

# Bedford Day

## Bedford Explained: Bedford Day ~ How Did it Start, and Why?

It's that time of year again, Bedford Day. A day where you learn all the things about Bedford you never knew. There are kids, animals, trucks, food, and more. I personally love the simultaneous joy of the children and the disappointment of the parents after the goldfish is won. It's always a lot of fun and I look forward to it every year. But the "every year" part got me thinking?



What is the History of Bedford Day, how did it start and why?

So once again, off to the Bedford Historical Society to ask about Bedford Day. It turns out the origins of Bedford Day are not all that clear.

Like most great traditions, things evolve. There were several events that could be categorized as early Bedford Days. But the modern incarnation is

fairly recent.

The first recorded all town celebration was to commemorate the town's sesquicentennial (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary) in 1879. There is little known on how it was celebrated, my guess is no goldfish, but it was the first known celebration of Bedford as a town that was recorded.

There were subsequent events for the 175<sup>th</sup> in 1904 and the bicentennial in 1929. Not much happened after that until 1967. In 1967 there is a mention of the Celebrations Committee celebrating the founding date of the town on September 23. The following year there was an effort to get the local merchants involved as sponsors of the event. Credit for these efforts to organize the merchants is given to two people, Mrs. George Haffermehl and Mrs. Warren Lewellen.



The first mention of what I would consider the Bedford Day we know is in 1967. You would be happy to know that even then, the dunking booth was a big draw. In 1968 it was actually a two-day event, with a lot of evening activities the night before. The day before featured: a fashion show, a crowning of "Miss Bedford," and a Bedford Day Ball sponsored by the Jaycees.

The Saturday of Bedford Day started with a Pancake Breakfast (of course), a parade, a cake decorating contest, and a 1729 themed

costume contest. There was also a road race as well as a water polo match between the fire and police departments. The whole day ended with a Bean Dinner and a Block Dance for both teens and adults.

The location of the modern Bedford day has changed throughout the years. In 1967 the booths were lined up on South Road, in front of the old Town Hall. A lot of the activities took place on Bedford Common. The Citizen of the Year was presented on the steps of the old Town Hall with booths lining the street.

It's not clear to me the exact date of the move to its current location behind the Town Hall, but it's safe to say it was sometime after the conversion and renovation of the building to its present use.

This is a brief history of the origins of Bedford Day, So when you hear the thud/splash/scream of the dunking tank, know that sound has been heard for a long time. Enjoy the day.

By Gene Kalb