

...the sizes and shapes and the number of strings are as varied as the cultures in which the instrument finds its origins. There remains a great deal of room for research and speculation about these origins, and also about how the dulcimer ended up in the Appalachian Mountain regions of the United States.

“Appalachian” is the name given to a series of composite mountain ranges stretching from New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont, through Virginia and West Virginia, and on into North Carolina, Tennessee, and Northern Georgia. (Some people even consider the Ozarks of Arkansas as part of the Appalachians.) In any case, the Appalachians, the oldest mountains on the North American continent, are far less rugged and altogether more hospitable than those which dominate the Western regions of the United States. And since the Appalachians mark the western boundary of the Eastern seaboard, they formed the first major physical barrier to westward expansion in colonial times and provided a major area for settlement.

Into these mountains came the adventurers, the criminals, the rugged individualists, and the general run-of-the-mill romantics from Western Europe. We’ll leave the rest of the story to a course in United States History, but sometime, after the trees were felled and the land divided, people remembered their European traditions. They built instruments like those from back home, stringed instruments that sounded like Scotch-Irish bagpipes, appropriate for local “get-it-ons” and gatherings. There was no single inventor of the dulcimer—just a gentle synthesis from many cultures that led to instruments found today in many shapes and sizes, but all known by one name, “dulcimer.”

And to distinguish this new instrument from the English Hammered Dulcimer, a zither-type instrument played with mallets, it became known as the “plucked Southern Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer.”

To meet the social and musical demands of a