

THE TIMES OF MINERAL POINT

ILLUSTRATED

A CASUAL COMPENDIUM: WORDS AND WHIMSY TO INFORM AND AMUSE THE LOYAL READER



BEATLES BENEFIT NETS \$4K FOR OPERA HOUSE

★

A Full House!

Nostalgic Fundraiser declared “successful.”

★

A February benefit performance by a Beatles band raised an estimated \$4,000 to help fund the refurbishing of the 1915 marquee at the city’s Opera House. Three hundred patrons filled the seats to enjoy the spirited songs of the “Fab Four,” rock stars of the 1960s.

GetBackWisconsin, five Madison musicians, played Beatles hits note for note, and provided historic facts and trivia for an enthusiastic audience.

The Times of Mineral Point underwrote the event to allow all proceeds to flow to the theater, where planning is under way for marquee repairs, more dramatic lighting, and new signage above the auditorium’s entryway.

Pointer donations, concession sales and a book auction added to the total amassed by ticket revenue.

The strong turnout for the show was greatly enhanced by freakish-warm weather, so the mid-winter musical Saturday night may have served as an antidote to the usual cabin fever of the Wisconsin cold season.



THREE GENERATIONS OF BEATLES FANS!
Marlene Marklein, Dodgeville, with her son, Dennis, and granddaughter Kristin Lindner. Dennis bought the Beatles book at auction.



H O O O O O O O O P S

Basketball fans AND students of body language may consider this the ultimate photo for both crowds. Here, Number 23 watches as his 75-foot buzzer-beater swishes, giving his team a 76-75 win in a 2009 tournament.

Look at the faces: all **oooooooohs**, no exceptions, even the opposing player.

We have cause to celebrate March Madness in Mineral Point. The Girls Team at the High School had the SWAL Title and an undefeated record in their league as this paper went to press.

Pointer Boys put together a decent season, too. We’re proud, and look ahead to days when we plant highway signs and paint the cars and trucks for the drive to Madison for state competition.

The wide world of good basketball is just one of the compensations for the discomfort of the cold months. There are others, not the least of which is the beauty of Driftless Wisconsin and our lovingly-preserved city, after a coat of snow blankets the land and sprinkles the trees and stones with sparkles.

Winter pays a few dividends. Snow-packed streets are clean and traffic is lighter. Neighbors enjoy quiet times and shared kindnesses—the folks across the way have a snow blower and use it to clean the walks at nearby homes, the kind of generosity that cannot be repaid. Well, maybe at a block party in the spring.

Yes, that would be a good thing.

Note to Self: put on a happy winter face, say “thanks” and be grateful you live in a friendly corner of the world.



You know who

Author Jerry Apps wears a big grin, winter or summer. At an age when he would be fully entitled to just declare himself “old” and fall into his recliner chair, Jerry and his photographer/son Steve Apps churn out highly-readable books about rural Wisconsin and local lore, produce warmhearted television fare, and make personal appearances to share a few homespun Apps-family country philosophies all over the state.

We’ll credit his energy to a simple fact: he’s lived his full life on a farm and cannot escape the work ethic, sensibility, and friendly outlook on life that seems to be part of family farming.

His *Rural Wit & Wisdom* (Fulcrum Publishing 2012) yields tips on surviving—no, *enjoying*—the cold season of the year. Here are a few of them:

1. Remember, winter is the time for warm memories, for your favorite woolen cap and leather mittens—the ones with the home-knitted liners.
2. Realize that winters in some years are so cold that when a man cusses, the words freeze and you don’t get to hear them until spring.
3. Hike in the woods on a below-zero morning, and listen to hear nothing more than your heart beating.
4. Read a book you’ve been meaning to read for some time and have put off. [Editor’s Comment: If you’re running a bit short on common sense, read *The Same Ax, Twice*, by Howard Mansfield]
- And 5. Learn that the Eskimos have fifty-two names for snow. Around here, ONE name seems sufficient when you have to shovel it.



MID-WINTER BEAUTY CAPTURED EN PLEIN AIR

The mid-February thermometer was shivering at 10 degrees, but an undaunted group of artists bundled up, grabbed their easels, brushes and paints and headed into the chilled outdoors to capture Mineral Point’s winter landscapes on their canvases.

The 2nd Annual Winter Edition of “Paint the Point,” sponsored by Arts Mineral Point (AMP) and several local contributors, brought nineteen invited artists to town for three days of fellowship and fine art. Most of the painters had been in the city before as part of AMP’s successful “Paint Out” events in August 2014 and 2015.

The artists were given two days to complete their canvases, frame their work, and compete in an exhibit at Tequila Point. AMP Volunteer Steve Tait constructed show panels for an Artists’ Reception where the paintings were unveiled. Wantoot Gallery’s Ried Knapp emceed the lively dinner, and Pointer artist Jane Wilcoxson, judge for the event, said, “We see strong work here. For these painters, it’s more than a technical exercise—they’re telling the Mineral Point story!”

Arts Mineral Point, pledged to “nurture” the arts, has worked hard to bring the plein air event to the city, and all seem to agree the weekend adds to the reputation of our creative community.

We saw welcome tourist revenue for the city’s business community, too.



“Best in Show” -- Lori Beringer from Argyle, WI

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OF HISTORIC UNDERSTANDING



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STRAIGHT TALK FROM "HONEST ABE"

An Op-Ed Statement by the 16th President on the "Party of Lincoln"

My firm intention was to maintain a discreet silence about the condition of American politics in 2016. I agreed to put down a few thoughts on this page because the Editor of this newspaper wrote to ask me, "Are you comfortable with Republican candidates using the phrase, 'The Party of Lincoln'?" The question greatly disturbed me, and after due consideration, I decided to speak to the current political climate in the Union I fought so hard to preserve.

No, indeed, I am *not* comfortable with the association of my name with the Grand Old Party of year 2016. The party we formed in Ripon, Wisconsin in the 1850s in no way resembles the quarrelsome "Establishment" and "Tea Party" combatants engaged in current political campaigns. I greatly fear both the GOP and the USA will suffer because of the party's current belligerence.

In the years since my nomination at the Illinois State Convention of 1860, I note the rise and fall of the founding principle of the Republican Party: *individual liberty*. Thrice, during the history of those 151 years, Republicans relinquished that fundamental concept, personal freedom, in order to serve the overwhelming interests of commerce. And, many statements from today's Republican candidates for local, state and national office seem to indicate that the defense of wealth and the wealthy are the common premise and the predominant and guiding vision of the party.

It was not always so, and I view the marriage of the GOP to big business and the wealthy elite as a misreading of the party's historic experience.

The founders at Ripon opposed the wealthy slaveholders who controlled the federal government. Pre-Civil War Democrats, by contrast, were in league with the plantation elite, citing the Constitution's protections for property ownership, and the 1850s Democrats allowed the planters to monopolize the country's resources at the expense of the working class.

I was elected in 1860 because of my belief in *equality of opportunity*, as promised in the Declaration of Independence, and I recoiled from the idea of using government to increase the treasury of the wealthy. I felt a healthy economy depended on widespread prosperity. Even as the Civil War raged, my Republican Party made good on our promises: gave farmers their own land, created public colleges, built railroads, and took control of the currency from the rich bankers. We ended slavery. We also invented national taxes, including the income tax, to pay for all those initiatives. The middle class grew, and the North and West, new national areas covered by our legislation, boomed.

But, when the war ended, many wealthy Americans joined with those who hated black people and other immigrants, to insist slavery had been the right course. This elite group worried that permitting poor men to have a say in government would produce a redistribution of the wealth the elite controlled. In the 1880s, the moneyed crowd mounted an effort, made a great deal of noise, and—sad to say—most of the elected Republicans folded their cards, tore up their pledges about equal opportunity, and tied themselves and their party to Big Business.

Like the slaveholders before them, they argued the privileged rich were

the true producers, directing the work of lesser men. The Party strengthened laws to protect business, crushed the workers, then jiggered the electoral map to stay in power.

The triumph of the wealthy business owners led to the transformation of the entire economy as the nation evolved from farm-based Agronomy to the big cities and the Industrial Revolution, but the economic downturn known as the Panic of 1893 reminded the GOP of my warning, "Government that serves only the rich man will ruin the country."

Chastened Republicans became a new party in 1893, striving to restore my earlier vision. Then came Teddy Roosevelt, the La Follettes of Wisconsin, and the Progressive Republicans who realized government had to correct the economic inequalities of industrialization or no man could rise. They cleaned up cities, built public education, protected the workers, and wrote regulations to curb business profiteering. These were the policies that fed a strong, growing middle class—a middle class of society *resurrected* by the Republican Party.



*"A House
divided
against
itself
c a n n o t
stand."*

*Mr. Lincoln, in
Springfield
in 1858*

But, as the nation approached the 1920s, wealthy Americans once more pushed back with determination and their great monetary resources. They quietly fed the rage that whipped up urban riots against African-Americans, immigrants and union workers, who were accused of sucking tax dollars from hard-working white people.

And, again, the Republican Party folded. In the ensuing anti-government backlash, the GOP and Pres. Hoover used tax breaks and cutbacks to drive economic inequality to a peak in 1928.

The following year, the bottom fell out of everything; the wealthy elite had destroyed the purchasing power that might have prevented the Great Crash.

Franklin D. Roosevelt reversed the 1929 collapse, although it took many years and World War II to make the U.S. a true world power. The New Deal put America to work, fed the poor, built up the infrastructure, fought the War, and enacted Social Security. FDR was the architect for Liberal policies that served as the nation's agenda and political pathway for three decades.

The Grand Old Party appeared to be finished, like Lee at Appomattox, but in 1952 a new Republican leader, Dwight Eisenhower, restored Lincoln-inspired principles and economic health by promoting economic equality all over the world. "Ike," a war hero, kept us out of war with Russia, used federal authority to desegregate the schools, promoted higher education, and paved the interstate highways. His policies were popular. Not with Big Business, however, and when the top income tax brackets reached 91%, major business interests invoked Constitutional arguments to demonize minorities, young people,

women and Democrats. Led by social conservatives, the GOP was lashed to the multi-national corporations (The "Military-Industrial Complex" Eisenhower warned about as he left office.)

In the following twenty years of turmoil, under Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Carter, the average citizen could not distinguish between celebration or desperation as the U.S. dealt with the Cold War, VietNam, and Urban Unrest.

As Farming had done in the century before, Manufacturing shrank as America entered the Age of Finance and Technology. And, with Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, the amiable movie star crafted a Great Divergence, intensifying the gulf between Liberals and Conservatives. He trimmed many government regulations, promoted the Right's social values, mapped a welfare haven for the wealthy, and built a huge global military force.

Post-Reagan years saw that huge military force in action in a series of "not-quite-full-scale-wars," in which the saber-rattlers found reasons (some of them falsely fabricated) to roll out the world's biggest military power, invade other nations, and create armies of occupation. The Bushes, father and son, Bill Clinton and Barrack Obama are players in a "perpetual war" drama.

Obama's most formidable enemy, however, has been a GOP Congress that called for his failure and did everything possible to make failure happen, even though the obstructionism badly damaged the country and ran contrary to average American self-interests. Meanwhile, the rise of "One-Percenters" pushed economic inequality until it equalled the 1928 peak, and the 2008 near-total collapse followed.

Obama has had limited success in rebuilding the economy, has reluctantly continued the endless wars he inherited, and has enacted a national health care law (once on Nixon's 1974 wish list).

Well, that recitation of history brings us up to date, it would appear.

So, with Lincoln-style melancholy, I must tell you I see the year 2016 as a wretched time for a citizenry frustrated and angry in a polarized political and social system in which most of our treasured institutions are in tatters.

The Party of Lincoln made choices, made mistakes, but tried to unify the states and add strength to America's shared ideals. But, today's Party of Naysayers and Fearmongers seems dedicated to division, not unity, and tearing down, not building up.

"Just say no!" is a slogan for stagnation.

The candidates of the GOP campaign harbor a dark view of the world and the people in it. Their language is that of attack: savage, hurtful, hateful. (I readily recognize ugly, profane scorn.)

The GOP's crop of cranks "wreak havoc" because they are passionate.

But, "wrath" is not "passion."

Passion can motivate beneficial and worthwhile change. Wrath, however, is merely vengeance posing as solution.

Americans cannot live with wrath alone, without reason and hope, without a chance to mark a ballot FOR something, not against it.

My life, and death, illustrates the destructive power of political hostility. Hate, unreasoned and unrestrained, pulled the trigger in Ford's Theater.

A. Lincoln



The OPERA HOUSE LET'S HEAR IT!

On opening night, in February 1915, the marquee at the new vaudeville and performing arts house was lit up for "The Misleading Lady," a long-running play with a New York cast plunked down in tiny Mineral Point.

Dedicated as a "Theatre for All the People," the Opera House played a vital role in Southwest Wisconsin culture for many years, attracting some of the nation's outstanding artists and productions. Live drama, grand opera, and symphonic music were all staged in the unique City Hall building, which accommodated city offices, public library and the 700-seat theater—and all under one roof. All the big names were here!

Performers played to full houses three or more times a week. Old news accounts show that passenger train schedules on the Mineral Point Line were often changed to allow patrons to see famous artists of the day. And, local school, drama and musical groups also began to use the auditorium.

Claud & Stark of Madison designed the building, and when construction was complete the building rivaled New York and Chicago theaters in beauty and practicality. With its broad stage, soaring proscenium arch, 60-foot upper chamber to enable the scenery to "fly," deep orchestra pit, and the room's great acoustics, the Opera House was by any measure a small-town treasure.

But, during the late 1920s the silent movies displaced stage performances and, as with thousands of American theaters, passing years brought artistic decay and physical neglect.

But a brilliantly-managed restoration was launched in 2009. The theater closed for a year as some of the best specialty contractors in the country worked with the walls, ceiling, seats and mechanical systems. The project came in on time and under budget, and opened to rave reviews.

Today, as a point of local pride, the Opera House welcomes drama, music of all shapes and styles, and monthly screenings for film lovers.

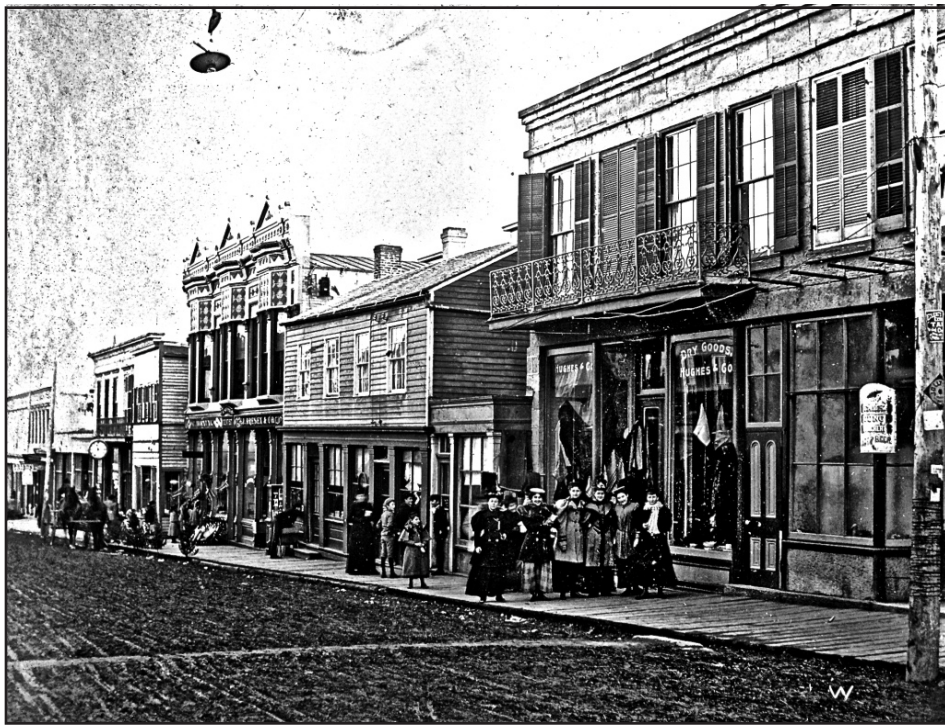
Comparable theaters all over the United States struggling to restore the grandeur of their vaudeville stages, and must raise big money to repair their century-old buildings. They spend their dollars and volunteer time to make needed repairs, and then try to attract good crowds. Most of these projects never get off the ground, or stall in mid-restoration.

To our great credit, Mineral Point planned ambitiously, wrote the checks, and brought back its vaudeville palace. And the community is using it well.

The Times of Mineral Point thanks all who attended our recent benefit performance of Get Back Wisconsin, the "pristine" Beatles band.

Your ticket will rebuild the marquee.

In days ahead, you'll arrive at the Opera House front door, look up and around, and say, "Hey, I helped!"



A DECENT DAY FOR HIGH STREET

A good crowd on the boardwalk in the 200 block. This photo shows a suspended street lamp (not a flying saucer) indicating the time period is after electricity arrived in 1891, but before the frame building was replaced in 1907. (now the site of the Bargain Nook, just west of the ornate metal facade of the Wantoot Gallery)

DIANE STUART NAMED PRESIDENT OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Diane Stuart is building an impressive resume as an arts and history activist in Mineral Point. A newly-constituted Board of Directors for the Mineral Point Historical Society elected Stuart their President, named Jude Clayton Vice-President, Nancy Schmit as Secretary and Shan Thomas as Treasurer.

Ainsley Anderson was promoted from Manager to Executive Director of the 77-year old organization.

Diane and her husband, Brian Stuart, purchased the historic Moses Strong residence on Fountain Street a few years ago, and have been restoring the home. She has also been active on the Arts Mineral Point (AMP) leadership team.

She told the Times. "People have been generous in their support, which will allow the Society to build on it's role as a historical resource in our community."

Lyceum Revisits Soldiers' Memorial Park

The historical society's February Lyceum focused on the development of the city's Soldiers' Memorial Park, ten acres rich with stories of hard work in hard times, tough local decisions, frustrations, natural disasters, and a variety of free vintage entertainment options for generations of happy Pointers.

Four panelists recollected the park's opening in 1922, its naming by the Red Cross to honor World War I veterans, its growth, the astonishing construction on the site, and its mission: "lively low-cost recreation for the residents of the city."

A 3.5 acre lake once filled the lowland alongside Shake Rag Street (then Hoard Street), and the hills held a big dance pavilion, a playground, and the Olympic-sized swimming pool built by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression. The country's Big Bands regularly played at the pavilion as 400-500 couples danced on a spring-loaded floor on Thursday nights. A water slide and lofty swing dumped swimmers into the pond and rowboats dotted the lake. Pageants, plays, and proms were staged in the park's pavilion and bandstand. A "Pasty Ball" and "Symphony of the Hills" were annual events. As the park's reputation grew, "the place was always packed," the panelists related.

The pool opened in 1937 with a water show and a water ballet, after workers on the public works project blasted rock from the park's hill, then put it back.

The lake was ordered drained in the mid-1940s, and the roof of the dance hall came crashing down in a snowstorm in 1979. The city's leaders reluctantly decided rebuilding would not be feasible. The bandstand was torn down in 2004.

So, Soldiers' Memorial Park took its present shape, and is maintained with help from present-day volunteer workers who remember "the good old days."

In spite of the losses, the park remains a remarkable community asset.

And, it's a fountainhead for great stories—sad or funny—from its history.



Interested residents pore over photos and memorabilia tracing the development of the Soldiers' Memorial Park.

MPHS 3rd Lyceum - March 20th - "THE POTLUCK"



LEGEND

LOCAL LEGEND

"PASSWORD," ANYONE??"

The Third Annual Allen Ludden Password Tournament takes place on Sunday, March 13th, at the Pointer's Public Library. The fun-filled competition pits two teams, each with two players, for four rounds of a word association game, with a play-off at the end.

Ludden was a Mineral Point-born TV game host, the husband of actress Betty White. He returned to his home town often, participated in local events, and is buried in Graceland Cemetery.

The 1:00 p.m. event is free, open to spectators if they promise they won't bother the contestants. Light refreshments will be served.

Local Ludden Lookalike Roland Sardeson will moderate the tourney.

Teams must register before March 11th by calling the Library at 987-2447.



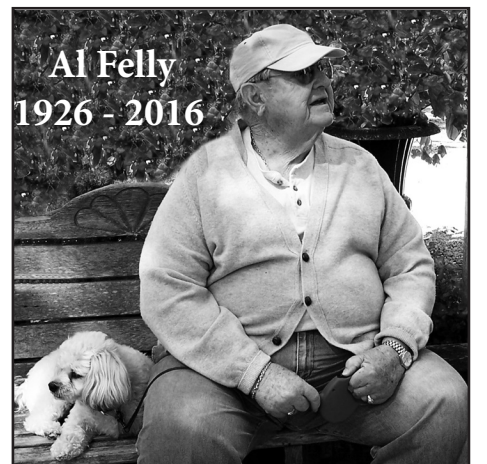
Garden Getaway

The 11th Annual Garden Getaway opens at the Shake Rag School of the Arts on March 19th and continues on Sunday, March 20th.

It's a weekend of inspiration for gardeners, a time to learn about plants, techniques, and household decor, a time to "get psyched" for the spring tasks that go with digging in the soil.

The school is offering fourteen workshops, lectures and demonstrations. Under an able faculty, you can learn to build a willow garden trellis, work with concrete to form patio plant containers, practice flower pounding, make herbal soaps, and sign on for a variety of other classes in the rustic arts.

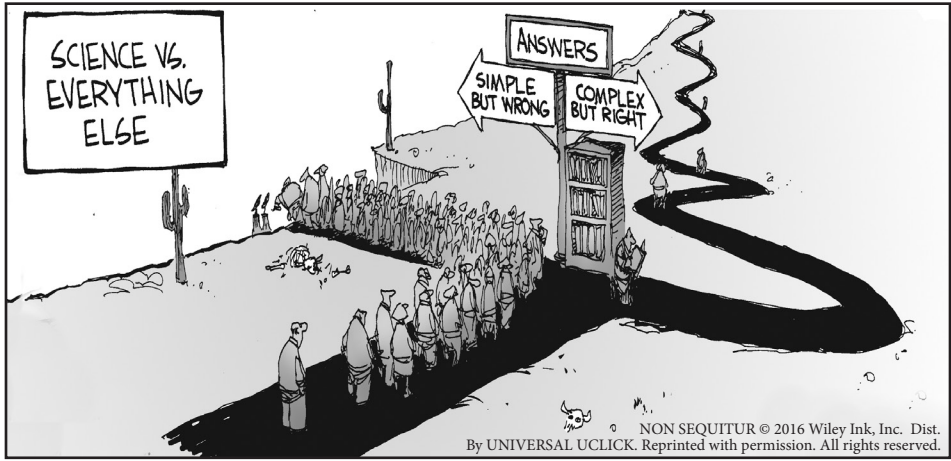
Check www.shakeragalley.com



Al Felly
1926 - 2016

Al and faithful companion "Buttons" in the Felly gardens behind their 1830s historic home, the Welsh House, on Shake Rag Street. A successful Madison florist, Al settled in Mineral Point where he tended his flowers, carved his wooden Santas, and greeted passersby from his favorite seat next to Eadie on the porch. As its landlord, he "saved" the grounds and cottages of the Shake Rag School. He encouraged early artists and potters and built that little valley into a magical spot. He brought kids to the city in the Redruth Exchange.

For his generosity and overflowing love, the *Times of Mineral Point* nominates him for the Pointer Hall of Fame.



FLOTSAM & JETSAM

BY THE EDITOR, FRANK BEAMAN

Scientists in overwhelming numbers point to man-made global warming as the source of climate change. Millions of doubters confront that scientific consensus by asking, “Well then, how come it’s snowing today?”

Scientists also say nuclear energy is a clean, safe, cheap source of electrical power. Doubters shout, “Not in My Back Yard!” Scientists tell us genetically-modified food poses no threat to health, and doubters say, “Not on My Table!” Scientist say there’s no evidence herbal supplements make you healthier, and the doubters swear “Ginseng gives me more energy every day!”

We like some “scientific truths” much better than others, don’t we? So, as is our custom, we choose the truths we want to believe, and shrug off the truths that are “inconvenient.”

And, as the cartoon points out, Americans often answer Hard Science with Soft Slogans, the “quick-fix” kind of simplistic fiction that has popular appeal but is factually wrong, or—even worse—a calculated, fabricated lie.

It’s a lot easier to choose the faulty-but-facile myth over the more complex reality. And, there are so many noisy advocates out there, busy selling easy answers to very difficult questions.

Science suffers in the bumper sticker age. We are so infused with hype and hysteria we can’t even recognize hype and hysteria. Most of us don’t take the time or expend the energy needed to get the answer that is “Complex but Right” by sorting through facts and the solid experience of genuine experts.

We are more easily persuaded by propaganda than proven fact.

This is especially true in politics, where almost every utterance is carefully crafted to push emotional buttons. Political messages are tested in focus groups and well-rehearsed before their public delivery. The truth of the utterance may be of secondary importance.

It’s the IMPACT that counts.

Republicans are adept at framing their issues in language that hits hard. The Grand Old Party, traditional home of big business, is skilled in marketing and promotion and uses all the right tools to reach the public with strategic messages, which are coordinated and forcefully presented in the mass media, the pipeline to the voters. Republicans display absolute certainty, leading the charge for or against the day’s topic.

Democrats don’t do it as well. They sometimes say, “On the other hand.” For the GOP, there is no “other hand.”

To compare the persuasive skills of our two political parties, examine the rollout of the Affordable Care Act in March 2010. Republican outrage was heard everywhere within minutes of the time the law was passed. They quickly renamed it “Obamacare,” a darker label. They warned of “death squads,” railed about “a government takeover of our health care system.”

Further, we were told, the new law was “unconstitutional,” and “catastrophic.”

Remember those strong words?

Congressional Democrats, who won passage of the ACA without a single Republican vote, emerged from their offices, blinked in the bright lights while facing the news camera and muttered, “Uh, if you would actually READ the document [10,000 pages?] you would see it’s not all that bad.”

Pretty weak stuff. And, the President seemed more the professor than the politician as he tried to sell the Act’s good points to a bedazzled public.

So, most Americans quickly came to agree with what the Republicans told them on the very first day of the long debate: “Obamacare is unpopular!”

They *made* it unpopular on Day One.

The House has voted to repeal the ACA more than sixty times, and the “unpopular” label is still the public’s view of the law. The muted voices who deal with reality and fact say, “The ACA has always been imperfect and it needs work, but it’s working pretty well.”

And, on today’s campaign trail we find another example of the difficulty of telling the whole story. Candidate Bernie Sanders warned the corporate and bank interests, “If you don’t end your greed, we will end it for you.” But, Bernie felt compelled to spell out just how he would do that, and his language got slushy: he spoke of “bank regulation, the Federal Reserve.” Boring! And, (gasp!) “taxes.” *Worse* than Boring!

Candidate Trump seems to feel absolutely no compunction to explain how anything would work. “We’ll win any war we want to start,” or “Make Mexico pay for the wall.” It’s just that simple.

Much of the blame for the woeful state of public discourse can be laid at the feet of the news media. Television, the Internet, Chatterbox Cable News and Fake/Funny News have replaced the newspapers and networks we grew up with as our reliable source for information. Journalism’s “watchdog” role has been usurped by the fluff of celebrity storytelling, a universe of mind-numbing and unimportant “Breaking” bulletins, and a bogus mathematical approach to “equal and fair coverage,” which pits one interview guest against a guest with an opposing viewpoint, to “balance” the discussion. The two recite their talking points, giving the audience only a puzzling war of words—heat without light.

There’s a better way to inform the public. Back in The Day (say, the 1970s), news carpenters used their (non-Smart) telephone to find the most qualified expert on a given topic, without regard to the expert’s affiliation. And, then, some reporters were “shoe-leather” journalists: they dug for facts, cross-checked each story, and presented material that was boring, a bit complicated, but important.

That’s what’s needed today: to weigh Fact versus Fancy and tell a truth-starved public what’s Complex, but Right.



Bob & Ray and The Virtues of Deadpan Humor

“...ly Ballou here.”

— Bob Elliott

If that strange quotation rings a bell in your memory bank, you’ve passed a test popped by David Letterman, in his first year as a late-night host, when he told his audience about a quick way to find out if someone has a good sense of humor: “If they like Bob and Ray, they’re O.K.”

Letterman’s comment seems odd, coming from a talk-show comedian who tells his jokes with broad strokes, because the humor of Bob and Ray was so ingeniously subtle and low-key many listeners could easily miss the joke. Smouldering silliness, let’s call it. It drew chuckles on radio and television for forty years, not through the use of explosive punch lines but with awkward pauses, unorthodox word choices, and some of the most off-beat characters ever invented.

Bob Elliott, 92, the soft-spoken one on the right in the photo, died a few days ago at his home in Maine. Ray Goulding, his deep-voiced and more blustery partner, died in 1990.

Who was the straight man? They took turns as they spun off timeless sketches debunking gasbags, political airheads, no-talent entrepreneurs and Madison Avenue hypemasters.

Their most enduring (and endearing) creation was Elliott’s mild-mannered but indefatigable radio reporter, Wally Ballou, whose “far-flung” news reports always ran a split-second late because the control room bungled the microphone cue (“upcut,” in radio jargon). The audience hears “...ly Ballou here.”

Wally was a self-promoter, but a rather modest one. He introduced himself as “radio’s highly-regarded winner of seven awards for good diction.”

His interview subjects, all played by Goulding, included a farmer plagued by bad luck even though his cash crop was four-leaf clovers, and the owner of a paper-clip factory who ordered all machines removed from his shop when he discovered he could pay his employees 14-cents per hour to bend the paper clips by hand.

The Bob and Ray treatment was not caustic satire, not nasty and noisy put-down. It was wry understatement.

One social critic wrote, “They never felt a need to destroy their targets; they preferred to tickle them to death with a well-aimed feather.”

Their sly routines had no show-biz slickness, no profanity, and they played to each other more than to the crowd. They created deadpan exchanges that proved comics could be hilarious without leaning on jokes and personal jabs.

That makes Bob and Ray godfathers to Bob Newhart. And, their satirical focus on the day’s absurdities makes them precursors to The Daily Show, Saturday Night Live, and other forms of alternative comedy.

Bob Elliott was fascinated with the silliness of certain words and by the power of repetition. In 1970, he played a ridiculously dull expert on Komodo dragons. He was interviewed by Goulding, who was distracted and kept asking the same question. Elliott fields each question by reciting dreary facts. “The Komodo dragon, world’s largest living lizard,” Elliott drones, “is found on the island of Komodo.”

On the radio, super-bland is funny.

The duo’s careers grew in the 1950s, on NBC’s weekend “Monitor” radio hour. They recorded comedy albums. Their bits spread to television, with guest shots on the Ed Sullivan show, as well as Johnny Carson, Steve Allen, and the aforementioned Letterman.

In 1970, they opened on Broadway with “The Two and Only,” which starred Wally Ballou, other characters, and the President of *Slow Talkers of America*, who drove his interviewer, Goulding, into a rage. He was talking, slowly, when the curtain fell for the intermission, and he was still in mid-sentence when the curtain rose again. The show ran for five months.

The exact reasons for Bob and Ray’s appeal are hard to pinpoint. By the 1980s, their gentle approach was unique among the crowded field of a louder, angrier brand of comedy. But, they were not forgotten, and their act was re-discovered as the decades went by. “We emerged every few years,” Elliott explained. They stayed alive with the “Bob & Ray Public Radio Show” on NPR in 1982. And, after Goulding’s death, Bob Elliott was cast on a number of TV sitcoms and variety shows—almost always as “the mild little man.”

Elliott was proud of their lasting appeal, although he expressed that pride, as he expressed everything, very quietly. What else would you expect from a man who once said of himself and his partner, “By the time we learned we were introverts, it was too late to do anything about it.”

