

# The Sound of Music... At The Old Stagecoach Stop

by Mark Zurbrick

Historians and archaeologists disagree on when humans first began to play music, but all agree that music has been around for tens of thousands of years. However, we think we have a better idea of when music was first heard at the Old Stagecoach Stop. It may have begun in the mid-1850s, as a tune whistled by William Walton McDonald as he swung his ax and built a log home and business for his family on the courthouse square in Waynesville. Perhaps one can picture W. W., his wife, Mary Jane, and their three young children gathering around the warmth of the stone fireplace to sing Christmas carols during the first winter in their new home.

The next summer, when stagecoaches traveling along the St. Louis to Springfield road stopped at W.W.'s establishment to rest or replace the team of horses, passengers would go into the tavern where Mary Jane served up food and drink. While waiting for their trip to resume, a few of the more talented travelers may have entertained fellow passengers by playing a musical instrument that they carried in their luggage.



It is doubtful that much music was heard in the building beginning in 1862 when the McDonald residence/business became a hospital for sick and wounded Union soldiers during the Civil War. However, an occasional bugle call or drum beat may have echoed down from

the Federal fort located on the hill above the town.

In 1876, a new owner used sawn lumber to enclose the double pen log cabin, expanding the first floor and adding a second floor of rooms, along with porches, to serve as a hotel. While we have no written or photographic documentation, it is hard not to believe that on a summers day, locals or guests would occasionally gather in the shade of the porches to play fiddle or guitar.

Live "homegrown" music eventually gave way to recorded music. An early example of this advancement can be seen in the 1940s sleeping room of the Old Stagecoach Stop. After a work shift helping to build Fort Leonard Wood, a tired laborer could return to his room, crank the handle on the spring-driven phonograph and play the hit songs of the time such as "Chattanooga Choo Choo" or "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy".

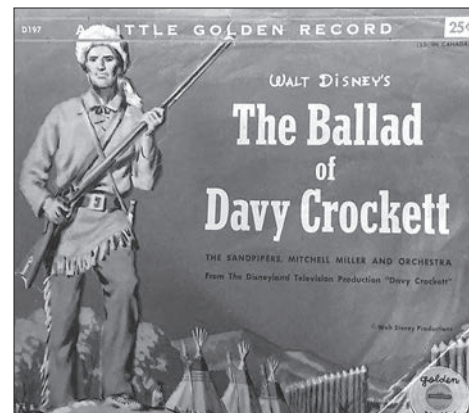


A more in-depth history of this early phonograph can be found in the Fall 2018 edition of the *Old Stagecoach Stop Newsletter*, which can be found on our website at <https://www.oldstagecoachstop.org/newsletterFall2018.pdf>.

When public electricity finally came to Waynesville sometime in the late 1930s, with it came electric motor-driven turntables such as the 1942 General Electric LC-648 Phonograph & Radio Console found in the 1950's apartment of the museum.



In 1954, Disney aired a television program that featured a series about the "king of the wild frontier" with its theme song reaching number six on the music charts the following year. Now, seventy years later, museum visitors can still hear "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" on a vintage portable record player!



Also found in the 1950's room is a 1947 Knight vacuum tube table



top radio in a Bakelite case. Bakelite was the first commercially available synthetic plastic (above).

The first commercial radio station in the United States began broadcasting in Pennsylvania in 1921, with commercial radio broadcasts coming to St. Louis a year later. However, it wasn't until 1947 that folks in Pulaski County could tune to KTTR in Rolla, and it wasn't until 1962 that KJPW came on the air in Waynesville/St. Robert.

As a side note, KJPW was not strictly about broadcasting over the airwaves. It also published the *Old Settlers Gazette* every summer from its first edition in 1983 until 2003. For the past 22 years, this history-packed newspaper/magazine has been produced and distributed by your friends at the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation!

Musician and song writer Don McLean wrote a chart topping song about a 1959 plane crash that took the lives of early rock and roll stars Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and Jiles Richardson, titled "American Pie" in which he repeatedly used the phrase "the day the music died". The music died at the Old Stagecoach Stop the following year, when the building was vacated and abandoned. The only sounds that may have been heard after 1960 were pack rats building nests in the walls and termites chewing away at the log beams underneath the centu-

ry-old building.

A quarter of a century later, the building had become an eyesore and was in danger of collapsing. In 1982, the city condemned the building, giving the absentee owner the choice of bringing it up to code or tearing it down. Thankfully, a small group of local citizens refused to allow the building, along with its history, to be destroyed and forgotten and in 1983 the building was purchased and the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation was formed. During the following decade, music could occasionally be heard via portable transistor radios as dedicated volunteers painstakingly returned the old building back to its historic splendor.

While music was occasionally heard after the museum opened to the public in July of 1994, via the already mentioned 1950s record player, it wasn't until 2002 that live music would again be heard during

the museum's Paw Paw Daze event, when the Waynesville Middle School Jazz Band gathered on the front porch to play and entertain guests.

From 2006 to 2015, the Foundation hosted an annual Appreciation Day for all of its volunteers and community supporters. In 2003 and 2004, a group of musicians from Rolla calling themselves "Sometimes Tuesday" played old timey music under the backyard shade trees during this event. A couple of years went by without live music before it returned for another five years thanks to the "River Berry Players," made up of three young bluegrass musicians.

This was followed by a five-year live music hiatus at the Old Stagecoach Stop ... unless you include the school bands that marched past the museum every year during Veterans Day and Fourth of July parades.



Sometimes Tuesday played all day on two Appreciation Days. They were named such because they rehearsed sometimes on Tuesday.




The Riverberry Players. From left, Lulie, Billy, and Railan Aistrope.




In 2017, live music was again heard in the building during Christmas on the Square. Hundreds of folks came through the festively decorated museum that offered warm crackling fires in the fireplaces along with tables of tasty homemade foods and treats. As visitors filled their

plates with goodies, Old Stagecoach Stop board member Pam Barnabee and fellow musicians Susan Wrassman and Carol Spurlock, played dulcimers in the Archeology Room. This talented group played at the popular end-of-season holiday event for two more years, until Covid





**NAM & RAY JACKSON-OWNERS**



*"Fresh To Your Table"*

**TUESDAY-FRIDAY 11 AM - 2 PM · 4 PM - 8 PM**

**SATURDAY NOON - 8 PM**

**573-451-2773**

**304 ROUTE 66 E · WAYNESVILLE, MISSOURI**

concerns prevented our being open in 2020 and 2021. When we opened back up for Christmas on the Square in 2022 and 2023, we were able to offer warmth, smiling faces, and free food... but sadly, no live music.

Happily, a group of students at

the Watson School of Music and the Arts in St. James, set up in the Civil War Room and played violins, keyboards, and sang both traditional holiday music and recital pieces during the 2024 Christmas on the Square event. Public appreciation

and approval of these young musicians' talents were obvious via the tapping of toes, smiling faces, and clapping of hands. Thank you Ronan, Zella, Bennett, Lincoln, and Lottie (left to right in the picture below) for a great performance!

Mark Zurbrick is a retired fisheries biologist and a member of the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation's Board of Directors, as well as a tour guide at the museum.



Christmas music was provided on dulcimers by, from left, Susan Wrassman, Carol Spurlock, and Pam Barnabee.



## Ridgeline Roofing and Renovations, LLC

*We are a licensed and insured residential and commercial roofing and renovation company.*

Exterior, interior, or any damages at all, call us and let us help you rebuild your investment.

WE ARE READY TO ROOF. Unleash the full potential of your home with Ridgeline's premium roofing services. As a locally owned and veteran-operated company, we are dedicated to providing affordable, high-quality roofing solutions. From new constructions to storm damage repairs, we will guide you through every step. Our team of experts is ready to tackle any challenge.

Schedule you free consultation now and let's elevate your home's curb appeal.

**Call 1 719 447-7801**