

FBI Files FBI-II

On a 'Hostile' Newspaper

Charleston, W. Va.

The FBI monitored editorial criticism of its activities made by West Virginia's leading daily newspaper, the Charleston Gazette, conducted criminal record checks of its owners and editors and, on orders from J. Edgar Hoover, the late FBI director, denied the newspaper any "information or assistance."

The secret record of the bureau's activities, begun after the Gazette started to attack its McCarthy-era preoccupation with subversion, was disclosed Saturday in 150 pages of FBI documents obtained from the bureau's "Charleston Gazette" file under the Freedom of Information Act.

The documents tracing the bureau's surveillance of the Gazette, after Harry G. Hoffmann became its chief editorial writer in 1951, became the first public confirmation that the bureau had kept elaborate files on "friendly" and "hostile" newspapers and had sought to discipline those that questioned its conduct.

So far as could be learned from the FBI and through a check of other newspapers by the Associated Press, the Gazette is the first such publication to avail itself of the mandatory record disclosure provi-

sions of the 1966 Freedom of Information Act, thus establishing that the bureau kept files not only on individual journalists but also on publishing organizations.

The file — or the expurgated portion of it obtained by the Gazette nearly a year after its first query to the bureau as to whether

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such a file existed — also showed that in the pre-McCarthy, pre-civil-rights years of the 1930s and 1940s, when the paper's editorials were consistently congratulatory of Hoover as "Policeman No. 1," the director sent copies of the editorials to the attorney general, his superior at the Justice Department, as they were mailed to him by field agents. The paper had a circulation of 80,000 at the time.

The breach that opened the bureau's secret campaign against the Gazette began with a 1953 editorial, sent to FBI headquarters in an "urgent" teletype from the Pittsburgh FBI field office, that strongly criticized congressional testimony by Hoover that year. He had indirectly attacked the conduct in national security matters of former President Harry S. Truman, an editorial favorite of the strongly Democratic newspaper.

Under Hoffman, who became editor in 1953 and retired earlier this month at the age of 65, the Gazette broadened its criticism of the hunt for "subversives" that developed under the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin.

In addition, as the FBI became increasingly involved in the civil rights struggle of blacks in the South in the late 1950s, the newspaper began a series of sharply worded editorials contending that "Hoover's bully boys" might not be giving full time and attention to the cases of the blacks and civil rights activists who were being killed and intimidated.

New York Times