

# ALEXANDER TO CELEBRATE OLD SETTLERS' DAY

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**By Amy Robinson**

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This year will mark Alexander's 70th Annual Old Settlers' Day celebration. The celebration promises a weekend full of food, fun, music, and activities for people of all ages. It's a time for friends and family to gather and reunite.

Old Settlers' Day is a traditional event that started 70 years ago when Len Burns decided that the community of Alexander needed some kind of fall celebration. Burns donated the meat for the very first celebration, and every year after that, someone has always followed in those same footsteps.

Typically a family is honored during the Old Settlers' Day festivities, and a member of the family donates the meat for Saturday's community feed. This year, the family being honored is that of Jack and Elizabeth Hatter, whose family will also be sponsoring the meat for Saturday's barbecue in the park.

Jack Hatter (1919-2007) and Elizabeth Wheeling Hatter were married in 1947 and settled on a small place three miles north of Squaw Gap. Their house had been a granary that was shipped out to North Dakota from Wisconsin. It has also been the Earl Post Office. It was just a two-room, uninsulated, cold, drafty house.

"Our life was quite simple," said Elizabeth. "We were pretty self-sufficient. We ran cattle on shares to help build our herd up, milked cows, and raised pigs and chickens. We had large gardens. We canned and preserved our food, and Jack hired out part-time in the area. In 1949, we bought the Bennie Peer School and moved it to our place a piece at a time. That is now our kitchen."

In 1950, the Hatters got electricity, so life was much easier for them. They remodeled and built onto their house, eventually getting indoor plumbing.

Elizabeth was born in Sidney, Mont., and she grew up on her parent's ranch with two brothers. She attended Shadwell School for eight years and then went on to graduate from Sidney High School.

Jack was born in 1919 at home, which was close to the Pennington Ranch. He grew up in the Bennie Peer area with his only sister. He attended country schools, riding horse-back many miles, and then getting home to do chores every day. He loved horses, so he went to work breaking horses for a local rancher.

"He always said he was born 50 years too late, as he liked the western ways and wished he had been born in the era of the real cowboy," said Elizabeth. "Jack also served in the Army during World War II. He was sent to Boot Camp in 1941, and was then shipped overseas to the South Pacific, where he served 39 months without a furlough. He returned home in 1945."

Together, Elizabeth and Jack had four children: Perry, David, Patrick, and Mary. They all attended country school and they all graduated from Sidney High School.

"They are all nearby ranching, working jobs, having kids, and grandkids," said Elizabeth. "We have nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren."

Elizabeth's parents, Joe and Florence Wheeling, came from Pennsylvania in the early 1900s.

They homesteaded, taught school, and did whatever they could to make a living. They ended up

with a ranch where they raised cattle and horses.

Jack's parents, Perry and Esther Hatter, came from Ohio and South Dakota in the early 1900s. Perry did a lot of road building, drilling wells and fencing, all with horses. He helped build the Yellowstone Bridge in 1932. Esther cooked for the crew.

"As a young boy, Jack should have been the first to cross the newly-constructed bridge on horseback as part of the dedication ceremony. But before the bridge dedication, someone else removed the rope and crossed the bridge," said Elizabeth. "This was very disappointing to young Jack."

When the new bridge was finished in 1996, they had a cattle drive across the old bridge before it was removed. Jack rode his old faithful horse, Speckles, across as part of the cattle drive.

When he was being interviewed by a reporter in regards to cattle ranching, he told her "you have to think like a cow to be a successful cattle rancher."

"We had a good, clean, happy, and peaceful marriage for 59 years," said Elizabeth. "We had lots of good and some bad things happen over those 59 years, but life and time marches on."

Elizabeth still lives at the home she shared with Jack through the help of her family. In recent years, her vision has started to fail her, which has hindered some of her ability to be as active as she once was.

"I still keep busy with making doughnuts, cookies, and other baked goods for my family," stated Elizabeth. "I am very appreciative to and for all of my family, and I couldn't imagine my life without them."

The Hatters will be honored with a special program on Saturday, Sept. 5, at 1:30 p.m. at the school football field.

That is just one special festivity of the weekend's events. The Old Settlers' Day celebration will take place the weekend of Sept. 3-6. Festivities are slated to kick off on Thursday, Sept. 3, with a Bonfire at 7 p.m., east of the park.

Friday's festivities start with a Chili Cook-off on Main Street from 3 to 7 p.m., followed by a street dance on Main Street from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Special music entertainment will be provided by The Culprits.

Saturday's events start with a parade down Main Street at 11 a.m. Then, a noon barbecue will be held in the park, honoring the Hatter family.

Vendor and Craft Booths will be set up from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and from noon to 1:30 p.m., there will be a Children's Carnival complete with fun and games in the park. At 1:30 p.m., a program honoring the Hatter family will take place at the school football field, followed by the Alexander Comets first football game in 27 years. That game, against Grass Range/Winnett will start at 2 p.m.

Bingo in the park will take place from 3 to 5 p.m., and the Hi-Way Lounge will host its Horseshoe Tournament at 3:30 p.m., with sign-up starting at 3 p.m.

Finally, The Great Outdoors will perform music for the evening Street Dance from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., closing out the weekend's events.

The weekend will be filled with something fun for everyone. And anyone wanting to join in the festivities can purchase a \$2 Old Settlers' Day Button, which will admit them in to all of the weekend's events.