



Fourth of July Celebration Ends With A Bang

by Mathilda Gregory, Editor-in-Chief

As those who live in Hardy Falls know, the Fourth of July is one of the town's favorite holidays. The entire community gathers out at Hardy Falls Park, near the waterfalls that gave our town its name, for an afternoon of picnicking and baseball, socializing and fishing. These activities are followed in the evening by one of the biggest fireworks displays in the area.

This year, a beautifully warm and sunny afternoon was enlivened, not only by picnics and baseball but also by a live band. The band, Roy and The Outlaws, was brought on board after playing several gigs in and around town, including the Country Time Bar and Grill Carnival, and the Murphy Bowling Lanes Grand Re-Opening.

"We heard them and thought they sounded fine," said Mayor Margo Truelove. "And they worked for free.

Although everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, and some people were even dancing, the music came to an abrupt end as the sun set when the band members broke into an extended dance version of "Inna Gadda Da Vida." After fifteen minutes, John Randolph, brother of lead singer Roy Randolph, jumped on the stage and turned off the sound system. The drummer was upset, but no blows were exchanged.

The audience applauded.

We're also pleased to report that this year's July Fourth celebration boasted fewer drunken brawls than have been seen over the past four years. Alcoholic beverages are not served in the park, of course, but celebrants routinely ignore the posted bans and bring their own supplies. As one might expect, this can lead to trouble for the police.

"This year wasn't too bad," Chief Jacqueline Kline said. "There were a few fights, and a couple of the college kids got hauled down to the station when they refused to break it up. Claude Beecher started yelling at June Esperanza, claiming she was harassing him, but we were able to calm him down and move him to the other side of the park.

The college students, Geoffrey Peterson and Mike Hawkins, were both charged with public brawling. Although Peterson was also charged with being drunk and disorderly, Hawkins was not. Both men were released immediately. In the interest of full disclosure, we should also point out that Mr. Hawkins is a journalism student and works as a correspondent for *The Hardy Falls Gazette*.

“Peterson came at me saying some crap about a friend of mine,” Hawkins said when questioned later. “I defended her.

“He defended his friend quite well,” Chief Kline said. “However, since the police were right there, he might have been better served asking us to intervene.

Hawkins declined further comment. Although we pointed out the error of his actions, he will not be removed as a correspondent at this time.

Unfortunately, the, relatively, peaceful celebrations came to an end when the fireworks began.

This year, the town council decided to make the fireworks display extra special by setting off the explosions from Richard Dunlop’s fishing boat, which would be anchored in the middle of the Hardy Falls lake.

“Richie volunteered,” said former mayor Barclay Ruffio. “What happened was just a damned shame.

“I get bad motion sickness,” protested Joseph Wagner, a licensed operator from Pyrotechnics Specialists, the firm contracted to run the show. “How was I supposed to know I’d be out on a freaking boat on a lake, for Pete’s sake! Nobody told me, or I would have asked them to send someone else. Then it was kind of windy, so the water was choppy, and I thought I was going to die. I was trying to concentrate on what I was doing, but it was hard when I was fighting not to toss my cookies in front of the whole freaking town.

As planned, Dunlop operated the boat while Wagner set off the fireworks. Once the display started, members of the audience noticed explosions out on the boat. These miscellaneous bursts grew more and more frequent as fireworks waiting to be deployed exploded. Then the inevitable happened. All of the remaining fireworks on the boat went off at once, going up in a bright, colorful, fireball.

Dunlop and Wagner jumped into the lake. Dunlop’s boat caught on fire.

To make matters worse, Dunlop had apparently been carrying extra fuel in the prow of his boat. It was ignited by the fire and detonated, igniting the regular fuel tank in turn. The resulting explosion broke the boat in half and sent up another massive cloud of smoke and flame.

Wagner cried out, saying that his hair was on fire, went under the water, then began flailing about. Ignoring him, Dunlop, treading water nearby, started shouting, “My f***ing boat!”

As debris started raining down on the shore, most of the audience ran to safety. At the same time, Deacon Black, Calvin Hardy, and Mateo Guerrero jumped into the lake and swam out to the two men near the boat. Deacon and Calvin got Wagner in a “dead man’s hold” and pulled him to shore.

Mr. Wagner’s hair was only singed, but he did lose an eyebrow.

“It’s a good thing he was in the water,” said Doctor Elias Johnson, one of the audience members, after checking him out. “His burns are basically superficial.

“I shouldn’t have panicked,” said Wagner, a little sheepishly. “But I don’t know how to swim.

Guerrero was able to get to Dunlop, but he claims that he had to practically knock the man out to drag him back to shore.

“If he was that in love with his boat, maybe he shouldn’t have stored fuel on it at the same time he was shooting off fireworks,” Guerrero commented.

Pyrotechnics Specialists declined to comment about the incident. However, a few days later, Richard Dunlop was showing everyone photos of the boat he was buying. One assumes an insurance payout was involved.

“I don’t think he’ll be willing to let the town use his boat next year,” said Mr. Ruffio with evident satisfaction.

The audience reaction to the display was mixed.

“I think we can safely say no other town will be able to match it,” Albert Cromwell said philosophically.

“I got covered with soot,” complained Martin Scanner.

“It was cool! Let’s do it again!” exclaimed six-year-old Clifford Barton.

Sophie Barton, Clifford’s mother, pulled him away.