Swayed Pines Festival, 1974-2000: Community Building through Music, Crafts, Food & Fun [2023]

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I was an archivist before I knew what an archivist was…and this poster about the first Swayed Pines “fiddle contest, music festival and crafts fair” is a prime example. As a first-year Bennie, I saved this poster and treasured it for years, eventually donating it to the Archives when I became the archivist and discovered nobody had saved it.

First Swayed Pines poster, 1974, from the personal collection of the archivist; donated to SJU Archives

SJU Archives, 35/4 Box1

Tree photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Negative Film Collection - PC 02\Vol 13\13-073 Campus Photos 1977\TIFF\SJU Archives image21 Swayed Pine--trees
I delighted in the happy imagery and the whimsical fonts. I had been there, and I knew that, indeed, there had been rain – a lot of it – and the small print about the move into the then-new Palaestra had come to pass. And I loved the “HOORAY!” – with “for generous souls” – in the small print!

First Swayed Pines poster, 1974, from the personal collection of the archivist; donated to SJU Archives

SJU Archives, 35/4 Box1
Here are a few photos from the first annual Swayed Pines Fiddle Contest, part of what was initially dubbed “May Fair” in 1974 at SJU.

1974 spring *SJU Alumni Magazine* p. 20-21

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5491/rec/1
Here’s a story about that “May Fair,” published in the spring 1974 alumni magazine — and a Wikipedia article about the then-25-year-old Minnesota fiddler who won that first fiddle contest, something noted on a blog tribute.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5491/rec/1

“The first annual Swayed Pines Festival was organized by a group of students in the spring of 1974. The ringleader was a student from South Dakota, David Kemp, who had attended a similar event in his home state.”

“It plans were to hold the first event on the football field in the shadow of the tall pine trees that rim the western edge of the natural bowl. Westerly winds over the years have given the row of trees an ‘easterly lean,’ hence the title, ‘Swayed Pines.’”

“Later organizers of Swayed Pines never again considered moving outdoors.”

“I think calling it the ‘first annual’ was something of a joke.”

Lee Hanley, SJU Public Information Director

Lee Hanley later became the Swayed Pines maestro. These are his words. [read slide]

Some of Lee’s remarks here were published in the summer 1997 alumni magazine, p. 4 https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5542/rec/125

Kemp photo: 1971-72 Student Directory

Hanley photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Hanley, Lee\Hanley, Lee with bellows camera Hanley Coll v1 p8 no1.jpg
The 1975 Swayed Pines event was promoted in this piece in the *Community* newsletter. It mentions that, in 1974, the first year, an estimated “300 people attended the festival.” The festival coordinator expected many more for the second annual event.

1975 April 23 *Community*  p. 1

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/50498/rec/5
Indeed, photos from the 1975 event (some by Lee Hanley and Thom Woodard) reflect the size of the crowd and the laid-back audience...

*Saint John's Magazine* Spring 1975 p. 2

An estimated 3,000 persons attended the festivities
...but also the serious demeanor of the contestants, such as a ten-year old accompanied by his father; Paul Dahlin, the overall winner in 1975; and an intent harpguitarist. [bottom photo]

Saint John's Magazine Spring 1975 p. 2-3

Left: Fiddlers with varied backgrounds and ages (including 10-year-old Bruce Hoffman, who was accompanied by his father) participated in the fiddle contest.

Middle: Minstrel Neil Christian, here playing the harpguitar, was one of many musicians participating in the second annual affair.

Right: An impeccable Swedish style of fiddle playing gave Paul Dahlin (right) the top prize in the contest.
Trophies awarded to winners of the Second Annual Swayed Pines Fiddle Contest were crafted by Steve Meyer of red oak from the St. John's woods and brass.

*Saint John's* Vol. 14, No.4 Spring, 1975, cover

[https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5534/rec/3](https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5534/rec/3)
For a century now young men at St. John’s University have been studying the works of Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn and Paganini. This spring, however, two days were devoted to celebrating a different style of music, a style that was created by men who never heard of dissonance, counterpoint or chromatics, men who spent their lives in coal mines and behind horse-drawn plows.

During the entire weekend of April 26-27—from noon to midnight each day—more than three thousand people sat, clapped, frolicked and danced in the new Warner Palaestra at the Second Annual Swayed Pines Folk Festival.

This year’s event included an old-time fiddle contest, an arts and crafts fair, a square dance and performances by many talented musicians. President Michael Blecker, O.S.B., who founded the Festival last year, arranged sponsorship for this year’s event through the Catholic Aid Society and the SJU Institute for Regional Culture; Brendan Doyle and Steve Meyer, lifelong Collegeville residents, acted as chief organizers, in association with Fr. Brian Millette, O.S.B., this reporter and others.

The high point of the festival was Saturday afternoon’s fiddle contest featuring 30 Midwestern fiddlers. Tom Ambrose ’68 of WCCO-FM and Garrison Keillor of Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) were masters of ceremonies. Keillor, KSJN-FM’s Prairie Home Companion, presented the top three performers trophies hand-crafted by Meyer from brass and red oak taken from St. John’s forest.

The Warner Palaestra’s arena was divided into two main areas, one for musical going on—harp, stringed and multi-instrumental—where fiddle, drum, mandolin and guitar, harp, bowed and plucked dulcimer, and mandolin were played. Also exhibited were homemade fiddles and other musical instruments: much of it was tape-recorded, and many of the people were standing by their various items, trying to sell them.

Also exhibited were handmade fiddles and other musical instruments: much of it was tape-recorded, and many of the people were standing by their various items, trying to sell them.

The author: Paul Cofell, a former St. John’s student, is an artist-musician living near campus. He is the son of William Cofell, SJU education professor.

...and a photo of a six-year-old contestant accompanied an article about the festival by Paul Cofell, himself a Collegeville musician. (His brother David would fit that description years later.)

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5534/rec/3
Garrison Keillor’s morning radio program in Collegeville, “A Prairie Home Companion,” was picking up momentum as a live weekly radio variety show on Saturdays, a take-off on the Grand Ole Opry radio program.

SJU Archives photo, Events p74
The 1975 contest brought out 20 contestants and more than 2500 people. The Fest was even bigger in 1976, with 25 fiddler contestants, 30 craftspeople, and about 3500 attendees.

1976 March 24 Community  p. 4
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/50671/rec/8

Photos by Thom Woodard: 1976 Spring SJU Alumni Magazine  p. 10
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5495/rec/7

Statistics from 1977 March 9 Community  p. 2
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47413/rec/12
The 4th Annual Swayed Pines Fest in 1977 featured Garrison as co-emcee again, also his 4th time doing so; this time he also broadcast his increasingly popular “A Prairie Home Companion” radio show live from the SJU Auditorium. He did it again in 1979, too – which was his last Swayed Pines appearance, as he was becoming a national radio celebrity. [He did come back to do another show at St. John’s in the summer of 1982 – broadcast live from the football stadium! – when it didn’t rain.]
The 1977 evening concert, after the radio show and a square dance, featured Guy Carawan, credited with introducing the song “We Shall Overcome” to the Civil Rights Movement. 1977 April 20 Community “Folk Singers in SJU Concert” p. 2
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47419/rec/16
1977 May 11 Community  p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47422/rec/19
And this 1977 photo shows one of the trophies – a block of Saint John’s wood with an engraved plaque and a pine seedling, made annually by a craftsman in Abbey Woodworking – originally David Landwehr ’74. [brother of the Archivist, who donated a spare trophy to the SJU Archives in 2023.]

1977 Saints yearbook, p. 52
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/38827/rec/11
One of those crafters was David Landwehr ’74, who made these trophies for years afterwards (and donated one to the Archives).

Photo: Swayed Pines trophy “spare” made by David Landwehr ‘74, who first make Swayed Pines trophies when employed by St. John’s Abbey Woodworking. He continued to make them for years afterwards in his own woodshop. He donated this one to the SJU Archives in April 2023 at the request of his sister, the CSBSJU Archivist!
"Also on sale will be sandwiches, St. John's Bread and, to help defray expenses, 'Swayed Pines T-Shirts.'"

The 1977 Festival got a lot of publicity, with this feature in The Record as well as multiple entries in the campus's Community newsletter. The event was growing every year. Now you could go to listen to the music, watch the fiddle contest, see demonstrations by potters, glass blowers, wood carvers, and many other artists in dozens – eventually hundreds – of booths, inside and outside of the Palaestra. You could buy Johnnie bread, pizza, sandwiches, Cold Spring bakery goodies, Coke products and Swayed Pines T-shirts.

1977 April 29 The Record p. 3

1977 04 27 p. 1 Community “Swayed Pines Fest Saturday”
The T-shirts featured the 1974 poster’s now-familiar fiddler logo. To finally give credit where credit is due (since she never received any royalties!), that image was created by class of 1974 art major K (Kay) Stevenson from Saint Cloud, who taught art at the Prep School for several years and went on to be an art professor at a college in Oregon. K and some of her friends were in that initial group of students who worked to make the first Fiddle Fest happen. Kay told me she remembers “the first year or two in particular - because 'the gang' was very much a part of helping Dave (Kemp) get things organized.”

Swayed Pines logo from 1986 Winter alum mag p.25
T-Shirt in the SJU Archives
Inset photo: https://www.weber.edu/sustainability/faculty-teaching-sustainability.html
WSU Gives Lindquist Award to Professor Who Enhances Community with Art

March 26, 2019

OGDEN, Utah – For her commitment and work to use arts for social awareness, advocacy and change, Weber State University visual art and design professor Kathleen "KC" Stevenson will receive the John A. Lindquist Award during a Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) celebration, April 8 from 1:30-3 p.m. in the Shephard Union Ballrooms.

Stevenson earned her Master of Fine Arts in printmaking from the University of Notre Dame and joined the Weber State faculty in 2001, in the Department of Visual Art & Design in the Helene E. Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities. In 2014, she was appointed director of printmaking.

According to Stevenson, students often worry about declaring art as a major and wonder how they will make a living; however, she said their education provides them tools for problem-solving, innovation, creativity, reflection and revision, and they come to know the pleasure and purpose of an artist’s role in contributing to the community — locally and globally.

“We live in an era that is accelerating exponentially,” Stevenson said. “For example, scientists tell us we see twice as many images every day than just three decades ago. With this visual proliferation, increasingly the role of artists and designers calls for awareness and purpose. It is rewarding and enjoyable to be involved with this significant work.”
The 1978 (5th) Swayed Pines was significant in that it was the first time a class of ‘74 alum from Wisconsin named John McCutcheon was a feature in the evening concert (although he had appeared the year before in a Wednesday concert with Guy Carawan). For his senior year January Interim, John had hitchhiked away from SJU to follow his passion to learn as much as he could about folk music; his Appalachian band, “Wry Straw,” would headline the Swayed Pines concert for two years in a row, and then, as a soloist, John would ultimately perform for Swayed Pines about 20 times, emceeing many of the fiddle contests as well. Besides John McCutcheon, performers over the years included John Prine, Taj Majal, Tom Paxton, Schooner Fare, Libba Cotton (composer of “Freight Train”), Guy Carawan (composer of “We Shall Overcome”), Claudia Schmidt, Bryan Bowers, Livingston Taylor, Loudon Wainwright III, Richie Havens and Arlo Guthrie (twice).

1978 April 19 Community  p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47446/rec/27
1980 April 24 Community  p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47484/rec/41
April 3, 1986 Community, p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/22881/rec/78
1996 April 25 The Independent  p. 16
The 1978 Swayed Pines festival was one of several that had an academic component to it as well. Workshops, presentations and lectures were sometimes given, and were always free and open to the public, in an effort to preserve and share the ethnic heritages of Central Minnesota. One, for 1978, was a discussion of the ethnic heritage of Stearns County; in 1979, it was about the creative genius of Central Minnesota; and in 1981, they discussed Minnesota rural life.
1982: American immigration history, including the Southeast Asian refugee program and the similarities and differences among the cultures of various peoples of Southeast Asia.

1982 April 8 *Community* p. 1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital-collection/SJUArchives/id/22588/rec/57

Right image: 1982 Summer *Alumni magazine*, p. 23
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital-collection/SJUArchives/id/5511/rec/59
The topic that got the most attention in the media was in 1980, which asked whether the (so-called) Stearns County Syndrome was a myth or a reality.

1980 May 1 Community p. 2-3
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47486/rec/3
1980 Saints yearbook p. 79
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/39141/rec/36
Here are just a few images to give a better sense of the ambience of Swayed Pines: the crowd on their lawn chairs inside the Palaestra...

1983 Saints yearbook, p. 51
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/42365/rec/61
Musicians – of all ages – jamming outside...
1983 Saints yearbook, p. 53
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/42367/rec/61
1987 Saints yearbook, p. 82
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/44710/rec/82
…more musicians…
Left: 1980 Swayed Pines Mandolinist
SJU Archives photo, Events p77
(similar photo printed in Summer 1980 SJU Alumni Magazine p. 16
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/8685/rec/43)
Right: 1980 May 1 Community p. 3
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47486/rec/3
Bands playing in the parking lot...
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-156 Swayed Pines 1995\TIFF\Image09.TIF
Artisans and crafters demonstrating and selling their work...
Saint John's Magazine Spring 1975 p. 3
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5499/rec/18
Wheelwright: 1987 Saints yearbook, p. 82
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/44710/rec/82
Weaver: 1991 summer Saint John’s Magazine, p. 21
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/9620/rec/111
...filling up the east half of the Palaestra basketball arena. The event featured as many as 150 crafts booths, inside...
(with folding chairs: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 01\01-026 Swayed Pines Arts Crafts 1975\TIFF\Image10.TIF & Image12.TIF
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-043 Swayed Pines 1994\TIFF\Image07.TIF
...and outside.
Color: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 16\16-018 Swayed Pines 1975-1983\TIFF\image03 Swayed Pines 1983.TIF
Right: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-043 Swayed Pines 1994\TIFF\Image07.TIF
...and performers entertaining the crowds with juggling, dancing, unicycling...

Dancers: 1988 *Saints* yearbook p. 26

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/43273/rec/87

1980 Swayed Pines Juggler - SJU Archives photo, Events p76,
Printed in Summer 1980 *SJU Alumni Magazine* p. 16

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/8685/rec/43


https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/43799/rec/112
...and breathing fire.
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-045 Swayed Pines 1994\TIFF\Image07.TIF
... HUGE crowds would show up if we were lucky enough to have great weather the last Saturday of April...

1987 Summer SJU Alumni Magazine p. 12
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/9350/rec/86
And yes, parking was a challenge! Swayed Pines became a huge campus event, attracting as many as 12,000 visitors for the day. [- Lee Hanley]

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-149 Swayed Pines 1994\TIFF\Image23.TIF
Lee Hanley:

“We would have 60-70 fiddlers competing in half a dozen categories of playing.”

“The young kids were always particularly popular with the crowd. In the final few years, we had as many as a dozen fiddlers under 12. We liked to think that this event and others like it were being successful in passing the folk art of fiddling along to another generation.”

Swayed Pines “was strangely popular among Saint John’s employees, who turned out in droves to volunteer as workers for the day.”

In its heyday (pun intended) “we would have 60-70 fiddlers competing in half a dozen categories of playing...[read slide]. The young kids were always particularly popular with the crowd. In the early years we usually had one or two fiddlers under the age of 12. In the final few years we had as many as a dozen under 12. We liked to think that this event and others like it were being successful in passing the folk art of fiddling along to another generation... We employees helped out, too. The event “was strangely popular among Saint John’s employees, who turned out in droves to volunteer.”
And then the bad times came. Scheduling conflicts led to the cancelling of the Festival in 1999, though John McCutcheon still came to do a concert on that last Saturday of April...but he performed in the BAC at St. Ben’s, not at St. John’s.

2000 April 30 (Sunday) "27th annual" booths & music but no contest or concert; Pinestock on Saturday

2001 April 28 (Saturday) no festival, but John McCutcheon concert in BAC, 8 pm [last JT]
But in 2000, *The Record* and the online campus newsletter *Connections* both promoted the “27th Annual” Swayed Pines event – with *The Record* referring to it as “slightly different” and “improved,” and again featuring food, artist booths, and musicians – but it was held only from noon-5 pm on the last Sunday of April, with no fiddle contest or evening concert. Contributing to its demise was the tightening funding, the difficulties finding volunteers, some years of nasty weather, and the retirement of founder and chief advocate Lee Hanley.
Years later, there were a few attempts to “revisit” or “restore” Swayed Pines (or at least to resurrect the name), but the momentum had been lost. A significant disadvantage was the change to the academic calendar; when the January Interim month requirement was removed in 2001, commencements moved up to Mother’s Day weekend instead of the end of May, so the last weekend of April was now close to finals week, and there were just too many events to squeeze into April.

2008 09 11 p.4 The Record “Swayed Pines Revisits Mysterious Past”

2015 10 09 p.4 The Record “SJU sophomore seeks to restore annual folk music festival”

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/29898/rec/76
So now the term Swayed Pines really does refer only to the trees themselves.
First Swayed Pines poster, 1974, from the personal collection of the archivist; donated to SJU Archives
SJU Archives, 35/4 Box1
Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 04\04-008 Swayed Pines - Trees, not Festival 1989\TIFF\image09.TIF
1992 January (winter) The Swayed Pines grace the *Saint John’s Magazine* cover
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5524/rec/113
1997: Lee Hanley, retiring from Saint John’s, being thanked by John McCutcheon
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Public Relations Office Photos - PC 08\Vol 03\03-088 Swayed Pines 1997\TIFF\Image03.TIF
1983: 
Troubador 
John McCutcheon 
gets his diploma 

1983 Summer SJU Alumni Magazine, p. 23 
1974 First Swayed Pines – emcees Garrison Keillor, Tom Kay
1975 Saint John’s article by Paul Cofell – emcees are Garrison Keillor and WCCO-FM’s Tom Ambrose
1976 Garrison emcees; no concert headliner; only one day, unlike two previous events
1977 Garrison does PHC from Festival w/Mary DuShane; Guy Carawan & John McCutcheon do Wed. evening concert, Guy does Saturday concert
1978 Included a panel on Stearns Co. history. Wry Straw (“John McCutcheon Trio”) for Saturday concert
1979 John McCutcheon & Wry Straw again; included panel on “the creative genius evident in Central Minnesota”; PHC show from a auditorium
1980 “Stearns County Syndrome” morning panel; John McCutcheon (“4th time”) & Reel World String Band
1981 Included symposium; on Saturday before students back from break.
1982 Concert: Elizabeth Cotten, Mike Seeger, John McCutcheon, and the New Prairie Ramblers
1983 John McCutcheon & Bryan Bowers; John gets his diploma from Bill Van Cleve
1984 John McCutcheon
1985 Doc Watson
1986 John McCutcheon in SBHS Friday night; Taj Mahal concert Sat. night
1987 April 25 (Saturday) Fiddle Fest included hot air balloons; Greg Brown & John McCutcheon
1988 John McCutcheon & Claudia Schmitt
1989 Arlo Guthrie & Tom Paxton
1990 John McCutcheon & Tom Chapin
1991 John McCutcheon & Gregory Gladkov
1992 John McCutcheon & Schooner Fair
1993 John McCutcheon & John Prine
1994 John McCutcheon & Holly Near & “Roots & Wings” workshops
1995 Guthrie & Livingston Taylor
1996 John McCutcheon & Eddie Havens
1997 April 26 (Saturday) John McCutcheon
1998 April 25 (Saturday)”25th annual” John McCutcheon’s 17th time; contest, crafts, food
1999 April 24 (Saturday) festival cancelled due to scheduling conflicts; John McCutcheon concert in BAC, 2 pm
2000 April 30 (Sunday) “27th annual” booths & music, but no contest or concert; Pinestock on Saturday
2001 April 28 (Saturday) no festival, but John McCutcheon concert in BAC, 8 pm [last JT]
The first annual Swayed Pines Festival was organized by a group of students in the spring of 1974. The ringleader was a student from South Dakota, David Kemp, who had attended a similar event in his home state.

Plans were to hold the first event on the football field in the shadow of the tall pine trees that rim the western edge of the natural bowl. Westerly winds over the years have given the row of trees an "easterly lean," hence the title, "Swayed Pines." I think calling it the "first annual" was something of a joke. It rained much of the day so the entire program was moved into the athletic facility, the Warner Palaestra. Later organizers of Swayed Pines, which continued for 25 years, never again considered moving outdoors.

I was on campus for an unrelated alumni event that day and happened to stop by the Palaestra to see what had attracted a crowd. They were in the midst of the fiddle contest and it was clearly a success and a crowd pleaser. I was impressed by the variety of people in the crowd – old people, young people, kids in strollers, people in wheelchairs, representatives of a variety of ethnic groups. It seemed a delightful cross section of humanity. It struck me that far too few academic campus events attract and serve such an impressive variety of people.

The next week I approached a colleague, SJU Development Director Mike Ricci, and suggested that we look into sustaining Swayed Pines as an annual event. He was persuaded, and the two of us approached the president, Fr. Michael Blecker, and made our case. He responded that he would budget $1,500 for each of the next two years to assist in keeping the event alive. "However," he said, "If you are not able to make it break even by the third year we will discontinue it."

The first two Swayed Pines were weekend or two-day events. A traditional German band played old time dance music on the Palaestra stage on Sunday afternoon. This part of the program proved to be too much work and less successful and it was discontinued in the third year. Swayed Pines always broke even or realized a small profit. Whenever there was a profit planners were authorized to carry it over and invest it to enhance or strengthen the next year's production. As an example, one year we used part of the profits from the previous year to contract with a Peruvian pan pipe group to perform outside on the lawn throughout the afternoon.
Typically we would have 60-70 fiddlers competing in half a dozen categories of playing. The young kids were always particularly popular with the crowd. In the early years we usually had one or two fiddlers under the age of 12. In the final few years we had as many as a dozen under 12. We liked to think that this event and others like it were being successful in passing the folk art of fiddling along to another generation.

In addition to the fiddling competition the event also featured a crafts fair with as many as 150 crafts booths in and outside.

Swayed Pines also featured an evening concert each year – the only part of the day-long program that required a ticket for entrance. John McCutcheon was a featured performer for at least 20 of the 25 years. John would play the first half of the show and then we would present another big name from the folk tradition. Our performers over the years included John Prine, Taj Majal, Tom Paxton, Schooner Fare, Libba Cotton (composer of Freight Train), Guy Carawan (composer of We Shall Overcome), Claudia Schmidt, Bryan Bowers, Livingston Taylor, Loudon Wainwright III, Richie Havens and Arlo Guthrie (twice).

When the first Swayed Pines was organized Garrison Keillor was still broadcasting from the Saint John’s University MPR affiliate. He emceed the first program and for approximately eight years, until his Saturday afternoon Prairie Home Companion show took his attention on Saturday afternoons, he returned each year to co-emcee the fiddle contest. Swayed Pines became a huge campus event, attracting as many as 12,000 visitors for the day. It was strangely popular among Saint John’s employees who turned out in droves to volunteer as workers for the day. Saint John’s owes special gratitude to the late Joe Faber of Viking Coke and the wonderful Viking staff. Especially in the second and third year, Viking’s sponsorship helped to secure Swayed Pines as an annual event. The Viking staff, all volunteer, would set up their booth and sell Coke and popcorn throughout the day. All proceeds were turned over to the event. Faber told me that his employees were so excited about being a part of the event that they would begin signing up as volunteers as early as February. (Swayed Pines was always the last Saturday of April.)

Swayed Pines was discontinued in 1999. I had retired in 1997 so I am not informed on the details. I recall that the Warner Palaestra was undergoing a major renovation during that year so our event had temporarily lost its home.

Lee Hanley, May 1, 2006

Some of Lee’s remarks here were published in the summer 1997 alumni magazine (page 4?) https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5542/rec/125