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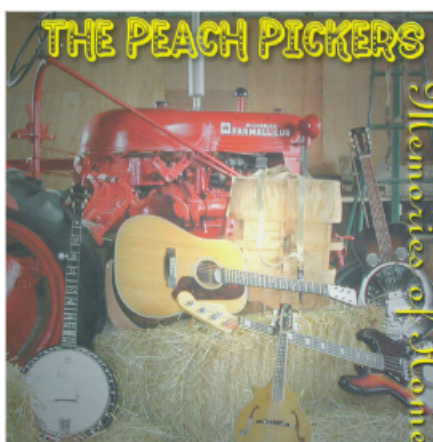
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Chris Quinn



# Who Were the Peach Pickers?



(L to R) Eric Goetz (guitar), Jim Dorian (singleneck steel), Johnny Harder, (guitar) James Ronald Angleman (Bass), and Don Austin, (fiddler).

Niagara Bluegrass from 70 years ago...

By Eric Goerz

**T**he story of the Lincoln County Peach Pickers goes back to 1952 and covers the early years of Canadian country music radio broadcasting. The story could literally be filed under the letter “H” for History. The Peach Pickers may be of some interest today to some of the senior generation following the 1950’s folk and country music scene in Canada. Prominent in the emerging musical climate of the day was the Main Street Jamboree Show, originating and broadcast

over CHML Radio Hamilton. It was a remote broadcast on location in various cities across Ontario, and the two hour Saturday morning stage show was carried on CBC Radio across Canada. At times it included guest artists from Nashville. It was quite popular, and these were the days when families gathered in front of the radio after supper. This was before television, of course.

Eric Goerz and John Harder lived on family farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake, right in the middle of peach country. After some rudimentary

guitar lessons, the boys felt they were ready for “the big time” on a small Niagara Falls radio station. It was a valuable learning opportunity for the two 19 year olds. They soon had a biweekly show with a fan club, and the letters were pouring in. It was a heady thrill for two farm boys. They sang close two part harmony in the style of the Louvin Brothers, Delmore Brothers and Johnny and Jack. The band consisted of guitars, mandolin, fiddle and doghouse bass. Banjo players were in short supply in the Niagara area at that time. The boys were ready now to move onwards and upwards! Not so fast, however.

*Below: (L to R) Karl Goerz (banjo), Al Teichroeb (mandolin), Vic Goertzen, (bass), Johnny Harder, Eric Goerz (guitar), Ed Enns (electric bass), George Rout (dobro).*



**“These were the days when families gathered in front of the radio after supper.”**

The boys lacked experience in the music business and they soon ran into trouble with the American Federation of Musicians. Their career came to a screeching halt when they played on a non-union radio station. They were fined and had to pay a penalty. Not exactly financially embarrassed, their bank account was not exactly overflowing either.

They considered cutting back on their food budget. Reluctantly, and in due course, the fine was paid and the boys were now in good standing. They could move on up the line in the Bluegrass Music field that they loved so much.

On the strength of a 78 rpm vinyl recording made in Buffalo, New York, 1953, and following a good audition performance, The Lincoln County Peach Pickers were accepted as members of the Main Street Jamboree. The weekly Saturday night production was broadcast with a large cast, and included a young Gordy Tapp (of later Hee Haw fame), and a 17 year old Tommy Hunter, (of the later CBC Tommy Hunter

Show). From time to time guest artists from Nashville were included: Carl Smith, Audrey Williams, Lefty Frizzell, Ray Price, Grandpa Jones, Doc and Chickie Williams and Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper. With the advent of television in the mid 1950’s the entire production moved to CHCH in Hamilton.

Although the real “big time” eluded the boys, Eric and Johnny and the Lincoln County Peach Pickers left an enduring mark on the emerging Canadian Bluegrass scene. The recordings of Niagara Moon and Mansion of Dreams became regional hits in 1953. The

former was written by Eric and the latter by Johnny some sixty-six years ago. They can still be heard from time to time on Canadian and American radio stations.

Terence Cox, a writer for The Downtowner magazine, says "they were pioneers in the formative years of Canadian Country music". Steve Fruitman writes in "backtothesugarcamp.com", "probably the first Canadian Bluegrass band to record!... in 1952...the duo of Johnny

Harder and Eric Goerz".

The original Peach Pickers ultimately disbanded and the boys moved on to their individual careers. But, as the phoenix of old, they emerged once again some fifty years later.

This time they were reinvented with new personnel, a new sound and a new purpose.

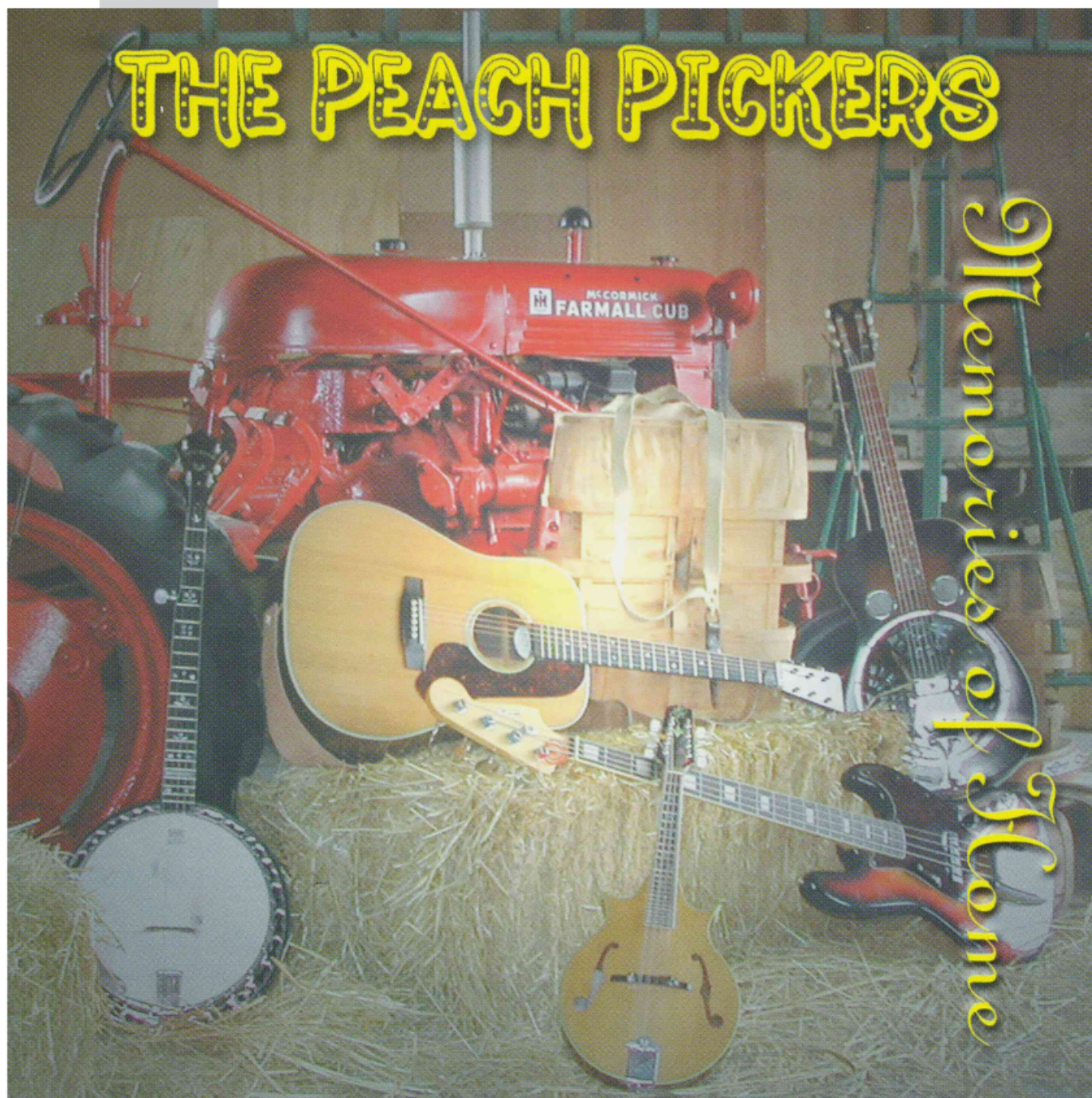
Eric and Johnny and the boys followed their Mennonite Christian heritage. They embarked on a five year bluegrass gospel fundraising

mission. They played in many churches throughout Southern Ontario, and recorded three powerful CDs with all proceeds going to the Mennonite Centre in the Ukraine. And they found their missing 5- string banjo player after all!

Eric and Johnny ultimately went their separate ways, and God blessed their families and vocations. But sometimes...on hot humid nights during peach picking time on the farm, Eric's mind wanders back to another time; a time when days were filled with guitars, mandolins, and concerts in faraway places.

When friends sang songs and played Bluegrass music. And he is ready to trade his baskets of peaches for that wonderful time; a time that used to be; a time now gone but not forgotten.

P.S. This article was submitted by request and on behalf of a former Peach Picker doghouse bass player and a great supporter of the Canadian Bluegrass music scene, Vic Goertzen.



**"But sometimes...  
on hot humid  
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