

Ed Hickey Vows to Bring Back the Yegatta Regatta

~Also Declares War on Potholes!~

Look for Exclusive Interview by Paul Juser in Coming Issue

The *Police Gazette* was there when Ed Hickey, locally famous as the manager of the Belmar Pub and Fitzies Irish Pub, declared his candidacy for mayor of Binghamton. Out of all the press present, we were the first ask the top question on the minds of all city residents: "What are you going to do about all these potholes out in the streets?"

Hickey vowed to hold the line against the growing pothole scourge. "It's spring," he began, "and next spring when I am mayor there will be potholes, and I'll try to fill them up as quick as I can. When it goes from 0 to 50 and 0 to 50 and there's salt and plows on the roads there's going to be potholes. I'm going to have people on the streets as soon as it gets warm enough to start making hot patch, and they're going to be patching the potholes. With the work ethic of our city workers I think they'll fix those potholes."

The other big news came in the speech Hickey made to his supporters. "I plan on winning the general election November 5th," he said. "And on November 6th, I plan on hammering out the details of the Yegatta Regatta, because that baby's coming back!"

From the late 1970s through the 80s, the Yegatta Regatta was fast becoming a local insti-

tution on par with the spiedie. It's hard to get Broome County residents excited about something on a mass scale. But when it happens it's a sight to behold. It happened for Jim Matthews when he brought professional hockey to Binghamton. Within a few years the Broome Dusters were the top-drawing minor-league hockey franchise in the country. And the same happened for a seemingly innocuous little activity like building a makeshift raft out of whatever buoyant objects you could find, filling it with as many people and as much beer as humanly possible, and floating it down the Chenango River.

The river is rarely more than four or five feet deep at its deepest, which limited the likelihood of drowning accidents, as well as provided a discrete way of temporarily leaving the raft to release some of the pent up beer. People looked forward to the annual Yegatta Regatta the way a Deadhead looked forward to the next concert. But all that changed the day a highly intoxicated Clarence Farrish fell out of his raft and drowned in two feet of Chenango River water.

News reports at the time say "companions on the raft with him were incapable of helping him because they were [also] intoxicated."

Lawsuits against everyone with a pulse ranged into the tens of millions of dollars. And that was that. The *Police Gazette*, of course, believes in freedom with personal responsibility. See, for example, our editorial on repealing all drunk-driving laws and replacing them with significantly harsher penalties for crimes committed while driving drunk.

A person who falls out of his raft and drowns during the Yegatta Regatta is a martyr to be venerated, not an excuse for greedy family members and Binghamton's favorite ambulance-chasing lawyer to do the big shake down and kill everyone's fun. Such actions demean Clarence Farrish's memory and make him seem more like some doofus than someone who, using his free will, was enjoying himself right up till the end.

So this is what Ed Hickey is up against if he wants to bring back the Yegatta Regatta. Everyone in the community is for it, except the people who actually have the power to give it the green light.

In a future issue, look for Paul Juser's exclusive interview with Ed Hickey where he'll ask the mayoral candidate how exactly he proposes to bring the regatta back, as well as other pertinent questions.

Paul Juser and The City from Another Universe



The Vampire of Doom City Part 4

In my mind, the Vampire was a wretched mental patient, discharged from the Castle on the Hill. He lived in a filthy downtown rattrap. One night he witnessed something terrible. He had a story to tell, and no one to whom he could safely tell it. His story was about no ordinary monster, but Police Chief John Zikuski of the Binghamton PD. New messages appeared even on days that were so cold no one in the city but myself and the Vampire were crazy enough to leave our homes or places of employment. I poked my nose in forgotten holes to find the fragmented messages. Should I ever be caught trespassing, my camera was loaded with images claiming the Binghamton top cop was a vicious murderer.

While he still liberally adorned the walls of the Ice Factory, most of the messages were penned in quiet locations where they would easily be missed. Size and length varied with the amount of security. Behind a Front Street storage mall, I discovered a long narrative across the back of each building for the benefit of any flood wall hikers. The vampire icon appeared alongside many, apparently representing Zikuski himself, though the real chief of police lacks the distinctive mustache, not to mention the giant vampire teeth.

The Vampire decorated overpasses, under-

passes, the walking bridge to the South Side, the statues on the Riverwalk, and any wall that was left unattended a few minutes. The more public, the faster the message disappeared. But others lingered. Under the Clinton Street bridge he gave grisly details of several crimes. On the paved path through the field between the long straight section of 81-North he painted an arrow to the place a human finger bone was allegedly discovered. The messages on Front Street past the Ice Factory told the story of a body dumped in that location, possibly Bambi Madden, possibly Michele Harris. The Ice Factory would be painted over, and the Vampire would strike again a week later. Layers of gray and blue paint look like post-modern art on the walls today.

Bambi Madden was his favorite subject, but he now claimed Zikuski committed Binghamton's oldest unsolved murder. Terry L. Dittman was a prostitute who was beaten and stabbed behind a Public Works building on the North Side. Bobby Jo Hatchcock had been a prime suspect since the 1997 murder. His semen was in the condom still inside Dittman when she was found. Hatchcock denied the charges, but also admitted they were possible as he'd been smoking crack with the victim either that night or the night before. He wasn't sure. He asked the leader of his Bible study group if a murderer could be forgiven. Other samples were recovered from the body that cast reasonable doubt on Hatchcock, and the case stagnated for 11 years.

The Vampire's magnum opus was on the back of a bridge support facing the Chenango River, where Route 17 crosses Front Street. The canvas was covered with cartoons and script. The left panel depicted a shark rising toward "Dracula" Zikuski, who knelt in a raft, his onion-shaped head staring down at certain demise. Another panel showed Madden and another woman driving stakes into "Dracula," who maintained a giant, spurting erection. Text

in black marker surrounded the figures, discussing the crimes and the conspiracy in detail. I have not returned to see if this work of art survived the highway construction that now dominates the area.

A rumor in City Hall held the Vampire to be a mental patient and that the start/stop nature of the messages marked periods of hospitalization. The Vampire had been silent in 2008 when Bobby Jo Hatchcock was arrested and then all through the trial. Hatchcock was convicted on new analysis of old evidence. I patrolled the streets relentlessly, searching for the Vampire's response. Part of me feared Hatchcock himself had been the author I'd followed.

While the story about Zikuski seems unbelievable, could the Vampire know something true? Hatchcock's story changed repeatedly. While he was undoubtedly with Dittman the night she died, he could never be sure he was the killer. The day after the murder, Hatchcock told his brother-in-law he knew the identity of the killer. Was he talking about himself, or another person? In the face of overwhelming evidence, Hatchcock was convicted and sentenced to 25 years to life. For 11 years Hatchcock was allowed to walk free with blood dripping from his hands despite his virtually unquestionable guilt.

Bambi Madden was a known prostitute and drug abuser. One rumor puts her not en route to a gas station for beer or cigarettes when she vanished, but turning a trick in the hotel above the former Sarah's Bar on Clinton Street. Now T. Mulligan's, the former dive was notorious with cocaine blown freely on the bar and outsiders were not welcome. Could Hatchcock be responsible for this or other murders during this time? I kept my eyes open for any word from the Vampire to see if he really knew something about the crimes he wrote about.

To be continued...
View his work at Regular Crazy, www.printisbetter.com.