

Where Were *You* on the Big Day?



COURTESY OF JULIE JACOB

Like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the bicentennial is one of those moments in American history, the kind we refer back to. Most of us are here to celebrate the nation's tricentennial, but we can remember the day of our birthday and feel satisfied that we threw a heck of a party.

That was the summer after my first year of college, and I was commuting from my parents' house in New Jersey to Philadelphia, where I worked as a temp. I spent my lunch hour walking the cobblestoned streets. I walked by the Liberty Bell, how an imperfect object had become such a perfect symbol of freedom. I stayed at the Ross' house. I strolled the waterfront and tried to imagine a time when if you wanted to get somewhere fast, you took a ship. My 17-year-old brain had a hard time.

On the big day itself, July 4, I stood on the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, which was closed to pedestrians—with thousands of other people. We stood high and looked down at the tall ships in the Delaware River, their flags snapping, and the ships decorated in red, white, and blue. As the sun set, we watched fireworks erupt in the sky, raining down color and embers and, I thought, hope: for our lives, for the beginning, and for the country, which we were just coming to understand. We understood geography and ideology, in dirt and water and asphalt and in our collective imagination.

All of this is why I love Julie Jacob's piece on the bicentennial ("Bicentennial," page 38). Her family threw a party in their Racine backyard, where her mother, Betsy Ross (pictured above). Tell us where *you* were on July 4, 1976, in an essay to the address on page 10. (Send photos if you have them.) We'll give away a subscription to the best story.



Elsewhere in this issue, we give you an idea for something to do every day in August ("62 Days of Summer," page 23). If we didn't cover your favorite summer activity, tell us about it; we'll publish your ideas in an upcoming issue.

For the "Great Wisconsin Adventure," we asked Madisonians Raphael Loew, and Molly Rose Teuke to give us the inside look at Mad City (page 58). Editor Laura Kearney offers her own tour of the fantastical gardens created by Riana Raad ("Riana's Magic Garden," page 41). Photographer Randy Larson conjures a pilgrimage to the county fair ("Come to the Fair," page 32). And there's much more.

We hope you revel in the joys of summer.

Harriet Brown
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>> POLL

In the April 2006 issue we asked whether you take more vacations in Wisconsin or outside the state. Most of you, apparently, stay close to home.

The results:
105, within our state
18, outside it

NEXT POLL QUESTION:

In his essay "My Wisconsin: Evening Milking" (page 16), Tom Carpenter writes about the joys and travails of life on a family farm. **Have you ever milked a cow by hand?** Vote online at wisconsintrails.com after July 5.

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There's no excuse for boredom this summer—we've got an idea for every July and August day. Take our advice, and next fall's "How I spent my summer vacation" essay will be a breeze.
by the editors of Wisconsin Trails

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Explore folk artist Riana de Raad's playful Beldenville garden of concrete mosaic sculptures and vibrant flower beds. Her creativity thrives wherever it's planted. *by Laura Kearney*

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Once our intrepid reporter acquires wilderness survival skills from Tracks and Trees Learning Center in Watertown, a wild grape vine will never look the same again. *by Kirk Smock*

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Song catcher Sidney Robertson Cowell traveled the state in the 1930s, recording the haunting strains of Wisconsin's earliest folk music, from ballads to lumberjack standards. *by Nicole Saylor*

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SPECIAL SECTION

GREAT WISCONSIN ADVENTURE

58 Madison

There really is no place like home. Here are our insiders' tours of Mad City, from its ancient past to the sparkling new MMoCA at Overture Center for the Arts; from biking the city's trails to walking the prairie at the UW-Madison Arboretum; from the Saturday-morning farmers' market to summer nights on the Memorial Union Terrace. Plus, two top-10 lists and some books to help you plan your visit. *by Harriet Brown, Raphael Kadushin, Laura Kearney, Patty Loew, and Molly Rose Teuke*

On the Cover

One of summer's many joys. See page 23 for 62 others. Photo by Victoria Snowber

BICENTEN



ALBASH



**Current events got you down?
Maybe what we need is
a really big celebration—
like the one held
on July 4, 1976**

BY JULIE JACOB

IN 1976, AMERICANS were cranky and cynical, worn down from years of tragedies and tensions. Vietnam, Watergate, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the bombing of Sterling Hall at the University of Wisconsin in Madison—the country's problems seemed endless. Americans needed something to feel good about.

The year 1976 also marked the country's 200th birthday—the perfect excuse for a party. *A really big party.*

"There was a healing that was trying to take place after the Vietnam War," says John Kaminski, director of UW-Madison's Center for the Study of the American Constitution. "One of the things the bicentennial really did was focus attention on the good things of America."

In the months leading up to the big day, people in Wisconsin and across America watched "Bicentennial Minutes" on CBS, followed "The Adams Chronicles" on PBS, painted fire hydrants with patriotic designs, stitched community quilts, collected bicentennial quarters, and bought souvenirs. Although coffee mugs and belt buckles weren't exactly what John Adams had in mind when he wrote to his wife, Abigail, that the anniversary of the nation's independence should be observed with "solemn acts," he would have smiled to know that 200 years later the country was still celebrating its birthday with "shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of the continent to the other."

In Wisconsin, people reacted enthusiastically. "A young man went to D.C. to start a bicentennial newspaper," recalls Martin Schreiber, then lieutenant governor. "Ripon College [had an exhibit] of presidential signatures. Youngsters in Sheboygan followed Johnny Appleseed's path and took helium balloons [filled with apple seeds] and released them into the sky."

Over the three-day bicentennial weekend, Americans saw the parade of tall ships on television, rang bells at 1 p.m. on July 4, oohed and aahed at fireworks, and celebrated the country's 200th birthday in a burst of giddy, goofy, glorious fun.



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Wisconsin's Gov. Patrick Lucey read the Declaration of Independence. Wisconsin Chief Justice Bruce Beilfuss read the Declaration of Rights from the Wisconsin state constitution, and Schreiber gave 13 ceremonial toasts to commemorate the country's birthday. (To this day, former Dane County Supervisor R. Richard Wagner celebrates each Fourth of July with friends—and 13 toasts.)

The weekend's festivities included performances of 1776 at Milwaukee's Melody Top theater; performances of a bicentennial rock opera, *The Return of the Spirit*, at UW-Milwaukee; a Happy Birthday America ice cream social in Monroe; the presentation of a bicentennial quilt to the mayor of Elkhorn; a skydiving show in Wauwatosa; and a re-enactment in Reedsburg of events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"John Adams would have been very proud," says Kaminski. 🍷

Julie Jacob, a native of Racine, lives in Chicago. She dedicates this article to her mother, who loved the Fourth of July.

BICENTENNIAL LEGACIES

What do Old World Wisconsin, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, and Wisconsin's bike paths have in common? They all got a boost from Wisconsin's observance of the bicentennial.

The federal American Revolution Bicentennial Commission gave the states grant money to plan bicentennial projects. In 1972, Gov. Lucey appointed 40 people to the Wisconsin American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, including then *Wisconsin Trails* publisher Howard Mead.

"[The governor] insisted that the activities had to be truly reflective of all Americans," recalls R. Richard Wagner, who became the commission's executive director in 1972. Over the next four years, the commission received about half a million dollars. Here's a sampling of what it funded:

- ★ Old World Wisconsin opened on June 30, 1976; it received nearly \$100,000. Some was used to survey the African-American settlement of Pleasant Ridge and research African-American history. Some went toward relocating and restoring the oldest cathedral in Wisconsin from Milwaukee to OWW's site in Eagle.
- ★ The Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation received money to build a museum honoring its history and culture. The grant was especially meaningful, says Wagner, because the Mohicans were allies of the colonists during the Revolutionary War.
- ★ The commission collaborated with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to publish a map of state bike trails.
- ★ The Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation got about \$36,000 to clear and develop parts of the trail.
- ★ The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources built Heritage Hill State Park in Green Bay as a bicentennial project, which the commission endorsed.
- ★ Dozens of smaller projects were funded, from the restoration of Klauber Hall in Madison to a bicentennial park in Oregon to an oral history project.

Bricks and mortar aside, Martin Schreiber believes that the biggest legacy of Wisconsin's bicentennial celebration is the chance it gave people to speak up about their government. Of all the commission's projects, he's proudest of "We the People," in which state newspapers periodically asked readers to give their opinions on how the government was doing.

Wisconsinites today, says Schreiber, could learn from the bicentennial celebration, taking the time "to reflect on what this nation is all about . . . to recognize how really critical and important and treasured these freedoms are." —J.J.