



Chapter 8

The Known Violins of “Sol” (Selman) E. Roach of Windber, Pa.

Since this project started in 2005, to date (2011) twenty-six Sol Roach original violins have been located. Twenty-four of these have identified owners and two are known to exist with the owners remaining anonymous. My search started with the three violins I have along with four in the hands of known relatives. With the help of Bill Jones of the Johnstown Tribune Democrat several more originals and regrads were found in the Johnstown/Windber area. The remainder of the violins, both regrads and originals, were found using the internet, primarily MEWZIK.com, a website run by Dwight Newton at the University of Kentucky, Lexington. The Windber Museum also had three instruments. The fate of these instruments ranges from family keepsakes, to unplayable museum pieces, to use by students of school age, to professional musicians. The instruments owners are in locations across the country, the majority being in the east.

This chapter presents the story of each of these instruments to the extent that it is known. Not every violin is represented by pictures. When I began this project there was no intention of a book. Violins that I was able to photograph were done in strictly field conditions, just to have a record of the instrument. Photo quality was often dubious. The pictures that appear in this chapter are pictures that might be said to represent identifiable periods throughout his career as a violin maker, from the earliest example found (1900) to the last example (1928), demonstrating the evolution of his craft.

As an example, there were four 1909 violins. It makes little sense to provide complete sets of pictures of each instrument considering that they were likely under various stages of construction at the same time using the same patterns and jigs. Instead, I use only the best set of pictures to represent all four instruments, eliminating the pictures of lesser quality. The three instruments that I own were photographed under controlled conditions with professional equipment and represent the basic styles of instruments that dominate Sol's work. These can be studied for detail of construction and finish.

Information on Original Violins owned by Lon Roach

Sol Roach appears to have used two types of tags, usually glued to the bottom board of the violin and visible through the F holes. One was the “MADE BY” tag and the other a “Repair” tag that described him as a manufacturer of violins. The latter appear in the regraduated commercial violins.

1907: This violin was made for his daughter Gertrude’s son Selman R. Morgan. Selman apparently played well but succumbed to “Scarletina” in 1909 at age 9. The violin eventually found it’s way back to Sol who made it his personal violin, inlaying his own photograph on the back. In 2005 a minor repair was done that required the removal of the

top board. It was found that on the underside of the top board Sol had written in pencil a narrative about the history of the violin, personal data about himself and about some of the techniques he used in finishing violins. He had taken the violin apart on May 6, 1914 to



re-graduate it. The tag inside was commercially printed and reads: “ Made by Sol.E. Roach, Windber, Pa. Made for Selman R. Morgan. The wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1720.” The 1720 is crossed out and 1650 written in pen next to it. This would show that he was making violins prior to 1907 and that his wood supply then had been from 1720.Written to the left of “Made by” is a symbol like a double sharp sign(X with four dots around the intersection of the legs). This symbol appear’s on other maker tags. Also the statement: “Sell my fiddle”Never . A second tag glued next to the “Made By” tag indicates that “The back of this violin was taken out of a residence of Thomas W. Lamsons Boston, Mass. Top of spruce from Dorchesler church Boston, Mass dated 1650.” A transcription of the text under the top board follows.

(peg end of top board opposite side of chin rest)

“Made by Sol E. Roach

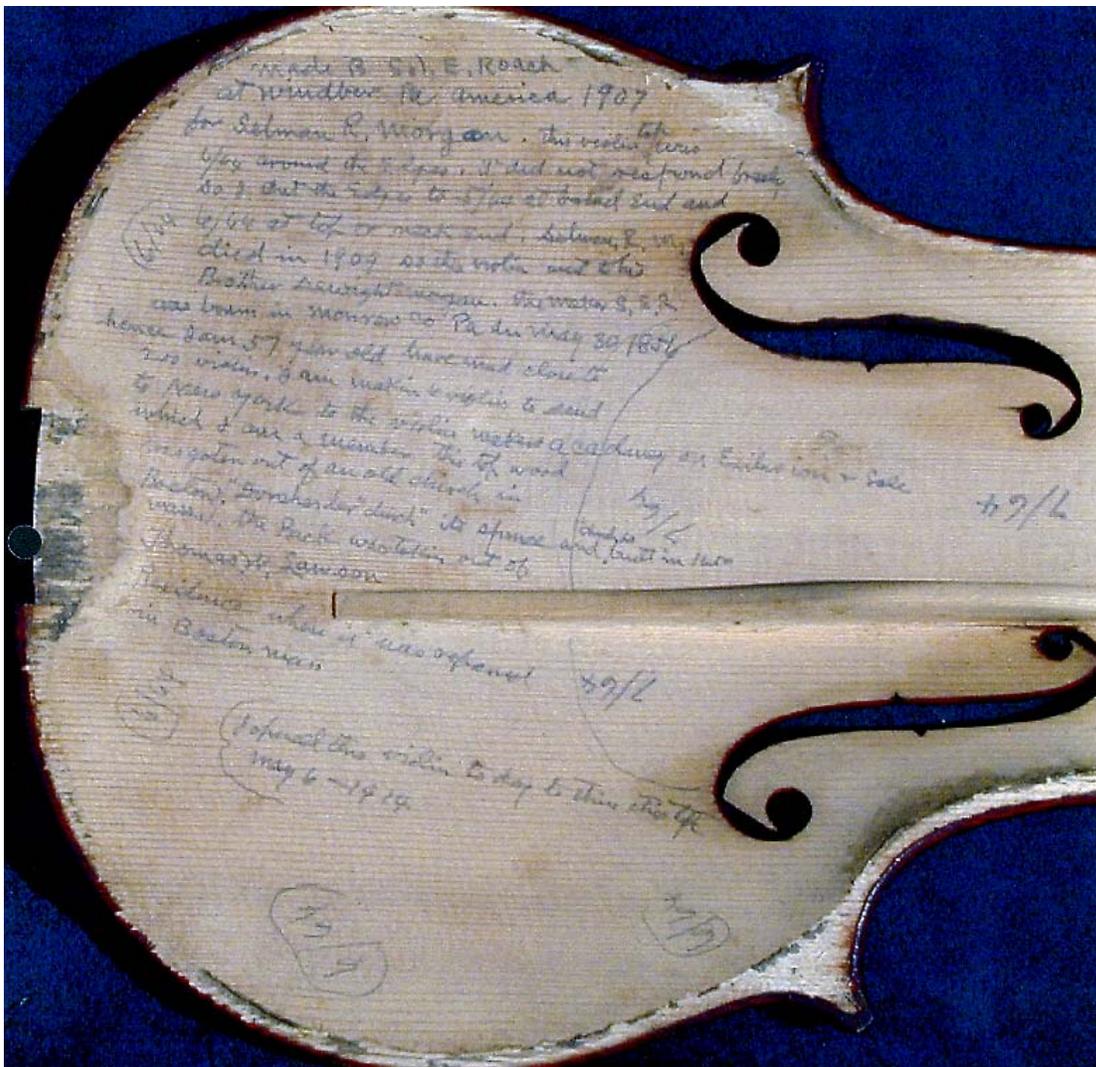
At Windber, Pa. America 1907 for Selman R. Morgan. This violin top was 6/64 around the edges. It did not respond freely so I cut the edges to 5/64 board end and 6/64 at top or neck end. Selman R.M. died in 1909 so this violin went to his brother Dewight Morgan. The maker S.E.R. was born in Monroe Co Pa on May 30 1856 hence I am 57 years old have made close to 200 violins. I am making 6 violins to send to New York to the violin maker academy on exhibition & sale which I am a

member. This top wood was gotten out of old church in Boston Mass. "Dorchesler" church. It's spruce and church is built in 1650. The back was taken out of Thomas W. Lawson residence when it was (repaired?) in Boston Mass."

"I opened this violin today to thin this top. May 6-1914."

(top end of top board right side of neck from top)

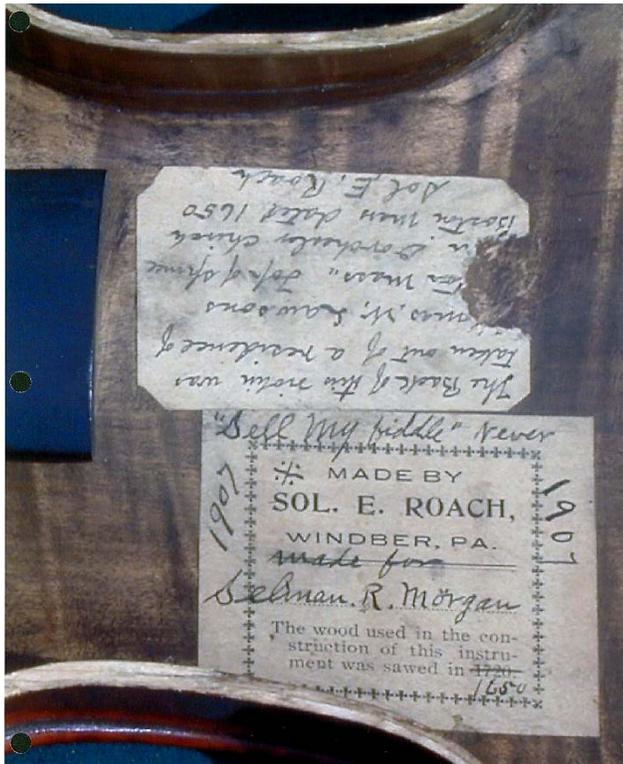
"My method of varnish & to bring out (the grain?) is first after smoothing sandpaper. I take a pint of strong amoney (ammonia?) dissolve it in some Brown Diamond dye. First 3 coats of this on the bare wood with a soft rag. Well rubbed in this will make the wood real dark brown. Next day I sand paper the top coats off this leaves nice brown markings. I then lay 4 to six coats of any color Oil varnish. Then after a couple weeks I polish. S.E. Roach "





1907 Dimensions:

- total length: 22 and 3/4"
- body length: 13 and 9/16"
- upper bout: 6 and 1/4"
- middle bout: 4"
- lower bout: 7 and 13/16"
- F hole length: 2 and 13/16"
- F hole outside to outside: 2 and 15/16
- Inside to inside: 2 and 1/2"
- body thickness: 2 and 3/16"









1911: This violin was made for Sol's grandson John S. (Jack) Roach, the son of baseball player Roxey Roach. John was born in 1908 and was raised in Sol's household. Sol opened the violin in 1922 to re-graduate it and at that time glued over the original makers tag wallet sized photos of John and his sister Margaret, both in basketball uniforms. A second tag was glued next to it indicating for whom it was made and that it had been opened in 1922. This tag also gives the dimension code used by Sol.

" B. 7 x 3/16 in 1911 T. 5-6 1/8 " A double sharp sign appears on this tag by the 1911 and a double sharp sign appears on what can be seen protruding from beneath the pictures on the original tag. From a note written by John about the violin: The back is made of Italian Cherry and the inlay strip around the edges is whalebone. The violin was taken apart in October of 2007 to repair a glue separation. No writing of interest was found on the inside. The same material found on the builders tag and covered over by the pictures was repeated in pencil on the top board. The violin is in excellent playing condition now and has been used regularly and professionally to excellent report. The violin continues to improve with playing. The luthier who worked on this violin felt it responded best with light-weight strings.

1911 Dimensions:

total length: 23 and 1/4"
body length: 13 and 7/8"
upper bout: 6 and 7/16"
middle bout: 4 and 1/4"
lower bout: 8 and 1/8"
F hole length: 2 and 3/4"
F hole outside to outside: 3 and 1/4"
 Inside to inside: 2 and 3/4"
Body thickness: 2 and 1/2"









1924: This violin was owned and used by another of Sol's daughters, Mary Lewis. The tags inside do not indicate that the violin was made specifically for her. The makers tag shows the double sharp sign along with a note in pen that the violin is made of "all old Italian wood". There is a note in pencil on the wood next to the tag that says: "Not sanded before varnish" and "cut of(?) lower end". This is next to pen note on tag about old Italian wood. Code is B. 6-7-8-12 T. 5.5-6-7-8.

1924 Dimensions:

total length: 23 and 1/2"

body length: 14"

upper bout: 6 and 5/8"

middle bout: 4 and 7/16"

lower bout: 8 and 5/16"

F hole length: 2 and 3/4"

F hole outside to outside: 3 and 7/16"

inside to inside: 2 and 15/16"

body thickness: 2 and 3/8"









Original Violin in Windber Museum

1924: Makers tag lists date and code. B. 6x3/16 T. 5-6-7-8 (owned by museum). It shows considerable wear with crack repair. The violin is not in playing condition.

Museum 1924 Dimensions:

total length: 23 and 1/4"
body length: 14"
upper bout: 6 and 5/8"
middle bout: 4 and 1/2"
lower bout: 8 and 1/8"
F hole length: 2 and 7/8"
F hole outside to outside: 3 and 1/4"
inside to inside: 2 and 7/8"
body thickness: 2 and 3/8"



Edward Surkosky with Windber Museum's 1924 Sol Roach violin.

Original Violins owned by others

1900: This violin is owned by Kenneth W. Husk of Aliquippa, Pa. and came to light as a result of the inter-net web-site MEWZIK.com. Mr. Husk had seen the article on Sol, and having a Roach violin, contacted the web-master in February 2008 who then contacted me. This is the earliest known Roach violin to date being made in 1900. The violin is in excellent physical condition and playing condition. The finish is darker with a reddish cast. It came to him through his son-in-law as it had belonged to his mother and was used by her as a little girl in the Pittsburgh, Pa. area. He said the back and bottom are made of curly maple. The makers tag is a commercially printed tag with a border of small +’s. The printing reads: Made By (first line), Sol E. Roach (second line) Windber, Pa. (third line). The fourth line is hand written in ink. It has the initials NY on the left side of the tag and 1900 on the right side. Under this is the printed statement “The wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1792”. Ken measured the violin and provided pictures.

Dimensions Husk 1900

total length: 23 and 3/8”
body length: 14 and 1/8”
upper bout: 6 and 9/16”
middle bought: 4 and 5/8”
lower bout: 8 and 1/8”
F hole length: 2 and 7/8”
F hole outside to outside (est) 3 and 9/16”
inside to inside 2 and 15 16”
width at center 9/32”









1903: This violin is in the possession of Joseph Nemanich of Johnstown, Pa. It is in playing condition but the top finish is dark and weathered. There is crack damage and damage to the edge of the right F hole. Although the bout dimensions are about the same as other instruments the distribution of the curve gives the body a straighter, narrower look. The builders tag is commercially printed and says:

“Made by Sol E. Roach”

“The wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1792”

Handwritten between those lines in ink is “Jany 1903”.

Joe Nemanich passed away in 2008 and his 1903 and 1919 originals were purchased from his estate by Hollister Ferrier of Chicago, Illinois in June of 2009.

Dimensions Nemanich 1903:

total length: 23 and 3/8”

body length: 14”

upper bout: 6 and 9/16”

middle bout: 4 and 9/16”

lower bout: 8 and 1/16”

F hole length: 2 and 3/4”

F hole outside to outside: 3 and 3/8”

inside to inside: 2 and 7/8”

body thickness: 2 and 1/2”



Bill Jones with Nemanich's 1919 and Joe Nemanich with his 1903 Sol Roach at Joe's Johnstown, Pa. home.

1903: This violin belongs to Kenny Hydock. Kenny is an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard and at this writing is stationed in the Tidewater Virginia area and lives in Suffolk. Kenny tells the story best.

“My great grandfather (John Hajduk) started work in the coal mines in PA, around Windber. From what my grandfather told me, my great grandfather got the violin from your great grandfather (Sol Roach). Best recollection is the violin was made specifically for my great grandfather. He quit working the coal mines and made his living playing the violin - fiddle-style - at barn dances, weddings, bar mitzvahs and other social events - essentially making his livelihood on his music.

The label has printed 'Made By' on the top line, along with 1903 (or 1905). The second line has printed "Sol E. Roach" and the third line has printed "Windber, PA". It also appears to have initials on the top left of the label - but it is so discolored it is hard to make out. I am afraid to use anything on the paper to clean it up - I do not want to damage the label.

As I read through the history of your great grandfather (Sol) I noted the son (Roxey) who was a professional baseball player. I find that extremely interesting because my grandfather spent a good portion of his life playing baseball. I am not sure if any of it was professional - it was hard to get him to talk about his younger days. There is a possibility that paths crossed many times back in the time.

(The violin) was given to me by my grandfather in 1989 in (Sebastopol) California. It had been over 20 years since I had visited with him - I was pretty much a child the last time I saw him, so I knew very little of my great grandfather until then. The violin was in poor condition - hanging on a nail from a piece of string in his home. My grandfather never played it - but some time in its history he put on a heavy coat of varnish that nearly ruined it.

I play guitar and knew the thing needed some major TLC if it were ever going to be played again. I moved to Alabama and met an old fiddle player named Eldon Bryson - who is also a luthier. I told him about the fiddle and he asked to see it. You would have to have been there to see his reaction - he took it in his hands like a concerned father over a sick child and closely examined it. Despite its condition, Mr. Bryson commented that the fiddle must have been a good sounding fiddle in its day - because it was very well played and worn. The fingerboard was very worn and it had a couple of cracks on the body. The tuning pegs were worn and the headstock had a crack in one of the peg holes - caused by the tuning pegs being worn into an oval. Mr. Bryson explained to me that any hand-made fiddle that does not sound good does not get played - so it always looks to be in good condition. He said the fiddle I have was sure to have had a good sound to be so worn out.

Mr. Bryson kept the violin in his shop to do some restoration on it. The fingerboard was replaced, the peg holes were repaired and he replaced the tuning pegs. He repaired the small crack in the body and he compounded the heavy varnish to thin it - restoring the resonance of the box. It took him a while to do it - mainly because of his health - but he got it done and treated me to some fiddle tunes on it. He commented that the fiddle still has some life in it.”

The neck appears to be a pre-made neck that has a stamp that reads "Conservatory Violin".









1903: This violin emerged in August of 2010 by way of the MEWZIK.com website and belongs to Loretta Zarlenga of the Los Angeles, California area. Although, based on a story told by Sol's grandson John S. Roach about Sol having made violins for professionals in NYC in the early part of the 20th century, this violin is the first one discovered currently being played by a professional violinist. Loretta wrote:

"It has never occurred to me to investigate the internet with regard to the violin that has been in my family since before I was born. My father brought this violin with him when he and my mother married and drove out to California over fifty years ago. When my parents settled in Southern California in the San Fernando Valley in 1956, the violin was propped on our mantle in the family room. It was old looking and did not have strings or a tailpiece at the time. That is where it stayed until about 1971, when my father decided to have it restored for me. I had been playing violin since 1966 on a different violin, and my father wanted to surprise me at Christmas with this newly restored instrument. He indeed had it restored by the now deceased Alfeo Batelli who had relocated to Los Angeles from Italy and who had restored many stringed instruments for members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as countless others. (Isaac Stern,

Itzhak Pearlman, Yehudi Menuhin among them)

*I have been playing professionally for over 36 years now, and I have always wondered about the maker of my violin. "Sol E. Roach Manufacturer of VIOLINS", 1101 Graham Ave. Winber, PA . General Repairing and *** supplies (I cannot read what the word is between "And ***Supplies), but above all this there has been written by hand, in faded black ink, "..Made by". When I read some of the history of Mr. Roach, it was stated that the first violin he made was in 1907. The year on my violin has a very distinctly handwritten"1903" on it. There seem to be written numbers to the left of the 1903 date and are very small and hard to read. There is an X with dots - 5 x 9 and below that is written a B 6 x 3/16 inside 4588.*

There were a few minor repairs done on my violin back in the early 1980's by a protege of Hans Weisshaar, and this particular gentleman (who was less than friendly) remarked that the violin was "amateurishly made". Nevertheless, this violin has a fine tone and really projects sound.

I would never expect that one who made guns would also take an interest in making violins as well. Mr. Roach seems to have been a man of many diverse talents!"

Loretta was born in Santa Monica, Ca in 1957 graduating from high school in 1975 and subsequently graduating from Smith College in Massachusetts. She has worked primarily in the area of chamber music and has also worked in musician roles in films and television shows. Most recently her main occupation has been Administrative Analyst in the Life Sciences Department at UCLA.

Her parents were both professional musicians. Her father Dominic, a clarinetist, had played both clarinet and saxophone with classical and popular music groups and often substituted for noted area symphonic clarinetists. His main occupation was music director at junior high schools in the San Fernando Valley. Her mother, Mary Garnett Poarch, was a singer and had worked with the Metropolitan Opera in New York. They had both attended the Cincinnati Conservatory of music.

The violin came from Youngstown, Ohio and was given to her father. She does not know who had previously owned the violin, how it got to Youngstown or who gave it to her father. She said that her father had related that at one point in its history the violin had been rescued from a fire. It sat on their mantle as a decoration until it was rebuilt for her use.

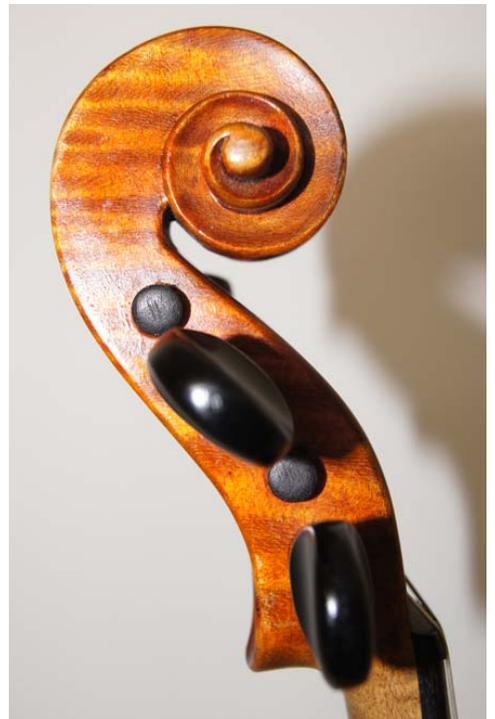
Loretta said that she enjoys playing the violin and that it is loud. It booms. She described it as a "wild thing" and that she is always working to "rein it in". This is in contrast to the sweet sounding 1790 Marius Petz instrument that she had played previously. It is not known if Alfeo Batelli did any regraduation work when he put the instrument into playing condition.

The makers tag is fairly standard as described above. This tag, however, contains a double sharp sign, a feature so far not seen on these earlier instruments, this being the first one to show it. The other 1903's do not show a double sharp sign. This violin also has a narrower, more petite neck. This feature is also found on the 1911 violin that was made for his grandson John Roach.



**Loretta Zarlenga with her
1903 Sol Roach violin.**







1909: This violin was made for Bernice, another of Sol's daughters. The tag includes the date, Sol E. Roach and Bernice E. Roach in the middle with pen notations vertically on either side. On the left is the double sharp sign with a hard to read notation in a bracket. It looks like "am alc arn . ale." On the right is "wood from 1650". This violin was purchased by Alex Didik just before WWI, who gave it to his brother Frank Didik Sr. who gave it to Pete Didik, father of Mary Ellen Ambroe of Dunlo, Pa, who now owns the violin. This violin was played by Pete Didik in the Lawn Valley Symphony, Charleroi, Pa. The violin is in good playing condition.

Dimensions Didik/Ambroe 1909:

- total length: 23 and 1/4"
- body length: 13 and 5/8"
- upper bout: 6 and 7/16"
- middle bout: 4 and 1/4"
- lower bout: 8 and 1/16"
- F hole length: 2 and 7/8"
- F hole outside to outside: 3 and 1/8"
- inside to inside: 2 and 11/16"
- body thickness: 2 and 1/2"



Above: Alex Didik and his 1909 Roach just prior to WWI at Charleroi, Pa.



Mary Ellen Ambroe of Dunlo, Pa. with her violin.









1909: This is another violin uncovered by the MEWZIK.com website. In December of 2008 Robert Johnson of Boardman, Ohio, near Youngstown, inquired about his son Thayne’s violin. The violin had been given to Thayne by Robert’s mother who had received it from an aunt. The tags in the violin disclose that it had been made for an H.D. Singer who was Robert’s great grandfather on his mother’s side. It should be noted that Sol’s mother was Sarah Ann Singer.

There are two tags in the instrument. Tag #1 is a printed tag with “Sol E. Roach manufacturer of violins 1101 Graham Ave. Windber, Pa.” in a box on the upper half. In the box on the lower half is written a double sharp sign followed by an “X” and 1909. This looks like a typical repair tag. Tag #2 is the makers tag and has a printed border of x’s and the usual information to include “Made by Sol E. Roach Windber, Pa.” on the top and “The wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1720.” In the lower left margin is the double sharp sign. Then, around the outer perimeter of the tag from the left vertical side is written “Made of”—“Old Side Board of”—“R.H. Roaches”. The date 1909 is written in the middle of the right hand margin and also in the margin bottom center. R. H. Roach was Sol’s father so part of this violin is made from a piece of furniture from Sol’s parent’s household. This is significant because there is a 1912, made

for a family member, that has the words “from side board” written inside it. Robert Johnson provided the following dimensions.

Dimensions Johnson 1909:

total length: 23 and $\frac{1}{4}$ ”
body length: 13 and $\frac{7}{8}$ ”
upper bout: 6 and $\frac{5}{8}$ ”
middle bout: 4 and $\frac{1}{2}$ ”
lower bout: 8 and $\frac{1}{4}$ ”
F hole length: 2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ”
 outside to outside: 3 and $\frac{1}{4}$ ”
 inside to inside: 2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ”
body thickness: 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ ”

1909: This violin belongs to Jay Carroll of Miami, Florida. It was made for and owned by his grandmother, Benice Roach Jarve, youngest daughter of Sol Roach. The violin is one of two that Bernice kept in a double case. The other is a 1912. The makers tag in the 1909 is a standard printed tag with black diamond border. Printing read: “Made by Sol E. Roach Windber, Pa.” and “The wood used in this instrument sawed in 1720”. The 1720 is crossed off and 1650 is written in ink. Written in ink between the former and latter is “for Bernice E. Roach”. An unusual symbol not seen on other violin tags is a square with a dot in the middle. The corners of the tag are also cut off. There are no graduation numbers on the tag nor is there a double sharp sign.

Dimensions Carroll 1909:

total length: 23 and $\frac{1}{8}$ ”
body length: 13 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ”
upper bout: 6 and $\frac{3}{8}$ ”
middle bout: 4 and $\frac{1}{4}$ ”
lower bout: 8”
F hole length: 2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ”
 outside to outside: 3 and $\frac{3}{16}$ ”
 inside to inside: 2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ”
body thickness: 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ ”



Jay Carroll of Miami, Florida, holding Bernice Roach's 1909 on the left and her 1912 on the right. Bernice Roach is Jay's grandmother.

1912: This violin is owned by Jay Carroll of Miami, Florida and was also made for Sol's daughter Bernice. It contains two tags. The original 1912 makers tag has a red trim line and printed text: "Made by Sol E. Roach, 1101 Graham Ave. Windber, Pa.". Between the name and the address in ink is "made for Bernice E. Roach". Under the address the date reads 1912 and 1922. Its graduation code is B 7x13/64 T 5.5/6/8. The second tag has a black spade border and rounded corners. It has a picture of Bernice as a young woman glued over it. Visible on the tag is "Made by Sol E Roach" and covered by the picture, the graduation code B 7.5x...picture....T5/6/x. It also contains a double sharp sign. Across the top an ink inscription appears to read "H.D. Stahl violin".

Dimensions Carrroll 1912:

total length: 23 and 1/4"
body length: 13 and 3/4"
upper bout: 6 and 3/8"
middle bout: 4 and 1/8"
lower bout: 8"
F hole length: 2 and 3/4"
 outside to outside: 3 and 1/4"
 inside to inside: 2 and 3/4"
body thickness: 2 and 1/2"

1912: This violin is owned by Mary Daley Kiernan of East Tawas, Michigan. She is a great granddaughter of Sol Roach. Her mother is Dorothy Roach Daley, daughter of Wilbur C.(Roxey), son of Sol. This violin was not viewed but information obtained by phone. Pictures and measurements are provided by Mary.

There are several tags in the violin. The original tag has a black border and has printed:

“Sol E. Roach
Manufacturer of Violins
1101 Graham”

It contains a written double sharp sign and the date 1912 in the right corner is the number 22.

There is a makers tag with a red border which has printed:

“Made by
Sol E. Roach
Windber, Pa”

Across the top is written “Made for Mazse Lewis Roach
1912”

At the bottom of the tag is code: B 8X3 1/6 reg. rated
T 5-6-8 1922

There is a third tag with a border of back X's. The tag starts hand written with “from side board” then printed “the wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1720.” Hand written is: ”5488 biller (double sharp sign) -?-“

One of these tags partially covers another tag. The part exposed appears to read “old fres tofa of 19”

Dimensions Kiernan 1912

total length: 23 1/4”
body length: 14”
upper bout: 6 and 3/8”
middle bout: 4 1/4”
lower bout: 8”
F hole length: 2 and 7/8”
F hole outside to outside: 3 and 3/16”
inside to inside: 2 3/4”
thickness of body: (est) 2 and 1/8”





1914: This violin belongs to Joan Ferrier Smith, a great granddaughter of Sol Roach through Sol's daughter Georgiana. The standard builders tag gives the code numbers 1/8 X 5/16 the double sharp sign 1914. Joan said that an Orpheo Debiase, claiming to be a member of the Akron Symphony, called several years ago and said that he played a Roach violin and that he was interested in purchasing hers. Debiase is a local name (Elton area) He could not be located.

Dimensions Ferrier Smith 1914

- total length 22 and 3/4"
- body length 14 and 1/4"
- upper bout 6 and 1/2"
- middle bout 4 and 1/2"
- lower bout 8 and 1/4"
- F hole length 3"
- F hole width
 - outside to outside 3 and 1/2"
 - inside to inside 3"
- body thickness 1 and 1/2"



Mrs. John Ferrier and Joan Ferrier Smith with their 1914 Roach violin.





1919: This is another violin that was owned by Joe Nemanich of Johnstown, Pa. It is in excellent condition and has a lovely reddish brown finish. Also peculiar are the very different F holes. They are longer, narrower and pointed at the top and bottom rather than rounded. The builders tag is printed but with a lot of written information.

Medium hard top of old fer
small Made by
bass bar Sol E. Roach 9x10 6/x
Windber, Pa
B. 7x3/16
T (?) 5x7 1/4

A double sharp sign appears to the left of Windber, Pa.

This violin is now owned by Hollister Ferrier of Chicago, Illinois following the death of Joe Nemanich in 2008.

Dimensions 1919 Nemanich

total length: 23 and 1/4"
body length: 13 and 7/8"
upper bout: 6 and 7/16"
middle bout: 4 and 1/2"
lower bout: 7 and 15/16"
F hole length: 3"
F hole outside to outside: 3 and 1/8"
Inside to inside: 2 and 5/8"



1920: Owned by Martha Sharpe Wetzel, Georgia. Not viewed.

1924: This violin is owned by George Corle of Imler, Pa. The makers tag reads: "Made by Sol E. Roach all old Italian wood B. 6-7-8-11 T. 5-6-7-8 April 1924" This violin is used regularly by Corle as a professional blue grass performer. He purchased the violin from O. Lee McDaniel, technician, of Bedford, Pa. According to Corle McDaniel had attempted to sell the violin at a gathering in New York for \$2,500 but had no takers. According to Corle the Roach violin has as good a sound as the best (in the blue grass world) but the Roach name is not known. He said that he has had interest in the violin from the fiddle players in both the Faron Young and Bill Monroe bands. Corle said he will never sell it. The violin is used daily. It showed accelerated wear on the finish at points where the hand and chin touches the body since seeing the violin two years earlier.

Dimensions Corle 1924:

total length: 23 and 1/4"

body length: 13 and 3/4"

upper bout: 6 and 1/2"

middle bout: 4 and 1/4"

lower bout: 8"

F hole length: 2 and 3/4"

F hole outside to outside: 3 and 3/8"

inside to inside: 2 and 7/8"

body thickness: 2 and 1/2"



George Corle with his 1924 violin in the bright sun outside of his Imler, Pa. home.

1924: Owned by Selman John Roach of Farmington, NM. John is the son of Wilbur C. Roach, son of Wilbur C. (Roxey) Roach and a great grandson of Sol Roach. This violin was rebuilt while the family lived in Minneapolis, Mn and was used by their son, now an engineering student in college. The maker's tag has a red border printed: "All old Italian Wood" Made by Sol E.Roach" this tag also includes a double sharp sign in the lower middle and the code: B 7-8-12

T 5-6-7-8 Feb 1924

An additional tag says: Hand made by Sol E. Roach Windber, Pa Feb 12, 1924. The following pictures of the violin were provided by the owner.







1924: This violin is owned by Tim and Kathy Thompson of Sherrill's Ford, N.C. and was discovered through the MEWZIK.com website. The violin was given to Kathy in Binghamton, N.Y. around 1990 when she was in elementary school by her grandfather, Charles Barnard, who was originally from Wilkes- Barre, Pa. Kathy played the violin in elementary through high school. It was also played in high school by her younger brother. The violin's color is reddish brown, is in playing condition and has recently been worked on. The makers tag is a standard "Made By" tag with address and a red outline. Hand written information on the tag includes a date "Jany 1924" the graduation code B. 6-7x3/16 T. 5-6-7-8 and difficult to read letters that appear to be "dycimone back". No double sharp sign could be located on the tag.

1925: Owned by Gene and Leslie Schaffer, Windber. This violin was not viewed on the trip. The following information was provided by phone. The makers tag has a red border and has printed: "Made by Sol E. Roach All old Italian Wood". The tag shows one double sharp sign and has the code:

B 7-8-12

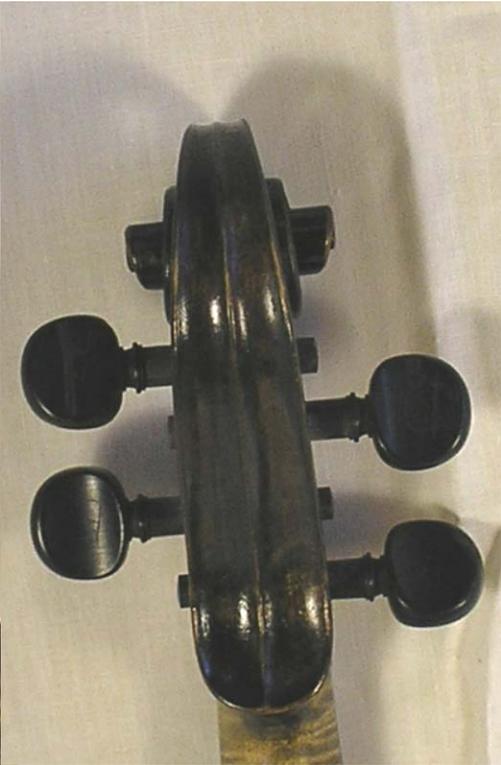
T 5-6-7-8

6-7-9 Additional notation says: "Heavy ends B. Bar 10 ½ long" "Dec 1925".

The violin was used by their son for 12 years while he was in school. He played in the Johnstown Youth Symphony. As of this writing he is at the Merchant Marine Academy Kings Point, NY.

1925: Owned by Bill Myers, son of Colette and Bill Myers of Algonquin, Ill. Colette is a great granddaughter of Sol through Sol's daughter Georgiana. The builders tag dates the violin as July 1925, has the double sharp sign, the handwritten inscription "all Italian wood" and Sol's graduation code T. 5-6-7-8 B.6-7-9, also inscribed what looks like "bid? raised 2 ½ X64". The violin is in good shape but currently unplayable and kept in a glass presentation case in Algonquin. Son Bill, the actual owner, is a music major.





1928: This violin is owned by Margaret Ann Carter of Ann Arbor, Michigan and was not viewed. It belonged to her mother Margaret Roach, daughter of Roxey's first wife Carrie and sister of John Roach. Sol apparently did not make a violin expressly for Margaret. She is thought to have acquired it after Sol's death in 1933. The violin is currently not playable and is missing its tail piece. Margaret Ann said that she took lessons on it as a child and that she was told it was not a very good violin.(violin would have to be put in playing condition by a professional and properly adjusted and evaluated) Her mother took the tail piece off to give to another child whose own had broken. From pictures taken by Nancy Davis the violin is unusual in that Sol used a two piece top rather than a one piece. All other violins viewed have had one piece tops. This might suggest that his supply of old wood was running low.

The builders tag is very simple with a simple line border printed: Sol E. Roach
Manufacturer of VIOLINS 1101 Graham Ave. Windber, Pa. Written in ink at the top
margin is "Made by" and in a box at the bottom B. 5-6-7-8-11 T. 5-6-7-8 1928.

Dimensions 1928 Carter: This violin was measured by Nancy Davis in June 2007

total length: 23 and 1/2"

body length: 14"

upper bout: 6 and 5/8"

middle bout: 4 and 3/8"

lower bout: 8 and 1/4"

F hole length:

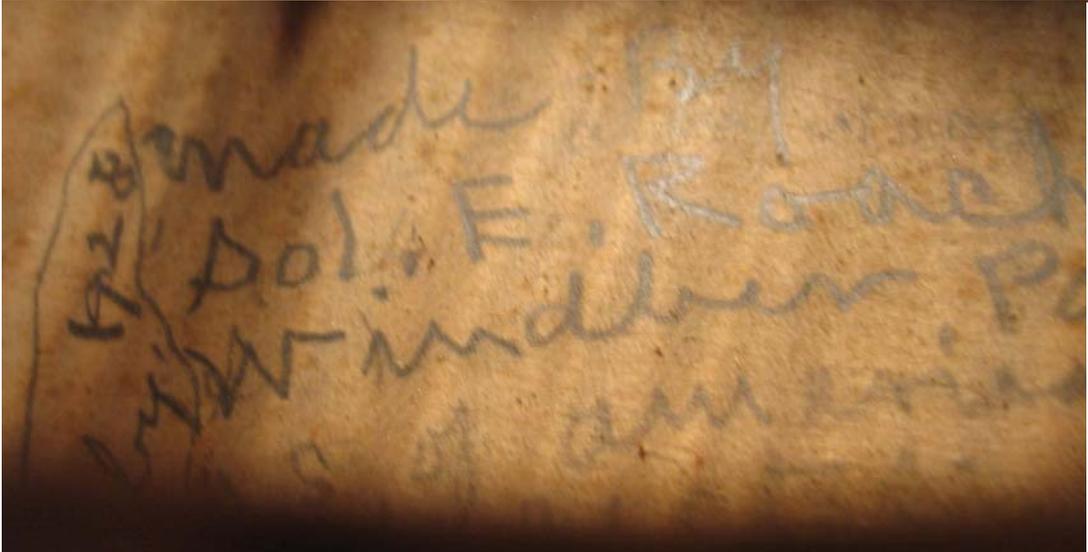
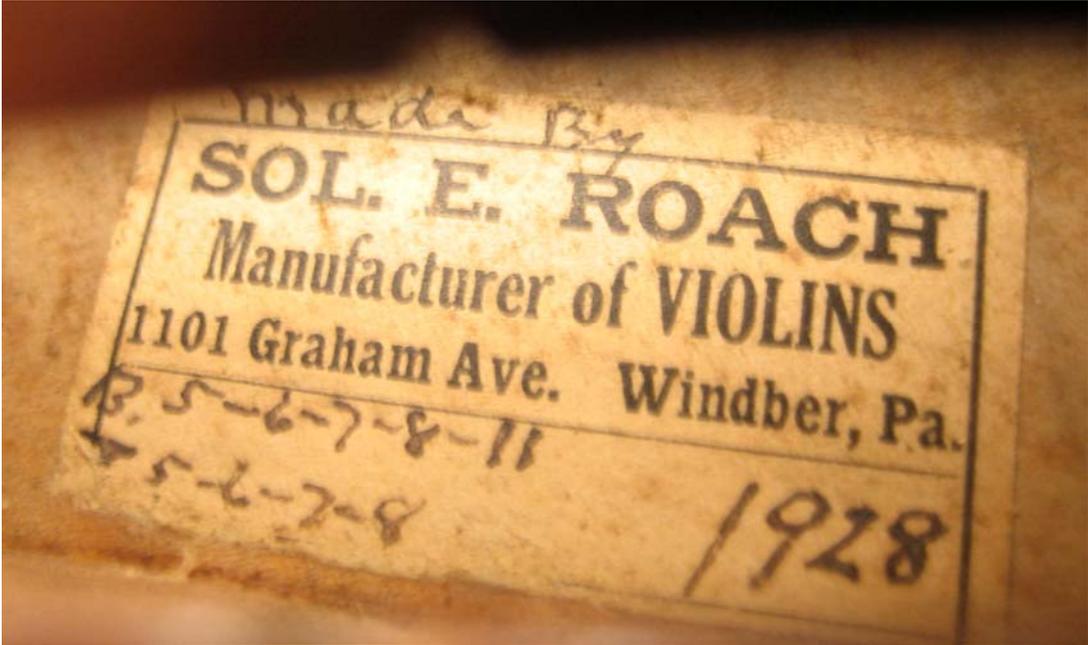
F hole outside to outside: 3 and 3/8"

inside to inside: 2 and 7/8"









The pencil writing under the right “F” hole reads: “Made by Sol E. Roach
Windber, Pa
U.S. of America
All old Italian wood”

Then, vertically along the left side: “Febby 1928”

Also of interest is that the printed tag he used was one he had used in re-graduated violins and he added in pen “Made by” at the top of the tag. He had apparently run out of his standard ‘Makers’ tags. Also noteworthy is the lack of a double sharp sign.

Unkown Original

In addition to the two original violins owned by Joe Nemanich of Johnstwon, Pa., Joe was aware of one additional original. However, he did not know the owners name nor any details about the violin except that when he saw it he photographed it. Here are the photos.



Another Unknown

In October of 2008 Nancy Davis of Ann Arbor, Michigan found a Sol Roach violin for sale on an auction website in Grey, Pennsylvania, about 17 miles southwest of Windber. The violin was sold in September to a man from Windber who had commented to the auctioneer that he wasn't leaving without that violin. In November the auctioneer contacted the individual for me in order to get information. The individual declined to cooperate even when it was explained that it merely involved information in an attempt to document the instrument and that it was a relative of the maker making the inquiry. The individual was a regular customer of the auction site so it was decided to respect his wishes. The violin apparently came from an estate in Windber. It is not known whether the auctioneer knew the difference between an original "Made By" tag or a "Repair" tag in a regraduated instrument.

