Editorial Page of The Birmingham Eccentric

A free, responsible and aggressive Press is democracy's first line of defense

Knocking on Wood

with JOHN H. HARWOOD

OUR OWN BLITZKRIEG

BOMBING of Britain has been horrible enough, but one writer has pointed out that more people were killed last year in the United States from automobile mishaps than died during that period in Britain from bombs. More than 34,000 deaths. The American Expeditionary Force in France took only 37,500 men in action during the World War. Yet, our huge traffic toll has not stirred the people at all, except for a few writers and organizations here and there; and the public is probably even-tired of what they have had to say.

Of course, it is all an unpleasant subject which does not concern you or me, EXCEPT, you or I or some one in our families may be next. That is a different matter, isn't it?

The whole problem could be vastly bettered, there is no doubt by adopting two policies. First, we have plenty of laws on the books, as the National Safety Council has pointed out, but they are poorly enforced. Police agencies and the courts in general don't think of careless driving as a criminal matter as much as they do a civil question. That is, if the driver pays for the damages, the police are usually willing to forget about it. That happens all the time all over the country, and private citizens lend their aid.

Should Be Condemned

But, as a matter of fact such an interpretation of the law should be condemned. It is none of the police's business whether a driver agrees to pay for damages. Their job is to enforce the law, not to act as a collection agency in a question of civil law between two private individuals. Often that is a lame excuse for failure to take action. "The man agreed to pay for the damages so we let him go." Repeat apologetic police and sheriff rejoinder heard in nearly every police station and sheriff's office throughout the land.

But strictly speaking, the damages are no affair of the police.

We remember a case not long ago in Birmingham where a driver under the influence of liquor ran through a red light and a collision resulted. There was no prosecution because an officer did not see the mishap and the driver at fault agreed to pay.

Last Sunday morning, one of our own city official's cars was stopped by another driver who went through a red light. We think he as a public official erred in not signing a complaint against the other driver. The reason he did not is easily understandable; the man is a good friend and does not want to make trouble for other people.

But that sort of sympathy and indifference to the principle involved is one of the reasons automobile drivers all over the nation are so careless and undertakers are kept busy. There is a general laxity in enforcement and a general laxity in driving. People are careless because they feel they can afford to take a chance. But don't forget the 34,000 people in the morgues and the hundred thousand and more in the hospitals! You may be next!

Reluctant to Prosecute

One reason for the few prosecutions for careless driving is that the police are reluctant to take anyone into court unless they have seen the mishap. When the officer himself is a witness to a law violation, the rest is easy for what the policeman tells the court, the court believes, usually, and the case is clean-cut. No work, no bother.

But, Birmingham has only a few policemen and they obviously are witnesses to only a handful of the accidents which occur. In the rest of the cases, it is the usual Birmingham policy to prosecute a driver only when the aggrieved person demands action and signs a complaint. Last week, one patrolman noted on an accident report sent one of the cars had poor brakes, but no ticket was issued. I

can remember an accident on Southfield recently when a driver admitted, in writing, failure to stop before entering Southfield, but there was no arrest, for the other driver apparently was not interested in all the bother of a court case. On the other hand, a law had been broken; the driver admitted it, and there was nothing to prevent the police from signing a complaint on information and belief, and subpoenaing the other driver if necessary in order to secure a conviction. Remember, if either driver had been going little faster, one or both of the drivers might now be dead, and what difference is there between homicide committed with a gun and homicide with an automobile? In either case, the loss is just the same.

I am writing this, not intending to single out our own police force as being any different from any other; but if I am to use examples that I know about, it is necessary to be somewhat personal.

The Second Need

At the beginning of this column, I wrote of two policies needed to reduce the traffic toll. The first, as I have just argued, is better enforcement of the laws we now have. The second is the need of traffic engineering.

I want to congratulate our police chief, John Hackett, on the establishment Jan. 1 in his office of an accident map, on which colored pins will be stuck showing the location of every accident. That map may not look important, but what it stands for is vital. How can any intelligent effort be made in Birmingham or anywhere else to reduce accidents if no one knows for sure where the worst spots are? When a house is on fire, the firemen don't start pouring water all over the house; they go to the source of the blaze or to the spot where it is the worst. The same applies to accident prevention, yet it is amazing to me how little attention is paid to this elemental fact.

The map will show where the most accidents occur—where the most work must be done to reduce them.

Consider stop signs. They are generally of uniform size—why I don't know. If one intersection is twice as dangerous as another, doesn't it seem sensible that the stop sign at that corner should be twice as large as a sign at a corner where an accident has never occurred? Some intersections in the county are constantly the scene of fatal mishaps, yet little is done about it, and I maintain that such oversights are disgraceful.

I believe that at the end of the year, Chief Hackett is going to find certain spots of unusual hazard. Some of the traffic lights may be too easily confused with other red neon lights behind them; there are undoubtedly certain intersections in Birmingham which need stop signs but which do not now have them.

Traffic engineering is, of course, more than the few points outlined here. It is a new thing, but when developed can not help but reduce accidents. When combined with more strict enforcement of traffic laws, the result without doubt will be fewer deaths and injuries on the highways.

The Great American Home

"This old guy insists on seeing the commander. . . . Says he wants to show him some real shootin', such as hittin' a squirrel in the eye at 400 paces."

The appointment of William Coit Allee by the City Commission to serve out the two-month unexpired term of Frank S. Packard will very likely turn out to be a good one. Mr. Allee has lived here long enough to know Birmingham and its problems, and is particularly well-schooled in the zoning and sign ordinances, for he helped draft the former and recently successfully defended the latter in an important test court case.

Mr. Allee, New Commissioner

Mr. Allee and Mayor John E. Martz, both lawyers, should make a good team in advising on the legal side of the city's affairs. Birmingham has no regular city attorney who attends all meetings and helps the Commission in its proceedings. Consequently, there have been instances when discussion on some point has dragged along because there was no immediate legal advice at hand from an outside source. Mayor Martz probably has hesitated at times to essay legal opinions for fear of appearing dogmatic, for Mr. Martz is a modest man. However, he and Mr. Allee working together should serve the city well.

Out of the dark continent of Africa last week, amid reports of British victory and Italian defeat, there came

Baden-Powell Will Ever Live in Youth

the news of the death of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the world-wide Boy Scout movement. It was with a feeling of true sorrow that this news was received by free thinking peoples throughout the world.

Although an officer in the service of Great Britain, Powell's greatest accomplishment knew no national boundaries; it knew no discriminations between races, creeds, or color. It was a service to the peoples of all nations, dedicated to the purpose of giving to youth the means to obtain strong bodies, clean minds, and able hands.

Few statutes have been raised in his honor; few books have been written about his life; his remains have been returned to the earth without pomp or ceremony.

And yet, the lives of millions of men and boys in 73 countries, stand in themselves as a monument of living achievement to his greatness. The good which has been accomplished by Scouting in the world, is perhaps reward enough for the time and energy he has given.

Scouting plays a vital part in the lives of hundreds of youths in Birmingham. There are 12 troops, four Cub packs, and one Sea Scout unit, serving nearly seven hundred boys. The opportunities of handicraft, citizenship, and camping, which are offered through Scouting in Birmingham, serve as the natural outlet for the energies of many a boy who otherwise would miss this very important part of living.

No other words can show more clearly the work for which he fought, than the oath of the Boy Scouts of America. Let it be printed here, in honor of the gray haired, eighty-year-old man, whose remains now lie in the sandy soils of Africa. He established peace, and he worked for truth; for has it not been said, "Who builds in boys, builds lastingly in truth."

"On my honor, I will do my best,
To do my duty to God and my country,
And to obey the Scout Law.
To help other people at all times.
To keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight."

Here is an example of foreign relations that poses a problem for the average American who learns that a woman employee of the American Embassy in Paris has been taken into custody by the Germans for alleged cooperation with anti-Nazi forces to allow them to flee to France. Your normal American resents such an act, and already our government proposes steps to obtain the woman's freedom. It is but a single case of an American held by the Hitlerites. Imagine the feelings in Germany, then, should our government (which is admittedly anti-Nazi, yet not at war with them), make wholesale deportations or arrests of German "agents" in this country. Pondering such situations, one can understand, even briefly, the problem that confronts a nation's State Department in maintaining international amity in times of international crisis.

Diplomatic Problems

SIN-FIGHTING EX-GOVERNOR Luren D. Dickinson left office January 1 without achieving any fruitage for the movement to decrease liquor consumption in the State he headed for nearly two years. The venerable crusader's record in office merely proves that his head wasn't capable of creating that for which his heart yearned.

The Armchair Philosopher

MENTAL DRAWBRIDGES

The Feudal Lord in the middle ages was a wise man. He built a huge wall around everything he owned, his home, his barns, his mills. And then he built a deep ditch around the wall and filled it full of water. Now and then he would sally forth and wage battle, but he could always retreat to his home, pull up the drawbridge and stick out his tongue at the whole world.

We should take a tip from the feudal lords. When we enter our homes in the evening after the business fight of the day is over, we should pull our mental drawbridges. We should separate ourselves from the problems, perplexities and difficulties of our tasks.

Too many of us leave the mental drawbridge down and our fear and worry enemies pursue us into our homes. We are fighting them all the time, often far into the night. They give us no rest. They capture our home and we surrender to discontent and unhappiness.

Pull up the mental drawbridge! Let pipe, peace, music, books, laughter and gay conversation rejuvenate, relax and inspire you for tomorrow's battle.—from "The Silver Lining."

An emergency always requires the use of extraordinary methods and technique to make possible the swift action.

Emergencie Require Swift Action

When your house is burning, you try to save as much of its contents as possible; you are perfectly willing to toss things out of the window to save them, even though they may get scratched or partially broken—though before the fire, you were very careful not to cause the slightest scratch upon them.

Our present national emergency, too, requires that we take necessary action to make for swift and certain action, even though some of the "furniture" of our peacetime constitutional home may be scratched in the doing.

It is difficult to determine the exact ratio of the two elements that make up our present national emergency; by this we mean "facts" and "emotionalism." These two ingredients are present in the current crisis; the known realities of our danger of invasion are sufficient to cause us to be concerned for our national defense, and to do something about it; that our government is now doing.

The "emotional" portion of the emergency cannot be determined with any exactitude, by anybody.

We dislike to express Congressional approval of the President's entire plan to aid Britain, which includes in part giving away much of our national resources, but also the vast power which he seeks to gain his objectives. The average citizen can do little but write or wire the White House, his Congressman and Senator, or all three; for the most part, we have to depend upon the intelligence and the conscience of Congress itself to retain for the people the constitutional powers set up by the founding fathers.

Thus is, after all, the test of representative government.

Our American form of government is the most expensive possible to mankind; it is also the most desirable. Human beings are by nature

Can Man Retain A Democracy?

free and instinct destined to attain freedom, as just as natural that man hunger for freedom as for a bird to fly. Regardless of his condition of contemporary government, whether it be under a primitive jungle tribal chief, or an enlightened republic, individuals seek physical, mental, and spiritual freedom as their divine birth-right.

This yearning for freedom is as inevitable in man as is the tap-root held as an ultimate pattern within the acorn. But no acorn will become a great oak without sun and rain and food from the soil; nor can a healthy freedom be attained unless those who make up society look in the sun of general and public decency, the rain of alert citizenship, and the soil-food of intelligent participation in the problems and solutions of the government they wish to retain and improve.

Over one-seventh of the State of Wisconsin, more than the area of Massachusetts, is now

Wisconsin Retires Land

withdrawn from all gainful use permanently, we are told by William E. McDermott in the Rotarian.

With a unique zoning law that permits counties to regulate and restrict their land to forestry, agriculture, and recreation, the State has encouraged the return of land to Nature, and with it, wealth.

In one instance the purchase of a struggling community cost a county $7,500, says the author, but saved a total of $21,602 in cost of schools, roads and relief annually. The community had paid only $256 in taxes.

We call attention to this retirement of land through tax delinquencies, abandonment, purchase and trade, because it may be possible for other states to do likewise. The system may not work in thickly populated areas, but there are many sparsely settled areas where almost anything would improve present conditions.

SENATOR BURTON K. WHEELER, of Montana, takes issue with President Roosevelt regarding this nation's aid to Britain in the war. The distinguished Senator is opposed to going sledlength by sending Britain up to half of our own armaments; he is opposed to extending Britain credit, too. If you have some notions on the subject, why not send them to The Eccentric for publication?

EVEN THOUGH SOME PEOPLE never get into airplanes, presenting them with an altimeter will keep them posted on how high they get up into the air—on frequent occasions of temper.

The Birmingham Eccentric

Published every Thursday at Birmingham, Mich., by The Eccentric Building, Notre Woodward Avenue

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Entered as Second Class Matter in the U.S. Postoffice at Birmingham, Mich.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

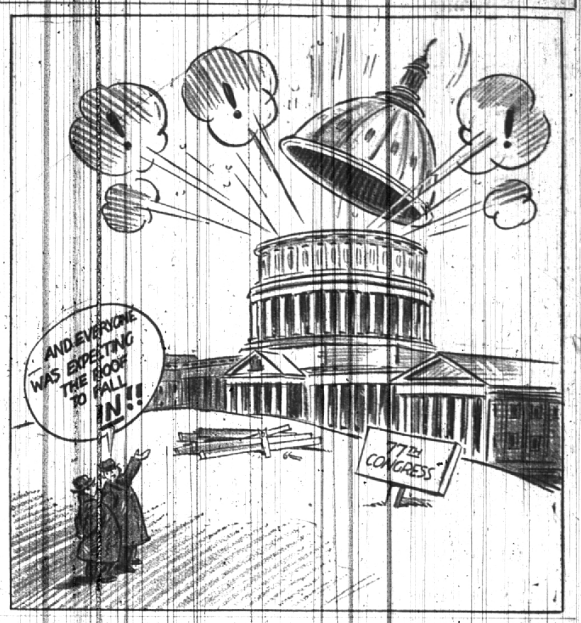
(In Oakland County) — (Outside Oakland County)
One Year $1.50 — One Year $2.00
Six Months .75 — Six Months 1.00
Three Months .40 — Three Months .50

All newspaper and advertising copy must be in the Eccentric office by Wednesday noon to obtain insertion for that week.

National Editorial Association, Michigan Press Association, University Press Club, and Oakland County Weekly Press Association.

NOTE: The Eccentric is pleased to publish stories of events which have news value, which are written by persons not connected with the editorial staff of the paper. Although must be presented before 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday. The right is reserved, however, to make such superficial changes in the form submitted as are necessary to the style of the paper and as the required brevity of the space. Because of mechanical difficulties in composing room, headlines written by those other than members of the staff cannot be used. Any erroneous reflection upon the character, standing or reputation of any person, firm or corporation which may appear in the columns of The Eccentric will be gladly corrected upon being brought to the attention of the publisher.

The 77th Sounds Off



People's Column

The Eccentric is pleased to receive communications for this column. All communications must be signed, but signatures will be held confidential upon request. Letters must be limited to 300 words and must be in the office by Tuesday noon for publication that following Thursday.

Thanks Eccentric For Its Aid

Editor, The Eccentric:

The Birmingham Musicale sincerely appreciates the graphic and editorial publicity you have given the organization during the past year.

The many favors you have printed have done much to bring our activities before the public. We wish to express our gratitude.

ELLEN MAGEAN REILLY
(Mrs. James S.)
Corresponding Secretary

Editor, The Eccentric:

This letter has been received by our club, and we suggest that you publish it if you find it worthy.

RICHARD S. FLEMING,
President Lions Club

"Dear Fellow Lion:

"United States and Canada are vitally concerned in preserving Democracy, and for 8000 Lions Clubs can materially assist in coordinating the efforts of our leaders.

"All Canadians are proud of the practical assistance and moral support which your people have already given.

"Gananoque, Ontario, Lions extend a hand of friendship to every member of your club. We are eagerly anxious to show you a welcome to Canada, where every dollar you spend is used to purchase much needed goods from the United States. However, we wish to point out that our purchases from your country are limited by the amount of U.S. dollars available. Every American who visits Canada helps to provide this necessary exchange.

"Crossing the border is simplicity itself—there's hope for more restrictions now than before the war. And aside from Canada being an ideal year-round vacationland, Your dollar, at par, starts ONE DOLLAR AND TEN CENTS. This dispels the false impression circulated throughout United States, about difficult travel, and entrance to Canada.

"We suggest that you have your local newspapers print this letter thereby bringing it to the attention of the many public. If any questions arise, do not hesitate to write to us. Your enquiries will receive our careful attention.

"F. E. MacNAMARA
President, Lions Club of Gananoque."

The Test

"I think there's someone downstairs."

"Why?"

"I just heard mamma laugh at one of papa's jokes."

Good For Better

Grocer—What do you want, sonny?

Boy—I'm trying to remember what ma wanted me to get in this jug.

Grocer—What jug?

Boy—Oh, I forgot the jug.

Gardeners' Corner

(This column is conducted for The Eccentric's readers by Mrs. Marc T. Patten, Box 146, Bloomfield Hills. Questions on gardening matters may be addressed to Mrs. Patten and they will be answered in the Gardeners' Corner or directly by mail.)

CATALOGUES

The time for new garden catalogues is at hand. If you have had a complete assortment of other years they will begin to arrive without further thought on your part. Otherwise you might like to look over the list of nurseries and seed houses in the gardening section of a home magazine and order some that are of interest. They are as varied as the plant material itself. Some are specialists in nursery stock. If one is not interested in new trees or shrubs this group can be passed over. Next come the general seed catalogues. Most of these catalogues are beautifully illustrated and are an education in themselves. One firm offers only five or ten cent packages varying the size rather than the price, according to the parts. Another firm offers 3,000 varieties. Can you resist a want more? Less economical but tempting, never-the-less, are the catalogues offering perennial plants and all types of bulbs. Following come dozens of specialty catalogues—delphiniums, wild flowers, ferns, peonies, primulas, roses. Each hobbiest can find several growers specializing in his field so don't. Try your hobby among the lists. If you don't find any growers we may be able to help you. Either send for them or stop by at the library for a glance at them.

TOOLS

Clean up tools now. Sharpen cutting edges, then oil them. Paint the wheelbarrow, and parts of tools that need protection against the weather. A bright band of color identifies the tool as yours and helps you find it in the grass or in the garden when you have laid it aside for a while. Well oiled tools all marked the same and hung in a row are indeed an inspiring sight. Winter evenings can be used in painting stakes, making labels, flats and home made tools like tampers—row markers—dibbers.

WOOD ASHES

Are you saving wood ashes? Store them in a dry place. Moisture is apt to carry off the very elements most useful to the plants.

MEETINGS

Monday, Jan. 20, 8 p. m. McGregor Library, Highland Park. "Snap up Your Garden Design." Mrs. Groesp Wasson Vance, Slides. Open to public, without charge.

Monday, Jan. 27, 8 p. m. Baldwin Library, Birmingham. "Evergreens, a Year 'Round Beautification Project." Mrs. Perry Reynolds. Colored Slides. Open to public without charge.

A Lesson For the Boss

"You want more money! Why my boy, I worked three years for $11 a month right in this establishment. Now I'm the owner!"

"Well, you see what happened to your boss. No man who treats his job that way can hang on to it."

Auto Loans—New or Used
Low Rates
BUY INSURANCE FROM YOUR OWN AGENT
The cost may be added to your balance
Wabeek State Bank of Detroit
BIRMINGHAM OFFICE—WABEEK BLDG.
FERNDALE OFFICE—141 WEST NINE MILE RD.
MAIN OFFICE—FISHER BLDG., DETROIT
DOWNTOWN OFFICE—FORD BLDG.