

The Canal Winchester Sesquicentennial Celebration

The Village of Canal Winchester traces her founding to November 5, 1828, when Reuben Dove and John Colman filed the plat for Winchester, Ohio, at the Fairfield County Courthouse in Lancaster, Ohio. Details regarding the beginning of Canal Winchester and her centennial celebration in 1928 were the subject of Tidbit #10. Fifty years after that centennial celebration, in 1978, the village prepared to celebrate her sesquicentennial.

The May 31, 1978, Times reported that: "Through the efforts of the Canal Winchester Area Historical Society and a special steering committee made up of community residents, the annual Labor Day Celebration is being transformed into something with far more excitement and flair than it has been in years. The traditional Labor Day parade and festivities sponsored by the Canal Winchester Athletic Boosters will be supplemented by a community celebration accenting the historic significance of the village." The article went on to state that "this year's event will be particularly exciting in light of the fact that it marks the 150th anniversary of Canal Winchester, the sesquicentennial."

The theme chosen for the parade was "Old Time Canal Days." Plans were made for an old fashioned street festival with activities reminiscent of the early 1800's. The article requested that anyone willing to serve on a subcommittee contact the organizers. It also stated the need for a "long flatbed wagon that could be used as a stage and some horses or ponies for use in the festival."

The July 19th Times detailed plans for the upcoming Labor Day event. Canal Winchester citizens were urged to forget going away for the Labor Day weekend because staying in town would be much more fun. The 150th birthday of the village would be celebrated in "an unforgettable burst of excitement" at the Sesquicentennial Celebration. Activities would be held on High Street downtown and on the grounds and parking lots of the Huntington National Bank, Faith United Methodist Church and the municipal building. Opening ceremonies on Friday evening were to include the crowning of Mr. and Mrs. Preservation – Dr. and Mrs. Walter Peer were chosen to be the honored pair. The many booths would open on Saturday morning. Events scheduled for Saturday included the judging of the contests and games. Sunday's activities would include a 10K run, the Aladdin Shrine clowns, the launching of a hot air balloon, and the beauty pageant. The Labor Day Parade would be held Monday, along with a meet the team session, and a band performance. The men were encouraged to "nurture their beards" for the beard growing contest. The article suggested that "everyone should think about wearing old fashioned clothing. Some people have started sewing already."

The August 16th and August 23rd issues of The Times gave details of the special events planned for the celebration of the sesquicentennial. The cutting of a huge birthday cake would open the festivities at 7 p.m. on Friday, September 1st. Plans for the four day event featured food, games, contests, the sale of crafts and memorabilia, entertainment, and even a disco dance. The article promised that something would be "going on almost continuously from September 1 – 4 in the heart of Canal Winchester." Many of the local organizations were to have booths along High Street, which was to be blocked off. Fireworks were scheduled for 10 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday nights. The highlight of Monday would be the traditional Labor Day Parade, which was to include an antique car parade.

Contests to be judged included new and historic quilts, home skills (canning, baking, sewing, knitting, macramé, crocheting), art, beard growing, and authentic costumes. Anyone could enter by just showing up at the designated time. The home skills contest would be judged on Friday afternoon, but all others on Saturday. Competitive games were to include frog jumping, pie eating, stilt walking, egg tossing, and bubble gum blowing. One special game planned was the opportunity to hit local public officials with cream pies.

For those persons interested in volunteering to work in the booths of the various organizations, such as the Music Boosters, Athletic Boosters, Boy Scouts, and others, or helping with other areas of the celebration, it was suggested that they contact the appropriate booth chairman or celebration committee chairman. It was also mentioned that some organizations had not yet paid their booth fee. The fee for Canal Winchester organizations was \$50 and \$65 for private individuals and organizations from outside the village.

The August 30th Times detailed the four-day schedule, from the 10 a.m. Friday deadline for items being judged in the home skills contest to be at the Huntington Bank basement to the Boosters Raffle at 6 p.m. on Monday. Although the celebration ended at 6 p.m. on Monday, it continued until midnight on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Many activities were on the schedule for the entire weekend. An exhibit of historical paintings, photos and 3-dimensional items of historic and contemporary Canal Winchester scenes was on display in the Huntington Bank lobby from noon to 6 p.m. Friday through Monday. Booths of the various organizations were open the entire celebration. The Athletic Boosters sponsored a flea market; no reservations were needed, but exhibitors had to supply their own tables. An antique show was held at the high school. Fifteen dealers would display glassware, quilts, coverlets, primitives, and country and Victorian furniture. The \$1 entrance fee would be refunded on a purchase of \$5 or more from any of the dealers and a door prize was awarded at closing time on Sunday. The Canal Winchester Area Historical Society

published, for sale, a special sesquicentennial book that is still being used as reference today, as well as commemorative cast plates. Free commemorative wooden nickels were available from local businesses. A commemorative button was available from the Historical Society for \$1.

By necessity, some events were at a scheduled time, such as the contests. Judging for the home skill and art contests was Friday afternoon, with ribbons given for places. The awards presentation ceremony was held Saturday at noon. There was no advance entry for the home skills contest. Anyone could enter an item in any category. All entries had to be at the Huntington Bank basement by 10 a.m. Friday. There were "all categories" of food and hand crafted items. The only rule was that the item, which didn't need to be newly made, had to be made by the exhibitor. (Someone else could take it to the bank building for the exhibitor, however.) There were two main categories: Food – pies, breads, sweet rolls, quick breads, cakes, cookies, canned vegetables, canned fruit, jellies, relishes, and dried fruits and vegetables, with subcategories in some divisions; and Textiles – knitted items, crochet, embroidery, tatting, counted cross stitch, hooked work, macramé, and woven work. Quilts were a special category in the home skills contest, since they "are an important part of our heritage." Quilts were divided into two categories, modern and historic, and judged under each category in the following divisions: appliqué, embroidery, all-over quilting, and patchwork. The article stated that "a quilt stand to display your quilt . . . would be greatly appreciated." The food would be sampled. Ribbons would be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places. One grand prize would be awarded for each of the two main categories, Food and Textiles. All entries would be displayed Saturday and Sunday, and could be picked up after 9:30 p.m. Sunday.

The disco dance was held Friday night on the Huntington Bank parking lot from 8 to midnight. It was the one "purely modern" event in a "primarily historic celebration." The Times suggested: "To add a slight twist to the disco event, why not wear your historical costume?"

The beard growing contest was held at the outdoor stage behind Shade's Restaurant at 1 p.m. on Saturday. No advance entry was required, just be at the stage. The only qualification was that the beard had to be at least ½" long. Categories for judging were: longest beard, oldest person with a beard, youngest person with a beard, longest mustache, and most unusual beard, but a person could win in only one category. From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., the Young Farmers organization had an Equipment Show. The Historical Society held a ham and bean dinner at Faith United Methodist Church on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. At 2 p.m. it was time for the costume judging and the pie eating contests. The pie throwing was scheduled for 3 p.m., and at 6 p.m. the bubble gum blowing contest was held.

On Sunday afternoon the beauty contest was held at 1:30. "Young beauties from the area" were invited to participate in the Canal Winchester Fall Festival Beauty Pageant. The August 30th Times stated that:

"Any girl within the CW school system, grades one through 12, or who attends a private or parochial school but lives within the CW school district, is eligible to participate. Entrants will wear sundresses for the competition and will be judged on poise, personality and overall appearance. A winner and two runners-up will be chosen in each of four categories to represent the Village in the Labor Day Parade: Tiny Miss (grades 1-4), Little Miss (grades 5-6) Junior Miss (grades 7-8) and Miss Canal Winchester (grades 9-12)." There was a rehearsal on Saturday afternoon for all beauty pageant contestants to outline positions and procedures.

The 10K run was scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday. The 10K run required a \$5 entry fee, which would pay for the T-shirt. At 3 p.m. the frog jumping contest was held, and at 7 p.m., the egg toss. The Aladdin Shrine clowns were also on the schedule for Sunday.

The flower show was scheduled for Monday at noon. The annual Labor Day Parade was at 1:30 on Monday afternoon. The antique car parade, like the home skill and art contests, required no advance entry. There was to be a separate Corvette division of the car parade. For the car parade all that was necessary was to show up on Monday at noon at the school grounds and the cars would be lined up in order of year. There would be a trophy for best of parade and all entries would receive an official sesquicentennial participation plate. There was no entry fee for the parade, but registration was required – entries were accepted until August 31. There were to be many categories of entries and an abundance of place prizes – including a trophy and cash prize.

After the parade, the band concert was held at 3:30. At 4 p.m. the stilt walking contest was held. At 5 p.m. one could "meet the team." The close of the Sesquicentennial Celebration was the Booster's raffle at 6 p.m.

The September 13th Times stated that: "Canal Winchester's Sesquicentennial Celebration is over and its organizers can take a long-awaited and well-deserved rest." The many contest winners were listed by event and category. The Times did reveal that the festivities were marred by some "flag-stealing vandals" during the festival. But the mayor went on to state that, "On the whole, however, there were few crime related problems during the recent celebration."

Photos on file at the Historical Society show lots of people in old fashioned costumes having lots of fun at the sesquicentennial celebration. It appears from the written and photographic records of the village that the celebration and enjoyment of events from founding anniversaries to fairs is a tradition that has continued for about 150 years in the village. That tradition of community fun and camaraderie continues

even today with the annual Labor Day Festival, which in 2003 had as its theme the Ohio Bicentennial, Christmas in the Village and other special events. Let us all hope that the citizens of the Canal Winchester area continue to find cause for and enjoy celebrations for many years to come.

Note: Sources for this tidbit include, but are not limited to: files from the Canal Winchester Area Historical Society, and The Times, Canal Winchester's local paper since 1871.