

Opinion: Bill comes due for re-engineered way of life

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No disaster is entirely natural in our re-engineered state and valley. Owing to our hubris, we humans have a direct hand in them all.

We have built cities on earthquake faults, balanced mansions on hillsides that burn in one season and slide into the ocean in the next, and moor boats in marinas where tsunamis are known to strike.

Having dammed almost all major rivers in California and many tributaries and creeks, we have constructed entire cities in what a century or 150 years ago was swamp, and made islands of rocks piled on peat.

Read the whole story

Opinion: The truth behind the McClintock clash

By Marcos Breton, Sacramento Bee

Daniel Hahn, the chief of police in Roseville, wants to be clear: His department did not shut down a recent town-hall meeting staged by Republican Rep. Tom McClintock. Nor did it tell McClintock he had to leave for his own safety because of an unruly crowd.

Roseville police made no arrests related to McClintock's Feb. 4 meeting at Tower Theatre. There were no acts of vandalism attributed to an estimated crowd of 500 people who packed the theater and the street out front.

Was it the biggest protest Hahn has seen in nearly six years as the Roseville chief? "Yes," Hahn said. "But things went very well that day. They went as well as could be expected. ... The people gathered weren't causing problems."

Read the whole story

Opinion: Fix California water and data systems

By Michael Kiparsky and Roger Bales, Modesto Bee

Few people realize how outdated our systems for water information are. Because of data limitations, real-time, transparent decisions about drought management, flood response and groundwater protection have eluded the state for the past century. Without basic numbers on where, when and how much water is available and being used, we can't improve how we manage our most precious water and natural resources.

A proposed law, the Open and Transparent Water Data Act – Assembly Bill 1755 – could coordinate and integrate existing data. Paired with the vision of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, AB1755 could foster entrepreneurship, innovation and scientific discovery. But the long-term opportunity is even greater: AB1755 could help move water and natural resource management in California from sticky notes and push pins to the smart data tools of the 21st century.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Mid-season check-in from Squaw

To the community,

This has literally been a historic season for our mountains and the region in terms of the nature and severity of the weather, with hurricane force winds, impressive and rapid snow accumulation, extreme flooding, intermittent and sometimes long lasting power outages, mudslides, avalanche conditions and more. From general operational challenges to very specific tragedies, this has been a winter we won't soon forget. On behalf of our entire team at Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows, I'd like to thank you for bearing with us as we continue to work hard to respond to the unique set of challenges Mother Nature has presented this winter.



Andy Wirth

With that said, I wanted to acknowledge specifically how our company is working to improve its performance. Despite factors that are materially out of our control such as sustained high

winds over the mountain tops and varying snowpack layers, we are working hard to refine the intense, safety-first choreography that goes into opening these remarkable, high alpine mountains. We readily acknowledge your zeal and passion to hit the slopes and enjoy the snow, and are just as frustrated when we're unable to provide access. I can assure you that we too, are passionate about the skiing and riding experience. While we simply cannot compromise safety as it relates to our team and guests, our intention is to open terrain as soon as conditions permit.

We are committed to continuing to make improvements across our operation by way of capital investments. An important example is our recent investment in Gazex, a remotely controlled avalanche mitigation system that uses propane gas and oxygen to create a concussive blast, triggering controlled avalanches before they can become a hazard. In addition to ski patrol efforts, the Gazex Inertia Exploders may decrease delays in lift start times, and increase the efficiency of Ski Patrol in opening the ski areas. We have invested over \$1.5 million in five deployments, and are working on plans to deploy many more across both mountains in an effort to ensure more efficient and expeditious terrain openings while not compromising on our all-critical safety focus.

We are also striving to communicate to you on a near-real-time-basis, primarily through our new app, website and Mountain Ops Twitter. For guests looking for a more in-depth understanding of our day-to-day operations, we also maintain a detailed Operations Blog. We have identified areas where we can and will improve, including a very real-time view and perspective of what winds, in particular, are doing across the top of the mountains.

Toward the goal of improving the decades old, region-wide issue of road congestion, we've been working with, if not challenging, our civic leaders in the region to develop real solutions – in the present tense – for regional mass transit

and traffic congestion reduction on Highway 89. We have been actively working on in-valley “micro mass transit” for Olympic Valley and Alpine Meadows with Chariot, incentivizing high occupancy vehicle (HOV) use with our POW Parking program, and improved communications via real-time road signage (along Highway 89, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows Roads) in addition to our app.

The Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows leadership team and I remain very open to feedback and suggestions. Through many channels, we welcome feedback on your experience, whether it’s related to our grooming, service or operations. We will always be open to your input, but ask that it be respectful in its construct. Our team works extremely hard to provide a great experience, and while we recognize areas where we can and will improve, it is imperative that respectful dialogue be the guidepost—predominantly with respect for the dedicated and hardworking men and women that comprise our team.

Our passion for these mountains is real and very genuine. We recognize that in the context of remarkable and historic weather circumstances, we can and will do better...by way of our commitment to review and improve our operations so we can more effectively communicate with you. This is our commitment, and we remain very appreciative of your support and understanding, and look forward to sharing many more powder days with you this season. It’s not a question of if, but how far into June we will be open. And it’s not a question of if, but how many lifts we will be running over 4th of July!

Warm regards,

Andy Wirth, president and CEO Squaw Valley Ski Holdings

Opinion: Managing AIS critical for Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

Over the last two decades, the Lake Tahoe region has become a national leader in fighting the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) that threaten to harm its world-renowned environment and the \$5 billion recreation-based economy it supports.

The Lake Tahoe region is working with other partners throughout the American West to better safeguard waterbodies and improve national invasive species policies. We are also working with the boating industry to help manufacturers design watercraft that are less likely to carry AIS and are easier to inspect and decontaminate.



Joanne
Marchetta

Ben Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This is especially true for invasive species that outcompete native species, and, once established, become incredibly difficult and costly to manage or eradicate.

Fortunately, Lake Tahoe’s watercraft inspection program has overseen the safe launch of tens of thousands of motorized boats at Lake Tahoe since its creation in 2008. Along with the Tahoe Keepers program that trains people to inspect and

decontaminate their own hand-powered watercraft, it has successfully prevented the introduction of any new invasives in the lake.

With this critically-important frontline prevention program working and sustainably funded through boater fees and contributions from the states of California and Nevada, now is the time to ramp up programs to better manage or eradicate the invasive species that are already in the lake before they can spread or do more harm.

The \$415 million Lake Tahoe Restoration Act that Congress passed in December will help on this front. The legislation authorizes up to \$45 million in federal funding over seven years for projects to combat invasive species at Lake Tahoe, and TRPA and its partners are working to secure those funding appropriations.

We have seen the impacts invasives can have, with invasive aquatic plants like Eurasian watermilfoil and curly leaf pondweed fouling marinas, beaches, and swimming areas. Nonnative warm water fish that follow the spread of these weeds further impact the lake's ecology and populations of native species.

Work done in Emerald Bay shows we can successfully fight the spread and harmful impacts of these invasive aquatic weeds. Through a labor-intensive project with light-blocking bottom barriers and weed pulls by divers, partner agencies restored six acres of shoreline that were being choked by aquatic invasive weeds. Several years later, iconic Emerald Bay remains weed-free.

Today, the Tahoe Keys is ground zero in the fight against these invasive aquatic plants and warm water fish. Weeds have overtaken as much as 90 percent of the 172 acres of canals and lagoons in this South Shore neighborhood. Clearing the canals and lagoons with mechanical harvesters each summer has failed

to stop the spread of the weeds, which have grown back thicker each year. It also creates small fragments of weeds that threaten to carry infestations to other parts of the lake.

Working with numerous public agency partners and researchers, the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association is creating an integrated management plan that identifies ways to better manage the aquatic weeds.

The plan is looking at improved mechanical harvesting and fragment collection methods, the use of bottom barriers, and scuba-assisted weed pulls. It is also investigating potentially new treatment methods at Lake Tahoe, such as the possible use of aquatic herbicides.

The Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association this month applied for permits from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and TRPA for a pilot project that would test the use of federally-approved aquatic herbicides at nine sites in dead-end lagoons in 2018. The association is proposing to install a barrier between the test sites and the lake and other safety and monitoring measures to ensure that the herbicides, which break down with exposure to sunlight and other natural processes, do not reach the lake.

While these herbicides are used to control invasive aquatic weeds in other parts of California and the United States, they have never been used at Lake Tahoe. And the application for this pilot project to test their use has raised some public questions about the risks it could pose for communities, drinking water, and the environment at Lake Tahoe.

Over the next year, TRPA looks forward to working closely with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association, other partner agencies and researchers, and the public to fully consider all the risks that could be associated with this potentially new approach to controlling invasive aquatic weeds at Lake Tahoe, as well as

the potential benefits.

To protect the environment, the economy, and the natural resources we all treasure, our Region must continue to work together and innovate for new solutions to better protect Lake Tahoe from the harms of invasive species.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Tapping moneyed elite began with WWI

By Charles Rappleye

From our earliest days we Americans have embraced leaders from among the ranks of the nation's moneyed elite. Voters set the tone when they chose George Washington, the wealthiest man on the continent at the time, as the first president.

But that choice was accompanied by a healthy skepticism of the role of money in the halls of government. As the years went by, recurrent scandals prompted rounds of reform, fostering an intricate system of rules to promote ethical conduct.

The result is a daunting interface between private and public life, the line marked by financial investigation, disclosure and divestiture. Still, from the early 20th century, U.S. presidents began to routinely call on leaders from business and industry to head key agencies of the government. And despite nagging public suspicion, the moguls drafted into service were consistently free of accusations—let alone outright findings—of corruption or misconduct.

Keep in mind, the sort of corruption threatened by the rich and powerful is quite distinct from the more garden-variety graft usually associated with public officials—bribery, principally; or undue allegiance to one political party or another. Such concerns were addressed in the late 19th century by the institution of the civil service, when federal employees were subjected for the first time to entrance exams, and protected from political removal. It marked the advent of a new kind of entity: the career civil servant.

Reckoning with the threat posed by wealthy appointees—that they might place their private interests ahead of the public's, using their positions to help their friends or augment their fortunes—came later, and required more elaborate safeguards.

It was the onset of the first World War, and the attendant task of retooling the nation's industrial economy for wartime production, that brought a surge of business executives into the government. Drafted by President Woodrow Wilson, starting in 1917, they signed on for service in new government bureaus at the nominal salary of a dollar a year.

First among these wartime stalwarts was Bernard Baruch, a financier and speculator known in his day as "the lone wolf of Wall Street." Appointed head of the new War Industries Board, Baruch recruited a bevy of his tycoon chums and together they put the peacetime economy on footing to produce uniforms, tanks and ammunition.

Another Wilson appointee was Herbert Hoover. A mining executive then based in London, Hoover emerged on the public stage by leading humanitarian war relief efforts for neutral Belgium. Calling Hoover back to the U.S., Wilson named him food administrator, and charged him with limiting domestic consumption and keeping the U.S. Army and its allies fed in the field.

Both of these men—and the dozens of other businessmen drafted to assist them—performed capably. Though these appointments came at the height of the Progressive Era, and the wary view of wealth that went with it, the American public came to accept these appointments as legitimate without audible objection.

Skip forward a decade, to 1929, and wealthy office-holders had become a routine feature in the federal government. More than that, it was a non-partisan phenomenon. Bernard Baruch had become the titular head and chief fundraiser for the Democratic Party, while Hoover, after a brief dalliance with the Democrats, won the presidency as a Republican. When Hoover became president, he decided to continue the dollar-a-year tradition, donating his salary to charity.

During Hoover's tenure the crisis was not war but the Great Depression, and he again turned to men of wealth. One of Hoover's principal innovations was to launch the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which would channel bailout funds to foundering banks and railroads. Selected to lead the new agency was Charles Dawes, a Chicago banker with a history of moonlighting for the government—he was the nation's first comptroller of the Currency, under President William McKinley, and later elected vice president with Calvin Coolidge. In 1925 he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his adroit management of postwar international debts.

Dawes immersed himself in launching the RFC until the bank owned by his family, the Central Republic Bank of Chicago, began to founder. Despite Hoover's protest, in June 1932 Dawes resigned his post and rushed home to wrestle with panicked creditors. Soon after, now against Dawes' private protest (he feared, rightly, political blowback), Central Republic was named recipient of the largest loan yet issued by the RFC. Though the bank ultimately closed, the bailout made for an orderly transition and the loans were repaid. But public

resentment over what appeared to be an in-house deal damaged the reputation of Hoover and of the relief agency.

Here was just the sort of misconduct that critics had feared from the outset—men of wealth protecting their personal interests. But the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt later that year seemed to clear the air.

Roosevelt was more sparing in his reliance on the men of industry and finance—and yes, all were men— but utilize them he did, especially when faced with a new World War. As the crisis loomed, like President Wilson before him, Roosevelt called on the dollar-a-year crowd. Leading this troop of civilians was Bill Knudsen, then-president of General Motors. An expert in mass production, Knudsen was appointed in 1940 chairman of the Office of Production Management and member of the National Defense Advisory Commission, at a salary of \$1 a year.

As production ramped up, Knudsen brought with him executives from car companies, AT&T, and U.S. Steel. New Deal bureaucrats and labor activists denounced the appointments, but despite all the procurement contracts, all the millions spent, there was hardly a whiff of scandal.

By 1942, when Knudsen was awarded with a formal commission as lieutenant general in the Army, the worst his critics could say was that he had been too slow in converting from peaceful industrial production to a war footing. “We are beginning to pay a heavy price for leaving the mobilization of industry in the hands of business men,” the *Nation* warned in 1942. Steelmakers, in particular, were fighting expanded production “as a menace to monopolistic practices and ‘stable prices,’” argued an editorial. It was “Dollar-a-Year Sabotage,” the *New Republic* headlined.

But those criticisms were drowned out by the din of factory production, the great outpouring of armament that yielded an

“arsenal of democracy,” as Knudsen phrased it, that carried the Allies to victory. “We won because we smothered the enemy in an avalanche of production,” Knudsen remarked later. For all the fears of conflicted interest, the businessmen had proved their worth.

The dollar-a-year appointment routine went out with World War II, but presidents continued to tap the moneyed elite for advice and expertise, a practice that became the source of a growing thicket of regulations designed to forestall malfeasance. Roosevelt broke first ground here, in 1937, with an order barring purchase or sale of stock by government employees “for speculative purpose.” Later, his War Production Administration required its dollar-a-year men to disclose financial holdings and undergo background checks.

From there, safeguards advanced by stages. John F. Kennedy, during his aspirational 1960 campaign, called for a new standard, by which “no officer or employee of the executive branch shall use his official position for financial profit or personal gain.” Upon his election, he followed up with an executive order barring any “use of public office for private gain,” and then lobbied Congress for parallel laws. The result was new criminal statutes covering bribery and conflict-of-interest.

Lyndon Johnson was never an exemplar of disinterested politics, but early scandal in his administration, involving influence peddling by Johnson intimate Bobby Baker, a businessman and Democratic Party organizer, prompted a new round of rulemaking. Each federal agency should have its own ethics code, Johnson ordered, and all presidential appointees were now required to file financial disclosure statements. In the 1970s, the fallout from the Watergate scandal, together with the troubles of presidential chum and advisor Burt Lance, prompted a new round of reform from President Jimmy Carter.

As with so many things, the status of ethics in an

administration tends to reflect the character of the chief executive, regardless of the rules in place at the time. Consider the following exchange, in 1934, between Franklin Roosevelt, Joe Kennedy, and presidential aide Ray Moley, prior to Kennedy's appointment at the SEC.

As recounted by Joe Kennedy biographer David Nasaw, Kennedy warned Roosevelt that he had "done plenty of things that people could find fault with." At that point, Moley interjected: "Joe, I know you want this job. But if there is anything in your business career that could injure the president, this is the time to spill it."

Kennedy's reaction was quick and sharp. "With a burst of profanity he defied anyone to question his devotion to public interest or to point to a single shady act in his whole life. The president did not need to worry about that, he said. What was more, he would give his critics—and here again the profanity flowed freely—an administration of the SEC that would be a credit to his country, the president, himself and his family."

After an exchange like that, codes and rules might seem superfluous. To outsiders, the Kennedy appointment appeared rash; "setting a wolf to guard a flock of sheep," one critic charged. But Roosevelt was unfazed. Asked why he'd named such a notorious crook as Kennedy, Roosevelt quipped, "Takes one to catch one." In the event, while nobody ever proposed Joe Kennedy for sainthood, he was never accused of misconduct or self-dealing while presiding at the SEC.

Charles Rappleye is a former news editor at the LA Weekly and the author of four books, his latest, "Herbert Hoover in the White House," was published by Simon & Schuster in 2016.

Opinion: Taxes are the wrong answer for Calif.

By Ted Gaines

Regarding Senate Bill 1, a measure I voted against in the Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing, that creates permanent new taxes and fees to fund transportation infrastructure:

Is anyone shocked that the proposed solutions to a very real transportation infrastructure crisis are more taxes and fees? It's all Sacramento knows and it's a tired formula that punishes taxpayers for the sins of the politicians.



Ted Gaines

We already have some of the highest gas taxes and worst roads in the country, made even more apparent by the potholes and sinkholes from recent storms. High speed rail needs to be put out of its misery before families pay another penny in gas taxes. The California Department of Transportation is overstaffed by 1,500 people, wasting \$500 million every year. Cut that fat before forcing people to pay a new registration fee for their cars. California diverts a billion dollars in weight fees away from transportation infrastructure every single year. Let's put that money back into road building before shaking down commuters and businesses even more.

Californians are getting 33 cents on the dollar for their

transportation spending and pay about three times the national average per mile of road maintenance. That begs for regulatory reform so that meaningless red tape doesn't get in the way of delivering infrastructure at a cost that's fair to taxpayers. Why is it that California spends nearly \$50,000 in administration per state-controlled road mile while Texas only spends \$4,000? Should our bureaucracy really cost 12-times more than theirs?

The new Washington, D.C., is proposing a massive infrastructure investment, common-sense, money-saving regulatory reforms, and cutting taxes – all at the same time. California needs to follow Washington's lead instead of continuing to reach into hardworking taxpayers' pockets to deliver the same pathetic results.

Ted Gaines, R-El Dorado, represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Opinion: Importance of Central Valley

By Joe Mathews

Are you finally growing up, Sacramento?

I pose that question not to our state government, but to the real Sacramento, the capital region. It's a query that also should be aimed at the Central Valley's other big urban areas.



Joe Mathews

The maturity of Fresno, Bakersfield or Stockton is not just a local question. The valley persistently lags California as a whole in employment, access to health care, and educational attainment. If California is going to make big gains, valley cities will have to lead the way.

Unfortunately, this narrative, which should be conventional wisdom, still feels novel. That's because the valley still thinks of itself as agricultural. That's understandable, given the region's rural history and the outsized influence agriculture retains over land use and politics. But that influence obscures the 21st century reality—most people in the Central Valley live in cities, the true economic engines of the region.

Valley cities are “small” only compared with the global mega-regions on the coast. More people live in the cities of Fresno and Sacramento than in the cities of Atlanta or Miami. And valley cities have grown into places far larger and more complicated than the governments and infrastructure that once sustained them. One great underappreciated drama in California is the race of these cities to catch up to their urban needs, by adding cultural venues, revamping downtowns, and developing new infrastructure.

Cities are in different stages of this process. The struggle in Fresno has been particularly dramatic. There is new life and housing in its downtown. A new bicycle and hiking trail will connect Fresno to Clovis, and a bus rapid transit system is being launched. Planning is under way to establish mixed-

use zoning districts on major thoroughfares.

But the most promising—and often most puzzling—urban case is Sacramento.

The capital region has long had advantages that give it a more diverse economy than other valley cities—from the presence of the state government to its proximity to the Bay Area. But for much of its history it coasted, happily lagging the fast-growing coast.

Today, it's a bigger, more ambitious place: The nine counties of the larger region together have 2.8 million residents, on par with the city of Chicago. The past decade has brought more than \$1 billion in public and private investment to Sacramento's center. A sports arena opened last year, a hospital is planned for the railyards and midtown Sacramento's neighborhoods are livelier than ever.

But beyond these gains, the picture is as muddy as the valley rivers.

A Sacramento leadership class heavy in real estate and state government types has a weakness for seeking validation—and outside visitors—with showy projects of dubious value, the same strategy that contributed to Stockton's bankruptcy. Among their current ideas are building an aquarium and expanding the struggling convention center.

Outside the city, getting the disparate parts of the capital region to work together remains difficult. While there are recent examples of regional progress on transportation, water, and workforce development, the capital region is not naturally cohesive. There's not even a consensus on how many of the area's counties are part of the region. The Sacramento Bee says there are four, government documents often refer to six counties, while a few philanthropists and academics list nine.

One of Sacramento's disadvantages as a region is its political

diversity; unlike the Democrat-dominated Bay Area, Sacramento is a swing region, from the left-wing NIMBYs of Davis to the Republican NIMBYs of the foothills. Another challenge to developing urban strategy is all the people who live in the so-called UnCity— unincorporated Sacramento County.

This lack of clear identity has made it harder for greater Sacramento to address its most stubborn regional problems, from housing affordability to transit. Sacramento County voters defeated a transportation sales tax hike in November that would have restored previous service cuts. And the lack of job growth in the region deserves greater attention. The Brookings Institution ranks Sacramento 95th among the nation's largest 100 metro regions in economic output per capita, with a 9.5 percent decrease over the past 10 years.

Sacramento's optimists argue that efforts to address such regional problems are deepening. They also point to Sacramento's new mayor, Darrell Steinberg, a former legislative leader with deep contacts among the overlapping governments of the region. To the good, Steinberg has made decreasing homelessness a priority, and is addressing it regionally, in a way that should force Sacramento County to offer more mental health services. (To the bad, he is pushing the aquarium idea.)

Californians are understandably wary when big plans emerge from the Capitol. But we should be rooting hard for the capital region. Our state will be much better off if Sacramento can fully launch itself.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: SITS dishes up food at B&B

To the community,

In line with their mission, Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra participates in local programs based on the specific needs of the South Shore community. On Feb. 6, the SITS joined with Bread & Broth to provide a full course, nutritious meal to food insecure community members who attended B&B's Monday meal at St. Theresa Grace Hall.

"This was a very gratifying time," said Teddi Breaux, a Soroptimist sponsor crew volunteer. "The guests were eager to enjoy the volunteers and vice versa. I'm very impressed with the organized event and the quality of food. People here are amazing to work with and friendly to a fault. Love the experience and want to sponsor an Adopt A Day again."

B&B would be very happy to see the Soroptimist of Tahoe Sierra back again because they were a great group of conscientious volunteers.

In addition to Breaux, Soroptimist members helping at the dinner included Blair Bolles, Nancy Muller, Joy Rogers and B&B Team No. 2 volunteer cooks Wendy David and Linda Malzone and setup/serving crew member Shelly Martinez who currently serves as the organization's president.

Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra strives to better the lives of women and children in our community. Bread & Broth is fortunate to partner with this generous and wonderful women's organization.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: How passports became symbol of U.S. identity

By Craig Robertson

It was originally a European tradition, not ours. But in 1780, needing a more formal way to send former Continental Rep. Francis Dana from France to Holland, Benjamin Franklin used his own printing press to create a new document. The single-sheet letter, written entirely in French, politely requested that Dana and his servant be allowed to pass freely as they traveled for the next month. Franklin signed and sealed the page himself and handed it off to Dana, creating one of the first known U.S. “passe-ports.”

Today, the nation’s passports still display vestiges of their diplomatic origins with a written entreaty to let “the citizen national named herein to pass without delay or hindrance.” But in almost every other aspect, the modern 32-page, eagle-emblazoned booklets bear little resemblance to Franklin’s makeshift bit of ambassadorial decorum. The differences hint at the profound shifts—in appearance, in use, in meaning, in trust, in who got to carry them—that produced a document that came to play a much larger role in American life than originally intended. It’s the story of how a few pieces of paper came to produce new answers to the question “who are you?”

The idea of the passport pre-dates the founding of the republic—one can find early mention of “safe conducts” in the biblical passages of the Book of Nehemiah and in histories of Medieval Europe. Like the Franklin-issued passe-port, these early documents evolved from deals that granted negotiators

safe passage through foreign territory. They relied largely on an assumption that the person presenting the papers was the person or group named in them (if any was named at all). But mostly, they were a formality. The privilege and reputation of the limited number of people who frequently traveled usually trumped the need for any formal letter of introduction.

For the hundred years following the American Revolution, the U.S. passport largely followed this historic form too. In the first half of the 19th century, the State Department only issued a few hundred passports per year. Governors and mayors did too, absent any law prohibiting it. The letter-like documents usually only identified the bearer's name, and could be drawn up to cover a diplomat, a private citizen, a non-citizen, a man's entire family, or even an entire ship. Passports then were rarely required for cross-border travel. Instead, they were more often used to gain access to private museums, collect mail from a post office, get invitations to social events, or to serve as a souvenir worth framing.

In these early years, the U.S. lacked compelling reasons to identify each person coming in and out of its borders. Immigration levels had been low, and the newcomers who arrived helped fill labor shortages and sparsely populated frontiers. And, unlike citizens of most other countries, Americans had long been skittish about any sort of national identification system. By the latter half of the 1800s, however, demographic and political winds began to shift. First came the laws prohibiting entry of prostitutes and convicts in 1875. Then came the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. During World War I, the U.S. government began scanning for spies, radicals, and Communists; and soon after, the Immigration Acts of the 1920s established hard nationality-based quotas. The more xenophobic the U.S. became, the more interest it had in separating traveling citizens from unwanted aliens at its ports.

In response to these new screening demands, the federal government turned to the passport. Through a series of ad hoc

laws and policies over the course of a few decades, policymakers radically transformed the passport from a diplomatic introduction for traveling elites into the highly-controlled identification for citizens we'd recognize today. In 1856, Congress granted the State Department sole issuing power over the papers, and limited their use to U.S. citizens. The agency also slowly standardized the passport's appearance. Engraving plates, signatures, and seals all lent the document a look of authority—giving it a form more like a certificate than a letter (the booklet form came later, in 1926).

Officials also added markedly modern requirements. Applicants had to produce supporting documents to prove their identity. Forms demanded consistently spelled full names and dates of birth. The passports themselves began consistently listing objective physical features of the bearer, such as height and eye color—shortly replaced by a stark, square headshot photo. Designated government clerks now checked all of the information, all with the idea of creating a verifiable identity that couldn't be easily assumed or forged. Congress made yet another big change: During World War I, legislators (alongside European nations) passed emergency measures that demanded passports from everyone entering the country. And after the war ended, the requirements never went away.

Between the 1850s and 1930s, these transformations did not go unnoticed. Newspapers filled pages with stories on the "passport nuisance"—the term used to cover the perceived absurdity that the government would force people of the "better" class to be documented like common criminals. Ladies blushed at having to tell their age to a clerk. Gentlemen objected to having their romantic notions of individual character reduced to a generic list of physical traits. Headlines like "W.K. Vanderbilt Tries to Identify Himself" detailed bureaucratic bothers, and the fact that President Woodrow Wilson needed a passport made front-page news. Stories chronicled tales like that of a Danish man who allegedly

waited weeks at the border to regrow the moustache in his ID photo. A 1920s advice columnist even recommended a young woman show a fiancé her passport picture as a test to see if he loved her. If he survived the shock of seeing the mugshot-like image, she could safely assume that he truly adored her.

In a society that previously relied on local reputation, the idea that the government could replace respectability with an impersonal bureaucratic document seemed, to many, preposterous. Rather than a privilege, some saw the passport as a symbol of eroding trust between citizens and their government.

But the government's new demands for proof of identity hit on another major shift going on in the United States at the time: it was becoming more difficult to immediately recognize who should be considered an American. Citizenship was extended to free slaves. The previous generation's surge in immigrant labor made it difficult to distinguish old faces from new. Women were beginning to demand recognition independent of a husband. A rising industrial middle class blurred old markers of status. At the same time, prosperity and easier modes of transportation were giving people more reason and means to move around. Travelers of all races and social status now mattered. Having a passport that said you were American took on new meaning for those who had to, and were allowed to, carry one.

The passport had become an instrument of control to help further xenophobic exclusion, but to many of its holders, the document could feel empowering, proof of their belonging. Because the U.S. doesn't issue any other form of national identification card (state driver's licenses and Social Security numbers fill the gaps, and can be obtained by foreign residents), carrying a passport became a way for citizens in the wide-reaching federation to assume a national identity. Though few possessed one—less than a tenth of the population for most of the 20th century—the passport, with its elaborate

seals and ornamentations, became the supreme authenticator of national identity.

The passport, more or less, settled into its current form by the late 1930s. Small adaptations in decades since generally followed larger historical trends. Authorities used them in reaction to the country's fears, attempting to impede Communists, terrorists, and scares in between. Tweaks were made in response to new technologies (the new 2017 passports will feature a stiff polycarbonate ID page containing an RFID chip), and to the expanding politics of inclusion (applications now accommodate gender changes and same-sex parents).

Perhaps the biggest change to the passport is that it's no longer novel. More Americans than ever have one—132 million, nearly quadruple the number 20 years ago. The “nuisance” of producing our small certificates of citizenship at the border has largely faded into thoughtless routine. Identities are blurring as more and more people move around. And, as they do, the little blue pocketbook with its lithographed scenes of Americana, awaiting all those coming-and-going stamps, has become one of the more improbable symbols of American identity.

Craig Robertson is a professor of media studies at Northeastern University and author of “The Passport in America: The History of a Document.”