Cutting the umbilical cord to Alma Mater

By Joseph D. Lasica R'77
Photos by Nat Clymer R'74

A SENSE of restlessness — some might say recklessness — enveloped the editors of the *Daily Targum* in the last of the Eisenhower years. Eager to play the role of campus catalyst, Rutgers College's lively student newspaper searched for a sassy way to snap the academic community out of its listlessness.

Just back from the 1960 National Student Association convention, editor-in-chief Robert Wiener, executive editorDavidRosenzweig and a few other student leaders were lounging around the Douglass Student Center one afternoon, shooting the breeze. Swept up in the idealistic fervor of the early civil rights movement, they were eager to "get some controversy goin' " to help ignite student awareness, Wiener recalls.

Suggestions to rouse the student body were offered, kicked about, discarded. Then suddenly, an inspiration. "Why don't we invite Nikita Khrushchev to speak at Rutgers?" someone suggested. The Soviet Premier was due in New York the following week, where he would bang his shoe upon the desk of the United Nations.

Their mission determined, the students donned jackets and trekked to the offices of Dr. Mason Gross. The new president of Rutgers gave the delegation his blessings, but instructed them to "go through proper channels" by contacting the State Department. Next day, the quintet telegraphed Secretary of State Christian Herter, asking Washington to waive a 30-mile-radius travel restriction and allow Khrushchev to speak at Rutgers. The *Targum* trumpeted the story in its September 16, 1960, issue.

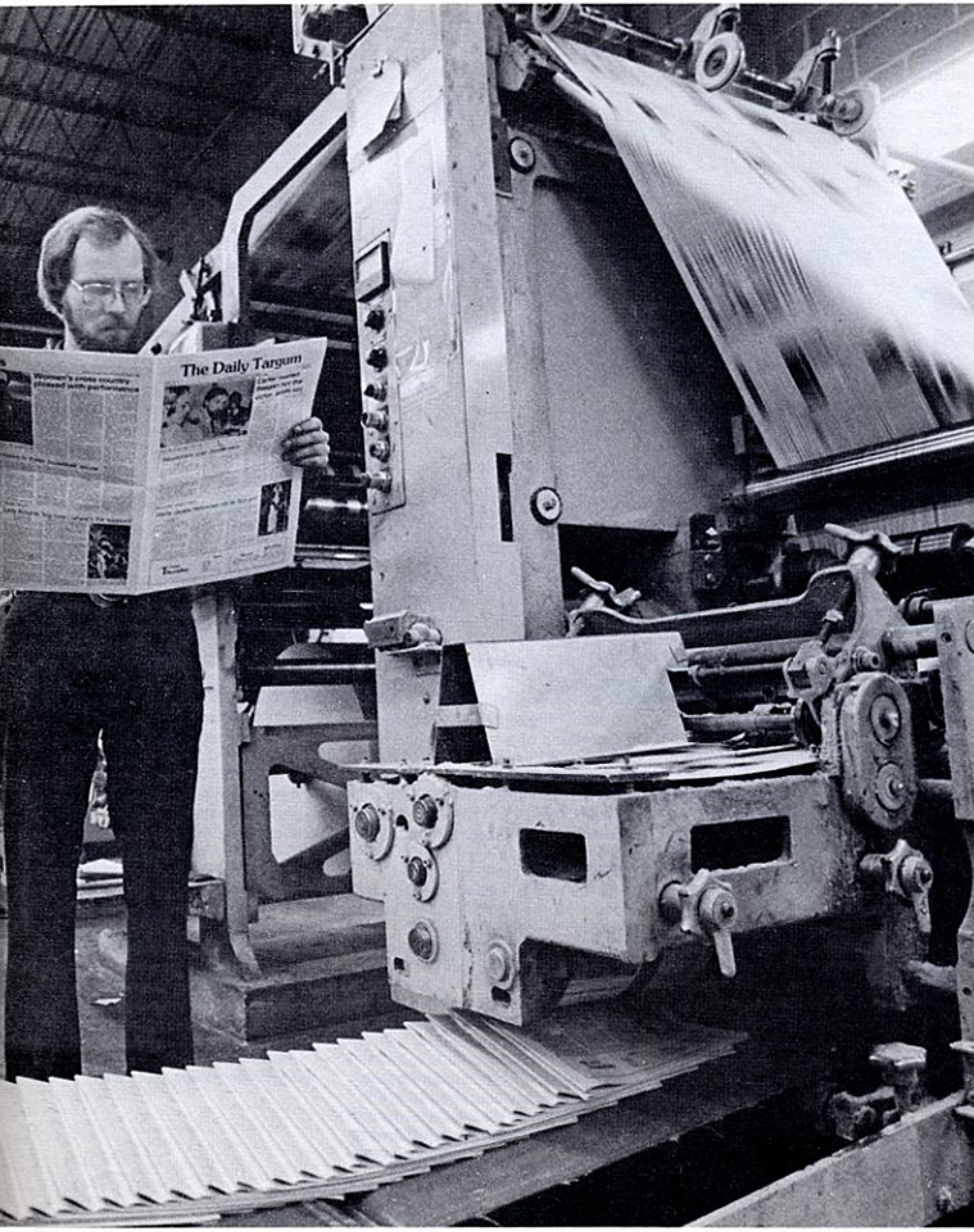
The reaction was fast and furious. "Every American Legion post was up in arms," Wiener vividly remembers. "New Brunswick's Hungarian community was totally outraged. Every right-wing state senator asked for an investigation of the radicals at Rutgers. I was getting hate mail and midnight phone calls. It was very heavy."

State Senator John Lynch introduced a resolution deploring the students' action and said, "If these five individuals want to hear Khrushchev, let them join him behind the Iron Curtain. Our people want no part of him or his godless and murderous tribe." A *Newark Evening News* editorial suggested the telegram had "embarrassed the nation."

But the *Targum* merely shrugged off the criticism. On September 23 it printed a prominent front-page "Open Letter" to Secretary Herter, expressing disappointment that the telegram had gone unanswered.

That bit of chutzpah was too much for Dr. Gross. "I never saw him so angry," recounts John McDonald

In the early morning, a pressman checks the day's edition as it rolls off the press.


The Daily Targum

R'38, then associate director of public relations, who served as intermediary in the dispute. The agitated president demanded that the editors apologize to Herter for their indiscretion. But Wiener, unyielding, suggested that Gross express his views in a letter to the editor. Exasperated, Gross finally relented. "Dr. Gross up to this moment believed in freedom of the student press," the mild-mannered McDonald yelled at Wiener, "but now he's having his doubts."

In many ways the episode epitomizes the *Targum* tradition. An unorthodox idea captures the imagination of some editors. The paper, sometimes as willing to generate news as cover it, gives the story splashy display. The inevitable controversy ensues, but the brash editors only delight in the battle. The flap lasts a few days, then is largely forgotten. In the end, the *Targum* retains its dogged independence.

Now, 20 years later, a new generation of editors is reaffirming that independence — but this time with the blessings of Old Queen's. This fall the *Targum* embarked on its 112th year of publication — and its first as a private, nonprofit corporation wholly independent of the University.

Any account of the *Targum's* move to independence must be prefaced by some background to acquaint the reader with the evolution of the fourth oldest student newspaper among the college dailies in America (behind *The Dartmouth,* Brown *Daily Herald* and Indiana *Daily Student).*

The *Targum* was not the first periodical at Rutgers College. In 1842 a band of students published the monthly *Rutgers Literary Miscellany,* and in 1854 the faculty put out the *New Brunswick Review.* Both succumbed quickly, and were little mourned. In 1858 the Philoclean and Peithossophian literary societies established the *Rutgers College Quarterly.* The magazine came to an abrupt end in 1861 after one smug critic, commenting upon an unpopular professor, was "severed" from the college.

In the fall of 1866, the Civil War over, there began an agitation for another attempt at a college periodical. Plans for publication were completed, but the paper lacked a name. One afternoon a number of undergraduates were gathered in Hertzog Hall discussing their dilemma. Suddenly one of them shouted, "I have it! The Targum! The Targum!" The euphoria was described by one of those present: "The spell of that afflatus rested upon all; Chaos fled straightway to his resounding caves, and Minerva tripped upon the scene festive and gay." But what prompted this inspiration and its immediate acceptance?

Rutgers President William H. Campbell had been delivering lectures on Hebrew literature to a class studying the original text of the Old Testament. During his lectures he often referred to the Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew scriptures known as the targums, particularly the Targum of Onkelos or the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel. (Translated from the Chaldean tongue, "targum" literally means interpretation.) Constant mention of these unfamiliar and striking names made them vogue words immediately absorbed into the slang of the upperclassmen.

Students began to apply the word to everything of a strange or unique character. William E. Griffis, Class of 1869, one of the paper's founders, noted that targums were known as the equivalent of crib sheets: "At examinations these targums were occasionally written on shirt-bosoms, or cuffs, or a tiny book slid up and down the sleeve, held by a string up and around the sleeve, so as to be visible or invisible as desired."

Students borrowed the word for their yearbook, published in February and December of 1867 and December 1868. But early in 1869 Robert C. Pryun, Class of 1869, became taken with the notion of a monthly *Targum.* He broached the idea to Griffis, editor of the annual *Targum,* and together they conspired to head off opposition to their scheme. In the first ingenious political coup staged at the *Targum,* Griffis and Pryun identified the likely chief objector of the plan, Charles C. Knapp, Class of 1869, and offered him the post of senior editor (editor-in-chief). Knapp accepted, and the student body, assembled in the chapel, gave its blessings to the proposal.

The first issue of the nascent *Targum* came on January 29, 1869. The monthly's lead article, penned by Griffis, was entitled, "What Our Mother-tongue Owes to the English Bible." Thereafter we find some campus news, poetry, alleged humor and endless essays on literature, science, philosophy, religion and travel.

A few issues later came a description of the first intercollegiate football game, held November 6, 1869. The score: Rutgers 6, Princeton 4. Probably no *Targum* article has been more widely quoted than that exclusive seven-paragraph account. As one pundit put it, "It's been all downhill from there."

For decades after 1869, frequent complaints were made that the periodical was neither a newspaper nor a literary journal, but tried to be both. Such criticisms were largely laid to rest by 1919, when the paper abandoned its 8½ x 11-inch layout and adopted a tabloid newspaper format. As the paper moved further into the 20th century it began to print fewer literary pieces but increased its coverage of campus news, especially sports, which captured front-page headlines almost weekly from the 1920s to 1950s.

Probably the least changed facet of the paper over the years has been the plethora of editorials: high-sounding, argumentative, often crusading or preaching. Sometimes they were heeded (a May 1869 editorial proposed scarlet as the school color, and the student body concurred days later); sometimes ignored (the paper urged Rutgers' admittance to the Ivy League in 1953). On rare occasions

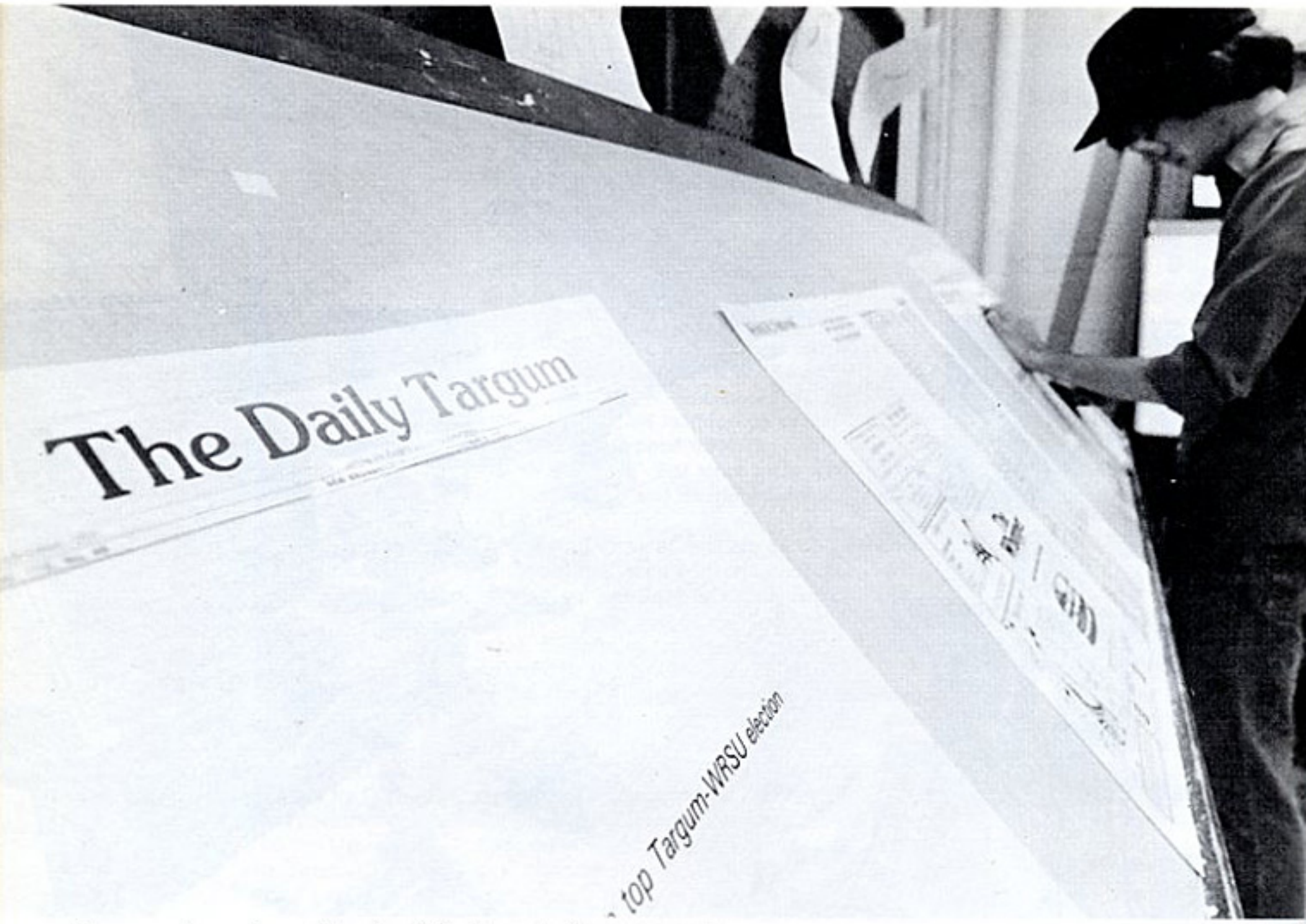
Copy for the next day's edition is typeset using the latest computer equipment.

they were prescient (in November 1947, after President Robert C. Clothier reiterated the University's policy against participation in post-season sports contests, a front-page editorial urged the administration to reconsider its opposition to a match-up between Rutgers and Penn State in the Freedom Bowl).

Remarkably, the editorial tenor has remained consistently progressive through the decades. At times the *Targum* has dabbled in radicalism, as in 1932 when it welcomed the vanguard of socialism (editor-in-chief Earl Schenck Miers R'33 editorialized, "What this country needs is not so much a good five-cent cigar, as Tom Marshall believed, but more professors who will wave the red banner of intellectual anarchism and toss the bombs of academic revolt"). Or 1968, when the paper made its first-ever editorial endorsement for president: Dick Gregory.

But those years were exceptions to its generally moderate posture. For instance, a November 7, 1941, EXTRA edition, printed on cardboard, urged students not to destroy the Lafayette College campus following a night raid in which Willie the Silent was smeared with slogans extolling the prowess of the Pennsylvania school. "Willy isn't asking to be avenged. But he does want us to be sensible *men* of Rutgers. Stay away from Easton tonight, fellows."

One of the brightest chapters in the *Targum*'s history came in the 1952-53 school year, when the paper chastised the University administration for investigating and firing Moses Finley, Simon Heimlich R'24 and later Abraham Glasser R'33, all professors at colleges on the Newark campus. A December 17, 1952, front-page editorial pontificated, "It has never been proved that either Heimlich or Finley are members of the Communist Party. But their very refusal to answer a question about this connection has been taken as an admission of membership. 'Guilt by association' is the term, we believe. This type of thinking is dangerous to a free society."



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By 1965 the University would come around to the *Targum's* point of view and refuse to fire Marxist professor Eugene Genovese, who said at a teach-in in Records Hall that he "welcomed" a Vietcong victory. Republican gubernatorial candidate Wayne Dumont, calling the remarks "outrageous, seditious and possibly treasonable," asked for the professor's dismissal. Governor Richard Hughes NL'31 asked the Board of Governors to conduct a full inquiry. The *Targum* assailed the assault on academic freedom and editorialized in support of dissent: "Preservation of this right is vital to the preservation and progress of American society."

Besides laying claim to the conscience of the campus community, the *Targum* also professes to represent the eyes and ears of the Rutgers student body, and in many ways the paper's news coverage has indeed reflected contemporary college life.

The *Targum* of the 1940s was a politically moderate sheet. It publicized the campus beauty queens and soph hop, and provided a platform for student and faculty thought. One of the few college dailies that continued to publish during the Second World War, the *Targum* may have contributed in a small way to Rutgers' becoming the State University of New Jersey.

In the spring of 1944 editor-in-chief Harry Kanz R'45 wrote an editorial supporting a legislative bill that mandated a study of converting Rutgers to a state university. But the *Targum's* official governing body balked. "The Targum Council (translate 'Dean of Men') refused to print the issue unless I revised or removed the editorial," Kranz related. "I refused and submitted my resignation as editor. With news stories beginning to appear (in *The New York Times* and elsewhere) on Rutgers 'censorship,' the Council relented, allowed the

issue to go to press with my editorial, and added comments of its own.

"The wide display of the story — and public comment on the underlying issue of Rutgers' becoming the State University — led to action by the legislature within two years making Rutgers the State University, despite the administration's initial opposition to such a 'radical' idea."

By the late 1940s the *Targum* was calling for progressive reform of campus institutions — like fraternities. The frats, whose control over the paper waned with the onset of World War II, had in fact become a major target for crusading editors, many of whom were veterans. Pledging, hazing and fraternity lifestyle in general were harshly criticized. The boiling point was reached on the night of April 23, 1949, when 100 fraternity men descended on Targum House at 24 College Ave., unzipped their pants, and urinated in unison on the walls of the house. The *Targum* decried the downpour as a "Rain of Terror."

The *Targum* of the 1950s often lapsed into the bulletin-board format of that period, but there were numerous shining moments. The paper gave wide coverage to the censorship of the college literary magazine *Antho*, the dismissal of professors during the McCarthy era, and the *Targum*-led March on Trenton to protest a planned $14 million budget cut.

One of the more controversial episodes of the era came when Walter Cummins R'57 wrote a November 8, 1956, editorial on "Sexual Restrictions" at Rutgers. The piece criticized the University's social regulations, which required Douglass women to be in their dorms by midnight six days a week and declared their rooms off-limit to men.

"But what becomes of basic urges under this reign of purity?" the editorial demanded. "Most of the students we know are not celibates. So they break rules or find relief in the darkness of Gibbons parking lot. And because the means is tainted with a feeling of dishonesty, the release of natural impulses through necking becomes unclean, perhaps leading to guilt feelings in many instances."

Eight weeks later, the *Monitor*, the official organ of the Trenton Catholic Diocese, branded the piece "offensive and shocking" and called for a "thorough investigation" by the Governor, legislature, department of education and Rutgers trustees.

Dean of Men Cornelius B. Boocock R'20 issued a statement the following week denying there existed "moral laxity" among Rutgers students.

Gov. Robert Meyner did not launch an investigation but called the editorial "an irresponsible article by a maladjusted boy." While newspapers across the state played up the story, Boocock prevented the *Targum* from printing a follow-up on the incident, Cummins noted.

After a period of relative calm, the paper was thrust into the turbulent events of the new decade. From the mid-'60s until 1972 the *Targum* assumed an activist, militantly antiwar stance. Advocacy journalism replaced objective reporting, though it is hard to say how one could remain dispassionate during that divisive era.

It was not the *Targum*'s left-wing politics, however, that incensed state officials once again in 1970. Readers who turned to page five of the September 14 *Targum* can be excused if they were taken aback by an opinion article innocuously titled "How I Spent My Summer Vacation." Its author, editorial page editor Max Sawicky R'71, managed to cram 24 vulgarities into the first paragraph of the piece. The disjointed article actually rebukes obscenity as an inadequate mode of expression, but few readers got that far.

Middlesex County Assemblyman Peter Garibaldi, running for Representative Edward Patten's 15th District seat, denounced the piece as "the filthiest thing I've ever seen." He introduced a resolution calling for an investigation of all state institutions to determine whether tax dollars were being spend to foment "disgusting filth and blatant immorality." He also called on the legislature to establish "moral guidelines" for student newspapers subsidized by public funds.

While Garibaldi's motion was pending on the floor of the legislature, the session was adjourned due to lack of a quorum, and a few days later, he withdrew it.

"That article did more damage to *Targum*'s reputation than anything we've done in the last 20 years," noted Bill Barrett R'74, co-founder of the Targum Alumni Association. "Whenever you'd go off campus and say you're from *Targum* people would say, 'Oh yeah, you run all the dirty words.' It was an incredible thing to try to fight."

When *Targum* editors were not busy incurring the wrath of state officials, they were usually churning out reams of copy to fill the next day's edition. The chore was tedious and often thankless. But nearly every semester came a respite that made the grind more palatable: the bogus *Mugrat* issue (that's *Targum* spelled backward).

Instigated by humor editor Charles Brower R'25, the first issue of "Ye Mugrat—Found-Dead 1925" commemorated April Fool's Day. The lead story in the one-story insert bears the headline, "Vice Commission Reports Orgy in Old Observatory." Adjoining the story is a photo of an unidentified derelict (Brower) clasping two whiskey bottles. Among the pearls of wit was this New Jersey College for Women social notice: "Sophomore Vigilance Committee has ruled

that green must be worn in conspicuous places, and as a result, next year's freshmen will wear green garters." Pretty racy stuff.

Taunting the female gender has been a recurrent *Mugrat* theme. The 1956 *Mugrat*, masking as the Douglass College *Caellian*, urged greater sexual license — freedom to wear bermuda shorts, "or for that matter nothing at all."

"Don't get us wrong, we still think the old alma mater is peachy. We are still for democracy and against sin. But let us modernize ourselves. Throw off the shackles of conformity, girls." The editorial concludes, "Well, what we are trying to say is we are glad the honor system is abolished."

The paper's occasional proclivity to sexism is not too surprising, though. It wasn't until 1969 that the *Targum* named its first woman editor. And even though Rutgers College has been coed since 1973, there have been only 15 others. Last spring, Nancy Greenberg R'81 was elected the paper's first female editor-in-chief.

The October 19, 1977, *Mugrat* went further than most. Its off-lead story warned that about 1700 "girls" had been dispensed defective contraceptive pills by Rutgers health officials. "The discovery was made last week when a Douglass College junior became the sixth girl to become pregnant since September while using University-distributed birth control pills." An anonymous spokesman urged all pill-takers to immediately report for a pregnancy test.

That morning about 100 women — freshmen, mostly — actually showed up at the Rutgers, Douglass and Livingston health centers.

Freshmen were not alone in being duped. Since the 1960s the *Mugrat* has masked as a regular issue of the *Targum*, complete with a *Targum* nameplate and credible front-page news.

The *Mugrat*'s February 17, 1972, off-lead story reported Curtis Tarr, director of the National Selective Service System, announcing 30,000 men would be drafted into the National Guard by July. College Press Service, a national mail news service for 300 college newspapers, picked up the story and, believing it to be authentic, sent it to its subscribers. Alerted of the mistake by a *Targum* editor who received the CPS release, Selective Service on March 9 sent telegrams to all state directors in the hope of preventing the hoax story from alarming thousands of draft registrants across the nation.

THE *Targum* has always prided itself on its independence from University control. But to a large degree that independence was illusory. Although Rutgers has almost never exerted overt censorship, there have been infringements on editorial freedom in recent years: a student government angry over lack of coverage froze the paper's funds; the dean of students threatened disciplinary action against the editors if the paper endorsed a mayoral candidate in 1974 or continued to run ads for term paper companies in 1979.

More important, the *Targum* was financially and legally bound to the University. If one can point to a particular date, the *Targum* lost a vestige of its independence in March 1924, when the student body created Targum Council and voted to eliminate individual subscriptions by imposing a mandatory student fee, and the University gave the paper two free rooms at 24 College Avenue.

While the relationship between the student paper and the University seemed comfortable enough, editors in every decade since the 1930s have toyed with the notion of snipping the umbilical cord. In a 1957 editorial entitled "Give Us Liberty," for instance, the editors cited problems with Targum Council and a prohibition against staff salaries as compelling reasons for independence. But the effort came to naught, as did a similar move in 1973.

By the summer of 1977, with the paper having turned a handsome profit under the editorship of Peter Sulyok R'77, the time was ripe for another try. On the second floor of a sparsely-furnished Highland Park apartment, editor-in-chief Norm Weisfeld R'78 and this author mulled over long-term solutions to the paper's habitual production foul-ups and slipshod reporting. Only a panel of distinguished alumni serving as a publishing board could rectify the situation, we decided. Seasoned journalists could advise the staff on copy and layout improvements, while businessmen could streamline the paper to ensure a smoother operation and steady profit.

The goal, in short, was to advance the paper's professionalism — to make the *Targum* the best college daily in the East.

The idea caught fire, spurred largely by the Samuel G. Blackman (R'27) Journalism Convention and Alumni Reunion held at Rutgers on April 8, 1978. The $17,000 convocation and testimonial dinner, honoring the retired general news editor of the Associated Press and former *Targum* editor-in-chief, drew nearly 1000 persons and such speakers and panelists as Daniel Schorr, Sally Quinn, Lesley Stahl, Richard Reeves and Carl Stokes. An outgrowth of that event was the formation, four months later, of the Targum Alumni Association, which now claims 100 members.

The association commissioned a study of independence, and a 10-man committee issued an 82-page report in April 1979 recommending incorporation as a non-profit enterprise.

The study envisioned an alumni board of trustees to replace the Targum Council, lending the paper continuity and expertise. Independence would enhance the staff's *esprit de corps* and perhaps remedy a severe staffing shortage by permitting gratuities to editors. Independence would give the paper control over how to dispose of its assets. And independence would prevent editorial infringements by University or student officers.

The report noted that 27 other college dailies are incorporated, including some of the nation's best: the *Stanford Daily, Daily Illini, Daily Californian* at Berkeley, and every Ivy League paper except Penn's.

The concept of independence came to be embraced by successive editorial boards. The movement began to snowball in February 1979 when the

Bundled copies of the paper are whisked from the loading dock for mid-morning distribution on the campus.

Targum halted its presses for two weeks to protest the administration's refusal to let the paper pay its editors an annual honorarium averaging 26 cents a hour. When tempers cooled, independence was overwhelmingly approved by the Rutgers College student body last December, and the University Senate approved the paper's plan to finance the move, though it added the proviso that seven of the 12 board of trustee members must be students.

Following a "declaration of independence" signing ceremony in the paper's Student Center offices (which are now leased from the University), the Targum Publishing Company was launched on July 1 with the filing of articles of incorporation in Trenton. Officially, the *Targum* became independent in October, when the University treasurer transferred nearly $100,000 in assets from the now-defunct student organization to the three-month-old "paper" corporation.

THROUGH the decades the *Targum* has slowly evolved from a monthly publication in 1869, to a bi-monthly in 1888, weekly in 1891, twice weekly in 1925, four times a week in 1954 and five times a week since 1956. During those years some of Rutgers' most illustrious alumni called themselves *Targum* men: poet Joyce Kilmer R'08, Nobel Prizewinner Selman A. Waksman R'15, Pulitzer Prizewinner Roy F. Nichols R'18, former U.S. Senator Clifford P. Case R'25, Nobel Prizewinner Milton Friedman R'32, television commentator Martin Agronsky R'36.

Today, none of the paper's 16 editors is well versed in *Targum* lore. But perhaps they can be pardoned, preoccupied as they are with running a $400,000-a-year business enterprise that averages 20 pages a day with a 16,000-paid circulation, a third of it on the Douglass, Cook and Livingston campuses.

The *Targum* has come full-circle. Now, as in 1869, it is a private enterprise, supported by student subscriptions and advertising income. Will secession breed success? If the past is any guide, the future bodes bright for New Brunswick's only morning daily.□