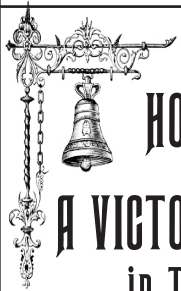


THE TIMES OF MINERAL POINT

ILLUSTRATED



HOLIDAY HISTORY: A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS in Three Acts

Mineral Point Historical Society
Celebrates the Season
with Carols, Crafts & Carousal

The Historical Society will transport holiday celebrants back more than a Century in time with three special events during December 2016.

On Saturday, Dec. 3rd, "A Victorian Christmas" is a holiday singalong, providing a musical background for the annual Gallery Night and Candlelight Shopping event. "Caroling on High (and Commerce)" begins at 6:30 as singers gather at the Cornish Heritage Park, next to the Opera House. Bring a song book if you want to. If a large group turns out, smaller choruses will be formed and will stroll in different directions. It's a casual event; carolers can come and go as they please.

On Dec. 10th, the Gundry home at Orchard Lawn opens its doors at 1 p.m. for an afternoon of ornament-making in the Victorian fashion with popcorn and cranberry garlands, trimmed paper, and the like. Some ornamentation will be used to decorate the Gundry house and Christmas tree. If production is high, participants will be able to take some of their creations home. (Kids come WITH an adult, please.)

On Saturday, Dec. 17th, the Society's major event is a Holiday Open House from 1 to 4 p.m. at Orchard Lawn. Drop in for a short visit or linger for a program with a variety of music, recitations by children, a reading of Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory*, tasty holiday treats, and a hearty singalong of the season's carols.

All three events are free and open to the public; and, in the spirit of Christmas gift-giving, the open house will benefit the Mineral Point Pantry, Pointer Pantry, and the Iowa County Humane Society. If you'd like to help, bring nonperishable food items or cash for the two Pantries. For the Humane Society, bring either a cash donation or take an early look at the wish list on their website and select a gift to bring.

Congratulations to the Board of our Historical Society for giving us a much-needed gift: the Holiday Spirit!



CAUTION: CONSTRUCTION ZONE - WEAR HARD HAT

Let's start with the oldest political chestnut, "The people have spoken."

Yes, an angry army of frustrated Americans have spoken, the Electoral College has listened, and the new Leader of the Free World is a man who proved, during a full year of repulsive campaigning, he had no experience in government, only scant interest in constitutional norms, outlandish policy positions, character flaws, indifference to Truth, and a spotty record on racism, sexism, and most of the other accepted standards for leadership conduct.

He vowed he would win, told voters to "Believe me!" They did. He won.

The election's surprise ending up-ended one of the greatest shows of mainline solidarity in American history. Both political parties, office-holders, diplomats, the news media, and the pundits all banded together to urge us to reject Donald J. Trump. But, Trump didn't hear the establishment's warnings. Instead, he heard the shouts of anti-establishment Americans who felt they'd been left behind in a nation run by snooty and condescending elitists, a nation that had sold out its working middle class, a nation populated by "Others" (the growing minorities who are squeezing "Us," the more familiar and comforting white majority).

White working-class voters and an unexpected number of fed-up Blacks and Latinos marked their ballots to say "No!" to Hillary Clinton and "Yes!" to the reality TV celebrity who labeled the nation "a disaster" and promised he would "shake things up." His improbable designs for radical change were appealing enough to turn blue states red and capture America's Midwest, its Middle Class and its Middle Mind.

Trumpsters may discover radical change won't be quick and easy. Over the past eight years, Republicans have written the playbook on blocking a President, showing Democrats the way.

OXFORD DICTIONARY: THE WORD OF THE YEAR IS "POST-TRUTH."

The Democratic Party *lost* the election as much as the Republican Party won it. The Dems sidetracked Bernie Sanders and insisted on Mrs. Clinton and all her baggage. Sanders might have offered voters a much clearer choice for the "revolutionary" change they were calling for. So, Democrats must learn hard lessons and party big-wigs should recognize the Donkey has wandered off the pathway that made the party the home of the working class.

We hear the clash of class warfare with an out-of-touch Royalty battling a fighting-mad mob of Commoners, an Old Order of Whites threatened by growing Ethnic Minorities, City Folks sneering at their Country Cousins, and Cutthroat Capitalism spawning corrosive levels of Income Inequality.

A workable truce to end these wars seems distant. Our greatest hope lies in our history. The Founding Fathers produced the American Constitutional system, which has been solid, stable, robust and self-correcting, and it has been vindicated again and again after questionable elections. Our system is designed to absorb political bluster, waves of fanaticism, war fever, ignorance, mediocrity, criminal behavior, corruption, and much more.

If Trump is serious (who really knows?), and if Congress and the American public go along with him, we may experience a dismantling of the experiment called democracy. Our challenge is to try to comprehend the forces that elected Donald Trump and try to channel that angry energy into something productive. We the People, if wise and courageous enough, will be able to pursue the Common Good.

Right now, however, we have no idea what our country will look like under a Trump regime.

Our history tells us that, with hope and hard work, we will survive.

But not necessarily unscathed.



Film Fest: "Boffo!"

"Boffo" is theater slang for "smash hit," and it's the right word for the 7th Driftless Film Festival, a three-day November event at the city's Opera House. A dozen feature movies and several documentaries lit the screen, playing to good crowds, and some fest-goers also took part in new cinema workshops and enjoyed after-hours shows and parties at local nightspots.

Eve Studnicka coordinated the Festival. She told the *Times*, "I think 2016 was our most dynamic year to date. We're growing as an event, and our expanded programs went over well." Studnicka said filmmaking workshops attracted young people who later expressed an interest in a collaborative effort to create cinema in the area.

"We're proud of our parties, too."

The festival opened with *American Fable*, shot nearby, and the show's filmmakers flew in from Los Angeles and New York City to answer questions from members of the local audience.



Eve Studnicka & Theater Mgr. Parrish Johnston

"As the Festival evolves, our primary focus is sustainability and accessibility for the Arts in Mineral Point, especially for the young people who will carry on the vision of earlier movie-makers; challenging stagnation with fearlessness and abandon," Studnicka said.

Plans are being drawn for another Mineral Point gathering of filmmakers and filmlovers in the fall of 2017.

Studnicka summed up, "This part of the world will never lose its magic as long as there are people searching for creative fulfillment."

LOOK
FOR
OUR
NEXT
ISSUE
ON
JANUARY 3RD



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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Check Sandee Beaman's
Online Events Calendar

<http://hwy23events.wordpress.com>

Simply click on an event
to get all the details.

The Inside Story:



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The full title is *A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, a Dickens novella published in London on December 19, 1843. It was well-reviewed, an instant best-seller, and, overnight, it became the most widely-read celebration of Christmas, which was not a major holiday in 19th-century England.

Yes, it's the tale of a bitter miser named Ebenezer Scrooge and his transformation into a gentler, kinder man after visitations from a former business partner and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. And, yes, the story provides a happy ending for the Cratchitt family, earning the well-known blessing from Tiny Tim, "God bless us, every one."

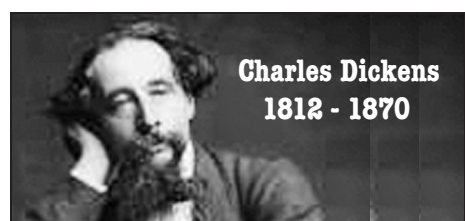
But, wait, there's more!

The book was written at a time when the British were examining Christmas traditions from the past as well as new customs such as cards, carols and trees. Rural workers were moving to the big cities in droves, leaving their Christmas traditions behind, but they didn't adopt the practices of city dwellers, and by mid-century, middle-aged Britainers were feeling nostalgic for the holidays of their youth.

But, few industrial workers and miners could afford to take off "the twelve days of Christmas," and a wretched economy ruled out many traditional forms of celebration. Dickens, who had worked at a blacking factory as a boy, remembered the days of British country life with games, dancing, mulled wine, pudding, and a fat roasted goose. He decided to "strike a sledgehammer blow" for the poor, reviving old traditions that promoted social harmony.

Dickens wrote the book during a career crisis. His sources for the novella appear to be many and varied, but are, principally, humiliating experiences from his childhood, his sympathy for the poor, and various old Christmas stories and fairy tales. Dickens intended a strong condemnation of greed, and Scrooge's transformation provided an optimistic message that proved popular. Thus, Dickens, himself, became associated with Christmas in the public mind. His work elevated the popularity of Christmas as a holiday, and established the idea of Christmas as a time of charity toward those less fortunate.

The story made Ebenezer Scrooge one of the most famous characters in literature. In many ways, the publication of *A Christmas Carol* transformed the author into a character much like the reformed Scrooge. His son recalled, "my father grumbled ["Humbug!"], but he loved the holiday as a jovial time, and he was a splendid host; always at his best, bright and jolly as a boy, and throwing his heart and soul into everything that was going on."



Charles Dickens
1812 - 1870



It wouldn't be December without The Nutcracker, the annual tradition that brings Tchaikovsky's popular ballet to the stage at the Opera House, with music, dance, color and a timeless story for appreciative holiday audiences.

The *Theatre of Ballet Arts*, directed by Summer Hamille, boasts a cast of ninety, ages 4 to 60, from thirteen Wisconsin communities. The performers spend nine weekends rehearsing their roles, two weeks of stage rehearsals, and entertain students at two area schools. This year's shows are dedicated to the late Roland Sardeson, who played roles in the ballet for ten years.

Performances are scheduled on two weekends, Dec. 2-4 and Dec. 9-11, with curtains opening at 7:30 on Fridays and Saturdays, and Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:30 p.m. Tickets at Berget's and Brown Paper Tickets.



Santa Returns for Photo Op at Shake Rag Alley

Once again, Mr. and Mrs. Claus will make a holiday stop at the Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts.

All are invited to bring the kids to the Center for "Family Photos with Santa," a long-time Saturday morning holiday tradition at Shake Rag. Mr. and Mrs. Claus welcome children and parents in the Cabinet Shop from 10 a.m. until Noon on December 3rd.

Elsewhere on the school's campus, Santa's Workshops make for a fun family day decorating gingerbread cottages and making Christmas crafts from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

\$10 for photos with Santa

\$4 for crafts/gingerbread cottages



MPHS 2017 Lyceums

The Historical Society announces its lineup of informative talks:

On **Jan. 15th** - George Johnson on "Pearling in Southern Wisconsin, including the Mineral Point Area" in the Community Room at City Hall at 2 p.m., following the brief Annual Meeting at 1 p.m.

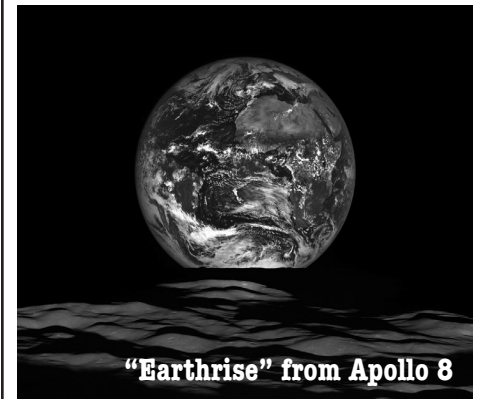
Feb 19th - "Badger Huts and Early Mining in Mineral Point and the Surrounding Area" a talk by Tracey Lee Robert, Sr. Lecturer Emeritus in the History Dept., UW-Platteville at 2 p.m. Location TBA.

March 26th - "DNA and Genealogy" the latest from Mary Eberle of DNA Hunters LLC. 2 p.m. Location TBA.



SILENT NIGHT THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF 1914

On Christmas Eve in 1914 the last known Christmas truce occurred, early in World War I. As dusk turned to night, German troops fighting in Belgium began decorating their trenches and singing Christmas carols. Their enemy, the British, soon joined in the caroling. The war was put on hold, and these soldiers greeted each other in "No Man's Land," exchanging gifts of whiskey and cigars. In many areas, the truce held until Christmas night, while in other battlefields the truce did not end until New Year's Day.



On Christmas Eve in 1968, the spacecraft known as Apollo 8 entered orbit around the moon. Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and William Anders became the first humans to orbit a celestial body other than our Earth, circling the moon ten times, testing equipment and taking photos. NASA would put a man on the moon's face less than a year later.

The astronauts sent a Christmas Eve broadcast home to Earth, and Borman recalled, "We were told we'd have the largest audience that had ever listened to a human voice, but the only instructions we got from NASA were simply 'to do something appropriate.'" The crew took turns reading biblical scripture from Genesis, which outlines God's creation of the planet.

The mission was to explore the moon, but what the astronauts really discovered was the planet Earth. As Anders said, "I think it's important for people to understand we are just going around on one of the smaller grains of sand on one of the spiral arms of this kinda puny galaxy. Earth is insignificant, but it's the only one we've got."



On Christmas Eve in Iceland, people exchange books then head to bed with their books and hot chocolate, to READ. Iceland publishes more books per person than any other country, and most of the new books come out just before Christmas. What's more, they have a NAME for it: "Jólabokaflod," which means "Christmas book flood."

HELP WANTED: COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Mineral Point Community Foundation (MPCF), which provides financial support for people, projects and plans in the city, is gearing up for 2017 by recruiting volunteers for two advisory boards that will solicit funds and select local non-profit recipients for foundation grants.

The MPCF Chair, Kristin Mitchell, told the *Times*, "It's fund-raising time in the growth of our young organization, and the addition of new board members will allow personal visits to our contributors, whose donations will strengthen the two components of the foundation: the Community Endowment and the Excellence in Education Endowment. We hope our neighbors will consider tax-deductible year-end donations."

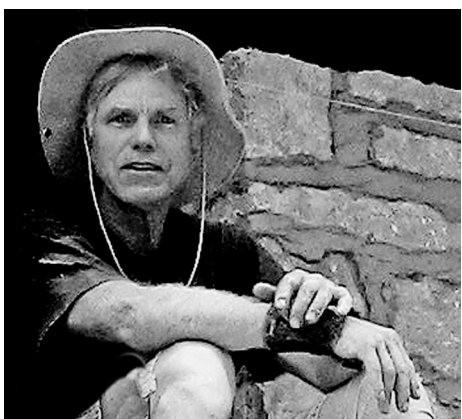
The mission of the Community Foundation is to invest resources in Mineral Point and its schools to meet changing charitable, educational, civic, historical, and cultural needs. Each year the endowment gives back a portion of its earnings in the form of grants to qualified organizations serving the

HELP WANTED: SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

Pointers will elect members of the city's school board to three-year terms on April 4, 2017. And, the time to declare as a candidate is drawing near.

For interested candidates, a Campaign Registration Statement 2016-17 and a Declaration of Candidacy 2016-17 must be filed no later than 5 p.m. on Tues., January 3, 2017 in the School District Office at the High School.

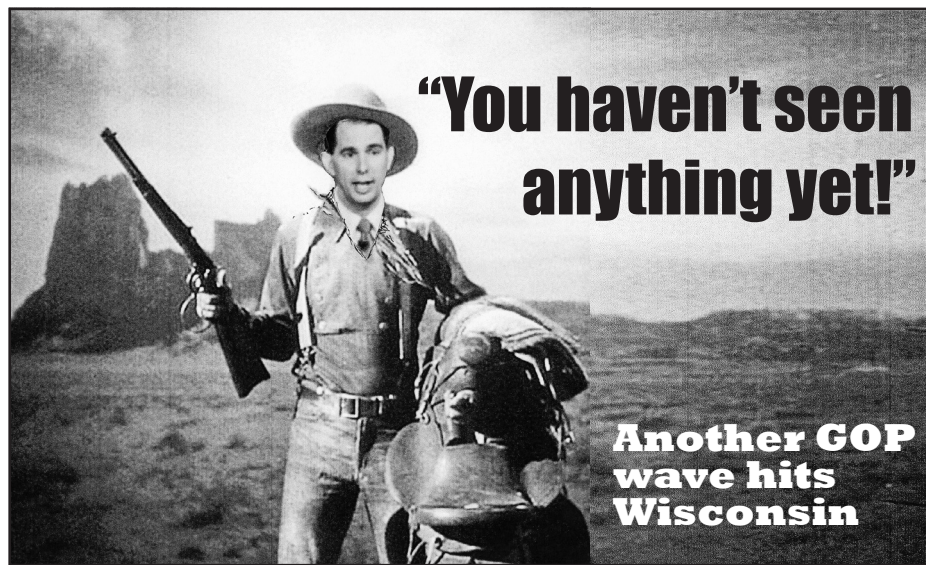
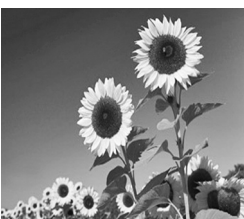
To learn more about what being a school board member entails, District Supt. Luke Francois will host an informational meeting on Wed., December 7th at 7 p.m. in the Elementary School library. If you cannot attend, but would like more information, contact luke.francois@mp.k12.wi.us or call 987-0740 and talk with Angela Schubert.



Pointer Phil Mrozinski and a growing group of RollieFans are honoring the late Roland Sardeson in a way we think might please the stonemason/actor/skydiver/potter/parader/feature attraction/impersonator/comic/town booster/volunteer... and cherished friend to so many of us.

Mayor Gregg Bennett has approved a request to declare and dedicate the First Day of the Summer Solstice as "Roland Sardeson Day" in Mineral Point.

As the group envisions it, the day will be set aside for "proper" celebrations: potlucks, parties, and a parade in which participants would dress in "their favorite Rollie costume." Circle June 21st on the calendar, and try to match Sir Roland's wit and unique style.



The 2010 Wisconsin wave election put Scott Walker in the Governor's chair, swept Republicans into the state's Senate and Assembly in heavily lopsided numbers, opened the door for a flood of enacted programs to make the state a Republican stronghold, and gave the GOP the privilege of drawing the geographic boundary lines of the state's legislative districts. The resulting redistricting, the ambitions of the governor, and the overwhelming legislative majorities gave Wisconsin's Republicans virtually unlimited power over the state's political affairs while diminishing the Democratic Party's voice to a whisper.

Republicans kept their clout with victories in the Walker Recall, the 2014 election, and an important win in the state Supreme Court. Conservative statehouse forces simply silenced opposition to their "reforms" by rolling out a score of dramatic measures to achieve Republican goals, suppress vote totals, and punish their adversaries.

And, with last month's Republican sweep of the Wisconsin ballot box, the Badger State GOP is more powerful still, with a virtual lock on state politics.

Both Madison and Washington have experienced a GOP Trifecta: control of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government. And, the Walker juggernaut in Wisconsin is now held up as a model for seizing control of government. Movers and shakers in the Trump administration are said to view Wisconsin's six-year Republican takeover as a blueprint for "draining the swamp" and drafting a dynamic Trumpist national agenda.

Scott Walker is the Chairman of the Republican Governors Association. He's quoted as telling a "giddy" gathering of GOP governors, "The sky's the limit!" and "The possibilities are endless now!" with Republicans in control of both the White House and Congress.

Those governors have drafted a list of targets for a sweeping nation-wide Republican makeover: gun control, health care, work rules, federal regulations, transportation, education, and environmental policies. With the help of special interest groups that have bankrolled "reforms" in Wisconsin and elsewhere, the goal is tax cuts for the wealthy and a boatload of conservative goals. The strategists seem to admire Walker's "divide and conquer" approach, and some suggest it's worth a try in Washington D.C.

The Governor, who has declared himself "unintimidated," gave a radio interviewer a rallying cry, calling for Trump to "go big and bold." It's "put up or shut up time," said Walker.

His minions in the statehouse are talking tough, too. Jim Steineke, the Majority Leader in the Assembly, hailed the Trump takeover, and said he had a message for anyone who thought GOP lawmakers were busy in the past five years: "You haven't seen anything yet!" he said. "There's bigger, bolder reforms coming." He offered no specifics.

In recent days, the state's Republican leaders have talked about creating a new kind of school voucher, shoring up road building funds, and wielding their power over the University of Wisconsin. Oh, and providing a laptop or tablet for all high school freshmen.

Republican lawmakers enjoy a 64 to 35 edge over Democrats in the Assembly, and a commanding majority in the State Senate as well.

Wisconsin's small towns and rural areas, although harshly treated by the state's GOP leaders, gave Walker & Co. the votes needed for steamrolling.

So, who will argue with them?

And, who will do battle with Trump? "To the victor belong the spoils" is an apt political axiom, and it's one that might serve as the Republican bumper sticker for the days ahead.

'Tis the Season to Be Jolly!



Here's jolly news: BLACK FRIDAY IS SURRENDERING TO TECHNOLOGY. The days of camping out and lining up are almost over. This year, even more than last year, early promotions in November have diluted the biggest shopping day, and cybersales have displaced before-dawn store openings. Online sales in 2016 were \$5.27 billion for Thanksgiving and Black Friday, a 17% increase over sales in 2015. More and more, holiday shopping is online (not In-Line), and the long-range impact on U.S. retailing —and our popular culture— is anybody's guess.



statesmanship

NOUN: skill in managing public affairs.

Observers of today's political climate may find it hard to believe, but there was a time in our nation's history when elected officials were able to set aside their natural appetite for conflict and practice the ancient art of compromise.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a time of growth, world power, and prosperity, compromise in the halls of Congress often accomplished a goal in what was quaintly called the Common Good, and compromisers were applauded, not scorned as traitors to their political party. The compromisers were known as statesmen (and women) and made the covers of popular magazines.

A pair of statesmen, Senators Everett Dirksen and Paul Douglas, represented Illinois in post-World War II times. Dirksen, the Senate's top Republican, was a powerful conservative. Known as "The Wizard of Ooze" because of his flamboyant oratorical style, Dirksen played a key role in the politics of the 1960s, helping Lyndon Johnson write and pass landmark civil rights bills.

Douglas, a scholarly economist, was a standout leader of liberal Democrats.

Both made significant contributions; both voted to move the country in positive directions even when their votes did not follow their party loyalties.

The outspoken Thomas "Tip" O'Neill was Democratic Speaker of the House in the Carter and Reagan administrations. He fought Reagan's GOP policies "until 6 p.m.," then enjoyed a cordial drink with his political rival as the two of them finessed key legislative issues.

Those were the days when "hands across the aisle" was not a fantasy, and "gridlock" was not the most accurate description of congressional inaction.

Today, as everyone knows, the two heavily-armed political parties crouch in the Capital's trenches. Eight years ago the GOP leadership vowed to make the Obama agenda fail and did all they could to block every move by the Democrat. Well, current Democratic leaders may very well make raw obstructionism their central purpose as we begin the Trump reign in office.

The tumble of statesmanship and the destruction of compromise has brought the nation to a dangerous point. No one thinks the government is running well.

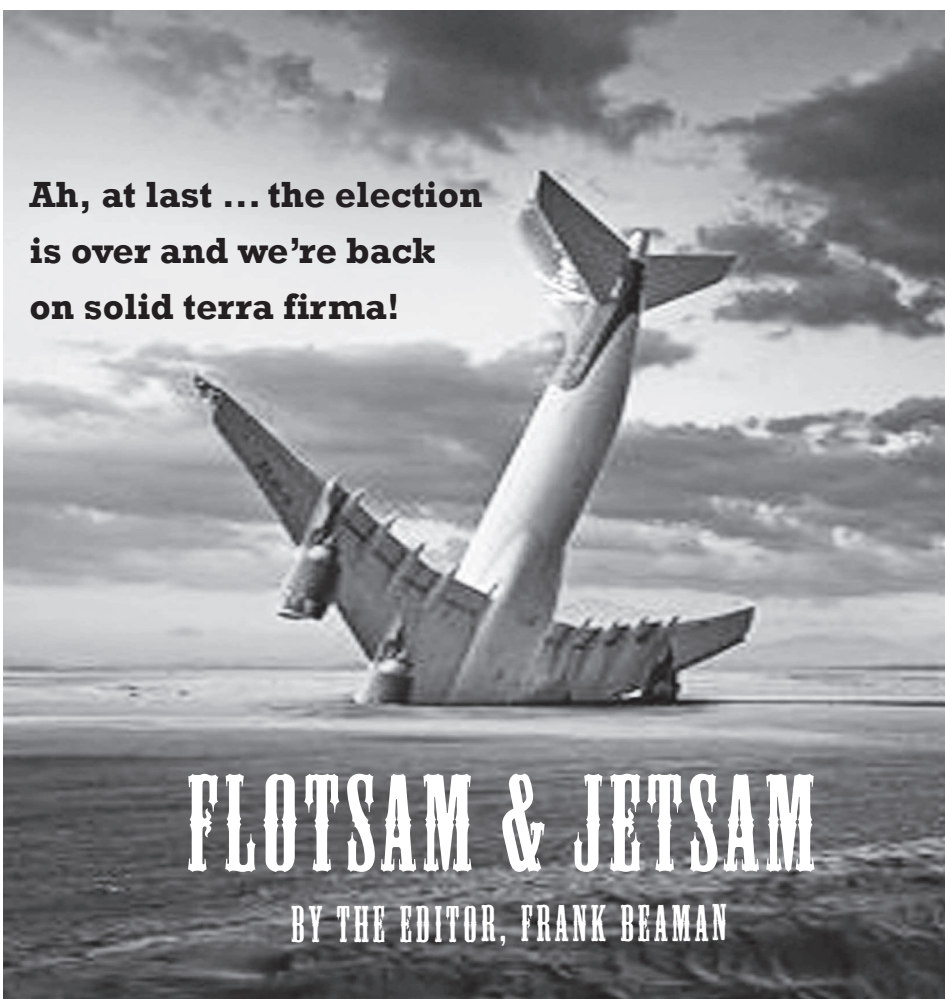
In today's political climate, several past presidents would be drummed out of their party for playing well with their adversaries. Dwight Eisenhower backed collective bargaining, a higher minimum wage, job safety, and equal pay for men and women. The top income tax rate was 92%. "Ike" kept us out of war, and warned us about the "military/industrial complex." Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, opened the doorway to China, and called for comprehensive health care with a proposal far to the left of the Clinton and Obama models. Ronald Reagan instituted the biggest peacetime tax increase in U.S. history, while pulling the nation to the right with de-regulation, military spending and a conservative social agenda.

There were once giants in the Capital.

Today, there are pygmies. And worse. Whither compromise?

Whither statesmanship?

Ah, at last ... the election is over and we're back on solid terra firma!



FLOTSAM & JETSAM

BY THE EDITOR, FRANK BEAMAN

For twenty-five years I used a notepad, cassette recorder, and typewriter—the archaic tools of radio journalism—to write about politics back in the day when news stories played it straight by simply reporting what was happening.

I've studied "good ol' boy" politics, the statehouse, and the old-line political machine in Chicago. I've covered five national political conventions, inhaled my share of tear gas, and sat through untold news conferences and spin-room shouting matches. Through the years, I convinced myself I was acquiring a "hands-on" education that would allow me, as an Old Hand, to write useful words, maybe even *wise* words, for an audience thirsty for knowledge.

Well, the Campaign of 2016 and its surprising conclusion wiped out all I thought I'd learned. So, I'm sorry, but my wisdom barrel is empty.

After pulling a NewsJunkie's All-Nighter on November 8th, I sat, stunned, for three days, reading the newspaper columns, online punditry, and stuff I've written in past editions of the *Times*. I was trying to find a point of view for this month's issue, and trying to cope with what I believe was a monumental wrong turn for my country.

Finally, in desperation, I looked up to the clouds to ask, "What can I say that hasn't been said before, said elsewhere, said better than I could say it?" And, "What can I predict under a Trump presidency?"

From the clouds, a thunderous voice said, "How the hell should I know?!"

That voice nailed it, folks.

I have no idea what to expect from Mr. Trump. Neither do you. I have a hunch The Donald doesn't know what to expect, either, because—as several of his campaign staffs found out—"Donald will be Donald."

More than any other president in modern American history, Donald J. Trump is unpredictable, and he has no public service record to provide clues to his most-likely strategies and actions. We *do* have his promises from the Campaign of 2016, but his policies are shrouded in the fog of electioneering and seem more a question mark than an exclamation point.

It's important to point out that post-election uncertainty has been common to every new administration in modern times, and so has day-after "make-nice"

language, and "hands across the aisle" and "give 'em a chance" bromides.

I don't think the "kissy-face" phase of the Trump administration will last long.

But what the hell do I know about it? Answer: Not much.

We've all had it with politics. Some of us whooped it up on November 9th. Some of us cried. A few of us replayed the "I'm Mad as hell" scene in Paddy Cheyefsky's 1976 cinema masterpiece, "Network." Fact is, that Mad-as-Hell episode was the signature image of Campaign 2016 as both sides dumped civil rhetoric and reasoned positions, and all the pundits were exposed as charlatans and know-nothings.

So, Dear Reader, for this autopsy I'll avoid punditry about the causes and effects that pulled the election in weird directions and elevated or damaged the candidates. Let me defer to hundreds of places where you can sort, sift and choose widely divergent opinion about what happened during this disjointed political year, on November 8th, and what may happen in the future.

My wisdom barrel is empty.

I may take up the pundit's pen in future issues of this newspaper, but for the nonce, I won't detail today's chaos, confusion, anger, and dread for my loyal readers. Instead, I urge readers to find and study reliable sources to try to understand the powerful forces that shaped the 2016 election and to explore the historical background that made a Trump presidency possible.

Mr. Trump broke every traditional rule of campaigning, revealed himself as a dangerously-flawed human being, but he heard what the professional politicians didn't hear: half of us, white working-class Americans, are fearful of becoming the minority population in a nation with increasing numbers of "the Others" (people who do not look, act, and talk "like we do.") And, half of us, the nation's middle class, feel we've been abandoned and scorned by the American establishment, left behind by technology, our jobs sent offshore by a ruling out-of-touch cultural elite and the cozy politics of Washington D.C.

The USA is a country in chaos, with political, racial, ethnic, and generational divisions fighting a class war in which we find it hard to talk to each other.

We'll have to move on. We must deal with the bombastic personality of a new

president with the backing of all three branches of the federal government, and deal with a loud, angry populace that has been stimulated by the hateful tone of the past year's politics.

Reasoned discussion has given way to finger-pointing and vulgar insults. And, bringing change to Washington involves "draining the swamp," not public discourse and gradual reform.

As citizens, we can either tune out or jump in. I recommend jumping in. But, I hope you'll listen to ALL the voices, exercising a little empathy and candid evaluation before falling in line behind a catchy slogan on a bumper sticker.

With more than 8 in 10 voters saying the campaign has left them repulsed rather than excited, rising toxicity threatens virtually every aspect of our daily life and poisons our friendships.

So, I turn, again, to the clouds.

"We've got a big problem down here! What are we to do?"

And, the big voice from above thundered, "How the hell should I know?!"

I can't resist using this space to repeat two axioms I've written several times on this paper's Page Four:

1. The USA has become little more than a television show.

2. We get the politics we deserve.

This year's election resembled the plot of one of TV's "fake-reality" shows in which tawdry actors dream up cunning deceptions and murderous devices to destroy their adversaries. The audience, armed only with gut instinct, a taste for blood, and a remote control clicker, buys into the most far-fetched tale.

Folks get the television they deserve.

Doesn't that sound like our politics?

Here's a bit of comfort for distressed voters (actually, just a blinding flash of the obvious): the local level is where people can create ways of life that work for themselves, their communities, and the structure and systems that support daily life. At the local level people feel their power, and they experience the outcome of their decisions up close. Local actions rarely make headlines, and even the best local efforts can be defeated by powerful corporate and political interests, but the most beneficial outcomes often are forged by people who meet face to face, argue, and finally compromise to make their home towns safer and stronger.

The hate and division, the deceit and vulgarity of Campaign '16 may be with us for some time, but an unusual season can open up opportunities to "gather in the bunker" and work for local change.

We are Pointers. We live in a remarkably cohesive town with remarkably gentle and friendly neighbors. We show, repeatedly, that we can create common sense solutions to our problems. And, we stay on speaking terms with fellow Pointers, even when we disagree with their point of view.

Healthy rural communities have a decided advantage over the big cities when it comes to making local change a positive enterprise that will produce real benefit to the citizenry.

For many years, towns in New Hampshire lit strange bonfires, dotting the landscape from border to border as a smoke signal for Old Home Week in August. It was a homecoming event to invite former residents to "come back and restore your village." That is, to rebuild the state's abandoned farms and empty storefronts. Often, it worked.

Isn't Old Home Week what we're looking for? A homecoming, a peace within ourselves and our surroundings. Solace. Restoration of spirit. Return.

Mending.

TRADITIONS FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE

It's a day to take stock of the old year and make promises you know you may not keep. People across the world link arms at the stroke of midnight and sing "we'll take a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne." The tune is an old Scottish folk song. Other customs have evolved from Scotland, too, and most involve singing and whiskey.

New Year's Eve marks the first day of Hogmanay, a name derived from an Old French word for a gift given at the New Year in a tradition known as "first-footing": If the first person to cross your threshold after midnight is a dark-haired man, you will have good luck in the coming year.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the English poet, wrote, "Ring out the old, ring in the new / Ring, happy bells, across the snow / The year is going, let him go / Ring out the false, ring in the true."

Here in the United States, the custom of raising and dropping a giant ball arose out of the time when signals were given to ships at harbor. Starting in 1859, a large ball was dropped at noon every day so sailors could check their ship chronometers.

The biggest Yankee celebration dates back to 1904 when The New York Times opened its new headquarters on Longacre Square and convinced the city to rename the area "Times Square". They hosted a big party, complete with fireworks, on New Year's Eve. Some 200,000 people turned up, but the paper's owner, Adolph Ochs, wanted the next celebration to be even splashier. So, in 1907, the newspaper's head electrician constructed a giant lighted ball that was lowered from the building's flagpole. The Ball was made of wood and iron, weighed 700 pounds, and was lit by a hundred 25-watt bulbs. Today, it's made of Waterford crystal, weighs almost six tons, and is lit by more than 32,000 LED lights. Times Square welcomes up to a million New Year celebrants every year.

Other cities have developed their own ball-dropping traditions. Atlanta drops a giant peach. Eastport, Maine drops a sardine. Ocean City, Maryland drops a beach ball, and Mobile, Alabama drops a 600-pound electric Moon Pie. In Tempe, Arizona a giant tortilla chip descends into a massive bowl of salsa. In Brasstown, North Carolina the drop features a Plexiglass pyramid containing a live possum; and Key West, Florida drops an enormous ruby slipper with a drag queen inside.

SOURCE: The Writer's Almanac on NPR



In the event of a New Year's Day hangover, here's advice from a major imbibor, W.C. Fields, who said he never used Bromo Seltzer for an over-plus of alcohol — he couldn't stand the noise. Instead, Fields suggested one should just have another drink — but stronger than last night's strongest stuff.

The star's movie *The Bank Dick* gives us a queasy-sounding solution used by bank examiner J. Pinkerton Snooping-ton in the film: a breaded veal cutlet in tomato sauce with a chocolate éclair for dessert; or two pickled eggs and some castor oil; or Hungarian Goulash and a coconut custard pie.

Washed down with a Martini.

"As democracy is perfected, the office represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

— H.L. Mencken, 26 July 1920