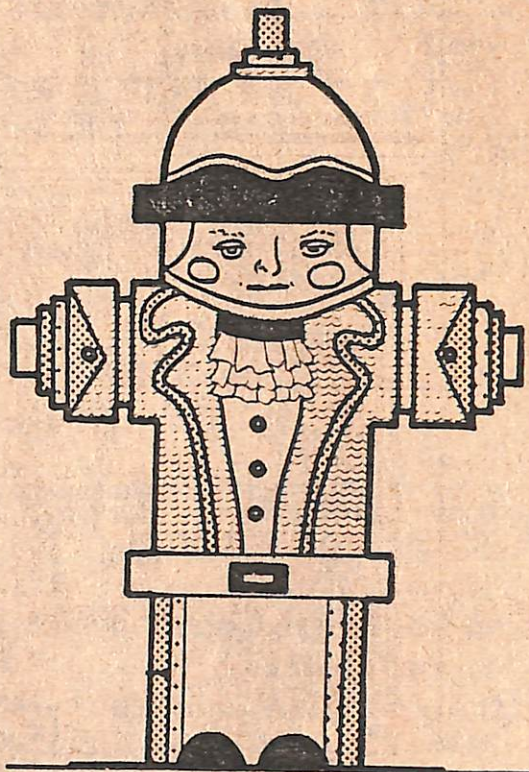


Who Needs Mail-Order Patriots?

We should have guessed where things were heading when the state bicentennial commission started out by borrowing an out-of-state flag instead of using the Maryland banner from the Battle of Cowpens. But who could have known that the city bicentennial committee would outdo the state by sending \$500 to Indiana for the right to paint Baltimore's fireplugs with copyrighted designs that portray Alexander Hamilton and George Washington as bright-eyed kewpie dolls?

If caricatures of Lafayette, Jefferson and other heroes are to be made targets for the canine population of Baltimore, then we fear the bicentennial will be an occasion not to celebrate but to ridicule our nation's origins. Even the city's fire fighters will have to assault these misshapen patriots if the plugs are needed for their real purpose. And what is the tribute to American Indians in the pun of painting Chief Running Water's name on a hydrant decorated to look like a toy red man from a tourist shop?

Maybe Indiana—which sent no one to help draft the Declaration of Independence, because there wasn't any Indiana yet—needs to cast about for cute, ad-agency gimcracks to help it celebrate the bicentennial. But what can we expect for the rest of our bicentennial celebration if the commission running it thinks a place with Baltimore's real revolutionary lineage ought to spend local taxpayers' money on ersatz, mail-order patriotism?



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