

## Where Were *You* on the Big Day?



COURTESY OF JULIE JACOB

Like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the bicentennial is one of those watershed moments in American history, the kind we refer back to. Most of us won't be around to celebrate the nation's tricentennial, but we can remember the country's 200th 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 often spent my lunch hour walking the cobblestoned streets. I walked by the Liberty Bell and wondered how an imperfect object had become such a perfect symbol of freedom. I walked by Betsy 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 with that.

On the big day itself, July 4, I stood on the Benjamin Franklin Bridge—normally closed to pedestrians—with thousands of other people. We stood high over the water and looked down at the tall ships in the Delaware River, their flags snapping, everything decorated in red, white, and blue. As the sun set, we watched fireworks erupt into the night sky, raining down color and embers and, I thought, hope: for our lives, which were just beginning, and for the country, which we were just coming to understand existed both in 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 Bash," page 38). Her family threw a party in their Racine backyard, where her mother dressed as Betsy Ross (pictured above). Tell us where *you* were on July 4, 1976, in an e-mail or a letter to the address on page 10. (Send photos if you have them.) We'll give away a free one-year subscription to the best story.

## >> 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](http://wisconsintrails.com) after July 5.

Elsewhere in this issue, we give you an idea for something to do every day in July and 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.

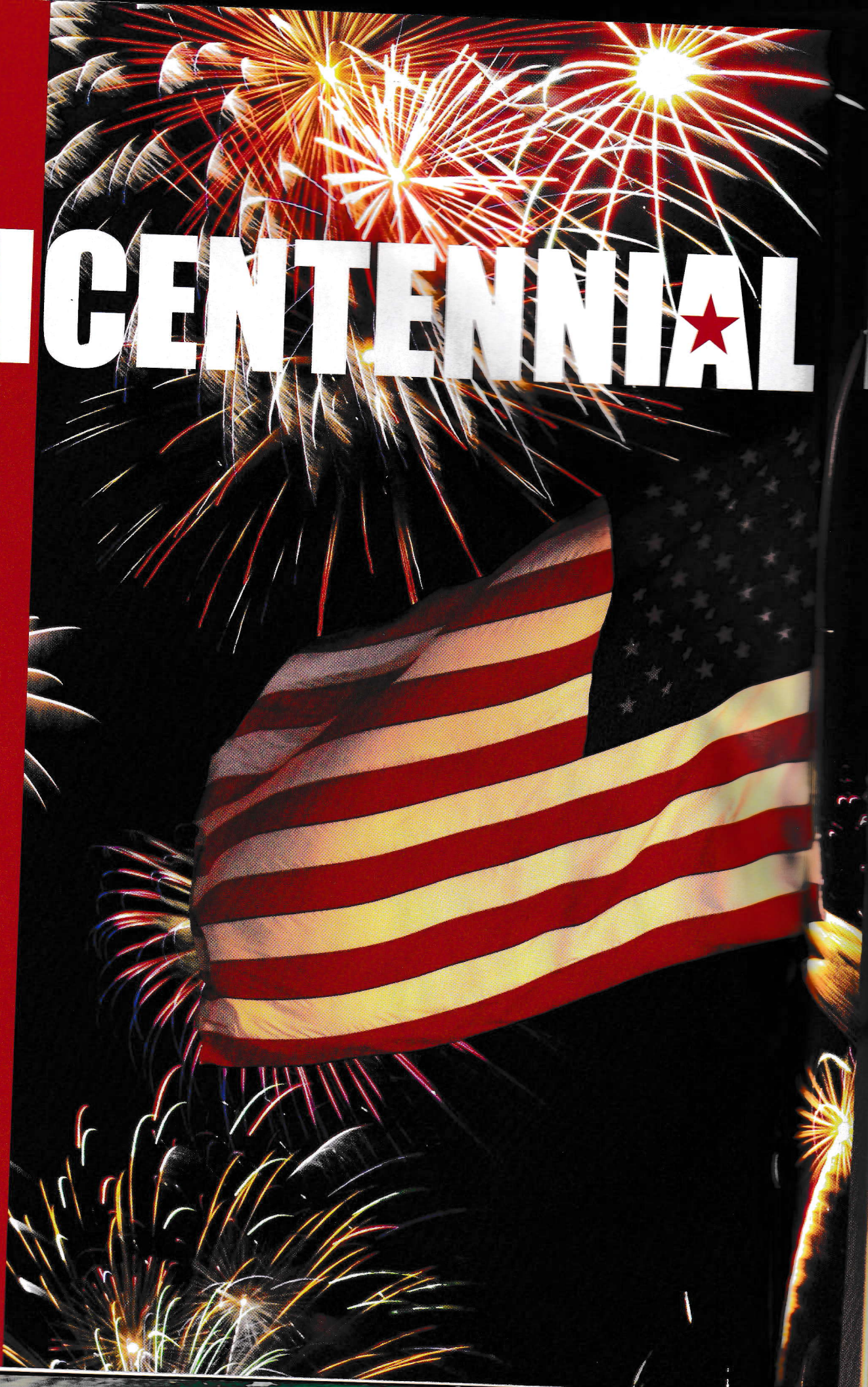
For the "Great Wisconsin Adventure," we asked Madisonians Raphael Kadushin, Paul Loew, and Molly Rose Teuke to give us the inside look at Mad City (page 58). Managing editor Laura Kearney offers her own tour of the fantastical gardens created by Riana de Raad ("Riana's Magic Garden," page 41). Photographer Randy Larson conjures the annual 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*  
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# BICENTENNIAL







# BASH



**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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200<sup>th</sup> birthday—the perfect excuse  
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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.