

## OLD HOME DAY - EAST HAMPTON CONNECTICUT

*As written by Dean Markham*

### The Glorious Celebration

Old Home Day, the Glorious Celebration, revived in 1979, has continued with an all-volunteer committee and organization since. After a tremendously successful Bicentennial Celebration in 1976 in a format similar to Old Home Day of years past, Morris “Moe” Lanzi Jr., Drum Major of the East Hampton Fife and Drum Corp., sought interested citizens to reinstitute Old Home Day annually. Joining Lanzi were Robert “Red” McKinney, Joanne Lanzi, Howard Engel, Melissa Engel, Burt Hodge, Jack Cannon and Dennis Erikson who organized to revive Old Home Day in what they hoped would become an annual occurrence. It took the COVID-19 pandemic to stop the 2020 three-day event, but not dampen spirits of the volunteers and the community, for what would have been the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual celebration. The enthusiasm and planning for 2021 continues by the committee which prides itself in being totally supported from its fundraising activities. The Old Home Day Committee will dedicate the 2022 festivities and event to the memory of Red McKinney, the perennial Master of Ceremonies, who met an all too young and a very untimely death in December 2019. They will “Paint the Town Red!”

### The Beginnings of Old Home Day – 1912 to 1928

The concept of Old Home Day in East Hampton dates back to the *Village Improvement Society*, begun in 1912 when local church societies organized to work together for the betterment of the community. Harlan G. Hills was named chairman at the first official meeting of the *East Hampton Village Improvement Society* on March 8, 1912, where they described their objectives as “the promotion and support of all forms of village improvement, and other public and charitable enterprises.” In Carl F. Price's *Postscripts to Yankee Township* the history of Old Home Day goes into further elaboration.

The society's adventures in raising money by entertainments began in 1912, when the president was authorized to appoint all present at that meeting to serve. At the June meeting, the committee reported in favor of holding a bazaar, such as had been conducted by the Methodist Episcopal Church the preceding summer, with booths and stand on the church lawn. This 1912 fair, however, developed eventually into a carnival, the famous “Push Cart Carnival” that flamed along the sidewalk of Main Street for nearly half a mile. It yielded a profit of over \$200, and was such a social success that its repetition was demanded for the next year. The carnival for 1913 and 1914, which conformed more nearly to the typical carnival of subsequent years, with a colorful parade, competing floats, and sales

booths at the fair's terminals (in later years, the Green at the Village Center). Subsequent carnival chairs were: Mrs. Carrier, Mrs. W.E. Day, Mrs. Cornelia Strong, Mrs. Carrie Barton, Mrs. Marion Strong, Dr. Frank Luntz, Hubert C. Hodge and Gordon D. Bevin.

All the carnivals were memorable, and most of them attracted thousands of visitors, as increasingly the fame of those carnivals spread East Hampton's fair name throughout the state and beyond. Some of these events can be recalled by their titles: 1917 - "Carnival of Allied Nations"; 1922 - "Mother Goose Carnival"; 1923 - "Advertising Carnival"; 1924 - "Book Carnival"; 1925 - "Carnival of Songs"; 1927 - "Carnival of States"; 1928 - "Community Circus"; 1929 - "Carnival of Paintings". Weekend events included minstrel shows or plays with local talent and always a baseball game between the local Belltown Bombers matched against another club from the Middlesex County Baseball League, played on the Center School field.

#### The American Legion Years – 1933 to 1950

Old Man Depression brought about an interruption in the series of carnivals under the Village Improvement Society, but in 1933, Treadway-Cavanaugh Post No. 64, American Legion, petitioned the society for permission to hold a carnival on the first Saturday of August, which was granted, and this became "The Seventh District American Legion County Fair and Old Home Day." The carnivals under the Legion in succeeding years took on a different character from those in the twenties, but they enriched the coffers of the Legion. The profits of the carnival of 1944 were given to the Welcome Home Fund of the Military Service Committee. The carnival of 1945 was the last of a series of carnivals up to that date. No carnival was held in 1946, one of the reasons recorded in the society's minutes being "the shortage of meats" - an interesting commentary on the etymology of the word "carnival." The name "Old Home Day" became the moniker for the event signifying a day that townspeople, those residing in East Hampton and former residents, could reacquaint with old friends.

#### The Sporadic Years – 1953 to 1976

For the next 30 years Old Home Day celebrations were sporadic. In 1953, the American Legion invited the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post to sponsor a revival of Old Home Day. Donald P. Markham from the Legion and Dennis Erickson from the VFW Co-Chaired the highly successful revival. In 1954, William A. O'Neill and Donald Markham Co-Chaired the Old Home Day festivities. The traditions of Old Home Day continued sporadically, revived as East Hampton celebrated its Bicentennial of East Hampton in 1967

but not to occur again until 1976, celebrating our Nation's Bicentennial. Both events were chaired by Donald Markham, with Eaton E. Smith serving as master of ceremonies.

### Old Home Day - The Glorious Celebration - 1979 forward

With an enthusiastic group of townspeople, Moe Lanzi organized the first modern rendition of Old Home Day in July 1979. Taking on some characteristics of Old Home Day Past, the main feature was a parade, but not just any old parade. The East Hampton Old Home Day Parade has included four divisions and had so many groups, the beginning of the parade, which stepped off in the Village Center, actually met up with the last groups, as the parade which had circled Main Street, East High Street, Lakeview and Summit Streets back to the Village Center. Quite a spectacle! Revised planning now stages the marchers, dignitaries, bands, floats, fire trucks and more at the High School with the parade ending in the Village Center at the Gazebo.

The most significant change has been the entertainment provided the attendees. On Thursday, Friday evening and Saturday from the end of the parade until closing, singers, bands and others entertain one and all, with funds raised entirely by the Committee, free to all who attend. With a big top tent to shade attendees from the often-blistering July sun, a removable dance floor on the Center School grounds and stage for the entertainers, local organizations sell a variety of food, drinks and treats.

The event received a significant boost in the 1980s when Bill O'Neill, Connecticut's 84<sup>th</sup> Governor, and East Hampton native son participated. O'Neill took special pride in his home town and made Old Home Day an annual affair, not only to march in every parade until his health declined when he rode in an antique vehicle. Because the Governor loved a parade, any parade, but especially his home town, many groups such as the Governor's Foot Guard have become mainstays. Other groups such as the Ancient Mariners have never missed the parade. They always provide a wonderful show, great fife and drum music and entertainment that all of us "kids" love.