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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: 465-015
Interviewee: Henry Pennypacker
Interviewer: John Newhouse
Date of Interview: 1975
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Note: Henry Pennypacker was vice president of Intermountain Lumber Co. in Missoula.

Henry Pennypacker: He sort of regretted—he was annoyed about the paper's liberal attitude and he said something to the effect that he wished the Anaconda still had the paper. So maybe he wouldn't have been the best one for you guys to [unintelligible].

John Talbot: His introduction to me, he walked into the office soon after I got there, and said he thought that we ran a socialist rag. He just wanted me to know where he stood. I guess he and Lloyd Schermer spent quite a bit of time talking about the newspaper. Okay, I'll see you in a little bit.

HP: Well, just sit down and fire away here.

John Newhouse: It's early in the morning to do much firing. I guess that Shorty was [Horace "Shorty" Koessler, Pennypacker's partner in Intermountain Lumber]—well, let's see, you've been in the lumber business most of your life, haven't you?

HP: No, not really. That company started right after the war in 1947, and at that time, Shorty, who had a ranch up in Swan River—I lived up there. I was a neighbor of his. He and some other people, two other fellows—one was a banker and one was a state veterinarian—started this lumber company, having noticed that maybe there was some money in trees and Shorty had a lot of timber up there so I got in with them. We built a sawmill and that's how the thing started. Then it moved down here to Missoula and went from there. Prior to that, of course, I had lived here since 1934 and I was up there on a homestead for a while, a long time. I was sort of a guide packer and that type of thing. Anyway, I came here directly from France. I had gone to France on my honeymoon in 1931 and stayed there three years.

JN: That's a pretty long honeymoon.

HP: Yes, it was. At that time, I had a job working for the European edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, which was still publishing at that time.

JN: I'll be darned. Did you have journalism training?

HP: No, I hadn't.

JN: How did you manage that?

HP: I just kind of stumbled into that. It wasn't much of a job; nothing was in those days, but you couldn't get a job in this country in 1931 anyway. At any rate, I stayed over there until 1934 when I came out here. I've been a reader of the *Missoulian* since 1934 more or less.

JN: What changes have you noticed since Lee took over? How do you feel about it generally?

HP: Well, of course I feel it's a pretty good newspaper, particularly from a technical point of view, not speaking necessarily about the editorial approach at all. But I think the principal difference probably between the way it is now and the way it was when it was owned by the Anaconda company, it's a much more entertaining and spritely paper than it was then. Under the company, it was fairly limited. It was only about an eight-page paper as a rule. Of course, we have to remember there was less population and circulation in those days too, but it didn't carry anything much on the editorial page except a few innocuous editorials, although I think it did have Westbrook Pegler.

JN: Well, he wasn't considered innocuous by everybody.

HP: No, I know that, and of course I sort of admired Pegler. I'd been reading him for years anyway.

JN: I kind of liked Pegler myself, then he kind of got over the hill.

HP: Then, of course, in his last years he was kind of over, he was over the hill, there's no question about that. But it didn't have much else on the editorial page except these innocuous editorials about apple pie and mother. Naturally, it didn't get into anything controversial, and surely nothing that the company might have had an interest in. Its local coverage was not too extensive either. Lot of people used to say, well you have to read the Spokesman Review if you want to get the Western Montana news.

JN: That's from Seattle?

HP: No, from Spokane. That's a pretty good-sized paper. However, I had no quarrel with it. At that time, I was up on a homestead and reading the paper was something I did only twice a week when the mail came in. Now, of course you have a much broader paper and much more entertaining paper, lots of features. Wasn't anything like Dear Abby in the old days. I think it's a much more entertaining thing to read than it was. I read it thoroughly every day for a somewhat ulterior reason.

I belong to the Rotary Club here and as John [Talbot] does, and so does Eddie Coyle. Anyway, every two or three weeks I deliver a little talk at Rotary entitled Rotarians in the News. Whenever somebody's done something and has gotten his name in the paper, why I mention

this, usually in a humorously, derogatory manner. So, consequently, I have to read the paper closely for fear that some guy will do something on page 16 that I missed.

But I, like my former boss Dr. Kessler of the Intermountain company, I sometimes, in fact frequently, disagree with the editorial stands that the paper makes, but everybody mellows as they go along, and every now and again Sam Reynolds will write an editorial that I agree with.

JN: [Both men laugh.] That's kind of scary, isn't it?

HP: Yeah, it is. I have a great admiration for Sam because he is a hell of a good editorial writer, even though his ideas are wrong. [Laughs]

I know also that it's impossible for anybody to write a good editorial 365 days of the year. They don't do it on the *New York Times* or the *Christian Science Monitor* or anyplace else really. Somebody's always got to be human, everybody's human. I think now that the paper is, I really think it's a good paper for its size.

JN: What in particular stands bother you? The ones that involved lumbering, or—

HP: Well, yes, I would say that to a great extent. I think the paper has gone overboard on the issue of environmentalism, and I think we've seen the same thing nationally, and now there is developing a backlash because of the situation with oil and the situation with pollution and so on. I think it was easy to see that something like this would happen, because the media as a whole kind of went off the deep end on this thing, which they often do.

JN: The pendulum is always swinging a little too far, it seems like.

HP: Yeah. And there is another thing, of course, which I notice about the paper, which everyone stoutly denies that is connected with the paper, and that is the tendency to try to create controversy in order to sell papers. Well, this is all right. If this is the way you play, well, that's fine, you know, but that results, sometimes, in devoting a lot of space to something that nobody gives a damn about. Once in a while, you try to stir up something when there isn't anything there to stir up, and that's—

JN: You get started and then find out it doesn't—

HP: Yes, so why run a three- or four-part series on something that nobody gives a damn about? That does happen occasionally. Then a lot of people say, "Well, why the hell have they got that in the paper, you know? Who cares?"

A good example of that occurred not very long ago. About five years ago there was a situation—

[Break in audio]

HP: —a controversial situation. There was clear-cutting in the Bitterroot National Forest. I don't know if you're familiar with that or not.

JN: Just heard about it. It was 500 miles or a thousand miles away.

HP: That thing blew up into a national issue, because clear-cutting is a practice all over the West, particularly on the west coast, where it is the preferred method of harvesting timber, but because of this thing and Senator [John] McGee from Idaho and some other people got into it, and so on and the forestry professor here, [Arnold] Bolle, the dean of the forestry school at the time, and some others wrote a report very critical of the forest service and so on and the lumber industry. So this was a big thing nationally. All right, that's five years ago.

Just a few weeks ago, the *Missoulian* decided, well, we'd better see if we can't renew this. So, they run a three- or four-part series as to what happened five years ago. Well, who cares, and I don't think it serves the purpose, if the purpose was to see if you could revive a controversy. Fine, if it were something else, what other purpose could it have? It wasn't that historical. It wasn't like saying, "Well, on this day, Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address five years ago," or something like that. So occasionally, that's an example of what I mean of kind of reaching out too far to get something that will add to the interest of the daily paper.

JN: Are the people around here pretty much Republican, Democrat, or—

HP: No, I think the majority would probably be Democratic, unquestionably.

JN: Well, with the university there, well that feeds them quite a few people who tend to be on the liberal line.

HP: Well, that's right. And, of course, the young people on the newspaper tend to be liberal because a lot of them will come right out of journalism school. I don't know of any journalism school that tends toward conservatism. [Laugh] So, of course, there is a little of that, but that really doesn't bother me much because I recognize that the working press has always been, tended in that direction.

JN: When it comes to the news columns though, do the liberal reporters tend to slant their news?

HP: Oh, yes, I think they do, and I think they do it somewhat unconsciously. Although, I have to admit also that I'm not really sold on what is referred to as the "new journalism."

JN: Neither am I.

HP: I'll just take the facts and see if I can figure them out for myself, if the paper will be kind enough to give them to me.

JN: Yeah, I really go along with that too. I don't think you have to educate every reader to your particular line of thinking.

HP: No, but anybody who's sincerely interested in it is working in his career and he's been steeped in this idea in a J-school he's naturally going to try to follow it when he gets a job.

But, I have to say this, too, at the same time that while you have young people working on the paper who may tend in this direction, you have very competent old heads too, some of whom date clear back to the time when the company had the paper.

JN: Well, you've got Erlandson and Coyle. I was down there last night and generally people like that aren't in the shop when you're putting it out. They work the daytime hours. But golly, there was Erlandson trying to work one of these new-fangled machines and Coyle trying to do the same thing. Neither of them looked very happy about the machines, but boy, they were sitting there so they got their input. There was a reporter whose hair is a lot longer than theirs—

HP: So, I certainly don't take the attitude that John mentioned as Doctor Koessler had taken and indicated to him that he thought it was a socialist rag. I don't think it is. I don't really think it's a rag.

JN: And not completely socialist.

HP: I didn't say.

JN: Has Shorty changed his opinion any? Is he mellowing any?

HP: I don't know. He talks to me about it or used to. I've only been retired a couple of years and still see him every once in a while, but he's retired also. But he used to ask me what I thought about the paper, and I told him in general what I just told you, that I think, technically, it's a pretty good paper for a town of this size. I've also mentioned to him that I know that you can't expect an editorial writer to come up with a great editorial 365 days out of the year. But Doctor Kessler is probably not typical of the readership of any newspaper, because he once told me that when he gets into a strange town, he's staying in a hotel or something, he picks up the local paper and the first thing he looks at is the editorial page. Well, how many people do that?

JN: Not many.

HP: Not very many. Lots of people read newspapers and never read the editorials.

JN: They do kind of an unusual thing here; they're signing the editorials. I've never. I guess it's done in a few other places.

HP: Well that might be construed—you might find a criticism of the paper there because I don't really think that's necessary. And extending that a little farther, I think the *Missoulian*, and probably lots of other papers today, go way beyond the necessity in awarding bylines and that sort of thing. Because I think this, of course it's like the guy having an extra stripe on his letter sweater and that sort of thing, but to most readers they couldn't care less who the hell wrote the story. It doesn't mean anything, and also, it's been done so much that it doesn't mean very much anymore in terms of recognition for the writer himself.

JN: One thing it does do though. Sam Reynolds is a personality in this town beyond which I've never seen anybody. I mean, he is. I think probably more people know Reynolds than knew Schemer, than knew John Talbot.

HP: Oh, naturally, but then, why not? He's writing the editorials and they're not.

JN: That's right. He is a personality in this town.

HP Another way to say that is there's a lot of people that don't like him, but he's a likable guy if you know him personally.

JN: That's an odd thing, isn't it? But he really is likeable. But I can see why people would disagree with him because he certainly—

HP: Oh, of course, this is an asset for the paper, because when you have somebody who is a personality, who is a figure, that's worth dough. To be crude about it, it is—I mean, that's a definite asset, that goes down on the balance sheet in black for the paper, not red, even though lots of people disagree with his position. If he were a complete nincompoop, why, of course, negative.

JN: Well, that just about tells me what I wanted to ask you. And if John will come back again, I'll go away and leave you.

[End of Interview]