

*State Chairman's Son Got the Works*

# The Day I Almost Didn't Go To Columbus



By RUSSEL CROUSE



It would not really have been any great tragedy if I hadn't gone to Columbus that particular day but it seemed so at the time. However, I did get there. I'll tell you now so this won't be a suspense story. I was ten going on eleven at the time which makes the whole thing practically pre-historic, anyway.

The trip to Columbus wasn't any great novelty. I had been there before and I was to go again many times. My father was chairman of the Board of the Ohio State Institution for the Blind, a position he held for seven-teen years. He was appointed by Governor McKinley and the position meant a great deal to him because he was very interested in the blind and the work of giving them a good education in spite of their handicap.

My father was a good friend of Governor McKinley's. He was a newspaper man by profession but he really was a

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politician at heart. At the time this incident happened he was editor of the *Toledo Times*.

He was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican. In fact it went a little deeper than the wool. It included the hide. I was brought up to think that William Jennings Bryan was some kind of monster. Dad was at one time Chairman of the State Republican Committee and as such made minor local history. He presided at one of the state conventions and in closing announced that Mrs. Annabelle Highnote would sing "America" and that everybody would join in the chorus. Of course, there isn't any chorus and he never heard the last of it.

## Big Wigs and Farmers

He was always attending Republican dinners and I remember one he told about which has stuck in my mind over quite a span of years and don't ask me how many, however. This was evidently a meeting to butter-up the farm vote, for it was attended by Republican big-wigs and farmers.

I believe it was in Columbus. Anyway for dessert there was watermelon, only this watermelon wasn't just plain watermelon. Some gourmet had thought of a sort of coup de grace for the menu. He had taken the watermelons involved, the

night before, cut a plug in them (remember the days when the grocers used to let you cut a plug and pull it out to see whether the melon was ripe.) This time the gourmet had poured into the plug-hole a hefty spike of catawba wine, then plugged it up again and put the melons on ice.

When they were served as dessert to the farmers, smiles greeted the surprising but apparently pleasant taste. Dad used to tell about the farmer who sat next to him, who very slyly slipped all the seeds off his plate and into his coat pocket. If watermelons tasted like that he wanted to grow a few.

That has nothing to do with the trip to Columbus that I almost didn't get, but the whole story isn't very important so I just threw all that in for good reminiscent measure. If you don't want to be bothered just go back and cross it all out.

### Congenial Men

The Board of the Ohio State Institution for the Blind met once a month—always the first Monday in the month. Dad went to every meeting. I think it was a sense of duty in the first place, but he had a good time at those meetings, too. The board members were congenial men—there was "Doc" Robinson of Ironton, who later was Warden of the State Penitentiary, I believe. There was Charley Flumerfelt, from Fremont or Tiffin or somewhere. And there was George Hayes, who, was, I believe, the first Negro appointee to public office in the state, a fine man whose opinion Dad valued on many subjects, not just that of the Board's work. I don't remember the others—they changed from time to

time—but the Board meetings always were pleasant.

As I say, Dad always went to them but he never liked to make the trip from Toledo to Columbus on the old T. & O.C. Railroad alone. I had two sisters, one older, Grace, who is now dead and one younger, Mildred, who now lives in New York. He always took one of us with him. The meetings being on Monday this meant we had to be taken out of school for the day to make the trip so I enjoyed it even more. The Institution was a big rambling building, which still stands and serves, in Columbus, and I had great fun running up and down the halls. It operated on a system of bell signals. The bell rope hung in the great hall and I used to ring it from time to time and never got caught because even the school officials and teachers were blind and couldn't see me.

Well, this particular Monday it was my turn to go to Columbus with Dad. He took me with him to the office where he had to get some work done before leaving. We had a couple of hours before train time so he said to me: "Here's a dollar. Go get your hair cut and bring me back the change."

### I Took Everything

So off I went. They had to put a special seat in the barber's chair for customers my size so up I climbed and had towels put around my neck and tucked in and the barber started to work. The haircut didn't take very long and when it was finished he asked me whether I wanted a shampoo.

"Sure," I said. I was willing to take anything he offered. So I got soap suds over my head and in my eyes, too,

when I bent over the washbowl and had the suds washed out.

"Singe?" he asked. And I accepted with alacrity. He lighted a piece of paper and touched my hair, here and there.

"Shine?" asked George Hightower, the colored shine boy, and I took that too.

"Toilet water?" asked the barber and I nodded. I got it. It was very "loud" toilet water, too.

Finally he dusted the itchy hairs out of my neck and I handed him the dollar and waited for my change. I didn't get any. It seems that all these things had been extra. I hadn't known that. It was bad enough that hair cuts had been raised from 25 cents to 35 cents but a dollar! I sneaked back to my Dad's office and sat down. He finally looked up.

"What happened to you?" he asked,

"you smell like a field of new-mown hay."

It was then that I confessed. I told him all.

He looked at me sternly.

"A dollar," he said at last solemnly. "I guess you've used up your train fare. I guess you can't go to Columbus."

My face and my spirits fell. My lower lip trembled a bit. Then I thought of something.

"Please, Dad," I said. "I'll make it up. I won't get another haircut for six months."

That did it. A big smile broke out over Dad's face.

"I'm afraid in that case some circus would kidnap you for the Wild Man From Borneo," he said. And I knew that I was going to go to Columbus. And I did. But for a minute I thought I wasn't going to make it.