

The First American-Made Mandolin: A Ripley's Believe It or Not!

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Introduction

It is impossible to talk about the debut of the first American-made mandolin without acknowledging the presence of a wildly popular group of Spanish musicians who arrived in America on New Year's Day 1880. That collection of bandurria players and guitarists launched an on-the-road show and ignited mandolin mania without any of them ever having performed on a mandolin. *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro* (hereafter referred to as the Spanish Students) inaugurated a spectacular musical tour and in doing so, they inspired Italian immigrants, freshly arrived and armed with Neapolitan-made mandolins, to chart a comparable path. Thanks to these Italian mandolinists who paid homage to the Original Spanish Students a bandurria craze may have been avoided. In its place, Italian immigrant musicians sparked a revolution that infused an irrepressible enthusiasm for the mandolin.

Out of that context, a young man arrived in Chicago and special-ordered a mandolin from Joseph Bohmann, a Chicago luthier. A mysterious "Mr. Seville" died in virtual anonymity but today he has earned legendary status by virtue of his curiosity about the mandolin.¹ The triangulated intersection of Mr. Seville, the Spanish musicians and the Italian mandolinists unfolded in Chicago and its reverberations are felt to this day. Current scholarship and newly discovered documentation irrefutably establishes how Chicago was home to the first American-made mandolin. Moreover, this story reconstructs sufficiently corroborated facts that eliminate all other contenders in the controversy surrounding the first American-made mandolin. The most plausible conclusion appears to answer the "who, what, when, where and how." Ultimately, it is my hope that one of the great mysteries concerning the birth of the mandolin in America will be settled once and for all.

America's First Magical Mystery Tour

In the midst of salon pleasantries and Victorian romanticism, a raucous bunch of strangely attired Latin musicians burst on the scene and changed the world. The young Spanish musicians enthralled their audiences as they exuded vitality and charisma. Cloaked in their festooned costumes, adorned with flowing capes, they captured the imagination of America's young adults. That convivial attitude created a certain irresistible mystique that spilled over from the theater into the homes of Middle America. American families had been strongly attracted to the subdued parlor piano but as a result of the feisty strummers, the ladies fell in love with the Latin dance rhythms, seductive serenades, and romanticized appearance of the strumming lads. And the young male concert goers wanted to attract those young women as well; it seemed that everyone wanted to learn how to play mandolin as part of the courtship dance.

American teenagers heard about the visiting "Spanish Students" and begged their parents to acquire tickets for the show. It was the must-see event of the season! Rub shoulders with the musicians on their Magical Mystery Tour! Discover what made them so obsessively attractive and popular? Was it sex appeal? Swooning women ready to taste the forbidden sangria and take private lessons? Perhaps it was newspapers promoting subscription sales and creating a cult of followers? If Tom Wolfe had attended a backstage party given for the Spanish Students, he would have cited the glitterati "sucking up" and how the elite wanted to appear "hip" or as Wolfe aptly described it: "Radical Chic."² Everyone wanted a way to remember the young musicians—perhaps a ribbon as a small memento. They were America's first Beatles.

The artist Charles Levy renders an imaginary scene of an unidentified troupe of musicians depicted as “Spanish Students” They are rendering the habanera rhythms as they accompany a flamenco dancer for a show at the Nouveau Cirque.



Listening to their jaunty Latin rhythms, audiences were drawn in as they desperately wanted to imbibe and absorb the exotic sounds of Spain.³ They ogled the musicians as they reveled in their costume-like robes and two-and-three-cornered hats. Putting aside some of the stereotypes circulating in newspapers about the Spanish musicians, reporters expressed intrigue about their overall attire just as American music critics wrote disparaging remarks about the British “mop tops.” These musical groups were undeniably attractive to a young generation wanting to break free. And just as the obsession with the “Spanish Students” grew into mandolin mania, so, too the frenzied embrace of the Beatles grew into a generation of guitar-strumming lads. These foreign invaders changed the world with their music.

Before the “Spanish Students” arrived in America, the precursors made the rounds at various festivals such as Mardi Gras and some even “stopped traffic” in Paris.⁴ Spectators flocked to the public streets to participate and bought seats at various theatrical venues; the audiences seemed mesmerized by the enchanting music. A Parisian poster from the Nouveau Cirque (to the left) recreates the city of Seville’s famous toreador festival featuring a flamenco dancer and her accompanying “Spanish Students” comprised of guitarists and bandurria players. A momentum was building around the university’s “Spanish Students” tradition as evidenced by myriad groups of troubadours who circulated in average rural towns as well as major metropolitan cities and European capitals. It was just a matter of time before they leaped across an ocean.

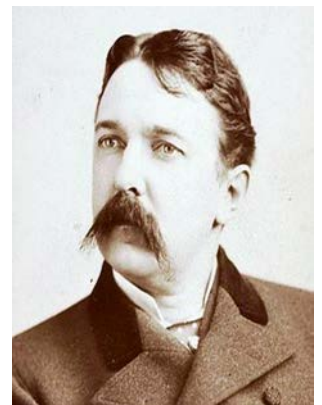
At a crucial moment, the great impresario Henry E. Abbey (1846-1896) seized on an opportunity to bring the so-called original “Spanish Students” to America. A well-practiced but bedraggled troupe of musicians survived a three-week transatlantic ordeal and arrived in New York on New Year’s Day 1880; Abbey feted his entourage and launched its first tour with a debut gig in Boston. Over the next four years, the troupes played in hundreds of venues throughout countless cities in America and on the nearby Spanish-speaking

islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico.⁵

For several reasons, these concerts became an historic turning point in mandolin history. From the very beginning Abbey’s musicians were touted as mandolin players from Spain.⁶ Over the course of their scheduled concerts, this troupe of bandurria players and guitarists cloned a twin, then a triplet followed by multiple groups which spawned second and third generation ensembles bearing similar if not identical names. The imposters were becoming just as popular as the original troupe. Many of these instrumental groups successfully capitalized on the frenzy created by Abbey’s group but with one distinct difference: Italian musicians performed on 8-string, double-course mandolins which nicely substituted for the 12-string bandurrias. No one was the wiser.

In the midst of the obvious deceit as to who and what instruments were played, Carlo Curti (1859-1926) a recent Italian immigrant with musical connections back in Italy and in New York hired classically-trained Italian mandolinists who fulfilled, and at the same time, perpetuated the mistaken claim of newspaper reporters. Virtually overnight, audiences and advertisers conflated these “me-too”

Ohio born Henry E. Abbey introduced the “Spanish Students” to America. It was his first foray into bringing European acts to American theaters. That success enabled him to have a string of hits.



mandolin bands with Abbey's *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro*. Same repertoire, nearly identical costumes, and all sprouting moustaches!

Within a couple of months of its American debut, the Italian copy-cats and wannabes were ready to stake their future on the extraordinary instant success of the Spaniards. Curti's "Spanish Students" (later the "Roman Students") became the most famous troupe out of the many others that proliferated.⁷ These multiple iterations included an endless list of various names such as "El Fígaro," "Zerega's Royal Spanish Troubadours," the "Venetian Troubadours," and "Students of Pompeii." Everyone cashed in on it!

In spite of the growing number of imitation bands that competed for the same theater venues, Abbey's densely-packed calendar made him a very prosperous man, enabling him to bring several successful singers and actresses to America, including Adelina Patti, Sarah Bernhardt, and Lotta Crabtree.⁸ Booked into theaters that he owned, his financial situation became complicated but it rewarded him with opportunities. He became the first General Manager for the Metropolitan Opera and he is credited for all sorts of theatrical "firsts" although, at the time, he never fully realized what he accomplished by bringing the "Spanish Students" to America.

The Misidentified Musical Instrument that Changed the World

The troupes of copycat entertainers were often called "fake" or "imposters" and while that is all true, there was one major important distinction between the original bandurria players and subsequent mandolinists. For the first time, literate mandolinists, steeped in the classical tradition, possessed greater flexibility to work from a common score, improvise from it, and hone in on featured soloists and ensemble arrangements.⁹ The Italian musicians grew up learning the Italian operatic repertoire, memorized a vast amount of it, and could rely on the written tradition in the classical and romantic genres. It was a definite advantage over many of the musicians in Abbey's group whose inherently faulty method of "learning by ear" might not produce the best results. To the booking agents and theater owners, it made no difference what they played or how they learned it, as long as the theaters were full every night.

In a sense, Curti and other Italian band leaders converted the mistaken identity of the bandurria into an auspicious beginning for a classically-based mandolin repertoire in America. The excitement surrounding the "Spanish Students" exposed Americans to a genre that required a specific instrumentation and it created the need for an American-made mandolin, an inexpensive musical instrument. Moreover, the Italian immigrant mandolinists saw infinite opportunities to teach it to eager young Americans. Armed with sheet music and mandolins, a generation of musicians changed the direction of the mandolin.

Questions needed to be settled: First, what *exactly* was a mandolin? Second: When is a mandolin not a mandolin? Answer: When it's a bandurria or a Spanish mandolin. The correct answer to the initial inquiry remains: A mandolin is always a mandolin and the bandurria is a mere doppelganger.

Most observers could not distinguish a bandurria from a mandolin or a lute. Naturally, the bandurria developed a nickname as a Spanish mandolin and newspaper reporters assigned it the misnomer.¹⁰ That mistaken identity of a bandurria as a mandolin dates back quite a ways. Even though the familiar bowlback mandolin may well have been conceived in the Arabic world of pre-Spain, it took a few centuries before it was perfected by Neapolitan luthiers who first heard it as an 'u'ud" (or "oud"), the Arabic word for "wood." That term was roughly translated into English as "lute" and the Renaissance lute evolved over time to give us Venetian gondoliers on canal boats and serenading troubadours standing in the shadows under a balcony. The blurred image of these musical instruments changed the course of mandolin history in America.

In January 1883 the "Spanish Students" returned for a second tour. It revisited some of the same places and explored new towns as well. By then, it had become apparent that the intervention of Maestro Curti and his mandolin-strumming Neapolitans forged a new path and attracted new devotees of the mandolin. Almost singlehandedly, Curti and his troupe resurrected the mandolin from dusty old operas and from the

oblivion of private salons. As the Italian professional mandolinists stroked the fluttering, warm tremolos, lilting barcarolles and frenetic tarantellas, the mandolin would become everyone's dream to play.

American youth were smitten with the sounds of what they *believed* to be a mandolin and they sought out to find one. Even if they had known the difference between a bandurria and a mandolin, bandurrias were simply not available except in the Spanish-speaking regions. Students searched for mandolins and Italian teachers trained in the art of playing the mandolin. Students abandoned their piano lessons and exchanged their violins (tuned exactly as a mandolin) for the Neapolitan bowlback.¹¹ Curti's mandolinists were not prepared for the first wave of students earnestly seeking lessons; teachers had to either import Italian-made mandolins or consult with newly arrived luthiers to build something comparable. Music studios would not be flooded with young men and women until mandolins were more readily available.

A young Mr. Seville wanted to learn the mandolin and he was fully equipped to do so. He was a well-educated musician who was capable of distinguishing the difference between the two conflated musical instruments. Although we know nothing of his musical training, his natural skills and how he apprenticed to become a luthier and a piano technician, Mr. Seville's Wisconsin childhood education and residency in Chicago connected him to one of Chicago's most famous luthiers, Joseph Bohmann. In addition, he had been lucky enough to be in Chicago when Abbey and Curti toured. His fascination for the mandolin and interest in learning how to play it may have started with his attendance at a concert.¹² No one can confirm if Chicago's luthier Joseph Bohmann ever attended a concert but he welcomed Seville at his factory door and opened his heart to Mr. Seville's quest to build the first mandolin in America.¹³

Chicago's Mandolin Craze

The First! The Very First! The Earliest! The Original! The Genuine Original! The One and Only! Superlatives abound but answers elude in the pursuit of an absolutely corroborated story that will, once and for all, document THE first American luthier to build a Neapolitan-style mandolin or any kind of mandolin for that matter. Joseph Bohmann, born in Neumarkt, Bohemia in 1848, traveled to America soon after the Civil War and became Chicago's renowned luthier with strong connections to the violin community and the Viennese classical tradition.¹⁴ He had studied the violin family of instruments in Bohemia, apprenticed with his Uncle Joseph, a luthier, and perfected his skills in Vienna, the hub of music capitals.

Just as America was preparing to celebrate its Centennial in 1876, Bohmann's family transitioned from cabinetry to building musical instruments. Their inventory expanded into a new frontier that was opening up. The popular fretted instruments such as the banjo, guitar, and mandolin were becoming popular along with Stephen Foster songs. Bohmann's astute awareness gave him the cutting edge as he observed the growing interest in popular songs used in the home setting and in non-classical venues. He advertised his expanded manufacturing and hoped to translate his success in the classical realm with success for the more traditional music-loving public.



At the height of the 1880 Christmas holiday season, Bohmann announced the official opening of his factory at 119 North Clark Street.¹⁵ Mandolins were not yet a part of his inventory judging by the advertisement; however, they were not far behind. Bohmann offered to repair the mandolins belonging to Curti's group when they returned from touring; he claimed they played "inferior" instruments. His music circular documented a "Who's

Who's list of now famous touring mandolinists: Vincent Leon, Salvatore Fachutar, Luigi Ricca, Cesare Valisi, Domenico Tipaldi and others. Their instruments were apparently in need of repair and restoration work. In his promotional brochure, Bohmann explained how "... [T]he violin players of Chicago" brought the mandolinists to his shop. Perhaps Mr. Seville, a builder of violins, was one who recommended they consult Bohmann's factory at 306 State Street.¹⁶

Chicago buzzed with Abbey's *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro* at the McVickers Theater in May 1880 and later in August.¹⁷ That first tour was probably enough to spark the mandolin curiosity but it would take a second tour, starting in 1882, to fuel even greater interest. By then many mandolin groups had permeated musical circuits and the bandurria-based troupe had performed in dozens of important venues that attracted big crowds.¹⁸ The enthusiasm would turn into hysteria and an insatiable appetite for the mandolin. The misleading description of the bandurria enticed many to investigate the mandolin and may have lured Seville to investigate. Those smitten with the bug abandoned their piano lessons and exchanged their violins (tuned exactly as a mandolin) for the Neapolitan bowlback.¹⁹ They imagined themselves on a gondola floating on a Venetian canal to strains of a barcarolle or plucking a pizzicato-style wild tarantella under a balcony in a back alley of Naples.

In 1882, Curti's Leon and Tipaldi returned to Brooklyn to teach, publish and import mandolins. Ricca set up as a luthier in Manhattan and taught a younger generation of luthiers like Antonio Grauso.²⁰ Fachutar and Cesare Valisi lost no time in establishing themselves as mandolin teachers in Chicago. Valisi attracted enough students to form a small orchestra and joined the music faculty at the Chicago Conservatory.²¹ He had already published a few classical arrangements for mandolin and piano with Boston's Oliver Ditson & Company; his brother Giuseppe took on the role as assistant conductor in his brother's Florentine Mandolin Orchestra and went on to become a prolific composer.²²

*All' Egregio Professore
e Concertista di Mandolino
Sig. Cesare Valisi
d'Amministratore
Luigi Arditi
Chicago - 21. Febbrejo 1892.*

The Valisi brothers arrived with abundant skills that were established long before they arrived. They seemed already linked to a number of theatrical venues as they schmoozed with a wide array of international celebrities such as the world famous composer and conductor Maestro Luigi Arditi. It is entirely possible they first met in London as Arditi reintroduced himself

to Cesare Valisi when he conducted in Chicago.²³ Arditi's endearing message, inscribed to Valisi on February 21, 1892, (above), indicates respect for Valisi's music career and his affectionate praise and admiration for him as a concert mandolinist.²⁴ While Arditi conducted operas and operatic divas, Valisi's mandolin orchestra performed in Verdi's *Othello* at the Metropolitan Opera and went out to California to back up the famous diva Angelina Patti.²⁵ Their lives intertwined as Mme. Patti also studied mandolin with Giuseppe, Cesare's brother.

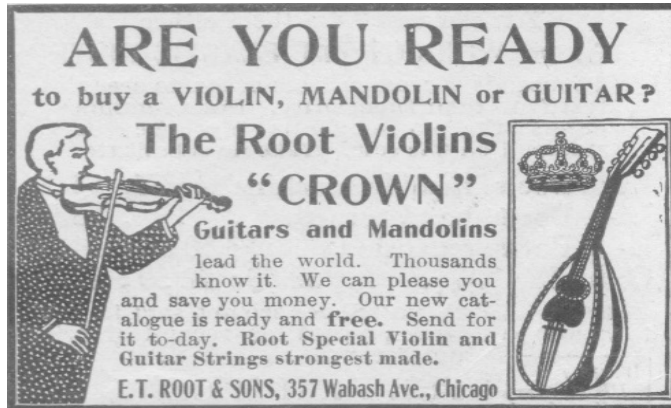
Meanwhile, potential mandolin students searched out music studios that offered mandolin lessons. Not until 1885, do we find Italian music instructors listed in Chicago directories. The names of Fachutar and Valisi appear and once there were enough moderately capable mandolinists, an orchestra was formed. In March 1886, a newspaper reporter interviewed an Italian Chicago mandolin teacher said to have been born on the outskirts of Milan. He provided a first-hand account of the situation and offered an assessment of the sudden rise in the mandolin's popularity. While the reporter does not identify the

Luigi Arditi 1822-1903) studied at Milan Music Conservatory and was based in London; he traveled extensively in America and worked with Henry E. Abbey and the Valisi brothers.



teacher by name, he cites his Wabash location. There is only one Italian mandolin maestro teaching on Wabash Avenue: Cesare Valisi.²⁶

In the reporter's interview, Valisi also mentions an unnamed "music dealer" who sold mandolins on Wabash Avenue. Valisi acknowledges that "[t]he demand [in 1886] is quite remarkable." In 1883 there were only a couple of musical instrument dealers on Wabash Avenue. Perhaps he was referring to musical instrument importers E. Root & Sons Co. or Julius Bauer.²⁷ Valisi cites a Wabash dealer who "two or three years ago...hardly sold one [mandolin] a year."²⁸ That sparse sales statistic would increase after the Spanish Students' tours. More inexpensive and moderately priced mandolins as well as the higher-end instruments became more available. Bohmann did not take possession of warerooms on Wabash Avenue until April 1894, and is therefore too late to be considered as the location for Valisi's claim.²⁹



Where did eager students go to buy a mandolin? At first, they relied solely on French and Italian importers. Root might have been a source for imported mandolins but Root's "Crown" models were not produced until later. Around 1890, their mandolins became quite affordable and readily available from their factory.

J. Howard Foote first imported French mandolins in Manhattan and opened a second retail store in Chicago at 307 & 309 Wabash Avenue in or about 1885 or 1886.³⁰ That

placed Foote as possibly an early contender for selling imported mandolins in Chicago but not for manufacturing them.

By 1895, Chicago's Montgomery Ward's catalog sold Bohmann's more moderately priced mandolins.³¹ However, again Bohmann's store was on State Street and no advertisements indicate he regularly manufactured mandolins during the mid-1880s. A decade later was a far different story. After the Chicago Fair was over, Bohmann benefited from his active campaign to advertise his mandolins but a devastating fire destroyed his storefront business in early December 1895 and he moved to West Madison Avenue.³² With a tremendous loss of inventory, he had to start all over and valuable time and status.

The Lyon and Healy Company had begun to carve out a giant foothold in the banjo and mandolin world. It was becoming a much more prominent music manufacturer and it stocked all kinds of imported musical instruments and music-related merchandise; however, they were not located on Wabash Avenue until much later. Neither did they self-identify as manufacturers of the Washburn mandolin until the late 1880s.³³ Thus, Cesare Valisi's claims as recorded in the March 1886 interview hinges on mandolin dealers and importers rather than any actual Chicago manufacturers.

Valisi's obvious preference focused on Italian-made sources, not Chicago luthiers who might have dabbled in making an occasional mandolin. Mandolinists looked to New York's growing community of Italian luthiers and to imported bowlbacks. They represented the highest quality (more expensive) mandolins as compared to the lower end American models. Over the next decade, Valisi and his brother managed to grow and sustain an orchestra. He accomplished that goal by becoming more politically savvy and booked several mandolin ensembles, including his own orchestra, to perform at Chicago's Columbian World's Fair. In 1894, shortly after the fair, his orchestra celebrated its Tenth Anniversary Season. That milestone implies that Valisi's first season as 1884-1885.³⁴ He was fueling mandolin mania.



As the waves of bandurria and mandolin troupes were crisscrossing the continent, an ambitious young Southern gentleman seized on what Valisi had already launched. Clarence Lockhart Partee (1864-1915) arrived in Chicago to study and he registered at a business college but he worked as a musician, having studied banjo and mandolin, and made a living as a music teacher. He went on to lead an extraordinary life as a freelance journalist and founded a banjo, mandolin and guitar magazine known as *Cadenza*, where he served as editor and publisher. While living in Chicago, he played mandolin on a small French model (possibly ordered through Foote).

In a well-circulated article published in 1902, and later in 1904, Partee recalled Bohmann's first manufactured mandolin and claimed he built mandolins in "1883 or 1884." He described Bohmann's first mandolin as "unusual [in] size, much larger" than Partee's French model. It apparently exhibited a "peculiar shape" and "crude construction."³⁵ While this recollection is still surprisingly vague given that he had first-hand facts, the role Partee played should not be underestimated. His motivation to exalt Bohmann appears to be honest enough as a journalist but he chose to play one of the imported brands.

As editor of the *Cadenza*, he consistently endorsed an elite clique of favorite mandolinists including Valentine Abt, Giuseppe Pettine, Stellario Cambria, Samuel Siegel, and Samuel Adelstein. In addition, Partee seemed especially complimentary of E.H. Frey publishing his compositions under the Partee aegis. In spite of Valisi's status, as a contemporary of Partee who traveled in the same music circles, Valisi would never appear in Partee's magazine.



Cesare Valisi



Joseph Bohmann



Clarence L. Partee

Nevertheless, Cesare Valisi operated a successful mandolin and guitar feeder school at Weber Music Hall and that suggests a growing enthusiasm for the mandolin. All the touring mandolinists such as Carlo Colombo who founded the “Venetian Troubadours” eventually settled down to teach. Others found stability in music-related careers and by the time Abbey’s “Spanish Students” wrapped up their final tour in January 1884, a fresh crop of eager students were seeking mandolin teachers.

Winnowing the Contenders

From 1880 until the First World War, the mandolin frenzy was gradual but non-stop accelerando. In the crucial early period, mandolin students were very much still inspired by all the charismatic musicians on tour. Students flocked to see the traveling bandurria and mandolin troupes and were won over. One such student was a Chicago-born musician first began his studies on violin and banjo in Cincinnati but after he heard the “Students,” he switched to mandolin. Frank Z. Maffey (1862-1935) was a teenager when he might have seen one or more of the touring spectacles. Both he and Mr. Seville apparently became inspired by the “Spanish Students” when they toured while Curti made elliptical patterns that seemed to follow Abbey’s first touring cycle.

As seventeen-year old student in a Cincinnati music college, Maffey recalled seeing what he called “The Spanish Troubadours.” Without a verifiable date or place, it has been presumed that Maffey heard one of the many faux groups. It is possible he saw Zerega’s “Royal Spanish Troubadours.”³⁶ With so many barnstorming groups making their way throughout the Mid-West, it is impossible to nail down which group Maffey actually saw. A detailed listing of Cincinnati dates yields opportunities for Maffey to have attended one of the concerts booked by Nick Roberts and Henry E. Abbey.³⁷ Is it likely Maffey and Seville enjoyed the same troupe?

Maffey makes a strong point about how this generic-sounding troupe of “Spanish Troubadours” inspired him to investigate the mandolin. He went to great lengths to find a Cincinnati luthier to build a mandolin. He even inquired in New York but he claimed that none existed. Ultimately after he failed to acquire a mandolin, he built his own and began to concertize on it.³⁸ In an interview given twenty-five years later, he declared himself the “first American” to play mandolin. If not the first, he was certainly one of the earliest to play on an American-made mandolin. After that fateful encounter, Maffey pursued a music career teaching mandolin for decades in Indianapolis where he founded an Indianapolis mandolin orchestra.

Another mandolinist who claimed to be the earliest to play an American-made mandolin was E.H.



(Edward Harry) Frey (1862-1932); he enjoyed an active life as a conductor, composer and mandolinist. He started his studies on violin with Professor Emil Wiegand (1870-1916) in Cincinnati when he was twelve.³⁹ Eventually, Frey became widely known as a mandolinist. It is plausible that while studying violin, Frey attended the College of Music in Cincinnati. In the early summer of 1880, Abbey’s Spanish Students saturated Cincinnati (and Chicago) with concerts. There was a reasonably good chance that Bohmann might have encountered violin prodigies visiting from Ohio conservatories. Perhaps in the course of seeking repairs, some visited Chicago where they all sat down in a friendly German brewery to chat in German about German violins.

Frey’s profile and endorsement appear in Bohmann’s circular “Celebrated Joseph Bohmann Mandolins.” According to his photograph (to the left), dated November 22, 1897, he attests to having owned a Bohmann mandolin for fifteen years. If that claim is

precise, the first Bohmann “made-to-order” mandolin could have been produced during the months leading up to late autumn 1882.⁴⁰ That date would certainly jive with the excitement surrounding Abbey’s second tour and with all the Italian imposter groups. However, if Frey had been the first to order a mandolin from Bohmann, we are left with one unanswered question: Why, then, didn’t Bohmann credit Frey as the first to order and purchase a Bohmann mandolin? Instead, Bohmann clearly exalts Mr. Seville on the first page of his music circular. (See page 21 after the Endnotes). Based on that chronology, Seville ordered and bought his mandolin in 1881 or early 1882, before Frey.

Still, Frey had a certain advantage over Seville and is a strong contender. His father was a musician and it is plausible that Frey’s father might have brought over a model of whatever he played (possibly a German violin) although German mandolins were thought to be too crude.⁴¹ Frey was preoccupied with his academic violin studies but he could have found time for a mandolin concert in Chicago and ordered a mandolin from Bohmann. Frey’s friendship with Bohmann and his “shout out” endorsement of his mandolins never did result in Partee making mention of Frey’s association with Bohmann in the *Cadenza*.

One final, slim possible contender for an early America-made mandolin is Samuel Swain Stewart, a Philadelphia banjo manufacturer. While he ran a well-established banjo business, chances are he wanted in on mandolin manufacturing. One author points to Stewart as having produced a mandolin as early as 1881 but offers no clues for that early claim.⁴² Stewart is listed as a banjo manufacturer in Seeger & Guernsey but arrives on the mandolin scene after 1887. Another source points to an even earlier, albeit unsubstantiated, birth of the mandolin as a “comparatively new instrument dating back to 1880.”⁴³ These possible candidates remain as runners-up and a certifiable exact date is shrouded in mystery.

Bohmann’s undeniable assertion remains true: Algernon Sidney Seville—the only Seville listed in the Chicago City directories of the early 1880s—bought the first special-ordered mandolin.⁴⁴ Frey may have investigated Bohmann’s factory in late 1882 but Bohmann elevated Seville and he is undoubtedly the first American-born musician to play an American-made mandolin.

Mr. Seville Goes to Chicago⁴⁵



Mr. Seville’s ancestors’ roots originate in Warwickshire County, the birthplace of William Shakespeare. His father James (1822-1913) was a rather successful British cotton merchant who arrived in Ohio, married, and served briefly in the American Civil War. He moved his growing family to Lodi, Wisconsin where he opened an emporium. The sixth child of eight, Algernon Sidney Seville was born on the same day as one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, July 3, 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg. Seville was probably educated in a parochial school in nearby West Point but there is no way to verify. After the Civil War, Lodi’s a public school “Union” was just getting established, too.⁴⁶ However, there were private and parochial schools in nearby Portage.⁴⁷ His prosperous family offered Algernon every opportunity to experience the world, and perfect himself as he explored his potential.⁴⁸ At 16 Seville was still enrolled in school and possibly apprenticed but no local directories identify a music teacher or a luthier who taught in the vicinity.

In his youth, his violin and piano studies fell under the

liberal arts curriculum and it is assumed he might have considered entering the teaching profession or becoming a luthier. One of Seville's young violin students reminisced about his music tutoring and education under him. Grant "Bill" Robinson had grown up in Lodi and lived there until he was about 23, setting up a music repair store when he was 29.⁴⁹ Decades later, in his final senior years, he was interviewed about his early education and how he learned to repair and build violins at a very young age. He described his teacher as "Algernon Seville...an Englishman from Lodi."⁵⁰ Based on Robinson's interview, Seville maintained his link in Lodi and continued to instruct whenever he found time and even after he left for college in Chicago.



In the 1930s, Robinson put those luthier skills to use and entertained himself by building a novelty violin. It was a violin made entirely of matchsticks. It took six years to build it but when it was finished, he apparently contacted or was contacted by Robert Ripley (1893-1949) of the famous Ripley's Believe It Or Not!⁵¹ Robinson wanted to display his novelty violin (shown to the left) at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Evidently, it was hoped that the crowds would be fascinated by this fully functioning violin and flock to see it or hear it played inside a pavilion where it would be housed. It is not known whether it was ever exhibited but thanks to Mr. Robinson, Seville's legacy is remembered and symbolizes an historic link to him.

Whatever music background Seville possessed, when he turned 18 on July 3, 1881, he chose to pursue a medical career instead of music but he would never abandon his love for the violin and the piano. He entered pharmacy school in Chicago and enrolled in the required classes to earn a retail pharmacist license. The school was a few doors up from Bohmann's establishment on State Street.⁵² Seville fulfilled an apprenticeship with a certified pharmacist to become a registered pharmacist and graduated from the Illinois College of Pharmacy, earning a license and state board certification to practice as a license pharmacist in January 1884.⁵³

According to his board records, he had worked a minimum of five years before he was granted certification.⁵⁴ According to his 1888 voter registration record, Seville had been living in his Chicago precinct for one year but had lived for seven years in Cook County.⁵⁵ That record corroborates Seville's pharmacy school registration and confirms that he began living in Chicago on or before 1881. Other Chicago directories confirm him as the sole Seville from 1881 through 1888.⁵⁶ With that in mind, he could have visited Bohmann's store and ordered a mandolin as early as autumn 1881. If that date for his initial residency is accurate, he lived through the mandolin repercussions of the Abbey and Curti tours. Surely, he must have visited the most prominent luthier in Chicago and as a luthier himself, an encounter might have led to debates about the merits of Italian vs. German violins.

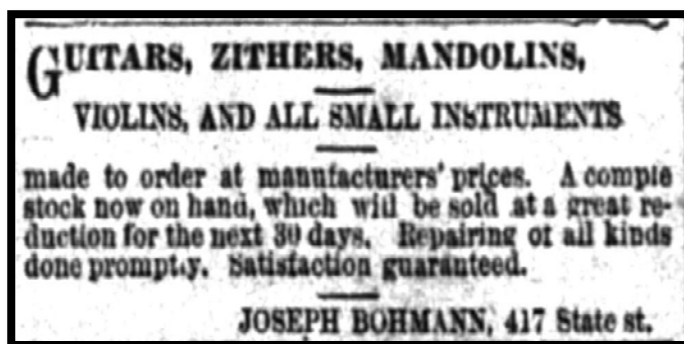
Mr. Seville graduated from the University of Illinois' School of Pharmacy located at 465-467 State Street, a few paces up from Bohmann's factory at 417 State Street. The college's sign hangs directly above the awning.



While Seville settled into pharmaceutical classes, Bohmann announced that “[F]or the first time in the history of Chicago, a factory of musical instruments” would serve the needs of the community.⁵⁷ The December 1880 holiday season advertisement introduced shoppers to his factory products but no mandolins are listed for direct sale. When Mr. Seville dropped in for some advice about a violin, he could have inquired about a mandolin. Perhaps Bohmann invited Seville to collaborate on building the first American-made mandolin. If so, the “made-to-order” mandolin might have been ready for pickup within six months. Whatever happened, 1881 was a busy year for Bohmann and by early 1882, his storefront had moved into “more commodious quarters” at 417 State Street.⁵⁸ His retail store thrived in the heart of the business district until a fire destroyed it during the first week of December 1895.

By 1885, Bohmann regularly advertised and catered to his clients with “made-to-order” mandolins.⁵⁹ That announcement pre-dated Lyon & Healy’s production of mandolins and placed him slightly ahead of the game. In 1886, Lyon & Healy officially entered the field but they tried to compete with Bohmann and claim they inaugurated the Washburn brand in 1883.⁶⁰ While Lyon & Healy were crowned as the most prolific manufacturer in the 1890s, the 1880s produced an insignificant number of mandolins.⁶¹ Although Bohmann never acquired a patent for a mandolin; however, in 1890 he registered one for a mandolin headstock. As a manufacturer, he devoted himself as to specializing in all the stringed instruments.⁶²

Bohmann’s main floor display room and basement level provided a competitive edge. It was in the business Chicago hub and within walking distance to the Civic Center and cultural venues. Seville’s retail drug store was located at 315 North Wells Street, across the river, a few blocks northwest of State Street.⁶³ Bohmann’s store served as a magnet for violinists. More than thirteen years after Seville ordered and purchased Bohmann’s first mandolin, Bohmann immortalized Seville in his music circular that he published



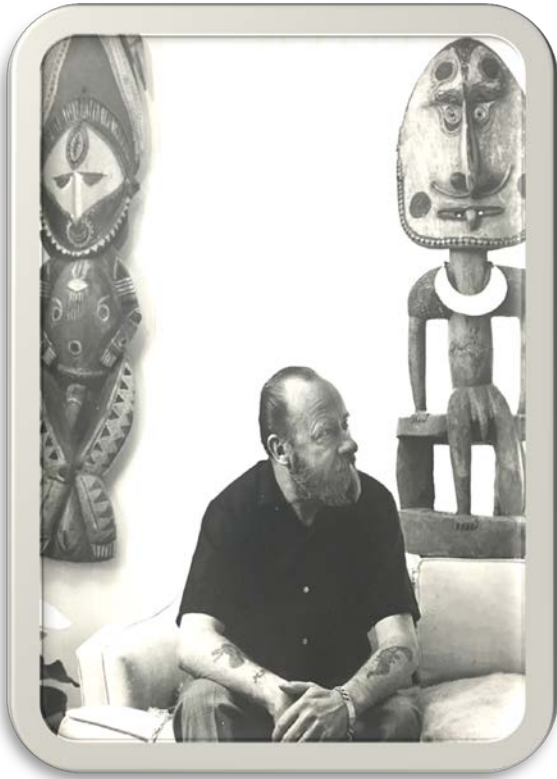
After the fire, in early 1896, Bohmann moved the store to 376 West Madison Street and needed to announce the new location and reinforce his presence. Having recently earned more awards on the world stage, it was time to crow a little and announce the news. He had created and published a music circular for distribution in 1896, filling it with images of his award-winning medals. He reissued the circular and amplified his accomplishments. Notoriously proud of his training and credentials, the circular denigrated the sound and craftsmanship of the “Spanish Students” mandolins. Bohmann jumped at the chance to malign Italian-made mandolins and to degrade the available “imported [mandolins that] were of such wretched quality.” That is not to say they were inferior but given the constant on-stage use and abuse from traveling, the instruments may not have been in the best of shape.

When the circular was republished, Seville had already been working in Memphis for more than a decade. Nevertheless, Bohmann memorializes the significance of that day Seville made his request. He may not identify a specific date or the year of Seville’s visit but his visit was important enough to give him prominence on the opening page. Bohmann documents that he built the first mandolin for Seville and the requests that followed were “made-to-order.” He began to build mandolins to offer a choice to students in search of an American model which might be less expensive than imported models. His circular asserted the superiority of all his musical instruments but especially, the exalted mandolin. Bohmann was up against everyone else in the game and he wanted to earn the crown!

Whether or not Bohmann and Seville stayed in contact remains unknown but Seville made occasional trips back to Chicago where his first wife lived. That brief marriage to Swiss-born Marguerite De La Fontaine resulted in their only child Marguerite.⁶⁴ She would give birth to Seville's first grandson, Emerson Seville Woelffer, in 1914. Mr.

Woelffer (to the left) became a well-known Chicago abstract expressionist. In a 1970s oral interview, Emerson retained a vivid (but limited) recollection of his childhood and described Seville as a musician who "played practically every instrument. Organized a businessmen's string orchestra in Memphis and he made every instrument in the orchestra."⁶⁵ His fond memories show a thoughtful grandfather who invested in his grandson's childhood.

Woelffer recalled that Seville had worked for "QRS Piano Rolls, in Memphis, Tennessee, and he worked on many of the player-piano rolls, transcribing from the piano [score] onto the piano player rolls with W. C. Handy."⁶⁶ Seville and Handy, the self-proclaimed Father of the Blues, were employed at one of the largest piano makers and distributors in the South. Handy was "arranging...music for one of the most prominent houses of Memphis."⁶⁷ Handy and Seville collaborated in the arduous task of converting blues piano scores to piano rolls. Mr. Woelffer made no mention of Seville playing a violin or mandolin but he remembered Seville's musical brilliance and ingenuity. There is no doubt that Bohmann and Seville shared a common bond as luthiers but Seville's grandson was much too young to fully appreciate the pioneering efforts made toward building a mandolin.



What kind of a mandolin did Bohmann build? Who really played it? One can speculate that he might have modeled a design after the Neapolitan bowlbacks brought to Chicago. Because Curti's Italian mandolinists brought their instruments to Bohmann and because many mandolinists were from Naples, it is easy to conjecture that they owned and preferred Neapolitan mandolins; however, Roman and Milanese mandolins could easily have been imported or at least brought over with mandolinists. Perhaps Bohmann mentored Seville in the luthier arts while working on Seville's made-to-order mandolin. Perhaps they shared love of the Viennese violin making tradition and shared their love as instrument tinkerers. Without any known mandolins still in existence from that first decade, it is only speculation as to design.

Cesare Valisi, standing far left.

Note the wide assortment of mandolins and guitars but very few have been identified with any degree of certainty. By the time the Valisi brothers started their orchestra, Italian mandolinists populated Chicago but it is unknown if any of them actually switched



VALISI'S MANDOLIN ORCHESTRA.

to playing Bohmann's.⁶⁸ Valisi's 1894 music circular shows various types of mandolins and guitars, a harp, a harp-guitar and two cimbaloms.⁶⁹ Bohmann openly ridiculed the Italian imports but he must have studied the imported styles seeking to perfect his own models. One might be able to speculate on the origin of the mandolins based on their headstocks or body shape and style.

In other words, the predominance of Italian-made mandolins suggests that Bohmann was acutely conscious of how foreign mandolins would impact his business. He had to compete against not only a century of manufacturing mandolins in Italy but the Italian immigrants whose knowledge of mandolins enabled them to distribute them in America. For example, the Valisi brothers became the sole agents of Mannello and Vinaccia mandolins in Chicago. (To the right)

Once the whirlwind bandurria and mandolin engagements tapered off, the talented Italian mandolinists carved out new careers teaching young students who flocked to musical instrument importers and to luthiers to try to find a mandolin. There were none to speak of. Well, except for one. Joseph Bohmann. That would quickly change as it seemed as though every Italian mandolinist became his own jobber and wanted to promote Italian mandolins.

Bohmann probably realized that mandolinists such as Vincent Leon and Domenico Tipaldi, former members of Curti's group, were cornering the market on imported mandolins in Brooklyn. Another Curti alumnus, Luigi Ricca, had opened a mandolin and guitar workshop in Manhattan as well and was churning out mandolins in operated large workshops. Apprentices and trained luthiers came to Ricca to perfect their skills and helped to increase production. Antonio Grauso was one famous worker who became an independent luthier with workshops in Manhattan and back in Naples. It pointed to how much the Italian immigrants dominated the expanding mandolin market, threatening Bohmann.

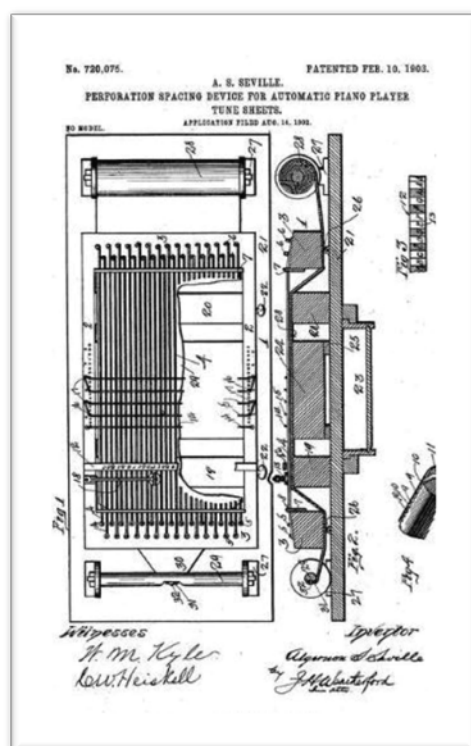
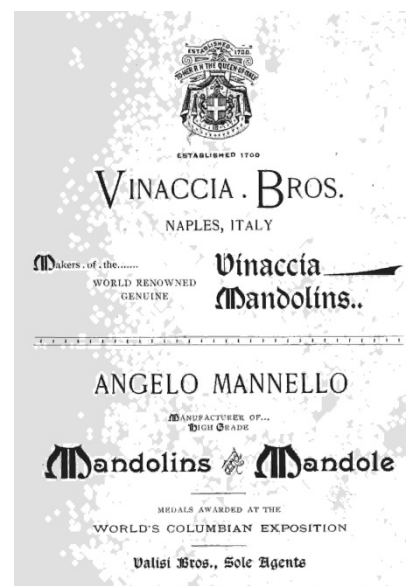
Today it's impossible to find a playable Bohmann mandolin made before 1900; they are rare creatures that pop up on eBay but usually with irreparable damage. As a result, it is not easy to compare and

contrast with any of the Italian mandolins made during that time.

Whatever Bohmann used as models, he is acknowledged as the "first to establish a reputation as a mandolin maker."⁷⁰ To be more accurate, he was the first to build one from scratch. Lacking any known blueprint, patterns or known models, he relied on whatever was available and those instruments he repaired (many belonging to Curti's mandolinists).

Bohmann's expertise and ingenuity matched well with Seville's passion for repairing musical instruments; Bohmann registered an arm rest patent to improve upon his stringed instruments.⁷¹ Seville entered an invention phase and improved the player piano. After Seville moved to Memphis, Tennessee, he worked as a piano technician, a tuner and repaired pianos for O.K. Houck Piano Company. His genius included four patents of which two were inventions for player piano music rolls. The Seville Music Perforator Company promised that virtually anyone could become an artist at the piano and learn to prepare (cut) his own sheet music.⁷²

(To the left) Seville's cost-saving patented invention received a full endorsement from Houck. His "Do-It-Yourself" perforation-spacing machine was modestly priced so that anyone could create sheet music at home for an automatic-piano player.⁷³



While working on these keyboard inventions, he became known as a “pianola expert.”⁷⁴ In 1904, his device and patent enabled Houck to perfect its player piano rolls.⁷⁵ He introduced special protective varnishes for wood that he also sold under “Seville Varnish Food Company.”⁷⁶ Seville’s chemistry background as a luthier may have helped in his education about wood varnishes for pianos and violins. He seemed endowed with esoteric knowledge about the best types of wood. His fourth patent was for an accessory used for automobiles called a “car-stake & strap appliance.”⁷⁷ Seville was like Leonardo Da Vinci hard at work creating his own legacy.

After nearly thirty-five years living in Memphis, Seville was ready for a change but not retirement. When Houck died in late May 1920, Seville stood at the crossroads. He was about the same age as Houck and deeply engaged in the Memphis world of music. Having served as a pallbearer during Houck’s funeral, inner reflections may have triggered a sense of mortality and within a few months, he and his wife had moved back to Chicago.⁷⁸ Before he left, Seville donated a special violin made from French wood (which he selected); it was all for a charity fundraiser to benefit a local Crippled Children’s hospital.⁷⁹ It represented a farewell gift to Memphis.

At 57 upon returning to Chicago, Seville took a new job in the piano roll department of Lyon & Healy.⁸⁰ After a hiatus of thirty-five years, his homecoming introduced a joyful season of celebration. His colleagues and the music community came out to welcome him home; he was “warmly received by many old friends who knew him when he was located in the city.”⁸¹ Seville was well-accomplished and he arrived with his credentials, ready to go back to work. His peers acknowledged how Seville and the American parlor’s player-piano changed the world of domestic entertainment.

Did Bohmann attend Seville’s “Welcome Home” reception? Did Seville pop back into the Bohmann store for a chat? Did they go out for a drink and reminisce about the good ol’ days when he and Bohmann were starting out in their separate but comparable lives? Did they swap new ideas for a music invention? Did Seville still own the mandolin that he commissioned from Bohmann? There are no answers to these questions but we can imagine that he must have been reminded how he had come full circle. From a small rural prairie town to the Chicago metropolis, as a pharmacist and as a musician, Seville used his intelligence and passionate mind to improve musical instruments.

In late 1924 during the holiday shopping season, he opened a music retail shop on Irving Park Boulevard. He must have been excited about finally owning his own music store. Within a week of its opening, he suddenly died. After thirty-five years of service to the world of music, he died on January 11, 1925. A brief obituary in the music trade magazines mentions his tenure at Houck’s store, his lifelong membership in the National Association of Piano Tuners and his position as a manager in Lyon & Healy’s “retail accessory” department.⁸² It is unfortunate that the editors did not acknowledge his creative genius as expressed in his designs, inventions, and the improvements made for the player piano, piano rolls, and the varnish formulas he perfected in the protection of wood.

The curious young man who sauntered into Joseph Bohmann’s store to inquire about a mandolin was a long forgotten story and only an obscure footnote in the history of the mandolin. Yet, Bohmann took the time to memorialize that turning point and recorded the name of “Mr. Seville” in his music circular. His immortality is duly registered in the mandolin pantheon of heroes. After he died, Seville’s widow brought his body back home to Lodi, Wisconsin where his remains rest in the Seville family section of Mount Pleasant Cemetery.



Conclusion

Algernon Sidney Seville became so much more than just another teenager intrigued by the touring bandurria players and the mandolin ensembles traveling similar circuits. It is not possible to know whether Seville gushed with excitement having heard Abbey's troupe or if he was smitten by the mandolin players belonging to Curti's "Roman Students" or other traveling Italian bands. The undeniable popularity of the "Spanish Students" and the great mandolin players who followed in Abbey's footsteps all worked toward opening the door to the mandolin in America. Seville's initial flirtation with the mandolin was not so much a casual leap into the unknown but a serendipitous detour to a new world of entertainment. It is indisputable that the Italian mandolin captured his heart and soul. From the encounter with Bohmann, a revolution started that has yet to stop.

Thanks to Seville's childhood music education (of which we know next to nothing) he possessed enough fundamental knowledge about the integral parts of the violin to explore the merits of the mandolin. Because the mandolin is strung exactly as a violin but with frets and double course strings, Bohmann was well-equipped to build one for him.

Somehow Seville convinced Bohmann to take a chance. It is not a far stretch to picture Seville, violin case tucked under his arm, walking straight into Bohmann's storefront with a request for rosin or a new bow. They chatted and within minutes, sat down and started to draw the designs that would become the first mandolin made in America.

Whereas enthusiastic musicians might have felt that playing the mandolin was cool, Bohmann probably saw it as a sound business decision. Perhaps it complemented his violin making and possibly he saw it as potentially lucrative if the mandolin frenzy continued. It was worth exploring that possibility no matter what the motivation.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the memory of the late Paul Hostetter, a most curious musician and excellent luthier who loved the Italian music and its tradition; he learned from the best and he loved to discuss the Spanish Students and related matters. He was always a reliable consultant and generous with his time. A genius with a heart! You are missed by so many who admired and loved you.

Endnotes

¹ Mr. Seville's name appears on page 1 of Joseph Bohmann's 1896 music circular. See Figure A, page 21. Courtesy of Bruce Hammond.

² "Personal." *Daily Republican*, 3 March 1880. Wilmington: DL. p.4. There does not appear to be sufficient information to identify the name of the troupe. The location of the event seems to be Paris. Private soirées, identifying members as the "elite" in attendance, rubbing shoulders and hanging out with handsome musicians could make one appear hip and cool. See Tom Wolfe's classic on the co-mingling of discrete classes: *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers*.

³ "A Republican Dazed by Royalty." *New York Tribune*, 30 December 1879, p.5. This review is somewhat vague as to which troupe it described. The reporter calls them "La Figaro" but it may be used here as a more generic term.

⁴ Gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque nationale de France. Charles Octave Levy (1820-1899) lithographer, artist and sculptor created the mystique surrounding the musicians. Levy may have imagined a scene for his Nouveau Cirque lithograph. More recent scholarship explains how these names and descriptions blurred together. See Paul Rupp, "Spanish Students Stop Traffic," *American Lutherie*, No. 131, Fall 2017, pp. 44-49.

⁵ Martín Sárraga, Félix, and Paul Rupp. "La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época." *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época*, 2018, pp. 75 & 78. A complete calendar of their concerts tours.

⁶ "The Spanish Student Troupe." *New York Times*, 2 January 1880. p.8. Abbey traveled with a manager, and a theatrical journalist who functioned as a press agent, Daniel Bicknell Hopkins (1829-1884). Hopkins belonged to the Barnum crowd and may have been the first American reporter to misidentify the bandurria as "mandolins [that] have 12 strings." In contrast, apparently only one reporter correctly identified the instruments as "Bandurrias." See "A Queer Spanish Gang," *Dallas Weekly Herald*, 30 March 1878, p.4. During that same Mardi Gras week, French reporters split on what to call the

musical instruments: *Le Rappel*, 4 Mars 1878, No. 2915. p.2. “mandolin Espagnole” (Spanish mandolin) became interchangeable with the Neapolitan mandolin. Contrariwise, a competing Parisian newspaper called them bandurrias. *Le Figaro*, Année 24, ed Série, No. 60., 1 Mars 1878, p.2. “Voici les instruments...six [sic] fandurrias...” Regardless of the typographical error, the reporter correctly identified the instruments with its proper Spanish term. Twenty years later, Samuel Adelstein, a mandolinist and musical anthropologist still held onto some animosity toward Carlo Curti and his spin-off group of Neapolitan mandolinists. He degraded their contribution by calling them “fraudulent” and responsible for creating an “erroneous impression.” Those claims could not be further from the truth. If anything, Curti’s musicians were the real deal even if they were a spinoff. Within a few weeks of starting his copy-cat band, Curti switched to the appropriately titled “Roman Students.” Still, there is no doubt that Curti tapped into the hysterical excitement and confusion to promote the mandolin. “Spanish Students.” Cf. Samuel Adelstein, “The Bandurria and the Spanish Students,” *The Cadenza*, Vol. 6, No. 4. May-June 1900, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Carlo Curti (1859-1926) and his brother Giovanni, a harpist, immersed themselves into Mexican culture and used Spanish equivalent names of Carlos and Juan. Curti’s core group of Italian mandolinists included Carlo Colombo, Salvatore Fachutar, Cesare Valisi, Vincent Leon and Domenico Tipaldi.

⁸ “Death of Henry E. Abbey,” *New York Times*. 18 October 1896. p. 9.

⁹ See Graham McDonald, *The Mandolin*, Canberra, Australia: Graham McDonald Stringed Instruments, 2016. p.85. Citing G. Henry Picard’s letter to a 1901 issue of the *Cadenza*. Email to author, Félix O. Martin Sárraga, 12 September 2019. With few exceptions, Abbey’s bandurria players learned and memorized by ear, performing the repertoire without sheet music.

¹⁰ Philip J. Bone, *The Guitar & Mandolin*. London, England: Schott & Co., 1913. p.218. Bone cites the origin of the confusion between the Spanish mandolin vs a Milanese mandolin. He points to Mozart’s “Deh vieni all’ fenestra” from *Don Giovanni* which is set in Spain. Even if we can’t prove if Mozart preferred a bandurria, it certainly shows how the two instruments were conflated at least back to the early 1800s.

¹¹ Various shapes and sizes of mandolins, including Milanese or Roman, but for the sake of this essay, Neapolitan was favored by many mandolinists in Curti’s ensemble.

¹² Martin Sárraga, Félix and Paul Ruppá. “La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época.” *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época*, 2018, pp. 136, 137. A complete calendar of concerts tours shows a second tour started in September 1882. In December 1882 and January 1883, Racine and Oshkosh, WI; Rockford, IL; and Chicago provided venues. Those months are likely when Seville would have attended a concert.

¹³ Seeger & Guernsey, *Cyclopaedia of the Manufacturers & Products of the United States*. New York: Seeger & Guernsey Co., 1890. According to their factory listings, in 1870, Bohmann, Lyon & Healy, and S.S. Stewart (Philadelphia) built banjos (p. 557); in 1883, Bohmann is listed as building guitars (p.558); in 1887, Bohmann, Lyon & Healy, Haynes, Hartmann Bros all listed as building mandolins (p. 558).

¹⁴ *The Columbian Exposition and World’s Fair Illustrated, Descriptive, Historical, Statistical*. Philadelphia: The Columbian Engraving and Pub. Co., 1893. p. 174. His biographical paragraph was probably written by Bohmann himself. “He first saw the light of day on October 23, 1848...etc.” If so, he states his birth as “New-Mark-Co, Pilsen, Austria.” It would appear to be a botched transliteration of Neumarkt, Bohemia.

¹⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, 20 December 1880. Bohmann and his father had been making musical instruments for at least four years before but the official announcement indicated that the factory was housed separately from the store.

¹⁶ Joseph Bohmann, “Celebrated Joseph Bohmann Mandolins.” Nd. Bohmann’s opening paragraph to his music circular clearly spells out how he came to service the mandolins belonging to Curti’s “Spanish Students.” Note: Bohmann probably first published the circular in 1896 and reissued it in 1899. Courtesy of Bruce Hammond. See Glossop map for address locations in 1883. See Figure A, page 21.

¹⁷ Martin Sárraga, Félix and Paul Ruppá. “La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época.” *La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época*, 2018, pp. 75 & 78.

¹⁸ Martin Sárraga, Félix and Paul Ruppá, 134, 176, 181. Chicago venues included McVickers Theater (1880), Haverly’s (1883), & Baum’s Concert Garden, and others; nearby venues located in Cairo, Rockford, and Oshkosh, WI. These specific venues would have been the most convenient places for a Chicago musician to enjoy a concert.

¹⁹ Various shapes and sizes of mandolins, including Milanese or Roman, but for the sake of this essay, the Neapolitan bowlback was favored by many mandolinists in Curti’s ensemble.

²⁰ To take a deeper dive into their biographies, the author suggests that readers consult my fourth book, *Italian Mandolin Heroes in America*.

²¹ Granville L. Howe, Ed., *A Hundred Years of Music in America*, Philadelphia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1900. p. 490.

²² *Musical Courier*, Vol. 24, No. 14, October 14, 1916, p. 107. Giuseppe and wife Anna Zastrow opened “Valisi Piano School” in Tacoma (later Puget Sound Conservatory of Music).

²³ Luigi Arditi, *My Reminiscences* Second Edition. Piccadilly, W. London, England: Skeffington & Son. 1896. pp. 246, 248-249, 285. Arditi was associated with the Royal Opera Theater and toured with Abbey in England. He debuted as a conductor in Chicago in 1879 and over a period of two years, conducted in Chicago and in Manhattan. With at least five

known crossings to America, Arditi got to know many Italian musicians in the Valisi circle, whether in Chicago or Manhattan when both Valisi's Mandolin Orchestra and Ricca's Mandolin Club performed in Verdi's *Othello*, Desdemona scene, in the Metropolitan Opera's 1891-1892 Season. Cf Gerald Fitzgerald, Editor-in-Chief, *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera*. New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1989. pp. 41 & 42.

²⁴ Luigi Arditi's personal note to Cesare Valisi appeared in Valisi's circular commemorating the Valisi Mandolin Orchestra's Tenth Season. In that same music circular, Angelina Patti endorsed Bohmann mandolins and thanked Giuseppe Valisi for instructing her on the mandolin. Valisi's music circular is courtesy Bruce Hammond. Giuseppe Valisi's numerous compositions became hits after the 1893 Columbian World's Fair theme and the 1904 St. Louis Fair: "Electric Tower," "Century Waltz," "Chicago Day," "Ferris Wheel" and "Southern Beauty." Download some PDFs of Valisi's public domain compositions at <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu>

²⁵ "Patti Sang Annie Rooney." *San Bernardino Daily Courier*, vol. 11, No. 120, 27 February 1892, Front page. Valisi's orchestra backed her up. Valisi returned to California to perform during for the Mid-Winter Exposition in San Francisco.

²⁶ *Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago*, Chicago: Chicago Directory Co. 1887. p.1936. Valisi is listed as a mandolin teacher at 241 Wabash Avenue (Weber Music Hall) in directories 1887, 1888, & 1889 and in A.N. Marquis & Co., Handy's *Business Directory of Chicago*, Vol 1., Chicago, IL. 1886-1887. p.590. "Cesare Valisi" Columbian Engraving and Publishing Co., Philadelphia and Chicago. *The Columbian Exposition and World's Fair Illustrated, Descriptive, Historical, Statistical*. Philadelphia: The Columbian Engraving and Pub. Co., 1893. p.121. Valisi states in his short paragraph that he toured for two years with Tipaldi and Ricca, possibly with Curti's "Spanish Students" also known as the "Roman Students"). The Valisi brothers were probably born in Magenta, about 25 miles west of Milan; it was considered part of the Metropolitan suburbs. A ship's roster shows Giuseppe Valisi's 1901 destination as Magenta. Antonio Valisi (b. 1893, Magenta) became a world renowned cellist. When the patronymic system is applied, it always results in the eldest son naming his first son after the father. If the Valisi brothers had a first-born, older brother who remained in Magenta, he would have had to name his first son Antonio (after their father).

²⁷ In the early 1880s' *Chicago City Directories*, George F. Root & Sons was listed at 200-206 Wabash Avenue. George F. Root was the famous Civil War composer. E.T. Root & Sons sold violins at 353-361 Wabash. Cf. *Origin, Growth & Usefulness of the Chicago Board of Trade*. New York: Historical Publishing Col, 1885-1886. p.266. Julius Bauer (1831-1884) had warerooms at 156 & 158 Wabash in 1885 and later at 226 & 228 Wabash. At 14 years of age, Bauer apprenticed in a Berlin musical instrument factory before immigrating to New York where he opened his first factory; he made his home in Chicago in 1857 when he opened a second factory and retail music store. Bauer mainly sold pianos.

²⁸ "The Mandolin Craze." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 March 1886, p.13. The Milanese maestro ran a music studio on Wabash near an unidentified music dealer. Lyon & Healy Co. was not located on Wabash in the 1880s; it was located at 162 State Street. However, in its first years (early 1870s) it was located at the corner of Washington and Wabash; later, at the corner of Wabash at 116th Street. Cf. Moses & Kirkland, *History of Chicago*, Vol.2. Chicago, IL: Munsell & Co., Publishers, 1895. p.452. The authors claim that "April 1885" was the earliest Lyon & Healy manufacturing date that covered all musical instruments (except for their reed organs which were manufactured soon after its original opening year of 1864).

²⁹ "Chat Changes Casualties," *Music Trade Review*, Volume 18, No.39. April 29, 1894, p. 8.

³⁰ A.N. Marquis & Co., Handy's *Business Directory of Chicago*, Vol 1., Chicago, IL. 1886-1887. p.140.

³¹ *Montgomery Ward Catalogue of 1895*, No. 57. Unabridged Facsimile. New York: Dover Pub., 1969. p. 243. Bohmann's Neapolitan styled mandolin sold for a modest \$15.

³² *Music Trade Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 39. 28 April 1894. p.8. In early 1896, Bohmann maintained a wareroom at 178 Wabash Avenue while maintaining the West Madison address; he could have used one for his office and shipping related matters and the other for manufacturing and storage.

³³ Thomas Hutchinson, Compiler. *Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Directory Co., 1882 through 1888, only Bohmann identified as manufacturer. Cf. "Lyon & Healy." *Music Trade Review*, Vol. 12, No. 20, May 20, 1889, p. 370. <https://mtr.arcade-museum.com/MTR-1889-12-20/6/> Lyon & Healy greatly expanded in 1889 with more than 100,000 sq. ft. of inventory space. This article cites every conceivable musical instrument and accessories. According to Groce, Foote claimed to be the "sole agent for French instruments." Cf. Nancy Groce. *Musical Instrument Makers of New York: Dictionary of Makers*, Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1991, pp. 158. Foote moved to 307 & 309 Wabash Avenue in or about 1887. Note: Partee played a French-made mandolin and certainly might have purchased it from Foote. Foote's source for French mandolins would have been Antoine Courtois et Mille. They started their French export business around 1870. "Archives Commerciales," 7th Année, No. 64, 8 Aout 1880. p. 1043. In 1880, they celebrated their tenth year in Paris at Rue des Marais. Gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque national de France. As to Tonk Manufacturing, the factory made piano stools but in the late 1890s, Wm. Tonk & Bros. started making mandolins. In 1903-1904, Tonk was located at 259 Wabash Ave., Chicago—too late to be considered as a contender to Bohmann. Cf. Jno. E. Land, *Chicago: The Future Metropolis of the New World*. Chicago: Land, 1883. p. 54; 172-173. An incomplete survey of manufacturing in Chicago but lists Bauer and a few others as musical instrument makers. Bohmann and J. Howard Foote are missing.

³⁴ *Chicago Blue Book*, 1894. Note: Editors state it is published in 1884 but is intended... "for the [upcoming] year ending 1895." p.820. Advertisement celebrates Tenth Anniversary which implies 1886 for its inaugural concert season.

- ³⁵ Clarence L. Partee, "First American Mandolin." *Argus Daily*, 5 April 1904, Mt. Vernon, NY. p.4. Partee's very short article was distributed to dozens of newspapers and first published in 1902; Partee republished it in a 1904 issue of the *Cadenza*.
- ³⁶ Adv., *Democratic Northwest*. 22 December 1887, col.1: p8. Maffey's complaint of not being able to locate anyone to make a mandolin would not have been made if the year was 1887 or 1888. By then, mandolins became much more available in cities and mail-order catalogs. Senor Zerega's troupe did not appear in Cincinnati where Maffey lived and studied but he could have traveled to see them. Note: Maffey's interview was twenty-five years after encounter with the "Spanish Students." Cf. Paul Sparks, *Classical Mandolin*, p. 90.
- ³⁷ Op Cit., Martin Sárraga, Félix and Paul Ruppá. "La Estudiantina Española Fígaro En Los EE.UU. Crónica De Sus Giras Americanas y Estela Según La Prensa De La Época." pp. 83 & 88. Cincinnati engagements in July and September 1880.
- ³⁸ "The First Mandolin Player." *Music Trade Review*. Vol. 40, No. 11. 18 March 1905, p.35. Maffey does not mention Chicago's Bohmann. Professor Maffey went on to conduct the Indianapolis Mandolin Orchestra. Cf. "Pay Your Money" *Indianapolis Journal*, 29 March 1890, p. 5. At one point, Professor Maffey had a hundred musicians in his orchestra.
- ³⁹ No author. *The Book of Ohio*, Vol. 2. Cincinnati, OH: Queen City Publishing, 1910. p. 1223. Frey was born in Ohio and his other siblings were born in Shannon, Illinois (about 120 miles west of Chicago). The author must be entirely honest about Frey's claims since Wiegand was several years younger than Frey. A bit of a stretch but not impossible.
- ⁴⁰ "Celebrated Joseph Bohmann Mandolins." p.7. Bohmann's "Style8" is a featured style apparently preferred by Frey. Note: Bohmann's circular was reissued in 1899 and accounts for inclusion of Frey's 1897 date under his photograph.
- ⁴¹ Sparks, p.49.
- ⁴² Jeffrey Noonan. *Guitar in America* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, Inc., 2009) p.171-172. 1881-1882 is too early for a mandolin in Philadelphia. Stewart was committed to the banjo, having written extensively about it. Any inclusion of the mandolin was probably closer to 1888.
- ⁴³ "Miscellaneous Small Goods." *Music Trade Review*. Vol. 39, No. 21. 19 November 1904. 123. See endnote 56.
- ⁴⁴ One cannot avoid mentioning the original "Algernon Sidney" (1622-1683) in British political history. The admiration for this Brit (who fought Oliver Cromwell and opposed dictatorial rule) remained elevated in the eyes of British immigrants in America. The naming of Seville was no accident and shows every sign of giving him a name to live up to.
- ⁴⁵ "Some Pertinent Hints on Selling Music Rolls." *Music Trade Review*. Vol. 62, No. 18, 29 April 1916. pp.12-13. Mr. Seville's portrait appeared in or about 1916. This is the only known photograph of him.
- ⁴⁶ One reference documents Algernon's birth Newmark, Wisconsin but no other evidence supports that town.
- ⁴⁷ J.E. Jones, *A History of Columbia County, Vol.1*. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1914. 155, 270-271. Portage, about 20 miles from Lodi) had St. Clara's Academy and collegiate academies that taught Greek, Latin, French, music, drawing and painting. His younger brother Frederick most likely studied Latin & became a physician and a pharmacist in Chicago. Edward followed in their father's footsteps and became a merchant and a prominent civic leader in Lodi; Frank became a piano tuner and worked in Chicago factories.
- ⁴⁸ https://oshkosh.pastperfectonline.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_criteria=seville&searchButton=Search
The Seville family is well-documented and family photographs are housed in the Oshkosh Public Museum. Algernon's sister Mary married into the Hellard family in Oshkosh. Daguerreotypes and photographic cabinet cards reveal a highly revered and prosperous family.
- ⁴⁹ Email to author from Ross Borenstein, 24 July 2019. "Looking Backward," *Madison Capital Times*. Madison, WI, "Bill Robinson," January 10, 1972. Robinson died April 8, 1942.
- ⁵⁰ "14,000 Piece Violin." *Madison Capital Times*, 19 August 1939, p.2. Newspaper accounts conflict on who asked whom.
- ⁵¹ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/1399/robert-leroy-ripley>
- ⁵² <https://pharmacy.uic.edu/about/our-history/> cf. A.T. (Alfred Theodore) Andreas, *History of Chicago, Vol. 3*. Chicago: A.T. Andreas Co. Publishers, 1886. p. 653-654. Bohmann's business moved to 417 State Street in 1882. Coincidentally, Lyon & Healy "recently commenced the manufacture of smaller kinds of instruments." That claim implies that Lyon & Healy may have started to build mandolins as early as 1885. One source points to 1883 but offers no evidence to support that claim. Cf. Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers' *Vintage Guitars*, p. 25. "Washburn probably appeared in 1883."
- ⁵³ *Third Annual Report of the State Board of Pharmacy of Illinois*, Vol. 3. (Springfield, IL: Illinois Board of Pharmacy) H.W. Rokker, State Printer & Binder., p. 17-19. The Board awarded Seville a "Licentiate in Pharmacy" on January 12, 1884.
- ⁵⁴ *Fifth Annual Report of the Illinois Board of Pharmacy*, Illinois Board of Pharmacy, Springfield, IL, H.W. Rokker, Printer & Binder. (Issue Five, 1886) p. 72. Seville became a registered assistant pharmacist.
- ⁵⁵ "Record and Index of Persons Registered and of Poll Lists of Voters," No. District of Illinois, Chicago. 1888. p.367. Ancestry.com. *Chicago, Illinois, Voter Registration, 1888* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2001. In 1888, his residence was 120 Randolph Street, about a half mile from Bohmann's factory.
- ⁵⁶ "Big Fires in Chicago." *Albany Express*. 9 December 1895, Front pg.
- ⁵⁷ "Musical Instruments." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 20 December 1880, p.7. Store opened at 119 No. Clark.
- ⁵⁸ Andreas, Vol. 3., p. 654.
- ⁵⁹ "Made to Order." *Inter Ocean*, Chicago, IL, 3 June 1885. p.12.

- ⁶⁰ Hubert Pleijsier, *Washburn Prewar Instrument Styles 1883-1940* (Anaheim, CA: Centerstream Pub. LLC, 2008. p.3. See endnote 40 which refers to Bohmann's mandolin having preceded Lyon & Healy's Washburn.
- ⁶¹ Paul Sparks, *Classical Mandolin*, p. 128. Lyon & Healy mass-produced about 7,000 mandolins in 1894 according to Sparks. Bohmann claimed that by 1899, he had sold 130,000 mandolins. Cf. Clarence L. Partee, "First American Mandolin." Mt. Vernon, NY. *Argus Daily*, 5 April 1904, p.4.
- ⁶² The earliest mandolin patents were Bini's in May 1887 (with a 5th string like a banjo) followed by G.B. Durkee (Assignor for Lyon & Healy) August 1887. Bohmann's Machine Head Patent US427962A. A mandolin patent filed in June 1889, and approved May 13, 1890. It expired 10-7-2019.
- ⁶³ Hutchinson, Ibid. 1885. p.1599. Thomas Hutchinson, Compiler. *Annual Directory of the City of Chicago*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Directory Co., 1885. p. 630 & p. 1599.
- ⁶⁴ The Seville family's roots seemed to be Episcopalian and dated back to membership at Warwick Cathedral; in spite of that affiliation, Seville's first wife was Catholic and a Chicago Catholic priest performed the civil ceremony. (Marguerite, born in Chicago in May 1887, died in Los Angeles in 1987).
- ⁶⁵ Phillips, Op. cit., Tape 1:1, p.4.
- ⁶⁶ JoAnn Phillips interview with Seville's grandson, the artist Emerson Seville Woelffer (1914-2013). Oral History Program, UCLA, 1977. Accessed August 1, 2019. Tape 1.1. February 26, 1976. Woelffer became an abstract expressionist. In a remarkable oral interview, he cites his grandfather in several aspects and notes his early influence upon his artistic future. The "Seville [name] came from Marguerite Seville's father, Algernon Sidney Seville, who was in the music business..." (Marguerite also played piano). "I recall my grandfather coming up maybe once a year and always bringing me some fabulous kind of gift in the way of a musical instrument, which I had no desire for. And I remember one time he brought a huge, huge box, a huge paint box with all sorts of colors and brushes in it." After Seville's first marriage faltered, his second marriage on November 27, 1889 to Aileen F. Barrett (1870-1970) produced a son, James William, and an immediate move to Memphis. He would go on to work in the cotton mercantile business in New Orleans.
<https://archive.org/details/emersonwoelffer00woel/page/n7>
- ⁶⁷ Ed. M.A. Harris, et. al. *Black Book*. New York: Random House, 1974. pp. 33. Handy's peak period for composing was about 1910-1915.
- ⁶⁸ Op. Cit. "The Mandolin Craze," Valisi claimed to have 35 students in 1886. What were they playing? Also see Gregg Miner's voluminous articles and analysis on Bohmann's musical instruments as used by orchestra members. <http://harp guitars.net/blog/2019/06/bohmania/> Cf. my paper about Emilio Calamara (harp guitarist) and wife Nettie (mandolin).
- ⁶⁹ Valisi's music circular is dated for the Tenth Anniversary Season, 1894-1895. Courtesy Bruce Hammond.
- ⁷⁰ Sparks, p. 48. Partee reprinted his original free-lanced article in *Cadenza*.
- ⁷¹ *Annual Report of the Commission of Patents: 1899*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890. p.37. Bohmann mentions the invention on the first page of his circular. See Figure A after the Endnotes.
- ⁷² "Everyone Can Cut Music," *Music Trade Review*, Vol. 40, No. 21, 27 May 1905, p. 28.
- ⁷³ Algernon S. Seville, U.S. Patent 720075-A. Granted, 1903.
- ⁷⁴ *City Directory*, Memphis, TN., 1913. R.L. Polk & Co., 745.
- ⁷⁵ "Late Patents of Trade Interest," *Music Trade Review*, Vol. 39, No. 21, 24 December 1904. p. 37. Seville's "Music-Scale" patent explained the precision measurements of the holes through which the air enters on a Pianola, also known as a player piano.
- ⁷⁶ "Seville Varnish Food co.," *Music Trade Review*, Vol. XLIII, No. 4, 28 July 1906. p.33.
- ⁷⁷ *Scientific American*, Vol. 95, No. 21, November 1906. Patent 835,930. Seville's other patents are recorded in previous issues.
- ⁷⁸ Editors, C.A. Daniell & Frank D. Abbott, "O.K. Houck Dies..." *Presto*, No. 1767, 5 June 1920, pp. 9-10.
- ⁷⁹ Editors, Daniell & Abbot, "O.K. Houck's Progressive Benevolent Violin Auction." *Presto*, No.1763, 8 May 1920, p. 18. Seville imported wood from timbers used in a 150-year old French house in or about 1906.
- ⁸⁰ "Seville with Lyon & Healy," *Music Trade Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2, 28 January 1922, p.42.
- ⁸¹ Ed., John C. Freund. *The Music Trades*, Vol. 62, No. 23, 3 December 1921. p.11.
- ⁸² "A.S. Seville Dies," *Music Trade Review*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 17 January 1925, p.28. His new shop was located at 3955 Irving Park Boulevard.

Postscript

We live during a time when first-hand knowledge and first-hand accounts, even when corroborated can be dubious. Fake news deceives! Historians are bombarded with unreliability. This situation is not new when researching but today, it is more acute. The press has suffered in the midst of faux news. Facts are still facts but they get fuzzy when opinions substitute for them. Therefore, the author suggests that a person's character plays a role in evaluating the reliability of an account but we mustn't rule out everything attested to.

Our sense of history is shaped by the sources we trust and how we interpret their content. To be fair but accurate, the crux of my thesis depends on the reader believing in Bohmann's truthful account and his claim to have built and sold his first mandolin to Seville. On the other side, that argument contains an inherent resistance to that conclusion because Bohmann constantly played the victim and certain biographical events point to how he felt people (other manufacturers) took advantage of him. His advertisements, couched in boastful claims of superiority, reinforced his egotistical belief that "he and he alone" made the finest musical instruments. He announced contests to prove this very point and challenged anyone to try to exceed his excellence in craftsmanship. (Evaluate these characteristics and details by reading Andreas' *History of Chicago*, Vol. 3, pp. 653-654.

Every historical event depends on truthful accounts, accurate interpretations and verifiable supporting (and irrefutable) evidence that can support a first-hand account. The trouble can sometimes begin with those who were present. Were they recording the event with accuracy and truthfulness or for posterity? Did they speak or recollect facts in a hyperbolic manner? Readers and historians must weigh inconsistent facts against a variety of documents, test it against a hypothesis, determine the veracity of each eyewitness and try to get as close to the truth as possible.

In the poetic expression of Emily Dickinson, I hope I told "... all the truth but [told] it slant." It is my contention that Bohmann was truthful when he announced the name of Mr. Seville. He wanted to share that credit. I believe that Seville's request, and the hysteria surrounding the touring mandolinists and bandurria players, factored into Bohmann's eagerness to become "the very first" to produce a mandolin. Never one to admit to "second prize," he rewarded himself with the top prize and banked on this moment in history to yield even greater notoriety. It probably didn't hurt sales either.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to those who contributed so much to finding that truth. Albert Partee for sharing documents and insights; Paul Rupp and Félix Oscar Martin Sárraga for fact-checking my claims and their considerable knowledge about the Spanish Students' calendar schedule. Bruce Hammond for allowing me to feature pages from his precious Bohmann and Valisi archives. Gregg Miner's indefatigable pursuit of knowledge about harp-guitars; Susan Curran White who provided the link that was needed to uncover the mystery of Mr. Seville, and Ross Borenstein, Todd & Wendy Borenstein for photographs and clippings from Seville's student Grant "Bill" Robinson, and the matchstick violin. The violin remains with Todd & Wendy Borenstein in Madison, Wisconsin. And to Joe Bartl whose gentle suggestions helped in innumerable ways.

Any mistakes or errors are mine, and mine alone.

With rare exception, most newspapers from this era possess no byline or authorship. Where it does appear, the person is identified. All cited newspapers, journals and archives were consulted on-line:

<https://www.fultonhistory.com>

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-cadenza#/?tab=navigation>

<https://www.arcade-museum.com/>

<https://newspapers.com>

<https://jstor.org>

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu>

<https://chicagology.com/>

Key to Glossop's Hotel, Amusement and Business Map. 1884. Chicago's non-sequential numbering of streets was not fully resolved until 1909; it is impossible to be exact but sometimes directories and advertisements identified a specific corner location.

1. Weber Music Hall, 241 Wabash @ Jackson. Valisi's studio, rehearsal space, & Valisi Bros. publishing house address.
2. McVickers Theater, SW corner of Madison at State. Abbey's troupe performed on first tour.
3. Haverly's Theater, Monroe Street, west of Dearborn. Second tour, 1883.
4. Root Music & Sons, warerooms, 357 Wabash @ Adams. Importers, later manufacturers
5. Joseph Bohmann, 119 N. Clark, original wareroom, 1880-1881.
6. Joseph Bohmann, warerooms, 417 State Street, from 1882 to 1895
7. Joseph Bohmann, factory, 306 State Street. This location remained constant.
8. Lyon & Healy, warerooms, NW corner, State Street @ Monroe.
9. Illinois College of Pharmacy, 465-467 State Street
10. J. Howard Foote, 307-309 Wabash.
11. Julius Bauer, 156-158 Wabash
12. Algernon Sidney Seville's retail drugstore, 315 No. Wells Street.

THE CELEBRATED JOSEPH BOHMANN MANDOLINS.

Acknowledged by all Leading Artists to be the BEST IN THE WORLD.

The mandolin has been in existence in Spain as many years as any string instrument has existed in the world, but never made a marked progress until a few years ago, when the famous "Spanish students," Fachutar, Valisi, Calamara, Montanelli, Columbus, Ricca and others, traveled through America and both pleased and surprised the public with an apparently new instrument. According to my musical understanding the performances seemed laughable, as the instruments possessed no tone. Meanwhile some of the "students" sought an instrument maker, to do some repairs to their mandolins, and through the violin players of Chicago they were brought to me, and I repaired the instruments in first-class shape.

The students thought that no such instrument could be made anywhere else in the world but in Spain; whereupon I made to order the first mandolin ever made in America, after a model of my own invention, in which I retained the principles of the violin for TONE and QUALITY, and which model all "amateur" makers have tried to copy, but never could reach the tone, because of their utter ignorance or lack of experience and genius in the art of violin making.

This first American Mandolin so thoroughly pleased the purchaser, Mr. Seville, that each of the students ordered an instrument and discarded the old one. This is the way in which the popularity of the mandolin started in America, and since that day I have had all I could do to fill orders. I first fretted the instrument perfectly and invented a patent Machine and Armrest for the mandolin.

At the Paris Exposition in 1889, expert and impartial judges awarded the **Bohmann Mandolin First Prize** over all competitors, both American and European, and received awards at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. At Antwerp Exposition, 1894, was awarded medal for string instruments of superior musical qualities, the only one awarded to American exhibitors. The same standard of excellence has always been maintained in the manufacture of Bohmann instruments, which places them in the lead of all others. The purchaser of a Bohmann Mandolin has a manufacturers' guarantee that the instrument is **ABSOLUTELY PERFECT** in every respect, and will positively not fall apart; no hoops, either inside or outside, being necessary to hold them together. America's greatest artists use the Bohmann Mandolin.

Figure A:

Bohmann's 1896 music circular (reprinted and revised in 1899) identifies on its first page (third paragraph) a mysterious "Mr. Seville" as the first purchaser of a mandolin, and in its first paragraph, it identifies some of the more famous "Spanish Students." He gives credit to Chicago's violinists who referred the Italian mandolinists (Curti et. al) to his workshop and factory on State Street. The question remains: was Bohmann being truthful when he states that they discarded their Italian-made mandolins to play his?