

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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1843 was a dry Fourth of July
By Jay Graybeal

Nineteenth century Fourth of July celebrations were usually boisterous community affairs. The day-long event included a parade, speeches and a dinner, frequently punctuated by gunfire, laughter and an occasional fist fight.

For a brief period at mid-century, a national abstinence movement took hold in America and brought about a change in the way holidays were celebrated. Local total abstinence societies called on their respective communities to bar liquor from all events. A total abstinence society was formed in Taneytown in 1841. Their minute book in the collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County contains a description of the "dry" Fourth of July of 1843 written by Peter Kephart:

"This was a proud day for Taneytown – a day to cheer the hearts of every Patriot, Philanthropist and Christian. According to previous arrangements prepared by the Total A. Society of the place and seconded by the popular voice of the community, Notice was given that the anniversary of our National Independence would be celebrated on Temperance principles. The community in general was invited, and special invitations were extended to the Taneytown Guards and a large number of the surrounding Temperance Societies to join us on the occasion. Preparations were made. The day arrives. – The morning slumber of our drowsy citizens were disturbed at break of day by the ringing of bells, firing of guns, &c.

"The Patriotic and liberal minded farmers of the surrounding neighborhood came pouring into town with large contributions of provisions for the dinner of the day. Yea, and already the proceeding evening, the invincibles of our town were seen traversing our streets, collecting similar contributions and bearing them to one common depository for the same purpose.

"At 9 o'clk. a.m. our Total A. Society met to make arrangements for the day. Next was seen a mounted escort of some 20 or 30 of the bone and sinew of our Society, parading our streets, waiting to receive the Societies from abroad. Soon word is brought that the Societies and delegations from Uniontown, Linganore, Sams Creek &c. are approaching in a body. Off goes our escort like the Flying Artillery and soon returned with such a string of carriages and vehicles of various kinds that many begin to think there was no *other* end to it. Meanwhile the citizens of the surrounding county poured in from every direction, till we could scarcely see the town for the people in it.

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"By this time the military company was formed and taking the lead in our escort which had now dismounted. They proceeded in a body to meet and conduct to town the Societies from Double Pipe Creek, Haugh's Church, Key's School House and Middleburgh. And soon our noble escort is seen returning, followed by a huge *Something*, enough to make the cold chills run over some of the brave *Guards* themselves, if they had looked behind them, but soldiers never do that. Various and amusing were the conjections among the astonished spectators – What the *creature* might be? The most common of which was, that it was a large elephant covered with canvas. We watched its approach with thrilling interest – till we came to the conclusion from the steadiness of its pace and the manner in which it pursued the even tenor of its way, that the *brastic* whatever might be its name or character, was at least sober and therefore harmful.

"Our conclusion proved correct, for on nearer inspection it turned out to be nothing less than the Mammoth Temperance ball of the Double Pipe Creek Society! – and the motto "with heart and soul this ball we roll," was visibly inscribed upon hundreds and thousands of happy countenances this day. This ball was followed by large numbers of the sturdy sons, fair daughters and blooming youths, composing the above named Societies. This procession was then formed under the direction of D. W. Naille Esq. as Chief Marshall, assisted by Mr. Geo. Landers, of Double Pipe Creek, according to the following orders Viz: 1st Taneytown Guards – 2 Music 3 Clergy, speakers, Readers, &c. – 4. The Ball – 5. societies from abroad – 6. Music – 7. Total Abstinence and Juvenile Societies of Taneytown – 8. Citizens and strangers in General. In this order the procession moved off to a spring and grove a short distance from town, where proper arrangements were made for the exercises of the day.

"After partaking of a cool draught from the 'Pure Fountain – No Substitute,' we repaired to the stand and seats. The meeting was organized by calling Mr. C. Birnie to preside, assisted by the Marshalls of the day, and a number of other gentlemen as vice president, and appointing the Rev. S. Sentman, Chaplain of the day.

"Meeting was opened with singing and prayers, and the Declaration of Independence read. This was followed by a lucid and eloquent address appropriate to the day and occasion by Sam'l. D. Lacompte, Esq. in which he showed conclusively that virtue and intelligence form the safeguard of our independence; showing at the same time the indissoluble connection between intemperance and vice, and temperance and virtue. This won for himself unfading laurels by the general satisfaction he rendered; of which, the gratification expressed by all classes and parties is the best evidence.

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"Next followed the dinner, a matter of no little importance to all present – and especially to the Committee of Arrangements, for here the contest was to be waged; and here the great-question was to be decided, whether the amplitude of their provision and the liberality of their friends or the sharpened appetites of their esteemed guests, should prove triumphant. To our great gratification, however, the former prevailed. After dinner the meeting was again call'd to order and efficiently addressed by Mr. T. Curry and the Revd. Mr. Perre, more particularly upon the subject of Temperance; and the result of the whole was the addition of eighty-seven names during the day and evening to the Total Abstinence Pledge. The procession was then again formed, marched to town, paraded the principle streets and after interchanging mutual thanks and congratulations, the procession was dismissed and the multitude dispersed.

"Thus was celebrated the 67th anniversary of our Independence in Taneytown; and tho' the numbers of persons present was variously estimated at from 2,000 to 2,500, yet not a single circumstance occurred to mar the harmony and happiness of the company – not an angry word, not an unkind feeling indulged to imbitter the recollection of this day's exercises."

The 1843 Taneytown celebration was typical of those at mid-century. The Abstinence Movement shortly thereafter peaked and communities soon returned to "wet" celebrations.

Photo credit: Historical Society of Carroll County Collection

Photo caption: David W. Naill, Chief Marshall, Taneytown Fourth of July Parade, 1843.