

WHAT GOES ROUND COMES ROUND

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By Noma Tucker



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Every farmer knows that if you plant weed seed you get weeds but if you plant a good seed you raise a good plant.

In 1892 the Umatilla County Pioneers had an idea that has carried on for 106 years - An annual reunion. The seed they planted has given us many exciting and interesting memories.

First, I would like to share with you some of these highlights of the first 59 years from those pioneers that lived them.

Second, I want to share some memories of the Pioneer Picnic from my own life, having attended nearly every one of them from as long as I can remember and being 85 that is quite a long time.

Third, we want to hear any special stories or facts you might have to share from your experiences.

Forty-seven year ago, in writing Weston news for the Milton Eagle Times, I did some articles based on interviews with a number of pioneers who participated in the first and early reunions. Those quoted have all passed away but fortunately the pieces printed weekly in the paper have survived in my scrapbook.

The article on April 24, 1951 was with Mr and Mrs W. S. Price. Mr Price told how the men went to the mountains and cut down a good many large evergreen trees and hauled them to town and very carefully planted them in the ground to look like a forest. This of course was for shade as well as decoration. An Indian had been watching the proceedings for a long time and after a bit had shrugged disgustedly and said, "White man, he fool. Those trees not grow."

The first reunion was, May 27-28, 1892 and was held on North Frankland street near where Pine Creek goes. The Prices recalled that the sixth annual reunion was in Milton on June 1-2, 1898 and the seventh one was in Athena. The reason for two days some years and the three days others was on election years it took an extra day for all the candidates to have their turn on the stage to give their speeches. This was on election years, and yes, they were boring especially to kids and the young people.

My mother remembers sitting in her Uncle Charley Crawford's home watching a flood in 1906, the year their family, the Smocks, moved from Randolph, Utah to Weston. The men were working on the ascension of a Balloon--she didn't remember if they got it to go up or not, but the Prices said the balloon did ascend and the memorable part of that was the women in long white dresses and white shoes trying to follow the balloon as it floated over town. They neglected to hold up their dresses so they all had a black boarder around the bottom. It seems the picnic was called off because of the flood. They meant the program I assume.

Mrs Alex McCorkell [Amy Taylor] remembered the old horse drawn Merry-go-round and what a thrill it was to ride. It was reported that one time a couple of "gay young blades", this was before the present connotation of the word "gay", took the patrons of this famous Merry-go-round on a wild ride. These young gentlemen decided to go for a pleasant afternoon gallop on the horses that were pulling the ride. This resulted in a lot of excitement. Mrs McCorkell also recalled seeing her first China silk dress and it was gorgeous. One of the really important events of the celebration was the fiddlers contest. Sometimes there were seven or eight players with their accompanist either playing the piano or organ or cording for them. Outdoor platforms were set up for afternoon dancing.

Tim McBride recalls how when the weather was hot the evergreen trees, newly cut, caused the pitch to run. The last of May and the first of June was many time very hot and people instinctively looked for the shade. Those who got under the trees found themselves with pitch in their hair and on their clothes. What a mess--Mrs McBride thought of the time the Red White and Blue bunting used for decorations faded in the rain. She didn't think people looked patriotic but just plain bedraggled. The McBrides saw their first phonograph at the picnic in Jamesons grove, on the creek back of where Marion Culley lives. It had cylinder records. It cost you 10 cents and you had to listen carefully to hear it. They also tell about the time the seats collapsed and Bernie Richmond [Blomgren] was singing and never stopped. That did help quiet the crowd.

In the articles there is a copy of the minutes of the first meeting in 1892

L.I."Pete" O'Harra and Claud Price remembered one year a Circus came to town with gambling booths where the odds seemed to be a bit out of kilter. The Sheriff decided he had better check the situation out and a bit of an argument followed. The Sheriff pulled his gun and shot a number of times into the ground. This brought a cry of "Hey Rube" and the Circus crew appeared. There was quite a ruckus. Anyway the Circus went broke and the seats and tent went to the Pioneer Association. Street sports were also part of the days activities. There was nail hammering and board sawing contests for the women and fat man races for the men. Watts and Rogers Hardware loaned saws for the board sawing and afterwards had to send the saws back to the manufactures to get the kinks out of them. One year there was a total eclipse of the sun. Everyone came to the program with a smoked piece of window glass to watch this great phenomenon.

Luella Pinkerton's most vivid memory was of the "Ladies Band". She played the slide Trombone. This group of 26 Ladies gained a lot of attention. They played for the

program and put on an evening concert. They also played for the Pendleton Round Up and the Walla Walla fourth of July celebration. In 1911 they won second prize for the concert in Walla Walla.

These articles covered a small bit of the memories of the first 59 years of the Umatilla County Pioneer Association meetings and all those interviewed are now gone. In the 47 years since that time things have changed. Isn't it miraculous though that the decedents and up to the present-day pioneers, have carried on the tradition? Where there was horse races and baseball we have parades and baseball. The little kids run races for money instead of having fat men and ladies races. The dances are not the old time waltzes and square dances but are for the young people and folks still come a long ways for the picnic and to renew former ties.

Personally, spring was a special time, school was out and the crops in. The women folks prepared for THE PICNIC. New dresses were a must--we all needed at least two new ones and the really lucky ones had four. Food for the picnic had to be prepared, cakes made and of course homemade Ice Cream. Finally, the great day came and we were off to the celebration, what excitement--we could hardly wait. Hopefully it would be good weather and no rain.

The reunion committee had been busy and seats were set up and a tent erected for the programs. A big carnival filled the streets and everything was ready for a gala two or three day party.

To the kids the Merry-go-round and its exciting music was hypnotic. Clark Woods, our town celebrity, often carried tickets for rides and would dispense them to various youngsters. Kids would anxiously follow him to see if they might be a lucky recipient. To show how mesmerizing this attraction was--my little sis and a couple of her cohorts even went up and down the street asking strangers for money to ride some of the attractions. She must have been about four years old, but you can imagine the family's mortification at this turn of events.

THE PROGRAM, throughout the years, is what the picnic and reunion was all about. Families took their lunches and ate in yards or at relatives houses and the whole festivities was arranged around the programs. In the earliest days they were held in the morning at ten a.m. and afternoon at one thirty p.m. The program was the main feature, and everything revolved around it. Even the Carnival noise was muted during that time. I remember how much I used to want to be on the Picnic program but with no talent to offer my first appearance was when I was honored by being chosen Queen four years ago, guess all things come to those who wait if they wait long enough. We all knew we would hear Clark Wood sing "Asleep in the Deep" and Anna Compton Winn was nearly always on the program. A good one was well balanced with singing-dances-musical number reading - skits and speakers.

Visiting with friends and getting together was the order of the day. People had time to relax and enjoy each other and all the excitement. The young ladies and gents paraded, showed off, flirted and enjoyed each other and the older folk remised, visited and

compared notes on crops, problems, recipes, and numerous interesting facts of life. People would arrive early to renew friendships then following the programs they would again congregate in groups. Before we moved to Prineville in 1951 I had served on the committee to arrange the entertainment, with Audrey Lieuallen and Walter and Miller Rayborn, so in lieu of being able to perform myself we would bring our boys and various others to be on the program. Danny and Jerry both played the Cornet and were on the program several different years. So I enjoyed a vicarious performance through their participation.

The first site I remember for the tent and seats was just south of the old gym in a vacant lot. The seats were boards on frames like circus seats or gym bleachers. I don't know how many years it was held there twenties, I think, but the last one was probably the year those seats collapsed with a full crowd on them. I was on the top row and remember riding them down. Many people were hurt but the program went on. After this accident the seats were moved to the school ground terrace where there was more stability. It also gave big locust trees to anchor the tent ropes to. The stage faced East and it made a pleasant setting for the activities. There were also boards on the slightly sloping ground for the less venturesome - people to sit on. Later a half building type of stage and storage place was built and then, after awhile it was moved to the Elliott park.

To the best of my memory, I have only completely missed about three picnics, even though living 250 miles away for 33 years.

What has become a big part of the annual affair was started as near as I can recall in the mid thirties. At one time those who had attended the old Weston Normal school, which was later moved to La Grande, held a picnic and get together the Sunday following the reunion. I remember thinking if it was a good idea for them it was an equally good idea for the graduates of The Weston Union High School. Notices were sent and the first Alumni dinner was held in the Odd Fellows hall across the street from here. This has become one of the important parts of the reunion and different classes are holding anniversary parties at this time on 10th - 20th - 30th and what ever seems like a good time. It brings people back for a return to former days and makes for a strong tie to the past.

Naturally, I have a lot more memories, but the length of my years is better than the length of my memory.

I am sure that each of you have some special thoughts of things that stay in your mind about this special time in our home town and in spite of all the negative publicity it is receiving I am proud to call it MY HOME TOWN.

As I have been talking I'm sure every one of you has been thinking of some special incident that has special meaning to you. Your Chamber of Commerce meeting notice asked you to bring some of your memorabilia to share with us. This year's plan for the reunion is again being centered more around the picnic in the park idea and would seem to me to be focused on the original concept of getting together and sharing experience and enjoying the fellowship of each other. I am just wondering who is going to give the

hour long political speech that should go with this new-old format. Maybe someone could come up with a good old fashioned melodrama to carry out the theme of What goes round, comes round.

And now to finish my presentation please all of you who have stories to share step forward and speak up so we who are hard of hearing and can enjoy YOUR wonderful memories.

Madam President I appreciate the chance to talk about the very special times in my family and my life. The Pioneer Reunion was always important to all of us.

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