

Woodbridge Township Commission Essay

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Memories are a critical portion of our past and they define us as individuals. Your identity which is who you are is created from piecing together tiny fragments of these experiences you had. No identity is the same due to the fact that everyone experiences are never the same during a given moment. Being the oldest town in New Jersey, Woodbridge Township rich history is filled with momentous occasions that play a part in its rich history. Woodbridge is a fascinating town where unique memories are pieced together, slowly creating history.

On May 14, 1969, the decision to hold an "Old Fashioned Country Fair," at Merrill Park on June 14 and 15 was finalized. This decision was made to celebrate the 300th Anniversary of Woodbridge and at the time the fair was an event most residents looked forward to. According to Miss Ruth Wolk, a chairman "The fair is getting bigger and bigger day by day... Everyday someone comes up with a bigger and better idea." (Leader Press, May 14, 1969). This upcoming occasion was increasing at a tremendous rate with all sorts of attractions to honor the founding of Woodbridge. The people who came early to the fair, otherwise known as the "early birds," would get the opportunity to receive several free gifts from the exhibits. The committee its own booth that sold anything from coffee mugs to dinner plates engraved with the anniversary seal. Crowds gathered to bring home a souvenir to remember this memorial event for many years to come. They were even allowed to bring home a copy of the township charter which was signed in the year 1696!! As reported in the May 14, 1969 issue of the Leader Press, "...Space movies from NASA and a twenty-minute film on the American Flag. There will also be a children's theatre, a rock 'n roll band for the young folks." (Leader Press). These are a few of the many exciting activities that represented our past. One of these past remembrances was that the stall members were requested to wear colonial costumes to liven the event.

"A special gold-type souvenir coin, about the size of a half dollar will be issued as part of the 300th Anniversary Celebration of Woodbridge Township, Mayor Ralph P. Barone and Miss Ruth Wolk, 300th Anniversary chairman announced today." (Leader Press, April 9, 1969). This glorious coin had been engraved with the anniversary seal on one side and the Municipal building on the other. They each had the dates 1669-1969 and were only distributed after being locked in an airtight container so the coin is preserved for future generations. This commission had predicted that the gold coins would be available for public purchase around May 30, 1969. However, there were only 10,000 coins available so if they wished to obtain one of these magnificent coins, they would have had to place an order early and mail it to Miss Ruth Wolk in time before the stock runs out. It was not surprising that on the day that the coins were put on sale, they vanished in the blink of an eye. Since advancement orders were accepted, people all over New Jersey were sending their

requests with the payment. One former resident who moved to Iowa even wanted one of these and some people didn't just want one, they wanted coins that ranged from 1-10!! The residents really appreciated the coin and it will remain a fragment of history.

With the boisterous crowds roaring at the top of their lungs waiting for the show to commence, it could only mean one thing.....the Marine Band was in town! In honor of the memorial anniversary of Woodbridge, the Marine Band, otherwise known as the "President's Own." They were one of the most famous bands in the United States and had agreed to put on two shows at 2:00 P.M. and another at 8:15 P.M. The concerts had taken place at the Woodbridge Senior High School and tickets were obtained from the First Bank And Trust Company. According to the Leader Press, "Under the direction of LT Col. Albeit Schoepper, the Marine Band is known to millions of Americans through its annual tours, its frequent radio, and television appearances and its concert series in the nation's capital." (Leader Press April 30, 1969). This explains how well known the Marine Band was in the late 1960s and how much of a difference it made that they were in Woodbridge Township for the first time. It was obvious that crowds would gather to watch their show due to the tremendous amount of publicity that they had gained over the course of several years.

Freezing and shivering, the crowds gathered around the Municipal Building to start the glorious day with a flag raising in honor of the one and only 300th Anniversary of the founding of Woodbridge. Mayor Ralph P. fiercely held on to his hat as the strong winds, blew the flag rapidly on its flagpole, at the Municipal Building. The Honor Guard struggled to raise the flag but finally, after clutching it, the flag was raised. After the ceremony, the mayor called a stagecoach to take him to St. Anthony's Auditorium with the cameras blinding him with the powerful flashes of light. This was where the reception was held. Representatives gave hopeful speeches to the committee and praised the town. After there was a celebration in which Frank Murphy dressed in a colonial costume as a master of ceremonies. A grand dance concluded the day's events.

On Wednesday, April 9, 1969, it was decided that there would be a special program held on Thursday when Canada Day would be observed. We would gift copies of the town charter to the guests of eastern from Canada. "Eastern" meant Woodbridge's newest industry also known as Eastern Airlines. According to an article published in Leader Press, " Wearing French colonial military costumes, the group will parade at the Eastern Airlines at 11 A. M. The "Canada Day" program will help to acquaint the Eastern." Woodbridge was very enthusiastic about giving out their charter copies as a symbol of remembrance. There was another performance at 3:15 where both Canadian mayors would introduce themselves and Miss. Ruth Bater Wolk and the committee would present the original copy of the charter. Several motion pictures of Canada were shown along with traditional Canadian food. This event truly connected the fragments of memories

scattered around in time.

Celebrations that were arranged for the 300th anniversary were magnificent. Each one of them represented who we are as a community. If I were able to travel back in time to participate in one of these grand activities, I would visit the fair. There I could witness what the past was like and engage in activities that resemble who we are. I wish to go to the entertainment rides and also receive my own free gifts. They could be worth millions of dollars someday in the future. The grand fair was like all of the pieces that make Woodbridge so amazing combined into one. Being there would have given me a chance to see how things worked back then. I want to see what fairs looked like during the 300th anniversary and get to know my community better one memory at a time. Woodbridge will continue to cherish the past and embrace the future in the years ahead.