

A Country

FOURTH OF JULY

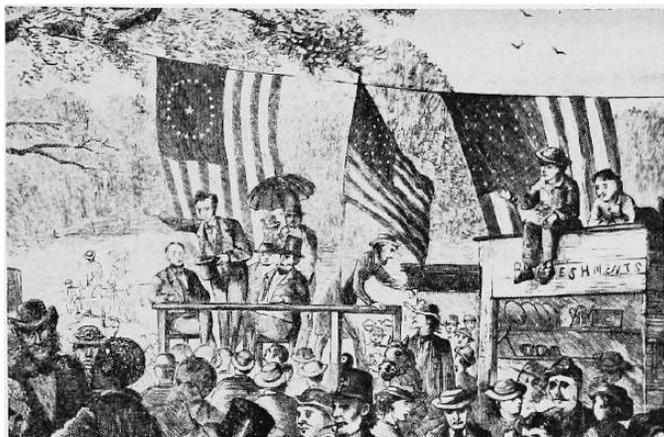
in Minnesota, 1862

A HUNDRED YEARS ago Minnesotans observed Independence Day under the cloud of war. It did not cast too dark a shadow, for the conflict had only begun and news from the southern battlefronts had been encouraging throughout the spring. The slaughter at Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg was still in the future, and recruiting rather than drafting filled the army's ranks. With a martial spirit in the air and patriotism running high, the traditional American Fourth of July celebration came to full flower in 1862.

One of the many gatherings held in Minnesota on that day was witnessed by Mrs. Ignatius Donnelly. She described it on July 23 in a letter to her sister in Philadelphia. Kate Donnelly's husband, the state's thirty-year-old lieutenant governor, was at the time laying plans to run for Congress and had already become one of Minnesota's most popular orators. He was always in demand on the Fourth of July, and as his wife observed to her sister, he "promised me year after year to take me but something interfered; there was either a baby coming, or one nursing, making it inconvenient for me to go. So this time nothing hindering, I started with hubby on the 3rd down river [from Hastings] on a magnificently decked steamboat. We had a splendid time. Landed at Wabasha in the evening. Rose next morning at 4 o'clock and proceeded in a magnificent barouche and fine horses (sent for us especially to drive us to the place of destination) to ride twenty miles inland to a place called Plainview where hubby was to be Orator of the day. We were on the road at 5 o'clock. The drive was over a beautiful country broken with immense bluffs up which we would drive to fine level country at the top for a few miles farther till we would come to another—it was like going up a mountain on one side to find at the top a plain.

"When we were within a mile or so of the place we were met by our escort. To me it was most laughable. Hubby has stood the kind of thing before—I was a novice. You know the reception a governor might be expected to get in Philadelphia [. . .] Well [it was] something similar but





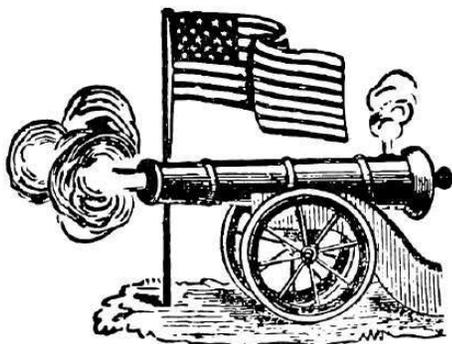
“Fourth of
July in
the Country”

more heart felt. The escort consisted of a marshall and assistant marshall *in uniform*, who rode on horseback in front of our horses. We were followed by a band of music in a wagon [,] then as we rode along, about 200 mounted gentlemen—two and two—opened a line and saluted as we passed through and joined in behind. In this manner we rode into the town. I almost bit my lips off to preserve a proper dignified composure under this pomp and ceremony . . . cannon booming, band playing [,] mob cheering, fire crackers whizzing.

“They had an immense grove erected with scantling and posts, covered with limbs of trees and ornamented with flags, flowers, &c. Under this 4,000 people partook of dinner. Their tables consisted of 10—200 feet in length each—making 2,000 feet of table. The table was loaded with boiled hams, roast chickens, turkeys, beef, lamb, pies, cakes, strawberries, lemonade . . . handsome cake pyramids, baskets and vases of flowers, &c. So much eating, drinking, toasting, speeching, &c, &c. Then in the afternoon they had horse races and trotting matches [on] a splendid beaten track 1 mile round. Harlequin Cavalry performance, and a speech (very comical) from one of them.

“We had no less than three carriages at our service during the entire day, a parlor to entertain any who might pay respects, and after the ball we went out a couple of miles to a gentleman’s place to sleep for the night as it would be too noisy at the hotel. . . . Next day we went back to Wabasha and up the river to St. Paul where I stayed a week and came back home just in time to put Iggy [Jr.] to bed with the measles, followed by Stanny.”

THE PICTURE above appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* for July 6, 1867. The one opposite, entitled “Sending up the Fire Balloon,” is from the same publication for July 8, 1877.





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