

Historical Ramblings

Lompoc's Pioneers Celebrate

A triple celebration of huge magnitude was held in Lompoc on November 11, 1925. The anniversary of the signing of the peace pact between Germany and the Allies, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the town of Lompoc and the opening of the new modern paved highway (Harris Grade) to Harris Station were the occasions for the Grand Jubilee that was attended by 10,000 people.

After a slight earthquake at 5:30 a.m., an opening salute was held at sunrise. Events that followed were a huge parade, a program at Ryon Park with a free barbecue at noon, horse races, a football game with fireworks between halves, bicycle races, and an evening movie at the Opera House followed by more fireworks. Three dances were held that night each attracting full houses at the Odd Fellows Hall, Foresters Hall and the Opera House.

Visitors came from San Luis Obispo and Santa Maria to try out the new road. 1200 feet of tables had been built for the picnic and 18 beefs were barbecued. Coffee, beans and bread completed the menu. 1800 people were accommodated at each sitting at the monster barbecue.

This was the golden anniversary of the founding of Lompoc. Fifty years had brought back remaining pioneers and their children to a celebration designed to overshadow all celebrations before it. It was the biggest community party ever seen in Lompoc. It has not been equaled since! Every man, woman and child who had ever lived in the valley returned if it was physically or financially feasible. Every organization, school and business in town participated in the two-mile parade that day.

As the party drew to a close, the crowd was halted by an announcement. "Folks, we have enjoyed one of the finest get-togethers most of us have had in many a day. How about making it a yearly occasion?" The response was a resounding "Aye." The result was the formation of the Lompoc Pioneer Society, which first met on July 25, 1926. The pioneers gathered in Foresters Hall for tea, reminiscing and viewing old photos. In the evening a dance was held at the Opera House. It again attracted a full house with no room for even one more "square" on the dance floor. After a picnic lunch on Sunday at Miguelito Park, A.G. Balaam called the meeting to order and conducted an election of the first officers of the society; James Sloan, President, Mary Saunders, Vice-President, A.G. Balaam, Secretary and Alex McLean, Treasurer. There were no membership dues. The only requirement for membership was that individuals had to be a pioneer, a descendant of a pioneer, or a valley resident for 25 years.

The Pioneer Reunion was eventually moved to Labor Day weekend, still carrying on the tradition of the Saturday tea, Saturday night dance and Sunday picnic. The tea served as the social get-together where pioneers could become re-acquainted and talk about old times. The dance featured a traditional opening with a grand march, followed by square dancing, waltzes, fox-trots, schottisches and the popular varsuvienne. The old-fashioned basket picnic drew the weekend to a close with the election of Pioneer Society officers for the coming year.

As years wore on, the dance was discontinued. Lompoc's founding pioneers were disappearing. Their children continued to carry on the Pioneer Reunion tradition. As generations passed, the younger crowd no longer considered themselves "Pioneers." They became too far removed from their ancestry and lost track of their Lompoc roots. Lifestyles had also changed and families became scattered all over the world, making it more difficult to gather at Labor Day. The Pioneer Society persevered for 70 years and finally disbanded due to dwindling attendance.

The Lompoc Valley Historical Society assumed responsibility for the Saturday tea and Sunday picnic, attracting a younger generation returning for class reunions. Each year, many reunions are held over Labor Day with the 50-year class being honored at a Friday night dinner to kick off the weekend celebration.

The class reunion weekend formula works. However, one wonders what will happen when the 50-year classes are those of the 1960's whose numbers swelled to hundreds of students, many of whom from military families who really never called one town "home." There may come a time when the current version of the Pioneer Reunion no longer works.

For the time being, we're still celebrating and honoring the memory of those, who 80 years ago, threw the biggest party Lompoc has ever seen.