



THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER FESTIVAL

From the upcoming book
WHEN THE STARS CAME OUT:

The Story of the Mississippi River Festival (1969-1980)

By Mark Pierce

"The Mississippi River Festival." Just mention that phrase to St. Louis area residents of a certain age and you're liable to get some amazing stories. And those stories bring to life a brief moment in time when Edwardsville, Illinois – and the campus of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville – was one of the nation's musical and entertainment meccas. Between June 20, 1969, and August 23, 1980, the Mississippi River Festival (MRF) held a mirror to our changing society, while entertaining more than 1.5 million attendees.

From Janis Joplin to the Wilson sisters of Heart; the Paul Butterfield Blues Band to ZZ Top; Arlo Guthrie to Harry Chapin; Smokey Robinson to Donna Summer (and that's just popular music!), the magic of the MRF lies in its diversity. Fans could enjoy classical, jazz, rock, dance, barbershop,

theater, and bluegrass over the course of a single summer. How many music series could attract Henry Mancini AND Alice Cooper? Bob Hope AND Richard Pryor? The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra AND the Ozark Mountain Daredevils?

In all, more than 350 festival events were held over 12 summers, and a few of those shows stand out above the rest. Bob Dylan came out of seclusion and made a surprise appearance with his pals in the Band in 1969. The Who attracted a crowd of more than 32,000 in 1971. The Eagles

and Chicago each made multiple trips to SIUE, attracting huge crowds every time. The Grateful Dead played under the tent in 1970 and again 10 years later.

Despite that level of star power, financial issues plagued the festival for most of its existence. It was only the hard work and dedication of university administrators, St. Louis Symphony officials, local leaders and a ragtag collection of student workers, and volunteers that kept the festival alive for twelve summers. When the end came, fans were left with only memories.

But those memories are rich and deep, and they still bring smiles 50 years later. (cont. page 4)



An early MRF postcard shows the "big tent" and part of the lawn audience during a symphony concert. (Mike Reinhardt)

MCHS NOMINATES NEW BOOK OF LOCAL HISTORY FOR STATE AWARD

MCHS recently learned about a new book by Morgan Sue Gray on her German and Swiss ancestors that immigrated to the area around Highland, Illinois, in the 1800s. The book is so well done that MCHS has nominated it for an Annual Award from the Illinois State Historical Society.

Geigerbuch: Connecting Germany and Switzerland to Illinois, and Back is a family history that begins with the family of Othmar Geiger and Delores Federer. Their granddaughter has created a genealogical book that works backwards in time towards their ancestors (Federer, Geiger, Lauer, Frisse, Woltering, Gschwend, Schürch, and more) who emigrated from Germany and Switzerland and docu-

ments the road to the "New Helvetia" or "New Switzerland," an early name for Highland, Illinois.

Alongside photos, documents, land records, and memorabilia that illustrate their lives are historical context sections that describe what was happening in the world during their lifetimes. The author did in-depth research in both Europe and the United States. Although some of her ancestors moved here from Switzerland nearly two centuries ago, the author, in a case of reverse immigration, has been living in Geneva, Switzerland, for the past 13 years.

Because this 362-page book is expensive to reproduce, the author has generously made the entire contents available free online to others interested in these families. It can be found at: https://archive.org/details/geigerbuch_msgf/mode/2up?view=theater

Hours

Wed - Fri, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sunday 1-4 p.m.

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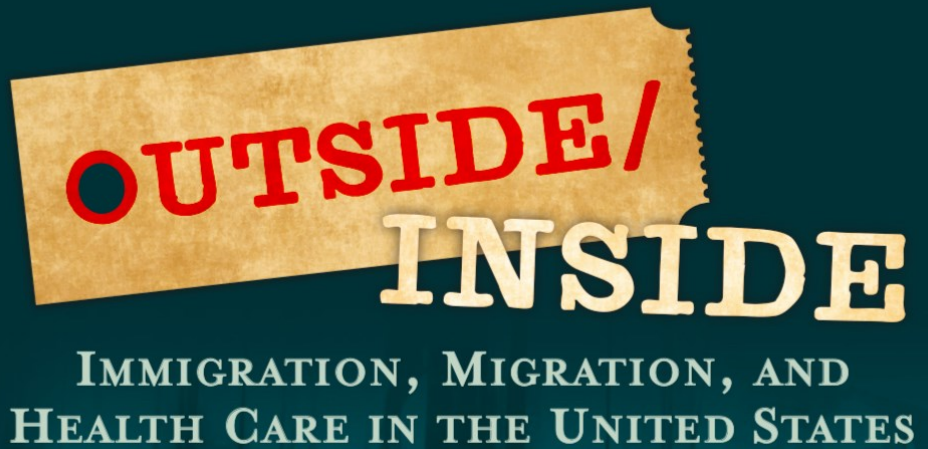
Contact us:

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RECENT NEWS

EXHIBIT COMING TO MCHS MUSEUM

The National Library of Medicine announced in October that MCHS will join 19 university and public libraries as recipients of a NIH/NLM traveling exhibition, *Outside/Inside: Immigration, Migration, and Health Care in the United States*. The exhibit uses a combination of documents and images to explore the history of ideas about immigrant health and the experiences had by immigrants and migrants with the US healthcare system since the late 1800s. Health care played a role in inclusion and exclusion, in “assimilation” and discrimination, in dividing communities and in strengthening them.



Noted historian and educator from Northern Illinois University, Beatrix Hoffman, PhD, guest curated the traveling exhibit produced by the National Institute of Health and the National Library of Medicine. The exhibition will complement the work being done by SIUE and MCHS on a separate grant project about immigration and migration into Madison County. *Outside/Inside: Immigration, Migration, and Health Care in the United States* will run at the Museum and Archival Library complex from May 8 to June 17, 2023. More information on the exhibit and related events will be announced at a later date. The exhibition and a companion website were produced by the National Library of Medicine.

HARVESTING HISTORY

November's Harvesting History event resulted in a number of interesting stories and documents being added to the MCHS collections, including the photograph shown here. The collecting of artifacts was part of an initiative to gather stories and documentary evidence to support the new immigration exhibition for the Madison County History Museum. As part of a grant funded by AHA-NEH, MCHS partnered with SIUE to research and produce a map of immigration into the county.

If you have a story or any items that you would like to contribute, a second Harvesting History event will be held on Saturday, Jan. 21, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Collinsville Memorial Public Library. Look for details in local newspapers or on the MCHS Facebook page. If you can't make the event but have items to share (artifacts will be photographed or scanned), please contact the Archival Library at 618-656-7569.

Pictured at left, is the German passport and handmade passport pouch of Sophie Heinkel. Sophie and her husband, John, were married in Germany in 1916 and emigrated to America, circa 1924, with two children, Hedwig (Hattie) and Christian. By the 1930 census, they owned their own home and John had applied for citizenship. (Beu Stutz)



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MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually
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VOLUNTEERS

There are abundant and varied opportunities for volunteers at either the Museum or the Library. If interested, please call 618-656-7569.

MEMBERSHIPS

Several membership levels are available to those interested in supporting the work of preserving Madison County history through a MCHS membership. Memberships run on the calendar year, Jan 1-Dec 31. Applications are available on our website, or at the Library.

THE Madison County Historical Society is a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

RECENT NEWS

MARK PIERCE AND THE MRF



Mark Pierce

Mark Pierce, guest author for the history article in this issue of the *MCHS News*, will also be the presenter for the April Speaker Series. Pierce has been a journalist and corporate communications leader in the St. Louis area for more than 30 years. A graduate of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Mark's love of music and connections with many who played pivotal roles in the Mississippi River

Festival story served as inspiration to write, "When the Stars Came Out: Stories from the Mississippi River Festival."

The book allowed the artists who played, the fans who cheered and the dedicated folks who made it all possible to tell their stories for the first time in a comprehensive manner. Mark lives in Glen Carbon with his wife, Sara.

For additional information (book is due in March) go to: <https://publishingconceptsllc.com/when-the-stars-came-out/>

MCHS NEWS DELAYED

The November newsletter was delayed by a broken press at the printer's followed by lagging delivery times with the U. S. Post Office. Some received their newsletter more than a month later than other recipients.

Since mid-November, MCHS members should have received both the November edition of the *MCHS News* as well as the *Annual Report* that has a membership renewal form included. If you did not receive one or both of these publications, please call 618-656-1294 and we'll make certain that a copy is forwarded to you.

JANUARY NEWSLETTER SPONSOR STEPHANIE MALENCH

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MCHS CALENDAR

Details are not yet complete for the 2023 Speaker Series Calendar, but MCHS will have a program on Native American history in February and one on the MRF in April. Watch Facebook and local newspapers for details later.

MCHS is now sending out emails with event information. Most will be sent from cindy.reinhardt@madcohistory.org.

Please add this address to your contacts or the message may go to your spam folder. The Society is being very selective regarding emails and will not share our list with other organizations.

"THE TIME HAS COME, THE TIME IS NOW"

...or so said Dr. Suess, but it works here too! Membership in the Historical Society runs from January 1 through December 31 each year, so if you haven't renewed lately, well, then..."The time has come, the time is now!" You can save us a buck (the cost of reminders) by renewing today.

GROUND'S VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Although there are many areas where volunteers are needed for the museum and library, one of them most evident this time of year is someone to assist with snow removal. MCHS has a small parking lot and sidewalks that need to be cleared of snow when weather dictates. If you are able to help, please call 618-656-7569.

In the meanwhile, many thanks to Mike Reinhardt for clearing sidewalks, trimming shrubs, and removing leaves in recent weeks.

PROGRESS WITH PROBATE FILES

All available volunteers are working on the project to digitize the probate records. To date, 32 of approximately 1,300 boxes have been completed in a process expected to take more than two years to complete. If you would like to assist with this project, please call 618-656-7569. No special skills are required and any amount of time is appreciated. Bonus: The work can be very interesting!

SPONSOR A NEWSLETTER

One of the Society's major expenses is printing and postage expenses for the *MCHS News*. To cover most of this expense, the Society looks for a \$500 sponsor for each issue (6 annually). MCHS is very grateful to Stephanie Malench who has sponsored the January newsletter for two years in a row. Thank you!

Sponsors can use this space to promote a business, congratulate a family member on a special occasion, or create a tribute to a special person. The \$500 donation is roughly the cost of each eight-page newsletter.

2023 newsletters will include issues on unusual Madison County homes, the coal mining industry, horseradish farming and more. Call 618-656-1294 if you are interested in becoming a sponsor.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MRF (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

The fledgling Southern Illinois University (SIU) campus in Edwardsville was opened in 1965 as an extension of the university's hub in Carbondale. Residence centers in Alton and East St. Louis had been functioning well since 1957, but growing enrollment was now exceeding available space. Wishing to establish a stronger presence in the St. Louis metropolitan area, SIU President Delyte Morris drove the purchase of 2,660 acres of prime Illinois land and the creation of SIUE.

The new Edwardsville campus enjoyed accessibility via nearby highways to downtown St. Louis, as well as the booming population centers of Madison and St. Clair Counties in Illinois. Morris had a shiny new toy. Now, he needed a way to entice St. Louisans to come over and check it out.

The other half of the MRF creation narrative is the St. Louis Symphony Organization (SLSO). Founded in 1880, the symphony is one of the oldest in the U.S., delighting classical music fans for decades through acclaimed live concerts and award-winning recordings. But by 1968, the SLSO was facing a deficit for the upcoming season, if it happened at all – the Symphony Society and Local 2 of the American Federation of Musicians were locked in a labor stalemate. Following a four-week strike, a deal was done, and it included a forty-four-week season beginning in 1969. The union had been successful in adding six weeks to the SLSO season through a summer music festival on the SIUE campus.

Friday and Saturday evenings at the SIUE series would be reserved for symphony concerts, while lighter “pops” concerts featuring the SLSO were targeted for Sunday evenings. But folk and pop artists were being slotted in for weeknight shows. The symphony would be sharing the bill with performers in other genres. No one could yet imagine the legendary artists who would make the trip to Edwardsville over the next decade.

Now, where to hold these concerts? There were plenty of spaces on campus to choose from, but officials were dazzled by a tree-adorned natural amphitheater that sat empty near Bluff Road on the university's northwestern edge. A large white tent would cover nearly 1,900 canvas director's chairs, with thousands of fans enjoying an unobstructed view from the sloping lawn area beyond the tent. Under the tent, the stage would be approximately sixty feet wide – large enough for a ninety-piece orchestra and a 100-voice chorus – with a specially designed acoustic shell located behind.

By March 1969, festival officials were ready to give this exciting new endeavor a name – the Mississippi River Festival. The moniker aligned with the stated goal to bridge



Mississippi River Festival
Edwardsville, Illinois
**Where the Stars Shine
All Summer Long**

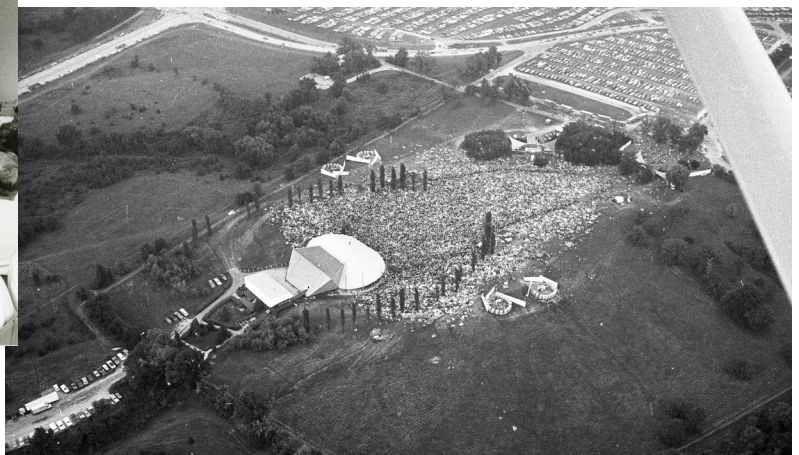
the Illinois and Missouri sides of the community. The accompanying logo was a simple but memorable one, featuring the MRF name, two wavy lines to represent the nearby river and a round dot for the moon. The logo would remain unchanged for the duration of the festival's existence.

Now, it was time to begin selling tickets, and a group of local citizens and volunteer groups took the lead. As this was 1969 – with the spirit of peace, love and brotherhood wafting through the air – tickets for all concerts were kept low, ranging from \$1 to \$5.50. “It was really a period of optimism and idealism,” says SIUE administrator and festival official Lyle Ward. “It had very little to do with any concept of making money. Our prices were unheard of anywhere.”

On opening night of the Mississippi River Festival – June 20, 1969 – Walter Susskind and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra kicked off the show, appropriately enough, with “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and went into Purcell’s “Trumpet Voluntary.” With assistance from the Cosmopolitan Singers and a quartet of soloists, the SLSO filled the early-summer air with Beethoven’s “Ninth Symphony” and Schubert’s “Eighth (Unfinished) Symphony.” A crowd of 1,545 was present for the MRF’s historic opening night.



A view inside the tent taken by Intelligencer reporter Dick Norrish (MCHS) and an aerial view showing the layout for the concerts. A large crowd can be seen on the lawn. (Pierce)



JANIS JOPLIN AT THE MRF

As the calendar turned to July 1969, the world anxiously awaited the launch of Apollo 11 and the prospects of man walking on the moon. On a local level, the MRF took a giant leap of its own on July 1 when a raspy-voiced, whiskey-drinking singer from Port Arthur, Texas, came to Edwardsville.



Joplin at the MRF (Rick Pass)

Wearing reddish-purple slacks and a light pink blouse, Janis Joplin lit up the stage with her energy and sheer force of will. The large crowd was blown away. After finishing her set and leaving the stage, Joplin was brought back out by a long, loud standing ovation. She smiled and shouted, "OK, but you better keep standing," before launching into a raucous rendition of "Piece of My Heart" that had fans dancing in the aisles.

Joplin at the MRF (Rick Pass) In his role with SIUE Broadcast Services, Tom Webb had the opportunity to interview Joplin that evening. But ... "She was just blotto," he reflects. "She had a funny little cigarette in one hand and about a half a bottle of Southern Comfort in the other. If you would have asked, 'What day is it and where are you,' she wouldn't have known."

Six weeks after her SIUE performance, Janis Joplin would perform at the legendary Woodstock Music and Art Fair in Bethel, New York. But she wouldn't be the only 1969 MRF performer to do so. In fact, six artists – Joplin, Arlo Guthrie, Joan Baez, Richie Havens, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and the Band – performed on the SIUE campus in the weeks before they headed east to Woodstock.

UNSCHEDULED SURPRISE

Speaking of the Band, more than 4,000 fans came to SIUE on July 14 to see the group perform, not knowing that a legend was waiting in the wings. Bob Dylan had performed in public only once over the preceding three years after a motorcycle accident. But he was planning a comeback, having asked the Band to accompany him to England for the upcoming Isle of Wight Festival. At the MRF, a surprise rehearsal was planned.

Most university and festival officials were not tipped off – but one was. “When they arrived at the Holiday Inn, the Band’s manager called (SIUE University Center Director) Bob Handy and asked him to come to the hotel and meet with them,” Ward says. “He went over, and they explained what they were going to do. Bob met Bob Dylan and the members of the Band. One of them said, ‘Got a surprise for you. Bob’s doing the encore if conditions are right for him.’”

The evening began, the Band took the stage, and virtually no one in the audience had a clue of what lie ahead – although one fan may have caught a brief glimpse on the lawn. “My brother, Steve, and his friend were walking around,” remembers Mike Reinhardt. “They came back to where we were, and Steve said, ‘You know, that guy standing up there on the hillside looks like Bob Dylan.’ His friend replied, ‘What the hell would Bob Dylan be doing in Edwardsville, Illinois?!’”

After their set was finished, the Band came back out for an encore – with their friend tagging along. “I wasn’t in the immediate area of the stage,” Webb remembers. “Everybody started screaming and yelling, going nuts. I thought, ‘Jeez, something’s wrong down there.’ So, I went down to the audio booth, and I

MISSISSIPPI RIVER FESTIVAL PROGRAM FOR 1975															
(All events at Festival site unless otherwise indicated.)															
Price Scale				Price Scale				Price Scale				Price Scale			
1	June 30	Films - The Magnificent Orson Wells - "A Touch of Evil" and "The Third Man," 7:30 pm, Meridian Hall, University Center.	2	July 17	Chamber Music Series - (Beethoven), 8:30 pm, Religious Center.	2	July 31	Chamber Music Series - (Mozart, Bartok, Brahms), Religious Center, 8:30 pm.	3	Aug. 11	Harry Chapin, 8:30 pm.	3	Aug. 11	Harry Chapin, 8:30 pm.	
4	July 1	Stephen Stills, 8:30 pm.	6	July 18	A Nostalgic Night of Glenn Miller Music - starring Ray McKinley, Ray Elmer, Paula Kelly and the Modernaires, 8:30 pm.	3	Aug. 2	Blue Grass Jubilee - Nititty Gritty Dirt Band, John Hartford, guest artist, 8:30 pm.	5	Aug. 14	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, (Music from the Ballet by Tchaikovsky, Bernstein, Ravel), 8:30 pm.	5	Aug. 14	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, (Music from the Ballet by Tchaikovsky, Bernstein, Ravel), 8:30 pm.	
1	July 2	Films - "Red River" and "The Last Picture Show," 7:30 pm, Meridian Hall.	3	July 19	The Crusaders with Michal Urbanik's Fusion, 8:30 pm.	1	Aug. 4	Blue Grass Jubilee - Nititty Gritty Dirt Band, John Hartford, guest artist, 8:30 pm.	4	Aug. 15	PERFORMANCE TO BE ANNOUNCED.	4	Aug. 15	PERFORMANCE TO BE ANNOUNCED.	
4	July 3	James Taylor - Phoebe Snow, special guest artist, 8:30 pm.	1	July 21	Film - "Antonia: Portrait of the Woman," 9:00 pm, Lecture by Antonia Brice at 7:30 pm.	1	Aug. 4	Film - "Loves of a Blonde," Communications Theater, 7:30 & 9:30 pm.	5	Aug. 16	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, (All Bizet Program with excerpts from Opera, "Carmen"), 8:30 pm.	5	Aug. 16	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, (All Bizet Program with excerpts from Opera, "Carmen"), 8:30 pm.	
1	July 7	Film - "Some Like It Hot," 9:00 pm.	3	July 22	Judy Collins, 8:30 pm.	1	Aug. 5	Film - "Closely Watched Trains," Communications Theater, 7:30 & 9:30 pm.	5	Aug. 16	Regional Arts & Crafts Fair.	5	Aug. 16	Regional Arts & Crafts Fair.	
4	July 8	Blood, Sweat & Tears, 8:30 pm.	4	July 23	Dave Mason - Poco, special guest artist, 8:30 pm.	7	Aug. 5	Roberta Flack, 8:30 pm.	6	Aug. 17	Peter Nero, pianist and conducting the St. Louis Symphony, 7:30 pm.	6	Aug. 17	Peter Nero, pianist and conducting the St. Louis Symphony, 7:30 pm.	
4	July 9	YES, 8:30 pm.	2	July 24	Chamber Music Series - (Bach, Chopin & Schubert), 8:30 pm, Religious Center.	1	Aug. 6	Film - "Capricious Summer," Communications Theater, 7:30 & 9:30 pm.	7	Aug. 18	Mac Davis, 8:30 pm.	7	Aug. 18	Mac Davis, 8:30 pm.	
5	July 10	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, Miriam Fried, Violin (All Beethoven Program), 8:30 pm.	8	July 25	Bob Hope, 8:30 pm. Only Lawn Seating Available	3	Aug. 6	Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger, 8:30 pm.	7	Aug. 19	Jefferson Starship, 8:30 pm.	7	Aug. 19	Jefferson Starship, 8:30 pm.	
5	July 12	St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor and Pianist, Gerhard Zimmermann, Conductor (Weber, Mozart, Strauss), 8:30 pm.	5	July 26	Night of Barbershop Harmony - starring The Chordbusters Chorus, The Dealer's Choice Quartet, The O.K. 4 Quartet and The Bron's Tones Quartet, 8:30 pm.	2	Aug. 7	Chamber Music Series - (Villa Lobos, Mozart, Stravinsky), 8:30 pm, Religious Center.	7	Aug. 20	The Osmonds, with special guests, Munch, 8:30 pm.	7	Aug. 20	The Osmonds, with special guests, Munch, 8:30 pm.	
6	July 13	Henry Mancini conducting the St. Louis Symphony, 7:30 pm.	1	July 27	Film - WWII Revisited - "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "Paths of Glory," Communications Theater, 7:30 pm.	6	Aug. 8	Erick Hawkins Dance Company, 8:30 pm.							
1	July 14	Film - "Intolerance," 9:00 pm.	1	July 28	Film - "The Adventures of Robin Hood," 9:00 pm.	6	Aug. 9	Erick Hawkins Dance Company, 8:30 pm.							
3	July 15	Muddy Waters, with special artist, James Cotton Band, 8:30 pm.	4	July 29	The Eagles, 8:30 pm.	4	Aug. 10	America, 8:30 pm.							
4	July 16	Gordon Lightfoot, 8:30 pm.	3	July 30	Linda Ronstadt, 8:30 pm.	1	Aug. 10	Films - Classics of Suspense from the Master: Alfred Hitchcock - "Strangers on a Train" and "Saboteur," 7:30 pm, Communications Theater.							
Lawn Seating for children under 12 is \$1.50. Children under 5, free.															

The 1975 pocket guide to the MRF folded to business card size but included all the dates as well as the pricing schedule. Image is actual size. (Mike Reinhardt)

said, 'What's going on?' And they said, 'It's Bob Dylan!' I went, 'Oh, really?!' Dylan did a little set and walked off stage. I hustled backstage thinking maybe I could catch him, but he was gone in a hurry."

CONCERT MEMORIES

EMERSON LAKE AND PALMER

MRF student workers such as John Klobnak occasionally enjoyed close access to the performers, leading to some lifelong memories. A 1972 visit by progressive rock supergroup Emerson, Lake & Palmer attracted a crowd topping 25,000. Hoping to make a quick escape after the show, the band was stymied – until Klobnak came along.

"I was working in the back of the tent, and they come back and see like 300 to 400 girls around their limo," he remembers. "So, we got six or eight guys and formed a diamond around them. We pushed our way through these girls, and they're grabbing at the band and trying to pull their clothes off. We get to the limo, and the keys are locked inside. Now we're stuck with a mob around us.

"I yell back, 'Get me a coat hanger!' Keith Emerson says, 'Uhhh, what do you want a coat hanger for?' I say, 'Watch this, man.' I put it into a loop, reach it down there and pop it open. He looks at me and says, 'That was bloody amazing!' That's how they escaped. I've still got the scars to prove that one, too. Those girls were vicious."

THE BEACH BOYS

Also that summer, Klobnak had a better-than-front-row seat to witness the Beach Boys. "My job was to sit under the piano, and when girls jumped on stage, I was supposed to grab them and

Cont. on page 7



Mike Love of the Beach Boys at the Mississippi River Festival. (Mark Pierce)

LARGEST CROWD

How did one of the most influential and popular bands in rock history – the Who – find themselves in lil' old Edwardsville, Illinois, on Monday night, August 16, 1971? First off, let's be clear - this was no concert. This was an *Event*, with a capital "E." And the buzz across the entire St. Louis area was far beyond anything seen for a prior MRF event – or even a rock concert of any kind. MRF officials expected a large crowd, even one surpassing Chicago's season one attendance of 15,915. In preparation, the team of student workers was bolstered in number. Loudspeakers were added to better reach the furthest points of the lawn and beyond. Additional refreshment stands were brought in.

As the St. Louis Symphony played a pops concert twenty-four hours before the Who would take the stage, fans were already waiting on blankets to be among the first to get tickets when the box office opened the next day. What Ward witnessed at 8 a.m. Monday morning was alarming – parking lots were full, and thousands of fans were swarming the MRF grounds. Now, anyone affiliated with the festival, the university or the symphony was on high alert.

The box office opened at noon, and the 12,000 yellow tickets printed for the concert were gone in the blink of an eye. Unused tickets from previous shows were soon being sold. At 5 p.m., the MRF team gathered to assess the situation. With 20,000 rowdy fans holding tickets and waiting for the gates to open – and thousands more in line to purchase tickets – officials knew they already had more people coming in than could comfortably fit into the venue. The decision was made to open the gates immediately to start letting people in. Appeals were also made to local radio stations to ask those who had not yet made their way to SIUE to stay home. That accomplished little, as most folks wanting to see the Who were already on site or stuck in nasty traffic jams on the roads leading to Edwardsville. Interstate 270 was backed up from Route 157 to Route 3 – about five miles.

Throughout the site, fans were amped as showtime approached.

One of them was Steve Porter, a journalism student about to begin his junior year who was sitting in the fifth row.

"It was closer than being on TV," he says. "I could hear the band members talking. If there was a break, I'd yell a song for them to play and they could hear me."



The Who at the MRF (Mark Pierce)

Somehow, someway, the festival team pulled it off. When the Who stormed the stage, an official tally of 31,756 fans was packed in every crevice of the site. That attendance record would never be broken. "It was so jam packed under the tent that people had to stand on their chairs," Porter says. "I was standing on a chair to see because you were elbow to elbow. And these weren't chairs made for people to stand on. At the end, you were worried that people were going to rush the stage."

The final song was "Magic Bus," and of course, Townshend smashed his guitar to pieces before leaving the stage.

"One fan went flying across the stage, diving for pieces of the guitar," Mike Reinhardt recalls. "Security dragged him off. It was wild. Best concert I ever saw."

The Who may have played their last number, but for exhausted festival and university staff, the long day wasn't over. There was still the matter of getting more than 32,000 people off campus safely, a task that took until 3 a.m. But from a safety and behavioral standpoint, relatively speaking, the show was uneventful.

"The fact that there were 30,000 people there, the incidents were very, very small," tent usher Greg Drexelius says.

MORE CONCERT MEMORIES

get them off stage,” he recalls. “I think I caught three girls. But that was a real experience being on stage with the Beach Boys.”

In addition, Klobnak had a pre-show interaction with Beach Boys singer Mike Love that seems a bit backward – college student loans rock star money. “We were standing around backstage, and he asks me for a quarter. He says, ‘I’ll pay you when I get off.’ I go, ‘Sure,’ and give him a quarter.” Klobnak laughs. “Still waiting for that quarter! Fifty years!”

And what did Mike Love spend the twenty-five cents on? “He bought a Diet 7-Up from a vending machine. If you see him, tell him he stills owes me a quarter.”

THE EAGLES

The Eagles ruled the airwaves when they played SIUE in 1975. And if not for the Who, the 29,941 fans who attended their July 29 show would be the festival record. Lyle Ward remembers the band members being ecstatic as they left the stage following the concert.

“The Eagles were a special group. That night, the fans would not stop demanding encores, and the band kept responding over and over again. Finally, the show ended, and they were so emotionally high about the experience – the crowd, the tent, the open air, all of it. They said it was the biggest crowd they’d ever played to. I’m waiting on the walkway right below the stage, and they’re whooping and hollering. Don Henley comes up and grabs me and gives me a kiss on the head! He said, ‘This is so awesome! We’ve gotta come back!’ I was kind of in shock, I think.”



Lawn seating at the MRF. Photographer Dick Norrish. (MCHS)

CHARLIE DANIELS

Unlike a concert in St. Louis – where the headliner emerged from a dark, shadowy backstage area, played for ninety minutes and disappeared – the Mississippi River Festival allowed for interaction between stars and their fans. It really wasn’t that difficult, as there were plenty of entertainers who fell in love with the MRF’s small-town collegiate vibe and embraced it with gusto.

A frequent lawn dweller during the late ‘70s was Buddy Fendler, a student at St. Louis’ Parkway West High School. Fendler’s Southern rock fanhood led him to a brush with celebrity in 1979 when the Charlie Daniels Band played the

MRF. While awaiting the band’s set, Fendler encountered a friend who said she could get him backstage. “We we’re like, ‘Yeah, sure! Why not? What else are we gonna do?’ So, I get back there, and good old Charlie Daniels is grilling barbecued pork steaks and drinking a Heineken. He says, ‘Son, have a beer and talk to me.’ They had a barrel of Heinekens sitting in ice, and we sat there and talked a little bit. Finally, he said, ‘Well guys, I gotta go get ready,’ and off he went.”

SOUTHERN ROCKERS FOR EVERYONE

A festival visit from Southern rockers such as Charlie Daniels, the Marshall Tucker Band, the Allman Brothers or the Outlaws was sure to draw a big crowd. And it was a certainty that Michael Hammonds and his group of Edwardsville High School friends would be sitting on the lawn, right of the stage, in an area locals referred to as the “Edwardsville Side.”

“My uncles used to listen to blues and that kind of stuff, but I never did go to any concerts,” Hammonds recalls. “Then, around my sophomore year in high school, we’d go to parties, and they would play Marshall Tucker and bands like that. It was great music. All of a sudden, they started showing up at the MRF, so we would all go for \$3 to sit on the lawn.”

As a young Black man, Hammonds estimates he was outnumbered “about 2,000 to one” at the Southern rock shows. “There were a couple other Black guys who would go to the rock concerts, but we were in the minority,” he says. “But I would go with my group of friends, and I knew they would protect me with their lives. Nobody would say anything nine times out of ten. Every now and then, somebody would say, ‘Man, what are you doing here? Why are you here?’ But my memories are good. It didn’t stop me from going.”

JACKSON BROWNE AND THE HOLIDAY INN

It may not have been a five-star hotel with all the bells and whistles the nation’s top entertainers were accustomed to, but if you were playing the MRF, more often than not, your home in Edwardsville would be the Holiday Inn. Located at 3080 State Route 157, high on a bluff overlooking the American Bottom, the Holiday Inn looms large in the festival’s history for many reasons. But none is more notable than the August 17-18, 1977, stay of Jackson Browne.

Following his August 17 MRF show, Browne and crew decided the Holiday Inn would be the perfect place to record a couple of songs for the new album. Backed by Lindley and the ace session musicians from the Section, Browne settled into room 124 and recorded the songs “Cocaine” and “Shaky Town” before leaving town the next day.

Rance Caldwell, an audio engineer for touring services provider Showco, was on the road with Browne that summer and worked the Holiday Inn recording



Toy Caldwell of the Marshall Tucker Band at the MRF (Pierce)

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session. "We set up a couple of adjoining rooms – mine being one – with recording equipment in one room and a tracking space in the other," Caldwell said. "We took the beds and turned them up against the wall and put the drum kit in there and a couple of guitars for Jackson. We ran all the wires and cables and everything back into my room, where it was tracked and recorded. Whenever they were in the room noodling around, it was my job to make sure all that stuff was captured on tape."

Released in December 1977, *Running on Empty* would reach No. 3 on the album chart and receive a Grammy nomination for Album of the Year.

END OF AN ERA

Did anyone in attendance on August 23, 1980, know that this would be the final event in the twelve-year history of the Mississippi River Festival? Maybe a few university officials had an inkling of what was to come. But there was no way for fans to know for sure that ZZ Top would be the last band to play the MRF.

After turning over management of the festival to theater promoter Nederlander prior to the 1978 season, the MRF's nine-year commitment to low ticket prices and diverse entertainment had given way to higher costs and a singular focus on pop and rock headliners. In addition, Nederlander's promise to construct a permanent concert site on campus had gone nowhere. Now, the university and the promoter were barely communicating.

When the final show ended, it was time to wait and see. Would SIUE officials pull the plug on the MRF? Or would they find a way to improve the situation with Nederlander and keep the festival alive in 1981 and beyond?

The answer came in a joint announcement from SIUE and Nederlander on May 22, 1981: The 1981 Mississippi River Festival season had been cancelled.

And that was it. No updates from SIUE or Nederlander were forthcoming. No press conferences announcing construction projects. The festival just disappeared. Instead

of seeing construction vehicles and hearing hammering at the MRF site, students and locals noticed that weeds were growing higher and higher, beginning to overtake the area. The 12-year journey of the Mississippi River Festival had reached its end.

MEMORIES ARE BEST

To commemorate the MRF's fortieth anniversary in 2009, a university committee paid \$1,000 for an Illinois State Historical Society marker to be erected near the concert site. The 44 x 51 inch cast-aluminum plaque now resides off North University Drive near the festival's parking area.

Over the years, smaller events and concert series have popped up from time to time in the Edwardsville area using the "Mississippi River Festival" name, and a few brief attempts have been made to resurrect the inspiration of the original festival and start it up again. But it always becomes clear that nothing will ever replicate the original.

"When I come back to Edwardsville, if I'm anywhere near the site, the memories flood back," says John S. Rendleman. "If I'm with friends who remember the MRF during its golden years, we can share stories. Those were the glory days. We were kids with no great responsibilities. We could just enjoy ourselves, and we sure did. It wasn't just the summer home for the St. Louis Symphony. It became the summer home for everybody in Edwardsville."

Drexelius adds, "I think we just need to remember it for what it was, which was a unique experience, and let it be. It was perfect as it was."



Sunset at the Mississippi River Festival. Photograph by Dick Norrish. (MCHS)