

## Paper Mache for July 5 by David Read

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July or day after, actually! Fun fact...I am a Yankee Doodle Dandy born on the 4th of July. Since it is a national holiday, I've never had to work on my birthday except one year when I was at Disneyland for a national YMCA convention and they chose to keep the exhibit hall open. Small price to pay I suppose. Speaking of Yankee Doodle Dandy, did you know "The Yankee Doodle Boy" is a patriotic song from the 1904 Broadway musical *Little Johnny Jones*, written by George M. Cohan. The play is about a fictional American jockey, who rides a horse named *Yankee Doodle* in the English Derby. Many of us know the song performed by James Cagney as Cohan in the 1942 film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

So aside from all the secular celebrations around our nation's declaration of independence, why does the Fourth of July matter? It marks the birth of the United States as an independent nation, commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The 56 brave souls that signed that storied document, which I have seen in the National Archives in Washington, DC, (a very moving experience I might add) included the usual suspects; Hancock, Adams, Franklin. There is even a signatory named George Read of Delaware, the same unusual spelling as my last name, but I've never been able to connect him to my lineage. It is a reminder of the courage and vision of those who risked everything to create a nation where people could govern themselves and pursue their own destinies.

I've been to several locations central to the beginnings of the U.S. including Independence Hall in Philadelphia where the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776, and where the U.S. Constitution was later drafted in 1787. The nearby Liberty Bell became a symbol of freedom and was rung to mark the first public reading of the Declaration. The crack came later. We were just in Boston and walked the Freedom Trail with a stop at the Old North Church where the lanterns were hung to warn of the British attack. I have visited Yorktown, VA where the decisive victory over the British in 1781, led by George Washington, effectively ended the Revolutionary War. I have yet to make it to Minute Man National Historic Park, site of the Battles of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts, which marked the first armed conflict of the War in April 1775. By the way, these important historic sites are all maintained by the National Park Service which is under budgetary attack. We can only hope that funding will remain in place so that everyone can see these places as they piece together their own understanding of how the U.S. came to be.

Speaking of the National Park Service, it also maintains the National Mall, the stretch of lawn that runs from the Capitol building to the Lincoln Memorial. My fondest July 4<sup>th</sup> memories include visits there with my family to witness firsthand the annual Capitol 4<sup>th</sup> celebration with live music followed by the grand finale of spectacular fireworks with thousands of others. It's an experience to behold and well worth the effort which I still love to watch each year on PBS. This year, we will lament the high price of fireworks and the shortened public displays due to the huge tariffs on China which produces over 90% of all consumer and commercial pyrotechnic products. In spite of the jingoistic fervor sweeping our nation, we remain a great country that will survive and thrive based on our core principles that resulted in our founding and will see us through as we continue to evolve.