

# Ancient Life Trapped in Tree Resins

By LYDIA KING FREHSE  
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Snow covered the bright trees as we drove through the Blue Ridge on our way to the nation's capital. But the honey-suckled was green and thick in the hollows and in Virginia it festooned the stone fences enclosing the old plantations.

Along the streets in Washington much attention has been given to the planting of shade trees so that now many varieties blend to color the landscape. Here autumn comes late and the leaves still cling to the ancient sycamores and oaks.

Along many avenues the ginkgo is much in evidence. It stands a link between our ancient and modern floras and its curious leaves which have no midrib, betray its relationship to the coal-age ferns.

But I have elected to go early to the natural history museum of the Smithsonian Institute. Among the trees in the parkway of the Mall a mockingbird disperses the gardeners are busy raking the leaves into piles.

The sun shines on the tall shaft of the Washington monument and is reflected on the towering dome of the capitol building.

AS ALWAYS I walk between the double row of massive columns with a feeling of keen anticipation for I am entering this repository of time with a special purpose.

I turn to the right as I enter the great rotunda. Reluctantly I pass by the earliest fossils, remnants of life in the ancient seas, to stand before a case containing the museum's collection of "amber" insects.

The amber insects are unique both in the manner and perfection of their preservation. To appreciate this fact we must turn back the pages of time some forty million years when a dense and dark forest of pine trees covered the shores of the Baltic sea in East Prussia.

Such a wealth of resin 'dropped' from the trees that myriads of insects were engulfed in the sticky fluid. Later as the sun shone down, the more volatile portions of the gum evaporated. Gradually it hardened into amber preserving in minute detail the body, wings and even the most delicate hairs of the tiniest insects.

NOW IN THE vicinity of the town of Königsberg and along the coast of Samland, the action of the sea washes away the sediments and leaves the amber pebbles exposed on the beach.

There has been much conjecture among the scientists about the life of this ancient coniferous forest. They have wondered most how any species of pine could exude the amount of resin needed to produce such quantities of amber.

Their conclusion is that it was secreted by the trees as a protective measure to seal the wounds occasioned by the violent storms and the constant inroads made by birds and animals, by destructive insects and fungi. A warm and humid climate prevailed which was favorable to decay.

It was also a time of terrific electric storms when the trees crashed their immense bodies against their fellows, tearing off great strips of bark and splintering and twisting the living wood.

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## A HAPPY CHRISTMAS STORY

(Continued from before)

"Hey, Blitz, look who's here this a.m.," shouted Don. (Short for Donner—not Donder) "Hi, Vixen, you're looking exotic for so early in the day."

"Thank you, Don. There are not many bucks that like to be called exotic but, I don't mind because I am really wearing false—I mean, my antlers are false. Well, what did you get me down here for early, Blitzen?"

"Vi, we've just been looking in our Stock Mirror and wanted you to comment on some of the fascinating things showing up at McB's store."

"O.K. Let's take a look. Ooooh! 'Dig' that terrific WICKER PICNIC BASKET and that magnificent BLENKO HAND BLOWN GLASS. Also that MEAT TENDERIZER 'sends' me when I think of that tough venison we had last night. By-the-way, where is that tough buck that used to hang around the Pole last winter, Blitzen?"

"I don't know for sure, Vi—but can you and Don make out those small objects on the shelf there by the wrapping paper?"

"Oh, Blitzen," ejaculated Vi. "those are perfect little horse and dog figures from Morten's Studios. They are really 'far out.' I think one is a beagle."

"Vi, you just reminded me. All the bucks (men, that is) are invited to the Birmingham Merchants' annual MEN'S NIGHT on Dec. 6th, from 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. (Sorry, Vixen, I didn't make the rules.) McB's will be open for their special event, the—

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identified some two thousand species from this source alone. Well over a hundred species of amber-embedded plants have been identified from this same forest, indicating the nature of an abundant flora. There is also evidence of a rich fauna of birds and mammals. Scientists have in their possession an embedded bit from a squirrel's coat and a red feather from the little red cap of a spotted woodpecker.

IN SUCH WAYS has the clever hand and mind of man uncovered the story of past life on earth. For no human being was alive to see the blooming or the dying of this ancient forest, or to hear the singing of the wind in its mighty boughs nor yet to feel the violence of its destructive storms. But the same sun which clarified the golden resin, entombing these ancient insect boards, shone down then even as it does today.



Mrs. Frehse

the towering dome of the capitol building.

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## MSC Students Announce Troth

Michigan State college has listed eight students from the Birmingham area as candidates for undergraduate degrees at the end of State's fall term. Stated to receive degrees from commencement exercises Dec. 6 at 8 p.m. in the MSC auditorium are: Douglas R. Gordon, journalism student, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. Gordon, 19010 Glenwood; Peter Hugh Iversen, general business, son of Norman H. Iversen, 28005 Eldorado; Ted Lee Miller, accounting, son of the A. F. Millers, 49 Hickory; Ralph Louis Peabody, elementary education, son of Ford Peabody, Rte. 1 Davidburg; Peter R. Plamstead, economics, son of Donald E. Plamstead, 606 S. Glenhurst; Joel Munroe Ross, history, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Ross, 711 Bates; Dale E. Sutherland, physical education, son of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Sutherland, 623 Creator road, and Patricia Ann Foy, social work, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Michael C. Foy, 17340 Buckingham.

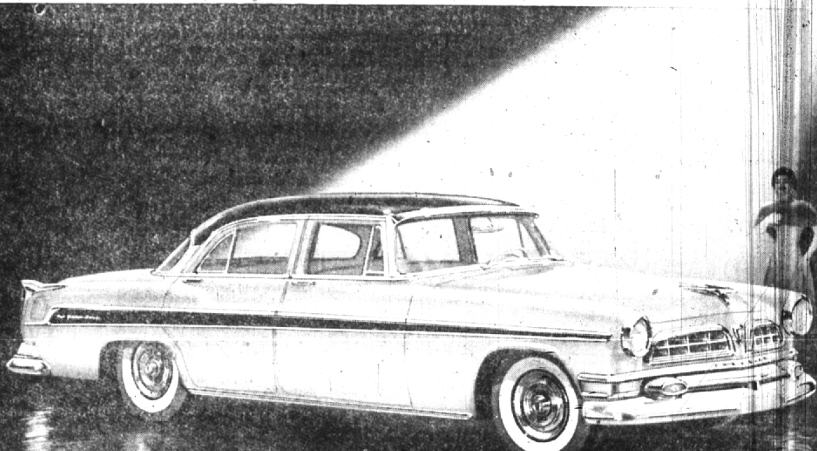
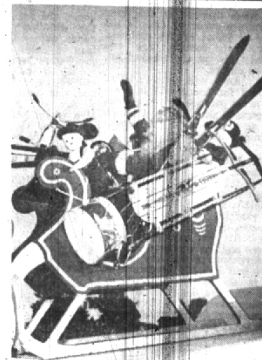
Society deadline is 3 p.m. each Tuesday.

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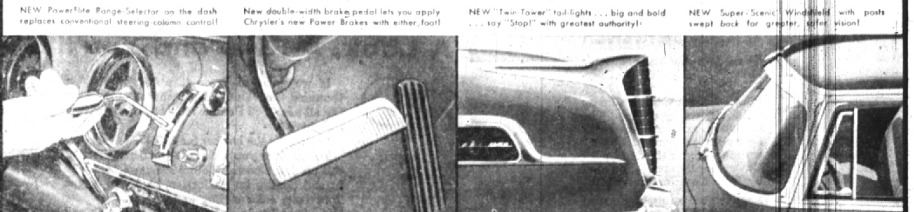
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