

Chapter 1

The School Yearbook and Its Functions

MORE THAN twenty thousand schools publish yearbooks annually in the United States.¹ These books touch intimately the lives of millions of students, their parents and friends. The well-planned and carefully edited yearbook records in enduring form the accomplishments of each student in the school.

It makes every student proud of his place in the school and community. It gives him a *sense of identity*, and hence affects his behavior as a good citizen. The nature of this *sense of identity* and its effect on behavior was emphasized by General E. C. Betts, judge advocate general in the European Theater of Operations.² Among other reasons, he attributed crime among American troops to a lack of a sense of identity. He pointed out: "This sense of identity is very important. If anyone is among friends or people he knows, he wants their respect, he hesitates to do anything shameful." The annual proudly proclaims the accomplishments of each student and identifies him with his picture.

At one time some school administrators and boards of education forced annuals to discontinue publication. In many cases both sides of the issue were not heard. The annual was allowed no advocate, no champion. One school principal who prided himself on killing

the yearbook — usually in a different school each year — remarked in exasperation, "A yearbook has more lives than a cat." Happily a principal of this kind is a rarity today. Most administrators and school boards recognize the value of the annual to the school and community, and many of the places where annuals were discontinued are now producing books again.

Four Functions of the Annual

What is it that gives an annual more lives than a cat? What do students and their families prize in the annual? What functions give it vitality? A careful study of the modern yearbook reveals that it has four important functions. To fulfill these functions it must:

1. Be a real memory book, a *glorified family album*, with pictures of every student and faculty member in the school.
2. Tell a complete human history of one year of school life.
3. Give worthwhile educational training to student staff members.
4. Build good will for the school by giving a true and comprehensive picture of what the institution is trying to accomplish.

How Yearbooks Got Started

A clearer understanding of the functions of the annual or yearbook can be obtained by a brief glance at its history and development. In the early years it was a memory album for seniors only. In the beginning seniors ex-

¹Estimated from information furnished by the National Scholastic Press Association, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn., The Taylor Publishing Company, Dallas, Texas, and Myers and Company, Topeka, Kansas.

²James Russell Wiggins in *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, March, 1946.

changed pictures. Some pasted them into albums together with newspaper clippings to serve as a reminder of school days. Some such procedure still exists in a few small schools.

Eventually printed yearbooks came into being. In the late 1880's, the use of halftones was developed, and the more progressive schools adopted this new method of photo reproduction in their publications. Tremendous possibilities were opened to enterprising editors with this new device for picture reproduction. However, editors did not start immediately to produce streamlined books similar to those now being printed. It was too much to expect yearbooks to change overnight. Most annuals continued to be senior memory books, with the addition of views and a few snapshots. After all, they were produced to a large extent by students who had little or no experience in the publishing business, and who were carrying a full assignment of school work in addition to their editorial duties.

The Annual As a Memory Book

Today the chief function of the yearbook is the same as it was before printed annuals made their appearance. It should still be a memory book, a family album of the school. Students still want pictures of themselves and their friends. Close studies of yearbook sales prove that the number of copies purchased *depends upon the number of people whose pictures appear in the book*. Every student whose picture appears is almost a sure purchaser. He can say to his family and friends, "Yes, that's my picture. Not a thing of beauty, perhaps, but it's there." That student feels he belongs. If he has to say, "No, there isn't a picture of me in the book," he feels unimportant and insignificant. The book has not fulfilled its function for that student.

How is the editor of a school annual going to get pictures of all students and teachers in the book? There are several ways. Often individual pictures of each student in the senior, junior, sophomore and freshman classes are printed in panels. If this is impractical, because of the size of the book or the cost to each student, individual pictures of seniors can be used and group pictures can be taken of the underclassmen.

An excellent opportunity to add pictures is afforded by the organization section. Each organization, whether in a university or high school, wants a panel or group picture of adequate size showing all its members. This, of course, can be supplemented with activity pictures to be discussed later. Pictures showing all members of each organization in school are double assurance that everyone will appear at least once in the annual.

Get Pictures of All Students

Some schools insure getting pictures of all students in the class section by paying for the photographs, from yearbook or school funds, for any student who cannot afford to pay for his own picture. These students are contacted on a personal basis, and the photographer usually makes a special price to the annual for this work.

In many instances, the photographer comes to the school and takes all the pictures of classes and organizations over a period of two or three days. To include pictures of all students who were absent during this period, and also to picture those who enter school later in the year, a page near the back of the annual often is devoted to one or more group pictures, taken during the spring, of "absentee and new students." The next best thing to getting a picture of a student in the annual, is to list his name as "member not pictured" with the class or organization to which he belongs.

Most families in the United States have a treasured, well-worn copy of a school annual that automatically opens at a certain page. On that page is a picture of a son or daughter, even though he or she may only be in some club or group picture. But that makes the school annual a worthy school project. That gives it life beyond its own year. It gives permanence to each year of school life.

The yearbook is nearly unique among books in that it is one of the select few which *all* owners keep throughout their lives. It is one of the few books they own which increases in value, as anyone can prove by trying to buy at five times its cost any privately owned annual which is ten or more years old.

Complete History of One Year of School Life

The development of the second function of the annual — telling a complete history of one year of school life — has been a slow and sometimes a confused process. Definite progress has not always resulted from some of the experiments tried, but excellent general improvement has resulted from the efforts of the many. Editors, faculty advisers and school administrators have made definite contributions.

State and national school press associations have given invaluable help by sponsoring conventions, yearbook contests and instruction books. Professional magazines, published for teachers and students interested in journalism and the graphic arts, have pointed the way with timely and worthwhile articles on yearbook production in all its phases.

Contributions of the thousands of photographers, engravers, artists, printers, cover makers and paper manufacturers who do the work on annuals should not be underestimated. Anyone truly familiar with the many hours spent by individuals of the graphic arts industry instructing and helping annual staffs long after the “whistle has blown” knows they are sincerely interested in more useful books and finer examples of good book production.

Get Complete Coverage

The editor of any yearbook is faced with the difficult problem of compiling a history of the school year while that history is being made. Events seeming important the day they happen often have little historical value. The fact that the leading halfback reports to football practice Tuesday afternoon with an injury that may keep him out of the important game of the year is a good news item, but the result of the game is more significant to the editor of the annual. The editor must separate the wheat from the chaff, the significant from the insignificant. It is more important to record the names of students who were elected to the Honor Society than to tell of the banquet they had on May 20.

What are some of the important things that should be included in the yearbook? The book must have some introductory or opening pages. Perhaps the title page is the only one

absolutely necessary. The late George Sargent called the title page “the door to the book.” It should give the name of the annual, the year published, the publishers, school, town and state. Many times this complete introduction is omitted, and the reader must then search through several pages to find the name of the school, the town, the state and year of publication. A detailed discussion of opening pages will be made in a later chapter. They are highly important.

At least one good view of the main school building as students generally approach it should appear early in the book. This reproduction will be more attractive if it shows students entering or leaving the building. One picture might serve for a small high school, but several pictures will be necessary to identify a large university and give the proper setting. Views carefully identified or interpreted by good cutlines will have added interest for the reader. If the book is to be a complete history of the school year, it must show students in classrooms, laboratories, shops or other places of curricular activity, and indicate actual class procedure. Every reader wants to know what and where.

Faculty pictures easily can be worked into the section portraying the work of the school by use of individual photographs, panels and group pictures, or the teachers can be shown in classrooms or laboratory pictures. Sometimes they are shown with the organizations they sponsor.

Sports coverage is good in most yearbooks. In fact, it usually is the most popular section in the annual. Editors must be careful to give a complete picture of the athletic program. Some attention ought to be given to activities of second teams, freshmen, scrubs, intramurals and girls' sports, so that proper balance is maintained. Copy should be interesting, lively and unbiased. Tell the story of the game or season regardless of its success or disappointment. Give due credit to opposing teams and emphasize the highlights of the game. An accurate, complete and easy-to-find record of scores of every sport is important.

Cover Extracurricular Activities

The extracurricular activities of students and faculty members are important parts of

the history of the year. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between an organization and an activity, and there is probably no definite dividing line. The significant thing is to include all of them. It is a definite achievement when a student wins a scholarship, is elected to an honor society, makes the debate team, orchestra, band or livestock judging team, fills a leading post on the yearbook or newspaper staff, takes part in a school play, is a cheerleader or in any other way proves that he is a valuable citizen in the school community. It is the job of the editor to pass out the palm of praise for success in all fields of school endeavor.

In the school life section, sometimes called the feature or snapshot section, editors have a real chance to tell their story by emphasizing the highlights of the school year with pictures that recall events, such as special assemblies, rallies, trips, traditions, homecoming celebrations, pep functions, open house, rush week, registration and many others. Candid shots which record current fads, fashions and habits of students lend interest.

The snapshots, or news pictures, should portray events and not feature individuals. These reproductions are more effective if they are large enough so people and objects can be recognized easily. Good headlines, copy and captions can do much to complete the story the pictures attempt to tell.

To produce a yearbook that will be prized by students and their parents, the editors must place major emphasis on the first two functions: (1) make the annual a real memory book by including pictures of all students and teachers and (2) record a complete history of the school year in pictures and type.

Educational Value of the Yearbook

The educational value of the school yearbook to staff members can be classified into two general categories: the technical know-how of the publishing business, and training in general business methods. The training thus acquired can be used in almost any business or profession the students may later enter. There are few fields of endeavor in which this knowledge cannot be used.

There are innumerable instances of staff members who, because of the inspiration and

knowledge acquired from working on the yearbook, have later become top-flight executives with newspapers, magazines, house organs, advertising agencies, publishing houses and engraving companies. Many student photographers and artists, because of their experience on the yearbook staff, have later become leaders in these fields.

The business training acquired from selling books and advertising, estimating and controlling budgets, managing offices and keeping records, co-operating with staff members and dealing with the public cannot be overestimated. The faculty adviser and other teachers should constantly remember that students will benefit from actually doing the jobs to which they have been assigned on the annual.

In many cases, especially as deadline dates approach, it would be simpler and quicker for the adviser to take matters into his or her own hands and order cuts, make layouts, instruct the printer and even write the copy and the picture captions. In some cases this may be necessary if contract requirements are to be met. In most cases it is not. A carefully planned production schedule will leave time to instruct the student staff members in their jobs and leave them sufficient time to complete all assignments.

Student editors and business managers can help in this educational process. The widest possible allocation of jobs, in general, is to be desired. In most cases the editors and managers have at least a fair understanding of all processes involved in the publication. In some cases the editor, and possibly the business manager, are the only ones who really understand the job. In these cases the yearbook is not serving its full purpose.

It is the job of the adviser to teach students to assume responsibility. The successful production of the annual requires skill in dividing and allocating responsibility and authority among others.

However, the adviser must remember that the educational value to the staff is distinctly, sharply subordinated to the goal of giving the school the finest, worthiest book within its means. The educational training afforded staff members is purely a by-product. The experience has high value only as it produces

a good book. The staff member who has only a small part in producing a really fine book will get better training than the editor-in-chief of a slovenly, fumbling, amateurish product. The adviser must assume the responsibility of producing a good book as well as affording staff members a worthwhile educational experience.

Building Good Will for the School

The yearbook, if it gives a true and comprehensive picture of what the school is trying to accomplish, can do much to sell students, parents and other supporters on the school's value to the community, the state and the nation.

Too often, even in small communities, the general public gets the impression that students spend most of their time "whooping-it-up" for athletic contests, going to dances or racing around town in "hot-rod" cars. They seldom have the opportunity to observe the long hours put in by students in classrooms, laboratories, libraries or in home study. If the yearbook brings to the attention of all who read it the worthwhile scholastic accomplishments of the school, in addition to extra-curricular activities, it aids in building good will for the school. If the voters of the community are well-informed about the real opportunities offered by the school to the young people of the community, they are more willing to vote bonds and pay taxes to provide needed improvements and adequate support

of the school. The annual provides one of the most effective ways of presenting these needs to the community.

Annuals to Prospective Students

Perhaps private schools were the first to recognize the public relations value of the yearbook. The private schools place much emphasis on the educational activities and devote considerable space to showing beautiful campus views as well as telling a complete history of the year. The yearbook is often sent to prospective students to tell them the advantages of that particular institution. The traveling representatives of private schools make use of the annual to present their institution in a favorable light to prospective donors as well as regular supporters of the institution.

Many of the more progressive tax-supported state colleges and universities have recognized the value of the school annual in showing prospective students and taxpayers of the state what the schools are doing. Often several hundred copies of the annual are purchased and sent to high school libraries and prominent state officials. Students attending the colleges are urged to show copies of their annuals to high school seniors and influential citizens in their home communities. Deans, heads of departments and coaches use the yearbook in discussing the merits of their institution when interviewing prospective students.