

THE PALIMPSEST

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Independence Day In 1845

On July 4, 1845, the United States observed the sixty-ninth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. During this period the thirteen original States had increased to twenty-seven with the admission of Florida on March 3, 1845. In this same period the population of the nation had multiplied ten-fold. In the campaign of 1844, James K. Polk, a Democrat, had been elected President on such burning issues as the annexation of Texas and acquisition of Oregon. John C. Fremont had explored the Rockies, Brigham Young was preparing to lead his Mormon followers across Iowa, the railroad and the telegraph were being extended westward with unparalleled speed, steamships were crossing the Atlantic in less than two weeks — the whole nation was aglow with the spirit of Manifest Destiny.

Possibly no other region was more conscious of this spirit than the Territory of Iowa. Its pioneers had watched a wilderness transformed into a

thriving Territory within the space of twelve years. These pioneers had framed a State constitution in 1844 only to reject it when the United States Congress had dared to reduce the area of the new commonwealth. Enterprising, self-reliant, and politically astute, the voters of Iowa were determined that the State to be carved out between the Mississippi and Missouri should be commensurate with their dreams in size and resources. Meanwhile, good citizens that they were, they had prepared to join their fellow Americans in the observance of Independence Day in 1845.

The population of the Territory of Iowa was approaching one hundred thousand in 1845. Iowa City was the capital, Burlington and Dubuque were the largest cities, while Davenport, Muscatine, and Fort Madison were flourishing towns. The observance of Independence Day, however, was not restricted to the larger cities. The story of various local celebrations may be gleaned from the scattered files of newspapers that were published in the Territory of Iowa a century ago.

Although a file of a Dubuque newspaper is not available for this period, a Burlington editor fortunately reported that the program of fireworks, if carried out at Dubuque on July 4th, would be "one of the most magnificent exhibitions of the kind ever witnessed in this country." Burlington it-

self observed Independence Day in a very appropriate style in 1845. "In the morning", according to the *Hawk-Eye* of July 10th, "the Sabbath School children and Teachers convened in the Methodist Church, where patriotic addresses were delivered to them by Messrs. W. H. Starr, C. C. Shackford and C. Hendrie. After the address the schools were marshaled by Col. Geo. Partridge and marched thro' some of the principal streets, accompanied by the Burlington City Band. They then partook of a bountiful collation prepared for them by the ladies of the city, and appeared highly delighted with the entertainment. There were nearly four hundred children in the procession and this made quite an imposing appearance."

At noon the older folks assembled at the Methodist Church where the Reverend A. Coleman officiated as Chaplain. After the Declaration of Independence was read, C. C. Shackford delivered a "chaste and eloquent" oration which was received with great favor by all. The exercises were interspersed with "first rate music" by the band and the choir, the former having a big stake in the day's activities since the proceeds from the ticket sale for the dinner which followed was to be used to buy new band instruments.

After the patriotic exercises in the Methodist

Church, the citizens formed a procession and marched to the Market House where a sumptuous dinner was prepared by Captain Wightman. The editor regretted that the toasts were not handed in for publication in the *Hawk-Eye* but praised Governor John Chambers for the sentiment expressed in "Our Boundaries,— Give us room".

The program at Burlington did not end with dinner and toasts. "In the evening," the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* recorded, "Mr. Tallant, Pyrotechnist, gave a display of Fire-works, and Mr. Kern let off a large Balloon, which made one of the grandest ascensions we ever saw. It kept in sight about three quarters of an hour bearing a westerly direction, and we have not heard from it since. In addition to the Balloon and Fire works, a large Ball came off at the New Hotel which was kept up until morning. The whole made up a very pleasant celebration."

The other towns in Iowa did not observe Independence Day with the same enthusiasm exhibited in 1838, when citizens could celebrate both the natal day of the United States and the birthday of the newly created Territory of Iowa. As usual newspaper editors took the initiative in attempting to stir up a good old-fashioned Fourth of July. "Do the citizens of this place or of this county intend celebrating the approaching anniversary?" queried

the Davenport *Gazette* on June 12, 1845. If so, the editor felt that "preliminary arrangements" should soon be made, and offered the columns of the *Gazette* for their publication. Apparently Davenport decided to observe a "safe and sane" Fourth, for on July 3rd the editor commented as follows in his Weekly Gossip column.

"There are no doubt those living to-day enjoying health and rejoicing in the prospect of a temporary happiness on the morrow, who on the eve of that day will slumber in death, violently caused by an improper mode of celebrating it. Hardly an Anniversary day has passed since the Declaration, but that in celebrating it, accidents have occurred from the premature discharge of cannon. We opine that we will not have to chronicle such a casualty as having happened in this county, as its citizens have unanimously agreed to spend the day in the most quiet manner. We perceive our neighbors intend keeping the day by a general turn out of the Sabbath School Scholars. They failed to extend an invitation to the citizens of this place, but we trust such negligence will be disregarded, as it no doubt was entirely unintentional. The cordial welcome usually extended to our citizens, we trust, will cause those fond of such displays to pass the day in Rock Island."

A number of prominent Iowans participated in

a unique Independence Day celebration aboard the steamboat *War Eagle* at Galena. After an old-fashioned Fourth of July dinner, the *War Eagle's* brass band struck up "Hail Columbia". Toastmaster Johnson of Bloomington (Muscatine) introduced the postprandial program with a toast to the Day we Celebrate. By special request Wilson Primm of St. Louis sang the "Star Spangled Banner". The editor of the *Davenport Gazette*, Alfred Sanders, responded with a toast to the Ladies. J. O. Phister toasted Bloomington and Burlington with the hope, "May Muscatine Slough never swallow the one, and Flint Hills crush the other."

At Iowa City the following announcement appeared in the *Iowa Capital Reporter* of May 31st. "The citizens of Iowa City and vicinity, who are favorable to celebrating in a proper manner, the approaching anniversary of our National Freedom, are requested to meet at the Convention Chamber on Tuesday evening, next, June 3d, for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements."

Apparently no concerted action was taken at this meeting for on June 25th the same paper noted that the Methodist Episcopal Sabbath School would celebrate the sixty-ninth anniversary of American Independence at the church. Parents

of the children and the public were invited to attend the exercises.

Although most of the larger towns did not observe the Fourth of July with the usual fanfare in 1845, many people did go out in the country to celebrate with rural communities. The editor of the *Iowa Capital Reporter* observed "joy and hilarity" among the two hundred citizens who celebrated Independence Day at John Fry's farm on Old Man's Creek in Johnson County. The people of that neighborhood gathered on the morning of July 4th, appointed Thomas M. Elliott as President of the Day, elected Thomas M. Smyth as Secretary, and named William Elliott, Edward Carson, Garret D. Eccles, and Martial Fry as marshals. A line of procession was then formed and marched to the "soul inspiring strains of the fife and drum." After returning to the starting point, all bowed their heads while the Reverend P. G. Patterson offered prayer. The Declaration of Independence was read by Calvin Cole. Almon H. Humphrey then delivered the Oration in a creditable manner. The procession reformed after the speaking and marched to a grove where a sumptuous dinner had been prepared.

After the removal of the cloth the celebrants cheered loudly as thirteen regular and twenty-one volunteer toasts were offered. The first regular

toast was to Our Country while the second honored the Tree of Liberty. The celebrants next quaffed toasts to the President and Vice President, the Army and Navy, and the Memory of George Washington. The bereavement of all Americans over the recent death of Andrew Jackson was acknowledged in a toast praising the "noble qualities" of Old Hickory as a "Hero and Statesman". Toasts were also drunk to the memory of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, the Heroes of Bunker Hill, to Warren and Montgomery, and to William Henry Harrison, whose name would be revered as long as freemen live. Tributes to America and Ireland, Our Flag, and the Union concluded the regular toasts.

Of the twenty-one volunteer toasts offered at Old Man's Creek in 1845, fully half dealt with Iowa and the local scene. Garret D. Eccles hailed the "Fair Daughters of Columbia", while Lemuel Humphrey countered with "Iowa — May her sons and daughters be as virtuous as her soil is productive." Eccles rose again and again to voice patriotic sentiments. Thomas Smyth, the secretary of the celebration, was almost as fervent as Eccles, proposing toasts to the Orator of the Day, the Surviving Officers and Soldiers of the Revolution, and the Day we Celebrate. Colbert Anderson hoped that the ground which "drank the blood of the

sons of the Revolution would never give bread to tyrants." William Elliott hailed the Volunteers of the United States while Martial Fry remembered the Sages and Heroes of the Revolution. George Paul toasted the "Citizens of Old Man's Creek — true and unflinching patriots, they celebrate this day in a manner becoming the sons of '76." To the "Ladies of Old Man's Creek", Charles H. Berryhill gallantly declared "our arms their protection, their arms our reward." Equally gracious was Almon H. Humphrey in hoping that the ladies who had prepared the dinner would "live long to enjoy the blessings of liberty and fare as sumptuously as we have this day." A. H. Palmer closed by toasting Old Man's Creek Precinct. "In respect to the virtues of industry and public spirit, cordial and generous hospitality, and a deep and abiding love of country, her citizens will suffer nothing by a comparison with those of any older portion of our common country. If the entire population of the Territory emulates them in these virtues, we may rest assured that the day is at hand when Iowa will make her advent as the twenty-eighth star in the glorious constellation of the American Union, and assume that pre-eminent rank among her sister states, for which the God of Nature has designed her."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN