

A HISTORY OF WEEKLY COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS
IN THE UNITED STATES: 1900 TO 1980

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Communication and Information Sciences
in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2009

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of community weekly newspapers in the United States during the period beginning in 1900 and ending in 1980. For this dissertation, the weekly “community” newspaper is defined as a newspaper operating in small towns and rural areas that placed an emphasis on local news. This study analyzes the nature of the weekly community newspaper and how it reflected American society throughout most of the twentieth century.

Despite all of the problems that faced the weekly newspaper industry throughout its long and proud history, the constants that remained were survival tactics in terms of reactive versus proactive responses to content, commercial, and professional concerns. Several times throughout the decades an obituary had been written for community weeklies. But they always found a way to fight back and happen upon a means, a method, or a message that resonated with audiences and advertisers enough so as to allow them to keep their doors open for another business day.

Community weeklies told the story of average American daily lives more thoroughly and in a more personal manner than the big-city dailies. In essence, the weekly publisher-editor served as author of his community’s life story.

DEDICATION

To Bob, Andrew, Adam, and Aaron

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful for the support and guidance of my committee chair, Dr. W. David Sloan, who introduced me to the study of journalism history and inspired me to choose it as my concentrated area of research. Thank you also to my committee members, Dr. Kari Frederickson, Dr. Karla Gower, Dr. Meg Lamme, and Dr. Wilson Lowrey, who offered helpful guidance and suggestions throughout this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Historical works on American journalism have given little attention to weekly community newspapers after the period when most newspapers in this country fell into that publication category. Despite the rapid rise of the daily metropolitan newspaper in the early twentieth century, weekly community newspapers continued, although many historians viewed them as insignificant and hard to label. Critics considered weekly newspapers, also referred to as “grassroots journalism,” the “country press,” the “rural press,” or the “community press,” as nothing more than smaller, low quality versions of their larger daily counterparts.¹

Perhaps the problem comes in defining what a weekly community newspaper is. An obvious category would be those newspapers published only once a week. But the term “community” separates those into further categories, because some weeklies served a small geographic area, while others reached out to a special interest audience, such as labor and religious publications. These special-interest weeklies served readers who shared an interest or cause but not a geographical community concern. Some weeklies were published in suburban communities and urban neighborhoods; so they would not qualify for the designation of “country” or “rural” press. For this study, attention will be given to weekly “community” newspapers in small towns and rural areas that placed an emphasis on local news. This study will explore the nature of the weekly community newspaper and how it reflected American society throughout most of the twentieth century. Community weeklies told the story of average

¹ The terms “weekly,” “community,” “country,” “rural,” and “grassroots” are used interchangeably throughout this study to describe the small-town community weekly newspapers referred to in this study.

American daily lives more thoroughly and in a more personal manner than the big-city dailies. Sensationalism was largely avoided; and a community's life story was told through birth, marriage, and death announcements, the comings and goings of the social elite, the accomplishments of local students, and the gatherings of community clubs, business and professional organizations, and church groups.

The period under consideration in this study begins in the year 1900, a time by which most metropolitan dailies were established and a definite line of divergence was drawn between big-city newspapers and small-town, community-oriented publications. Technological innovations dictate the concluding period of this study to be the end of the 1970s, at which time offset printing and the advent of computerized, desktop publishing changed the face of the publication industry and made it possible for the explosion of specialized and issue-oriented non-dailies, such as "shoppers,"² that took on some characteristics of the community weekly.

The twentieth century community weekly encompasses the cultural, political, and technological changes taking place in other aspects of American life. This study will incorporate the business, technological, and governmental considerations of operating a weekly community press. It will also explore politics and the important role of the crusading editor.³ As some community weeklies grew in circulation and advertising revenue, they merged with other weeklies to become daily newspapers. But others, despite expensive and problem-prone equipment, small staffs, and revenue shortcomings, continued publishing as community weeklies. Profit appeared to become the dividing line between dailies and community weeklies,

² This term refers to a newspaper, usually tabloid in size, designed specifically to display classified and retail advertising. Some newspaper operations printed their own separate shopper, but most shoppers were in direct competition with general-news weeklies for advertising revenue. A majority of the shoppers were circulated free of charge, relying heavily on advertising revenue for profits.

³ Throughout this study, references to a weekly publisher and/or editor are most often referred to in terms of "he" or "him" to reflect a large majority of the articles written by or about weekly publishers and editors during a period in which males held a high percentage of those positions.

as dailies entered the world of big business and profit motive while community weeklies focused on public service and idealism in the face of financial uncertainty. However, new business practices introduced in the latter half of the century allowed more community weeklies to become profitable enterprises.

For much of the twentieth century, small-town weekly newspapers connected with more small towns and villages on a regular basis than did the country's metropolitan newspapers. For example, in large sectors of the country the nearest metropolitan newspaper was located hundreds of miles away. A decade into the twentieth century, only fifty-one percent of Americans lived in metropolitan areas. The weekly newspapers of small communities played an important role in keeping the citizenry informed on local and national news. While a growing number of rural residents subscribed to both metropolitan dailies and their community newspaper, it was the weekly community paper that contained the news relevant to those in the immediate geographic area. The introduction of radio, television, and mega-merged metropolitan dailies with "community news" inserts did not supplant the weekly community newspaper as the main source for local news.

Because of the inherently "localized" nature of the community weekly, the accepted standards of "professional" practices in journalism do not apply in full to community weeklies. They differ in content, context, and purpose from daily newspapers, responding to the specific needs of residents sparsely populated regions. Despite the fact that most journalism historical works have considered weeklies and dailies together when referring to newspapers, this study intends to show that weekly community newspapers deserve a category of their own and attention rather than avoidance when it comes to explaining the role of newspapers in everyday lives.

Weeklies and dailies shared similar day-to-day operations and duties, although the differing size and scope of their readership, business relationships, and operational concerns dictated differing responses and problem-solving measures. There were many commonalities among weeklies and dailies in terms of general standards of practice in newsgathering and revenue-generating models. However, small and large newspapers differed extensively in their approaches to editorial content and community activism. Weekly publishers and editors were often under the threat of government intervention in such areas as postal, pricing, advertising, anti-trust, and censorship regulations. But they also served as a valuable government partner to distribute war propaganda and support various elected officials and their partisan politics.

Despite numerous threats to its existence, the weekly community newspaper survived and continued to play a prominent role in a community's quality of life, growth, and development.

Literature Review

Only a select number of journalism historians devoted entire works to the subject of community weekly newspapers in the United States. Comprehensive works in journalism history tend to mention the weekly field only briefly, perhaps in a chapter, but mostly in occasional paragraphs within topical chapters. However, two 1948 works by Thomas D. Clark stand out in the literature of the community weekly press because they emphasized the rural press of the South. *The Southern Country Editor*⁴ focused on the region's sectional problems, such as race, a one-party political system, and one-crop agriculture that were prominent in both news and editorializing in the region's community newspapers. In *The Rural Press and the New South*,⁵ he asserted that the southern country press served as a guide to the common man's thinking because

⁴ Thomas D. Clark, *The Southern Country Editor*, 1st ed. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948).

⁵ Thomas D. Clark, *The New Rural Press and the New South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1948).

its readers could easily understand the writing style in which community, state, and national problems were presented.

Two decades later, former weekly newspaper editor-publisher and University of Minnesota journalism professor John Cameron Sim published *The Grass Roots Press: America's Community Newspapers*. He explored the viability of the community newspaper press and considered its long-range prospects in terms of chances for survivability in the future. Early chapters discussed the beginnings of the weekly press to its heyday in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Later chapters considered to the perception of the weekly's role, the rise of weekly suburban newspapers, the impact of new technology, and the role community newspapers would have in the future.⁶

Considering perceptions of the weekly's role, Sim pointed out that many community newspapers followed the guidelines set by Houston Waring, who retired in 1966 as editor of Colorado's *Littleton Independent* and was a recognized leader in the community newspaper field. He outlined these functions of the community newspaper: (1) community newspapers make a community's economy work by advertising; (2) all sides of a question can be debated by permitting expression of public opinion through interviews and "letters to the editor"; (3) the press has a decision-forcing function with massive publicity requiring citizens to take a stand and no longer ignore an issue that has become a topic of conversation; (4) the press has a status-conferring function because those picked for mention are recognized as standing out from the crowd; (5) the press acquaints community leaders with the activities of other leaders; (6) the newspaper helps the reader understand his environment, i.e., when to pay taxes, where to register a child for school, etc.; (7) newspapers can assist citizens in crusading for improvement; (8) the

⁶ John Cameron Sim, *The Grass Roots Press: America's Community Newspapers*, 1st ed. (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1969; reprint, 1970).

press is a sounding board for policy; (9) the press strengthens moral resolution because tempted men fear newspaper publicity and thus are better able to resist temptation, making the press unwittingly a community chaperone; (10) the press is a medium of entertainment; (11) by devoting so much space to sports, the press encourages readers to think more about sports than war, focusing on the glories of basketball and horse racing instead of victories in combat; (12) the press attends to small and basic needs of readers through classified advertisements; and (13) the press gives Americans a sense of identity and belonging to a certain community.⁷

The important tie between the residents of a small town or agricultural region and their local community weekly was chronicled in Robert F. Karolevitz's *From Quill to Computer: The Story of America's Community Newspapers*. His 1985 work was published in recognition of the one-hundredth anniversary of the National Newspaper Association (also known for eighty years as the National Editorial Association). The association was founded to serve America's community press and continues to do so from its headquarters in Columbia, Missouri. He noted that during the period just prior to the heyday of the Penny Press before the Civil War, gazettes were generally short-run editions, limited by the printing process and populations. But with the emergence of metropolitan areas and the improvement of power presses, a marked division began to occur in the size and target of newspapers. It was also during the latter half of the nineteenth century that an emphasis in the writing and teaching of journalism history shifted heavily to the big names and the big dailies and away from the hometown press. Big name editors and publishers of large-circulation newspapers from that period on dominated the story of American journalism.⁸

⁷ Ibid, 87-88.

⁸ Robert F. Karolevitz, *From Quill to Computer: The Story of America's Community Newspapers* (Freeman, S.D.: Pine Hill Press for National Newspaper Foundation, 1985), 36.

John Tebbel gave more attention to country weeklies in his general history of U.S. journalism than previous works. Published in 1963, *The Compact History of the American Newspapers* included a chapter titled “The Rise and Fall of Country Newspapers.” He went into much detail on the earliest traditions of the small town paper, with special attention given to technological challenges. He stressed that in the 1900s, the country press was still operating as if it were in the colonial stage, if viewed from a technological standpoint. By the 1940s, influences in big-city publishing permeated the country press as well. As metropolitan newspapers became big business, country papers became small business. A decline in the number of country newspapers began in the 1920s with mergers and suspensions, which accelerated during the depression years.⁹

Other journalism histories make only brief mention of the weekly press and incorporate it in general discussions of technological and developmental changes and innovations, including mergers and consolidations that affected both the daily and weekly press. They also discuss, in some detail, the evolution from weekly, or non-daily, to daily publication of the country’s major metropolitan dailies. Also mentioned is the advent of ready-print¹⁰ and its utilization by papers of all sizes throughout the country.¹¹ The controversy surrounding the use of patent medicine advertisements in newspapers and magazines, and particularly in weekly newspapers, was

⁹ John Tebbel, *The Compact History of the American Newspaper* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1963), 258.

¹⁰ Ready-printed pages, a system introduced in this country by Wisconsin weekly publisher Ansel Nash Kellogg, were usually two, inside, pre-printed pages sent to smaller newspapers to help fill a four-page newspaper. The material on these pre-printed pages contained general news and features of a regional interest. The other sides of these pre-printed pages were left blank to be filled with local content. Ready-print was also referred to as “patent insides” or “printed service pages.”

¹¹ Wm. David Sloan, ed., *The Media in America: A History*, fifth ed. (Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 2002); Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927); Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 8 ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1996); Jean Folkerts and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., *Voices of a Nation: A History of the Media in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989); Sidney Kobre, *Development of American Journalism* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1969); Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York: Macmillan, 1937); James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism* (Garden City, N.Y.: The Garden City Publishing Co, Inc., 1923); Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

addressed fully in Frank Presbrey's *The History and Development of Advertising*¹² and James Playsted Wood's *The Story of Advertising*.¹³

Because of a heavier involvement in their respective state press associations, the historical accounts of these associations tend to provide more details about small-town and rural newspapers than the larger, comprehensive journalism histories. State press association historical works included dates and frequency of publication of the states' member newspapers, providing a chronological record of the numerous weekly startups, consolidations, sell-offs, and closures. Some of these works are no more than collections of minutes of the associations' annual conferences and meetings of governing officials, but they reflect changes in the newspaper field, from a financial, technological, and ethical viewpoint.¹⁴ Historical works of state newspaper dynasties are also prevalent, among them Daniel Webster Hollis, III's *An Alabama Newspaper Tradition: Grover C. Hall and the Hall Family*.¹⁵

Several sociological works have explored the role and influence of a newspaper in its community. Although they include some historical detail, their focus has been on contemporary

¹² Frank Presby, *The History and Development of Advertising* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929).

¹³ James Playsted Wood, *The Story of Advertising* (Garden City, N.Y.: Ronald Press, 1958).

¹⁴ Among state newspaper histories or collections that include twentieth century publications are: Fred W. Allsopp, *History of the Arkansas Press for a Hundred Years and More*. Little Rock: Parke-Harper Publishing Co., 1922; J. Cecil Alter, *Early Utah Journalism*. Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1938; Lester J. Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1935*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1936; L. Edward Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers, 1844 to 1984*. Muskogee, Okla.: Western Heritage Books, Inc., 1984; Rhoda C. Ellison, *Early Alabama Publications*. Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1947; Herndon J. Evans, *The Newspaper Press in Kentucky*. Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976; Louis T. Griffith and John E. Talmadge, *Georgia Journalism, 1763-1950*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1951; Osman Castle Hooper, *History of Ohio Journalism, 1793-1933*. Columbus, Ohio: The Spahr & Glenn Co., 1933; Walter C. Johnson and Arthur T. Robb, *The South and its Newspapers, 1903-1953*. Chattanooga, Tenn.: The Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, 1954; Eugene Jones, "A Decade of the Country Editor: 1954-1964," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 62 (1968): 52-68; Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Early Printing in Tennessee*. Chicago: Chicago Club of Printing House Craftsmen, 1933; Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Early Printing in Wisconsin*. Seattle: Dogwood Press, 1931; Nyle H. Miller, et al, *Kansas in Newspapers*. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1963; Ira A. Nichols, *Forty Years of Rural Journalism in Iowa*. Fort Dodge: Messenger Press, 1938; Thad Stem, Jr., *The Tar Heel Press*. Charlotte, N.C.: North Carolina Press Association, Inc., 1973; George S. Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*. Portland: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1939; H. L. Williamson, *History of the Illinois Press Association*. Springfield: Hartman-Jefferson Printing Co., 1934.

¹⁵ Daniel Webster Hollis, III, *An Alabama Newspaper Tradition: Grover C. Hall and the Hall Family* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1983).

conditions rather than history. Among them is *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* by Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd.¹⁶ Another such study is *Small Town in Mass Society* by Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman. The community newspaper, according to this study, “always emphasized the positive side of life, never reporting local arrests, shotgun weddings, mortgage foreclosures, lawsuits, bitter exchanges in public meetings, suicides or any other ‘unpleasant happening.’” By constantly focusing on warm and human qualities in all public situations, the authors observed, the public character of the community took on those qualities, which was very different from city life.¹⁷ Although Morris Janowitz’s *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* focused on suburban weeklies, it is considered a prominent sociological work in the study of community media.¹⁸

In their 1980 study, *Community Conflict and the Press*, Phillip J. Tichenor, George Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien explored how information was generated and communicated to various publics in a community and the relationships between communication processes and community structure and conflict. Data for the study was collected from field studies in nineteen Minnesota communities. Referring to various agenda-setting studies, they emphasized that selective attention by the media to select topics tended to reinforce certain values and norms in society. In addition, the study considered control of information to the public and the “community editor” role, which is concerned with maintaining spirit, harmony, and consensus by printing only information relating to a community’s good points.¹⁹

¹⁶ Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929).

¹⁷ Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 31.

¹⁸ Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952).

¹⁹ Phillip J. Tichenor, George Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1980), 19, 87.

A number of professional publications, including *Editor & Publisher*, *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*, *National Publisher*, *National Printer-Journalist*, *Publishers' Auxiliary*, *Grassroots Editor*, *N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, and *The American Press*, have provided extensive information on the weekly newspaper field. *Editor & Publisher* for many years ran a regular feature, "The Weekly Editor," which profiled weekly publishers and editors from across the country. *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, which was written specifically for the weekly newspaper industry, featured articles on individual weeklies, their editors, and staff members. Trade publications geared to the weekly newspaper field addressed the weekly's distinctive features, such as ownership (mostly family-owned through the first half of the twentieth century), small staff sizes of family members and friends with a publisher who often also served as printer and/or editor, the importance of ready-print for content and financial purposes, and encouragement for strong local news coverage and a "homegrown" editorial voice.²⁰

Although scholarly articles related to community weekly newspapers were limited in number, *Journalism Quarterly* and several social science journals, such as *Public Opinion Quarterly* and Malcolm Willey's 1926 study of weeklies published in the book, *The Country Newspaper*,²¹ addressed topics of interest in the weekly field.

First-person accounts of practicing rural journalism were re-told in a number of works, including those of Sherwood Anderson, Alexander Brook, Hodding Carter, Earl V. Chapin, John H. Cutler, P.D. East, Henry Beetle Hough, Clayton Rand, and William Allen White.²²

²⁰ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons)

²¹ Malcolm M. Willey, *The Country Newspaper* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926).

²² Sherwood Anderson, *Nearer the Grass Roots (and a Journey to Elizabethton)*. San Francisco: Westgate Press, 1929; Alexander B. Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor* (Bridgehampton, N.Y.: Bridge Works Publishing Co., 1993); Hodding Carter, *Where Main Street Meets the River* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1953); Hodding Carter, *First Person Rural* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963); Earl V. Chapin, *Long Wednesdays*. New York: Abelard Press, 1953. John Henry Cutler, *Put It On The Front Page*,

In addition, “how-to” manuals, handbooks, resource material, and textbooks on rural or community journalism were authored by Charles L. Allen, Millard V. Atwood, Thomas F. Barnhart, Phil C. Bing, Kenneth Byerly, Emerson P. Harris and Florence Harris Hooke, Grant M. Hyde, Bruce M. Kennedy, John McKinney, C.M. Meredith, Jr., Norman J. Radder, Walter Rae, James Clifford Safley, Malcolm Willey, Edward Miller, Kathleen Cushman, and Larry Anderson, to name a few.²³

Methodology

For this dissertation, the database newspaperarchive.com. was utilized to select weekly newspaper samples from each of the major geographical regions in the United States and at least one sample from each of the eighty years of study. Newspapers were selected that displayed evidence of a pattern of weekly publication (every seven days) or through content within the pages of an edition to verify that a newspaper was published on a weekly basis. Newspapers in communities with smaller populations were selected to avoid suburban weeklies. Within each

Please! (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1960); P.D. East, *The Magnolia Jungle: The Life, Times, and Education of a Southern Editor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960); Emerson P. Harris and Elizabeth H. Hooke, *The Community Newspaper* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923); Henry Beetle Hough, *Country Editor* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1940); Clayton Rand, *Ink on My Hands*. New York: Carrick & Evans, 1940; William A. White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946).²³ Charles L. Allen, *Country Journalism* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928); Millard V. Atwood, *The Country Newspaper*, The National Social Science Series (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1923); Thomas F. Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper: A Bibliography, 1925-1941*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Burgess Publishing Co., 1941; Thomas F. Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Management* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936); Thomas F. Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1949); Phil C. Bing, *The Country Weekly: A Manual for the Rural Journalist and for Students of the Country Field* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1917); Kenneth R. Byerly, *Community Journalism* (New York: Chilton Company, 1961); Grant M. Hyde, *Newspaper Reporting and Correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912); Bruce M. Kennedy, *Community Journalism, A Way of Life* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1974); John McKinney, *How to Start Your Own Community Newspaper*, 3 ed. (Port Jefferson, N.Y.: Meadow Press, 1977); C.M. Meredith, Jr., *The Country Weekly* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1937); Edward Miller, Kathleen Cushman, and Larry Anderson, *How to Produce a Small Newspaper* (Harvard, Mass.: The Harvard Common Press, 1978); Clement Moore and Herman Roe, *The First National Survey of the Weekly Newspaper Publishing Business in the U.S.* St. Paul: National Editorial Assn., 1929; Norman J. Radder, *Newspapers in Community Service*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1926; Norman J. Radder, *The Small-city Daily and the Country Weekly*. Bloomington: Indiana University Department of Journalism, 1927; James Clifford Safley, *The Country Newspaper and its Operation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930); Elmo Scott Watson, *A History of Newspaper Syndicates in the United States, 1865-1935*. Chicago: *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 1936.

ten-year period, newspaper samples were selected from different months, years, and geographic regions. No specific dates were deliberately selected based on major historical events (such as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy). The availability of newspapers was more limited in the earlier years under study. Several states have an extensive list of weeklies to choose from (particularly Iowa and Texas) while other states have no weeklies accessible for certain decades or the entire period under study (Utah, for example). Thus, more samples were included from specific states and regions. Library microfilm, personal files, and in-person reviews provided information on most Alabama weeklies included in the study.

Chapter 1

The early 1900s: Consistency in Content, Appearance, and Style

Community weekly newspapers in early twentieth century America were similar to their predecessors in terms of content, appearance, and style. This was due largely to business practices and financial constraints that limited the size of their newsgathering staffs and their ability to purchase more efficient technology. Their business practices were established by newspapers in Colonial America, while their newsgathering methods were largely reflective of techniques and technologies introduced in the last half of the nineteenth century.

However, unlike their predecessors, weeklies in the early twentieth century faced more direct competition from nearby metropolitan dailies that attempted to lure away subscribers, advertising dollars, and staff. Some newspaper industry insiders even predicted the death of the weekly because of direct competition with the metropolitan and small-town dailies. But as some weeklies struggled to survive, the more financially successful operations were faced with deciding whether or not to convert to a daily or multi-weekly publication schedule. The move to a multi-week publication schedule was usually the result of increased circulation and advertising revenue.

From its earliest days, the weekly depended heavily upon commercial and government job printing or bookselling to stay afloat. For example, the first newspaper printed in Colonial America, the single-issue *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*, was published in 1690 by Boston bookstore and coffee house owner, Benjamin Harris. Boston postmaster John

Campbell began publishing the country's first continuous newspaper, the *Boston News-Letter*, on April 24, 1704. It was his position as postmaster that enabled him to print government documents, the profits of which propped up his newspaper operation. Thus, printer-publisher, or postmaster-publisher, became a common job title in the community newspaper field.

Newsgathering for the weekly in the early 1900s continued to rely heavily on newspaper syndication services despite the efforts of a small, but vocal group of weekly publishers who resisted the use of syndicate material, also referred to as "ready-print," "canned copy" or "boilerplate." They argued that quality was more important than quantity, and they preferred the use of strictly locally generated news, although it cost more time and money. Their arguments were backed by the growing recognition that formal journalism training would better equip newspapermen to gather facts, write stories and editorials, solicit advertisers and subscribers, and design their pages for the most efficient use of space.

During the early twentieth century, a number of college journalism programs were developed, especially in the Midwest which was home to the largest number of weeklies. Weekly publishers and editors of the numerous small-town Midwest weeklies found welcome partnerships with regional universities that produced a growing number of skilled journalists. But for most weeklies, it was simply a matter of finances that dictated their extensive use of syndicate material. Examples of syndicate material are generously apportioned throughout the pages of many weeklies during the decade. But whether locally generated copy commanded a large portion of the weekly, or only a few sections, local editorial comment, opinion letters, and columns were closely watched by state and national politicians because they were representative of the thinking among "grassroots" community residents.

The business of community weekly newspapers

It did not take long for a novice country editor-publisher to learn that what mattered most in his profession was not the ability to write beautiful prose or compose sharp-witted commentary, but rather the ability to balance the books to keep presses rolling, supplies in stock, and equipment in workable shape. Ever present on his mind was how to increase local advertising revenue, how to attract national advertising, and how to increase circulation, as well as collect overdue subscription payments.

But ultimately, he discovered that advertising and subscription revenues simply were inadequate to keep most small-town newspapers in business. The problem for many rural publishers was that they knew how to produce a printed product, but they lacked management skills to run their operations in an efficient manner. To this end, the concept of a college degree in journalism became more readily acceptable as veteran pressmen began to realize the benefits that could come with a journalist trained in writing, sales, and management.

The lifeblood of most rural newspaper operations was commercial printing, although low rates did impact profit margins. For example, a 1902 issue of *The Hendricks (Minn.) Pioneer* contained a three-line advertisement in the lower right corner of page one marked, “Job Printing.” The self-promotion advertisement boasted that the *Pioneer* was equipped with all necessary presses for job printing — “the kind you want.”²⁴

Often the biggest money maker for small-town printers was the county government’s printing contract, as evidenced in an October 1900 classified listing for the sale of a community newspaper in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, a trade publication for subscribing members of the A.N.

²⁴ “Job Printing,” *The Hendricks (Minn.) Pioneer*, 2 October 1902, 1. The *Pioneer* was established in 1900. It boasted of being “A newspaper for conveying intelligence of passing events, etc.” Hendricks, in Lincoln County, is located in southwest Minnesota. Hendricks had a population of 757 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 1, section 6, 221, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

Kellogg (later Western Newspaper Union) newspaper syndication service.²⁵ The advertisement read in part,

A Special Snap-A DEMOCRATIC NEWSPAPER and job office in a democratic town and democratic county. Only one other democratic paper in the county. By agreement the county printing is equally divided between the two papers and all the county officers are warm friends to the paper....²⁶

Serving as the county's official government printer also proved lucrative to *The Rio Grande Republican* of Las Cruces, New Mexico, which boasted on its nameplate of being the official paper of Dona Ana County. As the official "recorder" of county business, the paper's March 3, 1905, edition included a detailed report on a county commission meeting.²⁷ Likewise, the *Pioneer's* masthead on page four included the phrase "Official Paper of Village of Hendricks."

Even though government printing contracts usually went to the low bidder, they were still highly sought by small newspaper publishers for status and business connections. But sometimes even a heavy schedule of commercial jobs meant a losing financial endeavor for the printer who charged his customers too little. In the early 1900s, Kansas legislators considered establishing certain rates for all types of official printing business. This fixed-rate proposal was in conflict with the practice of the day of awarding the printing contract to the lowest bidder. A January 1903 column in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* called on the support of the country newspaper "fraternity" to support fixed rates for government printing services. The column raised the question, "Why should the county printing be let to the lower bidder any more than the recording

²⁵ *The Publishers' Auxiliary* was a publication provided free of charge to syndicate subscribers of the A.N. Kellogg newspaper syndicate service (later the Western Newspaper Union). The publication featured tips on workplace efficiency and updates on legislative issues related to the publication industry. Incorporated extensively throughout the issue were articles promoting the benefits of using syndicate-supplied materials, which was of obvious financial benefit to the Kellogg company.

²⁶ "A Special Snap," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, October 1900, 66.

²⁷ *The Rio Grande Republican*, 3 March 1905, 1, 4. Las Cruces, in Dona Ana County, is located in southwest New Mexico. Las Cruces had a population of 1,221 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 1, section 6, 272, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

of deeds or the work of any other county officer?" Such practice often resulted "in forcing the price down to a figure that imposes an actual loss upon the man who does it."²⁸

Publishers had to commit a larger investment in a printing operation that supported both revenue-generating commercial jobs and a weekly newspaper because of the need for more personnel and supplies, and better-equipped and maintained press machinery. While some weeklies could be purchased in the \$1,000-plus range, the asking price for a better-equipped and more profitable community newspaper-printing operation could be double or triple that price. For example, a January 1900 classified listing in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* read in part: "Wanted. Will pay \$1,000 to \$1,200²⁹ down on Republican county seat weekly in eastern or central Kansas. Must be making money."³⁰

In his 1907 presidential address to the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the National Editorial Association in Norfolk, Virginia, John E. Junkin called upon the members to become more active in promoting improvement in the newspaper business. For example, he implored the membership to publicly voice its disapproval of paper stock being "in the hands of a great trust," resulting in "extortion" prices.³¹ He also referred to price controls on lead type³² and the availability of only one type-setting machine "that can only be purchased at an exorbitant price."³³ Thus, the quality of a weekly in terms of content and appearance was largely determined by the level of financial investment in equipment and personnel.

²⁸ "For County Printers: Are Entitled to Fair Remuneration," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 15 January 1903, 1.

²⁹ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$1,000 from 1900 was worth \$25,471.99 and \$1,200 from 1900 was worth \$30,566.39. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

³⁰ "Classified-I Want to Buy," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, January 1900, 8.

³¹ John E. Junkin, "President's Annual Address" (paper presented at the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the National Editorial Association, Norfolk, Va., 1907), 66.

³² Type refers to a metal casting of all the letters of the alphabet, both capitals, and lower-case, punctuation marks, and numbers, set in different styles, or fonts, and sizes, measured in points. The Monotype was the trade name for a machine that made and cast type. It was invented by Tolbert Lanston and put into commercial use around 1899. By the early twentieth century, many printers were moving from hand-set type to Linotype, the trade name of a typesetting machine, invented by Ottmar Mergenthaler in 1886, which used a keyboard to compose type.

³³ Junkin, "President's Annual Address," 66.

The phrase “all-home-print” was viewed by many publishers as bragging rights, because they believed that a community newspaper containing solely locally generated articles assured its readers of a higher quality publication. However, for many publishers, it simply was not financially feasible to handle such a printing load at their local offices. To do so would have required the hiring of more pressmen and typesetters, as well as the maintenance and replacement of expensive printing equipment and supplies. Type wore out or pieces were lost, which made it more difficult to fill pages with local copy and replace the expensive lead type.

Other business concerns of the weekly press were the threat of increased second-class postal rates, a lack of revenue from low subscription rates, and too many requests for free publicity from community organizations and publicity agents. An August 1901 column in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* referred to proposed federal legislation to require weekly newspapers using the carrier delivery system to stamp every copy sent to local subscribers with one or two-cent stamps, according to weight. The editorial stated, “The proposed change would be mostly felt by the country weekly publisher, and would mean the extinction of many, as they would not be able to bear the increased expenses.”³⁴ Given that an average subscription rate for weeklies was one dollar per year, much of the subscription revenue would have been absorbed in circulation costs. The proposed legislation was not approved. Even though the cost of delivering newspapers was out of the publisher’s control, he did determine his newspaper’s subscription rate. Commenting on both rising printing costs and low subscription rates, a Missouri publisher wrote in *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, “Many experienced publishers assert that one dollar a year is too little for a good country weekly, and there is justice in their claim. Would it not be a good time to increase your subscription price?”³⁵

³⁴ "A Dangerous Bill," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, August 1901, 1.

³⁵ "Increased cost of stock," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, February 1900, 1.

Compounding the problem of low subscription rates was a high demand for free publicity space. Country editors were constantly bombarded with requests for free publicity for community fundraising events. In an article about publishing a country weekly, longtime *Abilene* (Kan.) *Reflector* editor Charles Moreau Harger wrote that editors were criticized for charging for certain items that no city editor would have printed free, such as church and lodge notices about fund-raising events, and free advertising for semi-public entertainment events sought by travel promoters.³⁶

The publishers of *Shenandoah Valley* in New Market, Virginia, were very specific in identifying items that would not be published free of charge in their weekly. A page three notice in its January 15, 1903, edition proclaimed that the paper would not publish free “notices of shows, entertainments, festivals, cards of thanks, in memoriums, resolutions of respect by churches, Sunday-schools [sic], and orders; advertising and advertising puffs by correspondents, etc.” The paper would accept one insertion, free of charge, for a religious or charitable notice of general community interest “if it does not exceed 40 words....”³⁷

However, one publicity practice welcomed by country editors, especially those who attended the annual conferences of the National Editorial Association, was the exchange of courtesies with railroads, which Congress outlawed by its passage of the Hepburn Act prior to the group’s 1907 annual gathering.³⁸ As a result, for the first time in more than twenty years conference attendees were not given free railroad transportation to the conference, nor did they benefit from a conference entertainment excursion, which previously had been provided by the

³⁶ Charles M. Harger, "The Editor of To-day," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1907, 90.

³⁷ "Notices Not Published Free," *Shenandoah Valley*, 15 January 1903, 3.

³⁸ The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 created the Interstate Commerce Commission, which was responsible for oversight of railroads. A major controversy included attempts by railroads to obtain influence over opinion leaders by offering free passes. For newspaper editors, this practice entailed an “exchange” of a railroad pass for free newspaper advertising and favorable editorials. The Hepburn Act of 1906 strengthened existing railroad regulations, including the restriction of the use of free passes.

railroads. The law put an end to complimentary newspaper write-ups as a fair return for a railroad trip, and trading advertising space for transportation. In his address to the 1907 National Editorial Association annual convention, Kansas publisher and organization president John E. Junkin observed that the railroad rate bill had “disturbed relations” of newspapers and railroads that had existed since the earliest days of railroading. But, he added, “We will even in time take pride in our independence of the trade patronage of the railroads.”³⁹

An example of favorable railway publicity appeared in the form of an open letter, unsigned, from Southern Railway that occupied three-fifths of a page in the February 1, 1907, edition of *The Laurel (Miss.) Ledger*. The open letter addressed “To the Public Served by the Southern Railway Company” explained operating increases for the railway but assured readers that there would be no resulting passage rate increases. The letter concluded with the announcement that more information would be forthcoming in the following week’s issue.⁴⁰

Syndication Services Impact Production and Personnel Costs

While the printer-publisher or postmaster-publisher had to focus much of his time and effort on revenue-generating operations, he still had to produce a weekly newspaper. An important source for keeping his production and personnel costs down was the newspaper syndicate service. The first newspaper syndicate was a business born from a newspaper publisher’s desperation to stay in business during the Civil War. It was established in 1865 by Baraboo, Wisconsin, weekly publisher Ansel Nash Kellogg after his printer joined the Union army. He had difficulty filling his pages; so he ordered half-sheet supplements containing war news from the Madison, Wisconsin, *State Journal* that were folded into his newspaper. His first

³⁹ Junkin, "President's Annual Address," 67.

⁴⁰ "To the Public Served by the Southern Railway Company," *The Laurel (Miss.) Ledger*, 1 February 1907, 6.

issue with these pre-printed pages was published July 12, 1861. Other weekly publishers soon realized the benefit of ready-printed pages and started syndicate services of their own, but Kellogg took the lead in the burgeoning industry and eventually bought out smaller companies.⁴¹

In October 1871, Kellogg's business was destroyed in the great Chicago fire that damaged much of the city. Because of the company's temporary shutdown, many small-town newspapers had to suspend their publications, or readers received their newspapers with some blank pages inside."⁴² He quickly re-established his Chicago business and expanded his syndication service to include such "boilerplate" materials as literary serials, illustrated stories, and stereotype plates.⁴³ In 1886, he died in Thomasville, Georgia, having seen his company grow to 1,400 subscribers.

The syndicate material of general interest often fell into the categories of humor or interesting facts, while special series were related to such varied topics as religion, homemaking, and movie and stage celebrities. An example of a humorous syndicate-supplied item that appeared in *The Hendricks (Minn.) Pioneer* was headlined "Didn't Know Ping-Pong." The article originated in the *Chicago Chronicle* and relayed the story of a father who became upset

⁴¹ Another syndication pioneer was Wisconsin publisher Andrew Jackson Aikens. His service differed from Kellogg's in that he sold advertising space to Milwaukee businesses to reduce his cost to produce ready-prints and to provide a wider audience for the Milwaukee-based companies. He eventually bought out other Madison syndicate services, but his operation never reached the level of success of the Kellogg Company.

⁴² *Scientific American* magazine wrote of the incident, "The fire in Chicago had the curious effect of spoiling the 'outsides' of nearly two hundred weekly newspapers which are published, hundreds of miles from that city, in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. One of the leading printers of Chicago did a large business in printing these 'outsides' in duplicate and sending them to different places, where the local publishers printed the news on the other side. The farmers who depended upon these sheets for their weekly supply of news must have been puzzled to know how the Chicago fire could have deprived them of their village newspaper while the home office remained intact." *Scientific American* 25:20 (November 11, 1871): 313.

⁴³ Stereotype plates required squeezing a sheet of damp cardboard over the type. The cardboard sheet was then dried, lifted, and turned over and molten metal was poured onto the cardboard, making a cast. Stereotype plates were more expensive to use than ready-print because they required a press run, but some editors preferred the stereotype plates because they could move the syndicated material around on the pages. The term "boilerplate" was popularized to refer to any syndicated material. Eugene C. Harter, *Boilerplating America: The Hidden Newspaper* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 33.

after his daughter declared she was “in love” with ping-pong. He was unfamiliar with the game and thought she was smitten with a “Chinaman.”⁴⁴

Weekly subscribers looked to correspondents from small, rural communities within the newspaper’s service area to provide detailed accounts of local weddings, baptisms, and funerals.⁴⁵ The local content, printed on the blank sides of the ready-print newspapers, was usually designed to promote good will in the community. A “names make news” approach was popular in determining newsworthy local articles. Agriculture, illness, and religious revivals were also topics in high demand among rural newspaper readers.

As for national and world event coverage, most rural subscribers relied on ready-print and boilerplate to provide that type of information. However, the question of whether or not readers enjoyed the national and world reports was not always as much of a concern to the publisher as was filling his pages. Without syndicate materials he would have to hire more staff, order more supplies, or purchase new press equipment. In fact, newspaper syndicates were always quick to point out the cost benefits of using their services. A March 1901 article in the Kellogg Company trade publication, *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, gave examples of editors who left ready-print, only to come back, mostly for economic reasons. Thus, newspaper syndicates became the “silent partner” of the country press, writing and influencing the opinion of thousands of rural newspaper readers who were unaware of the source of much of their news.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Didn't Know Ping-Pong," *The Hendricks* (Minn.) *Pioneer*, 7 September 1902, 7.

⁴⁵ By 1900, there were nearly 12,000 newspapers published in the United States, roughly 9,000 of those being community weeklies located mostly in towns with a population of 10,000 or less. *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1900), 8.

⁴⁶ "Ready Print vs. Home Print," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, March 1901, 1.

The power and influence of newspaper syndicates

Aside from providing newspaper publishers a means to cut production and personnel costs, the syndicates also heavily influenced the content and style of weeklies and, subsequently, the lifestyles of small-town and rural residents. The most influential of these syndicates was the Western Newspaper Union. Since its establishment in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1880, the syndicate had more subscribers and geographic spread than any other weekly news service. A large majority of its customers were located in the Midwest region of the country where there was an abundance of small communities, in which it was not uncommon to have more than one weekly newspaper. By the early 1900s, WNU subscriber newspapers represented more than half of the country's total newspaper circulation, with an estimated audience numbering twenty-five million.⁴⁷ Thus, journalism became somewhat homogenized throughout much of the country as readers of weeklies were viewing the same articles on a wide assortment of topics.

Readers of WNU-subscribing newspapers read material edited by Wright A. "Pat" Patterson, a former Iowa publisher and Kellogg Company news editor who was hired as editor-in-chief when the Kellogg syndicate purchased WNU. The influential role he had among the nation's rural newspaper readers was reflected in the headline of a piece written about him in the October 1927 issue of *The American Magazine*. The headline read: "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers."

The article began with an account of a meeting between President Theodore Roosevelt and the WNU editor-in-chief, although the specific date of the meeting was not indicated.

⁴⁷ George Joslyn, a successful patent medicine salesman who moved into the ready-print business, became the Western Newspaper Union president in 1890. To build a subscriber base, the Western Newspaper Union and other syndicates worked out franchise agreements with their subscriber newspapers in which editors agreed to purchase a specified number of pre-printed newspapers, paid for by cash on delivery. In return, the syndicate provided the subscriber the newsprint and half of the editorial, typesetting, and printing costs. The syndicate could afford to provide the newsprint and production costs because of revenue generated from the national advertising sold on the ready-print pages. Western Newspaper Union was aggressive in its expansion tactics, enabling the company to purchase Kellogg's Chicago-based company and two other leading ready-print companies in 1906.

Roosevelt was apparently unaware of the number of readers represented by the newspaperman, who was requesting that the administration play an even-handed role with the country press and the metropolitan press when it came to releasing important information. Veteran newspaperman Edward B. Clark, who was also in the room, was reported to have asked the president, "I wonder if you know exactly who this is you are talking to?" When the president replied, "yes," Clark allegedly responded, "Do you realize that Patterson helps to edit twelve thousand newspapers; that the biggest paper in the country has nowhere near so many readers as he has?" With renewed interest, Roosevelt was reported to have asked Patterson for a meeting so he could explain his syndicate's operation to the president.⁴⁸

After thirty years with WNU, Patterson, who also served on the faculty of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in Chicago, relinquished his editor's position in 1940. He then moved to Orange County, California, but continued to write his "Grassroots" column in the WNU trade publication, *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, until 1953. When he died in 1954, few knew of his enormous contributions to the country press, but small-town editors throughout the country knew him to be the man behind numerous stories and advice-filled columns for more than sixty years.

Patterson and other syndicate editors and writers heavily influenced the lifestyles of small-town and rural residents. The material they wrote, edited, and selected for distribution served as a valuable tool for education, entertainment, and even spiritual uplifting. Boilerplate material was as varied as the thousands of community newspapers that subscribed to the syndicate services. There were "women's" columns on housekeeping, fashion, and celebrities, although it was unclear whether women wrote them because no authors' names were provided.

⁴⁸ Neil M. Clark, "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers," *The American Magazine*, October, 1927, 37, 158.

Columns geared to men touched on politics, agriculture, world affairs, and business. Page seven of a 1904 edition of *The Indiana (Pa.) Democrat* contained syndicate-supplied material geared to the homemaker. The section title for the page was “Of Interest to Women.” It contained tips “For the Dark-Haired Damsel,” and instructions on “How to Gain a Correct Poise.” A “Household Affairs” column provided recipes for curried lobster and frizzled oysters, while “Household Hints” offered tips on mildew and ink stain removal.⁴⁹

In the early 1900s, many smaller communities lacked a public library and their residents could not afford lavish book collections, so often the community newspaper, a few agricultural journals, and the Bible were the few types of reading material found in a rural home.⁵⁰ Housewives clipped the serial novels and short stories of noted authors that were published in weeklies and saved them in scrapbooks for reading material. News items of interest and social commentaries were also collected and served as lessons on government, politics, and current affairs.

One popular feature of the Kellogg plate service was “American History Puzzles.” The goal, according to the Kellogg Company, was to develop the puzzles along school lessons so schoolchildren would make use of them. The company wrote in its trade publication, “From innumerable letters which we have received we know that these puzzle pictures have been decided helps in the study of history in the schools, some teachers going so far as to make them a feature of each day’s history lesson.”⁵¹

As for educating readers on political issues, the syndicates provided columns written by various political commentators, although many of the columns were not attributed to the syndicate writer and so were presumed to have been written by the local newspaper editor. *The*

⁴⁹ “Of Interest to Women,” *The Indiana (Pa.) Democrat*, 7 December 1904, 7.

⁵⁰ William E. Garnett, “Rural Organizations in Relation to Rural Life in Virginia,” (*Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin*:256, 1927).

⁵¹ “Talks About Plates,” *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, 15 February 1903, 4.

Troy (Ill). *Weekly Call* ran a regular column titled “Washington Letter” that proclaimed to contain “National and International Affairs of Interest.” A sub-headline described the column as “A Budget of News Notes from our regular Correspondent” although no writer was identified by name.⁵²

Aware of the opportunity provided through the syndicates to distribute political propaganda anonymously, some politicians tried to exploit the country press. Country editors were forewarned of this practice by the Kellogg syndicate, which proclaimed to its subscribers that, unlike its competitors, it would not distribute such propaganda. A column, titled “Free of Isms,” observed in part that a publisher “wants a service he can trust with full confidence that he will not be misrepresented. He does not want to examine the columns of his own paper to discover whether he is advocating a political faith counter to his own ideas or that of his party or readers.”⁵³

The *Chillicothe* (Mo.) *Constitution* was one weekly that did not shy away from strong endorsements or condemnations of local political candidates. A 1906 editorial in the weekly accused an incumbent official of political corruption and tainted ties to liquor and railroad interests. The paper strongly encouraged that the official be denied a third term. The endorsed challenger was described as honest, untainted by railroad influence, and in no need of a “whitewashing” of his record.⁵⁴ In contrast, the *Laurel* (Miss.) *Ledger* only went so far as to publish positive biographical sketches of all those seeking county and city offices. Endorsements

⁵² “Washington Letter,” *The Troy* (Ill.) *Weekly Call*, 5 June 1909, 4. Troy in Madison County, is located in southwest Illinois, just east of St. Louis. Troy had a population of 1,080 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 1, section 8, 446, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵³ “Free of Isms,” *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, July 1900, 1.

⁵⁴ “Get to the Polls,” *The Chillicothe* (Mo.) *Constitution*, 26 April 1906, 2. The *Constitution* consolidated with the *Chillicothe Mail* and the *Chillicothe Star* on Sept. 1, 1900. It was later designated the official county paper. Chillicothe, in Livingston County, is located in north-central Missouri. Chillicothe had a population of 6,905 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 1, section 8, 459, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

were not given and commentary was not provided as to the qualifications or lack of qualifications among the office seekers.⁵⁵

Thus, careful editing at the syndicate offices to eliminate politically partisan material resulted in the local editor rarely having to “choose sides” in relation to ready-print material contained in his newspaper. Since ready-print was designed to be non-controversial, Patterson explained that the syndicate dealt with straight news by summarizing the most significant state, national or international happenings. He added that controversial subjects were “handled as if we didn’t have a single opinion of our own.”⁵⁶

For entertainment purposes, literary serials were among the most popular ready-print and boilerplate materials. A January 1903 article in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* urged publishers to purchase literary serials, especially following the Christmas holiday season, since their subscribers would have more time for reading following the busy Christmas holiday season. It was suggested, of course, that they run serials provided by the Kellogg Company. “Get a reader interested in a good serial and he will count the days until the next issue of the paper is due,” the article stated. “This feeling carries him past the time for cutting off the subscription, if it is the end of his year, and should he be so minded, and insures his continuing on your list.”

Publishers were encouraged to print the first chapters of a new serial before concluding another, to hold their readers’ interest “so they’ll never want to leave you.” They were also advised to run an extra printing of the first few chapters of a serial and send it out as a way to attract more subscribers. Betterman Lindsey was the author of a series titled “A Nez Perce Lochinvar” that took up three columns of an eight-columned front page in the September 7, 1901

⁵⁵ *The Laurel (Miss.) Ledger*, 1 February 1907, 2. The *Ledger* proclaimed itself to be “The Official Organ of All who Till the Soil.” The Cotton Growers’ Association and Farmers’ Educational Union were listed as sponsors of a page dedicated to agricultural news. Laurel, in Jones County, is located in southeast Mississippi. Laurel had a population of 8,193 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 1, section 8, 459, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵⁶ Clark, “Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers,” 163.

issue of *The Denton (Md.) Journal*. An identifying line stated, “Supplied Syndicate Literary Series.”⁵⁷ Western-themed series were also popular, including “Langford of the Three Bars,” which was authored by Kate and Virgil D. Boyles.⁵⁸ Other popular serials being published at the time were “The Kidnapped Millionaires,” by Frederick Upham Adams, and “A Knave of Conscience” and “The Trouble on the Torolito,” both by Francis Lynde.⁵⁹

And finally, on the issue of religious matters, ready-print and boilerplate materials served as a supplement to the Bible. Despite efforts to remain unbiased on religious matters, the ready-print industry did show partiality to its larger Protestant audience, with many of its editorial stances focusing on religious and temperance issues. One of the most popular and longest-surviving columns provided by the Western Newspaper Union was “Sunday School Lessons,” which lasted until the ready-print service died in 1953. For example, *The Troy (Ill.) Weekly Call* ran a column titled “Heroes of Faith” that featured weekly Sunday School lessons “specially arranged for this paper.”⁶⁰

A new century, an old problem: local news vs. syndicated material

The twentieth century introduced an ever-increasing dividing line between community newspapers devoted to locally generated news and editorials and those that were content to fill a majority of their pages with nationally syndicated material. “All home print” became the mantra of small-town editors who believed their newspapers were of a higher quality because their news

⁵⁷ Batterman Lindsay, "A Nez Perce Lochinvar," *The Denton (Md.) Journal*, 7 September 1901, 1. Denton, in Caroline County, is located in east-central Maryland. Denton had a population of 900 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 1, section 8, 454, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵⁸ Kate Boyles and Virgil Boyles, "Langford of the Three Bars," *Marshall (Mich.) Expounder*, 1 May 1908, 6. Marshall in Calhoun County, is located in south-central Michigan, just east of Battle Creek. Marshall had a population of 4,370 in 1900. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 1, section 8, 456, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵⁹ "Secure New Subscribers--Hold Old Ones," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 1 January 1903, 8.

⁶⁰ "Heroes of Faith," *The Troy (Ill.) Weekly Call*, 5 June 1908, 7.

and editorials were written locally. They relied on the curiosity of townspeople to subscribe to their newspapers, which featured lively accounts of local occurrences. Strong, locally oriented editorials were also a common feature of the “all home print” publications. In fact, the ranks of “all home print” advocates grew as more rural publishers became graduates of college journalism programs that multiplied, especially across the Midwest and numbered thirty-two by the year 1912.⁶¹ College journalism programs in the Midwest had a large potential enrollment population given the high number of community weeklies throughout that region and recognition of the importance of small-town weeklies among its college-age residents. The University of Missouri, which began offering a journalism course in 1878, was the country’s first college or university to establish a journalism degree program in 1908.⁶²

One of the most outspoken leaders among the “all home print” editors was William Allen White, publisher of the *Emporia (Kan.) Gazette*, who earned a national reputation for his well-crafted editorials on state and national issues.⁶³ In 1895, at age twenty-seven, he purchased the *Gazette*, which reflected his devotion to locally generated news. He recalled, “We stressed local news and printed a number of items that ordinarily would not have been printed in a strictly conventional newspaper. We were chatty, colloquial, incisive, impertinent, ribald, and enterprising in our treatment of local events....⁶⁴ Other publishers in the “all home print”

⁶¹ Walter Wilcox, "Historical Trends in Journalism Education," *Journalism Educator* 14:3, 1959): 5.

⁶² Tom Dickson, *Mass Media Education in Transition: Preparing for the 21st Century* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 15. In the late 1800s, journalism courses were offered at University of Missouri (1878), Denver University (1882), Cornell University (1888), State University of Iowa and Ohio State University (1892), University of Pennsylvania and University of Indiana (1893), University of Kansas (1894), University of Michigan (1895), Bessie Tift College of Atlanta (1898), and University of Chicago (1899). At the turn of the century, journalism courses were offered at University of Oregon (1902), University of North Dakota, Iowa State College, and Wharton School of Business at University of Pennsylvania (1903), University of Illinois (1904), and University of Wisconsin (1906).

⁶³ William A. White is best known for his now-famous 1896 campaign editorial, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” which pointed out that while other neighboring states had increased in population and wealth, Kansas had not. He threw pointed criticisms at state officials and the electorate for returning them to office. As a result, he received letters, some angry, most complimentary, from across the nation. Reprints were sent out, and newspapers throughout the country asked for exchanges, or copies, to reproduce in their publications.

⁶⁴ William A. White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 269.

movement joined him to encourage small-town editors to incorporate more local news and features so that their publications were a reflection of their distinctive communities rather than a hodgepodge collection of general interest items. White's strategy paid off as local subscriptions and advertising revenue increased for his newspaper, along with a national appreciation for his editorial opinions that were admired as examples of common sense and honesty originating from small-town America. Small-town weekly editors across the country exchanged newspapers with White and re-printed his editorials in their publications. His writings became so well known that the *Gazette* attracted subscribers nationwide, especially in the nation's capital. Despite his growing celebrity, and continued pleas to join the staffs of the nation's leading newspapers and magazines, he remained in Kansas to do the work he loved most, publishing a community newspaper.⁶⁵

The syndicate services aggressively sought ways to downplay the "all home print" movement among weeklies. The syndicates had a way of disguising their ready-print and boilerplate material to appear as if they were locally written. Because there were so many neighboring newspapers subscribing to the same ready-print syndicate, there was concern that readers would discover the duplication of pages and determine that their local newspaper was not "all home print." WNU's Patterson observed, "The service is so organized that papers in the same town, or nearby towns, never are embarrassed by both getting the same material."

To prevent neighboring newspapers from receiving the same ready-print pages, different pre-printed stories were sent for same-date issues. In addition to avoiding duplication of articles, the WNU editorial office was careful in sending out material without bias. The editorial office was ever mindful that the same articles were read in Protestant and Catholic homes, by blacks

⁶⁵ William A. White was a regular contributor to such national magazines as *McClure's*, *Scribner's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Collier's*.

and whites, and Republicans and Democrats. He added, "A man's bringing-up and education have a great deal to do with what he will read and how he takes it.... The great majority are not, consciously, very critical; and yet, subconsciously, they are the keenest of critics--they know what they like, what is helpful to them, what rings true."⁶⁶

As a result of the extensive use of ready-print and boilerplate in weeklies and a decrease in locally written editorials and opinion columns, the image of the crusading editor of the eighteenth century was giving way to the newspaper businessman. The businessman-editor was seen as being more concerned about advertising revenue and not offending the business community than stirring up controversy and increasing subscriptions. By the early twentieth century, fewer community newspapers were identified as "political organs." In 1907 the 1,500-circulation *Indiana (Pa.) Democrat* professed to be "the only Democratic newspaper published in Indiana County."⁶⁷

But beyond identifiable affiliation with a particular political party, editors of weeklies had to be careful even in deciding whether or not to choose sides in a local controversy, because in doing so, they would certainly lose some advertisers or subscribers, not to mention good friends. Charles Harger pointed out these types of local struggles, such as where to locate a school, whether or not to build a bridge, or even, who should be appointed justice of the peace, in his article about the country editor. He related how activists on opposing sides of local issues sought the newspaper's support. "One leader is, perhaps, a liberal advertiser; to offend him means loss of business. Another is a personal friend; to anger him means the loss of friendship. The editor of the only paper in the town must be a diplomat if he is to guide safely through the channel," he wrote.⁶⁸ The inclusion of more local coverage invited more controversy and

⁶⁶ Clark, "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers," 158, 160.

⁶⁷ *The Indiana (Pa.) Democrat*, 7 December 1904, 5.

⁶⁸ Harger, "The Editor of To-day," 90.

criticism of the community newspapers. Thus, it made the task of “all home print” advocates to convince their professional peers to abandon syndicate materials seem much more difficult.

But it was not so much a difference in opinion on syndicate content that kept many publishers away from an “all home print” edition as it was a matter of money. Being an “all-home-print” publication meant being able to afford more personnel, including trained journalists, and better equipment and supplies to support a 100 percent locally produced and printed publication. Weekly editors who ran “canned” editorials and filled half of their pages with syndicate material did not believe that their publications were any less a “community” newspaper. They simply recognized that without the financial, advertising, and content support of the syndicates, there would be no community newspaper. And a majority of weekly editors, though admittedly there were steadfast holdouts, did aspire to eventually release the shackles of syndication and have their newspapers join the ranks of “all-home-print” publications.

Formal journalism education impacts weekly newspaper content, personnel

Was a college degree required to efficiently operate a weekly newspaper in the twentieth century? Veteran journalists largely supported the belief that “office” or “shop” training was the only legitimate means to learn the newspaper business. In a 1904 issue of *North American Review*, Horace White, editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, argued strongly against a proposal by renowned newspaperman Joseph Pulitzer to establish a graduate school of journalism at Columbia University. White observed, “Every experienced journalist will agree that a nose for news cannot be cultivated at college.”⁶⁹ However, more newspapermen realized the advantages of journalism education and their professional organizations began endorsing the concept. Early endorsements for formal journalism education came from Walter Williams, a respected country

⁶⁹ Horace White, “The School of Journalism,” *North American Review* 178 (January, 1904): 26.

editor and leader among Missouri's state press association, and other Missouri editors who called for a program at their state university. In fact, the University of Missouri established the country's first college or university degree program in journalism and named Williams as its dean. At the University of Wisconsin, professor Willard Bleyer first taught journalism courses in 1906 as part of a two-year program, which was later expanded to create a department of journalism in 1912. Journalism textbooks were not available in the early years of these programs; so professors had only their experience and notes to rely on.

Previously, some journalism courses were offered at a handful of universities beginning in the 1870s. The first course was established by former Civil War hero Robert E. Lee, who, after the war, accepted a position as president of Washington University (later Washington and Lee University). He wanted to boost the economic opportunities for young men in the devastated South by offering scholarships in journalism and printing. Within the next few years, more journalism courses appeared among colleges, many in the Midwest, before the degree-offering programs began in the early 1900s.⁷⁰

As college-educated journalists sought jobs in the field, many were drawn to the allure of a big city and its metropolitan dailies. However, others were attracted to the idea of guiding a community's voice through its hometown newspaper and becoming a community leader. The college-educated country editor was more likely to write a personal column or editorial and replace syndicate material with locally written copy. Another attraction of small-town

⁷⁰ Among the professional journalists that early on supported the idea of college journalism courses were prominent New York editors R.R. Bowker and Joseph Pulitzer, Missouri Press Association presidents William Switzler and Walter Williams, and Philadelphia *Times* editor Eugene Camp. The facts and occurrences of the development of college and university journalism education programs are reported in several journalism history works, among them Richard T. Baker, *A History of the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954); Tom Dickson, *Mass Media Education in Transition: Preparing for the 21st Century* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2000); Wm. David Sloan, *Makers of the Media Mind: Journalism Educators and Their Ideas* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990); and Albert Alton Sutton, *Education for Journalism in the United States from its Beginning to 1940* (Menasha, Wis.: George Banta Publishing Company, 1945).

newspapers was that the publisher-editor reached an elevated status, alongside the local lawyer, doctor, and merchant. In his article "The Country Editor of to-Day," Charles Harger observed that more country editors were operating like businessmen and that the role of a small-town publisher had become more attractive to the trained journalist. He referred to the number of country papers that operated type-setting machines, ran presses with an electric motor, and gave the editor an income of \$3,000 or more and vacation days.⁷¹ "The country editor gets a good deal out of life. He lives well; he travels much; he meets the best people of his state; and, if he be inclined, he can accomplish much for his own improvement," he wrote. Thus, colleges began turning out more graduates who aspired to take on the community leadership role bestowed upon the small-town newspaper editor.

So, while the trained journalist became more of a fixture at metropolitan dailies and small-town newspapers, the commonly held assumption that most journalists aspired to work at the large dailies did not always hold true. Harger observed, "It is often remarked that the ambition of the country editor is to secure a position on a city paper. I have had many city newspapermen confide to me that their fondest hope was to save enough money to buy a country weekly in a thriving town."⁷²

Competition among daily, weekly newspapers for advertisers, subscribers

As the early twentieth century introduced more competition between dailies and weeklies for college-trained journalists and national advertising contracts, it also ushered in more aggressive actions by dailies to attract rural subscribers, which seemingly would have threatened the very existence of many weeklies. It was also during this period that the more successful

⁷¹ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$3,000 from 1907 was worth \$68,279.47. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁷² Harger, "The Editor of To-day," 94-96.

weeklies, those that expanded quickly in circulation and advertising revenue, had to decide whether or not to move to a multi-weekly or even daily publication, thus changing the “rural press” image of their publications.

The metropolitan newspapers introduced a new strategy to lure subscribers away from their community weekly by publishing their own weekly editions aimed at rural readers. These weekly editions were mostly compilations of the week’s news and contained little or no news from the rural communities. The metropolitan newspapers also sought more rural customers for their daily editions. However, only those farmers who lived close to a post office would bother to pick up their mail more than once a week. It was not unusual for those farmers who subscribed to a metropolitan daily to come in once a week to pick up their sack full of that week’s newspapers. To many of these farmers, it just seemed more sensible to subscribe to a weekly.⁷³ In response to its metropolitan competitors, the community press advertised itself as the best source for local news, though many papers continued to include world and national news from ready-print and boilerplate.

Aside from the dailies attempting to lure away their subscribers, a bigger concern for weekly publishers was that they were being overlooked by national advertisers who opted for the larger audiences guaranteed at a daily newspaper. Charles Allen, in his 1928 textbook on community journalism, observed that small-town publishers had themselves to blame for a lack of national advertising contracts because they did not adhere to fair rates and rules governing national advertising placements. Also, there was no standard column measure among weeklies. National advertisers were therefore required to work with individual newspapers instead of sending out a standard-sized advertisement for multiple placements.⁷⁴ If weeklies were to

⁷³ Wayne E. Fuller, *RFD: The Changing Face of Rural America* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1966), 291.

⁷⁴ Charles L. Allen, *Country Journalism* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928), 250.

continue to grow and thrive in the new century, they would have to adopt better business practices and attract not only subscribers but advertisers, both local and national.⁷⁵

Readership, advertising, and competition from other newspapers were the usual factors that determined whether or not a weekly would convert to a daily publication. However, a 1903 article in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* referred to another community characteristic important in determining if the citizens would support a daily newspaper. The article described the types of communities most accommodating to daily newspapers, as compared to those deemed less accepting. Non-daily towns, according to the article, were those whose people were unprogressive, whose merchants bought and sold in small quantities with no interest in expanding their business volume, and whose town leaders were not interested in securing new industries or holding old ones. But towns more accepting of a daily newspaper, according to the article, were usually located next to railroad connections and were surrounded by potentially profitable territory. The article continued, "If the publishers of some of the local weeklies do not take up the work of giving such towns a daily, some outsider will do so." The article was self-serving for the Kellogg Company because it promoted its ready-prints as a much less expensive means to publish a daily newspaper by providing "everything of a general nature that is supplied by the metropolitan press to its readers."⁷⁶

Despite the aforementioned concerns by publishers that competition from city dailies would put an end to their papers those concerns were largely dismissed in the latter part of the decade as weeklies continued to thrive. The small-town publications attracted newly trained

⁷⁵ To address concerns about competition with the metropolitan dailies for subscribers and advertisers, concerns which had been voiced by country editors since the late nineteenth century, Minnesota weekly publisher Benjamin Briggs Herbert led a group of publishers from across the nation to New Orleans in late 1885 to organize the National Editorial Association, a professional organization for the country press. From its Chicago base, the association began publishing a trade magazine, the *National Editorial Journalist and Printer and Publisher* (later re-named the *National Printer-Journalist*) in 1893.

⁷⁶ "The Value of Newspaper Fields: There is Danger of Underdoing Quite as Much as Overdoing in the Publishing Business," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, January 15 1903, 1.

journalists and, for the most part, hung on to their subscribers despite the best efforts of metropolitan newspapers to pull them away. Harger predicted that an effort by the dailies to include rural community news would not attract enough new subscribers to put the weeklies out of business. He wrote, "The life of a forceful paper is long. One such paper was sold and its name changed eighteen years ago; yet letters and subscriptions still are addressed to the old publication. A hold like that on a community's life cannot be broken by competition."⁷⁷

Frank Gwin, publisher of the *New Albany (Ind.) Public Press* told a 1903 gathering of the Southern Indiana Press Association that every well-established newspaper, whether daily or weekly, had a "clientele peculiarly its own." Gwin advised country editors that the best way to overcome competition from metropolitan newspapers was "to represent people's views in the current events of the day in the news columns. Spicy comments out of the ordinary create talk for the paper, and keep the publication in the public mind."⁷⁸

Harger argued that there were sentimental, even psychological, attachments one had for his hometown newspaper that could not be matched by readers of a metropolitan daily. He observed that a city businessman would throw away financial papers and sensational tabloids but would eagerly open the pencil-addressed home papers "that bring to him memories of new-mown hay and fallow fields and boyhood. Regardless of its style, its grammar, or its politics, it holds its reader with a grip that the city editor may well envy." He said the time had not yet come for the country paper to "assume city airs," nor would it be for many years to come. He explained, "The city journal is the paper of the masses; the country weekly or small daily is the paper of the neighborhood. One is general and impersonal; the other, direct and intimate. One is the marketplace; the other, the home."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Harger, "The Editor of To-day," 95.

⁷⁸ Frank Gwin, "The Competition of City Papers," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 15 August 1903, 1.

⁷⁹ Harger, "The Editor of To-day," 92, 94.

Community weeklies fight for a political voice

In addition to competing with the dailies for subscribers and advertising revenue, weeklies vied against their metropolitan counterparts to get the ear of their state and national legislators as a means to influence legislation, particularly bills that related to rural residents. Harger argued that small-town weeklies and dailies were more effective at lobbying their congressmen because of the readership they represented. He referred to the remarks of a Midwest congressman who said that he had seen many stacks of community newspapers on the desks of fellow congressmen. According to the congressman, much attention was given to any country editor who offered a rational idea about a national issue in an editorial because the idea came “from the grass-roots.”⁸⁰

The end of the first decade of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a period of phenomenal growth in small-town journalism. The number of newspapers grew at a rapid pace, and country newspaper operations became more sophisticated in their technology and profit-oriented in their business practices. As their metropolitan daily counterparts turned up their noses at these so-called “boilerplate” operations, country editors turned the heads of politicians and businessmen alike who recognized fully the benefit of advertising in their papers and winning the political backing of their readers. In his article about the rural press Harger concluded, “The country editor is doing very well, and the trend of his business affairs is in the direction of better financial returns and wider influence....Closest to the people, nearest to their home life, its hopes and its aspirations, the country editor is at the foundation of journalism.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ The congressman’s name was not provided.

⁸¹Harger, “The Editor of Today,” 96.

Chapter 2

The 1910s: Propaganda, Publicity, Paper and Postal Rates, and Patriotism

Weekly newspapers of the second decade of the twentieth century were marked by four main concerns: propaganda, publicity, paper and postal rates, and patriotism. Syndicate services had a diverse audience nationwide but a same-ness in content that made it easier for them to promote a political, economical, or social agenda. Press agents, representing public and private concerns, inundated the weekly press with news from any place other than home, which prompted an “all home print” backlash movement within the weekly field. But syndicate-heavy and all-home-print weeklies eventually came together in a cooperative effort to bring paper and postal rates down and support the country’s war effort, under the watchful eye of a censor-minded government oversight committee.

A vast majority of the roughly 15,000 weeklies across the country subscribed to syndicated ready-print and boilerplate services. Thus syndicate services had a wide audience for various types of propaganda material, particularly the unsigned editorials and opinion pieces distributed by politicians, political parties, and publicity agencies representing corporate and political interests.

Publicity bureaus became well established in the largest metropolitan areas. They began churning out “free publicity” targeted to weeklies in an effort to promote their clients’ products

and issues without having to pay advertising space for their messages.⁸² The weekly industry fought back, encouraging its members to refuse the material and opt instead for locally generated copy. But ready-print and boilerplate proved too beneficial to smaller news operations, particularly those with three or fewer employees, because they relied on the syndicate material to fill their pages.

But affording the paper on which the syndicate material was printed and mailing costs to distribute their newspapers became a major concern for publishers during this decade. Governmental intervention both helped and hurt the small newspaper industry in terms of paper costs and postal rates. Fortunately, price fixing among paper manufacturers was brought to an end and proposed higher postal rates for second-class mailings were rescinded.

Resentment on the part of the community weekly establishment towards free publicity turned to patriotic zeal with the outbreak of the Great War.⁸³ Weeklies became a vital partner with the federal government to promote patriotism and community support of the war effort. However, in the post-war period the patriotic zeal of a large number of weeklies was carried to the extreme in the form of selective censorship because these newspapers refused to report on growing labor unrest and a surge in the Socialist movement. Many rural editors viewed these issues as a threat to the patriotic principles that their readers overwhelmingly supported.

Community weeklies: propaganda tools?

Country journalism reached a peak in the United States by 1914-1915 as 14,500 weeklies were in operation throughout the country. Powerful business and government lobbyists

⁸² “Free publicity” was a derogatory phrase uttered by community weekly publishers embittered by the practice of advertising agencies to place most of their national advertisements in dailies and seek placement of publicity releases in the non-daily newspapers at no charge.

⁸³ The Great War lasted from 1914 until 1918 and was presumed to be the final multi-national military engagement of modern times. However, it was re-named World War I after another multi-national war broke out several decades later that became known as World War II.

recognized the influence of community newspapers over public opinion because of the vast distribution of ready-print and boilerplate material to an estimated audience of sixty million.⁸⁴ There was continued growth in the “all-home-print” movement, but the weeklies that opted for locally typeset news pages were far outnumbered by the small-town newspapers that subscribed to newspaper syndicates.⁸⁵

Congressmen and other elected officials took notice of the power of persuasive messages emanating from the editorial offices of the country’s leading ready-print and boilerplate syndicates and recognized the potential for both influencing public opinion and distributing their campaign material. Lobbyists for big business, foreign governments, and societal concerns also saw the potential to disseminate their carefully crafted messages through syndicate services and used the weeklies to full advantage.

As weeklies became recognized for their use as propaganda tools, government officials grew more concerned about the potential for a single company to monopolize the ready-print and boilerplate industry, thereby monopolizing propaganda messages. By the second decade of the twentieth century the leading sources for propaganda distribution were the Chicago-based Western Newspaper Union and the New York-based American Press Association. The two companies made a failed attempt at consolidation in 1909 and were embroiled in a bitter trade war in 1911. The federal government intervened in 1912 with a decree in a civil anti-trust suit against the news agencies. A *New York Times* article reported that the defendants were restrained from combining or continuing alleged unfair methods in competition. Otherwise, the decree stated, the agencies would destroy one or the other, leaving the other as a monopoly to influence

⁸⁴ *N.W. Ayer & Son’s American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1916): 11. Though the total for all types of weeklies is listed at 16,277 for 1915, the number of general-circulation community weeklies is considered to be in the 14,500 range.

⁸⁵ Some weeklies moved away from ready-print, but continued to purchase stereotype plates that could be spread throughout the publication, giving the appearance of an “all-home-print” edition.

the readers of 16,000 small newspapers, which represented roughly two-thirds of the country's population.

The government did not seek dissolution of either company. It reasoned that news gathering and dissemination could best be performed for the general public through the larger agencies if there remained "fair, genuine and substantial competition." The decree referred to the agencies' failed effort to consolidate that resulted in a 1911 campaign of destructive competition. The decree enjoined the WNU and the APA syndicates from underselling competitors or issuing false reports that would influence the customers of competitors. The decree forbade such business practices to continue. Otherwise, it stated, a monopoly would have resulted, most likely WNU with its assets of \$6.5 million as compared to \$1.6 million for the APA.⁸⁶

Just three years later, a government petition was filed against the WNU and three of its officials, George Joslyn, H.H. Fish, and M.H. McMillan. The officials were held in contempt of court for failing to comply with the court decree in the 1912 anti-trust suit. According to a *New York Times* article, the petition was based on affidavits that indicated the WNU circulated unfair reports about competitors in Toledo, Ohio, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, and sold its services to newspapers in Ohio and Michigan for a lower price than its published rates.⁸⁷

But the outbreak of the Great War turned the government's attention away from the once-warring syndicate factions, which by this time began working more closely together as the

⁸⁶ "News Trust Checked By Government Suit: Western Newspaper Union and American Press Association Restrained by Court, Affects 60,000,000 Readers: Government Saw Possibility of a Combination Which Would be Used to Sway Public Opinion," *New York Times*, 4 August 1912, 8. Estimates on the number of weekly newspapers differed because some totals included special-interest weekly publications, such as labor, immigrant, and minority newspapers, while others referred only to "general circulation" small-town weeklies. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$6.5 million from 1912 was worth \$143,374,787.23 and \$1.6 million from 1912 was worth \$35,292,255.32. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁸⁷ "Accuse Newspaper Union: Western Syndicate Charged with violating Federal Court's Order," *New York Times*, 8 June 1915, 9.

increased scarcity of newsprint and mounting prices reduced the size of many country newspapers and caused quite a number to close down.⁸⁸

Aside from protecting competitors in the newspaper syndicate industry from the threat of a monopoly, the federal government also intervened in the affairs of the syndicates on behalf of its readers who were alleged to be unwilling participants in various propaganda campaigns. A 1913 hearing of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary addressed the use of syndicate plate matter for propaganda purposes. Senator Albert Cummins, a Republican from Iowa, asked a lobbyist for the beet sugar manufacturers if he knew of a method of “giving to the public as news, arguments or statements that are intended to promote or sustain a particular propaganda and where the public has no way of knowing that the matter was collected by a person in the employ of a particular interest?” The lobbyist referred to President Woodrow Wilson and Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama as having used syndicated material from the APA in their nominating campaigns. Cummins also questioned the lobbyist about the use of syndicated material to affect public opinion “which in turn is intended to influence legislation.” Asked to identify all of the men employed by large corporations “to create a public opinion” through use of ready-print and plate matter, the lobbyist responded, “I do not think you would have enough space in this room for them all.” The lobbyist mentioned the WNU as being the largest of these syndication services.⁸⁹

The Senate committee’s investigation of syndicate material continued into the next year, when it explored the use of ready-print in country newspapers to lure nearly one million

⁸⁸ The American Press Association syndicate had only five percent of the ready-print business in 1912 but by 1917 had fallen to one percent because its chief competitor, the Western Newspaper Union, was able to sell ready-print at lower rates. In 1912, the APA had a large part of the stereotype plate business, but WNU was able to reduce its price on miscellaneous plate matter by one-fourth and on serials by one-third, pulling more customers away from APA. By 1917, APA decided to close its plate business and petitioned the federal government to see if it had to dispose of its plate plant as junk, or whether it could be sold to its only likely bidder, WNU. The court overturned the original decree of 1912, allowing WNU to be a bidder and purchaser of APA’s plate plant.

⁸⁹ Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Maintenance of a Lobby to Influence Legislation*, Sixty-Third Congress, First Session, August 1913, 1,113.

Americans to Canada through the use of advertising that was disguised as news. H.D. Cheshire, an immigration agent of one of the large railroads in the Northwest, said in an April 1913 *Washington Post* article that close to one million Americans moved to Canada after the turn of the century. He said that despite the efforts of Canadian immigration agents and government officials to lure U.S. farmers “there are cheap lands in Canada, but they require years of cultivation and many hundreds of dollars’ worth of improvements before they can be classed with the farming lands of the United States.”⁹⁰ A few months later, however, House Speaker James “Champ” Clark of Missouri said that the United States should loosen restrictions on homesteading and promote irrigation to deter the number of American farmers moving to Canada. He estimated that the mass emigration was costing the country roughly \$1.23 million a year. For example, Clark reported on a one-week period in 1913 during which 1,845 American farmers, worth \$388,500 in cash and \$145,000 in personal property, crossed into western Canada to settle permanently in British North America.⁹¹ A New York-based columnist attributed Canada’s immigration success to a \$2.5 million publicity campaign.⁹²

Newspaper syndicate officials and a Canadian interior department official backed up the columnist’s claim that advertisements presented as news in small country newspapers were a factor in luring hundreds of thousands of American farmers into Canada. A January 18, 1914, article in the *New York Times* reported that Courtland Smith, president of the APA, testified to the Senate committee investigating syndicate material that the Canadian government paid more than \$100,000 a year to the WNU, his company’s major competitor, for the distribution of ready-print that contained alleged interviews with supposed financially successful settlers in northwest

⁹⁰ "Come Back from Canada," *The Washington Post*, 8 April 1913, 6.

⁹¹ "Millions Lost to U.S.," *The Washington Post*, 23 June 1913, 4.

⁹² Holland, "'Holland' Says Publicity Aids in Canada's Vast Industrial Growth," *The Washington Post*, 18 August 1913, 7.

Canada.⁹³ He also asserted that the WNU Canadian contract called for the publication of a specified number of the interviews in a specified number of papers. Smith claimed that he had been approached several times by Canadian agents seeking a similar contract but that he always refused the offers.⁹⁴ Smith said the press association supplied “plate insides” to small country papers. He submitted a copy of a country paper in the West, with an example of the alleged propaganda. The story was about an Iowa farmer who allegedly nearly starved trying to make a living. He then sold out and moved to Canada, and subsequently became rich and prosperous.⁹⁵ An interior department official of the Canadian government testified voluntarily before the Senate committee that his country spent \$70,000 a year on publicity to draw American farmers to Canada’s northwest region.⁹⁶ His testimony was followed by that of H. E. Washington of Chicago, advertising manager for the Western Newspaper Union, who testified that the Canadian government paid his organization \$42,000⁹⁷ a year to print in 4,800 “ready print” papers statements “portraying in the brightest colors the possibilities of agriculture in Canada.”⁹⁸

An unsigned commentary appeared in the *Washington Post* in late January advising the politicians who complained about Canada’s publicity campaign to take a closer look at U.S. policies related to homesteading and irrigation. It asked, “Was it merely because they [American farmers] saw an ad or an article in the newspapers that the Americans sold their land in this country and took all their possessions with them into Canada?” It noted that advertising was a potent force, but that it must be supported by solid foundations of truth in order to be successful.

⁹³ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$100,000 from 1913 was worth \$2,159,812.50. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁹⁴ "Canada Accused of Luring Farmers," *New York Times*, 18 January 1914, 1.

⁹⁵ "Misled by Canada," *The Washington Post*, 18 January 1914, 4.

⁹⁶ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$70,000 from 1913 was worth \$1,511,868.75. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁹⁷ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$42,000 from 1913 was worth \$907,121.25. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁹⁸ "Against Canadian Lure," *The Washington Post*, 29 January 1914, 2.

Unlike the United States, it observed, “encouragement of the farmer and business man is the gospel of the [Canadian] government.”⁹⁹

A June *Collier's* magazine article reported on later testimony by George Joslyn, president of the WNU, before the same Senate committee. The article included the following brief extract from his testimony:

Chairman (Senator Lee S. Overman of North Carolina)-I understand that any company, person, corporation, association, or firm who desire to exploit themselves or exploit their business, and to create public opinion, could come to you and pay you a certain sum ... and you would send out the matter they wanted you to send the different papers, which would print it?

Mr. Joslyn-Yes, sir.

The Chairman-And for that sum of money you would send it out to these papers without marking it “Advertisement”?

Mr. Joslyn-Yes, sir.

Cummins blamed the emigration of some 800,000 American farmers to Canada during the previous twelve years on “paid propaganda in the guise of honest news.” While the investigation revealed only that the Canadian government was a WNU customer, the article concluded, “It would be interesting to know something about the other ‘persons, corporations, associations, or firms’ who exploit themselves through the Western Newspaper Union.”¹⁰⁰

Prior to Senate investigations on syndicate material, weekly publishers and editors made no attempt to identify boilerplate and ready-print as coming from a central source rather than the local newsroom. Ready-print pages did not attach author bylines to articles except for some regularly featured columns. The impression was that their publications were “all-home-print” editions without such a claim ever being made. Homogeneous news items were sent to a majority of the country’s newspaper readers without them even knowing it. Thus, weekly publishers and

⁹⁹ “Canada's Advertising,” *The Washington Post*, 30 January 1914, 6.

¹⁰⁰ “A Real Case of Tainted News,” *Collier's* June 6, 1914, 16.

editors were just as misleading in not providing attribution for syndicate articles as syndicates officials were in failing to identify advertisements, or paid publicity, as news.

Despite the propaganda assertions made against ready-print and boilerplate, weeklies relied heavily on syndicate material for commercial success. As more local advertisements were sold, more syndicate material was needed to fill additional pages. However, as a result of the Senate investigations into propaganda and the powerful newspaper syndicates, boilerplate and ready-print were more readily marked in newspapers as advertisements; or small-font letters representing the syndicate, such as “WNU” were placed at the bottom of the article.¹⁰¹

Other steps were taken during this time to promote honesty in advertising and to protect all newspaper readers.¹⁰² For example, the Standards of Newspaper Practice was adopted in June 1914 by the Newspaper Division of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World at its annual convention in Toronto. The standards outlined the following duties of a newspaper: to protect the honest advertiser and newspaper readers from deceptive or offensive advertising; to sell advertising as a commodity on the basis of proved circulation; to maintain uniform rates, according to classifications; to reject advertising deemed antagonistic to the public welfare; and to cooperate with other newspapers in maintaining the standards.¹⁰³

Publicity for political and promotional purposes

¹⁰¹ Western Newspaper Union bought out the American Press Association’s boilerplate and ready-print business in 1917, at which time the APA converted into an advertising agency. Wealthy Omaha, Nebraska, businessman George Joslyn died in 1916, having served as WNU’s president since 1890. In addition to WNU stock, he built his fortune on patent medicine manufacturing and sales.

¹⁰² The Bourne Newspaper Publicity law passed by Congress in 1912 required newspapers to make public its owners and circulation figures. The Audit Bureau of Circulations was established in 1913 by advertisers, advertising agents, and publishers to furnish reliable information on the size and character of the circulation of newspapers and magazines that belonged to the Bureau. Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism*, 418-420.

¹⁰³ "Advertising Ethics are now Codified," *New York Times*, 24 June 1914, 4.

While bitter competition between the dominant ready-print and boilerplate syndicates played out in a courtroom, syndicate material heavily influenced the court of public opinion in the 1912 presidential race, according to George Kibbe Turner who wrote about the election in a *McClure's* article. The 1912 presidential race not only brought a new face to the White House when Woodrow Wilson defeated incumbent President William H. Taft, but it also brought a new means of manufacturing public opinion. Suddenly press bureaus and the placement of free publicity became all important in the election of a national candidate. Turner observed that “direct popular choice of candidates had arrived; the presidential preference primary was here; and candidates, not parties, must introduce themselves directly to the voters--and incidentally finance the machinery for doing so.”¹⁰⁴

Democratic nominee Wilson was the first of the candidates to get his press bureau going. Three main outlets for presidential publicity campaigns were daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, and direct-appeal pamphlets and letters.¹⁰⁵ The September 24, 1912 issue of the *Centralia (Wa.) Weekly Chronicle* contained these Wilson-related headlines: “Bryan Will Help Wilson,” “Wilson Takes Issue with Roosevelt,” and “Wilson Gets Enthusiastic Reception.” The articles were released through the United Press Leased Wire.¹⁰⁶

What made the 1912 election even more interesting was that former President Theodore Roosevelt ran as a Progressive Party candidate. His campaign representative, Chicago newsman Medill McCormick, sent out queries asking country editors if they wanted a full news service on

¹⁰⁴ George Kibbe Turner, "Manufacturing Public Opinion: The New Art of Making Presidents by Press Bureau," *McClure's* July, 1912, 318. The passage of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913 allowed for the popular election of U.S. senators instead of by state legislatures.

¹⁰⁵ Luther B. Little wrote an article, "The Printing Press in Politics," in *Munsey's Magazine* 23 (1900) about the flood of campaign literature sent out by rival parties in a presidential election. He noted that in the 1896 election, the Republicans distributed, from their National Committee headquarters, roughly 2,000 tons of campaign literature.

¹⁰⁶ *Centralia (Wa.) Weekly Chronicle*, 24 September 1912, 2, 4, 7. The last name "Bryan" in the first headline referred to William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1896, 1900, and 1908. Centralia in Lewis County, is located in southwest Washington, south of Olympia. Centralia had a population of 7,311 in 1910. *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 2, 97, Table 59. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

the Roosevelt campaign. Return postal cards were sent out to 1,500 dailies and 6,000 weeklies. Three-fourths of the newspapers solicited for the campaign news service signed up to receive it. The same September 1912 issue of the *Centralia (Wa.) Weekly Chronicle* reflected the political posturing of the candidates in a headline that announced “Roosevelt Makes Reply to Wilson.” The only article related to then-President Taft in that *Centralia* issue was headlined, “Taft Says He will be Re-Elected,”¹⁰⁷ and there was no article referring to Socialist Party of America presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs.

The *McClure*’s article also pointed out that for years, country editors had been receiving plate matter from their syndicates, headquartered in New York or Chicago, for all types of political campaigns. In receiving syndicate campaign material, the editor also received news and composition free, while the politician was the beneficiary of free advertising.¹⁰⁸

Novelist, muckraking journalist, Socialist, and labor activist Upton Sinclair was a harsh critic of country newspapers because of their use of boilerplate campaign material. His scathing attack on journalism in a 1920 self-published book, *The Brass Check*, pointed out that campaign literature was printed in small-town newspaper offices because so many of them operated as both a printing job and newspaper operation. He noted that much of the campaign publicity also appeared as news in country weeklies. He described the practice of presenting campaign publicity as news as “a graft which is found in every state and county of the Union, and is a means by which hundreds of millions of dollars are paid as a disguised subsidy by the interests which run our two-party political system.”¹⁰⁹

While individual politicians benefited from publicity campaigns waged in weeklies, certain political issues were also the focus of intense propaganda efforts. Pressure from

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Democrat Woodrow Wilson won the election.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, "Manufacturing Public Opinion: The New Art of Making Presidents by Press Bureau," 323-324.

¹⁰⁹ Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check* (Pasadena, Calif.: Upton Sinclair, 1920): 238.

Protestant churches discouraged beer and liquor advertisements from appearing on ready-print pages as national Prohibition became one of ready-print's campaigns. The WNU worked closely with fundamentalist churches for passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the production and distribution of alcohol. Numerous anti-liquor and pro-Prohibition editorials and other publicity items were distributed through the syndicate's ready-print and boilerplate services. Among the pro-Prohibition matter was the "Temperance Notes" column that began appearing regularly at the turn of the century.

In fact, WNU Editor-in-Chief Wright Patterson recalled in a magazine article that Prohibition was a subject not to be joked about with the syndicate's readers. He said that a vast majority of humor in the Prohibition era seemed to be built around bootleggers and illicit liquor, but, he added, "Any joke on the subject offends a good many people, for the simple reason that they do not feel that good citizenship is promoted by ridiculing the law of the land."¹¹⁰ By 1920, it was estimated that ninety-five percent of small-town newspapers used either the ready-print or stereotype plate services offered by the WNU.¹¹¹

In addition to political and governmental affairs publicity, businesses that wanted to promote their products and services looked to the country newspapers for free publicity. Weeklies were filled with publicity items for pharmaceutical products masquerading as legitimate news stories. The appearance of these publicity pieces even resembled regular news stories, both in type style and size and headline writing. For example, an article appeared at the top of page two in the May 6, 1914 issue of the *Stevens Point (Wis.) Gazette* under the headline,

¹¹⁰ Clark, "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers," 163.

¹¹¹ Harter, *Boilerplating America*, 54. The Appendix (page 225) includes a list of Western Newspaper Union ready-print newspapers in 1915, totaling 5,866. The largest subscribing states were in the Midwest, including Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Western Newspaper Union Distribution centers were located in Atlanta, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Fargo, Ft. Wayne, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Lincoln, Little Rock, Memphis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New York, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, Sioux City, Sioux Falls, and Wichita.

“Stevens Point’s Reply.” A sub-headline, “Stevens Point Accepts the Evidence and Many Stevens Point Readers Will Profit By It” implied a topic of much importance. The article was a testimonial from a Mrs. O. E. Smith who wrote to the paper about a backache, headaches, and inflamed kidneys she endured the previous summer. According to Mrs. Smith, a family member suggested she try Doan's Kidney Pills and she was soon able to do her own housework. The “article” concluded, “Don't simply ask for a kidney remedy--get Doan's Kidney Pills--the same that Mrs. Smith had.”¹¹²

Publicity agents for vaudeville and circus troupes and religious revival organizations also sought publicity without having to pay for it. Grant M. Hyde, who wrote one of the earliest handbooks for country editors and journalism students, made the observation that “almost everybody is looking for publicity in these days” He referred to advertising pamphlets and pointed out that newspaper articles could be derived from the pamphlets that contained some legitimate news of interest.¹¹³

A Los Angeles brewing company did receive publicity from one of its advertising pamphlets, but certainly not the kind it hoped for. The company sent an advertising pamphlet to residents in nearby Covina, California, promoting its beer. An unsigned editorial, “Bottled Beer and Resurrection” in the March 22, 1913, edition of *The Covina Argus* derided the company for comparing drinking its beer to the Resurrection of Christ. The pamphlet was sent out during Eastertide when, according to the brewer, people were filled with thoughts of “coming to life and the Resurrection.” The company claimed that its beer would “put new life into your veins, a species of resurrection, so to speak.” The editorial speculated that the advertiser would not be

¹¹² "Stevens Point's Reply," *The Gazette*, 6 May 1914, 2. Stevens Point, in Portage County, is located in central Wisconsin. Stevens Point had a population of 8,692 in 1910. *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 2, 97, Table 59. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹¹³ Grant M. Hyde, *Newspaper Reporting and Correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 10, 121.

bothered by criticisms about the “ill-association of subjects.” It continued, “The only and the subtlest suggestion that would be entertained by this brewing company advertising genius would probably be a swift kick in the southern exposure of his jeans.”¹¹⁴

Of course, free promotional publicity meant the loss of advertising revenue for country newspapers, prompting printer-publishers to improve revenue-generating services that largely supported the newspaper operation through government printing contracts.¹¹⁵ North Dakota small-town editor Roy T. Porte found a workable solution to the problem of printers losing money when they bid on government and private printing jobs. Not long after he moved to Salt Lake City in 1916 to become secretary of the Ben Franklin Club, an organization of commercial printers, he published the first edition of the Franklin Printing Price List, which contained suggested charges for a wide range of printing jobs. Commercial printers, newspaper offices, type foundries, paper houses, and syndicates quickly adopted the uniform pricing list nationwide. The following decade, Roy T. Porte established the Porte Publishing Company to continue printing the pricing catalog. The Porte system, as it was known by many printers, included a cost-accounting system with forms designed to gather accurate information to determine individual printing job costs.

Paper costs and postal rates

During the period of international conflict leading up to the eventual entry of the United States into the Great War many small newspapers were on the brink of closing because of supply shortages and rising operation costs. But government officials quickly realized their potential as

¹¹⁴ "Bottled Beer and Resurrection," *The Covina (Calif.) Argus*, 22 March 1913, 4.

¹¹⁵ The impact of Rural Free Delivery has also been associated with a downturn in weekly advertising in the early 1900s because it brought the closing of thousands of smaller post offices around the country, many of which were located within general stores. Also, Sears and Roebuck expanded its mail order company, greatly increasing catalog sales, which also hurt small-town businesses. Both of these factors hurt local businesses, which in turn, hurt potential advertising revenues for weeklies.

a mouthpiece for the war effort and provided relief through investigations and legislation to keep costs down. War also brought personnel shortages in the print shops. So wives, daughters, and younger sons were called upon to keep their family newspaper operations running.

A greater number of newspaper consolidations began during the war because of high operation and supply costs; thus the number of smaller towns supporting two or more newspapers declined steadily. For example, price-fixing among newsprint manufacturers made it difficult for weekly newspapers to stay in business. In 1916, the Federal Trade Commission invoked antitrust laws against the paper industry, which was considering a price hike for sheet newsprint used by weeklies. The FTC found that during the first half of 1916, contract prices for large quantities of paper went as high as \$3 per pound, and after July 1, were as high as \$3.50. Most metropolitan dailies fell into this category of customer. Before January 1916, market prices for paper ranged generally between \$2 and \$3 per hundred pounds. However, after January prices steadily climbed, reaching as much as \$6 or \$7 per hundred pounds. Prices were even higher for smaller orders, such as those placed among weekly operations. A tentative agreement was reached in which the FTC would administer a distribution plan for paper manufacturers to sell to smaller publishers at contract prices equal to those of larger companies.¹¹⁶ Effective April 1, 1918, the FTC worked out an agreement with paper manufacturers and set fixed prices ranging from \$3.22 ½ per hundred pounds for roll print and \$3.62 ½ per hundred pounds for sheet print.¹¹⁷ Through their national and state press associations, many weeklies joined together for

¹¹⁶ "Trade Board Wants to Divide Up Paper," *New York Times*, 13 December 1916, 17. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$2 to \$7 from 1916 was worth \$38.97 to \$136.41. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

¹¹⁷ "Federal Trade Commission Fixes Prices," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 22 June 1918, 1.

cooperative purchases at more reasonable prices for newsprint, which, as in previous war times, was in short supply.¹¹⁸

Proposed postal rate increases also threatened the ability for a country newspaper to stay in operation during this period. In May 1917 a delegation of 150 newspaper and periodical publishers appeared before the Senate Finance Committee to voice their disapproval of a provision in the War Revenue bill to increase second-class postal rates on periodicals and newspapers. The publishers asserted that the rate increases would put two-thirds of the nation's publications out of business. Arthur Dunn of the American Press Association, representing thousands of small newspapers, said country newspapers would suffer most. "Their resources are smaller and they cannot stand much of a strain," he said. "To double the postage rates would drive half of them out of business at once."¹¹⁹

An editorial the following month in the *New York Times* described the proposed postage increase as "practically prohibitory upon newspaper circulation in parts of the country remote from the seat of publication." It was pointed out that the government justified the proposed increases by claiming that second-class rates did not adequately cover transportation costs. The editorial concluded that the country's newspapers were willing to "give freely of their profits and their substance to enable the Government to pay the costs of war, but they see no justice in the attempt to single them out for special burdens, heavier by far than those imposed upon the majority of other industries."¹²⁰ In September 1917 the Senate turned down a House-proposed system of zones to increase second-class postage. The zone system meant that publications

¹¹⁸ The National Editorial Association went through some significant changes in the latter part of the decade following the 1917 death of NEA's founder and first president, Ben Herbert, who served in that position for twenty-nine years. In 1919, NEA hired Minnesotan Herbert Cleveland Hotaling, as its first field secretary. The headquarters was moved from Mapleton, Minnesota to St. Paul at which time an engraving department was established to provide halftone and line cuts at a reduced cost for member papers.

¹¹⁹ "Publishers Attack Postal Increase," *New York Times*, 15 May 1917, 4.

¹²⁰ "Taxing Newspapers," *New York Times*, 20 June 1917, 10.

mailed to destinations that were closer to the place of publication would have endured only slight postage rate increases. Thus, mailings to locations in outer zones would have been cost-prohibitive for most country weeklies and publications with circulation beyond a 200-mile radius.¹²¹

But postal concerns continued to plague small newspapers as Congress approved zone rates for second-class mailings in 1918. Despite general disapproval of the increased mail rates among the publishing community, a North Dakota weekly publisher claimed in an April 1918 issue of *Publishers' Auxiliary* that the postal zone system would be the "salvation of the country press." J.H. Bloom, editor-publisher of the *Devils Lake (N.D.) Journal*, responded to efforts by the Authors' League, representing the country's national magazines, to repeal the second-class postal zone system. In an open letter to Authors' League president Rex Beach, Bloom argued that country editors and magazine publishers had different purposes; providing news in newspapers as opposed to stories and information in magazines. Thus, Bloom said he could understand the government allowing lower newspaper mail rates because newspapers served a quasi-governmental role in disseminating important news to citizens. But the same argument did not apply to magazines, according to Bloom.

Bloom further argued that postal rates should cover distribution costs, and that newspapers and magazines should increase their subscription rates to meet delivery expenses. He asserted that loyal subscribers would pay higher rates and the distribution of "junk" mail would lessen. For example, he said that farmers in his community would be relieved of the "junk" mail "masquerading as farm journals" that cluttered their mail boxes. According to Bloom, too many magazines "sponged" their transportation from the government, which enabled them to boost circulation and advertising dollars. He opposed the classification of newspapers with magazines

¹²¹ "The Postage Tax," *New York Times*, 17 September 1917, 12.

because of their differing purposes and delivery distances. He observed that national magazines were circulated over thousands of miles while country newspapers were generally delivered within a fifty-mile radius. Bloom concluded that country editors should oppose efforts of the Authors' League to repeal the new second-class postal rates. But, he admitted, his colleagues would more than likely follow big-city newspaper and magazine publishers in denouncing the postal increases, "blissfully unconscious of the fact that by so doing they are assisting the chief agents of the mail-order houses in stealing away their trade."¹²²

During this period it was also common practice for country editors to rely on the "free-in-county" circulation privilege to reduce their overall operating costs. A July 1918 article in *Publisher's Auxiliary* on a House Ways and Means Committee hearing indicated that the free-in-county privilege for country newspapers would likely not be changed. The article pointed out that "... in every measure proposed to increase second class rates during the past ten years, there has always been a provision excepting the free-in-county circulation of the present law."¹²³ After the war ended in November 1918, the post-war economy eventually settled and paper supplies and costs returned to more reasonable rates.

Patriotism: country weeklies and the Great War

President Wilson was re-elected in 1916 when the national conversation was dominated by talk of war preparedness and newspapers, both weeklies and dailies, were filled with pro-Allied forces editorials. After signing a declaration of war, Wilson appointed newspaperman George Creel to spearhead a war propaganda effort. Creel headed the Committee on Public

¹²² "Zone System is Salvation of Country Newspapers," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 27 April 1918, 1.

¹²³ "Free County Circulation Will Remain: No Likelihood of Change in Law as It Now Affects Many Country Publishers," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 20 July 1918, 1.

Information, which was established to disseminate facts about the war, coordinate the government's propaganda efforts, and serve as the government's liaison with newspapers.¹²⁴

The Committee drew up a voluntary censorship code; and in May 1917 it began publishing an *Official Bulletin*, which was reprinted in newspaper form. It contained a compilation of war-related pronouncements, announcements, and regulations from all government agencies and departments, including casualty and prisoner lists. Dailies for the most part subscribed to the *Official Bulletin*, but a special free weekly edition was sent to community weeklies in recognition that cooperation was more likely to come from the smaller publications. A *New York Times* article announcing the *Official Bulletin's* arrival pointed out that weekly editors in particular were encouraged by the Committee to "copy as many items as possible" from the government-issued newspaper.¹²⁵

In his book *How We Advertised America*, Creel said he initially did not endorse the concept of the *Official Bulletin*, but that Wilson was insistent on it. Creel said of the proposed publication, "I knew in my heart that it would be misrepresented, possibly to a degree that would destroy its usefulness." However, he acknowledged that the *Official Bulletin* proved to be beneficial to the administration in its war-promotion campaign.¹²⁶

In their examination of Creel and the Committee, authors James Mock and Cedric Larson pointed to the impact that the country's war-related propaganda effort had on the typical farm family, which they described as having no phone, living dozens of miles from any railroad, telegraph or post office, and previously paying little attention to public affairs. But because of CPI propaganda, they asserted, rural residents became more conscious of the war than more

¹²⁴ "Creel to Direct Nation's Publicity," *New York Times*, 15 April 1917, 1.

¹²⁵ "A Government Newspaper," *New York Times*, 10 May 1917, 9.

¹²⁶ George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 208.

“literate” people had been of any previous war. Every item of war news they saw, from their county weekly, agricultural magazines, or the city daily occasionally picked up at the general store, was information of “precisely the same kind that millions of their fellow citizens were getting at the same moment.”¹²⁷

New censorship regulations were approved in April 1918. The updated regulations outlined four conditions for articles: accuracy in statement and implication; avoid supplying information to the enemy; avoid injuring the morale of soldiers; and avoid embarrassing the United States or her allies.¹²⁸ Concerns were raised at the American Newspaper Publisher Association’s April 1918 convention in New York concerning enforcement of the code so ANPA representatives called for a gathering of select newspaper publishers to investigate the Committee and issue a report to Creel. Frank Glass, publisher of *The Birmingham (Ala.) News* and president of the ANPA, wrote Creel stating that the Committee review would be beneficial to the country and its newspapers, but would also strengthen the Committee’s “power for good.”¹²⁹ However, an effort to establish the ANPA committee failed and criticism of the Committee waned.

The Committee asked major advertisers and newspapers to donate space for war-related campaigns such as soldier recruitment drives. *The Logansport (Ind.) Chronicle* prominently displayed a 1917 front page call to arms that urged young men to “Join the U.S. Army or Navy Now—Your Country Needs You!”¹³⁰ A front-page article in the Monticello, Iowa, weekly

¹²⁷ James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1939), 6.

¹²⁸ "Provisions of New Censorship Regulations Are Made Public," *The Publishers' Auxiliary* 1918, 1.

¹²⁹ "Creel Promised Quick Inquiry By Publishers," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 11 May 1918, 1.

¹³⁰ "Join the U.S. Army or Navy Now--Your Country Needs You!" *The Logansport (Ind.) Chronicle*, 26 May 1917, 1.

described how the selective service draft would operate; and how local youths of military age would be “called to the colors.”¹³¹

Red Cross advertisements were particularly rousing in their call for aid on the home front. For example, the back page of a 1917 issue of *The Logansport (Ind.) Chronicle* was headlined “Join the Red Cross.” Citizens were encouraged to pay the one dollar fee to join the Red Cross and proudly wear its membership “badge of honor.” The promotional stated, “Not only will the Red Cross care for the captive wounded of the enemy as well as our own American Boys, but all measures for local relief, such as caring for needy dependents of the Logansport boys who heed the call of duty, will be centered in the Red Cross Chapter.” And finally, Logansport residents were reminded, “The Boys will be fighting your battle. They deserve every ounce of your Moral Support and Your Dollar, too.”¹³²

A local bank-sponsored advertisement encouraging Monticello, Iowa, residents to join the Red Cross was equally as patriotic as the Logansport message, but much more serious in tone. It stated, “If you give cheerfully and fairly your full share, you are a right minded, patriotic American citizen. If you don’t, you are an enemy of this United States of ours and will be known, recorded and treated.”¹³³ A March 1918 article in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* was indicative of the wide-ranging cooperation of weeklies to publish Committee-sponsored articles and advertisements in support of government war fund drives and volunteer campaigns. It

¹³¹ "Draft Numbers are all Drawn at Washington," *The Monticello (Ia.) Express*, 4 July 1918, 6.

¹³² "Join The Red Cross," *The Logansport (Ind.) Chronicle*, 26 May 1917, 8. Logansport in Cass County, is located in north-central Indiana. Logansport had a population of 19,050 in 1910. *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 2, 89, Table 59. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹³³ "Remember the Red Cross," *The Monticello (Ia.) Express*, 4 July 1918, 1. Monticello, in Jones County, is located in east-central Iowa. Monticello had a population of 2,043 in 1910. *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 2, section 5, 595, Table 1. Population of Minor Civil Divisions: 1910, 1900, and 1890. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

reported that country newspapers made it possible for the federal government to raise \$100 million for the war fund and increase Red Cross membership to twenty-three million.¹³⁴

Another war propaganda effort that relied heavily on the support of country newspapers for its success was the Liberty Loan Drive. Page one of the May 26, 1917, issue of the *Chronicle* in Logansport, Indiana, contained three brief articles related to the Liberty Loan Drive. The headlines posed questions such as “What is a Liberty Loan Bond?” and “What is the Security for a Liberty Loan Bond?” The third headline asked “What is the Nature of a Liberty Loan Bond?” Each article was designed to answer the basic questions about the drive and encourage residents to buy into the war-support program.¹³⁵

An April 1918 article in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* reported that one million dollars would be spent with country daily and weekly newspapers to advertise the third Liberty Loan Drive. According to the article, newspapers secured advertising either from the WNU or from the Liberty Loan committee of one of several Federal Reserve districts.¹³⁶ A week later, a report on results of the first week of the loan drive emphasized the importance of publicizing the drive through country newspapers. The article estimated that the third Liberty Loan drive would show greater sales than the first or second “because of the greatly increased publicity given to this loan through the country press.”¹³⁷

In an October 1927 issue of *The American Magazine*, WNU Editor-in-Chief Wright A. Patterson talked about the successful relationship of the U.S. Treasury Department and his newspaper syndicate, which placed numerous advertisements supporting the Liberty Loan in its ready-print and boilerplate matter. “The copy was free; it was up to the editor to get the space

¹³⁴ Henry P. Davison, "Publishers of America Deserve Credit for Greatness of Red Cross," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 23 March 1918, 1. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$100,000,000 from 1918 was worth \$1,376,772,908.37. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

¹³⁵ "What is a Liberty Loan Bond?" *The Logansport (Ind.) Chronicle*, 26 May 1917, 1.

¹³⁶ "Big Sum to Be Spent for Liberty Loan Ads," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 6 April 1918, 1.

¹³⁷ "Country Newspapers Deserve Credit for Loan Drive Success," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 13 April 1918, 1.

paid for by patriotic organizations or individuals. In a sense, this was pure propaganda. But the cause was legitimate,” he stressed.¹³⁸ A similar observation was recorded in an April 1918 *Publishers' Auxiliary* commentary on the vast amount of publicity opportunities that were available, and the growing number of publicity agents who took advantage of those opportunities. The article pointed out that while some newspaper publishers had pledged a ban on free advertising, a large number gave away more space in news and advertising columns than ever before, but for a good cause: the war effort. The commentary stated, “Simmered down, this free space is being given to the government as a war aid. Thousands of columns of newspaper space are being contributed by the patriotic newspaper publishers throughout the country every week to the cause of winning the war.”¹³⁹

While the Committee on Public Information found the country press to be a valuable partner in its campaign to build and maintain support of the country's war effort, the Committee also acted to suppress information considered to be disloyal to the American and Allied war cause. The Espionage Act of 1917 outlined crimes that were punishable by heavy fines and imprisonment for willfully issuing false reports or making false statements that interfered with the country's war effort, or promoted disloyalty in the armed forces, especially as it pertained to military recruitment. The Trading-with-the-Enemy Act of 1917 authorized censorship of all communications moving in or out of the United States. The Sedition Act of 1918 amended and broadened the Espionage Act, allowing the U.S. Post Office to ban publications from the mails. Roughly seventy-five newspapers, mostly special-interest and German-language, lost their mailing privileges or were pressured to self-censor news about the war. Among the newspapers that were censored were two daily Socialist publications, the *New York Call* and the *Milwaukee*

¹³⁸ Clark, "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers," 164.

¹³⁹ "...This paper has enlisted with the government in the cause of America for the period of the war...: Publicity," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 6 April 1918, 4.

Leader. Also, a Censorship Board, which Wilson established in October 1917, censored foreign cable, telephone, or telegraph communications.¹⁴⁰

It was not uncommon to find CPI-provided and locally written newspaper articles that condemned German military actions or questioned the loyalty of German-American citizens. For example, a 1918 edition of the *Monticello* (Ia.) *Express* included a page-one article, re-published from the *New York Times*, on German threats to imprison French citizens and inflict injuries on American prisoners in retaliation for German prisoners not being released.¹⁴¹ A news brief on the front page asserted that German propaganda was “throttled” in attempting to influence congressional representatives following a no-dissent vote in Congress to approve a substantial war bond issue.¹⁴² A brief article on page six of that same issue reported that Russian printers who were prisoners in Germany were forced to print books in Russian “to popularize the Kaiser and everything German.”¹⁴³ On the back page of the July 4, 1918, edition, an article reported on rumors that a Monticello man of German ancestry was a German spy. According to the article, H.F. Kettlitz, of Monticello, assisted a German-born friend from a nearby community who was arrested on sedition charges. The article explained that Kettlitz was a naturalized American citizen who “is in harmony with the spirit of our institutions and loyal to the country of his adoption.” It continued, “He [Kettlitz] says that he is chagrined that some one should do him the injury of circulating untrue reports that reflect on his honor. He lives an open life, and says

¹⁴⁰ "Government Board of Censorship Which Says What Newspapers May Print on War," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 11 May 1918, 1. The *Auxiliary* printed a copy of the only photograph ever made of the Censorship Board. Appearing in the page-one photograph were: Capt. David W. Todd, U.S. Navy, chief cable censor and director of naval communications; Maj. Gen. Frank McIntyre, chief military censor and chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs; Robert L Maddox, chairman of the board and chief postal censor; Paul Fuller, Jr., Directors Bureau of War Trade Intelligence; George Creel, chairman, Committee on Public Information; Genevieve Chapin, assistant to the secretary of the board; Frederick Blakely Hyde, secretary, and Eugene Russell White, deputy chief postal censor.

¹⁴¹ "More Atrocities are Threatened," *The Monticello* (Ia.) *Express*, 4 July 1918, 1.

¹⁴² "A Brief," *The Monticello* (Ia.) *Express*, 4 July 1918, 1.

¹⁴³ "Worth Knowing," *The Monticello* (Ia.) *Express*, 4 July 1918, 6.

anyone disposed to believe the slanders has full liberty to follow his movements, during all of his waking hours.”¹⁴⁴

A more personal approach to reporting war news, mainly because of the weekly’s inability to hire overseas correspondents, resulted in readership loyalty to community newspapers, asserted a Kansas weekly publisher. Mrs. Thomas E. Thompson, co-publisher with her husband of *The Courant* in Howard, Kansas, addressed a 1918 gathering of the Kansas Editorial Association at which she talked about competition from metropolitan dailies and the inability of weeklies to compete with the aggressive reporting practices of the better-financed dailies. She asserted that despite warnings that “the days of the country newspaper are numbered” she believed that the country newspaper was “capable of a still greater work than ever it has performed, because of close personal ties to its readers.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to competing against daily newspapers for war news, small-town newspaper operations also had to compete against the metropolitan dailies for printers and trained journalists with a solid business sense to keep their newspaper operations afloat in a war-torn economy. As in previous wars, the Great War brought personnel shortages to community newspapers, but apprentice programs were not as common as in decades past.

Despite a decline in apprenticeship programs, there was a dramatic increase in college journalism course and degree offerings. During the decade seventy-four colleges initiated journalism instruction, which brought the total to 131 schools in 1920.¹⁴⁶ A few college journalism textbooks were published during this period as well, including Grant Milnor Hyde’s 1912 publication of *Newspaper Reporting and Correspondence* and Phil C. Bing’s 1917 work

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 8.

¹⁴⁵ "Newspaper Woman Has Own Place: There is Distinct Field in Which She Can Be of Service, Says an Editor's Wife," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 8 June 1918, 5.

¹⁴⁶ The American Association of Teachers of Journalism convened at Chicago on November 25, 1912, a year in which thirty-two colleges were offering journalism courses. In 1917, the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism was organized as a sister body to AATJ.

The Country Weekly. Hyde, a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin, designed his book to serve as a general guide for all journalists on how to write different types of news stories.¹⁴⁷ Bing, a University of Minnesota journalism professor, directed his manual to students and practitioners of rural journalism. He wrote that despite ridicule from metropolitan dailies and “city folk in general,” the country newspaper was the best paper printed.¹⁴⁸

As during wars past, wives and daughters took over largely family-owned operations, including newspapers. However, by this decade the woman’s suffrage movement was in full swing and women who were sole proprietors, or those who assisted their husbands in the publishing business, recognized their important civic role and the need to stay abreast of political issues. Thompson, of the Howard, Kansas, *Courant*, said it was just as important for the country newspaper woman to be aware of current political affairs as it was for her husband. “It is now up to her to know something of politics--with which newspapers are so much concerned--of statecraft, of current world history and present-day progress,” Thompson said.¹⁴⁹

The pro-war effort of the country’s weeklies ended with the signing of the Versailles Treaty in June 1919, followed by a period during which community readers were largely left out of the national discussion on the spread of labor unrest and the Socialist Party unless they also read a metropolitan daily. The WNU’s Patterson readily admitted that controversial subjects in ready-print and boilerplate matter were avoided or “handled as if we didn’t have a single opinion of our own” because controversial topics aroused animosity among the syndicate’s subscribers.¹⁵⁰ So, even though boilerplate allowed weekly editors to “pick and choose” among

¹⁴⁷ Hyde, *Newspaper Reporting and Correspondence*.

¹⁴⁸ Phil C. Bing, *The Country Weekly: A Manual for the Rural Journalist and for Students of the Country Field* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1917), 7.

¹⁴⁹ "Newspaper Woman Has Own Place: There is Distinct Field in Which She Can Be of Service, Says an Editor's Wife," 5.

¹⁵⁰ Clark, "Patterson Helps to Edit Twelve Thousand Newspapers," 163.

syndicate material provided rather than run entire ready-print pages, their choices were limited because controversial topics had already been censored at the centralized syndicate office.

Sinclair, who was a regular contributor to the Socialist *New York Call*, had harsh words for the country editors he claimed were more concerned with “boosterism” and advertising revenues than the terrible working conditions of the American laborer. He wrote in his self-published 1920 work *The Brass Check* that the average country editor was an “ignorant” man whose idea of what was good for his readers included “optimism and “boost,” “cheer-up” stuff, “mother, home and heaven” stuff, “sob” stuff, and “slush for the women.” He criticized country editors for their use of ready-print and boilerplate. He also pointed out that sandwiched between this “filler” material was the “poison propaganda” of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, tariff lobbyists, railroad lobbyists, liquor lobbyists, and “the whole machine of capitalist graft and greed.”¹⁵¹

In Bing’s manual for the rural journalist, the author argued that country newspapers should focus on local matters rather than national or international events that had no local repercussions. He acknowledged that although there was a tendency among metropolitan dailies and their readers to ridicule the country newspaper, the criticism should be overlooked. However, *The Butts County (Ga.) Progress* could not overlook the fact that *The Atlanta Constitution* applauded a 1911 *Progress* editorial on the evolution of agriculture in the state. The editorial stated in part: “The one-horse farmer is no longer a term of derision. Time was when the one-horse farmer belonged to the poor trash class. Not so now. The one-horse farmer is the best investment any county can have, same as the one-horse merchant.” The editorial supported small

¹⁵¹ Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check* (Pasadena, Calif.: Upton Sinclair, 1920), 239.

farmers who worked their own land, as opposed to the thousands of acres held in “cold storage” by large plantations that promoted the “undesirable condition of tenancy.”¹⁵²

The *Progress* editorial brought attention and acclaim to the state’s rural residents, which certainly would have been considered a worthwhile endeavor to Bing who argued that the country weekly’s role was to promote the interests of the common man. Comparing metropolitan dailies and country weeklies, Bing asserted that the small-town weekly was the better newspaper than the metropolitan daily because “it comes nearer to fulfilling the purpose for which it was established--that of telling the news about its own community and of neighboring communities--than any other kind of paper can possibly come.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² "Constitution Endorses The Progress Editorial," *Butts County* (Ga.) *Progress*, 10 February 1911, 1. Jackson in Butts County, is located in north-central Georgia, southeast of Atlanta. Jackson had a population of 1,862 in 1910. *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 2, section 3, 343, Table 1. Population of Minor Civil Divisions: 1910, 1900, and 1890. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹⁵³ Bing, *The Country Weekly: A Manual for the Rural Journalist and for Students of the Country Field*, 7.

Chapter Three

The 1920s: New Competition, Influence, and Commercial Success

During the 1920s, a period often referred to as the Roaring Twenties, advanced technologies such as automobiles and radio, new forms of artistic expression such as jazz music and art deco design styles, and business risk-taking brought a new era of modernity and optimism to the United States. The community newspaper field became a part of the business boom-or-bust cycle in the midst of expanded competition, community influence, and commercial success. Radio became a financial threat to weeklies as the medium moved from single-sponsor programs to individual advertising messages placed between and during scheduled programs. During the decade academic studies, particularly in the area of sociology, began to consider not only the content of a community's newspaper, but its influence on local decision making as well. And finally, weeklies declined in number but increased in financial well-being as consolidations and mergers closed down the weeklies that were unable to remain as stand-alone operations.

Competition with metropolitan dailies for local and national advertising dollars grew as did aggressive advertising-seeking tactics of billboard, sign-painting, and handbill (a precursor to the weekly "shopper" newspaper) businesses. But the biggest advertising threat for weeklies to emerge in the 1920s was radio. A growing number of retailers and companies transferred portions, large and small, of their advertising budgets from weeklies to radio. The advertisers were drawn to large listening audiences and the novelty of "hearing" their paid messages as opposed to just "seeing" them.

Despite financial uncertainties in the fight for advertising dollars, the status of the small-town newspaper and its social influence on the community remained firm. Some sociologists recognized the key role of the community newspaper as well and began studying the political and social influences of weeklies and their editors. Interestingly, some of the media-influence studies occurred at the same time that elitist metropolitan journalists and literary writers criticized small-town editors for avoiding controversy in editorial columns or abandoning editorial writing altogether.

Newspaper consolidations, mergers, and chain ownership in the 1920s dramatically decreased the number of weeklies but resulted in newspapers that were more commercially viable. Commercial success came to the weekly publishers who improved their business skills, modernized their printing operations, and attracted national advertisers. The stock market crash of 1929, however, brought a devastating financial blow to the surviving newspaper groups and chains, leaving many more publications to fight for survival into the next decade.

Competition for advertisers and audiences

The potential to increase advertising revenue grew enormously for weeklies in the early 1920s as new products and services flooded the marketplace. But the economic resurgence in the weekly field was short lived after radio was introduced to the general public. National advertisers were especially drawn to the new communications medium and many transferred their advertising dollars away from print and into radio. However, a healthy consumer appetite and growing credit market proved to be enough to ensure a steady flow of advertising revenue to the majority of small-town newspapers.

In the early 1920s, the weekly served as a valuable advertising medium to facilitate “efficient merchandising” and support a community’s economic health.¹⁵⁴ A common-folk phrasing of the same message was delivered in 1922 in a page-one plea in *The Brookshire* (Tex.) *Times* to the merchants of Brookshire and Waller County, Texas. It read as follows:

When someone stops advertising, someone stops buying.
When someone stops buying, someone stops selling.
When someone stops selling, someone stops making.
When someone stops making, someone stops earning.
When someone stops earning, everybody stops buying.
KEEP GOING.¹⁵⁵

Fortunately for small-town newspaper owners, advertising in the 1920s grew enormously as new businesses were developed or expanded and new products were introduced into the marketplace. Some of the newer products were directly tied to “discovered diseases,” such as athlete’s foot, that were developed by advertising copy writers to create a need for certain products to fight illnesses or conditions.¹⁵⁶ For example, a one-column advertisement on the ready-print insides of *The Rocky Mount* (N.C.) *Weekly News* promoted the use of Cardui: The Woman’s Tonic, to help women who felt “weak, dizzy and worn out.”¹⁵⁷ All sorts of personal hygiene products were developed and advertised in national campaigns, among them deodorizing soaps, mouthwash, and toothpaste. The twenties became a spend, spend, spend economy as high-pressured salesmanship introduced new terms such as “no money down,” “credit terms,”

¹⁵⁴ Emerson P. Harris and Elizabeth H. Hooke, *The Community Newspaper* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923), 1.

¹⁵⁵ "Keep Going," *The Brookshire* (Tex.) *Times*, 13 January 1922, 1. Brookshire, in Waller County, Texas, had a population of 10,292 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 4, 641, Table 53. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹⁵⁶ Wood, *The Story of Advertising*, 388. According to the author, companies made up names for various bodily discomforts, odors, and conditions for which the companies claimed their product(s) would provide comfort, relief, and even cures. The most successful of these “discovered diseases” in terms of advertising success was athlete’s foot. The newly named illnesses and conditions were instrumental in increasing advertising revenues for weeklies.

¹⁵⁷ "Helps Sick Women," *The Rocky Mount* (N.C.) *Weekly News*, 17 September 1920. Rocky Mount, in Nash County, is located in the northeastern section of North Carolina. Rocky Mount had a population of 12,742 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 3, 268, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

“nothing to pay until ____,” and “liberal trade-ins.”¹⁵⁸ For example, Burger’s furniture store in Newburgh, New York, advertised “Liberal Credit Terms in Effect” in a 1927 edition of the *Highland Mills (N.Y.) Star*, which served the towns of Middletown and Highland Mills in Orange County, New York.¹⁵⁹

However, the historical problem of businesses wanting to circumvent advertising purchases to promote their products and services through free publicity continued into the 1920s. In his 1927 article in *The American Journal of Sociology* about the country press, Tulane professor Jesse Frederick Steiner observed that publicity agents for business interests furnished syndicate material “designed to mold public opinion in their favor.” He added that newspaper syndicates had not sold out to these special interests, but rather had found it convenient to use the already-prepared material. In doing so, the syndicates foisted upon the country press “propaganda of this kind to a larger extent than is ordinarily realized.” The article also pointed out that advertisements by monopolistic corporations, such as the Standard Oil Corporation and railroads, were used to gain “good will.” But, he added, “If the facts were known, it is likely that the rural press is no more hampered in its editorial policy by advertising interests than are the large city dailies.”¹⁶⁰

University of Illinois journalism professor Charles Allen, who wrote one of the earliest handbooks for country editors and journalism students, said of publicity men that “... as long as they succeed in getting copy printed as news, which is really advertising, they will never use paid advertising space. Most of the concerns which put out such material never took an inch of advertising in any country paper, and never will.” Of the various types of free publicity, Allen

¹⁵⁸ Wood, *The Story of Advertising*, 391.

¹⁵⁹ “February Furniture Sale Ends Saturday,” *Highland Mills (N.Y.) Star*, 3 March 1927, 10. Highland Mills and Middletown, in Orange County, New York, had a population of 18,420 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 2, 261, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.gov/>.

¹⁶⁰ Jesse Frederick Steiner, “The Rural Press,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 33:3 (November, 1927): 420.

expressed special concern about the use of product publicity. He questioned the fairness to readers of country newspapers who “expect to read fair news when they look in the news columns and if they find there a mass of propaganda talking up some certain product, they are disappointed and tricked.” He explained that because publicity material, referred to as mail copy, was so well written it was difficult for the country editor to tell what part of it was legitimate news and what was “pure advertising.”¹⁶¹

The bright outlook for small-town newspaper advertising in the 1920s dimmed when a new mass communicator and advertising competitor was introduced to the general public. In 1920, the Westinghouse Company launched radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh; by the end of 1922 the number of radio stations had grown from fewer than twenty to nearly six hundred.¹⁶² By 1927, radios were in 6.5 million homes. Much of the radio programming was entertainment oriented. So, to service its readers who were also radio listeners, weeklies ran radio programming schedules as an unpaid-for public service. For example, the *Highland Mills Star* in New York ran a listing of radio programs for Thursday through Sunday that filled three of a page’s eight-column format.¹⁶³ The feature was titled “Radio Programs for Week-End” and was organized alphabetically by a radio station’s location.¹⁶⁴ Weeklies discontinued the practice when radio was perceived as a direct competitor for national and local advertising dollars. But, in a competitive twist, radio management found that a “consistent and intelligent paid newspaper advertising

¹⁶¹ Allen, *Country Journalism*, 214.

¹⁶² Gleason L. Archer, *Big Business and Radio* (New York: American Book-Stratford Press, Inc., 1939), 67. This information appeared in an excerpt from the 1922 Annual Report of the Radio Corporation of America’s Board of Directors. The Federal Communications Commission was formed in 1927 by Congress to issue operating licenses and decide on the amount of power allocated per station.

¹⁶³ "Radio Programs For Week-End," *Highland Mills* (N.Y.) *Star*, 3 March 1927, 11. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Radio stations were listed from cities such as Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami Beach, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and smaller Midwest cities such as Davenport and Des Moines, Iowa, and Hot Springs, Arkansas. Programs were labeled with headings such as band concert, dinner music, lecture, orchestra, organ recital, and basketball game. Sunday programming was largely devoted to church music, sermons, lectures, and classical music performances.

campaign must back up a commercial radio program to make such programs successful,” as stated in a National Editorial Association newsletter article.¹⁶⁵ Although many national advertisers and some local merchants transferred advertising dollars away from newspapers and into radio, new products and services and a growing credit market for automobiles and high-end home appliances found willing customers among community newspaper readers.

Community Influence of a Local Newspaper

The 1920s introduced a period of study of the weekly during which sociologists began to recognize the importance of a community newspaper to conduct social investigation, particularly in the area of politics. A 1925 article in *The American Political Science Review* reported on discussions about research methods at a 1924 gathering of political scientists. Conference attendees were told that it would be useful to study the effects of various types of newspaper publicity upon elections in relation to the “amount of newspaper space for and against, number of papers for and against, as well as their circulation, amount of logical and emotional writing, and other factors.” But they were warned that studies using newspaper editorials could be complicated by the fact that candidates and particular issues were sometimes supported editorially to enhance the prestige of the newspaper and its publisher.¹⁶⁶

For example, Robert and Helen Lynd conducted a sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, in the mid-1920s and found evidence of local political patronage. They observed that the city’s leading daily newspaper rarely said anything editorially calculated to offend local businessmen, while the city’s weaker daily occasionally took an editorial stand on issues such as child labor. In

¹⁶⁵ "Radio Needs Newspaper Ads to Get Commercial Program Across," *N.E.A. Bulletin* 8:88 (May, 1927): 10.

¹⁶⁶ L.L. Thurstone, "The Significance of Psychology for the Study of Government and Certain Specific Problems Involving Both Psychology and Politics: Round Table on Politics and Psychology, Reports of the Second National Conference on the Science of Politics Held at Chicago, Illinois, Sept. 8-12, 1924," *The American Political Science Review* 19:1, 1925): 120.

fact, neither of the city's daily newspapers was personally edited by its owner, both of whom lived out of town. Also, the leading daily was a member of a national syndicate of papers so most of its editorials were written by a central board located in another city. It was the city's independently owned weekly, however, that regularly commented freely on local affairs. For example, the weekly's editor denounced the city's daily newspapers for ignoring the arrests of several youths from prominent local families on liquor law violations. The editorial stated, "We hope the day will come when it will be a criminal offense for newspapers to protect higher-ups and ruin the reputations of those without influence."¹⁶⁷

North Carolina State College professor Carl C. Taylor conducted the first study of the content of country newspapers. He reported his findings at the Fourth National Country Life Conference held in 1921 in New Orleans, which was sponsored by the American Country Life Association. The purpose of his study was to examine the sources of content for country weeklies and to determine if the newspapers were agents of service. The news articles in his study, taken from 243 Missouri weekly newspapers, were classified according to local, town, and county. The published conference proceedings included his report in the chapter titled "The Country Newspapers as a Town-Country Agency." He argued that country newspapers should not compete with metropolitan dailies to serve as a community's primary source for national news, commentary, or advertising. According to Taylor, country newspapers should strive instead to become a community institution with a mission and a future. He suggested that weeklies avoid local and national partisan political issues. He also recommended that weeklies

¹⁶⁷ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, 475-476.

reflect all of the communities that they serve and not just report news from the immediate vicinity.¹⁶⁸

Cornell University assistant professor Millard V. Atwood asserted in his 1923 work *The Country Newspaper* that the small-town newspaper was indeed a “community institution” like the church, school, public library, and farm and home bureaus. He said many failed to recognize the country newspaper as such because, unlike traditional institutions, it was an enterprise in which the publisher had money invested. According to Atwood, the country newspaper met the definition of an institution as being “anything forming a characteristic and persistent feature in social or national life or habits.” For example, he said there was no more characteristic habit of small town life than “waiting at the local post office for the weekly to be distributed.”¹⁶⁹

In 1926, Malcolm M. Willey, assistant professor of sociology at Dartmouth College, conducted a study of Connecticut weeklies. He found, however, that they fell short of their potential as a social influence because much of their content was boilerplate material.¹⁷⁰ He argued that, based on United States Census figures, it was necessary to visualize the country as a “nation of small towns” to which the country newspaper catered.¹⁷¹ The indiscriminate placement of boilerplate material throughout a newspaper “usually without a pre-reading by the

¹⁶⁸ Carl C. Taylor, "The Country Newspapers as a Town-Country Agency" (paper presented at the Fourth National Country Life Conference, New Orleans, La., 1921), 45. The report also included a brief analysis of survey results from 73 North Carolina weeklies that found the same general tendencies as those represented in the Missouri study.

¹⁶⁹ Millard V. Atwood, *The Country Newspaper*, The National Social Science Series (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1923), 53, 55. Millard Van Marter Atwood also served as managing editor of *Utica* (N.Y.) *Observer-Dispatch* and the *Rochester* (N.Y.) *Times-Union*. He later became associate editor for all Gannett papers and served as secretary of the New York State Society of Newspaper Editors and of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. While working for the extension service at Cornell University, he served as president of the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Life, and Human Sciences.

¹⁷⁰ Malcolm M. Willey, *The Country Newspaper* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926). Malcolm M. Willey's 1926 study of the country newspaper looked at thirty-five newspapers published in Connecticut. Issues from four months in a one-year period were included in the content analysis that found three-fourths of the newspapers devoted less than one-half of their reading space to local news.

¹⁷¹ In 1920 there were 14,946 towns in the United States with a population less than 10,000. Cities with a population of 10,000-25,000 numbered 459, and the number of cities with a population exceeding 25,000 was 287. *Fourteenth Census*, "Population," vol. 1, Table 31, 50. <http://www.census.gov/>.

editors,” was his reasoning for reaching the conclusion that the Connecticut papers were not “effective socializing agencies.”¹⁷²

In an article about Willey’s findings and similar studies conducted on weeklies, Steiner emphasized that even though a weekly’s content might be largely filled with non-local boilerplate material, most residents of rural towns preferred to have a community newspaper of their own and would support it “in spite of the desire to also read the city daily when available.”¹⁷³

The number of ready-print pages in weeklies dropped by roughly forty percent in the mid-1920s.¹⁷⁴ Many of the ready-print subscribers switched to boilerplate because it allowed a newspaper editor to order only the material he wanted and to reject any matter deemed unsuitable for his readers.¹⁷⁵ Thus, according to Steiner, many editors viewed the use of boilerplate as “less objectionable” than ready-print.¹⁷⁶ However, he lamented that some editors were not conscientious in this task and wound up selecting a “jumble of extracts” interspersed throughout their pages. For example, page three of the May 25, 1922, edition of the *Ackley* (Ia.) *World Journal* included boilerplate articles on trappers finding gold in Canada, “sensation mongers” in France, a stream in Washington state described as a “freak of nature,” and belief in charms. The page also included an exchange item on a lost love and a humorous brief from the

¹⁷² Willey, *The Country Newspaper*, 8, 61, 65.

¹⁷³ Steiner, "The Rural Press," 414-415.

¹⁷⁴ Longtime Western Newspaper Union syndicate writer Elmo Scott Watson published a monograph in 1936 that incorporated information he wrote for a 1923 WNU promotional pamphlet, in which he credited the ready-print industry with “the swift increase in the number of papers and in the phenomenal increase in newspaper circulation” for more than half a century. *A History of Newspaper Syndicates, 1865-1935*, Chicago: Elmo Scott Wilson, 83-84.

¹⁷⁵ Milton M. Quaife, "How A.N. Kellogg Revolutionized America's Country Press," *The National Printer Journalist* (February, 1922): 21. Quaife, a newspaperman turned historian, observed, “Ready-print worked a revolution in the rural press of America, the far reaching consequences of which defy measurement. Yet our formal histories of the press, while devoting ample space to such matters as the general idiosyncrasies of certain famous New York editors utterly ignore this development and one will search in vain for any mention of the name of the man whom above any other it is due: Ansel Nash Kellogg.”

¹⁷⁶ Steiner, "The Rural Press," 419.

New York Tribune.¹⁷⁷ The women's page of the *Big Piney (Wy.) Examiner* included a fashion article on a furred velvet evening wrap with matching shoes and handbag; clothing accessories that were not likely to be worn by the typical Big Piney housewife.¹⁷⁸

Steiner said that even more regrettable than the "hit-and-miss assemblage of material" was the tendency to use boilerplate to "disseminate thinly disguised propaganda of various political, economic, and other interests, dressed up in a style intended to appeal to farmers."¹⁷⁹ For example, page one of *The Soda Springs (Id.) Chieftain* contained a headline that boasted "J.C. Penney Retains Status of Farmer." The article (no author identified) praised the efforts of company namesake J. C. Penney for his ownership of purebred Guernsey cattle and for being "a steady advocate of better sires in the breeding program of dairy farms." The article also stated, "In the present attitude of business toward the farmer, Mr. Penney's opinion is widely sought in matters pertaining to crop diversification, stock raising and distribution of farm products."¹⁸⁰ Thus, the use of boilerplate gave weekly editors complete control over what syndicate matter was selected for publication. As Steiner indicated, some editors were either lackadaisical or naïve in their selection of material that often had understated political or product publicity purposes.

¹⁷⁷ *Ackley (Ia.) World Journal*, 25 May 1922, 3. According to its masthead, the newspaper was the result of a consolidation between the *Ackley World* and the *Inter-County Journal*. The *World* was established in 1893, succeeding the *Enterprise*, established in 1867. The *Inter-County Journal* succeeded the *Tribune*, subsequently, the *Phonograph*. Ackley, in the north-central part of Iowa, served readers in Hardin and Franklin counties. Ackley had a population of 1,529 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 2, 196, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹⁷⁸ "Furred Velvet Evening Wrap, Shoes and Handbags to Match," *Big Piney (Wy.) Examiner*, 4 November 1926, 4. Big Piney was a part of Lincoln County in 1920, which is located in the central-western part of Wyoming. The town later became a part of Sublette County. The town's population numbered only 173 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 3, 319, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹⁷⁹ Steiner, "The Rural Press," 419.

¹⁸⁰ "J.C. Penney Retains Status of Farmer," *The Soda Springs (Id.) Chieftain*, 8 August 1929, 1. The newspaper was a consolidation of *The Soda Springs Chieftain* and *The Caribou County Recorder*. Soda Springs, the county seat in Caribou County, is located in the southeast corner of Idaho. The county had a population of 935 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 2, 196, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

Non-controversial editorials distributed by the Western Newspaper Union syndicate in the early twenties caught the attention of national publications such as *The New Republic*. An article in its April 11, 1923, issue observed that country newspapers were “without purpose.” The author, in his criticism of ready-print and boilerplate, stated, “The editorial page, once the battlefield of charging opinions, is now filled with cheerful, watery blurbs prepared for a hundred papers.” A “mock sophistication” was being created in these small communities, according to the article, because country newspaper readers were being exposed to material intended for a more sophisticated, metropolitan audience. The article likened country newspapers to the appendix, “an organ without a purpose,” and stated that their readers suffered “boilerplate appendicitis” that brought complications to the “afflicted community” because country newspapers “upheld mediocrity and standardization of thought and custom and served as a breeding ground for propaganda.”¹⁸¹

In addition to determining the news value of product publicity, Allen pointed out that the country editor also had to deal with pressure from local publicity agents representing non-local companies to have their information placed as news stories. Despite the pressured sales pitches of publicity agents for copy placement, he suggested that whenever product publicity had local news value “enough to make it interesting and informative for country readers” it would be appropriate to run as a regular news story. Allen stressed that “free advertising” stories should be avoided. He described free-advertising stories as containing these attributes: repetition of a company name, frequent compliments, exaggerated statements, subtle references to the worth of a certain thing, statements that are so all-inclusive as to be ridiculous, and repetition of a certain fact or facts in connection with the subject of the news.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Lynn Montross, “Boiler plate appendicitis,” *The New Republic*, April 11, 1923.

¹⁸² Allen, *Country Journalism*, 214.

Outspoken and longtime country editor Charles M. Harger wrote an article in *The Outlook* magazine that defended the philosophy of rural newspapers to make friends instead of enemies and turn away from local news content that is “intensely personal and often as prejudiced as the editorials.” He claimed that the local political editorial column was of little interest to most except those involved in the situation. “Recognition of that principle marked the passing of the political organ, and today, the country newspaper dabbles little in politics,” he wrote. He noted that this transition turned the more successful weeklies into business enterprises that, contrary to charges of being subservient to the business office, instead offered an editorial voice that was “timely, sane and positive” from an editor who did not “go around with a chip on his shoulder seeking quarrels.”¹⁸³

The previous year, Steiner had also defended a business-minded approach by many editors of the 1920s that differed from their predecessors. He said many small-town editors turned away from the “militant nature” of caustic comments and fiery editorials and instead turned their publications into non-partisan organs because they had “an eye on increased profits through gaining the good will of the people.”¹⁸⁴

An ongoing campaign in *The New Republic* that denounced the use of propaganda by rural newspapers took a different turn in a 1926 article, “The Small Town Press Sells Out.” Author Carroll D. Clark acknowledged that the influence of rural newspapers was “potent and far-reaching” in shaping attitudes and opinion. To Clark, the influence of weeklies was troubling because of their increased advertising from large corporations, widespread use of “boilerplate” material, increased economic and political partisanship, and “swelling columns of thinly camouflaged propaganda supplied by various organized interests.” The weekly editor, Clark

¹⁸³ Charles Harger, "Opulent Country Newspapers," *The Outlook* 148 (February 29, 1928): 339-340.

¹⁸⁴ Steiner, "The Rural Press," 415.

emphasized, reviewed and selected for publication articles from the aforementioned news sources. He identified the national or “foreign” advertisements of monopoly corporations such as the Standard Oil Company, the American Telegraph and Telephone Company, various railroads, electric power companies, and other public utilities that appeared in weeklies. The purpose for the advertisements, according to the author, was to develop “good will” not only to the corporations but to the economic and political systems under which they operated.¹⁸⁵ For example, a two-column Standard Oil Company advertisement in a 1922 edition of the Ackley, Iowa, weekly addressed the issue of misinterpretation of the term “by-product.” The advertisement copy, which appeared and read like news copy, ran under the headline “Every Standard Oil Product a Primary Product.”¹⁸⁶

In his article, Clark admitted that much of the boilerplate material was “innocent, harmless and commonplace,” such as bulletins of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but argued that other material could have been viewed as “veiled propaganda.” He referred to articles from the American Bankers’ Association’s Public Education Commission that explained how bankers worked to promote agriculture improvements in their communities.¹⁸⁷ Other “veiled propaganda” sources that he identified were the American Legion, the U.S. Bureau of Education, the Agriculture Extension Department, International Harvest Company, and the Sears-Roebuck Agriculture Foundation. For example, news items from the American Legion dominated three of four available columns of copy on an inside page of a 1923 edition of *The Wakefield* (Mich.) *Advocate*. The articles concerned a Legion hospital, the Michigan tour of a Legion leader, the opening of a Legion orphans’ home, and a fund-raising effort by the Legion to place world war

¹⁸⁵ Carroll D. Clark, “The Small Town Press Sells Out,” *The New Republic* 45 (January 20, 1926): 237.

¹⁸⁶ “Every Standard Oil Product a Primary Product,” *Ackley* (Ia.) *World Journal*, 25 May 1922, 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

¹⁸⁷ Clark, “The Small Town Press Sells Out,” 238.

grave markers in France.¹⁸⁸ The author also referred to political propaganda and observed that, despite its extensive use, it was at least more obvious than the aforementioned “veiled propaganda” because it promoted partisan political issues or individual candidates. As an example, he pointed to state political machines purchasing vast amounts of newspaper space, which represented valuable advertising revenue for the weeklies.

Steiner made similar observations about the use of propaganda in his 1927 article on the rural press but noted that metropolitan dailies were also victims of legislative, political, and industrial propaganda efforts. He observed that the rural press appeared to be more gullible to such orchestrated efforts to mold public opinion only because of its greater use of syndicate material. He stated, “If the facts were known, it is likely that the rural press is no more hampered in its editorial policy by advertising interests than are the large-city dailies.”¹⁸⁹ For example, in their 1920s study of Muncie, Indiana, the Lynds found that the city’s two dailies, morning and afternoon papers, more closely resembled a community weekly because of their heavy use of syndication material. In contrast, the city’s only weekly, a four-page Democratic organ that carried no retail advertising, reflected the editor’s personality through its strong editorial opinions.¹⁹⁰

But whatever the content of the weekly, whether it was awash in syndicate material or chock-full of local opinion and news items, the rural press was recognized for its influential role because of the economic potential of its readers and the editorial guidance it provided to a large portion of the country’s populace. Allen wrote about the influential role of the country press, especially in terms of the economic potential of its readers, in his 1928 textbook on country

¹⁸⁸ *The Wakefield* (Mich.) *Advocate*, 21 April 1923, 3. Wakefield, in Gogebic County, is located in the northern part of Michigan near Lake Superior. Wakefield had a population of 4,151 in 1920. *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 2, 234, Table 51. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

¹⁸⁹ Steiner, “The Rural Press,” 420.

¹⁹⁰ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, 475.

journalism. He observed, "Farm families have great spending potential for items beyond that needed to raise crops. There are six and one-half million farm families that look to their local newspapers for news and editorial guidance."¹⁹¹

But it was the weekly editor himself, even more than his newspaper, who influenced the community argued Harris and Hooke in their 1923 work on the community newspaper. They explained that the community newspaper expressed the editor's conception of life in general and the life of the town. "... those who habitually read it [community newspaper] cannot fail to feel and respond in some degree to the influence which the editor both consciously and unconsciously exerts."¹⁹² An example of a weekly that was a printed representation of its editor's personality and political persuasion was North Carolina's Chapel Hill *Weekly*, according to Steiner in his article on the rural press. He noted that the Chapel Hill newspaper contained no boilerplate or other syndicated matter, such as serial stories or cartoons. He observed, "Every paragraph in the paper is written by the editor, who also solicits the advertising and runs a job printing business."¹⁹³ The strong influence of the small-town newspaper editor was addressed by *American Magazine* editor Merle Crowell at a 1929 session of the Southwestern Journalism Congress at which he said of country newspapers, "Their editors think saner and hit much straighter than some of their city cousins." He did, however, deride the "ordained-by-God" attitude of some editors who, he claimed, tended to talk down to their publics.¹⁹⁴ American Press Association President John H. Perry also recognized the growing perceived influence of the rural press, particularly its editors. He was quoted as follows in Allen's textbook on country journalism: "The force that controls this country of ours, in the long run, is the rural editor, in his

¹⁹¹ Allen, *Country Journalism*, 3, 4.

¹⁹² Harris and Hooke, *The Community Newspaper*, 93.

¹⁹³ Steiner, "The Rural Press," 418.

¹⁹⁴ "Crowell Pays a High Tribute to Country Press," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 20 April 1929, 5. Merle Crowell spoke at the third annual session of the Southwestern Journalism Congress at the College of Industrial Arts in Denton, Texas.

capacity as spokesman for sixty million Americans who live and earn their living on the farms and in the villages and towns of 5,000 population or less”

According to Allen, a successful country editor needed to be friendly, even-tempered, neat in personal appearance, well-read, cooperative, tactful, courteous, fair, and tolerant. In addition, he wrote that the country editor should serve as a leader and community booster, engage in community enterprises, develop others’ talents, run a financially successful operation, connect with a church, have command of the English language, cultivate originality and resourcefulness, and know how his subscribers make their living.¹⁹⁵ While Allen’s list of recommended attributes and activities were perhaps more idealistic than realistic, it did serve as a guide for country editors who viewed their role as much more than that of simply overseeing a local business operation.

In fact, country editors enjoyed a public endorsement of their prominence when they gained access and influence in the White House after one of their own, Ohio newspaperman Warren G. Harding, was elected to the presidency in 1920.¹⁹⁶ During his presidency, Harding maintained his membership in the National Press Club. A March 1922 *Washington Post* article mentioned the president’s attendance at a concert to mark the installation of a radio telephone receiving set in the rooms of the National Press Club. At the event, the president spoke of the power of the press in “moulding [sic] public opinion” and said that public opinion was a greater power than all laws.¹⁹⁷ Harding also spoke at the 1923 banquet of the American Society of Newspaper Editors at which he endorsed the organization’s adoption of a written code of ethics.

¹⁹⁵ Allen, *Country Journalism*, 10-13.

¹⁹⁶ Dr. George Tryon Harding Sr. owned *The Argus* in Caledonia, Ohio, where his son, Warren, learned the journalism trade. Warren Harding continued his journalism training at Ohio Central College in Iberia, Ohio, and also worked at the *Union Register* in Mount Gilead, Ohio. After completing his college studies, the future president and two friends purchased *The Marion (Oh.) Daily Star*, where he served as editor until entering politics full time. President Harding’s brief term came to an end when he died of apoplexy and Vice President Calvin Coolidge assumed the presidency in August of 1923. Coolidge was re-elected in 1924 but did not seek re-election four years later.

¹⁹⁷ "President Under Roof with Wilson," *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1922, 1.

A *Washington Post* article pointed out that he spoke “as a newspaper man and not as President of the United States.”¹⁹⁸ After his August 1923 death in California, members of the National Press Club adopted a resolution expressing its grief at the loss of a “fellow craftsman.”¹⁹⁹ From the time of the arrival of Harding’s body in the nation’s capital, newspapermen served as honor escorts throughout all of the funeral functions of state, including the train ride to Marion, Ohio and the burial service there.²⁰⁰

In fact, the weekly editorship was a job to which many men aspired, according to noted novelist and successful advertising copy writer Sherwood Anderson. He moved from Chicago and purchased a farm in southwest Virginia to enjoy a leisurely lifestyle and live off of the earnings from his short stories and novels. He soon became restless, however, and purchased the two weeklies in Marion County, Virginia. One was a Democrat publication, and the other, a Republican organ. In an article in *The Outlook* magazine, he explained his entry into the weekly profession by pointing out, “I think almost every man in the country has the belief, buried away in him somewhere, that he would make a successful editor.” Anderson left the political writing to the party leaders and focused instead on his observations of the “comings and goings” of the people in the community, and editing submitted copy by local columnists. The celebrated author-turned-editor was impressed by the quality of his local writers. He observed, “There may be an opportunity for as good writing in weekly newspapers of this kind as in the magazines or in books ... Some of the best writing we get nowadays is being done by the newspaper men.”²⁰¹

Formal education of editors, or the lack thereof, was a popular topic of debate in the weekly newspaper field. Some weekly editors believed that formal training was necessary to learn how to operate a newspaper business more efficiently and to write editorials based on fact

¹⁹⁸ "President Discusses 'Shop' with Editors," *The Washington Post*, 29 April 1923, 1.

¹⁹⁹ "National Press Club Grieves for President," *The Washington Post*, 9 August 1923, 5.

²⁰⁰ "Newspaper Men Form Continuous, Reverent Escort," *The Washington Post*, 9 August 1923, 5.

²⁰¹ Sherwood Anderson, "Nearer the Grass Roots," *The Outlook* 148:1 (January 4, 1928): 3, 27.

rather than emotion. Other editors believed that college journalism training was not necessary and that the best education could be received through the traditional apprenticeship. But readers generally respected their editors, who guided local political actions through the newspaper editorial page, for either their formal education or professional experience, as long as they were considered well read.²⁰²

Harger observed that thousands of college journalism graduates had moved into country newspaper offices. He wrote, “Ability to write clear English, to know news when he sees it, to touch the human-interest events of the community and transfer them pleasingly to the printed page is no mean art.”²⁰³ However, some country editors took pride in the fact that they were not college-educated “journalists.” One such editor was Don C. Wright of *The Chronicle* in Crane, Missouri. He responded to a column by Elmo Scott Watson of *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* in which Watson derided a locally written column by Wright that expressed a preference for mechanics-printers as small-town editors as opposed to trained journalists. The Missouri editor’s response letter, published in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, identified “journalists” as those who had recently graduated from journalism schools. He added, “I deny the fact that I am a journalist. However, I believe that I spend more time doing purely journalistic work on my newspaper than any other editor in my section. I am developing more columns of original matter than any of them, and yet, I do not aspire to the dignified, but unfitting, title of journalist.”²⁰⁴

Lack of a formal education among weekly editors in the South was not so much a sensitive issue as were the accusations by their peers in other parts of the country that they were too provincial in their thinking. For example, in the fourth of a series of articles on American journalism in a 1926 edition of *The Outlook* magazine author D.C. Seitz wrote that “it would be

²⁰² Clark, *The Rural Press*, 75.

²⁰³ Harger, “Opulent Country Newspapers,” 340.

²⁰⁴ Don C. Wright, “Not a Journalist,” *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, 2 November 1929, 4.

hard to prove that it [country newspaper] has progressed intellectually.”²⁰⁵ Articles in the national press pointed to the Southern press and its unwillingness to embrace 1928 presidential Democratic candidate Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York because of his Catholic faith and anti-Prohibition stand. For example, a December 1926 editorial in the *New York Times* opined that some Southern newspapers were resentful of the attention given to the attitude of the South toward Smith’s candidacy. Acknowledging that southern states had their fair share of “fanatical prohibitionists” and “religious bigots,” the southern editors argued that such persons existed in other parts of the country as well. The editorial, quoting some southern newspapers on Smith’s candidacy, observed, “Perhaps the small-town newspapers are more outspoken than those of the cities.” It re-printed an excerpt from an editorial in *The Cordele (Ga.) Dispatch* concerning Smith that stated, “Protestant America is a fine country because it believes in religious freedom, but free Americans should never fall under Catholic rule.”²⁰⁶ Other articles referred to southern resistance to unionized workers and the prospective International Paper & Power Company purchase of a number of southern newspapers to provide “built-in” customers for the Northeast company’s newsprint. A May 1929 *New York Times* article reported that regional textile strikes and interest of the International Paper and Power Company in purchasing southern newspapers gave some southern editors “an opportunity to declaim against communism” and restore stinging editorial words such as “predatory” and “plutocracy.”²⁰⁷

But noted author and journalist W. J. Cash observed that there were signs that progressive thinking was moving into some southern editorial offices. He offered two reasons why many smaller southern newspapers during this period were getting more progressive and intelligent editing. He pointed out that the economic depression halted the exodus to the North of talented

²⁰⁵ D.C. Seitz, "The Country Press," *The Outlook* 142 (January 27, 1926): 137.

²⁰⁶ "Smith and the South," *New York Times* 1926, E12.

²⁰⁷ Julian Harris, "South Sees Unions Gaining a Foothold," *New York Times*, 26 May 1929, E1.

young journalists and that the development of standardized daily journalism improved the overall quality of newspapers.²⁰⁸

But despite the influx of new thinking, University of Kentucky professor Thomas D. Clark emphasized that southern editors had to move slowly when they presented new ideas because of the traditional mindset of their readers. “The effect of this type of journalism is to be determined in terms of the slow and patient way in which society was brought to make changes of its own accord.”²⁰⁹ But there were some southern editors who defied the “slow-go” approach and instead openly fought traditional ways of thinking. For example, community involvement, such as joining the local Kiwanis Club, was expected of the small-town community editor. But Julian Hall, who became editor of the Dothan, Alabama, *Eagle* after his father’s death in 1924, had to ponder an invitation to join the local Ku Klux Klan chapter. Hall wrote anonymously in *The American Mercury* that one of the first things that happened after he became editor was to receive the Klan membership invitation. Such an invitation was not so unusual during the 1920s in the South when a resurgent number of Klan chapters waged strong anti-Jew, anti-Catholic, and anti-sin campaigns. In fact, his invitation came from the local superintendent of education, a prominent member of the locally thriving group. The new editor refused to join the group and spent the next several months lambasting the Klan, all the while “estranging friends and making enemies.” He wrote, “The country editor can either assert himself and defy the moguls of his community, in which case his life is an open hell; or he can knuckle under, in which case it’s a secret purgatory. Mine has been for the most part the open-hell variety.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Random House, 1941). 374.

²⁰⁹ Clark, *The Rural Press*. 110.

²¹⁰ Julian Hall, "A Small-Town Editor Squawks," *The American Mercury*:185 (May, 1939): 71.

Community Weeklies A Commercial Success

For some time many smaller newspaper operations feared that metropolitan newspapers would attract their readers and advertisers and eventually run them out of business. But despite having a reputation for being poor businessmen, weekly publishers on the whole made significant progress in achieving financial stability. Publishers who were unwilling or unable to modernize their business practices, however, were forced to go out of business or sell their operations to the highest bidders.

This general upswing in the economic status of small-town journalism was acknowledged in a 1927 article in *Editor & Publisher*. Len Fieghner, vice president of the National Association of State Press Field Managers, spoke at the association's 1927 annual meeting in Detroit and summed up concerns about big city newspapers taking over readership from small-town newspapers. He observed that weeklies no longer faced the threat of extermination but had instead established themselves more firmly because of the specialized audience they served. "No matter what quantity of small town local news is covered in the pages of the nearest large daily, there are always the seemingly trifling news items of local interest, which mean so much to the small town residents and which can be found only in their local newspaper"²¹¹

Not only were improved business practices welcomed in the weekly field, but they were a necessity, according to textbook authors Harris and Hooke, because of the high cost of producing a newspaper. They asserted it was "imperative that every unit of expense count toward service and income."²¹² Backing up their assertion was the testimony of a weekly publisher in Nebraska who wrote in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* of his inability to handle the mechanical duties of the print shop after being injured in a car accident. He reluctantly hired a printer but feared

²¹¹ "Motor Delivery No Menace To Small Papers," *Editor & Publisher* 60 (August 27, 1927): 5.

²¹² Harris and Hooke, *The Community Newspaper*, 303.

that all of his profits would be absorbed in the printer's salary. Since he was temporarily free from the print shop duties but confined to a wheelchair, a friend took him around town to visit with townspeople and businessmen to collect news stories and solicit advertisements. His efforts paid off in increased subscriptions and local advertising. He wrote, "There is a moral in that story for every man who is attempting to run a weekly newspaper by doing the mechanical work in the back shop. They will achieve greater success when they hire a printer and keep themselves out on the street."²¹³

Some publishers discovered the financial benefits of combining their newspapers and printing services with other businesses or public service roles. For example, a stationary and book store worked well in combination with a print job, according to Atwood, and enabled a publisher to have a better business location on a town's main street. He also noted that the insurance business was another popular sideline endeavor for newspaper editors, as were political appointee roles such as city clerk or postmaster.²¹⁴ Any potential conflicts of interest were seemingly not a concern for some weekly editors who felt it more important to keep their newspapers operating rather than to close down an important communication tool within their community, especially in a one-newspaper town.

A 1928 column in *The Saturday Evening Post* that identified its writer only as "One Of 'Em," responded to an earlier *Post* article that expressed surprise that country weeklies were succeeding financially. The author, a country editor, explained how it was possible to be both a weekly editor and a successful businessman. He described himself as owner and editor of the oldest weekly in a southwestern state and in a town with a population of 3,500. He reported having 2,000 subscribers at \$1.50 per year, plus a gross monthly income of more than \$1,000,

²¹³ "Hire a Printer and Be a Publisher," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 7 December 1929, 4.

²¹⁴ Atwood, *The Country Newspaper*, 33-34.

which brought his annual income to more than \$15,000.²¹⁵ He estimated that ninety percent of his income came from the immediate territory and that “foreign advertising” was placed by agencies for national advertisers on behalf of local merchants that sold their particular products. His advertising rates were twenty cents per column inch for local advertisers and thirty cents for foreign advertising. Reader advertisements, more commonly known as classified ads, were sold for ten cents per line. He reported having made as much as eighty dollars for a single issue and observed that in a town where a \$200-a-month income was regarded with respect, “I’m one of the big boys, if not the big boy.”²¹⁶

It was fortunate that small-town newspapers did not depend heavily on circulation revenues for their financial success. At the end of the decade the prevailing price of an annual weekly subscription was two dollars. A *Publishers’ Auxiliary* editorial observed that some publications charged as much as three dollars while others were sold for less than \$1.50 a year, especially in the South. The editorial urged country editors to charge at least two dollars and “devote a portion of the increased revenue to producing a better newspaper that will better represent the community, be more interesting to the subscribers and a better medium for the merchants.”²¹⁷

Weeklies that could not increase subscribers or subscription and advertising revenues simply had to close their doors or merge with another newspaper or publication group. Signs that weaker publications folded or were merged into successful printing operations were indicated in a decrease in the number of community newspapers from roughly 15,000 in 1915 to fewer than 12,000 in 1924.²¹⁸ In his 1926 study of the country press, Willey observed that during that same

²¹⁵ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$15,000 from 1928 was worth \$181,560.42. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²¹⁶ "How Did the Country Editor Get that Way?" *The Saturday Evening Post* 201 (July 14, 1928): 137.

²¹⁷ "It's Worth \$2.00...Ask It!" *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 4 May 1929, 4.

²¹⁸ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1924), 11.

nine-year period, the number of towns in which a weekly paper was published decreased by only 1,116. Also during that period, the number of county seats from which a weekly newspaper originated increased by fifty. He pointed out that those in the newspaper business interpreted the figures as a sign of strength “through the cleaning out of the marginal properties, and a consolidation of the stronger.”²¹⁹ Even by the late 1920s, the weekly continued to hold on in communities with a population of less than 5,000.²²⁰

Willey conducted a similar study with University of Minnesota colleague William Weinfeld that was published in the mid-1930s and looked at trends in numbers and distribution of the country weekly from 1900 to 1930. They found that the total number of weeklies declined from 11,310 in 1900 to 9,522 in 1930, a decrease of 2,280 or 19.3 percent. The study reported that among the twenty-two states that had a smaller percentage of papers in 1930 than in 1900, only four of them were west of the Mississippi River. Of the twenty-six states that in 1930 had a larger percentage of papers than at the outset of the century, only eight were east of the Mississippi River. Based on the data, the authors concluded that older sections of the country had previously experienced growth in weekly journalism, reached a point of maximum numbers and “in the face of economic and social adjustment declined or reached a state of stability in numbers of papers.”²²¹

In his *Outlook* magazine article on country journalism and its financial success, Seitz emphasized that despite a seeming dominance of metropolitan dailies and *The Saturday Evening*

²¹⁹ Willey, *The Country Newspaper*, 6-7.

²²⁰ The 1927 *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* listed roughly 9,000 weeklies published in towns under 5,000. Community weeklies were most numerous in the north-central states, with Illinois and Iowa each having more than 500 small-town community weeklies.

²²¹ Malcolm M. Willey and William Weinfeld, "The Country Weekly: Trends in Numbers and Distribution, 1900-1930," *Social Forces* 13:1 (October 1934-May 1935, 1934): 51-56. The study also found that the number of Democratic newspapers declined from 3,119 to 2,114, a decrease of 1,005 or 32.2 percent, the number of Republican newspapers declined from 3,537 to 2,567, a decrease of 970 or 27.4 percent, and the number of straight independent newspapers increased from 2,263 to 3,268, an increase of 1,005, or 44.4 percent. The newspapers with independent leanings (Democratic, Republican and neutral) increased in the same period from 2,866 to 4,272, an increase of 1,406, or 49.1 percent.

Post, most of the country's weeklies and some 2,000 dailies that he claimed could be considered country publications enjoyed a new-found prosperity. He wrote, "To a far greater extent than their city brethren they [country weeklies] have improved in appearance and increased in opulence. Many of them are veritable gold mines. A look at the income-tax payments made by some of their owners makes even a well-paid, city-hired man sit up and wonder if he had been truly wise in lighting out for the metropolis."²²²

Beginning in the latter half of the 1920s, John H. Casey, a University of Oklahoma professor and specialist in country newspapers, helped to identify some of the more successful weekly operations. Each year he named the All-American Country Weekly Newspaper team, which listed the top ten or so weeklies in the country based on editorial content and business acumen. In a 1929 *Publishers' Auxiliary* article he listed three "stellar" weeklies that he suggested should be studied by other publishers. They were the *Wayne* (Neb.) *Herald*, the *Freehold* (N.J.) *Transcript*, and the *Millford* (Del.) *Chronicle*.²²³ Each of these publications, according to the professor, were highly profitable, but more importantly, they were influential and beneficial to their respective communities.

In relation to profitability, newspapers that originated from county seats were considered the most desirable because of their potential for obtaining local retail advertising and legal notices. Harris and Hooke noted that it was not uncommon for the asking price of a weekly deemed "profitable and substantial" to have been more than twice the value of the physical plant and net tangible assets when earning potential and "good will" of the business was taken into consideration.²²⁴ For example, a listing in the May 1929 issue of *The Publishers' Auxiliary*

²²² Seitz, "The Country Press," 136.

²²³ "Casey Selects All-American Weekly Eleven," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 2 March 1929, 6.

²²⁴ Harris and Hooke, *The Community Newspaper*, 324.

identified two Texas weeklies for the asking price of \$35,000.²²⁵ One of the weeklies was located in a town of 15,000, and the other in a town of 2,500, just twenty miles away.²²⁶ Included in the offer was the purchase of one plant for the two papers, a warehouse, an adjacent vacant lot, and a long list of equipment to support both newspaper and job-printing operations. The owner listed net profits from the two previous years in excess of \$17,000.²²⁷ An alternate offer was also listed to include stock options, provided that the buyer was willing to organize a company and pay \$55,000 for the additional purchase of two smaller weeklies, printed at the same plant, and would agree to start a semi-weekly or daily and employ the current owner on the “same terms as other stockholders of equal capacity.”²²⁸

Country editors could not have foreseen the economic turmoil that would face smaller publications as they entered the next decade, as evidenced in a 1928 University of Missouri survey. Journalism professor T. C. Morelock conducted the survey of country editors that revealed that the weekly was holding its own despite the inroads of metropolitan dailies, large mail order printing houses, and other competitors. Although the number of weeklies decreased steadily throughout the decade, the papers that survived were generally more financially stable and better established in their communities. In the survey the editors stated that opportunities for public service and financial reward were good and steadily improving.²²⁹ A 1930 textbook on country journalism written prior to the stock market crash hailed the community weekly field as a profession that provided its publishers financial stability and personal satisfaction, “. . . and that is more than the average-salaried job on a city newspaper offers, with its speed, its high pressure,

²²⁵ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$35,000 from 1929 was worth \$423,640.98. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²²⁶ "Newspapers for Sale," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 25 May 1929, 5.

²²⁷ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$17,000 from 1929 was worth \$205,768.48. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²²⁸ "Newspapers for Sale," 5. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$55,000 from 1929 was worth \$665,721.54. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²²⁹ "Survey Reveals Country Paper Holding Its Own," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 9 March 1929, 1.

its grind, and its uncertainty.” Ownership of a country newspaper was “the most nearly ideal” goal in journalism, according to the text, “The man who owns a successful country newspaper,” it added, “indeed is well situated.”²³⁰

The October 29, 1929, stock market crash, also referred to as “Black Tuesday,” was not immediately portrayed as a national economic disaster in many small-town newspapers, although some editors could foresee economic troubles ahead. In a November 1929 issue of the *Sheffield (Ala.) Standard*, the local editor wrote, “The aftermath of the stock market debacle is bringing a series of stories, telling about bank closings, suicides, fortunes wiped out, and other evidences that it rarely pays to try to make money too fast, especially when you are fooling with forces that you do not understand.”²³¹

²³⁰ James Clifford Safley, *The Country Newspaper and its Operation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), 383. This volume was designed as a guide for a course in country newspaper work in schools of journalism and as a handbook for editors and publishers of country newspapers. The first chapter describes the general aspects of country journalism. Other chapter topics include country correspondence, auxiliary press services, selection of a location, financing a newspaper, and commercial printing.

²³¹ “Aftermath of Stock Market Debacle,” *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard*, 22 November 1929, 4.

Chapter Four

The 1930s: Boosterism and Business Survival

During the Great Depression of the 1930s personal incomes, tax revenues, profits and prices dropped, as did the demeanor of many Americans who fell into a personal depression after seeing their life's savings drastically dwindle or become depleted. Although most community newspapers also experienced a downfall in profits they also realized the importance of their business survival in relation to boosterism. Weeklies recognized their need to serve as confidence builders for the local business community as well as individual citizens who were also struggling to maintain a revenue source and keep bill collectors at bay. The weekly became a "must read" in terms of learning about the latest federal government jobs and relief programs. But it also served as a comforting reminder to its readers that life went on as usual – babies were born, brides were wed, and loved ones were buried. But weeklies had to be ever mindful of their balance sheet to keep their operations afloat. As a result, some weeklies quickly recognized the need to barter in terms of collecting subscription and advertising fees and paying bills, which kept their printing presses operating during challenging economic times.

A newspaper is a business; and, by the 1930s, the majority of weekly publishers became increasingly professional. Unlike their predecessors who undersold their printed products or were negligent in collecting advertising and subscription fees, the community weekly publisher of the 1930s understood the importance of balancing his books to keep the presses rolling. But the Depression necessitated a willingness to bend some book-balancing rules, and bartering proved

to be beneficial for the publisher, his newspaper readers, and business clients in order to maintain advertisers and subscribers.

As weeklies dealt internally with business viability concerns, they outwardly took on stronger roles as boosters for their communities, both in terms of supporting local merchants and boosting the morale of area residents with words of encouragement, advice on frugality, rural community updates, and actions of public service. Weeklies were the important link that kept communities together. The effects of the Depression were too easily recognizable in these small rural towns and villages; so the weeklies and small-town dailies focused on positive news as a means of boosting morale. They took on community leadership roles and sponsored various community service projects and relief efforts. In fact, many publishers took on enlarged roles as community leaders because their business peers suffered economic and emotional losses. Consequently, most weeklies and small-town dailies maintained their operations with this “golden rule” approach to business.

Boosterism: Coming to the Aid of Communities in Trying Times

Printing words of encouragement and advice on frugality, participating in public service, and printing names of area residents in community columns to give readers a feeling of importance were just some of the ways the country editor tried to boost the morale of area residents during difficult financial times. Textbook author James Safley wrote that the country newspaper was expected to serve as a leader in its community, to “be a guiding star in time of trouble, a counselor and a friend.” By doing so, he asserted, the editor derived “a great measure of satisfaction in the knowledge that he has been of genuine service to the public.”²³²

²³² Safley, *The Country Newspaper and its Operation*, 4, 383.

Although weekly newspapers traditionally declared their community service role across their nameplates, these “mottos” seemed to take on special significance during troubled times. For example, *The Richwood (Oh.) Gazette* staked its claim as “A Real Home Paper, Devoted To The Best Interests Of The Community In Which It Is Published.”²³³ *The Cambridge City (Ind.) Tribune* professed on its nameplate to be “More Than A Newspaper—A Community Institution.”²³⁴ *The Deming (N.M.) Headlight* printed the following just below its name: “Deming—Always Deming.”²³⁵

Weekly newspapers were certainly concerned about staying in business during hard economic times, but they were equally concerned about the well-being of their readers and community members. The financial well-being of community members certainly had a direct impact on the newspaper’s advertising and subscription revenues. A “distressed” community was less likely to provide willing advertisers and paying subscribers, but it also offered opportunities for community support and outreach—opportunities brought to the public’s attention through the weekly newspaper. In February 1930, *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard* published an editorial asking readers to look around them and see the ravages of an economic upheaval. It called on citizens to help those less fortunate. The editorial stated, “Colbert County may not be as prosperous as we might wish, but there is no famine, no pestilence, no dire danger. However, there are families in our community, hit by the hard hand of circumstance, unable to make satisfactory adjustment in

²³³ *The Richwood (Oh.) Gazette*, 14 June 1934, 1. Richwood, in Union County, is located in the northern-central part of Ohio. The newspaper, established in 1872, was circulated in Union, Delaware, and Marion counties. Richwood, in Claiborne Township, had a population of 1,573 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 8, 869, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

²³⁴ *The Cambridge City (Ind.) Tribune*, 27 March 1930, 1. The *Tribune* was established in 1868. Cambridge City, in Jackson Township of Wayne County, is located along Indiana’s eastern-central border. Cambridge City had a population of 2,113 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 4, 350, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

²³⁵ *The Deming (N.M.) Headlight*, 16 January 1931, 1. The *Headlight* was identified as a member of the National Editorial Association. The *Headlight* was established in 1882. Deming, in Luna County, is situated on New Mexico’s eastern-southern border. Deming had a population of 3,377 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 7, 739, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

life.” The editorial added that many would deny such a state existed. But it provided examples of hardships endured by local citizens and ended with, “Isn’t it about time for us to think along this line, not that there is any quick formula towards relieving distress, but rather that we may be more willing to assist established agencies?”²³⁶ *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times* addressed unemployed workers in a July 1930 editorial by stating, “There is no situation more discouraging to a man or a woman than to be dependent upon work for livelihood [sic] and yet be without a chance to sell their labor because of adverse economic conditions.”²³⁷

In contrast to the “boosterism” role taken on by weeklies, many of the larger metropolitan dailies were accused of downplaying the severity of the Depression for the purposes of propping up local businesses to keep advertising lineage up. For example, in their mid-1930s follow-up study of Muncie, Indiana, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd found that the public’s confident optimism did not begin to erode until late April 1930, when the city’s evening paper began publishing articles about a local “bad slump” and the past hard winter for workers.²³⁸ Among metropolitan daily critics was a journalism education leader who accused the large-city newspaper owners of being more concerned about their stockholders and advertisers than the welfare of readers. Kenneth Olson, president of the American Association of Teachers of Journalism, delivered a speech at the association’s 1935 annual gathering at which he criticized owners for not using their profits to help the poor and champion causes to improve their status in life.²³⁹

²³⁶ “Who Suffers in Colbert,” *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard*, 28 February 1930, 4. Sheffield, in Colbert County, is located in the northwestern corner of Alabama. Sheffield had a population of 6,221 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 2, 85, Table 5. <http://www.census.gov/>.

²³⁷ *The Tuscumbia Times*, 1 July 1930, 4. The *Times* was identified as a member of the Alabama Press Association. Tuscumbia, in Colbert County, is located in the northwestern corner of Alabama. Tuscumbia had a population of 4,533 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 2, 86, Table 5. <http://www.census.gov/>.

²³⁸ Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown in Transition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 17.

²³⁹ Kenneth E. Olson, “The Newspaper in Times of Social Changes,” *Journalism Quarterly* 12, (1935): 9.

The Depression not only called upon weekly editors to become morale leaders through their writings, but also to take the helm of community booster organizations in voluntary and elective positions that were previously held by successful local merchants. Country editor C.M. Meredith Jr. observed in his 1937 textbook on country journalism that “A compilation of the names of the leading men and women in the community is not now complete without the inclusion of the editor.”²⁴⁰

University of Minnesota journalism professor Thomas Barnhart reinforced Meredith’s observation in a study on editorial writing in weekly and small daily newspapers from 1930 through 1932. Writing about his findings in *Journalism Quarterly*, Barnhart emphasized that because of frequent bankruptcies and changes in business many of the traditional community leaders, such as bank presidents and major store owners, were no longer in positions to take on leadership roles. Consequently, the newspaper editor often felt obliged to take on a leadership role to encourage the community to “carry on” during the trying times of the 1930s.

In addition, Barnhart’s study revealed that many citizens who were previously involved in service clubs dropped out to focus on their own financial problems, so many community newspaper editors volunteered to head up charitable drives and conduct campaigns for relief funds.²⁴¹ In his review of 486 newspapers in forty-three states, he found that 470 papers provided aid to community welfare organizations, 430 aided in relief to the needy and unemployed, and 408 cooperated in miscellaneous relief projects, such as projects to provide psychological outlets for the unemployed. The study also revealed that of the weeklies studied, 361 cooperated with

²⁴⁰ C.M. Meredith, Jr., *The Country Weekly* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1937), 11. Chapter 8 included an analysis of eight eastern Pennsylvania country newspapers that showed the relationship between the amount of business in each of the newspaper’s towns, the number and amount of personal items and news stories, and the amount of advertising. Also analyzed was the amount of plate matter published, the amount of news published, and the amount of advertising and subscriptions. The number of commuters was also considered as bearing on the success of each newspaper, as were wages earned in the community and the amount of money spent in advertising. The presence or the absence of editorials, the number of news features, and the number of correspondents was analyzed to indicate each newspaper’s general financial condition and standing in the community, 163-173.

²⁴¹ Thomas F. Barnhart, "Newspaper Leadership in Times of Depression," *Journalism Quarterly* 10:1, 1933): 3.

merchants to stimulate trade, 353 worked to bring relief to farms, 342 sought to reduce taxes, 207 gave aid to banks, 187 fought to oust corrupt and ineffective officials, 72 sought county and township government reorganizations, 70 urged consolidating rural schools, 54 contributed aid to continue schools, 40 sought lower utility rates, and 17 led movements to adjust the city's indebtedness.²⁴²

Weekly and small-town daily newspapers in the early 1930s not only appeared to be more concerned about the welfare of their readers than their metropolitan counterparts, but they were also better mirrors of the public. The content of weeklies closely represented the daily lives of their readers. In fact, Barnhart's textbook on weekly newspaper management emphasized how important it was for an editor to turn out a newspaper that "mirrored the lives of small-town and rural folk."²⁴³

Because of its close tie to the community, the weekly served as a valuable research source, according to some sociologists. A sociology professor at New Jersey College for Women, Rutgers University, described the content of the average weekly as being "consistent and repetitive in nature" and primarily concerned with local affairs. He acknowledged that while some weeklies reported inconsistently, varied their editorial policies, or were careless or negligent about omissions, average community newspapers were considered accurate and thus could be considered as reliable a source as public records that were "often badly kept." He observed, "The person who does not know America's small-town papers does not know rural America."²⁴⁴

The concept of country journalism being better connected to its readers and more concerned about their well-being was embraced as part of a "back-to-the-country movement."

²⁴² Thomas F. Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Management* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), 5.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ John Winchell Riley, Jr., "The Country Weekly as a Sociological Source," *American Sociological Review* 3:1 (February, 1938): 41, 43.

Proponents of the small-town press acknowledged that weeklies still contained a fair amount of syndicate material. But they argued that the community weekly had closer ties to small communities than regional dailies and were thus more concerned about reporting on local matters.

By the mid-1930s, it was estimated that the Western Newspaper Union syndicate supplied features to nine of every ten U. S. weekly newspapers. Local editors had the choice of hundreds of features including cooking, fashion, business, sports, religion, travel, celebrity news, comic strips, gossip columns, literary series, and photographic layouts. In a 1936 *Time* magazine article, WNU editor-in-chief Wright A. Patterson estimated that nearly 11,000 small-town and metropolitan editors used WNU material on a regular basis. The syndicate also provided editorial commentary, including a regular column on the New Deal. Editors could choose from three categories of New Deal editorials: pro, con, and middle-of-the-road.²⁴⁵

A 1933 column in *The Nation* magazine, signed by the pseudonym “The Drifter,” referred to a back-to-the-country movement that ensured better support for the small-town press as metropolitan dailies became more national in character and circulation. The columnist wrote, “Many of our metropolitan newspapers already are so general as to leave a field in their own area for regional journalism.” The article bemoaned the death of a Georgia printer-editor who died after running a weekly for more than forty years. The columnist observed, “The printer-editor is a disappearing type, but the personal journalism which he exemplified and the country

²⁴⁵ "The Press: Big Boiler-Plate," *Time*, April 27, 1936, 32. The article stated that the Chicago-based Western Newspaper Union sold 400 types of features to 10,732 daily and weekly newspapers. The company operated thirty-four U.S. plants. In addition to supplying syndicate material, the company produced a weekly trade paper, operated a magazine printing business, and sold printing machinery and wholesale paper. Described as the world's largest publishing syndicate, WNU was valued by its owners at \$8,500,000. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$8.5 million from 1936 was worth \$127.15 million. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

newspaper where he flourished are on the upgrade.”²⁴⁶ Metropolitan journalist Jay House, a former weekly newspaperman, also alluded to a back-to-the-country movement and growing influence of the weekly in a 1934 article in *The Saturday Evening Post*. He asserted that the weekly was more capably edited than in previous decades and had a “better grasp of its function as a local newspaper.”²⁴⁷

But critics of the small-town press contended that printing mostly positive news or biased coverage in favor of a community’s power elite while ignoring or downplaying negative issues involving its privileged and powerful hurt readers rather than helped them. As an example, the author of a 1935 *Nation* magazine article referred to local newspaper coverage of the press guild fight at the *Journal* in Lorain, Ohio. The article described how management-labor conflicts were usually covered in small-town newspapers. The author asserted that fair reporting on management-labor issues could be expected from wire reporters. But he said that fair coverage could not be expected from a small-town newspaper reporter because of the reporter’s strong allegiance to his boss, who was often the owner of his town’s only paper as well as a heavy shareholder in the local plant where labor conflicts might occur. The author argued that by serving as “organs of special and local pleading for privileged interests” the small-town press purposely ignored news that could potentially harm local businesses and business leaders.²⁴⁸

Another important element of the weekly’s morale-boosting role during the Depression was to provide helpful advice on how to stretch a family’s food supply and living expenses. For example, farmers could read regularly published agricultural columns provided to the weekly press via state and federal agricultural programs on such matters as types of crops to grow and

²⁴⁶ "In the Driftway," *The Nation*, July 5, 1933, 17. The article mentioned the death of William Benjamin Franklin Townsend, printer-editor of the *Dahlonega (Ga.) Nugget* who single-handedly put out the weekly on a hand press for more than forty years. According to the author, the last words the editor wrote were “The editor is sick” at the end of a column on local news. Then the editor sat down to rest and died, at age 78.

²⁴⁷ Jay E. House, "The Old Country Weekly," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 12, 1934, 25.

²⁴⁸ Haywood Broun, "Lessons from Lorain," *The Nation*, July 31, 1935, 132.

how to diversify and rotate them. Often these articles were backed by local editorial comment. A March 1931 editorial in *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times* discussed a newspaper investigator who visited farm families in the country's drought areas and found evidence of suffering and lack of material comforts. But, according to the editorial, the investigator also found comfortable families practicing what was termed "safe farming." The editorial concluded, "If more farmers would grow all the necessities possible and then devote time and labor to the money crops—drouths [sic]—low prices and other disasters wouldn't entail such material suffering."²⁴⁹

A 1934 issue of *The Richwood (Oh.) Gazette* contained a news article on the growing trend of "part-time" farmers across the country, defined as industrial workers who were trying to grow a portion of their food, including keeping a flock of chickens or a sow on their property. According to the article, a survey of more than 200 "part-time" farm families in the vicinity of Columbus, Ohio, found that industrial workers were more successful in their farming efforts if they had some previous farming experience, as opposed to city workers who lacked farming know-how. The Rural Economics Department of the Ohio Experiment Station conducted the survey.²⁵⁰

Another helpful hint for those seeking out alternative food sources came in the 1936 edition of *The Pointer* in Riverdale, Illinois, that included a brief notice about the publishing of a 68-page leaflet that described and illustrated the most common species of mushrooms. According to the article, the leaflet was designed "to assist those interested in collecting mushrooms for food and to help them avoid the poisonous varieties."²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ "The Same Old Story," *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times*, 3 March 1931, 4. Throughout the Depression, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Information provided educational materials for the press to disseminate to the general public for the purpose of improving farming practices and food supplies.

²⁵⁰ "Farm Experience Asset to 'Part Time' Farmers," *The Richwood (Oh.) Gazette*, 14 June 1934, 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

²⁵¹ "Leaflet is Aid to Mushroom Pickers," *The Pointer*, 31 July 1936, 2. *The Pointer* served readers in Riverdale, Dolton, South Holland, and Lansing, communities outside of Chicago in Cook County, Illinois. Riverdale, in

Public service was another important task for the weekly editor as officers of local charitable and service organizations often asked the editor to lead or support community service programs and events. To promote community camaraderie, *The Journal-Advance and Benton County Gazette* in Gentry, Arkansas, advertised a 1933 community sale where items such as oil stoves, corn, hay, soybeans, cattle, and farm implements were sold. The promotion stated that ladies from the local Methodist church would serve lunch and community members were encouraged to “Enjoy lunch and a friendly visit with neighbors.”²⁵²

Weeklies also inundated readers with real-life morality lessons by publishing articles about fraudulent business practices and unethical financial schemes. For example, an April 1930 issue of *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard* contained the newspaper’s first banner headline, “Hackworth, Ex-Banker, Given 15 Years.”²⁵³ The article told of a former vice president of the Tennessee Valley Bank who was found guilty of embezzlement and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Other editors found themselves warning readers about such illicit business practices as chain letters, a popular “get-rich-quick” scheme during the Depression that often targeted rural residents. A single issue of the *Ada (Okla.) Weekly News* contained several cautionary tales about the buildup and the downfall of a local chain letter system that lasted only one week.²⁵⁴ One of the articles referred to chain letter mania that had swept the town and noted that stenographers and notary publics were kept busy taking transfers in accordance with the rules of the game. An

Thornton Township, had a population of 2,504 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 4, 320, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

²⁵² “Community Sale,” *The Journal-Advance and Benton County (Ark.) Gazette*, 6 April 1933, 2. Gentry, in Benton County, is located in the northwestern corner of Arkansas. Gentry had a population of 779 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 3, 121, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

²⁵³ “Hackworth, Ex=Banker, Given 15 Years,” *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard*, 4 April 1930, 1.

²⁵⁴ The *Ada Weekly News* serves as a good example of the consolidation of weekly newspapers that took place in the early twentieth century. The weekly was established in 1901 and consolidated with the *Ada Weekly Democrat* in 1910, the *Pontotoc County Enterprise* in 1912, and the *Ada Star-Democrat* in 1919, becoming the *Ada Evening News* and *Ada Weekly News* by the 1920s. Ada, in Pontotoc County, is located in the southern central part of Oklahoma. Ada had a population of 11,261 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 8, 895, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

editorial in the same issue warned residents of the dangers of the risky financial game and compared it to going into battle. "Every man," the editorial stated, "knows somebody is going to be killed but thinks it is the other fellow who will be hit and that he himself will come through safely."²⁵⁵ Two pages later, an article described the collapse of the Ada chain letter business, with a sub-headline that read, "Exchanges for Five-Dollar Systems Move Out; All Is Quiet And Normal On Main Street As Once Enthusiastic Fans Return Attention To Business."²⁵⁶ Ironically, the same issue also contained an article about the arrests of five chain letter promoters from Oklahoma City on felony charges of drawing a lottery for operating two separate chain letters in Shawnee, Oklahoma.²⁵⁷ Another article in the same issue reported on a civil suit for \$35,840 in damages against seven purveyors of chain letters as "chainomania" reached its peak and disappointed investors sought to "get even with somebody."²⁵⁸

Taking a local leadership role during the severe economic downturn of the 1930s, weeklies often joined in efforts with other local merchants to encourage shopping at independent hometown merchants as opposed to national chain stores. For example, a headline in an April 11, 1930, edition of *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard* proclaimed, "FACTS you should consider about the home-owned, home-controlled independent business men of Tuscumbia-Sheffield." The full-page message asked readers to ignore the claims of chain stores and mail-order houses that they sold goods and services for less. The message emphasized that a local merchant who sold the same goods for the same price also provided credit and delivery service and "carries you when you are short of money." The plea asked readers to trade with home businesses and keep profits

²⁵⁵ "Ada Chain Letter Fans Panicky In Attempt to Keep \$5 Systems Moving," *The Ada (Okla.) Weekly News*, 16 May 1935, 3, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

²⁵⁶ "Chain Letter Business Collapses Here As Late Investors Fail to "Cash In," *The Ada (Okla.) Weekly News*, 16 May 1935, 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

²⁵⁷ "Chain Letters Bring Arrests," *The Ada (Okla.) Weekly News*, 16 May 1935, 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

²⁵⁸ "Disappointed Investors Sue Chain Promoters," *The Ada (Okla.) Weekly News*, 16 May 1935, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

at home.”²⁵⁹ A similar full-page message appeared in a March 1930 issue of *The Cambridge City (Ind.) Tribune* under the headline, “A Chain is as Strong as its Weakest Link; a City is as Weak as its Strongest Chain.” The message, sponsored by the city’s independent home-town merchants, stated that chain stores took money out of the community and “neither directly nor indirectly will it [money] ever find its way back into circulation here.”²⁶⁰ In a July 1930 editorial, *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times* encouraged readers to buy from local independent merchants not only because they were local, but because the quality of their goods and services had risen to a competitive level with national chain stores. The editorial noted that merchants twenty years earlier did not understand that buy-it-at-home campaigns were permanently successful not because the businesses were locally operated, but because they remained competitive in goods and services. It said of the local merchants, “They sell goods now, instead of merely keeping them.”²⁶¹

Country correspondents, mostly farm wives who wrote about their communities and recorded everyday happenings, played an important role in boosting the morale of readers and the bottom line of weekly publishers. Correspondents wrote columns under the heading of a community’s name that contained news about its residents, usually related to births, marriages and deaths, social events, such as bridal showers and church receptions, out-of-town visitors, and travel. Correspondent reports from rural communities showed that, despite tough economic times, people still enjoyed their lives, attended church, visited friends and relatives, hosted social events, got married, and had babies, most of whom the newspapers described as “beautiful.”

²⁵⁹ "FACTS you should consider about the home-owned, home controlled independent business men of Tuscumbia-Sheffield," *The Sheffield (Ala.) Standard*, 11 April 1930, 6.

²⁶⁰ "A Chain Is As Strong As Its Weakest Link; A City Is As Weak As Its Strongest Chain," *The Cambridge City (Ind.) Tribune*, 27 March 1930, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

²⁶¹ "Real Merchants Here," *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times*, 8 July 1930, 4.

According to a country journalism textbook, country correspondents were “apostles of the country editor” because they sold the newspaper to hundreds that were “too far distant for him [editor] to reach directly.”²⁶² Publishers recognized that correspondents maintained subscriptions because of their columns’ popularity. In fact, the author of a textbook on weekly newspapers estimated that editors devoted more space to country correspondence than to any other single category because roughly half of the average weekly’s circulation went to readers on rural routes and in small communities. State press associations and the National Editorial Association, also recognizing the importance of correspondents, joined forces in 1937 to publish a monthly informal, instructive magazine named *Folks*, which was described as “the Helpmate of the Newspaper Correspondent.”²⁶³

An appreciation for these country scribes was voiced in a *Time* magazine article that profiled the 1935 winner of “The Best Country Newspaper Correspondent in the U.S.” contest, sponsored by the Crowell Publishing Company’s *Country Home* magazine. The contest winner was fifty-eight-year-old Mary Elizabeth Mahnkey of Oasis, Missouri, who had been a correspondent for forty-four years for the Taney County *Republican* in Forsyth, Missouri. She had also contributed poetry, letters, and farm gossip to *Country Home* magazine over the years. Her community was like that of many country correspondents in that its population numbered less than 100. In fact, at the time the article was published, Oasis had only twenty-one residents while the town of Forsyth, from which the weekly was published, had a population of 281.²⁶⁴ As winner of the nationwide competition, she received fifty dollars, a “fine silver meat platter with a

²⁶² Meredith, *The Country Weekly*, 63.

²⁶³ Thomas F. Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1949), 191, 197.

²⁶⁴ The Taney County *Republican* had a weekly circulation of 871.

vegetable dish to match,” a free trip to Manhattan, and the title of the best country correspondent.²⁶⁵

Thus, the country’s view of rural journalism, as displayed among the pages of nationally syndicated magazines and newspapers, was both complimentary and critical. Critics of country journalism continued to raise questions of fairness and favoritism while supporters of the back-to-county-movement applauded the rural press for its microscopic examination of the intimate details of small-town life.

Business Survival: Bartering and Battling for Advertising Revenues

The Great Depression left many businesses struggling for survival, and weeklies were certainly not immune to the economic hardships that caused many businesses to close their doors or consolidate with financially stronger operations. Although there remained a strong demand for weeklies, readers simply could no longer afford to pay for subscriptions. Compounding the problem was the loss of advertising revenue from local businesses that either shut down or discontinued advertising, and from national advertisers that restricted their advertising budgets to metropolitan dailies and national magazines.

With the previous decade marked by the consolidations and closings of the country’s weakest weeklies, it would have appeared that the remaining 9,522 weeklies in towns with a population of less than 15,000 were financially sound and ripe for expansion.²⁶⁶ In fact, University of Minnesota professor Bruce McCoy conducted a 1929 study, prior to the October 1929 stock market crash, on competition and consolidation in the weekly newspaper field. He estimated that weeklies served fifty-three percent of the country’s population. He predicted that

²⁶⁵ "Crossroads Correspondent," *Time*, July 29, 1935, 40.

²⁶⁶ *N.W. Ayer & Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1930).

the tendency toward consolidation of two or more newspapers published in the same city or town would lead to a new era of prosperity and service for the country press.²⁶⁷ But many of the surviving publications did not become thriving business operations due to an unforeseen economic depression that changed the financial outlook for many small-town newspaper publishers. The economic downturn accelerated the number of weekly mergers and suspensions, and many journalists left small-town journalism altogether.

The loss of job opportunities at weeklies was especially frustrating for the growing number of college-educated reporters and editors who viewed the weekly newspaper field as the easiest way to enter into their chosen profession. But despite the fact that journalism education was well established by this time, there remained many editors and publishers who trained as apprentices and never received formal journalism training. In fact, University of Wisconsin journalism professor Grant Hyde asserted that some journalists were “quite unfitted” for the profession. He observed in a 1931 article on the state of journalism that “Perhaps this dark year of depression may precede the dawn of a better day for journalism teaching.”²⁶⁸

As part of the effort to graduate more students fit for journalism, the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism appointed a special committee in 1938 to review curriculum requirements. The committee recommended that students take specific courses in business and advertising in response to an increased demand among weekly and small daily papers for employees trained in these areas.²⁶⁹ But despite these efforts, a 1939-1940 National Council of Professional Education for Journalism study found that there were more institutions providing professional education for journalism than placement opportunities

²⁶⁷ Bruce McCoy, "Competition and Consolidation in the Community Weekly Field," (*Journalism Quarterly* 7, 1930): 23.

²⁶⁸ Grant M. Hyde, "United States Journalism in 1931," (*Journalism Quarterly* 8, 1931).

²⁶⁹ "Journalism Schools to Improve Training of Students for Weekly and Small Daily Field," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 8 January 1938, 5.

warranted. For example, in 1939 the thirty-two schools of journalism in the United States had an enrollment of 6,295 students (undergraduate and graduate) and 216 institutions providing some journalism training had class enrollments of more than 13,000. But only 1,385 graduates were hired in the journalism field that year. The study also revealed that during the previous five years roughly sixteen percent of journalism graduates took jobs in the weekly field, while thirty-one percent were hired at daily newspapers.²⁷⁰

Despite the fact that the Depression tightened the personnel budgets of many weekly and small-town newspapers and thus could be seen as a means to “weed out” poor quality journalists, there remained a large contingent of experienced, better-trained reporters and editors who found themselves out of work. However, many of them eventually found jobs with the federal government after the Roosevelt administration established a number of federal agencies as part of an overall economic recovery program known as the New Deal.²⁷¹ Writing for federal agencies such as the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, former newspaper editors and reporters often found their work turning up in the pages of their previous employers -- small-town dailies and weeklies throughout the country.²⁷²

For some publishers who lacked funding to pay even a single reporter, the only newsgathering help came from local correspondents. Sometimes a correspondent’s only pay was a free subscription to the newspaper, according to Charles Wilson, who wrote about weeklies in a 1934 article, “The Country Press Reawakens.” Regarding country correspondents, he observed,

²⁷⁰ "Only Half of Journalism Grads Hired by Papers," *The American Press* 59:7 (May, 1941): 12.

²⁷¹ President Franklin Roosevelt’s 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act allowed businesses to fix prices and create production quotas. It also established fair-practice codes that guaranteed improved working conditions and the right of collective bargaining for labor. Small newspapers were placed under the jurisdiction of the Graphic Arts Industries Code, which was adopted in 1934 and was established to set minimum wages for newspaper employees in cities of varying sizes. The National Editorial Association served as a national code authority to ensure newspaper compliance to the NRA codes. The recovery act was later ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

²⁷² William E. Berchtold, "Press Agents of the New Deal," (*New Outlook* 164:July 26, 1934): 25. It was estimated that 6,600 were hired as writers, editors, historians, researchers, and art critics for the Federal Writers’ Project. A majority of the WPA employees were female.

“Few of them sign their work. Yet they write on, through flood and famine, drought and pestilence--miniature historians who expect neither money nor fame.”²⁷³ But while some correspondents received no cash compensation, C.F.R. Smith, editor of the country correspondents’ magazine, *Folks*, conducted a survey covering a large sampling of rural weeklies in Minnesota that showed that 87.5 percent of rural correspondents received cash payment for their work. The survey revealed that column inch rates paid to correspondents varied from two to five cents, while payment per column ranged from twenty-five cents to one dollar. The study also reported that monthly rates ranged from one to two dollars.²⁷⁴

Most weekly publishers had to consider a number of tough business-related strategies in order to remain in operation throughout the decade. One concern was whether or not to barter with subscribers. Thus, many small-town editors found themselves trading newspaper subscriptions or printed copies of previous issues that were lying around the newspaper office for coal, plumbing, medical services, and farm produce. For example, J. Milam, editor of the *Informer* in Jasper, Arkansas, was a one-man shop who kept his readers informed through trade outs of squirrel meat and bushels of squash for subscriptions.²⁷⁵ So despite the fact that subscription revenues might have been down, this did not necessarily mean that newspapers had fewer readers. Readers simply found more creative ways to “pay” for their subscriptions.

Because newspapers contained valuable information such as where to get a job, where to find a hot meal or temporary shelter, and where to shop for the lowest prices on everyday necessities, newspapers themselves became necessities for local residents. Therefore those who

²⁷³ Charles M. Wilson, "The Country Press Reawakens," *The North American Review* 238 (September, 1934): 262. A survey covering a large sampling of rural weeklies in Minnesota, conducted by C.F.R. Smith, editor of *Folks* magazine, showed that 87.5 percent of rural correspondents received money payments for their work. Column inch rates varied from 2 to 5 cents, payment per column ranged from 25 cents to \$1, and monthly rates ranged from \$1 to \$2. (Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, 198).

²⁷⁴ Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, 198.

²⁷⁵ Wilson, "The Country Press Reawakens," 263.

could not afford to pay cash for a subscription found other means to “pay” for a copy because they were too proud to ask for free copies, according to weekly editor Bruce Crawford of Norton, Virginia, who wrote about his country journalism career in a 1933 issue of *The New Republic*.²⁷⁶

Weekly editors were encouraged by their professional peers to take pride in their businesses and not to openly complain about their financial struggles. In fact, a 1928 column in *The Publishers' Auxiliary* chastised editors who published the “poverty joke” because it appeared as if they were whining about unpaid subscriptions. The joke referred to a preacher who asked all in his congregation to stand if they were paying their debts. Only one man remained seated. He then stood, looking “careworn and hungry, wearing last-summer’s suit” and explained that he could not pay his debt because “all of those who were paying their other debts were his subscribers.” The unsigned column pointed out that by printing the joke, editors belittled their profession and perpetuated the obsolete idea that operating a weekly was a thankless and poor-paying job. The joke also sent the message, according to the columnist, that an editor was “a spineless man whose weakness everyone imposes [on] because he meekly accepts whatever his subscribers choose to give.”²⁷⁷

Some country editors, though, were seemingly not as generous in offering free subscriptions for trade outs on handiwork or vegetables. *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times* listed its subscription rates on page four of each issue, along with the directive, “Cash in Advance.”²⁷⁸ *The Richwood (Oh.) Gazette* listed circulation rates with the disclaimer, “These rates are given only to cash in advance customers.”²⁷⁹ However, a published policy did not necessarily mean there was no opportunity for informal agreement and/or bartering.

²⁷⁶ Bruce Crawford, “A Country Editor,” *The New Republic*, September 27, 1933, 180.

²⁷⁷ “Why Reprint the Poverty Joke?” *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 12 February 1938, 4.

²⁷⁸ *The Tuscumbia (Ala.) Times*, 1 July 1930, 4.

²⁷⁹ *The Richmond (Oh.) Gazette*, 14 June 1934, 2.

A second key strategy for business survival in weekly publishing involved determining tactics that should be used to battle radio for dwindling advertising revenues. Potential weekly advertisers reduced their budgets and often considered an “either/or” advertising strategy as opposed to reducing advertising costs in various media outlets. Many merchants were drawn to the program sponsorship opportunities available in radio and turned their backs on advertising in the community weekly. Thus, weekly publishers began to recognize radio as the new advertising threat, and it became a theme for discussion in many meetings of national and state press associations in the early 1930s.²⁸⁰ National Editorial Association Executive Secretary H.C. Hotaling voiced his concern about radio competition in his annual report to the association’s 1931 convention in Atlanta. “There are country weeklies in America today,” he stated, “... that are fighting for existence because of unrestricted radio competition.”²⁸¹ In fact, by the end of the 1920s, radio advertisers had spent roughly \$40 million for broadcast time alone.²⁸²

While weekly publishers early on determined the advertising threat of radio, they were not as quick to recognize the new medium as a serious news competitor. In fact, weekly editors initially welcomed the use of radio as a news source -- by the late 1920s, radio was being utilized for news bulletins, such as ballgame scores or horse race results -- because they viewed the radio news bulletins as a means of getting people interested enough to subsequently buy a newspaper “to get more details.”²⁸³ But they abruptly adopted tactics to lessen the advertising competition

²⁸⁰ Wood, *The Story of Advertising*, 417. Total advertising revenue dropped almost a billion dollars from a peak of \$3.42 billion in 1929 to \$2.60 billion in 1930. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$3.42 billion from 1929 was worth \$41.39 billion and \$2.60 billion from 1930 was worth \$32.28 billion. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²⁸¹ H. C. Hotaling, "Executive Secretary's Annual Address" (paper presented at the Forty-Sixth Annual Convention of the National Editorial Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 1931), 29.

²⁸² Wood, *The Story of Advertising*, 413-415. In radio, the advertiser selected and often concocted the editorial background for his advertising through program sponsorship. Throughout the thirties, big-name radio personalities became associated with advertised products such as coffee, gasoline, and tobacco products. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$40 million from 1929 was worth \$484.16 million. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²⁸³ F. Parker Stockbridge, "Radio vs. the Press," *Outlook and Independent* 156, 1930): 692.

of radio. One such tactic included editing out the names of radio advertisers when publishing radio schedules.²⁸⁴ Weeklies also persuaded broadcasters to purchase advertising space in the newspapers to promote their programs.²⁸⁵

The loss of national advertising revenue was also a major concern for small-town publishers as the competition from dailies became more acute during the Depression. Massachusetts editor-publisher Henry Beetle Hough observed that the increased advertising competition from daily newspapers resulted in the curious anomaly of his newspaper, the *Vineyard Gazette*, becoming too costly a medium for the nation's largest and wealthiest corporations. However, he said, his newspaper was a practical and economical advertising venue for the small grocer with a limited advertising budget. As a result, his newspaper employed economizing measures and sought multiple small advertising accounts instead of depending on a few large national advertisers.²⁸⁶

In their pursuit of national advertising agencies, weekly publishers argued that even though many of their subscribers also subscribed to a daily newspaper from a nearby community, the hometown newspaper was the best medium for advertising. Weekly publishers often referred to a 1930 study on the newspaper reading habits of rural and farm families that found a sixty-one percent preference for viewing advertisements in their home paper as opposed to the nearby metropolitan daily.²⁸⁷

But despite concerted efforts to attract national advertising, the weekly publisher was forever aware that the greatest potential for advertising revenue was located just outside his front

²⁸⁴ Most early radio programs, whether drama, music, entertainment, or news, had one advertising sponsor with the name of the sponsor included in the program's title.

²⁸⁵ Hyde, "United States Journalism in 1931," 423.

²⁸⁶ Henry Beetle Hough, *Country Editor* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1940), 264-265. 256-57.

²⁸⁷ W.A. Sumner, "Reading Interests and Buying Habits of the Rural and Village Subscribers of a Daily Newspaper," *Journalism Quarterly* 9, 1932): 185. The survey revealed that 100 families subscribed to 260 newspapers, the majority having subscribed to both a weekly and a daily newspaper from a larger nearby community.

doors, on Main Street. The importance of local merchants advertising in their home newspaper was affirmed in a University of Wisconsin Department of Agricultural Journalism 1935 study that found that local display, classified, and legal advertising accounted for more than seventy-five percent of total advertising revenue in one hundred weeklies throughout the United States and Canada. In fact, survey respondents even offered advice on how weeklies could attract more local advertising: by eliminating the use of unpaid propaganda, or free publicity, from government agencies and businesses.²⁸⁸ With the exception of entire ready-print pages, free publicity was utilized on a need-to-fill basis, meaning the articles were placed in spaces that were not sold for advertising. Also, local merchants sometimes purchased advertising in their community weekly because of the tie-ins provided in publicity articles to certain products or services that could be found at local businesses.

In a 1934 *Editor & Publisher* article, country editor Paul Bittinger offered advice to weekly editors on how to increase advertising linage. He proposed that weeklies use more aggressive business methods such as hiring an advertising solicitor to prepare attractive, timely, and seasonal advertising layouts in advance to potential advertising customers. He also recommended the use of syndicated advertising services to provide updated artwork. Another suggestion was that editors use promotional themes, such as back-to-school specials, and customer discount coupons so that advertisers would receive better returns on their advertising dollar. For example, he said that his newspaper promoted weekly grocery specials for smaller independent grocers and, later, larger chain grocery markets. In doing so, he built up his newspaper's food advertisement linage. He also encouraged the use of national theme weeks,

²⁸⁸ William K. Howison and W.A. Sumner, "Revenue Sources of Country Weekly Newspapers," *Bulletin, Department of Agricultural Journalism, College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin*:10, 1938): 5, 31. Of the 100 weekly newspapers surveyed in the U.S. and Canada, 60 were from Wisconsin.

such as Cotton Week, Insurance Week, etc., for thematic advertising promotions and special sections.²⁸⁹

Some weeklies openly chastised local merchants for failing to advertise in their publications. A 1937 front-page personal column written by *Alton* (Ia.) *Democrat* publisher George E. Bowers referred to a Kansas weekly that contained a dozen blank spaces, each surrounded by a rule or border to represent non-advertising merchants and a dying town. Bowers then suggested that every business in his town should be represented in each issue of the newspaper. He reminded local merchants that 10,000 northwest Iowans read the *Democrat* on a regular basis. He wrote, "It's up to the business men to tell what they are doing. If they don't, the town's reputation as a business center is blasted."²⁹⁰ *The Sheffield* (Ala.) *Standard* suggested that more local businesses advertise to encourage sales during an economic depression. One of the newspaper's editorials stated, "This year advertising is more needed, not because people have less money to spend, but they hesitate to spend it. It is far more logical to advertise when sales are hard than when they are easy."²⁹¹ Other newspapers also appealed for more local advertising, but their approach was less direct. *The Hopewell* (N.J.) *Herald* reminded readers each week that the *Herald* "Gets Into The Home, Where Circulation Counts" in a proclamation printed above its nameplate.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Paul W. Bitterer, "Says Weeklies Must Try New Methods," *Editor & Publisher*, 1934, 9.

²⁹⁰ G. E. Bowers, "It Seems To Us," *Alton* (Ia.) *Democrat*, 6 August 1937, 1. Alton, a part of Nassau Township in Sioux County, is located in the northwestern part of Iowa. It had a population of 10,000 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 5, 388, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

²⁹¹ "The Way to Whip It," *The Sheffield* (Ala.) *Standard*, 4 April 1930, 2.

²⁹² *The Hopewell* (N.J.) *Herald*, 17 February 1932, 1. The advertising rates, listed on page four, were as follows: Cent-a-word Column, no less than 25 cents; Regarding Notices, 15 cents per line on first page; Cards of Thanks, \$1.00; Resolutions of respect, condolences, etc., \$2.00. The paper was listed as a foreign advertising representative for The American Press Association. Hopewell, in Mercer County, is located along New Jersey's central-eastern border. Hopewell had a population of 1,467 in 1930. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 7, 720, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

And finally, one key strategy that kept many weeklies in operation during the decade was to expand their job-printing services to increase revenues that were not directly tied to their newspapers. Taking such action redefined the publisher's role from editor-publisher to printer-publisher, a common role among the country's earliest newspapermen. Especially in smaller towns with declining trade centers, publishers replaced lost advertising revenue with specialized printing and engraving jobs. Even though an emphasis on job-printing operations made a publisher more a merchant and less an editor, it did extend the life of weaker newspapers, observed the author of an article on competition and consolidation in the weekly newspaper field.²⁹³

One country editor who wrote about the merchant-versus-editor relationship asserted that it was difficult for the editor to demand economizing of town officials while at the same time seeking their business through legal notices and printing jobs. He stated, "In a depression more than at any other time, citizens clamor collectively for public service and economy, but howl individually for special favors. The small-town editor-publisher, if he must scrouge [sic] to survive, is no exception to the general run of pigs at the public teat."²⁹⁴

Ultimately, only the strongest weeklies survived to the end of the decade. For some, survivability required consolidation with weaker newspapers, a decrease in advertising competition because nearby newspapers folded, or a revision in style, staffing, design, and content of their publications to appeal to new readers and advertisers. As a result of newspaper consolidations, physical plants improved and some weeklies even began using the latest technology -- an offset press.²⁹⁵ Although offset presses were somewhat experimental at the end

²⁹³ McCoy, "Competition and Consolidation," 28-29.

²⁹⁴ Crawford, "A Country Editor," 180.

²⁹⁵ Offset printing is a process by which an image is transferred by ink from a paper or metal plate onto a smooth rubber cylinder that then transfers the image to paper. The process was developed in the early 1900s. The equipment required for offset was less expensive than letterpress equipment required to produce the same size newspaper.

of the decade, early proponents asserted that offset would ultimately be more cost effective because it was cheaper to produce more photographs per newspaper issue. Offset would thus enable editors to respond to readers' demands for more photographs and illustrations. The weeklies that thrived during the decade began taking on some of the characteristics of the metropolitan dailies such as specialized staff reporters, separate editorial and business departments, and magazine-style design features that appealed to more readers and advertisers. For example, by the mid-1930s two Pennsylvania weeklies changed their formats, which were viewed at the time as innovations in the rural weekly field. The *Mount Pleasant Journal* added a sixteen-page tabloid magazine section, and the *Selinsgrove Times* discarded the traditional page-one design and replaced it with a magazine design style. The Selinsgrove newspaper also focused on developing local news that was not included in the area's daily and added a carrier boy delivery system.²⁹⁶

Surviving and Thriving

During the 1930s, weeklies served as a morale booster by encouraging local citizens to keep the faith and keep their money in the banks, but they also kept other businesses alive through advertising trade outs, promotional campaigns, and reinforcement of positive economic news. In many cases, they finished the decade in better economic shape than they entered it. A 1938 *Time* article observed that of the country's 11,852 rural papers, nearly half of them were more than fifty years old, and 151 were more than one hundred years old. Since the early 1930s, only 126 weeklies folded or were merged with other small-town papers. The average circulation of a weekly was 2,000. The article said of weeklies, "While their columns now include many of

²⁹⁶ "New Editorial Technique Seen as Need of Weekly Newspapers," *Editor & Publisher* 65 (February 23, 1935): 30.

the features found in dailies, and streamlined autos have joined the pills among the ads, they remain the most authentic expressions of U. S. rural life.”²⁹⁷

The following year, *Time* magazine published an article that reported evidence of continued growth, financial success, and influence in the weekly field. The article was based on the findings of its survey of one hundred typical weeklies and bi-weeklies throughout the country, estimated to have an audience of seventeen million readers. The article noted that despite the decade’s turbulent economic depression, weeklies had actually gained in numbers, circulation, and advertising lineage while dailies suffered declining numbers in those categories. The survey’s general findings were that most had good business in 1938 and early 1939; boilerplate ads were disappearing; news was ably written but editorials were either purely boosterish, overly timid, or entirely lacking; and a wealth of local columns kept the print lively and entertaining.²⁹⁸

Newspaper chains became an important factor to the financial success formula of newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s. Among the largest were the Scripps-Howard, Hearst, and Gannett newspaper chains, known for their acquisition of dailies throughout the country. But they also began acquiring weeklies, many for the purpose of consolidation with other small-town publications. However, the most influential national chain of weeklies began at the weekly level. A testament to the findings of the *Time* survey was demonstrated in the success of a West

²⁹⁷ "Rural Titan," *Time*, July 18, 1938, 36. The article featured John Holliday Perry, described as “No. 1 in the rural press.” In addition to having bought enough voting trust certificates and common stock shares the previous month to give him controlling interest of WNU, he was elected its president, succeeding Herbert Henry Fish who served in that capacity for twenty years. Perry was also president of the American Press Association, which was a national advertising representative for 5,000 country newspapers. In 1938, APA placed \$2.5 million of the \$7 million of national advertising in country weeklies. Perry also owned *American Press*, a trade paper for weeklies, and Publishers’ Autocaster Service, which sold casting boxes for making plates to country publishers. Perry was an attorney for the James G. Scripps papers in the Northwest and national counsel for the United Press Associations, the Scripps Newspapers, and the Newspaper Enterprise Association. He also owned four dailies in Florida and the *Reading (Pa.) Times*. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$2.5 million from 1938 was worth \$36.78 million. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

²⁹⁸ "The Grass Roots Press," *Time*, February 20, 1939, 48.

Virginia newspaper family. In 1934, the three Woodyard brothers (Ted, Bill, and Henry Chapman) of West Virginia acquired control of eight weeklies on Long Island, New York's North Shore. Together with their fifteen county-seat West Virginia weeklies, the Woodyards became owners of the largest weekly newspaper chain in the country. The second largest weekly chain was the seventeen-paper Procter group in Ohio, assembled by the late Colonel William Cooper Procter (Ivory Soap) and Charles Bond (Two-Pants Suits).²⁹⁹

Ted Woodyard bought out his brothers' interests in the group and extended the chain to twenty-nine newspapers and two job-printing plants at the end of the 1930s. He also owned Woodyard Associates, Inc., a New York-based cooperative of 2,113 small-town weeklies that was formed in 1938 to secure national advertising, buy paper and supplies, and set up a systematized accounting method. A 1939 profile in *The Saturday Evening Post* noted that his journalism career began in 1920 when his father, a United States congressman, purchased the weekly *Spencer (W.V.) Times-Record* for the three Woodyard sons to run. Their operating philosophy was to print as much local news as possible and eliminate most boilerplate copy.

As recalled in the article, the Woodyard operating philosophy was demonstrated firsthand when the publishing magnate returned for a visit to Spencer and greeted a local woman everyone referred to as "Aunt Sarah." The elderly woman explained to Ted Woodyard that she was walking with a cane because she had stubbed her toe. He proceeded to the newspaper office and told the editor to explain to readers that Aunt Sarah was forced to use a cane not because of old age, but because of an accident. He instructed the editor, "Tell them that Aunt Sarah might break all ten of her toes, but that the weight of seventy-five years can't break her indomitable spirit."³⁰⁰ Thus, thanks to the careful editing of a wise publisher, Aunt Sarah became much more than a

²⁹⁹ "The Press: Woodyard Weeklies," *Time*, July 9, 1934, 52.

³⁰⁰ Thomas Gerber and Hal L. Curtis, "Home-Town Paper," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 20, 1939, 14, 39, 42.

strong woman who refused to let a stubbed toe keep her down; she also became a symbol of determination and an example of strength for others in the community to rally around and imitate.

Chapter Five

The 1940s: Patriotism, Production, Professionalism, and the Post-War Period

After spending the previous decade boosting the morale of their citizens and the retail offerings of local merchants during a lengthy economic depression, community weekly newspapers in the 1940s returned to the task of promoting patriotism when faced with a second world war and the wartime challenges of skilled worker shortages and difficulty in replacing or repairing worn equipment. Post-war challenges included increased production and personnel costs, pushing for recognition as a profession rather than as a trade, and responding to societal shifts in relation to population patterns and worldview.

The role of a patriot press was not new to community newspapers, many of which had been established for the purpose of promoting or supporting a war effort. Fewer than thirty years prior, weeklies had proven to be valuable propaganda partners of the U.S. government during World War I. Thus it was not surprising when the federal government called upon them in late 1941 to serve as a propaganda partner after the United States declared war on Japan following the bombing of a U.S. military base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Another major challenge for weekly publishers in the 1940s was confronting production problems in relation to wartime and the post-war years. As was the case for many manufacturing industries during the war, preferences in terms of supplying raw materials and workers (often female) were given to the production of war-related products, such as weaponry and military supplies. So, during the war, newspaper operations had to deal with the loss of skilled pressmen,

equipment failures, and difficulty in finding replacement parts. After the war, the returning soldiers who were small-town editors and publishers were confronted with equipment in need of repair, higher costs for new equipment and supplies, and prospective employees in search of higher paying union wages.

Weekly publishers yearned for the respect of their metropolitan daily peers and leaders in the political and business communities, specifically as a means to attract national advertising accounts. They engaged in concerted efforts to improve their printed product, to unite politically and advocate certain issues, and to market their product as a valued business partner. They were thus able to enhance their publications' status as a mass medium outlet for national advertisers. As a result, government and corporate publicity seekers, political operatives, and a growing number of national advertisers viewed the weekly business as a valuable delivery system for their publicity, promotions, and propaganda.

In addition to helping the U.S. government in the international war effort during the 1940s, weeklies also waged a battle on the home front to respond to the changing news interests of readers. The post-war period brought new challenges to the weekly as soldiers who returned home had a wider world view and an interest in matters beyond their hometown's borders. Thus, editors had to carefully consider the balance between local and non-local news. But while there was an interest in news from afar, the more pressing issues at home included jobs, schools, public health concerns, racism, and housing for the returning soldiers and their growing families.

War Propaganda: The Weapon of Printers' Ink

Weeklies of the 1940s reflected their predecessors of the 1910s in that they were heavily utilized by the federal government as a propaganda tool to promote patriotism in all areas of everyday life, from the products that citizens consumed or rationed, to the jobs they held or left

behind to go to war. During World War I, weeklies became a vital partner with the federal government in publishing all manner of war-support information supplied through the government-sanctioned Committee on Public Information, better known as the Creel Committee. However, despite the fact that weeklies had a tradition of cooperating with the federal government to promote an international war effort, the preceding decade of difficult economic times turned the perspective of many weeklies inward. They had a stronger focus on local news and political issues and on community boosterism.

As a result, many weeklies during the 1930s decreased their subscriptions to nationally syndicated ready-print and boilerplate material companies and increased their use of government propaganda.³⁰¹ A growing number of government agencies provided informational columns and articles on such pocketbook issues as family finance, consumer spending habits, and business and farming practices. So, even though there was an increased amount of government publicity in their publications, weekly editors continued to place a strong emphasis on local matters, as evidenced in the heavy use of community correspondent and locally written columns. Much of the local content concerned the impact of war on the community. Correspondents submitted community reports that told of American Red Cross projects and soldiers stationed overseas sent columns home with their first-person accounts of battlefronts and foreign travels.

Thus, when Japan's 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor brought forth a declaration of war, weekly publishers had to decide how to balance local news with news from the war front,

³⁰¹ By the late 1940s, there were an estimated 250 newspaper syndicates that produced 2,000 non-local features such as columns, editorial cartoons, and comic strips. Most of the country's estimated 10,000 weeklies purchased at least one non-local feature. The main syndicate source for weeklies was the Western Newspaper Union, which served an estimated three of every five of the country's non-dailies. By this time, WNU was based in New York, with thirty-five branches throughout the country. According to country journalism textbook author Thomas Barnhart, the WNU's service to small-town newspapers was so complete that the company was referred to as "the Sears and Roebuck of the weekly newspaper field." Other syndicates that served weeklies were the National Weekly Newspaper Service, owned and managed by WNU, the Newspaper Enterprise Association of Cleveland, and King Features Syndicate of New York, the largest producer of syndicate material. Also, some state press associations sent out weekly news releases to members at little or no cost. Thomas Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1949), 202-06.

especially considering that syndicated news wire services made war news in the 1940s more affordable and accessible than during previous international conflicts.

Henry Beetle Hough, editor of the *Vineyard (Mass.) Gazette*, described the editorial battle of local news versus international news when he recalled hearing a radio report about Germany's 1939 bombing of Warsaw and invasion of Poland as he and his wife were riding in their car. The couple had just completed that week's edition of the *Gazette*, but his wife asked him whether or not they should return to the office and incorporate news of the Warsaw bombings in the newspaper. He wrote that "ordinarily the *Gazette* had no concern with outside news," but that given the seriousness of the situation, he decided to return to the office and re-make the front page to include the European war update.³⁰²

By the 1940s radio was considered a legitimate alternative news source to newspapers, particularly for national and international news. But weekly publishers continued to print syndicate and wire stories of important national and international events. They did so because community newspaper readers tended to retain their back issues for at least a week's time and could refer to the articles for details and in-depth coverage.

It is no wonder that the government called on weeklies to help the war effort, especially in recruiting, given the military's own data that showed the rural male to be the ideal fighting soldier. Lt. North Callahan, who worked in the Recruiting Publicity Bureau at Governors' Island, New York, described the "Ideal Composite Recruit" in a 1940 *Publishers' Auxiliary* article. The description included physical traits such as age, height, weight, and waist measurements. It also included societal traits such as being a native-born citizen from a rural community and a high school attendee with some mechanical, clerical, or occupational training. According to Callahan, an analysis of recruiting methods revealed that advertisements in small-town and rural

³⁰² Hough, *Country Editor*, 1-2.

newspapers were the most productive for enlistment purposes. He encouraged weekly editors to incorporate human interest stories in their recruiting articles, such as the enlistment of twins or five sons from the same family. He concluded, "It is suggested that all editors and reporters keep in closer touch with recruiting officials and thereby serve the double purpose of obtaining good stories for their papers and doing a worthy, public-spirited service for their country."³⁰³

As in World War I, many printers, editors, reporters, and publishers of small-town newspapers joined the military during World War II, which led to understaffed publications. In many cases, federal government propagandists served as an "auxiliary staff" for these publications, providing columns and articles from various bureaucratic agencies. Some publishers who joined the military ranks relied on their wives and daughters to keep their newspapers operating. In fact, by 1941 more than seven hundred women served as editor-publishers of weeklies.³⁰⁴

The war also changed the gender makeup of college journalism programs and overall enrollment figures. A *New York Times* editorial observed that war had turned the nation's schools and departments of journalism "over to the women for the duration," adding, "Men are as rare today in journalism classrooms as women once were in the city rooms of newspapers." College journalism enrollment decreased 57 percent from 1939, the last year before the war began to affect enrollment, to 1943, according to the American Association of Teachers of Journalism. AATJ president Douglass W. Miller stressed that finding jobs for its graduates was one of the big problems faced by the average school of journalism before the war. Since the war, however, he said jobs were more plentiful than persons to fill them.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ Lt. North Callahan, "Army Seeks Help of Editors in Rural Recruiting Work," *The American Press* 59:2 (December, 1940): 6.

³⁰⁴ "Women Publish 704 Weekly Newspapers in the United States," *The National Publisher* (July, 1941): 10.

³⁰⁵ "War Changes Schools of Journalism," *New York Times*, 19 December 1943, E9.

Smaller newspapers, especially those struggling financially, permanently closed their doors after their publishers joined the armed forces, while other newspapers suspended operations and were revived after the war. A January 1942 issue of the *New York Times* ran an Associated Press article about a small-town Massachusetts weekly editor who suspended his paper's publication after signing up to serve in the armed forces. Twenty-seven-year-old Joseph S. Cotton of *The Turners Falls Herald* announced the suspension with the statement "When you gotta go, you gotta go." He also wrote in his final article, "Opinion of the passing of *The Herald* is divided into two schools of thought--those who are sorry to see it go and those who are glad. The former includes persons about whom praise-worthy articles were written; the latter, persons who didn't like what the newspaper said about them."³⁰⁶

But even as the overall number of weekly newspapers decreased during the 1940s, from a high of 10,860 in 1940³⁰⁷ to a low of 9,672 in 1945,³⁰⁸ there were the occasional start-ups that owed much of their success to serving as an important home link for soldiers assigned overseas. Such was the case of the *Rowley (Mass.) News*, which was established in 1944 by seventeen-year-old Donald Kent. According to the young publisher, part of his newspaper's early success was that it came out during wartime. Under the tutelage of a neighbor who was a veteran newspaperman, Kent set the newspaper by hand and printed it on a foot-power press donated by his mentor. As success mounted, the operation was able to graduate to a larger press and typesetting machine the following year. Despite being a small publication, Kent said, "It [the newspaper] made a hit with the boys overseas to whom it was sent in an envelope with other mail from home."³⁰⁹ Also among the community newspapers that were established during World War II were the internment camp newspapers based in the ten relocation camps located in the

³⁰⁶ "Publisher Stops Paper to Join Armed Forces," *New York Times*, 17 January 1942, 12.

³⁰⁷ *N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1940).

³⁰⁸ *N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1945).

³⁰⁹ "Kent, at 17, is a Veteran," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 30 July 1949, 4.

western half of the country that became home to more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans during the war. The camp newspapers were established to disseminate government information and were under the direction of the War Relocation Authority.³¹⁰

In keeping with their role as a morale-boosting link between soldiers and their loved ones back home, many weeklies featured news updates on local residents who served in the military and columns written by local soldiers or their family members.³¹¹ The *Dispatch Democrat* in Ukiah, California, placed its standing column, “News of the Service Folks,” on the front page.³¹² The *McKean County Democrat* in Smethport, Pennsylvania, ran a regular column, “Bugle Calls,” that featured letters sent home from service members stationed overseas.³¹³

As they had during World War I, weeklies maintained a proud partnership with the U.S. government during World War II in campaigns to promote war bond sales; collect rubber, scrap metal, cooking fats, and other waste products; encourage rationing and maintenance of equipment and supplies; donate blood; sew garments for soldiers and civilians; grow vegetables; and volunteer for civilian defense programs. Many weeklies printed two-word reminders to “Buy Bonds” that were often positioned just to the right and left of the newspapers’ nameplates.³¹⁴ The war bonds campaigns were successful due in large part to the partnership of weeklies with the

³¹⁰ Merriman Smith, "Roosevelt Sets up Works Corps for Aliens from Coast Areas," *The Washington Post*, 22 March 1942, B6. Rennie Taylor, "Resettlement of Japanese Involves Unusual Problems," *The Washington Post*, 4 May 1942, 11. Catherine A. Luther, "Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict: Japanese American Internment Camp Newspapers during World War II," *Journalism History* 29:2 (Summer, 2003): 70, 73. The camps were located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.

³¹¹ Sgt. Robert L. Spencer, "Sgt. Robert L. Spencer Writes of Experiences With Overseas Army," *Kerrville (Tex.) Mountain Sun*, 27 May 1943, 9. Kerrville, in Kerr County, is located north of San Antonio in southeast Texas. Kerrville had a population of 5,572 in 1940. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 9, 1,058, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.gov/>.

³¹² "News of the Service Folks," *Dispatch Democrat*, 7 April 1944, 1. Ukiah, in Mendocino County, is located in the northwestern part of California. Ukiah had a population of 3,731 in 1940. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 3, 128, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³¹³ "Bugle Calls," *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 3. Smethport, in McKean County, is located in the northwestern part of Pennsylvania near the New York state line. Smethport had a population of 1,840 in 1940. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 8, 927, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³¹⁴ The nameplate is the large-print name of a newspaper that usually appears at the top of the front page.

federal government to promote patriotism through bond purchases. A June 14, 1945, edition of Pennsylvania's *McKean County Democrat* included a front page article that reported the number of bonds issued in the county for the Seventh War Loan Drive and attributed the drive's success to the appearance of a United States Army exhibit and show.³¹⁵ An expression of thanks for the key role that newspapers, particularly small-town newspapers, played in supporting the war effort came in the form of telegraphed messages from President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that were sent to members of the National Editorial Association gathered for the group's annual convention in Quebec in June, 1942.³¹⁶

Noted small-town publisher William A. White of the *Emporia (Kan.) Gazette* also praised the role of the press during the war, but from a different perspective. In an August *Atlantic Monthly* article (a condensed version appeared in *The Washington Post*) he observed that "all over the country newspapers, large and small, from the country weekly to the metropolitan daily, are discussing world politics with an intelligence that could not have been imagined twenty-five years ago when we entered the first World War." T.H. Thomas, a military historian who served on the general headquarters staff in World War I, asserted, however, that the credibility of war news and interpretation suffered from an overly optimistic slant.³¹⁷

Advertisers also joined in the war bonds campaigns, making use of the opportunity to promote patriotism as well as their particular services or products. The same June 14 issue of the *McKean County Democrat* included a nearly full-page advertisement that implored local residents to "Buy Bigger Bonds in the Mighty Seventh (War Loan)." The advertisement listed twenty local business sponsors along with the declaration that "This advertisement is a

³¹⁵ "County 'E' Bond Sales Reach \$649,000; 43 Percent of McKean's Quota Is Sold," *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 1. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³¹⁶ "Roosevelt and Churchill Praise Editors," *The Washington Post*, 24 June 1942, 19.

³¹⁷ William A. White, "Editor Praises Press Coverage of War: But Noted Military Expert Thinks News Slant of American Papers is 'Too Rosy'," *The Washington Post*, 26 July 1942, SP8.

contribution to America's all-out war effort."³¹⁸ A 1943 edition of the *Kerrville* (Tex.) *Mountain Sun* featured an advertisement from the local Charles Schreiner Bank that pleaded with patrons, "Don't Just Buy War Bonds ... Keep Them!" Essentially the advertising message explained that cashing in a war bond for much-needed cash was the equivalent of "giving aid to the enemy" and that patrons should instead seek out loans.³¹⁹

The Office of War Information served as a type of federal clearinghouse that provided regular columns to weeklies on a wide range of topics, including rationing and conservation. For example, one single column from June 1945 referred to the sale of surplus trucks in farm areas and called for homeowners to buy coal in the summer months. The same column also announced the cancellation of state and regional fairs by the Office of Defense Transportation to reduce inter-city transportation but noted that local and county fairs were allowed to continue.³²⁰

But just as the government war propaganda discouraged citizens from doing certain things, such as driving their automobiles, it also encouraged them to follow particular practices or engage in specific activities. For example, a 1942 article in the *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch* encouraged citizens to plant a vegetable garden, commonly called a victory garden, reminding them of the importance of good health and eating vegetables. It urged small-town and rural citizens to have a home garden rather than to rely on canned vegetables due to a strained transportation delivery system; a greater demand for vegetables in army camps, factories, and cities; and reduced tin supplies and commercial canning facilities, many of which were converted to war-supply factories.³²¹

³¹⁸ "He Can't Ask You Now!" *McKean County* (Pa.) *Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³¹⁹ "Don't Just Buy War Bonds ... Keep Them!" *Kerrville* (Tex.) *Mountain Sun*, 27 May 1943, 10. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²⁰ Office of War Information, "Town and Farm in Wartime," *McKean County* (Pa.) *Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²¹ "Home Garden Vital Due To Lack Of Tin," *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 2. Casa Grande, in Pinal County, is located in the southern-central part of Arizona. Casa Grande had a population of 1,545 in 1940.

Helpful tips for the homemaker on cost and supply savings during wartime were scattered throughout the women's pages of weeklies. The women's page of the *Dispatch Democrat* in Ukiah, California, published a "Ration Calendar" as well as a regular column titled "Mrs. America And The War," both supplied by the OWI. The column featured updates on ration books and news from the War Production Board on products that were available or prices that were altered. The April 7, 1944, column announced that a ban on metal scales to weigh babies was lifted so that metal scales could be used for the first time since April 1943. Other announcements included the availability of more leather at shoe repair shops, as ordered by the War Production Board, and reduced prices on lamps and lampshades due to new maximum prices that were set at the wholesale level by the Office of Price Administration. Column readers were also reminded of community pricing on seven hundred foods and other items. The column referred to the requirement that retailers were to post the community ceiling price on an item against the actual selling price. It was recommended that violations of ceiling prices first be addressed with the local retailer before being reported to the nearest Office of Price Administration bureau.³²²

In addition to a focus on women's wartime homemaking roles, there were also news articles and advertisements that reflected the growing role women had in the active military.³²³ A local Coca Cola bottling company in Kerrville, Texas, utilized a quarter-page advertisement in the local weekly to salute women who had joined pre-graduation programs at universities that qualified them for auxiliary services of the armed forces. The advertisement pictured a young, athletic-looking woman walking briskly, with accompanying copy that began, "Girls are in training, too...." A second photograph showed three young women in athletic attire enjoying a

Sixteenth Census of the United States, "Population," volume 1, section 3, 91, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³²² "Mrs. America And The War," *Dispatch Democrat*, 7 April 1944, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²³ The Women's Army Corps was organized in 1943. Other military branches soon followed with similar groups.

“refreshing,” “ice-cold” Coca Cola after exercising.³²⁴ There were also reports about women joining the workforce to replace soldiers at war. A 1942 front page article in the *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch* reported that a naval shipyard in Vallejo, California, would administer examinations in California, Nevada, and Arizona for potential female workers at the large military facility.³²⁵

Weeklies served as a community bulletin board to report on opportunities for wartime volunteer services. For example, a March 1942 article in the *Dispatch* referred to the start of “National Sew and Save Week,” which was part of an ongoing campaign in which women were asked to make a million home-sewn garments to distribute to “suffering civilians and returning soldiers.”³²⁶ The women’s page of the *Kerrville* (Tex.) *Mountain Sun* contained a headline without an accompanying article that stated simply, “Miss Raphel Announces Arrival of Army Yarn for Red Cross Knitting.”³²⁷

War-support campaigns also gave local businesses a public relations opportunity to applaud the efforts of local volunteers while invoking good will among potential customers and clients. For example, the Arizona Edison Company ran a four-column, three-inch advertisement thanking local women for donating their time and talent to American Red Cross and United States Defense Council “war work” such as sewing and knitting and for attending classes in first aid, home nursing, and canteen work.³²⁸ In a nod to conservation efforts, a Casa Grande, Arizona, Chevrolet car dealership encouraged residents to conserve their automobile tires. The

³²⁴ “That Extra Something! ... You Can Spot It Every Time,” *Kerrville* (Tex.) *Mountain Sun*, 27 May 1943, 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²⁵ “Arizona Women Will Be Given Chance To Work In Shipyards,” *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²⁶ “Million Garments for War Sufferers Goal Set in U.S.,” *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²⁷ “Miss Raphel Announces Arrival of Army Yarn for Red Cross Knitting,” *Kerrville* (Tex.) *Mountain Sun*, 27 May 1943, 10. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³²⁸ “The Army of Patriotic Women,” *Casa Grande* (Ariz.) *Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

advertisement listed ten ways to conserve tires based on the “Chevrolet Car Conservation Plan.”³²⁹

In addition to reaping public relations benefits from placing war-related messages of support in their local newspapers, businesses could also assist the country in its industrial recovery efforts through advertising, according to a U.S. Office of Censorship official. In a letter to the Association of National Advertisers, John H. Sorrells, assistant director of the Office of Censorship, reminded businesses of the importance of advertising to aid the country’s war effort. The letter, issued in March 1942, stated in part, “Advertising, properly conceived, can help speed the industrial effort, as it has in the past been a tremendous factor in promoting the American system of mass production.”³³⁰

As the war was drawing down, the National Editorial Association took steps to ensure its continued governmental support as postwar recovery efforts began. In January 1944, NEA president Albert Hardy announced the association’s formulation of a Community Development Committee. The committee was to serve as a clearinghouse through which all publishers could exchange ideas on community expansion, postwar rehabilitation, and employment opportunities.³³¹

Although the war ended in September 1945 after President Harry Truman ordered that atomic bombs be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, weeklies continued to respond to reader fascination about the military and development of the atom bomb. A 1946 issue of the *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette* contained a ten-photograph spread titled “Pictures Show Highlights of

³²⁹ "Goff Lists 10 Ways to Conserve Tires During War Period," *Casa Grande (Ariz.) Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³³⁰ "Advertising Is Aid To War Effort, OC Director Declares," *Casa Grande (Ariz.) Dispatch*, 6 March 1942, 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³³¹ "Publishers to Aid in Community Work," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 January 1944, 12.

Atomic Year One.”³³² Weeklies and local business sponsors also continued to promote military enlistment as patriotism was at a high level following the war’s end. The *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette* included a 1946 article that announced higher monthly base and retirement salaries among various Army rankings.³³³

Production and Personnel Problems

Weeklies remained much the same throughout the 1940s in terms of appearance and production quality due to an inability to employ enough skilled printers to maintain equipment because of World War II. The “typical country weekly” of the early 1940s contained eight pages, with seven columns per page.³³⁴ Not much had changed by the end of the decade, when most weeklies maintained a seven- or eight-column format with one-column stacked headlines and occasional illegible copy that resulted from the use of antiquated equipment and typefaces. In fact, a weekly editor advised his peers that it was more important to emphasize legibility and attractiveness in their publications than to be concerned with “aping the big-city daily style, with screaming streamers”³³⁵

Aside from antiquated equipment, weeklies also faced a shortage of skilled pressmen available to handle press equipment failures. To compound the problem, replacement parts for printing presses were hard to obtain because facilities that manufactured press parts were converted to produce war-related materials.

³³² "Pictures Show Highlights of Atomic Year One," *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette*, 8 August 1946, sec. 2, 4. Bedford, in Bedford County, is located in the southwestern part of Pennsylvania. Bedford had a population of 3,268 in 1940. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 8, 923, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³³³ "New Higher Pay for the Army!" *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette*, 8 August 1946, sec. 2, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³³⁴ Malcolm Forbes, "Is Your Newspaper a 'Typical Country Weekly'?" *The American Press* 59:12 (October, 1941): 8.

³³⁵ Raymond Wild, "Urges Modernization of Out-Dated Weeklies," *The American Press* 59: (November, 1940): 17.

Even after the war, small-town newspapers had difficulty in finding skilled printers for their shops. An article in a 1949 issue of *Publishers' Auxiliary* described the situation as “acute and alarming in some areas.” The article estimated a loss of 10,000 printers annually due to death, retirement, and change of vocation. New recruits from printing schools and apprenticeships were not sufficient to meet employment demands. Printing schools provided the better preparation for qualified workers rather than individual apprenticeships, according to the article, which referred to the success of G.I. in-service training as an example.³³⁶ To assure the quality of printing schools, it was recommended that instructors returned to the print shop at “frequent intervals” in order to acquire experience with new tools, machines, operations, processes and ideas. It was also suggested that the classrooms be equipped with modern machinery.³³⁷ A Veterans’ administration report issued in 1949 showed that 24,072 veterans studied printing and related subjects in shops and schools under the G.I. Bill. The report also revealed that on-the-job trainees outnumbered those enrolled in trade vocational schools by seven to one.³³⁸

During this decade a number of large weekly newspapers (usually sixteen or more pages) began subscribing to a syndicated wire news service, such as the Associated Press or the United Press. In his textbook on weekly newspaper writing and editing, University of Minnesota journalism professor and former weekly publisher Thomas Barnhart outlined the specifics of becoming a wire press member. To become an AP member, he wrote, the weekly publisher had to negotiate with the nearest bureau manager or AP field representative. The publisher and AP representative had to agree on a membership fee, a contract indicating type of service,

³³⁶ The G.I. Bill was officially titled the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944. It provided college or vocational education to returning War World II veterans, commonly known as G.I.s.

³³⁷ Leroy Brewington, "Shortage of Skilled Printers Requires Plans for Training," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 6 August 1949, 8.

³³⁸ "More Colleges Call on Active Journalists as Teachers; 24,072 Students Taking On-the-Job Printing Training," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 24 September 1949, 8.

assessments for unusual services, and transmission charges. Barnhart explained that most weekly publishers signed up for a “pony” service, which consisted of a portion of the full service such as telephone reports of five, ten, or fifteen minutes. A pony service provided 500, 1,000 or 1,500 words daily and included the right to clip AP dispatches from incoming daily newspapers. Also included were EOS (Extraordinary Service) calls or filings, which were described as fast-breaking AP stories to daily newspapers. In addition, as an AP member, weeklies were entitled to purchase AP-syndicated features. The cost for a typical pony service was \$5 a week, plus toll charges, which ranged from \$10 to \$15 a month. The United Press served weeklies in cities where it did not serve a daily newspaper. The UP service consisted of a toll-collect telephone or telegraph file that contained 100 to 200 words in abbreviated form. UP costs ranged from \$2.50 to \$10 a week in addition to telegraphic tolls for unexpected news of importance. UP also mailed advance releases of news and features, referred to as “United Press Red Letter” material.³³⁹

Although photographs were used sparingly in many weeklies because of high costs and production delays, the use of photographs rose sharply among the few weeklies that converted to offset presses. A 1941 *American Press* article about a survey of sixteen weeklies that used offset printing (also referred to as lithography) found widespread use of local pictorial news coverage and that an average of twenty-four percent of the editorial space had been given over to photographs. One publisher surveyed for the study referred to the use of the offset press as a “revolution in printing” in the weekly newspaper business. He observed that through lithography it was possible “to inject life into a traditionally monotonous, almost dead in appearance publication—the small-town community newspaper.” The article described offset printing as

³³⁹ Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, 206.

being in the experimental stage but noted that it was gathering momentum as more printers discovered the advantages of lithography.³⁴⁰

Finding qualified press workers also became a financial concern for small-town newspapers as many pressmen joined unions and began demanding the same union wages received by their peers at the metropolitan dailies. In his column "Experience Talks" in *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, Wright Patterson reported that some weeklies had to shut their doors because of increasing wage scales. He said the union workers had no choice but to stand by the wage demands dictated by their union, or else they would have lost their union membership. He advised newspaper workers to weigh the benefits of a job in their hometowns as opposed to a few extra dollars in their pockets adding, "A depression may hit newspapers, and newspaper payrolls, just as it may hit all other lines of industry," he declared. "Those papers that have been forced out of existence will not provide jobs at any wage scale."³⁴¹

The high costs of starting a newspaper and the frustrations of working with antiquated, worn-out equipment might have discouraged some returning soldiers from publishing a weekly newspaper, but others overcame the difficult odds and enjoyed long, lucrative careers. Among them was William "Bill" Stewart of *The Monroe Journal* in Monroeville, Alabama. Described by peers as a shrewd businessman and a keen editor, Stewart bought the *Journal* in 1947 and several other Alabama weeklies during the next few years. It had not been too many years earlier (late 1930s and early 1940s) when he was a journalism student at the University of Alabama. In recognition of his long and respected career in Alabama weekly journalism, Stewart was inducted posthumously into the Alabama Press Association's Newspaper Hall of Honor in 2000. Auburn University journalism professor Ed Williams wrote a nominating letter on behalf of

³⁴⁰ William B. Marsh, "Survey Shows Most 'Offset' Newspapers are Making Progress," *The American Press* 59:5 (March, 1941): 4.

³⁴¹ Wright A. Patterson, "Papers Declining as Costs Increase," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 8 January 1949, 4.

Stewart in which he recalled a conversation he had with Stewart about getting into the weekly newspaper field. As a college journalism student, Stewart took a class taught by the APA's first field manager, Doyle Buckles. Stewart told his colleague that Buckles convinced him and many other classmates to enter the weekly newspaper field, adding, "He (Buckles) made it [weekly newspapering] sound so interesting. He persuaded us that the weekly field offered fully as many opportunities for service and livelihood as did the larger daily newspapers."³⁴²

A Push for Professionalism

A growing number of weekly publishers promoted formal journalism education and the use of textbooks about the weekly field as a means to promote professionalism. A leader in this push was noted University of Minnesota journalism professor and former weekly editor Thomas Barnhart, who, by 1949, had published a trilogy of books on weekly newspapering. His first book, *Weekly Newspaper Management*, was published in 1939, followed in 1949 by *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing* and *Weekly Newspaper Makeup and Topography*.³⁴³ In *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, Barnhart explained that the small-town newspaper provided its community with "a localized expression of our country's purpose." He wrote that the weekly served as its community's spokesman, "the voice of its spirit, ideals, activities, and achievements."

A main reason for writing his series of textbooks, according to Barnhart, was that journalism students who entered the weekly field were perplexed by what defined news at a weekly newspaper, "as compared to what they've learned in a reporting textbook." He said most

³⁴² Ed Williams, nominating letter for Bill Stewart to be inducted into Newspaper Hall of Honor, March 13 2000.

³⁴³ William T. Koester, "Barnhart Rates as 'Editors' Man of the Week' for Educational Devotion to Weekly Newsmen," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 December 1949, 4. Thomas F. Barnhart began his journalism career in 1920 at the *Snohomish (Wash.) County Tribune* and then served as an assistant to the Washington Press Association field manager while a journalism student at the University of Washington, where he edited the student newspaper. He accepted a faculty position at the University of Minnesota in 1931.

of the textbooks were framed in terms of writing news for metropolitan dailies. For example, he said that a typical journalism textbook defined news as a fact or idea that would interest a large number of readers. His definition was “anything timely that is selected by the news staff because it is of interest and significance to their readers or because it can be made so.”³⁴⁴ Editions of *The Publishers' Auxiliary* also helped students to understand small-town journalism. Robert L. Warren, of the *Wayne (Mich.) Dispatch*, wrote to *Publishers' Auxiliary* and recalled that during his undergraduate days the “Ox,” as it was affectionately known by the students, served as a supplementary text in his community newspaper class.³⁴⁵

In addition to textbooks and guides, some weekly publishers wanted to learn how to better understand and serve their audiences. So they called upon academics to conduct various studies, such as readership satisfaction surveys. The Rutgers University Department of Journalism conducted a 1940 readership survey for the *Hunterdon County Democrat* in Flemington, New Jersey. After examining a sixteen-page issue of the newspaper, one hundred readers from Flemington and outlying areas marked the articles and advertisements they had read and then responded to questions about their reading selections. The survey found that among advertisements, illustrated motion picture announcements had the highest readership rating at eighty percent. The survey also revealed that two of the most popular features were obituaries and wedding notices. Some of the editorials were read by ninety-five percent of the male reviewers and eighty-five percent of the female reviewers. Classified advertisements were more popular with male readers, with eighty-five percent having read that section as compared to seventy percent among females. Most importantly, the survey found that eighty percent of the

³⁴⁴ Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, 35, 57-58.

³⁴⁵ Robert L. Warren, "The Open Forum-Faithful 'Ox' Reader," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 22 January 1949, 4.

participants said that their local newspaper helped them to become informed about prices and values and where to purchase needed merchandise.³⁴⁶

Social and political scientists in the 1940s explored the importance of the community newspaper as a social instrument, advancing the 1920s work of sociologist Malcolm Willey. Iowa State College journalism professor Charles E. Rogers, who started in journalism at a rural newspaper, asserted that one of the most important roles of the weekly was serving as a socializing agent because it went about its business “unsensationally, narrating the story of town and trade area with the minimum of irritation to its readers.” The weekly newspaper held special significance, he explained, “because the editor himself gets credit or blame for every expression, every shading of emphasis, and every omission.” In other words, he observed, news had the same force as comment.³⁴⁷

In terms of earning professional respect, weekly publishers began to recognize the importance of joining various organizations as a sign of accountability both for potential advertisers and readers. At the start of the decade, weekly publishers were advised that their newspapers would attract more national advertisers if they complied with requirements to join the Audit Bureau of Circulations. For years national advertisers had accused weekly publishers of fraudulently boosting their circulation numbers because they refused to adhere to the generally respected circulation reporting requirements of the Bureau, to which most daily newspapers subscribed. D. Howard Moreau, publisher of the *Hunterdon County* (N.J.) *Democrat*, spoke at the Bureau’s 1940 annual convention and emphasized that when competition threatened to cut advertising accounts for his weekly newspaper, he was well armed to meet the threat. As a Bureau member, he claimed, national advertisers were more prone to do business with his

³⁴⁶ Frank B. Hutchinson, "Weekly Newspaper Readership Studied," *The American Press* 59:7 (May, 1941): 8.

³⁴⁷ Charles E. Rogers, "The Role of the Weekly Newspaper," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 219 (January, 1942): 151.

newspaper and other circulation-certified publications. He encouraged national advertisers to do business with Bureau-member weeklies, stating, "National advertisers can well afford to encourage weekly newspapers to join A.B.C. by favoring those that are pioneering in A.B.C. membership ... The small-town newspaper that is progressive enough to comply with A.B.C. requirements will be just as quick to render service to a national advertiser and its agency."³⁴⁸

Weekly publishers were also advised to join forces through their national professional associations to attract more national advertising.³⁴⁹ Writing in *American Press* in 1940, *Stafford* (Conn.) *Press* publisher Robert Warner stressed that individual efforts to reach out to national advertising managers, agency space buyers, and agency account executives were usually ineffective. He also discouraged state press associations from contracting with a salesperson to represent their member newspapers in soliciting national advertising. "The only chance of national volume in the weekly field," he concluded, "is patient waiting for a change in the national advertising mind, plus patient plugging by our accredited representative, The American Press Association."³⁵⁰ An experimental readership analysis of the April 11, 1946, issue of the *Hancock County Journal* in Carthage, Illinois, which was selected as a representative weekly paper, indicated that more people read weeklies than was generally assumed by newspaper advertising representatives. A.W. Lehman, managing director of the Advertising Research Foundation, told attendees at the 1946 annual convention of the Weekly Newspaper Bureau of the National Editorial Association in Estes Park, Colorado, that readers of weeklies read more pages of individual issues than previously thought. For example, the average readership per page

³⁴⁸ "Weeklies Will Join ABC if it Means More Ads, Moreau Explains," *The American Press* 59:1 (November, 1940): 9.

³⁴⁹ At the start of the decade two organizations handled advertising for hometown weeklies, the American Press Association and Western Newspaper Union. In 1943, the National Editorial Association launched the Newspaper Advertising Service, Inc., which similarly offered a unified sales and service program to national advertisers and advertising agencies. The NAS eventually split from the NEA and became the Weekly Newspaper Representatives.

³⁵⁰ Robert Warner, "United Effort Only Way to Get More Ads, Says Warner," *The American Press* 59:2 (December, 1940): 4.

was 89 percent for men and 93 percent for women. In addition, Lehman noted that the study was able to accurately determine the cost per reader for advertisements in a weekly newspaper.³⁵¹

Many leaders in the weekly profession believed that some of their peers were too accommodating of publicity seekers who sought free publicity as opposed to paying for advertising space. Retiring National Editorial Association President Ray Brown spoke to members gathered at the association's 1941 convention during which he described the mass of free publicity sent to newspapers as "sabotage of news columns." He said that "this vicious circle will continue until some constructive method is arrived at whereby enormous funds that are now going into publicity can be diverted into the place they belong -- advertising columns." He outlined the NEA public relations program to promote the value of hometown advertising to national manufacturers and to persuade advertising agencies that hometown newspapers offered an equal economic value with metropolitan papers.³⁵²

There was much frustration on the part of weekly professional organizations in their attempts to "educate" weekly editors on the importance of not running publicity items due to laziness (not taking the initiative to gather more local news) or tightfistedness (refusing to hire additional staff to gather and write local news). Among the weekly organizations and publications that joined the fight against free publicity was *The American Press* magazine, which estimated that weeklies "gave away" \$250,000 a week, or \$13 million a year, in free publicity.³⁵³ Its finding was based on an analysis of free publicity "of a national nature" that ran during one

³⁵¹ "Advertising News," *New York Times*, 15 June 1946, 30.

³⁵² "NEA President Attacks Publicity as 'Sabotage,'" *The American Press* 59:7 (May, 1941): 3.

³⁵³ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$13,000,000 from 1941 was worth \$182,990,224.03. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

week in several hundred weekly newspapers nationwide. The advertising cost equivalency was figured at 32 cents an inch.³⁵⁴

Despite the negative connotation generally given to free publicity, weekly publishers were mostly critical of publicity seekers for commercial interests since their publications were much more welcoming of so-called propaganda pieces from various federal government agencies. A 1947 article in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* reported that 2,500 press releases were issued in an average year and that no newspaperman could possibly be a specialist so as “to interpret intelligently the work of specific scientists or administrators.” The article’s author surmised, therefore, that government information workers were valuable “time-savers” for scientists, administrators, and journalists.³⁵⁵ A chapter on publicity in Barnhart’s 1949 textbook on weekly newspaper writing and editing also emphasized the importance of government information workers. He referred to several federal departments, such as treasury, justice, interior, agriculture, commerce, and labor, which provided a steady flow of news and information to weeklies. Also helpful to small-town newspapers, according to the author, were the federal departments that dealt with federal loans, securities, public works, communications, labor relations, tax appeals, and employee compensation.³⁵⁶ While public utilities were often viewed as potential advertisers, most weekly editors considered themselves to be providing a public service in the printing of free publicity from government agencies.

With their attention to preserving and gaining advertising accounts, weekly editors were harshly criticized, particularly by their metropolitan daily counterparts, for appearing to abandon strong editorial comment in order to avoid local controversy that could lead to loss of advertising revenue. A chapter on editorial writing in Barnhart’s 1949 textbook acknowledged that a

³⁵⁴ "Free Space in Weeklies Worth \$13,000,000 a Year," *The American Press* 59:8 (June, 1941): 2.

³⁵⁵ T. Swann Harding, "Genesis of One 'Government' Propaganda Mill," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 11:2 (Summer, 1947): 233-234.

³⁵⁶ Barnhart, *Weekly Newspaper Writing and Editing*, 62.

growing trend was that of replacing the editorial with a personal column.³⁵⁷ However, Charles T. Duncan, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota, surveyed Minnesota's community newspapers and found that more than seventy-seven percent of them regularly ran conventional-type editorials, editorial columns, or both. He pointed out that he conducted the survey in response to a widespread belief that editorials in the weekly press were "on the way out." He admitted that while there was greater reader interest in personal columns than in the standard editorial, the study found that if Minnesota weeklies could be regarded as being indicative of a general trend, then "the editorial function still flourishes" in community weeklies.³⁵⁸

A 1949 *Publishers' Auxiliary* survey of members of the Eighty-first Congress emphasized the potential influential power that weekly newspaper editorials had among the country's leaders. The survey revealed that 276 legislators resided in 269 small towns of which 129 had dailies and/or weeklies and 110 had weeklies only. Writing on the congressional membership survey, Edward Farrell observed, "Inspection of this analysis shows the great potential influence of the non-metropolitan newspaper in national affairs. Newspapers speaking in behalf of their readers through editorial columns can carry extremely effective messages to congressmen—right from the home."³⁵⁹

In an effort to promote the political voice of community weeklies, the University of Missouri began publishing the *Grass Roots Digest* in 1949, which was described as the "official

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 272.

³⁵⁸ Charles T. Duncan, "Editorials Not 'On Way Out' Among Minnesota Weeklies," *Journalism Quarterly* 26 (March, 1949): 57.

³⁵⁹ Edward J. Farrell, "Survey Reveals Political Power of 'Grassroots'," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 12 March 1949, 1. In January, *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, or "The Aux" as it was commonly referred to, moved its editorial, classified advertising, and printing facilities from Chicago to Frankfort, Kentucky. In an announcement about the move, it was stated "We are much closer to the type of community to which we all are dedicated. In other words, perhaps we are trading something of an ivory tower in the city to a working re-acquaintance with the grassroots. We think that is proper." Wright A. Patterson and Elmo Scott Watson were listed as contributing editors, and George H. Bechtel was listed as editor. "Movement of Aux Creates Confusion; It Also Opens Way to Bright Future," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 29 January 1949, 2.

publication of The Grass Roots Editors of America.” The monthly digest contained a review of editorials from non-metropolitan newspapers across the country and was established “to recognize good editorial writing on timely subjects, to supply newspapers with good reprint editorials, and to furnish editors material that would help them write their own editorials.”³⁶⁰

In an effort to seek the respect of politicians, peers at metropolitan dailies, and pundits who had too quickly dismissed the weekly field as unsophisticated, unprofessional, and unimportant, community publishers referred to a 1940 national survey. Malcolm Forbes of the famous publishing family conducted a survey of weeklies that found them to be the prime printed medium for more than half of the nation's population. The survey also indicated that a reported total circulation of twenty-one million among weeklies did not reflect their full readership. Among other survey findings was that the rural counties that the weeklies served controlled the nation's political majorities and contained forty-eight percent of all retail stores with sales that totaled \$14 billion, or thirty-one percent of the national total.³⁶¹

In similar findings to the Forbes study, the Department of Commerce’s Office of Small Business examined weeklies and found them to be in a stronger position than ever before through a “survival of the fittest” factor. The commerce department study, published in 1949, found that even though the number of weeklies had steadily decreased, overall circulation had increased 165,000 from the two previous years. The study also stressed that the weekly field would continue to face increasing production costs and rising capital requirements. To assist

³⁶⁰ "Missouri Paper Digests Opinion of Grassroots," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 16 July 1949, 1.

³⁶¹ "Future of Weekly Newspapers Promising, Evaluation Shows," *The American Press* 59:10 (August, 1941): 4. Malcolm Forbes, son of publisher B.C. Forbes, conducted the survey for a senior thesis project at Princeton University. He interviewed seventy-five weekly newspaper editors in twenty states and also interviewed 250 residents of Englewood, N.J., a suburb of New York City, concerning the *Englewood Press*. Of the 250 Englewood residents interviewed, 200 were subscribers to the *Press*. He also interviewed fifty Englewood merchants, heads of schools of journalism, and press association officers. After graduation from Princeton, he bought a leading Ohio weekly, *The Fairfield Times* of Lancaster, with a circulation of 6,500. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$13 billion from 1941 was worth nearly \$183 billion. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

prospective publishers, the Office of Small Business prepared a booklet, “Establishing and Operating a Weekly Newspaper,” that was available for purchase (for 15 cents) through the superintendent of documents.³⁶²

Post-War Concerns

The post-war period brought new challenges to the weekly, as it had to serve a changing reading audience of more women who worked outside of the home or became more concerned about non-local affairs and soldiers who returned home after journeying far from the family farm or family-owned business. Even readers of weeklies who were not deployed developed a keen interest in news from beyond their town and surrounding communities. For example, as “war brides” began to populate many smaller towns, weeklies began to feature more news from their native countries.³⁶³ Although many women who were employed during the war returned to full-time domesticity after their soldier husbands came home, others continued to work, often because their husbands entered college on the G.I. Bill. While female weekly newspaper readers retained a high level of interest in society columns and personal items, they were more likely than men to read the front page as well as the entire publication. In fact, the authors of a weekly newspaper readership survey asserted that the content of the weekly was designed to appeal to women because of their higher readership levels, particularly in the categories of local news and display advertising.³⁶⁴ A 1948 feature on the modern farm wife in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* observed that while “politicking” was still considered a novelty among farm women, for an increasing number it [politics] no longer stopped at the county line. “The war dead are

³⁶² Walter A. Snead, "Department of Commerce Examines Weeklies, Finds Their Position 'Stronger Than Ever' " *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 27 August 1949, 4.

³⁶³ "War Brides Arrive in U.S. From Britain," *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 1.

³⁶⁴ Wilbur Schramm and Merritt Ludwig, "The Weekly Newspaper and its Readers," *Journalism Quarterly* 28 (Summer, 1951): 306, 310, 312.

coming home now--reminders of a disaster which mothers and wives, above all, hope can be averted again," it stated. "The war has made their world larger for having made their families smaller."³⁶⁵

In addition to a transition away from traditional gender roles, other domestic topics of importance included demands for improved education and health care, with particular attention paid to polio outbreaks. Challenges of surviving a post-war economic recession also became the topic of headlines. In addition, weekly editors recognized the importance of addressing larger cultural issues, such as racism, and the growing international conflict that became known as the Cold War. So, just as domestic and international concerns changed in society, so did the news preferences of readers of weeklies. Thus, despite a long-held allegiance to local and "pocketbook" issues, weeklies began to include more news about cultural shifts and international relations.

By the end of the decade, new products and technologies that had been placed on hold during the war were introduced to the average consumer who wanted to furnish a new home with an eye on convenience and more family and leisure time. In fact, at the end of the 1940s, farming families began to refer to "five o'clock" farming, meaning that with the exception of planting and harvesting seasons, farmers worked seven hour days, leaving evening hours open for church and social gatherings, television viewing, or outdoor hobbies.³⁶⁶

Thus, "modern-day" conveniences such as washers and dryers allowed families to enjoy more leisure time. Leisure time for many meant watching television, along with commercials for time-saving products. Referring to the country's obsession with convenience appliances, a syndicated columnist wrote in a 1949 edition of the Placerville, California, *Mountain-Democrat*

³⁶⁵ David Dempsey, "That Midwest Power--The Farmer's Wife," *New York Times*, 3 October 1948, SM46.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

about going into a department store where he saw one of the female workers coming up the stairs with a bundle of clean wash. He asked her if the owner was taking in laundry. She responded that the owner had put in a new automatic washing machine and was allowing store employees to do their laundry during their lunch break so they would have more time to relax at night and on weekends.³⁶⁷

Although many were pleased with having television as a new entertainment option, some disliked the fact that the advertising industry had seemingly taken over television programming as a means to promote a wide range of new convenience and leisure-time products and services. A syndicated column, "The Once Over" by H.I. Phillips, commented on the difference in radio and television advertising and observed that it was easier to tune out one's ears than one's eyes. He quoted reader Elmer Twitchell, who remarked, "I object to my home being made a showroom for the assorted products of American industry. Why should my den be converted into a commercial exposition hall and my parlor made a sales manager's delight?"³⁶⁸

To promote new time-saving products and services, national advertisers and utility companies partnered with local businesses that sold their wares and services, and provided weeklies a steady stream of advertising revenue for a growing consumer-oriented society. For example, a 1945 advertisement in the *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat* from Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania asked potential customers, "Is a Telephone in your Post-War Plans?" The advertisement pointed out that, after the war, materials and manpower could again be used for civilian needs, such as the expansion of rural and city phone service. The advertisement

³⁶⁷ Joe Marsh, "From Where I Sit," *The Mountain-Democrat*, 29 September 1949, 3. The column was distributed by the United States Brewers Foundation. Placerville, in El Dorado County, is located northeast of Sacramento, California. According to its nameplate, the newspaper was established in 1852 and was a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations and the California Press Association. Placerville had a population of 3,064 in 1940. *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 3, 127, Table 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³⁶⁸ H.I. Phillips, "The Once Over," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>. By the end of 1948 there were four television networks – NBC, ABC, CBS and Dumont Television. The number of television sets in U.S. homes increased from 9,000 to 125,000.

concluded, “Until final Victory, expansion must wait, of course.”³⁶⁹ The Standard Oil Company of California ran an advertisement that boasted about its company-developed “soapless” soaps, or detergents. The advertisement claimed that the detergents made water “wetter” to “attract dirt and grease like a magnet,” resulting in dishes that sparkled when cleaned.³⁷⁰ The same newspaper issue contained an advertisement for the Hotpoint brand automatic/electric dishwasher. The dishwasher advertisement featured illustrations of one woman toiling at a kitchen sink washing dishes, while another woman, dressed in a fashionable swimsuit, waited on her daughter to place the last dish in the dishwasher before they headed to a swimming pool. The headline read, “Decide Now ... Sink Or Swim?”³⁷¹ The Pennsylvania Electric Company endorsed electric ranges in an advertisement that referred to the appliance as “the pride and joy of a housewife.”³⁷²

What impact did implied pressures of domesticity through advertising messages and women’s pages articles have on the typical female reader of weekly newspapers? Many farm women found themselves spending more time away from cooking and housekeeping chores and instead spending money to replace coal stoves, outdoor plumbing, and hand pumps. They also developed a sense of fashion and spent time and money in nearby cities purchasing stylish clothing for “hat and glove” affairs, sometimes for a fashion consultant fee of \$10. The Department of Agriculture reported that the average farm family income tripled in 1947 from the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. One husband from Pekin, Illinois, stated in the *New York Times*

³⁶⁹ "Is a Telephone in your Post-War Plans?" *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁷⁰ "Easier Dish Washing...You'll Find the Secret in Petroleum," *The Mountain-Democrat*, 29 September 1949, 10. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁷¹ "Decide Now ... Sink Or Swim?" *The Mountain-Democrat*, 29 September 1949, 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁷² "The Pride And Joy Of A Housewife -- The New Electric Range," *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette*, 8 August 1946, sec. 2, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

article on farm women that “since the end of the war, my wife has bought everything the women in town brag about, including an expensive operation.”³⁷³

Along with better-equipped homes, there was a push for better-equipped schools and libraries, as many returning soldiers joined their children to become full-time students. In addition to writing editorials that endorsed the construction and support of public schools and libraries, some weekly editors went a step further, sponsoring book drives or even allowing their businesses to take on the multiple role of newspaper, printing house, and library. In 1946, when *Wheaton* (Minn.) *Gazette* editor William B. Sweetland moved to Wheaton, he discovered that the town’s only library existed at the local school. The school library’s reading material was geared exclusively to young people. So Sweetland started a library at the newspaper office with a \$25 investment, and a few feet of wall space.³⁷⁴ The *Gazette* staff operated the library and wrote updates on new library books and reviews of “must reads” that appeared in regular columns in the newspaper’s women’s pages.³⁷⁵

Time-saving appliances gave rural women more time for leisure reading. In his profile on farm wives, author David Dempsey interviewed Mrs. Victor Schwarzentraub (no first name given) who lived on a 280-acre farm near Washington, Illinois. She admitted that she “gads about” more than she used to, attending meetings of the Women’s Club the American Legion Auxiliary, a church “Good Neighbor” society, a women’s fraternal order, and the county Home Bureau. In addition to sewing her own dress for her son’s wedding, she tended a large garden that produced 200 quarts of canned and frozen food. She and her husband subscribed to ten magazines, half of which were farm journals and the rest were of general interest, including *The*

³⁷³ Dempsey, "That Midwest Power--The Farmer's Wife," SM12.

³⁷⁴ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$25 from 1946 was worth \$265.28. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

³⁷⁵ Charles T. Duncan, "Sweetland Wouldn't Wait for Public Library, He Founded One--In His Newspaper's Office," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 12 March 1949, 1.

Readers' Digest, *Life*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. During the previous year, she completed two Home Bureau reading courses of nine books each. She observed that in the past, women read on the sly because "a woman wasn't supposed to have time to read and keep her house clean."³⁷⁶

In addition to quality education, good health care was an important quality-of-life issue to the growing number of young families with pre-school and school-age children. However, quality of life became a more serious concern when several large epidemics of poliomyelitis occurred in the United States immediately following the war's end.³⁷⁷ A November 1948 *Washington Post* article reported that the number of infantile paralysis cases was expected to exceed 27,000 that year, just shy of the 26,000 cases reported in 1946.³⁷⁸ So after fighting a second world war abroad, Americans found themselves fighting a battle against infantile paralysis on their home shores.

In the mid-1940s, newspaper reports on polio cases started appearing with more frequency and increased to multiple articles within single weekly editions in the latter part of the decade. For example, a 1945 issue of the *McKean County Democrat* in Smethport, Pennsylvania, contained a brief article about a third case of infantile paralysis having been reported that year in Buffalo, New York.³⁷⁹ However, a single page of a 1948 edition of *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald* contained an advertisement for a family polio insurance policy as well as three United Press wire stories about polio outbreaks and another article about a statewide campaign to fight polio.³⁸⁰ One of the articles referred to an increase in reported polio cases in North Carolina.³⁸¹

The second article focused on a study presented to the First International Poliomyelitis

³⁷⁶ Dempsey, "That Midwest Power--The Farmer's Wife," SM12, SM46.

³⁷⁷ Alton L. Blakeslee, "Medical Detectives Hunt Polio 'Trigger' in Epidemic Localities," *The Washington Post*, 7 September 1947, B2.

³⁷⁸ "Polio Heading for its Second Worst Year," *The Washington Post*, 26 November 1948, 18. The article also reported that the record year for polio in the United States was 1916, with 30,000 cases reported.

³⁷⁹ "Polio in Buffalo," *McKean County (Pa.) Democrat*, 14 June 1945, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸⁰ "Polio Policy," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸¹ "North Carolina Battles Against Polio Outbreak," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

Conference in New York that revealed an increase in polio among teenagers and young adults.³⁸² The third article reported on the number of polio cases reported for the week (89) and year to date (736) in the state of Texas.³⁸³ A fourth polio-related article on the same page reported on the Texas governor's announcement of a statewide "Clean-up and Fight Polio Week."³⁸⁴ The following page contained a United Press article that addressed concerns about polio being linked to the use of public swimming pools.³⁸⁵ In Placerville, California, a band concert to aid a local Emergency Polio Fund was mentioned in a page one article of a 1949 issue of *The Mountain-Democrat*.³⁸⁶

Weekly newspaper coverage during the post-war period also began to turn an eye to domestic concerns related to racism, particularly in the South. Hodding Carter, editor of the weekly *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Mississippi, brought much attention to the issue when he received a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for his work against racism. Some weekly editors in other parts of the country acknowledged that racism was not unique to the South and joined in the fight as well. For example, a 1946 editorial in the *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette* applauded members of the First Methodist Church of Monroe, Georgia, for adopting a resolution that condemned the lynching of two local black couples. The editorial referred to the sensitivity of southerners that too much finger pointing was turned their way and emphasized that racial violence occurred in the North as well. The editorial stated, "They [southerners] will not be helped by silence.... They need assurance that they do not work alone or unnoticed"³⁸⁷ Despite an occasional reference to racial strife in the South, most general-news community weeklies throughout the country

³⁸² "Report Shows Polio Is Attacking More Teen Agers, Adults," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸³ "89 Polio Cases This Week," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸⁴ "Jester Proclaims Statewide 'Clean-up, Fight Polio Week'," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸⁵ "Health Departments Agree Swimming Pool Polio Not Connected," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 4. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸⁶ "Band Concerts Aid Polio Fund," *The Mountain-Democrat*, 29 September 1949, 1. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

³⁸⁷ "The South Can Stop It," *Bedford (Pa.) Gazette*, 8 August 1946, sec. 2, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

represented the majority white population. News from the black community was occasionally referenced with the word “Negro” appearing in the headline or standing headline. For example, the July 15, 1948, issue of *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald* contained a two-paragraph article at the bottom of the front page announcing “Negro Methodists Hold District Meet in Mexia July 12-16.”³⁸⁸ As Charles Rogers observed in a 1942 article on the American country weekly, “its society column almost never shows favoritism on class and racial lines, except of course toward the “blacks” and “browns” and the people born on the wrong side of the track, though they do have their birth and death notices announced.”³⁸⁹

While there was fear of change and misunderstanding among races within the country, there was also a growing fear and resentment of communists. In fact, the fear and resentment of communists grew to the point that the United States became engaged in what was popularly referred to as the Cold War against an expanding Soviet Union and other communist countries. Weekly editors, generally perceived as more patriotic and conservative than most journalists, took it upon themselves to educate their readers about the ills of communism. For example, a 1948 editorial in *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald* referred to a religious society communism experiment in Amana, Iowa, beginning in the late 1850s. The experiment failed, according to the editorial writer, because individuals rebelled against sharing equally with those who did not contribute as much to the general welfare of the society. The editorialist quoted a younger member of the Amana Society who said, ‘What Communists never seem to realize is that man isn’t a bee.’³⁹⁰

By the end of the decade there were signs that the economy was slowing down, so a 1949 editorial in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* encouraged weekly publishers to join another fight -- to

³⁸⁸ "Negro Methodists Hold District Meet in Mexia July 12-16," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 1.

³⁸⁹ Rogers, "The Role of the Weekly Newspaper," 151.

³⁹⁰ George Peck, "Man Is Not A Bee," *The Mexia (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, 15 July 1948, 4.
<http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

“mount a defense against the up-swing [sic] of recession psychology.” The editorial warned, “The greatest danger in this perfectly normal trend is that the people will develop a depression psychology.” Editors and reporters were reminded of their role to objectively present both gains and losses in business. The editorial continued, “It will be remembered that the people make prosperity -- and they make depressions. They do both with the editor’s help.”³⁹¹

The 1940s ended as they had begun, with an economic recession. However, the later recession was not as severe as the earlier one that required a world war to bring the country out of the depths of a depression. But as the weeklies published familiar stories of how to spend wisely and support local businesses, they also focused on new concerns from home and abroad that threatened their readers’ lives and security. Thus headlines about domestic wars on polio and racism and a Cold War on communist nations were regularly interspersed among articles about a Kiwanis Club pancake supper, the travel itinerary of a local couple, and the results of the pickle-eating contest at the county fair. But because of rural and small-town residents’ increased sophistication and concern about issues beyond their county’s borders, it was not uncommon to find the topic of discussion at a Kiwanis picnic, a Women’s Club meeting, or a church supper to be the growing communist threat, hunger in Europe, or the pros and cons of the Marshall Plan.³⁹²

³⁹¹ "Newspapers Play Vital Role in Fight Against Recession," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 16 July 1949, 4.

³⁹² Dempsey, "That Midwest Power--The Farmer's Wife," SM12. Mrs. Victor Schwarzentraub said that she attended the 1948 Illinois meeting of the Home Bureau at which there was talk about the Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, which was a United States plan to rebuild Western Europe after World War II.

Chapter 6

The 1950s: Becoming Localized in News, Centralized in Operations

Community journalism experienced resurgence in the 1950s due to several key factors. Urban sprawl moved more citizens into once-rural communities. Advanced technologies enabled small printing operations to discard ready-print pages and produce a financially feasible professional product. Chain ownership and central printing operations introduced a new business model for weeklies to remain competitive. And finally, weeklies concentrated more on local news.

A surging housing market that began in the late 1940s continued into the new decade. Veterans of World War II and the Korean War were the main contributors to the surge. They returned to the job force and sought more affordable housing outside of the country's large metropolitan centers. The result was the settlement of areas that became known as suburbs. An interstate construction program that President Dwight Eisenhower promoted made the suburbs more accessible. Just as pioneer settlements had become important links along the rail lines built nearly a century before, the interstate highway system transformed agriculturally based communities into important links on new roadways in the 1950s.

New residents of the suburbs and rural communities expected a town newspaper that focused on their interests and activities. Along with their journalistic expectations, they brought disposable incomes to support Main Street merchants who trumpeted their products and services in the pages of the community weekly. In response to a post-war emphasis on consumption,

weeklies competed head-on with “shoppers” or printed their own, which featured a heavy concentration of display and classified advertising and brief community-calendar listings and/or articles.

Technology developments in the 1950s revolutionized the printing industry as a whole, allowing for reduced overhead and operations costs that proved especially beneficial to small-town newspapers. Teletypesetters produced punch tape that activated a typesetting machine, eliminating the costly and time-consuming hand-set type. Offset printing, which expanded in the 1940s, became more prevalent among weekly press operations. Offset shops were less expensive to operate and turned out high-quality products in relation to type readability and illustration reproduction.

A number of weekly publishers in the 1950s purchased competing weeklies and consolidated their staffs and printing operations to cut production costs and reach an expanded geographic base. Weekly chains, central printing presses, and advertising collectives designed specifically to serve weekly newspaper groups sprang up during the decade. Chain ownership allowed weekly publishers to boast of larger circulations that attracted merchants because the businesses could place their advertisements in multiple publications. The larger circulations and multiple publications also proved to be a draw for national advertisers.

Weeklies, for the most part, became even more distinctively community oriented in the 1950s. Weekly publishers realized that the major advantage weeklies had over their media competitors was the ability to intimately cover local issues because of close personal and business ties to the community. In addition to the traditional country correspondents who wrote columns from surrounding rural communities, weeklies began adding reporters to their staffs. Reporters provided in-depth coverage on local issues since weeklies could not compete with the time-sensitive, news-announcement format of dailies and radio and television stations.

New pioneer printers: weeklies follow population movement

Just as their predecessors had a century before, small-town editors in the 1950s found it necessary to follow shifting populations. They established publishing roots in newly formed suburban communities or newly discovered rural crossroads as a means of survival.³⁹³ Both World War II and the Korean War brought a large drop in the number of weeklies, many in small, rural communities. In fact, since World War II there had been a steady decrease in weeklies, dropping to 8,892 in 1952 with a total circulation of 17.2 million, according to the first *Directory of Country and Suburban Home Town Newspapers*.³⁹⁴ At the end of the decade, the number of weeklies totaled nearly 9,000.³⁹⁵

University of Iowa professor Wilbur Peterson looked at a decrease in the number of weeklies in the United States from 1950 to 1959. He found that suspensions of weeklies occurred in 488 towns with a population of 1,000 or less, which left those communities without local papers. The total of all weeklies (in forty-eight states) dropped 788, with 703 of the decreases in small towns. Only five percent of country weekly towns retained competitive newspapers by the end of the decade. Peterson also reported that in the cities where a daily was published, 173 weeklies died. Of the 173 papers that failed, some of them were owned by a daily newspaper and

³⁹³ "434 Weekly Newspapers Are 100 Years Old, Or Older," *The American Press* 77 (October, 1959): 10. A 1959 analysis by *The American Press*, based on the *N.W. Ayer Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, determined there were 434 weekly newspapers in the United States that were 100 years or older. New York state had the most papers, with 73 having passed the century mark. Pennsylvania and Illinois were tied for second with 38 each. Among the oldest weeklies was the Williamsburg, Virginia, *Gazette*, established in 1736.

³⁹⁴ "Total Circulation Of Weeklies Now 17,269,183," *The American Press* 70 (July, 1952): 1. The directory, published by the Weekly Newspaper Representatives, Inc., was a combination of the directories formerly published by the American Press Association and the Newspaper Advertising Service. APA had published its own directory every year for the previous thirty-two years. The largest number of newspapers was in the state of Illinois with 622, followed by Texas with 557, and New York with 484. The directory showed there were 75,106,282 people living on farms or in towns of under-10,000 population.

³⁹⁵ According to the 92nd annual edition of the *N.W. Ayer & Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, weekly newspapers climbed to a record 22,818,335 in paid circulation in 1959, an increase of slightly more than 100,000 copies per issue from the previous year. Of these newspapers listed in the "weekly" category, 8,990 came out once a week.

were established for no other reason than to discourage a competitive weekly from entering the market. In addition, the study found a trend to one-newspaper places continuing. Only a few communities remained in the weekly field with multiple newspaper ownerships.³⁹⁶

For example, University of Minnesota journalism professor John Cameron Sim found that fifty-eight weeklies had shut down in Minnesota since 1942. Of the fifty-eight weeklies, twenty suspended operations during the Korean War. Thirty-six of the papers were revived by 1954, but only eight were in towns with a population of less than 500. Newspapers in towns of less than 500 people were in jeopardy of shutting down. Residents of these smallest communities often moved to larger towns and metropolitan suburbs. Also, the smaller towns had fewer retail outlets, which meant the loss of potential advertising revenue. Thus, Sim asserted that weekly publishers would have to emulate the pioneer printer and move to new or growing rural communities that needed newspapers.³⁹⁷

Sim and others in the weekly field believed that metropolitan dailies would not be able to cover the need for local news in the new suburban communities. He wrote, "The opportunities for community newspapers are not being sharply diminished by this shift of population; they are merely altered. Better a transplanted paper than a dead one."³⁹⁸

Several articles published in the mid-to-late 1950s provided examples of the explosive growth of a suburban weekly press. A 1959 *Newsweek* article titled "Making Publishing Hay in the Suburbs" explained how small-town newspapers were building circulation and profits on local news.³⁹⁹ *Editor & Publisher* highlighted the expansion of the Moreau Publications plant in

³⁹⁶ Wilbur Peterson, "Loss in Country Weekly Newspapers Heavy in 1950s," *Journalism Quarterly* 38 (Winter, 1961): 15, 20, 22. The study used figures from the 1950 and 1959 issues of the *N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*.

³⁹⁷ John Cameron Sim, "Weekly Newspapers Again Facing Challenge to Move," *Journalism Quarterly* 35 (Spring, 1958): 195-196.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 197.

³⁹⁹ "Making Publishing Hay in the Suburbs," *Newsweek* 53:25 (June 22, 1959): 88.

Orange, New Jersey. The company purchased adjacent property, built a new plant wing, and installed additional machinery and equipment. By the end of the decade the plant turned out eleven newspapers and produced forty-six “shoppers”⁴⁰⁰ that averaged twenty tabloid pages in size.⁴⁰¹

The prize-winning weeklies *Cleveland Sun-Press* and *Sun-Messenger* also expanded into the suburban market, serving nineteen eastern Cleveland suburbs with a population of 225,000. Publisher Harry Volk reported a combined “saturation” circulation of 62,000. *The Sun-Press* was founded in 1946 by Volk and Milton Friedlander to serve an area Volk described as a “neglected news field.” Volk recalled, “We were certain that if we could produce a weekly that was professionally written and edited and keyed to the suburbs, the advertising would follow.” The papers specialized in “work-up” or in-depth reporting stories to attract readers. Several stories that drew attention included a series on well-to-do women who shoplifted in the suburbs, a series on mental health, and stories on social drinking and alcoholism.⁴⁰²

Among the new “pioneer printers” who ventured into small towns previously without a newspaper was John Henry Cutler. The university professor and freelance writer had no previous newspaper experience when he founded the *Duxbury (Mass.) Clipper* in 1950 in a coastal resort town of less than 2,000. Cutler described himself as “the poor man’s William Allen White.” He wrote about his adventures of running a weekly, or “ragbag,” which he learned was another term

⁴⁰⁰ Shoppers were newspapers mailed free of charge to homeowners that provided large coverage areas for advertisers, something small-town newspapers could not do. The content was usually confined to advertisements, and perhaps a few community items or community calendar listings.

⁴⁰¹ “The Weekly Editor: Plant expansion,” *Editor & Publisher* 93 (September 10, 1960): 59.

⁴⁰² Max Price, “The Weekly Editor,” *Editor & Publisher* 93 (May 7, 1960): 32.

for a weekly. He started the *Clipper* with an outlay of \$100 and turned down a \$25,000 offer in 1959 to sell the paper.⁴⁰³

A 1960 *Editor & Publisher* article told of Lake Grove, Oregon, located ten miles southwest of Portland, which had no newspaper throughout the 1950s. In the spring of 1960 the town's 4,000 residents suddenly had two weeklies both named the *Lake Grove News*. According to the article, two weekly publishers in nearby towns had the same idea at the same time and chose the same name for their publications. However, one of the papers was renamed the *Press* after its second week of operation.⁴⁰⁴

But there were some metropolitan dailies fighting back against Sim's challenge that they would not be able to respond to the need for local news in the new suburban communities. A 1960 *Editor & Publisher* article featured the Baltimore *Evening Sun*'s answer to the problem of readers and advertisers spreading to the suburbs. The daily began publishing its own weekly inside the daily. The *Sun* weekly included typical features of the small-town press. According to the article, small retailers liked the fact that their advertisements, which previously seemed lost among the big displays in the daily publication, received more prominent placement in the weekly edition. An added bonus was that they were able to use newspaper techniques such as pictures and maps that were not readily available at the average country newspaper.⁴⁰⁵

Some larger metropolitan chains used suburban newspapers as a training ground for their newspaper management personnel. The metropolitan chains made a distinction between rural and suburban weeklies, and chose only the weekly suburban field as a training ground because its reader level of sophistication, retail options, and local concerns were similar to that of the

⁴⁰³ John Henry Cutler, *Put It On The Front Page, Please!* (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1960). In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$100 from 1950 was worth \$861.05, and \$25,000 from 1959 was worth \$177,762.35. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁴⁰⁴ "The Weekly Editor: Thursdata, One for each hand," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (April 2, 1960): 34.

⁴⁰⁵ Bramwell Terrill, "Weekly-Inside-Daily Reaches to Suburbia," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (May 7, 1960): 14.

metropolitan daily reader. For example, Knight Newspapers (Detroit, Akron, Charlotte, and Miami) bought two weeklies in Florida. The Knights moved younger men from their dailies into Florida for grassroots training. “Employees who come from a weekly operation,” said James L. Knight, the *Miami Herald’s* general manager, “tended to place proper values on selling, production, and editorial matters.”⁴⁰⁶

Signs of urban sprawl were evident in articles and advertisements scattered throughout the pages of weeklies. For example, in response to the quick spread of suburb and tract housing, a 1950 issue of *The Bessemer (Mich.) Herald* featured a three-column architectural drawing and blueprint of a new home model. The Claridge, as the model was called, featured an “attached garage under the same roof to give a larger appearance, two-bedroom, living room, kitchen-dinette.” Interested buyers were encouraged to contact the Small House Planning Bureau in St. Cloud, Minnesota.⁴⁰⁷ The same issue advertised kitchen cabinet installation from a local wood products company under the enticing headline, “How To Get Your Dream Kitchen – and SAVE.”⁴⁰⁸

Advanced Technologies

A single headline in the March 1952 edition of *The American Press* summed up a major shift in the production of weeklies: “Ready-Print Pages No Longer Available.” The only remaining ready-print service in the country, Western Newspaper Union, discontinued its ready-print service that dated back to the Civil War. For decades, ready-print contributed the pre-

⁴⁰⁶ Kenneth R. Byerly, *Community Journalism* (New York: Chilton Company, 1961), 16.

⁴⁰⁷ “The Claridge-Small House Planning Bureau,” *The Bessemer (Mich.) Herald*, 19 January 1950, 5. Bessemer, in Gogebic County, is located in the western upper peninsula of Michigan. Bessemer had a population of 3,509 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 7, 22-22, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁰⁸ “How To Get Your Dream Kitchen – and SAVE,” *The Bessemer (Mich.) Herald*, 19 January 1950, 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

printed “insides” of thousands of weekly newspapers. WNU President Farwell Perry cited rising costs of newsprint, production, and distribution as reasons for eliminating the service. Also there was less of a need for ready-print as more weeklies tied their success to an emphasis on local news, according to the article. During its peak, more than 7,000 newspapers used the WNU ready-print service. By 1952 that number had dwindled to 1,412, accounting for only five percent of WNU’s total business.⁴⁰⁹

At the same time that the national syndicate announced the discontinuation of its ready-print service, WNU stated that it would increase the number of features available in mat and plate form. These services were already provided by a number of private and public concerns to assist newspapers with “filler” material.⁴¹⁰ Corporations, businesses, trade associations, non-profit agencies, and governmental departments provided a wealth of boilerplate material for weeklies. Boilerplate was provided either free of charge or for purchase, usually on a contractual basis. Alexander Brook recalled the boilerplate material contained in his first issue as publisher of the *Kennebunk (Me.) Star* in 1958. The issue included two mats from the Dodge (automobile) safety consultant, three free “Did You Know?” mats, and “a variety of others inviting people to buy savings bonds, support the Heart Fund, and join the female branch of the Marine Corps.”⁴¹¹ Clippings from other newspapers also remained a popular option for “filler” material. Some

⁴⁰⁹ "Ready-Print Pages No Longer Available," *The American Press* 70 (March, 1952): 1, 26.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Alexander B. Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor* (Bridgehampton, N.Y.: Bridge Works Publishing Co., 1993), 20. Kennebunk, in York County, is located along the southern coastline of Maine. At the time of Brooks’ purchase of the paper in 1958 for \$30,000, it contained a four-page broadsheet, meaning one folded sheet. Brook’s first issue had 51 inches of legal advertising, 17 classifieds and 190 column inches of display advertising at 40 cents per column inch, for advertising revenue totaling \$109. Subscriptions were \$2 a year, or 5 cents off the rack. The paper had a circulation of 1,254, but, Brook wrote, that “350 were mailed free to former publishers’ friends, advertisers, potential advertisers, or people who had died.” The total newspaper income amounted to about \$8,000 a year. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$30,000 from 1958 was worth \$215,085.06 and \$8,000 was worth \$57,356.02. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

weeklies purchased pre-set columns from another newspaper, usually a nearby daily, published at the same central printing press.⁴¹²

As weeklies moved away from ready-print and its supply of low- or no-cost printing paper and pre-sold national advertisements, their job printing services offered an important income stream to help finance their newspaper publishing operations. In fact, some weeklies had to disband their newspaper operations and remain solely in the job printing service. An anonymous Midwest weekly publisher wrote about his two-year, financially losing venture from 1956-1958. He stated that he endured eighty-eight-hour work weeks, an \$80 weekly return on his \$20,000 investment, an average \$10,000 yearly profit, and limited family time. After shutting down the paper, he became owner of a job printing plant and free-lance photojournalist. He wrote, "I published a small weekly for more than two years while I watched a life-long dream turn into a frightening nightmare."⁴¹³

The American Press printing trade journal conducted a 1952 survey of weeklies that revealed that fifty-four percent of press-operating time was devoted to job printing.⁴¹⁴ It was not unusual to find countless promotional advertisements among the pages of weeklies touting the quality of printed products from their press plants. For example, a one-third-page advertisement in a November 1959 edition of *The Wright County (Ia.) Monitor* promoted the newspaper's job printing business as "Wright County's Most Complete Office Supply Store." The advertisement

⁴¹² Harter, *Boilerplating America*, 77. Harter recalled that in the mid-1950s, the *Garrett (Ind.) Clipper* purchased (at five cents an inch) pre-set county news left over from the press run of the nearby county seat daily paper in Auburn. He worked fourteen years in small-town journalism in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky, beginning in 1951.

⁴¹³ "The Weekly Editor," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (December 31, 1960): 30. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$80 from 1958 was worth \$573.56, \$20,000 from 1958 was worth \$143,390.04, and \$10,000 from 1958 was worth \$71,695.02. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁴¹⁴ "What Kinds Of Equipment Are Being Used In The Country Newspaper Shops Of America?" *The American Press* 70 (May, 1952): 28, 34. *The American Press* survey concerned the press operating times and types of equipment of the average weekly newspaper publishing plant. More than 600 weeklies responded to the survey, representing a 7 percent cross-section of the country's estimated 8,500 weekly newspaper plants.

listed office supplies, printing specials, and new merchandise, such as wedding announcements, business or professional cards, and daily calendars.⁴¹⁵

The 1952 *American Press* survey also found that only one in eight, or more than 1,000 weeklies, operated offset presses.⁴¹⁶ The survey even revealed that a majority of weeklies still used hand-set presses.⁴¹⁷ One such weekly was the *Garrett Clipper* in DeKalb County, Indiana. Publisher, professor, and author Eugene Harter recalled his apprentice days there from 1953-1956. He wrote that the “Country Campbell press dominated the room, resting on a rough tobacco- and ink-stained pine floor. Equipment was arranged as it would have been in the late 1900s.” He observed that the Campbell press occasionally “threw inked sheets of paper all about, especially during winter days when static electricity hung in the air” and that the printers responded by pouring buckets of water over the floor to moisten the air.⁴¹⁸

Despite the small percentage of weeklies using offset, also referred to as “cold type,” a growing number of production managers preferred offset and declared it the method of the future. One such manager was B.G. Burke, production manager at the *San Diego Union* and *Evening Tribune*, who recounted his company’s transition to offset in 1956 in a *Publishers’ Auxiliary* article. He described how the company acquired two Intertype Fotosetters and auxiliary equipment and set up a separate cold-type department. He explained that hot-type machine operators received additional pay to train in the cold-type process. The transition was a

⁴¹⁵ "Bargains Unlimited," *The Wright County (Ia.) Monitor*, 12 November 1959, 5. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

⁴¹⁶ Offset lithography, better known as photo-offset, made plates from photographs of pasted-up material for reproduction. The photograph of pasted-up material was known as a “master copy.” The reproduction quality for photographs was much better than letterpress and the equipment could be purchased for a tenth the cost of a letterpress plant to produce the same size newspaper. Walter Rae, *Editing Small Newspapers*, 2 ed. (New York: M.S. Mill Co. & William Morrow & Co., 1952), 189.

⁴¹⁷ "What Kinds Of Equipment Are Being Used In The Country Newspaper Shops Of America?" 10-11.

⁴¹⁸ Harter, *Boilerplating America*, 76.

gradual process, according to Burke, but the result was a more professional looking product that could be turned around in the same amount of time.⁴¹⁹

Victor Leiker, publisher of the *Middletown (N.J.) Clurriere*, suggested to attendees at the 1960 Mid-Atlantic Newspaper Mechanical Conference in Philadelphia that they incorporate his use of both offset and rotary printing as a possible solution to the rising costs of production. Leiker acknowledged that “better looking ads” could be produced using hot type so he advised publishers not to throw out their type-casting machines if they switched to offset. But he also pointed out that weeklies lost valuable national advertising because they continued to use the old hot-type method. He suggested that a group of independent weekly publishers establish a central offset plant to handle national advertising and other special printing projects. He concluded, “Offset is the nearest thing to solving the weekly problems today.”⁴²⁰

Walter Rae, author of *Editing Small Newspapers* (revised in 1952 from its 1943 edition), encouraged publishers to use “photo-offset,” as he termed it, because it made excellent reproductions of illustrations. Also, the equipment could be purchased for a tenth of the cost of a letterpress plant. The only disadvantage to offset, according to Rae, was the lack of distinctive type faces. However, he offered that the new eight-point IBM Electric Typewriter with justified lines, using the type face called “text type,” closely resembled a letterpress product.⁴²¹

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, evidence of the growth of offset in the weekly newspaper industry could be seen in the number of articles and classified listings in trade publications. Articles and classifieds told about the switch to offset or advertised the sale and set-up of offset presses. For example, one classified page in a 1960 edition of *The Publishers’*

⁴¹⁹ "Says Cold Type Method of Future," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 2 January 1960, 2.

⁴²⁰ "The Weekly Editor: The types to wed," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (April 9, 1960): 32.

⁴²¹ Rae, *Editing Small Newspapers*, 189, 190, 194. Rae explained that offset newspapers were generally of a tabloid size because the offset presses, which printed 6,500 copies an hour, were not large enough to print a double-truck standard size 8-column paper.

Auxiliary had several boxed advertisements with the following headlines, “Save \$15,000 on one year old Vanguard Rotary offset press,” “Complete offset set up,” and “Going offset February 1st.”⁴²² An article in the same trade publication related the switch to offset at the *Sharon* (Pa.) *Herald* as described by the newspaper’s production manager, Robert C. Schemback. He addressed the topic at the 1960 Mid-Atlantic Newspaper Mechanical Conference. Schemback stated that the failure of newspapers in the past twenty years was often related to the lack of modernization in equipment and that offset allowed an advertising sales department to offer more options to potential customers such as halftones, line cuts, and better layout design choices.⁴²³

Just as offset presses were scarce, photo-engraving equipment was found only sparingly in weekly production facilities in the 1950s. Only 763 plants responded to the 1952 *American Press* equipment survey that they used photo-engraving equipment. The most popular brand was called a Scan-A-Graver, which was an electronic engraving machine that made halftones by boring holes into plastic sheets.⁴²⁴ In his article on trends in the weekly newspaper field, University of Minnesota journalism professor Thomas F. Barnhart observed that the plants that used photo-engraving equipment were part of a movement in technological advancement that “ushered in a new era for the weekly as well as the small daily press.”⁴²⁵ The Scan-A-Graver, a product of Fairchild Graphic Equipment, a division of Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation, was promoted as a precision electronic engraving machine that could provide the

⁴²² "Big Opportunities," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 16 January 1960, 6.

⁴²³ "Paper's Switch to Cold-Type Told," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 14 May 1960, 2.

⁴²⁴ "What Kinds Of Equipment Are Being Used In The Country Newspaper Shops Of America?" 12.

⁴²⁵ Thomas F. Barnhart, "Recent Trends in the Weekly Newspaper Field," *Journalism Quarterly* 31 (Fall, 1954): 462. The Scan-A-Graver was a product of the Fairchild Camera and Instrument Company.

highest quality reproduction.⁴²⁶ Thus, the Scan-A-Graver, which allowed the addition of high quality photographs, not only gave weeklies a more professional appearance but also added a new element of localism to stories—names and faces.

Group Ownership, Centralized Printing, and Advertising Collectives

Weekly publishers had an obvious reason to pursue group ownership, centralized printing, and advertising collectives—their profits were sagging due to increased costs for shop wages, newsprint, and job shop paper and supplies. The Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers Association conducted a study of forty weeklies in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Ohio. The study revealed that gross income for weekly newspapers increased roughly 15.7 percent in 1951 over 1950, but profits continued to show a decrease. The Weekly Newspaper Bureau of the National Editorial Association conducted a similar study using the reports of 153 papers in thirty-three states. It found that net income before income taxes for 1951 was 11.2 percent, compared with 13.2 percent for 1950.⁴²⁷

Thomas F. Barnhart, often referred to as “Mr. Weekly Newspaper” because of his extensive research and writing on that subject, revised his *Weekly Newspaper Management* textbook in 1952, introduced in the 1930s, to address the changing business model of weeklies. His research for the updated textbook, which also served as a valuable resource guide for weekly publishers and editors, was based on personal visits to 232 small-town newspapers during the summer of 1952.⁴²⁸ Barnhart found that newspaper buyers continued to show an interest in acquiring medium and large weekly papers that earned an adequate profit. But buyers were only

⁴²⁶ "Top-Quality Engravings In Your Newspaper," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 9 April 1960, 3. In addition to the Scan-A-Graver, the Fairchild Company also sold Scan-A-Plate, engraving material that could be easily cut for mortises, silhouettes, and other effects.

⁴²⁷ "Gross Income Of Weeklies Rose 15% In '51," *The American Press* 70 (July, 1952): 14.

⁴²⁸ Don Robinson, "Barnhart Has Monopoly On Textbooks For Weekly Papers," *The American Press* 70 (October, 1952): 14. As a consultant, Barnhart participated in the redesign of more than fifty weekly and daily newspapers.

slightly interested in papers of communities with a population of less than 1,000, unless they were proven retail centers.⁴²⁹

In response to the struggles that publishers had in deriving profits from single newspaper ownership, a number of weekly publishers looked to group ownership for financial stability. Group ownership proved to be risky initially, especially for family-owned operations because of the heavy financial borrowing often required to purchase another newspaper. But it often paid off in increased subscribers and local and national advertising accounts. In fact, a number of business concerns with no background in community journalism also viewed weekly newspaper group ownership as a profit-making venture and hired trained journalists to run their news operations.

Group ownership came in several forms—a conglomerate of weeklies or dailies, a combination of weeklies and dailies, and a combination of newspapers (weeklies and/or dailies), and/or radio, and/or television. In 1952 Review Publishers, Inc. purchased the weekly *Freeport* (Tex.) *Facts*. The company also purchased the *Angleton* (Tex.) *Times* and ran the *Brazosport* (Tex.) *Daily Facts-Review*. C. P. Kendall, Jr., whose father bought the paper in 1914 when it merged with the Kendall-family-owned *Valasco* (Tex.) *World*, edited the *Facts* for more than twenty years. He assured *Facts* readers that the weekly would continue to be published every Thursday, but he also encouraged them to subscribe to the *Daily Facts-Review*.⁴³⁰

A concern among small-town newspaper readers was that the combination or consolidation of their hometown newspaper into a group or chain would mean the loss of a newspaper that focused on their particular community issues. But weekly publisher Alexander

⁴²⁹ Barnhart, "Recent Trends in the Weekly Newspaper Field," 460-461.

⁴³⁰ "Weekly Publication of Facts Will Continue," *The Freeport* (Tex.) *Facts*, 27 March 1952, 1. Freeport, in Brazoria County, is located on the gulf coast of Texas, to the southwest of Galveston. Freeport had a population of 6,012 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 10, 43-30, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

Brook responded to reader concerns about the loss of a hometown paper when he purchased and later combined two small Maine weeklies. Although there was a single edition for both communities, the front page was changed to reflect the news from that particular community. The nameplate was changed to match the front-page community of interest. Also a few minor changes were made to inside stories. Advertising and copy of general interest appeared in both editions. The newspaper mailing was separated so that residents received their community's name emblazoned on the front page. Brook observed that although the copy and layout changes meant more work for the staff, the effort quelled complaints about the two towns not having a paper of their own.⁴³¹

A similar effort gave residents in the Pennsylvania towns of New Oxford and East Berlin a sense that they still had their own community newspaper after the papers of the towns combined to form the *New Oxford Item-East Berlin News-Comet*.⁴³² A four-column nameplate for *East Berlin News-Comet* appeared on page five, along with a heading for "E.B. Classified." News and classified listings on that particular page related specifically to East Berlin and its surrounding villages.⁴³³ The villages were close enough geographically that event and classified listings would have been of interest to readers residing in the general vicinity.

A major benefit of group ownership was the ability to consolidate printing operations into one central plant. Many single-paper owners reached agreements to pool resources with other newspapers and jointly own a printing plant. Other publishers simply made arrangements with commercial printers to print their newspapers. Although publishers of small newspapers might have disliked the loss of control in having their newspapers printed at another location, they

⁴³¹ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 53.

⁴³² Two East Berlin newspapers, the *News* and *Comet*, had consolidated prior to joining with the *New Oxford Item*. In the masthead on page four it was noted that the *Item* was established in 1871 and the *News-Comet* in 1880.

⁴³³ *New Oxford (Penn.) Item-East Berlin News-Comet*, 12 July 1956, 4-5. New Oxford, in Adams County, is located in southeast Pennsylvania. New Oxford had a population of 1,366 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, section 9, 38-30, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

reasoned that this was the only way to stay in the news business. Publisher J.W. Rockefeller, Jr. wrote in a 1958 *Modern Lithography* article that an investment of a few thousand dollars and the use of a central [printing] plant enabled someone to enter the newspaper business. He added, “Here indeed lies hope for a reversal in the decreasing trend in dailies and weeklies.”⁴³⁴

The profitability plan of group ownership assumed that advertising revenue would increase because advertisements could appear in all of the publications, thus serving larger audiences and geographical areas. But in some cases although a group’s geographic range was expanded, population totals remained too low for paid-circulation publications to compete with the free-circulation shoppers.⁴³⁵ Alexander Brook explained that as he added new communities and newspaper editions to his southern Maine weekly newspaper group, initially it was not feasible to charge higher advertising rates. Despite an expansion of his group’s coverage area, he explained, overall circulation was not high enough to warrant increased advertising rates. In his words, advertising revenues were greatest if newspapers operated in “condensed, isolated, competition-free, high-income areas.”⁴³⁶

Just as weekly publishers found it financially beneficial to cooperate with other weeklies in a central printing operation, they also realized the benefits of advertising cooperatives. The elimination of the WNU ready-print service in 1952 also meant the loss of an advertising cooperative for the weekly publisher. Although the majority of advertising revenue went to the syndicate, the subscribing publisher did reap some benefits for any local advertising sold on the ready-print pages. Around the same time other advertising cooperatives were making changes as the American Press Association and the Newspaper Advertising Service merged and the Greater

⁴³⁴ J.W. Rockefeller, Jr., "What's the Future of Offset for Newspapers?" *Modern Lithography* (May, 1958).

⁴³⁵ A shopper is the term for a collection of advertisements, usually multiple-paged, tabloid-sized, and printed on newsprint, that were mailed to all residents within a specified geographic/retail area. The advertisements paid for the cost of production and circulation. Advertisers were guaranteed a saturation market for their messages. Shoppers usually contained very little, if any, news content.

⁴³⁶ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 120.

Weeklies Associates reorganized to 100 percent publisher ownership.⁴³⁷ *Deep River* (Conn.) *New Era* publisher Curtiss S. Johnson, a former advertising agency executive, encouraged other weekly publishers to hire a national advertising representative rather than worry about soliciting national advertisements. He explained in an article in *The American Press* that “An [advertising] agency likes to place its business through a representative just like a publisher likes to put his copy through a machine rather than set the type by hand.”⁴³⁸

Another means to fill the advertising hole left by ready-print national advertisers came from syndicate services and non-profit concerns that were established to offer weeklies “themed” messages to which local businesses could attach their names in the form of an endorsement. For example, thirty local businesses in Clarion, Iowa, sponsored a weekly church message in the local newspaper with a sponsor line that read, “in the interest of Stronger Churches and a Better Community by the following business and professional men of Clarion.” A syndicate service in Strasbourg, Virginia, provided the sponsored message.⁴³⁹ A non-profit concern, Better Schools, of New York City, joined with the Public Service Advertising Council to solicit local business sponsors for a community message encouraging attendance at school board meetings. Seven local businesses including grocers, the local electric cooperative, an insurance agent, a materials company, and a motor company sponsored the message that appeared in a 1957 edition of the *Sikeston* (Mo.) *Herald*. It stated, “Remember, Better Schools come from the personal interest of people like you!”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ "Ready-Print Pages No Longer Available," 26.

⁴³⁸ Curtiss S. Johnson, "Weeklies Can't Afford to 'Go It Alone' on National Ads," *The American Press* 70 (February, 1952): 16.

⁴³⁹ "One Great Certainty," *The Wright County* (Ia.) *Monitor*, 12 November 1959, 3. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

⁴⁴⁰ "These People are Deciding Your Child's Future," *The Sikeston* (Mo.) *Herald*, 1 August 1957, sec. B, 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

Emphasis on Local News

Weekly publishers who wanted to stay competitive with daily newspapers, radio newscasts, and the emerging television news industry, realized they should concentrate on doing what community weeklies could do best—provide in-depth coverage on local issues.⁴⁴¹ No longer could they rely on ready-print and boilerplate material to fill news holes within their pages. A 1951 review of thirty surveys and studies of weekly newspaper reading conducted during the previous twelve years affirmed the unique role that weeklies had in connecting residents to their community. University of Illinois journalism professor Wilbur Schramm and research assistant Merritt Ludwig found that “localness” and especially the publishing of local names made for high readership in weekly newspapers. Despite the fact that nearly all weekly newspaper readers surveyed relied on radio for current news and roughly half also subscribed to a daily or Sunday newspaper, Schramm and Ludwig found that the weekly did a better job of “knitting together its readers with the little understandings which are the essence both of communication and community.” They asserted that the daily served more as a bulletin board of the latest political, economic, and commercial news, while the weekly served as a “great wide window through which readers look out into their community and into the lives of their friends and acquaintances.” As an example of the strong community of interest developed by a weekly, the researchers found that it was difficult to find readers who were away from their communities for more than a few weeks without having their hometown newspaper mailed to them to addresses in all parts of the world.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ "Weeklies Becoming Increasingly Important, Says Florida's Governor," *The American Press* 77 (October, 1959): 18. The sub-headline of the article read: “Bigness of dailies re-opens field for coverage of activities of individuals by small town and neighborhood newspapers.” The article referred to an address by Governor Leroy Collins of Florida to the fall meeting of the New England Weekly Press Association held in Crawford Notch, New Hampshire. The governor’s main message was that weekly newspapers, rather than fading into obscurity, were becoming increasingly important.

⁴⁴² Schramm and Ludwig, "The Weekly Newspaper and its Readers," 301, 304, 314.

So instead of serving as a bulletin board of news briefs from near and far like the dailies, the weekly practiced “community bulletin board” journalism. For example, a 1955 edition of the *National Road Traveler* of Cambridge City, Indiana, included a two-columned box that ran down the entire length of a page and featured a list of piano students of Mrs. Hoyt Vanderbeek and the program of pieces they were to perform at their upcoming recital.⁴⁴³ The Sikeston, Missouri, police chief provided helpful hints on ways to avoid home break-ins as part of the city’s declared “Burglary Prevention Week.” The burglary prevention article appeared beside other page-one stories related to injuries and a death from local car accidents, Jaycees and Lions club announcements, five obituaries, a school-opening schedule, an upcoming election for community committee members, and the appointment of a person to oversee free food distribution.⁴⁴⁴ A 1958 edition of *The Weimar (Tex.) Mercury* featured a front page article on prices for various types of meat and eggs. After a slight space between lines, a new paragraph noted that “Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Havar of El Campo were Weimar visitors Wednesday.” Other page-one items included a leading story on arrests that solved thirty local burglaries, and four obituaries.⁴⁴⁵ A 1959, front-page article in *The Wright County Monitor* of Clarion, Iowa, also listed upcoming musical performances by local students that were to be held in celebration of American Education Week. The two-column article listed pieces to be performed by the Clarion High School band, string quartet, mixed chorus, and drama troupe. Other page-one articles included accident reports,

⁴⁴³ "Piano Recitals," *National Road Traveler*, 16 June 1955, 8. Cambridge City, in Wayne County, is located in the east-central part of Indiana. The newspaper proclaimed to be the largest weekly in the state, offering a “complete weekly review of eastern Indiana.” Cambridge City had a population of 2,559 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 5, 14-19, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁴⁴ "Don't Hang Out An Invitation to Burglars to Call, Chief Bruce Warns People Going on Trips," *The Sikeston (Mo.) Herald*, 1 August 1957, 1. Sikeston, in New Madrid and Scott counties, is located in the southeastern part of Missouri. The newspaper was listed as a member of the National Editorial Association and the Missouri Press Association. Sikeston had a population of 11,640 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 7, 25-25, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁴⁵ "Produce Prices," *The Weimar (Tex.) Mercury*, 12 September 1958, 1. Weimar, in Colorado County, is located in southeast Texas, west of Houston. Weimar had a population of 1,663 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 10, 43-31, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

agriculture news for dairy farmers and corn growers, church and civic club announcements, student awards, and an obituary.⁴⁴⁶ A 1951 edition of *The Boyden (Ia.) Reporter* contained these page-one standing headlines: Sick and Injured, Resolutions of Condolence, Card of Thanks, Celebrate Birthdays, Men in Service, School News, Many Move in Past Week, Club Meetings, Legion Auxiliary Meets, and Sioux County Court News.⁴⁴⁷

Some academics and journalism association leaders speculated that weeklies would die out if they failed to do an adequate job of covering local news. James Ford, dean of the school of journalism at Montana State University, said in a 1952 speech before a meeting of the North Dakota State Press Association, “In the little time that your reader has to sit down in the evening it is generally a question of whether he will read your paper or be snared away by the beautiful four-color picture of the charming, ravishing blonde illustrating a story in *The Saturday Evening Post*.” Most newspapers made it a real chore for the reader to get the news, let alone in readable form, he added, but “You don’t have to work very hard to listen or look at it in pictures, by comparison!” He suggested that weeklies not rely so heavily on syndicate and press service material and focus instead on covering local issues.⁴⁴⁸

So, how did weekly editors, reporters, and correspondents stay in touch with their communities? Mabel Temby, editor of the *Kewaunee (Wis.) Enterprise*, wrote in a 1959 article in *National Publisher* that she worked seventy to eighty hours a week and that her phone rang constantly. “The farmers get up at five o’clock,” she said, “and before they go out into the fields, they call to tell me about the hay they have for sale, or the cow they want to buy.” She even

⁴⁴⁶ “Climaxing American Education Week,” *The Wright County (Ia.) Monitor*, 12 November 1959. The *Monitor* was listed as a member of the National Editorial Association and the Iowa Press Association. Clarion, in Wright County, is located in north-central Iowa. Clarion had a population of 3,150 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 6, 15-21, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁴⁷ *The Boyden (Ia.) Reporter*, 8 February 1951, 1. Boyden, in Sioux County, is located in northwest Iowa. Boyden had a population of 541 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 6, 15-21, Table 7. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁴⁸ “Country Papers Must Cover Local News To Survive,” *The American Press* 70 (June, 1952): 36.

received calls in the middle of the night, recalling, “The taverns close at one, and they sleep mornings, so when my phone rings at 1:30 I know before I pick up the receiver that it will be one of them.”⁴⁴⁹ Newspaperman Eugene Harter seemed to imply that some weekly reporters became too closely involved in their readers’ personal affairs, blurring the line between news and gossip, when he recalled working with a society editor who penciled in wedding dates and another date nine months later. She’d then check the “Blessed Events” column, according to Harter, and match it to her chart. “Some weeks she would rush to the phone,” he wrote, “and amid much tittering, reveal the results of her biological research to her friends.”⁴⁵⁰

There was no blurring of the lines between news and gossip in “The Spillway,” a popularly read gossip column that ran for more than forty years in *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*. The column, named for the spillway of Wilson Dam on the nearby Tennessee River, was written by several anonymous authors throughout the years. “Nobody knew who wrote it except me and dad,” recalled John D. “Jack” Martin in a 2009 interview.⁴⁵¹ He said that most of the authors were women but “a couple of men did it at times,” adding, “It was a well-guarded secret.” To avoid being discovered, Martin said it was often under the cover of night that he went to the author’s home to collect that week’s column. An emphasis on gossip made the column “wildly popular” throughout the years, according to Martin. Following is a typical “Spillway” item: “A

⁴⁴⁹ Mabel Temby, “Hometown Editor Says Country Journalism Is For Me,” *The National Publisher* (May, 1959): 21.

⁴⁵⁰ Harter, *Boilerplating America*, 7.

⁴⁵¹ Marcy B. Darnall, John D. Martin’s grandfather, bought *The Florence (Ala.) Herald* in 1921. He had been editor of the *Key West (Fla.) Citizen*. His son, Marcy B. Darnall, Jr., and daughter, Louise Darnall Martin, inherited the paper from their father. Marcy Jr. ran the paper. His sister lived in Atlanta with her husband, Albert L. Martin. Marcy Jr. served in World War II as a Navy pilot. Before going to war, he asked his sister to take over the paper if he died while serving his country. After receiving his discharge papers in 1945, Marcy Jr. was tragically killed in a plane accident on his return to the states. So his brother-in-law, Albert L. Martin, who had never worked in the newspaper business, came from Atlanta with his wife, Louise, to run the paper. Their son, Jack, worked in various positions, mostly in the print shop, from the 1950s until the paper was sold in the mid 1970s. The *Herald*, a member of the Alabama Newspaper Advertising Service, Alabama Press Association, and National Editorial Association, was established in 1884. The banner claimed that the paper served “agriculture, commerce, industry and education in the Muscle Shoals District.” Florence, in Lauderdale County, is located in northwestern Alabama. Florence had a population of 23,879 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 4, 2-18, Table 7. <http://www.census.gov/>.

little bird has whispered to us that Louise Jones' visit in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, which delayed her arrival here and shortened her vacation with us by several days, was a significant one. We don't know a thing but how we are a-guessin'." ⁴⁵² "The Spillway" not only focused on who's who, but who's with whom, according to Martin. "If you were with your boyfriend instead of your husband, everyone knew about it," he added with a chuckle. ⁴⁵³

Commenting on the importance of covering a wide span of local issues, including social and gossip columns, Alexander Brook, publisher of the *Kennebunk (Me.) Star*, wrote that to be the community weekly of record it was important to report on what appealed "to the thoughtless as well as the thoughtful of all ages." ⁴⁵⁴

But, based on the local political climate and media competition, weekly newspaper local coverage was not always as detailed as it could be. In the early 1950s, University of Oregon journalism professor Charles T. Duncan surveyed more than 300 weeklies throughout the United States and found that city council meetings ranked much higher in news value than did school board or county board meetings. He also found that competition was a significant factor in determining a newspaper's diligence in reporting the news of local government. For example, he said that there was less contention between the press and local government in communities served by a monopoly newspaper than in those where there were competing newspapers. The survey also revealed that relations between the weekly press and local government news sources were more on the harmonious side. Also, he found that lack of time and shortage of staff were the most frequently mentioned reasons for failure to provide readers with regular, direct reporting of public affairs. Duncan was critical of weeklies that were more thorough in covering local government offices and departments but ignored the regular meetings of various governing

⁴⁵² "The Spillway," *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*, 2 January 1958, 4.

⁴⁵³ John D. Martin, "In-person interview with author," (June 23, 2009).

⁴⁵⁴ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 141. The *Star* later combined with several area weeklies to become the *York County Star*.

bodies. “If fewer than half of the weekly newspapers give on-the-spot coverage to the public sessions of three key units of local government,” he wrote, “then the community press is not doing its job [or] living up to the obligations of its self-assumed and widely-proclaimed ‘grass roots’ role.”⁴⁵⁵

Page one of the April 6, 1954, issue of *The Landmark* in Statesville, North Carolina, provided a good example of the importance of local news in a small-town weekly in relation to national or international affairs. Juxtaposed against stories about the resignation of the NATO commander of Central Europe and Congress tackling President Eisenhower’s budget was an article about a barn, some hay, a cow, and several chickens being destroyed in a fire, and another concerning the city’s decision to hire a dog catcher and purchase a truck.⁴⁵⁶

In attempting to offer more in-depth reporting on local issues, editors found it necessary to hire staff reporters. But this sometimes became a human resources nightmare because the weeklies had to find the money to pay the additional staff members. Then they often ended up losing the newly trained employees to larger newspapers in better paying markets. *The American Press* featured a *Nieman Reports* analysis of weeklies that served as a training school for reporters who sought jobs at metropolitan dailies. In his analysis, Charles T. Duncan found that pay scales for reporters on small newspapers had gone up sharply in recent years and that beginner salaries were often equal to or higher than at city dailies. Yet, he observed, gas stations in Eugene, Oregon, offered nearly as much for beginner attendants (college education not required) as most of the state university’s journalism graduates received as starting salaries. Aside from low salaries, he also raised the question of what could be done about making the small town more than a way station for young persons of talent and ambition. “To provide more

⁴⁵⁵ Charles T. Duncan, "How the Weekly Press Covers News of Local Government," *Journalism Quarterly* 29:2 (Summer, 1952): 292-293.

⁴⁵⁶ "Barn, Cow, Hay Lost to Fire," *The Landmark*, 6 April 1954, 1. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

lifetime careers,” he observed, “in both the editorial and business phases, careers short of ownership itself, to open a third road between the one leading to the publisher’s desk and the one leading yonder and away--that is certainly one of the great challenges confronting the community newspaper today.”⁴⁵⁷ However, publisher Alexander Brook discovered that reporters were more likely to stay if a sense of community was developed among reporters and they were offered incentives to stay once they acquired a strong community tie. He observed that the best young reporters would accept modest salaries “if the newspaper is vital and their coworkers compatible.”⁴⁵⁸

In an effort to increase staff but not the amount paid out in salaries, many weeklies relied on local “experts” or high school journalism students to contribute regular columns or sections. A popular contributor in rural newspapers was the county agricultural or home economics agent. For example, *The Wright County (Ia.) Monitor* featured a 1959 column titled “Get Acquainted with Squash Clan,” written by home economist Geraldine Steele. She encouraged housewives to explore some new dishes to put on their fall table. The article described the four main types of squash and how to select them for purchase.⁴⁵⁹ County agent Doyle Moore ran a regular column, “County Agent’s Notebook,” in *The Weimar (Tex.) Mercury*. One of his 1958 columns referred to extension, research, and commercial chemical company representatives participating in the county’s annual Brush Evaluation Tour. The same column also listed October 20 as the stalk destruction deadline for Colorado County cotton growers.⁴⁶⁰ Other examples of non-paid staff were the high school journalism students who wrote articles for the one- or two-page sections in a weekly issue devoted solely to local school news. The journalism department of Texas A & M

⁴⁵⁷ “Weeklies Too Often Viewed as Training School for City Jobs,” *The American Press* 70 (January, 1952): 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 141.

⁴⁵⁹ Geraldine Steele, “Get Acquainted with Squash Clan,” *The Wright County (Ia.) Monitor*, 12 November 1959, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

⁴⁶⁰ Doyle L. Moore, “County Agent’s Notebook,” *The Weimar (Tex.) Mercury*, 12 September 1958, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

College found in 1952 that eighty-nine representative Texas weekly newspapers devoted 11.3 percent of their news space to school news.⁴⁶¹

A strong emphasis on local issues sometimes went beyond reporting to advocating a particular action or way of thinking in an editorial, usually written by the editor. In fact, weekly editors who promoted a strong editorial voice joined forces in 1954 to establish the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors. The organization's purpose was to encourage and promote informed and independent editorial comment in weekly newspapers. Their actions followed a meeting two years earlier of the Freedom of Information Committee of Sigma Delta Chi at which it was reported that the tendencies of public officials and public agencies to withhold information were due "in part at least, to a decline in vigilance, in enterprise, and in aggressiveness on the part of local newspapers." A freedom of information panel held at Sigma Delta Chi's 1952 convention in Denver addressed the need for greater vigilance and enterprise on the part of newspapers. Gene Cervi, publisher of the weekly *Rocky Mountain Journal* in Denver, served on the panel.⁴⁶²

On the advocacy side, *The Bessemer* (Mich.) *Herald* was a strong proponent in 1950 for the construction of a youth recreation center and ran the following advocacy headline over its nameplate: "We Need Recreational Facilities For Bessemer." A page-one, two-column article described a well-attended community meeting to discuss the building of a youth recreation center. In fact, all of the page-one articles pertained to local issues—obituary notices, club meetings and social gatherings, city government, and local postal and air service issues.⁴⁶³

However, some editors made it a policy never to indulge in local politics through their writings, especially if it meant offending a potential advertiser or subscriber. For example, when

⁴⁶¹ "11.3% of News in Weeklies is About Schools," *The American Press* 70 (January, 1952): 12.

⁴⁶² William M. Blair, "Greater Vigilance Urged For Press," *New York Times*, 22 November 1952, 36.

⁴⁶³ "We Need Recreational Facilities For Bessemer," *The Bessemer* (Mich.) *Herald*, 19 January 1950, 1. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

hired for his first newspaper position in 1951 at a small weekly in Ohio, Eugene Harter recalled that the publisher advised him to avoid “rambling editorial wind” and warned “We don’t look fer trouble, no writin’ of opinions—not like the ol’ days.”⁴⁶⁴

Pulitzer Prize-winning weekly editor Hodding Carter of the *Greenville (Miss.) Delta Democrat-Times* was among the editors who vehemently disagreed with their weekly counterparts that newspapers were better served by remaining detached from their communities—“encouraging the good and denouncing the bad, but not taking personal part in the good or the bad of civic life.” In his book about his career in small-town journalism, Carter wrote, “I don’t see how I can stand apart in Greenville, praising and deriding and warning, and expect to be taken as anything but a town scold.” For years it was an accepted practice that country editors served as presidents or on the boards of local merchant clubs and charitable organizations. Some editors saw no conflict of interest as they ran the post office or ran for mayor or town council member. But Carter said an editor should not run for public office and that he, himself, probably should not have served on his town’s school board. However, he considered it appropriate that he served on the library board. He concluded that a free press and individual freedoms would be endangered if he became “afraid to print every story that has meaning for my town or to comment upon the controversial happenings.”⁴⁶⁵

Delivering the third annual Joseph Pulitzer Memorial Lecture at the Columbia University graduate School of Journalism in 1958, Carter also warned that pressure groups in small communities threatened the independence and survival of small weekly newspapers. He said pressure groups attempted to destroy “weekly newspapers that defend unpopular causes and civil

⁴⁶⁴ Harter, *Boilerplating America*, 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Hodding Carter, *Where Main Street Meets the River* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1953), 323, 336. Two southern weekly editors followed Carter’s award-winning ways, earning the coveted Pulitzer Prize for campaigns against the Ku Klux Klan. The 1953 award went to North Carolina editors Willard Cole of the *Whiteville News-Reporter* and Horace Carter of the *Tabor City Tribune*.

liberties.” He observed, “The pressure groups frighten advertisers, and the papers come under the gun of the local merchants and local political bosses.” He cited the case of Hazel Brannon Smith, editor of *The Lexington (Miss.) Advertiser* and *The Durant (Miss.) News*, who became the target of advertising boycotts and physical threats from white Citizens Council members and local officials after she accused them of discrimination and physical abuse of Negroes.⁴⁶⁶ In 1952, Park F. Stone, weekly editor of *The Maynard (Mass.) Enterprise*, was awakened twice in one night when a dozen shots were fired into his home. He speculated the attacks came because of his crusading editorials against liquor violators in Maynard and adjacent towns.⁴⁶⁷ Horace V. Wells, Jr., editor of *The Clinton (Tenn.) Courier-News*, received the 1957 Elijah P. Lovejoy Award for Courage in Journalism for his newspaper’s stance during the community’s contentious clash over school integration. As the award’s recipient, Wells was cited for “his realistic devotion to the principles of law and order while subjected to the scorn and abuse of a large segment in his community.”⁴⁶⁸ The home of *The Mount Dora (Fla.) Topic* editor Mabel Norris Reese was attacked twice with homemade bombs following her editorials that urged a calm approach to school integration and criticized local violent reactions to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision to ban segregation in public schools.⁴⁶⁹

During the 1950s, P. D. East was another Mississippi weekly editor who, like Carter, made a name for himself by writing fearlessly on local racial issues. However, unlike Carter, he averted from soft scolding and preferred instead to run lampooning advertisements and use sophisticated sarcasm that local readers often mistook for words of praise. For example, he printed an editorial on April 21, 1955, that compared Mississippi’s progress to that of the

⁴⁶⁶ "Publisher Warns That Pressure Groups Threaten Survival of Small Weeklies," *New York Times*, 26 April 1958, 40.

⁴⁶⁷ "Shots Spatter Home of Crusading Editor," *New York Times*, 3 September 1952, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ "Clinton Editor is Cited," *New York Times*, 16 July 1957, 18.

⁴⁶⁹ "Editor's Home Bombed," *New York Times*, 25 February 1956, 22.

crawfish. He wrote of the state symbol, the magnolia, that “once you have smelled a magnolia, you have smelled them all—every magnolia looks alike and smells alike.” But concerning the crawfish he observed that although they came in numerous shapes, colors, and sizes “there is one thing common to them all, and that’s the direction of movement.” He suggested that the state legislature adopt the crawfish as the state symbol, replacing the magnolia. The crawfish represented the state’s progress, according to East, which was “downhill, backward, toward the mud.” He described the state’s deliberations related to voting literacy tests, school segregation, and screening speakers before they were allowed to address public school and college students. He also listed the names of the state’s “great leaders” and purposely lower-cased their names as a sign of disrespect. East described being surprised that he did not receive a phone call the day that the editorial appeared. He received two calls the next day. Both men became subscribers to his paper as a result of the editorial. One remarked to East, “P.D., that’s telling them niggers where their place is, by God.”⁴⁷⁰

East wrote that he did not intend to become a controversial newspaperman when he started *The Petal (Miss.) Paper* in 1953 but rather a financially successful one who abided by what he sarcastically termed the dictates of success in the weekly field -- “loving mother and hating sin.” All the news stories and photographs from this small community near Hattiesburg were local. But he soon drew the ire of local advertisers and subscribers when he ran a front-page feature on the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s death, which he described as “unfortunate.” East recalled that a couple of subscribers took issue with him, saying that the only thing unfortunate about Lincoln’s death was that it did not come sooner. But East was most widely known for his lampooning advertisements aimed at Mississippi Sen. James Eastland, the white

⁴⁷⁰ P.D. East, *The Magnolia Jungle*, 139-143.

Citizens Councils, and the Ku Klux Klan. The lampoons became widely distributed and resulted in out-of-state subscriptions to his paper outnumbering local circulation.⁴⁷¹

Publisher Bill Stewart of *The Monroe Journal* in Monroeville, Alabama, was not as sarcastic in his criticism of racism in his community as East. On one occasion he was straightforward in his scolding of local Ku Klux Klan members. A December 1959 editorial, placed in a prominent position on page one, began “The race hate mongers are at it again. At a time when there should be peace and good will among all men, they have reared their mean, ugly heads and have decreed that a Negro high school band should not march in the Christmas parade that was to be held in Monroeville today.” Although the band had marched in the parade during the previous eight years, school leaders declined that year’s invitation in an effort to avoid violence. Stewart also complimented the schools’ leaders on exercising “extremely sound and careful judgment in efforts to avert any crises which both white and colored alike might regret.” The editorial concluded, “The fact that the Negro leaders pulled their band out of the parade is positive proof that they desire no violence.”⁴⁷²

Unlike Carter, East, Stewart, and other weekly editors who preferred to comment editorially on local, national, and international issues of concern, most weeklies avoided editorials altogether. Instead they offered syndicated opinion columns on such issues as the Korean War, the spread of communism, public school desegregation, and the space race against Russia. Opinion columns about newsmakers such as presidents Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, executed spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, anti-communist Senator Joseph McCarthy, and hip-swinging entertainer Elvis Presley were also popular. A weekly Wisconsin

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 15, 121, 124, 128. East’s most famous “fake ad” appeared on a full-page in the March 15, 1956, edition of *The Petal (Miss.) Paper*. It invited subscribers to join “The Glorious Citizens Clan,” with an accompanying illustration of a jackass and the proclamation that “You Too Can Be Superior.”

⁴⁷² “Peace, Good Will—Ku Klux Klan Version,” *The Monroe Journal*, 17 December 1959, 1. Monroeville, in Monroe County, is located in the south-central part of Alabama. Monroeville had a population of 2,772 in 1950. *Seventeenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, section 4, 2-18, Table 7. <http://www.census.gov/>.

editor took a personal interest in his state senator's anti-communist fervor. Editor Leroy Gore of *The Sauk-Prairie Star* in Sauk City, Wisconsin, headed a petition drive in 1954 to force McCarthy to stand for a recall election. After appearing on several New York radio and television shows, Gore received support and donations for his "Joe-Must-Go" club to print recall petitions and place them in Wisconsin's 350 small newspapers. Residents in Sauk City and nearby Prairie Du Sac (population of two villages 3,100) displeased with his petition efforts waged their own campaign, "Door-for-Gore," to encourage the editor to leave town. In less than a month the editor had obtained 200,000 petition signatures (400,000 were needed to force a recall election). Gore was unsuccessful in the recall effort and sold his paper in 1955, citing "post-recall repercussions" and the success of the anti-Gore club to drive "a tough wedge of personal hatred into the community."⁴⁷³

However, because of a heavy reliance on syndicated opinions as opposed to local commentary, a controversy arose about the lack of editorial writing in weeklies and the perceived influential power of publishers. A survey among Ohio's weekly editors showed that those who did editorialize considered it vital to their newspaper. But, they added, the fear of losing advertisements was one reason for keeping out of local squabbles. Of the 151 newspapers inspected for the survey, eighty-three had no editorial page or local column of comment, while sixty-eight contained columns or editorials. Some of the Ohio editors felt strongly about the use of local editorials and indicated so in their survey comments. Despite the fact that his weekly newspaper had to compete with four large weeklies, a daily published within ten miles, and the metropolitan dailies of Akron and Cleveland, Lee Cavin, editor of the *Seville (Oh.) Chronicle*,

⁴⁷³ "Editor Pushes Drive to Recall McCarthy," *New York Times*, 20 March 1954, 7. "McCarthy Critic Supported Here," *New York Times*, 10 April 1954, 9. "McCarthy Attacker Attacked," *New York Times*, 16 April 1954, 13. "Gore Sells Newspaper," *New York Times*, 25 February 1955, 19. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in June 1955 reversed a circuit judge's ruling that found the "Joe-Must-Go" club guilty of organizing as a corporation and spending money for political causes in violation of the state law that prohibited such action by a corporation. "'Joe Must Go Club' Wins," *New York Times*, 2 June 1955, 33.

asserted, "I believe editorials are the small weekly's only hope of individuality in a tight competitive field. We sell strong in the face of close superior competition." Another editor felt equally passionate about the importance of editorials, having stated in the survey, "An editor who doesn't use editorials should get the hell out of the business."⁴⁷⁴

The controversy surrounding the lack of locally written editorial opinion and assertions that editors held little political sway in their communities was sparked by the responses of country editors to twenty-five separate *American Press* opinion polls. Results from the early-1950s polls indicated that the opinions among weekly editors were largely conservative and did not conform to the majority opinions of Americans. One such *American Press* poll in February 1952 queried 718 editors and found that only six out of 169 southern editors said President Truman was their choice for the 1952 presidential election. Many said they would vote for a Republican rather than for Truman. It also found that the majority of country editors expected Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio to win the Republican nomination but they did not think he had as much chance of winning a race against Truman as would General Dwight Eisenhower.⁴⁷⁵

John C. Obert, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and editor of the *Alexandria* (Minn.) *Park Region Echo*, wrote about the conservatism of country editors and their lack of political influence in a July 1959 *Nieman Reports* article. He observed that "Far too many of the nation's 9,000 country editors share a grand illusion that they run the country."⁴⁷⁶ Obert's article drew a variety of responses, most of them defensive, from country editors across the country.

Dwight Payton, an editorial writer for *The Daily Oklahoman* in Oklahoma City and former editor

⁴⁷⁴ Tedd Conover, "Only 42% Of The Smaller Ohio Weeklies Publish Editorials," *The American Press* 77 (September, 1959): 10. The *Chronicle* had a circulation of 1,012 in a town of 963. It had a strict policy of no advertising on the editorial page. All the material on the editorial page was written by editor Lee Cavin and his wife, except a small syndicated cartoon.

⁴⁷⁵ "Less Than 4% Of Southern Papers For Truman; Taft, Eisenhower Run Neck And Neck As Favorites In Nation-Wide Poll Of Country Editors," *The American Press* 70 (April, 1952): 1. President Truman later announced that he would not seek another term. Republican Gen. Dwight Eisenhower defeated Democrat Sen. Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 general election.

⁴⁷⁶ John C. Obert, "Whatever Happened to the Country Press?" *Nieman Reports*, July 1959, 14.

and publisher of the *Overbrook* (Kan.) *Citizen*, wrote a response column in the *Oklahoman* that was re-printed in *The American Press*. He was unapologetic for country editors' "old-fashioned philosophies" in support of the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Christ, and the U.S. Constitution. He observed that the country editor "believes in the dignity and glory of the individual and holds that the 'social group' which is the liberals' great love is a soulless monstrosity typified by communists."⁴⁷⁷ Other editors, such as Weimer Jones of the *Franklin* (N.C.) *Press*, offered a tempered response. As past president of the North Carolina Press Association, he accepted that "there's enough truth in what he [Obert] says to warrant some soul-searching." Jones acknowledged that some weekly editors were ill-informed and that others suffered from provincialism. However, when he considered whether or not the country press had lost its influence to run the country, he responded, "I don't think you can lose something you never had." But he noted that it was a time of opportunity for the country weekly because people had less confidence in the daily press and television and radio to cover local issues of importance. As a result, he observed, "the country press has become both a stabilizing influence and a dynamic, constructive force."⁴⁷⁸

The dynamic force of weekly journalism was on public display during the 1959 United States visit of Nikita Khrushchev when, at the request of *The American Press*, weekly editors from across the country delivered to the Soviet premier copies of their newspapers.⁴⁷⁹ In soliciting editorials, newspaper copies, and letters explaining the free press to send to the Soviet

⁴⁷⁷ "Says 'Nieman Fellow' Portrays Country Editors As 'Moss-Brains'," *The American Press* 77 (September, 1959): 18.

⁴⁷⁸ Weimer Jones, "Liberalism and the Country Press," *The Iowa Publisher* (November, 1960): 4-5. The *Franklin* (N.C.) *Press* editor published a book in 1960 featuring a compilation of his weekly column "Strictly Personal." A former city newspaperman, he bought the *Press*, his hometown paper, in 1945, and his writings dealt with running a weekly and life among the mountain people. Weimer Jones, *My Affair with a Weekly* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: J.F. Blair, 1960).

⁴⁷⁹ "List 9,353 Weekly Papers with 22 Million Subscribers," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 7 May 1960, 1. According to the 92nd annual edition of the *N.W. Ayer & Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, weekly newspapers climbed to a record 22,818,335 in paid circulation in 1959, an increase of slightly more than 100,000 copies per issue from the previous year. Of these newspapers listed in the "weekly" category, 8,990 came out once a week.

leader, the trade magazine explained, “Mr. Khrushchev needs to be taught that the man who makes the decisions in our country is not the President but the voter on Main Street. He needs to learn that if he has anything to ‘sell’ us, he must sell the people.”⁴⁸⁰

So despite criticism from their own ranks that they were too provincial and avoided controversy so as not to run off advertisers, small-town newspapers experienced resurgence during the decade. More citizens moved to the suburbs or once-rural areas and supported their new or renewed community newspaper, both in readership and advertising. As a result of the population shifts throughout the 1950s, weekly publishers happened upon a successful business model of consolidations and group ownership, centralized printing, advertising cooperatives, and localized news to sustain them into the next decade.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ "Khrushchev Bombarded With Weekly Newspapers While Visiting In Washington," *The American Press* 77 (October, 1959): 14.

⁴⁸¹ "The Weekly Editor: More income," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (May 21, 1960): 34. Under the sub-headline “Income Up” the article stated that an increase in total income for 1959 of 9.1 percent over 1958 was reported by the weekly newspapers participating in the ninth annual National Weekly Newspaper Cost Study. Expenses increased by 7.6 percent for the same period. The 1959 “composite” paper had a circulation of 3,952, 117 more than the previous year. The average newspaper income per subscriber was \$30.88, up from \$28.31 in 1958. The composite paper had 13.9 employees and a 1959 income of \$8,757 per employee, and 284 subscribers for each employee. Advertising occupied 59 percent of the paper in 1959, compared with 54.6 percent in 1958. Local advertising was 78.5 percent, national, 9.5 percent, classified, 9 percent, and legal, 3.4 percent. The typical weekly paper published 1,101 pages in 1959, compared to 1,052 in 1958. A five-year financial study of weeklies in the state of Washington found that newspapers grossed more money but kept less of it as net profit after bills were paid. The survey, sponsored by the University of Washington and the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association, looked at the financial report of 76 newspapers over five years, 1954-58. The survey also found that 15 of those newspapers lost money after a decent salary for the publisher was deducted. Lee Irwin, "Weeklies' Profits Sink While Incomes Rise," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 5 March 1960.

Chapter Seven

The 1960s: A Time to Rethink, Redefine, Recruit, and Regionalize

The 1960s brought rethinking, redefining, recruiting, and the regional concept to the community weekly newspaper field. First, a newly defined approach to journalism, referred to as “community journalism,” became popular as journalists took on a more activist role in shaping the news. Second, there was a concerted effort on the part of many weekly journalists to remove the term “country” or “rural” and any stereotypes related to those terms from the weekly newspaper field. Third, aggressive recruitment tactics were undertaken in the areas of staffing, circulation, advertising, and professional associations to hold back growing competition from encroaching dailies, suburban weeklies, and free-circulation shoppers. Fourth, a regional concept enabled weeklies to expand their circulation base and production capabilities to reduce operating costs and increase their attractiveness to national advertisers.

Several important books and articles published in the 1960s related to the community leadership role of the small-town newspaper and its influence on community decision making. The role of the editorial, opinion column and personal column was explored, as was the impact of the community newspaper in creating news as opposed to reporting it. However, this so-called new approach of “community journalism” merely acknowledged something that weeklies had been doing all along.

For decades the stand-alone community weekly was most often referred to as a “rural” or “country” newspaper. The majority of weeklies did operate from small towns that were miles

away from metropolitan areas during the first half of the twentieth century. However, that changed during the 1950s when once-rural communities grew and suburbs sprang up around metropolitan areas. Thus, the weeklies that served the newly established and growing communities expanded their coverage from mostly agriculture issues. Weekly journalists believed that the “rural” and “country” labels were too confining for their profession and should be eliminated.

Weeklies throughout the sixties aggressively sought highly skilled production staffs to handle modern printing equipment. Only a handful of hand-set type shops remained that required only family members plus a few vagabond printers to produce a newspaper. The period experienced a shortage of skilled labor; so the centralized printing plant became a workable option for newspaper groups to staff the advanced technological operations.

Recruiting more subscribers also became a concern for weeklies as free-circulation newspapers and shoppers threatened their financial livelihood. Weeklies also had to compete with metropolitan dailies that, in their attempt to fight back for suburban readers, began to insert “weeklies” within their papers to cater to nearby neighborhood communities.

Recruiting for advertisers continued as weeklies explored ways to offer incentive packages and appeal to the ever-expanding suburban shopping centers that were closing down many family owned stores in the small-town business districts. Weeklies also devised attention-getting stunts and promotions to bring attention to their advertisers.

Professional organizations specifically geared to weeklies aggressively recruited members and focused attention on certain areas of interest or business models, such as editorial writing or the growing suburban weekly field.

And finally, the regional concept changed the business landscape of the weekly newspaper industry to the point that it became the survival model for most weeklies. The

regional concept included such practices as group ownership, joint operating arrangements, and centralized printing to manage personnel and costs.

Community Journalism: new term, old practice

In 1961 Kenneth R. Byerly published *Community Journalism*, which had the distinction of defining in its title the type of journalism practiced in community weeklies. Previous texts on the small-town press referred to “country journalism” and “rural editors,” which seemed to describe more the geography of the subject matter than the nature of the news. An exception was the 1923 book *The Community Newspaper*, co-authored by Emerson P. Harris and Florence Harris Hooke.⁴⁸² In Byerly’s 1961 work, the University of North Carolina journalism professor explored the type of journalism practiced at weeklies that distinguished them from their metropolitan daily counterparts. He had personal knowledge of the subject, having served as the owner of a semi-weekly in Virginia and as the owner and publisher of weekly and daily newspapers in Wyoming and Montana.

Certainly a distinguishing characteristic among many weeklies was that they reported news from areas that no other print media outlets covered, or that were only minimally mentioned in regional dailies. *The Titonka Topic* in Titonka, Iowa, made the claim above its front-page banner that it “Thoroughly covers a territory that is reached by no other paper.”⁴⁸³ *The Seguin (Tex.) Gazette* promised its readers in the paper’s policy statement “To publish the news as it happens, pointing out its significance to Guadalupe County....”⁴⁸⁴ So, not only did the

⁴⁸² Harris and Hooke, *The Community Newspaper*, 245-246, 252.

⁴⁸³ *The Titonka (Ia.) Topic*, 18 February 1965, 1. The *Topic* was listed as a member of the Iowa Press Association and the National Editorial Association. Titonka, in Kossuth County, is located in north-central Iowa. Titonka had a population of 547 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 17, section 2, 17-27, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Seguin (Tex.) Gazette*, 29 January 1964, 2. The *Gazette* was a member of the Texas Press Association, South Texas Press Association, National Editorial Association, Advertising Checking Bureau, Weekly Major

Gazette cover the area's news, which might be included in a regional daily, but it also explained the significance of events to its readers. For example, in reporting on the upcoming publication of the city's directory, the *Gazette* emphasized the importance of the directory as a resource for community residents. "Everyone gets his name in print without dying, marrying, running for office (and being elected or defeated), having an accident, being arrested, being quoted as to his opinion on some public question or winning a sweepstakes jackpot," the article observed.⁴⁸⁵

So, while national leaders wrestled with the larger issues of communism, a space race with the Soviets, the threat of nuclear war and the Cuban missile crisis, assassinations of political leaders, civil rights protests, a black power movement, a burgeoning psychedelic drug culture, peaceful and violent anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, race riots, and a growing feminist movement, community weekly publishers and editors attempted to help their readers make sense of it all. Efforts to localize larger issues and explain their significance to local residents was the challenge of small-town newspapers engaged in community journalism.

Several academic studies in the 1960s explored the concept of community journalism as it related to community leadership and decision-making.⁴⁸⁶ A 1961 sociological study summarized the findings of eleven case studies pertaining to community power and concluded

Markets and other booster organizations and promoted itself as being Texas' First Triple Service Award Winner (community service 1958-1962, agriculture, 1959, and industry 1960). The paper was established in 1846 as the *Seguin Mercury*, later comprising the *Western Texian*, *The Journal*, *The Seguin Times*, *The Seguin Record*, *The Seguin Anchor*, *The Guadalupe Gazette*, *The Seguin Zeitung*, *The Seguin Bulletin*, *The Guadalupe Gazette-Bulletin*, and finally, *The Seguin Gazette*. Seguin, in Guadalupe County, is located in south-central Texas, east of San Antonio. Seguin had a population of 14,299 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 45, section 2, 45-40, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁴⁸⁵ "New Directories Being Distributed," *The Seguin (Tex.) Gazette*, 29 January 1964, sec. 2, 2.

⁴⁸⁶ Among studies conducted during the 1960s that explored community journalism in relation to community leadership and decision-making were: Alex S. Edelstein and Otto N. Larsen, "The Weekly Press' Contribution to a Sense of Urban Community," *Journalism Quarterly* 37 (Autumn, 1960); William V. D'Antonio and et al, "Institutional and Occupational Representatives in Eleven Community Influence Systems," *American Sociological Review* 26:3 (June, 1961); Alex S. Edelstein and J. Blaine Schultz, "The Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role as Seen by Community Leaders," *Journalism Quarterly* 40 (Autumn, 1963); Alex S. Edelstein and Joseph J. Contris, "The Public View of the Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role," *Journalism Quarterly* 43 (Spring, 1966); Phillip J. Tichenor, Clarice N. Olien, and George Donohue, "Predicting a Source's Success in Placing News in the Media," (*Journalism Quarterly* 44:1, 1967); and Clarice N. Olien, George A. Donohue, and Phillip J. Tichenor, "The Community Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict," *Journalism Quarterly* 45 (Summer, 1968).

that, contrary to the tendency for editors and their newspapers to be ignored in these studies, “understanding the local decision-making process may not be possible without giving adequate attention to the strategy position of the newspaper editor.” Authors of the study noted that “major issues have been successfully resolved or blocked by the position taken by the newspaper editor.”⁴⁸⁷

There were numerous efforts within the weekly field to engage in community journalism. For example, editors of the *Burlington (Wis.) Standard Press* hosted a panel discussion with ten leading citizens and their wives to establish a newspaper code of ethics. The panel was held following the publication of a story concerning a sex scandal that involved a Burlington alderman. The community reaction against the story was strong although the meeting participants agreed that a double standard on whether or not to print a story should not exist, regardless of the individual involved. The panel decided that people who committed sex offenses were mentally ill and their offenses should not be reported because it would embarrass family and friends and children could be corrupted by reading sexually offense stories. Editor William E. Branned said that the community members gave the impression that newspapers should protect the offender rather than the offended. He said that reporting unfavorable news was not an enjoyable task, but a serious one, and that “A moral obligation can never be modified.”⁴⁸⁸

It is not surprising that the Burlington panel participants had such strong opinions about their newspapers’ ethics because active citizens are more likely to read the local newspaper, according to author Robert Dahl. In his 1961 work, *Who Governs?*, he pointed out that if politicians were convinced that the newspaper influenced public opinion, a publisher had some control over the choices politicians were likely to make. However, a politician skeptical of a

⁴⁸⁷ D'Antonio, et al, "Institutional and Occupational Representatives in Eleven Community Influence Systems," 445.

⁴⁸⁸ William E. Branned, "Community and Paper Meet, Decide Code of Ethics," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 September 1960, 2.

publisher's influence on the attitudes of voters or confident of his own capacity to offset editorial criticism was more likely to chance a fight with the newspaper.⁴⁸⁹

Alex Edelstein and J. Blaine Schulz also explored community leaders' perceptions of the weekly editor's leadership role. Writing about their findings in *Journalism Quarterly*, they reported on a panel discussion among forty-six community leaders, of which only one believed that it was the newspaper's role to initiate community projects. The majority of panelists said newspapers should work jointly with community leaders to initiate projects. Nearly 40 percent, however, said the newspaper's role was merely to provide publicity on community projects. As in the Burlington panel discussion, these forty-six community leaders were also questioned about controversial content in the local newspaper. Two-thirds of the leaders said the newspaper should publish controversy only when it could not avoid doing so. Only one-third said that newspapers should take the initiative to bring controversies to the public's attention.

Edelstein and Schulz then asked the same questions about newspaper leadership roles to a group of weekly editors gathered for an annual meeting of the Washington Newspaper Publishers' Association. In addition to a survey, the authors conducted personal interviews with 117 weekly newspaper publishers in the state. They found that the editors who had the clearest perception of the power structure tended to work with community leaders before "initiating" any community project. Working jointly with community leaders appeared to be typical for "community editors" as opposed to "journalist-editors" who had a much stronger identification with the traditional watch-dog role of the press.⁴⁹⁰

After community and newspaper leaders were surveyed for their views on the weekly newspaper's leadership role, Edelstein and Joseph J. Contris conducted a similar study to

⁴⁸⁹ Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 258-259.

⁴⁹⁰ Edelstein and Schultz, "The Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role as Seen by Community Leaders," 567, 571-573.

examine the views of the general public on the subject. The study found that 20 percent of persons surveyed approved of “action” or “avoidance” behavior while 75 percent asked that the newspaper “print both sides.” This was interpreted to mean that the public did not want the newspaper to polarize community attitudes on highly controversial issues, a value shared with community leaders, or “elites.” In addition, the study revealed that the public expected the newspaper to monitor tax spending, to discover and expose political corruption, and to report crime incidents. However, the public preferred a limited editorial role in publicizing and criticizing actions of government officials.⁴⁹¹

In its role as a community advocate, it was not uncommon for a weekly to become a rallying force in times of hardship rather than simply a reporter of doom and gloom. For example, publisher Charles Deal of the *Keynoter* in the Florida Keys placed a new slogan across the masthead of his weekly following the heavy destruction of the central Florida Keys in 1960 from Hurricane Donna. The slogan bragged, “A Freebootin’ Newspaper What Covers What’s Left!” Even though the area was heavily damaged, including a portion of the *Keynoter* plant, the paper became a rallying force for the community. Deal observed, “If we’ve kept up spirits and nudged people into action, then we’ve done what any good newspaper of any size would want to do.”⁴⁹² In Telluride, Colorado, some might say that a community newspaper saved the town from extinction in the early 1960s. John and Bettye McPhee started the *Telluride Times* in 1963, some fifty years after the town’s coal mining industry shut down and started a steady decline of industry and inhabitants. The newspaper initiated a “Clean-up, Paint-Up” campaign and was a motivating force to improve roadways to attract more tourists to the area.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ Edelstein and Contris, "The Public View of the Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role," 20, 24.

⁴⁹² "The Weekly Editor: Freebooter," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (October 8, 1960): 68.

⁴⁹³ "The Weekly Editor: Killed ghost town," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (August 15, 1964): 10.

The close relationship between a community and its weekly was not only expressed in a “can do” attitude, but also included a scolding on occasion. For example, the *Kennebunk* (Me.) *Star* publisher printed his feelings about some of his readers above the front-page banner. After a rough day with difficult subscribers who cancelled their subscriptions, Alexander Brook picked out the initials of what he’d been muttering, THWTB, and printed it in small type over the paper’s price amount. A few observant readers asked Brook what the letters stood for, as did a *Time* magazine reporter who did a story on bragging mastheads. The *Time* article reported that when asked about the mysterious initials, Brook “halfheartedly explained that they stand for THE HARD WAY’S THE BEST. In fact, they represent the classic cry of exasperated newsmen everywhere: To Hell with the Bastards!” Brook kept the initials on the nameplate until he sold the paper, renamed the *York County Star*, in 1977.⁴⁹⁴

Debate continued throughout the decade on whether a weekly had to maintain a strong editorial voice to be considered a community leader. There remained a group of weekly editors who were too timid to criticize town officials or merchants for fear of boycotts or lost advertising revenue. But a stronger voice seemed to be emerging in favor of editorial leadership. In response to the push for more local editorial writing, a new quarterly magazine for the weekly newspaper field began publishing in 1960. The magazine, *Grassroots Editor*, was the official organ of the International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors, headquartered at Southern Illinois University. The goal of the magazine and the organization was to enhance the editorial effectiveness of the small community newspaper.⁴⁹⁵ After reading a number of ICWNE conference reviews written by weekly editors in their local columns, *Editor & Publisher*

⁴⁹⁴ "Maxims & Moonshine," *Time*, September 29, 1961, 58.

⁴⁹⁵ "New Magazine for Weekly Editors," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 16 January 1960, 1. A similarly titled publication, the *Grass Roots Digest*, had been established in 1949 on the campus of the University of Missouri. The International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors also annually presented the Elijah P. Lovejoy awards, named for the martyred abolitionist printer, which were given to weekly and small daily editors for courageous performance in the face of economic, political, or social pressures against them and their publications.

columnist Rick Friedman observed that instead of the usual “shop talk” that prevailed at most newspaper professional meetings, ICWNE conference participants were able to focus on independent editorial comment and leadership in weekly newspapers.⁴⁹⁶

The importance of a strong editorial role among weeklies was further explored in 1967 when Trinity University journalism professor Paul R. Busch surveyed thirty award-winning weeklies across the country.⁴⁹⁷ He found that the editors of these papers supported strong editorial pages. Twenty-seven of the papers had an editorial page, and eight used their own editorial cartoonist. He also found, however, that many of them included editorial page columns from their congressmen.⁴⁹⁸

Among weeklies with a strong local editorial voice was the *Florence (Ala.) Herald*. A 1963 *Herald* column on the topic of editorials observed that “The editorial you read from time to time may not present the side you like or the side you are familiar with but they [editorials] reflect thought and their importance in stimulating interest for issues that concern the average citizen cannot be taken lightly.” It added that fortunately “most of those who follow the newspaper calling know their responsibility and follow it well.”⁴⁹⁹

Some weekly editors gained notoriety for not mincing words, while others took a more diplomatic approach to defend their stance or explain why certain issues were not addressed. “I write it like I see it, and I talk like I feel,” stated longtime *New Richmond (Wis.) News* editor-publisher John Van Meter. *Editor & Publisher* described him as “one of the last of the breed of

⁴⁹⁶ Rick Friedman, “The Weekly Editor: Comments on a conference,” *Editor & Publisher* 100 (August 26, 1967): 30.

⁴⁹⁷ The newspapers were from thirty states representing all regions of “the lower 48” and Alaska and Hawaii. They were selected for the study based on the number of national and state general excellence awards each had received from professional newspaper associations.

⁴⁹⁸ Paul R. Busch, “The Weekly Editor: Among the best,” *Editor & Publisher* 100 (February 4, 1967): 36-37.

⁴⁹⁹ “That Important Editorial,” *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*, 28 March 1963, 2. Florence, in Lauderdale County, is located in northwestern Alabama. Florence had a population of 31,649 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 2, section 2, 2-15, Table 8. <http://www.census.gov/>.

gadfly weekly journalists, a man alternately hated, feared, applauded, loved and always regarded with awe in his own home town.” As mayor, he wrote a column that carried the motto “Don't undertake vast projects with half-vast ideas.” The title of his editorial column was “IMPORTANT-if true.”⁵⁰⁰

The Guthrian in Guthrie Center, Iowa, used an editorial as a means to explain to its readers how some items were included in the newspaper and others not. The editorial stated that shortage of space was the most common reason for excluding material. It further explained that most newspapers used what it termed “time filler” for unanticipated open spaces. The editorial concluded, “Some filler is good, and some is just junk.”⁵⁰¹

But despite strong advocacy by *The Grassroots Editor* and individual editors to have a strong editorial voice, the overall record among weeklies was spotty. For example, a study of 215 non-daily Iowa newspapers (published during November 1960) found only 41 percent with editorial pages, compared to 63 percent in a similar 1930 study. More specifically, the study found that only 27 percent of Iowa weeklies with a circulation of less than 2,500 had editorial pages.⁵⁰² In fact, the editor of Michigan's largest and most successful weekly challenged what he described as the “so-called” political power of the country's “rural newspapers” because so few of them ran editorials. In a 1962 interview with *Time* magazine, Robert Myers, publisher of the 13,000-circulation *Lapeer County Press* outside of Detroit, observed that more than half of the country's weeklies did not print editorials. Thus, he asserted that America's rural newspapers

⁵⁰⁰ “The Weekly Editor: The Van Meter Reader,” *Editor & Publisher* 97 (November 21, 1964): 40. The *News* was founded by Van Meter's grandfather, Abe, in 1869. Of its 2,800 circulation, about 800 papers were sold on the newsstands to people who claimed they would not subscribe just on general principles.

⁵⁰¹ “Here's Reason Why Items Do Not Always Get In Paper,” *The Guthrian*, 26 November 1963, 2. The newspaper's nameplate featured a hawkeye illustration with two banners underneath, to the left “agriculture and livestock” and to the right “in Iowa where the tall corn grows.” It was noted that *The Guthrian* was the county's official newspaper. Guthrie Center, in Guthrie County, is located in southwest Iowa, west of Des Moines. Guthrie Center had a population of 2,071 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 17, section 2, 17-24, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵⁰² Wilbur Peterson and Robert Thorp, “Weeklies' Editorial Effort Less than 30 Years Ago,” *Journalism Quarterly* 39 (Winter, 1962): 53-54.

were “valueless, lily-livered and moribund” and run by “printers” who stuffed their pages with syndicated “hayseed” features.⁵⁰³

Stronger words concerning the lack or misuse of editorials in weeklies came from media critic Ben H. Bagdikian in a 1964 *Harper's Magazine* article. He criticized the weekly press for not writing local editorials and for diluting or misusing syndicate editorials in which the true source was concealed or minimized. He explained that the syndicates provided editorial services free of charge to weeklies and made their money by charging an association or a company a fee to place its point of view or a hidden commercial pitch within the editorial copy. As a result, Bagdikian asserted that “almost any private citizen or special group can buy his way into the editorial columns of smaller papers with relative ease and low cost.”⁵⁰⁴

Editorial complaints similar to those Bagdikian leveled against the weeklies were echoed in the criticisms of John C. Obert, editor of the *Park Region (Minn.) Echo*. He claimed that weekly editors shied away from controversy in editorials because they were concerned about not upsetting local businessmen. A 1964 editorial in *The American Press* agreed with Obert's assertion that newspapers should incorporate editorials. However, it observed that running a controversial editorial each week could be “laying it on a little heavy, both for the community and the busy editor.” It added that the solution was not “rippin' 'em up” once a week but rather “an editorial menu of fresh thinking” based on whether it was possible to accomplish an editorial's aim.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ "Success in the Sticks," *Time*, December 21, 1962, 42.

⁵⁰⁴ Ben H. Bagdikian, "Behold the Grass-Roots Press!" *Harper's Magazine* 229:1375 (December 1964): 102-105, 110.

⁵⁰⁵ "Charge: Irresponsible," *The American Press* 82:8 (June, 1964): 4.

From country journalism to community journalism

In his book on community journalism, Byerly asserted that the term “country weekly” was misleading because it gave the impression that country weeklies “have the rustic quaintness so often depicted by fiction and scenario writers.” Byerly’s work looked at the leadership role of small-town newspapers as opposed to homespun tales of trivia in the aforementioned fiction and non-fiction works. He quoted well-known retail magnate John Wanamaker as saying, “Give me a strong newspaper, and I’ll show you a thriving town. Show me a weak newspaper, and I’ll show you a town that’s going backward. A progressive town means a progressive newspaper. No community is any stronger than its own newspaper. It’s the life blood of every community.”⁵⁰⁶

However, publishing at least one newspaper in every county was no longer a certainty because of a changing business climate. In fact, by 1960 there were only two weeklies (twenty-eight in 1910) in Missouri that were published in towns of 200 or less and only 105 weeklies (345 in 1910) in towns of less than 1,000.⁵⁰⁷ John W. Hughes, secretary and business manager of weeklies in and around Calhoun, Georgia, noted that emigration from some rural areas meant that a newspaper exclusively “for that particular political subdivision [county] cannot be justified economically.” He said that a central, jointly-owned printing plant was the only means possible to reduce capital investments to a level that would allow newspapers to continue operating in low-population areas. A central printing plant was especially beneficial to weekly publishers, who were “by talent and inclination editors rather than businessmen or production specialists,” added Hughes.⁵⁰⁸

“Country” editors had to fight accusations of being provincial and more politically conservative than the general population. Mississippi editor Hodding Carter criticized rural

⁵⁰⁶ Byerly, *Community Journalism*, 5-6.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁰⁸ “The Weekly Editor: News brief,” *Editor & Publisher* 93 (November 26, 1960): 38.

journalism critics and their use of the word “provincialism” as applied to behavior and folkways associated with the “American hinterlands.” He observed that “you can find hicks in New York City” and “world citizens in Lawrence, or Emporia, or Greenville.” While he acknowledged that small newspapers had only limited political influence, he stressed that “their local news columns give a sense of individual existence and individual worth to millions of Americans.”⁵⁰⁹ A *Florence (Ala.) Herald* editorial stated that the editor of a small-town weekly was in a unique position because he knew all members of his community and they knew how to reach him at all times. It further observed that the editor had the “heavy responsibility” of recording not only local news, but state, national, and international news as well. It concluded, “Local editors and school teachers are largely responsible for the thinking that will protect America from forces, both within and without, that would destroy the freedom we enjoy.”⁵¹⁰

But some weekly editors were just as likely as daily newspapermen to criticize their peers for being too provincial. Outspoken critic Robert Myers claimed that part of his success in publishing the country’s largest weekly was to get rid of some “sacred cows” in rural journalism. For example, he refused to participate in community drives or censor unfavorable coverage for a large advertiser. Also, he printed drunk-driving charges, regardless of the offender.⁵¹¹ He did, however, retain one characteristic of country weeklies, the personal column, and incorporated it multiple times to the extent that his newspaper ran sixteen columns each week. Ten of the columns were written by non-staffers, but all of the columnists were local residents. In addition, sixteen correspondents contributed regularly to the publication.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁹ Hodding Carter, *First Person Rural* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), 246.

⁵¹⁰ "The Editor's Job," *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*, 19 September 1963, 2.

⁵¹¹ "Success in the Sticks," 42.

⁵¹² "Local Columns Sell Subs for America's Largest Rural Weekly," *The American Press* 82:1 (November, 1963): 18-19. Column features included “Farm Program News,” “The Green Thumb,” “Rural Route One,” and “Got a Problem?” Publisher Robert Myers wrote two regular columns, one on farming, and “Owner's Report,” on the

The assertion of weekly editors being more politically conservative than the general population was often supported in presidential polls that found them supporting the conservative candidate in larger percentages. This factor was affirmed in the 1960 *Publishers' Auxiliary* presidential poll that predicted Vice President Richard M. Nixon would defeat Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy "if the newspaper executives accurately reflect their community's feelings." Roughly 62 percent of weekly editors and publishers said their communities would support Nixon, while their personal preference for Nixon was upped to 65 percent.⁵¹³ A similar result was found four years later when *The American Press* conducted a pre-election poll in September 1964 on the Lyndon Johnson-Barry Goldwater race. The poll asked daily and weekly publishers in the under-50,000 circulation category which candidate their readers would support. The results found that of the 500 publishers from forty-six states who responded to the poll, U.S. Arizona senator Goldwater won the straw poll, 60.6 percent to 39.4 percent for President Johnson, who was returned to office in a landslide vote.⁵¹⁴

But despite criticisms of being politically conservative, weekly editors asserted that their writers and editors practiced journalism just as vigorously and professionally as their daily counterparts. Letters sent to a September 1960 issue of *Editor & Publisher's* "The Weekly Editor" column strongly decried an earlier column by a New York weekly associate editor who labeled country weeklies as provincial. One letter writer noted that more weeklies were being established or taken over by former daily newspapermen, many of them journalism school graduates with "a real nose for news and understanding of and practice in good typography and makeup." The letter speculated that daily journalists took satisfaction in "looking down their

newspaper. Editor Jim Fitzgerald also contributed two columns, "Side Roads," containing local comments, and "If it Fitz," a wide-ranging commentary with a humorous twist.

⁵¹³ "Most Editors See Nixon Victory," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 5 November 1960, 1. Nearly 4,000 surveys were returned from daily and weekly editors, although the exact number of weekly editor responses was not indicated. Senator John F. Kennedy later won the race by a narrow margin.

⁵¹⁴ "Publishers Predict Goldwater Victory," *The American Press* 82:12 (October, 1964): 14.

collective noses” at the weekly press only because they were disconcerted that weeklies were more widely read and enjoyed an editorial influence and community prestige beyond most dailies, and that weeklies filled a need and fulfilled a responsibility “which no other publication of any kind achieves.”⁵¹⁵

Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman were not so concerned that weeklies were “rustic” or “quaint” in their coverage, but that they provided an unrealistic reflection of their communities. Vidich and Bensman explored the foundations of social life of a small northeastern town in their 1968 sociological work, *Small Town in Mass Society*, and pointed out that “the belief in the superiority of local ways of living actually conditions the way of life.” Their premise was based on the observation that the weekly emphasized the positive side of life, such as job promotions, school achievements, local boy makes good in big city, man opens own business, contest winners, and athletic high scorers. The authors described such news items as “self-congratulatory newspaper articles.” According to the authors, a constant newspaper focus on warm and human qualities in all public situations resulted in the public character of the community taking on those qualities, a tone that was distinctly different from city life.⁵¹⁶

A 1965 study of Minnesota weeklies had similar findings. Sociologists Clarice Olien, George Donohue, and Phillip Tichenor hypothesized that the location of the editor or publisher in the community power structure had some bearing on conflict reporting. They studied four issues each from the month of February 1965 of eighty-eight Minnesota weeklies. They found that half of the newspapers reported no controversy and thus determined that whether a paper reported conflict was associated with how power was divided within a community. For example, in larger, more pluralistic communities where power was divided among more groups and

⁵¹⁵ "The Weekly Editor: Mail Bagged," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (September 17, 1960): 34.

⁵¹⁶ Vidich and Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society*, 31, 44-45.

individuals, there tended to be more reporting of community conflict in the local newspaper than in smaller communities where the power structure was more centralized and controlling of the local press. The study also added insight into the relationship of the editor to the community power and leadership structure.⁵¹⁷

Certainly, as was the tradition of small-town journalism, there were numerous examples of “self-congratulatory” types of reporting in community newspapers during the time of the Vidich and Bensman study. A large, front-page photo in the *Desert Sentinel*, a California weekly, showed a local high school student in front of his award-winning display at the 21st Westinghouse Science Talent Search in Washington, D.C.⁵¹⁸ An editorial viewpoint column in *The Seguin (Tex.) Gazette* titled “The Unsung Builders” promoted the area’s advertising merchants, who were described as “intelligent and brave enough to invest in the community.” The editorial encouraged readers to “support them because they’re supporting you.”⁵¹⁹ *The Titonka (Ia.) Topic* carried a weekly report, “The Bowler’s Corner,” in the upper left corner of its front page featuring scores from local bowling league teams.⁵²⁰ *The Rock Valley (Ia.) Bee* contained a front-page photo and article about a local businessman as part of an ongoing series,

⁵¹⁷ Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor, "The Community Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict," 245-246, 252.

⁵¹⁸ "Young Desert Hot Springs Scientist," *Desert Sentinel*, 8 March 1962, 1. The *Sentinel*, founded in 1940, was listed as a member of the National Editorial Association. Desert Hot Springs, in Riverside County, is located in southern California, just north of Palm Springs. Desert Hot Springs had a population of 1,472 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 6, section 2, 6-28, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵¹⁹ "Editorial Viewpoint: The unsung builders," *The Seguin (Tex.) Gazette*, 29 January 1964, 2. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

⁵²⁰ "The Bowler's Corner," *The Titonka (Ia.) Topic*, 18 February 1965, 1. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

“Businessman of the Week.”⁵²¹ *The Hubbard (Oh.) News and Reporter* posted a page-one photo and article that extended happy birthday greetings to a local set of triplets.⁵²²

However, Vidich’s and Bensman’s claim that the community weekly did not report on local arrests, shotgun weddings, mortgage foreclosures, lawsuits, bitter exchanges in public meetings, suicide, “or any other unpleasant happening” was misleading. There were plenty of examples of “unpleasant happenings” scattered among the so-called “self-congratulatory” news. For example, the front page of the July 11, 1963, edition of *The Florence (Ala.) Herald* reported on a city commission meeting where a group of Negro ministers sought the establishment of a biracial committee to avert strife in reaction to desegregation. The article also referred to a request from the local president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for the commission to adopt an ordinance that would prohibit the licensing and sale of goods made in communist controlled countries.⁵²³ Interspersed among Christmas greetings and photos of busy postal workers processing greeting cards and holiday gifts was a page one story in *The Upland (Calif.) News* about narcotics possession leading to the expulsion of two local students. Other articles in the same issue reported on a hit-and-run accident that killed a local youth, a forklift

⁵²¹ "Businessman of the Week," *The Rock Valley (Ia.) Bee*, 9 June 1966, 1. The *Bee* proclaimed itself as “serving Iowa's newest city.” The paper was a member of the Iowa Press Association and the National Editorial Association. Rock Valley, in Sioux County, is located in northwest Iowa. Rock Valley had a population of 1,693 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 17, section 2, 17-27, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵²² "Happy Birthday Palko Triplets!" *The Hubbard (Oh.) News and Reporter*, 6 November 1968, 1. The paper’s nameplate identified the *News and Reporter* as the home newspaper of the Hubbard, Brookfield, and Vienna, Ohio, communities and boasted of it being “Ohio’s Prize-Winning Weekly Newspaper.” The paper earned awards in the 1968 Ohio Newspaper Contest for news coverage, advertising, sports news, and layout design. The *News and Reporter* was published by Niles Suburban Newspaper, Inc., and was a member of the National Newspaper Association (formerly National Editorial Association). Hubbard, in Trumbull County, is located in east-central Ohio, just north of Youngstown. Hubbard had a population of 7,137 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 37, section 2, 37-28, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵²³ "Negro Ministers Seek Biracial Group; Communists Hit," *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*, 11 July 1963, 1.

accident that killed an Upland man, and the arrests of four juveniles who fired shots during an after-party fracas.⁵²⁴

Not all weeklies ignored or attempted to diminish local corruption or the racial strife of the decade, as critics of the “country” press accused them of doing. Many editors endured advertising boycotts, threatening phone calls, gunshots, and fires as they refused to back down from bullying law enforcement tactics or threats to stop promoting the equal rights of Negroes. In 1964, Hazel Brannon Smith, editor and publisher of the *Lexington (Miss.) Advertiser* (and three other weeklies near Lexington), won the Pulitzer Prize, the Elijah P. Lovejoy Courage in Journalism Award, and the Women of Conscience Award from the National Council of Women of the United States for journalistic courage. The twenty-eight-year newspaper veteran fought for equitable law enforcement and took on slot machine operators, liquor law violators, gamblers, and corrupt local politicians in her editorials. But she contended that from the time she bought her first newspaper in 1936 to the bombing of the fourth weekly in her group on August 27, 1964, she was not a crusader but “only an editor printing what she believed to be the truth.”⁵²⁵ The same year she won the Pulitzer, she also faced an ongoing (since 1954) advertising boycott from the Citizens Council initiated against “Hazel, the Nigger Lover,” a \$10,000 libel suit, and the loss of her husband’s job as a hospital administrator because of her editorials.⁵²⁶ Also, her rivals started a newspaper to try to put her out of business, though they were unsuccessful.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ *The Upland (Calif.) News*, 20 December 1967, 1, 4, 10. *The Upland News*, established in 1894, included *The Cucamonga Times* (published each Wednesday) and combined classifieds serving the *News-Tribune-Times* of Upland, Montclair, Alta Loma, Cucamonga, Etiwanda, and Mt. Baldy. Upland, in San Bernardino County, is located in southern California, just east of Los Angeles. Upland had a population of 15,918 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 6, section 2, 6-30, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵²⁵ Rick Friedman, “The Weekly Editor: Women’s angle,” *Editor & Publisher* 97 (October 24, 1964): 40. Smith also won the Lovejoy award in 1960.

⁵²⁶ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$10,000 from 1964 was worth \$66,819.85. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵²⁷ Rick Friedman, “The Weekly Editor: Women’s angle (part 2),” *Editor & Publisher* 97 (October 31, 1964): 27.

Gene Wirges, editor of the 3,000-circulation *Democrat* in Morrillton, Arkansas, received the Lovejoy award in 1962 for fighting the city and county political machine. A local resident told Wirges not long after he bought the paper in 1957 that local politicians were not “elected,” but rather, “selected.” While bringing to light corrupt practices of local politicians, the editor’s home was stoned and he was shot at, beaten, and threatened in person and over the phone. At one point he sent his wife and children to Little Rock out of concern for their safety, and neighbors felt compelled to stand guard at his home. Wirges discovered that Conway County’s longtime sheriff, who was a personal friend of Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, ran the local political machine.⁵²⁸

Another 1960s Lovejoy winner was J.R. Freeman, editor and publisher of the less-than-1,000-circulation *Frederick (Colo.) Farmer and Miner*. He bravely executed a one-man mission to inform the country about a scandal surrounding shale oil deposits. Following an eighteen-month investigation, he reported on an alleged federal give-away of millions of acres of shale oil deposits in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. He received numerous threatening phone calls and letters, and three shots were fired into his car while he was on his way to meet two investigation sources. In addition to the Lovejoy award he also received the National Newspaper Association’s Herrick Editorial Award for service in the national interest.⁵²⁹ Speaking at Sigma Delta Chi’s annual subscription dinner in St. Charles, Missouri, Freeman told of an eighty-year-old man who hobbled into his office and said he wanted to subscribe to the newspaper. The man pulled out five \$20 bills and said he wanted to give that amount for a \$3.50 subscription. Freeman said he

⁵²⁸ "Varieties of Violence," *Time*, September 22, 1961, 75.

⁵²⁹ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Three bullet holes," *Editor & Publisher* 100 (July 1, 1967): 15. A fellow weekly publisher in Long Island, N.Y., wrote an editorial on Freeman's behalf, calling for the establishment of a fund to help Freeman and other newsmen who put their lives and businesses on the line for the sake of press freedom. The editorial was picked up by the International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors, of which Freeman was a member, and was reprinted for a mass mailing to weekly editors throughout the country. Editors were encouraged to subscribe to the *Farmer and Miner* to support Freeman's efforts and run the series in their own newspapers.

refused the overpayment, but the old man explained that he wanted to help Freeman continue his reporting and “give the readers at least a \$100 more worth of the story.” After Freeman refused the cash a second time, the man said, “What are you trying to do? Break an old man’s heart?”⁵³⁰

Another stereotype of “country journalism” was that weeklies, unlike their metropolitan counterparts, willingly rolled out the welcome mat to any and all free publicity. That simply was not the case. A campaign began several decades prior to discourage weeklies from “giving away” valuable space that could be sold as advertising. An example of the success of the anti-publicity campaign came in a 1960 report of a major trucking association. The association surveyed 133 Florida editors and publishers and decided to drop weeklies from its news release mailing list because of a poor response to those willing to trade editorial space for ads.⁵³¹ Also, a 1960 editorial in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* referred to a Missouri Press Association publicity control committee study of Missouri weekly newspapers. The study found that the newspapers received fifty to one hundred pieces of free publicity releases weekly. Half of the newspapers did not print any of it, and the other half said they used a story or releases occasionally. Also, 50 percent thought the publicity material had some value, 25 percent said it was worthless, and the remainder said they would rather not receive the material.⁵³²

There were a number of weekly editors like William “Bill” Stewart, longtime publisher of *The Monroe Journal* in Monroeville, Alabama, who, according to his son Steve Stewart, reluctantly ran “free press releases” only when there was not enough local copy to fill the paper. The younger Stewart worked for his father in different capacities, from cleanup boy and inserter

⁵³⁰ Rick Friedman, “The Weekly Editor: A call for help,” *Editor & Publisher* 100 (August 12, 1967): 40. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$100 from 1967 was worth \$620.78. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵³¹ “What to do with Publicity Releases,” *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, 16 January 1960, 4.

⁵³² “PR Men Told: Include Local Angles,” *The Publishers’ Auxiliary*, 2 April 1960, 4.

in the late 1950s to publisher in the mid-1990s. He added, “We almost never bought outside materials. Our goal was to fill the paper with local copy.” Newsmen throughout the state mimicked the elder Stewart’s emphasis on local news. Their admiration for Bill Stewart was demonstrated in 1959 when they elected him as president of the Alabama Press Association. Forty-one years later Alabama journalists honored his outstanding journalism career when he was inducted posthumously into the Alabama Press Association Newspaper Hall of Honor.⁵³³

Critics of country journalism were especially harsh when it came to discussing the “personals” that reported on the social gatherings and comings and goings of area residents.⁵³⁴ But proponents of community journalism argued that the personals helped the community stay connected. The society columns of dailies usually mentioned only the financially well-connected, but the personals included folks from varied income classes, although Negroes were routinely excluded from the general-circulation publications. An example of how closely readers perused the personals was relayed in a 1960 *Editor & Publisher* news brief. It noted that the *Walton (N.Y.) Reporter* published an apology to two of its readers after the weekly reported that a couple was leaving for New York on a Thursday. The report implied that the couple would spend the entire weekend there. They returned Saturday, and the wife, a church organist and choir director, went to church for a choir rehearsal, but no one else was there. The janitor told her they thought she would be out of town, as stated in the paper; so the rehearsal was cancelled. That evening, the couple surprised other invited guests at a dinner party because the paper indicated they would be out of town.⁵³⁵

Rural journalism’s traditions were defended by the city editor of the *Portland (Ore.) Journal* who was a former weekly editor-publisher. He responded to an *Editor & Publisher*

⁵³³ Steve Stewart, "E-mail interview with author," (June 25, 2009).

⁵³⁴ A personal is a short news item of local interest that features names.

⁵³⁵ "The Weekly Editor: Thursdata, Welcome home?" *Editor & Publisher* 93 (March 5, 1960): 30.

column arguing that suburban weekly newspapers were better than country weeklies. William J. Cary, Jr. said the assertion of the suburban weekly's superiority was based on the "false premise that anything bigger is automatically better." Cary also addressed criticism about the quaint wording of personals. "The fact that Mrs. Jones served a delicious dinner, as did Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown, probably will continue to appear in the news columns of the country weekly for a long time," he wrote. "Few of suburbia's editors have had to explain to an irate Mrs. Jones why, after thirty years, her dinner for the quilting club suddenly is no longer delicious."⁵³⁶

In the same *Editor & Publisher* feature responding to criticism of weekly newspapers, Annabel Atterbury, editor of the *Hustiford (Wis.) News and Rural Route Flyer*, suggested there were many high quality weeklies in the country. She listed several as recommended reading for the author who derided country weeklies. "In Montclair and Wellesley the residents don't have time for cows and corn," she added. "In the corn and dairy country, the readers have little time for drama and music except as it comes over radio and TV. Who's the snob?"⁵³⁷

Recruiting workers, advertisers, subscribers, and organization members

By the 1960s it had become more difficult for the traditional family-owned weekly to retain qualified, trained reporters and print laborers as family-owned businesses dwindled and fewer publishers could count on succeeding generations to stay in the newspaper business. Marking his tenth anniversary in the weekly publishing field, John C. Bond of Rockland, Massachusetts, stated in a 1964 *Editor & Publisher* article that he owed his early success "to a wife who knew bookkeeping, a son who turned out to be a good newspaperman, and an excellent general manager who answered his classified ad in *Editor & Publisher*."⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ William J. Cary, Jr., "The Weekly Editor: Rural press defended," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (October 22, 1960): 56.

⁵³⁷ "The Weekly Editor: Mailbagged," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (October 22, 1960): 56.

⁵³⁸ "The Weekly Editor: Wife, son & G.M.," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (September 12, 1964): 30.

At an Arizona weekly, the publisher's family members realized in a tragic way the difficulties of staffing a small newspaper when *Tombstone (Ariz.) Epitaph* publisher Layton Smith was killed in a 1964 plane crash. Illinois weekly publisher G.C. Terry and his wife were staying at a Tucson motel when they heard about the crash. They drove to Tombstone to assist the *Epitaph* staff in putting out that week's edition under "very trying circumstances."⁵³⁹

So with an increasing loss of the family-owned newspaper tradition, more and more weeklies had to recruit employees from journalism and trade schools. But recruiting staff was not an easy task for weeklies even though college journalism enrollment was up. Communication students favored dailies over weeklies as well as the higher salaries of advertising and public relations. For example, a 1960 survey of University of Oklahoma journalism seniors found that the students viewed newspaper reporting and radio broadcasting jobs as the lowest paying in the field of journalism.⁵⁴⁰

In 1960, Northern Illinois University established a department to increase cooperation among community newspapers and college journalism programs in response to the growing problem of attracting college graduates. Department chairman Dr. Donald Grubb explained that the program would help alleviate the shortage of "grass roots" journalists through several initiatives. The initiatives included enhancing recruiting efforts at the high school level, offering more scholarships in community and rural newspapering, re-examining salary scales and benefits, and working with the industry to recruit professionals.⁵⁴¹ In another recruiting effort, the *Elgin (Ill.) Courier-News* ran a series of articles on journalism schools in the Midwest to encourage high school students to pursue a journalism degree. Fred Whiting, assistant dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern, applauded the *Courier-News* series. He praised

⁵³⁹ "The Weekly Editor: Thursdata, Lends a hand," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (February 22, 1964): 55.

⁵⁴⁰ "Students Rate Newspaper Jobs as Low Paying," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 20 February 1960, 1.

⁵⁴¹ "Smaller Newspaper Employee Problem Studied at NIU," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 23 July 1960, 3.

publisher C. Raymond Long for being willing to tackle the number one problem of journalism, “the failure of most media to sell themselves to young people who might be interested in entering our field.”⁵⁴²

There were, however, some encouraging signs that aggressive staff recruiting could make a difference. The School of Journalism at the University of Nebraska reported that in 1958 and 1959, 10 to 20 percent of graduates sought a career in the weekly field. In fact, the report revealed that more students went into the weekly field in 1958 than into any other single medium, including dailies and public relations. The university attributed the results to a three-pronged approach by the Nebraska Press Association, the journalism school, and the Nebraska High School Press Association to improve their recruiting programs.⁵⁴³

By the end of the decade, hirings and salaries reached levels more attractive to college graduates and highly skilled labor as evidenced in the 19th annual cost study of the Newspaper Association Managers and the National Newspaper Association. The 1969 study found that the average weekly newspaper employed 9.2 persons and had an average 379 subscribers per employee.⁵⁴⁴ In 1967, weekly employees working full time received an average salary of \$12,524.⁵⁴⁵

Employment practices changed in the weekly field with the advent of centralized printing operations. Recruiting highly skilled labor became important because of heavy press demands and equipment maintenance. John Cameron Sim, in his book on the grassroots press, observed that a central plant was in a better position to train apprentices, to offer better fringe and

⁵⁴² Robert U. Brown, "Shop Talk at Thirty: Journalism recruiting," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (April 9, 1960): 76.

⁵⁴³ Jerry Petsche, "Publishers Seek Ways to interest J-School Graduates," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 2 January 1960, 1.

⁵⁴⁴ "Net income of average weekly dips," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (July 4, 1970): 34.

⁵⁴⁵ "The Weekly Editor: Financial report," *Editor & Publisher* 100 (June 24, 1967): 28. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$12,524 from 1967 was worth \$77,747.04. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

retirement benefits and working conditions, and to control work hours more effectively.⁵⁴⁶

Because of available equipment and skilled labor employed at centralized plants, it was easier for weeklies to publish extras. An extra was an additional issue that came out between regularly scheduled publishing dates. The most common reason for publishing an extra was that a big story broke between publishing dates, usually from Thursday through Monday. For example, a large number of weeklies published an extra following President John F. Kennedy's 1963 assassination, which occurred on a Friday.⁵⁴⁷

Women, especially homemakers, found growing employment opportunities in freelance writing, advertising sales, and production. A 1964 *American Press* article discussed the cost benefits of converting from letterpress to offset printing. In the article Ohio weekly publisher Bill Mussey said that women made excellent compositors and that "one housewife can replace one printer, too."⁵⁴⁸ A number of "housewife columnists" expanded their traditional correspondent roles to commenting on their daily lives and families in a more sophisticated and, often, humorous manner. Housewives also found employment opportunities in classified and display advertising sales.⁵⁴⁹

Recruiting top salesmen and changing publishing tactics to draw more advertisers also became a major concern as the competition for advertising dollars grew fiercer this decade. Weeklies not only had to go up against dailies, outdoor advertising, radio, and television, but also a growing number of shoppers, suburban weeklies, free-circulation weeklies, and weeklies within dailies. A New Jersey publisher was one of many weekly publishers who found that the best solution to fend off the advertising competition of an area shopper was to establish one of his own. Michael J. Torpey, general manager of the 7,000-circulation *Freehold (N.J.) Transcript*,

⁵⁴⁶ Sim, *Grass Roots Press*, 152.

⁵⁴⁷ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Extra!" *Editor & Publisher* 97 (January 4, 1964): 42.

⁵⁴⁸ "Here's One Way to Compare Offset vs. Letterpress Cost," *The American Press* 82:11 (September, 1964): 18.

⁵⁴⁹ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Housewife columnists," *Editor & Publisher* 100 (September 23, 1967): 42.

told attendees at the 1960 Mid-Atlantic Newspaper Mechanical Conference that with \$15 worth of equipment (two blades and a set-screw) he converted one of his presses to put out an eight-page tabloid on Mondays in addition to his regular standard-size Thursday edition. Torpey stated that within four months he drove the competition away by offering a combination rate for the area merchants in both the shopper tab and the regular weekly.⁵⁵⁰

Despite the threat of suburban weeklies to take away advertisers, some weeklies benefited as they were pushed to bi-weekly and tri-weekly publication schedules in order to have enough space to accommodate a growing demand for advertising, largely from car dealers, realty brokers, and suburban supermarkets. *Editor & Publisher* gave the example of the *Buena Park News-West Orange County (Calif.) Progress* that became a semi-weekly in need of a bigger building and new equipment to accommodate multiple weekly issues and more advertisers.⁵⁵¹

Another factor in attracting new advertisers to weeklies was the rapid growth of offset printing, which provided a more professional looking advertisement and illustration and photo options. While only 27 percent of the 327 weeklies (averaging twelve pages or more) that responded to a 1964 trade survey used offset, another 13 percent planned to convert to offset within two years.⁵⁵² By 1969, the 19th annual cost study of the Newspaper Association Managers and the National Newspaper Association found that two-thirds of weeklies were printed on offset presses, as compared to one-third in 1965. Of the 111 offset papers that participated in the 1969 study, sixty-eight shared presses in central printing plants.⁵⁵³

Editors were quick to embrace offset because the process was based on photography and did not involve processes that required the use of union labor workers at larger printing presses.

⁵⁵⁰ "The Weekly Editor," 74. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$15 from 1960 was worth \$105. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁵¹ "The Weekly Editor: Unforeseen demand," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (March 26, 1960): 127.

⁵⁵² "1964 Newspaper Equipment Survey," *The American Press* 82:6 (April, 1964): 14.

⁵⁵³ "Net income of average weekly dips," 34.

Since weeklies were not tied to labor contracts they could make the progression to offset more quickly than dailies.

Offset changed the appearance of many small-town newspapers, which attracted advertisers because of increased uses of illustrations, borders, screens, and color. For example, photographers were hired not only to take news photos, but advertisement photos as well. Also, the offset press brought about a more uniform tabloid page size of seventeen inches in length and eleven inches in width. Most weeklies were printed on broadsheets, referred to as broadsides, meaning a page of twenty-two inches in length and seventeen inches in width. The switch to tabloid pages for weeklies made it easier for advertisers to place the same advertisement in multiple publications without having to make changes.

Weeklies were quick to promote their visual enhancements and increased production capabilities to attract advertisers and readers. The *Emmetsburg (Ia.) Democrat* boasted about its use of photographs. Under the nameplate it stated, “Get The Whole Story--ILLUSTRATED--in The Reporter and Democrat.”⁵⁵⁴ Although *The Desert Sentinel* in Desert Hot Springs, California, stated that it did not have darkroom facilities for processing pictures, readers were invited to submit pictures and feature articles for publication. The photos were then taken to a centralized plant for offset production.⁵⁵⁵ Editor Harvey Smalley, Jr. of the *Perham (Minn.) Enterprise-Bulletin* sent a special run of his paper around the state that featured a red flag on the front page. The back page was a full-page grocery ad in two colors. A paper company paid for the promotional. A write-up about the promotional in *Editor & Publisher* stated that Smalley

⁵⁵⁴ *The Emmetsburg (Ia.) Democrat*, 9 November 1961, 1. This issue included seventeen news photos (twelve head shots) and five advertising photos. The newspaper was designated the official city and county paper and was listed as a member of the Iowa Press Association, National Editorial Association, Weekly Newspaper Bureau, and National Advertising Representatives, Inc. Emmetsburg, in Palo Alto County, is located in northwestern Iowa. Emmetsburg had a population of 3,887 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 17, section 2, 17-24, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵⁵⁵ *Desert Sentinel*, 8 March 1962, 2. This issue included six community news photos and three advertising photos. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

considered the added cost of color a minor consideration if the results were increased national advertising. He pointed out that a major drawback to national accounts for weeklies was the poor quality of reproduction, failure to follow printing instructions, and lack of merchandising services.⁵⁵⁶

One Texas weekly was apparently very successful in attracting local and national advertising through its extensive use of photos and illustrations. About 70 percent of the contents of the December, 15, 1960, edition of *The Commerce (Tex.) Journal* were local and national advertising, including four full pages (of a fourteen-page edition) for Piggly Wiggly and A&P grocery advertisements. There were also local advertisements sponsored by department stores, appliance stores, pharmacies, insurance agents, carpet and tile stores, a movie theatre featuring an Elvis Presley film, auto supply stores, a Chevrolet dealer, furniture stores, a Coca Cola bottling company, optometrists, hardware stores, banks, the gas company, the power and light company, a barbershop, the telephone company, and a group-sponsored, full-page message urging Commerce residents to “attend the church of your choice Sunday.”⁵⁵⁷

Albion (N.Y.) Advertiser publisher Peter Dragon used typefaces and trust to draw advertisers and maintain a financially successful weekly. His “Dragon System” offered Albion businessmen exclusive one-year use of a certain typeface for their advertisements. His advertisers even trusted him to determine the appropriate size of an advertisement. For example, a shoe repair store that planned to run a full-page advertisement tried to cancel at the last minute. But at Dragon’s urging, the advertiser agreed to run an advertisement, although reduced in size

⁵⁵⁶ "The Weekly Editor: News Brief," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (October 15, 1960): 58.

⁵⁵⁷ *The Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, 15 December 1960. Commerce, in Hunt County, is located in northeast Texas, east of Dallas, and is the home of East Texas State College. Commerce had a population of 5,789 in 1960. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 45, section 2, 45-36, Table 8. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

and cost. Dragon convinced the shop owner that a smaller advertisement would be just as effective. So, despite losing some advertising revenue, he retained a satisfied customer.⁵⁵⁸

Clean typography was also a hallmark of *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*. Longtime print shop manager John D. “Jack” Martin observed that his family-owned newspaper was not successful at drawing many national advertisers but that it did attract a high percentage of local advertisers because of its readability and layout design. “Our paper was very easy to read,” he recalled.⁵⁵⁹

An unprecedented example of the growing appeal of weeklies among national advertisers came with a \$500,000 Camel cigarette campaign in 1960.⁵⁶⁰ A 500-line advertisement was placed in every general circulation weekly throughout the country to promote the cigarette brand manufactured by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. *Jackson (Ga.) Herald* editor N.S. Hayden wrote *Editor & Publisher* that his paper gave the advertisement prime position “as requested” in the campaign he termed “a major breakthrough” for weekly advertising. Hayden wrote that he was stopped by several readers who remarked that the Camel advertisement added “prestige” to “their little hometown weekly.”⁵⁶¹

The printing of supplements, which are magazine-type “themed” inserts that sought paid sponsors, became more common in weeklies in the 1960s. The supplements were usually slick, full-color tabloids of varying length that required little staff effort (containing a few brief local features, but mostly photographs) and acquired special advertising revenue beyond contracted accounts. Supplement themes were often tied to local businesses and industries. For example, the *Dearborn (Mich.) Press* promoted local tourist sites, such as the Ford Motor Company’s Rouge

⁵⁵⁸ "This is the story of a Dragon named Peter...And what he has done to make his paper profitable, efficient and award-winning," *The American Press* 82:12 (October, 1964): 28, 30.

⁵⁵⁹ Martin, "In-person interview with author."

⁵⁶⁰ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$500,000 from 1960 was worth \$3,500,033.76. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁶¹ "The Weekly Editor: Mail-Bagged," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (December 17, 1960): 30.

Plant and the Henry Ford Museum, in its annual Vacation-Fun-in-Dearborn supplement. The auto industry and Dearborn Chamber of Commerce provided advertising support for the supplement. Dearborn-area tourist centers and motels received extra copies of the tourism-themed supplement. During a Wayne State University Press Club panel discussion on problems associated with publishing supplements, Kenneth Weaver of the *Birmingham (Mich.) Eccentric* reported that his paper published seven supplements a year. They varied in topics such as spring and fall fashion, gardening, new automobiles, and Christmas gifts. He agreed with other panelists that it was appropriate to include features about an advertiser's history or product, but that an advertiser's request for an "editorial puff" should be refused.⁵⁶²

But photographs, illustrations, and improved printing quality were not the only attractors that brought more advertising to weeklies. Business-boosting stunts and sponsored special events also became popular. One publisher purchased some hens and a few guineas. Then, he asked local merchants to each donate a prize, such as a pocket knife or a shirt, for which they received an advertisement in his paper. The day of the stunt, a tag bearing the name of a merchant and his prize was attached to the leg of each hen and guinea. The publicity said the chickens would "fly from the top of the tallest (two stories) building" and that whoever caught a chicken or guinea would win a prize. According to a write-up in *Editor & Publisher*, the stunt drew a large crowd from miles around and was declared a success by the publisher.⁵⁶³

The end result of increased national advertising and sponsored supplements was that weeklies were less tied to their job shops. In fact, some independent weeklies were able to relinquish outside printing jobs altogether, while chain and group newspapers found it profitable to continue to print other newspapers and specialty print jobs at the centralized plants.

⁵⁶² Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Supplements," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (February 1, 1964): 29.

⁵⁶³ Billy Smith, "The Weekly Editor: Prizes to the Swift" *Editor & Publisher* 93 (March 12, 1960): 57.

Some weeklies found that sponsorship of special events paid off not only in advertising, but also in circulation. For example, the four-paper Walnut Creek Sun Group in California sponsored political candidate nights, travel and basketball nights, rifle safety programs, swim meets, and journalism clinics. It sponsored a workshop showing how to prevent shoplifting and published carpool lists during bus strikes. The company also offered free want ads each spring to job-seeking teens.⁵⁶⁴

Weeklies had to battle free-circulation publications to maintain their paid subscribers despite their best efforts at promotions and community service. However, the classification of weeklies into “paid” and “free” did not necessarily mean that all circulation was paid at “paid” weeklies or free at “free” weeklies. Some issues were given away at paid weeklies, and some free copies were paid for at free papers, particularly if mailed out of town.⁵⁶⁵

The incentives for a weekly to become a paid circulation were to gain legal status as a newspaper, to win less costly second-class postal privileges, and to become a vehicle for public notice advertising. But new postal regulations made it tougher for newspapers to get second-class mail privileges. The regulation required that a publication with a second-class permit have at least a 65 percent paid circulation.⁵⁶⁶ Papers belonging to the Audit Bureau of Circulations had

⁵⁶⁴ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Promotion pays off," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (June 13, 1964): 40.

⁵⁶⁵ Kenneth R. Byerly, "The Future of America's Weeklies," *The Grassroots Editor* 4 (July, 1963): 3. Weekly paid circulation had continuously grown since the mid-1950s and set a record-breaking high of \$24,399,490 in 1962 for the ninth straight year.

⁵⁶⁶ The U.S. Postal Manual, Section 132.225 reads: "List of Subscribers. Publications must have a legitimate list of persons who have subscribed by paying or promising to pay for copies to be received during a stated time." Section 132.227 reads: "Free Circulation Publications. Publications designed primarily for free circulation may not qualify for second-class privileges. Publications are designed primarily for free circulation when the total number of copies furnished during any 12-month period to legitimate paid subscribers (see 132.225) and to the purchasers of single copies constitutes less than 65 percent of the total number of copies distributed by mail at the second-class pound rates or the transient rate, by the publishers' carriers, and by other means for any purpose. See 132.31a. NOTE: The 65 per centum paid circulation standard established by this paragraph is effective upon publication. Publications which do not meet this standard but which now have second-class permits must maintain at least 55 per centum paid circulation until December 31, 1961, after which date the 65 per centum standard must be complied with."

no problem with the ruling because a 75 percent paid circulation was a requirement for ABC membership.⁵⁶⁷

As their competition for subscriptions increased, weeklies became more aggressive in their tactics to maintain and attract new readers, such as sponsoring contests and offering prizes.⁵⁶⁸ For example, a 1967 edition of *The Upland (Calif.) News* used a full page to promote the “Greater Upland Stores ... Gift-O-Rama.” The grand prize was a \$539 color television set. The promotional included a coupon for the grand-prize drawing along with instructions to fill out the coupon and return it to one of the fourteen participating merchants. The sponsoring merchants also included in-store coupons or small advertisements on the promotional page.⁵⁶⁹ *The Hubbard (Oh.) News and Reporter* in 1968 sponsored a bingo contest that had five business sponsors and ran for more than two months. A headline in the November 6 edition read “We Goofed!” and explained that the bingo number for the previous week’s issue was accidentally omitted. The *News and Reporter* issued an apology along with the aforementioned bingo number, printed on a cartoon drawing of a bug labeled “Bingo Bug No. 64.” As a result of the omission, contestants were given an extended deadline to turn in a winning card. The same *News and Reporter* edition included a two-thirds page promotional headlined “Enjoy a Fabulous Football Holiday in Sunny Miami.” The newspaper group that owned the *News and Reporter* sponsored a Super Bowl weekend tour for a special reduced-price group rate.⁵⁷⁰

The Super Bowl trip represented the kind of “trade out” advertising often practiced in the travel industry. Publishers received discounts and giveaways as incentives for subscribers in

⁵⁶⁷ "Publishers Are Finding it Tougher to Get Second Class Entry," *The National Publisher* (April, 1961): 15.

⁵⁶⁸ A University of Washington Weekly Newspaper survey revealed that the average subscription rates in 1960 were \$3.38 for the more prosperous weeklies and \$3.21 for the less prosperous. Billy Smith, "The Weekly Editor: Newspaper survey," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (April 23, 1960): 148.

⁵⁶⁹ "Greater Upland Stores ... Gift-O-Rama," *The Upland (Calif.) News*, 20 December 1967, 11. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$539 from 1967 was worth \$3,346.03. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁷⁰ *The Hubbard (Oh.) News and Reporter*, 6 November 1968, 3, 16. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

exchange for “free” advertising space. For example, a Chicago-based travel agency advertisement in *Editor & Publisher* encouraged publishers to trade out advertising space for travel accommodations that would be “ideal for prizes, contests, awards, or your family vacation.” The advertisement listed various trade-out options such as Caribbean cruises and resort accommodations along the Gulf and East coasts.⁵⁷¹

An Arizona publisher opted for the personal touch instead of promotions as a means to attract subscribers. W.H. Shurtleff III, of the *Marana (Ariz.) Times*, spent one afternoon a week visiting homes in outlying rural communities. He wrote up the folksy news and sent marked copies to the families he visited who were not subscribers. He also encouraged local merchants to tell him who frequented their stores so that he could make a mention of local shoppers in the newspaper.⁵⁷²

However, an article in *Editor & Publisher* questioned whether a weekly could have too many subscribers. Billy Smith argued that properly guided circulation was as important to the small weekly as it was to the large daily. As an example, he referred to a North Carolina weekly that, on press day, needed three persons working steadily for two hours to handle single-wrap subscriptions, many going out of state.⁵⁷³ But publisher Henry Beetle Hough of the *Vineyard Gazette* in Edgartown, Massachusetts, took issue with that observation, responding in *Editor & Publisher* that “The only limit to the circulation a weekly should have is the circulation it can get, no matter where.”⁵⁷⁴

In fact, by the end of the decade circulation among weeklies totaled more than 3.3 million. Audit Bureau of Circulation weekly newspapers reported total circulations during 1969 of 3,303,942, the highest U.S. total since 1965. Average circulation of ABC weeklies increased

⁵⁷¹ "Reciprocal Trades," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (December 17, 1960): 30.

⁵⁷² Billy Smith, "The Weekly Editor: More on circulation," *Editor & Publisher* 93 (April 16, 1960): 30.

⁵⁷³ Billy Smith, "The Weekly Editor: Too much circulation?" *Editor & Publisher* 93 (March 5, 1960): 30.

⁵⁷⁴ Smith, "The Weekly Editor: More on circulation," 30.

to 8,341 during 1969, as compared to 8,019 the previous year. Increases in total weekly circulation were reported in twenty-four of the forty-two states with ABC weekly newspapers. The 396 weeklies included in the study showed a net increase of 16,274. The largest circulation increases were reported in California, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. All figures for the report were taken from publisher's statements for the period ending September 30, 1969.⁵⁷⁵

Recruitment also became an important issue for professional associations that catered to the weekly newspaper field because of an increased focus on member services, such as publications and advertising services, and political lobbying on behalf of the industry. In 1961, the Weekly Newspaper Representatives, serving as a national advertising service for weeklies, wanted to expand its business into the small-daily field and was renamed American Newspaper Representatives. ANR bought Greater Weeklies in 1965, adding a professional listing service to its rate-setting, uniform billing program. In 1962 the National Editorial Association purchased *The Publishers' Auxiliary* trade newspaper from the FWP (Farwell W. Perry) Corporation, which was a successor to the national newspaper syndicate Western Newspaper Union. The NEA's publication, *National Publisher*, was absorbed by the *Auxiliary* in 1968. In 1964, the NEA officially changed its name to the National Newspaper Association.

The rapid growth in suburban weeklies resulted in the 1960 formation of a group of eight Chicago publishers into the Suburban Press Foundation, which by 1967 had grown to fifty-two publishers who represented 200 weeklies in major metropolitan areas. At first, most of them also retained their membership in the larger National Editorial Association, but they soon felt the need for a professional association that addressed the specific needs of the suburban weekly industry. Some suburban weekly publishers speaking at a workshop of the seventy-ninth annual meeting of the NEA in New York cited a sharp line of distinction between the suburban paper

⁵⁷⁵ "The Weekly Editor: Circulation gain," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (April 4, 1970): 30.

and the typical hometown weekly. They said NEA was unable to serve their interests and pointed to Suburban Press Foundation as an organization that better addressed their problems of labor, competition, and distribution. The suburban press publishers asked NEA to consider SPF as a supplementary or subsidiary group, rather than as a replacement. They wanted to remain with NEA because it was important in terms of staging conventions, providing a Washington voice and national advertising representation, and sponsoring travel study missions.⁵⁷⁶ NEA did not approve the request; so the Suburban Newspapers of America, an offshoot of NEA, was formed in 1964. Two years later the National Newspaper Association (formerly NEA) board approved a Suburban Newspaper Section with the NNA.

Other professional media groups also began to respect the business acumen and professional work of their peers in the non-daily newspaper field. For example, in 1960 the International Press Institute, with 1,300 members worldwide including 326 United States members, let down its barrier for membership to weekly, semi-weekly, and tri-weekly newspapers in the United States.⁵⁷⁷

The regional concept

Although gradually introduced in the previous decade, “regional concept” was the new label given to the varied operating agreements that developed among weeklies during the 1960s. According to *Editor & Publisher* writer Rick Friedman, the term generally took two forms. One form was a group operation of separate editions offering combined advertising rates and local coverage to large chunks of population. The second form was a single, large, free-circulation

⁵⁷⁶ "NEA," *The American Press* 82:9 (July, 1964): 16.

⁵⁷⁷ "Press Group Opens Doors to Weeklies," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 13 August 1960, 8.

newspaper, falling somewhere between the shopper's distribution patterns and the community weekly's feature approach.⁵⁷⁸

The regional concept was incorporated into eight Kentucky papers, with a combined circulation of 40,000, that joined together to form Greater Kentucky Publishing, Inc. A 4,000-square-foot printing plant was constructed near the town of Shelby from capital raised through a Small Business Administration loan and equal stock purchases among the eight owners. Each paper prepared its own pages at their respective locations while camera, plate-making, and presswork were conducted at the plant. A bonus for advertisers was that they received the 40,000-circulation audience without an extra charge. Also a twelve-to-sixteen page classified tabloid was inserted weekly, although sales, billing, and composition were handled separately by each paper.⁵⁷⁹

Another example of the regional concept was Hartley Newspapers of Columbus, Ohio, which was featured in an *Editor & Publisher* article. The group operated seven weeklies and a metropolitan daily. Duplication of pages (including classifieds) in various editions saved time, personnel, and composing room costs, but each paper had a separate front page, sports page, society page, church page, and several inside pages. The article pointed out that the operation drew large advertisers who would not have considered advertising in the smaller, individual papers.⁵⁸⁰

The regional concept included some quirky combinations as well. A husband and wife team in Minnesota operated the *Trimont Progress* and the *Ceylon Herald* in which a double front page made the *Progress* two newspapers in one. *Progress* subscribers got their Trimont (population, 942) news on the first four pages of an eight-page paper, with Ceylon (population,

⁵⁷⁸ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Regional concept," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (June 20, 1964): 42.

⁵⁷⁹ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Kentucky central plant," *Editor & Publisher* 100 (February 25, 1967): 38.

⁵⁸⁰ Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Regional concept," 42.

554) news on the back four pages. It was the reverse for *Herald* subscribers, with Ceylon news featured on the first four pages. A fold in the middle of the paper made the switch in news sections possible.⁵⁸¹

Another regional concept was the twin-weekly, a longtime operation model for Clarion County, Pennsylvania, publisher William C. Hearst. In fact, he claimed to oversee Pennsylvania's first dual political operation. Active in Republican politics, Hearst bought the *Clarion Republican* in 1941 and added the *Clarion Democrat* seven years later. Reasoning that the town should support two co-operating as well as two competitive newspapers, he changed the publishing schedule to Tuesday for the *Democrat* and left it at Thursday for the *Republican*. The partisan papers were still going strong in the 1960s during which time the news editor, a Democrat, was responsible for editorials for that partisan publication. Hearst continued to write editorials for the *Republican*. The operation included merged advertising, bookkeeping, circulation, general news departments, and production and printing facilities. Subscribers paid \$5 a year for the two newspapers, although they were not required to accept both.⁵⁸²

A major advantage to operating by the regional concept was that it helped weeklies to bring down the cost per thousand in advertising. The higher cost of placing advertisements in smaller circulation newspapers was going against the weekly in local and national advertising prospects, according to Al Stanford, publisher of the *Milford (Conn.) Citizen*. As he explained, it cost the same to set a newspaper, whether 1,000 copies or 500,000. He said the weekly had to offer larger circulations or lower its composition cost dramatically to overcome the disadvantage of cost-per-thousand estimates.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Gene Malott, "The Weekly Editor: His and hers," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (August 29, 1964): 30. Gordon Spielman edited the *Progress*, and his wife, Phyllis, edited the *Herald*.

⁵⁸² Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: Twin weekly's politics," *Editor & Publisher* 97 (November 7, 1964): 40.

⁵⁸³ Rick Friedman, "The Weekly Editor: The fourth criterion," *Editor & Publisher* 100 (February 18, 1967): 49. Compton was one of the three founding partners of the Compton Advertising Agency in New York before World

Looking ahead

Overall, weeklies were financially sound at the end of the 1960s. A 19th annual cost study by the Newspaper Association Managers and the National Newspaper Association found that the average weekly newspaper in 1969 earned a net income of 8.5 percent, almost equal to the profit in the previous year. The average income per subscriber for all newspapers participating in the study was \$43.15, an increase of \$7.95 per paper over the previous year.⁵⁸⁴ The distribution of income per subscriber was \$25.60 advertising, \$3.54 circulation, \$12.23 printing, and \$4.48 miscellaneous. Income for the paper per employee was \$15,238, a drop of \$357 from the previous year.⁵⁸⁵

But in considering the business outlook for weeklies in the coming decade, David Bowers wrote in *Journalism Quarterly* that centralized printing was a key factor from which two conflicting trends were emerging. One was the growth of chain or group ownership, which would bring new newspapers and the revival of competition in one-newspaper communities. The other trend was the impact that centralized printing of weeklies could have in a mass society, especially at the grassroots level. The tremendous growth of centralized printing of weekly newspapers could be significant to communications at the grassroots level, he reasoned, because it permitted anyone with little capital to start a newspaper.⁵⁸⁶

The American Press's 1968 industry forecast survey among weekly, suburban, and daily newspaper publishers indicated that new computer technology with photocomposition was "fast

War II. He later became the Bureau of Advertising's director and developed the slogan, "All Business is Local" for newspapers.

⁵⁸⁴ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$43 from 1969 was worth \$243.13 and \$15,238 was worth \$86,159.73. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁸⁵ "Net income of average weekly dips," 34. The study received 161 survey responses from publishers in forty states. The net income was figured after deducting a uniform and modest salary for the publisher.

⁵⁸⁶ David R. Bowers, "The Impact of Centralized Printing on the Community Press," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (Spring, 1969): 43.

becoming an accepted way of producing the words,” and offset was “entrenched” as the printing process. The survey noted that these technological advances occurred during the 1960s, “a decade which saw the greatest advances in newspaper mechanical production since Gutenberg in the fifteenth century.” And finally, survey participants observed that “progressive” newspapers would have to invest in large capital expenditures to purchase computerized equipment and offset presses but that the new devices would enable them to cut production costs and produce a better product.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁷ "The year that was...and the years ahead," *The American Press* 86:3 (January, 1968): 27, 29.

Chapter Eight

The 1970s: Careers, Content, Consumers, Consolidations, and Computerization

In the 1970s, mass media academics and sociologists, journalism educators and students, and newspaper industry and association professionals closely examined or considered community weeklies in terms of career opportunities, content, consumers, consolidations, and computerization. A tight hiring market in journalism led a growing number of college graduates and unemployed metropolitan daily workers to seek a career in the weekly field. Just as more college graduates reached out to community newspapers, so did their professors who initiated more academic studies in the areas of weekly newspaper content and consumers. In addition, consolidations of business operations, production, facilities, and staffing became more aggressive in the 1970s, due in large part to rapidly advancing technology, particularly in computerized operations.

A record number of journalism graduates, technology that reduced staffing requirements, and an economic recession that reduced hiring, led to a critical mass in the newspaper job market during the 1970s. As a result, more college graduates turned to weekly newspapers for long-term career choices as opposed to a steppingstone on the way to a metropolitan daily. Even career daily journalists began to view the weekly as an opportunity rather than a temporary stay-over between daily positions. Journalism education and job preparation became a topic of discussion in the tight job market. Job satisfaction also came into the discussion as former daily journalists came to recognize the value of the multi-tasking skills required of a non-daily staff member.

The content of weeklies had long been the subject of criticism and ridicule among the metropolitan press and academic elites. But there was difficulty in conducting content analyses of weeklies because many small-town publications were not available in original, microfilm, or microfiche form except in their local libraries. However, as weeklies became more accessible at metropolitan and university libraries, a growing number of academics conducted content analysis studies to accurately depict the types of information available in the weekly press. Likewise, more aggressive academic and industry studies looked at the societal aspects of the weekly newspaper consumer. Thus, the important questions of who read a weekly and what were they reading were answered more scientifically and less anecdotally. In addition, some weeklies faced the threat of invasive weekly zoned editions from metropolitan dailies that attempted to tap into “localism” along with weeklies’ advertising and readership markets.

Consolidations of weeklies into group and chain ownership and the resulting loss of independent family-owned newspapers became a major topic of discussion among newspaper businessmen and their professional associations. The consolidation concept of drawing strength in numbers also related to circulation as weekly owners debated the advantages and disadvantages of paid versus free circulation in terms of cost and competition.

Finally, computer technology changed every facet of operations, from newsgathering and writing, to production and distribution. Veteran personnel became perplexed as they had to abandon traditional practices and procedures to comply with new technology standards. It was a move some were not willing to take. Many veteran personnel opted for retirement, which created job openings for more newcomers to join the weekly employee ranks.

The weekly job market

The perceived role that *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein had in bringing down the Richard Nixon presidency in the 1974 Watergate scandal was often linked to an explosion in college journalism enrollment in the mid- to late-1970s. But some academics argued that there were several other factors that drew students to the field even before Watergate. A 1974 article in *Journalism Educator* revealed statistics from the country's 158 journalism schools and departments that reported more than 48,000 students in four-year and graduate college and university programs majored in journalism, which was a 15.9 percent increase from the previous year. This increase in journalism enrollment was compared to level or slight decreases in other academic disciplines (although not specified in the article). In 1970, the journalism enrollment increase was only 5.9 percent from the previous year, but then began rising steadily with increases of 10.8 percent in 1971 and 13.6 percent in 1972.⁵⁸⁸ Despite the "obvious glamour of Watergate" and its "getting the credit, or blame, for creating a flood of academic journalism groupies," American University professor Robert Blanchard outlined several other reasons why journalism enrollment had increased to 55,000 in 1975, based on statistics from the Association for Journalism in Education. He said journalism enrollment increases were part of a national student rebellion against higher education, which began in the mid-1960s. And similar to business and law schools, journalism schools provided "preparation for careers with specific, applicable skills." He referred to a waning appreciation for a broad liberal arts education and observed that students found "particularly refreshing journalism's traditional adversary relationship with government." Also, journalism schools addressed the emerging mass communication field of study whereas other academic disciplines had not. And

⁵⁸⁸ Paul V. Peterson, "U.S. J-enrollments Jump Nearly 16 Per Cent," *Journalism Educator* 28:4 (January, 1974): 3.

finally, Blanchard asserted that the skills, values and applied knowledge taught in media studies could be used in a variety of fields upon graduation.⁵⁸⁹

A rapid enrollment growth in college journalism programs, coupled with an economic recession, resulted in a tight job market for the newspaper industry overall. Not only were graduates struggling to find positions, but also veteran reporters. Therefore, some college graduates and veteran reporters who previously would not have considered seeking a position at a non-daily publication did so.

Responding to those who snubbed their noses at weekly newspaper work, Clemson, South Carolina, *Messenger* editor George Padgett was quoted in *Editor & Publisher* about misconceptions concerning the weekly field. He said that beliefs among some journalists that working on a weekly was “non-professional, non-challenging, and lacking in the excitement and glamour of a daily” were “pure bunk.” He speculated that out-of-work newsmen who sought weekly jobs as “last resorts” would find that the weekly staffer worked long hours for what, admittedly, was low pay as compared to dailies. However, the weekly staffer enjoyed a “variety of experiences the likes of which the daily reporter may never have.” Also, Padgett pointed out that weekly reporters had an opportunity to do more demanding in-depth coverage of events, such as informing readers what the passage of a sewer bond referendum would do to local taxes.⁵⁹⁰

In an effort to determine what weekly newspapers paid newsroom employees, Northeastern University and the New England Press Association sponsored a salary survey in 1974. It reviewed the salaries of reporters, reporters-photographers, editors, advertising salesmen, advertising managers, and general managers from seventy-three New England

⁵⁸⁹ Robert O. Blanchard, "Rising J-enrollments Caused by More than Watergate Glamor," *Journalism Educator* 30:3 (October, 1975): 56-58.

⁵⁹⁰ Mark Mehler, "The Weekly Editor: More work than play," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (June 9, 1973): 19.

weeklies and small dailies (up to 25,000 circulation) in a six-state area. It found that reporters with up to five years' experience earned a median salary of \$148.50 per week (\$7,722 per year) while those with more experience received median salaries of \$187.50, or \$9,750 per year.⁵⁹¹ An editor of a paper with more than five years' experience who more than likely doubled as a reporter earned a median salary of \$200 per week (\$10,400 per year). Assistant publishers or general managers were paid an average of \$282.50 per week, or \$14,690 yearly.⁵⁹² A 1975 National Newspaper Association (NNA) study showed that weekly publishers with a volume of \$200,000 to \$400,000 paid themselves on average \$19,211. The study noted that since publishers reaped both salary and profits, the two figures should be considered together. For example, weekly publishers, on average, provided a net profit before income of \$26,909, on an average gross income of \$286,090.⁵⁹³ In comparison, a college graduate starting at a daily in 1975 earned a median salary of \$140 per week, or \$7,280 annually.⁵⁹⁴

A 1976 survey by The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund showed that nearly seven of every ten college graduates who majored in a news-editorial sequence found daily or weekly newspaper jobs.⁵⁹⁵ *Publishers' Auxiliary* reported that only three percent of weeklies planned to reduce staff in 1975 while nearly one-fifth looked to hire college graduates. Ninety percent of daily newspapers anticipated either staff reductions or no increases in staffing for 1975. The

⁵⁹¹ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$7,722 from 1974 was worth \$32,456.82 and \$9,750 was worth \$40,980.83. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁹² George Speers and Richard W. Davis, "Salaries of Community Newspapers in New England for 1974," *Journalism Quarterly* 52:2 (Summer, 1975): 346. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$10,400 from 1974 was worth \$43,712.89 and \$14,690 was worth \$61,744.46. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁹³ "NNA Cost Study Shows What Weekly Publishers Pay Themselves," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 August 1976, 1. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$19,211 from 1975 was worth \$73,983.05, \$26,909 was worth \$103,628.64, and \$286,090 was worth \$1,101,754.70. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁹⁴ "1975 Grads Found Jobs, Newspaper Fund Reports," *Journalism Educator* 31:3 (October, 1976): 24. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$7,280 from 1975 was worth \$28,035.84. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁵⁹⁵ In 1958, editors of the *Wall Street Journal* established The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund to improve the quality of journalism education and the pool of applicants for jobs in the newspaper business.

survey also revealed that weeklies found other newspapers to be their second best source for recruiting newsroom employees, indicating an overall shift to more dependence on skilled personnel.⁵⁹⁶ So despite the fact that many college journalism graduates had ignored weeklies because of perceptions of less professionalism and lower salaries, more turned to small-town newspapers by the mid- to late-1970s because of better job opportunities.

Given job demand, how well were colleges and universities preparing students for the community newspaper field? Not very well, according to a 1978 Association of Education in Journalism and NNA survey. Results showed that only five schools of journalism (of a possible 300) offered a sequence, option, or emphasis in community journalism, Twenty-five more colleges taught one or more courses in community journalism.⁵⁹⁷ A few textbooks published in the 1970s were specific to community journalism work. They included Bruce M. Kennedy's *Community Journalism: A Way of Life*,⁵⁹⁸ John McKinney's *How to Start Your Own Community Newspaper*,⁵⁹⁹ and *How to Produce a Small Newspaper* by Edward Miller, Kathleen Cushman, and Larry Anderson.⁶⁰⁰

A 1976 debate took place about the practicality of a formal journalism education. Some small-town editors asserted in a *Journalism Educator* article that college training focused too much on theory and not enough on the practical side of the profession. They complained that some journalism schools tended to point students to the big dailies and did not give students a proper background for the self-starting responsibilities demanded on a community newspaper. Most of the editors interviewed for the article agreed that more attention should be given to

⁵⁹⁶ Theodore Serrill, "Weeklies Attract More Graduates," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 25 April 1975, 1.

⁵⁹⁷ Quintus C. Wilson, "Community Journalism Makes Curriculum Gains," *Journalism Educator* 33:4 (January, 1979): 9.

⁵⁹⁸ Bruce M. Kennedy, *Community Journalism, A Way of Life* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1974).

⁵⁹⁹ John McKinney, *How to Start Your Own Community Newspaper*, 3 ed. (Port Jefferson, N.Y.: Meadow Press, 1977).

⁶⁰⁰ Edward Miller, Kathleen Cushman, and Larry Anderson, *How to Produce a Small Newspaper* (Harvard, Mass.: The Harvard Common Press, 1978).

courses about the newspaper business. Ro [sic] Gardner, publisher of the *Lake Elsinore* (Calif.) *Valley Sun*, said, “The more students can learn about doing a little bit of everything--even if it be pricing job printing in a Franklin catalogue, the economics of country journalism, and practical plumbing--it will help on a small weekly.”⁶⁰¹

University of Missouri publications manager John English and journalism professor David Martinson countered that it was especially important for their students who took positions at small dailies and weeklies to be well versed in First Amendment rights and “the societal obligations of the press, particularly at the grassroots level.” The authors observed that an enrollment explosion in journalism gave smaller newspapers an opportunity to hire outstanding journalism students “who before would not have considered anything but the prestigious metropolitan dailies.”⁶⁰²

However, there were college journalism students like Ben Kocher who never viewed the weekly newspaper field as a second-best choice to working at a metropolitan daily. At age twenty-four, he formed a self-named company and purchased his hometown weekly, *The Millersburg* (Pa.) *Sentinel*. As the only member of his high school graduating class to return to Millersburg after attending college, Kocher said townspeople viewed his purchase of the paper “in terms of hope that the youth drain from the town could be reversed.” The history and political science major joined the *Sentinel* staff shortly before college graduation, advancing to associate editor before purchasing the paper.⁶⁰³

The debate on theoretical versus practical skills courses in journalism education continued as some critics described journalism graduates as “academic zombies.” Others

⁶⁰¹ Clifton O. Lawhorne, "Editors of Smaller Newspapers See Weaknesses in J-education," *Journalism Educator* 31:1 (April, 1976): 3-5.

⁶⁰² John M. English and David L. Martinson, "Cures Suggested by Editors Might be Worse than Disease," *Journalism Educator* 31:3 (October, 1976): 48-49.

⁶⁰³ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Youth takes over," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (January 17, 1970): 309.

countered that theory courses comprised only 30 to 40 percent of the curriculum. To improve journalism education, some professionals suggested that more emphasis be placed on the student newspaper as a training ground and on master's degrees and professional internships.⁶⁰⁴

Practical journalism experience became the cornerstone of a University of Arizona community journalism project in 1975 when students began publishing the fifty-nine-year-old *Tombstone (Ariz.) Epitaph*. The weekly circulated 400 local copies and sent 4,100 copies by mail. It focused on historical articles and local news. But the publisher realized that out-of-town readers were not as interested in local news; so he separated the newspaper into two publications. Publisher Harold O. Love, a Detroit lawyer, continued writing articles with a heavy emphasis on historical Tombstone and western lore for the *Tombstone Epitaph Journals*. The students took over publication of the *Tombstone Epitaph, Local Edition*, which focused on community news.⁶⁰⁵

Some professionals considering ways to improve journalism education also suggested that "mid-career" educational programs be made available to young journalists who were already working in the profession. In response to a call for educational opportunities for working journalists, the NNA and the National Editorial Foundation established a program in 1976 to help working small-town journalists broaden their skills. The NEF also sponsored the National Blue Ribbon Newspaper "accreditation" program and served as a support member of the American Council on Education in Journalism.⁶⁰⁶

Aside from entry-level jobs, management opportunities for women were more readily available at weeklies than dailies, although men continued to hold a large majority of the better-

⁶⁰⁴ D. Earl Newsome, Curtis MacDougall, et al, "A Crisis on the Campus - Is The Emphasis on Theory Undermining Journalism Education - And Ruining Tomorrow's Journalists?" *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 23 May 1977, 18.

⁶⁰⁵ "Students Take Over Tombstone 'Epitaph'," *Journalism Educator* 30:1 (April, 1975): 33.

⁶⁰⁶ "NEF Plans Community Journalism Program," *Journalism Educator* 31:1 (April, 1976): 41.

paying positions. A 1977 Indiana University survey found that 18 percent of female weekly employees held management positions, as compared to only 2.4 percent at dailies.⁶⁰⁷ The survey also found that men owned, entirely or in part, 72 percent of the 182 weeklies responding to the national survey. Females owned only 16 percent of the 182 papers. Twelve percent of the papers were jointly owned by male-female partnerships. In addition, 86 percent of female weekly employees made less than \$15,000 as compared to 45 percent of men.⁶⁰⁸ According to respondents, there were several key reasons that employment opportunities were better for women at weeklies than dailies. These included lower salaries, fewer male applicants, heavy employment turnover, less competition for positions, and more part-time jobs.⁶⁰⁹

The *Duncannon* (Pa.) *Record* and the *Perry County* (Pa.) *Times*, featured in a 1970 *Editor & Publisher* article, represented typical employment patterns among females in family-owned newspapers. Richard Swank, publisher and editor of both papers, had one daughter serve as an assistant editor and the other as a photographer. Both women were in their early twenties. Another female employee in her twenties, whom Swank described as a “gal-Friday,” were the backbone of the papers, according to the fifty-three-year-old publisher. The *Record’s* masthead promoted the publication as “An old newspaper with a young outlook.”⁶¹⁰

One female editor in the 1970s who did not rely on marital status or family connections to land her the title of editor-publisher started her own paper. In 1970, Hazel Hout McKinnon founded the *Northeast Arkansas Town Crier*, which served nine communities. The former school teacher began writing news on a typewriter and soliciting advertisements from a home office in

⁶⁰⁷ Management positions defined in the study were publisher, assistant publisher, editor, manager, director, and assistant editor, manager, or director. The survey was based on 182 weekly respondents from all geographical regions in the United States.

⁶⁰⁸ In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$15,000 from 1979 was worth \$42,856.97. <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.

⁶⁰⁹ Susan Holly, "Women in Management of Weeklies," *Journalism Quarterly* 56:4 (Winter, 1979): 811-814.

⁶¹⁰ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Young at heart," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (October 24, 1970): 40.

Manila, Arkansas. The paper was printed at an offset plant ninety miles away. McKinnon also served as photographer and employed three part-time workers to help with production and distribution of the twelve-to-twenty-page publication. She told *Editor & Publisher*, “We’ve got an Addressograph (mailing label) machine in the kitchen, makeup tables on the back porch, which also serves as the main office, and I work from an old-fashioned roll-top desk in the den.” She said the *Crier* concentrated on “chatty” news, which she distinguished from “country-type” news because it referred to local events and individual accomplishments as opposed to the comings and goings of residents.⁶¹¹

Other women were finding success on the business side of the weekly news operation. Employment surveys regularly found classified departments heavily staffed with women, largely due to part-time job opportunities. But Marianne O’Neil found success as manager of the classified advertising department that served Long Island, New York’s, Community Newspaper Inc., which included five weeklies. At the time of a 1970 *Editor & Publisher* feature article, O’Neil’s strategies worked to boost the classified pages total to six per week, published in a section carried by all five papers. One strategy she proposed was to write down the phone numbers listed on the sides of commercial trucks and contact the owners to solicit advertising. Of eleven full- and part-time staff members, the two male employees were designated to handle out-of-office, recruitment real-estate, and automotive advertisements.⁶¹²

Content: more personal journalism, less publicity

Did weeklies aspire to be simply smaller versions of metropolitan dailies, or did they view their community role differently, and thus purposely differ in content choices and

⁶¹¹ Mike Masterson, "The Weekly Editor: Former teacher gets on-the-job education," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (July 21, 1973): 22.

⁶¹² Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Classified success," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (October 17, 1970): 40.

performance expectations of their college-trained employees? This question was explored by California State University-Long Beach journalism professor Gerald C. Stone and student Janet Morrison. They considered whether small-circulation newspapers lacked standards or if they served different purposes than the metropolitan press. They reviewed various studies in the community newspaper field that seemed to show hometown newspapers met a different set of goals. They conducted a content analysis of community weeklies and small-circulation dailies to compare content.⁶¹³ The study found that weekly and daily newspapers tended to carry similar types of content. However, they found that circulation had a bearing on the proportions of various types of content. For example, their findings indicated that lower-circulation newspapers stressed grassroots copy and legal advertising and contained more society and correspondents' copy. Smaller papers also had a higher ratio of publicity material but contained fewer paid features, local pictures, and national advertising.⁶¹⁴ Bradley Greenberg's 1964 investigation of community newspapers concluded that the small-town newspaper served as a tool of unification in the community. In printing local news and pictures that the larger urban daily newspapers did not publish, the community press supplemented rather than substituted for the larger papers, Greenberg asserted.⁶¹⁵

Content, political relationships, and finances were the dependent variables of a follow-up study in which Stone and Patrick Mazza considered the impact of consensus theory on the community newspaper organization. The study considered the independent variables of length of time the publisher lived in a community, whether the publisher identified himself as a top

⁶¹³ Content reviewed was wire news, local news, local society, local sports, paid features, public relations, editorials-columns, correspondent copy, obituaries, wire pictures, free pictures, miscellaneous, national ads, local ads, classified ads, legal ads, and political ads.

⁶¹⁴ Gerald C. Stone and Janet Morrison, "Content as a Key to the Purpose of Community Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 53:3 (Autumn, 1976): 494, 497-498.

⁶¹⁵ Bradley Greenberg, "Community Press as Perceived by its Editors and Readers," *Journalism Quarterly* 41 (Summer, 1964): 437, 440.

community leader, and the size of the community. The authors observed that consensus between the publisher and the community power structure did not interfere “with the normal flow of news or editorial comment, at least not in the percentages of new or editorial matter carried.” The publisher could not expect financial gain (advertising revenue, in particular) from close associations with members of the community power structure, according to the study. The authors thus concluded that motives for “boosterism” were either the publisher’s own civic pride or “a desire by him to lessen potential strain between himself and his friends in the power structure.”⁶¹⁶

The new owners of the *Deer Park (Tex.) Progress* made a front-page promise to its readers on the type of content they could expect in their hometown weekly. The open letter to the community stated that community news, church news, school news, official news of the city, and personal news of “everyone who lives in Deer Park” would be the “backbone” of the *Progress*. It continued, “There is much to be done in the community as Deer Park continues its meteoric growth, and *The Progress* hopes to be in the middle of this effort to publicize what ought to be done, what is being done and, if necessary, what ought not be done.”⁶¹⁷

So, despite decades of avoiding “crusading” editorials in favor of placating the business community and local political power structure, more weekly editors in the 1970s deemed it important to use their perceived influence to advocate ideas and actions, and to scold local officials when necessary. However, reporting “what ought not be done” was more challenging, and, yes, even more threatening, to the weekly publisher than the daily publisher because of familiarity among small-town residents. Despite earlier studies that pointed to an inconsistent use

⁶¹⁶ Gerald C. Stone and Patrick Mazza, "Impact of Consensus Theory on Community Newspaper Organization," *Journalism Quarterly* 54:2 (Summer, 1977): 314, 319.

⁶¹⁷ "Progress will be Community's Voice," *The Deer Park (Tex.) Progress*, 1 January 1970, 1. Deer Park, in Harris County, is located in southeast Texas, just east of Houston. Deer Park had a population of 12,773 in 1970. Nineteenth Census of the United States, "Population," volume 1, part 45, section 1, 45-12, Table 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

of locally written editorials among weeklies, a 1979 survey of 359 non-daily editors revealed a perceived importance placed on editorials and editorial pages. An overwhelming majority of the editors indicated that editorials and editorial columns were an important segment of their newspapers that could be used to influence readers, particularly on local issues.⁶¹⁸

Throughout the 1970s there was no shortage of examples of crusading reporting among weeklies. For example, in January 1970 attackers tossed a fire bomb that destroyed the composing room of *The Monroe County Democrat* in Madisonville, Tennessee. The fire bomb followed two shooting attempts, a beating, a robbery/ransom attempt, and other minor intimidations designed to convince editor Dan Hicks, Jr. to stop “telling it like it is,” which was in reference to his ongoing campaign against corrupt local officials. Despite the damage, there was only a one-day delay in getting that week’s edition out.⁶¹⁹

Another east Tennessee paper, the *Newport Plain Talk* in Cocke County, faced new competition in 1970 when local officials invested in a weekly to try to run the *Plain Talk* out of business. The Cocke County officials were unhappy the *Plain Talk* reprinted an article from the *Knoxville (Tenn.) News-Sentinel* that revealed alleged graft and corruption in the county. The *Plain Talk* also ran a full-page account of an indictment against several local officials for civil rights violations. An overwhelming majority of the *Plain Talk*’s 7,000 subscribers, responding to a questionnaire, suggested that the paper should “keep on telling it like it is.” The *Plain Talk*’s

⁶¹⁸ Ernest C. Hynds and Charles H. Martin, "How Non-Daily Editors Describe Status and Function of Editorial Pages," *Journalism Quarterly* 56:2 (Summer, 1979): 318.

⁶¹⁹ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Editor attacked again," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (January 24, 1970): 38. In 1969, Hicks was awarded a Golden Quill Editorial Award and the Elijah P. Lovejoy Award for Courage in Journalism by the International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors for his ongoing fight against local corruption.

owner, John M. Jones, was also partial owner of the *Democrat* that had come under attack in nearby Monroe County for uncovering local corruption.⁶²⁰

A local political machine was also a threat to a southeast Georgia weekly. *Long County* (Ga.) *Press* editor William P. Durrence charged political machine officials with arson in a 1973 *Press* fire. He also linked the machine to ten other burnings in the previous four years and threats of arson to other Long County businesses, particularly *Press* advertisers. The *Press* was started in 1969 by fifty community residents who wanted a newspaper “just to print the truth.” Durrence explained in an *Editor & Publisher* article that at the time of the paper’s founding, Long County had a political machine that bought votes, used phony absentee ballots, and hand-picked juries and public servants. The 1973 arson incident followed local elections in which the anti-boss faction, supported by the *Press*, elected three county commissioners (of five) and a new clerk.⁶²¹

As publisher of the *Marblehead* (Mass.) *Messenger*, Bill Kirtz did not have to endure physical threats, only verbal charges of being a “troublemaker.” Some residents of this upper-middle-class yachting village on the state’s north shore did not approve of Kirtz’s type of advocacy journalism. In an *Editor & Publisher* profile, he said some of the investigative reports created a stir among residents because the findings “didn’t tell them what they wanted to hear.” For example, *Messenger* articles pointed to a community indifference to the problems in low- or middle-income housing and allegations against a local yacht club for excluding Jews and blacks from membership.⁶²²

Supporters of community newspapers argued that because of close associations to their readers, community newspapers better understood the concerns and challenges of local residents

⁶²⁰ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Politicos start rival paper," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (February 21, 1970): 43.

⁶²¹ Margaret Fisk, "The Weekly Editor: Truth draws fire in Georgia," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (March 17, 1973): 39.

⁶²² Mark Mehler, "The Weekly Editor: New publisher rouses Yankee town," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (May 26, 1973): 24.

than did nearby small dailies and large-circulation state and regional papers. Joseph Weston, editor of the *Sharp Citizen* in Cave City, Arkansas, asserted that because the metropolitan press could not reach out to regular people and interpret their problems, weeklies were being established at a rapid pace. The crusading editor founded his paper in 1972 and was an advocate of “personal journalism,” which included attacking politicians throughout the state. As a result, Weston regularly faced physical, economic, and legal threats.⁶²³

Alexander Brook, publisher of the *York County (Me.) Star*, was more cynical in his explanation of why dailies ignored controversy in the “outback.” In fact, he leveled the same types of accusations against dailies that metropolitan reporters and editors charged against weeklies for decades: avoiding controversy in favor of commercialism. He asserted that the daily’s only interest in rural areas was readership numbers for potential advertisers. As a result, he said, the dailies merely served as “scribes,” recording events rather than reporting them. Dailies did not probe for “the story behind the story,” he added, “because that can be dangerous-- and why bother? It doesn’t wage community service campaigns or investigate outback official shenanigans, because so what? It doesn’t waste editorial breath on outback improvement, because who cares?”⁶²⁴

But metropolitan dailies continued to fight back in their efforts to garner readers and advertisers from suburban weeklies. In 1975, the *Washington Post* began delivering zoned editions to the tri-state suburbs of Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland. A *Publishers’ Auxiliary* article noted that several weekly zoned editions had appeared in markets across the country, but that the Suburban Newspapers of America organization knew of no situation where a metropolitan weekly zoned edition forced a suburban newspaper out of business, but that the

⁶²³ Margaret Fisk, "The Weekly Editor: Arkansas editor faces trial," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (February 10, 1973): 12.

⁶²⁴ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 257.

threat was real. The *Post* reported that its first zoned editions generated 90,000 lines of advertising. Publishers of Sentinel Newspapers that circulated in Virginia and Maryland considered court challenges on charges of monopolistic practices by the *Post*.⁶²⁵ The following year, several weekly publishers in Cook County, Illinois, challenged the *Chicago Tribune's* Suburban Trib network, which published suburban zoned editions, for publishing legal notices. Illinois state law required that legal notices be published in a "newspaper circulated generally in the area." The plaintiff publishers contended that the Trib's zoned editions were printed in another county, and thus were first issued in a place other than Cook County.⁶²⁶

Weeklies also endured legal and business threats as a result of covering questionable practices at institutions and among the business community. For example, James Stewart, a nineteen-year-old reporter for the *Collegeville (Pa.) Independent*, was arrested for defiant trespass by the warden of the nearby Graterford Prison. Stewart, working for his family-owned paper, wrote about corruption, hushed-up escapes, and prisoner assaults. The *Independent* published a nine-part series on the prison prior to Stewart's arrest. As a result of the series, the *Independent* pushed for prison reform alleging that the prison offered no work or schooling programs.⁶²⁷

Editor-publisher Rupert Phillips of *The Mountain Home (Ark.) Baxter Bulletin* learned that the local Realtor board voted to withhold advertising because it disliked his paper's coverage of fires, accidents, floods, hospital conditions, and city council meetings and controversies. In 1973 visitor numbers were up at the resort community but real estate business was down. The Realtor board president complained about one *Bulletin* article on unusually high water in nearby

⁶²⁵ Sharon Mikutowicz, "Battle for Suburbs--Washington 'Davids' Face 'Goliath' Post," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 25 August 1975, 1.

⁶²⁶ "Zoned Editions Aren't Eligible for Legal Notices, Court Rules in Illinois," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 December 1976, 1.

⁶²⁷ Margaret Fisk, "The Weekly Editor: Father, son team expose Pa. prison," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (September 29, 1973): 14.

lakes. He charged that the paper never pointed out “how it was going to make the fishing better.” The Realtor board called off the advertising boycott after it began receiving national attention.⁶²⁸

Despite occasional boycotts, readers and merchants overall showed relative satisfaction with the content of their hometown weekly. For example, a 1970 University of Utah study found that sixty-seven store managers in twelve Utah counties indicated that they were satisfied with their hometown papers as an effective spokesman for the community in dealing with social, political, education, and economic problems.⁶²⁹ A 1975 Syracuse University survey found that local content and features were the most popular items among newspaper readers and that newspapers were preferred five to one over television as a source of local news.⁶³⁰

At the other end of the content spectrum from investigative reports and personal crusades was the community correspondent column. Correspondent columns rarely drew criticism unless a name was omitted or misspelled. Even into the so-called modern era of the 1970s, traditional correspondent columns persisted in weeklies throughout the country. *The Monroe Journal* in Monroeville, Alabama, ran columns from a dozen correspondents when Steve Stewart became the paper’s editor in 1973.⁶³¹ A 1977 edition of *The Santa Rosa (N.M.) News* published columns from correspondents in the communities of La Loma, Newkirk, Cuervo, Dahlia, Dilia, Pasgura,

⁶²⁸ Margaret Fisk, "The Weekly Editor: Realtors pressure on Arkansas paper fails," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (October 6, 1973): 15. The *Bulletin* was the largest weekly in Arkansas with a circulation of 11,500. The same year of the advertising boycott, the *Bulletin* received the Arkansas Press Association sweepstakes award as the state's overall best weekly.

⁶²⁹ "The Weekly Editor: Merchants' attitudes," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (March 14, 1970): 27.

⁶³⁰ "Newspapers are No. 1 in Local Information Readers Say in Survey," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 September 1975, 1.

⁶³¹ Stewart, "E-mail interview with author." Monroeville, in Monroe County, is located in south-central Alabama. Monroeville had a population of 4,846 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 2, 2-11, Table 6. <http://www.census.gov/>.

Vaughn, Encino, Puerto de Luna, and Anton Chico.⁶³² News from the rural communities of Riverton, Watson, Locust Grove, and Farragut in Fremont County, Iowa, were regular features of *The Hamburg (Ia.) Reporter*.⁶³³

It was not uncommon to find some correspondents whose length of service equaled or nearly equaled that of the number of years their community received designated column space in a nearby weekly. Among the faithful correspondents was Bruna McGuire, who began writing for Ray County, Missouri, weeklies in the early 1900s. In 1970 she was still going strong at age eighty-six, as was her column, "With Homefolks."⁶³⁴ But one noticeable change in the columns by the 1970s was the correspondent byline. In previous decades, the common practice was to precede the female columnist's name with the courtesy title of "Mrs." But a 1979 issue of *The Democrat* in Emmetsburg, Iowa, identified female correspondents by first and last name only.⁶³⁵

Local content in small-town weeklies operated on the premise that "everyone knows everyone." Evidence of the small town paper's approach to news from a "we're all family" standpoint perhaps explained the photograph of six dateless but identified boys, lined up at their high school junior-senior prom. The caption under the photo stated "The proverbial stag line."⁶³⁶ Also, it would be difficult to find a metropolitan daily with a local restaurant promotional for

⁶³² *Santa Rosa (N.M.) News*, 20 October 1977, 6. Santa Rosa, in Guadalupe County, is located in east-central New Mexico. Santa Rosa had a population of 2,485 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 33, 33-11, Table 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶³³ *The Hamburg (Ia.) Reporter*, 27 April 1972, 3, 7. Hamburg, in Fremont County, is located in the southwest corner of Iowa. Hamburg had a population of 1,649 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 17, 17-13, Table 6. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶³⁴ Viola Roadcap Groce, "The Weekly Editor: Little chronicler," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (April 25, 1970): 38.

⁶³⁵ *The Democrat*, 6 December 1979, 5. Emmetsburg, in Palo Alto County, is located in the northwest part of Iowa. Emmetsburg had a population of 4,150 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 17, 17-12, Table 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶³⁶ "The Proverbial Stag Line," *The Hamburg (Ia.) Reporter*, 27 April 1972, 6.

“Rabbit Suppers Served This Friday Night,” as was printed in a May 1973 *Recorder* advertisement for Sonny’s Lounge in Greene, Iowa.⁶³⁷

Despite a push for personal journalism that included personal crusades and people-oriented features, weeklies were persistently labeled the conduit for free publicity. Whether for product promotion or political posturing, academics and media elites viewed weeklies as dumping grounds for publicity type “news.” But several content analyses showed that locally generated content as opposed to syndicate or publicity “news” material was at a higher percentage in weeklies than major and second-tier (smaller market) dailies.

A 1973 University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire study looked at the use of political publicity in one of the state’s U.S. congressional districts during a non-election year. The sample included fifty weeklies in the Third Congressional District from a two-week period in October. The thirty-two press releases sent from the district’s one congressman and two senators were compared to their placement success rate. Also observed were subject matter, placement, length, and copy editing of the releases. Thirty-three of the fifty weeklies did not print any of the releases. Eight of the papers published 30 percent of the releases sent and were thus deemed “easy marks” for free publicity. The study authors refuted generalized claims and criticisms of extensive use of publicity in the weekly press. They concluded that the politicians studied were “minimally successful” in placing their releases in weeklies, adding, “Editors are not so gullible and do not passively accept Capitol Hill press releases.”⁶³⁸

Another study looked at the placement of news releases provided to Georgia weeklies from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. The extension service sent

⁶³⁷ "Rabbit Suppers Served This Friday Night," *The Greene (Ia.) Recorder*, 9 May 1973, 10. Greene, in Butler County, is located in the northeast part of Iowa. Greene had a population of 1,363 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, “Population,” volume 1, part 17, 17-13, Table 6. <http://newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶³⁸ Leslie D. Polk, John Eddy, and Ann Andre, "Use of Congressional Publicity in Wisconsin District," *Journalism Quarterly* 52:3 (Autumn, 1975): 544-545.

weekly packets to 168 weeklies with information about agriculture, home economics, and other related areas. The researchers reviewed a year's content of fourteen weeklies and compared the placement of the materials to the total amount of information distributed. They found that the fourteen papers used 15.7 percent of the available information. The heaviest use was material related to agricultural subjects, especially "how-to-do-it" stories.⁶³⁹

Some publishers fought back against the industrial icons that looked to weeklies for free space while spending large advertising budgets on television and dailies. A 1973 *Editor & Publisher* article re-printed a cover letter sent to weekly publishers throughout the country from the R.J. Reynolds Industries Corporate Publications Manager. The letter accompanied a "news" service packet that contained articles to promote cigarette sales. *Editor & Publisher* also published a reply letter sent to Reynolds from David Kramer, president of the Illinois Press Association and publisher of six weeklies at Gibson City. Kramer's letter stated that for years he watched Reynolds pump huge amounts of advertising money into television, radio, magazines, billboards, and dailies, but not weeklies. He pointed out that the company would not get free space in the other media, but appeared to expect it from weeklies. He concluded, "You spent your money with the other media and we've made it okay without it. Now get them to run your 'news.'"⁶⁴⁰

In relation to overall content, one editor-publisher found he spent too little time concerned with the quality of his newspaper's content because so much of his time was required on layout and design. By the early 1970s, the *Brown County Democrat* in Nashville, Indiana, a 2,700-circulation weekly that averaged from eight to twelve pages a week, moved to a modular, quasi-magazine-style makeup. The content was compartmentalized, using a lot of photographs

⁶³⁹ Al Hester and Sharron Smith Millwood, "How Georgia Weeklies Utilize Extension Service News," *Journalism Quarterly* 53:2 (Summer, 1976): 330-331, 333.

⁶⁴⁰ "Publisher Hits Weekly Tobacco 'News' Service," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (December 15, 1973): 15.

and jumped stories. In fact, publisher Bruce Temple won several design awards for his efforts. He recalled to *Editor & Publisher*, “I was brought up on metropolitan dailies where the emphasis was on helping the reader wade through scores and even hundreds of pages each day.” Convinced that weekly community newspapers had a different mission, he re-designed the *Democrat* to have a nineteenth-century look, meaning one-column headlines and no photographs on the front page. One reader complained that he had to “read the whole paper” to find certain items, which was Temple’s goal from the outset.⁶⁴¹

Consumers and their news preferences

Several studies were conducted during the decade to determine who read weekly newspapers and their preferred news sources for various types of information. Many studies pointed to the fact that most readers of weeklies also subscribed to a nearby daily. In fact, long-time publisher Mel Ruder, of the *Hungry Horse News* in Columbia Falls, Montana, recommended to his subscribers that they read a daily as well as a weekly. He even phoned in stories to the dailies--after his paper went to press.⁶⁴² But a 1977 Newspaper Readership Project survey revealed that only one in three daily newspaper readers also read a paid weekly. However, another third of the daily readers indicated that they regularly read a free weekly or shopper.⁶⁴³

A study of Pennsylvania weeklies offered a snapshot of readers who could be considered more community-minded because they submitted letters to the editor. Researchers Michael Singletary and Marianne Cowling reviewed the content of twenty-five non-daily newspapers in

⁶⁴¹ Bruce Gregory Temple, "The Weekly Editor: Readers like new-old look," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (May 12, 1973): 15.

⁶⁴² Ann Geracimos, "The Weekly Editor: Weekly for sale," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (October 27, 1973): 34.

⁶⁴³ "One of Three People Read Community Newspapers, Readership Report Says," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 28 November 1977, 4.

twenty-two Pennsylvania counties for a six-week period in the summer of 1977. They collected the names and addresses of writers of letters to the editor and sent them questionnaires. Eighty-four of 115 questionnaires were returned. Of the writers, a third were under the age of forty, most held professional jobs, more than half attended college, and three-fourths were male. Nearly 40 percent of the letters related to community problems, while 30 percent concerned state, national, and local government or politics.⁶⁴⁴

University of Minnesota journalism professors Clarice Olien, George Donohue, and Phillip Tichenor looked at news source preferences among residents who resided in weekly newspaper communities in Minnesota.⁶⁴⁵ They analyzed data from survey studies conducted in nineteen communities since 1969. Survey respondents were adults who had been interviewed in their homes. They were asked to choose among television, radio, and newspapers as their preferred source of news (in general, did not specify type of news--local, national, or international). The analysis showed that television was the preferred choice among communities in which the local newspaper was a weekly. They also found that while 90 percent of the weeklies' news space was devoted to local news, as compared to 40 percent in regional dailies, the bulk of news in smaller papers covered social events and athletics. Therefore, the weekly newspaper readers relied more on television and regional dailies to provide their public affairs news.⁶⁴⁶

A 1978 study of media use among rural Louisiana residents also found a heavy reliance on television for news about local government issues. University of Alaska professor George Winford analyzed survey data from 277 rural Louisiana households on media source preference

⁶⁴⁴ Michael W. Singletary and Marianne Cowling, "Letters to the Editor of the Non-Daily Press," *Journalism Quarterly* 56:4 (Winter, 1979): 165-166.

⁶⁴⁵ At the time of the study, Minnesota had 293 communities with populations of 10,000 or less. Of those, all but four had weekly or twice-weekly newspapers.

⁶⁴⁶ Clarice N. Olien, George A. Donohue, and Phillip J. Tichenor, "Community Structure and Media Use," *Journalism Quarterly* 55:3 (Autumn, 1978): 445, 447-449.

(television, radio, weeklies, or dailies) in four categories. The categories were local government, local community events, agriculture and homemaking news, and advertising information. He found that television was the preferred source for local government news (64 percent), while weeklies led as the preferred source for news about community events. Television and weeklies were nearly equal in importance for providing agriculture and homemaking news, 74 and 72 percent respectively. Weeklies were the most relied on source for advertising information (80 percent).⁶⁴⁷

Editorial and news content of small-town papers often reflected the assumed political leanings of readers of weeklies. For example, *The Florence (Ala.) Herald* apparently believed strongly that its readers were stand-up, patriotic citizens as evidenced by its 1970 re-printing of an American Legion Post resolution that condemned newspapers and television commentators for tearing down “America and our Armed Forces” during the Vietnam War. The resolution objected to the continued “spread of gossip, rumor, and hearsay directed against officers and men of the United States Army.” The *Herald* editorial conceded that some newspapers and commentators played up the sensational side of the news, resulting in “a great disservice to the nation’s morale, both at home and abroad.” It concluded, “Until our fighting men are brought home we are with them one hundred percent.”⁶⁴⁸

Another 1970 *Herald* editorial responded to the presumed conservatism of its readers when it referred to an “assortment of bearded and banded” University of Alabama students. The students were criticized for heckling former Alabama Governor George Wallace at a campus event. The editorial referred to the students’ behavior as “shameful.” The editorial also

⁶⁴⁷ George M. Winford, "Newspaper versus 'Newspaper': A Statewide Study of the Weekly," *Journalism Quarterly* 55:1 (Spring, 1978): 136-137.

⁶⁴⁸ "A Resolution," *The Florence (Ala.) Herald*, 26 February 1970, 2. Florence, in Lauderdale County, is located in northwestern Alabama. Florence had a population of 34,031 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 2, section 2, 2-11, Table 8. <http://www.census.gov/>.

speculated that some of the heckling students would look back on their behavior and feel ashamed, adding, “We sincerely hope so, but we have our DOUBTS. They are just NOT OUR KIND OF PEOPLE.”⁶⁴⁹

The *Algona* (Ia.) *Kossuth County Advance*, on the other hand, acknowledged the independent thinking among its readers when an editorial referred to recent elections and how Kossuth Countians voted both Democrat and Republican in national and local races. The editorial, signed “R.B.W.” for publisher R.B. Waller, stated that “On the national level, the results should send a clear message to Washington that there is an underlying dissatisfaction with the way some things are going, chiefly excessive government spending and inflation.”⁶⁵⁰

Although knowing one’s audience was an important element to editorial writing, even more important was attracting readers to the editorial pages, according to a respected journalism educator and former publisher. University of Georgia professor Ernest C. Hynds wrote a two-part series for *Publishers’ Auxiliary* on the importance of editorial writing. To encourage editorial readership, he said that editorials should take stands on important issues, especially local concerns. Also, he emphasized clarity in thinking and writing and the use of letters to the editor, which usually resulted in more calls and letters and subsequent editorial columns.⁶⁵¹ The second part of his series focused on tactics to increase reader participation in local concerns. For example, he recommended that papers offer coupons for readers who replied to editorials.

⁶⁴⁹ "A Shameful Episode," *The Florence* (Ala.) *Herald*, 26 March 1970, 2.

⁶⁵⁰ "Independent Thinkers," *The Algona* (Ia.) *Kossuth County Advance*, 13 November 1978, 10. Algona, in Kossuth County, is located in north-central Iowa. Algona had a population of 6,032 in 1970. *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, "Population," volume 1, part 17, 17-11, Table 6. <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/>, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁶⁵¹ Ernest C. Hynds, "The Newspaper Editorial Page -- Is it Heading for Oblivion, or Does It Remain an Important Vehicle for Service to the Public, part 1," *Publishers’ Auxiliary*, 12 September 1977, 6.

Another suggestion included the use of question and issue columns. Readers were requested to respond to a particular question and their responses were published as a group of letters.⁶⁵²

Consolidations: Larger chains and circulations, fewer family-owned papers

Consolidations continued into the 1970s, most aggressively in the area of group and chain ownership. A major incentive for consolidation was to increase group circulation to boost blanket coverage numbers and attract more national advertising. In fact, the decade opened with the announced formation of a national weekly newspaper group, Newspaper Corporation of America. Financier Cliff Hooper headed the Nashville-based company that indicated plans to offer weekly newspapers in all fifty states.⁶⁵³ Another successful weekly chain was Newspapers Incorporated of Shelbyville, Kentucky. In 1970 it was only two years old but already claimed ownership of nearly 15 percent of the state's weekly newspapers. It also had printing contracts for 30 percent of the state's weeklies. An *Editor & Publisher* article indicated that demands from publishers to be absorbed by the company were outstripping its capacity to print more publications.⁶⁵⁴

The continued consolidation of printing operations of weeklies to a central plant, begun in the 1960s, resulted in savings of as much as 40 percent of operating costs, according to a 1976 *Publishers' Auxiliary* article. Three kinds of central printing were described that were often regional in popularity. For example, cooperative central printing originated in Wisconsin and remained the most widespread form. A cooperative plant was jointly owned by several newspaper publishers. Operating costs and revenues were shared among the owners. In another

⁶⁵² Ernest C. Hynds, "The Newspaper Editorial Page -- Is it Heading for Oblivion, or Does It Remain an Important Vehicle for Service to the Public, part 2" *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 19 September 1977, 7.

⁶⁵³ "Network of weeklies planned by new firm," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (January 10, 1970): 24.

⁶⁵⁴ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: One more and growing," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (November 14, 1970): 70.

central plant operation, one newspaper might own a central plant that printed other publications for a fee. Other central printing plants were stand-alone commercial enterprises not owned by a newspaper or newspaper group. The appeal of centralized printing, in addition to saving equipment and labor costs, was the potential for profit and growth.⁶⁵⁵

Centralized printing plants also led to a reduction in the number of weeklies that maintained a commercial printing operation. Traditionally, revenues from a job shop enabled small-town weeklies to remain in business. However, as advertising revenue grew and central presses became an option, many weeklies abandoned their retail print operations. Generally, the larger circulation non-dailies with higher average advertising-line rates and a higher percentage of national advertisements were less likely to have a commercial printing operation.⁶⁵⁶

But a 1977 *Publishers' Auxiliary* article advised publishers to consider the profitability of their job shops before shutting them down. The article stated that commercial printing accounted for 34 percent of overall revenues for small-town newspapers with job shops. A survey of 128 publishers found that ninety-eight had some form of commercial publishing income, derived mostly from the printing of stationery, business cards, and forms.⁶⁵⁷ While solely commercial press operations were expanding in metropolitan areas, the combination newspaper-print business was the more likely type of printing operation to be found in rural communities.

Some weeklies found it beneficial to consolidate their newsroom operations, in addition to advertising. A University of Wisconsin study reviewed the merged operations of twenty-six community weeklies within the state. Given that most of the publishers owned two or more papers, their individual newspapers were often produced at one central editorial office.

According to the study, advantages of the consolidations were lower operating costs, better

⁶⁵⁵ "Central Printing, Once a Trend, is Now the Norm," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 24 December 1976, 4.

⁶⁵⁶ Gerald C. Stone, "Financial Statement Will Determine Job Shop Value," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 30 May 1977, 5.

⁶⁵⁷ Gerald C. Stone, "Considering Dropping Your Job Shop Business - Study the Figures Closely," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 23 May 1977, 20.

printing arrangements, and increased advertising. A disadvantage was loss of contact with each community. But the reality was that many of the smaller papers could not make a profit as a stand-alone operation.⁶⁵⁸

Another concern about the growth of chains and consolidations was that chain-owned and consolidated newspapers would become homogenized editorial voices. In the 1970s, University of Minnesota professors Daniel Wackman, Donald Gillmor, and Everette Dennis looked at the homogeneity of chain-owned daily newspapers. They considered chain newspaper autonomy in relation to presidential endorsements and found that chain papers were more likely to endorse candidates, and that there was a degree of homogeneity within chains. But, they ascertained that as the number of chain newspapers and independent voters, often susceptible to endorsements, grew that the press could play an important role in maintaining a two-party system. Their argument was based on the “enormous Democratic Party registration edge and Republican-biased newspaper endorsements,” which resulted in “adjusting the balance in partisan politics.” While their study did not consider weeklies, similar observations could be drawn given the weeklies’ history of strong endorsements for Republican presidential candidates.⁶⁵⁹

The rise in group and chain ownership, especially in suburban weeklies, also gave rise to concern about the loss of family-owned newspapers and potential members for weekly professional organizations. In fact, more growth was seen in suburban weeklies, as part of a corporate group or chain, than the traditional independent, family-owned weekly, although some publishing families did expand their ownership to multiple weeklies. Responding to this change in growth patterns, the Suburban Section of the National Newspaper Association merged with the Suburban Press Foundation and the Accredited Home Newspapers of America in 1971 to

⁶⁵⁸ Janet Rodekohr, "Merged Editorial Offices Have Given Wisconsin Weeklies Upper Hand on Costs," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 3 October 1977, 1.

⁶⁵⁹ Daniel B. Wackman, et al, "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," *Journalism Quarterly* 52:3 (Autumn, 1975): 420.

form the Suburban Newspapers of America. Three years later the NNA voted to change its by-laws to allow a place on its board for an SNA representative.⁶⁶⁰ Finally, in 1977 the NNA determined that suburban papers were eligible for membership if at least 25 percent of their content was news.

The loss of family-owned weeklies also meant a loss in membership numbers for the NNA. Newspaper scholar Hiley Ward interviewed NNA Executive Vice President William G. Mullen at the 1977 annual meeting of the Kansas Press Association at which Mullen stated that NNA would promote legislation to keep family newspapers from being sold. Much of the problem, Mullen explained, was in family newspapers being sold to pay estate taxes.⁶⁶¹

To address concerns about high estate taxes for independently owned newspapers, Arizona congressman Morris K. Udall proposed legislation in 1977 designed to encourage independent local newspaper ownership by authorizing trusts to finance future estate tax liabilities from current newspaper profits. The proposed legislation was for weekly or daily papers not owned by chains or public corporations.⁶⁶² Udall urged the government to examine ownership concentration in the newspaper industry. In a 1977 *Washington Post* article on independent newspapers, he referred to letters he received in support of newspapers remaining in local hands. The congressman said that inheritance and business tax laws forced “papers to merge and chains to buy, often at twice what the paper is worth.”⁶⁶³ Two years later there still was no legislative relief. At a 1979 hearing of the Senate Small Business Committee, a business analyst explained that newspaper operations were selling at about fifty times their earnings. For estate tax purposes, the Internal Revenue Service placed the valuation of the newspaper on what

⁶⁶⁰ "NNA Members Approve Several By-Law Changes," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 October 1974, 3.

⁶⁶¹ Hiley Henry Ward, "Ninety Years of the National Newspaper Association: The Mind and Dynamics of Grassroots Journalism in Shaping America" (dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1977), 313.

⁶⁶² William H. Jones, "Udall's Newspaper Bill Gets Industry Support," *The Washington Post*, 7 October 1977, E3.

⁶⁶³ William H. Jones and Laird Anderson, "Endangered Independents," *The Washington Post*, 3 August 1977, D9.

a buyer was willing to pay. Thus, an owner's heirs were often forced to sell the paper to pay taxes.⁶⁶⁴ But the administration of President Jimmy Carter voiced its disapproval of proposed estate tax law changes aimed at keeping locally owned newspapers from being purchased by chains. A treasury department official admitted the proposal would "at best, make it less expensive to pass newspapers from generation to generation," but said it did not address the "market situation" of the "ability and willingness" of big companies to pay high prices for newspapers. The prime sponsor of the legislation, North Carolina Senator Robert Morgan, said, "Faced with the enormous amount of tax, with large cash offers from chains and with little financial incentive to hold on to this important community service, the owners have sold out. They are selling out at a rate of one a week to chains." Like Udall's earlier proposal, the 1979 estate-tax legislation included a provision to allow a local newspaper owner to set up a tax-exempt trust to pay estate taxes. Opponents voiced concerns of "special relief for only one group of small businessmen."⁶⁶⁵ The estate-tax issue remained unresolved at the end of the decade.

But weekly newspaper purchases were not exclusive to traditional business groups and newspaper chains. By the 1970s some weeklies (total number unknown) became community-controlled publications as citizens combined their investments to maintain or revitalize financially troubled papers. The citizens often formed community foundations or independent trusts to maintain or establish an independent, locally focused news organization. A benefit, in addition to group capital, was an established advertising base that could guarantee a small paper's survival. *The Publishers' Auxiliary* featured a community-controlled paper that was established in Lake City, Michigan. A former school superintendent was designated the publisher because he was the only retired member among the eight-man purchasing team. The article

⁶⁶⁴ Nancy L. Ross, "U.S. Cautious on Media Concentration," *The Washington Post*, 30 May 1979, E3.

⁶⁶⁵ "Change in Estate Tax Law Opposed," *The Washington Post*, 11 November 1979, F12.

observed, “In this and other small communities, the business experience of local residents and the genuine community spirit have meant the survival of their newspapers.”⁶⁶⁶

A group of citizens in Greenburgh, New York, tried to save the town’s weekly after its publisher announced the January 1970 shutting down of *The Greenburgh (N.Y.) Independent* due to financial difficulties. Greenburgh citizens formed a “Save the Paper Committee” and quickly raised \$4,000, which was enough to publish another issue. A page-one banner on the issue read, “People plead for papers.” A full-page advertisement on the front page proclaimed “This Paper Is About To Die.” The advertisement solicited donations, and \$6,000 was raised the following week.⁶⁶⁷

Another factor that impacted the loss of overall membership in the NNA was an increase in the number of small-town newspapers that published more than once a week. As in the 1960s, it was not uncommon for weeklies located in rapid growth areas to convert to daily or bi-weekly and tri-weekly publication. However, some communities gained a new weekly after an established weekly converted to a non-daily publication. So after weekly numbers shifted between startups and conversions to non-dailies, NNA was able to claim a membership of about 5,000 weeklies and 700 small-town dailies in 1977. The number of weeklies and small-town dailies totaled nearly 9,000 by the end of the decade.⁶⁶⁸

Some weeklies were not successful in their conversion to daily publication. A 1976 article in *The Publishers’ Auxiliary* pointed out that some weeklies struggled financially and physically in the conversion to a daily. Challenges included an initial drop in circulation, loss of

⁶⁶⁶ "Community Ownership - Good Idea," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 September 1976, 1.

⁶⁶⁷ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: Never-say-die," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (February 14, 1970): 50. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$4,000 from 1970 was worth \$21,353.45 and \$6,000 was worth \$32,030.18. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁶⁶⁸ Ward, "Ninety Years of the National Newspaper Association," 309. Throughout its history, the National Newspaper Association failed to gain a majority of weekly newspaper membership largely due to financial and time constraints for publishers. Most weeklies, however, were members of their state press associations.

advertising accounts to competing publications, weak advertising support for multiple issues, and an insufficient population base to support circulation and advertising demands. The article also inferred that some papers failed in their efforts to increase frequency simply because they were not given enough time to succeed.⁶⁶⁹

In other instances, newspaper entrepreneurs viewed a weekly's conversion to a daily as an opportunity to start another weekly in that same community. For example, *The Saline County (Ark.) Pacesetter*, a weekly that started in Benton, Arkansas, in 1972, benefited from the success of Benton's other weekly that transitioned to a daily. Twenty-two-year-old publisher Whitney Jones speculated that because the people of the county were accustomed to a strong weekly, they would support the *Pacesetter*.⁶⁷⁰

Another major consolidation concern related to the issue of free versus paid circulation. Of course, most "free" weeklies began as shoppers, with little or no news content. The blanket circulation offered by free shoppers enticed some advertisers away from the traditional subscriber-paid weekly. Thus, weeklies often found it financially beneficial to consolidate with a shopper or to start their own. The shopper was the focus of a *Publishers' Auxiliary* article that observed that since shoppers arrived on the scene in the early 1950s, rural weeklies were still being advised to publish their own shopper before a competing one could be established. In 1977, it was estimated that 27 percent of small newspapers published shoppers. The article stated that weekly newspapers putting out a shopper did better financially than those that did not.⁶⁷¹

A number of publishers converted their papers from paid circulation to free circulation in response to pressure from the free shoppers' blanket circulation, the dailies' zoned editions, and

⁶⁶⁹ Bill White, "Not All Papers Succeed at Increasing Their Frequency," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 December 1976, 3.

⁶⁷⁰ Heber Taylor, "The Weekly Editor: Doctor's son makes success of Arkansas weekly," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (April 28, 1973): 50.

⁶⁷¹ Edgar Trotter and Gerald Stone, "Shoppers Are Permanent Fixtures - But What Else?" *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 11 July 1977, 11.

advertisers.⁶⁷² The advantage of free circulation, also known as controlled circulation, was that a newspaper was delivered free of charge to areas of desirable demographics for advertising solicitation purposes. Despite the conversion to free circulation, news content was not always compromised. For example, even though the Toms River (N.J.) *Shopper Reporter* began as a “throw away,” it became the *Reporter* in 1968 when news content was added to the weekly. Following the conversion from a shopper, more than 9,000 subscribers voluntarily paid for delivery of the *Reporter* under a controlled-payment plan. Founders and publishers Gilbert M. Seiznick and Leonard Lipitz emphasized that the free-circulation aspect of the operation gave advertisers the benefit of mass circulation (46,874) while enhanced editorial content gave the paper its readership.⁶⁷³

Father and son publisher and editor Edward B. Wright, Sr. and Edward B. Wright, Jr. converted their newspapers from paid to free circulation because they anticipated that free distribution from their competitors was inevitable. The Wrights owned the *Forest Hill (Oh.) Journal* and *Forest Hill (Oh.) Community Weekly*. At the same time, they started a new free weekly, the *Community Journal*, to compete with paid weeklies in adjoining Cincinnati-area counties. The Wrights increased their circulation from 7,200 paid to 40,000 controlled. They maintained the editorial integrity of the papers and their original broadsheet size to avoid being labeled tabloid-sized shoppers.⁶⁷⁴

Like the Wrights’ papers, the *Westport (Conn.) News* emphasized local news content since it began publishing in 1964 as a free-circulation newspaper. It later converted to controlled circulation, but its contents always reflected that of a traditional newspaper. Publisher B.V. Brooks, Jr. observed that “A free paper can buy circulation but must earn readership.” He said

⁶⁷² Zoned editions refer to changes in advertising and content to reflect the particular region, outlying community, or suburb to which the newspaper is delivered.

⁶⁷³ “The Weekly Editor: From free to paid,” *Editor & Publisher* 103 (June 13, 1970): 56.

⁶⁷⁴ Craig Tomkinson, “The Weekly Editor: Converts to free,” *Editor & Publisher* 103 (December 12, 1970): 53.

that in a town like upscale Westport the average free newspaper could not survive. "There are too many bright people and you can't feed them anything but quality."⁶⁷⁵

A mid-1970s recession and the changeovers to free circulation, shoppers, group ownership, and multi-weekly publication resulted in a modest decline in weekly circulation for the first time in more than a decade.⁶⁷⁶ In 1975, weekly circulation dropped 616,279 to 35.1 million, according to figures released by the NNA. Also, the total number of weeklies dropped, from 7,612 in 1974 to 7,482 in 1975. Among reasons cited for the circulation losses were recession-led shutdowns of newspapers and a shift to shopper-type publications whose circulation figures were not included in NNA reports. Other reasons given were the conversion of weeklies to dailies and rising postage prices. Higher postage rates brought a decrease in the number of or amount of free-circulation newspapers.⁶⁷⁷

A twenty-year analysis of weekly circulation from 1960 until 1980 showed that overall circulation increased 102 percent, mostly derived from an increase in free circulation. Since 1960, paid circulation increased by 65.5 percent while free circulation increased by 172 percent. Paid circulation was highest among rural weeklies (47.3 percent) as compared to only 39.7 percent of suburban weeklies and 13 percent of weeklies in resort communities. The study also revealed that 60 percent of group-owned papers had more free than paid circulation.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁵ Craig Tomkinson, "The Weekly Editor: No longer free," *Editor & Publisher* 103 (October 31, 1970): 15.

⁶⁷⁶ On the positive side, the NNA's 25th Weekly Newspaper Cost Study revealed that advertising revenue for weeklies climbed to \$1.1 billion in 1975. Despite a two-year recession, total revenues from advertising, commercial printing, circulation, and miscellaneous income brought the total to \$1.8 billion. Theodore Serrill, "Total Weekly Revenues Increase \$75 Million to \$1.8 Billion During '75," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 24 July 1976, 1. In 2007, according to the latest government figures based on the Consumer Price Index, \$1.1 billion from 1977 was worth \$4.2 billion and \$1.8 billion was worth \$6.9 billion. <http://measuringworth.com/>.

⁶⁷⁷ "Weeklies' Circulation Takes Modest Dip During 1975," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 March 1976, 1.

⁶⁷⁸ Eugenia Zerbinos, "Analysis of the Increase in Weekly Circulation, 1960-1980," *Journalism Quarterly* 59:3 (Autumn, 1982): 467, 469-470. The study used a proportion random sample of papers from New Jersey, Georgia, Michigan, and Washington.

Computerization takes over

The 1970s saw a near complete transition in the weekly newspaper field from “hot metal” to “cold type” printing in which the images of a newspaper page were created through photocomposition rather than in metal type. In his 1980 work, *Goodbye Gutenberg*, Anthony Smith provided a detailed description of new printing technologies that were available by the end of the 1970s. As he explained, a central processing unit (CPU), which served as a memory storage unit, replaced trays of molten lead, and web-fed offset presses replaced antiquated sheet-fed letterpress equipment. Reporters and editors used video display terminals (VDTs) to type their copy on a standard typewriter-type QWERTY keyboard. The VDTs had a cathode ray tube on which text appeared as keys were struck. Completed text was then sent to the CPU for editing. Another means to send copy to the CPU was through an OCR, or optical character reader, which was often referred to as a “scanner.” The OCR “read” copy typed on an electric typewriter and created an electronic signal that passed into the CPU for memory storage. The OCR could also create a punched paper tape that was fed into the CPU’s memory. The CPU automatically made corrections in hyphenation and justification of copy that was fed into the unit. Editors also used VDTs for more complex editing, such as selection and arrangement of wire service and local copy, and designating the placement of photographs within the copy. The CPU produced paper strips of columned copy that was cut and pasted onto a life-size copy of each newspaper page, with spaces left for photographs. The pages were then sent to the camera room where they were photographed to produce a negative from which a printing plate was made.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁹ Anthony Smith, *Goodbye Gutenberg: The newspaper revolution of the 1980's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 86-87, 89-91.

A 1975 NNA equipment survey revealed that most of the newspapers surveyed planned to spend the largest part of their equipment budget on composition equipment in the coming two years. The survey revealed that 91 percent of the country's weeklies were printed on an offset press, 20 percent planned to purchase OCR equipment, and 10 percent used a computerized VDT system. Also, photocomposition was the composition method of choice by 77 percent of the NNA survey respondents.⁶⁸⁰

Bruce Turvold of the award-winning, 4,000-circulation *Cresco* (Ia.) *Times-Plain Dealer* was one of the many small-town editors who embraced new technologies for typesetting and design. He also encouraged the use of a picture page as often as possible, given the advances in photocomposition that made it much easier to incorporate and produce high-quality photographs. Offset production and camera-ready copy was prepared at the *Times-Plain Dealer* Cresco office and delivered to a central plant at Calmar, Iowa, for printing.⁶⁸¹

Despite the advances in technology, costs remained a major concern. It was not uncommon for a print shop to use equipment several decades old. But replacement had to come much more quickly with the development of computerized equipment. And despite cost savings on production and staff due to advanced technologies, newspapers were still printed on paper. Throughout the decade, the newspaper industry faced newsprint prices that had doubled since 1970 amidst allegations of price-fixing among newsprint producers.⁶⁸² In addition, the industry faced newsprint shortages, particularly in the latter half of the decade, that reached record low

⁶⁸⁰ "Conversion to Offset of Weeklies, Dailies is Nearing Completion," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 November 1975, 1.

⁶⁸¹ Gerald B. Healey, "The Weekly Editor: Imagination at central plant," *Editor & Publisher* 106 (November 24, 1973): 42. The *Times-Plain Dealer* was named Iowa's Newspaper of the Year for two consecutive years and won numerous state and national awards.

⁶⁸² Bill White, "Antitrust Investigation of Domestic Newsprint Producers is Under Way," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 25 July 1977, 1.

levels.⁶⁸³ A major contributing factor was a mid-decade strike by the Canadian Paperworkers Union against four Quebec newsprint companies, which hampered newsprint production for six months.⁶⁸⁴ Newsprint shortages proved to be another factor forcing small, independent publications to shut down or to be sold to a chain.⁶⁸⁵

While computer technology brought production costs down, it also raised concern among employees that their positions would be eliminated or shifted to other responsibilities. Anthony Smith, the *Goodbye Gutenberg* author, described the dire newspaper-production-staff employment situation as follows: "Between the newsroom and the loading dock very few employees remain."⁶⁸⁶ NNA Executive Vice President Theodore A. Serrill pointed out that weeklies and small dailies avoided some potential unionization problems because they were quick to embrace offset printing and computerized typesetting, resulting in publishers being "freed from the printer's apron."⁶⁸⁷ The result of real or presumed staff downsizing, however, made the prospect of unionization among weekly newspaper employees a concern for publishers. Attendees at the 1977 NNA Convention were advised to listen to employees' complaints and remedy legitimate concerns in an effort to thwart union organization attempts. Media labor consultant Robert Ballow suggested that management meet with employees to explain business trends and production figures, thus giving employees a sense of involvement in the company.⁶⁸⁸ Ultimately, the move to offset meant fewer workers were required in the press operations, so weeklies did not have to deal with as many union organization efforts and the threat of strikes as the metropolitan dailies.

⁶⁸³ "Supplies of Newsprint Averaged 30 Days For October, Lowest Level in Seven Years," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 December 1979, 10.

⁶⁸⁴ "Paperworkers, 4 Quebec Mills Reach Settlement on New Wage Package," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 24 January 1976, 1.

⁶⁸⁵ Jones and Anderson, "Endangered Independents," D9.

⁶⁸⁶ Smith, *Goodbye Gutenberg: The newspaper revolution of the 1980's*, 86.

⁶⁸⁷ Jeffrey Colin Van, "The Community Press: Health is Good," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 24 January 1976, 1, 3.

⁶⁸⁸ "Threat of Union Organizational Moves for Smaller Newspapers Held Greater," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 7 November 1977, 2.

Reporters and editors were not as concerned about being replaced by a computer as they were about using a computer for everyday job functions. The use of a VDT required more skill than a regular typewriter. Some veteran journalists decided to retire rather than learn the new technology. Training of newsroom staff became a key component of successfully making the transition to computerization. And it was not a certainty that recent college graduates would be well trained on the technology since much of their classroom training was on older, often outdated equipment.⁶⁸⁹

So, as computers reduced many production-efficiency problems, they also increased human resource problems. Most of these employee problems, according to Smith, related to “the tension and anxiety of a staff about to undergo a major shift in work habits, even if direct loss of employment has been eliminated through negotiation.” He asserted that the motivational system of the staff was thus altered as departments disappeared and others were merged. As a result, Smith said that trust and dependence between supervisors and employers were often “drastically altered.”⁶⁹⁰

Threats to Traditional Weeklies

The 1970s brought attention to some hard realities for the weekly newspaper industry. While new business models and chain ownership provided financial models for success, proud traditions such as family ownership and independent editorial voices were dying. Publishers, once revered as community leaders and outspoken critics, were becoming more concerned about making a dollar than making a difference. More weekly publishers no longer lived in their newspapers’ communities, thus lacking a personal investment in the overall prosperity of the

⁶⁸⁹ Smith, *Goodbye Gutenberg: The newspaper revolution of the 1980's*, 97.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 106-107.

towns their publications served. Also, newsprint shortages and unionization threats made it difficult for small operations to survive, and estate-tax laws forced a number of publishing families to relinquish not only their livelihoods, but a defining part of their lives.

Maine weekly publisher Alexander Brook echoed concerns about the loss of strong, independently owned weekly newspapers. In his 1993 book about his years in weekly journalism, Brook boasted that before he left the *York County (Me.) Star* in 1977, it averaged between sixty and eighty-four broadsheet pages a week devoted exclusively to news about 50,000 residents in fifteen communities. In comparison, he observed that the *New York Times* devoted roughly forty pages a week on crime and government activities of the roughly twelve million residents of its city and surrounding communities. “A moderately active Kennebunker could expect to find his name repeated hundreds, even thousands, of times in the *Star* during his lifetime and the community events that shaped it,” he said. “The average Brooklyn resident never, all his life long, finds himself mentioned in the *Times*.”⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 255.

Conclusions

The community weekly newspaper in the United States came full circle from 1900 to 1980. It began with printers, not journalists, who viewed their newspaper publishing as an aside to their job printing, book selling, and stationary businesses. In the early 1900s, the editor of a weekly who also served as postmaster or official county printer had an outlet to enhance his political aspirations and/or gain financial reward through lucrative government printing contracts. Unfortunately, many of the earliest printer-editors proved to be inept businessmen, consistently undercharging on printing jobs. But a majority of country editors were tied to their job-printing services as the only revenue-producing aspect of their publishing operations. While some viewed job printing as a burden that kept them from pursuing their newspaper interests, others recognized the print shop as providing the financial foothold that allowed them to continue in the newspaper publishing business.

Several decades later as more college-trained journalists entered the weekly field, there began a transition to the editor-publisher role. The printing of the newspaper and print shop duties were turned over to hired staff. As a result, the editor-publisher was able to focus more on journalism than job printing. Editors were encouraged to take on leadership roles and become the “voice” of their community by writing editorials and personal columns. Some editors found that emancipation from their job printing duties actually made them better business people. They spent more time on Main Street gathering news and developing relationships with potential advertisers and subscribers.

But by the latter half of the twentieth century weekly publishers again turned their attention to the job printing business, for the purpose of joining with other publishers to operate centralized printing plants. The typical central plant owners were cooperative newspaper groups whose publishers were more likely to be business school graduates than journalism majors. Except for the smallest of newspapers, the publisher and editor positions were usually separate, with the editor managing the news operation while the publisher oversaw business and printing concerns.

The major insights we can draw about community weeklies during the period from 1900 to 1980 are the following:

1. Although not prominent among professional circles of journalists, community weeklies performed vital roles in their communities. While community weekly newspapers were not familiar to those who lived outside their geographical circulation boundaries, they were like an extended member of the family who tirelessly recorded the life happenings of relatives, as if in the pages of a cherished family album. Some weekly publishers and editors did gain recognition and readership well beyond their town's borders, but mostly from former residents who wanted to stay connected to "home." The main purpose of the weekly editor was to produce a publication that provided a common link and, in some cases, a lifeline to local residents.

Some weekly editors felt inferior to their metropolitan counterparts because they lacked the fame and acclaim that larger newspapers enjoyed. But for most weekly editors, the goal was not to produce a smaller version of a daily with the same type of content. They viewed their mission as being different from that of the large dailies, which explains why many readers of weeklies also purchased a nearby daily. Eventually many weekly editors embraced their niche as community boosters and took pride in bolstering the morale of their readers and business climate of their communities.

2. Starting in the early years of the twentieth century, weekly newspapers began to diverge from dailies as a clearly different type of publication. However, a group of weekly editors and publishers resented the comparisons to the metropolitan press because they believed that weeklies were viewed as inferior journalistic endeavors. The weekly was more personal and less objective than the metropolitan daily. There were even predictions of the death of the weekly newspaper when it faced direct competition from nearby metropolitan dailies that attempted to lure away subscribers, advertising dollars, and staff. The weaker small-town publications struggled to survive. Certainly there were weeklies throughout the period of study that seemed to be nothing more than vehicles for advertisements and free publicity, but the overall image was that of an industry (the weekly newspaper field) aspiring to a genuine mission of public service. As more weeklies survived, and even thrived, editors turned the heads of politicians and businessmen alike who recognized fully the benefit of advertising in their papers and winning the political backing of their readers.

3. "Localism" was the characteristic that distinguished community weeklies from their metropolitan counterparts. Despite a persistent criticism of weeklies, which came mostly from metropolitan journalists, that a large percentage of their space contained propaganda and free publicity material, "localism" propelled weeklies from financial straits to monetary strength. In fact, by the late 1970s the dailies were more pervasive in their use of syndicate material than weeklies. A 1977 *Publishers' Auxiliary* study found that seventy-eight percent of dailies subscribed to at least one syndicate news and feature service, as compared to only thirty percent of weeklies. The study also showed that on a per-issue average, roughly forty-three percent of the news space in dailies was given to syndicated non-local and feature material.⁶⁹² Thus, dailies

⁶⁹² Jeffrey Colin Van, "Although Local News Emphasis is Greater, Dailies Heavy Users of Syndicates, Wires," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 12 September 1977, 1.

eventually became the prominent users of syndicate materials even though previous generations of daily publishers and editors turned up their noses at weeklies for heavy syndicate content.

Longtime Maine weekly publisher Alexander Brook described syndicate materials as “risk-free and inexpensive” and admitted that a substantial amount of publicity and promotional materials became “filler” material. But he acknowledged a “glamour handicap” that weeklies had to overcome because they could not afford the same level of “spicy national and international items, titillating bits about celebrities and beautiful people, sensational crime, war, sports, and features” material available to dailies through syndicate services. Therefore, weeklies were challenged, he argued, to do a better job in presenting local news.⁶⁹³

4. While social and political scientists and metropolitan journalists labeled community weeklies as “boosterism” publications, the weekly newspaper field was proud of its role in bolstering community businesses and that of the editor in providing much needed local leadership during times of economic strife and war. Community weekly boosterism not only helped to establish communities along important transportation lines, rail and roadway, but it also forged an important relationship with the business community that enabled small-town commerce to thrive, especially during economic depressions. Weeklies served as lifelines to news about job availability and government relief programs. The weeklies served as morale boosters by encouraging local citizens to keep the faith and keep their money in the banks. But they also kept other businesses alive through advertising trade outs, promotional campaigns, and reinforcement of positive economic news. In wartime, the federal government found a willing partner in weeklies to promote all manner of civilian support. Community newspapers also served as a powerful recruiting tool to aid in the buildup of military forces.

⁶⁹³ Brook, *The Hard Way: The Odyssey of a Weekly Newspaper Editor*, 256.

5. Weeklies responded to a readership that became more interested in global issues following military deployments overseas and increased travel beyond regional borders. After receiving war news from abroad, even readers of weeklies who were not deployed developed a keen interest in news from beyond their town and surrounding communities. As “war brides” began to populate many smaller towns, weeklies began to feature more news from their native countries. In addition, improved roadways and affordable travel abroad exposed rural residents to interesting places and unusual customs that they could read about in syndicate features and news wire stories.

6. A distinction between the traditional small-town weekly and the suburban weekly grew by mid century, with the weekly mirroring the interests of rural and small-town residents while suburban weeklies addressed issues more in concert with those of a large urban area. Small-town editors were accused of being provincial and ignorant of global concerns. Their provincialism was sometimes reflected in their editorials or lack thereof. Or they were charged with protecting the establishment elite, of which the editor was often a prominent member.

Urban sprawl transformed once-rural areas into developed neighborhoods whose residents wanted a community newspaper that focused on local issues. The traditional weekly continued to serve residents of small towns situated miles from mid- to large-size metropolitan communities. It focused on keeping shoppers at home while the suburban weekly reaped the benefits of running advertisements for retailers from the large shopping centers and downtown shopping districts that permeated larger cities.

7. Threats to the traditional community weekly became much more aggressive from the 1950s and beyond as dailies added zoned community news editions, suburban weeklies multiplied and expanded their circulation areas, and shoppers, or free-circulation weeklies whose content was mostly advertising, lured away advertising revenue and readers because they were

cost-free and mailed to large geographic areas. In response to these threats, weeklies embraced a renewed focus on in-depth local reporting and a new approach to journalism. This new approach, often referred to as “community journalism,” emphasized a more activist role for the journalist in shaping the news.

8. The introduction of chain ownership and central printing operations brought a new business model to the weekly newspaper field that enabled many communities to retain a newspaper, albeit under new or corporate ownership. Centralized printing was a key factor from which two conflicting trends were emerging. One was the growth of chain or group ownership, which would bring new newspapers and the revival of competition in one-newspaper communities. A downside to chain ownership was the loss of an independent editorial voice, as newspapers within a chain often reflected the political leanings of its owner(s). The other trend was the impact that centralized printing of weeklies could have in a mass society, especially at the grassroots level, because it permitted anyone with little capital to start a newspaper.

9. Beginning in the twentieth century, community weeklies embraced the concept of professionalism through the establishment of national organizations, greater participation in state press associations, and growing support for college journalism programs. For the most part, weekly publishers and editors supported college journalism programs as a means to recruit more skilled workers to their publications. In fact, by the 1970s, a growing number of journalism programs offered specialized courses in community journalism. Training and sharing “best practices” at meetings and workshops and through professional publications proved extremely helpful as weeklies transitioned through business models and technological advancements that changed staffing and organizational needs. For example, weeklies had to adjust as fewer workers were needed in the business, production, and newsroom departments because computerization allowed for the consolidation or elimination of certain tasks.

10. Although chain ownership provided weeklies with a financial model for success, proud traditions such as family ownership and independent editorial voices were dying. As a result, more weekly publishers no longer lived in their newspapers' communities, thus lacking a personal investment in the overall prosperity of the towns their publications served.

The viability of weeklies owned, managed, and edited by the same individual was a concern for publisher Alexander Brook at the end of his twenty-year career in small-town journalism in the late 1970s. He described these individuals as an "obsolescing breed that became one fewer when I left." He predicted that few would remain, with the exception of one-person or husband-and-wife rural operations that printed their publication at an off-site central plant. "The individual sparkle of the weeklies will dim," he asserted, "as their owners cease to manufacture their products and lose control of makeup and design, which were once parts of their personal statement."⁶⁹⁴ His prediction held true at the end of the decade as more small-town family-owned weeklies sold out to chains because of burdensome estate taxes and lucrative buyout offers.

11. By the late 1970s the once-competitive daily and weekly newspaper industries found it necessary to unite efforts to combat an overall drop in newspaper readership. After decades of infighting, daily and non-daily publishers and editors from the major newspaper industry associations set rivalries aside to join a Newspaper Readership Council project designed to keep readers interested in newspapers.⁶⁹⁵ Rather than combating each other, they were called upon to fight a new battle: declining newspaper readership, especially among young people. A 1977 *Publishers' Auxiliary* article pointed out that illiteracy was another problem resulting in a growing number of young people who simply were incapable of reading a newspaper. If

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 302.

⁶⁹⁵ Bill White, "Readership Project Brings Newspaper Groups Closer," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 10 March 1977, 13.

illiteracy rates and newspaper interest did not improve, the article speculated, the newspaper industry faced a steady decline in overall circulation.⁶⁹⁶

A 1979 study on newspaper readership among young adults found that small-town newspaper editors were more in agreement with young adults than metropolitan editors on the importance of civic-mindedness over individuality of character in news content. But young adults also expressed a preference for national and international news over local news, which had a heavier emphasis in dailies. The study concluded that despite agreement among newspaper editors and young adults as to what newspapers' attributes should be, young readers were not "excited over the end product." Thus, the entire newspaper industry rushed to develop design layouts and content criteria that would appeal to a younger reading audience.⁶⁹⁷

So, despite all of the problems that faced the weekly newspaper industry throughout its long and proud history, the constants that remained were survival tactics in terms of reactive versus proactive responses to content, commercial, and professional concerns. Several times throughout the decades an obituary had been written for community weeklies. But they always found a way to fight back and happen upon a means, a method, or a message that resonated with audiences and advertisers enough so as to allow them to keep their doors open for another business day. Certainly a number of weeklies failed, whether because of poor business management or ill-advised political posturing, but many more survived and even thrived.

There was devotion among a majority of weekly publishers and editors. Some might even liken it to a religious calling to their chosen vocation. Even if their equipment was outdated and hard to manipulate, the survivalists were persistent in finding the right news-business formula to keep readers reading and advertisers advertising. From the pre-printed pages of ready-print to the

⁶⁹⁶ George Joplin, "Newspapers Will Face Many Old - and New - Problems," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, 25 January 1977, 12.

⁶⁹⁷ Elden Rawlings, "What Editors and Young People Think of Newspapers: Testing a Method for Measuring Reader Expectations," *Newspaper Readership Journal: Prototype Edition* (April, 1979): 27, 28.

computerization of page paste-up, weeklies re-designed themselves and their pages to remain relevant. At times weekly content was accused of being too commercial, as in “shopper” publications, too controversial, as in crusading editors who were more intent on bringing down political elites than propping up community morale, or too self-serving, as the editor who used his paper as a partisan platform for personal political aspirations.

As emphasized in the introduction to this study, community weeklies told the story of average American daily lives more thoroughly and in a more personal manner than the big-city dailies. In essence, the weekly publisher-editor served as author of his community’s life story through birth, marriage, and death announcements, the comings and goings of the social elite, the accomplishments of local students, and the gatherings of community clubs, business and professional organizations, and church groups. Even the introduction of radio, television, and mega-merged metropolitan dailies with “community news” inserts could not supplant the weekly as the main source for local news. Community newspapers were also full of primary sources because they contained the personal correspondence, journal entries, and political thought through “letters to the editor,” editorials, and guest columns of everyday citizens. “Citizen journalists” thrived in weekly newspapers before they were designated as such.

In summarizing his lifelong journalism career, Claude V. Campbell, owner-editor of the *Jewell (Ia). Record*, spoke for many editors when he talked about living and working in a small town. He was the topic of a 1949 *Publishers’ Auxiliary* “Editor of the Week” feature. He recalled his forty-year journalism career and noted that despite their size, small communities offered an opportunity to “live decently and give part of one’s time to service instead of trying to serve personal interests only.” He added, “Best of all, when you get out near the end of the road, there is the feeling that the publisher of a small town paper has--and that nobody can take from him--

that he has contributed something to his community in the years during which he has travelled
[sic] that road.”⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁸ "Small Town Jams Come Easy, Claude V. Campbell Declares," *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, 19 February 1949, 4.

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