

Joseph Medill, Giant of Journalism: Tribune Grows with Him

BEGINS HIS WORK IN 1855; LEAVES LASTING IMPRINT

Lays the Foundation for Modern Newspaper

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE was founded 100 years ago today, but in a real sense its history begins with the year 1855, when Joseph Medill, leader of the forceful group of men who have directed it continuously since, came to Chicago, bought an interest in the newspaper, and assumed directorship.

Joseph Medill in that year began a new age in journalism. Thru his work on THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE he laid the foundations for the modern newspaper of today.

There were larger and better newspapers in Chicago in 1855 when Medill, 32, and Dr. C. H. Ray, physician and brilliant editorial writer, met in Chicago and bought shares—Medill a third, and Dr. Ray a fourth—in THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE. These other newspapers are dead and gone today.

Small Ship in Right Current

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE in the summer of 1855 was a small ship, sailing the right current—toward freedom as the ideal of man and dignity as his heritage—but with the tiller constantly changing hands and no steady watch kept at the binnacle, Joseph Medill corrected that.

He was born April 6, 1823, in a part of New Brunswick, Canada, which was American soil when his father, William, a shipwright from Belfast, Ireland, settled there in 1819. He studied and practiced law after the family moved to Ohio, but soon turned to newspaper work. There he found the job he wanted. It also held promise of a career for his three brothers, something which he felt called upon to provide because of family circumstances.

Medill purchased the Coshocton Whig, in Ohio, in 1849 and renamed it the Republican. Soon he moved to larger and more influential fields in Cleveland. As an editor, by 1855 he already was a dominant figure, and he had made his mark in politics. Over strong opposition he had chosen the name for the Republican party, and he presided at its first party, and his own newspaper office.

[The Tribune's part in the origin and development of the Republican party is told on page 4. History of The Tribune begins on page 1.]

Controls Business Operations

Joseph Medill, during his first month in Chicago, assumed control of business operations at THE TRIBUNE, altho in truth he was more of a managing editor. The news and editorial columns were where his true interests always lay. THE TRIBUNE actually did not have a managing editor by that title until 1866.

A modest announcement of the new change in ownership was printed in THE TRIBUNE of June 18, 1855: "THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, daily, weekly, and bi-weekly, will henceforth be published by a new firm by the name of Wright, Medill & Co."

In the skilled hands of Dr. Ray and Medill, the editorial content of the newspaper was soon subjected to an overhauling.

THE TRIBUNE a few months before had supported Levi D. Boone, the Know-Nothing candidate, for mayor of Chicago. The Know-Nothing was a political party bitterly anti-foreign and anti-Catholic in tone, whose supporters regarded themselves as "native sons" of America, determined to break the political power of foreign immigrant blocs.

THE TRIBUNE, this day also showed little political awareness, dutifully reporting the election of Lyman Trumbull to the United States senate, but waiting four days to publish a Springfield letter throwing light on the enormous political significance of this event. Trumbull was a Republican, and his election forecast a Republican victory in Illinois and determined the political future of Abraham Lincoln.

Under Medill, the tack toward Know-Nothingism was halted, political oversights were eliminated and THE TRIBUNE began to talk a new kind of language—never before heard on the Illinois prairies.

Medill was an enemy of prohibition as an infringement of the rights of man, altho he had an abiding hatred of drunkenness and personally was a teetotaler.

Principles to Triumph

His predecessors had supported an ill-fated prohibition campaign thru THE TRIBUNE, and when the election went against them, the opposition paraded past THE Tribune office carrying crepe banners. Medill was in charge when this parade took place, and the next day THE TRIBUNE retorted:

"THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE is not dead. If not now, the principles which it supports will by and by be triumphant. We may endure the mortification of a hundred other defeats. The crepe may be borne by our door ninety and nine times, but sooner or later victory will perch on the banner we carry aloft. The Almighty has ordained it."

THE TRIBUNE about this time reported that daily circulation had increased in three months from 1,440 to 3,000 and was increasing at the rate of 100 a day, while the weekly circulation had soared 300 per cent.

Correspondent in Washington

THE TRIBUNE made new arrangements to obtain rapid transmission of eastern and foreign news. For the first time, it felt it could afford to have its own correspondent in Washington. He was Joseph Medill. In later years, Medill told how during this early, lean period his office was mostly under his hat. He haunted the halls of congress, listening, talking, getting acquainted with almost every congressman and politician, and writing daily letters home to his newspaper.

Dispatches from Washington and other important national and for-

elg news began to appear on page 1 of THE TRIBUNE, where, under a format of an earlier day, copied from London and colonial journalism, only advertisements and business cards had appeared heretofore.

Slavery was the national issue. Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, creature of Illinois' Democratic senator, Stephen A. Douglas, had reopened the northwestern territories to slavery if the slave-owners could send in large enough "soon squads" to establish a majority.

Full Text of Decision

Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's Dred Scott decision had given slavery constitutional authority, THE TRIBUNE said. With remarkable journalistic enterprise it printed the full text of the Taney decision, and the next day the dissenting opinion of Associate Justice John McLean.

Armed warfare, between gangs of slave and free settlers in Kansas became headline news, and THE TRIBUNE hired special correspondents to send dispatches from that state. In 1856, it apologized for presenting so much Kansas "battle" news to its readers in a prophetic note foretelling "that a civil war for the extension of slavery . . . is a danger most imminent and pressing."

"Whenever," said THE TRIBUNE, "the people of the north can be educated up to the point of resolutely saying to the slaveholders, and backing up what they say, 'thus far shall your accursed system go but no further, dissolve the Union if you dare,' then and never until then will the aggressions and the outrages of slavery cease."

War Forces the Issue

Not until the Civil war forced the issue did THE TRIBUNE advocate the outright abolition of slavery, and then, under Medill, it was the first newspaper of general circulation to demand emancipation of the slaves and the formation of battalions of freed Negroes to fight the Confederacy alongside their white brothers from the north.

THE TRIBUNE, however, had abolitionist forebears thru its absorption of Zebina Eastman's newspaper, the Free West, in 1855. One of THE TRIBUNE partners, John C. Vaughan, who had been half owner of the Cleveland Leader with Medill and had come to Chicago in the same year at his invitation, was identified with the radical abolitionist group. He could not, however, swing Medill and Dr. Ray to his opinion.

Vaughan, an able writer, shared the responsibility of editorship of THE TRIBUNE with Dr. Ray in 1855. In 1856, he retired and went to Kansas. Alfred Cowles, who had been a clerk in the Cleveland Leader office and had come to THE TRIBUNE in the same capacity, became a partner and cashier under Vaughan's retirement.

Merge with Tribune

Two partners of earlier days—Timothy Wright and Capt. Webster—sold their interests to Dr. Ray and Joseph Medill in 1857. The Tribune publishing firm became Ray, Medill & Co., with Cowles as the third partner.

Then, in 1858, John Locke Scripps and William Cross, who had been Democratic Press with THE TRIBUNE, Dr. Ray, Medill, Scripps, and Cross taking equal shares in the combined newspaper, which for the short period between July 1, 1858, and Oct. 25, 1860, was published under the title "Press and Tribune." Before that time, and ever since that time, it has been THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

Cowles maintained his interest in this new partnership, becoming business manager and secretary of THE Tribune company, a post he held until his death, Dec. 20, 1889. The financial panic of 1857 had caused some embarrassment. For the first time, the company was forced in 1858 to give an assignment. It got an extension of credit on its obligations for three years, but liquidated them in 21 months. This also was the last assignment.

Already, the destiny of that great powerful figure, Abraham Lincoln, had begun to intertwine itself with THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE to the greater success and glory of both.

[The full story of Abraham Lin-

coln and THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE begins on page 1.]

"He has grown upon me," Medill said of Lincoln some 40 years later. "I find in comparing him with other men that he was even greater than we thought—greater of them all."

Joseph Medill and Dr. Ray built THE TRIBUNE into the strongest newspaper west of New York. Horace Greeley's political amor-phousness at this time already had weakened the position of the New York Tribune, the Chicago Tribune's only journalistic rival.

It was the trenchant Lincoln editorials of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, most of them by the gifted and doughty Dr. Ray, that were quoted in other newspapers all over the nation and helped to make up men's minds for the balloting which placed Lincoln in the White House.

When the war came, in 1861, it was THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE which became the trumpet of the Union cause. Its goal was the salvation of the Republic and the defeat of the enemy. With the energy and spirit that came from his unconquerable Scotch-Irish ancestors, Joseph Medill put THE TRIBUNE into that battle to the hilt.

Appraisal by Historian

Capt. A. T. Andreas, venerable historian of Chicago, wrote of THE TRIBUNE in this period:

"Able, conducted and edited, enterprising in news-gathering, partisan, THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE . . . was the most prominent and successful newspaper in the west. It had the merit of being on the popular side of the great political and social questions of the times. Its constituency was composed of the educated and progressive people of the Northwest."

"During the war, it never for one moment faltered in the belief that the Union arms would be successful—never from first to last counseled peace on any other terms than entire submission. It was among the first, if not the very first newspaper to urge emancipation of the slaves."

[The full story of THE TRIBUNE and the Civil war will be found on page 3.]

The Circulation Soars

Chicago and the whole of Illinois was alive with volunteer regiments marching off to war. The war was close physically—fortresses at Cairo and Paducah—shooting at Island No. 10. It was close personally.

Families broken up. People wanted to read about it. They could do it only in newspapers. THE TRIBUNE circulation soared. New presses were installed to meet the demand, and more paper ordered. A Sunday edition was started for the first time. More and more men were added to the organization—reporters, copy editors, compositors, pressmen.

Under Medill, news gathering was departmentalized for the first time. For the first time, the circulation department materialized as a vital, potent, and highly respected force. It is in today's modern news paper, THE TRIBUNE's circulation department in the Civil war not only got THE TRIBUNE out to its regular subscribers. It got the newspaper to the troops.

In Union Troops

Everywhere that trains, or wagons, or a carrier on horse-back could take it, THE TRIBUNE went into the lines of the Union armies. It became "the Bible" of the Union troops, both bringing news from home and carrying to them the loyal message of their cause. Said THE TRIBUNE:

"Let the word go forth: God against Baal. Let the cry be: The Sword of the Lord and Gideon!"

The triumph of Appomattox, victorious end of the war, brought only bitter grief to the office of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE. A great man—"greatest of them all"—died five days later of an assassin's bullet.

"Hitherto the name of Washington has stood first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," wrote Medill. "His star shall not decrease, but that of another shall increase. Those who are now young will live to see the dawning of the fame of power of the martyred Lincoln."

The war years had seen corporate changes as well as solid growth in

THE TRIBUNE's organization. On July 24, 1861, THE TRIBUNE purchased the subscription list and good will of the Chicago Democrat, first newspaper ever published in this city, which dated from 1833. John Wentworth, who had edited it since 1836, made the sale, by which THE TRIBUNE can trace its lineage to the very origins of newspaper publication here.

In the same year, THE TRIBUNE was incorporated, by act of the Illinois legislature, Feb. 18, 1861. The incorporators were Dr. Ray, Joseph Medill, Scripps, Cross, and Cowles.

Scripps withdrew as editor March 28, 1861, when he was appointed postmaster of Chicago by President Lincoln. He was succeeded by Dr. Ray, who held the post until Nov. 20, 1863, when he sold his interest and withdrew.

The man who bought Scripps' stock was Horace White, who had joined THE TRIBUNE as a reporter in 1856, had covered the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and served as an editorial writer and Washington correspondent.

Medill Editor-in-Chief

Joseph Medill became editor-in-chief of THE TRIBUNE in 1863 when Dr. Ray retired. He held the post for the last two years of the war, and during the first year of reconstruction, but in 1866 he relinquished it to Horace White.

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE had reached a zenith of popularity, prosperity, and advancement under Joseph Medill, and busy years were to follow for him.

In 1869, Medill was named as a delegate to the convention which drafted the constitution for the state of Illinois. He drafted, championed, and put thru the section which provides for minority representation in the election of members of the house of representatives, an advantage sought by many states since but today possessed by Illinois alone.

Known as "Tribune Corner"

In the same year, THE TRIBUNE moved into its first building at the corner of Madison and Dearborn streets, which ever afterwards has been known as "Tribune corner." This supposedly "fireproof" building was destroyed in the great Chicago fire of Oct. 9, 1871.

[The story of Chicago's great fire, how THE TRIBUNE covered it, and Joseph Medill's account of it will be found on page 3.]

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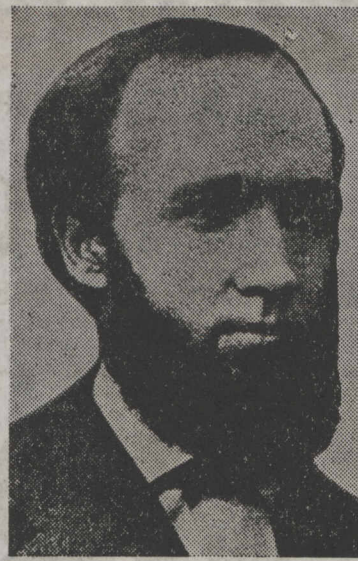
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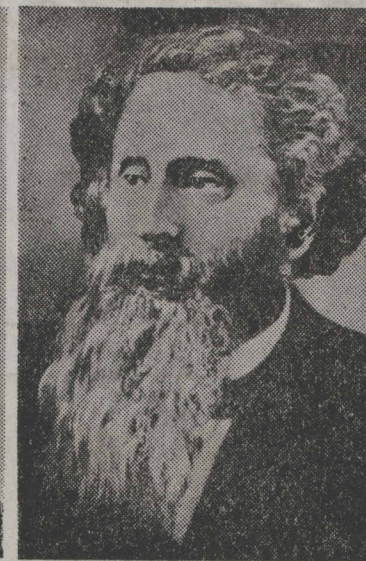
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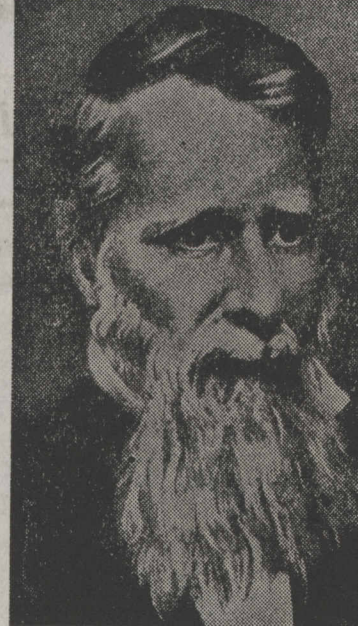
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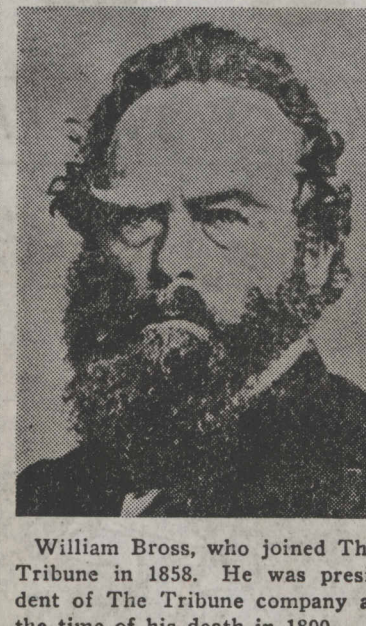
Horace White, editor in chief of The Tribune from 1866 to 1874.



Dr. Charles H. Ray, who joined Joseph Medill in the purchase of The Tribune in 1855.



John Locke Scripps, who became part owner of The Tribune in 1848 and again in 1858.



William Cross, who joined The Tribune in 1858. He was president of The Tribune company at the time of his death in 1890.

lished for it the second great premise of success—continuity of leadership. Without his steady hand at the tiller, the ship began to veer.

Under the editorial direction of Horace White, THE TRIBUNE in 1868 supported Gen. Grant for president, but in 1872, it began to desert its principles and supported the "Liberal Republicans"—"Mugwumps"—who nominated that hirsute political iconoclast, Horace Greeley, for president.

Medill Remedies It

As one of Medill's daughters said, long afterwards: "THE TRIBUNE was the 'Bible' of the Civil war veterans from coast to coast, but after Horace White went 'Mugwump' the paper did not prosper."

Medill was quick to recognize this, and he remedied it. While he was still in Europe, in 1874, he negotiated to buy sufficient shares of Tribune Company stock from Horace White and Alfred Cowles so that he controlled the company. Horace White went out, joining the Evening Post in New York.

When Medill returned to Chicago to take over the editorship of THE TRIBUNE, which he held until his death in 1899, this prophetic announcement was printed on Oct. 9, 1874:

"THE TRIBUNE hereafter will be as it formerly was under my direction, an independent Republican journal. It will be the organ of no man however high, no clique or ring however influential, or faction however fanatical or demonstrative."

As a Republican Journal

"While giving the Republican party and its principles a hearty and generous support, this newspaper will criticize the actions and records of Republican leaders as freely and fearlessly as in days of yore."

"Looking at the individual composition of the two parties and at their respective records and underlying principles, I cannot hesitate to give decided preference to the Republican party. Hence, THE TRIBUNE will be conducted as a Republican journal."

Twenty-five fruitful years for THE TRIBUNE lay before Joseph Medill when his announcement of policy was printed. The newspaper grew and prospered with him, and under him.

When a depression came, the advice of Joseph Medill was: "Seek the country; go to work; be sober and industrious, and other things will follow as a matter of course."

Judgment on Labor Strife

He was eternally right on the purchase of Alaska, and preparedness for war, which he foresaw 25 years before its time.

He had today's judgment of labor strife. He said:

"Strikes which aim at something beyond the laws of supply and demand for labor, such as the demand for the surrender by an employer of the control of his own business, must of necessity fail."

He heralded THE TRIBUNE's great present-day battles in defense of freedom of the press:

"The freedom of the press is more than anything else, dependent on the independence and fearlessness of the courts. The liberty of the press does not consist of the mere privilege of an editor. It is a liberty pertaining to the public."

He Opposes Prohibition

Teetotaler tho he was, Joseph Medill said of prohibition:

"Whatever can be done by moral means to check the consumption of strong drink, let it be done. But to depend on policemen and constables to make men sober and cure them of their appetite for stimulants is to lean on a broken reed."

Of his bitterest conquered enemy, the south, he said:

"While the rights of Negroes must be recognized, we oppose the infliction of carpetbaggers and swindlers on the white southern population. We oppose military support of carpetbag rule. Let the dead past bury its dead. We cannot rule with bayonets."

He had this opinion of Communists:

"If the chief end of man is to become a lazy loaf, a shiftless vagabond, brawling, long-haired idiot, a public nuisance, and an enemy of

the human race—let him turn Communist!"

Joseph Medill's best biographer did not write the longest account of his life, but what he had to say came from heart-warming intimacy of daily association. He was the late James O'Donnell Bennett, distinguished Tribune writer.

Writing of Joseph Medill on the 100th anniversary of his birth, April 6, 1923, Bennett said:

"That the personality and the 'feel' of this man should be thus pervasive after nearly a quarter of a century, that he should seem to be going along with us in our present and forward into our future, is highly eloquent of the kind of man and mind he was. Always he lived in the present and the future."

"At the age of 42, an age when men of mark in our time are about ready for significant tasks, he had finished a great work in the world. That work was the sustaining of the west of his country to the burdens and griefs of the Civil war."

Mind and Pen Still Active

"When he reached the age at which most men baffle anecdotal and musing when, in other words, he had passed 60, his mind and pen were intent upon Blaine and McKinley and—locally—the elder Carter Harrison, and upon our city."

"He was 70 when the World's Fair came, but for him it was not a wonder-work about which the fancies and reveries of a long life might cluster, but a renewal of his youth and a call to fresh tasks."

"He had passed 75 when the war against Spain was declared. He brought to the problems which its far-flung successes created, the breadth of vision he had brought to the problems of the Civil war. In short, he was an expansionist, not because he believed glory on easy terms was good for his country, but because he believed that his country had a mission and that the establishment of freedom everywhere was at once the most sacred and the most practical part of that mission."

"He was an expansionist, but also intensely a nationalist. He did not believe his country's work in the world was to be done by calling in some other part of the world to help us do it. No publicist in America had a profounder fear of the entangling alliance."

Finest Country on Earth

"He was frankly a chauvinist. He believed that the United States was the finest country on earth, that Chicago—despite Democrats—was the finest city in that country, and that THE TRIBUNE had more character and sense of service than any other newspaper in the world."

"Two Presidents offered him cabinet positions. It cost him no pang to decline them. . . . Conspicuously placed, he did his work in the world without making a fuss about it."

"His god was common sense, and the plain god's gift to him was great equality. He could keep his head when the highest in the land were in a state of panic."

"His life and his work sum themselves up in the good old word stalwart—meaning literally 'to have a firm foundation'—and that is why his work goes on and on."

"What Is the News?"

In his apartment in the Menger hotel, San Antonio, Tex., Joseph Medill died March 16, 1899, aged 75 years, 11 months, and 10 days. His grandson, Robert R. McCormick, was at his bedside. His last words were: "What is the news?"

Stalwart young Joseph Medill in his lifetime had produced a new, great newspaper. From a meager daily circulation of 1,440 copies Medill's TRIBUNE had come to be read by more than a quarter of a million people every day. From a one-room, shabby editorial office it had grown to an enormous, complex commercial organization upon which thousands of families depended for their livelihood.

One Solemn Commandment

Old Joseph Medill, at the end of his life span, rejoiced in this great heritage his youth had built, and he passed it on to strong young hands with only one, solemn commandment, written in his will:

"I want THE TRIBUNE to be, after I am gone, as it has been under my direction—an advocate of political and moral progress—and in all things to follow the line of common sense."

[Tribune history in the 80th century on page 3.]

COL. M'CORMICK GIVES STABILITY TO NEWS CRAFT

Changes Pattern of Life with High Wages

The Chicago Tribune today stands at the head of all American newspapers in prestige, circulation, advertising lineage, leadership, and influence.

It was far from the top in American journalism—or even in Chicago journalism—36 years ago when its present editor and publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormick, first was elected president of The Tribune Company.

If Col. McCormick's contribution to American journalism is considered apart from his contribution to THE TRIBUNE, it can be told in four words:

He made journalism respectable.

Far From It Then

When Col. McCormick took over editorial and news direction of THE TRIBUNE in 1915 and 1916, newspapering was far from a respectable business.

Reporters were low paid workers, noted for irresponsibility. Drunkenness was commonplace, despite the horror in which Joseph Medill, pioneer Tribune editor and publisher, had held that vice and the number of reporters he had once sent to Doughty and the Keeley cure at his own expense.

A job in the newsroom of a Chicago daily in those days could be classed as a "semi-hazardous occupation"—the hazard being a blue slip in the pay envelope at the end of the week, rather than bodily injury.

The traditional weekly pay day of most newspapers long had been changed from Saturday to a Tuesday or a Friday, so that reporters, copywriters, and photographers would not spend all their pay on a week-end of drinking.

Moved from Job to Job

All too frequently reporters and copy writers were "boomers," moving from job to job and city to city every few weeks, with each big hangover. Old timers tell of one Chicago newspaper (not THE TRIBUNE) which had several photographers on its staff who could neither read nor write. They made people they photographed write out their own names.

The managing editor of THE TRIBUNE at this period, brilliant tho he was, had no formal education whatever, and he pronounced a solemn curse, with bell, book, and candle, upon those aspiring youngsters who asked leave from his staff to go to college.

Low wages usually are the lot of men of wide education, and news reporters' salaries remained low. Reporters wrote long, windy pieces. They confined their enthusiasms to local items. They knew little of national or international political issues and less of history.

"Big Name" Writes

It was the custom for the larger newspapers to hire outstanding writers from other fields, biographers, novelists, and sometimes noted political figures, to cover daily events at the national political conventions. For many years, the Hearst newspapers hired William Jennings Bryan for this task.

THE TRIBUNE, too, had its galaxy of "big name" writers, doing jobs its own reporters could not be trusted to do—Finley Peter Dunne, the Marquis of Queensberry, writing on sports; Lillian Russell as a beauty expert; and Laura Jean Libby, author of 1916 political novels, advising the lovers.

For the 1916 political conventions, Col. McCormick refused to hire any "outside experts" to write for THE TRIBUNE. Instead, he turned the assignment over to Arthur Sears Henning, a young man who had spurned the managing editor's advice and returned to college for an education.

Mr. Henning had been a subordinate on THE TRIBUNE's convention staff twice before, in 1904 and 1912.

Good Pay Attracts Talent

Col. McCormick was the leader in establishing high salaries for newspaper writers. Good pay attracted better talent, but it did more. It promoted responsibility, sobriety, achievement, and respectability.