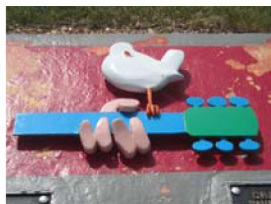


Woodstock turns 45: The beat goes on

Wavy Gravy, an icon of the Woodstock festival, talks about Abbie Hoffman and more. John W. Barry/Poughkeepsie Journal

John W. Barry, Poughkeepsie Journal 9:47 a.m. EDT August 14, 2014

Woodstock turns 45 and continues to inspire hope.



(Photo: John W. Barry/Poughkeepsie Journal)

The artist Jan Sawka in August 1969 was in a military punishment camp in his native Poland. A leader in the nation's student protest movement against the communist government, he had led street demonstrations a year earlier.



Ann Lessin and her son, Herschel Lessin, talk about their very different Woodstock experiences. John W. Barry/Poughkeepsie Journal

He and fellow inmates got their hands on a military radio and tuned in to Radio Luxembourg, which originated from outside the Iron Curtain.

Forty-five years ago this weekend, uncertain about his own future, Sawka, from thousands of miles away, via radio, was able to share in a historic event in the Hudson Valley. Attended by hundreds of thousands, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair remains a symbol of freedom.

Years later, Sawka would relocate to High Falls in Ulster County, not far from the Town of Woodstock.

He was quite taken by the Grateful Dead's performance at Woodstock, according to his daughter, Hanna Sawka.

"That was the first time he heard the band," Hanna Sawka said of her father, who died in 2012, and Woodstock, which took place Aug. 15-18, 1969. "He said it was amazing. He loved it. He heard it for the first time in such awful circumstances and such hopeless ones."

Decades later, he would work with the Grateful Dead, creating a set design for their stage that was unveiled in 1989.

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair took place nearly a month after the U.S. sent a man to the moon. The Vietnam War had been raging for years. And hundreds of thousands of young men and women converged on Bethel in Sullivan County for what is now considered by many to be the crowning achievement of the 1960s counterculture.

LEARN MORE ABOUT WOODSTOCK: [Paper trail leaves insight into Woodstock preparations \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/woodstock-leaves-paper-trail/13959983/\)](#); [Woodstock freaky facts \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/woodstock-freaky-facts/13959619/\)](#); [Top acts at Woodstock \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/top-acts-at-woodstock-1969/13959255/\)](#); ['Farmer' is little known despite his historic role \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/farmer-max-yasgur-plays-historic-role/13958495/\)](#); [Woodstock set lists \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/woodstock-set-lists/13958889/\)](#); [2 towns touched by Woodstock's lasting legacy \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/2-towns-touched-by-woodstock/13950313/\)](#); [A festival site reborn \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/woodstock-festive-site-reborn/13949851/\)](#); [Local concert-goers remember how they took part in history \(/story/entertainment/2014/08/12/concert-goers-remember-woodstock/13949305/\)](#)

"It doesn't seem that long ago," said Doug Lucy of Fishkill, who was 16 in 1969.

Lucy didn't attend the festival, but followed it on television.

"I watched it on the news and was just smiling the whole time, seeing people walking miles along the road, carrying sleeping bags and stuff, cars along the side of the road, people just sitting on the hoods, talking, getting along," Lucy said. "We were living through tough times back then. I had friends getting drafted right out of high school. It wasn't a real great time. There were racial problems going on. And Woodstock just kind of said, 'If the right people got together, you could have a good time.' It affected a lot of people. People wanted to emulate that."

Hugh Romney, known as Wavy Gravy, was at Woodstock working with his fellow members of the Hog Farm commune, serving hot food to the masses and talking them down from LSD trips gone bad.

Romney is well known for his famous stage announcements, including one that likely summed up Woodstock for many, despite the rain and the mud and the traffic: "We must be in heaven, man!"

Wavy Gravy told the Journal recently that Woodstock "was a miracle. It was the real jelly. There was an energy prevalent at Woodstock, and if you surrendered to it, you didn't need to sleep much, you could do amazing things. It would move you."

As Jan Sawka and his fellow countrymen took a stand against the policies of their government in Poland, those who attended Woodstock, in their own way, drew their own lines in the sand. And 45 years later, people are still drawn to the land.

On Friday night, Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, which operates a museum and performing arts pavilion on the Woodstock site in Bethel, will screen a documentary about Woodstock.

Once again, that famous field will be turned over to those who choose to stake a claim to the Woodstock generation, regardless of their age.

"For a lot of baby boomers, it's nostalgia for a time when you could get away with idealism, you could believe you could change the world," said Wade Lawrence, director of the Museum at Bethel Woods. "These days, that's a difficult belief to have. And for younger people, I think it's an inspiration, to relive Woodstock, to hear about those stories, to hope for a time when they can actually make a difference in the world."

Why does Woodstock still generate a buzz more than four decades after Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Who, Richie Havens, the Grateful Dead and others performed at the historic festival?

Michael Lang, the Ulster County resident who with partners staged Woodstock, responded with an answer that would likely resonate with someone who drove to Woodstock from Poughkeepsie or listened to it on a radio while imprisoned in Poland.

"The thing that comes to mind is that it really represented a moment of hope in what was a very dark and tumultuous period, and sort of represented that around the world," said Lang, who also staged Woodstock anniversary concerts in 1994 and 1999. "I think that has been imprinted on us all. Woodstock has become synonymous with the possibility of a better world."

As a teenager in 1988, Hanna Sawka joined her parents for a Grateful Dead concert at Madison Square Garden.

And she seemed to have her own Woodstock moment while sitting near keyboard player Brent Mydland while the band performed.

"I'd smile at him and he'd smile back," said Hanna Sawka, a filmmaker. "I had an amazing view of the guys playing."

In the broader sense, Woodstock for Hanna Sawka symbolizes "a spirit of creativity and an approach to the world, to make it a better place."

Asked about any lessons learned from Woodstock that resonate today, Wavy Gravy recalled something that Joplin said from the stage that had nothing to do with music.

"She said, 'If you have any food left, share it with your brother and sister, and that's the person on your left and the person on your right.'"

The big lesson we can learn from Woodstock, Wavy Gravy said, is, "Remember the person on your left and the person on your right. People got a big hit about what sharing was about, real sharing. That lasts them to this day. And the beat goes on."

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IF YOU GO

"Woodstock: The Director's Cut," a documentary, will be shown Aug. 15 on the festival field at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, Bethel, Sullivan County. The field opens at 7 p.m. The movie begins at 8:30 p.m.

Blankets and picnic baskets are encouraged. This screening is a fundraiser for the preservation of the Woodstock festival site. Suggested donation is \$5.

All ages are welcome. This film is rated R and is four hours long. Visit www.bethelwoodscenter.org or call 1-866-781-2922 for information.

Woodstock Freaky Facts

According to the New York State Police:

- Out of the hundreds of thousands of people who attended Woodstock, only 109 were arrested at the festival, all but four for drugs, "but no instance of violence came to the attention of troopers."
- Troopers booked 270 people on 408 charges who were either on their way to Bethel or returning home, and confiscated "a substantial quantity of drugs."

According to a New York State Health Department report dated Sept. 25, 1969:

- "Two companies provided 650 individual toilet seats and 200 urinal spaces. This number was planned to serve 60,000. Servicing was difficult due to crowds, stalled cars and mud. There were long lines at some of the toilet sites; however, the spirit of helpfulness and sharing allowed maximum use, not to mention the lack of inhibition on the part of the Aquarius generation. ..."

According to documents obtained from the Sullivan County Historical Society, Food for Love, the company hired to provide food, made the following projections based on 50,000 people a day for a three-day festival.

This is a sampling of the entire food list:

- Bread: 30,000 loaves.
- Marshmallows: 10,000 packages.
- Peanut butter: 1,500 pounds.
- Napkins: 600,000.
- Milk: 20,000 gallons.

- Cheese: 5,000 pounds.
- Coffee: 2,000 pounds.
- Plastic eating utensils: 900,000 pieces.
- Ice: 450,00 pounds.

Visit www.poughkeepsiejournal.com for articles, photos, music and video featuring Woodstock.

Visit www.jansawka.com/blog to learn about artist Jan Sawka.

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