted Danforth

Glenn Kroll

Andrew McLaughlin

Pat Averill

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

BMAM relies heavily on volunteers. We have been very fortunate to have had many bluegrass enthusiasts participate in many aspects of BMAM.

The board thanks the good folks who keep the BMAM jams running, as well as the past and present officers who meet each month.

As in most organizations, there is always room for folks to share their ideas and let us know what we can do to expand this great group.

These are some things that YOU as a member, can do to participate:

- Submit articles to the newsletter
- Help us at jams
- Volunteer to sit at the BMAM booths at festivals
- Lead or participate in BMAM workshops
- Help with Children's BG Music Program at Blistered Fingers Festival.

JAM NEWS

BOTH the **SOUTHERN** and **EASTERN JAMS** will **NOT BE HELD** until further notice. Due to the current pandemic, BMAM has suspended scheduling jams at North Yarmouth Academy in Yarmouth or the Grange in Brewer. We thank both venues for their longstanding support of our jams, and we hope to be able to hold jams again in the near future.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - FALL 2020

As summer turns to fall I look back at where we were last spring. There was so much angst and many questions as to how we should move ahead. The BMAM decided that we, in good conscious, would not be participating in any festivals with our booth. By late summer we knew BMAM would not be hosting the Southern and Eastern Jams. The State of Maine set guidelines for large gatherings and festival promoters. One by one, they realized that they could not comply and decided that the most important thing was the safety of attendees and performers.

As fall sets in, we see little progress in the pandemics' demise and are looking into what is in store for the bluegrass community in 2021. Issues that the board will be working on will chiefly be about membership and fundraising. Due to the cancellations of all festivals and jams we need to find other ways to connect with you, our members, to renew memberships; and to find ways to raise the funds needed to stay viable. If you have any ideas, please share with us. All members are welcome to attend our monthly board meetings as guests and share your ideas.

BMAM has a Fox banjo donated by Grace French. Bob French and Jimmy Cox collaborated on construction of this banjo, thus the name. We will be searching for a buyer that appreciates their collective rich, bluegrass history. More details to follow.

One favorable outcome of the pandemic for the board is the use of Zoom for virtual meetings. No longer do officers have to travel long distances each month nor be concerned about social distancing. Awkward at first, we seem to be on the downward side of the learning curve and everyone is in favor to keep using Zoom now and into the future. An exception might be made to have the annual meeting in person when times are safe again.

The Annual Election and Meeting will be coming right up. Ballots will be mailed to all current members on September 21. Please be on the lookout for it as voting is time sensitive. This year you will be voting for the president and five board members. The Annual Meeting will be held virtually this year on Zoom. Please see the notice in this issue of the newsletter for more information.

Madam president Beth Revels and her committee will be working on our Face-book page to make it more up to date, informative, and interesting to our blue-grass community. Please like, share, and follow to help us grow. Also, try to support our musician friends that have lost work. If you feel comfortable following guidelines consider some live shows and donating online for live performing.

The holidays are rapidly approaching and I would like to suggest, again, that a great affordable gift for any bluegrass friend or relative from anywhere would be a years' subscription to the Bluegrass Music Association of Maine.

It will be winter 2021 when you'll be reading my next report and I look forward to it. In the meantime, as we move ahead with the seasons, let's embrace the positives. Enjoy the upcoming holidays with your family, your friends and picking pals; and stay safe!

Joe Kennedy

BMAM OFFICERS

President: Beth Revels brevels@mainebluegrass.org

Vice President: Bill Umbel bumbel@mainebluegrass.org

Secretary: Nellie Kennedy nkennedy@mainebluegrass.org

Treasurer: Robert Bergesch rbergesch@mainebluegrass.org

Newsletter Editor: Stan Keach skeach@mainebluegrass.org

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BMAM ARCHIVES

Joe Kennedy jkennedy@mainebluegrass.org

Darwin Davidson darwin@darwindavidson.com

The Bluegrass Music Association of Maine is ...

an organization of people, listeners and players, who enjoy Bluegrass music. It was formed in March of 1995, and incorporated on July 8, 1996 as a Maine 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. The BMAM, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, welcomes all Bluegrass friends, fans, and pickers to become active members.

Functions of the organization include the following:

- To educate the public about Bluegrasss music, in order to foster an appreciation of its history and cultural heritage
- To further the enjoyment of Bluegrass music, for ourselves and others, through teaching, sharing, and playing;
- To encourage participation in Bluegrass music events;
- To promote Bluegrass music as family entertainment;
- To support area workshops, festivals and concerts;
- To support area musicians and bands that play Bluegrass music;
- To inform members about Bluegrass and related events around the state;
- To cooperate with other organizations to promote Bluegrass and related music;
- To preserve the memories of those who have preceded us in this field of endeavor.

COPY DEADLINE

is the 15th of the month prior to publication date. Ad rates are for camera-ready copy. Ads to be made up from scratch have additional cost and must be sent by the 5th of the month.

Payment must accompany ads when they are submitted.

Send all advertising to: Bluegrass Express Re: Advertising P.O. Box 9 Dexter, Maine 04930



The BLUEGRASS EXPRESS is a quarterly publication of the Newsletter Committee.

For information on how you can become involved, contact any committee member.

Please mail any news, photos, articles, information or anything pertaining to Bluegrass in Maine to this address:

BMAM Re: Newsletter P.O. Box 9 Dexter, Maine 04930

Advertising Rates

25 Words ______\$5.00

Business Card _____\$10.00

1/4 Page _____\$15.00

1/2 Page _____\$20.00



IN AUGUST, THE STATE OF MAINE GRANTED THE HALL OF FAME PERMISSION TO RESUME TOURS OF THE MUSEUM.



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BRONZEWOUND

WERU-89.9 FM (Blue Hill) AND www.weru.org

• HOST: Darwin Davidson • Thursday 8 - 10 PM | Paul Anderson - David Manski - Caren Mulford

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MAMA'S MIDCOAST BLUEGRASS

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• HOST: Mama Beth - STATION IS ON HIATUS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

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THE ROOTS OF COUNTRY

WBCO KIXX - 94.7 FM

• HOST: Stu Fleischhaker, Layla Cantafio • Friday 6 - 9 PM; Sunday 12 Noon - 3 PM

BLUEGRASS GOSPEL SHOW

WBCQ KIXX - 94.7 FM

• HOST: Carl O'Donnell • Sunday Morning: 9 - 10 AM



www.MaineBluegrass.org

Your source for Bluegrass information!!!

Please check your membership status!
Thanks!

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		Primary Instrument::
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A one year membership includes: Quarterly Newsletter Discounts to BMAM sponsored events