

News from Home

By M. C. BLACKMAN

THE MOST NOSTALGIC people in the world live in and visit New York City. Hundreds of thousands of residents born elsewhere make monthly, weekly, and even daily visits to the famed newspaper and magazine stands and shops in the Times Square area, to libraries, and to many other sources of information in the metropolis to find out what is going on in their native lands and home towns. Their number is augmented by uncounted thousands among the city's 15,000,000 annual visitors — roughly twice the permanent population. To provide these homesick people with news from home, communications media all over the world spend huge sums and use a surprising number of correspondents for special coverage of happenings in New York City.

The out-of-town newspaper stand recessed under a shelter in front of the Allied Chemical Tower (the old Times Tower) at the south end of Times Square, which purveys dailies from 350 American cities, is operated by Hotaling's News Agency. This unique concern, devoted exclusively to satisfying the home-news hunger of the uprooted, also operates a small shop in the Tower and a much larger one at 142 West 42nd Street, both stocked with foreign-language newspapers and periodicals.

The exact total of customers who patronize these stands is a trade secret. But attendants note that of the hundreds of thousands of people who call each year at the Times Square Information Center, 90 per cent of those who identify themselves as American-born continue around south of it to buy a hometown paper.

It would be possible, of course, for anyone determined to pry a trade secret from the Hotaling agency to take a position nearby from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. and actually count the number of buyers as they arrive continuously in groups of two to six at a time, hour after hour. However, the patronage varies from day to day, from season to season, and from event to event in New York City and elsewhere in the nation.

One observer recently noted that most of the buyers had one characteristic in common. They were not exactly furtive,

but they spoke to the attendant in low tones, transacted their business, and departed in a hurry, as though wishing to avoid being identified as hicks with straw showing in their hair. Typical of one group of patrons was a native of Arkansas now living in New York who bought a Little Rock paper to learn in detail about the primary elections just held in that state. Another group was represented by a Chicagoan attending a convention in New York City who got a hometown paper (the only one on the stand arriving by air on the day of publication) to read a more complete report of his organization's meetings in the metropolis than was available in the New York papers.

The atmosphere and the attitude of patrons are far different in the foreign-

publication shop on West 42nd Street. There, dozens of persons, most of them men, browse all day and part of the night among the labeled compartments of shelves in a sort of dreamy state of recollection, with long-ago-and-far-away expressions on their faces. They skim through a few publications, make a choice, pay at the cashier's desk up front, and depart, their mood seeming to vanish as they do so, perhaps to be revived later as they read in detail their native-land newspapers and magazines.

The statistics that Mr. Hotaling does not consider to be strictly his own business show that the firm regularly sells varying numbers of copies of about 2,000 periodicals and 600 newspapers from fifty foreign countries at prices high enough above the home cost to pay for transportation and provide a modest profit. Periodicals come by ship and arrive a week to a month after publication. Most daily newspapers come by air from England, Germany, France, Italy, and Ireland, the majority of them a day after the date of issue. Hotaling sells 2,500 copies each week of papers published in all six counties of North Ireland



"I must say, that is a mighty original line, Mr. Revere."

M. C. Blackman, now retired, was for a quarter of a century a noted member of the New York *Herald Tribune's* rewrite staff, one of the world's best.

and twenty-six counties of Eire, all of them weeklies except those from Belfast and Dublin. Buyers do not browse; they go directly to the proper shelves, buy, and depart briskly.

The business thrives among the foreign-born and among the foreign-stock population of more than 3 million in the city, chiefly because the foreign-language newspapers published in New York City do not satisfy the yearnings of the transplanted for news of their homelands. The papers published in the city in Greek, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, Italian, Slavonic, and Jewish languages tell readers of ethnic groups what is going on in their communities in the new country and contain some general news, but very little from abroad. They also leave unrepresented some forty other major foreign countries, a fruitful field for the Hotelling agency.

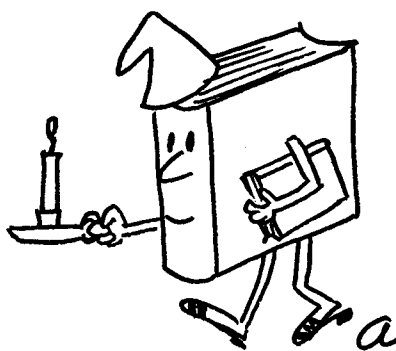
Other sources feeding the hunger in New York City for news from home include the main New York City Public Library and, to a lesser extent, branches in other boroughs; the New York chapters of the alumni associations of nearly all the major universities and colleges in the United States; the ninety-two United Nations missions that have permanent headquarters apart from Consulate General offices; and a general reading room maintained by the U.N. Secretariat for its staff representing the 117 member nations.

Special news stories and articles for foreign communications media are supplied by a horde of correspondents stationed in New York City. The United States Information Agency, which maintains a foreign correspondents' center at 340 East 46th Street, reports it has a list of 566 bona fide users of its services and facilities. This group, including many who send material only by mail, encompasses 200 full members and 150 affiliated members of the Foreign Correspondents Association who file daily news dispatches to newspapers published abroad.

THE president of the association, David Horowitz, correspondent for the Israeli paper *Hayam*, estimated that the members and non-members who write spot news for foreign newspapers file an average of 1,000,000 words a day through Western Union International, Press Wireless, the Radio Corporation of America, and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company's overseas facilities for telephone recording and dictation to manual receivers.

The only breakdown readily available for these communication services was provided by Western Union International (divorced completely from the parent company now), whose wire chief estimated that from 150 to 200 corre-

spondents regularly file through it from 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 words a month to foreign publications. The company also gave examples of the kind of metropolitan area stories reported in detail by correspondents to supplement the general U.N. and other dispatches carried by the regular news agencies from New York City, one of the two major news centers in the United States, the other being Washington. Several Italian correspondents filed to papers in Rome stories on the elections in Newark, across the Hudson River, where the Italian community vote has long been the deciding factor in municipal elections. The W. U. I. wire chief reported that most European nations, although they have few Negroes in their populations, are interested in all racial stories carried by the news agencies, but want special stories by their correspondents—about Negro voting, for example—only when an event affects members of their ethnic communities in this country. Other political stories that interest them, for mysterious reasons, are those concerning the public



careers of some of the Rockefellers. These are currently the brothers Nelson and Winthrop, running respectively as Republican candidates for Governor of New York and Arkansas, and their nephew, John D. Rockefeller IV, who led the Democratic ticket last spring in his race for nomination for the West Virginia House of Delegates.

Western Union reported that about 250,000 words a day are filed from New York City to out-of-town papers at special press rates, but since no special credentials are required, it has no record of the number of correspondents filing.

A great many more words are filed daily through the Bell System's Long Lines division, which keeps no classified records of telephone use. News calls are not distinguishable from others, and the company can only guess that some of the longer-lasting ones must be by correspondents sending news dispatches.

Thus the words flow across the miles, into and out of New York City, attempting to satisfy a never-ending hunger and undying nostalgia for "the latest news from home."

Hollywood Interview

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vited me to his coffee table, puffed on his pipe and gave an eloquent monologue for a half-hour about why a performer of his stature would subject himself to the regimen of a weekly hour on television; then he abruptly dismissed me, too. The interview had ended.

That's how the game is played daily in Hollywood. Performers' attitudes range from outright antagonism toward interviews among such long-established stars as Spencer Tracy, Frank Sinatra, or Doris Day to an eager search for publicity by the young crop of television headliners. Occupying a middle ground are many of the younger stars in Hollywood, who have practicality, a hard-headed business sense, and a confidence in their own ability to cope with any area of questioning that sets them apart from their older contemporaries.

A young, bright, and insouciant actress named Suzanne Pleshette told me: "The Hollywood generation before us deliberately created an entirely different kind of image. They were above and beyond life. They didn't get their clothes soiled. Today, nobody escapes being a fallible human being. The world has changed. So have we. But the public still doesn't want to think of us as intelligent, articulate people who maybe even love our parents. They like to think of us as troubled folk. As a result, we're constantly in the position of giving an intelligent interview and then seeing it distorted or misunderstood. So I've had to ask myself: 'Do I try to present another face or be true to myself and hope it will come out eventually in context?'"

Actress Connie Stevens put it even more succinctly. "These people," she told me, "want a movie star—not a buddy."

As long as the interview system operates the way it does, the chances of a Hollywood writer's probing very deeply into the psyche of a performer are fairly slim. However, the public appetite for news of its Hollywood heroes and heroines is apparently satisfied on a level that can still be reached via the Hollywood interview as its practitioners know it today. Maybe it's better that way.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column One should read: 4 (*Great Expectations*), 8 (*A Moveable Feast*), 15 (*The Caine Mutiny*), 14 (*Lust for Life*), 10 (*The Last Hurrah*), 11 (*Arch of Triumph*), 13 (*A Sentimental Journey*), 12 (*In Dubious Battle*), 1 (*Imperial Woman*), 2 (*Tobacco Road*), 5 (*Magnificent Obsession*), 7 (*The Sound and the Fury*), 6 (*Middlemarch*), 3 (*One of Ours*), 9 (*Random Harvest*)

Please Don't Steal My Reporters

By FRANK B. GILBRETH

DO THEY EVER SHOW on TV any of those movies of *The Front Page* genre, which Hollywood used to make about the newspaper game? A whole generation has matured—or at least it *should* have, if it's ever going to—since newspapermen were portrayed as acute, insouciant wise guys, who as often as not were delightfully stewed to the eyebrows. They wore presscards in the hatbands of their porkpies, called all women either “sweetheart” or “sister,” and liked to holler “stop the press” when they came dashing into the city room with a scoop designed to send a gangster to the Big House or to cause a general headrolling among the crooks in City Hall.

Having duly brought the press to a screeching halt, the Hollywood reporter would put his feet on his desk, light a ciggie, push his porkpie to the back of his head, and start pecking out a story. Meanwhile, pacing restlessly as a caged cat, the boss would be awaiting the first take of the story. The boss, incidentally, was an irascible, cigar-chewing cynic, invariably known as “Chief,” who had an expensive penchant for hurling his telephone through the glass panel of his office door.

Much of that Hollywood portrayal made the real reporter hoot in derision—especially when his Hollywood counterpart would start his story by typing his

own byline. A *real* reporter would no more have had the effrontery to award himself a byline than he would have (to use the second half of one of Rex Stout's imaginative similes) been inclined to tip a subway guard. The byline was (and still is) a bit of largesse bestowed at the whim of the city desk, and it was taboo for a reporter even to hint that one was merited. I remember a certain assistant city editor who would get red in the face if a reporter, when turning in copy, so much as cleared his throat suggestively, or indulged in what Shaw once described as “the modest cough of a minor poet.”

The movies were basically right, though: There *was* a certain amount of glamour and status in being a reporter. A reporter used to be a big wheel among his friends. He knew—or pretended he did—what was happening on the inside. He had cards to the speakeasies and passes to the shows. And one of these days he was going to write the Great American Novel or, at any rate, a short story for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Nowadays, alack, that's not the kind of status that counts. And a diminishing of status may be—and I think it is—the basic reason for the present and alarming shortage of newsmen [see “Where Are Tomorrow's Journalists?” *SR*, Jan. 8].

Most editors I've talked with say they could do a far better job if they could hold onto their present staffs and fill existing vacancies. “There aren't enough good men to produce enough superior daily newspapers,” the *Bulletin* of the American Society of Newspaper Editors complained in its August 1, 1966, issue.

The editors almost unanimously blame the shortage on “low salaries.” I think they're wrong because now, for the first time in the whole history of journalism, newsmen's salaries compare favorably with those of other occupations. And yet the shortage exists today, whereas it never existed back when newsmen were so badly underpaid.

For instance, when I started work as a young reporter for the New York *Herald Tribune* in 1933, I made \$18 a week. Certainly, that was during the Depression. But the point is that the going rate in the *Herald Tribune's* composing room at that time was \$56.52. Statistics of the American Newspaper Guild show that it wasn't until 1952 that—again, for the first time in history—the average experienced reporter began making as much as the average experienced compositor.

Now, reporters are well ahead of the back shop. When the *Herald Tribune* folded, the scale was \$178.60 for experienced reporters and \$149 for experienced printers. The minimum today for experienced reporters on the *Times* and the *News* is \$200, compared to the back-shop scale of \$149.

If there's a culprit in the newsmen-shortage situation, it's the mushrooming (some cynical editors might say toadstooling) public relations profession. In the last twenty years, public relations has lured tens of thousands of men and women away from newsrooms. Public relations pays somewhat better than all but the largest newspapers. But besides the pay, public relations firms dangle the bait of today's type of status: a private office and secretary, expense-account lunches, a golf club membership, posh conventions, and often a company car.

An old wheeze in public relations ranks is that, to be successful, you must treat the public better than your relations. Since part of a public relations job may involve getting stories into or keeping stories out of newspapers, the profession strives to keep on jolly-good terms with editors. But the perpetual raiding of news staffs makes the jolliness unrequited. Getting back to the wheeze, if the relations of public relations people aren't treated any better than editors, then family life must be a twenty-four-hour-nightmare.

I suppose that most public relations executives would hesitate a long time—several light years, at a minimum—before using the word “raid” in connection with their acquiring personnel. So if “raid” is too strong a word, one can always fall back on the rhetoric of the Public Relations Society of America, Inc. In a carefully phrased sentence which could well serve as a model for all public relations writings, the Society's *Occupational Guide* puts it this way: “The pattern generally persists whereby entry is made



“Miss Little, Willie Mays may retire. Come in here and hold my hand.”