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THE PASSING OF THE NEWSPAPER "SCOOP"

The Old Days of 'The Exclusive Story' Slowly But Surely Going.

(By Charles H. Zuber)

While the quest for news on the part of the daily press is as keen—and probably more so—in the present day as it was at any time in the past, there is no longer the frequent production or creation of the newspaper "scoop"—as it was called in the West—or "beat," which was its eastern designation—that marked the progressive and insistent journalism of that period preceding the beginning of the present century. Of course, there arise occasions when one newspaper in a city will publish a good "story" that its rivals fail to obtain except as a "rewrite"; but on the whole, the newspaper field today, like all other industries and crafts, is so well standardized that the opportunities for putting a "scoop" over on the other fellow are decidedly remote.

Police cases, court proceedings, hotel news, financial affairs—in fact all the big sources of daily news—now are handled in such a way at their respective places of origin that there is little or no prospect of one newspaper getting an advantage over another. But it was not always so. In the old days there were advantages of various kinds enjoyed by individual newspapers or reporters that proved prolific fields for "scoops." In those days the newspaper or newspapers which had political affiliation with a city, county or state administration were always favored when a big story "broke," this preference extending to police departments county court affairs and state news developments.

Trickier Offtimes Resorted to Nor was trickery excluded from the category of the news gatherers of those days. One of the common methods of getting a "scoop" was to secure petitions filed in suits which promised something sensational and then concealing the papers from the other reporters until the "story" was on the streets exclusively in one paper. Another common method of "putting one over" was to secure a live item from some individual, who desired to reach all the newspapers with his story, on the promise that the reporter receiving the statement give it to the reporters. The promise always was made, but sometimes "forgotten," with the result that the reporters to whom the item was originally told scored a "scoop" while the man with whom the story originated was "in bad" with the other reporters, who would not believe that he had requested its general dissemination. Officials, police characters, business men lawyers and others toadied to newspapers either as a matter of protection or to curry favor for future consideration, and in this way many a "scoop" was registered.

But under existing conditions, when the thirst for publicity and the fear of journalistic enmity is in the heart of every man who may become the guardian or source of a real news item, and with the various public agencies where news originates making known all their operations the advents of "scoops" are few and far between. To what an extent this dissemination of "big news" has become general instead of exclusive, is illustrated in an incident in a Middle West city, where two newsboys were selling rival evening papers. One of the newsies was shouting aloud the "sensation" which his paper carried. The other vendor, standing close to the boy who was conducting the journalistic ballyhoo, waited until prospective buyers came within a few feet of him and his rival, when he would remark, in an ordinary tone of voice, "I've got it in the 'Times,' meaning that he had the same item in the paper he was selling, with the result that, as his paper was the more popular of the two, he sold more than the chap who was drumming up the trade by his noisy shouting.

And the Rival Gets the Story A unique "scoop" is that of which old newspaper men of a certain city

in Ohio still speak with a decided chuckle. It seems that the cashier of a bank in a suburban city had been cutting quite a swath in racing and shady society circles. The rumor became current that he was short in his accounts, and on a certain Saturday night one of the large dailies in the big town received a strong "tip" from one of the cashier's "flames" that he had left town—also a large hole in the bank's exchequer. The newspaper tried to secure corroboration of the story from the bank officials, but, of course, they denied it. A reporter then was sent to the home of the accused man's brother for verification of the rumor. The brother flatly branded the yarn as a fake. The reporter insisted that his paper had the facts and would publish them. The brother countered with the threat that if the story was published the newspaper would have on its hands the largest libel suit ever filed in that section. After further verbal sparring, the brother repeated his threat of a libel, while the last words of the reporter were to the effect that his paper, having the "goods," would run the story just the same. However, after the reporter returned to his office and talked matters over with his chief, it was decided that there were not enough facts to justify the risk, so the story was temporarily shelved. In the meantime the brother of the cashier, taking seriously the threat of the reporter that his paper would run the story, bethought himself of a friend on a rival sheet who would be seriously embarrassed if this story "broke" on his route and he failed to get it. So he summoned his friend, gave him all the details of the defalcation, which amounted to nearly \$200,000, threw in all the racing and white-light effects—in fact, furnished all the materials for one of the biggest sensations this particular section had ever seen. The next morning—Sunday—the newspaper which had the original tip on the looting of the bank came out without a line about the affair, while the paper that had had no inkling of it until the threat of the rival reporter caused the brother of the cashier to act, had the details of the defalcation spread all over its front page.

Another queer angle of a "scoop" developed in a certain city where the proprietor of a newspaper and another citizen advanced \$250,000 to save one of the city's most cherished institutions. The newspaper proprietor failed to notify his editor of the matter, and the first the chief knew of it was when the editor of a rival evening paper telephoned him, just before making an edition, that he had not had time to make a real spread on the item, and that, if the other editor was willing, they would both hold the story for the second edition, to do it justice. The editor of the paper owned by the philanthropist pretended to make a concession by holding off, then sent his best men scurrying around to the proprietor to get the details of the gift in time for the next edition. He just managed to obtain the facts in time, thus saving himself and the proprietor the keenest humiliation. It is reported, however, that some years later this same proprietor allowed his own paper to be "scooped" in a real estate deal involving several million dollars and in which he was the prime mover.

Within the last 20 years there have been three "scoops" of an international character presented to the American people, none of which brought credit to the newspaper publishing them. One of them was the heralding of the death of President McKinley. Following the attack upon him by the assassin Czolgoz at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, McKinley hovered between life and death, while an anxious world prayed and waited for the Divine verdict. Then one evening the newspapers served by a certain press association suddenly burst forth with extra editions, announcing the death of the martyred President, with all the touching and sorrowful details of the last summons. For a brief period the whole country was rent by grief over the report. And then came the extra editions of the newspapers of the rival press association with the story that McKinley still was alive,

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and that hope was held out for his recovery. The newspapers which carried the story of his death were deeply humiliated and offered excuses and apologies for their error. But it was a long time before the false report was forgotten by the public, even though McKinley's death followed within a short time after the journalistic faux pas.

Pope's Death Prematurely Reported Some years later a similar blunder was made by another press association in connection with the late Pope Leo. The eminent prelate had been ill for a long time, and his death was daily, almost momentarily, expected. So when the newspapers served by a certain press association came out with extra editions, announcing the death of His Holiness, the Catholic clergy everywhere ordered bells tolled, prayers said and other devout manifestations over the passing of a great churchman. Then came the report to the rival newspapers that the Pope was still alive, this being followed by a reaction against the newspapers that had carried accounts of his death which required many months to eradicate. The fact that the Pope died within a short time did not mitigate the sentiment against the newspapers which had mistakenly chronicled his passing on.

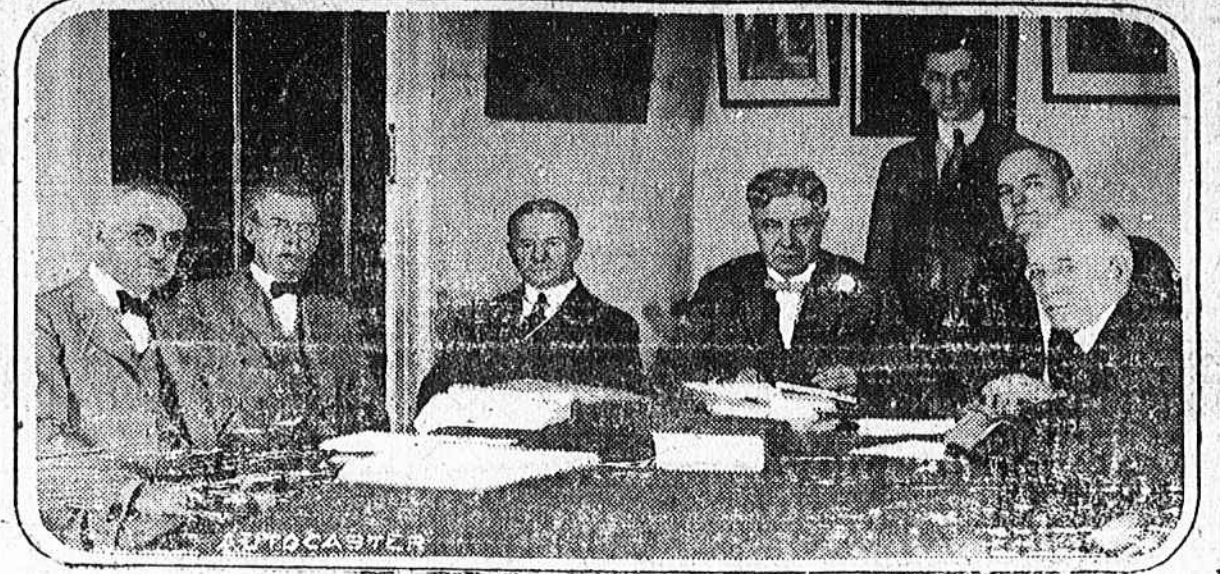
Carrying perhaps a greater shock than that of either of the two "scoops" above set forth, was that which followed the first announcement of the alleged signing of an armistice in connection with the recent World War. The people of the Allied nations, and particularly of America—as we can best judge—were heartsick over the awful carnage that was being waged by the contending armies abroad, and every little suggestion carrying with it the prospects of an early cessation of hostilities caused the wildest joy, not only among those who had sons, brothers, fathers and other relatives at the front, but among patriotic citizens generally. Then suddenly out of Brest came the story, credited to Admiral Wilson, that an armistice had been signed between the Allies and Germany, and that the war was actually over. This story was carried as a "scoop" by the newspapers served by one press association. Those who depended upon the news of a rival organization did not commit the blunder of accepting the original report as true, even though spontaneous celebrations were inaugurated in hundreds of places and hosannas of joy over the coming of peace were flung on high throughout the land. There came denials from Washington, from London and from Paris that an armistice had been signed; and from a feeling of the highest jubilation, inspired by the unauthentic report of a cessation of fighting, the nation was plunged into perhaps a deeper gloom than existed before the news of the alleged armistice was sent out. The reaction against the newspapers which published this story was extremely severe, and was not tempered for a long time by the fact that the armistice really was signed a week or so later.

A case where pure chance played a part in a "scoop" in connection with a murder case occurred about 15 years ago. Two dental students had been arrested for the murder and decapitation of a girl of their acquaintance.

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New Committee Studies Ford's Muscle Shoals Offer



Controversy over the Muscle Shoals offer made by Henry Ford has resulted in the creation of a new special committee which will consider the offer. Photograph taken in the Military Affairs Committee Room in the Capitol shows the committee which consists (left to right) of J. W. Worthington, Washington representative for Ford, W. B. Mayo, Ford's Chief Engineer, Congressman Wright of Georgia, Congressman Morin of Pennsylvania, Congressman Miller of Washington, Chief Clerk of the Sessions (standing), Congressman Fisher of Tennessee, and Congressman Crago, of Pennsylvania.

The head of the victim was never recovered, and the evidence against the two men was purely circumstantial. Either probably could have saved himself by turning state's evidence, but both held their peace. After they had been convicted, an appeal was taken by their attorneys. The arguments for a new trial were to be heard at the state capital, and thither attorneys and reporters went. Because of the particular brutality of the crime, the case had attracted nationwide attention, so that the matter of a new trial was a national, rather than a local affair. In wandering through the state capitol, where the court which was to hear the appeal was in session, the two representatives of one of the dailies of the city in which the original trial was held, were accosted by an attache of the state house, who informed them that, for a consideration, he would place them at a ventilator over the court room where the hearing was to be held behind closed doors, and where they could see and hear everything that transpired. The bargain was immediately made, plans were worked out by which one of the reporters, provided with a black flag and a white one, was to station himself at the opening in the ceiling, while the other was to wait a block away, in plain view of a window of the room in which the ventilator was located. If a new trial was granted, the watching reporter was to wave the white flag; if a new trial was denied, the black flag was to be shown. The reporter on the outside was to rush to the telegraph office immediately after receiving the signal and flash the word

"White" or "Black" into his home office. The scheme worked perfectly. The black flag was displayed; the fatal word flashed to the newspaper office, and the resourceful and lucky reporters had the satisfaction of knowing on their return home that their little strategy had beaten their rival by nearly an hour in getting the story of the confirming of the death sentence on the streets. This "Scoop" Brought No Boast It was in connection with this same case that the successful newspaper referred to registered a "scoop" of which it never boasted. One of the accused men hailed from a city about 60 miles from where the crime was committed, and there promised to be a wild race with papers to this city with the details of the execution on the day set for the hanging. The editor of the paper in question decided to be there first, so he secured all the details of the arrangements for the execution in advance and had an extra edition printed and dispatched to the town the night before, with instructions that they be placed on the streets at a certain time, based on the hour of the execution. Unfortunately the execution was delayed for two hours after the original time set for the hanging, with the result that a full and detailed report of the double execution was on the streets of the city 60 miles away fully an hour before it actually took place. It may seem to be crowding the record of Ananias a bit to say that it is possible for one newspaper to "scoop" another on the account of a big-league base-ball game, played according to schedule and in the pres-

ence of thousands of spectators. Yet this actually happened less than 20 years ago. It was during the telegraphers' strike that a team found itself in a series of games with the New Yorks on the Polo Grounds. Immediately on arriving in New York the traveling correspondents of the two evening newspapers who were accompanying the team, tired to secure wires from the ball park to their respective New York offices, from which they had private lines into their own home office. The effort was futile. Not only the foreign newspapers, but those of New York, also, were cut off from telegraph service to the ball park. One of the correspondents gave up in disgust. The other hustled out to the Polo Grounds, found a telephone in a blacksmith's shop opposite the ball park and rented it for the afternoon. He then secured the services of a cub reporter to manipulate the telephone, at the other end of which was the New York correspondent of the out-of-town paper. Relays of messenger boys were hired to carry the written results of the game by half innings from the ball park to the telephone, where the reports were transmitted to the correspondent down-town, and immediately relayed to the home town. That evening the newspaper with the persistent correspondent had a full account of the game on the streets 10 minutes after the game was over, while the rival sheet was perfectly blank as far as the account of the game was concerned.—The Dearborn Independent.

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