CHAPTER 8

ORGANIZATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

IT MUST be obvious to one who has gone into the question of news sources that news gathering by newspapers, farm journals, magazines of other types, news and press agencies, and syndicates is a highly organized business. Although any one issue of a journal may depend quite largely for its freshness and compelling interest upon what happens spontaneously in the world in time for that particular issue, it is never the mere creature of circumstance; it has not, Topsy-like, "just growed." It has been made, carefully, thoroughly. Nothing is left to chance. Every possible source of news, expected and unexpected, near and far, is known to the editors; regularly, from day to day or week to week, the paper's news-gathering forces go out to every source and gather and bring in to the editor's desk, or send in by mail, telegraph, telephone, cable, or radio, the great harvest of material, which is there sifted and sorted for publication. As a result the world's intelligence can be periodically presented to the reader for the price of a few pennies.

It is of course essential that anyone who expects to make a staff connection with some newspaper or other publication should know how this news-gathering machine functions. But it is equally important that anyone who expects to contribute to a publication should understand its workings.

The manner in which individual magazines and newspapers tap the sources of news depends upon the scope and character of the publication and the organization of its staff. Since we are dealing here with three general groups of publications, the farm, women's, and technical magazines, the daily newspapers and the weekly newspapers, we shall discuss each in turn, briefly, and see how each connects with its news sources.

The magazine: Between the covers of a typical magazine one finds the following kinds of material:

Editorials
News articles
Short informational and experience articles
Feature articles
Fiction and entertainment features
Correspondence
Illustrations
Advertisements

The material of these sorts must be secured in an organized, reliable way if the journal is to cover the important aspects of its field. We are not here concerned with advertisements, and for the other types of material than news articles a few words of explanation will suffice.

The reading material is gathered by the editorial department, which is presided over by an editor, who has general supervision of the journal's policies and contents, does more or less writing of editorials, occasional news stories and feature articles, and makes decision on more or less of the material prepared by other writers for his publication. The publisher sometimes also carries the title of editor, but even then a sub-editor is likely to be in active charge of the editorial content.

The editor's staff, small as compared with that of a daily newspaper, consists of a variable number of associate and assistant editors. These staff members are really reporters, who cover the news field of the publication, although some of them are also likely to be copy readers and have charge of the makeup of the magazine. Usually the different members of the staff are specialists in particular subjects.

This staff is supplemented by correspondents, contributors, and free lance writers, well distributed throughout the field of the journal, who are paid for such material as is accepted by the editor.

With this organization of staff members, correspondents, and contributors, the journal "covers" the various news sources in its field and combs them thoroughly. Staff members look after the

various centers which constitute their "runs" and also special assignments, which are given them by the editor, who keeps a record of meetings, conferences, and many other prospective events as well as of news and feature article tips and suggestions. To cover distant events or assignments a staff member may be sent out or some nearby correspondent or free lance writer may be asked to write the story and send it to the magazine.

The editorials, in which the policies of the journal and the opinions of the editor and publisher are presented, are usually written by the editor or his associates. Infrequently they may be bought from men or women who are not on the staff.

Much of the correspondence and contributed material comes from the readers of the publication, from college and experiment station workers, and from others who are in position to write about worthwhile subjects. A considerable amount of feature material, including short informational and experience articles, news stories off the routine paths, and photographs, is bought from free lance writers, men and women who make a business of writing articles for sale wherever they can find a market for them.

Through many channels, "free stuff" comes to the journal. Government departments, experiment stations and agricultural colleges, farm organizations, women's organizations, industries, all have their publicity or information services which send to farm and other journals free material concerning their activities. Much of it is disinterested and of corresponding value to the journal. The editor, of course, exercises his liberty in using or rejecting this material. Many times he will not publish it but use its tips for getting stories through his own staff writers or contributors.

When departments are maintained, such as junior club or home departments, a staff member is usually placed in charge, and the material for the department is written in part by that editor and in part by contributors and correspondents. Sometimes departments are conducted by part-time editors, who do their work in their homes, and sometimes such departments as that dealing with markets are syndicated.

The daily newspaper: Serving as it does all the people in its field, and that field often extensive, a daily newspaper must fill

its columns with reading matter that has a wide appeal; in some way, every day, it must interest every individual reader. Some papers make a special appeal to a class of readers, such as farmers, but even then they do not lose sight of the importance of making this farm news department of interest to others than farmers.

Without going into great detail, it may be said that the daily newspaper is made up of the following types of material:

Editorials: Reflecting in discussion and interpretation the views and policies of the editor or publisher, and written by the editor and his associate editorial writers.

Editorial miscellany and editorial correspondence: Clipped material from the editorial utterances of other newspapers and correspondence from all kinds of people, setting forth their views upon nearly everything that goes on in the world.

World news: Received by wire, radio, or mail through worldwide news-gathering agencies, which in turn "cover" every nook and corner of the globe.

National news: Received by wire and mail from news agencies and special correspondents in important centers, such as the national capital; it gives a bird's-eye view of the bigger things that happen day by day in the country at large.

State or sectional news: Received by wire, telephone, and mail, secured chiefly from special correspondents (or reporters) in every important town within the circulation territory of the newspaper. In the case of large news developments, staff men are sent out to "cover" them.

City or local news: Dealing with the endless variety of things that happen daily, expectedly and unexpectedly, wherever population is piled up in city masses. This is garnered by the newspaper's own staff, with the frequent and considerable help given by persons who have some interest in seeing news in print. In large centers, city press associations are maintained cooperatively or otherwise to cover routine news and to provide tips.

Sports news: Secured by special staff writers, correspondents, and news agencies, covering the entire field of sports, local, national, and international. Syndicated material is also used.

Society news: Dealing with activities of "society" as it may be defined by the particular newspaper and written by the society editor and contributors.

Financial, commercial, and market news: Gathered locally in such part as the extent of local business and market conditions dictates, but largely through special news agencies and received by wire or mail from the greater business centers.

Special department news: This varies widely in newspapers. Most newspapers now have special women's departments with one or more reporters, or else someone is employed on a part-time basis for the work. Food news is usually featured in Friday papers. Shopping news is often carried as a department. Farm departments are now carried in many daily papers. In recent years, school and church news has been featured in departments. Likewise, flower gardening is now a department in many papers. Newspapers frequently have special departments devoted to oil, mining, shipping, railroads, lumbering, commercial fishing, automobiles, real estate, or other business or activity important in its circulation field. Other frequent departments deal with field and stream, hunting and fishing, amateur photography, real estate, radio, stage, motion pictures, travel, and hobbies. Much of this is gathered by the paper's own staff, but department material is sometimes bought from correspondents, agencies, and syndicates. Other publications may give special attention to some class of news but use it as general news, rather than in a special department.

Features for entertainment or instruction: Provided for the most part by special agencies and syndicates and including comic strips, cartoons, feature photograph pages, bedtime stories, fiction, and the like. The use of these features has increased greatly in recent years.

It is obvious that this wide range of material, reflecting what the world of the newspaper is doing, is not brought together by mere chance methods, but only by thorough news-gathering organization, covering all news sources and centers within the publication's field. At the writing end of every news story is a reporter

who has done his work more or less fully under the direction of one of the news editors of the newspaper or its agencies. In part the nature and scope of this organization have been suggested in the brief survey of newspaper content, but it will be both interesting and profitable to the man or woman who hopes to do something in the way of writing for newspapers, to know in more detail how one of the largest departments, the city news department, is organized.

At the head of the city news-gathering organization is an editor, usually known as the city editor. With him are associated copy readers, who edit and write heads for the news copy, and a staff of reporters and photographers. Special departments, such as sports, may or may not be under the city editor's jurisdiction.

The reportorial staff is organized first to cover the definite news centers of the city and then to provide assignment men who handle largely out-of-the-ordinary and emergency news-gathering tasks.

The principal news centers are grouped in "beats" or "runs," and one reporter is assigned to cover each run regularly and be responsible for the news that develops there. On occasion assignment reporters may assist with a run. Such news centers are the police station, courts, county courthouse, federal buildings, state capitol, hotels, clubs, important business and banking offices, railroad headquarters, churches, schools, municipal buildings or "city hall," hospitals, public libraries, colleges and universities, political headquarters, and politicians. The reporter who is assigned to a beat spends most of his time on it, gathering news, making news contacts with men who are likely to know when news is to "break," and renewing old contacts. He may come in to the city room to write his news, as he usually does on a morning newspaper, or he may write it in some convenient place out on his beat and send it in or telephone it in to be written by other reporters (rewrite men) in the city room, if time or distance makes that necessary, as it often does in the case of afternoon newspapers in larger cities.

That considerable proportion of the day's news which does not develop on some reporter's beat or run is usually handled by the assignment men. A train wreck, an extraordinary accident, the

visit of some distinguished man—these events are assigned to one of these men by the city editor. Besides, the assignment men secure interviews, report speeches, cover special meetings and conventions, help out other reporters on big stories, secure feature stories, and do whatever other jobs the city editor may plan for them.

The city editor keeps on his desk a date or "future" book, in which he sets down, whenever he hears of it, a tip as to an event which is to transpire. Dates of coming conventions, meetings of the legislature or city council, opening of the school year, beginning of the baseball or football season, the farmers' short course at the agricultural college, wedding of a prominent citizen or son or daughter of a prominent family, an interesting or important case in court, when annual or special reports of public officials or investigation committees are due, the coming of a famous lecturer or musician—all are listed in the future book. It includes, besides, clippings from other papers that suggest stories, tips from reporters, ideas for feature stories.

At the beginning of each day's work, he notes down on the day's assignment sheet, or on special assignment slips for the individual reporters, any of these tips which he wants investigated for stories.

Another important man on a newspaper is the "state" editor as he is usually called. This is the editor who directs the work of out-of-town correspondents in the state or, more accurately, within the circulation range of the newspaper. These correspondents are for the most part men or women who send in news on a part-time basis while holding some other job.

In many cases, this correspondent is someone on the staff of a smaller local daily or weekly newspaper. He gathers news for his own publication. Often the same story can be wired, phoned, or mailed in to the larger city daily. He frequently queries the state editor to ask if some story is wanted.

The state editor and his local correspondents are of particular importance in the handling of agricultural and technical or industrial news. If good farm news of value to readers, which rises above the commonplace, is secured, it takes more than ordinary skill in gathering and writing it. The same applies to any type

of news which has a technical aspect. It is also important for a newspaper which circulates over a widespread territory in more sparsely populated sections of the country.

A good example of how such news is gathered and used is the *Salt Lake Tribune* of Salt Lake City. This newspaper has a circulation that covers Utah, southern Idaho, Nevada, and western Colorado. It has what it designates its Tribune Intermountain Service. Through this service, it covers the leading news events in agriculture, mining, industry, and similar matters throughout its circulation field. Other dailies which carry news from a wide circulation territory are *Dallas News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Denver Post*, *Portland Oregonian*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Kansas City Star*, *Des Moines Register*, and *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*.

News sources for the weekly newspaper: The news sources in the country weekly field are roughly those of the city field in miniature. The community has its news centers just as the city has. The members of the staff of the weekly paper, whether they number one or three or four, work in much the same way as the staff of the city paper. They are fewer in number, of course, and do a greater variety of tasks than the members of the city staff, and they need the "volunteer" helpers who offer their services in every community.

Editors of country weeklies depend upon local correspondents who live in the various communities within the circulation field of the publication. These correspondents are the reporters of the happenings in their locality. The wise editor trains these reporters to write good news copy and to recognize news as it happens.

The news-gathering agencies: Every daily newspaper of any consequence publishes regularly stories from distant sources. Stories of a flood in China, of a great drouth and famine in India, of a North Pole expedition, of a strike in London, of legislative action in Washington, or of a kidnaping mystery in California, will appear with as much certainty in even the smallest daily as the story of the automobile accident on the streets of the paper's own city.

That remarkable gathering of news in remote places, half the world away, and its transmission by messengers, by telegraph, telephone, cable, or radio, would not be possible except for such

news-gathering agencies as the Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service in this country. Europe and other parts of the world are served by other agencies. In recent years, however, war and censorship have disrupted much or almost all of the work of these foreign news agencies, and their place has has been taken to a large extent by official government or military daily announcements.

Some of these news-gathering services in the United States were originally established by newspapers cooperatively; others are private enterprises. By gathering news for a great number of newspapers and thus dividing the cost among them according to the magnitude of their businesses, the expense is not prohibitive to even the smallest. The kind and quantity of news service are also graded to meet varying demands.

These agencies have correspondents or special representatives in every important news center of the world, and in these centers they have the cooperation of member or customer newspapers. They cover the news just as systematically as the city staff covers its field. Literally no event of world interest can happen anywhere that it is not promptly put on the wires.

These agencies are giving increased attention to agricultural and scientific news, and are beginning to carry on their staffs special writers to handle these subjects.

Syndicates: Syndicates, in newspaper parlance, are enterprises, either cooperative or private, organized for the purpose of supplying to newspapers in noncompetitive fields such material as cartoons, comic strips, photographs, fiction and feature articles, prepared by highly paid artists and writers, illustrations secured at heavy expense, and the like. Very few newspapers could buy this material if they did not cooperate with other newspapers in securing it and dividing the cost. Many free lance writers in such special fields as agriculture, home economics, and science find in the syndicate a market for their wares.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Go through four issues of a magazine, one each for winter, spring, summer, and fall, of the current year and measure in column inches the amount of space

devoted respectively to editorials, news, feature articles, fiction, correspondence, illustrations, and advertisements. Note and classify under miscellaneous any material which does not fall under one or another of these classes.

2. Make a similar study of corresponding issues of the same magazine for a period of twenty years back, compare results with the present analysis and discover what changes in content have taken place in the twenty-year interval.

3. Choose, for purposes of this exercise, a magazine with which you are familiar, and list, taking into consideration the time of the year and the characteristics of the publication's readers, the news sources which you think the magazine should cover.

4. List all of the news stories on the front pages of a week's issues of a daily newspaper. Describe for each of these stories the reader groups which you think would be primarily interested in the stories. Compare your results.

5. Examine one issue of a daily newspaper and analyse the straight news stories, including department news, and determine how many were written by local reporters, how many came from press associations, how many from out-of-town state correspondents, and from other sources.

6. Examine one issue of a farm paper, a trade paper, or a technical journal, and find out, as far as you can, how much of the material was written by the staff, how much by regular correspondents, and how much by other contributors.

(*Note:* Whenever possible, a class in journalism should be considered as the staff of a local paper. Members of the class should be assigned to beats on the campus or in the community or made responsible for preparation of copy for a department. This can often be done in cooperation with a campus newspaper or student magazine. Assignments from such beats should be required at regular intervals throughout the course. For a large class, or where there are several sections, competing staffs might be organized. Students can sometimes secure work as campus correspondents for out-of-town papers. Students sometimes can arrange with a home-town paper to prepare a weekly department of news from the campus or college town.)