

The Bi-Centennial : A Town and a Nation in Need of a Party

For the nation, the 1970's was not a memorable decade. Vietnam, oil embargo, Nixon, stagflation, malaise, and hostages in Iran, had put the nation into a deep funk. But the Bicentennial made it bearable. This was a time for national soul searching, digging for your roots, building community. A big Rye history re-enactment at the church kicked things off and the 4th was a brilliant summer day with a huge parade the likes of which this town had never seen. There were dozens of floats, walkers, bikers or drivers. Lead by majorette Maddie Chichester and the hastily formed Town Band, we proudly marched, endlessly, from the School to the Cemetery. There was a beautiful float with a huge model of the church, Mel Low in a pick up touting the new recycling center and Guy Chichester on his red white and blue bicycle with his "Dump Mel" (Thompson) sign in front of his house, Francis Holway as parade marshall and Esther Parsons as master of ceremonies. We all gathered at the cemetery for speeches, music and militia mustering. And then the real fun began in Esther Parson's field with an obstacle course, pie auction, dunking booth, tug a war and many other activities and at the school a fireman's field day of events and a softball game followed by a bike race. There was an art show by local artists at the church and historical artifacts at the Town Hall. Finally everyone gathered back at Parsons Field, unaware that in a few years this would become the town common field. There was a big supper fitting of the 4th followed by a town band concert under the stars. The band included Tom Barron and Bruce Valley on trumpet and Jane Holway on "bass" and they brought the community together for a memorable finale and a day we would never forget. The town had outdone itself; there was a warm glow that lasted and the Bi-centennial committee, thanks to the urging of member Jessie Herlihy, transformed itself into the Rye Historical Society and the spirit of '76 lived on.