

The Foothills View

Friday, January 13, 1984

BOILING SPRINGS NC

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Earl Scruggs Makes A Visit Home

Earl Scruggs celebrated his 60th birthday last Friday at his latter-day home in Madison, Tennessee, near Nashville, the seat of his fame as an all-time great in bluegrass music.

The day turned out to be a bigger deal than he had expected, he said. Ronald Reagan and Nancy sent him a telegram from the White House. Friends, fans and fellow celebrities came and went all day, and the phone was abuzz with good wishes. Over home in Carolina, Gov. Jim Hunt proclaimed the birthday as "Earl Scruggs Day," honoring "a man of taste, dignity and modesty, — a credit to his native state."

"The press was there," said Scruggs of his Tennessee party, in typically modest surprise at all the to-do. "We took a little time to eat some ice cream and cake."

After the party, he got into his car with a friend, Dr. Cherrill Heaton, a professor at the University of North Florida, and headed for Boiling Springs.

So Saturday marked another celebration, perhaps a quieter one, at the ancestral family seat in lower Cleveland. Kin people and some friends gathered at the home of Horace and Maida Scruggs, Earl's brother and sister-in-law, on Rockford Road. The day was given to catching up on old stories and new ones, and doubtless it ended with music; even the Scruggs brothers who don't make it to the spotlight of the Opry are well-known banjo pickers around home.

If banjo picking was not the first sound the Scruggses heard at birth, it was the first of most ever day of their young lives. "I remember Horace and Earl saying they woke up to their daddy picking the banjo most every morning," said Maida.

They lived then in the Flint Hill Community, in one of



Friend Alfred Blanton, left, catches up on the news with Earl Scruggs during the banjo picker's recent visit with homefolks in Boiling Springs.

several houses on family land at the junction of Riverside and Maple Springs Roads. Their grandfather, remembers the oldest of the boys, J.E. (Junie) Scruggs, had bought 196 acres of land many years before for 20 cents an acre. "Not a foot in cultivation, still the original forest. They had log rollings and log burnings — think about what that timber they burned up would be worth today."

Their father, George Elam Scruggs, was married at 33 to Lula Ruppe, who was 13. The couple's first little girl died in infancy; the next five children — Junie, Eula Mae, Ruby, Horace and Earl — grew up and are living today, all but Earl still nearby.

Junie remembers their father as a sort of mathematical genius, besides an early-morning musician. "He went to a business school and studied mathematics. I saw him add long rows of figures in the thousands — he's just run his

finger down the rows, add 'em in his head and come up with a number in the millions.

"He wore a little pair of glasses down on his nose — like this — he paid about 20 cents for 'em, and he'd read. He got the weekly paper and the Atlanta Constitution and read 'em both from front to back. He'd help us with our homework, but I'll tell you, you'd better listen and get what he said the first time..."

George Scruggs died of cancer in 1928. By that time Junie was already an established musician in the community, and Horace and Earl, though very small, were learning.

"Earl used to sit on my knee and I'd note the banjo and he'd pick. Then he'd note and I'd pick," Junie said. "There was a blind banjo picker named Mack Woolbright — he was born without any eyes, and he played sittin' in, like, a straight chair, with rockers on it. He'd sit and rock and play. I remember him playing at a show at Flint Hill School the year Earl was born. Played 'Home Sweet Home.' When Earl plays 'Home Sweet Home' it sounds exactly like him."

Music was much in demand, though not necessarily greatly rewarded, in that time. "There was an old house, it was an old Bridges homeplace, I believe, over here close to Flint Hill Road (near Patrick Avenue). That house had one room that would hold thirty couples square dancing. Had a big old fireplace you could just pile the cordwood in and it'd burn about all night," Junie said.

"They'd come after me to come play for dances. I'd commence to plow about seven o'clock in the morning and then I'd put up the mules in the evening and take me a washpan bath and walk over there, get there about 8 o'clock and play till midnight, and walk home with a few matches and some marbles and blowgun and maybe 15 cents in my pocket."

That might be a little exaggeration, from the memory of a great story-teller, one of the family noted. But the scant rewards, along with the ease with which one could fall into sin in the music business (as in many others), steered Junie Scruggs away from music as a

livelihood, he says.

"I told Earl, when he was about to get serious about it, I said, Do me one favor. I said, don't ever play for a square dance. And he didn't. Only, one time, he told me, 'Well, I played for a square dance up in Gatlinburg the other night.' What for? I said. "For \$3,000," Earl said."

But he never played for many, before nor since. "I didn't see much future in it," Earl says now. Nor did that rare occurrence seem to blot his character, any more than a long life as a celebrity has lessened his graciousness and humility. Those traits, like music, seem to be a family gift.

Patillo Coming To College

Leon Patillo, a contemporary Christian musician, will perform at Gardner-Webb College on Thursday, January 19.

The 8 p.m. performance will be held in the college's Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center and is open to the public. Tickets are \$3 in advance or \$4 at the door and may be purchased in advance at the college's Charles I. Dover Campus Center, room 109.

A former lead vocalist and keyboard player with the band Santana, Patillo will bring to Gardner-Webb his own blend of pop, gospel and rock music.

Performing such contemporary Christian songs as "Temple to the Sky," "Dance Children Dance," "Star of the Morning," and "Cornerstone," Patillo's music and concerts provide audiences with both entertainment and a spiritual message.

In addition to his five solo album releases, Patillo has traveled throughout the United States taking his concert ministry to the Seattle Mariner's Kingdom and the RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C., appearing with such artists as Marilyn McCoo, Billy Davis and Earth Wind and Fire's Phillip Bailey.

Performances in Canada, Germany, Great Britain and Australia have also become a part of his annual concert tour.

Withrow May Try Senate Race

A locally-familiar hat may soon hit the ring in the U.S. Senate race.

"It's going to be interesting," for U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) during the May 8 primary, says Commander Bill Withrow (US Navy-Ret). Withrow confirmed Wednesday that he is considering opposing Helms for the GOP nomination in the Republican primary.

Withrow, a native of Rutherford County and a retired Gardner-Webb adjunct professor, expects to debate Helms on the nuclear weapons freeze issue. Withrow has advocated such a freeze.

Withrow saw combat during

World War II, and continued his Navy service during the Korean and Viet Nam wars.

Since his retirement from the Navy in 1966, Withrow, 66, has spoken to anti-nuclear groups such as SANE, and, should he choose to oppose Helms, Withrow says he expects his candidacy to be a test of anti-nuclear sentiment in North Carolina.

Withrow has until Feb. 6, the deadline for filing in the Republican primary, to make up his mind. North Carolina has a "closed" primary system, meaning that only those voters registered in a party may vote in that party's primary.

Tech Will Host

"Great Decisions"

Cleveland Technical College's continuing education department, in cooperation with the Shelby Community Schools program, will present two discussion groups of the Great Decisions '84 series beginning February 8.

The eight-week series moderated by Tom Rightmyer, rector of the Episcopal Church Of The Redeemer, will be offered each Wednesday morning from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. in the parish hall of the Episcopal Church, 502 West Sumter Street and each Wednesday afternoon from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. in Room 205 at Cleveland Tech. The series will run through March 28.

This marks the 30th year the Foreign Policy Association, a national nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization, has sponsored the Great Decisions series discussion of current foreign policy issues facing the United States.

The topics for the '84 Great Decisions include: U.S.S.R. Under Andropov; Hard Choices for Moscow & Washington; Mexico and the

U.S.: Discord Over Immigration & Central America; U.S. Security & World Peace; Allies, Arms & Diplomacy; South Africa: Can U.S. Policies Influence Change?; International Debt Crisis: Borrowers, Banks & the IMF; Saudi Arabia & Jordan: Kingdoms at the Crossroads?; China & The U.S.: Five Years After Normalization; International Drug Traffic: Can It Be Stopped?

A Great Decisions study guide, available in Cleveland Tech's bookstore for \$6, provides background and current data on the study topics. Participants are urged to secure the study guide prior to February 8 to prepare for the first topic.

Great Decisions '84 is open to all adults at least 18. A fee of \$10 will be charged although anyone 65 and over may register free. Teachers desiring certification renewal credit must receive prior approval from their school officials. Registration will be held at the first meeting on February 8. For further information call 484-4015.

A Winter Homestead



Sleeping cotton fields surround the home of the John Poston family, on Beaver Dam Church Road, as cold winds blow across the countryside. Only a few weeks ago the dead stalks were snowy with unpicked cotton balls. A few weeks ahead lie greening fields, as the cycle of the centuries on this farm continues.

Couple Will Wed



At a recent festive, six-course Chinese dinner prepared by her mother, Miss Margaret Chang and Dave Henkel announced their plans to marry. Margaret and Dave met at IBM, where they are co-workers. The daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Chang, of Boiling Springs, Margaret is a Gardner-Webb graduate. The place of the wedding is still to be undecided, but the date will be sometime in June.