



July 4th, 1899 - Goddess of Liberty!

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With the July 4th holiday approaching, we take a look back at the City of San Rafael's 1899 festivities commemorating the founding of our nation. Pictured above is the "Goddess of Liberty, Bertha Kappenmann. Bertha, just 17 years old, won a county-wide vote to represent 'Liberty' in the day-long celebration. Ballots were tallied the previous month at Hoover's Ice Cream Parlor on Fourth St. in downtown San Rafael. Bertha was the daughter of Attilan and Dora Kappenmann, who owned a number of saloons, and boarding houses in downtown San Rafael dating back to the late 1870s. Over time, the family ran businesses named Germania Hall, Sheppard House, Mulberry Saloon and Kappenmann's. They were also the proprietors of the New England Villa, a large boarding house with numerous cottages, a restaurant and tavern that catered to local residents and visitors to the city.

The July 4th celebrations began on the evening of July 3rd with a "bicycle parade" up Fourth St. followed by patriotic speeches and a musical concert courtesy of the Richardson Band of Sausalito. At midnight a fireworks exhibition with thundering cannon-fire thrilled the crowd. The next morning a parade of six "divisions" assembled at 4th and E streets and proceeded east to the grounds of the Hotel Rafael, then along Mission St. west, ending at the San Rafael Opera House on Fourth St. The Goddess of Liberty joined Mayor Sig Herzog, the Richardson band and a cadre of city and parade officials in the first division. Regally

enthroned on a horse-drawn carriage Ms. Kappenmann was, “handsomely dressed in national colors, holding the American flag in her right hand, seated upon her throne on a handsomely decorated float, surrounded with a number of allegorical tableaux.” The other divisions of parade participants included marching bands, civic and fraternal organizations and veteran groups cheered on by thousands of bystanders. Once at the Opera House, speeches and patriotic songs were presided over by the Goddess of Liberty and her attendants. In the afternoon, all repaired to San Rafael Park for a picnic that also included many games and races. As evening drew the celebration to a close, an even grander fireworks display began that the Marin Journal newspaper described as, “Skyrockets by the score shot into the air and, bursting, emitted a shower of streaming comets, lines of red, white and blue lights which floated in the heavens seemingly seeking a place among the stars.”

The year 1899 was a memorable year for the youthful Bertha Kappenmann. Later that winter, Bertha was reading before a small gas stove when she fell asleep. She was awakened by the gripping claws of the family’s cat to find the hem of her dress on fire. She wrapped herself in a rug and smothered the flames, after which the cat was praised and honored by family and friends alike. Bertha went on to marry Llewellyn Shelton, a steward at Kappenmann’s, and lived to the venerable age of 91.

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