CHAPTER 6

NEWS AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

IN a class in technical journalism which included persons enrolled in various technical and professional courses, an advanced student in ceramic engineering made a report on important news in that field. It might seem that such news would have no relation to the interests of the students of agriculture, home economics, pharmacy, and other subjects who were in that class, but it soon appeared that the opposite was true.

One item of ceramic news presented had to do with the development of a new type of milk bottle by glass manufacturers. This happening was also news to the dairy manufacturer who bottles milk, to the dairy farmer who retails milk in bottles, and to students who were preparing to enter these fields. It was also news to the home economics students majoring in foods, for a more sanitary container for milk is of concern to them.

In another similarly mixed class a pharmacy student brought in the story that because war had cut off foreign sources of certain drugs and herbs, the College of Pharmacy planned to investigate the possibility of growing drug plants in the United States through the establishment of an experimental garden on the University farm.

It developed that the Department of Horticulture was cooperating in the investigation. It appeared also that a major student in floriculture, a member of this journalism class, had been detailed to make a study of methods of growing sage commercially to replace the supply formerly brought from Europe. Sage is used in large quantities as flavoring in the manufacture of sausage, and also in cookery. So the shortage of this herb had news interest for the animal husbandry student majoring in meats and the home economics students majoring in foods, as well as for others along the line of the news story's development.

What no one in the class knew was that in a western intermountain state a well-known electric light and power company was actively promoting the experimental growing of sage and other herbs by farmers in its territory. The company sells current and electric equipment to farmers who need new cash crops. If sage could be grown profitably, the farmers would have more money to spend for power and equipment, and that was why the power company had a vital interest in the growing of sage.

These examples illustrate the fact that a piece of technical news is not likely to stand alone, by itself, in the particular field in which it happened, but is probably of concern in several other fields, and of interest to many different classes of readers.

News has many aspects: An item of news may be said to have a good many facets of interest, and each facet or aspect may be presented to a special group of readers with special interest in that aspect.

As the reporter puts it, he may write the story "to play up" either this angle or that, according to the publication in which it is to appear and the readers to whom it is to appeal. Certain details may be "played up" for one type of journal and "played down" for another. One aspect of the news may be amplified for the farmer, another aspect for the engineer, still another for the homemaker, and so on.

And that may be done with most happenings of consequence. They cannot be labeled for this or that group of readers only. They can be written with variations in emphasis on and selection of details and in approach to the reader. Important news in one place is likely to be of some importance in other places.

The weather an example: Take weather for a good example. Day in and day out weather has the most nearly universal news appeal of all the news in the world. It is not only of general interest, but of high importance in the technical, trade, and transportation fields.

Rain means that the college student wears a raincoat. The merchant displays waterproof garments and umbrellas. The taxicab business picks up. People who are caught in the rain send their clothes to the cleaner for pressing. The fair and the circus

may take out rain insurance. The same rain that may mean the failure of a church social to raise money for the preacher's salary may also ruin a Grange picnic, a political rally, or a department store sale. It may bring trouble to the state highway department in maintaining roads.

Excessive rains may bring news of floods, sometimes of nation-wide and world-wide interest. Or lack of rain may bring a drouth, such as the dry periods of 1931 and 1934 in the Great Plains. That drouth, with the help of winds, created the "Dust Bowl" and dust storms, compelled migration of farm population, selling of livestock, and abandonment of farms, and set in motion economic forces that are still potent.

An early fall frost in Iowa is big news. It may cause serious damage to the corn crop and bring an immediate upturn of prices on the Chicago grain exchange. Meat packers take note, for soft corn will likely change the feeding plans of livestock producers. Manufacturers of and dealers in farm implements and other goods bought by farmers take note, for sales may be reduced.

A frost in a vegetable-growing section may bring an end to the crop and its harvesting. A sharp jump in vegetable prices may result, and family food buying is likely to shift to other products. Canneries may shut down and discharge workers. To the florist the freeze may bring increased sales of cut flowers. Fog may disrupt traffic on land and sea, and railroads may get an increase in passenger business as motor travel by highway decreases.

Zero temperatures and blizzards are news of wide ramifications. The November blizzard of 1940 in Minnesota, Iowa, and other states caused death for many persons, killed much livestock, destroyed hundreds of thousands of turkeys which were ready for Thanksgiving markets, stopped all traffic in country and city. The storm killed fruit trees in a wide area, stopped the movement of fluid milk into St. Paul and Minneapolis. It threw a tremendous burden on state highway organizations and city street maintenance crews.

These happenings were news not merely for newspapers, but also for many trade and technical publications.

The following story which appeared about twelve days after the

blizzard, in "The Florists Exchange," published in New York City, illustrates how this specialized journal dealt with the news:

TWIN CITIES' SNOWSTORM PARALYZES BUSINESS

Nov. 16—The Twin Cities are gradually digging out of one of the most severe snow storms ever experienced. Nov. 11 and 12, all street cars were stopped and most stores were closed. All kind of traffic was halted. On Wednesday some street car service was resumed so that stores able to get their employees to work were able to carry on. Some damage was done to greenhouses, but with ample warning given, most houses were specially propped up to meet the onslaught.

Business, of course, has been at a standstill. All mums will be scarce for Thanksgiving, and roses decidedly tight. Mums are selling at $1 to $2.50 per dozen. Carnations are plentiful at 3 to 4 cents; glads now arriving make 6 cents. Orchids and gardenias are quiet. Finch roses make 3 to 4 cents; California violets, $1.50 to $2.50 per dozen bunches. Heather sells at 60 cents to $1 a bunch.

The most severe damage experienced was by E. C. Brown, Minneapolis, who had twenty feet of one greenhouse cave in. Albert Farmer's smoke stack blew down, fortunately without breaking any glass.

Holm & Olson experienced no damage, but had to use props. Tuesday morning some of the employees had to walk as much as five miles to get to work. The firm had two big funerals that day, and it was necessary to get a $500 blanket at 11 a. m. besides many other pieces. They were able to deliver all orders, and Holm & Olson feel very proud of their employees' loyalty.

Hans Rosacker Co. reported snow had twisted one of the purlines in one house but it was propped up safely. They were up all night Monday. On Tuesday no employees were able to get to the store and no deliveries were made. They were, however, able to take care of a large wedding on Wednesday.

This is only a portion of the story, which continued at length to give similar details about other establishments in the blizzard area.

Rural electrification's scope: The advance of rural electrification was attended by a news sequence of high importance. It began soon after the discovery of a satisfactory method of transmitting high voltages by wire over long distances. The "high lines" brought current to smaller towns and to the farms. That fact concerned engineers and experiment stations. When electric power was made available to the farm and farm home, it brought the need for wiring and equipment and prompted application of electricity to farm tasks in a new way. It meant electric lighting in the home, electric ranges, washing machines, mixers, and a long list of other devices which the farm home had been denied. This development opened great new opportunities for engineers and designers, architects, contractors and builders, manufacturers,

and distributors. At the same time, it gave rise to much additional news.

Fashion news ramifications: News of fashions is of great interest to women. It appears in the daily newspapers, in the monthly women's magazines, and elsewhere. Here such matters as length of coats, long skirts for party gowns, rayon dresses, nylon hose, feathers on hats, or costume jewelry are fully presented. What women will buy and wear is vital news also to the retail merchant, the wholesaler, and the manufacturer. But fashions often have far wider interest than that. Consider the length of women's skirts, for example. The following news story, sent out some time ago by the United Press, will illustrate some of the ramifications of fashion news:

SHORT SKIRTS FOUND TOUGH ON FARMERS

Washington, D. C. (U.P.)—Uncle Sam —not Confucius—say "Women's short skirts add to farmer's troubles."

That, explains the Census Bureau, is because it takes less cotton to make a short skirt than a long one. It would take a million bales of cotton to cover women's legs from the knees to the ankles. So, the surplus of cotton goes up and down with the hem of women's skirts. The city man's gain is the farmer's loss.

Uncle Sam—in a pamphlet issued by the Census Bureau—also say "fat woman make farmer happy, thin woman make him sad." Every time a fat woman diets off a pound she takes money out of farmers' pockets.

"Dieting has hit hard some of the important farm crops," says the bureau.

Lament Passing of Corn Meal

The bureau advises its public speakers to lament the passing of "good old corn meal mush and corn bread" and to view with alarm the sad plight of "the good old buckwheat cake" that used to grace the breakfast table.

Back in the gay eighties, when bustles were in fashion, the average consumption of corn meal was 117 pounds per capita. Fifty years later it was down to 21 pounds. Buckwheat has suffered a similar fate.

The length of women's skirts not only has an influence upon the cotton market but affects the wool market in the same way. Also, when America began to ride in closed autos and live in houses heated with hot air or steam, with doors and windows weather-stripped and walls and roof insulated, people began wearing thinner clothing in winter. Less wool is needed to make them.

Thus agriculture, engineering, and styles are involved. How far afield these influences spread is illustrated by the following story which appeared some time ago in the *Chicago Daily Drovers' Journal:*

STEAM HEATING AFFECTS AUSTRALIAN WOOL SALES

Melbourne, Australia—The perfected systems of central heating in the United States and their extension to England are having a serious effect on the sale of Australian wool, according to Prof. L. M. Giblin of Melbourne university.

Inhabitants of both countries, he said, are counting more and more on central heating to keep themselves warm instead of on Australian wool, as formerly.

There is a good reason why *Women's Wear*, a daily newspaper read by department store buyers, wholesalers, and manufacturers, publishes farm news dealing with cotton, wool, and flax. Wool and sheep are good news in Boston newspapers because that city is a great wool market. Any farm news is important in Hartford, Connecticut papers, because life insurance companies located here have large investments in farm mortgages. A florist trade paper carries news of women's styles because these have their effect upon corsages and other floral adornment women buy from florists.

Interrelation of other news: The building of a great structure, such as the Golden Gate Bridge, illustrates how news in the field of engineering also creates news in many directions. The construction of the bridge itself furnished a long chain of technical news stories which involved design, steel and other materials, painting, floor surface, approaches, and streets and highways to direct traffic flow to and from the bridge when completed. There was news concerning tolls, policing, parking space near ends for walkers across the bridge, and electricity which gave a shock to the toll-takers when their hands touched the hand of a car driver.

Such a bridge changed the traffic flow northward from San Francisco. It shifted industries and built up new ones, particularly roadside industries to the north. It had a wide effect on tourist traffic and on hotels, restaurants, and motor courts. It led to housing changes and building of new homes. Farmers north of San Francisco were able to get their produce into the city markets much more readily. In time, the bridge will have wide effects on schools, churches, and social life of communities.

The architectural engineer reads about real estate transactions for tips that may mean new work. The real estate man reads architectural and building news for word of the building of a new factory which may mean increased values and sale of houses and lots. The same news to a contractor means a possible chance to

bid on the construction. The house builder sees new homes to be built. To an engineer it may mean new streets, new traffic problems, and new sewage lines to be designed and constructed.

A graduate in home economics who goes to work on the staff of a woman's magazine or the women's department of an agricultural publication or a daily newspaper soon discovers the ramifications of news in the field of women's interests. She may have to visit the Furniture Mart in Chicago, a style show in New York City, or a rural electrification conference. She will find that her news concerns clothing manufacturers, equipment manufacturers, advertising agencies. She will discover that there is much to curtains, soap, paint, varnishes, cleaning fluids, drugs, disinfectants, packaged meats, and cheese besides their use in the home.

This graduate will soon discern that her range of activities goes far beyond the obvious interests of women in styles, food, clothing, furnishings, equipment, and the like, and extends into business, engineering, industry, and industrial chemistry.

Even news in one particular field frequently has ramifications and angles elsewhere in the same field as when disease-resistant head lettuce in California practically wiped out lettuce growing in Florida. A large increase in the growing of sweet yams in Louisiana which the market liked brought a sharp decrease in sweet potato acreage in Delaware. The tremendous increase in growing of forage and grass seed crops in Oregon in recent years is a result of government soil conservation programs in the South and sowing of winter cover crops over millions of acres.

The foregoing is not an analysis of the subject. It would take a whole book to do that adequately. But it is hoped that it will suggest to the student many things and stimulate his or her imagination.

For the student who wishes to pursue this further, a reading of *The Next Hundred Years*, by C. C. Furnas, associate professor of Chemical Engineering, Yale University, will be of interest.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Clip a news story of technical content from a daily newspaper or from a farm paper or trade publication. Write out a list of the various classes of people who would be directly interested in this news as a whole or in some part.

2. Write a careful report, either in discussion or outline form, of the ramifications involved in some rather recent or current technical news. Some possibilities for this would be rubber tires for farm machinery, quick-freezing of fruits and vegetables, sale of frozen fillets of fish (find out what happens to the rest of the fish), federal numbered highways, radio quiz programs, corn pickers, indirect lighting in homes, insulin, sulfanilimide, substitutes for arsenate of lead, standardized light bulb sizes, small combines, small tractors, home insulation, oil furnaces, sliced bread, adding vitamins to foods, homogenized milk, photoelectric cells, ultraviolet light, continuous freeze ice cream, state highway police, rayon or nylon, All-America seed trials, prefabricated houses, glass fiber, Grand Coulee Dam, TVA, direct marketing of livestock, cutting of cotton acreage by AAA, planting tung oil trees, mechanical sugar cane cutter, cotton in California, gravel culture in greenhouses, hybrid corn, Vitamin B, cod-liver oil, grass silage, government corn loans, paper milk bottles. Many angles of the Second World War and National Defense could be used, as steel, aluminum, Roquefort-type cheese vegetable seeds, Dutch bulbs, or silk.