

COMMENTARY

Mourning heroes

■ Yorkville paid tribute to Jefferson, John Adams

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July 4, 1826, was the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Across America celebrations were planned, including in York County.

Yorkville had a "Committee of Arrangements for the Celebration of the 4th" and that day the local citizens had a parade and listened to the oratory of X.H. Cushman. Cushman's address was printed in a Yorkville newspaper, the Encyclopedia, which



Nearby history

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mainly offered essays and copies of articles from leading national newspapers, but little local news.

The issue for the following week

told of the death of Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence. For the next three months the pages of the Encyclopaedia were dominated by details of Jefferson's life and death and that of John Adams, who died the same day.

The July 21 issue reported that the students at Ebenezer Academy, outside Rock Hill at the time, were planning a memorial for Jefferson. The students had elected Beverly Thomasson to read the Declaration of Independence and William Jefferson Hanna to deliver the oration in Fayette Hall.

A funeral ode was prepared and an anonymous student composed verses. The last verse: "Rule a world, Majestic named/Once proud kings, till kings be tame!/Thrones confront with his high fame — /Thomas Jefferson's."

When the students received word of Adams' death, they had another memorial service. Thomasson gave the oration on Adams' contributions, and local Revolutionary War veterans were in-

cluded. H.M. Tompkins addressed the veterans.

In late July, the newspaper printed some of the last letters of Jefferson, including one saying that his health would not permit him to participate in ceremonies at Washington.

Eulogists were struck by the coincidence of Jefferson dying on Independence Day (he had said a month before that he was not sure he could hold out that long).

Then the citizens heard that Monticello, Jefferson's home and plantation, was heavily mortgaged and that a New York bank would foreclose. Nationwide, citizens were determined that a republic should not be ungrateful and that Jefferson's daughter, Polly Randolph, should have her father's property. A great subscription drive began.

York District's leading citizens immediately responded, in the words of Yorkville's William Smith, to "relive the pecuniary embarrassment of Thomas Jefferson." By August, Jefferson's property was saved.

Yorkville decided to have a special event to commemorate the lives of Jefferson and Adams on Sept. 2, 1826, with Sen. William Smith the orator of the day.

On Sept. 2, a procession began at 11 a.m. at the courthouse and marched to a grove in the northeast part of the town.

Leading the parade was a Col. Rooker, marshal of the day, with Capt. Fleming's artillery company followed by Capt. Hill's infantry company. Next, in order, were the orators and clergy, the Committee of Arrangements, women, Revolutionary War veterans, residents and the cavalry. The Rev. Robert Walker gave the prayer, which was followed by William Smith's eulogy.

At the request of the Committee of Arrangements, residents of Yorkville wore black crepe bands on their left arms from Sept. 2 to Oct. 2, 1826.

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