

The Fortnightly Rant

A Tale of Three Bridges

Until three years ago it looked fairly certain that the U.S. Congress was going to allocate almost \$452 million to build two bridges in Alaska. The Gravina Island bridge would be longer than the Golden Gate, taller than the Brooklyn Bridge, and connect the town of Ketchikan (pop. 7,368) and Gravina Island (pop. 50). The Knik Arm Bridge, two miles long, would shorten the commute between Wasilla and Anchorage by one hour.

Logic would seem to argue that such a large expenditure for projects which would benefit so few would be hard to justify. But logic had the unenviable task of arguing against Alaska's senior Senator, Theodore "Ted" Stevens, and the state's sole Representative, Don Young. Both are Republicans.*

In Congress, power accrues with longevity. Stevens, who remembers selling newspapers with headlines about the Lindbergh kidnapping, has represented Alaska in the Senate since 1968. Young first went to the House just four years later. Over the next thirty-plus years, they earned reputations as two of the most notable pork farmers in Congress.

* Only Young, though, "during a debate on the right of native Alaskans to sell the sex organs of endangered animals as aphrodisiacs ... whipped out the eighteen-inch penis bone of a walrus and brandished it like a sword on the House floor." [Rolling Stone, Oct. 17, 2006] It seems to be something of a habit: "Young ... at a 1994 hearing ... waved an 18-inch oosik—the penis bone of the walrus—at Mollie Beattie, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Beattie had suggested that Alaskan Natives should be able to sell oosiks only as handicrafts, not uncarved, a proposal Young derided. The incident was especially embarrassing because Beattie is the first woman to head the Service, and the hearing marked her debut on the Hill." [The Progressive]

Things were looking good for the bridges—until Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of New Orleans. Shortly afterwards, Sen. Tom Coburn—a Republican from landlocked Oklahoma, of all places—introduced an amendment which would have redirected \$125 million of the Alaska bridge funding to New Orleans, for the repair of the heavily damaged I-10 Twin Span Bridge across Lake Pontchartrain. This provoked interesting reactions from both Stevens and Young.

An article published at the time in the *Anchorage Daily News* said "Stevens threatened to quit, to become a 'wounded bull on the floor of this Senate,' and he vowed that if his colleagues passed the bill, 'I will be taken out of here on a stretcher.'

For his part, Young said victims of Hurricane Katrina could "kiss my ear!" His dedication to the Knik Arm Bridge might best be gauged by the fact that if it were built, its official name would be "Don Young's Way." Or perhaps by the fact that its construction would greatly increase the value of land owned by his son-in-law.

Not for the first time, bluster trumped logic. Coburn's amendment went down to a lopsided defeat. But the national shame heaped on Alaska's Congressional delegation—and Congress in general—led to the stripping of the funding's "earmarks." The money went to Alaska, but not for the Bridges to Nowhere. Eventually even Governor Sarah Palin, long a staunch supporter of the projects, pulled the plug.

Almost. According to an October 15 article in the *Anchorage Press*, the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority, aka KABATA, is



MEMORIAL BRIDGE, AS RENOVATED, WITH FUNDS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

still "chugging away on the 18th floor of the Robert B. Atwood building downtown, spending millions in public funds in hopes the private sector will one day invest in a toll bridge from downtown Anchorage across the Knik Arm to Point MacKenzie ..."

"The Alaska Legislature created KABATA in 2003, and the agency has spent about \$46 million in federal and state tax dollars since then. **It's mostly federal money**, and much of it went to contractors creating designs and writing permit applications. A KABATA-authored fact sheet says about \$105 million has been allocated by Congress, so far. The bridge's environmental impact statement alone cost \$36 million." [Emphasis added.]

Stevens was just narrowly defeated in his bid for re-election. If it hadn't been for his seven recent felony convictions for taking bribes from VECO Corporation, an Alaskan oil services company, he'd be going back to the Senate.

Young, who has spent more than \$250,000 in campaign contributions for legal fees relating to federal investigations of whether he, too, received unre-

ported gifts from VECO, seems to have been re-elected. His opponent conceded the recent election on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Back In The Lower 48

The first bridge to offer toll-free passage over the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth and Kittery was completed in 1923. As befits something shared by frugal Maine and New Hampshire yankees, the bridge is actually a dual-purpose structure. Dubbed the Memorial Bridge, it also serves as a monument to "Sailors and Soldiers of New Hampshire who participated in the World War 1917-1919."

The cost of building the bridge was \$2,000,000. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' online inflation calculator, that would be about 25.6 million in 2007 dollars.

Like anything or anyone 85 years old, the bridge shows serious signs of wear. Transportation officials representing the two states have been discussing a rehabilitation project for years. This year, they finally agreed to solicit bids for the project. The estimated cost was \$44 million.

Alas, the two bids received were for \$59 and \$70 million—the two states were at least \$15 million short. Even in good times, both states are notorious penny-pinchers. New Hampshire officials proposed saving \$7 million by forgoing the historical restoration. Perhaps they could just burn off troublesome parts like the dedication plaque and the big gilded eagle with an acetylene torch, and drop them into the water. Maine, not to be outdone in cheapness, said no way.

So here we are with a venerable war memorial on the verge of falling into the river and creating a hazard to navigation, shutting down the only ice-free deepwater port in New Hampshire, the source of virtually all the state's road salt, and much of its heating oil. Not to mention closing the point of departure for however many tons of scrap metal per year. And forcing shipyard workers to drive however many extra miles to get to work. And blocking an escape route if Seabrook cooks off.

Please—can't someone find us an earmark for a lousy fifteen million bucks?

News Briefs:

Cheney, Gonzalez Indicted for Murder!

A Texas grand jury has indicted Vice President Dick "Dick" Cheney, former Attorney General Alberto "Fredo" Gonzales, and five Texas officials for "abuse of office, profiting from office, and murder."

Bask in that for a moment ... And to think—people say there's no such thing as good news! OK, now back to business:

Cheney's alleged culpability appears to stem from an \$85 million investment in the Vanguard Group. Vanguard owns a piece of GEO Group, formerly Wackenhut. Based in Florida, GEO operates private prisons in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. It has more than 11,000 employees, and an

nual revenue of over \$1 billion.

The indictments were handed up to District Attorney Juan Angel Guerra on Monday by a Willacy County grand jury, according to an account by Emma Perez-Trevino, who broke the story in Tuesday's *Brownsville (Texas) Herald*. Willacy is the 12th poorest county in the U.S., as measured by per capita income. Eighty-six percent of its residents are Hispanic.

Raymondville, the county seat, is the site of "Ritmo," an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility that holds 2,000 illegal immigrants in ten huge Kevlar tents. It's also the home of the Corrections Corporation of America's Wil-

lacy County State Jail. And it's the home of Management and Training Corporation's Willacy County Regional Detention Facility.

The *Texas Observer's* Forrest Wilder explained this unusual concentration of hoosegows-for-profit in August of 2007:

"Willacy is an economic backwater in South Texas with a near-comically dysfunctional local government. For over a decade area leaders have been trying to dig their way out of the doldrums by building prisons, jails, and detention centers and turning them over to private outfits for management. Raymondville, the county seat that locals are calling 'Prisonville,' is host to

what's probably the largest concentration of privatized jail facilities in the world. It's a great deal for the companies. They assume virtually no risk and get to collect healthy profits."

"Meanwhile the county has to worry about paying down its staggering amount of debt, approaching \$180 million, or about \$8,700 for every man, woman, and child in the county."

Gonzales is alleged to have used his office to block the investigation of assaults committed in prisons managed by GEO. The corporation was hit with a \$47,500,000 penalty in 2006 as a result of a civil suit brought by survivors of an inmate who was beaten to death by other inmates

just days before his scheduled release in 2001.

By Wednesday, a herd of lawyers were stampeding to the Willacy County courthouse to take part in the melee.

District Attorney Guerra has had legal troubles of his own. He was investigated last year on suspicion of extortion and using his office for personal business. After his office was raided, he "camped outside the courthouse in a borrowed camper with a horse, three goats and a rooster," according to AP. The investigation led nowhere.

The odds are that Guerra's in-

News Briefs
from page one

dictments won't lead anywhere, either. As former New York Judge Sol Wachtler observed—before his own spell in stir—prosecutors have so much influence over grand juries that they could indict a ham sandwich. And Guerra doesn't have much time to put "Dick" and "Fredo" behind bars. He lost the Democratic primary for DA last spring, and his term ends in a couple of months. Ah, well—as Lenny Bruce used to say, "In the Halls of Justice, the only justice is in the halls."

It's On Us, Fredo

Fredo was in plenty of trouble before Guerra went after him. For one thing, no one will give him a job. Also, he's being sued by eight law students for blocking "liberal-leaning applicants" from two Justice Department programs.

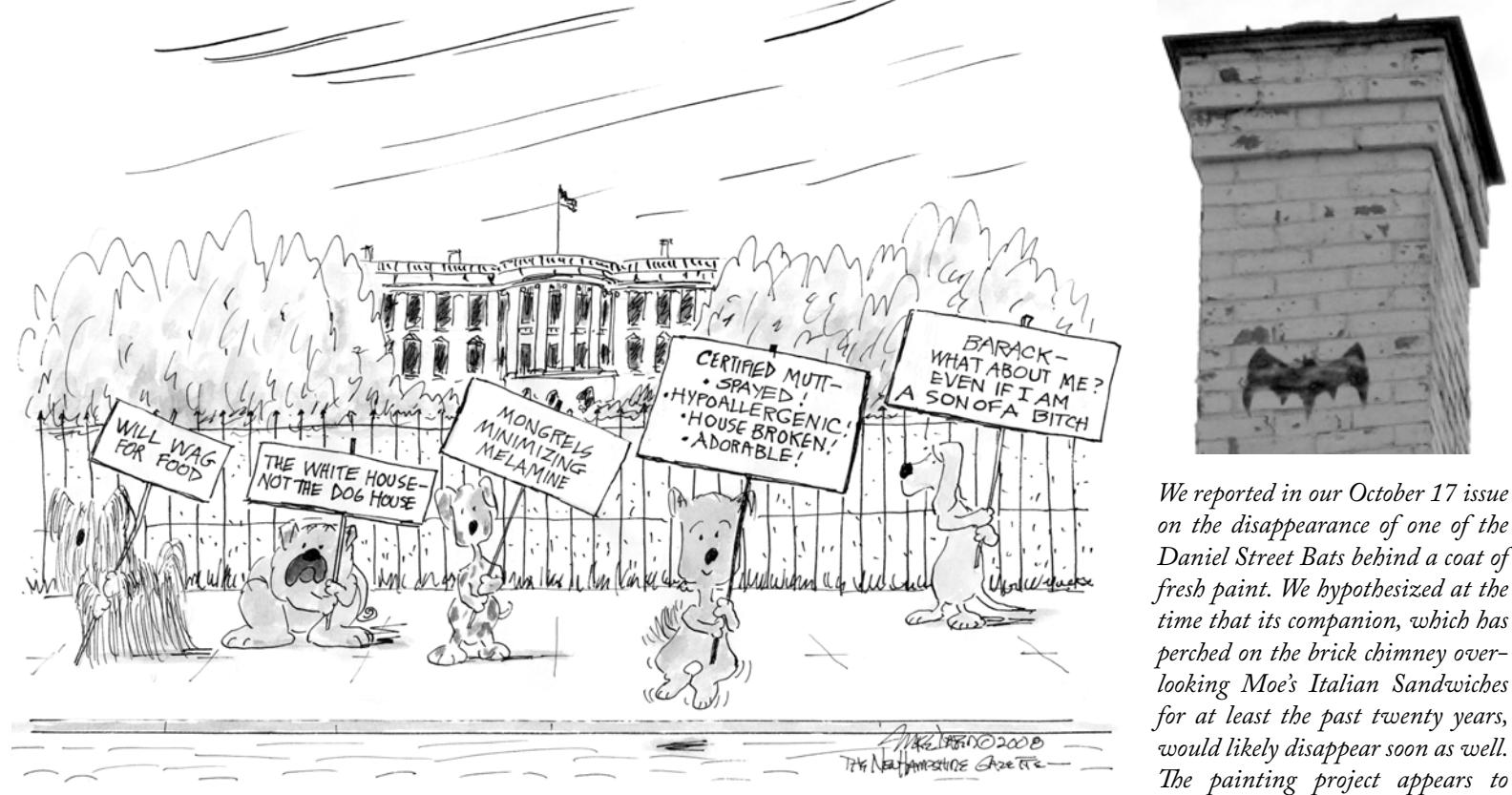
Gonzales may have done terrible things to the Justice Department, but the Department holds no hard feelings. It recently agreed to pay private attorneys, at about twice the cost of Justice Department attorneys, to defend Gonzales against the students he discriminated against.

A Profitable Investment

A lot of people who invested such wealth as they had in 401(k) retirement accounts have seen them shrivel up like salted leeches lately. But the right investment will always pay off.

Nineteen banks spent \$32,400,000 lobbying the federal government during the first nine months of this year, according to a report by Matt Kelley published in *USA Today* on November 7. And those same nineteen banks recently divvied up \$159,000,000,000 worth of newly-minted Bailout Bucks from the Treasury Department.

If those lobbying expenses are viewed as an investment, they paid off at the rate of \$4,907.40



to one.

If we were to make a phone call to one of the banks involved, we could probably get a thoroughly plausible explanation, from a trained public relations professional, detailing the many reasons why the bank's lobbying was thoroughly proper, completely justifiable, and utterly disassociated from the receipt of government bailouts. But we've just been through a presidential campaign, and we've already consumed our maximum annual dose of disinformation.

An Unprofitable Investment

A UPI report, also published on November 7, in the *Washington Times*, suggests that the U.S. investment in the invasion of Iraq was less profitable than the one noted above.

The report describes a leaked draft of an agreement between Iraq's state-owned South Gas Co., and the multinational oil giant, Royal Dutch Shell. Shell was formed in 1907, when a Dutch oil company merged with a British transportation company, to

better compete against Standard Oil.

The draft agreement would give Shell 49 percent of a venture with a 25-year monopoly on the production and export of natural gas from the southern Iraqi province of Basra. Most of Iraq's natural gas is found in Basra.

British troops have been the dominant foreign force during the present occupation of Iraq. After spending much of last year being besieged by Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, they withdrew to the airport, leaving the city in the hands of al-Sadr's militia.

In late March of this year, a force composed of 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and police, along with U.S. "advisors," attempted to retake the city. Fighting went on for a week. One U.S. Marine was killed, and seven were wounded.

According to an August 5 report on the website of the British newspaper *The Times*, "[f]our thousand British troops ... watched from the sidelines for six days" during the battle "because

of an 'accommodation' with the Mahdi Army." *The Times* quoted "American and Iraqi officers who took part in the assault" as their source.

The Christmas Truce

Ninety-four years ago this Christmas an event occurred on the front lines in Europe which struck terror in the hearts of commanders on both sides of the Western Front: British and German soldiers stopped fighting, and declared their own truce.

The trouble began when the artillery fell silent on Christmas Eve. German soldiers placed lit candles in trees and sang *Stille Nacht*. British troops in the opposing trenches responded with the English version of the Austrian Christmas song, *Silent Night*.

This initial lapse in discipline led to shouted greetings. Predictably, the situation deteriorated further: the antagonists agreed to a cease-fire to allow the burial of their fallen comrades in No Man's Land, the area between the trenches.



We reported in our October 17 issue on the disappearance of one of the Daniel Street Bats behind a coat of fresh paint. We hypothesized at the time that its companion, which has perched on the brick chimney overlooking Moe's Italian Sandwiches for at least the past twenty years, would likely disappear soon as well. The painting project appears to have ceased, though, and the bat is still there.

Throughout Christmas Day of 1914, the situation on the battlefield was completely out of control. Instead of exchanging gunfire, British and German soldiers were swapping tobacco, jam, and chocolate. Acting out an apparent contempt for their proper duties, the soldiers competed in decidedly non-lethal games of soccer.

The duration of the illicit truce varied in different parts of the front. In the worst-hit areas, killing did not resume until the new year. Naturally, top military commanders on both sides were horrified. In later years of the war, they were careful around Christmas to schedule artillery barrages in such a way as to prevent repetition.

On Saturday, December 6, this lapse in military discipline will be celebrated at the Music Hall with two performances of *All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914*. Professional actors will tell the story using the words of the

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Portsmouth's Veterans Day parade proceeds, in the westbound lane of Islington Street, towards Goodwin Park.

participants, taken by director Peter Rothstein from their letters and journals, accompanied by the vocal ensemble Cantus, singing the same songs sung on that night.

All is Calm is also being performed at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, and the Arizona Repertory in Tucson. It will be broadcast on Public Radio and the BBC on Christmas Day.

Veterans Divided on Whether to Support Veterans on Veterans Day

After shunning the organization Veterans for Peace (VfP) for a couple of decades during its Veterans Day ceremonies, the City of Manchester finally allowed the group to participate on November 11. While there were clearly a few people present who still had trouble with the concept, the overall reception was positive. New Hampshire VfP Coordinator Will Thomas reported that the day was "wonderful."

Altogether, fourteen members of VfP and Iraq Veterans Against the War marched in the parade.

"Not one negative [remark] was heard," Will writes, "[there were] no turned backs, no yells of 'Go back to Russia,' no middle fingers. Not one. Applause,

waving, cheers ... Oh, to be sure, some silent, cold stares ... But hey—W. still gets a 28% approval rating!"

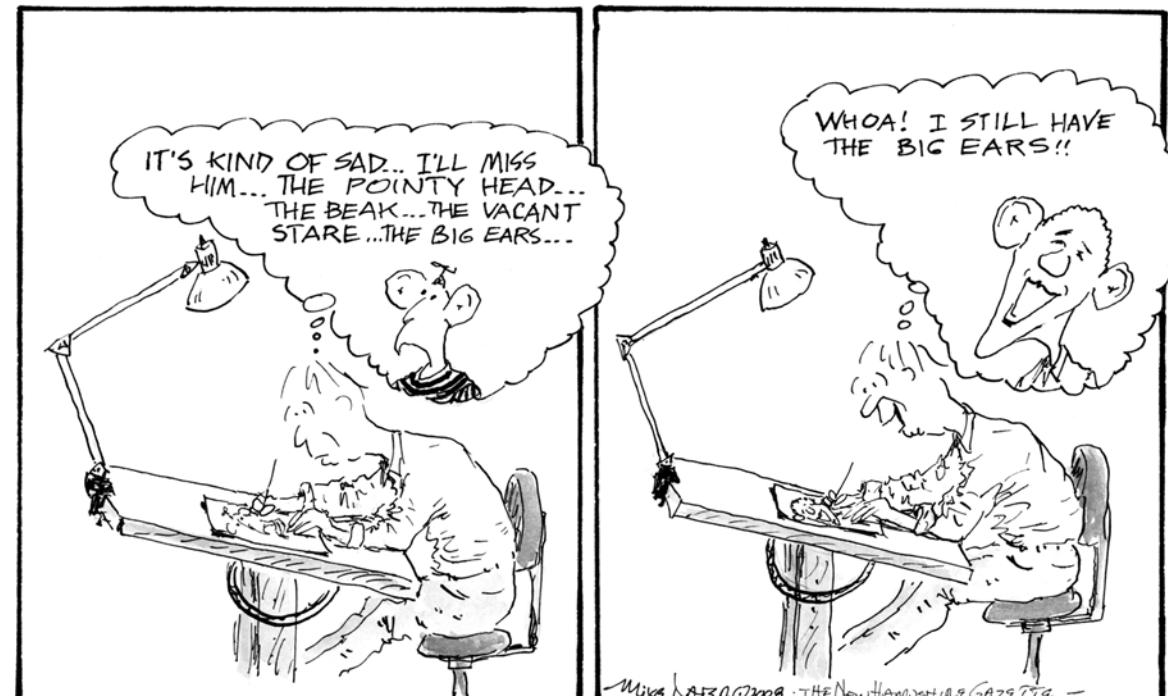
"What was extraordinary about this day was the fact that the right-leaning Manchester Vets Council finally acceded to our request that one of our own be allowed to speak at the post-parade ceremonies in Veterans Park. Last year, we had asked to have a speaker at the Veterans Day observances and were told 'No.' When NH VfP inquired as to why, we received no reply.

"The year prior to this, the Manchester Vets Council had had us removed from the parade because we were allegedly carrying signs that were 'political' (Support the Troops, Bring Them Home).

"So it was that [this year], one Will Hopkins, Iraq War Vet, addressed the crowd, which included as platform guests Mayor Quinta of Manchester, Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter, and the local representatives of most of the area veterans groups, including the American Legion."

Our New Obama-Slamming Department

On the off chance that George W. and "Dick" will actually clear



out January 20, and leave the Executive Branch to the Obamans, we thought it might be time to start warming up. John Russo will be waiting ...

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton? Good lord, why? If you picked Bill Richardson, you wouldn't have to worry about what Bill Clinton was up to.

Speaking of appointments, and citizens from the Land of Enchantment, what about David Iglesias? A Republican, Iglesias was a U.S. Attorney in New Mexico before he was fired for refusing to prosecute bogus cases against Democrats.

Ever since the election, we've harbored the irrationally exuberant notion that Iglesias might make a good Attorney General.

But no, apparently that could only happen in the Poetic Justice Department. Instead, President-Elect Obama has nominated Eric Holder.

As a deputy attorney general under Bill Clinton, Holder was asked to assess a proposed pardon for the fugitive financier Marc Rich. According to *The Nation's* John Nichols, Holder "gave Clinton a 'neutral, leaning towards favorable' opinion of the

proposed pardon."

OK, everybody makes mistakes. But, according to Nichols, he was also "part of the legal team that in 2005 developed strategies for securing re-authorization of the Patriot Act."

Beck Can't Take the Heat

Glenn Beck, who used to have an evening show on CNN's *Headline News*, complained on his radio show Monday that when his tour bus stopped recently at a Wendy's, he was accosted by "a truck driver with food in his hair" who called him a "racist bigot."

"You conservatives have destroyed this country!" the man complained, "you better not let me see you in the parking lot because I've got a truck and I'll run your ass over!"

Beck, who would surely have an Emmy on his mantle if only "Most Obnoxious" were a recognized category, noted that "luckily the swat team" was there—Beck's term for his "security guys."

"The hatred was so deep it was breath taking," Beck whined.

*"O wad some pow'r the giftie gi'e us,
To see ourselves as others see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us..."*

—Robert Burns

According to Wikipedia, Beck's annual income from his radio show alone is \$10,000,000 a year. He lost his CNN gig in October, after he announced he was moving to the Fox "News" Channel.



Booth Spruced Up

Peter Hamlin puts a new coat of red paint on the old British telephone booth next to the Portsmouth Discovery Center, under the watchful oversight of contractor Jeff Green. This little renovation project is a joint effort of the Chamber of Commerce and the Portsmouth Historical Society.



"WHEN THE POWER OF LOVE OVERCOMES THE LOVE OF POWER,
THE WORLD WILL FINALLY KNOW PEACE." — JIMI HENDRIX



Northcountry Chronicle

Gratias Ago

by William Marvel

Nearly half a century ago I sat at the very window where I sit now, looking out on the carpet of brown leaves and a generation of beech and maple trees that have since disappeared into the furnace. Probably I was taking a break from the historical fiction that I then favored—likely something by Kenneth Roberts, or Mackinlay Kantor—for I remember envisioning my own cast of historical characters prowling that late-autumn forest. Desperately did I want to capture a period of history myself, recreating the age exactly as it was and preserving it in print for the enjoyment and edification of those who came long after.

For years I followed that dream on the sly, writing after school, after work, or between jobs, but fiction was evidently not my calling. Lacking enough imagination to create interesting plots, I always had to use real incidents. Inadequate insight into the human psyche left me a

poor hand at character development. Worst of all, when I should have been paying attention to plot and character I wallowed in the details, growing obsessed with what people of a particular period wore, what kitchen appliances and bathroom facilities they would have had, what trades they would have followed, and what they would have discussed at mealtimes.

Eventually that obsession for accuracy in detail inspired serious research, and the next thing I knew I had found a career in history. Now I can sit at the window of my old room, surrounded by a library that I began collecting by the age of ten, and glance outside at my childhood dreamscape while ruminating between paragraphs. It has not been a lucrative life, and as the community burgeons with higher incomes and costlier appetites it requires increasingly stoic economy, but I am still pursuing a vocation only slightly modified from the one I wanted as a boy. For that I am truly grateful.

Curmudgeon though I am supposed to be, I need not look far for cause to celebrate in this season of presumed thanksgiving. There was all the summer rain, which rotted most of my tomatoes but kept my spring overflowing with cool, clear water. There have been the gorgeous, golden days of October and November, too few of which grace the average lifetime. There is that latest crop of hardwoods down back, that promise to keep me warm for a few years yet, no matter how high the price of heating fuel climbs.

I am profoundly grateful for the most entertaining and compatible companion anyone could wish for, who personifies the connotation of "helpmeet," except in the matter of putting things back where she found them. I am also thankful for the younger distaff denizen of our household, whose groggy morning persona bears my exuberant breakfast-table observations with good grace, most of the time. Her older brother engendered my everlasting gratitude, as well, by choosing a col-

lege nearly a thousand miles from here. That lad's tolerability has improved remarkably with age and distance.

Not to be forgotten is that mob of evangelical Kansans who intend to descend on my house for Thanksgiving, with a unilateral plan to stay through Sunday. Were it not for their promised presence I would not feel comfortable leaving my two girls alone over the holiday weekend while I slip away to work on my latest manuscript. My dear wife's kin, though, will keep her abundantly occupied and amused. Were it not that I plan to leave before they ever get here, she might not even notice my absence.

I am even thankful to that perennial fundamentalist crank and sore election-loser who, on Veterans Day, announced through the local newspaper that he did not "lay his life on the line" for the



likes of me. Evidently his army allowed inductees to discriminate a lot more freely than the one I entered; I must have been away on KP when they distributed the Whom Will You Defend Form (DD-666). For that good fortune I congratulate him, but I'm grateful that he offered such convincing proof of the nastiness and intolerance with which I characterized his political faction. I also especially appreciate having had the chance, some 20 years ago, to successfully defend his right to address the town meeting with his monotonous annual mania.

These are among the more important ingredients in my overall happiness, and I cherish them all. Oh, and there's my cat. I wondered why he kept pacing back and forth across the keys.

[Note: Rodman Philbrick will be back next fortnight.—The Editor.]

More Hate Mail, &c.

from page seven

FREEDOM, to the restoration of the feudal chains from which our forefathers escaped.

This direction is "socialist," the predecessor of communist. It actually represents public interests but this direction has put big business monopolies, such as the unconstitutional "EASY PASS" monopoly, which violates constitutional Article 83, Part II, into rewriting laws to privatize core public institutions for pri-

vate corporate profit; Thus, these monopolies are in collusion with corporate government at the expense of the taxpayers.

Such behavior is the betrayal of honor in regard to core Constitutional virtues "of, by and for the people."

It is a scoffing at the mandates of the supreme law of the land, violations of Oaths of Office and a "Wink and a Nod" as the taxpayers pockets are being picked. It is probably best described as anti-fascist. Now, is this direction really "socialist"? History

will attest that "fascism" was given meaning by Benito Mussolini, who is second only to Hitler in giving meaning to the word "fascism." Benito is quoted as saying, "Fascism should more appropriately be called corporatism, because it is a merger of state and corporate power." (See "Fascism in America" www.heartcom.org/fascism.htm.)

Dick Marple
Hooksett, NH

Pick of Emanuel May Spell Trouble

To the Editor:
Who is the biggest of them all?

A few years ago while in Somalia General Boykin shouted

out with glee that, "our god is bigger than their god." You see, with the gods, size matters. But I have to wonder, given recent events, which god really is the biggest.

Verily I say unto you Obama was sent to our country by the angel Gabriel to convert everyone to Islam. This is the very same angel who was an advisor to the end-times prophet Daniel. Centuries later he touched down in Palestine and impregnated a Jewish peasant girl called Mary. But even more astonishing is that Gabriel was the one who dictated the Koran to L. Ron Muhammed.

And so it came to pass Obama has been appointed as our presi-

dent. Allah must be very pleased. Not only did he pull off the 9/11 attacks while Jesus was on sabbatical, and annoint a Moslem terrorist flag-burner to the presidency, but just for fun he got in a few more jabs at the gays on Tuesday. One more feather in Allah's halo.

The OBAMAnation of desolation is about to begin my friends. Gird your loins. Just today the famous ARKeologist, professor Dug Spadewell, has translated an unearthed scroll fragment from the Book of Matthew that says, "And behold the anointed one shall choose a chief and they shall call his name Rahm Emmanuel, which means Allah with us." What else is left to say, but

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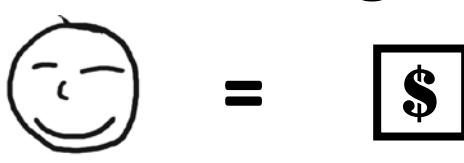


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Northcountry Chronicle

Long Remember

by William Marvel

November 19 marked the 145th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. With the approach of Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday he has become the object of even more attention than usual, and scholars of the Civil War era find their publishers anxious to market their work as studies of Lincoln, rather than as books about the war he oversaw. Legions of historians and hacks, meanwhile, are writing more specifically about every aspect of his life, and at least two entire books have now been written about his two-minute speech on a Pennsylvania hilltop.

Except for a couple of hostile Libertarian treatments and a salley or two by those who wished to claim him as gay, the latest Lincoln canon seems almost entirely adulterated. As the Christ figure of our civil religion, he has assumed a certain inviolability, and his memory is similarly invoked more as an emotional mechanism than as a rational example. The most thoughtful criticism of our 16th president meets accusations of virtual heresy, with even academic reviewers sometimes hinting "How dare you?" to those who question the conventional wisdom.

Notwithstanding that deific trend, four decades of serious study have led me to somewhat different images of Lincoln and his war than I ingested at Pine

Tree School. That reevaluation has, in turn, suggested a new interpretation of his eloquent little cemetery oration.

Alexander Gardner's badly marred stereopticon view of the dedication ceremony shows, in the right distance, the brick gate to Gettysburg's town cemetery, which stood during the battle and still stands today. The podium, with scores of dignitaries sitting behind the speakers, stands beside the tent at left, which Edward Everett asked to have erected near the podium. Everett, who delivered the real, two-hour dedicatory address, suffered from an enlarged prostate and needed a "private moment" immediately before and after the event. One wonders what the rest of the crowd did about that, with the nearest outhouse or bush half a mile away.

Lincoln crafted his homily to restore public faith in a war that he originally promised was meant only to suppress rebellion—and not to satisfy the aims of abolitionists who were then scorned as vigorously as today's community organizers. His abrupt shift to emancipation infuriated conservatives who had supported his original aim. The widespread arrest and imprisonment of his critics, combined with military repression at the ballot box, had made a mockery of the freedom and democracy he professed to revere.

Despite Union triumphs at



Lincoln (arrow) at Gettysburg, detail of a photo by Alexander Gardner, from the Library of Congress.

Gettysburg and Vicksburg the previous summer, the war had once again stalled along the Rapidan River in the eastern theater. In the west, the Federals had been badly beaten just two months before. An astounding Union victory at Chattanooga lay only days away as Lincoln reached Gettysburg, but as he climbed the podium that overcast day the future seemed to offer nothing but endless and fruitless war.

Like Pericles, during the civil wars of ancient Greece, Lincoln understood that, when all other arguments have lost their luster, the proponents of continued war can still fuel their argument with the sympathy that naturally accrues to the warrior who has died

in the cause. His address therefore appealed primarily to that sympathy, welding the sacrifice of "these honored dead" to the less tangible goals of preserving national unity and accommodating a "new birth of freedom." It was his allusions to the soldiers, and not to the political ideals, that drew the applause that day, but his words implied that otherwise respectable opposition to the struggle, or disagreement with its goals, amounted to disrespect for the dead. It was a ploy that could be—and has been—easily cheapened to defend a less worthy cause.

Eventually Lincoln won his war, but the slaves whose bondage it nominally ended saw no

real freedom. The forceful imposition of emancipation ignited another full century of repression, and only with the centennial of Appomattox did American apartheid even begin to succumb to the pressure of enlightened opinion. It took another kind of civil war to wound that dragon, but nearly two generations after the Selma march a portion of our population still voted against a presidential candidate precisely because of his African ancestry. Lincoln's war may not have been the first step on the road to freedom and equality. It may instead have been merely a false start, leaving it open to argument that those honored dead did die in vain, after all.

let us pray.

Amen.

Gary Walker
Campton, NH

Gary:

Thanks for writing. We can always count on you for a letter we just barely dare publish.

The Editor

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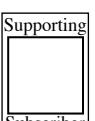
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Our Federal Government's Drug Habits

To the Editor:

Anent your issue of November 7: on page seven you observe that our government was involved in the opium trade during Vietnam.

True, but as the United States representative of the Bolivian Cocaleros Association, I resent your omission of our gallant co-operation with the United States, supporting its effort to oust the Sandinistas.

An interesting aside: if, as I read, 90 percent of the world's heroin fixin's come *out* of Afghanistan, how can we hope to control what gets *in*?

It's only semi-funny, when one thinks of our guys as sitting ducks in their mountaintop outposts.

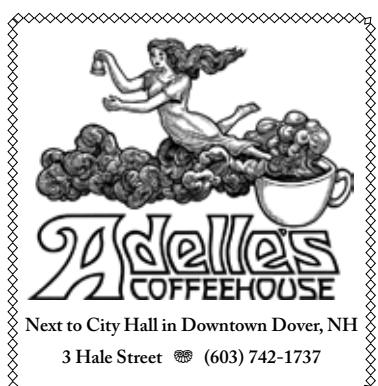
Les Leviness

Nyack, NY

Les:

Please—be reasonable. You can't expect us to jam every hypocritical criminal exploit of our national intelligence community into a simple little reply to a letter to the editor, can you?

The Editor



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character, "possessing high ideals or excellent moral character," and noblesse oblige, "an honorable and generous way toward those less privileged." Many nouveau-riche and wannabes, however, resent the graduated income tax as being proportionately unfair to them and consider it socialistic.

Success may be perceived as a sign of God's approval by those who enjoy it. God, presumably, can express His disapproval also as in the instance of Katrina when Republicans ignored reality in favor of letting God handle the details, forgetting that God's gift to man of a brain is conditional upon it being used, a truth the Administration dropped to the detriment of New Orleans.

Extremism invites its own reaction, Republican Evangelicals are as radical as the enemies they choose to confront to prove Christian dominance. The Axis of Evil was an excuse that, to insist that Iraq, Iran and North Korea do as Bush says. Diplomacy could have avoided sacrifice, but instead Iraq was invaded and is occupied, North Korea was condemned then struck from Bush's list of terrorist nations, but only after Bush reneged on his promise then kept it when North Korea reactivated its nuclear program. Iran is willing to talk any time Bush is ready, but he won't. In retrospect, the presumed threat from these nations appears more ephemeral than real. But what about Europe?

The Cold War is over, George W. Bush said so. Russia and the United States have cooperated in many areas since, but that hasn't stopped Bush from arbitrarily putting anti-ballistic missile sites in Europe, an unnecessary defense against God knows who,

Mash Notes, HATE MAIL,

without consulting Vladimir Putin, who takes exception to Bush's rude and irresponsible conduct. Putin is countering by playing Russia's Western Hemisphere cards in Venezuela and Cuba that gives the whole the appearance of a game of International Monopoly.

Ethnic cleansing is nothing new to Europeans as Georgia, a small offshoot-nation of the USSR with two autonomous Moslem regions within its borders, may be trying to prove. Both regions incline toward Russian rule but Ossetians, living peacefully under the eye of Russian peace-keeping troops, suddenly and brutally were attacked by the U.S. backed President of Georgia. Russian forces responded in kind, and the war soon was over. Recently, a team of fifty unaligned monitors investigated and concluded that Georgia started the conflict. Yet the U.S. accused Russia of a disproportionate response that caused Putin to assume a defensive posture toward the west. Might all of this have been orchestrated by the Religious Right to help John McCain get elected? God forbid!

The campaign for the presidency is over, Barack Obama won, and an anxious world waits on the threshold of an expectant and enduring peace if the problems he has inherited can be corrected. America doesn't need enemies, it needs friends and it ought to assure the nations of the world of its sincerity by removing from Europe the anti-ballistic missile sites already installed, withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq and return Iraq to its full sovereignty, and establish friendly relations with all nations of the world. The return on such a minimal investment would be enormous, so the sooner the better.

The greatest threat to America

is from within, not without. The Republican Party, with its Evangelical Holy See, operating as a permanent political majority, is over. The people have taken back their destiny by denying evangelicals and traditionalists the power of misguided persuasions that would return America to the Middle Age when religion was deadly.

The United States is a secular nation, based on separation of church and state. Our forefathers wisely declared its religious and territorial independence in the same century as the last so-called witch was condemned, convicted and killed by Christians in Salem, Mass. Let's leave it at that.

Ken Ramey
Paso Robles, CA

Yes, That humble Farmer

To the Editor:

Radio Friend Steve Pike sent me William Marvel's "Rebuking the Reich" column.

Who is this William Marvel and why isn't he published nationally? And if he is, why haven't I seen it?

I'd send Marvel's column to a couple of right-wing friends but, besides being totally ignorant of German history, they wouldn't understand some of the multisyllabic words.

The humble Farmer,
[a 28-year volunteer producer on Maine Public Radio who was kicked out for writing satire that said the same thing that Marvel says in this column ...]

PS. I write stuff like this, which will air on my radio and tv programs next week:

I have a friend whose son was so upset over 9/11 that he immediately joined the army. You can imagine his surprise when he found himself fighting in Iraq instead of Saudi Arabia.

An elderly woman told me



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And Other Correspondence

that she was scared to death of Obama. She said that Obama is a Muslim who will quickly make friends with those responsible for killing our soldiers and destroying our economy. Sure enough, the same week I saw him on television with three Republicans.

The humble Farmer

Dear humble:

Mr. Marvel is published nationally in This Olde Rag. You haven't seen because we're incompetent. We will try to do better. By the way: we very much enjoy listening to your show at thehumblefarmer.com/hear.html. It's a delight on many levels. Too bad the people running Maine Public Radio didn't haven't the sense or the courage to appreciate it. If you're short of capitol "H's, we'd be proud to lend you some.

The Editor

.....

Graduate After 10th Grade?

To the Editor:

Should students be able to graduate after completing 10th grade? That is now being discussed in the New Hampshire Dept of Ed, as reported by some of the New Hampshire papers. I sit here amazed that anyone would ask that question. What's more bothersome is that we have adults, paid by New Hampshire residents, who think this is a good idea.

New Hampshire Education Commissioner Lionel Tracy is now floating the idea of graduating some students upon completion of 10th grade. He says that the test, which has not been produced yet, would be a difficult test modeled after the AP or IB tests and that 10th graders would have to pass this exam in order to graduate early. Isn't the New Hampshire Education Department the same branch of government that thinks the NECAP is a good indicator of proficiency in math and science? Yet we have

some of the top mathematicians and scientists who have given their expert analysis indicating our standards are some of the worst in the country. How can we trust the validity of this test when our own standards lack substance?

The article goes on to say that those who want to go on to prestigious universities can still graduate after 12th grade and take an even tougher exam. That translates to lower expectations and standards for the graduating 10th graders. On one hand Tracy says these 10th grade students who graduate would be held to high standards and have to pass a rigorous exam. Then he goes on to say that the bar is higher for those graduating 12th grade. If the bar is set higher for 12th graders with a more difficult test, logic dictates it's lowered for 10th graders because less would be required of them.

Why would parents want to subject their child to missing out on two years of education? Especially since it is their taxes that have paid for it? I did not notice anything about Tracy saying taxpayers would get a refund on those tax dollars saved.

This sounds like a cost cutting measure that once again, does nothing to help the students of New Hampshire. It does sound wonderful for companies out there looking for full-time, unskilled workers making one wonder who Governor Lynch is working for: the New Hampshire students and parents or simply trying to meet the needs of a global workforce.

To whom is Lionel Tracy looking for guidance? Marc Tucker, who wrote a well known letter to Hillary Clinton, easily found on the web. He promoted programs like school-to-work and outcome-based education. Both

have been proven failures as far as improving academics among the student body. The mission of the schools, for Tucker, was to take schools from teaching academic basics and knowledge, to training students to serve the global economy selected by workforce

of discussion will appear on the blog, but you and/or your readers might be interested in contributing to it: shotofcompassion.wordpress.com.

Thanks for being a voice of solace these past eight years.

Paul Foster
Cyberspace

*Paul:
Comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable: that's our job.*

The Editor

.....

No Bailout for GM

Dear Editor:

For two decades, the "big three" American auto makers have been making a fortune building and selling gas-guzzling SUVs while Toyota and Honda were developing energy-efficient, well-designed, long-lasting cars. They were able to profit so mightily because their SUVs were exempted from the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) standards, due to their lobbying of Congress. Now the cry-babies want a bailout? I say, "Heck NO." Let these companies wither or get bought up by companies who know how to make good and useful cars for the 21st century.

Bruce Joffe
Piedmont, CA

.....

A Big Thanks to the "Stratham for Carol" Community!

Dear Editor,

Were you on the Stratham for Carol, or the Stratham Town Democratic Committee email and phone lists of volunteers this past year? If you were: **Thank You!**

Thank you for volunteering your time, showing up for visitabilities, offering your home for a house party, writing post cards, stuffing and labeling letters, can-



vassing, putting up yard signs, and for donating to the Carol Shea-Porter for Congress Campaign.

With your help, Stratham voted to send Carol Shea-Porter back to Congress by almost doubling the margin that she won by in town in the 2006 election.

You have ensured that this competent, caring, intelligent and hard working Congresswoman will be in Washington to make sure that the middle and working class people in New Hampshire have a strong voice.

Barbara Broderick and
Barbara Brockelman
Co-coordinators for Stratham for Carol, 2008
Stratham, NH

Freedom or Fascism?

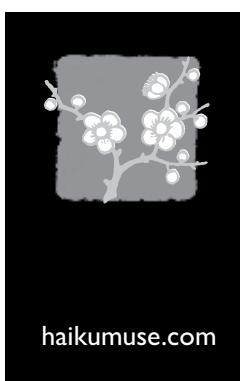
To the Editor:

It was Thomas Jefferson who said: "The issue today is the same as it has been throughout all history, whether man shall be allowed to govern himself or be ruled by a small elite."

It appears to many that our once great REPUBLIC has been morphed into an oligarchy that incrementally has taken our government in an opposite direction; from being the protector of

More Hate Mail, &c.

to page four



Thick fog

instead of the third tugboat
long sound from the sea

Tom D'Evelyn

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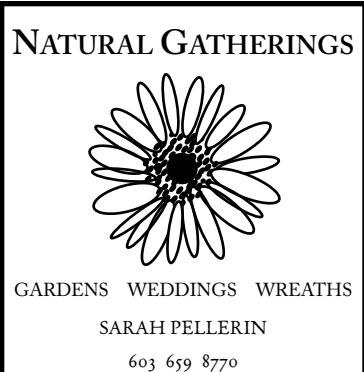
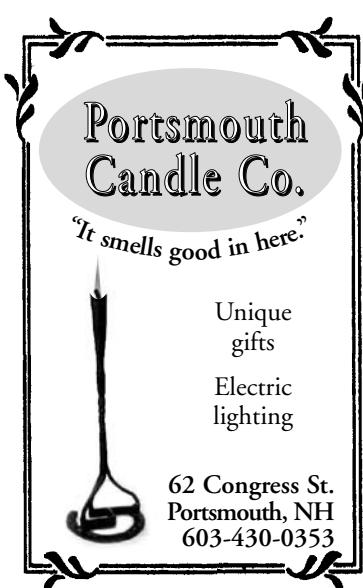
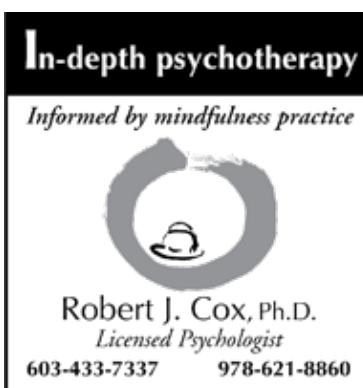
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ADMIRAL FOWLE'S PISCATAQUA RIVER TIDAL GUIDE (NOT FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES)

Portsmouth is bounded on the north and east by the Piscataqua River. Depending on which tour boat captain you believe, it's the second, the third, or the fourth fastest-flowing navigable river in the country.

caused by the moon. The other major player is a vast sunken valley, about ten miles upriver. Twice a day, the moon drags roughly seventeen billion gallons of salt water from the ocean, up the river, into Great Bay. (If the moon ever stopped moving that water for us, it could be replaced with 2,125,000 tanker

The moon's meddling creates a roving hydraulic conflict as incoming sea and outgoing river collide. The skirmish line moves from the mouth of the river, past New Castle, around the bend by the old Naval Prison, under Memorial Bridge, past the tugboats, and on towards Great

Bay. This spectacle can best be seen when the chart below shows the tide rising. A good place to watch is the little deck near the sterns of the tugboats, off Ceres Street. Twice a day, too, the moon lets all that water go. All the salt water that just fought its way upstream goes back to rejoin the ocean. This is when the

Piscataqua earns its title for xth fastest current. A good place to observe this is from Bow Street, up by St. John's church. Look up the river, from one of the little parking lots between the buildings. (Don't try to drive or park there, that won't work.) You'll see a red buoy, at the upstream end of Badger's Island,

bobbing around in the current. That buoy weighs several tons, is nine feet wide, and it bobs and bounces in the current like a cork! The river also has its placid moments, around high and low tides. Often when the river rests, its tugboats and drawbridges work their hardest. Ships coming in heavily laden with coal,

oil, and salt generally do so at high tide, for maximum clearance under their keels. When they leave empty, riding high in the water, they tend to go at low tide, for maximum clearance under Memorial Bridge.



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The logo for Midheaven is a decorative shield-shaped frame. Inside the frame, at the top, is a detailed illustration of two roses with green leaves. Below the illustration, the word "MIDHEAVEN" is written in a large, serif, all-caps font. Underneath "MIDHEAVEN", the services offered are listed in a smaller, italicized serif font: "Therapeutic Massage, Aromatherapy & Bodywork". At the bottom of the shield, the address and phone number are provided in a sans-serif font: "Jill Vranicar • Kate Leigh • Lucy Bloomfield", "16 Market Square, Portsmouth, NH", and "(603) 436-6006".

The logo for Soul Oyster Web Studios. It features the word "Soul" in a large, bold, black font, and "Oyster" in a smaller, grey, outlined font. To the right of the text is a graphic of an open oyster shell containing a stylized eye with a single visible iris and pupil. Below the main title is the word "Web" in a smaller black font, followed by "Studios" in a larger black font. The background of the card has faint, wavy, cloud-like patterns. At the bottom, the words "web & design" are written in a large, bold, black font.