

Weymann Harp Guitars

Gregg Miner



One of America's unsung guitar manufacturers must surely be the H. A. Weymann & Son company of Philadelphia ... and that goes double for harp guitars! Their banjos – both 5-string and tenors – are fairly common and widely known, as are their “mandolutes” (standard mandolins with their own unique body shape). 6-strings and ukuleles are less well known, and harp guitars have been a complete mystery, which this article finally makes an attempt at deciphering.

For those interested in the Weymann Company (or your own Weymann instrument), head on over to Charles Robinson's [Weymann Research](#) archives (2016-2023). I'll add Charles' index and some additional history below, but wanted to open with this important text he gives regarding labels and dating:

“While there is evidence that H.A. Weymann & Son, Philadelphia, were making stringed instruments from 1894 or earlier for their retail outlet, it looks likely that they did not increase production for wholesale purposes until the late 1890's. The catalyst for this was possibly the buying of production equipment and spare parts from the discontinued S.S. Stewart enterprise in 1898, also of Philadelphia. “Their very early banjos and guitars carried a gold decal, but no serial or style (model) number. Still later they carried a serial number but no style number. I believe around 1900 they finally added a style number as well. One conjecture is that Weymann started serializing their instruments after Martin started doing the same in 1898. This makes a lot of sense to me as I believe the gold decals (labels) they used, were made by the first company to manufacture decals in the U.S., The Meyercord Company, which was established in 1894 and registered in 1896.”

When I read Charles' new conjecture above (along with his serial number dating list), I was happy to discover that my own harp guitar circa dates matched up perfectly!

When Harpguitars.net first went live in 2004, I knew of only a *single* Weymann harp guitar. As you see in my title banner image, I now believe there are a total of *five*. I can only say "believe" as the first three are only "attributed to" – meaning that, while they are unlabeled, I am almost certain of their provenance, which I discuss in detail below.

As an introduction, and to whet your appetite for these instruments, I'll start with a little eye candy: my own Weymann, originally "unattributed" and a bit of mess. Take a look at her now!

Unless I'm mistaken (and I've scoured the site and my files), this is the only harp guitar currently known with *two* inlaid "tree-of-life" fingerboards! (Note that the bass "neck" is just for show, serving as a support for the twelve sub-bass strings; it is not used for playing.) Here is its story, including the long restoration process.

In 2008 my harp guitar friend Anthony Powell got a temporary job in the repair department at the legendary Gruhn Guitars. He immediately told me of a couple "basket case" harp guitars George had that might be something I'd be interested in – and of course I was!

I got a package deal on the three, the most intriguing being this unmarked, but very fancy, double-neck. It

was missing the bridge and much of the inlay, but I couldn't pass it up. As to the builder, George was originally thinking Joseph Bohmann, but noted that he "had seen the inlay pattern on certain Weymann banjos" – though my own web searches only turned up the more common Weymann vine inlay. But George was not mistaken, as I had the instrument at left in my files – then the only Weymann harp guitar known, owned by David Portman. Its neck inlay is the same exact pattern as mine's (with slightly different materials), which I'll compare below.





I had the instrument shipped directly to Kerry Char in Portland for restoration. As the Harp Guitar Gathering happened to be in the city that year, I was able to see it "as is" when we put it on display. Not bad. You can't see all the many cracks and other issues (of which there are always more than are first apparent!).

Luckily, the precise outline of the bridge remained. Not only that, but at this very same time, I coincidentally received photos of a nearly identical plain model harp guitar (at right). The owner Jim McKenna, was wondering who built his instrument, as it was also unlabeled. We noted that the sub-bass headstock was identical to mine, as were the body and overall dimensions. Only the bass "neck" overlay at the body - curiously reminiscent of Joseph Bohmann's harp guitars - and bridge shape were slightly different.



Jim kindly sent additional photos of the bridge from all angles, to help Kerry craft a reproduction for mine.

After some time, the initial repairs were done and I was able to see the nearly finished restoration. Kerry had repaired the multiple cracks, constructed the bridge, reset both necks, did finish touch up, etc. Due to my budget constraints, I told him to hold off on the fretboard inlay for now. While it was apart, he also beefed up the neck block, soundhole reinforcement, ladder bracing and bridge plate - as we wanted to make sure this would play while staying in one piece.

Let's take a quick look:





Dimensions are: Body: 21.5" long x 18.5" wide x 4.75" deep; Scale: 25"; Overall length: 43"



Everything looked good; however, I decided to improve the appearance of the neck inlay, which was of inconsistent quality to begin with, and missing way too many pieces for my taste.

So, before diving into string options and playing it, I sent it off to inlay expert Jimmi Wingert for a major touch-up. However, she is so in-demand by high-end luthiers (including her mother Kathy), that after a year in the queue, Kathy agreed to tackle it for me instead.

One problem with precision luthiers who work on some of these vintage instruments is convincing them that they have to "do a crappy job." It's anathema to them. But that's what this one required. Kathy and I had long talks about how far to take the inlay repair. Missing pieces were not the real issue, nor consistency (the job required a certain sloppiness to match the original).

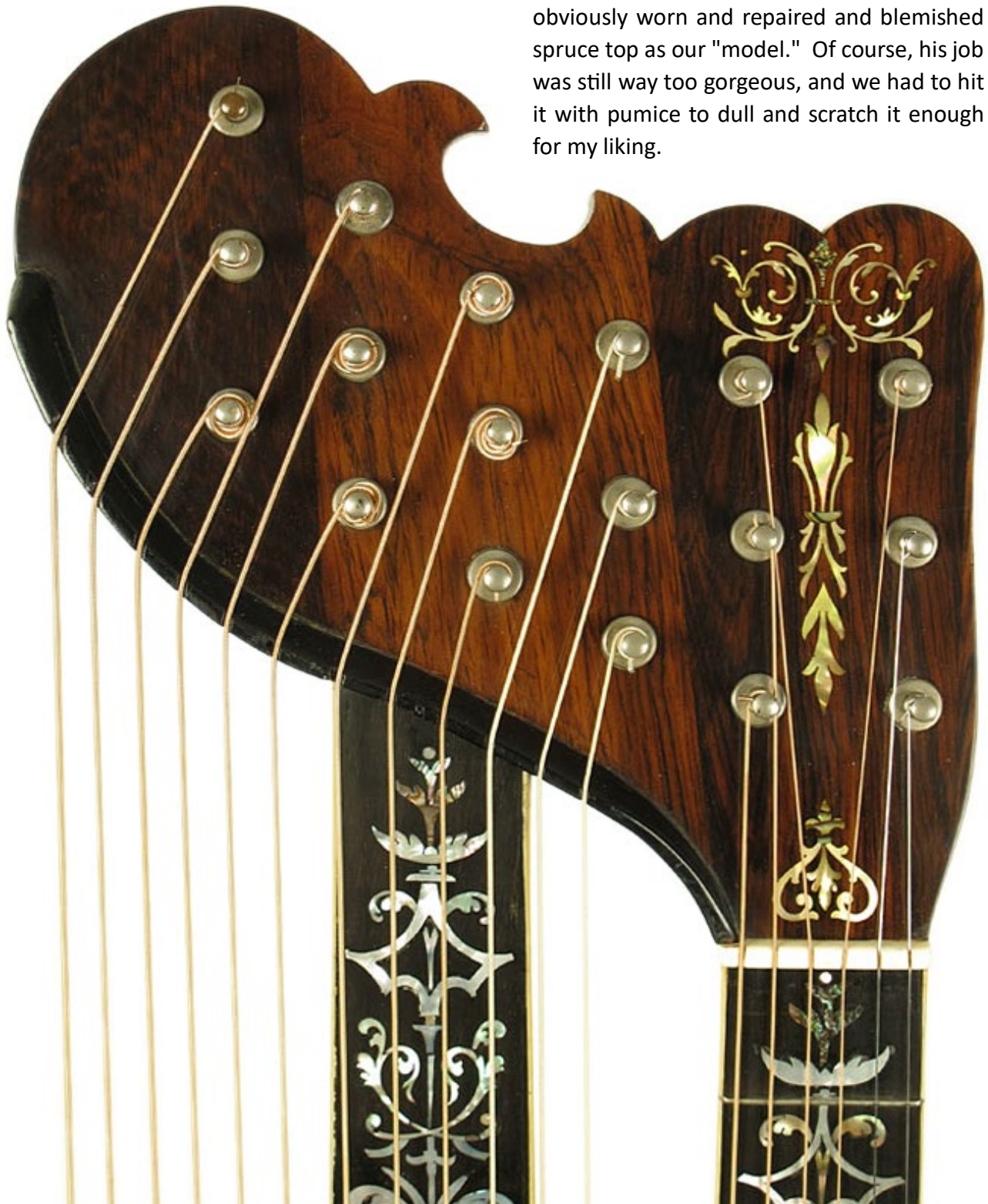
She explained that *symmetry* would need to be the key goal, as that would be the giveaway. I'm sure the job drove Kathy crazy, but in the end, everything – old or new – looks nicely blended in and appropriately "historical."

On to the next problem!



The fingerboard inlay now looked about as bright as it may have when new (the fingerboards being of course unfinished) ... but the beautiful headstock inlay – all but invisible under the thick dark, colored, aged shellac – was now bothering me. It simply no longer remotely matched the fretboard. The lovely three-piece Brazilian rosewood veneer also had a lot of finish issues, wear and discoloration.

So, I decided to take it to French polish whiz Richard Reynoso, a classical guitar builder and occasional restorer for me. Again, it *pained* him to have to do a less-than-perfect job! But we were forced with the reality of the very obviously worn and repaired and blemished spruce top as our "model." Of course, his job was still way too gorgeous, and we had to hit it with pumice to dull and scratch it enough for my liking.





I could finally string it up! Though Kerry made sure it could handle full steel strings, I tried silk & bronze on the neck, and extra-light phosphor bronze (tensioned roughly to the equivalent silk & bronze) for the 12 sub-basses, tuned standard (Eb on down, chromatically).

It sounds great, though not fantastic. The sub-basses are perfectly cavernous, but the high neck strings (as so often on these ladder-braced harp guitars) are a bit weak. As it turned out, Kerry probably went a bit farther than necessary to strengthen the

top. It would have been great to hear it at least once with all-original construction (just before implosion!). As the top isn't moving much, I may beef up the strings a bit in the future and see what happens.



Let's talk now a bit more about the H. A. Weymann Company, of which “active from 1864 into the 1940's” on Mugwumps Online was about *it* for the longest time!

Thanks to Charles Robinson, we now have the following topics to explore:

- [WEYMANN GUITARS \(Introduction\)](#)
- [WEYMANN SERIAL NUMBERS and DATING](#)
- [REGISTER Your WEYMANN Instrument](#)
- [WEYMANN Registration – Insights 300 instruments](#)
- [H.A. WEYMANN and SON – History Pt 1:](#) The era of H.A. (Henry) Weymann
- [H.A. WEYMANN and SON – History Pt 2:](#) The era of H.W. (Harry) Weymann
- [WEYMANN ‘Keystone State’ JUMBO GUITARS](#) c.1911-1913
- [H.A. WEYMANN and SON Innovations](#)
- [H.A. WEYMANN and SON CATALOGUES](#)
- [Rare 1925 WEYMANN BANJO CATALOGUE No.56 – Free Download –](#)
- [The C.F. MARTIN & Co./H.A. WEYMANN & Son. RELATIONSHIP](#)
- [H.W. WEYMANN PORTRAIT – A Question . . .](#)
- [AN EARLY 1917 WEYMANN UKULELE](#)
- [Article about H.A. WEYMANN & SON – from Musical Merchandise Mag 1929](#)
- [The WEYMANN “JIMMIE RODGERS” Special Model 890](#)
- [WEYMANN LOCATIONS around Philadelphia 1864-1930](#)
- [WEYMANN VIOLINS](#)
- [WEYMANN ‘F’ HOLE GUITARS – Styles 24, 30, 648, 748 & 848](#)

In addition to the above links, Charles highlights many other specific guitars.

One piece I didn't see included in his many articles is this one on the following page, from The Music Trade Review, March 20 1920 – a nice profile that concludes with several individuals involved in the company at the time. A 1913 issue also mentions yet another Weymann, William, "who is in charge of the factory."

Charles' response was “This was a post I was working on; however, I found some inconsistencies in dates and family members and it was still a work in progress. I received information from survivors of the Weymann family plus others, as well as other sources.” Unfortunately, his health has prevented Charles from continuing to work on his web site.

Today the Philadelphia pioneer in small musical instruments and musical merchandise is the firm of H. A. Weymann & Son. Harry W. Weymann is at present the head of this firm, and for thirty-six years he has been actively engaged in promoting the manufacture and sale of musical instruments, and prior to that time—from 1864—his father, Henry A. Weymann, conducted the business, which he had established. Harry W. Weymann says: "We have always advocated the higher grade of musical instruments, and I have made several important inventions in recent years, including the Weymann-Keystone State mandolite, the tone amplifier for banjos, etc., and the neck adjuster, which is used exclusively on the Weymann-Keystone State mandolins and banjos. "These instruments have gained a reputation among the professional players and are handled by all the leading houses from the Pacific to the Atlantic Coast. There are many specialties for which the Weymann firm are having a very large demand, such as the Keystone State strings for all instruments, and the Three-Star violins. "Our sales of musical instruments more than doubled during 1919 over any previous year in the history of the house. We attribute this demand to many causes—the music that was introduced into the soldiers' camp life being one of the many. While our factory force has been greatly increased recently, and with the introduction of improved machinery we have been able to greatly increase our production, yet the demand during the past year has been far greater than the output. "It has always been the policy of the Weymann house during the more than half a century of its existence never to try and compete with other manufacturers making cheaper goods, our prime object being at all times to maintain a high standard of quality and gain a reputation for making the highest-class musical instruments possible. That this policy has won out is conclusive proof through the great success this house has achieved. Associated with Mr. Weymann in the business is his brother, Albert C. Weymann; his two sons, H. Power Weymann and Herbert W. Weymann, and his sister, Mrs. E. C. Mullen.

Weymann's claim to fame were their banjos, mainly the highly decorated tenors of the '20s and '30s (the fancy Style 7 at right and others can be seen on [Günter Amendt's web site](#)). Of their much rarer guitars, Frank Ford once wrote that "Weymann was one of the great banjo producers in Philadelphia...although they did venture into guitars, mandolins and ukes. All Weymann instruments were characterized by exceptionally fine woodworking, fit and finish."

Let's return now to the inventorying of the slowly growing number of harp guitars, which I couldn't even begin to date until all the puzzle pieces finally started to coalesce.



It didn't take too long for me to identify this unusual instrument as another Weymann, though, again, I can only say "attributed."

On January 23 2023, *Antiques Roadshow* aired an episode filmed in Santa Fe, New Mexico on Museum Hill. Near the end, a gentleman is seen with his "Carlotti" harp guitar. Unfortunately, the instrument was not one of those treasures that warranted a full appraisal – only a quick cut to the owner standing in line with it. That means we can't get the appraiser's name in order to request additional information, or attempt to locate the owner, who was presumably local.

The screen captures from the PBS web site inform us only that it was identified as a "Carlotti harp guitar, ca. 1900," with a pretty low estimate! At least they got the date close. As for the name "Carlotti," I believe that it was either a repairman's label inside (no hint of a label can be seen), or possibly, the name of the *owner*. In his clip, he says that his "grandfather played it" (with no mention of building it); perhaps as this was the only scant information provided, the appraiser decided to give the unlabeled instrument "the family name," and perhaps based his lowball evaluation thinking it was some "homemade" oddity.



AR Carlotti Harp Guitar, ca. 1900
\$400 - \$500



A mystery indeed. In fact, it actually looks like a distinct, specific *cross* between my own Jenkins “Harwood” and Weymann harp guitars! And so:

Hypothetical theory #1 is that someone named Carlotti had access to one of each of those instruments in order to expertly combine their features and build this similar instrument. I *don’t* think that happened here – unless on the off chance he was a professional luthier employed by one of those two manufacturers.

Hypothetical theory #2 is that the name “Carlotti” was indeed seen somewhere inside the instrument, but was a repairman’s label or inscription. Which brings us right back to “who *built* it?”

Hypothetical theory #3 of it being a Jenkins “Harwood” brand instrument is unlikely, in that there is no white “Harwood” fretboard marker (which they *all* had), nor is the head an exact match, while the bridge is also wrong.

Ah, that *bridge*! And so, I believe it’s actually: Hypothetical theory #4 – an early experimental or custom 1890s Weymann *patterned* after the unique second generation 18-string Harwood which had recently been introduced.

Taking this further, I now posit that this unique instrument may represent Weymann's first foray into testing the waters for the harp guitar market – by “copying” the early-mid-1890s Harwood and designing their own bridge for it. Let's compare:



My own (attributed to) Weymann HG is on the left and my Harwood is on the right. I circa date both to the mid/late 1890s. Both are huge instruments with a full twelve sub-basses and Brazilian rosewood sides and backs. The Harwood is all-original; the Weymann has a replacement bridge modeled after one from a nearly-identical specimen. It features a severe slope down for the sub-bass strings with that delightful “arrow” tip, as in the “Carlotti” specimen. Photographed at roughly the same perspective, the center instrument's waist appears higher and less pronounced than the Harwood, while seeming to match closer to my Weymann (the width narrower, as the necks converge closer above the single soundhole).



In our mystery instrument, the *shape* of the bridge appears halfway between that of the Harwood and Weymann, with the builder presumably inspired by the Harwood's fancy bridge ends. These are an exact match to my Weymann's single decorative end.



As for the headstock, Harwoods (of which several are known) all have a scalloped head for the main neck and a routed scroll for the sub-bass piece. The "Carlotti" is plain. It doesn't resemble the Weymann, but as I said, I think they were copying a Harwood (and possibly only from an image). The sub-bass *nut*, on the other hand, is a perfect match to the Weymann, as it juts out gracefully, unlike the simpler Harwood. It shares the full twelve (chromatic) subs of both instruments and their friction tuners for all eighteen strings. The twin dovetailed "necks" are similar in all three instruments.

The unique double soundholes were clearly copied from the Harwood, though not their placement on the body, which is a new shape. It's chunkier than the Harwood, with the waist intersecting the lower portion of the holes like the Weymann rather than just below them as in the Harwood. Note that the Harwood's neck joins the body at the *tenth* fret rather than the 12th.

The “Carlotti” has two simple dot fretboard markers at the 7th and 9th fret. Most makers (including Jenkins on the Harwoods) put a dot at the *tenth* fret, while Weymann guitars have them at the *ninth*, as will be confirmed below.

The sides on the “Carlotti” appear to be mahogany (the other two are Brazilian rosewood), and the soundhole rings are simple (small herringbone, or just black & white rings).

Again, taking all these features together, I believe that the “Carlotti” harp guitar is actually a Weymann first (or early) experimental harp guitar, c.1895. Curiously, it may even have been one of the first instruments the company actually *manufactured themselves*. Following this reasoning, the other two similar 12-bass instruments (mine and Jim’s) were then designed to be *distinct* from the Harwood, including their own sub-bass head design and a standard single soundhole. They were thus built afterwards, around 1898 (as they bear no serial numbers).

Our fourth Weymann, seen earlier, is still another early “one-off” experiment without a serial number... but this time it has a Weymann *label*.



Owned by David Portman, this specimen looks like the more typical “early American” harp guitar experiment: an offset 6-string neck with an extended bass headstock and a simple support rod. Indeed, if not for the label, I might have once dated this Weymann as the earliest. Yes, it’s possible that both of the wide-body, 12-bass instruments originally also had labels, but I don’t think so. There is no sign of them having been once on the back of the headstocks, and my gut tells me that they were built as a follow-up to the “Carlotti” experimental instrument.

The label of Portman’s *seven*-bass, 13-string harp guitar is like that at right, shown on a standard 6-string. Charles Robinson’s label chart puts this as “Late 1890’s – 1913.” Again, this would seem to circa date the two large harp guitars at around 1898, just before the labels appeared.



Unfortunately, I no longer have my notes on Portman’s headstock, but I *don’t* believe it had a serial number. This would seem to put it (again, per Robinson) between c.1898-c.1900.

Remember how I predominately identified my own Weymann due to the fretboard inlay? Here are the two compared (mine is on the right). The pearl and metal inlay of Portman’s 7-bass looks in much better shape (if original) and has some “extra creamy filling” in the bottom piece as well.



Portman's unique instrument, continued...

Note the early friction tuners for all strings, and highly distinctive bridge (originality unknown).





One reason it took me this long to circa date the four instruments above was confusion from the sole information I could find on Weymann harp guitars which seemed to describe a completely different instrument.

These clues are from 1913 in The Music Trade Review (**bold mine**):

From the Oct 11, 1913 issue:

"Harry W. Weymann, in charge of the small goods department of the house, as well as the manufacturing end, notes that business has kept up remarkably well. They are making a special window display during the past week on the Weymann mandolutes, taking in all the sizes used in the quartet, also the new four-ply curly maple wood rim Weymann mandolutes, the **twelve-string contra base** (*sic*) Weymann guitars and the Keystone State mandolutes, all of their exclusive manufacture."

And from Dec 20, 1913:

"The house has just placed on the market **an extra large contra bass guitar with twelve strings**, and which retails at \$60."

These two MTR articles are clearly referring to a harp guitar with *six* sub-bass strings, which none of our previous specimens match. Note that the 1913 text does not inform us as to whether this was their *first* or just *another new model* harp (contra-bass) guitar.

But one finally turned up!



Note the dot fret marker at position 9 rather than 10, a key Weymann identifier. (All 6-strings on Charles Robinson's site have this same configuration.)

Vintage Axe acquired it, with co-owner Tom Wentzel writing:

“Bruce and I recently picked up a Weymann contra bass. It's a 15-1/2" lower bout, and you can clearly see the Weymann foil decal. Back and sides are Brazilian, and the necks appear to be cedar. Ladder braced (quite lightly, I might add!). The serial number stamped on top of the head stock is 15240 which, according to Chas. Robinson's Weymann database dates this one to c.1914. Most interesting is the signature underneath the top. The first name is clearly 'Bruno', but I can't make out the second name (Hinyaras?) nor the words on the second line.”



The foil label confirms the date, as Charles' database gives this "Shape B" as 1913-1918.

Tom and I wonder if the inscription might be that of a Weymann employee. Help us out?!



Thanks to David Portman, Jim McKenna, Tom Wentzel, and Charles Robinson for images.



About The Author: Creator and Editor of Harpguitars.net Gregg Miner has been fascinated by harp guitars since the early 1970s. He purchased his first instrument (a 1916 red sunburst Gibson) in 1983, then fell in love with the harp guitars of Chris Knutsen when he found his first one in 1988. He collects harp guitars, researches harp guitars, writes about harp guitars, plays harp guitars, produces harp guitar CDs, buys and sells harp guitars, and runs Harpguitars.net, Harp Guitar Music and the Harp Guitar Foundation. You would think that by now he would be sick of harp guitars, but he is not.

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