

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Taneytown 4th of July Speech"

Carroll County Times article for 3 July 1994

By Joe Getty

The traditional 4th of July celebration in Carroll County has included family get-togethers, community picnics, parades and speeches for many generations. During the 19th century, community leaders organized events to display the skills of local orators in recognition of our most patriotic holiday.

A speech delivered by the Rev. William H. Luckenbach at the Taneytown Centennial celebration of American Independence illustrates the patriotic themes and Revolutionary reminiscences popular in 4th of July oratory. Luckenbach served as pastor of the Taneytown Lutheran Church from 1875 to 1878, and based his speech on themes about the early history of Taneytown as gathered from long-time residents of the community.

This speech was published in 1894 as part of The Carroll Record Histories that are being published this fall in book format by the Historical Society of Carroll County. The book will include a 1994 historical supplement of family, business and organizational histories compiled by donors to the publication project. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact the Historical Society at 848-6494.

An excerpt from Rev. Luckenbach's speech as delivered on July 4, 1876, to the citizens of Taneytown follows:

"Mr. President and Fellow Citizens - We have not assembled here to day to indulge in acclamations of party triumph, - to celebrate the successes of partisan warfare. For the time being we are neither Republicans nor Democrats, but simply American citizens, a privilege coveted by millions who have never pressed our soil, or basked under our sun, an honor far greater than any that distinguishes the royal autocrats of Europe.

"We are here for the worthy purpose of giving expression to the sentiment of patriotism, which like the electric shock which every one feels who holds the same chain, thrills the nerves of forty millions of freemen. Certainly we would deserve to be shamed, if, while the entire nation is ablaze with patriotic enthusiasm, we failed to let OUR voices blend with the universal joy.

"The spirit of the day we celebrate can only be that of joy and gladness. From the last midnight hour of last year (1875) our whole country has been in a remarkable state of patriotic effervescence. Our cannon have never boomed more loudly, our bunting has never more proudly rolled out its stars and stripes to the breeze, our bells have never chimed more sweetly, and our doxologies to the beneficent Giver of all blessing have never been sung more heartily, than since Dec. 31, 1875.

"In city, town and hamlet, the first sounds that broke upon the ears of men, women and children, awakened from sleep in the first hour of this year of grace, 1876, were the notes of 'Auld Lang Syne' and the first thought they suggested to ten thousand minds was, 'we have been a nation one hundred years.' From that hour to the present moment the enthusiasm has been growing and expanded till, culminating, as it does to-day the land over, in grandest demonstrations, the world beyond our shores looks on and wonders whether we are not patriotically insane.

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"In accordance with the proclamation of the President of the United States, we are assembled, fellow citizens!, not so much to indulge in loud professions of loyalty to the government, as to recite so far as we have been able to collate it, the history of our locality for the last hundred years and more. . .

"Located, as it was in revolutionary and colonial times, on the great -route of travel between the Northern and Southern sections of our country, Taneytown, in all probability, witnessed more of the conflict between Tory and Federal partisans than has been recorded, or remembered. The redcoats thronged along yonder highway, striking terror into the hearts of the people while making for some distant objective point.

"Again and again the hated rebels, whom we are proud to call our 'forefathers,' traversed the road, hither and thither, poorly armed and equipped, and suffering wonderful privations, inconveniences and disadvantages which would have appalled men of less courage and faith, and would have crushed even such heroes, if their aim had been less worthy than that of carving out their independence. It is unspeakable, the amount of suffering endured by our forefathers in their long and severe struggle for the blessings of freedom.

"The feelings naturally occasioned in either foe toward the other, in those bloody times, was very bitter. The late Mrs. Mary Galt, whose death occurred some thirty years ago, used to take pride in exhibiting to interested visitors several bed quilts which, in the days of the revolution, had been perforated by the sword, or bayonet, of some Federalist who had been hunting, not wild game turkeys, ducks, pheasants, deer, or other juicy meats for hungry palates, - but Tories.

"A Tory could not be tolerated in or about Taneytown. A minion of George III was a very objectionable personage in this vicinity. He was 'spotted.' It was more necessary for him than for any other offensive character in the community to 'hold his tongue.' And woe to him, if, inadvertently expressing his Toryistic sympathy, he attempted to hide himself from the patriotic wrath of his neighbors, under the coverlets of his wife's or mother's, spare bed; scented by some irate Federalist, that spare-bed would surely need washing by said wife, or mother, within less than twenty-four hours."

The Historical Society is publishing "The Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities" during 1994. The book will include a supplement of family, business and organizational histories prepared by donors to this publication project. If you would like additional information about this project, contact the Historical Society at (410) 848-6494.

Photo Caption 1: The Rev. William H. Luckenbach delivered the 4th of July address at the Taneytown celebration of the American Centennial in 1876. His speech was later published in the newspaper as part of the The Carroll Record Histories and will be reprinted this year in a book being published by the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Photo Caption 2: The traditional 4th of July celebration in Carroll County included family gatherings, community picnics, parades and speeches. This 1888 photograph from northern Carroll County shows the typical entertainments at a picnic including lawn tennis, and croquet in a setting decorated with plenty of American flags.