Governor Leslie

Fire in the Purdue Armory on January 13 started 1928 in a troublesome way. The blaze destroyed vehicles, guns, military gear, and furnishings, but sunnier news came soon. The Scrivener, a new monthly literary magazine, debuted at Purdue. For this issue Ade composed “Welcoming the New Magazine”:

Some one long ago declared that Purdue University was to specialize on the teaching of Science, Agriculture and Engineering, and, because some one said that many students at Purdue have believed that it would be slightly improper for them to learn how to write for publication or to speak in public. It is true that Purdue never has been labeled a “literary” school and has not competed with the academic courses in other large institutions. But just the same every Purdue graduate should know how to write for the printer and should cultivate the usual knack of talking to various assemblages. It is too bad that the debating societies of long ago became overshadowed by other college organizations which went in for music and social affairs. I am glad to learn from Doctor Elliott that Purdue men and women are reorganizing societies which will meet for general discussion of current topics.

The engineer, the scientist, the research worker and the modern farmer will be called upon to deal with the public through the printed page and at all sorts of conventions and conferences. Some may even be tempted to take a fling at fiction or the drama. Booth Tarkington, John McCutcheon and other men who were in Purdue about my time went out into the world and began to write
books. It is an interesting fact that Purdue, which is supposed to be a “technical” school, has produced just as many authors as Indiana, Wabash and DePauw, to the south of us, all of them striving to plant the literary germ in the undergraduate. There is no reason why The Scrivener should not be an interesting publication and prove that Boilermakers can do something besides make boilers. (The Scrivener, January 1928)

In early February 1928, House Speaker Harry Leslie revealed that he would run for the Republican nomination for Governor of Indiana. Leslie promised old-fashioned honesty in government. That was timely talk. George Ade’s disgraced brother-law, former Governor Warren McCray, languished in prison in 1928 for mail fraud. McCray’s successor Governor Ed Jackson, although indicted for bribing McCray, won acquittal and stayed in office.

Cashing in on the momentary Harry Leslie pride, the Journal and Courier printed his biography. In it Leslie said that he believed “there is something radically wrong with the primary [election] system in Indiana.” He vowed to abide by the Republican Convention’s choice for governor. He added: “I [also] am opposed to the furtherance of political ambitions from the pulpits of the church. I have too high a regard for the churches and will accept no invitation to speak in any church while a candidate.” (Leslie, his wife Martha, and three sons attended First Methodist Church in West Lafayette.) The primary election that Leslie criticized, scheduled for May 8, would not be binding. The traditional Democrat and Republican nominating conventions would as usual take place in late May.

George Ade kept on writing. In February, J. H. Sears and Company published Bang! Bang! illustrated by McCutcheon. The promoters called this book “a collection of stories intended to recall memories of the nickel library days when boys were supermen and murder a fine art.” The volume contained eight of Ade’s works from the
Chicago Record in 1897-1898, stories that amounted to “a burlesque of blood-and-thunder dime novels and nickel libraries” (Russo, 100).

In July, Hearst’s International and Cosmopolitan included Ade’s “On His Uppers” in “Literary Treasures of 1928.” Country Gentleman magazine published Ade’s last one-act play, “The Willing Performer.” Ade contributed four more of his “At Long Range” observations between February and December to The Purdue Alumnus. His essay on “Farming in Indiana—Then and Now” came out in the July 1928 Purdue University Department of Agricultural Extension Bulletin.

Steering gear competition stepped up in 1928. Saginaw Products became the Saginaw Steering Division of General Motors. The Gemmer Company improved its single roller-tooth gear by producing a two-tooth version for even easier steering. On April 2, Ross Gear directors approved up to $100,000 worth of additions to the plant’s assembly and machine shop. This would raise production capacity from 2,200 units per day to 2,700. Within a month, the Directors further approved a five-for-one stock split.

It was probably in early 1928 that Dave Ross sat—in an upholstered armchair—for a formal portrait. The noted artist from Michigan City, Indiana, was Robert Grafton (1876-1936.) The occasion was Ross’s elevation to the presidency of the Purdue Board of Trustees. In the portrait, Ross, wearing a light-colored business suit with stiff collar and bow tie, gazes with quiet tolerance toward the painter.

On Wednesday night, April 4, Will Rogers returned to wow a Purdue crowd jammed into the Memorial Gym. “It was at the close of [Rogers’] monologue,” the Journal and Courier reported, “that Russell Gray of Chicago, president of the Purdue Alumni Association,
gave Rogers a certificate of [honorary] membership. Rogers beamed gratefully, then turned to the large assemblage of students. ‘Boys,’ he said, ‘I just got in five minutes something it takes you four years to earn.’”

In the course of his rapid-fire utterance, he lauded Lindbergh, but made fun of the...Lone Eagle as “the first man who ever carried a ham sandwich to Paris.” (Lafayette Journal and Courier, April 5, 1928)

On April 10, Lafayette’s Buick automobile dealer Charles Shambaugh announced that he had leased an eighty-acre cornfield near the Tippecanoe County Fairgrounds at the southeast edge of Lafayette. On the field he would develop Lafayette’s first airport. The Chamber of Commerce and the American Legion would help promote the venture. A mechanical tinkerer, Shambaugh had built and fixed carriages and wagons since the horse-and-buggy days. He had been building and racing primitive engine-powered cars, too, and had become a car dealer in the early 1900s. Now he told of planning to smooth the old cornfield furrows, seed the field with bluegrass, and build a sheet-metal hangar for office space and aircraft storage.

Money put up by Shambaugh and Dr. Arnett quickly put the field in shape. The first plane, piloted by a man from South Bend, landed on May 10. Shambaugh and Arnett enticed Indiana National Guard Captain Lawrence I. “Cap” Aretz to move over from Kokomo to run the Lafayette airport.

In Indiana politics a certain Fred Schortemeier led a statewide field of ten Republican primary election candidates for the Governor nomination. Harry Leslie, pledging to abide by the nominating convention coming May 24, trailed Schortemeier by 60,000 pri-
mary votes. But by law, the convention delegates had the final say. On convention day the delegates listened to all the speakers, weighed their “electability,” whispered to conduct the usual “horse tradin’,” and then chose Leslie on the seventh ballot.

The wonder of aviation remained new in the public mind after Shambaugh Field opened and each time Journal and Courier stories told of amazing feats of flights from all over the globe. Among them was the hometown story that involved Lena Stafford. Lena received a letter from a cousin mailed from Germany. The new 800-foot German airship Graf Zeppelin had carried the letter aboard one of its first trans-Atlantic flights before landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

As the local talk of Shambaugh Field gained volume and speed, followers of other flying news began to hear more about Amelia Earhart. In June 1928, Earhart became the first woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean by air (as a passenger and part-time pilot.) Reports also told about her buying an English Avro “Avian” biplane and starting to write a book, 20 Hrs. 49 Min., about the trans-ocean trip. G. P. Putnam’s Sons, of which Earhart’s friend George Palmer Putnam (son of one of the Sons) was treasurer, would publish the book. Then in September, Earhart made the first solo transcontinental flight by a woman. She was becoming rather a protégé of the promotion-minded, forty-one-year-old Putnam.

Putnam (1887-1950) in time became noted as an author, explorer, and publisher of scientific adventure books. A grandson of G. P. Putnam, founder of the publishing firm, George had led two expeditions to the Arctic—one in 1926 and one in 1927. One future biographer of Earhart would see fit to point out:

It is a popular misconception George Palmer Putnam used Amelia and drove her too hard, with the implication that he did this for his own ends, and of course he was earning a management fee from Amelia’s earnings...But in fact George was simply ensur-
ing that the maximum amount of benefit was gained from a unique opportunity. He realized that once Amelia’s name dropped out of the newspapers she would be just another woman aviator. No one would pay to hear her speak once the next record breaker seized the daily headlines. Amelia would undoubtedly have recognized the sense of this, too.

Amelia also saw the career George sketched out for her, and she wanted it. She was just as much committed to the property “Amelia Earhart” as George and, if anything, was probably self-driven. (Lovell, *The Sound of Wings*, 133-134)

On August 21, 1928, Shambaugh and Dr. Arnett disclosed that they would improve Shambaugh Field with lights and a beacon and get it placed on two airmail routes. Dedication of the field took place on August 26. Standard Oil of Indiana’s “Stanolind” publicity plane—a loud, lumbering corrugated metal-covered Ford AT-5 Tri-motor—landed for an air show and to offer rides.

Under Aretz’s management, Shambaugh Field gave Lafayette boosters a new selling point. The airport also inspired enough people—Dave Ross among them—to start thinking about a Purdue University Airport and to create more aviation courses.

From Shambaugh Field, the busy Aretz gave flying lessons and carried out charter service and emergency and goodwill “mercy mission” flights to rush sick or injured patients to distant hospitals or fly medicine to their bedside. Among Aretz’s students in those days was Michael C. “Mike” Murphy, a Lafayette boy who would earn the nation’s highest award for “outstanding contributions to American aviation.” Alberta Clark, a nervy twenty-one-year-old *Journal and Courier* reporter, wrote a series of stories about learning to fly with Aretz.

The wife of a Purdue purchasing agent made the first long-distance flight from Lafayette by a woman when Aretz flew her to Columbus, Ohio, for a conference. Federal inspectors who checked Shambaugh Field from time to time praised Aretz’s management.
Shambaugh added safety features over the years, among them better lights, and two-way radios.

On the other hand, there were risks and dark days in aviation. On September 9, 1928, there occurred the first fatal aircraft accident in or near Lafayette. Two joyriding students from the high school in Otterbein, Indiana, died in a Sunday afternoon crash on John Lugar’s farm half a mile west of the town. They were riding in a WACO piloted by Donald Burget, twenty-one, of Chalmers, Indiana. Burget survived serious injuries.

Coach Phelan’s 1928 Purdue football team—still distant from the Joke Division—won five games, lost two, and tied one. In Ross-Ade Stadium, the players thumped DePauw thirty-one to nothing; tied Wisconsin nineteen to nineteen before 15,000 fans; beat Case nineteen to nothing; beat Wabash fourteen to nothing; and shut out Indiana fourteen to nothing before a new record attendance of 25,000. Cries began going up from the many standees to build more Ross-Ade Stadium seats.

In the general elections conducted on November 6, Harry Leslie defeated Democrat Frank Dailey for Governor. Leslie won by about 45,000 votes. His popularity helped Republican Herbert Hoover, Iowa mining engineer, war relief commissioner, and cabinet member, carry Indiana on the way to crushing Democrat Alfred E. Smith by more than six million nationally for U.S. President.