EVERYONE is aware of the nation-wide celebration already begun in the observance of the 150th anniversary of the formation and adoption of the second frame of national government for the United States—the present Constitution. The official announcement regarding the celebration asserts that every “state, city, and town” will be given a place in the ceremonial activity attendant upon what probably will constitute the most outstanding historical celebration in the history of the country to the present. In every quarter of the nation from September 17, 1937, the official date for the opening of the observance and the date of the original signing of the Constitution, until April 30, 1939, when 150 years will have elapsed since the Constitution began to operate as a frame of government, a variety of activities will feature this great celebration.

The national direction of this important historical and educational enterprise is in the hands of the United States Constitutional Sesquicentennial Commission, established by Congress in 1935. The head of the Commission is the well known Congressman Sol Bloom of New York. Those attending the Philadelphia meeting of the Association will remember his expression of the general plans for the celebration. Others have read his address in Pennsylvania History. Pennsylvania members of the Commission from the House of Representatives are Frank J. G. Dorsey and George P. Darrow. By this date an elaborate organization has been set up for directing the national observance in its ceremonial, historical and educational aspects. An immense amount of historical publication and research will accompany the nineteen months of celebration. Pageants, motion pictures, authentic reproductions of documents, special stamp issues, art and historical exhibits, literary contests, historical publications and gatherings of various
types by patriotic, historical and civic societies will commemorate
the anniversary from coast to coast.

For Pennsylvania, however, this observance will have a sig-
nificance greater than can accrue to any other state within the
Union. For Philadelphia, it will have a meaning and importance
immeasurably surpassing that for any other city within the United
States. After all, the Constitution was framed within the limits
of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia and some of the greatest figures
within the Convention were Pennsylvanians. The soothing in-
fluence of the incomparable Benjamin Franklin on the deliber-
tions of that body; the polished style of Gouverneur Morris in
the final writing of the document itself, and the legal learning
and deep wisdom of James Wilson placed at the call of the Con-
vention, entitle Pennsylvania to claim no secondary place in what-
ever credit may be assessed for the formation of the Constitution
and the recovery of the nation from the difficulties of the Con-
federation era. It is, therefore, both fitting and proper that Penn-
sylvania should enjoy a preëminent place in this great national
sesquicentennial.

In Philadelphia the ceremonies and exhibits connected with the
rôlë of that city, so important in American history at the time
of the formation of the Constitution, are already under way. On
May 15th three couriers in full colonial costume, complete with
wig and cocked hat, galloped away from the portals of Franklin
Institute carrying invitations to the governors of the original
thirteen states to attend the celebration of September 17th at
Philadelphia. Preceding the exercises attendant upon this cere-
mony, Philip C. Staples, president of the Institute, officially opened
its exhibition commemorating the Constitution. At the invitation
of the president, Mayor S. David Wilson turned the printing
press which once graced the shop of Benjamin Franklin and pro-
duced the necessary printed invitations to be carried by the
couriers as in olden times.

Philadelphia patriotic, historical, religious and literary organi-
zations and institutions have begun a series of meetings, exhi-
bitions, receptions and exercises of wide variety which will con-
tinue for the length of the celebration. There is little doubt but
that the city will furnish within its limits the most outstanding
series of collections and exhibits illustrating the history of the
Constitution to be found in existence. The public exhibition of the original draft of that document will be one of the prized possessions of the city. What is asserted to be the largest privately owned collection of rare documents pertaining to the Constitution will be found at the Free Library, Logan Circle. Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach has assembled original autograph letters and documents, original editions of state constitutions of the period, and the certified official copy of the Articles of Confederation originally signed by Franklin on February 14, 1777. In addition the exhibit includes the official document announcing the ratification of the Articles, the original manuscript report of the Annapolis convention and a wide assortment of almost priceless pamphlets dealing with the controversy over the Constitution and its adoption. No American will be able to regard any celebration of the anniversary as complete without a journey to Philadelphia to see its exhibits and the original scenes around which the drama of the making of the Constitution was staged.

Perhaps the outstanding event of the entire national celebration will be the ceremony on September 17, 1937, at Philadelphia in commemoration of the signing of the Constitution. The literature of the national Sesquicentennial Commission emphasizes this opening of the national ceremonies as one of the highlights of the entire nineteen months of the anniversary proceedings. The plans for the event are not as yet fully known, but there is little doubt but that the stellar Centennial celebration of 1887 will be equalled if not surpassed by the pageantry of this occasion. Pennsylvania and its leading city will be the center of national attention and its Independence Hall, cradle of American liberty, will be toasted the length and breadth of the land. The ceremonies will be the most elaborate of the entire celebration.

The state-wide observance of the anniversary is under the direction of the Pennsylvania State Historical Commission. A recent meeting of the Commission approved definite plans for the program throughout the commonwealth. Through the coöperation of the Department of Public Instruction and the Works Progress Administration, it is proposed to furnish every public and parochial high school and private academy with an authentic scale model of Independence Hall. Plays bearing upon the Constitution and costume plates showing designs suitable for use therein, together with copies of the Constitution and biographies of the
Pennsylvania signers will be distributed. For some months the Commission has been organizing all through the state, county committees to administer local celebrations. According to present plans, September 17th will provide the high point in the state observance with county mass meetings. The historical societies will cooperate in these meetings and also stage special programs in connection with the celebration. Every school in the state will play some part in the observance. The Commission likewise is serving as a coordinating agency for the staging of the special celebration in Philadelphia.

With such progress evident in the development of the plans for the Pennsylvania portion of the national ceremony, there is no reason to believe that Pennsylvanians will have cause to feel shame for the rôle of their state in the present observance. Every Pennsylvanian will have a new sense of pride when, in the course of this nation-wide recognition of such an important event in our national history, the importance of Pennsylvania as a scene for, and an important participant in the original drafting of our second frame of government is made clear. The only care to be exercised is that in the exuberant patriotism which will naturally accompany such a great national festival neither Pennsylvanians nor Americans should forget the true function of the Constitution or lose sight of the realistic conditions under which it came into being.

An improper exaltation of that document as beyond any suggestion of change or criticism in the light of modern conditions can serve little useful purpose. The philosophy of Theodore Roosevelt, who is said to have declared on one occasion that the Constitution was made for the people and not the people for the Constitution, should not be denied. Neither would it serve any useful purpose to subject the public school children of the commonwealth to platitudinous and possibly warped interpretations of the origins of a document the roots of which were, as has been demonstrated long since by Professor Charles A. Beard, in the extremely prosaic clash of economic and other interests. The true greatness of the Constitution in its relationship to our history can be taught and appreciated without a distortion of the true function of any frame of government by a blind patriotic fervor. The veneration of the past and its institutions and accomplishments is best accomplished when realism is preserved and romantic nationalism made to play a subordinate rôle.