

The Birmingham Eccentric

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PUBLISHER: PAUL N. AVERILL. ASSISTANT PUBLISHER: HENRY M. HOGAN, JR. MANAGING EDITOR: KENNETH R. WEAVER. ADVERTISING MANAGER: ARTHUR SHAEFER

George R. Averill, Editor Emeritus

Your Right To Know Is Basic Necessity In A Democracy

This editorial relates to the subject of keeping citizens aware of the changes made by public officials when they pass various ordinances, each having the force and effect of law. Such measures may relate to zoning, the methods by which you are told what type of improvement you may place upon land, be it residential or business. Or they may relate to the pattern of special assessments for some community needs, for which you are taxed. Or they may pertain to the use of your automobile, wherein police powers are employed to enforce the legislative action. Each such ordinance IMPACTS UPON CITIZENS, who are presumed to know what their stipulations are and to obey them. Such procedures are, of course, normal and quite acceptable in the American system of local, state and national governments.

HOWEVER, IT is in the local governmental environment—where you live most of your days, where your home is located, where you attend school and church—that the rule of law is very close to you.

Every Monday night the Birmingham City Commission meets, in public. What it does, what its members say, in proper degree is recorded in the commission's minutes, kept by the city clerk.

Ordinances, in the making and in the passing, are discussed. The Eccentric's reporter attends these meetings and reports on the major news aspects of these developments.

AS REQUIRED by the city charter, the commission causes each ordinance in its entirety "to be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the community." This happens to be The Eccentric.

Publication of these ordinances is paid for by the City. The entire cost each year is approximately a month's pay of an average City employee.

Such publication comes in the tradition of the concept of the colonists who fathered this country, who were determined that our government be of, by and for the people.

LET IT BE clear that we are not concerned about any slight loss of revenue. Our concern lies in "the people's right to know."

This relates not only to the problems confronting government, but also to what elected and appointed officials do about operating government.

American history is replete with efforts of colonial editors to get and print public news—including many who went to prison or suffered loss of property because they resisted the attempts of certain appointees of King George III to shackle them.

WE RECALL these happenings of early days as a reminder that what public officials do on behalf of the people is information to which the public is entitled

and, for the most part, wants. And when it comes to adoption of ordinances, the public not only is entitled to know but also, in order to support the processes of basic self-government, MUST be given the opportunity to be informed. In an effort to avoid spending several thousand dollars to publish codification of Birmingham's laws, city commissioners discussed the possibility of authorizing either of two methods: publishing in the newspaper or posting in a public place. Codification consists of streamlining existing ordinances; eliminating outdated ones and omitting portions that overlap. This is Birmingham's first effort at codification. The city administrations says codification would be necessary about every 20 or 30 years.

THE ECCENTRIC agrees with the City's belief that publishing of codification would be an unnecessary expense inasmuch as each ordinance now in existence has already been published in the newspaper. But we disagree with one commissioner's view that mere posting of a new ordinance would be sufficient as a means of informing the citizens.

For in a city of a few thousand people doesn't an ordinance reach many more people when brought into their homes via the newspaper than it would if posted on a wall or a door or a bulletin board?

"Who reads ordinances in newspapers?" is the cry when now and then someone suggests "saving the taxpayers some money."

THE ANSWER we cannot state, exactly, but we know many people do, and when they become opposed to a specific ordinance they show up at a commission meeting to "speak their piece."

And on occasion someone shows up to commend commission action. How many people read ordinances but do not come to the meetings can never be ascertained.

Finally, let us point out that an ordinance, containing the exact legal language, the exact spelling and punctuation, the exact INTENT and MEANING of a legislative plan can never be fully duplicated in a news story.

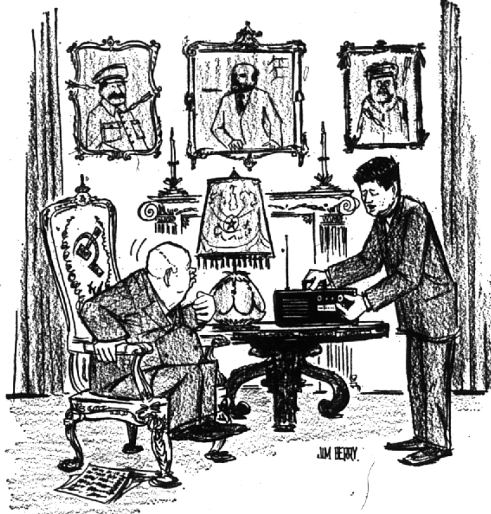
EVEN ONE informed reader may find that in a new or proposed ordinance its true intention has suffered from the inadvertent inclusion of some unnecessary or unfair or inequitable stipulation. And the VOICE of one reader then may be heard before the commission, and result in a re-evaluation and revision such circumstances might dictate.

If one reader so speaks up, the cost of publication is money well spent. We compliment our city commission for its decision last week to continue publishing in a newspaper all but codification ordinances.

By so doing it has given support to the principle of the public's right to be adequately informed of the laws that govern them.

There lately has risen in the utterances of many high politicians, especially among more Democrats than Republicans, tremendous criticism of those who may be labelled "conservative." They are stigmatized as "extreme rightists." They are larded with the propaganda of some form of tyranny, some identification with anti-humanitarianism. From the White House down, such utterances foul the air of presumed free, self-government. We suggest that such critics of conservatism go back to the utterances of their chief "political patron saint," one Thomas Jefferson. Why, Dear Reader, if Tom were around today we wouldn't be surprised if he not only would reject the Democratic ideology, but also the one the "modern Republicans" operate under. Ole Tom vigorously opposed both high taxes and centralized government!

Speaking of presidential candidates, perhaps one great contribution to Adlai Stevenson's double defeat for that office was because he had no wife (having been divorced). U. S. citizens want the White House to shelter not only a President and First Lady, but they also want to read about "the patter of little feet" in that residential establishment, too... and such feet may be the occupants' own children, or grandchildren. Such occupancy really humanizes that big home... really gives



"We are now prepared to unleash 'The Twist''

PEOPLE'S COLUMN Writer Opposes Plan For Shopping Center

To the Editor: The writer has learned of a plan to construct a shopping center, including a supermarket, in the triangle of land in Bloomfield Township bounded by the Grand Trunk, Adams and Big Beaver roads. The plan has progressed to the point that all the individual parcels have been acquired, at a price from five to ten times the selling price of land in the immediate area. The next step will be a petition to rezone. Two arguments have been advanced to justify the plan: First, because of the railroad and impending development of Big Beaver as a main feeder to the Chrysler Expressway, the land in question has been judged to have no future value as single-family property. The writer agrees with this opinion.

The second argument is that the intersection of two mile-roads is the logical location for a shopping center. On this opinion the writer violently disagrees.

There are many more factors to consider than the economic ones. What may be best from an investment standpoint may be the most undesirable from the overall community standpoint.

The main trouble with much of America's unsightly urban landscape is that for every decision made on the basis of what is most desirable for the neighborhood or the community, a hundred decisions have been made purely on the basis of the dollar.

THE WRITER offers three arguments against the proposed plan.

1. If a shopping center is needed in the North Adams area, it should be located further out from the center of Birmingham. The proposed location would further aggravate an already serious traffic situation on Adams Road. No one would use the proposed facility from the south and east; it would have to depend on trade from the north and west. These people could be

served better by facilities located in those areas. 2. All access would have to be from Adams Road. Because Big Beaver is slated to become a main artery and because of its steep incline west of Adams toward the railroad, any access road from Big Beaver would constitute a serious traffic safety hazard. 3. A commercial development on this site would create enormous pressures across Adams Road in Troy for similar land development. Eventually this pressure would make itself (See WRITER, 5-B)

Local Reporting Of School News Exceeds National

To the Editor: In a recent three-year nationwide study conducted by Stanford University and the United States Office of Education, it was found that the relative lack of knowledge of or commitment to public education was disturbing. At least, the acknowledged importance of education not withstanding. Happily, this image is not appropriate in the Birmingham area. For this, major credit must go to the breadth, depth and perspective of school news reporting as reflected on the news and editorial pages of The Eccentric during the past year.

In my opinion, it would be difficult to underestimate the importance to the community and to the students in our schools of the job you and your staff are doing. I believe it is of national significance.

WALTER J. PIEL, Administrative Assistant, B'ham Public Schools

Happenings of Long Ago

Bits of News Gleaned From Old Files Of The Eccentric

50 YEARS AGO Jan. 19, 1912 The business of The Michigan State Telephone is growing steadily and rapidly in Birmingham and Royal Oak. The company has approved an estimate to cost over \$1,000,000 which covers another independent line to Detroit from Birmingham and another from Royal Oak to Detroit. The extension of lines is forced by the big toll business originating at both of the two offices.

During the extremely cold weather, every dealer should make it his duty to see that his teamsters take care of their faithful horses. In the village of Fowlerville, a 10 cent barn is maintained where any unbroken horse can be placed at the owner's expense. We need such a barn badly. Thoughtless farmers will leave their steaming horses to shiver in the icy blasts.

The high school football team appeared this week in strikingly good looking white sweaters ornamented with maroon "B's." Formerly, the sweaters were maroon with white letters.

30 YEARS AGO Jan. 21, 1932

With the taking out of petitions for only two new candidates during the past week, the spring election campaign in both village and township fields had assumed a less hurried aspect today from that of a week ago when a small host of early office-seekers entered the lists together. The new petitions now in circulation are those for Charles E. Lewis for reelection as village commissioner and for Alice MacGregor for township treasurer.

Twenty-five seniors at Baldwin High School will end their high school career tonight when they receive their diplomas at the annual mid-year commencement. The Rev. W. Crossland, pastor of the Central Methodist Church of Pontiac, will deliver the commencement address. "What Next?" (See HAPPENINGS, 5-B)

Talk of the Towns

Have you ever been in a situation you know you've been in before? A memory that you can't quite bring into focus?

Whenever I stepped outside during the last week, something in the noggin clicked. The recollection finally came through. It happened very early in the morning when I was heading for my ice and snow-covered car.

See what I mean . . .

This photograph was taken last summer some 700 feet below the surface of the earth in Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Called Crystal Springs Dome, this artistry of nature is one of millions of limestone formations in the geological phenomenon located in southeastern New Mexico. The Crystal Springs stalagmite is growing at the rate of a thin coat of paint every 80 years.

This beautiful subterranean park of almost 50,000 acres was like living in the world of Jules Verne. It takes a big imagination to comprehend that the area was born more than 60 million years ago.

One of the caves in Carlsbad Caverns has long been the home of millions of bats which hibernate in the winter and fly in and out of the caverns during the rest of the year.

About dusk each evening, the millions of bats zoom out to forage for food. From a distance it looks like a cloud of smoke. This "smoke" is what first led Jim White, a cowboy, to explore the caverns in 1901.

Several years later the National Geographic Society with the United States Geological Survey made expeditions into the black underground formations.

Termed possibly the largest and most magnificent of the underground areas of water-carved limestone, Carlsbad Caverns is an exciting sight—infinitely more pleasurable than the automotive glacier that brought back its memory.

Guess this frigid sight hasn't been a complete waste after all.

. . . well that car wasn't quite as stupendous as this but you've got to admit the resemblance.

Suburban Sidelights

By HENRY HOGAN

I spent some time roaming around Lansing last week and while I will not say that it was like a three-ring circus, I did observe in the first ring the governor's State of the State address; in the second ring neighbor Romney's debate with neighbor Gus Scholle; and in the third ring the Constitutional Convention debate on illegal search and seizure.

The governor is a likable chap with an engaging boyish grin. For the last 12 months he has been occupying the chief executive's chair in Michigan through an interim appointment by organized labor in the last general election.

I personally think he has the ability to be a good governor, if he could shake off the shackles of his labor advisors. A good Democratic shudder at the bills he vetoed last year.

In his State of the State message he blamed the legislature for thwarting his last year's program, yet the record shows him to be his own worst enemy. He vetoed part of his own program and by over-optimistic forecast of revenue promised too much to too many people, which he couldn't deliver.

MEANWHILE OVER at the Jack Tar Hotel the real governor of the state, the Hon. August A. Scholle, president of the Michigan AFL-CIO, was debating with possibly the next governor of the state George W. Romney on legislative appointment.

Mr. Scholle's debating strategy is usually to put a big needle into his opponent until the opponent gets mad and becomes less effective.

In this debate neighbor Romney effectively put the needle into Scholle and had to spend part of the time trying to calm Gus down.

The winner of the debate depends on your political philosophy, but Romney scored all the forensic points.

AT APPROXIMATELY the same time over at the Civic Center Convention was really in action.

The subject was whether we should continue to except possession of narcotics and concealed weapons from the protection of the illegal search and seizure section of our Constitution.

Many speeches were given, but each was prepared in advance and the speakers repeated exactly what the previous delegate had said.

None of our own delegates were involved, but if this practice keeps up, the Constitution could not possibly be put on the November ballot.

I think, however, the Con-Con delegates are working very hard, and after some of them have seen their names in the press several times, they will cut down on their speech-making.

Overall it was quite a week in Lansing, but the year's still young and there's much more to come.

By KEN WEAVER City Beat

There are three types of men in this world—the briny, the brassy and the brassy. The latter are those who dance on the thin line separating the two; they possess characteristics of both, but they are neither completely one nor the other.

ZANE GREY's western novels and Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan stories recently came under fire by some people out in Sunny Cal.

But you certainly could marvel at the spectacular scenes he creates through the use of the printed word, especially the Arizona sunset.

So what if his people were more than human? What real harm lay in viewing them as pluperfect? Idealizing tends to bring about more goodness in people.

AT A RECENT Wayne State University Press Club workshop the student raised a question that exemplified the public's belief of what constitutes fairness in newspapers.

Why do the daily papers, the student asked, give more coverage and space to University of Detroit sports than to Wayne's? The answer, simple and plain enough, was that there is more interest—even among the student body—in U-D sports than in Wayne's.

Fair play, to the public, means a newspaper should give equal space and treatment—as, in this case, to the two schools.

Fair play, to a newspaper, means equal space and treatment when the specific news events warrant it.

Take politics, for example. In a certain locale, one party may be stronger than another; it engages in more activities; it wins more elections. Consequently, it earns more space and better placement in the paper than the opposing party.

It would not be fair to afford the weaker organization equal space and treatment solely on the basis of "being fair."

Concomitantly, it would be fair to handle that party's news in the same way as its opponent's when the actual news it created was just as significant.

Ethical newspapers hold to this principle regardless of their party preference or affiliation.

WHO IS to decide whether a man has brain or brawn?

State-Wide Travel Increases in 1961

Motorists drove an estimated 38.3 billion miles in Michigan during 1961, the State Highway Department reports. State Highway Commissioner John C. Mackie said state-wide travel during 1961 was about one per cent greater than in 1960. Traffic during 1960 was 8.4 per cent greater than in 1959.

Mackie said the greatest increase in traffic during 1961 was in the first six months—January through May—when state-wide travel was up about two per cent.

TRAFFIC during June, July and August—the vacation months—was up about six-tenths of one per cent.

There was a 10 per cent increase during the last four months of one per cent with an upswing in travel noted in December.

Mackie said the southwest Michigan area, with an increase of 10 per cent, had the biggest increase in traffic during the last four months of 1961.