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1973**Banjo**  
NewsLetterIssue  
#439

The 5-String Banjo Magazine

Banjo Newsletter, P.O. Box 3418

Annapolis, MD 21403-0418

(ISSN 0190-1559) (USPS 086-770)

BUSINESS OFFICE — (800) 759-7425

Fax: (410) 263-6503 • International: (410) 263-6503

Net: [www.banjonews.com](http://www.banjonews.com)e-mail: [bnl@infionline.net](mailto:bnl@infionline.net)

EDITORIAL OFFICE (508) 645-2820

170 Middle Road, Chilmark, MA. 02535-9705

Email: [banjonews@comcast.net](mailto:banjonews@comcast.net)

Editorial Fax: (508) 645-3648

Founders — Hub Nitchie &amp; Nancy Nitchie

Publisher — Banjo Newsletter

Business Manager — Spencer Nitchie

Editor — Donald Nitchie

Associate Editor — Ian Perry

Old Time Way Editor — Dan Levenson

Online Web Designer — Tom Adams

**Contributors:**

Tom Adams	Casey Henry	Wayne Shrubsall
Greg Cahill	Tim Jumper	Roger Siminoff
Bob Carlin	Dan Levenson	Jason Skinner
Eddie Collins	Ken Perlman	Hugh Strawn
Janet Davis	Ian Perry	Tony Trischka
Fred Geiger	Bob Piekierl	Pete Wernick

**Banjo NewsLetter**, P.O. Box 3418, Annapolis, MD 21403. Periodicals Postage paid at Annapolis, MD, 21401. Subscription rates for one year, payable in advance in U.S. Funds: U.S. \$26 (two years \$48); Canada via Surface: \$35 (2 years, \$65); 1st Class (U.S. & Canada) \$42 (2 years, \$78); Overseas Surface \$40 (2 years, \$76); Overseas Air Post \$74. No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher. For ad info, contact the business office. **BNL** is interested in all aspects of the 5-String Banjo: articles, drawings, interviews, tablatures, cartoons, photographs, history are always welcome. Include a stamped self-addressed envelope with submissions for publication. Indexed in The Music Index.

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# CALLOUS THUMB

It's hard to overstate the importance of J.D. Crowe to bluegrass, and bluegrass banjo. David Jakubiak recently caught a performance of J.D. and the New South, and had these observations:

"This past March I had the pleasure of seeing J.D. Crowe perform with his band in Stuart, Florida. Prior to the show, I researched my archives of earlier BNLs on Crowe. While J.D.'s appearance, at age 72, has changed, his music remains as tight

and energetic as ever. While performing 50-52 shows a year, JD Crowe hasn't lost a step. He still drives a bluegrass band with passion, and when you see him playing songs like Scruggs' *Flint Hill Special* or *Old Home Place*, you recognize that you have truly seen one of the best in the business. After the performance I had the opportunity to ask him a few questions. In particular, I wanted to know how he has managed to maintain a band which consists of not only outstanding performers but also impeccable vocalists. The sound of the New South is refreshing similar to some of his earliest work. Yet, former band members such as Tony Rice, Ricky Skaggs and Jerry Douglas are obviously no longer part of the group. J.D. explained that while he gets frustrated losing talented musicians, he carefully maintains contact with potential replacements via phone lists and recommendations from others. As he stated, "You really can't have a great bluegrass band without excellent vocalists." With J.D. Crowe and the New South, you have both. With J.D.'s eye for talent, this group performed flawlessly."

This month we feature the tab for *J's Tune*, which has been one of my favorite

banjo instrumentals of the past ten years. Also noteworthy is Zack Deming's *Movin' On*, an equally catchy banjo tune I urge you to listen to and try picking.

After 14 years with Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder, **Jim Mills** is leaving the band. Jim's driving banjo was a hallmark of the group's sound. "I've just come to the decision that it is time to move on," he said recently, "and I'm looking forward to whatever opportunities may present themselves. Of course I'll be focusing more on my banjo business." Jim Mills Banjo Inc. is engaged in the buying and selling of prewar banjos and memorabilia.

Mrs. Gill Sands sent in this photo of her Victorian-era Tunbridge ware banjo (see page 4). "After Joe Sweeney arrived at Liverpool in 1842 and played there for a month, he started a craze for the instrument that appealed to all sectors of society," writes Mrs. Sands. "It became fashionable to buy a banjo. As in the U.S., banjos were still hand made and came in all shapes and sizes, with 5, 6, 7 and even 12 strings, and with one or more drone strings, sometimes on both sides of the neck. Some were fairly crude but others had an amazing amount of work put into them, none more so than

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