

# 'Stonewall' makes Republicans look terrible

THE BEST advice Oakland County Republican commissioners have had lately has come from a Democrat who is normally their chief antagonist.

"You're treading on dangerous ground by allowing this to escalate," said Commissioner Larry Perneck, D-Southfield.

The matter at hand is the Grand Old Party's obsessive desire to hold a secret meeting, to fail even to report the subject and to deny attorney funds for prosecution of the legality of the matter. The more Republicans stonewall, to use an apt phrase from the Nixon era, the worse their behavior appears.

REPUBLICAN COMMISSIONERS closed the door on their caucus a month or so ago — the first time either party had tried it in Oakland County since the Open Meetings Act took effect in 1977.

Just why a caucus of otherwise reputable lawmakers needs to resort to secrecy is a mystery.

Their contention — supported by an opinion from Richard Thompson, chief assistant prosecutor and

the employee of another Republican officeholder — is that "a partisan caucus does not fit within the act's definition of a 'public body' and on that basis a partisan caucus would not be covered by the act," in Thompson's words.

That is balderdash, to put it politely. The Open Meetings Act specifically exempts "partisan caucuses of members of the state legislature" (sec. 8g). There is no exemption for county boards or city councils. Significantly, Thompson's letter makes no reference to this section.

OFFICIALLY, the Republican caucus, through chairman John E. Olsen, declines to say what it closed the door to discuss.

Democrats suspect they were discussing cutbacks in the Sheriff's Department and/or a personnel matter. Some Democrats are under the mistaken impression these may be legal topics for a closed session.

Not quite so. A public body may meet in closed



Tim Richard

session to consider a disciplinary matter, but only "when the named person requests a closed hearing" (8a), for a collective bargaining strategy session "when either party requests a closed hearing" (8c) and to review a job application, but only when the applicant requests confidentiality, and even then the interview must be in open session (8f).

In other words, for the kind of topics Republican commissioners were alleged to have been discussing, they had no right to close their caucus.

Far from containing "ambiguity" as

Thompson contends, the Open Meetings Act is written in simple, plain, layman's English, not verbose legalese.

DEMOCRATS, for their part, made a mistake when they asked Thompson whether the caucus of one political party could exclude members of the other political party.

It gave Thompson an alibi to say that "even though a partisan caucus were considered a 'public body' and hence covered by the act, there would still be a question of whether the caucus of one party could properly exclude members of the other party."

Republican commissioners are pursuing an anti-social and self-defeating course of action by closing their doors. Democrats owe it to the public to pursue the matter in court. If they can't get county money and if the party treasury is dry, well, let them hold a fund-raiser. We'll announce it in the community calendar.

## Michigan is still a great state

MICHIGAN'S 16 percent unemployment rate — highest in the nation — has been hammered at so loudly that one could forget there are other measures of a state.

Sift through other numbers, however, and you get a picture of Michigan as a place which, despite some problems, comes across as a pretty good place in which to live.

Consider, for example, that Michigan ranks second in the percentage of households which own their own homes. Our impressive rate is 72.7 percent compared to the national average of just above 64 percent.

It means folks here sink roots by plunking down their money where their homes are. It tells you something good about whether Michiganders will have a strong interest in their communities. All these mortgages also tell you why we have a shortage of venture capital.

IN POPULATION, Michigan has slipped from seventh in the nation in the 1970 census to eighth. We rank 49th in population growth — up 1.3 percent to 9.3 million.

Slow growth means we shouldn't have to spend huge sums of public capital on new schools and fire stations. We will have to maintain our public buildings as they age, but the kind of growth spending we saw for a generation after World War II is no longer a burden.

We get a mixed picture looking at wages. In 1981 the average earnings of production workers in manufacturing were \$426 a week — second highest in the nation. That was good if you were working. It was bad if you were trying to recruit new firms to locate here. The national average wage was \$318 a week.

MICHIGAN GENERALLY respects its school teachers, paying them an average of \$22,300 a year compared to the national average of \$19,800. That made Michigan teachers the fifth highest paid in the country.

On the other hand, our expenditures per pupil were 20th in the country (\$2,451 per student compared to the national average of \$2,350). How can that be, if teachers' salaries are so high? Larger class sizes and less equipment, we suspect.

Michigan parents aspire to send their offspring to college. We rank fifth in the nation in the number of undergraduate college students, which is pretty ambitious for a state which has slipped to eighth in total population.

INCOMES ARE high in Michigan. Median household income in 1979 made us eighth in the nation. Our \$19,223 per household was almost \$2,400 higher than the national average.

As for the poverty level, Michigan ranked 32nd, with 10.4 percent living in poverty compared to 12.4 percent across the nation. So even if we had some unemployment problems, we were still trying hard to take care of the unfortunate.

And we did it without a lot of help from Uncle Sam. The federal government spent \$1,914 per person in the state of Michigan, ranking us 44th among the 50 states.

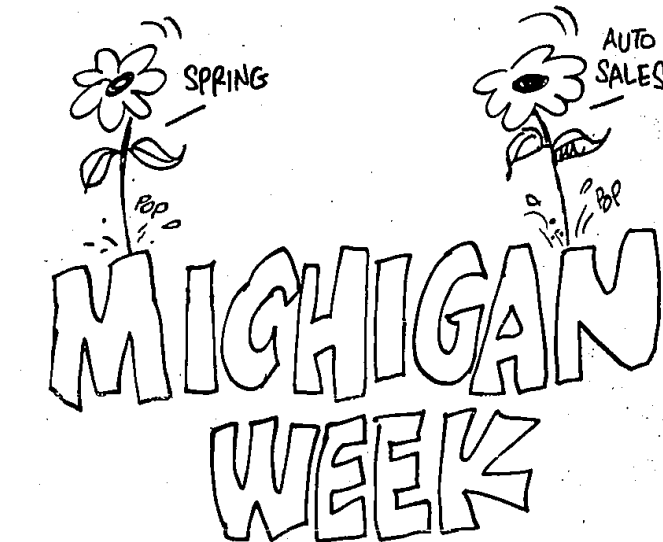
In part it was our own fault for dragging our heels on public transportation. We even shunned carpools, ranking 41st in that category.

Yet despite our heavy dependence on the automobile for getting to work, to the store and to recreation, Michigan ranked 46th in the nation in traffic fatalities — 27 fatalities per 100,000 licensed drivers compared to 35 nationwide.

It tells you something about our driving habits and the traffic engineering of our roads — something good.

No matter what the weather report, it is always much wetter, windier, colder or hotter someplace else. With our moderate climate, caused by the influence of the largest fresh water supply in the world, Michigan is spared the climatic extremes the rest of the nation puts up with.

Despite the problems, it's great to live in Michigan.



## Root beer, mead

### We made our 'pop' at home

WHILE THE Stroller abhors the very thought of going on the weekly "hunting" expedition for foodstuffs to fill the familyarder, one section of the modern supermarket really fascinates him.

It is the long row of liquid refreshments, commonly known as "pop," which takes up more than 60 feet and includes bottles of all shapes and colors.

This is fascinating to The Stroller because it is real proof of how the world has changed since he was a youth when such things were unheard of, even in the liquor store.

Back in those days, when The Stroller's father was too sickly to work in the shops, he took the advice of Mother and opened a small lunch counter. There he introduced The Stroller to what we called "soft" drinks. In those days, the only bottled refreshment was Moxie, a drink that contained some sort of iron ingredients and was supposed to give you added strength.

The taste of Moxie was not too enticing, so it was decided to add root beer. This couldn't be purchased in bottles. It came in syrup or extract, and it was designed for home production. With this we occasionally had lemonade, but only in the hottest of months.

IT WAS THE root beer to which The Stroller was introduced and taught how to brew. We had a five-gallon copper kettle with a spigot, and it was made in that container.

It was simple. You mixed the syrup with plain water, added a cake of Fleischman's yeast and set it set for several hours. Then came the task of bottling it. The five-gallon container held about 50 bottles of the brew, and The Stroller made it every other day.

Needing something to go with it, the family decided on an old Irish drink. It was called mead and was far different from root beer. Mead was made with an assortment of spices, and the main point was that it called for homemade yeast — which the Pennsylvania Dutch called "potato" yeast.

When this was finished, strained and ready for bottling, it had the color of lemonade. In those days, it was considered a great cure for "big heads" after a Saturday night jamboree. We sold more than a



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

case of it every Sunday morning.

So there we had it — root beer made at home, mead made at home and Moxie sold to us in case lots.

THAT'S WHY The Stroller is so fascinated by the soft-drink line in the modern supermarket. The other day he counted 17 varieties and all-sized bottles, up to what is considered a gallon.

In recent years with the diet craze, they even have diet drinks.

The first of the modern refreshments in bottles was Coca-Cola in a bottle that looked as if the neck had been squeezed. After that came Pepsi Cola, and now there are enough varieties to fill a 60-foot series of supermarket shelves with all colors and shapes of bottles.

It is a far cry from the days when The Stroller "brewed" root beer. How the world changes!

## discover Michigan

Bill Stockwell

DID YOU KNOW that Tiger Stadium on the edge of downtown Detroit has had four different names? It was known as Bennett Park, renamed Navin Field in 1912, Briggs Stadium in 1938 and Tiger Stadium since 1961 — the first time it wasn't named for a man. Baseball has been played on this site since 1900, a year before the American League was born.



Nick Sharkey

## The single parent: alone and in charge

I WAS STARTLED to read recently that only 17 percent of households today conform to the traditional picture of a male wage earner with wife and children at home.

I realized there was a great increase in working wives and in "one-parent" families, but I didn't know the degree. As reported in the Observer & Eccentric last week, the number of single parent families in the Detroit metropolitan area increased 87 percent from 1970 to 1980.

I had been a member of that 17 percent minority household. That has now changed. My wife has started a part-time job.

This isn't going to be a column about a househusband who prepares meals, washes underwear and irons pants. I do none of that.

My job now is to "cooperate" more fully in running the household. I serve the meals she has already prepared. I pre-rinse the dishes and put them into the dishwasher. I straighten the house before she returns from work at night.

To me, a home-cooked meal is putting some cold meat, bread and chips on the kitchen table. I don't feel guilty about taking the family to McDonald's for burgers.

In other words, shed no tears. I am no martyr.

YET, THERE still is an awesome responsibility in being alone with the children. I can identify with what mothers and single parents struggle with every day.

For the first time, I must really listen and respond to what the children say. No other adult can drop their tears or offer advice.

I have to respond to the exaggerations of a 10-year-old boy convinced that 13 girls in his class "like" him ("I'm glad I never had your problem. It would wear me out").

I must console a 12-year-old who sits on the bench of his baseball team ("You have to expect that in the seventh grade, but next year you will be a star").

I must advise a 5-year-old who cries when a friend threatens to go home ("Tell him to go home, you have better things to do than to play with him.") It requires flexibility to handle several children by yourself.

LAST WEEK as I coached the baseball team of the 10-year-old, the 5-year-old, who had been sitting on the bench, came up to me and said she had to go to the bathroom — right now. What to do? Another father took over my duty of hitting ground balls and I started looking for a tree.

It takes planning to care for children alone.

On Friday, the older children had to be at school at 8:15 a.m. The 5-year-old didn't get picked up by her car pool until 8:45 a.m. No problem. I drove the first two children to school and then returned home to wait for the car pool.

Oops. My key to the house was with the older children so they could let themselves in after school. I was locked out, and I hadn't finished dressing for work.

Casing the house like a burglar, I found an unlocked window in my bedroom. I removed the screen, pushed the window open and propped the 5-year-old through the opening. She landed on my desk, jumped to the floor and opened the front door.

THE FRUSTRATION of parenting alone comes not from the personal inconveniences already listed. If you keep smiling, they can be fun.

But it is disconcerting to leave the house a mess in the morning and know it will not be cleaned up when I return from work at night.

If I don't do something, it won't get done. That's what it must be like every day for single parents and working couples.