



Modern Times

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2022

Early Fourth of July Celebrations in Granville

Before the festive celebration that we enjoy today, complete with a parade, fireworks, Ferris wheel and cotton candy, Granville struggled to celebrate the 4th in an organized manner. In June of 1883, the *Granville Times* published commentary bemoaning the town's lack of celebration. "Granville has been backward in getting up demonstrations for the Fourth of July... It is not too early to begin to make preparations, for other towns are looking toward having a grand time..."¹ A similar appeal was published in 1891: "The Fourth of July is a day memorable in the history of this country... An educational town, like Granville, ought to be able to do something better."²

Attempts to organize were not successful as of July 2, 1891 when the *Times* advised "There will be no public demonstration here on the 4th of July, but as usual, no doubt, the youths of the village will have there(*sic*) customary sport. We would caution them against annoying the sick people in the city, and they should be very careful not to frighten horses with their fire crackers."

Fortunately, the following year, a motivated group of young citizens started a subscription paper to fund a celebration.³ Raising \$100, the funding allowed for a fireworks display of "roman candles, pin-wheels, fountains, mortars, sky-rockets and many other pieces" on the Episcopal church and Opera House steps.⁴

For further entertainment, the evening ended with a display of fire balls on Broadway! According to the *Times* in 1892, "After the rockets, etc. had been exhausted, then the most exciting sport of the evening began. This consisted of about seventy-five balls of candle wicking, saturated with turpentine, and then set on fire, which were immediately seized by the boys and hurled to and fro up and down Broad street between Main and Prospect streets. This display made a very pretty sight and kept the large crowd in good humor from the beginning to the close."⁴

Other types of "jollifying" to celebrate the fourth in this decade included everything from decorating houses and shop windows, picnics, and sending up paper balloons to bicycle races and baseball games in the late 1890's. In June 1894, the *Times* advertised the great fun planned for the upcoming holiday, including "a greased pig turned loose on Broad street, to be caught by the most dexterous man or boy."⁵

While we can't know everything that happened in these early celebrations, primary sources like the *Granville Times* paint a colorful picture of the ways that Granville citizens recognized the Fourth of July. It's clear that some found the festivities far too loud, while others hoped for more excitement; some wished for a more solemn recognition of the holiday, while others simply wanted to outdo our neighbors in Newark and Alexandria. Naughty village boys caused trouble with their firecrackers, and most of the activity took place on Broadway. Sounds a little bit like modern times.

(1883, June 1). Additional local. *The Granville Times*, 3(52), 2.

(1891, July 2). The fourth of July. *The Granville Times*, 7(6), 1.

(1892, June 30). We will jollify. *The Granville Times*, 14(26), 1.

(1892, July 7). The day we celebrate. *The Granville Times*, 14(27), 1.

(1894, June 14). The glorious fourth. *The Granville Times*, 16(24), 5.

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