

Freedom's Beat

The theme for tonight's concert was inspired by Katharine Lee Bates' immortal "*America the Beautiful*," written as a poem in 1893 (the same year Mankato's original Boy in Blue Civil War Veterans Memorial was dedicated) and published in 1895. In the second verse of her hymn of praise for America, Bates wrote: 'O beautiful for Pilgrim feet, whose stern impassioned stress, a thoroughfare for freedom beat, across the wilderness...' Tonight, the beat of the band's musical repertoire will celebrate the spirit of freedom, as we commemorate both the 248th anniversary of our nation's Independence and the 161st anniversary of the heroic charge of the First Minnesota Infantry Regiment at Gettysburg. The following quotes highlight the meaning of this day.

It was on July 2, 1776, that the Second Continental Congress ended its debate on independence for the thirteen British colonies in America, and voted to approve the independence resolution, proposed on June 7 of that year. Two days later, the delegates signed the Declaration of Independence, making it official. However, John Adams believed:

"The Second Day of July 1776 will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. —I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more."

The following inscription was taken from the First Minnesota Infantry monument at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania:

"On the afternoon of July 2, 1863 Sickles Third Corps having advanced from this line to the Emmitsburg road eight companies of the First Minnesota regiment numbering 262 men were sent to this place to support a battery.

Upon Sickles' repulse as his men were passing here in confused retreat, two Confederate brigades in pursuit were crossing the swale.

To gain time to bring up the reserves and save this position General Hancock in person ordered the eight companies of the 1st Minnesota to charge the rapidly advancing enemy.

The order was instantly repeated by Col. Wm. Colvill and the charge instantly made down the slope at full speed through the concentrate fire of the two brigades breaking with the bayonet the enemy's front line as it was crossing the small brook in the low ground.

There the remnant of the eight companies nearly surrounded by the enemy held its entire force at bay for a considerable time and till it retired on the approach of the reserve the charge successfully accomplished its object. It saved the position and probably the battlefield.

The loss of the eight companies in the charge was 215 killed and wounded, more than 85 percent.

47 men were still in line and no missing. In self-sacrificing desperate valor this charge has no parallel in any war.

The next day the regiment participated in repelling Pickett's charge losing 17 more men killed and wounded."

"These dead shall not have died in vain."

"All time is the millennium of their glory."

Written by Bryce O. Stenzel for "Freedom's Beat: An Evening of Patriotic Music with the Mankato Area Community Band

Tuesday, July 2, 2024 at Historic Lincoln Park in Mankato, Minnesota.