

event "A Republican lovefest of no small magnitude." The presence of Taft and his speech had a magnetic effect on the vast throng and the woods of Hazelden Farm rang with Republican enthusiasm for the rest of the day."

The opposition *Kentland Democrat*, however, while conceding the event was "a great day" and an occasion "which proved to be a good advertisement for Mr. Ade's Hazelden Farm," took a somewhat different tone. The *Democrat* said that the brevity of Taft's remarks was a disappointment to the crowd. The paper focused on the problems of transporting the people from Ade's farm to Brook and Ade, and added "and then professional pickpockets and thieves were there also and reaped a rich harvest."

John Ade, in his volume of Newton County history, summed up the event as, "The affair from start to finish was a splendid success. Everybody went home impressed with the fact that they had attended the greatest and most interesting political gathering ever held in this section of Indiana."

Locals Were Eyewitnesses to History

The rally for William Howard Taft at George Ade's home may be regarded as history for the annals of Newton County, but it is a pleasant memory of personal experience for some area residents, including Albert Bower and Howard Washburn of Kentland, Bower was 17 and Washburn was 12 when they attended the rally.



Albert Bower

Bower, 92, recalls riding to the rally with his dad William Bower by way of the family horse and buggy. Washburn, 87, arrived by car, then still a rarity, traveling with his friend Carrol C. Kent, the son of Kentland's founder, A. J. Kent. In fact, the means of transportation are some of the most vivid memories of the day for these two men. "They came by car, buggy, farm team and wagon, and saddle horse," states Washburn, adding that the conveyances were parked all over the Ade estate where the horses were fed and watered. "I wasn't much interested in Taft or politics at the time, the cars and the crowd were what interested me most. I had never seen that many cars before. None of them had windshields, and some of the people there were wearing the long duster coats and goggles that the first drivers wore," states Bower. Bower and his father left their horse and buggy at the barn of the hosts' brother Joe Ade, who was a good friend of the elder Bower. They walked across a field to get to the Hazelden grounds.



Howard Washburn

"Joe Ade had a private party for his friends up above the barn behind George Ade's home. He served ham and cheese sandwiches and beer. There were only a few Democrats around in those days, but Joe Ade had both Republicans and Democrats at the party," said Bower.

Both Bower and Washburn arrived around 10 a.m. and they recall that a big crowd was already on hand for the rally. Both state that the crowd was one of the largest they had ever seen, but Bower believes it was less than the 25,000 popularly believed to have been there.

"There was a lot of visiting going on in the crowd that jammed into the front lawn of the Ade estate. Everybody knew about the rally, but I didn't know that it would be that much out of the ordinary until I saw the size of the crowd," states Washburn. Bower recalls that some of the celebrants got a bit inebriated before the event was over.

"They had waited quite a long time for Taft, but when he arrived the aerial bombs went off and there was a huge cheer. It was quite an uproar," stated Washburn.

Both Bower and Washburn recall little of the Taft address, but they both recall vividly the appearance of the man who went on to become the nation's 27th President. Taft weighed in at well over 300 pounds, and his size is a prominent memory for both men. "He was a whopper. He was a pleasant looking fellow who was a pretty good speaker," states Washburn. Bower agrees that Taft was a big man with a friendly appearance. In fact, he quipped, that with Taft's trademark handlebar moustache, "he sort of looked like a bartender."

Bower said that almost everyone in the area must have attended the rally because he says so many people he knew there. Among the familiar names of those in attendance were Paul Weishaar, Bob Cunningham and Will Denney. "Alva Herriman drove one of the hay wagons that took people back and forth from Brook," recalls Bower.

Among other elements of the event the men recall are the bands which played throughout the day, the numerous other political speakers, and the Japanese daylight fireworks that were shot off east of the Ade home where the country club was later built. Washburn also recalled the huge American flag which was flown between two trees on the front lawn. The flying of such a flag is a tradition which continues at the Ade home when major events are held there today. There was a sort of picnic atmosphere that day as many brought picnic baskets which they sat on the lawn and ate. While Bower was lunching at Joe Ade's party, Washburn got one of the "full lunch pails" of sandwiches and pickles sold there for two bits.

Washburn states that after Taft and gubernatorial candidate James Watson spoke the crowd began to thin out. "Remember there were just dirt or stone roads then, and most folks had come by horse and buggy, so they had to get home before dark. Many had chores to do," states Washburn.

Indiana State Historical Marker

Located at Hazelden Home of George Ade
Brook Indiana

Placed in 2019 by the Iroquois-Washington Preservation Committee



Souvenir postcard from Taft's rally at Hazelden, the home of George Ade.

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William H. Taft's Presidential Kick-Off at Hazelden, the home of George Ade September 23, 1908

Written by John R. Funk and John J. Yost, published September 22, 1983.

Historians have termed the occasion "the most celebrated historical event ever to occur in Newton County." In his history "Newton County, 1853-1911" John Ade described the gathering as "the largest and most interesting public meeting in the history of the county."

The occasion was the visit of William Howard Taft to the Hazelden Farm estate of George Ade at which Taft formally kicked-off his successful campaign to be the 27th President of the United States. The event took place September 23, 1908.

To set the scene, in 1908 Theodore Roosevelt was in the last year of his tenure in the White House. George Ade was at the peak of his career. By that time Ade had already been one of America's most popular journalists and the author of the best selling "Fables in Slang." In 1908 he was the foremost playwright of the American theatre. Earlier that year he had been a delegate to the Republican National Convention which had nominated Taft, then Secretary of War, for President. Ade became acquainted with Taft when he served on the notification committee which formally informed Taft of his nomination.

A few years earlier Ade had built his beautiful Tudor-style home on his beloved Hazelden Farm near Brook, Indiana. The home is now a national landmark.

In 1908, the Republican party was badly split in Indiana and elsewhere in the country. The split in Indiana was between the conservative wing headed by the flamboyant James E. Watson, the GOP candidate for Governor, and the progressive wing, led by Sen. Al J. Beveridge.

This party factionalism was fired by the controversial question of local option on liquor regulation which was then before a special session of the Indiana General Assembly. Compounding the problem for Republicans in Indiana were the hard feelings which resulted from the fact that the incumbent Vice President Charles Warren Fairbanks of Indianapolis had been denied his party's nomination for the Presidency.

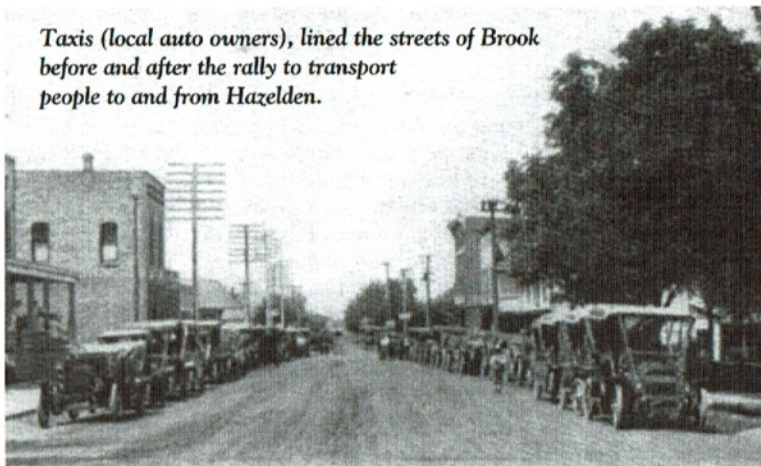
The original plans for the Taft campaign called for the conduction of a "front-porch" campaign in which he would remain at his Cincinnati home and issue position statements from there rather than campaign against his Democratic opponent William Jennings Bryan. When the cracks in party unity began to appear, Taft's campaign plans were shifted to a more active campaign starting with a swing through the western states by rail.

Early in the summer, Hoosier Republican officials had discussed the possibility of having a large rally for the party's state candidates, and George Ade's Hazelden estate was proposed as the site. When it became known that Taft was changing his campaign tactics to include a western trip, Republican leaders in Indiana, including Will H. Hays, later the head of the movie censoring Hays Office, began to pressure the Republican National Committee and Taft campaign officials to use the rally at Ade's farm as the official starting point of the campaign.

Two things led to Taft's decision to accept the invitation to speak at the Ade rally. First, Taft had been very favorably impressed by Ade when the playwright called on him as part of the notification committee. The second factor was that Taft had been Governor of the Philippines when the "Sultan of Sulu" was enjoying its successful Broadway run. When Hays pressed Taft in a telephone conversation for a decision on the Ade rally, Taft surprised him by responding, "I will go to the farm at Brook to meet the 'Sultan of Sulu'."

There were only 12 days between the decision to visit Hazelden and the event, and George Ade threw himself into the task of organizing the rally. Arrangements

Taxis (local auto owners), lined the streets of Brook before and after the rally to transport people to and from Hazelden.



had to be made with four railroads to transport people from Indianapolis, Terre Haute, and Logansport in Indiana and Chicago and Danville in Illinois to Ade's rural estate. Plans for food service and for moving the several thousand people expected at the event to Ade's farm also had to be made. An agreement had to be made with a committee in nearby Kentland to postpone by one day the start of the annual Kentland Horse Show which was scheduled to begin on the same day.

September 23rd dawned a pleasant early autumn day. Secretary of War Taft and his party boarded a four-car Big Four Railroad train in Cincinnati at 8 a.m. The train included a special platform-observation car called the Constitution. The festivities got underway at the Ade estate around 9:30 a.m. That was when trains began arriving in at the C. E. & I. Depot in Brook to unload passengers for the event. Ade had made arrangements with many local farmers to hire them to shuttle people between Brook and his Hazelden Estate, which is two miles east of town.

Throughout the morning the Brook Band, the Purdue Military Band, and the

Monticello Juvenile Band performed. Local politicians addressed the crowd through the morning also. The program took place on the front lawn of the estate. Over 200 automobiles and countless carriages, farm wagons and buggies were at the farm. Many of those in attendance brought picnic lunches, while others bought "full dinner pails" which included sandwiches, pickles and pie for 25 cents. Two large sections of circus bleachers were installed for seating the guests while others stood.

It is reported that while several thousand persons were expected for the rally, no one expected the 25,000 which turned out for the event. Among the problems that a crowd of that size created was the lack of adequate restroom facilities. Local tradition holds that the lush shrubbery and gardens of the estate along with nearby cornfields were employed for this purpose, and for years afterward no fertilizer was required on the estate.

The Taft train traveled from Cincinnati to Ade, Indiana, a train stop eight miles west of Hazelden Farm, making only brief stops in Indianapolis and Lafayette enroute. The train traveled at about 60 miles per hour, and at that speed arrived at the station at Ade an hour ahead of schedule. No one was on hand to meet the train. Word of Taft's arrival was sent to Hazelden, and a six-car caravan, which included Ade, his father John Ade, and Watson, set out immediately for the station. Secretary Taft chatted with the train crew until the autos arrived.

The stone road from the station to Ade's farm passed through the main street of Brook. All along the main street, arches had been erected with photographs of Taft and flowers and evergreens on them. Red, white and blue bunting was also up throughout the town.

Legend has it that when Ade decided to signal Taft's arrival with some aerial bombs, he ordered a dozen. That morning he tested them by exploding one. When Taft's car arrived, the remaining eleven were set off. Later one of Taft's aides complimented Ade by saying, "You are the only man I've met in a long time who knows that the Secretary of War rates a salute of eleven guns, no more and no less." Ade gave Taft's man an astounded look and said, "You mean to tell me that there are actually people in America who don't know that?"

Taft acknowledged the cheers of the crowd and then he and his party went into Ade's house for a light lunch. A half hour later, at 1:15 p.m. Ade and the Taft party went onto the front lawn to address the crowd. Following Ade's introduction, Taft stepped before the crowd, and praising his host, punned about how much the rally had "aided his campaign."

Taft's speech lasted about a half hour. He attacked his opponent's farm policy before the largely agricultural and loudly cheering audience. Concluding his remarks, Taft left immediately for Chicago where he spoke later that evening.

The festivities at Ade's farm continued throughout the afternoon. Watson followed Taft as a speaker. The Second Regimental Band from Chicago performed, and the crowd was treated to a display of Japanese daylight fireworks.

The crowd began to thin out later in the afternoon and there was much congestion reported along the road and at the train stations at Brook and Ade.

The reaction to the rally in the local press indicates that the event itself was "a splendid success," but other comments tended to break down along partisan lines. The Republican *Newton County Enterprise* termed the

Left, Rally-goers walked from Brook, came by horse and buggy, and drove their autos (right) to attend the Taft Rally at Hazelden.

