

**COVER SHEET**

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Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, PhD, Independent Contractor  
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Interviewee: Harry Bickel  
Interviewer: Jesse Wells  
Cinematographer: Sean Anderson  
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Transcription Notes:

**JW:** Jess Wells

**HB:** Harry Bickel

**SA:** Sean Anderson

In some cases, words such as "um", "uh", "and", "so" and "yeah" have been excluded.

Time notations have been included at approximately 2-minute intervals.

... Indicates pause, delay in conversation, or, weak transition/no transition in themes.

The following names of musical genres have been capitalized: Bluegrass.

Attempts were made to verify the names of all musicians and geographical locations referenced throughout this interview.

**0:00**

**JW:** We are doing our interview today for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. Welcome, Harry Bickel. Tell us where you're from and maybe...

**HB:** A little bit about myself?

**JW:** Yea.

**HB:** Well, I'm from Louisville. Born in Louisville in 1945, within a few months of when Bluegrass actually started which was late '45, '46, and have been here most of my life. Got interested in music back in the early '60s with the Kingston Trio thing, and the whole folk music boom. I went to Newport in '65 and started getting interested in instruments right around that same time, not only just playing them, but working on them and all that...

**JW:** Great. Can you describe a little bit of your childhood and family background? Musical and non-musical.

**HB:** No music in my family. Nobody played music at all. I was really the first one. I wanted to play the piano when I was a kid. My parents wouldn't buy me a piano. They didn't particularly care for music and, you know, I was one of these kids who was always jumping from this to that so they figured this would be a waste of money. They wouldn't buy me a piano, so I think I went out and I got my first job when I was in high school. With my first paycheck I went out and bought a banjo for \$40.00. I figured they probably hated banjos, so I got me a banjo and that was what I stayed with.

**JW:** Who did you hear playing the banjo that might have influenced you?

**HB:** Well, of course the Kingston Trio to begin with, and I had a buddy who called me over to the house and said, "You gotta hear this guy," and he put an LP on and it was Foggy Mountain Banjo, it was Earl. Then, after I had actually started working on them with a guy named Tom Hale here in town, he was a repairman, he called me one day and he said, "I want you to come listen to this banjo player. We're going to be building him a banjo neck." So I went on over to the house, and it was J.D. Crowe. So I was the one putting the inlay in, we didn't cut the inlay, you know, I was going to put all of the inlay in it, and he, J.D. asked me how much I'd charge to inlay the neck and I said, "Do you give banjo lessons?" He said, "Yea, I'll give you banjo lessons." So we just traded and then became friends after that.

**2:46**

**JW:** Was that your first experience as a luthier or doing any kind of...

**HB:** Well, I started in '63, '64 whatever, I started hanging out in a music store downtown, Shackletons. Tom Hale worked in the basement. He was the stringed instrument repairman. Another guy worked over there who did all the horns and wind instruments and all that. Being a big music store in the folk era, all these people were playing guitars and about half of them didn't know how to put strings on them. So they'd bring them back to the music store to put strings on them. They'd take them down to Tom. Tom hated to put strings on them, to stop what he was doing and put strings on them, so he'd pay me a dollar a guitar to put a new set of strings on them. So that's really how I started working on them.

**(HB Continued)**

Then he started showing me other things. When he left down there and started, he put his shop in his home and started working out of his home and at that point he would have me do things. Mostly, I'd do inlay work. He needed somebody to, when he'd build a banjo neck or had somebody bring a guitar in, he'd need somebody to go ahead and cut out the fret board and put the inlay in. Back then it was before we had a dremel. So, you had to use chisels and all that stuff.

**JW:** Yea. You did everything by hand.

**HB:** Yep.

**JW:** Did you have any specific patters you liked to work from?

**HB:** Well like I said, we were more... Tom was not a purist. Ok. Tom just did. So, he would order pearl out of a catalogue, and we would just take these, they still offer them, you can still buy all these different pieces and shapes, you know, bells and stars, this, and that and the other, and he would have a whole bunch of that. So I would kind of lay them out on the finger board and you know, just build a pattern. In fact, a couple of years ago I saw one of them end up on EBay, one of them that I had done.... But we just pieced stuff together.

And then, when we started to work with somebody like Crowe, Crowe a specific inlay. He wanted the flying eagle pattern. So, we ordered the flying eagle pattern. Pearl cutting is, it's not something you do unless you have the right equipment. It really needs to be done with a pearl saw under water and all that. We would just order that stuff and I'd lay it out on the neck, draw it out and then, you know, cut out the wood and put it in.

**5:15**

**JW:** What other experiences have you had with building necks for banjos or other instruments?

**HB:** Well, back in the mid-70s, I bought a house in the Cherokee Triangle here, the one that has since become known as the Bluegrass Hotel. Bunch of guys were living there, and my best friend at the time was a guy named Harry Sparks. Harry was, and still is, a really, really, fine luthier. Back then, nobody was a luthier because, I'm sure the word existed, but nobody, you would just insert repairman, or builders, or whatever. You just didn't, that wasn't a term that we used.

Sparky built a lot of, was building banjo necks, and back then the thing that people needed were five string, reproduction five string banjo necks to go in Gibson banjos. That was the big thing.

**JW:** So just the pot assembly and...

**HB:** Yeah, you could make the pot up if you wanted, but basically, Crowe would bring a Granda pot for a banjo and he would need a maple neck made for it with all the trimmings. So, Sparky and I, when I bought the house, we actually set-up the shop in the basement and it's still there. We built quite a few banjo necks for musicians. Most of them, again, most of them reproduction banjo necks for four or five stringed necks for Gibson pots. Back then, in the 60s, and even into the '70s you could buy a Gibson banjo pot for anywhere between \$100.00 and \$400.00 dollars, which I wish I'd bought a lot of them, but

nobody had \$100.00 to \$400.00 dollars back then. Sparky and I would work on the necks together down in the basement, and after a while we actually started working with Bill Sullivan of First Quality. Bill would make up the neck blanks to our specs, and then we'd, I would cut out the head stocks and all that kind of stuff, and put the, I would do most of the inlay work, and Sparky would do all of the shaping and all that, and the fitting and all and the finish. Well, you know, we cranked out a fair number, plus we repaired other stuff. Guys at their house fell down the stairs and broke their guitar necks, something like that, so we'd patch them back up and send them on out.

**7:46**

**JW:** What are some of your favorite banjos to work on?

**HB:** Well today, my tastes have changed a lot because of my playing. I played Bluegrass for a long time and then I started playing Old Time. I played claw hammer. Instead of the Gibson banjos that we were working on at that point in time, I've drifted back more to the 1890s and early 1900s Fairbanks banjos. Fairbanks, and Coles, and things like that, and that's really mostly, you know, that I do. I restore old banjos and put them back together and do what needs to be done to them. I just love the artistry that went into the banjos of that golden age, it was just incredible... the Fairbanks, their designs, their pearl work, everything like that is just... Some of it is way over my head. The engraving that they did, I'd have to have somebody else do that. It's just super fine engraving. The workmanship was just tremendous on those instruments.

**JW:** Absolutely. Can you talk a little bit about how the interaction between your woodworking, and building, and repairing, and playing? You touched a little bit on the Old Time banjo.

**9:13**

**HB:** It's funny. Banjo players typically, I think they have somewhat mechanical minds because there are a lot of adjustments that you can make on a banjo to get what you want out of it. Guitar players seldom do anything to their instruments. They take it to somebody if the action needs to be raised, or lowered, or anything like that. Mandolin players can raise their action a little bit with the bridges that have the little turn screw on them, but banjo players can do a lot of different things. They can put a different kind of head on it, they can tighten the head, they can loosen the head, they can put a higher bridge, a lower bridge, so there are a lot of things that you can do with a banjo.

I guess I'm the type of person, I didn't want to have to go to somebody else to have my banjo sound the way I wanted it. So I just kind of, back then, learned how to adjust them. I think that's one of things that Sparky and I did. We were very competent at setting up banjos to get the maximum sound on them. Sometimes it's funny. We would set them up, we would take an original flathead master tone, set it up, and it'd sound terrible. We'd take it apart completely, take every hook and screw off, put it back together, tighten it all down, and it would sound great. Nobody ever knew why, but you know, we would just fool around with them. We would get... we were very, very fortunate. Some of the guys that lived at the house, some of the guys came through the house... We would have sometimes a whole room full of master tones, flatheads to compare sound, or we'd have a half a dozen loar mandolins there. We'd just had them around and play them. So, you could really fine-tune your ear to what the capabilities were I think to the instruments. It's very hard to get those kinds of instruments together any more, but they were very commonplace back then.

**JW:** [Brief interruption by videographer...] I was just going to ask you what other banjos do you seek besides Fairbanks and Coles? What are some desirable...

**HB:** Some desirable banjos?

**JW:** Instruments? Yea.

**11:36**

**HB:** I like Chicago banjos. It's not a brand; it's actually... there was a Chicago brand, which you don't want... Lyon & Healy instruments, not only their banjos, but also some of their mandolins and guitars were just excellent. The engraving on some of the pearl on some Lyon and Healy instruments is just superb.

There was another maker, J.B. Shall. I've got a J.B. Shall banjo. It was made by Shall, but it was another guy that put it out. It's got a 13, or 12 and 3/4, no, 13 and 3/4 inch head. It's this huge thing. I just recorded with it and it's just amazing. Its got nylon strings on it, has just got this boom, this big boom to it. It's really fantastic.

I like those kinds of banjos. I like banjos that combine function with artistry. Now, you know, there are some very, very beautiful banjos made by S.S. Stewart, but I don't like to play them, and most people don't like to play S.S. Stewart banjos. They are incredibly well crafted, beautiful, beautiful pearl work, carving and all that stuff, but for some reason they just don't sound as good. As far as the best sounding banjo there is, I think Fairbanks, which they had the Fairbanks electric and it went into the White Lady and the Tubaphone and all that. Still today, for Old Time music, those are still kind of the state of the art.

**JW:** Still today?

**HB:** Still today, and Fairbanks burned down in 1904 and Vega bought them out. They've just continued and still, a lot of players still, that's what they want to play. Are there any contemporary makers that you like?

Yeah, I mean, there's some great... I've got, the banjo I play when I'm out playing most of the time has a neck by Wyatt Fawley with a Tubaphone pot. I really think the best bargains are old banjos. I mean, you can get some incredible stuff that, if you, dollar for dollar, if you paid somebody to do it today you'd pay three or four times as much as you would for the original one. Some people I think are scared of old instrument. They think, "Oh my God it's like an old house, it's going to fall apart on me," but there is some beautiful stuff out there. But Wyatt, you know, Wyatt does work... When Wyatt makes a copy of a Vega, or a Fairbanks neck, it looks and feels exactly like the original one. He'd just really good at that.

Bart Reiter, I've played some of Bart's banjos. There are some guys... Kevin Enoch makes some beautiful stuff. I've not played any of Kevin's I don't think. I've seen a couple of them.

There are some, I'm not going to mention names, but there are some folks making absolutely incredible artistic banjos today that don't sound good.

**JW:** Sure, that's...

**HB:** They don't sound good, and that's like having a beautiful car that doesn't run. I mean there's not a whole lot of use for it.

**15:04**

**JW:** Have you built any reproduction necks for Old Time banjos?

**HB:** We did. I gave up building stuff back a long time ago. When Sparky moved out, Sparky, he moved out in the '80s, and I just kind of piddled around in the shop after that. Actually, I traded a whole bunch of the old neck blanks we had to Wyatt for a banjo. So I haven't really gotten into that much. But we did make some Old Time banjo necks back then, but again, the demand was just starting for Old Time banjos. We, Sparky and I both played Old Time banjo, so we'd make them for ourselves. The big demand was, back then, for the Gibson style necks.

**JW:** Who else did you make necks for? You mentioned J.D. Crowe...

**HB:** J.D. and um, I'm trying to think of some of the people. We did that. We did work for different people. Sonny Osborne. Sparky brought Sonny over to the house one time while I was out of town and Sonny was down there having some work done. Of course, we did some work for Sam Bush. And Béla, we did some work on Béla's banjo. Sparky still does all of Sam's work on "Hoss."

**JW:** Oh, wow.

**HB:** Yeah. He may do some stuff for Béla. I don't know. Béla's gotten into custom necks. Monteleone I think makes his necks, so he has radius frets and all that. The guys that were around the house was Vince, you know, lived down there, and if his guitar needed, or if something needed work on it... We actually built one for Vince, Vince Gill. When he left he took it with him. It wasn't too much longer after that that a stagehand knocked it over and broke the headstock on it. So he didn't care for it, I think he's still got it, but you know, it was just whoever was around. Tony Whimson's brother, we built a banjo neck for him.

**17:06**

**JW:** What are some of the best instruments that have gone through your hands that you might have now?

**HB:** You mean that I've owned? I had two original flatheads. I've sold those since I don't play much Bluegrass anymore. In fact, the second one, the last one I sold to Béla. He told me not too long ago that it was his third favorite. Béla has got a lot of flatheads. It was his third favorite. Let's see, traded Sparky out of the other one. I got a couple of White Ladies number 7s that I love. They're very, very nice instruments. That's kind of the holy grail of Old Time, of the Fairbanks, White Ladies number 7s, although, it's funny, my tastes have changed in the last few years and I tend to like the Fairbanks electrics like the one I showed you earlier. Now that's, to me there's a different, it's a different sound. It's mellower. It's beautiful, and they all sound a little bit different, but I like the Fairbanks electrics probably as much as the White Ladies, and Tubaphones, I like Tubaphones a lot.

**JW:** Is there a wood preference there? Do you like Mahogany over Maple?

**HB:** I like Mahogany better. I'm not sure that... In a banjo, banjos are interesting because they're one instrument that you have to use a hammer on every now and then, you know, to get them in shape because they are not as depended upon wood as an all wood instrument is. The banjo has a lot of metal in it, and the tone ring around the top of it influences the tone much more than whatever wood. I like Mahogany because it's more stable. I've seen Maple necks that... Maple is just not a very stable wood. After a while they will twist on you, bend on your, or warp on you. That's one of the reasons why a lot of the makers that used them would split the piece of wood and glue another piece of wood in the middle and sandwich them together and make a three piece neck, particularly with maple, because when they tried to move that piece of wood would tend to keep them from moving against each other.

**19:38**

**JW:** What type of wood would you use as a veneer in the middle? Harder wood? Like Ebony?

**HB:** I not sure what they used. Ebony or... it depends on the company too. Some companies used cheap wood that didn't hold up very well. Pearwood. I think sometimes it depended on the model. Pearwood, you know, Fairbanks, for whatever reason, used Pearwood over the pit stock. These beautiful instruments, they spared no cost, but they dyed Pearwood... Maybe it was because of the look they got out of it or whatever, but over the years it deteriorated. I've got a Fairbanks Regent that the piece in between the two pieces of wood is deteriorated somewhat. Some companies, like I said, they made beautiful banjos and put all this work into it, but then they used a few pieces of cheap wood in it and it kind of fell apart.

**JW:** What are your thoughts about heads on banjos? Do you prefer skin or are there synthetic materials that you like?

**HB:** I use both.

**JW:** Both?

**HB:** I use both. I'm not that crazy... If I were playing Bluegrass, I'd probably be using a straight Remo banjo head. Some of my banjos, steel string banjos in particular, probably a fiberskyn **[verified spelling]** head. I think I like those the best; they have a little more thunky sound to them. On some steel string banjos though I use a nice calf skin, I love calf skin heads.

**JW:** Yeah.

**HB:** Particularly a nice, heavy duty, you get them tightened up and... you know, they used to say that people didn't want to use calf skin because they would break and all this kind of stuff, but I haven't had many calf skin heads break. I get them down, get them to tightness, I don't ever tighten one so tight that... Sparky and I always used as a rule of thumb, when you put a banjo head on and you get it tight, you should take both thumbs and it should depress just slightly like that **[demonstrates with hands]**. If you do that with a calf skin head there's really not much change, other than the fact that over time of course it's going to wear out. Particularly what I'm using are imitation gut strings, the nylon strings. I love calf skin with that. I wouldn't even want to put one of those on with a plastic head.

**[Slight pause in recording and interview]**

**22:29**

**JW:** Can you name some other teachers or people who have been mentors in your work?

**HB:** In the luthiery work or the playing?

**JW:** Well, both.

**HB:** Playing, you know, I was very fortunate to hear a lot of good people and meet a lot of good people. Tommy Thompson, with the Red Clay Ramblers, and I ended up living in the same apartment complex in North Carolina, so I kind of got inspired by Tommy in my playing. I probably learned the most from Harry Sparks. Again, I worked with Tom, and Tom did things a certain way. Sparky taught me more about doing work in a restoration. You know, there's a lot of difference between repairing an instrument, and restoring an instrument. When you are dealing with really fine and old instruments, you need to know how to restore them.

One person that I think we are all indebted to is George Gruhn. George Gruhn was one of the, if not the person, who got people interested in vintage instruments way back in the '60s and George is still going strong today. He laughs. He says, "He's owned more instruments more times than anybody," because he sells them and he trades them back, he sells them and we trade them back! But George, he is just a, he's an encyclopedia. It's just all in his head. I hear him on the phone sometimes, he's talking about, well that one had three screws, but next year they put four screws in it, and he just knows all that stuff. But he really has created the appreciation for old instruments.

I guess I learned a whole lot from Sparky. At that time, when we were working together, he had had a music store up in Cincinnati, a famous Old Time music store, and he was the only authorized repairman for Martin guitars outside of the factory at that time. So you know, he is just a very, very fine luthier. He doesn't do as much work today. Gary Cornett is just... I learned stuff. Every time I talk to Gary I learn stuff. I think he's pretty amazing, his ability to not only understand how the instruments go together, but all the materials that he uses, and the glues and everything like that. Back years ago, of course you didn't have crazy glue and things like that, there are places for all of it, but you have to know how the materials work.

**25:15**

**JW:** What are some aspects of the restoration process? Maybe finish? Or glues and wood that...

**HB:** Yeah, I'll speak mostly to banjos, which is mostly what I do. A Fairbanks banjo, what you've got to do a lot of times is to replace the pearl. For whatever reason, when they put the pearl in, sometimes it didn't stay in, and so it fell out. So you might have an instrument, I just bought a banjo recently that about half of the pearl, or more than half of the pearl was just gone. Now, you know you still have it cut out in your fingerboard, so it's fine, you know what to cut, and you can see a little bit of the engraving pattern so you know how it was engraved, so that kind of thing.

Fret jobs, sometimes you've got to replace frets. Sometimes you have to level them out. They are, you know, sometimes over the years they wear out, or you get high ones and you have to kind of level them out.



Binding, replacing binding... Finish work, I'm not the greatest finish work person in the world, but you know, but I know some. The one thing you try not to do with a vintage instrument is refinish it. You want as much of the original instrument, particularly when you get into guitars and so forth, people would rather have the original finish as many original parts as possible.

But there are a lot of things... On a banjo a lot of it is cleaning up the parts. Polishing it. Over the years, nickel-plating, over a hundred years, gets pretty dirty.

**JW:** Do you have any tips for cleaning metal parts?

**HB:** Absolutely. I just found this out after polishing them by hand for so many years. You go to a gun store, and you get one of these big drums, they use it to polish shell casings like brass casings, and you use rouge-covered Walnut shells. It's a thing that looks like a globe like that **[demonstrates with hands]** and you take the top off, and you fill it with the Walnut shells and the rouge, and you dump all the parts in and turn it on and come back about four hours later and they're clean as a whistle. It's just amazing. You still have to polish the stuff that's on the banjo.

**JW:** Sure.

**HB:** But it's just amazing. You can do wet ones and dry ones. I do the dry ones, but it doesn't scratch them up, it doesn't do anything, they just come out clean as a whistle.

**27:51**

**JW:** What about a finish? Do you have a preference? French polish, or...?

**HB:** Like I said, I don't do much finish work. I never did do that much. I just try to touch up little things or whatever. Yeah, I mean, French polishing is wonderful. That's the way a lot of the old necks were done, with French polishing. Again, I'm not a finish person.

**JW:** Have you garnered any recognition for your work that you've done besides...?

**HB:** Nah, not really.

**JW:** None?

**HB:** Again, over the years, there weren't a whole lot of people back in the '60s and '70s repairing instruments. In today's world, there are lots and lots of people repairing them, and some of them are just superb, and some of them are not so good. That's hard to determine. Who is good and who is not. You look and see which ones the professional musicians go to, you've probably got a better shot at it. Again, I have not been known as a luthier, we just had a banjo shop in the basement. We just kind of patched them up and sent them back out, and we did some good work.

**JW:** Do you think people have given you more credit than you are yourself?

**HB:** I don't know...

**JW:** Musically, who are some of the people you've maybe recorded with or performed with?

**HB:** I just finished an album with my original Buzzard Rock string band. Harry Sparks, Doc Hamilton, and myself started the band in 1975, and we sort of had an unofficial fourth member that was living at the house and that was Vince Gill. Last year, Vince invited us down to his studio. So we went this February and the four of us recorded an album. We are in the mixing stage right now, but it's mostly stuff we did back then, plus a song that Sparky's brother wrote. It was really fun. We spent a couple of days, we hung around Nashville all week. We went and heard the Time Jumpers play, which if you've never heard the Time Jumpers play, you want to hear the Time Jumpers play.

We went over and hung out at Gruhns all day. Michael Cleveland was there, so he jammed with us all day. And we had Charlie Cushman who played base with us. Vince has got a new studio in his house, so he calls the studio the house. That was fun... And I recorded some back in the '70s and the '80s. I recorded with Art Stamper a bit. But yeah, I'm still playing.

**JW:** Who are some of your favorite banjo players to listen to?

**HB:** Old Time banjo?

**JW:** Yeah, or just...

**HB:** Any of them?

**JW:** Yeah, any of them...

**HB:** Well Crowe of course, for Bluegrass banjo, and Earl. They are just... that's what I like. I used to like to listen to Bill Keith. I thought Bill Keith was good. When it got a little to, we used to call them "spaghetti runs," these guys run these things all over the neck... but I always liked the basic stuff. As far as Old Time banjo players, I really like Tommy Thompson's playing. I like Pete Hoover's playing. There was a guy up in Cincinnati that I didn't know, but somebody gave me tapes of, and actually, he was giving a banjo lesson to somebody, named Pat Dunford. Pat was a wonderful banjo player. He died a long time ago actually. He did one album for David Unlimited. So, I really liked Pat Dunford's playing, and there are a lot of good people out there now so.

**31:46**

**JW:** Yeah.

**HB:** When I started playing Bluegrass banjo, there wasn't anyone else playing around here. Then, all these guys started playing Bluegrass, so I guess I started playing Old Time then. Now there are all these people playing Old Time banjo, so now I'm going to get two sticks and beat them together or something like that...

**JW:** Playing the bones.

**HB:** Yeah, playing the bones. Not a lot of bone players around...

**JW:** Well, can you think of anything Sean [referring to videographer] that you...?

**SA:** No, not anything off of the top of my head...

**HB:** You aren't going to make me tap dance or anything are you?

**JW:** No, no.

**HB:** Is that it? Can I put my glasses back on?

**JW:** Yeah, I think that's it.

**HB:** Cut! Cut!

**JW:** Thanks.

**HB:** That was fun.

**[Interview stops at 32:35. HB demonstrates/discuss banjo for remainder of video]**

**32:40**

**HB: [Demonstrates on banjo].**

**33:04**

**JW:** That's a beautiful instrument.

**HB:** There, I don't need to be playing it. Do you just want to talk about it?

**JW:** Yeah! Show us some of the pearl, and maybe the engraving.

**HB:** Do we need to hold it up close to the thing? What do we need to do?

**SA:** I'll get it...

**HB:** You're going to get it? Ok. This is what I talked about earlier. This is a Fairbanks White Lady number 7. This is sort of the top of the line Fairbanks banjo of the regular line. They make some fancier custom ones, but this has become the benchmark for Old Time banjos. The "White Lady" refers to this tone ring that's inside. This was patented in 1901 by Albert Fairbanks and they were made in Boston. Most of the great banjos back in the 1890s, early 1900s, were made in Boston. This is a highly decorated model. You can see that it has engraved pearl in the headstock. All of the pearl up and down the neck is engraved. This is kind of a neat touch because the audience never sees this, but in the back, for the banjo player, there's a nice little engraved piece of pearl. And, there's another down here actually, but the banjo player is really the only one that ever sees it, that one back there. Then of course, the heel is very, very nicely carved and, it's imitation tortoise shell binding and all. So, it's just very nicely put together, instead of many companies, they just put a heel cap on, there are one, two, three, four, five... five pieces of wood there, so you get different colors of wood. Same thing up here. You have a stack. They're veneers. There's no functional reason to do that. Same thing here, you didn't have to all of those nice colored veneers in there. They just did it.

**35:31**

**(HB continues)**

At this time period, Fairbanks, they went so far into artistry as they matched the size of the peg head to the size of the pot and the overall length so that proportionately it looked good. At one time I think they had four for the same kind of banjo, they had four different sizes of peg heads, just so it would be proportionately correct. It's unusual to do something like that. Gibson, who made really fine jazz-aged banjos, but they made one neck. Basically one neck, same scale, never a difference in the scale really, and they just put different kinds of decorations on it. And this, these are replacement, except for this, this is the original tuner, but these are replacement tuners on it, but the original pearl buttons are still on it. So they made, they put solid pearl, mother of pearl buttons on them.

**36:33**

**JW:** Was this common back stripping?

**HB:** No, this is an extension. They sandwiched these veneers and then they ran them down the neck. And then of course, they had to carve it back so it was even, and they would come out as these rings like this. You only found that in the higher-grade banjos. At this time, this was the highest-grade banjo they would carry in their catalogue. Now if you wanted a presentation model, then you could order one special and it would have whatever you wanted on it. It would have cherubs and all these things on the pearl on the fingerboard, but this is basically an out of the catalogue, off the wall stock instrument, but the quality of it was just superb.

**JW:** Yeah, it's an amazing instrument.

**HB:** Yep, they are amazing instruments, and there are lots more like this from that era. This one was made right, just a little bit after the fire. Fairbanks burned down in March of 1904. Vega was right next door. Vega bought them out. They paid \$100 dollars for all their patents, and they continued making... and this banjo looks exactly like a pre-fire banjo, almost exactly like a pre-fire banjo. Just a slight few, very minor, minor differences. Vega didn't even put their name in them until 1910. They just kept on making them. It was a good product and sold well.

**JW:** Want him to play a little?

**SA:** Sure if he could...

**HB:** Ok.

**JW:** It'd be nice to hear.

**38:19 [HB demonstrates on banjo]**

**JW:** Thanks.

**HB:** Yeah. This is an interesting thing. Did you ever look at one of the original pips? They don't make them like that anymore... [Hands banjo off to JW], the little ivory, you know, fifth string nut. They actually did them alave [unable to discern word]. I've got, Gary was commenting a while back on one

that I have on another banjo that I've got that's even fancier than that. It's got different, it's curved like that and then it's got a little lip... Remember that one Gary? [References Gary Cornett off camera]. It was beautiful.

**JW:** No, you don't see that anymore. I was always curious about the back striping.

**HB:** Yeah.

**JW:** Did you make any necks like that? Bluegrass necks?

**HB:** We didn't, no.

**JW:** That's Pearwood, isn't it?

**HB:** Probably the, I would imagine the... yeah, yeah it is, look, you can see how cracked it is.

**40:34 [Video stops, no closing or check for room tone]**