

# Celebrations

## Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

Everyone loves a party—including the people of Naperville. The town has a long history of hosting elaborate celebrations to mark special occasions, from honoring local heroes to ringing in a new millennium.

### Home Coming Celebration—1917

In 1916, city officials began planning this four-day event to celebrate the town's many accomplishments. Residents, past and present, were invited to come and see how the town had thrived since its founding.



Each of the four days had a different theme: Old Citizens' Day honored Naperville's elders; Patriotic Day saluted the war time heroes; School and Church Day celebrated educational and religious accomplishments; and Community Day capped off the celebration with an elaborate pageant, music, and fireworks.

Naperville's joyous Home Coming Celebration had a bittersweet side to it. Held just two months after the U.S. had entered World War I, it also served as a farewell to those young men going off to join the battle.

### Centennial Celebration—1931

Despite the fact that the entire country was in the grips of the Great Depression, Naperville's officials were determined to celebrate the town's 100th anniversary. Held on June 5th and 6th, the Centennial Celebration commemorated Naperville's founding with a historical drama, big parade, water carnival, and spectacular fireworks display. Thousands of spectators from all over northern Illinois joined in the festivities.



In addition to hosting the celebration, the town purchased a 45-acre parcel of land that had once included the site of Joseph Naper's sawmill, gristmill, and trading post. The land was later

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developed as Centennial Beach, a public recreation center that residents still enjoy today.

### **Sesquicentennial Celebration—1981**

Naperville commemorated its 150th anniversary with a year-long celebration. Some of its major events were a variety show, Miss Naperville pageant, historical re-enactment of the three-day journey of town founder, Captain Joseph Naper and the original settlers from Chicago's Fort Dearborn to Naperville, as well as parades and fireworks displays.

The Sesquicentennial didn't end at the close of 1981. It continued to live on in the Riverwalk Project, which undertook the building of pathways and covered bridges along the DuPage River. It has become a lasting memorial to the community spirit of Naperville.

### **Millennium Celebration—2000**

How Naperville would celebrate the dawn of the new millennium was a hot topic among many residents. After years of planning, Celebration 2000 fulfilled its mission of providing "...a distinctive three-day joyous celebration..." The jam-packed weekend of activities included traditional fare like concerts, dinner dances, parades, torch lighting, fireworks, and a ball drop at midnight; as well as ice sculptures, 20th-century retrospectives, and student essay contests.

Community spirit was the hallmark of Naperville's Celebration 2000 with countless residents and organizations contributing to the event. And hometown pride swelled as over 85,000 people welcomed in the new millennium Naperville-style.

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