LOCAL NEWS OPERATIONS OF WOOD-TV

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INTRODUCTION

Television is the youngest of the mass media, and television news is still in its formative years. Since television began to mushroom across the country in 1948, little academic research has been done on television news and still less on the operations of a local television news department.

The author presents this thesis as a descriptive study of the operations of the WOOD-TV news department in the middle-sized city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Through a study of the news department, its personnel, its regular local-news operations, its special news programs, and its editorials, the author hopes to bring to light some of the means by which a television news department serves a community and some of the problems inherent in its task.

The first five chapters are mainly evaluative, because valid criteria are difficult to find. Late in the preparation of this thesis, however, Froke's 1959 study of broadcast news directors and operations became available, so that some of WOOD-TV's practices and policies can be compared with those prevalent elsewhere.

Probably the most significant comparisons would usually be with the median of the replies Froke received from combined radio-television staffs. It should be noted, however, that these medians may be higher than the actual medians for all such stations for two reasons. First, only members of the Radio Television News Directors Association of the United States and Canada were questioned --a group which may be more news-conscious than the average --and, second, there might be a prestige factor that would lead more of those felt their standards were high to be among the half of the recipients who replied to the questionnaire as against the half who did not.

Some conclusions on factors in an effective television news operation will be drawn in the final chapter. Many of these conclusions as necessarily subjective.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF THE STATION

Grand Rapids, which in recent years has alternated with Flint as Michigan's second-largest city, is a stable and prosperous community which dominates the economic life of southwestern Michigan. The city's population in 1960, 177,314 people, represents a gain of less than 40,000 citizens since 1920.[1] The United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Employment Security said in 1951 that the Grand Rapids area "probably has the most diversified industrial economy in Michigan, with most of the manufacturing development concentrated in the city...and its suburban fringe," and with little more than half the city's 54,200 laborers, of whom 41,3 per cent are skilled or semi-skilled workers, engaged in the metal-working trade.[2]

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[1]U.S., Bureau of the Census, Eighteenth Census of the United States: 1960, Population: Advanced Reports, 17. Flint and Grand Rapids are about twice the size of any other city in Michigan except Detroit. The balance of population between these two cities has changed because of annexation elections in recent years.

[2]U.S., Bureau of Employment Security, Area Manpower Guidebook: 174 Metroplitan Labor Market Areas, (1951) pp. 143-144.

Grand Rapids' 1960 volume of wholesale and retail trade totaled $787,907,000;[3] its hourly-rated laborers averaged $2.55 an hour; and average weekly wages amounted to $103 for a forty-hour week.[4] The city's per capita and per household incomes for 1960 were $2,003 and $6,558 respectively, and 61.2 per cent of the citizens owned their own residences.[5] The city had an art gallery, a symphony orchestra, a library, and three colleges: Calvin College, founded in 1876; Aquinas College, founded in 1886; and Grand Rapids Junior College, founded in 1914.

In 1924, Grand Rapids was Michigan's second largest city, with 137,634 people.[6] According to William J. Etten, editor of a centennial history of the city, Grand Rapids then enjoyed a national reputation as the furniture manufacturing center of the United States, if not the world, and its public school system was considered second to none by the University of Chicago's College of Education.[7]

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[3]Michigan Statistical Abstract (East Lansing: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Michigan State University, Third Edition, 1960). pp. 142 and 1956.

[4]U.S., Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, vol. 7, no. 8 (February, 1961), 40.

[5]Michigan Statistical Abstract, pp. 52 and 118.

[6]U.S., Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, 498.

[7]William J. Etten (ed.), A Citizen's History of Grand Rapids (Grand Rapids: A.P. Johnson Company, 1926), pp. 199 - 200.

Known by its citizens and other Michiganders as "the city of beautiful homes,"[8] Grand Rapids could boast even in the early 'Twenties that its citizens owned 50.2 per cent of their residences, placing the city among the few communities with more than 100,000 people to claim this distinction.[9] But the city lacked one institution which was then capturing the imagination of America, a local, commercial radio station.

By mid-1924, commercial radio stations were operating in such regional population centers as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.; in middle-sized cities such as Kansas City, Missouri, Providence, Rhode Island, and Olympia, Washington; and even in some smaller cities like Newark, New Jersey, Oakland, California, and Round Hill, Massachusetts.[10]

Grand Rapids' first local programs began on September 16, 1924, when the C.J. Litscher Company, a local seller of receiving sets, and the Radio Corporation of America held a week-long radio exibition in the Klingman Building. Radio equipment for civilian and military use

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[8] Ibid.

[9] U.S., Fourteenth Census, 1288.

[10] E.P.J. Shurick, The First Quarter Century of American Broadcasting (Kansas City: Midland Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 47 - 52.

was displayed. Audio engineers described professional techniques to amateur enthusiasts, and prizes were awarded to the best amateur builders of radio sets. The show's central feature was its broadcasts, which attracted five hundred spectators. Its station, WEBL, with a temporary license from the Department of Commerce, broadcast on 226 meters with 250 watts of power and was picked up by radio sets as far as three hundred miles away. Music and talks by civic and military leaders of the area were broadcast each day from 2 P.M. to 9 P.M. and 10 P.M. to midnight.[11]

Grand Rapids' first regular commercial station followed within a month. WEBK was the creation of two local small businessmen, Don L. Gildersleeve and Leo J. Robinson, who had begun as the Grand Rapids Radio Company to manufacture radio receiving sets and parts in 1922. In the two years that intervened they had worked on perfecting transmission and reception equipment. Operating experimentally on 261 meters with 20 watts of power, they had been heard as far away as Duxbury, Massachusetts. On October 19, 1924, soon after WEBK's first broadcast, the Grand Rapids Herald reported:

> Station WEBK got on the air for the...community evening services which it is broadcasting from the Trinity Community Church, without a hitch; and before the first number was ended, telephone calls were coming in from radio worshipers all over the city, who reported to the station that the services were

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[11]Grand Rapids Herald, September 14, 1924, and September 17, 1924.

being received successfully.

During the week the station has received reports that its programs have been heard over a territory of 50 miles.[12]

Gildersleeve and Robinson announced the station would broadcast every Sunday and Wednesday night, because most Chicago stations, which were popular in the Grand Rapids area, were silent on Sunday nights, while Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland stations did not broadcast after 8 P.M. on Wednesday evenings.[13] After two weeks, however, Gildersleeve and Robinson added Monday nights, too, confident they could compete with the big city stations.[14]

About five months later, Grand Rapids' second commercial radio station, WBDC, came into being. A half-page advertisement in the Grand Rapids Press announced its opening on Friday, March 13, 1925, at 5:30 P.M. in studios behind the Baxter Laundry Company's office in the city's northeast section. The call letters WBDC stood for "world-wide Baxter Dry Cleaning" for the laundry firm owned by State Senator Howard F. Baxter, who also owned the station. WBDC broadcast every day from noon till 8 P.M. on 256.4 meters with 50 watts of power.[15]

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[12]Ibid., October 20, 1924.

[13]Ibid., October 5, 1924.

[14]Ibid., November 3, 1924.

[15]Grand Rapids Press, March 12, 1925.

Meanwhile, Gildersleeve and Robinson operated WEBK from 1924 to 1926 with the financial support of the Furniture Manufacturers Association of Grand Rapids and Walter B. Stiles, co-owner of the city's leading lumber company, Stiles Associated Yards. Late in 1925 the backers asked the WEBK management to request a change of call letters to the more significant and easily remembered WOOD. The Department of Commerce approved, and on January 13, 1926, WEBK became WOOD.[16]

WOOD's managers followed suit and obtained new call letters more suggestive of the cleaning business. On October 22, 1926, WBDC became WASH.[17]

Between 1926 and 1929 each had changes in ownership before both were finally leased to an outside corporation.

Late in 1925, WOOD's inability to show a profit became a matter of concern to one of its backers. And by the autumn of 1926, the Furniture Manufacturers Association informed Gildersleeve and Robinson that it would no longer contribute to WOOD's support. When the Association withdrew from WOOD, Walter B. Stiles, with the aid of his brothers Frederick and Harry Stiles, co-owners of the

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[16]Grand Rapids Herald, January 13, 1926, and interview with Frederick E. Stiles, November 25, 1960. Mr. Stiles was formerly a partner in the WOOD Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, and is the brother of the late Walter B. Stiles.

[17]Frederick E. Stiles, ibid.

Stiles Associated Yards, acquired major capital interest and control of the station. Gildersleeve and Robinson remained as minority stockholders.[18]

Meanwhile, Senator Baxter found operating WASH an added burden to his other interests. On March 9, 1929, he sold WASH to a group of parishioners of the Grand Rapids Calvary Undenominational Church. This group, under the leadership of Adrian L.H. Verwys, Thys Ferwerda, and William Schonwald, bought the station mainly to make it possible for the Reverend Martin R. De Haan, their pastor, to broadcast his "Radio Bible Class," but also as a commercial venture.[19]

In 1933, the owners of WOOD and WASH, in a joint transaction, leased the operation of both stations to the King-Trendle Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, of Detroit.[20] The King-Trendle firm was owned by John H. King,[21] who began his business career as the owner and operator of a

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Interview with Thys Ferwerda, December 10, 1960. Mr. Ferwerda was formerly Secretary-Treasurer of the WASH Broadcasting Company, Incorporated.

[20]Interview with Dr. Stanley W. Barnett, November 28, 1960. Dr. Barnett was the General Manager of the WOOD-WASH Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, from 1945 to 1949.

[21]Until 1938, King's name was Kunsky and the corporation was known as Kunsky-Trendle. For convenience, the designation of "King-Trendle" is used throughout except on one quoted citation.

Detroit penny arcade, and George W. Trendle, a young Detroit businessman. In the early 1900's these two men had formed a partnership to invest in the rapidly-developing motion-picture industry and by 1930 they owned Detroit's largest chain of motion-picture theaters. That year they sold all their theater holdings to Paramount Pictures, Incorporated, to concentrate on their other interest, commercial radio.[22]

The King-Trendle corporation had been involved in radio since 1925, when it purchased the Detroit station, WGHP, from the George Harrison Phelps, Incorporated, advertising agency. King and Trendle changed that station's call letters to WXYZ, where Trendle later originated the long-lived "Lone Ranger" series. WXYZ carried the programs of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Incorporated, for almost a year, then dropped the affiliation to operate as an independent station.[23]

King and Trendle, perceiving the commercial impact of radio as an advertising medium, began to seek a state-wide radio chain. They achieved their goal in January, 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression.

> WXYZ became an independent with ambitions aspiring to local programs rivaling the network presentations. While this policy was being developed, George Trendle,

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[22] Stanley W. Barnett, December 10, 1960.

[23] "History of Radio in Michigan," Michigan History Magazine, XXI (Winter, 1937), P. 16.

> president of the Kunsky-Trendle Broadcasting Corporation, conceived the idea of a network involving stations in the principal cities of the state. On January 31, 1933, the network was put into operation, involving WELL, Battle Creek; WCBM, Bay City; WOOD-WASH, Grand Rapids; WKZO, Kalamazoo; WIBM, Jackson; and WXYZ, the big station in Detroit.[24]

King and Trendle called their group the Michigan Radio Network. They owned only WXYZ, and leased time from the other stations, which were locally-owned and operated. The Michigan Radio Network carried Detroit Tiger baseball games and programs of the two National Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, networks--the Red and the Blue. The Blue Network later became the American Broadcasting Company, Incorporated.[25]

King and Trendle paid special attention to Grand Rapids because they wanted to be sure of an outlet in the state's second largest city. They leased the operation of WOOD from the Stiles Brothers and of WASH from that station's stockholders , and created a new station, named WOOD-WASH, combining the existing equipment and staff to broadcast on a shared-time basis. WASH was on the air from 8 A.M. until noon, then was replaced by WOOD, from noon until midnight.[26]

WOOD-WASH was Grand Rapids' only radio station until

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Barnett interview.

September 18, 1940, when WLAV, a 250-watt station, came into existence.[27] The national census figures that year would indicate that Grand Rapids was the radio capital of Michigan, with radios in the higher percentage of its homes--that is in 44,158 or 95.8 per cent of its dwelling units.[28] King and Trendle felt, however, that their 500-watt station was not powerful enough to reach listeners in the sparsely-populated and rural areas surrounding Grand Rapids. On December 1, 1942, with the approval of the Federal Communications Commission, WOOD-WASH's power was increased to 5,000 watts. The WOOD-WASH night-time signal then reached Iowa, Missouri, and Maryland, and the station had to use directional radiation at night to prevent its programs from interfering with stations operating in those states.[29]

King and Trendle also built a new physical plant for WOOD-WASH in December, 1942. Located south of the Grand Rapids airport between Division and Eastern avenues in Paris township, the new twenty-four acre plant consisted of four buildings, three 230-foot towers, and was surrounded by a mile of high electrical fence.[30]

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[27] Broadcasting: 1960 Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: Broadcasting Publications, Incorporated, 1960), p. 172-A.

[28] U.S., Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Housing, vol. II, 634.

[29] Grand Rapids Press, December 1, 1942.

[30] Ibid.

In 1945 King and Trendle purchased all WOOD-WASH stock, thus obtaining complete control and terminating the original leasing arrangement. The call letters WASH were dropped and the station was identified only as WOOD.[31] By February, 1945, a new station, WJEF, had come to the air, and King and Trendle faced two competitors for advertising income.[32]

King and Trendle owned and operated the WOOD Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, until May, 1946, when they announced the sale of WOOD and WXYZ for $3,650,000 to the newly-formed American Broadcasting Company, Incorporated. The FCC refused to approve the sale, however, because WOOD was still under contract to NBC, an ABC competitor, officials promptly announced their intention to sell WOOD as soon as possible.[33]

The sale of WOOD by ABC became increasingly complicated, however, as two corporations sought to purchase the station in a struggle that was not resolved by the FCC until March, 1948. The first prospective buyer of WOOD, the Liberty Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, owner and operator of fourteen Michigan radio stations, announced on December 19, 1946, that the

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[31]Barnett interview.

[32]Broadcasting: 1960 Yearbook, loc. cit.

[33]Grand Rapids Herald, May 3, 1946.

FCC had approved its purchase of the station for $850,000.[34] ABC became impatient with Liberty's failure to finance the project quickly enough, however, and announced on August 13, 1947, that it had "resold" WOOD for the same price to Harry M. Bitner, Senior, former general manager of the Hearst newspaper chain, former publisher of the Detroit Times and Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph, and owner of radio stations in Indianapolis and Evansville, Indiana. The sales price reportedly included WOOD profits of $100,000 held in escrow by ABC. ABC thus found itself in the position of having signed sale contracts with two different parties.[35]

Bitner took his case to the FCC on September 3, 1947, when he formally applied for approval of his purchase of WOOD from ABC in the name of the Grandwood Broadcasting Company, Incorporated, a corporation 50 per cent owned by station WFBM, Incorporated, of Indianapolis, Indiana, which Bitner also owned with most of the rest of the stock held by members of his family.[36] Meanwhile Grand Rapids' fourth and fifth commercial radio stations, WGRD and WFUR, came to the air in November, 1947.[37]

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[34] Grand Rapids Press, December 19, 1946.

[35] Ibid., August 13, 1947.

[36] Grand Rapids Press, September 3, 1947.

[37] Broadcasting: 1960 Yearbook, loc. cit.

The struggle for control of WOOD carried on into 1948 before the FCC settled the matter in an extraordinary night session on March 27. Liberty's attorney requested a two-week postponement of the hearing to complete certain phases of its financing. ABC's attorney opposed it on the grounds Liberty had won previous postponements without being able to come through. The FCC refused any further delay. The Liberty application was withdrawn and the Grandwood purchase was approved.[38] So, on May 1, 1948, the Bitner interests assumed control of WOOD.[39]

Meanwhile, television was growing and Bitner's next step was to apply to the FCC for a commercial television station license on August 5, 1948.[40] It was too late, however. Bitner ran into an FCC "freeze" on the allocation of commercial television station licenses, while WLAV, which had applied earlier was approved and began operating in 1949.[41] After waiting a year for the FCC to lift the "freeze", WOOD's manager, Stanley W. Barnett, announced that WOOD had purchased a television transmission site on high ground in northeast Grand Rapids, but could take no further steps without a license.[42]

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[38] Grand Rapids Press, March 27, 1948.

[39] Ibid., August 5, 1948.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Broadcasting: 1949 Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: Broadcasting Publications, Incorporated, 1960), p. 62.

[42] Grand Rapids Press, July 31, 1949.

The Grand Rapids Press explained the "freeze" in these words:

> Originally it was planned to handle all television stations in the United States on 13 channels. The theory did not work out, however, and several stations ran into unexpected interference. So the FCC "froze" all applications for new stations last year till a new plan of alloting channels could be worked out satisfactorily. It is hoped by fall that all the "bugs" can be worked out and the FCC will be alloting channels again.[43]

Bitner waited in vain until 1951, and then, on May 18, he announced that Grandwood Broadcasting had reached a verbal agreement with the owner of WLAV-AM and WLAV-TV to purchase his television station and its micro-wave relay system linking Grand Rapids with Chicago. The sale was consummated for $1,367,000, and WOOD-TV began telecasting on Channel 7 on October 19, 1951.[44]

In its first three years of operation, WOOD-TV made two significant technical changes. In June, 1952, it gained FCC permission to shift from Channel 7 to Channel 8 to avoid interference with stations in Illinois and Indiana, it also obtained permission to increase its power and antenna height. The antenna was raised from 491 to 1,000 feet above average terrain. The station's video power was increased from 28,200 to 316,000 watts and its audio power from 14,500 to 160,000 watts, making WOOD-TV the strongest

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[43] Ibid., "Channel 1" is now reserved by the Federal Government and no longer is found on television dials.

[44] Grand Rapids Herald, May 18, 1951.

station in Michigan. When the station's new tower was completed on December 8, 1953, its signal reached north to Big Rapids; to a point twenty miles east of Lansing; to twenty miles west of Jackson; beyond Three Rivers to the south; and southwest to Benton Harbor.[45] In all, its signal extended over thirty-one Michigan counties and reached a total population of two million by January 1, 1954. Only five other stations in the United States then had as much power.[46] In anticipation of network color-casts, WOOD-TV also installed equipment to transmit color programs.[47]

On November 25, 1954, a sixth competitor for radio advertising revenue, WMAX began broadcasting, but to date there has been no other television station in Grand Rapids.[48]

A year later, on January 1, 1955, the WOOD Broadcasting Company moved into its new radio and television studios, WOODland Center, at 120 Northeast College Avenue.[49]

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[45]"WOOD-TV Comes of Age with Increased Power on 8," Peninsular Club Magazine, January, 1954.

[46]Ibid. The other stations were located in Denver, Louisville, Memphis, Minneapolis, and Wheeling.

[47]Grand Rapids Press, April 15, 1954.

[48]Broadcasting: 1960 Yearbook, loc. cit.

[49]Interview with Leonard Bridge, October 19, 1960. Mr. Bridge is Business Manager and Comptroller of the WOOD Broadcasting Company, Incorporated.

In April, 1956, WOOD-AM and WOOD-TV was almost sold as part of an abortive deal which the FCC called "the greatest such transaction in the history of the boradcasting industry."[50] On April 23, the Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, Incorporated, announced that it had signed purchase agreements for control of three television and four radio stations in the Midwest to strengthen its financial position by expanding into radio, television--as well as newspapers, motion pictures, and phonograph records. Crowell-Collier had purchased KULA-AM and KULA-TV, Honolulu, Hawaii, for a little more than $1 million just a few days before this announced $16 million expansion program. The seven stations in the Midwestern deal were WOOD-AM and WOOD-TV, Grand Rapids; WTCN-AM and WTCN-TV, Minneapolis; WFBM-AM and WFBM-TV, Indianapolis; and radio station WFDF, Flint, Michigan.[51] Crowell-Collier signed the agreement with the Consolidated Television and Radio Broadcasters, Incorporated, a firm Bitner had founded earlier in 1956 when he gained control of new radio and television stations.[52]

The transaction collapsed within six months, however. Paul C. Smith, president of Crowell-Collier,

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[50] Grand Rapids Press, April 23, 1956.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Broadcasting: 1956 Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: Broadcasting Publications, Incorporated, 1956), p. 366.

blamed the failure on lack of financing.[53]

With the collapse of the Crowell-Collier deal, the way was now open for Time, Incorporated, to buy the seven stations. Time, which also owned radio and television stations in Albuquerque, Denver, and Salt Lake City, had to sell one of its radio-television stations to comply with an FCC ruling that barred single ownership of more than five VHF outlets. It removed the last legal barrier by selling KOB-AM-TV, Albuquerque, to a Minnesota corporation for $1,500,000. Time then purchased the seven Midwestern radio-television stations on May 23, 1957, for about $15,750,000.[54]

That purchase completed, Time created a new corporation, TLF Broadcasters, Incorporated, as one of its subsidiaries. Grandwood Broadcasting, Incorporated, which had owned WOOD-AM-TV, was liquidated and its stock was turned over to WOOD Broadcasting, Incorporated, a new Michigan corporation held by TLF Broadcasters.[55]

At present WOOD-TV's closest competition in southwestern Michigan is WKZO-TV, Kalamazoo, which came to the air June 1, 1950.[56]

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[53] Grand Rapids Press, December 4, 1956.

[54] Ibid., May 23, 1956.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Broadcasting: 1960 Yearbook, loc. cit.

CHAPTER II

THE NEWS DEPARTMENT

WOOD-TV has had two news directors during its nine years on the air. The first to handle television coverage of local news was Robert N. Runyon; the second, and present news director, is Richard E. Cheverton.

Robert N. Runyon, 1949 to 1955.--Mr. Runyon, who was WOOD's news director from 1949 to 1955, had a wide background in broadcast journalism. He graduated as a radio, speech, and drama major from the University of Minnesota, free-lanced for several European publications, acted in western motion pictures, and worked as announcer, program director, producer, newscaster, or news director with eleven radio and television stations in the middle and Far West before coming to WOOD in September, 1949.[1]

"The department then consisted of one announcer who ripped off the copy from the news wire and read it over a microphone," he says. No effort was being made to cover local or regional news.[2] Runyon was a one-man news staff

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[1]Letter from Robert N. Runyon, Director of WILS News, Lansing, Michigan, November 17, 1960.

[2]Ibid.

at first. He began to cover all fire and police departments and the governmental units of Grand Rapids, Kent county, and surrounding communities.[3]

Runyon hired no additional newsmen until WOOD-TV came to the air in October, 1951. Then he hired a second reporter as well as a reporter-cinematographer. The third man was able to supply motion pictures while all three could handle still cameras. Runyon purchased a Bell and Howell 70 DL silent film motion picture camera and one Graflex camera for the news department and subscribed to the United Press International photo-facsimile service. The station's management urged him to editorialize, but he says he preferred depth reporting of major local news stories. The news department underwent no other major changes until Cheverton was hired as its news director in 1955.[4]

Richard E. Cheverton, 1955 to present.--Cheverton brought to his position a wide and varied career in journalism.[5] He was born in Joliet, Illinois, and educated in Muscatine, Iowa, before enrolling in Muscatine Junior College in 1935 to study liberal arts. After two years there he enrolled in Monmouth (Illinois) College

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Interview with Richard E. Cheverton, September 29, 1960.

in 1937, where he majored in English. He ran out of money in 1939, however, when he still lacked two credits in German to complete his degree requirements. Determined to make a career in journalism, he went to New York City, where he acquired a job with the Parkchester Review, a Bronx weekly newspaper. There, he says, he did everything from sweeping floors to general reporting before being hired in early 1941 to edit an advertising weekly in Newport News, Virginia. The weekly folded within two months, but Donald Stewart, one of its co-owners and the treasurer of Marshall Field's PM, hired Cheverton for a two-month stint as a PM reporter.

PM launched Parade, the Sunday magazine supplement, in 1941, and Cheverton was hired to edit the infant publication. He left Parade in January, 1942, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, to join the United State Navy. His three and one-half years in the Navy involved some journalism, however, for he edited two advance-base Navy training manuals at Camp Peary, Virginia. He left the Navy in 1945 with the rank of storekeeper first class.[6]

For the next two years, Cheverton left journalism to buy and operate a laundry-dry cleaning business back in Muscatine. He says he disliked business life, however, and decided to return to news director of KWPC, Muscatine, from 1947 to 1949. In 1949 he moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa,

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[6]Ibid.

where he was news director at KWCR until 1950, when he followed KWCR's manager, George Volger, to KRIB, Mason City, Iowa. Cheverton was KRIB's news director until 1951, when he returned to Cedar Rapids to serve as WMT's news director from 1951 to 1955.[7]

Cheverton was less than satisfied with the condition of the WOOD news department when he became its news director in 1955. "The station had no organized schedule of newscasts," he says, "only two cameras, no developing equipment, one motion picture photographer who also covered news, and an office boy who sometimes helped out in the news department. We had a man and a half."[8]

Cheverton rebuilt the news department by having specific time spots assigned for radio and television news programs and by expanding the staff over a five-year period.

The 1961 WOOD news staff.--From 1955 to 1960, Cheverton hired fifteen men in all in an attempt to build an efficient news department. Some were experienced newspapermen, some had worked in radio and television newsrooms in their college years, and some were hired directly from college with little or no commercial news experience. Six of these men are still with him, making a

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

news staff of seven, or one more than the median for such stations. Six of the seven came from other news jobs.[9]

William L. Vance, Junior, 28, is the assistant news director of the WOOD news department.

Born in 1932 in Oak Park, Illinois, Vance attended schools in that area and graduated from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, with a Bachelor of Science degree in political science in 1954. He worked for several months as a production manager at the Chicago tractor works of International Harvester, Incorporated, then entered the United States Army in January, 1955. He was discharged in January, 1957, with the rank of specialist three, the equivalent of a corporal. Vance then entered Northwestern University and received his Master of Science in Journalism (M.S.J.) with a major in radio-television news in June, 1958. During his graduate year he held odd jobs, but never worked for a newspaper. His only news experience was in broadcasting some news programs over WNUR, the university radio station.[10]

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[9]Cheverton interview, November 4, 1960, and Marlowe Froke, The News Director's Role in Information Programming (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1959), pp. 32-34. Froke's respondents gave combined news staffs as ranging from zero to 38 with a median of 6. The WOOD percentage with immediately proceding news experience is 85.7 per cent (Froke, 85.1 per cent).

[10]Interview with William L. Vance, Junior, September 15, 1960.

Vance joined the news department in June, 1958, as a newswriter and was promoted to assistant news director in May, 1960. As general director of the newsroom, he makes all assignments for reporters and photographers, keeps the future book reference library, and newspaper file in working order, occasionally broadcasts news on radio and television, and co-ordinates such special programs as those dealing with election returns. He writes a ten-minute radio newscast of state and local news and a fifteen-minute television newscast of state and local news five afternoons a week. He also writes two daily radio news reports of world, national, state, and local news.[11]

The department's two full-time reporters, Billie B. Gill and John Provancher, are college graduates who got experience in covering local news while working for their degrees.

Billie B. Gill, 29, covers the general news of Grand Rapids, with special emphasis on city hall and the Kent county public offices.[12]

Gill was born in Woodbury, Georgia, in 1931 and attended schools there before joining the United States Navy in 1948. During the next years Gill served in the Navy on three destroyers and an attack cargo ship and saw

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Interview with Billie B. Gill, September 29, 1960.

duty in Japan, Korea, and the Mediterranean area. Enrolling in the radio-television-film curriculum at Michigan State University, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1958. While at Michigan State, Gill was a reporter for WILS in Lansing, covering the Lansing city offices, Ingham county offices, and police stations. He joined the WOOD news staff in March, 1958, three months before graduation.[13]

In late 1960 Gill was covering Grand Rapids and Kent county in a radio-equipped car and calling in one- or two-minute news stories which could be aired immediately or taped for later replay. He also was doing sound-on-film interviews for television news programs. He wrote the news script which the television announcer used to introduce the television film and prepared a five-minute news segment for "Panorama," a WOOD-TV program resembling the National Broadcasting Company's "Today," which is telecast on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9:30. Gill also went to Chicago in 1960 to cover the Republican National Convention.[14]

John Provancher, 27, covers the Grand Rapids suburbs.[15]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid. It is noted later that there is a rotation of duties every six months among Gill, Provancher and Kirk.

[15] Interview with John Provancher, September 31, 1960.

Born in Kingsford, Michigan, in 1933, Provancher attended public schools in Menominee. At Menominee High School he worked on the school's paper, the Maroon News, and in his senior year became its assistant editor. He continued his journalistic interests in the United States Air Force from 1951 to 1955. He worked for the Public Information Office, was sports editor of Wings, the base paper at Chanute Air Force Base, and also did some general reporting. He enrolled in Western Michigan University in 1955, majoring in social sciences with a speech and English minor. While there he wrote newscasts, prepared radio and television news and public affairs programs for WKZO Radio-TV, and, during his summer vacations, covered the Kalamazoo city hall and police beat. In his sophomore year he edited the college newspaper, the Western Herald, was a member of the editorial board of Calliope, the college literary magazine, and wrote copy and did photographic work for the University yearbook.[16]

Provancher began working for WOOD the day after his graduation in June, 1959. In late 1960 he had the suburban beat which includes the city offices of East Grand Rapids and Wyoming; Grand Rapids, Paris, and Walker townships; the Kent County Airport; Aquinas and Calvin colleges; the Blodgett Hospital in East Grand Rapids; the Kentwood, Godwin Heights, and Northview school districts;

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[16] Ibid.

the Kent County sheriff's office; the justice courts; and special suburban assignments as they occur.[17]

The WOOD-TV news department does not subscribe to "rip and read" news practices. All wire copy must be rewritten for radio or television. The job of rewriting wire news for three nightly radio news programs and the one television report at 11 P.M. in the late 1960 period fell to James J. Kirk.[18]

Kirk, 26, was born in Pittsburgh in 1934. After attending schools in Pennsylvania and Illinois, he served a three-year tour of duty with the United States Marine Corps, from 1951 to 1954, and left the corps with the rank of sergeant and drill instructor. He worked from 1954 to 1956 as a bartender, coal miner, and ambulance driver, then enrolled in Indiana State Teachers College, Terra Haute, in 1956, transferring a year later to the University of Indiana. There he majored in radio and television, with emphasis on creative writing. Kirk spent three years in radio news as a reporter and newswriter with the Indiana University station, WFIU. He covered campus news, wrote world, national, state, and local news, and became WFIU's student news director in 1959. He also wrote and broadcast a Sunday evening news program for WTTV, a commercial

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Interview with James J. Kirk, September 15, 1960.

station in Indianapolis, from June, 1958, to March, 1960. WOOD hired Kirk in June, 1960, and he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in January, 1961.[19]

The person who had the rotation shift Kirk held in late 1960 writes state and regional news from the United Press International newspaper and broadcast wires as well as local news for the 5:06, 6:06, and 10:06 P.M. WOOD radio news programs, and world, national, state, and local news for WOOD-TV's 11 P.M. nightly newscast.[20]

The WOOD news department's chief photographer is Del Blumenshine, 40.[21]

Blumenshine was born on June 12, 1920, on a farm in Iowa. He attended schools in Cedar Rapids before entering the State University of Iowa in 1938 to major in chemical and electrical engineering. He switched to journalism, however, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1942. Blumenshine was active in photographic work throughout his college years. He was night photographer for the Cedar Rapids Gazette from 1938 to 1941 and did some free-lance photography of college football games. The loss of a leg from poliomyelitis at the age of twelve kept him from entering the armed services.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Interview with Del Blumenshine, October 26, 1960.

From 1941 to 1953 he continued working at the Gazette and became the paper's chief photographer. The Gazette had all its prints processed through a commercial photographer before Blumenshine became chief photographer, and one of his first acts was to install a darkroom with all printing facilities in the paper's office.[22]

Dissatisfied with the press photographers' lack of status as against newspaper reporters, Blumenshine and Clyde Artus, chief photographer of the Waterloo (Iowa) Courier, founded the Iowa Press Photographer's Association in 1943. Blumenshine was its president from 1943 to 1945. He was also regional secretary and national membership committeeman of the National Press Photographers Association in 1943, 1944, and 1946. From 1943 to 1952 he also taught an extra-curricular photography course at Cedar Rapids' Coe College.[23]

After eleven years as the Gazette's chief photographer, Blumenshine left the relative security of that job to become the sole photographer of WMT-TV, Cedar Rapids. He made the switch to television, he says, mainly because he wanted to portray life in action through motion pictures. He remained at WMT-TV till 1957, when he was hired as WOOD's chief photographer.[24]

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

Blumenshine has won four photography awards. He received the Iowa Press Photographers Association citation in 1942 and 1944 for outstanding achievement in camera journalism. As WMT-TV's photographer he shared the honors of its news department in winning the Radio-Television News Directors Association's Outstanding News Department Award in 1956. And in 1960 he received that association's citation for outstanding reporting in "The Wasted World," a WOOD-TV documentary.[25]

As WOOD's chief photographer, Blumenshine not only takes pictures, but is also in charge of the news department's complete photographic stock, valued at $15,000.[26]

The news department's staff photographer is Bill Backus, 31, a lifelong resident of Grand Rapids.[27]

Backus was born in 1929 and attended public schools in the city before studying for one year at the Davenport Institute, a local business college. He worked as an inspector for Automatic Musical Instruments, a local firm, from 1952 to 1957 before turning to reporting and photography, two fields in which he had no formal instruction. In 1957 and 1958 he worked as a free-lance photographer for WOOD-TV and WKZO-TV, Kalamazoo, and as a

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Interview with William Backus, September 15, 1960.

reporter for radio stations WJBL, Holland, and WLAV, WGRD, Grand Rapids. He joined WOOD as a staff photographer in 1958.[28]

Backus covers city news, fires, fatalities, elections, suburban news and county news with sound-on-film and silent cameras, processing his own shots. As a newsman, Backus also gathers the facts of the stories he covers pictorially and transmits them to the newsroom on a two-way "beeper-phone" in his car. WOOD news writers then write the story for broadcast.[29]

Eight other men have been members of the news staff at one time or another. One is now head of the Detroit Free Press Grand Rapids bureau, a second is a Chicago Tribune reporter, and a third is a reporter for the South Haven (Michigan) Tribune. Of those former staff members who continued in broadcasting, one is a radio news director at WLAV in Grand Rapids, another is a Bay City, Michigan, television newsman, and a third is a newswriter at KLZ, Denver, Colorado. Two former WOOD photographers are now doing free-lance work in Grand Rapids.[30]

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Cheverton interview, November 4, 1960.

A profile of the 1961 WOOD staff.--The 1961 Wood news department comprises seven men whose average age is 33. All seven have high-school diplomas, but only five hold the Bachelor's degree--one in journalism, one each in political science and social science (with a speech minor), and two in radio-television. One also holds a Master's degree, and that in television-radio news. The staff members have been with WOOD a total of 22 years, and have a total of more than 13 years in newspaper work and more than 42 years in news broadcasting. This means an average of 9.2 years' news experience per man, which seems only slightly below averages indicated by Froke.[31] Two of the staff members had a total of 7 years in the business world at one time or another in their careers. Six of the seven have lived in the Midwest most of their lives; the seventh was raised in the South. One has had extensive foreign travel in his background.

None of the newsmen reads the news on the air. The news broadcasts--but not the editorials, which are aired by Cheverton directly--are regularly presented by regular station announcers. Occasionally, however, because of a shortage of announcing personnel, or in order to acquire some news experience, the newsmen do broadcast the

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[31]Froke, op. cit., Table 17, p. 35. Froke's statistics, however, will not permit a precise statement because he lumps all experience beyond seven years into one category.

news themselves. Occasionally, also, they conduct interviews on other programs, In general, WOOD does not subscribe to the view held in some quarters that the man who writes the news should be the one to broadcast it. Froke's survey indicated that only 27 of 91 combined operations make a good announcing voice one of its requirements for employment.[32]

In addition to the news department there is also a public affairs department which independently, and occasionally with some co-operation from the news department, produces some programs of a quasi-news nature. This department is discussed in Chapter IV.

The WOOD market area correspondents.--WOOD-TV serves a market area with a population of just under two million. The station's Grade A reception area is 90 miles in radius; the Grade B reception area extends 10 miles farther, or as far north as Ludington, Michigan; and the 5 millivolt-measurement tertiary reception area has a radius of about 150 miles.[33] News that breaks in any part of the market area may be of interest to all WOOD-TV viewers. Since it is impossible for the regular news staff to cover the whole area on a daily basis, WOOD maintains a roster of fifty market-area correspondents. These correspondents

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[32]Ibid., Table 20E, p. 39.

[33]Interview with Leonard Bridge, WOOD Business Manager and Comptroller, November 16, 1960.

are of varied occupations, including retired newspapermen, radio and television newsmen, and at least three professional photographers.[34]

Most of the correspondents report only when major stories occur in their towns or cities, but about a dozen of them regularly telephone stories into the station two or three times each week. In 1957, for example, the department received photographs and film from eighty-two area photographers.[35]

The correspondents are paid various sums according to the use the news department makes of their filmed stories, still pictures, and the facts of the stories that accompany them. Cheverton determines the price he pays for still pictures on an ad hoc basis, but the department pays correspondents 25 cents a foot for motion picture film actually used on television news programs, plus incidental expenses incurred while covering a story. In most cases the department also reimburses them the cost of the film. If a correspondent drives a great distance to cover a story, WOOD may also pay him up to 10 cents a mile. Cheverton also pays bonuses for stories of exceptional merit.[36]

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[34]Cheverton interview, October 31, 1960.

[35]Ibid. This number must also include free-lancers.

[36]Ibid.

WOOD furnishes cards identifying its radio and television correspondents and authorizing them to collect and file news stories and news pictures for the station. The department also gives them a 33-page mimeographed manual describing the department's personnel, equipment, and news policies. The only manual available at the time of writing had been discarded as obsolete by the station and a new one was still under preparation. The old manual mainly provided suggestions for obtaining effective pictures. Photographers were advised, among other things to take all still pictures horizontally so that they would completely fill the television screen; never to take picture of people holding alcoholic drinks; to get general orientation views as well as particular ones; to identify fully every person or significent item in the picture; to be well acquainted with fire and police chiefs and to get their names and pictures into the news whenever legitimate; to get various and unique angle shots on accidents and fires, especially when identifiable landmarks were near the scene; to get good shots of pretty girls, children, men in uniform, and animals; to look for stories than would be more effective in pictures than in print; to get some action or motion into moving pictures of still subjects; to edit film completely before submitting it, rather than follow network practice of supplying a vast choice of shots; to get pictures to the station fast.[37]

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[37] Ibid., and The WOOD Manual.

Photographic equipment.--Cheverton and Blumenshine have increased the news department's photographic equipment from two to ten cameras and equipped the darkroom with full processing equipment and a complete supply of film. At present the station owns about $15,000 worth of photographic equipment as follows:

Motion picture cameras.

One Cine-Voice II, 16-mm., sound-on-film camera.

One 1,200-foot adapted Cine-Voice, 16-mm., sound-on-film camera with a kine-shutter, enabling the photographer to make a kinescope recording directly from the camera's tube.

One Bell and Howell 70 DL, 16-mm. silent camera with ½-inch, 1-inch, and 3-inch lenses.

One Bolex, 16-mm. silent camera with a wide-angle, regular, and 2-inch telephoto lens.

One Pan-Cinor, 17-mm. to 70-mm, with an f2.4 lens, commonly called a "zoom lens."

Still cameras.

One 4x5 Crown Graphic

One Exa, 35-mm.

Three Kodak Duaflex IV.

Blumenshine and Backus also own between them one Exa motion-picture camera, with 35-mm., 50-mm., and 135-mm. lenses and three still cameras--a Rollicord V, a 4x5 Crown

Graphic, and a Minox miniature camera.[38]

The photographers always use DuPont film for motion picture shots because it has a hard-based emulsion and can be processed at high temperatures. They use Ansco Hypan for 35-millimeter pictures and Tri-X and Super-Panchro Press, Type B, for 4x5 shots.[39]

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[38] Blumenshine interview, November 4, 1960.

[39] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

While this thesis is largely concerned with television presentation of local news and editorial by the WOOD news department, the reader should note that:

1. The one news department serves radio as well as television, presenting more than five hours of radio news casting each week as well as nearly four hours of news on television. Since much of the news-gathering, apart from any picture-taking, serves both media, it would be difficult to state how many man hours are devoted to either operation.[1]

2. The studio staff involved in news presentation -- and this for the most part includes the announcer reading the news--is not part of the news department.

3. The news staff does not devote itself wholly to local news, but part of its work involves editing and re-writing wire news which is included in some of the broadcasts.

4. A number of programs which might be classed as "news" in a broad sense and might come under a news department

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[1]WOODland Newsletter and Program Schedule, June, 1961, p5.

in some other stations--i.e., information and discussion--do not come under the jurisdiction of the WOOD news department. These include weather, sports, and the coverage of many local activities and problems that come under WOOD's Public Affairs Department, which will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The viewers' diet of news in its broadcast sense can best be seen by examining the typical weekly timetable, Figure 1.[2]

It is hard to define the precise boundaries of news. What the WOOD news department covers is news in a very restricted sense. The staff has little or no connection with a number of informational or partly informational programs that might be classed as news in a broader sense. These areas--in addition to various public affairs programs, which will be described in Chapter IV, include sports, weather, business, and farm news.

Sports is not a newsroom function at WOOD. Al Ackerman, 33, WOOD's sports director, covers local sports and presents it along with national sports news.

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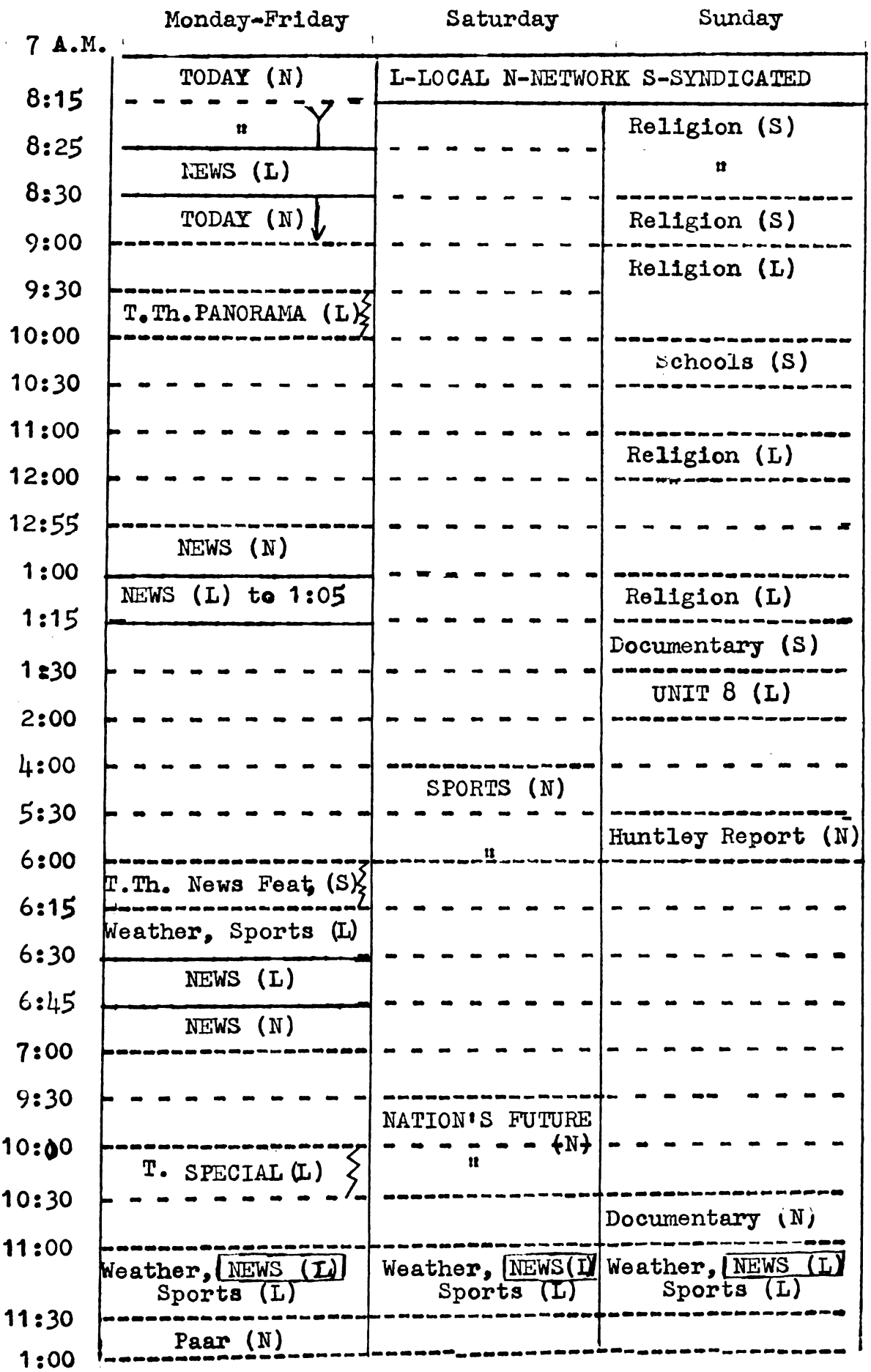
[2]NBC's "Today" has four newscasts and frequent interviews. Jack Paar only occasionally has an interview that might be classed as "news." "Panorama," which has a regular five-minute local newscast (p.27), is discussed with "Unit 8" on page 75. Some segments marked "religion" are local church services. Unmarked areas are occupied by entertainment, which fills a larger proportion of time than the chart seems to indicate. The programs named above (with the exception of Paar) account for 23.7 per cent of WOOD's air time.

FIGURE I -- INFORMATIONAL AND SEMI-INFORMATIONAL BROADCASTS -- WOOD-TV



He also does some narration for "Unit 8." He works directly under the program director and is independent of the news director. This seems to be a common but minority practice. The Froke survey revealed that in 52 out of 92 of the combined radio-television departments responding, sports was considered a newsroom function. Only 41 out of 90, however, assigned their sports reporters to the newsroom. And in only 30 out of 91 stations did sports reporters do any general news assignment. Newsmen, two to one, said they thought the assignment of sports reporters to the newsroom would improve the overall informational programing of their stations.[3]

Weather news is usually mentioned in passing on WOOD-TV's regular broadcasts, but the station also has separate extensive weather programs which have nothing to do with the news department. This separation of weather news reporting from the news department seems to place WOOD in the minority according to Froke's survey. He found that 48 out of 81 combined news operations considered weather news a function of their departments.[4]

The WOOD news department does not have televised business and farm programs, but may occasionally cover news in these areas. This fact may also place WOOD in a minority, for Froke's replies would seem to indicate that

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[3]Froke, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

[4]Ibid., p. 50.

72 out of 89 combined news department have business news program, and 37 out of 66 have farm programs.[5]

The WOOD-TV news department's own coverage and presentation of local news will be considered under the headings of sources, policies, organization, and intercommunications and monitoring equipment.

Sources.--The news department's sources of information include both public and private contacts in the city and local area and in the market area covered by its correspondents, and the Time, Incorporated, bureaus in Washington, D.C., and New York City.[6]

The greatest percentage of the local news tips and stories come from regular public and private contacts in the city. These include administrative heads, secretaries, public relations men and other members of the various city and county government units and almost every other kind of organization that exists in the community. Other sources include attorneys, doctors, hotel employees (especially elevator operators), and prostitutes. News from many of these sources and various random tips usually have to be tracked down to more official sources for confirmation.[7]

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[5]Ibid. It would not be certain, however, that many of these are not confined to radio. In replies from exclusively television news departments, the figures were 24 out of 44 and 21 out of 39.

[6]Cheverton interview, December 1, 1960.

[7]Cheverton interview, December 16, 1960.

Similar sources of news are tapped by the market area correspondents, about a dozen of whom regularly telephone stories into the station two or three times a week.[8]

The department also scans the Grand Rapids Press every day as a matter of course. If a story of interest is found that the WOOD newsmen have missed, a staff member is assigned to cover it. If there is not sufficient time to do so, he may rewrite the story, but will not quote directly from it.[9]

The department also draws on the Time, Incorporated, news bureaus in Washington and New York for national news with a Michigan angle. These bureaus serve the news departments of all the Time-owned radio and television stations and are financed by pro-rated contributions from each. The WOOD news department, for example, pays $100 a week for this service, and, in turn, receives daily reports from the bureaus and can receive still and sound pictures by air mail on request.[10]

Both bureaus are staffed by experienced newsmen. The Washington bureau is operated by Bill Roberts, former radio news writer from Iowa, who joined Time, Inc., to

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

operate the Washington bureau when it first opened in 1959, and his assistant, Carl Coleman, a former photographer-reporter who came to Washington from Time-owned KLZ and KLZ-TV in Denver. They daily inform WOOD via telephone of the activities of Congressman Gerald Ford of Grand Rapids and Michigan senators Phillip A. Hart and Patrick V. MacNamara, in addition to any other news that may have a Michigan angle.[11]

The New York bureau, which opened in June, 1961, is directed by Richard McCutcheon, a former NBC newswriter and former producer of the "Today" program. He daily telephones in some story of national or international developments. WOOD tapes the report and airs it at 11:55 A.M. five days a week on WOOD Radio.[12]

In February, 1961, the station acquired a mobile video tape unit. At 5:30 P.M. every day NBC sends its affiliates a half-hour of television news clips of significant events through its closed circuit video tape line which operates over the NBC coaxial cable. The news department uses an average of three television tape clips on its 11:00 P.M. newscast. It can use the mobile unit for one hour each day, but generally restricts its operation to interviews on the studio grounds because of the great

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

expense involved.[13]

The department's major flow of regional, national, and world news for its own programs comes through the United Press International newspaper and broadcast wires. The station also subscribes to the Unifax, UPI's system of transmitting news photographs over telephone cables. The staff also monitors NBC's "hot line," a closed circuit wire through which the network flashes news bulletins to its affiliates.[14]

The assistant news director keeps a future book as a guide to stories which will occur in the future, as well as reference books, and files of newspaper clippings. He also maintains a file of radio and television news scripts broadcast over the past year which is called "the morgue." The chief photographer also keeps a photograph and motion picture morgue as a matter of record.[15]

Policies.--Cheverton considers it the news department's basic responsibility to provide the greatest amount of information to the most people over the widest area of coverage, and to do this impartially and objectively.[16]

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[13]Cheverton interview, June 15, 1961.

[14]Cheverton interview, December 1, 1960.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

One of the first questions every news director must settle is his independence of operation. Cheverton says the broadcast division of Time, Inc., insists only on the principle that the news department do a good job in covering local news. It does not tell him how to achieve this end, he says, and in no way influences the direction of the news department. This also holds true of the station's management, he says, describing it as "hot" for superior news coverage, but giving him a free hand in directing the news department.[17]

A news director may face attempted pressures from sponsors, however. In at least one instance a sponsor has tried to exert pressure on Cheverton and failed. In 1959, the manager of one of the Meijer's chain of supermarkets, sponsors of the WOOD-TV 6:30 P.M. news report, caught a shoplifter in one of its stores. In the manager's office the man confessed other thefts in addition to this one. Rather than bringing charges, the manager made an estimate of the store's loss and tried to get the shoplifter to pay for it on an installment plan. He, in turn, brought charges of extortion against the management and won his case in court. The news department carried the story on both its radio and television news programs. One of the company's executive officers called Cheverton and requested that the story not be given so much publicity.

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[17]Cheverton, loc.cit.

Cheverton says he replied that regardless of the program's sponsorship, this story would be treated in the same manner as any other news story of equal interest.[18] On another occasion the department reported a story adversely involving the Holland Furnace Company regardless of the fact that this company was the sponsor of a sports program immediately preceeding its news broadcast.[19]

Cheverton says the station supports his demand for independence of operation, and no evidence has been found to indicate that he has failed to exercise this independence against any pressure.

Questions of good taste in handling stories involving rape, murder, or other violent crimes are always news problems which are increased in television by that fact that its pictures go into the home and are viewed by children as well as adults.

Cheverton says he avoids showing the kind of pictures that might disturb a person if he were eating. He does not carry stories of prostitution, sodomy, or divorce cases, the latter being ignored, he says, because they are too common. The department does not air pictures of corpses, but will show funeral activities outside the church and at the graveside in the case of locally

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

prominent people. In one case of murder involving a bathtub, the department showed the blood-spattered tub but not the corpse, to indicate the violence of the struggle before the killing. Pictures of persons with disfigured faces or maimed limbs are generally avoided, and stories of sex murders, perversion, or orgies are played down. The department usually uses the words "criminally assaulted" in place of "rape." The general policy is to avoid any picture that may be objectionable.[20]

Staff organization.--As pointed out in the previous chapter, WOOD's news staff consists of the news director, the assistant news director, three reporters, all of whom can operate still cameras, one reporter-photographer, and one cinematographer. Cheverton rotates the routine duties of the three reporters, but not the others, every six months. A man working on the evening shift, for example, will move to the morning shift for six months, then to the afternoon shift for six months, and, at the end of the year, he will be back in the time slot in which he began the cycle. Cheverton feels that otherwise a man working at only one job may develop ingrained or fixed habits and that rotation gives the reporters and newswriters a chance to see all sides of the news operation and to build new contacts. Television writers get a chance to write radio news, and vice versa. He also notes that this system does

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[20]Ibid.

not keep any staff member, all of whom are married, permanently on night assignment.[21]

To preserve the integrity of the news staff, all its members are under strict orders not to have their own traffic tickets fixed, nor are they allowed to use influence with officials to have tickets fixed for others. They are not allowed to create or "blow up" stories about public events in exchange for free tickets for their personal use. When newsworthy public events occur, however, Cheverton ordinarily expects the department to receive enough free passes to be able to cover the story. If the sponsors of such event do not furnish free entrance, and Cheverton thinks the affair merits coverage, the department pays for the tickets.[22]

Cheverton meets with the news staff every Wednesday afternoon at 1:30 for an indefinite period of time to discuss whatever problems staff members may have in mind.[23]

Intercommunications and monitoring.--The reporters and photographers can be in constant contact with the newsroom and with each other for distances of up to twenty miles through a radio intercommunications system. Five of the reporters and photographers have their privately-owned

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

cars equipped with station-owned two-way radios, and the WOOD-owned 1959 Chevrolet station wagon is also thus equipped.[24]

In the newsroom the staff maintains a voice tape-recorder with a legally required beep every fifteen seconds to warn the party at the other end of the line. It can be attached to any of the station's telephone lines. The staff also monitors the calls of the Michigan State Police district headquarters at Rockford Post, the Kent County sherriff's office, and the city's police station.[25]

The local news package.--The end result of the news-gathering process is the station's three daily television newscasts and its hourly radio reports. One of the reporters writes the 8:25 A.M. news program, a five-minute show; Bill Vance writes the 6:30 P.M. news report, a fifteen-minute program; and another reporter writes the 11 P.M. show, a ten-minute report. The first two shows are devoted to local and regional news, as each is followed by a network report, while the last one covers world and national news as well.[26]

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[24]Vance interview, December 5, 1960.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid.

The production of the news programs follows a basic pattern. To compile the 6:30 P.M. newscast, for instance, Vance draws on reports from the "beat" men, the reports of the market area correspondents, the wire service reports, plus any work of his own in interviewing and tracking down tips and reports on the police monitor. He then writes a ten- to thirteen-page newscast from the news at hand, previews all pictures and film to be used on the newscast, and notes the film cues on the double-spaced typewritten news script, a sample of which is included in the Appendix.[27]

The script's original copy is given to the television announcer who will read the news on the air. The modes of presenting the news on the air vary, but they include the announcer reading news on camera, silent films and still pictures with the voice of the announcer reading, sound-on-film interviews, and live interviews. In the case of tape-recorded interviews taken over a telephone, a live camera usually takes a shot of a telephone in the studio and a slide bearing the name of interviewer and interviewee is super-imposed on this shot while the interview is played for the studio audience.[28]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

Legal problems.--In the last fifteen years WOOD Radio and WOOD-TV have been threatened with libel action in six instances. On every occasion the problem was settled out of court before legal action was taken by plaintiffs.[29]

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[29]Bridge interview, November 16, 1960. The station's business manager and news department personnel declined to indicate what the cases involved and what cash settlements, if any, were made.

CHAPTER IV

SPECIAL NEWS PROGRAMS

We have seen that part of WOOD's total telecasting --its network newscast and news specials--include much news in the broad journalistic sense which is not produced by the local news staff itself.

There are times, however, when the news department itself goes beyond its normal routines and air time to produce what it calls "specials," as well as year-end news review, occasional panel discussions (which are more common to the public affairs department, however), and (on one occasion) a news conference.

News specials.--In 1959, Marlowe Froke questioned RTNDA television news directors on their special news-related operations. Of the 75 who answered, 48 said they carried news specials, or depth reports, on local problems. Thirty-seven said they presented such specials occasionally; eight weekly; two monthly; one triweekly; and one daily.[1] Many different definitions of a "news special," however,

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[1] Froke, op. cit., PP. 19-20. Hereafter only figures on the survey respondents will be used.

are probably involved, and one might question the possibility of a daily "special" in the usual sense.

A news special, as defined by Cheverton, is a program dealing with a single topic too complex or important to be given within the regular framework of news broadcast. A recurring example of such extended coverage occurs on election night. On two other occassions the news staff has produced a "special"--one a story of election expense irregularities, the other a study of the inhabitants of Grand Rapids' "skid row." Both programs won national citations.[2]

The station faces some loss of revenue when it presents a news special, an unsponsored program, since the time has to be pre-empted from some other local or network program. Any news department plans for a "special" are reviewed by the program department, which then arranges a time slot for the presentation. Despite the loss of revenue from the replaced program, Cheverton says, the program department has not denied such a new department request.[3]

The news department did its first depth coverage of a major local problem with an investigation of campaign

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[2]Cheverton interview, December 15, 1960.

[3]Ibid.

expense irregularities in the general city elections of April, 1958.

Cheverton said he and Blumenshine discovered that some candidates had failed to file accounts of their campaign contributions and expenses with the Kent County clerk, as required by Michigan law. The public records also revealed that some candidates who did file their accounts did not list any campaign expenses, even though it was known they had purchased radio and television time and had distributed match books and campaign cards. Further investigation revealed that Stanley Davis, who was running against the incumbent mayor, had spent twice the maximum amount of money allowed by Michigan law and, contrary to the law, had listed some of his contributors as anonymous; the Committee on Good Government had spent more than the allowed amount in supporting a bloc of candidates; and many candidates did not even know that anonymous donations had to be submitted to the State Board of Escheats.[4]

Cheverton and Blumenshine called these discrepancies to the attention of the Kent County clerk, the late Louis Donovan, who, they said, showed little interest at first, but later sent every candidate a letter asking for an amended return within ten days if anything in his original

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[4] Ibid.

statement was not in order. Many candidates complied, but some did not. So Cheverton and Blumenshine searched the public records again, making facsimile copies of all expense affidavits containing discrepancie. They took these to the Michigan Secretary of State, James M. Hare, who suggested that the records be turned over to the State Director of Elections, Robert Montgomery. Montgomery then sent two state investigators to Kent County. After a week's study they recommended to Montgomery that Kent County Prosecuting Attorney Stewart Hoffius assess the public records and follow whatever course of action he thought best. They said some prosecution of violators seemed warranted. Hoffius kept the records and admitted in a public statement that he had found some discrepancies and irregularities, but felt that no criminal intent was present. Hoffius, in effect, merely warned candidates that their accounts would have to be accurate.[5]

On June 16, 1958, WOOD presented a half-hour live television program on which Cheverton discussed the problem of election expense irregularities in Grand Rapids and Kent County. On the program he also exhibited facsimile copies of expense accounts and election results. State

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[5]Grand Rapids Press, July 19, 1958, p. 1. The newspaper accounts of WOOD's charge of election irregularities identified the source of the charge only as "a local radio and television station." This is one tangible indication of a certain rivalry that exists between WOOD and the Press that is more easily felt than substantiated.

Director of Elections Montgomery sent the news staff a letter of commendation in which he said the WOOD-TV report pointed up some weaknesses and vagueness in the state election law. He said he was drafting corrective legislation and planned to press for its adoption by the Michigan Legislature, which thus far has not passed these measures. The Radio Television News Directors Association gave the WOOD news department an honorable mention award for distinguished achievement in October, 1958, for this program.[6]

Since that time the news department has kept a close check on campaign expenditures. In November, 1958, it again found that some candidates did not file their returns within the twenty days required by law. The news staff called this fact to the attention of Kent County Clerk Claude Barkley, who, in accordance with state law, sent the recalcitrant candidates a registered letter giving them ten days to comply with state law or face prosecution. The candidates complied. When Mayor Davis sought re-election in May, 1960, the news staff called attention to discrepancies in his campaign report by informing Kent County prosecuting attorney Joseph Renihan. Renihan notified the mayor to submit a corrected account or

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[6]Ibid., and James O. Chapman, Elections Supervisor, Michigan Elections Bureau, Office of the Secretary of State, who informed the author on June 27, 1961, that corrective legislation has not passed the legislature since WOOD investigated the question of election expense irregularities.

face prosecution. The report was amended.[7]

The news department's other depth report on a local problem was "The Wasted World," a study of vagrants in Grand Rapids.

In January, 1960 a public debate developed in Grand Rapids over what should be done about the deteriorating buildings on lower Monroe Street, and the derelicts of society, or "bums," who lived there. Many citizens, including Mayor Davis, said that all bums should be rounded up and placed in work camps to build city parks or work on other public projects. Davis said these vagrants were attracted to the city by the excellent condition of its jail, where they could spend a warm winter, well cared for, well fed, and in clean quarters, at the public expense.[8]

On a February afternoon, Cheverton, Vance, and Blumenshine discussed these views and decided that no one knew anything more about the "bums" than that they were living on lower Monroe Street.

Blumenshine suggested that he get the facts by disguising himself as a bum and covering the story by living it as long as necessary.[9]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Interview with William Vance, November 25, 1960.

[9] Ibid.

On February 29, Blumenshine, dressed in non-descript clothes, his face covered with a three-day growth of beard, began a ten-day trip into the world of the "bum" as a seller of shoestrings and pencils on the corner of Northwest Monroe Street and Michigan Avenue. He carried a Minox miniature camera and strapped a Mohawk minature tape recorder to the stump of the right leg he had lost. He put the recorder microphone into his shirt pocket and disguised the microphone head as a hearing aid. The disguise was so successful that a long-standing friend failed to recognize him after staring at him for some time, thinking his face was familiar but being unable to place it.[10]

Blumenshine spent ten days and nights in the company of the city's "bums." His chief contact, a "bum" named Joe, took him to low-class hotels, bars, missions, and abandoned buildings, where the derelicts congregated. Joe took Blumenshine to one mission where a "bum" must sit through religious services and take a shower twice a week before he gets a free meal. The mission's breakfasts consisted of four stale rolls and powdered milk; the lunches of a bowl of gummy soup, two slices of stale raisin bread, and a glass of powdered milk, but no coffee; and supper of two stale doughnuts, two stale rolls, a glass of powdered

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[10] Ibid.

milk, but no meat or vegetables. Mission beds were old surplus double-decker iron bunks, with a grubby three-inch foam rubber pad, one close-woven army blanket, and a thin crazy quilt.[11]

Blumenshine found the missions less frightening than the "flop houses," however. One Bond Street "flop house," for example, charged 25 cents to sleep on the floor, 50 cents to sleep on a pad, a couple of thicknesses of cloth sewn together, and 75 cents for a bed. The three-story building had no heat and only one toilet for men. Guests had to vacate their rooms by 7 A.M.[12]

The news department presented "The Wasted World" on March 15, 1960, from 7 to 7:30 P.M. Cheverton introduced the program, explaining Blumenshine's mission into lower Monroe Street to find out what living conditions were like. Because of adverse lighting conditions, few of Blumenshines pictures developed well, but he was able to use twenty-two of the thirty-five slides of pictures he had taken. These pictures were mainly of the insides of flop houses and missions. He edited four and one-half hours of tape down to seventeen minutes for the program, mainly because the "bums" used vulgar or obscene language in their tape-recorded comments.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

Blumenshine and announcer Alex Dillingham discussed the situation on lower Monroe Street, showed slides of conditions there, and played the tape recordings for the television audience.[13]

From his investigation Blumenshine concluded that there were about 500 bums in the city, and not the thousands the politicians had claimed; that about 90 per cent of them had lived in Grand Rapids all their lives; and that many of them were pensioners or people who collected Social Security, which they rapidly exhausted through drinking, then turned to the missions to keep them in food and board. He even found some property-owners who lived this life despite their independent incomes. Blumenshine felt that his biggest discovery was that the majority of the "bums" were there because they wanted to be. They didn't want to create any disturbances and didn't want any of their people to disturb anyone else. They looked on loiterers as the real "bums" because they disturbed everyone else. Blumenshine considered most of these people honest. He said they didn't want to have anything to do with the law, and they didn't want the law to interfere with their way of living.[14]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

Favorable public reaction followed. Civic, social, and business organizations invited Cheverton and Blumenshine to speak before their members and play their tapes. Mayor Davis praised WOOD-TV's news department for its coverage of the problem and appointed a committee to coordinate housing and sanitation codes and recommend how these codes should be enforced. The housing board more carefully enforced its requirements on space and sanitary facilities for hotels, and the city closed the Empress Hotel, one of the more unsanitary "flop houses."[15]

For his work on "The Wasted World," Blumenshine received a special RTNDA citation, the only award given to an individual newsman at the organization's October, 1960, convention in Montreal.[16]

Local elections coverage.--In Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids there are two elections every odd-numbered year and four elections every even-numbered year. The WOOD-TV news department covers these elections extensively.[17]

On national election nights, the news department breaks away from the NBC network coverage for five minutes before each hour and half-hour to give the returns in city

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Interview with William Vance, November 16, 1960.

and county races.[18]

In 1959, Cheverton began to devise ways of speeding the local returns from the precincts to the station. Little, of course, could be done to speed up the vote-count in the precincts themselves. The polling places did not close their doors until 8 P.M., and all persons then inside were allowed to vote. After this, all absentee ballots were opened and cast on the machines in the county's 197 machine precincts or in the ballot boxes in the nineteen paper precincts in the outlying areas. All this took place before the actual counting began.[19]

In machine precincts the election officials merely opened the backs of the machines and read off and recorded the totals. In paper precincts, however, where officials had to tally the votes, this process took several hours. A further delay, however,came from the fact that the outlying township clerks waited until all their precinct chairmen completed their tallies before collecting the statements of votes for delivery to the Kent County Clerk's office in Grand Rapids.[20]

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid. Assistant news director Vance gave nineteen as the number of paper precincts in Kent County as of the date of this interview. That number has since been reduced to fourteen.

[20] Ibid.

The news department's problem in fast reporting of local elections results was to bypass all the delays subsequent to the precinct vote-count and get the returns as soon as they were recorded on the precinct's statement of votes.[21] This meant getting the tallies directly from the precincts. So when a special annexation election was held in Octover, 1959, the news department offered the Junior Chamber of Commerce $75 to man the suburban precincts and certain key city precincts and telephone the returns to the stations soon as they were tallied. The organization's officers agreed, but failed to enlist enough help, so the station got only fragmentary returns for its spot announcements and its regular 11 P.M. news report.[22]

So for the city-wide primary of February, 1960, the news department tried to find a more reliable system. It paid each of the 110 city precinct chairmen $2 each to telephone returns to the station before sending them to the city clerk. The same system was used in the general city elections in April and WOOD-TV was able to announce the unofficial final returns one hour and thirteen minutes after the polls closed and ahead of every other radio station in the city.[23]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

In a special county-wide election on June 7, 1960, the department did not go to the expense of securing fast returns directly from the precincts, presumably because it did not feel that public interest justified the expense. Moreover, since there were only two questions on the ballot, the counting could be done more quickly. So WOOD had the city clerk ask his precinct workers to copy out the tallies from the Statement of Votes on small cards. News department representatives then picked up the cards in the city and county clerks' offices as the precinct chairmen brought them in. WOOD secretaries and newsmen tabulated the returns and reported the results over a two-way radio directly from the offices.[24]

In the state primaries of August, 1960, however, WOOD went back to paying for immediate returns from the 211 city and county precincts in order to get the news as quickly as possible. The department paid each precinct chairman $2 to telephone the returns into the WOODland Center as soon as they were available. WOOD secretaries at the station tallied the returns and the station telecast the results on a special half-hour program from 10:30 to 11 that night. Though not all precincts had reported by that time, enough had done so to enable the news department to declare winners in every major county race.[25]

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

When WOOD covered the local election returns at the time of the national election of November 8, 1960, the news department added a new means of speeding the overall vote counting--an electronic computer. International Business Machine, Incorporated, had previously lent the news department five electric adding machines for the August primary and was so pleased with the free publicity it received as a result, that it now offered the station the use of a high-speed computer, an IBM RAMAC 305, to speed the vote tabulation. For a week before the election, IBM technicians from Detroit pre-recorded on the machine's memory discs by code number each office and question on the ballot, the number of precincts in Kent County, and the names and parties of all candidates. Though not programed for making predictions based on early trends, the machine did process the voting information at a very high speed.[26]

Vance again enlisted the co-operation of the 211 Kent County precinct chairmen in telephoning their returns into the station. WOOD also installed extra telephone lines, increasing from five to twenty the number of calls the station could receive at one time. On election night about 96 per cent of the precinct chairmen telephoned the unofficial returns directly into the station's switchboard, which relayed the calls to a second-floor office, where

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[26]Ibid.

twenty WOOD secretaries recorded the returns on special printed forms and sent them to an adjoining office. There ten secretaries verified the returns and punched them out on key-punch machine cards. The cards were sent to the first-floor WOODland Room, a large room which sometimes serves as a television studio, where IBM technicians fed the data into the RAMAC 305. Within seconds the computer processed the information and transferred it to an electric typewriter, which typed on a running sheet the code number assigned to each office and question, the office and question itself, the candidate, his party, the number of votes he received, the percentage of votes he received, the number of precincts reporting, and the percentage of precincts reporting. A sheet which kept a running account of the thirty-five offices and questions before the voters was torn from the machine after each resumé. WOOD reporter James Kirk read some of the returns over television from the WOODland Room, while other returns were sent to the second-floor studio, where Cheverton and members of the news staff read them to viewers at twenty-five and fifty-five minutes after each hour from 9P.M. to 1:30 A.M., by which time all races had been decided. Also in the second-floor studio were five blackboards which carried running totals of all races for the benefit of viewers and visitors to the studio during the program. Some victorious candidates were in the audience, and they took

the opportunity to thank their supporters over the air.[27]

Another innovation that Cheverton planned for this same election coverage was to have Kent County Clerk Claude Barkley set up a temporary county clerk's office in the WOODland Center's reception area. The plan called for Barkley to send unopened precinct returns from his office in the county building in care of a deputy clerk, who would open and handle the returns at the station and transmit them directly to the RAMAC 305, thus further speeding up the over-all vote tabulation. Four other radio stations and the local newspaper, however, tried to block this scheme. On November 3, the Grand Rapids Press and radio stations WGRD, WJEF, WLAV, and WMAX filed suit in the Michigan Supreme Court for a writ of mandamus requiring Barkley to perform his duties in his regular county building office. WOOD's plan, they said, would destroy their "equal and independent right to receive the returns of said election at the public office."[28] They accused WOOD and the county clerk of "illegal and improper contrivance."[29] The State Supreme Court ordered Barkley to show cause why he should not be enjoined from carrying out this plan to set up a temporary branch office for

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Detroit Free Press, November 4, 1960.

[29] Ibid.

counting votes in the WOOD-TV studios.[30] The case was dismissed on November 6, when Barkley signed an affidavit agreeing to handle the returns in his office as usual.[31] In technical accordance perhaps with the affidavit he had signed, Kent County Clerk Claude Barkley did open and "handle" the returns in his regular county building office, but R. Stanley Kilpatrick, his assistant, immediately carried the returns to the station, where they were tabulated in the RAMAC 305.[32]

Year-end news reviews.--The WOOD-TV news department presented year-end news reviews in 1959 and 1960. In both instances the program was assigned to one of the news staff, who was responsible for reviewing film clips of the year, writing, and presenting the half-hour program on the last Sunday of the year.[33]

The Froke study revealed that 40 out of 75 respondents scheduled such year-end news reviews. All but one also used only a man on camera with film clips.[34]

Weekly news review.--The WOOD news department does not carry a weekly news review, and Froke found such

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[30]Grand Rapids Press, November 5, 1960.

[31]Ibid. November 10, 1960.

[32]Vance interview, loc. cit.

[33]Cheverton interview, December 10, 1960.

[34]Froke, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

reviews to be the least popular type of information program. Only 14 of 61 respondents said they scheduled them. One respondent said he didn't think they were worth his time; twelve said manpower considerations would not permit presenting weekly news reviews; five said they had scheduled them but discontinued because of the difficulty in obtaining and keeping sponsors.[35]

Panel discussions.--Froke found that 55 of the 75 television news directors scheduled panel discussions as a part of their news operations. One news director held them daily; 30 every week; one monthly; and 23 occasionally. Froke felt that the panel discussion's popularity stemmed from its economy and comparative ease in planning and production.[36]

Cheverton, however, feels that unless a news director has the right kind of panel and a controversial enough subject, a panel-discussion program tends to be dull and boring. He thinks such programs are overdone and generally avoids them. Within the past six months, however, he has presented studies of adoption procedures in Grand Rapids and construction in Western Michigan in which there were panel discussions as well as films, video tape, and photographs pertaining to the subject.[37]

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[35]Froke, op. cit., p. 25.

[36]Ibid. pp. 17-18.

[37]Cheverton letter, July 19, 1961.

News conferences.--Froke discovered that only a little more than a third of his respondents held news conferences as an operation of the news department. Eleven departments reported that they held them on a weekly basis; two monthly; two daily; and fourteen occasionally. Froke said that the availability of a news conference guest was the main reason why so few departments scheduled them.[38]

Cheverton says that WOOD-TV has little opportunity to hold news conference, and the only time he would hold one would be when a WOOD newsman or station member did something newsworthy enough to call other media representatives in for a conference. He says there could be an understandable reticence on the part of the newspaper or competing broadcast media to cover a WOOD-sponsored news conference.[39]

The only example of such department-sponsored conference occurred in August, 1957, when Cheverton was involved in an air crash outside Moscow. He held a news conference at WOOD attended by reporters from the Grand Rapid Press and the wire services, which was not broadcast, but later that month WOOD reporters interviewed Cheverton on a special televised news conference.[40]

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[38]Froke, op. cit., p. 22.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

When a celebrity comes to town he is usually interviewed on the public affairs' department show, "Panorama," but news conferences in the sense of "Meet the Press," are not a part of the department's activities.[41]

Live special events.--Inasmuch as WOOD-TV does not have a live mobile television unit, it cannot cover live events outside its studio. The Froke survey revealed that 56 out of 75 television stations reporting do present some live programs of special events, including parades, pageants, festivals, parole board hearings, legislative sessions, the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, special reports on Democratic and Republican state conventions, and hearings on Capitol Hill.[42] Apparently this coverage of special events is not ordinarily handled as a newsroom function judging by the "no" answers of 75 out of 89 news directors who have combined television-radio news operations. However, 65 out of 76 newsmen said they thought special events coverage should be planned by newsroom personnel.[43]

The WOOD news department's only extensive coverage of a big news event was by radio in April, 1957, when a tornado hit Grand Rapids.[44]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Froke, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

[43] Ibid., pp. 50-51. On the last two questions the adjective "live" did not appear.

[44] Cheverton letter, loc. cit.

The public affairs department.--The WOOD public affairs department, which now produces some programs with some "news" content, was originally created to handle relations between WOOD and its audience. Its primary function was to co-operate with public-service, social, and civic groups in scheduling public service programs.[45]

Within recent years, however, and with a change in directorship of the department, public affairs has begun production of two programs, "Panorama" and "Unit 8." "Panorama" is a local program similar to NBC's "Today," and consists of news, interviews, features, and entertainment. The department presents "Panorama" every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 9:30 to 10. "Unit 8" is a weekly Sunday program which gives viewers a look at predominantly non-controversial subjects. It has recently presented programs on water conservation, epilepsy, summer theatre, a safety school for drivers, and water safety, for example. Cheverton describes "Unit 8" as "more like a tour of places and a look at certain events which are common in our living."[46]

The public affairs department hires an outside photographer to take still or motion pictures used on "Unit 8," writes its own scripts, and produces its own

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

programs. The only relationship between the public affairs and news departments is that they sometimes consult each other in doing research on various projects.[47]

Cheverton says that when public affairs was created as a separate and independent department, the news department did not have enough manpower to cover local news and also present the kind of programs done by "Unit 8."[48]

Froke found that in combined operations newsmen were almost unanimous in thinking there would be merit in having the news director in charge of all information programs, including news, weather, sports, and special events, and that such an operation structure would enhance the prestige of the station. Newsmen favored a "News and Public Affairs Director" having an equal voice to a program director by 86 to 8; even station managers favored it 40 to 21.[49]

Cheverton says that if a station re-organization were done today, public affairs might fall under the news director, as in many other stations where the title "News and Public Affairs" is common.[50]

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Froke, op. cit., Tables 27, 27A, and 27B, pp.54-55.

[50] Cheverton letter, loc. cit.

CHAPTER V

EDITORIALS

The Federal Communications Commission in its early days opposed, but later approved editorialization by broadcasters. In 1941, a Boston station, WAAB, began radio editorialization of its own on political candidates and controversial public issues. The FCC objected to this practice as not being in the public interest and the station dropped. Many broadcasters were disturbed by this FCC view, however, and made their feelings clear the commission. In 1949 the FCC reversed itself and decided to permit editorialization provided the licensee gave the opportunity for opposing points of view to be expressed.[1] The 1949 decision is still in effect, but many broadcasters are dissatisfied with it because it requires them not only to allow opposing points of view to be represented, but also to seek them out.[2] FCC rulings notwithstanding, few, if any, stations which editorialize seem

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[1]Sydney W. Head, Broadcasting in America: A Survey of Television and Radio (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), 342.

[2]Walter B. Emery, Broadcasting and Government: Responsibilities and Regulations (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1961), 246.

to be seeking out opposing points of view.

It was 1957 before a television news director began to editorialize on matters of local and state interest. He was Ralph Renick, Vice President for News and News Director of WTVJ, Miami, the recognized pioneer and chief advocate of television editorials.[3] In 1958, FCC Chairman John Doerfer, who favored broadcast editorials, chided broadcasters for not doing more editorializing.[4] A small minority of other television news directors have since followed Renick's example. In 1959, Marlowe Froke questioned 141 RTNDA television news directors on their editorial practices. Of the 75 who answered, only about one-third said their stations were editorializing or even planning to do so, and only 20 were actually doing so at that time. Three news directors said they presented editorials daily; one twice a week; one weekly; three twice monthly; one monthly; and 11 occasionally.[5]

Since January, 1959, the WOOD news department has been editorializing on both radio and television, and on October 8, 1960, won the RTNDA award for the most outstanding television editorials of the year in the

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[3]Robert Siller, Hal Terkel, Ted White, Television and Radio News (New York: Macmillan Co., 1960), pp. 207-210.

[4]Froke, op. cit., p. 67.

[5]Ibid., pp. 23-25.

United States and Canada. The award was based partly on the impact and effect the editorials had on community action.[6]

Since Grand Rapids now has only one daily newspaper, the Press, Cheverton's editorials give area residents the editorial voices of two media on local and regional problems. His two- and three-minute comments are presented thrice weekly on television, at the end of the 6:30 P.M. local news report, just before NBC-TV's "Huntley-Brinkley Report." The sound-tape of each television editorial is rebroadcast on WOOD Radio four times each on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In every presentation an announcer informs the public that what follows is a WOOD editorial. Cheverton reads his editorials himself, as do slightly more than half the news directors reporting in the Froke survey.[7]

Cheverton says his editorials are expressions of station opinion, that is, they represent the corporate view on any subject commented on. He says the opinions expressed are usually a distillation of ideas originating in the news department and are based on an intimate knowledge of the particular subject involved. While the

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[6]WOOD Editorial, October 3, 1960.

[7]Ibid., and Froke, op. cit., p. 24, who indicates that 11 out of 20 news directors read their own editorials on the air.

editorials must have the approval of the head of the station, Cheverton says that this has never been withheld.[8]

Cheverton says the primary purpose of his editorials is to shed light on local problems and spur the community into action, even though he does not always suggest specific ways to correct or improve situations. His editorials are generally critical but non-partisan in content.[9] They have covered such subjects as local and state government and politics, civic improvements, annexations, and the industrial development of western Michigan.

Government and politics.--Cheverton devotes more editorial comment to government and politics in Grand Rapids than to any other subject. He goes into state politics also, but does not touch national and international affairs.

His editorials are often critical of the city's political leadership. He began his attacks on the City Commission in May, 1959, with an editorial condemning the way in which the Commission fired City Manager Donald Oakes. Cheverton defended Oakes' city-hall record and suggested that a public hearing should be held. He accused the commissioners of "hamstringing Oakes with second-guessing committees," and Mayor Davis of letting a

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

personal vendetta interfere with his conduct of the city's business. Cheverton told his viewers that he learned from private sources of secret meetings in the home of one commissioner and in the Pantlind Hotel, with the firing of Oakes as their primary reason. When Oakes was officially fired and a new manager hired at the commission's regular meeting, Cheverton called the Commission's actions "a sad caricature of democracy, but ideal for those who use public office rather than serve it."[10]

Three weeks later he attacked the city government's leaders for their comments on Grand Rapids' losing its place as Michigan's second-largest city. He called City Manager Alfred Rypstra's comment that with fewer people the city could get by with less services for less, "shallow interpretation," and ridiculed as "cute" Mayor Davis' idea that the census figures were wbong and a recount should be taken.[11] He ended his editorial by saying:

> It is this attitude which forced us to become the third-largest city in Michigan. We've either got to pump some positive attitudes into our leaders or get new leaders. If not, we may find ourselves in seventh or eighth place in the Michigan standings.[12]

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[10] WOOD Editorial, May 5, 1959.

[11] WOOD Editorial, May 25, 1960. Grand Rapids later regained its position as Michigan's second-largest city after various annexation elections in early 1961.

[12] Ibid.

During the city's primary elections in February, 1960, Cheverton aired four editorials in which he attacked some of the candidates and rapped the public for its apathy. On February 1 he noted that for the first time in the city's history there were no contests for City Commission posts in the primaries. He blamed the citizenry for its apparently strong belief that there was "something a little indecent about politics," and he warned that no one should complain too much about conditions in the next two years since the critics of the city government had failed to oppose it in the election.[13]

On February 3 Cheverton hurled an array of brickbats, when he said:

> We've had a constable candidate who couldn't run because he forgot to register; we've had a commission candidate who didn't get enough valid signatures on his petitions; we've had a city commissioner who decided to run for re-election. Petitions were circulated at some public expense. Then, hours before the deadline for filing, the commissioner withdrew saying he was too old to run. Obviously he must have thought that before he ran in the first place. We've had, reportedly, another commission candidate who agreed to run only if he didn't have to campaign. This strikes us as an arrogant assumption by the candidate that it is not necessary to make his views known...that the voter be required, for convenience sake, to buy a pig in a poke. We've had a candidate who refused to serve in public office because it might cause dissension in the congregation of his church. We have a candidate for mayor who is running because he doesn't want the job to go by default. Interpreted, this could mean: "I'd rather not have the job, but I want the other fellow to have it less."

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[13]WOOD Editorial, February 1, 1960.

> It's a shame the second-largest city in Michigan can't find just three people interested enough to contest the commission races...that the only real races are for constables, mainly because the constable can make some money from the job.[14]

Cheverton then suggested that the citizens write in the names of responsible persons instead of voting for the candidates whose names were listed on the ballot.[15] As a result, Cheverton said, some of the voters wrote in his own name.

Two days later Cheverton criticized the public for its apathy, and suggested some ways to improve city government. He considered poor pay to be one of the chief reasons for better people not being drawn into office. He noted that with the commission carrying much of the burden of the city's business, a salaried person would find it almost financially impossible to serve in commission office. The result: fewer candidates each year and less interest in government. Cheverton also criticized the commission for taking on as much of the work as it did by breaking up into committees. He said he favored a strong city manager form of government, and felt that the commission should set policy and leave to the manager the task of running the city. In this way, he said, salaried citizens could enter the city's political life more

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[14] WOOD Editorial, February 3, 1960.

[15] Ibid.

actively as commission members and the public interest in the city's governmental life would increase.[16]

On February 17, two days after the city primary, Cheverton publicly warned the city's officials that they were elected by only forty-one per cent of thirty per cent, who took the trouble to vote, and, striking again at public apathy, he said that "...seventy per cent of the voters, obviously, were convinced there was no reason to vote."[17]

Cheverton twice took to task articles appearing in the Christian News, a local weekly newspaper published by the Dutch Reformed Church, for what he considered to be religious and ethnic bias at election time.

On March 30, 1960, he criticized Grand Rapids attorney John E. Damon, a writer for the newspaper, for some items on the political life of the city. Damon had noted that Mayor Davis received his heaviest support from certain wards which are heavily Lithuanian and Polish Catholic in composition, while the two precincts which traditionally supported the opposing Good Government candidates were heavily Dutch in character. Cheverton felt he saw subtle discrimination in the article and attacked Damon in an editorial. Damon demanded and received equal time to answer the charges and said over WOOD-TV that Cheverton misinterpreted his article. He said that no

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[16]WOOD Editorial, February 5, 1960.

[17]WOOD Editorial, February 17, 1961.

discrimination was intended, and that he and the Good Government Committee on occasion had supported Roman Catholic and Negro candidates despite opposition from Mayor Davis and other city leaders.[18]

During the legislative elections in July, 1960, Cheverton attacked Lawrence Asman, political cartoonist for the same paper and a candidate from the Sixteenth District for the Michigan Legislature, for injecting the religious issue into the campaign. Cheverton had attacked Asman earlier for political cartoons which raised religious and ethnic questions. In July Cheverton commented that Asman had issued a campaign flier which mentioned that of the four candidates in both Major parties in the legislative primary, three were Catholics, and only Asman was a Protestant. Cheverton said there seemed to be no point in bringing this fact to public attention unless Asman hoped to pick up a few anti-Catholic votes. He then suggested "that Mr. Asman should campaign on his records as an administrator and citizen rather than as the only Protestant who is running against four (sic) Catholics."[19]

The 1960 legislative election also provided a source of comment on the union-sponsored vote drive, a political tactic employed by the Democratic Party. In

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[18]WOOD Editorial, March 30, May 1, 1960.

[19]WOOD Editorial, July 25, 1960.

September City Clerk R. Stanley Kilpatrick trained twenty-six election workers to register voters at city fire stations. The group was almost evenly split between Republicans and Democrats. In its spare time a Grand Rapids labor union tried to use willing Democratic workers to register Democratic voters in a house-to-house registration drive. The laborers were to be paid five cents for every unregistered Democrat they found. The lists of unregistered Democrats were then to be given to Democratic election workers with instructions that they visit the people at home and register them on the spot. The union planned to pay twenty-five cents to the election workers for every voter registered in this manner. Kilpatrick immediately forbade this tactic as contrary to accepted registration practice and allowed registration in the home only in the cases of validated emergency. Cheverton said that Kilpatrick acted wisely and criticized the union for its registration plan.[20]

Cheverton said:

> Persons who can't take the trouble to register are poor citizens, and when any group encourages civic laziness by offering people special attention, they are helping to tear down the structure of good government.
>
> Of more consequence: if we consider that it is morally correct to pay for the registration of a voter, it is a short step to assume that it is morally correct to pay for his vote.

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[20]WOOD Editorial, September 21, 1960.

> The theory that we can manufacture good citizenship for thirty cents a head is cynical and narrow reasoning indeed.[21]

Cheverton's comments on state politics have so far been limited to the 1959 Michigan financial crisis and civil rights legislation.

In March, 1959, he sharply criticized both political parties for the manner in which they handled the Michigan financial crisis. In his view it was the people who really suffered from this situation. Though he did comment on how the problem should be resolved, he demanded some kind of tax, even a clumsy compromise, to save the state, and said:

> We need an end to Republican insistence that they will do nothing to enhance Governor (G.Mennen) Williams' chances as a presidential candidate. We need an end to Democrats who will not budge because it might help Republicans in the next election.[22]

In March, 1960, Republican Representative Lloyd Gibbs of Portland, Michigan, chairman of the State Affairs committee, disappeared from Lansing on the grounds of illness and let a civil rights bill die in his committee.

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[21] Ibid.

[22] WOOD Editorial, March 5, 1959. At this time the State of Michigan had run about $100 million in debt and was constitutionally prevented from borrowing in excess of $250,000. As the crisis between budget and income worsened, action was stymied for a long time between the Democratic Governor and those Democrats who wanted among other things a state income tax and a Republican Senate majority which insisted on a sales tax increase from three to four per cent. As neither side would give in, the situation in state finances became desperate.

Cheverton called his move "legislative tyranny," noting that Gibbs had also killed civil rights legislation two years earlier. Cheverton said:

> Mr. Gibbs forgot that when he accepts the chairmanship of a committee, he also accepts the responsibility for protecting all the people's interests. When Mr. Gibbs, who was elected by only 7,253 people, can withhold discussion and debate involving the fundamental rights of 560,000 Negroes in Michigan, something is wrong with our legislative system.[23]

Civic improvements.--Editorials urging civic improvement constitute the second-largest group of Cheverton's comments on local problems. These editorials deal with such problems as Negro housing in Grand Rapids, the Cascade Airport, psychiatric hospital facilities, and crime.

Adequate housing facilities for Negroes in Grand Rapids is one of the city's major problems. It was brought to greater public attention in July, 1960, when the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board fought Rule Nine, a Michigan Securities and Exchange Commission ruling that it was illegal for anyone to discriminate against a real estate buyer because of his race, color, religion, or national origin. Cheverton said that Grand Rapids Negroes needed more and better housing, that the predominantly Negro area of the city was too small, too run-down, and too commercial to be desirable, and that the better

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[23]WOOD Editorial, March 11, 1960.

neighborhoods, white areas, were the ones in which the Negro wanted to settle. But Cheverton also agreed with the Real Estate Board that the sale of a house is a private affair.[24]

> We can't argue with the board. The government has no business dictating whether you will or won't sell your house to a buyer. We don't think anyone--the Negro included--wants that kind of government dictation. We can't legislate bias out of existance.
>
> The real problem in Grand Rapids--and other cities as well--has been the avoidance of the basic problem. It is not possible to confine ever-growing numbers of people into a depressed geographical area of a city without creating an explosive situation. So far, no one has paid much attention to this face of the problem.[25]

Cheverton did not advocate specific measures to solve this problem, but suggested that civic leaders should adopt a positive program to solve it. Cheverton reaffirmed his position on September 30, when the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board, continuing its fight against Rule Nine, published the July 4 WOOD Editorial in support of its position. Cheverton informed his public that WOOD did not give its permission to reprint the editorial, but that after publication of the editorial it becomes public proberty and can be used without specific permission. He then said.

> WOOD approves the spirit of Rule Nine. But we are also conscious of the problems that arise when a

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[24]WOOD Editorial, July 4, 1960.

[25]Ibid.

> militant Negro moves into a neighborhood that is violently opposed to his entry. Such activities--enforced by law--may well increase race tension, race hatred, and all the evils that plague other sections of our nations.
>
> Rule Nine may well solve one Negro's housing problem and create a far greater problem for his race if it is used as a club and not as a last, desperate emergency measure.[26]

Another subject of much public discussion in 1960 was the proposal to build a new and larger airport in Cascade Township, southwest of the city, to serve Grand Rapids and Kent County. Conservative elements in the area fought the proposal, which was up for public acceptance or rejection on June 8. Cheverton aired two editorials in support of the new airport. The first was a discussion of three problems implicit in the proposal: need, cost, and timing of purchase. Cheverton felt that with the rising volume of air transportation Grand Rapids could not afford to lose this opportunity to build a new airport and to expand air travel and transport facilities. The city and county, then, needed the Cascade Airport. He explained that with Federal and State Money and revenue bonds financing the airport construction, the tax burden would be light. He showed, for example, that a taxpayer with a $10,000 home would pay only sixty-three cents a year for nine years to pay for the new facility, and that the old airport could be sold to help pay for the new one. Finally, he urged voters to support the proposal in the

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[26]WOOD Editorial, September 30, 1960.

coming election so that the airport could be bought immediately. In this way the area could take advantage of Federal and State funds. To buy later would result in a forfeiture of the funds, which would go to another community.[27]

> More important, somewhere along the line we must do the big and bold thing or end up in the backwash of an increasingly progressive civilization. We believe in the approval of the big and bold things we ought to do.[28]

The following day Cheverton took the occasion of the "Cascade Airport Show," a promotional scheme, and the Sixth Annual Antique Auto Tour to remind the citizens that "the horse-and-buggy days of the automobile and airplane" were past. He re-affirmed his support of the purchase of land for a new airport and urged the voters to support the proposal.[29]

The proposal was passed by the voters on June 8, and Cheverton hailed the vote as proof that "any community can get things done--if enough people will stir themselves and work together for progress."[30]

Cheverton turned his attention to the inadequacy of state mental health facilities in January, 1960. His

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[27]WOOD Editorial, June 2, 1960.

[28]Ibid.

[29]WOOD Editorial, June 3, 1960.

[30]WOOD Editorial, June 8, 1960.

editorial came as the result of two cases of arson by an eleven-year-old boy, who set fire to Camp O'Malley outside Grand Rapids, and to a home in the city's residential district before he was apprehended. He threatened to do the same thing in the future. The boy was mentally ill, and Cheverton took the opportunity to call his viewers' attention to the lack of sufficient facilities to deal with such cases of mental illness in children. He said that the LaFayette Clinic in Detroit was a short-term diagnostic institution and did not provide treatment; the Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor was jammed and was only a short-term institution; the Kalamazoo State Hospital was an institution for adults; the Ypsilanti State Hospital had child facilities, but provided no educational training and had no personnel trained to work with juveniles; the Boy's Vocational School in Lansing was filled with "hardened juvenile criminals" and did not provide psychiatric treatment; and the Hawthorn Center, near Northville, could not take the young arsonist for six months. Cheverton felt that the six to nine months of treatment the boy would receive there probably wouldn't cure him of his arsonist tendencies. Cheverton then supported the view of Probate Judge Wallace Waalkes that what Michigan needed was an adequately staffed youth facility that would keep a child long enough to effect a cure and also provide him

with an education or vocation which he could use throughout his life.[31]

In April, Cheverton, who had recently attended a short course for newsmen in crime analysis and reporting at Northwestern University, urged the citizens to vote for a juvenile detention home and advocated the establishment of a probation agency for ex-convicts. Cheverton felt that there was no panacea for problems of juvenile delinquency, but that public support of a juvenile detention home was the first step in the solution of the problem. At the same time he attacked the "careless justice" with which juvenile cases are handled in Grand Rapids and the "careless and ill-kept" facilities in which juveniles are detained.[32]

Supporting Municipal Judge A.J. Simhauser's request that the City Commission establish a probation service for municipal and police courts, Cheverton noted that it was against the law for a person on probation to report to the judge who sentenced him. Yet, because of the lack of a probation service, probationers were doing that every day. Attacking this inconsistency in law enforcement, Cheverton said:

> Obviously, it is hypocrisy for a community to advocate law and order and still tolerate a situation

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[31] WOOD Editorial, January 20, 1960.

[32] WOOD Editorial, April 6, 1959.

> which breeds criminality and contempt for the law faster than we can cope with it. This is a luxury neither our pocketbooks nor our consciences can afford.
>
> We think it imperative that the city commission provide a budget adequate to institute a non-political and responsible agency. This is not a luxury; it's a necessity. It cannot be done too soon.[33]

Annexation.--Annexation of suburban cities and townships is a problem that faces Grand Rapids as it does many other cities. Cheverton favored the annexation of Paris, Walker, Grand Rapids townships and the cities of Wyoming and East Grand Rapids in both 1959 and 1960 annexation elections.

On November 30, 1959, Cheverton said:

> We favor annexation not because Grand Rapids has the right to take what it wants when it wants it; not because the suburbs can't exist if they don't annex.
>
> We simply think Grand Rapids would be an improved city if the suburban people were in it. We think Grand Rapids would literally explode with the impact of a large number of people who have proven they are liberal, enthusiastic, independent, and willing to gamble for a future.
>
> It is true that suburban people could use their energies to improve present areas, but it could be a long uphill battle.
>
> History, geography, and commerce have thrown all of us together--for better or worse. We think the suburbs have the ambition and the power to make a better Grand Rapids metropolitan area. A step in this direction would be a political marriage between suburbs and city.[34]

One day before the annexation election Cheverton re-affirmed his support of the annexation proposal, but

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[33]WOOD Editorial, April 8, 1959.

[34]WOOD Editorial, November 30, 1959.

said he feared it would fail because the city government and planners did not give the people a finely-detailed program explaining the various problems involved in the annexation. The result, he felt, was too much confusion on too many issues.[35] The issue was defeated on December 8, and Cheverton claimed that the three townships and two cities didn't believe the Grand Rapids Press, the annexation committees, the city officials, and the Board of Education "when they haphazardly tried to sell the 'new city' idea."[36]

Cheverton then suggested that the city prepare the public for another annexation election by sponsoring an interchange of ideas between the city and the suburbs. He urged that the city draw up a finely-detailed and comprehensively-blue-printed program providing solutions and answers to such problems as water and sewage schedules; and that the city's Board of Education provide a detailed and fair plan for assimilating teachers, schools, and students into the city school system. He suggested that this plan be sold to Grand Rapids Township, where the

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[35]WOOD Editorial, December 7, 1959. This slap at the Press-an overt example of the undercurrent media rivalry-might seem a bit gratuitous inasmuch as Cheverton was also aditorializing on the same subject, unless it is a recognition that a newspaper, with greater space, is better fitted to present complex news background.

[36]WOOD Editorial, December 9, 1959.

annexation proposal met the least resistance, then to the other townships and cities involved.[37]

Another annexation election was scheduled for November, 1960. In May, 1960, Cheverton informed the people that United States Census figures revealed that since 1950 Grand Rapids had been losing population to its suburbs, and that the city would lose about $250,000 a year in sales tax and gas and weight refunds because of this. With fewer city residents to pay the taxes that provided basic city services, the city taxes had to be increased. This, in turn, led to a movement to the suburbs, where taxes were lower, and the result was, in his words, a vicious cycle. Cheverton suggested that only by adding population to the city through annexation could the problem be solved. And he urged the City Commission, the city manager, the Chamber of Commerce, and other interested suburban groups to start working for annexation.[38]

The November 8 annexation became a highly controversial subject in Grand Rapids and the suburbs during October. This annexation did not involve the three townships and two cities, as in 1959, but was an attempt by the city's attorney, Joseph Dilley, to annex certain

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[37] Ibid.

[38] WOOD Editorial, May 23, 1960.

uninhabited sections of land in townships bordering on Grand Rapids. Dilley's plan was supported by an old state law and his annexation procedure was sustained by a test case in the Michigan Supreme Court. Some suburban residents, angered by both his plan and his procedure, fought the move, however, and a public debate quickly mushroomed. WOOD devoted its usual editorial time to a discussion of both sides of the issue, then Cheverton announced WOOD's support of the so-called Dilley annexation. Explaining the station's support of the proposal, he said:

> The Dilley program is legally correct, and we can find little comfort in the use of the word "morality," used by both sides in this issue. If it's immoral for the city to raid the suburban territory, it is immoral for the suburbs to compete with Grand Rapids for the tax dollars of industry by using services supplied by Grand Rapids. If there is any lack of morality in this situation, it is shared by both sides.
>
> We approve the Dilley annexations because Grand Rapids must expand industrially. Grand Rapids cannot become a function. It must do more than supply water and collect sewage for the surrounding areas. That would be bad for Grand Rapids, and what is bad for Grand Rapids, in the long run, will be bad for the suburbs that surround her.
>
> By the same token, what is disastrous for the suburbs will harm Grand Rapids. Using the Dilley method for large-scale raids on suburban territory would be dangerous. Bankrupting a community or school district by wholesale annexation of industries that supply taxes would create problems that Grand Rapids is not equipped to handle.
>
> We do not believe the annexations to be voted November 8 will pose that problem. We believe these should be a part of the city.[39]

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[39]WOOD Editorial, October 29, 1960.

The Dilley annexation received public support and passed on November 8. To date, however, the three townships and two cities have not been annexed.

Industrial development.--Cheverton devoted two editorials to industrial development, one in the western Michigan area and the other in Grand Rapids.

On April 15, 1960, he informed viewers that Grand Haven's Chamber of Commerce estimated that one ton of cargo moving through the city's port facilities adds $12 to community income, and that both Grand Haven and Muskegon are rushing harbor improvements to capture the largest possible share of shipping trade passing through the Saint Lawrence Seaway into the Great Lakes. Cheverton suggested that all West Michigan manufacturing, processing, and shipping interests form a West Michigan Trade Commission to move out ahead of competition from other Great Lakes areas.[40]

> Shipping experts, port directors, community, business, and transportation representatives would be members. They should operate on the principle that in the highly complex field of foreign trade it is not enough to provide harbor facilities. The movement and disposition of products into our area, or out of it, involved many communities, businesses, and processes. Co-operation by and between all these interests would be beneficial.
>
> Admittedly, the competition between ports in West Michigan and the competition between communities would be difficult to overcome. But any action that would emphasize the advantages of working as a harmonious geographical and trade unit would be desirable.[41]

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[40]WOOD Editorial, October 29, 1960.

[41]WOOD Editorial, April 15, 1960.

Grand Rapids' apparent failure to attract new industries was the topic of an editorial on the need for community vigor in industrial development. On October 3, 1960, Cheverton called his viewers' attention to the fact that a new food-processing plant employing from 150 to 400 workers was opening in South Haven, and that another new plant employing 50 to 60 persons would be open soon in Muskegon. The companies announced that they decided to settle in the respective cities because of the vigorous manner in which the cities replied to their inquiries on industrial advantages.[42]

Said Cheverton:

> Muskegon and South Haven are to be congratulated. Other, less ambitious communities should be warned by a report issued by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research of Michigan State University. It points out that wages, salaries, and other labor income are more important in Michigan than in the nation, while every other type of income is less important here than in the nation.
>
> In short, this is a state geared to manufacturing. Any community which ignores this and doesn't work and work hard to get its share of industrial and manufacturing companies is going to be lost in the crowd.[43]

Cheverton's or WOOD's dissemination of opinions does not have a monopoly in the Grand Rapids area thanks to the separate ownership of the Grand Rapids Press, with which it is often at odds on public issues. While the news department could not easily offer the man in the street a

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[42] WOOD Editorial, October 3, 1960.

[43] Ibid.

"Letters to the Editor" column, Cheverton has on a number of occasions presented an opportunity for opposing points of view to be aired. Two instances have already been noted (page 84) in which he let persons whom he had attacked give their side of the story. And at the time of the Cascade Airport and Dilley Annexation elections he gave proponents and opponents of issues equal time in which to give their views to the public. But there is no evidence that WOOD or any other station is inclined to follow the FCC view that the licensee should always actively seek out the opinions of those who disagree with its editorial stand.

The case against editorialization.--The fact that significantly fewer than a third of the RTNDA television news departments editorialize reveals that not all news directors share Cheverton's apparent enthusiasm for editorials.

Donald E. Brown, associate professor of journalism and communications, University of Illinois, summarized the arguments against broadcast editorials in a speech to the 1959 RTNDA convention.[44] He cited numerous surveys that seemed to show people trust radio as a news source more than other news media and suggested that this might be due to the fact that radio news was usually presented

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[44]Froke, op. cit., pp. 76-70.

objectively and without editorials. Brown also felt that the limited number of television channels in certain areas would give many stations a virtual monopoly on the dissemination of televised opinion. He said it would be difficult for anyone to open a rival station in many areas.

Brown doubted that it would be wise to let stations editorialize for selfish reasons, and cited the television editorialists' successful public fight against pay television as an example of how broadcasters can use the medium to protect their own interests. A disquieting fact is that one quarter of the news directors in Froke's survey said they had no part in planning their station's editorials.[45]

Brown said the broadcast industry leaders consider editorials a management function, but in a majority of cases newsmen are expected to do the editorial work. The newsmen, he said, might be forced to write and voice opinions in which they do not believe. He also said there was little or no reason to think that broadcast management would be less conservative in its political, social, and economic ideas than newspaper management.

Brown recommended that the already overworked news staffs devote their efforts to improving straight news broadcasts, depth reporting, documentaries, and interpretation without injecting personal opinion or editorial comment.

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[45] Ibid., p. 24.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The elements of an effective news operation would seem to be a good professional news director, an able and sufficient staff, adequate equipment, and a favorable climate of management.[1]

As its news director WOOD has a newsman of experience and some professional stature. He has worked in newspapers, with a Sunday supplement, or in broadcast journalism for some twenty-two years. Recognition of his professional stature comes from two major sources: from the Radio Television News Directors Association of the United States and Canada and from TLF Broadcasters, Incorporated, the owners of WOOD. The latter is the broadcast division of Time, Incorporated, a highly news-conscious organization. One might reasonably assume that more than most owners this corporation would have considerable interest in the caliber of the man selected for and holding down the news director's job, which Cheverton has held for six years.

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[1] Jack W. Laemmar and Gene F. Seehafer, Successful Television and Radio Advertising (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), pp. 517-521, stresses these points specifically or by implication.

The RTNDA,it has been noted, has honored Cheverton in two ways--by electing him to high executive posts within the association and by granting him or his staff three awards within two years. Cheverton is now the RTNDA's First Vice Presedent, and will automatically become its President in 1961.

An effective news operation also demands an able staff which can provide the community with quality news coverage. The WOOD staff members seem to have had a well-rounded variety of experience in news operations before joining the company. Their combined experience to date totals about 65 years. Six of the seven are college-educated and at least five received training in writing during their college years. All worked in college or commercial broadcast news media before joining WOOD. Four also worked with newspapers.

Regardless of how well-trained and experienced its newsmen are, however, a good news operation also must have sufficient staff and adequate equipment to cover a local area effectively. WOOD's sound-recording and photographic equipment, it has been noted, includes a video tape unit, radio-equipped automobiles, and a large stock of cameras and photographic equipment. While the staff lacks a mobile live television unit and such luxuries as a helicopter, which Los Angeles' KTLA-TV uses in its local news coverage, it seems fairly well equipped for a

community of its size.[2]

Whether the department has sufficient staff to cover the area effectively is a difficult question to answer. It is doubtful if any television news staff comes anywhere near the size of a newspaper staff in the same city. A newspaper exists primarily for news, but a television station, by its very nature, must circumscribe its news operations. A newspaper, for example, regularly covers engagements, weddings, divorces, deaths, and hundreds of other routine stories, while a television news operation usually restricts itself only to the larger "headlines." Moreover, by comparison, television news has much less "space," (that is, air time) in which to give the news.

Money is probably the greatest limiting factor in television news operations, however. Even a newspaper finds its local news and editorials the most expensive part of its contents; wire news and features come cheaper. In a sense, its local news alone then would be a money-losing operation. But a newspaper exists primarily for news and sells itself mainly because of news. And its total advertising and circulation revenues support the total newspaper, with no item-by-item relationship. In a newspaper the story on page one, for example, helps bring advertising money to page 26. But in the economics of

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[2] Ibid., p. 518.

television, financial support is the more direct one of program sponsorship. A 6:30 PM. television newscast will not necessarily bring any more viewers or a sponsor to a 9 P.M. program.

By spending more, buying more, and doing more to improve a news program, a station might increase its local-news listenership to the point of being able to get more sponsor revenue.[3] But there is obviously a limit. WOOD has never even broken even on its news operations. Leonard Bridge, the station's business manager and comptroller, says that in the company's last fiscal year, 1960-1961, the news department cost the station $124,000 while it brought in a revenue of only $100,000, leaving a net loss of about $24,000 to the corporation.[4]

Factors other than direct financial return, however, can lead a station to want a top-flight news department. These include a sense of altruism and a desire for prestige, the desire or necessity of public service, and the climate of management.

Altruism, prestige, and a sense of public service are difficult to measure, but appear to be implicit motives

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[3]Froke, op. cit., p. 57, indicates that sponsors pay more for local news programs than for other local programs in 56.6 per cent of television and radio stations and less in only 1.2 percent of the stations.

[4]Bridge interview, July 12, 1961.

in any news operation worthy of the name. Rare is the newsman who does not feel with some pride that he is contributing something of value to the community.

Public service is not purely a matter of altruism. A television station possesses a revocable license from the Federal Communications Commission--the exclusive right to a channel--whose value, television men agree, may rise into the millions.[5] The FCC requires each station to devote some time to public service programming, in which it lumps such things as news, agriculture, education, discussion, talks, and miscellaneous programs.[6] Specific requirements have never been spelled out and so far the FCC has never suspended a license, but the threat is there which might materialize under a strong chairman, as Newton Minow seems to be. Any television management, therefore, has reason to be concerned with public service, though it might be tempted to carry out these responsibilities perfunctorily when they are not commercially profitable. As far as the WOOD news department is concerned, there seems to be no evidence that it has failed to show a sense of public service in its news operations.

A sine qua non of effective news operation is a favorable climate of its management. If it enjoys this,

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[5] Head, op. cit., p. 344.

[6] Ibid., p. 336.

it is likely to be better staffed and equipped, and function with much higher morale. As Laemmar and Seehafer say:

> Whether the station is large or small, the person in charge of the news department should have the confidence and backing of station management. It is of utmost importance to the broadcasting industry as a whole that television and radio stations supply a competent news service to the public. This cannot be done unless management is sympathetic to the problem and recognizes that the news department, like any other department of the station, must be run by specialists. In this case, broadcast journalists are necessary. With a qualified news executive, management can be confident that a department is properly organized and staffed, has a workable reporter-coverage system, and can provide the fine type of news service needed.[7]

At WOOD, as Cheverton stated earlier, the station management is "hot" for news operations. Cheverton reports directly to management without going through a program director, as seems to be the usual practice. Froke found that in combined operations three-fourths of his respondents said the program director was not the immediate boss of the news director. This would seem to make for better newsroom morale, because in combined operations where the program director was the news director's boss, about two-thirds of the newsroom personnel said he shouldn't be.[8] As has been suggested earlier, there might be good arguments for expansion of WOOD's news department to cover many of the station's other informational programs.

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[7]Laemarr and Seehafer, op. cit., p. 517.

[8]Froke, op. cit., Table 23C, p. 45.

While the climate of WOOD management might have been favorable to an effective news operation under other conditions, it could hardly be otherwise when the station is one of the five owned by such a news organization as Time, Incorporated.

A P P E N D I X

7/5/61 SAMPLE WOOD-TV NEWS SCRIPT

[3][1] The trial to determine the fate of J. Otto Peebles opened in Kent County Circuit court today...and if the opening is any criterion, it may set some records for length. Selection of the jury was the order of the day.

SLIDE[2] [4] Prosecutor Dick Loughrin spent hours asking each of the 14 prospective jurors if they knew any of the lawyers in the Warner, Norcross & Judd firm./.the only bit of levity occurred

ANNC[3] [3]

INDEX[4] [4] when the Prosecutor told the jury he was described as a soft-spoken, scholarly man... he didn't have the flare and showmanship that Harold Sawyer, Peebles' defense attorney had.

INDEX At this juncture Sawyer arose to object, said he appreciated the Prosecutor's endorsement,

INDEX but didn't think this pertinent./.Judge Fred Searl smiled and said, "I'm sure the jury will

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[1]Camera.

[2]Picture on slide projector.

[3]Announcer.

[4]Pictures or titles.

have an opinion on all of this when the trial is over." Peebles arrived in court with a fresh haircut, wearing a pressed blue suit. He appeared sallow from his long incarceration since the shooting took place. As Prosecutor Loughrin read the charges against him, Peebles bowed his head and lowered his eyes. A siren whined through the open court boom windows. Peebles looked up suddenly. His attorney Harold Sawyer looked across the defense table and smiled reassuringly. Sawyer's ever-present pointer was in his hands and he tapped his shoe as the long drawn-out proceedings droned on. Judge Fred Searl, presiding in the large courtroom of Judge VanderWal, cautioned everyone to speak up as the room is notorious for its bad acoustics.

Both sides were still challenging prospective jurors late this afternoon. That process could last for some time. Opening statements may come sometime tomorrow.

INDEX

ANNC 3

SLIDE 4

SLIDE INDEX

ANNC 4 3 [5]

-CMCL - F (4) [6]

INDEX [7]
R.P.

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[5] Dissolve picture from one camera to another.

[6] Commercial on film, camera 4.

[7] Picture or title on a rear projector.

[3] The Grand Rapids board of education today voted a 110 thousand dollar deficit into an already tight budget. The move came when the board agreed to give all its employees 189 dollars in pay raises. The move affects some 18 hundred employees...averages out to less than a two and a half per cent pay hike. The move gives the city's teachers pay hikes of 100 to 150 dollars a year, but still leaves Grand Rapids near the bottom of the list of the state's 16 major city's in its minimum starting pay for teachers. The maximum compares more favorably. The board accepted the cheaper of two plans submitted/by superintendent Ben Buikema. The second plan would have cost another 41 thousand dollars...would have granted raises averaging a little less than three per cent./Board president Bill Beaman summed up the board's feelings when he said they would like to make the raises more but they just don't have the money./Two other major actions today. The board decided what to do with newly annexed school children in Paris township. Some will be given a choice of going to city schools or continuing at their present schools on a tuition basis. Most will end up going to the Alger or Ottawa Hills elementary

SLIDE [4]

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ANNC [3]

schools, the Ridgeview or Ottawa Hills junior high school and the Ottawa Hills high school. The board looked over preliminary plans for an addition to the newly annexed Burr Oak school on the northeast side. The addition will be build between the old and new sections of the school at an estimated cost of 157 thousand dollars. When the new addition is finished the old section will be torn down and it will look like this.....

RP SCHOOL

2

4

SLIDE

(X) RP 8

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[8] Announcer to move in front of rear projector at this point.

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