

WELCOMING IN THE NEW YEAR

The old year of 1957 has run its course with but two days left to call its own. At Tuesday midnight the bells will ring out the old year and ring in the infant 1958 in the way New Albany has observed from the earliest days . . . or at least since about 1829 when the city's first bell was placed in the cupola of the old courthouse. The story of some of New Albany's earlier celebrations of welcome to the new year follows.

It was on December 31, 1813, that New Albany observed its first New Year's Eve. On December 31 of the year before there had been no town of New Albany. Just how the handful of residents of the new village in the wilderness marked the advent of the new year of 1814 has not been recorded, but it was quite likely that it was spent in a watch service. The watch service, a custom now all but vanished, was a sort of prayer meeting set apart to ask atonement for transgressions during the past year and to seek Divine aid and comfort during the year ahead.

As New Albany grew and became dotted with church buildings, the watch services were held there with the congregation gathering about 10 o'clock in the evening and spending the time in prayer and meditation until the ringing of the church bell indicated that the new year had arrived. During most of the 19th century in New Albany the watch service was the traditional way of marking the change of the year. Traditional, too, was the singing of "God Be With You Till We Meet Again" to close the service.

There was merriment, too, in welcoming the new year in those early times, but it was reserved for New Year's Day. The famous old Hale Tavern on Main

and West First Street was the scene of these festivities for many years. Dr. Asahel Clapp, New Albany's first physician, recorded in his diary on January 1, 1823, "There is to be a ball at Dr. Hale's tonight", the first specific reference in local history to a New Year's celebration. Today the Double-Seven Tire Service is on the site of the old tavern.

Another New Year's custom which came to New Albany with the establishment of newspapers was the so-called "Carrier's Address", a poem celebrating the new year which was distributed on January 1 by the newspaper carriers to their patrons. Often the poem was printed on silk with an elaborate, decorative printed border.

As the city became larger and more cosmopolitan, other attractions appeared on New Year's Eve. On December 31, 1857, a century ago, the old Woodward Hall on Main Street was the scene of a scientific show displaying the latest wonders of the age, including a balloon ascension . . . a display which attracted our great-grandfathers as much as a rocket launching today attracts attention.

By the time 1907 rolled around the festivities of the new year were being held on New Year's Eve as well as New Year's Day. Fifty years ago the Valhalla Club held a New Year's Eve dance at the Music Hall which still stands on Main Street, now doing duty as the Labor Temple. The Highland Club on Silver Hills had moved into its new building during 1907 and held an open house on New Year's Day. Other events of January 1, 1908, were an open house at the new quarters of the Merchants National Bank at Pearl and Main and an open house at the Y.M.C.A. to celebrate the burning of two \$1,000 notes on the mortgage which had been paid off during the year. The Merchants National Bank was a predecessor of the Union National, still at Pearl and Main, and the Y.M.C.A. is now the site of the New Albany Municipal Parking Lot.

The end of the old year often marks the passing of old institutions, and New Year's Eve of 50 years ago witnessed the passing of mail service on the river packets from New Albany to Evansville – a victim of mail by rail.

And now as New Albany prepares to celebrate New Year's Eve with festivity and gayety, it can look back at 144 other New Years' Eves, and forward to a year promising much in civic progress . . . new highways, new industrial development, new homes . . . all adding up to a happy new year.

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