

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

By FANNIE HURST

(© by McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)
(WNU Service)

YOU talk about your dramatic panoramas of life! What is more stirring than a glimpse backward, say along the twenty years that follow the college graduation of any given group. The college reunion is a singularly potent event. It is a stock taking. It is the moment of resume backward. Men and women who have not paused in the race of life long enough even to contemplate it as a spectacle, are here forced to face the evidence.

Twenty years after graduation. Have I failed in the race or reached the goal?

Two men who had not met for those twenty years were about to come together for the first time; two men who had been inseparables through four years of high school and four subsequent years at their state university.

The Heavenly Twins, they had been facetiously called during those years of their intimacy. It had been a nice friendship, ceasing, it is true, after graduation to have any active significance, or, for that matter, anything of a passive quality, because the paths of the two boys diverged instantly.

Rex Tyson went to Boston to learn the shipbuilding business in the yards of an uncle.

Claude Nipher returned to his home town to take up his father's business of taxidermy.

Varied interests if ever there were. Tyson climbing steadily ahead in the enormously profitable business of shipbuilding. Nipher, taking up where his father had left off, and then branching out into many tributaries that led off taxidermy, but into which his father before him had never ventured.

It was after twenty years of their respective efforts in their divergent fields that the old school and college chums were about to meet once more.

Tyson's home town, which was situated on the most northerly of the Great Lakes, floated steamers of enormous drawing power.

It was in connection with an enterprise to launch some gigantic boats on the bosom of this body of water that Tyson was returning to his home town.

In the twenty years since his graduation from the state university, he had not set foot in it.

Tumors of his fine success had come back, it is true. Some of the decorative monthly magazines had carried photographs of the Tyson country estate just outside Boston. The sailing lists of the big steamships bound for Europe frequently carried the name of Rex Tyson and Mrs. Rex Tyson, and the year his son was graduated from Yale university the papers were quite agog with the story of the ship magnate's son shipping for South America aboard a fruit steamer. From the bottom-up sort-of-thing which the American public loves to observe, and admires in the sons of its millionaires.

Nipher had followed Tyson's career pretty closely. Living as he did in the smaller environment of his home town, his laboratory built right on the quiet old frame house he continued to occupy after the death of his parents, Nipher had the leisure to watch with close scrutiny the various aspects of the outside world which interested him most.

Tyson's career captured his curiosity not only because it happened to whirl around the person of an old and valued friend, but because it illustrated a sociological and economic aspect of his country. It was interesting to study the success of a man like Tyson and to ponder over just what conditions made his kind of position possible.

Nipher married a few years later than Tyson. Where Tyson had chosen an eastern girl of some social prominence, Nipher made what was considered, even in his town, a peculiar alliance. He married a girl named Madalaine de Fond, daughter of a French Canadian who had drifted across the line from Quebec and earned a more or less precarious existence as a veterinarian. Madalaine was not only a rather plain, quiet girl, but she had quite a marked affliction. From birth she had been deaf, hearing only slightly with the left ear. Nipher beheld her one evening at the graduation exercises of the Central high school, where in spite of her handicap, she was graduated with honors. One year later they were married.

There were two children, normal youngsters with acute hearing.

One of Nipher's favorite occupations when he was not working in his laboratory and doing important mounting of animals for some of the foremost museums in the country, was perfecting an ear disk for Madalaine by which she might be enabled to hear more clearly.

Long years after his death, the Nipher ear drum was to earn great fortunes for his grandchildren.

But when Tyson returned to his home city, the Niphers were living the quiet and uneventful lives of small-town people of limited income.

Madalaine had no servant and took sole care of her two children. Nipher himself spent the long hours of the day at work in his laboratory with only one assistant, and although he had come to be regarded as the prime authority in his field, museum experts

Journeying to him for advice from all over the country, his income failed to keep pace with his achievement.

Besides, pre-eminence in taxidermy was not the kind of thing calculated to bring a man any great local eminence. Indeed it is doubtful if his townspeople had any idea that in their midst they were fostering a man who was truly supreme in his work.

Nipher was just rather an old fogey like his father before him. Tyson, if he had had time to give any great amount of thought to his friend in the years intervening, might have affectionately fallen in with that general estimate of him.

And yet, it was with a glowing sense of warmth that he turned his face back home on the shipping mission in question.

Good old Claude! Be a pleasure to write Claude a good fat check if for any reason he might be in need of funds. Chances were that he was. Taxidermist in a one-horse town. Read Claude had married. A deaf girl, too. Just like old Claude. Undesigning sort of fellow. Fall for nearly anything. Should have kept better in touch with old Claude. No friendships like the old ones. Good old Claude! Jove, won't ever again get out of touch with him.

So it was a genial, rather remorseful fellow who swung handsomely off a train one day in the little city he had once called home. A fellow with prosperity written all over him. In the cut of his clothes, his manner of lavishly tipping porters and chauffeurs. The look of his luggage. The general aroma of expensive well-being.

Nipher met him. The friends clasped hands. Big, long, silent clasps, two or three of them, and then, bag and luggage, great big Tyson crammed into Nipher's little old Ford roadster and off they chugged.

Offhand it was pretty much as Tyson had foreseen it would be. Stuffy, smelly, little old house. Smelly of horsehair and many, many gone yesterdays. Shabby gentility. Servantless. Madalaine, a faded, gentle enough, person with the persistently low voice of the deaf and the eager listening manner. Two nice, normal youngsters. A bedroom, scrupulously clean, but that smelled monotonously of the years. Oh, yes, Tyson had been right. The first glimpse of the place showed that.

Deadly, shabby, gentility. Neat poverty. Routine. Monotony. Provincialism.

Br-r-r. It made Tyson shiver as he unpacked his bag. So this was what the years had brought to Nipher!

Good old boy—a snide taxidermist in a spide town.

Doggone shame. Do something about it. Doggone shame.

Nipher, who was Tyson's age to the month, looked at least five years older than his friend.

Life had passed Nipher by.

Had it? Tyson had occasion to ask himself after his first snap-judgments had worn away and after he left the house at the end of five weeks where originally he had only planned to remain five days.

Had it, or had life passed Tyson by in a fashion that terrified him, now that he was beginning to realize the extent to which his nose had been at the material grindstone?

Why Nipher, with complete self-consciousness, chanted Gregorian verse to Tyson and Madalaine read poetry aloud during the long, quiet evenings, feeling its music along her lips as she transmitted it to her husband and children as they grouped about her in the lamplight.

The Niphers went on hikes in the springtime and actually and without self-consciousness studied the plant life of their region and brought home specimens for slides and mounted their findings in their "Springtime Books" as they called them.

Madalaine Nipher played the harp, and in the evenings she took on a delicate kind of beauty, sweeping her fingers along the strings of the instrument there in the mellow quiet of the shabby study.

Nipher was engaged in some of the most romantic kind of taxidermy. Mounting wild animals with such fidelity that several of the museums of Europe had called for his services. The Nipher wild animal display in a Chicago museum was said to be the finest in the world. Nipher thought nothing of spending a six-month studying from picture and life the anatomy of the dog, the tiger, the llama.

Frequently he went off on visits to the public zoos, Madalaine accompanying him.

The Niphers staged plays in their own little living room, playing and writing and doubling up in the characters themselves. For hours on end, one forgot Madalaine's affliction. The Niphers wrote poetry to one another and the Niphers had formed a quartet, Claude and his elder son Merle at the violin, the little girl Aerial at the piano and Madalaine at the harp which so transformed her into beauty.

Close, happy, almost naive family. Greedy for the beauties of life. Ignorant of its materialisms. Indefatigable in their quest for the happiness of harmony.

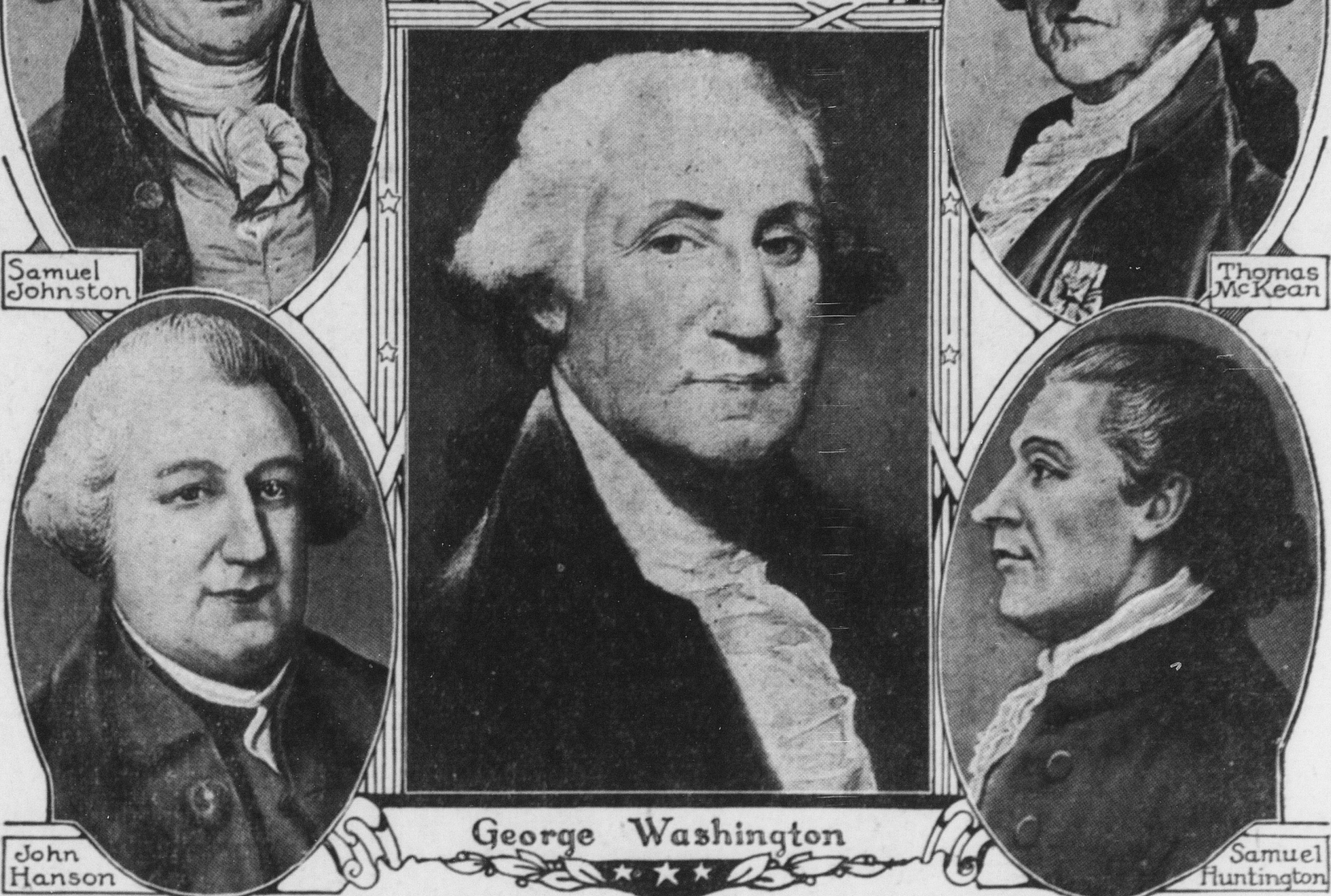
No wonder that Nipher's face, while lined with the thoughtful years, was a face of peace. No wonder that Madalaine at her harp had a strange, quiet beauty all her own. What more natural than that the children of this union should share in its beauty?

There was nothing that Tyson could do for Nipher. He realized that after his second day in the home of his friend.

There was so much that Nipher could do for Tyson.

Blessedly, Nipher realized that after the second day of the visit of his friend.

Who Was the First President of the United States?



(All Pictures, Courtesy Carnegie Institution of Washington.)

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



WHAT is it we celebrate on the Fourth of July?

"Why, the signing of the Declaration of Independence!" you reply.

"But why celebrate that?" you are asked.

"Because it is the birthday of our nation," you answer. And in both cases, you're only partly right.

As a matter of fact, the Declaration of Independence was formally adopted on July 4, 1776, by the Continental Congress, but so many members were absent on that day that no effort was made to secure their signatures to the immortal document. That was not done until nearly a month later. On August 2, 1776, the final copy of the Declaration was ready and the members then present (all whose names appear on it, except two—Thomas McKean and William Thornton, who signed later) affixed their signatures, thus giving the document an authority which it lacked up to that time.

So it depends upon a matter of interpretation whether July 4, when the Declaration was formally adopted, or August 2, when it was signed, shall be considered as the "birthday of a new nation."

But now that this "new nation" has come into existence, obviously it must have a head or an executive officer if it is to be a "going concern." Granted? All right! Of course, we all know that the executive officer of this new nation of ours which came into existence 150 years ago is known as the President. So there logically follows the question "Who was our first President?"

"Why, George Washington, of course!" you answer. But are you sure of that? For again it's a matter of interpretation. To be absolutely sure that you're right, you should say "George Washington was the first President of the United States." Be sure to put in "of the United States." For there was no such nation as the United States and no such office in it until it was created by the Constitution, framed in 1787 and adopted in 1788, and George Washington was the first man to hold the office of President under the Constitution.

In recent years attempts have been made to prove that several men who held the title of "President" and presided over the Continental Congress were Presidents before Washington. But those attempts have met what seems to be a final and decisive answer, from Dr. Edmund C. Burnett of the division of historical research at the Carnegie Institute of Washington, who has spent 25 years in exhaustive research of the work of the Continental Congress during the entire period of its existence from 1774 to 1781.

In a statement by Doctor Burnett, issued by the Carnegie Institution recently, he says in regard to the "President before Washington" theory:

"In this year of exceptional grace, the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-two and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and fifty-sixth, when we are celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington, many old controversies revolving about the character and career of the Father of his Country have been revived—controversies which seemed to have been permanently relegated to the realm of tales that were told—and several new ones have pushed their way to the front to make their bids for a hearing.

"Among the themes which are not precisely new nor yet hoary with old age is one which declares that the first President of the United States was not George Washington, but that this distinction belongs to John Hanson, president of the Continental Congress from November 5, 1781, to November 4, 1782.

"Similar claims, although on other grounds, have been put forth in behalf of other Presidents of Congress, but only that in behalf of

Hanson has been pushed with great vehemence or has attained any great vogue. In good time the legend John Hanson, first President of the United States, will also be assigned its appropriate niche in the Hall of Myths.

"The plain truth of the matter is that not one of the presidents of the Continental Congress, from Peyton Randolph to Cyrus Griffin, was ever President of the United States, either in fact, by title of courtesy, or otherwise. The first to hold that office, the first to bear that title, was George Washington; and all those who seek to bestow the title of first President of the United States upon any president whomsoever of the 'Old Congress' are but chasing shadows, pursuing will-o'-the-wisps.

"The Hanson thesis, which has had its own variations in the course of its career, has now assumed substantially this form: John Hanson was the first President of the United States, because he was the first President of Congress under the articles of confederation, the first constitution of the United States. This is the basic argument of the Hanson proponents, and it is to this argument that we shall, in the main, devote our examination.

"Was John Hanson actually the first President of Congress under the articles of confederation? Those articles, it should be recalled, were adopted by Congress on November 15, 1777, and two days later were sent forth to the several states with a plea for their speedy adoption. Some of the states readily assented, others ratified with certain provisos, while still others, led by Maryland, held back until their views with regard to the disposition of the western lands should be agreed to.

"By July, 1778, all the states except Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware had ratified the articles as they stood, and a few months later New Jersey and Delaware also came forward with their ratifications; but Maryland stood stoutly by her demand respecting the western lands (and a most praiseworthy demand it was), and not until her demands had been essentially complied with did that state agree to ratify.

The final step was taken on the first of March, 1781, when the delegates of Maryland in Congress, John Hanson and Daniel Carroll, appended their signatures to the articles of confederation.

"At the time of Maryland's ratification of the confederation Samuel Huntington of Connecticut was president of Congress and had been since September 28, 1779. There was no new election of a president of the body at that time, but on July 6, 1781, President Huntington gave notice to Congress that the state of his health would not permit him to continue longer in the exercise of the duties of the Presidency, and on July 9 Congress chose as his successor Samuel Johnston of North Carolina.

"On the following day, however, Johnston presented his declination, offering 'such reasons as were satisfactory,' whereupon Thomas McKean of Delaware was elected President (July 10). McKean served as President of Congress until the election of John Hanson, on Monday, November 5.

"It is to be observed, then, that two Presidents, Huntington and McKean, had served between March 1 and November 5, 1781, and another had been chosen but had declined the office. A chief question therefore is, whether the Presidents between March 1 and November 5, 1781, served under the articles of confederation, or whether John Hanson was the first to serve under and by virtue of that instrument. The question hinges on whether the articles of confederation were actually in force during that interval.

Doctor Burnett declares that they were actually in force. He continues:

"To contend, as do the protagonists in behalf of John Hanson as the first President of the United States, that the articles of confederation did not come into force until the first Monday in November, 1781, is to contradict official record and official interpretation.

"As an instance of the lengths to which this

contention has been carried, a recent biographer of John Hanson, after asserting that 'the election of John Hanson of Maryland was the first act of Congress of the United States, on its first day of existence,' proceeds to lay down this strange doctrine:

"Between the signing of the articles and this first Monday in November no government was actually in existence, though Congress continued to transact business simply because there was a great deal of pressing business to transact." He then remarks that, "during those few months there was a provisional president called Thomas McKean, . . . who was elected with the definite understanding that he was to retire with the formation of the first government November 5."

"It is scarcely necessary to point out that, aside from the evidences of fact already adduced, the argument that 'no government was actually in existence' from March 1 to November 5, 1781, is fallacious and entirely contrary to long-accepted legal interpretation.

"It is true enough that, prior to the adoption of the articles of confederation, there was no written document accepted as a constitution or fundamental instrument of government of the United States, but numerous governments have flourished and do flourish without any such written instrument. It may not be amiss, in this connection, to point out that the Congress itself, on the thirteenth of September, 1779, laid down the doctrine that 'these states now are as fully, legally, and absolutely confederated as it is possible for them to be.'

"The articles of confederation, so far as the main essentials of the instrument are concerned, did little more than put into definite written form the principles on which the government of the United States had theretofore been conducted.

"At all events, it is not to be gainsaid that, even at the time when John Hanson was elected President of Congress, these United States were dating their national existence from the fourth of July, 1776. They have continued to do so, and that assertion respecting the date of the nation's birth has held good both in fact and in law."

After discussing the conditions under which Hanson was elected President, Doctor Burnett says:

"In any event, John Hanson does have the distinction, if it be a distinction, of being the first president to be chosen for the definite term of one year, beginning on the first Monday of November. But this is very far from making him President of the United States.

"The evidence, it must be repeated, is conclusive that no president of the continental Congress, by whatever name it may be designated, whether 'the Congress,' as it first called itself, or 'the United States in Congress assembled,' as it came later to be called, was ever President of the United States. And this is true for this best of reasons, among others: because no such office as President of the United States existed until it was created by the federal constitution, framed in 1787 and adopted in 1788.

"The office of President of the United States which that Constitution created is an office wholly different in character from that of President of the old Congress, whether before or after the adoption of the articles of confederation; so different, in fact, that almost the sole thing in common is the word 'President' in their respective titles.

"The president of Congress was merely a presiding officer, and he was a member of the body over which he presided; he neither possessed nor exercised any executive authority. The President of the United States is almost solely an executive officer; he is not a member of the national legislature; and his contacts with the national legislative body, the Congress of the United States, are of a definitely limited character.

"There is therefore only one rational conclusion that can be reached, and that is, that George Washington was the first President of the United States."

(© by Western Newspaper Union.)