

# 1880s knew how to party

■ When the 100 residents of Sharon threw a daylong bash, 1,000 came to celebrate.

In July 1889, the "embryo town" of Sharon in western York County decided to have a picnic and invite everyone within a 15-mile radius.

Sharon probably had no more than 100 residents. But at least 1,000 people took up the invitation.

A visitor reported that he arrived in Sharon at about 9 a.m. on a Thursday morning and found quite a crowd "pouring into the village in a continuous stream from every quarter, in carriages, phaetons, buggies, road carts, in wagons, on horseback, muleback and on foot."

People of all ages came from the vicinities of "Yorkville, Olivet, Blairsville, Hoodtown, Bullock's Creeks, from over on Broad river . . ." Then trains arrived from Blacksburg and Hickory Grove to deposit more people. In the case of Blacksburg, a passenger car was attached to a freight train.

The day followed a pattern familiar to those who came so eagerly. At 10:30 the Blairsville band played a lively tune designed to tell the folk to gather at the speaker's stand. Invited orators spoke for the next two hours.

First, W.L. McDonald, Esq., of Yorkville



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spoke for about 20 minutes. His talk favored the Farmer's Alliance, an organization that was noted for its vigorous fights against monopolies. The favorite target of the time was the jute-bagging trust which farmers believed charged outrageous prices for the jute wrapping used around cotton bales.

Gen. E.M. Law, noted for his witty anecdotes, "good hard sense," and oratorical skills was the featured speaker. Law supported the Alliance's aims and recommended that the county's schools be so situated that no child had to walk more than a mile and a half to school. He admitted that the idea was impractical but thought it was time that the people begin working on it.

The band played "Old Black Joe" and the crowd was invited to dinner. The locals invited the visitors to eat with them.

"If any one went away hungry from the great feast that followed, it was surely not the fault of Sharon," the visitor wrote.

The food was described as: "beefsteak, ham, eggs, turkey, chicken, duck, salads, pickles and sauces, lightbread, biscuit, cake in all its variations, nameless cookies without number, pies, custards, preserves and jellies, and the whole spread was wound up with peaches, apples and watermelons."

Sharon had an organized baseball team that had little experience but had sent the Hickory Grove team a challenge. The two "match

teams" met under a fierce sun at 2:30.

Hickory Grove, led by its captain, Dr. Ward, scored 20 runs in the first inning and maintained its lead throughout. A heavy rain ended the game in the seventh inning. The score was Hickory Grove 50 to Sharon's 17.

Sharon was gracious in its defeat. The Sharon team gave the game ball to the Hickory Grove club. The Sharon ladies gave the victorious team a huge bouquet of flowers. Each club agreed to meet again.

Not all were interested in baseball; some sought other diversions. Several wished to dance and asked the owners of one of the stores, Plexico and White, if they might dance in the store. One of the men was an elder in the church and rejected dancing as improper. The other store owner offered his half of the store. Soon they were "tripping the light fantastic toe" to the music of an impromptu harmonica band.

Others organized games and played until a storm hit about 5:30. Still, the crowd didn't finally disperse until around 7:30.

The Sharon picnic was pronounced a great success. The crowd was reported as well behaved and orderly with "drunken rowdiness very conspicuous by its absence."

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