

# 1st Fourth in Detroit was a drag

What was the first Fourth of July like in Michigan?  
Probably not too exciting, according to State Librarian Frances K. Scannell. Records of the time are very sketchy, but with some knowledge of the times and a bit of imagination, a story emerges.  
On July 4, 1776, things were pretty sleepy in the backwater wilderness that would one day be known as Michigan.

IT WAS probably a hot day, as Detroit's 500 European residents wondered about the affairs of the fur trade that year: whether the Indian corn and wheat crops would be good, and if they should have cleared away another acre or so of woods, a mile down the road from the settlement.  
Perhaps, as some of the men ducked the noonday sun in a local tavern they discussed the rumors they had heard about trouble: hundreds of miles to the east, where their fellow colonists were fighting a revolution of some sort against King George.

There were individuals favoring both sides of the conflict but most Detroiters really weren't too interested in one way or the other. They were loyal British subjects and the British Quebec government, which oversaw affairs of the area later to be named Michigan, had officially adopted a neutrality policy—a policy that would be altered radically a year later when the Royal Government began forwarding Indian raids of the settlements north on the Ohio River.

ON THAT same July 4, however, things were happening at the only other outpost of European civilization in the territory between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, Fort Michilimackinac. An urgent request had come to the garrison there from the commander of the Fort of Quebec asking for help in lifting the siege of Quebec by rebel colonial forces under Gen. Richard Montgomery and Col. Benedict Arnold.  
In that July 4, 1776, a combined force of Chippewa and Ottawa braves under the command of the half-breed Charles Lang led Fort Michilimackinac, raising as fast as they could to the aid of Fort Quebec.

When they arrived weeks later however, they would find their efforts had been in vain: the rebellious colonials had withdrawn even before they left Fort Michilimackinac.

BUT ON THAT hot day in Detroit, such matters of international import were just too far away to be of great concern. The men in the alehouse, no doubt, also discussed the great industrial though they probably didn't use that word: the Industrial Revolution being decades in the future, breakthrough that their city was making. Why they had more than 30 carpenters, masons and blacksmiths busily engaged throughout the city and in a true demonstration of colonialist potential, even a silversmith had recently opened his doors in town.

Two hundred years later near where they sat and drank, more than a million horseless carriages powered by a technology as yet undreamed would roll off the assembly line.

WHILE THE MEN were at their cups, the women of colonial Michigan were discussing what to do about the education of their children.

The rich and the officers of the British garrison, of course, sent their offspring to Montreal for schooling, or retained private tutors. Many less well-off French settlers in the area sent their youngsters to the parish priest at St. Anne's to learn ciphering, writing, some reading and naturally, religion, but most of the British weren't Catholic.

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