

BARBEQUES AND OTHER SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Gray County, Kansas

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Consultants: Mrs. J. Barton and D. W. (Doc) Barton, both of Ingalls, Kansas

Nearly all social gatherings in the early days of the West had the church and school as their background. Before they built the churches, religious meetings were held at the homes of the pioneers. They often lasted all day, and the people for miles around would attend. They were much the same as the present-day basket dinners held by many of the churches.

Early settlers were left pretty much to their own resources regarding pleasures and social life. Their social life consisted of simple gatherings, where the entertainment varied. The first ones in this part of the country were cattlemen. They usually didn't have their own homes or their families with them. According to D. W. (Doc) Barton, (*See story; D. W. (Doc) Barton, Gray County, Kansas*) the cattlemen lived on the range with their cowboys. As a general rule, they camped out on the range and moved their camp as the cattle grazed farther away. They would make a dugout to live in during the winter months, and during the warm months, they lived in tents. They had a home camp but didn't gather there except during the round-up and the branding time.

So the cattlemen in Western Kansas did not have any social life among themselves. However, they occasionally attended dances at the small towns and the settlements that were springing up along the railroad.

Mr. Barton says they often held barbeques in Texas, where he came from when he brought his cattle herd to Kansas. He said large camp meetings were held, which sometimes lasted as long as six weeks. Many times there would be twelve or fifteen thousand people attending those meetings. Great preachers from New York or some other large city would hold the meetings. A large plot of ground had streets and alleys marked out just like a town. The people would go and stay during the entire camp meeting. Everyone would take some kind of provision. Some would take cows or hogs for the meat, while others would take sheep. The meat was all barbequed, and since there were so many folks there to eat, it needed to be roasting most of the time. To be well barbequed, the meat had to be roasted for about twenty-four hours. Others took cornmeal and flour to the event. They baked their bread right there in dutch ovens. Mr. Barton says they all had grand times at the camp meetings and barbeques.

The barbeques held in Western Kansas were not quite the same as the ones in Texas. In fact, the only barbeque that there is any record of in Gray County was held in Cimarron in 1931. It was held in connection with the Old Settlers Picnic. It was the first picnic to be held in Gray County. The beef that was to be barbequed was quartered on the evening before the picnic day. They started roasting the meat in the

evening and kept turning it all night until noon the next day. The barbequed meat was served for dinner the next day to all those attending the picnic.

Small camp meetings were held in Gray County, similar to those large camp meetings Mr. Barton told about in Texas. They were held after the homesteaders came to Western Kansas. The camp meetings here did not last very long, and there were not nearly as many people who attended. They used stoves more for cooking their meals, instead of the open-air methods at the barbeques.

The building of homes formerly drew the people closer together. Most of the first homes were built out of prairie sod. A sod cutter was used, to which a horse was hitched, and the sod cutter cut great blocks out of the prairie. It did not take long to build a sod house, and they were quite warm. When the neighbors gathered together to help build the house, it was usually a joyous occasion. A housewarming usually followed the completion of the house.

Quilting bees were another form of work that was also mixed with pleasure. Neighbors were invited to help quilt, and while the women quilted and visited together, the men spent the time talking over the important happenings of the times. That method of relaying information was the only means of obtaining the world's news in those days. There were no telephones or radios then, and news traveled slowly. But it was greatly enjoyed when it finally did reach those pioneers of the West.

Literaries later became a form of entertainment, and they consisted almost entirely of home talent. Spelling bees and singing schools were also held in those early days. All such gatherings were held for the purpose of entertaining and being entertained. Those early-day pleasures were so few and so simple that they were highly enjoyed by everyone.

Dances were held quite often, usually at the home of the settlers. Local musicians usually furnished the music for the dance. Occasionally, however, an orchestra would be obtained from Dodge City. This was especially true when the dance was held in one of the small towns. All holidays were observed by the pioneers.

During the years of growth in Gray County, many of the gatherings were held at the schoolhouse or the church. They were usually the center of the community.

Before the churches were built or preachers were available, gatherings for religious purposes were held at the homes of the pioneers. Sometimes one of the settlers would act as the preacher. At other times, the Bibles were read and the well-known hymns were sung. For those who were braving the frontier's hardships, faith in their God and faith in their land were essential. Their lives were welded more closely together by this common need, and a greater capacity for the enjoyment of each other's companionship grew up among them.