



# The Newspaper as a City Builder

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The role of the modern newspaper as a constructive factor in municipal progress depends to a great extent, if not wholly, upon the will of its publishers to make it more than a mere commercial enterprise, and upon the character that the newspaper has been enabled to develop during its existence in the community. Some newspapers may perform the functions of civic evangelists with better success than others, just as some bankers or some lawyers, or some men in commerce and in industry, may by attained and recognized leadership wield a larger influence on the destinies of their cities than other men equally prominent in the public eye.

For reasons of modesty I should very much dislike to discuss the part played by *The Dallas News* and its associated publications in the upbuilding of Dallas, did I not believe that what has been done in Dallas can be done with equal facility in any other city whose publishers, or one among them, accepts the responsibility of the newspaper as a personal responsibility, one not wholly associated with the counting-room.

Whatever influence *The Dallas News* has had in the creation of a metropolitan city in the Southwest where forty-five years ago it found a country town, is attributable to its rich heritage from the institution out of which it sprang, *The Galveston News* (dating back to 1842), which played in the earlier years of the development of Texas a part somewhat like that the Dallas paper has essayed in its own city and throughout the state and the Southwest.

This influence has been the influence of the men who made the newspaper, for the paper has been but the medium for the expression of their personalities and their ambitions for their state and for their city. As the paper has grown, so have they grown, and so has the city grown, in an interdependent spirit of faith and confidence, of friendliness and of good-will. This has afforded the basis for the civic vision that has through the years been transmuted into the reality of accomplishment, not singly by the newspaper, nor by an individual, but by an enlightened public will. This will was strengthened through education as to what was best for the community and its people, and a wide dissemination of knowledge of what could be done to make of Dallas a better place in which to live.

## The Newspaper's Opportunity and Duty

It is in this role of education, I believe, that the newspaper has its opportunity for public service, and its greatest opportunity for profit for itself. It is the duty of the newspaper to publish the news. That is a fundamental precept of journalism. This dictum may be given its broader application, with a serious study of the question of what is news. The management of *The Dallas News* has believed that news is to be found in everything that concerns the popular welfare; that news is not confined alone to the statement of facts after they have become facts, but also in a logical deduction and presentation of what may become facts of direct interest to its readers; a forecast of the penalties to flow from civic slothfulness, and a contrasting picture of the benefits to accrue from civic progress and public-spiritedness.

Moved by this conception of news and of the duty of a newspaper, *The Dallas News* for most of its lifetime has sought to keep constantly before the people of the city and the state the possibilities of their future communal greatness.

When *The News* was established here in 1885, Dallas, was in process of emulating Topsy. It was "just growing," as it had "just grown" from a single cabin on the banks of the Trinity in 1841 to the young but uncouth city of nearly a half-century later. Gradually, as it attained a foothold and prestige sufficient to make its efforts felt, the paper assumed a leadership in the direction of this growth. These initial efforts were not comprehensive, not the result of definite plan, but an evolution in the relationship between the paper and its public.

## Civic Improvement and City Planning

But progress was made. The city grew, and *The News* grew with it. Espousing all of the things that seemed to be for general betterment, the paper fostered the organization in 1899 of the Cleaner Dallas League, whose objectives are amply indicated by its name. This group attained some success in making the town a cleaner and hence a better place in which to live, but soon outgrew its sphere, and was supplanted in 1902 by the Civic Improvement League, this again sponsored by *The News*. This organization found a field for useful work, and

carried on with some success. But Dallas still was "just growing," and needed some definite plan.

In February, 1909, the writer, who had given much study to the whole question of city building and the potentialities of the growth of Dallas, read before a local club a paper on "Civic Responsibility." In this was presented the idea, then new in Dallas at least, that not only should the growing community have a city plan, but that this plan should comprehend what we now know as zoning. The thought fell upon fruitful soil, and in January of 1910, after a campaign of continuous publicity, the Chamber of Commerce, itself an outgrowth of earlier organizations less vital in aspiration, agreed to take up the movement for a plan for Dallas. George E. Kessler came here in May of the same year, and was retained to prepare the groundwork for the Dallas that is and that will be. These few sentences summarize a great achievement, one attained only after heartbreaking difficulties. Few persons knew anything of city planning, and most of these satirically referred to it as merely "a city beautiful." In the years since, they have learned differently. City planning now is a Dallas institution; its results manifest to every citizen.

### **The Greatest Accomplishment in the City's History**

The Dallas city plan is perhaps the greatest accomplishment in the city's history, for from it have come other elements of greatness. Through it the city has secured unified railway terminals, a union passenger station, and the removal of trunk-line tracks from its downtown district. It has enacted zoning legislation, has secured parks and parkways, playgrounds, water-supplies, traffic arteries, and numberless other conveniences unheard of before there was a plan. The tortuous Trinity River, which meandered through the heart of the city, often overflowing its banks, has been made to flow in a straight course by means of gigantic levees, over which five new bridges connect the two banks. As a result, many hundreds of acres of land are being developed into a splendid, modern industrial district where formerly swamps and breeding-holes for mosquitoes abounded. Since 1910 nearly \$100,000,000 has been expended on city planning and related projects; and there remains for expenditure now some \$15,000,000 of public moneys for the completion of elements of the vision that Mr. Kessler during his lifetime, and others since have reduced to understandable lines on engineering drafts.

*The News* has not been content with city planning in its physical aspects. It has sought and still seeks an improvement in the form of usefulness of the city's government, and has led the fight for city management, decision on adoption of which is likely to be made by the voters before the end of 1930. It has sponsored artistic and cultural developments and primary and higher education. It has aided in every way possible in the expansion of commerce and industry, in the provision of transportation, transit and traffic facilities.

It has been largely responsible for the organization and the functioning of a citizens' group known as the Kessler Plan Association, for the continuous promotion of city planning. It has sent its staff men to other cities to keep its own people informed on civic progress. And it has lent its aid to the passage of laws by the State Legislature to facilitate planning in other sections, to legalize zoning, and to inculcate throughout Texas the ideal of constructive and planned growth. Space does not permit of enumeration of some of the movements in which *The News* is proud to have had a share. They are sufficient to bring a feeling to its editors and to myself as its president and publisher, identified personally with most of them, of gratification that ours has been the opportunity, and that the results show that it has not been wholly wasted.

### **Defining Objectives—and Believing in Them**

In conclusion, I would make this suggestion: It is not enough for a newspaper to want to serve its public as a civic leader. The men behind the paper must believe in what they preach to their readers. They must define their own objectives, and sell themselves on their desirability before they can sell them to their readers. *The News* has believed in the things it has sponsored. It has, fortunately, enjoyed that measure of public confidence which has made others believe with it. Without that belief, and a faith that was consonant with it, little or nothing could have been achieved.

THE AMERICAN CITY is to be congratulated upon its own part in civic progress in America. Its columns have been a source of inspiration and of information to *The News* and the men who have labored to make Dallas what it is, and what they believe it will be. There remains much to be done. In Dallas *The News* is hopefully expectant of greater things; it is sure that for all of this great country there is still to be born a compelling civic-mindedness that will give us world leadership in urban living. In that THE AMERICAN CITY will, I know, have its great part, finding its reward in the record and knowledge of a public service well rendered. If in Dallas we have done that, we ought to be splendidly content.

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