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MT. CARLINE DAY IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

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274

MT. CARMINE DAY IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

(A Research Manuscript Article submitted by Bert S. Tua, Field-Worker S-149, in connection with a Manuscript article on "The Immigrant Coal-Miner of Southeastern Oklahoma")

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Project S-149,

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The material contained in this article was received by personal interview of the following:-

Leo Lalli, McAlester, Oklahoma,

John Scarpit, McAlester, Oklahoma,

Steve Giacomo, Krebs, Oklahoma,

Tony Dominic, Krebs, Oklahoma,

Steve Testa, Krebs, Oklahoma,

Ralph Raffeis, Krebs, Oklahoma.

1.

### Mt. Carmine Day in Southeastern Oklahoma

Thousands of people participated in a three-day Mt. Carmine celebration which opened, on July 15, with a festival at Midway lake between McAlester, and Krebs, Oklahoma.

The program was under auspices of the Krebs Congrega del Mt. Carmine, an Italian fraternal order that has frequently in the past staged similar celebrations of this noted church day. This is the first time, however, in a number of years that the program has been planned on so elaborate a scale.

Older residents recall when this fraternal order was much larger than it is today, when extremely elaborate plans were made for the celebration of Mt. Carmine Day, and when mammoth crowds, composed of immigrant coal-miners, their friends and families, commonly gathered from this entire area to celebrate what was to the mining population at that time, the outstanding event of the year.

The dominant religion among the early-day immigrant coal-miners was the Roman Catholic. The dominant element among the population was Italian. In Italy this day is a s e t

2.

of July being commonly designated as Mt. Carmine Day) was always begun by High Mass being held in the churches throughout the land and followed by a series of agricultural fairs in each community and a general spirit of carnival celebration attendant to the fairs or gatherings.

In Italy and throughout the world, notably in the South American countries, the Catholic church and its people commonly observe each Saint Day as perpetuated by the church. This observance might be followed by a dinner at the church or by some celebration offered by some order of the church organization. In the Madonna of Mt. Carmine being the mother of Christ and Mt. Carmine day being the most revered of all Catholic Saint Days, we see with what benevolent supplication and spirit of festivity the celebration of this day is entered into and observed.

Always, when a profit may be realized from the festivities, a contribution of some sort is offered to the church in which parish the festivities are held. As was the case in the local and recent celebration a donation was made to St. Joseph's Church, Krebs, Oklahoma.

## 3.

The organization sponsoring this celebration and those in years past in this community is an Italian lodge, a benevolent and fraternal organization of the same name as this celebrated day and known as the "Congrea del Mt. Carmine", Krebs, Oklahoma.

This organization had its inception in this community among the Italians who were early-day immigrants to the coal-fields of Southeastern Oklahoma. At one time its membership rolls numbered about three hundred and it served as a social and benevolent order among these early-day Americans. Now its roll-call counts only thirteen members.

This lodge was organized in 1892 and in 1893 the first Mt. Carmine Day celebration was held. Base-ball games, horse racing, boxing and wrestling bouts, a general carnival and a generous and gorgeous supply of lavish Italian fire-works were always features of these early celebrations. Whenever a huge out-door celebration was held about a thousand dollars was always invested in fire-works. Gorgeous crucifixes and replicas of the Mother Mary and Christ-child in colorful illumination and finally in smoldering embers, along with soaring rockets and other novelty ground displays created an impressive and not

4.

insubstantial pageantry. These celebrations by the Congrea del Mt. Carmine Lodge have been staged intermittently, since their beginning in 1892, perhaps a dozen celebrations having taken place since that time. The <sup>last</sup> ~~latest~~ celebration, aside from the recent display and attempt at revival of this custom, was held in 1912 prior to the entrance of the United States in the World War.

Of the recent celebration, it was said that the fire-works contracted for and displayed were the finest assortment sold in Oklahoma for several years. Soft-ball games were scheduled and played daily. The Dr. Shugart Carnival, with riding devices and several side-shows were set up in the park, and added to the festive appearance of the grounds which is a part of the Midway lake properties. The swimming pool with crystal clear water made the place unusually attractive this year. There were bathing beauty and diving contests with gold, silver and bronze awards for places. Similar awards were made in swimming contests. The McAlester high-school band furnished a group of musicians for daily concerts and the full band played a concert during the main event of the fire-works display of the three-day festival.

## 5.

According to Relph Raffeis, Manager of the Midway properties, about twenty thousand people attended the celebration on its closing day, with an average crowd of ten thousand on each of the two days preceeding the closing or banner day of the event.

The early-day out-door celebrations were held mid-way between North McAlester and Krebs at the old Krebs base-ball park which is not now in use. The cosmopolitan mining population of this area turned out in its entirety for this event whenever it was staged. The curious and the interested of the general population of this section of the state which did not understand fully the significance of the event also lent its friendly presence and enjoyed the general festivities that were in order.

The throngs which attended the early celebrations presented a far different picture from what we see today. Inter-urban street-cars and the horse-and-buggy were good riding in those days. Among the women of foreign birth in attendance were to be seen many attired in gaudy head-shawls, gay-colored waists and flaring, accordion-pleated skirts. Some of the men came in their shirt-sleeves and a pair of baggy trousers. And among the more suave and conventional were to be seen dark dresses worn

6.

by the women, and a dark suit and black hat by the men. Gaudy ear-rings and long curling mustaches were the order of the day. It was a common sight to see a father or a mother attempting to quiet one or two of a string of three or four children. Groups of a same nationality would congregate together and could be seen conversing in any one of half a dozen different languages. Only two kinds of soda-water or pop were known and demanded by these people. They were strawberry and sweet-lemon. Commonly they would call for these in broken English, and much in indian fashion,--"I'll take white" or "I'll take red"--- .

These were the sights of Mt. Carmine day in Southeastern Oklahoma and are the things which the old-timers in the mining-camps of Southeastern Oklahoma have watched diminish in importance and seen pass on with considerable feeling of reluctance and regret.

The first president of the Congrea del Mt. Carmine Lodge, in 1892, was Giuseppe Testa (Joe Head), Krebs, Oklahoma. From the son of this man, Steve Testa, who now resides at Krebs, Oklahoma, the writer was able to secure a partial list of names of members during the year 1900. These names were taken from an order list of those needing new caps and badges at that time and is the most

7.

complete membership list which the writer has been able to secure. It reads like the roll-call of an alien legion and lends some color to the atmosphere of the time. The names as given in their native language were as follows:

Angiolo Fabrizio	Osebio di Dominico
Giovanni Scarpetti	Gaetano Marino
Salvatori Conti	Salvatore Testa
Frank Volturo	Vincenzo Carano
Pasquale Carano	Donato Rossi
Giacinto Ricci	Pietro Giacomo
Angelo Fabrizio	Pietro di Frangia
Giuseppi Fanella	Francesco Tozzi
Antonio di Dominico	Angiolo R. Dominico
Genaro Frangia	Stefano di Giacomo
Salvatori Messina	Giuseppi Barelli
Pasquale Novelli	Dominico Testa
Vingienzzo Tonti	Giovanni Carosella
Giuseppi di Mino	Antonio Ferranti
Camillo Domenico Asebio	Nicola Fabrizio

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Present day officers and members of the lodge as given to the

8.

writer by the present president of the organization are:

John Scarpit, President

Tony Dominic, Vice President

John P. Dominic, Secretary

Leo Lalli, Secretary

Steve Testa, Treasurer

Felix De Jacimo, Member

Charley Sellars, Member

Nick De Jacimo, Member

Pasquel De Jacimo, Member

Jim Dominic, Member

Nunzia Testa, Member

Angelo De Jacimo, Member

Ralph Coviello, Member