

VOTE FOR



ARTHUR J.
BIDWILL

Republican

Candidate

for

NOMINATION

STATE
SENATOR
7th
DISTRICT

DOING EUROPE MINUS A GUIDE

By E. TODD WHEELER

Editor's Note: WILMETTE LIFE takes pleasure in publishing herewith one of a series of extremely interesting letters written by E. Todd Wheeler, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Wheeler of Wilmette, who, with his wife, is engaged upon a tour of the principal European cities. Mr. Wheeler, who is an architect, emphasizes the fact that his travels are without benefit of tourist guide. "What I had in mind," (in these letters) he says, "was to try to show that these cities are not the scenic, architectural and historical museums which tourist bulletins so often make them seem, but are really living cities full of active people whose life is very much like our own. I have not tried to give a complete picture, but merely a few simple comments." Mr. Wheeler's next letter will appear in an early issue of WILMETTE LIFE.

AMSTERDAM

If I were a blind man I would feel less at a loss to describe this city than almost any other. Every sound has a significance of its own, and taken all together, they express the life of this busy, noisy city remarkably well. In other places we have found streets that seem deserted, but here, except on Sunday, that is almost never so. People are always moving about and everyone makes some kind of a noise. Experiments in Chicago have shown that the intensity of sound at Randolph and Wells street is greater than at any other corner in the world. This may be true but you certainly could not find at Randolph and Wells the variety of noises to be heard daily at any one of a dozen corners here.

Wild Taxicabs

Of this multitude of sounds, probably those most insistent and first noticed are the traffic noises. Nowhere have I found taxi cabs of apparently more vicious intent than here. Even the London cabs in their moments of greatest unconcern for everyone else seemed hesitating and polite compared with these dashing taxis. But this method of driving is a direct result of the conditions existing, for a cautious driver on the narrow streets and bridges of the old city would never get anywhere. The urge for haste forces them to blow their horns almost continuously and the reverberation in the short, narrow streets helps multiply the sound and warn whoever might be approaching the next corner to be on guard. Most of the taxi horns are electric, you know, the kind that produces virtual deafness and paralysis in the bystander for about twenty seconds. Other cars, especially the old ones of which there are many, show more originality in their selection of horns so that sounds from them range all the way from the faint wheeze of an antiquated "Model T" to a wail that resembles the moo of a sick cow.

And Bicycle Bells

There is a continuous sound of bicycle bells. These are like our own, which go "ring, ring," working with a thumb lever, or may be the more musical variety which has two notes, a high one and a low one, and chimes them in succession each time you flick the lever. Some riders simply hang a bell on the bicycle and count on the cobblestones to joggle the wheel and ring the bell at the same time. They do. Still others, the delivery boys, wear a bell on the finger, which they bang against their box to make the necessary noise.

There are also the sounds of horses' hoofs and the rattle of wagons but these are far less common here than elsewhere because so much transportation is by water.

Water Traffic Contrast

In Amsterdam, water traffic noises are much more leisurely in feeling and quite restrained in comparison with the din of the streets. About the old city as a center runs a series of

concentric rings of canals and streets; from that center also a series of radiating lines so that the city plan roughly resembles a spider web with every third strand in both directions a canal, and the rest streets. Along the canals are tied many boats—great, long narrow blunt-nosed barges—with living quarters in a small cabin at the stern and a mast at the bow mounted on a swivel so that it can be lowered to permit passage under the low bridges. Most of these barges seem to be serving at the present as a place to hang the family washing, but many others go chugging up and down the canals carrying loads of merchandise, large and small. Every once in a while from the harbor comes the deep blast of a large steamship or the toot of a tugboat.

Klumping Wooden Shoes

Foot traffic accounts for the early morning noises, and the "klump, klump" of wooden shoes makes most of that. Here as in Copenhagen, many workmen wear them as a regular thing, and right across the square from where we are living is a shop where klompens are made and sold, some of them quite beautifully shaped. Added to these street sounds are the siren and bell clang of frequent fire engines and the bells and whistle of the street cars. Most of the noise they make comes in starting and there is none of the grinding of gears or the free style imitation of a boiler factory, which mark the passing of a street car in Chicago. Here they run in pairs. The conductor on the trailers blows a diminutive air whistle as a signal that he is ready to start. The conductor on the tractor rings a bell, the motorman rings his bell—and off they go without very much more noise. Trains cause slight disturbance, since they are relatively light, many of them electric, and have consumptive little whistles so weak that our engineers would blush to have to blow them.

Add Domestic Noises

Many noises come from domestic sources. It seems to be the general practice to clean the hall rugs each morning by taking them out on the sidewalk, each in a roll, getting a neighbor to hold the roll and beating the rug thus suspended in mid air, unrolling it and rolling it up like a scroll until it is all cleaned. If no neighbor is handy the rugs is draped over a step ladder set on the sidewalk for the beating. In the narrow streets of the old city this practice introduces a good many hazards for the cyclist and motorist, not to mention the danger to the housewives themselves. The cleaning is soon done, however, and by 10 o'clock the good housewife is busy scrubbing down the sidewalk, another daily task. The children make a great noise playing and singing in the streets, for there are not enough parks and playgrounds to take care of all of them. They spin their tops, shaped like mushrooms, by lashing them with a short whip of string tied to the end of a stick, which makes

a sharp crack each time it is used. Heavy merchandise is hoisted on the outside of a building and we often hear the creak of a pulley as some box or keg goes up to the passed in through the window. This is really the only way to get it in, as the stairs are narrow and unbelievably steep. At all times dogs and cats add their usual tunes to the chorus and the sea gulls fly in flocks above the canals and even in the main streets, making their shrill cry and fighting for bits of food.

Have Their Depression

Most of this description applies first to the old sections but many of the practices are carried over into the new sections where large apartment groups house the people, instead of the rows of narrow, leaning 17th or 18th century buildings which line the streets and canals in the older parts.

The weight of unemployment and depression is felt largely here and conditions are such that very little building is going on. So the cheerful sound of the carpenter's hammer is not one of those I have heard in Amsterdam. The city is constructing a few apartments as part of its housing development plan, but has only limited funds, not enough to put very many men to work.

Venders Everywhere

On the streets and in the market places the cry of the vender is never missing. All sorts of food, milk, coal, wood, delicatessen and flowers are peddled about on pushcarts, the vender crying his wares at the top of his voice. On market days the various market squares and adjoining streets are crowded with canvas-covered booths and with thousands of people. Every small article imaginable is sold, and many large ones also. Much second-hand goods, varying in quality from articles merely shopworn, down to junk, is offered for sale. And for all this each salesman hawks his customers and there is a great din of crying and haggling. The best show of all is at the clothing booths. In front of these they pile the clothing on a big tarpaulin laid down on the pavement and let the customers pull and haul at it as they will. What does that remind you of? Much discussion and consideration go into the selection of these articles, and even the oldest trousers generally find a buyer. This is, of course, one side of merchandising about which most of us know very little. On the other hand there are to be found here very smart shops and window displays to rival the best.

One aspect of marketing which I have not seen in Amsterdam but which we did see and hear in Apeldoorn, a smaller place to the southeast, was the cattle market. We were attracted by the great volume of bawling and mooing, and found quite a large market in a central square with a number of rings active in the bidding.

Oh, But Music!

But more pleasant to hear than any of these sounds is the music of the numerous street singers and players who invade all sections of the city each day. These musicians do not confine themselves to the familiar accordion and hurdy-gurdy but play a great variety of instruments, alone or in pairs, including the banjo, violin, cello, cornet, alto horn and guitar. In addition to these we hear quite commonly a glorious instrument about the size of an upright piano mounted on a wheel cart and possessing an elaborately carved and painted front much like a circus calliope. The instrument simulates a band complete with drums and

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