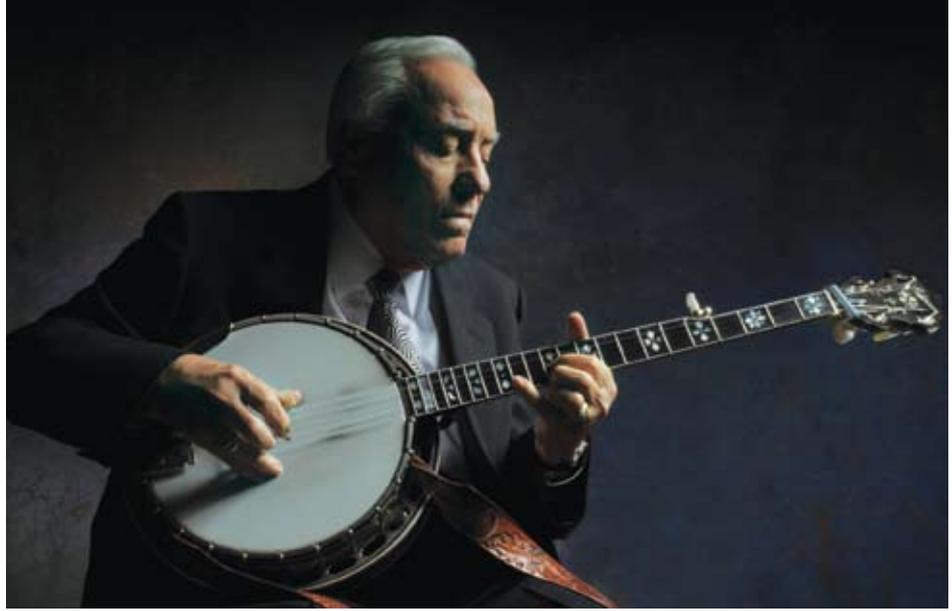




Don Gibson. Photo by Dennis Carney.



Earl Scruggs. Photo by www.nashvilleportraits.com.



## Don Gibson and Earl Scruggs

*Emily Epley, Executive Director,  
Destination Cleveland County*

**ROOTS MUSIC** shares and preserves history. It is a common thread that weaves people together and allows them to connect when they might not otherwise have done so. Cleveland County, NC, a region once rich in textiles, farming and music, now sees textiles and farming drying up, but its musical heritage remains rich. Musicians continue to emerge and impact the region and the world. Two musical legends are being honored in this community, Don Gibson and Earl Scruggs.

Gibson, born April 3, 1928, in Shelby was one of the most influential forces in '50s and '60s country music as a performer and songwriter. In 1950 after growing up on a farm and holding other odd jobs, Gibson headed to Tennessee.

In 1955 Gibson earned his breakthrough with "Sweet Dreams," which he wrote and recorded. In 1957, in a single day, he wrote two other country music classics — "Oh Lonesome Me" and "I Can't Stop Loving You" — which he recorded with producer

Chet Atkins. They abandoned traditional steel guitar and fiddle for a new sound featuring guitars, piano, drummer, upright base, and background singers, which became one of the first examples of what would later be known as the Nashville Sound. "I Can't Stop Loving You" has been recorded over seven hundred times by singers across genres. Gibson wrote three of the most famous songs in country music history and helped define the sound and style of modern country music. "I consider myself a songwriter who sings rather than a singer who writes songs," Gibson said. On November 17, 2003, Gibson died, but his songs have become country classics and continue to provide enjoyment for millions of fans and launch the careers of many singers.

Scruggs, the preeminent ambassador of the banjo, was born to a musical family and raised on a farm in the Flint Hill community. He played banjo and guitar at the age of four. Scruggs's reputation as a musical innovator and his unique "Scruggs-Style" banjo-picking are two of his greatest contributions to music. Scruggs worked at Lily Mill and would sometimes pick with co-workers during breaks. He left to pursue his radio and music and eventually teamed up with Lester Flatt. Though he is known for bluegrass pieces like "The

Ballad of Jed Clampett" and "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," Scruggs and his family have been cautious not to peg him as a "bluegrass" musician. In 1969 Scruggs and sons Gary, Randy, and Steve formed the Earl Scruggs Revue to perform a mix of musical styles. They were applauded around the world as one of the most inventive, respected, and creative bands in history. Scruggs recorded bluegrass as well as pop, rock, and country with artists Johnny Cash, Sting, Don Henley, Grateful Dead, Marvin Gaye, and Elton John. Scruggs, a humble man who has influenced generations of musical artists, said he would "pick for free if he couldn't make a living out of it."

Shelby and Cleveland county citizens will continue to celebrate Gibson and Scruggs through the Don Gibson Theatre (where the MoMS exhibition will be hosted) and the Earl Scruggs Center, both now under construction.



## WVSP 90.9 FM, 1973–85

*Sherman Johnson, Radio Host/  
Programmer, WARR 1520AM*

**As WAFR**, the nation's first black public radio station, was signing off the air for its final broadcast,