

# LABOR DAY

Introduction by George A. Turner

The country has been celebrating Labor Day since 1882. *The Democratic Sentinel*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, on September 8, 1893, published an article entitled, "Labor Day as Observed in Bloomsburg – The Jr. O. U. A. M. Have a Parade and Picnic." To put it into a historical context, an introduction on the start of Labor Day, and an identification of the Junior Order United American Mechanics are included.

Peter J. McGuire, General Secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, is often credited with establishing Labor Day. He felt there should be a time to honor those "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold." However, some historians identify Matthew Maguire, a machinist, who became the Secretary of Local 344 of the International Association of Machinists in Paterson, New Jersey, as the one who should have the credit for proposing a holiday to celebrate the laborer.

In New York City, Central Labor Union organized the first Labor Day celebration held on Tuesday, September 5, 1882. Two years later the custom of observing the holiday on the first Monday in September was established. The idea of a workingman's holiday quickly spread through the nation. Oregon in 1887 became the first state to make Labor Day a legal holiday. Twelve years after the first Labor Day, twenty-two other states had followed suit, and President Cleveland signed into law an act passed by Congress making Labor Day a national holiday.

Bloomsburg Labor Day celebration occurred on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, a Saturday rather than the first Monday in September. When Pennsylvania in 1889 first designated Labor Day as a legal holiday, it was on the first Monday in September. However, in 1893 the Legislature changed the day to the first Saturday in September. Since it was not uncommon for employees to work only a half-day on Saturday, this decision favored the business community since they would not have to give their workforce a holiday at the start of the week.

The organizer of this event was the Bloomsburg Junior Order United American Mechanics. This was not a labor union. Instead, it was a benevolent, patriotic, and secret fraternal group that embraced a nativist outlook that supported the interests of those born in the country over immigrants. The words "junior" and "mechanics" did not have any reference to age or occupation of the members. Initially, the Jr. O.U.A.M. was associated with the Order of United Mechanics but became a separate entity in 1885. To become a member one had to be native born, white, male, and between the ages of fifteen and fifty. It was expected that the member would fully subscribe to the following: "To maintain and promote the interests of Americans, and shield them from the depressing effects of foreign competition; to assist Americans in business; to establish a sick and funeral fund; to maintain the public school system of the United States of America, to prevent sectarian interference therewith, and uphold the reading of the Holy Bible therein."

The Jr. O.U.A.M. had scheduled a picnic at Oak Grove Park on Thursday, August 24; due to inclement weather, they cancelled it and decided to have a parade and celebration on Labor Day. The article identified the participants in the parade, the route it took through the town (two and a half miles long), and its conclusion at the festivities held in Oak Grove Park. Here there were refreshments, various amusements, and an orchestra that provided music for those wishing to dance. The Oak Park Grove Association consisting of twenty-five directors established the park in 1886 on East Fifth Street in the vicinity of the present-day Weis Market.

The article is reprinted as it appeared in the newspaper with the exception of a few corrections in punctuation and spelling for purposes of clarity.

### Labor Day as Observed in Bloomsburg –

#### The Jr. O. U. A. M. Have a Parade and Picnic

Saturday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, Labor Day, opened cool and cloudy, and for awhile it looked as if the Jr. O.U.A.M. would for the second time have to postpone their parade and picnic advertised to be held on that day. But not to be scared off so easily they decided to go ahead as per previous announcement and at an early hour had the Bloomsburg Cornet Band out, thus notifying the public that something unusual was about to take place. They were favored, however, for about noon the clouds partly cleared away, and the sun shone forth in all her splendor. The streets soon presented a holiday appearance, the banks, nearly all the public works and a few business houses were closed, and the employees thus turned loose, together with the people from the neighboring towns and country, thronged the sidewalks more or less all day. At 2 o'clock the visiting and home Orders formed on Market Street as follows:

Chief Marshall – T. C.  
Harter, horse back

16 Little Girls in White

Assistant Marshals

Bloomsburg Cornet Band

Washington Fire Co. of  
Danville with 22 men neatly  
dressed in gray uniforms

Friendship Fire co. with 22  
men wearing helmets, red  
shirts and black trousers,  
pulling hose carriage  
followed by the steamer

drawn by Samuel Neyhard's  
fine big team of grays

Rescue Fire Co. with 12 men  
uniformed and pulling  
carriage

Winona Fire co., with 12 men  
uniformed and drawing  
carriage

Marshal D. W. Carter on  
horse back

Berwick Jr. O.U.A.M.  
numbering about 20 and  
appearing to good advantage

Guards of the Colors carrying  
muskets

Patriotic Order Sons of  
America, presenting a nice  
appearance

Citizens Drum Corps

Jr. Order United American  
Mechanics numbering about  
40 and wearing bright  
uniforms

They marched over the following route: up Main Street to East, down to Fifth, out to Market, up to Third, out to West, out to Main, up to East, down to Seventh, out to Park thence to Oak Grove Park.

The G.A.R., Sons of Veterans and P.O.S. of A. of Danville arrived too late to take part in the parade and went directly to the Grove which was well filled with men, women and children.

The flying horse, puppets and other contrivances furnished the amusement for many while a good orchestra was stationed on the dance platform and played for those who wished to "trip the light fantastic toe."

Refreshments of great variety were served on the ground so that no one needed go away hungry.

Taken all in all it was a decided success, and the boys who had the details to look after wish to return thanks to all who assisted them either by their presence or otherwise.