

Centennial Celebrations

On March 1, 1903, the State of Ohio celebrated her Centennial. Unfortunately, little coverage was found in *The Times* regarding a celebration in Canal Winchester. A reference was made in the February 19, 1903, edition regarding "Ohio's Centennial in the Schools." The article states that the Ohio Centennial Syllabus had been prepared under the direction of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society for use by teachers and pupils in the commemoration of the centennial. *The Times* stated: "The syllabus is a pamphlet of 64 pages, and admirably fills the mission for which it was intended. It gives many valuable suggestions, helps and facts of Ohio's history, her resources, her progress and her famous men and women."

A copy of Ohio Centennial Syllabus was located at the library of the Ohio Historical Society. It is a booklet, published in 1903, containing poetry, short passages from essays, quotes, and pieces of information regarding Ohio, her people and her history. Following the quotations there are suggestions of subjects for pupil essays. For example, there is a quote from Laning regarding the Mound Builders. At the end of the quote, the following "subjects for essays" are given: Fort Ancient, Serpent Mound, Mounds at Newark, Mounds in our County.

The State Commissioner of Common Schools Bonebrake stated that: "The proper celebration of our one hundredth anniversary as a state is to be commemorated in the schools on Friday, February 27, 1903, and it is hoped that the exercises of the day may be productive of the growth of patriotic sentiment." The schools' celebration of the Ohio Centennial would have been the Friday before Statehood Day. There was no written evidence of further celebration in regard to the Ohio Centennial. The celebration in the village of the Canal Winchester Centennial in 1928 was, in comparison, a huge event.

Henry Dove, patriarch of the founding family, came to what is now the Canal Winchester area from Virginia in the first years of the 19th century. On October 1, 1811, he purchased the quarter section (160 acres) that would become "downtown" Canal Winchester and began clearing and farming the land. In 1821 (before his death in 1850) he divided his land between his sons, Reuben and Jacob. Jacob then sold his land to John Coleman in 1824.

In the mid 1820's, legislation was passed in the State of Ohio to commence the building of a canal system from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. (The roads at this time were non-existent to poor, so a reliable transportation system was necessary for the state to prosper.) The Ohio & Erie Canal was to transverse Ohio from Cleveland to Portsmouth through central Ohio. Those canal plans brought the surveyors right

through the middle of Reuben Dove's wheatfield. Although he at first wanted to sue the state, the canal workers convinced him that he would be better off laying out a town since the area was midway between Columbus and Lancaster – two county seats. On November 5, 1828, Reuben Dove and John Coleman recorded the plat for Winchester, Ohio, in Lancaster. (Since there were other towns named Winchester in Ohio, the village was renamed Canal Winchester when the post office was established in 1841.)

In the winter of 1927-28, George Bareis began "urging a centennial celebration" for the Village of Canal Winchester. Consequently, during the spring of 1928, plans were made for an elaborate, all-day event on Wednesday, the 4th of July, 1928.

It was reported in The Times on April 20, 1928, that: "At a called meeting of representatives of organizations on Wednesday, April 11th, . . . committees were appointed to proceed with the Centennial Celebration." An Executive Committee, Publicity Committee, Finance Committee, and Program Committee were formed and members named. It was decided to celebrate the Centennial around the 4th of July period – if possible including July 4th.

A meeting was scheduled for June 15th to "make final plans for the entertainment of the large number of people that we expect to visit Canal Winchester July 4th." The committees and members were listed in The Times, a list that included many prominent citizens of the community and surnames that are still part of the community. The list of committees had expanded to include a Parade Committee and a Fire Works Committee. The number of people on the Program Committee had greatly increased.

The June 15th Times detailed plans for the Centennial Celebration. "All the color of pioneer days in Central Ohio is to be revived for the occasion, in the form of floats, delineating the outstanding events of the town." The festivities were to be formally opened at sun rise by the Boy Scouts. The governors of Ohio and Virginia were to be part of the celebration. Governor Byrd of Virginia was to be accompanied by Winchester, Virginia, Chief of Police Dove. Among the plans for the day were: a parade, a fish dinner beginning at 11 a.m., addresses by former residents, an old-time dinner at 5:30 p.m. for the descendants of pioneers, and a masquerade parade at 8 p.m. followed by dancing on the main street to conclude the festivities.

The parade at 10 a.m. was to be a major event in the Centennial Celebration. Pioneers and descendants were invited to walk in the parade. Historic Floats were to depict such events as: the cutting of the first tree, building the first log cabin, digging the canal, the first canal boat, the stage coach, the railroad,

moving the post office from Waterloo to Winchester, the first school house, the pioneer doctor, and apple butter making. Prizes were to be awarded for the Best Historic, Most Beautiful and Most Comic Floats; Best Decorated, Best Characteristic, and Most Comic Automobiles; and Best Characteristic and Best Comic Juvenile entries. Prizes* were \$5 for 1st place and \$2.50 for 2nd in all categories. A list of Columbus firms that would provide advice on decorating was given in the paper. Professional floats from "any place in the world" were welcomed, but would be ineligible for prizes.

The Parade was to be led by the Basil Band, followed by Grand Marshal W. S. Hanners and two aids, city officials led by Mayor B. E. Schirm, descendants of the Dove and Coleman families, Veterans of the Civil War, Veterans of the Spanish American War, the American Legion, the Pioneers, and then the Historic Floats. (Photographs that were taken at the time show how large and magnificent the parade really was.)

A variety of events was planned for the day. At 1:25 p.m., the Peoples Bank was to make a Birthday Presentation to the town. A Community Sing was scheduled for 1:30 p.m. The June 29th Times announced a practice for the chorus at 8 p.m. that evening. It was reported that 45 had responded to the first call, but at least 100 voices were desired, especially more men and boys. Track and field events for the boys and girls included 60 and 100 yard dashes for boys and girls, standing and running broad jumps for the boys, baseball throws for the boys, pole vault, and a potato race for the girls. Special contests were the fat man's race and the fat woman's race, each 40 yards. Announced plans stated that other races would be added. Prizes* for each event were 50¢ for 1st place and 25¢ for 2nd. Recreation Ball Games (baseball) for the Canal Winchester "Juniors" and "All Stars" were planned for 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. versus neighboring Groveport. The Centennial Committee urged "that all homes be attractively decorated for the occasion." The prize* for best decorated home was \$7, second prize \$3, and third \$2. At 8:15 p.m., a Masquerade Parade was scheduled, with a 9 p.m. fireworks display to close the celebration.

Any celebration calls for food and the organizers planned accordingly. It was decided to have a Fish Fry. The citizens of Canal Winchester and vicinity were invited to come and bring their guests to the "big fish dinner" being served by the town. Dinner was to commence at 11 a.m. and continue "throughout the day." The cost of the fish dinner was 50¢. The June 22nd Times printed a notice for "men, women, boys and girls" to apply to help serve fish dinners. The article stated that 50 – 60 people would be needed and that "volunteer help would be greatly appreciated as the Committee is at great expense, but are willing to pay for service to those wishing it."

As reported in the Ohio State Journal on July 3, 1928, and reprinted in The Times on July 13th, attendance was expected to be about 10,000 persons. The Journal reported that the Canal Winchester citizens were hard at work on Monday, making floats that would depict the early events in the history of the town for the parade and decorating houses.

As is often the case in such celebrations, not all events occurred as originally planned. Governor Byrd of Virginia was unable to attend, but William Glass, ex-mayor of Winchester Virginia, and a lineal descendant of the founder of that city, would attend. Ohio's Lt. Governor William G. Pickeral was present instead of Governor Donahey.

Coverage of the Centennial Celebration in the July 13th Times described a grand event. The day opened with a salute fired by Columbus Boy Scouts and "lasted late in the night." Three large fireplaces were built on the main street to cook a ton of fish to feed the crowd – it was reported that 4,000 people were served. The four surviving members of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic – an organization solely for Civil War Veterans) were in the Parade. Oley Speaks and other members of the Speaks family sang. The Community Choir sang a parody of "America the Beautiful" written by Dr. Shook entitled "Winchester." (note: After finding the words in The Times, this was sung once again at the Pageant presented by the Historical Society in celebration of the Ohio Bicentennial.) The Peoples Bank presented a magnificent chime clock to the village. The recently restored clock still hangs on the old bank building – now the Town Hall of the Village. The masquerade parade in the evening proved to be a highlight which "far surpassed any former humorous parade ever held in Canal Winchester." The evening ended with fireworks and dancing in the streets "from early until late."

Prize winners for the 10 a.m. Parade and the Masquerade Parade were listed in the paper as well as the winners of the best decorated homes. It was noted that a special feature of the parade was a float with 19-year old twins, Jessie and Bessie Billingsley, as "Miss Canal Winchester 1928" and "Miss Canal Winchester 1828." In the list for the Masquerade Parade, the Times reported that the "above are all the prizes that the judges could get in the time allowed and because entries were so badly mixed up. We have not been able to learn the names of some of the above prize winners. If you are the 'Old Fashioned Woman' or the 'Country Doctor' or the 'Man in the Green Suit,' please notify the committee at once and your prize money will be forwarded." Track and field event winners were listed, noting that there were "no entries" in the Fat Woman's Race. The ball games ended in a tie with Groveport – "according much amusement to the numerous spectators." At the pioneer dinner for the descendants of the early village residents, nearly 70 guests were present.

The Times reported on July 13, 1928, that "8,000 or more persons were attracted to the gala event during the course of the day and evening, and many of them were descendants of the pioneers who founded the town a hundred years ago. . . . The crowd present at the afternoon's program still lingered and more came until an estimated crowd of 10,000 took part in the centennial celebration and enjoyed the spectacular display of fire works held at the school grounds at 9:00 o'clock."

The last part of this series of tidbits on Celebrations in Canal Winchester will take a look at the Canal Winchester Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1978.

* Although the prize money offered does not seem especially large today, sample prices from advertisements in the summer of 1928 show that it was significant. For example: a new Chevy was \$495 - \$715, 10 bars of Ivory soap cost 66¢, a dozen eggs cost 28¢, a gas range was \$55, and a new Buick coupe could be purchased for \$1195.

Note: Sources for this tidbit include, but are not limited to: The Times, Canal Winchester's weekly paper since 1871; information from the C. W. Historical Society's files; information from the Ohio Historical Society files; and the 1992 Canal Winchester: The Second Ninety Years by Lillian Carroll and Frances Steube.