

The Moorefield Celebration

The following article from the files at the Switzerland County Historical Museum helps to visualize a still remembered special event in Switzerland County's past.

The Moorefield Celebration by Hallie H. Smith, written Dec. 10th, 1924

There has been some discussion as to when the Moorefield Celebration was first started. It was originated by Rev. Reizin M. Barnes, pastor of Ebenezer Church, and Mr. Perry K. Cotton, and was first held in Smith's grove the last Saturday in August 1863; and has been held continuously on the same date every year since, for a period of sixty-two years.

It was then as it has always been, a Sunday School celebration, with religious exercises as well as social features. All the Sunday Schools regardless of denomination, within quite a large radius were invited to attend and take part in the exercise, and sometimes as high as ten or fifteen schools were represented.

Travel at that time was on horse back, or in horse drawn vehicles; the big jolt wagon predominating, and soon after sunrise Saturday morning the people began pouring through the village on their way to the grove.

The schools came in a body, headed by a gaily decorated wagon filled with girls and boys in their holiday attire, bearing banners on which was inscribed the name of the school.

On reaching the grove the schools formed in line and marched from the entrance to the speaker's stand, preceded by the U. S. flag with each school bearing its own banner.

This was a really pretty sight, with beautifully decorated banners, with bright ribbons borne by pretty little streamer bearers, all marching to the music of fife and drum.

Able speakers, usually ministers, were always provided for both morning and afternoon; and singing was one of the most enjoyable features of the day, each school bringing its best talent and prettiest songs; always sure of an appreciative audience.

At noon lunch baskets were brought out, cloths spread and the entire assembly gathered in family and friendly groups and ate dinner under the shade of the spreading beeches.

As time passed Sunday School picnics increased and the number of schools attending in a body decreased; but the attendance has largely increased so that it is now numbered by the thousands.

The auto has so revolutionized travel that many now come only in the afternoon, but the old timers still gather with friends and relatives and eat their lunch under the trees.

The Moorefield Celebration acts as a magnet, drawing people from long distances, not only in Indiana, but from far distant states as Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee, California, South Dakota, New York, Oklahoma and many others. They so time their visits to relatives and friends as to attend the celebration and renew old friendships and associations.

The little streamer bearers of years ago are now grandparents, proudly exhibiting their grand-children and great grand-children.

Fearing that a time might come when the grove would be no longer available, a committee was appointed and in 1922 fifteen acres were bought from Mr. J. C. Smith at one hundred dollars per acre. Many persons from a distance also contributed money for the purchase of this grove, so that the celebration might be held by future generations.

Providence favored us, as in the sixty-two years rain has never prevented the meeting, and in only two or three instances caused any inconvenience on the grounds.

While it is an enjoyable occasion, yet to the old there is an element of sadness in it. Of the persons who really took part in the exercises of the first meeting, there are probably not more than a dozen remaining; and each year some familiar face is missed to be seen no more.

The writer has been absent but three times in the sixty-two years.

Hopefully we have some readers who may remember the Moorefield Celebration and other things about the Moorefield community. You can contact us at 812-427-3560, email swcomuseums@embarqmail.com, or stop by the museum at 208 East Market Street. We look forward to hearing from you!

Martha Bladen