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Roger A. Lohmann

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# Survey Associates: Support Group for A Successful Nonprofit Journalistic Enterprise, 1912-1952

Roger A. Lohmann  
West Virginia University

More than a century before the current wave of popularity of nonprofit journalism with enterprises like Propublica and The Texas Tribune, a group associated with the emerging social work profession developed a successful journalistic in the years before World War I. Moreover, *The Survey* replaced a number of smaller, separate and less well-known publications and continued to be published as a national publication for the next half century, until the retirement of its founder and long-time editor. One of the reasons for its success was the membership association of donors that was established early and raised funds for the publication throughout its history.

Survey Associates was an eleemosynary membership organization established in 1912 for the specific purpose of ensuring financial support for *The Survey*, which was the new name taken by an independent publication which sought to provide news coverage of all facets of progressive reform in the United States. *The Survey* was a unique, cooperative journalistic experiment, which for the last fifty of its nearly 70 year history blended subscribers, contributors, editors, sources into a unique journalistic mélange: a unique progressive community of donors, supporters, writers, editors, reviewers and readers. Survey Associates was the readers' wing of this enterprise.

*The Survey* holds a unique position in American social history and the history of American journalism. It was born of the merger of *Charities*, the newsletter of the New York Charity Organization Society, and *The Commons*, which had from its founding in 1896 been the newsletter of the Chicago Commons settlement house, and had evolved into the national news outlet for the American settlement movement. When these two disparate publications, representing two distinct and at times antagonistic, wings of American social work, were merged into a single publication named *Charities and the Commons* in 1905, it signaled nothing less than a rapprochement between the Charity Organization and Settlement House movements out of which the organized social work profession was later to emerge. By 1909, those associated with the combined publication were increasingly dissatisfied with the negative connotations of the term charity and the somewhat obscure connotations of the term commons, and thus began a search for a better name for the masthead. At Paul Kellogg's suggestion, they seized upon the implications of the sweeping community wide perspective of the Pittsburgh Survey, and found the new name they had been looking for.

Kellogg himself had been directly involved in the Pittsburgh Survey, directing the project from 1907 until its completion, and editing the six volumes the study

produced. By this time, he had already been involved in what might be termed “social journalism” for more than 10 years. (Chambers, 35)

There have been other journalistic ventures in social work. NASW regularly publishes *Social Work*, and the Family Service Association of America (lineal descendent of the Charity Organization movement) has published *Social Casework* since 18XX. *Social Service Review* has been published by the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago since 19XX. Today, there are more than 30 academic and professional journals in social work. In general, however, these aspire to be “scientific journals” devoted to advancing knowledge, and tend to look askance at “mere” reportage. Currently, NASW and most professional produce periodical newsletters and what are known in journalistic jargon as “house organs” or “trade rags”. However, there has never been another independently published and cooperatively financed news periodical devoted exclusively to social concerns, and no other publication associated with social work has ever captured the public imagination, or had the broad social influence of the *Survey*.

However, publications explicitly devoted to practice issues and concerns have been far less frequent, and unsuccessful. The effort of NASW to produce a more “practice oriented” periodical with its *Practice Digest* a number of years ago went belly up. While there have been many “insider newsletters” and other limited range publications, the *Survey* stands alone as the only periodical ever to reach the entire professional, official and voluntary social work community (and go well beyond).

The origins of *Survey Associates* were simple and utilitarian. In 1906, Edward T. Devine, launched a campaign to solicit at least one hundred “cooperating subscribers” who would agree to pay \$10/year or more to receive . Over the next six years, the number of such cooperating subscribers had grown to over 600. In 1912, they all became the original voting members of the newly created *Survey Associates*, which was incorporated on October 31, 1912. (Chambers, 43)

## Board of Directors

The newly created organization was a unique commons composed of a periodical audience, with many shared interests and a self-governing membership association. Seldom in the history of American periodical publishing is there to be found anything quite like the participatory journalism of *Survey Associates*, where the audience also supplied many of the articles, board members were selected from among readers and contributors, and the board set an overall climate within which the editorial staff functioned more or less autonomously.

The Articles of Incorporation adopted in 1912 named the first 12 directors and set forth a procedure for electing four new members each year for three year terms. Board members were selected from among those qualifying as Associates. “Other journals had editors and staffs and subscribers but no other enjoyed a base of regular members who not only subscribed but contributed time and money. From

the Associates board members were selected; from the Associates over the years came fruitful suggestions and leads and the submission of major articles.” (Chambers 43-44)

Robert W. DeForest was elected President of Survey Associates, and held that office until his death in 1931. DeForest was also President of the New York Charity Organization Society, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and numerous other organizations. DeForest was directly involved in the American charity organization movement for more than 40 years, and personally recruited both John Glenn as Russell Sage Foundation director and Mary Richmond as director of the RSF Charity Organization department.

Edward T. Devine used the occasion of the creation of Survey Associates to resign his position as editor-in-chief of the Survey. Paul Kellogg was named in his place, and his brother Arthur was named managing editor at the same time. “As the Kelloggs conceived of them, the Associates constituted a core group of independent professional persons who were the expert specialists that society would have to accept and whose talents the nation would have to employ if rational control were to be asserted over the drift of life....Before they could be made into a true community of public servants they would need to learn from each other the essential information and design of each other’s separate professions. It was to the process of mutual education that the Survey was chiefly dedicated. Educators, lawyers and jurists, doctors and nurses, engineers, ministers, public administrators, social scientists, business managers, technologists and social workers -- if these professionals could learn to communicate with each other they might come to share a social vision and acquire a common body of social knowledge and processes by which the nation could be moved down the path of welfare and progress. Through the Survey such a community of elite groups might be forged.” (Chambers 44-45)

In the later years, the board began to come apart. The tale is a sad one.

Although the constitution called for 25 board members, there were no nominations or elections in 1947 or 1948 and by 1949, the board had dwindled to 13 nominal members, not all of whom were still active. During 1949, three remaining board members resigned, including two who were most familiar with publishing and Agnes Brown Leach, who along with Samuel B. Fels was one of the two largest patrons.

In June, 1950, following a suggestion by Adolph Berle, all of the board members except the chair resigned, leaving Kellogg free to secure a new board, or offering to help him liquidate. Kellogg, in his early 70’s and in ailing health, managed to put together a new board. In January, 1952, after Kellogg had suffered a stroke, Joseph Anderson, director of the newly created NASW, was appointed by the board to oversee the liquidation process, and the final issue of this long standing publication appeared in May, 1952.

## Fund Raising

In 1917 Paul Kellogg recruited Ann Reed Brenner, wife of a distinguished artist who had designed the Lincoln Penny, and an assistant with the Pittsburgh Survey a decade earlier, to assist with additional fund raising for the Survey. Several major components of the Survey Associates donor base were threatened simultaneously after the War. Although an important source of funds through their personal donations, the Survey Associates board was never particularly active in raising additional funds. Composed largely of prominent figures in social welfare with a few wealthy philanthropists, board members were, in Kellogg's view not very helpful in fund raising. "It all came down on the staff and repeatedly we did not know on Mondays where the money for printing bills and payrolls were coming from." (Chambers, 80-81)

Further, the annual Russell Sage Foundation grant was to be discontinued. From its founding in 1907 through the end of World War I, the Russell Sage Foundation had provided an annual grant to Survey Associates to subsidize publication of the Survey. In the early 1920's, however, the Foundation served notice to many of its grantees, including Survey Associates, that it would be gradually reducing its subsidy over a four year period.

Moreover, some large contributors had been scared away over the decade by the militant editorial advocacy of "social reconstruction" and industrial relations adopted by the Survey. The survey also found itself the victim of shifting philanthropic fashions. Formerly stalwart contributors and fund-raisers turned to other causes in this period. (Chambers, 81)

Ms. Brenner and a board member Agnes Brown Leach moved into the breach and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for *The Survey* over the next several decades. Brenner continued her association as a fund raiser for the publication for more than 25 years. (Chambers 81-82)

The fund raising strategy initiated after the War was simple and effective:

1. Increase the number of Survey Associates cooperating members.
2. Persuade established patrons to increase the size of their gifts each year.
3. Create a "Founders' Fund" to recognize donations larger than \$1,000
4. Enlarge board membership to include more large donors. (Chambers 82)

Brenner and Leach were quite successful. By 1922, when the Russell Sage funding was discontinued, membership contributions were on the order of \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year and the Founders' Fund held guarantees of an additional \$50,000 a year through 1926. Survey Associates membership exceeded 2,000 in 1929.

The publication grew with the nation in the 1920's. It had actually lost ground during the War from its pre-war high of 20,000 subscribers. By 1925, after the *Survey Graphic* and *Survey Midmonthly*, combined mail circulation for the two

publications exceeded 26,000 and another 4,000 copies were regularly sold on newsstands. (Chambers, 118) However, with the depression, circulation began to decline and revenues dropped off sharply after 1932-33. (Chambers, 119)

## Implications for Practice

There are a number of important lessons for contemporary practice which can be drawn from the Survey Associates scenario.

First, Survey Associates is an interesting and lively example of the application of concepts of participation and consumer/client involvement which are still current today. The idea of an association which breaks down hard and fast distinctions news presenters and their audiences, as well as between patrons, contributors, and subscribers is still an interesting and provocative one. As much as Hull House or Henry Street Settlements, Survey Associates constitutes an important and enduring monument to the pioneering role of social work in developing and encouraging models of organizational democracy.

Second, Survey Associates also demonstrates an ongoing and disturbing tendency of social work practice. In this, as in a number of other areas, social work was an important pioneer and innovator, only to neglect its discoveries until they are adopted by others. While the Survey publications were important pioneers in the journalistic investigation of social problems in the U.S., the market for social problems journalism was eventually dissipated or taken over by the journals of opinion like the New Republic and the Nation, and narrower newsletters like I.F. Stone's Weekly. When general circulation newspapers like the Minneapolis Star and Tribune rediscovered poverty and other social problems in the 1960's, no general social work periodical of this type reemerged. Social work had, by then, put most of its professional eggs in the direct service basket, and investigative journalism was left to others. In the 1960's, it was left for sociological publications, like Society, and general social science publications like Social Policy, to assume virtual hegemony of the social problems market, and for social work to adopt its current role of "consumer" of journalistic and scientific output.

Thirdly, the case of Survey Associates also illustrates in a negative way the familiar problem of leadership succession. Chambers documents the identification of at least two "heirs apparent" who were at one time or another being groomed for the eventual editorship of the Survey publications. Both eventually left the publication, and in the end we are confronted with the sad spectacle of an aged and ailing Paul Kellogg and an unenthusiastic and unimaginative board unable to identify a successor with the vigor and vision needed to update and reinvigorate the Survey. By the late 1940's, the Survey like its Progressive editor looked old, tired, out-of-date and uninteresting. Yet there are plenty of stories of periodicals in similar straits turned over to new editors, reinvigorated and given a new lease on life. Unfortunately, that didn't happen in this case.

Fourthly, in the case of Survey Associates and the Survey Publications, we confront a real, up-close look at the much-remarked upon decline of interest in

social problems in American society during the 1950's, and we must ask ourselves whether, indeed, we wish to go with the conventional macrosocial explanations that social problems were simply out of step with the "tenor of the times." Such zeitgeist explanations are comforting in their seeming justifications of the inaction of the period. From a practical standpoint, however, they fail to provide any convincing explanations as to why the times were as they were or why there is so little evidence in this period of the kinds of heroic struggles against complacency one finds in earlier periods.

From a social action standpoint, an alternative would be to suggest that there were social problems aplenty during the fifties. A broad range of important community sociological and anthropological and psychological studies from the period make that abundantly clear. (C.f., What was missing in social work was an editorial voice able to locate the audience of the "hard core" socially oriented and and editorial vision able to define stories to be covered and a suitable editorial outlet for writers interested in covering them. The inability of Survey Associates to adequately solve the problem of editorial succession goes a long way to explaining that void.

Finally, from a marketing perspective the continuing gap in editorial voice and audience left by the demise of *The Survey* says a great deal about social work's contemporary view of its place in modern society. As a progressive profession, with a keen sense of democracy and the importance of social problems to the daily lives of ordinary citizens, early social workers felt a strong interest in keeping one another informed about their activities, and sharing their "front line" information with others of similar outlook and sympathies. Social problems journalism, from this vantage point, was one of the tools in an overall repertory of democratic reform and social improvement -- useful for coordination, coalition building and numerous other practical applications.

For nearly four decades, *The Survey* and *Survey Graphic* served this progressive vision. Indeed, they appear to have served it long after the rest of social work turned to other pursuits (Lubove, 1970). In their absence, we find a social work profession deliberately committed to its role as an "applied science" consumer of the information of other, somehow more basic social sciences, and seemingly devoid of continued interest in a broader climate of informed public opinion on social problems. Lack of proper appreciation of the social work profession seems to be the single area in which democratic public opinion matters to social work today.

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