

THE TIMES OF MINERAL POINT

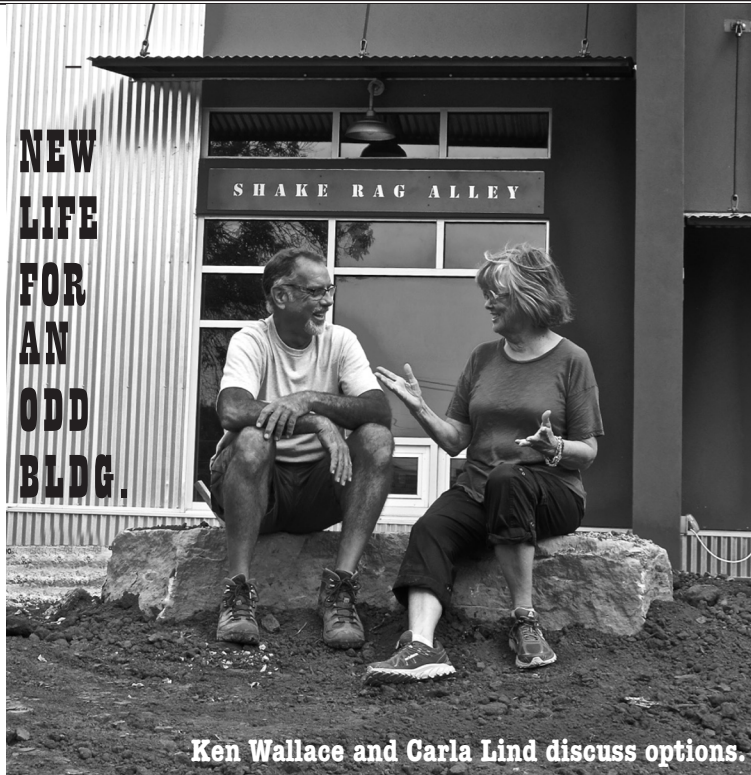
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October, 2015

WORDS AND OCCASIONAL WHIMSEY TO AMUSE AND INFORM THE LOYAL READER



Ken Wallace and Carla Lind discuss options.

The Lind Pavilion Opens with Fanfare

Most Pointers remember the building as a NAPA Auto Parts store, an architectural ugly duckling in the style of the hastily-built World War II military barracks. For many, the shiny, round-shouldered tin building atop the hill at the Five Points intersection was simply, "the Quonset Hut."

The building is transformed, and Shake Rag Alley School of the Arts has a significant new asset, the new Lind Pavilion, refurbished as a noteworthy example of repurposing that has made something odd and old into something new and dramatically useful.

A Grand Opening on Sat., October 3rd (from 7-10 p.m.) celebrates the completion of three years of construction. Plans call for tours, music by Point Five, a Silent Auction with donated art works, the auction of an original folk painting by Rick Harris, and a repeat of last year's popular Art Lottery, in which "Everybody Wins!" Your \$50 ticket is guaranteed to return a sample of original art by one of fifty participating local artists.

The community will also benefit from the 3200 square foot building. A "mixed-use and rental" facility, the Pavilion will accommodate up to 150 people attending classes, lectures, theater, workshops, retreats, reunions, weddings, and other events. Shake Rag

Alley staged several events at the center while construction was under way, and discovered the building can be quickly and economically reconfigured for a variety of uses by those who rent the space. Thus, the Pavilion will function as a "learning center," bringing Pointers together in harmonious surroundings.

The evolution of the building is an inspiration. In 2012, after a long period on the real estate market, the auto parts store was sold to entrepreneur Jay Homan, and when Homan decided to leave the city, he offered the store to Shake Rag Alley and donated his \$5,000 earnest money payment to the school.

Early funds were raised with a MacArthur Foundation matching grant secured by John and Linda Hurley.

Construction began in 2013. Architect Amber Westerman and Building Contractor Ken Wallace were chosen to design and reconstruct the run-down structure. "We felt it was important to use local people wherever possible," says Shake Rag Board President Mike Christensen, "not a big work crew from out of the city." Christensen, Board Members and Building Committee Volunteers all heap praise on Westerman and Wallace for their flexibility, patience, and initiative.

As work progressed Shake Rag Board Members and generous donors provided the dollars to keep the hammers swinging. The Hurleys, Joan Greenwood, Tim Marr and others led the way.

Then, the Linds stepped up. Board Member John Lind and his wife, Carla, brought early enthusiasm to the project and sponsored a \$20,000 matching grant to fund several months of construction. When John Lind succumbed to cancer last year, his widow's "bright and passionate efforts" took the project still further. In an exchange with the Shake Rag Board, Carla Lind pledged to provide the necessary funds to "finish the job."

And, in April 2015, she took the title "Project Manager," to supervise the hands-on work of day-by-day construction and dealing with choices and options to solve problems.

She says her family's intense involvement with the project has provided healing for the tragic loss of her husband. "The building is a reminder of John's artistic and impulsive sides, a tribute to his love and commitment to Iowa County." She praised the planners and work crew, describing them as visionaries. "Every day, I am more amazed at the creativity and generosity they possess."

She added, "I imagine John looking down from the Pavilion's mezzanine at the artists working below, lifting a glass of wine and saying to himself, 'now this is what its all about'."

That was one of John Lind's favorite expressions.

New Public Art on Pavilion Site

Part of the excitement at the October 3rd Grand Opening of the Lind Pavilion is the installation of a significant example of public art, a joint project of the Shake Rag Alley School and Arts Mineral Point (AMP).

"Comma" is the work of sculptor Lee Badger, and has been a traveling art work since its creation in 1996. AMP's Peter Flanary led the effort to bring the work to the city, and said Badger was captivated by the Lind Pavillion site, where it will rest for two years.

The ten-foot steel and ferro-concrete sculpture is a study of curvature in line, plane, shape, volume and dynamic space.

22ND FALL ART TOUR: LOCAL STUDIOS OPEN OCTOBER 16 TO 18TH



It's always a pleasant drive through Wisconsin's hills and valleys in the fall season, but it's also an opportunity to take home a local art treasure.

The 22nd Annual Fall Art Tour brings thousands of art-loving tourists to a circuit of Mineral Point, Dodgeville, Spring Green and Baraboo. This year, forty-four studios will open their doors to the public, giving visitors time to meet sixty-three artists and guest-artists, to watch them at work, and purchase their art.

The studios are as colorful as the fall landscapes. For the three days of the Tour, Oct. 16 through 18, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., visitors get a glimpse of

the artist's workplace and enjoy rare demonstrations of their craft: painting, sculpture, pottery, weaving, jewelry, woodworking, glass, photography and more.

In Mineral Point the headquarters for information about the free, self-guided tour is the Johnston Gallery, at 245 High Street. Tom and Diana Johnston have coordinated the event since its first year.

The drive between locations adds to the enjoyment of the colorful weekend. GPS coordinates and maps are available online and signs will direct you to all the locations on the tour.

Info at fallarttour.com.

Weaving Comes to the Incubator AMP Drafts Plans for Donated Looms

Three weaving looms of the traditional style are being set up this month at the Cannery Arts Incubator on Water Street.

Pointers Laura and Gary Cisler have donated looms of various sizes to the Incubator's artist space, to give interested persons an opportunity to learn the art of weaving and give experienced weavers a place to practice their craft.

As the looms are installed, a committee of Arts Mineral Point (AMP) will discuss and establish standards for the use of the looms in the large room shared by local artists.

In the late 1960s, artisan Ken Colwell, a gifted teacher and weaver, started a movement

by teaching and encouraging the art of traditional weaving in Mineral Point. Colwell inspired a generation with his enthusiasm and enjoyed an international reputation as a master of hand weaving.

AMP's Brian Stuart said, "It is our hope that the generous donation of traditional looms made by the Cislers will re-ignite the imaginations of a new generation, and make Mineral Point a leading weaving center."

The Cannery Arts Incubator and AMP's volunteer management team plan workshops to provide community access to looms and traditional weaving instruction.

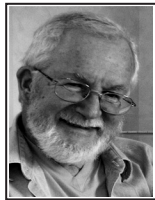
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OF HISTORIC UNDERSTANDING



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with delivery on the first Tuesday of the month.

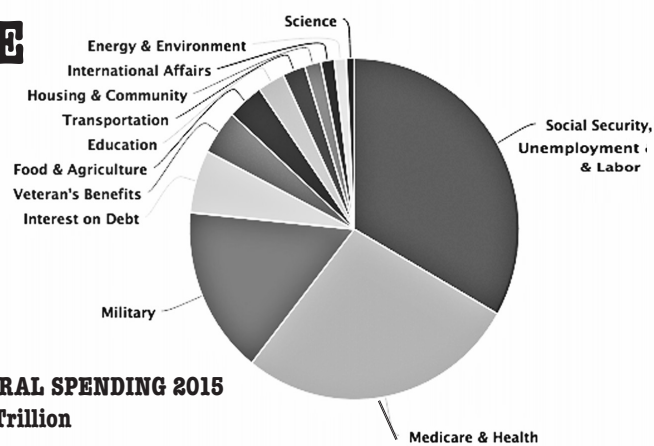
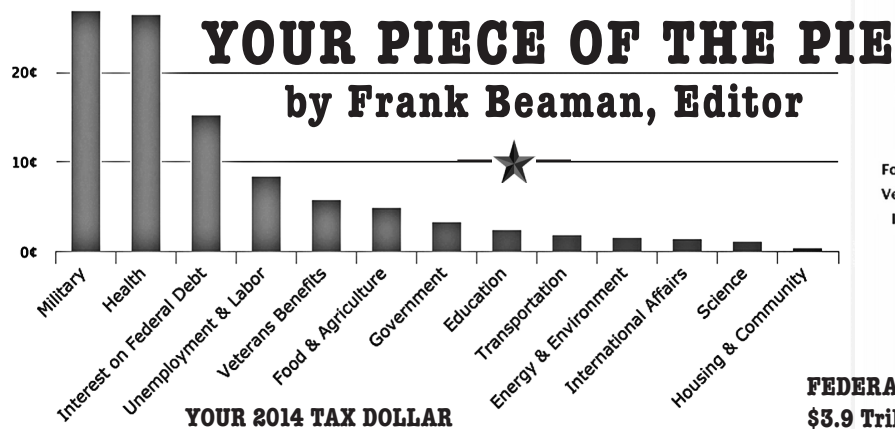
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WHAT'S HAPPENING?
Check S'andee Beaman's Online Events Calendar

Go to <http://hwy23events.wordpress.com> And simply click on an event to get all the details.



I was shocked—shocked!—to learn the state's share of my personal property tax was likely to go down by a single dollar. I'd been counting on the earlier estimate from the Governor, which talked about a decrease of 10 or 11 bucks.

I used the dollar to buy part of a cup of coffee, and got to thinking about how many times we are surprised, pleasantly or otherwise, by the ocean of numbers placed in front of us to sell a product, service or point of view, or to exaggerate, distort, shade or hide the truth.

Statistics are seductive, whether they reflect facts or are rigged as proof—or as protection—for a falsehood. And, in an age of cynicism, all numbers have become suspect and need scrutiny because the truth is often overwhelmed by rhetoric, advertising lingo, propaganda, and the widespread practice best described by the old barnyard term, bullshit.

We buy into the words and numbers that support our own beliefs, values and prejudices. And, in these complex and confusing times, we grab a slogan or a popular falsehood and make it a believable myth.

Government spending is the richest field for myth-makers.

Take Foreign Aid: for as long as it's been one of our government's programs, people have fumed, "Well, if we didn't give away so much to the rest of the world, we'd be able to fix our roads, bridges and schools!"

Actually, Foreign Aid is well under 1% of the U.S. budget. At \$23 billion (2013), it's a lot of dollars, but not a major share of total spending.

Or, take the popular punching bags, "waste and abuse." A bevy of government reports on fraud and abuse in federal Food Stamps, Welfare, and Unemployment Insurance programs say "improper payments" consume roughly 2-4% of each program's payouts, a rate that has declined from near 10% a decade ago.

The non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) answered my e-mail inquiry by saying "improper payments", government-wide, totaled \$124 billion in fiscal 2014." The GAO took pains to point out, "all fraud involving a federal payment is considered an 'improper payment,' but not all improper payments prove to be fraud. In truth, much of reported loss is due to government staff errors, not active fraud. (Decades of congressional cuts in the funding for federal agencies have left agents unable to process claims, let alone detect fraud.

Hiring more investigators might recoup billions of dollars, but the government has shed jobs, not added them.)

Most reported fraud within the food-stamp (SNAP) program is actually supermarket "trafficking," (the exchange of food stamps for cash). Rip-offs by food stamp beneficiaries are only 1% of the "errors."

Total health care spending in America is a massive \$2.7 trillion. No one knows for sure how much of that total is being embezzled, but the FBI pegs the cost for Medicare fraud at anywhere from 3% to 10%, saying much of the problem stems from false and inflated claims filed by doctors, clinics and hospitals, not wrongdoing by patients.

Voter fraud? A Loyola University Law School professor recently found only 31 credible incidents of "voter impersonation" since year 2000— out of more than 1 billion ballots cast.

To round out the picture, toss in fraud by defense contractors—perhaps as much as \$100 billion per year, roughly in the same range as Medicare and Medicaid combined.

It's hard to come up with definitive numbers for government spending. It depends on who you ask. Liberals say fraud levels are low, while conservatives insist they're astronomically high.

Government fraud, while a genuine problem, is roughly in line with fraud losses everywhere else. Appallingly, fraud has become a "cost of doing business." A typical business loses 5% of its revenue to fraud each year, and even when fraud is detected, 40-50% of the victims—banks, manufacturing, and government or private administration—don't recover their losses.

Bottom Line: we're talking about big money, but fraud isn't what is consuming our government, and eliminating fraud won't solve the government's spending problem.

The real elephants in the room are entitlement programs, interest on the debt and military spending.

And, once more, it's hard to get a handle on the budget's true numbers because the budget process borders on the incoherent. (NOTE: doing the federal budget is NOTHING like drafting the typical household budget.)

The U.S. Constitution gives the "power of the purse" to Congress but does not specify how Congress should exercise this power or how to put the budget together. So, in the evolution of the nation, the budget process has become a

jigsaw puzzle. The President proposes spending, and the House and Senate must determine the *appropriation* of funds—how much money will go to different agencies and programs. Congress must also pass *authorization* laws each year to give the government authority to actually *spend* the money. Authorizations often cover multiple years, so Congress must re-authorize some laws to continue the program in question, or protect certain spending from the risk of a yearly vote by making that spending "direct or mandatory."

Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, Veteran's Benefits and Debt Repayment are the "mandatory" expenses of the government. They make up 2/3rds of the total budget. The rest of the federal spending, the other 1/3rd, is considered "discretionary," And, when the President and Congress disagree, this is where the arguments start, and seem never to end.

Facing a September 30th deadline, recent days have produced news accounts of the Battle of the Budget along with threats to "sequester" or even "shut down the government" when the budget isn't in place by October 1st. At that point, Congress can be forced to a "continuing resolution" to keep the doors open. Or, worse yet, an "omnibus" bill that historically has served as a catch-all for political whim and pork-barrel corruption.

Even if the process were to move smoothly, the federal budget is, quite clearly, a document that is cobbled together, a spending plan determined by political decisions made under pressure while the ship of state is under way.

It's even messier than it sounds. The state of the economy, party politics, differing philosophies, public pressure, lobbying and campaign contributions all play a role in the formation of the federal budget.

More than half of total "discretionary" spending is the cost of maintaining our huge military force, at roughly \$600 billion. The political arguments are long and loud, carried out with slogans that change with the day's headlines. The central question is "war or peace?" but the heavy hand of the military/industrial complex is also on display.

The Pentagon's share of the budget has steadily increased, even as the bills come in. Our scrimmage in Iraq cost \$818 billion (the war was initially estimated to cost \$60 billion). Add "Homeland Security," to measure our thirteen years of

the "War on Terror," and the total cost climbs to \$1.5 trillion.

"The War on Drugs" costs taxpayers \$51 billion a year.

For the current "limited" action against ISIS, military spending is \$615,500 an hour.

The 2015-16 federal budget, submitted by Pres. Obama in March of 2014, calls for \$3.34 trillion in revenue and \$3.9 trillion in spending, which leaves a budget deficit equal to 3% of the gigantic U.S. economy.

Government income is gathered from three sources: 47% from Individual Income Taxes, 34% from Payroll Taxes paid by workers/employers, and 11% from Corporate Taxes.

If you pay an "average" U.S. Income Tax bill (about \$12,000), your payment is allocated into hundreds of budgetary pigeon holes. You'll pay about \$2,750 to the Pentagon. Energy Efficiency and Renewable Power programs will cost you only \$8.24. [See chart above]

Obviously, we're talking about our national *priorities* here, and, sadly, our fractured government makes the choices and holds the purse strings.

And, in spite of the debate from politicians, pundits and public opinion polls, our big priorities — the vital choices we make as a nation — change little from year to year.

The American electorate shares some of the blame. We voted our leaders into office. We don't work to stay well-informed. Reforms stall. We love to grumble about the cost of government, but we've made costly-but-popular programs virtually untouchable.

And, under the banner of "national security," we have built a mechanism for War with expenditures higher than the military spending of the next twelve nations combined.

The federal budget, at \$3.9 trillion, is about 21% of the national economy, estimated at \$18.124 trillion. [How big is that? Well, a *million* seconds is about 11.5 days, a *billion* seconds is about 32 years while a *trillion* seconds is equal to 32,000 years]

To support that \$18 trillion national economy, we are told YOU have to make cash registers ring. Right now, the U.S. treasury counts on *consumer spending* to prop up almost 70% of the U.S. economy.

So, when we are told it's our duty to "save less and spend more at the mall," it sounds like a joke, but it's not.

Aren't numbers FUN?

SOURCE: Office of Management & Budget (OMB), Nat'l. Priorities Project, Gov't. Accounting Office (GAO), the Atlantic Magazine.

THIS JUST IN --



A BIG GAS BUILDUP UNDER THE CAPITOL DOME

On April 1, 1933, the front page of the Madison Capital Times gravely announced that the state capitol building lay in ruins after a series of mysterious explosions.

The newspaper's account attributed the explosions to "large quantities of gas, generated by many weeks of verbose debate in Senate and Assembly chambers."

The paper ran this picture, by modern standards clearly a phony image, but readers in 1933 were fooled. And angry.

And, those who phoned the Editor told him they didn't like the April Fools joke one bit. (Many found it un-funny because, during the 1880s, the building actually *had* collapsed, killing several people.

IN 1842, MURDER IN THE ASSEMBLY

Under the Capitol dome, shouts and lamentations are nothing new, but in 1842 two members of the Assembly let their rage get the better of them, and the tragic result was murder most foul.

At a public session of the legislature, Charles Arndt of Green Bay addressed his colleagues and strongly implied that another member, James Vineyard, had told a lie on behalf of a political appointee. News reporters said Vineyard responded to Arndt's implied accusation "with language both violent and insulting."

The outburst led to a quick adjournment of the session, but when all others filed out of the chamber, Arndt stayed behind. He then approached Vineyard's desk and, as the Press put it, "requested Vineyard to retract his insults, which he refused to do. In fact, Vineyard repeated the heated and offensive words."

Arndt smacked Vineyard in the head. And, before anyone could step between the two men, "Vineyard moved back a pace, pulled a pistol, and shot Arndt dead."

In the spectator's gallery, Arndt's elderly father, who was in Madison for a visit with his noteworthy son, instead witnessed his murder.

The Territorial Council expelled Vineyard. He stood trial in his home in Green County, and the jury found him "Not Guilty." He was reelected in 1849 and promptly joined the crowd in the California Gold Rush. The violence, it would seem, was only a memory.



FILMZMP

This month's screening is a Belgian-French-Italian film written and directed by the Dardenne brothers.

"Two Days, One Night," carries its viewers to an industrial town to experience the plight of young Sandra, a wage-earner who must visit sixteen co-workers to try to persuade them to turn down a bonus — the only way Sandra can keep her job.

At the Opera House, with Social hour at 5, movie at 6 p.m. Guests of members are welcome with a \$10 ticket.



ENCORE

A Second Time for Krainik Talk

Art historian Cliff Krainik is returning to the Walker House on Oct. 24 for a second illustrated lecture on the "Life, Love, and Art of Max and Ava Fernekes." His dinner presentation coincides with the final days of the Fernekes exhibit at the Pendarvis Historic Site.

Krainik gave his first presentation on the Fernekes to a sold out audience in July, and promises to add new material to the October presentation.

Space is limited; call 608-553-0728 for reservations, or contact the Walker House.

2ND ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARTY AT GRAY DOG DELI



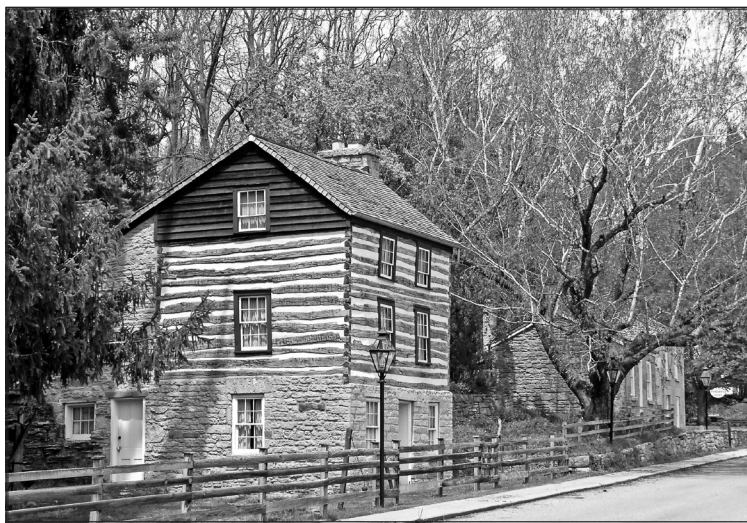
Friday, Oct. 30th from 8:00 p.m. 'til midnight, a "costume optional" holiday event with games, music, dancing and a costume contest. Snacks and some beverages are provided.

HALLOWEEN PARADE

On Oct. 31st, slip into your COSTUME and walk High Street at 4 p.m.

THEN, VISIT WITH OTHER GOBLINS

After the Halloween Parade, visit Shake Rag Alley and meet friendly costumed characters (not scary) who pass out treats at the school's historic buildings. A long-running Mineral Point tradition, it's fun for the family, adults and kids, a chance to don a wacky costume and say hello to other free spirits. From 5 to 7 p.m.



I



MINERAL POINT

by Frank Beaman

The Chamber's Joy Gieseke recently issued an invitation to readers of the Chamber of Commerce E-newsletter, asking fellow Pointers to write a statement about their *emotional* ties to the city. As a title, she suggested, "Why I Love to Live in Mineral Point."

The response was sparse. That's understandable: people will speak out on community issues but may be hesitant to gush, especially in a public statement, about their feelings. Nevertheless, we're all aware there IS an emotional link between cities and the people who live and work in them. And, successful cities are the ones that encourage and exploit the emotions and enthusiasms of their residents.

It's all spelled out in a book Gieseke recommends: *Love Where You Live*, by Peter Kageyama; and, after a quick read, this newspaper joins in touting the pages of that book as both a tonic and an inspiration for Mineral Pointers.

Kageyama opens a wide door for residents, calling for wider participation in the activities that support and strengthen a city's way of life. "We can all be city builders in some way," he says. "We can become Co-Creators—citizens who make their city better, more interesting, more lovable."

Kageyama says Co-Creators often work without a title or an office. They're usually not elected officials, philanthropists or noted "experts" in any field. They're simply passionately loyal to their city and optimistic about their city's growth, calling for constant improvement in their city's quality of life and promoting an attitude of happiness among their city's residents."

We recognize Co-Creators, don't we? They are the people who turn up and turn out for events, the volunteers, the backers, the boosters, the true believers, who invest their time and their treasure because of their trust in the rightness of the community and the ripeness of civic action. Co-creators believe in ideas, in possibilities, and in positives over negatives. They aren't frozen in time, waiting for committee action, a grant, a vote from a Board or Council. Instead, they are inclined to move ahead by enlivening

the city's *emotional* climate and negotiating change by sharing enthusiasms with neighbors.

Kageyama is an advocate for "emotional truth," which he considers more authentic than marketing spin or a fabrication that's only *technically* true. "We have pretty good radar, and when something rings emotionally true we sense its truth, so we can convince others it's true and can get things done."

He suggests this exercise: "Look, candidly, at the city's messages to the outside world. Ask if the messages convey emotional truth or just reflect clever branding and slick promotion. Then, make that "truth" question the litmus test for the continuing work of building the city."

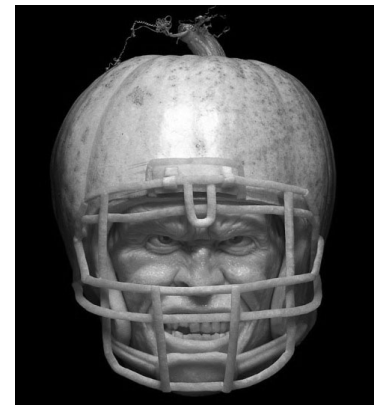
He also warns Co-creators, who push for constructive change, to recognize that change often frightens careful people, so Co-creators must be sensible and patient enough to show everyone the benefit of the proposed change. "Loving your city," Kageyama points out, "is not blind or impulsive action; it is an argument for common sense, for clear thinking, for spirited discussion, based on the belief that "the collective good produces a healthy balance."

Pointers who love their city and openly declare it become *consumers* of their city. They buy local, from "high touch" friends and neighbors. Their instincts keep their life rooted in their community, not in the far away shopping mall.

As the Times suggested last month, they look for ways to "Go Deep, Not Wide," to dig into the elements that make Mineral Point different from other places, to protect and promote those native characteristics, and to grow the city by pointing out its virtues.

Okay, Ms. Gieseke, count the author of this article as one who'll go public with his love for Mineral Point. I drove into town one day thirteen years ago, spent a few hours, and was surprised to hear myself say, "I want to live here!"

It's not an uncommon story. The charming city and its friendly people still have a firm grip on my affection; and, every day, I ask myself how I can best return the love this good and generous town has shown me.



THE LEGEND OF STINGY JACK

Ever wonder why we carve pumpkins for Halloween? And who the "Jack" of Jack O'Lantern fame is?

The tradition of carving "jack o'lanterns" originated in Ireland in the 1800s and began not with pumpkins, but with turnips, beets and potatoes. The custom is tied to an Irish myth about a man nicknamed "Stingy Jack."

Stingy Jack, according to legend, invited the Devil to have a drink with him, but, being stingy, refused to pay for the drink. Instead, clever Jack convinced the Devil to turn himself into a coin Jack could use to buy their drinks. Once the Devil did so, Jack kept the money, slipping it into his pocket alongside a silver cross. That cross prevented the Devil from changing back to his original form.

Jack eventually freed the Devil and made him promise he would not bother Jack for one year. He also made the Devil promise that if Jack died, the Devil could not claim his soul. The next year, Jack again tricked the Devil. This time, he talked him into climbing a tree to pick some fruit. Once the Devil was in the tree, Jack carved a cross on the tree so the Devil couldn't come back down until he promised not to bother Jack for ten more years.

Not too long after, when Jack finally did die, God would not allow him into Heaven. The Devil, keeping his promise not to claim Jack's soul, would not allow Jack into Hell either. So he sent Jack away with only a burning coal to light his way in the night. For his makeshift lantern, Jack placed the coal inside a hollowed-out turnip.

He's been roaming the world ever since. The Irish dubbed him, "Jack of the Lantern" and later as "Jack O'Lantern."

People in Ireland and Scotland began making their own versions of Jack's lanterns by carving scary faces and figures into turnips and potatoes, and placing the veggies in windows or by doors to scare away evil spirits.

And, Irish immigrants brought this tradition with them to the United States, where they found a native fruit, the pumpkin, was a perfect object for carrying on the holiday's carving tradition.

"The trouble with finding quotes on the Internet is determining whether or not they are genuine."

—Abraham Lincoln



"Nurse, I think he'll need a month to recover!"

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

BY FRANK BEAMAN, EDITOR

For several years now, I've chosen to believe I have a young man's mind tucked in an old man's body. Well, the body is proving the master of the mind, in a few painful and awkward ways.

There may be no one more boring than an Old Timer who recites his medical chart to anyone who will listen, so I'll be concise. I am to have back "fusion" surgery on Oct. 2nd, and the recovery period is a lengthy one.

I'm infused by the hope I'll "get my legs back." I'm quite optimistic about the outcome, but I'm realistic, too, so I am opting for a month out of the Editor's chair in front of my computer, to aid in a fairly long period of rehab.

So, no November issue.

Look for the Times in early December. And, look for a few changes in the newspaper's "look" and "feel."



Back in the day, movie-goers sat in front of BIG screens, not little ones, when we first heard this line in a fictional drama: **"I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more!!"**

Forty years ago! But that line has re-surfaced in politics as the "buzz of the moment."

The 1976 film "Network" was panned by the critics for "wildly overdramatizing the downward spiral of the news media," and for "needlessly calling attention to the American TV audience's appetite for violent spectacle."

Today, it's spooky how much the brilliant movie got right, by accurately predicting the spiral of the media in the 21st Century: "Survivor," YouTube, Rush Limbaugh, Jerry Springer, Honey BooBoo, and the fluffiness of today's News-papersLite.

The movie also shows we modern Americans as captives of the mass media living daily lives of suppressed rage.

In the "Mad as Hell" scene, television anchorman Howard Beale (actor Peter Finch) has

a mental break-down while he's on the air. Ignoring the teleprompter, he breaks into a cinematic soliloquy, a wandering but coherent rant about the state of American society: "Everybody's out of work or scared of losing their job. The dollar buys a nickel's worth. Banks are going bust. Shop-keepers keep a gun under the counter. Punks are running wild in the street. Nobody anywhere seems to know what to do. . .and there's no end to it!"

Beale tells his viewers to go to their windows and yell. And, they DO.

Satire, well done, indicting both the news industry and the viewing public, led along so easily by a command from the man in the glowing box.

And, we hear the echoes of all those angry voices today, don't we?

Speaking of ranting and raving, let me express my gratitude to the readers of this newspaper, who patiently wade through long, gray pages of text when I write a lengthy essay or analysis like the one on Page Two. I know these columns are a difficult task for readers.

Please believe me when I say I don't pretend to be a pundit. Fact is, most of what I write is not original with me. Rather, it's someone else's wisdom.

I follow established patterns of old-fashioned journalism. I'm a scribe, a sponge, curious and attentive to well-informed voices, then transcribing what they say to make their words clear and understandable to my readers. I write "long and strong" in the hope the Times columns will stimulate conversation and further study.

Editorializing? Of course! Every story calls for dozens of editorial decisions: picking the topic in the first place, and then selecting words, quotes, facts and figures that contribute to the story's structure. And, yes, pulling it all together to support a chosen point of view.

I enjoy the independence that comes with writing every word of this newspaper without any undue influence from advertisers or subscribers.

Since I get to pick all the words, I get to take all the heat.

That, it seems to me, is a pretty good trade-off.

FLOTSAM & JETSAM: THE ANNEX

If I am rejected at the Pearly Gates, it will be because some Heavenly Investigator uncovered the most shameful act of my long resume' -- the fact that I once helped to establish a corporate Call Center.

I blush. I hang my head, and, here and now, apologize to everyone who must deal with today's automated and "interactive" telephone gates and the semi-robotic workers who sit in their cubicles and work their computer screens to provide information that solves few problems and satisfies fewer customers.

At the end of a career as a radio news reporter, I drifted into public relations (as tired old broadcasters often do) and spent the end of my work years in Media Relations as the "spokesperson" for Illinois Power Co. (IP), the gas and electric utility for about 1/3rd of the area of Illinois.

In the early 1990s, IP was RE-ENGINEERED (remember that sweeping corporate fad?) and bright young consultants closed thirty Central Illinois offices and channeled all customer operations into a new Telephone Call Center.

As the Media Guy, I tried to put a good face on the fact that we displaced thirty local managers and their local staffs, the hands-on employees who connected the company with communities throughout our service territory. We deprived customers in all those towns of the privilege of contacting someone they knew to register a complaint, a tip or a suggestion. Older customers could no longer walk to the IP office to pay their monthly bill, and in small towns, then, that's something they did. Closed local offices weren't there to sponsor softball teams, give to the United Way, and all those cordial Local Managers could no longer speak to the Kiwanis Club, organize a golf outing, or serve on the City Council.

Most importantly, it now took five times as long to get a lineman (formerly your neighbor) to a trouble spot because the line staff had been cut back and now worked out of one far-away centralized depot.

The recruits in the shiny new Call Center had no idea what to do to help callers from other cities—the operators had never set foot in those towns.

"Re-organization" brought in hot-shot technocrats who fired dozens of good people, arranged buyouts for the old-timers, then moved on to their next project. Left behind in the rubble was the lifetime experience of loyal employees working in local communities — gone, with little recourse, as the company eliminated the positions or filled those jobs with entry-level newcomers.

But, IP's customers may have suffered even more than IP's employees.

Once the Call Center was in place, the utility no longer had a human face.

It had an 800-number.

OCTOBER'S WINNERS & LOSERS

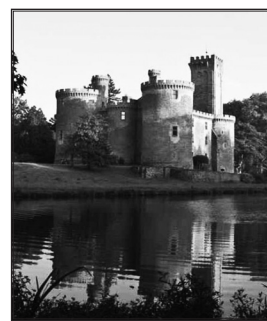


Babe Ruth was considered one of Baseball's Greats. He was also one of the sport's Bad Boys. Ty Cobb, a man hated by his opponents, teammates and the fans, is said to have sharpened the spikes on his shoes so his slide into a stolen base was something to be feared. Rogers Hornsby, a great hitter, was a racist with a gambling habit. Pete Rose famously ran over anyone in his way, and his off-field gambling has blocked him from the Hall of Fame. Reggie Jackson brought his "me-first" persona to the 1970's, then Darryl Strawberry snorted cocaine in the 1980's, and Carlos Zambrano was a loud and obnoxious beanball thrower who got into dugout fights with fellow Cubs. And, a Cub superstar, Sammy Sosa, injected cork into his bat and steroids into his veins. Mark McGwire broke records but turned out to be one of the biggest users of the steroid era, in company with Jose' Canseco, who was both a user and a dealer.

But, it's Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez who give our once-national-pastime its heaviest case of heartburn. Bonds may be the greatest player to ever take the field, but sulked, and fought with everybody. A-Rod, battling suspension, has a net worth estimated at \$300 million.

Wisconsin served up two Brewers Bad Boys: Gary Sheffield and Ryan Braun.

But, an old-timer named Andy Pafko did Wisconsin proud, displaying a good bat, a memorable nickname, and a reputation as one of the friendliest players in the game. A five-time All-Star, Pafko played seventeen seasons, appeared in twenty-four World Series games, and brought the hapless Chicago Cubs to the 1945 Series (their last win) just two years after he broke into the major leagues.



A SENSIBLE SOLUTION

Donald Trump wants a wall, because as we all know there are many rapists and desperados in Mexico. Scott Walker wants a wall because as we all know there are many terrorists in Canada. We once believed our neighbors were friendly, but now we know better.

In times of crisis, it's always wise to take the counsel of Hollywood Stars. Brad Pitt/Angelena Jolie's huge French Estate provides the answer to our border problems: a medieval-style moat! Yes, instead of costly walls, our proud nation could just dig ditches, North and South, fill them with water, install mines to destroy small crowded boats, and heavily stock them with the deadly flesh-eating fish, the piranha.

The castle is another good medieval idea: it's easily defended, with its drop-down gate, and if the bad guys get across the moat you can always dump hot oil on them from the parapets.

"Handy Andy" grew up in Boyceville, Wisconsin, a town without a baseball field. He was signed as a 19-year old by Class D Eau Claire after the team's agent came to the family farm. "He pulled into the driveway in that nice new car," Pafko said, "and it took me about five minutes to get off the threshing machine and change my clothes—then I was gone."

Statistics: lifetime .285 batting average with 976 RBIs. One other statistic: he never made more than \$30,000, and he worked another job during the off-season. Pafko never complained about the money because, as it's always told, "he was all about the game."

Another member of the Cubs, the "wait 'til next year" team of history, left us with words that should be read and reread as the 2015 World Series approaches in late October. Ryne Sandberg (.285 over sixteen seasons from 1981-1997, with nine consecutive Golden Gloves and ten All-Star games) had a disposition bordering on the saintly. When so many players turned sour, "Ryno" was as solid off the diamond as he was on second base.

And, ten years ago, when he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, he said, "I played the game the way it was supposed to be played; I had too much respect for the game to play it any other way. Everything I am today is because of the game of baseball—not the game you see on TV and the movies, but the game I know, a game we played with whiffle bats in the dirt and the alleys. The game was all about doing things right, to make good things happen."

Some of baseball's Millionaire Bad Boys sneered at the Cubs, calling them "losers."

"Handy Andy" and "Ryno," it's abundantly clear, were the losing team's Big Winners.