Coöperative News-Gathering

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ROSEWATER

HISTORY OF COÖPERATIVE NEWS-GATHERING IN THE UNITED STATES

BY

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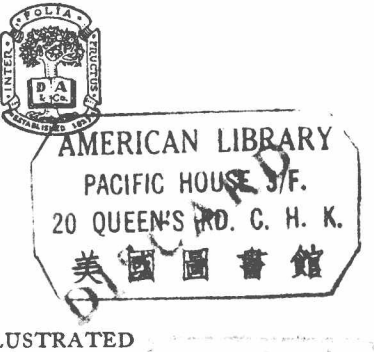
FORMERLY EDITOR OF THE "OMAHA BEE"



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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

EDWARD ROSEWATER

OLD-TIME TELEGRAPHER AND
PIONEER JOURNALIST

FOREWORD

This volume is the result of a careful study of the history of news-gathering organizations in the United States which has extended over many years. At the foundation of the study is a life-work in newspaperdom and an unflagging interest in the subject, along with a close touch with the field of education for journalism. Membership for more than a quarter of a century in the old Associated Press of Illinois and its successor, the Associated Press of New York, gave direct contact with the main developments and the chief personages concerned in the later movements. I have had also the incalculable advantage of inside information and original papers, relating to preceding press associations, accumulated and preserved by my father during his long career as an old-time telegrapher and then as an editor of force and prominence, beginning with the pre-Civil-War era.

The documentary source materials are, I believe, amply indicated in the textual references and footnotes. While particular incidents and limited phases of the subject have been dealt with in the standard histories of American journalism and in the biographies of those carrying the leading rôles, nowhere have they been given perspective and sequence, or interpretative treatment. Collections of books and pamphlets under this heading are being built up now in many libraries of the country, and I have made use of the outstanding ones. Critical comparison of these collections would not be warranted, since in great part they supplement rather than duplicate each other. The New York Public Library is a treasure house of exclusive pamphlets and early newspaper files. The Library

of Congress at Washington and the Library of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester are both rich in their similar possessions. The shelves of the Library Company and of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, contain some material not to be found elsewhere. A separate library of books and cuttings on journalism at Vassar College, begun by the late Professor Lucy Salmon, has proved valuable. Several schools of journalism have developed useful working libraries which have been drawn upon. I wish to pay this tribute to those administering each and all of these libraries, who without my asking any special privilege or favor, often without even making known my identity or divulging the object I was pursuing, granted me unfailing courtesy and considerate attention even further than I had a right to expect. The special libraries and morgues of certain great newspapers have also been freely opened for consultation, notably those of the New York *Times,* the Philadelphia *Public Ledger,* the Philadelphia *Bulletin,* and the Chicago *Tribune.* I am indebted largely to Adolph S. Ochs, of the New York *Times,* for otherwise unobtainable data concerning the Southern Associated Press; to the late Melville E. Stone for various suggestions; to Frank B. Noyes, of the Washington *Star* and president of the Associated Press, for going over the manuscript and giving pertinent advice; to Robert P. Scripps for permission to use material relating to the Scripps-McRae Press Association; to M. F. Moran, of the Associated Press office staff, for needed access to old reports and for sharing with me his fund of first-hand information; to the responsible officers of all the active press associations for helpful answers to my inquiries as to their organizations. It is quite impossible to mention each individual entitled to my thanks for encouraging and contributing to the continued prosecution of the study.

Aware of numerous shortcomings, I still venture to hope

that what is here recounted may illumine somewhat a phase of journalistic development which heretofore has had no comprehensive presentation and that it may be serviceable toward a clearer understanding of our institutional history and of the problems of our great news-gathering enterprises.

V. R.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

News—the basic factor in journalism

It is a graphic picture of current life that is spread before us by the modern newspaper. As we glance over the sheet daily placed in front of us, we glimpse a view not only panoramic in scope but almost simultaneous with the occurrences depicted. The varicolored canvas, by means of its printed characters, puts us abreast of what is happening throughout the world, it illumines life in all its different phases, it reflects its ever-changing lights and shadows, it delineates the discordant blotches as well as the soft-blended tintings, it exposes the hideous scars along with the exquisite beauties, it holds up examples to be emulated and to be avoided. But it is more than a picture; it is the essential footing for the next day's step unless that step is to be taken in semiblindness.

How do we come to have this intricate chart of diurnal doings? What agency performs the needful service for us with such dependable accuracy, despite frequent and sometimes inexcusable blunders; and how does it do it with such exceptional initiative and driving force? How does this machinery work and how came it to be so delicately adjusted to the task of tracking and recording the succession

of events on the rapidly revolving film of the newspaper cinema?

The history of news-gathering in the United States runs apace with the development of improved means of communication. American newspapers have been foremost in the field of news; here, more than anywhere else, emphasis is placed on the prompt collection and dissemination of news; here, sooner than elsewhere, each promising method of transmission has been tried out and utilized to the fullest extent.

It is hard to visualize the earlier conditions. The purview of the press has steadily broadened since the colonial beginnings. News brought in solely by the editor and his helpers, and only from territory accessible to them, could not long suffice. Journalistic enterprise pushed constantly forward. The assembling of the day's news has led, therefore, through cumulating stages to an intensively arranged reporting of events and also to an extensive scheme of coördinating the reports. In following the development of this organized news-gathering, we have a subject of study intimately interwoven with the industrial and cultural growth of the country, interesting and instructive, and certainly not devoid of its occasional lighter vein and picturesque aspects.

Generally speaking, before there can be coördination, there must be independent effort aiming in the same direction, even though unrelated. News-gathering has proceeded along the course, from couriers bearing messages embodying simple announcement and description, to an extremely involved interlocking set of globe-girdling forces utilizing for the purpose every available instrumentality of observation, collection, and transmission. As already noted, the progress of journalism on the news side corresponds closely to the

invention, and introduction, and expansion of the means of rapid communication.

Pioneering is necessarily groping and plodding, and the pioneer newspapermen had to adventure into untrodden byways. When we examine early-day newspapers, preserved for us as curiosities of the past, we realize at once the narrow lines within which the first journalistic activities were hemmed; we see the obstacles which the ground-breakers had to contend with, the scant resources at their disposal, the slowness of their fastest transit. We can more readily understand, in the light of the meager equipment and facilities, how very vague or local was their news, how even their advertisements were confined to matters of importance to the particular community. Most of the space was given, in many instances, to essays and contributed editorials of interest mainly to those of culture or to those who had ideas and theories of government. For the academic and literary, there was poetry and sometimes ponderous literary work.[1]

[1] Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States*, p. 138.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF SYSTEMATIC NEWS-GATHERING

First random efforts—The Merchants' Exchange: Topliff—Harbor News by rowboat: Blake; Bennett

SYSTEMATIC news-gathering naturally had to have its commencement in the most favorable field. For voyages to and from the mother country, the nearest and most active port in colonial America was Boston. At this point the most important information from abroad would be, ordinarily, soonest obtainable and, as Boston was first in printing and first in newspapers on this side of the Atlantic, it naturally should be first in instituting methodical collection of the news. Yet it can scarcely be said that the main credit for organizing the work belongs to the newspapers. The reasons are quite clearly disclosed by existing conditions of the times.

In all primitive communities, information is passed by word of mouth, and the news mart is found where the inhabitants are wont to congregate. In our colonial settlements, it was at the tavern or coffeehouse that reports of latest happenings were first bruited, that discussion of moot questions waxed warm, that the fads and foibles of the day were debated. To the coffeehouses, in particular, the merchants and traders of the town repaired to interchange the news that most intimately concerned them—the arrival and departure of ships, the sort of cargo carried, incidents of the trip, what passengers were aboard, what they had to relate of doings elsewhere.

In Boston, it was the Exchange Coffee House that long had the call. The news at such a place was, at least, fresh and prompt and continuous, and the early newspapers, appearing not oftener than once a week, could but follow in the wake. Indeed, the coffeehouse was the most fruitful fount of news for the paper and became the news stream of the rising press which obviously got together at haphazard the little additional material, and filled more of its space with controversial contributions, encyclopedic dissertations, official announcements, and doggerel poetry, than with information about events happening near or far.

The explanation as to why the first enterprise in news-gathering in colonial times lay in the field of shipping is, therefore, simple. The information obtained in the harbor was the vital news. Long after achieving national independence, as well as previously, the settlers were closely attached to the ancestral lands by their interests there; they were especially concerned in the changing relationships with the mother country, to which they were linked in many ways, and likewise in occurrences in the sister colonies. As the first comers inevitably chose the coast or river banks for their settlements, the first papers were printed in seaport towns where, aside from occasional land couriers, the ships constituted the chief carriers of persons, goods, and intelligence. Here, necessarily, the first organization for news-gathering was to be forthcoming.

Though the innovation hardly flashed with lightning suddenness, the year 1811 marked the advent into a novel venture of one whose individual impress proved long enduring. In its issue of November 20, the Massachusetts *Centinel* printed this item:

Exchange Coffee House Books. These news books &c, commenced and so satisfactorily conducted by Mr. Gilbert, are now