

**“No Alcohol, Please. It’s a Family Affair!”: Building Community Support For a
Bluegrass Festival Through Family Friendliness
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The luthier, or maker of stringed instruments, Stuart Mossman, one of the organizers of the first Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, spoke to the local Rotary Club about his plans during a meeting in September 1972. The *Winfield Courier* summarized his presentation: “Those attending will be people who like country and bluegrass music. Many are over fifty years of age and will bring their families along. Mossman pointed out the entire festival will provide good, clean family entertainment.” The message was reinforced after the fact by Winfield Police Chief A.V. “Gus” Froemming, who praised the event in the newspaper, calling it a “very professional” atmosphere. The *Courier* said “possibly those who may have had qualms about the weekend had confused a bluegrass festival with a rock and roll festival. However, the police chief remarked that ‘this would be a fine place to take the whole family.’”¹

In its first decade, the Walnut Valley Festival made a strong commitment to providing entertainment that was safe and fun for families. The festival’s definition of family friendliness was first and foremost a prohibition on alcohol and illicit drugs, along with social pressure to refrain from nudity. It also included efforts to provide plenty of space, modern facilities, and an atmosphere that made music the central activity. Finally, the festival provided family friendliness by playing up its elements that came from the tradition of folklife festivals and gospel meetings.

In a larger context, the festival’s commitment to family friendliness was indicative of the 1970s wave of nostalgia, preservation of folk traditions, and patriotism. In the minds of some Americans, the ideal of family togetherness was under threat. An activity such as a bluegrass festival could be a poignant, potent reminder of a time when people made music by hand with acoustic instruments—a time that some would nostalgically call simpler.

More specifically, the commitment to family friendliness was a defensive stance because organizers could not be sure of community support for the event, which began in 1972 and continued annually. Without community support for everything from fairground permits to hospitality for out-of-town visitors, the undercapitalized organization could have easily failed. In addition, its organizers risked the judgment of the community where they lived and did business the rest of the year. Winfield residents had reason to be wary. While they had little experience with bluegrass festivals, they certainly were aware of rock music festivals through media accounts and documentary films even if they had not attended one. Such festivals gained as much attention for nudity and illegal drug use as they did for music. It is reasonable to assume most residents of the small, Republican-leaning community would not have been enthusiastic about hosting such an event, particularly because free tickets available to students at the local United Methodist-affiliated Southwestern College would mean mixing college students with the campers.

¹ “Mossman Tells Plans for Bluegrass Festival,” *Winfield Courier*, Sept. 25, 1972; “First Bluegrass Festival Considered ‘Big Success,’” *Winfield Courier*, Oct. 2, 1972.

The effectiveness of the festival's promotional strategy contributed to the annual festival's survival and the community's acceptance, even when some festival behavior did not live up to the family-friendly label.

The new nostalgia

During the Cold War, American families were widely viewed as the building blocks that would form a wall against insecurity, socialism, and what some saw as moral decay. Families, consisting of men and women married for the first and only time and focused on raising children, would steer the country through any damaging internal conflicts. "The family seemed to offer a psychological fortress that would protect them against themselves. Bolstered by heterosexual virility, scientific expertise, and wholesome abundance, it might ward off the hazards of the age." The shift away from the 1950s suburban ideal of family togetherness caused anxiety.² Baby boomers "had been born soon enough to take the lingering traces of an earlier way of life into [their] own imagination." Trends through the 1960s diminished the importance of or replaced domesticity. Robert Cantwell says those who were born in the "upward slope" of the baby boom from 1941 to 1950 experienced an "environment of new neighborhoods, new schools, new businesses, new forms of recreation and entertainment, and technologies that would nearly abolish the world in which your parents had grown up."³ Elaine Tyler May says, "Critics of the youths of the 1960s complained that the family-centered ethic of 'togetherness' gave way to a hedonistic celebration of 'doing your own thing.'" In the late 1960s and 1970s, counterculture became mainstream. "Between 1965 and 1975, the land of togetherness became the land of swinging singles, open marriage, creative divorce, encounter groups, communes, alternative lifestyles, women's liberation, the Woodstock Nation, and the 'greening of America.'" ⁴ People were also talking about sex more publicly and more frequently. Naturally, sexual expression found its way into popular culture, leading to conflicts such as the Wichita City Council attempting to prevent a closed-circuit television broadcast of the musical *Oh! Calcutta!* known for its all-nude scenes. New fashions reflected an increasing openness about sex and sexuality. "A land where teenage girls wore girdles even to gym class became a land of miniskirts, bralessness, topless bathing suits, and nude beaches."⁵

Clothing and hair choices were contested throughout the postwar era into the 1970s. "Allied to the interest in folk music . . . was an intriguing new style of uncertain origin: young women with long, natural hair, peasant skirts, handcrafted sandals and barrettes, young men whose hair had been clipped by their girlfriends, not by the barber, with sideburns or beards, workshirts,

² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th anniversary edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 13–14, 105–106.

³ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1996), 318–319. ⁴ May, 211; Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 4.

⁵ May, 90, 111, 3, 210–211; "Commissioners Seek to Block TV Showing of 'Oh! Calcutta!' *Wichita Eagle*, September 15, 1970; Skolnick, 4.

handmade leather belts with brass buckles—all brought to campus by children of urban, middle-class background.” Hair length, in particular, created controversy. A poll in 1965 showed that 80 percent of people who responded believed schools should not allow boys to display long hair. It seems people of all ages and stations were under scrutiny. An AP article in the *Winfield Courier* had Spiro Agnew, vice president of the United States, confirming rumors that he was wearing his hair longer. He treated the situation with humor, claiming it was meant to draw attention from the hair he was losing. *The Wichita Eagle* made a front-page story out of a Baldwin City sixth grade student who was suspended from school for the length of his hair.⁶

Next to sex, perhaps the activity that was most antithetical to family togetherness was drug use, a signature part of the increasingly mainstream counterculture. Getting high in the 1960s and 1970s was sometimes a communal activity but one undertaken with peers or even strangers, not across the generations of a family. “Suddenly it was hip to smoke marijuana and ingest various abundantly available hallucinogens and narcotics, pastimes once reserved for society’s marginal elements. Drug use was widely reported by the news media and became the fodder for what could be called its own genre of drug related popular music.”⁷

The shift away from the ideal of family togetherness, including attitude and behavior changes related to sexuality, hair length, and drug use, did not dislodge the importance of family in the broad culture. Even in 1976, the year when the phrase “the Me Generation” was coined, a survey showed “both men and women were ‘extraordinarily certain’ that marriage and family were of prime importance in their lives.” Similarly, a pollster who found a variety of examples of ways that Americans sought personal fulfillment in the 1970s also found that the majority of people were oriented to normative values. “They strongly believed, for example, that drug use and extramarital affairs are morally wrong, and that women should put their children and husband ahead of their careers.”⁸

In the 1970s, there was a meeting of right and left perspectives in a nostalgic view of the centrality of family life, symbolized in television shows such as “The Waltons” and “Little House on the Prairie” and acted on by parents preparing natural honey-sweetened, carob chip cookies for their children. “Americans indulged in a newfound appreciation of folk art, Americana, and material culture.” This was especially apparent as the bicentennial approached and “celebrations around the country took a local approach, avoiding contentious national issues by focusing instead on folk culture, such as genealogy, quilting, bluegrass music, and local history.” The new nostalgia elevated family, patriotism, community, and the ideal of honest work.⁹

⁶Cantwell, 323–324; May, 210; Associated Press, *Winfield Courier*, August 30, 1970; *Wichita Eagle*, September 16, 1970.

⁷Thomas R. Gruning, *Millennium Folk: American Folk Music Since the Sixties* (Athens: University of Georgia), 2006, 31.

⁸Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise* 146–147.

⁹Christopher Capozzola, “‘It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country’: Celebrating the Bicentennial in an Age of Limits,” in *America in the 70s*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 38; Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History From Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 2012), 8.

Mossman's careful words to the Rotary Club suggest that the organizers felt community pressure to present the event as family-friendly, perhaps even nostalgic. It seems clear, though, that the effort was also sincere; the organizers believed in family, community, and hard work. They ranged from college age to young professionals, mostly young men and women with children of their own. They had ties to community service organizations, local churches, and Southwestern College. "Truthfully, bluegrass is a family type of entertainment," festival president Bob Redford told a *Kansas Farm Bureau* publication in 1976. "We planned from the start to have one of the top festivals in the country with the event being designed for the entire family." Redford credited the festival's success to the work ethic of co-founder Joe Muret: "I was ready to throw in the proverbial towel. But Joe is the typical farmer with a strong constitution, and he convinced us that we were so far in over our heads that the only way out was to hold another festival."¹⁰

The Walnut Valley Festival was consistent and effective in promoting itself as family-friendly, fitting comfortably into the new nostalgia. Photo and film evidence, along with online recollections, show that it was the norm for participants to have a family-friendly experience, even a multigenerational one. A participant's home movies show a happy toddler in the campground and the grandstand. A yearbook picture of the 1978 festival shows a younger, bearded banjo player in a t-shirt consulting with three older, clean-shaven men in collared shirts. A crowd shot from the same festival shows people on bleachers and the ground listening to music. There are more men than women, and the most provocative elements in the shot are a bare foot and a bored-looking child. The *Kansas Farm Bureau* article said "It's not unusual to see a 75-year-old man sitting in the Winfield fairgrounds grandstand with his fiddle on his lap tapping his foot. And beside him sits a 'long-haired' college student tapping his foot." It was even possible to have an explicitly Christian experience at the festival, as bluegrass bands typically include a generous amount of gospel music in their sets. Each festival included a gospel sing and/or a church service on Sunday morning.¹¹

Historian Arlene Skolnick says the new nostalgia created a meeting ground for the political right and the political left. At Winfield, it created a common ground between the freaks and the fogies amid the craft and demonstration booths. Even though bluegrass music's strongest lineage is from Appalachia, the rural setting of the Walnut Valley Setting made its music and crafts an authentic, if elevated, celebration of Midwest heritage. "By and large, the region's sustained rural heritage with its attendant interest in land and agriculture, seasons and life cycles, rural communities and interdependence, small towns and cities, as well as the weather, have all come to represent the Midwest to the rest of the nation." Ethnomusicologist Thomas R. Gruning says authentic rural culture was what he sought as a young folkie. Walnut Valley Festival organizers and supporters emphasized that the festival was grounded in rural heritage and,

¹⁰ Norma Sampson, "Bluegrass Festival Features Family Fun," *Kansas Farm Bureau News*, 1976.

¹¹ "Festival Draws Together Common Interests," *The Moundbuilder*, yearbook of Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas, 1979; Mike Ward, "Walnut Valley Festival - 1975 & 1976," YouTube video, 6:13, posted December 28, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5dy07Hz7QE, October 29, 2014; Sampson, *Kansas Farm Bureau News*, 1976.

increasingly, in the life of the community. “The Tisdale church and the Winfield Jaycees are preparing to meet your food needs,” organizers wrote when promoting the second festival. “Our town of Winfield this year is backing our Festival wholeheartedly.”¹²

Not rock

Some Winfield residents undoubtedly shared these concerns about changing families, including sexual expression and drug use. Organizers of the Walnut Valley Festival had to contend with such concerns in seeking support for their event. The effort was complicated by the high visibility in recent years of rock music festivals. Even people who eschewed popular music or did not know it well enough to tell a Joan Baez from a Loretta Lynn from a Grace Slick knew about the Woodstock festival in 1969 from extensive press coverage and a widely released documentary film the following year. Winfield residents were also likely familiar with Pittsburg Peace, a “Kansas Woodstock” held in Crawford County, Kansas, in September 1970, which commanded statewide headlines. Rock festivals did not cause the shift away from family togetherness, but to some cultural critics and worried parents, they may have symbolized it. “Parents of teenagers . . . were confronted with ‘sex, drugs, and rock and roll’—a new youth culture radically different from their own. To the public at large, these changes seemed to support arguments that Americans were abandoning family ties in general and ties to children in particular.”¹³

Sexual intercourse is not depicted in the documentary about the Woodstock rock festival, but nudity during and after a rainstorm is prominent. People walk around in the rain without clothes, and bare breasts are visible in the muddy aftermath. A man and woman strip to the skin after the rain to put on dry clothes that are offered. In both the film and widely published photographs, festivalgoers in various stages of undress swim and bathe together. “I think skinnydipping is beautiful if you can do it,” says one woman interviewed in the documentary, “but we’ve been made to believe it’s wrong.” Sex was also talked about during and after the festival. A young couple interviewed several times in the film say they reside together in a family situation, “what others might call a commune.” The woman acknowledges that they “ball and everything” but do not necessarily plan to stay sexually exclusive during the festival. Rock singer Grace Slick told talk show host Dick Cavett that she passed the time at Woodstock “getting it on.”¹⁴

¹² Ginette Aley, “Knotted Together Like Roots in the Darkness: Rural Midwestern Women and Region, a Bibliographic Guide,” *Agricultural History* 77, no. 3 (Summer 2003), 455 (accessed October 17, 2014); Gruning, 2; Joe Muret, Stuart Mossman, and Bob Redford, “Welcome to the Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival and Crafts Fair,” *Bluegrass Central*, September 15, 1973.

¹³ Skolnick, 130; Letter to the editor, *Wichita Eagle*, September 16, 1970; Michael Wadleigh, *Woodstock*, Warner Brothers, 1970, television broadcast on VH1 Classic, November 21, 2014.

¹⁴ *Woodstock*; Mike Evans and Paul Kingsbury, eds., *Woodstock: Three Days That Rocked the World* (New York: Sterling Publishing), 2009, 238. The same episode of Dick Cavett’s show that included Slick’s comment featured a performance of the song “We Can Be Together,” including the line “Up against the wall, motherfuckers,” which was not obscured.

With rock and roll and sex came drugs. Woodstock was known for a possibly tongue-in-cheek announcement about the “brown acid” not being very good, but the documentary account of it specifically and explicitly depicts marijuana use. Both Jerry Garcia and Country Joe McDonald hold up joints to the camera. An unidentified man fashions a pipe and starts using it. There is a whole montage of participants passing joints while Arlo Guthrie’s song “Customs Man” plays. A silent, amateur film of Pittsburg Peace does not show any explicit drug use besides beer drinking, though lingering shots of mushrooms and use of psychedelic designs to delineate scenes speak to the influence of drug culture. There were, however, clearly drugs including marijuana and mescaline widely available and casually used during the festival, which infuriated local residents and state politicians. Not coincidentally, state and local elections in 1970 included candidates voicing strong views on curbing drug sales in Kansas.¹⁵

News of rock festivals may have simply raised Winfield residents’ concerns with logistics and safety associated with a large event. The Pittsburg festival created a great deal of trash and attracted a number of motorcycles. *Woodstock* depicts festivalgoers knocking down and climbing over fences and has several scenes about the difficulty of providing enough food and gasoline. Townspeople are shown with attitudes ranging from supportive to sympathetic but concerned to condemning; organizers consistently describe the participants as peaceful, however.¹⁶

National awareness about rock music festivals was seemingly an obstacle to the fledgling Walnut Valley Festival in 1972 and beyond. Organizers made the case that the festival at Winfield was different. First, it was a bluegrass festival, firmly grounded in the much tamer tradition of folklife and folk music festivals, including traditional crafts. Its focus was on the music, particularly the growing interest in flatpick guitar, an acoustic lead style that made guitar as important as mandolin or banjo in a bluegrass ensemble. Festival literature consistently asked participants to keep alcohol and drugs away from the music and promoted this aspect of the festival. Finally, it was held in a spacious and safe environment.

The festival’s local antecedents were folk festivals put on at Southwestern College in 1967 and 1971. “The Southwestern Folk Festival” was a three-day, two-night affair in April 1967 directed by Sam Ontjes, a senior, with Stuart Mossman and Brent Pierce responsible for publicity. The festival featured headline acts Doc and Merle Watson, Jimmy Driftwood, and Mance Lipscomb, and attendance neared 1,500. “I can’t remember it being any one person’s idea,” Ontjes recalled later. He and a friend had attended the Newport Folk Festival in 1963 and brought back the idea of music workshops as part of a festival program. In subsequent years, Ontjes, Mossman, Bob and Kendra Redford, and others attended a festival in Mountain View, Arkansas, bringing back the idea of including a variety of acoustic music styles in concerts. The 1971 version, called “Walnut Valley Folk Festival,” took place in October 1971, planned by Ruth

¹⁵ *Woodstock*; Robert Blunk Jr., “Pittsburg Peace Festival, Cherokee County, Kansas,” filmed September 4–7, 1970, Kansas Memory video, four parts, 8:56, 6:19, 8:29, 9:37, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/222527>, October 29, 2014.

¹⁶ Blunk, “Pittsburg Peace,” Kansas Memory; *Woodstock*.

Huber, Mike Totty, David McMullen, and Mossman. Workshops and craft displays filled the day, and the evening included feature performers Dave Bromberg and Dan Crary.¹⁷

Festivals meant to preserve and expose folk traditions and music date back at least to 1928, when Bascom Lamar Lunsford founded the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, the first Appalachian folk festival. The nomadic National Folk Festival began in 1934, housed first in St. Louis, Missouri. Interestingly, Wichita was under consideration for hosting in 1970; if that had taken place, it might have changed the direction of the Walnut Valley Festival significantly. As a renewed national interest for folk music grew, George Wein and Albert Grossman organized a festival in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1959. Over the next several decades, the Newport Folk Festival would have a major impact on defining the notion of folk music for many Americans, and it influenced Ontjes as he directed the Southwestern Folk Festival. At Newport and the festivals that came after it, preservation of folk traditions went hand in hand with pop music that was influenced—in some cases, deeply, and in others, slightly—by more grassroots and less commercial artists.¹⁸

Walnut Valley Festival organizers demonstrated a strong commitment to musicianship and craftsmanship, in part to send a message that their festival was about something more substantial than skinny-dipping or sharing joints. This music-first attitude started with Mossman and other organizers declaring the festival's first contest, for flatpick guitar performance, a national championship. Mossman told Winfield Rotarians before the first festival he hoped Winfield would become known as the home of the championship. A year later, Mossman, Redford, and Muret wrote, "Last year's comments confirmed our interest in making a National Flatpicking Championship available to the Midwest. Our contestants came from every part of the nation and one came all the way from Hawaii . . . This year we have added a Fiddle contest, and we hope to add more next year if interest is shown." A few years later, a writer gushed about Mark O'Connor, who won both the flatpick guitar and fiddle contests in 1977. The writer asked why there were only 31 guitar contestants when the campground was full of pickers. "As one contestant explained simply, 'The entry fee is only a few dollars, but a lot of people who plan to enter change their minds when they hear some of the jamming going in the campground the day before the contest. You can easily be persuaded into thinking . . . an appearance on your part could lead to public embarrassment.'" After his double win, O'Connor commented on the steep level of competition: "I won the 1975 guitar contest, but I didn't even make the cut last year." By 1979, festival veteran and guitar clinician Crary was writing, "Have you been to a flatpicking contest lately? In many ways, they're an amazing experience. At last year's National Flatpicking

¹⁷ Sam Ontjes to Rex Flottman, email, March 29, 2011; "Walnut Valley Folk Festival" in *The Moundbuilder*, yearbook of Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas, 1972.

¹⁸ Michael Ann Williams, *Staging Tradition: John Lair and Sarah Gertrude Knott* (Urbana: University of Illinois), 2006, 11, 144; Erinn R. Barefield, "The Kerrville Folk Festival: The Path to Kerr-Version," master's thesis, Texas State University-San Marcos, 2010, 12; Gruning, 30.

Championship Festival in Winfield, Kansas, the field of contestants included at least thirty players who were doing things unheard of ten years ago.”¹⁹

Along with the contests, organizers booked some widely recognized talent for the first few festivals. Byron Berline was a Caldwell, Kansas, native who had performed and recorded with Chris Hillman of the Byrds in the country-rock act The Flying Burrito Brothers. Berline brought his bluegrass band The Country Gazette, including fellow Burrito Brother Roger Bush, to the first festival. A picture published in *Frets* showed Dan Crary, Tony Rice, Norman Blake, and Doc Watson on stage together at the festival in 1973. At a time when acoustic lead guitar was only beginning to be explored, those were among the preeminent practitioners. The high level of musicianship extended beyond the stages. Good festival settings “offer weekend, amateur, and semiprofessional players places to meet and play with each other and with professionals in the context of the campground. For some, the opportunity to spend extended periods of time in which music is the central daytime and evening activity is the primary attraction.” Walnut Valley Festival organizers emphasized the importance of this jamming culture, and local press showed it in action, almost every year publishing pictures of multigenerational amateur picking circles.²⁰

Along with quality music, organizers invited craft vendors who combined artistry and tradition. Everyone could agree on the inherent goodness of fresh-pressed cider, a hand-stitched quilt, and an Irish ballad.²¹ “We had 45 craft booths last year which created a lot of interest,” organizers wrote after the first festival. “Most of them made enough profit that they plan to come again this year and are helping us line up some 100 craft exhibits.” Photos of craft booths tend to feature women shopping at them, as in a photo from 1979 in *The Moundbuilder* of Southwestern College student Ellen Pederson buying jewelry.²²

Festival organizers in the 1970s worked hard to promote the festival as family-friendly and specifically as an environment that restricted alcohol and drugs. Allies in the local press and acoustic music media cooperated. A typical advertisement was for the 1974 festival, held September 20–22. It began with the assumption that the entire family would attend and that the pace would be slow. “Relaxing isn’t so hard. Just pack up the family and get yourself to Winfield, Kansas, for a grand way to wind down your summer bluegrass style.” The ad listed demonstrations and activities typical of a folklife festival, such as doll making, basket weaving, quilt making, and woodcarving, and instructed visitors, “Be sure the kids see how grandmother

¹⁹ “Mossman Tells Plans for Bluegrass Festival,” *Courier*; Muret, Mossman, and Redford, *Bluegrass Central*, September 15, 1973, 5; Dan Rhodes, “Weekend at Walnut Valley,” *Bluegrass Unlimited*, December 1977, 28, 31; Dan Crary, Flatpicking Workshop, *Frets*, July 1979, 70.

²⁰ *Winfield Courier*, September 30, 1972; Jim Hatlo, “Dan Crary,” *Frets*, February 1980, 34; Gruning, 110.

²¹ Clamjamfrey, a band from Connecticut that played Irish music, was booked the Walnut Valley Festival in 1979, and the local press said the performance was the first by an Irish band at a Kansas festival. “Something Different,” *Winfield Courier*, June 2, 1979.

²² Muret, Mossman, and Redford, *Bluegrass Central*, September 15, 1973; “Walnut Valley Festival,” in *The Moundbuilder*, yearbook of Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas, 1980.

used to make lye soap!" The ad is tagged with a friendly but clear warning: "No alcohol please. It's a family affair."

The ban on alcohol and drugs was a consistent festival rule from the beginning and a part of every piece of print advertising reviewed in the research process for this paper. In an interview with a bluegrass magazine in 1977, director Bob Redford claimed that a festival survey showed that one hundred percent of respondents wanted good security. "'I believe if you advertise something, you should back it up,' Redford said of his no alcohol or drugs on the grounds rule." It is not clear if the distinction between the fairgrounds, where possession of alcohol could get a person removed, and the campground, where moderate and discreet alcohol consumption was typically tolerated, was in place from the beginning of the festival, but it seems to be the way Redford was operating by 1977: "He observed, without sounding pious, he is a lay minister at his Methodist church. 'I'd give my eye-tooth to control the drinking in the campsites, but it is close to impossible. Although I don't drink, that doesn't mean I am against all people who do drink.'" The festival newsletter reiterated, "If you have to have booze with your bluegrass, you are emphatically not welcome in Winfield in September. . . . We don't want or need you and your alcohol at Winfield."²³ Being able to claim with a measure of confidence that the festival removed people who had alcohol or drugs was important in Winfield, which had a strong tie to the only recently United Methodist Church²⁴ and at least one operating chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the time. Winfield did not allow the sale of liquor by the drink until 1996 and did not allow the sale of packaged liquor for another decade. When it came to policy on alcohol and drugs, the festival was family-friendly.

The festival was also not a place where the cultural contests regarding clothing and sexual expression were waged. Based on viewing photographs in newspapers and Southwestern College yearbooks, women who performed and attended dressed with a higher concern for the fall Kansas weather than for any attempt at sexual expression. Commonly worn long skirts, prairie dresses, and flannel shirts were family-friendly and perhaps even indicative of the new "nostalgic rhetoric of family, flag, neighborhood, and work."²⁵

Walnut Valley Festival organizers emphasized its operations and facilities as part of the case for the event's family friendliness. No Woodstock fence climbing would be necessary. "For those of you who have not been to Winfield before, we would like to let you know a little about our facilities. We have a very large fairground where our Festival is held. The all-weather grandstand holds at least 5,000 people and we have room in front of it for 3,000 more." Promotional materials for the second festival claimed that \$60,000 had been invested into the "unlimited shady" camping area, including electrical hookups, restroom facilities, and access to fresh water. "We are trying to make this the cleanest and most comfortable festival you ever attended, with something of interest for everybody." An account of the June Jamboree, a summer festival put on by the Walnut Valley Festival operation in June 1979, begins with a staff member assuring, "We had a good, well-behaved crowd." The music press reinforced the Walnut Valley Festival

²³ Rhodes, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, 30.

²⁴ Before a 1968 merger, the church had been simply Methodist.

²⁵ Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise* 134.

reputation for smoothness and safety. A bluegrass magazine said the festival was “headed up by a stocky, partially–balding, intelligent man named Robert ‘Bob’ Redford. He says proudly, ‘I’m an organizer.’ The Association informed its patrons ‘Dogs, drugs, motorcycles and alcohol are not permitted on grounds. Offenders will be removed from the festival site.’ Amazingly, not one dog was seen on the grounds; not one motorcycle interrupted the festival, and no one suffering from overindulgence was seen in our area.”²⁶

The festival’s effectiveness in communicating its message is shown in the way the event was increasingly knitted into the fabric of the Winfield community through the 1970s. Though the contractual arrangements between the college and the festival shifted over the years, the first Walnut Valley Festival was presented in conjunction with Southwestern College, and all students received free tickets. Its inclusion in most of the college yearbooks through the 1970s is evidence that the festival remained a significant event in the college calendar. In 1978, the Winfield High School yearbook includes a picture of a festival stage in the same photo spread as prom, homecoming, and a school theatre performance. Community authority figures blessed the event in local media coverage. In addition to the police chief praising the professionalism of the first festival, city commissioner Homer Hetherington praised the organizers’ “over planning,” and Mayor Milton Nida commended the city personnel who assisted. The town’s fire chief, Joe Sanders, was an enthusiastic participant in campground jamming, as shown in newspaper photos from 1978 and 1979. Even the state’s attorney general, Curt Schneider, spent time in the festival campground, combining music with a campaign stop.²⁷

The festival’s family–friendly reputation stayed intact even though some participants and performers enthusiastically participated in public nudity, alcohol consumption, and drug use—or at the very least, songs about drug use. Several scenes in a home movie show nude people swimming and bathing in the river, reminiscent of *Woodstock*. Online responses to the video include these comments from Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival Facebook users Julie Bales Buresh and Connie Phillips Lawson: “That was back when nobody had showers. We used to jump in the river in our clothes to bathe.” “Saw my first naked man while riding with my sister through the grove (didn’t block the roads then). Must have been about 1975 or so. The river shots in this film reminded me of that. He was swimming. Maybe it was one of these people! LOL.”²⁸

Recollections in online discussion groups suggest that alcohol consumption was an assumed part of the experience for some festivalgoers. “Back then, of course, the shows started on Friday

²⁶ Muret, Mossman, and Redford, *Bluegrass Central*, September 15, 1973; “Winners Take Home Big Prizes,” *Winfield Courier*, June 4, 1979; Rhodes, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, 1977.

²⁷ Muret, Mossman, and Redford, *Bluegrass Central*, September 15, 1973; “Mossman Tells Plans for Bluegrass Festival,” *Courier*; *Royal Viking*, yearbook of Winfield High School, Winfield, Kansas, 1978; “It’s Becoming a Tradition,” *Winfield Courier*, September 14, 1978; “Harmonica Player,” *Winfield Courier*, June 4, 1979; “Schneider Predicts Knockout of Liquor Petitions,” *Winfield Courier*, September 16, 1978.

²⁸ Ward, “Walnut Valley Festival – 1975 & 1976,” YouTube video; Facebook Group, “Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival,” comments posted September 22, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2208526957/>, November 27, 2014.

night and lasted through Sunday night. The shorter length made for perhaps a bit more intensity—get down, set up, start partying,” wrote Jeff Boyer. “In a weird way, I miss the old ‘all or nothing’ feeling of the shorter fest. It had a kind of frontier rawness to it—fewer frills, fewer shows, frenetic activity all the time, run to a show, hurry to a jam, ‘don’t stop now,’ forget about food, don’t worry about showers, ohmygod it’s almost over, seems like we just got here . . . boyhowdy, back when we were all young—we sure knew how to PARTY!!” While presumably drug use was part of some participants’ partying, there is documentation of a story and song about drug use at the “Spring Thing,” a bonus event put on by the Walnut Valley Festival in April 1976. In a recording, John Hartford introduces a song he wrote for festival favorite Norman Blake, a guitar wizard, and gets four seconds of enthusiastic calls from the audience at the mention of the name. When Hartford goes on to say the song is about “two freaks who decide they are going to get together and smoke some dope,” he gets a full nine seconds of applause before he can continue. One interpretation is that the Spring Thing audience was more than twice as enthusiastic about marijuana as it was about guitar performance.²⁹

Boyer said a spirit of camaraderie prevented the party atmosphere from marring the Walnut Valley Festival for most people; this perhaps was another way of saying that the family-friendly ideals were shared even among the people who included beer and weed in their festival weekend. “The 1975–79 or so festivals (including the 1976 Spring Thing and the 1979 June Jamboree) were fairly rough and rowdy by current standards—hard partying all around as the event moved from a relatively small, confined affair to the megafest we’ve come to know and love. It seemed to me that those of us who had been with the Walnut Valley gatherings from the beginnings began to exert our own ‘calming down’ notices to those among us going a bit beyond enthusiasm. ‘Let’s not ruin a good thing with unnecessary rowdiness,’ seemed to be the consensus being communicated by gesture, expression, and appeal. We had a notion from the beginning of the ‘Winfield spirit’—helping out where possible, leaving the campgrounds in good condition, cooperating with fellow campers and staff, accepting some responsibility of our own to make the festival run smoothly. It seemed to work—many of the uninitiated became converts and adjusted their partying actions instantaneously.”³⁰

A bluegrass festival hosted by a small town fit naturally within the new kind of nostalgia around family, community, patriotism, and work that emerged in the 1970s. At the same time, the newsworthiness of rock music festivals such as Woodstock in New York and Pittsburg Peace in southeast Kansas may have also made Winfield residents worry about such an event. Sensing that community support was critical, Walnut Valley Festival organizers presented a festival firmly

²⁹ Yahoo Groups, “Winfield-I,” comment posted on September 16, 2006, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/winfield-I/info>, November 27, 2014; John Hartford, posted by user catthinkof1nottaken, “John Hartford – ‘I Thought You Were Holding’ – The Walnut Valley Spring Thing 1976,” YouTube video, posted March 4, 2014, <http://youtu.be/RI1ivL1FqOY>, October 29, 2014.

³⁰ Yahoo Groups, “Winfield-I,” comment posted on September 28, 2000, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/winfield-I/conversations/messages/1674>, November 27, 2014.

rooted in the folk tradition, featuring high quality musicianship. In advertising and by featuring crafts and traditional demonstrations, the festival organizers attempted to appeal to all ages and even to connect to the emerging nostalgia culture. Perhaps most importantly, the festival's attention to operations and security, including a consistent message that alcohol and drugs were not welcome, created a safe and family-friendly environment at least around the grandstand. The "Winfield spirit" helped extend that environment into the less rigorously controlled campground when participants began to celebrate in a rowdier fashion. The Walnut Valley Festival survived the 1970s and has continued annually ever since. It is hard to pinpoint if or when the festival was fully accepted by the community, but by the late 1970s, the *Winfield Courier* was running advertisements from Winfield businesses that hoped to benefit from the visitors. "Bluegrass Fans and Participants," one such ad read, "For Your Convenience, Sonic will stay open until 1 a.m. or later Friday and Saturday." If "America's favorite drive-in" was excited to see bluegrass fans, then the Walnut Valley Festival must have been a fine place to take the whole family.³¹

³¹ Advertisement, *Winfield Courier*, September 14, 1989.