THE CELEBRATION OF THE FORMATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

BY SOL BLOOM

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I T is with special pleasure that I am privileged to meet with you in discussing the preliminary plans for the participation by Pennsylvania in the Celebration of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States. As usual, Pennsylvania is foremost in patriotic zeal, the true keystone of the arch that supports our liberty.

We have listened with deep interest to the instructive address of my friend and recent colleague, the Honorable James M. Beck. By his unflagging industry in studying the principles of the Constitution, and his eloquence in expounding them, he has earned a high place on the roll of Pennsylvania's illustrious sons.

When we run our eye down the constitutional roll of honor, we are struck by the brilliance of certain names, a brilliance that not only immortalizes them but reflects glory upon the state of Pennsylvania. We see at the top of the roll, linked with the name of Washington himself, the name of Benjamin Franklin. We picture to ourselves that striking figure, ancient of days but sturdy as an oak, counselling his colleagues in the constitutional convention, spreading the benignant influence of compromise and accommodation and by his mere presence calming the passions of discord. To Franklin the United States will be forever indebted for the wisdom that contributed to the creation of a government of free men, inheritors of a vast continent—a government splendid in conception, triumphant over every assault of circumstance or time, and lighting the whole world with the glow of perpetual freedom.

We see the names of James Wilson and Gouverneur Morris. To them we owe the marvelous symmetry of the Constitution, the

1 An address read before the meeting of The Federation of Historical Societies, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and The Pennsylvania Historical Association on October 25, 1935, in Philadelphia.
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simple and majestic expressions that set forth the metes and bounds of our government. There shines the name of Robert Morris, friend and host of Washington, a patriot whose devotion to America is an inspiration that cannot fade from men's memories while they cherish liberty. We see the honored names of Thomas Mifflin; of George Clymer; of Thomas Fitzsimmons; of Jared Ingersoll—all of them collaborators with Washington and Franklin in creating the government of the United States. Here, in the city where they labored, here in the citadel of independence, we pay tribute to these great Pennsylvanians in our day, as our sons and their distant posterity will do hereafter.

You wish from me a word as to the purpose and scope of the Commission created by Congress to prepare for celebrating the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Constitution. The Commission consists of the President of the United States, the Vice President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, five Senators, five Representatives, and five persons appointed by the President. The Commission has elected President Roosevelt as its Chairman, and I have been chosen as Director.

It is the duty of the Commission to address the American people in regard to observance of the sesquicentennial of the Constitution; to prepare a comprehensive national plan for the celebration, and to correlate the plans prepared by state commissions or other bodies appointed by the Governors and by representative civic bodies.

The states that enjoy the unique honor of having participated in ratification of the Constitution will make special preparation, doubtless, for celebration of ratification day. Pennsylvania was prompt in ratifying the Constitution, having been preceded by only one State, its sister Delaware. It was on December 12, 1787, by a vote of 46 to 23, that Pennsylvania swung its enormous influence to the support of the Constitution. That state convention was composed of many famous and able men, including Abraham Lincoln, who was also a member of the convention that ratified the constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on September 2, 1790, where he seems to have exercised considerable influence. In the ratification convention he was, however, an Anti-federalist and voted against adherence. It would be a matter of interest to Americans everywhere if the historical societies of Pennsylvania would publish details of the life of this delegate.
from Berks county, who bore the patronymic of the preserver of this Union.

We hope and expect to enlist the cooperation of every patriotic American citizen in the celebration of the birthday of the Constitution. I shall not dwell upon details of our plans at this time, but they include preparations for national ceremonies on appropriate dates; celebrations by the states of their ratification days or the days when they were admitted into the Union; diffusion of literature concerning the inception and formation of the Constitution; biographical matter relating to the framers of that document; issuance of commemorative stamps; promotion of studies, oratorical contests, and essay contests by American youths; encouragement of pageantry, motion picture dramatizations, musical festivals, and other appropriate forms of celebration.

The Commission is directed to consider all plans which may be submitted to it; and we cordially invite individuals and societies to forward their suggestions.

It is also my pleasant duty to announce that Congress has authorized the Commission to accept contributions from any source to aid it in its work, to be accounted for in the same manner as any appropriation by Congress.

Referring again to the illuminating remarks of Mr. Beck, I wish to emphasize the fact that the United States Constitution Sesquicentennial Commission is concerned solely with the proper celebration of the anniversary of the formation of the Constitution. The Commission will not presume to deal in any manner with the interpretation of the Constitution. Our duty is to encourage the American people to render homage to the charter that establishes their government and guarantees their liberties. We shall try to throw a bright light upon the history of our national beginnings and upon the lives and characters of the patriots who labored in this city to frame the Constitution. In execution of this task we are entitled to the support of all Americans; for we ask nothing but their cooperation in celebrating their own glorious inheritance.