

TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE



Boris Chaliapin

KANSAS CITY'S ROY ROBERTS

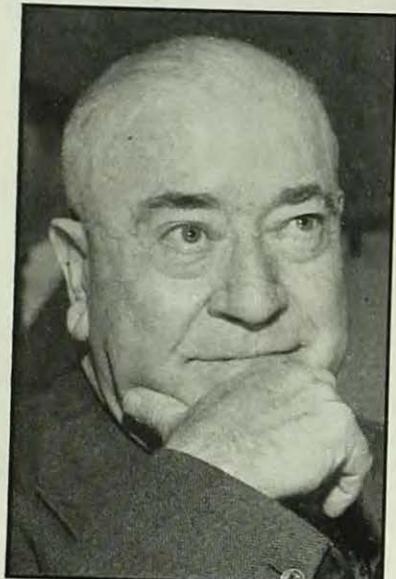
"I'm just a big, fat country boy."

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

bawdy houses on Cherry Street are now mostly respectable boarding houses. The raucous Chesterfield Club, where the waitresses wore nothing at all between their pumps and their permanents, has been torn down.

But the greatest change has come in the town's leadership. Merchants, bankers, railroad managers and hundreds of citizens who once would never think of messing in the town's dirty politics are now the backbone of the reform. Says Roberts: "Pendergast had civic leadership constricted. He even controlled the Chamber of Commerce. Good and able citizens took no part in the city's affairs. If they bucked the machine, they were liable to personal harm. When the machine broke down, we



BOSS PENDERGAST
Sin and boodling.

had a flood of new blood. Where there were a few civic leaders a few years ago, there are now scores."

Roberts is No. 1 citizen, but he is by no means Kansas City's boss. His position is unique in big-town journalism and politics. He never gives an order, has asked only one favor of the city administration in eight years (one of "the Senator's" friends needed a job). His great power is the *Star*. He can sit back, dictate an editorial or work up a story that will get the things done. Big Roy is the easiest man to see in town. To his desk every day come a steady stream of citizens to tell him their troubles and plans—everything from politics to church benefits. He always takes time to listen.

The man who technically runs the town is City Manager Perry Cookingham. The first time the city manager went to see Roberts, the fat man told him: "All we want is the best government you can give us. If we think you're wrong, we'll tell

you—on Page One." The last time Cookingham saw Roberts was to tell him that another city had offered him a similar job at higher pay. The quick result: a boost from \$18,000 to \$25,000 for Manager Cookingham.

The Nelson Tradition. To be up-to-date about Kansas City, every citizen has to read what Roy Roberts wants him to. Roberts' *Star* has no competition. The afternoon *Star* subscriber must also take its morning edition, the *Times*, and the Sunday *Star*. Circulation of each paper is above 360,000.*

The *Star* is known the country over for its conservative makeup (a banner headline is a rarity), its daily Page One story reflecting sweetness and light, and its local boosting. Some Kansas Citians wish they had some other paper to read; some say, "You'll never get anything in this town if Roy Roberts doesn't like you."

Like other *Starmen*, Roberts is steeped in the traditions of Founder William Rockhill Nelson,† a volcanic autocrat whose No. 1 tenet was to lead the people. Nelson told the citizens how to build their houses, what to put in their gardens, how to feed their babies, how to cultivate a pleasant voice. He also fought corruption and was Kansas City's greatest booster. Staffers even say that Roy Roberts, because of his enormous girth and bull neck (18½ inches), is beginning to look a little like the "Old Colonel," whose picture hangs on almost every wall at the *Star*.

The sandy-haired son of a fire-&-brimstone Congregational minister, Roberts started working for the *Star* as a paper-carrier in Lawrence, Kans. 50 years ago. At the University of Kansas, he was the *Star's* correspondent (also editor of the student paper, a campus politician, and a leading spirit in the Good Government Club and the Scoop Club).

On the Inside. When he joined the *Star's* staff (at \$22.50 a week) in 1908, he announced to *Starmen* in their favorite saloon that "this fat boy from Kansas is going to be the best Goddamned reporter the *Star* ever had." He soon was. He did stints at local, sports and state coverage before the Old Colonel sent him to Washington. For 15 years he was one of Washington's best "back door" reporters ("I never cared much for press conferences").

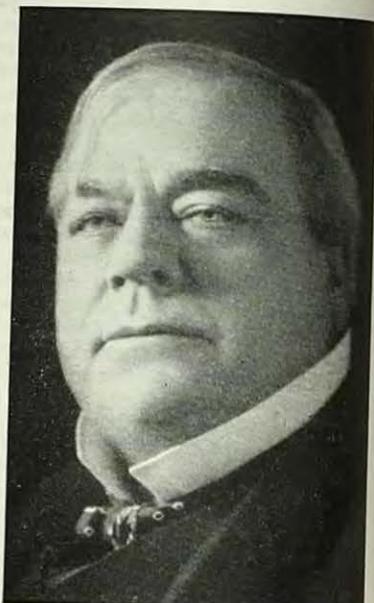
He returned to Kansas City as managing editor in 1928. Thanks to his Washington years, he has a list of friends which includes almost every major Republican and Democrat on the national scene. He has an insatiable urge to be on the inside

* The *Star's* monopoly in Kansas City dates from 1942, when the *Journal-Post* gave up a long-lost fight. The *Star* also has a country weekly, which goes to 440,000 farmers in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma.

† The *Star* is owned by more than 150 *Starmen*, who in 1926 borrowed heavily to buy it from Nelson's estate. Some of them draw up to \$50,000 a year in dividends. Roy Roberts' stock is estimated at close to \$1,000,000; his salary at \$50,000.

of everything important that is going on. Says Roberts: "I got started playing politics so I'd have background for political reporting, and I still play it that way. Before I'm anything else I'm still a fellow looking for a story."

Washington Levee. Politics is also Roberts' biggest recreation. He sometimes gets so engrossed in the game that he plays on both sides at once. In 1944, when he was strong for Tom Dewey, he was also strong for Home-Towner Harry Truman to get the Democratic vice-presidential nomination. At the Democratic convention he took Truman aside, advised him to "shut up this talk of yours about not being good enough to be Vice President or people will begin believing you." In the



FOUNDER NELSON
Sweetness and boosting.

campaign, the *Star* gave Truman as much attention as it did Dewey. Kansas City wags said that Roberts would not be happy until he elected both of them.

Roberts has covered every national political convention since 1912. He goes as a reporter, but he also gets a lot of politicking done. In 1940, a word from him in the press row got Kansas on the Willkie bandwagon early. This year the Kansans will probably be for Dewey at the start, but Harry Darby and Roy Roberts both think well of Arthur Vandenberg and like his chances.

Next week, Washington will get a visit from Roberts, an event which always pulls a long stream of bigwigs to his hotel suite. Among those expected at the country boy's informal levee: Ike Eisenhower, Bob Taft, Arthur Vandenberg. Dozens of others will drop in. They know Roberts not only as Kansas City's first citizen, but as a sagacious politico who can tell them which way the wind is blowing.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS



SIoux CENTER: MAIN STREET
Split down the middle.

IOWA

Satan's Tool

Where U.S. Highway 75 broadens into Main Street, there is Sioux Center, Iowa. Sioux Center is a Corn Belt town of 2,000 people. Of a Saturday evening, shiny new Fords and Plymouths, parked at an angle to the curb, line both sides of the street. Back from the broad sidewalks, the one-story frame and brick buildings house a pair of hash-houses, a Rexall drugstore, a Chevrolet agency, DeJong's Hatchery. There are no traffic lights.

Out behind Main Street, the white frame houses are scrubbed spotless, and box elders border carefully trimmed lawns. The citizens of Sioux Center bear such names as Gerritsma, Ver Steeg, Van de Garde, Schouten; some 97% of the town's population is of Dutch ancestry. Communicants of the strict Reformed (Calvinist) faith, they keep a tight rein on their youngsters. Main Street has one beer parlor, no state liquor store, no dance hall.

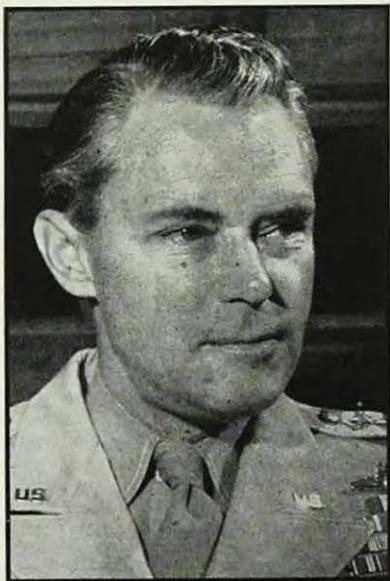
Nightly Except Sunday. Movies have never been popular with the churchmen of Sioux Center. An outsider wanted to erect a theater in 1938, but a popular referendum stopped him. The youngsters took to driving the eleven miles to Orange City's Tulip Theatre. A year ago, the Sioux Center American Legion post leased the Town Hall for a nightly (except Sunday) movie. The resulting uproar split the town squarely down the middle. Merchants liked the trade it brought to town; some citizens thought it kept Sioux Center's youth off the highways. But the Ministerial Association, led by young (30) Rev. Bernard J. Haan, rallied the town's oldsters to the anti-movie cause.

Haan, a lean, rock-jawed preacher, refuses to say outright whether he has ever seen a Hollywood movie. But he knows from reports, he says, that they are loaded with "sex, drunkenness and crime . . . a hindrance to the Kingdom of God." A cigar-smoker and a bowler, Haan denies that his people are narrow. "We are as broadminded as the Word of God allows us to be. . . . [But] we don't want movie

actors and actresses to be the educators of our children."

Last Detail. Sioux Center's five-man town council ducked the issue, put it up for referendum. Once again, "Satan's tool" lost—by 61 votes. But that did not settle the matter. The Legion's lease ran until April 1, and the town council, which had leased the Town Hall to the Legion, was up for election before then. Meantime, the issue of a municipally owned light plant arose, and Sioux Center's high school team reached the semifinals in the state basketball tournament. In the excitement, the anti-movie forces failed to line up a slate for the council election.

This week, the new council voted 4 to 1 to renew the movie license for a year. It looked as if the great god Progress might yet bring to Sioux Center's Main Street the last detail it needed to make it the duplicate of Main Streets up & down the land: a neon-trimmed marquee and posters showing Betty Grable's legs.



Walter B. Lane—Life

GENERAL VANDENBERG
The long and the short of it.

ARMED FORCES

Exit Tooley

At 56, General Carl ("Tooley") Spaatz had a lot to remember. In World War I he had shot down three planes. In 1926, he had been a defense witness at Billy Mitchell's court-martial. In 1929, a major, he had commanded the *Question Mark*, which established the feasibility of refueling planes in mid-air—and drew some badly needed attention to a badly neglected Air Corps.

In World War II, as commander of the Strategic Air Forces in Europe and later in the Pacific, Tooley Spaatz had led more men in air battle than any man before in history. He had earned Ike Eisenhower's accolade as "the world's greatest air strategist."

As the Army Air Forces' Commanding General, he had fought the good fight for a separate air arm. When the fight was won, he had become the independent Air Force's first Chief of Staff. Last week, following the earlier example of Hap Arnold, Jimmy Doolittle and others of the little group of pioneer U.S. birdmen, Tooley Spaatz retired.

To replace him, Secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington chose Spaatz's second in command, General Hoyt Sanford Vandenberg, 49. A favored nephew of Michigan's influential senior senator, Gen. Vandenberg rates as an able, affable officer, long on administrative ability, short on personal force.

After a poor start (he graduated close to the bottom of the West Point class of 1923), Vandenberg had forged a brilliant career. He was commander of the Ninth Air Force in World War II, head of the Army's G-2 and later Director of Central Intelligence for all the armed forces. He was Deputy Commander of the A.A.F. before he succeeded Ira Eaker as Spaatz's vice chief of staff.

Tall, lithe and handsome, he is the airman's idea of what an airman should look like, but some airmen felt that his lack of assertiveness was likely to handicap him in inter-service arguments with the Navy and the Army.