

***The First Pippen Reunion***  
***(circa 1918)***  
***(How do I know? I was there!)***  
by  
Benjamin J. “Jodie” Camp, Jr.  
July 21, 2000

*NOTE: Jodie Camp was born to Benjamin J. and Etta Bell Pippen Camp in 1912 in Dothan, Texas. He died in Riverside, California, in December 2004. After the passing of his wife in 2000 he started writing his autobiography, which he completed one week before he died. During that time he also wrote a few shorter stories about his past. This is one of them.*

To give you an idea of the history around the first Pippen reunion, I will give you the general surroundings of the territory.

Dothan, a “wide strip in the road,” was on the way from Cisco, Texas, to Putnam on the road that was later known as U.S. 80. It was seven miles west Cisco and six miles east of Putnam.

Uncle Jack Pippen and family lived about four miles east of Dothan, in a two-story white house just north of the Cisco-Putnam road. Uncle Will Pippen and his family lived about four miles northwest of Dothan, just west of the Moran Road, across from the Dothan Cemetery. Uncle Neil Pippen and family lived about 5-1/2 miles northwest of Dothan. Uncle Charley Pippen and family lived about six miles northwest of Dothan, and we, the Benjamin J. Camp, Sr., family lived just across the field north of Uncle Charley’s place.

Now that you have a general idea of where everyone in the Pippen family lived, I will explain about the community of Dothan.

There were, at that time, two businesses and about five houses in the block where

## **The First Phippen Reunion (circa 1918)**

Dothan was located. There was a grocery store. In front of the store was a Post Office, on the other end there were groceries. The owner's name was Mr. Bostick. The other business was a blacksmith shop -- the owner's name was Mr. McCarver. His wife worked as a midwife. Since the only doctor who serve the Dothan community lived in Putnam, six miles west, and he had only a horse and buggy for transportation, Mrs. McCarver's services were greatly needed. She was there when I arrived in 1912.

Later on, as oil leases increased, Dothan had a building boom. Another grocery store with two gasoline pumps went up. It was a building -- I would guess to be about 20 feet wide and nearly 60 feet long -- with a roof over the gas pumps. The owner's name was Mr. Bowen. Then later, as the automobile became popular, a Mr. Hazelwood built an auto garage. That was the end of the building boom.

Now that the scene is set, let's get back to the subject at hand -- the first Phippen reunion.

I was about six years old. I remember the talk about "picnic," as it was called -- or the "gathering" or the "reunion" -- weeks before. It was to be held at the creek on our place where there was a large flat spot of land covered with big oak trees and a big hole of water (my old fishing hole!) beside the shaded oaks. It would be on the Fourth of July. All the Phippen and family and friends were to be there. The women were to bring dishes -- beans, corn, cakes,

## **The First Pippen Reunion (circa 1918)**

pies, etc. – for the big gathering, and the men were to catch, prepare, and cook the fish.

Charley was to be the “chief cook and bottle washer,” since he already had the two 30-gallon wash pots and was accustomed to using them. He always had about 10 to 12 wolfhounds, and every day he would cook them a batch of mash for food. So he knew his stuff as far as cooking in pots was concerned.

And my dad, known as “Joe” Camp, was to assure the means to get the fish. Mr. Calvin Ramsey, a friend, had a 40-foot long and 6-foot deep fish seine (a type of fishing net), which had pockets in it that trapped the fish when they hit it. So my dad got in the wagon and went about three miles to the Ramsey home and borrowed the seine.

On the Fourth of July the big day started.

About 7:00 a.m., my dad (Joe Camp), my brother (Loys), my cousins (Little Charley, Uncle Charley’s boy, and Roy, Uncle Neil’s boy), Cal Ramsey (a neighbor), and Lloyd (Cal Ramsey’s boy) took the seine and started upstream as far as the water was three feet or deeper and started to “seine” the creek. (I didn’t mention that the creek I have referred to was called “Battle Creek.” It ran through Uncle Neil’s place and down through ours and then on north to “wherever” (I never got that far from home). It had several water holes up above our place that always had water in them. That was where the picnic or reunion was to be held on our place, and we called the place “The Big Hole.” It was about 40 feet wide and 100 or 150 feet

## **The First Phippen Reunion (circa 1918)**

long and was always full of water. Anyway, they all started upstream and were going to seine all the holes down to and including “The Big Hole.”

So the day started, and everyone had his job cut out for him. My job (mine and Willie’s, Uncle Charley’s boy) was to transport the fish from the place they were caught down to where Uncle Charley had his 30-gallon kettle set up. He had a fire going under each pot. One had boiling water in it to clean the fish, and the other was about two-thirds full of boiling hot lard. As soon as we got the fish down there, they started cleaning and preparing them for cooking.

We got all the fish and frogs. We had caught three large bullfrogs, but when we emptied the tow sack one of the frogs started jumping toward the water hole and got there before we could, so there were only two left!

When they got down to the deep hole, they had to round the seine against the bank and get in between the seine and bank and run the fish against the seine netting, which had pockets in it to trap the fish when they hit the net. “The Big Hole” had a lot of holes back under the bank where water had washed the dirt back in the holes, running the fish out and into the net. One place they ran a catfish out into the net, but instead of the seine folding into a pocket to trap the fish, the fish went straight through the seine. So they had to stop and repair the seine. That was the talk of the day — “the one that got away.”

## **The First Pippen Reunion (circa 1918)**

When they finished at “The Big Hole,” we took all the fish where the pots were and Uncle Charley and a crew cleaned them. When they got them all cleaned, Uncle Charley was ready for the cooking.

We had several species of fish in the haul -- catfish, bass, crappies, and several suckers. The sucker was a good-tasting fish but was rarely used for food because they had so many little bones in them.

Uncle Charley had the pot filled with hog lard to a rolling boil. He would take about one gallon of fish, frog legs, and put them in the boiling lard and leave them there for a few minutes. Then he would dip them out and place them on a towel to drain. He did this until all the fish were cooked. And remember the suckers I spoke of? They were cooked so well that all the small bones were pulverized. You could eat them and never find a bone!

While all this was going on, my mother and my aunts and friends’ wives were “doing their thing.” They spread out tablecloths on the ground and placed all the food they had brought on the tablecloth. When this was all finished, the fish was brought over. I would never have thought that there were so many fish in Battle Creek, much less that many caught! And they probably left many more in the creek.

Uncle Will gave the blessing, and we all started eating. It was a feast fit for a king, and we all ate until we could eat no more.

## **The First Phippen Reunion (circa 1918)**

After the feast, they all sat around telling tales. Some played dominos or 42, others had a card game going, and some had eaten so much they were sleeping.

The women all brought their handiwork and a chair with them. Some were knitting or crocheting, and some were painting. They all formed a circle, and in the middle of the circle was a one-gallon bucket. It was used as a spittoon. They would do their handiwork, dip snuff, and spit in the bucket. And there were very few who missed the bucket!

The boys were spinning their tops or playing marbles, and the girls spent their time with their dolls or playing jacks.

About 3:00 the day was coming to an end, and everyone had to get home and do their chores before it got dark. So after everyone had told their yarns and complimented the women for all their wonderful food they had brought, bragged about how much food they had eaten – and told again about “the one that got away” – they all started on their journeys home.

I didn't mention at the beginning, the transportation the people used coming to the Fourth of July Picnic or the Phippen Reunion. (Whatever you call it, it was the first!). Some walked, some came on horseback, and others came in buggies or wagons. A few had cars, but at that time cars were few and far between.

The big feast was over. Not being a storyteller, I just told it just as it was. I am sure I left out some important facts, so you will have to fill them in with the stories you have heard.

**The First Pippen Reunion  
(circa 1918)**

But I do know that everyone at the first Pippen Reunion had a wonderful time, and that this is how the Pippen Reunion was started. The Pippens are all still celebrating each year with a reunion in remembrance of the uncles, aunts, and cousins who have passed away. But the grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren are still keeping the Pippen Reunion going.

Keep the good work up, and God bless you all.

Your uncle, cousin, or some sort of kin,  
Benjamin J. Camp, Jr.  
Son of Benjamin J. (Sr.) & Etta Belle Pippen Camp  
(1912-????)