

# Remembering past Independence Days

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Celebrating July Fourth with a lavish display involving the whole community has a long tradition in Vacaville.

There have been years, though, when the demands of harvest time did not allow people to plan an official celebration.

July 4, 1883, was one such occasion. In a remarkable feat of typesetting, the Vacaville Reporter on June 30 decided to print the Declaration of Independence on its front page in the shape of the Liberty Bell.

This was accompanied by the following article: "When in the course of human events the people of Vacaville, Elmira, Winters, etc., are so busy with their fruit crop that they have no time to assemble themselves together to celebrate our nation's birthday, the REPORTER feels that they should at least read the Declaration of Independence, hence we publish it this week in rather novel shape."

The following year, several committees found the time to plan a celebration which was announced in the newspaper on June 28, 1884:

"Many will be pleased to learn that the Fourth will be celebrated at Oiler's Grove, under the auspices of the Prohibition Club of Vacaville. Extensive preparations for the event are being made, and the evidences are that a large crowd will be present to participate. ...."

Speeches formed an important part of all July 4 celebrations and speakers were hired from far away to provide an inspirational or educational view of this holiday as it was in 1884.

"Talented speakers have been engaged for the occasion, and no one who can spare the time should fail to be in attendance. A visit to the grounds will amply pay one, if there is no other inducement."

But fun and enjoyment still made up the major part of the festivities: "Roller skating during the day and a grand dance at night is on the programme (sic)."

The celebration of 1898 proved to be a major event in Vacaville's history. In addition to

the observance of July Fourth, the newly built high school was to be dedicated on this day.

The Parade Committee, the Bicycle Parade Committee, the Committee on Organizing Dewey's Juvenile Army, the Committee on Horribles, the Tug War Committee, the Committee on Distribution of Prizes, the Decoration Committee, Platform Committee, Committee on Grounds, and Committee on Fireworks worked for months to prepare for this important event.

A 13-gun salute at 5 a.m. began the day, followed by street concerts, the parade, ceremonies on the high school grounds including a musical program and a basket lunch at noon.

The afternoon continued with "The Horribles," a mock parade on Main Street with prizes awarded for Best Group (Dewey's Juvenile Army), Best Horrible (Awkward Squad, led by Frank Eversole, captain), and Best Representation of a Character (won by James Chittenden and Nate Holt).

The dedication of the new high school came next. Speeches and prayers by the Rev. H.E. Jewett and Rev. G.G. Eldrige were followed by Miss Oritta Ferguson, who raised the flag while the band played "Red, White, and Blue."

Tug of War and funny features, such as the wheelbarrow race, followed. The prettiest baby was awarded a gold bib pin. And finally, festivities ended with a fireworks display and the Firemen's ball at Walker's Hall, where the dancing didn't end until 4 o'clock in the morning.

Therefore, in its next edition on July 9, 1898, the Vacaville Reporter could proudly proclaim: "Our Natal Day - An Immense Crowd Gathered in Vacaville on July Fourth From All The Surrounding Country.

"Monday will be long remembered by the people of Vacaville and those from surrounding towns who visited here. It was one of the best, if not the best, celebration the people of this city have ever witnessed.

"The day was an exceptionally fine one although perhaps just a little too warm.

"At an early hour the people from the surrounding country began to arrive and at 10 o'clock the streets were crowded.

"The grand parade was all that it had been advertised to be. In fact, it was highly complimented by every one who witnessed it. Very nearly 500 people participated in

this part of the program.”

This parade, led by Mayor Frank H. Buck and Judges Sen. W.B. Parker and J.M. Arnold of Vacaville, H. Steinmiller of Dixon and W.H. Gregory of Winters, included Dewey’s Juvenile Army (young boys dressed in uniform), the Elmira Home Guards in uniform, a float representing the battleship Oregon, and the Liberty Car with Ora Stattler as Goddess of Liberty, surrounded by girls representing the states and territories.

“The success of the splendid management of the parade is due to the Grand Marshal O.H. Allison of Elmira, and his (25) aids, who kept everything in its place and saw that all worked in harmony.”

A very experienced grand marshall, Orestes Humboldt Allison of Elmira always presented an impressive picture leading a parade, as his nephew Leslie Allison remembered:

“There was a character if ever there was one - by any standards a hale fellow, well met ... His finest hour came when he dressed in his Knight Templar uniform, astride a fractious horse, led the July Fourth parade, followed by the Elmira Band ... which was in turn followed by the Drill Team. Who cared on that festive day if the band blew a few klinkers and members of the drill team were out of step?

“The sight of Uncle Resty in perfect command of his unruly mount made so by his frequent use of the spurs, his 3-foot long goatee-type red beard split in the middle with half streaming out behind in the breeze was enough to set the mood. That beard, incidently, (sic) streaming out over each shoulder, was inconspicuous at all other times as he tucked it in over his shirt collar and down inside his undershirt almost to his waist, and of course, his large red nose leading the way.”

The day proved to be a success all around. And so The Reporter concluded its report: “No drunkenness was to be seen throughout the day and not a single arrest was made by the officers. Everyone seemed bent upon enjoying the day to their best ability and apparently all succeeded.”

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