# 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

### WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH DEMOCRACY?

A WEEK or two ago, my contemporary of the Free Press, Mr. Malcolm W. Bingay, snorted once or twice in his column when some young Miss wrote him, suggesting that the schools are operated in an undemocratic fashion. The schools don't need more democracy; they need more discipline, quoth the proprietor of the Pellucid Pillar. I don't quite get it. If democracy is worth fighting two gigantic wars for, it ought to be a good thing to have around generally—in the home, in the schools, in the churches, in the factories, as well as in government.

I think Mr. Bingay believes that the youth of today have things too easy, that the notion should be knocked out of young heads to the effect that they have a right to do just as they darned please when they please. I quite agree. But that still doesn't prove that democracy should not be practiced in the schools.

Democracy is being confused with anarchy in this instance. Democracy does not mean freedom from restraint. In the schools, it does not mean that the students are going to take things over and run them to suit themselves, with laxity in attendance and in deportment. On the other hand, it does not mean that the School Board, the superintendent, the principals and the teachers should rule like so many petty Hitlers, imposing from above all the rules and all the discipline with an iron hand. That's poor policy and what's worse, it's poor education.

Democracy rests squarely on discipline; in fact, any system of government does. But the difference between the discipline of a democracy and that of authoritarian government is that in our system, the rules are set with the consent of the majority. Discipline is self-imposed. In the other system, it's a matter of obeying orders or getting shot.

But there is more to discipline than training people to obey laws for the sake of avoiding punishment. That's the negative approach, and it doesn't work too well, for the average human being, being an ornery cuss, is likely to commit the misdeed as soon as someone's back is turned. In fact, running risk provides a thrill to some people, and that's why kids get so much fun out of Halloween, and out of damaging new houses as they are being built—as is the practice in Birmingham.

I was amused at a recent meeting of the Board of Education when several of the members recalled their misdeeds as schoolboys. Some of the pranks they pulled would have caused a flurry of excitement today. In fact, one member concluded: "I guess we were pretty wild!"

Nowadays, our educators are more smart. They know a little more psychology, and they realize that if they can divert the child from wrongdoing by giving him something else to do, or if they can encourage him to help formulate his own rules and abide by them voluntarily, they are vastly further ahead. Democracy and its necessary discipline must grow with the child.

I think that is the trouble with our government today. The schools of another day and the "strict discipline" that some of our oldsters yearn for didn't do a very good job of teaching the meaning of democracy, otherwise, when election day comes in Birmingham, for example, more than 10 or 15 per cent of the people would turn out to vote.

One of the most difficult obstacles the teachers face in their effort to effect discipline are the parents themselves. In an older day, as I have pointed out in this column before, the fact of larger families made discipline a necessity. Six or eight people under one roof meant that respectful behavior toward adults just had to be; that there had to be a sharing of tasks; that hard work and drudgery were mingled with the more pleasant things; that the young men realized from the start that to get anywhere, they would have to get out and hustle for themselves. Now families are small; parents can put up with more nonsense from their offspring; the family income is split among fewer people and Junior gets an allowance; hard work at a boring task is unknown. Oil burners leave no ashes to be carried out.

"When I get through after a day's teaching, I'm worn out," one teacher told me not long ago. It's no wonder.

So teaching discipline and teaching democracy involves more than enforcing order, saluting the flag, and reading it a book how lovely democracy is. That merely scratches the surface and makes no lasting impression, as present conditions prove so well. The best-run school and the best-run nation is that in which people do the right thing because they want to, not because they have to.

## *Happenings of Long Ago*

**50 Years Ago**
**June 4, 1891**

An advertisement ran—"To rent, a neat clean, newly painted and kalsomined house, $8, per month."

The first lawn social of the season was scheduled to be held on June 9, at the Alex Parks' home. In addition to the home made ice cream, another feature was to be Invitelle De Puy Hinter, a renown fortune teller.

Nearly sixty families in Birmingham had joined up were "parading" of the sure and health giving water supplied by the local water works.

A. W. Campbell had platted seventeen acres near the railroad, planted the area with young maple trees, and plans to put the plat on the market as soon as possible.

**25 Years Ago**
**June 2, 1916**

The Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church were entertained at the home of Dr. Young on Woodward avenue.

W. J. Dever was struck and hit down while crossing Maple avenue by a car driven by Caleb G. Jackson one day last week. Mr. Dever had been confined to his bed ever since.

The subdivision of Quarton Lake District was placed on the market for sale on June 1.

**5 Years Ago**
**June 4, 1936**

The announcement was made that the Barnum swimming pool would be officially opened, for both children and adults, on June 15.

H. J. Koch collapsed on Sunday afternoon while playing golf at the Oakland Hills Club, and died the following evening. He was the vice-president in charge of the Detroit Office of the United States Advertising Company of Toledo. Surviving were his widow, Marguerethe, and two children, Elanor, and Dean.

Mrs. Robert Lynd was elected president of the Rotary Ann Club this week. Other officers are Mrs. Harold G. Webster, secretary; Mrs. Louis Hascall, treasurer; Mrs. W. B. Fauser, courtesy and membership chairman; and Mrs. George Steelman, chairman of the house committee.

## THE AMERICAN FAMILY . . . By George

"This is Slim . . . he's from out of the city."

## The School Tax Proposal

Monday, voters of the school district will be called on to express their will regarding the proposed two-mill increase in school taxes for the next five years. Two-thirds of the votes cast must favor the proposed change if it is to carry, and that requirement is the reason the Parent-Teacher Associations, the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women and others have been working so hard to put it across.

First of all, before going into the merits of the issue, we remind the people again that any qualified voter who casts his ballot in city and township elections may vote on the mill-tax question if registered on the school poll books, although only taxpayers and/or parents may vote for the candidates.

We had hoped that the new State appropriation would provide sufficient funds to provide extra money no matter what happened at the election next Monday, but the word from Lansing is that Birmingham's additional share of State money will actually be an estimated $1,300 less next year than it was this year.

We had also hoped that the City Commission, enjoying freedom from the 15-mill limitation which binds the school board, and sailing along comfortably with a $19 tax rate, would institute economies sufficient to encourage a more favorable feeling among the many people in Birmingham whose incomes are of such a size that the semi-annual tax bill becomes a burden. The City Commission has cut its rate but one-half mill. The City Assessor likewise has cut assessed values of property, a saving to the taxpayer to be sure, but also resulting in a cut in school income, amounting to about $1,600 in operating revenue.

But, because the schools and the City of Birmingham, are separate legal entities, it is evident that the schools must look out for themselves.

It is true that the schools have been operated on an economical basis. It has not been possible to do otherwise. The Eccentric is represented at every meeting (sometimes the only representative) and can vouch for the fact that the Board is eternally pressed for money, and never knows until a few weeks before the end of the fiscal year whether there will be a deficit. This year, fortunately, a $5,000 surplus is anticipated.

Why are the schools operating on a shoe-string? Simply this: The school population has increased approximately 15 per cent in the past 10 years, while the total funds available, including state aid, are still about 15 per cent less than 10 years ago. Teachers number about 20 per cent less than 10 years ago, resulting in an average class-size which is larger than desirable.

The proposed two-mill increase ($2 per thousand of assessed valuation) will bring in a theoretical $32,000 a year but actually probably only about $29,000 because of the usual tax delinquency.

At the last school board meeting, President Lee E. Joslyn, Jr., told The Eccentric representative that the board, barring unseen contingencies, plans to use about half of this amount for teachers, and half for much-needed repairs, the first year. The succeeding four years, a larger share is intended for teachers, he said.

Most people consider the teacher angle the most important of all, for it is possible to have good schools with good teachers, even though the physical plant may not be up to par. The additional revenue, if the voters provide it, should be used to retain the good teachers through better salaries and to secure the best type of replacements as they are needed.

The most potent argument to be advanced against raising the extra two mills is the fact that in these days of mountainous debt and increasing spending, local expense should be held to a minimum, even if sacrifice is entailed. Those who vote against the proposal will probably be guided by that consideration.

As for the 15-mill limitation, what is sacred about it? It was passed by a bare majority in the State election, but it requires a two-thirds vote in those districts which may seek to alter it. Local taxpayers should be sovereign in their own districts, for they must foot the bill.

## Let Them Speak Their Minds

Let's have a word in praise of prospective graduates, even now working their minds upon problems to be solved at the annual commencement.

While the race of human beings pokes fun at the youngsters, isn't there something to praise in the eagerness with which they attack the evils of the day and the shapeliness with which they plead their special causes?

Youth may be criticized for lack of years, but if cynical experience could serve half the problems that it thinks it can, where would impetuous youth find anything to correct?

So, to all young people of Birmingham let these greetings appear. Let them proceed with their study of "problems," and make known their "cures." Who knows what statesmen have been developed from school-day orators and what the world owes to the keen study of commencement day speakers?

PERSONALLY, AND VEHOROUSLY, and tremendously, and supercolossally, we want to add our congratulations to 13-year-old Louis Sissman, Detroit boy, who won the national spelling bee contest in Washington last week. We hope that some of the older students in every community will some day spell as correctly as Louis now does.

NOW THAT THE "HOOP" has been removed from Britain's eyes, John Bull's naval forces go right out and hit their mark: the big Bismarck.

## Help Our Soldiers!

Workers in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills began this week a financial drive to secure contributions for the United Service Organizations. The USO, composed of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish representatives, as well as war veteran groups, and many others, has as its objective the improvement of recreation facilities for the soldiers. If you have ever visited an Army camp, or have ever talked with one of the inductees, you already know how great is the need. The older citizens also know—or should know—how great is their obligation. The soldiers deserve the best, for it is not their fault that the adult leaders of the past generation have bungled so badly in preserving world peace. Yet, youth must pay!

The President, himself, has this to say about the USO campaign:

"... If national defense is to be an all-out effort, the preservation, yes, and the strengthening of spiritual and social values are imperative. In ordinary times, we take these ordinary good things of life for granted as no doubt most of our grandchildren we can well afford. Certainly in times of emergency like the present, complacency is a luxury which we must cast aside.

"Every community in the country has an obligation to scrutinize its services, its facilities for meeting the spiritual, recreational and welfare needs of its own people. Every citizen has an obligation to scrutinize his contribution to the common life he shares with his neighbors. Together, citizen and community have an obligation to maintain the wholesome, constructive activities and services which are the mark of us typically American.

"... The educational, private organizations which have incorporated this new country-wide group have taken a significant step toward the kind of nation-wide team work which is a prime essential for the maintenance of national morale.

"... My contribution to your planning can be only to commend your policies and objectives, and to give you God-speed in the great endeavor you are about to undertake."

## Budget Time In Birmingham

Once a year, when budget time comes around, the City Commission and its administrative officers and employes are put on the spot by a segment of the population which thinks taxes are too high. That is nothing new, for as long as government has existed, people have grumbled about high taxes, and in many instances such complaints have been justified to be sure.

All in all, it is a good thing, for in every business, public or private, administrators are sometimes inclined to forget that the money they are spending is not their money; but when the officials know they are to be held accountable for their stewardship, their sense of responsibility increases. Apathy toward public business is a sign of decay.

Here in Birmingham, the economy-minded folks have spoken and The Eccentric has printed what they have had to say; just as we print the views of any other group which has something to say collective chest.

But now that the budget is passed, whether we or the taxpayers in general like it or not, we must all increase our faith in the well-being of the entire city that is uppermost in everybody's mind. After all, Birmingham is a mighty fine city. It is a real community, not just a suburban collection of houses where people eat and sleep. It has an exceptionally good brand of citizenship, it has good churches, good stores, good schools, and honest public officials all sincere in their effort to do a good job.

The very fact that the people are often stirred by community issues proves that Birmingham has genuine community life with all its interests and problems. The City Commission, confronted as it is with a people interested in the budget, was pleased to have the turnout, even as a large segment of the audience appeared critical at times. The Commission's attitude, too, is healthy.

## Corn Cobs Into Explosives

Farmers generally will be interested in the process, developed by F. T. Wilkinson, of Glendale, California, to convert corn cobs into nitrocellulose, a base for explosives, and into synthetic rubber which can be fused with natural rubber in making tires.

Of course, we are not familiar with the process involved, but we understand that a laboratory is being constructed in Iowa for the purpose of utilizing the new process. State and Federal experts are cooperating in the plant, which may get into production before many months.


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NOTE: The Eccentric is pleased to publish stories of events which have news value and which are written by persons not connected with the editorial staff of the paper. All copy must be presented before noon on Wednesday. The right is reserved, however, to make such superficial changes in the words submitted as are necessary to the style of the paper and as are required by laws of the state. Because of space limitations in the 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 corrected upon being brought to the attention of the publisher.

## Spring House Cleaning

## PEOPLE'S COLUMN

*The Eccentric is pleased to present communications for this column. All communications must be typewritten, but signatures will be kept confidential upon request. Letters must be limited to 300 words and must be in the office by Tuesday noon for publication the following week.*

### Opposition Group Says School Funds Are Adequate

Editor, The Eccentric:

A proposal of which all citizens of every resident of the school district will be voted upon at an election to be held at Baldwin High and Pierce School (one to each) on Monday between the hours of 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. While the proposal is to increase in taxation reports to all the people, whether they own property or not, it is proposed that taxation on real estate be increased to provide additional funds for whatever purpose the school board sees fit to decide, no modesty as to amount for an increase all the above figures adequately improve the actual expenditures for the past years.

Figures for operating income in the present year are as follows: From taxes $642,672.58 in 1936, to $750,000.00 this year.

The proposal must be voted on because of a statutory limitation placed upon taxation of real estate for the protection of the owners. This limitation has already been reached and the school board seeks to break down this bulwark which if once broken may never be limit.

It is very interesting to note that the school board has been urging and petitioning the proposal to increase the taxation on the grounds that there is a shortage of funds to operate the schools, and answers money in an attempt to satisfy certain pressure groups and resist that added burden on the property owner.

Pamphlets distributed by the school board set forth that the proposal was sponsored by certain named groups. An economic investigation revealed that no official action of any of these groups has ever been consulted regarding the matter and the meeting of the group had been called for the purpose of discussing the proposal. The voter should be cautioned that the school board's pamphlet crediting this group as proof of the sponsorship may not be a statement of fact.

A thorough investigation of the entire problem has convinced this group that the proposal should be defeated.

HOME OWNERS' DEFENSE LEAGUE

### Business Sense

Mother—Well, Essie and you little sister choose which one of the two apples you want.

Essie—Yes, mamma, I told her to choose because I knew she'd choose the small one.

### Tells Way to Boost School Revenue Without Higher Rate

Editor, The Eccentric:

Nobody has yet pointed out in strong terms that the present condition of our schools could have been prevented to a great extent and that it still can be remedied to a little or no real increase in total school taxes.

The key to the situation is the policy of the school board. The real source of income of the 15-mill limitation and property taxes for general and local (not including debt service) all counts, township and school, is confined. This 15-mill limitation has been in force for several years and over the state the law was amended authorizing school districts to levy up to five mills for debt retirement for the next five years.

Four years ago the proposition was put before the school board to take advantage of this amendment to the law, but the board, with a few notable exceptions, took a passive attitude, and did not emphatically present the needs of the schools to the voters. The result that there were only 18 votes, and the proposal failed. And mind you, the majority of the teachers then employed, and the salaries paid, were based on the average over the past years, when teachers were on the average over $2,000 a year.

The board continued to be required to live with the 15-mill limitation and 10 per cent cut in the salaries of 1932, and has been hoping for more delinquent tax payments and state aid. The educational restrictions forced on the board by the emergency of the depression are still cramping the quality of our schools. This should not be and need not be.

Meanwhile, the condition of the schools was growing worse as indicated by increasing criticism of the quality of the school work. Is it any wonder in view of the following facts:

1. We have lost 20 of our best teachers to other places offering higher salaries, because our teachers' salaries are almost the lowest in the Detroit area.

2. The school year is only 38 weeks while every other suburban community in the Detroit area except Berkley has 40 weeks.

3. Quarts of classes have between 40 and 50 students when 30 is generally the desirable upper limit for good instruction.

4. Highland Park, Grosse Pointe and Ann Arbor now spend half again as much for school operation (not including debt service) per pupil as Birmingham. Before the depression we spent almost the same amount per pupil as these communities are now spending.

*During this time the board maintained a tax rate for debt service higher than was necessary, with the result that the latest auditor's report shows that we are $200,000 ahead of schedule requirements in retiring of bonds, if under circumstances this might have been considered a far-sighted policy to reduce future taxes.*

*However, if the board had told the public in 1937, or any year since then, how serious the situation was and had taken an aggressive attitude in favor of the amendment, it probably could have been passed. The tax rate for debt service could then have been reduced enough to offset the additional tax levy for operation and the total rate would be the same today.*

The school board had not as yet changed its policy at the time that

(Continued on Page 7, Part 2)


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