

## BANJO PLAYER MAKES STRINGS SING

By Linda Negro, Kirksville



Orval Hale is the envy of many a banjo player as he makes those strings sing without picks.

“Not many people in this area can play the banjo claw style – without picks on their fingers,” Hale said.

The audience can get a taste of Hale’s finer picking tunes Saturday when he performs with his son, John and

daughter, Cynthia at Eastern Illinois University’s Celebration ’79, A Festival of the Arts, in Charleston.

Many pickers would like to learn his style but Hale maintains the timing and ear for music just can’t be learned.

“Either you have it or you don’t,” he said.

“The perfect timing and an ear for music are God given talents you have from birth,” Hale explains.

“Everything is by ear – I don’t know a note,” Hale said. “I’m just like a computer – you feed it into me and I’ll play it back.”

Born with the natural talent for music, Hale can’t remember a time when it wasn’t part of him. He was born in Tennessee and spent a great deal of time listening as the fiddlers and banjo players gathered.

“We had nothing else to do but house parties,” Hale said. “We had no picture shows so someone would strike up a little tune and someone else would join in.”

Hale didn’t own a banjo but picked at another’s and found he had a talent.

When his family moved to Illinois, Hale worked on the farm at 50 cents a day to raise he \$7.50 he needed to order his first banjo from Sears & Roebuck Co. catalogue. Then he set about teaching himself to play.

Money was short when Hale started out and although he played on area radio stations, WJBC in Bloomington and WSZ in Tuscola, played in taverns and was the entertainment for the Armour Cheese Co. area meetings, it wasn’t enough to make a living.

Hale turned to other banjo and left his banjo picking for the evening. He was a carpenter and painter in the Bloomington area before he worked for A. E. Staley in Decatur for 33 years.

Rather than providing him a living so he could continue with his first love, the work at Staley's Interrupted his music for about eight years, Hale said.

"I got into some acid that worked the skin off my fingers and I couldn't touch the strings," Hale said. "That was in 1942 and by 1950 I started in again. I never got back like I was on the guitar and I'm still working to get back on the banjo."

Hale loves to entertain but always experiences a little stage fright at first.

"I'm always afraid I'm going to do something wrong to start with – but once I'm started I'm OK."

Audience or no audience, hale is happy just to play for himself.

"There is always something different to learn and you can never master the banjo – there's too much," Hale said.

"And it is just like playing checkers – there is always someone who can do it a little better."

*Oval Hale is the s/o William Mathias Hale & Sarah Elizabeth Henley.*

*\*See Chapter: 7 at <http://www.ajlambert.com>*

**Census Place: 1880 District 7, Putnam Co., Tennessee**

Dwl: 75 Family: 75

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 147B

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
<b>Francis HENDLEY</b>	Self	M	M	W	29	TN
<i>Francis Marion "Frank" Henley, s/o Aden S. Henley/Hendley &amp; Elizabeth Jane "Betsy" Gentry.</i>						
	Occ: Farmer	Fa: GA	Mo: TN			
<b>Josephine HENDLEY</b>	Wife	F	M	W	29	GA Savannah Josephine Glover.
	Occ: Keeping House	Fa: NC	Mo: GA			
Willie HENDLEY	Son	M	S	W	6	TN William "Willie" Byrd Henley md Sarah "Sallie" E. Hayes Clancy.
		Fa: TN	Mo: GA			
Willis HENDLEY	Son	M	S	W	5	TN Willis Aden "Adie" Henley md Mary Daisy Lancaster.
		Fa: TN	Mo: GA			
<b>Sarah HENDLEY</b>	Dau	F	S	W	1	TN
<i>Sarah Elizabeth Henley md William Mathias Hale.</i>						
		Fa: TN	Mo: GA			