

STORIES of New Jersey

Unable to stay idle, he undertook to improve the strawberries then grown. Beginning with plants that produced large sour berries and others that bore small sweet berries, he planted them in alternate rows. These he hybridized carefully and then submitted a fine specimen to forty-eight hours in a freezing mixture, producing the effects of a winter in the ground and thus obtaining seeds and plants the same season. By such methods he rapidly increased the size of berries from his plants, while also improving the flavor. Some of these "Hilton" or "Boyden" strawberries weighed fifteen to the pound and won him fame as a horticulturist. From one of his varieties he received a fair income, but most of his plants were given to his neighbors.

To support himself he worked for a hat manufacturer in Newark. He often walked the several miles to work and appeared content with his wages of \$50 a month. When a friend wrote a letter to a newspaper suggesting that a fund be raised to permit him to retire, Boyden refused to allow it.

Even in the hat factory his old habit of improving apparatus with which he was working asserted itself. He redesigned a machine for forming hat bodies which, oddly enough, was the only patent that he ever seemed to care to restrict for his own benefit. Stranger still, this was one of the few of his inventions contested in the courts. His rights were sustained, and at 80 he continued to work in the factory which his invention had helped to make prosperous.

Boyden was not above experimenting upon himself. One day he appeared at the factory with his iron gray hair turned jet black. To charges of vanity he replied seriously, "It is a scientific investigation. I have been experimenting on getting up a new hair dye to oblige a friend who wants to get married again." Boyden was not entirely successful; the dye began to lose its strength and his hair turned dark purple. He tried other chemicals, only to have his hair work its way through most of the colors of the rainbow. When it reached a rusty yellow, he sadly abandoned the task.

Early in 1870 the inventor, looking ahead rather than back over his long life, told a friend that he had plans for enough experiments and inventions to fill two more lifetimes. Within a few months these plans were part of his legacy to posterity, for on March 31 he died quietly at his home.

The city did not forget. In 1871 General Theodore Runyon began a movement to erect a suitable monument to his memory. Nineteen years later a bronze statue of Seth Boyden was unveiled in Washington Park, Newark, not far from the site of his harness shop. It represents the inventor as he would have liked to be remembered: sleeves rolled up, clad in a blacksmith's leather apron, in his hand a model of a locomotive. The original tablet on the monument was stolen about 1913. In 1925 the Newark Schoolmen's Club, with the help of small gifts from school children, replaced it with the present large plaque.

To pay Boyden tribute came another great American inventor, who had also done most of his work in New Jersey, Thomas A. Edison (see Bulletin No. 8, 1939-40 Series). At the ceremonies he said what he had previously expressed to the committee in writing. "Seth Boyden was one of America's greatest inventors, and one who had never received proper credit for his many great and practical inventions. They have been the basis of great industries which have spread over the entire world and give employment to millions of people."

The statue inconspicuously placed in the park does not wholly serve its purpose of recalling to Newark the memory of one of its most useful citizens. Recently his name has been restored to public consciousness by naming one of the city's low-cost housing developments Seth Boyden Court. But his most lasting memorial, more enduring probably than the bronze, now turned green, are the factories and foundries of the city he helped make a great industrial center.