

**Abraham Curry, Dr. Anton Tjader, and
American Jazz – The Carson City Connection**
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It seems that no matter how much we learn about the history of Carson City, the Comstock, and the “CC” Mint with its fabled coins, there’s always something new just around the corner. In one of my researches I found just such a new tidbit of information; in this case it is an amazing connection between the worlds of pioneer Carson City, Nevada and a more modern world, which I have grown up with: American jazz music.

At the outset I must give credit to Doris Cerveri’s fine book, *With Curry’s Compliments – The Story of Abraham Curry*. I retrieved most of the background information about Curry presented in this article from Cerveri’s book.



Abraham Curry in the prime of his life in Carson City.

I'll begin with Abraham Van Santvoord Curry, hailed as “the Father of Carson City,” who was born on February 19, 1815 in South Trenton, Oneida County, New York. He was the first son of Campbell and Elvira Skinner Curry. At age 20 he married Mary Ann Cowen (age 18), and eventually moved to Portage, Summit County, Ohio.

In 1854 he followed Horace Greeley’s advice to “Go West Young Man, Go West,” and along with his young son Charles headed to the gold fields of California. After moving around from San Francisco, Downieville, Red Dog, and other California gold field towns Curry wound up in Eagle Valley, Utah Territory. As just about all of us C4OAers know, Curry, the great man of vision, went on to cofound Carson City in 1858. Within a decade, he was instrumental in getting the renowned Carson City Mint established.

Sometime around 1859 or 1860, Curry traveled back east to Ohio and moved the rest of his family to Carson City. Besides their son Charles, Curry and his wife Mary were the parents of five daughters: Mary Etta, Emma, Lucy, Elvira, and Jane (called Jenny). Their fourth child, Lucy, will be one of the focuses of this article.



Lucy Curry Tjader, Cal Tjader’s great grandmother.



Dr. Anton Tjader, Cal Tjader's great grandfather.

Dr. Anton William Tjader was born in St. Petersburg, Russia (German parents) on November 16, 1825. He became a doctor and served as a surgeon with the Russian Imperial Army in the Crimean war of 1853 to 1855. Sometime during the late 1850s he immigrated to America, came out west and settled in Carson City, NV. He became one of Carson City's first doctors, and he served as a volunteer in the 1860 Pyramid Lake Paiute War.

In a lavish 1862 wedding thrown by Abraham Curry, Dr. Tjader married Curry's daughter Lucy Ann Curry. The new Tjader family eventually blessed Curry and his wife Mary with grandchildren: William Curry Tjader and Frederick McGregor Tjader. Frederick, who was born on October 4, 1869, plays a key role in the continuation of this article.

Dr. Tjader suffered an untimely death on July 7, 1870, at the young age of 44 years and 6 months, due to a stroke. It is reported that his stroke may have been caused by lingering problems from an arrow wound he had suffered ten years earlier while fighting in the

Pyramid Lake battle. He is buried in Carson City's Lone Mountain Cemetery, the same resting place as Abraham Curry.

In 1872, widow Lucy Curry Tjader married a good friend of her father's, Frank Davis Hetrich. Hetrich was a Carson City Mint assayer from its first day of operation and eventually replaced Henry F. Rice as the mint's third superintendent, in 1873. Hetrich was born (unknown date) in Easton, Northampton County, Pennsylvania, and became a 2nd Lieutenant in the Union Army's G 9th Penn Volunteer Regiment. After the end of the Civil War he moved west to Carson City, where he found a new career and eventually married Abraham Curry's widowed daughter Lucy.

After serving as mint superintendent for a little more than a year, Frank Hetrich was succeeded by James Crawford in late summer 1874. He moved with Lucy and her two young sons, William and Frederick Tjader, to San Francisco. Frederick grew up there and married Grace R. Gorham. In 1893 they gave birth to their son Callen Radcliff Tjader.

Nineteen years later in 1912, Callen R. Tjader married San Francisco native Victoria Wallace. They were both musically gifted, and teamed with a Swedish duo to form the Berkeley Four. They joined the touring Pantages Vaudeville Company, and on their travels Victoria gave birth to their first son, Callen Radcliff Tjader Jr., in St. Louis, MO on July 16, 1925. Their son was known to everyone as "Cal." Cal Tjader went on to become an accomplished tap dancer, drummer, percussionist, pianist, and a famous vibraphonist. He served in the U.S. Army as a medic (no surprise here—he had it in his genes). In 1946 he attended music school at San Francisco State University, where he met famed pianist Dave Brubeck. As a youngster, he tap-danced in the film *The White of the Dark Cloud of Joy* with Bill "Mr. Bojangles" Robinson, and at 16 he won first place in a Gene Krupa

drum solo contest, performing “Drum Boogie.”

Cal went on to record over 80 albums during his 50-year career. In 1980 he won a coveted Grammy award for his album *La Onda Va Bien*. Much like his great-great grandfather Abraham Curry was in his field of endeavor, Cal was himself a pioneer and visionary in his field. He was among the very first Anglo-Saxons to bridge the music worlds of Jazz and Latin. He worked with the most gifted and famous musicians of his time and is revered by all Jazz aficionados the world over. On May 5, 1982 while on tour in Manilla in the Philippines, Cal Tjader suffered a fatal heart attack at only 56 years of age. He is survived by his family and two brothers and is buried in the Italian Cemetery in Colma, California.

Cal’s great grandmother Lucy Curry Tjader Hetrich died January 7, 1921, and Frank D. Hetrich passed away on May 9, 1913. They are



Cal Tjader, American Jazz legend and great-great grandson of Abraham Curry.

both buried at the San Francisco National Cemetery in the Presidio of San Francisco.

In doing my research for this article I uncovered a vast amount of information that could easily be the makings of an entire book. My goal was to condense the contents of this fascinating connection into as brief a summary as possible. I came across much conflicting data during this research so I tried my best to get all the dates as accurate as possible. Naturally there may be a few minor errors, but I'm confident I got the names right, and I believe the main body of the story is true to the facts.

I reckon Abraham Curry, his daughter Lucy, and her beloved first



Three of the many albums Cal Tjader released during his long career. husband Dr. Anton Tjader would be extremely proud of their progeny, Cal. Imagine a single family tree blessed with not only one but two pioneering luminaries, both living within a 100-year span of each other! What makes it even more meaningful to me is that it links two topics that are most dear to my heart: the Carson City Mint and Jazz.

(Images courtesy of Southgate Coins and Wikipedia)