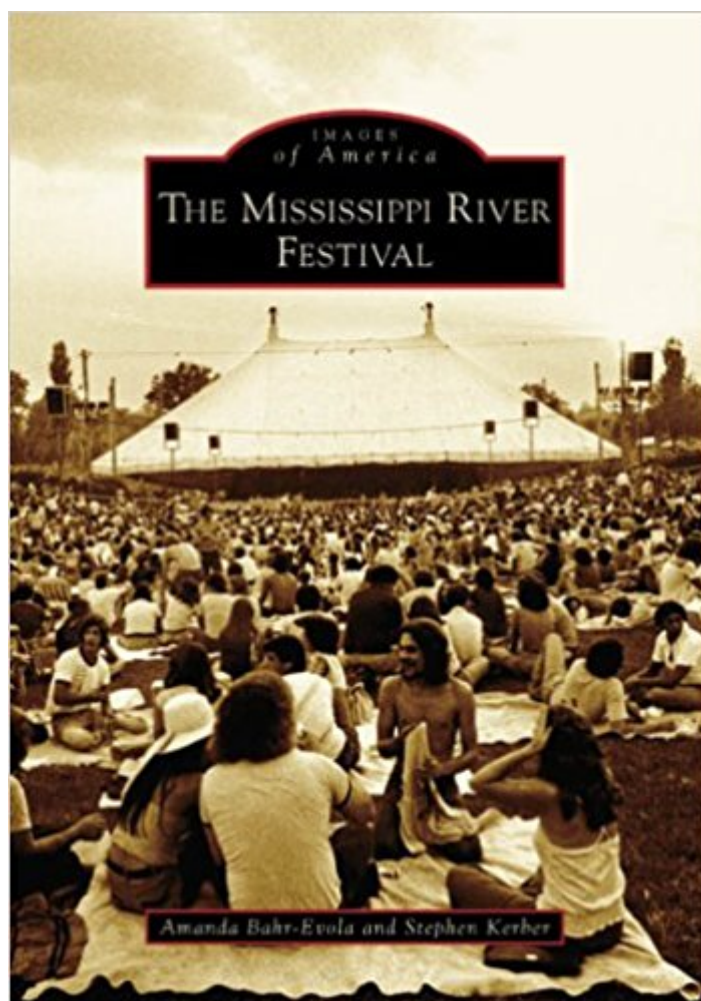


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# The Mississippi River Festival (IL) (Images Of America)



## Synopsis

In 1969, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville initiated a remarkable performing arts series called the Mississippi River Festival. Over 12 summer seasons, between 1969 and 1980, the festival presented 353 events showcasing performers in a variety of musical genres, including classical, chamber, vocal, ragtime, blues, folk, bluegrass, barbershop, country, and rock, as well as dance and theater. During those years, more than one million visitors flocked to the spacious Gyo Obata-designed campus in the countryside near St. Louis. The Mississippi River Festival began as a partnership promoting regional cooperation in the realm of the performing arts. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville invited the St. Louis Symphony to establish residence on campus and to offer a summer season. To host the symphony, the university created an outdoor concert venue within a natural amphitheater by installing a large circus tent, a stage and acoustic shell, and a sophisticated sound system. To appeal to the widest possible audience, the university included contemporary popular musicians in the series. The audacity of the undertaking, the charm of the venue, the popularity of the artists, the excellence of the performances, and the nostalgic memory of warm summer evenings have combined to endow the festival with legendary status among those who attended.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Historian Stephen Kerber is university archivist and special collections librarian at Lovejoy Library, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Historian Amanda Bahr-Evola is archives specialist at

Lovejoy Library and a lecturer in the Department of Historical Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Their desire to make accessible an accurate and comprehensive account of the Mississippi River Festival is embodied in this fascinating pictorial history.

I have a mantra that I've enjoyed ever since I quit boozin', "Expectations? I don't need no stinking expectations" Unfortunately I must have had some when I ordered this book because I was excited when it came but I was done IQQking at in about 15 minutes. Soon as I had time to look at each photo twice there wasn't much left to it. Don't get me wrong, I'm sure anytime I want to show my grandkids where grandpa took his parents to see the WHO or tell them about watching music in the rain this book will come in handy. I guess I was hoping for some nostalgia that it didn't capture. Or, maybe I'm just irritated because they didn't do a decent write-up on the Grateful Dead or try to describe how cool it was back when you could take your blanket and cooler and 5 bucks for a lawn ticket and enjoy total grooviness. No cops, no hassles, just fun and music, as it should be. Hopefully I can use the photos to generate the memories to tell my g'children. Nothing much there to read to them. I guess I was hoping the book would be as cool as the times I had there. Oh well.

Made up of mostly pics. Would have liked more info.

Great Book. I'm in it. Terry Beck

As a former employee there I was anxious to get this book and I was not disappointed when I did. LOTS of great memories rushed forth, the pictures of Skip Manley made me long to see the old man again, he always bought drinks. I wish she was still open, it was one of the best concert venues in North America and rock bands LOVED playing there as it had the only air conditioned outdoor stage in the world. Great home made food backstage for the bands too (courtesy Cindy Huckleberry and sisters.)

As a local resident of Madison County, Il, who attended many of the concerts at MRF, I anticipated the joys I would receive by turning the pages back towards memory lane. Well, if pop music is your preference, read on as this book omits most of the heavy metal and hard rock concerts at MRF. Yes, there is a reference to the WHO and Yes but this book does not discuss, local STL resident Lee Dorman's historic 1969 concert with Iron Butterfly and where is Mountain, Rod Stewart and Faces, Emerson Lake and Palmer, a long list of concerts are not addressed or represented in this

book. As University archivist, I am sure "selective" historian Stephen Kerber had access to the list of concerts performed at MRF and most likely, photo copies or originals of tickets or ticket stubs from the concerts. This book is a half hearted attempt to cover MRF. Seems someone preferred not to address or report on the wild side of MRF or the great musical performances by the big names of rock and roll. I give it a big "F" for accuracy and effort. In closing, the book seems to mirror the shame of tearing down what would still be one of the best venues in the STL area. Why is it that I can attend a rock concert in Taormina, Sicily today in a Greek teatro built in the Hellenistic age and rebuilt in the Roman period. MRF, in all it's glory, was operational for only 13 years and then torn down! And people wonder why America is struggling. Don't waste your money!

Today, August 15, 2009, marks the 40th anniversary of the beginning of Woodstock (August 15, 1969), the festival of music that is said to define a generation. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of a similarly iconic music festival that began before Woodstock, continued beyond it for many years, and brought the joy of music to many people in a relaxed, open atmosphere. The Mississippi River Festival (MRF) was an adventurous, risky, and highly creative project of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) which celebrated its own 50th anniversary in 2007. Located east of the Mississippi River across from St. Louis, the University in 1969 entered into a partnership with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra to perform a series of concerts in a natural amphitheater site on the northern portion of the campus. The University constructed a large, elaborate canvas tent under the long-term supervision of Skip Manley, who had years of experience as a circus tent manager. The tent was equipped with a stage, seats, an acoustic shell, and an excellent sound system. Extensive additional seating was available on the lawn which fronted into the tent. The Festival began in 1969 and was operated by the University until 1977. With increasing costs and financial losses, the University contracted the MRF to a private show business management firm to lease the site and operate the festival. Unfortunately, this arrangement proved unsuccessful and the MRF ceased operation after the 1980 season. Although the MRF began as a venture with the St. Louis Symphony, the Festival from the beginning was designed to feature the musical and performing arts in all their diversity. Under the direction of its conductor Walter Susskind, the Orchestra together with distinguished soloists such as Van Cliburn and Andre Watts performed many times during the MRF's early years. The orchestral concerts tend to be expensive to produce and they did not draw as well as concerts for other music. Thus, over the years, the St. Louis Symphony gradually reduced its participation in the MRF with other forms of music assuming greater prominence. Historians Stephen Kerber and Amanda Bahr-Eviola had access to an extensive

archive of photographs and other documentation of the MRF taken over the years by, among other sources, university photographer Charles Cox. Kerber and Bahr-Eviola wrote this commemorative account "The Mississippi River Festival" (2006) as part of the 50 year anniversary of SIUE in 2007. Plans are also underway for the construction of a commemorative marker at the site of the MRF later this year. This book is part of the "Images of America" series of Arcadia Press. Images of America renders an invaluable service in documenting the local history of places and activities in the United States which generally do not make their way into larger, more formal histories. This book includes about 200 photographs and accompanying text covering the history of the MRF. The book is in three chapters, the first of which covers the planning stages and opening years of the Festival, 1967 -- 1970, while the third chapter covers the sad years of the Festival's demise, 1978-1980. By far the longest section of the book is devoted to the glory years of the MRF between 1971 -- 1977. Most of the book is devoted to photographs of the many performers who graced the tent of the MRF during these years. The photos capture the intensity of artists at work. John Chapin and Judy Collins each performed under the MRF tent five times over the years, an accomplishment matched by no other popular artists. Their appearances receive extensive coverage in the book. A performance by the Who in 1971 resulted in the largest attendance for a concert in the MRF history. This concert, of course, is covered. Other performers include, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Jerry Lee Lewis, John Denver, Chicago, Sarah Vaughn, Helen Reddy, Joan Baez, the Jefferson Starship, Yes, and many more. The photos are accompanied by texts which offer information on the works performed and on the response of the audience. The book also captures something of the ambience of the MRF with the large audience stretched over the lawn on long summer nights, and the colorful staff of employees and students who helped run the Festival and make it a success. I never attended the MRF but was able to get a sense of it through this book. The other reviews of this book here on are by readers who had first-hand acquaintance with the MRF from a variety of perspectives. I found these reviews useful in supplementing my reading and in adding to my understanding of the Festival. This book captures something of the joy and emotion of music which are timeless. It also preserves a specific place and a specific mood in the United States both of which are unlikely to return the way they once were. The place and the feeling were those of the Mississippi River Festival of the Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville during the era of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Robin Friedman

The Mississippi River Festival was an outdoor concert venue similar to today's Riverport concerts in St. Louis. However, the drinking age in Illinois was 19 back in those days so you had one big

college campus party atmosphere. I remember missing The Allman Brothers and Jefferson Airplane shows and having to listen to friends sing Whippin Post or White Rabbit for days. I was able to attend the Eagles first concert with Joe Walsh. I remember seeing one of the early Aerosmith concerts and I think they opened for Head East. I heard Jackson Browne wrote some of his better songs while staying over in Edwardsville. I heard an urban legend about a baseball broadcaster's kid getting mugged there. For what it's worth, read this book.

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