

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 30, 2015

Boys State in Dover, 1941: I was selected as one of three from Wilmington Friends School to attend "Boys State," a two-day event in May sponsored by the American Legion. John Bader, the Ford dealer in Newark, was chairman of the Legion Committee that ran the event. For the better part of two days, Friday and Saturday, boys from high schools all over the state were chosen to become temporary legislators and occupy the real desks in the same chambers as the elected members of Delaware's General Assembly. From Wilmington Friends, Fritz Marston and I from the Class of '41 went to the House of Representatives, and Henry Berl '42 went to the State Senate. I drove down and back both days with Marston and two fellows selected from Sanford School as my passengers

To start things off the first morning, we were taken upstairs in Legislative Hall to meet Walter W. Bacon, Delaware's real governor, in his office. We felt important as he welcomed us to Boys State. Once downstairs in the House chamber, the workings of state government were explained, how the Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader were elected by their caucuses and how we were to behave for two days as if we had the power to sponsor, introduce, and vote on bills to be considered. There were lesser jobs in the House to be performed, in addition to the legislators. Marston nominated me to be one of two reading clerks; the other was a fellow from Sussex County. We had to "read out" all the bills for consideration and vote.

Fritz Marston himself campaigned for Speaker but had to be satisfied with Minority Leader. He bought a cigar and from his desk in the front row on the aisle, put on the air of an "old-time politician in a smoke-filled room." I think he regarded Boys State as a farce; I took it much more seriously and thought it was an honor to be selected. On one of the days, we had our lunch at the Pleasant Inn on South State Street near the movie theater, which had previously been known as the Duval Tea Room.

The other reading clerk had a real "downstate" accent, and he struggled even more than I did in getting the words right. He was reading out a bill proposing an overhead bridge to replace the railroad grade crossing from North Broad Street north of Middletown. He seemed to think "north" was "mouth," and he had to read this description several times. I knew the crossing, which was near my grandmother's home, and I knew he had the wrong word, but nothing much happened. I think the bill may have passed to build the bridge "mouth" of Middletown.

In the bills I had to read, only one comes to mind. It had to do with disease, which was referred to as "malady" in the bill. I remembered "Milady" from the Three Musketeers, but I had never heard of "malady." So each time I had to read "malady," I read it as "milady," many in the chamber were snickering, and Marston was laughing his head off. I became more and more embarrassed but kept going to the end with a very red face. I don't recall the fate of the bill.

I know Boys State kept going, and my guess is that more girls participate today than boys, but in 1941, there were no girls there.