

The Rituals of Spring

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Spring is here! Trees are budding, buttercups are swaying in the sun, day lilies are coming up in ditches. In years past when most everybody in Haywood County was engaged in agriculture, spring signaled the beginning of the crop year. Does it signal anything today?

Back in the 1950s, spring meant the imminent arrival of Field Day at two schools in Haywood - Douglass Jr. High in Stanton and Willow Grove, east of Brownsville near Highway 70 East going toward Jackson.

Field Day was held during the first week of May, just before schools were let out for the six weeks break for chopping cotton. Students from feeder schools came to the host school by bus, truck, or car on the big day. Each school had a prepared presentation for the mass assembly and brought its ablest students to compete in the sport competitions and games.

If you were a third or fourth grade student in Ms. Eunice Sweet's classes at Douglass, you and your classmates had spent the last month learning how to wrap the May pole on this auspicious occasion. There are many folk in their seventh and eighth decades of age with fond memories of trying to master wrapping the May pole with 3 inch wide streamers of brightly colored crepe paper. The procedure was there would be two groups of students marching around the pole in opposite directions. Each student held a streamer attached to the top of the pole. By weaving over and under, the students would wrap the pole in a checkered pattern. Regardless of how much the students practiced, on the big day, someone would inevitably go under when they should have gone over. Consequently, the pole was seldom neatly wrapped, but all enjoyed giving it a try.

Possibly the most exciting event of the day was the ball game. Usually it was boys playing and girls cheering them on. Of course, there were activities such as three-legged, crocker sack, and wheel barrow races. Sometimes there were leap frog teams. Competition was by age groups, first and second graders competed against similar others and eighth graders challenged other eighth graders.

Of course, there were snacks children could buy to supplement the lunch that most of them brought from home. Just about every item cost a nickel, from ice cream cones to soda pop. If there were sandwiches for sale, they were hot dogs on a bun costing ten or fifteen cents.

Around one or one thirty in the afternoon, the buses, trucks and cars would load up to take the exhausted children back to their home schools to wait and prepare for next year's Field Day!