



Survey of Tenor Banjos Created By Andrew Boorman

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Introduction

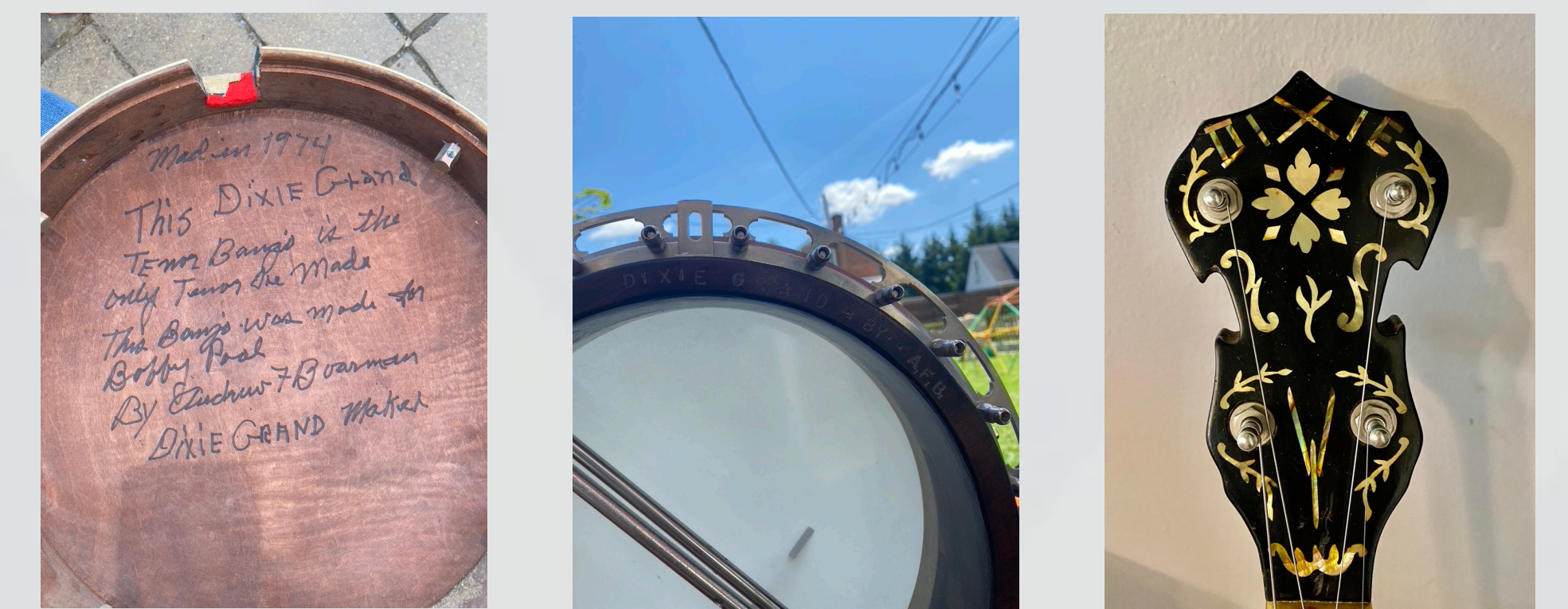
A luthier is a person who makes and repairs stringed instruments. Andrew “Andy” Boorman, based out of Hedgesville, WV, was known for his exceptional luthier work, specifically on his highly regarded and ornate “Dixie Grand” line of bluegrass banjos. Andrew repaired many instruments, notably repairing instruments belonging to highly successful musicians.¹ Andrew’s work has been previously documented, labeling him the “Guru of the 5-String Banjo”.² Despite the documentation of his work on bluegrass instruments, he has never been previously documented to have made a tenor banjo. Tenor banjos, a distinctly different instrument than the bluegrass banjo, were utilized extremely rarely in the style of music Andrew played. These instruments lack the high 5th string “bluegrass” or “5-String” banjos possess. This ethnographic study identifies one such instrument and addresses rumors of similar instruments.



Boorman's tenor banjo. Photo by Kaitlyn Price. Used with permission.

Instrument

The tenor banjo attributed to Boorman is set apart from other instruments due to the quality of the craftsmanship. This instrument (pictured left) is easily identifiable as Boorman’s work due to the signature on both the inside of the resonator and the rear of the body. Initially created as a gift for a community member, as seen with the note attached to the signature, this instrument sat for many years as decoration on the wall of a local shop.



Left: Andrew Boorman's signature inside the tenor banjo resonator. Center: Boorman's initials on the inside of the banjo. Photos by author.
Right: Headstock of Boorman's tenor banjo. Photo by Kaitlyn Price, used with permission.

Prior to the current owner’s acquisition, the instrument had fallen and sustained damage to the rear of the headstock, which was professionally repaired. This instrument, like many of Andrew’s other works, possesses hand-cut inlays on the side of the neck and headstock. It is feasible that Andrew attributed this instrument to the “Dixie Grand” line of banjos due to the elaborate “Dixie” placed into the headstock and the text “Dixie Grand” carved in the rear of the body.

Uniqueness

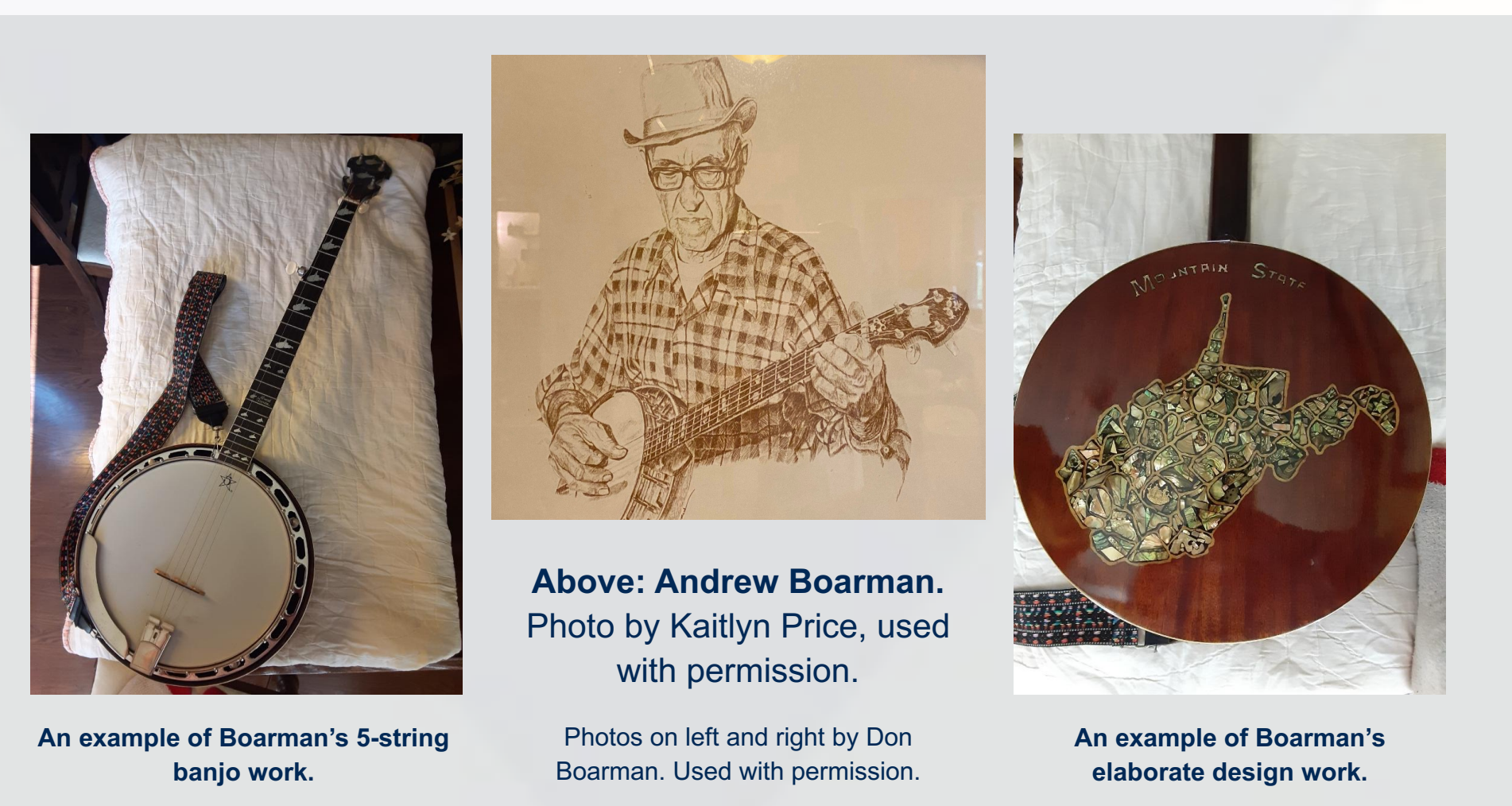
This study concretely identified one tenor banjo constructed by Boorman. In conversations, many individuals admitted that while they knew of his “Dixie Grand” line of bluegrass banjos, they had never heard of Andrew constructing tenor banjos. Almost all individuals who were contacted for this project declared that despite not knowing about any tenor banjo, they would not be surprised if he had made one prior to his death. The current owner of the tenor banjos had heard of Andrew possibly making more than one, but conversation with his children identified only one such instrument.

Conclusion

Andrew Boorman constructed a minimum of one tenor banjo during his lifetime. This study aims to contribute this information to the legacy of Andrew Boorman to ensure proper documentation of a local music legend. In performing this study, all archival information surrounding this topic was exhausted and all ethnographic leads uncovered were traced to completion as best as possible. As such, the author considers future study on this topic mostly closed.

Methods

Initially identified by a descendent of Boorman, a tenor banjo attributed to Andy was recently brought to light. Following IRB notice of this study, formal interviews were conducted with the relatives of Andrew. Conversations held off the record due to location issues were also held with many local musicians and friends of Andrew. Following these conversations, conclusive proof of the instrument’s validity and uniqueness were obtained.



An example of Boorman's 5-string banjo work.

Above: Andrew Boorman. Photo by Kaitlyn Price, used with permission.
Photos on left and right by Don Boorman. Used with permission.

An example of Boorman's elaborate design work.

Literature Cited

- 1: Devan, Brett. "The Del McCoury Band: State-Of-The-Art Bluegrass Purists." *Bluegrass Unlimited*, August 1990.
- 2: Kimmel, Dick. "Andrew F. Boorman: the Guru of the 5-String Banjo." *Bluegrass Unlimited*, September 1978.

Other relevant resources can be seen here:



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