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1979

"NORTHERN MICHIGAN'S GREATEST DAILY": AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE NEWS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND OPINION CONTENT OF  
THE TRAVERSE CITY RECORD-EAGLE BEFORE AND AFTER  
ITS PURCHASE BY OTTAWAY NEWSPAPERS, INC.

By

Martin David Sommerness

A THESIS

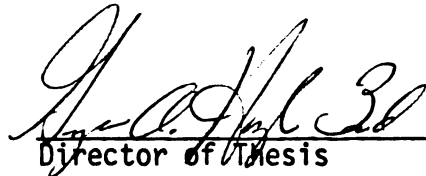
Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Journalism

1979

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Journalism, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

  
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Director of Thesis

## ABSTRACT

"NORTHERN MICHIGAN'S GREATEST DAILY": AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE NEWS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND OPINION CONTENT OF  
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One of the most controversial trends involving the newspaper business in the United States during the twentieth century has been the rise of absentee-owned newspapers and the subsequent decline in independent, local ownership. This study deals with one segment of that controversy: the sale of the Traverse City Record-Eagle by the family which had maintained an interest in it for more than 55 years to Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dow Jones and Company, Inc. A content analysis and readership survey showed the change in ownership had improved the news, entertainment, and opinion content of the Record-Eagle. An increase in news staff members, a switch from letterpress to offset printing, and a more aggressive, locally-oriented news and opinion policy have enhanced the ability of the Record-Eagle to serve the five-county Grand Traverse region.

This is dedicated to my parents,  
Dr. and Mrs. M. Duane Sommerness,  
who made this possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Unfortunately, the limits of space make it impossible to properly recognize all of the people in Traverse City and East Lansing who have helped me with the professional and academic training which made this study possible. My summer reporting internships at the Traverse City Record-Eagle and my studies at Michigan State University have proved invaluable. This project would have been impossible without the Record-Eagle staff members who provided me with many essential documents, especially the readership survey results, and the counsel of MSU School of Journalism faculty members. Among those who assisted me in innumerable ways, I would like to single out for special thanks Dr. George A. Hough 3rd and Dr. Maurice R. Cullen Jr. of the MSU School of Journalism; Dr. James F. Scotton of the Marquette University College of Journalism; and John P. Kinney, John Davis, and Jeannine Fedorinchik of the Record-Eagle.

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## INTRODUCTION

On September 29, 1972, the Traverse City Record-Eagle was sold by the Batdorff family, which had an interest in the newspaper since 1917, to Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dow Jones and Company, Inc. Prior to the purchase, the Ottaway newspaper group published 10 daily newspapers in four states while its parent company published the Wall Street Journal, Barron's Business and Financial Weekly, and the now-defunct National Observer.

This thesis is an analysis of how the news, entertainment, and opinion content of what was once a locally-owned newspaper has been affected by group management and absentee ownership. This study includes brief histories of the Grand Traverse region, the Record-Eagle, Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., and Dow Jones and Company, Inc.; a review of the pertinent literature on chain ownership and content analysis; and a content analysis of the Record-Eagle's news, entertainment, and opinion content before and after its purchase by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc.

The content analysis portion of the study is quantitative in nature. The constructed week method was used. Four weeks were chosen at random for the analysis, two from the year prior to the change in ownership, and two from the year five years after the change. All non-advertising content was systematically classified

into various categories to determine the general nature of the news, entertainment, and opinion content of the Record-Eagle. To obtain some qualitative concept of the performance of the newspaper, the number and type of articles published during each time period analyzed were compared to the results of a readership survey conducted in April and May 1977.

While specific conclusions were reached in this study, it must be realized that journalism is a perpetually unfinished business in which a newspaper and its staff must continually react to various internal and external forces, constantly molding and shaping news, entertainment, and opinion content if the publication is to survive. Therefore, by the very nature of the news business, this thesis can not be a final judgment of the effect of Ottaway ownership on the Record-Eagle. However, this thesis does give an indication of the general direction in which Ottaway management has channeled the Record-Eagle's news, entertainment, and opinion content.

This study was undertaken to examine in detail one small portion of the phenomenon described in Chapter III. The growth of absentee ownership in the newspaper business, the rise of newspaper chains or groups, and the concomitant decline in independently-owned newspapers has become a controversial subject in many quarters, including northwest lower Michigan, the circulation area of the Record-Eagle. In the sense that all publications are in a constant state of becoming, this thesis shows not a destination reached by

Ottaway managers and their policies, but the direction in which they are taking the Record-Eagle.

CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GRAND TRAVERSE REGION  
AND THE TRAVERSE CITY RECORD-EAGLE

Hill-lands and plains dominate the northwestern portion of the lower peninsula of Michigan. The area, comprising Leelanau, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Antrim Counties, is known as the Grand Traverse region. Glaciers receded from that part of Michigan for the final time about 9000 B.C.<sup>1</sup> As the glaciers left, they marked much of the surface with moraines and outwash plains.<sup>2</sup> Most of the land is 600 to 1,200 feet above sea level. "Distinctive and sometimes massive" sand dunes line the Lake Michigan coast, including the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in western Leelanau and Benzie Counties.<sup>3</sup> Most of the Grand Traverse region drains directly into Lake Michigan, but a sizeable portion of the area drains into the lake through the Boardman River watershed.

With an average annual temperature of between 42 and 46 degrees Fahrenheit and a growing season of about 130 days, the

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence M. Sommers, ed., Atlas of Michigan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1977), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 25, 33.

region has a temperate climate.<sup>4</sup> It receives about 31 inches of precipitation annually. The average snowfall for the region is 90 inches. The ground is covered by at least one inch of snow for about 110 days per year.<sup>5</sup>

Before white settlers moved into the Grand Traverse area, the land was covered with a forest of maple, beech, birch, and to a lesser extent, pine and oak trees. Following settlement and logging of the region, the composition of the forest changed. Some of the re-grown hardwood stands resemble the pre-settlement forest but the much-sought-after pine stands have been replaced by aspen, birch, and jack pine.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest known inhabitants of Michigan were Stone Age tribes of native Americans belonging to the Algonquin linguistic group.<sup>7</sup> One of the tribes, the Ottawa, eventually occupied much of the Grand Traverse region.<sup>8</sup> According to historians, the tribe had originated in the Ottawa River area of Canada and, under pressure from Iroquois rivals, was forced west to the Georgian Bay area of Lake Huron and ultimately along the northern shore of the lake to what is now known as Sault Ste. Marie.<sup>9</sup> The Ottawas

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 46, 49; The Traverse City Area Michigan (Chicago: Windsor Publications, 1967), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Sommers, ed., Atlas of Michigan, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 19, 45.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 108; Grand Traverse Herald, 6 December 1883.

encountered the Ojibwas, a people with whom they shared a common language, at the Sault and so moved south to the northeastern shore of Lake Michigan. Part of the area they inhabited, the Grand Traverse region, was given its name by French voyageurs with whom they traded. Exploring southward from outposts at the Sault and the Straits of Mackinac, the voyageurs found two large bays along the northeastern shore of Lake Michigan. Since they usually crossed such bays from headland to headland, they called the smaller of the two "La Petite Traverse" and the larger "La Grande Traverse."<sup>10</sup> The names were later anglicized to Little Traverse and Grand Traverse Bays.

During the time they were the principal inhabitants of the Grand Traverse region, the Ottawas led a generally peaceful existence, although they have been credited with using firearms and axes supplied by French traders to annihilate a small tribe in Emmet County, the Mush-quah-tas.<sup>11</sup> The Ottawas took part in the struggles for control of Michigan from the time the French started exploring the area in the seventeenth century, through the British replacement of the French in the eighteenth century, to the American eviction of the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>10</sup>The Traverse Region (Chicago: H. R. Page & Co., 1884; reprint ed., Traverse City: Grand Traverse Area Historical Society, 1974), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Morgan L. Leach, A History of the Grand Traverse Region (Traverse City: Grand Traverse Herald, 1883; reprint ed., Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University Press, 1964), pp. 7-9.

However, none of the violence that characterized that conflict is known to have reached the Grand Traverse area.

In 1836, the United States obtained northwestern lower Michigan from the Indians in the Washington Treaty.<sup>12</sup> A Presbyterian missionary, the Reverend Peter Dougherty, was the first permanent white settler in the Grand Traverse region. He landed on what later became known as Old Mission Peninsula in May 1839, two years after Michigan entered the union.<sup>13</sup> The church from which the peninsula derived its name was built in 1842, but the steady influx of white settlers forced the Reverend Peter Dougherty and his Indian parishioners to move across the west arm of Grand Traverse Bay in 1852 and establish the New Mission Church in Omena.<sup>14</sup>

The first white settlers in what later became Traverse City were Horace Boardman and Michael Gay, who arrived in 1847.<sup>15</sup> Boardman had been provided with money in 1849 by his father, an Illinois farmer, to establish a sawmill in northern Michigan. However, one pioneer said, ". . . experience had taught him that it would take more than the avails of one Illinois farm to sustain

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<sup>12</sup>Sommers, ed., Atlas of Michigan, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup>The Traverse Region, pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup>Al Barnes, Vinegar Pie and Other Tales of the Grand Traverse Region (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), pp. 112, 173.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 173.

an operating mill. . . ."16 The observant settler was a man who later became instrumental in fostering journalism in Traverse City: Perry Hannah, "the white-water millionaire riverman."17

The protege of Chicago lumber dealer A. Tracy Lay, Hannah sailed north in the spring of 1851 to determine if the land and mill owned by Boardman would be a good investment. The firm of Hannah, Lay and Company was established after the 26-year-old had scouted the area and reported to his mentor. The mill, land, and outbuildings were purchased from Boardman for \$4,500.18

As the new firm prospered, so did the area it served. Although the original interests of the company were in the lumber business, it expanded its operations to include a grist mill, a bank, a hotel, a department store, a real estate business, and a sailing and steam ship line.19 In 1858, seven years after Hannah made his fact-finding trip, the region got its first newspaper: the Grand Traverse Herald.20 Its name lives on in the title of the Herald and Record Company, which publishes its descendant, the Record-Eagle. According to Austin C. Batdorff, one-time president and general manager of the Record-Eagle, a history of

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-28.

<sup>20</sup>The Traverse Region, p. 62.

northern Michigan newspapers becomes "of necessity, a large part of the history of northern Michigan."<sup>21</sup>

Morgan Bates, the first journalist in the Grand Traverse region, was born in Glens Falls, New York, on July 12, 1806. Bates was introduced to the newspaper world in Sandy Hill, New York, where he worked as a printer's apprentice. He later worked as a journeyman printer in Albany, New York. When he was 20, Bates began his career as a newspaperman when he started the Warren (Pa.) Gazette. While in Pennsylvania, Bates employed a journeyman printer who became the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party in 1872. The printer, who was later called "one of the most influential editors in the history of American journalism" and "the greatest editor of his day," was Horace Greeley.<sup>22</sup>

In 1828, Bates became proprietor of the Chatauqua Republican, published in Jamestown, New York. While he published the Republican, Bates took Janet Cook of Argyle, New York, as his bride. Two years after he purchased the Jamestown newspaper, Bates moved to New York City where he worked as a foreman for Greeley and planned the typographical form of Greeley's New Yorker.<sup>23</sup> According to Dr. Morgan L. Leach, one of the first historians of the Grand Traverse

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<sup>21</sup>Austin C. Batdorff, "History of the Record-Eagle of Traverse City, Michigan," 1935 (typewritten), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Edwin Emery, The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 174, 177; Leach, A History of the Grand Traverse Region, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup>The Traverse Region, p. 63.

region, ". . . a strong relationship grew up between them, which continued till the close of Mr. Greeley's life."<sup>24</sup> While in Greeley's employ, Bates met Wilkins Kendall, who later became the first publisher of the New Orleans Picayune, and Eldridge Gerry Paige, who gained fame under his pen name "Dow Jr."<sup>25</sup>

Bates began his Michigan journalism career in 1833 when he moved to Detroit and became foreman of the Advertiser. In 1839, Bates and a partner he later bought out purchased the Advertiser. When the 1844 Presidential election went against the Whigs Bates had editorially supported, he sold his newspaper.<sup>26</sup>

In 1849, Bates took part in the California gold rush. He left California in 1851, but returned with his wife the following year. During the second stay in California, Bates was for more than one year the proprietor of the Alta California, which was at that time the only daily newspaper published west of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>27</sup> His wife was forced by ill health to return to Argyle in 1855. She died that year. Bates returned to Michigan in 1857 and worked in the Lansing office of the state auditor general. While in the capital, he married Clymene C. Cole.

When Bates moved to Traverse City, the small community was considered "an insignificant village" located "at least 150 miles

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<sup>24</sup>Leach, A History of the Grand Traverse Region, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

from any railroad, thirty miles from any regular steamboat route, and a hundred or more miles from even a backwoods stage route."<sup>28</sup> On November 3, 1858, the first Grand Traverse Herald was published. It was the first mainland newspaper north of Grand Rapids and earned Bates the title of "father of the press in that section of the state."<sup>29</sup>

In his opening editorial, Bates said he would "endeavor to make the Herald a useful and entertaining newspaper," although he noted that "bitter experience" had taught him "the folly of publishing a newspaper on the credit system."<sup>30</sup> A one-year subscription cost \$1.50. Operating on a cash-on-the-barrelhead system, Bates espoused Republican philosophy:

In politics we admit no such word as neutrality. We hate slavery in all its forms and conditions and can have no fellowship or compromise with it. . . . Entertaining these views on what we regard as the great political

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<sup>28</sup>The Traverse Region, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup>Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan, Michigan Pioneer Collections, vol. 6 (Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1884; reprint ed. 1907), p. 76; Perry F. Power and H. G. Cutler, A History of Northern Michigan and Its People, vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), p. 141; Milo M. Quaife, The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of the Mormons (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 185-87. The first newspaper in northern Michigan was the weekly Northern Islander, published from December 1850 through summer 1856. It served the Beaver Island Mormon community of James J. Strang. The first daily newspaper in northern Michigan was the Daily Northern Islander, which began publication in April 1856. Both newspapers ceased publication after Strang was assassinated in the summer of 1856, which precipitated the Mormon exodus from Beaver Island.

<sup>30</sup>Grand Traverse Herald, 3 November 1858, p. 2.

issue of the day, we shall support with zeal and firmness, to the best of our ability, the Republican organization, so long as that party shall be true to the principles that now govern it.<sup>31</sup>

The four-column newspaper was started with little advertising, no initial subscribers, in a county controlled by Democrats. Given the circumstances, its founder later said its birth "looked more like a madcap freak than a sensible business enterprise. . . . The only word of encouragement that we received was from Hon. Perry Hannah, who welcomed our advent kindly, and who proved a firm and steadfast friend."<sup>32</sup>

With the encouragement of Hannah and the substantial advertising for his store, the small weekly publication prospered. The newspaper published short stories, "brights," news of state and local affairs, national and international news gleaned from other sources, and items of interest to local Republican Party members. It carried the advertising of local merchants and professionals as well as business notices from Detroit and Chicago. Bates used the newspaper to advertise his land office, his position as notary public, his printing business in which "all kinds of job printing" were "neatly and expeditiously executed," and "Dr. Churchill's hypophosite of lime and soda," a patent medicine he sold in his newspaper office.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The Traverse Region, pp. 62-63.

<sup>33</sup> Grand Traverse Herald, 5 July 1861, pp. 1, 4.

In 1860, Bates was elected treasurer of Grand Traverse County on the Republican ticket, an office to which he was re-elected three times. The next year, President Abraham Lincoln appointed him registrar of the U. S. land office in Traverse City. He was later removed from the position for his criticism of President Andrew Johnson, but regained the registrarship after Ulysses Grant was elected president. Bates declined re-nomination for the office of county treasurer in 1868, the year he became the running mate of Henry Baldwin, the Republican candidate for governor. Bates served two terms as lieutenant governor, from 1869 through 1872. His duties included presiding over the state senate, work which "secured him the friendship and respect of the senators and all with whom he came in contact."<sup>34</sup> After they returned to Traverse City, both Bates and his wife died in the early 1870s.

While Bates owned the Grand Traverse Herald, it grew in circulation and size. It started as an 18- by 26-inch four-column folio, but in May 1866 Bates enlarged the columns by two picas and lengthened them two inches. In May of the following year, the newspaper was enlarged to a 24- by 26-inch six-column folio. Bates said the purpose of the publication ". . . wild and chimerical as it appeared to many, was to repair a shattered fortune--to make

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<sup>34</sup>The Traverse Region, p. 64.

money. We have succeeded beyond our most sanguine expectations."<sup>35</sup>  
 In December 1867, he sold the newspaper to DeWitt C. Leach for  
 \$4,000.<sup>36</sup>

Before he became a publisher, Leach had edited the Lansing State Republican, represented Genesee County in the state legislature, served as state librarian, represented northern Michigan in the U.S. Congress, and was appointed U.S. Indian Agent for Michigan by Abraham Lincoln.<sup>37</sup> In May 1868, Leach expanded the Herald to a seven-column newspaper measuring 26 by 40 inches. It was enlarged to eight columns in March 1869. Leach sold the publication to its founder's nephew, Thomas Bates, in 1876. Leach left the region for St. Louis, Missouri, following the sale, but returned six years later to publish a monthly agricultural paper, The Northwest Farmer.

Thomas Bates worked as a cashier for Hannah, Lay and Company and as a partner in a land office he owned with Leach before he purchased the newspaper his uncle had started. In the years following the creation of the Grand Traverse Herald, several other newspapers were started in the Grand Traverse region. Thomas Bates gained control of much of the press of the area through purchase and consolidation of the publications to become "one of the best known and most influential journalists in northern Michigan."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Grand Traverse Herald, 20 December 1867, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.; The Traverse Region, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup>Power and Cutler, A History of Northern Michigan, vol. 1, p. 142.

Elvin L. Sprague, who had worked as a salesman for Hannah, Lay and Company, started the Elk Rapids Eagle in Antrim County on March 31, 1865.<sup>39</sup> Starting as a weekly three-column folio that measured 15 by 19 inches, it was the second mainland newspaper in northern Michigan north of Big Rapids.<sup>40</sup> James Spencer later bought an interest in the publication, which was enlarged to 20 by 26 inches. In January 1866, the newspaper was renamed the Traverse Bay Eagle and expanded to 22 by 32 inches. In the spring of that year, a Northrup press, the first power press in the area, was purchased for the Eagle. Later that year the newspaper was moved to Traverse City, where it was enlarged to an eight-column folio and Lyman G. Wilcox bought an interest in it. In 1867, Sprague and Spencer bought out Wilcox. Sprague later bought out Spencer and expanded the Eagle to a nine-column folio. It was originally a Republican newspaper but moved into the Democratic camp in 1872 when Greeley ran for President.<sup>41</sup>

In 1881, with the birth and death of the Fife Lake Fye, a parade of ill-fated newspapers began in the Grand Traverse region. Included among those were the Fife Lake Comet, the Traverse City Journal, the Paradise Enterprise, the Kingsley Cyclone, the

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<sup>39</sup>Elvin L. Sprague and Mrs. George Smith, Sprague's History of Grand Traverse and Leelanaw Counties (Chicago: B. F. Bowen, 1903), p. 283.

<sup>40</sup>Power and Cutler, A History of Northern Michigan, vol. 1, p. 142; Quaife, The Kingdom of Saint James, pp. 185-87.

<sup>41</sup>Sprague and Smith, Sprague's History, p. 284.

Fife Lake Sun, the Traverse City Transcript, the Fife Lake Monitor, the Boardman River Current, the Traverse City Press, the Kingsley Echo, the Grand Traverse News, the Kingsley Hustler, the Fife Lake Booster, the Grand Traverse Sun, and the Grand Traverse Press.<sup>42</sup>

The Daily Eagle, the first daily newspaper in the Grand Traverse area, first rolled off the press on March 28, 1893.<sup>43</sup> While the weekly Traverse Bay Eagle was continued as a Democratic organ, the Daily Eagle was politically independent.<sup>44</sup> According to its founder, advertising increased so quickly "that only one year from the date of its initial number it became necessary to enlarge it from a six-column folio to one of seven columns."<sup>45</sup> The Monday through Saturday afternoon newspaper originally published only local news, but it eventually became a customer of the Scripps-McRae League wire service. In September 1898, the Eagle Press corporation was formed to operate both of the newspapers owned by Sprague. The firm brought the first Mergenthaler typesetting machine into the area for the use of the Daily Eagle.<sup>46</sup>

Bates was active during this period of press proliferation. In order to boost circulation, he began in 1883 to publish serially the History of the Grand Traverse Region, written by Dr. Leach,

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<sup>42</sup>Batdorff, "History of the Record-Eagle," pp. 5-7.

<sup>43</sup>Sprague and Smith, Sprague's History, p. 284.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

brother of DeWitt C. Leach. One of the first histories of the area, it was issued in pamphlet form by the Grand Traverse Herald, reprinted in volume 32 of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, and reprinted in 1964 by the Central Michigan University Press. On May 5, 1897, Bates and J. W. Hannen began publishing a morning daily to compete with the afternoon Eagle, the Morning Record.<sup>47</sup> It started as a five-column folio but expanded to one of seven columns. Published Tuesday through Sunday mornings, it sold for \$.10 per week or \$4 per year. Due to problems in securing an adequate wire service, the expense of producing a morning newspaper, and difficulties in reaching working people with a morning newspaper, the Morning Record became the Evening Record on March 11, 1901.<sup>48</sup> Its publication cycle changed to Mondays through Saturdays, which is still followed by the Record-Eagle. The Record, like the Herald, favored Republican candidates. In 1904, the Herald and Record Company was incorporated with Bates as president and his son, George, as vice-president.<sup>49</sup> In 1910, it gained control of the Eagle Press as well as the Fife Lake Monitor and the Kingsley Echo.<sup>50</sup>

On October 31, 1910, "the most important newspaper transaction in the history of northern Michigan" occurred: the

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<sup>47</sup>Morning Record, 5 May 1897, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>Sprague and Smith, Sprague's History, p. 285; Morning Record, 10 March 1901, p. 2; Evening Record, 11 March, 1901, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>Power and Cutler, A History of Northern Michigan, vol. 1, p. 142.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

consolidation of the Evening Record with the Daily Eagle to create a single afternoon daily, the Record-Eagle.<sup>51</sup> The Grand Traverse Herald and Traverse Bay Eagle, which had become semi-weeklies, were combined in an independent publication. The Grand Traverse Herald and Traverse Bay Eagle eventually folded.

On February 2, 1917, with the finances of the Herald and Record Company in severe straits, George Bates sold the firm to four men who ran the Battle Creek Moon Journal: Nelson F. Conine, George B. Dolliver, Austin C. Batdorff, and Richard T. Allen.<sup>52</sup> The next day, the Record-Eagle proclaimed in a headline with four-inch type: "U. S. Breaks With Germany."<sup>53</sup>

Batdorff and Allen were sent north to run the Record-Eagle. The partnership proved "successful" so the four men purchased the Cadillac Evening News, which they operated for two years before they sold it.<sup>54</sup> Allen later withdrew from active participation in the partnership, but Batdorff continued to oversee the operations of the Record-Eagle as president and general manager with the help of editors Lew A. Holliday and Jay P. Smith.

Batdorff, Conine, and Dolliver bought the Cheboygan Daily Tribune and continued their expansion by forming a holding corporation, the Conine Publishing Company, through which they

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<sup>51</sup>Evening Record, 29 October 1910, pp. 1-2; Record-Eagle, 31 October 1910, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup>Record-Eagle, 2 February 1917, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup>Record-Eagle, 3 February 1917, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup>Batdorff, "History of the Record-Eagle," p. 8.

purchased the Big Rapids Pioneer, the Manistee News-Advocate, and the Hancock Evening Copper Journal.<sup>55</sup> In 1935, with the single exception of the Booth syndicate, the Conine Publishing Company was the largest newspaper chain or group in the state.<sup>56</sup> From 1921 until the present, the Record-Eagle has been the only daily newspaper published in the five-county Grand Traverse region.

As the newspaper business in the Grand Traverse region underwent growth and consolidation, Traverse City also went through a period of change. The town started as a small lumbering and farming community. The rise of lumbering in the area brought profits to the firm of Hannah, Lay and Company with its many Traverse City interests, the Oval Wood Dish Company, and several other business ventures. It was a rough and tumble town. In the 1870s two messengers from Chief Sitting Bull visited the Indians in the area in an attempt to incite them against the white settlers. A missionary by the name of Father Mrack convinced the local Indians to stay out of the fray.<sup>57</sup> To serve the lumberjacks of the region, at least five bordellos operated in the area, as well as a "bumboat" that plied the waters of Grand Traverse Bay.<sup>58</sup> The going price was \$3 for an appointment or \$5 for the entire evening.<sup>59</sup> According to

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>57</sup>Barnes, Vinegar Pie, pp. 6-8.

<sup>58</sup>Al Barnes, Let's Fly Backward (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1976), pp. 190-91.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

Record-Eagle newsman Smith, the town was lively with the bordellos, 21 saloons, "and a lot of rough young people to keep things on the hum. Sin was in the saddle for both sexes."<sup>60</sup>

However, as the community changed, so did its morals. When the lumber industry exhausted the stands of timber in the area, it left and agriculture became a dominant force in the economy of the region. In the 1930s, a group of residents dressed as members of the Ku Klux Klan dynamited the bordello operated by a black woman called Mammy who employed between four and six white women.<sup>61</sup> In 1957 Smith complained that "now the Christians have taken the upper hand and Traverse City is almost a model community."<sup>62</sup>

Smith himself was one of the forces behind community change. Local residents, prodded by Smith, gathered in 1924 on Old Mission Peninsula, the same piece of land to which the Reverend Peter Dougherty had come some 85 years before, and prayed for a bountiful cherry harvest. This "Blessing of the Blossoms" evolved into the National Cherry Festival which each July attracts upwards of 300,000 visitors to the area.<sup>63</sup> The tart and sweet cherry crops produced in the region have earned Traverse City the title of Cherry Capital of the World, a place where even cherry pits are a

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>63</sup>Record-Eagle, 9 July 1975, p. 39; 2 July 1977, p. 47.

marketable commodity.<sup>64</sup> Tourism, boosted by the cherry festival, is a \$50 million per year industry in the region.<sup>65</sup> Snow and water skiing, sailing, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling are just some of the activities that attract people to the Grand Traverse region.

The Traverse City community is the cultural, educational, professional, and mercantile hub of northern lower Michigan. It boasts several civic players groups, a dance troupe, the Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Northwestern Michigan Symphony Orchestra, and several other musical groups. The educational needs of the area are met by several public and private schools, including Interlochen Arts Academy, Northwestern Michigan College, the Arnell Engstrom School at the Traverse City Regional Psychiatric Hospital, and the church-affiliated Leelanau Schools. With the Traverse City Regional Psychiatric Hospital, the Grand Traverse Medical Care Facility, Munson Medical Center, and the Osteopathic Hospital, Traverse City has the lowest physician-patient ratio of any area in the state.<sup>66</sup> In the city where Hannah, Lay and Company once reigned supreme and the Napoleon Motor Car Company once produced the Glidden truck, the chief products are clocks, furniture, automotive parts, and frozen

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 3D.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>66</sup>Richard A. Santer, Michigan: Heart of the Great Lakes (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1977), p. 212.

desserts.<sup>67</sup> The largest community between Midland and Marquette, Traverse City has a regional influence that extends into the upper peninsula of Michigan.<sup>68</sup> The population of the five-county region recently passed the 100,000 mark.<sup>69</sup>

During the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, the Record-Eagle was, for all practical purposes, a locally-owned newspaper. Although it had been sold in 1917 to out-of-town interests, two of the partners moved north to operate the publication. Austin C. Batdorff later passed on his duties to his sons, Robert and John.<sup>70</sup> When Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., bought the newspaper on September 29, 1972, it was the first time the Record-Eagle had been owned and operated by anyone but a local resident.<sup>71</sup> Although the Ottaway system of newspaper administration has allowed each publication in the group to make its editorial decisions independent of the company headquarters in Campbell Hall, New York, the founder of the firm, James H. Ottaway Sr., realized that some segments of the Traverse City community viewed the advent

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<sup>67</sup>F. Clever Bald, Michigan in Four Centuries, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), p. 285; Barnes, Vinegar Pie, pp. 19-22; Santer, Heart of the Great Lakes, p. 212.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>69</sup>Record-Eagle, 14 June 1978, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Employee's Handbook for Employees of the Traverse City Record-Eagle (Traverse City: Herald and Record Co.), p. 6.

<sup>71</sup>Record-Eagle, 1 September 1972, pp. 1-2; 29 September 1972, p. 4.

of absentee ownership with trepidation. He said in a corporate statement that company officials

. . . think that a newspaper's first duty is public service for its leaders and its community. . . .

We believe that a good paper should be fair and accurate in its reporting of the news, independent and objective in its editorial statements of opinions, and should provide helpful and efficient service to its readers and advertisers.<sup>72</sup>

The only immediate change the new owners made at the Record-Eagle was the installation of a new publisher, Elton Hall, to replace Robert Batdorff.<sup>73</sup> Other staff changes have been made since that time, some due to normal attrition and promotion and others which may have been the result of Ottaway management. Although the newspaper no longer calls itself "Northern Michigan's Greatest Daily," it has grown in circulation from 18,201 in 1972 to 22,678 in 1978.<sup>74</sup> A major expansion program was also begun after the sale which almost doubled the size of the Record-Eagle physical plant and replaced its 55-year-old letterpress equipment with an offset press.<sup>75</sup> The most controversial change wrought by the new managers of the Record-Eagle has been an increased aggressiveness in news gathering and reporting. The reaction of readers to that new policy is dealt with in Chapter III.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 1 September 1972, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Leon Rebuck, interview in his Record-Eagle office, Traverse City, Michigan, June 1978; Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., "Average Monthly Paid Circulation Report," June 1978 (typewritten).

<sup>75</sup>Record-Eagle, 20 March 1976, p. 1; 4 April 1977, pp. 17, 23.

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF OTTAWAY NEWSPAPERS, INC.

James H. Ottaway Sr., the founder of Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., was born July 8, 1911, in St. Clair, Michigan. The son of Elmer Ottaway, a co-founder of the Port Huron Times-Herald, he attended the University of Michigan and Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, where he majored in journalism and edited the school paper, The Sandspur. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Rollins College in 1933 and married a fellow student, Ruth Hart, in 1934.

His professional newspaper career began at the Port Huron Times-Herald, where he worked as national advertising manager and classified advertising director from 1933 to 1934.<sup>1</sup> After the death of his father in 1934, Ottaway left Port Huron to look after the family interest in the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, where he served as a member of the board, secretary and vice president, and

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<sup>1</sup>Winthrop Neilson and Frances Neilson, What's News--Dow Jones: Story of the Wall Street Journal (Radnor: Chilton Book Co., 1973), p. 154; Record-Eagle, 1 September 1972, p. 2.

assistant manager of the Times Publishing Company.<sup>2</sup> In 1936, after the family interest in the St. Petersburg Times was sold, Ottaway returned to Michigan where he worked as classified advertising manager of the Grand Rapids Herald and secretary of the Port Huron Times-Herald Company, a position he kept until 1947.

The Ottaway newspaper group was started in November 1936 when Ottaway, at the suggestion of his wife, ventured east and purchased the semi-weekly Endicott (N.Y.) Bulletin. Ottaway originally tried to purchase the publication from Harry Freeland on terms, but the owner wanted cash. To gather the \$50,000 needed to buy the newspaper, Ottaway dipped into his savings, got a bank loan, and borrowed from his mother. "She insisted on absolute security," he later said. "I even had to sign over my life insurance as collateral."<sup>3</sup>

Ottaway planned to turn the 4,000-circulation newspaper that served a shoe-manufacturing area into a daily publication. When the newspaper reached a circulation of 7,000, Ottaway did just that and lost a significant number of Bulletin readers to a nearby daily, the Binghampton Press. Although the Bulletin was sold in 1960, the experience helped form the Ottaway expansion philosophy. "One of those lessons was to make relative isolation an important factor when it comes to considering a candidate for

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.; Marquis--Who's Who, Who's Who in America, vol. 35 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1968), p. 1663.

<sup>3</sup>Everett Groseclose, "'A Gentle Management Style,'" What's News, November 1976, p. 2.

acquisition," wrote Everett Groseclose. "The other was to attempt to buy papers in locations where the economic base wasn't tied to a single industry."<sup>4</sup>

During World War II, Ottaway served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy and began buying the publications that constitute the current roster of Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. The daily Ottaway newspapers, their locations, the years they were purchased, their approximate circulations, and their printing cycles at this writing are:

The Star, Oneonta, New York, 1944, 18,275 Monday through Saturday mornings.

The Pocono Record, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, 1946, 17,607 Monday through Saturday mornings.

The Press-Republican, Plattsburgh, New York, 1952, 20,654 Monday through Saturday mornings.

The News-Times, Danbury, Connecticut, 1956, 39,010 Monday through Saturday afternoons and 40,576 on Sundays.

The Times Herald-Record, Middletown, New York, 1959-60, 61,160 Monday through Saturday mornings and 66,089 on Sundays.

The Union-Gazette, Port Jervis, New York, 1959, 5,128 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Cape Cod Times, Hyannis, Massachusetts, 1966, 32,863 Monday through Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings and 35,894 on Sundays.

The Standard-Times, New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1966, 48,749 Monday through Saturday afternoons and 50,782 on Sundays.

The Daily Item, Sunbury, Pennsylvania, 1970, 26,114 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

The Herald, Sharon, Pennsylvania, 1971, 27,155 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Record-Eagle, Traverse City, Michigan, 1972, 22,678 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Mail-Tribune, Medford, Oregon, 1973, 27,778 Monday through Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings, 29,901 on Sundays.

The Globe, Joplin, Missouri, 1976, 40,240 Monday through Saturday afternoons and 43,064 on Sundays.

The Daily Times, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1978, 11,433 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Beverly Times Daily, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1978, 9,077 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Newburyport Daily News, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1978, 8,855 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Peabody Times, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1978, 5,000, Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The Free Press, Mankato, Minnesota, 1978, 26,000 Monday through Saturday afternoons.

The People's Press, Owatonna, Minnesota, 1978, 8,000 Tuesday through Sunday mornings.<sup>5</sup>

Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. also publishes five weekly newspapers, the 5,307-circulation Hampton (N.H.) Union; the 5,886-circulation Grove City (Pa.) Allied News; and three Minnesota

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 3; Employee's Handbook for Employees of the Traverse City Record-Eagle (Traverse City: Herald and Record Co.), p. i; Record-Eagle, 31 August 1976, p. 20; 20 July 1978, p. 13; Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., "Average Monthly Paid Circulation Report," June 1978 (typewritten); Ottaway News Service Dispatch, February 1978, announcing purchase of Essex County Newspapers, Inc.; 1978 Ayer Directory of Publications (Philadelphia: Ayer Press, 1978), pp. 478, 483, 723; Working Press of the Nation, vol. 1 (Burlington: National Research Bureau Publications, 1978), pp. II-59, IV-85.

publications with a combined circulation of 5,000: the Kittson County Enterprise at Hallock, the Red Lake Falls Gazette, and the Middle River Record.<sup>6</sup> Other Ottaway holdings include the Rockingham County Gazette, a 30,000-circulation weekly shopper that serves the Exeter and Derry, New Hampshire area and The Land, a 27,500-circulation bi-monthly farm magazine.<sup>7</sup>

The group provides editorial, advertising, financial, and production support and consulting services to its newspapers from its headquarters in Campbell Hall, New York, about 70 miles northwest of New York City.<sup>8</sup> The Ottaway News Service supplies the newspapers with localized news copy from state capital bureaus and Washington, D.C., and since 1970 when the newspaper group became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dow Jones and Company, Inc., news from the Wall Street Journal and the Dow Jones News Service.<sup>9</sup>

One of the complaints often expressed about newspaper chains or groups is that news or editorial policy can be dictated from afar with little or no concern for the individual newspaper or the community it serves. Ottaway has supported the concept of editorial autonomy for the newspapers in his group. "I've always figured if we put out a good quality product, the business end will take care

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<sup>6</sup>Ottaway News Service Dispatch, February 1978; Record-Eagle, 20 July 1978, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; Ottaway News Service Dispatch, February 1978.

<sup>8</sup>Record-Eagle, 1 September 1972, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

of itself," he said.<sup>10</sup> His elder son, James H. Ottaway Jr., who became president of the company in 1970, agreed: "Local autonomy isn't a license to publish a lousy newspaper, but the freedom to publish a great one."<sup>11</sup> The editorial endorsements of the Ottaway newspapers during the 1976 Presidential campaign underlined the company commitment to local independence. Seven of the newspapers supported Gerald Ford, five endorsed Jimmy Carter, and one refused to support either candidate.<sup>12</sup>

When William F. Kerby, then president of Dow Jones, asked the senior Ottaway to suggest some newspaper businesses as possible Dow Jones investments, the Ottaway organization began considering the possibility of affiliating itself with the larger corporation. According to Dow Jones historians Winthrop and Frances Neilson, " . . . the advantages were obvious: an alliance with one of the world's leading publishers, the benefits of their financial backing, their electronic facilities, their research departments."<sup>13</sup> In July 1970 the Ottaways exchanged their newspapers for 914,038 shares of Dow Jones stock.<sup>14</sup> Policies remained the same after the merger. James H. Ottaway Jr., who had been chairman of the Yale Daily News and had worked his way up through the Ottaway organization,

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<sup>10</sup>Groseclose, "'A Gentle Management Style,'" p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Neilson and Neilson, What's News--Dow Jones, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

continues to guide the company his father founded more than 40 years ago. His younger brother, David, who worked as a foreign correspondent for the New York Times and Time-Life, is assistant foreign affairs editor at the Washington Post.<sup>15</sup>

The Ottawa organization could hardly have found a more influential and respected company in American journalism than Dow Jones.

The foundation for what has become the most successful of all financial publications in the United States, the Wall Street Journal, was laid in the latter third of the nineteenth century. When Charles H. Dow and Edward D. Jones left the Kiernan News Agency in New York City in 1882, they formed their own financial news organization, the Dow Jones News Service.<sup>16</sup> Their hand-written financial news business prospered and they soon started a publication, the Customer's Afternoon Letter, which was replaced on July 8, 1889 by the Wall Street Journal.<sup>17</sup>

The first Wall Street Journal, which sold for two cents a copy, hardly resembled its modern descendent. The early Journal was printed on four smaller-than-broadsheet size pages.<sup>18</sup> Today, the Journal with its 1.3 million readers in the United States and more than 90 foreign countries, is second only to the New York

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.; Record-Eagle, 1 September 1972, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Neilson and Neilson, What's News--Dow Jones, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Daily News in circulation among American dailies. Printed in 10 separate plants across the nation, the Journal has a tradition of excellence that has consistently won it a place on "best 10" lists of American newspapers. Time has called it one of the most distinctive voices in American journalism and the most widely-quoted source of conservative views.<sup>19</sup> Ernest C. Hynds, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Georgia, said that the reporting in the Journal is "considered excellent and its impact great."<sup>20</sup> Chris Welles, a critic of American business journalism, cited the Journal for its "awesome credibility" and its "scrupulous adherence to provable facts and to conclusions only as broad as those facts justify."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the general circulation Ottaway newspapers and the business-oriented Journal, Dow Jones publishes Barron's Business and Financial Weekly, operates the Dow Jones News Service and the Associated Press--Dow Jones Foreign Business News Service, prints Dow Jones Books, and, through a wholly-owned subsidiary, Richard D. Irwin, Inc., prints business books and college texts.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Rating the American Newspaper," "The Ten Best American Dailies," cited by Ernest C. Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1975), p. 264.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>21</sup>Chris Welles, "The Bleak Wasteland of Financial Journalism," Columbia Journalism Review, July/August 1973, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup>Employee's Handbook, p. i; Ottaway News Service Dispatch, February 1978.

Between 1962 and 1977 Dow Jones also published the National Observer. A weekly distillation of news, opinion, and social trends, it was called "one of the leading United States weeklies" and "particularly adept at relating its stories and the issues they discussed to its readers and their needs and interests."<sup>23</sup> In 1977 it was labelled ". . . dying proof that mere excellence does not necessarily guarantee success."<sup>24</sup> The publication was discontinued July 2, 1977, due to a cumulative after-taxes debt of \$16.2 million.<sup>25</sup> Advertising had failed to rise to the survival level of 50 percent of the total content while the circulation of the Observer had fallen from a 1973 high of 560,000 to about 400,000. "So," said a former Observer employee, Milton Hollstein, "the ax fell, and another great media experiment went into the hell box."<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1970s, before the Record-Eagle was purchased by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., Dow Jones with its Ottaway holdings was the ninth largest newspaper group in the nation in terms of daily circulation.<sup>27</sup> By mid-decade, Dow Jones had grown to

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<sup>23</sup>Neilson and Neilson, What's News--Dow Jones, p. 135; Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s, p. 265.

<sup>24</sup>Milton Hollstein, "The Noble Experiment that was the National Observer," The Quill, September 1977, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>"Half of Nation's Dailies Now in Group Ownership," "Groups of Daily Newspapers Under Common Ownership Published in the United States," cited by Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s, p. 132.

the seventh largest newspaper group in the nation in daily circulation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ben H. Bagdikian, "Newspaper Mergers--The Final Phase," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1977, p. 19.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Among developed nations with newspaper chains or groups, the United States has had the lowest degree of national concentration of ownership.<sup>1</sup> However, one of the dominant trends in the U.S. newspaper business during the twentieth century has been a drift toward concentration of ownership.<sup>2</sup> Press critic Ben H. Bagdikian has said that "concentration of control over daily news is accelerating."<sup>3</sup> In 1930, groups or chains--concerns that own two or more newspapers in different cities--controlled 16 percent of the daily newspapers in the United States and 43 percent of daily newspaper circulation.<sup>4</sup> Chains now control about 60 percent of the daily newspapers in the United States and approximately 71 percent of daily newspaper circulation.<sup>5</sup> Bagdikian believes that

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond B. Nixon and Tae-Youl Hahn, "Concentration of Press Ownership: A Comparison of 32 Countries," Journalism Quarterly 48 (Spring 1971): 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest C. Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1975), pp. 69-70.

<sup>3</sup>Ben H. Bagdikian, "Newspaper Mergers--The Final Phase," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1977, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

"the approaching end of the independent daily is not the result of a conspiracy among media barons. It is largely an impersonal process, operating in harmony with the rest of the American economy."<sup>6</sup> In 1973 he predicted that if the trend continued at its then current rate ". . . (allowing for leap years), the last independent will disappear at 10:48 p.m. on June 7 eleven years hence--appropriately, a Thursday, a fat advertising day, and also appropriately, in the year 1984."<sup>7</sup>

Gerald L. Grotta, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Oklahoma, has called the trend "an interesting controversy, both within and outside of the industry."<sup>8</sup> "Those who defend the trend cite the 'frightful waste' under diversified ownership," he said, "while those who oppose the trend see increasing concentration as a threat to 'a once noble profession.'"<sup>9</sup>

Critics of the drift toward concentration of ownership view it as a menace to the libertarian theory of the press as it has developed in the United States. That theory, according to Fred S. Siebert, dean emeritus of the Michigan State University College of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ben H. Bagdikian, "The Myth of Newspaper Poverty," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1973, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup>Gerald L. Grotta, "Changes in the Ownership Structure of Daily Newspapers and Selected Performance Characteristics, 1950-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Communication Arts and Sciences, came from the seventeenth century views of John Milton, out of which

have developed the contemporary concepts of "the open market place of ideas" and the "self-righting process": Let all with something to say be free to express themselves. The true and sound will survive; the false and unsound will be vanquished. Government should keep out of the battle and not weigh the odds in favor of one side of the other. And even though the false may gain a temporary victory, that which is true, by drawing to its defense additional forces, will through the self-righting process ultimately survive.<sup>10</sup>

The tendency of successful publishers to buy more newspapers has been viewed by critics of chain ownership as a move that could eventually constrict pluralism, the free market place of ideas, and thus the self-righting process.

Oswald Garrison Villard wrote in 1930 that "Any tendency which makes toward restriction, standardization, or concentrating of editorial power in one hand is to be watched with concern."<sup>11</sup> More than 40 years later the trend was still being debated and a relatively new corporate wrinkle--conglomerate-owned newspapers--caused Bagdikian to note that "In such a setting, news can become a mere by-product and there is a maximum potential for conflict-of-interest pressures."<sup>12</sup> Ernest C. Hynds summarized the fears of many critics when he wrote:

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<sup>10</sup>Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), pp. 44-45.

<sup>11</sup>Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Chain Daily," The Nation, 21 May 1930, p. 597.

<sup>12</sup>Bagdikian, "Newspaper Mergers," p. 19.

Those who oppose press concentration point out that the increased resources of groups can be used for evil as well as good. They contend that some group owners are primarily concerned with making money, not serving people. Such owners may avoid local issues that might be controversial and hurt business; such owners might be content to fill up the newspaper with national features and wire service materials and slight local coverage with its higher costs and greater risks. The critics also point out that with the exception of one base newspaper in each group all group owners are absentee owners who may know or care little about the local community; some group owners also may seek to control the flow of information by not reporting some things and providing only their version of others. Finally, it is argued that group owners can use their greater resources to discourage if not eliminate local competition; this can lead to higher advertising rates and more expense for everyone.<sup>13</sup>

On the other side of the issue are those who have said press performance should be judged on the basis of competence rather than competition. John C. Quinn, vice president in charge of news for the Gannett Company, Inc., said that the controversey has created "a plastic breastplate for the self-righteous, a false security for the self-conscious, a mantle of respectability for the irresponsible."<sup>14</sup> John C. Merrill, a professor of journalism at the University of Missouri, said that those who attempt to judge the quality of American newspapers on the basis of their quantity--both in numbers and owners--play an invalid "numbers game."<sup>15</sup> According to Merrill, ". . . it is possible for four

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<sup>13</sup>Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s, pp. 134-35.

<sup>14</sup>John C. Quinn, "The Big Myth," Neiman Reports, September 1972, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup>John C. Merrill, The Imperative of Freedom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1974), p. 69.

independent media to provide no greater variety of news and views than two media belonging to the same owner. . . . The contention that pluralism (of any kind) is necessary in a libertarian system is fallacious."<sup>16</sup> Hynds said

Those who defend newspaper groups argue that their greater financial resources enable them to do many useful things that smaller, individual operations cannot do. They can provide the capital necessary to develop new technology that will enable newspapers to serve better and compete more effectively. They can provide training programs and career opportunities that many individual operations cannot match. They have the resources to engage in investigative efforts and public service programs and produce a quality product; they have the resources to resist more easily pressures that might be brought by a local group.<sup>17</sup>

While a review of the literature concerning the effect of chain ownership on newspaper news, entertainment, and opinion content is inconclusive, the advent of chain ownership has often had a deleterious impact on a newspaper.

In his 1970 study of the effect of ownership structure on American newspapers, Grotta found ". . . consumers appear to receive no benefits from the assumed economies of chain ownership of daily newspapers. . . ."<sup>18</sup> He concluded that "If there are indeed significant economic efficiencies from larger scale operation in the industry, this study indicates that those benefits are not being passed on to consumers; in fact, there

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s, p. 134.

<sup>18</sup>Grotta, "Changes in the Ownership Structure of Daily Newspapers," p. 64.

is strong evidence that such concentration may result in higher prices and lower quality."<sup>19</sup>

Various researchers have found chain ownership of newspapers to have, at various times in various places under varying criteria varying results on newspaper editorials. Various researchers have concluded chain ownership has increased newspaper editorial vigor, decreased newspaper editorial vigor, and had no effect on newspaper editorial vigor.<sup>20</sup>

Michigan became a battleground for pro and anti-chain forces in 1977 when controversy caught up Panax Newspapers, a company that has interests in 11 daily and 43 weekly newspapers in seven states.<sup>21</sup> The episode started when George Bernard, a former reporter for the National Enquirer and recently named chief of the Panax New York Bureau, wrote two articles about President Jimmy Carter. One article charged that the President encouraged promiscuity among his male staff members. The other said Carter

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>20</sup>Emily Jean Aumen, "Content Analysis of Editorials in Sixteen Chained and Unchained Indiana Daily Newspapers" (M.A. thesis, Ball State University, 1973), p. 91; Daniel B. Wackman et al., "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Autumn 1975): 411-20; Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 54 (Summer 1977): 327-31, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1976).

<sup>21</sup>Roger Boye, "Those Two Michigan Editors Have Found New Jobs, But Their Angry Supporters Are Still Fired Up," The Quill, September 1977, p. 10.

was preparing his wife for the vice presidency.<sup>22</sup> The articles were sent to Panax newspapers with a note from Executive Vice President Frank Shepherd that said "Please run the attached stories as soon as possible. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

Two Panax editors, David A. Rood of the Escanaba Daily Press and Robert N. Skuggen of the Marquette Mining Journal, hesitated to publish the two articles and subsequently lost their jobs.<sup>24</sup> Rood called the articles "advocacy journalism at its worst" and he and Skuggen said Bernard filled the stories with "innuendo and insinuations" and jumped "to his own conclusions unencumbered by fact."<sup>25</sup> Uninvolved press critics roundly condemned the articles as "shoddy journalism on all counts; irresponsibly reported, poorly written, long and boring," "garbage," "sensationalistic nonsense," "an insult to the reader's intelligence," and "extremely sloppy journalism."<sup>26</sup> Residents of the two towns in which the newspapers are published gathered at meetings to support the editors, advocated subscription and advertising boycotts, and appealed to U.S. Representative Morris Udall, who has sponsored

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 10; John L. Hulteng, "The Crux of Panax: The Performance or the Power?" The Quill, October 1977, pp. 23-24.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

a bill calling for an anti-trust investigation of what Udall calls "chain store journalism."<sup>27</sup>

The controversy also embroiled the National News Council, which in July found the policies of Panax President John McGoff "regressive--a throwback to the crass episodes that marked the journalism of a bygone era--and . . . a gross disservice to accepted American journalistic standards."<sup>28</sup> The actions taken by McGoff, the council said, "highlighted one of the great underlying public fears about newspaper chains--that what the public reads is directed from afar by autocratic ownership."<sup>29</sup> The council decision was controversial, as it struck to the crux of the argument, the editor-publisher relationship. The following October the council reconsidered and reaffirmed its position, although there was sentiment that ". . . McGoff has the right to be wrong. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

Panax and McGoff did not take the criticism lightly, McGoff threatened a lawsuit.<sup>31</sup> Lawyers for Panax wrote letters

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<sup>27</sup>Boye, "Those Two Michigan Editors," p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>National News Council, "Statement on John P. McGoff and Panax Corporation Policy," Columbia Journalism Review, September/October 1977, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>National News Council, "Panax Decision Reaffirmed," Columbia Journalism Review, January/February 1978, p. 70.

<sup>31</sup>Jan Brydon, "Impending Disaster," MSU Alumni Magazine, September/October, 1977, p. 21.

supporting their client.<sup>32</sup> McGoff and his associates defended their actions and attacked their critics in a series of advertisements, articles, and letters in trade journals. In one advertisement, McGoff called the News Council a "kangaroo court."<sup>33</sup> Panax Editorial Director James R. Whelan, whose position was created after the dispute began, said neither Skuggen nor Rood was forced out of a job for refusing to print either story. However, Whelan said, Panax policies dictate ". . . that publishers ought to have more than ceremonial responsibility for the newspapers they publish, even if that means overruling their editors in cases of conflict."<sup>34</sup> Panax said in a corporate statement that McGoff

. . . not only has the privilege, but is accorded the right as principal stockholder, president and chief executive officer of Panax Corporation to distribute whatever news copy he deems appropriate and to demand, if necessary, that such copy be printed. Rarely has this authority been used and never has it been abused. In the case of the two Upper Peninsula editors, the factor which dictated dismissal was pure and simple insubordination.<sup>35</sup>

It was such a philosophy that caused the News Council to say in its first decision that McGoff and his executives either "are unaware of the difference between editorial opinion policy

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<sup>32</sup>Boye, "Those Two Michigan Editors," p. 11; Kay Lockridge, "News Council Reaffirms its Panax Statement," The Quill, November 1977, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup>John P. McGoff, "An Open Letter," The Quill, October 1977, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup>James R. Whelan, "Editor of The Quill Gets a New Award, Too," The Quill, September 1977, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup>Boye, "Those Two Michigan Editors," p. 11.

and news content or they are determined to ignore the principle publicly espoused by most chain groups that news judgments are delegated to the resident editors."<sup>36</sup>

While nothing like the Panax controversy had occurred in Traverse City, area residents have expressed concern about the absentee ownership of the Record-Eagle orally, in letters to the editor, and in selective mass-mailings. A forerunner of the Record-Eagle may have been founded by an uprooted New Yorker, but that has not kept area residents from complaining about the new, New York-based owners. Chris Dickon, a staff member of public radio station WIAA at Interlochen, observed during a broadcast about the newspaper that

People . . . say "The paper is getting into sensational stories on the front page--crime, rape, and so on, and so forth--and carrying all these crusades against good community members . . . and it's because they are owned by [the] east coast liberal establishment" although the Wall Street Journal is certainly not liberal.<sup>37</sup>

Viewed historically, neither absentee ownership of Traverse City newspapers, nor disputes arising from that form of ownership, are recent phenomena. One of the first absentee Traverse City newspaper owners was Morgan Bates, a nephew of the founder of the Grand Traverse Herald and brother of Thomas Bates. When Thomas Bates took over the Herald from DeWitt C. Leach in 1876, the younger Morgan Bates, who lived in Marshall where he published the Statesman,

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<sup>36</sup>National News Council, "Statement on John P. McGoff," p. 83.

<sup>37</sup>Chris Dickon, tape of "The Radio Chronicle" broadcasts of 9, 12 June 1978 (Interlochen: WIAA).

bought an interest in the newspaper.<sup>38</sup> When George Bates sold the Record-Eagle in 1917, the new publishers said they came "into the Traverse City field with no bias, no axes to grind, and no interest to conserve, save those of a successful newspaper."<sup>39</sup> However, some people in the community opposed the new publishers. The Traverse City Press, a semi-weekly that claimed its 3,000 readers gave it the "largest circulation in the city," supported local control of local newspapers:<sup>40</sup>

The Press will conduct an open forum in which the people will at all times have an opportunity to express their opinions with regard to the public interest. State, county and local news will be given preference and made a specialty. It will be the truth with no attempt to white wash or cover up. . . . The Press will always be for Traverse City first. It is owned and operated by those who actually know the ground.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Press did not survive, the controversy did. During the years between the 1917 and 1972 sales of the Record-Eagle, residents of the Grand Traverse region became accustomed to the Batdorff regime and eventually considered the new publishers part of the community. When Ottaway moved in, however, the debate began anew. Changes in newspaper policy brought changes in the perception of the newspaper by its readers.

An article and editorial about a local legalize-laetrile rally caused a storm of protest. One woman asked the newspaper

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<sup>38</sup>Grand Traverse Herald, 13 May 1876, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Record-Eagle, 2 February 1917, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Traverse City Press, 23 February 1917, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 2 February 1917, p. 1.

"Does Ottaway news publishers [sic] own drug stock in the international cartels? Do they put out canned garbage for you to print about laetrile? I assume so."<sup>42</sup>

An editorial pondered the fate of the snow-covered downtown business district in light of competition from new, suburban shopping centers. A downtown businessman, angered by the tone of the editorial, complained:

It must be comforting to editorialize on . . . competition . . . when, in fact, you enjoy a monopoly in the print media. Competition is the key . . . but I'm at a loss as to how we can get you to "clean up your act" when that key is missing!

. . . I remember the Good Ol' Days; a period in our history known as Pre-Ottaway. . . . Then came Ottaway . . . and accuracy went that-a-way.<sup>43</sup>

A series of articles about a prosecuting attorney who had allegedly wire-tapped his own home illegally also provoked outrage from a segment of the community. Two local lawyers circulated a letter to selected civic leaders. They said:

As long term residents of this area, we are profoundly concerned with the role of the only daily newspaper in our community. We have seen, first hand, how biased reporting and selectively ignoring information which contradicts that bias can totally warp the truth. . . .

. . . We think that community leaders should be aware of what is happening in the community where we live and work. A local newspaper in a monopoly position, without

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<sup>42</sup>Record-Eagle, 18 August 1976, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 15 November 1976, p. 4.

a commitment to the community and to responsible journalism is in a unique position to destroy.<sup>44</sup>

In a letter to the editor, the same two lawyers charged that "McCarthyism is alive, well and has moved to Traverse City, although its corporate headquarters may be elsewhere."<sup>45</sup>

Such criticism of the newspaper led Dickon to conclude that

There's some pretty strong feelings abroad in the community as regards the Record-Eagle, but like it or not, it's the only daily newspaper this community has. The Grand Traverse region would not be able to get along without a newspaper. . . .

Many Grand Traverse residents have asked how can a newspaper owned by Dow Jones possibly serve Traverse City, Michigan. It's a logical-sounding question and the pejorative term "absentee ownership" comes up often when people complain about the paper. Do those who own and publish the paper really care enough about the community to do their job fairly and accurately or are they just in it for the money?<sup>46</sup>

That observation presented no new information to Record-Eagle executives. In 1977, General Manager Gilbert Bogley said the newspaper "has been considered by some to be the 'newest bully on the block' since its purchase by Ottaway in 1972."<sup>47</sup> Perhaps for that reason, when Record-Eagle managers talk about the Ottaway firm,

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<sup>44</sup>Letter from Michael J. Houlihan and Stuart D. Hubbell to "concerned citizen," 19 January 1978. Discussion of Record-Eagle coverage of the People v. Blakeslee case. Personal files of James Herman, Traverse City, Michigan.

<sup>45</sup>Record-Eagle, 9 February 1978, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

<sup>47</sup>Gilbert Bogley, "Readership Survey of the Five-County Grand Traverse Region for the Traverse City Record-Eagle," 1977 (typewritten), p. A29.

they usually use the euphemism "group" instead of the word "chain." In that respect, they are like Frank E. Gannett, founder of the Gannett Company, Inc., who "disliked the word 'chain' because, he said, each newspaper in the Gannett organization had its own character and followed its own editorial desires."<sup>48</sup> The question remains: is the anti-Record-Eagle sentiment rooted in the performance of a daily newspaper in a monopoly position, the parochialism of its readers, or both? According to Merrill, "the only way to really get at pluralism (the significant type: message pluralism) is to conduct thorough--and continuing--analyses. The stress, then, must be on content, not on numbers of media or ownerships."<sup>49</sup> The purpose of this study was to conduct such a content analysis.

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<sup>48</sup>John Alfred Kaufman III, "The (Lansing) State Journal as a Gannett Property: An Inquiry into and Evaluation of Editorial Performance Under Gannett Co. Ownership" (M.A. thesis, Michigan State University, 1973), p. 18.

<sup>49</sup>Merrill, The Imperative of Freedom, p. 70.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHOD

The theory behind this study was that chain or group ownership of newspapers can be a boon, not a bane, to newspaper journalism. Three hypotheses were tested:

After the Record-Eagle was purchased by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., the news content of the newspaper improved (Hypothesis 1).

After the Record-Eagle was purchased by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., the entertainment content of the newspaper improved (Hypothesis 2).

After the Record-Eagle was purchased by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., the opinion content of the newspaper improved (Hypothesis 3).

Sixteen measures were chosen to test the hypotheses after a review of the literature of newspaper news, entertainment, and opinion content under varying forms of ownership structure. They were:

1. Change in the number of news/editorial workers employed.
2. Change in the size of the newshole used.
3. Change in the proportion of local to total material used in the newshole.
4. Change in the type of articles published.
5. Change in the type and number of photographs published.

6. Change in the number of locally-produced columns published.
7. Change in the size of the opinion page newshole used.
8. Change in the number of letters to the editor published.
9. Change in the type of editorials published.
10. Change in the number of editorials published in controversial contexts.
11. Change in the number of editorials published with mobilizing information.
12. Change in the number of editorials published with topics concerning specific geographic regions.
13. Change in the number of argumentative editorials published with topics in controversial contexts on local matters.
14. Change in the number of argumentative editorials published on local matters.
15. Change in the number of editorials published on local matters in controversial contexts.
16. Change in the number of editorials published with mobilizing information on local matters.

Measures 1 through 6 were used to test Hypothesis 1, measures 4 through 6 were used to test Hypothesis 2, and measures 6 through 16 were used to test Hypothesis 3.

Measures 1, 2, and 3 were suggested by Gerald L. Grotta.<sup>1</sup> He assumed ". . . a larger increase in the number of editorial employees would result in a greater increase in quality than would

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald L. Grotta, "Changes in the Ownership Structure of Daily Newspapers and Selected Performance Characteristics, 1950-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1970), pp. 36-38.

smaller increases or decreases."<sup>2</sup> "News/editorial workers" were defined as all newspaper employees under the authority of the editor. "Newshole" was defined by Grotta as "all non-advertising content."<sup>3</sup> Since it is more expensive to use staff-written news copy than wire service or syndicated material, Grotta said ". . . local content is one relevant variable in terms of the value of the product to the consumer."<sup>4</sup> His assumption was validated by a subsequent study in which he and other researchers found "The function of a small daily newspaper, as perceived by the subscribers, is to report local information."<sup>5</sup> "Local material" was defined as all copy and pictures directly concerning the primary circulation area of the Record-Eagle: Leelanau, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Antrim Counties.

Measures 4 and 5 were suggested by John A. Kaufman III.<sup>6</sup> All non-advertising material was systematically categorized into one of 14 types:

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>Gerald L. Grotta, Ernest F. Larkin, and Barbara De Plois, "How Readers Perceive and Use a Small Daily Newspaper," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Winter 1975): 715.

<sup>6</sup>John A. Kaufman III, "The (Lansing) State Journal as a Gannett Property: An Inquiry into and Evaluation of Editorial Performance Under Gannett Co. Ownership" (M.A. thesis, Michigan State University, 1973), pp. 104-5, 111.

1. Hard news--traditional stories about "timely occurrences, . . . usually written in the orthodox inverted pyramid form."
2. Supplementary hard news--"Follow-up or sidebar stories that serve to update or augment an original hard news story."
3. Casual general information--stories "which could be considered as of only passing, or casual, interest to most readers. . . ."
4. Community news--folksy information that falls between the hard news stories of "automobile accidents, death and injury," and the casual general information of "a report on the current status of sheep-raising in New Zealand." These items deal with everyday occurrences, such as births, weddings, student news, and club meetings.
5. Routine information--"Reoccurring news . . . daily weather forecasts, . . . and television and radio listings."
6. Enterprise--stories "that have resulted from the investigative efforts of the newspaper or news service publishing them. . . ."
7. Sporting news--stories about athletics, athletes, or physical recreation.
8. Interpretive features--stories which "explain to the reader the significance inherent in a particular circumstance. . . ."
9. Human interest features--stories with strong "psychological identification or involvement for the reader."
10. Entertainment features--articles primarily intended "to entertain the reader."
11. Service features--stories that tell the readers how to do something or where the best buys are.
12. Opinion material--all articles that express opinions or attempt to persuade, such as editorials, syndicated political columnists, and editorial cartoons.

13. Miscellaneous features--feature stories that do not fall in any other category.
14. Statistics--news that appears in statistical form, "such as sports box scores and stock quotations."<sup>7</sup>

Photographs were defined as either "wild," those published without a corresponding article, or "illustrative," those published with a related article. They were also categorized by origin: staff, local non-staff, wire service, or other. All photographs, including thumbnail mug-shots, were measured, except those which identified the author of a column.

Measure 6 was suggested by Gerard H. Borstel, who said a Columbia University study indicated that small, independent daily newspapers demonstrated "a particular orientation to the home communities" through local columns that was not evident in their chain-owned counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Since columns may be written to inform, entertain, or persuade, this measure was used to test all three hypotheses.

Measure 7 was suggested by Grotta, who said "It was not assumed that size of editorial page newshole does provide an index of diversity, but only that it provides an index for the potential

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<sup>7</sup>This typology is a slightly revised and expanded version of the one that appears in Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," pp. 139-40.

<sup>8</sup>Gerard H. Borstel, "Ownership, Competition and Comment in 20 Small Dailies," Journalism Quarterly 33 (Spring 1956): 221.

for diversity" of opinion.<sup>9</sup> "Opinion page newshole" was defined as all space devoted to the editorial and opinion pages.

Measure 8 was suggested by Chris Dickon. "Letters to the editor," another index of the potential for diversity, was a self-defining term. The publication of such letters, Dickon said, is "one of the most important services a newspaper offers, especially in this community, which uses the section heavily as an impromptu public forum."<sup>10</sup>

Measures 9 through 16 were suggested by Ralph R. Thrift Jr.<sup>11</sup> "Editorials" were defined as all written statements appearing on the opinion page which expressed the views of the Record-Eagle. Editorials were typed as "argumentative," those "which took a stand on an issue"; "explanatory," those which explained something to "the reader by simply identifying the individuals or the backstage forces that may be contesting with one another in a given news development"; or "variation," those which "differed in some way from either the argumentative or explanatory editorials."<sup>12</sup> Editorials with a "controversial context" were those on subjects "about which there

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<sup>9</sup>Grotta, "Changes in the Ownership Structure of Daily Newspapers," p. 39.

<sup>10</sup>Chris Dickon, tape of "The Radio Chronicle" broadcasts of 9, 12 June 1978 (Interlochen: WIAA).

<sup>11</sup>Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1976), p. 11; "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 54 (Summer 1977): 327-28.

<sup>12</sup>Thrift, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper," pp. 14-16.



were or could have been significant difference of opinion. The differences of opinion had to be within the circulation area of the newspaper."<sup>13</sup> "Mobilizing information" was defined as that "which can be used by members of mass media audiences to act on attitudes they already have."<sup>14</sup> Such information included providing a name to contact "in connection with an address, a telephone number or a position of some prominence"; data "about an event, normally giving both the time and the place of the event"; and "successful or unsuccessful methods of doing things either by an individual or a group."<sup>15</sup> The geographic focus of an editorial was categorized as local, directly concerning the Grand Traverse region; state, directly concerning Michigan; national, directly concerning the United States; or international, directly concerning a world issue.

In studies of newspapers and other mass media, the extremely large volume of evidence usually prohibits the researcher from analyzing all information available.<sup>16</sup> To obtain a small, manageable amount of data that is just as valid for inference as the universe from which it was drawn, the random sampling method was devised.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>"Mobilizing Information in the Mass Media," cited by Thrift, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper," p. 16.

<sup>15</sup>Thrift, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper," p. 17.

<sup>16</sup>Ole R. Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969), p. 17.

According to Ole R. Holsti of the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia, when sampling is randomized "over the long run, deviations from the true score can be expected to cancel each other out."<sup>17</sup> However, he said, systematic bias in sampling may create a "serious threat to validity."<sup>18</sup> Such systematic bias in the mass media may exist whether one is sampling from day to day, week to week, month to month, season to season, or year to year. T. F. Carney, a professor of history at the University of Manitoba, said "Some combinations of times can be atypical: a group of days might happen to be chosen all of which saw a major news item 'break' or, alternatively, which fell in times of unusual quietude."<sup>19</sup> One way to overcome such systematic bias Carney said, is to use a constructed time period, "an artificial week (or month, or year) drawn at random from the universe of days or weeks. . . ."<sup>20</sup>

Kaufman used a constructed week of seven days to judge a year of the Lansing State Journal before it became a Gannett property and a constructed week of seven days to judge a year after the newspaper had been purchased by Gannett.<sup>21</sup> Guido H. Stempel III,

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas F. Carney, Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972), p. 140.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," pp. 96-97.

editor of Journalism Quarterly, indicated that increasing a sample of newspapers for a year "beyond 12 does not produce marked differences in the results."<sup>22</sup> Each sample for this study of the Record-Eagle consisted of two constructed weeks of six days each for a total of 12 newspapers from each time period sampled. The two week sample size was chosen because Kaufman said the low degree of precision for his study "was caused by the small sample size and compounded by possible variance between week days and seasonal fluctuations latent in the individual issues that compose the sample."<sup>23</sup>

While the Record-Eagle was sold to Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. on September 29, 1972, the first mention of the sale appeared in the newspaper on September 1, 1972. Since the announcement may have had an effect on both the public and the staff perception of the Record-Eagle, and hence its performance, the first two constructed weeks of the content analysis were chosen at random from the year of newspapers published between September 1, 1971 and August 31, 1972.

Kaufman began his second content analysis period three months after the change in ownership of the State Journal, but Thrift said three years "was a minimum amount of time to allow for

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<sup>22</sup>Guido H. Stempel III, "Sample Size for Classifying Subject Matter in Dailies," Journalism Quarterly 29 (Summer 1952): 333.

<sup>23</sup>Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," p. 100.

changes in content because of changes in ownership."<sup>24</sup> The years immediately following the sale of the Record-Eagle were rejected for the second portion of this study because they were a time of flux for the newspaper in general and its editorial department in particular. After William Smith, the man who had served as editor under the Batdorff family, left the newspaper in April 1974, the publication was edited by Lee Lapensohn from June until December 1974, when he suffered the first of two heart attacks which forced him out of the newsroom.<sup>25</sup> For the next few months, a succession of men from other Ottaway holdings served as interim editors until Edmund P. Klein was appointed editor on April 14, 1975.<sup>26</sup> Klein left the Record-Eagle in October 1977 to become chief of the Ottaway News Service and later managing editor of the Middletown (N.Y.) Times Herald-Record.<sup>27</sup> John P. Kinney, who had worked as managing editor of the Record-Eagle since 1976, was appointed editor of the newspaper after Klein left.<sup>28</sup> Although Kinney had come to the Record-Eagle from elsewhere in the Ottaway organization, his promotion was important as it marked the first time in the history of the publication under Ottaway ownership that a person from the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 96; Thrift, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper," p. 43.

<sup>25</sup>Record-Eagle, 28 March 1974, p. 1; 14 April 1975, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 21 September 1977, p. 4; 17 June 1978, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 16 December 1977, p. 3.

newspaper staff had been appointed chief of the editorial department. Therefore, it can be assumed that under Klein and Kinney the Record-Eagle settled into a post-Batdorff editorial identity that met with the approval of Ottaway executives. The second two constructed weeks of the content analysis were chosen at random from those published between July 1, 1977 and June 30, 1978.

The first sample was composed of the following issues: May 1, 1972; July 3, 1972 (Mondays); December 28, 1971; March 14, 1972 (Tuesdays); October 27, 1971; January 26, 1972 (Wednesdays); September 16, 1971; April 6, 1972 (Thursdays); April 14, 1972; June 2, 1972 (Fridays); October 2, 1971; and June 3, 1972 (Saturdays).

The second sample was composed of the following issues: August 15, 1977; November 14, 1977 (Mondays); May 23, 1978; June 13, 1978 (Tuesdays); February 8, 1978; June 7, 1978 (Wednesdays); July 21, 1977; September 15, 1977 (Thursdays); October 7, 1977; December 16, 1977 (Fridays); August 6, 1977; and April 29, 1978 (Saturdays).

According to Holsti, "If research is to satisfy the requirement of objectivity, measures and procedures must be reliable; i.e., repeated measures with the same instrument on a given sample of data should yield similar results."<sup>29</sup> John Davis, a staff writer for the Record-Eagle, checked for coder reliability by analyzing

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<sup>29</sup>Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities, p. 135.

the content of a portion of the sample. A formula which Holsti said is "widely used" was employed to determine reliability:

$$C.R. = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

"In this formula," Holsti said, "M is the number of coding decisions on which the two judges are in agreement and  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  refer to the number of coding decisions made by judges 1 and 2, respectively."<sup>30</sup> Using that formula, C.R. or coder reliability equaled 89.9 percent. Since Schuyler W. Huck of the University of Tennessee and others have considered "a relatively high percentage" of reliability "usually above 85 percent," 89.9 percent was deemed high reliability.<sup>31</sup>

The results of the content analysis were compared to the results of a content analysis conducted by Dickon and contrasted to the results of a readership survey conducted for the Record-Eagle by Sterling Research Associates.

Dickon counted the number of what he called "hard news stories," "hard editorials," "soft editorials," and "letters to the editor." His pre-change of ownership sample consisted of all the Record-Eagles printed in June 1971 while his post-change of ownership sample consisted of all the Record-Eagles printed in May 1978.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>31</sup>Schuyler W. Huck, William H. Cormier, and William G. Bounds Jr., Reading Statistics and Research (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 335.

<sup>32</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

The personal interview readership survey was conducted during the last week in April and the first week in May 1977. A total of 653 people in the Grand Traverse region were surveyed, of whom 516 were Record-Eagle readers. Those surveyed were selected at random from township tax assessment records. With 500 respondents for each of the readership attitude questions, the survey had an error factor of plus or minus 4.5 percent. With 650 respondents for all non-readership attitude questions, the error factor was plus or minus 4.0 percent.<sup>33</sup> Survey accuracy was validated by a test in which survey data was checked against similar data from another source. Of those surveyed, 33.7 percent said they had voted for Jimmy Carter in the 1976 Presidential election. Election returns for the five-county region indicated that Carter received 37 percent of the vote in the area.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert Bogley, "Readership Survey of the Five-County Grand Traverse Region for the Traverse City Record-Eagle," 1977 (typewritten), p. i.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. ii.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

The column inch results for sample 1 (1971-72) were divided by 1.33 so the figures from the eight-column Record-Eagle of the Batdorff family could be compared to the figures of the six-column Ottawa Record-Eagle. In some tables, the percent columns may total slightly more or less than 100 percent since the figures were rounded to the second decimal place.

Measure 1 supported Hypothesis 1. When the Batdorff family owned the Record-Eagle, 14 employees were under the authority of editor William Smith.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the second sample period (1977-78), the number of employees under the authority of editor John Kinney had increased to 23 for a growth of 64.29 percent.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the nine new full-time news workers, the Record-Eagle had added two summer interns, one a photographer, the other a reporter.

Measure 2 supported Hypothesis 1. Table 1 shows the newshole increase and a categorical breakdown in column inches.

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<sup>1</sup>Telephone conversation with William Smith, Traverse City, Michigan, August 1978.

<sup>2</sup>Telephone conversation with John Kinney, Traverse City, Michigan, August 1978.

Instead of decreasing local copy and increasing non-local copy as some critics contend group owners are prone to do, Ottaway increased local copy and decreased non-local copy in the Record-Eagle after it purchased the newspaper. The size of the newshole also increased.

TABLE 1.--Overall newshole categories.

Material Type	Sample 1 (inches)	Sample 2 (inches)	Percent Change
Local copy	4,979.99	7,472.25	+ 50.04
Non-local copy	11,456.46	8,337.5	- 27.31
Local photos	1,243.13	2,540.75	+104.38
Non-local photos	<u>792.36</u>	<u>1,165.5</u>	+ <u>47.22</u>
Newshole	18,471.94	19,516	+ 5.66

Measure 3 supported Hypothesis 1. Table 2 shows that in addition to increasing the amount of local material in the Record-Eagle, Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. also increased the percent of the newshole devoted to local material.

TABLE 2.--Local newshole material.

	Newshole (inches)	Local Material (inches)	Percent of Newshole
Sample 1	18,471.94	6,223.12	33.69
Sample 2	19,516	9,913	50.79

Measure 4 supported Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. Table 3 shows story types for all copy. The most dramatic increases were in enterprise, interpretive, and human interest stories. Tables 4 and 5 show those story types increased in both local and non-local categories. Hard news, community news, and sporting news increased significantly while routine information and statistics increased slightly. The most dramatic decreases occurred in casual general information and miscellaneous story types. Much of these decreases can be attributed to the switch from an eight-column, hot-type newspaper to a cold-type one of six columns, and the increase in news/editorial employees. The changeover, along with the resulting layout innovations, did away with much of the need for short, filler blurbs. An increase in staff members meant more reporters to produce more local copy and more editors to handle it. The additional editors have also been able to exert greater care in selecting wire service and syndicated material for publication than their predecessors, as the scope of their duties is narrower. While Table 3 shows that the supplementary, entertainment, service, and opinion categories have decreased in overall content, Tables 4 and 5 show those subject areas have decreased only in non-local copy, and have increased in local copy. Non-local entertainment copy, for example, decreased 33.81 percent but local entertainment copy increased 25.78 percent.

Tables 4 and 5 show that almost across the board the Record-Eagle under Ottaway ownership and management has published less cheaply obtained wire service and syndicated material for the

TABLE 3.--Story types for all copy.

Story Type	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Inches	Percent	Inches	Percent	
Hard news	3,164.85	19.28	3,380.75	21.26	+ 6.82
Supplementary	208.08	1.27	204.5	1.29	- 1.72
Casual general	682.03	4.15	270.75	1.70	- 60.3
Community news	1,680.41	10.24	1,783.25	11.22	+ 6.12
Routine info	1,637.07	9.97	1,694.25	10.66	+ .35
Enterprise	24.44	.15	81	.51	+231.42
Sporting news	1,991.54	12.13	2,325.75	14.63	+ 16.78
Interpretive	403.94	2.43	726.75	4.57	+ 79.92
Human interest	212.03	1.29	579	3.64	+173.07
Entertainment	2,654.51	16.17	2,105.5	13.24	- 20.68
Service	2,159.03	13.15	1,092.25	6.87	- 49.41
Opinion	870.11	5.3	864.25	5.44	- .67
Miscellaneous	248.87	1.51	158.25	1	- 36.42
Statistics	499.54	3.04	543.5	3.42	+ 8.79

TABLE 4.--Story types for non-local copy.

Story Type	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Inches	Percent	Inches	Percent	
Hard news	2,639.66	23.08	2,101.25	25.2	-20.4
Supplementary	186.65	1.63	40.5	.49	-78.3
Casual general	553.46	4.84	233.75	2.8	-57.77
Routine info	384.59	3.36	377.75	4.53	- 1.78
Enterprise	none		35.50	.43	
Sporting news	1,402.63	12.26	1,347.75	16.16	- 3.91
Interpretive	371.05	3.24	525	6.3	+41.37
Human interest	175.94	1.54	258.50	3.10	+46.93
Entertainment	2,595.11	22.69	1,717.75	20.6	-33.81
Service	2,155.08	18.84	939.5	11.27	-56.41
Opinion	625.75	5.47	355.25	4.26	-43.23
Miscellaneous	53.57	.47	37	.44	-30.93
Statistics	312.97	2.74	368	4.41	+17.67

TABLE 5.--Story types for local copy.

Story Type	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Inches	Percent	Inches	Percent	
Hard news	525.19	10.59	1,279.5	16.92	+143.63
Supplementary	21.43	.43	164	2.17	+665.28
Casual general	128.57	2.58	37	.49	- 71.22
Community news	1,680.41	33.74	1,783.25	23.58	+ 6.12
Routine info	1,252.48	25.15	1,316.5	17.41	+ 5.11
Enterprise	24.44	.49	45.5	.56	+ 86.17
Sporting news	588.91	11.83	978	12.93	+ 66.07
Interpretive	32.89	.66	201.75	2.67	+513.41
Human interest	36.09	.72	320.5	4.24	+788.06
Entertainment	59.4	1.19	387.75	5.13	+525.78
Service	3.95	.08	152.75	2.02	+3,767.09
Opinion	244.36	4.91	509	6.73	+108.3
Miscellaneous	195.3	3.92	121.25	1.6	- 37.92
Statistics	186.57	3.74	175.5	2.32	- 5.94

sake of printing more expensive to produce local material. The larger news staff is obviously one of the causes of this change. With a larger staff, the Record-Eagle does not have to depend as much as it once did on non-local material to fill the newspaper. And, since local copy is more expensive to produce and is more popular with readers than other material, Record-Eagle editors naturally attempt to publish staff-written material as often as possible.

Quantity of local copy does not necessarily mean quality. Therefore, it is significant that major increases occurred in the hard news, supplementary news, interpretive, service, and opinion categories. Such increases certainly help promote what the Commission on Freedom of the Press said society needs most from newspapers: "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning."<sup>3</sup> Under the Batdorff family, more than 60 percent of local copy consisted of casual general information, community news, and routine information. Certainly such information is valuable to local residents, but not at the exclusion of all other information. While the Record-Eagle under Ottaway ownership has devoted more space to those three story types, it has given a significantly smaller percentage of its local newshole to those types of stories.

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<sup>3</sup>"Today our Society Needs, First, a Truthful, Comprehensive, and Intelligent Account of the Day's Events in a Context which Gives Them Meaning," Columbia Journalism Review, September/October 1977, p. 23.

Tables 4 and 5 show a greater effort on the part of the Record-Eagle under absentee ownership to tell the readers about the community in which they live than was apparent when the newspaper was locally-owned. However, some of the statistics may be deceiving. Although the number of column inches devoted to local statistics declined from the first sample to the second sample, the Record-Eagle has made less more by reducing many statistical stories--such as box scores and league standings--from regular type to agate type. Not all news comes in the written form. Tables 6 and 7 show the use of photographs by the Record-Eagle under Batdorff and Ottaway ownership, respectively.

TABLE 6.--Sample 1 photographs.

Photo Type	Wild		Illustrative		Total	
	Number	Inches	Number	Inches	Number	Inches
Staff	25	395.19	34	317.12	59	712.31
Local non-staff	6	59.96	49	470.86	55	530.82
Wire	16	301.5	16	251.5	32	553
Other	<u>11</u>	<u>81.39</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>157.97</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>239.36</u>
Total	58	838.04	134	1,197.45	192	2,035.49

TABLE 7.--Sample 2 photographs.

Photo Type	Wild		Illustrative		Total	
	Number	Inches	Number	Inches	Number	Inches
Staff	48	843.25	126	1,202.25	174	2,045.5
Local non-staff	7	85	54	410.25	61	495.25
Wire	38	368	136	438.25	174	806.25
Other	<u>8</u>	<u>110.50</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>248.75</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>359.25</u>
Total	101	1,406.75	353	2,299.5	454	3,706.25

Measure 5 supported both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. From the first through the second time period sampled the number of photographs published increased 136.46 percent for an 82.08 percent increase in space devoted to photographs. Much of this change must be attributed to the change in printing process. Under the letterpress system, photographers had to make scanogravings of prints they wanted to publish. The offset printing process eliminated that step, thereby freeing photographers for other work. Of course, sheer volume is not the only indicator of improved graphics. It would be fairly easy for an editor to fill a newspaper with wild photographs. Such pictures could be entertaining, but they would have little news value to the readers. While wild photographs increased 82.41 percent, illustrative photographs increased 163.44 percent or nearly twice as much. Although illustrative photographs can be anything from a thumbnail

mugshot to an action scene, they are important because they help readers visualize the story. Such photographs usually require more communication between editors, reporters, and photographers than do wild pictures. The best example of photographic improvement is the increase in illustrative staff photographs, which rose 270.59 percent.

Measure 6 supported Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3. The number, frequency, and type of columns published in the Record-Eagle during the first time period sampled were severely restricted. However, newspaper columns published in the second time period sampled were many, frequent, and varied. They ranged from news, "Club Clips," by Lori Steed, Kathy Stocking, and Kathy Hall; to entertainment, "Looking Back," by John Davis; to opinions, "When You're Ready," by Mike Ready. Table 8 clearly indicates the huge increase in local columns.

TABLE 8.--Local columns.

Criteria	Sample 1	Sample 2	Percent Change
Inches given columns	39.66	772.25	+1,847.18
Number of columns	4	35	+ 775
Average inches	9.91	22.06	+ 122.6

Measure 7 supported Hypothesis 3. The opinion page newshole increased 12.12 percent, from 1,522.24 column inches in sample 1 to 1,706.75 column inches in sample 2. The Record-Eagle also makes

more use of the opinion page under Ottaway ownership. When the Batdorff family owned the newspaper, seven columns of copy were floated over an opinion page of eight columns. Ottaway editors print six columns of copy on a six-column opinion page and often use an additional page for cartoons, columns, and letters to the editor.

Measure 8 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 9 shows the increase in letters to the editor. Under the Batdorff family, the Record-Eagle published few letters to the editor. What ones it did publish were infrequent. Ottaway editors of the Record-Eagle publish almost all letters they receive. The few they do not publish either are potentially libelous or are from somebody who has already had several letters printed in the newspaper. Chris Dickon called the letters to the editor section an impromptu public forum, partly because the region is populated by activists: "Many are vocal, concerned people who are not reluctant to unpack the moving van one day and speak up in a public forum the next. The level of political, social, and cultural activism in this community is high. Things change and expand quickly."<sup>4</sup>

Measure 9 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 10 shows the type of editorials published by the Record-Eagle during the two periods sampled. It is significant that argumentative and explanatory editorials increased both in percent and number while variation editorials declined in both categories.

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<sup>4</sup>Chris Dickon, tape of "The Radio Chronicle" broadcasts of 9, 12 June 1978 (Interlochen: WIAA).

TABLE 9.--Letters to the editor.

Criteria	Sample 1	Sample 2	Percent Change
Inches given letters	35.88	275	+666.42
Number of letters	6	43	+616.67
Average inches	5.98	6.4	+ 7.02

TABLE 10.--Editorial types.

Type	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Argumentative	7	50	9	52.94	+28.57
Explanatory	5	35.71	7	41.18	+40
Variation	2	14.29	1	5.88	-50

Measure 10 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 11 shows the context--either controversial or non-controversial--of the editorials in each sample. None of the editorials in sample 1 dealt with a controversial issue but more than half of the editorials in sample 2 did.

TABLE 11.--Editorial context.

Context	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Controversial	none		10	58.82	
Non-controversial	14	100	7	41.11	-50

Measure 11 did not support Hypothesis 3. Although Table 12 shows no editorials with mobilizing information appeared in sample 1 and one did appear in sample 2, the change was not deemed significant. Also, the number of editorials which did not have mobilizing information increased from sample 1 to sample 2. In his study, "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper," Ralph R. Thrift found "a paucity of mobilizing information" in both independent and chain-owned newspaper editorials.<sup>5</sup> This indicates the scarcity of mobilizing information may be an industry-wide phenomenon not affected by ownership form.

TABLE 12.--Editorials with mobilizing information.

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
With	none		1	5.88	
Without	14	100	16	94.12	+14.29

<sup>5</sup>Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1976), p. 70.

Measure 12 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 13 shows the number of editorials about local topics increased 175 percent from sample 1 to sample 2. Table 13 also shows that under the Batdorff family, Record-Eagle editorial writers could often be accused of what Jenkin Lloyd Jones of the Tulsa (Okla.) Tribune called "Afghanistanism": "The tragic fact is that many an editorial writer can't hit a short-range target. He's hell on distance. . . . You can pontificate about the situation in Afghanistan in perfect safety. You have no fanatic Afghans among your readers. . . ."6

TABLE 13.--Geographic subject of editorials.

Topic	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Local	4	28.57	11	64.76	+175
State	5	35.71	1	5.88	- 80
National	4	28.57	4	23.53	
International	1	7.14	1	5.88	

Measure 13 supported Hypothesis 3. From sample 1 to sample 2, Table 14 shows the number of argumentative editorials in controversial contexts on local matters increased significantly.

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<sup>6</sup>Editor and Editorial Writer, cited by Ibid., p. 6.

TABLE 14.--Argumentative editorials on controversial local matters.

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
With	none		5	29.41	
Without	14	100	12	70.59	-14.29

Measure 14 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 15 shows the increase in argumentative editorials on local matters.

TABLE 15.--Argumentative editorials on local matters.

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
With	1	7.14	7	41.18	+600
Without	13	92.86	10	58.82	- 23.08

Measure 15 supported Hypothesis 3. Table 16 shows that in sample 1 none of the editorials were on controversial local matters while more than half of those in sample 2 were.

TABLE 16.--Editorials on controversial local matters.

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
With	none		9	52.94	
Without	14	100	8	47.06	-42.86

Measure 16 did not support Hypothesis 3. Again, editorials in both sample 1 and sample 2 exhibited an almost total lack of mobilizing information. Table 17, which shows editorials published with mobilizing information on local matters, illustrates the same vacuum that Table 12 does.

TABLE 17.--Editorials with mobilizing information on local matters.

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
With	none		1	5.88	
Without	14	100	16	94.12	+14.29

A content analysis of the front and editorial pages of the Record-Eagle by Dickon supported the results of this study, as it showed increases in local hard news stories, hard editorials, and letters to the editor. Table 18 shows the results of his study.

To obtain some perception of what people in the Grand Traverse region want from the Record-Eagle, how they perceive it, and what they read in it, the results of a 1977 Sterling Research Associates Record-Eagle readership survey were examined. The information in this chapter about the survey comes from "Readership Survey of the Five-County Grand Traverse Region for the Traverse City Record-Eagle," a final report on the project written in July 1977 by the general manager of the newspaper, Gilbert Bogley.

TABLE 18.--Record-Eagle content analysis by Chris Dickon.<sup>7</sup>

Criteria	June 1971	May 1978	Percent Change
Number of front page hard news stories	17	47	+176.47
Number of soft editorials	16	none	
Number of hard editorials	6	20	+233.33
Number of letters to the editor	none	63	

Of the 653 people interviewed, 565 read a daily newspaper at least once or twice a week. Of those, 516 were Record-Eagle readers. More than 76 percent read a daily newspaper almost every day. Of the 86.5 percent surveyed who read a daily at least once a week, 65.8 percent read only the Record-Eagle.

The lowest readership of daily newspapers was among respondents who had finished some but not all high school work. In that group, 48.8 percent read a daily newspaper every day while 23.8 percent never read a daily. Readership was highest among those who had done some post-graduate work. In that group, 84.4 percent read a daily newspaper every day. Only 31.4 percent of those surveyed between 18 and 25 read a newspaper every day. As the age of the respondent increased, so did the likelihood that he

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<sup>7</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

or she would read a daily newspaper. Readership according to age was highest among those 56 and older, 74 percent of whom read a newspaper every day.

Four questions were used to determine overall reader perceptions of the Record-Eagle:

1. On this card are several rating categories. Could you select the category which most closely reflects your overall opinion of the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number <sup>8</sup>	Percent
Excellent		8
Good		58
Average		31
Poor		<u>2.8</u>
		99.8

2. On the whole, what sort of job do you think the Record-Eagle is doing?

Response	Number	Percent
Excellent	74	14.45
Good	409	79.88
Poor	<u>29</u>	<u>5.66</u>
	512	99.99

3. If a friend of yours moved to this area, would you advise him to subscribe to the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number	Percent
Definitely	242	47.36
Probably	224	43.84
Probably not	39	7.63
Definitely not	<u>6</u>	<u>1.17</u>
	511	100

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<sup>8</sup>In his report, Bogley did not list the number of responses to this question, or to questions 26, 27, 29, and 30.

4. If the presses of the Record-Eagle broke down and the paper couldn't be printed for two or three days, how much would you miss the paper?

Response	Number	Percent
Great deal	238	46.12
Somewhat	194	37.6
Very little	<u>84</u>	<u>16.27</u>
	516	99.99

No consistent evaluation of reader perceptions of the Record-Eagle emerged from the responses but it appears the public generally views the newspaper favorably. The responses to question 1 indicate that the respondents consider average closer to good than poor. The answers to questions 2 and 3 show that with and without a need factor, at least 90 percent of the respondents view the Record-Eagle favorably. However, that need factor is not too strong, as the answers to question 4 show about 54 percent of the respondents feel the Record-Eagle is not an integral part of their lives. Bogley believed "This speaks more to newspapers in general, I suspect, rather than contradicts our . . . 'excellent/good' rating."<sup>9</sup>

Cross tabulations indicate that the most ardent supporters of the Record-Eagle are usually 60-year-old men with high school educations and technical training. Most have lived in the area for 20 years and earn between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per year. The biggest detractors of the newspaper are 30-year-old women with

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<sup>9</sup>Gilbert Bogley, "Readership Survey of the Five-County Grand Traverse Region for the Traverse City Record-Eagle" (typewritten), 1977, p. A7.

graduate degrees. They earn more than \$25,000 per year and have lived in the region less than one year. The composite picture of the men is fairly accurate since survey numbers were large enough to draw them without much deviation. They were also the people most likely to advise those new to the area to subscribe. The composite detractors do not portray a fairly reliable picture of Record-Eagle critics as there were few of them in the survey.

Another indication of how readers perceive the Record-Eagle can be found in what survey respondents said were the best and worst attributes of the newspaper and what improvements they suggested. Three open-ended questions were asked of respondents (items which were not mentioned at least 10 times by respondents were not listed):

5. Now, think for a minute and tell me what you think is the best thing about the Record-Eagle.

Response	Number	Percent
Local news	154	29.8
Editorial page	37	7.2
General news coverage	31	6
Sports	28	5.4
Classifieds	28	5.4
Nothing	26	5
To keep informed	25	4.8
General advertising	21	4.1
Specific locale news	15	2.9
Easy to read	13	2.5
Other	10	1.9
	<u>388</u>	<u>75</u>

6. What do you think is the worst thing about the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number	Percent
No "worst" thing	99	19.1
Typos	36	7
Sensationalism	33	6.4
Sports section	29	5.6
No response	24	4.6
Comics	20	3.9
Other	19	3.7
Not enough local news	18	3.5
Lack of organization	16	3.1
Price	15	2.9
Don't know	14	2.7
Editorial page	12	2.3
Bias	12	2.3
Inaccurate reporting	11	2.1
Printing too small	11	2.1
Repeat old news	10	1.9
	<u>379</u>	<u>73.2</u>

7. Consider for a moment the overall content and performance of the Record-Eagle. What recommendations might you offer to improve it?

Response	Number	Percent
Nothing	74	14.3
No response	57	11
More local news	47	9.1
Better proofreading	28	5.4
Both sides	17	3.3
More accuracy	16	3.1
Don't know	16	3.1
"Out counties" news	15	2.9
More state sports	13	2.5
More local sports	13	2.5
Stress positive	13	2.5
More outdoor news	11	2.1
More national news	10	1.9
More good people news	10	1.9
	<u>340</u>	<u>65.6</u>

Few editors would be surprised to learn that readers like local news best. In addition to local news, several other responses, including general news coverage, to keep informed, and specific locale news, could have been listed in the same category. The

importance readers assign to local news was underscored by the 18 respondents who complained of not enough local news and the 75 respondents who wanted more local news or sports. The desire among Record-Eagle readers for more local news underscores the assertion by Gerald Grotta that local news "is one relevant variable in terms of the value of the product."<sup>10</sup> It also corroborated his research that readers perceive the function of a community newspaper is to report local news.

A heartening finding for Record-Eagle executives was that 123 respondents or 23.7 percent of those interviewed said there was either no worst thing about the Record-Eagle or did not know of any worst thing. Along the same lines, 147 respondents or 28.4 percent of those surveyed said they could think of nothing to improve the newspaper. The answers to questions 5 and 6 show that just about as many respondents think the Record-Eagle sports section is the best thing about the newspaper as those who think it is the worst thing about the publication. Not so with the editorial page. In that case, more respondents liked the editorial page than disliked it. More than 15 percent of those surveyed found fault with the broad category of untruths, including typographical errors, sensationalism, bias, and inaccurate reporting. While more than one-quarter of those questioned found no improvement necessary in the newspaper, more than 10 percent said reliability--better

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<sup>10</sup>Gerald L. Grotta, "Changes in the Ownership Structure of Daily Newspapers and Selected Performance Characteristics, 1950-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. 38.

proofreading, both sides to controversial stories, and more accuracy in reporting--was needed.

To obtain some indication of how readers perceive bias, understandability, and accuracy in the Record-Eagle, respondents were asked eight questions:

8. How true is this statement: Names of some local people are in the Record-Eagle very often while interesting news of other local people hardly ever get in the paper.

Response	Number	Percent
Very true	120	25.75
Somewhat true	241	51.72
Not true at all	105	22.53
	<u>466</u>	<u>100</u>

9. Some people say that most newspapers won't print anything that might make them lose advertising. Do you think this is true of the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number	Percent
Very true	55	11.85
Somewhat true	133	28.66
Not true at all	276	59.48
	<u>464</u>	<u>99.99</u>

10. Based on your experience, is the Record-Eagle accurate in its local and area news stories?

Response	Number	Percent
Usually accurate	280	56.33
Sometimes	181	36.42
Usually inaccurate	36	7.24
	<u>497</u>	<u>99.99</u>

11. In your experience, do headlines in the Record-Eagle give you an accurate idea of what really happened?

Response	Number	Percent
Usually accurate	350	69.03
Sometimes	134	26.43
Usually inaccurate	23	4.54
	<u>507</u>	<u>100</u>

12. Does the way the Record-Eagle writes the news make it easy for you to understand what happened?<sup>11</sup>

Response	Number	Percent
Usually	436	84.17
Sometimes	75	14.58
Seldom	7	1.35
	<u>518</u>	<u>100.1</u>

13. Does the Record-Eagle present both sides of important issues?

Response	Number	Percent
Usually does	282	56.06
Sometimes	180	35.79
Usually does not	41	8.15
	<u>503</u>	<u>100</u>

14. Do you think the Record-Eagle, in its news coverage and editorials, accurately reflects your feelings about your community and its leaders?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	161	31.69
Sometimes	275	54.13
No	72	14.17
	<u>508</u>	<u>99.99</u>

15. Would you say that the local news coverage of the Record-Eagle is fair and unbiased?

Response	Number	Percent
Always	48	9.64
Usually	369	74.1
Usually not	70	14.06
Never	11	2.21
	<u>498</u>	<u>100.01</u>

Although the somewhat/sometimes responses may appear difficult to interpret for questions 8 through 14, the answers come

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<sup>11</sup>On p. B3 of his report, Bogley says of this question "Evidently two extra cases mistakenly went into computer." This also apparently occurred in questions 18 and 20.

into focus when the definition of average used in evaluating the responses to question 1 is used to interpret the middle answer. Since more people define average on the positive side than on the negative side, somewhat/sometimes can be interpreted as more positive than negative. Bogley interpreted the middle answer "as being slightly more positive than negative, but certainly not totally so."<sup>12</sup>

The answers to question 8 show that almost three-quarters of the respondents think the Record-Eagle plays favorites with names that make the news. However, given the interpretation used in this study of the middle answers and considering people like to read about their friends, the responses are probably not an indication of serious reader dissatisfaction, especially in light of the answers to the subsequent questions. However, the answers to question 9 point out that many readers believe there is some sort of bias in the Record-Eagle. When about 40 percent of the respondents said the Record-Eagle might refuse to print something which could lose advertising for the newspaper, Bogley said the publication needed "to educate in this area."<sup>13</sup>

The responses to questions 10, 11, and 12 indicate most respondents think the Record-Eagle presents the news in an accurate, understandable manner. More than one-half said stories were usually accurate while about 7 percent said stories were usually inaccurate.

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<sup>12</sup>Bogley, "Readership Survey," p. A10.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. A12.

A somewhat surprising response was that more than 69 percent of those interviewed thought Record-Eagle headlines were usually accurate. Because of their brevity, their need to condense a story into a few words, and their function to attract readers, headlines often draw the ire of press critics. A backhanded compliment to Record-Eagle copy editors is that only 4.54 percent of the respondents found headlines usually inaccurate. Cross tabulations show that the best responses on accuracy came from people who have lived in the area for four years or less while more than one-half of the 36 people who rated news stories usually inaccurate have lived in the area all their life. Respondents said the Record-Eagle is more understandable than it is accurate. More than 84 percent questioned said they can usually understand what happened after reading news stories in the Record-Eagle.

Another surprising finding was that while less than one-third of those surveyed said the Record-Eagle usually reflected their views about the community and its leaders, more than one-half said the Record-Eagle usually presents both sides of important issues.

The responses to question 15 indicate the majority of people who answered the earlier three-response questions with the middle response are more positive than negative in their opinions about the Record-Eagle when they have four responses from which to choose. While responses to questions 6 and 7 indicate some people are concerned about bias in the newspaper, the answers to question 13 show that it is not a concern shared by a majority of the

respondents. More than 92 percent of those interviewed said the Record-Eagle is always or usually accurate. In spite of the answers to questions 8 and 9, the answers to question 15 show that at least 83 percent of the respondents thought the Record-Eagle was usually fair and unbiased, corroborating the responses to question 13.

Fifteen questions were asked of the respondents concerning their use and opinion of specific portions of Record-Eagle content:

16. If you were not sure about how to vote on a local issue or candidate, would you take the editorial page advice of the Record-Eagle on how to vote?

Response	Number	Percent
Definitely would	11	2.25
Probably would	139	28.43
Probably would not	154	31.49
Definitely would not	185	37.83
	<u>489</u>	<u>100</u>

17. How much entertainment does the Record-Eagle give you with its feature columns, pictures, comic strips, articles and news stories?

Response	Number	Percent
A great deal	129	25.05
Some	325	63.11
Very little	55	10.68
Other	6	1.17
	<u>515</u>	<u>100.01</u>

18. Do you read the news in the Second Section of the Record-Eagle? The Second Section contains an area photo feature, several nationally syndicated columnists, local club news, weddings, engagements, and other social news.

Response	Number	Percent
Regularly	366	70.66
Occasionally	110	21.24
Seldom	33	6.37
Never	9	1.74
	<u>518</u>	<u>100.01</u>

19. Do you think this coverage is

Response	Number	Percent
Too little	42	8.45
About right	434	87.32
Too much	21	4.23
	<u>497</u>	<u>100</u>

20. Do you read the news in the sports section of the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number	Percent
Regularly	188	36.29
Occasionally	127	24.52
Seldom	100	19.31
Never	103	19.88
	<u>518</u>	<u>100</u>

21. Do you think this coverage is

Response	Number	Percent
Too little	68	15.93
About right	320	74.94
Too much	39	9.13
	<u>427</u>	<u>100</u>

22. Would you rate the Record-Eagle on the quality and use of photographs? First, the national and international photos:

Response	Number	Percent
Excellent	65	12.82
Good	402	79.29
Poor	40	7.89
	<u>507</u>	<u>100</u>

23. And next, the photos of local and area news?

Response	Number	Percent
Excellent	123	23.88
Good	363	70.58
Poor	29	5.65
	<u>515</u>	<u>100.11</u>

24. Do you or your family use the Record-Eagle TV Section?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	341	66.21
No	174	33.79
	<u>515</u>	<u>100</u>

## 25. How long does it stay in use around the house?

Response	Number	Percent
All week	255	59.72
Part of the week	74	17.33
One day or less	98	22.95
	<u>427</u>	<u>100</u>

26. Could you rate the job which the Record-Eagle does in the following categories:

## News of Grand Traverse region events:

Response	Percent
Excellent	17.2
Good	57.7
Average	21.4
Poor	3.5
	<u>99.8</u>

## Sports news:

Response	Percent
Excellent	14.4
Good	46.3
Average	19.1
Poor	6.8
	<u>86.6</u>

## Special Weekend TV section:

Response	Percent
Excellent	14.1
Good	48.3
Average	17.8
Poor	7
	<u>87.2</u>

**Editorials:**

Response	Percent
Excellent	13.3
Good	52.1
Average	27.6
Poor	<u>4.4</u>
	97.4

**News of the town in which you live:**

Response	Percent
Excellent	9.3
Good	45.8
Average	32.4
Poor	<u>11.4</u>
	98.9

**State news:**

Response	Percent
Excellent	8.5
Good	56.2
Average	31.1
Poor	<u>3.9</u>
	99.7

**Social news:**

Response	Percent
Excellent	6
Good	49.8
Average	31
Poor	<u>4.1</u>
	90.9

**World news:**

Response	Percent
Excellent	5.8
Good	51.5
Average	35.3
Poor	<u>6.2</u>
	98.8

## National news:

Response	Percent
Excellent	5.4
Good	52.4
Average	35
Poor	6
	<u>98.8</u>

## Business and financial news:

Response	Percent
Excellent	3.9
Good	39.3
Average	38.3
Poor	9.5
	<u>91</u>

27. On this card are the names of a number of regular features that appear in the Record-Eagle. Would you tell me if you ever read them, and if so, how often? "Regularly" means almost every day they appear. "Occasionally" means about half the time; "Seldom" means about 20 percent of the time or less.

## Response by Percent

Feature	Regularly	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Area news briefs	72	21.6	5.6	0.8
State news briefs	58.9	32	8.1	1
World news briefs	55.2	29.2	13.7	1.9
Ann Landers	54.8	26.6	9.1	9.5
Obituaries	54.1	16	15.3	14.7
Weather report	37.1	18.3	22	22.6
Weekly outdoor page	36.9	27.8	18.3	17
Dr. Thosteson	36.1	29.7	14.5	19.7
Hospital notes	32.0	21.4	26.3	20.3
Area sports shorts	30.1	24.1	17.2	28.6
Birth announcements	31.1	16.4	24.9	27.6
Business newsmakers	29.7	31.5	22	16.8
Jean Dixon	29.7	24.7	15.4	30.1
Hints from Heloise	28.6	28	18.1	25.3
Weddings and engagements	28.6	23.4	27	21
Daily TV listings	27.6	19.3	22.4	30.7
Erma Bombeck	27.2	27.2	13.7	31.9
L. M. Boyd	24.2	19.9	14.5	41.4
Your home	24.1	32.2	20.3	23.4
Community calendar	23.7	28.8	26.8	20.7

Feature	Regularly	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Business page	23.6	28.6	24.1	23.7
Sloan gossip column	22	20.3	22.6	35.1
Religion page	21.6	31.1	22.2	25.1
Sylvia Porter	21.2	40.2	15.8	22.8
Sports hot line	20.8	18.1	16.2	44.8
Health and aging	20.5	25.5	25.1	29
Prep scoreboard	20.5	17.2	16	46.3
Monthly children's page	18.9	14.3	20.7	46.1
Farm page	17.4	21.2	23.7	37.6
Gallup poll	16.4	22.8	26.1	34.6
Dow Jones averages	13.5	12.2	22.8	51.5
Crossword puzzle	10.4	9.5	12.4	67.8
Bowling results	7.5	13.7	18.1	60.6
Bridge column	5.2	7.3	11.8	75.7
Rolling Stone features	4.4	9.1	13.3	73.1

28. Do you ever read any of the columnists or features which appear on the editorial page of the Record-Eagle?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	485	95.1
No	25	4.9
	<u>510</u>	<u>100</u>

29. If Yes, ask: On this card I have the names of these columnists and features. Would you tell me if you ever read any of these, and if so, how often you read each?

Response by Percent

Item	Regularly	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Letters to the editor	60.8	33	4.4	1.8
Editorials	47.6	40.3	7.3	4.8
Jack Anderson	22.4	34.9	18.2	24
Art Buchwald	21.4	35.3	17.3	25.8
William F. Buckley	16.7	35.5	20.4	27.2
Joanna Firestone	6.1	14.9	23.2	55.4
James Perry	3.8	11.9	22.2	61.4
Edwin Roberts, Jr.	2.8	13.5	21.2	61.6
Vermont Royster	3.2	14.3	22	60

30. How about these local columnists which appear throughout the paper:

Columnist	Responses by Percent			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Gene Hibbard (Local Scene cartoon)	32.3	18.8	16.2	32.7
Gordon Charles (Outdoors with Gordie)	29.5	29.9	16	24.5
Various local people (The Forum)	25.1	34.2	17.4	23.4
Joe Conklin (Sports)	23.4	21.2	12.7	42.5
John Davis (Looking Back, Sports)	19.5	25.3	15.4	39.6
Jim Herman (Cityside)	19.3	30.7	16.6	33
Karen Petrovich (On My Mind)	17.8	24.9	23.6	33.8
Nick Edson (Sports)	14.9	17.6	12.7	54.4
Lori Steed (Club Clips)	11.2	17.8	19.5	51.5
Robert Riebs (These Make Music)	9.8	17.2	20.5	52.1
Eunice Pines (PTA Potpourri)	6.9	15.3	19.1	58.7
Cornelius Beukema (Cornie's Corner)	6.9	14.9	20.7	57.1

Editor John Kinney said he liked the responses to question

15:

I don't think people should pick up the paper, read an editorial, and say "that's what I'm going to do," because a lot of times editorials aren't written to tell people

what to do, they're written to make people think. And even if they react to them negatively, I'd rather have that than they don't react at all.<sup>14</sup>

The finding that more than 69 percent of the respondents said they probably or definitely would not take the editorial advice of the Record-Eagle may have been caused in part by the increase in controversial editorials.

Almost 90 percent of the respondents to question 17 said the Record-Eagle provided them with at least some entertainment. Of the 25 percent who said it gave them a great deal of entertainment, 67 percent were more than 45 years old. The responses, Bogley said, indicate "the importance of our product as entertainment."<sup>15</sup>

The responses to question 18 once again indicate that an important function of a small town newspaper, as perceived by its readers, is to provide news of the local area. Much of the second section content can be defined from the typology in Chapter IV as community news. It apparently is serving its purpose as only 8.11 percent of the respondents said they seldom or never read the section and 87.32 percent said its coverage was about right.

The sports section, which had previously been both praised and damned as one of the best and worst sections of the newspaper, has fewer faithful readers than does the second section. This is undoubtedly because this portion of the newspaper appeals generally to men in that it is a traditional sports section. Cross tabulations

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<sup>14</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

<sup>15</sup>Bogley, "Readership Survey," p. A16.

indicate 79.2 percent of the males surveyed read the section while only 42.9 percent of the females read it. Sixty-eight percent of the male respondents said the amount of sports news is about right while 60 percent of the female respondents thought so.

The respondents overwhelmingly said the Record-Eagle is printing high quality photographs, with a slight edge given to local pictures.

Concerning the responses to question 26, Bogley said "if other questions are a measure, average must be looked at as more positive than negative, with still some room for improvement."<sup>16</sup> While readers gave news of Grand Traverse region events the highest marks, Bogley attributed "The relatively poor showing of 'News of your town'" to the inability of the Record-Eagle "to cover adequately the outlying areas."<sup>17</sup> Since the survey was taken, Kinney has increased the number of out-county bureau reporters from two to four. The relatively poor rating given business and financial news probably was not caused by any specific Ottaway management policy. Rather, it most likely reflects the industry-wide phenomenon to treat business journalism as a step-child in general circulation newspapers.

The high readership of area, state, and world news briefs caused Bogley to observe "The most obvious survey message is that

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. A15.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

people like their news in tight little packages."<sup>18</sup> His assertion was confirmed by comparing the responses to question 27 with the responses to questions 24 and 25. Slightly more than one-quarter of the respondents said they regularly read the daily television listings. When the same television listings are compiled in a weekly magazine and adorned with photographs, features, and separate listings by program type, readership increases to 66.21 percent. What is essentially a cosmetic change induces 77 percent of the respondents to keep the magazine for more than one day. Business newsmakers, another packaged news item, commanded about a 61 percent regular-occasional readership. Consisting primarily of re-written press releases about local people who have been promoted, Business newsmakers and its following indicate readers want more business news, and more out of business news than simply stock prices. It has been argued "If newspapers chose their features the way television chooses its programs, the entire paper would be filled with comics."<sup>19</sup> However, when the Record-Eagle asked survey respondents about the readership of its regular comics in the same manner in which it questioned them about its features, there were some intriguing responses. Only two comics--the Lockhorns and Peanuts--had more than 50 percent regular or occasional readership, but several regular written features scored above the 50 percent readership mark.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 18A.

<sup>19</sup>Lecture by Mary A. Gardner at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, January 1978.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents reported that they read the editorial page, which may be a function of the increased editorial aggressiveness in the Record-Eagle. Letters to the editor received the highest readership, supporting the claim by Dickon that they are an important indicator of community interaction. Ironically, the three columnists at the bottom of the editorial page readership hierarchy--James Perry, Edwin Roberts Jr., and Vermont Royster--are all Dow Jones employees.

Because of its poor showing in the responses to question 30, Cornie's Corner was later eliminated. Written by Cornelius Beukema, a former Chicago Tribune employee, it was devoted to senior citizens and their activities. Cross tabulations show his lowest readership was among his target audience. More than 70 percent of those 65 years old and older said they never read his column. Newsroom personnel justified the deletion by saying the same material would get better readership if treated as regular news stories.

Since it is primarily a graphic feature, the cartoon by Gene Hibbard easily obtained the top regular readership among local features. The outdoor column by Gordon Charles proved a perennial favorite. In the 1960s, when a relatively unsophisticated readership poll was taken, he was the most popular Record-Eagle columnist. Ten years later he again came out on top. The importance of a newspaper as a place for public debate was underlined by the high readership of The Forum, a column by various area residents with unique perspectives on issues of the day.

The survey revealed that people read newspapers for many reasons, but staying informed predominated. More than 66 percent said they did so mainly to keep up with the news. Seventy-six percent said they had a duty to keep informed about news and current events. Whatever the reason, the survey showed that people are reading the Record-Eagle, and that they generally have favorable perceptions of its content.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

According to Editor John Kinney, the Record-Eagle "has become more of a local newspaper under absentee ownership."<sup>1</sup> The results of this study support his statement. They also support all three hypotheses. Under Ottaway ownership and management, the Record-Eagle has become a better newspaper: its total content has increased, it publishes more local information, it provides a greater variety of opinion and entertainment matter, and it has become much more aggressive in its editorials. If, as Wilbur F. Story of the Chicago Times said in 1861, it is the duty of a newspaper "to print the news, and raise hell," this study shows the Record-Eagle under the Batdorff family took care to print little that would raise even a reasonable facsimile of hell.<sup>2</sup> Free-lance writer William Corbett, a reporter at the Record-Eagle before it was sold to Ottaway, said Batdorff executives took care not to print local stories that might disturb the community. When Corbett wrote what he considered a mildly critical but generally laudatory review

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<sup>1</sup>Chris Dickon, tape of "The Radio Chronicle" broadcasts of 9, 12 June 1978 (Interlochen: WIAA).

<sup>2</sup>Justin E. Walsh, To Print the News and Raise Hell! (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 3.

of an amateur theater production, it was replaced by an enthusiastic one written by a member of the theater group. When Corbett asked an editor if he should write a story about a controversy which had polarized segments of the community, he was told: "If there's anything important in it, we'll get it off the wire."<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the comment in Chapter IV by Gerard H. Borstel, this study proves that the absentee-owned Record-Eagle has a particular orientation to its home community that was lacking in its locally-owned days.

The Record-Eagle has improved its content in all three areas examined in this study. The results of the readership survey indicate people are generally satisfied with the overall newspaper product. However, dissatisfaction over the new ownership of the publication still exists. News Editor William Echlin said he will "cringe a little" when he hears derogatory talk about absentee ownership: "I cringe mostly because I feel like it's a slap in the face for my work, and the work of my reporters and the work of the people that are trying to make a decent newspaper daily, as if to say we didn't do it ourselves, we didn't make this newspaper better." He also observed

Absentee ownership . . . is an easy way to explain the paper to people that have a difficulty with the change. . . . It may have been very difficult for the newspaper to do what has been done in the last four years had it not changed ownership or had it not had the Ottaway group come in. But if it had happened, there would have been . . . another easy explanation. Somebody would have said "Oh, well, it's that

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<sup>3</sup>William Corbett, interview at his home, Traverse City, Michigan, August 1978.

new, rotten editor," or "Oh, it's the . . . son of the old publisher, the old guy knew the town well but the young guy is just trying to make a name for himself."<sup>4</sup>

As long as the Grand Traverse region is kept in flux by rapid growth and political activism, as long as the Record-Eagle continues its aggressive news and editorial policies, and as long as an embittered group of merchants and bureaucrats long for what one man called "the Good Ol' Days," the ownership of the Record-Eagle will be a bone of contention for many.<sup>5</sup> Such a continuing controversy may help keep the news staff operating at peak efficiency. As John Alfred Kaufman III said "Reporters working for editors and supervisors who maintain an attitude of indifference toward aggressive local news coverage can hardly be expected to display a greater amount of enthusiasm themselves. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Among other improvements, Ottaway managers at the Record-Eagle have substantially increased local hard news and supplementary stories, local enterprise stories, locally-produced columns, local interpretive stories, and local opinion material. However, room for vast improvement exists. The editorials of both samples, like those of many American newspapers, woefully lack mobilizing information. When a newspaper provides mobilizing

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<sup>4</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

<sup>5</sup>Record-Eagle, 15 November 1976, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>John Alfred Kaufman III, "The (Lansing) State Journal as a Gannett Property: An Inquiry into and Evaluation of Editorial Performance Under Gannett Co. Ownership" (M.A. thesis, Michigan State University, 1973), pp. 129-30.

information, by suggesting concrete ways an individual can interact with the political environment, it provides an essential service to its readers. Ralph R. Thrift Jr. maintained that mobilizing information, along with argumentative form, controversial context, and local subject matter, was one of the four ingredients of a vigorous editorial.<sup>7</sup> While he said other editorials could also be effective, he assumed the four elements of vigor "would be the most susceptible to fluctuation when an independently owned daily newspaper is purchased by a chain."<sup>8</sup> In his study, Thrift found "very little mobilizing information at all," which was one of the factors that made him conclude "editorial vigor does occur . . . but not very often."<sup>9</sup> Under Ottaway ownership, the Record-Eagle has made great strides in becoming a powerful editorial voice, but Tables 12 and 17 show its editorials could use much more mobilizing information.

Another area in which improvement has been made and more is needed is the broad category of presentation. The answers to question 6 show that about 23 percent of those interviewed thought some part of the way the newspaper presented its product was the worst attribute of the Record-Eagle. Included in this category were typographical errors, sensationalism, lack of organization,

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<sup>7</sup>Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "Editorial Vigor and the Chain-Owned Daily Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1976), pp. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 54, 74.

bias, inaccurate reporting, and small printing. The answers to question 7 show many respondents thought improvement in this area was needed. About 12 percent of them recommended the Record-Eagle work to produce better proofreading, both sides of stories, and more accuracy. Indeed, a newspaper which has had trouble spelling the names of its own staff members obviously needs better proofreading. An all too-easy response to this problem would be to give the bulk of stories to editors and proofreaders when they are off deadline so they would not be pressured simply to "get it read and out to the back shop." Such a scheme would either leave the newspaper full of old stories, or, in the words of Fergus M. Bordewich, full of features "so breezy you can hear the whistling through the holes where the news might have been."<sup>10</sup> Kaufman noted "when the writer, or newspaper, persist in using a lighter style--in pushing for pizzaz--the result can be a degeneration of reportage into little more than parody."<sup>11</sup>

Business news in the Record-Eagle also needs improvement. Gilbert Bogley said the relatively high readership of the Business Newsmakers section was "perhaps the biggest surprise of the survey."<sup>12</sup> He concluded its "strong showing . . . is indicative

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<sup>10</sup>Fergus M. Bordewich, "Supermarketing the Newspaper," Columbia Journalism Review, September/October 1977, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>Gilbert Bogley, "Readership Survey of the Five-County Grand Traverse Region for the Traverse City Record-Eagle," 1977 (typewritten), p. A21.

that many readers are ready for a better showing in this area."<sup>13</sup> The Record-Eagle is not alone among American newspapers in underestimating the value of business news. Chris Welles has said journalists have exhibited a "chronic blindness" to "the realities of business and finance."<sup>14</sup> Beyond the business pages of the New York Times, Welles said, financial journalism in American general circulation newspapers "is a bleak wasteland."<sup>15</sup> However, there is evidence that business news, long ignored by reporters, has gained in importance in the public mind.<sup>16</sup>

Record-Eagle financial news is largely confined to daily stock quotations; occasional first section stories about housing starts, cost of living increases, or new businesses; and a twice-weekly second section business page of mostly re-written press releases and non-local material. The newspaper could boost its business coverage rather easily without damaging its coverage in other areas. The four city reporters and four bureau reporters could be assigned to write business-oriented stories from their beats on a regular basis. Second section editor Marge Cotter has let it be known that she will make the first page of her section available to anyone with features. It can be argued that too much

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. A15.

<sup>14</sup>Chris Welles, "The Bleak Wasteland of Financial Journalism," Columbia Journalism Review, July/August 1973, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>J. T. W. Hubbard, "Business News in the Post-Watergate Era," Journalism Quarterly 53 (Augumn 1976): 488.

of her section is filled with soft, human interest features, and social news. Table 3 shows that more than 23 percent of local news in the Record-Eagle is community news, most of which appears in the second section. True, there is value in such material, especially for a community newspaper. It is also evident that almost twice as many respondents said there is too little second section material rather than too much, while more than 87 percent said they were satisfied with the amount of information they received from that section. The fact that Business Newsmakers falls into the category of community news illustrates the fact that readers may not be getting the proportion of various types of community news they want. It is obviously much easier to print pages of wedding photographs, summaries of club meetings, and pictures promoting the activities of fraternal or charitable organizations than accurate, ongoing accounts of the business of business. However, does such allocation of newspaper space, resources, and staff time give the reader his or her money's worth of information he or she needs to function in a complex society? Probably not.

As Record-Eagle circulation increases both in number of newspapers sold and in geographic area, vast amounts of space devoted to light material of interest to only a few may be a detriment. The reader in Mancelona obviously wants to know about the activities of the Antrim County clubs to which he or she belongs, but does he or she pay much attention to the business of

other groups in Omena in Leelanau County or in Beulah in Benzie County? Again, probably not.

When the Record-Eagle expands its coverage it may seem like a simple proposition to garner readers by printing social news of their area, but that sort of information is also provided in varying degrees by weekly county newspapers, shoppers with zoned circulation, and television and radio stations. However, an increase in out-county news in an attempt to lure new readers and advertisers could mean a concomitant decrease in copy concerning the primary circulation area of the Record-Eagle: the Traverse City area. Such a scenario would leave the door open for the establishment of a competing weekly city newspaper, a possibility suggested by some critics of the Record-Eagle. Possible remedies include zoned editions or special out-county inserts.

The hodge-podge of local, state, national, and international news, entertainment, and feature articles, opinion material, photographs, and columns in the Record-Eagle points to what John C. Merrill has said is the failure of many newspapers in the United States to become quality publications--the desire to provide something for everybody. According to Merrill, most American newspapers are "unfocused, undisciplined in basic journalistic philosophy, offering up all types of disorganized bits and snippets of entertainment, comics, puzzles, fiction, columns, and sensational or conflict-oriented news, and fair portions of undigested (and

usually bland) local editorial opinion or comment."<sup>17</sup> As Kaufman said, "Newspapers, like any business, are influenced by a fundamental proposition of hydraulics which instructs that a fluid seeks its own level."<sup>18</sup> In a sense, the Record-Eagle is caught in a paradox. Its editors wish to improve its quality, which takes money, the amount of money which can only come from advertisers, advertisers who want to reach the most potential buyers at the lowest cost. And, of course, the way to attract those new readers in the out-county areas is to offer news of their locale. Such a scheme may make the publication more profitable--and profits can be the best protection for a free press--but even if those newly-acquired profits are re-invested in the publication, there is an outer limit beyond which this expansion plan will not function. The managers of the Record-Eagle, in their quest to produce something for everyone, run the risk of eventually plunging beyond the common denominator and producing something for no one. It is a possible dilemma with which Ottaway executives need to reckon.

However, until that outer limit is reached, an observation by Ernest C. Hynds also applied to the Record-Eagle: "Newspapers should be judged on the basis of the roles they choose to perform and how well they perform. . . . Any newspaper that does a useful

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<sup>17</sup>The Elite Press: Great Newspapers of the World, cited by Ernest C. Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1975), p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," p. 129.

task well can be considered a quality newspaper."<sup>19</sup> The results of this study show the Record-Eagle has become a quality newspaper under Ottaway ownership and management, but significant improvement in form and substance are still needed in the publication. Another obvious example of an area in which the newspaper needs work is in reaching the youth market, a segment of the population that has exhibited a low readership of daily newspapers. The Rolling Stone column, which was bought to lure young readers, performed abysmally in the readership survey. According to Bogley, more than half of the respondents in the 18 to 25 age bracket said they never read the column.<sup>20</sup>

While it was outside the ken of this study, a survey of the attitudes of newsroom employees at the Record-Eagle might prove extremely valuable. During the course of this study, some workers expressed dissatisfaction about the professionalism, news judgment, and management abilities of certain editors. A survey of employee attitudes would determine whether the complaints were merely standard reactions against authority figures or signs of newsroom malaise. Such a study might also determine what affects, if any, the transient nature of Record-Eagle newsmen has on the publication. Under Ottaway ownership, the Record-Eagle has had a fairly high degree of transience among both its editors and reporters. Kinney

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<sup>19</sup>Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1970s, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup>Bogley, "Readership Survey," p. A21.

has called complaints about that impermanence a "valid criticism."<sup>21</sup> Another argument in favor of such a study is that it would determine if there is any empirical evidence to support the widely-held notion that "generally speaking, organizations that deal with external communication do not have good internal communication."<sup>22</sup> Kaufman observed that

A large corporation . . . that expands through horizontal integration should be, if it is not, well-schooled in the necessity to inform newly acquired employees of impending organizational changes and modifications to existing policies. That enhances morale, and it does not cost anything.<sup>23</sup>

A future content analysis of the type performed in this study would also be valuable as its results would give objective observers three points along which the development of the Record-Eagle under Ottaway ownership could be traced. This study shows that chain ownership has not had a harmful impact on the Record-Eagle, in fact, it shows that absentee ownership of the newspaper has made it a better publication. The diversity of research findings in the field of chain ownership of newspapers suggests that future studies should focus on the differences between chains. The local editorial control concept supported by Ottaway varies greatly from the centralized approach of

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<sup>21</sup>Dickon, "The Radio Chronicle."

<sup>22</sup>Lecture by Maurice R. Cullen Jr. at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, October 1977.

<sup>23</sup>Kaufman, "The State Journal as a Gannett Property," p. 124.

Panax. Differences of this sort may very well be the cause of differences in empirical findings. As in the Panax case, Oswald Garrison Villard's warning rang true: concentration of editorial power can be dangerous, but that does not mean all newspaper chains are dangerous. This study has shown that a chain-owned newspaper not only has the potential to serve the readers better than its independent predecessor, but in at least one case, did and continues to provide its readers vastly improved daily accounts of the world in which they live.

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