

The See-it-Twice Parade of 1900

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

This article features two photos from about 1900. Taken around 10:30 from nearly the same location above what is now the Wells-Fargo Bank, they show a 4th of July parade on Third Avenue. But notice one thing: in one photo the parade is headed west on 3rd Avenue. In the other it is headed east!

What a great idea! Floats and bands require a lot of preparation, for only a moment's view for any part of the crowd. Why not run it back again, and see what is on the other side of the float. Apparently they thought so in 1900!

In the distance is the dome of the First Baptist Church, where McGann's Furniture is now located. Near the center of both pictures is the new building (then) which today houses Ploetz Furniture. High above is a garish sign for Clavadatcher's "The Fair" store.

In 1900 our nation was but 113 years old, only slightly over half its 222 years of age today. Celebrating the Revolution was still serious business, calling for all day festivities.

The floats

Thanks to the pictures and a newspaper report, we have a good record of the parade. The "Industreal and Callthumpla" parade featured makeshift floats, all pulled by horses except for one automobile, "the real thing, carrying the Columbian Male Quartette".

The paper noted that some had never seen an automobile. Curiously, the next day the Burrington Store advertised that there was a 50% discount on remnants for those who did NOT ride in the automobile. What does that imply?

Unexplained was "Marriott Bros, had a 1920 airship. The motive force being a boy on a bike—the wonder was how the boy could keep his equilibrium". We have no idea about this. Somehow the Cousin's Turkish Bath showed "patrons going through all phases of his health-giving treatment". We can't picture this either.

Another puzzle: One float consisted of "an Oriental carrying a large banner." Later in the article another parade is stated "Twenty one Orientals took part in the big parade in the evening. It is a wonder that any of them had the courage to put on the black hoods, considering tat the thermometer registered 85 degrees at 8 P.M." Can anyone explain the reference to Orientals?



The Here-it-comes, there-it-goes parade



The Arrest

A final bit of entertainment was unplanned but surely drew a crowd. It seems that Reedsburg's John Lewis escaped from the nearby jail on Broadway and mingled with the crowd, watching the parade. Arrested by the sheriff, he made a run for it until the sheriff pulled a gun. Even then he exhibited vigorous resistance as he was returned to the jail.

There are other things to be noted in the photos. This July day was succinctly described by the News as "hot", yet every man appears to be wearing a suit. No ugly sweats, no garish tattoos. Even the less affluent took pride in their appearance, though a full suit seems ridiculous.

Moreover, women and children as well as the men are all wearing hats. A few young blades are wearing the new straw hat, later to become fashionable. In one photo, there is a suggestion of a sprinkle, since umbrellas, but not parasols, sprang forth for a few.

So justice was done to John Lewis, the Fourth of July was duly celebrated, and the nation began its 114th year. On the Fourth today, we begin our 223rd year, the world's oldest Democracy. Unfortunately we still have some crazies that just don't get it, resorting to a gun as their substitute for rational expression of opinion.

