

## Forms of Amusement in My Old Home Town

sp. In the little town where I grew up there wasn't much in the way of amusement, at least not in the ordinary sense of the word. But you could take your choice of a number of different <sup>pastimes</sup> ~~passtimes~~, depending on your ingenuity or inclination. Chiefly, these were loafing at Buxton's General Store, swimming at Three Rock, and attending an occasional tent show, pie supper, or other community activity.

R. Perhaps the most popular form of amusement among the menfolk, young and old, was lounging on the crude wooden benches and old cane-bottom chairs to be found on the porch of Buxton's Store. The porch faced the main road which ran through this little town of perhaps 300 population and <sup>in a way</sup> ~~every~~ <sup>was the center of the "business district."</sup> ~~one eventually passed that way.~~ Some of the loafers were regulars, and during warm weather you could find them there almost any day. There was tall and lanky old Mayhew Norris, a trucker whose time was his own, who enjoyed swapping tall tales with his neighbors. He was never without a cud of tobacco which caused his jaw to protrude in a comical way, and he punctuated his yarns with frequent guffaws and hearty slaps on the knee. He shared the spotlight with Fatty Williams who was distinguished as much for his extremely filthy overalls and jumper, worn the year round, and the two thumbs on his left hand as he was for his exceedingly rotund figure. No one could discover how Fatty earned a living. At one end of the porch was a gasoline pump where motorists were served by the genial clerk, big Jim

Cromwell. He would wipe his odoriferous hands on his trousers and return to the store to sell everything from cheese and pork to coal oil and shoe polish. Incidentally, besides outfitting and feeding the family and livestock at Buxton's, you could also get a troublesome tooth pulled. Mr. Buxton, so I've been told, kept a pair of pliers in his desk drawer just for that purpose.

Perhaps even more than loafing at the Store, the boys enjoyed swimming at Three Rock. Three Rock was a lovely, deep pool in Rock Creek <sup>a shallow stream</sup> which wound through a narrow ravine north of town. Inaccessible except by foot, it was considered too dangerous for girls. The route led up the railroad tracks, across the big <sup>railroad</sup> bridge with only a catwalk between you and the rocky bed of the creek 250 feet below, and down a steep and rocky path on the other side. One of the huge flat boulders which gave the swimming hole its name served as a diving platform. Bathing suits were unnecessary, and the boys and dogs splashed and yelled and barked, all but drowning out any sound of the frequent trains which roared across the towering bridge a hundred yards downstream. Girls had to be content with an occasional trip to the Mill Pond, which could be reached by an easy stroll up the dusty road and through an old field. The pool was shallow and swimming there was a tame sport.

Another summer amusement of the youth was the occasional travelling show which would pause for one or two nights and set up its paraphernalia in a tent on Mr. Buxton's pasture. It wasn't really a pasture, being unused and grown up in dog fennel. This weed gave off a peculiar odor which

scented the inside of the tent. We accepted this as a part of the occasion and never thought of complaining about it. We were summoned to the three-reel show by the exciting boom-boom of the showman's drum. By the time <sup>we</sup> were settled on the stadium-like, backless benches, it was quite dark outside. The interior was lit with strings of electric light bulbs. The showman carried his own dynamo, since we had no electric current. The reserved section consisted of ~~xxxxxx~~ folding chairs down center and was grandly roped in. Since these seats cost 35¢, they were much beyond the means of most of us. Before the show, the showman's helper would sell boxes of candy kisses. The boxes were deceptive, since they were usually only half filled. However, some lucky person always found a pair of silk stockings in the prize box, so the demand was fairly high. The younger boys liked to sit on the ground in front of the reserved section which put them with <sup>in</sup> ten feet of the screen. There they could follow every exciting moment of the inevitable western, urging on the hero and booing the villain with uninhibited yells. After every flickering, jerky, silent reel, there was an impatient pause while the operator changed reels. Then we galloped on through the picture, worn out, but glad that the hero saved the pretty girl, and assured that they would live happily forever after.

For romantically inclined girls and boys, such occasions as the pie supper sponsored by the school or church were the highlights of the winter season. Every girl would bake the richest kind of pie possible and pack it in a crepe-paper decorated box, hoping that a certain young man would

buy it and share the pleasure of eating it with her. These pies were donated to the organization and, at the appointed evening hour, auctioned off in the largest school room available. Practically the whole community turned out for these affairs. Uncle Will Jones was the auctioneer, as a rule, and he did a noble job of it. Completely toothless, and with an extremely long, white mustache, presumably to cover his deficiency, he nevertheless carried himself with the dignity befitting his position as local postmaster and deacon of the Methodist Church. He considered himself quite a wit and liked to display his talent on the auction block. Bidding ran rather high, depending on the popularity of the girl contributing the pie. Sometimes, through a conspiracy, a young suitor was forced to pay up to \$5.00 for the privilege of eating pie with his sweetheart.

When other forms of amusement were scarce, we were always able to fill in with Sunday School picnics, wiener roasts, and the "serenading" of any handy bride and groom. Although homely, our amusements were varied and many of them depended on the inventiveness and imagination of the participants.

This is well done - an excellent "themo." However, it is - by professional standards - a fairly flat description: honest, detailed, but without those touches, or an over-all pattern that makes it really come alive.  
(Thanks for the Xmas card.)

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