THE LETHBRIDGE HERALD: FACTORS INVOLVED IN JOINING CHAIN

By Georgia G. Fooks
Lethbridge Community College

In its seventy years as a Southern Alberta newspaper, The Lethbridge Herald, first as a weekly and then a daily, remained independent for fifty-four years, the last Alberta daily at the time not owned by a chain operation. Then in 1959, nine days after the formation of F.P. Publications Limited (FP), the Herald became part of that newspaper organization which today ranks as the largest newspaper chain in Canada in terms of circulation.

Not too many years before his death, Senator Buchanan, who bought the weekly Herald one month after it was started on November 8, 1905 and started the daily on December 7, 1907, said that his paper would never become part of a chain under absentee owners, like other prairie dailies. How then did the change of ownership occur within a relatively short time period from the Senator's death in 1954?

One has to look at the background of the paper to understand the transition.

The Lethbridge Herald was started by F.E. Simpson and A.S. Bennett in 1905, the year Alberta became a province and not quite a year before Lethbridge was incorporated as a city. The place was booming, just on the verge of the Great Land Rush. Lethbridge was already famous as the place of the last great Indian battle in Canada, the location of Fort Whoop-Up, a notorious whiskey trading

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post, and the spot in the dominion to which the newly formed North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) were sent to establish law and order. None of these was the reason for Lethbridge becoming the third largest city in Alberta and the center of trade in the south. The discovery of coal, the finest anywhere in the area, gave the initial push to its growth. The great rush for prime farming land and the eventual development of irrigation completed the job of making it the hub of Southern Alberta.

Lethbridge already had a newspaper when Simpson and Bennett started The Lethbridge Herald. The Lethbridge News was begun in 1885 by E.T. "Si" Saunders, a former member of the NWMP. This paper was still operational when the Herald was started, in fact it printed the first issues of the Herald since Simpson and Bennett had no press. Simpson had started many early newspapers along the Crow's Nest Pass in British Columbia before coming to Lethbridge. Once the Herald was running he returned to Cranbook where he was still operating the Cranbrook Herald, leaving Bennett to publish the Lethbridge weekly.

That fall, W.A. "Billy" Buchanan came to town looking for a newspaper property. He had a background of journalistic experience, having worked for the Toronto Telegram and the St. Thomas (Ontario) Journal. He was not impressed with Lethbridge but returned for a second look a short time later and on December 20, 1905 purchased a half interest in the Herald for $500. Within one year he owned the paper outright.

The Herald was popular almost from the start. Although it had begun with four pages, by spring of 1906 it was often printing sixteen. This meant that one issue had to go through eight runs since the Optimus flat bed press acquired by the Herald only printed two pages at a time. By October 31, 1907 the paper reported it had never lost a subscription in the city.

Then on December 11, 1907, the Herald became a daily despite the fact that the city had a morning daily, The Southern Alberta News. It was a bold move to go into the evening field since morning papers were more popular in those days, but it was an astute decision that resulted in a permanent daily for Lethbridge. Buchanan was to say later that he started the dubious venture because he was...young, ambitious and undoubtedly a bit daring...The weekly Herald...with its constant dinning of the slogan, 'Watch Lethbridge Grow' had developed an ambition with me to get back into the 'daily field.'

The first edition of 300 was sold up and down the streets of Lethbridge with many copies being given away to Lethbridge businessmen. A month later the circulation had grown to 800 and was expected to be 1,000 by the end of the month. Shortly after The Southern Alberta News ceased publication as a daily and went back to a weekly so the Herald was left alone in the daily field. The News limped along for another few years, sometimes a daily, sometimes a weekly, finally folding in 1913. Only one other bonafide newspaper has been published in Lethbridge over the years. This was the Lethbridge Telegram which started in...
1915 and did not survive the First World War, succumbing to rising costs and lack of labor.\textsuperscript{13} From then until the present The Lethbridge Herald has had the city of Lethbridge and Southern Alberta to itself, an area of 20,000 square miles. It has not only been a profitable paper with rising circulation and revenue every year, with the exception of the depression period, but it has also become one of the most widely quoted papers in Canada and one with an enviable reputation with others in the field.\textsuperscript{14}

Wilfrid Eggleston, retired director of the Carleton University School of Journalism, called it "the best small-city daily in Canada."\textsuperscript{15} Eric R. Dennis, at the time editor of the Halifax Chronicle Herald, said that a newspaper that can instil in a community the confidence and inspiration that is required to attract new business, new industry and new people "...has risen to the heights of journalistic purpose. Such a newspaper has been The Lethbridge Herald."\textsuperscript{16}

Buchanan adopted the slogan, "The Herald Serves The South"\textsuperscript{17} in 1920 and it has been on the masthead since. When Buchanan became an Alberta publisher, he made it known that he was going to promote this part of Canada. C.G.K. Nourse, first Lethbridge manager of the Canadian Bank of Commerce and a former president of the city Board of Trade, said that this spirit of positive support was evident from the first day Buchanan arrived in town.\textsuperscript{18} He promoted sugar beets, mixed farming, railroads for Southern Alberta, trans-Canada air flights, anything that would benefit the area, but the major crusade of the paper became irrigation. Buchanan was to say, "Irrigation to my mind, has done more to make Lethbridge what it is today than anything else."\textsuperscript{19}

Buchanan's political connection (he became a Member of the Legislative Assembly for Alberta in 1909, a Member of Parliament in 1911 and a senator in 1925)\textsuperscript{20} has helped in his crusades. He said that the paper "...convinced the people of the area that irrigation was their salvation and pressure on the government, eventually brought action." Others agreed with the key role that Buchanan and his paper played. George R. Marnoch, president of the Lethbridge Board of Trade from 1914 until 1921 and first president of the Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District, one of the early companies, said that this irrigation scheme would not have succeeded without Buchanan and the Herald.\textsuperscript{21} Sugar beets, a crop that saved Southern Alberta during the depression, would not have been possible without irrigation. T. George Wood, long-time manager of Canadian Sugar Factories said,

The beet sugar industry of Southern Alberta owes a debt of gratitude to The Lethbridge Herald...the solid support of the paper has been a real factor in the establishment of sugar beets in Southern Alberta. We realize that your support is not confined to this farming industry, but that your newspaper has something not commonly found in any newspaper, you are farm minded.\textsuperscript{22}

By 1952 when Buchanan built the Herald's present home, the fifth building the paper has occupied since its inception as a weekly, the Herald had a circulation of 15,000, 74 full-time employees and 74 district correspondents. Buchanan was proud of the fact that he had been associated with the paper he founded longer than any living person in Canada. He was also proud of his unusually loyal
work force, twenty-one of his employees having been with him for over twenty-five years, four of these over forty. Most of these employees were Canadian or British, but one, and American-born newspaperman, Charles Frank Steele, was to remain with the paper for forty-one years and eventually wrote Buchanan's biography, Prairie Editor.

On Buchanan's death June 12, 1954 from cancer, his long-time associate and one of Canada's top agricultural writers, Harold Long, said of him:

We here at the Herald always thought of Senator Buchanan in the same bracket as the builder of the Toronto Telegram, the late John Ross Robertson with whom the young Buchanan of the early 1900's worked and from whom he learned the fundamentals of good reporting and good editing. Or we compared him to the greatest of U.S. 'grassroots' editors, William Allen White of the Emporia, Kansas, Gazette, whose intimate knowledge of the thinking of the farmer and the small town business man made him sought out by the great and the near-great of Washington and State capitals.

Although the Herald was a relatively small paper it was in many ways remarkable and on the death of its great Canadian owner was to remain in the Buchanan family. The Senator had received many offers for his paper, even from loyal employees who requested that they be allowed to buy stock, but he would never sell. He had two sons, Donald William, and Hugh Pendrie. The older son, Donald, although trained as a journalist, was not interested in the newspaper business, and so the younger, Hugh, succeeded his father as president and editor of The Lethbridge Herald. His father had wanted his son to succeed him in the triple posts of president, publisher and editor but Hugh Buchanan took only the two titles and gave the office of publisher to Harold Long who had been with the paper since 1911 and was well thought of both in and out of the field. Hugh Buchanan would have liked to be publisher but he knew Long wanted it and was near retirement. He said about his decision, "When my father died I was 33, Harold Long 65...I had respect for his knowledge and experience."

The younger Buchanan was well liked by the staff. He had been with the paper since 1945 after finishing a stint in the navy followed by enough time at Queen's University to complete his degree. At the time of Senator Buchanan's death, Hugh Buchanan was managing editor. He said, "I should have had no problems at all."

Some changes started to occur. Although Buchanan maintained his father's approach to news and his general format he chose a new type face, one that was bolder. He recalled, "I wanted to make the Herald a livelier paper--hence more flamboyant type." He also raised salaries, his own and others. He called the move he made drastic.

My father, though a very generous man otherwise, never paid himself more than $9,000 at the Herald and when I took over Harold Long was only earning in the neighborhood of $8,000.

Buchanan knew he had a tough job in taking the paper over from someone as
highly respected as the Senator. He not only wanted to maintain the paper's good reputation but also to increase the family's fortunes in the media. He started talking with Max Bell, wealthy Calgary newspaperman and owner of The Albertan, one of two newspapers in that city, about merging their respective properties. Just when this transaction started cannot be pinpointed exactly. Some who were involved at the time think it was the fall of 1954, others the winter of 1955. Norman Botterill, manager of CJLH-TV, Lethbridge's first television station, thinks that Bell was around as a Herald shareholder when the application for a television license was made in November 1954. Certainly it was before Essex Company Limited, the family corporation of Bell, recorded ownership of 28,145 of the 65,000 common shares of the Herald on December 14, 1955. 

At any rate it was just a few months after his father's death that Hugh Buchanan became involved with Lethbridge Broadcasting Limited in applying for a television license. It was probably about this time that he started discussions with Bell. Two things support this assumption. First, a large amount of money had to be pledged for the television station and employees remember that they worked hard just before the Senator's death to pay off the indebtedness of the new building. That would indicate that there was not a surplus of ready cash available although the Herald credit was good. Secondly, in an interview Bell gave the Star Weekly, Toronto, in 1966, he said that he had tried to buy The Lethbridge Herald in 1954 but had to settle for a substantial share.

Buchanan rented an apartment in Calgary soon after he took control of the paper. He spent many weekends in that city and at times would be invited socially to the same affairs as Max Bell and his friends. A story of how the newspaper merger began was recalled by several who were involved in one or other of the papers. It has not been confirmed since both the principals are dead. The story is that Buchanan approached Bell one evening and said that if he had The Albertan he could make it a paying newspaper. The Albertan had never been known to be prosperous. Bell asked Buchanan why he did not buy the paper and the answer was that Buchanan did not have any money. Bell parried that Buchanan had newspaper stock so something could be worked out. Buchanan said of the ensuing transaction:

The Albertan was strictly a trade...Max Bell and I had our properties evaluated. The Herald was deemed the more valuable of the two; therefore I ended up owning 59 percent of both papers, Bell 41.

With the stock trade, Buchanan took the title of president for both companies while Long remained as publisher of the Herald and Bell of The Albertan. No announcement appears to have been made of the transaction in either the Calgary or Lethbridge papers. The first Herald reference was September 2, 1955 when Buchanan in his capacity of president of the two papers announced the appointment of James M. Manson as promotion director of The Lethbridge Herald and the Calgary Albertan.

Although both Bell and Buchanan were heard to remark at several separate occasions that each would eventually own both papers outright, Bell does not appear to
have tried to make any changes in the Lethbridge paper nor did he take an active part in its operation. Employees remember him being introduced to the staff and visiting infrequently. Buchanan said later, "At no time did Bell ever try to interfere in the Herald in any way." On the other hand Buchanan did make some attempt to influence The Albertan. Shortly after the trade, a provincial election was called in Alberta. The Albertan had traditionally been Liberal in federal elections but Social Credit provincially. Buchanan decided to turn The Albertan into a Liberal paper provincially and notified Cleo Mowers, who was writing the Calgary paper's editorials then. Mowers, who understood that he was to take his orders from Bell, objected, and phoned Bell in England where he was visiting. Bell flew home and confronted Buchanan about the order, causing the Lethbridge man to rescind it. Buchanan said after that Bell

...reminded me of my promise to allow him, as publisher of The Albertan, complete control of editorial policy. I backed down on the strength of such indisputable evidence.

Buchanan made two other comments to show that he did not back off from The Albertan entirely. He said he raised some salaries in the Calgary paper and also threatened to close it at one time because of its loss position.

In March 1956 at the age of sixty-seven, Harold Long retired and Buchanan took the title of publisher, his name going on the masthead in that position on April 3, 1956. He continued to put out the special editions and the year-end roundups that his father had been noted for.

He was in control of the paper for five years. During his period as owner he spent some part of each year out of the city. At first it was just weekends in Calgary but soon it extended to winter holidays in California and he was away for months at a time. He was drinking heavily and living beyond his means, something that was possible because Max Bell, several times a millionaire, was lending him large sums of money. Buchanan spoke later about his serious character flaws and described himself as an alcoholic.

During his absence senior employees carried on as well as possible. They realized that Buchanan needed help. Don Pilling, who had been named managing editor in 1957, went to California to talk to Buchanan but was unsuccessful in trying to get him to return to the paper. Rumors of financial difficulty had reached the community. These were taken seriously enough that a group of Lethbridge businessmen tried to raise enough money to buy the paper. They were not successful.

Buchanan had once said of Bell that he was "extremely impatient and acted with blazing speed once his very sharp mind was made up." This proved to be the case in his Herald takeover. Leading up to it was the formation of F.P. Publications. On July 16, 1959 a story on the front page of the Herald announced the organization of this company by Victor Sifton of Winnipeg and Max Bell of Calgary. The front page story said:
Incorporation of a new company which will own or control five Canadian newspapers, a weekly and with interest in one other daily was announced today by Victor Sifton, editor and publisher of the Winnipeg Free Press.

In association with Mr. G. Max Bell of Calgary I am incorporating a new company to be known as F.P. Publications Ltd., with head offices in Winnipeg. The new company will own or control the Calgary Albertan, Victoria Times, Victoria Colonist, Winnipeg Free Press, Ottawa Journal, Winnipeg Free Press Weekly and will also have a substantial interest in the Lethbridge Herald, the controlling interest of which is held by the Buchanan family.

Mr. Bell together with family and associates hold a 40 per cent interest in the new company and I and my family hold 60 per cent interest.

What led up to the organization of the company has been speculated on by many. One story, told by senior employees who do not wish to be quoted, is that it was a case of a misdirected letter. George Bell, Max Bell's father, had once owned the Saskatchewan papers, the Regina Leader-Post and the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix. It was common knowledge that the younger Bell would have liked to have those papers. He wanted to get more into newspapers, big ones. A former editor of his, Hal Straight, said that Bell did not care for small papers. The Saskatchewan papers were owned in the fifties by Clifford Sifton, son of Sir Clifford Sifton, a Manitoba lawyer and one time Immigration Minister, who started his newspaper holdings with the Manitoba Free Press (later Winnipeg Free Press).

When Sir Clifford died he left his media company to his two sons, Clifford and Victor. This included, besides the three papers already mentioned, the Free Press Prairie Farmer and some radio interests. Whether the brothers did not get along, as has been often reported, or whether they wanted to make it easier to pass on their holdings to the next generation, another theory put forth, the Siftons split the company, with Clifford Sifton taking the two Saskatchewan papers and the radio interests and Victor, those in Manitoba. The Bell story concerns the two brothers. As it is told Bell felt that since he had been able to get into The Lethbridge Herald by trading stock he might manage an interest in the Saskatchewan papers by the same means. He therefore dictated a letter asking Mr. Sifton whether he would be interested in such a proposal. Bell told his secretary to send the letter but she somehow was confused and sent it to the wrong Sifton, Victor. The story continues that Victor Sifton liked the idea and so he and Bell got together and F.P. Publications was the result.

Although it has a nice O'Henry twist, the story does not describe what happened according to Richard S. Malone, today's president of F.P. Publications [now retired]. He said that he was responsible for Bell and Sifton getting together. A friend of both Bell's and Sifton's, Malone was working at that time as general manager of the Free Press. On a trip east he found that the Ottawa Journal might be for sale. He suggested to Victor Sifton that he buy it. Sifton was interested but wanted someone else in on the deal. Malone suggested Bell since he knew the Albertan wanted to buy into more newspapers. Sifton agreed and so the two formed a syndicate to buy the Ottawa paper on April 28, 1959. Each held fifty per cent of the stock but to provide a balance of power should any dispute arise they placed two per cent...
of the shares with Malone. Malone said that the two were pleased with this deal and so decided to put all their holding into a common company and this resulted in the formation of FP which the Winnipeg Free Press announced as coming into being on September 2, 1959 but which, as has already been mentioned, was reported in the Herald in July of that year.

Just nine days after the Herald announcement Bell contacted Buchanan in California and said he wanted his loans repaid immediately. Buchanan said he did not have the money and Bell replied that he would take the newspaper. Buchanan was later to describe the ensuing transaction as "more than fair." Both Buchanan brothers received $600,000 as a cash settlement for their interest in the paper and local television station. Hugh Buchanan received $90,000 more as severance pay. He said he was offered the job of publisher of the Herald for life at $10,000 a year but declined. The only conditions of the sale were that Buchanan would not go back into the newspaper business in Alberta for twenty years, that certain old employees would be guaranteed their jobs and that the Senator's name would not be removed from the masthead.

The announcement of the sale came as a shock to the employees. Buchanan never entered the Herald again. The staff was told quietly by their department heads, the public in a front page story, Saturday, July 25, 1959. It said in part:

Announcement was made today that F.P. Publications Ltd., of Winnipeg, Man. has acquired control of The Lethbridge Herald Company Limited. Formation of F.P. Publications was announced July 16, 1959 by Victor Sifton of Winnipeg and C. Maxwell Bell of Calgary. They own or control the Ottawa Journal, Winnipeg Free Press, Winnipeg Free Press Weekly, Calgary Albertan, Victoria Times and Victoria Colonist.

An editorial explained:

The change in ownership of the Herald can be explained by saying we have joined a new commonwealth of newspapers. We have mixed emotions but we will attempt to serve the public better.

Malone said that the reason The Lethbridge Herald deal was completed only nine days after the formation of the company was that Bell had agreed to consolidate his holdings as one of his conditions of partnership. At that time he only owned The Albertan outright with the major portion of the shares in the Victoria papers and his Lethbridge Herald stock.

Therefore it would seem that the acquisition of the Herald was one of the keystones in putting together this large chain operation in Canada. Sixteen years ago FP did not exist. Today it owns some of the most prestigious papers in Canada with a total circulation in 1970 of 855,170 more than one-fifth of all newspaper readers in Canada. Since that time the company has continued to grow. In 1972 they acquired the Montreal Star and its companion company, the Montreal Standard Publishing Company Limited, which puts out the Weekend magazine, CANADIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION 47
Chain ownership in Canada seems to be a way of life and is increasing rapidly. In 1971 it was reported that the eight largest ownership units in Canada controlled 70.13 per cent of the daily circulation in the country. This is of great concern to Senator Keith Davey, chairman of the special senate committee on the mass media convened in 1969 and 1970. In November of last year [1974] he was urging the break-up of the chains which he said have grown substantially since the senate media report come out five years ago. He sees their growth as apt to "engulf almost the entire newspaper industry" and "not exactly conducive to press freedom." Walt McDayter and Russell Elman, Canadian journalists, take a little different view. They look at it as big business but also agree that perhaps something should be done to stop this growth.

It would be absurd to conclude that because some groups across Canada are consolidating their media holdings, they're doing it in the hope of obtaining a monopolistic stranglehold on Canada's communication systems. It's just big business, with determined investors struggling in a fiercely competitive field to diversify their interests widely enough to assure their viability. In short, they want to guarantee that their business will show a profit, that it will continue to grow. But might it not be in the public interest to put a limit on their growth?

What of the Herald today? Cleo Mowers, a publisher appointed in 1961 by FP, says that the paper is still independent and that he gets very little interference from the parent company. Both the original owners of FP, Bell and Sifton, are dead and Malone who speaks for the company now says the policy they decided on when FP was formed is still in force today. That was that any paper owned by FP would continue to maintain its own identity and would not be centrally controlled. Mowers says he feels "a little saddened" at the decline of the independent newspaper and that with its disappearance something is lost. However, he is also sure chain operations are inevitable because of rising costs. He says the best alternative to independents is an operation like FP where each newspaper remains independent. It then has a chance of being a powerful voice in the community.

FOOTNOTES

4. The North-West Mounted Police was later named the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A Herald article of 1974 headlines "'Mounties' birth was spurred by profligate south and fire water" reports that the prefix "Royal" was granted by King Edward VII of England in 1904 in recognition of the force's service to the Canadian West.
5. Saunders with another former NNMP member C.E.D. Wood had started the first newspaper in Souther Alberta, *The Macleod Gazette* in 1882.
6. Dave Kay, a writer in the Cranbrook Courier, in a column of January 17, 1968 entitled "Come With Me To Yesterday," No. 187, said of Simpson, "He is directly responsible for putting Cranbrook and Lethbridge on the map. His column 'Observations by the Old Man' was read from ocean to ocean...He was a good fellow to work with and a prince among men." The papers Simpson started along the Crow's Nest Pass in British Columbia included the Wardner International, the Marysville Tribune and the Wattsburg Wrinkle.

7. C. Frank Steele, Prairie Editor. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1961), pp. 9-12

8. Ibid., p. 20

9. The Lethbridge Herald, October 31, 1907, p. 2

10. Steele, op. cit., p. 160

11. W.A. Buchanan, "The Daily Herald...How It Began," The Lethbridge Herald, December 11, 1947, p. 3

12. Ibid., January 9, 1908, p. 4

13. W.A.R. Cocq was managing editor. When the paper folded Buchanan offered Cocq a job and he joined the Herald staff to remain for over thirty years.

14. Steele, op. cit.

15. The Lethbridge Herald, July 12, 1954, p. 10

16. Ibid., October 5, 1957, p. 6

17. This slogan was written by C. Frank Steele and first appeared on the masthead April 20, 1921

18. The Lethbridge Herald, December 10, 1932. p. 3

19. Ibid., December 11, 1947, p. 7

20. C. Frank Steele's book Prairie Editor gives detailed account of Buchanan's political life.

21. The Lethbridge Herald, December 11, 1947, p. 45

22. Ibid., December 10, 1973, p. 8

23. Harold Long and Buchanan were known as a team, they worked so well together.

24. The Lethbridge Herald, July 12, 1954, p. 4

25. Donald Buchanan was associate director of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa until his death in a car accident in 1965.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Norman Botterill, personal correspondence, April 7 to May 7, 1975

32. A.S. Williamson, personal correspondence, April 10, 1975

33. Lethbridge Broadcasting Company is a public company formed by The Lethbridge Herald and Taylor, Pearson and Carson, owners of the local radio station.


35. Buchanan, op. cit.

36. The Lethbridge Herald, September 3, 1955, p. 9

37. Buchanan, op. cit.

38. Cleo Mowers, Personal Interview, July 5, 1974


40. Buchanan, op. cit.

41. Buchanan, op. cit.
Hugh Buchanan dropped out of sight until 1962. At that time he turned up in Hamilton, Ontario, a non-drinker and joined the staff of The Spectator as an editorial writer becoming editor of the editorial page before his sudden death on August 7, 1974 at the age of 54.

Besides those already mentioned it has The Toronto Globe and Mail, with the largest circulation in the country.

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Windsor is publishing a newsletter entitled MONITOR. The first publication was in November, 1978. Anyone interested in receiving a copy should send their name and address to Professor Andrew Osler, Department of Communication Studies, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4. It is anticipated that the MONITOR will be published three times a year.