

Glorious 4th Loses Luster In Heartland

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HAYS Kan., July 4 —

There was a big Kiwanis fireworks display, an effort to regenerate some of the old patriotic fervor, but by and large the 197th anniversary of the nation's founding went by unmarked in this city of 15,000 in the American heartland.

There were no parades. No giant picnics. No American Legion events. No speeches by visiting dignitaries. Even the venerable tradition of displaying the American flag seemed to have been largely ignored.

Part of the reason, unquestionably, was that Hays, in western Kansas is in the midst of the wheat harvest, and few were willing to let a holiday interrupt the lumbering progress of the huge combine machines.

But, deeper than that, it seemed clear that the people of Hays, the town that Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickock once called home, were preoccupied with things over than overt patriotism.

Unlike the large urban centers, the issues of race, unemployment and crime do not cut deeply in this hub of wheat, cattle and oil production. But other issues do — the runaway rise in prices, the fuel shortage which for a while endangered the wheat harvest and still forces gas stations to close on weekends, the growing shortage of feed, and, perhaps most dramatic — the Watergate affair.

The impact of Watergate probably is not as easily apparent on the surface as it is in the big cities. But talks with many people indicate consistently that the scandal has penetrated deeply here, all the more so because of the great will to believe in the integrity and honesty of the nation's leadership.

Typical is Ruth Brown, an 81-year-old former teacher, now a widow, partly deaf and blind, living alone in an old world frame house in downtown Hays. Mrs. Brown, a lifelong Republican, hung her flag with the help of some passersby, but she remembered the days when "there was a different feeling in the country, when we had a different patriotic idea."

is heard everywhere. David Hirtel, a college student who works summers harvesting wheat, said, "People around here wish the whole thing would get over with. It scares us out here, 'cause we always kind of look up to our leaders."

The mayor of Hays, a real estate man named Henry Marcotte, added, "I wish it could be over quickly. It's hurting the confidence in government. It has even carried on down to people in my position. People question someone for being a politician."

Marcotte, a Democrat who switched to Mr. Nixon in 1972, also complained about reports that Mr. Nixon used public funds to improve his Florida and California homes—an easily graspable bread-and-butter issue that seemed to be catching on in these parts. "There had to be some favoritism somewhere, some kickbacks," he said.

The increasing skepticism in conservative Kansas, one of the most solid Nixon states in the last election, is reflected in the press as well. Today's Hutchinson, Kan., News editorial quoted Thomas Jefferson's list of grievances against King George III in the Declaration of Independence—"He has obstructed the administration of justice. . . . He has made judges dependent upon his will. . . . He is transporting large armies of mercenaries to complete the works of death, destruction and tyranny. . . ."

Then, the newspaper pointedly adds: "These grievances were filed against King George III. We mention that just in case you got confused about the monarch at whom the Declaration was aimed."

Noted Norbert Dreiling, Kansas state Democratic chairman, a Hays resident: "Nixon symbolized for Kansas mid-America, the work ethic, the respect for law ethic. When the symbol itself fails, there's an awful vacuum. The Nixon thing has hit us so bad, it's almost too much for the American conscience to take."

At tonight's Kiwanis fireworks spectacular, these concerns were submerged, for the moment at least, in a sea of patriotic enthusiasm. At the end, during the benediction, Tableau No. 23 was fired, and suddenly the sky was alive with a 15-foot depiction of Uncle Sam kneeling in prayer.

"Kneeling in prayer of reverence for an undivided America," went the narration, "with respect for the law of God and man. Only then will we enjoy liberty and justice for all. Only then will we preserve and enjoy freedom. . . ."

To many of those gathered, it seemed like a fitting message for the times.

Not all of the change could be attributed to things like Watergate, she said, but the revelations have shaken people's faith and confidence. "We do not know what's going on in our government any more. All we know is we've had a lot of crookedness, and that's what it is, just plain crookedness."

Like most others, Mrs. Brown is reluctant to incriminate the President. But the growing uneasiness about his involvement is almost universal here. "I think what he should do is just come right out and say it was so-and-so, and he was sorry for all the mess and he was going to work with Congress to straighten this thing out. You have to be big enough to apologize."

This almost plaintive need for Mr. Nixon to do something to quiet the nervousness about his involvement