

# Thousands help centenarian Parks celebrate birthday

No history of Monroe County would be complete without James Parks, one of a hardy breed of pioneers who could write in his memoirs that itinerant Indians occasionally slept in front of the cabin fireplace.

Small wonder, then, that his 100th birthday was an occasion for a well-attended celebration. In reporting about that impressive milestone, the *Bloomington Saturday Courier* informed its readers (who hadn't attended the "party"), "The occasion brought together a crowd of people estimated from eight to ten thousand in number. There were 10 acres of a moving mass of human beings, horses and vehicles."

The gathering place was Worley's Grove near Ellettsville, where Parks had lived for 64 years. The family had moved to Indiana from Wilkes County, N.C., and faced some anxious times until they settled in Richland Township.

Who of the celebrators didn't know or know of what an enormous contribution Parks had made to the progress of the county? He had been county commissioner, school



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

commissioner, judge, and a state legislator. In the latter case, he declined to run after one term, because he said he couldn't afford to pay for room and board in Indianapolis while the Indiana General assembly was in session.

Among the crowd for the celebration were people from the surrounding counties, particularly Morgan County. According to the *Courier*, "A special train from Martinsville and intermediate points brought six coaches loaded with people." As for the county seat of Monroe County, "The morning train took 450 people from Bloomington, and the noon train 150 more, while many went in private conveyances."

At the celebration there were those who saw the opportunity to make some money off

the crowd. Explained the newspaper, "A 'wheel of fortune' did a thriving business outside of the limits of the grove, and a number of the boys left a considerable spare change with it." There were also quite a few refreshment stands of "invigorating but not intoxicating" beverages on the grounds.

In a receiving line, Parks and his wife shook hands with those who wanted to congratulate him. In some instances he had to be told who the greeters were, because his eyesight was failing.

There was one guest who was particularly noted by the reporter. "They were greeted with many a hearty handshake and warm kisses, Uncle Jimmy especially coming in for a large share of the latter, which when administered by a cherry-lip damsel, he seemed to relish as in the days of yore. Once we thought that Mrs. Parks looked a little bit jealous, but, probably that was a mistake of ours."

The most prominent of the guests was former Indiana Gov. Thomas Hendricks, who was later to be vice president of the United States in the Grover Cleveland administra-

tion. Hendricks gave a half-hour after-dinner speech.

Other dignitaries who attended the dinner prepared by Mrs. F.E. Worley, were Indiana University President Lemuel Moss, a professor and a judge.

It was a timely celebration, since Parks died a couple of years later. In his obituary on April 7, 1883, the *Saturday Courier* chirped, "He was a staunch Democrat all his life, which probably accounts for him living to such an old age. He was never beaten for a political office. The first president he voted for was Thomas Jefferson, and he voted for every Democratic candidate except Horace Greeley."

In tribute to Parks the newspaper borrowed from the Bible. "He fought a good fight; he has run his race, and to use his own language, The Lord has called him home, where there is a heavenly mansion prepared for him, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Rest in peace."

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