Gene Lees Ad Libitum

Jazzletter

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Mail Bag

The last three issues of the *Jazzletter* have meant so much to me it's hard to express in words. The *Jazzletter* brings together the histories of jazz musicians and the value of the music as it has developed in a way that cannot be duplicated. There is no academic resource I know of that can match it. In addition, it brings together people of like mind so they can keep in touch with a common cause that makes us all feel not so alone, because we have a partnership of understanding that is priceless, a gift of togetherness. Thank you.

— Bill McCarty, Alameda, California

No, it is I who thanks you.

I am glad to hear that you are recovering from your ordeal. Since the *Jazzletter* is one of the few pieces of mail I look forward to receiving, I wish you good health for both personal and selfish reasons.

— Richard Lee, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Richard Henry Lee is a sixth-generation descendant of Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, delegate to the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1779 who proposed a resolution that led to the Declaration of Independence. He wrote a proposal that with only slight modification became the 10th Amendment to the Constitution: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

The present Richard Henry Lee's mother was a Canadian, married to an American. Dick Lee was born in Toronto while his mother was home for a visit. Now retired, he has had a career as a teacher and in educational book publishing.

One of my friends, the New York musicians' agent and manager, Edith (Didi) Kiggen, is a direct descendant of John Quincy Adams.

It has crossed my mind that for the most part the ringing names in history were no less interested in what is undoubtedly the world's oldest and certainly most popular sport than anyone else, for as Anatole France (I think it was) put it, "Of all the aberrations of sexual behavior, the strangest is abstinence." Considering the vast brood of children J.S. Bach fathered, God knows how many descendants he has running around our world.

Now is not the time to lace your otherwise interesting and informative *Jazzletter* with acerbic political asides. The entire American populace is hopelessly polarized along a single political fracture, and meanwhile the Demorepublicratic party is in collusion to keep any other party from gaining a voice, an audience, or any political influence. Meanwhile, Libertarians, like me, have to listen to doctrinaire crap from both political wings of the Demorepublicats. Time was when your political commentary was witty and side-splittingly funny, e.g. *The Uninhabited Windbreaker,* but no more. All is venom now. In your mind, try replacing lightening-rod Condolessa (sic) Rice with low-profile, Joe Blow. Would Joe make *Jazzletter*? You will set few minds and change none, so you might as well cut it out, and stick to what you know best, music, and do well, writing about music and the people who make it.

— Allen Hall, South Haven, Minnesota

Allen Hall is the author of letters-to-the-editor in many parts of the country.

From time to time, it seems, someone makes the "discovery" that the United States is a one-party political system. Always, most notably in the example of Ralph Nader, this pronunciamento is made as if it were Divine Revelation. It isn't. A really thoughtful analysis of the American political impasse came in Walter Karp's 1973 book Indispensable Enemies: The Politics of Misrule in America. *He traced patterns of voting in the United States since the Civil War, saying the two parties were dependent on each other and by tacit agreement passed power back and forth.*

He wrote: "In more than two-thirds of the states of the Union, one party or the other has been predominant for thirty, fifty or even a hundred years. Measured by control of the state assembly . . . most states can be described as permanently Democratic or permanently Republican. In those states the second party is more or less a legislative minority; on the occasions when it does gain a majority, it usually loses it in the following election, like water seeking its own level."

He says that "special privileges are not stripped away from special interests that have been paying the organization heavily for protecting those privileges" and writes that the regulars of each party cooperate with those of the other to prevent the rise of mavericks in either party, and cites many examples in support of this point.

The Libertarian Party's web site defines itself as a "classical liberal" organization, but the attitude of its members toward freedom of speech and of the press often seems to be: "You have the right to say or write anything I agree with. Otherwise, shut up." Which is essentially the attitude of much of the Republican party and apparently all of the religious right.

It is an outlook shared by the extreme elements of Islam. If you are horrified by the blind bombings in Israel and Iraq, remember that this practice is not unknown in the United States, with bombings of churches and the Atlanta Olympics and abortion clinics and all the other brave activities of the kill-for-life people. That's not to mention the fairly successful effort to exterminate the native Americans.

A thriving third party is probably impossible in the United States. Without a parliamentary system, third parties cannot attain the participation in coalitions that allows them influence in policy and public visibility. As for the separation of the legislative, executive, and judiciary, that died when in 2000 the Supreme Court appointed a president.

With the last *Jazzletter*s there was a brief but harrowing account of your past year and a half. You seem to have been through hell. Nevertheless, I am glad you have come through, if only for the selfish reason that I can receive another year of the best writings on jazz, contemporary culture, and politics from your good self. The last three issues were excellent.

— Geoff Blowers, Hong Kong

Geoff Blowers teaches in the Department of Psychology at the University of Hong Kong. He is dean of the faculty of social sciences.

The May 2003 *Jazzletter* was of special interest to me as you wrote of Lenny Bruce who, together with Mort Sahl and Walt Kelly in his *Pogo* comic strip, were the preeminent social satirists of their time. My friends and I frequently used bits of their material in our own verbal exchanges. Example: when one of us experienced some misfortune, the others would console him or her with "Aw, you bettah off." As you will recall, that's the punch line of the piece in which Bruce speaks of a restaurant where he and his wife frequently dined. On entering the restaurant after a long absence, he was greeted by the owner who asked Bruce about his wife and effused about her beauty and what a lovely couple they made. When Bruce informed him that they were divorced, the Chinese restaurateur commiserated as mentioned.

Near his end, Bruce performed in Vancouver at Issy's Supper Club but his engagement was cut short by the police whose attention was drawn by Jack Wasserman, a columnist in the *Vancouver Sun*. It is likely Bruce would not have finished his engagement anyway as he was frequently incoherent, ostensibly due to drugs.

In his prime, Bruce may have cut George Carlin but, in spite of his own experience with drugs, Carlin has had better legs — no doubt in part due to Bruce breaking the vulgarity barrier. My view is that Carlin isn't exactly chopped liver when it comes to satirizing religion et al.

This is probably an appropriate segue to another of your topics, the social/science fiction writer Philip Wylie. Wylie's principles of science, logic, reason, and psychology were shared by fellow science-fiction writers Sir Arthur C. Clarke, Gene Roddenberry and Isaac Asimov. The latter three were Humanists (as am I), an international movement where belief in the supernatural is anathema. Humanism, as you may know, is a bête noir in the religiously inclined USA. Art Buchwald once devoted a column to the ways Humanism was considered by many to be the devil's work and needed to be diligently persecuted. More recently, however, Mario Cuomo, in a 9/11 commemoration, said on national television that Americans had to show tolerance for persons of all faiths and persons with no faith system such as Ethical Humanists.

Cuomo appears to confuse several disparate organizations: the Ethical Society, the Council for Secular Humanism, and/or the American Humanist Association, all of which have similar principles. So there does appear to be an attempt by some at inclusivity. It has to happen, because census statistics show that persons without religion represented 18 percent of Canada's population in 2001 versus 4 percent several decades earlier.

Many Americans, including national politicians, insist on disregarding the country's founders' proscription for separation of church and state. The government's religiosity and patriotism is, among other things, creating an environment in which international terrorism is flourishing and finding its way into their homeland. This is at a time when religion is losing its charm in countries like Canada, and in Spain, where the government is transforming the nation into a secular society.

Keep those *Jazzletters* coming.

— Herb Fears, Vancouver BC

Your memoir of Grover Sales was a moving piece — a fine tribute to a fine man. I felt privileged to read it. And privileged, through your generous doing, to have known him. I wish I had known him better.

The rest of the package was as terrific as ever — entertaining, informative, provocative, and brilliantly written.

And, not altogether incidentally, how perceptive of your mother to predict in one succinct phrase the outcome of the Women's Lib movement.

— Cliff Hopkinson, New York City

She had major shortcomings as a mother, but she was a prodigiously intelligent and well-read woman.

Cliff Hopkinson is a British-born writer and editor. He has often contributed generously of his assistance in copyreading and editing the Jazzletter.

He is one of the best I ever encountered.

Another Chorus of Stardust

Artie Shaw told me a few years ago that his band was playing a theater in Rhode Island just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The theater manager told Artie between tunes that he had received a call from military authorities, asking that Artie read a message to the audience. It ordered that all military personnel return to their stations. "It seemed as if half the audience got up and left," Artie said.

"With the world going up in flames," he continued, "suddenly playing still another chorus of *Stardust* didn't seem to mean very much."

After the performance, Artie gave notice to the band. He joined the Navy, formed a new band and took it to the South Pacific, where it endured a fairly rough war. I'm sorry to say that, unlike the Glenn Miller band in England, the Shaw Navy band was — as far as I know — never recorded.

With the world again in flames, trapped in a religious war fomented by fundamentalists on both sides, I am deeply troubled. The late Steve Allen, one of the most intelligent and informed human beings I have ever known, told me at least fifteen years ago about the game plan of the American religious right. He said they had tried to take the federal government by direct assault and failed. The new plan, he said, was to infiltrate the entire political system at the lower levels — school boards, city councils, county councils et al — and then go after the higher levels of government. Steve sent me clippings from publications of the religious right which made the blood run cold. And their plan has succeeded. Steve cautioned against the dangers we faced from the rise of a radical fundamental Islam. The confrontation of the two was inevitable.

Of late the survival of jazz seems about as important as another chorus of *Stardust*. It isn't a question of whether jazz will survive so much as whether we will survive. The population grows obscenely, and coastal California is well on its way to complete ruin. Do not let the ghetto girls have abortions! They *must* have their babies. It is God's will! We will not educate the children of course; we are cutting the educational budgets. We have a place for them when they grow up: prison. *That* is the dogma of the religious right.

We have just been through a century of horrors, and seem to be destined for more. The trench warfare of World War I, the stupidity of the Versailles Treaty that was the bastard child of Clemenceau and Wilson, the degradation and starvation of Germany and the rise of Hitler in that opportunity, the Rape of Nanking, Stalin, World War II, Auschwitz, Buchenwald and all of the rest, the Cold War, the Korean War, the Viet Nam war, the Gulf War, and the present mess.

Look at all of it — and there is much more — and the question "Where is jazz going from here?" becomes trivial. I will not attend jazz "conferences" sponsored by *JazzTimes* or anyone else, for there is always one of those "roundtable" discussions in which the salient question seems to be: What are we going to do about the state of jazz? I always want to shout: "Buy up all the record and broadcasting companies!"

I started the *Jazzletter* in 1981 because I felt trapped in trying to get anything said within the limitations of magazine formats. The assigned lengths of articles never was adequate to serious subjects, running around 2500 or 3000 words. With the *Jazzletter* I found that I could write anything to whatever length I saw fit. The publication gave me freedom, and this has been a joy, one made possible by the readership. Before I ever wrote about jazz, I was writing about classical music, and before that I was writing on all manner of subjects. As a correspondent covering the French negotiations to withdraw from Viet Nam, I made a study of the country and its history, and there is much that I could tell you about that — and why the United States was doomed to defeat from the moment Jack Kennedy gave permission for U.S. military "advisers" to start shooting back. They must teach a course at West Point titled *How to Underestimate the Enemy 101,* from George Armstrong Custer to Tommy Franks.

A reader asked, "What does 'ad libitum' mean?" It is Latin, of course, meaning *freely*. In early jazz, solos were known as "ad libs". I added the term to the logo of the *Jazzletter* to prepare the readership for the liberties I intended to take. The following is one of them.

SONG LAKE SUMMER

Foreword

One evening in November, 2004, Keith Olbermann, on his MSNBC show *Countdown,* said that P. T. Barnum did not, as reputed, originate the phrase "There's a sucker born every minute." The expression, he said, came from one David Hannum, a man in the vicinity of Syracuse, New York, whose name was now lost to history. Hannum, it was alleged, came up with that aphorism over the famed "Cardiff Giant" hoax, a limestone body supposed to be the petrified remains of a prehistoric corpse.

The father of this deception was one George Hull of Binghamton, who had the statue carved in Illinois and shipped to his cousin near Cardiff, New York, and buried. In due course, they had it dug up and declared a genuine historical find, charging a gullible public fifty cents a person to see it. Hull had studied both paleontology and archaeology, and knew what he was doing. His cousin, and partner in this fraud, was named William Newell, and given the American propensity for bestowing family names on offspring, I would ask you to keep that name *Newell* in mind.

With the galloping success of their deception, Hull and Newell sold shares in their "giant" to a syndicate headed by a banker named David Hannum. When Barnum made a bid to buy the "Giant", I can believe Hannum said that there was a sucker born every minute. More on this later.

And Dave Hannum is not forgotten. Not by me, anyway, and thereby, not to coin a phrase, hangs a tale.

In 1800, the nation we know as the United States, a specific shape on the map (the Lower Forty-Eight), did not exist. The Continental Congress was only four years in the past, and the country comprised the original colonies, together in an uneasy alliance. Then in 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte, for reasons not entirely clear, offered to sell the territory known as Louisiana to the fledgling country. Given Voltaire's infamous comment about Québec — that he wouldn't spill one drop of French blood for a few arpents of Canadian snow — one is moved to conclude that the French had even less notion than the English of what they possessed in America. Thomas Jefferson, then president, moved immediately, agreeing to pay $11,250,000 and other sums totaling $27,267,622 for this territory.

But what had the newborn U.S. actually bought in the Louisiana Purchase, as it came to be called? Well it wasn't the state of Louisiana. It was the Mississippi Valley and points west, a total of 828,000 square miles of great mineral resources, rich potential farmiand, grazing lands, forests and wildlife resources, and this vast region would in time become the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, plus most of the land in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Minnesota. The purchase price came to a little under three cents an acre. The Louisiana Purchase has been called history's greatest real estate bargain. You can't buy many a house in Beverly Hills for what Jefferson paid to double the land mass of his country.

No one knew what this land contained, however, and a year after the purchase, Jefferson sent an army captain who had been his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, on an expedition to find out what lay out there. Lewis elected to have a co-leader of the expedition in the person of a lieutenant named William Clark. Lew is, to prepare himself for the expedition, studied botany, zoology, and celestial navigation. Their expedition is an incredibly rich story, and a truly heroic one. They eventually descended the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. The brilliantly intelligent explorations lasted from 1804 to 1806, and the two men were acclaimed when they returned home with their masses of data. We are currently celebrating the bicentennial of the expedition.

In 1808, Lewis was appointed governor of the state of Louisiana by Jefferson, but he was treated quite badly by official Washington, as heroes and pioneers (Columbus, Joan of Arc, Billy Mitchell, the World War I Canadian general Arthur Currie, and many more) often are, and died on his way to Washington on October 11, 1809. It is not known whether his death was murder or suicide.

After the Louisiana Purchase, American expansionism accelerated, taking the Southwest from Mexico, including Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California. In 1853, Congress created the territory of Washington on the West Coast. These lands made the shape of the Lower Forty-eight states, to which in time Hawaii and Alaska would be added.

But it was a land nobody knew. Writers were the great communicators in that time long before radio, television, movies, and other mechanical or electronic means of communications. And writers became heroes to a public that was a lot more literate than the general American public is today. The final exams to graduate from public school in Salina, Kansas, in 1896, contain questions of grammar, geography, and arithmetic that probably few college graduates could answer today. Shakespearian companies played the mining towns of the Old West. The Bible and the plays of Shakespeare were widely read. The public read Dickens, who by the middle of the century was a public hero, so much so that when he toured the United States to make readings from his books, his appearances were mobbed. Later Oscar Wilde too

was mobbed, and by the end of the century, Rudyard Kipling was yet another hero in America.

Offenbach had the same experience when he visited America, and European operas held vast sway over the public. Any American music was looked on as inferior. This was in part due to a cabal of music publishers. Since they had to pay no royalties on European music, they conspired to let it be known that only European music was any good. This led to a condescension toward American music that has not entirely abated to this day, and certainly contributed to an attitude of at best tolerance toward American folk music and to jazz, far and away America's most brilliant contribution to the arts.

Nothing indicates the state of a nation's collective emotions as accurately or quickly as its popular music. Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'une faune* had its premiere in 1895. In the United States, *America the Beautiful* was published, and so was *The Strawberry Blonde*. The following year brought *All Coons Look Alike to Me* (which was not the exercise in bigotry that its title suggests), *Laugh and the World Laughs with You, My Gal Is a High Born Lady, The Red River Valley, Sweet Rosie O'Grady* and *When the Saints Go Marching In. Break the News to Mother* and *The Stars and Stripes Forever* belong to 1897. 1898, the year of the Spanish American War, brought *Because, Ciribirbin, Gold Will Buy Most Anything but a True Girl's Heart, It's Always Fair Weather, Kiss Me Honey Do, When You Were Sweet Sixteen*, and *You're Just a Little Nigger, Still You're Mine, All Mine*, and in 1899, the first all-black musical reached Broadway, *Clorindy or The Origin of the Cakewalk*. 1900 gave us *Heart of My Heart, My Wild Irish Rose, On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away* (by Paul Dresser, a hero of mine among songwriters and the brother of novelist Theodore Dreiser, both men of stout social conscience who incidentally were devoted to each other), and a thunderclap of instrumental composition whose significance probably no one perceived: Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*. That same year Columbia Records introduced cylinder records, and the Graphaphone company marketed a machine to play them on. We understand events only in retrospect, including even — maybe especially — those of our own lives.

But the literature and music that were the staples of the American culture reflected European sensibilities and experience, in the case of literature, an English viewpoint, although Balzac, Flaubert, Dumas, and Victor Hugo were also read and admired on this side of the Atlantic. There was a vacuum in American literary life. Then came Bret Harte, a native of Albany, New York who in 1854 at the age of nineteen moved to California to work in various jobs and then as a newspaperman at the Northern Californian. In 1868 he was named editor of the *Overland Monthly* for which he wrote his first fiction, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* followed by *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, containing vivid imagery of the mining country. They were immensely popular, and soon he was writing for Eastern publications, including the *Atlantic Monthly*. Bret Harte is generally credited with being the founder of a new school in American letters, that of local color.

Another contributor to this school was his friend Mark Twain, whose writing he published and with whom he once collaborated on a play. Twain too wrote of the west, but his especial contribution was his portrayal of his native region, Missouri, with such works as *Old Times on the Mississippi, Tom Sawyer*, and *Huckleberry Finn*.

Washington Irving has been called "the father of American literature" and the "inventor of the short story." All such labels should be treated with skepticism. In his *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, Irving attacked the English condescension toward American writing, but more important, perhaps, the book contained *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Rip Van Winkle*, and *The Specter Bridegroom*, which helped create a somewhat spooky image of the Hudson River Valley country. Though he produced many other important works, including a five-volume biography of George Washington, he is remembered chiefly for those odd and charming short stories.

In Maine, Sarah Orne Jewett produced gracious, beautifully-written short stories of local life. Her work is unfortunately half forgotten now. But she was an important figure among those writers who were holding up mirrors to American life.

In surveys of American "literature" it is the usual thing to slide with slight embarrassment over the name of O. Henry, because his ingenuity in manipulating plots with surprising and powerful endings. He became unfashionable in the later era of "slice-of-life" fiction, much of which is distinguished by its meandering and arty pointlessness. But O. Henry's portraits of New York City street life offered memorable pictures of one part of the nation at that time.

Civil War veterans were commonly seen on park benches of that era, and a young native of Newark, N.J., named Stephen Crane, avidly listened to their tales of battle and recorded their impressions in a short novel called *The Red Badge of Courage*, which veterans praised for its vivid accuracy, thereby disproving the maxim that a writer should write only about what he has experienced personally; Crane had never seen a battle at the time. Crane, a meteor in the literary skies, lasted only a short time, dying at twenty-eight in 1900 of tuberculosis, for which there was then no effective treatment other than rest, and certainly no medication. This was true of a host of other ailments, including scarlet fever,

whooping cough, and diphtheria, and life expectancy in America that year was 47.9 for men and 50.7 for women. It was not uncommon for families to have seven or eight children only two or three of whom would see maturity.

All that was about to change. In December 1901, the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi, the primary experimenter with wireless transmission of signals, succeeded in receiving a message in Newfoundland from Cornwall, England. It consisted of nothing but the Morse code signal for the letter S, but the achievement was explosive. What might he have felt had someone told him that scarcely more than a hundred years later, his invention would be used by the space explorer Cassini to transmit vibrant color images from the planet Saturn and its satellites back to planet Earth. Its journey had taken seven years. And the explosion of communications in the years between Marconi's first transatlantic transmission revolutionized the entire human culture, with the coming of ubiquitous radio and television broadcasting, the motion picture, recordings, the video camera, and even video cell phones. All that came to pass in little more than a lifetime. My grandfather was born when Sitting Bull was still alive; he lived to see a television image of a man walking on the moon.

The nineteenth century began with the thunderings of Beethoven. It ended with the haunting stillnesses of Debussy, music that often seems like luminous quiet curtains, resembling the aurora borealis. In the decade before the new century began, Debussy composed *Princeps, La Demoiselle élue*, and *L'Après-midi d'une faune*, which, more than a hundred years later, still seem "modern" and graceful while later works of a more "radical" nature sound clumsy and dated.

In 1892, Antonin Dvorak became director of the National Conservatory in New York, and though he remained only until 1895, when his yearning for Bohemia at last took him home, his influence on American music was lasting. For one thing, he taught Will Marion Cook, to whom he emphasized, as he did to all his charges, that the United States would never have a strong national music until its composition embraced its native elements, including those that came from blacks. After a concert in Boston, Cook was infuriated by a review in one of that city's newspapers saying he was the finest young colored violinist in the country. He strode into the newspaper office, confronted the critic, asked if he had written this, and told that he had, Cook smashed his violin on the desk, saying, "I am the best young violinist in the country!" He vowed never to play again. I have checked on this story and been assured by qualified scholars that it is true. I can only hope that Cook used a violin he didn't care about.

He began composing, writing with poet Lawrence Dunbar *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk*, not only the first black musical to be presented on Broadway but for a long time the only one. He later founded the Southern Syncopators, one of whose members was Sidney Bechet, and it was this orchestra that caught the attention of Ernest Ansermet, the Swiss mathematician and conductor whose encomium to the new music conferred its first critical legitimacy on jazz. But more: Cook was a considerable influence on Duke Ellington, and in this we can see the lengthened influence of Dvorak on American music in that time just before the turn of the twentieth century.

As the century began, a boy in New York City named Jerome Kern turned fifteen. George Gershwin was two. In another fifteen years, a boy born in Hoboken, New Jersey, was christened Francis Albert Sinatra, and in 1929, the year he turned fourteen, Wyatt Earp died.

While Stephen Crane was working on *The Red Badge of Courage*, another tubercular young man was contributing to the body of regional fiction by which America was getting to know itself. His name was Edward Noyes Westcott, and the only book he would ever write was *David Harum: A Story of American Life,* published in 1898 in New York.

Westcott had died only a few months before. He at least had lived long enough to read the galley proofs, but he had no idea that he had written an international best-seller, the best-loved book of its era. Within twenty months the book had sold half a million copies, a figure that would thrill any publisher today, and an astonishing one in view of the country's population at that time — a little over 74 million. The book was soon translated into other languages, although one wonders how David Harum's upstate New York country accent was rendered into, say, Spanish. In 1904, a play based on the book was a hit on Broadway.

The reason for the book's success was the idiosyncratic character of its protagonist. Thirty-five years later the story's popularity was undiminished. During the Great Depression, two films based on it were made in Hollywood, one with Will Rogers in the title role — an improbable casting typical of Hollywood; Rogers was unlike David in appearance or character, and his Oklahoma accent bore no relation to that of the region of David's upbringing — and another with Guy Kibbee, who specialized in playing oafish rubes. An afternoon radio serial was based on the story, and soda fountains in the areas around Rochester and Syracuse, back when such emporia were furnished with wireback chairs and cool marble-top tables, featured on the bill of fare something known as a David Harum sundae. The popularity of the story obviously extended across the border into Canada, since the David Harum sundae was to be found on the menu of an ice-

cream parlor of my own youth in St. Catharines, Ontario, which is not far from the region of the story.

Edward Noyes Westcott was born in 1846 in Syracuse, the son of a dentist. Already living in the city was the family of Andrew Dickson White, who had moved to Syracuse in 1839 when his father was put in charge of a new bank. The younger Westcott became a musician, painter, poet, and singer, though his formal education ended when he was sixteen and started work as a junior clerk in the Mechanics' Bank of Syracuse. He spent two years in New York City in the office of the Mutual Life Insurance company, then returned to Syracuse where, in 1880, he founded the firm of Westcott and Abbott, bankers and brokers. When the partnership ended, he became registrar and financial expert of the Syracuse Water Commission. A prominent figure in the musical life of the region, he wrote the lyrics and music (and "the harmony as well," a contemporary report naively informs us) of a number of published songs.

When his tuberculosis brought his singing to an end, he began to think seriously about writing fiction. He was now compelled to concentrate on one of his abilities instead of spreading his attention across all of them. In the summer of 1895, at Lake Meacham in the Adirondacks, where he had gone in hope of recovering his health, he began work on the only book he would write, completing it in fifteen months.

Forbes Heermans, in an introduction to a 1900 edition of the book, wrote, "Each (character) is entirely the creation of the author's imagination, and this fact he asserted with much earnestness, over and over again."

I didn't believe that from the time I first looked into the book, which caught my interest perhaps thirty years ago when I happened to remember the David Harum sundae and wondered why it should have been named after a novel. I managed to track down a copy of the book, long out of print. I became fascinated by the material in it. I read it many times, becoming more and more convinced of Harum's historical reality. No writer could have invented him, nor the wonderful idiosyncratic turns of expression that issue from him in a steady, natural flow. I set out to find out what I could about him, which led me to the autobiography of Andrew Dickson White, published in 1904.

Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918), the educator and diplomat who with industrialist Ezra Cornell — who built telegraph lines between American cities; his company became Western Union — founded Cornell University at Ithaca. White, who led the American delegation to the doomed Hague Peace Conference of 1899, vividly describes a man of David's character, though he does not name him. This man, he says, was one of the principles in the Cardiff giant hoax of 1869. "He was," White wrote, "a horse-dealer in a large way and banker in a small way from a village in the next county." Cardiff is in Onondaga, whose chief city and county seat is Syracuse. The county immediately to the south is Cortland. Obviating any doubt that he and Westcott are describing the same character, White says in a footnote, "For a picture of the doings . . . of this man, and also of life in the central New York villages, see 'David Harum', a novel by E.N. Westcott, New York, 1898."

This led me to look into the Cardiff giant hoax, which in turn led to various books and unpublished documents. I studied maps of the area between Syracuse and Binghamton. Westcott set his story in a town called Homeville in Freeland County and villages called Buxton Hill and Peebles. These communities do not exist. But the map did show that Homer is in Cortland County and near it are villages named Truxton and Preble. I read more and more about that area of New York, increasingly convinced that someone very much like David Harum must have lived there. And Andrew Dickson White was born in Homer.

Finally I telephoned the Cortland County Historical Society, where a woman said that, yes, it was known that David Harum was based on a real character who had lived in Homer, and some of the old-timers had remembered him.

"What was his real name?" I said.

"David Hannum," the woman replied.

I determined to go to Cortland at the earliest opportunity. I had driven through the region any number of times, heading up Interstate 81 from Binghamton, when I used to go home from New York to Canada and my parents' cottage on a small lake near the Thousand Islands. The highway rides the shoulder of a long extension of the Appalachians. I thought the country was pretty, indeed very beautiful, but like so many highway travelers I gave only evanescent thought to the lives of people sleeping and working and eating and falling in love in the Currier and Ives villages on the plane of the valley below. Alas, one's purpose on a freeway is only to get there, wherever "there" might be.

In March of 1989, I found myself with a few free days and took advantage of them to go to Cortland. I went to the court house and, on the fourth floor, introduced myself to a slim, slight, gray-haired and pretty woman named Shirley Hepple, the county historian. I asked her about Harum-Hannum. Yes, he did exist, she said.

Did many people come here to ask about him? I enquired.

No. Mostly those who came here did so to look up their own family records.

Shirley Hepple directed me to clippings of interviews with people who had known Hannum, and most significantly, to

a book published in 1900 by a writer named Arthur T. Vance. Its title: *The Real David Harum*. It too is out of print, although there is a copy in the Cortland Free Library.

I came to know the real names of characters who had, through Westcott, become extremely familiar to me. Vance wrote that the incident involving Billy P. Cullom happened exactly as Westcott had described it, except that the man's name was William Parker Randall, always called Billy P. Vance said every horse trade in the book transpired as described, as well as the encounter with Bill Montaig. He said Westcott knew Hannum very well; he had known him since boyhood. Hannum and Westcott's father had been in a business deal together.

Then, as I traced relationships of people long dead, I made a more surprising discovery. David Hannum was Edward Noyes Westcott's uncle. The Westcotts spent a great deal of time in Hannum's house in Homer, and he in turn visited their home in Syracuse, thirty-six miles to the north. I am further convinced — from cross-references between sources — that Westcott must have kept a diary of his uncle's remarks and reminiscences, and that they are all but verbatim transcripts.

Finally, I learned that Andrew Dickson White not only was a native of Homer: he was born on November 7, 1832, in a house almost directly across the street from Hannum's.

When, in one of our conversations, Shirley Hepple learned that I had been extensively involved with jazz, she asked if I had ever heard of Spiegle Willcox. Had I! He had played in the Jean Goldkette band at the Graystone Ballroom in Detroit with Bix Beiderbecke and Frank Trumbauer. Shirley said he lived nearby, just outside of the little town of Cincinnatus (pronounced Sin-sin-AY-tus). I was astounded. I telephoned him, introduced myself, and went to his house, far out in the woods on a small lake. We would become quite good friends, and I would visit him whenever I passed that way. (A sign on a tree near the house read "Graystone Ballroom.") Spiegle was born in Cortland in 1903, five years after Westcott's death, at a time when Cortland had both a music conservatory and an opera house. Once when I was at his house he picked up his trombone and blasted out a high note. He said, "You noticed that was a high . . ." well, whatever it was. He said, "You also noticed I didn't hold it too long!" And he laughed. That was characteristic of him: his laughter. I pondered his constant sunniness, since he was nearing ninety and knew the life-expectancy figures as well as anyone. Often you will find that older people find solace in religion, the expectation that they are going to "a better place." This prompted me to ask, "Spiegle, are you religious?"

"Nope!" he said, and, once again, laughed. I loved Spiegle, and thanks in part to my conversations with him — *real name Newell Willcox*. Remember that name?

I spent days driving around the back roads of Cortland and its adjacent counties. At first I thought Westcott had altered topography to suit his plot. But the more I studied the land from the highways and the hills, the more I realized that the terrain was exactly as Westcott had described it. For example, the small body of water adjacent to Homer hardly deserved the designation of "lake" that Westcott gave it. But then I saw, when I viewed it from above, that it had once been very much bigger. The lake had been drained and filled to make roadbed for Interstate 81.

After Shirley Hepple told me what she knew of the model for Westcott's book and suggested areas of research — including the Farmers Museum at Cooperstown where the Cardiff giant now rests — she asked if I had been to the house.

"What house?" I said.

"The Hannum house," she said.

"You mean it still exists?" I said, with shock.

It was now a bed-and-breakfast. Shirley telephoned the current owners and told them I was interested in seeing it. Cortland and Homer are contiguous now; the farmland that lay between them in David's time had all but disappeared, paved over and filled in with buildings — a hospital, a farm-implements store, a gasoline station, a liquor store, a Grand Union supermarket, a motel.

By car it takes minutes to get from the Cortland County courthouse to Homer, whose Main Street is remarkably unchanged. I learned that the cobblestones and streetcar tracks were still there, preserved under the asphalt as the pavements of Pompeii were preserved by volcanic dust and ashes.

The houses along Main Street are glorious, wonderful old mansions of stone or brick or wood, with grand porches. They are in excellent condition, which becomes the more interesting when you note the dates on plaques at their doorways: 1868, 1870, 1880. Architectural and historical groups sometimes come to observe them. The street is wide, as if the planners of the community expected it to become an important city.

To be continued

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