

Franklin Ford Collection

edited by
Dominique Trudel &
Juliette De Maeyer

a
mediastudies.press
public domain
edition



edited by Dominique Trudel & Juliette de Maeyer

FRANKLIN FORD COLLECTION

A MEDIASTUDIES.PRESS PUBLIC DOMAIN EDITION

Franklin Ford Collection contains previously unpublished works and works in the public domain.

Published by MEDIASTUDIES.PRESS in the PUBLIC DOMAIN series

Original formatting, spelling, and citation styles retained throughout, with occasional [*sic*] to indicate an uncorrected error.

mediastudies.press | 414 W. Broad St., Bethlehem, PA 18018, USA

New materials are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0)

COVER DESIGN: Mark McGillivray | Copy-editing & proofing: Emily Alexander

CREDIT FOR LATEX TEMPLATE: Book design inspired by Edward Tufte, by The Tufte-LaTeX Developers

ISBN 978-1-951399-22-1 (print) | ISBN 978-1-951399-19-1 (pdf)

ISBN 978-1-951399-21-4 (epub) | ISBN 978-1-951399-20-7 (html)

DOI 10.32376/3f8575cb.80aee30a

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER 2023939244

Edition 1 published in July 2023

Contents

“He Has Ideas about Everything”: An Introduction to the Franklin Ford Collection *vi*

Acknowledgments *xlvi*

The Larger Life: A Poem Dedicated to Franklin Ford *xlix*

I Reforming the News

Draft of Action *3*

A Newspaper Laboratory *64*

Banding Together the Leading Newspapers *67*

The Press of New York—Its Future *68*

Organization of Intelligence Requires an Organism *71*

In Search of Absolute News, Sensation, and Unity *73*

The News System: A Scientific Basis for Organizing the News *107*

II Interconnected Flows: Money, Information, and Transportation

<i>Better Credit Reporting</i>	116
<i>Traffic Associations</i>	127
<i>The Country Check</i>	130
<i>The Express Companies and the Bank</i>	147
<i>The Mercantile Agencies and Credit Reporting</i>	155
<i>Co-operative Credit Reporting</i>	163

III News is Government

<i>City News Office Needed</i>	166
<i>Municipal Reform: A Scientific Question</i>	169
<i>Government is the Organization of Intelligence or News</i>	198
<i>The Simple Idea of Government</i>	206
<i>A New and Revolutionary Government</i>	208
<i>News is the Master Element of Social Control</i>	213

City News Office Needed

FRANKLIN FORD

Published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*,
June 8, 1901 (doi)

Franklin Ford Tells Why a Clearing House of Facts Would Be of Inestimable Value

To the Editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*:

The letter of Mr. Samuel H. Bishop¹ in your issue of June 4 supports my contention that the reform in city government of which we hear so much necessarily involves the definite and systematic organization of municipal information or news. Mr. Bishop sees no danger "in centering power at the City Hall" if means are provided whereby the people of every section may "know what they want and know how to convey what they want to the City Hall."

The end marked out will be reached by giving to the existing news system a responsible center through which the facts can be coordinated and so transformed into a governing force. Municipal betterment, therefore, is a question of commercial organization; it is as far removed as possible from the complaints of reformers who have no remedy to propose beyond the defeat of one party and the substitution of another.

The new center would report city business as a whole, and in all its parts: it would become the clearing house for all municipal facts.

The conduct of city affairs must be confused and wasteful in the absence of a comprehensive system of reporting and of central registration. Until all the facts are accessible at some one point, the various divisions of the city government can have no clear understanding of each other and no adequate working relation.

¹ [The letter by Samuel H. Bishop published in the June 4, 1901 issue of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* is itself a reply to a previous letter by Ford published in the same newspaper. Bishop's letter supports Ford's project for an "organization of intelligence."]

The true re-formation of city affairs must be based on a scientific and full organization of municipal news, in contrast with this or that propaganda of opinion.

In the telephone, or instantaneous communication, the modern press, and the fast mail train, the newspaper has come to possess a perfect working machine. Prior to these conditions news organization could not on the whole be more than nominal, but it can now be made actual and responsible on all sides. The method of journalism is to become scientific in all particulars. The news traffic involves in its sweep the entire organization of intelligence from the university center to the remotest social happening.

The news system consists of the daily paper, the trade or class journal, and the bureau of information. In its outworking the reporting system will connect with all sources of expert knowledge, and with every individual in the community as any one may at times possess a fact of value to his neighbor, to his class or to the people as a whole. But the daily newspaper is center of action.

The proposed organization of municipal news involves the closest co-operation between the various organs of the system. As now, the different parts of the news system do not buy and sell of each other save very incidentally. It is a singular thing that when a new fact is disclosed in the news movement it carries three possible sales or profits: its general meaning to be distributed through the daily paper, its class bearing to be cold [*sic*] through the trade paper, and its value to particular individuals which they can obtain at the bureau of information. The desired co-operation will be reached through division of labor and the freedom of action which the telephone permits.

The new center will be called the City News Office. It will act as a common medium for the exchange of all information having a direct bearing upon the regulation of city affairs, doing in this respect what the Ship News Office does in its field and with equal precision. The City News Office will bring the municipal facts of Chicago, London and Berlin side by side with those of New York. At the same time the facts of New York's government will become accessible to the world, and the natural demand for authentic news in this field will be met.

Through gaining a common center all the parts of the city's news system will be at the service of every citizen; without this it is much in the condition that the telephone system would be were there no main center connecting all together. The town is replete with useful bureaus of information which will become available through the City News Office.

As Mr. Bishop writes from the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities, of which he is assistant secretary, I am led to point out the inevitable effect of a scientific news center on the important matter of charity

regulation. The Charity Organization Society of Manhattan was instituted eighteen years ago. It was intended "to be a center of intercommunication between the various churches and charitable agencies in the city. To foster harmonious co-operation between them," and to "promote the general welfare of the poor by social and sanitary reforms." It was to be a clearing house for the city's charity system.

Great good has been accomplished by the Charity Organization Society and its Brooklyn ally, the Bureau of Charities, but the results are small in comparison with the benefits that would follow the incoming of a responsible general center for the city's news system. Such a center would invite and in fact compel from the charity news center so great efficiency in clearing that the utmost of wise government would be assured.

This lesson from the field of charity regulation goes to make plain that the one road to city government reform is through the systematic handling of municipal science or news.

FRANKLIN FORD

City Club, Manhattan, June 8, 1901