

# INDEPENDENCE CENTENNIAL, 1876

Carlton C. Qualey

THE BICENTENNIAL in 1976 almost inevitably causes the historian to wonder what was done by way of celebration 100 years ago. A look at Twin Cities newspapers published before and after July 4, 1876, provides some items of at least passing interest.

"Centennial Races. Opening St. Paul Meeting. Largest, Finest and Fastest Field of Trotters and Runners Ever Together in the State. The Centennial Fourth Programme." Thus read headlines in the *St. Paul Dispatch* of July 3, 1876. There followed an account of the race opening and thereafter the line of order for the centennial parade in St. Paul. No issue of the *Dispatch* was published on the Fourth, but the July 5 issue of the newspaper reported what had occurred. So did the *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer-Press and Tribune* (then surprisingly combined) of July 4 and subsequent days.

The celebration in St. Paul, apparently the official state observance, opened with what must have been a thunderous artillery salute of 100 guns. The parade then proceeded in five divisions, led by banker John S. Prince as chief marshal, from City Hall to Rice Park where the exercises were held. There, another artillery salute was fired, a prayer was offered, band music was performed, the Declaration of Independence was read, a centennial hymn was sung, and then the honorable ex-Governor Cushman K. Davis gave the oration of the day. Starting with the early Christians and the fate of Rome, he came up through the ages to the glorious birth of the United States and the creation of a great nation by the labor and enthusiasm of countless people from all lands, especially the English, Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians, all now fully assimilated, he said.

Addresses by Mayor James T. Maxfield, Governor John S. Pillsbury, and Henry A. Castle, editor of the *Dispatch*, followed Davis' lengthy effort. Fireworks were displayed at 8:00 P.M. An advertisement in the *Dispatch* read: "1776-1876. Before going home tonight call and get 1776 tea from the Atlantic and Pacific Tea

Company. A beautiful chrome free." Thus the tea motif and commercial advantage were artfully combined.

A *Dispatch* reporter had wandered about St. Paul on July 4 to see what citizens did, and found them going about their business. His most noteworthy observation, given in the July 5 issue, was: "All the saloons were open."

On July 6 the *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer-Press and Tribune* printed the grandiloquent address of the official centennial orator, William M. Evarts of New York, at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, by far the most ambitious project planned in connection with the nation's 100th birthday observance. The same St. Paul and Minneapolis newspaper also reported briefly that celebrations had been held in such Minnesota cities as Winona, St. Peter, Northfield, and Taylors Falls. Extensive coverage was given to the opening of the St. Paul racing season.

Present-day feminists will be interested to know that on July 4, 1876, there was a ladies' political meeting at the Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church, Minneapolis, chaired by Mrs. Thomas B. Walker, a name to be immortalized in a modern Minneapolis art museum.

Although the St. Paul exercises appear to have been the official state celebration, Minneapolis had its own parade, fireworks, and gun salutes "every fifteen minutes from 8 to 12 o'clock[,] making a salute of 24 guns for the 24 states at the close of the first half century of the republic." Thus reported the *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer-Press and Tribune* (July 2), which added: "All societies will have their respective quarters for the general rendezvous, Bridge Square."

As things turned out, the same newspaper reported on July 6, "a necessity not anticipated" forced reversal of the order of procession "in one respect, Cooper, Bailey & Co.'s circus being placed in the advance, with its fine band in the lead, and furnishing the multitude excellent music. Then came a long line of equestrians and equestriennes, followed by monkeys on horseback, lions and tigers complacently viewing the crowd from the tops of their cages, camels, zebras, camelopards [giraffes], elephants of assorted sizes . . . followed by the loud caliope [sic], all producing a scene of wild confusion which is not witnessed more than once in a century on the American continent or elsewhere." Then followed the local, human, part of the parade which extended for two or three miles.

On July 6 the news of Custer's "last stand" along the Little Big Horn River on June 25, 1876, arrived from Dakota Territory and took over the headlines and columns of the Twin Cities newspapers. The news of the "massacre" came too late to dim the July 4 and centennial celebrations, but it was inadvertently a sour note in the aftermath of the celebration of a century of "freedom."



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