



## "If It Fitz..." Christmas at the estate

By Jim Fitzgerald

If you've been paying attention, you will recall that, a few days before Christmas, I announced that I would spend the holiday at my daughter's country estate, Dog-Poop-on-the-Driveway, in Lapeer county. This was my darling way of social-climbing one hyphen ahead of Henry Ford II, who celebrated Christmas at his country estate at Henley-on-Thames in England.

This particular daughter is Ferd, the newlywed, and his was her first opportunity to prepare a large family dinner and in some small way repay her parents for ending her out into the world without knowing how to plug in a toaster. Remembering that Ford's daughters, since leaving home, have married a Greek shipping tycoon, designed haute couture clothing and dated the governor of New York, I arrived at Ferd's with a pocketful of peanut butter sandwiches.

From two blocks away, I could read the smartly lettered sign nailed across both doors of Ferd's garage. It said "Welcome to Dog-Poop-on-the-Driveway." Several neighbors, obviously impressed by their proximity to a classy residence, also had put signs on their

homes. These signs said "For Sale."

A few hours before the appointed time for dinner, Ferd was seen carrying a raw turkey into her laundry room. I immediately went into her kitchen to see if she were by chance washing her husband's socks in the oven.

A few hours after the appointed time for dinner, we still hadn't eaten. I figured the delay was caused by the fact that Ferd didn't have a dryer and was forced to hang the turkey outside on the clothesline. But I later learned that in her laundry room she has a roaster, which, unfortunately, is as complicated as a toaster and must be plugged in.

The turkey was finally eaten, just before the Red Cross arrived, and Ferd asked her guests if they would like apple pie for dessert. When we all agreed we would, she immediately began peeling the apples.

Ferd and her husband have recently added Jessica to their family. Jessica is a dog and is responsible for the sign on the garage. When gifts were opened, I was startled to learn I had given Jessica a sweater for Christmas. There is something to be said against letting your spouse do your shopping for you, and I just said it.

It has long been my belief that God rewarded dogs for being animals instead of humans by freeing them from all earthly fear of zippers. When I bah-hum-bugged that I resented being made an unsuspecting party to the dressing of a dog, Ferd criticized me for not

wanting to give a present "to your granddaughter."

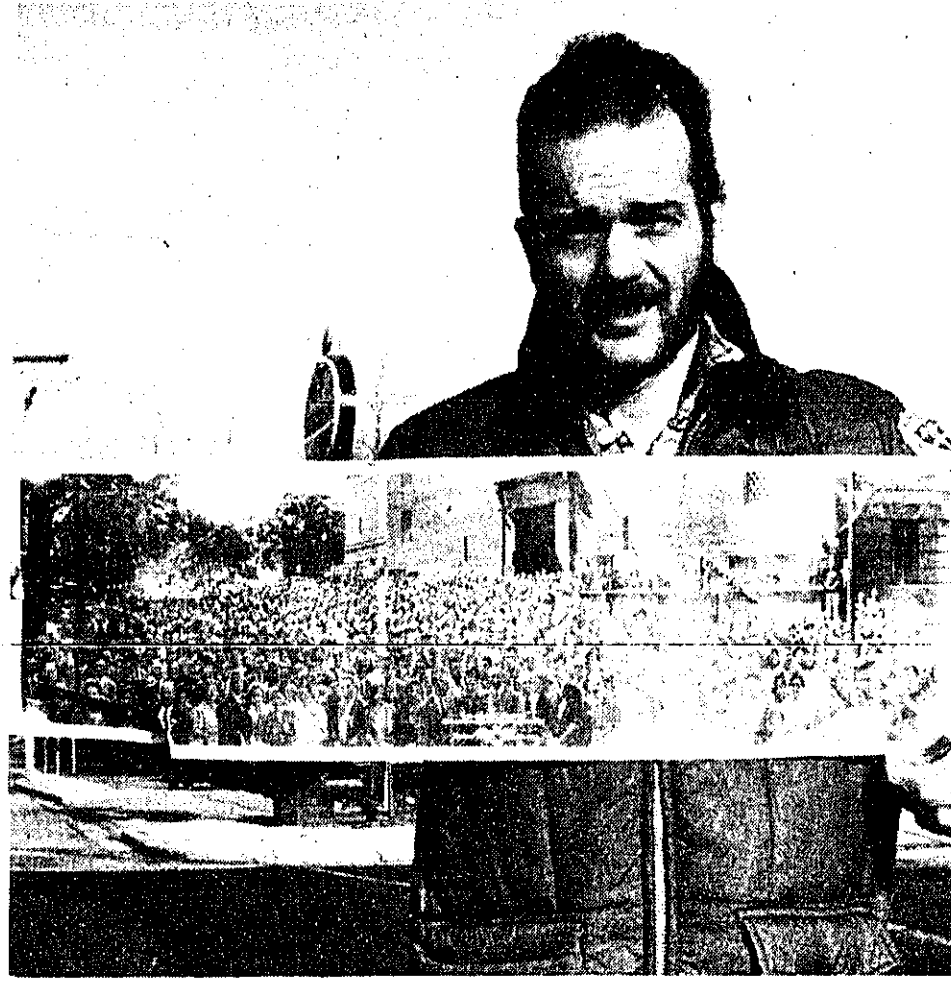
I should have listened to my mother, who wanted me to be a pope. But she never warned me that someday I might be the grandfather of a hairy mutt who gets dressed before going outside to decorate the driveway.

Speaking of poop, there were some two-legged grandchildren at this Christmas party. One of them was five-year-old John, dressed completely in Superman uniform. When he yelled from the bathroom that he needed aid in completing his toilet, I expressed surprise. John explained: "There are some things Superman can't do."

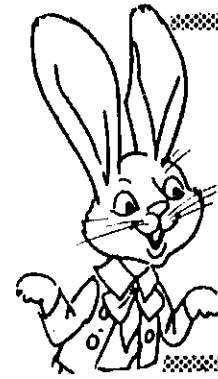
Also present, to add a modern touch to the Christmas caroling, was 10-year-old Michele. She was equipped with one of those portable microphones that you must have seen advertised on TV. When you sing into it, your voice comes out of nearby radios whether the radio owners like it or not. This microphone was invented by George Orwell.

It was really something to watch Michele sing "Silent Night" into her amazing gadget while tears came to the eyes of her 83-year-old great-grandmother, who is older than radio. There is much to be said for family parties, even by a smart-aleck columnist, and I just said it.

I hope Henry Ford II had a good time at Henley-on-Thames. There is no way he had a better time than I had at Dog-Poop-on-the-Driveway. When it comes to hyphens, you can't beat l-o-v-e.



**RECOGNIZE ANYONE? -- Robert Becker is the owner of this almost 3-foot long photograph, which came with the house he owns at Elizabeth and West Streets, owned at one time by the late Guy Landon. Photo shows participants at the convention of the National Rural Letter Carriers Association and Ladies' Auxiliary in Portland, Ore., in August, 1939. Presumably Landon is in the photo as he was a rural mail carrier.**



## Rabbit Tracks

By John Haire

(And anyone else he can get to help)

Not because we have an axe to grind with the incumbents is it disappointing that there will be no competition for village council positions.

It's that when competition comes all the policies and decisions of the village fathers are thoroughly aired and sometimes changed.

When competition comes it gives the taxpayer a chance to air his gripes with a reasonable chance of having someone pay attention.

When competition comes it gives the paper at least one story of general interest and sometimes a series of them.

That last reason is important only to editors and, perhaps to the persons written about.

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The year has been a disaster for firms and individuals depending on snow to make things go. It's too late, the experts say, to recoup losses sustained in December in the months ahead.

While the absence of snow has the resorts and equipment manufacturers gnashing their teeth, the absence of the white stuff has been a boon to Michigan deer.

Regardless of what happens now, say Department of Natural Resources officials, the herd will weather the winter in wonderful shape.

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No wonder he's one of Cass City's best. My spies report that Bill Kritzman was playing golf Sunday.

## Last tax bills are mailed

Treasurers in Grant, Brookfield and Sebawaing townships mailed tax bills to property owners within the Owendale-Gagetown School District last week on the advice of Huron County Prosecutor Peter B. Capling.

The prosecutor journeyed to Lansing last Wednesday to deliver his brief in response to the tax rollback suit filed by Attorney General Frank J. Kelley.

He had also hoped to learn when the state Court of Appeals will conduct a hearing or make a decision on the case. No one was able to tell him that, he told the Chronicle, so he advised the three township treasurers to mail the tax bills.

He explained his brief argues that because of the various court cases involving the Goslin property, it's questionable what the true state equalized valuation of the Owen-Gage district is, which affects whether a tax rollback should be applied. Accordingly, he says the appeals court must make that decision.

not a defendant in the Kelley suit, has now filed a motion to be allowed to intervene, according to Supt. Ronald Erickson.

That was necessary in order to allow the district to tell its side in the dispute, he said.

Erickson also said that due to a temporary shortage of funds, payless paydays for school district employees began Dec. 21, on what would have otherwise been a normal payday.

That had been expected, the only question being when they would start. Paychecks should resume once property tax income starts coming in in January.

## Much U.S.

### food in Iran

The U.S. has provided Iran with 80 percent of its wheat, 25 percent of its feed grain, 70 percent of its vegetable oil and rice and 100 percent of its soybean oil cake and meal imports.

## Taxes higher in Owen-Gage district

Property tax bills finally got mailed this year. In Elkland township, higher taxes are being paid by

those in the Owendale-Gagetown School District, which makes up only a very small portion of the township.

Millage figures are usually round numbers, with maybe one decimal point added, but this year, there are lots of decimal places.

The Tuscola county bridge levy, for instance, is usually 1 mill, but this year is .9557 mill.

The reason is the Headlee tax limitation amendment, which required a rollback of levies so that the increase in revenue to taxing units because of an increase in property valuations was no more than the inflation rate.

Of Elkland township's total valuation of \$30.12 million, \$28.62 million is in the Cass City School District and \$1.498 million in Owen-Gage.

The total millage levy in Cass City for school operations is 19.9875; debt is 1.1.

In the Owen-Gage district, the total operating levy is 21.5 mills, which hasn't been rolled back and is now the subject of a Michigan Court of Appeals suit filed by Attorney General Frank J. Kelley. The levy is two mills less than it was a year ago, however, because of a

reduction in the extra voted millage in June. Kelley's suit claims the rollback should have been applied to the millage in effect before Dec. 31, 1978.

The Cass City district is in the Tuscola Intermediate School District, which levies 1.5157 mills for special education (part of which is for construction and operation of a county special education building) and 1.6578 mills for construction and operation of a county vocational education building. Both buildings are now under construction. There is also a .1421 mill levy for intermediate district operations.

In the Huron Intermediate School District, of which Owen-Gage is a part, the district levy is .10 mill, plus .70 for special education. There is no millage for vocational education.

Other millages are the same, no matter what the school district: county tax (for county government operations), 4.0139; county bridges, .9557; and township operations, 1.5470.

The total levy for all taxes for those living in the Cass City School District is 30.9097 mills; in Owen-Gage, 33.2166.

## The Haire Net



When I was 11 I could remember my mother saying that the future of small newspapers was doubtful because all the big major accounts were going to spend their money in radio.

Substitute television for radio and you had the concerns of the 60s. Substitute cable TV and cassette recordings and you have the concerns of the 80s.

You can substitute any industry you care to and there are dark clouds on the horizon. The corporate farm taking over for the family farm. The imports killing the auto industry and the appliance industry. Jobs lost to foreign competition.

Any of these fears can be substantiated. In the newspaper industry papers at Elkton, Gagetown, Owendale, Kingston, and North Branch have folded within the last 20 years. Others are on their last legs.

It's sad that these papers are gone because it's a reflection of the struggle the communities they served are having to stay alive.

It's sadder still when papers die in towns big enough to support them. Died when their neighbor publications down the road have prospered.

The economics of newspapers are like any other business. They need good management or they die. The same as the family

farm. While many succumb, others prosper.

There's a tendency for the farmer and the publisher to say that it's tougher now to get by than it used to be.

It may be worse today than it was five years ago, but it can't be worse than it was during the depression years. How did businesses manage when there were no checks and virtually no cash?

So it was certainly worse in the 30s than it was in the 70s and is apt to be in the 80s.

The next decade may not be as good as the last 10 years.

Our standard of living is due to go down, say the experts.

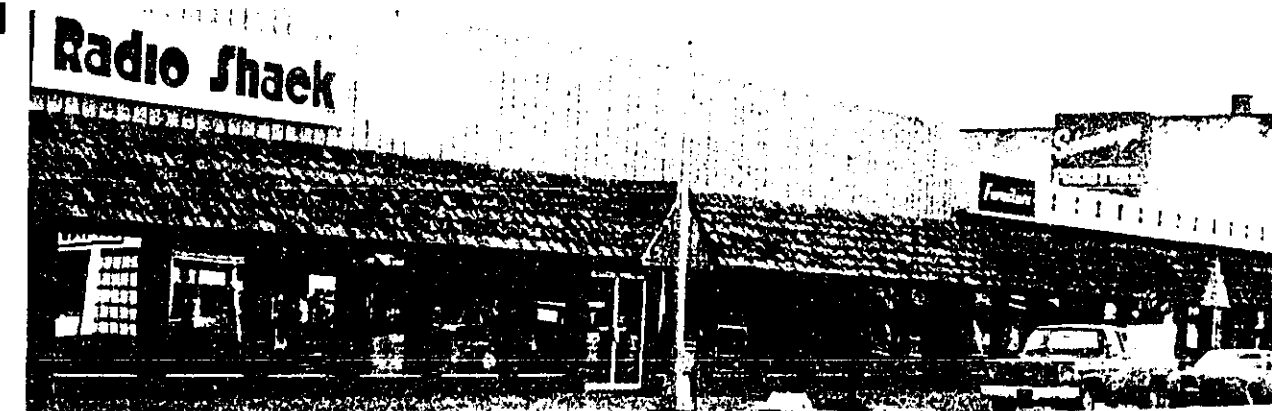
Inflation is eating away at all of us. There will be more papers tossing in the sponge. More family farms will be consolidated.

It's probable that the family farms will be bigger. It's sure that the newspapers of the 80s will be bigger than they are today.

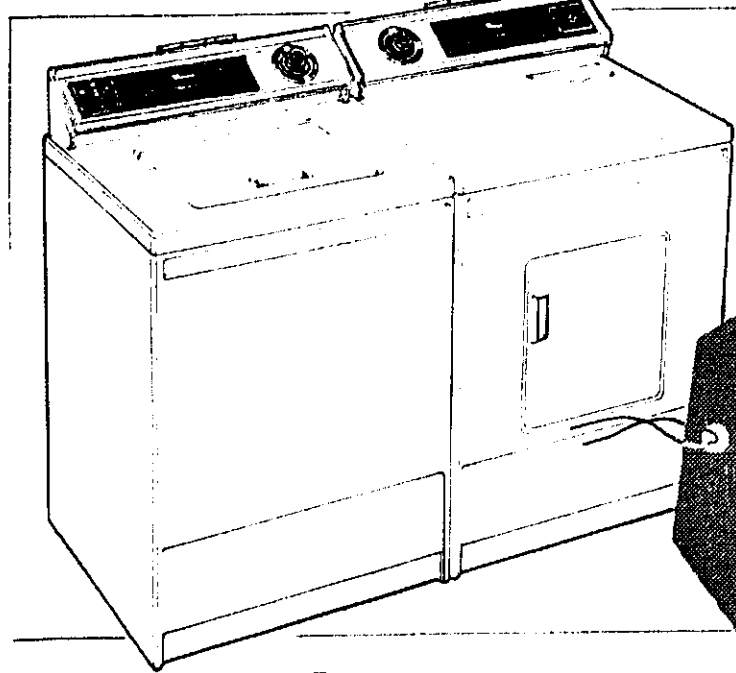
They must be bigger to solve the myriad problems ahead. Unchanged will be the determining factor that will decide which family farms survive and which papers will be writing about what the 90s have in store.

It will be the ones with good management supplemented by hard work.

A little bit of luck won't hurt either.



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