

"WHAT'S THE NEWS?"



NE day last year there reached the editorial office of the Philadelphia "Times" three letters, written by Mr. Charles A. Dana, Mr. E. L. Godkin, and Mr. Henry W. Grady, respectively.

Replying to one query, all three suggested another: "What is news?" Not finding in the books any definition of news, as the newspaper-maker and newspaper-reader understand the word, I asked a number of journalists to define the commodity in which they deal, and out of the correspondence which followed was evolved this definition: "*News is an unpublished event of present interest.*"

It is an event, rather than a fact or circumstance, because it contains the element of happening. It is unpublished, in the sense that it is unknown to the readers of the newspaper whose editor contemplates its publication. It is of present interest—present, because it changes existing conditions or impressions; and of interest, because it affects either the heart or the pocket-book of humanity.

An event which fulfills these three conditions is news, irrespective of time or locality. Both Livingstone and Unyanyembe died in Africa. The world did not hear of the explorer's death until months after it occurred. Time did not affect the character of the news. The world never heard of the death of the negro. Locality did not affect the character of the news. That which did affect the news-character of both events was their relative value.

Editing a newspaper is the process of weighing news. No newspaper ever prints all the news, although many advertise to do so. Events which are printed are those which the editor believes to be of the greatest interest to the greatest number accustomed to read his journal; and the lengths and positions allotted to the items, as they appear in the journal, illustrate the editor's notion of the public's estimate of their varying values as news.

While the editor edits the newspaper, the public edits the editor; hence it follows that the public, so greatly given to grimaces over the perusal of its follies, possesses full power to season its news to its own taste.

What is the total annual cost to the wholesale purchasers of news—namely, the publishers—of the entire news-product of the United States? An answer to this question would be of interest, but it has never been answered. For several years I have been gathering information upon which to base an estimate. Pub-

lishers have uniformly extended me every courtesy; nevertheless I find it an exceedingly difficult quantity to arrive at, and for my figures I do not claim absolute accuracy. Publishers in this country annually expend something near the following sums for news:

For press despatches.....	\$1,820,000
" special ".....	2,250,000
" local news.....	12,500,000

\$16,570,000

The business of the Associated Press, a mutual concern which pays nothing for its news, and which serves its patrons at approximate cost, amounts to \$1,250,000 per annum; and that of the United Press, a stock corporation, is \$450,000 per annum. The former aims to provide news about all important events, in which work \$120,000 in telegraph tolls is expended; while the latter endeavors, above all else, to provide accounts of events occurring in the vicinity of the respective papers served.

The estimate for special despatches includes telegraph tolls and pay of the correspondents who furnish the news. This service is conducted by the publishers in the large centers of population, who find the reports furnished by the press associations either not full enough, or not to the political taste of their readers. Here are the average monthly bills for special despatches of fourteen leading journals:

Atlanta "Constitution".....	\$1,100
Boston "Herald".....	5,500
Chicago "Herald".....	6,500
" "Tribune".....	4,500
Cincinnati "Commercial-Gazette" ..	5,800
" "Enquirer".....	4,750
Kansas City "Journal".....	1,050
Minneapolis "Tribune".....	3,000
New York "World".....	9,514
Philadelphia "Press".....	3,600
San Francisco "Call".....	3,500
" "Examiner".....	8,000
St. Louis "Globe-Democrat".....	11,660
St. Louis "Republic".....	3,300

The foregoing are the extreme in this department of expenditure. Many excellent journals find it possible to limit their bills to from \$400 to \$1000 per month.

The cost of the "local" news far exceeds that of both the other departments; not because the local services of individual papers cost more in every instance, but because so many journals maintain local bureaus, yet pay nothing for press or other despatches. The bills for local news of the leading New York dailies are the largest of any in the country,

and for two reasons — a larger territory to cover, and a greater demand from outside for the local news of New York. Their weekly bills range from \$1500 to \$3400.

When news is delivered upon the news-editor's desk it has then to be edited; and editors' services command in Boston, from \$30 to \$60 per week; in New York, from \$40 to \$100; in Philadelphia, from \$30 to \$70; in Cincinnati, from \$25 to \$50; in Chicago, from \$40 to \$80; in St. Louis, from \$20 to \$45; and in San Francisco, from \$40 to \$65. There are 35,000 persons in the United States engaged in editorial work upon daily and weekly newspapers. This is the report of the labor organizations; but more than half this number more properly belong in the list of news-gatherers rather than of editors, a class whose services command only from \$10 to \$35 per week.

White-paper bills cut a big figure in the outlay of the newspaper publisher. Here are the annual paper bills of eighteen leading journals:

Atlanta "Constitution"	\$63,000
Baltimore "American"	103,000
Boston "Herald"	315,000
Boston "Globe"	326,000
Chicago "Herald"	265,000
Chicago "News"	324,000
Chicago "Tribune"	195,000
Cincinnati "Enquirer"	252,000
Kansas City "Journal"	53,000
Louisville "Courier-Journal"	135,000
Minneapolis "Tribune"	60,000
New York "World"	667,500
Philadelphia "Press"	245,000
Philadelphia "Times"	165,000
San Francisco "Call"	120,000
San Francisco "Examiner"	155,000
St. Louis "Globe-Democrat"	205,000
St. Louis "Republic"	125,000

It is to be remembered that circulation is not the only factor which determines the amount of the publishers' white-paper bills. Both the size of the sheet issued and the quality of the paper used are material considerations.

Following are weekly composition bills of several of the great dailies:

Baltimore "American"	\$2,000
Boston "Globe"	4,100
Chicago "Herald"	2,106
Chicago "News"	1,500
Chicago "Tribune"	2,500
Cincinnati "Enquirer"	3,200
New York "Herald"	3,780
New York "Times"	3,000
New York "World"	6,000
Philadelphia "Ledger"	2,150
San Francisco "Call"	1,650
St. Louis "Globe-Democrat"	2,700
St. Louis "Republic"	2,000

The New York "Sun" pays \$140 per week to proof-readers; the New York "Times" and New York "Tribune," \$245 each; and the New York "Herald" and New York "World,"

\$315 each. A new "dress" of type for the New York "Times" or New York "Tribune" costs \$12,000; for the New York "Herald," \$15,000, including mailing type; and for the New York "World," \$13,890, excluding mailing type. As a rule, new type is purchased annually.

Immediately the newspaper leaves the office of publication there are items of expense that are seldom considered. They are the pay and the profit of the person who leaves the paper at your door. The fact that you regularly receive and pay for the paper is worth to him, in the form of good-will, \$2 if you live in Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Cleveland, Louisville, or St. Paul; \$3 if in Pittsburg, San Francisco, or St. Louis; and \$5 if in New York, Philadelphia, or Washington.

Even your circumstances are taken into the account — wealth, age, disposition — as affecting your likelihood to continue a subscriber. Newspaper-delivery routes are staple properties, varying in value according to the number and — oddly, but logically — the social standing of the patrons served.

A route-owner who regularly receives from a subscriber twelve cents per week for the Philadelphia "Public Ledger" holds the name of that subscriber, when he sells his route, at a stiff \$4 to \$5 — the highest, if its list be taken as a whole, of any journal in America. Carriers deliver 60,000 copies daily of the Philadelphia "Public Ledger." Note the large capital here represented. The man who buys the news of the day for a penny contributes his mite towards the support of an American journalism whose product, Mr. Joseph Pulitzer estimates, foots up \$100,000,000 per annum.

Newspaper routes are worth from \$200 to \$2000 in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Milwaukee, and New Orleans; from \$400 to \$3000 in Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Pittsburg; and from \$1000 to \$5000 in Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington.

Newspapers have two sources of income, advertisements and sales of copies. The former is greater than the latter, but not in a proportion so overwhelming as is generally supposed. Most dailies in our largest cities realize an income in about the proportion of two-thirds from advertising to one-third from subscriptions and sales. The value of great newspaper plants is difficult to arrive at. A rule is, to value the good-will, a quantity which does not include building, outfit, or machinery, at the sum of the profits during the preceding five years. But this rule is followed only in legal appraisements; I know of no publisher who ever sold at such a price.

The proportion of daily-newspaper circulations to city populations is rapidly increasing.

This is because newspapers are cheaper and earlier delivered than formerly. Leaving out Brooklyn, six American cities have populations of over 300,000. Now if we admit the claims of the publishers, it is found that, in proportion to population, the copies of newspapers printed and sold in them stand thus:

	Morning.	Evening.	Total.
Boston	53.54	62.87	116.41
New York	64.28	31.17	95.45
Chicago	41.25	22.60	63.85
Philadelphia	36.89	16.33	53.22
St. Louis	23.75	14.08	37.83
Baltimore	25.08	5.41	30.49

A material element in the foregoing figures is tributary territory, an important consideration in what publishers term the "field." With the three tributary cities of Brooklyn, Jersey City, and Newark, New York, the metropolis and financial center of the country, has a very decided advantage. Yet it is easily distanced in the matter of proportionate newspaper circulation by Boston, and rather closely pressed by Chicago.

In the six cities having populations above 200,000 the proportions stand:

	Morning.	Evening.	Total.
San Francisco	64.28	28.60	92.88
Pittsburg	53.23	33.50	86.73
Cincinnati	43.17	36.71	79.88
Cleveland	21.29	24.22	45.51
Buffalo	6.44	23.46	29.90
New Orleans	19.44	8.16	27.60

San Francisco's proportion is high, because of the metropolitan character of the city towards the Pacific Coast, and because of the large ratio of adult males. Pittsburg and Cincinnati are high, because of their vast tributary territory, for two finer newspaper fields than these do not exist in the world. But Cleveland drops to almost one-half the ratio of Cincinnati. Why? Because Lake Erie cuts off one-half her tributary territory.

If the location of Cleveland be disadvantageous as a field for newspaper enterprise, that of Buffalo is far worse. The proportionate circulation of her newspapers tells the story. Little assistance to newspapers is gained from the lake traffic, while the lake itself cuts off a large part of the field. The boundary of Canada is a dead-line to newspaper circulation, the Dominion reading public preferring Toronto or Hamilton papers, on account of political and national affiliation. Lake Ontario is disagreeably near on the north, but not more so than Rochester, with her journals to flood Buffalo's field on the east. The only outlet is the territory on the south, but even there the Pennsylvania line is soon reached, beyond which readers prefer home newspapers.

Eight cities have populations above 100,000. Their proportionate newspaper circulations stand:

	Morning.	Evening.	Total.
Kansas City	29.28	34.28	63.56
Detroit	21.14	33.14	54.28
Rochester	22.91	21.30	44.21
Providence	7.28	36.44	43.72
Louisville	22.35	18.33	40.68
Washington	9.52	25.77	35.29
St. Paul	22.00	10.00	32.00
Minneapolis	9.14	16.00	25.14

Disadvantageous newspaper fields are Galveston and Key West, where water wastes are on every side; Milwaukee, where Lake Michigan cuts off one-half the field, and Chicago papers well-nigh ruin the remainder; Washington, where almost everybody has interests other than local; and Wilmington, where three uncomfortably near State boundaries are scarcely less deadly in their effect than the deluge of Philadelphia penny newspapers. Galveston and Milwaukee gain, however, from the loyalty of large States.

The city of Erie is, perhaps, more unfortunately located for newspaper enterprise than any other in the Union. Lake Erie wipes out its field on one side, and a range of hills and indifferent railroad communications almost wipe it out on the other side. The boundaries of Ohio on the west and New York on the east are dead-lines to circulation in those directions; and, as if the situation were not sufficiently desperate, the city itself is the apex of a triangle of railways which bring in Cleveland, Pittsburg, and Buffalo newspapers before the ink of the struggling Erie journals is dry. It is not strange, therefore, that the ratio of circulation to population in the city of Erie is the lowest of any in the United States: morning, 6.42; evening, 8.85; total, 15.27.

Never before was newspaper competition so fierce as now. Vast investments are at stake and the best brains are commanded at salaries which, already high, are steadily growing higher. Yet here is the opinion of Mr. George W. Childs:

In my twenty-five years' experience I have never seen a daily newspaper injured by competition. If a paper degenerates, as many have done within my recollection, the cause is always to be found inside, not outside, its own office. I have seen one publisher take another publisher's business, never, though, because of the superior ability of the former, but always because of the marked incompetence of the latter. Daily papers sometimes die of dry-rot, sometimes reach the sheriff's hands through political blunders, internal quarrels, or jealous ambitions; but a paper that is successful, wide awake, and honest can never be injured by competition, however fierce.

Eugene M. Camp.