

editorial opinion

Dad's responsible for lifelong book penchant

Every Christmas a conflict between Barnaby and the world is resurrected. To be sure it is a friendly one, but a conflict nevertheless.

It has to do with Christmas presents. The scenario goes like this:

"Steve, what do you want for Christmas?"

"Books."

"Oh, c'mon now. You've got enough books to open a small library. What else do you want?"

Quietly, I sit down with my stack of New York Times Book Review sections, make out a list of books and distribute it to potential Barnaby gift-givers. And, for the most part, the list is ignored.

The blame for this book penchant and the resulting holiday conflict rests squarely on my father's shoulders.

It started years ago when I first discovered the wonderful world of books and, better yet, the intrigue of browsing through bookstores. I was about 8 years old.

Frequently during the year we would visit my

grandmother who owned an apartment house in Ann Arbor.

Visiting my grandmother was a delight for a number of reasons, but one adventure was utmost on my mind — the trip to the bookstore.

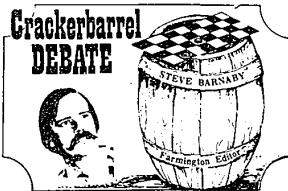
IMPATIENTLY, I WOULD sit in my grandfather's big overstuffed chair, feet dangling in the air. While pretending to watch television, I would be, in reality, watching my father's every move.

I knew the moment would come, but not before my father and I played out the teasing little drama which made the trip's prospect even more tantalizing.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, my father would walk over to the closet, put on his coat and head for the door.

"I'm going out for awhile," he would say to my mother.

Then, reaching for the door handle, he would suddenly turn around, look at me and say, "do you want to come along?"



In one move I would jump from the chair, grab my coat and be out the front door waiting for my father. Inside, he would exchange a quiet smile with my mother.

We always went to this little bookstore called the

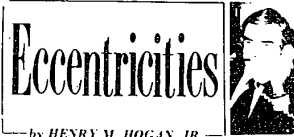
Blue Front. In recent years, friends who attended the University of Michigan tell me the Blue Front was a hangout for students more interested in browsing X-rated magazines than studying.

But for me it was a palace of knowledge. Obviously my father steered me past the "adult" reading to the shelves containing the more classic writings.

It was at the Blue Front that I bought my first edition of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* — my favorite novel and guiding light through life.

It also was at the Blue Front that I met Ernest Hemingway, Theodore Dreiser, Rafael Sabatini, John O'Hara and many more friends who have kept me company through the years.

It has been years since I've visited the Blue Front. It may be gone for all I know. But I'll always remember those trips to the bookstore and the game that my father and I played to get there.



by HENRY M. HOGAN JR.

Excitement in suburbia

During the last 15 to 20 years, there has been a tremendous migration of people from the central city to the suburbs.

The 1970 census showed more people living in suburbs than in the central cities.

The 1980 census, experts tell me, will show more people living in America's suburbs than in central cities and rural areas combined.

Many reasons have been given for this migration — seeking better schools, escaping crime and vandalism, or just wanting to own a house on a decent-sized lot.

Retailers have recognized this migration by following it with suburban shopping centers.

Some other services such as restaurants have followed more slowly.

BUT THE SLOWEST of all movements to the suburbs has been art and culture.

This is quite surprising because most patrons of the arts now live in suburbs.

This means that if people want to take advantage of the arts, they must go to the central city. Yet many won't do it because they have come to fear the central city at night.

While the growth of suburbia is exciting, it has not been known as the place "where the action is." One often hears the expression that the sidewalks are rolled up at 5 p.m.

It's very lonely to walk down suburban downtown streets at night because there are no people around. Some communities have even zoned out residential living in their downtowns.

SOMETHING HAS happened in Birmingham in the last couple of weeks which may change all this for that community.

The Nederlanders, of Fisher Theater fame, have taken over the old Birmingham movie theater and are bringing in live Broadway-caliber shows.

Hopefully, the Nederlanders will profit from the endeavor because the community definitely will.

It will bring more people into the downtown at night, encouraging more economic activity, which in turn will make the area more vital.

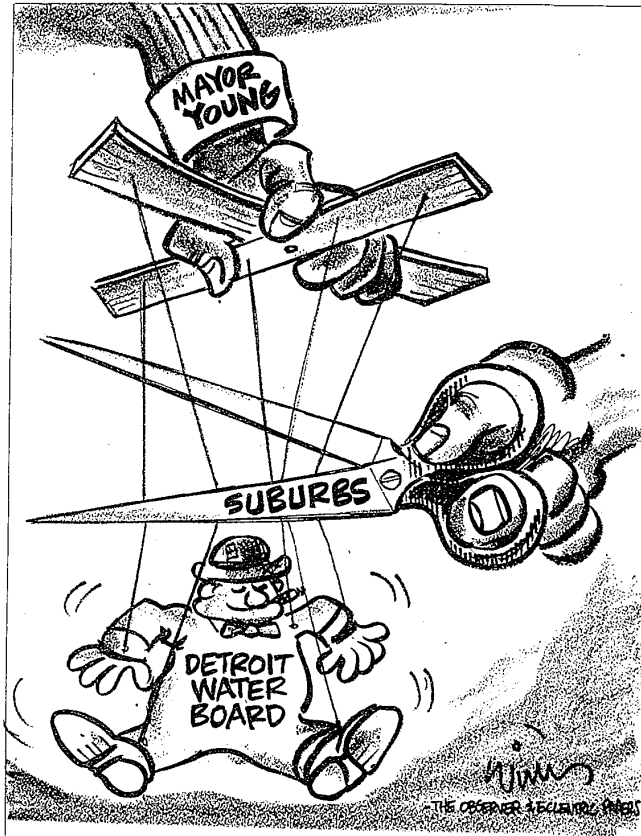
The more activity, the more possibility other types of cultural events can be lured out to where we all live.

Obviously, the Nederlanders are gambling that suburbanites want culture in their backyard because they are bringing top shows with top actors and actresses, and they are being planned for extended engagements, not one-night stands.

I hope the community is smart enough to support the project overwhelmingly because of its long-range benefits to all.

The M-275 decision

The State Transportation Commission has opted for continuing with the M-275 freeway across western Oakland County. Because most opponents had only opposed a freeway without offering a realistic alternative, the state had to choose between M-275 and nothing. Had the opposition supported a parkway instead of blithely labeling it "M-275 Jr.," they might have had a chance.



What we need is taken away

There was something different about the Old Philosopher when he pulled his chair up to the luncheon table. His smile was missing.

For years we had been meeting over lunch to discuss the world's problems. And many were the times we just sat and laughed at the odd turns it was taking.

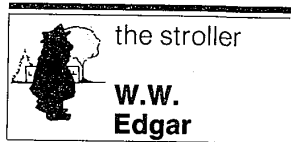
This time it was different. Instead of smiling or laughing outright he was frowning as he said "I don't know where we are going to. But it certainly doesn't look good to me."

"I just can't make heads or tails out of the actions of our lawmakers," he began. "And the more I hear of their actions, the more puzzled I become."

When the Old Philosopher gets in one of these talking moods, The Stroller has learned from experience not to interrupt him. So he just sat and listened.

"LOOK AT WHAT they are doing. They are making trouble for the two things we need most — homes and automobiles. First they took away our transportation with the passing of the old-time streetcars that took us from place to place in the suburbs."

"And how about the old interurban street railway that was always a joy to ride up to the towns along the river on the way to Port Huron? And how about the train we used to ride from Plymouth to Lansing and Grand Ra-



pids? They took both of these modes of travel away from us.

"What did we get in their place?" he asked. "They have given us expressways as an open invitation to move away from the cities and build a nice home in the suburbs. Sounds great, doesn't it? But let's look at it."

"Take a look at the new M-14 as an example. It gets us out of Detroit in a hurry. But it rushes us past the City of Plymouth where the only exit is at the western end of the community. When you get off the expressway you have to drive back in to the city."

THE OLD PHILOSOPHER reached his peak when he went on a tirade over what the government is doing with the automobile.

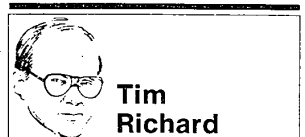
"They took away our streetcars and the railroads, and we were enticed into owning automobiles to build up the economy of the country. Now look at what has happened."

"Suddenly, the automobile has become a menace. Its exhausts foul the air too much. So they forced the auto companies into costly changes. Then they started at the energy crisis and now are forcing the automakers to build cars with fuel conservation in mind."

WHAT ABOUT CHRYSLER? Should the government bail the company out of its present dilemma?

"Why not?" the Old Philosopher answered. "The government helped get Chrysler into the jam and now it should help to get it out. And the government shouldn't be allowed to collect interest on the loans. Why allow the government to make money on any assistance it might give?"

No wonder he wasn't smiling.



Right road to reform?

And now into the fray comes George W. Kuhn, drain commissioner in and for the county of Oakland, hoping to reform the Detroit Water and Sewerage Board after others have failed.

Kuhn and suburban friends are starting a petition drive to put a proposed law before voters which would give the 100 or so customers of the Detroit water and sewerage system something to say about how this indispensable utility is run.

At present the system is a Detroit city department. Its director is appointed by the mayor. Its seven board members, including three suburbanites, are appointed and removable by the mayor. Its rates are approved by the Detroit City Council. Its employees must be residents of the city of Detroit.

Customers from outside the city have no power to do anything but pay their bills.

OTHERS, AS I've said, have tried to reform the system.

State Rep. John Bennett, D-Redford, has won some reforms, but not of the water board appointment process itself.

In 1975 state Rep. William Ryan, D-Detroit, proposed reconstituting the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments as a more powerful agency with half its members directly elected by the public. One of the new SEMCOG's powers was to be the appointment of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Board. Opposition, especially among suburbanites, was so fierce that the Ryan bill never came to a vote.

Federal District Judge John Feikens, hearing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency case against the ineptly run Detroit sewer plant, had a chance to reform things this year by appointing a special administrator. Feikens blew it. In one of the most colossal blunders ever committed by a judge, Feikens appointed the mayor of Detroit himself as the special administrator.

In 1972 a Governor's Special Task Force recommended using such agencies as SEMCOG as a kind of "umbrella agency" over regional authorities. It would select their boards, formulate their personnel guidelines, review and approve their budgets and relate them to the regional planning process. That report got lost.

SEMCOG itself has shown no inclination to assert itself.

AND SO THERE is a political vacuum.

And Kuhn is attempting to step into it.

Kuhn is headed in the right direction, although I'm not sure he is taking the best path.

He is talking of setting up a "Metropolitan Council" on a one government, one vote basis. The Metro Council would meet once a year, pick its chairman, set water and sewerage rates and select a nine-member Regional Water and Sewer Commission.

The Regional Commission would replace the current Detroit water board. It would have three Detroit members and six suburban members. Detroit's members would be picked from nominees provided by the Detroit City Council (not the mayor).

Kuhn's petition drive will require 229,000 legal signatures, which means he must collect 300,000 for a margin of safety. Then the question must go before the voters.

KUHN'S PROPOSAL has much merit and a few problems. Without appearing to be negative, I'd like to point out some of the problems:

The bill would affect only southeast Michigan, but the entire state would have to vote on it. We would feel uncomfortable voting on a bill that affected only Midland or Escanaba. Wouldn't they be uncomfortable and uninformed voting on our bill?

It would be better to have SEMCOG appoint the Regional Water and Sewer Commission than to create a new Metro Council. The Metro Council would meet only once a year and for one purpose. SEMCOG's executive committee meets monthly and its General Assembly quarterly; its members get to know each other. On the other hand, SEMCOG has been lackadaisical in seeking new powers and indifferent to the water board question.

The Metro Council would be organized on a "one government, one vote" basis rather than by population. Someone is sure to start a lawsuit over that apportionment plan.

And yet — all other attempts at water board reform have fallen flat. The Kuhn proposal deserves nothing less than serious, sober consideration. Kuhn may not be travelling the best road, but it may be the only road that is open.

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Steve Barnaby
Editor

23352 Farmington Road
Farmington, Mich. 48024
(313) 477-5450

John Reddy, General Mgr.

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