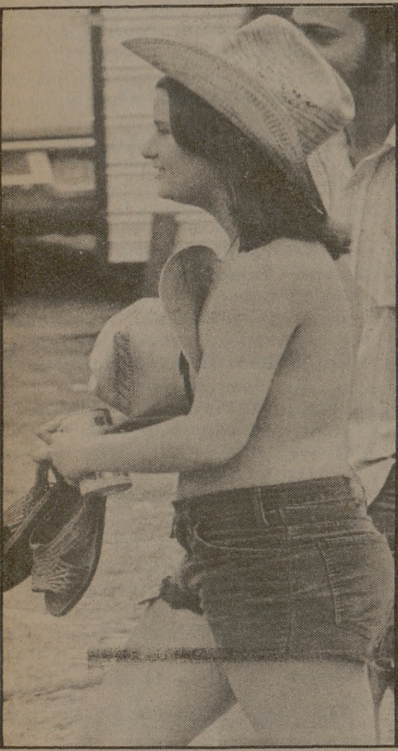
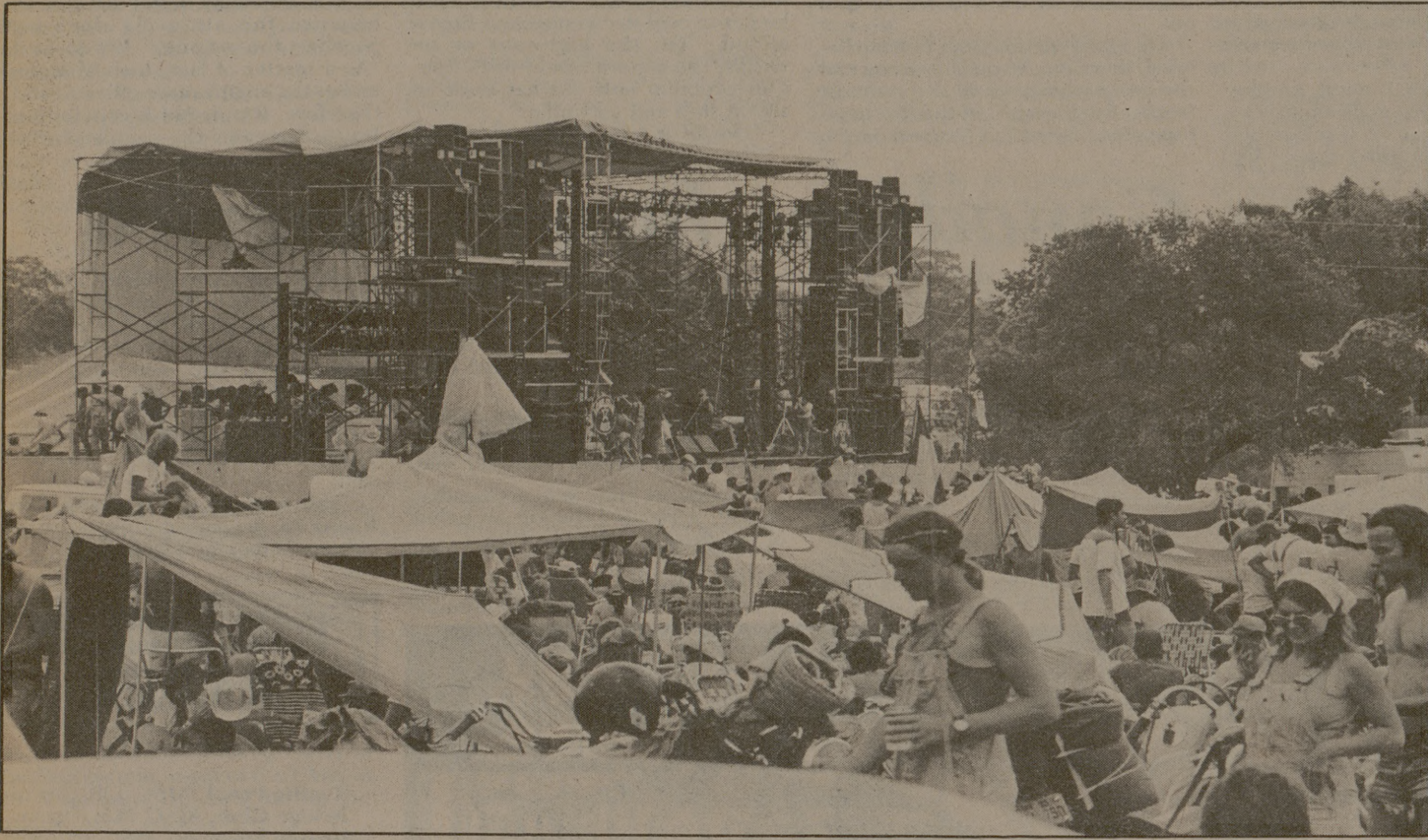


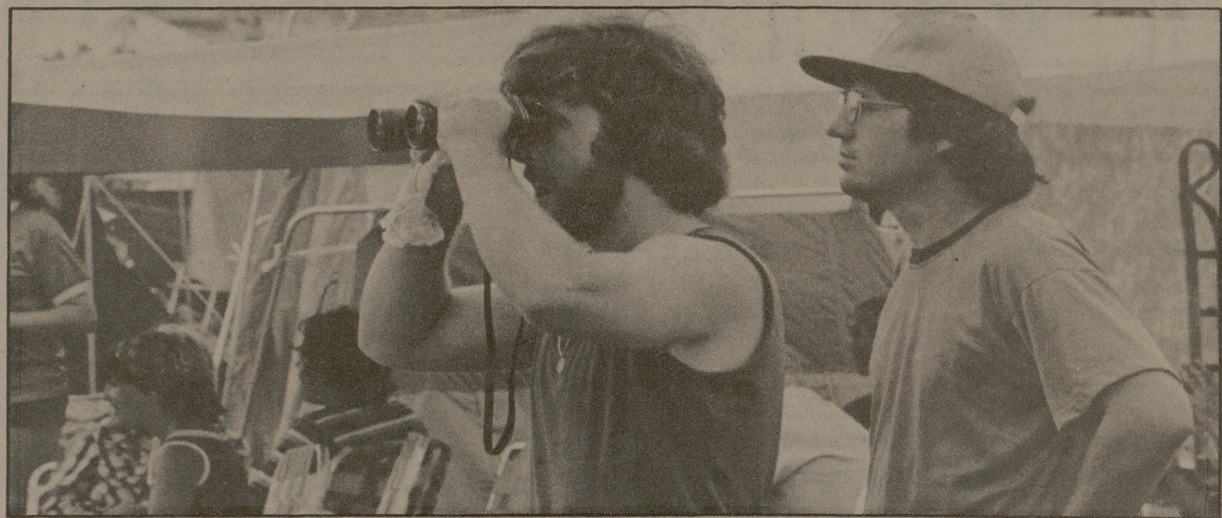
The third century comes in on a high note

# Gonzales picnic was good way to celebrate



*'Despite dust, showers and CLOD, the party went on . . . . People wandered around in a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds, enjoying the freedom.'*

Battalion photos by Dennis Edgerly and Richard Chamberlain



The Citizens for Law, Order and Decency were right: Willie Nelson's Fourth Annual Fourth of July Picnic did "lead to drunkenness, drug use, nudity and lewd, immoral behavior."

It was a good picnic. Although the affair was not scheduled to begin until the morning of the Fourth of July, people began arriving as early as Thursday. By the time Jerry Jeff Walker officially opened the show Sunday morning, more than 80,000 people were encamped on the South Texas ranch where the event was held.

Those who remembered the staggering lines of people, the huge traffic jams and the searing heat at last year's Liberty Hill picnic had a pleasant surprise. There were enough outhouses and latrines, more than enough concession stands and everyone was able to park and camp fairly close to the festival site. Even the weather cooperated. Although it was extremely dusty, it was overcast most of the time and a light shower Sunday afternoon settled the grit and cooled things off a bit.

Saturday night was Big Party time. Thousands of people roamed the area, moving from campsite to campsite, ingesting various inebriants. Leon Russell went onstage before dawn Sunday and played a set for those still capable of sitting up and listening.

A community shower had been set

up and hundreds of people used it in the morning to wash off the grit and grime of the night before. The shower was built without a top, sides or floor and one had to wade through ankle-deep mud to reach it.

Advance tickets for the event were \$10 apiece, but the few gate attendants there worked only occasionally. By mid-morning on the Fourth, all pretense of a paid concert was abandoned. The fence was knocked down and the crowd streamed through.

Most of the people roused themselves out of their stupors and went to the concert area early, only to be put back to sleep by a long-winded pastor from Gonzales who gave the morning sermon. Russell then came out to, in his words, "translate the sermon into language y'all can understand."

Ronald Crosby (alias Jerry Jeff Walker) woke everybody up and got the crowd singing with a loud, rollicking version of "This Land is Your Land." With the Lost Gonzo Band as backup, Walker's show was brilliant.

Steve Fromholz, rapidly becoming more than "A Rumor in His Own Time," took the stage after Walker. By the time the festival was over, the list of performers included Hoyt Axton, David Allen Coe, Rusty Weir, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Bill Callery, George Jones, George M. Jones, Bobby Bare, Tracy Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel, Milton Carroll, Doug

Sahm, B. W. Stevenson, Billy Joe Shaver, Waylon Jennings and Jessi Coulter, Linda Hargrove, Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, and, of course, Willie and his band.

The action, however, was not on the stage as much as it was in the audience. Most of the people that go to music festivals of this sort, as opposed to concerts, go to have a good time rather than to listen to tunes. Most of them succeeded.

However, there were bad times also. There were reports of numerous fights and stabbings, of snake bites and one drowning. Although the bites and drowning, perhaps, could not have been avoided, the fights certainly could have been.

Just as there were fights, there was also kindness. People forgot

their own affairs as they helped child find his parents. Food was shared freely and, for those not fortunate enough to have cars found hitchhiking easy.

For the vast majority, the event went on. People wandered around a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds, enjoying the freedom. The picnic was well staged, with good food and no undue hassles. There were no undue hassles, the authorities, at least after the court order permitting the picnic and the townspeople, while not particularly friendly, were not hostile. Willie Nelson has said this will be the last Fourth of July Picnic; if there is a next year, have a hard act to follow.

Richard Chamberlain



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