

## FOURTH OF JULY IN EARLY DAYS

THE pioneers were patriotic as well as public-spirited and industrious. The first Fourth of July celebration of the town was in 1846, less than four months after the town had a legal existence. The soldiers had left, taking away all the cannon, but cannon improvised from logs, and blacksmiths' anvils, were utilized to make a noise, while the small boy echoed it by charging old smooth-bored, muzzle-loading muskets with bullets picked from cabin logs which had been "peppered" by the soldiers in some of their hilarious moments. There were no cartridges and breech-loaders in that day.

Early in the day, a procession was formed of about two hundred persons—nearly the entire population—which marched to a small grove not far from where the Observatory Building now is. Colonel Tom Baker, the first Prosecuting Attorney of the county, an active Democratic politician and prominent functionary, delivered a fine oration, and William McKay, afterward Judge of the District Court, read the Declaration of Independence. A big banquet was spread, at one dollar a couple. Toasts, repartee, and cheers were abundant, the event winding up with a dance on the lawn in the evening, by the light of the silvery moon. It was a joyful occasion.

A. D. Jones, who surveyed and laid out the town only one month before, subsequently wrote of the affair, that four weeks later he took a census of the entire population, and, among those present, were "eleven young ladies and thirteen young gentlemen who were proper subjects for matrimony, and an old maid by the name of Jemima Scott."

As the census of a month later showed less than three hundred, with a big sprinkling of babies, the presumption is that the celebration was an old-fashioned jollification.

In 1847, the day was celebrated in the well-known Saylor Settlement, near where Saylorville now is. It was largely attended by

settlers of the county. There was a big dinner, impromptu speeches, and a general jollification. John Saylor, on whose claim the festivities were held, came here in 1845. There was nobody between him and British Columbia, except the Red Man. In the rear of his cabin was a beautiful natural grave. He had a permit to furnish hay for the garrison, and embraced the opportunity to develop a farm. Mrs. Saylor was a pioneer of true womanly virtues, and endured privations and trials which would overcome most of the sex to-day. When in a reminiscent mood, she would tell of times when the larder was empty and the family went to bed at night hungry; that for six weeks at a time she was alone, while her husband was away on business, with wolves so bold and plentiful they chased the house dogs to the doors, and would climb up and peer into the windows; that for better sauce, wild crab apples were roasted; that roasted acorns sometimes had to satisfy craving hunger; that honey gathered from the bee trees was the only substitute for sugar available; that once a lot of Indians came and demanded meat. A big club in the hands of her husband cleared them out.

In 1848, extensive preparation was made for a celebration in the grove on George Beebe's farm, up in Madison Township. It was managed on the cooperative plan, by contributions from the old settlers all over the county. The principal manager was Mrs. Beebe, who was a master at such functions, and very popular. She was a good cook, lived in a log cabin, and didn't have many desirable accessories to culinary art. Sometimes the flour, ground in the very uncertain mills, would not be bolted. She fitted an old veil to a dry-goods box, in which to bolt the flour, by shaking it. The feature of this celebration was the dinner, for which the good dames spent a week in preparation. It was said one person dug a sack of potatoes and carried them three miles on his back to add to the menu. At one cabin, salt was solicited. The reply was: "Oh, no! We have no salt!" But it was a splendid affair, and hugely enjoyed. It afforded opportunity to give play to an exuberance of spirit long pent up by their isolation, for cabins two and three miles apart were considered quite neighborly. William H. McHenry, afterward Judge of the District Court, delivered an oration. The day was passed in recreations and mutual exchange of incidents in their pioneer days. There were no fireworks.

In 1851, the steamboat *Caleb Cope*, having run the obstructions of the River Improvement Company, happened to be in port in Des Moines, having brought up from Saint Louis a big load of flour and other food supplies. The people were in patriotic mood, for nothing is more conducive to good humor than a well-loaded stomach. The *Cope* was chartered for an excursion up the river. The *Star* of that date says:

"The Des Moines Band was there, and the light fantastic toe brought into requisition. Our city belles and beaux understand that performance well—in fact, are hard to beat."

The presence of the "Des Moines Band" on that occasion should be accepted in a Pickwickian sense, the instrumental music at The Fort then being two or three fiddlers.

While I think of it, the fiddle was a prominent factor in many ways in those days, and some notable pioneers were very good fiddlers. "Old Joe" Williams, as he was called by the lawyers, who started in as Territorial Judge in the lower part of the territory, and moved north and west as counties were organized, until Polk County was added to his district. He was somewhat eccentric, but opposite to Judge McFarland, for he was a radical prohibitionist, and made special effort wherever he went to get the lawyers to sign the temperance pledge. He was an excellent lawyer and judge. He was also a good musician, played several instruments, but the fiddle was his favorite. At places where he held court, he would join the lawyers in social gatherings and entertain them with songs and his fiddle.

He was once a candidate for Supreme Judge, with S. C. Hastings as his opponent. At the same time, George W. Jones and Thomas Wilson were candidates for United States Senator. At the nominating caucus the Judge and Jones won out. The defeated fellows were deeply chagrined. Said Wilson to his friends: "If I had been beaten by a high-minded, honorable man, I could have stood it without a murmur, but to be defeated by a dancing-master will ruin my reputation forever."

Hastings retorted with: "Wilson, you were defeated by a high-minded, honorable gentleman—a dancing-master. I congratulate you. For me there is no consolation; a d—d fiddler beat me."

The allusion of Wilson to the "dancing-master" will be appreciated by old-timers, who knew George W. Jones when in his best Chesterfieldian days.

As a rule, the National Holiday was fittingly recognized by the pioneers, according to their environments, usually by neighborhood gatherings, with little martial spirit. The sky-rocket, camion cracker and toy pistol had not arrived. The enjoyment was more satisfactory than the general experience at the present time.

Des Moines has never given much concerted recognition of the day as a body politic. It is usually observed scatteringly by societies and families, in picnics and social functions.

In 1876, was one of the most elaborate displays ever held in the city. It was estimated that not less than twenty-five thousand persons were in attendance. Governor Kirkwood was President of the Day, Rev. A. L. Frisbie Chaplain, Doctor E. R. Hutchins and B. F. Montgomery of Council Bluffs the orators. The speakers' stand was at the old Fair Grounds near 'Coon River, on lower Ninth Street. There was booming of cannon, bands of music galore, elaborate street decoration, a big procession, and exuberant enthusiasm everywhere. The day was to wind up with a splendid display of fireworks on the east bank of the Des Moines River, above the dam. The entire population had gathered on the West Side bluff to witness it. The day had been hot and sultry, several persons succumbing to the heat. Just at the opening of the fireworks, with scarce a moment's warning, there was a cloudburst of water, and for twenty minutes it seemed as if the very bottom of the firmament had dropped out. There was no wind, no lightning, no thunder—nothing but a sudden swash. There were no sewers, and few streets paved. Bird's Run, an open ravine, was the natural drain for all the north and northwest part of the city, and it quickly became a very demon. For fifty feet in width it swept everything in its way. Every wooden bridge over all street crossings from Eleventh to the river was carried off; at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue, it tore away nearly a whole building lot. The sudden drenching of the people put a damper on the closing scene of what was a notable celebration.

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