

George's Good Line of Work and the Tamalpais Agreement

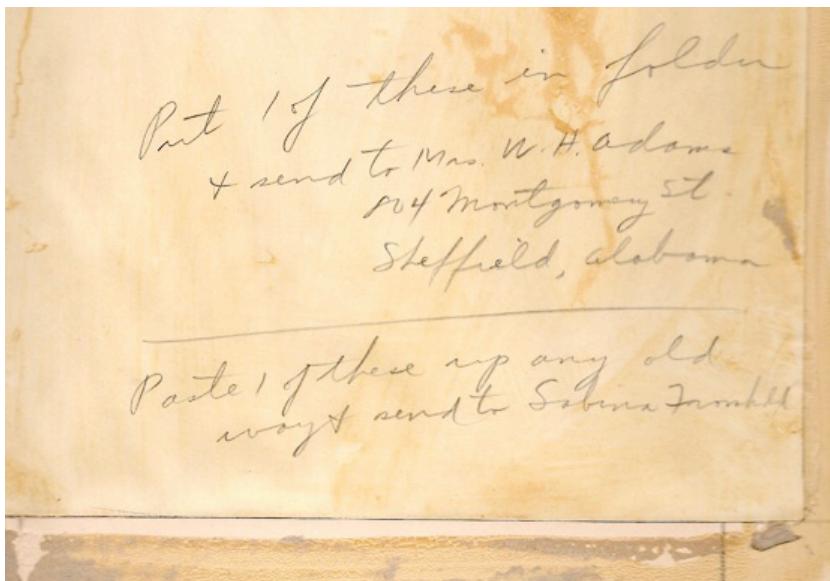
One of the interesting men whom I met in my work was George Haig, who was the regional representative of McManus, Inc. At that time McManus, Inc. was the principal advertising agency for the Chrysler Corporation, and George Haig made frequent rounds of the major Chrysler distributors in the Pacific Region. We had a number of talks in which he explained many of the things that they did in serving the Chrysler account. I remember thinking to myself, "George is in a good line of work and an interesting one." But it never occurred to me in my talks with him that it was a line of work that I should try to get into. However, a suggestion was made from another quarter which changed my thinking.

On May 2, 1929 an older friend of mine, Ruth Maier, who had been chief bookkeeper at the Greer-Robbins Company in Los Angeles and was then living in San Francisco, introduced me to a young friend of hers who was visiting San Francisco with her mother. Miss Maier's young friend was Sabina Fromhold. I had a date with this young lady, previously arranged by Miss Maier, and we went dinner and dancing at the Palace Hotel Palm Court in San Francisco.

I was intrigued to find that my date had a job in advertising. She was a copywriter for the H & S Pogue Company in Cincinnati where the family lived. We talked about advertising quite a lot that evening and at one point Sabina Fromhold said to me, "I think you ought to go into advertising. I think you would be a good account executive." "What," I said, "is an account executive?" This was May 2, 1929, and three days later on May 5, while I had not yet decided to apply for an advertising job, the two of us had settled something else.

On top of Mt. Tamalpais Sabina Fromhold agreed to become my wife. Four days later it was necessary for her to return to Cincinnati with her mother. I visited Cincinnati in

1930, when we became formally engaged, with a ring, but with the on-rush of the depression and other subsequent problems we did not get married for almost nine years. In due course we did carry out the "Tamalpais Agreement," and on April 18, 1938 we were married in Cincinnati. We recently had our 43rd wedding anniversary. By that time I had spent 41 years in the advertising business before retiring in 1972.



HANDWRITTEN NOTE BY EMERSON PRIOR TO 1938,
ON THE BACK OF A PHOTOGRAPH, SHOWING HE
WAS ANNOYED WITH SABINA FROMHOLD

During one of the evenings I spent with Sabina in 1929, before she returned to Cincinnati, we had dinner at the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. While dancing we bumped into the President of the H. O. Harrison Company, George Weber, who was dancing with his fiancée, Catherine Maupin. I introduced Sabina to them, and we exchanged a few pleasant words at the edge of the dance floor. Then a very tragic thing occurred, and something that would not have happened with today's medicine.

George Weber, who was a man not yet 40, went to the hospital for a tonsillectomy. After surgery he developed an infection which could not be controlled, there being no antibiotics,

and in a few days George Weber was dead. His place was taken by James W. McAlister, his partner, who became the company's President. I should mention that Mr. H. O. Harrison, for whom the company was named, also owned one-third of the firm, along with Messrs. Weber and McAlister, but he was a silent partner and not active in running of the company. Jim McAlister purchased George Weber's share from his estate. I believe that they had an agreement making possible this transfer either way, while both partners were living.

I was deeply shocked by George Weber's death because he was such a young and dynamic man, so successful at an early age, and he had been so good to me. However, Jim McAlister was to prove an equally good friend. Bob Jansen and Jim McAlister were very close, which helped my feeling of security. And we were in the midst of a boom year in 1929, but then came the stock market crash and automobile sales seemed to be affected almost as quickly as stock. By the Spring of 1931, the entire motorcar industry was feeling its full share of the depression. I received a 10% salary cut along with everyone else in the firm, but this didn't bother me too much because consumer prices had also begun to crumble.

And so in June 1931, at the age of 24, I entered the advertising business as an employee of the Leon Livingston Advertising Agency in San Francisco. The offices of the Livingston Agency were in the penthouse of the Mills Building, at 220 Montgomery Street, right across the street from San Francisco's most distinguished skyscraper of that time, the Russ Building at 235 Montgomery Street. A number of advertising agencies had their offices in the Russ Building, including Lord & Thomas, which later became Foote, Cone and Belding.

The Livingston Agency was by general agreement in the advertising circle one of the two principal San Francisco owned advertising agencies. Its proprietor was Leon Glover Livingston, then 41 years old and a first rate advertising man by any measurement. He had risen through the ranks as a copywriter. Mr. Livingston wrote honest, hard hitting, colorful and effective copy. The other leading San Francisco agency at that time was Emill Brisachaer, whose offices were about a block away from Livingston's. As some firms did, the Brisachaer Organization, which had its offices on the second floor, had its firm

name lettered on the windows. Below the firm name they had these words "Advertising Engineers." I always considered this phony, a view which must have been shared by Mr. Livingston, because there was absolutely no love lost between Messrs. Brisachaer and Livingston.

The Mills Building, in whose penthouse we had our offices, was an elegant San Francisco building quite unlike the spanking new Russ Tower across the street, but nevertheless a very distinguished San Francisco building with many first-rate tenants. It was one of the few buildings in downtown San Francisco which survived the 1906 earthquake and fire. I understand that extensive reconstruction was necessary, but the building was very much the way it was when built in the 1890's. Just for comparison, the penthouse was on the tenth floor of the building, while the Russ skyscraper across the street took 35 stories and was then, by a good margin, the tallest building in San Francisco.

I joined this agency at a salary of \$125 a month. It might seem that it would be quite impossible to live on such an income, but it really wasn't. My take-home pay at the H. O. Harrison Company, there being no deductions in those days, was \$250 a month minus a 10% depression cut from my starting salary of 1928. I effected a few economies, moving into a cheaper room at Mrs. Kelly's Boarding House on Jackson Street. All boarders got the same meals just the rooms varied, and my economy room came to \$30 a month for room and board, and the meals were quite good!

Some of the Livingston Agency's accounts at the time when I joined it were these: the Wells Fargo Bank and the American Trust company, which were then competitors but merged 30 years later; the Morris Plan Company; the California Association of Ice Industries (yes, ice was advertised in those days in competition with refrigerators!); the Levi Strauss Company, a sound business then headed by Walter Haas, Sr., and which developed into one of the most successful clothing marketers in the world; and a leading Mexican beer, Carta Blanca, brewed by the Cerveceri Cuahemoc. The listings of accounts shows that the agency was heavily weighted in the direction of financial business. This later changed with the ac-

quisition of such accounts as Durkee Famous Foods in Oakland.

Livingston's largest account, the Pacific State Savings and Loan Association, was at that time the largest savings and loan association in the United States, and it was very aggressive about going after business. One principal medium employed was a three hour radio program every Sunday morning from nine to twelve on one of the main San Francisco radio stations. This was a musical program, mainly popular music, with a lot of commercials fitted into it. Pacific State Savings was quite successful in soliciting new savings accounts. Why its marketing activities never caused any visible friction or trouble with the agency's two large bank accounts, I never knew. Both Wells Fargo and American Trust remained steadfast Livingston clients.

Pacific State Savings, which was so successful in the late 20's and early 30's in winning new accounts, did have some serious difficulty before the depression was over. I am not familiar with exactly what happened, but I do know first hand that Mr. Robert Odell, the head of the company, survived as an important figure in the banking world. There was another Livingston account which I neglected to mention in my previous recounting. This was Pauson's, a men's store which occupied four floors on the corner of Kearny and Sutter Streets. The store was run by a very colorful figure named Sam Lowe. This was a retail account which the Livingston Agency handled on a retainer basis.

What did I do when I joined the agency? My fiancee had said two years earlier that I would make a good account "executive." But Mr. Livingston quite wisely gave me the opportunity to show what I could do in other areas at the beginning of the association. I had come in as an ostensible research man (that is the best adjective I can think of), and so he put me to work doing research for various of the agency's accounts. One of the first studies was for Levi Strauss and Company. It was well received, and I was off to a good start. But I hasten to say that my qualifications to do any kind of research at that time were so very thin that I wonder how I got by at all. I suppose it was the fact that the year was 1931, and also because being 24 years old I had no idea of my own limitations.

Mr. Livingston let me know that he would like to turn me into a well-rounded advertising man. So he tried to turn me into a copy writer. My first assignment was to try some commercials for the account of California's Association of Ice Industries. I think that Leon Livingston felt that I was a rather slow pupil, because though I tried very hard and kept writing trial commercials, he felt that none were acceptable. Finally when he was about to give up on me I produced two commercials which he liked very much, and which were broadcast on the radio. I then began to get other such assignments, including one I was really scared of. It was to write the script for Pacific State Savings three hour radio program. I did this for a few weeks without getting fired, until I was transferred to some other assignments.

During my years with the H. O. Harrison Company I had formed a close friendship with a man by the name of Berk, who was a rising young reporter with *The San Francisco Examiner* and who was greatly interested in automobiles. He also was more interested in promotion of all kinds than purely editorial work. So he left *The San Francisco Examiner* and set up his own advertising and publicity agency in the Spreckels Building on Market Street. Harry Berk and Leon Livingston became good friends, and late in 1932 Harry moved his smaller agency into the Livingston firm. This began for me a long-time association with a most remarkable and talented person. Harry got me my first job in New York, as I will report later, and he was to work with me both in Foote, Cone & Belding and McCann-Erickson. We remained the closest of friends until his death in 1971.

After Harry Berk joined the Livingston Agency, James W. McAlister regained control of what had been the H. O. Harrison Company and continued doing business in the same building, but with a new name: James W. McAlister, Incorporated. He had the Northern California Chrysler-Plymouth franchise serving the 47 counties of Northern California, and his right hand man, as before, was Bob Jansen. Immediately upon regaining the franchise, Jansen appointed our agency to handle the firm's advertising, promotion and publicity.

Harry Berk had done some work on special assignment for Jansen and McAlister when they had previously had the

Chrysler-Plymouth franchise, and they liked Harry and regarded him as an excellent promotional man. So by appointing the Livingston Agency, they had two men available to work on the account whom they knew well. Even though the year was 1932, the newly enfranchised James W. McAlister Company got off to a fine start and a profitable one.

As things worked out Harry Berk became more and more the creative director of their account, and I became the account executive. So I was beginning to fulfill my fiancee's earlier prophecy. I also began to write copy for the McAlister account, ads which were credited with bringing people into the showrooms. No one was more surprised than I. As far as the distribution of labor was concerned, in those days an account executive or contact man was supposed to write copy. Mr. Livingston was very pleased that his team of Berk and Foote seemed to be working out so well on the new McAlister Company account, and he began to look around for other things for both of us to do. This took neither planning nor prodding in Harry's case, because he was always such a self-starting dynamo. It was he who went over to the East Bay and got the Durkee Famous Foods account, which the national advertising agencies in San Francisco thought they couldn't miss acquiring.



HARRY BERK, ON THE LEFT, WITH EMERSON

A new opportunity soon turned up for me. Leon Livingston had always personally handled the Pauson account, but tensions developed between Leon and this client. One day when Hastings & Co., a larger and more prestigious men's apparel store offered Leon their account, if he resigned Pauson's and accepted Hastings. The location of Hastings was at the corner of Post and Kearny streets. It was a truly fine men's store which had only one real competitor in San Francisco, which was Roos Brothers. Only a short time after Hastings became a Livingston client he turned the account over mainly to me to run. I put it this way because he (Mr. Livingston) still maintained close supervision of the account and wrote much of the copy himself.

I remember, as though it were yesterday, the two men who ran the Hastings Store. I should say "stores," because they had a smaller branch close to the St. Francis Hotel. These men were C. H. Turner, President of Hastings, and Robert J. Ralph, its general manager. Both of these men were very fine people, gentlemen in every sense of the word, but "C. H." possessed one unusual trait. He had a temper of tornadic proportions. I had never seen the like of this before, nor have I seen it since. Fortunately, this temper was directed at me very, very, few times. I was lucky. Just being around it was enough to scare a would-be young account executive out of his shoes. However, somehow I survived on this account and continued to handle it as long as I was with the Livingston firm. I also wrote quite a bit of copy of the Hastings account, most of which was accepted, though sometimes not on the first "try."

I did some contact work on The American Trust Company account and got to know the man in charge of advertising, Harris Kirk, who later became President of the bank. Though in this instance my work was more as an assistant to Mr. Livingston. I also got to know a wonderful man by the name of Jerry Wickland, who was in charge of advertising and related activities at the Wells Fargo Bank. But my association with Jerry was not extensive, because Mr. Livingston kept this account rather to himself. He was well regarded by Frederic L. Lipman, the President of the bank.

I would like to mention some of the people with whom I worked at the Livingston Agency in those far-away days. There was a business manager of the office who did most of its accounting and billing, Ilene Farnsworth. There was Bernice Biederman, who ran the production department with one assistant. "Bee" is sort of my last link with this first agency of mine. We exchange Christmas cards and notes each year, including 1984.¹ There was John delCardayre, who was Leon Livingston's principal copywriter other than himself. Del was an exceptional copywriter, and a very fine person. Some ten years later he and his wife moved East, and he got in touch with me. I immediately gave him a job at Foote, Cone and Belding. Del was a true craftsman and he was very successful in his work in the East.

There was Alberta Rudolphi, who was art director of the agency and who seemed to work on a 24 hour basis turning out the agency's necessary work in this field. She came East when Leon Livingston opened an office in New York in 1945, and came to see me at Foote, Cone & Belding, but she was not looking for a new connection. She was one of those who was strongly attached to Leon Livingston. There was Joseph Sill, Jr., who claims to be Joseph Sill VII, but who used "Jr." because, as he put it, it was more readily acceptable. Joe was a Pasadenaan and a darn good advertising man both in contact and copy, who joined the agency about a year after I did.

These are just a few of the people with whom I worked at this agency in the penthouse of the Mills Building. I liked them all. They were very nice to me and made me feel quite comfortable as I was gaining a foothold in the advertising business.

I did some work while at Livingston's in the new business area, but do not recall any smashing successes. One of the most interesting calls I made was on Adrian J. Falk, who was one of the head men at S&W Fine Foods. Mr. Falk seemed genuinely interested in our agency, but we never got the account.

About a year after joining forces with Leon Livingston, Harry Berk developed some associations in the East through his work in the motorcar field and received an offer from the J.

¹ Foote was dictating this in 1985.

Stirling Getchell Agency, in New York, to join that firm. He had met Mr. Getchell and associates on a previous trip. Harry accepted his offer and left the Pacific Coast for good. So in a relatively short time after joining forces with the Livingston Agency, this colorful and dynamic man was gone. I remember the day in November 1932 when I drove Harry down the San Francisco Peninsula to Mills Field and watched him take off for New York. The plane was a DC-2, the same type in which I flew to New York in 1936. I did not feel envy as I watched him take off. I was very glad to remain in San Francisco. My feeling was just that I was losing a very good friend – which did not prove to be the case at all.

Harrys going put more responsibility on me in the handling of the McAlister account, and I found myself in charge of the account in every sense of the word. Though the budget of the account wasn't all that big, I was really beginning to make good on Sabina's prediction. Things worked out very well with Bob Jansen and Jim McAlister, and for my part I enjoyed the satisfaction of having a happy account and watching the firm's business grow, feeling that I had some part of that. My salary gradually increased at the Livingston Agency and by mid-1934 I was up to \$250 a month – the same salary that I was earning when I came to San Francisco 6 years previously. But of course we had a depression between those dates.

Just as I felt that things were going rather smoothly for me with Leon Livingston and his agency, trouble came over the horizon like a cloud. Leon had a friend in the advertising field by the name of William C. Day, and he decided to bring Mr. Day into the firm. I believe Mr. Day joined the agency with the title of Vice President, which I am sure bothered Joe Sill and me a little bit. I can't recall, because I never did know exactly what Bill Day was supposed to do, except help Leon and in some ways to run the shop.

Hiring this man stretched the agency's finances and it was logical that Bill Day should soon tell Leon that expenses should be cut. This remained merely a general point of view until something happened to me physically. Late in the Fall of 1934 I was hospitalized for a full month in San Francisco's Mt. Zion Hospital. The diagnosis was acute inflammatory catarrhal jaundice, and I turned as yellow as a pumpkin. I imagine

this diagnosis would be expressed somewhat differently today, probably as some form of hepatitis. I was never considered to be in danger, but I must say I felt awfully sick. Jaundice or hepatitis can be a miserable disease. When I finally returned to work, Leon called me into his office to give me some bad news. He said that Bill Day had recommended that there be a general salary cut and that my salary was to be cut 40%, from \$250 per month to \$150 per month. I promptly quit.

Leon could not change my mind, and at his request I agreed to work at the agency for two weeks before leaving physically. I had no idea where I would get a job, and my exchequer was not too great after the expense of my long illness. But I felt that the 40% salary cut was absolutely unconscionable, and I didn't like Bill Day anyway.

When I told Bob Jansen, who now was Vice President and General Manager of the James W. McAlister Company, that I had quit the agency he promptly offered to give me their account with office space at their headquarters on Van Nell Avenue. And he offered to provide whatever financing I needed to get started as an advertising agency. I told Bob that I did not think that it would be proper for me to take an account from the Livingston Agency under the circumstances, and I declined his offer with thanks.

About a week later Bob Jansen telephoned me at my office at the Livingston Agency where I was still working, and said, "Look Emerson, Jim McAlister and I would like you to have our account, but if you won't take it then we're going to appoint Harry Elliott." Harry Elliott was a well-known publicity man along automobile row and generally well regarded, but he was better known as a publicity and promotion person than an advertising man. I knew that Bob Jansen was not kidding. He wasn't the kidding type. So when I realized that Livingston would lose the account anyway, I agreed to accept Bob's offer.