President Elliott and R. B. Stewart put George Putnam in charge of buying the airplane for the Amelia Earhart/PRF “flying laboratory.” In March 1936, Putnam informed Lockheed he was ready to make a first payment on a 10E “Electra” (Lovell, 230). In a biography of Elliott, Frank K. Burrin wrote:

Although she was never on the campus at any one time for more than a few weeks the days [Earhart] spent at Purdue were busy. Elliott asked her husband what he thought most interested Miss Earhart in the field of research and education beyond academic matters. Putnam said she was hankering for a bigger and better plane to use as a laboratory for research. Earhart discussed this with Elliott, Dave Ross and others, and there was established in April 1936, within PRF, an Amelia Earhart Fund for Aeronautical Research. From this fund was purchased a Lockheed “Electra” [that] became known as the Purdue Flying Laboratory.

Lockheed had introduced a ten-passenger Model 10A “Electra” in early 1934. The 10A was an all-metal, cantilever low-wing monoplane with twin engines, two rudders, and retractable wheels. Lockheed classified the “Electras” as “short-range light transports.” Four-hundred-fifty-horsepower Pratt and Whitney engines powered the 10As. Those engines gave the planes a maximum speed, at 5,000 feet, of a bit more than 200 miles per hour. An “Electra’s” ceiling limit was 19,400 feet and range 810 miles. The wings
spanned fifty-five feet, body thirty-eight feet seven inches, and height ten feet one inch. Lockheed built about 150 “Electras,” following the 10As with progressively better 10Bs, 10Cs, 10Ds, and 10Es. By March 1936, 600-horsepower engines were powering the 10Es when Putnam and Earhart were ready to buy.

George Ade’s fan mail, whether he was wintering in Florida or summering at Hazelden, still contained pleas for advice from budding writers. One of them, Stuart Gates, received this counsel when Ade wrote to him from Miami Beach on March 18, 1936:

The way to learn to write is to keep on writing, and when you are reading keep a dictionary at your elbow and check up on the words which are new to you or whose meaning might be in doubt. Build up your vocabulary but do not strive to put into your stock too many long, unusual or freakish words. A simple and direct style is always the best. (Tobin, 191-192)

One federal Depression-era relief program already up and going—the Works Progress Administration (WPA)—announced plans in April 1936 to build a circular concrete swimming pool in Lafayette’s Columbian Park. Meanwhile, Purdue, mostly through R. B. Stewart and PRF, was applying for much more WPA help for several ambitious building projects. Grandstand construction at Ross-Ade Stadium in 1936, for example, raised seating capacity from about 23,000 to about 32,000.

On June 17, Eleanor Roosevelt visited Purdue to learn about housing research and to speak about the issue of housing to 6,000 people crammed into the Purdue Armory. The nation’s first lady—wife of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt—attended a Science and
Leadership Institute. Many in her audience were Purdue Summer Session students. A good many others were curious onlookers. The Institute drew leaders in science, business, journalism, and religion.

Indiana Governor and Mrs. McNutt, Mrs. Roosevelt, and her secretary arrived in West Lafayette about nine-thirty a.m. The four with Purdue guides inspected several of the experimental homes west of Ross-Ade Stadium and a wheeled mobile home designed by W. B. Stout, of Detroit. The party spent more than an hour in talks with President Elliott and Frank Watson, director of the housing project. “I came to Purdue,” Mrs. Roosevelt told the Armory crowd, “to learn as much as possible about your interesting experiments in housing.”

I am no expert in housing, and can only talk of a few of the reasons why it seems all of us should be tremendously interested in the subject.

I think we can all agree there is nothing more important than the homes of the country. There are many problems before us, but none seems more important to me than the possibility of acquainting our citizens with the realization that many of our people live in homes where they cannot possibly be comfortable and have a reasonably happy home life. If that be true, then we have not achieved the objects for which our forefathers founded the country.

The smiling first lady quickly gained rapport with her audience. She named three housing problems in America: rural slums, city slums, and “the great group which could own their own homes if the price could be brought down to the possibilities of their incomes.”

Bad housing begins to tell first on the women. They are the first to become old before their time and their thoughts turn first to the effects on the children. Most homes cost too much for peo-
ple with average incomes. The extraordinary thing about such experiments as those at Purdue has been to show industries what [how much] housing costs. But more interesting will be to see what can be done to moderate costs.

Mrs. Roosevelt emphasized the importance of getting the public interested in the problem of housing and insisted this was necessary before progress could be made. She asserted that the basis of any change in many phases of American life had its foundation in better housing. She quoted the Federal Bureau of Investigations Director J. Edgar Hoover as saying that “prisons and asylums are filled with people who come from homes where the environment was bad, where they never had a chance to become anything except a warped human being.”

President Elliott said that Mrs. Roosevelt’s visit had given a great impetus to the Purdue experiments. He introduced Dave Ross to her as “the father of the housing project.” While touring the research houses, Mrs. Roosevelt declared that American industry had been “stupid” about housing. However, she questioned the practical value of pre-fabricated houses unless there were “pre-fabricated families” in which the number of children is regulated. She said too many houses were planned with no thought of where or how furniture would be placed. There should be no wasted space in any home and every spot should have a specific use. She specifically disliked rooms without doors (Journal and Courier, June 17, 1936).

After the Armory address Purdue officials drove Mrs. Roosevelt past the Women’s Residence Hall, then over to the Elliotts’ home in Lafayette for lunch with the McNutts and others. At one-thirty p.m. she was taken by car to Indianapolis in order to board a train for New York City.

For Dave Ross, Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit was just another busy day. During 1936, he was getting three more patents for his construc-
tion methods. His Rostone investment, economically speaking, was only treading water. Fairfield business was drifting as well in the general Depression malaise. But Ross Gear was a brighter story. Ross Gear was ending its thirtieth year in 1936. That year, in defiance of general conditions, Ross Gear would earn more than $347,000 and show a surplus of nearly $411,000. Sales of “twin cam and lever” steering gears for cars and smaller off-road vehicles were rising so fast that at one point the Directors doubled the quarterly stock dividend to sixty cents a share.

In West Lafayette, some of the vacant land Dave Ross had given to Purdue, or had helped Purdue acquire for future use, still stood south and east of Ross-Ade Stadium. Although it had been reserved for the Purdue Master Plan since the early 1920s, the land remained undeveloped in 1936. Part of it then became the site of choice for an athletic field house. The federal Public Works Administration (PWA) would foot much of the cost as part of its aim of Depression relief.

The hottest weather ever recorded at Purdue struck between July 5 and 27 in 1936. Fifteen times temperature reached 100 degrees or more Fahrenheit. Purdue instruments measured the official numbers. The all-time record high of 111 occurred on July 14. The intense heat damaged certain city streets paved with bituminous or “blacktop” material. The Wabash River between Lafayette and West Lafayette reached its lowest level since measuring began in 1870. Where “flood stage” was calculated to be a mean depth of eleven feet, the river in the heat dried to six inches. Purdue agriculture specialists predicted Indiana’s smallest corn crop since 1881.

Among some of his oldest friends and fans, George Ade’s absence from the public eye was beginning to be conspicuous. He con-
ceded the point in a letter from Hazelden that he dated August 5, 1936, in reply to a question:

I am compelled to say that the literary work I am doing at present is not sufficient in bulk or importance to bear any important relation to present trends in the work by American authors. We may discover by looking over recent outputs that there is a tendency among American writers to favor biographies dealing with our more eminent people, novels that try to illuminate some of our more important periods...It seems to me that all the ‘trends’ are encouraging and educational and will help us to better understand our own country. The fact that many fiction writers favor mystery stories is not to be deplored because most provide good entertainment. (Tobin, 194)

The central plot in a little remembered motion picture—released in 1936 both as Freshman Love and Rhythm on the River—came from Ade’s old stage play The College Widow.

Ade wrote and spoke little in public on the subject of religion. Yet he did respond from Hazelden, in the fall of 1936, to inquiries from George Vaughn, a law professor at the University of Arkansas:

I doubt very much if I am qualified to speak with any authority regarding the need of a “spiritual awakening.” I think our greatest national handicap at present is the willingness and the desire of so many people to live at government expense and get money from the government on any sort of pretext. If you would define a spiritual awakening as a renewed enthusiasm for the activities of the orthodox churches, and especially those of Protestant persuasion, I must say frankly that I do not discover any tendencies in that direction. I think we need a revival of the spirit of independence and unselfish patriotism and a return to the old-fashioned virtues of economy and saving. I fear that we are suffering from a lack of moral fibre and have taken the wrong slant on what our government really should undertake to do for us. Frankly I have no recipe for insuring a return to the cardinal virtues. (Tobin, 194-195)
That hideous 1903 train wreck would have seemed tragedy enough. Yet a new, tearful chapter in Purdue football took place on September 12, 1936. The football team was involved in practice and conditioning routines at the Ross Engineering Camp. The first game of the season against Ohio University was scheduled for September 26. An explosion and fire in a dressing room the young men were using killed two players and injured four. Some players had been using gasoline to remove adhesive tape, a precaution against spraining ankles or other joints in practice. After workouts a plugged shower drain accumulated the gasoline rinsed to remove tape from players’ skin. A water heater clicked on. A spark from the water heater controls ignited fumes from the pooled gasoline. In the blast Carl Dahlbeck, a football guard, died almost instantly; halfback Tom McGannon died of his burns five days later.

In the midst of the all-campus mourning about the football tragedy—on September 19—Amelia Earhart landed her shining silver “Electra” 10E at Purdue Airport. News reports vaguely mentioned that the plane was to be loaded with “additional laboratory equipment for various flight tests” and let it go at that.

Coach Noble Kizer’s stunned players recovered from the training camp deaths enough to drub Ohio forty-seven to nothing in the season opening game in Ross-Ade Stadium. About 17,000 fans watched. This game started the 1936 season that ended with five Purdue wins, one tie, and two defeats. The Old Oaken Bucket game against Indiana before a crowd of about 30,000 in Ross-Ade Stadium ended in a twenty-to-twenty tie on November 21.

During the football season, President Elliott announced that Purdue had received another PWA grant. It would be coupled with donations and proceeds from a bond sale to finance a multi-purpose athletic field house northwest of Stadium and Northwestern avenues. Dave Ross, behind the headlines, gave $100,000 toward
the field house, but typically he insisted that his name be kept secret. “Just let it appear that the money came from various alumni,” he said, “and then others will take more interest.”

The first national referendum on President Roosevelt’s drastic New Deal approach to government, with all its Depression-era programs, took place on November 3. In office since early 1933, Roosevelt now ran for a second four-year term and won by more than eleven million votes. The Republican challenger had been Alf Landon, businessman and governor of Kansas. In electoral votes Roosevelt won 523 to eight, but in Tippecanoe County races, a record 26,800 people voted, and Republicans scored wins almost as decisive as before Roosevelt.

There was one more note of sadness about Purdue football. Failing health—kidney trouble—forced Noble Kizer to retire from coaching at the age of forty. Since the 1930 season his strong Boilermaker teams had won forty-two times, lost thirteen, and tied three. Kizer’s top assistant coach, Mal Elward, took over. Elward would serve Purdue as interim, and then head coach in football, and as athletic director for one year, until 1941.

Just before Christmas in 1936, a Chicago-area man named George Hiram Brownell published *Revived Remarks on Mark Twain*. The volume, its printing limited to 1,000 copies, commemorated the centenary of Mark Twain’s birth. Five hundred copies were numbered, Ade autographed them, and the other 500 went out unsigned. Ade contributed four articles: “Mark Twain: A Quarter Century Later” (dated Hazelden Farm October 21, 1936); “Tribute to Mark Twain” from *North American Review* June 1910; “Mark
Twain and the Old-Time Subscription Book” from *American Review of Reviews* June 1910; and “On the Death of Mark Twain” from the *Chicago Tribune* April 22, 1910.