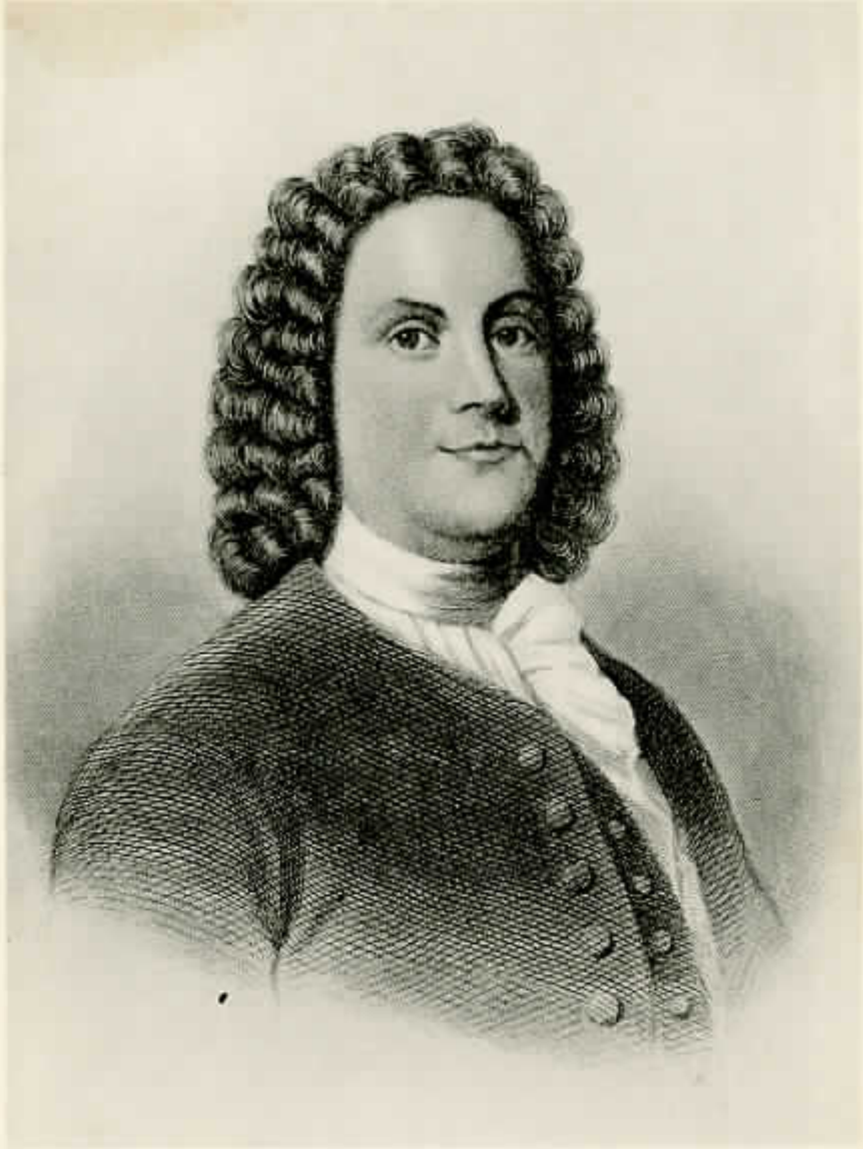

Benjamin Franklin at the time he retired from the active management of the Pennsylvania Gazette. From an engraving after a painting made about 1748 and known as the Sumner Portrait.

AMERICAN JOURNALISM

A HISTORY OF NEWSPAPERS IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH 250 YEARS

1690 to 1940

by Frank Luther Mott

New York · The Macmillan Company · 1941

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shot one man, leaves his new assistant in charge of the office, saying:

> Jones will be here at three—cowhide him. Gillespie will call earlier, perhaps—throw him out of the window. Ferguson will be along about four—kill him. That is all for today, I believe. If you have any odd time, you may write a blistering article on the police. The cowhides are under the table, weapons in the drawer, ammunition there in the corner, lint and bandages up there in the pigeon-holes. In case of accident, go to Lancet, the surgeon, downstairs. He advertises; we take it out in trade.[14]

Editorial billingsgate declined toward the middle of the century, though western papers generally used rougher speech, and though Horace Greeley could screech, "You lie, you villain; you sinfully, wickedly, basely lie!" at William Cullen Bryant, of the *Evening Post*; and Bennett could fling at Greeley such unamiable epithets as "crazy, contemptible wretch," "monster," and "ogre." But such language was frowned upon in many quarters. Even in Kentucky, and as early as 1837, editors got together and resolved to "abstain from all disrespectful personal allusions or epithets toward each other." [15]

CRITICISMS OF THE PRESS

The period's leading attacks on the press were those of Cooper, Dickens, and Wilmer.

Charles Dickens visited the United States in 1842, and in the same year published his *American Notes*, in which he distributed praise and blame on American institutions and customs as he understood them. This was just at the end of the Cooper "war," and the criticisms of Dickens sound remarkably like those of Cooper. What they both chiefly objected to was what they conceived to be a corrupt control of every phase of American life by the press. Wrote Dickens in the last chapter of *American Notes*:

> While that Press has its evil eye in every house, and its black hand in every appointment in the state, from a president to a postman; while, with ribald slander for its only stock in trade, it is the standard literature of an enormous class, who must find their reading in a newspaper, or they will not read at all; so long must its odium be upon the country's head, and so long must the evil it works be plainly visible in the Republic.

The next year Dickens began the publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in which were introduced two caricatures of American journalists—Colonel Diver, publisher of the New York *Rowdy Journal*, and that worthy's chief writer, Mr. Jefferson Brick. Indeed the hero's first impression of New York was one of shouting newsboys:

> "Here's this morning's New York *Sewer!*" cried one. "Here's this morning's New York *Stabber!* Here's the New York *Family Spy!* Here's the New York *Private Listener!* Here's the New York *Peeper!* Here's the New York *Plunderer!* Here's the New York *Keyhole Reporter!* Here's the New York *Rowdy Journal!* Here's all the New York papers! Here's full particulars of the patriotic locofoco movement yesterday, in which the Whigs was so chawed up; and the last Alabama gouging case; and the interesting Arkansas dooel with Bowie knives; and all the Political, Commercial, and Fashionable News. Here they are! Here's the papers, here's the papers!"

The first book devoted wholly to criticism of the American press was Lambert A. Wilmer's *Our Press Gang; or, A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers*. Wilmer, whose own journalistic life had not been altogether fortunate, had gathered together a collection of accusations against newspapers and newspaper men. His book, published in Philadelphia in 1859, was a curious and sometimes instructive compilation of strictures on the press.

NEWSPAPER PERSONNEL

A writer in one of the current reviews of 1851 declared that "writing for the press is a profession—a craft." [16] Greeley, however, testifying in London before a committee of the House of Commons, said journalism was not a "profession apart," since it drew on men who had been "brought up to the bar, to the pulpit, as printers, and so on." Yet the professional attitude became, in the forties and fifties, far more noticeable in the American press than it had been before. Men of high attainments engaged more and more frequently in journalism. Raymond, Dana, Bryant, Ripley,

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[14] Mark Twain, *Sketches Old and New* (New York, 1875).

[15] *Niles' Register*, April, 1837 (Vol. LII, p. 80).

[16] *Whig Review*, November, 1851 (Vol. XIV, p. 417).

Bigelow, Hallock, Prentice, and Bowles were prominent among those who helped to raise the level of the new "profession." Though Greeley was outspoken in his contempt of college men in the newspaper office, well-educated journalists became more and more common in the prominent positions—especially in the East.

At the same time, the decline of what is sometimes called "personal journalism" had set in. This was an inevitable effect of the revolution in news brought about by the penny press. The emphasis on news as the chief function of the newspaper and the growing size and complexity of the newspaper organization detracted from the personal prestige of the editor-in-chief. A magazine writer of 1855 said:

> The newspaper-press has taken a more extensive scope, called into its service a greater variety of talent, entrusted its leading specialties to men peculiarly qualified to do them justice; the great journals are now rather corporate institutions than individual organs; and hence the former autocratic influence of men like Horace Greeley is on the decline.[17]

Greeley himself had recognized this situation some years earlier.[18]

Reporters did not become necessary to newspaper staffs until the penny papers had placed an emphasis on local news. Not until the forties did even the largest papers generally have reporters for "local items." [19]

Women began to find places on some newspapers. For many years women had set type in printing offices,[20] especially in the smaller towns; but the first woman editor of an important daily paper was Miss Cornelia Walter, who edited the Boston *Transcript* 1842-47. Margaret Fuller brought a greater reputation, however, to the New York *Tribune* during her editorial service on that paper 1844-46. In Washington the picturesque Mrs. Anne Royal conducted her weekly *Paul Pry*, later the *Huntress*, for twenty-five years; these papers may be described as forerunners of the modern Washington gossip columns. Mrs. Royal was once convicted as a common scold and sentenced to be ducked according to the penalty prescribed by an old law, but the sentence was suspended. Jane Grey Swisshelm attained some fame by her clever editing of the Pittsburgh *Saturday Visiter* in 1848-52, and her letters from the national capital to her own paper and the New York *Tribune* earned her distinction as the first woman of the Washington corps. The reformer Frances Wright was an editor on two or three reform papers. Several women edited famous magazines, notably Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, of *Godey's Lady's Book*, and Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, of *Peterson's Magazine*. Mrs. Sara Willis Parton gained much fame as a contributor to the New York *Ledger* under the pen-name of "Fanny Fern."

The highest editorial salaries were said to be $3,000 in 1851,[21] and below the editor-in-chief they ranged from $500 to $2,500. It is doubtful whether they went much higher in any instances before the Civil War.

The printing trade still furnished most of the journalists. This was particularly notable among the country weeklies and the western papers. A job-printing business was still a necessary adjunct to any newspaper. "The local patronage of advertising, and particularly *jobbing*, is the *main* support of a newspaper establishment," declared a Chicago daily.[22]

Typographical unions, which had in a few instances been effective in raising wages in the latter years of the eighteenth century but had later suffered a relapse, became active again in the thirties. A national organization was formed in 1836, but it was wrecked by the hard times which ensued; and not until eight or ten years later were the local unions reorganized. In the meantime printers on New York newspapers had been receiving since about 1830 a weekly wage of $12. Morning papers raised this about 1844 to $15. In Boston the rate was only $9, and the 1848 strike of the Boston printers, which was aided by the New York union, stimulated printers throughout the country to new unionization efforts. As a result, the National Typographical Union was organized in 1850, later to become the present International Typographical Union. By 1860 it numbered thirty-four locals and about

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[17] *Putnam's Monthly*, July, 1855 (Vol. VI, p. 76).

[18] See p. 277, footnote.

[19] See Boston *Herald*, August 6, 1847.

[20] Wives and widows of printers and publishers had engaged in journalism before this, though never very prominently. See footnote, p. 25.

[21] Greeley's London testimony in Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*, p. 547; also Whitelaw Reid, *American and English Studies* (New York, 1913), Vol. II, pp. 246-47.

[22] *Daily Chicago American*, July 12, 1839.

Increases in the price of paper stock necessitated rises in subscription rates for virtually all papers in 1862. Some two-cent papers went to three cents and some to four cents. The New York *Times*, for example, raised its price to three cents in 1862, and to four in 1864. The *Evening Post*, and later the *World*, went to five cents, and the *Journal of Commerce* to six. The leading papers became stabilized at four cents after the war, though there were a number of three- and two-cent papers, and, as noted below, one penny paper.

The four-page penny papers also had to increase rates during the war. The Boston *Herald* went to two cents in 1862; and in 1864, when the other Boston papers rose to five cents, it went to three, but fell back to two the next year. The New York *Sun* tried to meet the crisis by reducing type- and page-sizes, but finally went to the two-cent level in August, 1864. The New York *Daily News* made its increase a year earlier, but it dropped to one cent after the end of the war. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* was sold to George W. Childs and the banking firm of Drexel & Company in December, 1864, and the new owners brought the price at once to two cents. At the beginning of 1865 the Baltimore *Sun* took similar action.

INCREASING NUMBERS OF NEWSPAPERS

American newspapers increased in number by one third in the decade of the sixties, so that there were about 4,500 of them by 1870.[15] Dailies multiplied more rapidly than weeklies, increasing fifty per cent in the decade. As a basis of comparison, it may be noted that in 1870 the United States had about three times as many newspapers as the United Kingdom,[16] and more than a

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cent), soared within a few years to about a quarter of a million; though this was greatly reduced for a time by the national disaster in the Franco-Prussian War, the paper soon recovered and rose to greater heights. The London *Daily Telegraph*, first modern English penny (two-cent) paper, was founded in 1855, soon passed the *Times* in circulation, and by 1870 had about 175,000. Another London penny paper, the *Standard*, had 140,000 for its morning and evening editions together. The London *Echo*, first modern English halfpenny (one-cent) paper to succeed, was begun in 1868, and had about 80,000 circulation by 1871. London dailies and New York dailies were about equal in aggregate circulation at the end of the period (1872), at half a million for each city.

[15] These are census figures for daily, triweekly, semiweekly, and weekly publications, with deduction for class weeklies. Rowell's figures do not differ greatly.

[16] *Leisure Hour*, April 15, 1871 (Vol. XX, p. 234).

third of all the newspapers in the world.[17] An English writer explained the American phenomenon thus:

> America is the classic soil of newspapers; everybody is reading; literature is permeating everywhere; publicity is sought for every interest and every order; no political party, no religious sect, no theological school, no literary or benevolent association, is without its particular organ; there is a universality of print.[18]

THE PROFESSIONAL IDEA IN JOURNALISM

The professional phases of journalism, as distinguished from its commercial and mechanical elements, may be said to be: first, those which emphasize public service; and, second, those which relate to proficiency in writing and editing. The skill of a Franklin and the devotion to principle of a Bryant may be said to have been professional in kind; but as long as newspapers were produced chiefly by printers as adjuncts of printing establishments, the degree of professionalism was likely to be small. Certainly some printers—as Franklin himself, Thomas, Russell, Greeley—had attained a high level of professionalism; but the generalization remains tenable nevertheless.

By the midcentury, journalism had attracted such a number of men of high character and educational attainments as to command a more general respect for the calling than it had formerly enjoyed. Many came to look upon it as, in some of its phases at least, a profession. This attitude was strengthened in the period immediately after the Civil War. Writing of that period, Whitelaw Reid, Greeley's assistant and successor on the *Tribune*, could say:

> Our greatest newspapers are carried on rigorously upon the idea that journalism is a profession. . . . The preliminary education of the mass of journalists is much better now, I fancy, than that of the corresponding classes in the profession ten or twenty years ago. I know that on the *Tribune*, about which there has been a popular idea, once falsely attributed to its editor, that "of all horned cattle, he least liked to see a college graduate in his office," there is scarcely a writer who is not a college graduate; while, indeed, two thirds or more of its reporters are,

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[17] Eugene Hatin, historian of French journalism, estimated the total number of newspapers in the world in 1870 at 12,500. James Grant, *The Newspaper Press* (London, 1871), Vol. II, p. 433.

[18] *British Quarterly Review*, January, 1871 (Vol. LIII, p. 4).

to use the vague phrase, men of liberal education. I presume the same thing is true of the other leading papers.[19]

The first gesture toward special college education for journalism was made in 1869 by General Robert E. Lee, who was at that time president of Washington College.[20] He offered fifty scholarships to boys who intended to enter journalism, and made arrangements for them to work out their tuition at the printing trade. But no special journalism courses were set up and no scholars appeared. General Lee died the next year; and education for journalism remained only an idea, laughed at by most observers.[21]

Editors on morning papers in New York received only $25 to $60 a week after the war, and those on evening papers somewhat less. Reporters were paid $15 to $30.[22] Writers in whatever field were ill paid.

Women became more important as newspaper workers. Mrs. Emily Verdery Bettey is said to have been the first woman to do general reporting on a New York paper; she began work on the *Sun* in 1868. Gail Hamilton for the *Tribune* and Grace Greenwood for the *Times* wrote famous Washington columns.

THE END OF AN ERA

The year 1872 seems to mark the end of an era. Bennett died in the summer of that year, and Greeley five months later. Raymond had died in 1869. Bryant, in partial retirement from editorial work, was translating Homer.

Perhaps even more significant than the passing of these great editors from the scene was the declaration which Greeley made in the *Tribune* shortly before his death: "Henceforth it shall be my endeavor to make this a thoroughly independent journal." Independence from party bonds had been making great advances. Greeley's declaration may be taken as marking the end of a long period dominated by great party newspapers.

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[19] Wingate, *Views and Interviews*, p. 30.

[20] Later Washington and Lee University. Education for journalism was not actually established there until 1926.

[21] Two of the earliest journalism manuals were *Haney's Guide to Authorship* (Jesse Haney & Company, 1867), and *Hints to Young Editors* ("By an Editor," 1872).

[22] Maverick, *Raymond*, p. 325; Julius Wilcox in Galaxy, November, 1867 (Vol. VIII, p. 798).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

For the Period 1860-1872

THE standard histories of American journalism named in the bibliographical notes to preceding chapters—Bleyer, Hudson, Lee, North, and Payne—are useful for the present period. The *Union List of Newspapers* continues invaluable. Daniel J. Kenny, comp., *The American Newspaper Directory* (New York, 1861), though a mere list geographically arranged, is somewhat helpful. *Geo. P. Rowell & Co.'s American Newspaper Directory*, issued annually beginning with 1869 gives much more information, including, for most papers, conservative estimates of circulations for the year preceding the date of issue.

F. Lauriston Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (Boston, 1914) gathers together much good material on Civil War reporting. W. E. Griffis, *Charles Carleton Coffin* (Boston, 1898) and Coffin's own *Four Years of Fighting* (Boston, 1866) give details of the experiences of one of the most famous of the war "specials." Other correspondents' stories are found in the first volume of George W. Smalley, *Anglo-American Memories* (London, 1910), two vols.; *Memoirs of Henry Villard* (Boston, 1904), two vols.; the first volume of Royal Cortissoz, *The Life of Whitelaw Reid* (New York, 1921); Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field* (New York, 1865); G. A. Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant* (New York, 1866); Junius Henri Browne, *Four Years in Secessia* (Detroit, 1866); Albert D. Richardson, *The Secret Service, the Field, the Dungeon, and the Escape* (Hartford, 1865); etc.

The three journalistic autobiographies most valuable for this period are John W. Forney, *Forty Years of American Journalism* (Philadelphia, 1877); Alexander K. McClure, *Recollections of Half a Century* (Salem, Mass., 1902); Franc B. Wilkie, *Personal Reminiscences of Thirty-Five Years of Journalism* (Chicago, 1891). The last is valuable chiefly for light on the Chicago *Times*.

The authorized *Life of Charles A. Dana* is by James Harrison Wilto the prize ring on the part of many readers. Almost as sensational but less gory were the stories of the international walking matches of 1879 and 1882. The international yacht races to defend the America's cup, which occurred at intervals during the period made big news.

Among the great crime and scandal stories of the period were those of the kidnaping of Charley Ross in 1874, still unsolved; the greatest of domestic scandal cases in American history, the Beecher trial of 1875; the trial of Mrs. Florence Maybrick for poisoning her husband in 1889, an international story handled gravely by the English press, but sensationally in the cabled accounts published in the New York *World* and other papers; and the mysterious murder of Dr. P. H. Cronin, the Irish Nationalist leader in Chicago, with the subsequent trial, in 1889. This last trial was reported with exceptional brilliance for the Chicago *Herald* by John W. Postgate, in stories illustrated by Charles Lederer's sketches. The first electrocution for murder, performed at Auburn, the New York prison, in 1891, was not reported; but a change in the law the next year permitted the presence of newspapermen as witnesses. Thus the first stories of legal electrocution were written in 1892 by six New York reporters, including Arthur Brisbane for the *World* and Charles Edward Russell for the *Herald*.

REPORTERS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The reporter had come into his own. He was key man in the New Journalism. His growing importance is shown by the increased use of the by-line, common in the Sunday papers, and by 1886 frequent in the daily editions of the New York *World*, the Boston *Globe*, and a few other papers. Most of the famous editors of the time had risen from the ranks of reporters. "There are better reporters in America than anywhere else in the world," wrote an English observer in the *New Review* in 1893.[5]

On the other hand there was the famous occasion on which President Eliot was said to have called reporters "drunkards, deadbeats, and bummers."[6] Certainly there was too much drinking by reporters.

Journalists were, on the whole, much better educated than

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[5] *New Review*, June, 1893 (Vol. VIII, p. 655).

[6] See *Journalist* through February-March, 1890.

formerly. "In the large cities," said a famous reporter of the period, "notably in the East, regularly educated men are the rule. Journalism has grown to be a profession."[7] Whitelaw Reid also thought journalism a profession, but the *Nation* took issue. No special education was required, it argued, the ability to observe and to write being "a gift"; and besides journalism was too commercial to qualify as a profession.[8] Nevertheless there was much talk—occasionally favorable—about special education for journalism.[9] Cornell University in the years 1875-79 offered a Certificate of Journalism for the completion of a prescribed liberal arts curriculum plus some work in the university printing department, but it had no special journalistic courses. Apparently the first of such courses to be offered in a university were two at the University of Missouri in the years 1878-84; they were called the "History of Journalism" and "Materials of Journalism."

One factor operating against professionalism was the insecurity of tenure. Frequent "shake-ups" were common in most newspaper offices; and while this made for rapid advancement of the young and brilliant men, it was disastrous for the older workers—and men grew old quickly in the intense and exciting life of a great newspaper organization.

Journalists' salaries virtually doubled during this period. By its end, in New York City several managing editors were receiving over $6,000 a year, city editors got $3,000 to $5,000, and a score of good reporters drew as much as the city editors.[10] But these were in the top brackets, and $15-a-week police-court reporters and $25-a-week general-assignment men were common. Payment by space rates, with a guarantee to star writers, was common by 1890, and most established journalists in New York objected to working on salary; but Pulitzer, recognizing the abuses of this system and paying liberal salaries, wielded a strong influence against space-writing.

Women flocked into newspaper work in the eighties. The *Journalist* estimated in 1886 that 500 women worked regularly on

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[7] Junius Henri Browne, in *Lippincott's Magazine*, December, 1886 (Vol. XXXVIII, p. 723).

[8] *Nation*, June 26, 1879 (Vol. XXVIII, p. 433). This was a reply to Reid's recent address before the Ohio Press Association.

[9] See note on earlier efforts in this direction, p. 406.

[10] Foster Coates' syndicated letter, quoted in *Journalist*, December 24, 1887.