

CHAIRMAN of the U.S. Bicentennial Society, Virginius Dabney stands before the historic St. John's Church in Richmond, Va., scene of Patrick Henry's 'Give me liberty or give me death' speech.

Bicentennial Takes a Lot Of Planning In Richmond

By ELIZABETH C. MOONEY
Special to The Herald

The nation's two hundredth birthday party in 1976 is going to take a little advance planning.

In Richmond, Va., where Patrick Henry's call for liberty or death still echoes in St. John's Church, they are beginning to worry that the occasion might be marred with the sort of tawdry commercialism which inevitably creeps into so many American celebrations from presidential inaugurations to the arrival of the pandas at the National Zoo.

They want to avoid the drugstore salt and pepper sets with Washington's head superimposed and the sleazy scarfs in neon colors with the Washington Monument and the dove of peace.

Glittering Roster

THE U.S. Bicentennial Society, recently formed in Richmond, says it means to do battle against this form of cheap jim crack. It has attracted a glittering roster of trustees including Samuel Eliot Morison, Gregory Peck and Alistair Cooke, and its chairman is Virginius Dabney, historian, Pulitzer Prize winner and long-time editor of the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Dabney says they want to see that everything about the commemoration is

in good taste, historically authenticated — and strictly first class.

The society, brain child of two Richmond businessmen, Robert Kline and William Morrison, is offering first class collectibles indeed. Should you want one of their 1,000 museum-authorized replicas of George Washington's dress sword, it's yours for \$925, complete with solid silver knuckle guard, pommel and hilt furniture — as well as a wall mount.

Authenticity Certificate

THEY ARE made in London, and if you buy one you'll get a certificate of authenticity and your name in the Wilkinson Sword registry. It's all attested to by Merrill Lindsay, a member of the armour committee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

If weapons aren't your consuming interest, you may like the idea of setting your table with some of the society's bone china. You have your choice of plates with the society's double eagle etched in 24-carat gold (retailing here in Miami at Fabunique Galleries at \$125 each) or some of the limited edition of Young America Series plates taken from paintings of Winslow Homer — \$150 for two boxed together.

The first set of the 2,500 has been given to President

and Mrs. Nixon for the Nixon library — before Watergate, says Bill Morrison. The State Department is also purchasing some for gifts to visiting dignitaries.

Special Assistant

BILL MORRISON, who was at one time special assistant to the director of the National Gallery in Washington, is currently scouting the country for suitable portraits of American patriots which the society plans to use on a third type of china for your most elegant dinner parties. Patrick Henry, George Wythe and Haym Saloman, the Jewish refugee from Poland who gave his fortune to the Revolutionary cause, have already been given the nod.

There will be only one woman represented — Abigail Adams — and Samuel E. Morison is writing a brief biographical sketch to go with the plate. He also plans to write the sketches for John Paul Jones and James Otis, and Bruce Catton will do those of Ethan Allen and

stick as ever it did for flint, hardtack and a clean pair of socks.

Other pretties are in the works. Just arrived are the first samples of a pair of George Washington's silver-mounted flintlock pistols — only 950 of these will be made, so place your order early.

There will also be copies of one of the chairs in John Trumbull's painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, now hanging in the Capitol. Trumbull was actually at the signing, so it is thought to be historically accurate. Later there will be a Revolutionary-type bottle in which a special bicentennial brandy will be sold.

Historical Buildings

DABNEY, a man with an elfin smile disarming enough to charm a tax collector, conducts the business of the society in between work on his forthcoming book about Richmond. He is currently



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Don't look for Paul Revere on one of these. He was stricken from the list after a conference at which it was pointed out that he never made the famous ride for which he was given credit. He was in fact, says Dabney, involved in a very ignoble role in the Penobscot Expedition of 1779. He was actually court martialed, though later he was awarded a "highly dubious exoneration."

Special Flag, Cufflinks

FOR THE history buff with a thinner wallet there will be less spectacular purchases. The society is sponsoring a special bicentennial flag, silver and gold cufflinks with the double eagle symbol and a copy of a Revolutionary soldier's "anything bag," a sort of pouch which they feel will double as a ladies' handbag. It will have a shoulder strap and a flap and should make as convenient a place for cigarets, compact and lip-

stick as ever it did for flint, hardtack and a clean pair of socks.

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DABNEY, a man with an elfin smile disarming enough to charm a tax collector, conducts the business of the society in between work on his forthcoming book about Richmond. He is currently searching for a new headquarters for the society in one of Richmond's historical buildings, perhaps within the shadow of St. John's Church.

He wants to use this headquarters as a sort of central command post for sparking ideas in other cities which might help make the bicentennial a smash. He thinks the restoration of an old house might be in keeping, or the writing of a local history. He hopes some of the diverse celebrations will be pulled together by commissioning a commemorative symphony to be played all over the country one night in the spring of 1976. The American Symphony League at Wolf Trap Farm in Washington will help select the composer.

"We're a resilient nation," says Dabney, sitting under the portrait of his collateral ancestor, Lighthorse Harry Lee, which hangs in Richmond's Commonwealth Club. "By 1976 we should be celebrating more. I don't see why we can't do it in good taste."

ELIZABETH C. MOONEY is a freelance writer who lives in Washington, D.C.



ARMS AUTHORITY Merrill Lindsay inspects the first of 1,000 reproductions of the George Washington inaugural sword crafted by Wilkinson Sword Limited in London. The \$925 sword has been commissioned by the Bicentennial Society.