5th Generation Rhoades Family Heads Thriving Blair Enterprise Which Boasts of Big Job Printing Operation

In Washington County, at the extreme eastern end of Nebraska, the town of Blair is the home of The Enterprise. It is one of two weekly newspapers in that town of 4,000.

The Enterprise could well be termed a dual business for it operates, in conjunction with the newspaper, The Enterprise Publishing Company which has developed a volume which would be mighty attractive as a commercial plant alone. In fact, Publisher J. Hilton Rhoades is not always sure whether the newspaper, or the printing and publishing, is the standout.

The Enterprise plant is a busy place. Each week it meets a deadline for its own newspaper, The Enterprise. On Friday afternoon, it meets another deadline for a North Omaha newspaper. Each month it meets a deadline for an eight-page magazine. Bi-monthly it meets another deadline for a larger magazine which has a circulation of over 10,000. In addition, it meets a deadline each month for a high school paper and three other magazines. And there are dozens of other regular customers whose needs are cared for by the plant.

Editor Rhoades is assisted by his wife, Lucille, who spends three days a week at the office, and his son Kenneth, who has developed into an all-around man and can fit into any position in the plant.

Newspaper work is now in the fifth generation of the Rhoades family. In 1869, the year that Blair was founded, J. Hilton Rhoades' great grandfather, Benjamin F. Hilton, and grandfather, L. F. Hilton, brought the first newspaper press up the Missouri River on a boat and started the first newspaper in Blair. It was called The Register. Later L. F. Hilton purchased The Enterprise, which was a struggling sheet at the nearby village of Kennard and moved it to Blair. After Mr. Hilton's death, his son-in-law, John A. Rhoades took over the operation of the paper.

The Enterprise, as a newspaper, has had all the color of the old-time rough and ready publications. The late L. F. Hilton was the crusading type of writer who loved a political scrap and never failed to spare the whip in his editorial columns. He was a forceful, but often caustic, writer and in terms of today's thinking not too good a business man. He believed that it was the editor's duty to set everything in the community straight and keep it that way, and his efforts in that regard often cost him a friend and sometimes an advertiser.

As a consequence when John A. Rhoades took over the paper at the death of Mr. Hilton he was confronted with a newspaper which had a few staunch friends but likewise many enemies, a lot of prejudices and some equipment which was quite inadequate for the job.

In addition to that, he started in a field which had three newspapers and a large commercial plant which, in itself, was enough to have discouraged many men.

The elder Mr. Rhoades, now 82 and retired, is the father of the present editor and he watches the humming activities at The Enterprise plant with much interest. He still makes an almost daily trip to the plant, just to "see how everything is going" and to get another whiff of printer's ink.

When John A. Rhoades began publishing The Enterprise the plant was located in a basement room of a Blair bank building. The only equipment was a model Z Intertype, an old style 10 x 15 jobber and a newspaper press which would not run. Presswork for the newspaper was "borrowed" from one of the other plants in town.

It has taken a lot of time and hard work to build The Enterprise from a struggling 4-page 6-column sheet with 300 subscribers to its present 8-column 12-page size with 2,710 subscribers.

Growth of a newspaper is not spectacular in a field which has competition but growth for The Enterprise has been constant and solid.

Twenty-seven years ago J. Hilton

J. Hilton Rhoades . . . spark plug of The Enterprise

Andy Brennfoerder, Chief Compositor. He likes the homey touch of the small town shop.

Rhoades joined the staff of The Enterprise. He was fresh from school and a couple of years teaching and, like most young men, fired with the ambition to carve a deep niche in a short time.

Hilton, by nature, was a direct opposite of his crusading grandfather. He had no desire to get embroiled in politics. He believes that it is the obligation of any newspaper to enter into and explain all controversial community matters.

Hilton enjoys business and he enjoys making things click. He wastes little time, himself, and has build up a fast-operating plant and staff which will keep pace with that idea. "Life is short," he points out, "and we have a lot of things yet to do."

Coming to the staff at the age of 20, Hilton was pretty much of a lad. He had just been married to his wife, Lucille, and the two were entering upon a new and seemingly uncharted way of life.

At that time The Enterprise still had the old Model Z, the old 10 x 15 jobber, but the newspaper press was running. A few other odd pieces of equipment had also been added and his father had gotten the plant out of the basement and into a part of its present building.

When Hilton joined the staff, the week's work consisted of putting out the newspaper, printing a few envelopes or statements and distributing the ad type. Any piece of job work which wouldn't fit the 10 x 15 was untouchable. Since there was no type to set, the gas under the pot of the old Model Z used to be turned out Thursday afternoon, not to be lighted again until Monday morning. Now, The Enterprise's three linotypes are hot every day of the year.

Hilton's urge to make things click probably started The Enterprise toward its present status as a commercial plant. Fridays and Saturdays grew long and tiresome. The back shop was quiet as a tomb, with little noise evident except the click of the ad type as the shop's lone compositor returned it to the cases.

Walking the streets for orders of 500 envelopes didn't hold much promise of a rosy future and it was quite evident that something better should be sought after.

It took time—lots of it—and thousands of miles of driving to make contacts which finally started The Enterprise in a larger field of printing. Eventually the right contacts were made and the work began to roll in.

Then came the realization that the larger printing orders couldn't be produced unless there was equipment. The result was that there has been a long string of presses and machinery in and out the rear door of The Enterprise plant for a number of years.

Three additions have been built to the building and a fourth addition is being eyed every time work begins to stack up.

The machinery-buying whirl has, in a way, become a vicious circle, buying more machinery to do more work so that more machinery can be bought, etc.

But to avoid that whirl getting out of hand, Editor Rhoades now budgets the plant on the basis of business done. Each new machine purchased is now equalled by an outside investment foreign to newspaper and publishing work. Most of these investments are in the form of business and residential rental property in Blair.

Some of the townfolks who visit The Enterprise plant have suggested that maybe the printing of The Enterprise as a newspaper should be discontinued and full attention given to the commercial field.

But Mr. and Mrs. Rhoades have no intention of doing such a thing. In the first place, publication of The Enterprise is a highly profitable business. In the second place, both enjoy newspaper work.

Commercial printing is hard work, requires extremely close application and constant supervision. Margins are close on the larger jobs and a mistake can cost the profit on many dollars worth of work. Moreover, as a plant grows larger the need for correlation of all departments becomes more and more acute. Otherwise, operators are waiting for copy or proofs, pressmen are waiting for type and bindery folks are waiting for their part of the work.

Newspapers in larger towns, such as Blair, have problems and obligations which those in the smaller communities do not have, Rhoades believes.

Since the town is larger there is more news to be covered. This requires a larger paper and a larger staff. When the selling field is

The Blair Enterprise is one of two newspapers published in the Washington county seat. The Blair Pilot-Tribune, published by Reed O'Hanlon Jr., was last month's feature newspaper.

divided, such as it is in Blair, the publisher is faced with one of two things. Either he must operate with less profit and older equipment, or he must turn to commercial work to supplement his income.

Editor Rhoades has chosen the latter, although it has cost him a six-day week of 10 to 12 hours daily.

In The Enterprise plant there are three typesetting machines. There is a Model 8, 14 and 33, all Linotypes. The 33 is nearly new and is equipped with quadder, blower and other accessories. The Enterprise has 25 type faces available on the machines.

The paper uses all women operators. This trend got started during the war and has worked with such success that it has been continued. Women operators have both advantages and disadvantages, Editor Rhoades finds.

A good woman operator will often set more type than a man. Usually they are easier on the machine, he finds. In addition, since all of The Enterprise operators are also housewives, they welcome, rather than object, to an afternoon off when the flow of copy into the plant has been interrupted for some reason.

The disadvantage to women operators is that they lack some of the mechanical sense that men have and require more maintenance help.

But in The Enterprise plant both Editor Rhoades and Kenneth have become fairly good machinists and they keep the machines operating without many calls from professional service men.

Kenneth Rhoades with the new arc light in the engraving room.

Operating the Model 14 is Mrs. Faye Williby. Faye is a wee slip of a girl who learned to operate in the plant of her uncle, Chauncey Everhart, who operates the Orchard News. She has been with The Enterprise off and on for the past seven years. The "off" times have been when young Ronnie and Cheryl put in their appearance in this world.

Operating the new 33 is Mrs. Ethel Thompson. Mrs. Thompson came to the paper four years ago. She had been dissatisfied with her 5 a.m. shift in an adjoining restaurant and wanted something with better hours. When it was suggested that she try the Linotype, she asked "Which machine is a Linotype?"

Now she sets all of the ad type on the 33 and also gets out a good string of straight matter. Ethel "graduated" from the Model 8 a little over a year ago when the new machine was installed. It was the first brand new Linotype ever to come to Blair—a town which has had as many as four newspapers at one time and boasts a large church publishing house which hires 30 persons. Needless to say, Ethel takes great pride in the machine and is doing an exceptional job of taking care of it. She has a daughter, Louann, age 12.

A beginner operator on the Model 8 is Mrs. Bessie Masters. She has been on the staff six months and her string of straight matter is beginning to be quite a help.

In The Enterprise plant there are five presses. Three are automatics.

The newspaper is printed on a Cottrell cylinder. It's about like any other weekly newspaper press and has an attached Omaha folder.

The "workhorse" of the plant is an automatic Miehle cylinder. It does the bulk of the commercial work and also prints the extra sheet when The Enterprise runs fourteen pages. It has swingback feeder, extension delivery, ink agitator and a number of other extras.

Volume in the plant has now about outgrown the Miehle and Rhoades says he is already thinking about adding another press.

Two years ago a Kelly Clipper (14" x 19") was installed to help the Miehle on half size sheets. Volume

At left: Mrs. Louise Ranheim, social news, proof reader and office work. At right: Mrs. Lucille Rhoades, wife of the editor. She keeps books, edits country correspondence and assists with local news.

The Enterprise has long had an all-woman staff of Linotype operators. At left above is Mrs. Ethel Thompson who operates the new 33. In the middle is Mrs. Bessie Masters who Rhoades says works "just for the fun of it." At the right is Mrs. Faye Williby who learned to set type from a good teacher—Chauncey Everhart of the Orchard News.

now has grown to the place where a second full-sized press is needed, so the Clipper will soon join the parade out the back door.

There is a 12 x 19 Kluge which carries most of the smaller work and a 10 x 15 open press which is used for short runs and odd jobs.

Andrew Brennfoerder, compositor in the plant, operates the Kluge and gets jobs ready on the open press.

Kenneth runs the Miehle and Kelly on week-ends and Editor Rhoades pitches in to help when long runs require doubling up of hours.

Although most of Andy's time is taken up at the ad bank, he likes to diversify his work at the presses and usually there's enough ahead to make that help most welcome.

Andy came to The Enterprise eight years ago after doing a stretch of defense work on the West coast. Before that, he had been with the Lawrence Locomotive for 21 years. He started there back in the days when the jobber was run by foot-power and the news press was turned by crank.

For a short time, about a year ago, Andy tried the Omaha World-Herald, but he visited The Enterprise plant every day and finally came back to the country newspaper.

Other part-time helpers in the composing room are Ted Lathrop and Don King. Both study at Blair's Dana College.

Ted has been with The Enterprise since his high school days. He has learned to operate, feed the cylinder, set the less complicated jobs and is becoming an all-around printer. He was called into service two years ago and during that time acquired not only a wife, but a family as well. Now he is attending Dana under the G.I. bill and working part time in The Enterprise plant.

Ted Lathrop

Don King started when school opened this Fall. Printing as a full time career doesn't seem to be in Don's plans, although he would make a good man at such work. Don clears out forms and operates the new Nolan melting furnace. The furnace installation was prompted by the new Model 33 whose big lines kept the smaller melting pot going every day. The installation cost $1,200 but a careful check of the time saved reveals that it is returning that investment at the rate of about $7.50 per week.

Another recent installation in the composing room is a new Woodsman saw blade on the composing room saw. Since The Enterprise has an engraving plant and zinc is often cut, it was found that the saw blade was being changed three to six times a week. The zinc was always cut with a dull blade. A check revealed that each change took two minutes. Those two minutes are worth from 6 to 8c. That's somewhere between 25c and 50c a week for time to change blades. Moreover, blade sharpening was costing about $3 monthly. So, when things were added, it was found the $71 for a blade which would stay sharp a year was a good investment. A new radial arm Hammond Router, added in May, is saving an estimated two hours weekly in the backing of mats and chipping of plates, Rhoades says. The machine cost $750 but will return its cost in less than four years.

That's the way most of the improvements have been figured. Editor Rhoades believes that labor-saving equipment should be considered "investments"

Mrs. Velma Gustin, in charge of the bindery, trims another book job. At the left is Mrs. Berniece Jensen, part-time bindery helper.

and not expenditures. He defines an investment as something which will return itself, and every new piece of machinery is figured on that basis. If it will pay interest on the investment and retire itself by its earnings in 10 years, he considers it a good investment.

The same consideration was given the purchase of a new Baum folder in April of this year. The new all-buckle jet Baum replaced an older machine. Increased speed of operation, plus additional uses of the machine which included perforating, scoring, pasting and trimming, made it apparent, before it was purchased, that the machine would pay. To further verify this contention, a notebook was hung beside the machine when it was placed in operation last April. Every job which went through it was recorded as to the number of sheets and the type of work done. The amazing thing about it is that the total by mid-October had reached a half-million sheets—a volume which those working in the plant did not believe possible.

Mrs. Velma Gustin is in charge of the work in the bindery department. She takes care of book assembling, stitching, operates the folder, trims books and feeds the news cylinder. She has several other women who help out every few days when another book or magazine job is being assembled and mailed out. She also operates a small Pitney Bowes folder which is used for small jobs.

In the front office Mrs. Louise Ranheim gathers local news and takes care of the telephone and customers. Louise's husband is a professor at Dana College and she has two children in Blair High. She has been with The Enterprise four years and has become very proficient in her work. She does much of the proof reading on commercial work.

Mrs. Rhoades helps with news writing, rural correspondence editing, and proof reading on Tuesday and Wednesday. She is also at the office on Saturdays when Mrs. Ranheim, who works a five day week, is at home. Mrs. Rhoades does the plant's bookkeeping. Ellen Andrews, a Junior at Blair High, helps her on Saturday in the preparation of tear sheets, making out statements and other details of the work.

About Monday noon of each week, Kenneth shifts over to the work of becoming sports editor and plant photographer. He shares part of the list of advertisers with his Dad and the two of them usually complete their calls for ads by late Tuesday afternoon. Ken also operates the engraving plant, making from six to 18 plates per week. He writes a personal column on the sport page entitled "This and That."

In the midst of the busy whirl of stock buying, supervising in the plant, shooting trouble, estimating jobs and taking care of public relations, Editor Rhoades finds time to write most of

Don King prepares to take another load of pigs back to the Linotypes.

Ellen Andrews, Blair High Junior, seems to take her newspaper work pretty seriously.

the material used on the front page. He also writes a column "What Other Towns Are Doing" which is a 2-column full length feature of unusual news events gleaned from 43 of the state's weeklies. There are a number of Enterprise readers who rely upon this column each week to keep them informed of many of the news facts about the state which do not get into the metropolitan papers. The column takes a lot of time—usually about five hours per week, but it has proven interesting to both writer and reader.

Rhoades also writes an editorial each week. It is his policy to use home-written editorials which relate to some home subject. "Generalized editorials which deal with things outside our circulation area belong to the dailies," he says. Another policy which is seldom violated is the use of re-print pictures from city dailies. All Enterprise pictures are original photos by the Enterprise staff. Except in rare cases no photos are copies from Omaha, Fremont or Lincoln papers.

Editor Rhoades is a Past President and Past Secretary of the Blair Rotary Club. He is also a Past President of the Blair Chamber of Commerce and is currently Chairman of the Board of the Congregational church. Blair has just formed a nine-man Planning Commission, which will be an advisory group to the Blair City Council and he is a member of this commission. For the past 21 years he has been the official U.S. Weather Observer at Blair.

The Enterprise has taken an active part in the bringing about of new street lights in Blair and many other civic improvements. Most recently, it has helped in the securing of funds for the building of a new $250,000 Community Hospital at Blair.

Mr. and Mrs. Rhoades have a number of hobbies. One that they especially enjoy together is traveling and photography. They take both colored slides and movies. Every three-day weekend is used to advantage by taking trips to Duluth, Minn., Estes Park, Ozarks, Mitchell, S. D. (to see the Corn Palace) etc. Pictures taken by the Rhoades have been arranged in various series such as "The Four Seasons of the Year," "Scenic Nebraska," "Wild Flowers," "Villa Louis-Prairie du Chien, Wis.," etc., and are given as programs for the Farm Bureau, 4-H, Rotary, PEO, OES meetings and church groups. Colored slides taken of the Pasadena Rose Bowl Parade were shown, by request, to eleven different public organizations last year.

Music is another hobby of Mr. Rhoades. He at one time had a dance orchestra. He has directed the church choir, taken part in male quartets, but his chief talent is at the piano. He was instrumental in forming plans for a Community Sing at the Blair City Park a few years ago which drew crowds of 2,000 or more every Sunday night during the summer. He played the piano at these sings. His desire is to install an electric organ in his home.

Besides their son Kenneth, Mr. and Mrs. Rhoades have a daughter, Mrs. Dean Morrison (Charlotte) who lives in Burbank, Calif. Kenneth's wife, Virginia, is a home town girl and just prior to their marriage she was chosen the National Farmer's Daughter of America. She also served as the Society Editor of The Enterprise before their marriage. Hilton and Lucille have three grandchildren, Candace Rhoades 3, Mark Rhoades eight months and Virginia Ann Morrison was born October 21 at Burbank.

The Rhoades find it's a busy world. Life is so short and there are yet so many things to do.

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