

April 26, 2023

Alaska Folk Festival Board,

Thank you all for your efforts in putting on the 2023 performances of the Alaska Folk Festival. I was amazed at the contributions of the many performers from out-of-town and out-of-state. What a change from the humble start we made back in 1975!

And that humble start is what I'm writing about today. I read the history of the festival as presented on your website, quoting from Mike Miller's March 1984 article in *Alaskafest Magazine*. And although I hold Mike in high esteem for his great works over the years, there were a few details in his article and in some of the rumors that have grown up over the years about the origins of the festival that I feel should be corrected – just for the record, as they say.

I spoke briefly with Dylan Proudfoot one evening at the JACC and pointed him to a couple pages of a memoir that I published in 2020 that explicitly record the actual circumstances that led up to that first event. I have scanned those pages and included them with this letter for your reference. You may notice one discrepancy as to the dates of that first "jamboree". In the March 4, 1975 letter that I wrote home, I gave the dates as April 3, 4, and 5. I must have been assuming a Thursday-Saturday event, rather than the Friday – Sunday event that was eventually decided on and printed in the other enclosed document, the April 2, 1975 notice in the local paper. I thank the staff at the Alaska State Library for helping me unearth that item on microfilm.

The newspaper ad also backs up the content of my memoir on page 99, where I describe how we decided to name that first event the "First Annual Folk Music Jamboree", assuming of course that there would be others to follow.

I should add that the "20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Alaska Folk Festival Family Album" which we published back in 1994 includes the text of an interview in which Dan Monroe recalls my initial meeting with him. That was where the plan was hatched for that first event. I regret that I don't have a more complete listing of all who performed or did workshops at that first event. Might be a great project for some volunteer!

So, please do what to feel is right to get this more authentic history on record. It's a great tradition that deserves a solid foundation on that "humble start" back in 1975.

Thank You,

*Dan Hopson*

Dan Hopson  
Douglas



Bob Banghart, Dan Hopson, Susan Logue and John Palmes (l to r), another group I played with in mid-70s

tured cat. I played it a time or two with a Renaissance recorder group in town, but it eventually retired to a wall ornament – a purpose it serves to this day in my music studio.

So, I passed on Renaissance music for the time being and tumbled back

into folk music. Sometime in February of 1975 I had a visit at the yurt from a California guy whom I'd gotten to know. As we sat talking about music, he said he was impressed by how many folk musicians there seemed to be in the community. He went on to suggest that maybe we should imitate California and hold an outdoor folk music fest of some sort in Evergreen Bowl (now Cope Park). I thought that was a great idea – until I had second thoughts about Juneau's climate!

But I had been playing with a folk music group that included Dan Monroe, who happened to be the director of the Alaska State Museum, where Chuck Cox had worked and I had volunteered at times. So I hitched into town the next day and made my pitch to Dan for an indoor music festival at the museum. He liked the idea, and by March 4 that year I wrote home: *"There will be a 3-day folk music jamboree in Juneau on Apr. 3, 4, 5 with concert, musical 'fair' (booths set up around the State Museum with people showing off their musical wares), workshops and jam sessions. Being involved with the planning of it is taking some time but there's lots of good talent around here, so we're expecting great results."*

At an early organizational meeting, we discuss advertising. What do we call this thing we're proposing? We pull our collective audacity together and decide to call it the "First Annual Folk Music Jamboree", April 1975. Would it carry on into future years or just fizzle? Who knew? As it turns out, the "great results" we expected have turned out to be 44 years of Alaska Folk Festivals at the time of this writing, with more to come.

The group that I played with at the time included June Hall, Paul Dindler, and Bob Banghart, besides Dan Monroe and myself. We spread the idea out to our friends and acquaintances and eventually got enough musicians rounded up for three days of jam sessions and workshops at the museum, plus a Saturday evening concert. Some of the performers that I recall from that first concert were Gloria Barkeley doing a solo act; Paul Beck, Joe Malinowski, and Billy Hudson in a trio; fiddler Avrum Gross and piper Rob McMahon playing Celtic tunes together; and the group that I played with. We were known as the Chicken Ridge Rowdies, often meeting to play in June and Paul's living room up near 7<sup>th</sup> Street, aka Chicken Ridge.

There was no poster for that first event – just an ad in the newspaper as I recall. The beginnings of the festival were recounted in a memoir published for its 20th anniversary in 1994. And during those first twenty years, I'd have to say that my personal high point came during the 1990 festival. I rounded up some friends and put on the following short 5-part satirical skit – complete with costumes – during my 15-minute Friday evening time slot:

Some thirty years earlier, a 1959 movie called "A Hole in the Head" featured the catchy tune "High Hopes" by Sammy Cahn and James Van Heusen, which became quite popular that year. Its theme was persevering against all odds to achieve the seemingly impossible. I had the idea of turning it around and citing some dubious development projects or causes currently in the Juneau news that failed or were failing despite their high hopes. Copyright restrictions protect some of the lyrics in our

### FOLK MUSIC

The Alaska State Museum will sponsor a folk music jamboree Friday through Sunday at the museum. The program will include public performances, workshops and a musical fair. Contact Dan Monroe at the museum for information.

APRIL 2, 1975

SE Alaska Empire