

It was a lavish affair for the 1914 celebration

By Nancy Dingler

Sunday, July 17, 2005

The July 4, 1914, Independence day celebratory event was topped off by a patriotic concert in Fairfield's ballpark, conducted by Vacaville's Brass Band.

American and Japanese fireworks began around 10 p.m., just as the band completed its repertoire.

Fairfield's population was around 900. More than 6,000 Solano County residents crowded into the city to celebrate the dedication of the county seat's new courthouse. It was completed in 1911. (The wheels of government turned slowly at the beginning of the 20th century, just as they do now.)

The magnificent architectural achievement still stands today, majestically peering from its Texas Street and Union Avenue location, across from the newest county edifice that was dedicated this past April. The celebration to dedicate the courthouse in combination with this nation's birthday put the 2005 ceremonies to shame.

Local citizens felt it was way overdue to have a real party to celebrate the completion of the Greek revival building, designed by architects C. Hemmings and W.A. Jones. The Solano Republican in April 1914 noted committees had formed and money raised.

The committee to invite state notables invited Gov. Hiram Johnson but he couldn't make a solid commitment because of his schedule.

In the May 8 edition, a story ran that revealed "The Suisun portion of the finance committee secured about \$1,000 in a day last week for the celebration of July 4th." The supervisors donated \$500 to the cause.

By May 22, the committees had been firmly established and the program began to take shape. Charles F. Wyer assured county residents "a beautifully decorated building and some extensive advertising for their home county as well."

"Owing to the dedication of the Court House, this celebration is a countywide affair, in which the entire county should take an active interest, and any and everybody throughout the county is invited to participate in the affair, either by entering floats or decorated automobiles, in the parade, or any manner they chose, but, above all, COME!"

The ladies of the community planned a barbecue. Local orchardist Lewis Pierce had been prevailed upon "to furnish a riding and roping series of cowboy events and will collect as good a show as can be secured in California."

A huge dance pavilion was planned as well as ball games. Suisun City's new deep water harbor was to host the water sports, including "some fast motor boats ... to win honors if possible." In the May 29 edition of the Solano Republican, the headline banner boasted, "More Than Three Thousand Dollars Donated to Make the Celebration a Great Big Success."

Getting the governor to commit was becoming an increasing problem so the committee contacted Judges McLaughlin, Samuel Shortridge and Emmet Sewell in the hopes one of these men would be able to attend the ceremony.

The Wednesday Club ladies were put in charge of selecting the "Goddess of Liberty," while A.C. Tilman was charged with soliciting floats. He reported that there would be "some nifty floats when the parade forms on July 4th."

In June, Miss Della Sherburne was picked to be the Goddess of Liberty, surrounded by a court of Mrs. Doris White, Ruth Morrill, Madelyn Lenahan and Dorothy Sparks. Frank Trainor and Lester Heermann were the court's pages.

The greatly anticipated day dawned as a large contingent of citizens from Vallejo joined the celebration. The courthouse had been lavishly decorated by Mr. Sadler who "surely deserves praise for his treatment of the building," the Solano Republican said. The crowd expressed delight, as never having seen a more beautiful building and decorations at one time.

Festivities began at 9:30 a.m. as participants in the parade gathered on Great Jones, Taylor and Madison streets on their way to Texas Street. They marched past the courthouse, turned on to Union Street, marched around Suisun City and then turned around to march back to Fairfield.

Four bands led the divisions: the Winters Brass Band, the Vacaville Brass Band, the Twin Peaks Fife and Drum Corps and the Imperial Concert Band. The merchants and fraternal lodges had outdone themselves with thought and much work on the floats.

"The parade was certainly one to be remembered. It was bright and beautiful and displayed the wealth of labor and some very original designs. Exclamations of delight were heard on every hand as it passed. In close ranks, it was over a mile in length."

Pacific Portland Cement, the company that established the town of Cement, presented

a beautiful industrial float consisting of a large gilded wagon bearing a water tank made of cement, silo and even samples of products manufactured by the company. The float was drawn by six "fine fat mules." Suisun Hardware Company won second place for commercial floats.

The Wednesday Club won first prize for best decorated automobile. The Goddess of Liberty and her court adorned the car, drawn by six white horses.

Accompanying the Goddess float, were little George and Martha Washington, garbed in royal robes.

The parade ended back at the courthouse, where the Rev. F.M. Washburn gave the invocation, followed by Chairman J.S. Brown, who introduced Supervisor H.J. Widenman.

Widenman gave a history lesson of all the courthouses of the county from 1850 to the present date, with costs and other interesting data. Then the keynote speaker, Charles F. Stern, a commissioner of the State Highway Department, was introduced.

Obviously Hiram Johnson could not attend. The highlight of the ceremony was when Brown, after a short speech, turned the keys of the courthouse over to the people of Solano County. The crowd dispersed for lunch or went to watch the horse cart races.

Afternoon entertainment opened with the much anticipated Grand Rodeo and Wild West Show. Events included bull riding, bull dogging, bronco busting, relay race, potato-sack race, Roman race, goat tying contest and trick and fancy roping. Track and field sports were hosted at the ball park. Suisun City held the water sports, including swimming races and high dives.

After the fireworks and concert, there were two grand balls at the Open-Air Pavilion in Suisun City and the Majestic Hall in Fairfield.

Indeed, an exhausting and fine celebration it was.

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