

The 4th of July

Community Comment
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Another Fourth of July has passed. This year, with the 4th ^{on} Wednesday, it was hard to know which weekend would be celebrated. Our local Festivals all seemed to be well done and well attended. Ferndale was traditional and Arcata had baseball. Humboldt enjoys the richness of small town America in many respects.

I hope, in all the fun and spectacle, that most of us took the time to remember why we celebrate this date. This is our great nation's birthday celebration. We could get technical and argue over the real date of when the country was actually founded. But we celebrate the birth of an idea; an idea of governing that combines democracy and the practical work of governing a large and diverse population. Remember, at our start, only men could vote, we allowed slavery, the vast majority of us lived and worked family farms, and most people never ventured more than fifty miles from home.

Over time this changed. We expanded our territory and began the move West. As more people came, cities grew in size. Our concept of housing and daily needs began to change. Work diversified as demand changed for larger and denser populations. The civil war cemented the role of the Federal government and States Rights and duties. Slavery became a thing of the past. And then came the transcontinental railroad.

With the railroad came the ability to move people and goods and services faster and with more volume than ever before. Factories and factory work shifted what we did away from agriculture. More cities sprang up and the West was settled. The speed of going across country was so fast that one comment was you didn't even have time for a bath. I guess that was true if you only had one bath a week or so.

During all this time, people were coming to this country for the opportunity to have a future. Immigrants came from all over. They brought their language and culture and, in many cases, were not well treated. Over time, they gained acceptance and respect and we have the melting pot of cultures that works better than any place on earth.

But America didn't just change these immigrates. America changed too. So did governing. Laws were passed that reflected the times and population growth. States and Cities took on new roles. The Supreme Court was pressed to interpret the Constitution as Congress passed new laws to meet the challenges of the day.

Two World Wars have been fought to protect countries and people and to protect our chosen way of life. These wars also changed us. After World War II, more people went to college and moved to distant places for work. Our quality of life was never better.

The 4th of July is fun and full of summer activities. But this birthday should remind us all how special this country is. And the hard work, sacrifice, and change it has demanded of our parents and past generations.

We continue that work today. And it will always be hard and contentious. And we will be better for it.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.