

## 1950 to 1951 - Squeeze Box Serenaders



*Above, left to right: Joseph Wankerl, Harlan Blau, Duane Blau, Dean Blau, Michael Haller. Photo was taken in the summer of 1950 at the Joseph and Agnes Beer Haller farm home located about 3 miles north of Plain, Wisconsin. The car in the background is Dean Blau's 1939 Ford.*

One day in 1950, the Blau boys went to the home of Mike Haller, probably to play some softball and hang out. Mike's mother, Agnes Beer Haller, loved to play the piano and sing. Joe Wankerl (a nephew of Agnes) was there with his guitar. Everyone ended up singing along while Mrs. Haller played the piano. A few days or weeks later, the Blau boys decided to go to Joe Wankerl's home with their accordions. One thing led to another and a group was formed with members Dean Blau, Harlan Blau, Louis "Louie" Nachreiner and Joseph Wankerl.

How or what date the group chose "Squeeze Box Serenaders" as their name is not known, but they went by that name from their first days together until the Blau boys went into the Army in 1954. "Squeeze Box Serenaders" first appeared in print when the group played in their first amateur contest at the Sauk County Fair in Baraboo on August 31, 1950. Dean recalled the group most likely didn't use that name every time they played. In the beginning, "Joseph "Merle" Alt also played guitar with this group for a short time.

Sometime before the Mary Prem and Bernard Brings wedding in June 1951, Joe Wankerl left the Squeeze Box Serenaders and went to play with the Fingerhut group called the "Badger Valley Boys." This is most likely when Duane Blau joined the Squeeze Box Serenaders with his guitar. Details are sketchy, but Duane was playing a guitar in August of 1950, and probably didn't formally play with the group until 1951.

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