

Circling the Nation With George Graves

Article No. 8

Kansas City, Mo., May 27—I had hardly run out of the state of Oregon when I ran into the negro element. At the hotel at Boise they had negro waiters, the same at Pocatello and from there on they increased, chambermaids, bell boys, porters, elevator boys, and last night I went to a movie and they had nice chocolate colored lady ushers. I don't mind them rather like them as they seem to be about the only ones who will speak to a stranger. The cat may be all right but give me the west where all seem to be on an equal. Have been here two days and have not made one acquaintance. If I try to strike up a conversation with some one, they walk away like I was a bunco man. Even the hotel clerks will not hold a conversation with you. I would like to say right here what I think about it, but there are too many church members in Salem.

Prices here are about the same as they are in Oregon. The only thing I have found cheaper is shoes, price 10 cents. Hotel rooms and meals are higher.

I have not seen an Oregon automobile license since leaving Wyoming. Tourists have disappeared entirely in fact they hardly know that they are there. Another thing that has disappeared is the silver dollar. You always receive one dollar bills in exchange for a five. I am far enough east now that people stand around and gaze at my car. Have twelve stickers on the windshield and more going on every day.

Until my arrival here, had not seen a speed cop since leaving Oregon.

Say, you ought to see the traffic officers here who stand at the street intersections and direct the traffic. Some boys I tell you. They are dressed in dark blue, blue flannel shirts and no coats. Out of one hip pocket sticks the butt of a large revolver and the other the strap of a billy. They seem to handle the traffic well and no traffic jams. They allow no parking whatever on the principal streets, no taxis. That is what should be done in Portland.

Brick, brick, brick, brick everywhere, streets and sidewalks paved with it and when a man describes a building to you he tells you how many bricks it contains, even the warden at the penitentiary at Leavenworth had to tell me how many bricks the convicts turn out in a day. I will be glad when I get back so I will not see any more bricks.

Yesterday women were selling artificial flowers on the street for Memorial day. It made me home sick for a sight of the Oregon flowers and roses.

The only thing I see around here that reminds me of Oregon is the Janette bathing girl stickers. I notice on the windshields.

The barbers here are all dressed in white, even to their low shoes and hosiery.

So much for things I notice that are different, must now get back to my continued story.

Arrived in Omaha May 20th, a week ago today and I am no farther east now than I was then, which I shall explain later. At Omaha, I was then just half way across the country. Had made good time, but am losing now.

At Omaha I visited three days with friends, a woman I used to go with, when she was a girl of fifteen in Portland. She moved to Omaha 24 years ago and I had not seen her all during that time. Now she is married, has a beautiful girl at the age of fourteen and a boy eighteen. She had changed so I would not recognize her, but still she looks young and pretty. They were all so nice to me, and she made me lemon pie and straw berry shortcake, because she knew I was very fond of them.

Talk about back, I had driven all the way from Salem to Omaha and I had not seen a drop of rain, that meant a whole lot to me, for if it had rained while I was in Wyoming and Nebraska, I would have had to stay right there, until the dirt roads dried up.

The night before I left Omaha there were two thunder and lightning storms. I left the following morning and went to the edge of the city on rough broken up brick pavement. There before me staring me in the face was the black gumbo mud roads of Nebraska. I

stopped at a filling station and asked the attendant his opinion in regard to putting on chains. He advised me to do so, which I did, and I was sure glad of it, but then I do not know if they were of much use, because I seemed to skid just the same, the mud was not deep, it was all on the surface so it took me just one hour to make eight miles of skidding. At the end of 40 miles the cars had packed down a hard dry track, so I took off the chains, and had good wheeling the balance of the day, all up and down short hills. Finally I came to a narrow wooden bridge, just room for one car to pass over at a time. At the end of this bridge I had to dig up 25 cents toll. Go! The fellow who owns that bridge must have a good thing. Then I went on and came to the Missouri river, crossed on a railroad bridge, and went clear west a gate tender but had to return and pay another toll. This time it was 25 cents one way 40 cents for the round trip. Can you imagine that? I call that soaking it to the tourist. No wonder there are no tourists to be seen around here.

After crossing the river I found myself in St. Joseph, Mo. I do not know how that happened, for I had started for Kansas City, and it was then six o'clock and I was due there. Anyway I was glad of it for I liked St. Joseph. It was the first town I had been in that reminded me of my boyhood days spent in the east. The streets were so narrow you could cross them with a hop, skip and a jump. The hotel was a dandy, a big one with a large porch in front, with large green painted rockers. It reminded me of the hotels at Saratoga Springs, New York. The dining room was old style, but beautiful, meals were excellent and low priced, which made them taste much better. Old southern negro waiters, one showed me to a table, another gave me a card and a pencil to write my order on and another waited on me. I had a fine room and met a civil clerk, who seemed willing to talk to me. No wonder, because he had lived on the Pacific coast and in Salem and Eugene. Another thing I noticed was the heavy red carpets. Your shoes would sink so deep it was difficult to shuffle your feet along.

We were through at the dinner hour. The warden took us into a small gallery facing the dining room, right under us at the orchestra, and in plain view, a fine looking lot of men dressed in white. They were all professional players. How that gray-haired fellow wearing glasses could play the piano, and the snare drummer, a fine looking young negro, he was sure an expert. Before coming to the prison he pulled down a salary of \$175 a month for playing with those drums.

Finally the hour approached, the orchestra struck up a lively march and in marched the prisoners two abreast. They walked to their places at the long tables and stood all facing us. I thought they would never stop coming. I did not want them to stop. I have attended swell banquets and heard swell orchestras play but I never heard one play as this one did. After they were all in their places the captain gave the signal and they sat down and went to eating.

I had the menu but cannot find it. The orchestra played all during the meal. When each prisoner had finished eating he folded his arms, when they were all folded the captain gave the signal and they all arose at once and marched out as they had entered. I cannot describe the feeling that came over me during that scene. I had never seen anything like it, never anything so interesting, and I could have sat there all the afternoon and listened to that orchestra.

The warden took us into his private office and showed us many interesting things, the rope he had bought to hang that man who killed the guard. The manuscript of the life of Roy Gardner as he had written up, dope and needles and many other things. He told us how much food it took to feed the prisoners. I do not remember all that, but I do remember he said it took 450 dozen eggs for one meal.

I spent two hours in the prison and believe it the two most interesting hours of my life.

The city of Leavenworth is an old town, not progressive, the population decreasing instead of increasing. I pulled out that afternoon and after going three miles over broken up brick pavement I found myself at the National Soldiers' Home. I drove up the beautiful driveway and was astonished at the size of the home and the beautiful grounds and the most beautiful hand stand I have ever seen. From here I went on to Lansing about three miles and there was the state penitentiary of Kansas, built in 1854. Built of stone, and reminded one of a European castle, with its stone towers. From here I headed straight for Kansas City over a paved highway. First passing through Kansas City and then over a long viaduct to Kansas City, Mo. There is where I stopped again. In my next I will tell you about Kansas City and

what I hear about the roads of Missouri.

Very truly yours,
GEO. H. GRAVES.

Kansas City, Mo., May 28.—In my last I forgot to tell you about the Elks club at Omaha. They have a new building, opened a short time ago, a very expensive one, but I could not see it. The lodge room is finished in black walnut and this room alone cost \$83,000. Have an organ that cost \$10,000. The lounge room is also finished in black walnut, the furniture is all imported. This room cost \$17,000.

They have a dining room, also a cafeteria, the latter is open to

the public. The facing on the cafeteria sewing table cost \$3.99 a square foot, the total cost of the facing \$1690. The total cost of the table \$6,900. There are probably 40 tables in this room, and each table cost \$120. They are covered with black vitrolite.

The Elks building at Saint Joseph, Mo., is only one story in height it was built in 1905. It is pretty on the outside, finished in the Elks colors, and looks more like an Elks building than any I have seen. It has a large porch. The lodge room is in the center of the building and all other rooms open off of that.

I fooled around all morning in Saint Joseph, because I liked the place, had lunch at the Elks club, and then started off for Leavenworth, Kansas, went through another tall gate. At three o'clock I came to the Leavenworth prison. I wanted to go through it. As it was Saturday nothing doing so I telephoned to the warden and still nothing doing but he told me that if I would remain over until the following day, he had a party of friends he was going to show through and I could join the party. I certainly stayed and I was well repaid. I cannot tell you all about the prison, as I could not see what I remember the warden said the gate to the prison, the main gate, cost \$5000. I will tell you of some of the things I remember seeing. We came to one part of the prison, it's a separate building. The warden would not allow the women to enter, because the men in this building are as bad as they can be. They cannot be punished any more far what they might say. In this building there are 22 cells and in one of them I saw Roy Gardner. They have him where he sure will never get out as he did at McNeil Island. In another they had a tall young fellow who had killed four men, the last one was a guard at the prison. It was in the dining room. He held up his hands, the guard approached to see what he wanted and he stuck a knife in his heart, then braced up and said: another man dead from heart trouble. What are you going to do with men like that excepting to lock them up in solitary confinement. I saw all kinds of criminals—notable ones. The prison contains 2700 inmates. Twenty-five per cent negro, most of them are dope fiends, 43 bankers, 47 preachers and 42 lawyers. Saw one old gray-haired man, the prisoner's dad, who had been there 19 years, and still he was not a trusty. I saw so many good looking men, saw the seven men who were convicted with Doctor Cook, they are figuring on letting them out.

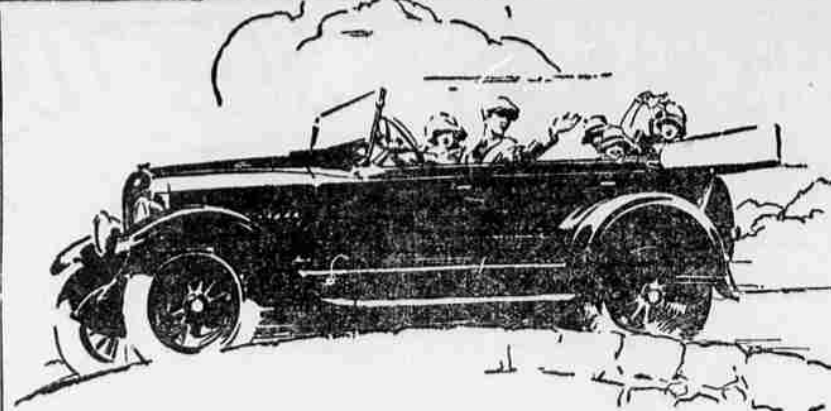
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