



# MORE GROOVY

## THE SOUND STORM FESTIVAL

# THAN WOODSTOCK OF APRIL 1970

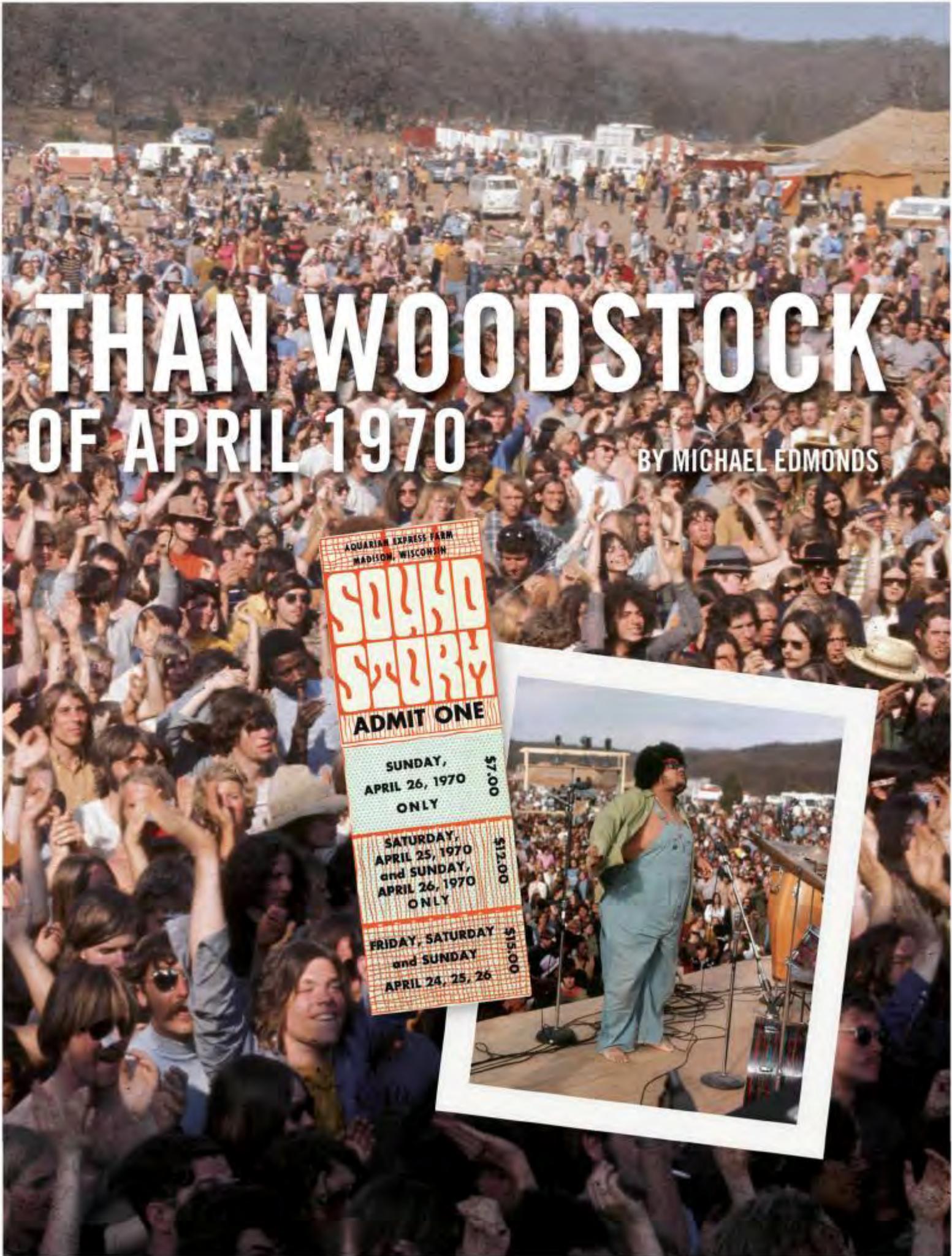
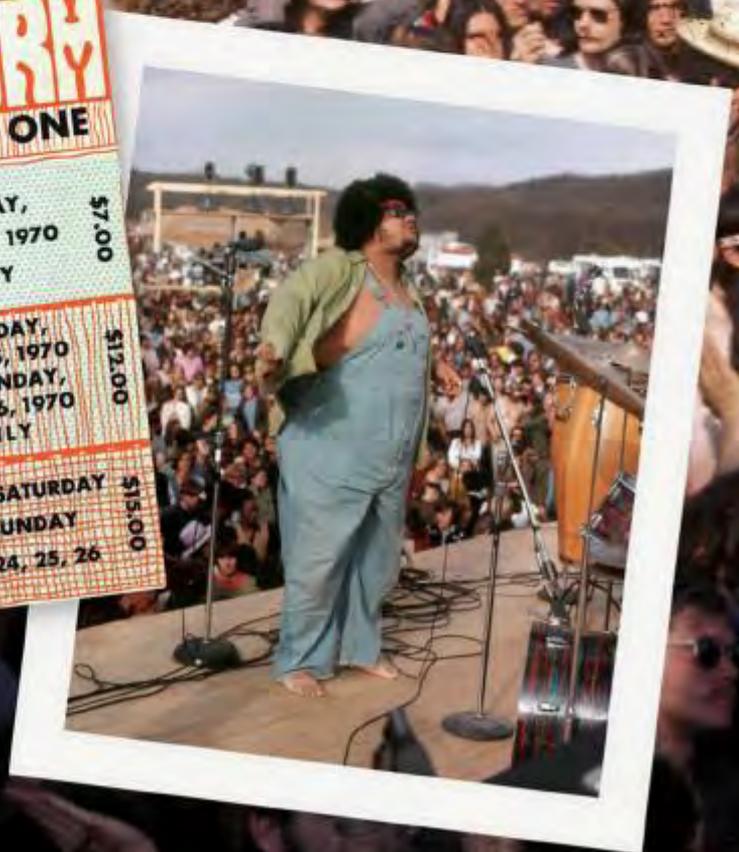
BY MICHAEL EDMONDS

AQUARIAN EXPRESS FARM  
MADISON, WISCONSIN

**SOUND  
SUNDRY**

**ADMIT ONE**

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 1970 ONLY	\$7.00
SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 1970 and SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 1970 ONLY	\$12.00
FRIDAY, SATURDAY and SUNDAY APRIL 24, 25, 26	\$15.00





The Golden Freak, Pete Obranovich, on horseback at the Sound Storm grounds

Pete Obranovich worried he might be the only guy to ever stage a rock festival to which nobody came.

It was the morning of Friday, April 24, 1970, and for five months he'd been straining friendships and making enemies to create Sound Storm, Wisconsin's first outdoor rock festival. Opening day had finally arrived, but as he peered down the empty road outside Poynette, Wisconsin, all Pete could hear was gentle spring breezes.<sup>1</sup>

He didn't need to worry. For the next three days, pulsating electric guitars, ubiquitous LSD, perfect weather, and clouds of marijuana smoke would help thirty thousand young people invent a separate reality outside Poynette. Nearby, disgusted residents feared for their children and vowed never to let it happen again. To this day, participants debate what actually happened there forty years ago. They generally agree, though, that Sound Storm marked the height of hippiedom in Wisconsin.

Photos on previous page:

An appreciative crowd seen from stage. The camping area can be seen in the background (left).

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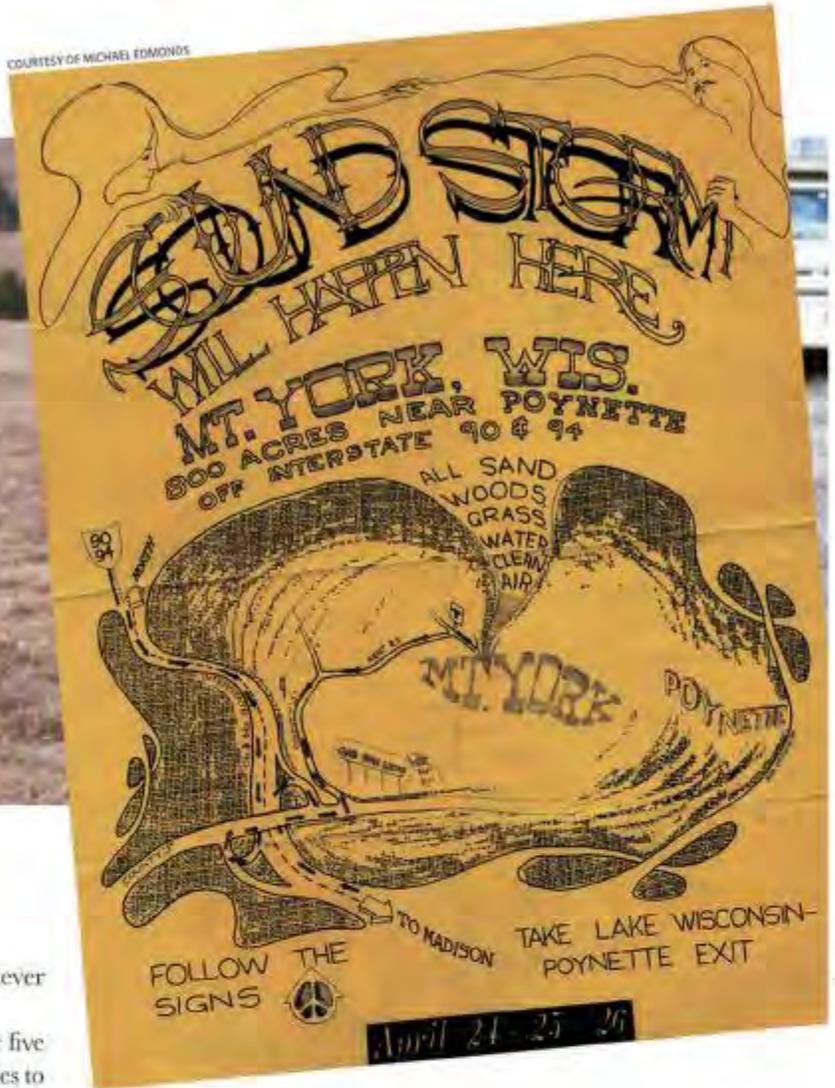
Tickets were printed and sold, but most Sound Storm attendees bypassed the ticket booth and found other ways onto the grounds.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL EDMONDS

James Ramey, better known as Baby Huey, performed with his band The Babysitters.

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COURTESY OF MICHAEL EDMONDS



An advertising poster with a stylized map pointed the way to the festival site near Poynette.

### The Golden Freak

Pete arrived in Madison in the fall of 1969 at age twenty-seven with his Harley, shoulder-length hair, and impeccable counter-culture credentials. He was neither a revolutionary nor a flower child. "I was always a one-per-center, all the way," he explained, using a bikers' term for the one percent of society that doesn't fit in anywhere at all. "My biker life was my politics."<sup>2</sup>

In 1967, he trekked from Buffalo, New York, to Los Angeles and then wandered up the coast to Seattle. Along the way, he spent time in Haight-Ashbury with psychedelic alchemist Owsley Stanley and stayed at Ken Kesey's commune in Oregon ("hell, even the cows on that place were laying on their backs, waving their feet in the air"). He helped handle the Grateful Dead's equipment when they played in the Northwest and became friends with Jerry Garcia and keyboard player Pigpen McKernan.<sup>3</sup>

When he landed in Madison in September 1969, Pete was using the name Bobo, one of several identities he could pull from his wallet. "We didn't know his real name until long after-



Despite local opposition, landowner Irene York allowed the show to go on by renting her land as the festival site.



Workers set up the stage and scaffolding for speakers one day before the festival began.

wards," says his attorney John Hanson. When a Madison reporter asked Pete where he came from, he replied, "The world. I'm from the planet Earth."<sup>4</sup>

This was just after Woodstock, and many people wondered if a similar event could happen in the Midwest. Pete had worked that summer on a festival outside Seattle and was the only person in Madison with firsthand experience. In January 1970, he formed a company called Golden Freak Enterprises to organize Sound Storm for the following spring.<sup>5</sup>

"For Pete," said his friend Bob Pulling, "every day really is a new day . . . The whole world starts all over again when he gets out of bed every morning." Pete's charisma was palpable, and he was unrelentingly energetic. Part lovable kid brother and part con man, one friend said Pete missed his true calling; he could have made millions as a televangelist.<sup>6</sup>

Golden Freak consisted of Pete and several allies. Sandy Nelson's curly blond hair and cherubic features made him look like the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, and he proved as loyal to Pete as the lion was to Dorothy. When Pete first landed in Madison, Bob Pulling repaired his Harley and shared his orange barrel acid. They became lifelong friends, and Pulling agreed to take photographs during the festival. Recent law school grads Jack Van Metre, John Hanson, and Roger Schnitzler, intrigued by the idea and in need of clients, took on Golden Freak's legal work.<sup>7</sup>

Their services were essential because local authorities and the counterculture had been battling in the streets for two

years. Golden Freak knew there would be strong opposition to a festival. In March 1970, Pete announced to the press that Sound Storm would be held at Aquarian Express Farm, a commune in western Dane County. "It wasn't big enough," he later recalled. "Hell, it wasn't big enough to be the parking lot." But it was a perfect way to call out the opposition, and the media quickly revealed the official strategy for suppressing the festival. It also cast Sound Storm as a David-and-Goliath battle between middle-aged bastions of law and order and a handful of hippies with nothing but their dreams.<sup>8</sup>

Among those who followed the controversy was a seventy-nine-year-old grandmother in rural Columbia County. "I read in the paper that they were trying to have it at Cross Plains," Irene York said. "So I wrote and told them about this spot and they came up and looked at it and said it was perfect." According to neighbors, the York family members "were very much individual free-thinkers." Irene's son Mayam admitted that, "Mother didn't care what Poynette people thought and said so, in so many words."<sup>9</sup>

Their farm was an ideal site for a festival. It was near Interstate 94, just half an hour north of Madison and an easy drive from Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Twin Cities. It could shelter tens of thousands of people in a natural amphitheater, its sandy soil would drain quickly in the rain, and Rowan Creek ran through the bottom to provide cool water and shade.

Pete agreed to pay \$5,000 to rent the farm for Sound Storm. The April 13, 1970, contract also promised a security force of

# Dekorra, Poynette counsels given rock festival question

By JACK KELLY  
Daily Register Staff Writer

Following a stormy session at the regular meeting of the Dekorra Town Board last night, the question of permits for a proposed rock music festival in the Poynette area late this month remained unsettled.

Closed after the opening meeting with members of the Poynette village board, town selectmen referred the matter to Portage Attorney Arno Miller, town counsel, for a study of a legal aspects of the case, and scheduled a special meeting next Monday.

Further, Van Metre said, the Poynette area property was more or less ideal because of controlled access, relative isolation, soil conditions that insured rapid drainage in event of rain, and general topography.

"In my own opinion, the York property is the best suited for such purpose than either of the others," he said.

No less well-groomed and neatly barbered, Tomlinson said that in drawing up the lease agreement for the property owner, it has been

and traffic flow. Gols said he was confident his department could handle the traffic but lacked man-power and equipment for the actual policing of the festival itself.

Among county officials also present, but declining comment — were Zoning Administrator Robert Irwin, Civil Defense Director B. J. Amsted, Patrol Captain Arma Ohmsorge, Detective Captain Robert Namejs, Supervisor Elmer Flisk and Resource Director Palmer McCoy.

But if the county officials remained silent the rest of the spectators — a period was raised — were

In the weeks before Sound Storm, municipalities attempted to block the festival on legal grounds.

Local authorities prepared for the worst.



COLUMBIA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Gols (kneeling, right) and his deputies kept the peace in Columbia County when thousands of young people flocked to the area for Sound Storm.

not less than one hundred security guards (striking UW-Madison teaching assistants) as well as ambulances, medical staff, and two helicopters. Golden Freak also promised not to permit "use of, presence, consumption of or sale of alcoholic and/or intoxicating beverages, liquors or drugs on the premises." Everyone expected there to be drug and alcohol use, contract or no contract, but Irene York's counsel insisted that liability for infractions should rest squarely on Golden Freak.<sup>10</sup>

With a venue in place and construction ready to begin, Sound Storm needed more tangible assets than hippie dreams. Bob Pulling later recalled that they had no money at all, though attorney Roger Schnitzler thought that Pete possessed a few hundred dollars. To raise money, Pete decided to license vending rights to merchants who wanted to sell food to the crowd. When restaurateur Jeff Wehrman paid for the right to sell burgers and hot dogs, Pete approached anyone who might put down cash for a similar monopoly. Local businesses shelled

## Rock festival report

# County ready if riot occurred

By JACK KELLY  
Daily Register Staff Writer

Columbia County Sheriff Van Gols revealed today that county officers—in the event riot developed at the recent Poynette area rock festival—would have had immediate access to a large cache of police weapons.

In a report being prepared for submission to the county board of supervisors on the overall crowd control plan adopted by his department for containment of the estimated 15,000-25,000 who attended the controversial three-days-plus "heavy" music marathon, the sheriff disclosed:

"Continuing with our plan, we obtained a truck from the Highway Department in which we had stored, without going into numbers, shotguns (with bird shot), automatic rifles, tear gas guns and canisters, and miscellaneous other equipment which we felt could be used to control any crowd until standby help arrived."

The "standby help" consisted, he noted, of trained personnel from surrounding county

extreme provocation by the officers under his command.

There were many people in the county, he said, who apparently believed it was in the purview of his office to ban such affairs, and some who "assumed, in fact, that I authorized the rock festival to be held in this county."

"This, of course, is a legislative matter and is controlled only by the governing body, in this case the county board, and only by the county board."

The geographical features of the site area — a natural amphitheater on the 540-acre Irene York farm, a little more than a mile east of Poynette, figured prominently in the containment plan exercised by the department, Gols explained.

"The site itself was not only ideal for the promoters and visitors, but also to us in law enforcement. It was away from the village — not far enough, perhaps, but at least located ideally for observation," he said.

"The parking area was adjacent to our Command Post as were the pedestrian paths entering the rock site. . . . Theoretically, the festival area proper could only be reached by paid admission on a foot path almost a half-mile beyond the parking area. All such foot traffic could be observed from our Command Post personnel, or personnel stationed at the various check points established throughout the larger area."

Patrol cars assigned to duty on the surrounding roads were instructed to avoid coming into the site area to avoid confusion. At the same time, as many marked cars as possible were kept circulating about the perimeter to create a constant impression of police presence.

In Poynette, local police forces were augmented by squads from Adams, Sauk and Dane County.

"Our plan, from the start, was to concentrate on efforts in the immediate vicinity, including Poynette, without leaving the remainder of the county unprotected," Gols continued.

"This meant bringing in personnel from our three neighboring counties as well as added state patrol coverage. At the same time—because we were expecting at least 25,000 people—we asked that supplementary police personnel be put on a standby basis in the counties starting the mutual assistance agreement with us."

Throughout the affair, a National Guard observer remained at the Command Post—a 26-foot communications trailer obtained from the Office of Emergency Police Service, a division of the Department of Transportation.

"Good communication played a key role in our operation," Gols said.

"Electric power was brought in by the Wisconsin Power and Light Co. and telephone



SHERIFF GOLS  
Precautions taken

forces, state and federal agencies and the National Guard.

In a series of meetings with local groups designed to quell before inception any wave of hysteria, Gols had told alarmed area residents immediately prior to the festival opening that his men—though instructed to avoid provocation at all costs within the site itself—would use "guns, not clubs" if violence erupted.

"Our main concern was to protect the persons and property in the immediate area and in the Village of Poynette," he reported today.

The job faced by his department was complicated, he said, by pyramiding rumors that swept through the county immediately after a Circuit Court decision denied injunctive proceedings sought by the county board to halt the scheduled performance.

"Many of the people in the area were concerned for their lives and property in the light of the violence that, less than one week earlier, had broken out on State St., in Mad-

COURTESY OF MICHAEL EDMONDS

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More than thirty bands appeared over the three days of the festival. Although he received second billing, Ken Kesey did not actually attend.

Jeff Amundson, lead singer of Madison, Wisconsin, band The Bowery Boys

David "Colonel" Leis (guitar), Steve Ungs (bass), and Roger Wylie (drums), of the Rockford, Illinois, band Wheezer Lockinger

out for the rights to sell lemonade, soft drinks, ice cream, and tee shirts. Within a few days, Pete had \$45,000 in hand.<sup>11</sup>

He contacted Jefferson Airplane, but their fee was too high for his budget. Jerry Garcia, however, committed the Grateful Dead to play for just \$9,500 (a third of their usual rate) out of friendship for Pete. Although the contract called only for a 50-minute set, the Dead had such a good time they played for several hours. Pete lined up about another thirty local bands for \$250 to \$500 each. In all, the music cost Golden Freak between \$30,000 and \$35,000, most of it paid in cash when performers took the stage.<sup>12</sup>

Pete hired lighting and sound experts from Chicago's former Electric Theater, who were building custom audio systems for bands around the country under the name Tomorrow Inc. Crew members Mike Dzielinski and Sparky Raizene arrived in Poyette on Wednesday, April 22, helped build the stage, and then began erecting speaker and mixing towers. The next morning they unloaded truckloads of speakers and amplifiers and, using a rented crane, hoisted massive bass units into place. They spent the rest of Thursday and Friday scaling the towers to install high-frequency horns and testing connections in time for the first act on Friday evening.<sup>13</sup>

As opening day approached, Sound Storm was a fragile house of cards. The whole fantastic edifice would crash to the

ground if it rained, or if a number of other uncontrollable variables came to pass. Pete's attorneys knew they'd gone out on a limb, swept along initially by his charisma and the sheer posterousness of it all. But when the political establishment tried to drive a stake through the heart of their vision, they got mad.

### "Guns, Not Clubs"

Local radio reporter Jim Packard says that most rural residents panicked at the thought of being outnumbered twenty-five-to-one by beatniks, bikers, rebels, and freaks: "[I]t was like science fiction, monsters from outer space descending on them." Poyette's county board representative, Elmer Fisk, recalled "lots of nervous, tense people, who didn't know but they would bust all the windows and burn the town down."<sup>14</sup>

Rural Columbia County had just emerged from a generation of intense suffering. After the Depression paralyzed its economy, most young men were called away to fight in a horrific war from which many never returned. Those who did come home started new lives under the ominous shadow of the Cold War and mushroom clouds. In 1970, more than forty percent of the county's adults had not finished high school; two-thirds of the men worked at blue-collar jobs in factories, construction, trucking, or farming. Only one teenager in five went away to college.<sup>15</sup>



Concertgoers share a large bucket of water. Drinking water was a concern at Sound Storm.



It was rumored that acid blotters were dropped by helicopter, but it was security flyers that fell from the sky.

The village of Poynette was a hard-working, God-fearing town of 1,100 where tidy streets ran at right angles and churches outnumbered taverns. Residents prided themselves on their well-equipped volunteer fire department, new high school, and patriotic boys in uniform. It was obvious to them that the American way of life was successful. When hordes of young people who rejected that lifestyle threatened to invade their town, they were understandably alarmed.<sup>16</sup>

On April 14 and 16, 1970, local officials called public meetings about the looming catastrophe. Golden Freak's attorney Jack Van Metre tried to calm residents by telling them his staff had researched rock festivals around the country and most had been "orderly, agreeable, and interesting." Irene York's attorney explained that the contract prohibited drinking, drug use, and disorderly conduct. When asked how that would be accomplished, Van Metre described the security force of striking UW-Madison graduate students. A Poynette village selectman promptly burst out, "Those are the very kind of people we want to keep out of our community." No one went home reassured. The second meeting ended with officials demanding that county government halt the festival.<sup>17</sup>

The county board immediately sought an injunction in circuit court. They argued that "public health, morals and safety are in danger," that fans might go "on a rampage," and that the plan violated sanitation and zoning ordinances. Golden Freak's attorneys responded that the contract met local codes and the land was already zoned for commercial use, which explicitly included theatrical performance such as rock festivals.<sup>18</sup>

The case was heard on April 22, 1970, by Circuit Court Judge Robert Gollmar, who was indebted to his neighbors for re-election and shared their values. He declared opening in court that, "I wouldn't go to a rock festival if they carried me out there on a sedan-chair and purchased me a portable toilet." But Gollmar

grew up in a circus family and sympathized with anyone trying to pull off a good show. He also had deep knowledge of and respect for the law. So he ultimately ruled that, "if these people comply with the law, they have a right to have a rock festival. And Mrs. York, as a property owner, has a right to lease her property . . . the application for a temporary injunction is denied."<sup>19</sup>

Poynette was stunned. A whirlwind of fear swept through the more impressionable residents. Some parents worried their teenagers would sneak onto the York farm and come home addicted to drugs, or run off to California and never come home at all. Some thought Hell's Angels might roar in on their Harleys to rape their daughters and terrorize the community. A few in the all-white village even feared the Black Panthers would invade. The night before the festival began, one speaker at a local meeting urged residents to keep their firearms close at hand.<sup>20</sup>

Most residents were more realistic. Local officials, in particular, simply resigned themselves to making the best of a bad situation. This burden fell squarely on the shoulders of forty-one-year-old Columbia County Sheriff Vearn Golz who, as a professional law officer, knew that the worst rumors were unfounded. But he also knew that moving thousands of people safely around rural roads was a major challenge. With concertgoers certain to exponentially outnumber police, he decided to ignore minor infractions inside the festival grounds and focus his resources on keeping the hippies as far away from the village as possible.<sup>21</sup>

Golz set up a command post next to the main parking lot in a twenty-six-foot trailer. Hundreds of uniformed officers were called up from as far as one hundred miles away, many strategically positioned to radio advance notice of approaching motorcycle gangs. Others were trained to work undercover inside the crowd and keep their fingers on its pulse.<sup>22</sup>

As opening day approached, Golz took every opportunity to defuse tension, publicly praising the "excellent cooperation



Kink Middlemist (left) works his hair and the keyboards and Denny Craswell (right) lashes at his drum kit as the Minneapolis band Crow keeps the party going into the night.

from the promoters of the affair” and giving the impression that he anticipated no problems. But he secretly brought in a truckload of shotguns, automatic rifles, and tear gas canisters, and he privately assured Poynette officials that if trouble broke out it would be met “with guns, not clubs.”<sup>23</sup>

By the evening of Thursday, April 23, nerves were frayed. Sheriff Golz had scheduled hundreds of officers in twelve-hour shifts and assembled his cache of weapons. Pete remains mystified by the town’s reaction. “I don’t know what the [expletive deleted] they were so afraid of,” he later commented. “It was just a bunch of kids listening to music.”<sup>24</sup>

#### “A Vision Worthy of Dante”

The next morning, Sheriff Golz activated his mobile headquarters, hoping for the best but prepared for the worst. Nearby, Pete waited outside the ticket booth, wondering if anyone would actually show up. In the woods a mile away, Mike Dzielinski and Sparky Raizene scrambled across four-story-tall speaker towers with electrical tape and screwdrivers. As reporter Jim Packard watched long-haired workers finish erecting the stage, he wondered silently, “Was this really happening, out in a field in Poynette?”<sup>25</sup>

Thousands of cars were soon parking in farmers’ fields all around the York farm. Seeing them approach, Jack Van Metre thought there might actually be money in Pete’s wild idea. But neighbors had posted signs and handed out maps to guide concertgoers through the woods without paying, and fewer than twenty-five percent actually bought tickets. Pete enlisted biker friends to cruise the perimeter on their Harleys, one of whom brought in one hundred nervous fans like captured prisoners of war. But the site was “a leaky sieve,” in Schindler’s words, and a number of fans always thought Sound Storm had been a free festival.<sup>26</sup>

By mid-afternoon on Friday, 1,500 people were lounging on the hillside in the sun while engineers went through sound checks and vendors opened their stalls. Madison’s Mifflin Street Co-op offered a free food booth stocked with one thousand pounds of brown rice, three hundred pounds of oatmeal, one hundred pounds of onions, and fifteen bushels of apples. A group calling itself the Milwaukee Tribe set up a mimeograph machine beneath a Vietcong flag and began printing a newsletter. By sunset, groups of ten to twenty people were pouring in steadily, and the opening night crowd eventually swelled to twelve thousand.<sup>27</sup>

Nick Berigan hitchhiked up from Madison and crept in through the woods after dark. As he crested the final ridge, the brightly lit stage burst into view below him. Music reverberated off the opposite hillside and thousands of people danced around camp fires. He called the scene “otherworldly—a vision worthy of Dante.” After taking it in for a few seconds, he said to himself, “This is cool,” and descended into the maelstrom.<sup>28</sup>

The first night climaxed when Pete walked onstage between sets with Irene York. He introduced her as “the person who made all this possible” and asked fans to “hold up a light for Granny York.” John Hanson, watching from the periphery, remembers that “the entire hillside lit up like a Christmas tree.” Pete said York “balled like a baby, the tears streaming down her face.”<sup>29</sup>

For the rest of the night, music pulsated off the stage, bare-foot dancers spun in the shadows, and the valley filled with the fragrance of pot smoke. “Campfires flickered as far as the eye could see,” reported the *Milwaukee Journal*, “and long-haired youths dressed in everything from raccoon skin pants to bib overalls gyrated happily in a dusty tangle in front of the stage.”<sup>30</sup>

John Hanson trekked over to the farmhouse with the final installment of Irene York’s \$5,000 in cash. Except for two juveniles who tore down No Parking signs, the police made no

arrests. Sheriff Golz told the press, “Both the promoters and the fans have been very cooperative.”<sup>31</sup>

### Thirty Thousand Freaking Freely

The sun rose on a glorious Saturday morning. “It was like God loved rock festivals,” Roger Schnitzler recalled, “in the 70s and 80s, just fabulous weather.” Sheriff Golz awoke in his trailer and sent undercover officers Robert Hamel and Gary Cross into the crowd to gather intelligence. There was a lot for them to see.<sup>32</sup>

Fans had arrived from all over the nation. There were dedicated hippie moms in long dresses cuddling babies. Brawny bikers with greasy hair drinking beer for breakfast. A woman wearing nothing but sunglasses, nonchalantly catching the rays. College students from every campus within 200 miles. A naked man flailing ecstatically atop a U-Haul truck. Great circles of dancers holding hands and spinning entranced in front of the stage. Solitary wanderers exploring the woods with peculiarly rapt attention.<sup>33</sup>

On Saturday, members of The Hog Farm arrived in a painted school bus. This New Mexico-based commune traveled the country helping people use psychedelic drugs for personal liberation. Wavy Gravy, their best-known member, often dressed as a clown, “cause it’s joy that makes me move in this jail, this earth that’s a jail, and what we’re plottin’ is one incredible jailbreak.” The Hog Farm had organized the free food and medical care at Woodstock and came to help at Sound Storm.<sup>34</sup>

Drug dealers wandered openly through the crowd all weekend, like hot dog vendors at a ballgame. Marijuana, hashish, LSD, mescaline, MDA (an Ecstasy-like psychedelic), hallucinogenic mushrooms, and a buffet of uppers and downers were always within easy reach. Announcers issued warnings from the stage: “Don’t buy the white tabs or the orange wedges, it’s bad shit.” The mimeographed newsletter assured readers that the “grass, hash, purple microdots—closest to pure acid” were all fine, and that the orange sunshine LSD was “outasite.” Alcohol flowed freely, and newspaper accounts suggest that the most widespread mind-altering chemical at Sound Storm may have been Bali Hai, a cheap screw-top wine.<sup>35</sup>

Before long, Golz’s undercover officers were spotted, and the festival’s mimeograph machine had alerted the crowd under the headline, “A Pig Is a Pig Is a Pig.” Pete, fearing arrests of fans or harm to officers Hamel and Cross, commandeered a helicopter and flew into Madison, where he printed 10,000 flyers. Adorned with Golden Freak’s buzzard and bomb logo, he dropped these onto the audience from the sky and urged readers to “Keep the Faith.”

#### FREAKS:

There are people who aren’t turned on and are trying to turn off what’s happening here. It depends on you, each and every one of you, to make it! So please don’t break it. Let the vibes be your guide. Just let it be.



Michael McCormick of Madison was named the Mud King and crowned with a wood violet.

Remember, you are the leaders and there is no way to peace. Peace is the way.<sup>36</sup>

Hamel and Cross escaped unharmed.

Sheriff Golz was astonished by the crowd’s peacefulness. “It’s just amazing,” he told the *Milwaukee Journal*. “If you had this many middle-age people, drinking the way these kids are, you’d have no end of fights and trouble.” Perhaps he didn’t appreciate the pacifying effects of ego-melting psychedelics.<sup>37</sup>

Pete estimated that at any given moment, more than half of the audience was tripping on LSD or similar hallucinogens, drugs which often dissolved the ego and spawned mystical experiences. “One youth, with downy sideburns and a mustache,” reported the *Milwaukee Journal*, “whittled ‘G. Z. Loves Life’ into the trunk of a maple, then carved a heart around the inscription.” A person discovering heaven in a wild flower or giggling at the thought there could ever have been a “me” would be unlikely to start a fight.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, only one significant confrontation was reported during the entire weekend, and it was settled not by the police but by Pete.

When the Vietcong flag was hoisted onto a sound tower, patriotic Chicago bikers demanded its removal. Pete offered to have the stars and stripes raised on the opposite tower, but this didn’t satisfy them. When the ringleader started to climb



Barbara Swenson of the band Northern Comfort before her onstage wedding to bandmate Robert Leslie

onstage and tear down the flag himself, Pete leaped microphone in hand, knocked him to the ground, and pummeled him into the dirt. As comrades swarmed in to retaliate, Pete held the microphone up in one hand, pulled a knife out with the other, and announced, "Any of you other [expletive deleted] want some?" He then helped his adversary up and the two of them went for a beer.<sup>39</sup>

Three dozen bands played at Sound Storm. "We would set up a band on one side of the stage," audio manager Mike Dzielinski recalled, "and while they played their set, we'd set up the next band on the other side so that there would be very little down time between bands." Apart from the Grateful Dead, only a few can be easily traced today.<sup>40</sup>

The Chicago group Rotary Connection blended rock, soul, and psychedelia featuring multi-octave solos by vocalist Minnie Riperton. Illinois Speed Press mixed rock, soul, and country. Baby Huey was a three-hundred-pound protégé of Curtis Mayfield whose trippy renditions of R&B tunes spawned a permanent following. Rockford-based Fuse played hard rock and blues, and two years later evolved into the power-pop sensation, Cheap Trick.<sup>41</sup>

While the bands played, thousands of dollars in small bills were being counted, tallied, banded, and paid out at the ticket booth. Tickets cost \$15 for the whole weekend, \$12 for Saturday alone, and \$7 for Sunday. If even one fan in four paid to

get in, more than \$100,000 in cash should have changed hands during the weekend. Golden Freak's attorneys rotated shifts watching the money and discretely carried wads of bills downhill to hide them backstage in a suitcase in the sound crew's trailer. Roger Schnitzler estimates that by Sunday afternoon, \$75,000–\$100,000 was hidden there.<sup>42</sup>

As temperatures rose into the eighties, sweaty festival-goers christened a stretch of shoreline "Earth People's Beach" and transformed a huge mound of soil nearby into a slide, flying down it into Rowan Creek like otters. After frolicking in various states of undress, they crowned twenty-one-year-old Michael McCormick of Madison "The Mud King" by encasing him in slime and balancing a marsh plant on his head.<sup>43</sup>

A high point of the weekend was the wedding on Sunday of Robert Leslie and Barbara Swenson. The bride wore flowers in her hair and an ankle-length white cotton dress. Explaining why she chose to be married at a rock festival, she told reporters, "All of these people are our friends, and where could we find a church big enough for them?"<sup>44</sup>

Poynette residents could hear the music two miles away and watched the news coverage every night, but most obeyed Sheriff Golz's advice to stay away. Poynette's only police officer, John Raesch, took several calls from anxious parents whose teenagers had snuck out and were worried they might run off to California. He later claimed with mock pride, "[W]e didn't lose even one to the hippies." High school basketball coach Richard Hanick and his wife drove down to the York farm with windows rolled up and doors locked; they never got out of their car. Village board member Mel Egger briefly surveyed the scene and concluded that "animals treat their own kind better than what I observed."<sup>45</sup>

Village merchants were more positive. Three bar owners had ordered truckloads of beer and wine, and one reported selling fifty cases of Bali Hai. So many long-haired fans found their way into town to buy supplies that shelves in many stores were swept entirely clean. Merchants joked afterward that "the only guy that didn't make money was the barber."<sup>46</sup>

By Sunday afternoon, thousands of their friends had been partying non-stop for forty-eight hours, and still the crowd continued to swell. New arrivals could be immediately spotted by their relative cleanliness. Those who had arrived on Friday night were generally covered in dust from the grounds, mud from the creek, soot from their campfires, or all three. As the sun reached its zenith on Sunday, tripped-out veterans and bright-eyed newcomers were all eagerly awaiting the top-billed band, San Francisco's Grateful Dead.<sup>47</sup>

### "World Comes Undone"

Twenty-five miles away, the Dead were piling into John Hanson's nine-passenger station wagon, which quickly filled with dense blue smoke. Jack Van Metre, who hated highway driving under the best of conditions, struggled to avoid a debil-

itating contact high as he sped north to Poyner. A half-hour later, the band tumbled out behind the stage laughing hysterically.<sup>48</sup>

The Grateful Dead were not yet famous. When performing, they almost always took LSD, played without any predetermined song list, and improvised instrumental passages lasting thirty minutes or more. Their mission was to deconstruct the listener's inherited mental conditioning and enable mystical epiphanies to break through. As lead guitarist Jerry Garcia put it, "Magic is what we do. Music is how we do it." Anthropologist Joseph Campbell likened them to shamans and their concerts to ecstatic ceremonies.<sup>49</sup>

While their equipment was being set up at Sound Storm, the Dead prepared the usual sacraments. A case of soda was brought onstage and each can popped open. A Visine bottle with an eyedropper appeared, and each can was dosed with liquid LSD. The cans then circulated to everyone onstage and into the audience.<sup>50</sup>

Between 2:30 and 7:30, the Dead performed three long sets. No one can verify what they played, since Pete's reels were lost and no tapes survive in the band's vault. They must have performed all the psychedelic standards from their album *Live/Dead* as well as their new country-rock songs from *Workingman's Dead*, which they had just recorded. Mike Dzielnicki often helped set up their sound systems when they played the Midwest. He says, "As the band has admitted, because of their improvisational style sometimes they were on and sometimes they weren't. At Sound Storm, they were definitely on." John Hanson recalls that they were relaxed and engaging on stage, nurturing a generous, supportive atmosphere across the hillside.<sup>51</sup>

Recollections posted at fan Web sites include some evocative details about the Dead's five-hour performance:

After second GD number, band asks audience if anyone has an I Ching. A book is passed forward but Bob says, "No, the grey book." That is produced, band kneels down together in center of stage, tosses coins, reads results, all rise laughing and hollering, launch into Other One . . . Phil in middle, Jerry to audience's far left, Bob on far right. During jam, playing lickety split, suddenly Jerry and Bob stride quickly to center, band starts playing double-time, world comes undone . . . It was dark when we left and I had to drive home to Milwaukee, since I was the only one able to . . . Driving home, I announce that, "Now I can die." Pal Jim concurs, though third passenger was a little uneasy . . .

An urban myth persists that LSD was dropped from aircraft during the Dead's performance, with one person claiming Ken



Although the weather was unseasonably warm, temperatures dipped into the forties at night. Here, festival-goers warm themselves around a fire in the camping area.

Kesey himself was at the controls. When asked about this, John Hanson replied, "I hope it turns out to be true; it *ought* to be true." But Bob Pulling pointed out that it would have been unnecessary: "There was enough acid there without having to drop it from a helicopter." Pete suspected later that hallucinations at the time and the passing years transformed security flyers that he dropped on Saturday into the myth of an LSD airlift.<sup>52</sup>

Pulling recalled that at the end of the third set most of the band left the stage exhausted and happy, but rhythm guitarist Bob Weir remained at his microphone trembling and entranced, almost catatonic. The Dead's crew came forward, picked him up under the armpits, and carried him backstage. Hanson bundled the band into his station wagon and, as the car filled with pot smoke again, he imagine he "could see the headlines already—'Promising Young Attorney Arrested on Highway 51 with Notorious Rock Band.'" On the ride back, Jerry Garcia told him that "for its scale, this was the best festival they had ever performed at, the most mellow."<sup>53</sup>

### Wake of the Flood

By then, Wisconsin and Chicago fans were flowing quietly toward their cars. About three thousand people who'd journeyed from California or the East Coast lingered around their campfires while the stars came out, losing themselves in what the Dead called "the transitive nightfall of diamonds."

Golden Freak Enterprises, meanwhile, got a rude surprise: the suitcase with \$100,000 had vanished during the Dead's performance. "Looking back," Roger Schnitzler says, "we got caught up in the general excitement and failed to act very



Jerry Garcia, lead guitarist and vocalist for the Grateful Dead, on stage at Sound Storm



The legendary Grateful Dead performed Sunday afternoon as the headline act of Sound Storm.

business-like." They saw no point in reporting the theft since thousands of suspects had already disappeared down the highway. Sound Storm had been an ecstatic musical and social success, but a financial disaster.<sup>54</sup>

Pete grabbed the last few thousand dollars lying around, put half in his pocket and left half for his attorneys, and then headed into Madison. By noon on Monday the York farm was empty, though wide-eyed stragglers reportedly wandered out of the woods for several more days.<sup>55</sup>

Estimates of total attendance varied widely, since fans arrived and departed non-stop throughout the weekend. The press and police reported between six and twelve thousand on Friday night and between fifteen and twenty-five thousand on both Saturday and Sunday. Allowing for overlap, probably thirty thousand different individuals attended at least part of the festival.

From a crowd of thirty thousand, the police made only three arrests—two for littering and one for drunk driving. The medical staff treated about sixty people, most for minor burns suffered at campfires. About twenty-five were treated for bad LSD trips. "It's incredible, really," one of the nurses said. "This many people and nothing more to report than that."<sup>56</sup>

Comparisons with Woodstock were inevitable. One fan who had been at both festivals called Sound Storm "better than Woodstock. Not as many people, but a more groovy event." A Chicago reporter called it "a lesson in glittering possibilities" and Madison's *Capital Times* characterized it as "peaceful and—quite often—ecstatic."<sup>57</sup>

Local residents, on the other hand, were outraged. Elmer Fisk, chairman of the Columbia County Board, spoke for the

majority when he called Sound Storm "one of the most repulsive situations imposed on a friendly, tranquil, beautiful rural community . . . We were shocked by what we saw, what we heard and by the reports we have read."<sup>58</sup>

Many of those reports came from law enforcement, whose opinion was epitomized in the title of an article in their professional journal: "Rock Festivals, Cancer in Our Society." After complaining about being ordered to ignore violations of the law, Lt. Lyle Sewell claimed it would have taken "very little to agitate these people and possibly cause a riot . . . It would be very easy for a young person to attend a festival like this and to smoke 'pot' for kicks, or even try some of the dope that is passed around, and perhaps become addicted . . ."

The festival's harshest criticism came from Madison's left-leaning counterculture, which denounced Golden Freak for being "outside hippy capitalist promoters." "The general attitude," reported the *Madison Kaleidoscope*, "was 'Let's rip off the pig promoters . . . I hope they go bankrupt. All they're interested in is money.'" Editor Mark Knops objected to this attack. Besides being "one of the best little rockfests ever pulled off," he wrote, Sound Storm had strengthened the counterculture: "Freaks [sic] from towns all across the state came out of winter hibernation, shook off their paranoia, grooved together, rapped together, reinforced the idea of alternative culture, and went back home to East Jesus, Wisconsin, with renewed self-confidence and enthusiasm."<sup>59</sup>

Knops also detailed the festival's finances. Pete had informed him that total costs amounted to about \$102,000 but revenue came only to \$81,000, leaving an outstanding debt of

\$21,000. Knops laid the blame for this on freeloaders. Only seven thousand tickets had been sold and everyone else snuck in without paying, including more than four hundred posing as reporters for his newspaper, which actually had a staff of ten. No mention was made of the stolen suitcase full of cash.<sup>60</sup>

Columbia County bore some of the costs, too. At the May meeting of its board of supervisors, those were itemized as overtime wages for police (\$2,769), meals (\$595), and legal fees (\$1,815), totaling \$5,179.<sup>61</sup>

Among the unpaid creditors was Jamieson's Lumber in Poynette, which had supplied materials for the stage. On July 4, Tom Jamieson went over to the York farm and repossessed all the plywood and planking that remained, which he resold to a contractor building a new home. The stage from which the Grateful Dead distributed free LSD became part of a ranch house in Poynette.<sup>62</sup>

Although Golden Freak lost thousands of dollars, no one regrets the events. "I didn't do it for the money," Pete later explained, "I did it for the happening, so people could get together. . . . Everything went wrong and nothing went wrong. It was a helluva lot of fun."<sup>63</sup>

Sound Storm marked the end of an era. While thousands tripped on LSD in the warm Wisconsin sunshine, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were planning the invasion of Cambodia. Within days, protesters filled the nation's streets, shut down college campuses, and faced down the National Guard at Kent State. A few weeks later, radicals blew up Sterling Hall in Madison, killing an innocent physicist. At the end of the summer, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix died from drug overdoses. That fall, Charles Manson's trial highlighted the malevolent potential of mind-altering drugs.<sup>64</sup>

Over the next four decades, psychedelics were replaced by crack cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin as America's drugs of choice. "Back then," Bob Pulling reflected, "it was an 'expand your consciousness' mindset. Now it's just 'Get high and feel good.'" LSD prophets like Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, and Jerry Garcia grew old and died, and the vision of a psychedelically enlightened America died with them. Endless wars, a presidential impeachment, and the attacks of September 11 reduced the hippie phenomenon to a distant memory.<sup>65</sup>

Nearly forty years later, many participants still cherished Sound Storm as a turning point in their lives. For example, sound engineer Mike Dzielinski recently recalled "that long weekend as being one of the greatest of my life. I'm sure that about thirty thousand others who were there would feel the same way." Audience member Paul Uebelher said it proved to him "that thousands of strangers could get along and be together and share in harmony, [that] a counterculture was really possible." Nick Berigan concluded, "From the perspective of twenty-first-century America, it may as well have been in another universe. Sometimes I have to pinch myself and say, 'Did that really happen?'"<sup>66</sup> ❧

## Notes

1. Interview with Pete Obranovich and Bob Pulling, April 15, 2009.
2. Phone interviews with Obranovich, January 29 and February 10, 2009.
3. Phone interview with Obranovich, February 10, 2009.
4. Interview with John D. Hanson and Jack Van Metre, February 4, 2009. *Capital Times*, April 16, 1970, Section 6, page 3.
5. Phone interview with Obranovich February 10, 2009; interview with Bob Pulling, March 13, 2009; nurses had nicknamed Pete "the Golden Freak" when hepatitis C turned his complexion yellow that winter.
6. Pulling interview, March 13, 2009; phone interview with Roger Schnitzer, March 19, 2009.
7. Interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009; Obranovich phone interview, February 10, 2009; Pulling interview, March 13, 2009.
8. Interview with Obranovich and Pulling, April 15, 2009; phone interview with Schnitzer, March 19, 2009; Rosemary Kendrick, "Board to Pay Our Home's Bills Only Through April 2," *Capital Times*, April 3, 1970, 2.
9. Jack Kelly, "County officers ready for three-day festival," *Portage Daily Register*, April 23, 1970, 1; Elmer Fisk interview with Jim Cook, June 22, 1995, side 1 (in the possession of Jim Cook, Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin. I am deeply grateful to Jim for sharing his research materials); Mayam York interview with Jim Cook, June 25, 1995, side 1.
10. "Affidavit of Irene York," Columbia Co. Circuit Court, Case no. 12414; interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009.
11. Interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009; Richard Jaeger, "Dane County's 1st Rock Festival Due on April 24," *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 31, 1970, 44; "Rock Festival Opens with Light Crowds," *Capital Times*, April 24, 1970, 1; Jon Wegge, "Cars Keep Streaming Toward Rock Festival," *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 25, 1970, 1; Mark Knops, "Rockfest: The Inside Story," *Madison Kaleidoscope*, May 5, 1970, 1.
12. Interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009; Knops, "Rockfest," *Madison Kaleidoscope*, May 5, 1970, 1.
13. Michael Dzielinski, personal communication (email), August 15, 2009.
14. Interview with Jim Packard, February 12, 2009; Fisk interview with Cook, June 22, 1995.
15. *Census of Population Wisconsin, Volume I, Part 51*, tables 119 and following.
16. *Wisconsin Blue Book*, 1946, 442 and 1952, 505; Poynette Press, May 28, 1970, 2.
17. Jerry Ambeleng, "Poynette Area Seeking Way to Block Festival," *Capital Times*, April 16, 1970, 1; Jack Kelly, "Dekoera, Poynette Counsels Given Rock Festival Question," *Portage Daily Register*, April 15, 1970, 1; "Springtime with the Rockies" *Wisconsin Star*, June 1970, 5; Jack Kelly, "Officials Find Legal Threat to Bar County Rock Festival," *Portage Daily Register*, April 17, 1970, 1; "Columbia Co. Acts to Block Rock Fete," *Capital Times*, April 17, 1970, 29.
18. *Columbia County Board of Supervisors, Proceedings . . . April 21, 1970*, through April 1, 1971 (Portage, Wisconsin, 1971), 6; "Plaintiff's Memorandum Brief," Columbia Co. Circuit Court, Case no. 12414;
19. "Defendant's Statement of Facts," Columbia Co. Circuit Court, Case no. 12414; interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009.
20. Robert H. Gollmar, *My Father Owned a Circus* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1965); "Ruling," Columbia Co. Circuit Court, Case no. 12414.
21. "Springtime in the Rockies," *Wisconsin Star*, June 1970, 5; "Enthusiasts Begin Arriving as Festival Begins Happening," *Portage Daily Register*, April 24 1970, 1; John Raesch interview with Jim Cook, June 25, 1995.
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27. "Rock Festival Opens With Light Crowd," *Capital Times*, April 24, 1970; interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009; phone interview with Schnitzer, March 19, 2009.
28. Dave Wagner, "6,000 Enjoy First Rock Fete Evening," *Capital Times*, April 25, 1970, 1, 5; *Marquette Eagle Star*, April 25, 1970; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 27, 1970.
29. Phone interview with Nick Berigan, February 3, 2009.
30. Interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009; phone interview with Obranovich, February 10, 2009.
31. Dave Wagner, "6,000 Enjoy First Rock Fete Evening," *Capital Times*, April 25, 1970, 1; *Marquette Eagle Star*, April 25, 1970; *Milwaukee Journal*, April 25, 1970, page 1.
32. *Portage Daily Register*, April 25, 1970; *Milwaukee Journal*, April 25, 1970, 1; interview with Hanson and Van Metre, February 4, 2009.
33. Phone interview with Schnitzer, March 19, 2009; *Portage Daily Register*, April 30, 1970, and May 2, 1970.
34. *Milwaukee Journal*, April 27, 1970.
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