

CHAPTER 7
THE SOURCES OF NEWS

NEWIS is such eerie, uncertain stuff, likely to spring up here, there, anywhere, at any time, expectedly or unexpectedly—how do news writers and newspapers and magazines manage to gather it as completely as they do? How do they make contact with the events of the world, how are their staffs able to find out what is going on, get in touch with the people concerned, and collect the information for publication while it is still fresh? What and where, in other words, are the sources of news?

To the uninitiate there is always more or less of mystery about the process, and it isn't strange that there should be. Will you not try to conceive for a moment the intense activity which goes on in any community during a given period of time, say an hour. Imagine the innumerable words that are spoken, the goings and comings, the emotions given vent to, the decisions reached, the enterprises set under way, the uncountable expressions of human energy. All of these are happenings, although only a small fraction of them is news. If it were necessary for the reporter or editor to acquaint himself with all of these activities in order to be able to sort out those of significance and news value, he would have an impossible task. The uninitiate sees only this complexity, and that is why there is for him a degree of mystery about the gathering and publishing of news. Yet there is really nothing mysterious about it but merely thoroughgoing system, intelligent understanding, industry, and perseverance. Fortunately, too, the significant activities of community, state, nation, and world rise to the surface of the welter and make themselves known through various machineries of society.

News centers: Corn is being bought and sold in nearly every community in the country, but it isn't necessary, in order to print the news of the corn market, for a newspaper to survey the selling

and buying operations of the entire country. This task is done by machinery erected for the purpose, the grain exchanges and boards of trade, and all the newspaper has to do is to get in touch with the *news center* where this information is accumulated and made available. It may do this directly or through its press association.

Many varied activities of a public or quasi-public nature are always under way in every county, so many and so varied that no one individual, without assisting agencies, could hope to gather the news of all of them. But in very large part these activities originate in or find their way to the county seat and its courthouse and public offices. The news gatherer need merely make contact with that center to tap this important supply of news, much of which will have an agricultural bearing. Sometime or other in the year a great many citizens of the county make their way to the courthouse to transact business, and often they leave the kernels of news stories of value with the courthouse attaches, with whom the reporter makes regular contact.

So with the great majority of the significant activities which the newspaper or magazine is called upon to report, whether in the small local field or in the world field. News concerning such activities has almost a canny way of accumulating in *news centers*. These centers may be individuals as well as organizations. They are sources of "unexpected" news as well as "expected" news—in fact, these centers furnish the best insurance that "unexpected," spontaneous news will be secured.

It must not be assumed from this discussion that the tendency of much of the news to accumulate in centers relieves the reporter of the necessity of initiative and creative effort. He must always be on the lookout for tips; he must even conceive and develop stories, especially of the experience and information type. But even then he will usually make his way to the news centers to get much of the material with which to construct his story.

What, from the point of view of technical news, are the chief news sources and centers? No list can, of course, hope to be complete, because of the variety of local conditions; much less can one hope to enumerate all the stories that may be secured at each

source. But the list which follows will suggest some important news sources and a few typical stories which may be secured there.

News from individuals: Certain persons in any community, small or large, because of their positions, political, financial, or social, and their daily activities, are inevitably in touch with important developments. Among these are:

Organization officers: Information, especially advance and inside information, about organization activities, meetings, policies, resolutions, and political and legislative programs. This applies to any field but is especially important in agricultural news. Farm business organization officers and managers are especially good sources of news. So, too, are officers of a county AAA organization.

Extension workers: County agricultural agents supply news covering the whole range of agricultural activities in their county and frequently of other fields as well. Home demonstration agents know of the organized and individual activities of women. State extension workers in agriculture, home economics, and industrial arts are in daily contact with matters and activities in their particular fields which make news.

Field or service workers: Agricultural and home economics supervisors for the Farm Security Administration, representatives of Federal Farm Loan banks, agricultural agents of railroads, field men for such rural industries as dairy manufacturing or sugar beet factories, home service workers for public utility companies, and rural electrification fieldmen for a power company are individuals who are valuable sources of news.

Public officials: Many transactions affecting agricultural, engineering, business, and home interests must pass through their hands, and they have many contacts. They also can supply statistics, laws, regulations, and other information. The county engineer has news of engineering projects in a county. The auditor knows of county supervisor activities. Health officers, livestock regulatory men, inspectors, and others know what is going on. This extends from local and county up to state and national officials.

Teachers: The college teacher often has knowledge of new developments in technical matters, but a research worker or extension worker may be a more valuable source. Local public school teachers have contact with both school and civic matters. The vocational teachers of agriculture and home economics are especially good sources of local news in their fields.

Research workers: These are the best sources of information on new developments of a technical nature. Included are not only workers in agriculture, home economics, and engineering at state institutions, but workers in the United States Department of Agriculture and all other government research in any line. Workers in privately endowed institutes and foundations and in the experimental and research laboratories of industrial firms are excellent news sources.

Business, industry, and professions: Bankers, business men, officers or managers of business or industrial firms, physicians, lawyers, engineers in charge of construction jobs, department managers and buyers in stores, managers of markets and auctions, veterinarians, and architects are further examples of individuals who are in constant contact with news.

Prominent people: In every community there are prominent farmers, outstanding women, leaders in various activities, and the like who can often furnish many tips for news.

Cooperators: The active news gatherer will find sooner or later some man or woman in his field who has an extraordinary faculty for knowing what is going on in that field. He may or may not be named in the foregoing list of persons, but seemingly news inevitably finds its way to him long before it becomes general property. Every experienced reporter finds such a man and will testify to the value of his cooperation, usually given without any motive except possibly to secure the satisfaction there may be in knowing that he is in a way responsible for the publication of big news.

News of organized activities: Important community affairs are often the work of established organizations. That has become increasingly true with the development of organizations to do almost everything imaginable under the sun. Again any list can

be only suggestive, but if the reporter will supplement the following list and keep in touch with the organizations named, he will tap important sources of news:

Farm organizations: The Farm Bureau, Grange, Farmers' Union, breed associations, rural social organizations, conference groups—these are some of the organizations which help to make agricultural news through their activities. Practically every kind of agricultural news will find its way into the business of these organizations or into the informal talk of their meetings.

Women's organizations and clubs: These are as fruitful of news in the homemaker's field as the men's organizations in theirs. Garden clubs, Parent-Teachers' associations, home demonstration groups, and other types belong here.

Engineering societies: Each field of engineering has its national society, many of them with subordinate state branches.

Scientific societies: As with engineering, each of the sciences has a national organization. Each state, also, has a number of scientific organizations.

Schools: The public schools have increasingly become centers of community life and spirit; that is especially true of the consolidated schools and those having vocational agriculture and home economics departments. The boys and girls in the agricultural and home economics classes, in club work and projects, are alert, and there is almost universal community interest in what they do.

Churches: Often a rural church sees its responsibility and opportunity in the rural field and lives up to it, and then it becomes a profitable center of news.

Nonagricultural groups: Chambers of commerce, various civic organizations, community center activities, rural Y. M. C. A.'s, and other youth groups frequently maintain a strong cooperative relationship with agricultural and home life.

Farmer business organizations: The development of cooperative marketing associations has opened up an entirely new field of news.

News of state-wide interest: News of state-wide interest is quite likely to find its way into certain centers, such as the state capital, the city where the state agricultural college is located, and

the headquarters cities of various organizations. The more important state centers of technical news are:

State agricultural organization headquarters: A great variety of important information passes through these offices, both from over the state and from all parts of the country. They are all gathering statistics, miscellaneous data, facts about legislative matters, and farming experiences; through them it is possible to get a state-wide view. This also applies to state AAA offices.

State experiment stations: Invaluable centers for technical information.

State colleges of agriculture: Literally, most of the things of general interest in agriculture either originate here or center here.

State department of agriculture: Such a department is charged with the gathering of much agricultural data, with enforcement of regulatory measures, with the conduct of many promotional enterprises.

Offices of state government: From the governor's office on down, the state government headquarters are in considerable measure dealing with matters that concern agriculture, engineering, and industry.

State highway commission, state railroad commission, state architect's office, state industrial commission, and state tax commission are other examples.

State department of education: The state director of vocational education is usually connected with this department, and his office is a center of valuable news on vocational education.

State legislative reference bureau.

Legislative bodies: In an agricultural state a very large proportion of proposed legislation affects the farm. Much legislation is engineering news.

Shows, fairs, expositions, short courses of state-wide interest, and farmer's institutes.

Banking, financial, commercial, and trade headquarters: News of banking and finance, general agricultural conditions, and similar information of agricultural news value are certain to center in these offices and in the offices of bank examiners, officials of state banking organizations, boards of trade, and the like.

State weather and crop bureaus: The agents of these bureaus touch practically every rural community of the state, and what they gather in the way of statistical and other information is brought together in the state headquarters. Every farm journal issue is quite certain to carry more or less news from this source.

News of national and international affairs: Just as the community and the state have their organizations and leaders, who are the chief sources of community and state news, so in national and international affairs technical news develops in well-defined places:

United States Department of Agriculture: This includes the bureau of home economics and is the center of so great a wealth of news that it cannot be enumerated.

Weather bureau.

National and international farm and women's organizations: Such as the National Grange, American Farm Bureau Federation, Federated Women's Clubs, and so on.

Promotional activities: Business and industrial groups maintain research, publicity, and promotional bureaus, associations or foundations which supply technical news, often of high value.

National farm business organizations.

Market and financial news from the great boards of trade and exchanges, national and international banking houses, the United States Department of Agriculture.

Legislative news from national legislative bodies and heads of government departments.

Transportation, from the Interstate Commerce Commission and railroad and ship company officials.

Commerce and trade, from the Department of Commerce, Department of Interior, and national and international trade bodies.

Shows, fairs, and expositions.

Education, from the federal office of education, educational foundations.

Surveying the news field: If the news gatherer will make a careful survey or analysis of his field, he will find it very helpful. In such a survey he should list systematically every news source

and the kinds of news or information he may expect to get from it, the person who should be called on, the meetings or conferences regularly held in connection with it, and such other facts as are likely to prove helpful to him. If he makes it of permanent record, to be added to or modified as need be, from time to time, it becomes a guide to systematic, thorough news gathering. Experienced news editors and reporters may record these facts in their memories, but many of them compile a complete black and white record for filing and use.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read through one copy of a weekly newspaper, a daily, and a farm or women's or scientific magazine. Write across the face of each news story what you think was the source of the material contained in the story.

2. Imagine that you have just been appointed farm news or women's editor of your home-town paper. List the centers of agricultural or women's news which you would plan to cover. Suggest one or more stories that you think you might get at this time from each of these news centers.

3. Imagine that you are a reporter on your local daily newspaper, with the job of covering local engineering, industrial, and business news. List the important places and people you would call on regularly to secure this news.

4. List all the important sources of technical news in your own major field to be found in your state, being specific as to departments, organizations, and names.

5. Analyze your own campus as a source of news for a state farm paper, being specific as to names, places, and departments. Or make such an analysis for a trade paper in some other field—as engineering, home economics.

6. List ten faculty men and women on your campus or in your college or division who, because of their prominence, are good news sources.

7. Find out where the outstanding or predominant market for five of the following is located: livestock, range steers, kosher beef, wheat, sudan grass seed, cotton, cottonseed cake, soybeans, soybean oil meal, wool, mohair, naval stores, fish oil meal, anthracite coal, cheddar cheese, butter, alfalfa hay, tobacco (any type), bent grass seed (United States grown), red clover seed, cabbage seed, Iceberg type lettuce, Idaho potatoes, sunflower seed, flour, peanuts, Portland cement, paving bricks, road oils, wire nails, steel rails, clay drain tile, long leaf yellow pine, plywood, 40% ammonia gelatin, white lead, sulfate of copper, porcelain bushings, electrolytic copper, aluminum ingots, sulfur, fuller's earth, stainless steel kitchenware, linoleum, coffee, tea, rock wool insulation, rosebushes, chrysanthemums (cut flowers), dusting sulfur, *Asparagus plumosus*.

8. Find out by interviewing faculty members where you could secure the most recent news developments in connection with one of the following: Acala cotton, well irrigation, bucket-line dredging for gold, farm home zero cold storage, new uses for glass wool, growth-promoting substances, producing certified alfalfa seed, sugar beet seed, insulation for electric refrigerators, preparing hybrid seed corn for marketing, where and how California gets its dairy cattle, preventing irrigation channel waste, relation between power farming and size of farms, direct marketing of hogs, hardy garden chrysanthemums, aluminum production, earth-cement roads, home garden tomato varieties, spinach production in winter, vitamins in pork. (These are suggestive only. The instructor may see fit to prepare his own list, suited to members of the class and to sources of special interest in a state or region.)