

Beecher Island reunion upcoming

The annual Beecher Island reunion is set for Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 15 and 16, at the Beecher Island campgrounds on the Beecher Island road.

Many people come for the entire weekend, as there is lots of room for campers. Food will be available throughout the weekend from The Idalia FCE Club, The Wray Lions and The Idalia Lions. Among the many things to enjoy on Saturday will be a black powder shoot, a pedal tractor pull, music by the Swinging Seniors, the Beecher Helping Hand Club quilt show, horseshoes, games and races for all ages.

At this year's reunion local amateur radio enthusiast Ron Peterson will be hosting a special event radio broadcast. A broadcasting station will be set up on the grounds and radio operators from around the world will be able to take part in the reunion.

Visitors are encouraged to stop in at the broadcast trailer. They may have the opportunity to visit with people around the world. The special event broadcast call letters are NOB.

The Saturday evening entertainment will be Loose Cannon Bluegrass. A Denver-based band will be playing traditional bluegrass original songs, soft ballads, sweet harmonies and instrumental barn burners.

Sunday morning gets underway with the Idalia Lions pancake breakfast. Area Boy Scouts will lead the ceremonial flag raising.

Sunday service will feature speaker Phil Mitchell with music by Mike and Lorraine McCullough.

The afternoon show will feature Rex Rideout. Rex is a long-time student of music and songs of the 19th century American West. He has performed at many historic sites and museums across the west.

Rex plays mandolin, fiddle, guitar and banjo, as well as other instruments. He will also be performing the traditional song "Arickaree."

The guest history speaker this year is John H Monnett. John is a professor of history at Metropolitan State College in Denver. He has written several books including *The Battle Of Beecher Island* and *The Indian War of 1867-1869*.

Following John's presentation will be the raffle drawing for the Helping Hand Club baskets and quilt.

Check the ad in this week's Herald for more information on the times of the events.

History

The reunion has long and deep roots in the tri-state region. In September of 1868 after weeks of pursuing a band of Dog Soldiers, a company of scouts led by Major George Forsythe and Lt. Fred Beecher made camp on the banks of the Arickaree River.

On the morning of the 17th they were attacked by the Indians. Making their way to a sandbar island in the creek bed, they were able to hold off their attackers.

With all of their horses killed and many wounded men, they had to remain on the island for nine days until the 10th Calvary Buffalo Soldiers came to their rescue. This became known as the battle of Beecher Island in honor of Lt. Beecher who was killed in the fight.

In September of 1898, several of the scouts came to the area to find the location of the battle. After erecting a primitive marker they began making plans for a reunion of the remaining scouts.

The first reunion took place in 1899. The reunion has taken place every year since.

These men felt the need to preserve the battle ground and their memories of these events. They created The Beecher Island Battle Memorial Association in 1905.

Helpful hints

Common baking soda found in most kitchens can be used in other ways besides baking.

- Scrub pans. Sprinkle soda on crusted casseroles and roasting pans and let sit for five minutes. Lightly scrub and rinse.

- Brush teeth. Use a paste of baking soda and water.

- Fight class-B fires (flammable liquids, such as gasoline, oil, and grease). Baking soda can be used to smother only a small flame.

- Deodorize. Dust baking soda under your arms to absorb body odor.



EDA MAE HOWARD sliced into her 88th birthday cake at her childhood home, now The Spencer House Bed and Breakfast, this past weekend.

Herald staff photo by Karen Krien

Woman celebrates 88th birthday in St. Francis childhood home

By Karen Krien

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A former St. Francis resident was pleasantly surprised when her children brought her back to her childhood home as her 88th birthday present.

Eda Mae Hancock Howard received a card from her daughter, Cindy, telling her to save the weekend of Sept. 1 – to have her bags packed (with one nice outfit) and be ready by 7 a.m. on Saturday – that she would be going on a trip with the destination to be a surprise. That surprise was a weekend at the Spencer House Bed and Breakfast – the home which she and her brothers and sister grew up in.

The Spencer House, owned by Carl and Kate Jenkins, has a history of only a few owners. It was built by Farmer Schields somewhere around the late 1888 or 1890. He then sold it to Willits Smull.

In 1934, Albert and Frances Hancock bought the house, moving their family from the very small house at 300 W. Webster. After Al died, Mrs. Hancock continued to live in the big house until she entered the Good Samaritan Village in the mid 70s, then it eventually sold to Joe and Hilda Mlinek. The Jenkins bought the house 7 years ago.

Eda Mae was about 10 years old at the time they moved to the house. She remembered it was a "wonderful house" and they "lived" in it.

There were five children, John, Betty Lou, Harriett, Eda Mae and Lyman.

We would roll up the carpets and we and our friends would dance, she said. We were allowed to have parties and play in the house. The baby grand piano sat in the same corner that the Jenkins have one sitting. We loved to play the piano and sing, Eda Mae said. Her brothers built tree houses and dug caves in the yard.

"It was our home," she said. "And we enjoyed it."

Mrs. Hancock, also known by many people, especially her grandchildren, as "Mom Honey," loved china and pretty dishes. Her daughters, as well as her

granddaughters, were sometimes invited to tea served on her best china. Eda Mae remarked that she was glad that Mrs. Jenkins also had teas for young girls, carrying on a "house tradition."

Through the years, the Hancocks were friends with Dr. Ed and Rachael Keller. After Mrs. Keller died several years ago, the family brought the Jenkins a set of goblets that Mrs. Hancock had given the family and they thought the goblets should stay with the house.

The house, while large for that time, had three bedrooms and one bath. There was a small room that was used for a nursery. Eda Mae said the girls slept in the east room.

St. Francis was a small town, Eda Mae said, and people cared about others. One Christmas Eve, a couple and their teenage daughter had a car wreck. Both the parents were hospitalized in St. Francis and the girl was alone at the hospital.

We went to the hospital, Eda Mae said, and visited with her, inviting her back to stay at our home. That was one of the evenings when we rolled up the carpet and danced. The next morning, we had a Christmas present for her. She had a wonderful time, Eda Mae said, despite the trauma of the accident. And, we thought nothing of having an extra person for Christmas.

Christmas was a wonderful time at the Hancock house. There was a huge Christmas tree which almost touched the 11-foot ceiling. We decorated the house and the tree, Eda Mae said.

Their mother's mother, "Muzzie" (whose real name was Eda Mae), stayed with them in the cold months. At Christmas, she baked cookies and made candy. Eda Mae noted that Muzzie was also a painter and painted a mural on one of the walls in the house which the Jenkins did cover in their renovation but did not destroy.

Eda Mae and her siblings went off to college. Both Mr. and Mrs. Hancock were college graduates and, Eda Mae said, it was not "if" you were going to college, it was "when" you were going to college.

So after Eda Mae graduated

from St. Francis high school with the class of 1942, she headed to Kansas State University. World War II was still going on and nurses were in short supply. She started training as a nurse, thinking she would see what it was like. She worked over 2 years at Bell Memorial, now known as University of Kansas Medical Center. When the war was over, she was told they didn't need nurses anymore.

The folks told me, she said, just get your degree. She graduated with a degree in home economics but, while she was at K-State, she met her future husband, Claude Howard, who had been a fighter pilot in the war.

They were married in front of the fireplace at the Hancock home. Eda Mae said she was wearing a steal, blue dress as she walked down the stairs to meet Claude. When she walked into the Spencer House on Saturday, she went straight to the fireplace, telling her kids that this was where she and their father were married.

The couple moved to Mission where Claude got a job with the government and Eda Mae began teaching home economics. They bought a house and lived there for the next 63 years. Howard died a little over a year ago but Eda Mae still lives in the house.

They had four children, Steve, Kay, Cindy and Trey. And, all four of the children had fond memories of their grandparents' home and St. Francis. They spent time, mostly in the summers, visiting St. Francis and their grandparents, Mom Honey and Hi Pop.

Cindy loved the big trees and playing on the porch. For years, she said, the railing was her "balance beam" and she spent hours walking on them. She said she liked to ride the bike to the Dairy King and bring back a treat for her and Mom Honey.

Kay remembered the parade. Coming from Mission, she said, we didn't have the opportunity to be in a parade. Sometimes, we rode bikes and other times, because we were friends with the Kellers, we were able to ride horses.

There were also the county fairs and Kay remembered how much

fun they were. It was so different from the fairs in the city, she said.

Trent, the youngest of the four, remembered being able to drive to the Dairy King. It took me an hour, he said, to which Cindy said, "and I pedaled the bike!"

They remembered dragging Main – something they didn't do in the city. They remarked how everyone waved then and, they still wave today.

Trent also remembered going with Dr. Keller to pull a calf. It was quite an experience, he said.

Steve, the oldest son, said he was always impressed by the way the local news spread. One time on the way to visit, there was a radio program where they heard that they were coming to visit the Hancocks in St. Francis.

People were always so friendly, he said.

Coming back to St. Francis this time was really like a trip back in Mom's world, Kay said. We have all learned so many things as Mom's memory was jogged by her surroundings – things that we had never heard and probably would never have heard if we had not come back to her old home.

The Spencer House

Carl and Kate opened the elegantly decorated Spencer House as a bed and breakfast this spring. It offers three bedrooms and two baths. Delicious breakfasts are served on china, either in the dining room, on the porch or the upstairs deck.

Eda Mae and Cindy came back for the St. Francis high school alumni in June. Eda Mae had called for reservations but the Spencer House was already booked. That was when Cindy had the idea of having her mother, along with her four children, spend a weekend.

It was a wonderful birthday present, Eda Mae said.

For more information about the Spencer House, call 785-332-2531 or e-mail thespencerhousebandb@yahoo.com. Or, check out the bed and breakfast's facebook page at The Spencer House Bed and Breakfast.



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