

## "The Amphions Hold a Fete Champete"

Carroll County Times Article for 14 July 1996

By Jay A. Graybeal

Although our county Court House is generally thought of as a place where justice is (or isn't) meted out, the site has also been used for other purposes. On July 5, 1875 a group of local young people who called themselves "The Amphions" held a fete there. The event was described by former Times editor J. Leland Jordan in his Time Flies column of March 5, 1943.

Some years ago-68 to be exact, Westminster had an orchestra known as the Amphions. Like most other organizations of that day and this, it needed funds. Instead of raising these funds among its membership to carry on, it immediately struck up an idea old as hills, and as modern as a Churchill tank-that of letting the public pay the bill.

A fete was planned and the high sounding name Fete Champete, was chosen. The Court House and lawn was to be the place, and the affair was planned to be opened on July 5-a day-late celebration of the 4th; the year was 1875.

As a preliminary, or shall we call it a bit of clever advertising, there appeared on our streets, a little publication of four pages, known as The Amphions's Journal-Mary B. Shellman, editress, and Willie T. Hoppe publisher. At that time Hoppe was publishing another paper (monthly, too,), known as "The Boys Rights." Many exposes were promised in the Journal, and according to the editorial column of the American Sentinel of that week "what less than a shower of hurtling hand-grenades should be expected from Miss Shell-man." To think they spoke of hand-grenades in those days. Terrible!

Evidently plans were carefully laid, for the affair opened with "great éclat with several thousand persons being present . . ." according to the local press. (In those days there was an ornamental iron fence atop a stone wall around the Court House grounds). From a published account, the fete was one of great brilliance. The Democratic Advocate stated that "The main entrance was illuminated by two hundred gas jets, in a half circle, and a handsome chandelier, the supports of the circle being entwined with American Flags. Hundreds of Chinese lanterns were suspended around three sides of the Court House yard, which with innumerable gas lights, produced a scene unequalled for beauty. The lower and upper porticos of the Court House were illuminated by large chandeliers and other lights."

Those assisting at the refreshment tables, the handkerchief booth, the post office, and other booths of entertainment were costumed-representing "China, Poland, America, Brother Jonathan, George and Martha Washington, flower girls, the Indian chief Modoc, and many others." Dr. Charles Billingslea read the Declaration of Independence from the lower portico; the combined choirs of the town sang patriotic songs from the upper portico, and a program of music was presented by the Frizellburg and National Grays bands. The grand display of fireworks concluded the first successful evening.

Visitors were present on the opening night from Baltimore, Frederick, Reisterstown, Hanover, York, Elkton, Belair, Easton, and many other points distant, as well as from all sections of the county.

The gala affair was continued each night of that week, concluding with a "grand masquerade and pyrotechnic display" on the night of the 10th. Music on these evenings was furnished by the Uniontown Brass Band, the Mount Pleasant Band, a band from Manchester, and surprisingly enough, by the

Amphions themselves. The little Journal appeared on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

In the issue of the closing day there appear a Poem, "Our boys" which I intended to publish with this account-but alas, there is no more space. In our next Times Flies, shall publish the contents of several of these issues-they may be of interest.

While glancing over these issues and the accounts in the local press, we were wondering just what Judge Boylan and Judge Parke would think of having a rustic fete in the Court House and on the grounds today.

Several copies of The Amphion's Journal and The Boy's Rights newspapers survive in the Historical Society's collection. For the most part the papers contained humorous poetry including a lengthy one called "Our Boys" mentioned by Jordan in his column. Jordan saw fit to reprint the poem in his next column and I will do the same.

Photo caption: The Carroll County Court House at the turn of the century, scene of "Fete Champete" in July 1875. Historical Society of Carroll County.