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Researched and compiled by A.J. Coleman, L&T Reporter



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Housing situation in Liberal remains segregated

Liberal's City Commission worked through a long, difficult meeting in early July 1963, as the board tried to solve a problem of alleged housing discrimination.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Ray, "a Negro couple," told the commissioners they had tried in vain to obtain suitable housing in Liberal. The couple, "highly respected citizens of Liberal for many years," stated that "directly or indirectly they had repeatedly been denied housing in the predominantly white sections of Liberal by owners and realtors." Ray said he just wanted a good house, either in northeast Liberal where he lived at the time, or in some other part of town.

Commissioner Ralph Warren, a local building contractor, offered to build the type of home the couple wanted. He said he could also build more houses of the same kind, in the northeast section of Liberal. Warren said that he had already tried in the past to do such a project, "but

property owners of lots in the area wanted excessive prices.”

Mrs. Ray became emotional during the meeting, telling the commissioners that she and her husband “wanted to work out the problem in a Christian way, and that they had the necessary money to buy a nice home.”

The couple had appeared in March, and nothing had yet been resolved by the commission. Mayor Charles Brisendine asked the Rays to be patient as the commission tried to sort out the problem, since “the commission had no authority to force anyone to buy or sell property, but an effort was being made to improve conditions.”

John W. Fitzgerald Jr. made the front page for being in the hospital on his 13th birthday. The young Fitzgerald, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. (Bill) Fitzgerald, was celebrating his birthday at home, just north of town, and decided to ride his bicycle along U.S. Hwy. 83. A station wagon struck the back of John’s bike, “demolishing the bicycle,” but throwing its rider free.

The family took John to Epworth Hospital for X-rays, and treatment of severe bruises. Doctors decided to keep him overnight for observation.

The accident occurred as the station wagon finished passing another vehicle, and pulled into the lane where John was riding on the shoulder of the road with his brother.

Prices had gone up at the Motor Vehicle Department in Liberal. Don Christensen, the new driver’s license examiner, reminded local residents that a new law effective at the beginning of July 1963, raised the price of the driver’s license examination from \$2 to \$3. This fee was in addition to the \$2 it cost to get a license for a two-year period.

Those who failed the written or driving parts of the test would have to pay an extra \$1.50 for retesting. High school students who had completed Driver’s Education were exempt from the \$3 fee, but still had to pay 50 cents for an instruction permit.

Changes were also in the works for Liberal telephone customers. A new “metropolitan” system would require phone users to dial MA, the first two letters of the Liberal prefix Main, plus five numerals, in order to make calls.

The switch was expected to take effect July 11, 1963, after Southwestern Bell finished installing new equipment and lines. Liberal’s telephone growth had made the change necessary, said the Southwestern Bell manager, Bill Ewing. More than 5,000 phones had been added in the past 10 years.