Ray Tate and the hard-core School musicians could easily keep on singing and playing until dawn — so, they thought, instead of staying out all night at clubs, why not bring an all-night party to the Old Town School?

As always with OTS parties, any excuse would do. "The parties began when Ray Tate decided the School should celebrate the 100th anniversary of the [1871!] Great Chicago Fire," explains Mike Dunbar. "The party was so successful we added two more all-nighters annually, George Washington's birthday and the Last Blast [in May]. Very often those parties lived up to their name when School custodian Cory Camallieri and I would kick out the diehards at dawn."

"We'd finish our gigs around two and slide over on to 909 West Armitage to see what was happening. It was like a folk fest and a mini-convention all rolled into one. One could not only see who was an up-and-comer (and there were many) but also had the rare opportunity to see usually a dozen or two local or touring performers all in one place — not only playing and singing but telling all their very best tail tales, drunken lies, and filthy dirty jokes!" — Kurt Peter

"Things stayed pretty hectic until two or so. That's when the hot dogs ran out. I guess. At around four o'clock, performers were finishing up their last gigs or being kicked out of their early ones would start to filter in. This was when things got good. I heard Fred Holstein play there at four in the morning. I watched Vaas Clements pass his fiddle around so everyone could see the beautiful hand carvings on the head. Dax Van Ronk staggered in and toted the place up, musically. On and on. It was too much!" — Terry Miller

The end of an era: the closing of the Saddle Club

"It was from a scene out of On the Waterfront," says Ed Holstein. "But at 10:30 on Thursday nights, it was packed." The Saddle Club, just down the street on North Avenue, was a haven for Old Town School regulars. But at the stroke of twelve on Halloween night, 1974, "that nightfall maligneditons of smoke, drink and folkes," as Judy Haufl put it, was to lose its license. Its habitus would not let the occasion go unmarked; Judy remembers.

"For years, we had a huge free-for-all party every Thursday night at the Saddle Club — it was a filthy, stinking hole. It was smoky, noisy; everyone was drinking and laughing no one (except Win Stracke) could ever get the audience to shut up. Anyway, one night we heard it was going to close forever.

"The last night, the booze was flowing, we were sobbing hysterically. Ray Tate and the Bluegrass Boys were playing, Ray could hardly make it to the stage. When he did, he announced, 'We're not leaving! Everybody was cheering. But the liquor license was going to expire at midnight. Well, the cops came around 11:30. First they politely said, 'OK, everybody, let's go!' But gentle persuasion would not do, as feeling was by now, let us say, running high at which point an anonymous, overzealous officer opened up his mace container, an event which, at last, drew the undivided attention of every individual present. Dick Kay and others got it in the face. We scrambled for the exits and boiled out into the street and started to sing "We Shall Overcome" out on North Avenue. At least we had the satisfaction of knowing that this club was going out in a fitting way: not with a whimper!"