

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Fourth of July

Liberty and independence were the watchwords throughout the thirteen original colonies in the spring of 1776. George Washington had been appointed commander-in-chief of the American army, the Second Continental Congress was in session in Philadelphia, and the whole Atlantic seaboard was aflame with revolt from historic Boston in the Old Bay State to picturesque Charleston in the Palmetto State. On June 7th Richard Henry Lee had laid before Congress his famous resolution declaring that "these United Colonies are, and, of right, ought to be, Free and Independent States." Four days later a committee, composed of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, was appointed to draft a declaration of independence. On July 2nd Congress approved the Richard Henry Lee Resolutions. The following day it turned its attention to the declaration of independence which Jefferson had drawn up and on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence

was adopted and officially signed by President John Hancock and Secretary Charles Thomson. A Philadelphia dispatch declared:

A new nation this day greets the world. The news of its birth is already speeding throughout the States in the hands of trusted, speedy express riders. "The United States of America," to use the name already adopted by the Continental Congress, begins business on the morrow. His Majesty the King of Great Britain has lost thirteen Colonies.

The Declaration of Independence, the Ordinance of 1787, and the Constitution of the United States are the three greatest and most precious documents in American history. Without the Declaration of Independence the other two documents never would have been written, hence our national history actually stems from July 4, 1776.

Five Iowa counties — Adams, Carroll, Franklin, Hancock, and Jefferson — were named for signers of the Declaration of Independence. The town of Independence honors the immortal document of American freedom. In addition seventy-six townships in Iowa commemorate the Declaration of Independence. The town of Monticello is named in honor of the home of Thomas Jefferson, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence.

#### *Early American Celebrations*

The first celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence took place at Philadelphia on July 8, 1776, when a cheering crowd

heard it read for the first time. The following year the Continental Congress adjourned for the day, bells rang, bonfires were lighted and fireworks ignited in the evening. A Hessian band played at a dinner in Philadelphia and loyal citizens lighted their windows with candles. In 1788, after the ratification of the Constitution, a more elaborate celebration was staged in Philadelphia. The celebration of Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, as it is more commonly called, soon became the most widely observed American public holiday.

So important was Independence Day in pioneer life that Americans inaugurated significant events on that day. Governor DeWitt Clinton turned the first sod for the digging of the Erie Canal on July 4, 1817. Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, turned the first sod for the building of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad on July 4, 1828, and citizens of Carroll County may well remember Carroll's famous words on that occasion: "I consider this among the most important acts of my life, second only to that of signing the Declaration of Independence, if, indeed, second to that." The cornerstone of the Washington Monument at Washington, D. C., was laid on July 4, 1850. Iowans may recall the words of Enoch W. Eastman inscribed on the Iowa stone in this monument which reads: "Iowa. Her affections, like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable Union."

*Early Celebrations in Iowa*

The permanent settlement of Iowa did not begin until June, 1833, but there were Fourth of July celebrations in Iowa before that date. The soldiers at Fort Madison may have observed the Fourth of July from 1809 to 1813, but no documentary evidence exists to record it. The first known celebration of the Fourth of July on Iowa soil occurred in 1820 when Captain Stephen Watts Kearny and a small force of American troops pitched their camp near the site of Dunlap in northeastern Harrison County in the Boyer River Valley. "This day being the anniversary of our Independence," wrote Kearny in his journal, "we celebrated it, to the extent of our means; an extra gill of whiskey was issued to each man, & we made our dinner on pork & biscuit & drank to the memory of our forefathers in a *mint julup*."

We do not know whether troops from Fort Crawford or Fort Armstrong ever celebrated the Fourth of July in Iowa. We do know that on July 4, 1828, a party of lead miners from Galena, Illinois, chartered the steamboat *Indiana* for a Fourth of July excursion to Julien Dubuque's grave at the mouth of Catfish Creek. These Galenians were the first white settlers known to have celebrated the Fourth of July on Iowa soil. They raised the American flag opposite the tepee of an Indian maiden, said to be the first time the flag was flown by private citizens in what is now Iowa.

*The Fourth at Dubuque: 1836*

Undoubtedly the lead miners who entered Iowa in June, 1833, celebrated Independence Day in proper style but no details are available. It remained for the *Dubuque Visitor*, the first newspaper in Iowa, to record a meeting of Dubuque citizens in the Tontine House on June 14, 1836, at which arrangements were made for the first elaborate celebration of July Fourth. Whenever a community wishes to stage a successful celebration it includes the local editor on the committee of arrangements. Dubuquers were aware of this for on June 29th John King editorialized:

Monday next will be the 59th anniversary of our National Independence, and the Birth-Day of Wisconsin Territory. It will be celebrated in this town with great eclat. We are glad of it. So long as the return of that day is duly honored by the American people, we may well presume that the principles which were proclaimed upon it sixty years ago, are still cherished, and the glorious institutions founded upon those principles are still safe!

The observance of the Fourth of July in 1836 required a host of "Officers of the Day" at Dubuque. Dr. Stephen Langworthy served as "President of the Day," with four fellow townsmen assisting him as vice presidents. Ezekiel Lockwood was named "Marshal of the Day" with three assistant "Marshals" to aid him. The parade formed at the Tontine House at eleven o'clock in the morning and marched to the Catholic Church

for divine services where the Reverend Samuel C. Mazzuchelli acted as chaplain. Milo H. Prentice read the Declaration of Independence and William W. Coriell delivered the oration in an "eloquent and impressive manner." The procession then reformed and marched "to the green in front of the town, where an excellent dinner was prepared to which the company did ample honor."

Following the "removal of the cloth" the Dubuquers prepared to drink the toasts which formed a customary part of every Independence Day celebration. Thirteen "regular" toasts were drunk in honor of the thirteen original colonies. The pattern of these toasts was well outlined by custom. In quick succession the lead miners raised their glasses to "The Day We Celebrate," "The Signers of the Declaration of Independence," "The Memory of Washington," "The Sages and Heroes of the Revolution," "The Constitution of the United States" (the "greatest work of human wisdom" whose "sacred pages" it was hoped would not be marred by "the blindness of ambition, nor the madness of party strife"), "The Union," "The Army and Navy of the United States," "The Territory of Wisconsin," "The President of the United States," "The Governor of Wisconsin Territory and our Delegate in Congress," "The Press" (hope was expressed that its "licentiousness should be tolerated rather than its freedom be destroyed"), and "The Elective

Franchise." The thirteenth toast was invariably given to the fairer sex and the gallant Dubuque lead miners were not slow to conclude this series with a toast to "The Fair of Wisconsin — Although *minus* in numerical comparison with the other sex, yet *plus* in virtue and acquirements." Six hearty cheers greeted this popular toast for the dearth of women was keenly felt by many a lonesome miner on the Iowa frontier.

More than forty "volunteer" toasts were offered by the assembled lead miners, a noteworthy feat when it is remembered that these Dubuque pioneers seldom imbibed water on such occasions. The majority of these "volunteer" toasts were personal, local, or regional in character. The Dubuque lead miners quaffed toasts to "The Pioneers of the West," "The Squatters of the Black Hawk Purchase," and "The Miners and Smelters of the Upper Mississippi Lead Mines." Because of the large Irish population at Dubuque it was natural that they should toast the Irish among them as well as "Daniel O'Connor — The Liberator of Ireland."

Numerous toasts were drunk to newly-born Wisconsin Territory, to Dubuque and Des Moines counties, and to Dubuque — the "future capital" as well as the "Geographical and Popular Centre" of Wisconsin. Two toasts were drunk to General Sam Houston and another to the "Heroes of Texas" who were winning their independence in

1836. The "Fair of Wisconsin" were twice-remembered, that of John King being a classic — "*Woman — Were it not for Woman, our infancy would be without succor, our age without relief, our manhood without enjoyment, and Dubuque without an inhabitant.*"

*Other Territorial Celebrations*

As mushroom settlements sprang up in Iowa and Wisconsin numerous Fourth of July celebrations were observed. In 1837 the *Iowa News* recorded Independence Day programs at such far-flung points as the foot of the Lower Rapids in Lee County and the newly rising capital at Madison. In 1838 the Federal government named the Fourth of July as the natal day of the Territory of Iowa. Formal exercises dignified the observance of the holiday at Dubuque, Burlington, Fort Madison, West Point, and Denmark, and similar celebrations were probably held in other places between Keokuk and Fort Snelling. Burlington celebrated the birthday of the Territory in a "handsome style." James W. Grimes read the Declaration of Independence, David Rorer delivered the oration, and Charles Mason served as marshal. Judge David Irvin presided at the "sumptuous repast" at the Wisconsin Hotel. Thirteen "regular" and twenty-eight "volunteer" toasts were proposed.

In Fort Madison the citizens met in Jacob Cutler's new building at the ringing of the bell to cele-



brate Independence Day. Among the notable guests who sat down to a dinner served in an arbor on the bank of the Mississippi was Chief Black Hawk, who attended "decently clothed in citizen's dress." Six hundred friends of "civil and religious liberty" gathered at West Point in Lee County to celebrate Independence Day. The citizens of Denmark in Lee County heard the Rev. Asa Turner open the meeting with prayer and then read the Declaration of Independence. J. P. Stewart of Burlington then gave a temperance lecture after which fifty-three persons took the total abstinence pledge and a temperance society was organized. The toasts at Denmark were drunk in cold water, a fact which won the applause of many temperance advocates who deplored the use of "brandy and wine to aid the tongue or mind on such an occasion."

*July Fourth in 1846*

The year 1846 was memorable in the history of Iowa. It marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the adoption of the Constitution of 1846, and the admission of Iowa into the Union as a State on December 28, 1846. On July 8th one-fourth of the Iowa City *Standard* was devoted to reprinting the newly adopted Constitution and little space remained to record the unusual Fourth of July service conducted by the Sabbath schools of Iowa

City in the Methodist Episcopal Church. "The performances of the scholars were highly interesting, and were witnessed by a numerous and gratified audience," an editor declared. "After the exercises at the Church were concluded, the scholars were formed in procession, and, accompanied by their teachers and a large number of citizens, proceeded to the Capitol, where they partook of a sumptuous collation, prepared by the Ladies of our city."

Independence Day at Burlington in 1846 was equally interesting. In the morning the Sunday schools held an exhibition. The ladies of the Congregational Church gave a dinner at noon costing  $37\frac{1}{2}\phi$  for the purpose of collecting means to furnish their church. In the evening they gave a musical for which they charged 20 cents. Farm women were invited to bring in their meats, cream, and other farm produce to help the Congregationalists.

At the noon meal Governor James Clarke presided at one table and Col. F. H. Warren acted as President & Director. After dinner toasts prepared by President Warren called to their feet a number of men who found themselves pressed into service unexpectedly as responders. These were drunk in "*cold water*, yet never have we passed a more pleasant Fourth, or seen a more cheerful cold water Society."

First Toast. — *The Pulpit and its Ministers.* — The strongest safeguard to our perpetual inheritance of Free-

dom. Reverend William Salter responded.

Second Toast. — *The Executive of Iowa*. — His history is an example that the highest offices of the Republic are open to capacity, integrity and worth. Response by Governor James Clarke.

Third Toast. — *Harvard University*. — From this time honored Seat of Learning has gone forth genius, eloquence and scholarship. Nobly has her representative to-day, sustained the reputation of her classic halls. Response by C. C. Shackford, Esq.

Fourth Toast. — *The Saint Louis Editorial Fraternity*. — Its usual intercourse with us is through the medium of types; its representative to-day does not lack the faculty of oral communications. Response by S. J. Burr of the *St. Louis People's Organ*.

Fifth Toast. — *The Lee County Bar*. — We have to-day the best evidence that it does not lean upon a broken *Reid*. Response by H. T. Reid of Fort Madison.

Sixth Toast. — *That State of New Hampshire*. — There have been transported from its granite soil, scions to vegetate in the fields of Theology, Physics and Law. Let the tree be judged by its fruit. Response by James W. Grimes.

Seventh Toast. — *Our Territory*. — We have been favored with a glimpse of Iowa in 1845, in print: can we have a glimpse of the other, in person. Response by Major John B. Newhall.

#### *Sale of Lots at Wau-bun*

In 1856 one of the most unusual Fourth of July celebrations was advertised in Iowa County. This was the end of a three-year-period when almost a quarter million immigrants poured into Iowa. Town sites were sprouting up on every hand, many of which were simply paper towns. The

enterprising owners of one of these sites, hoping to attract settlers, inserted the following card in the *Iowa City Republican* of July 2, 1856.

FOURTH OF JULY.  
WAU-BUN.

WAUBUN is the name of a town site situated in the centre of Iowa County, 8 miles South of Marengo and 30 miles West of Iowa City, and upon the location of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad. It is upon the high prairie, presenting the appearance of a most healthy locality and picturesque view of a wide extent of country.

The proprietors Henry Miller, Esq., of Cincinnati; Messrs Housel, Dawson, and others of Davenport, have agreed to immediately invest full five thousand dollars in the erection of a Hotel and Family Residences. Lithograph maps of the town plat will shortly be published, when persons wishing to become residents can have an opportunity to purchase Lots.

ON FRIDAY THE FOURTH

The National ensign will be raised, which will serve as a guide to persons crossing the prairie to view the locality. In the evening it is expected a display of FIRE WORKS will be exhibited.

BENJ. RIVERS,  
Agent for the Company.

July 2, 1856. — dlt. lmw.

*Panics Did Not Deter Celebrations*

Panics and economic depressions did not prevent Iowans from celebrating the Fourth of July. McGregor, for example, scheduled the "biggest kind" of a Fourth in 1857. "Harding of the American will prepare the dinner — the orator is not

yet selected — a good band will be in attendance. There will be a Boat race to Prairie du Chien and back — a horse race on the other side, by way of varying the exercises, and — dancing will commence at American Hall at precisely three o'clock, to be continued till 12 — midnight. Those not entirely blind will see sights and wonders here on that national day of 'Yankee Doodle'."

An equally "great time" in the form of a picnic dinner was promised at West Union. Those bringing food were advised to "leave knives and forks at home as the dinner is to be eaten in the most rural style possible." Far to the west, on the chocolate-colored Missouri River, the citizens of Sioux City paid homage to the founding fathers in 1857 by celebrating their first Fourth of July. The event was chronicled in the first number of the first newspaper printed in Woodbury County which was issued on the afternoon of July Fourth. The *Sioux City Eagle* declared:

The glorious natal day of our independence was properly celebrated for the first time in Sioux City, to-day, by the gathering of our citizens in the grove above Perry creek, where seats had been prepared. The assemblage was addressed in a spirited and eloquent manner, by Dr. S. P. Yeomans (register of the United States land office) and County Judge William Van O'Linda.

True, there was no firing of cannon or strains of music, but every bosom swelled with patriotic emotion at the remembrance of that glorious and successful struggle for freedom, made by the gallant and rebellious sons of '76.

The observance of the Fourth of July was, indeed, an important social event in the life of the frontier. It afforded an opportunity for the pioneers to get together and discuss the weather, the prospects for good crops, and the coming land sales. Politicians could also display their patriotism and oratorical prowess. Many rural communities throughout this period had to content themselves with the floating of "Old Glory" from a newly-raised Liberty Pole. A pot-luck dinner, the reading of the Declaration of Independence, and an oration by a local preacher or some prominent citizen from a nearby community generally concluded such rural programs. The speeches and toasts at the banquets gave composite expression to the hopes and fears, the opinions and prejudices of the pioneers.

The larger cities endeavored to observe the Fourth of July in more elaborate form. In 1857 Dubuque advertised a lavish celebration and kept her citizens informed of progress through the columns of her daily newspapers. The editor urged that a decent and orderly celebration demanded a "clear head" and that drunkenness was especially "disgraceful" on Independence Day. "Let us keep the day as Washington and his brave compeers would do, were they still among us — with minds unclouded and hearts patriotically warm."

The following arrangements were outlined. The roar of a cannon would usher in the Fourth of

July at daybreak. A salute of thirty-one guns at sunrise and the ringing of bells assured most Dubuquers of the futility of sleep for the remainder of the day. The procession formed in the public square at 10:30 a.m. and, led by the Dubuque Band, marched through the principal streets. The remainder of the parade was composed of the Dubuque City Guards, the German Turnverein Society, the several fire, hook and ladder, and hose companies, the mayor and the common council, the members of the bar and judiciary, citizens, and strangers. Guns were fired during the procession and a salute of thirteen guns was fired at sunset. In the evening the Hon. Ben. M. Samuels read the Declaration of Independence after which short addresses were made by the mayor and other dignitaries. A band rendered martial music between speeches. A "grand display of fire-works" concluded the program.

The following year, in 1858, citizens of Mitchell County gathered at Mitchell to observe Independence Day. According to the *Mitchell County Republican* of July 8, 1858:

The celebration of the "Fourth" at this place, came off on Monday last. The day could not have been more auspicious. Clear, yet not too warm; the air pure and bracing.

At day-break one gun was fired, and at sunrise a Federal salute. At ten o'clock a procession of some fifteen teams, with several hundreds on foot, was formed at the Liberty Pole in West Mitchell, and marched to the Grove

near the Grove School House. The Mechanics' Brass Band of Mitchell, drawn by six horses, led the procession; the whole under the charge of Marshal S. B. Sherwood.

The grove selected is a beautiful spot, and the position of the stand and seats was good and they were conveniently arranged.

At half past eleven o'clock the exercises were opened with a highly appropriate prayer by Rev. Wm. Windsor.

The oration by Lieut. Gov. Faville, was an able and eloquent production, portraying in a graphic manner the characteristics of the true patriot, and the evils with which we are, as a nation, threatened. But as we hope to be able to publish it entire next week we omit further comments.

The band, throughout the day, did great credit to themselves. The officers of the day performed their parts with credit. An excellent dinner, was served up by C. C. Prime, of the National Hotel. There were large delegations present from St. Ansgar, Burr Oak, and Osage. The number present must have been over one thousand.

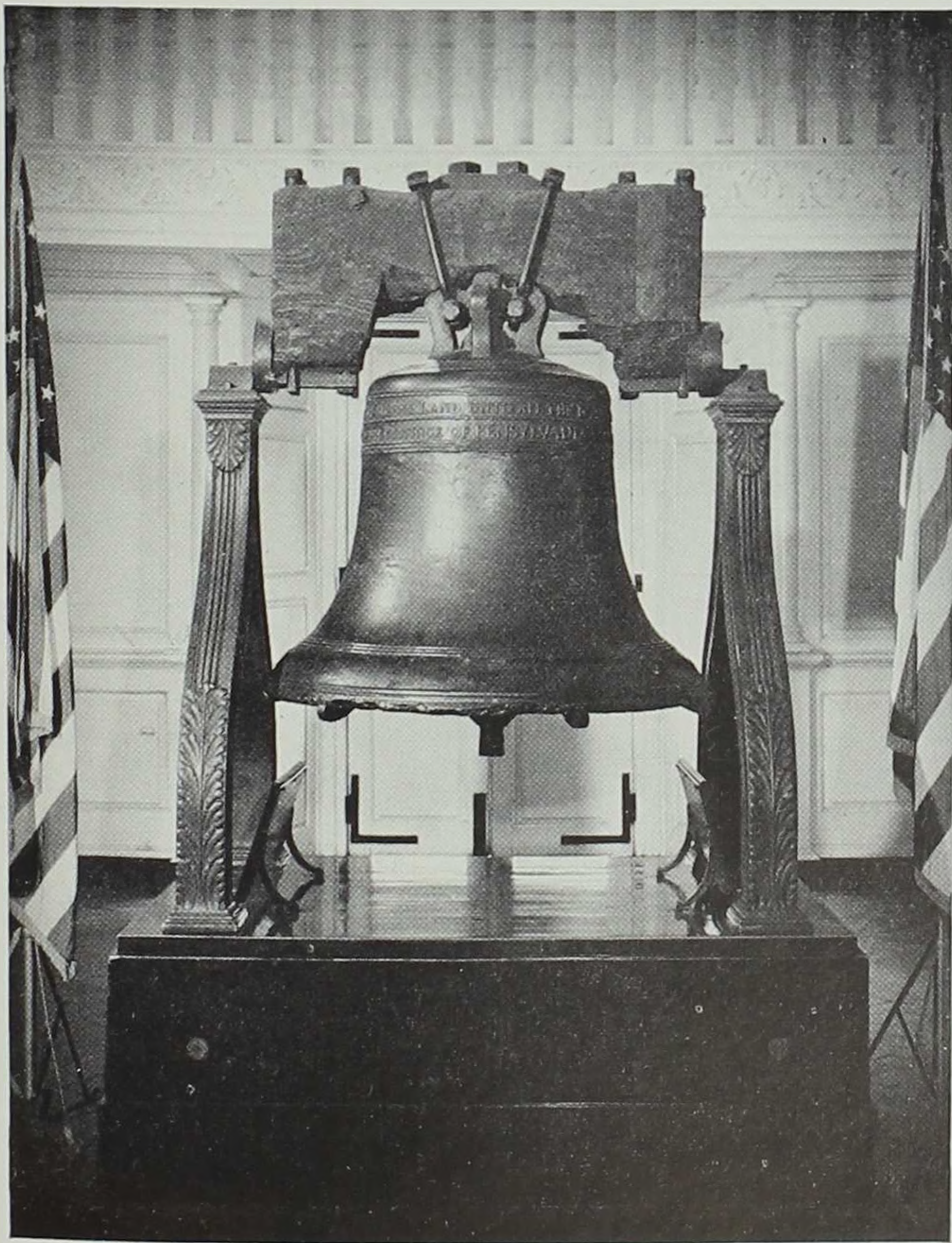
#### *The Fourth in 1865*

The close of the Civil War brought added emphasis to Independence Day throughout Iowa. The *Sidney American Union* of July 3, 1865, noted that citizens of "Tabor, Hamburg, Manti, the 'Old Camp Ground,' &c.," in Fremont County were observing the Fourth independently. He was especially impressed by the observance at Tabor where 1,200 "denizens" met in a grove south of town to hear the Glee Club and listen to a typical Fourth of July program.

Prof. Brooks read the Declaration of Independence with a clearness of enunciation and an impressiveness of delivery not often witnessed on such occasions.



THE LIBERTY BELL IN INDEPENDENCE HALL



*Proclaim liberty throughout the land!*



Old Glory Always Featured on the Fourth



Mrs. William Van Ysseldyk Photo

Soldiers of Many Wars Paraded Iowa Streets  
The Fourth at Marengo About 1906



Iowans Vied for Honors on the Fourth



Hugh McCoy Photo

Keosauquans Cheered This Buggy on the Fourth



Wilfred Mortenson Photo

Auto Races Were Common on the Fourth



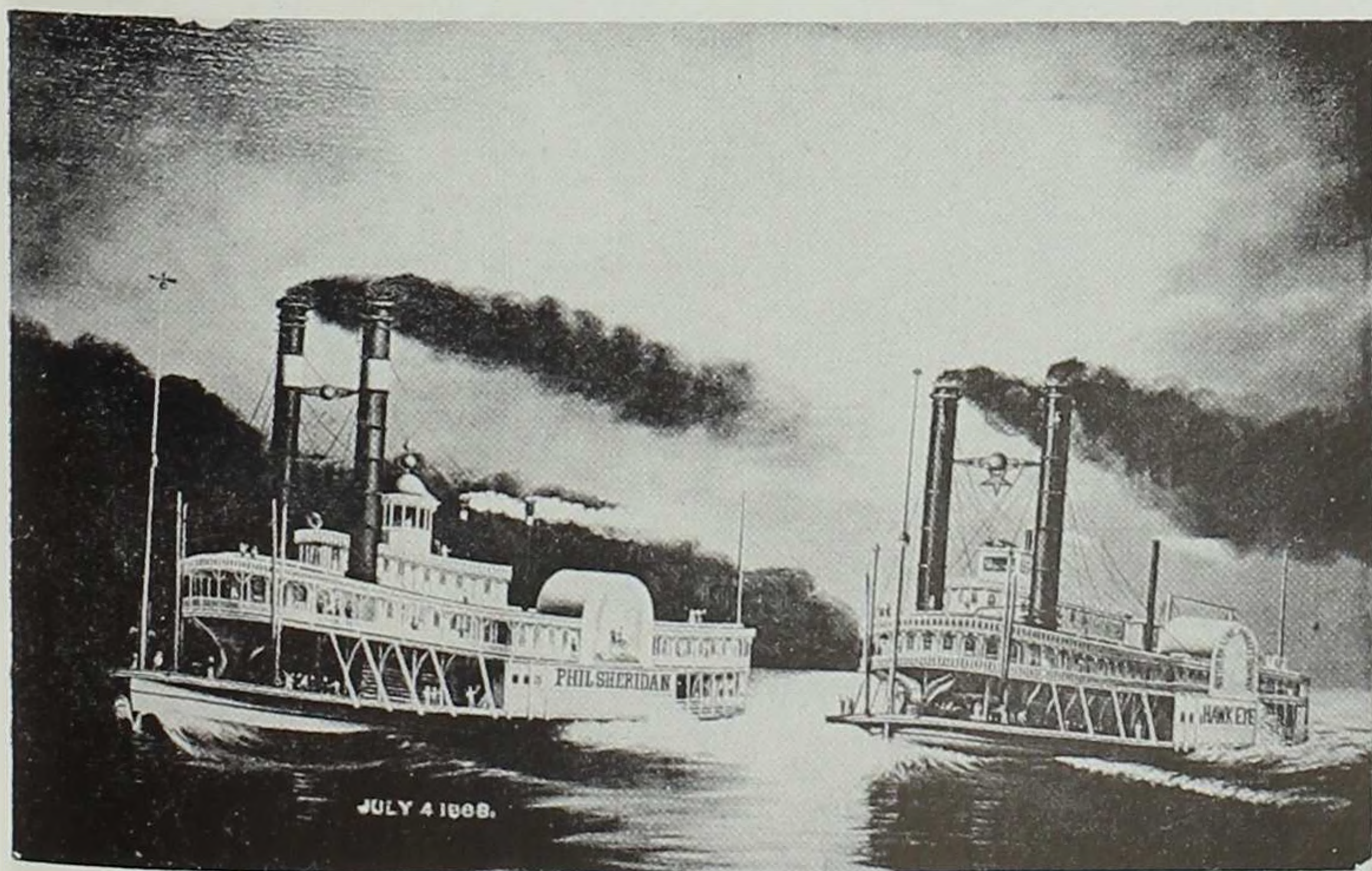
Wilfred Mortenson Photo

Family Picnics Featured Homemade Ice Cream  
On Mill Creek in Cherokee County about 1912



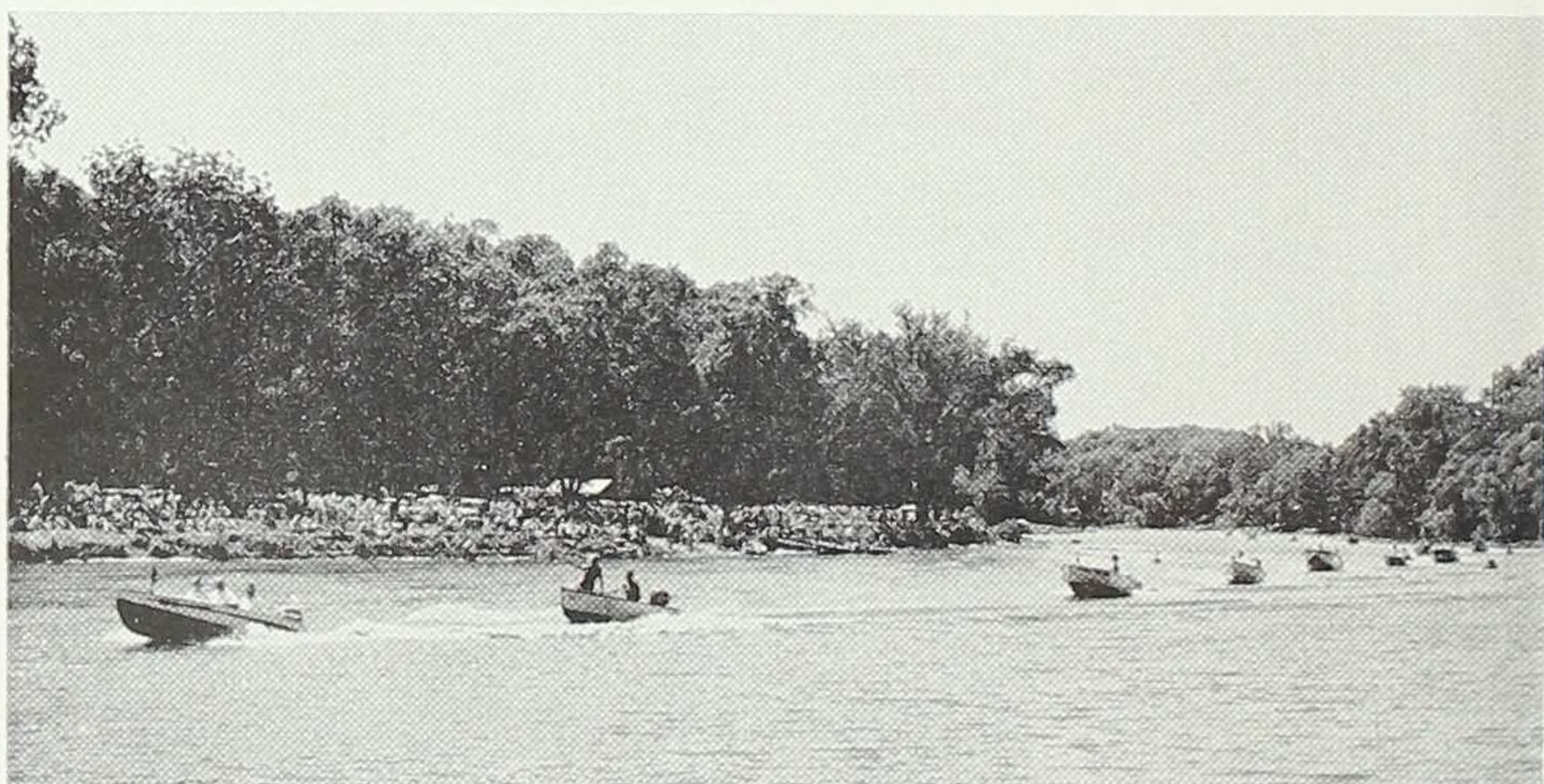
William J. Petersen Photo

Independence Day on the Raftboat *Musser*  
*Bands, Bumbershoots, and Bustles*



William J. Petersen Photo

Upper Mississippi Steamboat Race on Fourth  
The *Phil Sheridan* beat the *Hawkeye State* from Saint Louis to Dubuque:  
Time 40 hours, 53 minutes, making 17 landings enroute



Iowa City *Press-Citizen* Photo

Boat Parade on Fourth at Iowa City in 1957



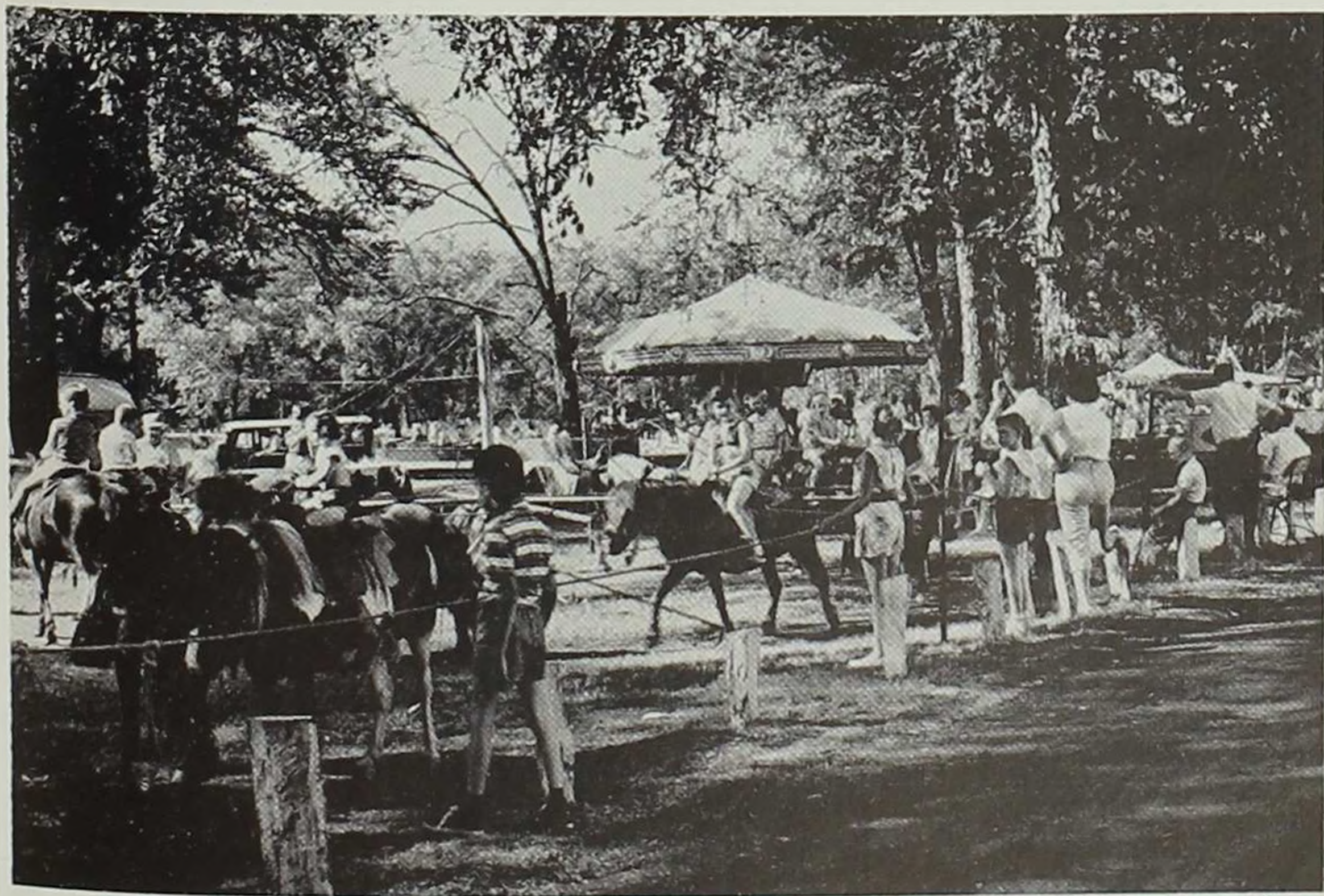
Photo Courtesy of Max Proctor

Flag Drill Team at Clemons about 1913



Iowa City *Press-Citizen* Photo

Fireworks Thrilled Iowa Citizens in 1957



Iowa City *Press-Citizen* Photo

Children Had Their Day in City Park

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a solemn and conscientious appeal is made to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of their intentions. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly we have suffered the longest Sufferance under them, but a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same arbitrary and oppressive course, have evinced a clear and undeniable proof that the design of the British King is to reduce us to absolute Tyranny. Now therefore, we are obliged to acquiesce in a more just and stable Government, one which is founded on the principles of Liberty and Justice, and which will secure to us the rights and liberties which we are entitled to by the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God.

We the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress assembled, do hereby declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and Independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connections between them and that Crown, are and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, enter into Commercials, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.

In Witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and seals, this fourth day of July, 1776.

John Hancock  
 Samuel Adams  
 John Adams  
 Benjamin Franklin  
 Thomas Jefferson  
 George Washington  
 James Ogelthorpe  
 John Jay  
 Robert R. Livingston  
 George Clinton  
 William Livingston  
 John M. Smith  
 George Nicholas  
 Benjamin Harrison  
 William Willoughby  
 George Mason  
 James M. Smith  
 George Wythe  
 John Hancock  
 Samuel Adams  
 John Adams  
 Benjamin Franklin  
 Thomas Jefferson  
 George Washington  
 James Ogelthorpe  
 John Jay  
 Robert R. Livingston  
 George Clinton  
 William Livingston  
 John M. Smith  
 George Nicholas  
 Benjamin Harrison  
 William Willoughby  
 George Mason  
 James M. Smith  
 George Wythe

The Freedom Train Visited Iowa in 1948 with Its Many Precious Documents



After another excellent song, the Orator, Hon. J. G. Day, was introduced to the audience. His oration was of marked ability, worthy the Judge's high reputation, and an honor to the occasion.

When the Judge had concluded his address, the audience had another musical treat, when Dr. Hanley was loudly called for. The Doctor was listened to with attention. His remarks were chiefly historical, drawing from the stirring events of the last four years, and deducing therefrom appropriate wisdom for the day. When he had concluded, dinner was announced. The throng was organized into a procession, and marched to the tables, which were loaded with the substantials and delicacies always found at a 4th of July celebration at Tabor. Rev. Williams invoked the Divine blessing upon the good things tastefully arranged, when a general good time was experienced in partaking of the delicious fare.

When the replenishing operation was finished, the audience was recalled to the stand where music and toasts were in order. We cannot give the toasts or the responses; suffice it to say the toasts generally were appropriate, and the responses satisfactory — at times eliciting much applause.

After the toasts, the audience gave the Glee Club, the Committee of Arrangements, and the Orators, a vote of thanks, when the people, "chuck" full of happiness and contentment dispersed to their several homes.

#### *Centennial Celebrations in 1876*

The State of Iowa was thirty years old when the nation celebrated the centennial of the Declaration of Independence. The youthful commonwealth had made giant strides in those three decades. Her population had grown from 102,388 when Iowa was admitted into the Union to 1,350,-

553 on the eve of the national centennial. In 1846 only the eastern half of the State was thinly settled; in 1876 the entire western half was populated and the frontier line had moved across the Big Sioux River into Dakota.

During these heroic years Iowa had taken part in the Mexican War; waged a bitter partisan battle over the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision; and seen the organization of the Republican Party in 1856. In 1876 the sordid days of reconstruction were drawing to a close. Colorado entered the Union on July 4th as the "Centennial State," the twenty-fifth to join the original thirteen. News of the Custer Massacre was telegraphed from Salt Lake City on July 4, 1876, vying with reports of the Fourth of July and the "centennial storms."

While all the great metropolitan centers celebrated Independence Day with genuine fervor in 1876, the most elaborate of the ceremonies was held at Philadelphia where the Centennial Exposition had been opened by President U. S. Grant on May 19th. Alexander Graham Bell astounded Americans as well as such foreigners as Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil by his exhibition of the telephone. There, too, John Stewart of Manchester, Iowa, took the gold medal and the first premium with the golden butter churned at his Spring Branch Creamery. Young William Dean Howells believed the Agricultural Hall was the "most

exclusively American" display at the Philadelphia Exposition and the most novel of all the exhibits in Agricultural Hall was Iowa's display of her rich soil — five and six feet deep — revealed in huge glass cylinders.

Although it ranked below such towns as Dubuque, Davenport, and Burlington in population, no Iowa community surpassed Des Moines in the magnitude of its Fourth of July celebration in 1876. Special passenger trains ran to the State capital from all directions, with fares reduced one-half for the occasion. One hundred extra policemen were engaged to maintain "perfect order" in the vast throng of citizens and strangers. The decorations of the city were said to be "unrivalled" both in number and quality. The main streets were lined with banners and bunting, beautiful arches spanned strategic points, and the profuse exhibition of flags of all nations added color to the celebration.

Fifty thousand people jammed Des Moines that day. Many were doubtless attracted to the capital city by "Howes' Great London Circus Hippodrome" which afforded spectators a "Panoply of Splendor" and a "Blaze of Gold." This self-styled "Largest Show Upon Earth" boasted of "Five Educated Elephants" and claimed more "performing animals" than "any other Ten Menageries in the World!"

The three-mile-long parade through the streets

of Des Moines was described as the "grandest spectacle ever seen in Iowa." The procession began with a float entitled "Iowa in 1776," depicting a vast unbroken prairie on which three live cub wolves were playing. The next float was called "Iowa in 1830" and represented the Indian and the white man in council. The third was labeled "Iowa Today" and revealed the agricultural interests of the Hawkeye State. The Third Regiment of Iowa Militia followed, Baker's Battery of Artillery bringing up the rear. Next came the orators and dignitaries with Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood occupying the first carriage.

Beautiful floats followed, depicting such stirring pictures as "Columbia," the "Temple of Liberty," the "Thirteen States," and "Washington and His Staff." The Capital City Band marched ahead of the Des Moines Fire Department which presented one of the "grandest pictures" in this moving pageantry of color and life. The "Army and Navy" vied with the "Public Schools" for applause. The march of the "Trades" was hailed as the "grandest part of the procession" not because of its beauty and history but because the steady stream of bricklayers, carpenters, coal miners, carriage makers, mill workers, merchant tailors, boiler makers, pottery workers, tanners, stone cutters, soap makers, meat packers, etc., showed with striking eloquence and meaning the "remarkable growth of our proud young city."

The colorful "Fantastics" — Indians, devils, suffragists, sailors — was composed of fully 700 mounted men while as many more rode in vehicles or marched on foot. The parade countermarched at the courthouse and then proceeded to the Fair Grounds where twenty thousand spectators were gathered around the stand. Governor Kirkwood presided and excellent orations were delivered, but the *Iowa State Register* concentrated on the many-columned speech of William M. Evarts which had been delivered at Philadelphia.

Only the fireworks failed to please the people and the press, much resentment being displayed over the fact that the east side of the town had been chosen for the display instead of one of the bridges. This was too far for most people to walk and it was charged that not one of the emblematical pieces was visible from the west bank. According to the *Iowa State Register*: "Not an accident marred the day, and everything connected with it, with the exception of the fireworks, had been completely successful."

Des Moines was but one of hundreds of Iowa communities that observed the nation's birthday in 1876. At Polk City the centennial Fourth was celebrated in "good style" despite the accidental explosion of an anvil that could be heard ten miles away. At Prairie City the crowds enjoyed the greased pole climb, the sack and potato race, and the dancing and swinging. At Montezuma, J. B.

Grinnell gave an eloquent oration during which he endeavored to picture what Iowa could be like in 1976. Mrs. Kate Harrington, the "greatest poet" in the Hawkeye State, read a "beautiful and original poem" at the Clear Lake celebration. Jackson County attracted attention when the local women suffragists were assigned a place in the Maquoketa procession and were later, by the common consent of the crowd, granted a place on the speakers' stand.

Oskaloosa featured the Fourth of July with "more fast horses" than had ever before "congregated" at one Iowa fair. Probably one thousand strangers joined citizens in listening to the services. The splendid oration was marred, according to one eye-witness, by a "most disgraceful scene" when a brewery wagon "decorated with flags and bunting, and bearing the mottoes, 'Take your drinks where folks can see you,' 'down with fanatics,' etc. was loaded with kegs of beer, both human and wooden, and driven around the square several times in the presence of the assembly; the occupants displaying goblets of beer at arm's length, at times quaffing it and indulging in bacchanalian revels; at other times handing out beer to bystanders."

While Iowans were "shooting the works" on July 4, 1876, Dame Nature joined in the celebration with what was aptly called by many editors the "Centennial Storm." Scores of communities

suffered devastating losses from cyclonic winds and torrential downpours. The town of Rockdale on Catfish Creek on the outskirts of Dubuque was swept away in a maelstrom that took thirty-nine lives. A tornado at Indianola took five lives, badly injured scores of Warren County residents, and caused property damage estimated at \$500,000. Pella suffered a "fearful" rain and hail storm and the damage at Oskaloosa was equally severe. The hurricane at Cedar Rapids destroyed thirty homes — driving their inmates into the "pitiless black night." Fort Madison experienced the "most terrific tornado" in its history, Burlington felt the wrath of the storm, and the town of Tracy was reported destroyed.

*The Fourth in the 20th Century*

Fifty years later, when Philadelphia celebrated the sesqui-centennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1926, Iowa had grown from sturdy youth to strong maturity. The manner in which the Fourth of July was observed had also undergone many changes. Gone was the reading of the Declaration of Independence, in honor of which "The Day We Celebrate" had originally been observed. Gone was the drinking of the "regular" and "volunteer" toasts that had paid such fitting tribute to the "Founding Fathers" and all that was great in American history. Gone too were the colorful community parades of yesteryears, enjoyed by town and country folk alike.

In their stead had developed an emphasis on the private and public display of fireworks, an emphasis on "noise" rather than a contemplation of the deeper significance of Independence Day. With this shift in emphasis came a growing loss in lives and property. On July 4, 1931, carelessly handled fireworks destroyed the entire business section of Spencer causing property damage estimated at \$2,000,000. The use of fireworks within the town limits of Spencer thereafter was prohibited.

*Editorials on Independence Day*

The danger of an over-emphasis of fireworks and explosives on the Fourth had long been recognized by thoughtful Iowans. "The land will reek with gunpowder, and many will be killed," declared the *Iowa State Register* on July 2, 1876. By 1890 this paper observed with regret that the "Old Fashioned Fourth" was being supplanted by the small boy with firecrackers. "This is a day that never steals in unannounced," the editor declared. "It always makes itself heard on arrival. It isn't backward about when it shall announce its approach, and so begins when patriots are trying to sleep the sleep of the just. . . . The small boy claims the Fourth of July as his own. He is willing to give Memorial Day to the veterans and Thanksgiving Day to the churches. He will divide Christmas with the rest of the family, but the Fourth of July he claims as his own."



"Celebrations are not as common on this day as they used to be a few years ago," the editor pointed out, and continued:

Citizens generally seem very apt to think that they have performed their duty when they buy firecrackers for the children and then go off fishing for themselves. Not so. Keep up the Fourth with old-fashioned celebrations. Have some inspiring addresses. This is a good occasion to teach lessons of patriotism. It is all right to be merry and have a good time, but the real meaning of the day should not be forgotten. It was on the Fourth of July that the fathers declared the colonies free and independent. The sons should see to it that on the Fourth of July at least there should be some serious thinking about how to promote the welfare and prosperity of the Nation, that was born on that day.

But celebrations were not the only form of observing the holiday. Great and lasting projects were often inaugurated on Independence Day. The cornerstone of the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City was laid on July 4, 1840. The Methodists can point with pride to the fact that just as Reverend George B. Bowman laid the foundations for Cornell College on July 4, 1852, so the citizens of Sioux City laid the cornerstone of the present-day Morningside College on July 4, 1890. But will the citizens of Chariton remember in 1976 that the Charitonians of 1876 made up an iron box filled with the things of that first centennial day which they hoped would be opened by the mayor of Chariton on July 4, 1976?

The tragic destruction of downtown Spencer in 1931 was a powerful argument against the unlicensed sale and use of fireworks and firecrackers. After a carelessly thrown firecracker ignited a blaze that gutted Remsen on July 4, 1936, causing damage estimated at around half a million dollars the General Assembly, following the example of a number of towns and cities, declared the sale of firecrackers and fireworks for individual use illegal in Iowa.

From earliest days newspaper editors urged the celebration of the Fourth of July. On May 13, 1874, the *Brooklyn Journal* urged its citizens not to overlook "The Ever Glorious 4th."

It should never grow dim in American minds. A departure from the principles then fought for will be the signal and remarkable sign of our coming dissolution, the beginning of a "decline and fall" more important, more terrible and more fatal than that immortalized by Gibbon. It will be the death of the greatest people Earth in all her hoary centuries ever saw. Let not that dreadful day dawn in our time. To perpetuate the revolutionary spirit, to keep fresh in remembrance the sacrifice and bloodshed that was necessary to establish our liberties will go a long way to maintain national purity and greatness. Let us hold fast that which is good, and annually refresh and instill into the minds of the young the patriotism and public virtue of the Fathers. If there is any one lesson that should now be taught more than another, it is the lesson of public purity and virtue, and it cannot be better or more forcibly taught than by reviving the history of the long and efficient public service rendered by the noble founders

of our government, and their reward, slight in cash, abundant in honor, in confidence, faith, love and gratitude. If they had lean purses, they were rich in honesty, integrity, and the affection of their countrymen. Come, let us live over the olden time, and have a national holiday. Let the citizens prepare for a good time; have music, a procession, an oration, a feast, songs and mirth. Begin *now*, appoint committees, secure ground and all the necessaries for an enjoyable day.

In response to this editorial reminder Poweshiek County citizens set the wheels in motion. On July 1, 1874, the *Brooklyn Journal* proudly recorded the results in the following headlines.

The Glorious Fourth.  
BROOKLIN ALIVE.  
WE CELEBRATE  
EMINENT SPEAKERS.  
FIREWORKS.  
MUSIC — RACING.  
Young Man Bring on  
Your fast Nags.

As Brooklyn always has been ahead, so yet she maintains her precedence.

The return to the "old time atmosphere" was observed by the *Des Moines Register* as it studied the Fourth of July programs in 1937. Community celebrations, baseball games, racing, picnics, and patriotic programs had taken the place of exploding cannon crackers in most places. Red Oak had played host to eleven southwestern Iowa bands in a celebration sponsored by the American Legion

and featuring an afternoon and evening parade. Eldon had sponsored an old-fashioned celebration at the Wapello County fairgrounds. Keokuk had dedicated its new airport and Senator Guy M. Gillette had spoken at Emmetsburg at a picnic sponsored by the Bethany Lutheran Church. The Delaware County Agricultural Society had sponsored a ball game, horse races, band concerts, free acts, and a dance program at Manchester. Strict supervision was taken over all community-sponsored fireworks.

#### *World War II*

In 1944 Iowa soldiers observed the Fourth of July on far-flung battlefields. Most significant of all was that held on the field of Normandy where General Omar N. Bradley pulled the lanyard of a 155-millimeter "Long Tom" artillery piece to start a devastating artillery barrage on La Haye du Puits. An Iowa war correspondent, Gordon Gammack, was deeply stirred by the genuine Fourth of July celebration sponsored by a liberated Normandy town. A dozen French children had been taught "America" which they sang while Thunderbolts and Mustangs roared overhead. A fourteen-year-old boy told how the hearts of all Frenchmen were "overflowing with joy because you have come." The mayor of the town (who reminded Gammack of former Representative Gus Alesch of Plymouth County) told of their "four years as prisoners and even hostages" and ex-

pressed thanks that "the end of a nightmare" had finally come. The mayor said there was a sacred duty to perform — to honor the dead. At his suggestion "the French women and children departed to lay roses from the thorny bushes of Normandy on the graves of American soldiers who died during the liberation of their town."

*During the Korean Conflict*

Wars always afford an opportunity for special observance and dedication to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence. On July 4, 1951, during the Korean conflict, Drew Pearson wrote in the Des Moines *Register* editorial page of our need for selling our American philosophy and way of life to the world and not allow the salesmen of the Kremlin to outstrip us with their "phony" doctrines. "The Fourth of July is so bogged down with parades and picnics, fireworks and baseball," Pearson declared, "that we never get around to studying the great document whose signing we are celebrating."

On the same editorial page Bert M. Leck of the *Rock Valley Bee* wrote:

The youngster of 11 or 12 has a clearer meaning of what July 4 stands for than has his parents. For the most part, the average American takes July 4 as just another holiday, a day of rest and relaxation or perhaps a good day for a picnic. Unlike Christmas, July 4 has no religious significance but certainly it should mean a great deal to every American, native or naturalized.

July 4 marks the anniversary of our independence as a nation. Our every liberty stems from that date. Surely we should pause long enough to consider the true significance of this, our Independence Day. That doesn't mean that we should wear sackcloth and ashes but we should realize the meaning of the day and be ever so humble for the privilege of being an American. Enjoy the day — most certainly, but as we go our various ways, let us give thanks to those patriots who made our way of life possible.

In 1957 the Fourth of July was celebrated in much the same way as previous generations of Iowans had celebrated it. True, the uniforms of our marching men have changed from those of Civil War days and there are more stars in Old Glory than a century ago. It is also true that world problems have become more complex with each passing year. Nevertheless, the fundamental freedoms still are highly prized and editors, cartoonists, statesmen, and Americans in every walk of life stand ready to proclaim them throughout the land.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN