

Pierrot celebrates 80th birthday

Gourmet George's gala without food

By W.W. EDGAR

They're planning an unusual trick on George Pierrot, one of the country's best-known connoisseurs of good food, when he celebrates his 80th birthday at the Detroit Art Institute on Wednesday.

About 2,000 members of his army of friends are planning a real bash from 6:30 p.m. without serving dinner. It possibly will be the first time in his life that the little round man, who has eaten in almost every restaurant in the country, will be at a birthday party without food.

What it lacks in food, the party will make up in a most unusual way. To accommodate the thousands expected to be on hand, the affair will be held in three rooms in the institute. The rooms will be named for special points in Hawaii from which the jovial traveler has just returned.

George, himself, will hold forth in the Kresge Court which will be named the Royal Court for the evening. The north wing will be the Oahu room, the Recital Room will become the Hali Oki Bowl, the auditorium will be the Poli Auditorium, while the south wing will be the Kapiolani Room where the dancing, featuring several Hawaiian numbers, will take place.

It is an unusual program, but George is an unusual person. And the party promises to be one of the most unusual in the history of Detroit society.

Imagine a party with more than 2,000 guests, and you can get some idea of the manner in which one of the world's greatest travelers and one of its greatest gourmet diners will be ushered into the eighth decade of his life.

Throughout the three-hour period, George, who made a name for himself with the Sunday afternoon World Travel Adventure Series at the institute and for his penchant for good food wherever it is to be found, will be the subject of many a fine yarn.

It is said that he has eaten on the ice fields in Alaska, the sunny climes of the South Pacific and the leading dining emporiums in Europe. And yet he is a familiar sight at the Ronto Cafe hard by the Eastern Market.

One of the stories they tell of his familiarity with the best places to get certain foods concerns the year the Tigers won the pennant in 1988. In a relaxing moment, some of the nation's top sports writers decided to select an all-American meal with the dishes they most enjoyed in the various cities of their travels.

George happened to be within hearing distance and had his ear cocked to get the writers' choices. When they agreed on shrimp at Sharkey's in Orlando, Fla. as a starter, George could contain himself no longer.

"And don't forget oxtail soup at Shevlin's in Cincinnati," he called over to the writers' table.

On another occasion, so the story goes, a group of Detroit club rights men in Honolulu attending what was supposed to be an official luau—the peak of Hawaiian cuisine.

When one of the group complained about eating "burned pig" and said he would give anything for a good steak, a voice from another table called,

"You can't beat the steak at Candis right up the avenue." Sure enough, it was George Pierrot calling to his distraught fellow traveler. He knows the places and if the food is good, is certain to have dined there.

A regular at the annual WJR holiday party, George is the center of attention as he walks along the food line to fill his plate. And he is a picture when he starts devouring the roast beef at the Raleigh House or Ren-Gen. A diner par excellence, you will find him at the most unexpected places, and no other man in Detroit can recite the menus of the best eating establishments, for he has dined in all of them.

It will be a great night for George. Not only will he be celebrating his 80th birthday, but he will be celebrating the 4th anniversary of the World Adventure Series that is one of the most popular entertainments in all of Michigan.

He started the series on a lunch, and for more than four decades has been offering the series. He also was on television until a short time ago, and won his way into the hearts of many with the programs on the tube.

The effect of these TV shows is best attested to by the story of an elderly gent who was listening to several of his friends tell of their experiences in Europe. They were talking about walking up the avenue in Paris to the River Seine, when the elderly gent said, "And if you had looked to your left, you would have seen the Cathedral of Notre Dame."

"When were you there?" one of the group asked.

The old gent smiled and said, "I never was there in person, but I learned it all from George Pierrot's travel series on television. I used to have a longing to travel. But when Pierrot started his shows, I gave up the idea. I now spend my vacations at home. I have seen more of these famous places on his show than if I had been there myself."

Pierrot is not a native Detroit, although he is looked upon as Mr. Detroit. He was born in Chicago, and after wandering out to the west coast, he came to Detroit in 1922 to take on a job as associate editor of Business magazine. From there he went over to the staff of the American Boy and Youth Companion magazines, where

he provided youths with exciting tales of adventure.

It was through this work that he attracted the attention of the late Edsel Ford, who encouraged him to start the World Adventure Series to help finance the art institute. It was a success from the start.

It would take more than one volume to do justice to the little round man and his salutary influence on Detroit and Detroiters. For his sense of humor has kept the town laughing.

And as George would have it, the money from the admission charge (\$15 per person) to the big party will be used to redecorate the institute, especially the 50-year-old auditorium, which he always refers to as "my home away from home."

But the most unusual feature of the big evening will be the mammoth birthday celebration for the greatest diner in the country—and there will be no dinner.



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Sponsored by the EMU Student Government and the Office of Minority Affairs, Humanitarian Day is being held in memory of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King. King was born on Jan. 15, 1929.

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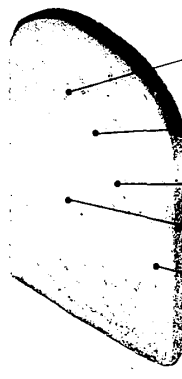
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