

DAVID GRISMAN'S



VOLUME I 1900 - 1920

INTRODUCTION

David Grisman is a self-described “seeker,” and through decades of constant seeking he has also been a remarkably effective “finder” of many special instruments. A few of them have become especially well known to fans of Dawg music, and have reputations for being among the best of the best (thanks in no small part to the player!). But many others are virtually unknown today because they are impossibly rare, or because they have been so overshadowed by a collective appetite for “standard” designs. David has been seeking and finding oddities for years, though, and his passion for all things in the mando universe further inspires him to discover and share the unique musical personalities they have to offer.

And now he is giving us a taste of some of the oddest ones out there. The examples on this first volume are significant because they were all made between 1900 and 1920, a true heyday when mandolin orchestras were popular and numerous manufacturers were competing with fabulous offerings made to very high standards of craftsmanship. It was a wide-open frontier filled with novel, cross-fertilized designs, intricate pearl inlays, and idiosyncratic curlicues and swoops and points everywhere. There was still no such thing as a Gibson F-5, but this collection proves there were already some truly terrific-sounding and elegant-looking mandolins available.

It feels as close as we can get to stopping by David's living room for a personalized mandolin history lesson and a private solo concert. And this is the first—and perhaps only—time many of us will ever get to hear these oddballs. What a shame that Albert Shutt never heard one of his creations in Dawg's inimitable hands!

Thank you, David, for helping your fellow seekers discover some meaningful landmarks, and for expanding our appreciation of mandolin music in every possible direction.

— Rich Walter (Senior Curator, Musical Instrument Museum)



About a year ago, I ran across these recordings and was inspired to make more of them with the help of my masterful sound engineer, Neville Pearsall. I decided to organize them chronologically and so here, dear fellow mando-maniacs, I now offer this first volume of Oddball 8-Strings, all built in the first 20 years of the last century. I hope you enjoy checking out the tones!

— David “Dawg” Grisman. April. 2026

Being an “oddball” myself, my passion for mandolin playing and the instruments themselves, coupled with extensive traveling over the course of more than half a century, has enabled me to acquire some amazingly unusual, and often unique, 8-string “tools of the trade.” In 2017, while “Decibel” Dave Dennison was setting up microphones in our living room to record an album of duets with guitar phenomenon Tommy Emmanuel, I decided to hear what some of these antiques sounded like and also threw in some commentary about them.

ASK THE
MAN WHO
OWNS
ONE

Regular Model

Violin Model

and listen to what he says. I am willing to abide by his decision: for I know well that any man owning a STAHL MANDOLIN, MANDOLA, MANDO-CELLO, HARP-GUITAR OR BANJO will sing its praises in louder tones than I could. That is because he is using the instrument every day and is intimately acquainted with its every phrase, mood and expression. Now, HERE IS THE REAL TEST of the sincerity of a manufacturer's claims. Many of them claim everything in sight, but who among them is willing to leave the verdict to THE MAN WHO KNOWS? Wm. C. Stahl, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for one — and perhaps the only one. THE NEW AND IMPROVED STAHL MANDOLINS, MANDOLAS, MANDO-CELLOS, HARP-GUITARS AND BANJOS are built upon honest, solid upon their merits, and are guaranteed to be THE BEST IN THE WORLD TODAY. Please remember, this statement is not merely my personal opinion issued for advertising purposes, but it is THE OPINION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST ARTISTS, TEACHERS AND SOLOISTS. One can easily blow one's own horn, but when a manufacturer's praises are sung by thousands of experts, then the weight of testimony takes on a significant value. Join the lists today by addressing

WM. C. STAHL, Milwaukee, Wis.
THE REAL SENSATION of the Guild Convention, the Stahl Mandolins, Harp Guitars and Mandolins. Ask those who were there.



Track 1

“PICKIN’ THE PETTINE” – 1900 VEGA “PETTINE SPECIAL” MANDOLIN



VEGA MANDOLIN

Pettine Special

VEGA MANDOLIN

Pettine Special

Twenty-four Frets to E or Twenty-nine Frets to A

Description

Made from very old seasoned wood. Sounding board stock fifteen years old. Scientifically graduated.

Body

Forty-five rosewood ribs, separate pieces and even thickness. Edges bound with fiberboard, wide solid pearl border. Sound hole inlaid with pearl ornaments. Genuine tortoise shell guard plate, pearl inlaid, late design.

Neck

Curly maple neck, ebony veneered and carved scroll headpiece. Pearl rings around pegs. New Special engraved ball plate, silver plated machines with pearl buttons. Extension fingerboard, twenty-four frets to E, inlaid pearl design, handsomely engraved. Pearl dots on side at principal positions.

Trimmings

Fancy carved ebony bridge. Ivory nut, metal string rest, engraved silver plated tailpiece. Durable Finish—Hand Padded.

Price, \$105.00

Factory Departments:

Dep. THE VEGA COMPANY, Vega, Mandolin and Guitar
 A. V. STANFORD BAND INSTRUMENT CO., Chicago, Tennessee, Ill.
 Dep. THE A. C. FAIRBANKS CO., Boston and Montreal
 62 Sudbury Street, Boston, Mass.

Giuseppe Antonio Luigi Pettine was born in Isernia, Italy in 1874. He was a child prodigy and a great virtuoso who may have been the first mandolin artist to endorse his own model made by the Vega Company in Boston.

PETTINE'S DUO STYLE OF **Mandolin Playing**

The only book devoted to that style. Price 75 cents. Usual discount. Duo, Trio and Quartette forms of playing. Pizzicato, Vibrato, Melody and Accompaniment, ALL IS EXPLAINED in this book, with interesting and progressive exercises, and pieces such as

BEETHOVEN'S "ADIEU TO THE PIANO"
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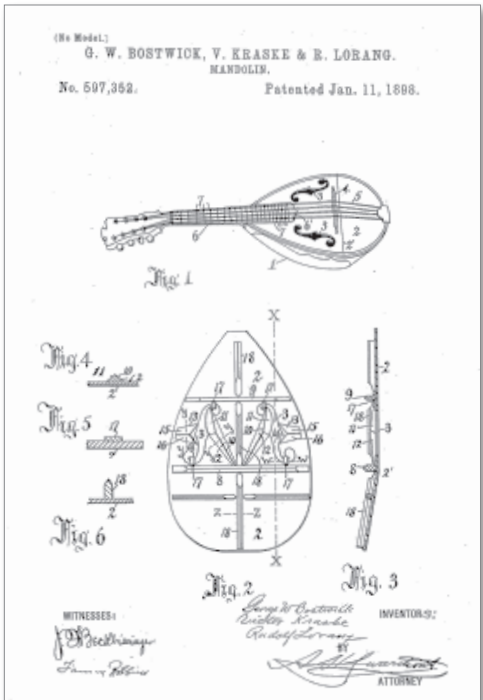


Track 2

“WHERE’S WALDO?” – 1902 WALDO MODEL 636 MANDOLIN



The Waldo Company in Saginaw, Michigan developed a design for a bowl-back mandolin with f-holes. Patented in 1897, this was something that apparently had never been done before.



Track 3

“CHECKERBOARDS” – 1905 GIBSON F-3 MANDOLIN



Here is a Gibson F-3 mandolin made in 1905. It's got a fancy pearl and wood-inlaid border. It's got three points. It's got the neck more or less going in the wrong direction but it still sounds pretty good!



IT'S A GIBSON



Track 4

“YOWZA!” – 1905 GIBSON K-4 MANDOCELLO

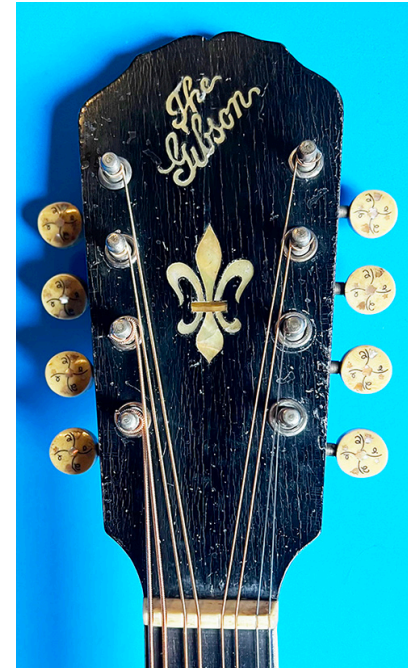


Here's a real beast also made in 1905 by the Gibson Company. I've never seen another one like this. It's a very fancy beautiful 3-point design in an extra large size.



Track 5

“DANZA DAWG” – 1905 GIBSON H-2 MANDOLA



This early H-2 is bound in alternating strips of pearl and wood, and it's got those fancy Handel inlaid tuning gears. The bridge height is pretty substantial which is not typical for 1905.

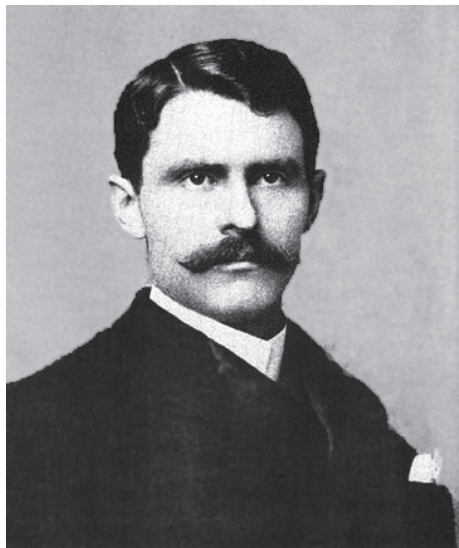


Track 6

“GIBSON GAVOTTE” – 1906 GIBSON A-3 MANDOLIN



It's got Orville Gibson's picture on the label and a beautiful natural top. A fancy squiggle inlaid in the headstock and a beautiful tortoise scratch plate inlaid with a seashell design. Low height to the bridge but it still sounds pretty good.



Track 7

“FUNERAL MEDLEY” – 1907 GIBSON F-4 MANDOLIN



This top-of-the-line Gibson F-4 has an unusual three-piece flame maple neck. Somebody really played the heck out of this instrument — there's even pick wear below the bridge! I played this mandolin at Jerry Garcia's funeral.



Track 8

“SHADY GROVE” – 1909 GIBSON H-4 MANDOLA



Perhaps the very first Gibson H-4 mandola, made in 1909 when all the f-model instruments had three points. It wasn't until 1912 when the first 2-point mandolins appeared, but this is kind of a “mystery mandola” — and possibly the first 2-point Gibson!



Track 9

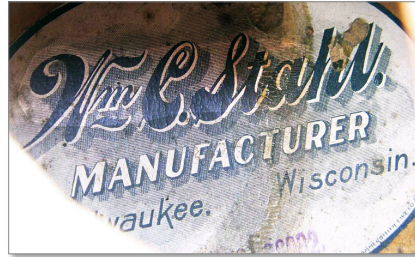
“PUT ON YOUR OLD GREY BONNET” – 1910 MARTIN STYLE 7 MANDOLIN



This was the top-of-the-line mandolin made in 1910 by C.F. Martin Company in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. It's about as fancy as you can make a mandolin and still retain a modicum of taste!

Track 10

“YOU GOT IT” – 1910 STAHL (LARSON BROTHERS) NEW OR VIOLIN MODEL MANDOLIN



This is a carved, black top instrument made by the Larson Brothers in Chicago and marketed by William Stahl Company in Milwaukee. It's got a kind of medieval shape, somewhat violinistic. Introduced as the "New Model" in 1909, it became the "Violin Model" by 1911.


My New and Improved 1909 Styles Now Ready




My new and improved 1909 Mandolins are beyond doubt the **finest Mandolins in the world. Action, Models and Mechanism** are absolutely perfect while the **tone** is so far superior to other Mandolins that comparison by **actual test** will prove the greatest surprise you have ever experienced.



NEW MODEL



The Incomparable
STAHL



VIOLIN MODEL



Track 11

“NEAPOLITAN DREAMS” – 1910 LINGETTI LYRE MANDOLIN



Made in Naples, Italy by Gennaro Lingetti, this wonderful mandolin has two hollow “wings” attached to the headstock by metal rods. It’s a bowl-back with a circular bowl made of rosewood. A beautifully made unusual instrument.

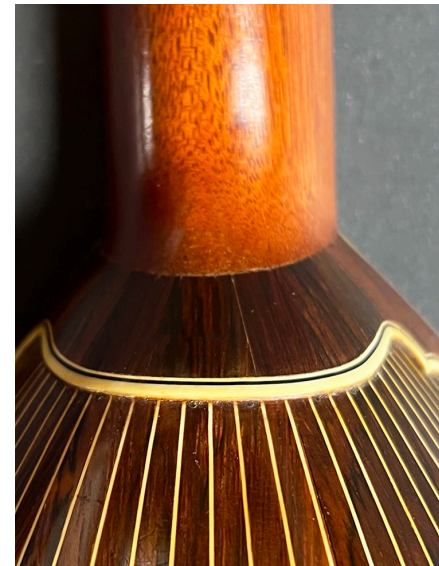
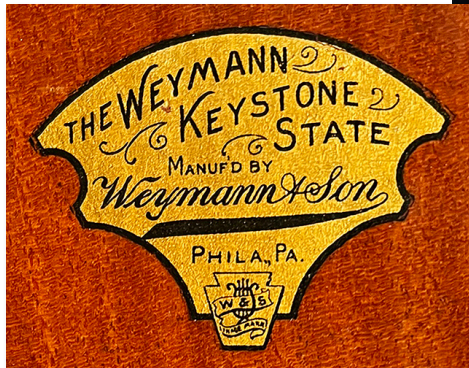
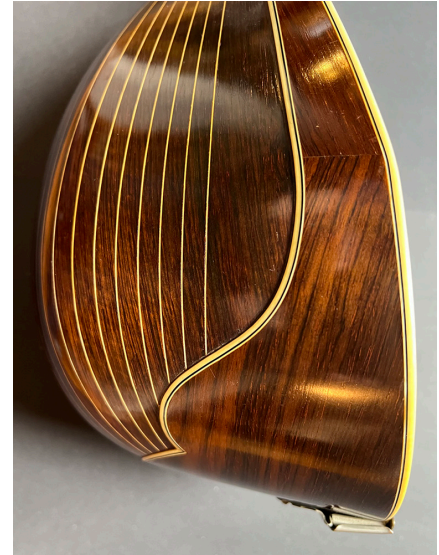


Track 12

“MEANDERINGS” – 1911 WEYMAN DELUXE BOWL BACK MANDOLIN



Here's one of the most ornate mandolins made by the Weymann Company of Philadelphia, this bowl back elaborate pearl inlay, marquetry and engraving, with the laminate “Keystone State” label on the back of the headstock.

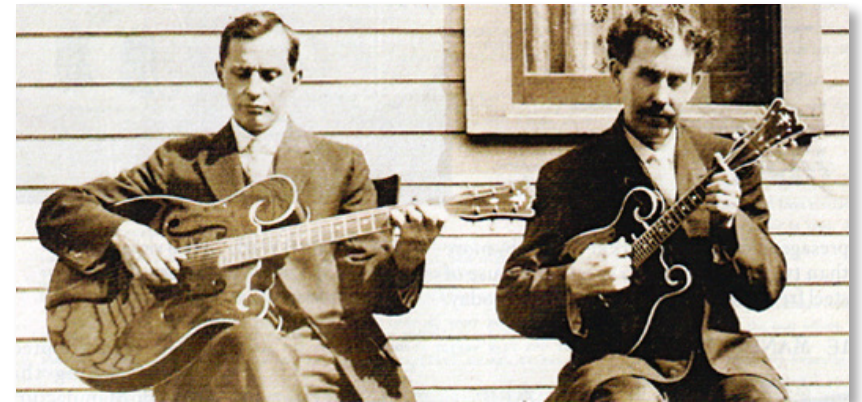
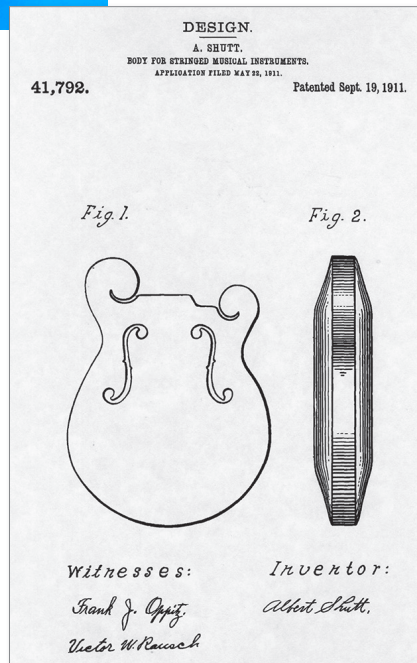


Track 13

“TOPEKA STRUT” – 1912 SHUTT STYLE 3 MANDOLIN



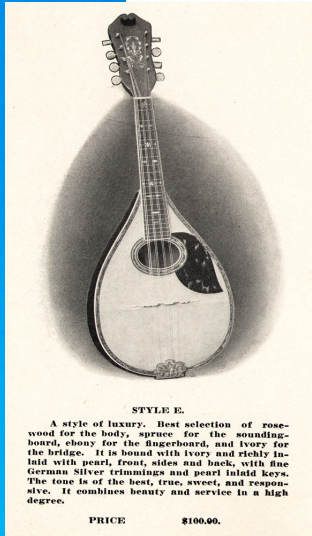
This historically important mandolin oddity has not one, but two scrolls! It also has an elevated fingerboard and f-holes, a decade before those features were incorporated by Lloyd Loar into the Gibson F-5!



Unknown guitarist (l) and Albert Shutt (r), circa 1913

Track 14

“OH DEM GOLDEN SLIPPERS” – 1914 MARTIN STYLE E MANDOLIN



In 1914 the C.F. Martin Company began making flat-back mandolins in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. The Style E was their top-of-the line, with its choice woods and bound on every edge of the body with pearl. "It combines beauty and service in a high degree."

Track 15

"BISCUITS & GRAVY" - 1915 ORPHEUM No. 1 OCTAVE BANJO-MANDOLIN



Here's a giant 8-string banjo made in 1915 by the Orpheum Company in New York City. It's got a 13" head, probably the original skin head and original strings. I just left it the way I found it. It's a real beast!



ORPHEUM
Banjo-Mandolins
Better than the best

More tone, more carrying power, more resonance, more detailed construction, more workmanship, more value, more satisfaction than any musical instrument of its kind.

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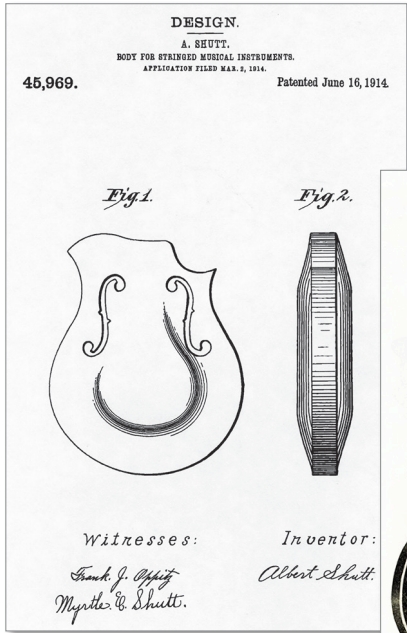
Rettberg & Lange
225-227 East 24th St., NEW YORK

Track 16

“HOME SWEET HOME” – 1915 SHUTT STYLE D No. 2 PROFESSIONAL MODEL MANDOLA



Albert Shutt from Topeka, Kansas, was a musician and an instrument builder, whose ground-breaking innovations preceded those of the Gibson Company. This mandola utilized “thoroughly air-seasoned quarter-sawn sycamore” for its back and sides.

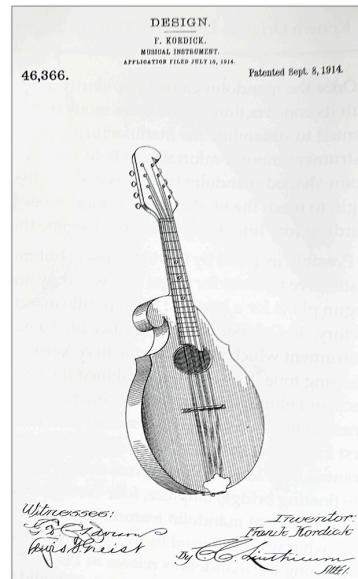


Track 17

“DAWG’S BOUNCE” – 1916 REGAL “LORNA PARK” REVERSE SCROLL MODEL MANDOLINA



In 1914, Frank Kordick, president of the Regal Company of Chicago, filed a patent for a flat-back “reverse scroll” mandolin design. This example from 1916 is much fancier and was possibly a custom order for Lorna Park, whose name is engraved on the tuner plate.

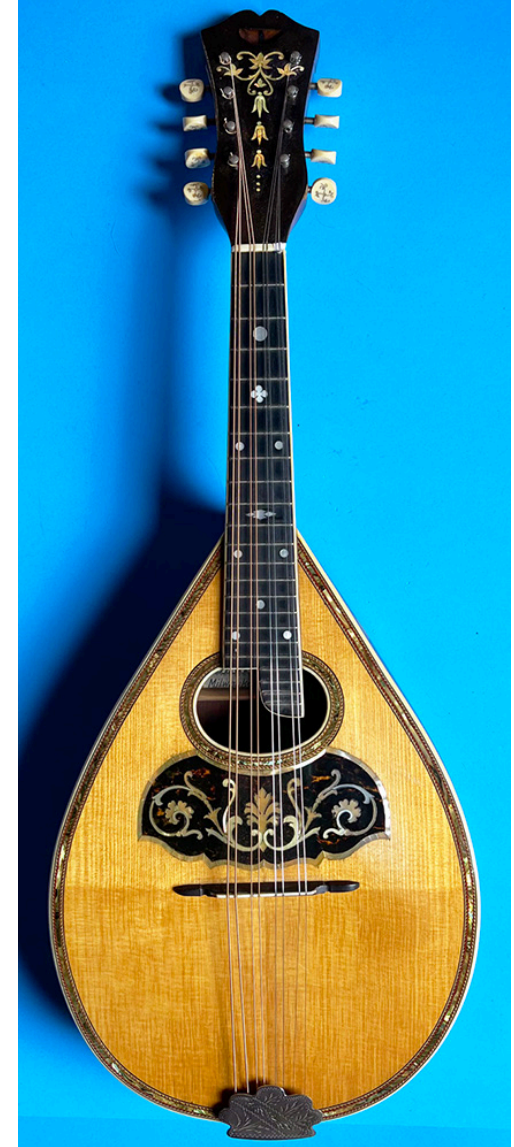


Track 18

“LARSON RAG” – 1916 STAHL (LARSON BROTHERS) ENGLISH MODEL MANDOLIN

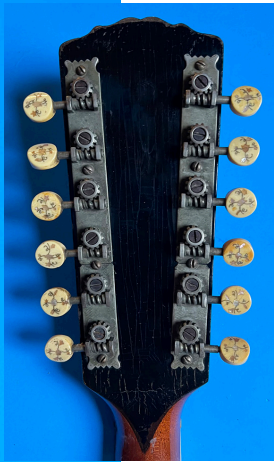


This fancy flat-back mandolin was built by the Carl and August Larson, Swedish immigrants, and marketed by the William Stahl Company. The Larsons also built guitars for Maurer, Euphonon, Prairie State and Dyer and were the first makers of steel string instruments in America.



Track 19

“WHISPERING TREMOLOS” – 1916/26 GIBSON 12-STRING A-4 MANDOLIN



Sometime in 1926, Mr. Al Bluhm, a vaudevillian, commissioned the Gibson Company to make a 12-string neck for his 1916 A-4 mandolin. This is one 8-string that earned its “odd-ball” status by adding four additional strings for a three-course musical feast!



Track 20

"SAM-BINO" - 1917 LYON & HEALY STYLE A "SPECIAL" MANDOLA



Built Like a Violin

reinforce the solid mahogany outerstrips. The full length view of the neck shows the artistic hand carved scroll head that gracefully terminates the neck piece. From a standpoint of beauty or dependability this neck is unexcelled.

Compensating Tailpiece

Another exclusive feature is the patented compensating tailpiece, Figure 5. This so divides the string length that a perfect octave is produced back of the bridge, one octave above the harmonic produced at the 12th fret of the fingerboard.

FIGURE 4A

Full length view of neck

FIGURE 5

Compensating tailpiece

Other

The parent It all vibrational gain, heavy the chader avoided. Another is the plate which permits the free vibration of the mandolin top while providing a rest for the mandolinist's hand.



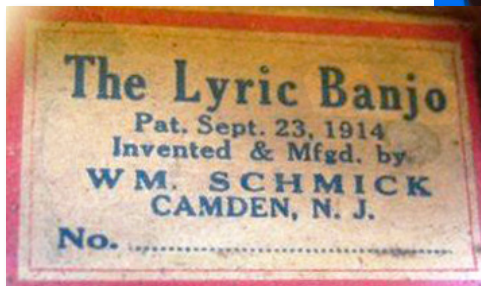
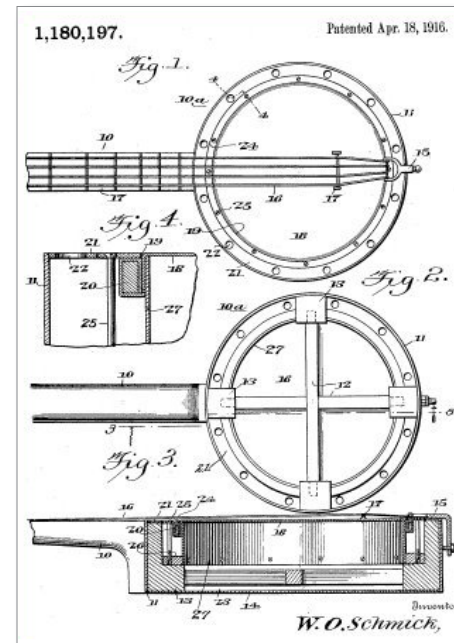
This top-of-the-line mandola is unlike every other carved Lyon & Healy mandolin family instrument that I've encountered. It has a flamed maple back, sides and a three-piece flamed maple neck, all with natural blonde finish.

Track 21

“FUNKY MB BLUES” – 1918 SCHMICK LYRIC MANDOLIN-BANJO



This unusual mandolin-banjo was designed by William O. Schmick of Camden, NJ. The Lyric brand name was used for his line of banjos with very deep resonators, made for him by the Vega Company. It may have inspired their “Vega Vox” models as well as the top-tension Gibson banjos that came later.



Track 22

“GIT-CELLO IMPRESSIONS” – 1920 GIBSON L-4 MANDOCELLO



This unique original Gibson instrument has an L-4 guitar body with an 8-string mandocello neck, bridge and tailpiece. As such, it foreshadows the Loar K-5 and is probably the first guitar-shaped mandocello ever made by Gibson!

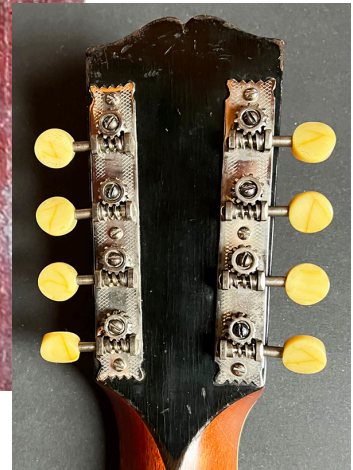
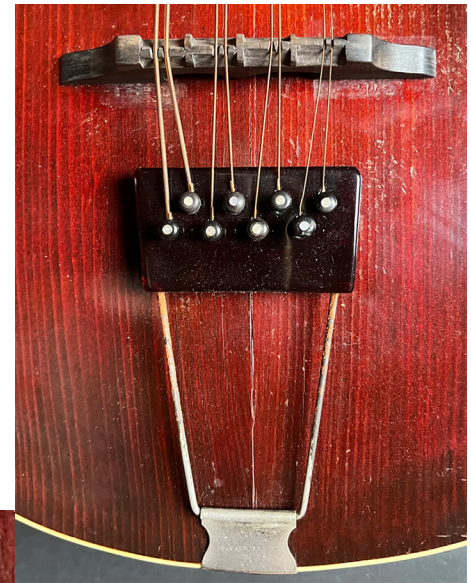




photo courtesy of Jim Garber

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