

INTERVIEW WITH BOBBY ST. PIERRE

By Stan Keach



Pictured from l. - r.: Howie Dearborn, Grace French, Bob French, Brian Mason, Bobby St. Pierre

In 1971, Bobby St. Pierre was a 13-year old mandolin prodigy playing with Jimmy Cox's bluegrass band. Since then, for over 50 years, Bobby has played a major role in the Maine bluegrass scene. He also builds high-quality stringed instruments in his home in Cundy's Harbor.

I recently sat down with Bobby St. Pierre to talk about his life in bluegrass.

STAN: How did you get started playing the mandolin?

BOBBY: My dad was a really good guitar player, and when I was a kid, one day, we were walking down Main Street in Brunswick, walked by a pawn shop. And I asked him, "What's that thing in the window?" And he said it was a mandolin. I'd never seen one before.

I was 13, I think. A couple days later, he came home with it. He showed me a couple things to get me started. And he says, go play with it for a while.

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF BMAM

We're celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Bluegrass Music Association of Maine all year! While we were officially incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1996, the work of forming BMAM started in 1995 with a group of dedicated bluegrass fans in Maine. Our mission is to preserve, promote and support the growth of bluegrass music in Maine. We're proud to have played a role in building a vibrant bluegrass community from South Berwick to St. Agatha, and from Bethel to Bar Harbor.

We've got a great slate of events to commemorate our 30th birthday. Here are a few to put on your calendar:

APRIL 11th - BMAM'S 30TH BIRTHDAY BASH IN YARMOUTH!

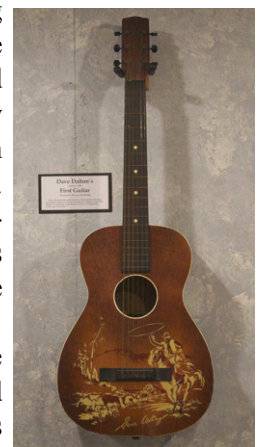
We're having a party and you're invited! Come on out to 317 Main Community Music Center in Yarmouth where we'll be hosting afternoon jams and a songwriters circle from 3-5pm and cake and cheers to 30 years from 5-6 PM. At 7 PM, our concert kicks off in 317's beautiful Founders Hall with Old Eleven, the BMAM Bluegrass All-Stars, and The Katahdin Valley Boys as they embark on their farewell tour. Tickets are \$20, with a discount for BMAM members. Visit www.mainebluegrass.org for more information and to buy your ticket. Y'all come!

JUNE 3rd - BLUEGRASS DAY AT THE MAINE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

BMAM's 30th Anniversary year-long celebration includes a Bluegrass Day at the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on Wednesday, June 3. The day will start with a formal tour of the museum guided by Ken and Jane Brooks at 10 a.m. In the mid-afternoon there will be a presentation focused on the MCMHOF Inductees that represent Maine bluegrass and there will be sharing.

The museum will be open all day to the general public until 4 p.m. for self-guided tours. The Hall of Fame and Museum is regularly opened each 1st and 3rd Wednesday monthly. To schedule a tour, please contact Paul Main at (207) 490-2001 or Ken Brooks at (207) 654-2227.

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Memorabilia from the Bluegrass Room at the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame.



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF BMAM

Continued from front page.

JUNE 17TH - BAND SCRAMBLE AT BLISTERED FINGERS FESTIVAL

BMAM will be hosting a band scramble at the Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Festival in Litchfield. The event takes place on the Wednesday night before the festival kicks off, so come early, join a band, and get up on the main stage! Stay tuned for more information from BMAM President Steve Bixby, who is organizing the band scramble. And make sure to check out the lineup for the June edition of Blistered Fingers—you won't want to miss it!

SEPTEMBER 3RD SECOND ANNUAL BAND COMPETITION AT CROOKED RIVER GATHERING

BMAM will be hosting its second annual band competition at the Crooked River Gathering in Hiram.

Last year's event was a blast, and this year's contest is shaping up to be even more fun. We've got some awesome prizes for the winning bands, including a slot on the main stage at next year's festival.

More details will be coming soon, so keep an eye on our site (www.mainebluegrass.org) and the Crooked River site (www.crookedriverarts.org) for updates, deadlines and rules.

OCTOBER 17TH BMAM PRESENTS ROCK HEARTS AT CENTER THEATRE

In what's becoming an annual tradition, Rock Hearts is traveling across the Piscataqua to bring their driving bluegrass to Maine. BMAM is proud to present this concert, and we'd love you to join us for this awesome night of music. Watch for updates on our website and on Facebook.

That's not all, folks! We've got more in store for our big birthday celebration, and we'll spread the word when we have news to share.



Timothy earned the top prize at last year's inaugural band contest at the Crooked River Gathering

INTERVIEW WITH BOBBY ST. PIERRE

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STAN: *Did he play bluegrass?*

BOBBY: He mostly played Chet Atkins and Roy Clark stuff. He played plectrum banjo as well, and he was showing Jimmy Cox some plectrum stuff, and Jimmy was teaching my dad five string. Jimmy used to go to everybody's houses to give them a lesson. He didn't have a studio set up at home.

STAN: *You were 13. About what year was that?*

BOBBY: About 1971. Jimmy and my dad were in the living room playing, and I was in my bedroom playing on the mandolin. Jimmy saw me, from the living room. He says, "Bring that thing out here." Jimmy's a good mandolin player. He showed me a couple things. I said, "Will you give me some lessons?" He says, "Sure." After I took lessons from him for about a year, Jimmy says, "I'm getting ready to start a bluegrass band. Will you play mandolin with me?" And I says, "Yeah, heck yeah." So that was my start to playing.

STAN: *So did you learn pretty fast that year?*

BOBBY: Yeah, I picked it up pretty fast. Well, fast enough that he wanted me to be in the band with him. I stayed with Jimmy seven years, and that's when he decided to focus on building banjos and less time on playing.

STAN: *Who was in the band when you started playing with Jimmy?*

BOBBY: Jimmy, Smokey Val on fiddle, Stan Savage on guitar. Dick Gilmore played bass at first, and then Jimmy's son, Buff, played bass. The last four or five years, it was Bob Carter on guitar.

STAN: *When you stopped playing with Jimmy, you were about 21?*

BOBBY: Yep. In '78 or '79.

STAN: *When you started playing with Jimmy, you'd been taking lessons for a year. How long did you keep taking lessons?*

BOBBY: I took lessons from Jimmy another couple of years after I joined his band. After that, he'd still show me things. Like I'd play a break, and if he didn't like what I did, he'd show me what he wanted me to do. After six, seven years, he didn't have to. I was pretty much getting everything he wanted me to play.

STAN: *And were you listening to any specific mandolin players?*

BOBBY: I liked Bill Monroe, and Doyle Lawson. Doyle's just so clean. I used to love listening to Jimmy Gaudreau, too. When that band ended, I played with the Morse Brothers for one year.

Continued on page 4.

BAND SPOTLIGHT: BACK WOODS ROAD

Back Woods Road Keeps Bluegrass Alive in Maine

By Taylor Smith

Born out of a late-night jam session at the Blistered Fingers Bluegrass Festival, Back Woods Road has spent over a decade proving that great music is worth the detour. The Maine-based sextet—led by Richard and Jane Bernier—plays a high-energy blend of blazing instrumentals, soulful ballads, and crowd-pleasing covers reimagined with a bluegrass twist. Over its 15-year tenure, the band has built a devoted following across Maine and beyond. With a refreshed lineup and a packed 2026 schedule, Richard talked with me about Back Woods Road's origins and influences, and what's coming down the road next.



Clockwise from left: Corey Bonnevie, John Krainis, Dimitri Eleftherakis, Mike Conant, Richard Bernier, Jane Bernier

TAYLOR: *When did Back Woods Road form?*

RICHARD: The original band formed in 2011 as a three-piece Bluegrass/Americana Band with myself, Jane Bernier and Woody Woods after a former band that we were all in, The Nitpickers, disbanded. We actually all met at the Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Festival when it was in Sidney, Maine. After a fine night of jamming, we all agreed we should form a band. And we did. So Back Woods Road's actual origin comes from The Nitpickers.

Fast forward, and typical of many bands, Woody left for Oregon and we moved along and hired Mike Conant to play banjo and fiddle and Gavin Smith on bass. More shuffling with members and Shawna Bell came into the fold on bass and Hunter Webber on banjo. Down the Back Woods Road a little later and we hired Jake McCarthy on bass and Jason Wescott on guitar. The Back Woods Road of today members are Richard Bernier on dobro, guitar and vocals; Jane Bernier on vocals and guitar; Mike Conant on fiddle and vocals; John Krainis on banjo and vocals; Corey Bonnevie guitar and vocals; and Dimitri Eleftherakis on bass and vocals.

TAYLOR: *How would you describe your sound?*

RICHARD: We like to say we are a bluegrass/newgrass band with a broad spectrum of music featuring all the great instruments and voices we have in the band. We have a female lead singer, which brings many bluegrass girls' tunes into the fold. Raging fast and furious often, we all get a kick out of high-speed. We're happy to tone it down also and play some beautiful slow ballads and traditional bluegrass tunes.

TAYLOR: *What are your influences?*

RICHARD: With a six member band it gets very interesting. Jane loves Rhonda Vincent so we cover some of those and some Steeldrivers, as well. We love modern bluegrass as well, and cover Jaelee Roberts, Darin & Brooke Aldridge, and Tina Adair to name a few. We also include some traditional bluegrass tunes by Del McCoury, J.D. Crowe, and The Country Gentlemen. BWR also loves to bluegrass popular hit songs that are catchy and make them our own. Some fun ones are "Time after Time," "I've Just Seen A Face," and "Last Train to Clarksville."

Continued on page 6.

Maine Country Music Hall of Fame presents
UNPLUGGED:

An All-Acoustic Live Country Music Show Fundraiser in Hartland

The Maine Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum will present UNPLUGGED, an all-acoustic live country music show on Sunday, April 19, 2026, from 1pm-4pm at the Irving Tanning Community Center, 62 Elm St., Hartland, Maine.

The show will feature a great line-up of legendary Maine country and bluegrass performers, all inductees to the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame including Brian Gelina, Stan Keach, Joe and Nellie Kennedy, Phil and Ellen LaClaire, Paul Main, Ken and Jane Brooks, and Ray Stafford. All proceeds from this event will benefit the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum, a 501(c)(3) non-profit cultural organization based in Mechanic Falls, Maine, and the only country music hall of fame museum east of Nashville, Tennessee.

The Irving Tanning Community Center is located at 62 Elm St, Hartland, Maine. Tickets are \$15 at the door, general admission. Show starts at 1pm. Doors open at 12 noon. Food and beverage will be available at the show.

For more information contact 207-613-5411 or find the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame on Facebook. This show is sponsored by Thai Palace Restaurant, Jeanne's Boutique, and Lakeside Self Storage, all located in Hartland, Maine, and a short distance from the show venue.

Irving Tanning Community Center
62 Elm Street, Hartland, Maine

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STAN: How many Morse Brothers were in that group?

BOBBY: It was Erlin and Les and Kendall on guitars; Dickie Pelletier the bass; Jim Spazuoco on banjo. That band lasted only one year. That was between probably '79 and '80. And then I played with Dick Bowden and the Fort Knox volunteers for a year. Dick and Bob Mavian, and Dick's sister, Bobbi, on the bass.

Then I went a spell without playing at all, and then we were at a festival. Bob French came up to me and says, "Joe Val just told me I should ask you if you want to play mandolin for me." And I says, "Yeah. I'll give it a try." So I sat in with them, and we ended up staying together another seven or eight years as a band.

STAN: Into the late '80s.

BOBBY: Into the late '80s, yeah. That was a fun band. It was Howie Dearborn on bass, Brian Mason on fiddle, Bob and Grace, and myself, and sometimes Charlie Patterson. I learned a lot from Bob. He'd always warm up before every show, but he would never play on stage what we warmed up with. And I bet you for the first six years anyway, every set that we'd do, he'd sing a song that I'd never heard before. And he'd look at me and he'd say, "Take your break."

STAN: Did he do that on purpose?

BOBBY: I think so. I'm grateful for it because I think it really made me into a better musician. He would put me on the spot and it was one of those things – either you sink or swim, you know?

After Bob & Grace, I took a break. I think it was like 3 years. I didn't even take an instrument out of the case.

STAN: How did it happen that you weren't playing with Bob and Grace anymore?

BOBBY: They were getting elderly, and not feeling well. They did the occasional show, which I'd help them out with, but they weren't doing the festival scene.

STAN: Was it okay with you to be not playing?

BOBBY: I was ready for a break. We had kids by then.

There was one other band I played with In 1990, I played a year with Richard Hefner, Gene Groves, and Butch DeForge as Instant Grass.

STAN: Where is Richard Hefner from?

BOBBY: West Virginia. He came up here for a year. And I met Richard at a jam one day. We jammed a little bit, and we hit it off.

STAN: And that was between Bob and Grace getting done and North Star?

BOBBY: Right, 1990. That was for one year.

STAN: His name sounds familiar.

BOBBY: His band is the Black Mountain Boys in West Virginia. Blaine Sprouse has played with them a lot.

Sherri and I have gone down there and there have been picking parties at Richard's house, and it's just been some phenomenal pickers he's had there.



Bobby with Jimmy Cox and band

STAN: And then came North Star?

BOBBY: Yes, in 1994, Bill Smith called me, and he says, "I've ended Bluegrass Supply, and I want to start a new band. Would you be interested in playing mandolin?"

I said, "Gee, I'm going to have to think about it. I haven't played in a couple of years." He said, "Well, we're getting together up at my camp." It was a 4th of July weekend in '94.

I've always enjoyed field picking with Billy; he was such a good musician, and had a good demeanor – just a fun person to pick with. I said to myself, "I'm going to kick my butt if I don't at least try it." So I called him up and told him I would try it. We met up at the camp and we played all weekend up there, and we had a blast. And the next 13 years I was with North Star until Billy passed away in 2007. And it's probably the best 13 years of music I ever had in my life. It was really, really good.

STAN: I'll bet.

BOBBY: Yeah, it was. That band just got along so well together. The kids got along, all the adults got along. There were no egos, no bad blood. It was just so much fun to play with them. Everybody liked the material selection.

And then when that ended, let's see, Ted DeMille and I joined Dan and Kelly Burke as Bits and Pieces in 2008-2009. We played a year or so. After that, Ted and I did a duet act. We continued playing together until this day, we still try to get out a little bit. And then, what, four or five years ago? You asked me to play with you guys [*ed.—the Sandy River Ramblers*].

STAN: How long has it been?

BOBBY: I'm thinking probably five years. Before that, you'd ask me to sit in with you, because Dan couldn't make it and then . . . I don't remember what the first gig was, but anyway, we've been together since.

STAN: Yeah, it's been good. And then we did a few of those duet or trio gigs, mostly in the Black & Tan in Augusta. That was fun. So tell me a little bit about the nationally famous people you've played or sat in with, like Mac Wiseman.

BOBBY: I played with Mac twice. I played with him when North Star backed him up at the Oxford Record Family Festival.

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INTERVIEW WITH BOBBY ST. PIERRE

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STAN: When was that?

BOBBY: Oh... Late '90s, I'm guessing. Maybe early 2000s. And then another time I backed him up at Thomas Point Beach with Herman McGee.

STAN: So he just came up and needed a pickup band?

BOBBY: Yeah, somebody come up and asked me if I'd go up and help back up Mac Wiseman.

STAN: What was that like? Did you go over things ahead of time?

BOBBY: Oh, heck no. Just went on stage.

STAN: And luckily you'd gone through some of that stuff with Bob French when he did that kind of thing purposefully.

BOBBY: Yeah, thank God I had done that kind of training with Bob French because with Mac we didn't rehearse anything. We just went on stage, and he did his thing, and we just took a break when he pointed at us and that was it.

STAN: How many sets was that?

BOBBY: I think we did two sets at Thomas Point and I'm sure we did two at the Record's Festival.

STAN: How long before you went on stage did you get approached to do it?

BOBBY: Oh, it was quick. Herman said, "Would you go up and help me with Mac?"

And I said, "Sure." A similar thing happened at a festival in New Hampshire. I was with North Star at the time, but it was between gigs, so Ted and I had decided to go up to a festival in New Hampshire. Joe Arseneault came up and says this band needs a mandolin player.

And I said, "This is my weekend off. I really don't want to."

He says, "Oh, come over and check them out. Their bus is right here." So I walked over. It was Tim Graves and Cherokee.

STAN: Oh, wow.

BOBBY: Yeah. So I got on the bus with them and then I started jamming. They said, "Yeah, we want you to go up on stage with us." But I did rehearse with them. We played two or three hours before we went up on stage.

And he said, "We'd like you to sit in for the whole weekend with us." So I did. It was kind of neat.

STAN: Besides Monroe, Doyle and Gaudreau, any other mandolin players impress you a lot?

BOBBY: Somebody I'm very impressed with, but I can't grasp his stuff, is Ray Legere. He's phenomenal. There are a lot of good players out there. I mean, Sierra Hull. You watch her – I mean, she's just a monster.

STAN: Didn't you get to play with Raymond Fairchild?

BOBBY: I've been in a jam at Jimmy's house with Raymond and his son Zane. It was never anything official.

STAN: Tell me about the mandolins you've played over the years.

BOBBY: I started out with that one my dad bought me out of the pawn shop, which was an electric Kent mandolin. I never plugged it in, but that's what I started with. I played that for three, four years.

STAN: So did you start playing with Jimmy with that?

BOBBY: Yes, that electric mandolin. And three years later, Bobby Tidwell had Jimmy Gaudreau's old 1923 F4, and Sam ended up with it, and I bought it from Sam. I still have that today. It needs repair. I'm still working on it.

STAN: So in the mid '70s you were playing that?

BOBBY: Yes, and I played that until 1979 when Jimmy finished my Cox F5 that he built me, and I played that until North Star ended, or even a little longer, until I started building instruments myself. My very first instrument was a mandola. I found a builder out in California, Roger Siminoff, that sold plans for them, so I got some plans; and I've done woodworking all my life.

STAN: And your background is in design at Bath Iron Works?

BOBBY: No, it wasn't. At that time, at Bath Ironworks, all I ever did was insulate. I didn't start design work at BIW until 15 years ago.

STAN: So when did you make that first mandola?

BOBBY: In 2008.

STAN: How many instruments have you made since then?

BOBBY: I'm on like number 18, 19 now, something like that. At least 15 mandolins, a tenor banjo, a banjo mandolin. I built a ukelele and three or four mandolas and an octave mandolin.

STAN: And then you got into designing at BIW.

BOBBY: When I was at BIW, I was out with a heart issue and they wouldn't even let me go climb a step ladder. One day they called me up and said, "Would you like to try a desk job? I'd been out of work like eight months." And I said, "Sure." They said, "We need some help in the CAD design area." He said, "This job will probably last a year."

So I went in and I found, Holy moly, I really like this. It's good work. So there was an opening in CAD and I applied and I got in and the rest is history. I retired doing CAD work there, which I really enjoyed.

STAN: I met you at the Salty Dog Festival in Greenville in 1981. Sam Tidwell introduced us. Liz and I had just moved to Maine. We were practicing with Sam, getting ready to play with him. Sam played a set or two with Cheryl Lovely at that festival. You picked some in the field with us and Sam. Who were you there with?

BOBBY: I was there without a band. That was in between bands. I'd gone up with my father-in-law.

STAN: That was a while ago.

BOBBY: It was.

STAN: Fifty years, something like that. Well, I've got a lot of good material here. Thanks so much for doing this.

BOBBY: You're welcome.



A handcrafted mandolin
by Bobby St. Pierre

BAND SPOTLIGHT: BACK WOODS ROAD**Back Woods Road Keeps Bluegrass Alive in Maine***Continued from page 3.***TAYLOR:** *Do you write original material?***RICHARD:** With all the changes the band has gone through, writing always seem to take a back seat. We have two originals which we are bringing back, "Whose Side You're On" and "Lost Trains," and we look forward to Corey's originals coming up.**TAYLOR:** *What have been the highlights for the band since you started?***RICHARD:** We have had several great gigs throughout our tenure: The Thomas Point Bluegrass Festival a few times with a huge crowd on Maine Day; Blistered Fingers Bluegrass Festival, our favorite festival; White's Beach Bluegrass Festival, Brunswick Arts Festival, along with shows at Bath Heritage Days, Wayside Theatre, Maine Garlic Festival and more.

Some real highlights going back to our beginnings are playing on Channel 6's "207" show, and also on Good Morning Maine on Channel 13. We also opened up for Sawyer Brown at the Oxford Fair a few years ago, which was exciting. We love hosting jams and a very memorable moment at TPB was having Chris Jones (DJ Sirius XM) and the Night Drivers come and join our jam. Our biggest and best jams always take place at the Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Festival. We love having people join us and we made very good friends with Nothin' Fancy, who are regular jammers with us.

TAYLOR: *What's in store for the band?***RICHARD:** We would like to record our second CD with the new band members. We are always asked at various venues if we have a new CD. We're working on it. 2026 ushers in many shows and we are looking forward to playing them with Corey Bonnevie joining us. Look for us at Music for Mavis in Turner, Bowdoinham Summer Concert Series, Brunswick Arts Festival, Brunswick Music on the Mall, Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Festival in Litchfield, Maine Garlic Festival in Canaan, Wayside Theatre in Dexter, and Applecrest Orchards in Hampton Falls, N.H.*To find out where Back Woods Road is playing next, follow them on Facebook or check out their website, www.backwoodsroadband.com.***BMAM'S JAM CALENDAR**

BMAM's indoor jams offer a great way to keep meeting up with friends and fellow pickers throughout the winter and early spring. BMAM hosts four jams on a monthly basis: The Eastern Jam in Brewer, the Southern Jam in Yarmouth, the Farmington Jam, and the Aroostook County jam.

The Eastern Jam has wrapped up for the season, but there are still opportunities to jam in Yarmouth, Farmington, and Aroostook County!

For the Farmington and Southern Jams, admission is \$5 for BMAM members and \$7 for non-members. The Aroostook County jam is free, and donations are always appreciated.

FARMINGTON JAMThe Farmington Jam takes place at the Farmington Community Center, 127 Middle St., Farmington. For more info, text Stan Keach at 207-485-0298 or email stankeachbluegrass76@gmail.com**Farmington Jam dates:**

- March 22
- April 26
- May 24 (tentative)

SOUTHERN JAMThe Southern Jam takes place from 1PM-4 PM at the First Parish Congregational Church at 116 Main St., Yarmouth. The venue offers two floors of jamming, with plenty of room for pickers of all abilities. For more information, reach out to BMAM board member Bob Bergesch at rbergesch@gmail.com or 207-831-8908.**Yarmouth Jam dates:**

- April 19

AROOSTOOK COUNTY JAMThe Aroostook County jam is held the second Sunday of the month at the Grand Isle Community Center, 366 Main St., Grand Isle. All ages and skill levels welcome, and all acoustic instruments welcome! For more information, contact Kathy Bestwick at kathybestwick11@gmail.com.**Aroostook Jam dates:**

- April 12
- May 10

*Watch for BMAM updates**on Facebook or at www.mainebluegrass.org.*


JAMS • CELEBRATION • CONCERT

BMAM BIRTHDAY BASH!

1996 30 YEARS 2026
BLUEGRASS MUSIC ASSOCIATION OF MAINE

SATURDAY • APRIL 11, 2026

3:00 PM Jams & Songwriters Circle
5:00 PM Cake & Cheers to 30 Years!
6:00 PM CONCERT

Old Eleven

and the BMAM Board All-Star Band.

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FROM THE BMAM ARCHIVES

This year, we'll be highlighting some notable news, pics and updates from 30 years of the Bluegrass Express newsletter.

1995 - Bluegrass at Morganfield's



“The first Sunday night bluegrass show at Morganfield's in Portland was a wonderful success. Two of Maine's most enjoyable bands, Northstar and the Fogg Brothers, were received with great enthusiasm by the crowd. Each band had an extraordinary sound with a good mix of original and traditional music. It was obvious that no one wanted the evening to end as the Fogg Brothers were cheered back to the stage for their encore. I was delighted to see so many BMAM members supporting the show. Del McCoury will be headlining on November 19th, 1996 and Chesapeake (consisting of some members of Seldom Scene) will be appearing at Morganfield's in December of 1996.”

2016 - BMAM'S Monthly Board Meeting



Clockwise from left to right: Chris Pollack, Bill Umbel, Ren Bernier, Joan Richert, Kathy Scott, George Scott, Walter McGee, Joe Kennedy, Bob Bergesch, Kate Greeley (and Beth Revels behind the camera).

Believe it or not, BMAM's board used to pile into their cars and drive to a central meeting spot every month for the regular BMAM board meeting. These days, those meetings take place over video. Video calls are certainly easier, but we miss the fun of all being in the same room together. This photo is from a 2016 meeting in the back room of Down Home Music in Fairfield.



NEW MEMBERS

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Crystal Farrow | Cass Gilbert |
| Jonathan Reis | Michael Martin |
| Jim Smith | Charles Peters |
| Randy Dondero | Dan Kidd |
| Martin Pelletier | Frank Hartig |
| Sam Wilkinson | Russell Donahue |

MEMBER RENEWALS

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Dan LaPointe | Paul Cameron | Adrian & Veda Lerner |
| Keith & Sandy Hillyard | Joan & Evan Richert | Walter Magee |
| Michael Chung | Richard Jagels | Brian Tarbox |
| David Tripp | Ken & Jane Brooks | Ellen Carlson |
| David Robison | Bill & Elaine Walsh | & Catherine Barrows |
| & Laura Richardson | Don & Angela Glidden | Mic & Lilly Ackley |
| | Jake & Liam Henning | Reginald Petit |



64th Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Music Festival
June 18, 19, 20 & 21, 2026
Litchfield Fairgrounds - Litchfield, Maine

<p>The Gibson Brothers (NY) S Danny Paisley & The Southern Grass (PA) S Caleb Bailey & Paine's Run (VA) T Rock Hearts (RI) S Hemingway Brothers (ME) F</p>	<p>Nothin' Fancy (VA) F, S Alaskan Sunnyside Sisters (FL) F, S Katahdin Valley Boys (ME) F Kevin Prater Band (KY) T, F Blistered Fingers (ME) T Robinson's Gospel (MA) Sun</p>
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Emcee - Sandy Cormier
Sound - Blistered Fingers

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REMEMBERING GABE HIRSHFELD

Gabe Hirshfeld passed away on December 28, 2025. The Boston-based banjo player was just 36, but had already left a huge mark on the bluegrass community with his inventive and creative playing as well as his extraordinary kindness and humor.

Maine's own Eli Gilbert was kind enough to share this remembrance of Gabe.

The first thing Gabe Hirshfeld ever said to me was "This is an Earl Scruggs lick." Then he said "Here's how Don Reno would have played it." Then, "Here's how Ralph Stanley would have played it." He didn't know I was already a fan of his, and I didn't know that we were already becoming friends.

I had watched Gabe perform with the Lonely Heart-string Band and was in awe of his ability to seamlessly combine traditional and progressive banjo styles, almost speaking his own banjo language. I came to learn that his thoughtful, sincere, and at times hilarious playing style was perfectly mirrored in his personality. The years that followed were full of long hours and late nights discussing the banjo, bad movies, and anything else that could make us laugh until it hurt.

Of course, I was just one of many people who were lucky to call Gabe a friend, and it seems that anyone who met him was among that group.

There's no substitute for Gabe's presence in my life but I feel deeply inspired by the memories we shared, and the memories of Gabe shared by others, to try to embody just a fraction of his kindness, generosity, and sense of humor.

- Eli Gilbert

The Boston Bluegrass Union has set up a memorial fund in Gabe's name to support the musical education and development of young banjo players while preserving and advancing the community that defined his life and work. For more information, visit www.bbu.org.

Photos by Tristan Scroggins.





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SCENE IN MAINE

We're taking a swing outside of Maine to celebrate the triumphant return of the Boston Bluegrass Union's Joe Val Festival. The weekend was full of familiar faces, fantastic picking, and stellar stage shows. Maine showed up in a big way and it was wonderful to hang with so many BMAM members throughout the weekend.

What's been going on in your corner of the bluegrass world? Reach out to Bluegrass Express Editor Taylor Smith at tsmith@mainebluegrass.org to share your photos and stories. We'd love to hear from you!



Mainers, unite!



Maine's own White Mountain Ramblers on the Joe Val Showcase Stage.

BMAM board member Shari Elder emceeding the Joe Val Main Stage.



BMAM board member John Roc picking the mandolin with Joe Sings Joe, a tribute to the late, great Joe Val.



BMAM board member Stan Keach with Mac and Herman McGee of White Mountain Bluegrass.



BMAM board member John McCusick and his wife, Sharon.

TEACHER'S CORNER: GET READY TO JAM!

By Ted DeMille

Jamming is a fun and essential component of bluegrass music. You'll want to be able to jam at bluegrass festivals and meetings of your local bluegrass organization. Here are some tips that will put you in the best position to make good use of your jamming opportunities.

Before you Jam: Become familiar with the standard bluegrass chords. G, C, D and A will get you through about 80% of bluegrass vocal and fiddle tunes. Learn Em, Am, and the more complicated Bm and you'll be able to play 92% of the bluegrass repertoire.

Along with these chords it's a good idea to become acquainted with standard bluegrass singing and instrumentals. Knowing songs that will come up at a jam will certainly enhance your participation and enjoyment.

Blue Ridge Cabin Home, Nine Pound Hammer, Long Journey Home, and Will the Circle Be Unbroken are mainstays. Fiddle tunes like Soldier's Joy, Angeline the Baker, Whiskey Before Breakfast, and Salt Creek are almost certain to be called at a jam.

Learn these before you jam and seek out other lists of standard bluegrass tunes to fill out your knowledge. Being able to play these songs at a reasonable tempo and being able to make the chord changes in time will help you stay with the song and provide a good musical structure for the singers and the soloists.

Approaching a Jam: When you approach a jam, be realistic and honest about your playing ability. You want to fit in to the jam you're joining. There's no shame in passing on a jam where you may be over your head.

If you're not sure at first, hang on the outside edge of the jam and listen to the players. Gauge the tempos and the difficulty of the chords and the changes. Also evaluate the people in the jam and the welcoming nature of the group. Review how many of each instrument are participating in the jam. If there are already fourteen guitars—no matter what the level—you may want to wander along.

If the jam appears to be a good fit, make sure your instrument is in tune before you join in. Take a step back and tune up prior to playing your first chord. It's also not a bad idea to ask into a jam. Use your social skills to check if the jam is open or is a band rehearsal masquerading as an open jam. If you are warmly welcomed, it's time to start playing.

During the Jam: Play at a reasonable volume and use respectful dynamics when you're playing. It's respectful to play at a lower volume when a singer is singing. And while you can play guitar louder during a banjo solo, you'll want to cut back when a guitar or a mandolin is soloing so those instruments can be heard and appreciated.

Listen carefully to the song leader's (usually the person who has picked the tune) instructions about solos, harmony singing, and arrangement. If you have any skills in any of those areas and the song leader is open to your participation, by all means volunteer. Be honestly complementary of the songs and playing you hear in the jam and be a supportive member of the jam circle. That way you'll be invited to many more jams and be able to meet and enjoy the company and music of the friendly and talented bluegrass community.

Ted DeMille is a celebrated songwriter whose songs have been recorded by artists such as Rock Hearts, The LaClaires, Night Flyer, and The Rigney's. A career educator, Ted spent more than 20 years as an elementary school teacher and authored books and articles about educational theory. More recently, Ted has combined his musical and educational expertise as a teaching artist at 317 Main Community Music Center in Yarmouth. He's played in notable bands such as North Star, Magic 8 Ball, Old Eleven, and Captain Geech & the Shrimp Shack Shooters.



THE KATAHDIN VALLEY BOYS TAKE A FAREWELL BOW



Pictured from l.- r.: Dan Simons, Jeff Folger, Steve Bixby, Ken Brooks

After 28 years, the Katahdin Valley Boys are drawing the curtain on a fantastic run as one of Maine's best and most enduring bluegrass bands. The group has gone through a number of personnel changes over the years, but the latest lineup has been a steady presence for a decade. Today, the band features original member Jeff Folger on banjo, Ken Brooks on guitar, Steve Bixby on bass, and Dan Simons on mandolin.

Meanwhile, Ken Brooks also announced that after 61 years of performing, he's retiring from the road. He's playing the final slate of shows in 2026 with his wife, Jane Brooks. The duo has been a fan favorite for more than two decades.

You'll have plenty of chances to catch the Katahdin Valley Boys this year, including at BMAM's 30th Birthday Bash on April 11 at 317 Main Community Music Center in Yarmouth, as well as at both the June and August Blistered Fingers Family Bluegrass Festivals.

Check them out on Facebook to see what else they've got in store for 2026. And also stay tuned for a deeper dive into the band's history in a future issue of the Bluegrass Express!

THE GRASS IS BLUE AT THE MAINE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME

There are a lot of bluegrass names in the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame. Below is a list of inductees representing Maine's bluegrass community:

1980	Al Hawkes	2014	Joe & Nellie Kennedy
1984	Fred Pike		
1993	Smokey Val	2018	Brian Gelina
1997	Tim Farrell	2019	Stan Keach
1997	Mac McHale	2019	Jane Brooks
2000	Jimmy Cox	2020	Greg & Sandy
2004	Banjo Bill Anketell		Cormier
2008	Bob & Grace French	2020	Pati Crooker
		2021	Phil & Ellie
2009	Dave Dalton		LaClaire
2012	Perley Curtis	2023	Dotty Farrell
2012	Ken Brooks	2024	Bill Thibodeau
2013	Dick Pelletier	2025	Jeff Budge
2013	Sam Tidwell	2025	Bill Smith

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**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 Bluegrass 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 a 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.

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Please email any news, photos, article information, or anything you find pertaining to bluegrass in Maine to tsmith@mainebluegrass.com or mail to this address:

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