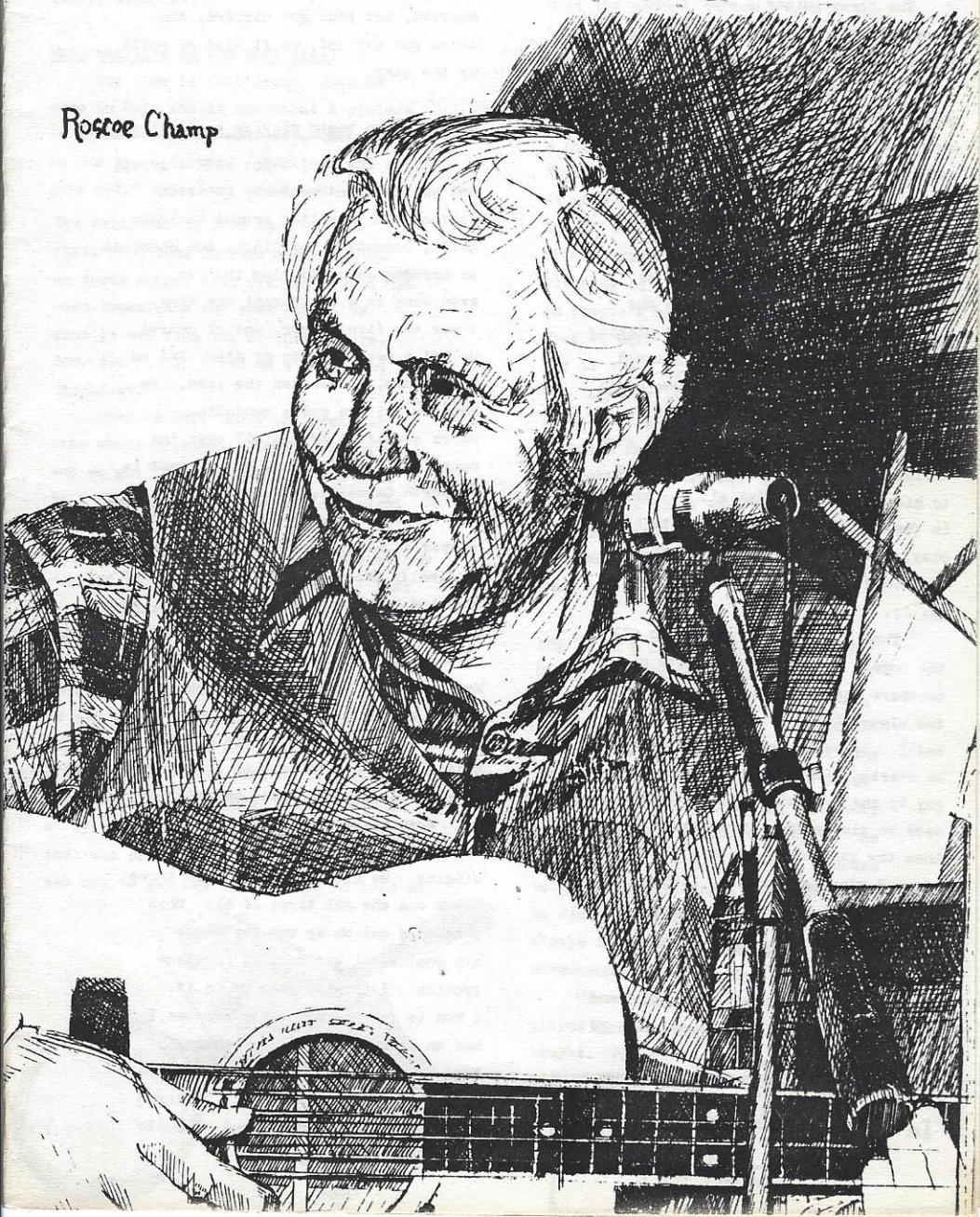


QUARTER NOTES

Folk music in Brookfield along the Old Plank Road Spring 85 V. 3 no. 2

Roscoe Champ



An Interview with... Roscoe Champ

by: Ron Simpson

How did you first come to take up music?

The first guitar I ever tried to play was my brother's. He was going with a girl in Portsmouth, Ohio. He played the guitar pretty well, and he brought this guitar home with him from Portsmouth. It was a little Stella guitar, a real small thing. So, he was playing around with it, and one day when he went to the store or something, I picked it up. My mother showed me a G chord, then C and D because she knew some music. So, I started playing around with the thing, and I learned it pretty good. Then a neighbor moved in across the way over there - a fellow named Robert Seals who was a real good musician. Then I started going over to his place along with all the kids in the neighborhood to listen to him play. That gave me a good start, and he showed me a lot of stuff on the guitar.

Then I started singing with all the boys. There was three sets of brothers there; the Shelton brothers, the Wimmer brothers, and my Brother and I. So we formed a brother sextet. We started singing and playing, and a guy by the name of Paul Wimmer that used to play with us progressed faster than the rest of us at that time. He started playing mandolin, fiddle, and, of course, guitar. So he was kind of the leader of the gang. We used to go around over the hills there, build up a big bon fire, and sit around and sing and play 'til we got so we could make pretty good music.

thought for the issue:

"In dreams begin responsibilities"

- Delmore Schwartz

Then the war came along, and Paul Wimmer went in the Marines and I joined the Air Force. One of the Shelton boys went in the service too during World War II. He became a hero over there - took his guitar with him. They had a big write-up about him in Look magazine and Life magazine.

When we all got back, we didn't start playing much because I got married, and Paul got married, and Jesse got married, so it kind of split up the gang.

When did you begin playing professionally?

After the war, I got with a group, and we travelled probably in seven states. We travelled around to lodge halls, community buildings, and churches or ~~anything~~ we could sing in. We even sung in a restaurant one time. I was the first tenor, and of course we had a second tenor or alto, and we had a bass, and we had the lead. We had two guitars and a mandolin. We're scattered around all over the country now. I'm here, one of them is in North Carolina, one in Virginia, and the other one is in Ohio. We stayed together for seven years, and we finally broke up. They decided that they had had enough running around. We wore out two Ford cars running around for seven years. One of the guys was a painter. We'd sing and he'd paint. He was the lead singer also. He was offered good money to paint in New York, but he decided he'd rather be with us. He liked to travel and sing and paint and play.

When we broke up, my wife and I had a radio program, and we started singing. We did that for two or three years and she got tired of it. Then I started out on my own for about six months. I was working in electronics. I finally gave up on it. I had to get up real early because I had an early show. I was working long hours at that time, so I just decided to give up on it too. I stayed with electronics and got out of music for a long time.

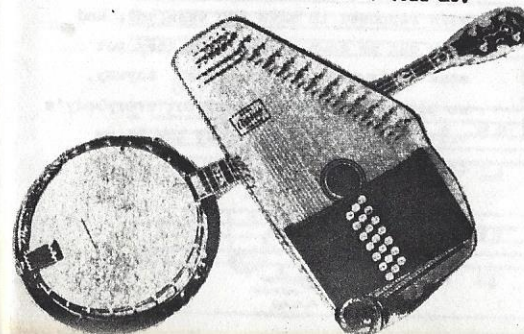
When I moved to Illinois, I finally got back into it again. I started going over to the Old Quarter, and over to the Two Way Street. I started going to the Jones' first, though. I took a few lessons from Tom Jones on the banjo. I really met what I think is one of the nicest bunch of guys I ever worked with or played with. I really enjoy it.

What was life on the road like?

One time in that group, when we were in Ohio and it was about 4 o'clock in the morning, we went into this diner in our stage clothes. "What do you guys do?," this lady asked. We told her.

She said, "Well, I'll tell you what. You come in here and sing two or three songs, I'll fix you one of the best breakfasts you ever had." We went in and sang two or three songs. Boy, she really fixed us a real good breakfast.

Then we left there and took our time about driving. I drove one time and we got into Indianapolis and came to a star type intersection like eight corners in Brookfield. I missed the road, and got on a street down there that ran off the the railroad station. That was also early - we were always sleepy. We'd finish a job then take off to go someplace else. I asked a man how to get out of there, and he told me. He was gathering up newspapers, the Indianapolis Star. When he turned around I saw a sign on the back of his coat that said, "I am blind. Please support me by buying my papers." Well, I thought that was pretty good - I asked a blind man how to get out of town and he told me.



2

So, we went back up and I hit the star again and got the right road. We were headed for Portsmouth, Ohio. We played our job, then we went home for a day or two. Then we started out again and ended up in Virginia someplace. We were just going all the time. We travelled to Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Maryland, all over the place. It was a lot of fun - I was young. I was only 24 years old when we started out. I stayed in it till I was 31. We did pretty good at it. Sometimes we'd make a hundred dollars a night which wasn't bad money back then. That was an enjoyable time and it gave me a chance to see a little bit of the country. I always liked to travel around. The only bad part was sleeping in hotels. Sometimes we stayed in people's homes depending on the job that we were doing. That's about the way it was.

Another time, we were going home from a little town called Taswell. We hit a daggone cow in the middle of the road. We were out there in cattle country. I don't know what ever became of that. The man who owned the car had insurance. I guess he took care of it.

Was there a lot of music around the house when you were growing up?

My brother who had that guitar, (by the way, he eventually married that girl in Portsmouth, Ohio), could play a guitar real well. You know, three people can catch a 'c' chord, and every one of them will sound different. He had that knack about him that sounded better than anything I ever heard. He did a terrific job and everybody was always after him to play. He played the harmonica with it.

Of course, all of our music was played by ear. That's the way we were taught. My mother played reed instruments, and my dad picked a five string banjo clawhammer style. My mother

cover art by Dave Martin

played accordian, concertina, harmonica, and jew's harp. She even played a comb. You put a piece of paper across a comb and play that. Everybody played by ear, and that was a way of life there, back in West Virginia. Back then you had to live in a large city to see anything close to what you have today. We lived about six miles out of town, so we just played music all the time.

I used to play occasionally with a guy named Marvin Billings. He was a good musician too. All the neighborhood boys and girls would go on hayrides and sleigh rides. Old Marvin and I were the hit of the gang 'cause we'd play music for them all. That was really fun. We used to have a big time.

Who are some of the other people you've played with?

I had one experience where I played with a real folk music person. I was at the Appalachian Folk Festival in a little place called Pipestem. They have a big park there now, and a golf course and the whole thing. Heddy West was one of the performers, and she was playing a dulcimer. She wanted to know if there was a guitar player out there. Well, I hadn't played a guitar in years, but I got up there and played with her. I did alright, but I hadn't played a guitar in twenty years. We did some good stuff. She was playing some of the old songs that I knew, so we really made out okay on the thing. That was really a joy to play with Heddy West.

Who were some of your early musical influences?

During my earlier years of music, I was influenced by the Carter Family, and by Jimmie Rodgers, Carson J. Robinson, Riley Puckett, and some of the early musicians. My aunt worked in a shirt factory, and she had one of those old RCA crank victrolas. The thing really played good and sounded good back then. She would buy those 78 records of all the people like the Delmore Brothers. She bought one a week. I used to go over



there on Saturday and Sunday and listen to them. We used to have a big old radio that got the Grand Ol' Opry. It had a big battery. That's before we got electricity out there. That was another thing that influenced me to keep up my music at an early age. Especially the Carter Family. I still have some of their records that I play. Of course, they're reissues from back in the late 20's and early 30's. I still play them and enjoy them, and my mind goes back to the time I started out playing music. They were a great influence on me. Not only me, but other people too.

How many instruments do you play?

I started out the guitar, then I went with the mandolin because my brother and I used to play a lot of guitar/mandolin songs. In fact, Paul Klonowski, a friend of mine at the Old Quarter, has the mandolin that I had, and Don Buedel has the old Gibson guitar that I had. My brother and I used to play those things. Then I started foolin' with the banjo, taking lessons from Tom Jones. Then I decided to try the autoharp. I took lessons on the autoharp from Ann Hills up in Evanston at Hog Eye Music. That was pretty easy to learn. I play the guitar and autoharp now more than I do any other instruments. I've been away from the banjo for quite a while, so I'm trying to learn it again.

What have you been doing recently?

I had a real experience last Sunday. Don Buedel and I went up to the "Flea Market" radio show to play. We were supposed to have two sessions, and they cut us down to one, and they put some Hollywood star on there. Anyway, we played the ten minutes, but everybody's writing them a letter about the thing to find out why we got cut down to ten minutes.



West Fork Gals

for mandolin

arr. by: Don Buedel

I have heard this tune many times, but was never able to remember it long enough to work it out. Dave Landreth was nice enough to play it on his banjo for me and I captured it on tape. From there I worked it out on the mandolin.

A lot of it is based around the double stop for D at the 4th fret, 3rd string, and 5th fret, 2nd string using the 2nd and 3rd fingers respectively. You can also use the double stop for G at the 2nd string 2nd fret and 1st string 3rd fret in the 2nd measure- A part, only here use your 1st and 2nd fingers (or someone else's, if they'll loan 'em to ya).

This tune is a real Barbie doll, so dress it up any way you' like.

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Jim Brewer: Chicago Legend

by: Peter Steinberg

(re-printed with permission from Come for to Sing! magazine, Spring '76, vol. 2 no. 2, pg. 19)

Chicago bluesman Jim Brewer was born in Brookhaven, Mississippi in October, 1920. His father was a musician, and while Jim was still quite young his father taught him the basics of playing guitar. Beyond these basics, Jim largely taught himself. He says that his father knew that he would have a hard time making a living at any job because he had very poor eyesight; if he could play the guitar, at least, he could make music on the streets wherever his travels took him. Jim also learned a little piano, but his father stressed guitar; he said, "You can always carry your guitar with you, but you'll never know where you'll find a piano."

Jim's mother was very religious and wouldn't allow him to play any blues when he was young—only religious music. He learned the blues from his father, who told him that the blues was what people would pay him to hear.

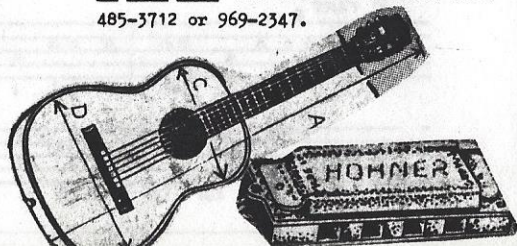
Jim's family moved to Chicago in 1939. It was at his point that, at age 19, he started to devote his energies to the blues. He got a lot of his material from old records of famous bluesmen, but a major source of material were the Chicago and St. Louis bluesmen he knew and played music with. Big Bill Broonzy was among the many artists that influenced Jim. Jim started playing blues

in the Chicago streets in 1940, mostly on 43rd and 47th streets on the south side. In 1950, he got the urge to travel and moved to St. Louis, but he returned to Chicago a few years later to make it his permanent home.

Jim plays spirituals, boogies, and many styles of blues, but most of his work is in the country and Mississippi Delta blues idiom. His music is old time, acoustic blues from the area he grew up in, not the electrified blues most people are familiar with today. His hands are incredibly strong and shaped to the old Martin guitar that he plays, and when his fingers start moving on the strings, the notes come flying fast and smooth. It is amazing how much sound he can pull out of his guitar when he plays one of his boogies; when he sings, the guitar and his voice blend to produce a fine, unique traditional blues sound.

Jim starts his performances with his theme song "I'll Fly Away," an old spiritual that he has arranged to suit his own musical style. The religious influence from his youth is still present in his performances—sometimes he'll pause in the middle of a set, look up, and say, "Now I think I'll do a few religious numbers." He may play spirituals for five to twenty minutes, but at some point he'll stop again, look up, and say, "I think I'll play some boogie." Then he's off, fingers flying fast and light. Mostly, though, it's "Let's play the blues"—and for forty minutes an amazing collection of country and delta blues numbers spills out into the crowd.

Jim has written a few blues numbers and boogies, but most of his repertoire is traditional. His playing reflects the work of Broonzy, Tommy Johnson, and other great bluesmen, but he doesn't copy anyone else. Over the decades he has been playing, Jim Brewer has developed his own inimitable style. Chicago's Jim Brewer will appear at the Old Quarter Coffeehouse on April 6th, at 8:00 p.m. For more information call 485-3712 or 969-2347.



Up and Down the Old Plank Road

by: Richard Geiger

Well, the Plank Road Folk Music Society has been formed. Some of you who weren't here from the beginning may be wondering about our name. Just what is this Plank Road anyway?

Well, before Ogden Avenue became Ogden Avenue, it was known as the Old Plank Road, and before it was the Old Plank Road it was the Southwest Plank Road. It connected Chicago with Lawton's trading post in Riverside, crossing the "nine mile swamp." From there it proceeded southwest to Brush Hill through Pierce Downers settlement to Napers settlement.

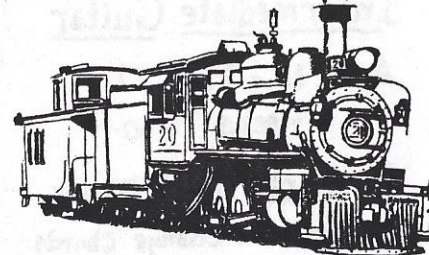
The Plank Road then was a great connecting link between villages and settlements from Riverside to Naperville and on to Plainfield. Many of us felt that it was therefore appropriate to name our society for the Plank Road since our members hail from towns from Riverside to Naperville, and it would stand for and signify to some extent what we all have in common.

More than just a connecting and unifying symbol, though, I think it recalls some of the history and tradition of this area in the same way that much of the music we do springs forth from and reminds us of our past.

I don't want to get too philosophical here, but I did want to set the scene and explain our reason for coming up with our name. In future columns, I will be talking about the history of the Plank Road and the towns through which it passes. I hope that these pieces will be enjoyable and informative. They also might give someone a little motivation to research some of the songs popular in this area in those early times, or possibly even write some new ones.

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Record Review

"By Heart" by Bryan Bowers

Flying Fish ff 313

I begin this review by saying I don't believe in record reviews because one person's musical taste is as valid as the next person's. I suppose that's why I had no qualms about buying this album despite a rather negative review in a recent issue of Prets magazine. Reviewer Jim Hatlo's main complaint was that everything seemed much too slow. I feel Mr. Bowers' rendition of "Hot Buttered Rum" gives the listener a chance to savor both the melody and lyrics in much the same way that a hot meal has more flavor than cold leftovers. "Dog" is a humorous look at life with a four legged family member which I'm sure many of us can relate to. It's true that "I'll Fly Away" is perhaps the slowest version of that song ever pressed in vinyl, but in the hands of Bryan Bowers it proves most enjoyable. I must confess to a silent groan when I read the title "Zen Gospel Singing," expecting something weird and off-the-wall. It turns out that this totally hilarious lament of a Baptist-raised convert to Zen is one of my favorites containing some of the finest four part harmony ever tongued (in cheek). "Black Heart" has a very powerful, albeit negative lyric, reminiscent of a thousand one-night gigs in a thousand third-rate dives. It has some fine dobro playing by Mike Auldridge, and slow seems the best way to go with this one. While listening to Mr. Bowers' version of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," I can't help but think that man has taken the autoharp to its fullest potential. At any rate, it certainly gives us parlor pickers a level of excellence to work toward. The other songs on the album are of the same high caliber, and all are tastefully arranged. No, this record

isn't a non-stop toe tapper. I'd recommend it for those relaxing evenings spent in a more reflective mood - but then I don't believe in record reviews.

—Ron Simpson

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Instrument Care

by Ken Tobias



"Why does this guitar cost so much more than that one, they look the same..." No day passes at Tobias Music without that question arising. Let's take a look at the various construction costs that effect a guitar's price. Since each player has his or her personal preferences in sound and feel, we'll only discuss manufacturing cost differences in these short paragraphs.

Like any consumer product, guitar costs are subject to two variables: time and materials. The more labor costs involved and the more costly the woods, the more expensive the instrument. Since labor costs vary considerably throughout the world, they represent the biggest single factor in determining instrument prices. In ascending order of labor cost we have Mainland China, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and U.S.A. In evaluating guitar quality, we have to be careful not to make quick judgements based on country of origin. A Korean or Taiwanese guitar might be inexpensive but not necessarily cheaply made. There are many excellent oriental craftsmen who have studied their art for ten or twenty years. Some makers like Yairi, Yamaha, and Suzuki have been in business for thirty to fifty years and produce extremely fine instruments that compare favorably with any on the market.

The second variable that effects guitar prices is material cost. In order to be pleasing to look at and to produce good tones, a guitar will be constructed of expensive and sometimes rare woods. A guitar craftsman has different requirements than the home builder. The home handyman can often make allowances for imperfections in a piece of wood. These imperfections can be hidden under a cushion or a pile of books, while the guitar maker must have clear woods with few or

no flaws. For a guitar back, he needs a near-perfect piece about two feet long by nine inches. Even the most common woods like mahogany come dearly when they are flawless. In order to reduce costs to the customer, fine woods are often laminated over less perfect pieces. Less expensive guitars utilize more laminated woods in their construction. In ascending order of price are all laminated guitars, partially laminated guitars with solid tops, and finally, the most expensive are all solid wood guitars. Again, we have to use care that we don't totally downgrade less expensive instruments because of laminated parts. An all-laminated guitar will be reasonable in cost, good looking, strong, and can give the player years of enjoyment. Some very fine guitar makers use laminated woods to reduce the final cost to the customer. Mr. Yairi laminates the sides and backs of his guitars and Mr. Ramirez from Spain laminates some parts of his world-famous classical guitars.

The final choice when purchasing and instrument can only be made by the player. That choice will be very personal and he or she will consider sound, feel, and budget. Your budget should be the first consideration followed by an analysis of your preferences in sound, shape, feel, and looks. Take your time, shop around, and try to be open minded toward all of the available products.



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ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE

- Friday March 22 **THURSDAY'S CHILD** -- Illness forced postponement of their appearance last month, but we were luckily able to reschedule this popular, up-beat trio. Their music ranges from traditional folk and bluegrass tunes to songs by John Prine and the Eagles. Vocals with guitars.
- Friday March 29 **MIDNIGHT JUBILEE BLUEGRASS BAND** -- Always a big hit, this group will entertain you with banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar, bass and more. Excellent foot-stompin' and hand clappin' bluegrass fun!
- Friday April 5 **MARVIN LENSINK** -- An excellent folk and blues performer, Marv plays and sings originals and standards (and some not-so-standard!) He's a great guitarist, and a favorite at our open mikes and at the Old Quarter.
- Friday April 12 **MICHAEL OFFUTT** -- Mike's thoughtful and sensitive style is thoroughly entertaining and has made him one of our favorites. His songs, with guitar and banjo, are melodic, topical and fun. He's also a great story teller. You'll want to sing along!
- Friday April 19 **** OPEN MIKE **** Another of our sessions where anyone is welcome to perform, and we always have a great variety of excellent performers. If you would like to try our stage on for size, sign up on our bulletin board, call Dave (968-5526), or just show up on the 25th. But come early! Music starts at 8:00.
- Friday April 26 **MARK DVORAK** -- A joint concert with Fred Holstein in March illustrates Mark's widespread popularity. His easy-going style and skillful guitar and banjo playing are a real treat. He sings and plays traditional and contemporary folksongs and singalongs.
- Friday May 3 **CHARLIE LEWIS** -- Presenting contemporary folk-style songs from his collection which are unique and thought-provoking, Charlie says: "I sing for my own enjoyment and for the enjoyment of my friends." You'll enjoy his songs with 12-string guitar and banjo.
- Friday May 10 **PAUL KLONOWSKI** -- Paul is one of our favorite performers of traditional folk music. A featured performer at our Heritage Fest Concert last summer, he accompanies his songs with guitar and banjo. A great show!
- Friday May 17 **STEVE BUDDE & JIM DEWAN** -- This talented duo performs a wide range of traditional folk music including Irish, bluegrass, old-time and fiddle tunes. With mandolin, fiddle and guitar. Don't miss!
- Friday May 24 **RON SIMPSON & ROSCOE CHAMP** -- Great folk and old-time music performed by two of the best! Outstanding guitar and autoharp playing will make this evening one you'll remember.

The Two Way Street Coffee House is a not-for-profit community project of the First Congregational Church of Downers Grove. Doors open at 8:00 PM, and refreshments are available. A \$1.00 donation is requested at the door.



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- April 6 The Old Quarter proudly presents an evening of living history with two of the last acoustic blues guitarists in Chicago; JIM BREWER and DAVID HONEYBOY EDWARDS accompanied by MICHAEL FRANK on harmonica. Join us for a show filled with blues, gospel, old spirituals and stories. Admission is \$3 for this very special night.
- April 27 **BARNDANCE** The Plank Road Folk Music Society and the Brookfield Kiwanis Club are combining their efforts and talents to benefit the Brookfield food pantries and the Plank Road Folk Music Society. Dancers will be on hand to take you through the steps and music will be provided by our ever popular All-Star Volunteer Band. Beer and wine will be available. Admission is \$2 and a can of food. **NOTICE:** This event will be held in the Windemere Rm. of St. Barbara's on the northwest corner of Prairie and Windemere in Brookfield.
- May 4 **ANDREW CALHOUN** returns to The Old Quarter with songs from his albums, "The Gates of Love" and "Water Street". Andrew is one of the most acclaimed songwriters in the country today. Our own PAUL KLONOWSKI will open the show with his song bag of folk and old-time country songs.
- May 18 **MARK DVORAK, PETE NORMAN and STEVE BUDDE** with JIM DeWAN The young turks invade The Old Quarter in an extravaganza of music not to be missed. We promise you an evening of traditional folk music including Irish, bluegrass, old-time and fiddle tunes.
- June 1 **THE PLANK ROAD FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY 1st ANNUAL PICK-NIC** in beautiful Kiwanis Park on Brookfield Ave. just east of Prairie Ave. We have the shelter reserved from 11 a.m. till dusk. Bring your own food and drink. Lots of music. Playground for the children. **BE THERE!**
- June 15 **OPEN MIKE** with RON SIMPSON and ROSCOE CHAMP. Need we say more?



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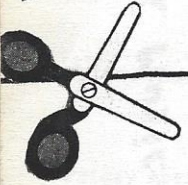
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