

CHAPTER 29

PRINTED SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The particular thing to which one must surrender is fact.—Woodrow Wilson.

ANYONE who is ambitious to write more than an occasional short experience or interview article will find it of great value to collect and file newspaper and magazine clippings, pamphlets and bulletins, and references to publications that should not be mutilated by clipping.

This material forms the basis of the morgue, which every aspiring feature writer should have. Morgue, as a newspaper or magazine writer uses it, is the colloquial term for a reference library made up largely of clippings, photographs, and pamphlets, as distinct from a library proper of printed and bound volumes.

Along with clippings should be filed away pamphlets, bulletins, books of current statistics, some general books, and some standard books of reference to form the complete library of the writer. No matter how few these are at the beginning, they should be classified in some logical order. While the morgue is still small, cheap manila folders are a convenient method of filing, but as the collection grows, some sort of filing case will be necessary. Bulletins and booklets may well be kept on ordinary shelves but classified in the same order as the material in the folders.

The next step for a writer, after beginning a morgue, is to get his name on mailing lists. There are certain magazines and periodical publications to which he should subscribe. Others can be obtained for the asking, such as government publications, experiment station bulletins, and releases from publicity services of many sorts. It is handy to have a little card catalog of the places from which one regularly receives printed matter. This will be valuable in case of change of address.

In beginning a morgue and system of handling printed information, the novice must remember that such a collection cannot

be accumulated over night. It is something that must grow. As a writer investigates a new subject, he will accumulate printed information concerning it. After the article or series of articles is written, this material can be sorted over and that which has permanent or future value saved for filing.

It must also be remembered that the value of a morgue for the average writer depends as much on what he throws away as what he saves. At first he will want to save everything. But as space fills up, he will have to go through his files, sort out and throw away things which do not pertain to the writing he is doing, which have become obsolete or which are now available in better form.

At first the writer will save many clippings from newspapers and magazines. But as he discovers where such news is obtainable, he will find himself gathering the original data instead. For instance, a beginner may clip and file a newspaper story giving details of the state wheat crop. Later he will be on the mailing list of the government crop reporter in that state and will have access to the same original source as did the newspaper reporter.

Using the morgue to get ideas: Writing feature articles wholly out of clippings and the morgue is the lazy man's way of doing it. Its honest value lies in its aid to the writer in gathering ideas and material and not as a substitute for genuine reportorial work. Keeping up the morgue should serve first as a means of discovering ideas for articles, as has already been suggested.

It can serve also as a background and foundation for the writer when he comes to prepare an article. Before he sets to work at writing the article, he can pull out from his files all the information he has on the subject and fill himself full of its history, its sidelights, and its background. It will aid him in presenting statistics and making comparisons. It will save many a trip to the library, and bridge over failure to ask certain questions in the course of an interview.

The real story, however, should be written mainly from the information the writer has obtained at first hand from interview, investigation, or experience. The fresh data in the notebook are the real material for the story. A story will always be better, nevertheless, if back of the notebook is a well-arranged reference

morgue to fortify the writer with background material and make possible the necessary checking and verifying of the interview.

Verification of currently published data: Too much reliance should not be placed in the material that is clipped from current magazines and newspapers, or even from technical trade publications. If the information contained therein—the statistics, the names, the places, the incidents, and other facts—is to be used, it may save serious error and embarrassment to verify it. That can be done by consulting original sources or standard books of reference, by correspondence with original sources, or by calls.

What a writer needs: The printed sources which a writer in technical fields uses are of various kinds. Let us list these and then discuss each class briefly:

1. Newspapers.
2. Federal publications.
3. State publications.
4. College and experiment station publications.
5. Journals of societies.
6. Yearbooks, annuals, and trade directories.
7. Statistical volumes.
8. Abstracts and indexes.
9. Programs and catalogs.
10. A good dictionary.

Newspapers: It would be valuable to a student in a technical journalism class to subscribe to a leading newspaper in some city distant from the location of his college or university. A writer in any special field should subscribe to newspapers which cover territory in which he is most interested.

Thus a writer specializing in writing about matters concerning petroleum might subscribe to newspapers in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Dallas, or Shreveport. A writer interested in agriculture on a nation-wide basis might well include a number of papers which have good farm departments or give special attention to the subject, such as the *Daily Pantagraph*, of Bloomington, Illinois, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, *Des Moines Register*, *Fargo Forum*, *Lincoln Journal*, *Weekly Kansas City Star*, *Dallas News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Fresno Bee*—to name a few.

Federal publications: Practically every branch of the Federal government publishes bulletins, circulars, reports, yearbooks, annual reports. Some of them also issue periodicals, either printed or mimeographed. The United States Department of Agriculture has a valuable library of standard information, and issues dozens of different periodicals. Other government publications in the field of commerce, mines, weather, highways, labor, children, public health, geology, standards, patents, and others are of value to writers. Reports from special commissions and published hearings of committees of Congress are frequently valuable. For instance, reports made in recent years on farm labor by a committee headed by Senator Thomas of Utah; and others on migration of citizens made by a committee of which Senator Tolan of California was chairman, are outstanding.

The easiest way to keep track of all of these is through the Catalog of Public Documents, a monthly publication of the Library of Congress.

State publications: Most states issue a wide variety of reports, yearbooks, and bulletins of value. These include publications on agriculture, livestock sanitation and regulation, feeds and feeding, seed inspection, mines, highways, public health, water supply, geology, taxation, legislation and laws, and other subjects. A handy way to keep track of these is through the monthly list of state publications, a periodical published by the Library of Congress in Washington.

College and experiment station publications: Agricultural colleges and experiment stations publish bulletins. These are often in three different series. One is of research publications, issued in small editions for use of research men only. A second is the regular bulletin series, usually based on experimental work, but written in such a manner that they can be read and used by farmers. A third is a circular series. This includes popular and nontechnical discussion of information of use to farmers or some special class and includes material from any recognized source. In addition the extension service usually publishes its own series of bulletins and circulars. Home economics is usually included along with

agriculture in any of these. Engineering colleges or divisions usually issue their own series of bulletins and other publications.

Many agricultural colleges also publish periodicals. For instance, Cornell University, the University of Illinois, Iowa State College, and the University of Minnesota—to cite examples. Each issues a monthly publication giving current news and discussions in the field of agricultural economics and farm management. A number of engineering experiment stations likewise have periodical publications. An outstanding example of this latter is *Engineering Experiment Station News*, published by Ohio State University. *The Kansas Industrialist* has long been another valuable college publication. A number of colleges publish extension magazines. Special mimeographed periodicals may be issued for garden clubs, florists, nurserymen, poultrymen, and other special classes of citizens.

Practically every land-grant college or university issues publicity and information releases and clip sheets for use of the press. In some cases, this material is sent out mainly by the extension service. At other institutions, it is sent out by the information service of the college or university. These releases go to daily and weekly papers and to farm and other publications. Often interested writers can get on the mailing lists. A writer visiting a college can usually obtain extra copies of recent releases which he may not have received.

Other particularly valuable publications are the annual reports of the experiment stations and of extension services. These are storehouses of information and invaluable to any writer. In recent years agricultural colleges have had copies of the reports of county land use planning committees. This has furnished a new type of information to writers never before gathered in any such handy form. Much of this material is as yet unused by feature writers. Tips for dozens of articles dealing with both farm and home can be found in these reports, gathered and written by farm men and women. Some of the Wisconsin county reports have been outstanding in the feature material they contained.

Journals of societies: Practically every special field of science engineering and technology has its own organization and its own

official journal or publication. Whatever the field—entomology, agronomy, floriculture, plant pathology, pomology, home economics, dairy science, vocational agriculture, poultry science, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, ceramics, highway engineering, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and others—it has its own publication. Trade, industrial, and business organizations, too, have their own publications. Besides national publications of these types, many state or regional groups publish their own journals. All of these constitute a storehouse of material upon which a writer can draw. Many of these can be found in the college library, where they can be consulted. A writer may wish to subscribe to one or more in which he is especially interested.

Yearbooks, annuals, and trade directories: Writers must secure information in many different fields. They may want to know the officers of this or that organization. They need to know correct names of people and firms. They want to get in touch with manufacturers of products or equipment. They want names of people or firms in a certain city or locality which they are to visit. To serve these various purposes, a good many yearbooks and directories are available. Some are government publications; others are put out by organizations. Some are special editions of journals and publications, while others are annual reports. In some cases, they are published transactions of an annual meeting.

While it is not possible here to publish a complete list, the following will include some of the more widely used reference books of this type, classified somewhat roughly, which will give students an idea of the wealth of reference material available.

Agriculture, Home Economics, and Related Fields

Yearbook United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Annual Reports of Bureaus and Officers of USDA

Workers in Subjects Pertaining to Agriculture in Land-Grant Colleges and Experiment Stations. (USDA)

Directory of Organization and Field Activities of the Department of Agriculture. (USDA)

RUS—Biographical Directory of Rural Leadership. (No recent edition)

Directory of Agricultural and Home Economics Leaders (Wilson)

- Buyers' Guide* (Farm Implement News. Annual)
Tractor Field Book (Farm Implement News. Annual)
The Red Tractor Book (Implement and Tractor. Annual)
Who's Who in the Butter, Cheese, and Milk Industries (American Butter Review. Annual)
American Rose Society Annual (and other publications)
The Gladiolus (New England Gladiolus Society. Annual)
Canners Directory (National Canners' Association. Annual)
Annual Report, Vegetable Growers' Association of America, Inc.
The American Fertilizer Hand Book.
Proceedings of Annual Convention, American Seed Trade Association.
Seed Trade Buyers' Guide and Directory. (*Seed World*. Annual)
Horticultural Trade Directory (A. T. De La Mare Co., Inc. Biennial)
Buyer's Guide for the Fruit Farm, American Fruit Grower. (Annual issue)
Membership Directory of American Society of Agricultural Engineers.
Standardized Plant Names (1942 edition)
Engineering, Industry, and Business
Thomas Register of Manufacturers
Macrae's Blue Book
Moody's Manual of Investments
The Municipal Year Book
Minerals Yearbook (U. S. Mines Bureau)
Automotive Buyer's Guide (Chilton)
Annual Review Number of American Exporter
Passenger Progress Number of Railway Age
Market Guide (Editor and Publisher)
Yearbook of Journal of Engineering Education (Society for Promotion of Engineering Education)
Directory Issues of American Society of Civil Engineers and equivalent directory issues for other engineering societies as mechanical, mining, and metallurgy, electrical, ceramics, and others
Who's Who (Now includes monthly supplement)

Statistical volumes: A good many of the references listed above contain statistical information. Many branches of the United

States Government issue statistics in printed and mimeographed information daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Likewise, much state material is issued. Each writer should become familiar with such sources in his field. A few of the more important public and private statistical sources are as follows:

Agricultural Statistics (USDA. Annual)

Crops and Markets (USDA. Monthly)

Statistical Abstract of US (U. S. Commerce Dept. Annual)

United States Census (Covers wide range)

Survey of Current Business (U. S. Commerce Dept.)

Annual Report of Chicago Board of Trade.

Drovers Journal Yearbook of Figures (*Chicago Daily Drovers' Journal*)

World Almanac

Abstracts and indexes: Writers frequently wish to get the gist of technical publications to keep in touch and know whether they apply to their work. In the field of agriculture and home economics, the *Experiment Station Record*, published monthly by the United States Department of Agriculture, is by far the most outstanding. *The Engineering Index*, monthly and yearly, supplies brief abstracts as well as an index in the field of engineering. The greatest technical abstract service in the world is *Chemical Abstracts*, issued by the American Chemical Society. *Ceramic Abstracts* covers its own field. Most technical and scientific journals include abstracts as part of their editorial functions, and so do engineering and trade publications to a considerable extent. There are special abstracts published in some scientific fields.

Indexes to periodical and other literature are a big help in running down material. Besides indexed abstracts, there are special index services available at libraries. Some of these are:

Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature

The Agricultural Index

The Engineering Index

Art Index

Industrial Arts Index

Library of Congress Monthly List of State Publications

Catalog of United States Public Documents

Technical Book Review Index

The Bibliographic Index

Occupational Index

Current Biography (monthly and cumulative)

Facts On File (weekly)

Programs and catalogs: Programs of meetings and conventions of many kinds of organizations often give tips for articles, contain information and names, and are valuable for filing away. In the chapter dealing with meetings, the annual program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science was mentioned as being a printed volume of several hundred pages. Often trade papers publish special issues in connection with conventions that are equivalent to yearbooks. The catalog of the International Live Stock Exposition at Chicago, of the International Flower Show at New York City, and similar documents are valuable as reference material.

The commercial catalogs of business firms and houses are a valuable part of the standard information which a technical writer uses constantly. The agricultural engineering writer may secure catalogs from implement houses, and the home economist may get similar material from manufacturers of household equipment, furniture, food supplies, and the like. The writer on garden topics can't get along without the catalogs from seed companies, nurseries, and manufacturers of garden supplies. An engineer in any field makes constant use of catalogs of equipment and materials. The scientific worker arranges for special catalogs of chemicals, biological supplies, instruments, and books.

These catalogs often contain spot news of new materials or new equipment. They contain descriptions of things in use. For instance, the seed or nursery catalog will describe a plant, give the exact color of a flower, give cultural directions. It will give the scientific name, as well as the common name, both correctly spelled. A writer may want to look up the exact term used to describe a part of a machine. The catalog may give it.

Dictionary: This needs no explanation. Any writer worthy of the name has one at his elbow and uses it. Writers in special fields learn that there are various scientific and special dictionaries available in those fields. The book, *Standardized Plant Names*, men-

tioned above as a reference book, is a plant dictionary as far as spelling is concerned. In *The American Fertilizer Hand Book* may be found a *Dictionary of Fertilizer Materials and Terms*. This section has been reprinted by the educational and research bureau of the U. S. Producers of By-Product Ammonia. These are examples of any number of such special dictionaries in technical lines.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Secure a list of available bulletins of your own state agricultural or engineering experiment station. Write to at least two other stations for lists of available bulletins.

2. Examine masters' and doctors' theses on file and find three ideas for possible feature articles. Members of the class may be assigned to different years. An index of each of these two classes of material can now be seen at the library.

3. Have a talk by a member of the reference staff of the college library on government documents and their use.

4. Make a list of publications in your state in one major field, preferably your own main interest—as agriculture, scientific, business or trade, engineering, women's interests.

5. Answer at least five advertisements in a magazine or journal in your major field which offer booklets free or for a nominal cost. Write for five trade catalogs that are free.

6. Make a complete list of all possible sources of printed information in your state in your own special field.