

# The Zithers of the Pennsylvania Germans

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A PAPER READ BY

DR. HENRY C. MERCER OF DOYLESTOWN, PA.

AT A MEETING OF

THE BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Held at Doylestown, Pa., January 20, 1923

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## The Zithers of the Pennsylvania Germans.

BY DR. HENRY C. MERCER, DOYLESTOWN, PA.

(Doylestown Meeting, January 20, 1923.)

TIME long past through social changes rather than years, has left in our museum eleven remarkable narrow box shaped stringed musical instruments, so little known, so forgotten or overlooked by musical antiquaries, yet so linked with the technical history of music, as to demand particular attention. Locally known among the Pennsylvania Germans, who made and played them, by no other name than zithers (pronounced by them "zitter"), all were found in Bucks county, and eastern Pennsylvania in the last twenty-five years; they are here classified and described under two groups, namely, first, as plectrum zithers, or zithers played by striking the strings with a quill or stick (the plectrum) held in the hand, and second, as bow zithers or zithers played with a bow.

### PLECTRUM ZITHERS.

There are seven instruments, here called plectrum zithers, in the museum of the Bucks County Historical Society, which though superficially resembling the bow zithers next described, on examination, differ considerably in construction. They are all thinner and longer than the latter. Their strings, far more numerous, are always of wire; they lack bows, and their bridges and keys are differently made and differently placed.

Museum No. 13605 (Figure 1) typical of all, is a rectangular box 3 feet 6 inches long, made of thin pieces  $\frac{3}{16}$  to  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch, of soft wood, glued and pegged together without nails, and against a rectangular wooden block at the base  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches square, by 1 inch thick, and, at the upper end, to a solid wooden head piece, 15 inches long, with ornamental scallops on its left side, holding the keys.

The eight steel wire strings are stretched about one-half inch apart from a straight row of headless iron pins, driven into the base block about one inch below its upper rounded corner, and extending thence to three groups of short square topped iron

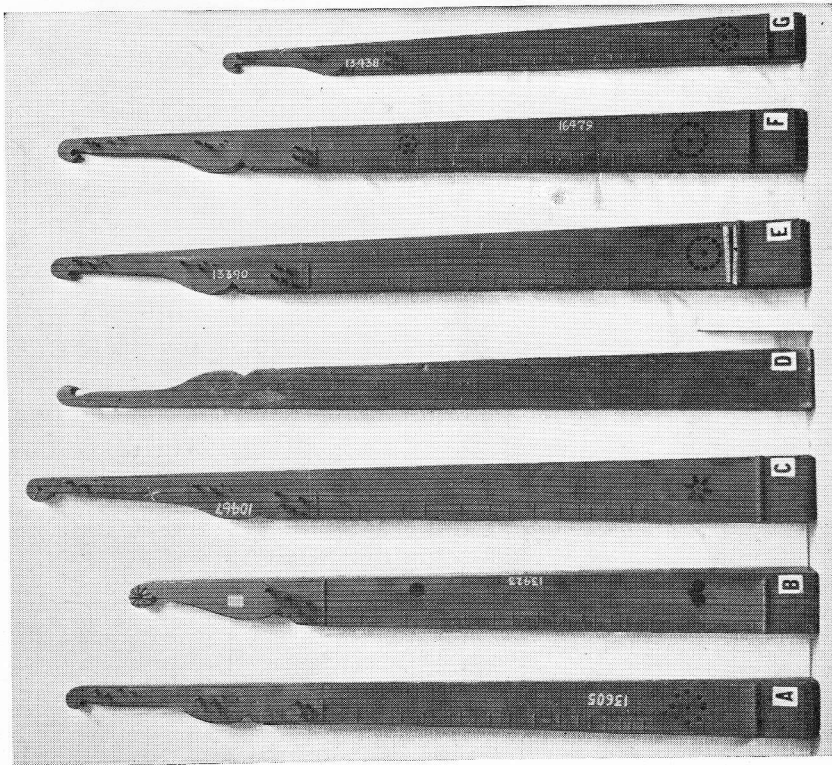


Figure 1

SIX PLECTRUM ZITHERS IN THE MUSEUM OF THE  
BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, DOYLESTOWN, PA.



keys screwed into the top of the head piece and tightened with a loose key, like a clock key (missing). Two of these strings on the left side extend over a row of frets made and placed like those of the bow zithers later described, and passing over a bridge entirely unlike the bridges of the bow zithers, namely a low flat one-quarter inch high wooden strip wire-edged on its top, and glued down upon the top board about three inches from the base of the latter. Six of the strings, namely those not crossing the frets, do not cross this bridge but are lifted from the top board at their upper ends by notched iron pegs set close to their respective keys in the head piece, while a high heavy fret at the upper end of the instrument again serves to lift the two strings engaged clear of their frets.

This upper fret is heavier and longer than the rest, so as to catch not only the two engaged strings, but all four strings from the first group of keys, and all the frets are stapled, not upon a fret board, but directly upon the top of the instrument. Including this upper fret the frets are fifteen in number, set on the left side of the instrument, all otherwise of the same length and placed at musical intervals so as to produce a scale of musical notes marked in ink on the top board of the zither between the frets. The short and wooden bridge engage only two of the eight strings upon the instrument. The sound-hole just above the bridge consists of thirteen circular perforations around a large center hole.

**VARIATIONS IN CONSTRUCTION.** Though this zither reasonably describes the six others in the collection, the instruments shown herewith vary considerably in construction. A, C, F and G have eight strings, B has five, and D and E have nine. The number of keys in the various groups varies in consequence. The wire frets always stapled on the left edge of the instrument are always fifteen in number except in G, which shows only twelve. They engage two strings in A, B and G, and three in C, E and F. In G, six of the strings namely those not crossing the frets are wire wrapped. G is much smaller than the other instruments. The sound-holes are always on the upper, and never on the under sides of the instruments, and as shown, vary in design. The under side of one is illustrated in D. The keys otherwise set in three groups appear in B in a single group, and in B the upper

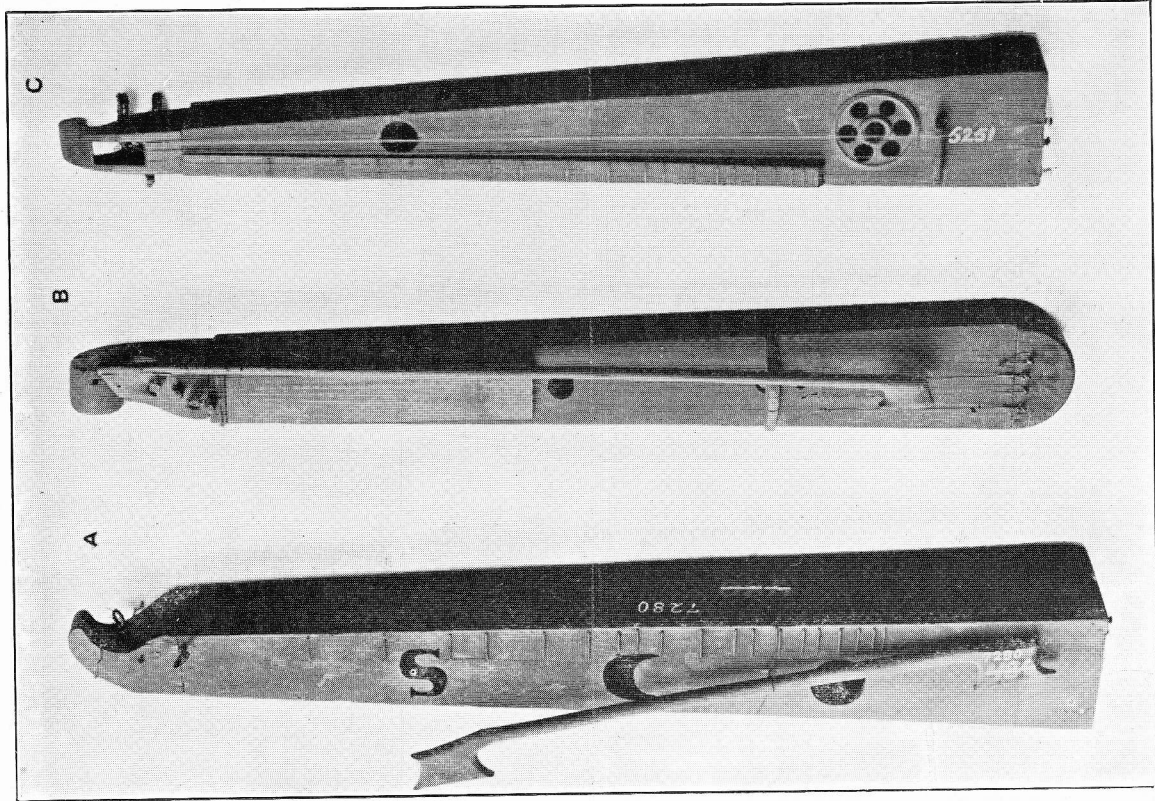


Figure 2

THREE OF THE FIVE BOW ZITHERS IN THE MUSEUM OF THE  
BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

heavy fret, above noted, crosses the entire instrument, otherwise this fret only catches the strings from the first or lower group of keys.

Some of the instruments are stained a reddish brown, others retain the natural color of the wood. Four of them, namely D, E, F and G appear to have been made by the same hand.

#### ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE PLECTRUM ZITHER.

None of them came from Bucks county, but all from the Pennsylvania German region northwest of it, i. e., Northampton, Berks, Lebanon and probably Montgomery counties. All were bought from dealers, except G, purchased from a private individual in Bethlehem for twenty dollars.

No traditional evidence has appeared as to how they were played, but two quills, either of goose or turkey, about three and one-half inches long survived and came with E, as shown in the illustration, and may have been used as plectra. Mr. Lapp of Doylestown township, acquainted only with the bow zither, never heard of zithers being played by plucking their notes whether with the fingers, a quill or a stick. None of the instruments of this group have legs, catgut strings or sound-holes on the bottom. The well-known, many stringed Tyrolese table zithers, also played with a plectrum, may have been derived from them, for Herman Newdel in the *Musikalisches Conversations Lexicon*, Berlin 1879, Vol. II, page 496, says (without describing the method of playing) that:

"In Thurginia the peasants are still (1879) using a zither with four metallic double strings in three different sizes. The capacity of each is two octaves. In recent times another kind of zither has been brought to great perfection. This modern zither was, until about forty years ago, only known as a peasant instrument among the inhabitants of the Styrian Salzburger and Bavarian Alps in the different valleys of which there were known to be different types of this instrument. Some of these zithers from Halle in Pinzgau and Mittenwald dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are preserved in the museums at Munich and Salzburg, and in private collections."

#### BOW ZITHERS.

There are five of these differently constructed and differently played instruments in the museum, three of which are shown in the etching (Figure 2) and of which C will serve as a type.

This instrument is a tapering box 2 feet 7 inches long, 8 inches square at the base and 6 inches at the top, made of thin strips of soft wood glued to the heavy solid wooden head and base pieces. The top piece or block with an ornamental downward curl is perforated with a large rectangular hole for the insertion of the keys and strings, three in number, now restored but originally made of catgut, and exactly resembling violin strings, set about one inch apart, along the left side of the instrument. They are fastened at the base of the instruments to three wooden knobbed pegs driven into the bottom piece about half-an-inch below the top, and extend along the full length of the zithers to the keys, through the key-orifice in the top piece. These keys are not home made, but of common violin type, and inserted transversely, two on the right, and one on the left of the top piece. There are eighteen wire frets, namely short pieces of iron wire about 1 inch long, with bent pointed ends driven like staples at musical intervals on a 3 inch wide 12 inch long fret board. This latter is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick at the base tapering to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch at the top hollow underneath and glued down on the top of the instrument close along its left side. A common violin bow (missing) was, I learned, used with this zither. The original bridge is also lost, the present bridge being a thin flat topped 2 inches long, 1 inch high, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick restoration. There are two sound holes on the top of this zither. The upper, a  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch circular orifice cut through the top board, and the lower a group of seven  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch holes inserted near the base, just above the bridge in a solid circular piece of hard wood glued into a hole. Another 1 inch round sound hole  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches from the base, not shown, perforates the smooth bottom of this instrument, which bottom is furnished with two  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch high wooden pegs, at the two lower corners, to lift the lower end of the zither from the ground.

The five instruments of this type, of which only three are here shown, vary considerably in construction. The original strings, replaced on B and C, are missing on them all, but there are, or judging from remaining keys, were as noted, three on C, four on B and two on A, three on museum No. 13834, and seven on museum No. 17822, which instruments I will call D and E.

In B they are not of catgut, but of wire, with the right one wire



wrapped, and in A, evidently a left-handed instrument, they are set to the right on the top board, in B upon its middle, but otherwise always along its left side. The keys, corresponding to the number of strings, were all turned, not with a wrench or clock key, but between the thumb and forefinger, they are common store bought violin keys in C, rude home made wooden pegs, probably modern restorations in B, and made of local blacksmith wrought iron with perforated thumb pieces in A, D and E. In C the keys are screwed into the right and left side of the top piece through the rectangular orifice as mentioned, but in A, B, and D and E which lack this orifice, screwed vertically downward into the solid wood.

There are no frets on the restored instrument B, eighteen in C, and sixteen on A, D and E. They are all made as described, of wire staples of varying length, driven at musical intervals along the left edge of the top board in C, D and E, but along the right edge in A,—directly upon the top of the instrument in A, but otherwise into fret boards as described, and always so as to engage one string, the outermost only. As remarked before, the restored instrument B differs from them all in having its four strings and fret board set in the middle of the instrument, and may therefore have been played like a violin.

Bows. According to information given by Joseph Lapp, the bow, now lost, originally used with C, was not home made, but a common modern store bought violin bow. The bows in A, a wood piece 14 inches long, and in B, ditto 13 inches long, are home made, and show at their ends orifices for pegging in the hair (missing) stretched as in violin bows.

BRIDGES. The original bridges are all missing. The restored bridge on B is a solid round topped thin strip  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches long,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick,  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch high, and on C a flat topped restored ditto 2 inches long,  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick, and 1 inch high, propped under the strings, as shown, towards the base of the instrument. None of the five instruments as described, except C, show sound-holes or legs on the smooth flat under sides. Some are stained a reddish brown, and others show the natural color of the wood.

#### OWNERSHIP AND ORIGIN OF THE INSTRUMENTS.

Of D and E (not here shown) nothing more is known than that D was bought about 1920 from A. H. Rice, a dealer in antiques, of Bethlehem, Pa., who had obtained it in 1919 in Berks or Montgomery county; E, also from Mr. Rice, was bought by him in 1921, at a farm sale, in Northampton county, Pa. B was given to the writer in 1897 by Jacob Gross, formerly a Menonite minister and schoolmaster, then living on King's road, New Britain township, Bucks county, Pa. No notes were taken at the time concerning this instrument, which Mr. Gross said he had himself made and played upon in his earlier days, probably about 1865. It had long lain disused and out of repair in his house, and I think he roughly remounted it for me, namely with a new bridge, keys, and wire strings, in 1897.

I obtained the left handed instrument A, with its hairless bow, and lacking its strings (also about 1897), from Abraham Godshawk, a Menonite schoolmaster, then living near the old (disused in 1922) schoolhouse, and the Menonite Meeting-house on Deep Run.

But our chief knowledge concerns zither C, which was obtained from the daughter of Joseph Lapp, the latter now (1922) collector of taxes for Doylestown township. Joseph Lapp, a Menonite, gives me the following novel and valuable information, supplementing previous notes taken from him on January 10, 1921.

Mr. Lapp says the bow zither, C (Figure 2, Museum No. 5,251):

"Was made by his father, Henry Lapp, about fifty-five years ago. Joseph, then in his boyhood, lived on a farm in Bedminster township, Bucks county, adjoining the Ridge road, about one mile southwest of Keller's Church. His father not only played it, but made several other instruments like it, one made about the same time, 1875, for a Mr. Schrauger of Hilltown township, who died about thirty years ago; also another for a person unknown to him. Joseph Lapp says: My father taught English and German at Mood's public schoolhouse in Bedminster township, and previously, when a scholar there, about 1863, had been asked by the teacher to bring his 'zitter' to school to play an accompaniment to the singing at classes called "spelling bees." Father often played at home, singing himself while playing generally German hymns, such as were sung in the Menonite Meeting-house. Among these hymns I remember one called 'A. B. C.' and another called 'Spar Dein Buse Nicht,' and sometimes 'Home Sweet Home.' He never

used wire strings, but always catgut strings, not made by himself, but bought at stores. The head-piece of this instrument and the common violin keys fitted into it, were not made but bought. Also the turned piece with seven holes, inserted for sounding, just above the bridge. The original bridge made by my father was of hard wood, possibly maple, hollowed at the bottom, like a violin bridge, not flattened like the one now on the instrument, but curved at the top, though not so much as that of a violin. The body or box of the zither was made of white pine, without nails or pegs, but glued together with hot glue. The bridge was glued down on the top at its two points of contact. The fret-board was made of walnut or cherry wood, and the frets made of wire bought at the store. In playing this instrument my father always removed or pushed back the tablecloth and the oilcloth underneath it, and set the instrument, with the keys towards his left arm, upon the table. He always played standing up, always with the bow held in his right hand, and never with a quill or bone or other plectrum, making the notes only on one string, namely: the one on the outer left side of the instrument, pressing down upon this string, with his left forefinger not directly, but with a goose-quill, about four inches long, held horizontally at right angles to the string, and which he slid up and down over the frets, without lifting it, and hence in no sense a plectrum. Occasionally he slid the bow across the other two strings, which always sounded the same note or drone. My father sometimes played slow secular tunes, but generally hymns. He played by note, and the music book used by him is still (1922) in existence. He did not make the bow for this instrument, but used a common violin bow which he had bought. He never made bows for any of the 'zitters' constructed by him, though he sometimes replenished his bows with loose white or black horsehairs, pulled from the tails of our own horses. This hair was glued and pegged into the bow in the usual way."

#### INFORMATION OF ISAAC OVERHOLT.

Further information concerning these instruments came from Isaac Overholt of Plumsteadville, whose father, Abraham Overholt, had made a bow zither before 1844 and played upon it about forty years ago. The writer saw that zither sold at a sale of the Overholt property in 1905, when it was bought by a person then of Doylestown, but now supposed to be living in Indiana. It was loaned to the writer about 1897, and Isaac Overholt, who well remembers it and often heard his father play it, being interviewed on February 9, 1918, and again on March 7, 1922, thus answers the following questions concerning it:

Q. How many strings did it have? A. Three.

Q. Were they of wire or of catgut? A. Of brass wire.

Q. How was the instrument played?

A. My father laid it on a table before him with its neck to his left arm and frets on the side nearest him. He played with a bow held in his right hand, pointing towards the left side of the zitter, and at right angles to the instrument.

Q. Did it have frets? A. Yes.

Q. How many strings passed over the frets?

A. I think only one, but I am not sure; there may have been two.

Q. Did your father use a quill or bone to press the frets?

A. He used a piece of bone until it was lost, then a piece of hickory wood, held in his left hand and pressed horizontally downward between the frets and parallel to them.

Q. Did your father ever hear of anyone playing without a bow?

A. Yes. Visitors sometimes came in and picked up the bone used to press down the frets, and used it as a plectrum. Father never played without a bow.

Q. How was the bow made?

A. Of hickory wood in the shape of a violin bow, with horsehair strings. Father made it himself. He pulled hairs from the tails of our horses to mount it, and used rosin.

Q. How did he tune the instrument?

A. He turned the keys to which the ends of the wire strings were fastened, between his thumb and forefinger.

Q. Did he lay the zither on the table, or on his lap?

A. Always on the table.

Q. What tunes or songs did your father play?

A. Always hymns. The instrument was too slow for dance or lively music.

Q. About what date did your father make this zitter? A. before 1844.

Q. Did he take off the tablecloth before playing it?

A. Not if there was one on the table at the time.

Q. Did he play standing or sitting? A. He played in either way.

Q. Did you ever hear the instrument called by any other name than "zitter," for instance hommel? A. No. I always heard it called a "zitter."

Q. Was the bridge curved or flat on the top?

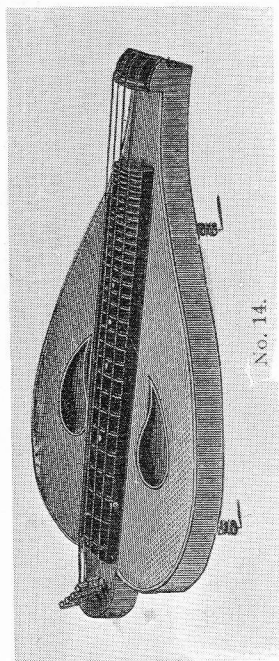
A. Flat and notched for the strings.

Q. Did anyone but Mennonites play these instruments and were they connected with the services of the Mennonite church?

A. I always heard it played among the Mennonites, but it was in no way connected with our church service. My father played his own zitter only for his pleasure and never in church. He never played it at school. I heard that the Leatherman family, also Mennonites, living north of Plumsteadville had owned a zitter. I also saw another one, made about 1840, by David Meyers, who lived on the Stump road west of Hinkletown. I attended school at the Deep Run Mennonite German schoolhouse when



Samuel Godshalk, who inscribed the music notes on the beams of the school room, taught there.<sup>1</sup> His father Abraham Godshalk, had also previously taught there, but I never knew that Samuel had a "zitter," and never heard one played at school.



No. 14.

Figure 3  
MODERN GERMAN BOW ZITHER

Although the instrument thus described belongs to the rare class of stringed instruments played with a bow, yet not held against the body or horizontally, it is not to be confounded with the modern German bow zither, as shown in Figure 3, also always bowed in playing and also laid flat on the table. The latter information I learned from E. J. Albert, musical instrument maker, of 124 South Ninth street, Philadelphia, who furnished us with the above illustration. This is a flat oval fretted instrument about one foot long, sometimes round bottomed and resting on pegs, and sometimes flat bottomed, with four wire strings stretched, not along its side, but across its middle and played like a violin. There is no drone, and all four strings, not one only, are used to sound the notes. The still more modern table violin is a violin of the usual mounted shape with legs, etc., to play on a table in the same way.

This modern German bow zither is supposed to have been invented by Johann Petzmeyer (b. Austria, 1804; d. Munich, 1885), and while the old Bucks county bow zither, Fig. 2B, being also laid on a table and played like a violin, may be classed with it, all the other bow zithers in our collection are differently mounted, and differently played. Whether Petzmeyer copied or

<sup>1</sup> For papers on the Mennonite schoolhouse, with notes of music on the beams and blackboard, with illustrations of the same, see our transactions, Vol 2, page 63, and Vol. 4, page 533.

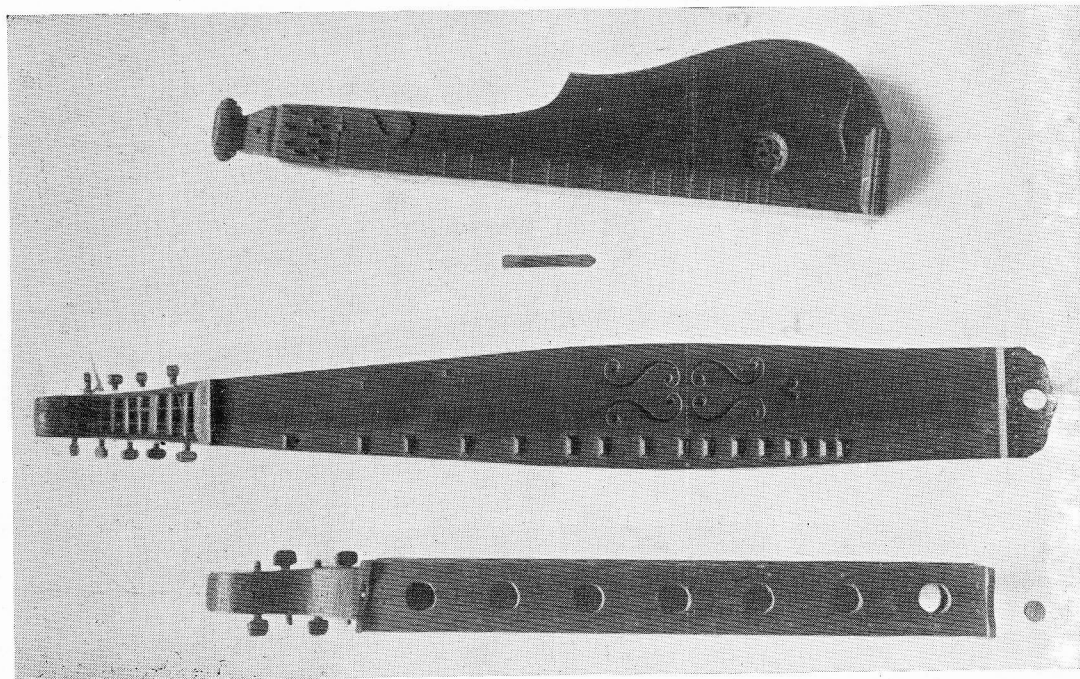


Figure 4

NORWEGIAN AND DUTCH ZITHERS FROM THE SCHEURLEER COLLECTION AT THE HAGUE.

By kind permission of Dr. F. Scheurleer.

adopted his bow zither from either of these earlier instruments we have thus far been unable to learn.

In 1919 the writer had found that the Metrolopitan Museum in New York and the Pennsylvania Museum in Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, each possessed an instrument of this type. Also through the kind information of Miss Laura Long, and Mr. R. P. Hommel, that two pictures by Hans Memling, painted about 1490, one in the collection of Baron Bethune, at Alost, near Brussels, and one in the Royal Museum at Antwerp, and also a wood cut by Hans Holbein of about 1525, called "Death and the Pedlar," in his series known as the "Dance of Death," show these bow zithers, held, however, and played, in an impossible manner, not on a table, but in the air. But, no information was obtained from either of the above named museums, concerning the instruments, nor from the publications of the South Kensington Museum, in London, the various musical dictionaries, or from C. H. Albert, the violin maker of Philadelphia, above mentioned, and several musical instrument makers in New York and elsewhere. Then when a letter was written to Salzburg concerning the origin of the modern Tyrolese plectrum zither (the zither par excellence) and the modern German bow zither, said in Germany, as before mentioned, to have been invented by Johan Petzmeyer (b. Austria, 1804; d. Munich, 1885), failed to give any new information as to how or when either the Tyrolese, or the German bow zither, might have been derived from this ancient instrument, the writer asked Mr. R. P. Hommel, on a visit to Europe in 1920, to inquire concerning it at the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam, and at the National Museum in Munich. Neither of the latter had specimens or knew anything of the instrument, but Mr. J. W. Enschede, Herringacht 68, Amsterdam, a student of church hymns, and of the origin of barrel organs, showed Mr. Hommel a photograph of one of these instruments now in a local museum in Friesland, and Dr. F. Scheurleer (Laan Van Meerdevort 53 F, The Hague), a noted collector, had several of both the bow and plectrum type in his collection.

In 1921 the latter wrote a letter to Mr. Hommel, in which he says that the instrument in question is called "Hommel" or "Nordische Balk" in the Netherlands, was played there either

with a bow or plectrum, and is described in a Dutch pamphlet, the Bulletin of the North Netherlands Musical Society (Tijdschrift Der Vereeniging voor Noord Nederlands Muziekgeschiedenis—Loman, Amsterdam, 1882, part I). The writer, J. C. Boers, says that these box-shaped instruments, two to three feet long and with three or four strings laid flat on a table in playing, had been known in Friesland in 1750 and survived there in 1846, where their name was "Hommel" or "Noordische Balg" (wood stick).

Boers quotes a German traveler, J. G. Kohl, who vaguely described an instrument of this kind with brass strings, called Hommel, laid upon a table, and played with a quill plectrum, by an old woman on the Isle of Fohr, in East Friesland, in 1846, when the latter told him that the instrument, supposed to have been introduced from Holland, and then nearly obsolete, had been formerly common on the island, that it was sometimes used for dancing, and played in households to the accompaniment of other instruments, and the singing of Sunday afternoon hymns.

Another writer quoted in the pamphlet named, Nicholas Douwes, organist at Tzum, in Friesland, about 1750, says that

"The hollow square instrument of from two to three feet long, sometimes longer or shorter, is stringed with three or four strings, with a comb at each end, over which the strings are drawn by means of a brass clamp. The melody is produced only on the first string, and the others have almost always the same sound, and serve sometimes the purpose of bass. The playing is done by someone with two small quills, sliding with the one over the strings, and striking with the other along the first string over the tones. Others go with the bow over the strings and with the nail of the left thumb strike on the first string over the tones, and play also the melodies."

In Germany, according to this article (date not given), it was called "Scheidhold," (Woodstick) "Hommel," (Bee) or "Spanish Hommel," and there played sometimes with the right thumb, but using a small stick, held in the left hand, to press between the frets, as previously described.

In Tuscany, Italy, the same writer says that the instrument was called "Symphonia," and supposes it to have been anciently used by the Romans. In France it was called "Buche," also "Espinetie des Vosges," and in Russia "Palaika."

Diderot's Encyclopaedia, Original Folio Edition, Paris &



Neuchatel, Vol. 12, Plates, articles Luthier, Plate 4, No. 6, illustrates the instrument with three strings, like keys, set as in C, Figure 1, through a hole in the head-piece, with eighteen frets, and a sound hole closely resembling C, but lacking the bow.

Dr. F. Scheurleer, above mentioned, again writes to Mr. Hommel in a letter dated September 12, 1921, as follows:

"I beg to send you two photographs of instruments in my collection, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 (See Figures 4 and 5). They are zithers called Hommel or Noordische Balk. No. 2 (Figure 4, in middle), is a modern Norwegian one. Nos. 5 and 6 (Figure 5, right) are trumpet marines, quite different instruments. These ones are the instruments painted by Van Eyck, Memling, etc. They are played in a vertical position. Hommels always in a horizontal one, and generally with a plectrum. No. 1 (Figure 4, left) shows the bottom of the zither. You will see that these and the trumpet marines are two quite different instruments."

In answering this letter, April 24, 1922, after describing our Pennsylvania zithers as above, and enclosing photographs of both kinds, I added as to identification of the instruments in the old paintings referred to, as follows:

"I never saw any picture by Van Eyck of this instrument but only three reproductions of paintings; 1 in the Bethune collection at Alost by Memling, another in the gallery at the Royal Museum at Antwerp by Memling, and 3 in the wood cut of Death and the Pedlar in the Dance of Death series by Holbein. All these instruments as played by angels or the figure of death, in these pictures, are held in an impossible manner either for Trump Marine or Hommel, probably by painters license. All are being played with the bow, not plectrum, all are too small in proportion for the Trump Marine, none show the narrow neck of the latter for sliding the hand, and none could possibly be encircled by the hand, like the Trump Marine, as shown in your photographs of Trump Marines. I cannot, therefore, agree with you in thinking that these instruments in these pictures are Trump Marines. They seem to me to be bow Hommels, painted in cases where the introduction of a table might have thrown the picture out of balance. At all events as shown the playing is impossible."

From the recent investigations of Miss Loraine Wyman, Mr. Cecil J. Sharp and other collectors of American folk music, it further appears that the instrument, whether played with a bow or a plectrum, is still in use in the secluded mountain regions of Kentucky and Tennessee, where the mountaineers who may have brought it with them from Britain about 150 years ago, call it the "Dulcimore," and use it to accompany their singing of

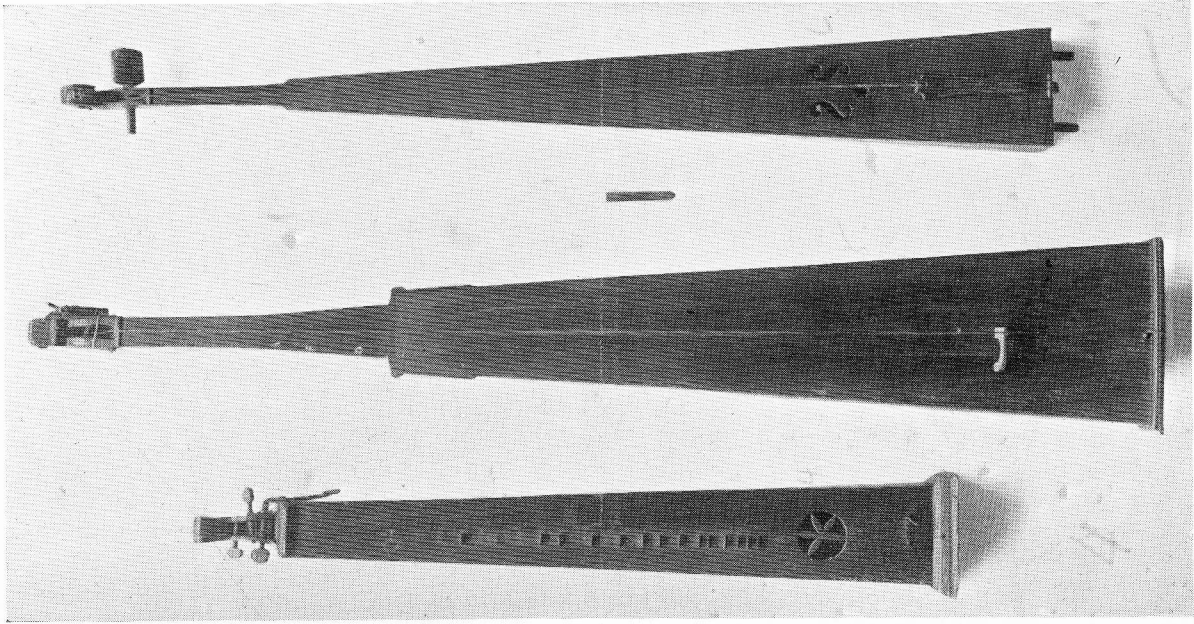


Figure 5

ZITHER (LEFT) AND TRUMP MARINES FROM THE SCHEURLEER COLLECTION AT THE HAGUE.

By kind permission of Dr. F. Scheurleer.

English and Scotch ballads. Figure 6, shows one of these so-called Dulcimores, kindly presented to the Bucks County Historical Society by Miss Loraine Wyman, authoress of "Lonesome Tunes," who obtained it in 1915 in Kentucky. It was made (so says a paper pasted inside of it) by Mr. E. Thomas of Bath, Kentucky, from whom Miss Wyman bought it. It is 33 inches long,  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches at widest part and  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches thick, curved on the sides. Its keyboard sets in the middle and has, or had, three wire strings, one of which to the left, is fretted, and plays the tune, while the two others tuned in unison a fifth below the tune-string, are drone strings. According to the information of Mrs. Luigi Zande of the Pine Mountain Settlement School, Harlan county, Kentucky, Jan. 24, 1922, it is still played in the mountains, by sliding a quill horizontally over the fretted string with the left hand, while striking the instrument with another quill, or, a leather plectrum, or as shown in the illustration Figure 7, with a bow in which case the "Dulcimore" is either again laid flat on the table or rests with its lower end on the player's lap and its upper (the key end) projecting, as here shown, upwards over the edge of the table.

J. C. Boers, the writer of the Dutch pamphlet, herein quoted, who refers to the great difficulty of obtaining information on the subject and the

method of tuning, etc., makes no clear classification of the two kinds of instruments, but in general describes most of them as played with a plectrum, with a vague reference to some played with a bow. He gives no exact description of the playing, nor does he describe in any case the bows, or the two bow zithers or hommels, which he shows with their bows in his second pamphlet illustration, not here reproduced, which latter was inserted, not in his own article, but out of place in another part of the musical journal. Nevertheless, that the zithers thus described by him and illustrated, are identical in type with those in our museum, there can be no doubt.



Figure 7  
PLAYING THE DULCIMORE IN KENTUCKY

#### CONCLUSION.

In the confused and somewhat unsatisfactory information thus gathered, it appears that we have found in Bucks county, and eastern Pennsylvania, twelve remarkable, obsolete, and little-known stringed musical instruments, shown in Figs. 1 and 2, which though superficially resembling each other, differ in their construction, and method of playing, and may be clearly divided into two classes, those played with a plectrum, and those played with a bow. Also that these instruments, in whatever way played, have long been used under various names in Europe. That they may have been known to the ancient Romans, and are probably, if not certainly, identical with the instruments shown in pictures

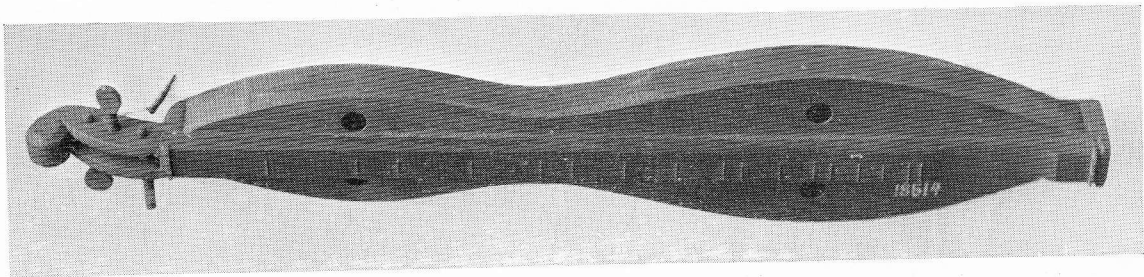


Figure 6  
THE KENTUCKY  
DULCIMORE



by Memling and Holbein, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

More definitely as to the first class, the Plectrum Zithers, we have learned but little, except the mere fact of their existence among the Pennsylvania Germans, and the certainty that as they all lack bridges, they could not have been played with a bow. Otherwise our efforts to discover how when and where they were made or played, or, through correspondence, to associate them directly with the history or origin of the great Tyrolese Plectrum Zither of modern times, have failed.

On the other hand we have learned that the bow zithers, now entirely disused and generally forgotten in Bucks county, were made near Doylestown as late as 1870; that in playing them the player stood up holding the bow in his right hand, when the zither lay along the edge of the table, on which he played it, with the key end towards his left arm. In his left hand he held horizontally a goose quill or a small stick about three inches long and one-fourth inch thick. This he did not use as a plectrum but pressed down on string No. 1 only, so as to press the latter against the frets and so by means of the bow, held in his right hand make the notes on that string alone which was nearest him on the outer edge of the instrument. The other strings, however, he tuned them, produced a drone whenever he chose, by tilting the bow down upon them to suit his taste. There were bridges like violin bridges on all these instruments as shown in Figure A, but the original strings were probably always of catgut not wire.

We have also learned that these very rare so-called bow "zithers," almost unknown to musical antiquaries, were in Bucks county, Pennsylvania, invariably associated with the Mennonites, a pious sect, which came to Pennsylvania about 1720, and that they were used by them only as a pastime, sometimes to play slow secular tunes, though generally hymns, and never associated with their church services or any religious ceremonies.

Though they may be traced to Friesland and northern Holland, where they survived until about 1846, there is no reason for supposing that the Mennonites first heard of them in their passage through Friesland on their way to America, or brought them thence, since known by various names, the instruments had been long previously in use in Russia, France, Italy, and Germany, and

must have long antedated the modern German bow zither, invented by Petzmeyer, early in the 19th century.

How far these bow played zithers from Pennsylvania are to be associated with the origin of all bow played stringed instruments remains to be learned. And it seems remarkable that musical antiquaries have not given a clearer account of this unique instrument, which when played with a bow, is not, like many of its kind, held against the body, but laid upon a table.