

Saturday

August 25, 1973

## Briarhoppers Win New-Old Fans

What time is it? Hit's Briarhopper time . . . again, if briefly, after 22 years . . .

There was a day when radio ruled the roost. Grady Cole woke up the chickens, and the Briarhoppers put them to bed. Suppers were consumed, across Carolina, to raucous lullabies like "Down Yonder," and "Orange Blossom Special," and sometimes followed, necessarily, by a pinch of so-dey or some peppermint tea.

The Briarhoppers hung up the fiddles and the bows, the musical saws and the mandolins in 1951, and went about various new pursuits. Roy "Whitey" Grant and Arval Hogan went to work for the post office. Fiddlin' Hank Warren took up photo technology. He's working at WBTV now in the photolab. Don "Pappy" White went into the musical instrument business. Charlie



**Dot Jackson**

Briarhopper, er, Crutchfield, found his way into radio-television management.

The only way one could enjoy a Briarhopper concert was on 78 r.p.m. records, some of which dwell in a technically improved — that is, scratch-free, state in the archives of the Library of Congress.

Well, enlightenment will out. Fiddlin' Hank, Pappy, Whitey and Hogan got to-

gether Thursday night for the first time in two decades to play for a square dance at Edwin Towers. It was hard to say who had the grandest time.

(Right off it would have seemed to be Ernest Whitehead — being one of few gentlemen present, he danced most every set with a different girl. But nobody sat around sad. The ladies up and danced with one another.)

Anyway, the success of the reunion was so total that the Briarhoppers are going to play again, next for the Methodist Home on Sept. 13 at 7 p.m. Maybe Hank will play his saw again — music to bring tears to the eyes, and hands to the ears — No — it's lovely . . .

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LOVERS OF the country music arts may want to get up to Union Grove tonight, where Harper Van Hoy is holding his annual Fiddlers' Grove Square Up, the clog and smooth dance festival.

Champion clog and square dance teams will compete for awards while on-lookers relax in the pasture. Admission is \$5 for the night, kids under 12 free . . .

★ ★ ★

AND FOR those who would have their stomping be more productive, Fairfax Landstreet, down off U.S. 321 4½ miles south of York, in Delphos Community, tells us to come get grapes.

"There weren't enough to bring in the picker," Fax says, "but they're beautiful right now . . ." He gets \$4 a bushel if you pick, \$5 if he picks.

"Come down 321 and turn left at Scott's store and come about a mile to the little pasteboard sign. If you see grapes on your left, you've passed it," he says . . .



**The Briarhoppers Get Back Together**

*. . . for the first time in 22 years*



The Briarhoppers, as they'll appear for Sunday's telecast, from left are: Announcer Jim Patterson, Hank Warren, Claude Casey, Shannon Grayson, Arval Hogan, Don White, Roy "Whitey" Grant, Bill Davis and Fred Kirby.

## BACK AGAIN

### It's Foot-Stompin' Briarhopper Time

By EMERY WISTER  
News Staff Writer

"Do you know what time hit is?" asked the little man in the flowered shirt and red trousers.

"No!" shouted the rest of the fellows, most of them also in flowered shirts and red trousers.

"Why, hit's Briarhopper time."

And — musically speaking — away they went, fiddlers sawing, guitarists picking, banjoists strumming. The Briarhoppers, who made country music on WBT from 1935 to 1951 were taping a special for WBT's sister station, WBTV.

"SURE IS NICE to be back," Claude Casey shouted over the din when the first number had been completed. "Why, I haven't seen Bill Davis here since 1958."

Davis, Casey, Roy "Whitey" Grant, Arval Hogan, Shannon Grayson, Don White, Hank Warren and Fred Kirby were standing under a roofless shack in the WBTV studios ready to make a little music for the hour-long special on WBTV at 12:30 p.m. Sunday.

"I thought it would be a good idea to get the gang back for a special show," said Kirby, 65, one of the original Briarhoppers. "I've

been looking forward to this for some time."

It was time for a song and Casey, who's now 62 and runs a radio station in Johnston, S.C., started it all off yodeling. When it was all over the group cheered, shouted and stamped feet.

"Worst thing I ever heard but I ain't heard much," said one. A camera operator asked if all the fellows could see the cue cards that provided instructions and guidance.

"See the cards?" asked one Briarhopper. "I can't even see the fellow holding them."

Davis, now 83, and the dean of the lot, was tuning up his bass fiddle.

"I haven't quite retired yet," said Davis, who lives near High Point. "I still play in night clubs for wedding receptions and things like that."

The show will be aired as a "special edition" of Kirby's Little Rascals program. Jim Patterson, the regular announcer, will provide the chatter and do "commercials."

"How about a little 'Steel Guitar Rag,'" Kirby shouted. Don White, 66, the Briarhoppers' original steel

guitar player, stepped up and picked out a foot-stomping tune.

Taping stopped for a real commercial break. One of the Briarhoppers shouted to a man in the studio audience. "Hey, I can see the whiskers on your leg from here."

"Why don't you fix it for me?" the man answered. He unstrapped an artificial leg and held it out to the Briarhoppers. No takes but a lot of laughs.

Kirby thought it would be nice if Grant, 59, and Hogan, 64, (who were teamed in the Briarhoppers as Whitey and Hogan) would do a number together. Grant plays guitar and Hogan mandolin, both sing.

"WE STILL MAKE some music when we're not delivering mail," Grant said. "Between us we take care of Independence Blvd. for the Postal Service."

Hank Warren, 66, who still works part time as a WBT-WBTV photographer, wanted to saw his fiddle. He spotted a highway patrolman in the audience.

"Always a state cop around," Warren said. "No matter where

## Briarhopper Time Again

From Page 1B

we'd go in the old days we'd see one."

"Expect you saw me," said the trooper, C. J. Roger of Charlotte. "I've been in Charlotte for 34 years now and always was a Briarhopper fan."

"I remember once I was riding a new patrolman around with me. He was still in training and when we stopped this car for going too fast. I sent the trainee to the car to talk to the drivers," Rogers said.

"It was a car full of Briarhoppers and one of the fellows had a freckled face, red hair, and was wearing big red britches and red underwear. It scared this new fellow so badly he almost quit."

Fred Kirby asked Claude Casey to sing another song and do a little yodeling. "What key?" he asked Casey.

"Whis-kee," shouted one of the Briarhoppers. Casey started singing "Any Time You're Feeling Lonely." Whitey and Hogan came back with "The Dusty Bible," then the whole band broke into foot-stomping instrumental, "Orange Blossom Special."

SHANNON GRAYSON, 59, came up to do a little banjo picking, something he called "Interstate Rag." There was more stamping and cheering. There was after every number.

"Hey," shouted one Briarhopper to another. "How'd your taters turn out this year?"

"Didn't turn out, had to dig 'em," said the other.



**STILL PLAYING** — The original WBT Briarhoppers are still picking and strumming together after 30-plus years. They are senior citizens now and still love to entertain as they did when they visited Rowan Manor Nursing Center Friday afternoon. That's Hank Warren on the

left with the fiddle, Shannon Grayson in the back, playing the banjo, Orvil Hogan, singing and playing the mandolin, Don White with the bass and Whitey Grant on guitar. (Post staff photos by Wayne Hinshaw).

## The Briarhoppers

Their country music show was a 'must' in heyday of radio

By JANE BOUTWELL  
Post Staff Writer

"It just feels so good that we're able to entertain people at our age." Don White leaned forward in his chair, his eyes fixed in a gaze in front of him. "We're all senior citizens ..."

The combined ages of all five of the original WBT Briarhoppers is about 340 years, he said.

Regardless of whether The Briarhoppers were feeling good about entertaining, the people listening to them Friday at the Rowan Manor Nursing Center's hoedown were definitely enjoying themselves. Even those confined to wheelchairs were tapping their feet and timidly clapping their hands to The Briarhopper's country and bluegrass music. And some began to reminisce about the years before television when the "Briarhopper Show" played on WBT radio in Charlotte every day at 4:30 — right before the "Lone Ranger."

"I been listening to them — there's no telling how many years," said William Sawyer, a resident at the center. "I'm a pretty old man and I guess I've been listening since it started." "Oh yea," said his neighbor, Bob Benson. "We been listening to 'em for 40 years." "It was a big — a national thing — yes ma'am," said Sawyer. He sat around the radio with his family when it was time for The Briarhopper Show, he said.

### OLDEST GROUP

"The Briarhoppers are the oldest country and bluegrass group in this part of the country," White said. He joined the group in 1935 and has been "in and out" since then.

Hank Warren joined The Briarhoppers in 1936, Orvil Hogan and Whitey Grant in 1941 and Shannon Grayson in 1946. They talked about themselves during a brief break between sets. Their audience, dressed in western gear for the hoedown theme, was anxious for them to return.

"I guess I was the last one to join," said Grayson, the banjo player. "But I started playing when I was 6 —



**BRIARHOPPER FANS** — Bessie Simmons (Minnie Pearl) and Sarah Graham clapped and tapped their toes almost non-stop Friday during The Briarhopper's performance. Mrs. Simmons said it reminded her of when she was young and "danced all night."

an old pump organ. My family would go into the woods, anywhere to keep from hearing me. I got a five-string banjo when I was 7 — so my father could send me out to the barn. I couldn't take a pump organ there ..."

"My mother showed me the first chord on the guitar when I was oh, probably 10 years old," said White, lead singer and bass guitar player. "I learned the rudiments of music from my grandfather, who was a singing teacher. I taught guitar for several years and still do." He also plays the electric Hawaiian guitar.

"I was playing my music before I saw my first teacher," said fiddle player Hank Warren. After seven months of lessons, he began to teach himself the finer points of the fiddle. Now, "he plays the best 'Orange Blossom Special' you ever heard," said his wife, Inez.

### WIVES COME, TOO

She and Mary White, Polly Grant and Evelyn Hogan came with their husbands to Friday's performance, just as they have every other performance since their husbands joined The Briarhoppers. Ruby, Grayson, Shannon's wife, would have been there too, but she was recovering from surgery.

"We each of us got the same wife of 40 years," said Warren. "I'll be married 48."

"We don't any of us smoke, we don't any of us drink beer, and some of us have never even tasted whiskey. And we all claim ourselves to be Christians," he continued.

As a group, "we've got no problems at all," said White. "We go out to eat together, socialize together, just like one big happy family."

"We're all just like brothers and sisters," said Mrs. Warren. "I'm closer to the other wives than I am to my own sisters."

### TV BROUGHT DECLINE

The group played steadily together until the early 1950s, Mrs. Warren said, when the onset of television brought the decline of radio shows and concert tours.

"When television came on, people quit coming to things. They would stay home and watch television."

"We were phasing out when television came in, and raising families," said Hogan. So he and Grant got jobs driving buses in Charlotte, then both began working in the post office, a job from which Hogan recently retired. Grant is a cabinetmaker, and Warren is still on the payroll of WBT.

Television may have hindered the work of some of the members, but Warren adopted a new profession with the onset of the new medium — photography. He still works one day a week for WBTV making still slides for the television station. And he is a lifetime member of the National Press Photographers' Association — a rare and coveted honor.

But when he picked up his fiddle, it looked like nothing else belonged in his hands, unless maybe, a hand saw. He played "Amazing Grace" on an ordinary carpenter's saw with his violin bow.

The WBT Briarhoppers were just one of the guest groups at Friday's hoedown. The Carolina Cloggers, a group from western Rowan County, performed to bluegrass music by The Wheels, a Salisbury group.

Darwin Exley, executive director of the nursing center, said the staff provides a program every year for residents of the center. The entire staff dresses to fit the theme, and some nurses and assistants bought material this year to make costumes for some of the residents. Everyone worked hard to prepare decorations and make plans for the hoedown, he said.



## **Briarhoppers To Perform**

The original Briarhoppers will perform throughout Anson County. Pictured from left to right are Fiddlin' "Hank" Warren, Shannon Grayson, "Whitey" Grant, Hogan, and Don White.

# **Briarhoppers Slate Anson Performances**

The Original Briarhoppers, a string band, will perform at five locations in Anson County on Friday, May 11.

The country and bluegrass group will appear on the Square in Wadesboro from noon until 1 p.m. The performance is free, and the public is invited to bring their lunch and enjoy the music while they eat. (In case of inclement weather, the performance will be held in the Little Theater at Wadesboro.)

Wadesboro from 11-11:30 a.m.

•Wadesboro Nursing Home on Country Club Road from 2:30-3 p.m.

•Lillie Bennett Nursing Center on Morven Road in Wadesboro from 3:30-4 p.m.

The Briarhoppers include Don White, Whitey and Hogan, Shannon Grayson and Fiddlin' Hank Warren. All are former radio stars of the 1940s and were broadcast on WBT in Charlotte. They disbanded in

# McAllister

*...and his people*

Charlie Briarhopper. Now there's a name. Charlie Briarhopper, the man who signed WFBC on the air, is retiring. That word retiring may be a little strong. What he's really doing is moving on to other things.

I'm talking about Charles Crutchfield, who retires at the end of this year as president of Jefferson-Pilot Broadcasting Company, the parent company of WBT, in Charlotte.



Jim McAllister

When I was a youngster in a small town just outside Charlotte, WBT was about the only thing we ever listened to. Grady Cole was the star of the airwaves and Charlie Briarhopper and the Briarhoppers were next in line. Charlie organized the Briarhoppers about 1934 and they were instant radio sensations of the South. Charlie had left WFBC in Greenville to become program director at WBT in September 1933.

Yes, Charlie Crutchfield's voice was the first heard on WFBC when it signed on the air May 20, 1933. He was trying to call it all back the other day. "As well as I remember I introduced Mr. B.H. Peace, Sr., who owned the station and the newspapers, and he then introduced his pastor, Dr. Rhett Turnipseed, who offered a prayer. We stayed on the air about three hours that day and many prominent people in the area spoke; a choral group from Furman sang and there was an organ recital. I've got a copy of that program in my scrapbook at home."

Charlie remembers that there were about six people on the payroll at WFBC then. "B.H. Peace Jr. was manager of the station and there were three announcers. One of them was Bill Bivins who I brought to WBT later and who later went on to CBS where he was the announcer for Fred Waring's program. The other announcer was Milton Ponder. I don't know what happened to him."

## Made a radio set

Charlie had started his radio career with WSPA in Spartanburg, his hometown. "I went to work there in 1929 and put that station on the air," he said. "I remember when I was a kid there in Spartanburg I made a crystal set out of a quart ice cream container. WBT was the first station I ever heard. That was about 1925."

If you didn't live through those years, it's difficult to imagine the impact that radio had on people's lives. I'm convinced that it was much stronger than television which came along in the early 1950s. "Grady Cole was the biggest name in the Carolinas back then," Charlie said. "They tried to get him to run for governor and he could have won. Grady had his morning show and then he came on at 12:30 with the market report. The farmers all over would wait until they heard what Grady said about the market before they sold their stuff."

And the Briarhoppers. They were the hottest thing on the air. Corny and country, but everybody listened to them. Whitey and Hogan and Claude Casey and Charlie Briarhopper himself. "I remember we would give away an 8 by 10 picture of the Briarhoppers to anyone who sent in a Peruna box top. We'd get 10,000 box tops a week. Did that for 10 years. I don't think any network promotion has ever done better than that. It cost about 18 cents to put a bottle of Peruna on the shelf and it sold for \$1.50 a bottle. We told people that Peruna would make them feel better and as far as I know we were telling them the truth. It would make them feel better. Of course, it was about 40 proof. Everybody was drinking the stuff. Yeah, it made 'em feel better for a while."

## Just like old days

Six or eight months ago WBT celebrated its anniversary and they asked Charlie Crutchfield to play Charlie Briarhopper one more time. He was the emcee just like the old days and there were Whitey and Hogan, Hank Warren, the fiddle player and comedian, Don White, Bill Briarhopper, now 80 years old and Claude Casey who owns a radio station in South Carolina now.

It was fun for Charlie Crutchfield in the old days, but things have changed, he says, in recent years. "There wasn't much trouble for a while — and then the unions hit us. Today you spend most of your time dealing with various government agencies. Yeah, it was a lot more fun in those earlier, simpler days."

Charlie likes to sit and let his mind wander over what has happened to his business. "It's a very profitable business, that's true. And it is subjected to an enormous amount of criticism. Rightly so, I think. There is entirely too much sex and violence on television. This programming is a bad influence on children. I'll agree with that. I think television is trying to be too much like the movies. This is a mistake. You're sitting there and something on TV hits you before you know it. It's an invasion of privacy. Unless we stop it, the government is going to stop it for us. I think we're very short-sighted in this business."

When Charlie Briarhopper walks out the door of WBT for good on Dec. 31 it will be the first time he hasn't worked there in 44 years. He says he's going to loaf awhile, but not for long. "I'm a workaholic. I'm not happy unless I'm working. So I've been making plans. I'm going to start teaching top business people how to conduct themselves when they're interviewed by the press, primarily the television press. You see how articulate people like Ralph Nader are on television and then you see some business executive who acts like an imbecile. I want to help these people. I'm a member of the board of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I've tried it on them for size and I've already got more prospects than I can handle."

# Briarhoppers delight new fans and old

By AVERY PHILLIPS  
Special to The News

During the period from the mid-1930's until the early 1950's, the Briarhoppers were one of the most popular and well-known country music groups in this section of the United States.

Listening to The Briarhopper program on WBT radio was a tradition for countless families across the Carolinas.

The Briarhopper program was a regular on WBT from 1941 until its termination in 1951. During World War II the group traveled to military bases in both North and South Carolina to entertain the troops and regularly performed shows in polio wards at hospitals across the state.

Theirs was a familiar sound and the names of the individual members of the group were as familiar to their listeners as if they were family members.

Originally, six members comprised the popular traveling group and performed together the longest period of time, although all during their performing years other men came and went. They developed such a large and devoted following of fans that it sometimes became necessary for two units to travel just to satisfy the great demand for personal appearances across the Carolinas and in adjacent states.

The six original members are Arval Hogan on the mandolin; Roy "Whitey" Grant on the guitar; Fred Kirby of Indian Trail (now well-known cowboy star) on the guitar; Claude Casey on the guitar; "Big Bill" Davis on the bass fiddle; and Garnett B. "Fiddlin Hank" Warren on the fiddle.

After the demise of the regular show on WBT, the individual group members entered other professions. During the early 1970's they got back together and today their popularity has once again soared with a new generation of fans, to the delight of fans from the original Briarhopper days.

They now perform on a regular basis at church, school and club functions, in nursing homes and hospitals as well as at bluegrass festivals across the two Carolinas and in Ohio.

Whitey jokingly says, "We are busier now in our retirement years than ever before. If we all still had regular jobs now, we wouldn't be able to work for so many performance bookings."

The group that performs and travels together today includes Whitey, Hogan and Hank from the original six, Don White on the bass fiddle and Shannon Grayson on the five-string banjo. White and Grayson were members of The Briarhoppers at different periods during the earlier years of the group.

Big Bill Davis, now 90 years old and a resident of High Point, still performs with the group on occasion



The Briarhoppers from left are Don White, Shannon Grayson, "Fiddlin' Hank" Warren, Claude Casey, "Whitey" Grant and Arval Hogan.

when they have shows in his area of the state.

Whitey and Hogan have remained an active singing and performing duet for 47 years straight, a fact that Nashville has determined to be the longest running duet act in the world.

Claude Casey, a former member of another well-known country music group, The Tennessee Ramblers, who later joined The Briarhoppers, is owner and general manager of WJES radio station in Johnston, S.C., where he now lives. Retired, he, his wife Ruth, and their sons operate the station.

The group now finds a great deal

of pleasure and satisfaction in its rejuvenated music careers in traditional country and bluegrass music.

In the March 1978 issue of "Bluegrass Unlimited," a trade magazine, a lengthy article on the group's history and that of the individual members as well, concluded by stating, "Over the past four decades the various members of The Briarhoppers have made notable contributions to old-time, bluegrass and country music. Today they continue to entertain in the tradition of which they have long been a part."



The Briarhoppers as they appeared in a 1946-era photo: Fred Kirby, Roy Grant, Claude Casey, Arvall

Hogan and Bill Davis; and squatting is Elmer (Hank) Warren, then known as Hank Briarhopper.

## The Briarhoppers To Hold Reunion

Continued From Second Front

The Plaza. Both are mail carriers. Roy carries on one side of Independence Blvd.; Hogan, the other.

Then there's Elmer Hank Warren, now a photo lab man at WBT-WBTV. Then he was known as Hank Briarhopper and was the comedian and fiddler.

Claude Casey, was a Briarhopper star and soloist. He owns a radio station in Johnston, S.C., now. And who could forget Fred Kirby who sang and played guitar. He still does some of that at WBT and WBT today.

Then there was Big Bill Davis who played the violin. He's retired and living in High Point today.

**THE LATECOMERS** were Nat Richardson, steel guitarist; Shannon Grayson, who played five string banjo; and Don White. All live in Charlotte. Richardson is a mail carrier, Grayson a cabinet maker and White a music teacher at Tillman Music Co.

They'll all attend as well as Cecil Campbell who was not a Briarhopper but was with another group the Tennessee Ramblers. And Crutchfield himself expects to attend if he's in Charlotte.

Crutchfield, Grant will tell you, was the Briarhoppers' announcer when he was promoted to station manager. So he turned his announcing duties over to someone else only to have to return to the job by popular demand.

Grant will hedge at the exact number of shows the Briarhoppers played but figures 3,400 is a good guess since they were on for 11 years. During World War II their shows were also aired on the Columbia Broadcasting System's Dixie network which WBT originated and beamed to troops in the South Pacific.

"We got to know some of the men on a first name basis as they would write to us," Grant said. "I guess we were

at the height of our popularity during the war. We were on from 4:30 until 5 p.m. every day."

Grant says the group is in for a swinging, but sober evening Saturday.

"That's because none of us drink," he said. "The highway patrolmen used to say they might find a Briarhopper asleep behind the wheel of his car, but he'd always be sober."

### A Hillbilly Reunion

## 'Hit's Briarhopper Time'

By EMERY WISTER  
News Staff Writer

played more than 3,400 programs between 1940 and 1951.

**THE RADIO** show was a standard in homes throughout the Piedmont Carolinas as it came on each weekday in the late afternoon.

The program opened with an exciting shout from announcer Crutchfield: "Hit's Briarhopper Time..." followed by the banjo-dominated tones and nasal twang of Wait Till The Sun Shines, Nellie.

Old-time hillbilly music and gospel songs were interspersed with radio commercials which have since become classics—Crazy-Water Crystals, Color-Bak and snuff.

Now the Briarhoppers, all still alive and healthy, are getting together for their first reunion since they went off the air.

"No music or anything like that," says Roy Grant, a city mail carrier for more than 12 years. "We're just getting together for an evening of relaxation and eating."

"We'll meet at the Steak Palace on Albemarle Rd., and I figure we'll sit down to eat long about 7:15. I'm so excited I can hardly wait."

**THERE WERE** eight Briarhoppers, though only five were originals; three were latecomers. Only two are still working at the same old stand and even they have slightly different duties. Some are now living in other communities.

First off there was Roy Grant and Arvall A. Hogan, who worked as a team known as Whitey and Hogan. Roy played guitar and sang lead and Hogan played a mandolin and sang tenor.

Would you believe these two are still together. They live next door to one another on



ROY GRANT  
... 'Just Getting Together'

# Briarhoppers

## Group Has 'A Big Time'

By JOE DePRIEST  
Star Staff Writer

In 30 minutes the William Tell Overture would crackle in radio land and the Lone Ranger would ride on the airwaves.

So what time would that make it?

"Briarhopper time," the boys would chime at exactly 4:30 p. m. and "Wait Till The Sun Shines Nelly," their overture, further confirmed the announcement.

Thirty minutes of country music was then churned out of the WBT studio in Charlotte — "blue eyes crying in the rain," "pins and needles in my heart," "if I had the wings of an angel" and it was all brought to you by the makers of Peruna (universally pronounced Pe-Rooney), a patent medicine that would so the ads claimed, if not cure all the ills flesh was heir to, certainly make them more comfortable to live with.

The Briarhoppers, thanks to their radio show and personal appearances, were, from 1935 to 1951, one of the most popular country music groups in the Carolinas.

About four years ago, for the "fun of it," the group reunited and started playing parttime, generally "having a big time," said one of its longtime members, Don White.

The Briarhoppers have been to Shelby before — playing here, as elsewhere, at schools and theaters during the '30s and '40s, White said. Saturday they are coming back to Shelby to play a benefit show at the Shelby City park for the Oxford Orphanage in Granville county.

Shows are at 2 p. m. and 7:30 p. m. and will be headlined by Grand Ole Opry star Billy Grammer.

Most of the musicians are semi-retired now, White said. Fiddlin' Hank Warren, Roy (Whitey) Grant on guitar and vocals, Arval Hopson on mandolin and vocals, Shannon Grayson on five-string banjo and himself on guitar form the present membership with a group that, since its formation in Charlotte in 1935, has gone through many personnel changes, White said. Everybody's association with the Briarhoppers goes back a long ways, White continued. His began in 1935.

White came to Charlotte from his native West Virginia and started singing with the Crazy Buckle Busters on WBT. Crazy Water Crystals — a condensed form of patent medicine made from mineral waters in Texas — was the sponsor.

Crazy Water also sponsored J. E. Mainer and his Mountaineers at the same radio station and, in fact, White recalled, WBT in those days had an impressive roster of future country music legends — Bill Monroe, who would become the "Father of Blue Grass" and his brother Charlie, one of the most popular acts in the country and the unique Carter Family — A. P., Maybelle and Sarah. White roomed with Bill and Charlie Monroe in "my mother-in-law's rooming

house" in Charlotte. Then there was Snuffy Jenkins, one of the innovators of three-finger banjo picking.

The first song he performed on radio was "The Prisoner's Song," White recalled, an old one then, in 1935, and one, he was happy to learn, that Sonny James put back on the country music charts this year.

When the Briarhoppers began their show, they were frequently called on to provide the backup for visiting singers in the Queen City and, in the late 1930s, when young Roy Rogers was plugging his first movie, the group played behind him at the "old State Theater," White said. They did likewise with Tex Ritter.

White was in and out of the Briarhoppers. In 1943 he went out — with others in the group, to form the Tennessee Ramblers and their rambling took them to California where they managed to get in a few movies — three, to be exact — over at Republic with Lula Belle and Scotty in "Swing Your Partner," at Columbia with Jimmy Wakely in "Sundown Valley" and, later, with Roy Acuff in "My Darling Clementine."

Later, White was on the National Barn Dance over WLS in Chicago — worked with Rex Allen three years, and worked in Cincinnati with Merle Travis. White and Fred Kirby — another Briarhopper member — worked for a while in Nebraska and, generally, it was a fairly steady shifting from station to station, group to group.

Meanwhile, the Briarhoppers (WBT-WBTV) head Charles Crutchfield is generally credited as the founder, White said) made some records, kept up the personal appearances, sang through the war years (Arthur Smith joined for a time during that period) and, by 1951, saw their longtime radio program come to an end.

This was at the peak of Hank Williams' career. Country music had started to change.

There is still a market for the older brand of country music, White said, pointing to the very good receptions the Briarhoppers get in their current appearances. He also is encouraged by the popularity of blue grass festivals where the Briarhoppers — who don't play blue grass as such but "old time" country music — have appeared.

White's musical tastes, he thinks, are pretty broad — "I like some of all of it" — including the Big Band sound, even a little rock. When it comes to country, he likes the classic singers, the great Red Foley, Eddie Arnold, Bob Willis, Merle Travis — the list can get long in a hurry.

Their 1976 show is "more or less" what the Briarhoppers have always been doing, White said.

And, invariably, White continued, someone at a show will say, sure, I remember the Briarhoppers — they came on just before the Lone Ranger.





# INMENT D

Sauvignon 01 and Villa Dalm...

## SHOWTIME

by Emery Wlster

I went to an old-fashioned fish fry at Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church the other night. The fish was great and the desserts scrumptious, but five guys in red shirts playing guitars, fiddles and assorted stringed instruments stole the show.

They were the Briarhoppers. Yep, the same gallus-snapping, toe-tapping, hee-hawing five who first entertained us on WBT Radio 47 years ago. Those were the days when companies making such medicines as Peruna, Crazy Water Crystals and a hairdo called Colorbak kept us musically entertained on the radio.

Entertained? Well, maybe that was a bit of an overstatement for many people. Truth is a lot of people looked down their noses at that kind of music, and I guess maybe I was one of them.

The Briarhoppers were just one of many bands playing what we then called "hillbilly" music. Many of us were turned off by the twangy, nasal and frequently off-key voices. I didn't like it and don't to this day,

Continued on page 3D)

## CONTINUED

# Briarhoppers really put on an excellent musical show

(From page 1D)

but if you've heard the Briarhoppers lately those guys don't sound like that, if indeed they ever did.

I won't say Roy Grant — he and fellow B-hopper Arvel Hogan team up as Whitey and Hogan — has a great voice, but it's pleasing and he does have fun. So do the others and, best of all, so do we.

I guess what I'm trying to say is the Briarhoppers were probably a little ahead of their time. If they weren't genuinely appreciated then, they are now. What's more they go all over North Carolina putting on shows and playing at public schools to teach the youngsters what the popular music of earlier generations is all about.

They're in demand all over the state. They play in cities larger and larger than Charlotte, but they play in the largest. Grant and Hogan

For when taken their act to Europe 372-24 recently returned from a tour

of Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, and were very well-received.

"We've had opportunities to go to New York," says Grant. "And from what I've been told, I think we would go over all right but we just decided not to do it."

As I said a few lines back, the five Briarhopper playing now are the originals, the others being Don White, Hank Warren and Shannon Grayson. Warren is the comedian. He can do all sorts of magic and crazy things with his fiddle and even gets a little music out of his saw.

The thing about these guys is that, with all their highjinks and foolishness, they are really good musicians. Ballads, old folk songs, hymns . . . they sing and play them all.

"All of us read music," says Grant. "But we don't let it get in the way of putting on a good show and having a good time."

# Syn MYRTLE BE



From Charlotte And The Carol



Kays  
Gary

## Making Music And History

Fifty years ago they made music together and Thursday their mothered memories were resurrected in a daylong reunion recorded for posterity at Metrotape Inc. on South Boulevard.

Members of The Briarhoppers and The Tennessee Ramblers featured on WBT Radio in the years of the Great Depression and well into the Forties were assembled for a day of enjoyment and history-making. It will become part of a Spirit Square program Oct. 25-26 that also will include live performances by country music makers. The project is sponsored by the N.C. Department of Archives and History.

All day they trooped in and out of the studios and joyously shared those memories.

They included Charles Crutchfield, Briarhopper master of ceremonies, whose molasses-smooth bass voice extolled the restorative powers of "Peruna," a tonic, and "Crazy Water Crystals," another product, which did deliver action.

Briarhoppers on hand included silver-haired Claude Casey, owner of two radio stations in Johnston, S.C.; Homer "Pappy" Sherrill; Roy "Whitey" Grant and Hank Warren. Joining them during the day

were Cecil Campbell of The Tennessee Ramblers; Clyde McLean, who wrote comedy sketches for them in the '40s; and the ageless Fred Kirby, the longest-running singing cowboy in radio.

Crutchfield recalled that the group got its name when he and the late Bill Bivens, another WBT announcer, were rabbit-hunting and kicking up thickets to jump the little critters. "Briarhopping is what it was and that's the name we picked for the band," he said.

Crutchfield recalled that his regular salary at the time was \$20 a week, but that he got \$10 extra for announcing the "Briarhoppers Show" five days a week.

While ratings services weren't functioning at the time, he believes that in the Piedmont Carolinas it was second only to "The Grand Ole Opry" out of Nashville.

Roy "Whitey" Grant, chuckling at the sight of old photos flashed on a screen — young, smooth faces under slicked-back hair — remembered Depression stardom as the greatest stroke of luck.

"I was making \$20 to \$25 making music and \$20 a week in the mill at Gastonia. I had money coming out of my ears for those days when most had trouble kicking up a dollar."

Crutchfield, who in later years as chief of WBT-WBTV delighted in telling of his goofs, threw in still another. "I let Wayne Newton get away," he said. "His mother, living somewhere above Greensboro around the Virginia line, brought him down in knee britches and we auditioned him and that high soprano voice. She wanted us to manage him. We agreed and we were going to put him on the show but we didn't press a contract that day. Later she called that her brother, who was out of a job, decided he'd manage Wayne so he did and he's still doing it — millions upon millions of dollars worth."

They talked of the fraternity of country musicians — of playing in a Virginia country schoolhouse once when "the whole Carter family was right there in the front row and when it was over Maybelle and I invited us to their house and we played all night until Maybelle said, 'Did you know it's 6 o'clock? I'd better get us some breakfast' and she did — country ham and eggs."

They shared stories of Fred Rose, a songwriter off Tin Pan Alley who dashed over two and three songs at a time, selling them to Gene Autry (the radio and movie cowboy) for what he thought was big money, \$40 each, which in turn made Autry hundreds of thousands.

..... THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

Friday, July 19, 1985 19C

## Briarhoppers, Ramblers Make Music And History

Continued From Preceding Page

honored folk-music writer Lamar Stringfield in a concert at the old Armory Auditorium, playing a 20-minute version of his "John Henry." The Briarhoppers then played their version, which took all of 30 seconds, "and it brought down the house. We got a standing ovation. It was bluegrass-style."

Bill Monroe, they agreed, did not originate bluegrass and Earl Scruggs did not invent three-finger banjo picking. Briarhoppers had been playing "that way all our lives and Snuffy Jenkins down in South Carolina was the daddy of

"Some told him he ought to write some songs for Roy Acuff but he was 'shamed to have his name on that kind' of stuff," said Grant. "Finally he wrote a couple under the name of Fields and when he started getting royalty checks of \$7,000 to \$8,000 he changed his mind. Roy was big back then."

Somebody said "You Are My Sunshine," an all-time favorite, was written by a radio listener who phoned it in to some artist and never got personal credit. And somebody else said few people ever knew that "The Yellow Rose of Texas" was inspired by a mulatto beauty.

They were all saying that old hymns and ballads were favorites of their time and remember "Who's Gonna Put Shoes On Your Poor Little Feet?"

They joyfully recalled the time when the Charlotte Symphony See BRIARHOPPERS Next Page

three-finger banjo pickin'."

They talked of strutting the streets in \$12 suits from Stein's and Mayo's, of the prosperous feeling of walking into Hice-Williamson's Smoke Shop on South Tryon and paying 25 cents for the deluxe, roast beef-piled-on sandwiches. But they talked mostly of each other and the old tunes and songs: "Wildwood Flower," "Wabash Cannonball," "What Would You Give In Exchange for Your Soul?" "Chinese Breakdown" . . .

It was a great, eight-hour day of recording a time that was and I caught but a half-hour of it.

But now it's all on tape for all time.



**BRIARHOPPERS TO APPEAR** — Down South from 1935 to 1951, country music fans tuned in the Briarhoppers radio program from Charlotte. The group will appear on a program Saturday in Shelby with Grand Ole Opry star Billy Grammer

and others in a benefit performance for Oxford Orphanage. Shows at the Shelby City Park at 2 p. m. and 7:30 p. m. From left to right are "Fiddlin' " Hank Warren, Arval Hogan, Shannon Grayson, Roy (Whitey) Grant and Don White.

# Hear that? Fiddle music in the wind

The Briarhoppers burst onto the Carolinas music scene in 1934 and they're still playing today, in person and in spirit.

*Special to The Observer*

If you're listening to the wind moaning at the eaves or sighing through the branches of a tall pine and imagine you hear the faint strains of a fiddle, don't worry. It's Fiddlin' Hank. You might hear the ringing of a banjo, too. That's Shannon. And that tapping sound? That's God's foot, keeping time to a little bluegrass, thanks to a couple of old Briarhoppers.

**Bob  
Inman**



Hank Warren, one of the finest fiddlers and nicest people to come out of the Carolinas in many a year, passed away back in December at the age of 88. He was preceded in death by Shannon Grayson, who could make a banjo talk. They were both original members of the Briarhoppers, a legendary string band with its roots deep in Carolina soil and its music a testament to what happens when talent meets heart.

Hank hadn't played with his old buddies for several years, not after he started missing notes and decided it was time to hang up the fiddle. But he remained a cherished part of the band's legacy. Fellow Briarhopper Roy "Whitey" Grant calls Hank the "best comic fiddle player that any of us have ever seen," and recalls how Hank could play a fiddle and do a bird imitation at the same time.

The Briarhoppers burst onto the Carolinas music scene in 1934, thanks to the imagination of a honey-voiced young announcer named Charles Crutchfield at Charlotte radio station WBT. As Crutch tells the story, it all began with a phone call from a Chicago businessman whose company sold patent medicine products — Peruna iron tonic, Kolor-Back hair dye, Radio Girl perfume, and the like. He called WBT one day, say-

ing he wanted to schedule a hillbilly music program, an hour a day, six days a week, to showcase his projects. The station manager asked Crutch, "Do we have a hillbilly band?" Crutch said, "Yes sir."

There was no such band, but Crutch and colleagues quickly rounded up a crew of musicians, called them "The Briarhoppers," and went on the air. Their show was a huge, instant success and The Briarhoppers became a household word in the WBT listening area. The audience ranged from Depression-battered farm families to city dwellers such as young Charlottean Billy Graham. Crutch and the Briarhoppers were down-to-earth people on the radio, amiable visitors in your home with the kind of corny jokes you would tell your next-door neighbor and some upbeat music to make your day more pleasant.

In one early promotional gimmick, WBT offered listeners a black-and-white photograph of the Briarhoppers in return for a box top from Peruna. The station was overwhelmed with requests — more than 18,000 per week. When that began to fall off, the station offered a color photo of the band, and later a picture of the Last Supper. The Briarhoppers show, as much as any in America, helped transform radio into a powerful advertising medium.

The band also performed live throughout the region, sometimes driving all night to get back to Charlotte for the next day's radio show. Hank Warren was a crowd favorite, the class cut-up, appearing in a costume complete with hiked-up trousers, a goofy hat and painted-on freckles. The Briarhoppers enjoyed the kind of celebrity we associate these days with movie actors and rock stars. But they never forgot their roots. When they entertained — by radio or in person — you felt like you were with

home folks.

Hank also achieved a measure of notoriety outside the world of the Briarhoppers. In 1936, he was playing fiddle with a band called the Tennessee Ramblers. They were invited to Hollywood to appear in a Western movie with Gene Autry and Smiley Burnette: "Ride, Ranger, Ride." While they were there, Hank got a telegram. Back in North Carolina, wife Inez had given birth to twins. Hank hurried home to assume his more important role of daddy.

Over the years, the original band members drifted away to other jobs and careers, some of them outside music. But in the early 1970s, they got back together. They started playing occasional dates — retirement centers, schools, civic clubs — and found that folks hadn't forgotten.

Three of the originals are still around — Whitey Grant, Don White and Arval Hogan. They've been joined by a couple of youngsters: David Deese, who carries on in the tradition of Shannon Grayson's banjo licks, and Dwight Moody, Hank's choice to replace him as fiddler. The Briarhoppers are busier than ever now — voices strong, instruments hammering out the tunes that thrilled a radio audience more than a half-century ago. When they play their theme song, "Wait 'Til The Sun Shines Nellie," it's almost impossible to stay in your seat.

So give an ear to the wind. If you listen carefully, you'll hear Hank and Shannon, playing at the heavenly hoedown. Then go listen to the present-day Briarhoppers at a venue near you. You'll find yourself part of a big, enthusiastic audience, young and old, who are drawn to their music. Some folks say it's all about nostalgia. Heck no. It's because these guys are just plain good.

*Observer columnist Bob Inman  
Charlotte novelist and screen  
and former news anchor for  
His column appears every  
Write him at P.O. Box 47/  
Charlotte, NC 28247-07*

# The Briarhoppers

## Truly Americana

By Ray Thigpen

To make mention of the Briarhoppers one has to truly speak of living legends in the art of hillbilly and bluegrass music. The Briarhopper Show started on WBT Radio in the 30's and continued on the powerful Charlotte, N.C. station until 1955. During this time they were one of the station's most popular programs. The radio show gave them more bookings than they could possibly handle. Show time was 4:30 to 5:00 each afternoon. As soon as they went off the air they would rush across the street to the car, load their instruments and head for a show date. Often they would travel as far as two hundred miles to do a show, then get back to Charlotte after daybreak the next day to catch only a few hours sleep before returning to the station for rehearsal. For years these show dates were performed at schoolhouses during pre-electricity days; this is now referred to as the historical kerosene circuit.

The Briarhoppers have influenced many with their music. One who recently relayed this to me while I was taping an

interview was Wilma Lee Cooper. Wilma Lee says she and Stoney (Cooper) used to listen often to the Briarhoppers over WBT and their own music was influenced very much by them.

Roy "Whitey" Grant was born April 7, 1916 in Shelby, N.C. At the age of nine Whitey developed an interest in the guitar. There was a neighbor that played some guitar and took a liking to the young boy. This neighbor drove a truck and would sometimes let Whitey ride with him. Whitey liked to ride in the truck but really had a different motive in mind. He knew this neighbor always stopped off his route at home for lunch. When they would reach the neighbor's house at noon, Whitey had guitar, and not lunch, in mind. As the neighbor would start to eat, Whitey, knowing where he kept the guitar, would always pull it out and ask where does your finger go for "G" and for "C." After about five years, Whitey saved up some money and pestered this neighbor into selling him his guitar, he also drew off some chord diagrams for Whitey.

Orval A. Hogan was born July 24, 1911 in Robbinsville, N.C. and, shortly after, the family moved to Andrews, N.C. Hogan's older brother played guitar along with a neighbor who played fiddle. They formed a duet and played locally. Hogan had played the guitar a little but not with the duet. The neighbor saw a mandolin in the Sears and Roebuck Catalog and showed it to Hogan's brother, who immediately ordered the \$3.50 mandolin for Hogan so he

could join the two playing music. When the mandolin finally came, it was the first time any of the three had actually seen one.

That night after chores, Hogan got out an old record by The Scottsdale String Band that featured a mandolin on the lead. Well, before he went to bed that night Hogan had learned to play "Chinese Breakdown" from listening to that record on an old Victrola.

Whitey and Hogan formed their now famous duet back in 1935 and went on WGN Radio in Gastonia, N.C. In 1941 they were asked by WBT to join The Briarhoppers. Back in the early days, the two recorded many records for labels such as Decca. Some of their most popular recordings during this era was "An Old Log Cabin For Sale," "Turn Your Radio On," "There's A Power Greater Than Atomic" and well over 30 more.

Recently, Whitey and Hogan were recognized by the Grand Old Opry from records kept in the archives of the Country Music Hall of Fame as being the oldest duet performing today. Whitey and Hogan both credit Jimmie Rodgers with influencing them most in their music. Neither had the pleasure to meet Jimmie Rodgers in person, but several times Whitey came close to meeting him.

However, Whitey had a nephew who was hitch-hiking to New York and a gentleman in a 1925 "T" Model stopped and carried him all the way to New York. The gentleman was none other than Jimmie Rodgers.

Don White was born September 25, 1909 near Sutton, West Virginia. It was in 1932 that Don first went into radio on a station at Charleston, West Virginia. Then in 1934 he joined WFBC Radio in Greenville, S.C. Out of the five members that still carry on the Briarhopper group, Don was the first to join, having done so in 1935.

After four years on the Briarhopper program, Don, along with Fred Kirby, went to WLW in Cincinnati, Ohio. Don has worked on many different radio stations during his career including WLS in Chicago.

In early 1942 Don moved back to Charlotte and once again joined the Briarhoppers. Then later in 1942 Don was asked to fill a vacant spot with The Tennessee Ramblers. The Ramblers at this time consisted of Don, Cecil Campbell, Claude Casey and Jack Gillette. They worked for WBT and had a featured spot on the Briarhopper Program.

The Tennessee Ramblers were asked in 1943 to go out to Hollywood and make some movies. They appeared in movies with such stars as Dale Evans, Lula Belle and Scottie,



The Briarhoppers include, left to right, "Fiddlin' Hank" Warren, Shannon H. Grayson, Orval A. Hogan, Don White and Roy "Whitey" Grant.

The Durango Kid and Jimmy Wakely. Before leaving Hollywood they worked seven days with Roy Rogers. Roy was booked for a week at the Warfield Theatre and the Sons of the Pioneers had to leave for New York, so the Ramblers filled in for the Pioneers to help Roy out.

Fiddlin' "Hank" Warren was born April 1, 1909 in Mt. Airy, N.C. Through the years The Tennessee Ramblers had many personnel changes. In the mid-30's Hank was one of the first to join the group. This group of The Tennessee Ramblers went to Hollywood back in 1935 and made a movie with Gene Autry. Hank needed the money he could make from this movie because his wife was expecting. While in Hollywood, Hank's mind was back in Charlotte. Between sets Hank met Max Terhune who is better remembered as "Lullaby" from the old western movies. Max immediately sensed Hank was worrying about something and Max, being a devout Christian, started to talk with Hank, and told him to have faith and everything would be fine. Sure enough, in a few days Hank received word he was the father of twins.

Hank played with both The Tennessee Ramblers and The Briarhoppers over WBT. This gentleman is not only a great fiddler, but a noted photographer. When WBT-TV came on the air, Hank started working as a photographer, and though retired now, he continues working for the station part-time. Hank, to date, has never missed a paycheck from WBT since 1941. As a noted member of the news media, Hank is one of a very select few to be awarded a lifetime press card. Hank does all the fiddle work for the Briarhoppers but on every show he lays down the fiddle and plays a hand saw. This is something I personally have never seen, but one other professional recording artist do. When you hear Hank play "Amazing Grace" on the saw, it sounds like a steel guitar. This is indeed a rare art in music.

Shannon Grayson was born on September 30, 1916 in Sunshine, N.C. His family had an

old pump organ sitting in the living room and Shannon was fascinated by it. When only six years old, he started practicing on that old organ. Shannon was too short to sit on the stool and reach the pedals at the same time, so he would stand on the floor and pump the pedal with one foot. He almost drove the family out of the house with his trying to play the organ, so his father bought him a five-string banjo and would send him to the barn to practice his music.

Music was in Shannon's blood, but after he got older he took up guitar and mandolin, and almost quit with the banjo.

Then he nearly quit when he play the three-finger roll on banjo, so Shannon went back to playing banjo. Shannon credits Snuffy most for his influence on banjo.

Shannon started in music on a professional status with Bill Carlisle over WSOC Radio in Charlotte, in 1937. When the war broke out Shannon had moved to Knoxville working with Bill and Cliff Carlisle. Cliff Carlisle worked for and recorded with the late Jimmie

Rodgers and Shannon would often ask Cliff about the real Jimmie Rodgers. Shannon found that Jimmie was a very down to earth gentleman and all he had hoped him to be.

Shannon joined the Briarhoppers in 1944 and remained until the show went off the air in 1955. Then Shannon formed his own bluegrass gospel quartet called The Golden Valley Boys. They did a number of cuts for the King label and four for RCA.

Now, at the many bluegrass festivals the Briarhoppers play, Shannon says the most rewarding thing for him is to do something on stage that

Today the Briarhoppers are one of the finest bluegrass bands around. During the festival season they play a heavy schedule, doing shows as far as Ohio where they have been booked consecutively for the past five years.

They were booked on the World's Fair in Knoxville for two different times, and to date have out four albums. The Briarhoppers are truly Americana.

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Ojai, Calif. Columnist Marilyn Beck reports that the couple, whose careers have kept them on the run for the past year, passed the 110-year-old farmhouse during a drive through the rural Southern California community — and bought the property, interior unseen.

## And That Was Just For Lawyers

A judge has ordered publishing heir Peter Pulitzer to pay his former wife's divorce lawyers \$26,000, ruling their claims for \$12,000 more were unjustified.

The lawyers represented Roxanne Pulitzer in failed efforts to have the settlement in her 1982 divorce modified on appeal.

## Briarhoppers To Play On 'Prairie'

Charlotte's own Briarhoppers will perform live,



The Briarhoppers: "Fiddlin' Hank" Warren (from left), Arval Hogan, Don White, Shannon Grayson and Roy "Whitey" Grant.

coast-to-coast Saturday on "A Prairie Home Companion," aired locally at 6 p.m. on WFAE (91 FM). The group's "Briarhopper Time" show on WBT from the late 1930s to the early 1950s earned them a bushel of faithful fans throughout the Carolinas.


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