

Bicentennial Event



THE BICENTENNIAL

Communities program, begun in 1973, was one of the national efforts leading to the multifaceted celebration of the country's 200th anniversary. A primary goal was to generate grassroots interest for, and participation in, the Bicentennial. Any city or town wishing to be designated a Bicentennial Community completed a brief application, including a description of planned activities—often civic improvements or historic-preservation measures—that fit the stated national ideal of “A past to remember, a future to mold.” There were tangible dividends: Bicentennial Communities could apply for state grants to assist with the activities they had proposed, and each received a flag with its official red, white, and blue Bicentennial symbol.

In December 1973 Duluth filed its application and early in 1974 was proclaimed Minnesota's first Bicentennial Community. Thanks to aggressive efforts by the state organization, known as the Minnesota American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (MARBC), more than 340 cities and towns had received official designation by July 1976.

Here, we see Lt. Gov. Rudy Perpich presenting the official flag to the Bicentennial Committee of Milan, a small western Minnesota farming town, in May 1976. Perpich served as honorary chair of MARBC; in



Lt. Gov. Rudy Perpich presenting a Bicentennial flag at Milan, Chippewa County, May 1976 MHS COLLECTIONS (STATE ARCHIVES)

this role, he traveled throughout the state to preside at these ceremonies. Indeed, archival records place him at 22 such gatherings in May 1976 alone and more than 300 flag events between 1974 and 1976. Local newspapers covered these presentations, helping to raise the statewide profile of this Democratic-Farmer-Labor politician from the Iron Range. Aided by this increased recognition, Perpich would twice win gubernatorial elections, in 1982 and 1986, and serve parts of three terms as governor.

This photograph, sent to Perpich by the Milan Bicentennial Com-

mittee, features a carefully typed record of everyone pictured, along with their committee and civic responsibilities. A handwritten letter accompanying the photo, penned by a committee member, reveals that Perpich requested the image and the names of everyone present. He clearly recognized the value of these ceremonies and this visual record.

—Thomas Saylor

Thomas Saylor is professor of history at Concordia University, St Paul. He is coauthor, with Dave Kenney, of a forthcoming MHS Press book, Minnesota in the '70s (Fall 2013).

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