

Roy Parker, reporter, editor and historian, prepared these the biographies on North Carolina journalists in 1998 to mark the 125th anniversary of the NC Press Association.

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## 'The Newspaper'

What did a typical North Carolina newspaper newsroom look like 80 years ago?

The best description is in a work of fiction, a short story by North Carolina's most famous author, Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938). Titled "The Newspaper," the story undoubtedly describes the office of the Asheville Citizen. As a teen-ager, Wolfe delivered the newspaper. His brother briefly worked as a reporter.

Wolfe sets the scene of his story with a passage in the form of stage directions for a play:

*The time: A hot night in June 1916.*

*The place: The city room of a small town newspaper.*

*The room has three or four flat-topped desks, typewriters, green-shaded lights hanging from the ceiling by long cords, some filing cabinets. Upon the wall, a large map of the United States. Upon the desks, newspaper clippings, sheets of yellow flimsy, paste pots, pencils, etc. Overall, a warm smell of ink, a not unpleasant air of use and weariness.*

*To the right, a door opening into a small room which houses the A.P. man, his typewriter, and his instruments. To the left, a glass partition and a door into the compositor's room. The door stands open and the compositor can be seen at work before the linotype machines, which make a quiet slotting sound. The A.P. man's door is also open, and he can be seen with in, typing rapidly, to the accompaniment of the clattering telegraph instrument on the table beside him.*

*In the outer room, Theodore Willis, a reporter, sits at his desk, banging away at a typewriter. He is about 28 years old, consumptive, very dark of feature, with oval-shaped brown eyes, jet black hair, thin hands, and a face full of dark intelligence, humor, sensitivity.*

*At another desk, his back toward Willis, sits another reporter - young, red-headed, red-necked, stocky - also typing.*

*All the men wear green eye-shades. Theodore Willis is smoking a cigarette which hangs from the corner of his mouth and which he inhales from time to time, narrowing his eyes to keep the smoke out.*

*Harry Tugman, the chief pressman, enters at this moment with a bundle tied in a newspaper under his arm. He is a powerful man, brutally built, with the neck, shoulders, and battered features of a prize fighter. His strong, pitted face is colorless, and pocked heavily with ink marks.*

Wolfe's classic picture could serve as the introduction to the working environment of North Carolina daily journalism for at least another 50 years.

By Roy Parker Jr.

January 1998

## NC Press Association

The shape and business of collegial gatherings of North Carolina editors was set in the earliest days of the North Carolina Press Association, formed on May 15, 1873, at a "convention" of 29 journalists gathered in the Wayne County courthouse in Goldsboro.

The convention was called for both professional and political purposes. Professionally, the new organization hoped to better regulate the flood of patent medicine and other forms of Victorian Era quack advertising that was inundating their offices, and which some editors rejected while others accepted gratefully and even offered cut-rate advertising fees. A resolution called for the new association to "examine the character and reliability of all advertising agencies seeking business with members."

The gathering also had political aims. It prepared a resolution

for the North Carolina General Assembly calling for preparation of statistics and other information on the state that could be used to further economic development and probably also to dampen the propensity of editors to make far-fetched claims for their communities.

The association was also fraternal. Editors and publishers generally liked each other's company, and there were benefits outside the state, too. The Georgia Press Association, for instance, sent a telegram to the new association saluting "the fraternity of the Old North State" and asking for a report on its activities.

The social aspects of the association quickly rose to the fore at this founding meeting, when members were invited for a free ride on the cars of the Atlantic Rail Road to the newly-developing town of Morehead City, on the sound just down the tracks from Goldsboro.

By 1875, this aspect of the NCPA was traditional. At the meeting that year in Wilmington, members partook of a "carnival atmosphere" as they rode the steamship Raleigh along the Cape Fear to Smithville, or Southport. The Wilmington Concert Cornet Band accompanied the excursionists.

The trip to Wilmington also set a pattern of NCPA conventions held around the state, roughly rotating between east and west. Asheville hosted its first convention in 1881, Morehead City in 1886. By 1900, Asheville would have another convention, Morehead two more.

Another ironclad tradition established early was to rotate the presidency each year, usually requiring the vice president to prepare the program for the coming year.

By 1900, with Asheville once again the scene of the convention, more than 130 editors and publishers, many with spouses and children, were in attendance. The NCPA itself had become a tradition for newspapers in the state.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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## William Henry Bernard

William Henry Bernard (1837-1916) was both Mr. Editor and Mr. Democrat of Wilmington for 40 years after he became editor-owner of the Wilmington Star.

Bernard was a Virginia native who came to North Carolina by way of Texas. He was first a staunch Whig who opposed secession, and then a 24-year-old soldier in the first regiment of Confederate troops from North Carolina who saw battle in the Civil War.

Bernard had once edited a newspaper in Texas named The Star-Spangled Banner. When his brief war career was over (he was discharged for physical disability), he worked on newspapers in Fayetteville, where he had settled with his wife, a native of the town on the upper Cape Fear. Late in the war, using a press from a defunct prewar newspaper, he actually published a daily newspaper, the Daily Telegraph.

When the war ended with Fayetteville battered by the visit of

General William Tecumseh Sherman's army, Bernard moved to Wilmington with Col. John D. Barry and founded the Wilmington Dispatch. In 1867, he left the association and began the Wilmington Star.

The newspaper became a powerful voice of a resurgent Democratic Party, fighting against the post-Civil War Republican Party that, thanks to large numbers of newly-franchised black voters, was often in the majority. Bernard, working as both party chairman and editorial propagandist, at times foiled the majority.

His newspaper's editorial platform was stridently in favor of states rights and white supremacy. It also plugged for economic development and railroads for the port city. He lived to see Wilmington's rise from bitter racial strife in the 1890s to a growing rail center and shipbuilding port during World War I.

The Wilmington Star-News continues as one of the state's longest-established daily newspapers. In contrast to its white supremacy tone of 100 years ago, a modern-day editor Alfred G. Dickson, won a national award for his editorials condemning links between the Ku Klux Klan and law enforcement officers.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## 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

## Beatrice Cobb

Her name was Beatrice Cobb (1888-1959, but several generations of North Carolina journalists knew her as "Miss Bea" or simply "Bea."

The daughter of the publisher of her hometown newspaper, the Morganton Herald, she started a typical early 19-century career for women by teaching school for four years. But then she went home to work for the paper, and when her father died in 1916, the 28-year-old Bea took up a career as editor and publisher that would last until her death in 1959.

Attending an annual meeting of the North Carolina Press Association in 1922, she found herself chosen secretary of the organization by her male peers. She held that job until her death.

She made over the post into an unpaid nearly full-time activity. She recruited new members from among the state's editors, and later on usually had a big say in choosing annual officers for the organization. She modernized the newsletter into a monthly publication and organized winter meetings in Chapel Hill and summer meetings, usually at resort locations, that became obligatory occasions for a large portion of the state's journalism family.

Part of Cobb's clout in journalism grew from her political clout. From

1934 until 1952, she was Democratic National Committeewoman from North

Carolina. Beginning in 1928, she attended a half-dozen Democratic National Conventions.

She was influential in Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal as an advisor on allocations to federal agencies in the state. She was the only Southerner on a committee named by FDR to choose a successor to James A. Farley as Democratic National Chairman. As a political campaigner, she had worked with Farley, who managed Roosevelt's first campaigns for the White House.

Deeply knowledgeable about the state's politics and political personalities, her affability made Cobb effective as both public official and editor. Her newspaper was dedicated to widespread coverage of local affairs and regularly won NCPA awards for public service, reporting, photography, editorials, and sports. She hired newsroom editors and reporters who also took active roles in the journalism organizations in the state and carried on the newspaper after her death.

The University of North Carolina recognized Bea Cobb's leadership in the state's journalism and politics by awarding her an honorary doctorate in 1949.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January

## Willard Cole and Horace Carter

When Willard Cole (1906-1965) and Horace Carter took on the Ku Klux Klan in Columbus and Robeson counties, they had to keep a loaded shotgun by the front door. But tenacity and courage eventually won them the 1953 Pulitzer Prize, the first ever awarded to weekly newspaper journalists.

Cole was a Wilkes County native who edited the Whiteville News-Reporter. The younger Carter was editor under Cole of the associated Tabor City Tribune.

The two began editorializing against the resurgent Klan as early as 1950, when night-riders, many from South Carolina, began holding cross-burning rallies in the rural countryside along the Pee Dee River, and harassing families in the area.

Week after week, Cole hammered the KKK activities, ran names of Klan leaders, interviewed people who said they had been terrorized, and prodded law enforcement officers to take action.

Cole had been in Columbus County for 20 years, first as head of the Tabor City Chamber of Commerce, and newspaper editor in Whiteville since 1948, so he was personally familiar with many of the people he attacked. A Klan leader said, "I guess we despised the editor of the News-Reporter most."

Klan violence reported by the newspapers led to arrest over 80 men on kidnapping and assault charges, and all were convicted.

The Klan in the Pee Dee region made journalism history again

in 1958, when a nighttime Klan rally near Maxton was broken up by hundreds of angry Lumbee Indians, who poured out of the woods on a cold January night to chase two dozen robed participants to their cars.

In the melee, a reporter and a photographer for the Fayetteville Observer were slightly wounded by the birdshot flying through the darkness. Reporter Pat Reese and photographer Bill Shaw had to stop by the hospital before heading back to their newsroom to report the night's events.

Shaw's photos, taken just before the shooting began, were the best visual record of the event, which made national headlines and eventually led to congressional hearings that exposed 20th-century Klan activity throughout the South.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## John Campbell Dancy

John Campbell Dancy Jr. (1857-1920) of Tarboro was the son of a former slave who combined politics and journalism as a leading spokesman and activist for black North Carolinians after the Civil War.

At a time when most white editors were ardent partisans of the Democratic Party of the day, Dancy was an effective editorial voice for the Republican Party.

His father was a well-known builder, but the teenage Dancy was drawn to the newspaper office. He apprenticed as a type-setter for the hometown journal, the Tarboro Southerner.

He attended Howard University in Washington, returning home when his father died. He became principal of the local school for black children. His interest in politics was whetted when black Congressman Adam Hyman took him to Washington for a few months as an aide.

To further his political interests, Dancy launched the North Carolina Sentinel, and as its editor, editorially backed black candidates and the Republican Party generally. The newspaper was among a half-dozen black-owned journals on the scene in North Carolina during the decades after the Civil War. All concentrated their editorial attention on politics and education.

Three years after beginning the Sentinel, Dancy's writing attracted leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion, who invited him to come to Salisbury to edit the Star of Zion, a weekly journal that covered church affairs and black news from around the state. Dancy was editor of the influential publication for five years.

Meanwhile, he attended national conventions of the Republican Party, campaigned for the party in North Carolina and other states, and in 1891 was named Collector of the Port of Wilmington, the highest-paid federal job in North Carolina.

While Dancy's editorial days ended in the 1890s, he became one of the most noted black speakers of his day, delivering commencement addresses at Tuskegee and Livingstone, speaking from the same platform with Booker T. Washington in Carnegie Hall on the centennial of the AME Zion Church.

The final years of Dancy's active career were spent in another important federal job, as Register of Deeds of the District of Columbia from 1901 until 1910.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## 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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## Gordon Gray

Gordon Gray (1909-1982) was among the 20th century's most notable North Carolina newspaper publishers. His only problem was he almost never had time to be a publisher. He was continually pulled away from the newspaper office for public service.

Born to a well-to-do Winston-Salem tobacco family, Gray trained as a lawyer and became a newspaper publisher by heading a corporation that bought the Winston-Salem Journal and Twin City Sentinel (afternoon) in 1937, as well as a local radio station.

In the next four years, however, Gray was often away from the office as a member of the North Carolina General Assembly from Forsyth County. Then came World War II, and Gray rose from private to captain. He got back to Winston-Salem in 1945 and resumed his editorial career.

But then a Washington friend called and asked Gray to become undersecretary of the Department of the Army. In 1949, President Harry Truman named him secretary of the Army. He became the first secretary who had ever previously served as a private.

Gray hardly settled into the secretary's office in the Pentagon when his home state called. In 1950, the board of trustees of the University of North Carolina offered Gray the presidency of the UNC system, as successor to Frank Porter Graham, who had been appointed to the U.S. Senate by Governor Kerr Scott.

For five years, Gray presided over the higher educational campuses that were exploding with post-World War II growth, while often going to Washington for special assignments from the White House.

In 1955, he stepped down from the university post to become undersecretary of the Department of State for International Security. He led other key jobs under President Dwight Eisenhower.

Finally, in 1961, he returned to North Carolina to take up the presidency of the newspaper corporation, and of a corporation of radio and television stations throughout the region.

When he was in his editorial office, Gray exercised an energetic and determined leadership in community service and civic betterment, the hallmark of so many North Carolina newspaper editors in every century. His talent for leadership sent Gordon Gray away from the office more than most others.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## C.W. Griffith

Clarence Wilbur Griffith (1904-1958) epitomized the hometown newspaper editor in North Carolina who combined a zeal for the future of his community with a deep devotion to its past.

As editor and then owner of the weekly Forest City Courier in Rutherford County from age 21 until his death in 1958, Griffith built an editorial following through vigorous advocacy of economic, cultural, and tourist development of the mountain region of the state. His newspaper regularly won awards for its coverage of local news and for its interest in community causes.

Griffith was an enthusiastic member of the North Carolina Press Association from his earliest days as an editor. He helped establish the Western North Carolina Weekly Press Association and was its president and secretary.

Like many other hometown editors in the state, Griffith was an active politician. He served a term in the General Assembly in 1933-35, and was a longtime political warhorse in the county's Democratic Party executive committee.

In keeping with his principal avocation, that of avid local historian, he served as historian of the NCPA from 1938 until his death. Griffith participated in nearly every important booster effort in western North Carolina. He was a member of the Great Smoky Mountain Museum Commission; a leader in the chamber of commerce, Red Cross, Boy Scouts; an advisor to the National Youth Administration; a trustee, of the Rutherford County Library, and even the North Carolina Governor of the Sons of the American Revolution.

In his avocation, Griffith wrote a history of Rutherford County, dozens of articles and genealogical papers and essays on all phases of North Carolina history. He was president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association in 1929 and served on the North Carolina Historical Commission, the policy board of the state Division of Archives and History, from 1938 until his death.

An affable but hard-charging man, Griffith was at his desk in the office of the Forest City Courier on a cold January day, working on the next edition, when he suffered a fatal heart attack in 1958.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Thomas Henderson Jr.

Thomas Henderson Jr. (1787-1835) left an important mark on North Carolina's early journalism before he pulled up stakes in 1823 to move to the state of Tennessee.

After a short apprenticeship on the North-Carolina Journal at Halifax, the former printer co-owned the new Raleigh Star with Dr. Calvin Jones, beginning in 1809. In 1815, Henderson became the sole proprietor and changed the name to the Star and North Carolina State Gazette. The newspaper was published each Thursday from its shop "at the upper end of Fayetteville Street near Casso's Corner."

For an early 19th-century editor, Henderson set high standards for the content of his paper. He announced there would be no rumors or "stud horse advertisements in its columns."

Eschewing long articles, Henderson ran summaries of congressional and other national news and local intelligence. Competing with the powerful

Raleigh Register, the Star hewed to a middle-of-the-road political line, although Henderson personally professed Federalist principles. He was popular enough with legislators to become the State Printer for several years.

Henderson's own strong interests in agricultural matters, literature, and cultural affairs were reflected in the columns of the newspaper.

His print shop was also a book store. He encouraged the compilation of a statistical and informational almanac covering all the state's counties, a project he hoped would encourage better communication between the eastern and western reaches of North Carolina. The project floundered during the War of 1812, and the sketches sent from a dozen counties were later published by historians.

During the war, Henderson briefly commanded a unit of Raleigh militia that accompanied a military tour of the coastal defenses. From then on, he was referred to as "Colonel Henderson."

Henderson's move to Tennessee was made possible when he was hired by the University of North Carolina to negotiate for Revolutionary War land claims that the university wanted as escheats. Henderson's successful negotiations made him wealthy, since he was awarded land equal to half the university's claim, tens of thousands of acres.

Henderson sold the Star and moved to a plantation in Madison County, Tennessee. There, he continued as a leading citizen and political activist, often a visitor to the governor's mansion. He was also a patron of a local academy that he founded.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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## Abraham Hodge

Abraham Hodge (1755-1805) furthered his career as a printer by spending the winter of 1778-79 with General George Washington at Valley Forge, operating the press that turned out orders, commissions, and recruiting posters for the Continental Army. When the war was over, Hodge, a New Yorker, sought warmer climates in the little village of Halifax, North Carolina.

In 1785, he was named state printer by the state's General Assembly, and would hold that lucrative position until 1800 except for a one-year break in the 1790s. And he would become the most active founder of newspapers in 18th-century North Carolina.

During his career, he had printing establishments at various times in Edenton, Fayetteville, and New Bern, as well as Halifax, which was usually his home. In partnership with Andrew Blanchard, Hodge was founder-proprietor of the State Gazette of North Carolina in New Bern, and then moved the newspaper to Edenton.

In 1792, he was back in Halifax as founder of the North Carolina Journal. Hodge continued to edit this influential newspaper until his death. But he was also busy elsewhere as well.

In 1796, he and young William Boylan established the Minerva and

Fayetteville Gazette in the village on the Cape Fear. But when Raleigh was finally established as the state's permanent capital, Hodge & Boylan in 1799 moved their presses to the raw settlement in Wake County and renamed it North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser.

Like nearly all newspaper proprietors of the time, Hodge ran a political journal. He was a staunch Federalist, and his paper engaged in hard-fought editorial combat with the growing power of the anti-Federalist, later Republican, political forces in the state.

The 1800 election of Republican Thomas Jefferson and his followers in the state ended Hodges' longtime hold on the state printer's post. But he continued to publish the Minerva until he retired in 1803.

Hodge gathered information for a 1794 North Carolina Almanac, and he was among the first contributors of materials to the tiny library of the new University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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## James Davis

James Davis (1721-1785) was North Carolina's first printer and first newspaper proprietor. He brought his press and type with him when he arrived in New Bern in 1749 from Williamsburg for what would become a 35-year stay.

The colonial Assembly of North Carolina had sent word that it needed an official printer, and Davis was well trained, having apprenticed under the first printer in Virginia, William Parks.

Davis announced his business "at The Printing-Office in Front Street." You can still see a typical print shop of Davis' day on a visit to Colonial Williamsburg.

While busy with official duties as public printer, such as printing a revised edition of the colony's laws, Davis launched the North Carolina

Gazette in 1751. While it seems to have been discontinued by 1761, Davis was soon back at it, with the North-Carolina Magazine or Universal Intelligencer, first published in 1764. The four-page newspaper lasted until 1778, when the difficulties of printing in the midst of the Revolutionary War forced its discontinuance.

The columns of the Gazette were typical of colonial newspapers, with a lot of information from outside New Bern, but little local news. Much local information was contained, however, in paid notices, which came from other parts of the colony

North Carolina's second and third newspapers were in a sense the offspring of Davis's first. In 1764, when the colonial Governor tried to take away Davis's official post in and give it to Philadelphia printer Andrew Steuart, Davis used his considerable political clout (he was also a member of the Assembly from New Bern) to thwart the move.

Steuart gave up the fight and went to Wilmington, where he launched another North Carolina Gazette. But then Steuart drowned while swimming in the Cape Fear River, opening the opportunity for Adam Boyd to buy the Gazette's printing equipment and begin the Cape Fear Mercury in 1769.

During the Revolutionary War, Davis supported the Patriot cause, but he made everybody mad when he took umbrage at the recruiting methods of a young French officer attempting to raise a volunteer regiment in Craven County. Davis himself raised a mob, and threatened to wreck the camp. He was denounced for "arbitrary and scandalous behavior" that had "given New Bern a name that every inhabitant except himself and minions would blush at."

So, in a sense, James Davis was also the first editor, but hardly the last, to incur the wrath of his community.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Walter Ney Keener

Walter Ney Keener started out to be a lawyer and a politician but gave those up for the editorial office and wound up working in a half-dozen North Carolina editorial offices. Few journalists saw as much of North Carolina as Keener.

Keener graduated from Wake Forest College with a law degree and went into the newspaper business by co-owning the hometown paper, the weekly Lincoln County News in Lincolnton. He edited the paper on the side while building up his list of law clients. He served a term in the General Assembly as representative from Lincoln County.

In 1909, however, the newspaper bug bit solidly, and Keener abandoned the law. He first went to the Raleigh Times, where he became city editor for two years before moving to the Durham Sun as both managing editor and city editor for a year.

He moved to Charlotte in 1913 to be city editor of the Charlotte Chronicle, and only a few months later was on the go again, this time to the High Point Enterprise as editor. After another two years, he went to yet another North Carolina news field, taking a position as editor of the Wilmington Dispatch.

Keener's whirlwind nine-year tour of the state's daily journalism ran its course in 1918, when he returned to Durham and the editorship of the Durham Morning Herald. When the company acquired the afternoon Durham Sun, he became editor of both newspapers, a post he held until his death 13 years later.

A man of wide interests and strong opinions about his community, Keener put the Durham newspapers firmly on the side of economic development, improved education, and modern local government. His editorials were described as "forceful and effective." The Raleigh News & Observer said: "Frank Keener was frank, independent, and courageous, with a deep aversion to shame and pretense wherever it appeared."

Keener was an active civic clubber, and an avid alumnus of his alma mater in nearby Wake Forest. When he died at 51, he was buried in the Wake Forest Cemetery.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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## H.A. "Slim" Kendall

Henry Wiseman "Slim" Kendall (1897-1968) was an editorial writer who sheathed his iron-hard opinions in the velvet of a superbly elegant writing style.

As associate editor and then editor of the Greensboro Daily News from 1930 until his retirement in 1965, Kendall made the newspaper an influential voice in local and state affairs. He championed mental health care, improved public schooling and prison reform on the state level, and turned well-trained reporters loose on local problems in a city where racial and social tensions often ran high, especially in the post- World War II period.

Kendall's polished writing style influenced other editorial writers, and he was often called on to lecture and advise on improvements in journalism. As an active member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, he was influential in fashioning and promoting better standards for writing and reporting. He won first-place awards from the North Carolina Press Association for editorials, and posthumously, the Edward R. Murrow Award for reporting.

Like so many North Carolina editors, Kendall took a personal role in many local and state organizations dealing with the issues he championed in his editorials.

He was on the North Carolina Educational Study Commission, devising postwar plans for the state's higher educational institutions. His contributions to higher education, both editorially and personally, led to an honorary degree from Duke University, his alma mater, in 1960.

He was a member of the policy board of the state's mental health hospital system. In Greensboro, his work with retarded children led the local association to name its center for him. The Greensboro chamber of commerce gave him the city's "outstanding citizen" award in 1958.

Kendall was a native of Shelby. His newspaper career began with a brief stint on the Morning New Bernian in New Bern. From 1920 until 1930, he was editor of the Rocky Mount Telegram. Joining the Daily News in 1930 as associate editor, he became editor in 1942.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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## Thomas J. Lemay

Thomas J. Lemay (1802-1863) was a politically-active editor in the fiercely partisan journalism of antebellum North Carolina, when editors often competed with personal invective in their editorial columns,

As editor-owner of the Raleigh Star and North Carolina Gazette from 1826 to 1853, however, Lemay tried to calm the purple prose by asking editors to agree not to discuss personalities or use "indecorous language" in their columns,

His efforts to bring new standards for editorial policy as well as to standardize financial procedures led to the earliest gathering of North Carolina newspaper editors as a professional group.

In 1837, Lemay joined Thomas Loring and Joseph Gales, editors of other Raleigh newspapers, in calling a meeting in Raleigh. Thirteen of the state's 25 editors showed up.

The call for an editorial ethics code was ahead of its time, however, and it fell on deaf ears in most editorial offices. The meeting of editors, however, set a tradition that would lead to other ad hoc gatherings of editors, and eventually to the founding of the North Carolina Press Association.

Lemay was among the earliest to grasp the possibilities of the telegraph. In 1850, he followed the example of Edward J. Hale of the Fayetteville Observer in getting telegraphic copies of important government papers tapped from the office of their political friend, Secretary of the Navy William A. Graham of North Carolina.

Like nearly all North Carolina editors of his day, Lemay was for state's rights and a small federal government, but strongly favored local and regional internal improvements, the state fair, state help for railroads and economic development.

Another specialty with Lemay was improved farming methods. In the 1840s, he established the monthly North Carolina Farmer. He also issued a yearly Lemay's North Carolina Almanac.

As a journalistic mentor, Lemay left his mark on the most famous of all 19th-century North Carolina editors, William Woods Holden of the North Carolina Standard. The young Holden spent five years as an apprentice and employee on the Star, living in Lemay's house. When Lemay sold the Star in 1853, Holden had been editor of the Standard for 11 years and was already a top leader of the resurgent Democratic Party.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Tony McKevlin

Eye-witnesses say Anthony John McKevlin (1902-1946) was the fastest two-fingered typist North Carolina journalism ever had.

As a sports reporter and then editor, Tony McKevlin was a marvel of other reporters when he sat in the press box at a football game, writing play-by-play description almost faster than the players could execute the plays. But McKevlin was destined to be for even greater contributions to the state's journalism than his speed at the portable.

The South Carolina native was sports editor of the Raleigh News & Observer for 14 years, beginning in 1927. And in an age when sports reporting was still a very partisan craft, with reporters often taking unabashed stands for one team or another, McKevlin insisted on evenness and accuracy in the copy. He standardized statistical coverage of sports. He set up his columns in a section that became the model for newspapers across the South. His coverage enhanced the standing of high school and collegiate sports.

In 1941, however, McKevlin's career took a new and significant turn. Upon the death of the much-respected Frank Smethurst (1891-1941), McKevlin was named managing editor of the newspaper just as the United States entered World War II.

With male reporters in short supply because of the war, McKevlin recruited women, still a rarity in Southern newsrooms, for many reportorial jobs never held by them previously.

As in his sports department, he insisted on high standards of accuracy and evenhandedness in copy, even in the political reporting of a newspaper that was a fierce editorial partisan of the Democratic Party.

Several women who trained under McKevlin and filled the wartime posts went on to major jobs in political and cultural reporting, notably Marjorie Hunter, who covered the North Carolina General Assembly and then went on to a distinguished career in the Washington bureau of the New York Times.

The war took a toll on McKevlin's health, as he worked for a time as both managing editor and city editor of a newspaper that was often shorthanded. He became blind in one eye. Mrs. McKevlin died just as he took the job.

A terminal illness was neglected until he collapsed and was taken to Rex Hospital in Raleigh, where for several weeks he continued the complex job of a newspaper publisher and editor by telephone from his bed. He died at 44, still practicing his craft.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## C.A. 'Pete' McKnight

Colbert Augustus McKnight (1916-1986) seldom heard anyone call him by his full name. He was always "Pete" McKnight.

As editor of the Charlotte Observer during the roiling years of the 1950s and 1960s when the racial revolution swept the South, McKnight exercised both editorial and personal influence to move Charlotte toward peaceful acceptance of desegregation of schools and public life. It was a tough job. For a half century and more, the Observer had been a bastion of economic conservatism and racial superiority in the community and in North Carolina.

McKnight's soft-spoken style belied his tenacity in remaking the Observer. He rebuilt the newsroom, adding bureaus throughout the surrounding area and in the state capital in Raleigh. He pressed his reporters to dig critically into community problems. He used his standing as a big wheel in the chamber of commerce to rally the city's business elite behind steps to desegregate public accommodations and to back court decisions requiring extensive busing to achieve integration of schools in the fast-growing urban area.

McKnight's newspaper career started as a teenager when he worked for the hometown Shelby Star. He spent a summer in Cuba, working with an older brother who was Associated Press correspondent there. After graduation from Davidson College, he worked for the Charlotte News as a reporter and editor of feature pages. During World War II, he was editor of an English-language daily in Puerto Rico.

Back in Charlotte, he was soon editor of the News. In the early 1950s, he founded the Southern Education Reporting Service, which published a monthly journal reporting on racial developments in Southern education. The Knight newspaper chain brought him back to Charlotte as editor of the Observer in 1955.

McKnight's energy and commitment to modern journalism made him influential among his peers. He served as president of the North Carolina Press Association and the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Scores of young journalists trained under him and went on to important jobs in the Knight chain and on other newspapers.

A health problem that made him nearly blind caused McKnight to leave active editorial leadership in 1976. But his mark was on the Observer for good. Editors and publishers who followed him tended to view their role in the activist, community-oriented mold of Pete McKnight.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## John Charles McNeill

North Carolinians don't much associate John Charles McNeill (1874-1907) with journalism. He is more known as a giant of our state's literature, whose collection of verse titled "Songs, Merry and Sad" was so beloved that he was unofficially proclaimed the poet laureate of North Carolina in 1906, 25 years before there was an official post of that name.

But McNeill spent as much time during his short life as a newspaper writer as he did in his other vocations of teacher and lawyer. And, in fact, much of his poetry, and all of his prose, first appeared in newspaper columns, specifically in the Charlotte Observer.

McNeill grew up in the bosom of a large Scotland County family in which writing was revered. The family spent much time at a Lumber River summer place known as Riverton. His father, Duncan McNeill, had been an editor and poet. John Charles was an avid reader of classics, and at Wake Forest College considered himself a poet and teacher before he acquired a law degree.

McNeill's poetry about the crisp days of October, the "possum time" of rural North Carolina, and of his days as with his "sunburnt boys" swimming in the dark waters of the Lumber River (he called it the "Lumbee") were popular in his day, and remain so today, with two editions of his poetry still in print.

McNeill briefly practiced law in Lumberton and Laurinburg and served a term in the General Assembly as representative from Scotland County.

But when the Charlotte Observer published some of many poems in 1900, he found a journalistic connection that would last until the end of his life. Editor Joseph P. Caldwell liked his work so much that in 1904 he invited McNeill to become a full-time writer.

From then until his short life ended, McNeill turned out scores of columns and dozens of poems for the Observer. His manuscript collection of "Songs, Merry and Sad" won the first Patterson Cup in 1905, the state's highest literary honor.

A collection of 40 of McNeill's prose pieces in the Observer, clipped and collected many years ago by the late Jasper Memory of Wake Forest College, was published in 1998 by St. Andrews College Press in Laurinburg under the title "Home in the Sandhills."

The final piece was a poignant good-by, titled "Thoughts on Going Home to Riverton." John Charles McNeill is buried in the Spring Hill cemetery at Wagram, only a couple of miles from his boyhood haunts on the Lumber.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Catherine and Victor Meekins

Catherine Deaton was a young music teacher, but she knew about newspapers. Her father was publisher of a weekly newspaper in Mooresville.

When Catherine became the wife of the sheriff of Dare County, Victor Meekins (1897-1964), in 1929, among the first things she thought about was a newspaper for the then-isolated Outer Banks and Roanoke Island.

So once the three children were brought along, they started the weekly Dare County Times in the early 1930s.

In his early 20s, Meekins had worked for the legendary W.O. Saunders on the Elizabeth City Independent, so he fell naturally into the role of both leading public figure and newspaper editor. Catherine handled much of the other news and the business end.

Meekins continued the dual role of editor and sheriff in 1946, and then he became chairman of the Dare County Board of Commissioners. Catherine, meanwhile, was busy with newspapering. At one time, the Meekins published weekly newspapers in Tyrrell and Hyde counties, and at Nags Head. They consolidated them into the Coastland Times in 1949. The newspaper is still owned by a son.

Victor Meekins was a man of all purposes for his native Outer Banks.

He was born in a big 19th-century house on the northeast "soundside" shore of Roanoke Island. His family had been on the island since colonial days.

He boosted tourism, backed development of the Cape Hatteras National

Seashore, pushed for bridges and roads, developed advertising materials for the area he named "the Walter Raleigh Coastland." He also became a well-to-do owner of beach property in the post-World War II boom times on the coast.

Meekins editorial style was pithy and strong. His news stories, especially about projects he considered vital for his community, were unabashedly one-sided. Off the editorial page, he was known for his colorful profanity and laconic good humor.

For nearly 30 years, Meekins collected (or concocted) colorful stories about the Outer Banks in columns titled, "The Old Sea Captain and the Drummer." The pieces were assembled in a booklet, with the subtitle "Salty Dialogue from the Land of Wind and Water." The paperback was for years a favorite of visitors to the Outer Banks.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Spencer Murphy

Spencer Murphy (1904-1964) was born into a first family of Salisbury, the son of Pete Murphy, a noted North Carolina political leader famous for his defense of free speech in the 1920s "Monkey Debate" in the General Assembly.

After a busy student career at the University, where he founded the *Buccaneer*, a campus humor magazine, Spencer Murphy came home to Salisbury to become a reporter for the afternoon *Salisbury Post*. From then until his death, he was a leading North Carolina journalist. He became editor of the *Post* in 1936 and executive editor in 1954.

Murphy's editorials were frequent winners of the North Carolina Press Association's first-place award for editorial writing, and received national recognition from the Freedom Foundation. He wrote articles for the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Literary American*. In 45, his newspaper was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, for a report on the plight of a widow and her children.

Murphy's perspective on such issues as racial justice and the plight of the poor were echoes of his father's progressive stands. He was on the executive committee of the North Carolina Social Hygiene Society and a director of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. After World War II, he was an ardent internationalist, a board member of the North Carolina United World Federalists, and president of the Citizens Committee for United Nations Reform.

Murphy was also deeply interested in furthering cultural causes. He was president of the North Carolina Symphony Society in the 1940s, and a trustee of the North Carolina Library Association. He was also a trustee of North Carolina Central College in Durham, filling an unexpired term of his father.

His death at 60 was unexpected. The *Greensboro Daily News* summed up Murphy's contribution: "As one of the 'Young Turks' of North Carolina journalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he did much to help re-orient the political and social thinking of North Carolinians. Through the years as columnist and editor, he established a reputation as an independent thinker."

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Roy and J. Mayon Parker

The Parker brothers, Joseph Roy (1895-1957) and James Mayon (1901-1977), made Ahoskie a weekly newspaper hub in the 1930s with one of North Carolina's first newspaper chain operations.

In a single printing plant, built just before World War II, they published four weeklies, including their hometown Hertford County Herald, and papers in Bertie, Gates, and Northampton counties.

The older Parker became owner/editor of the Herald just after graduating from Wake Forest College in 1915. He had been a summer printer's devil and pressman while at school. Mayon, who had a similar back-shop beginning, joined him in 1928. When they acquired the Bertie Ledger-Advance in Windsor, Mayon moved there to edit it and then moved to Ahoskie to take over the firm when Roy Parker became ill in 1934.

In the 1920s, Roy Parker was among the first to acquire a linotype machine for a weekly newspaper, and the Herald twice won the coveted Savory Loving Cup, then the state's most prestigious journalism award for content and design.

In the early 1930s, he and several other editors, especially Victor Meekins of the Coastland Times in Manteo, commissioned a Nags Head beach cottage named "the Fourth Estate" that was planned as clubhouse and retreat for the North Carolina press.

Parker was president of the North Carolina Press Association in 1933-34, a professor of weekly journalism at the University of North Carolina in the 1940s, and a member of the 1957 General Assembly from Hertford County when he died.

Mayon was equally innovative. He acquired one of the first press cameras owned by a weekly, a Graflex, in 1928 and took thousands of photographs of the region. He called the first meeting of the Eastern North Carolina Press Association.

Mayon's earliest and enduring claim to fame was that as sports editor of the Wake Forest College newspaper in the early 1920s, he coined the team nickname, the "the Demon Deacons." Throughout his career, Mayon Parker used stationary identifying himself simply as "Printer." And it is on his gravestone.

For a quarter century, the Parker Brothers, Inc. weeklies won dozens of NCPA awards for all phases of news and editorial operations. A 1939 historical edition was later expanded into a local history book by Roy Parker, "The Ahoskie Era of Hertford County."

The newspaper firm remained in the family, carried on by Mayon's son, Joseph M. Parker, until the 1980s.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

## Robert Lee Vann

The second half of the 20th century has seen a notable array of North Carolina journalists who made their careers and their mark on national journalism outside the state.

They include such contemporary personalities as Gene Roberts, retired editor of both the Philadelphia Inquirer and New York Times, and Penny Muse Abernathy, former president of the New York Times News Service.

But in the first half of the 20th century, perhaps North Carolina's most influential contribution to national journalism was born in the Hertford County village of Ahoskie. He never knew his father and his mother was a cook in the household of a prominent family in the nearby farming community of Harrellsville.

Robert Lee Vann (1879-1940) rose from the cotton field to become founder-editor-publisher of the Pittsburgh Courier, which by the early 1930s counted 250,000 readers across the country, the largest circulation of any black-owned newspaper in history, and one of the few newspapers of any kind to have a national circulation.

Vann managed to acquire a first-rate education at Virginia Union University and Western University in Pennsylvania, and was licensed as a lawyer in that state in 1909.

From then on, he was a leader in politics, national and local, as spokesman and advocate for black causes. He moved in high Republican Party circles, debated with W.E.B. DuBois over the administration of the National Association of Colored People, and even criticized A. Philip Randolph as an obstacle to organizing the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

A powerful voice for the Republican Party in the first decade of the century, he became increasingly disillusioned in the 1920s. In 1932, he made a historic break and led his newspaper into the Democratic Party, urging black voters to support Franklin D. Roosevelt for president. His defining editorial called on his readers to "turn the picture of Lincoln to the wall."

By 1940, however, Vann was disappointed with FDR's failure to do more economically for black citizen. Shortly before he died, he announced his support for Republican Wendell Wilkie.

Vann's fame made him a role model for black businessmen and politicians, and he was honored when public schools in Ahoskie and Pittsburgh were named for him, scholarships were established in his honor at Virginia Union and Western, and a World War II Liberty Ship was named for him in 1943.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998

To learn more about journalists in North Carolina, consult the Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.