

Appalachian Dulcimer
The Musical Instrument of Kentucky
Effective March 23, 2001

How it Happened

Mary Smith of Vine Grove, Kentucky, read a story in the May - July 2000 issue of the Dulcimer Players News, telling that there was a bill being submitted to the Michigan Senate which would name the hammered dulcimer the official instrument of Michigan. She found that very interesting. (On March 30, 2001, on the opening day of the Ohio Valley Gathering sponsored by the Louisville Dulcimer Society, it was learned from Gail Schwandt, author of the DPN article, that the bill did not pass and it is not the official state instrument. In the hearts of Michigan hammered dulcimer players, IT IS !) Soon after reading the article, Mary was with her friend Senator Elizabeth Tori and mentioned the article and thought that the Appalachian dulcimer should be the official musical instrument of Kentucky. Senator Tori did not know if Kentucky did indeed have an official state musical instrument. The subject changed and nothing more was discussed that day .

On June 27, 2000 Mary wrote a letter to Senator Tori and enclosed a copy of the Dulcimer Players News article. In the letter she again mentioned the thought that it would be appropriate if the Appalachian dulcimer was the official musical instrument. In that letter she spoke of Jean Ritchie and her tremendous influence, keeping the dulcimer alive and well. Mary was aware that Senator Tori was having the Legislative Research Committee check on the existence, if any, of a state musical instrument. Being rather presumptuous, she stated that dulcimer players would show up in Frankfort "en-masse" on "the day".

In July of 2000, Mary received a fax from Senator Tori stating that the Bill Draft had been completed and that it would be prefiled so that it would be presented in the early portion of the 2001 Session.

Mary sent to Senator Tori a copy of Jean Ritchie's "The Dulcimer Book", historical information obtained from the "internet" and an article about Homer Ledford, among other items. She spoke to Nancy Barker, Jean Ritchie, Homer Ledford and Richard Albin concerning history and festivals, etc. and forwarded all this information to the Senator. She provided phone numbers of these individuals in the event the Senator needed to speak to them.

On February 13, 2001 approximately 65 persons with dulcimers in hand arrived in the rotunda of the capitol building in Frankfort. Music of the dulcimer echoed through the halls (and just outside Governor Patton's office) for about 45 minutes. A greeting address was given by Senator Tori to the players and other guests during the performance. She extended an invitation for the hearing of Senate Bill 5 when the Senate convened at 2 pm that day.

Kind words of enthusiasm were offered by Senator Tori on the Senate floor on behalf of the Appalachian dulcimer and its history. Special recognition was expressed by her for Homer Ledford, who was in the Gallery, Warren May and Jean Ritchie. It was also noted that Jean Ritchie had donated her first primitive dulcimer to be placed in the capital city History Museum. Senate Bill 5 named the Appalachian dulcimer as the Musical Instrument of Kentucky and it passed the Senate 38 - 0.

Time passed....dulcimer players, anxious. On March 8, 2001 the bill passed the House with a vote of 94 - 1.

On Friday March 23, 2001 approximately 50 persons again returned to the rotunda with dulcimers in hand to witness the signing of Senate Bill 5 by Governor Paul Patton. This occurred in the rotunda around 11:15am. Many dulcimer players on both the left and the right of the Governor proudly held their dulcimers. Following the signing, the dulcimer players AND Senator Tori gathered on the marble steps near the rotunda and played My Old Kentucky Home and several other popular folk tunes. (This was captured by a Lexington TV station).

On Friday evening, March 30, 2001, at 8:00 pm Mary Smith and Senator Tori were honored during the opening concert of The Ohio Valley Gathering, sponsored by the Louisville Dulcimer Society. This event took place March 30 - April 1 at the Ramada Inn in Lexington, Kentucky.

LONG LIVE THE SWEET SOUNDS
OF THE
APPALACHIAN DULCIMER

The Official Musical Instrument of Kentucky

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