

CHAPTER 5  
NEWS OF SPECIAL FIELDS

**W**HILE news is news, and all news possesses the basic qualities discussed in the preceding chapters, yet all news matter is not made of the same sort of stuff; its subject matter varies widely.

Just as we may say of all good building material that it has strength, durability, and adaptiveness, but that it may be stone, brick, wood, or steel, so we may say of all news stories that they possess certain characteristics in common, but that they vary in substance. The story of a crime, the story of a new method in farming, of some new short cut in homemaking, of some new device for moving materials on a great construction job are similar in that each contains some measure of those qualities of newness, importance, nearness, human interest, and so forth which are basic, but they are widely different in subject matter. Because of their basic news qualities they have a modicum of appeal to all persons, but the largest interest in stories arising out of agriculture, women's activities, engineering, industries, and trade is for certain special groups whose activities in life link up closely with the subject matter.

**Two broad divisions of news:** Therefore news may be divided into two very broad divisions as to its *common* or *general appeal* and as to its *special* or *limited class* or *group appeal*. *News with a common* or *general appeal* is the news that fills the daily or weekly newspaper; *news with a limited class appeal* is the news of the class or trade publications, such as the farm journal, the women's journal, the engineering magazine, the merchants' trade journal, the drygoods trade journal, and so forth.

It must be borne in mind, of course, that the *newspaper* does not ignore the special fields of news; on the contrary, an increasing proportion of *newspaper* space is devoted to departments for news

of special fields, but for the most part it gathers and presents only the immediate phases of the happenings in those fields and usually only the surface phases. The thorough, technical handling of the news or information of the special fields of agriculture, home economics, engineering, science, industry, and trade is the definite and more or less exclusive function of the class publications. Because of difference in fundamental appeal of the newspaper and the class journal in their respective fields, the former is quite likely to rely for its handling of news in special fields upon writers without technical training in these fields, whereas the class publication demands writers who combine technical training and experience with their ability to write. More and more newspapers, however, are attaching to their staffs men and women who are specially qualified to gather and write news relating to these special fields.

This book deals only in a secondary way with news of the first broad division just suggested—the news of accidents, crimes, disasters, sports, and the like. It gives some consideration to the gathering and writing of this general news because it affords an abundance of laboratory material for the beginning reporter and good practice in acquiring facility in the use of fundamental news writing forms.

The main emphasis of this text is upon news in the second division just defined—technical news. It concerns itself principally with news in the special fields of agriculture, home economics, engineering, and the various branches of science, but news in any other technical or special field is within its scope.

**Technical news:** Agricultural news is news that pertains closely to agriculture as an art and as an industry as well as the activities in the lives of people engaged in agriculture. Home economics news is news that pertains closely to the activities of the homemaker in the operation and management of her home and family. Scientific and engineering news pertains, likewise, to the special concerns of people engaged in scientific and engineering occupations. A marriage of rural people, or crime or disaster among them, is not agricultural news as it is now being defined; nor is news of a society event home economics news; nor is a story tel-

ling of the ceremonies which accompany the opening of a great bridge engineering news; for in none of these cases does the story pertain to the practice of agriculture, home economics, or engineering.

If a farmer develops a specialty of bluegrass seed production and makes a success of it through the use of special methods, that is agricultural news; its subject matter relates to agriculture as an art and industry. If a homemaker works out a way to arrange her kitchen to save both time and labor, that is home economics news for it relates to the art of home economics. Likewise, when an engineer develops a method of building concrete highways of standard strength with the use of less reinforcing steel, that is engineering news, for it deals with the technique of highway construction. These simple distinctions are fundamental.

An examination of these very simple illustrations of technical news reveals quickly that they have in them the basic qualities of news (discussed in Chapter III). They have in greater or less degree, newness, unusualness, importance, human interest, nearness, and seasonableness; they do not necessarily have the quality that demands immediate publication, but recency is not a *sine qua non* in these special fields of news. The examples do have most of the essentials of news, and it is important to re-emphasize that news is news, wherever it may be found, whatever its subject matter may be, and for whomsoever it is written.

It must not be understood from what has just been said that recency is not an element of value in gathering and writing news of the special fields. It is. If the story of the farmer's bluegrass seed enterprise can be told while it is "live" and still has in it the vitality that is inherent in events that are current instead of long past, it will be that much more interesting and valuable.

**Spot news and time copy:** In the daily newspaper field it is common to refer to news that is told immediately after it happens as "spot news." It has a particular value because it is "spot news." In contra-distinction there is the term "time copy," applied to news stories that may be deferred for a time to give way to the stories that press urgently for immediate publication. These

terms have application in the news field of the technical or class journal, as well as in that of the daily newspaper.

A meeting of a scientific society or an agricultural organization is spot news. The dedication of an engineering structure or a speech by a famous nutritionist is spot news. So also are, for example, observations of an eclipse, the promulgation of new animal quarantine regulations, the announcement of specifications for an engineering enterprise.

Stories about the following would ordinarily constitute time copy: the grasshopper situation, women's fashions for fall, the relative merits of various types of road surfacing materials, a research into the commercial uses of furfural.

**Technical news in the daily newspaper:** Obviously the "best" newspaper story is one which will vitally interest all of the readers of the paper. It is equally obvious that very few stories meet this specification. The newspaper has an unselected audience—one made up of all kinds of people, with all kinds of interests, but it is able only rarely to find a story which all of its readers will read with interest. In other words, much of the news in the daily paper is directed primarily toward sections of its circulation. The sports news, for example, is directed primarily toward the men; the women's page, obviously, is primarily for the women. The market and financial news is primarily for business men. A story about a suburban improvement association will be of interest to people of the suburban area concerned. A story of a state convention of the hardware dealers' association will be of interest to hardware merchants, their employees, and friends.

Some technical news is, of course, so important, vital, and dramatic that it will be read by a large proportion of the newspaper's subscribers. Much more often, however, technical news is printed because of the special interest certain groups will take in it.

For many years newspapers have recognized the value of news material especially designed for women readers. Practically all of our larger newspapers have women's departments, directed by a women's editor. Frequently she has under her women who are

especially trained in foods, fashions, interior house decoration, child care and training, and other subjects of paramount concern to women readers. The material in these departments consists largely of time copy. Spot news of primary interest to women is usually handled in other parts of the paper and in the same way that other spot news is handled.

Special attention to agricultural news is a more recent development in daily newspaper making. During the past twenty-five years a number of daily papers have employed farm editors. On some papers these farm editors run a farm page or farm department. On other papers, while they are not assigned special space, they cover the farm news of the paper's territory. In this case the farm copy is judged for its news value just as any other copy is judged and placed in the paper according to its reader interest. The farm editor is frequently an advisor on editorial policy, as related to agriculture.

Daily newspapers carry much scientific news. They are particularly interested in scientific material dealing with health—medicine, surgery, dietetics—and with chemical research, especially as it is related to industry. Some larger daily newspapers employ special staff members to handle scientific news. They also depend largely for this kind of material upon the press services and syndicates. The Associated Press, for example, has a science editor and a correspondent who devote all of their time to the covering of scientific news. Science Service is a syndicate, founded and endowed by the late E. W. Scripps as a non-profit corporation, which supplies to subscribing newspapers wire and mail coverage of science news.

Daily newspapers deal with engineering news in a less organized way than they do with the other subjects in which we are interested here. Although some newspapers have automobile and aviation departments, these emphasize the commercial aspects of these fields rather than the engineering. While a newspaper is not likely to employ a reporter specifically to cover engineering news, the ability of a reporter to do so may be an added qualification.

**Handling of technical news is different:** There is a fundamental difference between the way general news is usually written

for a daily newspaper and its typical reader and the way technical news is written for the reader who has a technical or special interest in the story. The latter wants to know more about what happened, the exact details involved, the background, the interpretation of the facts, the consequences, and so on.

To illustrate, the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station some time ago announced a new tall fescue developed jointly by that station and the United States Department of Agriculture, and promising to be of importance as a new pasture grass. This much was news for daily newspapers.

But a farmer would want to know more details: where seed could be secured, on what soils it could be grown, just how and when it should be sown, when livestock could be turned onto it, how the crop would withstand winter temperatures, what kinds of livestock could be pastured on it, what its feeding value would be in comparison with other pasture grasses, and so on. A story giving these details would be a technical news story of the sort that a farm paper only would want to carry.

Then agronomists in other states, interested in the subject would want to know the botanical history of the new seed, the facts about the work of breeding or selection, the detailed records of the plots in the grass nursery, and something about the other strains or varieties tested and discarded. The telling of these more technical and scientific facts would be a story to be written for a journal read by agronomists and other agricultural scientists.

A large seed company introduced a vegetable new to the United States, bringing it from China. Its leaves resemble the leaves of lettuce, while its stalk is similar to celery. That much about this happening makes a good newspaper story. But the vegetable grower or the home gardener wants details about how to grow it. The woman interested in foods wants to know how to prepare, serve raw, or cook this new vegetable. The general newspaper story may not include the fact that the thick stem must be peeled before it can be used as a salad green or cooked, but this technical detail is all-important in a story for the information of readers interested in foods.

Some time since, a big story, carried by newspapers all across

the country, dealt with the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows bridge. This was general news, of widespread interest because of its unusual features. To the engineer, however, there were many details which the daily papers did not carry. The reasons why the bridge failed were of course a part of the general story, but the engineer wanted to know all about the original plans, the mathematical and mechanical calculations involved in the planning, the structural details, the materials used, construction methods, and changes to be made in the new bridge to be built. Such things constitute technical news for the engineer.

**The country or community weekly:** The weekly newspaper published in a small town has a much different field and function from the city daily, farm journal, or any other publication. While its constituency is comprised of people with a wide variety of occupation and interest, yet they have so much in common that they are united as city people are not united. They live closely together; they are all neighbors; they know one another's names and more or less of one another's business. Whatever may happen to one member of the community has deep interest for all the others. Therefore we shall not expect to find the same news content in a country weekly that we do in a city daily.

Rather than events of intrinsic importance in the world at large, the newspaper will play up the happenings of its community—happenings which have significance and universal local interest because of the closeness of the readers to one another. On occasion the country weekly may give space to happenings of state or national importance, but as a rule its concern is with the events of its own immediate community.

That is true of local news about farming as well as of social or other news. Whereas the writer of agricultural news for the farm journal or city daily must always weigh each item to determine whether it has sufficiently wide interest and importance to appeal to his publication's larger and more heterogeneous audience, and eliminate much of detail, the writer for a weekly paper may feel assured that any agricultural event that has a reasonable measure of news value will appeal to the readers of his publication, and he may profitably include most of the intimate details he can gather.

John Brown's purchase of a new bull to head his dairy herd, the annual picnic meeting of the Center Township Farm Bureau, the experience of Albert Smith with his crop of Sudan grass, the topping of the Chicago market by Henry Thompson—all these events may be of too little importance in the estimate of the journal published for a state-wide constituency, but they are the kind of news stuff that makes the local country newspaper a success. There was a time when country newspapers did not fully recognize the value of this local agricultural news, and they made no particular effort to get it; but that has changed and some of them employ special reporters to gather and write it. Many of them maintain special farm departments.

**Technical material in magazines:** Many different kinds of magazines use technical material—and in many different kinds of ways.

*General magazines*—Magazines of very general circulation, such as *Harpers*, *Atlantic*, *Saturday Evening Post*, frequently run articles about agriculture, home economics, science, and engineering. Such articles must, however, be interesting because of their wide significance, their importance, or extreme unusualness. The *Saturday Evening Post* might very well run a story about a great engineering project, such as Grand Coulee Dam. *Harpers Magazine* might run a story which would describe and evaluate the work of the Farm Security Administration. In these cases the articles would deal with technical subject matter, but they would be presented to a nontechnical audience because of their general interest.

*Farm journals*—The great bulk of the material in farm journals is technical in subject matter in that it deals with the science of agriculture. It is written for the most part, however, in a popular, nontechnical manner. Among the farm journals are the national and regional magazines, most of them monthly publications, the state farm papers, most of them weekly or bi-weekly, and a large group of magazines which deal with particular phases of agriculture, such as the breed publications, horticultural magazines, dairy papers, etc.

The farm journals usually contain departments for farm women which are filled with home economics material.



*Women's magazines*—Most of the women's magazines are national in scope, have large circulations, and present home economics material in a popular form.

*Engineering magazines*—There are many engineering magazines devoted to the different aspects of the engineering profession. Because the subscribers to these publications are, for the most part, highly trained technicians, the material which they contain is much less "popular" than that in the women's and farm magazines.

*Scientific journals*—At one extreme, among scientific journals, are the very highly technical publications in the various fields of science, publications designed primarily for research workers in those fields. These journals, with their small, highly selected reader groups, make no attempts at all to be either interesting or intelligible to the layman. At the other end of the spectrum are the "popular science" magazines. These appeal to the curiosity of the layman by recounting the unusual and the romantic developments in science and invention. Between these two extremes are many publications with varying degrees of popular appeal.

*Trade publications*—To this category belong many hundreds of magazines which serve the interests of particular trade and professional groups. It would be difficult to name a business or trade in the country which does not have a publication to recount its news and discuss its problems.

*House organs*—Many commercial organizations and trade associations publish magazines, usually for free distribution, which have either or both of two purposes: to inform the employees of the organization of its news and policies and to build employee good will and cooperation; and to reach prospective customers of the organization with the story of the organization and its products.

*Wide scope of technical news:* When we use the terms agricultural, home economics, and engineering with reference to news of the technical field their connotation is much more inclusive than may first appear. The sources of news within their respective fields are correspondingly more numerous.

Agriculture has to do with soils, farm crops, animal husbandry, poultry, entomology, plant pathology, pomology, vegetable gardening, floriculture, farm management, rural economics, rural

sociology, dairy manufacturing, genetics of plants and animals, engineering, veterinary medicine, vocational education, extension, and the basic sciences that relate to them.

Engineering has its many branches also—civil, mechanical, electrical, chemical, mining, ceramic, architectural, industrial, and still others.

Home economics has to do with foods, nutrition, clothing and fabrics, home furnishings, household equipment, home service work, child care and training, vocational teaching, design and decoration, institutional management, home planning.

Closely related to agriculture, engineering, and home economics are the major sciences—chemistry, bacteriology, physics, mathematics; likewise manufacturing, selling, advertising, and economics are a part of many of these various subdivisions.

Technical news is sometimes cumulative, extending over a period of time. As each new stage develops there is more news to tell. As a broad economic movement unfolds, a piece of scientific research is carried forward; as a great construction job proceeds, the story of each phase is news. Sometimes the final story may be written as a general feature article.

Agricultural news in recent years has dealt much with widespread movements, such as the land boom of 1919 and its consequences; cooperative marketing and other farm organizations; efforts toward national farm legislation; the Agricultural Adjustment Administration; the soil conservation programs. There has been widespread planting of pasture and winter cover crops. Corn Belt farmers have turned to the use of hybrid seeds, cut down their corn acreage and adopted such new crops as soybeans. Cotton acreage in the South has decreased and livestock has increased. Specialty crops have spread through the Intermountain states and along the Pacific Coast.

New varieties of grain have been developed by state experiment stations and the United States Department of Agriculture. Plant diseases and insect pests have been attacked on a wide front. Power machinery has reached every section of the country. Rural electrification has spread. Agricultural extension has gone into every area, and the teaching of vocational agriculture has been

set up in most rural high schools. Population has flowed toward cities when times were good and back again when the depression came on. Great mass movements of farm people have taken place, especially toward California and the Pacific Coast. Government programs, such as the Farm Security Administration and land use planning, have made big news.

Among the outstanding new events in the engineering field in recent years has been the construction of great dams, such as Shasta, Grand Coulee, and Norris. A number of gigantic bridges have been built. The nation has been crisscrossed with a network of paved highways, and new super-highways, such as the Merritt Highway in Connecticut and the Pennsylvania Turnpike, are now coming into the news. Skyscrapers in cities, new types of factories, housing for low income workers, and all kinds of defense program structures have made construction news.

The development of the automobile industry, motor truck transportation, airplane building and travel, motor buses, Diesel-electric engines, streamlined trains, operation of freight trains on passenger schedules, and the passing of electric interurbans—all these have made transportation news.

The field of engineering has also been concerned with air-conditioning, insulation, utilization of by-products, solvents, lacquers, plastics, essential oils, alloys, synthetic materials, high compression motors and photoelectric cells—to mention just a few more outstanding developments. The whole task of providing war materials and defense supplies has been largely an engineering task.

Coming within the scope of home economics have been the discovery of various vitamins in food, synthetic fabrics such as rayon and nylon, and new types of foods such as tenderized hams. Frozen foods, boneless meats, and power household equipment have made news.

Under the heading of scientific news would come many discoveries in fields of research, such as cyclotrons, cosmic rays, new drugs, such as the sulfa compounds, ultraviolet light uses.

*Technical news available to students:* Important technical news stories in the fields just reviewed are not beyond the possibilities of students in technical journalism courses, with limited time available to find

and write them. Fortunately, as explained in a previous chapter, a college campus offers adequate material.

In the assignments listed below is one to secure a list of ten tips for technical news stories. To illustrate what may be found we present here some of such tips secured by members of one class recently, given just as the students brought them in:

Research is being carried out on consumer preference for grade labeling on canned goods and vegetables by Department of Rural Economics.

Animal husbandry section of Experiment Station has been conducting an extensive experiment to determine the relative efficiency of crossbred and purebred steers in feedlot, using Hereford and Angus cattle.

Agricultural Engineering Department has been conducting tests for some time to determine rate of drying of grains in bins and cribs.

Home Economics nutrition staff is making plans for a study of the food intake of college men.

Study of social development of young child being made through observations at nursery school.

Experiments on grass silage and alfalfa hay for sheep.

Campus agricultural engineers devise new corn grader and sizer to facilitate grading of hybrid seed corn.

New cart dynamometer, only one of its kind in world, developed by graduate student in agricultural engineering, which measures both take-off and draw-bar power requirements simultaneously.

Extension entomologists are collecting scab-infested apple leaves in fall to use in predicting spraying dates next spring.

Extensive study of college girl's wardrobe to be made by clothing division of School of Home Economics.

Experiments this year confirm theory that there are varieties of hybrid corn resistant to aphids.

Control of aphids on brussels sprouts in early fall effected by new spray tested in university vegetable garden.

New type dairy herd improvement testing, on Wisconsin plan, known as owner-sampler, introduced into state.

An adult evening school in nutrition called "bride's course," being given by member of Home Economics staff.

Yearly summary of farm home account records completed by Home Economics Extension workers.

Photoelectric cell used to control light intensity in floriculture greenhouse.

Experiment in Agronomy Department being conducted in which an electron microscope which magnifies 100,000 times is used to test clay minerals which come from all over the world.

#### ASSIGNMENTS

1. Analyze the news content of a daily newspaper to determine which stories have general appeal and which have a class or group appeal. Measure in column inches the amount of each kind of news. (A basis for interesting comparisons will be secured if different members of a class use different newspapers for this assignment.)

2. Count and measure the agricultural, scientific, engineering, and home economics stories in a week's issues of a daily newspaper; in a weekly newspaper. Compare the totals with the totals for all news carried.

3. Compare the handling of market reports, crop reports, and weather news in a daily newspaper and a weekly farm journal. Write a 300-word analysis of your findings.

4. Prepare a list of 10 tips for technical spot news stories, material for which you could get and write up.

5. Take an exceptionally good news tip, involving matter of more than ordinary interest, and outline how you would develop a story about it for (a) a farm or technical or women's journal; (b) a county seat weekly; (c) a daily newspaper.

6. Prepare an outline report on the important news events in your major field, both locally and nation-wide or world-wide, within the past five years or so. Consult members of the faculty and others and literature as necessary, in getting these facts. Two or three students may work together in preparing this assignment. (Note: Oral reports before the class by students in various lines of work have proved interesting and valuable in a class taught by one of the authors of this text.)