

Fourth of July in 1860

In 1860, Bedford, the county seat of Taylor County, was a town of almost five hundred people. It had been laid out six years earlier, but the panic of 1857 had paralyzed its prospects for a time. By July, 1860, however, it had recovered, and with the vigor of youth had begun to assume a leadership in the affairs of the county. Buchanan, now Siam, to the southwest, Platteville to the east, Lexington to the north, and Memory to the west were rival villages. Both of the latter have long since disappeared, and the two former, missed by the railroads of a later date, never fulfilled the dreams of their founders.

Bedford at that early day had six general stores, a drug store, a hardware store and tin shop, one hotel, one church belonging to the Missionary Baptists, a schoolhouse, a weekly newspaper, a sawmill, and two steam grist-mills. A crippled blacksmith worked all day at his forge while a trained dog pumped the bellows by means of a tread-wheel contrivance.

Stagecoach lines connected Bedford with Quincy, Illinois, to the east, and with St. Joseph, Missouri, to the south. The arrival of a stagecoach was an event which brought many of the adult portion of the town to the postoffice, there to wait impatiently

while the postmaster removed the mail addressed to Bedford from the sack and carried it into his office. In due time he would call off the names on the letters, and the person to whom a letter was addressed would raise his or her hand and cry "here".

In this growing town, then, where the arrival of the stagecoach was an event, little wonder was it that a proposed celebration of the "Glorious Fourth" in 1860 loomed large in the minds of all. Particularly so since the Bedford Sax Horn Band, organized scarcely two weeks earlier by a German barber who had learned to play in the Fatherland, was slated to head the procession and to furnish music throughout the day.

Couriers on horseback carried the news of the proposed celebration throughout the county. At an early hour on the morning of July 4, 1860, roads leading from the different sections of the country to Bedford were lined with wagons and horses moving toward the county seat. Young men on "spirited mounts", boys on "trusted nags", fathers in "homespun", and mothers and daughters in their "best calico" rode many miles to be on hand early for the celebration.

Soon the dusty streets of the little town were thronged "to their utmost capacity" by a good-natured, pleasure-seeking crowd. In a short time three local doctors acting as marshals of the day formed the crowd into a procession on Main Street.

Headed by the Sax Horn Band and a color bearer with an American flag, the parade, with veterans of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War in the van, followed by lodge members in full regalia, Sabbath school children, ladies and their attendants, gentlemen, and in the rear "carriages, wagons, &c" moved "in good order, to the grove north-east of town, where due preparations had been made for the occasion".

The program began with the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Then the orator of the day, the Hon. J. W. Warner of Leon, aroused anew the patriotism of his audience by his impassioned address. At the conclusion of his extended remarks the entire assemblage found places around a table five hundred feet long, "loaded with all the delicacies and substantials of life that the inner man could desire, or the mind suggest, which were partaken of with a gusto".

At the close of this bounteous picnic dinner the crowd again assembled before the speaker's stand where a flag made by Bedford ladies was presented to Clayton Township for bringing the largest delegation to the celebration. J. H. Turner, of Bedford, then offered the following toast: "The Constitution of the United States: — In its adoption a blessing — in its strict observance our present salvation — in its perpetuation the hope of the world". G. W. Friedley, a local attorney, responded "in an eloquent, and patriotic speech, which caused every

face to brighten with emotions of patriotism, and arouse them from their weariness". A toast to the Pilgrim Fathers whose "patriotism, heroism, and unconquerable fortitude, born and inbred in them, achieved the glorious results we this day celebrate", and another to the "spirit of 1860" closed the speaking program for the day.

Then a huge cake, made at the cost of twenty-five dollars by W. F. Walker, a local citizen, "received the attention of the audience." This cake was four feet high, and among other adornments had fifty-six flags implanted around the base block, each bearing the name of a signer of the Declaration of Independence. As in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, this huge cake divided into tiny pieces fed the multitude.

Throughout the exercises the Bedford Sax Horn Band played alternately the two tunes it had mastered, and the ump ta, ump ta, ump ta ta, of the huge bass horn set feet to keeping time. A choir, too, sang patriotic songs.

Although the day had been hot—indeed, quite the warmest experienced so far that year—it was late afternoon before the crowd dispersed "well pleased but somewhat wearied" with the extended exercises of the day. The local editor estimated that eighteen hundred people had marched in the parade, and a grand total of twenty-five hundred, he said, attended the exercises at the park.

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