Herman Beyle and James McCamy: Founders of the Study of Public Relations in Public Administration, 1928-1939

Mordecai Lee

Introduction

This article is an historical retrospective on two academicians from the 1920s and 30s who, essentially, invented the academic study of public relations in public administration. This subfield has had an erratic status within the discipline. Initially, it received major attention in public administration textbooks and in the writings of some of the mainstays in the field through the mid-1950s. However, that attention gradually faded during the second half of the 20th century (Lee, 1998). But now, during the first decade of the 21st century, the subject seems to be regaining a modest profile in the literature and pedagogy (Lee, 2009).

In general, public administration is viewed as having parentage from the “real world” and from academe. The former comprise the good government reformers of the Progressive era. While these reformers sometimes had links to the academy, mostly they were self-styled civic activists. Some were employed by nonprofit municipal research bureaus or efficiency bureaus; others were private citizens opting to dedicate their discretionary time to such goals. The other progenitor of the discipline was political science. Most early academics, beginning with Woodrow Wilson and Frank Goodnow, came from political science departments. Like other aspects of the history of American public administration, the study of government public relations can be traced to these two ancestors.

Ancestry of Public Relations in Public Administration: Reformers and Practitioners

Good government reformers in the Progressive era (1890-1920) quickly grasped the importance of using publicity to inform the citizenry on public affairs. Publicity could trigger public pressure
on politicians to adopt the reforms these Progressives were advocating. Publicity became a central tenet of the good government movement, assuming positive and extensive coverage from some of the city’s daily newspapers. These reformers, men and women, were outside government, usually affiliated with nonprofit civic and advocacy organizations (Straughan, 2007).

One of the earliest publications by a reformer documenting examples of the powerful impact of publicity occurred in Harrisburg (PA) beginning in 1902 (McFarland, 1906). The use of publicity to promote reform was then refined and institutionalized by William Allen, a researcher and good government reformer in New York City in the first decade of the 20th century. In 1907, he teamed up with fellow civic activists Henry Bruère and Frederick Cleveland to found the nonprofit New York Bureau of Municipal Research (BMR). However, in 1914 John D. Rockefeller, Sr. agreed to fund the bureau, but only if it shifted from its adversarial and publicity orientation to a noncontroversial and behind-the-scenes operating style. Going for the money, Allen was out. Nonetheless, by then, the importance of publicity had seeped deep into the reformers’ modus vivendi (Schachter, 1997).

It was only a short step from recognizing the importance of publicity to impose government reforms from the outside to seeing the usefulness of publicity to reformers inside government. For example, in 1908, a staffer from the New York BMR wrote that “it is apparently the last thing to occur to many public officials, when they are in need for support for their policies, to go directly to the public and ask for what they want” (Miles, 1908, 208). In 1912, the Milwaukee city government’s Bureau of Economy and Efficiency released a study of the municipal public health department. It urged the department to increase its focus on dissemination of publications as an effective way to promote what would now be called wellness among the citizenry. According to the report, authorities “cannot hope to secure the best results, however efficiently they may do their work, unless they have the good will and cooperation of the people” (Gunn and Lueling, 1912, 3). One of the papers at the National Municipal League’s (NML) 1917 annual conference was by the Director of Public Welfare of Dayton’s (OH) municipal government on “Humanizing Welfare Reports” (Snyder, 1918). The next year, NML’s Secretary summarized the state of the field by noting “Democracy demands publicity” and that municipal officials should make more of an effort to publicize the work of their departments (Woodruff, 1919, 7).

In 1927, Professor Leonard White of the University of Chicago summarized the value of publicity in his handbook for city managers. He stated the now-conventional wisdom that a city manager should view public relations as an distinct aspect of his duties (at the time they were all men), including dealing with the press, giving public talks, issuing public reports and being in contact with nonprofit civic organizations (White, 1971, 210-26).

Ancestry of Public Relations in Public Administration: Political Science

As an offspring of political science, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely when public administration first became interested in public relations. Woodrow Wilson’s landmark article referred to the
importance of public opinion, but mostly in the context of administrators needing to be sensitive to public opinion between elections (Wilson, 1941, 499). The book that is considered the founding of the field of modern study of public opinion was Walter Lippmann’s 1922 *Public Opinion* (1997). (However, Lippmann was not in the academy.) Political science quickly picked up on the subject, broadening attention from empirical studies of public opinion to propaganda efforts to influence it. Harold Lasswell, at the University of Chicago, was one of the earliest political scientists interested in propaganda (1972).

It appears that the first political scientist significantly interested in public relations in public administration was Harvard’s Pendleton Herring. He had written his dissertation at Johns Hopkins in 1928 on interest group lobbying of Congress (Herring, 1967 [1928]). At the beginning of Franklin Roosevelt’s first term, Herring’s interest in lobbying expanded to a newer phenomenon, pressures on Congress from executive branch agencies. After FDR’s inauguration in March 1933, the use of professional public relations officers by many of the early New Deal alphabet agencies greatly expanded compared to previous practice. Herring thought this was a relatively new form and source of pressuring Congress.

In December 1934, Herring convened and chaired at the American Political Science Association’s (APSA) annual conference a panel on “Public Relations of National Administrative Agencies.” It was a mix of academics and practitioners, the former included John Gaus (University of Wisconsin [Madison]) and Marshall Dimock (University of Chicago) and the latter category included Louis Brownlow (Ogg, 1935, 109). That same month, Herring published his first writing on the subject. He observed that the New Deal seemed to be upsetting Congressional domination of departments and agencies in the executive branch. One of the reasons, he suggested, was that a federal bureau “can coerce the legislators through its power of propaganda. The procurement of apparent popular support through skillfully conducted publicity may so fortify its position that Congress would hesitate to abolish the bureau or reduce its appropriation” (1934, 191). Herring expanded on that theme in an article the next year in the *Annals* (1935) and then as a chapter in his 1936 book *Public Administration and the Public Interest* (1967).

Like Herring, APSA panelist Dimock had also published a piece on external communications in public administration in 1934, but the venue was a non-refereed journal, *National Municipal Review [NMR]*, NML’s monthly publication (Dimock, 1934). Even before Herring and Dimock, Clarence Ridley, who had academic credentials (a PhD from Syracuse University), published an article about one aspect of government public relations. But his orientation was towards practitioners, specifically trying to nurture the new profession of city management. In 1927 he published an article on municipal public reporting, but it, too, was in *NMR* (Ridley, 1927). Therefore, the nod goes to Herring as the first academic to publish in a refereed journal a discussion of public relations in public administration.

By the time Herring published the first truly academic piece in 1934, the topic was already old hat to civic reformers (outside government) and municipal practitioners. However, it is signifi-
cantly that Herring and his colleagues were largely focusing on the national government while those outside the professoriate, whether good government reformers or practitioners, were almost exclusively interested in municipal government. So, these two clusters of early interest in government public relations were like ships passing in the night. Despite their sequential chronology, there appeared to be little overlap or cross-fertilization between them.

**Public Reporting and Publicity: Beyle and McCamy Subdivide the New Field into Democratic vs. Pragmatic Public Relations**

The rubric of public relations in public administration quickly split into two relatively discrete topics. One was called public reporting and focused on the general obligation of public servants to contribute to an informed public, the sine qua non of democracy. This was a focus on communication for information sake, with no motive other than promoting the workings of democracy. This topic was very much a reflection of the “public” in public administration. Senior government managers were being inculcated about their accountability to the public and their obligation to circulate facts that would be helpful to public opinion. Such an obligation, of course, did not exist in the counterpart field of business administration. Here was an element of management that highlighted the differences between the public and private sectors.

The other subtopic of government public relations was one based on the pragmatic needs of public administrators. In this context, effective communications strategies could help an agency accomplish its substantive goals, such as notifying specific population categories of a new program that they could benefit from, using publicity as a way to encourage compliance with laws rather than relying on an enforcement strategy (“Only you can prevent forest fires”), or obtaining the cooperation of the citizenry to serve as the eyes and ears of an agency (such as the 911 system). This was a focus on the “administration” in public administration, namely the benefits of public relations in executing agency programs.

(Note the distinction between the study of external communications by public administration versus a political science focus on political communication in campaigns and by elected officials.)

The division of the study of government public relations into the two distinct foci, democratic purposes versus pragmatic ones, was gradually identified and formalized by two seminal academic research studies in 1928 and 1939. Herman C. Beyle’s *Governmental Reporting in Chicago* (1928) was the first major academic investigation of public reporting and became the founding document for the subfield of democratic public relations within the larger academic rubric of government public relations. Then, in 1939, James L. McCamy’s *Government Publicity* was the first academic study of pragmatic public relations in public administration and is considered the original book for that subfield. (Note on Style: To avoid duplication, references to publications by Beyle and McCamy can be found in the two bibliographic appendices and are not repeated in the References section.)

While the two books were on separate aspects of public relations, both of them used “government”
in their titles. Strictly speaking, Beyle’s was a study of reporting by local governments in the Chicago area. So, he could have titled the book “Municipal Reporting” or “Local Public Reporting.” Similarly, McCamy’s volume was limited to the federal government, so it could have been called “Federal Publicity.” That both of them used the broader term “government” is an indication of their vision that they were studying phenomena that were prevalent throughout the public sector in the US, at all levels of government. They were laying the groundwork for subsequent academic attention to the generic topics of reporting and publicity, rather than activities limited to one level of government. This catholicity is a contributing factor to the influence their books had on public administration, with the scope of attention extending to all aspects and levels of government.

Beyle’s and McCamy’s research are being deemed here as the founding documents of the academic study of public reporting and publicity for four reasons, none met by earlier publications on the topic (some cited above). First, each was a book-length investigation of the topic. Second, the research was conducted with an academic orientation, with both projects being the authors’ dissertations. Third, each volume was a comprehensive and modern study, using social science and empirical research techniques, rather than the literature that preceded it, all largely normative, institutional, descriptive or practitioner-oriented. They used some basic, but rigorous, quantitative measurement and research techniques. Finally, both studies were published by a university press (in this case both by University of Chicago Press), giving a further academic imprimatur to their two works.

It was no coincidence that both books were authored by doctoral candidates in political science at the University of Chicago and that both were published by its Press. At the time, the University of Chicago’s political science department was something of a hotbed of academics who were reforming the discipline to include public administration and, further, that they wanted public administration to be relevant to the real world. Perhaps the most prominent of this impressive group was Charles E. Merriam, who was elected to Chicago’s City Council as an alderman and used that platform to become acquainted with the inner workings of government as well as to push for reforms he hatched in the ivory tower (Lee, 2008, 95-96, 117-18). (He later served on the Brownlow Committee, with Luther Gulick as the third member.) Merriam’s colleagues included some already mentioned, such as Leonard White and Harold Lasswell. Another was Harold Gosnell, who – while more interested on the electoral side of government – was a pioneer in using innovative empirical methodologies. (A section of the American Political Science Association now has an annual Gosnell Prize for best work in political methodology.) Collectively, they encouraged their doctoral candidates to focus on studying the reality of modern government, using social science methodologies then beginning to blossom within the discipline. Tellingly, McCamy described “the stimulating and intellectually adventurous faculty” in the department who were interested in public affairs (1939, ix).

Beyle and McCamy did not overlap as graduate students, but they certainly knew each other later in their careers. For example, in 1940 (a year after McCamy’s book was published), the new American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) held its second annual meeting to coincide
with APSA’s 36th annual conference. McCamy chaired a two-session panel on “Public Reporting” that was jointly sponsored by APSA and ASPA. At the first session, Beyle read a paper on “Research in Attitudes as Related to Public Reporting” and at the second (two days later), on “Techniques Determining Emotional Factors” (Colegrove, 1941, 122, 131) (Another panelist presenting different papers at the two sessions was Rensis Likert, then with the Program Surveys Division of USDA’s Bureau of Agricultural Economics.)

**Governmental Reporting in Chicago: Herman Beyle Inaugurates the Academic Study of Public Reporting**

Professor Merriam encouraged Beyle to focus on public reporting for his dissertation. From Merriam’s perspective, this was an important topic, going so far as stating, “No field is more important to the electors who seek information on the working of their government.” The problem, Merriam felt, was that, notwithstanding the topic’s importance, it “may be called a jungle through which run only a few trails, and some of those are little used” (1929, ix). He was referring to the emerging normative consensus that public reporting was one way to harmonize professionalization of municipal management with democracy. Several academics were calling for systematic public reporting, such as Harvard’s William Bennett Munro (1916, 7-9), as well as non-academically based reformers, such as Bruère at the New York BMR (1916, chap. 6) and Cook (1919, chap. 7). However, virtually no one had delved in depth or detail into what municipalities were currently doing, drawing generalizations from current practice, and then developing “best practices” recommendations that were empirically, rather than normatively, based.

Merriam pushed Beyle to study the topic dispassionately and comprehensively by collecting and reviewing all annual reports issued by every governmental body operating in whole or in part in the City of Chicago for 1923. Beyle eventually accumulated a shelf of publications that was more than five feet long. The 412-page dissertation was approved in September, 1926. The book, with virtually no change from the dissertation, was prepared for publication during 1927 (the date of the acknowledgements section is October 1, 1927) when Beyle had already taken his first position at the University of Minnesota. It was published by University of Chicago Press in June 1928 as part of its series on Social Science Studies sponsored by the University’s inter-departmental Local Community Research Committee (Bulmer, 1980).

The book (and dissertation) presented a methodical review of all the Chicago-area reports he was able to locate. However, about half the local government bodies did not issue annual public reports. To provide context for his investigation, he compared the reports to counterpart ones from Boston, London, Paris and Berlin. The book had the standard structure of such a project. It began with an overview of the importance of the subject, including a review of the (scant) literature, the scope of the study and the methodology of the inquiry. In the body of the book, Beyle divided public reporting into segments. First, he reviewed the process, including the reporting systems in place, and then the sequential steps of preparation, submission, publication, and distribution. Second, he reviewed the contents of the reports, followed by a study of the data contained in the re-
ports and, finally, of the methods of presentation in the reports. Following the conventional academic formula, the book ended with a chapter presenting a summary and conclusions, including identification of further subjects for research. The final chapter included a proposed list of tentative principles of “good reporting practice.” (That’s also a reminder that the term “best practices” was invented long before it made a comeback in the 1990s.) The book concluded with two appendices, a bibliography and an index.

The same year the book was published, Luther Gulick reviewed it in APSA’s *American Political Science Review (APSR)*. While it was a mixed review, his positive comments indicate the book’s thoroughness and what contributed to its later landmark status: “The great strength of this book lies in the tireless ingenuity which has been applied to the study of 60,000 pages of Chicago's public reporting. … The author has taken too many fine strokes with a monster brush, but he has finished one task that *no one will ever have to tackle again*” (1928, 997, emphasis added). Gulick’s lukewarm reaction to *Governmental Reporting* was somewhat puzzling. In his famous 1936 eight-lettered acronym POSDCORB, the “R” was for reporting, indicating its importance as a management activity. Reporting meant “keeping those to whom the executive is responsible informed as to what is going on” (Gulick, 1987, 13).

While not a review, half a decade after Beyle’s book was published, Professor Roscoe Martin wrote that it “was the pioneer study in this field, [and] remains one of the most useful books available on the problem” (1934, 103n1).

**After Governmental Reporting**

A short summary of Beyle’s subsequent academic career relating to public reporting has been presented elsewhere (Lee, 2006, 252-54). As an indication of the instant credibility he received due to the book, just a year after it was published and while still a junior professor, he was named as one of eight members of the National Committee on Public Reporting. The Committee was a prestigious project sponsored by four of the most important good government and public administration practitioner groups at the time: NML, ICMA, the Governmental Research Association and the American Municipal League (later the National League of Cities).

Beyle gradually conceptualized public reporting as two-way communication. Using baseball terms, he suggested that the topic covered both “pitching” (i.e. releasing reports) and “catching” (receiving feedback from the public after the reports were released). That, in turn, got him increasingly interested in survey research, public opinion polling and other increasingly sophisticated quantitative methodologies. His last publication devoted principally to public reporting, as opposed to in passing, was in 1939. (See Appendix A for a bibliography of Beyle’s writings on public reporting.)

Even though he was losing an active interest in public reporting, Beyle continued being involved in the subject. By now at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, he was recruited by Dean William Mosher to help on a 1941 investigation into public relations of public personnel agen-
cies. He designed a questionnaire to measure citizen feedback on reports from civil service systems to be used with New York City and Cincinnati residents, and to visitors at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York. In 1947, Beyle gave a talk on “Public Administration and Public Relations” to the chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in Albany, the state capital (News, 1947, 219). He stayed at Syracuse University for the rest of his career, teaching there for 28 years. He died of a heart attack at age 64 in 1956.

Post-Beyle and through to the mid-1950s, the most important writers about public reporting were Clarence Ridley and, later, his protégé Herbert Simon (Lee, 2003; 2006). In part, their work was a continuation of Beyle’s, emphasizing the centrality of reporting to public administration and the need for comprehensive reporting templates. An overt linkage between them occurred in the late 1930s. Ridley sent twenty-something Simon to Syracuse to meet with Professors “Henry [sic] Beyle” and Spencer Parrott who, Simon wrote in his memoirs, “were approaching the topic of municipal measurement from a somewhat different angle than ours, and who wanted to discuss the relation f the two approaches” (Simon, 1996, 65). Ridley and Simon parted company with Beyle in several major ways. They were interested in reporting only as a final product of their major concentration on municipal performance measurement, they were practitioner oriented and – regarding reporting – they were largely normative in focus, seeking to convince city managers and municipalities that this was a good and important thing to do.

While public reporting gradually faded from the agenda of academic public administration (along with the larger rubric of public relations), Beyle’s book continued to be cited. This is an indicator of its status as a definitive and lasting contribution to the literature. Some recent citations (in reverse chronological order) include Lee (2006), Williams (2003) and Pinderhughes (1987). Some other recent writings about reporting did not cite Beyle, but their publication demonstrated some academic and practitioner attention to government reporting. For example, in 2007, two Australian academics published a study of public sector annual reports. They documented a reemerging vitality of the practice of government reporting in their country (Mack and Ryan, 2007). That same year, a professional association of Canadian accountants issued a how-to study guide to promote effective public performance reporting by government agencies (Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, 2007). In 2008, the 2nd edition of the Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Public Policy included a new entry on popular reporting, a topic that had not been covered in the original 2003 version (Clay, 2008).

The lasting value of Governmental Reporting is its comprehensive and disinterested perspective. Looking back 80 years after it was published, it currently reads as more than an historical artifact of Chicago area reports in 1923. But, Beyle’s systematic review of the process and contents of public reporting and then contextualization by using reports from other major cities in and out of the US, all contribute to a sense of detailed scholarship rather than normative exhortations. By the time he concluded the book with his “tentative” best practices, he had achieved credibility to venture in that direction. Those recommendations are, largely, applicable to the early 21st century as much as to the 1920s.
Mordecai Lee

**Government Publicity: James McCamy Inaugurates the Academic Study of Publicity in Public Administration**

When McCamy arrived at the University of Chicago in 1932 for his doctoral studies in political science, he had already demonstrated an interest in government public relations. His master’s thesis at the University of Texas (Austin), approved in 1932, was on “Governmental Reporting in Texas State Administration.” He, of course, cited Beyle in it (p. 5). By now, another luminary in the department was Marshall Dimock, who had arrived in 1933. He was McCamy’s dissertation adviser at Chicago. It will be recalled that in 1934 Dimock published an article in NMR, declaring in its opening sentence that “The most neglected aspect of public administration is salesmanship – what is usually called, in the broader sense, public relations” (1934, 660). Lasswell was also a dissertation adviser.

By the mid-1930s, other authors were following up on Herring’s and Dimock’s earlier cited writings. In particular, the founding of *Public Opinion Quarterly* provided an outlet for discussions about government public relations. Its first issue was published in January 1937. At that time, *POQ* did not have the focus on highly quantified survey research that it later evolved into. Rather, both practitioners and academics contributed articles on various aspects of public opinion, including the relatively new phenomenon of public relations activities of federal agencies. Harold Lasswell (then still at Chicago) was *POQ*’s associate editor, in charge of the section of each issue relating to governmental topics. The first issue contained an article by ICMA head Ridley on “Municipal Reporting Taken Seriously.” Subsequent issues in early years contained articles on government public relations by *New York Times* reporter and columnist Arthur Krock, by a senior PR man in a federal agency and by a staffer at the Library of Congress. Volume 4 included a repeating section called “Who’s Who in Federal Publicity.”

However, as in Beyle’s case, the topic of government publicity was still in its infancy with no other academic books on the subject. McCamy, like Beyle, was virtually inventing a new field of study. McCamy researched his dissertation mostly in 1937 and early 1938. Years later, he reminisced about how much “fun” he had working on his dissertation: “I felt that I was making discoveries, and I was. I was discovering not only the large and unknown apparatus for propaganda, but also the theory, new also, of propaganda in man’s communication.” His main regret, he told this author nearly 35 years later, was that “the military was so insignificant as propagandist that I barely mentioned it” (letter to the author, July 30, 1971, author’s files). McCamy’s 291-page dissertation “Federal Administrative Publicity” was approved in August 1938 and then – with almost no changes – quickly moved to publication by the University of Chicago Press, with the slightly revised title *Government Publicity: Its Practice in Federal Administration*. McCamy cited Beyle in his dissertation (p. 16) and book (p. 15), further reflecting the close linkage of their path breaking publications. Even though *Government Publicity* was not released until June 1939, the date of the Preface is November 15, 1938. By then, McCamy had moved to Vermont to join the faculty at Bennington University. While nothing in the book identifies it formally as part of a series, the Press advertised McCamy’s book in the first issue of *Public Administration Review* as part of

The book (and dissertation) presented a methodical review of the practice of public relations at that time by federal executive branch agencies, some old line Cabinet departments, others created by Roosevelt. Like Beyle’s book, McCamy’s had the standard structure of such a project. It began with an overview of the importance of the subject, including a review of the (scant) literature, the scope of the study and the methodology of the inquiry. In the body of the book, McCamy subdivided the practice of government publicity into segments, each of which was the topic of a chapter. He created categories other than the obvious and pedestrian silo approach of dedicating a chapter to each major department or agency. That would merely have presented a compendium of vertical case studies, essentially a descriptive approach. Rather, he organized the subject horizontally, presenting empirical research results based on patterns of practice he found across-the-board in executive branch departments and agencies. The categories he created covered methods of communication, methods of distribution, quantitative analysis, coordination, and staffing.

McCamy also developed a theoretical framework on the purposes of government public relations, including Beyle’s focus on democracy-driven external communications (1939, 21):

1. distribute publicity among or for the clients of the agency;
2. catch and hold the attention of the large public;
3. influence legislation;
4. reply to attacks upon the agency;
5. avoid publicity;
6. report, without particular aims, the routine news of government.

To collect this information, McCamy created a questionnaire and surveyed the publicity activities of all but the most minor agencies. He also conducted in-depth interviews with major PR practitioners in the federal government. Another methodology he used was content analysis. He analyzed newspaper coverage, seeking to identify how much of a story emanated from an agency’s press release and how closely the story tracked the orientation of the release. (Lasswell was a major proponent of content analysis as a methodology.) Using these empirical and social science research techniques he collected original, comprehensive and in-depth data.

Again, like Beyle, McCamy followed the standard academic template of ending the book with a summary and conclusions from the inquiry. Then, being careful, he separated the conclusions chapter from a final chapter providing his views on the implications of his study. He suggested that government public relations was not a threat to democracy or the free press and was not inherently a reflection of dictatorship. (This was in the context of the propaganda activities of the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy; as well as accusations by the conservative coalition in Congress that Roosevelt’s 1937 reorganization proposal would be tantamount to a dictatorship.) McCamy viewed government PR with equanimity, as a benign extension of modern pub-
lic administration, emerging as integral to the administrative process. Public relations was more than self-serving publicity by an agency (and there was some of that) or Beyle style reporting. Rather, publicity activities were an inherent element of administrative leadership.

The initial reviews of the book were very positive and hinted at what its lasting contribution would be. The first review, in 1939, was in *APSR*. Wengert, who had written his 1936 (unpublished) dissertation on a narrower aspect of federal public relations (under John Gaus at Wisconsin), gave it a very favorable review. He saw the book as an antidote “To the emotional and frequently uninformed critics of the government publicist.” Given the political and journalistic attacks on public relations activities of executive branch agencies in FDR’s administration, “McCamy’s revaluation [sic] of the publicity function is thus also a contribution to such understanding as will permit its protection against stupid suspicions and attacks” (Wengert, 1939). A more detailed review in *POQ* noted that government propaganda was much in discussion, “but upon which few facts are known. The author has made a noteworthy contribution in widening the field of information on this subject” (Rohlfing, 1940, 365). Finally, Harwood Childs, a Princeton political scientist who was first editor of *POQ* and a leading expert on propaganda and public opinion, gave McCamy’s book a very favorable review in the *Annals*. He described it as “the most complete factual survey to date” and “about the only and certainly the best treatment of the subject of government publicity now available” (1940).

**After Government Publicity**

By the time the book was released, McCamy had left Bennington and spent WWII as a federal administrator, first as an assistant to Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace (later Vice President during FDR’s third term) and then with several wartime and post-war federal programs dealing with international economic policy (McCamy, 1952, viii). He joined the political science faculty at University of Wisconsin (Madison) in 1947 and taught public administration and other subjects there until he retired in 1971. Initially, he maintained his interest in government publicity (see Appendix B). Gradually, his major interests shifted to foreign policy, then to science policy. His last book, published in 1972, was an extension of the latter subject, dealing with environmental studies, then a new topic in the academy. He died in 1995 at age 89.

*Government Publicity*, while long out of print, continued to be a touchstone reference as the definitive treatment of the subject. Its status was confirmed 40 years later when Martin included it in his *Guide to the Foundations of Public Administration* (emphasis added) in the chapter on “Press and Interest Group Relations” (1989, 150). *Government Publicity* continued to be cited frequently by academic authors in public administration and other closely related subjects. Some recent examples include (in reverse chronological order) Cone (2007), Kosar (2005), Baskind (2004), Rose (2000), Craig (2000), Dunn and Legge (2000), Bird (1999) and Winfield (1994).

The lasting value of *Government Publicity* derives from what it accomplished. McCamy’s was the first book-length treatment of an emerging and relatively new subfield within public administra-
tion. In that sense, he pioneered the subject by defining it comprehensively and then measuring it quantitatively. He presented first-time data on public relations practices and demonstrated that the subject could be researched using credible and basic social science methodology. A subject that had been largely under attack by political and journalistic hysteria, he was the first to ground it with a reality check. The facts simply didn’t support the purported manipulative power asserted about government public relations. Finally, McCamy showed that external communications was an inherent element of modern public administration, not an ancillary appendage.

From Then, Till Now: Summary and Conclusions

In retrospect, the breakthroughs that Beyle and McCamy accomplished were based on a trend that was not apparent to most until decades later, namely that communication of information was the basis not only of understanding how modern society and government function. Theirs was an extraordinary insight, presaging the information age and the communication revolution. Public reporting was an act of conveying information to external audiences that had the purpose of improving the democratic process. Meanwhile, government publicity entailed communicating to the public information that would improve the delivery of governmental goods and services.

Partly as a result of the impact and influence of Beyle’s and McCamy’s landmark books, public administration briefly treated public relations as one of its important subdivisions of the field. Through the middle of the 20th century, the major textbooks all contained relatively extended discussions of the topic (Lee, 1998). Then the subfield gradually faded from attention. When Waldo assessed the status of external (and internal) communications in public administration in 1992, he concluded it was “a significant but neglected topic” (Waldo, 1992, xi). It might not be so much that it disappeared, but rather that its component parts found new homes in a kind of public administration diaspora. The table seeks to correlate McCamy’s 1939 typology of government public relations with more contemporary terminology and nomenclature.

Now, however, there are straws in the wind that government public relations, as a subfield of public administration, may be re-congealing and the topic gaining a greater profile in the discipline. According to Holden, “The potential interconnection between public opinion and the success of public administration is one of the most profound realities to which political science may yet direct new attention” (1996, 35). Some recent publications relevant to government public relations have included (in reverse chronological order) Piotrowski (2007), Liu and Horsley (2007), Fairbanks et al. (2007), Roberts (2006), Raphael and Nesbary (2005), Graber (2003), Weiss (2002), and Garnett and Kouzmim (1997).

This would be a timely development given the dominant role of communications, the news media and information technologies in 21st century life, society and governance. A current day sensibility regarding government public relations for democratic purposes (and topics to study) would include e-reporting (i.e. using new technologies to report directly to public instead of indirectly...
through the news media), appointment of a “Chief Democracy Officer” in large agencies comparable to CIOs and CFOs, and maintenance of governmental e-news sites comparable to websites maintained by daily newspapers (Lee, 2005; 2007). Some of the pragmatic uses of modern public administration deserving academic study include sophisticated media relations by bureaucracies, crisis communications and use of paid advertising.

If such a renewed interest in the subject proves to be the case, then it would give new life to the pioneering work of the two founders of the subfield of government public relations, Herman Beyle and James McCamy and their seminal books.
Appendix A

Bibliography of Herman Beyle’s Writings on Public Reporting
(in chronological order)


National Committee on Municipal Reporting, Public Reporting: With Special Reference to Annual, Departmental, and Current Reports of Municipalities, Publication No. 19. (New York: Municipal Administration Service, 1931). [Beyle was one of eight Committee members.]


“Governmental Reporting and Public Relations,” mimeograph typescript (42 pp.), 1938 (?), Syracuse University Archives. [Beyle’s summary: “Since this chapter is used by the author as a point of departure for a series of class discussions on Governmental Reporting and Public Relations, this list of suggestions may be considered as a brief expository syllabus” {p. 35n49}.]

Public Opinion and Government, teaching manual, mimeograph (?), 1938 (?). Contains at least 43 chapters. [This manuscript was not located.]

“Reporting – A Two Way Street,” Public Administration Review 2:2 (February 1939) 16-18. [This journal was briefly published by Syracuse University’s Public Administration Alumni Association. After it ceased publication, the newly created ASPA revived the title for its refereed journal.]

Sections on to public reporting (especially Appendices B and E), in William E. Mosher (chairman), Public Relations of Public Personnel Agencies; A Report Submitted to the Civil Service Assembly by the Committee on Public Relations of Public Personnel Agencies (Chicago: Civil Service Assembly of the United States and Canada, 1941). [Mosher stated that Beyle “prepared special sections of the report” {p. xi}.]

“The Responsible Citizen in Democratic Governance” (chap. 9), in Our Ways of Governance (Endicott, NY: Citizenship and Political Science Staff of Triple Cities College, 1948). [This is a revised version of the 1941 book/curriculum, but Beyle was the sole author.]

Appendix B

Bibliography of James McCamy’s Writings on Government Publicity (in chronological order)

“Governmental Reporting in Texas State Administration,” master's thesis in political science, University of Texas (Austin), 1932, unpublished.


Section on public opinion and administrative publicity in “We Need More Personalized Administration,” in Felix A. Nigro (ed.), Public Administration Readings and Documents (New York: Rinehart, 1951) 474-77.


“Government Publicity, 1972” (guest lecture), Syracuse University, October 11, 1972. Unpublished, author’s files.

References (other than Beyle and McCamy)


Mordecai Lee


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**Dr. Mordecai Lee** is Professor of Governmental Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. James McCamy was Lee’s political science advisor during Lee’s senior year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1969-70). Following in McCamy’s academic footsteps, Lee authored *The First Presidential Communications Agency: FDR’s Office of Government Reports* (2005) and edited *Government Public Relations: A Reader* (2008).