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Oral History Number: 465-030

Interviewee: J. Strand Hilleboe

Interviewer: John Newhouse

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Note: John Strand Hilleboe joined the Billings Gazette in 1941. At the paper he worked as an advertising salesman, advertising manager, general manager and publisher. He retired in 1975.

J. Strand Hilleboe: The thing that gets me as being the most vital thing under Lee ownership has been the freedom that it gave us as opposed to the, really—the Anaconda Company didn't—they were decent employers. They didn't pay attention to you, frankly, much but you had a feeling all the time, and you knew they selected editors, not to phone them every day, but those that would do what they, or handle things as they wanted them handled. There was no cross-pollination. Hell, you didn't even know the people at the other plants. You never went to meetings and seminars and things that gave you any [training], and, amazingly, some of our papers, a couple of them at least, were pretty damn good newspapers even at that, as far as that was concerned.

The thing that I guess really is the most impressive thing is how, at least in the case of the *Gazette*, the one that I know best, how the identical staff—right at first—boy, how things changed right now. When they had the freedom to write, when they had the freedom to pore into government—Anaconda kind of liked to not stir the pot too much, but when they brought it out into the open and made the townspeople acquainted with the lack of government that we had at that time, it was [unintelligible].

In fact, Don [Anderson] and I were challenged once by a couple of leading citizens. Once, when he was in town, on a street corner after we attended a Rotary Meeting, they said, my god, you're driving government out behind the shed; the meetings are going to have to be held very quietly. Because it was a "father knows best" attitude that existed.

And I think there has been a real force here in improvement of government. It has been the newspaper. Not that I'm saying we're happy with what we have now, but it certainly is a damn sight better. We, at least, got responsible people running for office rather than the people that were getting elected simply because they were nice, but they had failed at business.

John Newhouse: They needed the job.

SH: They needed the job. That's what had happened before. I really think that's been the most impressive thing and besides, we have, we really have tried very hard to give our readers a better newspaper. We've gone through phases. It depends on who's hiring if you really want to know. You'll get a managing editor who is bright, quick, sharp, alert and he likes to hire bright, quick, sharp, alert people, and the first thing you know you've got a bunch of activists in there,

everyone with a cause that he is trying to promote. So, then the weeding process has to begin again [laughs] and then you will get someone who produces too staid a newspaper for you for exactly the same reason, because he doesn't want anybody mad at him. We have been very lucky in having some good men here. John Talbot was an exceptional find. He is a terrifically capable guy today. I think John suffered somewhat back in Madison, simply because he was the son-in-law [of Don Anderson] and because others feared that he would be stepping into their shoes because he was the son-in-law, and they sort of kept him down.

JN: What did he do for you here, Strand?

SH: He was general manager now, they call it now, but it was called business manager then. In the first year, he asked questions incessantly, and we were so busy that he continued to be just a real chore having him.

Then all of a sudden, just overnight, evidently he thought, well, now I'm ready and capable. He stepped in and started doing things, and suddenly I realized I had someone that was just a hell of a good man. I don't know how—I drew the original floor plans, in a sense, for this building, not [unintelligible] design of the architects, but we ran some, we had a firm do some projections for us, growth needs, space needs for people for various departments and things and John took an awful lot of interest in this.

I drew some plans, a two-story and a one-story and we took them into the center office then and met with the officers of the company and got approval on the one-story, or the two-story, excuse me. Phil Adler felt that the one-story would be totally out of place downtown here. It would just look like a manufacturing plant, which a newspaper is. So we went home and we interviewed architects and selected some local architects and got this done. I don't know, believe me, I don't how I would have done it alone without John. We split up the work at that time, pretty much.

JN: What year was that, Strand?

SH: Well, we started '66 and finished in '68. It was supposed to be built in about 14 months, but it ran a little longer at that time. I'm sure the one in Madison will run longer than it's supposed to. He was replaced by a guy named [Ron] Semple, who is now [Lloyd] Schermer's assistant. Ron was strictly an editorial type. I'm sure it never entered his mind that he could be anything else.

We had a class-like thing here in job training, TJT [Total Job Training] we called it, and that sort of stimulated Ron. Ron found out that there were other departments in the newspaper. His idea prior to that is true with many of your editorial people, the rest of the newspaper is service for one purpose, to support the newsroom.

JN: Well, but of course this is so. No argument there. [Laughs.]

SH: He and Talbot were very good friends, or became very good friends and Ron used to spend quite a bit of time with him so when Schermer went back to Davenport from Missoula, Talbot was selected for that job, and then I was asked who I wanted for my assistant here and I had a couple of candidates in the place but I wanted Ron and the choice was excellent.

He found out, to his surprise, that he had an affinity for numbers and really enjoyed working with department heads. They were all scared to death because they thought it would be run like a Marine encampment because he had been a Marine and he pretty much had that—in fact, a drill sergeant he had been. So, he pretty much had that attitude. But really, I had a little chat with him about that; he worked with them very well.

One of the funniest things—I must tell you this, when he left—Ron still believes in the string tie with the diagonal stripe, the black or dark grey suit with a vest. In fact, he couldn't buy clothes here. He had to get back to Brooks or if he could get over to England where he could pick up those flannels, he always did, and that's all he ever wore. When he left, they had a party for him, which was something that really touched me a little bit. He got me aside and he said, "You know I thought these people didn't like me. [Laughs] He had felt that there was sort of a boss-employee adversary relationship until then, I think, and it really touched him.

We all arrived a little early and our pressroom foreman, who is sitting at the table out there, Hob [Hobart] Tandy, has a delightful sense of humor, just absolutely delightful, and Hob had gone down to St. Vincent de Paul and he had found all the narrow, diagonally striped ties he could find and all the vests that he could buy, and everybody there when Ron walked in was wearing a narrow, diagonally striped tie and a vest. Some of them had to be cut, the vests had to be cut down the back so they would go on. [Laughs.]

JN: St. Vincent de Paul was a secondhand place. [Laughs]. Oh, wonderful.

SH: I thought that was tremendous. Talbot, you know, he's got nervous mannerisms. When I am at the table with him, I never leave my glasses out like that because he would be picking them out and doing this, or a pencil, he will just disintegrate it. If you're having lunch with him, the same thing is happening, he'll take a fork and be working it—

JN: I noticed that. I didn't know that was habitual.

SH: So, when he left, the same guy went down to St. Vincent de Paul and bought up all the spoons and things he could get and gave him a whole shoebox full of bent spoons. [Laughs.]

JN: Oh, gee, you're probably scared to leave now.

SH: Anyway, I keep getting off on tangents, but I've been lucky in having some very, very, good men and I've got Larry Siegel, who was the corporate personnel director, but he wanted very

badly to get into active—oh, he wanted to get out of a staff situation and into an operational one. He had been around all these newspapers so many times, and I think he thought he had seen so many things that he could improve. I think he has changed his thinking there considerably, too. [Laughs.] He's working very hard.

JN: What does he do for you?

SH: The general manager.

JN: General manager? He took Ron's place.

SH: Yeah. It's been very tough for him. He's been on a staff job for a long time. These fellows rather naturally moved into it like Ron and John, simply because they at least had been associated in a department. In John's case, he had been at Muscatine [Iowa] before he came up here in the same sort of a job and on a small newspaper like Muscatine, you've got to do everything.

JN: Well, that is really your number-two man here?

SH: Oh, yes.

JN: You and he are sort of partners, not quite equal.

SH: Yes. That's essentially it. The same sort of relationship that Dick Gottlieb and Murph Wolman have. It is the primary responsibility of the general manager, workflow is the primary responsibility and making damn sure that deadlines are being met and that nothing is—because after all, with us, John, you've got to cover an awfully far flung area which is more territory than the [Wisconsin] State Journal does. We're going clear up to the Canadian border, more than 400 miles, and we've just got an awfully far flung, a really great big doorstep.

JN: How about your newsroom personnel? You've got, [Duane] Doc Bowler is now—

SH: He is editorial page editor now. He was our editor. This didn't, in all frankness—Doc is a damn good newspaper man. He recognizes a story, he moves on a story, he is really—but he can't handle people. People very quickly learn to hate Doc Bowler. He is critical, he has a very sharp tongue, he is not judicious in where he uses it in front of people, of others, and so on. We were losing so many people out of the newsroom that I instituted, before AMA, an exit interview. All cracks led back to Bowler, that is all there was to it. People were leaving simply because they either feared him or they couldn't tolerate him. Now, he doesn't believe this. I had to be brutally frank with him. He feels we are losing a great deal by his not out there, and I agree, we are losing quite a lot. He's got ability, but he knows where the stories are and he knows how to get them. Believe me, this guy knows that.

I think the worst thing that happened—we were over in the old building when Doc first came, we had a short staff, only about 18 people, for desks and reporting, the whole ball of wax, running a morning and evening newspaper. First thing that Doc did was when summer rolled around, he started taking the vacation shifts over, a lot of them. There was scarcely a man there that didn't have to admit to himself that Doc was not only capable of doing the job, but probably did it better than he did. This earned him a real degree of respect.

And he—his family didn't move down until summer, but he was spending untold hours, always has, always does. I think he probably has a bad family life or something and escapes it through work. Anyhow, he would come down and be around and when the paper was put to bed, he would go out and have a pitcher of beer or two with the boys down the street, and they found out he was human. Then we moved up here and we were showing growth, and the staff was 30 years old then, and we put him in the glass cage down there in the office, and he could sniff when something was happening and he would be right out there and telling others what to do when somebody else should have been telling them, it was their job.

The city editor for example, he'd move right in and take over. Or if he saw two reporters, one sitting on the edge of the other one's desk talking, he might be able to tolerate it for a minute and a half, but a few minutes, he was out there and: "What the hell's the matter with you; you've got work to do," that sort of thing. This was the sort of a guy he was. So, I had to back him off. Got him to write the editorials and he still held the title of editor, and I put George Pinkerton, who was the—well, excuse me, for a time Semple was managing editor, and things worked pretty well because Semple was a very strong man.

He would stand up to Doc, and oddly enough, Doc liked him too, you know he did. [Unintelligible] Then George [Pinkerton] was managing editor, and really I sat with them together and I said, "Now, for god's sakes, we all know why we're doing this, but Doc is having his personnel problems down there and I want you, George, to confer with Doc daily. I don't want Doc shut out."

But it didn't happen. They couldn't get along and George is a reserved, quiet, introvert in a sense. He, if someone hurts his feelings with a biting comment, why he's going to cringe and get back in a corner, and he isn't going to come back and that's essentially what happened. So we wound up with George pretty well running the newsroom, and Doc writing the editorials. Now, just this year we have made another change. We have brought in a man as editor, a great capable man, I think, strong minded. He's having his problems—

JN: His name is?

SH: Bill Roesgen.

JN: George is still managing editor, and Doc is editorial page editor? When did Doc became—let's see, he was editor. He became editor about 19—

SH: Oh, I don't recall. I think it was somewhere about 1963. He became editor about 1963 or that area.

JN: I was down in Davenport, Lloyd Schemer brought out some of the old files, his personal files and showed me some things he thought might interest me and one of them was a letter from Don Anderson to him to Lloyd saying that he had been at a meeting of some of the people in Montana, and they were madder than hell when we were just roasting for putting all the money into Davenport.

I think Doc Bowler was quoted as saying, "Christ, if we had the money you're putting into Davenport, why, we could do big things out here." Do you recall that meeting?

SH: No.

JN: Isn't that the damnest thing? Apparently, Don and somebody else came out here and they just lit into them. I don't know whether—so you became publisher when?

SH: Almost immediately, about a month after they bought the properties. I shouldn't say that; they made me general manager for a year, and they didn't have any publisher. I was running it. Then in '60 they made me publisher. Two or three days after they bought the paper, they installed me in that general managership.

JN: That pretty well takes care of the major changes that have happened the time we took over, doesn't it?

SH: As far as the top management is concerned. In our mechanical departments, it's been a very different thing there. We've had, we've made some major changes, of course, as most newspapers have, and some of these things you have to change. We had two very fine men as pressroom foremen out here, but one was 75 years old and one was 76, believe it or not. I did not see how they could physically

stand the changeover. I knew what it was going to be, they didn't really. They were both as enthusiastic as hell about going to offset but, you know, there was—

The presses had to be installed, the training programs, we had to continue to put the old paper out on the old mill. Nobody in the pressroom had had any experience with a four-page wide newspaper. Each and every one of them had worked only on a unitubular press, the old stovepipe, and they had a lot to learn. So, we brought in Tandy from Davenport.

JN: That's his last name?

SH: Hobart [is his first name]. Hoby went down—Muscatine, by that time, had a little community office there, and he went down there to learn something about offset and then came out here and worked with some people. And the foremen stayed while we had letterpress, but then left. A couple of great guys—

[Break in audio]

SH: Anyhow, Hobart was an unusually good teacher and leader. Rather than getting resentment when he came in over these people, why he gained their loyalty and their help. It was evidenced by the fact that the two old foremen just stayed right there and worked until we went offset. Our composing room foreman at that time, when I told him I would bring someone in, and I brought Roger Kirk, whom you know—in fact, we assisted him in getting his last year of college education so he wanted his degree before he came out here. So that we would have a hold on him and bring him into the composing room because wanted somebody that could help us with cold type. Nobody knew anything about that.

Our composing room foreman at the time, [Willis C.] Bill Gaspard, was just delighted over the news. He almost wept when I told him. I had no real knowledge of how much he feared this thing. He was just scared to death of his ability to cope with it, to handle it, to handle a conversion to cold type. He was very happy to step out of the picture and become just a journeyman. He stayed as a journeyman until retirement and still comes back and works a shift now and then with us, and he had been our foreman for a long time.

JN: You went to cold type and offset at the same time?

SH: Yes. 1968.

JN: Were you the first of the Montana group?

SH: No. Missoula beat us to it a little bit. We started earlier but we had this building to do and everything else, so we didn't get started as quickly as they did.

JN: Schermer got antsy. [Laughs.]

SH: Oh, yeah, that's right.

JN: I heard about that. How was Schermer as a leader out here?

SH: Oh, very fine, very fine. Very well liked down here, and his word was good. He's a charger, he always has been. He is yet. He jumps too fast, too often. There aren't any if or ands about it, although I think he's improved in that area. But boy, somebody had to hold him down once in a while.

JN: Don Anderson.

SH: We all tried. [Laughs] He would really get in there. But, on the other hand, he had some good ideas, and he was very willing to accept good ideas, too—don't kid yourself—from others. We tried things out here that the staid Midwestern Lee papers had never thought of.

JN: You had a little trouble, too, didn't you?

SH: Oh yeah, they didn't like it, many of them. Top management wasn't too enamored of some of the things that we—

JN: What were some of the things that you did that got you—?

SH: One of the things, out here we started, for one thing, not only budgets, but budgeting sessions. I mean, where we would get together and do comparisons. We really started an idea exchange that they did not have back then. They had meetings back there, but they were a social affair in a sense.

JN: What do you mean, an idea exchange?

SH: Well, we would get together in a room, we would sit down and discuss common problems. For example, whether they were economic, or whether they were labor or whatever they might be, and we would also, if we had something going that was working well, we would tell the others about it. Now, this is nothing new, but it was new among Lee newspapers. And what's more, Schermer would—I sometimes thought that telephone [unintelligible] to his ear when he assumed the leadership out here after Dick Morrison left.

Schermer would be phoning and phoning. He knew what was going on, believe me, around—you could always tell when Lloyd would really get involved in some new civic project or he was really busy with something that he was trying because then the phone quit ringing. But if he really wasn't busy why—and he cannot—he would be the last to say this, but he cannot tolerate inactivity. Jim Burgess has told me that he can just tell by the way sometimes Schermer would slam his hat on and walk out the door that Schermer was going fishing, or he was going to do something because he hadn't had enough problems that day. He just loved to be embroiled in problems.

JN: But that wasn't in policy, was it? I mean, you didn't sit down and say you were going to support [unintelligible] for this side or the other?

SH: Oh no, no, no. Schermer was a great believer in autonomy. I was, several of us were, and we had real problems with this, particularly when [Walter] Rothchild came into the fold, when the electronic media came into the fold, because Rothchild's feeling was to have some puppets dancing at the end of strings that he controlled.

JN: Who was that?

SH: Rothschild. Walter Rothschild ran the electronic end and then when they came in, this is where the real problems started. Dave, as he became more and more involved with corporate affairs, particularly when we went public, drifted from the newspapers.

Dave Gottlieb, when I first knew him, was, beyond any shadow of a doubt, as good a newspaper man as I have ever known. He knew newspapers, believe me. He knew advertising. He really was not comfortable as far as the editorial end was concerned. He recognized that this was his area of least expertise and really felt deficient there, more deficient than he was actually, I think. When it came to the rest of it, mechanical, advertising, circulation, the business end in particular, there was a guy that you would look a long, long, time before you him or a better newspaper man.

Dick Morrison out here was a damn good newspaperman. Not the most popular man in the world by any means, but when it came to knowledge and skills, he was very, very competent. As Rothschild influenced Gottlieb a great deal with his thinking and one thing or the other, and we really had some very serious battles actually within the company over centralized control versus autonomy.

JN: Well now, did Rothschild want to go beyond just the electronic side of it and—?

SH: Oh, yes, yes. He really, as a matter of fact, Gottlieb wanted him to be his assistant.

JN: Then you were bucking Gottlieb then too. Gottlieb by that time was in Davenport, then?

SH: Oh yes, he was in Davenport. Gottlieb was in Davenport all the time. In 1960, Gottlieb moved from a position of business manager and advertising manager of the *Times Democrat*. He dropped his advertising managership. [Don] Feeney became advertising manager of the *Times*, and Gottlieb devoted half of his time, at the beginning, to the *Times Democrat* as business manager, and half of his time to being general manager of Lee Enterprises.

JN: How in the hell did you ever stop that, or how did you ever get it resolved?

SH: We just had knockdown, drag out fights on a couple of occasions, really, arguments within the board.

JN: Was he trying to tell you who to endorse?

SH: Yeah, he definitely was. Yes. He—

JN: Gottlieb through Rothschild or...?

SH: Yes. He wanted us to name Rothschild as his assistant and it was about that time that we had a—Gottlieb was on the road so much. He was gone so much, and you couldn't find him. When there would be things where corporate decisions were needed, it was next to impossible. We felt that our only chance was to get a good newspaperman into Davenport, and this is what we did.

I sat down and wrote everything down so I wouldn't get off on a tangent, and I phoned Schermer one day and told him what I knew he had to do. I just kept on and I was looking at that sheet of paper and ticking off the points and finally I was through. Why, I waited for a response from him and none came. I said, "Are you still there?"

His voice floated back: "You son of a bitch." [Laughs] Because he didn't want to—he loved Missoula, he loved Missoula. He had been welcomed into that community. It was just the sort of thing that was made for him. He had started the United Fund there and pushed it to its success the first year and he went out and battled for better air connections there and got them and he was a real community figure. Besides, he was operating a newspaper that was being, that was growing and being accepted, and he was doing a good job of it. He was making headway there. He didn't want to go back.

JN: But partly, as a result of your call—

SH: Oh, I think so, yes, but he knew it, he knew it. I wouldn't say it was a result of my call. He knew what he had to do, and I had just spelled it out and since—

JN: Brought it out into the open where he couldn't duck it as easily.

SH: That's right. He knew what he had to do. And he came down here and told me some of the problems, then after that, tending to it, some that I hadn't thought of that I didn't understand because it was family involved back there.

JN: Adler was his father-in-law.

SH: There were animosities and things in there, and problems that just made it difficult as hell. When Lloyd left here that time, believe me, I did not envy the choice that he had to make. I didn't envy him at all.

JN: What capacity did he go down there as?

SH: He went down there as vice president for newspapers and assistant to Dave. Rothschild was vice president for electronics and assistant to Dave, so they were on a [unintelligible], excepting that Rothschild had Gottlieb's ear all the time. Phil [Adler] retired about the same time. Lloyd delayed going until it was just about retirement time for Phil. We really needed somebody that

would support newspaper autonomy in there, very badly, we needed someone who would be available there, so if there were things that we could not—I told Gottlieb two or three times, “I’m perfectly willing to take the responsibility; I’ll make the decisions on things like this.”

Gee, I would have to go into talk to him later and say, “I couldn’t get hold of you and we had to do this.”

“Well, why didn’t you...?”

I would say, “I am perfectly willing to do this, but I don’t want to hear afterwards, what the hell did you do that for?”

JN: Was Rothschild trying use his influence in the same way in the other parts of the Lee group? Other than Montana?

SH: Oh yes, yes. The whole thing. Oh, definitely. He was a great believer in centralization of authority. He felt that—a favorite statement of his was, there is only one publisher, and that is the corporation.

JN: He has since retired, hasn’t he?

SH: Yes.

JN: Where did he come from, anyway? Did he belong to that group?

SH: Yes. He had been a radio salesman originally, an announcer. As a matter of fact, he sang, I believe. I think that is how he started in radio. He was a singer. You know, when they used to have staff artists. Then he became an announcer and then got into the sales end of it, and really, Rothschild was a capable, he was a shrewd individual. I think he was the product of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother and he was a very devout Catholic, extremely so. There has been quite a lot of difference since he has been out of the deal.

JN: That’s been the last three or four years?

SH: Yes. He was still active and on the board when Dave died, so it’s since then, but he was about due for retirement at that time. I believe he retired the next spring—I can’t recall.

JN: What are some of the things that you’ve done here that you are particularly proud of as a newspaper man, that is within the town or within the state?

SH: Oh, I think some of the things of which I’m particularly proud, outside of the original thing I mentioned that we really made people aware of their government, which I think is—and I think

we have really told it as it is. I think think we have a very strong editorial page and I'm proud of that. I say that for one reason and one only and that is the mass of letters to the editor we get, which I think is indicative of the thing. We could run a full op-ed page every day.

JN: George O'Connor [former Montana Power Co. president] doesn't quite agree with you.

SH: Oh, no, he doesn't agree with our stand, of course not. That was the very next thing that I was coming to. I don't think that we are ecologists, you know, to the extreme. We believe that coal should be extracted, that it is a resource that is in need and should be used, that strip mining is the practical way to extract it. But on the other side of the coin, we also believe that when it is extracted that the costs attendant to this, and by that I mean the highways that have to be built, the school houses that have to be built, in other words, why should the taxpayers as a whole, subsidize this thing? We believe that the land should be restored to some usefulness, as it can be. We recognize that it can't be returned to what it was, but it can be restored to some usefulness for grazing, or—

We feel that this is an agricultural state, has been an agricultural state and that coal could not strip the state totally of its waters. We recognize that tourism is quite an item in our economy, too, and if you're going to lower the rivers to a point where there aren't any rivers left to provide water for steam generation but that you are going to destroy, or you may push up one industry, which frankly is an industry that—these coal steam [unintelligible] are highly automated. Frankly, a handful of ants could operate them. But then you knock off another industry that may be of pretty substantial value to the state too. So these are the—

JN: Where do you and Montana Power meet head on on this? Don't they have somewhat the same philosophies you have? Or are they just bastards all the way down the line?

SH: Oh, I think they have been a force for evil, by and large. They're trying to reform. I think they have finally have it sunk through that they can't do everything that they want and to hell with anyone who gets in their way, and the devil take their hindmost, and all this sort of thing. I think they are finding this out. I think they have been the most arrogant business that I have ever encountered. They have used threats, coercion of all sorts, their lobbying efforts have been just unbelievable, and if you did something that they didn't like, you would get a letter from their chief counsel threatening you with a suit. And this happened a couple of times in one year here, and I said "Fine, sue," and nothing happened.

I do not think that—they have been a grasping—I'll give you a prime example. I'm not going to swear at the accuracy of figures, but according to my recollections, they were willing to pay eight cents for 1,000 cubic feet of natural gas, not at wellhead, but delivered to a collection, which precluded any—nobody could afford this. And yet, when Northern Pipelines or whatever it is out of Omaha, came in and bought the fields, the gas fields—I can't remember the name of the hills—Montana Power screamed their head off. At the very time that they were willing to pay no more than eight cents, which, I think was it, to the guy that had drilled the well and had

the gas. They were buying gas out of Canada and paying 25 to 30 cents for it, and many people really believed that the Corettes, who were the chief owners, the chief stockholders, of Montana Power, owned those wells up in Canada. I don't know if it's true or not, but there was much discussion along those lines. It would be the sort of thing that I would expect of them. No, I don't think they have been—

JN: They are probably making a transition from a group that could do any damn thing they wanted to, because there was no opposition—

SH: There never was. They have irritated people beyond belief. I am surprised that they don't have more opposition than they do have. Over in the Bitterroot, a beautiful area, I don't know whether you heard about that when you were over there in Missoula, a but there was an existing transmission line running across the mountains there. They wanted to put up a bigger line for their northwest grid; completely sensible thing to do, no doubt about it, but were they going to follow the route of their old one? Oh no, they wanted to cut a new swath through there and use the right of eminent domain there and everything else to do this. And they would—people fought and would take them to court, and they still did not budge. They were just absolutely adamant. And they didn't have really good reasons. You know, people have owned property along the stream and have beautiful mountains behind them. They don't like to see a big swath developed there. They were fighting it very hard. Well, let me give another example. They just proceeded, even though they knew they had to have impact statements and everything else. Aimed at building [unintelligible] Colstrip. They just proceeded to go ahead and do it, without the permits. This is the sort of arrogance these people have, and you know if they were not pushed, the spoil banks would have been there without a bit of green on it for 100 years, regardless of what they say.

They had the ex-president of the School Mines up there, guy named [Edwin] Koch, right in their pocket. I think that there has been some change, don't misunderstand, and I think, certainly, we've—you know, they have been so deceptive. Here's an example. When they started that plant, they told about how many gallons of water it would take...let's say 8,000 gallons daily, that's the figure that sticks in my mind. Our reporters, by doing some snooping, simply because they couldn't find out where the water was going to come from—there isn't that kind of water in Colstrip. And they couldn't get any information from Montana Power. Montana Power isn't going to talk. So they started snooping and they found that a year and a half earlier, Montana Power had put a claim on the Yellowstone River in Treasure County, a claim on water, calling for a conduit of no less than 5 feet in diameter there and claiming billions of gallons of water annually out of there. As a matter of fact, about half of the normal, as I recall, half the normal low flow of the river at that point. They had never admitted this, they just talked about what this spot [unintelligible] because they already had in mind additional plans, and so forth. And there has been an awful scrap, you have probably heard about this, over plants three and four down there, which are 700 megawatts a piece.

JN: Well, are one and two already in?

SH: One and two are...they are not completed yet, they're not on line.

JN: But they're building, they will be completed.

SH: Oh, yes. These are the ones that were built, they started building long before the permits were issued. The whole thing is that the fact that they are building right now with Pacific Power & Light or whatever it is, or Puget Sound Power & Light, the two that they are building right now, will generate the approximate electrical needs of the state of Montana at present. They have claimed that *we* need this power. We think that we would much rather see the coal transported to Gary, Indiana, or wherever it is needed, rather than have Gary, Indiana's, pollution problems here in Eastern Montana.

JN: Take the coal there and they'll send the electricity back here via transmission lines.

SH: It doesn't have to be sent back. We've got adequate [electrical power], at the present time, to serve not only this state but they also, they are going to run a—

[Break in audio]

SH: That's one of the things we're proud of—I think that we have [unintelligible], that was the coagulating factor, the thing that has really made some of these miners, strip miners, the power complex back off a little, and think in terms of maybe we better satisfy the need for public good. I don't say that they are all bad. Some of the real leaders, for example, in this area in anti-pollution stuff have been the oil refineries. Two of the three—the three is the Farmer's Union. They have had to be pushed every step of the way. They aren't about to do anything, but the ones you would think would be the first in line. But both Continental and Exxon here have really taken, they have spent an enormous amount of money in cleaning up.

JN: From the air pollution, mainly?

SH: Air and water both. They have put in—I never knew that there are bacteria that will devour petroleum products, but there are. The water that they use in their refining process goes into ponds for the action of the bacteria just practically makes water boil and when it goes back into the river, it's very good.

JN: Is this the Clark Fork here still?

SH: This is the Yellowstone River. They have been very fine. We are having some problems. The state right now is pursuing, some of the trace minerals that are not very much considered in generating are really very harmful. They are finding loss of animal life, wildlife in particular, vegetation and so on downwind from Montana Power's plant right now. Chlorides, things of that sort are in—

JN: Was there any particular reporter that got on to this ecology thing and has been leading the way, or is it an amalgamation of everybody?

SH: No, it's been pretty much been an amalgamation, and I think the thing that really touched it off was a report called *The Northcentral Power Study*, which was—the work was done and it was put together by the Bureau of Reclamation but it was paid for by a consortium of energy companies, both petroleum and electrical generating. Really, it located on their maps, for example, some 42 generating plants of more than 1,000 megacycles, or megawatts, rather. Pretty soon, you look at that thing, and it talks in terms of 30 year's productivity and coal seams that are up to 50 feet in depth and so on and then it would be gone, and you then suddenly realize what you're going to have left, something that resembles the face of the moon.

JN: Who read that here? Somebody here must have looked at it and thought, oh my gosh.

SH: Oh, yes. I think we had. The guy that was really—yeah, we had a young reporter named Ron Schleyer, who really got wound up on it more than anything else—he's no longer with us—and who brought it to the attention of our editorial board, and we started campaigning against the—he had been assigned the, I believe Bowler had received a copy of it, the power study, and it got him quite upset. He was a wild-eyed, oh man, really, just really wild-eyed conservationist. He felt that this newspaper should have, in fact, he wanted us to have him purely on ecology, his beat. We just weren't quite big enough a newspaper to have a—

JN: Doc has done quite a bit editorially on this, hasn't he?

SH: An awful lot. As a matter of fact, I believe that he was nominated for a Pulitzer a year ago by a group of women in Glendive, Montana. It's our really sincere belief, from information that we have gotten, that Doc would have won that Pulitzer had it not been for the Watergate thing, the two boys— [Woodward and Bernstein of the *Washington Post*.]

JN: It was bad timing.

SH: We think he would have. The second thing that we're proud of here is the fact that we pursued, because of Dan Foley, I guess, who was our State Bureau chief at that time, we pursued and brought suit against the State Industrial Accident Bureau [Board] because they refused to open any of their records.

JN: Did you do that as the paper here in town or as Lee or—?

SH: No, we did it as the paper here. Lee really, the organization really backed the thing.

JN: How come Helena didn't bring a suit instead of you?

SH: Well, I guess because at that time, I was the group leader out here, and I guess because I was the most excited and upset about it. Dan had called me about it, really, and besides the—our principal attorney is here. I had asked for him because I was here [and] when Schermer left, I assumed the duties that he had out here as far as the four papers are concerned. Little things, but still things: somebody has to call meetings if we're going to meet, someone has to determine if Lee Newspapers out here are asked for a donation, what we're going to give. Somebody has to centralize. We sell advertising as a group, the Montana Group, national advertising. Someone has to decide whether the State Bureau boys get a raise because they are employed by all of us. All these little things, there's nothing big but there does need to be someone doing these things, and because I was in that position at that time, why, it was Foley who called me in said I can't get in there. They won't let me. I asked who he had talked to and it was a clerk, and so I called [Bernard] Bud Longo, who was our attorney here. And he said Foley should go—and have a witness with him, if possible— to Industrial Accident Bureau and ask to see Mr. [James] Carden, the head of the division, and demand access to the records from Carden. Then, if, depending on whether Carden should turn him down or give him access, why we should proceed from there. He did that, Carden turned him down, we brought suit in Yellowstone County. Now, it was transferred to Helena, the suit, but it was the *Billings Gazette* and Strand Hilleboe who bought the suit. I agree it was Lee Newspapers in Montana, not just the *Gazette*. On the other hand, I say I'm proud of it because I don't think it would have ever been pursued had I not pushed it.

JN: You could have very well have said, forget it and gone fishing.

SH: I think that was quite a stroke. I think if the Attorney General's office just had a little more push and brains and things, I think—it was just lost around here, you know, through carelessness or stupidity or both, I don't know which. There are going to be at least 15 of the more prominent attorneys behind bars some time or the other in this state because of that, because it was an awful rip-off. We, at least, have, as a result, already legislation has been passed that—we have evidence, admission of one guy that has gone to prison that he had the judge that decided against us in his pocket. He sat in the judge's outer chamber at the judge's typewriter and with his secretary, had his secretary write out the decision, which then took it into the judge and he signed it.

JN: That was the one that decided against your [access to the records]—

SH: That's right. Then we carried it to the Supreme Court and won there.

JN: What kind of guts does a man have who will do a thing like take his secretary over and use the judge's offices, typewriter and stationery, type out the decision and take it into the judge and say here, sign?

SH: And that's what happened.

JN: I can't imagine much more gall than that.

SH: I think that's something in which we can rightfully take some pride, not just the *Gazette*, but all of the Lee newspapers. I really think Lee has brought the caliber of newspapering in this state up quite substantially. I think that they have proved to be good employers. Our turnover is minimal.

JN: How has your circulation been in the middle of all this?

SH: Our circulation has continued to gain, even though some areas of our state, particularly the areas in which that we cover, have been losing in population. Billings itself has been gaining.

JN: How big a town is Billings?

SH: Today I would say 75,000 at least.

JN: Back in 1959, your circulation was around...?

SH: Between 36 and 37,000. Today it's between 55 and 56,000. We lopped off, during the newsprint crunch, we discontinued service to some of our outer perimeter, and I don't think we will ever reestablish it, unless—in fact, it may go the other way. I don't feel we have a duty and obligation to supply a newspaper to somebody simply because he wants it, if it costs us money. The way second-class rates have been going, the way gasoline prices, labor for drivers and that, costs of units, trucks, the tire costs, everything else has risen so sharply that it costs us a lot more to get that newspaper into a person's hands. We could haul 400 miles to Plentywood, which we do.

But when we put the newspaper into that post office there for delivery to boxes in the post offices or to rural routes, those things have to have been labeled, bundled, bagged by rural route or by city box holder right here before it leaves the plant, before it's put in the trucks that we employ to haul it up there. They're all contract haulers. We don't own any of our own trucks, and we pay zone 3 rates on 'em up there. And I'll tell you this: our average of all rates from December for big papers amounted to \$1.57 per subscriber—which is a far cry from what second class used to be. In January with lighter papers, it dropped to, as I recall, to \$1.21 or \$1.27—it may have been \$1.29, I don't remember to the dollar. You know the same thing is true with carrier delivery systems. Where you have them, you have to have district managers out, they're working with the carriers, they cost more constantly to—we may be pulling in our—we lopped off, at that time, about 2,000 subscribers. Then we've gained those back and have shown a slight gain over that. Rollie Harris, our circulation manager, told me last month—we're beginning to feel the pinch a little bit, and their investigations so far have shown that almost without exception where we are getting the cancellations, it's where people are sharing the newspaper.

JN: That's something new.

SH: Yes, it is. It's particularly prevalent in apartments. We're finding this to be true where one subscriber will buy the paper, but two families are reading it.

JN: Have you gone to this—I don't know what you call it—this tube—for the reporters?

SH: Yeah.

JN: VLT? Or what the heck is it? I'm so new I don't even know it.

SH: VDT, Visual Display Tubes. [Visual Display Terminals]

JN: No, but we are having the system installed. We're doing some remodeling right now and will be installing it this year sometime. It's like everything else, you know, as installations are made they discover bugs in it, or new applications, or something, or it's underpowered in some areas, or one thing and another, and then you get holdups and it's very difficult to pinpoint a date, but we hope to have such a system in and operating this fall.

SH: Davenport and Missoula are kind of testing it out for the system?

JN: Well, yes, we have now—Missoula's will be the fourth one, and they have half of theirs in right now. They have the news portion of it in now. It is installed in Davenport, and I think, now, they have all theirs online. Now, Missoula's will not be online, they are using a tape system. It is in Mason City, also tape in LaCrosse. Ours will be more along the line of Davenport's online system, a hard-wired system where the reporter will write his story, correct it. You know the difference between this and other technological changes that have come in the past, like you and I are damn well old enough so we can remember when TTS came in and they started using tape and that, at first, and everything. I can't remember Mergenthaler's invention quite; it was already—[laughs]—but those things, you know, really didn't have the support of everybody in the newspaper. It just meant that printers were getting [unintelligible] out of jobs.

This is a different thing. If the reporters, or one of the ad people want these things, the classified people particularly, because it's a work aid to them. Oh, to a reporter they are tremendous. Think, John, how many times—now, wait a minute, I can see you doubt this, but think how many times you have interviewed somebody, let's say, and you have made notes and you're going through here and composing your story, and you've looked over and that and here you get back to there and here's something that you know should have been back in that story earlier. And so what do you do?

You've got to write an insert there for it. You write that insert paragraph, then you've got to refer back to the thing to see that you got the insert just right and then when you've got the

whole thing finished, you get your shears, and you clip that out, and you take your shears and you paste the thing in. All that sort of thing. No more. The guy sits there, he sees that he misspells Hilleboe, he doesn't have to X it out and do it again, he just takes and puts that light cursor on that spot, and types in a couple letters, and it's right. Then if he's got an insert like I was talking about, he just scrolls that story back where it is and he puts that cursor there and he starts typing it in and he can put it right in the middle of a paragraph. He can sit there in front of that screen and scroll that story back to its beginning when he's finished it and just take and hit the advance button and that story will just keep moving up at about reading speed for him.

If he's a slow reader, why, he'll lift his finger off then when he's read down and push it again and he can sit there and reread his story more easily than he can, and they love it. And with a classified ad person, they sit down there and that thing, when they have taken something over the phone, they can tell exactly how many lines it is and the thing will even give them the cost. And they've got all—everything there. The name of the person, the telephone number, the address—you'll have it for billing purposes—they've got the ad, can read the ads back and say, "Mrs. Jones, that's so many lines for 8 days, it will cost you—" They don't even have to think.

So, it's just got tremendous advantages. They don't have to sort these things by classifications either, and send 'em out in takes, because the equipment will do that automatically. Matter of fact, the way they do it in Davenport in automobiles; if you wanted to buy a 1970—because that was the last year before they started putting that anti-pollution stuff—all 1970 cars are there. Then the 1971s and '72s, '73s, you could do it by make of car the same way, and the system will automatically insert new ads, kill out ads that expired and put them under the right classification and put them however you want them, alphabetically, or by age, or however. You know, this is something.

And so what do you think of—you've got a situation here where people want this thing, the people that are using it.

JN: I was watching [Ed] Erlandson up at Missoula the other night—he's just learning it. [Laughs] I was putting myself in his place. Once you learn it, I imagine it would be great, but god almighty, it's just—

SH: Well, they haven't had much of a training period up there, either. We've got one down on our floor now, which we are using. When people have time, they can go over and sit down and—

JN: Just to play around? Well, there are other things I should ask you, or you should tell me?

SH: Oh, I don't know. I guess another thing we're very proud of, frankly, is this building and the fact that we—that the workflow in it is excellent. This is of really prime importance in a newspaper, because if you're saving steps, you're saving money, and the fact that we did it

locally—local architects use it, or I mean designed it—and that it is sufficiently attractive so that people will point to it and say, “That's our newspaper.”

JN: Does it do anything for the people working in it?

SH: Oh, I think so, yes.

JN: You mean the fact you've got an atrium here— you've got a pleasant place to have a cup of coffee— people coming in—you must be a little bit more deferential because they're coming into a fine place rather than a little hole in the wall. I would think it would make a difference in your employees' attitudes toward themselves. I remember where—

SH: I think it does. I'll tell you this, you'd sit down in the composing room you'll find those printers out there wearing neckties, shirts, and stuff, you know. I think a great many of them wear short smocks so that they—oh, there isn't any need for a shirt today, or anything.

JN: These are the people who are working with your computers, et cetera. Is that what you mean by printers?

SH: Well, no, many of them are punching tape. We still have that system, you see. They speed up the pages and everything, but it isn't like the old days when they had to lug heavy lead around, and so on, and they've responded to it. I think, too, that they feel pretty good about—you know they come up and sit down and have a cup of coffee or eat their lunch up in our lunchroom. The pressmen, the printers. Believe me that black gang, when they come up here, they change clothes first. They still—you're never going to get rid of dirt as long as you're dealing with machinery as big as the press that's got ink in it. I know notice when I call Tandy, when we were sitting there—right now, he's probably sitting down there in coveralls that are just black, but when he comes up for lunch, he'll be cleaned up. Oh, I'm sure it's had an impact on the people, sure. We have an awfully small turnover here.

JN: Well, Don mentioned I ought to see Russ Hart. And Bobby Jones seems to be the two that he thought were—

SH: Well, I don't know, Bobby Jones was an old classmate of Bob's at Montana State, and I don't know. He was a sheep man here, and he's been a director of First National Bank for a many, many years. He might be a good source, I don't know. Don seems to think so, he said so in his note to me.

[End of Interview]