

## Tom Bost

Modern news coverage of North Carolina state government and politics could be said to have started with William Thomas "Tom" Bost (1878-1951), who became Raleigh correspondent of the Greensboro Daily News in 1914 and was still at it when he died in 1951 after a brief illness.

By the 1930s, Bost was already the "dean" of political reporters, referred to as the "Boswell of state government," known by office holders and office seekers as a journalist who would be fair and accurate about their activities.

Earlier political reporting had concentrated mostly on campaigns and speeches. Bost also wrote stories about budgets, policies and personalities in government. The General Assembly was his special love, and he set the standards for describing legislation and characterizing legislators.

Bost's reputation for fairness and thoroughness was all the more remarkable because, on the one hand, he had strong political views, he was an ardent New Deal Democrat, and on the other, he seldom took notes of the sort that all journalists so assiduously collect. His peers marveled at the knowledge he carried in his head, and the memory that allowed him to listen to speeches or to interviews without taking a note, yet repeat them without error.

Bost also set another pattern as both reporter and commentator. His

daily column, "Among Us Tar Heels," ranged over politics, history, social developments, and anything else about North Carolina that struck his fancy.

Bost's strong religious beliefs made him a lifelong opponent of capital punishment. He attended more than 250 executions as a "religious duty," trying through his writing of the gruesome details to inspire abolition of the gas chamber.

Born to poverty near Salisbury, Bost spent two years at the University of North Carolina, worked on newspapers in Salisbury, Charlotte, and Durham before coming to Raleigh in 1912 as city editor of the News & Observer. The desk job didn't suit him, and he took the Greensboro job two years later.

Bost's wife, Annie Kissler Bost (1883-1961), came with him to Raleigh. Earlier a school teacher and executive secretary of the State Federation of Women's Clubs, she was named commissioner of the state's public welfare system in 1930 and held the post until 1944.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998