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*About 1900*

FOURTH OF JULY

1861-1900

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The main author of this article was Philip Fulton, a teacher in the San Juan School District. The research of George Klare, Jr., also contributed to the subject. Mr. Fulton's paper has been reduced in length and somewhat modified to fit the limitations of *Golden Notes*. The source for this story is the newspapers for July 3, 4 and 5 of the years indicated in the text.

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Pictures and extract from the *Sacramento Union* are through the courtesy of the Sacramento City and County Museum at 1009 Seventh St., Sacramento.

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*COVER PHOTO: Courtesy City-County Museum*



***ST. GEORGE HOTEL***

*The four story building in the right, located at 4th and J Streets, scene of the flag incident on July 4, 1861. Focus of the picture is a "military" detachment and their cannon called "UNION BOY" fired on Fourth of July celebrations.*

*Courtesy City-County Museum*

# FOURTH OF JULY

1861–1900

**S**ACRAMENTANS have celebrated the Fourth of July almost every year since 1849. They thereby appropriated a celebration that commemorated the English colonists' Declaration of Independence from a European power. A more exact group might have recalled the fact that California received its independence from a European power on September 16, 1822, when Mexico, which then ruled California, successfully completed its revolution from Spain. Be that as it may, Californians celebrate the Fourth of July.

The celebration from 1849 until 1861 was sometimes sporadic and informal and accompanied by patriotic editorials in the local papers. The outbreak of the Civil War stirred patriotic sentiment, for citizens considered the war a battle to save the Union. Celebration of the Fourth of July from 1861 to 1865 began at daybreak with church and fire bells ringing and local military units firing their cannon on the waterfront. By mid-morning, Sacramento residents and out of town visitors began to line the streets for an advantageous position from which to watch the grand civic and military parade. Following this event, many assembled in the Pavilion at 6th and M Streets for the literary program. Here a prominent citizen would read the Declaration of Independence, a poet would read his poem commemorating the event and a well-known speaker would deliver a long, patriotic oration.

The Fourth of July in 1865 marked the beginning of a new era in the celebration. The Civil War was over and the intense emotional involvement in that event seemed to seek relief and overflow in patriotic celebrations. The editor of the *Sacramento*

*Union* seemed to catch this new spirit in his editorial for that day.

The present generation of Americans have been brought very near in spirit to the men of '76. During the long calm ruffled only by the windy strife of partisan place-seekers which preceded the great rebellion, our people were accustomed to burning powder, saluting the flag, and indulging in oratorical patriotism upon the Fourth of July; but the emptiness of the program became proverbial, for the people knew nothing of the stern realities of war and sacrifice; had much reason to question whether any of their living leaders would dare to bleed for a cause or a principle; respected rather than loved the national bunting, and recalled the story of the Revolution at the annual celebration with a kind of skeptical wonder as to whether the champions of American independence were actually the lofty, valorous and devoted patriots so persistently depicted for the emulation and honor of posterity. The epic of independence was gradually passing from distinct perception. . . . The change was sudden. . . . The masses have felt the same noble thrill of patriotism which animated their ancestors. . . . They have witnessed the ravage of war, and experienced the terrible anxiety of waiting for bulletins that must announce a costly victory or a disastrous defeat. The survivors of Andersonville are among us. . .

Like the men of the Revolution, the patriots of our day have also fought and triumphed over a terrible league of foreign and domestic foes, and grieved to know the worst of their enemies were of their own household. . . . Amid the thunderous rejoicings of a redeemed nation on this Fourth of July, we shall pledge allegiance to true democracy and resolve that henceforth, come weal or woe, the United States of America shall present an unsullied and consistent example of respect for the inalienable rights of man.

But again there was no need to remind the populace of its patriotic duty. For when the day actually dawned, heralded by the ringing of city fire bells, "every principal street" in the city was hung with bunting and flags and from the porches and windows of both stores and homes could be seen likenesses of Washington, Jefferson, and Sherman surrounded by branches and greenery brought in by the cartload from outlying areas. The parade consisted of over thirty units included in which were military units, fire companies, the wagons of patriotic merchants and several

private vehicles. The literary exercises were reported to be of the "highest quality," and the day, which ended with fireworks, was described as "a great success."

The revived spirit of celebrating the Fourth of July produced a new phenomenon in 1867. A group of irreverent young men, bored with the traditional literary exercises and boat races in the afternoon, decided to relieve their boredom with their own parade. The *Union* reported on July 3, 1867, that the group was planning a burlesque procession in the style of the "'Windy Guards,' which refers to General Winn's none-too-well-trained guards." The paraders adopted the title of "Sherman's Bummers," apparently in imitation of General Sherman's "motley caravan," which paraded in the Grand Review held in Washington, D.C., in 1865 and had so delighted the crowd.

The "Bummers" of Sacramento were apparently organized for fun and to relieve the boredom and pompousness of some of the Fourth of July celebration. Their fun consisted of ridiculing or presenting a cynical commentary on prominent events and people. The group, which spent over two hours in procession, was presided over by a "General Sloverngovern" who brandished a large wooden sword. He was followed by carriages of ladies, and ladies on horseback, "all of which presented a somewhat masculine appearance." This feature was followed by a Chinese on horseback who carried a sign which read, "Forty dollars a month, eight hours a day," a crack at the Central Pacific Railroad's use of Chinese labor in building the first transcontinental railroad. Bringing up the rear of the line were the commissary and ordinance department of the detachment. The commissary was a wagon containing a keg of beets, an empty cask, a live goat, a live cat, and a dead chicken. The ordinance consisted of a fifteen-inch smokestack mounted on a dry-goods box and a pair of wheels. Reclining against the box were three pumpkins labeled "cannon balls." The whole was heralded by a sign which read, "Sherman, first in war, first in peace." The parade, reported the *Sacramento Union*, "was viewed to the great edification of men, women, boys, girls, Americans, Foreigners, and Negroes."

This group of irreverent youths, stimulated by the public reception of their burlesque parade, and their impulse to thumb' their nose at "the establishment," appeared again on July 4, 1868,

with their "Rag-Tag and Bobtail Brigade." By now they had been dubbed the "Fantasticks" and the "Horribles" and subsequently only as the "Horribles." They had emerged from the sort of comic tableaux kind of thing, with which they began, into a biting, pungent satire of not only the official parade and the literary exercises and their dignitaries, but of the foibles of life as well. One of the most notable of these was a group of men banded together under a banner labeled, "The Celebrated Order of Kuk-Klux."

Patriotic fervor and the impishness of the "Horribles" seemed to lag between 1868 and 1876. In fact, the Declaration of Independence was not even read in 1871, the only time this failure occurred between the Civil and Spanish American War.

However, the Centennial celebration of 1876 revived not only patriotic fervor but also the "Horribles." The Fourth of July celebration of that year must certainly have been awaited with a great deal of anticipation. Indeed, one receives the impression that if anything had happened to delay the event, the city would have burst at the seams. For at least a week before the great day, virtually every local newspaper advertisement was decorated with flags and an eagle, if not also with a patriotic motto of some sort. And on July 1, 1876, the *Sacramento-Record-Union* displayed on its front page, a full page facsimile of the Declaration of Independence with an insert which described not only the political conditions which led to its signing, but a description of the actual signing as well. The same issue also contained an official programme of the day, one full column in length. A conspicuous addition to the activities which had the official sanction of the Committee of Arrangements was the parade of the "Horribles." And vying for attention on the same page as the programme were advertisements of various theatrical attractions which would be offered especially for the holiday, as well as notices of the various horse races planned for the day at Agricultural Park. Innumerable ads offered Chinese Fireworks of every kind and description for sale. The Butchers Association of Sacramento announced that it would hold a torchlight parade on the eve of the Fourth, invited all comers to participate, and respectfully requested that all homes and business establishments on the route of the parade be illuminated by torchlight. The enthusiasm of the moment carried

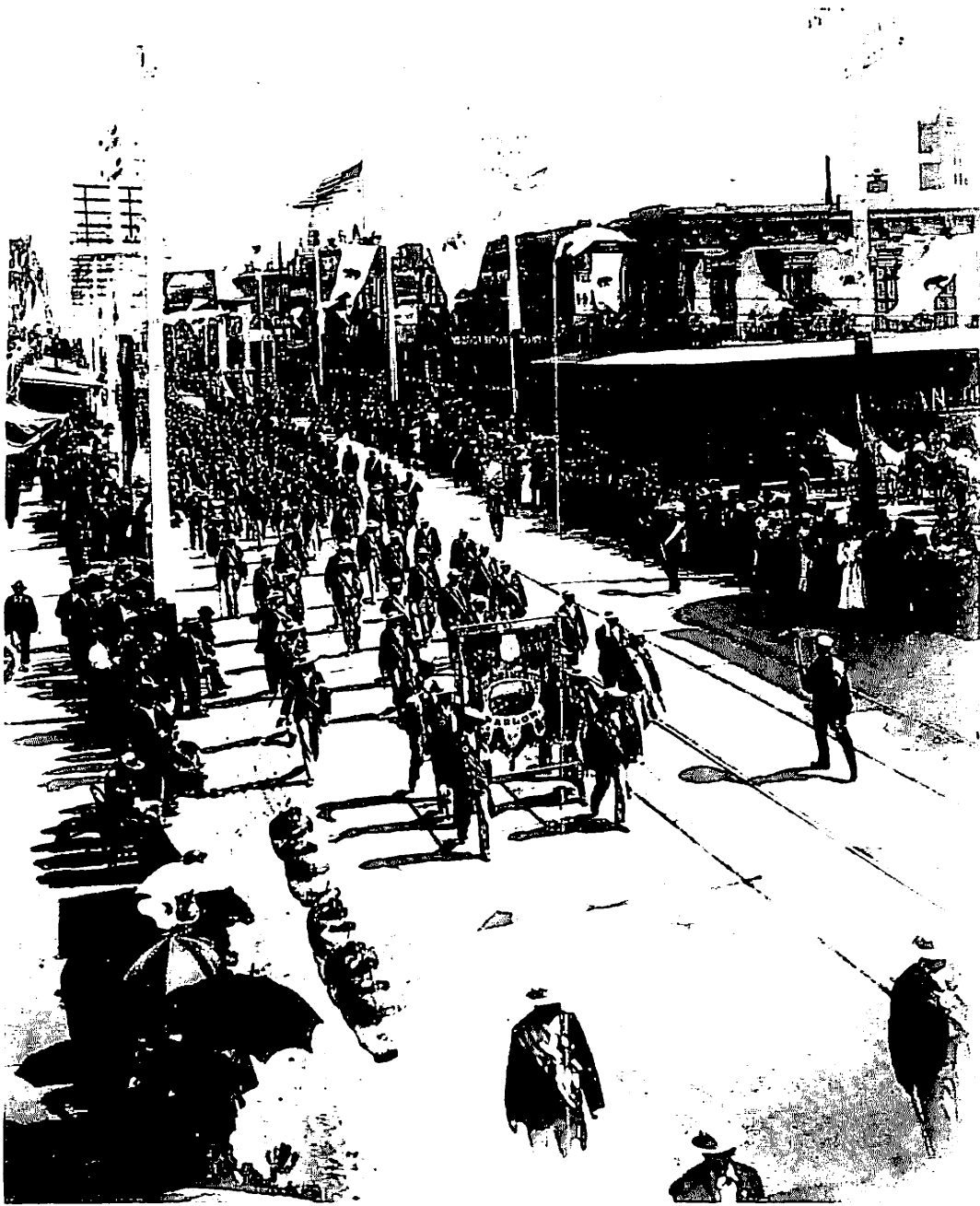
over into even the field of religion. And on the Sunday which preceded the Fourth of July, whole services were planned around the patriotic motif, including sermons with titles such as "Religious Patriotism," and the signing of patriotic songs.

Luckily, nothing did happen to delay the long-awaited celebration, and when dawn greeted the city, accompanied with salvos of artillery from the Sacramento River levee, it illuminated a collection of business houses, saloons and private dwellings which were about to collapse under the weight of their own ornamentation. The day before the celebration, the city streets were jammed with cartloads of greenery which was arranged on every square inch of available space. That there was any room for it at all was a matter of the merest chance for the several business establishments in the city which provided the bunting and flags for the occasion reported that by noon on the eve of the Fourth every scrap of material which was red, white or blue had been sold. And no wonder that it had, when one could count as many as one hundred and fifty small flags on the facade of just one store. And in addition to the traditional methods of decoration, many Sacramentans added a new wrinkle by displaying in front of their homes wrought iron replicas of patriotic symbols illuminated with numerous tiny gas jets. The decorations were elaborate, it is true. But nothing, no matter how elaborate, could outshine the subsequent events of the day.

The main event of the morning was the parade. It was the largest that had ever been held in Sacramento. Composed of over seventy-five individual units, its three divisions took one-half of an hour to pass any given point along the route of march. Immediately after the parade, some 1800 people adjourned to the city pavilion to hear the literary exercises which featured, among other things, a Centennial Chorus of one hundred voices.

If the main event of the morning was the parade, then the main event of the afternoon was most certainly the parade of the "Scent-ennials." And the "Scent-ennial Illiterate Exercises" gained for themselves the enviable merit of having attracted more people than those of the morning. Some 2,200 to be exact.

After the "Scent-ennials" parade, many people attended one of the numerous banquets which were given by organizations for members and their guests. Some of these were "The Vegetable



*The Native Sons of the Golden West – Parade on J Street about 1895–1900*  
*Courtesy City–County Museum*

Growers Collation" which was attended in large part by the Italian people of the area. The Mark Hopkins' entertained one hundred members of the Sacramento Hussars and their guests, and equally large numbers of people attended "The Firemen's Banquet," "The Artillery Collation," and the "Pioneer's Banquet." The climax of the day was the display of fireworks at Capitol Park which was viewed by "nearly the entire population of the city, reinforced by hundreds of visitors from Stockton, Folsom, Woodland, Davisville and in fact the whole country 'round about Sacramento.' The display which contained of course countless individual rockets, bombs, and firecrackers, featured sixteen "set-pieces," most of which were in the patriotic motif.

Despite the complexity and the variety of the Fourth of July celebration in Sacramento, one facet is and always has been a matter of the greatest interest. That facet is, of course, the "Horribles." To persons of the present day the attraction is, of course, their unusual and bizarre character. The interest shown in them in the past, however, was a completely different matter. For far from being a universally approved method of celebration, they were a hotbed of controversy and a snarl of factional interest.

In 1877, the "Horribles paraded, and presented as the feature of the day a caged monkey labeled 'Darwin's Ancestor.'" In 1878 several features were worthy of note. A single watering can affixed to the bottom of an old spring wagon was labeled "Sacramento Dust Raiser" in honor of the city water wagons. A second float depicted an Indian family appropriately labeled "The Native Sons of the Golden West." In 1879 the two most clever satires were, first, a wagon with sand flooring in the center on which stood Denis Kearney speaking to a group of sandlotters, the whole of which was labeled "W.P.C., whining, played-out Communists." And a Chinese laundry on wheels labeled "No Whites Need Apply." In 1880 extremely generous prizes were awarded for the first time for the best "Horrible" characters. The displays were so geared to the times that although they were easily understood by the observers, their significance escapes the 1972 reader. One float represented a barber shop which bore the question, "What! Shall I shave you and give you a drink, too?" Another float entitled "The Sand Lot" consisted of Denis Kearney locked into a drygoods box labeled "The Chinese Must Go!" "The Supreme Court Will Get Me Out!" "Every vote for Freud is a Vote to Keep Me Out of Jail!" One

very pointed jibe entitled "Delegates to the Chicago Convention for Grant" consisted solely of two Negroes. And, finally, two little boys made up as women were designated simply as "Women's Writes."

The popularity of the "Horribles" decreased significantly after 1880, for newspapers reported few details of their antics. Open revolt against the "Horribles" came in 1885 when the editor of the *Union* wrote:

We have persistently and irrefutably opposed the so-called procession of the "Horribles" in the Fourth of July observance. They have no right place in them and are offensive and brutish.

Nevertheless, the "Horribles" were revived in 1890. Captain Karcher and his police force were depicted on the warpath for their salaries, the city fire-alarm system came in for a good rib, and a tramp bore the sign, "Don't vote for the bond measure; dirty streets are good enough." In 1891 the hit of the day was a satire on the custom of taking wounded persons to the receiving hospital in rickety express wagons. In 1892 a circus visited the city, and no "Horribles" were held. In 1893, however, the city was disturbed about the attempt of San Jose to appropriate the state capitol, and the feature of the "Horribles" of that day was a float constructed to resemble the capitol which bore the sign, "Solid As A Rock, Removal An Impossibility." Then from 1894 until 1898 no "Horrible" celebrations were held in Sacramento.

The "Horribles" were again publicly censured in 1896 when the *Sacramento Bee* wrote that "many grotesque figures were in line and a number of them were positively indecent." Two years later, the *Union* noted: "The 'Horribles' were not extremely funny, but at least they were respectable."

Prior to the celebration of the Fourth of July in 1898, the Board of Trustees of the city voted to postpone the annual appropriation to the "Horribles" committee until it could arrange a time for its parade which would not conflict with the time arranged for the bicycle race. The race, it seems, was sponsored by the Bicycle Club, the members of which described themselves in their complaint to the Board as among the most influential citizens and largest taxpayers in the city. In a meeting which occurred after the celebration, the Board voted to pay the claim of the

“Horribles” committee, but not without argument. One un-named member stated that it was a complete waste of money, while another said that “it should be \$500 as it kept the people in town all day.” This is the end of the “Horribles” in Sacramento. In 1899, in place of the “Horribles” a picnic was held at Oak Park. In 1900, newspapers expressed great dissatisfaction with official civic parades. In spite of the patriotic fervor which must have been engendered by the Spanish American War, none of it had been transferred to the Fourth of July celebration to give it the transfusion it so badly needed. After 1900, these celebrations seemed to lose the energetic quality they had from 1861 to 1899.

Various towns imitated the Sacramento “Horribles.” Marysville witnessed them in 1879, Red Bluff in 1884, Folsom in 1898 and Truckee in 1909.

Extracts from the *Sacramento Daily Union* for July 6, 1861

### NEW BIRTH OF THE NATION

The people of Sacramento city and county, on Thursday, held their first grand Union mass convention since the integrity of the Union was violently assaulted by traitors. The Union Club, embracing a large majority of the citizens of each of the districts and townships of Sacramento, have held Union meetings within their respective organizations since the news arrived of the fall of Sumter, but by common consent the anniversary of our independence appears to have been looked forward to as the occasion for a public testimonial suited alike to the day and the hour which has given it additional sacredness and solemnity. . . .

The ringing of joy bells at sunrise, and the firing of the customary salute to the return of the day, were the first acts recognized under the official programme of exercises; but long before the sun's disc appeared above our Eastern mountains and while the shadows of night were sleeping in their recesses, sharp explosions of small arms and miniature ordnance, with a running fire of crackers in the intervals, betrayed the sleeplessness of the spirit that was born with the first light of the day. The merry peal at sunrise was led by the bell of the Catholic Sisters of Mercy Asylum; and the iron tongues of the watchful sentinels in other towers had scarcely joined in full chorus, before the brazen mouth of the cannon welcomed the god of day, tipping with silver crest the "jocund mountain top." The national salute was fired. . . at the corner of Seventh and L Streets. Other salutes were fired in one or two different portions of the city, by private parties, and in the pauses of the roar we could hear the dull thunders of the Sutterville artillery, proclaiming to the remotest southern bounds of the Sutter grant the validity of our title to the glorious Fourth. . .

As the sun rose, the glories of the dawn that had left the skies were reflected from the housetops and towers of every conspicuous building in the city. The celestial stripes and the stars in their azure firmament shone out broad and radiant from church spire, State House, steamboat, hotel and office, while smaller

emblems -- patches of the dawn of Independence -- waved from a hundred different roofs of private dwellings, or displayed their roseate hues from the dark green backgrounds of trees and gardens. The city was early astir, and the streets at once became lively with the din and bustle of the approaching celebration. Deputations from the country began to drop in, and by nine o'clock nearly every part of the county was represented by men, women and children in family or neighborhood parties. . . .

[There then follows three columns describing the parade and the units involved, with girls dressed as the "Goddess of Liberty." The parade ended at the pavilion at the northeast corner of Capitol and Sixth Streets, present location of the city parking lot. The feature of the "Literary Exercises" in this building was an hour and a quarter oration by Thomas Starr King.]

### FIREWORKS IN THE EVENING

Long before nine o'clock, the hour at which the pyrotechnical display was announced to begin, the public square between Ninth and Tenth Streets was in possession of an advanced corps of an "army of observation." By the hour of nine, the broad ground was covered, and every window, shed, post and tree surrounding the square was occupied by spectators. Carriages formed a cordon around the outside, and still hundreds were unable to see. Probably not less than seven thousand people were attracted to the spot. . . .

[Then follows a description of the fireworks.]

They were displayed from the north side, and the interval between the set pieces was filled by discharges of rockets and other fiery missiles from Young America Engine house [located on Tenth Street facing the Plaza]. The exhibition was all over before ten o'clock and the immense audience wending their way homeward, fatigued but satisfied with the observance of the day.

The display of the national flag of all sizes on public buildings, private residences, in front of stores, etc., was so general and so emphatic as to give evidence of a Union sentiment at least overwhelming if not altogether all pervading in the community. From the roof of the Union office we counted fifty-one flags

floating from flagstaffs. . . .

[By actual count there were 598 flags flown from buildings between Front and Twelfth and between J and N Streets. The St. George Hotel alone exhibited forty-seven flags. Units and individuals in the parade carried 317 flags, making a total of 915 flags to be seen in downtown Sacramento. However, there were some dissidents, called Secessionists, who spiked a cannon at the Pavilion and who hauled down at least one flag. But the most sensational incident was described as follows.]

Another incident of a somewhat kindred character occurred at the St. George Hotel soon after ten o'clock in the evening. J. W. Bideman and Curtis Clark, in reaching Fourth and J Streets, after the exhibition of fireworks at the Plaza had concluded, noticed in the hands of J. P. Gillis a flag entwined around a cane. Gillis was at the time standing on the corner in company with E. J. Sanders. Bideman concluded at once that the flag was not that of the Union, and remarked to Clark, "I'll bet ten dollars that that is a secession flag, and if it is I'm bound to take it if it is unfolded." In the course of a few moments, Gillis unfolded the flag, which proved to be that of the Southern Confederacy, and raising it on his cane over his left shoulder marched up and down the sidewalk in front of the St. George. The most of those present appeared to be Secessionists by sympathy, and were pleased with the exhibition. Bideman and Clark followed, and the first named, on approaching Gillis, caught him with the left hand by the throat and with the right tore the flag from the cane and put it in his pocket. Gillis appealed to his companion for a knife but no weapon was exhibited. Bideman stated that no such flag as that could be carried in this town in his presence, and left the ground with it. He and a large number of his friends returned to the St. George subsequently, and Frank Rhodes and A. Burns waved the flag and invited the Secessionists present in the most pressing manner to come and take it. The invitation was not accepted. Major Gillis subsequently plead for its return very earnestly, but the flag was considered by its possessors as too valuable a trophy to voluntarily surrender it. It is made of silk; it is two feet wide and four feet long; contains three stripes, two red and one white, and on the blue field were ten stars. When waved around by its captors, one star fell off, which the boys concluded was South Carolina.

[This flag is currently for sale by its Eastern owner.]

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P. O. BOX 1175  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95806

THE MANSION PUBLISHING CO.