

Louis Martin Started *Negro Journalism* Paper With Guts, \$135

Consistent Interest in Betterment Of Negro Status Solidified Paper

By **LOUIS E. MARTIN**
(Editor and Publisher)

The Michigan Chronicle was a child of the depression. In April of 1936 when Lucius Harper, then executive editor of The Chicago Defender, came to Detroit to open an office and start a new newspaper, the New Deal was just beginning to get into high gear. Economic recovery was more of a promise than a reality.

Robert S. Abbott, founder of The Defender, who had only four more years to live, had given the reins of his business to his young nephew, John H. Sengstacke, along with the title of general manager of The Chicago Defender.

It was Sengstacke who decided to keep presses that were growing idle in Chicago going with a new newspaper. Harper was sent over to launch it.

With a cash budget of \$135 and a million dollars worth of nerve, The Michigan Chronicle was published on April 14, 1936.

I remember looking at the forms in the composing room in Chicago where I was getting my feet wet as a cub reporter. I didn't dream then that less than eight weeks later I would be in Detroit nursing this new baby.

One day in May, young Sengstacke called me on the telephone in the city room. How would I like to go to Detroit? I was getting \$15 a week and I stood to get a \$5 raise. It was a deal, a big deal.

On June 6, 1936 I arrived in the Motor City. I was 23 years old and my new title was editor and publisher.

The "green sheet" was being printed on The Defender presses on Wednesday and shipped overnight to Detroit for distribution on Thursday.

The paid circulation when I arrived had grown to 900 each week and the unpaid circulation was twice as large.

I will always remember Harper's warning when I sat down in the editor's chair. It went like this:

"Now, kid, I know you've got a solution to the race problem; I haven't seen one of you college boys who didn't. But, you know, if you really want to do some good, you've got to get to the people first. You've got to make this sheet go. And remember, newspapers are sold. You can't give 'em away."

Lucius gave me the keys to the one room office at 1727 St. Antoine after introducing me to the other tenants of the building who, for the most part, were the most important and richest gamblers and numbers kings in Detroit.

He left \$17 in a cloth money sack, the entire cash capital of the business, and told me to be careful with the money.

Having gone to college at Ann Arbor, graduating in the class of 1934, I recognized a few of the names of the leaders in Detroit. I knew hardly any of them by sight.

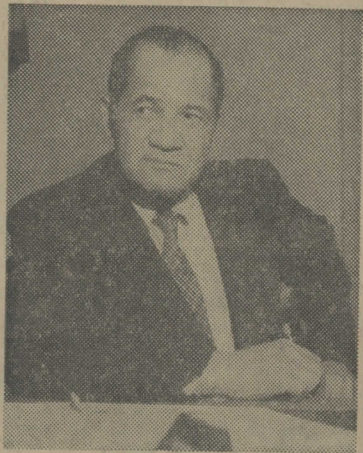
John Roxborough and Joe Louis, however, had offices in the building and by watching the traffic in and out of that office, I quickly got to know or recognize almost everybody of consequence in the community.

1936 **CHRONICLE** 1956

MICHIGAN
RELIABLE INDEPENDENT

Saturday, April 14, 1956

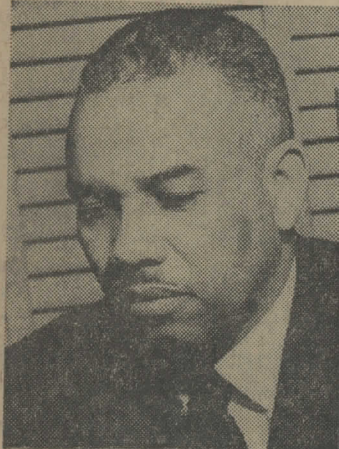
Section Three—Page 1



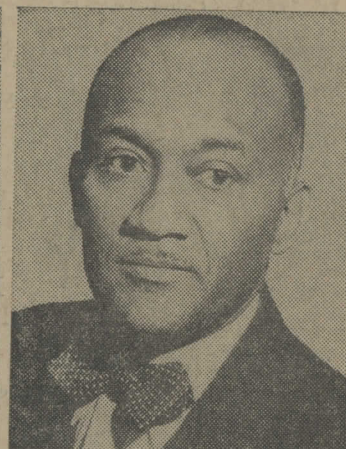
CLARENCE JACKSON
Advertising Manager



WILLIAM MATNEY
Managing Editor



CHARLES J. WARTMAN
Executive Editor



LONGWORTH QUINN
General Manager

The CIO talk was like a shower of rain on the parched earth. It appealed to my sense of fair play and I jumped into the fight with both feet and The Michigan Chronicle.

Horace White and I signed a joint telegram which went out to a large number of Negro community leaders inviting them to a meeting to hear the CIO present its side of the fight to organize the auto industry.

It was the first meeting in the effort to win the Negro community over to labor's side.

The speaker at that first meeting was Emil Mazey who is now secretary-treasurer of the UAW-CIO.

In short order The Chronicle came under fire from some of the community leaders, especially those preachers who had influence at the hiring gates. We countered them, however, with the eloquent Rev. Horace White.

The rank and file of the people rallied to The Chronicle and by 1940 when I bought the present quarters for The Chronicle, we had passed the 15,000 circulation mark

and four years later we hit 25,000 for the first time.

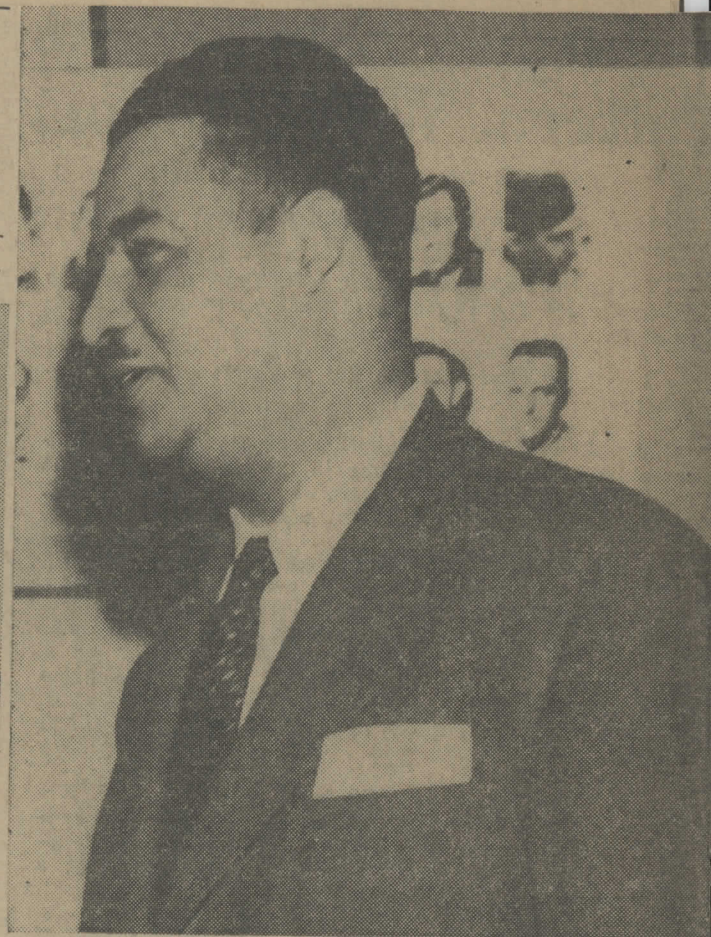
The pro-labor platform of The Chronicle had given us a secure place in the hearts of many people.

It also brought us difficulties. Once organization of the shops was completed the great fight between the left and right wing elements in the union came out into the open.

We soon saw that we had to take a stand. I relied most heavily on the advice of Frank Winn who was a member of the NAACP board and a close associate of Walter Reuther. Frank was anti-Communist all the way.

The editorial I wrote urging Negro workers to join with Reuther was reprinted by the thousands on green circulars and distributed in the plants prior to the convention at which Reuther won control of the UAW.

A few weeks later I received an invitation from Reuther to a private dinner in his hotel suite in Boston during a CIO convention where he thanked me for The Chronicle's support in the UAW. I was a proud boy, indeed.



LOUIS E. MARTIN, Editor and Publisher

That was a decade ago and I never dreamed then that the UAW or Walter Reuther would have made so much progress and become so well accepted in the general society.

Today, young Detroiters have no notion of the depth and severity of the great labor fights of the early forties.

These were the times of great adventure, when the basis for the present progress was laid both for The Chronicle and the people as a whole.

The Chronicle was in the thick of every fight and it figured in the housing controversies which, like labor difficulties, were forever erupting.

The first major eruption involved the Sojourner Truth Housing Project which was bitterly fought by whites in north Detroit.

It took state troopers finally to bring order and prevent Negro occupancy of the homes.

This was only the prelude, however, to the riot of 1943, the blackest period in Detroit's history.

The rioting followed weeks of sporadic hate strikes in the auto industry which was in high gear producing material of war.

A fierce housing shortage, difficult social problems created by immigrant Negroes and whites who came from the South to man the expanding plants, agitation by hate-mongers and fascist fifth columnists of the German Bund and other extremists, all combined to create intense social friction.

a newspaper and I learned fast that I had to trust my own judgment. I, of course, have never been afraid of making a mistake. I made plenty of them but, fortunately, none of them were fatal.

Harper had not stayed long enough to build a staff, I had to lean on Russ Cowans, who had been for years the Defender's Detroit correspondent, and any literate person who happened to be in the neighborhood on Tuesday, the deadline day.

Russ, incidentally was secretary to Joe Louis, along with Grayce Sadler and others. Anyone who could write a straight English sentence was fair game for me as long as he did not insist on wages.

I learned early that while straight newspaper reporters are hard to find, if you scratch a lawyer or a preacher hard enough, you will find a journalist.

That is the way I got Hamilton, Jr., "The Sage of St. Antoine Street", and Horace White. Their contributions made a lot of local history.

I should state at this point that The Chronicle was built, it seems to me, because we were lucky enough to make the right friends and the right enemies. The latter were often just as helpful as the former.

By September of 1937 we were incorporated under the statutes of Michigan and, while The Chronicle was still being printed on The Defender presses, we became legally independent of the Chicago paper.

Subsequently, of course, we became a completely local newspaper, using local printers and exercising local control of the paper's editorial policies.

More than any institution, I know, The Chronicle owes its growth to a host of wonderful individuals who were really not in the newspaper business at all.

If I take pride in anything it is in my good fortune in being able to call upon and get assistance from hundreds of persons who represented every walk of life.

Among my "assistant editors" were such gallant souls as Gloster Current, Roy Lightfoot, Mrs. Beulah Whitby, Thomas Ormsby, Charlie Diggs, Sr., John Dancy, H. B. Taliaferro, John and Charlie Roxborough, Bishop Baber, Reverend Peck, Aaron Toodle, Charles Mahoney and Louis Blount, John White, Gladys Mills, William Sherrill, Beaubien Street Slim, Ramon Scruggs, Father Malcom Dade, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bledsoe, Emmett Cunningham and Joe Cole, Jap Sneed and Stautz Anderson and scores of others. To publish all the names would be impossible.

Many Detroiters have forgotten that The Chronicle's first theatrical editor, Rollo Vest, whom I stole from The Courier, gave the world the name "Paradise Valley". We needed a name to run a mayoralty contest and Rollo came up with it.

Roy Lightfoot was the first Mayor of Paradise Valley. The publicity given this contest, incidentally, gave The Chronicle its first nation-wide notice.

As I look back across the span of 20 years, I suppose the most fundamental operation which assured the growth of The Chronicle centered around the labor movement.

Fresh out of college with no experience, I was shocked to learn how tough a break Negro workers got in the foundries of the auto plants and how insecure the men felt about jobs in the factories.

A Negro would be fired off the job for voting the "wrong way" or for any trivial matter that offended his straw boss.

A preacher from out of Kansas, Homer Martin, was talking about a new union back in 1936 and about equal rights for Negro and white workers, the same pay and the same privileges.



BUSINESS OFFICE STAFF—Seated, Grace Peeples and Nancy Dixon. Standing, Betty Haskins, Pauline R. Brown and Rehna Smith.



CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT—Left to right, Hutchinson, classified manager, and Ruth Whitfield, Dorothy Stephens, Madge Cyars, June Brown

JAMES COLVARD
Distributor

The Michigan Chronicle devoted almost an entire
(Continued on Page 2, Section Three)



EDITORIAL STAFFERS of The Chronicle who edit and assemble materials for the paper. Seated: Myrtle Gaskill, society editor, left, and Nellis Saunders, church editor. Standing, left to right: Joseph Strickland, feature writer; Alonzo Wheeler, artist; Roy Stephens, chief editorial assistant, and Richard Henry, feature editor.



ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT — Left to right, Alonzo Wheeler, Tremaine Shearer, William Cutler, Robert Leatherwood and Joseph Tucker. Seated; Clarence Jackson, advertising manager.

Publisher Established Pattern, Won Support

(Continued from Page 1, Section Three)

edition to that one story of the riots and our statements were quoted everywhere.

Visiting newspapermen from Life, Time, and the wire services made The Chronicle office their secondary headquarters.

I sent my version of the riot to almost every publication in the U.S.

County Prosecutor Dowling, when questioned by newsmen about his do-nothing role in the riots, charged that the NAACP and the Negro press, including me specifically, were to blame for the problems and the riots.

We emerged from this controversy with more circulation and more respect than ever before, Dowling was repudiated at the polls and retired as a major force in the Democratic Party of the State of Michigan.

In all the fights and controversies, The Michigan Chronicle had taken positions which won the support of the majority of the Negroes and a large number of liberal whites.

Working hand in with Gloster Current, Dr. J. J. McClendon, and the other leaders of the NAACP, the newspaper was in truth the authentic voice of the most advanced and progressive leadership of the community, a tradition it still maintains.

Not all of The Chronicle's efforts lay in the area of controversy.

We joined with Nellie Watts to organize the Patrons of Arts.

We found time to publish a book of poems by a member of The Chronicle staff who had won the Avery Hopwood Award for poetry while studying at the University of Michigan.

I refer to the work of Robert Hayden, a native son, whose book, "Heartshapes in the Dust", was actually printed on a hand press in The Chronicle basement. Bob is now a professor of English at Fisk University.

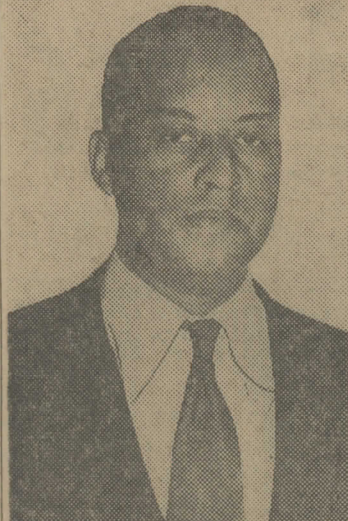
We could do these things because we had the good fortune to surround ourselves with eager employees and able associates. Some are still with us: James Colvard, Grayce Sadler and Horace White.

I remember Larry Chism, Louise Blackman, John Wood, Alonzo Izzardo, Ruth Webb, Jim Butler, and a great many personalities who played a part in the early days. There are many, many others.

The Chronicle hit the big time in the mid-forties when we were able to attract such associates as Longworth Quinn, Charles Wartman, Bill Matney, Clarence Jackson and others.

In 1944 Congressman William Dawson of Illinois asked me to serve as assistant publicity director of the Democratic National Committee in charge of the Negro press for the Roosevelt-Truman campaign of that year.

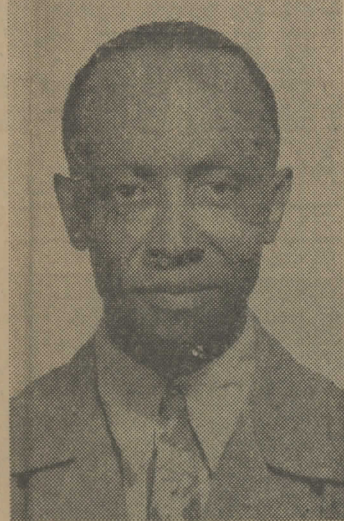
I went to New York for this special project and that



REV. HORACE WHITE
News Analyst



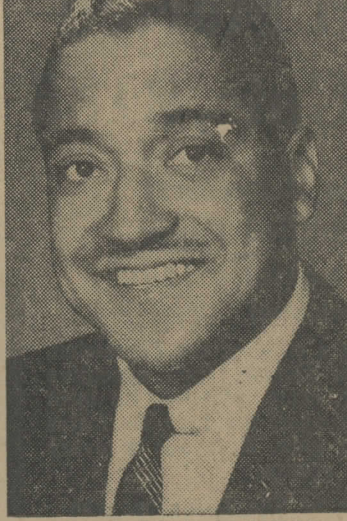
EDNA HOLCOMB
Columnist



ISAAC JONES
Reporter



GRAYCE SADLER
Columnist



JOE "ZIGGY" JOHNSON
Columnist



DAUPHINE WALKER
Reporter

Chronicle Closely Allied with Community Progress

"No Retreat" in Second Ten Years

By CHARLES J. WARTMAN

The second ten years in the history of the Michigan Chronicle began with the post World War II era.

Returning service men and the cutbacks in plants from defense work to goods for civilian consumption brought many social, political and economic problems as Detroiters began the adjustment to peacetime living.

The problem of adequate housing for Detroit's Negro citizens became the main issue in Detroit following the war and the Michigan Chronicle carried on an unrelenting fight to eliminate segregation in public housing.

A long and frustrating struggle to have more public housing units built on vacant land sites predominated the housing struggle for several years.

For years, improvement association forces combined with City officials and politicians to "prevent the changing

marked the beginning of my interest in other enterprises in addition to The Chronicle.

Under the general managership of Longworth Quinn, The Chronicle has in the last decade broken all records for growth and prosperity.

It has become an institution and an integral part of the total community life.

The friends and associates who helped to build it in the first place are still in the front rank of its supporters today.

Finally, among the persons who gave me so much help in the early years was The Chronicle's first bookkeeper, who was also the editor and publisher's chief assistant, and often chief critic, my better half, Mrs. Gertrude Scott Martin.

of the pattern of segregated occupancy in public and private housing, by blocking the use of vacant sites for public housing."

Hand-in-hand with the fight against segregation in public housing, the Chronicle, the NAACP, and various other civic groups waged a determined fight against restrictive covenants.

A series of "racial incidents" culminating in the now famous case of Sipes vs. McGhee finally brought the issue of restrictive covenants in Michigan before the United States Supreme Court.

The Chronicle gave wide publicity to the case.

In 1948 the Supreme Court outlawed restrictive covenants and the greatest movement by Negroes in the history of Detroit began.

The number of Negro home owners jumped more than 70 percent and the solution to housing for Negroes which had been sought and so bitterly fought in public housing was found in private housing.

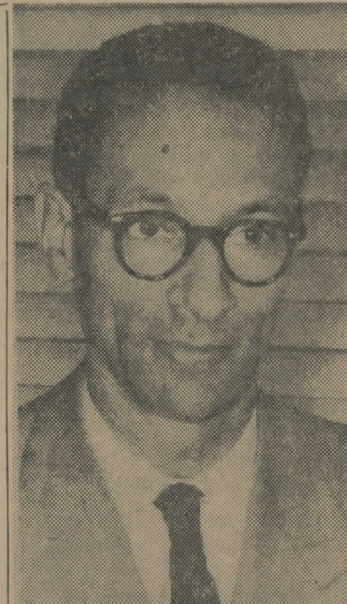
The second ten years witnessed a revolution in labor union politics and the change of control in the Auto Workers and other CIO unions.

Always a strong pro-union paper because of the advancements made by Negroes through organized labor, the Michigan Chronicle weighed carefully the issues involved in the 1946 UAW convention and in line with its basic interest in the movement, crusaded against "communist domination" of the CIO.

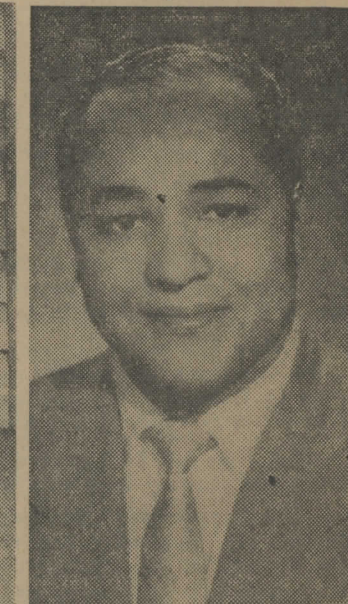
On the local and state political scene, the Chronicle joined the small group which supported youthful G. Mennen Williams for Governor in 1948 and continued its uncompromising opposition to the ultra-conservative control of the City of Detroit.

The election of G. Mennen Williams in 1948 and the Truman victory nationally began an era of Democratic party ascendancy in Michigan, which admittedly is unparalleled in the nation.

A coalition of liberal democrats, labor unions and minority groups under the leadership of Williams began the awesome task of "liberalizing" the government of Michigan.



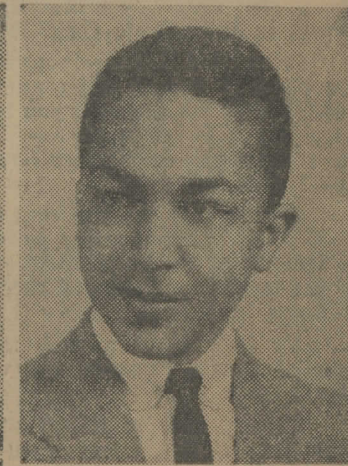
EDGAR DAVIS
Comptroller



WILLIAM LANE
Columnist



ROBERT L. NOLAN
Music Critic



CHARLES STEPHENS
Youth Writer

a "family newspaper" during these years.

An excellent women's and social news section under the guidance of Myrtle Gaskill, combined with thorough coverage of the activities of the churches of the city and

**CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE MICHIGAN CHRONICLE
ON ITS 20th BIRTHDAY**

Gov. G. Mennen Williams

Philip A. Hart, Lt. Gov.

James M. Hare, Sec'y of State

Thomas M. Kavanagh, Att'y General

Sanford A. Brown, State Treas.

Victor Targonski, Auditor General

DONATED BY FRIENDS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ...

of Michigan.

Then there began a series of political "firsts" which reflected the new day in Michigan.

Charles W. Jones was appointed Judge of Recorder's Court. Gov. Williams ordered the end of discrimination in the Michigan National Guard. Qualified Negroes were appointed to state commissions in numbers heretofore unknown in Michigan.

On the local scene, the Chronicle led the attack against the freezeout on Negro candidates for public office. After one unsuccessful attempt, Dr. Remus Robinson was elected to the Board of Education.

Wade H. McCree, who had been appointed to a vacancy on the Circuit Bench, won re-election in his own right.

The fight for the enactment of a Fair Employment Practices law began in the second ten years. In 1955 the legislature of the state enacted a fair employment practices law and set up a commission to administer it.

The Chronicle faced one major crisis in the post war period, when printing operations, which had been handled in Chicago were hampered by the crippling Typographical Union strike of 1947.

After using photo engraving for a few weeks, the entire Chronicle printing operation was shifted to Detroit and publication of the paper was moved from Thursday to Wednesday.

In addition to its interest in civic, political and economic affairs, the Michigan Chronicle built a sound reputation as

FOR THE RECORD:

**20 Years You Have Been on Trial,
For "Aiding and Abetting" in the
Service of Education, Informing
and generally being active in the social
Political and Economical Uplift of
The People in This Community.**

**Your Conduct Has Been Commendable
Fearing The People Would Suffer
Without Your Service**

**It Has Been Decreed That You Be Placed
ON PROBATION, and Further; You
must report to the people of Detroit
each and every week the rest of your
natural journalistic life.**

**Praise and Congratulations
for Your First 20 Years.**

May Success Continue with You.

Willis M. Graves
Atty. at Law

the guidance of Myrtle Gaskill, combined with thorough coverage of the activities of the churches of the city and the programs of civic and social clubs, earned a place for the Chronicle in the homes of additional thousands of readers.

In 1941 the Michigan Chronicle passed the 25,000 mark. In 1955 the ABC circulation topped 38,000.

Outstanding Chronicle staffers received national recognition for their work in these years. Publisher Louis Martin, won National Newspaper Publisher awards for Editorial Writing and Column Writing.

Charles Wartman, executive editor, won awards for the pamphlet "Detroit Ten Years After" and for column writing. Managing Editor, William C. Matney, reporters Roy Stephens, Richard Henry and Hoyt Fuller were cited with awards for their work.

In all, the Chronicle and its personnel won a total of ten awards from 1946 to 1955.

The change in the Detroit housing picture and the demonstrated ability of Negroes to buy homes was reflected in the phenomenal growth of the Chronicle's classified advertising section.

Beginning with less than one-half page in 1950, the Chronicle today carries five to seven pages of this type of advertisement, handled by a special staff under the direction of Mrs. June Brown Hutchinson.

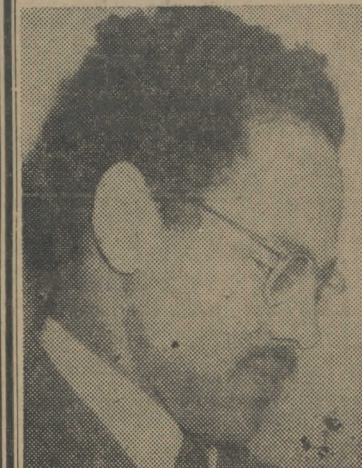
Today the Chronicle is headed for unlimited horizons in circulation and influence.

Recognized as the largest weekly in the state of Michigan, the Chronicle has gained national recognition as a well-edited, typographically excellent newspaper with a sound editorial policy.

In all of the 20 years of its existence, the Chronicle has followed a policy based upon the proposition that second class citizenship for Negroes must be destroyed.

The positions it has taken in politics, labor, civic affairs and other community issues have consistently reflected this policy.

And now at the end of the first twenty years, the Chronicle looks forward to new horizons in a rapidly integrating society, confident of its ability to meet the challenge of the coming years as it did those of the first twenty.



JOHN W. ROXBOROUGH, II, Chronicle attorney, is former aide to Secretary of State Dulles and outstanding young civic leader.



RUSS COWANS, former managing editor of The Michigan Chronicle, who was instrumental in organizing the present Chronicle staff.