

Youth pursues 'John Hancocks'

By CHRISTINE WALDEN
You may remember Merrill Benninger.

He's the sandy-haired youngster who rode his bike three miles just to get Glen Campbell's autograph. That was last summer, but the 12-year-old's pursuit of "John Hancocks" has not ended.

In fact, the recent Celebrity Golf Tournament at Great Oaks netted Merrill a whole pageful of signatures.

"I've got about 15 now," he said while fingering pieces of signed paper. "See I've got Mr. and Mrs. Belvedere, Bill Bonds. I got this one in Florida, it's the guy who is Huckleberry Finn on T.V. but I can't remember his name."

AND THAT'S how Merrill operates. Sometimes he knows who the

person is, sometimes he doesn't. His criteria for an autograph is simply supposed fame.

At the tournament, Merrill immediately recognized Bozo the Clown, even though Bozo was without red hair and big shoes.

"I could tell it was him from his voice," explained Merrill. "Someone told me it was him, but I would have known. If you listen to him and if you watch him on T.V. you know who he is."

Conversely, Merrill spent part of the day riding the golf course with "Don Osrich or somebody like that. He's with the red wings. I didn't even know who he was."

HE DID, however, get his signature.

While Merrill's autograph collection is growing, it is currently one signature short due to the loss of Doc Severson's autograph.

It's a wonder he doesn't lose more.

"I'd just rather have 'em on pieces of paper. I don't like carrying around an autograph book," he explained. "It's too much trouble."

There is one autograph that Merrill really wants—Elvis Presley's. And, hopefully, if Elvis makes it to Cobo Hall this summer, Merrill will be there, scrap of paper in hand.

"I JUST think he's really neat," he said. "My favorite song is 'Jailhouse Rock,' by him. I like to play the drums to it."

Yes, drums. When Merrill's not on his bicycle or there are no stars in Rochester, you might find him in his poster-lined room, beating the drums. Merrill speculated that his drum playing might even make him the autograph-signer rather than the autograph-getter.

"I'd like to be famous, I don't know what for, but maybe for playing the drums."

Knowing Merrill, he just might make it.

IF FOR A minute you watch his pursuit of an autograph, his participation in an event you know he's got determination.

He may be a typical 12-year-old kid who likes bike riding and motorcycles and rock music. But there's something about the twinkle in his eye, the tone of his voice and his boldness that make adults, including famous ones, take note.



Merrill's autograph collection now numbers about 15. (Photographed by Barbara McClellan)



Rocking out on the drums is one of Merrill's favorite past times

After 43 years

Career woman leaves her job

By SANDY TESSLER

Working at Cranbrook Institutions has been a way of life for Helen McIlroy. She has devoted two-thirds of her life to a career as bookkeeper, secretary, public information liaison and advisor.

On June 28 she retired, taking with her an honorary life membership in the Garden Auxiliary, a water color painting of Cranbrook House and the respect of her colleagues and employers.

"In a sense, Cranbrook has become a part of my life," she said, "because I had its interests at heart ever since I came there. I really love the place."

She started work at Cranbrook at age 23. Henry Booth, son of the founder of Cranbrook and chairman of the board of the foundation until last year, had employed Miss McIlroy as his secretary since 1946.

She had, among other duties, assisted him in researching and typing a history of Cranbrook traced back to its beginning in 1891. She will continue to help on this project after her retirement.

MISS McILROY described the Cranbrook founder and her original employer, George Booth, as a creative and dynamic personality.

"He was a person who inspired you to do your best."

When she was young, Miss McIlroy was interested in interior decorating. She carried her interest over into her work.

"Setting up a letter with the proper margins and nice headings is a lot like setting up a picture. It's a form of art. Maybe it isn't creative, but I don't feel just anything will do," she explained.

On the eve of her retirement, Miss McIlroy described her feelings as "mixed."

"I will miss Cranbrook, but I'm looking forward to having time to take care of my home and garden."

She plans to remain active in the Cranbrook Music Guild and Garden Auxiliary.

"Life will go on and there will be new interests," she said, "but I won't forget the old ones."



Helen McIlroy walks of Cranbrook

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