

Edward's Dream:



The Stompin' Ground

by Arthur Menius

Once upon a time in a high, misty valley deep in the Smoky Mountains lived two champion clog dancers, mother and son. Named Elizabeth and Kyle Edwards, they shared a dream. They wanted to build the perfect structure for clogging and bluegrass music.

A quarter of a century passed by. Kyle worked as a contractor, and danced, some say better than anyone his age in Maggie Valley, North Carolina. His mother, a member of Sam Queen's original 1928 Soco Gap Dance Team, went to her reward, but not before she saw her son win a world's championship. By 1981 Kyle, then 42, was ready to realize their mutual dream.

During November of that year, hardly the usual month for construction start ups, he began construction of the Stompin' Ground using local people and materials. "We worked on it in the winter time, me and five of my carpenter friends," he recalled. "We finished it, the last nail, and all the carpenters left, on May the first 1982 at five o'clock. We opened it at 8:30 the same day on

schedule." Raymond Fairchild and the Crowe Brothers became the first act to headline the Stompin' Ground.

One glance at the huge wooden barn hulking beside US 19 in Maggie Valley reveals the enormity of Edwards and friends' accomplishment. In half a year containing the area's worst weather they built a 20,000 square foot dance hall. Kyle estimated that he can squeeze from 2000 to 2500 people into the double tier of benches that cover three sides of the cavernous concert/dancing hall.

The building incorporates all the facets of the Edwards' vision. "I had my own specifications in mind. I wanted a good, high ceiling, a good oak dance floor, and a good Peavy sound system. I didn't have a blueprint or a drawing, but I knew what it would look like when I finished, and it turned out very well, I'm happy to say."

Fairchild, Maggie Valley's resident banjo wizard, pointed out that while the acoustics are good, "Kyle keeps working to get it better."

Sonny Osborne, on hand to tape a segment of the Nashville Network's "Fire On The Mountain" series, said, "this place... it's just unreal how good

the sound is in here. I've been very impressed. They couldn't have picked a better building to do it in."

TNN Programming Director Elmer Alley, a long time WSM official, compared the acoustics of the all wooden structure to the Opry's old home, the Ryman Auditorium.

Edwards had not envisioned the Stompin' Ground going into homes coast to coast as the site of "Fire On The Mountain." Taping of the series has brought an unequalled array of talent to the facility during the past two years. Around four dozen major bluegrass, old-time, and acoustic acts, ranging from Bill Monroe and Doc Watson to New Grass Revival and John Hartford, have come to the Stompin' Ground to appear on the Linear Group program.

That has permitted affable Kyle to make a number of important contacts. He plans to bring many bluegrass headliners back to the Stompin' Ground on his own as his finances permit. He already boasts one name known wherever bluegrass fans gather in Raymond Fairchild and the Crowe Brothers. "It's meant a lot of work to me," Fairchild reported. "I've played here the last

few summers, ever since it started. The Crowe Brothers and I are here from May through October, Sunday through Thursday, at the Stompin' Ground. I'll be gone a whole lot, I'd say fifty percent of the time, but I'll be here when I'm in town." When Fairchild can't appear, the Sour Mash Band takes his place.

Kyle reserves Friday and Saturday nights for clogging, square, and team dancing with John and Audry Wiggins and the Cross Country Band providing the music. "We run seven days a week from May 1 to October thirty-first," Kyle said. "We do a lot of audience participation—clogging, square dancing, competitions—and the people get involved. There are no alcoholic beverages sold here. I want to keep it family. I want you to be safe to come here, to enjoy yourself, and I want you to get your money's worth everytime you come. So far we've been fortunate. We've had a lot of people come here and like it and go back and tell their friends. That's what we want."

In the process the Stompin' Ground has become a focal point in a very competitive resort market. Barbara Kimble of the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce said her office had received letters from all over the country from people who had seen the Stompin' Ground on television. She felt the facility provided a welcome change of pace from the usual



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vacation theme parks. "The Stompin' Ground is extraordinary, something special, a pleasant surprise for the tourists. It's our Grand Ole Opry."

The Stompin' Ground also serves as the headquarters for another publicity generating Maggie Valley institution, the Magnum Cloggers. Kyle founded the team in 1979 and performed with until his retirement in 1982. His son Burton, a former World's Champ, now directs the Magnum Cloggers in conjunction with sister Becky, a three time United States Champion. In January 1983 ABC television network cameras came to the Stompin' Ground to film the dance team for "Good Morning America." That program's producer had encountered the group at the Knoxville World's Fair.

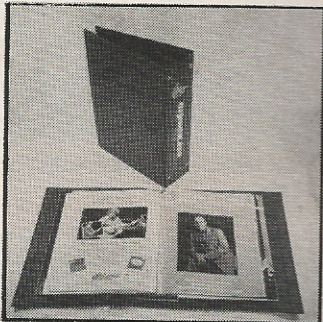
"We haven't been able financially to do a lot of publicity, but now we're overcoming some of the obstacles," Kyle stated. "Bluegrass pickers all over the country would appreciate this building, because it's got the atmosphere for what I call true mountain music. We've got something that can make bluegrass grow tremendously."

Fairchild presented a local musician's view of the Stompin' Ground, "It's the greatest thing that ever happened to Maggie Valley." Elizabeth Edwards would be proud.

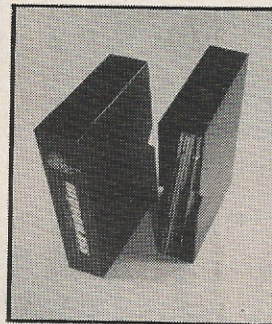


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