

THE TIMES OF MINERAL POINT

Vol. 4, No 1

ILLUSTRATED

May, 2015

WORDS AND OCCASIONAL WHIMSEY TO AMUSE AND INFORM THE LOYAL READER

MINERAL POINT LODGING: A 21% INCREASE

A.M.P.'s PROGRESS

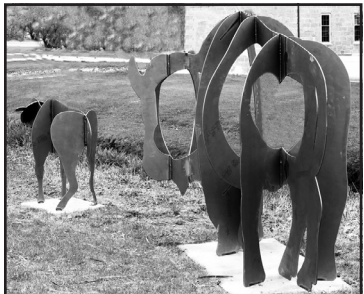
Local Arts-Building Organization marks dynamic 1st year

The Arts Mineral Point (AMP) May 2nd Membership Dinner Meeting celebrated a year of accomplishments.

The leadership team for the arts-advocacy group listed several successes for AMP's first year: opening a promising Arts Incubator in the Cannery building; instituting public art with a sculpture garden at the top of High St. and a new work at the Walker House; staging two successful "Paint Outs" for Midwestern plein air artists (with juried competitions, prizes and canvas sales); revitalizing the city's Gallery Night program; establishing an AMP Facebook page with 600 Internet users in its base; and recruiting a growing membership roster for the organization's financial support.

As gallery owner Ried Knapp put it, "Our first year was a whirlwind, putting good ideas into motion to enrich the city's cultural climate. But, we can always use more help—more members, volunteers, and people with experience and needed expertise."

Peter Flanery, Roland Sardeson and Bill Grover prepare a pad at the Walker House for Bill's bison sculpture.



New Public Art: "Will Rust for Peace"



May 1st is a day of joyous celebration all over the world. Or, it's day of condemnation. It depends on who you ask.

In many countries, the date is Labor Day, with roots in the 19th-century rise of organized labor in the United States, a social movement marked by strikes organized by communists, socialist and anarchists. For many, May Day became associated with Communism, and in the Soviet Union May 1st was used to show off the Russian military hardware.

In the Cold War faceoff with Russia, Pres. Eisenhower tried to redeem the nature of the holiday by declaring it both Law Day and Loyalty Day.

Worldwide, it remains a day of rallies and protests.

In Egypt, India, and elsewhere, it's a celebration of spring and fertility.

In medieval England people gathered flowers to "bring in the May" and erected a maypole bedecked with garlands of bluebells, forget-me-nots, cowslips and sycamore twigs. It's also the date of Beltane, a Celtic calendar festival celebrating the start of summer. Beltane was known for its bonfires, and has been revived by neo-pagans all over the world as a major religious holiday.

In Germany, May 1st was the date of a pagan festival that the Christians later turned into the feast day of St. Walpurgis. The night before—Walpurgisnacht—is still celebrated in parts of rural Germany as a variation on Valentine's Day, with the delivery of a tree, wrapped in streamers, to one's beloved.



The very oldest May Day celebration still takes place each year in Cornwall.

The "Padstow 'Obby 'Oss" (Hobby Horse), a 14th century tradition, draws thousands of people. The fun begins at midnight the night before, when "Mayers" gather at the Golden Lion Inn to serenade the owner with a Night Song:

"Rise up, Mr. Rickard, and joy to you betide, for summer is a-come in today; and bright is yur bride, that lays down by yur side, in the merry morning of May..."

Followed, of course, by a day of dancing and drinking.

Another traditional Middle English dance often seen in the month of May is Morris Dancing—lively and colorful, with a troupe in traditional garb accompanied by an accordion player. [The photo above shows a visiting company of Morris Dancers under the trees at Orchard Lawn a few years ago.]

Pointers may not mark the day with a May Pole and a jig, but we're kicking up our heels at the end of another long Wisconsin winter. The Farmers Almanac predicted a second Polar Vortex, but 2015 was "normal" and temperate by most standards.

The chill was still capable of causing a severe case of cabin fever. But, at the same time, winter gave us beautiful landscapes, "on one of those days when a winter storm has ended and the sun is hiding behind a haze. Although unseen, the sun is reflected everywhere, so that all things stand out sharp and clear."

We write words like those with the hope that a poetic image might soften the harsh memory of too many days in the "Refriger-Nation."

OVERNIGHTERS BOOST CITY'S TOTAL TOURISM TO \$1.2 MILLION

The impact of Tourism has increased the local economy by more than \$1.2 million, as the city's lodging industry enjoyed a record year with an estimated 21% jump in overnight visitors.

Deb Donaghue, chair of the city's Tourism Commission, praised "hard work and aggressive promotion" as factors that improved the city's image and drew tourists from a wide geographic area.

"For our overnight guests," she said, "Mineral Point offers a mix of lodging options, and tourists can choose between colorful contrasts: a cottage or a mansion, a cabin or historic home, a B&B or a motel."

The city boasts seventeen inns, guest houses and motels, and is adding more places to the roster.

Donoghue credited a variety of developments for the hefty hike in lodging: purchased promotions on regional radio, Facebook posts, advertising in the American Players Theater playbill, Isthmus, ads in other publications, the distribution of 35,000 rack-cards and books throughout the state, and the use of the city's website and High Street Beat on the Internet.

She said a flattering article by the Associated Press was a boon to local tourism, and a rewrite of travel rules for Lands End employees also added to the city's tourist population.

New events, such as the 2014 "Paint Out," and a boost for Gallery Nights produced additional benefit for Lodging.

The Tourism Commission will spend \$50,000 in 2015 to promote the city. "The goal," Donoghue says, "is to make Mineral Point the tourism hub for Driftless Wisconsin."

"Remember," she said, "an overnight visitor spends about \$100 a day in the city, as a shopper and/or diner."

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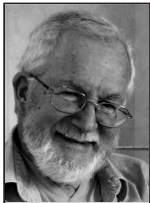
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OF HISTORIC UNDERSTANDING



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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Check Sandee Beaman's
Online Events Calendar
Go to

<http://hwy23events.wordpress.com>

And simply click on an event
to get all the details.

RIDING THE RAILS TO PROMOTE THE CITY



In boom-and-bust Mineral Point, there were years when nine trains would pull into the old railroad depot every day. The city's economy was healthy, and the town wanted other cities to know it. Tourist traffic, we reckoned, would add a bit to our economy.

Someone came up with a great promotional scheme. To proclaim the good times in Mineral Point, the city's famed Iron Brigade Band would board the train, and businessmen (almost always men) would join the band to ride the rails to other cities along the tracks.

In those other towns, the band would jump off the train, play a tune to draw a crowd, and stand in support behind a promotional presentation by a Mineral Point diplomat. Then, the passengers on the "Businessman's Special" would hop back on, and the train would move out to the next city, where the noisy marketing event would be repeated.

We have little hard data on the economic success of the venture, but everyone agrees it must have been one of the most effective eye-and-ear-catching stunts ever mounted.

The Municipal Band was formed in 1843, gained well-deserved national attention as "the Iron Brigade Band"

during the Civil War, and in World War I played farewell concerts for troops headed off to combat. The band became a fixture at parades, pageants, fairs and local recitals at the bandstand that once stood in Water Tower Park. During the Great Depression, Pointers could walk to the Social in Library Park, get a hamburger for a dime, a beer for a nickel, and listen to the lively tunes of the Muni Band.

The Band lives on in its 172nd year, and its thirty (or so) musicians will begin their practice sessions in June.

Julie Tredinnick, the band's long-time officer and spokesperson, said the group will follow its traditional schedule for the summer season: the first concert will entertain the crowd at the annual Ice Cream Social at the Mineral Point Care Center on June 25th. The band plays a concert in front of the historic Court House for Darlington's Canoe Fest, then celebrates the 4th of July with a holiday concert that is a sort of homecoming for band members, as they take seats at Soldiers' Park just before the annual fireworks display.

Tredinnick puts it this way: "It's a band with its heart in the community; we have old timers, like me, and we have High School kids."



Until recently, we thought a website was a spider's home. But now, the *Times of MP* owns a website with this newspaper's name on it. And also a domain, [once defined as "lands controlled by a Ruler."]

We've always felt readers should have ink on their hands when finished with any newspaper; but, in this digital age, we've come to realize readers need to have a choice between old-fashioned newsprint, held in the hands, and the Internet screen. So, reluctantly, we've succumbed to the wonders of the blogosphere.

The *Times* will still be tucked
[Continued, right]

inside the *Shopping News* on front porches in the city on the first Tuesday of the month, and papers will still be available at local stores, galleries and restaurants, but readers may also simply go online, click the mouse [formerly known only as a small rodent] and scroll through the *Times* columns, at:

www.timesofmineralpoint.org

H. D. Thoreau on Town Meetings



When, in some obscure country town, the local people come together for a special town meeting, to express their opinion on some subject which is vexing the land, that, I think, is the true Congress, and the most respectable one that is ever assembled in the United States.

*Henry David Thoreau
1854*



The Driftless Area Fibre Arts Faire moves to rooms of the rowhouse at Pendarvis for the weekend of May 30-31, giving local artisans an opportunity to show off natural fibers and the plants and animals that produce them.

Twenty-two vendors will take part in the free event, sponsored by the Pendarvis Historic Site and The Pear, the boutique on Fountain Street.

Alpacas and sheep will graze on the Pendarvis lawn, and a variety of hands-on demonstrations will trace the creation of wool yarns, "from sheep to shawl," illustrating shearing, cleaning, carding, spinning and at last weaving or knitting—the operations that transform an animal's coat into an article of clothing.

Participating local artisans will also sell hand-dyed and spun yarns, garments, yarn supplies, original handmade textiles and textile art.

Visitors can enjoy a lunch, local foods, cheese and wine.



**Don't be defeatist,
dear. It's so
middle class.**



One must admit the English handle their language well.

Especially the wealthy Post-Edwardian aristocrats who are portrayed on British television.

Amongst that well-heeled group, no one employs wit and words as weapons as well as Violet Crawley, (the actress Maggie Smith), the Dowager Countess of Downton Abbey.

As a public service, in the hope readers will find them useful, the *Times* hereunder repeats a few examples of the dowager's wisdom:

"At my age, one must ration one's excitement."

"There's nothing simpler than avoiding people you don't like. Avoiding one's friends, that's the real test."

"It's the job of grandmothers to interfere."

"Principles are like prayers; noble, of course, but awkward at a party."

"A woman of my age faces reality far better than most men." And, "Men notice nothing."

"Vulgarity is no substitute for wit."

And these two to quiet Mary: "Lack of compassion is as vulgar as an excess of tears," and "Stop whining and find something to do!"

The *Times* recommends the use of one or more of these language gems whenever the proper social occasion dictates.

JOY GIESEKE TO HEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Board of the Mineral Point Historical Society has elected Chamber Director Joy Gieseke as the organization's new President. She succeeds Matt Ostergrant.

Ostergrant and his wife, Denise, were long-time Board Members and among the most active volunteers in the city. Both resigned from the Board, due to health concerns.

Gieseke told the *Times* the months ahead will be devoted to a review of the Society's activities, described as "a rebuilding." The Board opted to cancel its February and March 2015 Lyceums, and there will be no Founders' Day, the mid-summer event hosted by the Society. Weekend tours and "Jammin' on the Porch" will continue, and the Gundry home is available as a rented space for special events.

Officers are Carl Tunestam, VicePres., Peter Pfothenhauer, Sec., Nancy Pfothenhauer, Treas.

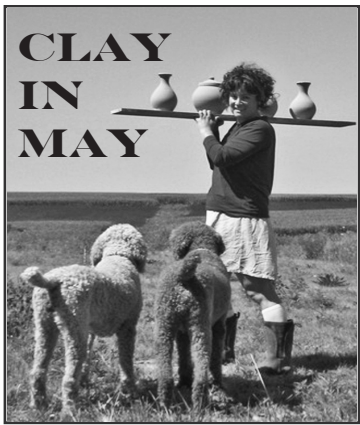
Our Vivid "Vernacular" Heritage

Most of our older buildings are catalogued as "vernacular architecture," defined as "man-made structures with a local history, built by local people from improvised plans and whatever building materials happened to be at hand."

The Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF), visited Madison and the surrounding countryside in 2012 to study the area's diverse architecture. A research team published two guidebooks for the VAF tour members, and in one of the books there's a rich, insightful chapter for heritage-hungry Pointers.

Check out the VAF fieldwork by scrolling through the "Mineral Point Overview." To get there, open <http://blcprogram.weebly.com/fieldwork-archive.html> and skim the Home page to "Southwestern Wisconsin Tour, 7 June 2012". Click on the red "From Mining to Farm Fields to Ethnic Communities: Buildings and Landscapes of Southwestern Wisconsin." When that site opens up, scroll down to page 127. You'll learn fascinating facts about our city and its landmark buildings, and see carefully drawn maps, floor plans and elevations of the structures studied on the VAF's two-hour midday tour of Mineral Point.

It's an academic project, to be sure, but the language is not stuffy. The photos and detailed illustrations will show you hundreds of things you never knew about our town's architectural heritage.



Potter Christie Cole totes a few items to the kiln, part of the Windy Ridge studio's preparations for the annual Clay in May Pottery Tour, on May 2-3rd.

Several local potters show their diverse talents in a self-guided driving tour, giving you a chance to meet and talk with the clay artists during throwing-wheel, kiln and studio demonstrations, and their pottery is available for sale.



LIBRARY TACKLES TASKS FOR BOOKFEST

The Public Library staff is checking off items on a ToDo list, preparing to play host to the Southwest Wisconsin Book Festival, an autumn event with the theme, "All Things Books."

The library's Board voted to accept a transfer of management offer from Kristin Mitchell Design, the firm that had sponsored the bookfest for several years.

Librarian Barbara Polizzi says the revised gathering of authors on September 13th will be free to the public, and will genuinely reflect the local literary climate.



ARCHIVES SCANS LOCAL HISTORICAL FIGURES

The Library's Mineral Point Room, the city's treasure chest for history, has launched a new effort to utilize the vast collection of the Mineral Point Historical Society by scanning and creating digital files of photos of residents of the city. Some of the photographed people are considered prominent citizens; others less so.

Nancy Pfothenhauer oversees the program, working with Joel Gosse, a volunteer from the Board of the Society.

Pfothenhauer says her earlier scans of photos from the extensive collection have amassed a folder with black and white depictions of 250 local homes and business places. The digitalized photos of these local buildings are available online, as a valuable service by the historical society.



FARMERS MARKET OPENS ITS 20TH SEASON

It's so much more than locally-grown foods—it's a discussion center for the organic lifestyle and one of the city's social highlights, "the place to be" on Saturday morning. Vendors are on hand from 8:30 to 11 a.m. in Water Tower Park.

THE FAIRY HOMES OF SHAKE RAG ALLEY

Stroll the grounds at Shake Rag Alley on Sat/Sun, May 23/24, to see original miniature fairy homes built for this tour. Buy one of the tiny homes at a Silent Auction, or make your own from supplied materials. Kids can dress up and pose for a picture, holding a magic wand they've created. And, new this year, enjoy a moonlight tour and cocktail reception Saturday at 8 p.m.

The Shake Rag Alley School of the Arts offers a variety of adult weekend workshops in May. Classes in rustic crafts, jewelry, writing, blacksmithing/welding, fabric arts, beads, painting and photography. Check the school's website and sign on!

PENDARVIS LAUNCHES ITS SEASON

One of the state's most-interesting historic sites, Pendarvis is now offering daily tours that give visitors an informative look at the life of the city's early miners. Tours by costumed tour guides from 10 to 3, with reserved group tours and self-guided tours of the mining acreage as well.

FOLKLORE VILLAGE MAYPOLE SOCIAL

If the PageOne story on the history of the Maypole pushed your buttons, visit Folklore Village on May 16th, and enjoy the potluck and dance that begins at 5:30 p.m., This family event celebrates Spring's arrival as participants weave patterns around a flower-adorned Maypole. Bring flowers from home to add to the Maypole. Sue Hulsether will be leading the easy-to-learn dances.

ORCHARD LAWN OPENS ITS DOORS

The Gundry family's 1868 historic Italianate home, surrounded by nine acres of lawns, flowers, and trees, is open for guided tours on May 23rd. Tours Friday through Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.

AMERICANA AT THE OPERA HOUSE

Grand Marquis, the Kansas City band that features "America's Musical Roots" returns to the city at 7:30 on May 9th, for an evening of blues, Prohibition-era Jazz and more. And the popular local group, Point Five, shares the stage for the repeat concert. \$15 General Admission tickets at Berget Jewelers.

FILMZMP SCREENS CHILEAN MOVIE

"Gloria," a subtitled 2013 film from Chile, is the flick pick for FILMZMP members on May 10th, with social hour at 5 and movie at 6 at the Opera House. "Gloria, a free-spirited middle-aged woman, confronts realities of her whirlwind relationship with a former naval officer whom she meets in Santiago."



A rainy-day windshield phone-shot by Dana Gevelinger, who encounters deer, turkeys and farm vehicles on the road to her job at Kristin Mitchell Design.

WHY CAN'T THEY BE LIKE WE WERE?

(Perfect in Every Way!)

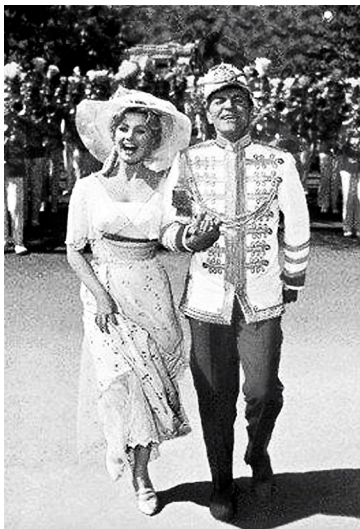
We fill idle moments in conversation with alarming examples of the decay of moral values in our popular culture. And, many times, we drag up the old reliable, "What's the matter with Kids, today?" Fearful adults have been asking that question since the time Socrates was shuffling around the agora, mumbling about the teenager he'd just met.

In "Bye Bye Birdie," the 1963 Broadway musical, the oh-so-typical parents told us, "They're disobedient and disrespectful, noisy, crazy, sloppy, lazy loafers, laughing, singing, dancing morons, with their awful clothes and their rock an' roll, and no one understands anything they say." The Older Generation asked, "Why can't they be like WE were, perfect in every way?"

The very best treatment of Troubled Teens, however, is "Ya Got Trouble," from the 1957 hit, "The Music Man."

Let's visit the Pool Hall in River City, to hear "Professor" Harold Hill, a charlatan, who promises to create a small-town Boys Band with his "think system", which equips a young musician to play well without learning much about music. Oh, and wearing uniforms he says he'll import.

His first task is to convince the townspeople they desperately need the Boys Band, and he does that by pointing out dangerous habits the town's young men have been collecting. Playing pool, for example, instead of noble Billiards. ("Any boob can take and shove a ball in a pocket.") It's "the road to degradation," Hill warns. He speaks of the sinister influence of "some big out-of-town Jasper" (i.e., decline often stems from outside influences), and exposes a moral slippery slope created by the presence of near-beer and the Cubeb cigarettes in the community. "Next thing you know," he says, "they're headin' for the dance at the Armory – libertine men and scarlet women." (Ahah! fear of sexual encounter, spiced up by ragtime music.) Besides, the boys will "fritter away" their free time, which should be spent on their daily chores.



Suddenly, Prof. Hill yells, "Mass-teria!!" At that point in the song, he's actually admitting to his audience that he has INDUCED the mass hysteria that now grips them. But, by that time, the parents are all inside his trap, ready to write the checks for the band's uniforms.

Hill then stands before the town's statue and throws in, seemingly for no particular reason, "Remember the Maine, Plymouth Rock, and the Golden Rule!" (Con artists usually back up their panic pitch with words about the Founders, the Bible, Dangers of Foreign Countries, and the necessity to Love Our Military Forces.)

Playwrite Meredith Willson's sharp satire is tucked into what looks and sounds like Midwestern Americana. And, as you leave the theater, you realize how long we've been stewing about the natural evolution of normal adolescents, most of their teenage foibles resolved by merely growing up. You also learn lessons on gullibility, and the power of fear, how easily you can be whipped up over imaginary threats if a clever con man can push all the right hot-buttons.

The Trouble in River City vaporizes in a happy ending and a big parade.

The boys' parents realize their offspring do what *they* did when they were teens, and cast aside irrational fears.

Prof. Hill doesn't skip town with the parents' dollars. He stays, reformed by the love of Marian the Librarian.

Fast-forward to 2015, when parents gnash teeth over cell phones, video games, haircuts, hormones, and all the old bugaboos that are present-day counterparts to 1912's Cubeb cigarettes, low-slung knickers and hidden dime novels. Then, now, and in future days, they're just familiar milestones on the road to adulthood.

So, for the finale, everyone marches to "76 Trombones," and the boys keep the beat and play all the right notes.

Yer darn tootin'!

**"Go into the arts. I'm not kidding.
The arts are not a way to make a living.
They are a very human way of making life more bearable.
Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly,
is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake.
Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories.
Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem.
Do it as well as you possibly can.
You will get an enormous reward.
You will have created something."**



Kurt Vonnegut

FLOTSAM & JETSAM

BY FRANK BEAMAN, EDITOR

It just feels so right, after a four-month “hibernation,” to sit at my familiar desk, in my favorite house, in the town I love, and type out a few words to the faithful readers of this odd little publication.

The power and playfulness of words is a life force for this Class of ‘55 English major. As an idealistic young journalist I pledged “to write truthful words that tell truthful stories about a messy world.” That’s still my goal. So, in this newspaper, I pile words on a gray page to give readers a lonely alternative to what journalism has become: Info-Tainment, the fleeting images and sound bites we’ve come to accept as Truth in on-screen America.

As impatient consumers of Breaking News, Facebook and The Buzz, we don’t take the time to chase down the Truth. And, sad to say, the popular media lack either the knowledge or the courage to declare an Untruth or Halftruth what it is: a Lie.

We’re drowning in Lies.

We’re drowning, as well, in fuzzy platitudes and slogans that sound sorta historical, sorta nostalgic, sorta patriotic, but don’t stand up to examination. The currently popular declaration, “We’re gonna take our country back!” is empty rhetoric that begs questions that are seldom asked, seldom answered.

So, yes, words matter.

We live in the Information Age, right? No, no, not really! It’s more accurately an age of mere *Communication*, with bits and pieces of information floating around in front of us, fragments that must be fashioned into real enlightenment.

And there are experts out there who are well-paid to blur the line between fact and fiction.

In my view, one of the most interesting contests between fact and fiction has always been American History. We are awash in history, you might think, with officials devoted to preservation, magazines that feature historic temples listed next to nearby motels, best-selling books, movies and TV documentaries, and weekend Civil War reenactments.

But, much of this kind of history is the stuff of camera-ready prime-time mythology, visual images and symbols used in a work of art. We like the Past as romance, not a slog through the library stacks. We want to believe the lads in the cemetery at Deadwood were killed during six-shooter street duels. Nope. In most cases they were shot in the back by their adversary. No warning. At long range. With a rifle.

Yes, it’s true, “The Truth Will Set Us Free,” as we were taught in childhood. But the Truth is sometimes ugly.

So, we sometimes change the Truth to suit our need for something more, er, palatable. We paper over the ugly facts, stuff the facts into a bottom drawer in university archives, selectively study the positive stories, or simply sacrifice the Truth to a handy Whitewash.

Filmmaker Ken Burns taught millions of Americans about the Civil War a few years ago, but he’s not likely to take on embarrassing sagas such as the Indian Displacement or U.S. Intervention in Latin America.

So, we grow up with folk lore and tinkered textbooks.

Here are two points we need to remember: 1) History is not WHAT HAPPENED in, say, 1776; it is a STORY about what happened in 1776. And, 2) History, even when it’s ugly, can be oddly reassuring because it CONTINUES. (Or, as Arnold Toynbee expressed it, “History is just one damn thing after another.”)

History’s stories change, in the snail-paced evolution of Truth. History is work in progress, constantly being written and re-written by historians with divergent beliefs and different audiences. Some of their accounts will be a quest for Truth, some less so. Furthermore, there are some who use history as propaganda for political or marketing advantage; and, face it, don’t we see examples of that every day?

That’s why it’s important to read more than a single account to learn the real story of an historic event or historic personality. The hard work falls to the reader, to the consumer of the new biography, the viewer of the TV series, the digger searching for Truth.

It’s worth the effort because ignorance of the past invites despair in the present day, the suspicion that “somehow, something has gone badly wrong with almost everything.” Although some of our history is sugar-coated, much of what we see and hear today is wrapped in melancholy, and we’re told 70% of us think the nation is in decline. Living with poisoned politics, fear and cynicism, many of us are in virtual paralysis.

“It’s an Age of Anxiety,” we say, and we ask, “What can one person do?”

History, with its long reach into the Past, provides at least a partial answer.

History teaches that we have always -- always -- lived in an Age of Anxiety, and what we can do is survive by outsmarting, outworking, or simply outliving our troubles.

Those who came of age in the Eisenhower era (you know, “back when a hamburger cost 25 cents”), often entertain friends and family

with their Crises List: Urban Riots, Civil Rights, the Cold War, Space Race, Viet Nam, Watergate and the murders of JFK, RFK and MLK. And, the Rise of Computers.

But, think about what the generation preceding the 1950’s had to deal with: the Titanic in 1912, World War I, Women’s Voting Rights, Prohibition, the Stock Market Crash, the Great Depression, A. Hitler and the Holocaust, World War II and the Atomic Bomb.

Survivors of that era are “The Greatest Generation.” Actually, like all other historic groups, they were *survivors*.

Which is to say, as Mark Twain did, that “although history doesn’t repeat itself, it usually rhymes.”

We might take comfort in the knowledge that today’s dire circumstances are much like those in ancient Rome, or 17th century London, or any other time in history.

Yeah, I know. It isn’t much to hang onto.

As for the question, “What can one person do?”

Once more, history offers an answer. Look no further than elsewhere on this page, to read about Gaylord Nelson’s seven-year crusade to produce the one-day event that made the fledgling Environmental Movement a front-page story. Sen. Nelson’s story is impressive because Earth Day forced a lazy public and a reluctant Congress to go to work for the endangered planet.

The story of Earth Day 1970 should ring bells in 2015.

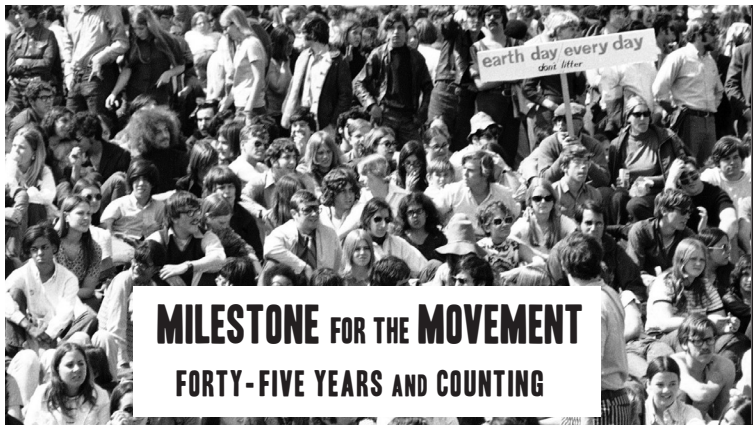
Today’s world is moving in two opposing directions. Government and Big Business represent globalization and corporate supremacy, and it’s clear that those with money and power will not willingly relinquish their control to regulators or reformers. We The People, however, are starting to forge a different future, built on a human scale, to replace discredited institutions with a new economy. It’s all about Living Local, where We the People matter.

More and more, we realize that only a Social Movement, the kind of grassroots effort that springs from the hearts, minds, and throats of private citizens, will cut through the greed and gridlock to bring about healthy change. Earth Day 1970 did exactly that.

Although there were many worthwhile observations of Earth Day 2015, one of the biggest was a rock music concert on the National Mall. Sadly, that’s often today’s kind of activism: we sing a song, lay a wreath, light a candle, buy a brightly-colored bracelet.

That won’t get it done.

Gaylord Nelson, and history, will show us the *right* way.



MILESTONE FOR THE MOVEMENT FORTY-FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING

Earth Day 1970 became the largest public demonstration in the nation’s history; and, almost overnight, the country launched drastic measures to deal with the deterioration of the global ecology.

It wasn’t a day of protest.

It was a day of study, designed to make slumbering Americans aware of a host of grave threats to our environment.

Made suddenly aware, on a single day, an aroused American public called for action, and got it.

We revere two Wisconsin conservationists, John Muir and Aldo Leopold, but it is Gaylord Nelson, twice Governor and then U.S. Senator, who gave the Environmental Movement its most dramatic moment—the huge Earth Day Teach-Ins of April 22, 1970.

Seven years earlier, with John Kennedy in the White House, Sen. Nelson had proposed a nationwide event to educate Americans about the need for strong environmental reform.

(In the 1960’s, the condition of our natural world was a backburner issue—no Big Name advocates, no speeches, and scant attention paid to 160 years of delay and decay.)

Nelson pushed his bold idea through Congress, the news media, and the nation’s colleges; and, when Earth Day finally arrived, 20,000,000 citizens hit the streets and tens of millions more listened in classrooms, symposiums and on the broadcast networks. The day became an instant tradition, an important annual event with landmark status in the politics, conversations, and literature of the country.

For the next ten years, both political parties and Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter remembered the shouts of the Earth Day crowd and passed twenty-eight major environmental laws affecting the nation’s air, water, wetlands and endangered species.

The condition of the planet had entered the political arena and became part of popular culture. Activists who believed reform was possible gained new hope and new power.

But the Movement, whose voice was transformed from a murmur to a roar on Earth Day 1970, enjoyed only a decade of decisive progress. The anti-regulatory Reagan years, the indifference of most of the subsequent administrations, and the orchestrated, well-funded rise of anti-environmental skeptics has slowed the 1970s momentum of the Movement, and dimmed its high hopes.



Gaylord Nelson

Today, most of the young students who carried the signs on Earth Day 1970 are carrying Medicare cards. America heatedly debates the ethics, science, and politics of our natural habitat. The arguments, which have gone global, often produce more heat than light.

And, sadly, the answers to the major environmental questions—reform, rescue or retreat—are obscured by the fog of ideological conflict between those who revere our natural resources and those who believe man holds dominion over nature and should be free to plunder the planet’s resources for the marketplace.

Gaylord Nelson was the “go-to” man for many Wisconsin initiatives. He was dubbed

“the Conservation Governor” while he was working to clean up Lake Michigan and overhauling the state’s natural resources program. He built a Youth Conservation Corps

to create Green jobs for unemployed young people. He used a cigarette tax to build the Outdoor Recreation Action Program, which acquired one million acres for parks and wilderness areas. Reflecting his small-town roots in Clear Lake, WI and the influence of Bob LaFollette, his popular measures catapulted Nelson into the U.S. Senate in 1962.

Reading about the life of this man, you learn he was one of only three U.S. senators opposed to the VietNam war, he was a strong advocate for civil rights, he battled poverty, and fought the abuses of the pharmaceutical industry. His love of nature included preservation efforts for the Appalachian Trail and a nine-year crusade to preserve Wisconsin’s Apostle Islands as a National Park.

And, most notably, he planted the seeds for awareness and change in the nation’s environment with his singular vision for the first Earth Day.

Gaylord Nelson was tireless, but not shrill. He worked for sensible, attainable goals. He stood up for his ideals, but treated his opponents with respect. He recruited his rivals and brought them around to his side. That kind of bipartisan leadership earned him a nickname from his congressional colleagues, as “The Conscience of the Senate.”

Nelson donated his papers to the Wisconsin Historical Society (1,000 boxes of documents, audio recordings, films and photos). The collection rested unexplored until 2006, but has now been organized and placed on the WHS website.