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GEORGE R. AVERILL, Editor and Publisher
PAUL NEAL AVERILL, Business Manager
GEORGE W. AVERILL, Managing Editor
ROBERT E. BURGER, Advertising Manager

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Local Tax Assessing

During the past several weeks, meetings have been held between a local group of business property owners and the Birmingham Board of Review, which includes the city assessor.

The subject under consideration at these meetings was the assessed valuation increase, running from ten to several hundred per cent over the 1949 tax roll.

The taxpayers had been given from two to three months advance notice of this unprecedented high rate of increase—a period of time so short that it smacked of something like bureaucracy in high gear.

The business group engaged a tax lawyer to investigate the situation.

Several meetings ultimately were held, during which the Board of Review obviously was defending the high increase. While such an attitude was expected on the part of the assessor, the other two members of the Board of Review's antagonism to the property owners' protest was something of a surprise.

A Board of Review is a quasi-judicial tribunal, supposed to represent not only a defense of fair and equitable assessing methods, but equally to represent the taxpayers. The Board is presumed to be of an open mind, to listen to both sides of the question and then to decide.

From the start of the first formal meeting between the two groups, it was apparent that the Board of Review had made up its mind to defend the increased tax valuations prepared by the assessor—even before a fair hearing was given to the aggrieved taxpayer group.

Finally, however, the hearings did go on, and the Board eventually lowered up to ten per cent some of the tax values.

This common sense is not intended to discuss all the pros and cons of whether or not the increased tax rates are warranted. That matter may be decided by the State Tax Commission, if it is brought into the picture later.

But we do regret the antagonistic attitude of the Board of Review in this controversial case. It is the first time in Birmingham history that we have observed such assessing procedure. While the current situation concerned largely the business property lands, it could become the treatment accorded residential properties as well.

It is regrettable that the city assessor failed, for three years, to increase business land values in keeping with current sales. Because of this, he says he decided to put the entire increase on the 1949 roll. No doubt he needs more help in his office.

Had he done the same with residential property, a justified howl would have been raised in this community, of course.

The situation provoked by this tremendous valuation increase should, we believe, cause our city commissioners (four only elected local city public officials) constantly to be aware of taxing methods in the assessor's office.

It is presumed that all local property owners are willing to share, equitably, the costs of local government. By the same token, however, they properly expect efficient and up-to-date management of the assessor's office, as well as all other departments of city government.

Confidence in each year's tax roll is of paramount importance to the successful operation of our city government.

Fooling The Taxpayers

Governor G. Mennen Williams is a nice chap, personally, but when he gets tangled up with economic and tax problems, he says what he says with an eye to the politician's efforts to garner votes.

[For example, the Governor wants to get the Legislature to place a corporation tax on the State's tax books. He says such a tax "is not a consumer's tax," but merely a tax upon corporation profits.]

But where do corporations get profits? Why, from the sale of what they produce for the public. If their taxes are increased, or their labor and material costs are increased, these increases are passed on to the consumer. There is no other place for the costs—that fact is recognized by all people who know anything about business operations.

Why does the Governor argue that a

corporation tax is not a consumer's tax? The answer is simple. He seeks to fool as many voters as he can on the subject, so that they won't vote against him.

His corporation tax would be a "hidden" tax, just as so many of the taxes are that people pay today.

When the Governor argues as he does, he is, of course, speaking what may be termed as "political truth"—but most assuredly he is not speaking the economic truth.

The difference between political and intellectual honesty is as far apart as the gullibility of the public will stand for. Public officials who consistently use economic and intellectual honesty as the basis for their utterances do not remain in office very long. That is why many officials use the "political" approach—the persuasive and paternalistic nature of which they have found gets them more of the ill-informed voters' support.

Marshall Plan Insurance

We have come to the conclusion that Marshall Plan aid to western Europe is like an insurance policy against fire. The fact that our help to rehabilitate impoverished democratic nations to ward off the growth and spread of Communism has partially worked, is payment enough on our investment, it appears.

One renews his insurance policy even though, at the time, he has not had a fire. Extension of Marshall Plan aid is, therefore, logical as a continued insurance policy against the fires of Communism.

From Our Point of View

President Truman is worried about the constant increase in unemployment. Here's an easy partial answer to the problem. Let President Truman lead in a honest movement to cut down on federal taxes, so that smaller business will have enough left in their tills each year to expand their businesses, thus making more jobs.

It is reported that Mrs. Perle Mesta, top Washington hostess, friend of the Trumans, is coming back from her post as U.S. Ambassador at Luxembourg to seek a transfer to another country. That interests us here at The Eclectic... for Mrs. Mesta's chief aide is Dorothy Williams, who obtained her first newspaper job on The Eclectic quite a few years ago. When she left here, she went to the Free Press, then the Times, in Detroit, and did well on both papers. Later she went to Washington, became one of the best feminine reporters in the nation's capital, was elected president of the Women's National Press Club, and now is with Mrs. Mesta. What a jump from her humble beginning on a then village weekly!

It is about 85 years since the end of the Civil War, probably too soon to expect the South to forget the Northern carpet baggers who were, in part, southern citizens who oppose President Truman won't join with the Republicans to defeat him. Further proof of that old saying that "habit is stronger than reason."

Democracy's greatest problem is not to acquire intelligent answers to the common problems of a social order of things. We think the larger problem is "how to get the answers to the public, and to move that public into political decision," by getting them to the polls at election time.

So They Say . . .

Milovan Djilas, Yugoslavian official: "As a socialist nation, we will never in our foreign policy do anything that will strengthen the power of imperialists."

Ernest O. Melby, educator: "You can't understand the United States until you've been outside it."

John J. McCloy, U. S. High Commissioner in Germany: "We are not seeking an opportunity to hit anybody over the head."

Wright Patman, Member of Congress from Texas: "If there is a one-package answer to socialism, it is home ownership."

Freda S. Krehm, teacher: "It is natural to desire and expect that one's children be perfect physically and mentally."

Orville Prescott, reviewer of books: "Poetic justice is merely encountered in life that it is sometimes a pleasure to meet it in fiction."

Explosion or Dud?



Happenings of Long Ago

Bills of News Gleaned From Old Files Of The Eclectic—The Items That Made The Historic Background Of The Birmingham Of Today.

50 Years Ago
APRIL 13, 1900

John F. Kellogg will open a new grocery store in the Poppleton building opposite Schaeck & Co.'s hardware store on Woodward avenue tomorrow. He will be pleased to meet anyone in looking for choice tidbits of food and will do his utmost to satisfy their palates.

The Methodist ladies feel grateful to Mrs. Charles Schaeck and Mrs. Eugene Smith who gave the M. E. Aid Society their regular monthly tea and furnished everything there were about 60 who partook of the free refreshments.

Our genial educator, John Hanna, will gladly receive contributions in aid of famine-stricken lands at the meeting of the M. E. Aid Society their regular monthly tea and furnished everything there were about 60 who partook of the free refreshments.

A pile of sawdust thrown upon the sidewalk on Middle street has annoyed the residents of that street for some time. It seems to have escaped the eagle eye of our vigilant marshal.

The Birmingham road market has been taken from its winter quarters and for the last few days has been under the direction of Charles E. Mudge, and his first assistants, helping put the streets in fairly good shape.

20 Years Ago
APRIL 17, 1930

Howard Crull has been selected by the Board of Education to be the new head of Barnum junior high school. Crull has been teaching for nearly twenty years and is well known here. The board also announced that Morris Cook had refused a position in Battle Creek and would remain at Adams.

John P. Hackett has been engaged as the new police chief for Birmingham, and will take over his duties May 1. Hackett, who has had 16 years' experience with the Lansing police, has said he will make no changes in the local department. Lt. Richard Lawler is acting chief at present.

Robert Allen, local business man and commission member, will be the guest speaker at the next change club meeting next week. He will show his famous collection of stamps.

A new municipal refuse dump has been obtained on Lakeland drive near Quanton lake. The dump has been fenced in and will be kept locked except from 10 a.m. to noon. No garbage, metal or combustible material may be disposed of, commissioners say.

Mrs. Nancy B. Thomas of the Baldwin public library, spoke to the members of the Business Girls' club in the Community House in general, and gave brief outlines of some of the modern, outstanding works now obtainable at the library.

5 Years Ago
APRIL 19, 1945

Birmingham has set up its committee to take part in the national campaign to purchase Bibles for members of the armed forces. The local committee was headed by Mrs. R. L. Bigger. The amount necessary to purchase

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ONE OR ANOTHER By George Wm. Averill

HAVE A CIGAR

A communist, of course, has the privilege of discussing or reporting those facts which at the moment, particularly appeal to him. So this week I have put aside my comments on the weather, the bad roads, the national and international situations to write about a new girl who arrived on this planet at 3:07 p.m. last week (Wednesday, April 12).

She is my daughter, Janice, who by the end of this week will be two and a half years old. I am a two-year-old brother, George, Jr. Concerning her physical appearance, I will only bother you with the fact that to her mother and me she is a beautiful baby. At the present stage, she only seems to say, "That is another encouraging sign."

BETWEEN OUR home and St. Joseph Mercy Hospital are seven blocks. Although normally I would have to stop at it if the fathers could keep from the hospital entirely, such would be the case.

LOOKING AHEAD By George S. Benson

FRENZIED FINANCING

Federal Government to live beyond its income. Mr. Snyder has done this in a quiet way.

The demand is cut at the \$5 billion in the annual budget. Continued deficit financing, in the form of the issuance of Treasury notes, the notes were made by the Federal Reserve Bank, they were of short term, good interest rate and often free from

But as the Federal debt climbs on beyond a quarter trillion dollars and Federal deficit spending is continued, the Treasury may be forced to frenzied financing.

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MICHIGAN MIRROR By Gene Alleman

TOWNSHIPS ACCUMULATING SALES TAX MONEY

Michigan townships, blessed by \$20,798,834 in sales tax diversion money to date, are going to the limit of mud-mired rural roads.

During 1949, in 68 of the 83 Michigan counties, towns and township boards have received commissions a total of \$3,150,000 under provisions of Public Act No. 14, 1948 special legislative session.

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1949, townships received a total of \$3,150,000 in state sales tax revenues, diverted to townships under the sales tax diversion

THUS IT IS CLEAR that approximately 33 per cent of the state sales tax distributed to townships in 1949 was transferred to county road commissions to improve rural highways.

It is equally clear also that millions of dollars are accumulating in the treasuries of township boards, waiting approval of township boards to be expended for public services.

The records of Auditor General Mumford show that sales tax collections from December, 1946 to June 30, 1947 brought a total of \$2,722,722 to Michigan townships.

The amount was doubled in the following fiscal year, ending June 30, 1948, the rising tide of sales tax revenues to townships rose to an all-time high of \$5,170,000.

As of December 31, 1949, Michigan townships had received a total of \$20,798,834 from the sales tax revenue at Lansing to be used for township needs.

ACT NUMBER 34 of the Public Acts of 1948, approved by the Governor on January 19, 1948, provides that "a township may appropriate any unexpended balances in the outgoing or general fund of the township for the maintenance and improvement of township roads and other public services."

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PEOPLE'S COLUMN

The Eclectic welcomes letters for this column. All must be signed, but signatures will be kept confidential upon request. Letters must be limited to 500 words.

Dear Fellow Citizen of Southfield: When we go to vote April 24th, let's be calm and collected and reason and freedom and our local government.

If anyone has any personal grudges, or class hatred in our midst, let's not bring it up at an election of this kind, because that only shows lack of respect for our fellow citizens.

Personally, I would like to see a new town hall—one that we can be proud of in our own American cities.

Let's not mix with fire in our midst and hatred in our hearts, as they say by any agitation whatsoever. Poor or rich, we all have to bear the burden of this annual burden, or whatever is voted on and carried.

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THE STUDENTS, I repeat, are not the younger element, as the senior sports jackets proclaim

Tonight a loud and fierce fist fight was carried on right down in front of the alley, and was successfully terminated by Mr. Holah. I congratulate him because last week a similar fight was carried quite awhile with no interruption in another local theater where discipline was being taught (and the kids seem to realize just how far they can go to annoy the audience).

Mr. Editor, I write this letter in

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