

## BLOOMSBURG'S 1908 NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATION

An article entitled, "Used to Dress Up, Visit on New Year's Day," appeared in the Bloomsburg newspaper, *The Morning Press*, on February 22, 1940, recalled how people in Columbia County used to celebrate New Year's Day in the early 1900s. It told about individuals who wore masks and went about their community accompanied with some drummers to visit their friends and to have refreshments. There was also the custom of roving bands of "shooters" who marched around discharging their firearms. Apparently, this was common occurrence in the Roaring Creek area. The writer declared, "It was as much a feature of New Year's as sauerkraut and many had a fine time, either in parading about or watching." *The Morning Press* in 1904 described the New Year's observance on the first day of the new year: "As the Court House clock tolled the hour of twelve yesterday Bloomsburg's bells and whistles joined in a medley of noise and joyful clanging. The band was out on a serenading tour and everyone was on pleasure bent." It also made a reference to "mummers" who were out celebrating in full force in different parts of the county. A century ago "watch night services" in religious congregations were common as opposed today. A newspaper account in 1907 reported the Methodist Episcopal Church in Bloomsburg commemorated the passing of the old and coming of new year in a continuous three hour service, "deeply spiritual," by a large number in attendance.

Today, people celebrate New Year's differently from how our ancestors did several generations ago. In the early part of the century the focus was more on January 1 whereas today it is on New Year's Eve. When we hear of "mummers," we immediately think of the mummers' parade in Philadelphia, certainly not in Columbia County. Today, the big attraction is the numerous televised football games on New Year's Day.

*The Morning Press* had a headline on the front page announcing that "Bloomsburgers at Danville," for New Year's Day on January 1, 1908. The magnet that drew hundreds to ride the trolleys to Danville was the annual mummers' parade. The newspaper describe it as the "best that they have ever held" with thousands lining the streets until late in the evening. The following year the Friendship Fire Company took the leadership to organize Bloomsburg's first mummers' parade. Officials selected New Year's Eve for the event instead of New Year's Day rather than compete with Danville's celebration. Throughout December the local newspapers carried stories about the forthcoming mummers' parade such as the different groups participating, the judges, and the prizes for winners in the various divisions.

The procession started at eight o'clock in the evening from Town Hall and took a two-mile route through the town. It went down East Street to Fifth Street, then west to Market Street, turning north to Third Street and then west to West Street. After turning right on West Street to West Main, it then continued east up to Carver Hall, and countermarch to conclude at Market Square. The organizers asked the people living along the line of march to turn on their porch lights or place torches along the curb to make the street brighter. Parade participants also carried Japanese lanterns to help illuminate the parade.

*Daily Mail*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, on January 2, 1909, published the following article, "Massed Bands a Feature of Parade" that gave a laudatory account of the town's first mummers' parade. It was clearly seen as a success, and for a number of years the custom continued. Prizes provided by the town merchants would be considered rather unusual today. There were a few editorial changes involving capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

## MASSED BANDS A FEATURE OF PARADE

Mummers' Event in Bloomsburg New Year's Eve Was a Royal Success

### MORE THAN 700 PEOPLE IN LINE

Thousands of People Were Out and Everybody Had a Good Time

With thousands of people watching it, the first annual Mummers' parade, which was held under the auspices of the Friendship Fire Co., on New Year's Eve, was a signal success. There were more than 700 people in the procession, including five bands and a number of floats.

Every costume was a credit to its wearer, and every organization in it deserves special mention as well as does every individual. In all it was an event worthy of the name, and is only the beginning of what will, no doubt, be an annual institution in Bloomsburg.

Long before the time set for the parade the streets began to take on a holiday appearance. Despite the cold weather the residents turned out in force, and Main Street was soon crowded. Not only was this street crowded, but at every intersection of streets over which the procession could be seen hundreds of people all anxious to get a good view of the parading mummers were gathered.

That all the arrangements had been well made was evidenced by the lack of confusion that usually accompanies such a turnout. Everything was orderly, and the preliminaries passed off just in the manner planned by the committee from the Friendship Fire Co., which originated the parade, and which deserves much credit for its success.

Shortly after eight o'clock, the hour set for the parade, it was announced that all was ready for the event and it was off. The line of marchers as previously published was followed and there were plenty of red fire and light among the route. Many of the mummers carried lighted Japanese lanterns, and torches. These with the many-colored uniforms made a unique and attractive picture.

Leading the parade was [County] Commissioner Jerry A. Hess, who was the Chief Marshal, mounted on a fine charger, and followed by the remainder of the committee of the Friendship Fire Co. They were followed by the Citizen's Band, dressed up in a fantastic manner, who wore an attractive "Merry Widow" lid. Then came the Rescue Fire Co., with its great darktown makeup, the Rescue Life Saving Crew, with its hook and

ladder, and their ambulance, which might have been Joe Fest's ice cream cone wagon. A Red Cross nurse, with a "Merry Widow" hat, was inside the "ambulance." A reel of rope pulled by a dog and a delegation of the Rescues made up as Darktowners completed this highly ludicrous representation.

Marshalling the second division was A. H. Gennaria, with the Millville Band, furnished the music. The Knights of the Golden Eagle Commandery followed and made a fine appearance. William Brobst acted as commanding office in the absence of Mr. Gennaria, the commander of the division. The Patriotic Order Sons of America followed. It made a fine appearance.

Bruce C. Hidlay led the third division, and the Catawissa band furnished the music. Bloomsburg lodge of Red Men shone particularly brilliant. Ahead of the band rode a delegation of six Red Men, and after the band came the lodge's float. Upon it were a regular Indian wigwam and a number of "Indians" in full uniform. They made a fine appearance and were applauded to the echo all along the line of march. Following the float came about thirty Red Men on ponies. This lodge was easily the best feature of the parade.

Harry Gilmore was the marshal of the Fourth Division, after which came the Bloomsburg band, which was led by T. L. Gunton. The band represented many different characters, and Mr. Gunton also wore a unique costume.

The Bell Telephone Company had a magnificent float in the line, with young women operators at a switchboard, apparently in the act of sending and receiving messages. The float was drawn by four horses. The Friendship Fire Company had a big delegation in this division as did the Good Will and Winona Fire Companies.

Leading the fifth division was the Espy band. All the musicians wore high hats, and made a comical appearance. Following this came the Bloomsburg High School, with its band called the "Dutch Noise." It was amusing and was decided upon as a prize winner, although there was no class in which to place it. The judges decided to make up a purse with which to purchase a prize, but this was later returned by the committee, which purchased a handsome American flag as a prize.

In addition to the lodges and fire companies in the parade, there were hundreds of grotesquely costumed individuals, many of which had makeups that were original and afforded much amusement along the line of march.

As a fitting close for this great parade, the four bands, under the leadership of Prof. Charles B. Smith, of Catawissa, and 100 strong, massed and marched up Main Street, playing "Onward Christian Soldiers." It was a great rendition, and was much enjoyed. Prof. Smith, by his able direction proved that he is a finished musician, and received many compliments.

For its success in arranging and bringing to a completion this New Year's Eve the committee of arrangements deserves the highest credit. It only asked contributions to meet the actual expenses, and no man was asked for more than a dollar, although some contributed more. The amount received was between \$90 and \$100, which in itself was enough to cover all bills, including compensation for all bands. The merchants who contributed the prizes also deserved a great deal of credit.

When it is considered that Danville had over \$200 worth of cash prizes for the mummies' parade on New Year's Day, and that the parade was not very much better than the one held in Bloomsburg, the great success of the initial Mummies' event in this town can be realized.

The list of prize winners is as follows:

For the most fantastically dressed woman, Ray Turner, received an umbrella donated by Lowenberg's clothing store.

Second, prize, hassock, donated by W. H. Brower's carpet store to a lady unknown to the judges.

For the most fantastically dressed boy, Guy Andrews received the first prize, a pair of skates donated by W. Mck. Reber.

Second prize, pair of buckle artics donated by C. M. Evans to the boy who turned a "flipper" in front of the judges.

For the most fantastically dressed man – first prize a sweater donated by Townshend's clothing store to the leader of the K. G. E. Commandery.

Second prize, umbrella, donated by Gross and Son to the man dressed in a flour sack.

For the finest float in line, the Bell Telephone girls won the first prize, and suitcase, donated by Housenick and Co.

The second prize, 25 pounds of flour, donated by H. B. Sharpless was won by the Midway.

For the most fantastically dressed couple – first prize, wine set donated by the Fair Store, to the man dressed like Uncle Sam and his lady.

Sam Brooking and M. R. Kelly won the second prize, one dozen plates donated by Paul Z. Harman.

For the most fantastically dressed fire company, the Rescue Hose Co. won the first prize, an American flag, and the second prize, a rug donated by the Leader Store Company to the Friendship Fire Company.

For the most fantastically dressed girl – first prize, 25 pounds of flour donated by Tooley and Co. to the Japanese girl on the right of the parade during the counter march down Main Street.

Second prize, one dozen cans of corn by J. L. Sharpless to the girl dressed in dark and red.

For the most fantastically dressed secret society – first prize, an American flag to the Red Men.

Second prize, lamp donated by H. Mercer to the K. G. E.