

Reflections of Years Gone By & the Linton Freedom Festival By Ralph Witty

Ralph Witty is beginning into his 35th year in heading up the Linton Freedom Festival. He has and still remains active in the community and the Linton-Stockton Chamber of Commerce. Honored this past January with the esteemed title of President Emeritus by the Board of Directors of the Linton-Stockton Chamber of Commerce. Witty was honored with a plaque for him personally along with one that is on display at the Chamber's office along with a standing ovation by approximately 150 community leaders of both Linton and Greene County.

Remember the good 'ol days? When Linton's Parade began at little A Street and South Main Street and went north, ending at the Linton High School? And when almost every business and not-for-profit entered a decorated float in the parade?

Back in the 1930's, the parade was a celebration of Independence Day and the decorated floats were old cars, decorated to the max! Even though the Linton Parade didn't have a particular name, it was a huge celebration! Peoples Trust Company was at the "Wheel of Progress", the Linton Daily Citizen cruised down the parade route with pride, and the folks awed at Tri Kappa's decorated car. The Auxiliary Band performed from Waterloo, Indiana and people watched from rooftops as the Linton Miner's Band strutted their stuff.

Our Country went through World War II and then the Linton Parade became more military oriented (Winged Victory – WWII) with Color Guards and military personnel marching in the parade.

Parade themes began and our Country's colors were displayed vividly and proudly. In 1967 Delta Theta Tau displayed their pride with our Country's Eagle as a "Symbol of Freedom". Civitan Club honored Miss Liberty with the "Land of the Free".

1976 brought about the Bicentennial. The Linton-Stockton PTA worked hard to display the American Revolution Bicentennial 1776 – 1976. The Professional Services of Linton pulled together to enter a "huge" float, entitled, "The Future Begins Today". New Car Dealers, celebrated together, saying "It's Time to Trade!" Linton's Retail Merchants celebrated their "Freedom, the Right to Vote." General Electric reminisced the past to present with a revolving picture show of events of Linton's past history. Coal City brought the cake (look at all those candles!), the Linton Rotarians displayed the flags, and the Heyoka Indians even joined in our celebration.

Moving into the 80's, the Indiana State Festivals Association joined us, NSWC Crane displayed their pride, and the Chamber of Commerce showed us that "Young Minds are Tomorrow's Future".

The 90's brought about the Linton Downtown Businesses to Celebrate our Freedoms, The Past, Present, Future. The Chamber of Commerce showed off their Freedom Festival Queen and other area queens joined us too. The Medical Professionals celebrated with Miss Liberty, Citizens national Bank celebrated their 60th Anniversary and Independence Day, and Bloomfield State Bank and Peoples Trust Company brought lions, tigers, and what – no bears? No need when you bring monkeys, seals, and the circus to town. We even let the Hoosier Hillbilly's bring their clan to town!

The Millennium brought about a new century for all of us and we celebrated with a lot of help from Mrs. Gilmore's First Grade Class at the Linton-Stockton Elementary. They not only choose that year's parade theme, "The New Mil-Lintonium: The Future of Linton" but proudly displayed this on T-Shirts designed for the first graders and a decorated float helped usher in the new century.

Then the world once again took another turn with the horrific tragedy of 9-11 and the following year the parade was dedicated to the Police, Fire, and Rescue workers in, "A Tribute to America".

With the war in IRAQ, this year's Linton Freedom Festival is dedicated to our men and women in the services with the theme, "Defending Our Freedom".

As I look back over the years, I've seen the parade grow from year to year and have even taken the time to trace it back to 1905. Course I wasn't around then so I only know what others have told me and I've seen some really neat old photographs.

The Linton-Freedom Festival Parade earned the title of "Indiana's Largest Independence Day Parade", years ago, and brings approximately 40,000 people to our town. Sure, it takes a lot of work, I know first hand the amount of work this type of event takes but I think that it is well worth it and I plan on helping for years and years to come. In fact, we're already planning our Centennial Celebration for 2005 when we will celebrate 100 years!

If you're one of our regulars, we'll see you on the 4th again and if you've never been to our Linton Freedom Festival, then come and join us; the more the merrier!

To obtain a complete schedule of events contact the Linton-Stockton Chamber of Commerce at (812) 847-4846.