



Jubilesta

Jubilesta, if you Google the word you would be pointed to several YouTube musical renditions. But here the term refers to celebrations taking place in Sleepy Eye. They were three day affairs in July, starting on Friday and ending Sunday.

Mankato Free Press (24 July 1958)

Sleepy Eye Jubilesta parade set

Long known for its musical units, the 1958 Jubilesta parade was set to offer the most ever. Corps were coming from all areas of Minnesota, plus Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Floats, clowns, saddle clubs and majorettes with the bands were scheduled to strut their stuff Sunday afternoon through the town, along with the Schells Hobo Band and other oompah bands. With a centennial theme, many queens representing area towns were expected to attend. And, of course, there

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was a midway with attractions from Merriam shows. The celebration was to start Friday night and end after the parade on Sunday.

By 1958, I was married, living in Minneapolis, so would not have been at the 1958 Jubilesta.

Jubilestas as Sleepy Eye happenings faded away, probably not many years after the 1958 event.

Saturday nights in the summer were big. That is when farmers got cleaned up and went to town. You had to leave early to get a good parking place. Essential for people watching. Some came as early as 5. Prime spots were long gone when we usually arrived.

The town moved from diagonal to parallel parking, probably in the late 40s. That move cut prime spots in half!

Stores were open Saturday nights. Streets were full of people.

Saturday nights lost their luster once merchants decided to stay open on Friday evenings instead of Saturday evenings.

But the summer Saturdays that stand out are the Saturdays of jubilestas. The midway extended north from U.S. 14, 1st Avenue N to the railroad tracks. There was the usual, rides and win a prize every time huckster. Hamburger stands run by churches and cotton candy.

I have no recall of when they started or when they went away.

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Baseball was big in and around Sleepy Eye after WW II and the 50s. It was a semi professional mix of local amateur talent and paid aspiring professionals. The Western Minnesota Baseball League at its zenith in 1953 consisted of:

Fairmont,
Marshall,
New Ulm,
Redwood Falls,
Saint James,
Sleepy Eye,
Springfield,
and
Wintrop.
In its prime, teams played two or three times a week.

I am drawn here to baseball because of an event 3 August 1947 burned into memory.

It was a hot, humid Sunday afternoon in Alexander Ramsey Park State Park in Redwood Falls. We were there for a family outing with the Mertz and Hirschs. Though we had no intention of attending, it happens that the Sleepy Eye Indians were playing the Redwood Falls team that Sunday afternoon.

The star player for the Sleepy Eye was Marty Ledebor. He was signed in 1945 at the age of 18.

Ledebor led off the seventh with a single. The next batter tripled. Ledebor rounded the bases staggering as he crossed home plate and then collapsed on the way to the dugout. He died hours later in a Redwood Falls hospital. (For a more detailed account see an article in the New Ulm Journal *Remembering Sleepy Eye's adopted son*, 30 August 2017, Randy Krzmarzick; aka Weeds). The town was in shock.

Later in August 1947, the Sleepy Eye Herald Dispatch printed a tribute to Ledebor. A poem written by a handicapped man from Lake Lillian who Ledebor befriended.

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*The final game is over, the ninth inning has been played,
And our centerfielder has laid his bat away.
He went out, as God would have it – among a sporting throng,
With his fans and pals around him – after a run so very long.
It was not the opposing pitcher who did finally him retire,
It was Death who made the putout, and God was the Umpire.
Now the Angels are his teammates, and they'll see him safely thru.*
