

4th of July

Independence Day of the United States of America



The Star Spangled Banner

THROUGHOUT the year, visitors to Washington, DC, pause to view the flag which inspired the US national anthem. The 185-year-old flag, the Star Spangled Banner, is massive (9.75 x 10.4 meters). Its 15 white cotton 5-pointed stars are on a blue field of English wool bunting, with 15 stripes, eight red and seven white, of wool bunting. The linen backing is more than half its

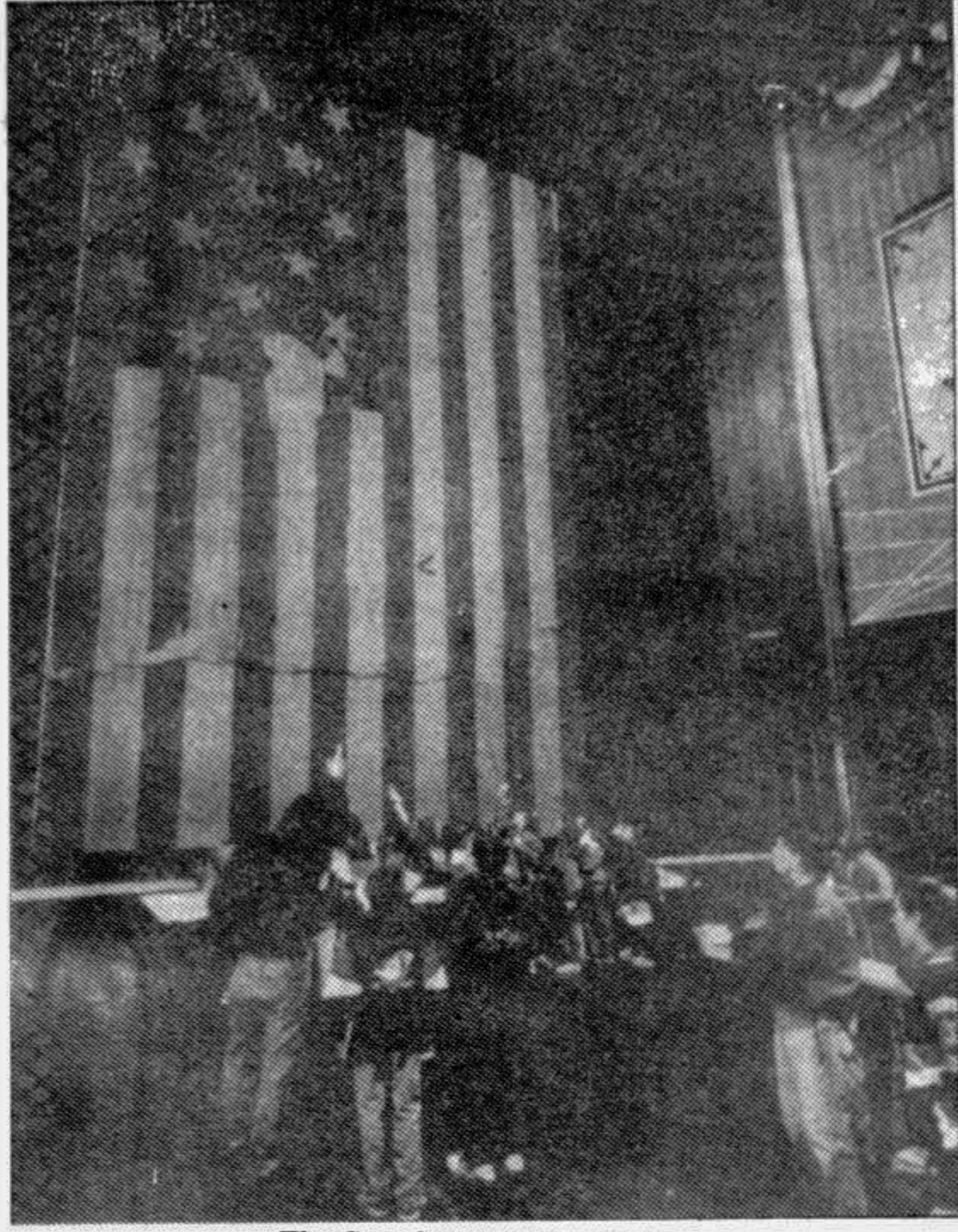
weight of about 68 kilos. Unlike today's flag, the flag of the early 19th century had one stripe as well as one star for each state currently in the Union. This handsewn flag was made in the summer of 1813, 36 years after the Stars and Stripes pattern was adopted as the US national flag. With the War of 1812 still raging against the British and after they had burned the US

Capitol and White House in Washington, this flag flew over Fort M'Henry in Baltimore on the night of September 13, 1814, as British ships began bombarding the fort. On a British truce ship out in the harbor, Francis Scott Key, a young American lawyer who was negotiating the release of a prisoner, watched anxiously as the bombardment continued into the night. He was so relieved to see the flag still flying in the morning that he wrote a poem of the occasion, "The Star-Spangled Banner." He ironically set it to the tune of a popular English song to commemorate the American victory. Key's poem was adopted as the national anthem in 1931.

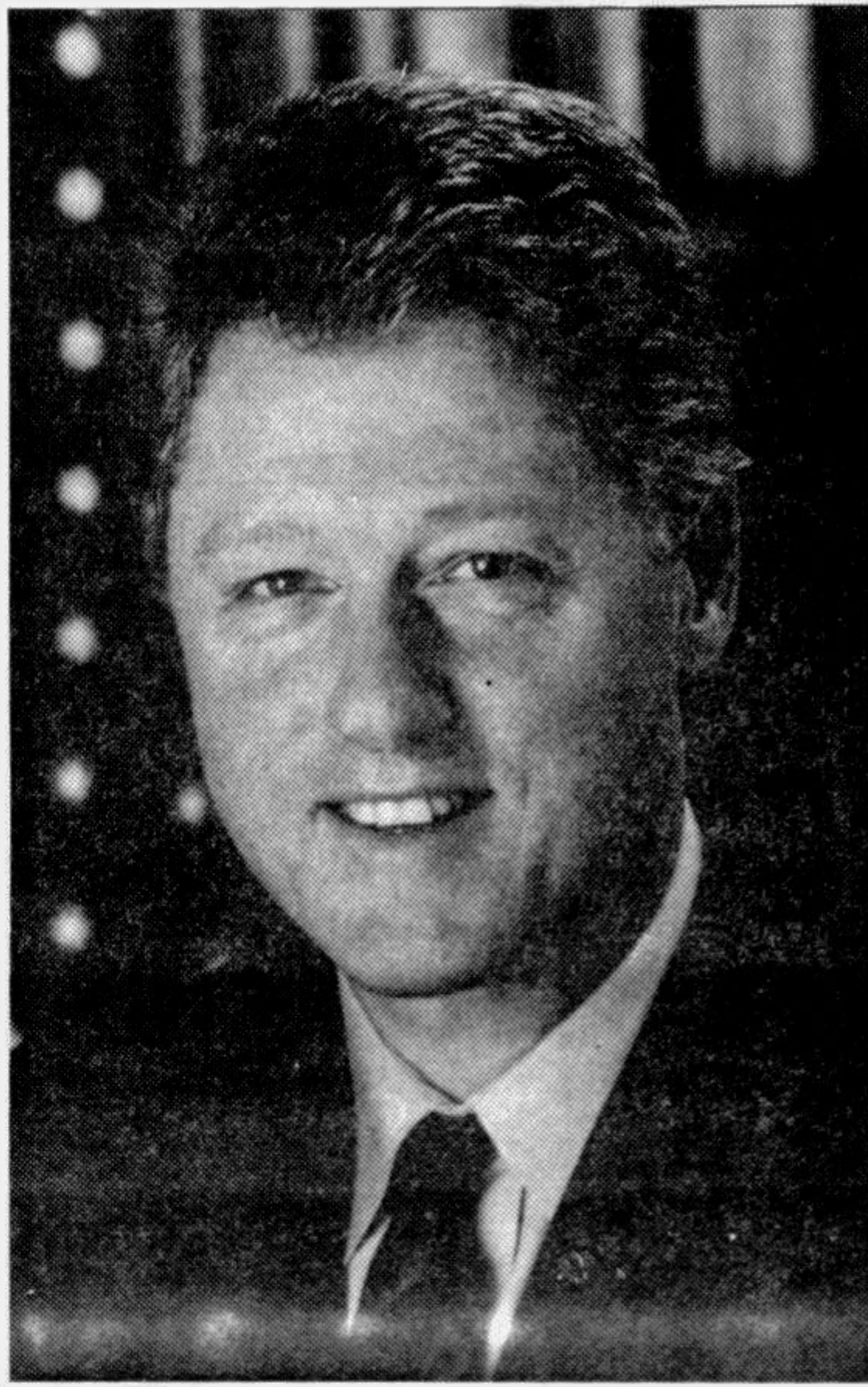
The flag itself was given to the commander of Ft M'Henry, and his family donated the flag to the Smithsonian Institution in 1970, where it was subsequently placed on public display. Since 1964, the Smithsonian's new National Museum of American History has prominently displayed the flag in its specially designed site at the main entrance on the National Mall.

As a national treasure, the Star-Spangled Banner flag has been included in the White House millenium plans for the preservation of America's treasures. Faded by weather and age, the flag has been further damaged during its 80-year display by the influences of light, pollution and humidity.

The flag will be removed from display in October 1998 and laid flat in analysis to determine the best conservation treatment, which is currently estimated at \$5.5 million. The public will be able to observe the work through windows in the conservation lab. After approximately three years, the museum intends to re-exhibit the banner in an environmentally controlled glass case.



The Star Spangled Banner



President Clinton's Independence Day, 1998, Message

President Clinton believes the coming century will present "limitless possibilities," and that the people of the United States now have an "unprecedented opportunity" to prepare for its challenges.

In his 1998 Independence Day message, released by the White House July 1, the President noted that the US people "have benefited from the wisdom of our nation's founders who crafted a blueprint for democracy that has served us well for more than 200 years and continues to inspire newly independent nations around the world."

"We are all heirs," he said, "to the rights articulated in our Constitution and reaffirmed by courageous men and women of every generation who have struggled to secure justice and equality for all." He also said "We are forever indebted to the millions of Americans in uniform who have shed their blood to defend our freedom and preserve our values across America and around the globe."

Following is the White House text: "I am delighted to join fellow Americans across the nation and around the world in celebrating Independence Day."

Throughout the year, we set aside special times to remember and celebrate our different ethnic roots. But on Independence Day, we rejoice in our common heritage as Americans and in the values and history we share.

We have all benefited from the wisdom of our nation's founders, who crafted a blueprint for democracy that has served us well for more than 200 years and continues to inspire newly independent nations around the world. We are all heirs to the rights articulated in our Constitution and reaffirmed by courageous men and women of every generation who have struggled to secure justice and equality for all. We are all forever indebted to the millions of Americans in uniform who have shed their blood to defend our freedom and preserve our values across America and around the globe.

But we Americans are bound together not only by a shared past, but also by a common future. Blessed with peace and prosperity, we have an unprecedented opportunity to prepare for the challenges of the next century: to keep America free and secure, to improve health care and education, to bring the opportunities of the Information Age into every home and classroom, and to strengthen the bonds of our national community as we grow more racially and ethnically diverse.

On this Independence Day, as we celebrate our rights and freedoms and look forward to a new century of limitless possibilities, Hillary joins me in wishing you a wonderful Fourth of July."

Patriot Alley

by Edward E Ericson, Jr.

EVERY Fourth of July, we neighbours gather early in an alley. It's an alley with pretensions: it's called Hollyhock Lane.

The hollyhocks are gone now, and the concrete is purpled by mulberries instead. We rise to see the Hollyhock Lane Parade; then half of us repair to the alley for a patriotic service. This has happened 63 times before. Attendance has been rising in recent years, and in 1997 there were more than a thousand people on hand, approaching some of the big turnouts of yesteryear.

The Calvin-Giddings Patriotic Association runs this show. Always multi-ethnic, the area is now also multi-racial. If you move onto the 800-900 blocks of Calvin or Giddings, the streets between which the alley runs, you had better clean up and paint up and help with the planning, or the neighbours will talk about you. Imagine the shock of the family that was closing on a house purchase, only to learn that their unfenced, terraced back yard provides the annual programme stage.

Even those of us who go year after year are a little surprised that a traditional celebration of this sort continues to attract strong interest in the 1990s. After all, it's throwback. It's often hokey. But in this alley we do pretty much the same thing our immigrant forebears did. They probably did it better, but at least we still do it. As the smiles all around say, we love it for the sheer happening of it. This is how to make time stand still.

At night over public TV we can see the downtown glitz and faux and striving. Here we see a plain parade and an unchanging ceremony with no outside talent. It's pure ritual, with the meaning mostly remembered, and we revel in the effortless charm of the ordinary. Highways are packed with Americans leaving town for the holiday. Here we plan our summers so we can stay home and mill around in an alley that for 364 days a year is nondescript.

The parade began in 1934, when four fathers, looking for something to drain the energy out of their sons, decided to march through the neighbourhood playing their horns. A woman now about 80 who was there at the creation says that the only song they all knew was "Onward, Christian Soldiers". A group of old neighbours, awakened by the unexpected clatter, called the cops. Trouble. It was 5:30 AM. For lack of a parade permit, the police closed down the show. On July 5, the four fathers went down to City Hall and got a permit for the next July 4. The cops happily changed sides and have ridden escort ever since, sirens sounding. This is how a tradition starts.

In 1935 the Screech Owls, Inc., of Grand Rapids, Michigan, civilly delayed reveille until 5:45 AM. The march ran only the length of the alley. After flag-raising and the national anthem, a full hour, 6:00-7:00, was given over to firecrackers! Then came the parade: "Each kid, and this includes the grown-up kids as well, will please bring a drum, horn, flag or all three. 7:30 was time for a "Peaceful snooze (Try and get it)."

By the next year, reveille had been moved further back to 7:00. The city newspaper took interest in the celebration in 1938: "So far as is known here, the Grand Rapids community is the only one in the country staging such an event." By 1939 the order of activities had pretty much settled down to what we have today, parade preceding programme and fireworks no longer mentioned. The 1940 poster reads in part, "We will always remain a liberty-loving nation, tolerating no dictatorships." In 1941 the patriotic association filed articles of incorporation.

Now, at 8:00 AM, the calliope hauled out of the local museum each year awakens the open-windowed slither for blocks around. We reach curbside

around 8:30, parade starting-time. It loops through several blocks, and most of us move to see it twice, there being not all that much to see. Those on the curb are as interesting to watch as those in the street. I look for those I know. I watch a mixed-race feminist student clapping — for the strolling politicians? I spy a former student, now a Presbyterian minister known to join gays in marriage. I greet a smiling Italian-American man from the local conservative think tank. I hook up with a genial left-wing black colleague: no arguments today. Unum overrides pluribus.

Here comes the parade, random order. A man on a unicycle — old Hollyhock tradition — with a kid on his shoulders. Someone in a full-body Goofy costume — good thing it's cool today. A modern fire engine; an antique fire engine; a Steelcase semi, shiny as always. A 20-strong band tootles, its one practice over, and I see my next-door husband and wife and daughter whose instruments I never hear at home. It's called the Hollyhock Band, and the music is okay.

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Now for the floats. They are on kid's red wagons; the Rose Parade this ain't. They are being judged, with prizes to be

Then we walk through the shaded alley lined with bunting on fences and garages, and under "Welcome" signs hanging from horizontal ropes we hold our annual rendezvous amidst red, white, and blue. There's coffee for adults, punch for kids. Good music bracketing the programme, before and after, comes over a good amplifier from a group that allows itself to be known for this one day as the Hollyhock Jazz Quintet.

awarded. Kid-ridden bikes with crepe-paper-festooned spokes are too many to count. They must stay behind a rope being walked along the route and parents, on foot or on bike, are interspersed to accompany the little ones. Where is the dog that pulls the wagon that carries the tyre? Here are 15 motorcycles, riders black-jacketed. They must not be Hell's Angels; I see a 60-year-old man known to have done time as an elder in his conservative church. Then come the convertibles antique to kids but nostalgic for oldsters. They carry signs for political office-holders and challengers, but the cops know to walk, not ride. Their juvenile underlings pass out stickers,

little flags. Tootsie Rolls. The cops have cheek-aching grins, point to folks they know, sometimes veer over to the curb for a handshake with an old friend.

Vern Ehlers, our congressman and a Berkeley-trained physicist, sticks out for wearing a sport jacket over white shirt and tie. He says he'll shed the coat for his other three parades later in the day. Shy and formal, he seems more awkward here than when in hearings shown on C-SPAN. He shows up even in off-years, though he's in a safe district that seems not to mind substance over splash. Stickers with his name on them soon adorn many shirts. His predecessor and another former predecessor at Calvin College, Paul Henry, who died too young, used to toss out O'Henry bars, and in the alley I once asked him where he developed the habit of giving things away.

Then we walk through the shaded alley lined with bunting on fences and garages, and under "Welcome" signs hanging from horizontal ropes we hold our annual rendezvous amidst red, white, and blue. There's coffee for adults, punch for kids. Good music bracketing the programme, before and after, comes over a good amplifier from a group that allows itself to be known for this one day as the Hollyhock Jazz Quintet. We Hollyhock veterans recognize more faces than we know names. We chat with those we know, smile with tentative familiarity at those we don't. An Asian couple, rare here, walks by jabbering in foreign tongue. Pops recognizable from paper and TV give controlled but warm greetings. Do they recognize me? Today I'm an equal-opportunity grinner, wrinkling up toward those I vote against as much as those I vote for. I see a former student who eagerly tells me how she used to ride her bike in the parade. Looking around, I'm impressed by how many college kids are here, pseudo-sophisticated eyeskin shed for a day. There's my current favourite five-year-old, adopted from India and living two doors away. "Hi, Ericson." Lifting her, "Hi, Angela. Are you having fun?" Yeah.

A woman from Giddings Street comes, smooth at the mike. As the flag goes up the little pole, teens costumed as Uncle Sam and Miss Liberty lead us in the pledge of allegiance. Kids, like the adorescent girl next to me, sing hands go over adult hearts, follow suit; some know all the words. A strong-voiced woman leads us in singing the Star-Spangled Banner; we are loud, hearty, astonished by ourselves. The prayer is offered by a Catholic priest from the local parish. I'm startled when he ends "in Jesus' name," more startled by the loud "Amen" from the crowd. Protestants, probably.

It's time for introductions of public office-holders first "our man in Washington," then state senator, state representative, country commissioner, mayor, city commissioner. Each gets to wave to the crowd, and each gets a good applause, but none gets to say a word. We are patriotic today, not political. So the challengers, though allowed to march, are not introduced by name, just given a general hand for their presence.

The speaker gets five minutes. We've had some big names, one of whom was to be President, Jerry Ford. We've even had a couple of imports, such as a congressman from California. We're now back to the original spirit with a local speaker — lol a young neighbour just a couple of years out of my classroom and now into organizing inner-city kids for urban gardening and for making and marketing their own brand of barbecue sauce. He speaks about regeneration, about welcoming the young into our cherishing of the American heritage. He has a good joke and gives a good talk in the genre remembered from his childhood.

Prizes for the floats are now announced, first, second, and third place in each of the two

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Torpedo Patriotism

by Jack Kelly

THE organized displays that professionals fire are just one side of the fireworks business. Equally replete with tradition and nostalgia are the firecrackers, fountains, and bottle rockets that ordinary citizens shoot off in their back yards. These "toy" fireworks, as they are known in the industry, became popular after the Civil War.

"Before then it was popular to shoot guns and cannons to celebrate the Fourth," says Warren Kloforn, an author who has written about fireworks history. "The blackpowder-based fireworks that were introduced were a less lethal form of revelry than indiscriminate shooting."

In the early years of this century, children everywhere religiously saved their pennies to invest them in firecrackers at a nickel a pack. Torpedoes, small balls that exploded on impact with a sidewalk, were another popular diversion, along with snakes, doubleheaders, chasers, skyrockets, and pinwheels. Toy cannon and cap pistols were also closely associated with fireworks. Early models used primer caps designed for black-powder guns. They were responsible for decades of blasts and blisters.

On a typical July Fourth youngsters woke before dawn and sneaked outside with Christmas-morning anticipation. Every boy wanted to set off the first Independence Day salute. By the time the sun was up, most towns were alive with the dry crackle of miniature explosions, every one a "death to a redcoat". The air would be thuged with sulfur until after the town fireworks display at night.

The Chinese have been the traditional suppliers of firecrackers, which continue to be manufactured and braided into strings by hand. The early black-powder "mandarin" firecrackers emitted a rather feeble snap when lit. In 1916 Thomas G. ("Ray") Hitt, a pyrotechnic innovator from Washington

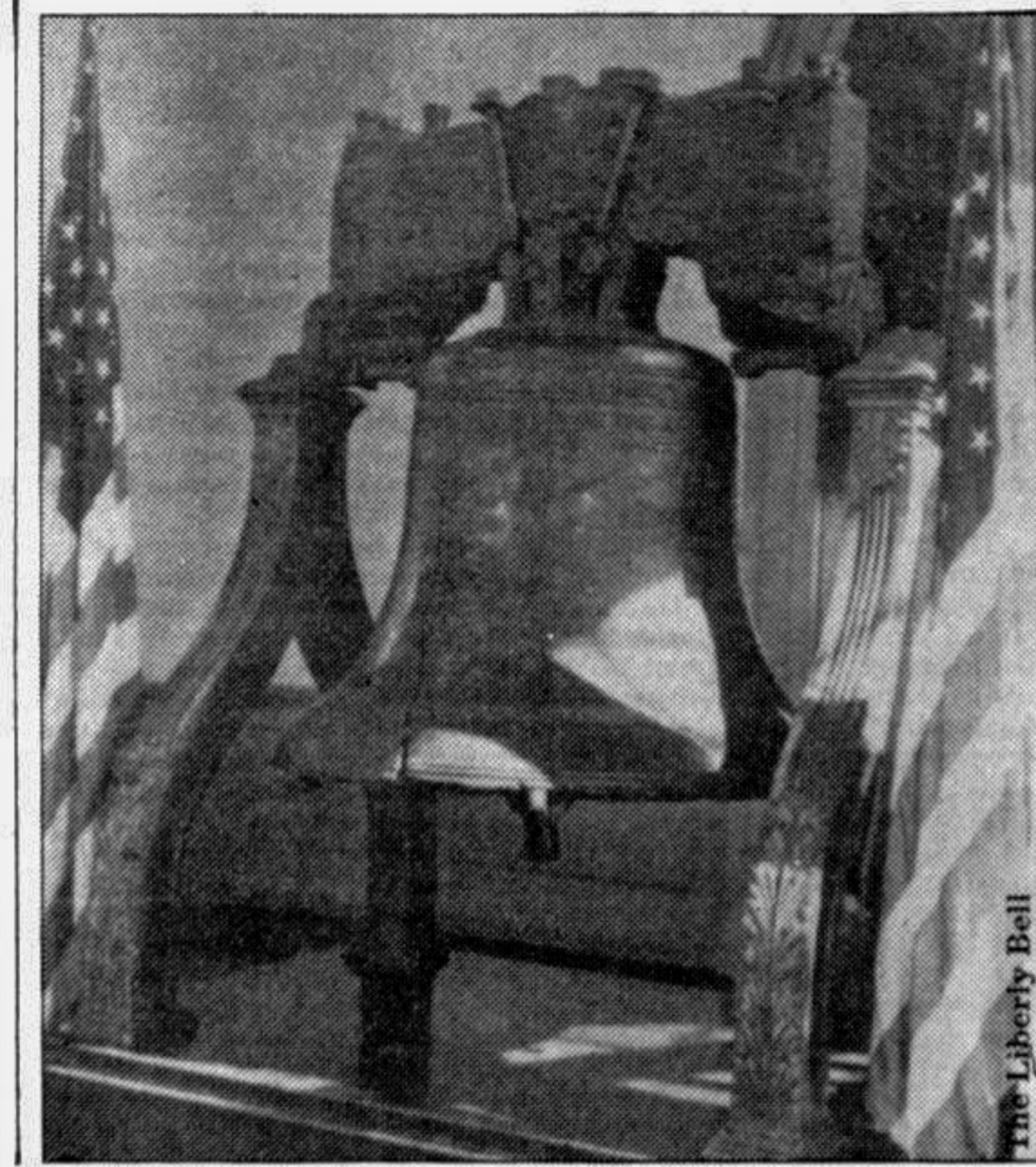
State, experimented with photographic flash powder, a mixture of powdered magnesium or aluminum and an oxidizer. The formula was soon introduced into the Chinese fireworks industry. The resulting "flash-light crackers" exploded with a much sharper report than their black-powder predecessors.

Flash powder also turned domestically made salutes and "cannon crackers" lethal, fueling the anti-fireworks crusade. "You had cannon crackers up to twelve inches long," says John Niemi, a Park Forest, Illinois, letter carrier who moonlights as a dealer in antique fireworks. "They were like bombs. They killed people." Salutes were eventually limited to five inches.

The attraction of consumer

fireworks has not diminished. Recognizing their improved quality and reliability, a number of states have liberalized their laws in recent years. Thirty-two states now allow citizens to purchase fireworks. At stands near state lines, fireworks retailers have long carried on an interstate trade, which is immune from state strictures. This year consumers will set matches to an estimated \$250 million worth of pyrotechnics, ranging from simple sparklers to a device evocatively labeled "Wild Imagination."

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Heartiest Felicitations on the Independence Day of United States of America

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