

The News-Review

Published Daily Except Sunday by the
News-Review Company, Inc.

Entered as second class matter May 7, 1926, at the post office at
Roseburg, Oregon, under act of March 2, 1879.

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Member of the Associated Press, Oregon Newspaper Publishers
Association, the Audit Bureau of Circulations
Represented by WEST-HOLLIDAY CO., INC., office in New York, Chicago,
San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, Denver
Subscription Rates—In Oregon—By Mail—Per Year, \$12.00; six months, \$6.50;
three months, \$3.50. Outside Oregon—By Mail—Per Year, \$13.00; six months,
\$7.00; three months, \$3.75.
By News-Review Carrier—Per Year, \$13.00 (in advance); less than one year,
per month, \$1.25.

CHANGE LIBEL LAW

Coos Bay Times

The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association intends to introduce measures in the legislature to clarify the libel laws of the State. We hope our local representatives will support it. Some background is necessary to explain it.

There are two kinds of libel damages—special damages and general damages. Special damages are those actual losses which a libeled person proves he suffered. He loses a contract, is fired from his job, or some such thing. The law says he should be compensated for his loss by the person perpetrating the libel. We agree with that and would suggest no change.

General damages are those for loss of reputation and are awarded even though there has been no actual monetary loss by the defamed person. Here is where the change is asked. The Newspaper Publishers' Association wants journalists to be free from such damages provided they print a retraction "in substantially as conspicuous a manner as the original publication of the defamatory matter complained of."

This is not an attempt to evade responsibility. It is sought because newspaper operations are so complex that possibility of error is likely to occur in a number of places. Everyone makes mistakes and sometimes the mistakes are serious. The newspapers would like to be able to correct the mistakes without being slapped with an imposing libel suit.

Errors can occur at the source. Hundreds of people call news into the area. It cannot possibly all be checked. Some of the errors are most innocent. We recall a case (not in The Times) when a woman called in the engagement announcement of her daughter. She sent a picture in. It was published. Only because there was an alert pressman was the paper free from suit. He happened to know the person to whom the daughter allegedly was engaged. He was married and had four children and was a pillar of the community. The mother did not know a thing about that aspect of her daughter's swain. The newspaper destroyed some 2,000 copies of its edition that day. It could have meant a disastrous financial suit. There are other places where source errors can easily arise. In explaining the background of a crime or police action, reporters often have telephoned on administrative material from police files or reports. If the police report is wrong, the reporter might be also. And the paper is held responsible.

Errors, of course, are possible in the reporting. As an instance, Time Magazine has scores of researchers working on its weekly edition. Yet, time and again, it makes mistakes.

Errors can easily be made in setting type. The "not" left from the sentence "Joe Doakes is not a liar" could bring a libel suit. (We are mindful of a recent instance when loss of an "e" turned Reed College in to "Red College.")

It is even possible to print libelous material through an error in the stereotyping department. We recall pictures of the Mayor of San Francisco which were transposed so that under the Mayor's picture were outlines referring to him as a dog and under the dog's picture were some remarks about the Mayor.

Certainly any newspaper tries its hardest to prevent such things happening. But sometimes they do and trying to make amends through printing corrections doesn't help much. The irate citizen wants money.

We do not believe that a newspaper ought to be able to malign a person without recourse to the law. But an error and intentional statements are two different things. We pay for our mistakes through the shame of being shown as incompetent at times. We do not think that passage of the law will make any newspapers any less responsible. — u.e.b.

Hal Boyle

Somewhere in the Caribbean — Leaves from a cruising notebook:

People who save their money for years to take a pleasure cruise abroad sometimes suddenly find, once the ship has sailed, they don't know how to enjoy the trip.

"Everything is so strange and new they feel half lost," said Ray Lewis, who has spent 20 years helping such people rediscover their sense of fun.

Lewis is a cruise director. His job is to get passengers to mix, to make them feel at home aboard ship, and to tell them about the islands and countries they are going to visit.

Ray, who has spent the last three and a half years on the Furness Line's Ocean Monarch, has traveled more than a million miles, conducted 300 cruises, including two around the world.

After helping scores of thousands of passengers with their problems, he has come up with the following tips for tourists making their first cruise:

"Don't forget to bring along your sense of adventure. If you expect everything to be like it is at home, why leave home? Make the best of any situation. Don't gripe.

"Avoid drinking too many icy drinks in hot climates.

"Don't phone the captain and tell him he's speeding—or going too slow. It will only wound his feelings if you tell him he doesn't know how to drive a ship.

"Don't get into a cab in a strange country until you've made a firm deal with the driver on the price.

"Don't always expect natives in a foreign country to speak your language. The chances are they haven't had the same advantage you have.

"You'll get a lot more pleasure out of your trip if you'll take the trouble ahead of time to learn something about the countries you are going to visit."

Bad Memories Noted
Lewis is wryly doubtful, however, that many tourists will pay much attention to that last tip. "You'd be surprised," he said,

"how many people come back from a cruise and can't even tell where they've been."

There are many reasons why people take sea voyages—to get a rest or a suntan, to broaden themselves or to duck a subpoena server.

"But all single girls under 23 are looking for romance," said Lewis positively. "So are all the single girls over 23, but few will admit it. I know of at least a dozen marriages that resulted from romances that started on this ship. They've all been good sports about it, too. None blame me afterward."

Ray who wears a close-clipped gray mustache and looks like Hollywood's idea of a handsome stock broker, was born in Brooklyn and began traveling fairly early in life.

Ceylon Rated Tops
"I left high school rather suddenly," he explained "as a result of playfully hitting Quentin Reynolds over the head with a piece of wood. Really it was playful—he was bigger than I was."

In the decades since then his work has taken him to most of the faroff cities and exotic countries of the world. He thinks the two most interesting places on earth to live are probably Ceylon and Mexico.

"Ceylon was the best," he recalled. "It's hard to beat a setup where you can have seven servants for a total of \$27 a month—and you wake up with the choice of taking a swim, golfing, or going elephant hunting."

When I asked Ray if there were any fabulous part of call he had missed in his voyages but still dreamed of seeing, he replied: "Well, I can't say I dream about it exactly—but I've never been to Atlantic City."

But, on the Other Hand!

