Essay associated with oral history tape of Mr. J. (Hattah, undertaker).

The Newcastle Herald Newspaper

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Open For Debate

Australian History

Wednesdays

The Newcastle Herald dates from 1876 when two earlier newspapers combined successfully to produce a daily newspaper which has continued unswelt and has had many refinements and improvements made to its pages and has attempted to keep in tune with the needs of the community.

Printing began in the colony of New South Wales with 'The Sydney Gazette and the N.S.W. Advertiser' of 1803; a semi-government publication communicating official and general information but subject to censorship. Governor Bligh was rather sensitive to criticism in the press and wanted to impose licensing and stamp duty on the press but was unsuccessful.

In the 1830s newspapers went on to develop widely and in 1840 the Sydney Herald began a daily publication which continues today. The small populations of long distances apart had created a very large number of papers with low circulation and a high price on a scale unlike other countries. Four county newspapers in 1849 in New South Wales became at least twenty by 1859. The collection of accounts had always been difficult and the system of restrictive practices through newsagents began as early as the 1860s. Another feature was rivalry between the provincial city and its neighbouring capital city such as between Melbourne and Geelong.

The leading paper in the Hunter Valley in the first place was the Martin's Mercury.

from the 1850's onwards. It became a daily in 1894. It was not until the 1900s that Newcastle could rival Maitland when the coal production, export and growth in population put it ahead. Even the first Newcastle paper 'The Newcastle Telegraph' of 1855 was soon absorbed by the Northern Times of Maitland. Many papers were launched in Newcastle and strangely 'The Newcastle Pilot' became the first daily to be published outside Sydney in 1874.

Two papers have links with the Newcastle Herald. The earlier one, from 1858, called 'The Newcastle Chronicle and Hunter River District News' was founded by John Sweet with a small capital of £100 and a hand printing press. The other was the 'Miners Advocate' founded in 1873 and owned by Sweet's father-in-law, James Fletcher. The two amalgamated and formed the 'Newcastle Morning Herald' in 1876. The Miners Advocate as the name suggests began with vigorous support for the workers' rights. A successful daily paper emerged in the Herald

Late on James Fletcher sold, in 1889, to a syndicate of four persons namely Berkeley, Johnson, Palmer and Fulbeet. Late Palmer sold out. A limited company was formed in 1908 and went on to be controlled exclusively by the Berkeley and Johnson families.

Mr. Sydney Womage was to become prominent in the future of the paper though the Berkeleys. He had become as of their adopted sons from their neighbouring and became , as the Berkeley estate, as

5. Robin Walker, The Newspaper Press... p 169
6. Ibid
residency benefiting of their shares in the Herald in 193
Wansey left and settled in Bermuda.

Next the company, John Fairfax Ltd, became
interested in the paper and in the acquisition of
shares. By then the Newcastle Herald was shareholder in
recently set up television channel NBN 3.

Farfanoff offered to buy out the Johnson shares but
this required approval from the Berkeley-Wansey
estate 20 representatives flew to Bermuda to
approach Mr Wansey who approved of Johnson’s
selling out.

At the same time the Perez Consolidated Press
Group was interested and had made similar approaches
to Wansey who had not been forthcoming but Fairfax
feared that he might be swayed. Fairfax responded
covered this by returning to Bermuda to
obtain a legally binding agreement from Wanscy to
secure a takeover. Another matter was the
links with television and the difficulties that
drove when outside interests, namely, of Fairfax Ltd,
became involved in ownership that was restricted
to local interests. The problem was got
round by these local interests going to Wanscy
together with arrangements which hardly
supported the spirit of the restrictions of ownership.
Wanscy retired and took up as chairman.

The time went on the widowed Mrs Wanscy,
in 1977, gave Fairfax total ownership of the Herald.
By 1979 the Herald was the most technologically
advanced paper in Australia after two years of
changeover to the Harris computerised production
system. The afternoon Daily, The Newcastle
Sun was discontinued in 1980 having been
acquired in 1936. Other provincial newspapers have continued to be acquired by the Herald.

Special commemorative editions have been published in 1933, (the 75th anniversary) 1958, 1966 and in 1983 to name a few.

The 1933 was a twenty-four page edition and wrote of one Hoe press and production of a 24 page paper at the time of 36,000 copies an hour, sorted into bundles of 50. A new development was the making of half tone blocks and a process engraving plant that had been installed and the employment of a photographer.

In the 1966 historical survey edition mention is made of two Hoe presses having speeded up production. Prior to the turn of the century linotype and rotogravure printing presses and a lettered typebed that casts a line of type were reported as producing 7,000 an hour.

This contrasts well the latest printing feature obtained highlights.

Despite advances the paper has declined in size and circulation if its advertising campaigns and associated competitions are any indicators of a problem. There should be little excuse for problems or short changing when the high standard and competence of the Fairfax company is taken into account. The paper has been able to respond to consumer demands but some attempts are being made to be innovative and maintain a good standard of reporting of more of local issues in keeping with growing importance of these issues and their unique nature.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


James Edward Alfred Hattam, retired of 27 Merewether Street, Merewether. Born at Carrington and later moved to Wickham. Attended school and when 14 years secured work with the Daily Guardian. The branch office was at Scottish House now the T and G Building on the corner of Hunter and Watt Streets. His task was to meet the half-past six Sydney train at Newcastle station to collect the Sydney newspapers for distribution to agents.

He transferred to the Newcastle Sun.

1935 transferred to Newcastle Morning Herald building in Bolton Street.

His earlier clerical work in the office of the Daily Guardian. He remained alone in the office while the staff were out on business in the district. There was a manager Mr Sharp and a reporter.

Clerical Work with the Sun earned him 32/6d per week. Later the award was £3.5.0. which was not a high pay. He was a pay clerk for the industrial employees.

The advent of new technology. The redundancy of The Sun workers for it was not paying its way.

Retraining in 1979 for new technology. Hot metal work was abolished. The linotype operators had to change to the typewriter keyboard. Production was speeded up to beat the Sydney editions.

The Fairfax takeover led to the editor making changes such as the new masthead and the placement of the editorial on page four.

Mention of company owners.

Worked under seven managers: Morris, Flower, Johnson, Hallett...Bornfield, Leck, Knight.

Women were not accepted in the printing industry, it was not looked upon as work for the girls.

Industrial disputes have occurred over the years, but strikes were brief.

Importance of teamwork and speed.

In an emergency the staff are able to print an edition with the new technology.

His wide involvement with Rugby League since 1930. Has held many honorary positions and life memberships.

Worked fifty years with NMH and only lost one weeks work.

Earlier printing methods were slower. Typesetters were paid for piece work.

NMH has been a workers paper. These days has an open mind on politics. A paper can fox in a paper.

A side ends
Mr Les Lumsdon's popularity is mentioned along with other cartoonists. Importance of circulation figures and advertising. Claims about the great length and great strength of the paper used to print on. Role of current free press. The Star and other newspapers being printed in Sydney to cut costs. Cycled to work on his first job and has aimed to live close to work-place. Employees living in Cessnock spent a great deal of their time travelling to and from work which seemed at odds with their fight for the forty hour week. He has lived in Merewether for thirty years. Present changes at the junction shopping centre have not concerned him because he is not a shopper but would think that his wife realizes the convenience of the development. John Fairfax Retired Association was set up four years ago by Mr Nicol. Mr Hattam is secretary. Social activities for members numbering eighty two and partners in addition. District Park Tennis Association is the venue. Planning an outing to Lostock Dam. The Association is subsidised by NMH. Employees Christmas club once cost 6d per week. Christmas party was held at the dog track at Broadmeadow. Another time a dance in the Masonic Hall in Union Street. Superannuation favour the younger generation. He paid 3/4 week for many years. Many unions were involved in work at the NMH. Arrangements could be made to view the disused printing press along with the new at the NMH. Linotype process involved copy being set using brass moulds, molten metal and other techniques. The metals were recycled. Risks from dangerous metals. Use of Lead, Antimony and Tin. Hot metal process. No knowledge of lead poisoning. Hearing impairment was a problem from noise.

End

Mr Hattam did not supply the date of his birth. He said he retired in July 1979. It had been decided to exclude other topics about his life.
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Interviewer C. Noonan