

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
30 June 1991

Centennial celebration recalled
by Joe Getty

The Fourth of July is one of our most cherished holidays and the history of Carroll County documents many festive and joyous celebrations to mark this patriotic holiday. Our nation's Centennial celebration in 1876 was a major event in Carroll County and our local communities were treated to parades, orations, decorated streets and evening illuminations.

People who drive down West Green Street today pass one of the monuments erected by the City of Westminster for the Centennial. Most people don't notice the small brown stone on Belle Grove Square at the corner of West Green and Bond Streets. Those who do notice it may wonder about its history.

We can learn about this monument by turning to the July 8, 1876, edition of the Westminster newspaper, the American Sentinel, and reading what the local correspondent wrote about its dedication ceremony:

Belle Grove Square, July 4, 1876.

After reading of the Centennial celebrations of many places, I do not think a more beautiful ceremony adorned the glorious 4th anywhere than our own people performed by planting a Centennial Memorial Tree and Stone in our public square. To Messrs. D. N. Henning and James H. Diffenbaugh the credit of this beautiful idea and its execution under the auspices of the City Council belong. The tree is one of the span oak variety and looks thrifty. The stone is an American shield of spotless American Marble, bearing the usual stripes with thirty seven stars surrounding this inscription: 1776 JULY 4th 1876.

It rests on a brown stone base on the front of which is the name of P. H. IRWIN, Mayor, and on one side are the names of the Committee who conceived the idea and carried it into execution; D. H. Henning, James H. Diffenbaugh and B. Frank Crouse. The whole was the work of our promising young sculptor Mr. John Beaver, who made it in a day and a half.

Promptly at 6 ½ o'clock P.M. the tree was planted, a number of our citizens who were present, including the Mayor, and several of the Councilmen, requesting the privilege of throwing a few shovelfuls of dirt around it. As soon as the tree was planted Mr. Henning, a chairman of the committee arose and reported the work to the city fathers as follows:

'We have assembled here in pursuance of a part of the regular exercises for the celebration of this Centennial day, to carry out a purpose of the Honorable Mayor and

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City Council of Westminster, which is one of the most appropriate acts that could be performed by us on this occasion, and most honorable alike to its performed by us on this occasion, and most honorable alike to its performers and its purposes, to-wit: The erection of a monument in commemoration of the first century of the American Republic, and as a testimonial of the gratitude and care we owe and feel for its founders, the men of 1776, who have passed away and left to us this country's birth; ushered into life as it was amidst death and war and want, the fruit of many a hotly fought and well contested battle field and wisdoms council chambers, baptized by the blood, sufferings and desolation of a race of men and women whose like has never been surpassed in grandeur, - won by such heroism and devotion to their cause as have placed their names so high upon the roll of fame that all the world may see them, and there to say as long as earthly time shall be, and such as martyr's only are possessed of. In memory of our country's infancy and its youth which has not passed away, its sturdy growth and self-reliance, its independence from its own well developed resources, its illustration of civil and religious liberty, and the truth of a people's self-government have challenged the wonder and respect of nations that were old before its birth. In memory of this glorious day which has dawned upon us, crowned with all the jewels of a nation's good, this day which marks the first century of our country's high and noble missions among the nations of the earth, will be a epoch in our history for all its history and the manner of celebration by us will be looked upon by future historians as the test of our appreciation of its institutions. This day is a point from which we may turn and looking back compare ourselves as citizens with our fathers and, mending whatever errors we have made, draw fresh inspiration from their lives for the future. We have raised here no column of stone or metal, for they are but dead marks that belong to the past from the date of their erection - but we have planted here a tree - a thing of life - that it may be a living link uniting the past and present with the future, that its young roots may ramify the earth and draw there from its life as does our country's principals from our own hearts, and grow in strength and beauty, that our children and our children's children may in time to come beneath its shade find in every whispering leaf stirred by the free air an oracle to teach them how to live as free men and their fathers and to teach them trust in Him who holds the destiny of nations in His hand.'

Mayor Irwin briefly responded: 'MY FELLOW CITIZENS: As the representative of your city authorities it is my duty as well as pleasure to sanction and accept this your action, and my only regret is that this duty was not committed to an abler head than mine. We celebrate today the grandest event in our country's history, and we cannot say or do too much to commemorate it and keep it fresh in the minds of our people. One hundred years ago three millions of people were struggling for a national existence. Today forty millions of people send up their glad shouts from a free and independent nation. May this tree which you have planted, like our glorious republic flourish and grow strong, striking its roots deep down into this soil as the love of our institutions has taken root in the hearts of the people. May it widely spread out its branches, affording protection to those who seek its shelter as does our glorious country to the weary, friendless exile of every nation. Watered and nourished by the life-giving dews and sunshine of heaven, may it grow

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stronger and stronger, so that it may be able to withstand the storms of nature, as has our noble ark of liberty withstood the fierce tempests of the passions of men – May the fruits of this tree, like the influences which go forth from this land of freedom, fall upon fruitful soils, and other trees grown from this, and other republics from out those influences, until liberty is proclaimed throughout the world. Again fellow citizens we accept this tree from your hands and acknowledge your work to be the act of the city, since it was authorized by the authorities of the city, but at the same time, gentlemen of the committee we thank you most cordially for the beautiful idea of planting this Centennial Tree, which originated with you, and which has done so much for the commemoration of this day.'

At the conclusion of this it began to rain and further ceremonies had to be abandoned. This is certainly an interesting feature of our Centennial celebration and deserves to be held in everlasting remembrance. The tree and stone are now the property of all of our citizens to watch and defend, and we hope any attempt to injure either will be promptly reported and punished."

To those who know its history, the small brown monument serves as a reminder of the patriotism of our forebears and the significance of the 4th of July.