

11-14-09

HISTORICAL HANGOUT

The man who brought the '60s to town

As owner of hippie hot spot The Barn, Leon Tabory planted a flag for the counterculture in SV

✓ By WALLACE BAINE

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Despite its reputation as a natural wildlife preserve for 1960s-style hippies and similarly free-spirited life-style rebels, Santa Cruz County was once, in fact, a quiet, conservative, decidedly un-hip place.

If anyone were ever to draw up a list of those most responsible for turning Santa Cruz from the latter to the former, among the top five names would certainly be Leon Tabory.

Tabory, who died in September a week before turning 84, will be remembered at a memorial service on Sunday for a life that

reads like a grand 20th century novel. But in the cultural history of the county, Tabory stands, for good or ill, as a pioneer in establishing the '60s counterculture in this area. He brought in the Day-Glo colors where once had been only red, white and blue.



SEE THE BARN ON A2 **TABORY**



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Leon Tabory was the owner/operator of the Barn, a landmark off Highway 17 in Scotts Valley that, for a brief moment, was the local epicenter of the flower-power movement. Tabory brought some of the earliest rock light shows as well as live musical acts including such iconic figures as Janis Joplin and Country Joe & the Fish to a converted dairy barn.

THE BARN

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For a few crucial years in the mid-1960s, Tabory was the owner/operator of The Barn, a landmark off Highway 17 in Scotts Valley that, for a brief moment, was the local epicenter of the flower-power movement. In the middle of tranquil, bucolic Scotts Valley, Tabory attracted droves of young longhairs where few had been seen before. A psychologist by training, Tabory presided over a vibrant weekend scene that featured some of the earliest rock light shows as well as live musical acts including such iconic figures as Janis Joplin and Country Joe & the Fish.

"The Barn was my first experience in Santa Cruz (County)," said Ralph Abraham, a longtime friend of Tabory and a leading figure in an online project called the Hip Santa Cruz History Project. "(Leon) was the reason I moved here."

Abraham said Tabory used The Barn as a kind of incubator of what was then radical new era values of community and human potential.

"Those light shows, he really took seriously," he said. "He used psychedelics as therapy."

Coincidentally, the city of Scotts Valley was first incorporated the same year Tabory took control of The Barn — 1966. The Barn wasn't the first outpost of the counterculture in the area — the Hip Pocket Bookstore and the old Catalyst in downtown Santa Cruz had opened earlier, providing a welcoming atmosphere for the politically conscious beat-generation vibe that had flourished in San Francisco in the 1950s. He wasn't even the first to bring a new

IF YOU GO

MEMORIAL FOR
LEON TABORY

WHEN: 2 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Santa Cruz Moose Lodge, 2470 El Rancho Drive, Santa Cruz

DETAILS: Friends, colleagues and loved ones are invited to share memories at www.leontabory.com. Donations are being accepted in Tabory's name at the Dominican Hospital Foundation, 462-7712.

cultural scene to The Barn. Fabled beat figure Eric "Big Daddy" Nord opened a coffee shop in The Barn in 1964.

But it was Tabory who first brought the full-blown hippie aesthetic to the county, and it was Tabory who found himself in a long, draining battle with the newly established city. The Scotts Valley Planning Commission approved Tabory's first application to open The Barn as a community center, but warned him with a "no beatniks" rule.

The Barn opened with its light shows, its live concerts, its colorful crowds and its eye-popping guest list, which often featured not only Janis Joplin and Country Joe McDonald, but beat generation luminaries Neal Cassady and Ken Kesey, both Tabory friends.

The appalled Scotts Valley City Council ordered The Barn closed, citing Tabory's lack of a license to host live entertainment. Tabory refused to change and was arrested for ignoring a court order. Thus began a long series of trials pitting Tabory against the city, most personally against then-Mayor Bill Graham, who said to the Sentinel in the middle of Tabory's contempt-of-court

trial: "He doesn't get the picture he's not wanted around here."

Tabory later sued Graham for slander.

"He was very mellow and very sweet," said Tabory's daughter, Ramah Hinde of Santa Cruz. "I wouldn't call him a combative person, but he had very strong opinions and ideals and he had a passion for that movement."

Tabory was an unlikely figure to lead the hippie hordes into Santa Cruz. A native of Lithuania, he had spent his early life living under the occupation of both the Soviets and the Nazis, the latter of whom sent him to the Dachau concentration camp. After the war, thanks to the help of an American relative, Tabory came to the U.S. where he attended college in Michigan and Wisconsin to pursue a doctorate in psychology.

He first came to the West Coast to establish a new therapeutic program at the penitentiary at San Quentin, where he met and befriended Cassady. He first came to Santa Cruz County to take a job as a staff psychologist at General Hospital (now Dominican Hospital). He took an active interest in the emerging cultural scene at the Hip Pocket and at Esalen Institute in Big Sur.

At The Barn, Tabory and his then-wife Kathy welcomed visitors to a coffee shop and art gallery, along with a vast dance room where bands played live and psychedelic light shows danced on the walls. The Barn was even featured in Tom Wolfe's Merry Pranksters saga "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test."

"Leon was always there at the door," said Holly Harman, who is writing a book about her experiences growing up in a hippie commune in the Santa Cruz Mountains. "It was \$1.25 at

the door for live music and light shows. The Barn really brought a lot of people in that particular culture together."

In his battles with Scotts Valley, Tabory claimed that the music and light shows were not merely entertainment but, in fact, a form of therapy, and thus the city's ordinances didn't apply. Eventually, the constant arrests and legal wranglings forced Tabory to sell The Barn in 1969, at which point the hippie generation had achieved critical mass across the country. Tabory, in his later years, indulged an interest in computers and worked at the computer lab at Cabrillo College.

Santa Cruz's Marq Lipton was a Tabory relative — Tabory and Lipton's mother were first cousins. Once a month for several years, Lipton and Tabory lunched together. Lipton said those encounters enriched his understanding not only of Tabory, but of bigger issues in his own life.

"It was amazing, considering all he had gone through," said Lipton, "but he was still a very optimistic guy. He had this certain exuberance and positive outlook and he always had an interest to find out why people treat other people the way they do."

In the summer of 1966, when the new city planning commission was deciding whether to grant Tabory's wish to open The Barn, he was asked whether he planned to cater to a "beatnik clientele."

Tabory was not about to acquiesce to such a suggestion.

"I hope the day never comes," he replied, as quoted in the Sentinel's reports of the meeting, "when I turn my face away from anyone that shows me friendliness."