

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 5, 2010

The Glorious Fourth: Although the founding fathers of the second Continental Congress worked long and hard and placed on the line “their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor” toward a cause that had little chance of success on July 4, 1776, it was several weeks before many in the 13 colonies got the word. The Declaration of Independence was read in New York on July 9 and in Charleston, South Carolina, by late July. While news was slow to spread in those days, very few events have inspired people around the world to seek freedom from oppression as did our Declaration signed on the Fourth of July.

How do we celebrate today? Do we even think about what we are supposed to be celebrating? Do we revere those who staked everything they had so we can have parades, eat hot dogs, and enjoy fireworks? Occasionally I reflect on the great contributions of our early American forefathers, but my record and that of my immediate family is the same as most families I know: a vacation day in early summer to have a good time. My experiences do not deserve attention, but I'll mention those I can recall anyway.

In the early 1930s, I spent July 4 at my parents' Queen Street house in Rehoboth with my family. My grandmother Shallcross and her cousin Gertrude Whittock (“Cousin Gertie”) would usually be with us. In the evening, limited fireworks would take place “up town,” and there would usually be a merry-go-round ride on Masten's carousel on Rehoboth Avenue. There was a more modern carousel at Playland on the Boardwalk, but Masten's was faster, jerkier, and the music was louder—much preferred. From 1937 through 1940, I was at Maplewood, New Hampshire, on July 4 as the annual Maplewood trapshooting tournament took place the first week in July. My dad took an interest in going, and I was lucky enough to accompany him and take part. My mother went only once; she enjoyed Rehoboth too much. In 1940, I was lucky enough to win the Dunspaugh Memorial Trophy at Maplewood (high on all targets for the four days).

On July 4, 1941, we were going westbound through Salt Lake City on our long western trip in our '37 Packard. In '42 and for several years after World War II, we were guests, along with about 25 others, at the Woodward Farm at Mendenhall, Pennsylvania. A few times I took our Mountain Wagon and gave rides after dinner. We would arrive before 6 P.M., the men would pitch horseshoes until called to eat, at which time we would sit down at one or more long tables on the lawn for a delicious feast. Then we would pitch again until dark; none of us beat the Woodwards: Norris (our host) and his two sons, Horace and Jimmy. As darkness fell, we could look to the southeast to observe Irene du Pont Sr.'s private fireworks at Granogue. A few would stay for card games in the house, completing another glorious Fourth.

On July 4, 1971, the “Game Group” (eight couples plus this writer, who was not married until 1985) was in Rehoboth, and all piled into the bed of my '69 Chevy Longhorn pick-up truck to observe the fireworks at Cape Henlopen. On July 4, 1972, I was in Yellowstone National Park, along with our Stanley Model 87 and Weldin, Dorothy, and Joan Stumpf, as we enjoyed a day off from the “Trans-Con” tour to observe the marvels of Yellowstone. This was a special day to be there, as the oldest of all our national parks was celebrating its 100th birthday that year.

The first July 4th parade in Hockessin (in recent times at least) was part of a three-day celebration in our Bicentennial year of 1976. In my newly acquired 1905 Stanley Model CX, I led the parade with New Castle County Councilman Francis J. Swift and his granddaughter aboard. It was such a success that the parade was held again in '77 and '78, then dropped for a few years when interest waned. Starting again by the early '80s, it has continued uninterrupted each July 4th for nearly 30 years. Cars from the Auburn Heights collection have taken part almost every time, and we had six from our collection plus members Bob Wilhelm ('18 Stanley), Steve Jensen ('11 Stanley), Jerry Novak ('31 Chevrolet), and Lou Mandich ('18 Buick and '25 Dodge) taking part this year. Each car was loaded with drivers' relatives and FAHP members and friends.