

The United States Centennial – 1876

Since the bicentennial of Ohio's statehood is on the horizon and plans are being made in all parts of the state, including Canal Winchester, for a yearlong celebration, a look at past celebrations, fairs, etc., in the Village seems appropriate. The next several tidbits will review Canal Winchester's celebratory history. One of the first recorded celebrations was the local observance of the 1876 United States Centennial.

The May 11, 1876, issue of The Times featured an ad "to call a meeting of citizens of the town and surrounding country, to meet at Games' Hall on Monday Evening next to take into consideration the propriety of celebrating the coming Fourth in our own town. We trust that our friends in the country will attend this meeting and help get up an old fashioned Fourth of July Celebration."

Evidence supports the idea that our illustrious ancestors were much more efficient than seems to be the case today. In the May 18th Times, it was reported that the meeting called for Monday was "large and enthusiastic and the unanimous desire was to get up an old fashioned celebration!" A committee was appointed to say how the day should be celebrated and they asked leave to report on Tuesday evening. The meeting adjourned and reassembled on Tuesday at which time a "programme" for the celebration was submitted as follows:

1st. That a suitable grove contiguous to our town be secured, upon which a stand for speakers and officiators, and temporary seating for females and children be erected.

2d. That a procession of all who may desire to participate therein be formed at such hour and place within the town as may be deemed best, and under the escort of the Winchester Band, proceed to the grove at 10 ½ o'clock.

3d. At 11 o'clock, a.m., the exercises of the day be opened with prayer, after which reading the Declaration of American Independence, speaking, music, patriotic songs, &c., at proper intervals, and such other exercises as shall be in harmony with the occasion, and not incompatible with strict propriety and decorum, and at – o'clock, p.m., prayer be pronounced and the assembly dismissed by benediction.

The planning committee made a few additional suggestions including: that an invitation be extended to the Clergy of every sect or denomination, without distinction, to join in the celebration of this Centennial Birth Day of our common country; and that "the employment of all reasonable means to suppress the sale or use of intoxicating drinks at or contiguous to the grove, before or during the celebration" be made in order to ensure that the celebration would be conducted with "the patriotic respect which should characterize a free people." The report concluded with a list of committees, including membership, which they was felt would be required for the celebration. One of those committees was just for water and ice – items not to be taken for granted as they are today. With just a couple of amendments the report was adopted. In less than a week from the call for a meeting, a basic plan for the celebration was in effect! (Nothing gets done that rapidly today.)

From the reports in The Times, meetings were held weekly on Tuesdays for progress reports and further planning. On May 25th, it was reported that "our people are alive, the committees working diligently and everything so far promises a big time and big doin's in Winchester on the Fourth!"

By June 1st the committee on grounds had procured Jerry Kramer's woods for the celebration and it had been decided to have a Basket Dinner. A desire for a chorus of at least 100 voices was expressed. A general request was extended to all who could to assist the committee in charge of grounds to put them in proper shape. The June 8th Times reported that the Committee on Finance was at work and would raise all the funds to defray expenses. On motion, Charles Speaks, H. S. Binkely, and John Chaney, Jr., were appointed to procure a cannon. A committee of "Safe Guards" for the day was named.

By June 15 The Times was reporting that there would be a "grand, spread eagle, American bird, Centennial Fourth of July in Winchester. The Centennial year will not flicker out in this end of the county." After the activities of the day, the Winchester Dramatic Association proposed to make it a lively evening on the Fourth with entertainment for the people of Winchester. Bareis records that on July 4, 1876, "The Poacher's Doom" and "Take Care of Charlie" were rendered by the dramatic club.

The June 22nd issue of The Times reported that "indications are that the celebration of the Centennial 4th of July, here, will be fully up to the expectations of those who have been working so earnestly for its success." It was announced that by general agreement the businesses would be closed on the Fourth. The Committee on Music requested all those willing to participate in the singing exercises to meet for rehearsal on June 27th at "7 ½ o'clock." The desire was to secure 100 voices for the occasion.

Unfortunately, the June 29th through July 13th issues of The Times are missing, so we did not have the complete report of the actual celebration. George Bareis reports only that "the Centennial Fourth of July was appropriately celebrated in Kramer's grove north of Winchester" in his History of Madison Township. The committees and plans recorded in The Times and by Bareis suggest that the day included a program featuring speakers, including a reading of the Declaration of Independence; music, both vocal and instrumental; decorations; and a cannon.

It was interesting to find that the commercialization of American celebrations is not new. In the "Local Matters" column on June 1st, it was reported that "the centennial stocking is the latest go. We haven't seen any of 'em yet, but they are said to be very beautiful. Females alone wear them." An editorial comment was made at the end of the planning committee's report in that same issue to: "Save all your Centennial memorabilia for the next Centennial. If you cannot find interest in them at that time yourself, perhaps somebody else can." The souvenir business was alive and well even then.

Note: The sources for this tidbit include: the 1876 issues of The Times, and History of Madison Township by George Bareis, published in 1902.