

REPORT TO THE EDITORS



There's No Crime in Teaneck

NOT so long ago, FBI agents swarmed through Teaneck, New Jersey. They poked, probed, questioned and checked. Then they wrote a report. For years, Teaneck has been at the bottom of the annual crime parade of statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and because the town seemed too good to be true, the G-men were out to determine whether the low figure was fact or fiction. It is fact. Teaneck is the nearest thing to a crimeless town in this country.

Teaneck has had exactly one murder in almost two decades, with this one hardly counting, since the man was killed elsewhere and his body dumped on the town's outskirts; two robberies in seven years; an occasional rubber check, and a handful of burglaries each year. Teaneck is not a remote village in a mountain fastness, but is one of the largest municipalities in Bergen County, with a population of 33,000. It is a scant five miles from New York City, and is next door to many of New Jersey's busy industrial centers.

During 1944, the Teaneck police department entered the names of nine juveniles in its black book. But only two of them actually committed a crime, and these two came from another city to steal tires. The others included four boys, ranging in age from seven to ten, who tossed stones at passing trains. They were lectured and the dark deed has not been repeated. Two older boys practicing judo smashed a neighbor's window, an accident rather than a crime.

The adult-crime picture for '44 was equally barren. A police clerk with time hanging on his hands listed 190 "Crimes Reported and Known," but only in Teaneck would many of these episodes ever be placed on a station-house blotter. The entries included such whimsical items as eavesdropping and detaining a homing pigeon.

How to Clean Up a Town

Teaneck took its first step toward becoming a crimeless town in 1930, when the residents, faced with shrinking incomes and rising tax rates, decided to clean house. Instead of electing the other party in the hope of reform, the aroused electorate kicked all politicians where it hurts and scrapped their form of government in favor of a city manager.

Lean, white-haired Paul A. Volcker, who made a reputation as city manager of Cape May, New Jersey, was hired to take over. His instructions were brief: Clean up the mess and run the town as if it were a going business concern. This has been done. Since Teaneck is a residential community, its main business is to encourage new residents. Its population in the past fifteen years has almost doubled. Yet despite the increased demand for town services plus new costs for services never before given, the municipal debt has dropped a cool \$3,000,000, an indication of how deep the political pork barrel is, even in average communities.

Respect for law was established among adults by making it impossible to fix traffic tickets and by chasing the bookies, policy collectors and gambling joints out of town. Respect was obtained from the teenagers by giving them a place in the sun.

They are encouraged to drop in at City Hall with requests, and reasonable ones are granted. If they are off the beam, they are told why. Recently a group of high-school students met with Volcker and Recreation Superintendent Rodda. They thought an outdoor party in the town's central park might be a good idea. Volcker and Rodda thought so too. The students were allowed to select their own chaperons. The police safety bureau constructed a dance floor, the fire department set up powerful floodlights and built a safe bonfire for hot dogs and marshmallows, and the highway department contributed trucks for transportation. The manner in which the various town departments pitched in is typical of Teaneck. (Government is a community affair to an extent seldom seen elsewhere.)

No citizen of Teaneck can complain that he doesn't know what is going on. Each year, a large-size, thirty-two-page booklet containing the proposed budget, a detailed report of the activities of every department and an analysis of all expenditures is delivered weeks in advance of a budget hearing to each home. (The taxpayer knows the score and he knows what to do about it.)

—EDWARD D. RADIN.