

Development of the Gibson F5 Peghead

The original factory specifications for the "new style mandolin-F5" gave detailed information on the various parts of the instrument. Most of the parts were defined as "dimensions the same as F4", however, the head veneer was listed as "to be bound and made according to drawings". There was no reference to the peghead being the same as the F4 mandolin that had been in production for many years.

The first catalog depicting an F5 mandolin shows the original "closed loop" style script along with a fern inlay. The "fern" inlay as such, did not appear until mid-1924, and then only on a few instruments.

The F5 peghead (right) as depicted in Gibson Catalog "N", the first catalog illustrating the F5. The peghead is single-bound and has the closed loop style logo. Neither has been seen in conjunction with a fern pattern inlay. Additionally, the fern pattern did not appear regularly until 1925.



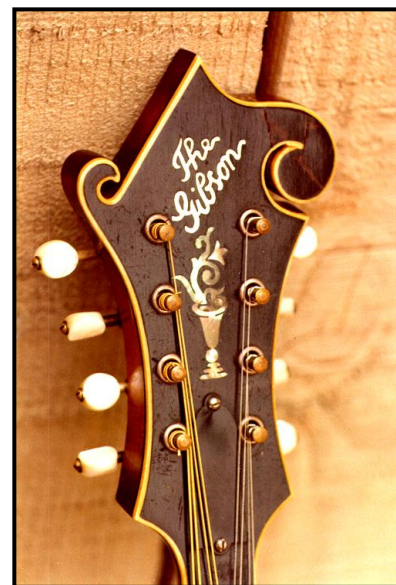
[70281 June 1, 1922 \(left\)](#)



This instrument is the earliest known F5 and appears to be a "proto-type". The peghead is single-bound and has the tuners canted inward. The truss rod appears to have been backfitted to the instrument. The logo style is the closed loop design. Aside from this single instrument, the positioning of the tuners does not appear again until March of 1923.

[72204 February 26, 1923 \(right\)](#)

This peghead is typical of early F5's produced until March of 1923. "The Gibson" and the flowerpot are inlaid low on the peghead, and the tuners are canted outward. These instruments generally had the early "serrated" tuners, but the last few have the standard "pointed" tuners. This peghead is double bound with white and black. The black line is actually a wood underlay to the peghead veneer.

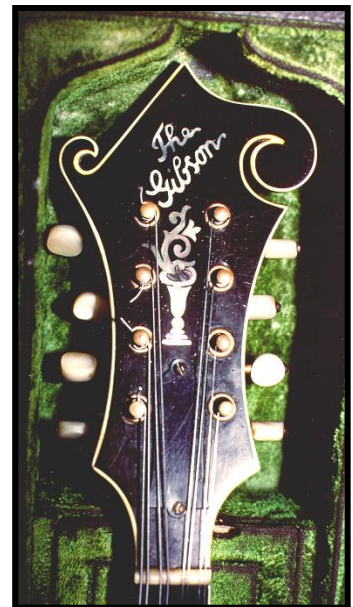


The “proto-type” F5, along with the first illustration shown in catalog “N”, have the pointed style tuners installed in the inward canted position. The inward canted positioning of the tuners appears to be an innovative design detail of the F5. This positioning provides a straighter alignment to the nut and prevents the strings from binding against each other. These tuners and the inward position did not appear regularly on F5’s until well into 1923. The “serrated” end tuners were standard for all Gibson mandolins at the time, as was the outward (at the top) canted positioning. Serrated tuners have a rectangular back plate with a squiggly design on each end. “Pointed” tuners have a “fleur-de-lis” appearance at each end of the back plate. Serrated tuners, when installed in the canted outward position, do not fit very well and the plate actually hangs over the cutout for the larger curl of the peghead. Additionally, the shaft lengths of the serrated tuners are too short to install in the canted inward position.

Presumably, Gibson started production of the F5 before taking delivery of the pointed tuners that appear to be designed with the inward canted position in mind. Consequently, they used the peghead overlay and tuners that they had on hand.

[72615 March 27, 1923 \(right\)](#)

This peghead is one of the first to have the tuners installed in the inward canted position. The position of the tuners, combined with the location of the inlay gives the peghead a crowded look. This peghead is also double bound like 72204.



[73992 July 9, 1923 \(left\)](#)

This peghead has the inlay positioned higher, giving the overlay a much more balanced look. Note that the flowerpot is the same distance from the logo. The binding is white, black, white on the sides of the peghead. This binding style continued until late in the February 18, 1924 group of instruments.

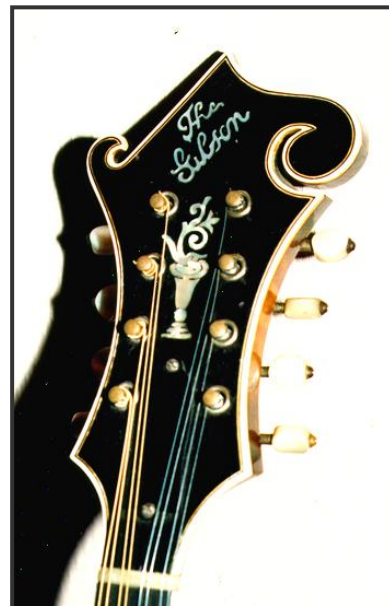


[73747 July 9, 1923 \(left\)](#)

This peghead is one of the first to use the "open loop" style logo. The "closed" pattern continued to be used off and on until the fern inlay became standard for all F5 mandolins. The binding is white, black, white on the sides.

[76778 March 31, 1924 \(right\)](#)

Triple binding on the face of the peghead is the variation depicted in this photo. This variation is first recorded with F5 number 75707, February 18, 1924. Note that the flowerpot is now positioned lower and further from the logo. The binding used here is a much whiter, ungrained, celluloid material. The previous binding was a grained yellow/gray, slightly translucent, ivoroid material. The new white binding was used exclusively after it was introduced. This binding seems to vary somewhat in color with some batches being pure white.



[76549 March 31, 1924 \(left\)](#)

The "Fern Loar" is considered by many to be the ultimate F5. There are only a few recorded in The F5 Journal. Loar era ferns differ from those of the mid-'20's in that the abalone inlay tends to be striped and contains much more greens and reds with an occasional blue piece showing up. The binding is also slightly narrower on the Loar instruments. The logo is always of the open loop style. The hardware on this particular instrument is silver. Several fern Loars have gold hardware. The "Fern Loars" F5's with gold hardware have string post bushings that are the same size as those used with silver hardware. The bushings used with post-Loar fern F5's are much larger. This fact tends to prove that the hardware was not changed out at a later date.



[80782 Unsigned Post Loar 1925 \(left\)](#)

The peghead shown here is typical of most December 1, 1924 F5's. The binding is white, black, white on the face. Of special note is the return to overlay used in 1922. The "closed loop" logo is used and the inlay is positioned so low as to be slightly covered by the string post bushing. The hardware is gold plated on this instrument. It is conceivable that Gibson made an effort here to use up old overlays in preparation for the change to the fern inlay which became standard immediately afterwards.

[84685 Fern F5 – 1926 \(right\)](#)

The peghead shown in this photo is representative of typical post-Loar fern F5's. The white, black, white binding is slightly wider and the string post bushings are slightly larger. Note that the tip of the "fern" is obscured by black paint (actually India ink), an occasional miscue that appears on numerous Gibson instruments.



[85954 Fern F5 – 1927 \(left\)](#)

The inlay shown here marks a significant change in both the fern pattern and the logo. The fern inlay is far more delicate, and the logo is like that used in the late teens. Binding is white, black, white, but somewhat narrower than previous ferns. There is reason to suspect that these overlays were actually produced around 1921 or 1922, but were never used.



[87565 Fern F5 – 1928 \(left\)](#)

This inlay is the same as 85954, however, a switch has been made to modern style tuners with the buttons located above the string posts. This instrument is one of only a few in which the tuners do not interfere with the fern inlay.

[87639 Fern F5 – 1928 \(right\)](#)

The overlay is located slightly higher on the peghead of this instrument as were most mandolins of this period. Abalone during this period is quite devoid of color. Note how the string posts are drilled through portions of the inlay. This trend continued for several years.



[93723 Fern F5 – 1934 \(left\)](#)

The significant change here is the lack of “The” on the logo and the horizontal orientation. The upper piece of inlay has been eliminated to facilitate the change. Only a few examples of this pattern have been seen. It should be noted that this variation probably exists on an F5 with “The Gibson” inlay. Numerous examples of horizontal “The Gibson” have been seen on F4’s of this period, and the Pee Wee Lambert ’22 Loar No. 71628 also bears that pattern variation. F5 No. 71628 was however, extensively reworked in the late ‘20’s.



[94970 F5 – 1936 \(left\)](#)

This F5 is representative of the change to Art-Deco styling throughout much of the Gibson instrument line. The logo and the revived flowerpot are very heavy and “crude”. The binding is very wide and the string post bushings are generally hexagonal during this period.

[97490 F5 – 1940-41 \(right\)](#)

The last pre-war F5’s bear a fleur-de-lis inlay. It is generally accepted that 1942 was the last year for production of F5’s until after the war.



These are the actual brass templates used to cut peghead overlays in 1923. The template on the left is dated in early '23 and has centering holes for tuners in the canted inward position. The early '23 date on this template supports the fact that F5’s were placed into limited production prior to the arrival of the new tuners designed for the F5. Only one A5 Loar signed mandolin is known to exist. It bears a Sept. 10, 1923 signature date. The template on the right is for the A5, and is dated June '23, three months prior to the signature date on the instrument.