

THE OLD CARTER COUNTY FAIR

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The announcement of the Carter County Fair in a recent issue of the East Kentucky Journal, a paper published at Grayson, calls to mind the checkered career of this annual gathering. For many years this annual get-together of the folks was known as the Reunion of the G.A.R. and held under the auspices of the Grand Army Post at Grayson. N.T. Keaton was president of this organization nearly all of the time during which the G.A.R. post had charge of the Reunion. The veterans gathered in the park for their annual outing each year and at the inception of the reunion there were a large number of the soldiers yet living. A program of speaking and various other events made the days enjoyable and at mess time the old soldiers and their families gathered about a long table and their regular mess of roast beef and "slungulphon" as they called it. At night many of them slept in the open as they had done in the old days when they soldiered together. Old uniforms that had been worn in the service of Uncle Sam at Gettysburg, Chickamauga, at Lookout Mountain, at Perrysville and in the skirmishes with John Morgan in his raid through Kentucky and Ohio were in evidence on these occasions. The former soldiers met comrades from all parts of the county and from other states, for they scattered far and wide. The stories of former days brought to mind all the horrors and pleasures of the late "unpleasantness between the states." They fought again those famous battles that decided the fate of the nation, they told of the hardships of Sherman's March, of the awful carnage of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, of the dangers passed through at Little Round Top and Big Round Top, and Lookout Mountain, of the nights spent in sleepless terror on various battle fields and of the narrow escapes they had during their service, all of which had not been lessened with age and at least a few of the experiences grew larger with the vividness of the imagination of those entering the period known as "the second childhood."

On the occasion of the Reunion everybody planned to be among those present and for about fourteen years this annual gathering was one of the great events of the social life of Carter and parts of adjoining counties.

Bands, platform dancing, picnic parties, baseball games, balloon ascensions, shows and various other things added to the pleasure of those who attended.

The thinning of the ranks of the old soldiers and the fact that the officers of the G.A.R. Post become to some extent inactive in promoting the annual gathering it was succeeded by the Carter County Fair which has promoted by The Grayson Amusement Company. For five years this company promoted the fair with more or less varying success. A race track was added and Grayson was on the list of one of the racing circuits of the state. Some good races were had during the Fair times which usually lasted for four days. This year it will be held under the auspices of the Carter County Agricultural Society and the program indicates that it will be of more than usual interest as an agricultural exposition.

The usual excuse for the attendance of folks from far and near is the fact that one might see here folks that they have not seen for many years; folks that do not see each other oftener than once a year meet at the fair and tell of the many good things as well as the misfortunes that have come to them.

So fixed has the event become in the life of the folks of Carter County that nearly all events date from the fair, and before it came to be called Fair, they recalled the reunion. If one traded horses, or was sick, or sold a farm, went on a visit, or anything out of the ordinary routine happened to them it was always a short time before or after the reunion or fair. Folks got married at the Fair, children were born near the date of the last reunion, near relatives died and other incidents were remembered by their proximity to the reunion or the fair dates of each year.

One of the features of former fair and reunion days was the ever-present horse trader. There are numerous folks in the mountains of Kentucky whose sole occupation used to be trading horses. Most of the stock were of the class called "plug" horses. The mode of travel in the old days was by horse or on foot. Even the buggy was slow to gain favor among the visitors at the reunion and it was no extraordinary sight to see from fifty to two hundred men and boys "swapping" horses and jockeying about on their "plugs" on the days of the fair. Many of the horses that changed hands several times died of exhaustion and lack of nourishment before they got very far from the fairgrounds. The horse trader, while he is still occasionally in the county not near so common and the plug horse of bygone days is almost unknown.

This year the fair will be the first four days of September. It will be the occasion for folks far and near to come in Grayson for a visit with old friends and to meet new ones. Strange faces will be seen, and the familiar one will be somewhat changed, a silent but sure reminder that the "mills of god grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine."