

## The Great Diffusion

### *Hollywood's Reporters, Exhibitor Backlash, and Quigley's Failed Monopoly*

In an internal memo from June 1932, *Motion Picture Herald* publisher Martin Quigley instructed his editor, Terry Ramsaye, to publish a testimonial from an independent producer in praise of the trade paper. "Because of circumstances attending the reorganization of our company a year-and-a-half ago, there was a natural suspicion in the minds of many people, including the Independents, that we were going to be all for the major companies and against everything else," wrote Quigley.<sup>1</sup> The memo was received by Ramsaye in their new offices in New York City.

The Quigley Publishing Company had left Chicago in 1931 after acquiring *Motion Picture News* and *Exhibitors Daily Review and Motion Pictures Today*. It was a move that made sense for reasons of economy—a New York base of operations was essential for *Motion Picture Daily*, and the proximity to the leading distribution executives was beneficial for the weekly *Motion Picture Herald*, too. But it only contributed to the perception that Quigley had turned his back on the independent exhibitors of the Heartland, the struggling managers and owners who had once pledged loyalty to a "Herald Only" Club.

Recognizing the perception problems, Quigley told Ramsaye, "It is important that we should do everything possible to establish ourselves as an all-industry paper."<sup>2</sup> Quigley and Ramsaye (along with the editors of *Motion Picture Daily* and *Hollywood Herald*) tried to find ways to make themselves valuable to the entire industry, publishing detailed reports on market conditions, labor relations, and production schedules. If judged strictly by the quality of what they published week after week, they were succeeding. *Motion Picture Herald* was a model for the application of industrial journalism practices toward the film industry. Even

the typography, printing, and paper stock were of superior quality, boasted Quigley Publications' general manager, Colvin W. Brown.<sup>3</sup>

Yet none of this was enough. Technical mastery and typographical excellence ultimately mattered far less to key constituents of the *Herald's* readers than what they perceived as the paper's true allegiances. Over the next year, Quigley would watch his subscriptions plummet, a former employee challenge him with a rival publication, and his Hollywood paper go out of business. In 1932, Quigley took out a \$50,000 loan from ERPI—AT&T's licensing arm for its sound technologies—to keep his operations going. It was a secretive arrangement that proved embarrassing when the news became public a few years later during a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) investigation.<sup>4</sup> Despite having the backing of the major studios and AT&T's patent pool, it was clear by the end of 1933 that Quigley's attempted monopoly and vision of an "all-industry paper" had failed.

Why did Quigley fail? And what does his failure tell us about the business cultures and attitudes within the film industry? To answer these questions, we need to look closely at the publications that successfully competed against Quigley's well-capitalized machine. *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter* were the most important of these challengers, and as a result, I will give them the most attention. But *Showmen's Round Table* and *Boxoffice* also played important roles in the undoing of Quigley's grand plans, as did the money and support of workers within sectors across the film industry. By exploring (first) *Variety*, (second) the LA production community, and (third) the exhibitor community and rival papers pitched to them, we can see how the combination of tenacious, opportunistic publishers and the cultures of industry workers resulted in the formation of a Hollywood trade press that did not adhere to the rules or plan that Quigley and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) had agreed upon.

Before analyzing those trade papers, though, we need to analyze the environment in which they published and competed. "In light of the current depression," "on account of the depression," and "despite the depression" were frequently used phrases across all of the industry's publications.<sup>5</sup> The Great Depression was also boldly invoked in the advertisements within the papers. Paramount promised exhibitors booking its pictures that "Your Box Office Depression ends."<sup>6</sup> MGM went a step further in its 1932 campaign, "The Hell with Depression!," which featured cartoon illustrations of Leo the Lion enthusiastically dancing, and, in another ad, punching a man wearing a tuxedo and top hat (fig. 28). "GOOD pictures sock depression RIGHT on the schnozzola!" emphasized the latter ad, taking the hard-sell approach with lots of text, product details, and even another illustration. This larger and more prominent illustration imagined a young boy talking with his grandfather in the year 1972. "Grandpa, what did you do during the Great Depression? Were you licked too?" asked the boy. "No, my lad," responds Grandpa. "I played Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures." This imaginary exchange reveals one way in which the Great Depression was already being memorialized as it played out in real time. The film industry's workers and the American people were living through something historic, and they knew it.



**MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG!**

**GOOD** pictures sock depression  
**RIGHT** on the schnozzola!  
**"TARZAN, The Ape Man"** is M-G-M's current sock!  
**BUT** we've "got a million of 'em — a million!"

**THE WET PARADE** — Knocks Washington, D. C. for loop in M-G-M's smash opening! Dorothy Jordan, Walter Huston, Jimmy Durante, Lewis Stone, Mynna Loy, Robert Young, Neil Hamilton, Wallace Ford, John Miljan.

**LIMPY** — JACKIE COOPER and 'CHIC' SALE. What a combination for laughs and heart-throbs!

**NIGHT COURT** — Boston opening with typical M-G-M ballyhoo packs State Theatre! Walter Huston, Phillips Holmes, Anita Page, Lewis Stone, Jean Hersholt, John Miljan, Tully Marshall

**JOAN CRAWFORD** in LETTY LYNTON — "Possessed" takes a back seat. This is her top romantic thriller! Guess who they love to see make love to beautiful Joan. Robert Montgomery, of course!

**RAMON NOVARRO** in HUDDLE — Romance! Thrills! That's what your public wants! A new romantic role for Ramon. With Madge Evans, Una Merkel, Ralph Graves.

**GARBO** in AS YOU DESIRE ME — Need we say more?

**MARIE DRESSLER** and **POLLY MORAN** in PROSPERITY —  
 It's what the doctor prescribes for that tired box-office feeling!

**LAST NIGHT! "GRAND HOTEL"**  
**OPENED AT THE \$2 ASTOR**  
**An Event in Motion Picture History!**

**METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER**  
**The Hell With Depression!**

FIGURE 28. "Merrily We Roll Along!" [MGM advertisement], *Film Daily*, April 13, 1932, 3, [https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/filmdailyvolume55859newy\\_o887](https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/filmdailyvolume55859newy_o887).

### THE DEPRESSION AND THE MOVIES

"The motion picture business is neither depression-proof nor fool-proof," observed Abram F. Myers in the pages of *Film Daily* and *The Film Daily Year Book* at the dawn of 1932.<sup>7</sup> The occasion was reflections from industry leaders on the past year, and Myers, the chairman of the Allied States Association and longtime opponent of vertical integration, was not in any mood to pull his punches. Indeed,

no sector of American life was truly depression-proof by 1932. Unlike its relatively fast bounce-backs from previous financial panics, the United States was now two full years into this depression, and the conditions were only worsening. The unemployment rate was more than 20 percent, hitting African American communities and working-class whites especially hard. People who had considered themselves middle class now worried about how they would get by; those who always had worried about how they would get by and who lacked safety nets were plunged into new depths of poverty.<sup>8</sup> Inexpensive forms of entertainment that were once considered depression-proof, like going to the movies, increasingly became perceived as a luxury, one more thing that needed to be rationed.<sup>9</sup>

Within this context, the nation's film exhibition sector experienced tremendous losses and closures.<sup>10</sup> Film historian Kathryn Fuller-Seeley emphasizes that small-town theaters were hit especially hard; she estimates that "by 1932, about 8,000 of the nation's 23,000 movie theaters were closed. Densely populated urban areas of the East Coast and West Coast experienced a relatively minor theater closure rate of from 7 percent to 20 percent, but the Midwest, Plains, South, and northern New England lost from 22 percent to 47.7 percent of all their movie houses."<sup>11</sup> Small-town theaters fought to stay afloat by offering reduced price admissions, double-features, and "dish night" promotions (which were eventually surpassed by "bank night" cash prize drawings).<sup>12</sup> These practices were regarded with disdain by the major distributors and frequently critiqued in the pages of *Motion Picture Herald* for the ways they seemed to devalue the core products of the industry and, in the case of double features, keep children up too late at night.<sup>13</sup> But the promotions clicked with Depression-era audiences, and they brought warm bodies and much-needed revenue into theaters on nights that they might otherwise sit empty. To inexpensively book the content needed for a dish night, bank night, or the second half of a double bill, exhibitors turned to the Poverty Row producer-distributors, such as Monogram, Tiffany, and Astor.<sup>14</sup> These Poverty Row companies, in turn, became the best advertising customers of *Boxoffice*, *Showmen's Round Table*, and the other exhibitor papers of the 1930s that wound up providing Martin Quigley with unanticipated competition.

The same theaters that the major companies resented for running double features and dish nights had their own long list of grievances coming back toward them. Independent exhibitors complained about block booking, high rental fees, and an abundance of pictures that they regarded as too "urban"—a term that could mean something either too racy and risqué or too highbrow and sophisticated—for the tastes of their audiences.<sup>15</sup> As we will see, these exhibitors looked for trade papers that would keep them informed, give them forums to discuss problems and solutions, and forcefully represent their interests. They also found a champion in the abovementioned Abram F. Myers, who as a former Federal Trade Commissioner understood how to lobby the government into greater investigation and oversight into antitrust practices within the film industry.<sup>16</sup>

The Depression's effects, of course, extended to theaters located in major American cities, too. Theater ownership proved to be financially disastrous for some of the industry's biggest corporations. In January 1933, Paramount-Publix and RKO both entered receivership, the result of a depressed box office and the huge debt burdens that both corporations had taken on in their massive theater acquisitions of the late 1920s. As Tino Balio notes, "Paramount's bankruptcy was the second largest the country had ever known and one of the most complicated."<sup>17</sup> In the weeks following the announcements, Paramount took out full-page advertisements in several trade papers to emphasize that its subsidiaries, Paramount Productions Inc. and Paramount Pictures Distributing Corp. were "NOT in receivership. They will continue to produce and distribute quality motion pictures under the same management and personnel as before."<sup>18</sup> Yet the power structure had changed. Paramount's Adolph Zukor, who had long been regarded as the film industry's human embodiment of unrestrained expansion and monopoly, was no longer in charge of the corporation he had built. William Fox and Universal's Carl Laemmle also lost control owing to major financial restructurings of their companies.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, just as the nation's Prohibition laws were ending, a more sober and cautious approach to the corporate management of the major film corporations was taking hold.

The RKO and Paramount bankruptcies were both announced during the period now widely viewed as the lowest point of the entire Great Depression—the four months between the November 8, 1932, election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency and his inauguration on March 4, 1933.<sup>20</sup> Outgoing president Herbert Hoover resisted helping Roosevelt implement the bold policies on which he had campaigned and beaten the incumbent. A stressed financial sector became even more uncertain, and the general public worried about the solvency of local banks and the security of their savings accounts. Although thousands of American banks had already closed during the Depression, a new wave of bank runs—with customers withdrawing their money from banks en masse—created an all-out crisis in February 1933 that threatened to decimate the institutions that remained.<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt famously addressed the panic in his inaugural address, declaring that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Yet words alone were not enough. Within days of taking the Oval Office, Roosevelt declared a banking holiday, closing all banks temporarily to try to avoid their permanent collapse.<sup>22</sup>

The March 1933 bank holiday proved a pivotal moment in Hollywood history, particularly in the relationship between studios and their creative workers. In response to the bank holiday, the studios implemented 50 percent salary cuts to most of their production workers. The studios claimed that the cuts were a temporary necessity resulting from the tightened credit situation and a shortage of cash to meet payroll obligations.<sup>23</sup> But as banks reopened and the salary cuts remained in place, Hollywood's writers, actors, and other creatives came to believe they had been duped. They felt that the studios had cynically and opportunistically used

the bank crisis to cut salaries and increase corporate profits, all at the expense of people who actually made the movies that audiences paid their hard-earned money to see. Galvanized, writers organized and formed the Screen Writers Guild in April 1933.<sup>24</sup> Actors followed soon after with the Screen Actors Guild.<sup>25</sup> All of these groups read the local trade papers closely, looking for voices in the press to affirm their perspectives and call out the greed of their opponents.

Somehow, in the midst of so much upheaval, these studios and their workers managed to produce some of the most spectacular and memorable movies ever made. Depression audiences were temporarily transported watching *King Kong* (1933) climb the Empire State Building, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance in *Top Hat's* (1935) art-deco Venice, and Clark Gable lead a *Mutiny on the Bounty* against Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh. The high-energy, show-must-go-on spirit of the Warner Bros. backstage musicals *42nd Street* (1932) and *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), featuring a mix of new and seasoned chorus girls, presented the enduring American dream of upward mobility alongside a jaded knowingness that *life ain't fair, kid*. The real showstoppers always came at the end: Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic musical numbers, using massive sets, high camera angles, dozens of dancers, and intricate editing to transform the cast into plastic abstractions.

The style, energy, and ambition dramatized and embodied in the backstage musical found their way into showbusiness journalism, too. The film industry's trade papers found new ways to compete, and the ones that survived lasted for decades to follow. Mirroring the plots and aesthetics of backstage musicals, the first battles waged in the *Motion Picture Herald* era would be over matters of speed, money, and style.

#### VARIETY STAYS IN THE PIX SHEET BIZ

Martin Quigley hated *Variety*. It's easy to see why. The paper had scooped him on the giant story of 1930 that belonged to him: the creation and adoption of a new Production Code. And this was just one of many ways that *Variety* thumbed its nose at Quigley and his publications. *Variety* played by its own rules, always trying to have it both ways: *Variety* was a relentless scorekeeper of how the studios, theaters, and other trade papers were doing, yet it refused to have its own circulation audited. As a result of *Variety's* keeping its numbers a secret, an exasperated Quigley estimated "that the cost per page per thousand units of trade circulation in VARIETY is as high as \$100," compared to a rate of \$15 per page for *Motion Picture Herald*.<sup>26</sup> Why did the studios not see the error of their ways?

Quigley was infuriated when he saw traces of *Variety* slang seeping into his own publications. When he read through one of the first issues of *Motion Picture Herald* in January 1931, Quigley fired off a lengthy memo to his staff, warning them not "to attempt any imitation of the style of 'Variety' by the unbridled use of corrupted



English words and resort to cheap and near-obscene slang expressions which are decidedly more representative of the carnival racket and variety show business than the motion picture industry.” Quigley highlighted several specific offenses:

From page 8, Jan. 17 issue: “One of the gravest bulls, and most expensive ones at that, pulled daily etc. etc.” Cheap language for publication. We don’t want it.

From page 12, same issue: “An ‘Examiner’ reviewer was aired” etc. etc. Some more stuff we don’t want.

From caption on box, page 50: “Up in the Big Dough”. Not printable English.

Personal talent on the stage may not be any more properly referred to as “flesh and blood” entertainment than as “liver and kidney” entertainment. The word “flesh” as descriptive of a form of entertainment is prohibited.

Keep “sex” out of headlines.<sup>27</sup>

These objections to “flesh” and “sex” demonstrated the strong degree to which morality and propriety loomed large for Quigley in the language used in his publications.

The memo and its chiding also revealed that *Motion Picture Herald’s* editor, Terry Ramsaye, was still getting acclimated to his new boss. Ramsaye’s writing in *A Million and One Nights* (1926), his book about cinema’s early history, brought a playful quality to the stories he told, and he had championed the use of film slang early in his career. In 1916, for example, Ramsaye, then the director of publicity for the Mutual Film Corporation, sent postcards to exhibitors and journalists proposing that the industry consider using *pix* as a substitute for the word *movies*.<sup>28</sup> He was largely unsuccessful, however, and *pix* was used infrequently in the trade press until 1928, when *Variety* took it up.<sup>29</sup> Now, Quigley was making it clear that such slang had no place in the pages of *Motion Picture Herald*. Ramsaye seems to have adapted quickly, publicly excising instances of the very slang word that he had championed fifteen years earlier, even as he privately filed away clippings and notes that he found interesting into what he labeled as his “dope files.”<sup>30</sup>

If style and language served as markers of difference between *Variety* and *Motion Picture Herald*, then speed and breadth of box-office reporting became a common objective—an obsession, even—on which both papers competed directly. The major metropolitan houses were seen as bellwethers for how a film would perform across the nation’s other major markets. The grosses also functioned as a form of industry scorekeeping, tracking the comparative performances of movies, studios, and theaters.<sup>31</sup> In its efforts to be as timely and comprehensive as possible, *Variety* generated weekly estimates based on information it said it received about Friday’s performances—noting, for example, that Columbia’s *Criminal Code* (1931) “jacked business up to \$14,000” at LA’s Pantages (a Fox-owned theater), while RKO’s *Royal Bed* (1931) had “no names to lure; weak and may get \$3,000” at Minneapolis’s Seventh Street Theatre (an Orpheum house that had become part of RKO).<sup>32</sup> Not to be outdone, *Motion Picture Herald* published several pages of “Theatre Receipts” near

the middle of most issues. *Herald* distinguished its coverage by including markets that *Variety* typically ignored, like Charlotte, Providence, and Des Moines.<sup>33</sup>

In the March 1931 issue of *Harrison's Reports*, editor P. S. Harrison lampooned this competition, referring to it as the "'Variety'-'Herald' Farce-Comedy." Harrison highlighted discrepancies in the figures they reported for the same films and theaters, refusing to give the upper hand to either publication. Harrison argued that the managers "do not give out receipt figures to either paper, and that both papers are forced to guess such receipts in order to pretend that they are giving their readers a real service."<sup>34</sup> Harrison was minimizing the networks of sources that *Variety* publisher Sime Silverman and Quigley had both cultivated and that did, in fact, deliver authentic information. Ultimately, however, the race became a draw. Both papers continued to gather and publish box-office information as quickly as they could, with Quigley using the frequency of the *Motion Picture Daily* as an added weapon in the battle.

On one important and measurable front, however, *Motion Picture Herald* took the clear lead. As chronicled in the previous chapter, Quigley had financed the acquisition of *Motion Picture News* and *Exhibitors Daily Review and Motion Pictures Today* through persuading the major film corporations to sign large five-year advertising contracts with Quigley Publications. The chief rationale was "substantial savings to the motion picture advertisers by eliminating duplication in advertising efforts," with Quigley estimating that each studio would save \$25,000 to \$40,000 per year.<sup>35</sup> The plan worked like gangbusters for Quigley. In the first two years of *Motion Picture Herald*, Quigley saw the number of advertising pages in his weekly trade paper increase substantially, from a median of 22.75 advertising pages in 1930 (the year preceding the new arrangement) to 55 pages in 1931 and 44 pages in 1932.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, *Variety* watched the number of film-related advertising pages drop from 18.75 pages in a typical issue in 1930, to 14 pages in 1931, to 9.25 pages in 1932.<sup>37</sup> To make matters worse, the other chief entertainment forms that *Variety* covered—vaudeville and "legit" theater—had been hit even harder than the movies. Two-thirds of Broadway theaters were dark in 1932, and *Variety* sold a mere 3.25 pages of non-film-related advertising per issue that year.<sup>38</sup> "Depression cutting deep into biz," reported *Variety* on its Times Square entertainment page, a statement equally true about the paper itself.<sup>39</sup>

Sime Silverman needed cash to keep his paper afloat. To try to raise money quickly, *Variety* lowered its subscription price from \$10 per year to \$6 per year (with additional promotional discounts for subscribers who signed up for multiple years).<sup>40</sup> *Variety's* new rate was still double the \$3 yearly subscription cost of *Motion Picture Herald*, but the price drop appears to have been calculated to create a sense of urgency for readers to subscribe or renew, paying up front for subscriptions that would last up to three years and expand the paper's advertising reach. The subscription drive alone did not raise enough money, though, and Sime Silverman took on substantial debt—so much so that, by the end of 1931, the bank refused to continue lending to him.



Deep in debt and unable to borrow more money, Silverman called in a favor from Joseph Kennedy. The godfather of RKO and father of a future president contractually agreed to become the guarantor of Silverman's bank loans.<sup>41</sup> If Silverman defaulted, the bank could debit the money owed from Kennedy's account (a scenario that happened in April 1933 to the tune of \$11,944).<sup>42</sup> The structure of the deal was classic Kennedy.<sup>43</sup> He was able to put in relatively little of his own money yet achieve a substantial result: saving *Variety*, a paper that had helped him achieve success in the film industry, through extending access to an ongoing credit facility.<sup>44</sup> But if this deal feels completely congruent with what we know about Kennedy, then it is equally incongruent with much of the lore that has been passed down over the years about Sime Silverman. In Hugh Kent's influential 1926 *American Mercury* essay, Kent celebrated more than simply *Variety*'s language. He praised the paper's independence—its refusal to follow in the footsteps of the *Clipper* and enter into financial entanglements with captains of industry that might compromise the paper's editorial integrity.<sup>45</sup> During the Great Depression and a time of need, however, Silverman accepted financial help from Joseph Kennedy to keep the lights on.

Sime Silverman's greatest accomplishment may ultimately have been in grooming a deeply loyal and hardworking staff who believed in *Variety*'s mission with an almost religious fervor. During the early 1930s, Silverman experienced a severe decline in health. As he took a step back, his lieutenants stepped up. Their contributions, even much more than Kennedy's credit line, proved vital for *Variety*'s continued existence. In 1931, Sime's son, Sid Silverman, took over much of the publishing responsibilities and shrewdly decided to enhance *Variety*'s coverage of radio, a strategic decision that paid off later that decade.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, managing the day-to-day operations of *Variety* fell largely to editor Abel Green and manager Harold Erichs. "Abel was the star, but Harold signed the checks," writes Peter Besas, who emphasizes the financial discipline that Erichs imposed on the paper during the Depression.<sup>47</sup> When Sime Silverman died, on September 22, 1933, he left seven hundred stock shares to his wife and son, and the remaining three hundred were split among Green, Erichs, and six other loyal staffers. Together, they took ownership of the paper in every sense of the word.<sup>48</sup>

Sime Silverman spent the final months of his life in 1933 living in Southern California. He had moved for his health, with doctors recommending the warm, dry climate. While living in the region, Silverman met frequently with Arthur Ungar, who had opened *Variety*'s LA office in the mid-1920s and had been selected to edit the company's new LA-based paper, *Daily Variety*. The new paper debuted on September 6, 1933, less than three weeks before Silverman passed away.<sup>49</sup> In *Daily Variety*'s first issue, Arthur Ungar promised a paper that would deliver "the news of the show business" without "vanity publicity" and without any attempt to "tell those in the show business how to conduct their business."<sup>50</sup> This was followed a few weeks later by a full-page self-advertisement for *Daily Variety*: "NOT A TRADE PAPER PRINTING TRADE VIEWS but A NEWSPAPER PRINTING TRADE NEWS."<sup>51</sup>

For readers today, these might sound just like any other journalistic platitudes—a commitment to objectivity, news gathering, and editorial judgment. Readers in the Hollywood of 1933, however, would have recognized Ungar's words and the advertisement for exactly what they were: attacks on the movie colony's most popular publication, the paper that had outmaneuvered Martin Quigley's *Hollywood Herald*, provoked several libel lawsuits, and even stolen *Variety*'s own news.

#### THE RISE OF HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"We have never at any time been 100% in the good graces of the majority of the production and distributing companies," reflected W. R. "Billy" Wilkerson about the early history of his trade paper, the *Hollywood Reporter*.<sup>52</sup> It was an understatement from a publisher who had been banned from more than one studio lot. The occasion for Wilkerson's musings was court, a familiar setting for a publisher who was also frequently accused of libel and other transgressions.<sup>53</sup> In this particular case, Wilkerson was trying to avoid paying the taxes that the government said he owed. His defense was becoming a popular one among Hollywood personnel: deductions for homes, clothes, and luxury items were all necessary in an industry in which business and social life were inseparable.<sup>54</sup> Although Wilkerson was not able to persuade the Board of Tax Appeals on the merits of his case, there is no doubt that Wilkerson's power and success emerged from his effectiveness at operating within Hollywood's social circles and culture. Even when a studio would officially bar the *Hollywood Reporter*, Wilkerson was always able to find people who worked within it to leak news, buy ads, and even lend him money (fig. 29).

The legacy of Billy Wilkerson is complex, with his shameful role in the post-war blacklist (which primary sources substantiate) and his possible involvement in organized crime (for which there are not primary sources to substantiate).<sup>55</sup> W. R. Wilkerson III has recently addressed these aspects of his father's life in *Hollywood Godfather*, and I am grateful for the biographical details, character traits, and personal memories that he has shared.<sup>56</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the trade paper's first few years and Wilkerson's activities that I have been able to document using primary sources. By turning to correspondences that were saved in the manuscript collections of Hollywood personnel, along with documentation generated through lawsuits and old copies of the trade paper itself, we can identify the strategies and tactics that differentiated the *Hollywood Reporter* from its competitors and appealed to the sensibilities of Hollywood's creative community.

The *Hollywood Reporter* was audacious from the start. But it was not immediately combative or incendiary. The early issues, published daily and generally running four pages, looked a great deal like *Film Daily* in their makeup, with short news items pertaining to all branches of the film industry. The most detailed and valuable reporting went into tracking the production schedules of the studios—snapshots of how many pictures each studio was making, and which stages of the production

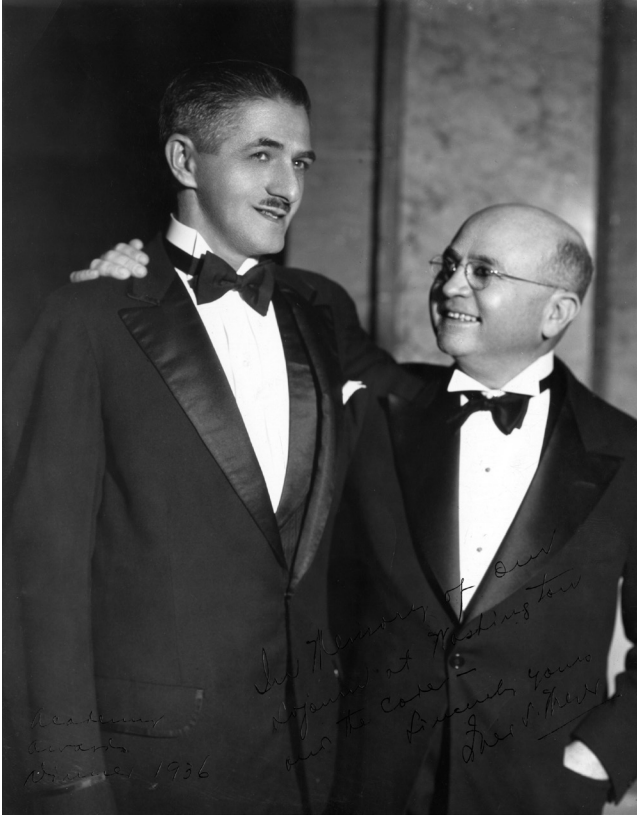


FIGURE 29. Two of Hollywood's behind-the-scenes power brokers: *Hollywood Reporter* founder, W. R. Wilkerson (left), and influential attorney Edwin J. Loeb pictured together at the Eighth Academy Awards Banquet in 1935. Photograph courtesy of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

process those pictures were in, at a given moment.<sup>57</sup> The *Hollywood Reporter* also devoted considerable attention and energy to the review of new pictures, an area of interest to exhibitor readers (who might book and play the pictures) and Hollywood creative workers (who liked to keep tabs on one another's films and note whose work stood out within a particular production). To compete with other trade papers based on speed of reviews and capitalize on its Southern California location, Wilkerson tried to embed *Hollywood Reporter* agents within the preview screenings that took place throughout the region.<sup>58</sup>

Two of the *Hollywood Reporter's* signature columns were included in the paper's first issue. The first and most famous, "Trade Views," was Billy Wilkerson's platform for addressing the industry. He would later use it to taunt and attack his perceived enemies, but in the early issues, he spoke more generally on matters related to advertising, distribution, production budgets, and picture quality.<sup>59</sup> Wilkerson knew something about all these topics, but he projected the confidence and authority of the world's foremost expert—a self-assuredness (or narcissism, in the eyes of his critics) that would only grow over the next three decades. The

second of the *Hollywood Reporter's* signature columns was the gossipy "The Low Down," penned by Edith Wilkerson, who was married to Billy at the time.<sup>60</sup> Edith Wilkerson had a knack for using playful language to hook readers and keep them interested—even when there wasn't much to report. "At a hey-hey party the other evening in Hollywood, a movie star found himself with several 'impromptu' dinner guests on hand, and an undersupply of food," revealed Edith Wilkerson in one such "Low Down" column. She generally refrained from identifying people by name in the column, instead dishing on "a well known actor" or "a certain studio executive of the valley." She frequently employed a two-sentence joke structure of setup and punchline: "We hear that a certain 'popular' young writer is about to be presented with deportation papers. This does not exactly come under the heading of 'Bad News' to anyone who worked on the same lot with him."<sup>61</sup> Between "Trade Views" and "The Low Down," Billy and Edith Wilkerson set the tone for the *Hollywood Reporter*—a publication that was both playful and forceful, breezy and authoritative.

While gossip, reviews, and industry prognostications were plentiful in early *Hollywood Reporter* issues, pages of advertising were not. Especially after the *Reporter* entered its second full month of publication in October 1930, the advertisements that provided the profit center for any trade paper became relatively scarce. The major film corporations were opting not to buy ads, a practice in keeping with their overall approach to earlier LA trade papers, such as *Camera!*, *Film Mercury*, and *Film Spectator*. But some of these companies were going a step further: warning their employees against purchasing ads. Billy Wilkerson later reflected: "We will get along very well with a studio for months and months, then because we happen to print a true story of something that happened on their lot or reviewed one of their pictures that they thought was good, but our reviewers didn't, would bar us off the lot and suggest that their employees refuse to advertise with us."<sup>62</sup> While these sorts of anecdotes about studio access might sound apocryphal or like the stuff of lore, contemporaneous evidence and sources back them up.

The problems with access appear to have begun within months of the trade paper's debut. In a March 1931 letter to Edwin Loeb, Billy Wilkerson pleaded with the influential Hollywood attorney to help him gain access to the studio lots. Some of the studios, Wilkerson protested, were barring *Hollywood Reporter* staff but permitting entrance to New York trade papers. In his letter, Wilkerson emphasized that the reason he wanted to be on the lots was about advertising, not newsgathering. He framed his request around "soliciting the writers on the lots" to buy ads in a forthcoming special "Writer's Number" issue. Wilkerson promised that *Hollywood Reporter* would use "disgression" in its sales techniques and avoid interrupting people who were busy at work. "We will not use high pressure methods in getting writers to sign for space AND THERE IS NO RETALIATORY EXPRESSIONS if a writer denies our request for advertising assistance," Wilkerson assured Loeb. The attorney may have read this, considered Wilkerson's reputation, and wondered

if the publisher doth protest too much.<sup>63</sup> The *Hollywood Reporter* managed to expand its advertising business in the months and years that followed, but the matters of studio access and ad sales to creative workers continued to loom large.

Wilkerson also needed help with the news-gathering functions of his young paper. He cunningly found a solution in the three thousand miles that separated New York from Los Angeles. Many members of the Hollywood creative community loved *Variety*, but they didn't appreciate how long they had to wait for it. The Silvermans' LA subscribers waited at least three days longer for each new issue than their New York City counterparts, as trains hauled their copies cross-country. Thanks to the telegraph and telephone, however, information could travel much faster than paper. Billy Wilkerson capitalized on this advantage. When the new week's issue of *Variety* came hot off the press each Tuesday morning, a *Hollywood Reporter* correspondent was among the first to devour it. The correspondent would then relay—via phone or telegram—all the important film news back to the *Hollywood Reporter* home office, which repackaged the information into Wednesday's daily paper, sometimes saving a few items for Thursday as well. Wilkerson never attributed the source of this news, which after he was done with it, had become old news by the time *Variety* reached the West Coast on Friday.

In February 1932, *Variety* sued *Hollywood Reporter*, demanding an injunction and alleging that Wilkerson had been stealing its news for months.<sup>64</sup> Suspicious that they were getting scooped on their own news, *Variety* had set up a sting operation, publishing a deliberately fake news item to see if it cropped up in the pages of *Hollywood Reporter*. Sure enough, it did.<sup>65</sup> The fictitious news item concerned an executive's return to the Fox studio, a far more bland plagiarism trap than the time, in 1908, when *Variety* caught the *New York Dramatic Mirror* copying its vaudeville reviews by inventing a new comedy act called "The Undertaker" and waiting for a slightly altered review to pop up in the competitor's paper.<sup>66</sup> The *Dramatic Mirror* episode became a favorite and often repeated story in *Variety*'s self-lore, most likely because of the way it turned the tables on the more established and snooty *Dramatic Mirror*, with the added flourish of naming the takedown "The Undertaker."<sup>67</sup> In contrast, *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* seldom rehashed the news-copying incident, perhaps because the particular lawsuit fizzled (no injunction was awarded) or because the rivalry would escalate, over time, to much greater heights.

#### THE HERALD LAYS AN EGG IN HOLLYWOOD

As Billy Wilkerson's *Hollywood Reporter* fought in the mud to obtain news, advertising, and attention, Martin Quigley's *Hollywood Herald* seemed to have everything going for it. The major studios had committed to purchase advertising, aiding with the single biggest challenge to a trade paper's financial health. On the newsgathering side, Quigley had a reporting network in place that he could

use, with correspondents in LA and most other major cities. And not to be overlooked, one of the industry's most respected trade paper editors and thought leaders, William A. Johnston, had agreed to serve as the *Hollywood Herald's* editor. Yet Quigley's daily LA paper never caught on. *Hollywood Herald* lived for an undistinguished twenty-six months (June 1931 to August 1933) before shutting down and fading into obscurity.<sup>68</sup> Few film historians have ever heard of this paper, and Martin S. Quigley never mentions *Hollywood Herald* in his book about his father's career.<sup>69</sup> What went wrong?

There was more than one cause for *Hollywood Herald's* failure. Because of the lack of primary sources addressing the paper and the publication's rarity (most of the issues are lost), some causes are easier to identify than others. One cause—and likely a symptom of larger problems—was a lack of steady leadership. William A. Johnston lasted as editor for a mere three months.<sup>70</sup> The circumstances surrounding his departure are unclear. Was his style a mismatch for the LA creative community? For Quigley Publications? For both? Johnston stayed active in the film industry, working in studio publicity and story departments, but he never again enjoyed the influence he held during the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>71</sup> Johnston's successor was Leo Meehan, who had earlier served as *Hollywood Herald's* general manager (and, before that, worked as a producer and director).<sup>72</sup> But Meehan, too, would ultimately leave. In March 1933, Wid Gunning, formerly of *Wid's Daily* and *Wid's Weekly* and an on-again, off-again screenwriter, took over as the paper's editor.<sup>73</sup> Even Wid, though, could not make the venture successful; *Hollywood Herald* folded just a few months later.<sup>74</sup> The rapid turnover of editors clearly hurt *Hollywood Herald* in its efforts to compete locally against the *Hollywood Reporter*, *Film Spectator*, and *Film Mercury*—all publications with strong, consistent leadership.

On a broader level, Quigley had underestimated the difficulty of the entire enterprise. He was launching a new publication into the already saturated marketplace of LA-based film industry trade papers. In addition to the *Hollywood Reporter*, Quigley was competing with Tamar Lane's *Film Mercury*, Jack Joseph's *Inside Facts of Stage and Screen*, and Welford Beaton's *Film Spectator*—which, perhaps because of the heightened regional competition, changed its title to *Hollywood Spectator*.<sup>75</sup> The format Quigley had chosen—a daily paper rather than a weekly—placed additional pressures on the news-gathering and ad-selling operations. By the spring of 1932, less than a full year into its existence, *Hollywood Herald* slowed down its publication frequency and became a weekly.<sup>76</sup> And the timing of the entire initiative meant that Quigley and his revolving door of editors were trying to sell subscription and advertisements during the height of the Great Depression.

Yet Quigley had misjudged something even more fundamental. He did not understand Hollywood culture. He could never fully wrap his mind around—or come to accept and embrace—what made the movie colonists tick. The editorial pages that I have been able to read in extant copies of *Hollywood Herald* are



models of tone deafness, excruciatingly out of touch with the lives, desires, and tastes of Hollywood's creative community. Just as he did in *Motion Picture Herald* and *Motion Picture Daily*, Quigley insisted on including his own editorials in the pages of *Hollywood Herald*. Firmly taking the side of producers over creative laborers, Martin Quigley excoriated his readers for the "high salary and excessive cost evils which threaten the industry" and declared that "the production colony must adjust itself to a changed order."<sup>77</sup> To Hollywood's production community, Quigley was a mouthpiece for corporate interests, blaming the industry's problems on labor and speaking to them in a condescending way. To make matters worse, the paper's attempts at gossip in its "Talk of Hollywood" section were always boring and flat. Why would any actor, screenwriter, or craftsperson want to subscribe or purchase an ad in this paper? Quigley loathed *Film Spectator* and *Variety*, and he made sure *Hollywood Herald* did not replicate *Spectator*'s prolabor stance or *Variety*'s playful style and juicy gossip. The result was a Hollywood paper that he was proud of but that no one in Hollywood actually wanted.

A defining moment for both *Hollywood Herald* and its biggest competitor, the *Hollywood Reporter*, occurred in March and April of 1933 when the studios implemented 50 percent salary cuts in response to the national bank holiday.<sup>78</sup> *Hollywood Herald*'s newly installed editor, Wid Gunning, offered his thoughts in an editorial entitled "Your Time Is Coming. Don't Rock the Boat!," which veered between empty platitudes ("Don't be blue. Be happy. This country is going places now.") and demands that laborers fall into line and do as they are told ("Right now every film worker in Hollywood should 'play ball' with the big companies until the present emergency is over.").<sup>79</sup> Quigley and Gunning had adopted the exact opposite strategy that Welford Beaton utilized six years earlier, when, during an industry-wide salary dispute, Beaton forcefully took the side of labor, and *Film Spectator* rocketed in popularity. For a paper that was already struggling to find traction, this stance may have been *Hollywood Herald*'s mortal blow.

Billy Wilkerson, however, used the salary cut to engage the *Hollywood Reporter*'s base of readers and deepen divisions between the LA production community and New York corporate executives. In addressing the national bank holiday, Wilkerson initially adopted a unifying tone, noting that a shared sacrifice was required by all for the good of the industry and country. As the weeks went on, however, and as it became clear that some studios (most infamously, Warner Bros.) were not going to restore full salaries, Wilkerson went on the attack. He praised Hollywood creatives and criticized their corporate overlords who "in their arrogance [have] shown that they are stupid. They have underestimated the intelligence, the brains of their employees."<sup>80</sup> He called out MGM and Warner Bros. for being greedy,<sup>81</sup> and he celebrated production executive Darryl F. Zanuck's decision to leave Warner Bros. when the company's president, Harry Warner, reneged on a promise to restore salaries.<sup>82</sup> Wilkerson also directed a great deal of column space toward bashing Will Hays, the MPPDA head and longtime ally of Martin Quigley.<sup>83</sup>

Hollywood's screenwriters and actors, who were organizing during this period to form their own unions, had found the trade paper that they wanted to read. They rewarded *Hollywood Reporter* with their subscriptions, advertisements, and news tips. A few years later during a legal dispute over his taxes, Wilkerson recounted his memories of the period in an effort to explain large income fluctuations. "When [the studios] declared a 50% salary cut for eight weeks we fought it and lost all of the \$190,000.00 advertising business we had from the major studios," recalled Wilkerson. "We were barred out of the studios, but we had the support of the writers, directors, and technicians. Otherwise, we would have been forced out of business."<sup>84</sup> Wilkerson claimed that this episode solidified the studios' view of *Hollywood Reporter* during this period as the "labor paper" (a designation that just slightly more than a decade later would have been unthinkable, as Wilkerson weaponized his column into an instrument for blacklisting suspected communists and ruining careers). But much like he demonstrated during the blacklist era, Wilkerson showed his power through a willingness to call out and publicly shame specific groups and individuals. He named names.

In his combative "Trade Views" columns from the spring of 1933, Wilkerson carefully delineated between insiders and outsiders, between Hollywood's authentic, hardworking, and knowledgeable production community and the ignorant, lazy East Coast corporate officers who tightly controlled the purse strings.<sup>85</sup> "Well, the New York execs have come and gone," wrote Wilkerson in one such column, noting that "if they accomplish twice as much on their next trip six months hence, as they did this time, the result of those efforts will still total nothing."<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, Wilkerson generally spared the high-paid production executives who worked in Southern California (and with whom he frequently socialized) from his blistering criticisms. In these ways, the *Hollywood Reporter* helped to produce and reiterate the film industry's production culture and community boundaries. Working actors, writers, directors, craftspeople, top-tier agents, and studio producers were all members of the authentic Hollywood production community. Outside of these velvet ropes stood exhibitors, distribution exchange managers, and New York corporate officers—all part of the same industry but not the true filmmaking community. Also on the outside, looking in, were the many aspiring actors, writers, and Hollywood wannabes. All of these constituencies included subscribers and readers of the *Hollywood Reporter*, but not all of them belonged to the community, as it was constituted and reproduced by Wilkerson.<sup>87</sup>

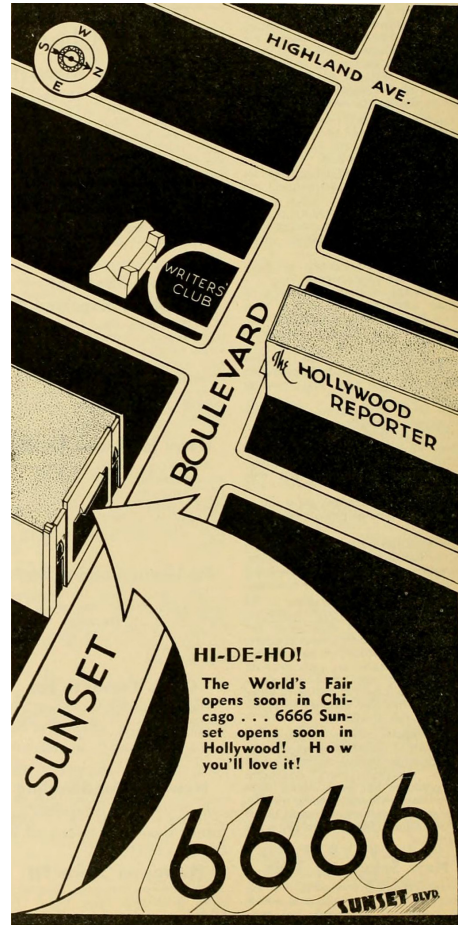
Wilkerson's relationship with MGM's central producer, Irving Thalberg, provides a particularly interesting example of how behind-the-scenes arrangements influenced the *Hollywood Reporter's* content, financial health, and community gatekeeping. Thalberg was an outstanding producer of movies, but he was also a brilliant producer of his own self-image—Hollywood's wunderkind who had the magic touch and understood every component of the filmmaking process.<sup>88</sup> During the period of fall 1932 to summer 1933, Thalberg became especially self-conscious

about his perception within the industry. His fragile health was widely known. More embarrassing, MGM's heads on the East Coast (Nick Schenck) and West Coast (Louis B. Mayer) had conspired during his recovery from illness to effectively demote Thalberg, relieving him of the duty of supervising all MGM productions and, instead, making him one of several unit producers on the studio lot (alongside Mayer's talented son-in-law and former RKO executive, David O. Selznick).<sup>89</sup> Rumors swirled that Thalberg might soon leave MGM altogether.<sup>90</sup> Within this context, Wilkerson and Thalberg developed a mutually beneficial alliance. Thalberg supplied Wilkerson with news and likely tipped him off about the test screenings for MGM films—a practice that Thalberg was famous for embracing and reviews of which helped to distinguish the *Hollywood Reporter* against its competitors. In a private letter, Wilkerson thanked the producer for “the font of information you furnish me on each and every visit we have.”<sup>91</sup> For his part, Wilkerson made sure that Thalberg stayed in the news and his columns in a manner that Thalberg approved, noting, for example, the producer's “great health” and how he “respects artists” in February 1933.<sup>92</sup>

But the relationship did not end there. During the same period in April 1933 when Wilkerson publicly attacked MGM's New York executives for their greediness, he privately asked Thalberg for a big favor: “Would you be inclined to make me a loan of \$4,000 or \$5,000 . . . with my personal IOU your only security?” Wilkerson closed his letter with two promises: he would pay the money back within twelve to fourteen months, and “nobody will ever know this letter is written and certainly no one will ever know of this transaction.”<sup>93</sup> Both promises were broken. Wilkerson never paid back the \$4,000 loan. In fact, three years later, he borrowed an additional \$2,500 from Thalberg. The reason we today know about these clandestine loans, the reason the original letter was saved for posterity, is that they became part of an accounting of the Thalberg estate after the producer's untimely death in September 1936.<sup>94</sup> By that point, ironically, Wilkerson was in a dispute with the Screenwriters Guild, and rumors swirled among Hollywood creatives that “L. B. Mayer owns a controlling interest of all ‘Wilkerson’ enterprises such as Reporter, Vendome, and Trocadero.”<sup>95</sup>

Shortly after receiving Thalberg's loan in spring 1933, and as the “Trade Views” column continued needling East Coast executives, Wilkerson opened his first restaurant—the abovementioned Vendome. In one of the early ads for Vendome, Wilkerson emphasized the restaurant's Sunset Boulevard location and its proximity to the Writer's Club, a clear message to the constituency whose support he had cultivated through his columns on the salary cuts (see fig. 30). The opening of Vendome marked a turning point in the history of Hollywood trade papers. By creating a lunch restaurant (which also served as an imported food store), Wilkerson was taking the cultural functions of a show-business trade paper and grafting them onto a physical space. As Wilkerson later reflected in a court deposition, “The restaurants were built to help the newspapers. When the Vendome was built

FIGURE 30. Advertisement for Vendome—promoted for its address, 6666 Sunset Blvd., and its proximity to the Writers Club—in the trade paper published by Vendome's owner, W. R. Wilkerson. Source: "6666 Sunset Blvd." [Advertisement], *Hollywood Reporter*, April 24, 1933, [https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/hollywoodreporter1215wilk\\_0692](https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/hollywoodreporter1215wilk_0692).



we had difficulty getting into the studios and I wanted an attractive place where people could come so I could get news and help my advertising. The Vendome accomplished that purpose over a period of five or six years. Almost everybody in the motion picture business that wasn't exactly working that day was at the Vendome for lunch. The result was that my men could go there and collect news that they could not otherwise get.<sup>96</sup>

Wilkerson's critics accused him of selling overpriced lunches at the Vendome in exchange for brief mentions in *Hollywood Reporter*.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, this was core to Vendome's *raison d'être*. The restaurant simultaneously brought in successful Hollywood creatives who Wilkerson could no longer access on the studio lots, along with ambitious aspiring writers, actors, and directors who would do almost anything for a studio contract. For those trying to break into show business or move up in the pecking order, a lunch they could hardly afford meant the chance of

getting written up in *Hollywood Reporter* and getting closer to their dreams. Show business trade papers had long profited from selling ads to aspiring stars; Wilkerson continued selling those ads but now included fine cheeses and cured meats on the menu.

Acting as good maitre d's, Wilkerson's Vendome staff gave preferential treatment to the more established and powerful Hollywood figures who came in for lunch. Their presence and patronage increased the prestige value of the restaurant for Wilkerson and everyone who walked through the door. Wilkerson was surely exaggerating when he claimed to be serving lunch for "almost everybody in the motion picture business that wasn't exactly working that day," but his phrasing was emblematic of a show business culture in which work and leisure, in which the commercial and the personal, were intimately bound up. Additionally, this blending of work and social life echoes Tom Kemper's research into the emergence of talent agents in 1930s Hollywood. Kemper conceives of "Hollywood as a business world embedded within a social network" and calls on film historians to draw on the field of economic sociology, which studies "how markets remain deeply and internally structured as social systems."<sup>98</sup> Wilkerson understood that Hollywood operated as a social network, and he created both a newspaper for that network to follow one another and physical spaces for that network to convene.

In contrast, Martin Quigley had no aptitude or appetite for this side of Hollywood society and culture. Despite declaring that *Hollywood Herald* would be "the daily journal of the motion picture's creative community," Quigley and his string of short-lived *Hollywood Herald* editors were always on the outside of that community looking in, like reporters in the Polo Grounds' press box trying to yell down at the players on the field. In fairness to Quigley and his editors, they were hardly alone in their failure during this period. *Inside Facts of Stage and Screen* closed shop in 1931.<sup>99</sup> *Film Mercury's* editor, Tamar Lane, claimed to seldom mingle "socially with the film colony," preferring to maintain the sort of boundaries that Wilkerson trampled over.<sup>100</sup> He suspended the publication of *Film Mercury* in 1931. Although it began intermittently publishing again two years later, *Film Mercury* was never the same force it had once been.<sup>101</sup> Tamar Lane's vision was for Hollywood to devote more resources to the production of artistically ambitious films to be distributed into specialized theaters patronized by intelligent, adult audiences. In the context of widespread theater closures, this vision seemed more far-fetched than ever before.

In October 1931, Lane took a job at RKO as a story consultant and editor. And, on the side, he worked on writing a story of his own. Published in 1932, *Hey Diddle Diddle* was Lane's satire of the stupidity and greed that ruled Hollywood. Largely forgotten today, especially compared to Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust* (1939) or Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run* (1941), Lane's novel takes readers through the inner workings of a large film company. Perhaps not surprisingly, trade papers play a prominent role in the book. A team of studio executives select

their next season of movie projects by spreading out a trade paper, looking at the advertisements, and imitating what they see their competitors doing.<sup>102</sup> A sleazy distribution sales manager charges \$35,000 to his expense account while traveling the country to rig votes for an exhibitor paper's contest about the public's favorite stars.<sup>103</sup> Later, the studio's production chief boasts: "The trade papers we can depend on—they've got to give us good reviews. One paper is just as good as another for quoting to exhibitors."<sup>104</sup> But if Lane believed this last part, he was wrong. American exhibitors were reading their trade papers with a critical eye, and they did not regard the publications as equally trustworthy.

#### EXHIBITOR RESISTANCE AND READING ALTERNATIVES

As Quigley faltered in his attempts to replace *Hollywood Reporter* with *Hollywood Herald* as the premiere trade paper of the Los Angeles production community, the publisher encountered resistance from an even more important constituency: exhibitors. During the late 1910s and most of the 1920s, independent exhibitors had trusted Quigley's *Exhibitors Herald* as a staunch advocate for their interests. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, that sense of loyalty shifted during the transition to sound and the three years that led up to the formation of *Motion Picture News*. Independent exhibitors increasingly perceived Quigley as a sellout, a mouthpiece for the studios and the Hays Office. One year before the launch of *Motion Picture Herald*, P. S. Harrison went so far as to say that "Martin Quigley has forgotten that the independent exhibitors exist."<sup>105</sup> Harrison's readers would have found evidence to support this claim in *Motion Picture Herald's* pages. The "What the Picture Did for Me" section, especially popular among small-town theater managers, had been phased out in 1930, just as the Depression was setting in. And *Motion Picture Herald's* masthead had made two symbolically important changes from *Exhibitors Herald World*: the paper was now published in New York, not Chicago, and the word *Exhibitor* was nowhere to be found in the title. The days of the "'Herald Only' Club" were over. Many independent exhibitors looked toward other papers for their sources for news, community, and an affirmation of their grievances.

The most acrimonious fight for the loyalty of exhibitor readers emerged from within *Motion Picture Herald's* own ranks. When Quigley acquired *Motion Picture News* in 1930, one of its biggest assets was the "Managers Round Table" section, edited by Chick Lewis. But whereas *Motion Picture News's* William A. Johnston had given Lewis free rein on the section's content, style, and length, *Motion Picture Herald* publisher Martin Quigley and editor Terry Ramsaye insisted that "Managers Round Table" conform to their editorial guidelines. Lewis bristled under the increased scrutiny and control. In December 1931, he fired off an angry memo to Quigley: "After four years, during which time I have never published a single item which proved embarrassing to the publication, I feel fairly competent to judge



what is best for the department and those who read it. I cannot possibly agree to anything but a free hand and unless you can convince Mr. Ramsaye that such a course is best all around, I will have to withdraw from the publication immediately."<sup>106</sup> Just over a year later, the break finally happened. Quigley claimed he fired Lewis. But in a maneuver that feels straight out of a Hollywood movie, Chick Lewis pulled a *you can't fire me, I quit*, insisting that he voluntarily resigned. One fact neither party disputed was that Lewis did not stay idle for long. In May 1933, just two months after his exit from *Motion Picture Herald*, Chick Lewis debuted his slim new trade paper—*Showmen's Round Table*.<sup>107</sup>

In launching *Showmen's Round Table*, Lewis capitalized on the goodwill he had earned among exhibitors from editing the "Manager's Round Table" and the long-simmering suspicions that Quigley was in the pockets of the major studios. Lewis called *Showmen's Round Table* "the Foremost Independent Trade Paper of the Industry," emphasizing that it was "Unbiased, Honest and Truthful in Its Editorial Policy and a Proved Record for Fearlessness," clearly attempting to contrast his new paper against the *Herald*.<sup>108</sup> Lewis received letters of support from exhibitors along the East Coast. "I and my gang in this part of the country are for you 100%," wrote the owner of the Maryland Theatre, who added that "the Managers' Round Table Club is a Chick Lewis organization and not a Motion Picture Herald proposition." The theater owner closed by saying: "If you are going back into publication work I feel confident in saying that 10,000 showmen will be with you."<sup>109</sup> The actual number was far less, but the threat and embarrassment were great enough for Quigley to file a lawsuit, alleging that Lewis acted with "the intent and purpose to deceive the buyers and readers" of *Motion Picture Herald* by prominently displaying "Round Table" in his new paper's title.<sup>110</sup>

Quigley's lawsuit succeeded only superficially. In response to the claims of consumer deception, Chick Lewis dropped "Round Table" from the title and rebranded the publication as *Showmen's Trade Review*. He continued to publish his paper for the next two decades, offering his readers wisecracks, marketing gimmicks, and a sense of belonging to a community of savvy, independent showmen. Setting up his offices on 42nd Street, Lewis brought a wisecracking New York sensibility to his paper, the Bugs Bunny to *Herald's* Elmer Fudd. His readers, mostly concentrated in the mid-Atlantic region, could page through and find sections such as "The Product Check-Up," "Advance Dope," and "Box Office Slant."<sup>111</sup> As these section titles suggest, Lewis took a more freewheeling and playful approach to language than most other exhibitor papers. He was also looser with his sense of screen propriety than the prudish Quigley and Harrison. Lewis openly reflected on a picture's "sex appeal" and exploitation opportunities geared toward promoting a film's steamy lure.

*Showmen's Round Table* / *Showmen's Trade Review* found its affinity with independent exhibitors who occupied the middle ranks of the exhibition sector. A neighborhood theater owner in Baltimore, for example, or a theater manager located on a Main Street in eastern New Jersey was likely to be a loyal Chick Lewis

reader. They viewed themselves as underdogs compared to the downtown movie palaces and studio-affiliated theaters. Yet they also viewed themselves as superior (bigger, better, more modern) than small-town and rural movie houses located out in the sticks. These midrank theaters needed an edge to compete and stay relevant; Chick Lewis supplied them with tips and techniques, and he made them feel seen and appreciated in the process.

Chick Lewis's best advertising customers were the Poverty Row studios, such as Monogram, Astor, and, later, Republic. The Poverty Row studios did not own their own theaters, and the major film corporations generally would not give them screen space in their prestigious downtown houses, so they needed the bookings of *Showmen's* midtier exhibitors to stay in business. And because Poverty Row pictures generally lacked major star power, the studios depended more on genre, an exciting title, and other exploitation angles to sell them—all of which fell squarely within Chick Lewis's wheelhouse. Lewis thanked his advertisers with the traditional quid pro quo of news and editorial attention. As a result, Monogram's slate of pictures made front-page news in a 1934 issue in which the studio bought two advertising pages.<sup>112</sup> Although the title changed to *Showmen's Trade Review*, the overall structure continued: the paper was a mutually beneficial enterprise for midtier exhibitors, Poverty Row studios, and editor-publisher Chick Lewis.

Another mid-Atlantic trade paper—one more militant than *Showmen's Round Table*—emerged in 1934 to challenge the power structure of the major film companies, affiliated theater chain, and *Motion Picture Herald*. In its debut issue, *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin* called for a “Revolt in the Industry!” and announced itself as the official organ of the Independent Exhibitors' Protective Association (IEPA), which was supportive of Abram F. Myers's Allied States Association and fought against what it considered to be unfair trade practices, ranging from block booking to the showing of movies in churches, taprooms, and other “non-theatrical” venues (fig. 31). *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin* claimed to speak up for all independent exhibitors who no longer wanted to be “the doormat of the industry,” but it was published in Philadelphia, and the advertisements taken out by local vendors and states'-rights distributors suggest that it was primarily consumed by exhibitors in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland (one issue referenced one thousand readers).<sup>113</sup> *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin's* chief target was the larger trade organization it was “revolting against,” the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America (MPTOA), which it viewed as a corrupt instrument for the benefit of the major film corporations and theater chains.<sup>114</sup> But *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin* also took aim at *Motion Picture Herald*, which it perceived as a mouthpiece for the MPTOA and major companies.<sup>115</sup>

As Martin Quigley struggled for the attention of mid-Atlantic exhibitors against *Showmen's Round Table* and *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, he also faced competition for readers and advertising dollars from increasingly powerful regional exhibitor papers. Quigley himself had started as the editor of a regional

# INDEPENDENT EXHIBITORS FILM BULLETIN

VOL. I No. 1

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1934

PRICE 10 CENTS

## Revolt in the Industry!

Much is heard these days about the Tories of the business world—those gentlemen of wealth who oppose all progress and change for fear it might cut into their hoard. For them the plight of the many means nothing. There is the gospel of "Privileges for the Few". Destitution to them is the problem of charity not social justice.

Just as in Colonial times the Tories were the big boys who stuck by the King and opposed the American Revolution, so to-day the Tories of the trade are those exhibitors who are sticking with the producers and their chain theatres and opposing the attempts of the independent exhibitors to organize.

But to-day, when we think of the Revolution, we remember, not the Tories who played safe and stuck by the King, but the "Independents" of that time, who left their bloody footprints on the snows of Valley Forge. Similarly, in the years to come, when the independent movement throughout the industry is firmly established, the exhibitors will honor, not the Tories of the M. P. T. O. who, subsidized by the producers, tried to destroy the independent movement for selfish reasons of their own or because they were too timid to fight. Rather will they remember that hardy little band of pioneers who, in the face of the most discouraging obstacles, carried on to success.

The independent exhibitor, to-day, is the doormat of the industry. The spectacle of 13,000 exhibitors waiting fearfully each season to learn what new impossible demands the eight major film companies will impose

upon them is not a pretty one to behold. If these 13,000 theatre men ever learned their true strength they would sweep the eight major monopolists with their \$10,000 weekly star salaries and their fancy bonuses for executives into the Pacific. And the industry would carry on and be a lot healthier.

The blame for the disorganized state of the independents can be placed squarely on the shoulders of the M. P. T. O. Tories. Playing the game of the producers, these M. P. T. O. Tories maintain a pseudo-exhibitor organization in each territory with a skeleton membership in which predominate producer-owned theatres. And the most discouraging feature of all is to see a number of really estimable independent exhibitors in the M. P. T. O. permitting themselves to be used as a respectable front for the producers and their chain theatres in the plan to keep the independent strength scattered. BUT THE HEIGHT OF SOMETHING OR OTHER IS THE FACT THAT CERTAIN OF THESE EXHIBITORS ACTUALLY PAY DUES INTO AN ORGANIZATION OF THEIR BUSINESS ENEMIES — THE PRODUCER-OWNED THEATRES WHOSE CLEAR PURPOSE IS TO ELIMINATE ALL INDEPENDENT COMPETITION BY ONE MEANS OR ANOTHER!

Every independent theatre owner in this zone must make his choice. Will he join the I. E. P. A.—a group of grimly determined Vigilantes organized to battle for the independent's rights? Or will he support an organization of producers and chain theatres?

Issued weekly for the Independent Exhibitors of Eastern Pa., S. New Jersey, and Delaware—And dedicated to the Protection of their Interests.

FIGURE 31. *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin* declared a "Revolt in the Industry!" in its first issue and provided another source of competition against Martin Quigley's *Motion Picture Herald*. Source: "Revolt in the Industry!," *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, Sept. 11, 1934, 1, [https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/filmbulletin193401film\\_0001](https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/filmbulletin193401film_0001).

trade paper, growing *Exhibitors Herald* from a trade paper for the community of Chicago exchanges into one of the leading nationals. A handful of the regional trade papers that were his peers during the mid to late 1910s remained active throughout the 1930s. One of the very first regionals, *Amusements*, continued to publish from Minneapolis and serve exhibitors in the northwestern region of the US. Meanwhile, that paper's founding editor, Tom Hamlin, had relocated permanently to New York City, where, starting in 1923, he edited and published *Film Curb*. A short, weekly trade sheet, *Film Curb* primarily held interest for exhibitors, exchanges, and executives in New York, although it appears to have enjoyed some additional reach across the country (Hamlin self-reported the circulation in 1935 as seven thousand, although he declined to have that figure audited). Meanwhile, in Toronto, Ray Lewis continued to advocate for Canada to obtain greater sovereignty over its screens, both in the pages of *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* and in her work aiding the White Commission's 1929 antitrust investigation into Paramount's Famous Players Canadian Corporation.<sup>116</sup> She was a close reader of *Motion Picture Herald*, and she wrote to Quigley and Ramsaye to let them know when they veered too far north of their lane and reported something inaccurate about Canada's film market.<sup>117</sup>

Two other regional papers—*The Exhibitor* and the *Reel Journal*—underwent dramatic expansions in the early 1930s. *The Exhibitor* had served the greater Philadelphia film community reliably since its 1917 founding by David Barrist. In 1928, however, the paper changed hands when it was acquired by Jay Emanuel, a local film industry insider who was elected as MPTOA treasurer that same year. Emanuel had a background in both exhibition and distribution, having previously worked as a theater manager, distribution sales agent, and exchange operator.<sup>118</sup> Leveraging his professional contacts in the region, Emanuel expanded *The Exhibitor* into, in his words, “the Pride of the East Coast!,” with three different editions for Washington, DC; New York State; and, of course, Philadelphia. By 1932, *The Exhibitor* could claim to deliver the “Home Town Trade Papers of 4600 Showmen!”<sup>119</sup> But not everyone in Emanuel's hometown appreciated his work. His active role in the MPTOA and support of the organization's policies earned him the enmity of many independents in these regions, some of whom broke away to form the IEPA and *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*.<sup>120</sup> Yet the IEPA did not seem to permanently damage Emanuel or his brand; subscriptions and advertising sales for the Philadelphia Exhibitor trended upward across the second half of the 1930s.<sup>121</sup>

Yet even Jay Emanuel's expansion of *The Exhibitor* paled in comparison to transformation and growth of Ben Shlyen's *Reel Journal*. Founded in Kansas City in 1920, the *Reel Journal* had been a model of film row friendliness, reporting on the community activities of Kansas City's exchanges and the theaters they served, including updates on how the local industry's bowling league was doing. But Shlyen's ambitions extended beyond the theaters and exchanges of Kansas and Missouri. Beginning in the mid-1920s, Shlyen embarked on a campaign to acquire

as many regional trade papers as possible. A new company name was needed for this venture, and in 1926, Reel Journal Publishing Company rebranded itself as Associated Publications. The name and idea may sound familiar to readers. As we saw in chapter 3, Tom Hamlin had created a network of regional trade papers just a few years earlier called the Associated Film Press. Both Hamlin and Shlyen no doubt hoped the name “associated” would evoke positive affinities in the minds of readers and advertisers with the Associated Press, which had been syndicating news content to newspapers across the world since the mid-nineteenth century. Yet a key difference separated Shlyen’s Associated Publications from Hamlin’s Associated Film Press: ownership. Whereas Hamlin had served as a New York–based advertising representative for regional trade papers, Shlyen’s strategy was to acquire regional trade papers outright, as well as create and publish new papers for adjacent territories in which he sought to compete.

In August 1927, Associated Publications took a big leap forward, announcing it had expanded into seven regional papers, spanning seventeen contiguous states fanning outward from Shlyen’s Kansas City.<sup>122</sup> The *Reel Journal* was now joined by two trade papers that Shlyen acquired—Omaha’s *Movie Age* and Detroit’s *Michigan Film Review*—as well as four new papers that he created: *Film Trade Topics* (Denver and Salt Lake City territory), *Exhibitors’ Tribune* (Oklahoma and Memphis), *Motion Picture Digest* (Chicago and Indianapolis), and *Ohio Showman* (Cleveland and Cincinnati). Like today’s media conglomerates that own local newspapers scattered across the country, Associated Publications operated by pushing out national news, editorial, and advertising content across all of its newspapers. Initially, Shlyen believed that the sense of local flavor would be a selling point for readers and advertisers. In an ad that ran in *Film Daily*, Associated Publications emphasized “7 DISTINCTIVE PUBLICATIONS. Each the HOME Paper in its Home Region.”<sup>123</sup> Despite the fact that the same printing press in Kansas City published *Film Trade Topics* and *Ohio Showman* every week, each paper was given its own title, logo, and cover design. “National in Scope. Local in Service” was the Associated Publications slogan.<sup>124</sup>

During the peak Depression years of the early 1930s, however, Associated Publications adjusted its strategy and changed its branding. Efficiency became more important, local distinctiveness less so. These changes emerged out of Shlyen’s ambition to expand the reach of his regional papers to cover all of the US (and eventually Canada). In 1931, he started a new regional paper, *Boxoffice*, to compete against *The Exhibitor* in the East Coast exchange cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC.<sup>125</sup> In starting *Boxoffice*, Associated Publications created a single regional trade paper to cover markets that, in the estimation of Jay Emanuel and *The Exhibitor*, were sufficiently distinctive to publish three different editions. This was telling of what was to follow: the replacement of “regions,” rooted in exchange hubs, with broader map areas that divided the country into “sectional editions.”



TABLE 2. *Boxoffice* Regional Editions and Predecessor Journals

Boxoffice Region	States Encompassed	Previous Titles Absorbed into Boxoffice
New England	Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine	<i>New England Film News</i> (Boston)
Eastern	New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania (East), Washington, DC	—
Southern	Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina	<i>Motion Picture Times</i> (Dallas), <i>Weekly Film Review</i> (Atlanta), <i>Exhibitors Tribune</i> (Memphis)
Mideast	Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania (West)	<i>Exhibitors Forum</i> (Pittsburgh), <i>Ohio Showman</i> (Cleveland), <i>Michigan Film Review</i> (Detroit)
Central	Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Upper Michigan, Missouri (East)	<i>Motion Picture Digest</i> (Chicago)
Midwest	Missouri (West), Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota	<i>Reel Journal</i> (Kansas City), <i>Movie Age</i> (Omaha/ Minneapolis)
Western	California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado	<i>Film Trade Topics</i> (San Francisco)

SOURCES: Ben Shlyen, "The Last Word," *Reel Journal*, June 16, 1931, 18; Audit Bureau of Circulations, "Auditor's Report: Boxoffice. Report for the Twelve Months Ending June 30, 1939," Sept. 1939, Alliance for Audited Media, Arlington Heights, IL, microfilm.

The full rebranding of Associated Publications' papers took place in 1933. The *Reel Journal*, *Film Trade Topics*, *Michigan Film Review*, and the other Associated Publications regional titles were phased out. Shlyen replaced them all with *Boxoffice*: "the National Film Weekly, published in seven sectional editions."<sup>126</sup> The seven sections covered New England, Eastern, Southern, Mideast, Central, Midwest, and Western. Advertisers could purchase space nationally for all seven editions of *Boxoffice* or by single edition.<sup>127</sup> As table 2 shows, Associated Publications collapsed previous distinctions among regions, bringing multiple exchange cities into the same fold.<sup>128</sup> A side-by-side comparison of different regional editions of *Boxoffice* allows us to reverse engineer how the paper was prepared and published. The earliest date for which I have been able to locate multiple sectional editions of *Boxoffice* is January 12, 1935. The Midwest and New England sectional editions both ran exactly forty-eight pages that week (longer than usual because the issues included the "Modern Screen and Its Furnishings" equipment section, *Boxoffice*'s counterpart to *Motion Picture Herald*'s "Better Theatres" and, before that, *Motion Picture News*' "Accessory News" sections). The cover page of both sectional editions featured an advertisement for Monogram's *Women Must Dress* (1935). In the



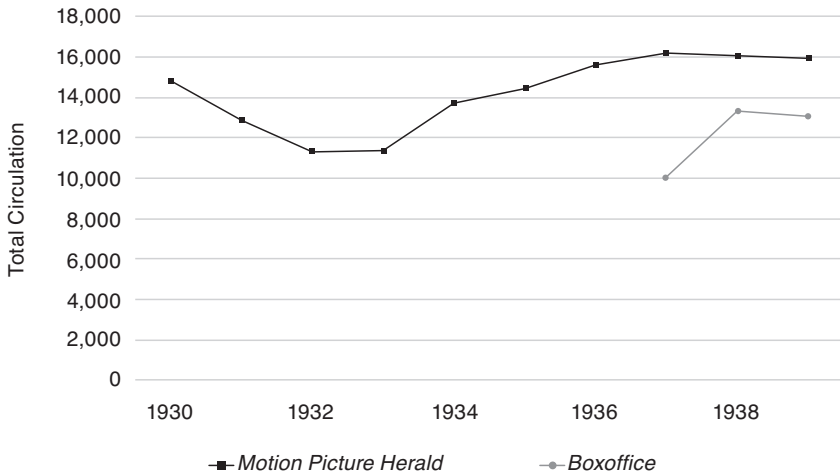


FIGURE 32. 1930s Audited Circulations: *Motion Picture Herald* vs. *Boxoffice*. The earliest audited circulation data for Plaintiff Complaint, undated, at 4, Quigley Publishing Company v. Showmen's Round Table and Charles E. Lewis, US District Court for the Southern District of New York, Equity Case Files, RG 21, E 76-321; Audit Bureau of Circulations, "Auditor's Report: Motion Picture Herald. Report for the Twelve Months Ending June 30, 1936," Sept. 1936. Alliance for Audited Media, Arlington Heights, IL, microfilm.

very front and back of both editions, an exhibitor reader could find a few pages of local news items, announcements, and advertisements. Almost everything in the middle, however, was identical. The same news, reviews, editorials, and advertisements—all laid out in the same style and printed on the same press—filled the bulk of the magazine. In total, forty out of the forty-eight pages of these two *Boxoffice* sectional editions were the exact same that week in 1935, whether you received the paper in Bangor, Maine, or Topeka, Kansas.<sup>129</sup> From a publishing standpoint, then, *Boxoffice* was a model of paper efficiency—cheaper to produce on a per-unit basis and more profitable than either a strictly regional trade paper or a more elaborate national weekly, like *Motion Picture Herald*.

A spirit of cheerful efficiency also characterized the paper's editorial style and much of its appeal to exhibitor readers. Ben Shlyen did not have the ego of William A. Johnston or Martin Quigley. His priority was building a successful trade paper, not being a thought leader whose editorial comments would echo across the nation. He spoke adamantly against tax increases and other government policies that he thought would place hardships on the industry; but, generally, his editorials took a soft touch, siding with his exhibitor readers without demonizing the major film corporations with whom they so often fought (and who purchased ads in his paper). Sometimes, he spun the formula around, agreeing with the studios on a small point, then explaining why they were wrong about a bigger point. When a federal judge ruled in 1935 that the studios' prohibitions against double

features were illegal, for example, Shlyen responded by praising the decision on the basis of helping exhibitors compete and survive. “We hold no brief for double features; personally we don’t like them,” began Shlyen, distancing *Boxoffice* from the controversial practice. “But too many exhibitors have told us they would be out of business, if it were not for their double bills, to call it a ‘destructive’ policy. It seems to be a matter for each individual to decide for himself—to sell the kind of merchandise that his clientele will buy tickets to see and to put it before their eyes in a form that is appealing and profitable.” Shlyen called for “clean competition of the ‘live-and-let-live’ type [that] will enable many darkened theatres to be lighted again.”<sup>130</sup> *Boxoffice* spoke to these exhibitor readers, who valued its straightforward style, clarity, and brevity. As more darkened theaters lit up again, the paper’s subscriptions soared (fig. 32).

#### MOTION PICTURE HERALD—A SUCCESS IN FAILURE

Martin Quigley’s consolidation plan for the film industry’s trade press had failed. *Hollywood Herald* was shuttered. Quigley looked on bitterly as *Motion Picture Herald*’s paid circulation declined from 16,108 in December 1930 to 14,811 in December 1931 to 12,860 in 1932 to 11,292 in December 1933.<sup>131</sup> While much of this decline was caused by the Depression marketplace pushing exhibitors out of business, it was also a sign that many exhibitors who remained had found new trade papers to read—alternatives to *Motion Picture Herald* that they preferred and more closely identified with. In response to the plummeting subscriptions and widespread perception that he had sold out to the studios, Quigley reinstated the “What the Picture Did for Me” department in 1933 as a consistent three- to four-page section in every issue. Small-town exhibitors greeted the section’s return enthusiastically, and, as Kathryn Fuller-Seeley has shown, they used “What the Picture Did for Me” reviews as a forum to share experiences and try to communicate to producers about the types of movies they did and didn’t want.<sup>132</sup> The change appears to have helped, and *Herald*’s circulation increased to 13,703 in December 1934 and 14,438 in December 1935.<sup>133</sup> The *Herald* won back readers by returning to its roots.

That Quigley failed in his goal to dominate trade publishing for the motion picture industry does not mean that *Motion Picture Herald* was a failure as a trade paper. In fact, many exhibitors of the time, as well as film historians decades later, found enormous value in the paper’s comprehensive news coverage, reviews, and special issues that took deep dives into different corners of the industry. Quigley’s archives contain several folders of testimonials, letters and telegrams from producers and exhibitors around the world—London, Amsterdam, Calcutta, Nebraska—thanking him and congratulating him on such a wonderful paper.<sup>134</sup> And, as Quigley Publications’ general manager, Colvin W. Brown, liked to remind people, *Motion Picture Herald*’s typography and paper quality stood far above

its peers.<sup>135</sup> Yet none of this was enough to convince the film industry that it should concentrate its advertisements, readership, and loyalty into Martin Quigley's publications.

In 1938, Martin Quigley took years of pent-up frustration and expressed it in a memorandum. "Quigley Publications invested upward of \$600,000 and promised the business a trade press which would do credit to any industry. Those promises have been fulfilled," he stated emphatically. He then continued:

It was possible for these publications to attain the degree of excellency which they have attained largely because the industry concentrated its advertising in their pages. As business improved, within and without the industry, appropriations became larger and more widely diffused. Today appropriations have contracted, but the diffusion has continued, resulting in a reduction in the volume of advertising which went into these publications under the original distribution of appropriations.

Continuation of this diffusion can, and unless corrected will, destroy that value which the motion picture industry has created in an outstanding trade press.<sup>136</sup>

From a rational perspective, Quigley could not understand why the larger industry enabled this diffusion of advertising spending. On a cost-per-thousand basis of authentic industry readers, the Audit Bureau of Circulation data showed that *Motion Picture Herald's* per-page cost of \$15.00 was a bargain compared to *Boxoffice* (\$24.04), the *Philadelphia Exhibitor* (\$38.45), and *Variety* (potentially more than \$100). *Motion Picture Herald* even beat out the leading journals of the restaurant industry (\$16.58), plumbing market (\$17.81), hospital field (\$18.12), and hotel field (\$22.12). Plus, *Motion Picture Herald* was far more professional in its presentation than other magazines that claimed to serve the film industry. "Advertising is the right arm of the sales machine," remarked Quigley. "It is not a sales practice to cover his territory, regularly or periodically, with inexperienced men, or ill-informed men, or men shabbily attired with questionable reputations and manners, merely because they need a job. Advertising can, and should be bought, on the same basis of value and the same tests of character that prevail in the employment of salesmen."<sup>137</sup> Yet this is exactly what had happened. Dressed in their shabby suits—metaphorically and perhaps literally—*Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*, *Showmen's Round Table*, *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, *The Exhibitor*, and *Boxoffice* had swooped in and spoiled Quigley's plans. A decade after his 1927 acquisition of *Moving Picture World*, Quigley had as many competitors as he had ever had.

A major bright spot was emerging, though, for Quigley and his legacy. As we saw in the previous chapter, Quigley had initially been disappointed by the film producers' lack of compliance to the Production Code that he had helped formulate in late 1929 and early 1930. But thanks to the pressure campaign of the Legion of Decency that Quigley and Joseph Breen stage-managed in 1933 and 1934, major gains had been achieved in the Code's enforcement. The key turning point came in June 1934 with the establishment of the Production Code Administration (PCA),

headed by Breen, and the elimination of the jury of producers (which had been a major obstacle for the Code's earlier enforcement).<sup>138</sup> With the strong-willed Breen at the helm of the PCA, the system finally worked as Quigley had hoped. Immoral and salacious material was addressed at the script stage, then revisited again when the finished picture went up for Code approval.<sup>139</sup> Without the PCA's approval, a picture could not be distributed by the major film companies. It was a policy that also applied to older films; dozens of films in the studios' libraries were recut or blocked from re-release.<sup>140</sup> Quigley was pleased by what he perceived as improvements in film quality and the public's regard for the motion picture industry. He saw this as his greatest achievement, and he was ready to publicly take the credit he thought he was due.

Quigley's first major steps in writing his role into the history of the Production Code occurred in April 1935 with the help of his allies. In a speech to British film producers about the Code's history, Will Hays introduced Quigley, the event's main speaker, as having "played a leading part" in the development of the Code.<sup>141</sup> A few months later, the twentieth anniversary issue of *Exhibitors Herald* contained a six-page celebratory biography that described the Code as "conceived and directed by Martin Quigley."<sup>142</sup> *Motion Picture Herald's* Terry Ramsaye wrote the biography, and he also wrote a blurb in praise of Quigley's 1937 book, *Decency in Motion Pictures*. In the book, Quigley laid out his philosophy for the Code in greater detail than in any other single publication, and he discussed the involvement of Hays and Father Daniel Lord.<sup>143</sup> But lest anyone forget Quigley's starring role in the formation of the Code, Ramsaye explained in his blurb: "These pages from the hand of Martin Quigley have been set down with a characteristic modesty, but also with the very considerable authority of the man who first conceived the need and the growing necessity for the Production Code with which to-day the organized motion picture industry aligns, and seeks to align, its wares with American mores and the civilized standards of a wider world—the man, too, who brought the Code into being and put through its acceptance, against many obstacles."<sup>144</sup>

With Ramsaye, Hays, and others writing his contributions to the Production Code into the historical record, Quigley could remain modest in his self-presentation and focus his efforts on making the case for the Code's necessity and relevance. He continued to perform this work for the rest of his career.

Quigley also continued playing a mediating role between the film industry and the Catholic Church. If the artifacts we choose to keep are representative of what we value most, it was Quigley's communications with Catholic leaders, speeches to Catholic organizations, and his role in formulating and supporting the Code that he felt proudest of and came to see as his legacy. The majority of documents preserved in the Martin J. Quigley Papers at the Georgetown University Library speak to these aspects of his career. In contrast, only a small part of the collection directly emerges from the more ordinary, day-to-day operations of his five-decade career as an editor and publisher. Quigley came to accept that he would be one of

many trade paper publishers for the film industry and not even the leader, at that. But he was singular among his peers in his role in aligning Hollywood film content with Catholic morality.

## CONCLUSION

Martin Quigley's attempt to create an "all-industry paper" and produce a network of publications addressing a united film industry ran into an intractable problem: no spirit of all-industry unity existed. Instead, the early 1930s witnessed further fracturing of different constituencies. The West Coast production community demanded gossip, taste judgments, and a social forum that could not be serviced by a single trade paper, especially not one that took the side of management over workers. The prolabor magazine *New Theatre* speculated that "Quigley tried to break into Hollywood with a daily and sank \$175,000 in the venture. It failed because it was recognized as a company union organ."<sup>145</sup> Quigley had major corporate backers to fund this and other initiatives. But *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* also made it through the Depression with the support of wealthy patrons (Joseph Kennedy and Irving Thalberg, respectively) from within the industry.

Meanwhile, independent exhibitors continued to favor a partisan, explicitly pro-exhibitor press over the conciliatory model championed by Quigley. *Motion Picture Herald's* calls for fair dealing across industry branches rang hollow for the majority of participants, who lacked the market power and scale of the handful of vertically integrated studios. We should also remember that show business was (and remains) a porous, aspirational industry in which new actors, writers, producers, exhibitors, and even trade publishers were continually trying to insert themselves and advance their status. Debates over what the industry was, what it should be, and what defined its culture were played out in print, week after week, in the 1930s trades.

Among so much turmoil, however, new structures of stability emerged. Remarkably, most of the trade papers that stayed afloat until 1934 (or began publishing in the early 1930s) stayed in business for two or three more decades, including *Film Daily*, *Showmen's Trade Review*, *Harrison's Reports*, *The Exhibitor*, *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, and, from Quigley Publications, *Motion Picture Herald* and *Motion Picture Daily*. This was a "diffused" stability, to use Quigley's term. But this web of competing trade papers outlasted many other industrial structures, including the vertically integrated studios, resistance to licensing A-level pictures to television, and the Production Code Administration. Four publications—*Daily Variety*, *Variety*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Boxoffice*—survived much longer, and they remain active to this day, largely as digital publications.

For Quigley, the great diffusion was disappointing and frustrating. But for film and media historians, it is something to be celebrated as a triumph. We should recognize the millions of pages published by the American film industry's trade press as among Hollywood's greatest productions. Much like Hollywood films of the

same era, these papers are complex productions; celebrating the heterogeneity of the papers does not mean reading them uncritically. But the film industry's trade papers include a diversity of voices, perspectives, and expressions of language that you don't find in the trades covering other, frequently bigger, American industries. They did more than write the rough draft of film history; they helped make that history, too.