

POPULAR MUSIC AND CULTURE COLLECTION

Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library



GEORGIA OLD-TIME FIDDLERS CONVENTIONS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 2013

12:00 NOON TO 5:00 P.M.

DAHLBERG HALL LOCATED AT
30 COURTLAND ST. SE ON THE
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS
IN DOWNTOWN ATLANTA, GA.

Georgia State University proudly provides a home for the Popular Music and Culture Collection. A significant portion of this collection includes materials related to early country, bluegrass and Southern gospel music in Atlanta. Collections are comprised of primary resources such as sheet music, photographs, handbills, sound recordings, scrapbooks, correspondence, news clippings, and oral history interviews. For additional information about the Popular Music and Culture Collection, please contact:

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Popular Music and Culture Collection
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GEORGIA
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL





ABOUT GEORGIA'S OLD★TIME FIDDLERS CONVENTIONS

Among out-of-towners arriving in Atlanta on Tuesday, April 1, 1913, were dozens of rural residents bringing with them fiddles, banjos and guitars. Their mission was to play those instruments at the fiddlers' gatherings scheduled for that night and the two following nights at the Atlanta Auditorium-Armory located at the corner of Courtland and Gilmer Streets. Soon to be known as the Atlanta City Auditorium, the building, minus the auditorium, is now owned by Georgia State University and has been renamed Dahlberg Hall. Some of the out-of-towners had dreams of winning prizes for their efforts. The event to which they were headed was the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Convention. The winner of the Thursday night fiddlers' contest would return home bearing the title of Georgia State Fiddle Champion of 1913.

Most of the musicians performing at the 1913 convention, like the majority attending future conventions, were from the northern half of Georgia. Wherever they were from, the tunes they played had been handed down from generation to generation and learned by ear. Among the tunes played that Tuesday night were "Polly Put the Kettle On," by Wiley Harper from Monroe; "Hop Light, Ladies," by J. D. Crenshaw from Covington; "Arkansas Traveler" by John Block from Lawrenceville; and "Swanee River" by Fiddlin' John Carson from Cabbage Town on the outskirts of Atlanta. Following the Tuesday night fiddlers' contest, a square dance was held in Taft Hall. Now known as Veterans Memorial Hall, it is the location of today's event. Before leaving Atlanta that week in 1913, a group of about forty fiddlers met to establish a permanent organization called the Georgia Fiddlers' Association. Members of the new organization agreed to thereafter promote an annual fiddlers' convention to be held in Atlanta. The organizers succeeded in achieving their goal for the next twenty-two years. Their last convention took place in 1935, during the middle of the Great Depression.

Thank you for joining Georgia State University in celebrating the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers' Association and the annual Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers' Conventions that followed under the Association's auspices. These events played an important role in the evolution of a musical genre that is now known as country music. The University's Special Collections and Archives is pleased to host today's event. The Special Collections and Archives houses the Wayne W. Daniel Collection and numerous artists' collections that contain photographs, oral histories, audio and video recordings, books, sheet music, and other memorabilia pertaining to the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers' Conventions and early country music. Recognition of the artists and events from this era and genre of popular music continues Georgia State University's educational outreach to the academic community, specialists, and the general public.

Coordinators:

Kevin S. Fleming and Wayne W. Daniel

This project is supported by the Georgia Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities and through appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly.

Additional support was made possible through the Wayne Daniel Endowment and the Georgia Music Foundation.

SCHEDULE

THE GEORGIA CRACKERS

Music performance

DR. WAYNE W. DANIEL, GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

“The Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Conventions Revisited”

This presentation provides the listener with a basic historical background for the understanding of the nature, and the impact on the South and the nation, of the annual Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Conventions held in Atlanta from 1913 to 1935. The presenter describes a typical example of the conventions, and highlights some of the atypical activities that took place during many of the fiddlers’ gatherings. The listener becomes acquainted with how the conventions played an important role in the evolution of the musical genre that is now called country. The presenter speaks of the careers of some of the conventions’ performers who, as successful radio and recording artists, are now heralded as pioneers in this fledgling phase of country music. Presentation guest Barbara Panter-Connah, a local fiddler, discusses how the convention contestants, who originally were all males, bowed to the dismantling of the gender barrier that had so long prevailed. The result was the two-time crowning of a female Georgia Old-Time Fiddle Champion.

KEVIN FONTENOT, TULANE UNIVERSITY

“More Fiddles, Less Whiskey:
Fiddlers, Conventions, and the Search for Respectability”

During the first decades of the twentieth century, fiddlers across the United States banded together in organizations designed reform the images of fiddling and fiddlers. This paper will examine the role played by leading fiddlers in this process, with emphasis on the activities of Confederate veterans and their associated organizations. Comparisons will be made with fiddle associations in various areas of the country and the impact of the organizations on the development of professional country music. Highlighted will be the activities of Henry C. Gilliland, the Texas fiddler who helped hone the culture of fiddle contests and cut the first country recording with Eck Robertson in 1922.

Music historians have cited the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers’ Conventions as one of the places where country music had its beginning. Several of the conventions’ contestants and winners became famous during the early years of country music. The genre was known widely at the time as hillbilly music. Among those who became famous was Fiddlin’ John Carson, who made his broadcasting debut on Atlanta’s new radio station, WSB, in 1922. He made his first recording in 1923 here in Atlanta and went on to record prolifically for the next eleven years. His radio and recording successes made him a household name among hillbilly/country music enthusiasts nationwide. Another winner, Gid Tanner, who recorded with his band, the Skillet Lickers, from 1924 to 1941, is considered by country music scholars as one of the most popular and influential early hillbilly string bands. Riley Puckett, who played banjo and sang at the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers’ Conventions, was best known for his widely emulated guitar playing on more than 200 of Tanner’s Skillet Lickers records. Today, we celebrate the success of these historic events and the talented and ambitious artists who, partly because of the conventions, achieved local and nationwide popularity and an enduring influence.

1913 GEORGIA FIDDLERS’ ASSOCIATION

Officers	Executive Committee	Constitution and By-laws Committee
Timsey Warren, President	R.M. Stanley, Chairman	J.T. Holland, Chairman
A.V. Poole, First Vice President	John Bloch	T.J. Low
P.A. Ludwig, Second Vice President	R.M. Simonton	C.C. Moon
H.J. Weaver, Secretary	E.S. Cown	M.Y. Robinson
	John M. Carlton	H.J. Weaver

BREAK

STEVE GOODSON, UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

“‘South of the North, North of the South’: Entertainment in Early Twentieth-Century Atlanta”

This presentation will provide an overview of the developments in commercial entertainment in Atlanta during the period of the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Conventions and of the conflicts that developed as the city transitioned from a small-town past to a big-city future.

JAMES AKENSON, TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

“The Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Convention: Teaching Materials and Strategies”

This presentation provides examples of teaching strategies and supporting materials designed to engage, involve students with a variety of content in history, geography, economics, reading, literature, and language arts. National music and Common Core standards will be referenced as well as state standards. Strategies will be consistent with teaching models designed to maximize student engagement with factual information as well as higher order thinking skills.

BREAK

DEMONSTRATION OF AN OLD-TIME FIDDLERS’ CONTEST

Mickey Nelligan
Barbara Panter-Connah
Jerry Burke

THE SKILLET LICKERS

Music performance

SPEAKER BIOS

Wayne W. Daniel, retired Georgia State University professor, is author of *Pickin’ on Peachtree, A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia*, published by the University of Illinois Press. His more than 200 articles about country, bluegrass, and Southern gospel music have been published in scholarly journals and popular magazines. He has given numerous presentations on these subjects at meetings of such organizations as the Tennessee Folklore Society, the International Folk Alliance, Coastal Georgia Historical Society, the Nashville Old-Time String Band Association, and the annual International Country Music Conference held at Belmont University in Nashville.

Barbara Panter-Connah is a member of the band Hair of the Dog and part of the Appalachian trio The Rosin Sisters. Barbara carries on the Georgia tradition of her Fannin County grandfather, whose fiddle and tunes she inherited. Her later mentors include 1930’s Georgia champion Anita Sorrells Wheeler, and the great Cajun fiddler Dewey Balfa, a National Heritage Fellow. Barbara and her husband, Whit, were named “Folk Legends” by the North Georgia Folk Festival, scored and performed the music for the award winning play, “Loup Garou” out of New Orleans, and recently appeared with renowned Georgia musician, Michael Daves, at the Rockwood Music Hall in NYC.

Kevin S. Fontenot teaches history at Tulane University’s School of Continuing Studies. He has coedited (with Ryan Brasseaux) *Accordions Fiddles Two Step and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*, and is coeditor with Patrick Huber on the forthcoming *North of the Ohio: Northern Fiddlers and Stringbands of the 1920s*. Fontenot has published widely, including articles on Cajun music, Governor Jimmie Davis, Cleoma Breaux Falcon, Henry Gilliland, and Leo Soileau. Tulane’s School of Continuing Studies awarded him the John Dyer Award for Excellence in Teaching. He regularly presents papers at the Louisiana Historical Association and the International Country Music Conference.

Steve Goodson was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and grew up in nearby Prattville. He received his B.A. in History from Auburn University at Montgomery in 1988, and earned his Ph.D in History in from Emory University 1995. He then joined the faculty at the University of West Georgia, in Carrollton, where he is now a full professor and department chair. His book *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-*

1930, published by the University of Georgia Press, won the Georgia Historical Society's Bell Award as the best book on Georgia History published in 2002. He is also co-editor of *The Hank Williams Reader*, which is in the final stages of revision for the Oxford University Press.

James E. Akenson is Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Tennessee Technological University. He uses roots oriented music in his teaching methods courses for elementary and for secondary social studies. Akenson also teaches a graduate course for teachers on how to integrate country music into the K-12 curriculum. He has been active in the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies as President, Executive Director, and as Board of Directors member. Akenson is Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the International Country Music Conference. He has also served as President of the Tennessee Folklore Society. He is in the public schools on a regular basis where he supervises practicum students and often teaches lessons ranging from grades 1 to 12---usually taking southern roots music and linking it to the topics required by state standards. In 2002, Akenson taught country music oriented lessons in five different schools in Gympie, Queensland, Australia as well as delivered the keynote for the Australian Country Music Conference.

PERFORMER BIOS

The Skillet Lickers name is synonymous with old-time string band music in Georgia. This band from Dacula, GA is familiar to historians and folk music fans across the world. The Skillet Lickers can trace their heritage back to 1924, when the band made Columbia Records' first "hillbilly" record. The group now consists of the 3rd and 4th generation Skillet Lickers including Gid's grandson, Phil Tanner, and great-grandson, Russ Tanner, who still carry on the tradition today, nearly a century later.

The Georgia Crackers are one of the finest new old-time string bands going. The group faithfully re-creates the vintage sound of the 1920's "hillbilly" sting bands, while keeping alive the spirit of spontaneity and improvisation. The group includes Kenneth Johnson on guitar, Chip Corbitt on clawhammer banjo and Mick Kinney on fiddle. The Georgia Crackers reach back for that old-time feel and surge forward in a rush so entertaining it's mesmerizing.

GEORGIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

The Georgia Humanities Council is a statewide nonprofit organization working to ensure that humanities and culture remain an integral part of the lives of all Georgians. Their goal is to help Georgians understand the history, stories, ideas and traditions that inform our lives, so we can understand our past in relation to our present. They aim to strengthen Georgia's cultural institutions through local and statewide partnerships in order to develop more educated and self-sustaining local communities. They also help foster a sense of pride of place that highlights the value inherent in the local history and culture of Georgia's communities.

They conduct several programs to accomplish their mission. Including:

- Grant Program
- New Georgia Encyclopedia
- History Day in Georgia
- Governor's Awards in the Humanities
- Civic Reflection
- Museum on Main Street
- Partnership initiatives such as the Prime Time Family Reading Program, the Georgia Literary Festival, the Sesquicentennial of the Georgia Civil War
- Publication partnership with the University of Georgia Press. Recent works include: *Democracy Restored: A History of the Georgia State Capitol*, *Georgia Odyssey*, *New Georgia Encyclopedia Companion to Georgia Literature*.

Visit them online for more information at <http://www.georgiahumanities.org>



NOTES

The Georgia Music Foundation was organized as a not-for-profit corporation in 1994 to foster an appreciation for the state's rich music heritage through programs of collection, preservation, education and outreach.

In its first decade, the Georgia Music Foundation worked exclusively with the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in Macon to cultivate the museum's permanent collection of artifacts and media. In 2007, the Foundation acquired and began publishing Georgia Music, a quarterly magazine dedicated to celebrating the state's legends, landmarks and unsung heroes. Now nearing its third decade, the Georgia Music Foundation is forging new partnerships and initiatives that fulfill its mission goals of collection, preservation and education while expanding outreach to include the promotion of music as a key sector of Georgia's growing creative economy.

Through its support of programs that preserve the past and provide learning opportunities in the present, the Georgia Music Foundation imagines a future where music generates even greater cultural, educational and economic benefits throughout the state of Georgia.

Visit them online for more information at <http://georgiamusicmag.com/>