

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 23, 2017

Our Nation's Bicentennial: The year 1976 was a wonderful year. After the turbulent period of the 1960s and early 1970s, people believed in their great country again. The assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King Jr., the riots and local curfews, the outlandish behavior at the Woodstock (NY) music concert, the shootings at Kent State University, the Vietnam War, and the Agnew and Nixon debacles were all behind us.

Plans for celebrating the nation's birthday began far in advance. The Broadway musical "1776" opened in 1969 and was an outstanding success, surprising the critics who said a musical based on American history could never succeed. The main hero was John Adams, the most unpopular and underrated of the founding fathers. This was later made into a movie, which appeared before 1976. There were many television shorts featuring Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, Davey Crockett, and Swamp Fox Marion, the latter two being series by Walt Disney. Disney also made a great short film "The Great Locomotive Chase," based on the Andrews raid of 1862. There was a whole series entitled the "Adams Chronicles," which followed four generations of the Adams family, starting with our second president.

Millard Newman planned the third Transcontinental Reliability Tour in 1976, starting in Seattle in early June and terminating at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July 4. They encountered snow and slippery roads crossing the Bitterroots west of Anaconda, Montana. Their final luncheon stop before reaching Philadelphia was in Delaware at Buena Vista on July 2. I went down in our Model H-5 to meet the tour participants.

I was too busy with the Hockessin-Yorklyn-Corner Ketch Bicentennial Committee to participate in the cross-country tour, as I had done in 1972. Our community started early, and the committee, chaired by Lee Murch, met regularly starting in 1974. In 1975, a historical pageant was put on at Henry B. du Pont School, directed by Kay Lord. I was an elderly Quaker gentleman with a beard, but I don't think my part required much more. Unrelated to the pageant, Hockessin Friends Meetinghouse was remodeled inside to look more like it had in the 18th century. Tours were planned for the historic properties in the greater Hockessin area. Local historian Joseph R. Lake Jr. wrote the first edition of "Hockessin: A Pictorial History," with editors Bud Pragoff, Louise Jackson, and myself. Advance orders were taken at a discounted rate (\$13.50), and 518 books had been sold before the first copies were delivered on Memorial Day weekend 1976. Eventually, 1,500 books were printed, and all were sold by 1978. How do I know this? I was in charge of printing and distribution. In 1997, Joe Lake published an improved second edition, which also sold well.

Conestoga Wagons, pulled by teams of oxen, crossed the U.S. from west to east, following portions of the Oregon Trail. This procession stopped for a couple of days at Carousel Farms off Limestone Road, and I visited with my 1912 Mountain Wagon. About a dozen tall ships sailed up the Delaware to Philadelphia. Weldin Stumpf and his friend John Duffy, with their families, watched them pass from the middle of the river in John's home-made steamboat with a Stanley engine.

July 4, 1976, fell on a Sunday. Hockessin festivities began Friday night with an opening program at St. Mary's R.C. Church. On Saturday, Sunday, and Monday (a legal holiday), arts, crafts, and other vendors covered downtown Hockessin. The Wilmington & Western Railroad ran steam trains all three days from a temporary ticket office set up in a caboose next to the fire house. On Sunday, July Fourth, the first Independence Day Parade in many years passed down Old Lancaster Pike with thousands of spectators. I drove our 1905 Model CX, acquired the year before and painted in temporary red, white, and blue colors, and I carried County Councilman Francis J. Swift of Hockessin and his four-year-old granddaughter through the parade. He had persuaded New Castle County to buy land in the center of town to be called Hockessin Bicentennial Park. Profits from the sale of Lake's book went to improve the park. When Swift died two years later, the park was renamed for him. At 12 noon on July 4, Weldin Stumpf blew the steam whistle on top of our Auburn Heights

boiler room. Fireworks followed the big day's activities. On July 9, accompanied by Jerry Brady, I drove the CX to Atglen (PA) and took part in the Bicentennial parade in that Chester County borough. It was a glorious few days.

The one disappointment of the Bicentennial Year was attendance at National Parks and major attractions. Elaborate plans had been laid to accommodate multitudes of people who did not show up. It happened that many, like those in our area, stayed home, partly fearing the crowd, and partly to participate in local activities. One thing I do remember about 1976 at the Magic Age of Steam: foreign visitors, especially those from Australia and New Zealand, were numerous, and many told me they wanted to visit our great country during our Bicentennial Year. I hope the United States is as popular abroad today as it was in 1976.