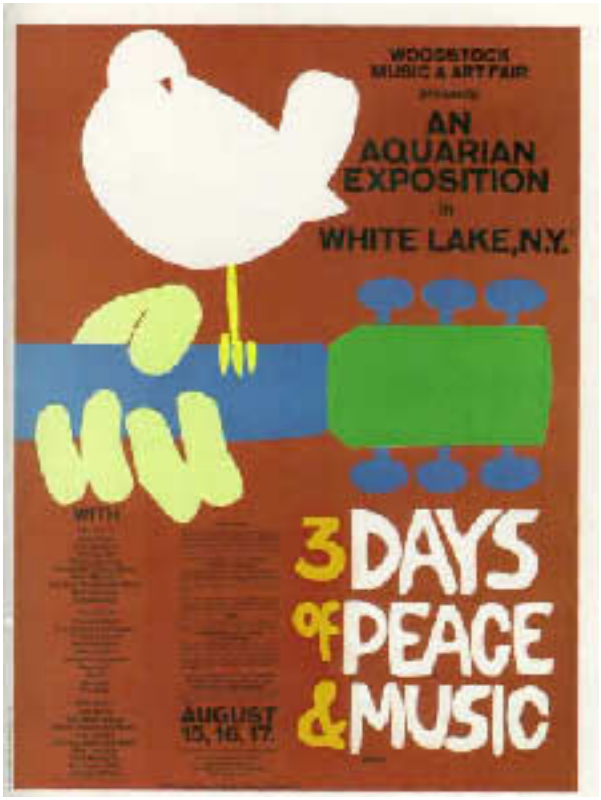

How Woodstock Happened...

Reprinted from The Times Herald-Record
Woodstock Commemorative Edition

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The last bedraggled fan sloshed out of Max Yasgur's muddy pasture more than 25 years ago. That's when the debate began about Woodstock's historical significance. True believers still call Woodstock the capstone of an era devoted to human advancement. Cynics say it was a fitting, ridiculous end to an era of naivete. Then there are those who say it was just a hell of a party.

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969 drew more than 450,000 people to a pasture in Sullivan County. For four days, the site became a countercultural mini-nation in which minds were open, drugs were all but legal and love was "free". The music began Friday afternoon at 5:07pm August 15 and continued until mid-morning Monday August 18. The festival closed the New York State Thruway and created one of the nation's worst traffic jams. It also inspired a slew of local and state laws to ensure that nothing like it would ever happen again.

Woodstock, like only a handful of historical events, has become part of the cultural lexicon. As Watergate is the codeword for a national crisis of confidence and Waterloo stands for ignominious defeat, Woodstock has become an instant adjective denoting youthful hedonism and 60's excess. "What we had here was a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence," said Bethel town historian Bert Feldman. "Dickens said it first: 'It was the best of times. It was the worst of times'. It's an amalgam that will never be reproduced again."

Gathered that weekend in 1969 were liars and lovers, prophets and profiteers. They made love, they made money and they made a little history. Arnold Skolnick, the artist who designed Woodstock's dove-and-guitar symbol, described it this way: "Something was tapped, a nerve, in this country. And everybody just came."

The counterculture's biggest bash - it ultimately cost more than $2.4 million - was sponsored by four very different, and very young, men: John Roberts, Joel Rosenman, Artie Kornfeld and Michael Lang. The oldest of the four was 26. John Roberts supplied the money. He was heir to a drugstore and toothpaste manufacturing fortune. He had a multimillion-dollar trust fund, a University of Pennsylvania degree and a lieutenant's commission in the Army. He had seen exactly one rock concert, by the Beach Boys.

Robert's slightly hipper friend, Joel Rosenman, the son of a prominent Long Island orthodontist, had just graduated from Yale Law School. In 1967, the mustachioed Rosenman, 24, was playing guitar for a lounge band in motels from Long Island to Las Vegas.

Roberts and Rosenman met on a golf course in the fall of 1966. By winter 1967, they shared an apartment and were trying to figure out what they ought to do with the rest of their lives. They had one idea: to create a screwball situation comedy for television, kind of like a male version of "I Love Lucy".

"It was an office comedy about two pals with more money than brains and a thirst for adventure." Rosenman said. "Every week they would get into a different business venture in some nutty scheme. And every week they would be rescued in the nick of time from their fate."

To get plot ideas for their sitcom, Roberts and Rosenman put a classified ad in the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times in March 1968: "Young Men With Unlimited Capital looking for interesting, legitimate investment opportunities and business propositions." They got thousands of replies, including one for biodegradable golf balls. Another seemed strange enough to work as a real business venture; Ski-bobs, bicycles on skis that were a fad in Europe. Roberts and Rosenman researched the idea before abandoning it.

In the process, the two went from would-be television writers to wanna-be venture capitalists. “Somehow, we became the characters in our own show,” Rosenman said.

Artie Kornfield, 25, wore a suit, but the lapels were a little wide and his hair brushed the top of his ears. He was a vice president at Capitol Records. He smoked hash in the office and was the company’s connection with the rockers who were starting to sell millions of records. Kornfeld had written maybe 30 hit singles, among them “Dead Man’s Curve,” recorded by Jan and Dean. He also wrote songs and produced the music for the Cowsills.

Michael Lang didn’t wear shoes very often. Friends described him as a cosmic pixie, with a head full of curly black hair that bounced to his shoulders. At 23, he owned what may have been the first head shop in the state of Florida. In 1968, Lang had produced one of the biggest rock shows ever, the two-day Miami Pop Festival, which drew 40,000 people. At 24, Lang was the manager of a rock group called Train, which he wanted to sign to a record deal. He bought his proposal to Kornfeld at Capitol Records in late December 1968.

Lang knew Kornfeld had grown up in Bensonhurst, Queens, like he had. Lang got an appointment by telling the record company’s receptionist that he was “from the neighborhood.” The two hit it off immediately. Not long after they met, Lang moved in with Kornfeld and his wife, Linda. The three had rambling, all-night conversations, fueled by a few joints, in their New York City apartment.

One of their ideas was for a cultural exposition/rock concert/extravaganza. Another was for a recording studio, to be tucked off in the woods more than 100 miles from Manhattan in a town called Woodstock. The location would reflect the back-to-the-land spirit of the counterculture. Besides, the Ulster County town had been an artists’ mecca for a century. By the late 1960s, musicians like Bob Dylan, The Band, Tim Hardin, Van Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin were moving to the area and wanted a state-of-the-art studio.

Lang and Kornfeld were searching for seed money for the festival and money to build the recording studio. They never saw the “young men with unlimited capital” ad, but their lawyer recommended they talk to Roberts and Rosenman. The four met in February 1969. “We met with them in their apartment on 83rd Street in a high-rise,” Lang recalls. “They were kind of preppy. Today, I guess they’d be yuppies. They were wearing suits. Artie did most of the talking, because I think they seemed puzzled by me. They were curious about the counterculture, and they were somewhat interested in the project. They wanted a written proposal, which we had but we didn’t bring with us. We told them that we would meet again with a budget for the festival.

To this day, the founders of Woodstock disagree on who came up with the original idea for the concert. And, dulled by time, competition and countess retelling, no one recollection is consistent. Lang and Kornfeld say Woodstock was always planned as the largest music festival ever held. At the second meeting, Lang recalls discussing a budget of $500,000 and attendance of 100,000. Lang said he had started looking at festival sites in the fall of 1968, which would have been well before he’d hooked up with Kornfeld or Roberts and Rosenman. But Rosenman and Roberts maintain that they were the driving force behind the festival. As Rosenman and Roberts recall it, Kornfeld and Lang primarily wanted a studio, hyped by a party for rock’n’roll critics and record company executives. “We would have cocktails and canapes in a tent or something,” Rosenman said. “We’d send limos down to New York to pick everyone up. Tim Hardin or someone could sing. Maybe, if we were lucky, Joan Baez would get up and do a couple of songs.”

At some point, Rosenman and Roberts focused on the party idea and decided that it really ought to be a rock concert. “We made a deal,” Rosenman said. “We’d have the party, and the profits from the party would be used to pay for the recording studio. Ultimately, we had the money, so what we said went.”

By the end of their third meeting, the little party up in Woodstock had snowballed into a bucolic concert for 50,000 people, the world’s biggest rock’n’roll show. The four partners formed a corporation in March. Each held 25 percent. The company was called Woodstock Ventures, Inc., after the hip little Ulster County

town where Dylan lived.

The Woodstock Ventures team scurried to find a site. Real estate agents across the mid-Hudson were scouring the countryside for land to rent for just a few months. Feelers went out in Rockland County, then in Orange. For $10,000, Woodstock Ventures had leased a tract of land in the Town of Wallkill owned by Howard Mills, Jr. “It was a Sunday in late March,” Rosenman said. “We drove up to Wallkill and saw the industrial park. We talked to Howard Mills and we made a deal.” “The vibes weren’t right there. It was an industrial park,” Roberts interjected. “I just said, ‘We gotta have a site now.’”

The 300-acre Mills Industrial Park offered perfect access. It was less than a mile from Route 17, which hooked into the New York State Thruway, and it was right off Route 211, a major local thoroughfare. It has the essentials, electricity and water lines.

The land was zoned for industry; among the permitted uses were cultural exhibitions and concerts. The promoters approached the town planning board and were given a verbal go-ahead because of the zoning. Nonetheless, Lang was unhappy with the site. It was missing the back-to-the-land ambience Woodstock Ventures was selling. “I hated Wallkill,” Lang said. Ventures set to work on the Mills property, all the while searching for an alternative.

Rosenman told Wallkill officials in late March or early April that the concert would feature Jazz bands and folk singers. He also said that 50,000 people would attend if they were lucky. Town Supervisor Jack Schlosser thought something was fishy. “More than anything else, I really feel they were deliberately misleading the town,” Schlosser said. “The point is, they were less than truthful about the numbers. I became more and more aware, as discussions with them progressed, they did not really know what they were doing. I was in the Army when divisions were 40,000 or 50,000 men,” he said. “Christ almighty, the logistics involved in moving men around... I said at one point, ‘I don’t care if was a convention of 50,000 ministers,” I would have felt the same way.”

In the cultural-political atmosphere of 1969, promoters Kornfeld and Lang knew it was important to pitch Woodstock in a way that would appeal to their peer’s sense of independence. Lang wanted to call the festival an “Aquarian Exposition,” capitalizing on the zodiacal reference from the musical “Hair”. He had an ornate poster designed, featuring the water-bearer.

By early April, the promoters were carefully cultivating the Woodstock image in the underground press, in publications like the Village Voice and Rolling Stone magazine. Ads began to run in The New York Times and The Times Herald-Record in May. For Kornfeld, Woodstock wasn’t a matter of building stages, signing acts or even selling tickets. For him, the festival was always a state of mind, a happening that would exemplify the generation. The event’s publicity shrewdly appropriated the counterculture’s symbols and catch phrases. “The cool PR image was intentional,” he said.

The group settled on the concrete slogan of “Three Days of Peace and Music” and downplayed the highly conceptual theme of Aquarius. The promoters figured “peace” would link the anti-war sentiment to the rock concert. They also wanted to avoid any violence and figured that a slogan with “peace” in it would help keep order.

The Woodstock dove is really a catbird; originally, it perched on a flute. “I was staying on Shelter Island off Long Island, and I was drawing catbirds all the time,” said artist Arnold Skolnick. “As soon as Ira Arnold (a copywriter on the project) called with the copy-approved ‘Three Days of Peace and Music,’ I just took the razor blade and cut that catbird out of the sketchpad I was using. “First, it sat on a flute. I was listening to jazz at the time, and I guess that’s why. But anyway, it sat on a flute for a day, and I finally ended up putting it on a guitar.”

Melanie Safka had a song on the radio called “Beautiful People.” An extremely hip DJ named Roscoe on

WNEW-FM played it. One day, Melanie ran into a curly-haired music-business guy named Michael Lang, who was talking about a festival he was producing. When Melanie asked if she could play there, Lang's answer was a very laid-back, "Sure." "I thought it would be very low key," recalled Melanie.

Woodstock Ventures was trying to book the biggest rock'n'roll bands in America, but the rockers were reluctant to sign with an untested outfit that might be unable to deliver. "To get the contracts, we had to have the credibility, and to get the credibility, we had to have the contracts," Rosenman said. Ventures solved the problem by promising paychecks unheard of in 1969. The big breakthrough came with the signing of the top psychedelic band of the day, The Jefferson Airplane, for the incredible sum of $12,000. The Airplane usually took gigs for $5,000 to $6,000. Creedence Clearwater Revival signed for $11,500. The Who then came in for $12,500. The rest of the acts started to fall in line. In all, Ventures spent $180,000 on talent. "I made a decision that we needed three major acts, and I told them I didn't care what it cost," Lang said. "If they had been asking $5,000, I'd say, 'Pay 'em $10,000.' So we paid the deposits, signed the contracts, and that was it: instant credibility."

In the spring of 1969, John Sebastian's career was on hold. From 1965 to 1967, Sebastian's band, the Lovin' Spoonful, had cranked out hit after hit - "Do You Believe in Magic," "You Didn't Have To Be So Nice," "Did You Ever Have To Make Up Your Mind," "(What a Day For a) Daydream" and "Summer In The City." But in 1967, after the Lovin' Spoonful appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show", things began to go wrong. Two band members were busted for pot possession and left the group. Their replacements never quite fit in. In 1968, the group broke up, and Sebastian tried going solo. But his performing career wasn't taking off. So, in the spring of 1969, Sebastian headed west to do a little soul searching. He ended up at a California commune where the hippies made money by making brightly colored shirts and jackets by a process they called tie-dye.

The residents of Wallkill had heard of hippies, drugs and rock concerts, and after the Woodstock advertising hit The New York Times, The Times Herald-Record and the radio stations, local residents knew that a three-day rock show, maybe the biggest ever, was coming. Besides, Woodstock Venture's employees sure looked like hippies. In the minds of many people, long hair and shabby clothes were associated with left-wing politics and drug use. The new ideas about re-ordering society were threatening to many people. In Wallkill, those feelings were unleashed upon Mills and his family. Residents would stop Mills at church to complain. Ventures tried to head off some of the complaints by hiring Wes Pomeroy, a former top assistant at the Justice Department, to head the security detail. A minister, the Rev. Donald Ganoung, was put on the payroll to head up local relations.

Allan Markoff watched the two freaks walk into his store in late April or early May. They were Lang and his buddy, Stan Goldstein. Goldstein, 35, had been one of the organizers of the 1968 Miami Pop Festival. For Woodstock, he was coordinator of campgrounds. "They wanted me to design a sound system for 50,000 or so people," said Markoff, who owned the only stereo store in Middletown, the Audio Center on North Street. "They said there could even be 100,000, might even go to 150,000."

He thought Lang and Goldstein were nuts. "There had never been a concert with 50,000; that was unbelievable," Markoff said. "Now, 100,000, that was impossible. It's tantamount to doing a sound system for 30 million people today." Markoff, then 24, was the only local resident listed in the Audio Engineering Society Magazine. Lang and Goldstein had picked his name out of the magazine; suddenly, Markoff was responsible for gathering sound gear for the greatest show on earth. He remembers one characteristic of the sound system. At the amplifier's lowest setting, the Woodstock speakers would cause pain for anyone standing within 10 feet.

Markoff had doubts about the sanity of the venture until he saw the promoters' office in a barn on the Mills' land. "That's when I saw all these people on these phones, with a switchboard," Markoff said. "When I saw that, I said, 'Hey, this could really happen.'"

Rosenman and Roberts couldn't entice any of the big movie studios into filming their weekend upstate. So

they got Michael Wadleigh. Before Woodstock, rock documentation meant obscurity and few profits. A year before Woodstock, Monterey Pop had fizzled at the box office, making movie execs skittish over the idea of funding another rock film. During the summer of Woodstock, Wadleigh, 27, was gaining a reputation as a solid cameraman and director of independent films. Two years earlier, he had dropped out of Columbia University of Physicians and Surgeons, where he was studying to be a neurologist. Since then, he'd spent his time filming on the urban streets, the main battlefield for the cultural skirmishes of the 1960s. He'd filmed Martin Luther King Jr. He'd filmed Bobby Kennedy and George McGovern talking to middle Americans on the campaign trail in '68.

Wadleigh was experimenting with using rock'n'roll in his films as an adjunct to the day's social and political themes. He was also working with multiple images to make documentaries more entertaining than those featuring a bunch of talking heads. And then the Woodstock boys came to his door. Their idea was irresistible. The money was not. Wadleigh went for it anyway.

Goldstein went alone to his first town board meeting in Wallkill. "This was before we knew we had problems," he said. "It was probably in June. We had a full house. No more than 150 people. There were some accusations. Someone made some references to the Chicago convention. That it was young people, and this is the way the youth reacted, and that's what we could expect in our community. (Wallkill Supervisor Jack) Schlosser said that Mayor Daley knew how to handle that. Then I lost my temper. I said there was no need for the violence and that (the police) reaction caused the violence. I said that Daley ran one of the most corrupt political machines in history."

Schlosser, who attended the Chicago convention, didn't recall such a specific exchange about Daley. He did remember the convention, however. "I saw these people throw golf clubs with nails in them," he said of the Chicago protesters. "I saw them throw excretion. The police, while I was there at least, showed remarkable restraint."

As the town meetings and the weeks wore on, the confrontation between Ventures and the residents of Wallkill got worse. Woodstock's landlord, Howard Mills, was getting anonymous phone calls. The police were called, but the culprits never were identified, much less caught. "They threatened to blow up his house," Goldstein said. "There were red faces and tempers flaring. People driven by fear to very strange things. They raise their voices and say stupid things they would never ordinarily say." To this day, Howard Mills will not discuss how his neighbors turned against him in 1969. "I know that it is a part of history, but I don't want to bother about it," Mills said.

Woodstock Ventures billed the concert as a "weekend in the country" - temporary commune. The ads ran in the newspapers, both establishment and underground, and on radio stations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Boston, Texas and Washington, D.C. A concert ticket also bought a campsite. But even a commune requires some kind of organization. In late June, Goldstein called in the Hog Farm.

The Hog Farm started out as a communal pig farm in California; its members eventually bought land next to a Hopi Indian reservation in New Mexico. Its leader was a skinny, toothless hippie whose real name was Hugh Romney. He was a one-time beatnick comic who had changed his name to Wavy Gravy and held the wiseguy title of "Minister of Talk". "We brought in the Hog Farm to be our crowd interface," Goldstein explained. "We needed a specific group to be the exemplars for all to follow. We believed that the idea of sleeping outdoors under the stars would be very attractive to many people, but we knew damn well that the kind of people who were coming had never slept under the stars in their lives. We had to create a circumstance where they were cared for."

The Wallkill Zoning Board of Appeals officially banned Woodstock on July 15, 1969. To the applause of residents, board members said that the organizer's plans were incomplete. They also said outdoor toilets,

such as those to be used at the concert, were illegal in Wallkill. Two weeks earlier, the town board had passed a law requiring a permit for any gathering of more than 5,000 people. “The law they passed excluded one thing and one thing only - Woodstock,” said Al Romm, then-editor of The Times Herald-Record, which editorialized against the Wallkill law. Wallkill Supervisor Jack Schlosser denied that this was the intent.

The Wallkill board may have done Woodstock Ventures a favor. Publicity about what had happened reaped a bonanza of interest. Besides, if Woodstock had been staged in Wallkill, Lang said, the vibes would either have squelched the show or turned it into a riot. “I didn’t want cops in gas masks showing up, and that was the atmosphere there,” Lang said. “With all the tensions around it, it wouldn’t have worked.” Another Woodstock Ventures member, Lee Blumer, remembered the threats made in town. “They said they were going to shoot the first hippie that walked into town,” said Blumer.

Kodak wanted cash, but the movie crew got no money upfront for film. So Wadleigh pulled $50,000 out of savings, both from his personal account and an account for his independent film business. During July, Wadleigh was out in Wyoming filming a movie about mountain climbing. When promoters lost the Wallkill site, Wadleigh cringed. “I had this feeling of absolute terror that it wasn’t going to come off,” Wadleigh said. “That feeling that someone could pull the plug out on us didn’t go away until the music started.”

Elliot Tiber read about Woodstock getting tossed out of Wallkill. Tiber’s White Lake resort, the El Monaco, had 80 rooms, nearly all of them empty, and keeping it going was draining his savings. But for all of Tiber’s troubles, he had one thing that was very valuable to Woodstock Ventures. He had a Bethel town permit to run a music festival. “I think it cost $12 or $8 or something like that,” Tiber said.”It was very vague. It just said I had permission to run an arts and music festival. That’s it.” The permit was for the White Lake Music and Arts Festival, a very, very small event that Tiber had dreamed up to increase business at the hotel. “We had a chamber music quartet, and I think we charged something like two bucks a day,” he said. “There were maybe 150 people up there.”

Tiber called Ventures, not even knowing who to ask for. Lang got the message and went out to White Lake the next day, which probably was July 18, to look at the El Monaco. Tiber’s festival site was 15 swampy acres behind the resort. “Michael looked at that and said, ‘This isn’t big enough,’” Tiber recalled. “I said, ‘Why don’t we go see my friend Max Yasgur? He’s been selling me milk and cheese for years. he’s got a big farm out there in Bethel.’” While Lang waited, Tiber telephoned Yasgur about renting the field for $50 a day for a festival that might bring 5,000 people. “Max said to me, ‘What’s this, Elliot? Another one of your festivals that doesn’t work out?’” Tieber said.

Yasgur met Lang in the alfalfa field. This time, Lang liked the lay of the land. “It was magic,” Lang said. “It was perfect. The sloping bowl, a little rise for the stage. A lake in the background. The deal was sealed right there in the field. Max and I were walking on the rise above the bowl. When we started to talk business, he was figuring on how much he was going to lose in this crop and how much it was going to cost him to reseed the field. He was a sharp guy, ol’ Max, and he was figuring everything up with a pencil and paper. He ws wetting the tip of his pencil with his tongue. I remember shaking his hand, and that’s the first time I noticed that he had only three fingers on his right hand. But his grip was like iron. He’s cleared that land himself.”

Yasgur was known across Sullivan County as a strong-willed man of his word. He’d gone to New York University and studied real estate law, but moved back to his family’s dairy farm in the ‘40s. A few years later, Yasgur sold the family farm in Maplewood and moved to Bethel to expand. Throughout the ‘50s and ‘60s, Yasgur slowly built a dairy herd. By the time the pipe-smoking Yasgur was approached by Woodstock Ventures, he was the biggest milk producer in Sullivan County, and the Yasgur farm had delivery routes, a massive refrigeration complex and a pasteurization plant. The 600 acres that Ventures sought were only part of the Yasgur property, which extended along both sides of Route 17B in Bethel.

Within days after meeting Yasgur, Lang brought the rest of the Ventures crew up in eight limousines; by then,

Yasgur was wise to Woodstock, and the price had gone up considerably. Woodstock Ventures kept all the negotiations secret, lest it repeat what had happened in Wallkill. At some point during the talks, Tiber and Lang went to dinner at the Lighthouse Restaurant, and Italian place just down Route 17B from El Monaco in White Lake. That's where the news leaked out. "While we were paying the check, the radio was on in the bar. The radio station out there, WVOS, announced that the festival was going to White Lake," Tiber said. "The waiters or the waitresses must have called the radio station. We were just in shock. The bar was now empty. Michael just had a blank look. We all went into shock." On July 20, 1969, the world was talking about the first man to walk on the moon. But conversation in Bethel centered on this "Woodstock hippie festival." "I was used to fights, but I wasn't ready for this one," Tiber said.

The Woodstock partners have since admitted that they were engaged in creative deception. They told Bethel officials that they were expecting 50,000 people, tops. All along they knew that Woodstock would draw far, far more. "I was pretty manipulative," Lang said. "The figure at Wallkill was 50,000, and we just stuck with it. I was planning on a quarter-million people, but we didn't want to scare anyone."

Ken Kesey's farm in Oregon was overrun with hippie acolytes. Kesey lived in Pleasant Hill, which became home base for his Merry Pranksters, the creators of the original Acid Tests in San Francisco. Kesey had bought the farm with the earnings from his two bestsellers, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (1962) and "Sometimes a Great Notion" (1964). The fashion of the day was to share and share alike. But the horde was starting to bother even a founder of the counterculture.

As the Apollo 11 astronauts were strolling the Sea of Tranquility on July 20, the Pranksters were hearing from Wavy Gravy, whom they knew from the Acid Tests. The Hog Farmers said they were getting $1,700 to gather as many people together as possible and get them to Bethel. "Kesey was glad to get rid of everybody," said Ken Babbs, then 33 and the leader of the Pranksters' Woodstock squad. Babbs packed 40 hippies into five school buses. One was "The Bus" - the one later made famous by author Tom Wolfe in "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." The Bus had a custom, psychedelic paint job and a Plexiglas bubble on top, and it was packed with sound gear. Its destination sign read: "Further." "While Neil Armstrong was taking a giant leap for mankind, we were starting to take a giant leap for Woodstock," Babbs said.

Max Yasgur had two concerns. "He thought a grave injustice had been done in Wallkill. And he wanted to make sure that he got the $75,000 before some other dairy farmer did," Rosenman said. "They were in no particular order. I'm not sure which was more important to him. Having said that, I'll say this about Max: He never hit us up for another dime after we paid him. I remember that every time we went over there, Max would hand you one of those little cartons of chocolate milk. Every time. We ended up with all these cartons of milk around the office."

Contracts for the use of land surrounding Yasgur's parcel ended up costing Ventures another $25,000. "We could have bought the land for what we rented it for," Lang said. Meanwhile, hand-lettered signs were being put up in the town of Bethel. They read: "Buy No Milk. Stop Max's Hippy Music Festival."

Lang had set a $15,000 ceiling for any act. But the hottest act in the country - guitarist Jimi Hendrix - wanted more. Hendrix had gotten a one-time fee of $150,000 for a concert earlier that summer in California. His manager was demanding that much to play Woodstock. But by July, Lang had some leverage too. He didn't need Hendrix to make the biggest concert of the year. If Hendrix wanted to come, he'd be welcome. "We paid Jimi Hendrix $32,000. He was the headliner, and that's what he wanted," Rosenman said. Then Ventures lied about the terms. "We told everyone that was because he was playing two sets at $16,000 each. We had to do that, or the Airplane would want more than $12,000." Lang set the bill so that folk acts like Joan Baez would play on Friday, the opening day. Rock'n'roll was saved for Saturday and Sunday. But Hendrix's one-and-only set was always to be the finale. His contract said no act could follow him.

Motel owner Tiber's new job was to be the local liaison for Woodstock Ventures in Bethel. He was paid $5,000 for a couple of month's work. Tiber was earning his money too. "The town meetings never drew more

than flies before," Tiber said. "But then they were standing-room-only, maybe 300 people. Maybe it was that Michael was barefooted. He came off the helicopter with no shoes. I'd never experienced anything like that before, but that was the way he was. That was fine with me, but I think they didn't like it."

Bethel residents had read about the worries in Wallkill: drugs, traffic, sewage and water. Public fury mounted once more. A prominent Bethel resident approached Lang. He said he could grease the wheels of power and make sure Lang got the approvals he needed. All the fixer wanted was $10,000. Woodstock Ventures got the cash and put it in a paper bag. Lang won't name the man who solicited the bribe. But ultimately Woodstock Ventures would not pay off. "We were very concerned with karma," Lang said. "We thought that if we did pay someone off, that would be wrong and we would change the way things came out." The suggestion of a payoff galvanized Yasgur's support, Lang said. "At that point, he really became an ally, not just a spectator."

But there may have been a payoff, anyway. Rosenman wrote in a 1974 book that he issued a $2,500 check to a man who was demanding $10,000 to arrange local backing. Years later, Rosenman said some of the events in the book were hyped for dramatic tension. "And I honestly can't remember whether I wrote the check or not," Rosenman said.

At least one of Woodstock's opponents also was approached to fix the deal. George Neuhaus was one of the old-style, old boy politicians in Bethel, in and out of the town supervisor's post for years. He thought Woodstock was being jammed down the throats of local people who didn't want it. That July, Neuhaus was approached by a man who wanted him to be a guide through the local political maze. Neuhaus wanted none of it. Like Lang, Neuhaus wouldn't identify the man, but both indicate it was the same individual. "It wasn't, per se, money, but he wanted to know if I could get the thing off the ground," Neuhaus recalled. "I was sitting on my porch. I threw him the hell off my property. I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

Bob Dylan was the only one of Lang's rock'n'roll heroes who hadn't signed a contract. The promoters had borrowed some of Dylan's mystique by naming their concert after his adopted home town, which was only 70 miles from Bethel. Dylan's backup group, The Band, was already signed. Lang figured that Dylan's appearance was a natural. So he made the pilgrimage to Dylan's Ulster County hideaway. "I went to see Bob Dylan about three weeks before the festival," Lang said. "I went with Bob Dacey, a friend of Dylan's, and we met in his house for a couple of hours. I told him what we were doing and told him, 'We'd love to have you there.' But he didn't come. I don't know why."

In late July, Woodstock Ventures obtained permit approvals from Bethel Town Attorney Frederick W.V. Schadt and building inspector Donald Clark. But, under orders from the town board, Clark never issued them. The board ordered Clark to post stop-work orders; the promoters tore the signs down with Clark's tacit approval. He felt he was being made the fall guy for the town. Schadt said that Woodstock's momentum was accelerating like a runaway train. "At that time, it had progressed so far, any kind of order to stop it would have just resulted in chaos," he said. "Here you have thousands of people descending on the community. How in the world do you stop them?"

Ken Van Loan, the president of the Bethel Business Association, wasn't worried. He'd decided this festival could be a great boost for the depressed economy of the Catskills. "We talked to the county about promoting this thing," said Can Loan, who owned Ken's Garage in Kauneonga lake. "We told 'em it would be the biggest thing that ever came to the county."

As July became August, Vassmer's General Store in Kauneonga Lake was doing a great business in kegs of nails and cold cuts. The buyers were longhaired construction guys who were carving Yasgur's pasture into an amphitheater. "They told me, 'Mr. Vassmer, you ain't seen nothing yet,' and by golly, they were right," said Art Vassmer, the owner.

Abe Wagner knew that little Bethel, with a population of 3,900 souls, wasn't set to handle the coming flood of humanity. Two weeks before the festival, Wagner, 61, heard that Woodstock Ventures had already sold 180,000 tickets. Wagner, who owned a plumbing company and lived in Kauneonga lake, was one of approximately 800 Bethel residents who signed a petition to stop the festival. "The people of Bethel were afraid of the influx of people on our small roads, afraid of the element of people who read the advertisements in the magazines that said, 'Come to Woodstock and do whatever you want to do because nobody will bother you,'" Wagner said.

By August, Elliot Tiber was getting anonymous phone calls. "They'd say that it'll never happen, that we will break your legs," Tiber said. "There was terrible name-calling. It was anti-Semitic and anti-hippies. It was dirty and filthy.

A week before the festival, Yasgur's farm didn't look much like a concert site. "It was like they were building a house, except there was a helicopter pad," Vassmer said. Vassmer had heard the nervous talk among his regular customers, especially when they heard the radio ads. "'I don't know about this,' they'd say," Vassmer recalled. "They'd say, 'Boy, when this thing comes, we're gonna be sorry.'" That same week, a group of outraged residents filed a lawsuit. It was settled within a few days; the promoters promised to add more portable toilets. "There was a lot of intrigue," Lang said. "I don't remember it all."

Those 800 petitioners weren't too happy with Bethel Supervisor Daniel J. Amatucci. "He didn't inform us about all the people until a week before the festival," Wagner remembered. "He turned around and threw it in the wastebasket without even looking at it." Wagner protester. Amatucci read it. Then he told Wagner it was too late.

Michael Lang gunned a shiny BSA motorcycle across a field of grass. He wore a leather vest on his shirtless back, and a fringed purse hung at his hip. A lit cigarette hung out of his mouth as he popped down the kickstand. It was early August 1969, and Lang commanded an army of workers throwing together the rock concert. A filmmaker came by to ask Lang some questions, freezing Lang, his motorcycle and his attitude forever in a movie moment that captures the careless bravado of youth. "Where are you gonna go from here?" the interviewer asked. "Are you gonna do another?" "If it works," Lang answered.

Ventures decided to try to win over the residents in Bethel. It sent out the Earthlight Theater to entertain local groups. It booked a rock band called Quill to do free performances. But Earthlight, an 18-member troupe, didn't do Shakespeare or Rodgers and Hammerstein. They did a musical comedy called "Sex. Y'all Come." They also stripped naked. Frequently.

On August 7, Ventures staged a pre-festival festival on a stage that was still under construction. Quill opened the show, and Bethel residents sat on the grass, expecting theater. Instead, the Earthlight Theater stripped and screamed obscenities at the shocked crowd. "They went from being suspicious to being convinced," Rosenman said.

Wavy Gravy rounded up 85 Hog Farmers and 15 Hopis. He donned a Smokey-the-Bear suit and armed himself with a bottle of seltzer and a rubber shovel. Then he and the barefooted, long haired Hog Farmers flew into John F. Kennedy International Airport. "We're the hippie police," Gravy announced as he and his entourage stepped off the plane on Monday, Aug. 11.

The opposition plotted a last-minute strategy to stop the show: a human barricade across Route 17B on the day before the concert. Tiber heard about the plan on Monday. "So, I go on national radio and said that they were trying to stop the show," he said. "I didn't sleep well. About two o'clock in the morning, I wake up and I hear horns and guitars. This is on Tuesday morning. I look out, and there are five lanes of headlights all the way back. They'd started coming already."

Kornfeld made Warner Brothers an offer it couldn't refuse. It was Wednesday, two days before showtime. Ventures had to make a movie deal... now. All Kornfeld wanted was $100,000 to pay for film. The concert would take care of the acting, the lighting, the dialogue and the plot. "Michael Wadleigh was up there (at the site) waiting with (Martin) Scorsese," Kornfeld said. "All they needed was money for film. The contract was handwritten and signed by myself and Ted Ashley (of Warner Brothers). I told them, 'Hey, guys, there are going to be hundreds of thousands of people out there. It's a crap shoot: spend $100,000 and you might make millions. If it turns out to be a riot, then you'll have one of the best documentaries ever made.'"

Wadleigh rounded up a crew of about 100 from the New York Film scene, including Scorsese. Wadleigh couldn't pay them until much later, but he could get them inside the event of the summer. The crew signed on a double-or-nothing basis. If the film made it, they'd get twice regular pay. If the film bombed, they'd lose. The crew got to Woodstock a few days before, driving up in Volkswagen Beetles and beat-up cars. Wadleigh's plot ran like this: Woodstock would be a modern-day Canterbury Tale, a pilgrimage back to the land. He wanted the film to be as much about the hippies who trekked to Woodstock as about the music on stage. He wanted the stories of the young people, their feelings about the Viet Nam War, about the times. The stories of the townspeople. These would make the film, not just the music.

Eight miles away, Timer Herald-Record harness racing John Szefc was working on a feature story at the Monticello Raceway. Then he caught a glimpse of the traffic out on Route 17B. It was 11am, more than 24 hours before the concert, and traffic was already backed up all the way down Route 17B to Route 17 - a distance of 10 miles. "That's when I knew this was going to be big. Really significant," he said. Szefc's story that night was about the effect of the concert on the racetrack. Some bettors fought the traffic on Route 17B and managed to get to the windows. But the handle was down $60,000 from a typical weekend night in August.

By the afternoon of Thursday, August 14, Woodstock was an idyllic commune of 25,000 people. The Hog Farmers had built kitchens and shelters with two-by-fours and tarps. Their kids were swinging on a set of monkey bars built of lumber and tree limbs, jumping into a pile of hay at the bottom. Wavy Gravy recruited "responsible-looking" people and made them security guards. He handed out armbands and the secret password, which was "I forget." Down the slope, stands were ready to sell counterculture souvenirs: hand-woven belts, drug paraphernalia and headbands. Christmas tree lights were strung in the trees. Sawdust was strewn along the paths. Over the hill, carpenters were still banging nails into the main stage. The Pranksters and the Hog Farmers had built heir own alternative stage.

Prankster leader Babbs acted as emcee, opening the stage to anyone who wanted to jam. The sound system was a space amplifier borrowed from the Grateful Dead. "Over the hill and into the woods we went," Babbs said. "We had the free school for the kids, the Free Kitchen and so, the Free Stage.