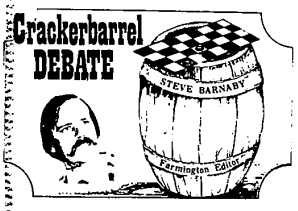
editorial opinion



Willoughby Wink staggered into the office. His bulbous nose was more red than ever and his crimson face was shrouded in consternation.

"Hey, Willoughby, it's been a long time. Where have you been?" I queried the notorious character who had been noticeably absent from the scene.

"We've got a serious problem on our hands. I've been out investigating and have discovered that I don't live in Farmington Hills," hiccupped Willoughby.

Now, Willoughby has been known to put away a little too much of the old sauce. But I never figured he'd get to the point that he didn't know where he lived.

"C'mon Wink. Everybody knows you've lived in Farmington Hills for the last three years. You'd better go get some help," I said, a bit annoyed as the deadline pressure lurked over my shoulder.

"No, no, it's true," he protested. "I was up at the corner of Orchard Lake and Eleven Mile the other night and a lot of the folks up there said we live in Sleepy Hollow."

A FEELING of horror crept over me as I contemplated the ramifications of this situation. After all, if persons at city hall were saying this was Sleepy Hollow, it must be.

"Look at the transcript of the city council's last meeting. One of the residents said he wanted this area to remain Sleepy Hollow and a councilman agreed.

Looking at the transcript, I saw the quote.

"If the people want a Sleepy Hollow, that's what they are going to get," said the homeowners' councilman.

And to think that all these years the newspaper's masthead has carried the Farmington logo. Our credibility was shot. That's worse than saying a meeting is on Tuesday, when it's really on Monday, or saying that Joe Alkateeb came in second in the council race when it really was Earl Opperthauser.

"Not only that," said Willoughby, "but they might not even let anyone else into Sleepy Hollow. So you'd better hurry up and move into Sleepy Hollow before they close the doors."

"What are you talking about, Willoughby?"

"A guy at that meeting said he doesn't want anybody else to move into Sleepy Hollow. He wants to maintain the rural atmosphere. Rumors are that Sleepy Hollow may secede from the Union."

My mind's imagination went wild. Just imagine, a bedroom community nation in the middle of this great metropolis.

Checkpoints could be established. Custom officers could be hired, with CETA funds, of course.

"But, I'm a little worried. Some folks are saying that only single-family homes would be built that have a market value of $150,000. Anyone less than 40 years old and more than 65 would be deported," said Willoughby.

"All buildings could be no more than 10 feet high so the residents could enjoy the view of the flatlands," he continued.

And just imagine, I thought, Sleepy Hollow could have a flag with the Headless Horseman emblazoned on it.

Certainly shows you where some persons' brains are located.

Maligned suburbs aren't so 'sub' today

Eccentricities

by HANK HOGAN

In my curiosity about the complexities of suburbia, I have looked for "suburban" sociologists who have done enough research on the suburbs to clearly sort out the pluses and minuses and the whys and wherefores of their existence. I have found very few who cared.

I found many "urban" sociologists who blamed the suburbs for the downfall of the central cities, and most of their research about the suburbs seemed negative.

It is these people who produced a distorted popular stereotype now known as the "suburban myth." The myth classed suburbanites as a homogeneous middle-class population of core city commuters, living in split-level "little boxes" surrounded by lawns full of crabgrass and pursuing a standardized, superficial and highly conformist lifestyle of barbecuing, golf clubbing and wife swapping.

THE 1970 CENSUS should have changed many social scientists' ideas because it showed that the suburbs were no longer "sub" to the "urb" in the traditional sense.

As a result of the recent intra-metropolitan deconcentration of economic activity occurring in the wake of the population exodus from central cities, suburbia in the late 1970s is emerging as the "outer city," according to Dr. Peter Muller of Temple University. He is one of the few who have looked into the subject.

The 1970s census documents the vast scale and new dominance of America's suburbs. It paints a vivid portrait of a decidedly suburban nation:

•37.6 per cent (76.3 million) of the U.S. population resided in the suburbs, with 31.4 per cent (63.8 million) living in the central cities and 31 per cent (63 million) in the rural areas; 1975 population estimates show the proportions to be 39.1 per cent suburban, 29.6 per cent central city and 31.3 per cent rural.

•54.2 per cent of the nation's 1970 metropolitan population lived outside central cities; in the 25 largest metropolitan areas, 62.7 per cent resided in the suburban ring.

•In the 1960s, suburbs grew five times faster than central cities.

•In the 1960s, the suburban share of metropolitan employment in the largest metropolitan areas grew by 44 per cent compared to a seven per cent decline for central cities. By 1973 suburban employment nationwide exceeded the cities' job total for the first time.

•Suburban political power now accounts for the largest bloc of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (131 suburban, 130 rural, 102 central city, and 72 mixed districts, with many partially suburban), as well as control of several key state legislatures.

WHAT THIS RESEARCH is starting to show is that while the large central cities are having and will continue to have troubles, metropolitan areas are still very healthy. With this trend in mind, maybe we should forget about artificially pumping up the central city and use the combined resources of both the city and suburbs to create stronger metropolitan areas.

This won't happen until there is strong suburban leadership because the power base in the central city is so well entrenched.

But it seems as if this is what the people want or they wouldn't be setting these new trends.

The Stroller

Henry Hall's monument in Michigan

By W.W. EDGAR

Travelling across Nine Mile Road en route to the Michigan Inn to attend a meeting of the Detroit Bowling Hall of Fame Committee, The Stroller came across a sight that unleashed a flood of memories.

There, just east of Middlebelt Road, silhouetted against the sky, was an old-time ski slide complete with platform that has weathered the wintry winds and icy blasts for years.

Just the sight of it caused The Stroller to stop and let the memories come tumbling through the years.

Hundreds of persons drive by it every day. But few of them realize the ancient wooden structure is a symbol of the glory days of ski jumping competition and a daily reminder of the legendary Henry Hall, who ruled the sport and helped make the upper peninsula the American capital of ski jumping.

A MEMBER of the famous family of ski jumpers, Henry was the first man to leap more than 200 feet. He did it at Steamboat Springs in Colorado in 1917 when his winning leap measured 106 feet. Later he leaped 229 feet in British Columbia in 1921 and still was winning championships when he was 41 years old.

The memory of these feats and the sight of Henry coming down the slides carried The Stroller back to the days when he was a rookie on the sports staff of the Detroit Free Press—more than a half-century ago.

He had arrived in Detroit early in February and wondered just what sort of sport activity was going on along the Great Lakes at that season of the year.

He didn't have to wait long to find out that the activity was far different from anything he had known back in the foothills and mountains of Pennsylvania.

ABOUT THAT TIME, the Hall boys, at Henry's urging, left the upper peninsula. They brought with them their favorite sport by building slides at Brighton and Rochester.

Few sports writers in those days knew anything about ski jumping, so it wasn't a surprise when The Stroller was assigned to cover the jumps at Rochester one Sunday afternoon.

This old ski jump on Nine Mile in Farmington reminded The Stroller of the glory days of Henry Hall a half-century ago. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

It wasn't a surprise because The Stroller also had been assigned to cover the speed skating championships on Belle Isle the previous week, possibly because he was fat enough to withstand the blasts that blew down the lakes.

"Go out to Rochester on Sunday," the sports editor said, "and look up a man named Henry Hall. He'll tell you anything you need to know because he not only built the slide but is running the event."

So out to Rochester went the rookie, not knowing what to expect. He never had seen a skiing event, and the nearest he ever came was to go "belly bumper" down the old Pine Street hill at home.

WHAT AN AFTERNOON it turned out to be! So awed was he that the cold didn't seem to bother him. He stood amazed as one jumper after another came down the slide, and took off into the air like a bird and landed upright at the bottom of the hill.

The Stroller had made a promise to himself when he started his sport writing career. He would try to engage in any sport he covered.

As years went on, he played golf with Walter Hagen, rode in the Miss America X when Gar Wood set the world speedboat record and rode around the Indianapolis race track with three-time winner Wilbur Shaw at 130 miles an hour.

But that cold Sunday afternoon in Rochester, The Stroller, after watching the ski jumpers, decided he'd wait for some other sport and leave the ski jumping to others.

The real pleasure of the afternoon came when he was invited to sit down in the warmth of a cabin and chat with Henry Hall. Talking like a father to the young writer, Hall explained the technique of ski jumping and gave The Stroller all the information he needed.

"I didn't think you knew so much about ski jumping," said the sports editor after he glanced at the rookie's story.

"I didn't know anything about it until I met Henry Hall this afternoon," The Stroller answered, and he was on his way to making good on a metropolitan daily.

YEARS LATER—in 1974—he had the pleasure of seeing Henry Hall inducted into the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame.

And all these memories came tumbling through the years when he looked at that old, weather-beaten slide on Nine Mile Road.

It is a monument to a real champion.

Health convention

There will be no nominating speeches, parades or hoopla at this convention. The reason is that it's a health convention, ant it will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in Henry Ford Hospital's West Bloomfield Center, 6777 W. Maple west of Drake. And you need pay no party dues to take part.

If you figure that when you lose your health you lose everything, then it pays to look in on the convention.

You can find out if you have high blood pressure, diabetes symptoms, poor vision. You can learn more about cardio-pulmonary resuscitation or scoliosis.

HFH staff will be joined by volunteers and students interested in health care careers. They come not only from West Bloomfield but from Birmingham, Bloomfield, Orchard Lake, the Farmingtons and Livonia.

They will assist you if you want to take tests and screenings. They'll have exhibits and films on curvature of the spine, detection of breast cancer and organ donations. They'll take your blood if you want to donate a pint to the Red Cross. They'll translate medical terminology into everyday language you can understand.

The personal records of your test results will be forwarded to your physician. That alone could become your ticket to good health.

Footnotes on piano pedals and parking

Tim Richard

Semi-musical notes:

About a year ago, the Oakway Symphony publicist provided us a prophetic feature story about Andrew Henderson.

"Where's Andrew?" are two of the most frequently heard words around that community orchestra. Henderson is the harpist, assistant conductor, stage director for Oakway's frequent extravaganzas—and a general Mr. Fixit.

At the recent cabaret concert, a strange thing happened about two minutes after pianist Ruth Burczyk had begun Liszt's moody "Hungarian Fantasy." The pedals fell off the Steinway piano.

"I was in the back of the room, and I could see it (the pedal assembly) wavering, and I said 'Omigod' right at the time it broke loose," Henderson said.

Pianist Burczyk halted the performance. Conductor Frank DiBlasi and the orchestra went on to another work. Someone pulled the curtains. Andrew Henderson took off his coat and went to work.

"A wedge and two screws are supposed to hold it in place," he said of the pedal assembly, "but there had been only one screw installed." He sells the pianos for a living so he should know.

He used an ordinary screwdriver as a wedge and in a few minutes completed the repair. The emotional mood of the Liszt work had been disrupted, but the audience got a complete performance by a real professional.

Conductor DiBlasi cringed at the incident, but if I know him at all, in a year or so he'll be telling the story at parties and cracking up with laughter.

I HAD READ only once of something like that happening but had never seen it.

I read about it in a two-inch story in the Free Press one day in 1966. An obscure American pianist was performing a recital in a backwater town in Ontario when the pedals fell off. The story never said whether anyone was able to fix it.

The young American's concert career, meanwhile, was going badly. He even considered giving it up and going into teaching.

Two years later he won a politically sensitive competition, and today his name is a household word. Van Cliburn.

OF ALL THE topics I've expounded on, the one that seemed to touch the most sensitive nerve among readers was my non-review of a Detroit Symphony concert. That was the story about how we got stuck in a short but immobile line to get into the Ford Auditorium Underground Garage for 24 minutes, never did get in, and finally went home.

I don't really relish writing anti-Detroit pieces, but Motown provides so much free ammunition that it's hard to avoid.

No sooner did it appear than friends and total strangers began telling me their hard-luck stories about parking in that ineptly run garage.

A die-hard symphony fan from Redford Township named Ruth Shaw said getting into the garage is so difficult that her carload of friends goes in at 6 p.m.—2½ hours before concert time—with Thermoses of tea and packages of cookies.

"And if the auto show is on at Cobo Hall—well, forget it. I think they should send the symphony out on tour then," she said.

She provided one notably constructive suggestion: Issue parking stickers to season ticket purchasers, just like we do for state parks, and simply wave in the stickered cars. If half or more of the patrons are season ticketholders, it would speed up the line considerably.

POSTSCRIPT: Reading my non-review last month, you get the impression it happened once. Actually, the inordinate delay occurred twice. I didn't write about it the first time because I thought it might be a fluke. It wasn't. That Ford Auditorium Underground Garage is miserably bad news.

A Division of Suburban Communications Corporation

Philip H. Power, Chairman of the Board

Richard D. Aginian, President, Chief Executive Officer

Farmington Observer
"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"

Steve Barnaby, Editor

22170 West Nine Mile, Southfield, MI 48075, (313) 352-5400

John Reddy, General Mgr.
Thomas A. Riordan, Executive Editor
George J. Hagan, Advertising Director, Fred Wright, Circulation Mgr.