

OLD TIME BALLS IN HONOR OF WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

By William Frederic Worner

The first public celebration of the anniversary of George Washington's birthday, during his lifetime, is said to have taken place in Richmond, Virginia, followed by observances of the day in Maryland, Massachusetts and elsewhere. It was during Washington's first term as President of the United States that the 22nd of February was fixed upon for formal visits of congratulation; balls also were given to celebrate the occasion. By 1790, the event began to be widely observed. The Society of the Columbian Order resolved to commemorate it forever.

It seems quite impossible now to determine just when the first public celebration of the day was held in the borough of Lancaster. It is known, however, for a certainty, that as early as 1796 the birthday of the "Father of His Country" was fittingly observed here, "with the usual demonstrations of joy." This quotation is copied from the Lancaster Journal of Friday, February the 26th, of that year. In view of the fact that the Journal used the expression, "the usual demonstrations," it is natural to infer that the event had been previously celebrated in this town. On the evening of the 22nd of February of that year a splendid ball and supper were enjoyed at the White Swan tavern, kept by Matthias Slough, at the south-east corner of Penn Square and South Queen street. This ball, as stated by a weekly newspaper of the time, was honored by a "brilliant assemblage of ladies. The utmost harmony and decorum prevailed, and every countenance testified to the high esteem held for the great character whose merits the people were celebrating."

In the year 1797, Washington's birthday was celebrated in Lancaster borough "with every demonstration of respect and veneration. A large company of gentlemen at Mr. Mathias Slough's [White Swan inn], and another at Mr. Leonard Eicholtz's, dined in honor of the day. In the evening, a ball at the courthouse was honored with a brilliant assembly of ladies; after which they retired to Mr. Slough's and partook of an elegant supper prepared for the occasion.

"The officers of the militia partook of a handsome repast at the house of Major John Light and closed the day with social festivity.

"The Volunteer Company of Infantry fired sixteen rounds in honor of the day, partook of an elegant dinner at the Conestoga bridge, and returned at a seasonable hour in sobriety, order and harmony."

The following year, 1798, the anniversary was recognized in Lancaster "by a ball in the courthouse, which was honored with the presence of a brilliant assemblage of ladies. The company partook of a splendid supper at Mr. Slough's."

Friday, February 22nd, 1799, was celebrated in Lancaster with "every demonstration of joy and respect.

"The volunteer companies paraded, and, after various other evolutions, saluted the day with sixteen rounds. They then retired to partake of entertainments prepared for the occasion, and closed the day with order and decorum.

"In the evening there was a ball and a supper at Mr. Slough's, which were honored with a handsome assemblage of ladies."

In 1800 the observance of Washington's birthday anniversary assumed a different aspect, and more in keeping with his elevated rank and character. The immortal hero had passed to his heavenly reward a little less than two months before. Tuesday, January 7th, 1800, was observed by the inhabitants of Lancaster borough as a day "of mourning, tribulation and respect for the memory of the illustrious Washington." A solemn procession moved through the principal streets of the borough to Saint James's Protestant Episcopal

church, where a requiem service was held in his memory. Six weeks later, Saturday, February 22nd, the anniversary of his birth was observed in Lancaster "with the most respectful attention. Divine service was held in the different churches, and discourses portraying the virtues and patriotism of 'the hero whose loss we deplore,' were spoken to crowded audiences. An handsome eulogium was delivered to the members of Lodge No. 43, (and a number of respectable visitants) by Brother W. C. Frazer."

In 1805, the anniversary was celebrated by a "practising ball," held in Mr. Fisher's long room. Mr. Cezeron, who taught dancing in Lancaster for many years, was the promoter of this affair. The managers were Mr. Yeates, Mr. Hubley and Mr. W. Barton. Strange to relate, the ball began at 7 P. M.

Three years later, Monday, February 22nd, 1808, the anniversary of the birth of our greatest American was held "with many demonstrations of respect." In the evening, a splendid ball was given at the Fountain inn, which, at that time, occupied the site of the present Lincoln hotel, 32 South Queen street. It was kept by Henry Reigart. This ball, we are informed by the Lancaster Journal of Friday, February 26th, 1808, "was attended by the most brilliant assemblage of ladies that we have ever witnessed in Lancaster." There were also present his excellency Thomas McKean, governor of the state, and Thomas M. Thompson, secretary of the commonwealth. Several members of the legislature also attended, Lancaster at that time being the capital of Pennsylvania.

In 1810, Washington's birthday anniversary was celebrated by a ball that was held in the lodge room of Masonic hall. The building is still standing on West King street, adjoining the old city hall.

On Friday, February 22nd, 1811, a "birth night" ball was held at the old Fountain inn, which was still kept by Henry Reigart. Members of the legislature, and others who desired to attend, were informed that the subscription paper was to be seen at the bar of the Fountain inn, where they could subscribe.

On the eve of the anniversary in 1812, a ball was given in Lancaster that probably surpassed anything of the kind ever held in the town up to that time. The event took place at the tavern conducted by John Hatz, which was located on North Queen street on the site of the present Pennsylvania hotel. The tavern, known as "The Sign of Doctor Franklin," had recently been rebuilt. A little less than a year before, (on Friday, March 1st, 1811) the citizens of Lancaster had been startled by the cry of fire, which broke out in a building in the second block of North Queen street, tenanted by Philip Klein. Before the flames could be checked, four dwelling houses, a blacksmith's shop a barn and other buildings, were destroyed, including the tavern owned by John Hatz, at that time kept by George Koenig. Mr. Koenig lost not only all the liquors in his cellar and other property, but also several hundred dollars in cash.

In connection with the fire, it is interesting to read in the Lancaster Journal that "the gentlemen of the Legislature generally, exerted themselves with a zeal that did them honor, and justly entitles them to the gratitude of the inhabitants of Lancaster."

The "borough fathers" of Lancaster, even so far back as 1812, had their civic problems as well as have the city fathers of the present. Evidence of this is in the rebuke administered by the press of that day to the town officials for the inadequacy of fire equipment. The Lancaster Journal reminds the citizens "that the sorry condition of some of the engines did no credit to the borough; nor was the spirit and activity of many of the citizens so conspicuous as we have seen it on former occasions. There were too many commanders—which at least produced confusion in obedience."

In concluding its criticism, the Lancaster Journal made the following pertinent statement:

"The alarm of fire not having been given until the flames had made considerable progress, shows that there is something required from the police."

Nine months after the fire, John Hatz had his tavern rebuilt and ready for occupancy. In the Lancaster Journal of Friday, November 22nd, 1811, he informed "his friends and the public in general that he has opened a tavern in that new three-story brick house, Sign of Doctor Franklin, a few doors north of Mr. Dickson's bookstore, North Queen street, Lancaster, where he hopes by keeping good liquors and accommodations to obtain a share of the public patronage."

When the social leaders of the town decided in 1812 to observe the anniversary of Washington's birth by a subscription ball it was but natural that they should select the newest and finest hostelry. Accordingly, the ball was held in John Hatz's ballroom, Sign of Doctor Franklin, on the eve of Washington's birthday anniversary, February 21st, 1812. The managers were: A. Reigart, Jr., James Humes, John Reynolds and J. P. Porter.

In 1908, the late Miss Susan S. Steinman found among a lot of old papers the original list of the subscribers, as well as of the guests invited, to this ball held on February 21st, 1812. It bore the signatures of many of the best-known residents of Lancaster borough at that time—many of the names being still familiar. What became of this time-stained document is not known. It was carefully copied, however, at the time of its discovery; and the names were published in the Lancaster Intelligencer of February 22nd, 1908. It is from a copy of this newspaper that the following list is taken:

"We, the subscribers, agree to pay our respective parts in defraying the expense for a ball in celebration of Gen. G. Washington's Birth, to be held on Friday evening, the 21st instant, at Jno. Hatz's ball room. Lancaster, February, 1812."

W. P. Atlee.

William Bausman, Mr. Biddle (senator), Edw. Brien, James Buchanan, Mr. B. Buckley, H. A. Bullard, Jno. Burg, Junr., Th. Burnside.

H. Carpenter, G. Clarkson, Joseph Clendenin, Geo. Cochran, Rob. Coleman, S. C. Coleman, T. B. Coleman, Richd. M. Crain.

Geo. Dorrance, Jno. Drinker, Wm. Duncan.

Jno. Eberman, Jacob Eicholtz, James S. Espy, R. Evans.

S. Fahnestock, Patk. Farrity, Wm. A. Finley, Walter Franklin, John Frazer, Jacob Frey, Junr.

John B. Gibson, J. Gibson, Wm. Glenn, Geo. Graeff, J. Graeff, Jr., Michl. Graeff, Daniel Groves, John Gundacher.

Willm. Hamilton, Mr. Hand, Geo. Haverstick, Henry E. Heinitsh, Mr. Henderson, George Hoff, Jr., J. Holgate, C. R. Hopkins, John Hubley, Jos. Hubley, Jas. Humes, Sam'l Humes, Junr.

Wm. Jenkins.

Henry Keffer, Wm. Kirkpatrick, Geo. H. Krug.

Nath. Lightner.

Thoms. McEuen, Mr. Marvin, Geo. L. Mayer, Benj. R. Morgan, Josh. Mosher.

Thos. M. Noss.

John Passmore, Alexander M. Piper, Wm. Pennock, J. B. Porter, J. Preston.

J. Ralston, Adm. Reigart, Jr., Dan. Reigart, Jno. Reynolds, Molton C. Rogers, W. B. Ross.

Conrad Schwartz, Junr., James M. Sherry, H. Shippen, Anthony Simmons, F. Smith, Jasper Y. Smith, Jno. F. Steinman, Jr.

John F. Voigt.

Hugh Wilson, J. Worrell.

J. Yeates.

Paul Zantzinger, Jacob B. Zell.

The names of those invited to the ball follow:

Mrs. Atlee.

Mrs. Barton (David), Mrs. Barton, Misses Barton (4), Mrs. Barnet, Misses Bausman (3), Mrs. Bryan, Miss Burd.

Mrs. Carpenter, Miss Carpenter, Mrs. Clarkson, Misses Clarkson (2), Mrs. Clendenin, Mrs. Clendenin, Mrs. Cochran, Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. Crain, Mrs. Cuningham.

Miss Davis, Mrs. Dickson, Miss Diffebach, Mrs. Dornick, Misses Dornick (2).

Miss Eaton, Mrs. Eberman (John), Mrs. Eicholtz (Painter), Miss Eicholtz, Mrs. Elicott, Miss Elicott, Mrs. Evans, Misses Evans (2).

Mrs. Fahnstock, Miss Fahnstock, Miss Fahnstock, Misses Fairness (2), Mrs. Franklin, Miss Emlen D. (Franklin), Miss Emlen P. (Franklin), Mrs. Franks, Misses Frey (2), Mrs. Fulton.

Mrs. Gainor, Mrs. Galbraith, Miss Gezeran, Miss Gloninger, Miss Sally Graff, Mrs. Graeff, Misses Graeff (2), Miss Gray, Misses Gundaker (2), Miss K. Gundaker.

Mrs. Hall, Misses Hall, Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Hand, Mrs. Haverstick, Miss Haverstick, Miss Heck, Mrs. Henry, Misses Henry (2), Mrs. Henry (Ben), Misses Henry (2), Miss Herbst, Mrs. Hoff, Miss Holgate, Mrs. Hopkins, Mrs. Hough, Miss Hough, Mrs. Hubley, Misses Hubley (2), Mrs. Hubley (John), Misses Hubley (4), Mrs. Huffnagle, Misses Huffnagle (3), Mrs. Humes (Sam'l), Mrs. Humes (Sh'ff), Misses Humes (2), Mrs. Huston.

Mrs. Jeffries, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. M. Jimsey, Misses Jordan (2).

Miss Kauffman, Mrs. Keffer, Mrs. Keppele, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, Mrs. Krug (George), Miss Kuhn.

Mrs. McCulloch, Miss Martin, Mrs. Michael (Wm), Miss Michael (do), Misses Michael (2), Mrs. Montgomery, Mrs. Moore, Misses Moore (2), Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Moore, Miss Moore, Misses Mosher (2), Miss Muhlenberg, Miss Muny, Mrs. Musser (George), Misses Musser (2), Mrs. Musser (John) Mrs. Musser (Mats.), Mrs. Murray, Mrs. Myers, Miss Myers.

Miss Ogeiby, Miss Old, Miss Oldricks.

Mrs. Passmore, Mrs. Porter, Miss Porter, Miss Pleasant.

Mrs. Reid, Misses Reid (2), Mrs. Reigart (Harry), Miss Reigart (do), Miss Reigart, Mrs. Rieger, Misses Reiger (2), Miss Reynolds, Miss C. Ross, Mrs. Ross (Patton), Miss Ross.

Mrs. Scott, Miss Scott, Mrs. Shaffner, Mrs. Schwartz (Cond. Jr.), Mrs. Slaymaker, Mrs. Smith, Miss Smith, The Governor, Simon Snyder, Miss Snyder, Mrs. Steinman.

Mrs. Trisler, Misses Trisler (Geo), Miss Trimble.

Mrs. Voigt.

Miss Watkins, Mrs. Weaver (George), Miss Weaver, Mrs. White, Mrs. Whiteside, Miss Whiteside, Mrs. Whitmoir, Misses Whitmoir (2), Mrs. Whitmer (Bridge), Miss Whitmer, Mrs. Wilson (Hugh), Mrs. Anne Wilson, Miss Wilson, Misses Work (2).

Mrs. Yeates, Misses Yeates (2).

Mrs. Zantzinger, Miss Zantzinger.

Author: Worner, William Frederic.

Title: Old time balls in honor of Washington's birthday / by
William Frederic Worner.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Washington, George, 1732-1799 --Anniversaries, etc.
Washington's Birthday.
Holidays--United States.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1927

Description: 63-66 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 31,
no. 5

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.31

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address