

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

The case of the curious contract

When is a contract not a contract? And when does it become a contract? Or was it ever a contract? Or, if so, what kind of contract?

For the answers to this mystery, join me as I step through the squeaking door for a trip into the shadowy world of Ellery Holmes — or is that Sherlock Queen?

This trip isn't for the faint of heart, for we're going (gasp!) to a Vernonia City Council meeting for "The Case of the Curious Contract."

A piece of paper surfaced recently that Mayor Wally Vaughn and Councilmember Bill Hansen said was a two year employment contract for City Recorder Don Dunaway.

They also said they hadn't seen it before, though mysteriously, their signatures were on it, and in a very stylish black and white.

When they signed it, they said, they were under the impression that it was a wage agreement. They didn't know it was an employment contract until Dunaway told them so; they were confused.

Perhaps by scrutinizing the document we can find some clues to sort out the confusion; at least it's worth a try.

Right near the top of the paper it says "Contract." That must mean it's a contract. But what for?

Aha! It says "Exempt Employees & Fringe Benefits" and it has a date on it, July 1, 1987. Experienced sleuth that I am, I immediately grasp the significance of that date for it is the beginning of the 1987-88 fiscal year!

Next on the mysterious missive are the words "Pay increase for exempt city employees, 1987-88 —5%" followed by "Pay increase for exempt city employees, 1988-89 —3% plus 1/2 of 1% of the cost of living index. This may be considered negotiable."

Following these cryptic comments are the signatures of Vaughn and Hansen, plus the remaining councilmembers on December 15, 1987, the time the document was signed - Joe Batty, Wells Oviatt and Rob Richards.

What I need to know now is what is "negotiable?" The whole document? The rate increase? What?

This contract is getting curiouser and curiouser!

Seizing a shortcut to the solution of this mystery, I headed for the archives called "Minutes," looking up the aforementioned date.

Astonishingly, the minutes make no reference to a two year contract of any kind, and the only employee contract mentioned is approval of the 1987-88 salary contract.

One mystery has been solved - there is no employment contract, and the wage agreement was for one year with the second year negotiable.

But there is still one mystery that eludes me. Why were Vaughn and Hansen confused?

Between the Bookends

By Noni Andersen

During my childhood I travelled all over the world, meeting royalty, politicians, rich and poor people, the famous and the infamous.

Yet I never left home and spent very little money. My travels were provided by local libraries and the wonderful world of books.

It never occurred to me not to read; my parents read to me, there were always books around, and special times weren't complete without the gift of a book. I read and gave books to my children, too, and now they are reading and giving books to their children.

So with Christmas fast on our heels, I'd like to suggest this tried and true way to delight all the people on your list.

For small children there are so many imaginative stories that it's difficult to make a choice. You can start with nursery rhymes or Mother Goose, continue through Dr. Suess' rib-ticklers like "The Cat in The Hat," or sneak through the colorful jungle of Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are."

As children grow older, they love tales of adventure and accomplishments. Mark Twain's "Tom Sawyer," the Paul Bunyan tales, Jack London's "Call of the Wild," and

other sagas flow on a rapid river of action.

There are hundreds of stories for sports fans, about baseball, basketball, tennis, auto racing, football and more. For the outdoorsmen there are books about wildlife, hunting and fishing.

Hobbyists will enjoy books about their special activities - photography, gardening, painting, woodworking and so forth. In fact, it's hard to imagine a hobby that hasn't been written about.

There are books for bird watchers, dog owners, herb fanciers, astronomers, wine makers, fossil hunters, kite makers and bike riders. Books about auto restoration, canoe building, organic gardening, furniture making and stamp collecting.

For cooks, or would-be cooks, the selection is huge. There are cookbooks for children, and cookbooks about microwaving, vegetarian meals, barbecues, desserts, fish and game. For a good comprehensive cookbook, it's still hard to beat "Joy of Cooking," but who can resist a book titled "Take One Egg and Crack Up?"

You say you have a student with no time for hobbies and no interest in cooking? Then a dictionary is the choice. There are regular, rhyming



and foreign dictionaries; dictionaries of antonyms and synonyms, or of foreign phrases. And don't forget Roget's "Thesaurus," the college student's friend.

If you have family or friends who live a great distance away, you can show them Oregon with one of the great books of photographs by Roy Atkeson or other nature photographers. Or take a shut-in outdoors with a book of flower or wildlife photographs.

Humor books make great gifts, too. All the favorite cartoon strips are represented by books - Garfield, The Far Side, Doonesbury and many more. A gift of laughter can never be too highly rated.

There are classics, mysteries, romances, science fiction, bible stories and westerns. There are books about the theater, music, history and the arts. There are novels, short stories, anthologies, poetry, essays, biographies and autobiographies.

There really is something for everyone in the wonderful world of books. This year, give a gift with imagination. Give a book.

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

American cities are our best examples of true democracy. However, our system works only if the public insists that it does so. This insistence is missing in Vernonia, as the following example illustrates.

1. Recently the mayor altered Council procedures, eliminating public comment on issues until after Council action.

2. The city is deluged in law suits. Everything regarding these suits is being cloaked in "exclusive sessions." The public is kept unaware of the number of lawsuits, reasons for the suits, etc.

I have regularly attended council meetings for years, but have never heard any information about law suits. The rationale for this secrecy is that public knowledge would be harmful to the city's negotiations. Even if a particular case calls for discretion on the part of the council, the public is due a detailed report upon resolution of each case. How else

can we make changes to avoid future law suits?

3. At a recent council meeting, city staff, the mayor, and a council member attempted to pass off an agreement signed last December detailing future wage increases, as a personal service contract with the city recorder. Such a "no-cut" multi-year contract would not allow the city to dismiss or lay off covered employees. This erstwhile contract was less than two inches long in content.

Do any of our citizens recall asking the Council to give anyone a contract in which only the employee can cancel? Such a decision would illustrate the worst business judgement used by council in a decade.

Without public input, this is the kind of government we will receive. Only constant reminders of the public's trust and need to know will ensure the best government in Vernonia.

Jim Tierney,
Vernonia

To the Editor:

It seems like there is nothing easy.

A simple proposal for a city administrator in Vernonia should be something everyone can agree with. However, without any background knowledge, some people feel threatened by this proposal. This has caused rumors and false charges by people who are underinformed.

A city administrator could be an asset for Vernonia. He/she would be able to carry out the Council's wishes; make day to day decisions needed to run the city; attend meetings in St. Helens, Salem, etc. to represent Vernonia's interests; apply for grants; encourage businesses to locate here.

A city administrator is allowed to do only what the Council deems necessary to control all departments, short of hiring and firing. Having an administrator in charge and accountable would

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