

# Comma Causes Crises

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of order and joins the group of intense comma haters.

The next try at coping with comma problems is to ignore them. This idea fails because the indoctrination of rules has included automatically inserting commas while reading. Practical, jokers, sometimes, enjoy, placing, them, in, obviously, wrong, places, and the, result, is, an, irritating, jumble, of, awkward, pauses.

Thomas Edison is said to have lost a number of patent rights because his secretary didn't know the difference between a restrictive and non-restrictive clause. She probably would not have appreciated the following poem as much as others.

In 1924, Amos R. Wells wrote "In Praise of Punctuation Marks." Here, in one stanza, he comes to the rescue of the comma when we want to erase it from our minds:

"Dear Comma, most familiar, close at hand,  
Alert, prepared, you leap at our command,  
Glad, eager, swift, obedient to our will.

And keen, though small, our purpose to fulfill."

The versatility of the comma, which he praises so highly, is also the cause of headaches and heated arguments. It may be "obedient to our will," but our readers are not so obedient. They cannot read the meaning because we simply wish it.

Cases in law may be cited where people went to court over commas because of a difference in meaning. Insurance companies have such complex phrasing that insureds can twist the meaning by bickering over a phrase. The meaning has been questioned enough that BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY and the judiciary make commas as insignificant as possible. They say, "a comma is a point used to mark the smallest structural divisions of a sentence, or a rhetorical punctuation mark indicated by the slightest possible separation in ideas or construction." (BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY, p. 356)

It is a common declaration in a legal brief that commas are no part of the English language. As far as lawyers are concerned, all punctuation is subordinate to the

text, and punctuation marks must never themselves be permitted to control the meaning of the text of a legislative enactment. Still people are willing to try to attach significant meaning to a comma if it means an insurance company is going to pay for a new roof.

It is interesting to note the role that commas can play in the courts; cases have actually been won or lost as an indirect result of a misplaced comma. Here is an example in which a comma omission was used by the defense as part of the grounds for dismissal of the case.

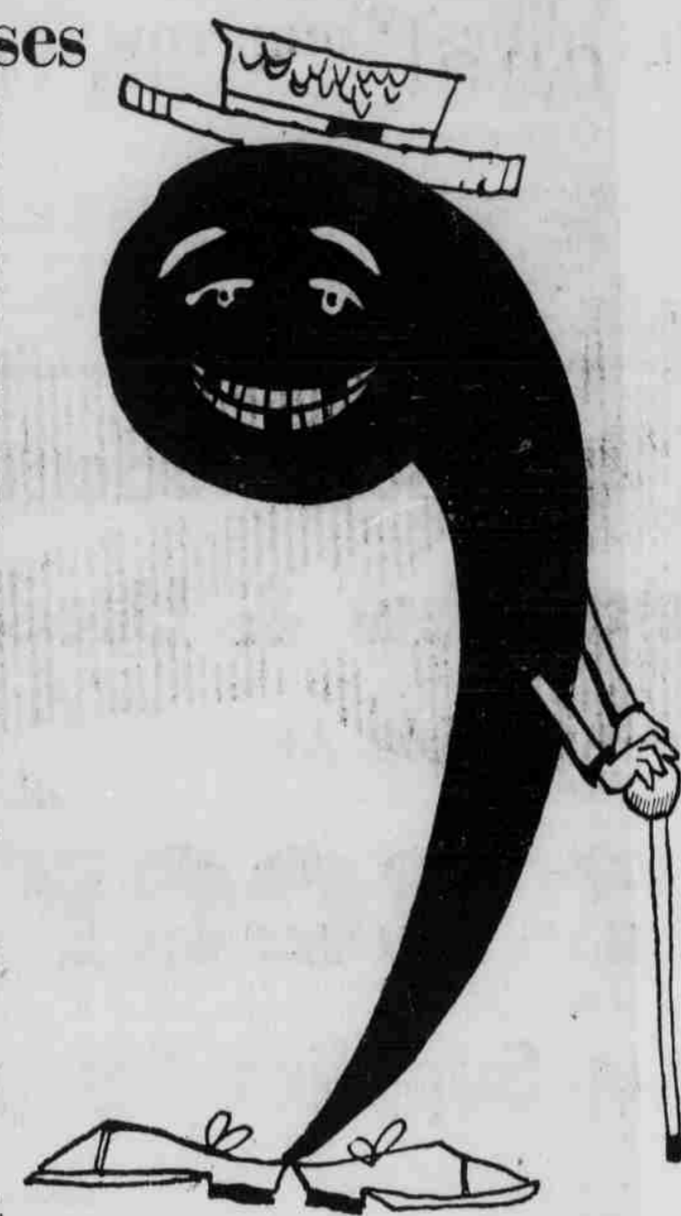
"... the unknown heirs and devisees of the defendants, if any there be, and all other persons, unknown, claiming or who might claim any right, title, estate or interest in, or lien or encumbrance upon, the real property described in the complaint, or any thereof..." (from a 1924 case in New York lower courts).

The procedural error was: "failure to show a comma after the word 'estate' in the above quoted concluding phrase of the caption to the complaint and summons." While this case was not declared a mistrial on the basis of this one comma, it definitely added to the strength of the case.

Publishers deal with commas realistically. Since each publisher builds his reputation upon the way he appears in print, he must decide upon a set of punctuation rules and stick by them. To illustrate the touchiness of the comma situation, try asking a magazine or newspaper who takes care of the punctuation and spelling for the publication. They immediately begin looking around to see who seems most capable of weathering a torrent of angry words from a dissatisfied reader.

The hierarchy of a publishing company provides that the editor is right unless the proof-readers and copy-editors have a really logical defense for a particular procedure. The continual usage of every-day English makes publishers constantly aware of clarity, and quality publications are rewarded for their extra effort; they are able to set the rules of modern English simply by printing according to the standards in their "house book."

Once the basic comma rules are learned, there is nothing



wrong with using your own judgment. Because the comma requires such "tender loving care," it can be the mark of especially careful writing. Well-managed usage promises smooth, easy-to-understand results, but if you let this little hot-house plant make

you "hot under the collar," you can ruin your whole writing style as well as clarity. Once you have learned the rules, commas no longer present a problem; indeed, they do accept their little half-turned position and become "obedient to your will."

## Two Japanese Join Workshop

Two Japanese teachers have traveled half way around the world to join 38 secondary school teachers in a summer workshop on economic education June 14-July 3 at the University.

The Japanese teachers, Umeo Takeda and Osamu Watanabe, asked to attend the workshop "because we have been impressed by the ef-

forts to improve economic education in your country. We believe that we have much to learn from your long experience in this matter."

Nebraska participants are receiving fellowships provided by the Nebraska Council on Economic Education, according to Dr. E. S. Wallace, University staff member and executive director of the Council.

# Love Library Staff Prepares Supplementary Book List

Staff members of Love Memorial Library have prepared a list of new books for supplementary summer reading. The list is divided into three parts: humanities, social studies, and science.

Reviews of the books will be included in each edition of the SUMMER NEBRASKAN.

## HUMANITIES READING ROOM

Long, Charles H. ALPHA; THE MYTHS OF CREATION. This title is the first publication in a series called "Patterns of Myth." This particular book explores the various theories, myths and religious beliefs concerned with the genesis of the universe, the earth and man. It includes the primitive ideas of early man and his contemporary equivalent, as well as the oriental, classical and historical aspects of the various legends concerned. The fascinating relationships between widely divergent cultures is illustrated in this book through the legends and religions dealing with a common factor to all — that of creation.

Woodall, Mary, ed. THE LETTERS OF THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH. Letters of famous men can often be most revealing of the character of the writer. The writer in this case, Thomas Gainsborough, was a well known artist of the eighteenth century and his letters reflect the spirit of his times, as well

as showing a most descriptive way of life in the frustrations and problems of any artist in any age. Included are letters to relatives, usually his sister, patrons, friends and acquaintances. The flavor of the writing is in all manner of style, ranging from the flowery and formal to the frank and outspoken.

Rawicz, Piotr. BLOOD FROM THE SKY. This translation of a French novel is not light, pleasurable reading, but its impact is surely thought-provoking and compelling. The story is the tale of Boris, a Jew, who manages to escape from the Nazis by his wit, although not without losing much at their hands. Attention to detail and the effects of physical surroundings on man's emotions bring about a high degree of reader identification and make the horrors of the book even more unforgettable.

## SCIENCE READING ROOM

Sittig, Marshall. CRYOGENICS; RESEARCH AND APPLICATIONS. An excellent foundation in the really new frontier of cold engineering. It provides much technical data in the application of cold to space research, in biology, in electronics, in nuclear physics, in the handling of food and the fabrication of metals. Easily understood information on how cold is produced and measured, where it is studied, and how it affects the prop-

erties of materials. Many fine illustrations.

Bergwin, Clyde R. ANIMAL ASTRONAUTS; THEY OPENED THE WAY TO THE STARS. An entertaining, factual account of the various animals — mice, dogs, chimpanzees, bears — which have paved the way for man in hitch-hiking to space.

Watson, W. H. UNDERSTANDING PHYSICS TODAY. A plea for a philosophy of physics based on actual discoveries of physicists rather than on the old classic formalism. A readable, well written book.

## SOCIAL STUDIES READING ROOM

Cole, David L. THE QUEST FOR INDUSTRIAL PEACE. Drawing on over twenty years of experience in mediating labor disputes, the author discusses the factors involved in collective bargaining. He also suggests procedures to improve the process of achieving industrial peace.

Milbrath, Lester W. THE WASHINGTON LOBBYISTS. In addition to studying the lobbyist as an individual, the author also studies the role of lobbying in national politics. Although intended primarily for professional political scientists, the general reader who is interested in public affairs will find this work useful. The author suggests lobby groups and lobbyists have a beneficial effect on the process of making national policy.

## All-State Enrolls Record Number

High school students from every county in the state arrived at the University Sunday to take part in the annual All-State High School course.

John Moran, director of All-State, said registrations hit the 470 mark; a new attendance record with 50 more students than a year ago.

Students registered Sunday morning and were assigned to rooms in the women's resi-

dence halls and Selleck Quadrangle. Classes for all sections in art, journalism, music and speech began at 8:30 a.m. Monday. The programs continue through July 2.

All-State is held annually at the University of Nebraska to give high school students the opportunity to participate in laboratory and class study which will help them evaluate their talents.

**SUMMER SESSION WORSHIP**  
SUNDAY, 9:30 A.M.  
University Lutheran Chapel  
(The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod)  
15th & Q A. J. Norden, Campus Pastor

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