

A LOT OF LIFE IN A LITTLE SPACE

This is National Want Ad Week, a good time to delve into those classified columns, where brevity is often the soul of wit—and high drama

By JERRY KLEIN

NOBODY NEEDED to tell George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, or Abraham Lincoln that "it pays to advertise." They found out for themselves.

So have the thousands of other Americans who run \$800 million worth of classified advertisements in our newspapers every year. They know that to rent a houseboat, sell a left-handed glockenspiel, or locate a long-lost relative, nothing beats the classifieds. And even as casual reading, these columns often provide classics of pathos, inspiration, and humor.

Consider these lines from a New Hampshire newspaper: "Need secondhand studio couch (not necessarily comfortable). Mother-in-law due next week." Or this ad, published in Massachusetts: "I have male and female hamsters. Will trade the lot of them for anything—anything!"

The Association of Newspaper Classified Advertising Managers—sponsors of National Want Ad Week, March 10-16—have come up with the fact that there was humor between the lines of America's very first such ad. This notice was run in 1704 in the *Boston News Letter* by a farmer who had a "fresh cow" for sale.

When the ad had been set in type, the farmer was told there was still a little space left and was

asked what else he would like to say. "Well, my daughter is getting married," he replied. "Can we say that?" And so the nation's first want ad announced a cow for sale and a farmer's daughter to be married—all in one.



There wasn't anything humorous, however, about the classified ads George Washington took. In 1773, for instance, he placed one offering 20,000 acres of land for sale.

Benjamin Franklin couldn't resist the opportunity to do a little preaching in one of the many ads he ran. When he learned his wife's prayer book was filched from church, Ben ran the following insertion: "The person who took the prayer book is desired to open it and read the Eighth Commandment, and afterwards return the prayer book into the same pew again, upon which no further notice will be taken."

Abraham Lincoln also advertised directly to a wrongdoer, but he laced his message with wit. "Stolen—a watch worth \$100," declared the rail splitter. "If the thief will return it, he shall be informed where he may steal one worth two of it, and no questions asked."

A help-wanted ad of Lincoln's era read: "Wanted, young, skinny, wiry fellows not under 18. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred." One of those who replied was a fellow named William Cody. As Buffalo Bill, he—and the others who answered this strange ad—wrote a romantic chapter in America's frontier history by forming the famous Pony Express.

An Illinois newspaper carried this historic classified ad: "Wanted, watchmaker with references who can furnish tools. State age, experience, and salary required." The ad was run by a Richard Sears, and one of the respondents was an ambitious soul named Alvah Roebuck.



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"A high-grade young man for office position requiring some bookkeeping experience," read a later ad printed in a Michigan paper. "A fine opportunity for the right applicant." The right applicant turned out to be the late Harlow Curtice who, as head of General Motors Corp., became one of the most famous and highest-paid executives in American industry.

Another successful businessman, Walt Disney, marks his start from the day he answered an ad in a Missouri newspaper. It read: "Wanted, artist. Cartoon and wash drawings. First-class man wanted. Steady."

And not many years ago, a group of Republicans in California used a classified notice to find a man interested in entering politics as a candidate for Congress. Response came from a young Navy veteran whose name you may recognize: Richard M. Nixon.

THE CLASSIFIEDS often supply a charming glimpse into the everyday lives of America's newspaper readers. Consider, for instance, the long-suffering husband in Rochester, N. Y., who recently told the world: "Notice is hereby given that my dear wife has purchased still another driver's permit. The guided missile is a gray '56 Chevrolet. Please exercise extreme caution!"

Or the man who came into a Nevada newspaper office one day and placed an ad declaring: "I will not be responsible for my wife's debts." This was followed a few days later by another ad stating: "My advertisement of Jan. 24 was



an error. I will be responsible for my wife's debts." On this return visit to the classified counter, the man was accompanied by his wife, who wore a pale-blue dress—and a dark, determined look.

In Iowa a starry-eyed young man who was altar-bound advertised his good fortune this way: "Frederick Harold Green announces his utter astonishment at being accepted in Holy Matrimony by the most incomparable Evelyn Estes."

Many a teardrop sparkles in these columns, too. A newspaper in South Dakota printed this ad: "Will party who picked up a black cocker spaniel Sunday either return him or come and get the three-year-old boy he belongs to?"

Auspicious for all concerned was the classified declaration made by a Montana doctor. He announced: "I have cancelled and burned all notes, records, and accounts due me over a period of 39 years. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN HUEHNERGARTH

COVER:

Once compared with Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe, actress Lee Remick is now carving her own star image, as you'll learn on page 10. Photograph by Peter Basch.

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