

Potpourri

Here is a parcel of revelations, straight from various horses' mouths. I won't pretend the stuff is of cosmic importance, but the horses were extremely kind to me—and at a time when every headline makes one shiver, it may not be a bad idea to turn from tragedy to trivia and enjoy the idiots' circus that life has become. The world, after all, is governed these days by fools, cowards, and scoundrels.

MORTUARY

In Rocky Mountain, Ark., there was (and perhaps still is) an undertaker's emporium that bears the endearing name "Gay and Pleasant's Funeral Home."

JEQUIRITY

This is not a legal term. It is not the name of a seaport in Ecuador. It has nothing to do with jackals, jacquards, or jequirs. (There are, in fact, no jequirs.)

Jequirity is simply the name of the scarlet and black seeds of the licorice loved by Indians and used (the seeds, not the Indians) in making beads for tourists.

I have no idea why I'm telling you this.

WHY "ALBION"?

How often have you wondered why England's sobriquet—perfidious or not—is *Albion*? Since I often have, it is with pleasure I inform you: after grueling research, I have discovered that *Albion* may have been the Celtic name for Britain, probably after the white (Latin: *albus*) cliffs of Dover.

Another story has it that Albion, a Roman who came to England, was the first Christian to be martyred there.

But my favorite caper in etymology is the third and more lurid yarn, which recounts the tale of a king of Syria with so commodious and cooperative a harem that the potentate sired no less than 50 daughters—the oldest a lass named Albia. All 50 girls are said to have committed matrimony on the same night, and each—rumor has it—promptly murdered her husband.

So the 50 Syrian widows were punished by their daddy—who hustled them aboard a ship and cast it adrift. The vessel finally reached England, where all 50 murderesses settled down and married natives and, so far as we know, lived harpily ever after.

I do not vouch for this shamelessly Anglophobic version of how Albion became anglicized.

THE RATS OF ANIR

Off the coast of New Guinea, there is an island named Anir. Anir was being ravaged by rats some years ago: huge, ferocious rats who were harassing the natives and terrorizing the children and fattening themselves on the garbage.

The beleaguered authorities finally imported a shipment of voracious cats to Anir. Today the rats on Anir are even plumper and more jaunty, I am told, because they ate up all the cats.

If you can find a moral in this, let me know. Anir sorely needs a Rodents' Thinker.

NEITHER SLEET NOR HAIL

A letter addressed to the dean of the Augustinian order in Guisborough, England, was returned with the address crossed out and (it tickles me to note) with this message, scribbled by one of England's incomparable postal service minions: "This monastery was dissolved in 1540."

APOTHEGMS

Last night, over wet martinis, a droll friend made my week by proclaiming: "Ring Lardner's best wisecrack was this one: 'While he was not dumber than an ox, he was not any smarter.'"

I was so enchanted by that zap that I traced it to its source. It *wasn't* written by Ring Lardner. It was minted by James Thurber, in his peerless jape *My Life and Hard Times*. He was describing the mental endowment of an Ohio State tackle—immortalized as Bolanciewicz.

This reminded me of the memorable *pensée* by Mr. Pete Gent, whilom flanker for the Dallas Cowboys: "What I lack in speed, I make up for in cowardice."

PATRIOTIC PATRONYMICS

A columnist I always read with respect is Mr. Vermont Royster. He writes in the *Wall Street Journal*, which is about as excellent as a paper can be. His name has always tantalized readers.

The other day I met a hemstitcher who told me that Mr. Royster's father was so patriotic that he named his progeny after states in the union. "Mr. Royster has a sister named Virginia Carolina. And Vermont Royster's middle name is Connecticut."

How could I resist asking Mr. Royster if all this is true? He responded:

Dear Leo Rosten,

You are on the right track but slightly derailed. I am named for my *grandfather*.

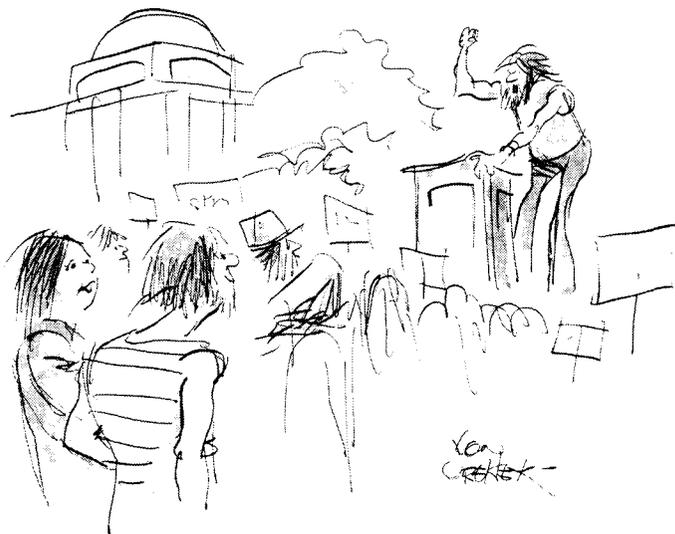
My great-grandfather had seven living children, all named after states—to distinguish them from his brother's children. No one ever got the two families confused.

The names were:

- Vermont Connecticut
- Arkansas Delaware
- Iowa Michigan
- Oregon Minnesota
- Wisconsin Illinois
- Virginia Carolina
- Georgia Alabama

Except in my case, the custom has died out. I feel like the last of the Mohicans.

Cordially,
Vermont Royster □



"Hard to believe he flunked public speaking."

World Environment Newsletter

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Global Report

Nakuru, Kenya—Every day, this high Great Rift Valley town spills 1.1 million gallons of partially treated sewage into a nearby shallow lake without outlet. The municipal dump drains into the lake, as do fertilizers, DDT, dieldrin, and other pesticides from the surrounding farmland. Such things happen every day all over the world.

What makes the situation here unusual is that Lake Nakuru is one of the wonders of the avian world and is part of the first national park in Africa created especially for birds. About a million pink flamingos, tens of thousands of white pelicans, thousands of cormorants, herons, and some 400 species of other birds feed here, attracted by the lake's delectable algae; the larger species consume about 150 tons daily.

Although the man-made pollution that enters the lake is being carefully monitored, nothing is being done to stem the flow. Scientists calculate that within another decade or so, the level of pollution will become lethal.

Stuttgart—At a time when natural-gas supplies cannot meet demand, the resource is still being flared off many oil fields because it is too difficult or expensive to transport. A German living near here is obtaining international patents for a plan to transport gas by airships. On the return trip, buoyancy would be achieved with saturated steam. Steam might also be used in transporting heavier-than-air gases and would make inflammable gases far safer; adding 27 percent steam is said to make even hydrogen non-inflammable. Patent-holder Hermann Papst maintains that a variety of gases could be carried by airships safely and very economically.

San Juan—A huge superport and refinery, sufficient to supply the present oil needs of the East Coast of the United States, is to be built on the western coast of Puerto Rico. With the encouragement of the Scientists' Committee for Public Information and various groups within the commonwealth, the Natural Resources Defense Council is filing suit to prevent construction on the grounds that the project would cause massive air pollution, endanger fishing grounds, consume valuable

farmland, and exhaust the island's limited water supply.

Opponents of the superport-refinery contend that the project would provide relatively few jobs and only modest revenue. The chief beneficiaries would be the United States and U.S. oil companies. Moreover, the suit asserts that the commonwealth government has failed to follow its own, and the federal NEPA, requirements. Indeed, Puerto Rico is seeking exemption from environmental protection laws because, according to two University of Puerto Rico scientists,

PUD, a Forward Step in Housing Developments?

An alternative to Levittowns and one-acre zoning is finally emerging as a force for more economical land use, improved design, and more sensible living. Known as Planned Unit Development, PUD represents a trade-off between communities and developers, with the potential for meeting a wide range of environmental ills: visual pollution, misuse of land, wastage of energy and materials.

PUD permits higher densities—up to 15 homes per acre—and a mixture of commercial building and varied housing on the same integrated site. These mean high profits and substantial inducement for the developer to accept the other half of the bargain: he must plan the entire tract in advance, not in piecemeal chunks; and he must set aside a substantial portion of the site for open spaces held in common.

According to *Design & Environment*, more than half of all U.S. cities now have PUD ordinances, and by 1976 PUDs may exist in 25,000 communities. At their best, PUDs provide a new standard of architectural innovation and variety, mixing town houses, cluster housing, one- to three-story single or multi-family homes, and mid-rise apartment buildings of five to seven stories. The public greenbelts afford space for recreation areas, walkways, and bicycle paths, and they require the skills of the landscape architect. The provision of commercial space means that many residents can walk to offices and shops.

PUD cannot ensure imaginative planning, design, or landscaping, but it encourages them, and alert communities can demand them.

the proposed complex would cause a 400 percent increase in emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and particulates into the island's atmosphere.

Boulder, Colo.—An atmospheric scientist here has advanced the theory that airborne particles of radioactive dust settling on tobacco leaves may be responsible for the high incidence of lung cancer among cigarette-smokers. Made insoluble by the heat of the burning cigarette, particles accumulate and persist in the lungs, where they emit alpha radiation. Edward A. Martell of the National Center for Atmospheric Research believes that the greatest significance of his research may be in assessing the health hazards of nuclear reactors fueled by plutonium, which may also be airborne in particles of respirable size and which also emits alpha radiation.

Bombay—One of the hazards of dam building is that the enormous weight of the impounded water may cause earthquakes. Detailed records of seismological activity in the region of the Koyna Dam south of here has led two Indian scientists to speculate that a serious earthquake may be imminent.

Since the reservoir started to fill in 1962—in a region where earthquake tremors had been unknown—there have been hundreds of minor shocks and four earthquakes above 5 on the Richter scale. The most serious, in December 1967, caused extensive damage and killed approximately 200 people. After 12 years, the underlying rock clearly has not settled permanently and there continues to be a direct correlation between seismic activity and the water level behind the dam.

Honolulu—Hawaiians are gradually realizing that they are both exceptionally vulnerable to shortages and dislocations in fuel supplies and uniquely endowed with natural energy: geothermal, solar, wind, waves, ocean currents, and thermal gradients. The state's total dependence on fossil fuels, which must be imported from a minimum distance of 2,000 miles, is a condition that the government intends to end with all possible dispatch.

Further motivation arises from the fact that it is not feasible to have an electric grid connecting islands with low-population densities scattered across 350 miles of water; massive