CHICAGO: WHERE NEW YORKERS GO IF THEY MAKE A WRONG TURN IN JERSEY

Manhattanites find the man in the photograph fascinating because he tells them of a funny place they believe exists only in his imagination.

By Joseph Egelhof

THE LACK of any of New York's accents is not enough to mark a midwesterner in Manhattan. Many New Yorkers don't have them. But a note of quiet enthusiasm in the midlands voice *is* distinctive. The midwesterner talks about things as if they're news.

Jean Shepherd's radio voice has this quality because he was raised in Hammond, Ind. Shepherd broadcasts six nights a week over WOR, telling New Yorkers stories about the part of the country he used to know:

"A solitary Presbyterian standing in the darkness of an Indiana twilight," he says, "peering over the Illinois state line in the direction of Calumet City, its neon lights illuminating the firmament, filled with goatish cries of passion, knew the tortures of temptation and the lures of the damned as few mortals have ever experienced them. He either turned immediately to hard-shell evangelism or to drink. Sometimes both."

In the opinion of persons who appreciate satire, Shepherd is one of the three or four best satirists in the United States. But satire—as such—is appreciated little. Most of Shepherd's fans like his program because, during his soliloquies, he often talks about experiences in funny places, such as Metropolitan Chicago.

Do New Yorkers believe? "They believe steadfastly that the stories are the wildest figments of my imagination—that no people could really live and behave that way this side of Oz," Shepherd says.

"On the other hand, transplanted midwesterners recognize my tales as merely factual accounts, somewhat toned down, of life in the hinterland."

Believers or not, New Yorkers listen. And by doing so they have made the 41-year-old-voice from Hammond a factor in an important development—a development that owes its existence also to the toll roads, McCormick Place, and New York's problems.

Because of all these things, New York is beginning to discover Chicago.

Up to now, the "first city" has had only the vaguest conception of the "second city." Older New Yorkers have heard that some years ago "Al Capone was running Chicago like a wild west circus." The only other name they connect with Chicago is that of the late Col. Robert R. McCormick, editor and publisher of The Chicago Tribune.

After World War II, whatever New York had learned about Chicago pretty much faded away. The late Adlai E. Stevenson was known in New York, but he was considered to be from Illinois, one of the plains states, rather than from Chicago. So for more than a decade the word "Chicago" had no connotations at all in New York. Ex-Chicagoans found it eerie, as if someone in outer space had dematerialized a fondly remembered mass of people, homes, and business places, along with the steel mills [New York has no industrial wonders like Chicago's], State street [far more impressive than any of Manhattan's retailing centers], and the lake front [nothing in New York is as beautiful].

Then the toll roads began to open the minds of New Yorkers, who value transportation facilities above anything else on earth, because without transportation New York would be only a bunch of islands. They realized that if they were on their way to visit relatives who had moved to Jersey, and made a wrong turn onto the toll road, and continued driving while looking for a U-turn, after 900 miles of toll booths they would be saying, "So this is Chicago."

Also news of two feats of construction in Chicago drifted to New York [mostly by word of mouth].

New Yorkers immediately coveted the McCormick Place exposition complex—the greatest municipal trade promotion anywhere in this generation. They also would admit, if they were in the habit of admitting anything, that Chicago's twin Marina City Towers are far more exciting than any new skyscraper in the city of skyscrapers.

When the St. Lawrence seaway began bringing New York's ocean ships to Chicago, New York was not worried, but it had a feeling that something was going on behind its back.

On top of it all, New York's self-assurance has been shaken by a number of New York-size troubles—the near-flop of the gigantic World's fair, the eastern power blackout, the subway-bus strike, the revelation that the city's water supply was uncertain in dry years, and the disclosure that the city was running out of money and needed large increases in municipal taxes. New Yorkers wonder if Chicagoans might be having it better.

Chicago should not leap to the conclusion that New York has discovered it yet. Peering thru the fog, New York has just sighted the indistinct mass on the horizon. As yet, New York has no feeling of rivalry with Chicago or any other city, and it may not have such a feeling for a long time. It considers its own essence unique, not subject to comparison.

New Yorkers mentally picture the other great cities of the United States as lying behind them, because New York faces out to the rest of the world, especially Europe. And, like other Americans, New Yorkers can give stereotyped responses to the the names of some of these cities—"automobiles" to Detroit, "movie stars" to Los Angeles, "steel" to Pittsburgh. They often are aware, in a passive way, of Philadelphia, but find it impossible to think actively about a city that is the symbol of total inactivity. The only place that inspires revulsion is Boston.

But in the case of Chicago, there hasn't even been a handy stereotype of late. When Jean Shepherd arrived in Manhattan and started his radio program in 1957, coming by way of Indiana university and jobs in Toledo and Cincinnati, he was amazed at the ignorance of most New Yorkers about his native midwest. Chicago was mentioned in New York newspapers only in connection with national weather reports and stray airplane crashes.

"It's not that New Yorkers feel superior," he marvels. "It's just that Chicago doesn't exist for them.

"Chicago seems to be under the illusion that a mighty battle is being waged culturally and otherwise with New York. New York does not even know that a fight is going on, and if it did, it would probably think it was Philadelphia getting smart. New York just stands and looks out to sea while Chicago stands defiantly, glaring at New York's backside."

Trying to fill the vacuum, Shepherd told his listeners about the Chicago "used car cult." This is a "major religion" which Chicagoans practice by going from one automobile lot to another on Sundays. New Yorkers found it incomprehensible.

He also baffled New York with "one of the chief Indiana masochistic pleasures."

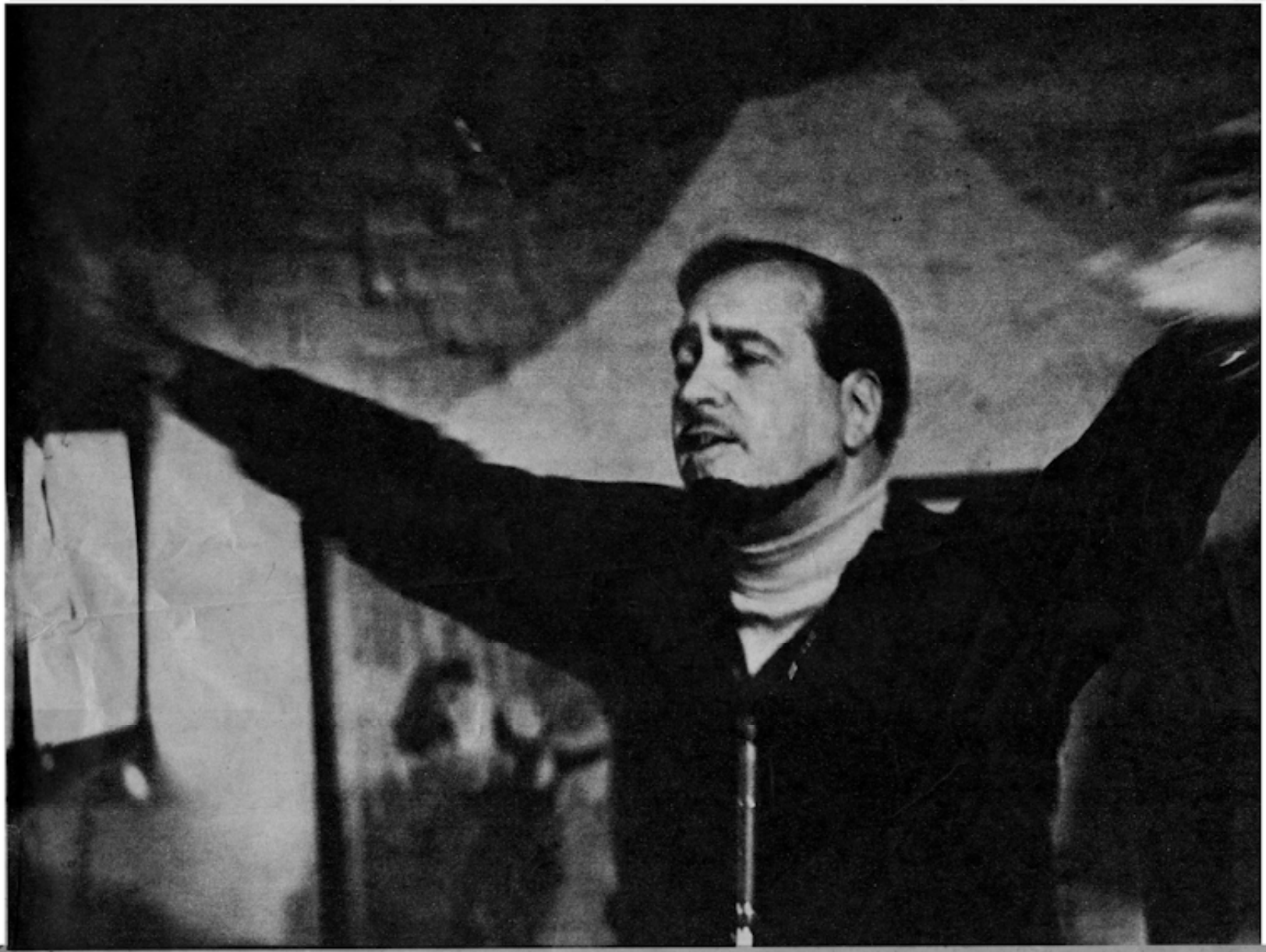
"On a Sunday afternoon, with the sun shining brightly, you get out on the Indiana turnpike and count license plates—plates that bear exotic place names such as New York, California, and Florida, where people are living the real life. After a good lush afternoon of license-plate-counting, there is only the Howard Johnson."

New Yorkers, who are good-natured about the failings of Jersey, are appalled by tales of regional animosities in Chicagoland.

"Chicago residents are all firmly convinced that every nutty driver seen on the Outer drive is either in fact an Indianan or, at the very least, one spiritually. Exactly the opposite is true in Hammond or East Chicago, where it is widely believed that the murderous and inept Chicago driver is largely responsible for the rising death rate as well as higher insurance premiums."

And the duplicity of the Hoosier! According to Shepherd, there are at least 35 towns in northern Indiana, each containing a minimum of 35,000 inhabitants, in which every citizen claims he was personally shot up by the late John Dillinger when John held up the local bank. Each time you check up on one of these stories, you find that Dillinger was watching the Cubs in Chicago on that very day.

But sinful Manhattan understood Shepherd's long tale of visiting a Chicago burlesque theater with



Jean Shepherd tells New Yorkers how it really is out west. His first novel, "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash," will be published this fall.

two other youths. The Hammond boy's guilt was so agonizing he imagined he had caught some disease, until he discovered it was only his itchy Sears & Roebuck underwear.

New Yorkers are happy to be told midwesterners spend their time looking at "that other golden world" in New York. The midwest, Shepherd says, is, or at least was until recently, the only section of America not conscious of itself.

When New Yorkers leave their "golden world" and visit Chicago, they apparently are pleased. You have to use the qualifying word, "apparently," because you probably couldn't find out if they were displeased. New Yorkers learned long ago not to criticize a fellow's home town, but to try to say something nice about it. It would be easy for a Chicagoan in New York to get a long series of approving comments about Chicago, none of which would mean anything.

But New Yorkers returning from Chicago often say that they admire the industrial might and spacious beauty of the No. 2 metropolis. They seem delighted by what they call the "friendliness" of Chicagoans who volunteer help to strangers. New Yorkers, inside, are just as friendly, but they have an ingrained reluctance to take the generous initiative.

They also may be a bit puzzled, however, by a number of other things they have witnessed—such as Chicago's blanket attacks on vice. The New York attitude is that vice is immoral when offered to New Yorkers, but a civic asset in dealing with visitors. Chicago's failure to make that distinction is considered a holdover from the days when it was a cattle town and the good citizens had to wipe out all vice, "good" as well as "bad," because it was attracting too many gunslingers.

And then there are Chicago's cultural and entertainment facilities. There is only one Broadway, of course, and New Yorkers don't expect to find another. But when they compare the populations of New York and Chicago, and then contrast what New York has with what Chicago has, many of them conclude that Chicago is not even holding its own in the high-class fun area.

The "first city" doesn't know everything there is to know about the "second city" yet—but it is beginning to learn. Perhaps by the time it does get to know the city well, Chicago will have learned from New York, too. ■