

Reunion

The 1981 Statehood Achievement Award led to an unexpected reunion of two men who had not seen or heard of each other for more than half a century.

One day shortly after he'd received the Chillicothe Kiwanis Club award, R.W. Connett of Pikeston had a long-distance phone call. A male voice at the other end asked, "What's your name?" and identified himself as John W. Shiedler who had played in Connett's Topeka, Kan., high school band 52 years ago.

Shiedler asked Connett to go to Huntington, W. Va., as his guest for the Longhorn Rodeo appearing there. The nonagenarian, who has directed the Adelphi Community Band for 15 years, was delighted to hear from his former pupil and made plans for the trip.

Since none of his family was able to take him to the event, an employee with his daughter, Iris Dixon, volunteered. Mrs. Mary Crabtree of Waverly never misses an Adelphi Band appearance if she can help it, so she offered to take him to Huntington.

"We went to the ticket office and I explained who I was and what my instructions had been," Connett said. "The ticket taker told me to wait and he brought the man (Shiedler) out to me."

"I had not seen him since he'd played cornet in that high school band. He had left Topeka and moved to Mobile, Ala., he told me. He was bigger than I imagined he would be... taller than I."

Shiedler directs two of the bands with the four divisions of the Nashville (Tenn.)-based rodeo which tours the country annually. His wife directs bands for the other two units.

"I wouldn't have known him at all, if I'd just gone to the rodeo on my own. It's hard to remember everyone from so long ago," Connett explained. "Here was a full-grown man wearing a cowboy outfit."

Although they had a scant five minutes to converse, Connett learned that Shiedler had read a newspaper account about the Statehood Award to Connett who will be 91 this month. He could not resist calling to learn if the honoree could possibly be his former teacher.

"Folks to whom he introduced me during our brief reunion were amazed," the active band director-piano technician remarked. "It was a great show and I was really so pleased the man would be that interested in me and the Statehood Award. The rodeo is going to be in Columbus in May. It's really a tremendous affair."

Connett plans to round up some of his family for the Columbus appearance and hopes to have more time to reminisce with Shiedler.

Right now, Connett and the Adelphi bandmen are busy preparing for the annual Pike County Dogwood Festival, April 24-26, in Pikeston. The band is to lead the traditional Sunday afternoon parade and then will reassemble in front of Connett's Main Street piano shop to give an on-street concert.

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