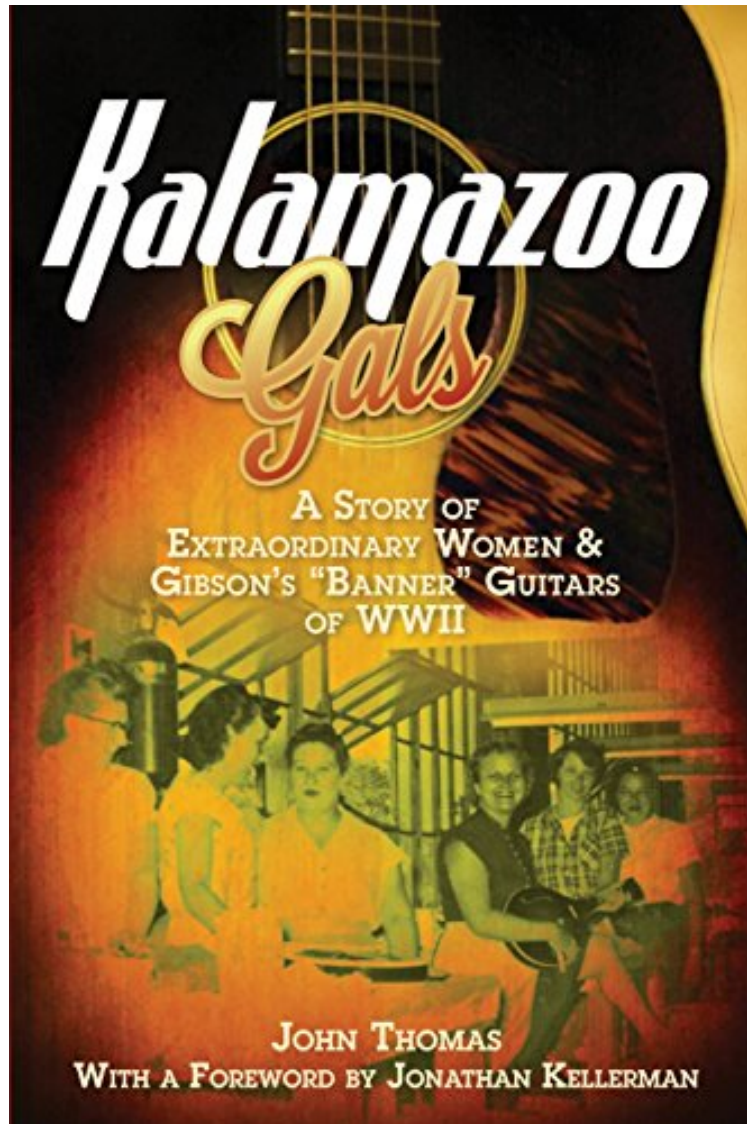


Kalamazoo Gals: A Story of Extraordinary Women Gibson's 'Banner' Guitars of WWII

John Thomas

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#459586 in Books Thomas John Kellerman 2013-01-26 2013-01-26 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.02 x .61 x 5.981, 1.02 #File Name: 0983082782288 pages Kalamazoo Gals A Story of Extraordinary Women Gibson s Banner Guitars of WWII | File size: 79.Mb

John Thomas : Kalamazoo Gals: A Story of Extraordinary Women Gibson's 'Banner' Guitars of WWII before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kalamazoo Gals: A Story of Extraordinary Women Gibson's 'Banner' Guitars of WWII:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Who Knew?By Lauren KExtremely interesting book. Turns out

those "pre-war" banjos and wartime guitars that are so prized were pretty much made by women. During WWII, the work force at Gibson in Kalamazoo, MI became almost entirely female -- the author works with what information there is (turns out Gibson kept very poor records for that period -- almost as if they didn't want the women to get any credit!) to make his case for that conclusion. Makes terrific sense to me, and there's no evidence at all that I can find to contradict it. One note: I am drawing the conclusion about banjos myself --it makes sense to me, and my own interest is in banjos rather than guitars. Mr. Thomas addresses only the famous "banner Gibson" guitars -- those were truly made *during* the war. "Pre-war" banjos generally were made from 38-39 through about '48 -- I've no idea why they are all called "pre-war". One of the things that struck me the most was that the author convinced folks at MI State University to run some tests on the instruments that he could find -- he wanted to find out if there was any basis in reality for a musician's perception that these instruments **really** are different than the instruments made just before and immediately after the war. And, lo and behold, it turns out there is! Frets filed a micro-meter finer, something just a bit thinner, more finely done. Since these instruments were tested by those that were verifiably made by an all-male crew, I found this quite interesting. A good deal of the book is given over to interviews of those women Mr. Thomas could still find to talk with. This makes the women, and what they contributed to the music industry, really come alive. I'm really glad he helped preserve this part of our history, as without a book like this, it would be lost (note above that the Gibson company itself kept very poor records). Before purchasing this book, I read some of the other reviews -- there are some who are critical that Mr. Thomas didn't find more women to interview -- I am not sure how that is his fault though! 50 years after the war, there were only so many left, and only so many who could be located! So he did what he could. There are also some who criticize him for thinking that the Banner Gibsons are/were such a prized instrument -- well that's not something he invented either. Certainly in the banjo world, a banjo made in that era is worth a lot of money -- and I've heard from guitarists that indeed these wartime instruments are quite special. When one of these guitars or banjos can sell for something in the 100's of thousands -- well Mr. Thomas isn't fantasizing. Personally, I would recommend this book. It's an important piece of our history, and the women should be given credit.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful book of guitars and Americana By SETJohn Thomas, law professor, writer and Gibson aficionado's book Kalamazoo Gals, tells the lost (or hidden) history of Gibson's guitar manufacturing during WWII. Through a complex combination of factors this story was lost, forgotten and disavowed. Gibson was pathetically incompetent at coherent record keeping of their guitar production. They were supporting the war effort with their manufacturing capabilities, so may have tried hiding that they were still producing guitars. They seemed ashamed of the fact that these "secret" guitars were made almost entirely by "unskilled" women (or afraid of the market response to that revelation). That shame or fear was unfounded as these guitars, with their unique "banner" logo are considered some of the best acoustic guitars in Gibson's history. That mysterious fact makes this story even more compelling. John Thomas's book undertakes a daunting modern-day socio-archeological "dig" to find this story behind these guitars. It took years to compile and expanded into more than just a story about guitars. Along the way, it tells the story of the "gals" who made these guitars, what put them in the workplace, how they made such good guitars without training or formal "skill". It tells the story about those people. It also paints a picture of our war-time country and small town America. John presents this story as a combination narrative "documentary" and dramatic historical non-fiction. He also sprinkles in a perfect dose of imagined 1940's dialogue and interactions. His writing style is immediately engaging, full of light-hearted sarcasm and heartfelt admiration for the subject. I particularly loved the proposed story of how the conversation went around Gibson's incoherent numbering system. I had expected to read this book casually and light-heartedly, but I couldn't put it down. Last night, I sat at the local fireworks celebration, waiting for dark with kids were playing all around - footballs and Frisbees flying. We were listening to our philharmonic belt out classic American tunes at their outdoor Independence Day concert and I sat in my lawn chair reading Kalamazoo Gals. Nothing could be more American than that. If you are a Gibson guitar fan, or appreciate guitars. If you ever just held an acoustic guitar, heard of The great Depression, ever saw a WWII-era factory smokestack or had a grandmother you should read this book.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Great Research and Writing By Mark Stone I love Gibson and have owned/played a bunch, so my initial draw to your book was that. However, Kalamazoo Gals made me think about the times, also. World War II was staggering in its immensity, both abroad and at home. The "Gals", whom I feel like I know because of your descriptions, are heroes to me along with all Americans that preserved our freedom. My favorite parts of the book ended up being your interactions with the Gals themselves, visits to their homes and the teas. The guitar sections, which drew me in the first place, became secondary (although still interesting - -). I think you've done remarkable work with your research and writing -

An excerpt from Jonathan Kellerman's foreword: "When it comes to music, the human factor is all. Yet so many books on musical instruments obsess on the fine points of construction while neglecting the talented people who began the process: transforming planks and slabs and slivers into masterpieces of sonic beauty. That's understandable; many players and collectors live and breathe trivia. But it's an approach that misses the point. In 'Kalamazoo Gals,' John Thomas has chosen to rise above that, fleshing out the most human of stories without neglecting the techno-stats that

guitar geeks crave. The goal John set for himself was monumental: illuminating the elusive history of a legendary group of WW II-era Gibson guitars known in the vintage trade as 'Banners' because of the decal affixed to their headstocks. Now recognized, nearly three quarters of a century after their manufacture, as among the finest acoustic guitars ever produced, over 9000 Banners were built during a period when, according to 'official' accounts, no Gibson instruments were produced because the company had shifted to churning out war goods. Even more remarkable, much of the work that went into Banners was performed by a group of young Michigan women with no prior training in musical instrument construction! The contributions of Rosie the Riveter and her cohorts to the survival of American manufacturing during the 'Good War,' are well known and beyond profound. But until now the contributions of a band of intrepid, unpretentious, stunningly skillful, thoroughly American women to both the war effort and to the endurance of one of the greatest musical instrument manufacturers ever known, has gone unheralded. Kudos to John Thomas for telling their story."

"[R]ecommended reading for a range of collections, from women's history and music to World War II and American history. ...[A] powerful saga that is packed with historical links and rare glimpses of a guitar maker and a war, and a group of women whose jobs changed lives."Midwest Book /California Bookwatch"John Thomas' personal quest to find the lost Kalamazoo gals is endearingly told inKalamazoo Gals: A story of Extraordinary Women Gibson's 'Banner' Guitars of WWII. This is not just one story but many; finally giving these women their voice, to talk about the guitars they made for a manufacturer that denied they ever existed."Feminist Times"[A]n enchanting story of brittle and eccentric company founder Orville Gibson, these very special guitars and the testimonies of the surviving Kalamazoo Gals." Mojo Magazine"[A] warm and engaging book that reconstructs the lost story of how [the Kalamazoo Gals] built some of the greatest flat-top acoustic guitars ever manufactured - and then, after the war, stepped quietly back into domestic home life. ... Thomas has written a book that communicates on many different levels; as a work of social history, this has a far broader appeal than just guitar lovers."Songlines Magazine"I've always believed that behind every great guitar is a great story. The so-called Banner Era Gibsons made in Kalamazoo around World War II are among the greatest flattop acoustic guitars ever made, and the story behind them--and the women who built them--might be even better. John Thomas has given the guitar world a gift by telling this great, and largely unknown tale." -Allen St. John, author ofClapton's Guitar: Watching Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument.From the Back CoverIt's a haunting image. At least it was for author John Thomas. Some seventy women sit in four rows in front of the Gibson Guitar factory in the mid-1940s. Conventional wisdom and company lore had it that Gibson had ceased guitar production during WWII, with only "seasoned craftsmen" too old for battle doing repairs and completing the few instruments already in progress. What were these women doing there? The image so bedeviled Thomas that he eventually set out to find at least one of the women in the photograph. He found a dozen. Along the way he would discover that despite denial that endured into the 1990s, Gibson employed a nearly all female workforce to build thousands of wartime guitars and marked each with a small, golden "banner" pronouncing that "Only a Gibson is Good Enough." The banner appeared on the guitars at the moment those women entered the factory in January 1942, which fate choreographed to coincide with the precise instant when Glenn Miller's "I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo" reached the pinnacle of the pop charts. The banner disappeared at the end of 1945 when the war ended, the soldiers returned, and most of the Kalamazoo Gals ceded their guitar making jobs back to their male predecessors. On his personal journey, Thomas tracks Orville Gibson from his birth in upstate New York to the founding of his namesake company in Michigan and to his return to his birthplace and death in a mental hospital. He takes us to meet these women in Kalamazoo and to travel with them through the Great Depression and into WWII. He wanders the hallways of the abandoned Gibson factory in search of the ghost of its founder, Orville Gibson, steps into the imaging clinic to seek radiographic evidence of sublime quality of the Gals' craft, and tracks the "Banner" Gibsons from Kalamazoo into the hands of their first owners. Ultimately, he leads us straight into the hearts of the Kalamazoo Gals.About the AuthorI'm a law professor, freelance writer, and guitarist still striving for mediocrity. My articles range in topic from music and musical instruments to politics, health policy, bioethics, and autism. My writings have been published in law reviews, medical journals, music magazines, national newspapers, and the Oxford Dictionary of Music. My X-ray project that demonstrated why the "Banner" Gibsons built by the Kalamazoo Gals are superior to those built by their male predecessors and successors has morphed into an art show that is traveling to museums throughout the US through 2016 with the National Guitar Museum. For information about the art show, visit vintagesteelguitarart.com/. For some of that mediocre guitar playing and to check out some of my other projects, visit johnthomasguitar.com/. For more information about "Kalamazoo Gals" visit kalamazooGals.com/.