

NO PRIVACY IN CITY LIFE.

What Modern Methods
are Bringing Us To.

Officials are Kept Well
Informed.

Things a Man Believes Locked
in Secrecy of His Own
Breast, Put on Record.

[Chicago Tribune:] Is it possible to be a private citizen in Chicago?

The general impression is that it is. The opinion of experts is that it is not, and then the investigation that is necessary to determine upon which side the truth further confuses the subject.

The first thing that is done is to define the term. It has been agreed that there is a distinction between a prominent citizen and a private citizen. The resident who rises into the scope of the public eye by reason of his wealth or business or philanthropy or interest in politics has to in a measure turn over his life to the public. So much is said and printed about him that he becomes in a sense public property. Public officials expect this, and are not offended when their private friendships and intimacies are exploited. These prominent citizens who expect the invasion of their privacy are not to be considered as applicants for enrollment in the ranks of private citizenship. In that class must be included the men who do not hold office, who do not seek office, who are not so rich that they cannot be ignored, and who are not engaged in occupations that bring them conspicuously into view. They are the so-called private citizens. They are the men who are appointed to be the campaign orator and the reformer of the great mass of people whose will is law, although they are not seen in the forefront of the conflict, or words to that effect. In a word, they are the unknown.

At least, that is the theory. They are known to have a home and a business. They may belong to a church or a club or they may not, but they are regarded as men whose private concerns are known to no one except themselves and their families. If this be true, of course they are in the true sense of the word private citizens.

That is the way it looks from a distance. When the subject is more closely approached it is seen that the veil of privacy is thin, and that while the men are on earth many others have the right or take the privilege of looking through the veil.

The inspection begins at the birth of the man who is called the private citizen. The physician of Chicago is called upon by the city health department to make a list of all births, and in this list the name of the private citizen first appears.

He is a private citizen so far as officialism is concerned then until he gets ready to go to school. Then the Board of Education takes him in hand and in the person of the teacher in whose charge his first years of school life are given demands that he answer certain questions or that these questions be answered for him. The questions are concerned mostly with estate of the youthful private citizen's health. If he has had smallpox, diphtheria or measles the Board of Education wants to know it. Then, if he is excused from school, he has to return with a certificate setting forth the fact that he is suffering from no contagious ailment. Then the examining physicians who work under Superintendent of Compulsory Education Routine come to the private citizen's school ever so often, and sometimes they look at his tongue and in other ways pierce the veil of privacy to see whether he has been careless enough to contract croup or anything that may be dangerous to the pupil that sits next to him.

He gets through school all right, and about that time the man who is willing to give him a position or a job, or whatever he chooses to call it, appears. He has many questions to ask. They concern the private citizen's habits. If the position is one of trust and it is necessary that the employe should give a bond, there is the bond and liability company to be reckoned with. It looks into his life carefully, and after it has found that he is honest and steady it says that it will go upon his bond, and he goes to work. But he is not yet through with the bond people. Every little while they investigate the characters of the bonded employes for whom they are responsible. Their search is always a thorough one and brings to light about every fact in connection with the private citizen that is of any value.

He may go to another house for employment and he has to have references, and they have to be looked into, and there is another investigation of the man, who fondly imagines that his privacy is his own.

He makes up his mind to be married and, waving all examinations by the parent of his beloved, there must be admitted as evidence that he is not exactly a private citizen the questions that Marriage License Clerk Salmonson in the county building asks him. The clerk has no option. The questions are prescribed by law. They touch on the private citizen's age and on the age of his fiancée. They ask about his father and mother and about hers, and then when the marriage license is granted and the ceremony performed, the private citizen goes to settle down into his private citizenship.

But there is the flat or the house to be rented or the apartments in the hotel or the boarding house to be secured. Some boarding-house landladies are more strict than others in their inquiries, and it is difficult to formulate a set of questions that would apply equally to all the residence hotels. But in the case of the flat or the house it is not so hard. Many of the renting agents have complete application blanks that must be made out. In them the private citizen must tell where he is employed and how much money he gets. Then comes the man at the house furnisher, and he has to know just how much furniture is going into the home, and the piano man is a competent witness as to the price of the piano.

Then the gas inspector, and the janitor, and the grocer's clerk, and the maid, and the woman next door, they all get a chance to look over the lives and habits of the private citizen, and when the man comes to write the insurance policy upon the household property he supplies it all. The private citizen goes to get life insurance, and besides answering questions about his own health and financial standing, he has to go back into the past and describe to the best of his ability the ailments that distressed his ancestors. After he has secured a full pack of these minute questions he has to submit to a physical examination. When it is over the doctor knows all about his lungs and his heart, and

his smoking and the social glass that he may or may not take.

Then suppose an emergency arises and he wants to pawn his watch. He goes to a pawnshop, puts down the timepiece, gets a ticket and the money he requires, and goes away thinking that that is all there is to it. At the close of the day's business the pawnbroker takes the name of the private citizen who have adopted him as their uncle, and goes with it or sends it to the detective headquarters in the City Hall. The Detective-Sergeant who has charge of the Pawnbroking Department then knows that this particular private citizen has pawned his watch. The Detective-Sergeant whose business it is to look through the pawnshops in search of stolen property knows it, too. Surely there is not so much privacy there. The authority is laid upon the police by a city ordinance.

But perhaps the private citizen does not want to go to a pawnshop. Suppose he wants to go to a money lender and give his notes for an advance of money. Then he has to answer questions about his financial condition, and every other merry wander in town is notified that this private citizen has made application for a loan. If he has borrowed money from any of the others that they notify the man to whom he is now applying. So again his privacy more a jest than a reality.

Then if the man is doing business on credit, Dan and Irdstreet get him on their books, and regular reports are made about his business. If he gives a chattel mortgage, the fact is duly notified. If he borrows money, it is noted. If he assigns, the fact is spread abroad. His financial affairs are at the beck and call of subscribers to mercantile agencies.

If his business is such that he wants to make a bid on some public work, the City Hall gets to know his business record. If it is private work, the man who is letting the contract wants to know something about him. If he dabbles in politics, in only the smallest way, his conduct toward his friends and enemies of the party which claims him as a member, is carefully looked after. If he is called for jury service he has to stand a rigid examination, and another rigid cross-examination. He is asked whether he knows any of the parties in the case, any of their lawyers; whether he has a prejudice against any of them or against any man on account of his nationality, religion or business.

If he gets into court as a witness, his life has to be an open book. If he is put on trial for any offense, the microscope is one of the highest imaginable power. Even if the litigation in which he happens to become involved is civil in its nature, he is subjected to questions which challenge his right of privacy.

Then the city directory and the telephone directory men come around, and they ask questions, and the agents who have things to sell ask questions. Then there are more censuses to be taken, and censuses, of course, are compounded of questions. Then the special assessment man, and the dog license man, and the policeman have to be reckoned with. The police not only have the right to stop the private citizen as he is on his way to his private home at night, and make him explain his identity, and the contents of the package he may be carrying, but they have the right to ask him questions about his friends and acquaintances. And then the newspaper reporter, with his quenchless thirst for information, must be included in the list of those who are always tearing at the veil of privacy, and when the private citizen comes to die, the health department demands a full report of his sickness before it will issue a burial certificate. Thus it is that from the cradle to the grave the private citizen is constantly in the glare of the camera, and whether there is such a person as a real private citizen is a question that assuredly admits of more than one opinion.