

By Belinda Thurston

Staff writer

ASPINWALL — Classmates from 1917 through 1961 danced with Father Time at the Aspinwall Grand Reunion last weekend.

A dinner-dance Friday kicked off three days of festivities that have attracted more than 1,100 graduates of the former Aspinwall High School. Saturday, the school and one of the oldest living graduates, I Harnett Loersch Kircher, were honored in the centennial parade. Kircher graduated in 1919.

A picnic Sunday at Squaw Valley Park in O'Hara concluded the weekend celebration.

For many, the chance to meet with peers from the defunct school was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"I saw a girl I hadn't seen in 31 years," said Carolyn "Cookie" Quince, class of 1960. They recognized each other immediately.

For Chet Klingensmith, class of '44, the reunion was nostalgic and romantic. A highlight, he said, was having women confess their crushes on him in their school days.

Because Aspinwall High School offered classes for grades 7 through 12, many say this reunion was reminiscent of the close-knit atmosphere of the school. Most classes have had reunions, but the Grand Reunion topped all others with all grades and years represented.

John Morcom, class of '51, came from Philadelphia. "People you didn't talk to in high school, now you see them and get to know them better. It's great. They're great people."

Some felt saddened knowing they represent a school that no longer exists.

"I feel very bad (the school is gone). I live on Virginia Avenue. The old school was down the street. Now there are condos. I think it's a tragedy," said Quince.

"Every time I pass where the school used to be it makes me feel sad," said Ruth Bell, class of '38.

Others look at the situation differently.

"Even though the school isn't here there's a lot of camaraderie. The school lives on in the community," said June Kircher Boyd,

class of '45 and daughter of Kircher.

The kinship stretches to former faculty as well. One teacher, in particular, was in high demand.

"They are standing in line like kids waiting to see Santa Claus," said Boyd.

Pat Kiley Chlebus, now living in Orlando, Fla., taught English for 32 years, mostly at Aspinwall. She taught in Fox Chapel Area School District when the merger occurred in 1961, and retired in 1966.

Chlebus says she received 52 birthday cards from former students this year. "I consider them my friends," she said.

For Mary Ann Lyons Dickinson, class of '58, Friday's event was her first reunion. She came home from San Clemente, Calif., and found a family reunion as well. Her sister, brother and mother went to Aspinwall.

By 11 p.m. at the dinner-dance Friday, the band and most people were still rocking. Klingensmith was looking for someone.

"I'm looking for a gal that taught me how to dance. She told me to save her a dance tonight," he said.