Five Decades at the Press

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An Insider Tells His Story of Legendary Editor Louis B. Seltzer and a Lifetime of Working at The Cleveland Press

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Dedication

Ray De Crane (left), editor in chief, and Robert Dewey, publisher of Northern Ohio Business Journal in 1977 (From The Cleveland Press Collection).

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Preface

Ray De Crane, a reporter and editor at The Cleveland Press for 44 years, is particularly qualified to tell the story of The Press and its legendary editor Louis B. Seltzer. De Crane knew first-hand all the editors and writers during a five-decade period (1932-1977) at The Press.

“I was at the paper during its glory years when it was acknowledged as the leading newspaper in the state of Ohio,” says DeCrane. (Time magazine in the 1960s named it one of the top papers in the country because of its devotion to reader and community service.)

For 22 of those 44 years, De Crane was at the center of action, an editor on the City Desk, working with one of the outstanding city editors in the country, Louis L. Clifford.

“Fortunately for me,” adds De Crane, “I left the paper five years before it suffered the common fate of most evening newspapers in the country – killed by television.”

The stories below were written by Ray De Crane in 1998 for The Cleveland Press web site.

Part I: The Seltzer Way

1. The Seltzer Spirit: Boundless Energy, in Touch with Community

Louis B. Seltzer, editor of The Cleveland Press from 1928 to 1966, was a tireless individual. Those half his age would be unable to keep up with his pace. On a typical day, if he was not attending a civic affair at lunchtime, he was giving a speech before a fraternal group, business association, or a neighborhood group. He firmly believed that to be a good editor you had to be in constant touch with the entire community–not just the leaders and the business establishment, but the “little people” as well. The busy Seltzer topped off his day by invariably attending a dinner meeting where, if he was not the speaker, he was the featured guest who would freely mingle with the crowd. With his long work day-which extended into the late hours of the night on most occasions, Seltzer was an early riser. When, as assistant city editor, I reported for work at 6 every morning to get ready for the first edition of the day, I invariably found Mr. Seltzer sitting at the City Desk reading the morning paper.

After several months of this, I became curious about how early Seltzer actually arrived and started to come in a little earlier each day. When I got to arriving by 5:30 and still found Seltzer sitting there, I lost interest in the game and reverted to my 6 a.m. starting time.

2. Seltzer Service: Help the Reader, From Cradle to Grave

Louis Seltzer was proud of the oft-repeated statement that The Press followed its readers “from the cradle to the grave.” Newborns were promptly enrolled in the paper’s Cradle Club, where they regularly received pamphlets on the care and feeding of the infants. There was a teens writer who reported on the accomplishments of those in that age group.

And there was a Golden Age writer who covered meetings of Senior Citizen groups. Couples planning a Golden Wedding celebration were encouraged to come into The Press office, have their picture taken in the photographic studio and then to sit down with a reporter who would prepare a story to be published with the photograph of the couple in the next day’s paper.

Once a year Seltzer would play host at a dinner party for all the people in the city who celebrated a golden wedding in the last year. They would enjoy a fine meal, wear paper party hats, have a piece of a giant wedding cake, and hear Editor Seltzer praise them for being role models in the community. For many of the attendees it was their first time in the ballroom of a big hotel.

At the end of one’s life, The Press was happy to carry a glowing obituary about the individual: a man could be noted for being an excellent handyman who frequently came to his neighbor’s assistance in fixing things,” and the women were cited for being “an outstanding mother and an excellent cook and seamstress.”

3. Seltzer Power: Why He Was Called "Kingmaker"

A diminutive man — about five foot, eight, and weighing no more than 140 pounds – Louis B. Seltzer was truly a giant in the Northern Ohio area. Because of his mighty power and influence, he was regarded as a “king maker” by the politicians and business establishment during many of his 38 years as Editor of The Press (1928-1966).

Politicians in the Greater Cleveland area would not consider entering a race for elective office without first calling upon “Louie Seltzer” – as he was known to everyone — in an attempt to get a promise of his editorial endorsement for the job. If they could not get a commitment of an endorsement, they would strive for at least a promise that The Press would be neutral in the race and not actively oppose him. Unsuccessful in either attempt, they would wisely refuse to run for the office.

It was widely rumored in the Cleveland area that there was an underground tunnel from City Hall to The Cleveland Press so that an uncertain mayor of the city could quietly and privately confer with Louie for advice and guidance on a major issue. Despite the tremendous influence and power he enjoyed, Seltzer never abused that authority. He truly believed that in every move his paper made, his overriding concern was the best interest of the city.

In 1941, a year when neither Republican nor Democratic leaders seemed to be developing a strong candidate for mayor, Seltzer looked over the field and decided that a then Common Pleas judge would make an outstanding mayor.

Well before the primaries for mayor, The Press wrote many stories about the judge, his impeccable credentials, sound decisions, judicial temperament, unquestioned integrity, and with it all, the promise of becoming a great mayor.

So successful was the build-up that Frank J. Lausche entered the mayoral race and was easily elected. Following a highly successful tenure as mayor, Lausche became Ohio governor and later U.S. Senator.

In 1953, Seltzer again proved his ability as a “king maker.” Again, there was a dearth of mayoralty candidates, or so the editor thought, and he had his eye on a virtual unknown, Anthony J. Celebrezze. Although Cleveland is a diverse ethnic community, many of The Press’ top writers expressed the fear that the city was not yet ready for an Italian mayor.

Undeterred, Seltzer went forward with his conviction, built up Celebrezze as ideal mayoralty material and saw him become an easy winner. In his fifth term as mayor, Celebrezze was selected by President John F. Kennedy as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Later Celebrezze became a federal judge.

4. Seltzer Style: Impeccable Dress, but Down-to-Earth Relations with Staff

Editor Seltzer was a sartorial perfectionist. Staff writers frequently commented how he would wear a different suit every day and often went longer than a month before wearing a suit a second time. A trademark of his was his flowing breast pocket kerchief. Invariably at holiday staff parties when the writers would put on skits, one of them would make a dramatic stage entrance with a breast pocket handkerchief flowing halfway down to his waist. Editor Seltzer would lead in the howls.

The boss wanted to know everything about his staff members. If there was sickness in the family, he wanted to know about it. If a new baby was expected, he wanted to be the first to hear about it. At Christmas time the children of every staff member up to the age of about 18 would receive a gift from Seltzer and his wife.

There was the time when the medical writer for the paper was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Shortly after the diagnosis the writer was unable to come to work anymore. Seltzer sent the writer, his wife and their two children to Arizona for a month, paying all their expenses. The ailing staff member was also kept on the payroll at full salary until his death more than a year later.

The boss was not an ivory tower editor. He loved being in the city room where the action was. When a big story was unfolding, he was always to be found lingering around the city desk or the national news editor’s desk to observe the action first hand.

Even on a normal day he would sit at an empty desk in the city room, pull up a typewriter and pound away, preparing an editorial or one of his highly regarded LBS pieces.

This was before the days of computers and word processors. Like many newspapermen of his day, Seltzer never learned touch typing. He would sit before a Royal or Underwood typewriter and use the two finger, hunt-and-peck system and go as fast as most touch typists.

Although most of the writers and sub editors adopted rolled-up shirt sleeves as the dress of the day, Seltzer was never seen around the city room minus his suit coat.

This must have irritated Frank Gibbons, a six-foot five, 250-pound sports writer, when the properly dressed

editor was standing amidst a group of reporters joking and kibitzing. Gibbons picked up the 140-pound Seltzer, up-ended him, and lowered him into a tall, square wiremesh waste basket partially filled with discarded newspapers. One who on rare occasions could swear like an infantry soldier, Seltzer issued an appropriate epithet and then joined in the hilarious laughter.

On those rare occasions when he had an open schedule at lunchtime, Seltzer would invite a small group of sub-editors to have lunch with him at the Union Club, the elite club for the town's movers and shakers. While he would encourage his invited staff members to order a steak or prime rib, he would always order a vegetable plate for himself. I can't recall ever seeing the man eat a piece of meat.

Following dessert he would order the waiter to bring a box of fine cigars to the table. Invariably, he would direct Managing Editor Harding Christ, an inveterate cigar smoker, to take the cigar box and its remaining contents to Christ's office.

5. Marion Seltzer: Guardian of Good Taste

Marion Seltzer, the loving wife of Editor Seltzer, probably had a bigger impact on the content of The Press than even she realized. All it took was a comment from the editor at the morning staff meeting that Marion didn't like the tone or some of the language used in a story of the previous day's paper, for all those in attendance to make a mental note.

From that moment on, during the editing of stories the various editors would hesitate and think, "Would Marion approve of this?" If there was any uncertainty, the language would be changed.

If Mrs. Seltzer were alive today, I often wonder what she would think of the nudity and foul language which is so prevalent today.

Part II: Other Stories to Tell

1. A Visit to Ninth & Rockwell: What it was Like to Work at the Press' Longtime Home

(The final home of The Cleveland Press was at East Ninth and Lakeside, which The Press occupied from 1959 until the paper demise in 1982. Before that, for 56 years, The Cleveland Press was located two blocks south on East Ninth St. at Rockwell Ave. Below, Ray De Crane tells what life, work and Press people were like at that location.)

The Cleveland Press building at the corner of E. Ninth St. and Rockwell Ave. was a four-story red brick structure that looked more like a factory than a newspaper office. The Editorial Department was on the fourth floor.

As you stepped off the elevator, the first office on your left was occupied by John W. (Jack) Raper. Jack was a Will Rogers type of humorist who had a daily column that appeared on the Editorial Page.

Instead of a half-column head shot of Jack appearing in his column (as was the style for most personalized columns), Jack's column bore a standing caricature of him with a strand of hay protruding from his mouth; in other words, a typical "hayseed."

In short, pithy paragraphs he highlighted the news of the day in a fashion that poked fun at politicians, movers and shakers, and otherwise pompous individuals. His trademark was his final item in the column. It invariably was a direct quote from a politician, be he local or the Washington variety, that was so patently untrue or exaggerated that it was at the point of being ridiculous. At the left of the quote was inserted an artist-drawn black bull. Jack used small, medium and large bulls.

He was careful to use the large bulls infrequently, so that they produced a hilarious belly-laugh for the reader when they did appear.

Next to Raper's office was the den of David Dietz, the Science Editor. Although located in Cleveland, Dietz wrote science pieces for the entire Scripps-Howard chain of papers. He was in his heyday at the time of the discovery of the atomic bomb. He would write pieces on the tremendous power of atomic energy that could be understood by the non-scientific mind. Great medical discoveries and advances were also his forte, although later The Press developed its own medical writer.

Editor Seltzer's office was in the left-front corner of the fourth floor. In a small outer office sat Ralph Shurtleff, Seltzer's personal secretary. The editor's office was not particularly large and certainly not pretentious. Seltzer sat behind a metal desk in a non-leather swivel chair.

The office was ringed with plain, wooden chairs where Norman Shaw, associate editor; Harding Christ, managing editor; Louis Clifford, city editor; Dean Wilder, news editor; the telegraph editor, and occasionally the society and sports editors would sit at the staff meeting, which began every morning promptly at 8 a.m.

In turn the various editors would report to the editor on the important stories that were being developed for the day and which articles would get the headline display. After hearing from all the sub editors, Seltzer would make his own input and suggestions. Sometimes he would comment, mostly complimentarily but occasionally critically, on some stories that may have appeared in the previous day's paper.

The morning staff meeting was usually over in 15 to 20 minutes, never lasting more than a half-hour, since the many editors had to get back to their desks to prepare for the first edition.

The wide-open massive city room was down the hall from the editor's office. Here was found the factory atmosphere. The windows on the north side of the city room did not slide up or down. They were pushed open by a metal rod which had slots in it at the end you held in your hand.

You inserted the slot in the bottom metal frame of the window to hold open the window as much, or little, as weather conditions dictated. Of course you could not have window screens in such push-open windows. So, in summertime, dust and dirt, plus flies, mosquitoes and moths had easy entry.

Air conditioning was unheard of in the old building. In preparation for summer, the janitorial staff would mount rotating fans on shelves about eight-feet high and scattered throughout the city room.

There were spittoons at the city desk, the horseshoe-shaped copy Desk, and on the floor beside the metal desks of all the male staff writers. This must have been a throwback to earlier days when newspapermen chewed tobacco. In the '30s and later years, most of the reporters smoked cigarettes.

They rarely discarded their burned cigarettes into the spittoons, rather tossing them on the wood floor when they were finished with them. Sometimes the burning cigarettes were crushed out by the heel of the shoe, but mostly they were just tossed on the floor and left to burn themselves out. The wood floor, of course, was covered by cigarette burns.

The three-man city desk was near the middle of the open city room. Desks of the reporters and rewrite men surrounded the city desk. To the left of the city desk was the old-fashioned telephone switchboard staffed, usually, by two telephone operators. When a call would come in for the city desk, instead of ringing one of the city desk phones, the operator would just call "City Desk" and one of the three city desk editors would pick up the call. Usually it would be from one of the "beat reporters" — police beat, City Hall, Criminal Courts or Federal Court — calling in with a story. The city desk man would look around the city room looking for a rewrite man or reporter who was available and just call out his name. The newsman called would pick up his phone and the operator would immediately transfer the call to him.

There would be those occasions when a beat reporter or a reporter out on a working story would want immediate contact and he would say to the telephone operator, “City Desk in a hurry.” Instantly one of the triumvirate would stop what he was doing and pick up the call.

It was at those moments when all eyes in the city room would turn to the City Desk to see what was going on. Usually the response to the call was a cry out by the city editor to a reporter and a photographer to “go in a hurry.” Those are the magic words in a newspaper office that make this type of work so exciting. Everyone recognizes that a major breaking story is underway, be it a three-alarm or higher fire, shooting, murder, train wreck or major accident.

The same type of excitement is generated when five quick bells are sounded by the UPI (United Press International) machines, which furnished regional, national and international news. It means a FLASH is coming. It commands immediate attention. It’s strange how in an otherwise noisy city room with the clattering of so many typewriters and the sounds of 50 or more people talking at once, those five bells heralding a FLASH can be heard across the room and create utmost silence.

Reporters, writers and editors get up from their desks to huddle around the UPI machine to see what major news is unfolding. The purpose of the flash is to give editors the opportunity to stop the presses — if a press run is on — and to prepare to replate the front page or to prepare for an EXTRA on the important story that is developing.

Memorable FLASHES have been:

- President Kennedy is shot.
- Hitler’s army invades Poland.
- Allied invasion of Europe begins.
- Massive bomb goes off in World Trade Center.
- Bombs destroy Oklahoma City federal building.

Next to the city desk is the copy desk. Stories come here from either of two sources — the city desk, where its editors have already edited copy written by local writers, or the telegraph editor who is submitting stories removed from the UPI machines.

Sitting in the inside center of the horseshoe-shaped copy desk is the slot man. Stories of a major nature are passed along to the news editor who is responsible for designing and selecting Page One stories. Other stories which will go on inside pages are tossed by the slot man to one of the copy readers who sit on the periphery of the copy desk. The slot man has already marked the copy with the number of the headline he wants. The copy reader writes the headline, further edits and if necessary “trims” or shortens the story.

When his job is done he passes the story — with headline attached -back to the slot man who then sends the story in a pneumatic tube to the composing room where it is set in type. At least that is the way newspapering was done in the E. Ninth Rockwell building of The Press before the advent of computers, which completely eliminated the setting of type.

In the No. 1 seat on the outer periphery of the copy desk sat the Telegraph Editor. He handles all of the out-of-

town, out-of-state and out-of-the-country copy which is transmitted by UPI machines — a large type of electric typewriter which receives stories from other UPI machines scattered anyplace in the world. In his unique position on the copy desk, the Telegraph Editor was able to see any visitor entering the city room and walking down the aisle toward the city desk.

Because of the free-wheeling, easy-going atmosphere of the Seltzer newspaper room and the Telegraph Editor's familiarity with the UPI system of ringing bells prior to the announcement of a major news story, the Telegraph Editor had a maintenance man install an electric buzzer under the editor's desk.

The approach down the aisle of an attractive female visitor merited a single buzz from the editor. None of the working reporters paid much attention to a one-buzz. But when it got up to the higher range and approached four bells — which meant, "Stop whatever you're doing and look; she's gorgeous," — everybody in the city room complied. I don't remember the name of the Telegraph Editor who had the buzzer installed, but it remained in operation for many years until The Press moved to its new building in 1959.

I don't know if it was because of the more sedate atmosphere in the new building, if by that time there was a new Telegraph Editor, or maybe someone just forgot, but there was no such buzzer in the new building.

Also in the new building the editor and the business manager had identical ornate offices on opposite sides of the second floor. Instead of the morning staff meetings being held in the editor's office, the new building had an ample conference room with a long table around which a dozen or more of the attendees could comfortably sit. Following the staff meeting the conference room was used by reporters and sub editors who wished more privacy when conducting interviews.

Seltzer never knew — or at least pretended not to know — that the conference room was used every Saturday afternoon by the reporters and photographers for a poker game.

2. Every Paper has its Characters; the Press was no Exception

(Newsmen of “Front Page” legend kept a bottle of liquor in a desk drawer. Some indulged more than others. Below, Ray De Crane recalls some of the memorable imbibers on The Press staff.)

George Davis was the drama and movie critic during the ’30s and early ’40s. He had a desk which was next to a window overlooking Rockwell Avenue. George was the only staff member who had a safe next to his desk. The only “valuables” in George’s safe were his liquor bottles.

One night while working on a review of an opening night play, George felt the need of another drink — he already had several. He put a water glass on his desk and then opened his safe. Unfortunately, none of the bottles in the safe contained much liquor. As George emptied the meager contents of a bottle into his glass, he tossed the empty bottle out the window where it smashed on the Rockwell Avenue sidewalk four floors below. He proceeded to empty one bottle after another — it making no difference if it contained bourbon, gin, scotch or vodka. Again, as each bottle was emptied, it went out the window. When the glass contained enough for him, the critic closed the window and the safe, then emptied his glass.

He liked to work at his typewriter in his stocking feet. So George took off his shoes. As he walked to the men’s room — a considerable distance from his desk — George carried several newspapers. With each step, he positioned a page of the newspaper down in front of him on the floor. He made several round trips on the paper-covered wood floor before completing his review. Fortunately, no one was walking along the sidewalk that night. At least there were no reports of anyone being hit by falling bottles.

Another veteran newspaperman gained entrance to Associate Editor Norman Shaw’s doghouse by over-indulgence. Shaw didn’t want to fire him; because of the man’s long tenure at the paper, he would have been entitled to a year’s salary as severance pay under the Guild contract. Instead, Shaw instructed the city desk to give the offender no assignments and nothing to rewrite, hoping that he would quit.

The veteran outsmarted Shaw. He came to work every morning with a couple of books. He spent the entire working day reading books, taking an hour off for lunch. After a few weeks, Shaw fired him and the offender collected his year’s severance pay. Byron Filkins, a photographer, who if he were wearing elevator shoes might have been five feet tall, was another Press character who had a drinking problem.

One day he was sent to a suburban high school to take a picture. Thinking it would improve his picture, Filkins mounted a step ladder to get elevation for his group picture. Unfortunately, in his stupor, he fell from the ladder, to the amusement of the high school students.

Outraged, the principal of the school telephoned Seltzer, informed the editor of the incident and demanded the photographer be fired. Seltzer reluctantly complied when “Fiddles” returned to the office.

Instead of going home — or to a bar — Filkins crossed E. Ninth Street and went directly to the office of the Diocese of Cleveland where he asked to see Bishop McFadden. The photograher knew the bishop because of the many times he had photographed him at ceremonial occasions at St. John’s Cathedral, a short block from The Press at E. Ninth Street and Superior Avenue.

Bishop McFadden was amused by the photographer because of the many times Filkins used to call out, “Hey, Bish, look this way,” to get a better shot during processions into the Cathedral. Although not a Catholic, Filkins asked the bishop to give him the “pledge” so he would stop drinking. As soon as it was administered, Filkins said, “Now do me a favor. Please call Louie Seltzer and tell him to give me back my job.” A friend of both Seltzer and the photographer, the bishop called Seltzer and then happily told Filkins to go back to work. Filkins never had a drink after that. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous and maintained his sobriety until the day of death many years later.

Always borrowing money during his drinking days, Filkins started to save money and delighted in showing anyone who asked a big roll of $20 bills tightly wrapped by a rubber band. It became his security blanket. Whenever he was tempted to have a drink, he would reach into his pocket and pull out that wad of bills and realize he never had that during his drinking days.

3. Why and How a Newspaper Union Got Started - At the Cleveland Press

The American Newspaper Guild, the union for newspaper reporters and editors, had its beginnings in the editorial office of The Cleveland Press in the 1930s.

Publishers and newspaper owners only had themselves to blame. Pay for news people was pathetic. For example, copy boys — the traditional entry position for aspiring reporters – were paid $15 for a 40-hour week. That's a starvation wage of 37 1/2 cents an hour.

Two women telephone operators who staffed the switchboard in the city room were off duty from 5 p.m. Saturday until 5 p.m. Sunday, but calls had to be handled in the city room on a 24-hour basis. The solution was to break up the 24-hour period into three eight-hour shifts to be handled by copy boys. For these so-called "dog watch" shifts, the copy boys were paid an additional $2. That's 25 cents an hour. And that was overtime work. The copy boys had already worked their 40 hours for the week. There was a sufficient number of copy boys that most would get a "dog watch" shift only once a month.

One copy boy, however — married at age 20 and only earning $17.50 a week — was so desperate to earn extra money that he volunteered to work the 5 p.m. Saturday to 2 a.m. Sunday shift every week.

He worked a regular eight-hour shift on Saturday and then remained for an additional eight hours, receiving 25 cents an hour for his extra time. Reporters with three or more years of experience — so-called journeymen — often were paid $20 to $25 a week in the early 1930s. It is no wonder, then, that there was a massive turnout in 1933 when veteran writers Robert Bordner and Garland Ashcraft called a meeting in The Press city room to discuss forming a union.

Even though many of the writers were receiving a lesser wage than the City of Cleveland was paying its garbage collectors and street sweepers, there was a reluctance on the part of many in attendance to join, or form, anything called a union. After much debate, it was decided to call any newly formed organization the Cleveland Editorial Employees Association.

Within months it became known as the Cleveland Newspaper Guild and by the end of the year it was recognized as Local No. 1 of the American Newspaper Guild. In Cleveland the first Newspaper Guild contract was signed

with the Cleveland News, the afternoon competition of The Press, in 1934. It provided for a $45 weekly minimum for journeymen reporters with at least three years' experience.

Many Cleveland News reporters saw their wages doubled over night. John Rees, a veteran police reporter for the News, celebrated when his income skyrocketed from $20 to $45 a week.

Meanwhile, at The Press, Editor Seltzer was still keeping a tight lid on the payroll. His standard merit increase was $2.50 and that only came after what seemed like months of negotiation.

Reporters seeking a raise in pay first had to call on Seltzer's secretary, Ralph Shurtleff, and request permission to see the editor. Hearing the reason for the visit, Shurtleff would tell the staff member to wait on the bench in the hall, outside the editor's office, until called. There, every passing reporter on his way to the elevator to leave the building would see the staff member on the bench and would be certain what he was waiting to discuss.

Once called into the inner sanctum, the reporter would make his memorized speech for more money only to hear Seltzer say he needed more time to study the situation, ending the session with the comment, "See me next Tuesday." Unfailingly, the reporter would be back in the editor's office the next Tuesday, only once more to have the session ended with the refrain, "See me next Tuesday."

This would seem to go on for months before the $2.50 would finally be granted, by which time the reporter felt he would soon have to start negotiating all over again.

The "Tuesday" refrain became so familiar around the office that when skits were put on by staff members at holiday parties, without fail some "actor" would mouth a "See me Tuesday" comment to the accompaniment of loud guffaws from the audience.

In 1936, two years after the News contract, a contract was signed between The Press and the Newspaper Guild. The same $45 weekly minimum was established. One journeyman reporter then making $25 a week was dismissed. Management felt he was not worth an extra $20 a week. Among other provisions, the contract called for an eight-hour day, 40-hour week.

The time came (I'm not certain of the year) when U.S. Labor Department agents came to The Press and privately interviewed staff members on a no-name basis to see if The Press was violating the Fair Labor Standards Act by failing to pay time and a half wages for overtime worked. Fearful of jeopardizing their jobs, many staffers denied that was the common practice. Nevertheless, shortly after, The Press started to pay 1 1/2 times for overtime and in later contracts with the Guild an extra 10 percent was guaranteed for night shifts and for holiday work.

Editor Seltzer often times declared to staff members that if he were a working newspaperman himself, he would be a member of the Guild. Because future contracts with the Newspaper Guild provided for salary increases or increasingly higher minimum salaries for certain jobs, merit increases became a rarity on the paper. Perhaps Seltzer's tight-fisted approach on salaries was a reflection of tight budgetary restrictions imposed on him by Scripps-Howard.

During World War II, I was named Labor Editor of the paper. Part of my assignment was to cover the weekly

meetings of the AFL and CIO central bodies and then to return to the office and write my story on the meeting and leave it in the city editor's mail box for publication in the next day's paper.
Those were overtime hours which were reimbursed at the time and a half rate. One of the labor groups met on the first and third Wednesday of the month, the other on the second and fourth Wednesday. I hated those four months when there were five Wednesdays. No labor meeting that night meant I earned less money that week.

One day after the war, Norman Shaw, associate editor, called me over to the desk of Harding Christ, managing editor, to tell me that I was being promoted to assistant city editor. I was to get a $3 weekly increase, he told me. "What about the overtime pay I will be losing?" I asked. "Overtime belongs with the job, not the individual," he told me.

"When I go home I'm going to have a hard time convincing my wife that I got a promotion when I tell her I will be making less money," I said. The raise was increased to $5 a week. But the promotion still cost me money. My successor as Labor Editor was Tom Boardman, who later succeeded Louis Seltzer as editor of The Press.

4. Ray De Crane Tells of His Early Years at the Press - Starting at Age 10 - and How He Learned the Ropes as a Reporter on the Police Beat

It seems to me that I had been working at The Press almost all my working life. My introduction to the newspaper business came in 1924 when I was only 10 years old. I bought my first newspaper route from a boy who was giving it up after many years of delivering papers. I suppose it was the going price at that time but I paid the departing carrier five cents for each of the customers on his route. It took me a couple of weeks to pay off my debt to my mother, but after that I was a young entrepreneur.

By signing up new customers to win prizes in frequent circulation contests and by aggressively signing up people moving into the neighborhood I expanded my route to 110 customers. My route man who delivered the papers to me told me I had the second or third biggest route in the City of Cleveland. He didn't know but part of my business. In addition to the 110 Press customers I also delivered 50 Waechter und Anzeiger papers to my German- reading cutomers.

And that was just my afternoon business. In the morning I delivered the Plain Dealer on the same street where I had my Press route and accounted for another 100 papers. When I finished my route about 6 a.m. I went over to Berea Road and Madison Avenue where another bundle of Plain Dealers was waiting for me.

There was a street car stop at the intersection and when the car Stopped, several passengers would raise a window and pass out coins tome, after which I would hand them a newspaper.

My many business activities continued following the stock market crash of 1929 and the depression years of the early 1930s. For part of that period I was bringing home more money to my Mom than my Dad was earning as a machinist. When I graduated from high school in 1932, The Press wanted to break up my over-size route into three smaller routes. I agreed on one condition — The Press give me a full-time job in the circulation department. They agreed and I sold off all my routes.

When summer ended I started my freshman year at John Carroll University in Cleveland. Again I negotiated a deal with The Press and the circulation manager agreed to let me work a three-hour night shift while I was

in school. I entered John Carroll, taking a pre-med course, thinking that I was going to be either a doctor or a newspaperman.

The next summer, as I finished my freshman year in college, I returned to The Press again to work full-time in the circulation department. I may have been a good businessman, but realist I was not. This was prior to the days of grants and student loans from the Government. In appraising my situation I was forced to admit that it was impractical for me to expect my family to pay my tuition for another three years of college, to say nothing of the additional years to become a doctor.

I started to college thinking I would be either a doctor or a newspaperman. I decided on journalism as a career.

I told the circulation manager of my decision and asked him if he would help me get into the editorial department. He immediately took me up to Mr. Seltzer's office. Upon hearing my story, the editor said I would start working the next day as a copy boy.

After a year's service as a copy boy, I was transferred to the library where newspaper clippings and photographs are filed away for future reference. In newspaper parlance the library is known as the morgue. I hated the tedious work in the morgue. My big day after almost a year there came when Norman Shaw, then city editor, came to me and asked if I would like to start work the next day as a police reporter. I was overjoyed.

At The Press, at least, work as a police reporter was the first step in becoming a full-fledged reporter.

In the press room at Central Police Station, there was a speaker on the wall that carried all police radio calls and all fire alarm signals. When the police radio dispatcher sent a detective car or a zone car to a reported robbery, or a shooting, and giving a location, the police reporter would instantly go to work.

Checking a "criss cross," a telephone book which lists phone numbers by address rather than by name, the reporter would immediately call the scene and start to get the information even before the arrival of the police. When the radio call was a report of a bank robbery with the bank being named, different tactics were employed. The bank would be directly called and the person answering the phone would be asked if there had been a robbery. Most of the time the reporter would be told that it was a false alarm, that the alarm button had been accidentally set off.

Just to be on the safe side, the police reporter would then ask, "You don't have a gun to your head as you give that answer, do you?" This was done because there was a chance the robber was still in the bank.

In the case of fire alarms — and every alarm in the city would be heard in the press room — the reporter would count the number of bells being sounded. There would be no introduction, no conversation, just the sounding of bells. It would go like this:

Four bells (hesitation), seven bells (hesitation), one-bell (hesitation), five bells. That's 4715. The reporter would pull out a card file drawer listing by number the location of every fire alarm corner box in the city. The card for 4715, for example, would show E. 45th St. and Superior Ave. The card would also list the number and locations of the pieces of fire equipment which would respond.

The reporter would again go to work on the criss-cross and get phone numbers in the area. “There’s a fire call in your area,” he would say. “Do you see any fire equipment yet?” “Can you tell if it’s a working fire?” “What’s burning — house, garage, office building?”

In this way the reporter would obtain enough information to determine if he should alert the city editor, just leave the card out as a reminder to call the battalion chief when he returned to headquarters to get details on the fire, or upon learning that it was a false alarm just forget the incident and return the card to the file drawer.

Another type of fire alarm would command frenzied immediate attention. That alarm would come in like this: Slow tolling 1-2-3, pause 1-2-3, pause 1-2-3. Then the more rapid 4715 sound.

This is no ordinary fire, you would know. It’s a three-alarm fire. No working the criss-cross on this one. You immediately call the city desk and notify them of the three-alarm fire. Usually they will assign a reporter and photographer to go instantly to the fire scene.

Police reporters working the night shift have to operate differently and they, therefore, learn the ropes much faster. There is no one staffing the city desk at night. No one for the police reporter to call with a story, to have the city editor, or one of his assistants, turn the call over to a rewrite man to have the story prepared for the paper.

The night police reporter is on his own. He investigates the story himself, gathers all the information, and then writes the story. Not in the form in which it will appear in the paper but in the form of a “Memo to the city desk.”

In that way the first man on the city desk in the morning receives all the “memos” from the overnight police reporters and decides what is to be done with them. Some may be so trivial as to be discarded. Others may require more follow-up work before a story is to be written. Still other memos might be grouped together with other similar stories, such as putting several auto accident stories into a single story.

Of course, after a few months of writing “memos to the city editor,” the ambitious police reporter realizes that if wants to gain the attention of the city editor, he should try to write an occasional feature story or a news story as if it were being written for the paper.

Then, of course, what a great thrill it is for the young cub reporter if his story should appear in the paper exactly as he had written it, or at least with only minor changes. The only thing better would be if the city editor would put the reporter’s name on it. A by-line story for the young is truly to be envied.

In my days at The Press I worked through the ranks from police reporter, Criminal Courts reporter, Federal Court reporter, before being brought into the office as general assignment reporter, and then promoted to Labor Editor.

Then, when I was named assistant city editor and was assigned to the early morning shift starting at 6 a.m., I was the one awakened during the night by the police reporter telling me of a major fire, a murder, a spectacular accident, or other major event. It was then my responsibility to determine if I should awaken a reporter and photographer to send them out on the story. They, of course, would start to receive overtime pay. I would try to go

back to sleep until my regular wake-up call at 4:30 a.m. But I would have the satisfaction of knowing that I would have a fresh major story to start the day’s activity.

5. Biography of Ray De Crane

Ray De Crane was a reporter and editor at The Cleveland Press for 44 years, from June, 1932 to March, 1977.

Starting as an 18-year-old copy boy in 1933, De Crane served as a police reporter, Criminal Courts reporter, and Federal Beat reporter (responsible for covering not only Federal District Court but also all the U.S. Government agencies in Cleveland, including Internal Revenue). He became Labor Editor in 1941.

For 22 years, from 1944 to 1966, De Crane was Assistant City Editor, working with one of the outstanding city editors in the country, Louis L. Clifford. For his last 11 years, he was Business Editor, and he retired from The Press in 1977.

After leaving The Press he got into banking and became a financial consultant specializing in retirement planning. He retired from his second career in 1986, and now lives in Westlake.