

OVERTON COUNTY INSTRUMENT MAKER, MUSICIAN TO SIGN BOOK ABOUT HIS EARLY YEARS THERE

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LIVINGSTON -- The Overton County Heritage Museum has a special book signing scheduled for Saturday. Homer Ledford, born in Overton County, graduate of Livingston Academy, bluegrass performer and renown maker of bluegrass instruments will be in town reading from his book and performing on some of his handmade instruments.

Over the years Ledford and his Cabin Creek Band have shared the stage with bluegrass greats Bill Monroe and Ricky Skaggs, opened for Allison Krause and performed in Ireland, Japan and Ecuador. He has had a book written about him, a documentary film made about him, a bluegrass festival named after him and, a couple of years ago was featured on Michael Feldman's "What Do You Know" radio program on NPR.

But Ledford's book, *See Ya' Further Up the Creek*, is not about his travels or his ability to craft musical instruments. It's about his early years in Overton County when he and his cousins were "good boys. You just couldn't trust us."

Ledford has written more than 60 stories that are illustrated by his daughter Cindy Ledford Lowy and contain snippets of the life he led in rural Tennessee just at the advent of radios and telephones.

His stories recall places like the one room school he attended in Ivyton and, when that closed, the school at Alpine, until it closed and he finished school at the Livingston Academy.

"I learned more in that one year than in all the other years I went to school combined. The boys at Alpine were mean as snakes and that made learning a little difficult.

"Livingston had good discipline. The principal there said he never had trouble with discipline until Alpine kids began coming," Ledford said in a telephone interview.

But the Livingston Academy opened the world of education to Ledford who spent a year at the Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, N.C., before he went on to Berea College in Berea, Ky., and then transferred to Eastern Kentucky University and graduated with a B.S. in Industrial Arts and a minor in Art in 1954. He went on to complete 18 hours towards a Masters Degree and taught industrial arts in Kentucky for almost 10 years.

When he left teaching it was to make a living making musical instruments. He estimates that he's made 5,776 dulcimers, 475 banjos, 26 mandolins, 26 guitars, 18 ukuleles, 13 dulcitaras, three dulcijos, three dulcibros, four violins and one bowed dulcimer.

He invented a unique instrument called the dulcitar (a combination of a fretless banjo and an Appalachian dulcimer) which now resides in the Smithsonian Institute.

But the stories in his book are not about his college years, either.

Instead, he recounts the shenanigans he and his cousins got up to in the era where stunts like joy riding in a boat down a raging river could get youngsters in to deep water that could be fatal, and when hitching to Livingston, 10 miles away, to go to a movie was perfectly safe.

"We would wander around the square before the movie. We were old enough to start courting, but we didn't know how," Ledford said.

Some of his stories describe boys who could have been cronies to Tom Sawyer and even with farming chores taking up most of their time managed to get into trouble.

He describes a Fourth of July a little different from the holiday we now celebrate.

"With the corn laid by and all the other chores done, we (boys) would set out to Livingston... The only way we had to get there was by hitchhiking so we would walk down the hill, cross the river on a swinging bridge and hike another mile up the hill to the old gravel road where we hoped to catch a ride. We would always get a ride, but sometimes would have to walk quite a ways before that happened.

"When we finally arrived in town, the excitement really arose to a very high pitch. There were preachers on the corners, a clown or two, and one police car. One policeman was all they could afford. There were people of every description, some dressed in 'overalls' as we called them, and some in suits and ties. I guess the well-dressed ones were the folks that had 'made it' by selling moonshine...

"There were all kinds of shows and activities going on such as raffles and poker games - the illegal type - but who cared."

Ledford describes some of the other Fourth of July activities -- such as the greasy pig catching contest, the sack race and the 'husband calling contest' which he wrote that his aunt Virgie won each year.

In other stories he describes family members and friends and the beginning of his interest in making musical instruments and other inventions -- like a telescope from old eye glass lenses.

We learn about the first time he saw a train and an airplane and what his uncle Otis did to take advantage of the new Model A automobiles.

And we get to read a love letter from a young Ledford to his fiancée Colista.

But as much fun as the stories are, the book also contains a CD of 15 traditional folk tunes which he plays on some of his some of his favorite instruments with guest performers and accompanists.

The book and CD combined cost \$19.95. The signing will take place from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. this Saturday, Dec. 10, at the Overton County Heritage Museum at 318 W. Broad St., Livingston. For more information call Paula Stover at (931) 403-0909.

Published December 07, 2005 11:36 AM CST : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

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