

# How Fulton Celebrated July 4th In Years Gone By

## 2011 4TH OF JULY CELEBRATION

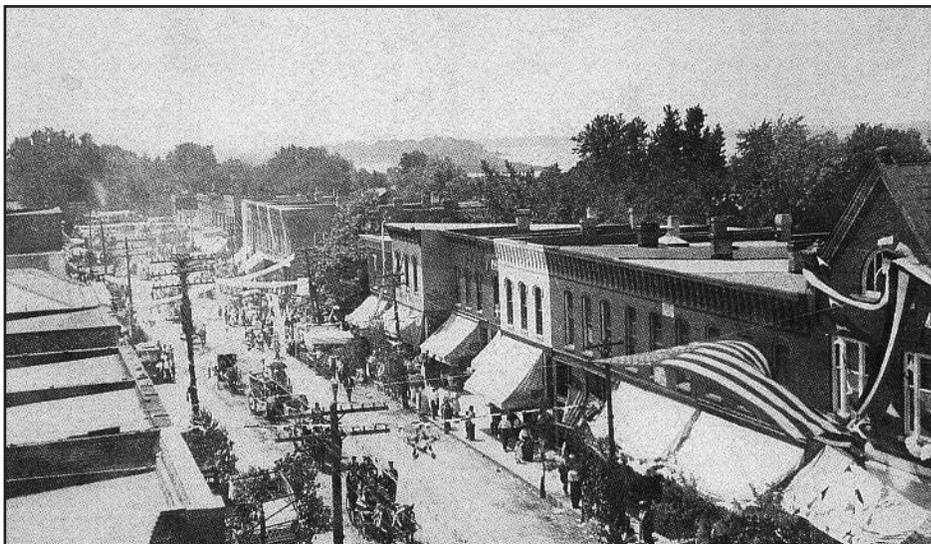
By Barbara Mask

Headlining the Fulton Journal on July 7, 1911, *“Over 12,000 Visitors Entertained July 4th—Decorations, Parade, Program of Exercises, Races and Attractions Best Ever. Committees Praised for Efficient Work—Everybody Pleased and no Accidents or Disturbances Marred the Greatest Fourth Ever Observed in Fulton.”*

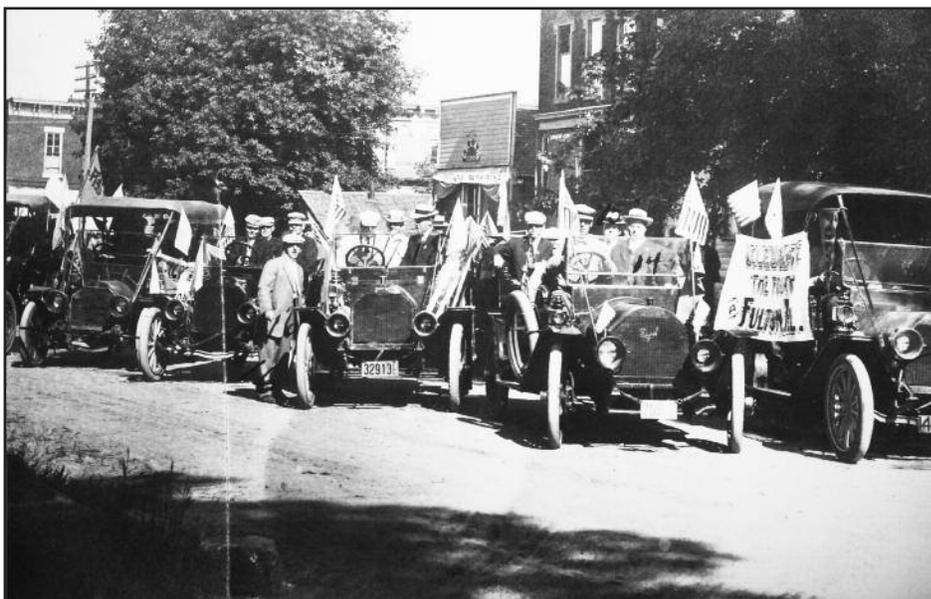
While 4th of July celebrations had become a tradition here in Fulton, it was in the year of 1911 that was considered the ‘greatest of them all.’ 1908 was another great celebration but it rained that day and some events were canceled. In 1911, there was no rain, but the temperatures soared to over 100 degrees. In spite of the heat, the Journal reported, *“The nation’s birthday was celebrated gloriously and, notwithstanding, the immense crowd estimated to be between ten to twelve thousand people, and the intense heat of the day, the demonstration was highly creditable to the committees in management and not only called forth the praise of visitors generally, but gave the city of Fulton a great advertisement...”*

### THE CROWD

Visitors came from every direction and used various modes of transportation. The early trains brought a large number from Carroll County, and the C&NW brought in over a thousand from the east (later arriving trains continued to deliver more visitors). Over five thousand people came from Clinton via the ferry boats and the bridges. Both automobiles and carriages brought people from other towns. Reports are that the guests were “well-dressed, well-behaved, good-natured and patriotic.” Restrooms were provided for the women and children and one wonders about the male visitor’s accommodations with that many of them in Fulton for the day.



1911: 4th of July Celebration in Fulton, IL



A caravan of automobiles from Fulton visited area communities inviting them to the 4th of July big event. Fulton Opera House can be seen in the background.

### DECORATIONS

Businesses downtown used lavish and patriotic decorations on their storefronts. The streets were brightly colored with flags and bunting and streamers (there were fewer decorations in the 1908 photos; perhaps because of the rain that day). Residences throughout the community were also attractively decorated with the national colors.

### THE GRAND PARADE

Like recent Dutch Days Festival celebrations, the parade drew the biggest crowd. It was a grand opportunity for the local community to share with others what made Fulton special. The 1911 parade was a splendid pageant. *“There were sixteen decorated automobiles, four floats loaded with school children, fifteen ladies and the same number of gentlemen on horseback (and the ladies road astride), a drill team from Lyons and twenty-four floats and decorated vehicles of business firms.”* The population in 1911 was 2,488 so it is admirable that the business establishments embraced the celebration with their overt participation. The parade route differs from our current one. It started at the river front and 10th Avenue (current site of ‘de Immigrant’ windmill). The Libby Band from Morrison led the parade east on 10th to 4th Street (Main Street), left on 11th Avenue and south on 9th Street to 15th Avenue, then west on 15th to 4th Street and north on 4th Street to the college campus site (current site of the post office). Parade entries were listed in the Fulton Journal:

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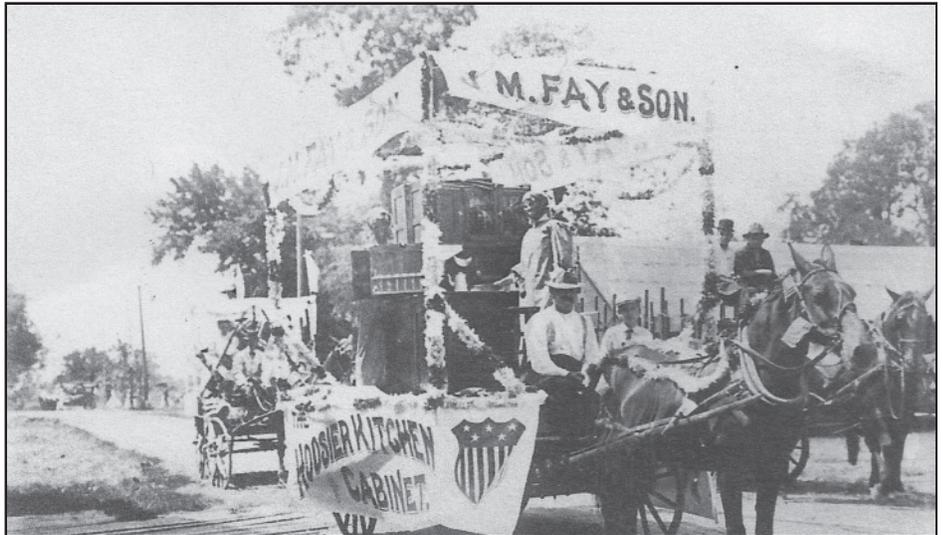
- G.A.R. in autos
- Four floats with school children
- W.O.W. Drill Team (17 men)
- Thirty ladies and gentlemen equestrians
- Patent Novelty Company
- Hamm's Brewing Company
- John Renkes, Jr., carriages
- Turcotte Sisters, millinery
- J. M. Fay & Son, furniture
- A. C. Williamson, druggist
- J. E. Temple, hardware
- P. C. Rathgeber, furniture
- M. R. Doran, monuments
- Joyce Lumber Company
- Edward Robbins & Company, department store
- A.S. Chapman, groceries
- A.D. Mitchell & Son, groceries
- J.C. Reagan, plumber's supplies
- Folkert Kadyk, groceries
- R. Green & Sons, department store
- John P. Bly, cement blocks
- E.F. Johnson, news and confectionery
- McCullagh Bros., hardware
- Fulton firemen
- S. J. Akker, ice dealer
- American Express Company
- J. C. Snyder, coal and feed
- Winnie Tracy, pony with decorated cart.

#### ENTERTAINMENT

The 'exercises' were held under the big elm trees located on the north side of the college building (post office site). The opening prayer was offered by Reverend K. J. McAulay, pastor of the Presbyterian Church. The program included music and an eloquent and patriotic address by Reverend W. J. Abel of Morrison who held the audience's attention for forty-five minutes. He "combined humorous stories with patriotic sentiments in the right proportions." The school children sang, "America," and a male quartet from Morrison sang, "in excellent voice through megaphones." There were firecrackers and cap pistols, "kept up an almost constant fusillade on the outskirts of the grounds."



**This parade entry had 14 young ladies, each one representing the 13 original colonies plus the Statue of Liberty.**



**Twenty-four local businesses entered floats in the parade. (See Listing)**

#### CONTESTS AND RACES

Although the heat must have been oppressive in the afternoon, the contests started at two o'clock on the college campus with a fifty-yard sack race. There were eight entries: Oliver Plunkett was first money, \$1, and Eugene Field came in second for a prize of fifty cents. One wonders if his namesake, current First Ward Alderman Gene Field would participate (and win) in such a race? Then, a girl's race followed with nine entries and the winner was Irene Burch with \$1 prize and Gertrude Wilkens won fifty cents. Another fifty-yard race for boys had fourteen entries. The most interesting and amusing contest appeared to be the fifty-yard fat men's race. With three entries, C. H. Cooley took first money of \$1 and Claus DeWeerd second place and captured the fifty-cent prize.

#### ELEVENTH AVENUE RACES

Eleventh Avenue, originally named Broadway, was the widest street in Fulton one hundred years ago and probably remained so until Fourteenth Avenue was widened to accommodate a main thoroughfare through Fulton. This part of the program was a team of horses racing against time. The distance was from the watering tank located in the middle of the street between Petersen Plumbing and Words of Wisdom stores. They went up to the west line of Eighth Street, in front of the homes of Wayne Higgins and Randy Balk, which was a distance of 350 yards. C. V. Martin came in first with his team at 29 seconds; then George Ingwersen, Kirk Snyder and Claus DeWeerd. This race was followed by an exhibition race by Clinton's famous fire team, "Bonny and Beauty" who ran the race in 26 seconds. Gary Harrity recently wrote an article in the Clinton Herald about this team of horses.

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### **THIRTEENTH AVENUE RACES**

The program of sporting events was held on Prairie Street; currently 13th Avenue. The first was a horse race with five entries and won by David Shaw's horse, and second place went to Kirk Snyder's horse. A mule race followed with both entries owned by J. Galusha of Gardenplain. He was awarded first (\$5) and second place (\$3). The last sporting event on 13th Avenue was a ring riding contest with four entries.

### **FOURTH STREET RACES**

The closing events in the afternoon were of high interest to the crowd. It was an automobile race with a distance of one and three-fourths miles starting at the pump station (corner of 4th Street and 13th Avenue) going south to 15th Avenue; then east to the C, M, & St. P (Milwaukee Depot at 14th Street); turning around there and returned to the starting point at the pump house. This timed race had four entries. Mr. Greeneugh of Sterling came in first (\$5) with his Oldsmobile touring car at 3:17; about thirty-two miles an hour. Elmer Van Dellen with his Buick took second place (\$3) with a time of 3:29 and H. Dierks of Clinton, third, time of 3:45. A bicycle race followed with Omar Morrow winning first place

### **EVENING PROGRAM**

The evening program was presented on a platform on the corner of 4th Street and Broadway (11th Avenue); same site as the stage used for the Fulton Dutch Days Festival. At eight o'clock, the Libby Band presented a musical concert and the Morrison quartet performed again. Surprisingly, the next activity on the program was a wrestling match between Charles Meeker and Kid Estabrook. Reverent J. J. Clancy, pastor of the Catholic Church, served as the referee. Meeker won two of the three bouts.

### **DANCING**

There was dancing day and night in the opera house and the Fulton Journal reported, "although the heat was oppressive, there were a large number who participated in the pleasure of the festive dance."

### **IN REVIEW**

The committee was applauded for the celebration in its planning and its success in the local paper. "The celebration was not only a success in attracting the largest crowd of people ever gathered at one time in Fulton, it was creditable for the capable management and strong list of races and attractions. It was one of the best advertisements for Fulton as a progressive and growing city that could be devised and hundreds of visitors expressed the highest praise for the merit and high order of which the plan of celebration was conducted."

### **1908**

"A view of the glorious day in Fulton as we celebrated the 4th of July," was written on a postcard in 1908 sent to Nellie Bastian (Mrs. Fred) who was visiting the Panama Canal. Miss Mable Bare went on to say, "the old town hardly knew itself and in spite of a down pour of rain in the morning, the celebration was as success." There are several photos of the 1908 July 4th celebration at the Fulton (Martin House) Museum. Umbrellas were in view on most of them.

Wishing you a Happy 4th of July on Americas 237th Birthday.

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