



DOROTHY DRESCHER PERRY

“WE WILL LET THE EAGLE SCREAM AND FLOP
HIS WINGS TO THE SATISFACTION OF ALL.”

Thus on June 16, 1891, seventy-five years ago, the *Ely Iron Home* announced that city's first Independence Day celebration. Two weeks later, as fervor mounted in the raw new community on the booming Vermilion Range, its journal declared: “We Will Celebrate! You bet we will! Why? Because we have the money and the patriotic citizens to honor the national holiday. The American bird of freedom will soar over us and look with great pleasure upon our demonstration of patriotism. . . . Three hundred Chippewa braves with their squaws will take part in the parade and exhibit the terpsichorean art in the giddy mazes of a pow wow.”

In observing the Glorious Fourth, Ely was aided not only by its Indian neighbors, but by visitors brought in on special trains from Mesaba, Tower, and even as far away as Duluth. The events were detailed by the *Iron Home* in its edition of July 7.

When “at daybreak the cannon belched forth in thunderous tones the tidings that another year of national independence had

passed, everybody in this charming young city was prepared to celebrate the day in the most patriotic manner, he or she was capable of.” As early as 4:00 A.M. a cornet band “paraded the streets, making the air ring with national music,” and by eight o'clock the first order of the day's long program, “the Calithumpian parade,” put in an appearance. The first wagon represented a prize ring; the “next wagon was an amusing burlesque on the [Fourth of July] celebration of Tower. . . . Ely with music, songs, fireworks, decorations and a spirit of life. . . . Tower, pictured in a grave-yard manner.” The calithump also included “a representation of a band with about 16 pieces, fantastically attired, playing a march in the wildest disorder.”

The calithump was followed by the “grand procession” which formed on First Avenue and Camp Street, marching through the city in the following order: “Platoon of Police; Ely band; City officers in carriages; . . . Finn temperance society[,] uniformed; Swedish society, uniformed; Austrian society in full uniform; Officers and members of [fire] Companies 1 and 2 with their appliances; Chippewa braves and squaws on wagons

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numbering about 300; 'Float' display of Ely business houses; Speakers of the day and prominent citizens in carriages." The children were there, too: "All the States and Territories [were] represented by young ladies of the Ely schools." The marching column was directed by the town's mayor, John Pengilly, who as marshal of the day was "mounted upon his black steed" and plainly "no novice in the Marshal business."

When the procession reached the temporary pavilion which had been erected, Mayor Pengilly introduced the orator of the day, the Reverend Father Joseph F. Buh, who delivered, according to the reporter for the *Iron Home*, "one of the most able addresses we ever had the good fortune to hear." The Reverend Alexander Sandstrom of the Lutheran church spoke next in a "dialect" with which the reporter was "not conversant." The journalist judged from the applause, however, that "the oration must have met with the approval of the Finn contingent." A Presbyterian minister, the Reverend T. A. Ambler, concluded the formal exercises by

A procession on Camp Street, probably in the late 1890s



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reading the Declaration of Independence "in a clear, distinct tone, which was heard and enjoyed by the monstrous audience in the pavilion."

The afternoon was devoted to athletic contests of various kinds. "At 1:30 the hose cart race between companies No. 1 and 2 was run. . . . the carts started in opposite directions very even . . . but on the home stretch cart No. 1 gained considerable." But this race was not to the swift. "Although No. 1 was ready to receive water considerably quicker than the other crew, the man at the hydrant . . . did not turn the water on, and No. 2 got . . . the \$25 prize."

Civic pride may have suffered somewhat when a Tower baseball club defeated the Ely "Stump Dodgers" by a score of sixteen to five, for the newspaper had boasted on June 30 that the "championship prize will be open to all amateur clubs in St. Louis County [and] . . . any base ball team desirous of defeat before a monstrous audience; having the sand to play the Ely nine and by some unaccountable reason winning the game, will receive . . . \$100." Baseball was followed by wheelbarrow races, sack races, horse racing, and "the fat men's race."

According to the paper, "The grand ball at the pavilion in the evening witnessed the largest gathering of people ever seen on a floor at one time in this city and dancing was indulged in until the small hours of the morning; the music being furnished by the Ely Cornet band" — those stalwarts whose music had begun the day-long celebration. "So engrossed were the people in the ball, that the management thought it better to postpone the fireworks until the next night."

A notice in the *Iron Home* for June 30 had promised six hundred dollars worth of fireworks — "a monstrous display of pyrotechnics." Apparently the show lost nothing by the delay, for on the night of July 5 Ely witnessed "the most magnificent display ever seen on the range," climaxing a holiday on which the "young Metropolis of the Vermilion" had set "All Other Celebrations . . . in the Shade."



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