

Topics

Passports, Eggplants and Hare Krishnas

Expired Visa

Frances Knight, director of the United States Passport Office since 1955, who leaves office on Sunday, was almost retired eleven years ago. It was in 1966 that she beat back efforts to ease political restrictions on the issuance of passports and brought about the resignation of her putative superior, Abba Schwartz, then head of the State Department's Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs. That was also the year she was shown to have played a part in trying to have United States embassies spy on H. Stuart Hughes, a Harvard professor and prominent opponent of the war in Vietnam, as he traveled abroad.

Miss Knight's bureaucratic inclinations never changed, but, happily, the times did. Two years ago she proposed a "lookout file" of scores of thousands of Americans "whose applications for passports may be of interest to . . . law-enforcement agencies"; the idea met effective opposition.

Miss Knight's alliance with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and a host of Congressmen kept her in office two years past the mandatory retirement age of 70. Secretary Vance gets the credit for not extending it to three years.

When Miss Knight was not complicating the lives of some citizens, she was making it easier for many by increasing the efficiency of the Passport Office. It would be courteous to remember the benefits she conferred

rather than the injuries she inflicted, but those who lived through those decades may find it difficult to forget the misguided zeal that marred her service.

The Greengrocer Explosion

Not the least of the city's small and unexpected pleasures right now is what might be called the greengrocer explosion—those fruit and vegetable stands being set up all around town in the best small-business tradition by Korean vendors. Street corners seem to spill over with crisp, freshly-iced greens sparkling in the sun, snowy cauliflowers, jewel-bright radishes and piles of satiny-purple eggplant that give as much pleasure to the eye as to the palate. The greengrocers are offering such spectacular competition to the supermarkets that even those giants have had to spruce up their wilted lettuce and tired beans and try to match the variety that is making snow peas and arugola as common as carrots.

Adding to this flowering of fresh vegetables are the "greenmarkets" that have been started by community groups in several parts of the city to bring farm produce directly to shoppers without any middleman at all. The city is apparently ready to approve plans to build an open-air market under the Manhattan end of the Queensboro Bridge—if it doesn't fall down, as one city engineer has predicted. The area would be leased to a private developer, an appealing

idea in spite of the fact that the city's track record in such deals courts disaster, and 59th Street traffic is near strangulation now. But if the project works, it could rival the attractions of Boston's Quincy Market, which has brought consumer chic downtown, with the clam lovers and fennel fanciers. Greengrocers need not be small potatoes.

On the Upeat

The word "gospel" means good news, and the good news in religious circles is that the present trend of religious feeling is to be happy. Those raised in an earlier day who huddled in boarding-school chapels while ministers exhorted them to feel guilty about anything that made them feel good, may find difficulty in connecting the present frame of mind with the religion of their youth.

In a longer view, however, revivals of religious happiness are at least as typical of religious experience as the sense of doom and suffering that modern Americans associate with Calvinism and the 19th-century churchly mood. Certainly for the agnostic observer, cheerful religion is a welcome spectacle, and so we urge the local planning board to permit the Hare Krishna sect to hold its desired celebration in Washington Square park. The Hare Krishna music is repetitive; the shaven heads might horrify Vidal Sassoon; but its members, in their colorful garb, enliven the urban scene, and seem right in the current mood.