



The Texas Fiddler



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JUN 2017

May was a very busy month for so many of us. There are proms, graduations, Mother's Day, Memorial Day just to name a few! We were able to squeeze in a couple of great contests for y'all to enjoy.

We had a great turn out in Groesbeck on May 7th. One of our long time members, Mr. John Allred, did a fantastic job keeping the crowd's attention as he did the announcing for us and he brought in his band to do some entertaining in between divisions. This was the 49th year for this Fiddle Fest and they always are a great host. The local Lions Club served a great bar-b-que plate and it could not have been a better crowd and gorgeous spring day. Next year will be the 50th Anniversary and the town of Groesbeck plans on making it count!!!

Athens Old Fiddlers Reunion is held on the courthouse square every year and has also been around as long as I can remember. In the past several years they have had a good, but smaller group turn out and compete, but this year they blew it out of the water! Although this contest is not run by TOTFA, they attracted a ton of participants. I have included their results in this month's *Done Gone* section on page 6.

Summer is here, and we all know how kind and cool our Texas summers are. Due to the heat, we do not have any contests on the calendar for June.

In April, the Texas State Fiddlers Frolics is held the third week of April. Stuart Fryer runs that contest like a well-oiled machine. One of the highlights of his contest is the annual induction of a fiddler into the Texas Fiddler's Hall of Fame.

I am very proud to say that one of our very own members, Mr. Jesse Mears was the recipient of that honor for 2017 and it is very well deserved. Jesse has been a staple in Texas fiddling and TOTFA my entire fiddling life. A contest would not be the same without him there. Jesse has won so many contests and divisions, and even though he may have lost a few, you would always see him be gracious and humble. As a young fiddler, Jesse was always welcoming and supportive of me and I know he continues to do so with those upcoming fiddlers. I have included his biography from the Fiddler's Hall of Fame in this issue on page 3.

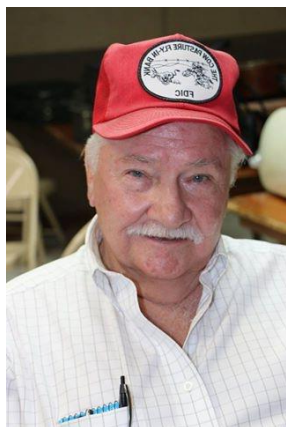


Photo Courtesy of Jackie Williams

Pictured: Jesse Mears

Taken at the Fiddlers Frolics in Hallettsville, Texas.2017

Congratulations to Jesse Mears and thank you for all you do for the fiddling community!!

2017 Calendar

Here is a listing of contest dates, such as they are known, for 2017. This list will be updated as needed as more information is known.

Date	Name / Location
Sep 8	Johnson Cty Pioneers & Old Settlers Reunion Fiddle Contest Alvarado, TX
Oct 7	Chicken & Bread Days Fiddle Contest Bowie, TX
Oct 14	J. Box Roberts Memorial Fiddle Contest Seguin, TX
Oct 21	East Texas Yamboree Fiddlers Contest Gilmer, TX
Oct 28	Crockett World Championship Fiddlers Festival Crockett, TX
Nov 11	Dale McPherson Memorial Glen Rose, TX-

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The
Texas
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Jesse Mears

Jesse W. Mears arrived in this world on January 19, 1939 in Brazos Point, Texas, the sixth of seven children born to Jesse Lawson “Shorty” and Lula Thompson Mears. The Mears family members were hard workers who labored long hours in the cotton fields but always managed to find time to enjoy fiddle music. Music has been a deep-rooted tradition in the Mears family. Around 1920, Jesse’s father, Shorty, purchased a Sears and Roebuck fiddle from his uncle who had purchased the instrument ten years prior for the grand price of \$9.98. In between farming and fiddling, Shorty would sand down the top of the fiddle to enhance the tone. By the time Jesse inherited his father’s fiddle, the top was so paper thin that it had to be replaced. Jack Mears, Jesse’s great uncle, was a widely recognized fiddler who played and traveled extensively throughout Texas. Some of his recordings were preserved by music historians and can be found in the Library of Congress. Jesse’s brother, Walter Mears, is also a fiddle player who has participated in many contests around the state of Texas. While Jesse expressed an interest in the fiddle at a very young age, his father was fearful that Jesse would be careless with the instrument. Finally, when Jesse was sixteen years old, his mother told him that he could secretly practice on his father’s fiddle but he would need to “be careful and hold it over the bed when

you play and be sure and put it back just the way you found it". With years of music already stored in his memory, it wasn't long before Jesse began to develop his own style and drive.

In the early years, Jesse would attend "fiddlings" at house parties and churches. His band of accompanists then included Herschel Simmons, Carl Simmons, John Biggs, and Buddy Weeks. Falls Creek Church in Acton, Texas was a common gathering place, and it was there that Jesse met the likes of Benny and Jerry Thomasson, Sleepy Johnson, Dale Morris Sr., Wallace and Dale McPherson, and Texas Shorty and his brother, Robert Chancellor. One time, after Jesse had played "Leather Britches", a voice behind him exclaimed "By doggies, right there is the best Mears fiddler of 'em all!" He turned around to discover the voice belonged to Benny Thomasson. Jesse had actually learned some of his licks off of one of Benny's recordings. He was honored by the compliment but later confessed that had he known the great Benny Thomasson was standing behind him and listening, he probably would have been too nervous to play the tune. It was also at Falls Creek that Sleepy Johnson taught Jesse to play "Old Sport". Afterwards, Sleepy laughingly complained that "it's not right to teach someone a tune and then they play it back to you better than you!" Jesse always tried to encourage the younger fiddlers at the jams including Randy Elmore, Valerie Ryals, and Tommy Hughes. Valerie commented that in those days, there were not many female fiddlers. She has appreciated Jesse for always treating her fairly and for his willingness to help her with her music.

In addition to the house parties and jam sessions, Jesse began to enter various fiddle contests scattered throughout Texas. There was a time when almost every small town in Texas hosted a festival with a fiddle contest. Some of the more notable contests were Athens, Gilmer, Alvarado, Hallettsville, De Leon, Crocket, Gatesville and more recently Bowie. Jesse entered and won his fair share of these contests as evidenced by his collection of trophies, belt buckles and plaques. It was at these contests that he met and was duly impressed by Omega Burden, the Franklin family (Major, Ray, Royce, Louis, and Larry), his long-time friend and rival, E. J. Hopkins and his son, Carl. The Morris fiddlers were friendly but fierce contest competitors, and Jesse still enjoys listening to the recordings of Dale Sr., Terry, Kenneth, and Dale Jr. During this time, Red Steely introduced Jesse to Norman and Vernon Solomon. An up tempo fiddler himself, Jesse always admired the Solomon's drive and finesse. One time at a contest, Jesse was in need of an accompanist and spied Bill Mitchell. At the time, Jesse did not know Bill that well so he wanted to clue him in on his playing style. When Jesse informed Bill that he played up tempo and faster than most fiddlers, Bill responded, "I don't think it will be a problem. I played with Norman Solomon for twenty five years!"

By this time, Jesse was raising three sons. They became his built-in accompanists and traveled to contests with him. In 1982, Jesse recorded his first album "Family Tradition". His sons provided the rhythm for the album - Jesse Jr (guitar), Tony (tenor guitar) and Mark (mandolin). Somewhere along the way, Jesse met Kathy McVicker and she became his lifelong friend,

accompanist, and companion. Her Texas style chord progressions on the tenor guitar influenced Jesse to make subtle improvements and changes to his style of fiddling. In 2006, she encouraged him to record the CD “Done and Gone Fiddlin’” which featured Jesse, Kathy, and their talented musician friends Steve Williams, Royce Franklin, and Jacob Johnson. Jesse understands how important the rhythm section is to good fiddling. Some of his other favorite accompanists include Ray Franklin, Rex Gillentine, Bobby Christman, Anthony Mature, and Hyatt Hopkins.

Throughout the years, Jesse played with several different country and western bands including Rambling Rhythm, the Country Westerners, and the Southlanders before forming his own seven piece band, Jesse Mears and Fiddlin’ Fever. His breakdown fiddling had always been heavily influenced by two fiddle greats – Benny Thomasson and Terry Morris. These band gigs exposed Jesse to another form of fiddling and other musicians. He is proud to have played with guitarist/vocalist Mike O’Daniel, steel guitar player Albert Talley, piano player, Bill Thacker, and twin fiddler/vocalist Tommy Hughes. In 2004, Jesse was inducted into the Country Music Association of Texas Hall of Fame.

Jesse loves the rich history of Texas fiddle music. It gives him great pleasure to see new generations carry on the tradition. Jesse has always tried to encourage the young fiddlers, and he continues to motivate musicians today. Keenan Fletcher claims that she was inspired to transition from classical violin to old time Texas fiddling after listening to Jesse’s fiddle CD “Done and Gone Fiddlin’”. After an initial phone conversation, Jesse helped Keenan get started on a few breakdowns and then introduced her to his fiddling friends and the TOTFA community. His musical influence even has international ties. Paul Inbar of Israel learned “Cattle in the Cane” after listening to Jesse’s version of the song on You Tube. They have since spoken on the phone and have remained connected via the Internet. Jesse is amazed by today’s young and talented musicians. He is confident that the future of Texas fiddling is in young and capable hands.

Jesse Mears loves to fiddle, loves to listen to fiddle music, and loves the comradery of the musicians. Whether it’s at a small jam in Glen Rose with Marty McPherson, Marty and Randy Elmore, Valerie Ryals, and Dennis Sparks or at a major jam session at his lake house, Fiddler’s Point, he is in his element around music. He has always been thankful for the many friends and associations he has made through his music. Fiddling has not only been a fulfilling hobby for Jesse, fiddling has created lifelong friendships and opportunities to associate and share music with some of the finest musicians in Texas.

This biography contributed by Kathy McVicker. It has been edited for publishing

Done Gone

Groesbeck Fiddle Fest May 6 ~ Groesbeck, TX	Athens Old Fiddlers Reunion May 27 ~ Athens, TX
<p>65+ Age Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesse Mears 2. Tom Fonville 3. David Looper 4. Bill Mays 5. John Allred <p>0-15 Age Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elliott Dean 2. Linda Masters 3. Anthony Orosco <p>16-35 Age Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mia Orosco 2. Jason Andrew 3. River Lee 4. Noelle Nugent 5. Karissa Nugent <p>36-64 Age Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carl Hopkins 2. Marty Elmore 3. Kevin Freeman 4. Luke Masters 5. Cliff McCall <p>Accompanist Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ray Franklin 2. Anthony Mature 3. Steve Williams 4. Jim Reina 5. Jacob Johnson <p>Championship Division</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carl Hopkins 2. Jason Andrew 3. Mia Orosco 4. Marty Elmore 	<p>Seniors (ages 60+)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starr McMullen 2. Jesse Mears 3. Tom Fonville 4. Anne Bresert 5. John Blevins 6. Cliff McCall <p>Small Fry (ages 0-9)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thomas Paskvan 2. Kristan Paskvan 3. Kaitlyn Decker 4. Brooklyn Burgin 5. Maggie Scala <p>Jr. Jr. (ages 10-12)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preston Marriott 2. Tanner Marriott 3. Linda Masters 4. Makayla Byerly 5. Dustin Decker <p>Junior (ages 13-17)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ridge Roberts 2. Leah Sawyer 3. David Sawyer 4. Nate Jacobson 5. Beth Cheatham <p>Adult (ages 18-59)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Karissa Nugent 2. Katie Crawford 3. Hollie Williams 4. Jill Baker <p>Open (all ages)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mia Orosco 2. Devon McCauley 3. Junior Marriott 4. River Lee 5. Monte Gaylord 6. Ashley Dryer 7. Shira Ellisman 8. Noelle Nugent 9. Eddie Davis

June Birthdays

Allison Wilson	June 1
Gene Banks	June 3
Bill May	June 10
Linda Masters	June 13
Ashlyn Corbin	June 15
Ben McPherson	June 18
Wesley Hall	June 22
Jason Crisp	June 23
Nathan Pedneault	June 26
Larry Bodie	June 27
Ethan Frazier	June 27
Sonny Hopkins	June 28



*Jason Crisp (top left) Photo from Missy Crisp
 Larry Bodie (top right)-Photo from TOTFA Facebook page
 Sonny Hopkins (bottom left)-Photo from Jackie Williams
 Ben McPherson (bottom right)-Photo from Ben's Facebook*

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