

# PEORIA

By *ELISE MORROW*

Long libeled as a rube town, this "whisky-making, earth-moving capital of the universe" is actually a bustling city of violent contrasts. It abounds in both churches and saloons, civic conscience and gambling.

This is the sixty-second of a series of articles on America's most colorful cities. The next, which deals with St. Augustine, Florida, will appear in our March 5th issue.

**E**XCEPT for Brooklyn, no community in the United States has been slandered so elaborately as Peoria, Illinois. Generations of comedians have vulgarized Peoria as the symbol of the rube and the boob, and have used the city's name to establish a suitable background for jokes about libidinous drummers. Peoria has become a companion word for "hayseed," an all-American common denominator, a municipal equivalent of the man in the street.

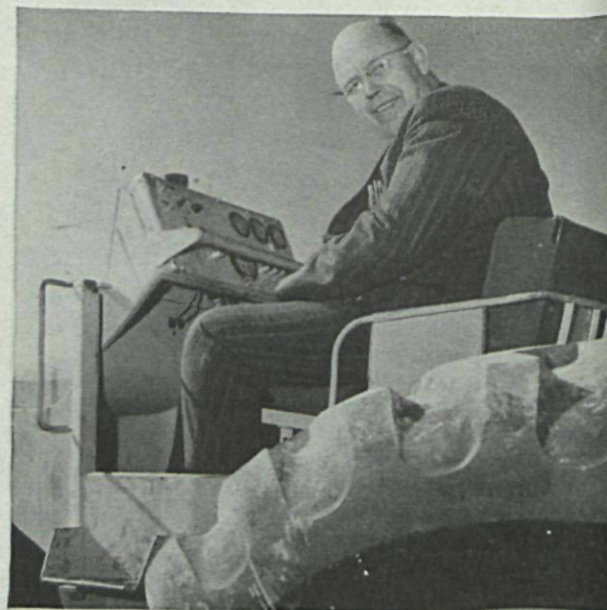
This libelous comedy, which identifies Peoria as provincialism reduced to absurdity, has given Peoria a spurious value in American culture

which has little to do with the town itself. The mythical civic personality is related to the reality only in so far as Peoria is an average American midland city and the vigorous fulfillment of the average American town. It has no individuality which is not wholly American and no eccentricity or virtue which is not entirely indigenous to the Midwest.

Peoria lies, most fortunately, on the western bank of the Illinois River, on a lovely upland sweep rising out of the rich Central Illinois prairie. The Illinois is a pretty, placid river, and is a major segment of the Lakes-to-Gulf inland waterway. It has given Peoria cheap transportation for its aggressive and diversified industry, and scenery for one of the most spectacularly beautiful residential sections in the country. Peoria's finest homes are built along bluffs which rise 300 feet above a stretch of the river so wide and calm that it is called Lake Peoria. Pres. Theodore Roosevelt is quoted as having described Grandview Drive, the principal residential street,



Loading flatcars with the product of the Caterpillar Tractor Company, Peoria's biggest employer.



Robert G. Le Tourneau, maker of excavating machinery. His slogan is "God Runs My Business."



The state's second-largest city—only Chicago is bigger—lies on the western bank of the Illinois River, an important segment of the Great-Lakes-to-Gulf inland waterway. The population is about 117,000.

as "The World's Most Beautiful Drive," an accolade which has been commemorated in the call letters of Peoria's largest radio station, WMBD.

The village of Chicago was a precinct of Peoria County from the time the county was organized, in 1825, until 1831. Now Peoria is, next to Chicago, the largest city in Illinois. According to the best available estimates, it has a population of 117,000 within the city limits, and 68,000 more persons live on its perimeter. Its claim to being the oldest continuous settlement in the state, although sometimes challenged, is generally accepted. First charted, fortified and colonized by the French in the late seventeenth century, Peoria has been a civilized settlement since 1691.

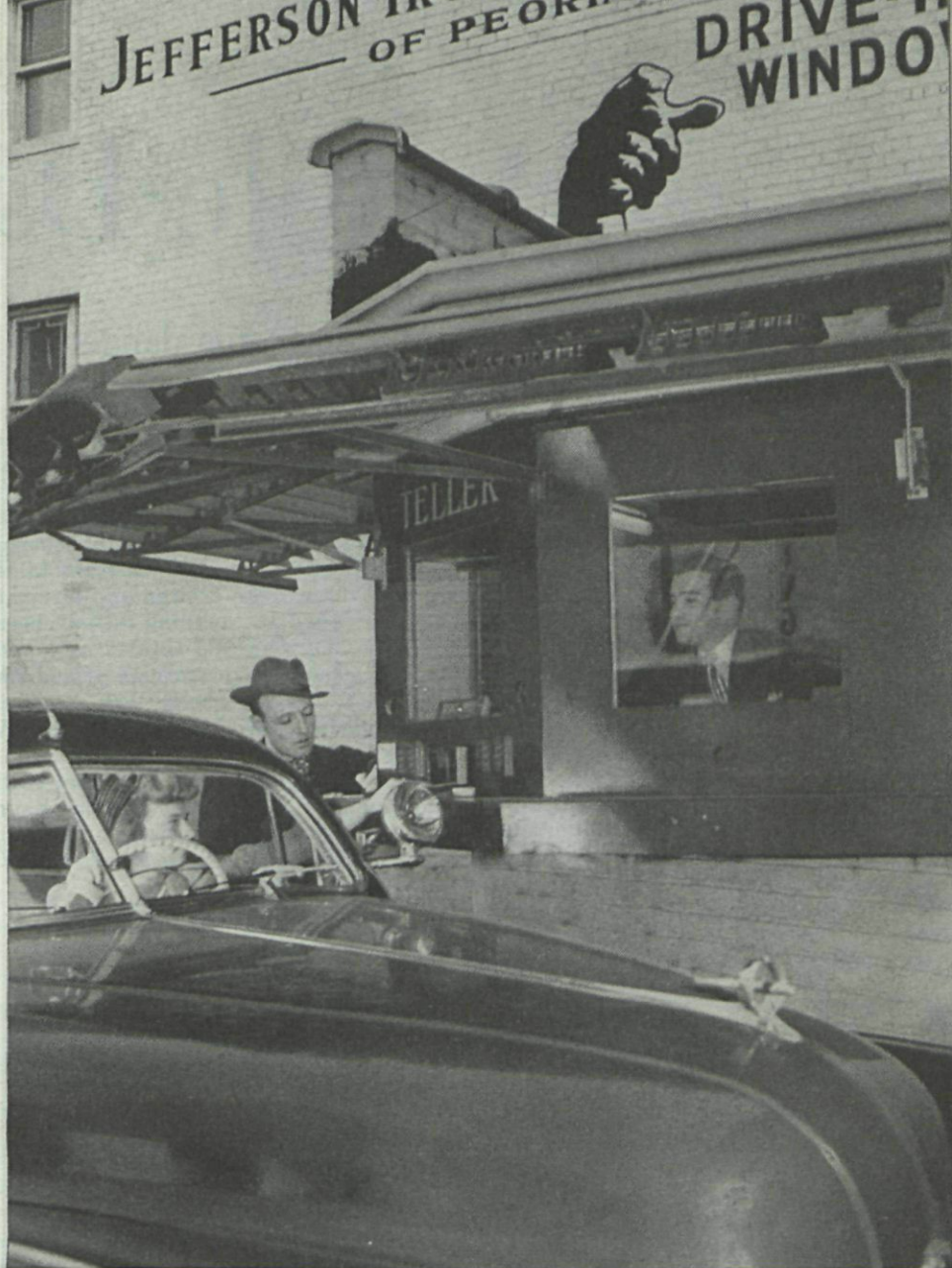
Peoria was, successively, under French, Spanish, British and, finally, American control, and the original American settlers were the hardy Anglo-Saxon pioneers who spread through the Illinois country from Virginia, Kentucky and Maryland. The heavy German immigration of the late 1840's, which played such an important role in determining the character of St. Louis, also provided a Teutonic overlay for Peoria, and after them came the Irish.

This is a city of violent contrasts, as tangible as the differences in its air and weather. It can be clear moonlight in the residential districts on the bluffs and yellow with fog in the ugly, frequently foul-smelling industrial valley. Politicians have used this cleavage with considerable success for years, reducing the city's problems to a conflict between the haves on the bluffs and the have-nots in the valley. Its further contrasts include an abundance of churches and an abundance of saloons; a genuine, highly developed and progressive civic consciousness, and a long and odorous history of gambling and sin dens.

Peoria is described by its friendly postmaster, Howard Gorman, as "the whisky-making, earth-



Bradley University students rehearsing their annual musical. The school, founded in 1897, teaches everything from the humanities to watchmaking.



Motoring depositors of the Jefferson Bank beat the parking problem by using the drive-in tellers' windows, among the first established in the Midwest.

moving capital of the universe." This, although grandiose, is reasonably accurate. Boosters call Peoria "the city of good spirits." Whisky did help to define its original character and has continued, almost more than any other single factor, to influence its history. Brewers were prominent among the industrial founding fathers, and whisky and beer, supplemented always by a variety of smaller manufacturing, were the economic backbone until the earth movers arrived. Hiram Walker operates in Peoria the largest single whisky-distilling unit in the world.

The city's largest industry today is the earth-moving Caterpillar Tractor Company. The "Cat" plant in East Peoria employs 22,000. Caterpillar is the spiritual home of Alexander Botts, the wild and marvelous tractor salesman of Saturday Evening Post fiction. Peoria's other leading manufacturer of earth-moving machinery is Robert G. Le Tourneau, an eccentric genius whose slogan is "God Runs My Business."

With Caterpillar and Le Tourneau, the largest employers in Peoria are the Keystone Steel and Wire Company, Hiram Walker, and Altorfer Brothers—washing machines. Beyond them, there is an astonishing variety of large and small operations—more than 200 industrial firms producing 1500 different products, including everything from commercial solvents to golf-club-head covers.

Such industrial diversification gives Peoria an unusual economic stability. The city also draws upon the fat Illinois farm land which surrounds it. Peoria lies fifty miles from the geographic heart of the great American corn belt, and 150 miles from the center of the nation's cattle-raising industry. The United States Department of Agriculture, after searching the entire Middle West, chose Peoria as the perfect site for a \$2,000,000 regional research laboratory to develop new and extended uses for

farm commodities and their by-products. One of four such laboratories in the country, it has had a long list of achievements in the past eight years, among them discoveries which made possible the large-scale commercial production of penicillin.

That the name of a city so fortunate and fruitful could have been taken in vain so relentlessly for so long is a source of wonder to most Peorians. Some serenely attribute it to the pure melodiousness of the old Indian word, Peoria, a little exotic, but entirely American, which rolls so nicely on the tongue; more are resentful of the implication that "Peoria" is synonymous with "hick town."

"We don't laugh when someone says 'Peoria,'" one of the city's first citizens remarked not long ago when the subject came up for discussion.

Many Peorians date their city's downfall in the national mythology to two masterpieces of libel visited upon them in the early '20's. The first is a scene in a popular play of the period, called *Lightnin'*, in which an addlebrained girl says mournfully that the only reason she and her husband got married was that they happened to be in Peoria and it rained all week.

The second is a gay little madrigal, written in 1925 by Billy Rose, which was still being sung by soldiers and sailors during the second World War. It is called *I Wish't I Was in Peoria*, and it has eight stanzas, all equally derisive, but in several cases remarkably prescient. The last stanza says that "they trim their nails with guns in Peoria," a statement which would not have seemed, at times in the past few years, much of an exaggeration.

Earlier stanzas allege that:

*The present mayor of Peoria  
Works in a five-and-ten-cent storio. . .*

*They chased the laundry out of Peoria,  
The legislature passed a lawria  
And bought a bathtub for Peoria.*

This whimsey has a peculiar connection with present reality. Mayor Carl O. Triebel, who heads the first remotely successful reform administration in Peoria's history, never worked in a five-and-ten, but he is the owner of the Ideal Troy Laundry, one of the largest laundries in the city. He was elected in 1945. Mayor Triebel is a very plain man, referred to both by himself and by his enemies as "a damned dumb Dutchman." He lacks completely the silver-tongued, keys-to-the-city expansiveness of many Midwestern municipal officials, but he is stubborn, patient, honest and sincere. He is also very philosophical.

Recently, while shepherding a visitor about the city, Mayor Triebel drove past the Ideal Troy and, pointing to it, said, "That's what makes it possible for me to be mayor." He has considerable affection for the laundry, and he went on to explain that running a laundry is good training for running a city. "It makes you patient and fatalistic," he said. "Things come in dirty and go out clean, and every week they lose a little something. . . . You can't be a perfectionist and run a laundry any more than you can be a perfectionist and run a city."

In his campaign Triebel was backed by an anonymous business group, with the help of Peoria's vigorous and progressive Association of Commerce. This group is called, interchangeably, "the better element" and, by those hostile to it, "the secret sixteen." Triebel certainly undertook one of the most difficult jobs in municipal administration when he undertook to clean up Peoria. Probably only a man of his patient, forbearing personality could have weathered the difficulties of the job; even Triebel doesn't speak

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tions. The Katharine Gibbs chain spends \$50,000 annually operating a placement service in the four cities where the schools are located. It maintains a field staff of five traveling representatives who cover the country investigating new job opportunities and soliciting business at schools and colleges. A graduate of the Providence school may choose from openings in Boston, Chicago or New York. This service is free for life to all graduates. Twenty years after graduating, alumnae—who in the meantime may have married and raised children—sometimes return for a free two-week refresher course, after which Katharine Gibbs finds them jobs with companies preferring "mature women."

The younger girls are more popular, but cause the most trouble. Each branch of the Gibbs system maintains a "do-not-follow-up" list of employers whose past performance indicates an other-than-business interest in hiring pretty girls. Students are not permitted to answer calls from unknown out-of-town businessmen who request that a secretary be sent up to their hotel rooms.

Yet the management can hardly afford to be stuffy. They don't stand by

the old saw that business and pleasure won't mix. In fact, many a sound business relationship has turned into an equally sound romance.

Gordon Gibbs set an example by marrying his attractive secretary, Blanche Lorraine, of New Bedford, Massachusetts—a Gibbs graduate, of course.

The files of the placement bureau are crammed with employer record cards marked "KGH," meaning "Katharine Gibbs husband." On long winter afternoons when the girls grow weary from pounding typewriters, scribbling shorthand and cranking adding machines, the teachers revive spirits by telling their favorite story of the Wall Street banker who requested two secretaries in as many months.

In his first request the executive carefully specified that the girl must possess charm as well as solid business training.

When he called up the second time and repeated the order, the placement office asked what had happened to the first girl.

"She married my son," replied the banker, making no effort to conceal his eagerness. "This next one is for me."

## PEORIA

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of reform, for in Peoria the word is irksome to too many people.

Peoria has never regarded itself as corrupt, nor has it seen in its abundance of gambling joints and other hospitable establishments anything more than the habiliments of a friendly convention city. Its leading citizen of the past few decades was Triebel's predecessor, the late Edward Woodruff, an old-school politician who served as mayor, off and on, for a total of twenty-four years. Woodruff, a man of personal honor, held the old-fashioned, human-nature-being-what-it-is viewpoint; he let the town run wide open as long as the operators paid on the line into the city coffers.

Woodruff was, in many ways, more than a mayor. A small, scrawny, red-faced man, with a cigar perpetually in his mouth, he owned an ice company and lived in an unfashionable section of town. He liked people, and he liked to hold court on the city-hall steps instead of in his office. To many older Peorians he epitomized the city; he was Mr. Peoria.

The success of Mayor Triebel's cleanup is a matter of dispute. It is, however, undeniably true that neither gambling nor prostitution is able to operate with the happy abandon that was assured them before. Any traveling salesman or convention delegate at the hotels will tell you nostalgically that Peoria isn't the gay town it used to be. Although you can gamble now, you have to do a certain amount of searching, instead of having gambling, as one businessman said, everywhere but in the churches.

Peoria's housing shortage is about average. It is a community of homeowners, largely. Many of the industrial workers have come from the surrounding rural areas, for which Peoria is a trading center, and have settled in the city.

"They own their humble little homes, they are liberal-minded and they are the backbone of the community," said one politician in describing his valley constituency.

To understand Peoria, it is necessary to understand this usage of the word "liberal." In Peoria, as in Springfield and south to East St. Louis, "liberal" does not mean what it means to the rest of the country.

When a Peoria official says that he assembled a group of liberal elements in the community, he does not mean that he called a meeting of presumably forward-thinking folk from church, labor and business. He means that he rounded up the free-and-easy boys from the back room. This localized conception of the word was demonstrated by a remark made by a businessman who rejected the offer of one of the gamblers to set up slot machines in his store.

"I'm as liberal as the next man," said the businessman, "but I told him slots don't belong in here."

This is what one of the toughest old aldermen in town meant when he got up during a council meeting and shook his fist at Mayor Triebel, shouting, "You're a lying, cheating skunk! . . . You got elected saying you were a liberal, and look what you turned out to be!"

For practical purposes, Peoria is divided into these two factions, the so-called better element and the liberal element. The latter group is strong, and it includes not only numerous sinister and shady types but some business and labor people who feel that Peoria was meant to be what they call a friendly, wide-open convention town, and that it is good for business for it to remain so.

As one liberal put it, "Peoria was always a nice, sociable town. That was the old Spanish custom, and frankly it isn't possible to clean it up; there aren't enough police in the state of Illinois to do it."

Triebel had to move slowly and compromise considerably because of the power of his opposition. He was advised to carry a gun. He did for a while, but finally discarded it.

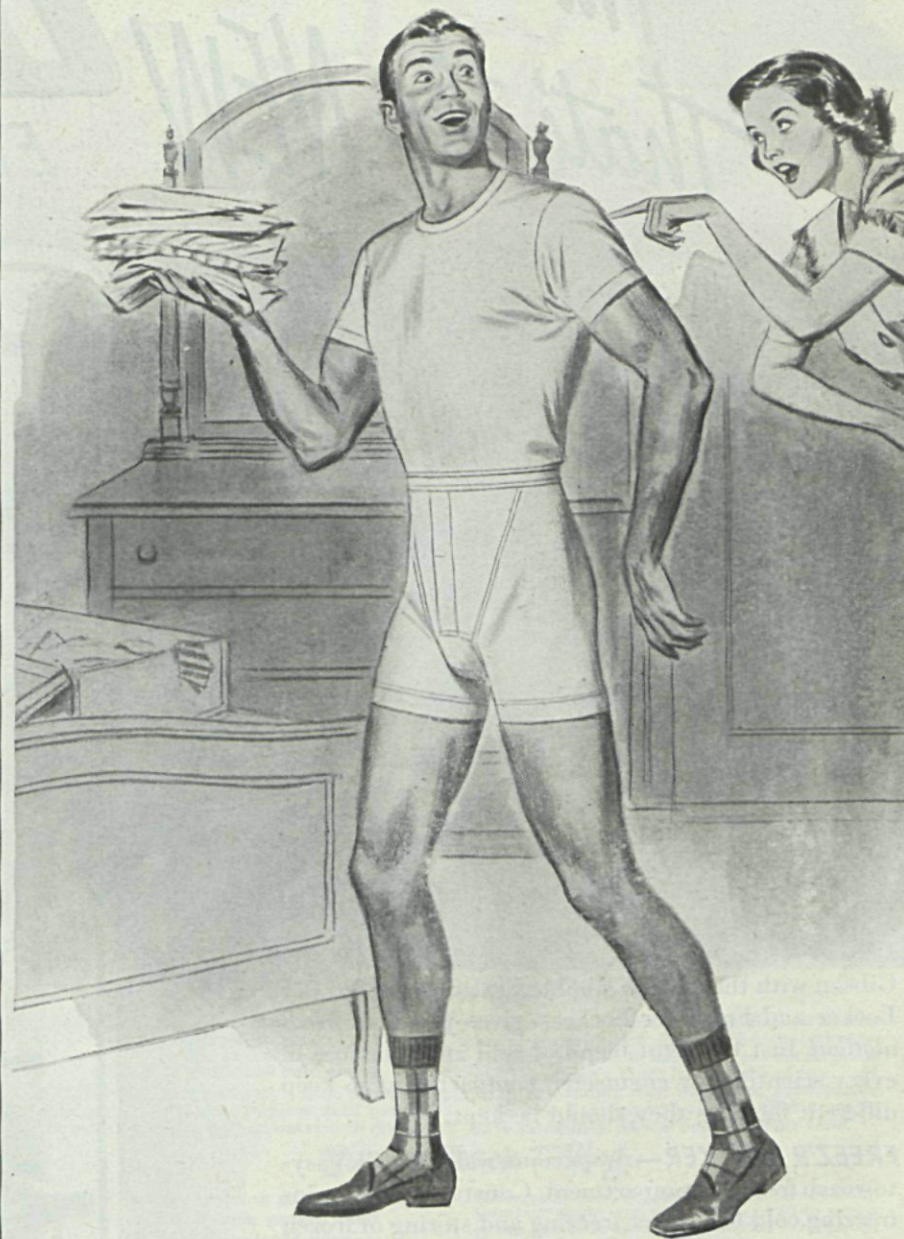
"It was too bulky," he explained. "Besides, I wouldn't have known what to do with it."

Civic consciousness of its own sort is not restricted to the better element in

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# Check Your Trunks, Mister?

(AND WE HOPE YOUR WIFE IS LISTENING)



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Peoria. Several big and dubious operators have always been proud that they "contributed lavishly" to charities, and several exhibited, at least superficially, a sportsmanlike approach when Triebel was elected.

"If we never turn another wheel," one of them said cavalierly, "we're happy you're elected." Another, Carl Shelton, sent one of his emissaries, Ferdie (Fishmouth) McGrane, to Triebel's office sometime after the election to consult with the mayor on readjusting the slots to the change in administration.

Triebel said something about not having any more slots, and Fishmouth unhappily reported this back to the boss.

Shelton himself then came down to the mayor's office. Triebel repeated that the slots were down.

"Well," said Shelton, "I guess that'll give me more time to spend down on my farm."

"I guess it will," said Triebel.

Shelton did spend more time down on his farm in Southern Illinois, living a pleasant pastoral life until he was ambushed and assassinated near there about two years later. He had left his Peoria interests in charge of his brother Bernie, who stayed on, living just outside Peoria on a farm known somewhat hilariously as Golden Rule Acres. Bernie kept his hand in what rackets were left and hoped eventually to take over again full scale. He was murdered last July at a dismal roadside beer-and-juke joint he maintained near his farm. One of the surviving Shelton brothers, Earl, assured the reporters after Bernie's death that he was just a dirt farmer, boys, just a 100-per-cent dirt farmer.

The late Bernie, not surprisingly, knew that his future was uncertain. During the last several months of his life I tried in numerous ways to see him, and was unable to get to him. He was, his acquaintances said, "easily disturbed these days" and "likely to hit you over the head with the butt of a pistol if he didn't like your attitude. It wouldn't matter to him you're a woman. Bernie's got no sense of galantry."

Bernie left, with instructions to his wife, a remarkable document. It was a recording, laboriously made in the Shelton sunroom, of a conversation between himself and an alleged representative of a Peoria County public official. The conversation involved an alleged bribery attempt, and the in-

structions with the recording were as remarkable as the recording itself. Shelton directed that, in the event anything happened to him, the recording be turned over to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The Post-Dispatch is the newspaper without whose fairly regular services, as one prominent Illinoisan puts it, Southern and Central Illinois would have trouble remembering the fundamentals of civic morality. In the ensuing investigation, a grand jury returned indictments against three Peoria County officials, all of whom pleaded not guilty when arraigned. A subsequent grand jury reversed the pitch by indicting the Post-Dispatch reporter involved, and ridiculed his charges.

In any realistic estimate, Carl Shelton—although not the less gallant Bernie—would have been counted as one of Peoria's first citizens.

"He as good as ran the town for eight years," said one official. "You couldn't spit around here without you asked Carl."

Carl was a murderous, intelligent, amiable tough baby with a powerful ego and a Robin Hood complex. He was not unpopular in Peoria. One of the local papers ran a column when he was killed which would have been more appropriate to the death of the president of Harvard. He never swore or drank, people will tell you—"only soft drinks"—and to hear many sentimental posthumous discussions of him, you would think he had been a pillar of the community and a gentleman and scholar.

This viewpoint was, however, restricted. Shelton's adversaries on his own level were less respectful. "No decent, high-class hoodlum would have anything to do with him," one of them said.

Carl and Bernie, along with a lot of other hoods, moved in and out of Peoria during prohibition, when the town became a hotbed of bootleggers from all over the country, trying to move in on the large supply of leftover whisky. They returned with repeal, and, after a few years, took over the gambling racket.

Carl and Bernie were not the only prominent Peorians to die by violence. Their murders remain unsolved, and so does the ambush slaying in March, 1947, of George P. McNear, Jr., the large, handsome, austere president of the Toledo, Peoria and Western Railroad. McNear, a man of neurotic drive

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"Peach Pie fit for a King!" sings Bing

# Sunny Peach Pie



BING CROSBY, Star of "A CONNECTICUT YANKEE," a Paramount Picture in Technicolor



## Sunny Peach Pie

Ann Pillsbury's Pastry

- 1 cup sifted Pillsbury's Best Enriched Flour
  - 1/2 teaspoon salt
  - 1/2 cup shortening
  - 2 to 3 tablespoons cold water
- Sift together flour and salt. Cut in shortening with pastry blender or 2 knives until particles are size of small peas. Add water until dough is

moist enough to hold together. Roll on floured board or pastry cloth to about 1/8-inch thickness. Fit loosely in 9-inch pan; gently pat out air pockets. Trim pastry 1 inch beyond rim of pan. Fold to form standing rim; flute edge. Prick pastry with fork. Bake in very hot oven (450 degrees F.) 12 to 15 minutes. Makes one 9-inch pie shell.

## Sunny Peach Filling

- 1 #2 1/2 can sliced cling peaches, drained
- 1 baked 9-inch pastry shell
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup syrup from peaches
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon grated orange rind
- 1 tablespoon butter or margarine
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Arrange drained peaches in baked pastry shell. Combine sugar and cornstarch. Add to peach syrup and cook until thick, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in orange juice, rind, butter and salt. Pour over peaches in shell. Chill. Serves 6.

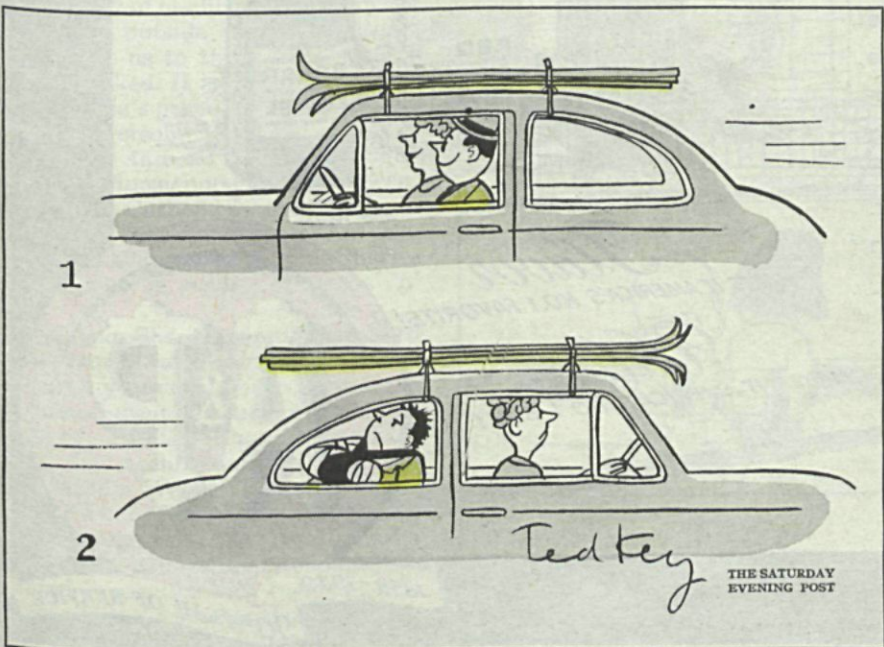
California Canned Cling Peaches have a true peach flavor. They're yellow as the sun that ripens them! Packed orchard fresh! Instantly ready to use! Best peaches for pies, cakes, salads, desserts! Priced right! Every grocer has them!



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## Canned Cling Peaches from California

Canned Halves · Canned Slices · Canned Fruit Cocktail · in tin or glass



THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

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and ambition, had had trouble for years with everyone with whom he dealt—the railroad unions, his bankers, lawyers and bodyguards. He was shot on a foggy night as he walked to his home from a basketball game.

Most of Peoria's leading citizens, having a higher life expectancy, lead comfortable and prosperous but unpretentious lives. They live in beautiful homes, either on Moss Avenue, the oldest residential street, on a lower bluff, or farther out, in the Grandview Drive section of the bluffs. Their social life revolves around two clubs, the Peoria Country Club and the Mt. Hawley Country Club. The best businessmen's lunch used to be served at one of the gambli houses; now the men go to the old Crève Coeur Club or to the smaller University Club. The Crève Coeur looks like a dingy fortress, a small-town Union League, from the outside. The inside, which was recently redecorated, is spacious and comfortable.

Although the bluff-and-valley division is sharp, Peoria as a whole is neither a snobbish nor a narrow town. It has little racial or religious intolerance. This is partly because of its low percentage of racial minorities and foreign-born peoples, but it is also due to the quality most Peorians mention first when they try to analyze their town—its warm friendliness and pleasant openness.

There is no founding-father aristocracy to speak of. The founding fathers were largely old brewing and whisky families, and most of their descendants have long since left Peoria. The city's industrial life is so vigorous that there is a continually renewed industrial aristocracy. Some of the finest homes are owned by families who have lived in the city less than fifteen years.

Peoria's feeling and focus have always been practical, realistic and forward-looking, rather than nostalgic or spiritual. In a way, it is, like so many American industrial towns, without legend, tradition or a rich continuity of history. It is outside the hallowed Lincoln country, although Ernest E. East, Peoria's semiofficial historian, has recorded that Lincoln made seventeen visits to the city and, during one of them, made what Beveridge, the Lincoln historian, called his first great speech.

As their most famous citizen, Peorians almost always name Robert G. Ingersoll, the eminent agnostic. Peoria erected a statue in his memory, and many older folk, who recall him with affection, believe that he bequeathed to Peoria a part of her liberal—both in the Peoria and outside senses—heritage. "He taught us to think free," one of them remarked. It is rather characteristic of Peoria's paradoxical nature that besides Ingersoll, Peorians name as their most famous son the Right Reverend Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, the eminent Catholic scholar.

After the monsignor come Jim Jordan, who is Fibber McGee, and Charles Correll, who is Andy, of Amos 'n' Andy.

Monsignor Sheen's parents moved to Peoria from a near-by farm when Fulton was seven years old. Sheen grew up in Peoria and went to school at Spalding Institute—a Catholic boys' high school named for Archbishop Spalding, the great Middle Western prelate—where he and Fibber McGee were classmates.

The monsignor's Uncle Dan, a Peoria lawyer, was, astonishingly enough, associated in practice with Ingersoll, and was as much of a spectacular character. Dan Sheen was a prohibitionist, and, in

one of the biggest whisky towns in the country, he ran unsuccessfully for mayor as a dry.

It has been said of Peoria that "aside from the vice and graft, it's a fairly efficiently run town"; and that, undoubtedly, is true. Its schools are good, as are most of its municipal services, and its location is almost ideal for easy, pleasant life. Edging the city are more than 1000 acres in well-equipped parks, and Lake Peoria provides half a dozen bathing beaches as well as boating facilities.

One of Peoria's most energetic do-gooders remarked not long ago that "it's a wonderful place for anyone interested in community betterment, because there's so much to do." Actually, Peoria has done more in a positive sense than most towns its size. Its people will organize themselves enthusiastically for almost any imaginable cause. Many of the city's prodigious number of organizations are routine marching-and-chowder societies, but there is a solid base of constructive civic activity. One hundred and forty women's groups, representing an intimidating total of 10,000 women, are organized into the Women's Civic Federation. The federation, which includes a thriving Junior League and League of Women Voters, had a large share in electing Mayor Triebel through a high-pressure telephone campaign.

Peoria's cultural activities include the Peoria Players, one of the oldest little-theater groups in the country, an active Amateur Music Club, the Peoria Symphony Orchestra and Bradley University. Bradley was founded in 1897 by a wealthy Peorian, and it was planned with the help of John Dewey and Dr. William R. Harper, first president of the University of Chicago. Small but

expanding, the university is much like Peoria itself in its vigor and variety—it teaches everything from the humanities to watchmaking.

Peoria harbors something called the I Too Reform Progress Society and the Liederkrantz Singing Society, but it also has the Peoria Mental Hygiene Society, which, with the help of the city's seven psychiatrists, maintains a mental-health clinic. There is a well-used teen-age recreation center, one of the most successful Junior Achievement branches in the country, and the Peoria Plan Veterans Service Center, at which committees of industrial and professional leaders of the city have helped to provide veterans with everything from job placement to medical help.

The Peoria Plan for veterans was developed originally by Dr. Harold A. Vonachen, director of medicine at Caterpillar, who also is president of the American Society of Industrial Physicians and Surgeons and commodore of the Illinois Valley Yacht Club. Doctor Vonachen is an impassioned, energetic, rather cherubic-looking man who feels very strongly about everything, including overeating. In the executives' dining room at the Cat plant, he snatches desserts from the hands of sputtering vice-presidents whom he regards as too corpulent, and he has organized the Caterpillar Fat Men's Club, the purpose of which is to shame members into keeping their figures.

The father of seven children, Doctor Vonachen is a member of one of Peoria's most notable self-made families. His brother, County Judge Francis Vonachen, is a saintly man dedicated to fighting juvenile delinquency; the head of one correctional institution in Illinois has remarked that if there were a few more judges like Vonachen there

would be fewer delinquent children. Another brother is a prominent pediatrician.

Peoria has a rather striking number of self-made successes like the Vonachens who have stayed on in their home town instead of deserting it for Chicago or the East, as so many Middle Western bright boys do. Louis Neumiller, the gentle, conscientious president of Caterpillar, started as a blueprint boy. His brother, Harry, is president of one of the city's smaller plants and past president of both the Peoria and the Illinois associations of commerce. Two of its psychiatrists, Dr. Walter Baer and Dr. Helen Coyle, struggled for their educations, studied all over the country and returned to their native town when they settled down to practice. Doctor Baer's brother, Theodore, is a lawyer who started in 1931 with nothing but college debts and retired to California last summer, a millionaire in his early forties. He still keeps an interest in his Peoria law firm and commutes by air every few months. At thirty-eight, Theodore Baer was the youngest board chairman of any bank in the country; the bank is the Jefferson Trust and Savings, a sleek, young institution that looks like a movie set and has drive-in teller windows where motoring depositors can pick up money as though it were hamburgers.

The culmination of all Peoria's pride of city, the community project to end all community projects, is known as Exposition Gardens. This is a plan so grandiose that it could have been conceived only in the whisky-making, earth-moving capital of the universe. It will be a gigantic community center, with three main buildings, many smaller exhibition buildings, and facilities for educational, religious and agricultural gatherings, conventions, stage productions, sports events, concerts and harness and auto racing. It will be used the year round, the major event to be a week's fair competing with the Illinois State Fair, at Springfield, seventy-six miles away.

All this got under way last spring, when more than 1000 men and 150 pieces of earth-moving equipment beat 140 acres into shape by moving 250,000 cubic yards of earth in forty and one half hours. Everything was donated—equipment, labor, fuel, bus transportation, food for 4500 meals, and old Dr. Hiram Walker's medicine for the prevention of tedium. Lieut. Gen. R. A. Wheeler, chief of Army Engineers and a Peoria boy, supervised this mechanical madness after a parade of bulldozers, tractors, trucks and scrapers through the streets of Peoria and the detonation of five aerial bombs got the show started.

President Neumiller, of Caterpillar, was on hand and so, very much so, was R. G. Le Tourneau. WMBD broadcast the proceedings from the scene, and at one point Mr. Le Tourneau was called upon for a few words. Mr. Le Tourneau, who spends much of his time addressing church audiences all over the country, brought the full force of his evangelistic fervor to the occasion.

"Ah!" he cried, waving his arms up and down. "Look at those beautiful big machines move that earth! Oh, don't I wish I were down there running one of them!"

This went on at some length, and finally the shaken announcer got a word in edgewise.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Le Tourneau," he said. "Isn't this a great spectacle? Isn't this a magnificent example of democracy in action? Isn't this a wonderful demonstration of the true spirit of Peoria?"

"Amen!" Mr. Le Tourneau shouted.

THE END



THE SATURDAY  
EVENING POST

Drucker

"I'm not going to school today; my throat's so sore I can hardly whisper!"

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