

NEWS FROM WHITE HOUSE

How the President Meets the Men Who Write for Press.

MCKINLEY SET A PRECEDENT

Wardened President Always Easy to Reach. T. B. Courtes and Sagacious, Taft Reticent and Wilson Ready.

The great white light of publicity, which all statesmen and politicians cry for and few really want, has made immense headway at the White House under the Wilson administration, and there are not so many secrets around the executive offices as many suppose.

Patronage rows and disaffections; lack of party harmony, national or local; personal jealousies and bickerings among leaders, most of which eventually find their way to President Wilson or Secretary Tumulty; Secretary Bryan's foreign policies and hosts of other minor matters are often kept bottled up on the general principle that their publication would do nobody any good, but there is real wide-open publicity around President Wilson and his immediate assistants on momentous national questions in which the people are directly and vitally interested.

All of which leads to a story of the gradual development of pitiless publicity in and by the White House and of the methods and channels by which the people—plain and fancy—obtain their information of the doings and movements of presidents.

Corps of Recent Origin. Until twelve years ago no regular accommodations had been granted newspapermen in the daily life of the executive offices. When the White House was rehabilitated in 1902 and the president given offices at the west end of the reconstructed building a room was set aside for reporters and correspondents. Their ranks have increased so fast that they now have a regular organization of similar nature to the correspondents at the capital, and this organization is recognized by the president and his assistants.

Prior to the time of President McKinley reporting the White House had not become an organized daily and hourly business as it is now. Up to 1897 the offices of presidents were in the main White House. Five comparatively small rooms on the east end of the second floor of the White House belonged to presidents, their secretaries, stenographers, and clerks, and there the executive business of the nation was conducted. What is now the private entrance for the families of presidents was then the main entrance for all purposes, social, political and personal. Catering to the people through the newspapers and magazines had not become the art it is now. Newspaper men made occasional trips to the White House to inquire of private secretaries about appointments or other subjects upon which their newspapers wanted enlightenment, but there were no regular assignments to cover the White House as in late years. Presidential visitors were not "held up" and asked to tell about their business with the president. They would have been horrified at such a proceeding.

Presidents Had to Be Trained. "Pitiless publicity" had not become a fact or an issue. Presidents were not trained or educated in the art of slugging this psychological stuff to the people before the opposition could get there. Private secretaries understood that their principal duty was to prevent newspaper salesmen getting anything of what was going on. Presidents talked to intimate newspaper friends in a strictly confidential manner, not for publication. Presidents who wanted to get their views to the public did so through messages to congress or an occasional letter, publication of which was permitted. It was considered undignified to be fighting the opposition through some of the modern day methods. Gruff but honest Grover Cleveland paid little attention to the newspapers and President Harrison used the press very little to get out his views. Neither resorted to traveling among the people as a means of disseminating their views. Cleveland went fishing and hunting, but not for votes. He was fond of the whirl of a rod and the flash of a game fish at the end of the line, while duck shooting was the height of his joy.

McKinley was the first chief executive to begin going among the people in response to invitations to attend functions here and there. He enjoyed circulating among the voters and he made many trips. Mrs. McKinley and members of his cabinet generally accompanied him and he insisted that liberal provision should be made for newspaper representatives. One car and sometimes two cars would be set aside for the press and Mr. McKinley considered the correspondents as part of his party, sharing in all the honors and entertainments provided by citizens and railroads. Those were in "the good old days" when the railroad handed out free passes with lavish hand. The presidential train cost nobody on board anything and were stocked with the finest things to eat and drink to be found in the land. Even with that the railroads found the undertaking profitable, as big crowds were drawn to places along their lines where the president stopped.

McKinley and the Reporters. McKinley's loyalty to the press was shown on one of his trips through the south. His itinerary in a certain southern city included driving through the estate of a man of immense wealth. The superintendent of the estate sent word that newspaper men were not expected to be with the president. "Then I will not accept the invitation," Mr. McKinley sent word back through his secretary. That promptly settled the matter. Mr. McKinley's kindly, thoughtful disposition was shown in a number of instances when correspondents traveling with him became ill. He personally looked out for them and sent delicacies and flowers.

The beginning of the McKinley administration saw the establishment of the present system of reporting the White House. A reporter of The Star who was sent there began writing a daily column of events, including interviews with visitors, items about their business, facts and gossip about the day's work and movements of the president; everything he could gather was legitimate. Other papers and press associations followed the plan, and it has been effective ever since. Mr. McKinley's encouragement at the inception being vitally important.

Private secretaries, senators and representatives have been slowly trained to a recognition of the wisdom of being frank and fair with reporters and correspondents who greet them before and after conference with presidents. The courtesies of the statesmen have become "wise" to the good results that followed judicious advertising of White House calls in their states and districts, and when it is possible to do so tell what they have seen the president about. Of course, they do not always do so with the understanding that the White House shall know that the facts are given by them. It is the

LORD HIGH ADMIRAL OF THE ROYAL FLEET.



business of the reporter to know how to handle the information given him so as to set the news into his paper and at the same time conceal the source of the material. To hinder in handling information of this kind, making trouble for his informant and others, would be unpardonable. And so the statesmen and correspondents told unreservedly to each other, the man in public life trusting the correspondent to be fair and tactful in his report.

Easy to Get to McKinley. President McKinley was accessible to newspapermen who were well known to him. Naturally he gave more time to correspondents of papers friendly to him than to correspondents of hostile papers. He held to the traditional idea of politics in those days that it was best not to talk too freely, but he was candid where he thought it not imprudent to be so. The old school view that too much publicity was dangerous and insured trouble prevailed to a degree in his handling of public matters. Despite his long experience in public life he had not become an adroit manipulator of the public mind through the newspapers.

It was Colonel Roosevelt, McKinley's successor, who put into useful practice the view that to get to the public first with your own opinions and facts was equivalent to hitting the other fellow the first blow in a personal encounter. And the colonel left many a political corpse in the arena by beating the other fellow to the newspapers and getting his side fixed in the public mind. When the opposition trailed along behind with explanations the public was tired, too tired to read much. The colonel's "first-blow" tactics had done the work. Colonel Roosevelt was the best posted man ever in the White House on the preparation of material he wanted to get to the public through the newspapers. He knew then, as he does now, the best days in the week to get the most into the papers, the days when they have the greatest amount of space. He was an adept in writing the material to be printed so that it would get under the hides of the people in just the right way, and accomplish just what he wanted to accomplish in making a certain impression.

Always Courteous. Colonel Roosevelt was always courteous and kindly to correspondents at the

White House except in two instances where he did not like something that had been written and brought about the recall of the men. He had a habit of sending for a large number of correspondents at a given time to enlighten them on some subject before congress and the country. He would talk freely, not mincing words, but would often wind up with the declaration that he did not wish any of the information used at that time, simply desiring to post the correspondents as to what was going on. When the colonel did not want to talk, however, when he preferred to keep secret certain developments, he knew how to do it to perfection. Correspondents could not draw anything from him with their most direct questions.

Colonel Roosevelt had three or four intimate friends among Washington correspondents, men he liked to talk with and whom he favored in many ways with im-

portant information not ready to be given to all the correspondents. These men had access to him almost any hour and kept his confidence.

Colonel Roosevelt's favorite time for talking with the newspapermen was when he was shaving for luncheon, just after he had finished his day's program of callers and conferences. His daily habit was to send for William Dulaney, his colored messenger, and be shaved about 1:30 o'clock, before going to luncheon guests at luncheon. Sitting in a special chair Dulaney had for him, the colonel talked gaily to his press friends. His face lathered and wearing one of his famous grins, he was an unusual figure as he talked animatedly and interestingly.

Taft Not an Advertiser. President Taft did not profit by the successful advertising methods of Colonel Roosevelt. He did not do any of the

things Roosevelt had done. He was on friendly terms, though, with newspapermen, and saw the press boys as often as his work would permit. He, too, had a few intimate friends among the Washington writers, and they enjoyed an intimate

friendship with him. They could not prevail upon him to get to the newspapers in better manner with his views on public affairs. He detested the deliberate use of the press to accomplish his own popularity, and seldom appeared in the news-

papers until long after the opposition had "battered him" some hard wallop. The other fellow got to the public first in his case. He had, though, the good will and esteem of all newspapermen.—Washington Star.

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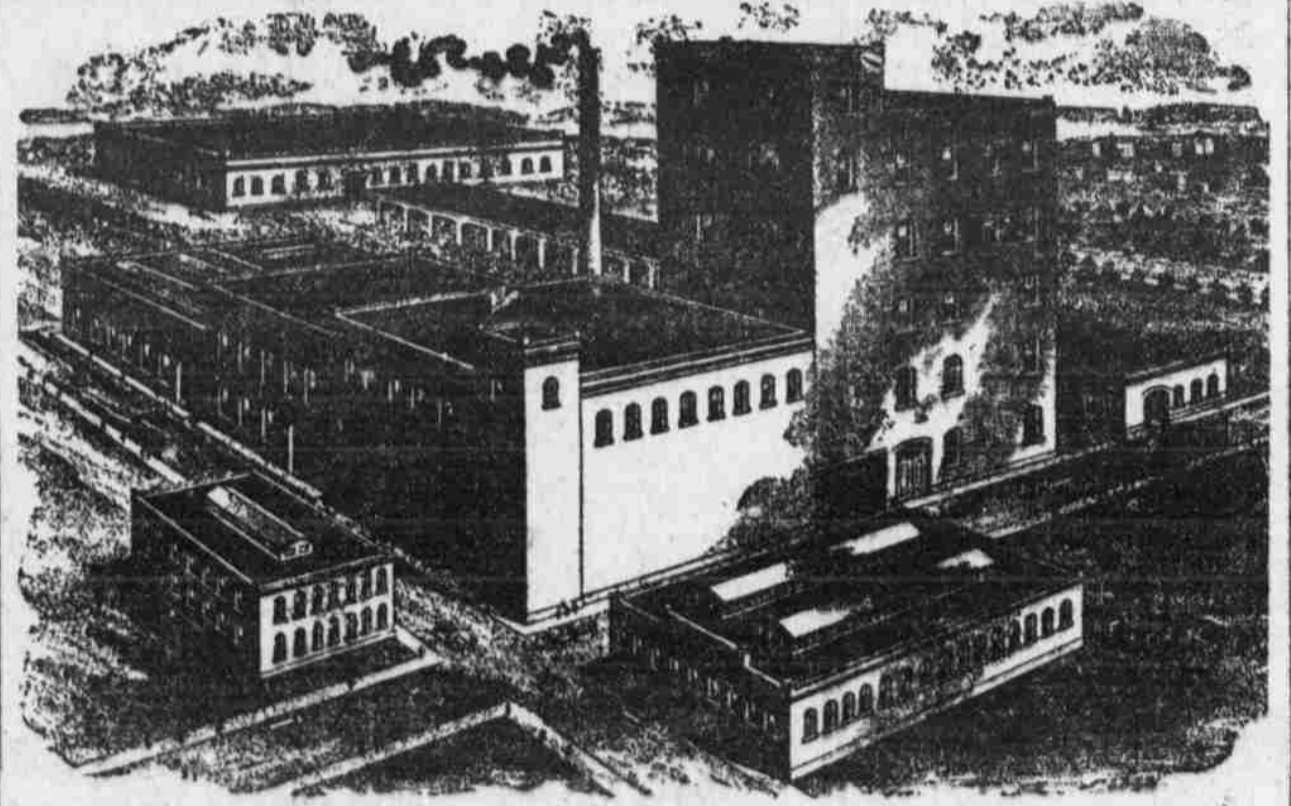
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