



12-15-1990

## Old Soldiers Day Reunion

Pam Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, Pam (1990) "Old Soldiers Day Reunion," *Westview*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol10/iss2/12>

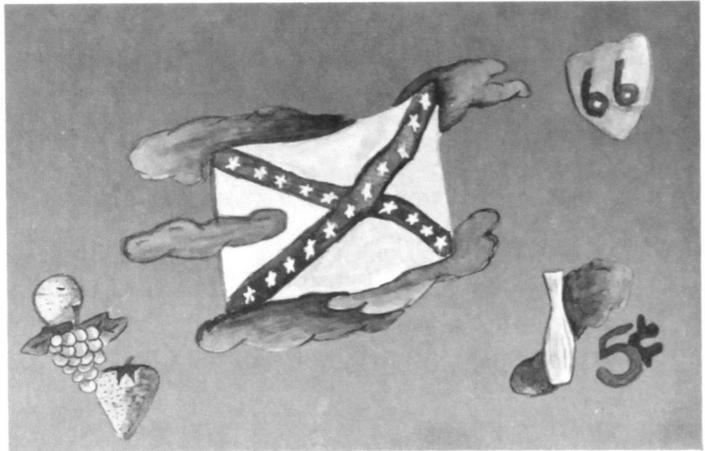
This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



# Old SOLDIERS DAY REUNION

—By Pam Smith

**T**HE LITTLE TOWN OF Bridgeport sits just north of the famed Old 66 Highway. All my life, Bridgeport has held a special place in my heart. My mother was reared there, and



my grandmother lived there for many years. The end of the road to Grandmother's house meant love and perhaps fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and garden tomatoes and okra. I spent many summer evenings on my grandmother's front porch gazing across the riverbottom, listening to stories about mad dogs, cardboard-lined shoes, or the wagon ride to Oklahoma from Missouri. Most evenings the Rock Island train wound its way through that beautiful valley. Coyotes howled through those peaceful, lazy summer evenings.

Sometimes she told stories of the Old Soldier's Day Reunion. It sounded like another world, and indeed it was. It was a world of lanterns hanging from summer trees, of passenger trains, and of town bands playing "When It's Springtime in the Rockies." Recently I visited Bridgeport again. My grandmother

is gone, but Aunt Cuba still lives there in that place rich in history and Oklahoma folklore. She shared with me these pretty memories of the Old Soldier's Day Reunions.

## THE HOME OF THE BLUE AND THE GRAY

(as told by Cuba Cauthron)

I'm not sure what year the reunions began, but I remember that the last Civil War gathering was in 1917. We looked forward to it for weeks.

My grandfather, Joseph Wilson Kerr, was a veteran of the Civil War. He picked us up in his buggy and took us to Bridgeport Park, which lies along the river bottom southeast of Bridgeport. It was a real treat to eat at the cook shack. It was a large tent kitchen set up by Minnie Grey and her sister for the old soldiers. The Civil War veterans camped out all weekend, and the soldiers and their families ate at the cook shack. We felt special eating there. The park was lined with horses, buggies, and wagons. A passenger train ran at 9:00 in the morning and again around 3:00 in the afternoon.

You'd see the old soldiers in the Civil War uniforms. I remember Georgia, my sister, and I had pretty princess-style dresses. Hers was silk and mine a pretty cotton print. They were tight-fitting in the style of the day. Our hair was in braids. Mother wore her hair in a loose bun, and she put two whisps in it by pulling it in a light twist. Yes, I think we were pretty.

Oh, goodness, there was so much fun to have. There were game stands all decorated in red, white, and blue bunting. There were baby contests and horse races of course. The swimming pool was open all afternoon. George Clark and his wife, Martha, ran the pool. They kept a big tank

of cold drinks—strawberry, grape, and orange for 5 cents. No diet drinks either. Goodness, I don't suppose anyone dieted in those days.

Every afternoon a club or church group would put on a skit at the auditorium. It could be funny or serious. Then each night there would be dances. Why, we'd dance to "The Red River Valley," "Carolina Moon," and "The Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia." There would be lanterns hanging in the trees; people seemed happy and peaceful. Groups of old soldiers sat around campfires telling stories and laughing and maybe shedding a tear now and then. I just know it was great fun to be a young girl. It was a happy time for all.

## COME WITH ME

Can you imagine walking toward this gathering on an August evening? You'd hear laughter and music from the bandstand. You'd see lanterns shadowed by trees and campfire smoke. Some would be packing up picnic baskets and sleepy children for the wagon ride home. And you'd hear crickets, of course. Yes, the most glorious sound of Western Oklahoma evenings must be summer crickets.

Just across a wash and up a hill, east of the Bridgeport Park and Arena, you will find the remains of the old swimming pool. Many times I've sat on the edge of this pool, eyes closed, listening, just listening for the voices of Western Oklahoma. \*

*(PAM SMITH lives in Geary with her two children, Adrian and Mary Grace, and operates an antique store. She received a degree in English Education from SOSU and is currently working toward a Master's degree.)*

*Design by Cynde Roof  
Illustration by Tommy Campbell*