

Mertzon Has Lights, Plumbing, Some Pavement, No Lawyers

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MERTZON, Texas — An expert on small towns might disagree, but the fact is there are occasions when we need a lawyer here at Mertzon.

By this I don't mean we need one of those big city high-toned fixers who can write an account of a pedestrian-tricycle collision in terms that would make an Oliver Wendell Holmes reach for his dictionary. I refer to one of those halfway sort of arrangers who knows enough to initiate court action and has a talent for inciting his clients to carry their complaints to the courthouse.

As it is now, and we'll never be part of this dynamic age unless we change; we have a respectable number of squabbles but far too high a percentage of them are settled out of court without a judge ever hearing of them.

It's true, we're only 28 miles from San Angelo, a city blessed with enough counselors to supply General Motors, the United Nations, and just about any other organization in the country. But try as we may, most of us can't maintain the proper degree of anger necessary to make the 30-minute trip and arrive at one of the Angelo lawyer's offices incensed enough to want to sue. A citizen can leave Mertzon madder than a hydrophobia bobcat, but by the time he stops at the county line for a soothing six pack or a soda, chances are he has practically forgotten the cause of his anger by the time he arrives in San Angelo.

With this in mind, it's easy to see that we need a lawyer on hand at all times, a man who can stir up a petty quarrel until both sides are ready to spend thousands of dollars on a matter that the insurance people might appraise at around 15 cents.

Do not think we lack the material necessary to carry off some notable civil suits. If nothing else, we have enough loose poultry and unleashed pets to occupy half the legal talent on Manhattan island for a year. If you add the incidents arising from wandering milk cows, kid ponies, and a burro or two, it's doubtful if a 25-year-old judge would live long enough to hear all the cases.

As it is, we work all these things out among ourselves. Neighbors will live and die in the same block and remain on speaking terms. Oh, they may have a tense moment or two when one of their chickens scratches up two day's worth of flower gardening, or when a parakeet escapes and roosts on a neighbor's freshly laundered tablecloth. But as far as a barrister or a jury ever hearing about the strained relations, there's more chance of Jack Nicklaus taking up croquet for a living.

It's difficult to say what it would take to induce a young shyster to move to our community. Obviously a town of less than 600 souls can offer little volume unless the young counselor is ambitious enough to generate business from the conditions outlined above.

Meanwhile, we can only hope that a lawyer will indeed settle there someday so Mertzon will have a chance to make legal history. Until it happens, there isn't one chance in a thousand that Mr. Johnson will send us a single Peace Corpsman.