



Jan. 8, 2014

### **TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM ... while dusting**

Having been born and raised in Eagles Mere, Gwen Klus who serves as a member of the board of directors for this historical society, has contributed her local knowledge and artifacts from her family for quite some time. But Gwen recently brought in a piece that appears to be somewhat unique and simultaneously curious: a Ukelin. Along with the instrument, Gwen has supplied a copy of the "Ukelin Anatomy" and an insert to slide under the strings for beginners. (And also a copy of her bill for repair/refurbishing of the instrument with original parts where needed.) This piece measures 28" long and 7 1/2" at its widest width, with its core body only 1 1/2" deep. The definition for a Ukelin is: a bowed psaltery (an ancient musical instrument with numerous strings, plucked with the fingers or with a pick) with zither strings made popular in the 1920's. It is meant to be a

combination of the violin and the Hawaiian ukulele. It lost popularity in the 1970's because the instrument was difficult to play and often returned to the manufacturer before it had been completely paid for.

Research shows that multiple patents were issued from 1923 to 1926 for the production of Ukelins. Records show that one manufacturer sold the instruments to door-to-door salesmen who would generally sell in rural areas and often on time payment plans at a much increased cost to the consumer. After the Great Depression these already high prices continued to climb even higher. Although no evidence shows them ever being sold in music stores; this was one of the sales ploys at that time to state that the salesman was selling at a reduced price. Cost ran between \$35 and \$40, which would have been a lot of money in the 1920's and '30's for a leisure piece. Because they were touted as easy to play – which was not the case – sales of the Ukelin declined due to misrepresentation by salesmen and the advent of television hindering the sales of all musical instruments. So that by 1972, production of the Ukelin was stopped.

This little tyke has sixteen melody and sixteen bass strings, divided into groups of four for playing accompanying chords. The melody strings were played with a bow and the bass strings plucked or strummed. It is tuned to a C major scale, and unless tuned to include them, is unable to play chromatic notes.

This Ukelin will have a home among other instruments within the Living Area Room of the museum complex, along with all background and instructions for visitors to discover this odd little combination for musical pleasure.