

GARVIN GATE BLUES FESTIVAL A LITTLE BACKGROUND

1988 – In The Beginning

It all started in 1988 with an idea to have a blues jam in the parking lot of the Rudyard Kipling. At that time the Garvin Place Association was expanding its boundaries to become the Garvin Place Neighborhood Association and they wanted to initiate an annual event. Because the parking lot was so limited, it was decided to have it on Garvin Place by the Gate. The chair of the Association was enthusiastic about the location and got a good response from the neighbors. Within a few weeks it all came together with the sponsorship of the County Judge Executive's Jefferson Discovery Program. The performers were all local bands. Unfortunately it rained that Sunday in October and only five hundred people came.

1989 – Expansion to 2 Days

In 1989 the festival expanded to two days with beautiful weather and ten thousand people attending. Henry Woodruff received the first Sylvester Weaver Award from the Kentuckiana Blues Society. H-Bomb Ferguson and Eddy Clearwater were the headliners. Clearwater jammed in the Rudyard Kipling following the festival.

1990 – Officially Arrived

Because the large crowd had been hard to contain on Garvin Place, Oak Street was closed between Fourth and Sixth and the stage was set up in the intersection for 1990. Scott Mullins, host of the WFPK Saturday Night Blues Party, was the music coordinator. He pulled some strings and there were several exceptional acts that included Fenton Robinson, James 'Thunderbird' Davis, Roosevelt 'Booba' Barnes, Phil Guy, Lefty Dizz, Paul Black & the Flip Kings, plus the Jelly Roll Kings. Twenty thousand people came and the festival had officially arrived.

1991 – The Gate and the Rud Host

The 4th Annual Garvin Gate Festival brought Professor's Blues Review (Eddie Lusk) and Maurice John Vaughn from Chicago to be the headliners on Saturday. The KBS hosted a blues jam that night at the Rud with Rocky Amaretto and Winston Hardy. The Garvin Gate Association produced a slick souvenir program and the cool 'saxy' cat appeared at the gate as the new logo.

1992 – Expansion to 3 Days

The festival expanded to three days in 1992 with Willie Little as the music coordinator. There was a diverse assortment of local talent with a Gazebo Stage located at the other end of Garvin Place for acoustical acts. James "Yank" Rachel at 83 delighted the audience with his mandolin and Lamont Gillispie and the Home Wreckers featured Sam Myers.

1993 – Party Hardy

The lineup for the 1993 festival was mostly local bands with Kent Duchaine, the Louisiana guitarist, headlining the first two nights. Winston Hardy, Mr. Mumbo Jumbo, received the 5th Sylvester Weaver Award. This festival initiated supporting the Kentucky Harvest by encouraging people to bring canned goods.

1994 – Mississippi Meets Chicago

The 1994 festival featured Junior Kimbrough on Friday and Willie Kent & The Gents with Bonnie Lee on Saturday. There was a benefit for local bluesman Henry Woodruff in the Rud with the Dennis Ervin Band.

1995 – Louisville's 11th Largest Event

In 1995 the festival was in its 8th year and had become Louisville's 11th largest event drawing 30,000 to 40,000 people over three days. Three headliners were recruited from Chicago including Magic Slim & The Teardrops, Mississippi Heat with Dietra Farr and Byther Smith and The Nightriders.

1996 – Stage Full of Stars

The 1996 festival had a second Gazebo Stage near Ormsby and there was another fund raiser following the festival in the Rud for Lorene Wells, wife of Foree Wells, with music provided by the Metropolitan Blues All Stars. The main attractions were Deborah Coleman, Chubby Carrier & The Bayou Swamp Band and Jimmy Dawkins. Dawkins brought Edde Shaw's band as his backup so there was a stage full of stars. It was a moving moment when an ailing Jim Rosen sat in to blow his harp with Dawkins. Mary Ann Fisher was honored with the Sylvester Weaver Award.

1997 – Ran Out of Gas

In 1997 Howard Rosenburg had left town and the Garvin Gate Neighborhood Association volunteers had run out of steam after nine years. It is significant to note that da Mudcats performed every year at the Gate and Foree Wells played at all but two festivals.

The event was briefly revived as the Louisville Blues Festival and moved downtown to Theater Square for three years from 1997 to 1999. Even though the talent was great, it just wasn't the same when they put a fence around it and charged admission.

2007 – Resurrection of the Gate

With the return of Howard Rosenberg, financial support from Metro councilman George Unsel and Mike Suttles booking great acts on a lean budget, the Gate was once again alive and well. Chicago guitarists Lurrie Bell and Jimmy Burns headlined Friday and Saturday night with a tribute to Jim Rosen that reunited da Mudcats with Sue O'Neil. Sonny Sitgraves, a local drummer who played with several Chicago bands, received the "Weaver." It was a déjà vu experience after an absence of eleven years.

2008 – Ready for Eddy

This festival was lucky thirteen for Garvin Gate with more sponsors and larger crowds. Chicago blues ruled again with Nick Moss & The Flip Tops and Eddy "The Chief" Clearwater headlining each night. Clearwater, now a 73 year old legend, closed his set with "West Side Strut" which hit a groove that got the whole crowd in sync. When Joe DeBow finished his set with Pure Gravel he was presented with the "Weaver."

2009 – Harp Heaven

The theme for this year's festival on October 9 and 10 will be harmonica blues featuring internationally recognized Sugar Blue. See you at Garvin Gate, the crossroads of Louisville blues.

Keith S. Clements
Blues Curmudgeon Emeritus