

In the non-fiction book “Empire Statesman” (The Rise and redemption of Al Smith”) 2001 By Robt Slayton, we find our old chum, the ferret faced Otto Eppers W8EA/2EA amateur and cartoonist extrodinare- His early past is given a few pages in the Slayton offering. Starting Page 395

In his latter years old Al Smith, NYC Statesman reappeared, the leader who still felt deeply the pain of an average NY’er and would go to great length to cure this. - One of his best moments began when an unusual letter arrived at the Empire State Building, it was addressed, like so many others, “Mr Al Smith C/O Empire State Bldg., NY City, N.Y.” What made this one unique, however, were the beautiful hand inked cartoons that graced both envelope and the pages inside.



The first thing you saw; therefore, even before you opened it, were two newsboys amid a typical East Side scene. One of them, eyes open in disbelief, complains “How in Der Sam Hills are Yer Gonner prove that after all Dese Years?” His companion clearly the leader of the two, aggressively gestures and replies, “Well Dots easy, Our pal Mr. Al Smith was Once Der Gov-ner for New York - AN’ such news Al Smith Kin never Ferget See!”

Inside the message was revealed, the artist Otto Eppers, grew up in Al Smiths old neighborhood and in 1910 got the brilliant idea to “earn some money by taking a real Brodie from the new Manhattan Bridge.” For the uninitiated a Brodie meant, taking a dive off the aforementioned span as a publicity stunt. But someone squealed and the cops blocked that little trick, so Otto turned instead to the first of its kind, Al Smith’s beloved Brooklyn Bridge and took the appropriate header off its noble walkway. Somehow Eppers managed to survive but after being suitably arrested and booked, Otto opened the summer season in Coney island on the strength of his exploit.

This Eppers revelation took 4 written pages to tell, but the first was a doozy. Covering most of the sheet was a remarkable ink drawing; In the background was the Brooklyn Bridge, with a splash in the water representing where Eppers had concluded his illustrious jump. Dominating the scene, however, was the foreground section; on a pier, back to the observer but watching the action, stood a man with a derby, arm wrapped around the largest, fluffiest striped cat imaginable! But if the art seemed festive, the letter was sad. Continued page two.

# YOUTH DIVES OFF BROOKLYN BRIDGE

Youngster Eludes the Police and  
Plunges Into the East River,  
Escaping Unhurt.

THEN ANOTHER TRIES IT

Patrolman Captures Him Just as He  
Is Getting Ready for the  
Long Drop.

The police had their hands full yesterday with bridgejumpers. One ferret-faced youth, who said he was 17 years old, did manage to elude their vigilance and plunge off the Brooklyn Bridge, but a middle-aged laborer was stopped just as he was about to climb over the parapet of the new Manhattan Bridge.

When the boy was arrested after being hauled out of the East River he said he was Otto Eppers, a cartoonist of 535 Dean Street, Brooklyn. He said that his only object was to get notoriety, but there were stories about that he had tried to collect for his feat a purse of \$1,000 from the storekeepers of Brooklyn. It was said that a Flatbush clothier had promised to give him \$250 and a suit of clothes.

Word had come to the police in the morning that an attempt to jump from a bridge was to be made, and all along the Manhattan Bridge Acting Capt. Burke had posted patrolmen, among them four bicycle policemen. It was their presence which prevented Eppers from using that structure as a diving point.

Soon after noon Eppers went to the garage of Henry Fisher of 372 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, and asked for a machine. He had on a bathing suit under his coat and trousers. He told Fisher what he intended to do, and Fisher lent him an auto. With Mason Beck of 9 St. Mark's Avenue Fisher and his chauffeur, Harry McGinty of 87 Lexington Avenue, the youth started off.

He made for the Manhattan Bridge from the Brooklyn side, but saw that there was no chance of his being able to scale the railing unmolested, so the machine was headed for the Brooklyn Bridge.

(NY Times 30 June 1910 Eppers article)

Otto Eppers had moved from NYC and was living in Clearfield Pa, a religious young man, he told his story to the local priest, but father Leo Anderson first "Showed signs of doubt," and then just laughed out loud. Our boy Otto (W8EA) had been humiliated. Through a lot of years, miles and bodies had passed under the bridge, Eppers still believed the only man could or would help him; he asked Al Smith to obtain the court record of his arraignment and then send it with a personal letter to Father Anderson, because "this will surely open their eyes."

Eppers ended his letter with all he could give; I hope I didn't bore you any, "he pleaded, "and should you ever need a favor that I could grant upon request - I would fulfill it even at the cost of my own life."

Robert Slayton continued "No matter how moving the appeal, it is important to stop and think about what Eppers had requested and whom he had requested it from." Obtaining any kind of evidence of this obscure event, whether it be a court document or a press clipping (let alone both) would be a long and painstaking process. And Al Smith was fighting for the Empire State building, rebuilding his own finances and figuring out what to do with Franklin Roosevelt. He was a little busy, in other words, to be handling that kind of solicitation from a total stranger.

On May second 1935 Father Leo Anderson received a letter from Mary Carr, Al Smith's secretary, who enclosed "a photographic copy of a news clipping as well as the copy of a report from the Police Department."

QSL cards hand drawn by W8EA/2EA are a joy to observe. Bob Green collects them and places up for all to view on [www.w8jyz.com](http://www.w8jyz.com) A salute to Eppers even though he has been gone since the 50s and has a good following now because of his talents. We feature the second half of the Eppers' arrest and his Brodie off the Brooklyn Bridge. Continued page three.

When he had got 500 feet from the Brooklyn tower Eppers leaped from the auto and began to climb the lattice work along the edge. Patrolman Scheffmeyer made a run for him, but he was too quick, and, placing his hands above his head in regular diving fashion, and bending low down, he let himself go. The drop is reckoned at more than 150 feet, and for the first half of the distance Eppers was able to keep straight through the impetus of the take-off. But then he began to twist and turn, and finally struck the water in a sitting position.

He had arranged that a tug should be ready to receive him, but the enforced alteration in his plans had disturbed this arrangement. When he came up he saw the tug Florence fifty yards off. He struck out for her, and the crew, who had seen the jump, were ready for him. They hauled him in with boathooks and found that he was unhurt. They took him over to the Manhattan side and landed him at the foot of Fulton Street.

There he was arrested on the charge of attempted suicide, and was taken to St. Gregory's Hospital. Dr. Dietrich examined him and found that except for bruises about the back he seemed uninjured. He was placed in a hot bath, and was then told to rest awhile on a couch. Asked why he had performed such a foolhardy feat, Eppers said:

"It hasn't done me any harm. I wanted to become a professional high diver and I want a reputation. I belong to the Carlisle Athletic Club, which has its quarters at Carlton Avenue and Dean Street, and have been a swimmer since I was 9 years old.

"I wasn't a bit nervous except when I saw so many policemen about. My clothes didn't bother me at all, but I seemed to be half an hour in the air, and believe that I went right down to the bottom."

His clothes were so badly torn in fishing him out that the police had to find an old pair of trousers to make his appearance in court fitting. He was taken to the Tombs Police Court about

(Continued from bottom line defective print) \*\*4 PM and arraigned before Magistrate Appleton on the attempted suicide charge. His mother and sister who had been sent for, were in court when they magistrate heard the charge, he smiled and Eppers couldn't restrain a laugh. "Well he seems very much alive doesn't he, remarked the magistrate."

He was admonished on his foolhardiness and let go. As Eppers walked out of the court room, his family received him with many up-braidings. He escaped from them as well and went off in Fishers auto. Authors note; I'm glad our subject didn't try this stunt again! He had many good years left in ham radio, entered the U.S. Army, married a Pennsy gal & returned to NYC and became a well known artisan - staff cartoonist. I've tried to obtain Mr. Eppers obituary and have not been successful. It is noted that many are intrigued by the W8/W2EA art work and I for one would love to have about a thousand QSL cards designed by our subject. One day, May it be so.

Credit NY Times files, Robert A. Slayton's book "Empire Statesman" By Free Press