THE "Progressive Revolt," that nation-wide reaction of the early 1900's against the complacency of the "Gilded Age," reached even unto Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. The forces of Reform, heretofore waging an unequal struggle with the various political "machines" in the city and the state, hoped for an end to the plundering of tax-payers, the trifling with public interests, and the inability of the citizenry to lodge effective protests. This was particularly true in "corrupt and contented" Philadelphia, where good government elements for two decades had fought ballot-box stuffers, official corruption, and criminal extravagance on the part of the municipal authorities.¹

The burgeoning optimism for a better day owed much to the labors of Thomas B. Wanamaker and Edwin A. Van Valkenburg, proprietor and editor respectively of the Philadelphia North American. Reform had seldom received a "good press" in Philadelphia. But with Wanamaker's purchase of the North American from Clayton McMichael in February, 1899, this situation was partially corrected. The "Old North" was transferred into one of the nation's more effective and widely circulated "progressive dailies."

Neither Wanamaker nor Van Valkenburg knew very much about conducting a metropolitan journal, but this lack was offset by the former's adequate purse and the latter's energy, zeal, contacts, and experience in practical politics. The effectiveness of

the many *North American* crusades that followed, however, was largely due to Van Valkenburg's vigorous and ingenious editorship. In an age when personal journalism was largely a thing of the past, Van Valkenburg made of the paper a generally recognized vehicle for his own views, and the *North American* came to be identified rather with Van Valkenburg, the editor, than with Wanamaker, its owner.  

Although he was not a native Philadelphian, the editor's ancestral roots were deep in Pennsylvania soil. He was born in 1869, in Tioga County, of Dutch and Connecticut Yankee stock, and thus he perhaps came naturally by the stubborn independence which he later displayed as an editor. He received his early schooling in the Wellsboro public schools, and after a brief term at Cornell University, which he was compelled to discontinue because of poor health, he returned to Wellsboro to engage in various occupational pursuits—store keeper, shoe clerk, and surveyor for the New York Central Railroad. Eventually, he joined his brother-in-law, William L. Shearer, in the purchase and operation of the Wellsboro *Republican Advocate*, a venture which launched him on a political career of exceeding interest and excitement, terminating only with his death in 1932.

In view of his later anti-machine reputation, it is ironic that Van Valkenburg's first important role in Pennsylvania politics came as a member of the organization controlled by Matthew S. Quay. "Van's" yeoman efforts for the Republican tickets in Tioga County in the 1890's won the attention of Quay, who was always eager to bind promising young politicos to his organization, and the young up-country journalist was rewarded by the post of Clerk of the House Committee on Appropriations at Harrisburg in 1894. This was a political appointment pure and simple, but Van Valkenburg appears to have regarded his responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. He tried conscientiously to serve the legislative committee in the interests of honesty and economy.

*The general impression that it was John Wanamaker who purchased the North American in 1899 is erroneous. No doubt the merchant prince approved of his son's acquisition, but James S. Benn, who knew both Wanamakers, states positively that it was the younger Wanamaker who was the actual owner. Tom Wanamaker apparently used the family's "open account," to which, as a member of the Wanamaker firm, he had access. This probably accounts for the impression that the North American was purchased by John Wanamaker. James S. Benn to the writer, January 9, 1951.*
This phenomenon must have been a refreshing, if not disturbing, spectacle to Pennsylvania legislators of the 'nineties. He occupied a key post, and he was able to observe the inner workings of the state government, particularly its financial operations. As a promising cog in the Quay Machine, Van Valkenburg became thoroughly schooled in the intricate methods of a tightly knit and disciplined political organization. This was to serve him well when he later fired his innumerable editorial blasts at "Quayism" in Pennsylvania politics.

Although always a Republican in his political affiliations, Van Valkenburg was a consistent rebel. He abhorred "bosses" and "machines," and he was soon to become disillusioned with Quay. In economic matters a conservative, he first seceded from the regular Republican organization in 1895, when he gagged at Senator Donald Cameron's "silver heresy." Although Quay withheld organization support from Cameron, Van Valkenburg aligned himself with ex-Postmaster General John Wanamaker, who headed a dissident faction and who had ambitions to succeed Cameron at Washington. Wanamaker employed Van Valkenburg and A. K. McClure as intermediaries between Quay and himself. Van Valkenburg, already an incipient insurgent, broke with his erstwhile patron and went over to the Wanamaker camp.

In the subsequent Quay-Wanamaker contest for control of Republicanism in Pennsylvania, Van Valkenburg served as field marshal for the anti-Quay faction. Possessing a complete knowledge of Quay's methods, he fought fire with fire. He organized and led the "Committee of Seventy-Six," a group of Republican legislators who pledged themselves to unrelenting opposition to Quay during the 1896 session of the General Assembly. Two years later Wanamaker toured Pennsylvania from Philadelphia to Erie, flaying Quay in a series of able speeches. Contemporaries in a

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a For an account of Van Valkenburg's part in this see, E. J. Stackpole, Behind the Scenes With a Newspaper Man (Philadelphia, 1927), 265 ff. McClure gives his version in his Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1905), II, 598-599.

b Van Valkenburg was indicted in 1897, on charges of attempted bribery of legislators in the interest of Wanamaker's senatorial candidacy of 1896. The trial never came off, and Wanamakerites declared that it was quashed by an alarmed Quay who feared that it would disclose that which were better left undisclosed. See the New York World, November 18, 1897, and Stackpole, op. cit., 258 ff.
position to know agree that the “merchant-prince” employed Van Valkenburg’s polemical talents in the composition of these speeches, and their content and style resemble later editorial assaults in North American columns against “Quayism.” The “Machine’s” success in the 1898 elections persuaded Wanamaker to retire from active office-seeking himself, but he passed the torch of reform to his eldest son, Thomas, who bought a moribund North American and dedicated it to an unrelenting fight against Quay and all his works. A keen observer, Tom Wanamaker saw in Van Valkenburg a kindred spirit, and he persuaded the erstwhile Quay cohort to join him in the operation of the once respected and influential newspaper.

Philadelphians awoke in 1899 to the realization that the “Old N.A.” had taken a new lease on life. Under its preceding owner, Clayton McMichael, the paper had exhibited an intellectual rigor mortis, still operating on the momentum provided by the talents and energy of its longtime editor and owner, Morton McMichael. In the final stages of retrogression, limping along with a circulation barely approaching five thousand, the journal required either a transfusion of new blood or a decent interment. Probably few Philadelphians would have been disturbed had its owners chosen the latter.

The change in ownership was not immediately apparent. In January, 1899, the North American was engaged in an editorial defense of Quay following his indictment for complicity in the State Treasury scandal of that year, possibly because Clayton McMichael owed his current position as City Treasurer of Philadelphia to the Quay Machine. On January 26, 1899, the paper announced the dissolution of the firm of “Clayton McMichael & Sons,” publishers of the North American, and reported that the paper had been sold to a New York syndicate. Within a fortnight the once fervent Quay advocate was transformed into a militant anti-Quay sheet, a startling reversal of policy. It required no great discernment to recognize that the Wanamaker forces had captured one of Quay’s journalistic batteries.

Van Valkenburg’s own account of this arrangement is found in his letter to E. J. Stackpole, cited in Stackpole, op. cit., 271-272.


Stackpole, op. cit., 271.
As a commercial proposition the *North American* held little promise of profitable return. Tom Wanamaker paid $175,000 for the enterprise, which was housed in a narrow six-story red brick building at Seventh and Chestnut, a structure which Winifred Black later described as "an eyesore, even for Philadelphia." It had, however, several recognized attractions. Among its more tangible assets was its Associated Press franchise. Of perhaps greater importance was its known reputation as a solid, respectable journal with long-standing Republican antecedents. Not the least of its inducements was that its purchase by Wanamaker would deprive Quay of a respected, if feeble, editorial supporter.

The new owner moved immediately to make "a splash in Philadelphia journalism." Wanamaker's interest in the paper was more than a mere desire to further his father's political aspirations. Reform in Philadelphia could be achieved only by public opinion, which needed to be aroused and prodded. This was, he believed, properly the function of the press, and the *North American* was destined to be the journalistic leader in this crusade. But first it had to have readers. Once read, its message of reform could be circulated. Wanamaker, therefore, enlisted the aid of his close friend, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., in the task of refurbishing the editorial staff. To replace the "few underpaid and sleepy reporters" he imported Bennett-trained newsmen from New York. Immediate financial profit was secondary. Sounding the tocsin for good government, for honesty in commercial affairs, for active citizen participation in public enterprises, and blasting away at every opportunity at the Quay-dominated Republican machine, the *North American* wrought a minor revolution in Quaker-city journalism. The transplanted New Yorkers saw to that, and in their zeal injected a "yellow" tint to the once stodgy columns of the "N.A." Among the importees who galvanized the journal into a new vigor were Samuel S. Chamberlain, a Hearst-trained managing editor; Winifred Black, one of the early "sob-sisters"; Charles Nelan and Walt McDougall, cartoonists who drew with satirical pens; James S. Benn, who, as city

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8 An interesting but not always reliable picture of life on the staff during this transition period is Walt McDougall's *This Is the Life!* (New York, 1926), 264 ff. See also Henry R. Whitcraft's "Fifty Years of Journalism in Philadelphia," *The Beehive*, XXV (July, 1934).
editor, maintained some discipline among this individualistic crew; Arthur McEwan, who brought a West Coast breeziness to the editorial page; and many other energetic journeyman writers and reporters.

Van Valkenburg's place in this scheme of things was at first unofficial. From the beginning he functioned as circulation manager, but it was soon evident that his concept of this responsibility took him into every nook and corner of the business. Although inexperienced in the details of metropolitan journalism, "Van," or "E.A.V.,” as he was generally known, obtained a liberal education from the New Yorkers. Ere long, Van Valkenburg acquired the sobriquet of "The Chief," as Wanamaker turned over to him the almost complete direction of the paper.

Back of every great enterprise of moment is to be found the self-dedication and zeal of a consecrated personality. For the "New North American" it was Van Valkenburg. "It was his
leadership and that alone,” declared his long-time city editor, James S. Benn, “which was responsible for the North American’s remarkable career.” A man who moved easily among politicians, business men, liberals, conservatives, party workers, reformers, independents, and people of all classes, Van Valkenburg remained a self-described “progressive conservative.” He was a congenital insurgent and sentimentalist, yet his career was one of hard-headed realism. He was more than a superficial thinker, yet he was hardly introspective enough to be called an intellectual. He was a man of action, nervous and impatient respecting the complacency and civic inertia of the upper class circles which, he believed, should lead the community. His abhorrence of political dictation and his antipathy for a subservient press brought him into almost incessant conflict with his party’s leadership in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Such idiosyncrasies made him an independent in politics. His personal integrity, natural talent for journalistic rhetoric, profound knowledge of human nature, and Dutch stubbornness enabled him to become within a few years what an experienced contemporary called “the most efficient publisher and editor in America.”

He impressed all with his energy, acumen, foresight, and zeal. Benn describes him as “a veritable steam engine for energy,” a trait which he radiated to his associates. “I have had contact with some pretty shrewd ones,” reported Henry R. Whitcraft, “but Van had them all backed off the board.” Although E. J. Stackpole, publisher for many years of the Harrisburg Telegraph, was “not always in sympathy with the Van Valkenburg policies,” he detected “beneath all ‘Van’s’ appearance of fierceness . . . a heart full of kindness and real love for his fellow man.” Walt McDougall, not easily awed by persons of elevated rank and position, considered Van Valkenburg “the only editor who was ever able to discern an idea pictorially,” a characteristic which must have endeared him to cartoonist McDougall. Lincoln Steffens has left us a picture of Van Valkenburg the optimist. “He and he alone in his city seemed to have some hope of beating the system there [Philadelphia],” and Theodore Roosevelt once addressed

9 Letter to writer, January 15, 1951.
10 McDougall, op. cit., 265.
him as "the man who is now on the whole the most useful American citizen now alive."\textsuperscript{12}

Naturally, such a positive personality generated enmity. Among his foes were counted Matthew S. Quay, Boies Penrose, Samuel W. Pennypacker, James McNichol, Israel Durham, John K. Tener, and, in the words of an admirer, "those who didn't 'play fair' either in business or politics."\textsuperscript{13} Occasionally he broke with political friends, like Gifford Pinchot. Once the North American listed the various categories of opposition to its policies as:

All who benefit through intrenched evils in politics... every crooked contractor, every protected wrong-doer, every derelict or dishonest public official, every member or hangeron of the organization which they control. One notorious Mayor of Philadelphia made it a condition for holding appointive office under him that the incumbent should work to exterminate the North American. . . .

Finally... there is the citizen of sodden respectability, who earned for Philadelphia the description, "corrupt and contented."\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, as the reputation and circulation of the North American spread, the name of its editor became known. Senator Albert Beveridge, of Indiana, set out to prove to Van Valkenburg the scope of his reputation by addressing a letter to him from Indianapolis: "Van, Philadelphia." The missive was delivered, according to an associate, "without the loss of an hour." A Philadelphia Press poll in 1915 found Van Valkenburg ranked as a leading Pennsylvanian with Governor Martin G. Brumbaugh, Edward Bok, John Wanamaker, and Dr. Russell Conwell.\textsuperscript{15}

It would require perhaps several volumes to do justice to Van Valkenburg's editorial crusades during this interesting era. It is not enough to cite the North American as "a journal of reform." It was the journal of reform, especially in Philadelphia. Each campaign followed a familiar pattern—revelation, denunciation, and exhortation. In most cases the editorial fulminations produced little immediate improvement, but their very persistency un-

\textsuperscript{12} Cited in New York Times, November 27, 1932.
\textsuperscript{13} Arthur Joyce, "E. A. Van Valkenburg Leaves the North American," Editor & Publisher, November 15, 1924.
\textsuperscript{14} North American, November 18, 1908.
\textsuperscript{15} Editor & Publisher, July 3, 1915.
doubtlessly shook the fortresses of intrenched official corruption, pricking the complacency of Quaker City respectability, and in a few instances moving the citizenry to positive action. Despite the covert antagonism of many conservative Philadelphians, who distrusted *North American* sensationalism, the paper gained circulation and reputation, and consequently soon became profitable.

Van Valkenburg's reform strategy was aided by the extent of the abuses prevailing and often by the very arrogance of the "interests" which his paper assailed. In May, 1900, for example, the *North American* featured a *verbatim* transcript of an interview between John Wanamaker and certain representatives of the Ashbridge mayoralty administration, revealing that the Mayor's intermediaries had threatened blackmail against Wanamaker should the newspaper's exposes continue. At about the same time the journal publicized the "Oleo Scandal," wherein wholesalers and corrupt state inspectors conspired to mulct Pennsylvania dairy farmers of millions of dollars each year. The journal's disclosure of the unsavory details of a transaction of 1901, whereby certain favored private utility interests were to obtain almost *gratis* a street railway franchise, aroused an ineffectual public protest; but a more successful effort to halt a "stupendous steal" of the city-owned gas works in 1905 was credited by many Philadelphians to the editorial cries of alarm in the *North American's* columns.

Throughout its first five years of energetic support of reform in local and state politics, Van Valkenburg's *North American* refused to let up in its attacks on "Quayism." When the party leader died in May, 1904, the usual fulsome newspaper eulogy was missing from its pages. Van Valkenburg's considered evaluation was that "a shadow has passed from Pennsylvania." Nor was any less stringent criticism spared Quay's successor, Boies Penrose. Described during his lifetime as a liar, a corruptionist, a welcher, a libertine, and "a tory of the most reactionary type," Penrose would become after his death, the *North American* predicted, "only an unwholesome memory."

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17 *North American*, April 7, May 7, June 26, 1900.
15 *Ibid.*, June 14, 1901; April 19, 1905.
Quay and all his works led the Republican *North American* to support William H. Berry, the Democratic nominee for the State Treasurership in 1905, and when the Democrats elected their candidate to this post, the *North American* accepted and printed the numerous messages of congratulation which its editor had received.\(^2\)

Less violent, perhaps, but none the less intense was the paper's tilts with Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker. Few men in public life evoked so great a display of satire, sarcasm, and ridicule in *North American* pages as the hapless Pennypacker. The belief that Pennypacker had been catapulted into the governorship by Quay, his distant kinsman, rendered him *persona non grata* to Van Valkenburg, and the governor did not help himself by his zealous support of the Salus-Grady bill, more familiarly known as the "Press Muzzler bill."\(^2\)\(^2\) The feud between editor and governor continued throughout the latter's administration and was climaxed by the "Capitol Graft Scandal" exposures in 1906. Many of the sordid details of this unhappy affair had been uncovered by *North American* reporters, and although the editor did not accuse Pennypacker of dishonesty, he assailed him for criminal neglect and stupidity.\(^2\)\(^3\) The acrimonious exchanges between Van Valkenburg and Pennypacker perhaps diverted *North American* readers and unquestionably gained both circulation and fame for the paper.

The vehement attacks on the Republican organization in Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia made for some confusion as to Van Valkenburg's political persuasion. In a signed editorial, a rarity in *North American* columns, Van Valkenburg explained that the journal's Republicanism "is of that old fashioned kind which finds its foundation in a deep veneration for the principles of the Declaration of Independence." He denounced what he termed, "Commercialized Republicanism."\(^2\)\(^4\) This heterodoxy frequently

\(^{21}\) Among those who attributed the result to the *North American*'s efforts were ex-Governor William A. Stone, an erstwhile Quay auxiliary, and Lincoln Steffens. See *ibid.*, November 10, 1905.

\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*, May 13 through May 23, 1903. This measure was aimed at all newspapers in general, but there is little doubt that the *North American* was its immediate target. Pennypacker in later years could refer to the paper only as "a worthless sheet published in Philadelphia." Samuel W. Pennypacker, *Autobiography of a Pennsylvanian* (Philadelphia, 1918), 145-146.

\(^{23}\) *North American*, October 1, 1906.

\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*, May 27, 1902.
led him to support independents, at times Democrats, and always Reformers. The mayoralty campaign of Rudolph Blankenburg in 1910 drew the *North American’s* enthusiastic support, and the Blankenburg election constituted one of the few political triumphs for Reform in Philadelphia city politics.\(^{25}\)

In contrast to Van Valkenburg’s hostility to the state and local Republican organization was his consistent support of the party’s national ticket. Perhaps the keynote to his editorial policy was his devotion to Theodore Roosevelt and the “Square Deal,” a point of view which made the national scene paramount in his thinking. His relations with “T.R.” were particularly intimate,\(^ {26}\) and the *North American* reflected Rooseveltian policies, sometimes anticipating them, always defending them. The paper was one of the few metropolitan journals to defend the President’s course in the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902. It defended his “Big Stick” policy in foreign affairs, particularly his aggressive actions in Panama. Although editorially non-committal on the question of a third term for Roosevelt in 1908, Van Valkenburg supported William Howard Taft as the man “to perpetuate and perfect” Roosevelt’s progressivism.\(^ {27}\) When the break came between Roosevelt and Taft in 1911, the *North American* became one of the most vehement anti-Taft organs.

In the three-cornered Republican fight for the Presidential nomination in 1912, Van Valkenburg appears to have flirted temporarily with the forces backing Senator Robert M. La Follette, of Wisconsin.\(^ {28}\) Nevertheless, the Philadelphia editor was instrumental in swinging the support of the Pennsylvania delegation to the Republican National Convention to Theodore Roosevelt,\(^ {29}\) and

\(^{25}\) For much of the information regarding the behind-the-scenes political activity which Van Valkenburg carried on in the 1910-1916 period I am indebted to Mr. Donald W. Disbrow, of the Beaver College faculty, who is currently making a study of the Progressive Movement in Philadelphia for those years. Van Valkenburg later broke with Mayor Blankenburg, writes Mr. Disbrow, because the latter decided to work with certain political and commercial circles which the *North American* had unsparingly denounced.

\(^{26}\) Van Valkenburg was called upon by every Republican President from Roosevelt to Herbert Hoover for advice and counsel.

\(^{27}\) Donald W. Disbrow has called my attention to some Van Valkenburg correspondence in the Theodore Roosevelt Papers filed in the Harvard College Widener Library which indicate that E.A.V. was for Taft as early as 1907, before Roosevelt publicly supported him.


following the emergence of the Progressive Party’s “Bull Moose” ticket, he became a leader of “our small, ardent, and widely frowned-on Roosevelt group in Philadelphia.”

So bitterly anti-Taft did Van Valkenburg make the North American that John Wanamaker, whose personal friendship with the President moved him to protest, withdrew his regular full-page advertisement from its pages for a three-week period. Although most of his editorial strictures were reserved for Taft, Woodrow Wilson received a number of sharp thrusts. Van Valkenburg had corresponded with the New Jersey Governor, and had praised him in North American columns. But now the Democratic nominee was denounced as “a lifelong follower of reactionary policies . . . a devotee of states’ rights and other relics of toryism.”

Van Valkenburg’s disappointment at Roosevelt’s failure in 1912 was mitigated somewhat by the Progressive Party’s capture of Pennsylvania’s electoral vote, and he expressed the conviction that it presaged the birth of a “new party” in the nation. He still had hope that Roosevelt would lead a united Republican Party to victory, and, although he dutifully supported Charles Evans Hughes in 1916, he busied himself rounding up support for Roosevelt for the 1920 campaign. Roosevelt’s death in 1919 was a blow to Van Valkenburg and he turned in 1920 to support General Leonard Wood for the Presidency. In the Harding-Cox campaign of that year, Van Valkenburg “made the pilgrimage to Marion” to interview the Republican nominee, but his paper never extended Harding other than negative support.

Van Valkenburg’s role as a reform editor was on the wane with

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31 Gibbons, op. cit., II, 239-240. Wanamaker withdrew his “ad” in objection to a Herbert Johnson cartoon which emphasized Taft’s ample girth while referring to his “broad statesmanlike views.” See North American, February 16, 1912.

32 In a statement to the writer (interview of October 20, 1951), James S. Benn states that Wilson sent an intermediary to Van Valkenburg sounding him out as a possible member of the Wilson Cabinet. This overture, which came after Wilson’s election, Van Valkenburg refused to consider.

33 Van Valkenburg appears to have felt primary loyalty to the “Bull Moosers” of 1912, and not particularly to the Republican party. The presence of Penrose and Joseph R. Grundy at the head of the state organization alienated him from the Pennsylvania party. In 1916, he wrote to Roosevelt that “convincing arguments do not come readily to mind” for support of Hughes. See Mowry, op. cit., 360-361.
the passing of Theodore Roosevelt. Only La Follette and Wilson remained as outstanding "progressives," but in Van Valkenburg's eyes neither measured up to the high standard set by "T.R." La Follette had never appreciated Roosevelt, which damned him in Van Valkenburg's view. Wilson was first of all a Democrat, and after experiencing mounting distrust respecting Wilsonian neutrality policies, the North American editor broke completely with the Democratic President when Wilson refused to permit Roosevelt to lead a volunteer division to France in 1917. Finally, the reform crusades had about run their course in Philadelphia. To a correspondent in 1918, Van Valkenburg wrote that there were no real issues in Pennsylvania worth fighting for. Increasing "internal" troubles on the North American occupied his attention, and both the editor and the paper fell in with the drift toward "normalcy" of the postwar years. By 1924, the journal was applauding Coolidge economy and had become only one more of a number of conservative journalistic spokesmen in Philadelphia. The North American's occasional lapses into the language of Progressivism after 1920 were neither sufficiently frequent nor sustained to win new or keep old progressive friends.

Any examination of Van Valkenburg and the North American must include some notice of the editor's journalistic enterprise and ingenuity. While the New York element predominated the paper earned a reputation as a "yellow" and generally unreliable sheet. After Van Valkenburg assumed full charge, much of the sensationalism was toned down, although North American columns still featured the type of news presentation and writing that made for popular appeal. Van Valkenburg was cognizant of the charge of "yellowness," and in a counter-indictment he paid his respects to what he called "drab journalism."

In our generation every newspaper that cannot be throttled, nor bribed, nor cowed and persists in a stubborn policy of truth telling catches the "yellow" taunt.

11North American pro-Ally policy won it the warm commendation of Ambassador Cecil Spring-Rice. See Spring-Rice to Van Valkenburg, June 11, 1915, and James M. Beck to Van Valkenburg, August 9, 1916, Van Valkenburg Papers (in possession of his daughter, Mrs. C. E. Bennett, of Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, who has kindly made them available to the writer).


Yellow journalism, at its worst, lied to make a quick dying sensation about one or a few individuals. Drab journalism lies to 90,000,000 of right-minded Americans daily. . . . All the lying [is] done under the pretty, profitable mask of the conservative, constitution loving, court reverencing Pharisee. . . .

There is a thing vastly worse than the worst of "yellow journalism." It is the drab newspaper, across the front page of which public opinion should stamp the stigma of the leper, "Unclean! Unclean!"

Yellow or not, North American circulation climbed. From a claimed circulation of 15,000 in 1900, the figure rose to 160,000 copies daily by 1903. In the week following the fatal wounding of President William McKinley in September, 1901, it averaged 240,000 copies a day, reaching a peak of 317,761 on September 7th. War news from Europe was a probable factor in increasing the daily average circulation to 183,000 in 1915, but the paper was soon to begin a steady decline to 154,000 in 1918; and, when the North American ceased publication in 1924, it had but 135,000 copies sold each day.

Meanwhile, the ancient structure in which the McMichael-owned daily had been housed was woefully inadequate for an enterprise in keeping with the grandiose ambitions of Wanamaker and Van Valkenburg. In March, 1901, the paper moved to the just recently erected "New North American Building" at Broad and Sansom Streets, an edifice which was, for a time, Philadelphia's tallest skyscraper.

Six months later the new proprietors broke another North American tradition with the appearance of a Sunday edition, despite the objections of John Wanamaker, who offered to purchase the paper to prevent this development. A number of "extra-curricular" exploits gained fame, circulation, and revenue.

Special trains to distribute editions in up-state counties as well as

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37 North American, January 11, 1912.
38 Ayers' Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals for the years named.
39 North American, September 11, 16, 1901. Julian Hawthorne, son of the renowned Nathaniel, participated in the "death watch" at Buffalo and dispatched able and lengthy stories to the paper.
40 See Ayers', op. cit., for the dates indicated, and Editor & Publisher, April 3, 1915.
41 The building is now "121 South Broad."
in Southern New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland enabled the North American to compete with New York journals. A “free employment bureau,” campaigns for funds to finance “outings” for underprivileged youngsters, the “North American Sanatorium” at Atlantic City for the treatment of tuberculosis, and charity drives of all kinds, featured its pages. Perhaps of greatest and most enduring significance was Van Valkenburg’s editorial leadership in promoting in 1907 the inauguration of the first sale of Christmas Seals to combat the “White Plague.”

In May, 1904, the North American ventured to inquire of its readers their opinion as to the paper’s contribution to Philadelphia and their suggestions as to future policy. The answers received and printed ranged from the highly complimentary to the severely critical. Most correspondents agreed that the journal was enterprising, influential, sincere, and, above all, interesting. Those of conservative bent chided it for its sensationalism and its too frequent disrespect for constituted authority. Many welcomed its crusades for good government and its efforts to create an enlightened and civic conscious citizenry.

Van Valkenburg would have been among the first to attribute the success of the North American to its able staff of writers, cartoonists, reporters, and crusaders. The turnover was fairly rapid, since Van Valkenburg set a fast pace. He was intolerant of sloth and carelessness. Following the departure of the New York contingent in the early 1900’s, the personnel remained relatively stable, particularly in the upper echelons. The editor’s chief lieutenants were James S. Benn, Hugh Sutherland, John C. Eckel, and Frederick B. Forbes. Other “staffers” who contributed much were Carl Sprout, Leigh Mitchell Hodges, Walter Darlington, Robert Johnson, Hugh Eames, H. M. “Hy” Andrews, William T. Ellis, James “Jimmy” Isaminger, Charles N. Christman, Walter Linn, Arthur Joyce, Henry R. Whitcraft, Dean Hoffman, Harry Young, Einar Barfod, and Paul Mc. Warner. Judge James Gay Gordon, the North American solicitor for many years, penned occasional editorials. The distaff portion of the editorial laborers in-

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43 Leigh Mitchell Hodges, “The Seal Against Fate,” Reader’s Digest (December, 1936), 19-22; North American, December 11, 1907.
44 Ibid., May 28 1904. Lincoln Steffens once wired Van Valkenburg (ibid., November 9, 1905): “You have shown that when the press represents the public, the government must.”
cluded Janet H. Stewart,\textsuperscript{45} Rose M. Weston, and perhaps the best-known and most widely read writer on the entire staff, Mrs. Ann B. Scott. Mrs. Scott’s page, “The Market Basket,” discussed culinary arts and brought to the paper “more food advertising than any other morning newspaper in Philadelphia during the past year.”\textsuperscript{46}

In theory, Tom Wanamaker was Van Valkenburg’s superior. Yet, the proprietor was wise enough to recognize his editor’s rare talents, and he appears to have left Van Valkenburg considerable freedom of action. In practice, the \textit{North American} was conducted as a partnership,\textsuperscript{47} and Wanamaker labored to bring Philadelphia the best in journalism which his purse and Van Valkenburg’s ingenuity could provide. Following Wanamaker’s death in March, 1908, the paper lost much of its momentum, since his heirs displayed less interest in and accord with its notable crusades for reform.\textsuperscript{48}

By the early ’twenties Van Valkenburg appears to have wearied in his crusades which no longer interested a public increasingly bound up in the attractions of “normalcy.” He failed to find common ground for action with the Wanamaker heirs, who seemed to consider the paper a commercial liability and who were uninterested in its editorial policies. “None but a superman could have juggled a six million dollar business proposition on a financial shoestring as you have done since T.B. [Wanamaker] went,” his brother-in-law wrote in 1921. A few months later the editor was writing to his daughter, “Though my courage is strong and

\textsuperscript{45} Miss Stewart was one of the first woman assistant managing editors in America. See Philip Schuyler, “Woman Executive Discusses Ideal Daily,” \textit{Editor & Publisher}, October 18, 1924.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, September 5, 1914. An office legend (probably authentic) has it that Van Valkenburg stumbled into a North Philadelphia restaurant operated by Mrs. Scott, and, impressed by the quality of the food served, interviewed her and hired her to conduct “The Market Basket.” Whether true or not, E.A.V. habitually made snap decisions that had profitable consequences.

\textsuperscript{47} Van Valkenburg owned some stock in the “North American Company.” He might have had more, but he refused to borrow the necessary capital, since he wished to avoid being obligated to anyone whom he might later have to criticize editorially.

\textsuperscript{48} In his \textit{This Is the Life!} (op. cit.) Walt McDougall paints a less than complimentary picture of Tom Wanamaker and his purposes. (See pp. 271-272, 276). This testimony is at variance with that stated to the writer by James S. Benn, Sr., who knew and worked closely with both Wanamaker and Van Valkenburg.
my enthusiasm never deserts me, I am conscious that I am under a deepening shadow of fatigue." Fearful that the Wanamaker heirs, "who knew not Joseph," were trying to "ease him out" of the journal's management, convinced that he could no longer perpetuate the policies for which he had stood, weakened by a chronic heart ailment, and suffering from mental depression, Van Valkenburg decided to withdraw from any connection with the North American.

On the morning of November 14, 1924, the paper revealed that "with this issue we regret to be obliged to announce the retirement of Mr. E. A. Van Valkenburg as Editor and President of this newspaper." The statement continued with the expressed hope that after a prolonged rest the retiring editor would "again resume the life of activity and leadership for which he is so eminently fitted." Contrary to the expectations of his many friends, Van Valkenburg was never again to edit the North American or any other newspaper. He refused to publish his real reason for resigning his editorship, concerned lest any airing of his grievances would do harm "to scores of old and faithful employees of the N.A." Retiring to his Tioga County farm, "Vanacres," he became an "experimental farmer" until his death.

The North American did not long survive Van Valkenburg's withdrawal. Confirming rumors which had been bruited about Philadelphia newspaperdom for some months, Cyrus H. K. Curtis paid $1,700,000 for the enterprise, which included two-thirds of the stock, the Associated Press franchise, and the "goodwill and fixtures." Although Van Valkenburg had but recently departed, he openly declared that he had known nothing of the impending transaction. "Please make it crystal clear to the newspaper craft" he wrote, "that I had nothing to do with the sale . . . and deplore it." The final issue appeared on Sunday morning May 18, 1925.

W. L. Shearer to Van Valkenburg, February 14, 1921; Van Valkenburg to Mrs. C. E. Bennett, July 2, 1921.

A staff "cabal" was apparently formed in conjunction with the owners of the majority shares to undercut Van Valkenburg's influence. The resultant break with long established friends disheartened E.A.V. (James S. Benn interview with writer, March 26, 1952). See also, Janet H. Stewart to Mrs. C. E. Bennett, October 25, 1935.

Stackpole, op. cit., 273-274.


Ibid., May 23, 1925.
For a few weeks the *North American* merged with Curtis' *Public Ledger*, but its staff quickly scattered and the journal soon became but a memory.

For the next eight years Van Valkenburg remained in relative obscurity. Occasionally he corresponded with old time friends giving frank opinions as to the state of public affairs. By 1927 he evinced disillusion with Coolidge's "static statesmanship," which he deemed a party liability. He wrote infrequent letters of recommendation on the behalf of former associates. It was agriculture that captured his interest. "Agriculture is the most basic, and therefore the most important of industries. . . . Nothing in this world could induce me to again assume the burdens and responsibility of conducting a militant, progressive newspaper," he declared, adding that "to be connected with any other kind would be unthinkable." He was content he confessed, "to drift into the back eddy of public affairs."

Nevertheless, in 1932, Van Valkenburg emerged temporarily from retirement to give material assistance to President Herbert Hoover in the Presidential campaign of that year. Called to Washington to solve the dilemma posed by the Prohibition issue, he drafted a plank which met with Hoover's approval, and he remained to lend aid and counsel regarding general campaign strategy. "Enough of my activities," he wrote to his family, "have been uncovered and seeped into the newspapers to restore me to the category of interesting public figures."

On Sunday morning, November 27, 1932, the New York *Times* gave prominent position to a dispatch which began: "Edwin A. Van Valkenburg, former newspaper editor and advisor of two Presidents . . . died of heart disease in the Jefferson Hospital here tonight. . . ." Although neither the *Inquirer* nor the *Public Ledger*, staunch Republican dailies in Philadelphia, deemed his passing worthy of editorial notice, the Democratic Philadelphia *Record* expressed the sorrow of the city's "fourth estate."

Van Valkenburg to George Wharton Pepper, January 3, April 4, 1927. For copies of Van Valkenburg-Pepper correspondence I am indebted to Mrs. E. A. (Louise) Van Valkenburg, of Philadelphia.

Van Valkenburg to Edwin S. Potter, April 10, 1929.

In a letter to the writer (February 28, 1952) former President Hoover writes: "I enjoyed great friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Van Valkenburg. . . . I saw him many times on public issues."
IT'S "THIRTY" FOR "VAN"

Edwin A. Van Valkenburg, a man of high courage and fine purpose passes on—one of those rare personalities that forgets self in devotion to the self-appointed task.... That he died on Saturday closes a chapter in Philadelphia history.... An exact appraisal of what he did for Philadelphia, and what he saved to Philadelphia, would be impossible.58

58 November 28, 1932. J. David Stern, who published the now defunct Record, began his newspaper career as a "cub reporter" on the North American under Van Valkenburg.