



Old Home Day

(Verses read at the "Old Home Day" celebration in Oregon, Mo., Tuesday, July 27, 1909.)

From thy fold long since departed,  
wand'ring far from sea to sea,  
Yet in all our far-flung journeys,  
back our hearts have turned to thee.

Unto thee, O old home city, nestling  
'twixt thy hills green-walled,  
And we hastened back to answer  
when the Old Home's voices called.

Back to scenes of youth and play-  
time; back to memories sublime,  
Throwing from our ageing shoulders  
burdens laid by passing time.  
As the child heart turns to mother,  
so our hearts turn unto thee  
When we hear your sweet tones call-  
ing, "Come, my children, back to  
me!"

From the flower-decked prairies,  
from the busy market place,  
We have hurried at thy summons  
with glad smiles upon each face.  
Plow, and pen, and plane, and ham-  
mer for a time are given rest  
While we, tired and wand'ring child-  
ren, lay our heads upon thy breast.

Old Home Day! And all thy children  
gathered 'neath the old roof-tree,  
Singing songs of sweet home coming,  
paying homage unto thee.  
And the years are all forgotten, while  
the now fades into then  
Till we grown-up men and women are  
but boys and girls again.

Hark! The old school bell is calling,  
grasp thy books and haste away;  
Laughing, singing, happy children;  
back again to yesterday.  
Memory sweeps aside Time's curtain,  
waves aloft her magic wand,  
And we trip o'er Russell's pasture,  
wander down to Kunkel's pond.

Light of heart, care free and happy,  
once again we gaily go  
O'er the hills and through the valleys  
to the Big Tark's muddy flow.  
Through the hazel patch we wander,  
on beneath the walnut trees,  
While the echoes of our laughter  
freight the far-flung summer  
breeze.

Home again! And all the strivings  
of the long years are forgot  
As we join in glad reunion 'round the  
Old Home's sacred spot.  
Hand clasps hand, and friendly  
greeting bids the years' long cycle  
turn  
Back to other days where altars of  
our youth's fires brightly burn.

Home again! O scenes of playtime!  
Memories sweet of days long dead!  
Back to thee, O dear home city, gather-  
ed in thy arms outspread.  
And where'er the future calls us,  
over land or over sea,  
We shall hear thy loved voice calling,  
dear Old Oregon, to thee!

Oregon, Mo., July 28.—Big doings  
in the old home town yesterday. It  
was "Old Home Day," and the way  
the wanderers of the years came  
flocking back to the little city nest-  
ling in the Missouri hills testified to  
the love they bore it. Same boys  
and girls of yesterday, too. The  
years hadn't made any difference in  
the youth of their hearts, although it  
must be confessed that it was differ-  
ent with faces and hair. Faces bore

wrinkles that were not there in the  
old days, and there were streaks of  
silver in hair and beard. As a mat-  
ter of fact, some of the boys didn't  
have any hair left worth mention-  
ing. But it was the youngest, jol-  
liest, happiest crowd that ever gather-  
ed in the old haunts. Actually we  
wouldn't have noticed the flight of  
time if the trees hadn't been so much  
bigger, the court house so much more  
weatherbeaten and the old hack line  
from Forest City pushed into ob-  
scurity by a real railroad running in-  
to the old town.

The committee in charge of the  
celebration had an eye to the eternal  
fitness of things when it selected  
"Deacon" Dobyns to deliver the ad-  
dress of welcome to the returned  
wanderers. The "Deacon"—he is  
called that because he is so different  
—has been editor of the Sentinel in  
Oregon for upwards of forty years,  
and his pen had chronicled the birth  
of a goodly share of those who con-  
fronted him when he arose to speak.  
That pen had chronicled their mar-  
riages, the birth of their children,  
and their many wanderings to and  
fro over the face of the earth. But  
the committee "stuttered" a bit when  
it selected the wanderer who respon-  
ded to the address of welcome, for  
the response was delivered by the  
writer who, thirty years ago learned  
the printer's trade in the old Sentinel  
office under the tutelage of "Deacon"  
Dobyns; who played "hookey" from  
the old school house on the hill, and  
who had engaged in enough boyish  
pranks in the precincts of the old  
town to warrant the prediction that  
sooner or later he would meet up  
with court and jury.

Fortunately for the people there  
assembled the gray-haired youth who  
responded to the "Deacon's" eloquent  
words of welcome was utterly un-  
able to give voice to all his heart  
felt, for if he had been able to do  
so, and had essayed the task, he  
would have been speaking yet.

But we didn't go back to the old  
town for the purpose of listening to  
speeches. We went back to slap  
each other on the back, to "tell tales  
out of school," to shake hands, to  
eat good old Missouri fried chicken,  
to climb the old school house hill,  
to wander down through Russell's  
pasture, to loaf along the banks of  
the Big Tark, to skip stones over the  
glassy surface of Kunkel's pond and  
forget that something like a quarter  
of a century had slipped into the  
eternity of the past since we were  
boys and girls together in the old  
home town. And we succeeded, too.  
The only thing that marred the plea-  
sure of the day was that it only had  
twenty-four hours in it.

My, my! What a host of memo-  
ries were called up during the day.  
There was the time John Philbrick  
gave "Ol' Reub" the drink of whisky  
made thick with cayenne pepper, and  
we yelled with glee when we recalled  
how "Ol' Reub" drank it, blinked  
his bleary eyes and murmured, "Dat  
was sho' pretty wahn likker, Mistah  
Philbrick." Then there was the time  
Tom Hinde cut the hole in the top  
of "D" Gardner's new plug hat on a  
bet of a dollar that he could do it  
and then put the piece back so no-  
body could tell it had ever been cut  
out. Then we fairly rolled over in  
glee when we recalled how disgusted  
"D" looked when Tom admitted that  
he had forgotten how to do the  
trick. It was hot—just hot enough  
to remind us of that cold winter night  
on the long hill when Ann was fear-

fully injured by being hit by a flying  
sled, and we walked home in silence  
and sorrow thinking that one of the  
favorite girls of the old crowd was  
about to leave us forever. But bless  
your soul, Ann was at the home com-  
ing celebration, as young as ever,  
and with her came a stalwart son  
older than she was the night she  
was hurt.

And, of course, some one filled  
with humor had to remind the crowd  
of the young fellow who was sus-  
pended by Professor Hill, and whose  
father compelled him to walk three  
miles to Forest City every morning  
and attend school under Professor  
Anderson. It was real mean of that  
fellow to recall that particular inci-  
dent—and two or three more relat-  
ing to the same part.

We talked about the "taffy pulls"  
we used to have about every Friday  
night during the winter. We had  
'em on Friday night because Ben  
Harris, the school house janitor,  
didn't ring the study bell Friday  
night at 9 o'clock. It happened be-  
fore our time, but we talked of that  
awful night when lightning struck  
the old Masonic block, and of how  
the bolt set fire to the clothing of  
one of a party of poker players in  
the third story, and of how he ran,  
with clothing ablaze, clear down to  
the creek and jumped in, and lived  
to tell the tale. It reminded us of  
the time when that poker story was  
dinned into our ears to convince us  
of the horrible fate that awaited all  
gamblers.

Of course we boys had to recall  
the organization known as the "Ore-  
gon Zouaves," captained by "Deacon"  
Dobyns, and we smiled when we  
thought of those baggy red trousers,  
those blue jackets and those dinky  
little caps perched so jauntily upon  
the sides of our boyish heads. We  
couldn't realize that the first appear-  
ance of that martial brigade was on  
the Fourth of July more than a quar-  
ter of a century ago.

But what's the use of trying to  
write of all we recalled at that re-  
union? It would take a volume of  
The Commoner.

But one thing is sure—the memo-  
ry of that day will live in the minds  
of those who were present as long  
as life shall last. The echoes of the  
old songs we sung will ring in our  
ears until the eternal silence falls.  
The shouts of laughter will be a  
benison until the sun sinks into the  
west for the last time, and the smiles  
upon the faces of the old chums will  
in God's good time fade away for a  
moment, only to grow brighter on  
the other side.

We wouldn't have missed that day  
for any dozen days we can recall,  
barring one or two, of course. Bless  
you, we went down there with the  
weight of well nigh a half-century  
on our shoulders, and here we are  
ready to start back with doubt in  
our minds whether we'll be old  
enough to vote at this fall's election.  
That's what an "Old Home Day" ce-  
lebration like this one does for a  
fellow, and we leave it to you if it  
isn't worth while.

Measured by population Oregon  
isn't much of a city, but measured  
by the recollection of boyhood plea-  
sures it's bigger than New York or  
Chicago. Its corporate limits are  
narrow compared with some of the  
cities the wanderers have visited in  
the years ago, but its hospitality  
has no bounds.

Of course there were some sad  
features about the occasion. We  
missed some of the old, familiar  
faces. Not all of them personally  
answered "Here" when the roll was  
called, but from the jungles of Cuba  
and the Philippines, from the fast-  
ness of the Rockies and from the  
prairies of the west the summer  
breezes bore the spirit answer, and  
we knew that though absent in the

flesh they were still with us and of  
us.

If ever you hear the voice of your  
old home calling you back to a  
"Homing Coming Day," you just take  
the advice of one who has enjoyed  
the experience, and hike back, no  
matter how difficult the task of  
preparation may be. It's the best  
medicine for age and spirits that ever  
was devised.

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