

The Daniels Family

For more than a century, four generations of the family of Josephus Daniels, a Washington, N.C. ship's carpenter, were giants in North Carolina journalism, principally with the News & Observer of Raleigh.

The elder Daniels was killed in 1865 by a freak shelling of a vessel returning him to his home village. His wife, Mary Cleaves Seabrook Daniels, moved to Wilson and proceeded to raise five young sons, two of whom became journalists.

Charles Cleaves (1864-1951) and his brother, Josephus (1862-1951), launched the Kinston Free Press in 1882. Charles Cleaves edited it for three years, and also worked on the Wilson Advance. Meanwhile, Josephus worked on the Wilson paper, owned an interest in newspapers in Kinston and Rocky Mount, went to the University of North Carolina law school, and wound up in Raleigh both as printer to the state government and editor of the State Chronicle.

Charles Cleaves proceeded also to get a law degree, quit newspapering in the early 1890s and wound up as a New York lawyer for 35 years.

Josephus Daniels wound up as owner-editor of the News & Observer, which had been a rival of the Chronicle. For the next 50 years, he would become the state's most notable editor and leading political figure. When not writing fiery editorials on yellow legal pads as the editorial conscience of the state Democratic Party, he was Secretary of the Navy in the administration of Woodrow Wilson, and ambassador to Mexico under Franklin D. Roosevelt. He wrote a multi-volume autobiography that is a virtual political history of the state during his era.

Three of Josephus's four sons spent their careers on the family newspaper, Frank as publisher, Jonathan as editor, Josephus as circulation director. Frank Daniels was an influential figure in newspaper industry organizations. Jonathan authored books of social commentary and history, and was on the White House press staff briefly in 1944-45.

Frank Daniels Jr. succeeded to the publisher's mantle and began a career that included important posts in industry organizations, chairman of the Associated Press, and like his grandfather and father, president of the N.C. Press Association. He was a major force in North Carolina art and culture through the philanthropic Daniels Foundation, and was influential in economic development of the Research Triangle as a member of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority.

His son, Frank Daniels III was editing the newspaper when it was merged with the McClatchy group of newspapers in 1995.

By Roy Parker Jr.
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