



## 2013 Induction Class



### **Emory & Linda Lou Martin**

In 1943 a young fiddler named Linda Lou received an offer from John Lair for a job at the Renfro Valley Barn Dance in Renfro Valley KY. Not long after taking the job she went out to one of the shows where she met Emory Martin. Before the year was over Linda Lou and Martin were married in between shows in Atlanta, Georgia. John Lair worked hard at producing a show featuring performances by the actual residents of the community.

Linda Lou was born Wanda Arnold in Gate City, Virginia on March 13, 1926. During the depression her family moved to Indianapolis where she grew up listening to county music on the radio and on phonographs. At the age of ten she began to learn Hawaiian guitar watching her sister play who was taking lessons. When she was in the 8th grade she started taking violin lessons at school and by high school she was playing in the school orchestra.

Her father was big in to politics and use to take her to the conventions and rallies for the Republican Party where she would entertain. She would also play for Shriners' meetings and at churches.

She landed her first professional job after appearing on an amateur contest in Mt. Vernon, Kentucky. She didn't win but after performing she was invited to talk to the shows promoter John Lair. A short time later she got a telegram from Mr. Lair offering her a job with an all girl band started by performer Aunt Hattie who was

taking the show to radio station WGST in Atlanta. It was then that Mr. Lair gave her the stage name Linda Lou, she was only 15 at the time. She was with the show at WGST for about a year.

After the break up of the group in 1942 Linda went back to Indianapolis and got a job with the WIBC Jamboree barn dance playing with "Little" Jimmy Dickens along with Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper. She played fiddle, steel guitar and sang. The station manager wanted a group like the Coon Creek Girls so they put Linda together with Virginia Sutton and Bernice Scott of the Blue Mountain Girls on the program, and called the show Linda Lou's Sunshine Special. She stayed until 1943 when Mr. Lair offered her work at Renfro Valley.

Emory Martin was born August 26, 1916 in Hickman County, Tennessee. Emory came from a musical family, his older sister Eva played guitar and brother Kenny played guitar and bass with Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, and Robert Lunn. Emory would watch his father play banjo and was seven years old when he learned to play by ear.

Emory was born with only a six-inch stub instead of a left arm. Emory worked hard to adapt his own playing style. He created bar chords using his nub arm. He tried a lot of different ways to play the left hand part. He would lay the banjo down on the floor and use his foot." Using his heel as a pivot, he moved his big toe up and down the neck of the banjo to produce the note. He would also play notes with his teeth.

When he was 16 years old Emory won a contest put on by "Fiddlin' Sid Harkreader at the princess Theater in Nashville. He played "The Wreck of the Old 97". He was hired by "Fiddlin" Sid after the event and went to work part-time while trying to finish school. He did this for the first 2 years, and finally quit school and went full-time.

In 1936 Harkreader disbanded his group and went to work for Uncle Dave Macon. Emory followed him and worked quite a while with Sid and Uncle Dave. Emory had to take time off for an appendectomy in 1937 and after recuperating went back to Nashville to find the band touring. He went to work for a new radio station WSIX.

It was there Emory met Johnnie Wright. "Johnnie and his wife (the future Kitty Wells) had a program on WSM. Emory joined Johnnie Wright's Tennessee Hillbillies. Emory and the Tennessee Hillbillies made a tour of several regional radio stations.

When WWII broke out it was hard for the group to tour because of gas rationing. Emory went back to Nashville and worked with his father, a rock mason. One morning while listening to the radio he heard the Holden Brothers being broadcast from WHAS in Louisville. He had done shows with them in Bluefield, West Virginia. They were playing shows at Renfro Valley. Emory called Jack Holden who in turn told John Lair about Emory. Emory arrived at Renfro Valley in February 1943.

Not long after Emory arrived in Renfro Valley Jack Holden was drafted in to the army and his brother Fairly left for the Navy. It was here at Renfro Valley he met his future wife Linda Lou. They began playing together and hit the road for almost a year straight. After returning to the Valley Linda Lou started playing shows with the Coon Creek Girls broadcast on CBS radio.

Emory would continue to work off and on over the years at Renfro Valley in between different stints with both the Holden Brothers and Johnnie Wright and his wife Kitty Wells. On March 27, 1950 Emory played on several tracks for Kitty Wells to be released on RCA records.

In 1958 Emory and Linda weary from the road decided to retire from show business. Emory would run a Gulf station in Renfro Valley for the next 14 years while Linda went back to school to become a nurse and worked at local hospitals.

In 1991 the Martins published the memoir -One Armed Banjo Player, Emory Martin: Early Years of Country Music. Emory passed away April 7, 2006, at the age of 89. Linda still makes her home in Mt. Vernon today. The musical influences of Emory and Linda Martin will be felt for generations to come.