

THE FOURTH OF JULY IN REDRIDGE

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The Fourth Of July is coming up shortly, which brings back memories of the fourth of July celebrations of the past while living in Redridge as a small boy.

It was one of the very few holidays when the stamp mills would shut down with only the boilers and turbines kept running, so that the people could enjoy the festivities of the Fourth of July.

Of course, we all had to have firecrackers of all sizes which we purchased at the pool hall or candy store and at the Redridge Store, and we were warned to be real careful with them, and we were.

We all wanted to make as much noise as possible; so we took our firecrackers up on the bridge at the Redridge Dam, lit them from a thing we called a punk, a stick like a pencil that once lit burned slowly and one could light a lot of firecrackers from it. We dropped the firecrackers all lit through the railroad ties, and gauged them to explode half way down to the ground; so that the steel dam would make the bang sound louder and it would reverberate through the sleepy town of Redridge. Can you imagine what it sounded like with a bunch of kids exploding firecrackers?

An Uncle of mine Charles Mehring, a machinist at the Baltic Mill made a cannon, an exact replica of a Civil War cannon with a steel barrel about two and a half feet long and about six inches in diameter with a bore of about one and a half inches, and it had wheels about eight inches in diameter. The Mehring boys would haul that cannon up the hill by the depot, load it like they did in the Civil War minus the cannon ball of course and shoot it off to make some more noise. It was so noisy that the cows wouldn't go out to eat grass and the dogs would be hiding under the bed.

After the Mehrings moved away, that cannon ended up under our side porch, pointing out at the road coming in from Houghton. I used to tell the kids that came to see that cannon that it was my Grandfather's in the Civil War and he brought it home with him. I told that story so often that I almost believed it myself.

Besides making a lot of noise, there were other quieter ways we celebrated the Fourth of July by gathering down on the road between the band stand in back of the school and the little Finnish Church.

The band stand was a building about twenty feet square and had doors on all four sides that lifted up to form an awning and exposed a counter where they served pop and ice cream, which were kept in tubs of ice. Above this part of the Band Stand was an open area with a railing all around where the Redridge Band played their summer concerts, and the Redridge residents gathered around and listened to the music and visited with one another.

On the Fourth of July a lot of games were played and prizes were given to the Children who participated in the games. One of the games was the penny scramble where Mr. Holman would toss up a bunch of pennys into the air and one could watch the kids dive in, bump heads and try to pick up all the pennies they could. A penny meant a lot in those days and I don't

believe kids today would scramble for a dollar.

Another game was the three-legged race where two people would put their legs in a burlap sack, and try to run. One would have his left leg in the sack while the partner would have his right leg in the same sack and there would be several teams in the race.

Another was the wheelbarrow race where one was down on his hands and knees, and his partner would hold his feet up and they would then race to the finish line. I never liked to be the wheelbarrow in that type of race and avoided it if possible because that road was gravel and ones hands could get awfully beat up by the time they arrived at the finish line.

Of course, there was usually a baseball game played that afternoon down in the ball park on the Lake Shore which attracted large audiences seated on the grassy bank.

There were always some kids shooting off firecrackers during the festivities, such as putting a firecracker under a tin can to see how high the can would fly. Once though I remember someone threw a firecracker and it landed in the cuff of my Father's pants and then it exploded. It burned his leg slightly and it blew a rather large section off his pants leg.

In the evening there was always a band concert in the band stand and the festivities ended with some fireworks and then it was all over and back to work the next day.