Change in Libel Law Is Proposed

Bill Would Let Correction Bar Punitive Action

By Delmont T. Dunbar

Maine legislators at the 95th biennial session, while being asked to consider the biggest raft of liquor measures in recent years, are confronted by contrast with only one directly affecting the newspaper business though possibly two others could be classified as having indirect effect.

The major bill, hearing on which was conducted before the Judiciary Committee February 21, asks that the lawmakers modify the state libel laws by nullifying punitive damages when a correction has been requested and obtained within a specified time.

The measure is modeled after a law enacted in California and which, when tested, received the green light from the State Supreme Court, which gave it the stamp of constitutionality in a split though impressive decision.

Under the current code the wronged party may recover not only compensatory and specific damages but punitive as well when the attack has been of an obviously malicious nature. Punitive damages, as the words imply, are imposed additionally by a jury, as a sort of fine, to punish the offender.

"Smart money" is a term sometimes used to describe such an award, the idea being that the defendant be made to "smart" for his sins.

The proposal would not in the least affect the right of a plaintiff to recover actual damages, proved and probable. It would, however, absolve a newspaper from punishment for an error which it later acknowledges and corrects. The correction would in it-

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MAINE TO KOREA. Jim Martenhoff, Associated Press cameraman whose war pictures have won wide acclaim, is a former member of the U. of M. class of 1940. He was seriously injured in a jeep crash this month.

(AP Photo.)

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 Associations Plan March Meetings

March meetings in Augusta are scheduled for both of Maine's newspaper associations.


Maine Press Association will meet on either March 24 or March 31, according to its president, Roger N. Woodcock of the Sanford Tribune.

Both gatherings will be at the Augusta House.

Jim Martenhoff's Photos Featured

Next issue of the Maine Alumnus will feature pictures taken in the Korean war zone by a former Maine student, James E. (Jim) Martenhoff, who is an Associated Press photographer.

Martenhoff, according to Alumni Secretary John C. Sealey, Jr., entered the University of Maine in 1936. He came from East Rockaway, N. Y.

Jim joined AP's staff in 1945. Since then, he has been working in New York City, Boston, Raleigh, N. C., and Miami.
The Maine Journalist

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Newsworthy Event

The University of Maine's Conference on Canadian-American Affairs, at Orono on April 19-20, will be of special interest to many Maine newspapermen.

Lester Pearson, Canada's minister of external affairs, whose job corresponds to that of our secretary of state, is scheduled to speak on "Canada, the United States, and the United Nations." Problems of defense, economics, agricultural relations, education, and diplomacy will be discussed by other prominent representatives of the United States and Canada in a series of forums and class meetings. Speakers will include:

S. Claude Hudson, principal economist, Department of Agriculture, Canada; Nathaniel Pepper, professor of international relations, Columbia University; Edgar McInnis, professor of history, University of Toronto; F. E. MacDiarmid, director and chief superintendent of education, New Brunswick.

Francis A. Flood, agricultural attache, U. S. Embassy, Ottawa; Clifford McIntire, assistant general manager, Maine Potato Growers, Inc.; Livingston Satherethwaite, deputy director, Office of British Commonwealth and North European Affairs, State Department; and Major General R. L. Walsh, USAF, American section, Canadian U.S. Permanent Joint Defense Board.

All sessions will be open to the public.

Words are the dress of thoughts, which should no more be presented in rags, tatters, and dirt than your person should be.—LORD CHESTERFIELD (1750).

Reporter vs. Scientist

BY ROBERT P. WILSON

Urging caution and conservatism in reporting scientific news, Dr. Edward F. Thode, associate professor of chemical engineering at the University of Maine, recently warned student reporters:

"Science news sources will dry up if misquoted."

Taking the typical scientific feature article as an example, Dr. Thode suggested eight "rules" for the reporter:

(1) Read some background material on the general field before the interview.
(2) Try never to make an error of fact even though direct quotes are not involved.
(3) Get the interviewee's main slant and give it some play. It will please him.
(4) Do not try to "build up" conservative statements to make a more red-blooded story. The scientist will see red.
(5) If time permits, allow interviewee to read your copy and make suggestions.
(6) Remember, the results of scientific investigation are private property until released.
(7) Identify by name and title all persons in cuts.
(8) Watch little things. Don't call a mechanical engineer a technician. A director of chemical research would rather not be called a research chemist.

"Most technical men realize you have a job to do," Dr. Thode said, "and they are willing to cooperate. But they have jobs to do, too, jobs which may be made more difficult by irresponsible reporting. Don't put them on the spot. In the end you will both profit."

Dr. Thode, who was associate editor of his college newspaper while at M.I.T., offered his suggestions at the invitation of a senior journalism class.

Steamboat Lore In A New Edition

John M. Richardson's "Steamboat Lore of the Penobscot" has gone into an attractive fourth edition. Since there were three printings of the third edition, the current printing is the sixth since the book appeared in 1941.

The author, publisher of the Rockland Courier-Gazette, has gathered in words and pictures (more than 160) what the jacket fittingly calls "the dramatically human story of the rise and fall of steam navigation on Maine's Penobscot River and its two great bays."

In a foreword, Ben Ames Williams says, "...there is enough here to delight the most eager appetite—and leave the reader hungry for more."

The book was printed in the Kennebec Journal Print Shop.

In Memoriam


Ten In Journalism Will Get Degrees At Maine In 1951

Ten men, including four war veterans, will complete their degree requirements at the University of Maine in 1951 in journalism.

Biographies of these prospective graduates are being printed by the Maine Journalist in two instalments.

The first group follows:


**EDITI CURTIS** is Orono reporter for the Penobscot Times.
Cross To Conduct Survey On Access To Public Records

Harold L. Cross of Skowhegan, newspaper lawyer, has been retained by the Committee on Freedom of Information of the American Society of Newspaper Editors to conduct a study of "access to public records."

Professor Cross’s Maine Newspaper Day seminars on press law were attended by many editors and publishers in 1949 and 1950.

Last October, Professor Cross spoke of the growing concern of many newspaper editors, lawyers, and journalism educators over the increasing tendency of public officials to resort to handouts and withhold public records.

The purpose of the ASNE survey is to collect information that will help editors in their individual efforts against official secrecy.

George Murray Is Editor Of Sunday Commercial

George M. Murray of Brooklin, Me., is Sunday editor of the Bangor Commercial. His appointment followed the resignation of Raymond M. Cadahy, who is now on the staff of the Providence (R.I.) Bulletin.

MUZZLE BLAST on a masthead means that the publisher is either an artillery or an antiaircraft unit. Gerald A. Rogovin is editor of a paper with that name at Camp Edwards, Mass., and Woody Bigelow is starting one at North Camp Polk, La.

JOHN KEMP MURPHY and his bride, the former Florence Berube, are living at 7 Gannett St., Augusta. He is acting sports editor of the Daily Kennebec Journal in the absence of Paul McCann, on duty at Dow field.

PAUL K. NIVEN, editor of the Brunswick Record, is serving for the third consecutive year as corporate gifts chairman in the Maine Cancer Society’s fund drive.

ELLSWORTH AMERICAN is now in its 101st year.

New Addresses

PVT. ELWOOD B. BIGelow, Jr.,
Service Battery, 424th FA Bn, North Camp Polk, Louisiana.
2ND LT. WILLIAM J. BRENNAN,
M1-USAR, 0-983240, First Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group, Fort Riley, Kansas.
LT. (Je) SAMUEL N. MAYO, Jr.,
USS James C. Owens, D776, c/o Fleet Postmaster, New York.
CPL. WILLARD NISBET, Jr.,
RO 31398140, Hq. Det., Brooks Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas (awaiting commissioned duty).

Change Is Proposed In State Libel Law

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self indicate a lack of malice, and it is on malice that punitive damages are awarded.

So much for the newspaper side. On the other side of the fence hardship cases would be inevitable. They are inevitable under any law.

Occasionally a politician might suffer under the proposed change in the libel law in that the correction might not be forthcoming until after the election. But the number would be far fewer than the number of newspapers that are now made to smart disproportionately for innocent mistakes. The change would at least tend to balance a one-sided rule book.

Naturally, a bill to outlaw liquor advertising in the State would affect the business office of every newspaper, but its purpose is so categorical that it requires no elaboration.

The measure, scheduled for hearing the last week of February, said simply such advertising would henceforth be “verboten.”

The third piece of legislation would affect only the headline writer, and him frequently. A bill to change the old familiar name of Farm Bureau to County Extension Associations may easily increase the suicide rate among State Editors who refuse to go in for abbreviations.

Mr. Dunbar, contributing to the foregoing article, is editor of the Bangor Daily News editorial page.

General-Reporter Salutes Inductees And Creates Beat


According to Editor & Publisher, General Dexter has assigned himself to cover the departure of each contingent of inductees from Lewiston. That involves early rising, but the assignment has been carried out faithfully since the General’s own son. David, a reporter for the Bangor Daily News, left for service last fall.

Impressed then with the drama and meaning of the departure scene, the General went back to the office and wrote a colorful news story as well as an editorial. That’s how the beat began.

Two From Maine Attend Press Institute Seminar

Two Maine newspaper executives, Paul S. Plumer of Augusta’s Daily Kennebec Journal and Richard K. Warren of the Bangor Daily News, were members of the two-week seminar of the American Press Institute, Columbia University, which opened Jan. 22.

RUSSELL H. PETERS, co-publisher of the Bangor Commercial, is a member of the Maine State Selection Committee for the Rhodes Scholarships. Peters studied at Oxford after his graduation from Cornell.

DALE E. JENKINS of Milo provided the cover picture for the December issue of The Forty and Eighter, national magazine of the American Legion’s “Forty and Eight.”

JOSEPH H. COBB, Bangor Daily News reporter, will conduct a class in news writing for juniors in English at Orono High School on March 2.

MELVIN S. LAVINE of Brighton, Mass., has joined the staff of the Sanford Tribune. He was graduated from the University of Maine in 1950.