



# Talk of the Town: The Rise of Alexandria, Louisiana, and the "Daily Town Talk"

*Fredrick Marcel Spletstoser*

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As the sleepy courthouse town of Alexandria, Louisiana, began to recover from the devastation and trauma of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Daily Town Talk appeared. Nicknamed "Alexandria's postage stamp paper" by a rival publication, the Town Talk aimed to be "the best daily outside of New Orleans" and became one of the most successful regional newspapers of its kind. It quickly championed urban rejuvenation and envisioned Alexandria as the "Future Great" city of the state, if not the entire South. Fredrick M. Spletstoser tells the story of the paper's first sixty years and of the town's triumphs and setbacks during that same time. An unpretentious country journal, the "Town Talk" would become in the second half of the twentieth century a pioneer in newspaper technology under the leadership of Joe D. Smith, one of the most respected names in American journalism.

Though Alexandria did not evolve into the grand and glittering metropolis dreamed of, it was not for lack of effort. The Town Talk and the family who published it were among the city's most optimistic champions. The newspaper was inextricably bound up with—and often directly behind—transformations in Alexandria's urban landscape, the development of municipal services and education, efforts to attract industry and cultivate trade, and the stimulation of surrounding agribusiness.

In chronicling Alexandria's past, Spletstoser examines the construction, timber, and railroad booms that occurred across the turn of the century, the large and enduring military presence in central Louisiana, and the impact of Huey P. Long's political career. Along the way, he narrates colorful stories culled from the "Town Talk"'s pages and describes the fascinating family members who published the paper during this entire period.

Among the most important institutions in the South after the Civil War, small-town newspapers recorded the feelings and desires of the vast majority of the common people. Talk of the Town illustrates the role provincial journalism played in the planning and expansion of towns throughout the country as it relates the engrossing social, cultural, economic, and political history of one southern place and the people who lived there.

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