

Greenbriar boys. In the summer of 1958 the Greenbriar Boys were just getting known in the Northeast, their home base was Greenwich Village. They would go to Washington Square Park on Sunday afternoons. This was where all the decent pickers of Folk and Bluegrass, in and near NYC, would go to play and jam and learn from each other. There would be a gathering of audience around each group of musicians and it wasn't long before the G.B. Boys had fans from all over the area coming down to stand and watch - sometimes crowds of over 150 people. Ecoutons les sur YouTube :

« He was a friend of mine » : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jn7dFz-AuYE>

The G.B. Boys had actually met each other earlier that summer in the park. Every Sunday a few people would approach and say "We're having a party", or "I own a record company, would you be interested..." However, hardly anyone called back. By the time Maynard Solomon, who headed the folk department at Vanguard Records, came by and said the same thing the G.B. Boys were muttering "yeah... sure" under their breath. But Maynard did call them to join in a record project called "New Folks" where four different acts would do one quarter of an album. One song the boys did used an original melody from Bob Yellins (the Greenbriar Boys banjoist), which they put to the lyrics of a traditional song called Stewball, previously recorded by Cisco Huston, one of Woody Guthrie's travelling partners. When you add a new melody to public domain lyrics or vice versa it's copyrightable, so that's what they did. When folk singers heard this song, they knew it was something special. It's been recorded by at least 20 people since, and remains one of the Greenbriar Boys biggest claims to fame. The G.B. Boys were Ralph Rinzler (mandolin), Bob Yellin (banjo), and John Herald (guitar). About a year after "New Folks" was released in 1959, Maynard told them Joan Baez was interested in them backing her on a couple of tunes for her second album, on which they played and sang harmony to "Banks of the Ohio" and "Darling pal of mine". While this was in the works, Maynard asked them to do their very own whole album for Vanguard. Joan's and their own album was released in 1960. With the addition of bass player Jack Cook and fiddler Buddy Pendleton, it was titled "The Greenbriar Boys". Ralph Rinzler recorded one more album with them for Vanguard entitled "Ragged But Right", released in 1962 and one for the Electra label where they backed up female singer Dian James. This album was entitled "Dian and the Greenbriar Boys" and released in 1963. Dian sang in the Molly O'Day mountain singing tradition. The album was done in Los Angeles and Electra was convinced it had crossover possibilities into the pop market. It was produced by Jim Dixon who was a bit of a visionary, seeing that shortly after he went on to produce the Byrds' first albums which contained their first huge hit - Bob Dylan's "Hey, Mister Tambourine Man". The album was "quite good, with some fine songs", says John, but did not take off as expected and consequently Dian and the G.B. Boys did not tour - mostly because of the distance between NYC and LA. Meanwhile, Ralph Rinzler, who had always been interested in musicology, decided he could do more to further American folk culture and music by working on a more academic side. In 1964 he went to work for the Smithsonian Institute in D.C. where he established the division of American Folk Life, among many other major contributions. During this period Ralph also managed Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys and Doc Watson, who John (along with Ralph) had a small part in discovering. "An interesting story", says John, which he'll put into a larger biography sometime. As Ralph phased himself out of the group, "we were lucky", says John, "to be joined by the phenomenal mandolin player Frank Wakefield". "He was the real McCoy, born and raised in Tennessee". Also, for a short while, just before they started recording their last album, the G.B. Boys were graced by another bluegrass master - Jim Buchanan (on fiddle) who had played on some of the recordings Bob Yellin and John had learned from. With Russ Savakus on upright bass they released "Better Late Than Never" in

1965 on Vanguard. During the 1960's Maynard Solomen at Vanguard Records took a liking to John's guitar playing and asked him to play on many folk recordings, including those of Doc Watson, Ramblin Jack Elliot, Buffy Saint Marie, and three albums with Ian and Sylvia. John also recorded on other labels for Bonnie Raitt, David Bromberg, Tom Rush, Logan English, Jody Stecher, and the movies: "Hi Mom - You are what you eat", and "White Line Fever", sometimes under the pseudonym of "Daddy Bones". Starting in 1969 a group of people from the Woodstock, NY area (calling themselves the Woodstock Mountain Revue) began the first of four recordings for the Rounder label. One a double album is shown on this page. The personnel fluctuated from album to album, but the nucleus of the group consisted of the great folk singers Artie and Happy Traum, Pat Alger (who went on to write songs for Garth Brooks), the famous banjo player Bill Keith (who invented Keith pegs - a method for bending the strings while playing - and one of the 3 or 4 styles of bluegrass banjo that exists today), Rolly Sally (the writer of the wonderful song "Killing the Blues") and Jim Rooney (who gained stature as a record producer for the likes of John Prine and Iris Dement. Other personnel on different Mountain Revue recordings were John Sebastian, Eric Kaz, Paul Butterfield, Rory Block, Larry Campbell, Maria Muldaur, Eric Anderson, Caroline Dutton, Cyndi Cashdollar, and Paul Siebel. Shortly before moving to Los Angeles in 1972 John recorded his first solo album for the then major label Paramount. Among the artists helping out were many friends from the Woodstock and NYC areas including the wonderful and inventive electric guitar player Amos Garret, Howie Wyeth (piano and drums), Steve Soles and Ned Albright (harmony singing), Bob Neuwirth (co-producer), and Rob Stoner (elec bass). Howie, Steve, Rob and Bob were the first core of Bob Dylan's infamous Rolling Thunder Revue Tour in 1975. The four having come together totally by chance, walking in off the street separately and gathering around a piano with Bob Dylan at the Bitter End Bar. "I surely regret living on the west coast at the time and not being there" says John, especially since the aforementioned people met for the first time during his Paramount recording sessions, a year or two before. John moved from LA to Philadelphia in 1976 and formed a bluegrass band there - The John Herald Band. The group toured and recorded an album for the Bay label in Berkeley, CA in 1977 entitled "John Herald and the John Herald Band" The personnel recording were Caroline Dutton (who played fiddle with the John Herald band in various configurations for the next 13 years), Rolly Sally (now with the Chris Isaak Band on elec bass), Gordon Titcomb (mandolin, pedal steel and acoustic guitar), and Wanamaker (Andy) Lewis (on banjo). In 1977 John moved from Philadelphia back to Woodstock, NY (where he had previously lived from 1965 to 1972) and formed an electric country bluegrass band. This was about two years before the urban cowboy trend of the 80's began. The band had some wonderful musicians including Larry Campbell (fiddle, pedal steel and elec guitar, and is now with Bob Dylan's band), Jim Carter (singer extraordinaire and elec bass), Joel (Bishop) O'Brien (drums, and formerly with James Taylor and the Flying Machine - a group John was in for a couple of months), and Gordon Titcomb (mandolin and pedal steel and now with Paul Simon). The band lasted about 2½ years and played the usual rowdy bar scene that a million bands go through, with very little reward. John Says "I had to take a stab at hard core drums and electricity, because so much great music is made with these instruments. The trouble is, for it to be enjoyable you have to travel with your own great sound system and a roadie or two, which we couldn't afford. We never did record". In 1982 it was back to acoustic bluegrass with folk overtones. In 1984 John recorded for Rooster Records out of Vermont. On "The Real Thing" the musicians were Caroline Dutton (fiddle), Cyndi Cashdollar (dobro, and now with Asleep at the Wheel), George Quinn (elec bass), and Joe Deetz (banjo). The group also put out a live tape of themselves recorded at the Joyous Lake nightclub in Woodstock in 1983. Of all his recordings

this is John's favorite. This band was together for 6 years. All of John's solo and Herald Band albums were on labels that went out of business a few years after the albums were recorded (Paramount, Bay, and Rooster records). That's the sad story folks, but true. These records may be collectors items. "The Best of John Herald and the Greenbriar Boys" (Vanguard) and "More Music from Mud Acres/The Woodstock Mountain Review" (Rounder), may be available from the companies themselves.