Ste. Genevieve’s Fourth of July Freedom Celebration
Ste. Genevieve, Missouri
Ste. Genevieve County

In 1811, the Louisiana Gazette, Missouri’s first newspaper, published an article about Ste. Genevieve celebrating the 4th of July with 18 toasts, cannon salutes, and songs. This is the first record of Ste. Genevieve citizens celebrating our nation’s independence. In the past, the firing of a cannon has announced the start of the day and later it was used during community celebrations. While for many, the 4th of July has become a day of picnic and family events, Ste. Genevieve continues to celebrate the Independence Day with community events.

Now each year, a Patriotic 4th of July Celebration is held near the courthouse square, a traditional meeting place for Ste. Genevieve citizens in the past. It begins at 12 noon with a traditional ringing of church bells in memory of the announcement of Independence in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. The program begins with posting of flags by the VFW Honor Guard, recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by local youths, and then singing of the National Anthem. Members of the Ste. Genevieve colonial militia and the Junior Militia participate to honor the role of the Ste. Genevieve Militia at the May 26, 1780, Revolutionary War battle in St. Louis. The local Civil War group’s participation honors those who fought and died during our Civil War to restore the Union begun that original Independence Day.

A brief history of events occurring in Philadelphia prior to July 4th, 1776, telling of the arguments and negotiations that occurred within the Second Continental Congress is presented. It is explained that a formal description of the Declaration of Independence from England approved by representatives from 12 of the 13 colonies was announced on the 4th of July, 1776. Although Independence Day became a federal holiday in the United States in 1870 and a paid federal holiday in 1941, celebrating the 4th of July goes back to 1776 when independence was formally adopted.

Readings from the Declaration of Independence are then offered by a prominent member of the community. The VFW Honor Guard fires a salute in honor of those brave composers and signers of the Declaration. A keynote address is given about a patriotic subject such as freedom or patriotism.

This is followed by a musical program. A selection of songs honoring the various branches of the American military branches is performed and the playing of taps for those who have died in service to our country is quietly played in reverence. Also honored are veterans, those currently on active duty, and their families for the sacrifices they have made to protect our freedom. The event concludes with the singing of “God Bless America” and “America the Beautiful” followed by the retirement of the colors by the VFW Honor Guard.
Just before dusk, hundreds gather spreading out on blankets and in camp chairs for this festive event in our Pere Marquette City Park. The Ste. Genevieve Municipal Band gives a concert of traditional 4th of July music. The “Muny” band, composed of local adults and high school students, presents a variety of patriotic music, again honoring all branches of the military.

As darkness starts to descend, anticipation grows for the annual 4th of July fireworks display providing Ste. Genevieve citizens and visitors with a visual celebration honoring the 1776 signing of the Declaration of Independence. Local organizations, businesses, and individuals contribute to fund the star bursts and glittering explosions. Finally, this day of celebration comes to an end creating the largest traffic jam this small community experiences each year.

Bibliography:


2 Rozier, Firmin A., History of the Early Settlements of the Mississippi Valley, 1890, 322-324; Ste. Genevieve Herald, July 9, 1887

3 Mueller, Robert. “muellerrj@yahoo.com.” stegenevieve@gmail.com, 15 March, 25 April, 2020.


5 Ste. Genevieve Herald, July 10, 2014; ibid, July 8, 2015; ibid, July 6, 2016; ibid, July 12, 2017; ibid, July 11, 2018; ibid, July 10, 2019.

6 Ste. Genevieve Herald, June 13, 2018
Figure 1 - VFW Honor Guard Posting of Colors.

Figure 2 - Milice and Jr. Milice at the Patriotic 4th Ceremony.
Figure 3 - A Moment of Silence Honoring Fallen Soldiers.

Figure 4 - Bob Mueller addressing relating history.
Figure 5 - 4th of July Fireworks Display

Figure 6 - Ste. Genevieve’s Freedom Celebration Logo.
Figure 7 - People listening to Muny Band from Ste. Genevieve Herald newspaper dated 07-11-2018.

Pere Marquette Park hosted the evening event during Ste. Genevieve's Fourth of July celebration. Above, early arrivals camped out on the hill overlooking Yankee Field, where the Ste. Genevieve Municipal Band (top right) performed its annual patriotic concert. At the same time, workers set up fireworks to be launched from the old tennis courts for that night's show. (Photos by TOBY CARRIG/Herald Staff)

Figure 8 - Fireworks from Ste. Genevieve Herald newspaper dated 07-10-2019.

The finale of the fireworks show presented by the Ste. Genevieve Fireworks Committee lit up the sky over Pere Marquette Park on the Fourth of July and ended a day of celebration. (Photo by TOBY CARRIG/Herald staff)
Figure 9 - Crowd at Ste. Genevieve’s Pere Marquette City Park.