

Features, etc.

The 4th AOTFC At U.G. by Gavin

The 47th Annual Old Time Fiddler's Convention at Union Grove



100,000 people who came and went over the Easter weekend. Friday night we formed the 10th largest city in the state. Saturday we peaked 65,000... a lot of people, too many to begin to squeeze into the two acre tent set up for the shows. But many didn't really want to see the shows, music was everywhere, along with the people, tents, cars, smoke, cold.

One truck driver from the mountains expressed: "I don't believe they came for the music, you don't see any of them up at the tent for the contest. Of course, we're so drunk we can't get up there either."

A lot of beer. Some busts were for dope-either four or ten (depending on whose statistics). Two overdoses. Most arrests were made for driving under the influence.



A mile or two down the road was the Old Time Fiddler's and Blue Grass Festival at Fiddler's Grove. This alternate contest was started feeling that the old one was too commercial. It was calmer, less hectic, definitely less commercialized. Only 2,000 went... mostly blue grass purists. This convention was started in 1970 by the younger brothers of the OFTC manager. Union Grove Fest was originally started by their father H.P. Van Hoy as a fund-raising for the local school in 1924.



The majority of the people were freaks. A lot weren't. People got along quite well-except, as usual, for hassling by the touring motorcycle gangs. Few, if any, fights existed.

"As long as a fellow treats me right, I don't give a damn how he wears his hair." Tommy Jarrell, 70, Mt. Airy.



Many hand-made goods were sold by individuals as well as craft stores, etc. Junk food was supplied by the local food dealers. Organic food was around for those who cared to look, dig, pick...

Trash was kept at a minimum for the festival, though the land was definitely left scared. The managers fooled the people and showed up with trash-collecting tractors.

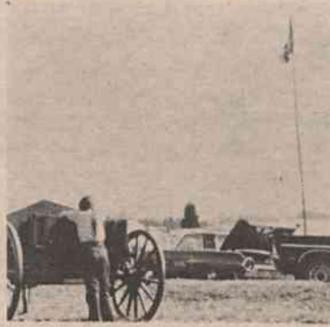


Many outside activities occurred. Anyone wondering about the plane buzzing over constantly-some ingenious private pilot made a fortune flying over tourists at \$5 a head.

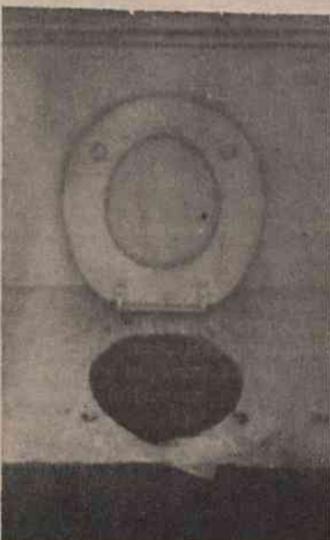
The coyotes were beautiful. Picture a four mile valley filled with the sound of 10,000 voices in a chorus of howls. What a sense of unity. Or 10,000 voices when a minor forest fire broke out.

The 1971 World Champion Fiddler was dubbed early Easter morning, Clark Kissinger, 74, of Charleston, W. Va. He's been practicing since 1902.

A.O. Wood and the Smoky Ridge Boys won 1st place best band. There were many other titles given.



The people were colder than at most festivals. The shows were great, weather nice. Surely most people had a good time.



"The Public Messiah"

Continued From Page 2

only way a man stands on his own two feet. I had a friend once; his name was Teddy Gordo. He was an Irish Jamaican German. A Jewish Buddha. He used to FLOAT around this city. No shoes. They say you must wear shoes. You must do this, you must do that. You push the Americans; that doesn't matter. You push the Blacks and that doesn't matter. But the day you push the gypies, you'll blow yourself up. They're going nowhere.

Now Dardin is a lunatic. Dardin is so mad that they won't have me in the mental hospital. I drive everybody sane.

You don't see me getting up at seven o'clock to go to work!

Now every time I pray to God I find that I am talking to myself. Let me tell you the difference between sanity and madness. If you walk around Winston talking to yourself, they'll certify you. (To be certified is to be committed to a mental hospital for an indefinite period of time.) But you can talk to your wife all day, and if she's not listening, you're normal.

Were you really in the madhouse? asked a man coming up to him after the meeting.

Yes, says Dardin. And I left my false teeth at 271 Free Street. It's been pulled down now...turned into a parking lot. Pay your fare.

He left with no more good-byes than a cat.

Dardin did not come into the park for two weeks. Clapp said he was in Forsyth Hospital with T.B.. He wasn't. Freddie Klein said that he was back in the madhouse... somebody had said so, but twenty-eight days went by. Perhaps he's been certified, said Lomas; he has been once, and then Jenny got him out. He hadn't been certified.

Four weeks passed. Rudolph Dillon, who keeps the newstand at the corner of Waughtown and Chappel, said he was dead.

After five weeks speeches began to be prefaced with memories of Dardin: how he was bred as the successor to Bones Thompson, the great speaker of the thirties, and how he had died unwanted, undernourished, and drugged up right in the park, in full view of the crowds he had earlier swayed with his wit.

Six weeks passed. The rumors were authenticated by more people. The man who ran Jason's said that he had died of drugs in the park, and that he knew someone who had been to the funeral in Kernersville.

Seven weeks passed. Clapp had been accusing Lomas of being responsible. Lomas just shrugged and said that if you sell yourself as a bundle of festive lunacy to the crowds week after week, you're bound to get infected sooner or later.

Dardin, said Lomas, had a drab obsession that he was a genius, and that his body was too small to carry it, so he had to set about destroying it. There is no room in Dardin for Dardin, all that drek. And anyway, he had to die young.

Young? said Clapp.

Well, to me he's young, said Lomas. He had to die young to please the public. The trouble is that he hasn't left much of his genius behind him for them to play around with.

There are the two articles in FACT, said Freddie Klein.

Yes, said Clapp.

The rumors changed. Dardin was thought to be in State Prison. The dull epitaphs wound up. Clapp went to find him.

Who do you want? asked the prison sentry.

I'm a friend of Bobby Dardin's. I was told by...

Who by?

A man called...

We can't disclose any information; I'm sorry. Wait here. The sentry closed the green door in the corner of the gates.

Come in. Now, you say you are a friend of this Dardin, well, how are we to know? If you were a wife or something like that, we might be able to do something. You see, if you can prove that he told you, by a letter, that he was here, then we'd be able to tell you whether he was or not.

He's only allowed one letter a week, said Clapp, and I expect he sends that to Jenny - that's the woman who's looked after him sometimes...

Can't help you then, said the sentry, showing Clapp out. You see that's the last right we give the prisoners...privacy.

Well, have you got a match? asked Clapp, flicking an unlit cigarette that hung from his lips.

No, said the sentry. I don't smoke.

You must have been tempted.

Clapp wrote to Dardin, in care of the prison. A letter came back.

In replying to this letter, please write on the envelope?

Number 11773, Name: Dardin, R.F., North Carolina State Prison, Laurel Road, Raleigh, North Carolina 28714.

2 February 1971

My dear Friend,

Thank you for your letter. I know that you can't read very fast, so I'm not going to write this letter very quickly. I am in my winter quarters, the Irish Riviera. I was arrested. It was a frame up. I was stoned on purple hearts and wandering around tapping on store windows with a twig. The said it was loitering with intent. The intent was all theirs. I was found guilty and got three months.

But don't worry, it's not too bad inside. At least we have central heating, three meals a day, and good warm bed.

I am working in the mattress factory; three men from Kernersville are doing time here, so I'm not alone.

This hotel is packed for the winter season. My two cell mates are the best a man could hope to meet in a day's walk.

I share the john with Mervin Sam, an ex-Cockney who has been on the road most of his life. He has a gypsy daughter. One of the Jones'.

Yours, Bobby
P.S. I come out on February the 8th. Meet me. 7 o'clock, am.

Seven o'clock, February the eighth. The gates opened and a few prisoners walked out. The light was jaundiced, the wind cold. The gate half-closed again and then reopened. Dardin stepped out, shaking hands with the sentry.

Bye-bye, love. The gates closed. He wiped the hand he had just shaken the sentry's hand with down the side of his trousers.

Hello Clapp, you filthy goat!

I heard Dardin speaking in the park today, said Lomas. Usual stuff: Every lavatory cleaner in America is a frustrated journalist, insults to the women, and...

Did he mention the prison? said Clapp.

No, said Lomas. No, he didn't tell them where he'd been. Kept it back. It must have been a strain; he always makes anything like that part of his equipment.

There's a species of a large worm, Lomas went on, which begins to eat its tail, if it's coiled itself up carelessly and the tail happens to be in front of its mouth. That is the ultimate egocentricity. Dardin has a long way to go.

I don't know about that, said Clapp.