

## The Fourth at Webster City

*In the second issue of his Hamilton Freeman, Charles Aldrich described the celebration of Independence Day at the little frontier town of Webster City in 1857. No better commentary upon the character, habits, loyalty, and hopes of the people of that community could have been written. — The Editor.*

“Our folks” celebrated the 81st Anniversary of our National Independence, in good, old-fashioned, patriotic style. The festivities commenced with a Grand Ball at the Willson House, the evening previous. A large number of young people were in attendance, who whiled away the night in the mazes of the gay dance, and only dispersed when the National Salute was fired at sunrise.

At 10 a. m. the Procession was formed on the Public Square, under the direction of the Marshal, Col. JOHN PEAKE, and his assistants. The procession was headed by a Military Company, organized for the occasion, then came the citizens generally, and after these, the Sunday Schools of this vicinity — the whole presenting a very fine appearance. A commodious stand and seats had been erected in the grove just back of town, to which the people marched.

A. MOON, Esq., presided. Rev. J. K. LARGE was introduced to the audience, and opened the exercises with a most eloquent and impressive prayer. J. J. WADSWORTH, Esq., read in a very clear and distinct manner, that "old abolition document," the Declaration of Independence. J. F. DUNCOMBE, Esq., having failed to redeem his promise to deliver the Oration, S. B. ROSENKRANS, Esq., of this village, took the stand and delivered an Address to which he had been able to devote only a few hours of preparation. It was a very fine production, abounding in happy hits and stirring eloquence. He was frequently and loudly applauded, and few speakers could have given better satisfaction to a Webster City audience.

The exercises at the grove were interspersed with the singing of several patriotic songs, by a Choir formed for the occasion in this village. All who had a part assigned them in these proceedings acquitted themselves in a highly creditable manner. After the benediction was pronounced, the procession was again formed, and marched back to the Willson House, where the guests sat down to a bountiful Dinner.

According to custom appropriate toasts were read after dinner, beginning with "The Day we Celebrate." Then followed others to the memory of George Washington, the President of the

United States, the Governor of Iowa, our Army and Navy, the heroes of the Revolution, the Congress of 1776, the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road, and the "Women of the Age in which we Live — May they never forget the blessings of religion, or fail in perpetuating its influences upon our race." To most of these toasts the citizens responded with cheers, though to some they drank in silence. The last Toast, the Pulpit and the Press, was responded to by Rev. Mr. Large, in a short, but neat and appropriate speech.

Several Volunteer Toasts were then offered, in honor of the President of the Day, the Orator, the Ladies, &c., &c., but the following are all we have been able to obtain for publication:

Col. John Peake — He has by his courtesy and noble bearing won the admiration of the men — May he be equally successful in winning the confidence and love of the ladies.

To the above, presented on behalf of the Ladies, the "Col." made a brief but appropriate response. The following sentiment was then read:

The Pioneer Farmers of Hamilton County — Men who bore the unceasing brunt of toil and privation in opening to civilization one of the most fertile and lovely regions of the West — May they live long to enjoy the substantial blessings they have helped to create.

Mr. Peter Lyon was called out to respond to this toast. He was surprised to see such a large and happy audience before him — something he never anticipated when he came to this county. When he came here six years ago, there were but four settlers along the Boone River. No houses here. Provisions were very scarce, and had to be brought from Ft. Des Moines. There was no grist-mill in this vicinity, and he purchased a small hand-mill to grind his corn. He thought this was earning his meal "by the sweat of his brow." He had to use his "thinking cap" then, and he found it a very necessary article. He had frequently seen nearly as many elk grazing on our village plat as there were people before him; and he had shot one only a few rods from the spot he then occupied. He detailed at some length the toils and privations of the early settlers, frequently producing convulsions of laughter among the audience, by his quaint sayings and pithy anecdotes. He had expected to live and die here, with only his few border neighbors around him; but he was pleased beyond the power of expression to see so many increasing evidences of a thrifty civilization about him. When he closed, three hearty cheers were given for the "Old Pioneer."

Judge Maxwell also entertained the audience with some interesting reminiscences of the first

settlements here. He came here to enter land for purposes of speculation, but the great beauty and fertility of the country had induced him to remain and become a farmer. He came down in good strong terms upon "land-sharks," though he admitted having been one to some extent himself. The great want of Hamilton County was practical farmers. He was improving his land as rapidly as possible, and it gave him great pleasure to see so many in the same business. He was a southern man, and he considered the Yankees a shrewd, trafficking, tricky people; but he liked to live among them.

The "Merry Boys of Webster City" came out in the afternoon, in their very fantastic and grotesque costume. They had Border Ruffians, "cullud pussons," Irishmen, Yankees, "milicious ossifers," and a great variety of other characters, all of whom performed their parts in a manner that excited infinite mirth. They danced a Cotillion on the Public Square, and sang two original songs, composed for the occasion, after which they vanished as mysteriously as they had appeared.

The weather was fine, the attendance large, nobody drunk, and every one was pleased with the proceedings from first to last.

CHARLES ALDRICH