

arts & entertainment



Daily Nebraskan Photo

The crowd thins out during the last days of the Brownville festival.

Bluegrass six feet under following Brownville death

By Michael Zangari

The decline of the "Old Fiddlers' Contest" at Brownville and the sudden rise of "Boogie Hill" at Peru State College is not a classical epic of great proportions.

It does give an excuse, though, to reflect on the resurrection and subsequent burial of country and bluegrass music in the wake of its discovery by the public.

Although the attempt to create a bluegrass festival at Peru represents a worthwhile concert opportunity for a new generation of performers, it is out of respect that the Brownville festival be laid to rest with muted dignity.

The Brownville festival started as a historical-cultural experience. Initially, the audience numbered in the hundreds, and was dominated by a traditional type of bluegrass-fiddle competition.

The annual event caught on. Older people mixed with the young. There was a nice cooperative atmosphere as there was an influx of young talent and music. There seemed to be little of the generation gap that papers talked about.

The final year of the festival was a realization of the woodstock nightmare. The crowds overflowed into the thousands. People parked on Brownville citizens' front lawns.

The drunkenness of much of the crowd served to sharply divide the crowd, driving many of the older patrons into their own secluded area. There were open hostilities, and a good deal of the tradition and good feelings disappeared from the stage and the crowd.

The county commissioners' office, because of the complaints of the Brownville citizens or the impossibility of providing sanitary facilities for the mob, did not grant a permit for the competition this year.

There have been token attempts to relocate the festival, but for the most part this year's competition on the Belle of Brownville riverboat lacked the spontaneity and atmosphere of the previous festivals.

Enter Peru's Boogie Hill.

This festival, which will last from noon until sunset this Saturday, will have an atmosphere similar to that which killed Brownville.

There will be no lack of talent at the festival. It features Lincoln's Sandy Creek Pickers, last years winners at Brownville, and former Bluegrass Crusade members Steve Hanson on banjo and Gary Howe on mandolin, both Brownville veterans, and Peter Blakeslee, a professional singer-dobro player. A dobro is a steel-bodied guitar.

after midnight



There will be a Willie Nelson look-alike contest and a dinner that night.

I don't think the early atmosphere and the simplicity of Brownville can ever be created again. It's sad to try. The music can always be better; Peru's line-up is outstanding, and it will likely be a fine, modern bluegrass concert.

I'm reminded of a Daily Nebraskan interview with Steve Hansen last year when he was mulling over the demise of the Bluegrass Crusade.

He indicated that the break-up of the group was partially caused by the necessity of doing more commercial bluegrass music.

He said, "I'd like to do a more traditional type of bluegrass, but I've got to think about making a living, too."

I'd like to think that somewhere on some isolated back porch, there's an old man, and a fiddle, and an audience of one.

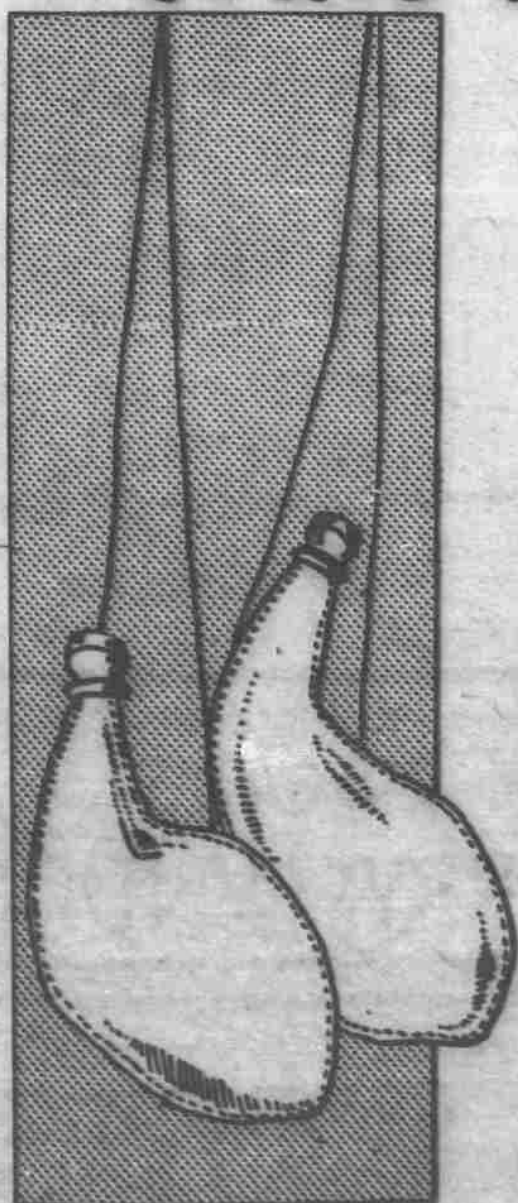
Recital is Sunday

Quentin Faulkner, UNL School of Music instructor, will perform the *Organ Mass of Nicolas de Grigny* on the Miskell Memorial Organ at 4 p.m. Sunday in Kimball Recital Hall.

The organ mass was a musical form employed in European churches from the 15th to the 18th centuries, in which organ music alternated with choir chants.

Assisting will be members of the School of Music Madrigal Singers, under the direction of John Moran, School of Music director.

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