WITH OR WITHOUT OFFENSE...BERNARD HANKS AND THE ABILENE REPORTER-NEWS

by

SALLY ANN LOGUE POST, B.A.

A THESIS

IN

MASS COMMUNICATIONS

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirement for
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Approved

May 1984

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my committee chairman, Dr. Harmon Morgan, and the members of my committee, Dr. Billy Ross and Dr. Bill Dean, who gave me guidance and support during the researching and writing of this thesis.

Thanks also go to Stormy and Patty Shelton and all those connected with the Abilene Reporter-News for helping me to reconstruct the life and philosophies of Bernard Hanks.

A special thank you goes to my parents for their never ending support. And to my co-workers I want to express my appreciation for their understanding and help.

And, finally, to my two special friends, Jim Hastings and my husband Joe Post, I especially want to say thank you not only for their editing and proofreading, but for the encouragement and support that made it possible for me to finish this work.

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INTRODUCTION

Bernard Hanks was a man who believed in the living. Because he didn't have much use for monuments to the past, it's fitting that the communications company which bears his name and the newspaper to which he dedicated his life are very much alive and looking to the future.

Both the Abilene Reporter-News and Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc., are constantly searching for ways to improve the services they provide for their consumers, while still operating under many of the same principles Hanks and his partner, Houston Harte, established many years ago.

Hanks was not a trained journalist. He was a skilled businessman who believed in the importance of a newspaper as a prime source of information and entertainment. Before his death in 1948, Hanks set standards for the Abilene Reporter-News which still are the cornerstone of the paper's journalistic philosophy.

Hanks believed a newspaper should print all the news and print it accurately. This belief is reflected by the motto, "Without or with offense to friends or foes we sketch your world exactly as it goes," that appears each day under the paper's nameplate on page one. Hanks, who chose the Lord Byron quotation as the paper's motto in 1927, believed in those words. Long-time Reporter-News Editor Frank Grimes said in an editorial that the motto

expressed, "a hope, a goal, an aspiration -- a policy."[1]

Hanks also believed a newspaper should be forever on the lookout for the "little fellow." Former Reporter-News Editor Ed Wishcamper quoted Hanks as saying, "Always keep an eye out for the little fellow. The big ones can look after themselves, but the little fellows have nobody but the newspaper to fight for them."[2]

Hanks also believed that the Reporter-News should take an active role in the development of the city by supporting activities that would contribute to the growth of Abilene. Despite his interest in the growth of the city, Hanks never ventured very far into the public spotlight. Even though he served on a few civic committees and was elected to a two-year term on the school board, Hanks was not necessarily well known to the average citizen of Abilene. Local historian Rupert N. Richardson said of Hanks, "I cannot think of another man whom I knew as well as I knew Bernard Hanks and can say or write so little about him."[3]

While Hanks may not have been well known to the average citizen of Abilene, he was greatly respected by his colleagues in the newspaper industry and many prominent politicians, including then-Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson. The numerous letters and telegrams received at the time of Hanks' death prompted his widow, Eva May

Hanks, to say, "I guess I didn't know little Bernard was such a big man."[4]

It is because of the contributions of Bernard Hanks to journalism that this thesis will examine the history of the Abilene Reporter-News and the man who was its conscience for 44 years.

NOTES

[1]Ed Wishcamper, From Tent to Computers. (Abilene: The Abilene Reporter-News, 1981), p. 53.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Rupert N. Richardson, letter to author, June 26, 1983.

[4]Wishcamper, p. 53.

CHAPTER 1

THE FUTURE GREAT

In 1881, when the Texas and Pacific Railroad owners chose to bill their new town as "The Future Great," they had the foresight to recognize what Abilene could become. That prediction could have applied to the Abilene Reporter-News as well.

In those early days, making a living in Abilene was not easy, despite the railroad's prediction. The only visible means of support were farming and ranching or catering to those who did.[1]

One of the earliest businesses to be established in the city was the Abilene Reporter, which published its first edition on June 17, 1881, just three months and two days after the sale of the first town lots.

C. E. Gilbert, the owner and publisher of the Reporter, began operation in a tent while he built the newspaper's first home. Gilbert, who had published the Navasota (Texas) Tablet before moving to Abilene, had many setbacks in the early days of the Abilene Reporter.

Shortly after moving into his new building, Gilbert became ill with typhoid fever. During the time he was ill, a fire destroyed one block of the new town, including the Reporter's new offices.

Despite his illness and the loss of his business, Gilbert chose not to give up, as many men might have been

tempted to do. Instead, he rushed into production with the Reporter's first "extra edition". This edition, and subsequent editions of the Reporter, were printed at the Baird (Texas) Clarendon until Gilbert rebuilt his offices.

Gilbert's reporting of the fire included a summary of his own losses:

> All that constituted the paraphernal appertunances of the Abilene Reporter office on yesterday, is now a heap of smouldering ashes, twisted irons and masses of melted type metal; but tomorrow she will, Phoenix-like, rise from the ashes, clad in bright new garments, and resume her career of usefulness.[2]

Gilbert was right. By continuing to publish the Reporter on borrowed equipment until his plant was reconstructed, he showed a tenacity that launched a newspaper tradition that continues today.

During Gilbert's time, as happens today, editors frequently used their editorial columns to attack those with whom they disagreed and each other as well.

The editors and publishers of the various Abilene papers have always placed the well-being and growth of the city near the top of their lists of priorities. Gilbert and his first competitor, W. L. Gibbs, publisher of the Magnetic Quill, exemplified this.

Both men strongly believed they knew what was best for the town, but their views were diametrically opposite.

Gilbert, who was raised in a farming community,

believed that the future of Abilene lay in bringing in more farmers to the area.[3]

This position was not popular with the area ranchers, who controlled a major part of the economy. Gibbs believed as did the ranchers, that settlers would do serious damage to their open ranges.[4]

Gilbert and Gibbs were quick to point out the faults of the other man's position and showed they were willing to use more than words to define their stands. As the attacks in the editorial columns became more personal, Gilbert, armed with a buggy whip, went searching for Gibbs after he had taken particular offense to a Gibbs' editorial.

Gilbert struck Gibbs with the whip, and in retaliation Gibbs drew a pistol and fired a shot that resulted in a minor wound to Gilbert's forehead.[5]

The fight was just one phase of the war between Gilbert and Gibbs. The free grass issue, about which both men felt strongly, resulted in an advertising rate war with each man trying to undercut the other.

Because Gibbs had the support of the more financially secure cattlemen, Gilbert knew that he must take bold steps if he was to save his newspaper. The rate war was costing Gilbert a great deal of money, but rather than fold his paper and move on he took two steps to save the

Reporter from financial ruin.

First, he turned his weekly newspaper into a daily. While the move didn't expand his revenue, it did place him in a better competitive position by allowing advertisers access to advertising space every day rather than having to wait for the weekly paper in which everyone else in town had advertisements.

Second, Gilbert orchestrated the beginnings of a third newspaper in Abilene. Gilbert had hired James L. Lowry to work for him at the Reporter as a printer. Assuming Lowry's beliefs on the future of Abilene to be similar to his own, Gilbert suggested that Lowry start a weekly newspaper.

Gilbert offered Lowry the use of the Reporter's plant and several other propositions, but Lowry finally decided to open an independent operation. On March 27, 1885,[6] Lowry began publishing the Taylor County News.

In later years the News was bought by Bernard Hanks and became the second namesake of today's Reporter-News.

Gilbert was correct about Lowry's support of the farmers' position on the free grass issue. Lowry also believed that farmers and ranchers would have to live in harmony and included in his newspaper the latest news on how to upgrade cattle ranching.[7]

The combination of the two newspapers pushing for

more settlers to come into the area and new barbed-wire laws being passed in the state legislature forced the cattlemen to turn to more modern ranching methods and to learn to live with the farmers.[8]

After a long battle, Gilbert finally won his personal war with Gibbs in September, 1885, when the Magnetic Quill ceased publication. With that challenge behind him, Gilbert's Reporter and the News both were able to prosper. develop the personal bitterness which had characterized the Gilbert-Gibbs competition.[9]

With things going smoothly for both Abilene newspapers, Gilbert felt the urge to move on and sold the Reporter to Dr. Alf H. Tolar in May, 1886. This move proved to be a good one for Gilbert but not for the Reporter.

Gilbert moved to Dallas. He bought and edited the Times-Herald and later was one of the organizers and president of the Southern Afternoon Press Association.

Tolar, who returned The Reporter to weekly publication, saw his tenure as owner/editor fall victim to drought and financial setback. The "Drought of 1887" proved fatal to the crops in the area and to Dr. Tolar's interest in the newspaper.[10]

Tolar found that serving in the state legislature was much more interesting and profitable than writing editorials predicting rain that never came.[11]

Tolar's sale of the Reporter to John Hoeny, Jr., of Weatherford, proved to be an important move in assuring the future success of the Reporter.

The changes which Hoeny made in the paper heralded a period of growth that would be continued under publishers George Anderson and Bernard Hanks.[12]

Hoeny had come to Abilene in 1883 to establish a horse ranch. When local businessmen and bankers learned he had owned and published other newspapers, they urged him to forego his ranch and buy the Reporter.

Hoeny not only brought the newest printing equipment to the Reporter's plant, but also pioneered several new features in the newspaper. Hoeny accepted the first liquor advertisements in the paper's history and organized the classified advertising into a column by itself, making the Reporter one of the first newspapers in the country to do so.[13]

Hoeny's most far-reaching effect on the Reporter's future was a personnel decision. In 1894, an announcement in The Reporter noted Hoeny had hired George S. Anderson of Roby, Texas, to "be in charge of management... collect accounts, solicit advertisements, etc."[14]

Neither Hoeny nor Anderson could have known that Anderson's association with the Reporter would lead him to become one of Abilene's leading businessmen, financiers,

and philanthropists.

Hoeny's improvements and additions to the Reporter were good for the newspaper but taxing on his pocketbook. Within months of Anderson's arrival, Hoeny filed for bankruptcy[15] and left Abilene.

Despite severe financial losses being suffered by the newspaper, Anderson took aggressive steps to stabilize the company. With the approval of the bankruptcy judge, Anderson turned the Reporter into an afternoon daily once again and within months had the newspaper back on solid financial ground.[16]

The court allowed the sale of the newspaper to John L. Stephenson and Hugh Keifer in 1897. Anderson was not listed as a purchaser at that time, but by 1900 he was listed as the newspaper's owner.[17]

The Reporter has traditionally supported civic and educational activities in Abilene. Under the proprietorship of Anderson and Kiefer, the Reporter experienced something its predecessors had never dealt with--war.

In January 1897, Stephenson sold his interest in the Reporter to L. B. Shook, who was editor of the newspaper when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898.

Shortly after the sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana harbor, the Reporter published its first morning edition on February 15, 1899. A notice in that issue

read:

> This morning we issued an edition at 8:30, and will continue to do so as long as the general interest justifies it, or during the war, seven days a week. Our afternoon service will be continued as before, with the cream of the news, and this will be printed every day at 4 p.m. Those who pay a dollar a month will receive both the morning and afternoon editions. We should have at least a hundred more regular subscribers for this special war service, and hope to get them. With both night and afternoon services the paper is cheaper.[18]

While the announcement showed an intent by the Reporter to give its readers the best possible coverage of the war news, it also demonstrated how the owners were willing to use the war to increase circulation.

The war news that the Reporter printed was from unidentified sources. Since the Reporter was not a member of the Associated Press at that time, the origin of the material is unknown.[19]

These unidentified dispatches and the competition that was present between newspapers during this era of personal journalism resulted in biting comments from other West Texas editors.

Both the Midland Reporter and the Colorado City (Texas) Stockman questioned the timeliness and accuracy of the Abilene newspaper's war news. The attacks prompted Shook to print excerpts from those critical editorials and respond with:

> The above is a sample of one kind of journalism but we would hate to appear before any of our five hundred readers west of Abilene in the light the above two editors have thrown upon themselves. Such silly lying is really not worth an answer. All our dispatches, as a rule, are verified in the St. Louis Globe Democrat, printed next day.[20]

The reaction from Shook may have been a simple response to having been attacked by rival editors, but it also may have given a hint as to why the Reporter was attacked in the first place. The five hundred readers west of Abilene to which Shook referred may well have been taking a big chunk out of the Colorado City and Midland newspapers' circulation.

During those years at the turn of the century, the Reporter and Abilene continued to grow. The city's business interests flourished as more and more businessmen moved into the area. The educational system grew, and the Childers Classical Institute, the forerunner of Abilene Christian University,[21] was founded.

It was also during those years that an eight-year-old boy began delivering newspapers for the Reporter.

NOTES

[1]Wishcamper, p. 10.

[2]Abilene Reporter, August 27. 1881.

[3]Hugh Cosby, editor, History of Abilene. (Abilene: Hugh E. Cosby, Co., 1925), p. 64.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Katharyn Duff and Kay Seibt, Catclaw County: An Informal History of Abilene in West Texas. (Burnet, Texas: Eakin Press, 1980), p. 79.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 80.

[9]Ibid., p. 81.

[10]Cosby, p. 65.

[11]Duff, p. 82.

[12]Cosby, p. 67.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Abilene Reporter, February 5, 1895.

[15]Duff, p. 83.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Abilene Reporter, February 15, 1898.

[19]Wishcamper, p. 27.

[20]Abilene Reporter, May 13, 1898.

[21]Wishcamper, p. 31.

CHAPTER 2

BERNARD HANKS

Bernard Hanks and his pretty little pony have undertaken to deliver the Daily Reporter on the north side. As soon as they learn the route they should do the job to a turn. Should anyone fail to get the paper please be patient and report the matter to us, though Bernard said he thinks he found all the readers this morning.[1]

The above announcement in the Abilene Reporter signalled the beginning of a relationship between Bernard Hanks and the newspaper that would last a lifetime. George Anderson couldn't have known that he was beginning an association with a young man who would become his business partner and most trusted friend.

Born September 19, 1884, in Dallas, Texas, Marshall Bernard Hanks was the son of Dr. and Mrs. R. T. Hanks. The family moved to Abilene in 1892 when the Rev. Hanks left his post as pastor of the Dallas First Baptist Church to take a similar position in Abilene.

The Anderson-Hanks relationship began before the move to Abilene. Anderson had met the Rev. Hanks in Roby, Texas, where Anderson owned the newspaper, and while Hanks was in Roby to conduct a revival, Hanks was a guest in the Anderson home. When Anderson moved to Abilene, the Rev. Hanks returned the hospitality and asked Anderson to stay in his home for a few nights. There, Anderson roomed with his future paper carrier, Bernard Hanks.[2]

Hanks demonstrated his aptitude for business at

an early age. After moving to Abilene at age eight, Hanks looked around the city to determine where his best business opportunities lay.

At that time milk cows were free to roam around the city, a situation which was becoming a sore point with many of the women. Hanks saw the chance to make money and to perform a good deed for Abilene. He bought a pony to deliver his newspaper route and made a deal with Colonel J. H. Parramore, who had a fenced pasture at the edge of town. Hanks arranged with cattle owners to drive their cattle to Parramore's pasture each morning and return them home each evening for $1 a month. This proved satisfactory to the townspeople and to Hanks, who split each dollar he received with Parramore as rent on the pasture.[3]

Hanks' association with Anderson and the *Reporter* was interrupted when he went to Waco, Texas, to enter Baylor University. Hanks' determination to finish what he started brought an end to his school days in the first semester of his second year. Hanks was ill with a fever, and against doctor's orders he played in a Thanksgiving Day football game. That night his temperature rose dramatically, and it was after Christmas before he recovered from the complications of the illness.[4]

During his school years Hanks' family had moved to Caldwell, Texas, and after leaving Baylor he returned

to Abilene. Anderson said:

> When he (Hanks) recovered, his father wrote me he was coming back to Abilene. I encouraged him to return, and he found a job in a grocery store. One day he told me they were going to cut his wages, and Reporter. We have since been associated, and our business partnership has continued more than 30 years.
>
> Bernard finished up a bookkeeping course, and then took charge of the Reporter books. It was not long until he became business manager, then advertising manager. I was editing the paper. He was looking after the business end. This continued until the commercial printing and newspaper were divided Bernard Hanks taking over the newspaper.[5]

During all the years Hanks spent nurturing his newspaper, he still found time to enjoy sports. Hanks remained an avid football fan and developed an interest in raising horses. A great deal of his time away from the newspaper was spent organizing the first polo club in Abilene. He would also attend the Kentucky Derby each year. His daughter, Patty Shelton, remembered his love for horses and the trips to the Derby:

> We went to the Derby yearly. Mother always complained about having to go, but after Daddy died, she always still went each year.[6]

Hanks also loved to hunt and fish and every year took a group of friends to a hunting lease near San Antonio. Patty recalled one hunting trip to New Mexico:

> If you were from out of state, you paid for the license to hunt in New Mexico. Daddy went into a place to get a license and they asked him if he lived in New Mexico, and even though he always intended to pay for the li-

> conse, he said yes. When the man asked him where he was from Daddy said Tucumcari. Well, the man then asked Daddy to spell Tucumcari. He couldn't so he just reeled off a bunch of letters. He later said of all the places in New Mexico to pick, he couldn't believe he had to pick Tucumcari. His friends and he enjoyed that story for some time, and it really was typical of his sense of humor.[7]

Even though his hunting license story demonstrates he was just as likely as the next man to stretch the truth when it came to a $2 hunting license, in matters of business Hanks was a man who believed deeply in honesty and loyalty and whose word was rarely questioned. His integrity was a familiar theme repeated in the recollections of family, friends, and former employees. Long-time Lubbock newspaper editor Charles A. Guy, who shared both a business and personal relationship with Hanks, had high words of praise:

> I would say Bub Hanks, all his old friends called him Bub, was one of those men you hear about but rarely see. His word was as good as his bond. Whatever Bub said, you could take it for what it was, cause that's the way it was.
>
> He was a shy man who always went around with his hands in his pockets. He never put on the dog. And he was a smart man. He was wise, and he was just, and he was honest. I don't think I ever knew a better man than Bub Hanks.[8]

The late Josh Barrett, who served Hanks as a reporter, publisher, promotion director and radio station manager, echoed Guy's words and called Hanks a friend to all his employees:

> He was a very close friend. He was very affable and considerate of all the employees. He was just a fine man. He was a friend of every employee he ever had I guess, until that employee violated a trust or something like that.[9]

Many of the men who spent most of their lives working for Hanks share Barrett's sentiments. Frank Grimes, who served as editor of the Reporter-News for many years, wrote in an editorial at Hanks' death in December 1948:

> Loyalty to friends and faithful employees were his finest characteristics. I always felt free to confer on editorial matters, but I was given a free hand, which Hanks always respected.[10]

Patty agreed with that assessment of her father and added that his fairness and honesty applied to her as well. She recalled that if she told either her mother or father something, they always believed what she said. She also remembered her father as being strict but not dogmatic and always respectful of her individuality. He offered options and advice, but insisted that she make up her own mind about many things:

> If I really didn't know what to do, he would tell me options and advice, but I still had to decide for myself. Of course it usually ended up that the way he preferred was always best.[11]

Despite Hanks' dedication to his business, he was still able to see the humor in other people's lack of

business aptitude. Patty recalled that her father may have been a little disappointed because she was not as business oriented as he would have liked. She remembered losing her billfold one day and informing her father that she had lost it and the $5 in it. Later, when she had to call him back and admit she had finally found the billfold in the deep freeze where she had dropped it while putting groceries away, she recalled his reaction:

> I called Daddy and told him where I had found my billfold and that now I really know what frozen assets were. Well, you could have heard him all the way out to the house telling his daughter how smart she was.[12]

Hanks not only was able to laugh at his daughter's lack of business sense but also was even able to see the humor in business decisions made by others which affected his own business. Patty recalled a young newspaper carrier who delivered the society section and the news section of the newspaper alternately to the houses on his route. After numerous complaints, Hanks called the boy in to ask him what the problem had been. The boy explained he had received only half the number of papers from the circulation department that he should have, and he reasoned that the readers would rather have half a paper than none at all.

Patty said:

> Daddy laughed about that for years and

> said he never could figure out whether he should have fired the boy or given him a raise.[13]

Hanks' interests were not limited to sports and business. He was an intellectual man who was as deeply interested in world affairs as he was in what happened in his own hometown. Charles Marler, director of journalism and mass communications at Abilene Christian University, said that while researching his dissertation on Frank Grimes, he came across information from which he could draw several conclusions about Hanks:

> I think Hanks was a real smart guy and intellectually curious. I think he still found time to be very interested in what was happening in the world and still run his business interest. Usually when someone is so interested in something like polo, he is interested in the pursuit of the mind.[14]

Marler's contentions were supported by a letter from Hanks to his long-time friend and political ally, Lyndon B. Johnson. Shortly after suffering a heart attack, Hanks wrote:

> I am still more or less on the retired list, spending about two hours a day at the office, which gives me more time for reading and trying to keep up with events as they occur in European capitols, as well as Washington and Austin. In fact it is hard to decipher just what is going on.[15]

Hanks may have had a hard time deciphering what was going on in other countries, but he was always aware of what was happening in Abilene or in Washington if the

action affected Abilene. The Reporter-News always took an active role in backing the people and issues that Hanks and his editorial staff believed were best for the city. Even people from outside the city were impressed with Hanks' support of Abilene. Guy commented that Hanks was one of the great citizens of Abilene. Anderson, writing at Hanks' death, said:

> To me Bernard Hanks not only was a lifelong partner, but he was one of the most brilliant newspapermen I ever knew. His passing removes from Abilene a man who at all times and under all circumstances carried his part and more of the load in the advancement of the city.[16]

NOTES

[1]Abilene Reporter, September 17, 1897.

[2]R. C. Crane, Sketch of the Life of George S. Anderson (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Printing Company, 1946), p. 62.

[3]Duff and Seibt, p. 84.

[4]Wishcamper, p. 32.

[5]Crane, p. 63.

[6]Personal interview with Patty Shelton, Abilene, Texas, March 17, 1983.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Personal interview with Charles A. Guy, Lubbock, Texas, April 26, 1983.

[9]Personal interview with Josh Barrett, Abilene, Texas, October 16, 1982.

[10]Abilene Reporter-News, December 14, 1948.

[11]Patty Shelton interview.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Personal interview with Charles Marler, Abilene, Texas, June 24, 1983.

[15]Bernard Hanks, letter to Lyndon Johnson, May 12, 1939.

[16]Abilene Reporter-News, December 14, 1948.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICS

Bernard Hanks was a political activist. A two-year term on the Abilene School Board was the extent of his service in office, but throughout his career he was to wield political influence at the local, state, and national levels.

Hanks worked as hard at politics as he did at publishing his newspaper. While on the school board, he served on the finance committee, the purchasing committee and the committee for buildings, grounds, and special buildings. In addition, he was appointed to the publicity committee, which presented a tax hike proposal to the voters, to the committee that selected a new athletic coach for the school system, and to the committee that prepared and presented a building program for the schools to the city commissioners.[1]

While the school board minutes document the energy and time which Hanks dedicated to the position, he never sought public office again. Instead, he chose to work quietly behind the scenes letting other men take most of the credit. This did not indicate that he had any less desire to see Abilene grow, but that he chose to work for his city in a much less visible manner than some people.

It was his dedication and his deep sense of honesty and loyalty that enabled him to develop relationships with

politicians such as Lyndon Johnson. The relationships were not only politically advantageous for Abilene but also eventually transcended politics to become warm personal friendships.

One of the most notable instances of Hanks' use of his friendship with various politicians was his assistance in securing a military base for Abilene during World War II. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, many Abilene citizens realized that there would be an increase in military activity in the U. S. and believed that a base in the city would help the post-depression economy. Robert M. (Bob) Wagstaff, a local attorney, spearheaded the drive, declaring that a military installation in Abilene would help the economy. Wagstaff knew that Camp Bowie, where he had trained during World War I, had helped Fort Worth grow, and that a military base in Abilene would stimulate similar growth.[2]

With the blessing of the Chamber of Commerce, Wagstaff and a special committee went to Washington to seek Congressional approval of the proposed base. Many other citizens were pressed into service, including Bernard Hanks. Hanks did not hesitate to call on his friends in Washington, D. C., among whom were Senator Tom Connally, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, and then, Congressman Lyndon Johnson.[3]

Between the official efforts of the city and the unofficial help of Hanks' friends, Camp Barkeley was established in Abilene on November 26, 1940. With the announcement of the camp's opening, the city's work was only half completed. Abilene would have to provide the land for Camp Barkeley at a cost of about $125,000. The catch was that the money had to be raised within one week.

Again, Bernard Hanks and the Reporter-News entered wholeheartedly into the campaign. Numerous articles and advertisements were run explaining why the base was needed and urging citizens to donate to the cause. One headline explained the necessity of the camp. It read:

> "Uncle Sam won't wait! $125,000 on the Barrelhead and We Get $1 Million Monthly Payroll"[4]

The city reached the goal with money to spare, and in February of 1941 the first troops of the 45th National Guard Division took up residence at the new camp.

Johnson was to help Abilene and his friend Bernard Hanks again two years later when Johnson assisted in the acquisition of another military installation. Howard McMahon, who served as assistant publisher under Hanks and publisher after Hanks' death, recalled how Johnson was the prime force in helping Abilene secure Abilene Air Force Base:

> Back in 1942 the Abilene Chamber of Com-

merce undertook to get an air base located here. Briefs were prepared setting forth the advantages of Abilene. The late Bernard Hanks, publisher of the Reporter-News, and W. P. (Dub) Wright took the brief to Washington.

There they got bogged down. They were forced to sit around cooling their heels, unable to get any action. Mr. Hanks remembered his young friend, the youthful Congressman from Austin's 10th District, Lyndon Johnson. He went to call on Johnson and presented his problem.

Immediately he got action. In a short while Abilene's application was processed and the World War II Abilene Air Force Base came into being. If Lyndon hadn't have helped us that time 14 years ago, we might not even have had a chance to get started on our present Air Force Base. The old air base served us during the war. Then, the 1,500 acres we had from it served as the nucleus for our present big installation (Dyess Air Force Base). This helpful friendship of Johnson's continued through the years. Abilene has never asked him for help and failed to get it.[5]

McMahon, along with Dub Wright, a local businessman and Chamber of Commerce member, was the prime force in securing Dyess Air Force Base in the early 1950s. Again, McMahon called on Johnson for help. The necessary ingredients of the campaign's success were the 1,500 acres left from Abilene Air Force Base, a fund raising drive that netted $893,261, and the help of Johnson and Congressman Omar Burleson. Congress did appropriate funds for Dyess Air Force Base July 3, 1952.[6]

More than Hanks' political ally, Johnson was a close personal friend. Hanks first met Johnson at the Taylor County Old Settlers' Reunion at Buffalo Gap when Johnson

was then state director of the National Youth Administration. Hanks was impressed with the young man and made one of the first political contributions which Johnson ever received. A short time later Johnson was elected to Congress from the Austin 10th District.[7]

Numerous letters and telegrams between the two men demonstrated that their friendship was important to them both politically and personally. Johnson depended on Hanks for political support in the West Texas area. In a May 1, 1941, letter to Hanks, Johnson said of his campaign for the senate:

> If it were not for Houston Harte, Pat and boys like you, I am afraid a great section of Texas would never hear of Lyndon Johnson. You are already doing a good job.
>
> I am not going to get to see you much, but I know you will be in there every minute, and you will have a United States Senator.
>
> I have low organization, little money, and fewer acquaintances, but I have a bunch of friends like you and others who will work nights and that is something I have that I am counting on to elect me. God bless you.[8]

Johnson's prediction was not quite accurate. He lost the hotly contested election to Texas Governor W. Lee (Pappy) O'Daniel. But that letter and others between the two men showed how hard Hanks was willing to work on a Johnson campaign.

A June 9, 1941, telegram from Hanks to Jim Blundell, a Johnson campaign worker, instructed Blundell to tell

Johnson that the El Paso Times would announce for him and that things were all set for "the biggest rally ever held in Corpus." Hanks also was willing to spend more than time on Johnson's campaign. A letter from C. R. Pennington of Abilene, chairman of the lower Colorado River Authority, to John B. Connally, then a member of Johnson's campaign staff, said:

> Bernard Hanks and I have hired a full-time man to work this District. He has been working now about one month putting out literature.
>
> Bernard Hanks paid for the band and the broadcast for Lyndon when he was here the first time.[9]

Despite the outcome of the election, Johnson was grateful for the work and for the money which Hanks had spent on the campaign. A telegram from Johnson to Hanks said:

> Abilene was a grand surprise when the votes came in. I had done little work there. You did a tremendous lot. I hope you will have the time to thank the many people who helped with you to make the memory of Abilene such a bright one for me.[10]

Johnson apparently called on Hanks for support many times during the beginning of his political career, and Hanks was not afraid to call on Johnson to return the favors, especially in matters of his own business. During hearings in Washington, D.C., to determine if Hanks would receive a license for radio station KRBC in Abilene, a

discussion with the attorney representing another group trying to secure the same radio license prompted a letter to Johnson asking if the rumor that Johnson was backing Texas A&M University's bid for the license were true:

> I asked him (the Beaumont attorney) why he thought you were behind A&M's application, and he replied that in trade or agreement you made with A&M some time back you promised to get them a full-time commercial broadcasting station.
>
> About this time a new witness showed up, and the conversation was dropped and not mentioned again, but I sincerely hope that Attorney Herman has grossly exaggerated your situation insofar as the A&M application is concerned.[11]

Hanks had his answer from Johnson within two days. In a short but pointed letter Johnson assured Hanks:

> Herman does not know what he is talking about. I have done nothing to help A&M...I am pretty well occupied remaining status quo in Austin (referring to his and Lady Bird's own radio station).[12]

With or without Johnson's help, Hanks received the license for radio station KRBC over applications from Houston, Beaumont, Texas A&M University, and Lake Charles.

There were many letters between the two men that reflected the personal friendship that enabled Hanks to ask Johnson for favors, such as talking with friends from Abilene who travelled to Washington, D.C. In a September 25, 1945, letter, Hanks noted that a close personal friend, Judge W. R. Ely, would be in Washington and asked

that Johnson talk with him. Johnson immediately replied that he would be happy to see Hanks' friend. The same letter indicated that Johnson had used some influence to help another young Abilene citizen:

> Bernard, I was glad to get the Pennington boy's difficulty straightened out and hope you will let me know if there is anything else I can do for him.[13]

The deep fondness between the two men was demonstrated in much of their personal correspondence. In a long, rambling letter written shortly after Hanks had suffered his second heart attack, Johnson wondered if his friend had come to the understanding that he must slow down for his health's sake:

> I hope you have come around to that point of view in your thinking, because you are in a much better position to reach such a conclusion and stick by it than I am (Johnson, too, had recently suffered a heart attack). If I had as many friends and had done as much for all of them as you have, I would just sit back on my front porch in my rocking chair and let them wait on me for a while.
>
> Take it easy; quit reading your own editorials; quit worrying about anybody, including me and what I am going to do in politics; and I'll bet you will drive a car to my funeral faster than you son-in-law did when he took us on a political tour of your section and wound up in Eastland ahead of schedule.[14]

Following Hanks' death, Johnson's relationship with the Abilene Reporter-News and the city remained warm. Johnson extended to McMahon, to Grimes, and to Mrs. Hanks, the same friendship he ha extended to Hanks. In a

February 20, 1953, letter to Grimes, Johnson wrote:

> My most treasured possessions are friends like you. During the long years when Bernard was with you I always had a warm spot in my heart for the Abilene Reporter-News. You have taken up right where Bernard left off.[15]

Mrs. Hanks also felt that the friendship which her husband and Johnson shared would continue for as long as she was connected with the newspaper. In an October, 1956, letter following a Johnson speech, Mrs. Hanks wrote:

> You were so gracious to mention Bernard in your address. It touched me very much, and I certainly appreciated it. How Bernard believed in you, and so right he was.
>
> Best wishes and good luck to you in the years to come. If I can do anything to help please let me know.[16]

Johnson's respect for the Reporter-News was understandable. The newspaper was a reflection of its publisher, and until recently the Reporter-News remained as staunchly Democratic as Hanks had been during his 44 years as its policy maker.

NOTES

[1]Minutes, Abilene Independent School District, 1923-1924.

[2]Wishcamper, p. 69

[3]Ibid., p. 57.

[4]Abilene ReporterNews, November 26, 1940.

[5]Wishcamper, p. 57.

[6]Ibid., p. 88.

[7]Ibid., p. 56.

[8]Lyndon Johnson, letter to Bernard Hanks, May 1, 1941.

[9]C.R. Pennington, letter to John B. Connally, June 20, 1941.

[10]Lyndon B. Johnson, telegram to Bernard Hanks, July 2, 1941.

[11]Bernard Hanks, letter to Lyndon Johnson, March 20, 1946.

[12]Lyndon Johnson, letter to Bernard Hanks, March 22, 1946.

[13]Lyndon Johnson, letter to Bernard Hanks, September 27, 1945.

[14]Lyndon Johnson, letter to Bernard Hanks, February 20, 1946.

[15]Lyndon Johnson, letter to Frank Grimes, February 20, 1953.

[16]Eva May Hanks, letter to Lyndon Johnson, October 27, 1956.

CHAPTER 4

BERNARD HANKS AND THE REPORTER-NEWS

In 1984, the editorial staff of the Reporter-News believes that it reflects an independent Democratic philosophy with an emphasis on the independent. With the endorsement of Richard Nixon for president in 1968, the paper's editorial staff ended an era in which the paper would choose to endorse no candidate rather than endorse a Republican.

Following Hanks' death on December 12, 1948, Mrs. Eva May Hanks became president of the newspaper operation. Although she delegated the actual operating duties to her editors and publisher, she retained final control. Charles Marler noted in his doctoral dissertation on Frank Grimes that Mrs. Hanks demonstrated her control of the paper during the 1952 presidential election.[1]

At a meeting of the Reporter-News editorial board, all but Grimes voted to endorse Republican Dwight Eisenhower over the Democratic candidate, Adlai Stevenson.

Grimes, whose duty it was to write the endorsement editorial, refused to do so and said, "I am a Democrat." Hal Sayles, managing editor of the newspaper, then was selected to write the editorial. He was saved the trouble when someone remembered to discuss the issue with Mrs. Hanks the next day. Ed Wishcamper remembered that she

insisted:

> No, you are not going to endorse Eisenhower. Bernard never endorsed a Republican in his life and we're not going to start now.[2]

In order to keep peace among the editorial staff, it was decided that the Reporter-News would not endorse anyone that year.

The editors have maintained an active role in endorsing candidates, but they concentrate more on the candidates themselves and not on their party affiliation. Current editor Dick Tarpley has indicated that the paper must endorse candidates because it owes a debt to the readers and has a tremendous obligation to inform the public. Tarpley said:

> Our editorial board interviews the candidates for state and national office and based on those interviews we select the person we feel is best for the job. I don't believe we really have much effect on the outcome of presidential or gubernatorial faces because those candidates have so many other ways to become known to the voters. But, in the lesser known state races, I believe we play a vital role in that the candidates often have no other way of making themselves known to the voters.[3]

Mrs. Hanks has proved to be a vital element in maintaining her husband's philosophies after his death. His friends believe Hanks would be proud to know that his wife has taken over the business and has made sure that the firm was run in the manner he had worked so hard to establish. While it was not unusual for a woman to succeed her

husband as president of a company at his death, it was unusual for her to become an actual working executive. Charles Guy said:

> Most of the time when that kind of thing happens (the wife taking over an executive position at the husband's death), it's just an act. But not with Miss Eva May. To my personal knowledge the people at the paper didn't resent the fact that here was the bosses' widow coming in. She was the head of the newspaper, and they felt like Miss Eva May was something special, and I think so too. As a matter of fact I think Bub might have out-married himself; I did too. What I mean by that is we just really had ourselves some really doggone fine wives. Miss Eva May wasn't a professional newspaper person, but she knew everybody in town, and she had a fine sense of loyalty to the town and to the newspaper. I never knew a woman outside my own family I had more respect for than I did for Miss Eva May.[4]

Not many of Hanks' associates were aware of the vastness of his business endeavors or the power and respect he commanded in political and journalistic circles. Word of Hanks' death brought expressions of loss and praise from politicians and journalists around the world.

Hugh Baillie, president of the United Press, sent word from Santiago, Chili:

> Have just learned of the passing of Bernard Hanks and want to express my deep sympathy. We have lost a very good friend, and American journalism has lost a stalwart who can ill be spared.[5]

M. M. Donosky, president of the Texas Newspaper Publishers Association, also sent condolences and spoke on

behalf of the membership of the organization:

> His (Hanks) associates have lost a great friend; the newspaper fraternity has lost an inspiring leader; the state and the nation have lost an outstanding citizen.[6]

Words of praise also came from friends and coworkers in Abilene.

In two separate editorials following Hanks' death, Grimes eulogized the man with whom he had worked for 34 years. In one of the editorials Grimes paid his publisher a high compliment:

> He never asked us to write a line we did not feel like writing, and he never by word or deed, in the thirty-four years we worked for him, rebuked us for something we had written. This, God knows, was no tribute to us; it was a tribute to Bernard Hanks' kindness.[7]

In another editorial, Grimes said that Hanks would be greatly missed by his co-workers at the Reporter-News and the other newspapers which he and Houston Harte had acquired. Grimes wrote that Hanks had left behind a tradition for those employees to live up to and, in Grimes opinion, that tradition meant a high sense of responsibility to the public and a fair and impartial presentation of the news.

Hanks' dedication to fairness was reflected in what Katharyn Duff, a long-time reporter and editor at the Reporter-News, called his five-point creed for a newspaper:

1) A newspaper's prime business is news. It should get the news and get it straight.
2) The paper is not to use its power to reward friends or punish opponents.
3) A newspaper should assume responsibility for leadership; it should invest itself in causes that advance the area it serves.
4) A newspaper should have courage.
5) A newspaper should serve its people.[8]

The five points served the Reporter-News under Hanks and still are the basis for the newspaper's operating policy. Hanks' insistence that the newspaper always be fair in its news pages is reflected in the motto which has been carried on the nameplate of the newspaper since 1927.

The motto was the result of discussions between Hanks and Grimes concerning a policy statement for the newspaper. They wanted something that would reflect their goal of objective reporting but couldn't agree on the wording.

While Grimes was reputed to be an expert on Lord Byron, English poet/playwright, he credited Hanks with finding the Byron couplet, "Without or with offense to friends or foes we sketch your world exactly as it goes," that became their motto. Grimes is quoted as saying he was sitting as his desk one day when Hanks dropped a piece of paper on his desk containing the couplet from "Don Juan." The quote struck Grimes as being exactly right, and the words have run every day on the front page of the

newspaper since April 4, 1927.[9]

Hanks also was firm in his belief that the newspaper should promote Abilene and the surrounding area. Duff said thanks and his wife believed the newspaper should be written for the readers and not for themselves:

> They would not have used the newspaper to benefit themselves. Hanks believed that if he were to make money, the town had to grow. So, he chose to put his influence back into improving the town.[10]

Tarpley said that philosophy is still present in today's Reporter-News:

> The role of the newspaper is to be the best medium for news and advertising for the people of the area and to provide leadership in the community through editorial policy. We critize the areas we think are problem areas, but we are very supportive of those things we think are a benefit. We work closely with the community and the area.[11]

During the 1920s George Anderson and Hanks made a business decision which gave Hanks control of the newspaper and allowed him to advance the policies he thought best. In 1923, the commercial printing operation and the newspaper were divided. Anderson took control of the Abilene Printing and Stationery Company; Hanks headed the Reporter Publishing Company.[12]

Hanks' desire to support the community was evident during the Depression years. Josh Barrett recalled that during those hard financial times, Hanks attempted to

devise activities which might provide a little diversion for the people of the community and also possibly increase his own advertising and circulation. Barrett recalled that Hanks established swap days on the first Monday of each month to encourage retail trade. He also would bring in big name dance bands, such as Duke Ellington's band, and would sponsor free concerts.

He also co-sponsored many events with the Chamber of Commerce. In 1931, the Reporter-News ran an advertisement asking if business was satisfactory and, if not, posing the question that perhaps it was salesmanship that was way off and not business.[13]

While the ad promoted a lecture by a business analyst and sales counselor from Cleveland, Ohio, it could as well have been talking about another great promoter and salesman from Abilene--Bernard Hanks. His promotions, coupled with sound business management, enabled the Reporter-News not only to survive the tough economic times but to prosper to the point that Hanks began planning future expansion programs.

The newspaper did have its share of financial troubles. The size of the paper graphically illustrated how the depression affected the Reporter-News. Two weeks before the stock market crash, the Reporter-News published 26 pages plus two special tabloid sections of 24 and 16

pages. On March 3, 1933, the newspaper produced 12 pages.[14]

Frank Pruitt, former circulation director of the Reporter-News, recalled that during the height of the Depression, the paper would take almost anything in payment for subscriptions, including chickens, eggs, pecans, and cottonseed.[15]

Pruitt said that Hanks made every effort to keep all his employees, but those who left voluntarily were not replaced:

> I was on the lowest rung of circulation then, but he gave me a half day each day to sell classified advertising so I could stay. I'm so thankful he let me stay.[16]

The Abilene-Reporter survived the Depression and continued to grow with the city. Hanks always made sure that the Reporter-News had the best and latest equipment and that the building which housed the equipment had ample space. Hanks' first expansion program predated the Depression years and coincided with a period of growth for the whole city. During the 1920s a new college was formed, two hotels were built, and the population doubled.

During that time, Hanks announced that he was installing a new press and was building a new three-story structure to house The Reporter. That building was expanded in 1928.[17] The purchase of the new press was heralded with a front page story describing its advant-

ages, accompanied by an eight column picture of the press which ran at the top of the front page. The story said:

> It is the policy of The Reporter to keep pace with Abilene and the progress of Central West Texas...A cheaper press could have been bought, less up-to-date equipment could have been provided, but The Reporter wanted the best, because The Reporter feels that the best is none too good for the readers and advertisers, whose loyalty and patronage have already created a need for better and enlarged facilities. [18]

Hanks continued with two more expansion projects. He did not allow the difficult financial times of the 1930s or a heart attack to curtail his expansion activities. While confined to his bed following his heart attack in 1938, Hanks had an architect visit his home for instructions to draw plans for a new office building to be attached to the existing three-story building. The offices and a new 24-page press were ready for business on April 13, 1940.[19]

Hanks' final expansion project was completed after his death. In 1947, he again saw a need to expand to meet the needs of his readers. The property immediately adjacent to the Reporter-News offices was bought, and a new plant was added to the remodeled existing building.[20]

On the opening of that building, Mrs. Hanks underscored the policy of expansion which continued through the dedication of the Reporter-News' current offices in 1981

during the paper's 100th anniversary celebration. She said:

> It was always the desire and ambition of Mr. Hanks that this newspaper should have the facilities - in equipment, office space, and personnel - to adequately take care of the newspaper needs of the community and surrounding area. That will continue to be the policy of the company.[21]

Hanks did more than update equipment and expand buildings; he expanded the newspaper as the need arose. On September 1, 1926, the first edition of the Abilene Morning News was published. The name was taken from the old Taylor County News which The Reporter had acquired and ceased publishing in 1911. With the addition of that morning edition, the Reporter-News became a regional newspaper: the only morning paper published between Fort Worth and El Paso, and the only morning paper between Amarillo and San Antonio carrying Associated Press dispatches.[22]

Pruitt said Hanks always thought of the paper as a regional newspaper:

> We went to areas where there was no daily newspaper, and we wanted those people to think of us as their daily paper. Many of those towns had weekly papers, but we wanted to be their daily newspaper.[23]

The Reporter, published Monday through Friday evenings, and The News, published Tuesday through Sunday mornings, continued to secure their positions in Abilene and

the surrounding counties during the 1930s. By January 1, 1927, The Morning News had a circulation of about 4,000 and by 1931 had surpassed the 7,000 circulation of The Reporter by 3,000 customers.[24]

Despite its continued growth, The Morning News never established its own identity. Wishcamper recalled that, in 1936, when he was sent into the territory on assignment, people referred to the morning paper as The Reporter. This finally led Hanks to combine the two papers under one nameplate, The Reporter-News, in 1937.[25]

The paper was expanded again at the beginning of World War II. Until then, no Monday morning paper was published. Wendell Bedechek, who served Hanks as managing editor of the morning paper, remembered that because Pearl Harbor was bombed on a Sunday, a special Monday morning extra edition of the paper was rushed into circulation. The Monday morning paper became a permanent fixture after that.

Bedechek remembered that Hanks said:

> The people must not have to go from Sunday morning until Monday afternoon without a newspaper during war.[26]

Hanks' progressive attitude was also reflected on the editorial pages of the paper. Marler said that Hanks' willingness to dedicate all of Grimes' time to the editorial page was not only an unusual occurrence for that era

but was also one of the things that made the paper exceptional. Marler said that the running of both conservative and liberal columnists reflected Hanks' and Grimes' open-minded attitudes:

> The diverse editorial page reflects the West Texas spirit. We are a diverse group of people and highly independent who believe we are entitled to our own opinion. And Hanks and Grimes were committed to balancing the editorial page through a diversity of voices.[27]

Those whose business it was to watch the competition also believed the Abilene Reporter-News was a good newspaper. Guy, who was editor of the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, said the paper was good because it was a reflection of its owner:

> The Abilene Reporter-News was a reflection of Bernard Hanks in the respect that it is solid and it is decent and doesn't go off on tangents. I always had a great deal of admiration for Bernard and a great respect for him. He always knew what he was talking about, and he was a good newspaper man.[28]

Bascom Timmons, who served as a Washington, D.C., correspondent for The Reporter during the 1920s, said in a letter to Marler:

> The Reporter was one of the best newspapers in West Texas - perhaps the best - although the Wichita Falls Times (and later the Amarillo News) were good. I think also The Reporter was as good as any in Texas in a town of comparable size.[29]

Another indication of the quality of the newspaper was the longevity of its personnel. Pruitt, who began

work for The Reporter in 1929 and still works part time in the advertising department, said that the wisest thing he ever did was stay at The Reporter rather than accept other jobs that came along. Hanks insisted in hiring only people in whom he could place his trust Pruitt said:

> I was over the mail room at one point, and Hanks asked me to have the foreman do something for him. He later checked back to see if the job had been done and when I told him the man did exactly as I had asked, Hanks said, "Whenever you find a man that will do what you tell him and do it right, hold on to him."[30]

The philosophy evidently worked then and does today. Tarpley said that the paper makes an effort to hire the most competent reporters and editors right out of college. He said:

> Our goal is to keep them and develop them with our company. About one-fourth of our staff of 60 have been here more than 10 years, and 45-48 percent have been here more than five years.[31]

Tarpley said that although there are not many people still around the Reporter-News who remember Hanks, he firmly believes that Hanks' spirit still lives at the paper:

> The newer generations don't realize it, but it (Hanks' spirit) is very much a part of the whole philosophy of the Abilene Reporter-News. His philosophy of fair play and integrity in the news still hovers over this newspaper, just as his picture hangs over the newsroom.[32]

Hanks' former employees and friends believe that he

would be proud that his newspaper retains its basic foundations even though times have changed dramatically since he was publisher. They also believe he would be happy with the way the few Texas newspapers which he and Houston harte bought have blossomed into one of the largest communications companies in the country. Katharyn Duff summed up Hanks' progressive philosophy that still permeates both the Reporter-News and Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc., when she related a story Stormy Shelton used to explain why Harte-Hanks went public in the early 1970s:

> It's like the ole boy who made buggy whips. If he'd just switched over and started making automobile starters, he'd be in business today. But he's still making buggy whips, and he's going down the drain.[33]

NOTES

[1] Charles Marler, "Frank Grimes West Texas Editor." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1975), p. 421.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Personal interview with Dick Tarpley, Abilene, Texas, June 23, 1983.

[4] Guy interview.

[5] Abilene Reporter-News, December 14, 1948.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Abilene Reporter-News, October 3, 1971.

[9] Wishcamper, p. 52-53.

[10] Duff interview.

[11] Tarpley interview.

[12] Wishcamper, p. 54.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 58-59.

[15] Abilene Reporter-News, October 3, 1971.

[16] Wishcamper, p. 66.

[17] Ibid., p. 42.

[18] Abilene Reporter-News, March 30, 1920.

[19] Wishcamper, p. 56.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Abilene Reporter-News, March 26, 1951.

[22] Wishcamper, p. 44.

[23] Telephone interview with Frank Pruitt, Abilene, Texas, October 14, 1983.

[24] Wishcamper, p. 45.

[25] Ibid., p. 42.

[26] Abilene Reporter-News, October 3, 1971.

[27] Marler interview.

[28] Guy interview.

[29] Letter from Bascom Timmons to Charles Marler, October 24, 1973.

[30] Pruitt interview.

[31] Tarpley interview.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Duff interview.

CHAPTER 5

HARTE AND HANKS

A long-time associate of Hanks and Houston Harte called them a great combination. The associate noted that Hanks was the hard-nosed businessman while Harte had the creative ideas. When the two were combined, all the qualities needed for a great organization were present. Charles Guy, who was part of the first partnership agreement in which Harte and Hanks were involved, agreed with that assessment:

> Harte was a hammer and would really push you, Hanks was the leveler. When Harte would get into hot arguments, Bernard was always the man who put oil on the stormy waters.[1]

The Harte-Hanks relationship began in 1924 when the two had lunch with J. Lindsay Nunn, owner of the Amarillo newspaper, at a meeting of the Texas newspaper publishers at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas. The luncheon led to a long friendship and business partnership which became the foundation of today's Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc. Of the personal friendship between the two men, Frank King, former southwest manager for the Associated Press, said:

> A touch of friendship and human need had warmed the early relationship of the two men. Not long after he had put everything he owned into the San Angelo Standard, Harte learned he must undergo an operation; one from which a relative had not survived only a few months earlier. Deeply worried about his family, Harte wrote to his friend Hanks in Abilene and asked if he would take charge of his affairs and do the best he could for his wife and small son if

> he did not come through. Hanks, responding, expressed his appreciation of the confidence and, in turn, asked Harte to do the same for him in any emergency. Thus, based on business acumen and personal relationship, their friendship was sealed as they prospered. The long, business of Houston Harte and Bernard Hanks was based on mutual confidence and recognition of personal competence.[2]

The luncheon with Nunn led also Harte and Hanks to become involved in the purchase of the Lubbock Plains Journal. There are varying stories about the actual purchase of the paper, which also involved Guy and Dorrance Roderick. At the time of the sale, the Lubbock Plains Journal was owned by James C. Nance and Curtis Keene. One account of the sale had Nance returning to his home state of Oklahoma and selling the paper to Guy and Roderick, who in turn sold some stock to Harte, Hanks and Nunn.[3]

Another account had Harte remarking during that Dallas luncheon that he had an offer to buy Keene's half interest in the Lubbock Plains Journal. Nunn said thus he had a similar offer to buy the other half of the paper from Nance. Hanks offered to put up $1,000 in operating money to buy the Lubbock newspaper.[4]

At any rate, within a few months the Plains Journal became a daily, evening and Sunday newspaper that eventually took over its rival, the morning Avalanche, owned by J. L. Dow. According to Harte's accounts, Nunn closed the deal which put the Avalanche under the same ownership

as the Journal. When Nunn returned to the hotel where Harte and Hanks were staying he told his partners that there was a small catch in the purchase of the Avalanche, Harte said:

> Hanks went over to the table, poured three drinks, handed one to Lindsay, gave one to me and as he sat down with his own, tried to get Lindsay to tell us what had happened. Lindsay finally said he had bought the Avalanche, that we would increase the capital of the Journal corporation, give Mr. Dow 20 percent of the stock and the enlarged corporation would give Dow a note for $40,000. Hanks and I were enthusiastic about the trade, but when we started to compliment Lindsay about it he didn't act just right. Sitting with his drink in his hand, Lindsay began his second trade.[5]

What Nunn intended for his father, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Elbert Nunn, to be included in the partnership. He said his father had not been happy since Nunn had sold his Amarillo newspaper to Wilbur Hawk and Gene Howe. Nunn also reminded them that his father had been writing a Sunday School column for the Journal.[6] The deal would have given Harte, Hanks, and Nunn each 20 percent with Dow and Dr. Nunn receiving 20 percent. Harte recalled that Hanks paused for a few minutes, took a drink from the quart fruit jar of bootleg whiskey, and answered that his father, also a minister, would like to be included in the deal:

> Lindsay, my father is a Baptist preacher too. He isn't rich like yours. He is blind and you know the Baptists are not too generous

> with their disabled retired ministers. However, I can under-stand how Dr. Nunn feels. I think your proposition is all right. I am sure you would not be opposed to my cutting my father in for a part of this deal so he could live out his remaining years in comfort. Let's just cut this thing into sixths.[7]

Harte agreed with Hanks and added that his own father had developed a keen interest in the newspaper business since Harte had made such a success with the San Angelo newspaper and would like to be cut in on the deal Harte said:

> I know you will not object to cutting him in on the Avalanche and the Journal and dividing our 80 percent seven ways. This will give us each about 11-1/2 percent. I didn't have time to finish. Lindsay said, "Aw you guys go to the devil."[8]

Following the settlement of the argument, the three completed plans to take over the Avalanche on September 15, 1926, without any more talk of Dr. Nunn's interest in the newspaper. The next year, the men purchased the remaining shares held by Dow.

Despite the disagreement as to who played what role in the purchase of the Journal or the Avalanche, Harte noted that the paper made money from the start. In 1927 the paper showed a profit of $72,000, which exceeded the earnings of both Harte's San Angelo newspaper and Hanks' Abilene newspaper.[9]

Harte's and Hanks' association with the Lubbock

newspapers ended in 1928 when Nunn, Roderick, and Guy offered to buy out their partners. At Hanks' urging, the two sold all but 10 percent of their shares for $90,000.[10]

Harte and Hanks decided to continue their business relationship under a partnership called Harte-Hanks Newspapers, Inc. The San Angelo and Abilene newspapers would not be part of the corporation. The first newspaper to become part of the corporation was the Corpus Christi Times.[11]

In March of 1928, during a conversation with Jake Spencer of the Goss Printing Press Company, Harte learned that W. E. Pope, who owned the Corpus Christi Times, might be having financial trouble. Spencer told Harte that Pope was building a nine-story office building and needed $75,000 immediately to keep the contractor on the job and indicated that the Times could be bought for that amount.[12]

After talking with Hanks, Harte called Pope, who agreed to sell the newspaper for $75,000 cash. Harte and Hanks had their attorney wire $500 to Pope for a two-week option on the newspaper. By the time the wire arrived in Corpus Christi, Pope had also told John Payne, the former publisher of the Houston Post, he could have an option at the same price. Harte recalled that, based on what they knew of Pope, it was a good thing they had wired the

money:

> From what we had heard of Elmer Pope, we felt it would be hard for him to resist taking $500 off a Western Union boy regardless of his other commitments. We were right. Pope took the money and signed the boy's receipt.[13]

By wiring the cash to Pope, Harte and Hanks received first option on the newspaper. Harte recalled that he and Hanks arrived in Corpus Christi during a rain storm and went to see the newspaper plant. The equipment included only three or four linotype machines, all in poor condition. The press was located under a tarpaulin and bolted onto four large beams in the vacant lot in back of the newspaper building. Harte recalled the discussion that night which was the deciding factor in their purchase of the newspaper on March 15, 1928:

> After dinner, Bernard and I went out on the wooden pier that extended 200 or 300 yards into the Bay from the Nueces Hotel. I was very low about the equipment and what we had seen of the Corpus Christi Times. As we got to the band pavillion at the end of the pier, I apologized to Bernard for taking his time and wasting his money on the option. I said I would stand the cost of the option and we could call it a day. Bernard turned around and looked back at the city. "If you want to buy linotypes the place to go is Brooklyn," he said, "I think this town has a future and I like the water."[14]

Harte and Hanks were later to become involved in a partnership with Charles E. March and E. C. Fentress that would consolidate the Corpus Christi Caller with the

Times. Harte and Hanks agreed that if the Caller could be bought from Roy Miller and the Henrietta King Estate, they would combine the two papers and others into a new holding company known as Texas Newspapers, Inc. The new Caller-Times Publishing Company was established November 13, 1929, and placed into the corporation along with Harte's and Hanks' shares of the Harlingen Star and the Paris News. Marsh and Fentress placed their stock in the Texarkana Press and the Brownsville Herald into the company.[15]

The merger of the Times and the Caller was profitable to both papers, but for the new company as a whole times were not good. Within three years the company was dissolved with Harte and Hanks retaining control of both the Caller-Times and the Paris News. Marsh and Fentress received the Harlingen, Brownsville, and Texarkana newspapers.[16]

The purchase of the Paris News in 1929 was one example of how Hanks was willing to let Harte do a great deal of negotation and leg work when it came to acquiring a newspaper. In Harte's private papers it was noted that after informing Hanks of how negotations had gone that morning:

> We agreed not to offer over $115,000 if I could get the paper signed up for that, and Bernard said not to call him back until the

contract had been completed.[17]

The purchase of the Big Spring Herald was the only deal which Hanks initiated. Harte and Hanks took over the Big Spring newspaper March 22, 1929. Hanks remained active in the management of the paper by securing refinancing of the note during the Depression years and eventually securing a permanent home for the newspaper. In 1941, Harte and Hanks found a suitable building on Main Street, but it had been bought the day before for $6,000 by W. L. Mead, whom Hanks had known when Mead was in the bakery business in Abilene. Harte noted that Hanks was well aware of how Mead liked to make a quick profit:

> After a little bit of dickering, Bernard offered him $8,500 for the building which Mead immediately accepted. Later Mead complained to us that it cost him $12,500 to buy the land and build the bakery which he then occupied and which was not anything like as good a building as that which the Herald purchased from him.[18]

In 1956 the Main Street location was sold for $25,000 and the newspaper's present plant was built on Scurry Street.

Hanks' business instincts failed him in one business deal that cost the partnership a chance to buy the Marshall News some years before they actually did. In the spring of 1930, Harte and Hanks spent a considerable amount of time talking to Joe Herrin and Hal Winsborough, owners of the Marshall News. After a trip to Marshall,

Hanks decided that there wasn't much of a future in owning a newspaper in Marshall. If Hanks could have known that C. M. (Dad) Joiner would strike oil on October 30, 1930, he might have reconsidered his opinion of the city. When reminded of his prediction that there was no future in Marshall, Hanks said:

> If I had known there was oil in that area, I would not have fooled with the newspaper but bought land.[19]

At that time, farm land could have been purchased for $15-$20 an acre, and large blocks of mineral rights for $1 to $2 an acre.

Harte and Hanks did keep Marshall in mind for a future purchase after oil was discovered and in 1936 made the purchase final. Harte recalled that this was the only time he had made a deal without talking to Hanks before signing the contract. To buy the then Marshall News-Messenger, Harte had to mortgage it and the Paris News for $100,000. Harte finally found financing in Paris, Texas, with the help of Pat Mayse, president and general manager of their Paris newspaper. After arranging financing, Harte went to Abilene to explain the deal to Hanks, who was not happy about the transaction:

> He was anything but enthusiastic. He did not say he would not go into the deal, but he left me with the unmistakable impression that the only reason he was going into it was that it had already been made.[20]

After that conversation with Hanks, Harte returned to San Angelo and checked with his banker to determine if he could arrange financing on his own. The bankers were not enthusiastic about making a loan on two East Texas newspapers, but would gladly loan him the money against the Standard Times. With that knowledge, Harte wrote Hanks and told him that he was sorry about having made a deal without consulting him on the details and said that he could get a loan in San Angelo to pay for the Marshall newspaper:

> I wanted him to know he did not have to come in, that I did not want him to make the purchase merely because we had talked about it before this particular contract was signed. He called me up the next morning and laughed about my letter and the Marshall deal. That was all that was ever said between us about this transaction. But after this experience, we talked before we made any move whatever.[21]

Another incident occurred on the Marshall deal that made Hanks feel better about the purchase. Mayse, who owned a part of the Paris newspaper, also signed the notes that secured the Marshall paper. Harte noted that every time Hanks would sign one of the $1,000 notes he would comment that he might as well open a vein and sign it with his blood:

> But when he would see Pat endorsing the note, when he had not been requested to do so, it amused him so that he could hardly keep a straight face. I believe this exhilarated him to the extent he forgot to complain about how

> he was losing his life's savings on this wild deal at Marshall.[22]

One of the best deals which Harte and Hanks made was in 1940 for the Denison Herald. The building and equipment were in excellent condition and both men knew that they would not have to spend any money on the building and equipment for years to come. And as Harte said, "We had never bought a newspaper like that before."[23]

J. Lee Greer, publisher of the Denison Herald when Harte and Hanks bought the newspaper, issued a statement in the paper expressing his reluctance to part with the Herald:

> I know it is going into hands of experienced, ethical newspapermen who have been my close personal friends over a long period of years. I therefore feel that the Herald is going into safe hands.[24]

Also included in Greer's announcement was a statement of the Harte-Hanks newspaper philosophy:

> We believe that a newspaper has a definite responsibility to the territory it serves, and that much of the development destined for the Denison area can better be carried on by a newspaper which considers community betterment its No. 1 duty.[25]

Harte and Hanks built an empire on this philosophy. Guy indicated that they were successful for that and other reasons:

> Harte and Hanks were close to what they were doing. They were Texans and not a great big robot corporation. They had high standards

the local guys had to live up to, but they didn't interfere too much with the local operation.[26]

NOTES

[1]Guy interview.

[2]Hugh Morgan, "The Acquisition of Newspapers by Houston Harte" (master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1967), p. 64.

[3]Freda McVay, The Paradoxical Plainsman, (Lubbock: The Texas Tech Press, 1983), p. 14.

[5]Morgan, p. 56-57.

[6]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[7]Morgan, p. 61.

[8]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[9]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[10]Morgan, p. 63.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 70.

[13]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[14]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[15]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[16]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[17]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[18]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[19]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[20]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[21]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[22]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[23]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[24]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[25]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[26]Houston Harte, undated private papers.

[27]Guy interview.

CHAPTER 6

THE PRESENT GREAT

It's doubtful that Hanks or Harte imagined that their Texas newspapers would become the foundation for the national communications empire that is now Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc.

Though Hanks shared the knowledge of his newspaper holdings and his plans for the future with only a few select friends, he had a strong desire to see the partnership grow. One of those friends, Lyndon Johnson, worried that Hanks' dedication to his business interests would jeopardize his health. In a letter that expressed worry about Hanks' health following a heart attack, Johnson wrote:

> ...it isn't necessary that you spend a lot of time gallivanting over the country looking after business enterprises that are far exceeding the fondest expectations you expressed when you got into them.[1]

The company did grow and expand as Harte purchased other papers and radio stations after Hanks' death, but the major growth of the company has come since the company was switched from private family ownership to public ownership in 1972. Edward Harte, eldest son of Houston Harte and publisher of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times, said that although his father did not want the company ever to go public, he finally gave in when he could no longer

ignore the fact that upon his death estate taxes might force a breakup of the company to which he and his partner had dedicated their lives. By this time a few privately owned newspapers and radio stations had grown into a communications company that produced revenues totaling $396.9 million in 1982.[2]

The company has expanded its operations to include a number of communications enterprises. Robert G. Marbut, president and chief executive officer of the company, said in 1983:

> There was a time when Harte-Hanks thought nothing above the Red River was worth buying. That's not true anymore, just as it is no longer true that newspapers are the best way to communicate. Improved technology and more markets make it necessary to expand.[3]

Harte-Hanks owns six FM and five AM radio stations, which accounted for $27.3 million in revenues in 1982. Television also has become an important component of the company. Its four network-affiliated VHF stations produced $47.5 million in revenues in 1982. Cable television has been a large growth area since Harte-Hanks entered the field in 1978. The firm owns nine systems with 27,000 basic subscribers and 20,000 premium subscribers and manages, with options to buy, eight additional systems serving 26,100 subscribers.[4]

One of the newer division of Harte-Hanks is the

Consumer Distribution Marketing (CDM) division. CDM is a complete publishing, distribution, and marketing system geared to help advertisers target their messages to specific market segments. CDM advertising publications in California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida reach about 3.2 million households weekly, and in connection with other mailers, CDM has the ability to deliver advertiser messages to 96 percent of all American households. The division also offers the facilities of six research firms to help advertisers determine the effectiveness of their marketing efforts as well as to help them pinpoint their target markets.

By subcontracting commercial printing to Harte-Hanks newspapers and outside printers, CDM has coordinated the printing and nationwide mailing of 550 million advertising preprints for one major national advertiser alone.[5]

Despite the diversity which television and CDM bring to the company, newspapers remain the backbone of Harte-Hanks Communications. Revenues in 1982 from the 28 daily, 22 Sunday, and 24 weekly newspapers and other publishing ventures owned by Harte-Hanks totaled $196.7 million--or 50 percent of the company's total operating revenues.[6]

Marbut said that Harte-Hanks newspapers have become community information centers in response to consumer demands. The newspaper chain is examining ways to best use

its skills of gathering and producing information to create new products and services for identifiable segments within their communities. Marbut said the company must change to remain successful, but he firmly emphasized that the changes will not be at the expense of the traditional newspaper service upon which the corporation was founded. To illustrate the point, Marbut pointed to the new two-way communications systems which the company installed among its 13 Texas daily newspapers in 1982. The system allows the newspapers to share stories and information of mutual interest through computer linkups with the company's capitol news bureau in Austin.[7]

Marbut pointed out that no matter how large the company grows or into what areas it expands in order to survive, Harte-Hanks must effectively meet a need in the marketplace with a product or service which can be produced at a profit. He said:

> If this theory is true, then it makes sense for a communications company to get as close to their customers with its product or service as it can in order to better understand the customers' needs. We define our business not in terms of the product we produce or the service we provide, but in terms of the needs we meet.[8]

Marbut also said that continued success and effectiveness for the company demand that Harte-Hanks look outside the company and the communications industry to

determine what uncontrollable factors might exist which could significantly affect the company's ability to meet consumer needs for information and entertainment. He said:

> At Harte-Hanks we have formalized the process of looking outside more than we have in the past. We try to meet consumer needs at Harte-Hanks by saying that we don't have a newspaper in Abilene, Texas. What we have, and what we want to have there, is a community information center. The idea is that we have, in that town, the ability to gather information, to process it perhaps better than anybody in Abilene, and that we have a sales force that calls on every business in town. If we can use those assets, and if we can define our business not in terms of the Abilene Reporter-News, but in terms of being an information provider in Abilene, then we can create other products such as shoppers and weekly newspapers targeted to certain areas of the city.[9]

Marbut said that this attitude of looking outward is the key factor in any success which Harte-Hanks will have in the future. As for the Reporter-News, it has already survived for more than 100 years and Stormy Shelton, current publisher, maintains that the newspaper will always survive. Shelton notes that unforeseen changes may occur, but the Reporter-News will always be the primary source of news information and advertiser messages for the mass population in Abilene.[10]

The people who knew Bernard Hanks best believe that he would be proud of the company as it exists today and would approve of the progressive attitude of management.

As his daughter Patty said of her father:

> He believed in the living. He didn't like things like memorials. Anything he did was for the future, it wasn't in memory of the past.[11]

That one bit of philosophy may be the greatest legacy which Bernard Hanks could have left Houston Harte and the friends and family who helped build Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc., into a multimillion dollar, nation-wide communications company.

NOTES

[1]Letter from Lyndon B. Johnson to Bernard Hanks, February 13, 1946.

[2]1982 Annual Report, Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc., p. 3.

[3]Personal interview with Robert G. Marbut, Lubbock, Texas, February 21, 1983.

[4]1982 Annual Report, Harte-Hanks Communications, Inc., p. 22.

[5]Ibid., p. 16-17.

[6]Ibid., p. 10-11.

[7]Ibid., p. 11.

[8]Speech, Robert G. Marbut, Texas Tech University Mass Communications Week, February 21, 1983.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Telephone interview with A. B. "Stormy" Shelton, Abilene, Texas, October 14, 1983.

[11]Personal interview with Patty Shelton, Abilene, Texas, March 17, 1983.

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