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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: 465-013
Interviewee: Ed Erlandson
Interviewer: John Newhouse
Date of Interview: 1975
Project: Lee Newspapers Oral History Project

Note: Ed Erlandson first worked at the Missoulian in 1936 as a copy boy. After graduating from the University of Montana he took a job briefly as sports editor in 1938 for the Record-Herald in Helena, then was hired at the Missoulian, where he worked until retiring in 1978 as executive editor.

Ed Erlandson: —you know, I mean speeding and innocuous substances. As long as there no ways for the Anaconda company [unintelligible]. So it was like a breath of fresh air when Lee came in, because then we had letters to the editor, we had opinions of our readers, and we had an editorial page editor who was aggressive and tackling issues, controversial issues. We went into depth, new make-up, we livened up the paper tremendously. So there was an awful lot of improvement, but the point I tried to make was before that it really wasn't as bad as a lot of people, a lot people would say that there was distortion, lies and Anaconda Company was looking over your shoulder all the time, and that wasn't true at all. The only time they looked over their shoulder was any story where the company was involved. Anything else, they didn't care as long as again, there weren't any waves. As long as you did a good job and I think we did in covering the news. They could care less. But, once you stepped on their toes, of course they were over here like a bunch of banshees.

John Newhouse: You were really into the technological revolution.

EE: Yes, I guess. In '53, the tape came in and took the editing away from us, and now these machines are giving the editing back to us. That's on the wire services.

JN: That's a tape that they put in the linotype, you're speaking of. That was in '53.

EE: Around then, yes.

JN: When did you go to offset?

EE: Around '68. It was in a, yeah, around June of '68.

JN: What do you call these monsters here?

EE: This is a video display terminal. You haven't seen these?

JN: I've seen them, but I don't know—

EE: Well, you see, you edit on here. UF1 means Use format 1, which is one column measures, and you can edit by moving this cursor around. Say you wanted the Bitter Root to be cap [capital letter] R, as our style used to be. Hit the insert character, hit a space, and then take the cursor off and put it back over the r and get a cap R. You don't want it that way, so you go back here, you delete that character, backspace, make a lower-case r out of it and you're back to Bitterroot. Then as you read copy you just go up one line at a time.

The nice thing this is that you don't have dirty copy anymore, strike outs [unintelligible] all over. Some reporters could really mess it up. This is all clean and it is easier to spot errors.

JN: Then this goes directly to the computer?

EE: Yeah. Now when we are ready to set it, we just put S-E-T and punch the send line and it perforates the tape out there. It skips the process where you used to send out copy and then they would punch a tape. So now they don't do that anymore, we do it here. And this is the way it's going to be in the paper, hopefully. You got page 11—

JN: How much does one of these things cost you?

EE: Around $7,000 a piece, and we have 12 of them in here. As they create more and more of these, of course the price will come down. Just like the typewriter. The first typewriter I imagine was pretty expensive. It was probably about $15, which was expensive in those days. This is quite a change in editing, of course.

I really enjoy it in some ways but, as I said, it doubles your work and makes it a lot slower because you have to edit everything twice now where we used to edit it once. You just type it out on here and start out PE, space, then CTN for the city directory. I'll show you here, I'll put this back in the directory. That's N, then hit the send line and it goes back into the computer. Now see I have two directories I'm working on. One is a copy directory, there are three stories in there. The other is the city directory; there are several stories in there. The one I was just working on was a rewrite, program mall on page 11. I run this, I put FE for fetch and hit the send line button and that story comes back. Any one of those stories I just put FE and it comes back.

JN: This is a story you've written, or someone else has?

EE: This is a story that [Frank] Walsh has written, see, for tomorrow morning's newspaper. Actually, it's a rewrite.

JN: So, you're sitting here being, what, the copy desk, or the editor—

EE: Yeah. This is the copy desk where you give it a last check before it goes out and I dummy it on here. So, times are changing. Next to be coming is pagination where you make up the whole page at once and push a button and it goes directly to the pressroom.

[End of Interview]