

This Day in Saratoga County History

Jubilee Independence Day – July 4, 1826



From the Centennial History of the Village of Ballston Spa, Edward F. Gross, 1907

Semi-Centennial Celebration of American Independence

The semi-centennial celebration of American Independence in Ballston Spa, on Tuesday, July 4, 1826, surpassed in interest and pageantry all the Fourth of July observances in Saratoga county that preceded it, or have followed it. The day was ushered in by the national salute from the “trophy gun” captured from Burgoyne, and the ringing of the old bell hanging in the steeple of Christ church, and the other village bells.

The most prominent feature of the great procession was a car forty-two feet long and fourteen feet wide, named the Temple of Industry. This was intended to represent the industrial development of the country during the first half century of the nation’s life. The car was drawn by thirteen yoke of oxen, representing the thirteen original states, each yoke in charge of a driver clad in a tow frock, and all under the command of Jacob Near, of Malta. Upon the car were thirteen representatives of that number of branches of the mechanical arts, plying their vocations. Among them were the printer, striking off semi-centennial odes, the blacksmith with his anvil keeping time with the music, the cooper making more noise than all the others, and Mr. William Van Ness, who while the procession was moving, made a pair of shoes for the president of the day, Hon. Samuel Young, then Speaker of the Assembly, to whom they were presented with an appropriate address and response.

Another interesting feature of the procession was a band of thirty-seven Revolutionary veterans, who kept step to the music in a way that indicated that had not forgotten their military discipline. Jeremiah Pierson, a soldier of the Revolution, held aloft the Stars and Stripes, Lemuel Wilcox, another war veteran, bore a standard inscribed “Declaration of Independence,” and another veteran, John Whitehead bore a standard inscribed “The Constitution of the United States.”

Another attractive feature was the Corps of Union Cadets, composed of two fine looking and admirably dressed uniformed companies from Union College. The corps was under the command of Major Holland, the register of the college and a veteran of the war of 1812.

The procession moved through the principle streets amid salvos from the brass six-pounder captured from Burgoyne, to the Baptist Church, which stood on the corner of Science and Galway Streets, on the lot now [1907] occupied by the railroad water tank. Hon. Samuel Young presided. Prayer was offered by Rev. Eliphalet Nott, President of Union College. The Declaration of Independence was read by Anson Brown, a young lawyer of the village, who died while Representative in the Twenty-sixth Congress. The oration was delivered by Hon. John W. Taylor [from Ballston Spa], then Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Union Cadets dined at the Sans Souci Hotel, and the toasts were at the Village Hotel. Among the regular toasts was the following: "John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Charles Carroll of Carrolton, the surviving signers of the Declaration of Independence. As the measure of their days, so is that of their fame-overflowing." When this sentence was uttered it was not known that since the sun had risen on the morning of that day two of those illustrious patriots had been slumbering with the dead, leaving Charles Carroll the sole survivor.