

Prologue:

Years before Ann Landers and *Dear Abby*, there was Pegge Parker, a 21-year old high school graduate who began writing a daily advice column for teenagers in the Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) Telegraph in the 1940s. She named her column *'Teen Topics* and invited her teen readers to send her their problems.

Born Margaret Witwer (Peggy) Lyons, she took the pen name Pegge (with an “e”) and Parker, because everyone had a Parker Pen. It was a time when the country was preparing for, and eventually entered, World War II.

The subjects ranged from problems about dating—first date, going steady, breaking up, curfews from parents—and how to make friends—shy boys, diets, games, etiquette (on buses, trains) and an emphasis on using correct

English. She also had advice on reading current books, in addition to the advice columns, she spiced her columns’ writing about visits to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Naval Academy at Annapolis. She also wrote about visits to New York, Philadelphia, Washington and even a “Dixie Diary” of a trip to visit servicemen from the Harrisburg area in training in Louisiana.

The column was one of the most popular items in the newspaper. In July of 1942, after almost two years of writing six columns a week, she left the paper to join the staff of the Washington Times Herald in Washington D.C.

This selection of her columns are copies of microfilm archives since the newspaper ceased to exist shortly after the end of World War II.




*This is a picture of the Harrisburg Telegraph news room in November 1941 while Pegge was writing her column.
(Pegge Parker is located in the center of the picture on the aisle.)*

Teen Topics

By **PEGGE PARKER**

You may present your problems to Miss Parker, who will attempt to solve them.
Simply address Miss Pegge Parker, Harrisburg Telegraph, and read the daily column for her solution.



A few notes about the columns:

When the columns first appeared in the paper, the headline was a plain box. After several months, and as her name and column began gaining readers, the paper inserted a picture in her column header.

After a year of writing columns, Pegge took her first vacation of two weeks in New York. While in New York, she visited a Fifth Avenue salon and the hairstylist gave her a new look which was then used in the column (starting on page 79).

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You will find references to sororities and fraternities in the columns. At the time Harrisburg had two senior high schools, John Harris and William Penn. The sororities and fraternities in the high schools were similar to the sororities in colleges and universities in that they had Greek letters. In practice they were really clubs of girls and boys in their schools.

Peggy Lyons was the treasurer of the O.T.J. Sorority of John Harris and William Penn. According to the year book, the Pioneer, for 1937, O.T.J. "has established for itself a long-lived reputation of always having something up it's ambitious sleeve."

Also in the Pioneer for 1937, the following: "Delta Sigma Sorority was organized in 1917. During the nineteen years that it has been in existence it has gained the reputation of being one of the outstanding organizations of the school. It is very well represented in sports, studies and social activities. The sorority is composed of academic girls belonging to the senior class. The club fulfills the purpose of fostering interscholastic

friendship and social activities among the girls of John Harris and William Penn."

Other sororities listed in the yearbook were the S.G.C. Sorority which had eighteen girls, nine from John Harris and nine from William Penn; the J.F.F. sorority which was the only sorority that included both junior and senior girls (Peggy's sister, Dorothy Virginia, belonged to the J.F.F.); and the Phi Theta Kappa Sorority (Pegge wrote a column about one of it's dances.)

After many of her columns, Pegge would ask if the readers had any questions. Here are some examples:

After a column about introductions. "If P.P. has forgotten something you've been worrying about where introductions are concerned, drop her a note so your 'how do you do's' will always be polite and perfect."

After a column about colds: "Are you confined to your bed just now and find time heavy on your hands? Pegge Parker can tell you some amusing sick-a-bed games to play, suggest time-chasers and make you feel better if you'll write to her."

After a column for boys on dating: "Are you unpopular and left out of things? How many parties are you invited to? Do girls say they're busy when you ask for a date? Address your problems to Advisory Headquarters, Miss Pegge Parker, care of the Harrisburg Telegraph."

After a column about being a hostess: "Have you a hostess worry that Pegge Parker hasn't mentioned in her column? Why not write her a little note and ask her to set you straight?"