

Newspaper Beginnings

My newspaper career began as a carrier boy. We did not use the term newsboy, which was applied to boys who shouted their wares in Chicago and New York. I obtained a route by applying at the Davenport *Daily Leader*. The pay was about \$1.15 a week and the work included evening deliveries for five days and an early Sunday morning chore. Within a few months I had the added duty of carrying papers from the press to the carriers' room, which the circulation manager gave me in order to add 25 cents to my week's wages. He was George W. Davis, a man of great kindness, whose loss I mourned deeply when he was drowned at Black Hawk's Watch Tower while giving his boys a boat ride.

On New Year's Day we carriers distributed calendars to the people on the route. The newspaper furnished the calendars at cost, usually 10 cents apiece. We then rang doorbells and presented them, in hopes of a generous gift. Every one of us knew exactly what a route was good for on New Year's. My Brady-Perry-Main Street hill route was one of the good ones, where a number of customers — including C. A. Ficke — were known to give the boy \$1. There were many

quarters, and quite welcome; I also received a pair of mittens from a kind woman.

The press held my fascinated attention, no less than its big brother of 25 units does today. It was a flat-bed machine, printing from type, and it ground out papers methodically and slowly. Only one Davenport newspaper of that day, the *Republican*, used stereotyped plates on a rotary press. But I did not linger in the pressroom. What lay beyond, in the front office and the editorial room upstairs, stirred my curiosity.

The *Leader* preserved the furnishings of the General Grant period — fixtures of polished walnut, with huge ornate portals through which impressed customers handed their 15-cent want-ads. The editors' desks upstairs were no less antique. They were built like a square piano, with similar legs. All the copy was written by hand except that of the city editor, Sherman W. Searle, who used a typewriter. He wrote practically all the local news at great speed and worked feverishly and for endless hours. I bothered him with questions, and he always responded courteously. He was absorbed in his profession, and I respected him greatly.

I began submitting high school notes and soon was writing my head off. When news items were few, I invented events — that is, I organized debates and even clubs, with the sole object of reporting them. The newspaper printed everything

I wrote. But I didn't like its free silver politics, and its interminable front-page editorials attacking the gas company. I had a conviction that the front page should be devoted solely to news.

That year I offered to write up a Washington's Birthday celebration and was told to go ahead. This was apart from school news that I had been turning in. About a week after my report was published I went to Mr. Searle and asked for my pay. Mr. Searle was visibly shocked. He stared at me, and then said he would confer with the editor. The editor, Joseph E. Halligan, was a tall, broad-shouldered, bearded man who appeared formidable until he began to speak in a high, shaky voice. He conferred with Tom Feeney, the business manager. Finally Mr. Searle asked whether 50 cents would be acceptable. I said it would. He sent me to the business manager with the order, and that gentleman flicked me half a dollar with an expression of great pain.

For a number of weeks I continued writing my high school column. Then I found the Davenport *Republican* more compatible with my admiration of Theodore Roosevelt and what I considered newspaper enterprise. I transferred my talents to the latter and found a ready welcome. The plant was a microcosm of newspaper making. It had an editorial writer of experience and a strong editorial page. The news departments were clearly defined.

Through the kindness of Charles W. Daly, the city editor, I found open to me all sorts of new experiences. And when school vacations came, Daly hired me at \$3 a week. On his personal card he wrote a notice to all whom it might concern that I represented the *Republican*. At my first assignment a bespectacled reporter from another newspaper arrived on his bicycle. I showed him my card, and he smiled and extended his hand to his "colleague." He was Ralph W. Cram of the Davenport *Democrat*.

My graduation from high school took place in February, 1903. A few days before Daly told me he had a job for me. The graduation took place, I believe, on a Friday, and the following Monday at 7 p.m., Daly gave me the telegraph editor's chair. It was a great moment for me, such as can be appreciated only by those to whom newspaper-making is second nature. A few days later a number of my high school pals held a sleigh ride; tooting horns and ringing bells they arrived in front of our lighted newspaper office and shouted for me to join them. I came out and waved them on, and hardly heard the bells receding in the distance as I turned back to the news services. I had broken with adolescence and begun a long, arduous, and always wonderful association with the printing press.

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