

The original documents are located in Box 39, folder “Ford, Betty - Trees” of the Sheila Weidenfeld Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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Donna L. Merritt
7406 1/2 St. S.W. #312
Washington, D.C. 20024
554-5099

Sheila,
Man,

This is so
"frazzly associated" that
it maybe confusing.
Please call if you have any
questions.
Wed.

Dear Sheila,

First, let me say Thank You (from the bottom of my heart) for returning my call as you did. It mean't more than I can say — especially as I really hated to bother you, knowing even in my own limited way, how tremendously overworked you already are. Anyway, the real possibilities of the concept that we discussed seem to me, to be of too much potential value to be overlooked.

Also I want to say that if you think the thing is worthwhile pursuing in any form, I'll do anything and everything I can to help make it happen. In that regard I have already asked Dennis Stroy if he will go with your judgement and he has agreed completely. He has also asked me to send you his sincerest thanks for, as he put it, "being the kind of person who understands".

To continue ... as you know Stroy came to WRC while I was there, trying to get assistance for the project as outlined ~~in~~ in the attached proposal. I became interested, especially when I began to learn more about his family and the fact that he and they had initiated and fully supported all the costs involved throughout the five-year period of work to



A few details:

Dennis' mother recently died, I think of a stroke. His father was a master tailor who came to D.C. during the Depression from Columbia, S.C. to seek work in an environment then more hopeful for Black folks. In time, his father ~~the~~ fell victim to ~~some~~ severe asthmatic and other respiratory-related conditions which also plague several of Dennis' brothers and sisters.

(Dennis included, however in his case not too severe). Mr. Stroy Sr. then became a cab driver here in the District in order to support his wife and eleven children ~~of~~ (Dennis is the oldest).

With the help of the children and his wife, Mr. Stroy Sr. held his family together through years of one financial crisis after another and one illness after another AND produced a family unit of such enduring strength, ~~determination~~, support and love that today the Stroy children, now mostly grown, have taken up that heritage to maintain their home in such a way that they all support and work for the individual goals of each family member.

I don't want to make you think I'm trying to build them up into something they're not. They're just a typical "lower class," very human, Black Washingtonian family, just like thousands of other families, Black and white, that I've had the privilege of meeting in my rambling around the country. But the Stroys have an almost innate understanding of ^{the principle of} "family unity" ~~that~~ as an enduring means of building the



unique qualities of each individual within it.

Sheila, these folks are so far behind the proverbial 8-ball, according to the typical standards of "What it takes to Make It" that they shouldn't even be here! They ought to all be dead! They have only the "roughest" education and all the classic hard luck horror stories that ONE hears from Black families all over America; FOR EX: Dennis was in reform school from Age 13-15 for 290 days of truancy from school. (2 yrs) but with them, there is a difference that I believe to be the point.

The Stroys believed in themselves and in the hope of the American environment, "The American Community", if you will and PROCEEDED with HONOR in the face of every adversity. They have always pooled whatever they had, just as thousands of others have, in order to help each ONE try whatever they NEEDED to to find full development.

The result has been not only Dennis, who is a full time sculptor in a world suspicious of that; but also others like his sister, Esther Stroy, 19, who is an Olympic track star (she beat that respiratory thing) and his sister Edna, 26, who designs ^{beautiful} clothes and sews now at home with Mr. Stroy Sr. Edna is suffering from ^{sp?} emphysema and asthma and may not make it — but Dennis found a Black physician in New Bern, N.C. who has agreed to try to get Edna into the Duke University asthma clinic if Dennis will come and do a garden piece for his home. Dennis is now hurrying to finish the tree before July 4 so that he can



take Edna to the hospital and stay to help her while she's there.

There's so much more that it's a book; but the Stroys ^{truly} see the beauty of living in a way that's really hard to describe. As Dennis says "The success is in trying. It never was anywhere else. When you see that you begin to understand the tangible nature of faith."

I became so fascinated with the Stroys that I asked a friend of mine, Mike Raul of the Adams Group (an ad agency) in Silver Springs to help us. (He, by the way is a white male from a family background similar to Dennis') ~~and~~ Mike jumped right in and has worked weekends etc. on his own, for no \$, to help get Dennis and the Stroys the recognition ~~we~~ both believe they deserve. During our conversations which led to the proposal, the point came up about the theme of the American Family as it related not only to Dennis' piece but also to many larger issues which deeply concern us.

It seems to me that The American Family best describes so many things that we as a nation are about that I thought you might be interested in the idea and maybe in Dennis, too as his tree is his way of trying to express his feeling about his own family; the "Black" national family, as it relates to him, and the larger American family, of many peoples, of which we're all a part. After all, perhaps all this country was ever supposed to be about



is seeing if we, together, can support the dreams ~~and~~ the hopes of each ^{one} of us.

Although the ~~the~~ circumstance is somewhat different (~~however~~ their early history suggests that the Fords have a tremendous amount in common with the Stroys) it struck us that ONE of the most outstanding characteristics of the ~~first family~~ ^{their understanding of "family"} is the very same kind of strength of purpose and sense of values ^{that goes} beyond the politics, beyond the specifics of this moment in our history and ~~that has marked every description of~~ perhaps straight to the point of what something like our Bicentennial celebration should be about.

I believe all Americans truly respect and admire the plain and simple devotion of the Fords to each other in a way that rivals no American family, except the Kennedys ^{ON a whole other level} ~~stand~~ perhaps for a while the Roosevelts, in our history. You know that the pure dignity of it has given pause to an otherwise pretty rough press.

Perhaps we are at a time, if the moment can be seized, when it's not corny for a family to love each other and help the ^{member} individuals ^{survive,} flourish and grow in that, no matter what comes. And if one family can do it then perhaps we, as a National family, can do it. It surely seems as if it's time to try it. Let me know what you think. Don.

I'd love to see the Fords together call for a sponsor some kind of Bicentennial related tribute or salute to the American Family.

If you like it please go ahead as you see fit.
 P.S. / I really don't want to be publicly involved at all.
 My personal interest in this I guess is obvious but I would be so proud to see the Stroys be told by someone who counts what a success they have truly achieved. They don't know. Mr. Stroy Sr. is old and he has said to me many times that he wishes he could have done more - but he didn't know how, as if he might wonder if it's been enough. The kids worry because they don't quite know how to tell him in words so they fuss over him when they can and try to show him they're going to be alright ~~for ever~~

Dennis has a son, Denny, who is a bright, talented youngster of 13 with his 10th job after school and high hopes for a future in which he can grow. I would like Dennis' son to know about his family too... especially his pop who has this hanging on ~~the~~ wall in the basement workshop:

"ON Creativity"

The MAN who follows the crowd, will usually get no further than the crowd. The man who walks alone is likely to find himself in places NO ONE has ever been before.

Creativity in living is not without its attendant difficulties, for peculiarity breeds contempt. And the unfortunate thing about being ahead of your time is that when people find out you were right, they'll usually say that they knew it all the time.

You have two choices in life: you can dissolve into the mainstream, or you can be distinct. To be distinct you must be different. To be different you must strive always to be what NO ONE ELSE can be... Alan Ashley-Pitt.



Project Proposal To
American Revolution Bicentennial Administration

April 9, 1975

"The Family Tree of Hope"

Submitted by

Dennis Eroy

5301 Sth St. N.W.

Washington DC

phone (202) 723-8763

Sheila,



They're only interested
because it's done almost

Whatever gets
them some credit
for a activity seems to
be their primary thrust
also they're "out of their
league" in terms of what it
ought to mean to do the
most good to the most

I called the ARBA to see if
anything was happening. At pre-
they say no # but they'll run
an article in the Bicentennial
to get publicity & try to arrange
some ceremony at the tree
warner. I don't like the idea
of blowing the concept's whole
thing with someone who's ess-
done nothing and not in the family thing gro
cheap

Dear Verna:

Thanks very much for all your interest and help. Be talking with you soon.

Dennis Stroy Jr.



Dans -
Sent Wed. a.m.

- Mike

Proposed

Dennis Stroy, an accomplished Washington sculptor, is near completion of a five-year project to create the nation's largest work of African/American, wood hand-carved sculpture.

The sculpture has been carved from an oak tree donated by the District park department. It stands 22 feet high, and bears an intricate design of Black faces and figures.

It is proposed that Dennis Stroy present this remarkable piece of sculpture to the country as a Bicentennial Project, on July 4 (estimated completion date); and that the Bicentennial Administration fund all necessary costs for completion of the Project, including its removal, transportation and display. It is the sculptor's desire that this work, known as the "Family Tree of Hope," be permanently exhibited in an area of the District of Columbia where it will receive maximum public exposure; and that a plaque with the artist's name and brief explanation of the work be a part of the exhibit.

Background

The "Family Tree of Hope" was conceived by Dennis Stroy in 1969 as a long-term project that would ultimately be donated to the city of Washington, D.C. His original objective, which has remained unchanged, was to portray the unity of a Black family.

Stroy perceives family unity as the single most important source of strength and hope for members of minority groups. Recognizing that economic and social factors of poverty tend to pull apart minority family ties, he has created this sculpture as a representation and monument to such unity.

This concept has taken on added importance to Stroy during the five-year project period because of the unity and support of his own family, all of whom encouraged him in the

I think that's the nature of our time this applies to us all.



completion of the sculpture, often at their own personal sacrifice.

To date, the entire cost of the project has been shouldered by Dennis Stroy and the Stroy family. During the five year period, an estimated 3,650 man-hours were invested by Stroy alone -- the equivalent, in professional sculptor fees, of at least \$73,000. In tools alone, he has invested more than \$1,100; an additional \$750 has gone into miscellaneous supplies and materials. (Appendix A)

Completion Costs

There are a number of essential 'completion costs' that must be incurred as this project reaches its conclusion. Those that can be estimated at this time include \$1,465 (Appendix B) for finishing tools and preservatives for the sculpture. Lights will be necessary so that Stroy and volunteers who will assist in the final 'filing' can work at night, in order to meet the July 4 deadline. *(This was based on Bicentennial suggested possibilities)*

In addition, there will be expenses related to the removal of the tree from its base, transporting it and perhaps temporarily displaying it, and creating a permanent foundation and plaque.

Long-Term Goals

Dennis Stroy's eventual goal is to instruct others -- primarily minority group children -- in the art of wood sculpture. His own experience has been that developing such a talent can quite profoundly and positively affect young lives.



In Stroy's own words, "Sculpture teaches you tolerance and a much greater understanding and awareness. It has put me in touch with different people from all races, who share a common appreciation of art. I think this appreciation exists in all human beings."

To communicate the importance of family unity to minority group members . . . to instruct others in a valued, centuries-old art . . . and to improve the quality of life. These are the goals of Stroy's "Family Tree of Hope."

Dennis Stroy, Jr.

Work Experience

- 8-73 to present: Family Tree of Hope project
- 9-72 to 8-73: Contracted by Sacred Heart Academy, Washington, D.C., as art instructor; and by Federal City College as Extension Program instructor.
- Also presented a six-week demonstration in wood sculpture for Compared to What, Inc., a nonprofit arts cooperative.
- 12-70 to 9-72 Visiting Art Instructor, Howard University and George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- Also contracted by the District of Columbia Department of Recreation to teach and lecture art in public school system.
- 3-70 to 9-70 Directed and taught wood sculpture program for Summer in the Parks, United States Park Service
- 3-69 to 6-70 Instructed in wood sculpture for The New Thing Art and Agriculture Center, Washington, D.C.
- 1968 - 1969 In cooperation with James Gadson, worked under contract for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (supported by Smithsonian Institute and Ford Foundation) to carve a tree in "Resurrection City".
- 1966 - 1968 Served as apprentice sculptor under James Gadson, New York City. Provided free art classes for children and lectures-exhibits at Harlem Hospital, Stoneybrook University, Columbia University and Walt Whitman College, NYC.

Professional Recognition

Local Television: 1969 appearance, "Panorama," WTTG-5
Washington, C.C.

1971 & 1972 appearances, "Harambee,"
WTOP Channel 9, Washington, D.C.

Local Newspaper: 1969-1973 feature & major feature
articles in New York Times,
"Portfolio" of Washington Star-
News, Washington Post, The
Afro-American, The Atlantic
City Press and "Art Gallery
Magazine."

Awards:

1st prize, sculpture/ 10th Annual
Atlantic City On the Boardwalk
Art Show, Atlantic City, N.J.
(5/70)

1st prize, sculpture/ Atlantic City
National Indian Summer Art Show
(10/71)

1st prize, sculpture/ D.C. Department
of Recreation Annual Art Show,
Washington, D.C. (6/72)

1st prize, sculpture/ 12th Annual
Atlantic City On the Boardwalk
Art Show (7/72)

Exhibits:

Present, Holston Gallery, Washington
11/73 - District of Columbia 1st Annual
City Celebration

9/73 - 7th Annual Community Art Hap-
pening, D.C. Dept. Recreation

12/71 - Mayor's Office, Washington

10/71 - Capitol East Natatorium Art Fair

10/71 - Octoberfest, Van Ness Centre

12/70 - Georgetown University, Washington

6/70 - 1970 Summer in the Parks Expo
at the White House

1969 - Corcoran Gallery of Art, Wash.

in the "Family Tree of Hope"

April, 1970 to April, 1975

5 straight chisels - 1"	36.00
5 straight skew chisels - 1"	36.00
7 straight gouges - 1/2"	50.40
7 straight gouges - 3/4"	50.40
8 straight gouges - 1"	70.20
5 straight gouges - 2"	75.00
5 short bent (spoon) - 3/4"	35.00
5 long bent - 3/4"	50.00
5 long bent - 1"	55.00
5 short bent - 1"	50.00
5 fishtail - 1/2"	35.00
5 fishtail - 1"	50.00
5 parting (V) tool 1/2"	35.00
5 parting (V) tool 1"	50.00
100 leather tipped handles	200.00
20 wood carving mallets	50.00
5 hand wood carving kits	50.00
5 India Gouge slip stones	25.00
5 combination bench stones	28.00
5 hard Ozark stones	25.00
25 gallons pure raw Linseed oil	<u>375.00</u>

\$1,481.00

plus additional costs of lighting; transportation & misc. materials.
(approx. #400)

* Hours: 3,650 hours @ \$20/hour = \$73,000

* Sheila, Dennis isn't asking for 73K or any money if there isn't any - although finishing costs of approx 2K ^{would be great}. Bicentennial just wanted to know what it cost; Mike told Dennis that he should count his time at stand. the value of the piece. So Mike found we added it up and



Appendix B

Completion Costs Required to Finish
the "Family Tree of Hope"

April, 1975 to July, 1975

Files: Rasps & Rifflers

5 #R20	25.00
5 #R21	25.00
5 #R23	25.00
5 #R25	25.00
5 #R26	25.00

Brushes

10 #FS-1	20.00
5 #R68"	20.00
5 #HR10 12"	20.00

25 lb. pure beeswax 255.00

25 ga. pure raw Linseed oil 375.00

Subtotal/815.00

Hand light 150.00

Flood lights (est.) 200.00

Misc. costs* 300.00

\$1465.00

* to allow for price fluctuation & breakage; for heating elements needed to apply beeswax at site of carving; transportation costs for 'filing' volunteers.

This is the
real dollar
amount - without
labor - needed to
finish the tree.



April 24, 1975

Verna E. Clayborne
Program Officer
American Revolution Bicentennial
Administration
2401 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20276

Dear Verna:

I'd just like to restate my offer to assist you in any way possible with the Dennis Stroy "Family Tree of Hope" project.

Since our meeting on April 4, Dennis has been working almost daily on his carving, looking toward the July 4 deadline. The tree is beginning to take on many of its "finished" characteristics and is a most remarkable and impressive work.

Verna, I'm quite excited about this project, both from the point of view of Dennis Stroy as an artist, and what I think it will mean as a minority achievement and permanent symbol. I know you are, too.

I'm sure either Donna or Dennis will be speaking with you soon. Again, if there is anything more you need in the way of written materials and so forth, please don't hesitate to ask.

Best regards,

Michael Rawl

W - 588-2722

H - 652-7429

Shake FILE

*This young lady
doesn't function too
effectively in my opinion.*

She doesn't respond for long periods,

*then "shotguns" with half-thought out
ideas and tries to railroad if you don't really*

*think the ideas are in Dennis' best interests by
what she's too busy to really be bothered by // we don't
along with she's*



This 22 foot section of oak tree is being sculpted by noted Washington artist Dennis Stroy, with the cooperation of the (park service).

His estimated time of completion will be mid-summer. At that time, the sculpture will be presented by the Stroy family to the city of Washington, D.C. for display as the country's largest example of African/American art.

More than five years of individual work have gone into this sculpture, with all expenses met by Dennis and the Stroy family. By mid-summer, however, several substantial costs will be required to complete the sculpture.

Foremost among these are preservative bees' wax and varnish for its surface, and the costs of severing, transporting and mounting the sculpture at its final destination. This will require approximately \$_____.

Contributions are being solicited at this time. If you would be generous enough to help underwrite this project, send contributions to:

Dennis Stroy Sculpture Fund
(appropriate address)

or visit with the artist during his daily working hours.

Thank you for supporting this exceptional project.

The Dennis Stroy Sculpture Fund

*FYE
We'll do something
like this to raise the
money to finish if necessary.*



Hi Donna:

Couple of thoughts. First, I got the impression from Dennis that he wants to donate the sculpture to the city. If this is so, it's very newsworthy.

You'll need to doublecheck this, tho, before we try to get any publicity, OK? Let me know.

If we can go with the donation angle, I think we might put up the sign before you get coverage, so the media can help or not, as they see fit.

Also, it's important that the Fund have credibility. Perhaps you or some established trustee (an institution, school?) should head it. In addition to raising money, the Fund should also discuss with the City where the sculpture is to be exhibited. . . what sort of plaque will be provided. . . how much of the cost, if any, they will share, and determine the overall expenses before putting a price tag on the sign.

The purpose of all this -- as I see it -- should not be to raise money for Dennis, but to get him recognition for his accomplishment and as a talented artist. In the long run this will be much more important and lucrative for him.

Finally, I've compiled a brief media list for you to work from (add others you know) and also one of people I know personally. Yours is enclosed. Approach should be, first, what he's doing and why; some personal & family background; the fact that, shortly, the sculpture will be completed.

Let me know when and we can start trying to get coverage. I think some good will come out of it.

Best

Mike

*sherlock
FUT*

PS - maybe I can help get the sign typeset.



American Heritage Dictionary

Defines family:

1. The most ^{instinctive} fundamental social or mating group in man and animal, especially the union of man & woman through marriage and their offspring; parents and their children.
2. One's spouse and children
3. Persons related by blood or marriage
4. LINEAGE, ~~of~~ common heritage
5. All members of a household who share a domestic home.
6. A group of like things.
- * 7. A special or particular world of something, fellowship (personship)
"the family of man"

* Isn't America a special or particular world of something... really?

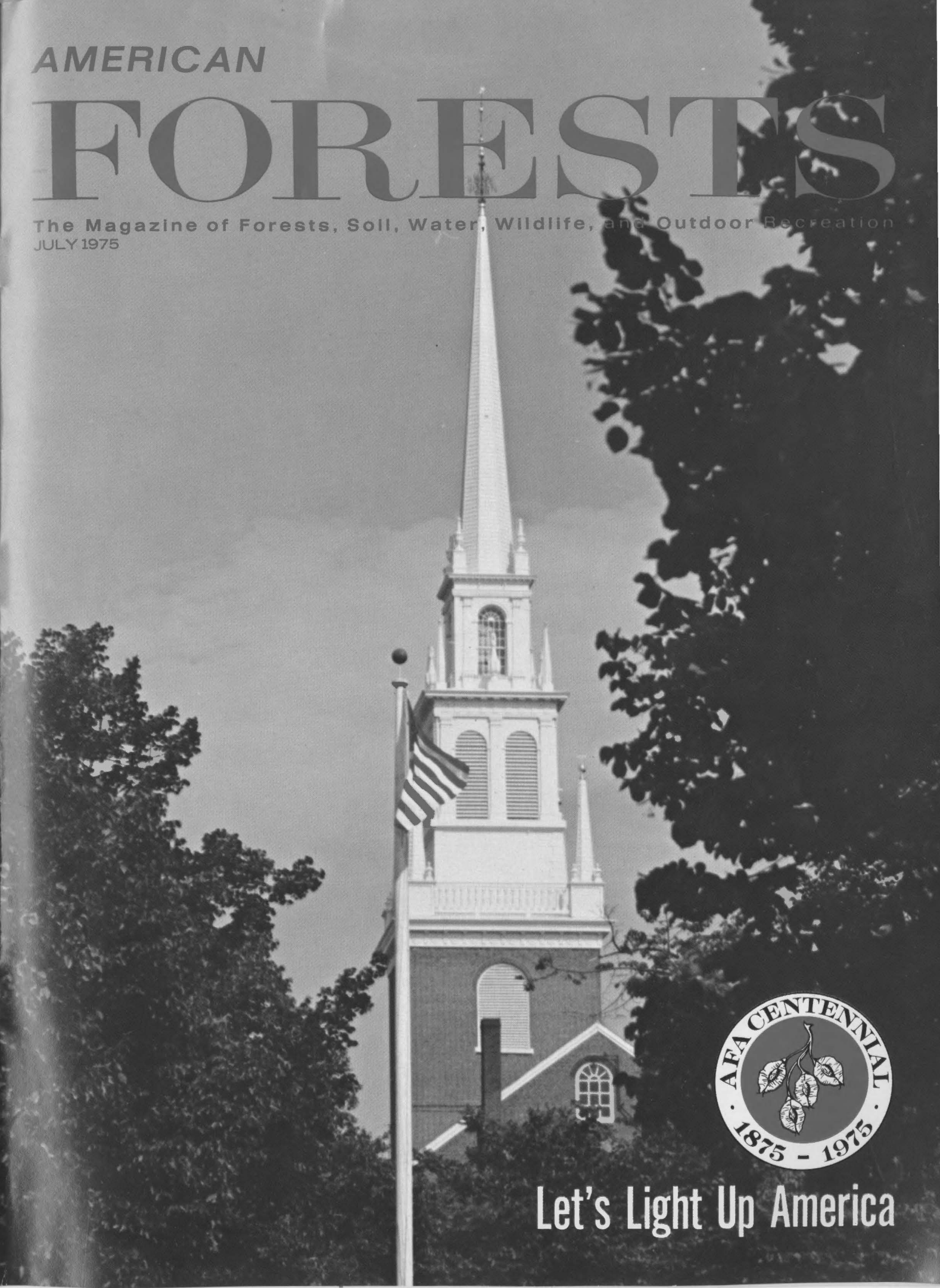
ONE thing the "American family" has, even now, is hope! and that's really what Dennis' tree is about.



AMERICAN

FORESTS

The Magazine of Forests, Soil, Water, Wildlife, and Outdoor Recreation
JULY 1975



Let's Light Up America

FAVORITE TREES OF FIRST LADIES



*To stand beneath
a stately tree
that has withstood
the sun, rain and wind
for years
and let its thick,
green foliage
shade me
is a most quieting time.*

*In fall,
when colors abound,
no rainbow can rival
the beauty of trees
in autumn dress.*

*And in winter,
bare branches
against a cold sky,
coupled with
contrasting green firs,
make the loveliest
of landscapes.*

*God's handiwork
is all about us —
our forests
declare His work.*

— Betty Ford

This is the first of what we hope will be a series on favorite trees. We asked Mrs. Ford and several former First Ladies to tell us their favorite tree. Mrs. Ford said she didn't have a favorite—she liked them all—as you can probably tell from her remarks here. In forthcoming issues of the magazine we will run, at irregular intervals, comments by other First Ladies. And depending on reader response, we will follow up the "First Ladies" series with the Favorite Trees of other prominent people.

—EDITOR



Carving Up a Family Tree

By Judy Flander

Washington Star Staff Writer

Arising figuratively from the mud and lost dreams of Resurrection City is a 22-foot-high wooden statue celebrating the family and the hopes of man. It is the emerging work of Washington sculptor Dennis Stroy Jr., 33, who has been carving the giant dead red oak

has spent more than 3,600 hours on the "Family Tree Hope," and \$7,000 in tools and equipment, much of it improvised because the handles of ordinary carving tools are too short to work a medium 30 inches in diameter. They've been makeshift and difficult to use. Now Stroy hopes to find "someone as good working in metal as I am in wood" to hand-forge some tools to



November 3, 1975

Dear Mr. Fish:

I received the attached correspondence regarding the "Family Tree of Hope" project proposed for Rock Creek Park. I'd be interested in knowing the disposition of the project.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld
Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

Mr. Manus J. Fish
Director
National Capitol Parks Service
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20242



November 3, 1975

Dear Donna:

Thanks for your letter. It was good hearing from you again.

I've written Mr. Fish about the "Family Tree of Hope" project. Hope everything is going well.

Sincerely,

Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld
Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

Ms. Donna Merritts
Intermedia, Inc.
1730 M Street, N.W.
#802
Washington, D.C. 20036

cc: Mr. Manus J. Fish



Donna Meintt

tree in Rockcreek park

railroad fire
insurance co.

} interested
in under-
writing
project.

554-5099.

Make Copy for Donna
& send back

Carter Barron
by trailer "Eucalyptus
tree" - Tree next to
it.