

Albert “Hap” Boyer (1928-2012): Métis Fiddler

Hap Boyer was a legend in the field of traditional Métis fiddling. Hap served for 23 years in the Canadian Armed Forces mostly with the 3rd Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. His unique style of playing took him on international tours that earned him wide acclaim in his field of music. He is one of the featured artists on the Gabriel Dumont Institute’s *Drops of Brandy, and Other Traditional Métis Tunes* (2002), a four CD set, containing over 150 fiddle tunes performed by 12 master Métis fiddlers. An accompanying book was also released, with sheet music for every song in the compilation, as well as biographies of the performers, and a detailed look at the history and cultural importance of Métis fiddling.



In a Gabriel Dumont Institute interview Hap recounts¹:

I was born 1928, November 2 in a log house along Murray Lake not too far from Cochin. My parents were Joe Boyer and Helen? They were married by a father in Cochin. I was baptized by Father Lagott nearly 73 years ago. My dad was a fiddle player and he fiddled at home. He didn't fiddle in public. It was different with my Grandfather, Patrice Boyer, he was a great fiddle player along with his brothers. He was also a jigger. He was born in St. Louis, SK. He married late Charles Nolin's daughter, Virginia Boyer. I like fiddle music so much that I would go to one house with my mother and sit by the old fiddle players until I tired myself out till I fell asleep. I use to listen to their fiddle tunes. I got to play some of their fiddle numbers Later in the years, I got to myself one these rattle phones that you wound up and got fiddle numbers. I copied some of these fiddle tunes; I copied most of the old lady fiddlers down home. I use to practice and practice and practice and I was getting nowhere, then I was just disgusted. Then my mother told me that if I wanted to be a good fiddle player, that I should play at a crossroads when there is a bright moon and play at 12 midnight and you will become a fiddler. I never said

¹ Gabriel Dumont Institute, Friday October 5, 2001. <http://www.Métismuseum.ca/media/db/06748>

anything, then one night there was a big moon so I put my fiddle in a pillowcase and tied around the saddle horn and rode my horse out to the crossroads, a quarter of a mile away. Waited for 12:00 midnight and I played my fiddle at the crossroads, then I put my fiddle back in the pillowcase. I never told my mom for three or four days. When I told her she said I would become a fiddle player now.

My dad's cousin, he's passed on now, he said "I got a rattle snake tail in my fiddle, why don't you get one" he said "That rattle snake tail is so that????? when you play." I couldn't get a rattle snake tail so I had a cousin from North Dakota come down and told her about that so she said she would try to get me one in North Dakota. She mailed me a rattle snake tail and on the parcel she put fiddle rattler. So I got that rattle snake tail and put it on this fiddle. When I play that fiddle, if I don't have a pickup on it, it's like I'm playing through a comb with a paper. Last summer when she (cousin from North Dakota) to Batoche she said to me that she got me another rattle snake tail. When I got my pickup in Prince Albert during Batoche days, this one guy asked as a joke "do you have a rattle snake tail in there"? I said yes, and looked at me and said really. He couldn't believe it. The old Métis people, a lot of time put a rattle snake tail in their fiddle.

Obituary from the *Battleford's News Optimist*: October 31, 2012

BOYER: Hap (Albert Ronald) Boyer (83), passed away in North Battleford, October 24th, 2012 just before his 84th birthday following a brief illness. Hap was born in a log cabin near Murray Lake on November 2nd, 1928 to Joseph and Helen Boyer. He was raised on a farm and at a young age, he picked up the fiddle and taught himself to play. He played at many dances and as a young man, then joined the army. There he continued to play and mastered his fiddle playing. During this time, he met his wife to be, Shirley Patterson in Winnipeg and they married in Wainwright, Alberta in 1952. Shortly after, he was called away to serve in Korea with the United Nations Peace Keeping Force and while there, he continued to play his fiddle with his band. It was there, he adopted the name Hap when they named his band Hap Boyer and His Homesteaders. He continued to play all over Canada with many professional musicians and always brought back interesting souvenirs on his travels. Hap spent 21 years in the army, most with 3 RCHA and was stationed in many bases including his year in Korea, 2 years in Germany, and 6 months in Cyprus. Hap received 6 medals for his achievements with the army. He and Shirley had two sons, Gary, Ronald and a daughter Sharon. He retired from the army in 1971 and continued to work at several jobs including mail delivery, cab driver and his favorite, playing his fiddle music and the many different bookings. In 1980, Hap's daughter Sharon died in a car accident in Ontario and at that time, her daughter Mandy was being cared for by Hap and his wife Shirley. They eventually adopted her and she became their daughter. So at middle age, Hap and Shirley started raising a 2 year old and watched her grow up. Hap played for many years at Batoche and was also a Métis Senator who was vocal on Métis issues and history. Hap was disappointed when due to his health he could no longer participate because he couldn't travel. He then focused on playing locally, still making and selling his recordings both tapes and discs and often playing at different nursing homes with his band friends for senior shut-ins. Finally, he could no longer do that and spent time at home with Shirley, dog Max and played his

fiddle, watched sports, McDonald's coffee and enjoyed his telephone calls with friend and family. Over time, both he and Shirley moved into River Heights Lodge due to health reasons and were able to benefit from the care, first Shirley and later Hap. On January 24th, 2012, Hap lost his wife of 59 years & 6 months, Shirley to complications of diabetes. Following her loss, he spent his time watching sports, interacting with both residents and staff and always had a joke ready to go. Hap became ill and a short time later, he passed away peacefully, much like his wife did, months earlier. Hap Boyer is survived by his sons, Gary (Carmen), Ron (Loreen), Mandy (Gerry Bidyk), several grandchildren and great grandchildren, also one sister, Kathleen (Vince Converse), sister-in-law, Judy Heska of Winnipeg and several nieces and nephews. Hap was predeceased by his parents, Joe & Helen Boyer, one brother, Claude Boyer, daughter Sharon and recently, his wife Shirley.



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