

An Interview with
Wallace G. Vernon

at his newspaper office in
Eldon, Missouri

05 March 1997

interviewed by Ray Brassieur
transcript edited by N. Renae Farris



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[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

RB: This is Ray Brassieur. Today is March 5, 1997. I'm interviewing Wallace Vernon at his office in Eldon, Missouri. I guess we're ready to start. What I'd like to do is start a little bit with just about your life, a biography and that kind of thing, just so we can get a few of the details correct at first. Your full name is?

WV: Wallace Gale [phonetic spelling] Vernon.

RB: Gale is your middle name?

WV: Uh-huh.

RB: And you were born in what year?

WV: I was born [in] 1926, right here in Eldon. Lived here all my life.

RB: What's your birth date?

WV: November 23rd, 1926.

RB: What about your education? You went to school here in Eldon?

WV: I went to school here in Eldon, and then I was in service for a little while. I wasn't destined to get into the newspaper business. I thought I wanted to be an architect, and when I got out of the Air Force, I headed down to Oklahoma. It was the Oklahoma A & M at the time, Oklahoma State, because of their Architecture School.

RB: Where's that? In Normal?

WV: Stillwater. And I kind of got my freshman year in there. And then I got into the newspaper business because they offered me a job back here at home, after my first year in college. And that's it! (chuckles) That's when I came back.

RB: Who was it that offered you that?

WV: Carl [E.] Winter. Carl Winter had bought this [newspaper].¹ He'd just graduated from the University [of Missouri - Columbia] the year before. And he was from a newspaper family, however, his folks had owned the Jeff [Jefferson] City newspaper at one time. And I started working here at this newspaper in high school, so I knew the mechanics of the thing. And Carl came in, fresh from the University. Of course, his folks were in the daily newspaper business and what have you, (chuckling) but he had no idea what went on behind the front desk, and I knew that, because I had been here, worked in high school and what have you, back here.

RB: When did you start? What level were you at? Were you like a freshman in high school? How old were you?

WV: I guess I was a sophomore in high school, just working after school, for old man [E. H.] Shepherd who was one of the first founders of this newspaper. This newspaper hadn't had many owners. So I started working for him when I was in high school.

RB: And what were you doing at that point, your first job?

WV: Oh, well, of course it was... We were casting lead and sweeping the floor and running the mailing machines and all that. You know, just a flunky, really. However, during one summer, he had -- (chuckling) you won't believe this -- but he had a society editor quit, and I was there, so he just put my name on the paper as society editor and I did the things that a society editor would do.

RB: So had you had to go around and...?

WV: For a summer, that's right.

¹ The Eldon Advertiser.

RB: Collect information about...

WV: That's right. Well, among other duties: Way back then, we had passenger trains going through here all the time, and somebody always met the trains as they came and went, to find out who was going where, and it was in our local news who came and went. You couldn't get away from us.

RB: So that was part of the [duties] of the society [editor]?

WV: That's right. The comings and goings of the people on the train, and also the buses. We had a regular bus service through here, and we'd go to the bus station when they came, and pick up things. And in addition to the club news and things that women...

RB: Were you primarily interested in people from Eldon that was traveling?

WV: Oh yes! Sure.

RB: Or just anybody that...?

WV: Well, Eldon, or their relatives that would come to visit, you know. But yeah, it was primarily Eldon people. (chuckling) There weren't any celebrities going through or anything like that.

RB: So that was newsworthy stuff.

WV: Certainly was.

RB: Who was going on vacation, and who was...

WV: That's right. Or just going to Kansas City to shop. You know, at that time, why, people did go by train to Kansas City or St. Louis to shop from here.

RB: That got in the news then.

WV: It certainly did, yeah.

RB: Now, you were saying something about pouring lead. What was your other job?

WV: Well, you know, when your letterpress -- of course we had the old Linotype machines, you know -- and then all the graphics, all the illustrations and everything... You're too young to know what a mat is, that you poured the lead over to make the pictures in the paper. You are, I guess! (laughs)

RB: Yes, I am.

WV: All right. To make ads, pictures, and graphic illustrations and everything, we had this big pot of lead back there in the back, and you would pour... I don't know whether I've got one or not. *[Gets up to go look for an item, walks away from microphone briefly.]* I haven't. I thought maybe I had one thrown around here. But we made two kinds: One kind, it was called a "shell cast." And this had an image on it, oh, maybe it was a quarter-inch thick, and then we'd nail that onto a board. And then you'd print directly from that, after you put the ink on. The other was a "full cast," which I don't know how thick -- that thing was three-quarters of an inch thick, or something like that. And it was solid lead. Those old pages were heavy when you got them in the forms, you know. But that was a part of my job. The printer's devil did that. (laughs) He was back there in the back. And I'd set type. We had lots of hand-set type at that time, too. Oh, we had Linotype.

RB: Now, did you say "printer's devil"?

WV: Yeah, certainly, I was called a printer's devil. Sure.

RB: And the printer's devil would be the one who...

WV: He was a flunky, yes. Certainly was.

RB: He would do any job there happened to be.

WV: That's right.

RB: Now, who was responsible for generating that art, the particular art, and then you would cast...

WV: Well, okay. Like now, we still buy stuff for our computers and what have you, from Metro and the other companies that furnish the artwork for the computers and what have you. They originally... And you'd get a mat book of the illustrations that showed all what you had. Then you'd have a big box come that was full of those mats. And they were paper, they were made out of paper, but it was paper that would, I don't know, treated some way or other, so when you poured that hot lead over it, why, it would transfer the image to the lead.

RB: And then you could reuse it then _____ times?

WV: Oh yes, we re-melted the lead. You see, that was one thing about it. Yeah, we used the lead, we melted everything up each week and poured it into what we called "pigs." We had pig molds, and you'd pour that lead back into pigs, and then start over again.

RB: So that was a weekly process, then? Had to take place every week.

WV: Oh, sure, oh yes, that's right.

RB: Was there any sort of danger at all in that operation?

WV: Oh, certainly! I've had that hot lead poured down my shoes. (laughs) Yes, certainly, it was hot lead. You never wanted to get water. Occasionally you'd get some moisture in that lead pot, and it'd pop lead to the ceiling if you did that. Yeah, there was some danger involved.

RB: What kind of training did you get for that kind of thing?

WV: We were trained on the job. The fact is, for a number of years after I owned the newspaper, we still had students from school, the C.O.E. students, that worked for a half a day or something for us, that did that very thing. We did that until 1968. That was when we put in our offset press and everything.

RB: Okay, the offset changed that then?

WV: Offset took care of it. When we went to offset, then it all became... It wasn't immediately photographic images, but you know, we had the old strike-on machines that justified the columns and everything. Tape-operated, they generated a tape.

RB: Uh-huh. So that was part of the Linotype operation there? _____.

WV: The lead part, yeah. The Linotype produced type on lead. Now, you haven't seen that?

RB: Well, I'm pretty new to all of this technology, and I'm trying to learn.

WV: I'm going to leave your mic[rophone] just a second. *[Pause, walks away and returns.]* Those are sawed-off Linotype slugs right there. Originally, they would have been half an inch tall. But, I mean, that actually is a piece of Linotype slug right there.

RB: And you would have had to melt, like you say, lead to produce this each time.

WV: Sure, that came out of the Linotype machine. And then, of course, that went into a form and was inked and the paper printed directly from that.

RB: All these old Linotype machines, of course, they've been replaced?

WV: I don't know of anybody that's still using one. There might be. There might be one someplace or other that was still in operation (chuckles), but I wouldn't know why.

RB: What happened to all the machines? Just junked?

WV: Well, they were junked. I tell you what, when we put in our offset press and our plant went to offset, I junked a typesetting machine, called a Ludlow machine, that set *big* type, that we hadn't had six months. Paid \$12,000 for it, and they took it out the back door and it went to the junk. (laughs)

RB: Oh! And what year was that?

WV: In 1968.

RB: So during the '60s there was an awful lot of changes that took place.

WV: Oh, yeah, we had a complete *revolution* in the newspaper business. I've been through two *complete* revolutions -- or *three*. When we first started going offset, we had strike-on machines to set our type and justify it. And these things were very like a typewriter, they looked like a typewriter. But you had to have two of them. One of them punched the tape, and then when that tape went through the other one, it justified the columns. So it'd come out on paper, printed on paper, but then you'd paste them on the sheets and then print them by offset. Then came the phototypesetting machines, and this was all done on photographic paper -- you know, that had the negatives that shot the type on the photographic paper. And that was pasted on. Then they were replaced by the computers.

RB: Okay. But the photographic business there was a pretty big revolution.

WV: Oh, *fantastic* revolution, certainly. Yes, it was.

RB: Did it save time, or did it increase?

WV: Well, it increased the quality of the printing. Because before, with these old strike-on machines, although they were better than... They did justify -- you had justified type and what have you -- but actually, you were doing typewriter work with them. And then

when the photographic machines came on, yes, the quality was beautiful. The fact is, it took a *while* for the computers to catch up to the *quality* of the phototypesetters.

RB: Now, the phototypesetter came out during the '60s, did it?

WV: Well, let's see. Maybe the '70s. When we first went to offset, I don't know that there was a phototypesetter *on* the market at that time. Might have been a rare case, but not many. Most of them were the strike-on machines, and then came the phototypesetters.

RB: I saw a reference -- while we're talking about technology and that -- I saw a reference in Mr. Taft's book that in 1960 you had a pretty big change here.² You got a new Duplex press?

WV: Okay. Well, that wasn't a *new* Duplex press. (laughs) In 1960, we moved into the building which is next door here. We built that building. Prior to that, we'd been located in the building uptown. And prior to that, we had an old Babcock hand-fed press. And when we came down here, it was new to us, all right. It was a duplex press, but oh my God, that press was probably fifty years old when it came into this plant. You couldn't beat one to death.

RB: Do you remember the brand name of it?

WV: It's called a Duplex. That was the name of it, a Duplex press. And ours was a -- they called them "single revolutions" and "double revolutions" -- ours was a very basic press, but it would print eight pages at a time, and it did it from a roll of paper. Prior to that, we printed from sheet-fed paper.

RB: From sheet-fed paper. That's what you were using when you first came here.

² William Howard Taft, Missouri Newspapers. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964), 325.

WV: With the old Babcock press, a sheet-fed press. You had to have a person up there a-shaking the sheets and putting them in the press.

RB: So to go back to your early days, you were talking about, even in high school, when you started working here.

WV: Oh yes, that was a sheet-fed press. You fed them into the press, and then you fed them through the press twice, because the press would just print four pages at a time, so you'd print that four pages, turn that big sheet over, and run it through the press again to print pages on the back. *Then*, run it through a folding machine, which folded it up and cut it and got it ready to mail.

RB: So the folding machine was a completely different machine?

WV: Ours originally was a completely different machine. Now, at some time we did get a folding machine that hooked onto the press, but it never did work nearly as good as the original, you know.

RB: So, as a printer's devil, now what part of that whole process did you participate in?

WV: I did every bit of it. I mean, I eventually got where I fed the... You realize that most newspapers at that time also did commercial printing, job printing -- letterheads, envelopes, all that sort of thing. And we had little presses around. I learned to feed those little presses, and then the big press, and the mailing. Eventually, I did every bit of it.

RB: So like the little presses were used for jobs?

WV: That's right, job printing -- letterheads, envelopes, and brochures, things like that.

RB: So you all were doing that sort of business besides the...?

WV: Oh, yes, we did that too. Because, well, at that time our paper always came out on Wednesday afternoon, and Thursday and Friday and actually we worked on Saturdays at that time, at least a half a day on Saturday, if not the full day. To justify keeping a printer, you had to have something for him to do, because there wasn't enough to do. So we did commercial printing.

RB: Do you recall, did you have a separate printer, a person who was considered the printer?

WV: Oh no, they were all the same thing. Oh, you mean in addition to me?

RB: Right, right.

WV: Oh yes, oh yeah. Usually we had two Linotype operators, and a printer, and a printer's helper probably, and a printer's devil. I mean, probably there were usually, in the beginning, six of us in that production end back there.

RB: Can you line those up, that kind of a staff up, hierarchically? For instance, you had Mr. Shepherd, I guess, was called the publisher?

WV: Oh, yeah, okay. Then, of course -- up front now -- when I first went there, Mr. Shepherd was the editor. But he usually had, like I say, this society editor. Now, this could have been just some woman from around town, you know, that he'd trained there. And as I recall, his wife even did the bookkeeping. We didn't have a bookkeeper at that time, up front. Mr. Shepherd and his wife would take care of that. I suppose that the Linotype operators... And they shifted off. They could set type and put pages together, too. And they usually didn't run the press, but they would run the folder on occasion when we got ready. Because when the paper got printed, then *everybody* there had to be on the mailing machine and tying them up and all that sort of thing. But there is one difference.

You know, right now we do the biggest part of the work for the post office, sad to say. But you know, when our papers go out of here, they're in walk sequence, so that when they get to Chicago, the mailman doesn't have to put them in the sequence that he goes, and all that sort of thing. And you know, there's a *lot* of work goes into doing that. At that time, every paper that we... We wrapped them up in a paper that had an address on it, and we tied them all in great big bundles, put them in a little red wheelbarrow and hauled them over to the post office.

RB: And they sorted them.

WV: (chuckling) They did all the sorting and everything at that time! We didn't sort the papers that went here from the ones that went to California or New York or anything.

RB: Well, they caught on with that Zip Code business, and now they're making everybody do it.

WV: Oh yeah, it's so much. But it *really* is complicated now. You know, they even monitor our mailing list. We send our mailing list in now, and they're monitored. Every month, I think, the girls have to send them in, and they put the new Zip Codes on and all that sort of thing.

RB: So you've got to keep up with those mailing lists and everything. Probably by computer, I'm sure.

WV: Oh, yes. There's no way in the world you could do it without a computer, now. No, no way.

RB: But in those days, though, you had to have some books, just writing down.

WV: Oh, sure, yeah, it was different.

RB: Now, back to the staff again. Could you arrange those different people there on the staff, say, by salary? Was there some way...? For instance, was the Linotype operator more highly valued, say, than the printer?

WV: Ah, I'd say they were about the same. The printer back in [the] back and the Linotype operator, their salary would have been about the same. And then of course there would have been the printer's helper, who would have been somewhat less. I have no idea, it's been so long, what the salaries would have been at the time, but...

RB: And the printer's devil, then was somewhere down...

WV: He was kind of low man on the totem pole. Now, I made a quarter an hour when I started to work.

RB: How many hours a week?

WV: Well, I didn't work all that many when I first started, you know, as a kid. I don't know, I did good to work twenty hours a week, maybe, probably. I don't know that I worked *that* much. Probably didn't, because *I* wasn't in a program at school, I was simply working *after* school, which maybe fifteen hours might have been as much as I got in.

RB: So you were making somewhere around five dollars a week?

WV: Something like that. But it was pretty good money! (laughs) You realize, that was quite a little while ago.

RB: That's right.

WV: So that wasn't bad.

RB: You were doing well.

WV: Doing all right.

RB: Tell me a little bit about Mr. Shepherd. Now, he had been around here for years, you say.

WV: He was one of the founders of the newspaper. Yes, he was there, and he was the editor and publisher until -- Oh, I'll bet you I could get a date wrong here, too -- but I believe, I would say probably 1945.³ And he sold the paper to a fellow and his wife. The name was M. [Merrill] C. Dionne. I'll swear I can't even remember where Dionne was from, right at the moment. But anyway, they ran the paper for just a little over two years, I guess.⁴ And that's when Carl Winter came in and bought it. He bought it in 1947, and then it was 1948 when he asked me to come back. Actually, he gave me a partnership in the newspaper. I say "gave" -- he *loaned* me the money. (laughs) I didn't have any money, heavenly days, to do it!

RB: But he invited you into partnership.

WV: He invited me in for a partnership, and actually (chuckling) financed it for me. And then, when I came back, as I say, I knew what went on back in the back, and I could supervise the back-back. I had done a little other writing when I was in the service. I did some writing for the post newspapers and what have you, that I was around, but you know, just local stuff. But anyway, I did that, and then I took over the advertising department, and I sold advertising and what have you. And Carl then, by that time... We hired an editor, and Carl just kind of, you know, was the prime publisher, I guess. But anyway, he wrote too, but we did hire Madeline MacFarlane [phonetic spelling].

RB: So he *did* write?

WV: Oh yes, as an editor. And Madeline MacFarlane was with us for many, *many* years.

³ This date appears to be correct based on information in the Official Manual of Missouri, 1945-1946.

⁴ Glenna F. Dionne served as editor.

RB: Why did Mr. Shepherd get out of it?

WV: Well, he was just old.

RB: How old was he, for instance? I have here a little note that he had run the paper for some forty years or so.

WV: The paper was established in 1894, and you're talking about 1945, see.

RB: Do you remember his dad, Mr. Shepherd's dad?

WV: I think his dad was N. E. Shepherd, if I'm not mistaken.⁵ I kind of think maybe that was the name. And there was also a partner by the name of Helfrich. You know, I've got this someplace. I don't remember all this stuff.

RB: You have like a little history of it?

WV: Yeah, I probably can dig it out someplace for you, if you want.

RB: What kind of impression did those men leave with you? Like even his dad, or himself, you know, Mr. Shepherd?

WV: Well, Mr. Shepherd was kind of -- he was a terribly *religious* man. And when I started working there, we didn't run -- we had one of the best movie theaters in this part of the country, but we wouldn't run an ad for a movie that was going to be on Sunday, at that time. (chuckling) And of course there was no liquor, beer, or wine advertising ever came near us. That was for sure!

RB: Do you remember which religion he was?

WV: You know, I think he belonged to the Methodist Church, but he was one of those fellows that didn't go to his own church every Sunday, he went from church to church in town.

⁵ Issues of the Eldon Advertiser for 1894 list him as N. J. Shepherd.

Yes, he did, he went around from one church to the other, although he was a Methodist. But no telling where he'd show up, you know. He walked with a limp. He was a little short man, kind of a... He was well-respected in town. But he was a little bit different, you know. People would joke about Mr. Shepherd too (chuckling) on occasion, and what have you.

RB: You're talking about E.H. Shepherd now?

WV: Yes. Now, the other one I couldn't tell you a *thing* about. No, not a thing about the other one.

RB: But he was a respected member of...?

WV: Oh yes, for sure. And even way back then, he would go on trips with the National Newspaper Association [NNA], go to their meetings all over the country and travel around with them and what have you. No, he was quite respected. I'll never forget when he died. He continued to work for Carl, and he worked for us just a *little*, you know -- not all the time, he didn't come to the office every day -- but he would write some for us and what have you. But when he died, I never will forget the funeral director said, "Why in the world did Mr. Shepherd, you put him in such a cheap box?" And he really didn't acquire any wealth at all (chuckling) I'm sure, when he died.

RB: He hadn't acquired any wealth at that time?

WV: No, not really.

RB: So the newspaper business throughout his life was not one that...

WV: Not particularly.

RB: A lucrative profession.

WV: No. No, there were lots of people in town that had a lot more money than Mr. Shepherd did. But he was a happy guy. He had a daughter and a son. And his son, Hartwell, went to the University, and while he was there -- I think he was just in his freshman year -- he fell off a cliff into Hinkson Creek and was killed while he was at the University. So the only other descendant he had was a daughter, and she never had any children. She lived in New York and she worked for some magazine or something in New York. I don't know exactly. I can't even remember that, because I didn't even *know* her.

RB: So the daughter sort of followed in...

WV: His daughter *was* in the writing business of some kind, not newspaper, as such.

RB: So he didn't have any more family then for the paper to go on down to?

WV: No.

RB: Because that's one of the themes I'm finding is so important to, especially small-town newspapers, is that family is very important in it.

WV: Well, it is, but as I say, he had no other... He had some nephews and nieces around town, but they weren't particularly close to him. They were in different occupations and what have you.

RB: So you pretty quickly, after coming from Oklahoma, you were involved in the paper business.

WV: Oh, yes.

RB: In a highly _____.

WV: That's exactly right. I mean, yeah.

RB: Can you think of who would have been your -- did you have someone that you considered a mentor or someone who really was the one who influenced your...?

WV: Well, you know, I really don't know. Carl and I were very close. I mean, as I say, Carl offered me the partnership here, and we were very close. However, in 1953, after five years, he found another newspaper. Actually, it got to where the partnership was working as good as any partnership in the world, but it's kind of hard to divide up things, you know, where everybody's real happy. And he found a bigger newspaper in Berea, Ohio, and he moved to Berea and was there for not many years, because he wife couldn't stand the climate there. So then he went to Arizona and he bought a small chain of newspapers in Arizona. He still lives in Tucson, we see him every once in a while.

RB: And you bought him out?

WV: I bought him out at that time. I had got married in the meantime and had a little boy.

RB: Tell me about that a little bit. You married after you came back from Oklahoma?

WV: Yes. Yeah, after I became a part owner of the paper in 1948, I got married in 1951.

RB: A local girl?

WV: Sure did. Her dad was the local Chevrolet dealer. (laughs)

RB: What's her name?

WV: Marguerite Tompkins [phonetic spelling] was the name. Tompkins Chevrolet. It remained Tompkins Chevrolet, oh, my gosh, way up until the '80s, I guess, even though it had changed hands and what have you.

RB: Did she go to work with the paper?

WV: No. No, Marge never was involved. I mean, we had three kids (laughs) along the way. She did *some* things -- you know, she'd run errands for us and this and that and the other. And the fact is, a little later on, even after my son, [Jeffrey] Dane [Vernon], got into the business, she did a little more of that, because we [were] kind of widespread. You know, we go from Iberia down here to Tipton. [The] paper's all around. And until now we've pretty well got equipment in every town to produce everything we have to do. Well, you see, this is our central plant -- of course, where our press is, and what have you. Originally, we set all the type for all our newspapers right here in this...

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[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

WV: When we set all the _____... In 1968, we decided to put in an offset plant -- buy that press and all the equipment it took to do it. And at that time, we had, over at California, Jack [P.] Crawford was over there at the time, and he kind of wanted his paper [the California Democrat] printed offset. The man over at Tipton, Mr. [Everett Norris] Pizer, wanted his printed offset.⁶ So we put in the equipment to do it here. Now, they did set their own type in Tipton *and* California, but we owned [the] Stover paper [the Morgan County Press (by the 1980s)], and we owned the Versailles paper [the Leader Statesman], and we had the Tuscumbia paper [the Autogram-Sentinel] and what have you, so all of that type for those papers was set right here by the typesetters in this plant. It was quite a...

RB: It was hectic at that time.

⁶ This newspaper was Tipton Times. Mr. Pizer was generally known as Norris. This distinguished him from his father, who was also a newspaperman. The elder Mr. Pizer was also named Everett, but possessed a different middle name.

WV: It was *hectic* to carry that kind...

RB: Are all of those weeklies?

WV: Oh, they're all weeklies. Uh-huh, all weekly papers.

RB: So Monday and Tuesday were pretty hectic days.

WV: Pretty hectic! Very hectic, they certainly are. But even with the computers, *we've just now* reached a point where each of our -- in Tipton, for instance, we've got scanners and what have you, that we put together our whole pages over there, and we do the same thing in Versailles and Tipton. And here we bring our Stover stuff into Versailles, where it's put together. And then we handle the Tuscumbia stuff here.

RB: Can you scan those things there, or can you send it electronically?

WV: Now, we do not do that as yet. We can or we could. I think we've got all the equipment that's necessary, but we *don't do that* as yet.

RB: That would make a big difference.

WV: You know, just recently photographs were something that was taking a lot of time, because we didn't have photo _____. Now, we've got scanners everywhere, and we don't even make prints of our pictures anymore. We just scan the negatives. (chuckling) There are lots of things computers have done. They've changed things a lot, certainly.

RB: Talking about technology for a moment, how did you take that change? For instance, in '68, you made a big change. Then during the '70s they wanted to change _____.

WV: That's right, we did. We were really investing money, and then within a few months (chuckling) all our equipment was virtually *obsolete*, and we started again! Well, I'll tell you what, I haven't completely changed, and at my age, I'm not going to. (chuckling) I

run this computer every day, but I don't do *near* the things that the other people do on their computers. I just don't. And I don't think I'll ever get on the Internet. (laughs)

RB: But you saw the need to go to computers?

WV: Oh, yeah! Oh, certainly, yeah. Yeah, we were pretty early to go to computers for typesetting. We were fairly early. I can't remember the exact date, but I mean we were in the vanguard.

RB: In the '80s or '70s? Still in the '70s?

WV: Well, I'm sure it was in the '80s, but very early '80s, I'd say.

RB: And there've been revolutions since then in just the computers.

WV: Well (chuckling), I mean, there's new software and stuff that comes out every *day*.

RB: Then you have to upgrade the hardware to keep up with the software.

WV: Yeah. The only fortunate thing about it is that computers aren't as expensive as Linotype machines used to be, *or* phototypesetting machines. You know, you're talking about a couple, three thousand bucks to replace these computers and what have you, where those phototypesetting machines, every time we'd go to that, we'd be talking \$40,000 to \$50,000. The Linotype machine could go much more than that!

RB: Were you able to get rid of that machine, that offset machine, to other...?

WV: We practically gave it away. There was no... No, it just becomes obsolete *so fast*. And that was one thing, now, about the phototypesetting machines. They were beautiful pieces of machinery! They were *expensive* to operate, because you're talking about *film*. You're running *film* through those things all the time rather than just plain old paper. So although they did a beautiful job, the *expense* of it was quite a bit.

RB: Now, those phototypesetters, where'd they all go? You say junk still?

WV: You couldn't give one away today that I know of. There for a while, there were some high-quality book printers and what have you, that weren't satisfied with what was coming off the computers, and they continued to work [using phototypesetters] for a while. And, kind of like the old letterpress equipment, a lot of it originally was sent to foreign countries. You know, South America or some emerging country or something that could use it.

RB: But now, Microsoft is wanting to sell them their computers, so they don't want to _____ . (laughs)

WV: Yeah, that's probably right. No, they probably don't want no more of it. But at one time, that *did* happen. But, like that old Duplex Press that you said to me, well, when that went out our back door... Let's see, we had put that in here in 1960, and 1968 when they took it out the back door, they came in there with sledge hammers and just beat it up and took it to the junkyard. (laughs)

RB: I could imagine, you know, there's people like my age but then a lot people that's a lot younger that are going to come along and wonder -- if they wonder at one point -- what the technology of the newspaper business was like during the *middle* part of this century. They're going to look around, and they're not going to *find* any machines to represent that period, or very few.

WV: You know, the Press Association has... Have you been up to...? [*Snapping fingers, trying to recall*] Oh, what's the...? Where they have the museum.

RB: Right. On campus? No?

WV: At Rocheport! Isn't it Rocheport or...?

RB: I haven't been there, I haven't seen that. Oh, you mean Arrow Rock?

WV: Arrow Rock! I'm sorry, Arrow Rock.

RB: Yes, they do have something.

WV: At Arrow Rock there is... Now, I don't know, though. I don't know whether they have...

I know that that would have been letterpress equipment. They had Linotype machines, and the old presses and all that. I would *assume*, maybe, they have moved some of the phototypesetting machines or something.⁷

RB: See, I'm afraid they're going to skip over that section, you know.

WV: They may not, I don't know! It could be. Because I do know that -- not the phototypesetters, I can't even remember where our phototypesetters went -- but I know it was a big pile of money that went someplace, and we didn't get anything for them. But the strike-on machines that we *first* had when we started, that were tape-fed and what have you, I can remember them sitting here in this back storeroom that we got here, for a couple of years, and nobody could figure out what to do with them, so they were finally just sent to the junk too.

RB: Discarded.

WV: Nobody wanted them. Nobody wanted them at all.

RB: Right, right.

WV: So it's been a revolution. There's no doubt about that.

RB: Yes, in technology.

⁷ This portion of conversation refers to a display of early printing equipment owned by the Missouri Press Association. It is housed in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall at Arrow Rock, Missouri.

WV: Yeah, quite a revolution.

RB: The other big changes, in your *own* career, has been in expansion, and that's taken place since you took... Let's see, [in] 1948 you got... In 1953, was that the year started buying out...?

WV: Well, I bought Carl Winter out in 1953. Before Carl left, when I first came here, we just owned the Advertiser. But in '48, maybe '49 -- I think we started buying it in '48 right after I got here -- we bought the Tuscumbia paper down here.

RB: Okay, that's what was I wondering, when you...

WV: Then after Carl left, there was also a paper at Iberia, see. And I bought that paper in, I don't know, sometime in the '50s.

RB: Early '50s, you say?

WV: I bought that and combined it with the Tuscumbia paper. That's where you get the Autogram-Sentinel. The Tuscumbia paper was the Autogram, the Iberia paper was the Sentinel. And so I combined those two papers, and that became the Autogram-Sentinel.

RB: And the Autogram had already been a... That was a very old paper to begin with, wasn't it?

WV: Oh yes, that's the oldest paper. That's older than the Advertiser.

RB: What were the circumstances at the time that you acquired that paper?

WV: All right, Jac [W.] Zimmerman owned that paper. I don't know whether you've heard of Jac Zimmerman.

RB: I've heard that name.

WV: He's the one that owned the Bolivar paper [the Herald-Free Press.] But he had a chance to buy the Willow Springs paper [the News] from Jim [W.] Brown [Jr.] of Harrisonville. Jim Brown owned the Willow Springs paper. Jim had *come* from Willow Springs. And I guess maybe he had gone to Harrisonville. So Jac Zimmerman had a chance to buy that paper. So we bought the Tuscumbia paper from Jac, and he and Reba went off to Willow Springs. They were there for a number of years before they came over to Bolivar.

RB: Did you ever, in the history of that Autogram paper, go back to...? Hear anything about Aurora Springs?

WV: Aurora Springs had a newspaper [the Democrat] at one time. Aurora Springs is just right on the south edge of Eldon here, and it was one of the early... Aurora Springs, had the railroad not come through Eldon, would probably be the biggest town in the county, because they had a mineral springs down there, and at one time, there was a big spa-type hotel in Aurora Springs down there.

RB: The end of the nineteenth century.

WV: Yes. But when the railroad came through, it came through up on the hill, here in Eldon, and then the businesses started coming up the hill. But yes, Aurora Springs originally had a newspaper.

RB: So they had a newspaper there. That's what I was wondering, Aurora Springs there, because you don't always see it on the map anymore. It's still there.

WV: Yeah. Well, yes, you can get to it, because it's still _____. You go... Oh, you came from Columbia, though. But as you go south here, the first branch [a county road] off the

highway [Business Loop U.S. 54] that you come to, right at the south edge of town, winds down around a hill and goes through what was Aurora Springs.

RB: Now, when you got a-hold of the Tuscumbia paper, then, by that time, did it still have things like the morgue or anything? Photos or anything that came with it? In other words, the old stuff or materials?

WV: Yes, it did. It had old files, and we've got, still, some of them back here. The fact is, now, the Autogram, before Jac Zimmerman got it, it had been owned by some people from Jeff City by the name of Meyer.⁸ And the woman in the couple that owned it, had had a bunch of the old files bound and refurbished down there. So yeah, we got those. But I tell you, that's one thing we've been, I guess, pretty lax in. When I came here, way back there in the '40s, and what have you, Mr. Shepherd didn't send our papers off to be bound. We bound them in the shop. Well, of course we didn't have any bindery. (chuckling) The way we'd do it, we'd take an ice pick back there and stack them up and pound holes in it and then run strings up and down through it and put some cardboard around the outside. So those files just positively deteriorated and we don't have them. We finally reached a point where you couldn't keep them, and we just dumped them. Of course, they're all microfilmed, anyway. All our newspapers from Day One, I think, are on microfilm.

RB: Okay.

WV: So, you know, they are preserved in that way. But as far as the actual paper files, we just had to dump them. There was no way we could... We have *some*, and we're still having

⁸ Charlotte M. and Ellis Meyer.

papers bound, all right, and trying to keep a little better care of them now. But back in the early years, we just didn't. They weren't taken care of.

RB: That's one thing I was wondering, because as you acquired these smaller papers, with some of them *very old*...

WV: Iberia had never had a file bound. They had no files. We did haul a bunch of the papers from its beginning up here, because the owner's mother had saved one of every one since the very beginning. She had them in an old shed out in the back of the house. But they were just, you know, papers like you'd stack up at home until you got ready to throw them away. But Glenn [A.] Martin's mother [Laura Ferguson Martin] had saved those papers, and we did haul them up here. They, again, were in such bad shape. They had been, as I say, in an old barn, and they'd been wet and... There was just not much *preserving* to them, but we did haul them up here for a while and try to glean some old files and things out of them.

RB: Those never got, probably, to the microfilm.

WV: No. Well, yes, now I think those are microfilmed. Well, I can't swear to that, though. Now, we don't have those microfilms here, but I thought maybe the [State] Historical Society *would* have them.⁹

RB: Right. I can check. I'm just not sure.

WV: I'm not sure, but that would be the Iberia Sentinel, that we wouldn't have, if we don't have anything. They just simply weren't preserved in a bound file (chuckles) whatsoever, from Day One.

⁹ The State Historical Society of Missouri does have this newspaper on microfilm, but there are gaps in its holdings.

RB: But at any rate, just in terms of business. Now, you thought then that it was time to -- and you had the opportunity -- to go out and acquire some of these smaller...

WV: We were competitors, you know. And this was kind of a deal. The Autogram was the old county seat paper, Tuscumbia. And county seats *still* mean something to newspapers, I think, in *my* opinion, anyway. It means something to the *town*, and that influences [the] newspaper. When Carl and I bought the Autogram, we didn't buy the building from Jac. (laughs) Jac sold the building to Glenn Martin from Iberia, and he moved the Iberia paper to Tuscumbia. And, you know, Tuscumbia, with a population of 200, there we were, had *two* newspapers being printed out, and of course, all the advertising practically had to come from Eldon anyway, because there wasn't anything really in Tuscumbia. So it was a matter of kind of economics and what have you. But we paid a fair price for everything we bought, I think. It paid off in the long run.

RB: Now, if you would buy it, you would still keep on staff at each one of these places, I guess, and they _____.

WV: Well, that worked for a while. We had a lady who had worked in Tuscumbia -- actually, for Jac Zimmerman -- that stayed on in Tuscumbia and ran our office. It didn't take anybody... it just took one person, there was no need to have more. But she took care of the courthouse news and all that sort of thing. And then for a while, a year, maybe more, we tried to keep somebody in Iberia. We rented an office over there, and had a lady to run the office and do the subscriptions. But that finally reached a point where it wasn't *economically feasible*. We were covering the news, (chuckling) we were giving people lots of news and what have you. We weren't getting any advertising to pay for it, from

that end of the thing. So we turned those people into more like country correspondents. We didn't maintain an office, but we kept people there who gathered the news from the area for us. Kind of "stringers," I guess maybe is what you'd call it.

RB: That's what you'd call a stringer?

WV: Well, I suppose I would. That's as close as I could come to it, I guess, for the people that we had there.

RB: That's kind of interesting, the lexicon that you have, I'm sure that develops around a newspaper. You had a print devil there, and you talk about _____ stringers.

WV: (chuckles) I'm surprised Les Simpson didn't tell you anything about printer's devils!¹⁰ Of course I don't think Les ever was a printer's devil. (chuckles) I think Les was a little too sophisticated [for that].

I've got a story about Les Simpson, too. One time we were in Portugal, and we were in a real fancy hotel over there, and it was time for dinner, and Les' wife was looking for Les, trying to find out where he was. And we always knew he kind of leaned toward the bars, you know -- in main not because Les *drank* all that much -- but that's a friendly place, a bar is a friendly place. And he was at this Hotel ?Esterel? and Madeline couldn't find him, but finally when he showed up, [she asked him], "What in the heck have you been doing, Les?" "Um, well," he said (chuckles), "I've been talking to Elliott Roosevelt." And that's *exactly* what he'd been doing. He'd bumped into Elliott Roosevelt up at the bar, and spent (laughs) half the afternoon talking to Elliott. Elliott was there

¹⁰ Referring to William Lester "Les" Simpson, Jr., a long-time Missouri newspaperman. See C3965 Missouri Newspaper Project, interview conducted on March 4, 1997, a.c. 6.

with his family for some reason or other, and of course Les is kind of political anyway.

Les is quite a guy.

RB: Now, which one was Elliott?

WV: Elliott was Franklin's son, one of Franklin's sons. He had two or three, or four maybe, I don't know.

RB: He took the opportunity while he was in Portugal to... (laughs)

WV: Les had a long conversation with Elliott Roosevelt. I'm sure it was *politics* all the way.

RB: Because he was a Democrat anyway.

WV: That's right. Oh, yes.

RB: I'm sure they had a lot to talk about.

WV: Yeah. Les is quite a guy. But I'm surprised he [didn't say anything about a printer's devil.] He certainly knew about printer's devils because...

And then, well, I don't suppose you're supposed to have any train of thought, but you're talking about buying these papers. It was 1960 that... We hadn't bought any newspapers -- well, I guess maybe the Iberia one was the only one -- that weren't for sale. In 1960 Roy [E.] Otten, who owned that paper [the Versailles Leader-Statesman] and had owned it for a few years up there, he was in bad health and what have you, and he wanted to sell that paper. And he called me and asked me if I wanted to buy it. And at that time it looked like an opportunity. It was a going newspaper. So we did.

RB: That's the Iberia [newspaper]?

WV: No, this was the Versailles paper. We had also printed, in this plant, the Stover paper, the Morgan County Press. It was the Tri-County Republican for a long time. But we had

printed that, for the people that owned it, for quite a little while. We started printing it because the fellow that owned it had cancer, and he couldn't work.¹¹ And one day we walked in the office here, and here was all his copy and everything, just stacked up on *my* desk, and they asked if we could print that newspaper, said Matt was in the hospital, they didn't know what to do, they didn't have anybody to do it. And I said, "Sure, we'll do what we can." So we threw it together and printed them a newspaper (chuckles) and shipped it up there. And then we just continued to print that paper for them, and we set type for it and everything. They'd just bring their copy in, and _____ we'd send it back up there. Then when he died, why, his wife ran it for a little while.¹² And then she wanted to sell it, it was for sale, and she wanted us to buy it! [She] said, "There's no sense in anybody else buying that paper. You've been printing it, you know what it is." So we did. We bought that paper.

And then the same thing happened to Tipton when [Thomas W.] Miller got ready to sell the paper, why, he said, "Wally, you've been printing..."¹³ (laughs) We'd been printing it for years too, although it was just a contract print thing. You know, he'd bring the copy in. [He] said, "You might as well buy it as anybody else." So [we] figured out a fair price and we bought it.

So we really didn't go out, you know, to attempt to buy up everything that was around. It just so happened that when the time came, these people wanted to sell their

¹¹ Matthew E. Washlick.

¹² Clariiece J. Washlick.

¹³ Miller was the son-in-law of E. Norris Pizer, the former publisher the Tipton Times.

newspapers. They thought we put out good newspapers and would do a good job, and they just kind of leaned toward us (chuckles), so that's how we came about it.

RB: Wow. And how many are you involved with now at the moment?

WV: Well, okay, we've got the Tipton paper, we've got the Versailles paper, got the Stover paper. We've got the Tuscumbia paper and the Eldon paper. And then we also print the Highway 5 Beacon, which is a throw-away. It used to be a subscription paper, but it didn't work out for us, so it's just a throw-away type thing.

RB: And now all of those papers at the moment, are there any editors in any of those papers?

_____.

WV: Oh yes, certainly. Yeah, Tipton has a full staff up there. Let's see, Tipton, we've got an editor, an advertising sales person, a front office worker, and an additional typesetter. We've got four people in Tipton. We've got two people over in Stover, and gosh, I don't know how many we've got in Versailles. We've got an editor and an assistant editor and advertising person. Yeah, we've got... The only thing, in Tuscumbia now, we just have one girl. And once again, this is the stringer-type thing that we've got down there. But Tuscumbia is so close here, and our editor of *this* newspaper, *lives* in Tuscumbia. So it isn't all that difficult to pick up what we need from Tuscumbia. And we still in Iberia, we have a lady. She's just a housewife, but she's got just the same computer that I've got setting right behind me here, and she picks up local news and some little bit of advertising and what have you, puts it on a disk, sends the disk over here, and we run it out. So we have somebody everywhere. And I don't know whether you noticed our paper, the Advertiser, has a second section called "The Examiner."

RB: Uh-huh, I saw one _____.

WV: Well, when that newspaper goes out of this office, all down in the Lake area, that "Examiner" is on the outside. We have the same thing for Tuscumbia and Iberia. Right now, it's in the first months of the year. It's kind of slow, and we can get it all in one section. But it will develop into two sections, and usually is, as time goes on. It has a section called "The Iberian News," and it's usually just as big as the Autogram-Sentinel section. All those papers that go to *Iberia* have *that* on the outside of it. (chuckles) So we package them a little different.

RB: And then they have the advertising on the inside?

WV: Uh-huh. They're packaged a little different.

RB: So that's one way to make the locals _____.

WV: That's right, it kind of keeps a local identity with it.

RB: That's one question I have. We haven't really talked much about philosophy in papers.

WV: That's right. (laughs)

RB: But that seems to be a... If you have *one* paper, and say you own one paper, publish one paper, and then you have an editor, and then you come out, and you have a certain way of approaching the news and presenting it, perhaps. But each paper seems to be a little bit different. How do you combine all of those?

WV: They *are* a little bit different. Well, the thing of it is, our newspapers are still *local* newspapers. I mean, it's just about *people* in each community, so it has to... In Tipton, the lady that is the editor over in Tipton has been with the newspaper for a *number* of years, and she's hometown, she knows what the people want, and what they get. Now,

we aren't very political. We aren't into politics all that heavy, you know, as far as editorializing and what have you. We would support candidates and what have you, but usually down here, we've got candidates from our different parties, and we don't even have Democrat and Republican in town (chuckles), you know. And usually, if people get nominated or get on the ballot, you can make a choice all right, and you're going to be doing pretty well right, no matter who you get. It's not partisan politics like you get a little bit higher up.

RB: So you say there's not even a Democrat and a Republican. So what do you have?

WV: Now, there is in the county here, but we just... We've got a People's Party and a Citizen's Party.

RB: Really?

WV: Yeah, we haven't had Democrat and Republican for years here in town.

RB: Really?!

WV: Now, some of the other towns do, but they aren't -- they're affiliated, I guess -- but they aren't tied too close to the state and national.

RB: Is one of them more Democrat than the other one? Does it seem like one is more toward the Republican?

WV: Oh, I don't think so.

RB: It's local politics.

WV: It's just local politics, and we've got a kind of a heated campaign going on right now, in town here, with people that... They're just different, but whoever gets elected probably is going to do a good job, do the best job they can, and what have you.

RB: I've talked to some people, and they have an idea that politics is not very important in the newspaper business. And then I talk to other people like Mr. Simpson who say it's absolutely essential. (chuckles)

WV: Les would say that, I'm sure -- and Jimmy Kirkpatrick would say that, and there's lots of people that would.¹⁴ And I don't say that it *isn't* all that important, but I mean, we've got a... The Advertiser, until just a few years ago, was listed as an *Independent* newspaper. We're now a Democrat paper, but we weren't. For years and years and years it was an Independent paper!

RB: Well, that's what I was wondering. Something that Mr. Simpson said that I didn't know was that a paper has to be listed. Is that true? It has to be listed.

WV: For legal notices (chuckles), the *ballots* for the statewide offices and what have you, to be printed in the newspaper -- the Secretary of State controls this -- but usually it was put in a Democrat paper *and* a Republican paper in the county. Now, the reason that we could be Independent all those many years and still get political advertising -- which is very important, I mean, it can be a good hunk of money, constitutional amendments and things like that, you know, _____ get there -- was the fact that there wasn't another Democrat paper in the county. Now, there could have been a little bitty one sitting on the corner down here that didn't have 500 circulation, but if it was listed as a Democrat paper, when those legal notices came out, *it* would have got the legal notices, and here we would set as the biggest paper in the county and we wouldn't have got it. Our readers wouldn't know *what* was going on!

¹⁴ Referring to former Missouri Secretary of State James C. Kirkpatrick, who also had been a newspaperman.

RB: But you did not _____.

WV: We didn't have a Democrat paper in the county. We just had a Republican paper. So in that instance, why, it was to be published in two papers in the county of opposing politics. So we always printed the legal notices, and the other paper always printed the other.

RB: _____ the Republican.

WV: Yeah.

RB: Is that still the same today?

WV: To my knowledge, it is still that same. We have since changed and the Advertiser is listed as a Democrat...

[Tape Counter 478; End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

RB: Mr. Vernon, you say you printed the Democratic ballots and the notices?

WV: Yeah, but it's not only Democratic. You don't... What I mean is, the ballots. Democrat and Republican, the whole thing. You know, it's just one thing. They print in both papers: they print in a Republican paper, and in a Democratic paper. So in *some* counties where they... How did that work? There are some places where they don't even have another paper. I guess they just get all of it.

RB: Yes, because that's what I was wondering was... Say, if you represented the Democratic side, I guess in each [county] you have to have both sides, two papers. One has to be the Republican, represent the Republicans...

WV: Yeah, mm-hmm. And where we're listed is in the "Blue Book".¹⁵ You see, it's listed in the Missouri Blue Book as to whether or not you're a Democrat paper or a Republican paper.

RB: But, now, how did your other papers fit in like that? Let's see, you have one in Tuscumbia, _____.

WV: Well, you see, what we do, when that... The Miller County paper *is* a Republican paper - it's listed as a Republican. The Advertiser is listed as Democratic. So we've got a Democrat and a Republican paper. Each of them print the amendments and ballots and whatever comes out. Versailles has got the same thing. Versailles is a Democrat paper and the Morgan County Press over at Stover has always been a Republican paper. So, you know, the legal notices... This used to be a big deal, because legal notices could account for, in the past, *gobs* of money! Newspapers used to just be established during an election year, to get (chuckles) legal notices!

RB: To get the legal notices.

WV: The legal notices, yeah.

RB: So, Vernon Press has been able to sort of get... Because they've _____.

WV: Well, we've printed it in both of our papers, yeah. But when we didn't *own* the other papers, it was the same way. I mean, originally, when I came here [to] the Advertiser, we always did. But as I say, we kind of lucked out, because there wasn't a Democrat paper in the county at that time, so we got the publication as a Democrat paper, and the Tuscumbia paper always got it as a Republican paper.

¹⁵ This is a nickname for the Official Manual of the State of Missouri, published by the Missouri Secretary of State's office.

RB: But as far as that goes, your editorials... You do have editorials, though, some, in these towns?

WV: I tell you, our editorials are mostly personal columns. I mean, we will run something as an editorial on certain events at times, but mostly, like Jennie has in our paper, a personal column each week, and she editorializes in that column, you know.

RB: Right. Some of these personal columns, though, depending on the viewpoint of the writer, can be *real* pointed one way or another.

WV: Oh, sure! Yeah, yeah, we don't hold back on it, as far as that goes. And each of our editors, the one in Versailles and Stover and Tip[ton], they all have their editorial columns, but they are usually more personal observations than real heated, slanted editorials. But they do come out. They can do what they want to, (laughing) to a certain point. And I don't really control that, see. My son does that now. You know, I'm just back... You've seen, nobody pays any attention to me back here.

RB: (laughs)

WV: I mean, I'm back here, but Dane pretty well controls the policy, although it hasn't changed any at all.

RB: When did he come into the business then? Did he work as a young boy?

WV: Oh, gosh, he's been here...

RB: Did he work with the paper as a youngster?

WV: Well, yeah, actually. When he was in high school, he figured out what he was going to do. He wanted to come into the newspaper. So actually, in his junior year, he took COE and came down here and helped back in the back shop, learned to run the press, and do

all that sort of thing. I decided that wasn't really the thing for him to do, being as I didn't have a (laughing) journalism degree, he *had* to have one, and he was *going to* have one, and what have you, so I wouldn't let him come back the next year and his senior year. But then he graduated from the University with a journalism degree, and then actually while he was over there, he wrote a column and came back and worked while he was in school at the University.

RB: Right there at the University?

WV: At the University.

RB: When did he graduate? _____?

WV: Oh, my gosh, I can't remember the date. He would have been, let's see... [*thinking out loud, but not audibly*] It's been about fifteen years, I guess.

RB: Because when he got out and finished his degree there...

WV: He came immediately. He came right here and went to work, yeah.

RB: How did he...? Did he go to work as what, as a...?

WV: Well, he went to work as a special projects person here, I guess. We gave him an office and he started using what he'd learned at school that we hadn't learned, to come up with special sections for the paper and different promotions and this and that and the other. He did well. And then, how come he went *that* direction, then... Actually, when we bought the Stover paper, our editor at Versailles was Jim Anderson, and Jim Anderson eventually owned the Hermann paper [the Advertiser-Courier]. He doesn't now, he's sold it since then. But he was from -- not Hermann, down in that area, Hermann -- and he knew Jay Graf and what have you, and Graf got ready to sell that paper. He offered it to

Jim. And when we had bought the Morgan County paper, being as Jim was the editor up in Versailles and was handling it, I had given him sort of a partnership in that paper to keep him over there and running it. So when he had the opportunity to buy the Hermann paper, why, that left a hole for Dane to go to Versailles and take over that Stover paper over there, and so he went there, and he's been there ever since. But they do as much in Versailles as we do here, as far as getting the papers put together and everything. The only thing they don't have is the press.

RB: So Dane now is...

WV: He's the president of Vernon Publishing. Actually, he's the publisher of *all* these papers.

RB: Right. _____.

WV: I am the *ex*-publisher. (laughter) And of course, we are a corporate setup and I am the chairman of the board of the corporation, but he's the president of the corporation. My wife is the secretary.

RB: And he's remained down in Versailles then?

WV: Mm-hmm.

RB: But he still, though, oversees...

WV: He runs things from there. He sends me envelopes (chuckling) of things to do down here.

Yeah, that's right.

RB: That's not very far, I guess, anyway.

WV: It's eighteen miles. Oh, it's no problem. He's here every day.

RB: You all have done a lot of running of country roads here, anyway, over the years.

(laughs)

WV: Oh yes, that's right.

RB: Trying to knit all these little papers together.

WV: Back to... You were talking about philosophy a while ago, and mainly I suppose you think of the politics and what have you of a paper. But I tell you what, what I've always envisioned these newspapers, and I think they're going to be here for a long time, in spite of the fact that the Internet is a big hullabaloo about that it's going to do to us. And TV was going to, and cable TV was going to just cut us out of all kinds of business and all that sort of thing. But we've still got a niche here that *nobody else is filling*, because it is strictly a *local* newspaper. We don't really have to pay any *attention* to anything going on outside of our local area here. And that's what makes our newspapers.

We had a girl from the University came down here for an internship one summer. And that's when the big deal was that everybody had to get rid of their country correspondents. We're not going to have no more of these people having dinner with somebody out in the country, or going to church on Sunday, this and that and the other. So she came down here with the idea, she looked over our paper, that we were pretty foolish, using all that space for that stuff, and she'd go out, and she was going to make a survey and show us that we could get rid of that stuff, and then we could have a more *newsy* paper -- whatever that meant, I don't know. But anyway, she did, she spent the summer here, and she would go out and interview our correspondents and talk to the community that they were in and everything, and by the end of the summer, she came in, she said, "You know what we've got to do? We've got to have a big picnic, and we've got to have a party for these people and call them all in, because you've *got* to. This

newspaper won't *survive* without those people out there." So consequently, we have more than most do, I realize, and sometimes it is a *little* boring. But the people whose names are in those columns, if they lived in Jeff City, they'd never see their name in print. And there are a lot of other newspapers around, and they're just *fine people*, but they don't do significant things -- they're not on the city council, they're not running on the school board, or doing all this sort of thing. But they're out there. They're a part of the economy, and the society of the community. So I fully contend that community newspapers like we've got are going to be around for a while. If they're not, it's our own fault. If we get high and mighty ideas that, you know, get a... You know, start using national news and all that sort of thing, why, that could happen. But as long as we're still...

RB: Well, now, I guess, even still though in the local scene, and especially over a broad area -- like you cover a pretty broad area -- you could take different tacks, though, if you wanted to. For instance, what we see most often on the television or in bigger newspapers, is this sort of investigative thrust there, with people going out and they want to find something. It's got to be a flashy story, or it's, you know...

WV: We've had reporters who were trained that way, who come in here and try to do that. And it just doesn't work with... I mean, we want to be investigative, yeah, we want to get the *facts* and all that sort of thing. But we don't need to be (laughs) like the...

RB: Well, you know, I suppose even in the country... Now, in the city -- you think of it associated with the city -- there's all kinds of things: there's graft, there's squabbles, there's scandals.

WV: Oh, we have them, we have it here!

RB: Right, even in the country you would have those things.

WV: We have those, and we don't slight it, but I tell you, there's a lot of difference in the way people write headlines, and (chuckles) what have you, on the *same* information and what have you. We don't want to promote ourselves as a great investigative newspaper, trying to tear down the country. (laughter) I mean, that... But that don't mean that we're *not* printing the news. And we do, we try to get to the bottom of things. But we still, if somebody walks into the front door with a giant turnip or (chuckling) something that's bigger than anybody else has got, that turnip may very well appear in a picture in our paper.

RB: (laughs) Right!

WV: And people will look at that turnip, and they'll read [about] who grew that turnip.

RB: So if you have a minor scandal on one hand and a huge turnip on the other, you'll...
(laughs)

WV: Well, we'll treat them kind of equally. (chuckles) But we will do it, whereas, you know, there are those who would think that was kind of below them, to do that.

RB: Right. Well, that's an interesting topic, and it's one that's constantly coming up today, especially with the news in journalism. And we have a case right now, for instance, of this Dallas morning paper...¹⁶

WV: Yeah, I've been hearing about that.

¹⁶ Possibly referring to an incident where the Dallas (Texas) Morning News was accused of stealing computer files from Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh's defense attorney. This material included a purported confession, which the newspaper printed.

RB: So what *they're* doing, regardless of whether they did anything wrong or not, but they still are affecting that case quite a bit.

WV: Oh, sure. Yeah, you know, I still consider us newspapers. And I kind of steer away... I was kind of making fun of the word "media," in fact. I mean, media just connotes something different to me, for some reason or other. And I like to just call us newspapers, and continue in the tradition of good newspapering. (chuckles) And I know we're part of the media, but I get so disgusted with television anymore, the stuff that... And I'm sure there's a reason for why there's so much *tripe* on there. You know, it used to be that when the TV station just came on at eight o'clock in the morning, and close down for the day and then came on at five. But the rest of the time, why, you got some kind of meaty stuff. But now when they have to go twenty-four hours a day, there ain't enough stuff out there to... You know, they just have to drag themselves in the dirt to fill...!

RB: They make up things...

WV: Well, sure!

RB: ...or they build up stories.

WV: Yeah! It just gets terrible boring to me!

RB: So you don't see the paper as something that would necessarily -- as some people, I guess some people claim and some people criticize -- that it molds opinion? Is it there to...?

WV: [*mock surprise*] Oh?! I think people still *respect* newspapers, and I mean, I don't say we don't express *opinions* in the paper. And yeah, I think it can sway people, sure! Yeah,

sure! I don't think there's any doubt about it. But it also can lose its credibility pretty quick sometimes, and that happens sometimes.

RB: Yeah, well, that has come down too far on one side, I guess.... You're in a curious position where you have all these various... In your community, or in your readership, say, for instance, covers a wide area.

WV: Yeah, it does! Yeah, we sure do!

RB: You've got some in that population there that are *really* quite different from others, I guess. I mean, you have some... In some places, don't you have pockets that are Republican?

WV: Miller County -- I mean, we're a pocket of Democrats here in Miller County. Now, all our county offices are Republican. I can't remember when we've had a Democrat in our county offices. The same way with Morgan County over here. Miller and Morgan Counties have been *strongly* Republican counties for *long* time. Now, it's a little different over in Moniteau County. There are more Democrats there, you know, a little different. And Cole County, of course, has got a bunch of Democrats over there. (laughs) Obviously! But no, it is... *And*, here in this county, now if... It's really still true. If you want to get elected to a county office, you might as well go down there and sign up on the Republican side. I mean, even though everybody knows you're a Democrat, why, when you register, you'd better say you're a Republican, because that's the way you get the votes. It's just *been* that way. Been that way. (chuckling) And we've had lots of good Republicans in office! There's no doubt about that, but...

RB: And you're still striking at a balance somehow in your editorials? Well, you don't go into it that heavily.

WV: No, we do not, because generally speaking they... It's very seldom that we have people that are just *so bad* that they... That would be the reason that we'd editorialize, if they were just so bad that there was no way in the *world* they could handle what they were going to. But normally, it's not that way. We generally have better candidates.

RB: Since 1948, do you remember any big issues that were newspaper-related that came up or that you thought were the biggest issues around, that you *covered*, for instance, in your newspapers?

WV: Oh, gosh, that'd be hard to come up with.

RB: Yeah, news every year has got its high points. You have disasters, you have... This Lake of the Ozarks thing has really been... Hasn't that grown, more or less, since the time that you...?

WV: Oh, *fantastic*! Oh, yes! The growth of the Lake Area has been *phenomenal* in the last few years. And it brings in its problems. Got a lot of problems with the quality of not only the water, but the Lake down here. One of the big controversies going on down there right now is this Party Cove. You've heard of [the] Party Cove?

RB: Right.

WV: Yeah. Well, I mean, we write about [the] Party Cove in here. However, it usually is not in near as big a headlines as the Camdenton paper (chuckling) has in it.

RB: But that's a case where...

WV: Now, American Publishing, I don't know whether... But the people usually that they have running that outfit down there, that's where we... We've hired people from there, and we've got some good people there. But they've *trained* their people *entirely different* than we want our people to operate.

RB: Really?

WV: Well, they like to stir up dirt (chuckles) there, you know. They really do! Their headlines indicate it, and what have you.

RB: Now that'd be American Publishing? Is that, what, _____?

WV: No, the Lake Sun.

RB: And they're part of American Publishing?

WV: Yeah! Oh, yeah, Lake Sun, they're owned by American Publishing.

RB: That's a pretty big operation, then, American Publishing.

WV: Oh, I suppose one of the biggest in the world, yeah.

RB: They own a lot in the Midwest and different parts of the...

WV: They own London, Tel Aviv. I mean, they're worldwide.

RB: Do you recognize a certain way that they operate, then, that you could even recognize on a local level like this?

WV: Well, yeah. We do. Now, I don't know that it would be that way *everyplace*, but I know that their reporters go about things *a lot different* than we would like *our* reporters to go about things.

RB: Is there a way that you can use the term either "conservative" or "liberal" in trying to describe that? Or does that even work?

WV: I don't think that... No, I don't know that that...

RB: It doesn't have to do with _____ value system, but...

WV: And I don't know as I can think of a specific incident. But they've been sued by school boards for the things they say in their newspaper, that their reporters make big stories out of little things (chuckles) that go on, and what have you. I don't know as I could say anything specifically.

RB: Now, that's grown, right? Another thing that's grown, say, in the last decade or, say, twenty years...

WV: Oh, certainly.

RB: ...the bigger, say, conglomerate. The bigger conglomerates own lots of... Do you see that as a problem in any way?

WV: Well, you know, it's just *different* than it used to be. Like the Missouri Press Association has a *convention* each year. Used to be *every* little newspaper, the owner was the publisher and what have you, and we'd all get together and share our thoughts and this and that and the other. Well, now, when we get together, why, there could be one guy there that represented a dozen or two dozen newspapers and what have you! I guess they're powerful, I don't know, I suppose. Yeah, I'm not so sure that it's...

RB: Has it resulted in -- has the membership in the Missouri Press Association gone down, do you think?

WV: (sigh) Well, Doug would have to tell you that.¹⁷ I'm not so sure that we... But, you know, most newspapers still belong. But by the same token, they're controlled by, like,

¹⁷ Probably referring to R. Douglas Crews, the Executive Director of the Missouri Press Association.

American [Publishing or other similar conglomerates.]

RB: Fewer individual.

WV: Yeah. Yeah, the control of the papers is entirely different than what [it was.]

RB: And I supposed they probably *do* have -- we'd call it corporation-wide training sessions.

WV: Oh, I'm sure they do, because they shift... Their turnover, it would scare *me* if we had to train people and what have you. They don't have to train them, but they shift people around from different places, you know, and where it looks like their turnover is pretty great. Well, it is in the *individual*, but I mean within the organization, I don't know what...

RB: But it's a trend that's probably grown.

WV: Oh, sure. Sure, yeah.

RB: So you're kind of "middle of the road," in a way. The independent owner and publisher is on one side, but now you've become a corporation.

WV: Oh, yeah. (sigh)

RB: But you're not necessarily looking to expand into Illinois or...?

WV: Oh, no. No, not at all. I don't think my son is either (chuckling) but I could be wrong. But I don't think so. But you'd be surprised how many smaller newspapers really are owned by these big *conglomerates*, you know.

RB: Have you ever been approached by one?

WV: Oh, we would have a standing order. (chuckles) Yeah.

RB: For them to come in? They would buy...?

WV: Oh, yeah. And they've got the money. They've got *lots* of money.

RB: But you've been reluctant to sell?

WV: Yeah. You know, if Dane hadn't been in the picture, why, when I got ready to retire, why, of course [there] would be a "For Sale" sign someday or other. But he was sitting in the wings (chuckling) and been planning on it for a long time.

RB: And you think he'll carry forth this more local...

WV: Oh, yeah! Yeah, sure.

RB: That's where he's at.

WV: Yeah. Oh, he'll expand. He'll do different things. For instance, that machine there is... What do you call that crazy...? See, there's eight telephone lines running in through there and everything? That's one of the voice things, where people punch the buttons and get (chuckling) information and all that sort of thing that... Yeah, I mean, he'll *do* things, different things, as time goes on. But primarily, I think he'll be dedicated to just making these newspapers better.

RB: Do you have any other family members or does he...? How about his family now? Does he have children?

WV: Well, he's got a seventeen-year-old boy and a fifteen-year-old boy. And now his wife works in the paper. She works here. Now, she's been in this office, in fact, 'til just a couple of weeks ago. And his -- (chuckling) I'll tell you -- paperwork has got to where it's such a *pain* that she's going to spend more time with Dane and do the [paperwork]. Just like our, you know, the withholding tax stuff, where you have to do it by wire anymore, and all that sort of thing. And all the government reporting and stuff you have to do. It gets to be a pain in the neck! And she's going to help him out with that.

RB: You have to report probably on a quarterly basis and all various sorts of...

WV: We report on a *weekly* basis. And it's wire transfer anymore. You don't go to the bank like you used to, and give them the money and *they* do it. He does it with... I don't know how he does it.

RB: He has to do the banking too. _____, you know, that kind of...

WV: Oh, yeah.

RB: The mailing. He has to do the post office's job, the banker's job, and the...

WV: Oh, yeah! You know, it really is. (chuckling) There's a *lot* more to it than there used to be! A *lot* more to it.

RB: So all of these machines, then, they haven't necessarily reduced the staff time required?

WV: Mm-mm. No.

RB: And it's still a little too early to see whether Dane's boys will be interested? Or have they shown any interest?

WV: I have no idea what his kids will want to do. They might or they might not, I just don't know.

RB: Well, I ask you that, because that has really been a strong theme throughout all of [these interviews], especially the country newspapers. It shouldn't have surprised me, but it was kind of a surprise to see to the extent that family was involved in these things.

WV: Well, now, Les was a good example of that, you know. Of course, he came from a newspaper family, strictly. And then Betty and both of her boys are into it, you know.¹⁸

But I don't know.

¹⁸ Probably referring to Les Simpson's daughter, Betty Spaar, who also is in the newspaper business.

RB: You didn't have any other family members?

WV: I have one other son. But my other son, when he was fifteen years old, says, "I want to be an airline pilot." So we immediately started taking... Went to ground school, and he and I both learned to fly. He went off, and within three years he was an FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] [licensed pilot and instructor], giving lessons and what have you. He's been with Delta Airlines for the past seventeen years.

And then I have a daughter. And my daughter works for the Secretary of State, and she is the home page for the Secretary of State, and I don't know what-all else over there. She's definitely into the high-tech.

RB: What's her name?

WV: Patricia [G.] Dudenhoeffer. She works for the Secretary of State.

RB: Does she work in the Information Center there in Jeff City?

WV: Yeah! Well, she works right in the office, yeah.

RB: I'm there occasionally, doing different things.

WV: Oh, is that right?

RB: And I correspond with them quite a bit there. State Archives, you know.

WV: She worked for the State Library for six years, I believe.

RB: I might have a chance to meet her, you know, on occasion there.

WV: Patty Dudenhoeffer. (chuckles)

RB: I wouldn't have made the connection. (laughs)

WV: No, you wouldn't have, no you wouldn't have.

RB: Let me ask one more question, Mr. Vernon. As we go along in this project here, where we're taking the oral histories and comments of people who've been in the business for a long time, do you have any suggestions of either who we should talk to, or what the major topics are that we need to cover?

WV: (chuckling) I'm just not smart enough to know exactly. No, I don't really. It's bound to be valuable to some people...

[Tape Counter 493; End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]
[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side2, Tape 2 of 2]

RB: I know I ask dumb questions, or naive questions.

WV: No, not really.

RB: But on the other hand, though, it is a new thing to me. One thing that I think *is* sort of interesting there, is the technology involved and how much it has changed.

WV: Yeah.

RB: And I have a feeling that some parts of that could be undocumented, those changes that _____.

WV: Well, you know, I had never thought of it. But, you know, now that you mention [it], I just don't know. And I haven't been to the museum up there at Arrow Rock for a long, long time. And it would just seem *logical* that as these other things were *phased* out, that some of them would end up at the museum. But, you know, I couldn't swear to it. I don't know!

RB: They might think they're too modern, and yet there's such a strong break there.

WV: They're obsolete, so yeah, sure. Yeah, it's true.

RB: And the other thing then that I know from other fields, is that when technology changes like that, you lose a set of terms. All the terms, and some of them are not just descriptive terms, but some of them might be even metaphors about different things that are associated with the machines, and how it acted and _____.

WV: Probably. Wouldn't find many people who would look at that thing and call it a "plane," but that's what that was, that what this mallet [was called.] You planed down these slugs. You see, they were all of a height, but you'd have to put them on a marble surface, and put that thing, and pound it with that mallet to make it all level. So this thing is a plane.
(laughs)

RB: And did it have this felt bottom on it?

WV: Yeah!

RB: That's exactly how it was?

WV: Yeah! Some of them did, and some of them didn't. I mean, they weren't all that way, but just a plain wooden bottom would work. I'll tell you what, I take this back. The felt, to plane the things down level on a flat surface -- it didn't. But to make a *proof*, after you'd put ink on it [the tray of set type], then you'd lay a piece of paper down there, and pound this thing there very gently on there, and make a proof that you could read. And then that one *would* have the felt on it.

RB: And you'd call it like a printer's plane?

WV: Yeah.

RB: A carpenter, of course, wouldn't call it a...

WV: Well, no, that don't look anything like a carpenter's plane, but that's exactly what that is [called].

RB: *[Speaking in regard to photographing]* Let's see if I still have any film in here at all. 'Cause I wouldn't mind taking a shot of that thing as you're describing it.

WV: Do that.

RB: And when would be the last time when you used that?

WV: When you got to offset, why, there was no reason for this, you see, because your offset is on a plate. I mean, it was used strictly with the lead type.

RB: And you got your offset machine here?

WV: In 1968 is when *we* did, yeah.

RB: In '68. So up until that time, you had use of it.

WV: Why, certainly! Yes! Yeah.

RB: And they were made -- manufactured, I'm sure -- and then so they were available to...

WV: Oh, to everybody, sure -- all the printers. Sure, it was in the printer's catalogs.

RB: Printer's catalogs -- still a pretty specialty item.

WV: Yeah.

RB: And so you wouldn't see them around. You'd have to order them and get them in.

WV: Yeah.

RB: You're absolutely right. I did *not* recognize that, even after you showed me the lead there.

WV: (laughs)

RB: I still wouldn't have known what that was for.

WV: For some reason or another, I used to have one of those things that we poured from the mat around here. But I don't know what in the world I've done with it. Just a little thing, about so big. But you know, that stuff, for a few years you have it laying around and then it disappears.

RB: So mallet and the plane. And there probably were other things, and probably as many different... 'Cause that's a complicated [process] in the mechanical operation, even in the old days.

WV: You know, you get your type and your other graphic stuff that was all lead. And they had a big frame, a steel frame you'd put it all in, and then you had what they called "quoins." And a quoin was a little expanding... What do you compare it to? I don't know. But you screwed a little top in it, and they'd expand out to hold the type in there. And then you'd plane it down to make it level, so when the roller went over it, why, it would print even on there.

RB: So the quoin operated like a little vice or some sort that would keep things in...?

WV: Yeah.

RB: And you could adjust them, as far as...

WV: That's right.

[Aside about tape recorder, small portion omitted.]

WV: No, I was going to show you... I'll take you up front there, and I think I've got some pictures on the wall that show the lock-up of the type and what have you.

RB: If you would do that, what I'll do, I'll carry this with me.

[Recording stopped for a time, then resumes.]

WV: I'm trying to think. I used to have a little lead thing from back in our old letterpress days, a little bracket thing laying around here. Was it back there in that...? Do you remember seeing that?

up: Yeah, I remember what it is, but I haven't seen it for years and years.

WV: If I can remember where that crazy thing is. Okay, that's here. Let me get my glasses.

[Greetings exchanged between Brassieur and graphics designer, omitted.]

WV: Okay, see this frame, that steel frame -- that was called a "chase," a steel chase. These things here are the quoins. And you see that little handle there, you'd stick down in those little things and when you twisted it, that would squeeze it and tighten it up in there. And there were different kinds. Here's a chase over here that has a different kind of a quoin. This one's kind of an enclosed [variation,] and it's got its little handle on it.

[Incidental conversation regarding proper spelling of words omitted.]

And let's see, I don't know if there's anything else we were talking about there.

Oh, well, of course here is one of the.... There's some type. That probably is something that's poured, that thing there. The pictures, they came off of a different machine.

RB: Now, first of all, about these prints right here that are up on your wall here in the office: Where did they come from?

WV: I think these came from the Missouri Press Association. They came from a paper company years ago, but I think maybe we got these from the Press Association.

RB: 'Cause that's a great documentation.

WV: Yeah, it is.

RB: An artist's rendering of the process.

WV: Seems like maybe they originated with some paper company.

RB: Starting from this one here on the left, what is this fellow doing here?

WV: Well, he's simply cleaning up a press. He's just wiping down the rollers on the press.

RB: Can you tell what kind of machine that would be there? That's was one of those larger machines, like you described earlier.

WV: Well, no, I can't tell. Actually, those rollers aren't *on* the press. He's got them *off* of the press. See, they're just on a rack, but he's cleaning them. He's cleaning them up.

RB: You had a certain rack that was designed so that you could clean those things?

WV: Well, we didn't. I'm sure some people did.

RB: Now, the second [picture]...

WV: He's printing on a job press, and we used to call those a "snapper press," because what they do, you know, they [*snaps fingers*] snap back and forth. They were called a snapper.

RB: Did you have a certain name brand of those things that you all had here?

WV: I think ours were Challenge, I think was the name maybe of the hand-fed presses that we had.

RB: I saw a picture of an old Gordon Press. It also operated like that, but I think it was a bigger...

WV: That's not familiar to me. But, you see here, this guy's planing. (laughs)

RB: Right. That's what he's doing, he's planing it.

WV: You see right there, he's planing the type down to get it level so that when they put it on the press it won't poke through the paper one place or another. Of course, that guy there

is just hand setting type. Yeah, those pictures, we've had those for a long, long time. I *am* kind of proud of them.

RB: What about the speed of that hand-set type, the guy that was setting type? It seems like that ought to take *ages* to do.

WV: (chuckles) Well, you get so you could set it up pretty fast. Yeah, you could hand set type pretty fast.

RB: Did you do very much of that?

WV: I have hand set my share of type. Yes, I have. I certainly have! I never did learn to run the Linotype machine. (laughs)

RB: Did you have to be a pretty good speller for that? Hand setting? You didn't have corrections...?

WV: (chuckling) Well, if you didn't spell it right, somebody would take a proof of it and send it back to you [and then you] had to re-do it. So it was *better* if you were a good speller.

RB: You didn't have any "spell correct" like you have on the computer nowadays.

[Both examining a picture]

WV: Oh, no. Now, you've seen that. That picture's familiar to you, surely, isn't it?

RB: That's from Norman Rockwell?

WV: Yeah.

RB: "Country Editor."¹⁹ So what sort of operation is going on here? Now, you've got a fellow operating...

¹⁹ In April of 1945, Norman Rockwell came to the offices of the Monroe County Appeal located in Paris, Missouri, where he used the setting and the staff as his models for a painting entitled "Norman Rockwell Visits A Country Editor"

WV: That's just the editorial. Monroe County Appeal. And that appeared way back in wartime, really. Became very famous.

RB: They mostly collected news in that scene.

WV: Oh, yeah.

RB: Except here's a guy running, he's got a little sailor's cap on.

WV: All right, that's the printer's devil. I don't know where he's going, but he's doing something.

RB: But that's a characteristic pose, that one where he's running.

WV: (chuckles) He's on the move! He's on the move, sure. He couldn't be a... No, he's a devil, 'cause he's got his apron on and everything.²⁰

RB: That was characteristic of the...

WV: Yeah, you'd get awful dirty if you didn't wear an apron, *awful* dirty.

RB: I wonder what your printing operation looks like today. Is it operating today?

WV: If you want to come back here...

[Recording stopped, then resumed]

WV: Once again, you see, we're scanning pictures, just from the negative there. And he's enhancing. But these guys are getting pretty good on enhancing the pictures with computer.

RB: You can manipulate them a certain amount, can't you?

WV: That's right, yeah.

gd?: We can do anything we want to, anything at all.

²⁰ This character was indeed a printer's devil, modeled on a boy named Dickie Wyatt.

RB: Still, does it compare with photography?

up: There's a lot more control over the pictures this way, than there was in the darkroom. A lot more control over the light and we can even put *in* light, put in different lighting effects and everything where there was none before. We can put a spotlight in one area and shine it down and all kinds of stuff that we couldn't do in the darkroom.

RB: Right.

WV: It's pretty new with the boys, but they're doing a *good job* of it, I think.

RB: And you've got all MacIntosh? Is that the machinery that you've gone to?

WV: Yeah.

up: This is a Power Mac, it can take either Mac or IBM. It's either/or. I've pulled in stuff that was on IBM before onto here.

WV: _____ run _____.

[Speech nearly drowned out by sounds of machinery.]

WV: Right now they're printing the Versailles paper. I guess Versailles. Yeah, they've already printed the Tipton paper this morning. That's one thing about it, all our papers practically come out on the same day: Eldon and Tipton and Versailles all come out today. Stover paper we printed yesterday. The Highway 5 Beacon we printed Monday, and then tomorrow we'll print the Autogram-Sentinel. It'll come out tomorrow. But we've got three of them that come out today.

RB: Today is Wednesday.

WV: So they're all dateline Thursday.

RB: And it's sort of like the end of the process here now today, right?

WV: Right now. I mean, this is.

RB: Monday and Tuesday you would have been putting together stories and developing?

WV: Yeah, that's right.

RB: Now, it's putting out the finished product.

WV: That's right. As it comes off the press, all that complicated mailing process (laughs) goes on over here.

RB: What sort of a machine do we hear in the background, Mr. Vernon?

WV: Well, that's the press. That's a Goss Community Press.

RB: Goss?

WV: Goss Community.

RB: How long have you had that machine?

WV: Well, the first two units of that press were put in in 1968, and then we added two more units ten years later, I guess, something like that. And we need more! (laughs)

RB: So would you think about going to another machine there?

WV: No, no, I think we would just add units to this press.

RB: Oh, you can build onto it?

WV: Oh yes, sure.

RB: Well, it looks like it has... Are all those individuals units? Looks like it has four different units.

WV: We've got four units and a folder.

RB: Uh-huh, and you can just add onto them then?

WV: We can. Our only problem is, we're going to have to build a new building to do it, because we haven't got enough room behind it.

RB: Right. So this building here was built in 1960?

WV: This building was built in 1960, right.

RB: Did you design it yourself?

WV: Well... What, designing the...? It was entirely different in 1960.

This was the only building we had in 1950, so there was a wall coming through here.²¹ All our editorial offices and everything were up in this area up here. And then we had Linotype machines and the old press and everything was back in that other unit. So we bought that building later, that old building became available and we needed to expand, so we bought that one later.

RB: Let's see, which one? That's the one that has the Greek facade on it?

WV: Yeah. That originally was... When we bought it, it was two buildings. It was an old hardware store and a grocery store over there, and we combined the two and redid it.

[Leaving press area, moving into another room, voices drop out for a bit and then resume with sound of machinery muffled in the background after a door closes.]

Now, our files... This room's a mess, but what files we have *of* the papers left are in here. You can see they're fairly recent, really. We've got, what is it? I guess that's 1956, maybe.

RB: And you have some microfilm?

WV: Yes. We've got our micro... There's all the microfilms. They're all microfilmed.

²¹ Year as spoken. From the context of the following conversation, the original building they possessed in 1950 was later remodeled and expanded by 1960.

RB: Do you ever have any use to go back to that older stuff? I mean, does anybody look at it?

WV: You mean these bound files?

RB: Either the bound or the microfilm?

WV: Oh, yes! Oh, yeah. Yeah, there are people that... It may not look like it, as dirty as this room is, but yes, it's used constantly. Yeah, a lot of people use our microfilm. We can't print them. If they need something printed out of it, why, they have to go up to the University and get it, but they do come here and...

RB: Researchers, you mean?

WV: Research, yes. Oh yes, they're used!

RB: Gosh, I would think that would be a great resource, considering how old these newspapers were to begin with, you know, _____ when they started.

WV: *Oh, yes!* Yeah, yeah, those files are invaluable! They certainly are, they certainly are. But, as I say, the bound files were just in such bad shape, that... I want to show you something here. I said that...

[Speech stops, sound of a crash and a large item being moved]

WV: 1960. These are the ones that I said the lady who owned the Autogram before had these old papers bound. But you can see how brittle these are, and they've actually been almost *coddled*. And so you just can't...

RB: Like you say, those have been microfilmed by the State [Historical Society of Missouri]?

WV: Oh yes, they've all been microfilmed. They've been microfilmed.

RB: But every now and then, you know, we'll run into a real older thing that someone just happened to have that was a publisher, or that came down to him from another publisher, you know, who [acquired it] just by accident, so I ask that question about those things.

WV: Well, I guess I maybe wish we had all the real old ones, but I don't know, no better care than we can take care of them.

RB: That's right, as long as they...

WV: The microfilm is good on them, and they *can* be reproduced, so...

RB: That's right! And the newspaper library, of course, at the State Historical Society, they have people on staff to take care of just... That's what they do.

WV: (chuckling) Yeah, that's an amazing place over there.

RB: It is.

WV: That is amazing. But anyway that's what we've got.

[Sound of leaving room. Recorder off, then restarts]

WV: ...paper and the Versailles paper will both go out in those two trucks out there, before very long. But it serves the purpose.

RB: Well, there's some great prints in here. Do you all collect those?

WV: Well, I painted all those. (laughs)

RB: You painted those?!

WV: I painted all of those.

RB: Well, now, I didn't realize you were a painter!

WV: Well, I don't know that I am, but I... They're some that _____.

RB: When did you start that?

WV: Oh, it's been years ago I painted. I haven't painted recently, really, but I used to paint a lot. I had a lot of bigger pictures like that. My son took them (chuckling) all home and put them on his walls, my son Dane.

RB: So you had time to paint earlier in your life?

WV: I used to do this in the dining room of my house when the kids were running around my feet.

RB: So that would have been, like, say, twenty years back?

WV: Oh, it's been longer than that. Gosh, thirty years ago, I guess.

RB: Thirty years ago?

WV: I suppose.

RB: What inspired you with these boats? Look at these! These are fishing scenes. These aren't Missouri scenes, are they?

WV: No, I did that from a picture of some. I don't know, I always liked boats. Now, these over here, I did while we vacationed in Yugoslavia one time. And those two there I did from slides we took in Yugoslavia. This is a kind of a modernistic one that I did of a lake cabin that we had down on the lake. [*Reading the date on the paintings*] 1974 on those.

RB: Did you ever have any schooling or anything in that?

WV: No.

RB: So you just decided to take it up?

WV: I just liked to paint.

RB: And that's oil paint that you're doing, huh?

WV: Yeah, it's oil. I'll tell you what, it's really sad that this old bridge, I don't know whether it... When they tore up Yugoslavia in the last few years, why, they bombed that thing.

That bridge was built in the sixteenth century. It was a *beautiful* thing! I just couldn't believe that people have things like that and tear them down like that, but they sure did!

RB: And so you were in Yugoslavia thirty years ago?

WV: Uh-huh.

RB: Well, this says '74.

WV: Well, 1974, whenever that was.

RB: "Mostar." That was in Mostar?

WV: Uh-huh.

RB: What was it like there? I see people walking down the street there in the scene.

WV: *Oh*, it was a beautiful town! *Beautiful* little town! They had a market down there, and this little restaurant down next to the _____.

RB: And people were living pretty harmoniously.

WV: [Marshal Josip Broz] Tito was still there, see. And *yeah*, we had a beautiful time there.

We were on a study mission with the New England Press Association, and we were

guests of the Yugoslav government for two weeks. And it was *beautiful* country! We

went to all the seaside resorts and everything, and traveled all around. Went to Belgrade

and visited their newspapers, and all kinds of stuff. It was a *nice* trip! I just can't *imagine*

the turmoil and the destruction that goes on in places like that.

RB: So you didn't feel that under the surface while you were there?

WV: No, not really. No, people seemed pretty happy at the time, pretty content.

RB: And especially the press would have been a sensitive thing if there were any problems.

WV: Yeah. No, you know, Tito held Yugoslavia together. But there was no *plan*. When he left or died, why, there was no plan for succession, and there got to be all kinds of inner turmoil and what have you.

RB: Power grabbing.

WV: Uh-huh. And then, of course, the Muslim and all the different factions got into trouble. But I just thought that was such a...

RB: This is off the subject of the Missouri press, but did you feel when you visited newspapers there at that time, did you feel they were under pretty strict control?

WV: Well, I'm sure they were. Yeah, you could kind of get that feeling, that they were pretty controlled. No doubt about that.

RB: Did you have the opportunity to compare, for instance, the newspaper operation there, and then you had this experience here?

WV: There's no doubt that they were pretty well controlled as to what they could do. The fact is even though... And I say, the people appeared to be well fed and pretty happy, and you didn't see great poverty. And we went through the country, we went from one end to the other. And they had these *beautiful resorts*, you know, out on the sea and everything. But, by the same token, even our guide, who was a native of Zagreb there, that was on our trip the whole time there, she -- you could tell that they weren't just as *free* as we are to do anything you want to do, and what have you, you know. But being as it was, I guess that control was what kept them together. And when Tito... I mean, he had

enough power to keep them in line. And so it was kind of a shame, because, as I say, it's a beautiful country. Beautiful country.

RB: They've been a wreck there, since then, haven't they?

WV: Yeah.

RB: Still not finished with it.

WV: No. I can't understand it.

[Recording stopped, resumes in another room. Looking items hung on wall.]

RB: Is this place here, now...?

WV: That is my house. That's where I live.

RB: You've got an air view of it.

WV: North part of town here.

RB: That's a lovely place there, beautiful property.

WV: Well, we like it. We've lived there about twenty years and enjoy it very much.

RB: Well, I was just looking around. Since I'm looking, you have your important things on the wall here.

WV: Well, you know, that's really kind of the reason... You know, as I say, I'm in a semi-retired mode, and I guess most people, if they retire, they wouldn't have an office downtown. They'd take this stuff home and put it someplace, but I haven't got anyplace to put it at home.

RB: Right, so you keep an office. Sure.

WV: (laughs) So I just keep it here.

RB: Yeah, this one here is from the [United States] President?

WV: My wife _____ those things _____. Of course, I was the director of the National Newspaper Association for six years, and then prior to that, I was a Missouri state representative [to the national organization] for probably ten years before that.

RB: What years was that now?

WV: Well, from '75 to '81 I was a director. And I used to go to Washington every year to the Government Affairs Conference, did for years. And of course we always went to the White House. And then one time I happened to be at the right place at the right time one time to get a telegram come to my office down here. It said, "President and Mrs. [Richard Milhous] Nixon request the honor of your presence at the White House for a reception," on a certain day. So, at that time they invited the -- I was the officer of the press association at the time -- and they had invited a hundred people to come to a reception at the White House and spend a day. So we did. That's the pictures over there of the White House reception. Then while my son was in the University, [James Earl] Carter had little groups of newspaper [people] in, you know, for just chats and what have you, and we were allowed to bring a photographer when we came. So I went to that and took my son and he had a great time, because they let the photographers that we took become a member of the White House press corps for the day. Every time they'd open the door, the President would do something, why, he'd run in with the photographers, take his pictures and everything, which was kind of fun.

RB: Sure. Well, now, was this position here elect... Are you talking about state representative?

WV: The Missouri Press Association elects a representative to work with the National Newspaper Association. And Bill Miller down at Washington [Missouri] is that.²² Now, my son has been that, but I was that for I forget how many years -- quite a little while. Prior to that, I simply attended the Government Affairs Conference anyway, and was on a lot of committees. In fact, I was chairman of the conference for two years before I was *anything*. And they always have a -- or practically every year -- the President invited whoever wanted to come to the White House to come over and have a reception of some kind. So I've met every president from John Kennedy to Carter, I guess. (laughs) It's real interesting work.

RB: Sure. Did you ever run for political office?

WV: No.

RB: Never inclined?

WV: Well, I was city councilman here for a couple of terms, years ago, but that was it.

RB: Sure, that's an important role. What years was that? Was it back in the '70s?

WV: Well, that probably would have been in the '70s sometime. I can't remember. My gosh, I was doing everything all at one time, it seemed like. I served on the President's Advisory Council for Extension over at the University for a few years over there, too. And it seemed like the same time I was an NNA director and I think I was city councilman at the same time, doing everything. Had too many eggs in the basket, I guess, I don't know.

RB: Now here's one that I find interesting. Wallace G. Vernon, a *Colonel*, Honorary Staff of the Governor. What year was that?

²² William Miller, publisher of the Washington Missourian.

WV: Well, that was *way* back. (laughs) That was John Dalton, when he was...

RB: That was January of the year 1961. So under John Dalton as governor.

WV: Uh-huh, John had a *lot* of colonels that year. Now, I've told you, I'm really not all that much into politics, but I am a Democrat, simply because I grew up a Democrat and what have you, and he just had a *lot* of Democrat colonels. (laughing) _____ how many that year, but that was the...

RB: And in that role there as colonel....

WV: It was just a [ceremonial]. On Inauguration Day, you wore the uniform. They had two or three social events over at the governor's mansion.

[Tape Counter 478; End of Side 2, Tape 2 of 2. End of Interview]