

America's 43rd star shines brightly

Chris Carlson/The Carlson Chronicles

Wednesday marks the 123rd anniversary of Idaho's admittance into the union of states we call the United States. A 43rd star went onto America's flag. Across Idaho this year, though, the focus has been primarily upon the 150th anniversary of the creation of Idaho as a territory within the union.

Nothing wrong with that as long as Idahoans, as they prepare for the Fourth-of-July festivities, also take a moment to reflect on the great state we are privileged to inhabit and to offer thanks as the state's birthday is duly noted.

Some accuse me of being almost snobbish in the pride I take in being a native-born Idahoan. Whenever I re-enter Idaho upon returning from a journey to a neighboring state or a foreign land, to the embarrassment of those with me, I sing loudly and often off-key (I'm told I'm tone-deaf), the state song, "Here We Have Idaho."

During the recent book promotion tour Randy Stapilus and I took around the Gem state, we were the program at the Twin Falls Rotary. Can't begin to tell you how pleased I was the Twin Falls Rotary still has as a standard part of its program the singing of the state song.

The following day when we were introduced as guests at the Pocatello Rotary, I could not help contrasting the failure of the Pocatello Rotary to sing the state song. It's a tradition one hopes all service clubs around Idaho will maintain.

Thinking about Idaho's sesquicentennial celebration of territorial status led to memories of Idaho's wonderful statehood centennial celebration in 1990. Extremely well organized by a commission headed by Wallace businessman Harry F. Magnuson, with Marty Peterson serving as the executive director to oversee the almost flawless implementation of various local celebrations at the county level, Idahoans everywhere radiated pride.

Like many families, the Briggs clan (originally from Twin Falls, Gooding and Pocatello) held a family reunion in Garden Valley coincidental with the concluding celebratory activities of the centennial. We watched the grand finale on television from Boise's Bronco Stadium where a full-house crowd, of 35,000 people, roared their approval as a certain tall, bald-headed governor, doffed his Stetson in a sweeping salute to the people of this great state.

Then I came across an old yellowing copy of a wonderful tabloid newspaper put together by Idaho's weekly and daily newspapers in 1976 as a salute to the nation's bicentennial. Printed by the Twin Falls Times-News (Wiley Dodds was the production manager and Bill Howard was the project's business manager), it had items of historical significance and short biographies on various Idahoans who had achieved success in a number of endeavors through the years.

The project was spearheaded by Hope Kading, then chair of the Idaho Parks Foundation and a member of the Idaho Bicentennial Commission.

The list of contributors from Idaho's newspaper industry reads like a "Who's Who" of leading journalists through the years: John Corlett, Jerry Gilliland and Jim Poore of the Idaho Statesman; Dick High, Dave Horsman, Bart Quesnell and George Wiley of the Times-News; Butch Alford and Jay Shelledy of The Lewiston Tribune; Dave Morrissey of the Idaho State Journal; Ted Stanton and David Johnson of the Daily Idahonian.

Television and radio contributions came from luminaries like Mindy Cameron, Paul J. Schneider, Vern Nelson and Jean Hochstrasser. Other contributions came from state agency public information officers, as well as folks like Arthur Hart and Judith Austin at the state historical society, and Idaho history buffs like Louise Shadduck, then representing Idaho's timber industry.

The publication is chock full of information that reminds one it is Idaho's people as well as the unique state we inhabit that exist in a combination found nowhere else.

As we take time to reflect about Idaho Wednesday, let's hope on July 4 we will also reflect on what makes the United States the shining city on the hill Ronald Reagan often spoke so eloquently about, a nation and a melting point of people unlike any other gathering in history.

Let this also serve as a reminder to those Tea Party types who espouse the terrible notion of nullification and a state's questionable right to secede when we all stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to that flag which has Idaho's 43rd star on it, we altogether say the words "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Have a happy third and Fourth of July.

Carlson is a retired journalist who served as press secretary to former Idaho Gov. Cecil D. Andrus. He resides at Medimont in Kootenai County.