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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 465-011

Interviewee: Dick Morrison

Interviewer: John Newhouse

Date of Interview: 1975

Project: Lee Newspapers in Montana Oral History Project

Note: Richard Morrison was business manager of the Missoulian under the Anaconda Co. ownership, then became publisher of the Montana Standard and the vice president and general manager of the Montana Newspapers of Montana under Lee Enterprises. He retired in 1962.

John Newhouse: —with Anaconda for quite a few years, weren't, you Mr. Morrison?

Dick Morrison: Thirty years.

JN: So that would go back to about 1920?

DM: I once worked for them in 1930. Worked for them 29 years, or something like that. [He retired in 1966.]

JN: You notice quite a difference since Lee has taken over—

DM: Yes.

JN: —or are they just talking too much?

DM: What do you mean?

JN: Is there a difference in the style of journalism they practice?

DM: Well, of course, of course. Entirely different, and I don't mean that in a necessarily 100 percent of it is better. Some of the Anaconda papers were pretty good papers. None of them were as bad as you may have been lead to believe. But they operated them a little differently. This theory that they were entirely subject to the whims and the direction of people outside the newspaper field simply was not true. We, at least not in Missoula—my experience was here—and we seldom heard or had directives from Butte. Do this or do that, do the other thing. Of course we knew, in a general way, what their plans, and what their theories, and so forth were. We did nothing, perhaps, to challenge them or to annoy them but we didn't just roll over and play dead, either.

I recall during World War II, an incident when Anaconda Wire and Cable Company was indicted [in December 1942] by the federal government for furnishing substandard wire, and it came in, Associated Press, and our editor called my attention to it, and we discussed it, and we ran it. We didn't hide it. Nobody in Butte called us up and told us to keep it out of the paper. As I

recall, some of the other papers did too. We had other instances of that kind; we sometimes had someone connected with the Anaconda Company would try to throw their weight around. It was usually somebody, a bookkeeper in the lumber department or something, you know. [They would say] Don't you put that in the paper now. I'd say, to hell with it and we'd run it. We did that. Many of those things if we had been strictly regulated, we wouldn't have. So, there was a lot of bologna attached to that. How good the papers were, I don't know, perhaps you saw the material that [Don] Anderson accumulated for the Library. My statement I asked to have deleted. It's no longer available. And I wasn't saying that for the public, I was saying that for Don. I was telling him some of these things as I remembered them, and I said some things I wouldn't have said if I had known it was going to be made public. I didn't know he was going to use it that way. And then some of the other contributions I thought were the awfulest conglomeration of muck that I ever saw in my life. Some of these fellows had no part in it, they knew nothing about it, their position with the company was such that they were not in a position to know what was going on.

But they had to write some and Don wanted some, so they wrote some for him. So I asked that my contribution there be deleted. I just didn't think it was anything I wanted to be associated with.

JN: Ever regret not being back in those days, or is it a kind of relief to be out of them?

DM: Well, I worked for Lee for eight years. I was the general manager of the Montana properties and we had a lot of problems, particularly in the first four or five years. There was only two of the newspapers that were really problems. After the deal was consummated, the fellows in Missoula always made a little money. Helena wasn't doing very well; Livingston was just tossed in with the rest of them. But Butte was a very difficult problem.

JN: That was labor, mostly, wasn't it?

DM: Well, labor, yes, and then we acquired that at a time when Butte was starting its big decline. Butte, you must realize, is not a city, or not even a town, it's a mining camp. That's all it is, and all it ever was, and now—

JN: It may not even be that.

DM: But 1900, they tell me, I wasn't here, but they tell me back in the early '20s they had 98,000 people.

JN: You can't believe it.

DM: Well, when I came here, they had 13,000 men working on the hill and when they finally shut down their deep mine operations a few weeks ago, I think there were less than 800.

JN: On the hill, or in—?

DM: On the hill. I'm talking about miners. When you say 13,000 miners working on the hill and then of course, thousands of laborers and surface people and the BAP [Butte, Anaconda & Pacific] railroad.

JN: That was quite a city in those days.

DM: That was quite a city up until World War II.

JN: Then it began to fall apart. When you talk about on the hill, does that mean going down in the ground, or is that open pit?

DM: Well, they didn't have the open pit until the early '50s.

JN: Oh, I see, so on the hill meant they were going down in the tunnels underground.

DM: I had a picture, I don't know where it is now, taken of the hill. We sat down one day, and I think we counted 40 or 41 headframes, that's the—I'll bet there aren't 10 left. Most of that has been dumped in the pit, cut and dumped in the pit. Others abandoned.

JN: What's happening in Butte anyway—they got more profitable mines?

DM: Well, they are down so deep, now mining in those areas, that the cost of getting copper out and processing it is just prohibitive.

JN: I am building a new house and what they are charging me for copper wire. Why, you could go 40 miles down.

DM: Well, the copper fluctuates. Anaconda Company, of course, got their tail in a place down in Chile, dropped \$300 million down there, and that damn near wrecked them. This was back in '67, '68, '69.

JN: Did the Chileans take over the mines?

DM: The government did, just appropriated the property [in 1971]. They had this huge investment there and they're supposed to be getting some of it back and I think they are but they were a large part of the profits for many years [unintelligible] copper.

JN: \$300 million will take a dent in anything.

DM: The bank took them over. [Unintelligible] is head of the organization, but he's got to stay down there making money.

DN: You've got Don Anderson's picture over there.

DM: Oh yeah. That was when I was associated with the board of directors and so forth, [Jim] Burgess and Anderson, Mr. Lee Loomis, Mr. Walter White, Phil [Adler.] Three of them are dead, Loomis, Adler and White. I haven't seen any of the others for years.

JN: You think some things they did better back in the Anaconda days?

DM: Oh, I won't say they did things any better, they did them differently, and I think their objective reporting was better. We didn't get out a five-day newspaper, which is what they're doing now. Your Sunday, Monday, and to some extent, Saturday papers seem to me the office boy gets them out. There's nothing in them. [unintelligible] over the wire. What we used to call anytime [journalism]. You could run it next week; it's just as good. Very little objective reporting. Very little active reporting. It seems to me, I'm not saying it's true. I know they have their problems.

JN: Is this is a pretty good news town?

DM: This? Oh, no. Any small town that's dominated by the University is apt to be backward in other areas. The town the size of Madison. The university is big, but it doesn't dominate the town like our university does this one. It's only the last few years that this town has started to bloom, about the time Lee took over. Hoerner-Waldorf wasn't here [it opened in 1957], and [Van] Evans [Plywood, which opened in 1959] wasn't here, Borden [Chemical, opened in 1970], wasn't here, Interstate Lumber wasn't here. [He likely means Intermountain Lumber, which opened in 1957.] All that stuff has come in, came just after Lee bought the *Missoulian*. As a consequence, there was a tremendous growth in circulation. Now, whether their percentage of coverage is any greater than it was, I don't know. I just don't ever see those figures anymore. But that is the truest measure of acceptance of the paper by the people of the community. I have no idea about this.

JN: I was going to see Shorty [Horace] Kessler, [owner of Intermountain Lumber] but he's up in British Columbia. Is Henry Pennypacker—he is one of the people who is really not very happy with the paper, I gather.

DM: I don't know; I don't know where he lives.

JN: I guess he's in the lumber business.

DM: He retired. He was one of Shorty's cohorts.

JN: Oh, he's retired, is he. Is Shorty retired?

DM: Oh, yeah, he sold out.

JN: Well, he's still got an interest in it. Or he's interested in the business anyway. He still had an interest but not financially.

DM: He's done a lot for the paper, he told me. I don't know. Of course, I don't give a damn who's the publisher, or what kind of a job he does. When he's the only guy in town, there's going to be a lot of people not going to like him.

JN: Yeah, as long as he takes a stand—

DM: Whether he takes a stand or not! The fact that he's got the only paper in town, he's a target for all the sharpshooters. I remember years and years ago in Spokane, [William H.] Cowles owned the Spokesman-Review and Chronicle. A fine newspaper, but I had people in Spokane tell me, in all sincerity, that he was trying to hold Spokane back, and he was trying to keep the town from progressing, because if it got any bigger it would increase the Associated Press rate, which is stupid, of course, but people go for those things. Any time you only have one newspaper in town, you're going to find a lot people that don't like it.

JN: There are an awful lot of one-newspaper towns.

DM: Of course, because it has gotten so that it is economically impossible almost to have competitive newspapers, unless they operate like they do in Madison [Wisconsin] and Lincoln [Nebraska].

JN: Well, Madison is kind of lucky that way; the town is just about the right size, I guess.

DM: [Unintelligible] was very highly regarded and respected.

JN: Yeah, he sure was.

DM: I think he was nuts—

JN: You aren't alone.

DM: What?

JN: You aren't alone.

DM: But he made it pay.

JN: Yeah, he did. If he could stir it up and make it pay, he would. And boy, he did.

DM: Same is true down in Lincoln. Without the joint production facilities there you'd have an impossible situation. Salt Lake is an example of it, they came to it. Of course, the church had the *Deseret News* for years, [unintelligible] but now they produce the *News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* out of the same plant. One mechanical operation, both got a chance.

JN: Well, its damn nice for a town to have two papers.

[Discussion about a retirement party going on.]

DM: We're very, very anxious that they get a daily paper over there. We had the *Anaconda Standard*, a little tabloid daily which we were printing on an old [unintelligible] press and stuffing into the *Montana Standard*. That was pretty sad. They just raised hell; they wanted us to suspend the *Butte Post* and move it to Anaconda. We had an evening paper. Well hell, they couldn't support a daily paper over there. We tried to make our peace with them and do the best we could. We never could please them and you didn't dare sell any advertising over there because they couldn't pay their bills. It was a pain in the neck. I always wanted to make a weekly out of it.

They finally sold it to a guy, or gave it to him, and he made a weekly out of it, but Anaconda in the meantime was going down to where there was just nobody left to complain anymore.

JN: When Lee took over, there were around 10,000 people over there?

DM: But that was 40 percent less than was there five years before and when they came in they put in a big concentrator over at Butte.

Well, instead of hauling 600 cars of ore over at Anaconda every day, they were hauling over 30 cars of concentrate, see. The BA&P cut down the smelter deal over there, then they moved the zinc activities somewhere around Great Falls and Anaconda was pretty sad. Of course, Butte is pretty sad now, and someday this town will be in the same fix when Champion gets through cutting down the last tree. Well then, we better [unintelligible]. When your resources are gone, there's nothing to sustain the town.

JN: It's all got to come out of the ground, one way or another.

[End of Interview]