



# Fiddler's Rag



Vol. 52, Number 08  
Celebrating 51 years

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association  
[www.fiddlers.org](http://www.fiddlers.org)

August 2024  
Next Jam August 4<sup>th</sup>



## President's Note

By Susan Goodis

July 7th was the first Summer jam at the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden Park. The temperatures were in the 90s in the sun, but the breeze in the shade of

the redwoods proved to be the perfect place to spend the afternoon. With close to 50 attendees, we had several bluegrass/singing jams, a large oldtime jam and an even larger slow jam. Several members gained much appreciation for leader Sharon McCorkell, as they tried to fill her shoes prior to her arrival. She makes it look easy to lead, but it does take a special knack and she has it. Thanks, Sharon, for leading, welcoming the newcomers, and bringing their skill level up a notch at every jam.

Remember, the third Sunday jams are happening at a different park every month. These jams are smaller and allow musicians to try different musical styles. By playing in different communities, new people hear our music and may even play with us. Some folks have discovered SCVFA for the first time and are now members. Give it a try on August 18th at the Washington Park in Sunnyvale - near the corner of S. Pastoria Ave.

Great news! Four new tutorial videos for "Chinquapin Hunting," taught by Ray Chen, are now available on the [SCVFA YouTube channel](#). Check it out and put in the time to learn this excellent tune. It is great fun to play together as a group.

Half of the SCVFA board (Ray, Cliff, and I) will be at Camp Washington Carver for the annual Appalachian String Band Music Festival in Clifftop, West Virginia. In addition to the 24/7 jamming, I look forward to cheering on Ray's family band, "The Corn Likkers," as they compete in the band competition.

Many thanks to Ann and Minema, who have stepped up to publish our monthly newsletter this month in Ray's absence. We need your contributions of content to continue newsletter distribution every month. I invite you to write a music-related article

at any time. The publishing team will add it to our newsletter at a future date when content is needed. Keep the articles coming so we can keep the newsletter coming every month.

SCVFA has a tremendous leadership team with one open trustee seat on the board. As vice-president, Ray Chen leads the board meetings with focus, organization, and skill. After seven years of leading the board meetings, I have transitioned to serve as the support and social arm of the organization. Together with an excellent working board, we work to keep SCVFA as a vibrant community to promote traditional music.

We are looking for someone who shares our same goal of keeping SCVFA strong to fill the remaining board seat. No musical knowledge is needed. Don't be shy. Email me with questions or your particular areas of expertise that may be helpful to our organization: [president\[at\]fiddlers\[dot\]org](mailto:president@fiddlers.org). "Many hands make small work." Volunteer to minimize the work and increase the fun for all. Please say "Yes" when asked to become a trustee.

How else can you support SCVFA? The answer is: performing with us! *All musicians of all levels are invited and more than welcome* to join our "playouts" (outside performances). I call it "safety in numbers." The money generated from these playouts is a major source of revenue for SCVFA (over \$1500.00 so far this year) and they are fun! Each time you play, you will see your skill level climb another notch. Email me at [president\[at\]fiddlers\[dot\]org](mailto:president@fiddlers.org) to be notified of performance opportunities. Come play with us whenever you can.

Word of mouth and sharing on social media is how we invite others to join the fun.

*(continued on page 2)*

| In This Issue:                                     | Page |
|--|------|
| President's Note.....                              | 1    |
| American Week 2024 by Susan Goodis .....           | 2    |
| SCVFA Happenings .....                             | 4    |
| Spotlight on "Elzic's Farewell" by Ray Chen.....   | 5    |
| Jam Photos by Zakkai Melamed & Susan Goodis .....  | 7    |
| Mt. Airy: A Musical Pilgrimage by Cliff Riggs..... | 8    |

Let your friends, coworkers, and family know what a treasure this group is. Invite your non-musician friends to come and listen. Play music together. Build lasting friendships in a welcoming community. Become a better musician. We continue to gather to share music and help others grow.

I will not be at the Rose Garden Park Jam in August but hope you will. Take pictures and share them with me to be published in the September newsletter. As always, thank you for being part of SCVFA, a community of people who love to make music together. Your continuing support of SCVFA is keeping traditional music alive. ---Susan

## American Week 2024

By Susan Goodis

I spent my Fourth of July holiday at “American Week,” a music and dance camp put on by the Bay Area Country Dance Society (BACDS) in the rustic and beautiful setting of the Quaker Center in Ben Lomond. The focus is contra dance music, taught by some of the best musicians for this style. [Ryan McKasson](#) has a reputation as a performer, composer, collaborator, and teacher. He is the first reason I was drawn to this camp. Hayden Stern is a fiddler and teacher, and their decades-long musical journey includes a range of traditions and styles, focusing on Scottish and Cape Breton music. [Alex Sturbaum](#) (they/them) is a singer, songwriter, dance musician, and multi-instrumentalist who performs across the country at festivals, contra dance weekends, and more. [George Paul](#) (AKA Java George), pianist, prolific composer, and band leader, brought the musicians together as he led the morning waltzes and the camper band. These talented musicians are what made American Week very special. I was fortunate to learn from them. Everyone was awed by their music all week.



American Week teaching staff L to R: Alex Sturbaum, Hayden Stern, Ryan McKasson, George Paul, Steve Kemble

Each day starts with “Waltzes Before Breakfast,” my favorite time. Camper musicians play waltzes for the dancers each morning before breakfast. This year, all of the waltzes we played were composed by Java George. The remainder of the day is filled with contra dancing, singing, and dance calling and music workshops up until dinner time. We worked on contra fiddling, Cape Breton fiddle, and Newfoundland dance music, as well as preparing to play for the Wednesday night contra dance.



Music workshop at BACDS American Week

Each night following dinner, a different band or musician performed a concert of their non-contra music. Then we cleared the floor for more contra dancing. If you are not a dancer, the evening options are listening to the amazing contra music while watching your friends dance or jamming with others at the dining hall. My choice was always dance. It’s hard to keep your feet still to such excellent music.

This camp is small compared to many others, but that is the real charm. I was able to connect with more people and make even more new friends.



Happy campers!!

The Fiddler's Rag is published monthly by the Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association and is provided to members of the Association. The Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association (SCVFA), founded in 1973 in San Jose, California, is a nonprofit, volunteer-operated organization dedicated to the preservation, teaching, and enjoyment of traditional music. Membership includes electronic delivery of the Fiddler's Rag.

To join, sign up at the jam or see <http://www.fiddlers.org/join-the-scvfa/>.

### Officers

|                            |                 |                            |                            |
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| President-Trustee .....    | Susan Goodis    | News Editor .....          | Ray Chen                   |
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Layout / Review: Ann Whitesell, Minema Clark  
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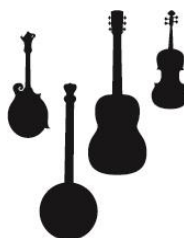
**Donations** to SCVFA are greatly appreciated and will assist in keeping traditional music alive by passing it on to the next generation.

**Many local corporations offer matched donations for non-profits.** Check with your employer... they may offer this benefit.

You can easily add SCVFA as a 501(c)(3) organization;  
 our EIN is 51-0196154

Donate as you are able  
 and traditional music will reap the benefits.

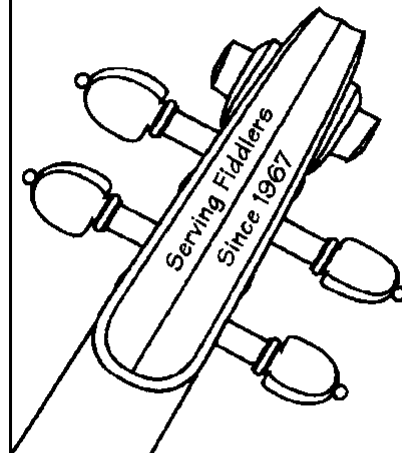
SCVFA was founded in 1973 to support fiddling but supports and welcomes musicians other than fiddlers. The image to the right side of the Fiddler's Rag name on the first page includes a mandolin, a banjo, a guitar and a fiddle, to illustrate the diversity of instruments played at our jams and events.



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# SCVFA Happenings

## SCVFA Mission Statement

*Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association (SCVFA) preserves traditional music genres that feature fiddle and other acoustic instruments. SCVFA takes pride in “passing it on” to musicians and listeners of all ages and abilities.*

## Diversity Statement

*SCVFA believes that our mission is fundamentally improved by diversity and inclusion. SCVFA is at all times committed to providing an open, safe, and welcoming environment for all our members and guests. We celebrate the varied abilities, ethnicities, sexualities, ages, gender identities, religions and cultural backgrounds of our community, and do not tolerate discrimination based upon these differences.*

**First Sunday Jam: August 4<sup>th</sup> 1:00 to 5:00 pm** at the Municipal Rose Garden, 1649 Nagle Ave. at Garden Dr. in San Jose Suggested donation: \$5.00 – more or less as you are able. [Click here to donate online.](#)

**1:30 – 2:30:** Slow jam – learning by ear is encouraged, as traditional music is an aural tradition. Developing your ear does take time, but it is a worthwhile skill. If you need a little help, tunes are available on our [SCVFA website](#).

**1:00 – 5:00:** Jamming – Bluegrass, Old Time, Americana, Scandinavian, Celtic.

“AFTERS” Join us at Taqueria Lopez 2.  
1460 Park Avenue, San Jose.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Jam: August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1-3 pm**  
Washington Park, 840 W. Washington Ave, at the corner near Pastoria, Sunnyvale

**[CBA Golden Old Time Campout:](#) August 22-25.** Guerneville, CA

**[Redwood Dulcimer Days:](#) August 16 – 17**  
Virtual Festival on Zoom

**[Berkeley Old Time Music Convention:](#)**  
**Sept 18-22.** Concerts, workshops, dances, stringband contest!

**[Good Old-Fashioned Bluegrass Festival:](#)**  
**August 8 - 11.** San Benito County Historical Park, Tres Pinos

**[Silicon Valley House Concerts:](#) August 21**  
Corwin Zekely, **August 27** Red Wine

## July Board Meeting Highlights:

*By Jessica Ollmann, Secretary*

We updated our list of pre-approved recurring payments to reflect current costs and changed the allowance for increased costs from 10% to 20%.

We received \$250 for playing for the Mid-Peninsula Widows and Widowers Association.

The board discussed the popularity and importance of slow jam circles. We voted to continue hosting slow jams at our monthly jams at both Rose Garden Park and Hoover Middle School and to pay Sharon McCorkell a stipend when she is able to lead.

Bennett Amodio was appointed as our new Treasurer, taking over from Dinah Showman who, after many years of conscientious and appreciated service, has been helping him with the transition.

Cliff Riggs is working with Pete Showman to take over the role of Membership Secretary.

SCVFA has until now had only a Recording Secretary. The board created the position of Secretary and appointed Jessica Ollmann to the role.

Due to changes in the membership renewal process, and changes to how we do our banking, our bylaws may need some updates. Although we can continue to address issues as they come up, Dinah and Pete volunteered to go through our bylaws and note any potential problems.

We are researching options for a mid-sized sound system that would be effective for payouts at venues such as farmers markets.

## Spotlight on “Elzic’s Farewell”

By Ray Chen

Elzic’s Farewell was composed by Harvey G. Elswick (pronounced “Elzics”) in West Virginia in 1889. The story has it that it was written by an ancestor of French Carpenter who played the melody as a farewell tune before marching off to fight in the Civil War and that he never returned home. [Darol Anger’s notes](#) on the tune say that Jim Comstock of Richmond, VA researched the tune’s origins and published the following in [The West Virginia Songbag](#) (1974).

“The tune was actually written by one Harvey G. Elswick who was born in Pike County, Kentucky in 1838, and who did serve in a unit from that state during the Civil War. After that conflict Elswick returned to Pike County, but in 1875 he and his family removed to Kanawha County, West Virginia, to live on 80 acres in Malden and Elk districts, and it was there that he wrote the melody now known as “Elsic’s Farewell” in April, 1889. Harvey lived on until 1915 and was buried at the Elswick Cemetery at Quick, Kanawha County. Comstock cites the researches of a descendent, the Rev. Albert Elswick of Wallkill, New York, into the Elswick family and finds that Harvey Elswick played the tune at the request of his mother, who was on her deathbed. Complying with her request to “play his fiddle for her once more before she died,” Elswick was inspired to play the tune as his farewell. Wilson Douglas plays the tune in standard tuning.”

The two oldest sources I can find are from [French Carpenter](#) (born 1899) and [Gaither Carlton](#) (born 1901). The two versions seem similar so it’s likely that they are close to the original version.

A search of recordings seems to indicate that are three main trees of Elzic’s – one descended from [Carpenter/Carlton](#), another from [Doc White](#) (Carlton’s son-in-law), and a third from [Wilson Douglas](#). Carpenter’s low part starts with a slide that Carlton doesn’t play, while Doc White’s is more intricate than either one. Douglas’s version has distinctive microtones in the high part that some people (like [Rafe Stefanini](#) and [Erynn Marshall](#)) play even if, like Rafe, they don’t play the Douglas low part. Douglas’s low part starts with the distinctive slide that you hear from Carpenter but the melody is a bit different and has a different groove. Listen for yourself and see what I mean!

[The Wildmans](#) (see picture) play a great example of a 3-part Elzic’s with a Doc White-based low part and a modern middle part. I call that the 3<sup>rd</sup> part and it’s sometimes called “the hippie part” because it’s newer and often left out of the 2-part versions. Or if you prefer bluegrass, [Julian Pinelli and friends](#) played a nice version. They’re both 3-part versions with a Doc White-based low part, but they play the



*The Wildmans playing “Elzic’s Farewell” at The Floyd Country Store*

parts in a different order: one goes high to low and the other low to high. Then there’s this [monster jam on stage at Berklee](#) with Bruce Molsky, Tony Trischka, Molly Tuttle, Sierra Hull, Allison DeGroot, and a stage full of others (including two people on a concert grand piano!). They play a 2-part Elzic’s where they use the 3<sup>rd</sup> part as the low part – probably because both the old-time and bluegrass people know it! And finally, the [Reeltime Travelers](#) recorded a Carpenter-based version that I like and used when I learned this tune.

Many players (myself included) play a French Carpenter-based low part but straighten it out so it works for a contra dance. That long slide into a repetitive groove in the low part and the contrasting high part are great when paired with the right dance, especially if the band hits the downbeat hard on the low part. My version is more syncopated in the low part (that Round Peak influence at work!). I’m also working up the 3<sup>rd</sup> part (it’s so cool!) and I may try tackling the Doc White low part, too.

Elzic’s seems to be one of those unusual tunes where people might mix and match the parts and the order depending on the circumstances, personal taste or how they’re feeling that day. Some people will play a 3-part version when jamming, but play a 2-part version for a contra dance and use the 3<sup>rd</sup> part as an alternate low part. [Norman and Nancy Blake](#) do that as do the [Hillbillies from Mars](#) (a great local contra dance band led by Daniel Steinberg) in their rather funky version with a Doc White-based low part. Pete’s transcription (see next page) is from the Hillbillies version.

Because of this, Elzic’s is a tune that will really keep you on your toes at a jam! Will the fiddler start on the high part or the low part? Do they play a 3-part version and if so, in what order? If they play a 2-part version, will they throw a 3<sup>rd</sup> part in as a variation? How do they play the low part? A Carpenter/Carlton-based low part and a Doc White-based low part are likely to be different enough that it will sound really messy if they’re both played at

the same time. And if it's a small jam they might just start mixing and matching parts and versions!

fiddler is doing and adapt your playing to fit in so it adds to the music instead of clashing with it.

So there's no "wrong" version here but with Elzic's, it's a really good idea to listen to what the lead

Whatever you choose to learn, I hope you have fun with it! Enjoy!!

Pattern: Nx (AA.B.A'.CC) +AA *Elzic's Farewell* *Traditional*  
 A Dorian (Based on the Hillbillies From Mars version) *Arr. by Pete Showman*  
 ♩ = 90

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo of 90 bpm. It is divided into sections A, B, A', and C, with a Coda at the end. Chords are indicated above the notes.

- Section A:** Measures 1-4. Chords: Am, G, Am, G.
- Section B:** Measures 5-8. Chords: Am, (A), Am. Includes a circled 'C' above the Am chord in measure 7, with the instruction "(To Coda last time)".
- Section A':** Measures 9-12. Chords: Am, G, Am, G.
- Section C:** Measures 13-16. Chords: Am, G, Am.
- Section A' (repeated):** Measures 17-20. Chords: Am, G, Am, G.
- Section C (repeated):** Measures 21-24. Chords: Am, (A), Am.
- Section C:** Measures 25-28. Chords: Am, Dm.
- Section C:** Measures 29-32. Chords: Am, Dm, Am.
- Coda:** Measures 33-34. Chord: Am. Ends with "FINE".

Additional markings include a circled 'C' above the Am chord in measure 7 and a circled 'b' below the note in measure 32. The word "Coda" appears above the final Am chord in measure 33.

Arr. and typeset in ABC by Pete Showman, r1 6/14/2014, based on the version on the nice "Hillbillies from Mars" CD. You can hear the whole track at their website: [www.hillbilliesfrommars.com](http://www.hillbilliesfrommars.com); click on "Products".

Norman and Nancy Blake play a similar version at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ9EY-mPtwU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ9EY-mPtwU), but in Fm, and with the A' part repeated: AA.B.A'A'.CC (and they end after the C part).

# July Pictures

Photos by Zakkai Melamed & Susan Goodis



## Mount Airy: A Musical Pilgrimage

By Cliff Riggs

Mt. Airy holds a special place in my musical heart. It was here that I first heard Old Time music. I impulsively took my family to see the contest one weekend, and a year later, I found myself wandering the park with a new banjo, looking for a jam. The first friends I made in the music community were here, out in a field at the park. It's a high priority for me to return each year.

This year, as I have for the past 18 years, I attended the [Annual Mount Airy Bluegrass & Old Time Fiddlers Convention](#), which celebrated its 53rd anniversary. This year, much like the previous three, I was the very first person to arrive at the festival. After driving my camper across the country (it's that much fun...), I reached the site a full 10 days before the festival's official start on June 6th. I was only there about an hour before the next person showed up, but by that evening—still 10 days before the official start—we were already jamming in the park!

If you're considering attending an Eastern fiddlers convention, Mount Airy is an excellent choice. Located in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, the festival is set in a 10-acre park maintained by the local Veterans Association. There's plenty of flat, open camping space, and although it can get quite crowded, there's always room for one more tent. Finding shade is the bigger challenge—you'll need to arrive early to secure a spot with some cover. However, the festival is fantastic for families and first-time festivalgoers. Veterans Memorial Park is very close to the town center, offering easy access to shopping, hotels, tourist attractions, and restaurants. You can spend the whole week in the park playing tunes or take a break to explore downtown Mt. Airy, which inspired the Andy Griffith Show. To make things even easier, the local chamber of commerce runs a daily bus from the festival grounds to downtown and other local attractions.



*Shady campsites can be found if you're early. Later arrivals camp in the sunny (sometimes muddy) meadow.*

There are full hook-ups for RVs, but don't count on getting them; they are often reserved years in advance. I know people who have camped in the same spot for all 18 years I've been attending. You don't need to bring a week's worth of food; grocery stores are just a short car ride or an easy walk away. Also, beware of pitching your tent in a seemingly ideal, big open spot in the field—it's likely a low spot that will turn into a small lake during a typical summer downpour, leaving your camper or tent in the middle of it. And if camping is not your thing, there are many hotel rooms a short drive from the festival.

Musically, Mt. Airy offers a good balance between Old Time and Bluegrass, attracting luminaries from each genre every June. Each style has well-defined campsites, so finding a jam that suits your taste is as simple as following the music until you find yourself in the midst of various jams.



*There's always a jam somewhere in camp.*

As usual, I spent most of my time visiting with friends and playing music, engaging less in the other available activities. However, there's plenty to do at the festival. Like most large festivals, there are several workshops for all instruments, along with dancing and singing classes. There are also yoga and exercise classes for those needing to stretch after a long afternoon or evening of playing.

The contest is very popular with the local audience, and while it's almost expected that Mt. Airy locals will take the top prizes, many musicians step onto the stage to play some tunes and support the event and its musical traditions.

Mt. Airy is always held the first full weekend in June. If you are interested in attending, let me know and I'll look for you. 😊



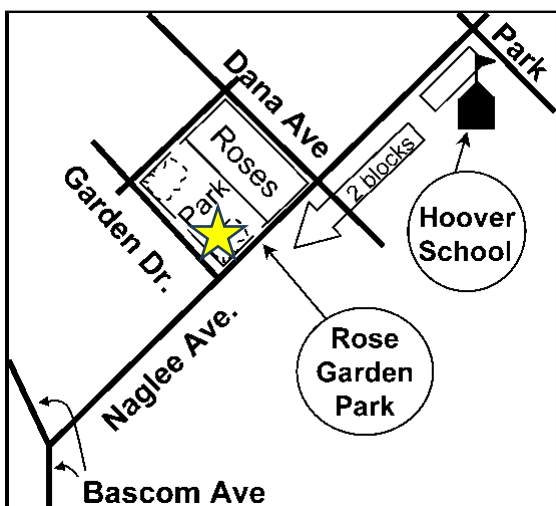


SCVFA  
P.O.Box 2666  
Cupertino, CA 95015-2666

**Next Jam:  
Sunday August 4<sup>th</sup>  
1-5 pm at Rose Garden Park**

## Directions to San Jose Municipal Rose Garden Park

Damaged or Missing Issue? Call us,  
or email to: [newsletter \[at\] fiddlers.org](mailto:newsletter@fiddlers.org)



## Bluegrass Jamming Rules

- The leader chooses the next soloist and when to end. For songs, that's the person who sings the verses. For instrumentals, it's the person who kicks it off.
- Use signals to offer, accept, and pass on solos and to end the tune. Signals are body-language only!
- Pick tunes that people know or are easy to learn (easy key, standard chord progressions, simple lyrics).
- Don't use sheet music or an electronic device.
- The soloist is always right – if the soloist changes tempo or starts late, follow them anyway.
- Support the soloist. Give them room to be heard and to improvise by:
  - Playing quietly with basic, unsyncopated rhythm.
  - Not singing harmony on verses unless asked.
  - Not singing at all during instrumental solos.
- Listen to the music and watch for signals. The more advanced the jam, the more this matters.
- When in doubt, ask questions (but don't argue with the answers).