Ringing in the new year at Hagood Mill

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
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PICKENS — Every year, traditional musicians from the area gather to celebrate a new year with music from the mountain culture surrounding Hagood Mill.

"For this year's event, a few of us from Hagood Mill went on a journey deep into the mountain gorges, bushwhacking our way through dense patches of 'dog hobble,' trudging across 'crik' after 'crik' in search of an elusive group of hillbilly mountain musicians," Hagood Mill director Billy Crawford jokingly said.

They found The Drovers Old Time Medicine Show, a hard charging, moonshine-fueled bluegrass band with a good dose of country humor thrown in for good measure.

Crawford said they hit the stage like Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers and the band's heroes on the Grand Ole Opry, such as Uncle Dave Macon.

"Whether it's a foot-stomping fiddle number or a solemn gospel number, this hillbilly band is the real deal," Crawford said.

Legend has it that The Drovers Old Time Medicine Show came from Prater's Creek, a small farm town in Pickens County.

Like his forefathers, Dr. Ignatius J. "Grandpa" Trundell worked the farm year after year to grow corn he'd later grind into elixir — also known as liquor.

When the time came, he and Uncle Carl would hitch Ol' Sparkey the mule to the wagon and hit the medicine show trail to sell their elixir and play a little bluegrass along the way. They hit every city, town and hollow within 500 miles, with Grandpa on guitar and Uncle Carl picking the banjo. After providing some down-home entertainment, they'd cure whatever ailed the audience.

Grandpa's oldest grandson, Dalvin, learned to play the bass when he was so young he had to stand on a chair to play. Known as the smartest grandson, if Dalvin wasn't thumping the bass, then his nose was stuck in a book.

His other grandson, Clovis, wasn't like other kids. Doctors, neighbors and a local preacher said Clovis was too different and wouldn't be of any help on the farm. So the boy was sent away to a state-run facility and only visited his family on Christmas and July 4.

In the meantime, his brothers Homer and Dalvin were improving their playing skills. When Homer got his driver's license, he and Dalvin stole their father's truck and rescued their brother. But a few days later, the state authorities came to the farm to take Clovis back.

Grandpa requested that the family be able to play one song before Clovis had to leave, and he was granted his farewell tune.

When the family started playing, Clovis grabbed his mother's washboard and joined in. The state authorities knew then that Clovis belonged at home playing music with his family. So the Drovers, along with Cousin Ray, have been traveling the medicine show trail ever since.

In this fictitious family, guitarist Ed Campbell plays the role of Grandpa, banjo player Carl Yother portrays Uncle Carl, fiddle player Ray Harper is Cousin Ray and bass player Lindsey Cole is Dalvin.

"I've always liked folks like Minnie Pearl who had a fictitious back story and just went by those stage names," Campbell said. "So that's when we came up with the legend of the Drovers."

It's one of the things that sets The Drovers Old Time Medicine Show apart from other bluegrass bands — that along with their old style and the fact that 90 percent of what they play is their own original work.

The day's festivities will begin at 11:30 a.m. with Three Creeks Over, a homegrown bluegrass/gospel band consisting of three multitalented teenage musicians.

Sabrina Stewart, Sarah Stewart and Sean Crowe were all inspired by the Young Appalachian Musicians program at an early age. Sabrina plays the guitar, Sarah plays the mandolin and Sean plays the banjo.

"Living in the mountains of South Carolina, the traditions of bluegrass music are very strong," Crowe told The Journal during a previous interview. "I enjoy hearing the music and playing it. Most of the current bluegrass musicians are older, and it's going to take young people to carry on the music."

The Hagood Mill historic site will be open from 10 a.m.-4 p.m with traditional art demonstrations — everything from blacksmithing and basket making to spinning and bee keeping.

"So, head on out, grab a plate of great food on site from the Gatehouse Restaurant and enjoy a special day at the Hagood Mill," Crawford said.

Admission is free, but there is a $5 parking fee. For more information, call (864) 898-2936.

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Above, playing hard charging, moonshine-fueled bluegrass, The Drovers Old Time Medicine Show hits the stage like Bill Monroe and the Stanley Brothers. Below, Three Creeks Over will play at Hagood Mill on Saturday as the historic mill site rings in the new year.

