

Would You Like to See Great Event?

GREAT EVENTS will take place in 1985. History will be in the making and we will have close-up views of what happens.

Leave the guessing about what events will turn out to be great to the prognosticators and evaluation of what they mean to the historians. The question for today is whether we will recognize a really significant occurrence if we see one.

Some are obvious but many important incidents and discoveries have been given little notice until long afterward.

American Heritage magazine asked a number of authors and scholars, including members of the Society of American Historians: "What is the one scene or incident in American history you would like to have witnessed — and why?" Replies published reflect a wide diversity of opinion about significance of events.

An evolutionist said he would like to have observed what he said was a cataclysm that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, "that

made all of human history possible."

Another respondent said he would like to have "sat on a pier between 1200 and 1500 to see who besides Columbus and Sebastian Cabot showed up."

Others wished to have seen the witchcraft trails of early America and scenes of the Revolutionary war. Mentioned were the Battle of Lexington, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitutional Convention, and "the time Thomas Jefferson got his come-uppance as a bird watcher." He wrongly identified a bird.

A retired librarian would have chosen to be with Lewis and Clark in 1805 when they first glimpsed the Pacific ocean. One respondent would rather have crossed the Mississippi river with pioneer settlers, another to have seen the opening of the Erie Canal, and a historian preferred the invention of telegraphy.

Oratory got quite a bit of attention. Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" and his Gettysburg Ad-

dress were choices. Oratorical powers of George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Daniel Webster were glowingly described.

Wars are significant events and were cited by several. Pickett's Charge and the surrender at Appomattox court house were Civil War options, while a man who lived through it named the Armistice Day celebration of the end of World War I.

Politics scored but by no means dominated the choices, indicating that later generations may not consider events as significant as they may seem when happening. A historian named the Golden Spike ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah, in 1869, and a Yale professor selected the Blizzard of 1888 — in New York City.

Apparently nobody mentioned the Wright Brothers' first flight, but a history professor at the University of Texas joked he would like to have witnessed Jacob Brodbeck's first manned aircraft flight over Luckenback, Texas, in 1865.