



# “Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays  
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



## Mr. Roundabout

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I learned something new the other day from a motorist much more experienced than I. When entering a roundabout, once you're in the circle, keep going until time to leave it. Do not hesitate. You know, G&S: “Fair heart never won fair lady” – or got one out of a roundabout.

I can't begin to count how many times I have had to wait, once in the circle, for the pusillanimous driver immediate head of me just to keep going.

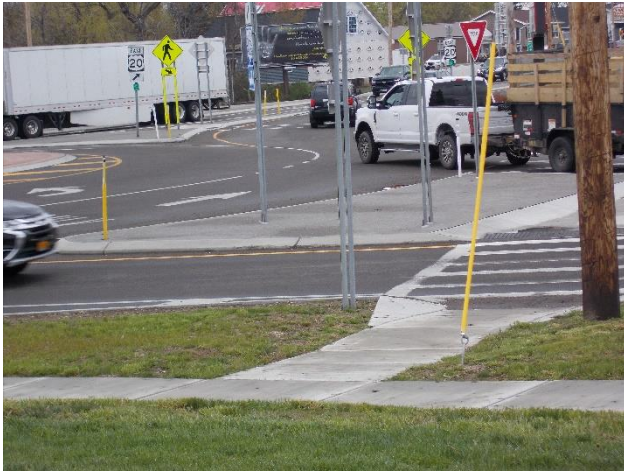
I'm betting everyone reading this has his own opinion on their worth. I've gotten used to them and can accept the dread sometimes involved though, quite honestly, I found it much more pleasant to simply sit at a red light until it was ready to turn green for me.

If you're really interested, the New York State Department of Transportation has a page titled Motor Vehicle Guidance: “The information found here intends to provide guidance in the form of detailed text, animation and graphics for motor vehicles traveling roundabouts. In addition, information regarding pedestrian and bicycle usage may be found on subsequent pages.” (For those two, I'd simply say forget it. There have to be safer ways.)

“Recently,” our state wants to tell us, New Yorkers have gained support as they become experienced with their use and design. “Drivers in those states also are becoming comfortable with their use. In the cities and towns where roundabouts have been built, and even where the public has been hesitant about accepting them initially, roundabouts ultimately have been accepted enthusiastically because of the increased safety they provide, along with” – get this! “traffic calming and aesthetic benefits.”

Granted in one of our usual intersections there are 32 points where vehicles could conflict, 24 for pedestrians. A roundabout limits those points to eight and eight. But why then confuse things even further by adding a second lane?





Let's just clear up one thing before progressing on to the quite remarkable man who designed this ... well, adjectives left unwritten.

Enough on the harrowing experiences we locals are frequently faced with.

Let's meet the man sometimes called the "Father of Traffic Safety," William Phelps Eno, was born June 3, 1858, to Lucy and Amos R. Eno.

I include that only because Dad was quite a character in his own right. Starting as a merchant

of dry goods, he expanded into real estate, built New York's Fifth Avenue Hotel and then gathered up much valuable real estate throughout the city, building a considerable fortune for his family.

Papa Eno and some relatives chartered the Second National Bank of New York which he turned over to one of his sons who subsequently embezzled millions before running away to Canada. Customers panicked and withdrew three to four million dollars. Good ol' Dad made good on it all.

As an aside Papa Eno built a four-story home at 233 Fifth Avenue. When it was time to sell, the Reform Club bought the building for \$240,000 (equivalent to \$6,829,333 in 2019). According to my sources that is now the home of the Museum of Sex which I find more interesting than driving in circles.

Automobiles were a rarity when our Eno was a youth but horse-drawn carriages seemed to already be causing significant traffic problems in places like New York City, his hometown. Getting stuck in a traffic jam at the age of nine remained with him for he later wrote, "That very first traffic jam (many years before the motor car came into use) will always remain in my memory. There were only about a dozen horses and carriages involved, and all that was needed was a little order to keep traffic moving. Yet nobody knew exactly what to do; neither the drivers nor the police knew anything about the control of traffic."

In spite of public and private criticisms, nothing was done until Eno, our "public-spirited citizen who spends his winters in Washington" decided to try to make a change. "Reform in Our Street Traffic Urgently Needed," written by Eno was published in 1900.



Although never learning to drive a car himself, Mr. Eno gets credit for traffic regulations, the stop sign, the pedestrian crosswalk, the traffic circle, the one-way street, pedestrian safety islands and even the taxi stand. New York City's Columbus Circle, (1905) was followed by the Arc de Triomphe (1907) and Rond Point on the Champs-Elysee (1927), both in Paris and London's Piccadilly Circle in 1926, all used his rotary traffic plan.



While Mr. Eno died of bronchopneumonia on December 3, 1945, his ideas definitely live on.

Written February 9, 2021