

BANJO À CINQ CORDES

NORMAN HOWARD

The Banjo and its Players

NEW YORK: NORMAN HOWARD, 1959, 100 PAGES

BOUND ESPECIALLY FOR MISS SHIRLEY SPAULDING*

MAY 10, 1960



Banjo Orpheum #3 'Special' de Shiley Spaulding.*

Joué par Greg Adams lors de l' 'A.B.F. Rally', Newark, NY, en octobre 2017.

Photo : G. De Smaele.

Cet ouvrage, imprimé sur un papier translucide, fut spécialement monté et relié pour la banjoïste Shirley Spaulding (1899-1991) et en porte l'ex-libris. Il n'a jamais été publié. À ma connaissance, il n'y aurait que deux copies accessibles au public, dont un exemplaire conservé à la Public Library de New York (Performing Arts Research Collections, Lincoln Center) sous le titre **A History of the Banjo, 1957**. L'auteur l'a annoté manuellement. Il n'aurait réalisé que quelques duplications de son tapuscrit.

Ce rarissime exemplaire original, appartenant à Shawn Mc Sweeney (Toronto) n'a pu être photographié, à Toronto en octobre 2017, qu'à la condition expresse qu'il ne soit utilisé que pour mon usage personnel et strictement privé.

G. DS.

**POUR RESPECTER LE SOUHAI T DE MR MCSWEENEY, ET MON ENGAGEMENT,
PRIÈRE DE NE PAS COMMUNIQUER CET OUVRAGE AU PUBLIC.**

Gérard De Smaele

Octobre 2021

Shirley Spaulding



Shirley Spaulding was born in New Rochelle, NY, July 13, 1899. Her father was a pianist, music publisher and composer of many popular songs. Her brother Cliff taught her to play the banjo when she was 12. By her late teens she was banjo soloist in a group of entertainers at many camps, hospitals and canteens.

Her 1920 Edison recordings were the first ever by a woman banjoist and included *Somewhere in Dixie*, the first ragtime instrumental recording in the US by a woman. Mr. Edison (who by this time was quite deaf but enjoyed banjo music because he could still hear it), arranged for one of Shirley's recordings to be the opening number for the initial broadcast of WJZ in Newark, NJ. This was the first radio station in the New York City area. In 1921 Shirley gave her first live broadcast from WJZ, with piano accompaniment.

Around this time, Shirley became a pupil of "Banjo Bill" Bowen, improving her fingering and repertoire. She performed as a soloist for the New York Serenaders and the American Guild. Her repertoire included Bowen arrangements of piano pieces "Kitten on the Keys" and "Nola" as well as standard banjo repertoire by American and British composers. Two of her favorites were Bowen's "Stepping Out" and Grimshaw's "Footlight Favorite". She played for the sheer love of the banjo and did not make a business of her talent. Numerous offers to commercialize her abilities through theatrical work were refused.

Shirley had other keen interests, and is remembered outside the classic banjo community as Shirley Spaulding DeVoe, prolific writer and researcher of the decorative arts. For more than forty years she traveled throughout Europe and the United States in search of new material. Her many books and articles have become standard texts in the field of applied arts.

Shirley is shown c. 1925, with her specially made Lange Orpheum No 3 banjo*.

<https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies>

THE LAST CHORD

ABF Vice-President SHIRLEY SPAULDING DeVoe died on October 25, 1991 at the age of 92. She was one of the great banjo artists of this century.

She was born in New Rochelle, New York on July 13, 1899. Her father, George L. Spaulding, was a well known composer and publisher of popular songs and piano music. Shirley began the study of the banjo at age 12 under the tutelage of her brother Clifford. (Cliff Spaulding, 1890-1973, was ABF Librarian and Vice President.)

Both Shirley and Cliff joined the newly formed New York Serenaders about 1912, and were active for many years. Shirley rapidly showed great musical ability and became a soloist for the Serenaders. She did a lot of performing as a soloist at the end of World War I for camps, hospitals and canteens. About this time she began studying with William D. Bowen who remained her coach and arranger for many years.

In 1921 the Edison Company released Shirley Spaulding's recording of Percy Jaques' Royal Tourist March and a few months later her rendition of Morley's Danse Arlequin. A year or so later Shirley's recordings of Lansing's Somewhere in Dixie and Grimshaw's A Footlight Favorite were also issued. These are most commonly seen as the thick, Edison Diamond Disc vertical cut, records, but all but Footlight Favorite were also issued as Edison four minute Blue Amberola cylinders. It is said that her recordings were used on the first musical program broadcast from WJZ, the Westinghouse Station, in Newark, New Jersey on October 12, 1921. These were the first banjo recordings made by a woman in North America, and as far as can be determined, her Somewhere in Dixie was the first true ragtime instrumental recording by a woman in North America. Although she made test pressings for Emerson and Victor these were never released. The four Edison sides are the only records of her playing extant today. Some of her musical reminiscences were published in the Spring 1981 issue (#141) of the Five-Stringer.

Shirley was very active with her banjo in the 1920's. She did many live radio broadcasts in these early days of radio. She was often a featured artist of the American Guild of Banjoists, Mandolinists and Guitarists. "Smiling" Shirley Spaulding appeared in many shows, benefits and even briefly in vaudeville.

Her playing, by any standard, was exceptional. She had wonderful attack, clear definition, a beautiful full tone and impeccable phrasing. Bill Bowen, an extraordinary banjoist in his own right, acknowledged that once Shirley learned a piece no one could play it better. Bill also said that his ideal record would be one of Shirley playing Nola and Kitten on

the Keys.

Shirley married George W. DeVoe in the 1920's and they had one son, George S. DeVoe.

Although she continued her banjo career into the mid 1930's, including appearances on the Major Bowles Show, the demands of her family and the hardships of travel associated with music eventually led her to give up the banjo. In the late 1930's she took up the harp and studied under Marie Miller at the Juilliard School of Music. For a time she played the harp at benefits and concerts in Western Connecticut where she lived.

Beginning in the late 1930's Shirley DeVoe became interested in the art of Early American Decoration. She became an expert on japanning and ornamentation of tin and papier-mache. She was a consultant, historian and lecturer for the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Inc. In the early 1960's she began concentrated research on the "wares" of decoration. She eventually documented her findings chronologically and pictorially, an approach that was until then untouched in Early American decorative literature. Her studies took her to France, the Netherlands and England, in addition to her extensive research in New England. She published three books: The Tinsmiths of Connecticut (1968), English Papier-Mache of the Georgian and Victorian Periods (1971), and The Art of the Tinsmith, English and American (1982).

By the late 1970's she was badly arthritic and had difficulty walking, yet she continued her research here and in England, often spending long hours on ladders and scaffolding tracing patterns and studying decoration. Her arthritis and a hip problem limited her mobility in the past decade. In spite of this she remained cheerful and occasionally corresponded with your editors. She was greatly helped and encouraged by her husband George, who even in his 90's continues to work in the family real estate business and to regularly play golf.

Our condolences are extended to her husband, son, grandchildren and other family, and to her many friends throughout the world.

(We are grateful to Mary Smith who supplied us with the information regarding Mrs. DeVoe's art and antique activities.)

