

This Is The Week That

... By Don Hoenshell

LANSING — Warden William H. Bannon didn't pace the floor much at Jackson State Prison when he was called in after the 1963 riots to keep the lid on. He is now head of the Detroit House of Correction in Plymouth.

He was tough as old sail leather, and he offered to take on the any-body in the place, bare knuckles or you name it.

But in moments of reflection over a cup of chewy prison coffee, Bill might say,

"You know, I've got 4,500 guys in here — some of them pretty smart — and all they've got to do is think of ways of making things tough for me."

And that's the way it is these days with every saloon keeper and party store entrepreneur in Michigan — how they keep their licenses with hundreds of pretty inventive minors trying to buy booze illegally.

SO THE LEGISLATURE has devised a complicated series of proofs they say will prevent this sort of thing. Actually, the bills which whizzed through the House do two off-the-wall things.

They require a fellow to spend more time filling out forms and signing documents than it would to stomp out his own grapes. A man could die of thirst.

They protect the liquor licensee, a good feature.

But to say that hereafter John won't be able to fake his draft card or driver's license and buy all the six-packs he wants is ridiculous. And he can still collect a legal buyer so he can drink it illegally.

That's the way it is sometimes with legislation: A noble gesture

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Birmingham Eccentric

We are proud of the Birmingham community for the stand the voters took April 10 on the fair housing referendum.

This pride does not come from the fact that we have hit the headlines nationally as the first practically all-white community to approve an open occupancy law by public referendum.

What others say is not as important as what we do, and we have, by public vote, said that we believe all people should have an equal opportunity if they can measure up to the community's standards, and the standards shall not include prejudice.

NOW THAT the election is over, however, we cannot sit back and rest upon our laurels.

The vote confirmed what a majority of people believed any-way, but it helped no one.

A Special Serenity

There's a special serenity about early morning in a city.

There's no one on the mile roads, the shopping centers are quiet and the only sounds are your own whistle and maybe a bird in the park.

The city is fresh then, just awake and gearing up for the angry sounds of people and the buzzing of commerce. In a way, the city lives a lifetime in a day.

Half spent at noon and waiting for retirement at 3 p.m., the city like people becomes panicky that it has missed something when 6 p.m. arrives.

Then it dies and is quiet.

But there's always a special serenity for early people in the concrete gulches.

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From the Publisher's Desk

OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power

hides the real — and perhaps more noble or honest — purpose. Time was under Michigan law when a driver involved in an accident could sue any of the dozen bars where he tarried before the crash. There was no real way of telling when drink made him unfit to drive.

The lobbyists have been pitch-ing for years for some protection for the liquor license. They should have it, but folks, let us not sell this sort of thing as great social reform. When?

UNDER THE HOUSE bills, a beer or liquor buyer will have to show driver's license and draft cards; the testimony of minors could be used against them in court; the buyer would sign a register in the store or tavern.

The key provision, however, is that after this the tavern or store could not be cited for a license hearing. And the kids would be held more responsible.

If they felt responsibility, they wouldn't be trying to falsify their ages anyway. More patches on the law won't stop them — but these might help responsible businessmen.

Go back to Bill Bannon for a minute.

The kids will figure a way.

There was a full moon this week [these bills were passed], along with another classic — to remove "killer trees" from the roadside to reduce traffic accidents.

Next time we hear of a tree spending the wrong way on I-96 looking for somebody to kill, we'll get out an extra.

That's the way it is sometimes with legislation: A noble gesture

It's odd what happens when a police car stops at the scene of an accident or some disturbance, particularly at night.

The cruiser comes rushing up into a blackness, with sirens going and red or blue lights flashing.

Cars slow down. People come out of their houses, and gather into a crowd. Cars arrive, with curious drivers.

The siren slows to a grinding hum. The policeman get out of their car and start trying to cope with the situation.

People stand around, the colored lights flickering back and forth across their faces, which suddenly stand out from the black backdrop of the night with unexpected ferocity.

You're in the middle of a riot.

An injured man is lifted out of the wrecked car, or a man in handcuffs is led, struggling, to the police car. A little hum runs through the crowd.

Then you look into those flickering, flashing, psychedelic lights. You feel the crowd. And your grasp on reality starts to slip a little bit.

Someone grunts in the back of the crowd. You look to see who it is, and all you can see are those strange, strained faces, distorted in the flashing colored lights. You start to get excited — not angry at the police, just excited by the strange and stimulating setting — and then someone throws a bottle at the police ...

The question of proper police procedure in such cases has an obvious pertinence this summer, in a time of racial unrest and civil disorders. It has an obvious implication for police departments in big cities with a high riot potential just as it applies to

policemen out here in Observer-land.

THE PERFORMANCE OF the Detroit Police Department during the troubles following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has been praised as exceptional. The policemen, together with state policemen and National Guard troops, used restraint coupled with overwhelming force. People were kept off the streets and not allowed to form into groups.

And, most interesting, the police cars did not use their sirens or their flashing lights, even while making their way to the scene of a crime. It worked. Very few crowds gathered around police cars.

I talked to a high official in the Detroit police department about the matter. He said that it was standard operating procedure for police cars to shut off their flashers when handling a traffic problem or when arriving at the scene of a disturbance.

Why? "Because we don't want to draw a crowd and we don't want oncoming traffic to stop or slow down to gawk at the police," the officer explained.

He added that he was convinced that such procedures, although an officer might forget to turn off his lights when confronted by a real emergency, were very important in preventing crowds from gathering and becoming stirred up.

THE MICHIGAN STATE Police "recognize the problem," according to an official in Lansing, but there are no standard procedures for turning off the flashers on state police cars. "We're really not sure what happens in a crowd around a police cruiser," the officer added, "and it may well be that the flashing lights do excite people."

When asked if just a simple, clear, white, steady light might both provide illumination for night work and prevent crowds from getting excited, the state police officers said that such suggestions had been made before but that nothing particular had been done to study them.

Farmington City Police Chief Robert Deadman, one of the most respected law enforcement men in the state, recognizes the problem.

He points out that sirens, particularly the high-pitched "yelpers," and flashing lights are very useful in getting police cars through traffic, particularly at night. Drivers can see the flashing lights or hear the sirens and get out of the way.

Deadman adds that in his experience it is often useful to leave the flashers on when at the scene of a crime, since the lights often give the psychological impression that more policemen are on the scene than actually are there. "Sometimes we really need that psychological advantage," Deadman said, "but it's not always reasonable."

A call to the University of Michigan's Department of Psychology produced the information that very little research has been done on the reaction of crowds to flashing colored lights. However, both professors with whom I talked said that it seemed intuitively obvious that flashing lights would excite people, give them a feeling of unreality, and possibly promote violent behavior in a strained situation.

THE ODD THING about the whole question is not that police are undecided about the effect of their lights on crowds, but rather that very little has been done to explore the problem.

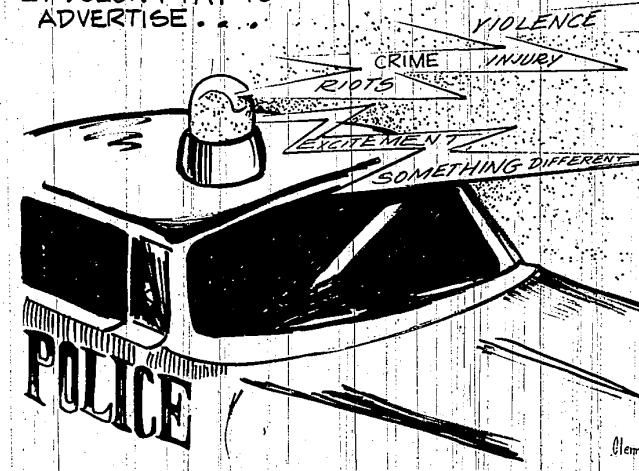
And in a summer of potential violence, to ignore this matter is to court disaster.

Police departments in this area should talk with the Detroit police department to get the thrust of the thinking behind the procedures used in Detroit. The state police, perhaps through the police academy in Lansing, should be encouraged to study the problem and to release their findings and recommendations. Something more than a slap-dash review of academic research should be done.

At present, most police procedures virtually guarantee that a crowd will be drawn to a police cruiser at night. It may become excited. This crowd then has to be dispersed, and it is precisely at that point where many incidents break out.

Maybe it would be better for the police to turn out their lights in order to prevent the crowds from turning out.

IT DOESN'T PAY TO ADVERTISE



Sense And Nonsense

Remember the slogan "Have a Cup of Coffee For the Road"? Now science tells us that it doesn't help, except to make you a very wide-awake drunk.

It's time to return your neighbor's snow plow and borrow his lawn roller.

Give a good man a horse he can ride, and he'll still have trouble with the chuckholes on Five Mile.

Genetics is tinkering with people again and promises to be able to produce identical twins for everybody and maybe with all their dad's charm. Next move is to poll the mothers, follows.

A Detroit legislator complains that the state capital building hasn't opened to visitors on weekends. And there are some brains up there that aren't open at all.

We're in this community, have both the wither and the talent and intelligence to make great strides in this direction.

The vote on Monday put us on record as believing that our fellow man should have equal opportunity.

Now let's all join in the next step to see that he is not a second class citizen because his early background did not give him a skill or trade and his outlook on the world is not measured by his life in substandard living conditions.

Man never fastened one end of a chain around the neck of his brother, that God's own hand did not fasten the other end round the neck of the oppressor.

—Alphonse Lamartine (1790-1869)

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Little Frog, Big Voice, Makes Spring Official

Everyone has his favorite sign of spring — the opening of baseball season, the blooming of wild-flowers, the start of harness racing.

All of those signs are either governed by the calendar or inconsistent from year to year, at best. The "first" robin, even, is unreliable because some stick around all winter.

There's only one sure sign of spring — one that is guided by nature and still readily noticeable by the suburban. And that is the high croaking of the tiny spring peepers.

WHAT ARE they?

Well, they're little men you never see. You hear them, though, a quarter of a mile away from the ponds and puddles and streams where they're mating.

They're remarkably little frogs — maybe the size of the end of your thumb. You wouldn't believe something that small could make such a welcome racket.

Only the male does the croaking. His throat sac swells until it is nearly as big as the rest of his body. Some people mistake the sound for a cricket, but crickets won't be chirping until summer.

And they're incredibly difficult to find. Small boys are sometimes successful in capturing them, but old folks (anyone over 12) and girls can't even see them.

The peepers quit croaking and take a dive under the leaves at the bottom of the pond as soon as anyone comes around. The dirty little black dog who travels with this hiker isn't the least bit interested, preferring instead to terrorize field mice.

THE ONLY TIME you hear or see the spring peeper is when spring really arrives. Their built-in mechanisms tell them when cold snaps are safely out of the way.

The rest of the year, they're wood frogs. They have large toe pads with which they can climb trees and shrubs, and they're virtually impossible to spot them.

The spring peeper goes by the scientific name of *hyla crucifer* — the "cross-bearing frog." On his back is a dark mark that looks like a long X or perhaps like a pair of Y's placed tail to tail.

The nature book says spring peepers are "abundant in areas of bushy second growth," which is an apt description of the suburbs and the woods of southern Michigan.

Actually, the spring peeper covers most of the eastern United States. But in suburbia, where wildlife is quickly cleaned out as subdivisions spring up, he's one of the remaining links with nature.

When he's here, spring's here. — Tim Richard

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS