
JACK O'CONNOR

North Carolina 1960s Counterculture Oral History

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Tales from a Southern Hippie

I'm Jack O'Connor, and I've lived in North Carolina most of my life, pretty much all over the state, but I've been living in Statesville, which is maybe 20 miles from Love Valley, since the 1963. I believe the fall 63 right, when everything started happening, you know, the Kennedy assassination, all that middle of civil rights.

In 1969 the counterculture was happening everywhere except the South, unless you maybe lived in Atlanta.

Charlotte was a little bit ahead of everywhere else in these rural areas. There was a newspaper, underground newspaper, that was a big thing back then. There was a newspaper called the *Inquisition*.

That was one of the things about the counterculture in the midst of the terrible horrors of the Civil Rights experience, Kennedy getting assassinated, the Vietnam War getting cranked up, you know, then there was all this positive, happy stuff. And it was like, screw the rest world. Yeah, we're going to enjoy life.

We're in college, we're away from our parents and our old high schools and stuff, and we're experiencing the world. And you know, I mean, I definitely dabbled. Always in drugs. I always tell people I was responsible drug user. it was like a sacrament, you know? I mean you shared the joint and whatever.

We're just living this life and hanging out in the head shops. It was a head shop in Charlotte called Canned Heat and there was another one Shrewd's MF Holding Company.

We had seen all this stuff in *Life* magazine about Woodstock. We were excited. Then in the spring, they were talking about the second Atlanta Pop Festival was coming up, So we all went down to Atlanta, and you know, that might be where I heard about the fact that there was gonna be a Love Valley festival.

The Long, Strange Days of Love Valley

Love Valley has always had this sort of questionable reputation, it's right in the very tip top, northwestern corner of Iredell County. So, it was out in the boonies. and when I got to high school, I remembered, and of course, we weren't old enough to buy beer, but I can remember there that this was during blue laws, you couldn't buy beer on Sunday or anything like that. Well, in Love Valley, you could. So sometimes we would come up to Love Valley and get beer.

When I was in high school, one time they made a movie, or supposedly were making a movie, and they needed extras and so a bunch of us came up here to see about getting in the movie.

After the Atlanta festival, you know, things were cranking up here in Love Valley. So, we would come up here just to check out the scene.

it's getting closer and closer to the festival and people are starting to show up. You know, there were a few came right away, of course, but very few. But that changed, and more and more people started coming, and started getting to be crowds, and people were starting to camp out and it was, it was a big it was a big mess.

So, when we got actually closer to the date, like the last week before the festival, then it was really picking up. I was at this festival and had a big time. We came up just every night when we could get away and then had go home and go to work next day and stuff. I got my girlfriend and I can't remember if somebody went with us or not, but we went up there, and by now the cars were parked all in the ditches. It was pretty sensational, because people looked different, people wore wild clothes.

They hired bikers to do security. They were out of control. And they had like a line across the street, and they basically, you had to go through there, kind of like the gauntlet and they took whatever they wanted, and they took my bottle of wine.

There really is only one downtown street in Love Valley we would go walk up to the arena You walk down to the end of the street, and it's like a cliff. It's like it opens up into this big bowl, and down there is the valley. They had kind of made some bleachers and stuff built into with rock and stuff. And then above that, it's sort of terraced dirt, which was pretty rough and so that's where everybody sat. We had our tent posted back to the left of the stage, just not too far, 100 yards at the most, maybe more like 50. So, we were close. We can hear all the music. We hung out in the arena and stuff, and listened to music, and hung out in the tent and just participated in what everybody else participated in.

It was jam packed. It was just a crowd, I'd say like 100,000. They were having fun and joy, and they were paying attention to the music and stuff. And there were people selling stuff right and left they had a free food kitchen; they had these huge pots of food and girls all in their Indian print skirts and smell of the patchouli oil. It was all the classic everything

There were rumors that on Sunday, other bands appeared like, supposedly, Sly and the Family Stone.

I would come to the valley on occasion after the festival. I got reconnected to the Love Valley people, because there was very much a Woodstock feel like not the festival Woodstock, but the town Woodstock.

I've never met the Allman Brothers or but they were, they were here a lot, and other friends of mine got to know them they actually bought property there. Well, Dicky Betts did.

But the good times really started after the festival, because yeah, and I'm sure you must have heard about how the community grew up subsequent to the festival,