

grassroots editor



*A journal
for newspeople*

**Published by the
International Society
of Weekly Newspaper Editors**

Editorials: A thing of the past in community newspapers?

By Les AndersonPages 1-9

The Pulitzer and the Klan

By Thomas C. TerryPages 10-16

**Backyard's best? Nation's best weekly may be Jackson
Hole, Wyo.**

By Dr. George A GladneyPage 17

Young journalists' attitude toward their communities

By Kim LandonPages 18-20

A look back at journalism over 70 years

By Robert H. EstabrookPages 21-24

volume 44, no. 3 • fall 2003

Editor: Dr. Chad Stebbins
Graphic Designer: Liz Ford

Grassroots Editor
(USPS 227-040, ISSN 0017-3541)
is published quarterly for \$25 per year by
the **International Society of Weekly
Newspaper Editors**, Institute of
International Studies, Missouri Southern
State University, 3950 East Newman Road,
Joplin, MO 64801-1595. Periodicals
postage paid at Joplin, Mo., and at
additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes
to **Grassroots Editor**, Institute of
International Studies, Missouri Southern
State University, 3950 E. Newman Road,
Joplin, MO 64801-1595.
Volume 44, Issue 3, Fall 2003

Subscription Rate: \$25 per year in
the United States and Canada; \$28 per year
elsewhere.

**Officers of the International Society
of Weekly Newspaper Editors:**

President: Donna Remer
Voice Newspapers, New Baltimore, Mich.
E-mail: donna.remer@voicenews.com

Vice President: David Burke
The Tuam Herald, Tuam, Ireland

Executive Director:
Dr. Chad Stebbins, Director, Institute of
International Studies, Missouri Southern
State University, 3950 E. Newman Road,
Joplin, MO 64801-1595
Phone: (417) 625-9736
Fax: (417) 659-4445
E-mail: stebbins-c@mssu.edu

Board of Directors:
Sandra George
Wisconsin Newspaper Association,
Madison, Wis.
Harry L. Hix
Gaylord College of Journalism,
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla.
Carol O'Leary
TP Printing Co., Abbotsford, Wis.
Goodloe Sutton
Democrat-Reporter, Linden, Ala.
Jeremy Waltner
The Freeman Courier, Freeman, S.D.
Chris Wood
Door County Advocate, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.
Immediate Past President:
Nancy Slepicka
Montgomery County News, Hillsboro, Ill.

Editorials: A thing of the past in community newspapers?

By Les Anderson

“What we want, and what we shall have, is the royal American privilege of living and dying in a country town, running a country newspaper, saying what we please when we please, how we please and to whom we please.”

— William Allen White

In his message to the 2003 Kansas Press Association convention, W. Dean Singleton, chairman of the Newspaper Association of America Board of Directors, said “newspapers *are* the community.”

“Study after study shows that we are the No. 1 choice for local news, business, sports — everything that impacts the lives of our readers where they live, where they work,” said Singleton, CEO of Denver-based MediaNews Group, the second-largest privately held newspaper company in the country. “We don’t just reflect the community. We don’t just report on the community. We are the community. We are as imbedded in the lives of the people who live there as they are in us.”

For many weekly and daily editors and publishers, local editorials are the heart and soul of a good newspaper, and reflect that commitment to community.

Doug Anstaett, publisher of *The Newton Kansan* for nearly 16 years and a consistent national winner in editorial writing, said local editorials are the backbone of a good community newspaper.

“Newspapers have tremendous power, and if that power is used for the right reasons, it can lead a community to greatness,” said Anstaett, who became editorial page editor at the *Topeka Capital-Journal* in July.

Sixty-six percent of editors and publishers of daily newspapers (30 of 45) in three Midwest states responding to a survey about local editorials say they still write them. Only 58 percent (67 of 116) of their weekly counterparts say they consistently produce local editorials. Among semi-weekly editors and publishers representing 44 publications in the three states, all but two (96 percent) say they write and publish editorials in each issue. It should be noted, however, that of those 44 semi-weeklies, 37 are published by Suburban Journals of St. Louis. Of two biweeklies for which responses were received, one carries locally produced editorials in each issue.

Newspapers in Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri were asked in the survey whether they run local editorials in every issue. If publishers and editors answered negatively, they were asked whether they occasionally write local editorials and, if not, why.

Later in the survey, newspapers publishers and editors were asked whether they endorsed candidates for elections on the local, state, and national levels. They also were asked whether their newspapers sponsor, or help sponsor, candidate forums.

“Many Americans, especially rural, don’t have the ability to disagree without being offended or taking an opinion personal,” said Stan Stamper, president and publisher of the *Hugo Daily News* in Oklahoma. “When we feel strongly, and have time to make a case for our position, we don’t hesitate to do so.”

In some rural areas of the Midwest, where population is shrinking, responsible people worry about community survival, said Darrel Miller, publisher of the *Smith County Pioneer* in Smith Center, Kan.

“I feel it behooves us to play a role in that survival,” Miller said. “I feel, however, that my most important role is providing information to the public and some guidance with editorials. I have been credited by the people involved with editorial campaigns

hat caused an elementary school to be built and a hospital addition to be constructed. Whether this is true or not, these were satisfying experiences.”

Kansas editors emphasize local editorials

A total of 78 newspapers — 21 daily, four semiweekly, 52 weekly and one biweekly — in Kansas responded. Circulation from the Kansas papers totaled 447,981: 327,952 for dailies, 15,269 for semiweeklies, 2,500 for the biweekly, and 102,260 for weeklies. One weekly publication, not a member of the Kansas Press Association, would not reveal its circulation but responded to the questionnaire.

Twelve of 21 Kansas daily editors or publishers who responded said they run local editorials several times weekly, if not each day. Among Kansas weeklies, nearly half — 24 of 52 — of their editors and publishers said they do not carry local editorials in each issue. Three of four semi-weeklies publish local editorials in each issue. The only biweekly whose editor responded does not run local editorials in each issue.

Don Ratzlaff, editor of the weekly, free-distribution *Hillsboro Free Press*, said he sees locally produced editorials as part of his newspaper’s responsibility to the community — “even on weeks when we feel we’re writing primarily to fill space.”

Caroline Trowbridge, editor and publisher of *The Mirror*, a weekly in Tonganoxie, agrees with Ratzlaff about a newspaper’s responsibility. She also sees benefits.

“We feel that running locally written editorials helps us connect with our readers,” said Trowbridge. “In addition, it provides an opportunity to prompt discussions of topics important to our community.”

The Harris newspapers in Kansas — seven dailies in Hutchinson, Salina, Chanute, Parsons, Ottawa, Hays, and Garden City with a total circulation of just under 100,000 — place an emphasis on local editorials.

“It is a longstanding tradition in our company that the top executive at each paper also is the editorial voice,” said Tom Bell, editor and publisher of *The Salina Journal*, one of the Harris newspapers. “That gives each paper personality. It is sad to see so many papers water down editorial pages, especially in Kansas.”

John Montgomery, editor and publisher of *The Hays Daily News*, another Harris daily, said a newspaper’s editorial voice is a privilege that should be exercised.

“Local editorials are critical to the newspaper being a community leader, and they stimulate public discussion on important local issues,” Montgomery said.

Ann Charles, editor and publisher of another Harris paper in Parsons, Kan., said she is disturbed by the number of small dailies that are dropping editorials.

“In judging Texas dailies last week,” Charles wrote in May, “it is obvious more and more dailies under 7,000 are dropping them. Must be because they’re being gobbled up by chains out to make money, and they hire general managers. . . not editors and publishers.”

Dane Hicks, publisher of the weekly *Anderson County Review* in Garnett, Kan., said solid, local papers must have locally written editorials.

“There just isn’t any better way to illustrate the newspaper’s connection to the community,” Hicks said.

Gary Mehl, *McPherson Sentinel* publisher, said his daily newspaper has opted for the column route.

“Both my editor and myself run a weekly column, and we fill in with local guest columnists each week, as well as some nationally syndicated writers,” Mehl said. “Since we are so small and have so many different duties, there’s simply not time to get everyone together to discuss the issues and assign someone to write it, on top of everything else we do. Most controversial issues are editorialized to some degree in either my editor’s or my column as warranted.”

Rod Haxton, publisher of *The Scott County Record* in Scott City, Kan., agrees that editorials are key to a strong newspaper. But, he adds, in many small communities with weekly newspapers where the editorial writer is also the ad salesman, it can make ad sales more difficult.

“That is why you don’t see editorials in many small-town newspapers,” Haxton said. “It takes a lot more courage to write editorials in a small town than it does a daily in a larger city.”

Phyllis Bell, managing editor of *The Lebanon Times*, a weekly with a circulation of 600, said a lack of issues in her community and the time factor — “being a newspaper of one person” — are reasons her newspaper doesn’t carry regular local editorials.

Tom Throne, publisher of *The Leavenworth Times*, said cutbacks in personnel and a resulting lack of time have shifted priorities for local editorials. Throne’s daily paper runs a local editorial on Sunday and occasionally during the week. But, Throne added, the paper is considering adding one more local editorial each week.

Time is also a factor in Holton, where David Powls is editor and publisher of the twice-weekly *Holton Recorder*, which runs local editorials “90 percent of the time.”

“As an active member of our news/ad teams, editorial writing currently takes a back seat in my list of priorities,” Powls said. “I’m usually rushing to meet the opinion page deadline.”

Although Kansas’ largest daily, *The Wichita Eagle*, carries at least two local editorials in each issue, its publisher, Lou Heldman, said he thinks the publisher’s job at most newspapers is somewhat misunderstood.

“As publisher, I probably spend 70 percent of my time on advertising, circulation, production, financial, and personnel issues, and another 15 percent on community, leaving only 15 percent for news and editorial,” Heldman said. “I think that’s the most misunderstood part of the job by outsiders, who still have in mind the old model of editor, publisher, and owner all wrapped into one.”

Missouri editors bemoan lack of time

In Missouri, responses to the survey came from 12 daily newspapers, 38 semi-weeklies, one biweekly, and 45 weeklies. Total circulation of the papers whose editors and publishers responded was 1,670,751: 440,635 for dailies, 787,300 for semiweeklies, 439,016 for weeklies, and 3,800 for one biweekly.

Seventy-five percent of Missouri dailies (8 of 12), 65 percent of the weeklies (29 of 45), the biweekly, and all 38 semi-weeklies covered in the survey carry local editorials in each issue.

Like their counterparts in Kansas, publishers in Missouri frequently bemoan a lack of time and staff necessary to write regular local editorials.

"We would prefer to have more local editorials, but we have a lean editorial staff," said Judy Tritz, editor of *The Kirksville Daily Express*. "Reporting the news is the highest priority."

Charlie Meeks, editor of the weekly *Cedar County Republican*, said the only reason her paper doesn't run local editorials consistently is a lack of time.

Time constraints also are cited by Darryl Wilkinson, editor and publisher of the weekly *Gallatin North Missourian*. Wilkinson said it was a deliberate decision to devote more time to development of Internet strategies. "We plan to return to the regular habit of editorials soon," he added. "I feel it is important to a newspaper."

Jean Black, editor and publisher of the weekly *Slater Main Street News*, said newspaper executives must weigh the consequences of speaking one's mind. Her 1,600-circulation publication does not regularly carry local editorials.

"Do we really have freedom of speech in this age of rampant lawsuits?" Black said.

Neil Richards, publisher of weekly *Independent-Journal* in Potosi, writes a half dozen editorials a year — maybe.

"We are the only newspaper in a small town," Richards said. "We are a small business that needs all support to survive. You don't get that by alienating and polarizing part of your community each week."

Emory Melton, co-owner of the weekly *Barry County Advertiser* in Cassville, maintains that few people read editorials.

"In fact," Melton said, "I think most folks secretly resent editorials. People who take the trouble to read editorials usually have their minds made up or are quite capable of deciding for themselves."

Bob Foos, editor of the weekly *Webb City Sentinel*, doesn't like to write editorials.

"I'm mainly just a photographer who has learned to write news," Foos said. "Also, I rationalize it's best for me not to write editorials because I'm the paper's lead reporter."

Foos said he tries to be unbiased but is sure regular readers can tell from his style and choice of stories how he stands on issues.

"A jury would probably convict me of being a cheerleader," he added.

Lucy Vaughn, editor of the 2,250-circulation *Salisbury Press-Spectator*, writes a weekly editorial, continuing a tradition of more than a hundred years. Henry J. Waters III, editor and publisher of the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, said his local editorials are consistently among the most popular items in his newspaper. Michael Jensen, publisher of the daily *Standard-Democrat* in Sikeston, said local editorials — all signed — have run for years and continue to bring great response from readers.

The Lake Gazette, a weekly in Monroe City, Mo., is known for its strong local editorials.

"And, yes, we have lost advertisers," said publisher and owner Linda Geist, "but they always come back because they want to be in a newspaper which is read."

Rob Viehman, publisher of the weekly *Cuba Free Press*, said editorials are the backbone of a small, local paper. "We try to make people think and keep local government honest," Viehman said.

"I can't imagine a newspaper without a regular editorial, although I see many," said C.A. Moore, editor and publisher of

the weekly *News-Xpress* in Butler. He called locally written editorials — good or bad — the heartbeat of a newspaper.

"A paper that doesn't have an editorial voice is not doing its job properly," said Steve Roth, editor of the weekly *New Haven Leader*. "You must have it, although it doesn't have to be heavy-handed."

Scott Jackson, publisher of the *Boonville Daily News*, runs an editorial in each issue on local issues when possible, but also statewide and national topics as well.

"We are a small newspaper but have always published an editorial page," Jackson said. "I believe this page is an important part of all newspapers, even small ones. . . While we don't expect our readers to agree with us always, we want them to think about the issues. . . I think too many small papers are afraid to upset the locals and choose the path of least resistance."

Bill Milligan, general manager of Call Newspapers Inc., in four St. Louis suburbs — Concord, Oakville, Suncrest, and Green Park — said simply that newspapers without editorials aren't doing their jobs.

"We've grown from zero to 170,000 circulation in 10 years in part because we take stands on behalf of the public," Milligan said. "People don't always agree with us, but they know we're independent."

Dan Wehmer, publisher of the *Webster County Advertiser* in Seymour, trades editions with about 40 other Missouri weeklies.

"Only three carry local editorials," Wehmer said. "Most, I feel, don't do it for apathy. . . or even lack of talent. Some don't do it for fear of losing business. But I find it essential. It takes time and effort to write a strong editorial and exact change (or even thought) with it, but a newspaper isn't complete without its editorial voice."

Oklahoma editors publish editorials as issues merit

Twelve daily newspapers in Oklahoma, along with two semi-weeklies and 19 weeklies, responded to the survey. The papers' total circulation was 173,195: 111,100 for dailies, 15,000 for two semi-weeklies, and 47,095 for weeklies.

Only 25 percent of the Oklahoma dailies (3 of 12) and 53 percent of the weeklies (10 of 19) responding to the survey regularly publish locally written editorials in each issue. One of two semi-weeklies carries local editorials in each issue.

Gloria Trotter, editor and publisher of two weekly papers, *Tecumseh Countywide News* and *Shawnee Sun*, said "it's not a real newspaper if it doesn't have regular, locally written editorials." And, Trotter added, "We have the best editorial writer in Oklahoma!"

Local editorials must be in every paper, said Lawrence Corvi, publisher of the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*. "It tells the community we care. . . we pay attention to the news," Corn said. "A paper without editorials is like an empty house. . . no heart, soul or compassion."

Some small-town editors and publishers, however, say it's too easy to offend readers. The chief reasons they don't write editorials, though, are lack of time and small staffs, said Melissa Grace, editor of the weekly *Ringling Eagle*. Steve Boggs, publisher of the *Durant Daily Democrat*, said his paper runs editorials as time allows for research.

Scott Rains, editor (and staff as well) of the 1,100-circulation weekly *Cyril News*, said he writes editorials as space and time

allow, and whenever he's fired up and has something to say.

"We rarely run local editorials," said Greg Stone, associate editor of the *Sapulpa Daily Herald*, "though they are run during times of national crisis or during hotly contested election year cycles. Part of the reason we do not carry more local editorials is due to the inability of some of our writers to produce quality editorial/opinion copy."

Chris White, publisher of the daily *McAlester News-Capital & Democrat*, said his paper runs local editorials about twice a week, as issues merit.

"We run editorial comment on issues we feel strongly about," White said. "Forcing a daily opinion piece makes our stronger-held positions weaker by putting them in the same position as what ultimately becomes filler/fluff."

Robert Evans, owner and publisher of the weekly *Barnsdall Times*, circulation 950, said he has often wished he had not editorialized, especially on local issues.

"But we have weathered the storms over the last 50 years," Evans said. "So far, we are still standing on our feet, although we've been threatened several times and have lost advertising accounts."

Evans added that he's never been physically harmed. "Had one thug pull a gun for an editorial about a county commissioner," he said. "He warned us that if he had to return, he'd pull the trigger next time. The commissioner was eventually kicked out of office and spent time in the state penitentiary."

No word on what happened to the thug with the gun, though.

J. Leland Gourley, editor and publisher of the weekly *Oklahoma City Friday*, said his editorial pages are for his readers' interest and information — "not to save the world."

"That's the job of preachers and politicians," Gourley added.

Tim Curtin, publisher of the weekly *Watonga Republican*, said he took over the paper at age 22 when his father died. He said readers in his community are very opinionated and local editorials excite "about one-third of them to a state of nervousness, and they don't value the free exchange of thought."

"I thought it would get better (1966 to 2003) once I got some gray hair," Curtin added, "but no one seeks my opinion. It stresses quite a few to be 'advised' on just about any subject. Thus, there are diminishing returns for any editorial effort."

Andrew Kirkpatrick, editor of the daily *Guthrie News Leader*, said his paper has a local columnist "who writes about things going on, so if we haven't got anything to say and there aren't any hot-button issues, we don't say anything."

Local editorials — and the letters and responses they generate — are among the most important and best-read features in the *Oologah Lake Leader*, said publisher John M. Wylie II. The 3,000-circulation weekly runs locally produced editorials in each issue, Wylie said.

Larry Russell, owner and publisher of the weekly *Wynewood Gazette*, said a newspaper that doesn't carry editorials isn't worth its salt. He writes local editorials as often as there is an issue that affects his readers.

"It's cowardly not to," said Russell, "and the kudos far outweigh the criticism they draw. Vicious attacks are uncalled for, but readers are always interested in what you have to say, whether they agree with you or not."

Few weeklies endorse candidates

Although the majority of newspaper publishers and editors in Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma responding to the survey write local editorials on a regular basis, the same is not true for endorsing candidates, particularly on the local level.

In the three states, 56 percent of daily editors and publishers (25 of 45) who responded said they endorse candidates for elective office. That percentage drops significantly among weeklies in the three states: 29 percent (33 of 116). Among semiweeklies, 89 percent (39 of 44) of the responses stated that local candidate endorsements are carried in their newspapers. One of two biweeklies reported endorsing locally.

The percentage of papers endorsing for state and especially national candidates is higher, according to those responding. Among dailies, the percentage endorsing for statewide offices ranges from 62 percent in Kansas to 83 percent in both Missouri and Oklahoma. The same percentage of Kansas dailies endorse for national elections, while it drops slightly to 75 percent in Missouri and Oklahoma.

Among weeklies, Oklahoma publications endorse most often in statewide elections (53 percent), while the numbers drop to 37 percent in Kansas and 33 percent in Missouri. In national elections, Oklahoma weeklies again endorse 53 percent of the time, followed by 35 percent of Kansas weeklies, and just 27 percent in Missouri.

Neither biweekly offers endorsements in either state or national races. Thirty-seven of 38 Missouri semi-weeklies endorse in both state and national races while both Oklahoma semi-weeklies publish endorsements. Only one of four (25 percent) of Kansas semi-weeklies endorse on the state or national level.

Laura Kelly, editorial writer for *The Wichita Eagle*, said the newspaper is in a unique position to evaluate candidates and help readers make informed decisions.

"We also believe we have the ability and responsibility to help shape our community in positive ways through our editorials, and endorsements are an extension of that," Kelly said.

Kelly said *The Eagle's* endorsement process includes a minimum of individual 30-minute interviews with each serious candidate (they don't bring in the cranks who are not mounting viable campaigns), background checks, and field reporting. That reporting may include everything from informal interviews with associates to observing their performances at forums to monitoring their mailings and Web sites.

"Our endorsements are much less reliant on political party and ideology than on suitability for the job," Kelly added.

Bill Milligan, general manager of Call Newspapers Inc., in and around St. Louis, said readers respect the newspapers' editorial voices because they know they are independent. The papers endorse candidates for local, state, and national elections, and sponsor forums that attract 50 to 2,000 people, depending on the race and issues involved.

"We know most of the candidates," said Milligan. "We know about all of the candidates' records. We know their motives and, in most cases, their supporters' motives. We monitor campaign finance reports. We know our community and its needs. Who better to make a recommendation to the public?"

Dan Wehmer, editor and publisher of the *Webster County Citizen* in Seymour, Mo., said his weekly newspaper endorses candidates because a vast majority of the public doesn't know the candidates.

“That even applies to local or county races,” said Wehmer. “Subsequently, candidates do spend more time with our paper and our residents, grooming for an endorsement. That, in turn, benefits my community.”

Miriam Pepper, editorial page editor of *The Kansas City Star*, said endorsing candidates at all levels is an important role for the paper.

“For added balance,” Pepper added, “we have run a roundup of various endorsements from other groups, too.”

In Springfield, Mo., the daily *News-Leader* also endorses candidates.

“We can get more time with candidates than most readers can,” said Robert Leger, editorial page editor. “It provides valuable information for voters in making their decisions.”

In Hannibal, Mo., publisher Jack Whitaker said the daily *Courier-Post*’s editorials are an important function of the paper. Whitaker said his editorial writers strive to become educated and well-informed on issues and candidates in contested races, then pass that knowledge on to readers via endorsements.

John Wylie II, publisher of the weekly *Oologah Lake Leader* in Oklahoma, believes in endorsing candidates. Wylie said his paper’s bias (moderate Democrat) is well known among readers.

“People rely on us for political insight,” Wylie said. “Some because they agree with us, some because they want to cancel out our vote.”

Mark Codner, publisher of *The Madill Record*, a weekly in Oklahoma, echoed Wylie’s comments.

“We believe, in this age of apathy and low voter turnout, that an informed voice must be provided, showing community leadership and setting a good example,” Codner said.

As a rule, the Harris newspapers in Kansas endorse in all elections, but Duane Schrag, publisher in Chanute, said he doesn’t always endorse a candidate in races — only when he feels it’s necessary.

“That’s damn subjective, I know,” Schrag said. “It’s my job.”

Another Harris publisher, John Montgomery of Hays, said he doesn’t necessarily endorse to sway voters’ opinions, and local results often diverge from the newspaper picks.

“I think voters appreciate endorsements as one more piece of information in their decision-making process,” Montgomery said.

Jim Bloom, a Harris publisher in Hutchinson, said endorsements are a way for a newspaper to show community leadership, which is what a newspaper should provide, primarily as a way to spur debate and increase interest in elections.

J. Leland Gourley, editor and publisher of the weekly *Oklahoma City Friday*, said his readers demand to know his newspaper’s opinion on candidates. Hundreds of readers carry his endorsements to the polls, Gourley said.

Karen Sipes, assistant editorial page editor of the daily *Topeka Capital-Journal*, said her paper endorses in the general election but not primaries.

“We feel primaries are for the parties, and we don’t want to be caught in an awkward situation of having to come back in the general and endorse someone we endorsed against in the primary,” said Sipes.

Sipes added that the newspaper has access to the candidates for candid one-on-ones.

“That gives us insight into what kind of public official they will make,” Sipes said. “Plus, we cover the areas that they will be dealing with, so we have some additional background there. Especially on the state and local levels, we bring the candidates in for interviews with the editorial board. In many ways, newspapers serve as the eyes and ears of the public, and endorsing is just another way of doing that.”

Murrel Bland, editor and publisher of two Kansas weeklies, *Wyandotte West* and *The Piper Press*, said it is part of a newspaper’s responsibilities to make recommendations as to the best candidate.

“As an editor, I make choices,” said Bland. “As a voter, I make choices. Both are the responsible things to do.”

Dave Seaton, editor and publisher of the *Winfield Daily Courier* in Kansas, said he endorses candidates because he believes it helps voters.

“Especially those who do not follow politics closely, to weigh the candidates’ qualifications and make up their minds,” Seaton said.

Scott Jackson, publisher of the *Boonville Daily News* in Missouri, said his paper endorses state and national candidates, but not on the local level.

“Because we are a small newspaper,” Jackson said, “editors’ tenure is about three to four years. That makes it difficult to endorse on the local level.”

Gloria Trotter, editor and publisher of two weeklies in Oklahoma, the *Tecumseh Countywide News* and the *Shawnee Sun*, said her readers expect endorsements.

“But we’ve found it’s too difficult in local races,” Trotter said. “We have to work very closely with them, and it gets too personal. We have broken this rule once or twice when we felt a local candidate was dangerous.”

In Jewell County, Kan., Bill Blauvelt publishes *The Record*, as well as another weekly just over the state border in Nebraska, *The Superior Express*. *The Record*, the smaller of the two publications, usually does not have an editorial page because of its size and the fact that Blauvelt doesn’t live in the county.

The Express, however, each week carries an editorial page, most of which pertains to local issues.

“In most elections, we do not endorse candidates, though we have and may do so again,” Blauvelt said. “We have frequently endorsed state and national candidates but haven’t done so with local candidates in several years. About 30 years ago we did endorse a candidate for county judge. Our man lost and the winner used his position as judge to make life unpleasant. We were never in his courtroom, but he found ways to make life difficult. I expect that experience has influenced our actions in later years.”

J. Zonelle Rainbolt, editor of *The Cordell Beacon*, a weekly in Oklahoma, endorses occasionally, but only when she feels very strongly — pro or con — about a particular candidate.

“As a general statement,” Rainbolt said, “I don’t take a public stand, as the editor, on political races. I resent movie stars telling me how to vote and I don’t want to fall into the trap of assuming my job gives me extra privileges. There have been a couple of exceptions, including our most recent city election.”

Don Ratzlaff, editor of the weekly *Hillsboro Free Press* in Kansas, also doesn’t carry political endorsements.

“In our situation, the choices usually have been ‘good’ versus

‘good,’ or at least ‘good’ versus ‘OK,’” Ratzlaff said. “On the rare occasions when it is ‘good’ versus ‘bad,’ I think it’s already obvious to the local voters, too. Generally, we don’t see much value in endorsing one candidate over another — especially, in a small town, if the one we would endorse would happen to lose. Beyond that, we feel it’s our task to get the candidates’ views in front of the people, and then let them decide.”

Gary Mehl, publisher of *The McPherson Sentinel*, a six-day-a-week paper in Kansas, hates to address endorsements because his paper’s policy does not express his true feelings.

“I think newspapers should have the freedom to endorse a candidate,” Mehl said. “Unfortunately, we are owned by a corporation out of Chicago, which is only interested in dollars and not in issues. We simply can’t afford to alienate anyone with the budget expectations that face us daily. That’s the reason, in a nutshell, we don’t endorse candidates. Oh, to be free of these bonds!”

In Durant, Okla., Steve Boggs, publisher of the *Durant Daily Democrat*, endorses in local and state elections, but not on the national level.

“Nobody cares who we endorse for president,” said Boggs. “We only endorse when three criteria are met: Is there a discernible difference in the candidates, in our judgment? Is it a close race? Will our endorsement affect the outcome of the race?”

Chris White, publisher of the daily *McAlester News-Capital & Democrat* in Oklahoma, said his paper doesn’t endorse in all elections.

“We endorse only when the editorial board feels one candidate is clearly more qualified, it’s an important position or race to our readers, and when our opinion could make a difference,” White said.

That also was the opinion of Steve Haynes, publisher of *Nor’West Newspapers* in Kansas.

“We do endorse, but rarely, only when we think it will have an impact or is otherwise important,” said Haynes. “Routine endorsements, just to be doing them, have never appealed to me. We never skip local editorial content and local columns. They are the soul of the newspaper, and a good readership item. Letters are even better.”

Betty Spaar, owner of *The Odessan* and *Focus on Oak Grove*, two weeklies in Missouri, writes a personal column telling readers how she plans to vote — “a round-about way of endorsement.”

Wendell Lenhart, publisher of *The Republican Times*, a daily in Trenton, Mo., doesn’t endorse because he doesn’t think it makes a difference to readers.

Barbara Glover, editor of *The Oakley Graphic*, a Kansas weekly, said she has never felt it was the duty of the paper to endorse candidates.

“We put their viewpoints out there, and let our readers decide for themselves,” said Glover. “I have never been influenced by a newspaper endorsement.”

Greg Branson, editor of the *Osawatimie Graphic*, another Kansas weekly, doesn’t want to compromise the paper’s objectivity.

“I write the editorials, but I also cover city council and school board,” Branson said. “It is too hard to separate personalities from issues.”

Craig McNeal, editor of the *Council Grove Republican*, a

five-day-a-week newspaper in Kansas, said it is more important to encourage people to vote than to endorse candidates.

“We attempt to provide balanced reporting for all candidates, both sides of a bond issue, etc.,” said McNeal. “The voters can make up their minds on how to vote.”

Darrel Miller, publisher of the weekly *Smith County Pioneer* in Kansas, agrees.

“We comment on local issues, state issues and national issues on a regular basis, and might praise or blast individual candidates,” said Miller. “However, I feel that it’s presumptuous to tell American citizens how to vote. This goes against the grain of my feelings about democracy. I feel that voters should gather information about the candidates from many sources, including our newspaper, but their decision in the voting booth is sacred to them. Perhaps editors can sway voters, but I prefer that they educate them.”

Miller also said there is a danger of a backlash with political endorsements in newspapers.

“The voter may vote against what the editor propounds, simply because he doesn’t like the editor,” Miller continued. “I believe some editors take themselves much too seriously when they try to decide how their community will vote, and God help any community that is governed in that manner.”

C.A. Moore, editor and publisher of the weekly *News-Xpress* in Butler, Mo., said he has found too often that endorsements can be the “kiss of death” for candidates. Moore’s paper seldom endorses local candidates, but occasionally voices support for state and national candidates.

Some smaller papers, like the weekly *Nodaway News Leader* in Maryville, Mo., take stands on issues but not candidates. Pamela Weaver, publisher of the *Pulse Legal Publication*, a five-day-a-week newspaper in Kansas City, Mo., said it’s safer not to endorse candidates. Rob Viehman, publisher of the weekly *Cuba Free Press* in Cuba, Mo., said his paper tries to remain neutral in local races. And Linda Geist, publisher and owner of *The Lake Gazette*, a weekly in Monroe City, Mo., said she endorses in state and national candidates but not local.

“We’re related to half of them, or live next to them,” Geist said.

That sentiment was echoed by several other small-town editors and publishers.

“It’s a small community,” said Neil Richards, managing editor and publisher of *The Independent-Journal*, a weekly in Potosi, Mo. “We know them all, and don’t try to influence who people vote for.”

Tom Throne, publisher of the *Leavenworth Times*, a six-day-a-week daily in Kansas, said he hasn’t endorsed in years.

“Makes too many people mad if you choose wrong,” said Throne. “Besides, how do we really know who will do the best job? There’s more downside than upside.”

Barbara Vice, editor and publisher of the weekly *Drumright Gusher* in Oklahoma, said she has to feel very secure before she endorses a local candidate. Vice said she doesn’t want the responsibility of swaying readers in a local contest between two good candidates.

Dave Bergmeier, editor and publisher of the *Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, which publishes six days a week in Kansas, said he has always believed endorsements put newspapers in a no-win situation with readers who simply don’t want to take time to be informed and can look for a scapegoat.

“While I really believe this,” Bergmeier said, “I am open to new ideas or suggestions on this topic. If a person was overwhelmingly unqualified, I might take a look at it. Politics can be nasty at times.”

In Washington, Kan., Dan Thalman is editor of the weekly *Washington County News*. He’s also a member of the school board. The newspaper hasn’t endorsed candidates for any elections for at least 10 years, Thalman said, primarily because the former editor didn’t believe in it.

“I would like to get to the point of endorsing candidates,” Thalman said. “However, I’m not sure I’ve gained the level of respect I need yet to throw my endorsements into the mix. And, I believe, Washington County has the highest percentage of Republicans in the state, so I am not sure an endorsement outside of that party would make a bit of difference for the candidate, and would likely draw criticism for the newspaper.”

Ida Roberts, owner and publisher of *The Fairfax Chief*, a weekly in Oklahoma, said her paper serves a small, rural area.

“Endorsements lead to community division on a public scale,” Roberts said. “We decline to create, aid, or add to any split in community life.”

Jennifer Wilson, news editor of the weekly *Hillsboro Star-Journal* in Kansas, said her newspaper has enough animosity from the community without endorsing candidates.

“We don’t need unnecessary polarization,” Wilson said. “We’ll save that for the really important issues.”

Mike Kellogg, publisher of the daily *Stillwater NewsPress* in Oklahoma, endorses in all but local elections. “Local candidates are not endorsed not to give the impression of slanting coverage,” Kellogg said.

Jean Black, editor and publisher of weekly *Slater Main Street News* in Missouri, said in her rural Midwestern community, she would lose too many subscribers if she offered endorsements.

“Then there would be no newspaper,” Black said.

John Marshall, editor of the weekly *Lindsborg News-Record* in Kansas, bought the newspaper in 2001, so he hasn’t had to deal with a national election. Marshall has endorsed in state elections but won’t on the local level.

“I have declined to endorse local candidates on grounds that we’re the only paper in town,” said Marshall. “and to take sides — unless dealing with a nut case — would not be wise.”

Roger Dillon, editor and publisher of the weekly *Shannon County Current Wave* in Eminence, Mo., doesn’t believe in endorsements.

“You can’t sell what you give away, and working with elected officials you have opposed can be difficult at best,” said Dillon.

In Pretty Prairie, Kan., Tim Stucky, publisher of the *Mount Hope Clarion* and *Ninnescah Valley News*, endorses locally but not on the state or national level.

“While our contact with local candidates provides a basis for endorsements, we do not have similar contact with state or national candidates,” Stucky said.

Robert Wilson, editor and publisher of the *The Milan Standard*, a weekly in Missouri, said his political affiliation is known among readers. “And there are times I do not want to endorse,” said Wilson.

Tim Curtin, publisher of *The Watonga Republican*, a weekly in

Oklahoma, endorses only for state elections.

“There seemed to be no ‘bump’ in the candidate’s favor,” Curtin said. “Half love him, half hate him. We tend to elect good ol’ boys.”

Darryl Wilkinson, editor and publisher of the weekly *Gallatin North Missourian*, said some rural weekly editors sometimes don’t know local candidates as well as readers. He said endorsements provide the risk of alienating too many readers for little return.

Russell Clark, editor of the weekly *Oklahoma Legend* in Tahlequah, doesn’t endorse candidates because he wants to be impartial and report the news fairly.

“And we do not want to alienate any advertisers over politics,” Clark said.

That same feeling comes from Cindy Sheets, publisher of *The Perkins Journal*, a weekly in Oklahoma. “We do not endorse for two main reasons: small-town politics and small advertiser base.”

Karen Brady, owner of *The Elkhart Tri-State News* in Kansas, a weekly, endorses occasionally in state and national elections, but never on the local level.

“Most local candidates are business owners, friends, involved in the community,” Brady said. “I have to live here — with the winners and losers — and do business with them.”

Charlie Meeks, editor of the weekly *Cedar County Republican* in Stockton, Mo., said it is a long-standing policy of her paper not to endorse candidates to avoid hard feelings in a small community.

“We try to present the facts and let people make their own decisions,” Meeks said.

Gay Hagan-Donaldson, editor of the weekly *Wellsville Optic-News* in Missouri, said it wasn’t her place to tell people how to vote.

Laura Watson, managing editor of *The Excelsior Inc.*, a weekly in Lancaster, Mo., doesn’t endorse because she doesn’t want the paper to be deemed one party or the other.

“We usually take stands on issues, but not candidates,” said Rosalie Ross, publisher of the weekly *Rawlins County Square Deal* in Atwood, Kan. “Maybe we don’t want to take the heat or potential loss of revenue.”

Judy Kallenbach, editor and general manager of the twice-weekly *Bolivar Herald-Free Press* in Missouri, said local candidates often run on personality rather than qualifications.

“There’s no way to come out ahead with endorsements unless a candidate is clearly unqualified,” Kallenbach said, “and then we’ve run news stories rather than endorse another candidate. We occasionally endorse a statewide candidate, usually when it’s someone who is from this area.”

Emory Melton, co-owner of the weekly *Barry County Advertiser* in Cassville, Mo., doesn’t endorse because he believes people resent being told how to vote. He said the same is true for editorials in general.

“I think most folks secretly resent editorials,” Melton said.

In Paola, Kan., Phil McLaughlin, publisher of the twice-weekly *Miami County Republic*, doesn’t believe in endorsing candidates for any election. *The Republic* carries strong, local editorials in each issue, and McLaughlin’s paper has been a consistent state and national winner in editorial writing.

Local political endorsements, said McLaughlin, discourage candidates who fear the newspaper will endorse their opponents. As far as state and national candidate endorsements, McLaughlin said, "Do our readers really care what we think here? What's our special knowledge?"

Andrea Hurley, editor of the weekly *Marthasville Record* in Missouri, said she prefers to present information to allow readers to make an educated choice at the polls.

"The newspaper's opinion on qualified candidates should not be used to garner votes for any candidate," Hurley said. "We remain a neutral party and let the issues speak for themselves."

Matt Jacobs, editor of the six-day-a-week *El Dorado Times* in Kansas, said his newspaper does not endorse candidates.

"We feel if we provide all of the information we can in an unbiased perspective, a smart electorate can make informed decisions without newspaper endorsements," Jacobs said. "Also, in these days of corporate profit above all else, it is difficult for upper management to allow an endorsement of a candidate who spent less than his opponent did on newspaper advertising."

Advertising is a reason several of the newspaper executives who responded don't carry endorsements in their publications.

Joe Harder, editor and publisher of *The Onaga Herald*, a weekly in Kansas, said a newspaper's main purpose is to disseminate information to the public.

"Newspapers make their living by selling advertising," Harder said. "Candidates use newspaper editorial sections as free editorials instead of paid advertising. Then, they turn around and spend the large portion of election money on TV and radio ads. We don't run candidate endorsement editorials. Again, the newspaper industry is taking it in the shorts, while the other media are making big bucks."

Connie Musil, owner and publisher of the weekly *Frankfort Area News* in Kansas, said her newspaper runs candidates' ads, and lets the public makes its own decisions.

In *The Western Times*, a weekly in Sharon Springs, Kan., editor and publisher Julie Samuelson said candidates have made a practice of wanting free space — press releases and editorials — instead of advertising.

"Damned if I'll help for free!" said Samuelson.

Dick Clasen, editor and publisher of *The Eureka Herald*, another weekly in Kansas, doesn't endorse on the local or state level but will in national races.

"If we run stories and endorse, they get free advertising and then spend their money on TV and radio advertising," Clasen said. "It's not the same on the national level."

Some papers sponsor forums despite declining attendance

Thirty-six percent of the publications (75 of 207) whose editors and publishers responded to the survey sponsor or help sponsor candidate forums. And some of those editors and publishers who responded favorably say turnout is typically poor, depending on the number of candidates and issues.

Randel Grigsby, publisher of the twice-weekly *Yukon Review* in Yukon, Okla., said fewer people are attending his newspaper's forums.

"We sponsor the entire event," Grigsby said, "but today less than 100 attend. Fifteen years ago, about 500 attended."

Bonita Gooch, editor and publisher of a biweekly in Wichita, *The Community Voice*, works with other community groups to sponsor forums. They usually draw a crowd, Gooch added.

In Parsons, Kan., *Sun* publisher Ann Charles works through the chamber of commerce. Attendance is usually mediocre, Charles said, but the forums are rebroadcast on cable several times and generate conversation in town.

The city televises forums in Olathe, Kan., said Dan Simon, publisher of *The Olathe News*.

"The candidates are all there," Simon said. "The city televises them, the chamber co-sponsors, and about 10 other people show up. Voter turnout is a major problem here. We're working on a program to change this."

Chris White, publisher of the *McAlester (Oklahoma) News-Capital & Democrat*, said forums are well received and attended, with 100 to 150 in attendance. Forums also are broadcast on local radio.

Robert Leger, editorial page editor of the *Springfield News-Leader*, a Missouri daily, said his newspaper continues to sponsor candidate forums, but lately has been moving to partnerships with television stations to broadcast the debates.

In Abilene, Kan., publisher Dave Bergmeier is the driving force behind local candidate forums.

"You can already guess it's up to the newspaper to make sure it happens," Bergmeier said. "I usually include the local radio station and they have been very supportive, too. I also run it under the umbrella of the chamber of commerce's legislative division, which I chair. I always figured the bottom line was to get people out of their homes and to public forums to become better educated."

In Kansas City, *The Star* helps sponsor candidate forums, but also hosts in-house debates, then publishes transcripts for readers.

"Response is good," said Miriam Pepper, editorial page editor for *The Star*. "And we have reporters participate in TV debates, too."

Response to candidate forums is also good in Durant, Okla., where publisher Steve Boggs said his newspaper sponsors forums at every opportunity.

"Readers love it," Boggs said, "but we never sponsor anything post-endorsement."

In El Dorado, Kan., *The Times* has helped sponsor forums in the past, but not this year. "However, we cover all forums, no matter the sponsor," said editor Matt Jacobs, adding, "Papers with forum coverage often sell well."

John Wylie II, publisher of the weekly *Oologah Lake Leader* in Missouri, said poor attendance at past candidate forums did not justify the exposure, effort, or candidates' time.

"We'd do it again if we could find a format that worked," added Wylie.

Some newspapers have moved to more of a "meet and greet" event. In Seymour, Mo., *Webster County Citizen* publisher Dan Wehmer said response is typically high.

"Always upwards of 100 folks attend," Wehmer said. "However, we conduct forums in a different manner than most. We do nonpartisan Q&A forums."

In Monroe City, Mo., *Lake Gazette* publisher Linda Geist tried an ice cream social. Still, Geist said, there were more candidates than voters in attendance.

In Tonganoxie, Kan., Caroline Trowbridge, editor and publisher of *The Mirror*, said her newspaper sponsored candidate forums before both the city and school primaries and the general election last spring.

"While members of the community commended us for doing this, we had somewhat dismal turnout," Trowbridge said. "Generally, 10 to 15 people each time. Had we had hot issues in our elections, I think the turnout would have been higher."

Even if public turnout for forums is light, F. Kirk Powell, editor and publisher of the weekly *Pleasant Hill Times* in Missouri, said they create a setting that allow the newspaper to better report on the races. Several other newspaper editors and publishers in the three states surveyed echoed Powell's comment, saying that even if they don't sponsor the forums, they provide thorough coverage.

In Oklahoma City, however, *Oklahoma City Friday* Publisher J. Leland Gourley doesn't see any benefit in forums.

"Our readers do better reading my editorials than listening to the candidates," Gourley said, adding that the weekly paper also

prints complete questionnaires that are submitted to all candidates.

Bob Foos, editor of the *Webb City Sentinel* in Missouri, said his weekly newspaper is in a one-party county and community.

"The only 'forum' is the Republican primary," said Foos.

Julie Samuelson, editor and publisher of *The Western Times* in Sharon Springs, Kan., said her newspaper helps sponsor candidate forums, even though response is "lousy."

"People have become very jaded regarding politics," Samuelson said. "They are tired of being lied to and are tired of not having honest people to vote for."

Les Anderson is associate director at the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University. This article was originally presented to the ninth annual Newspapers and Community-Building Symposium, sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media and the National Newspaper Association Foundation, in Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 24-27, 2003

United States Postal Service
Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

1. Publication Title: **Grassroots Editor**
 2. Issue Frequency: **Quarterly**
 3. Publication Number: **10-7-2003**
 4. Issue Date: **10-7-2003**
 5. Number of Issues Published Annually: **4**
 6. Annual Subscription Price: **\$25.00**
 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4):
 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer):
 9. Full Name and Complete Mailing Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank):
 10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)
 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box.
 12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates. Check one):
 13. Form 3526, October 1999

13. Publication Title: **Grassroots Editor**
 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: **Full 2003**

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total number of copies (Net press run)			
16. Paid and Outside-County Subscriptions (Based on Form 3541, (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies)		400	400
17. Paid In-County Subscriptions (Based on Form 3541, (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies)		273	273
18. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Third-Party Mail Distribution		0	0
19. Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS		0	0
Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 16, 17, 18, and 19)		673	673
20. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)		68	68
21. Free Distribution In Mail (Carriers, including bulk mail)		0	0
22. Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS		0	0
Total Free Distribution (Sum of 20, 21, and 22)		68	68
Total Distribution (Sum of 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22)		741	741
23. Copies Not Distributed		50	50
Total (Sum of 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23)		791	791
24. Payment of Postage and Postage Guarantees (This should be 100 percent)		50	50

16. Publication of Statement of Ownership: **Full 2003**
 17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: **Chad Stebbins**
 Date: **10.1.2003**

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

Instructions to Publishers

- Complete and file one copy of this form with your postmaster annually on or before October 1. Keep a copy of the completed form for your records.
- In cases where the stockholder or security holder is a trustee, include in items 10 and 11 the name of the person or corporation for whom the trustee is acting. Also include the names and addresses of individuals who own or hold 1 percent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities of the publishing organization. In item 11, if none, check the box. Use extra sheets if more space is required.
- Be sure to furnish all circulation information called for in item 15. Free circulation must be shown in items 16a, e, and f.
- Item 16b, Copies not Distributed, must include (1) nonreturnable copies originally stated on Form 3541, and returned to the publisher; (2) estimated returns from news agents; and (3) copies for office use, leftovers, second-class, and all other copies not distributed.
- If the publisher has Periodicals authorization as a general or requester publisher, this Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation must be published. It must be printed in any issue in October or, if the publication is not published during October, the first issue printed after October.
- In item 16, indicate the date of the issue of which this Statement of Ownership will be published.
- Item 17 must be signed.
- Failure to file or publish a statement of ownership may lead to suspension of Periodicals authorization.

PS Form 3526, October 1999 (Rev. 9/99)

The Pulitzer and the Klan

Horace Carter, the Pulitzer, and how a weekly editor stood up to the Klan — and won

“Any man can have kids. It’s what you do with your life outside your family that counts.”

— W. Horace Carter¹

By **Thomas C. Terry**

A line of 29 cars snaked down Highway 701 East to Railroad Street in Tabor City, North Carolina, through the business district, and along the “dusty, unpaved streets” to “the bottom” where the black citizens lived, surrounding it like a lariat. The lead car bore a two-foot high “brightly-glowing red cross” above its radiator; the letters “KKK” scrawled on its windshield. The dome lights of the cars, mostly bearing South Carolina plates, burned luridly in the dark and warm of that July 22 evening in 1950, illuminating the occupants, 100 armed men all cloaked in the white robes and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan.²

There was no violence that first night, no cross burnings, no voices raised in anger or protest. Stunned residents lined the streets in silence. A butcher from a meat market clattered down the steps of his grocery, wiping his bloody hands on his apron.³ “What’s going on?” he asked a knot of Tabor City residents watching the spectacle in disbelief. Jewish businessman Albert Schilds stood aghast in the doorway of his department store.⁴ A drunk, mouth hanging open, leaned for support against a utility pole.⁵ Three black women tried to melt into the crowd.⁶ Standing by the curb, Police Chief L. R. Watson “seemed petrified” at the spectacle of Klansmen prowling the streets of his town. The Tabor City police force consisted of just two men and if the Klansmen attempted violence, they would have met little resistance.⁷

Twenty-nine-year-old W. Horace Carter, editor, owner, and founder of the *Tabor City Tribune*, had been tipped off by his barber earlier in the day that “something” was going to happen that evening.⁸ When he heard the wail of a siren, he looked outside his rented home for the tell-tale smoke from a fire. Seeing none, he jammed his rumpled felt hat on his head (“I wanted to be a ‘real’ newspaperman”), and headed toward the “uptown” of Tabor City.⁹

If a twist of fate had not sent him to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and journalism, he would have been in China as a Christian missionary rather than Tabor City.¹⁰ And yet, another crusade, a mission of a different kind, was driving down the unpaved streets of Tabor City. Gradually the caravan of cars unwound and disappeared toward South Carolina, red taillights gradually swallowed by the night.¹¹

Carter picked up one of the flyers scattered by the Klansmen. “Beware of association with the niggers, Jews, and Catholics in this community. God didn’t mean for all men to be equal... We are organizing all over your state and particularly in this community.” It was signed by Grand Dragon Thomas L. Hamilton of the Association of Carolina Klans.¹²

Dismayed, troubled, and yet determined, Carter walked home, recalling in his memoirs: My duty as the only newspaperman in Tabor City stared me squarely in the face. I could not compromise my con-

science. I must fight the Klansmen with all the power that my tiny press could muster. That meant that I too would be the victim of their wrath. I was no hero, but the die was cast and I would have to respond. I must fight this KKK resurrection... The blueprint of what the future might hold for me... flicked through my busy mind as I slowly walked home.¹³

It is the purpose of this article to discuss the choices Horace Carter faced, the actions he took, often alone, isolated and unaided, and the results his editorials engendered during the Ku Klux Klan’s resurgence in southeast North Carolina during 1950-1952. His efforts culminated with the imprisonment of 62 Klansmen, two-thirds the number police estimated had driven slowly through Tabor City that first night, and the bestowal of the Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service on Carter and the *Tribune*.

Carter was part of a Southern tradition of liberalism, a philosophy that surfaced at times of trial. At the time Carter was fighting the Klan, Raleigh’s *News and Observer* was completing its transformation from a segregationist publication under long-time owner Josephus Daniels, a newspaper that had helped spur the disenfranchisement of blacks in the late 19th Century, into a liberal bulwark in the state under Daniels’ son, Jonathan. Other journalists contemporary with Carter — Ralph McGill, and Hodding Carter, both Pulitzer Prize winners — had their own battles either with the Klan, or other demons from the South’s history.

Carter also enjoyed a circle of family that helped support him, especially his wife, and a few in the wider North Carolina newspaper fraternity. His own father, though, disagreed with his opposition to the KKK at first.¹⁴ Charles Kuralt and the *News and Observer* of Raleigh eventually rallied to his cause. Willard Cole, a long-time friend at the nearby semi-weekly *Whiteville News Reporter*, supported him in his clashes with the Ku Klux Klan, and actually shared in the Pulitzer.

Out of the chaos

The Ku Klux Klan was born in the chaos of the postbellum South, “during the restless days when time was out of joint . . . and the social order was battered and turned upside down,” according to David M. Chalmers in his history of the clandestine organization.¹⁵ With carpet-baggers and scalawags in power in the South, the economy shattered, cash worthless, agriculture practically ruined, land redistribution threatened (and carried out on a small scale), properties sold to settle back taxes, and many children and women orphaned and widowed, restoring pride and a respect for the traditional white leaders required drastic action in the minds of hundreds of thousands of Southerners.

Like a mold that is not quite eradicated, the bleach-sheeted Klan was revived in the wake of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* in 1915. It died back, only to be rejuvenated again just after World War II, led by Dr. Samuel Green, an Atlanta, Georgia obstetrician.¹⁶ His unexpected death in 1949 took away the Invisible Empire’s only national leader and led to the organization’s further, perhaps final fragmentation.¹⁷ Into that vacuum in the Carolinas, for a time, would step Leesville, South Carolina, grocer Thomas L. Hamilton, self-styled Grand Dragon of the KKK. And W. Horace Carter.

Convictions

Carter's convictions came from the first "liberal" he ever met, Dr. Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). "He had a lot to do with it," Carter remembered.¹⁸

He believed in equality of the religions and equality of the races. And not many people did then . . . Not many people believed in sitting down and eating with a black man, for instance. But he got it across to me very tactfully and over a lot of different conversations that they were entitled to all the privileges the rest of us were entitled to. And I think that's what I was thinking of when I saw those 29 cars go down the street.¹⁹

Carter was editor of *The Tar Heel* at UNC-CH. Dr. Graham had an open door policy for students, invited them to his office and home, and was seen frequently around campus talking to students. On Sunday nights, Carter recalled, he would often have members of the newspaper staff to his home for dinner.²⁰ Carter's friendship with and respect for Graham sparked a defining moment in his journalistic life.²¹ During World War II, Dr. Graham, a friend and confidant of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, served on the War Labor Board in the nation's capital, while remaining as university president. There was grumbling from other university administrators and the board of trustees about this arrangement.

Adopting the practice he would later use to great effect in Tabor City, Carter wrote a stinging editorial excoriating opponents of Dr. Graham. Though it was a "small student publication paid for largely by fees collected as part of the quarterly tuition," its editorial resonated far beyond Chapel Hill.²² "I wasn't smart enough to write diplomatically. I still am not," Carter admitted, describing his blunt language.²³ Carter's fulminations infuriated State Senator John Umstead, who telephoned Carter and demanded he meet him at the journalism school "right now!"²⁴ His nerves "like a bowl of Jell-O(r) on a merry-go-round," Carter headed across campus to Bynum Hall to meet with the senator. When he arrived, he was met at the top of the steps by the dean of the journalism school, Skipper Coffin. Coffin told him of a similar call he had just received from Umstead. His words would galvanize Carter. "I don't give a damn whether you are right or wrong, but don't you give in to him. You stick by what you wrote and what you really believe, regardless of what he threatens," Coffin instructed Carter in an "almost dictatorial tone."²⁵

A few minutes later, Sen. Umstead arrived and met with Carter alone. "His face red with rage," he demanded to know Carter's sources; Carter refused, but let the senator know they were authoritative.²⁶ Sen. Umstead gave him a "raking over the coals," and then "made me get in the car and go to Raleigh" to meet his brother, William Umstead, former Congressman, Democratic state chairman, and future U.S. senator and governor.²⁷ Despite the pressure, Carter remained steadfast and adamantly declined to divulge his sources or back away from his editorial position. Five days later, Carter received a letter from President Roosevelt praising his convictions; he printed it on the front page of *The Tar Heel*.²⁸ Eventually, Dr. Graham retained both positions. In his memoirs, Carter summed up the effect this episode had on his nascent career: "For more than half a century, I have lived by the same premise concerning controversial subjects when my business, home, and even my life and my family were threatened by someone who disagreed with my position(s) . . . I started my whole crusading career right there . . . I've never seen it as being heroic. I've always seen it as just another way to tell what was going on in the community."²⁹

Into print

The days between the Klan parade, and his earliest opportunity to

respond in print, the next Wednesday's edition of the *Tabor City Tribune*, were worrisome to Carter. As he recollected later: Was it worth sacrificing our happiness, shattering the tranquil life of running a little weekly newspaper in a small town and taking part in Red Cross Drives, church covered-dish suppers, and the Annual Yam Festival promotion just because I believed in a principle? Was it worth the risk that the print shop might be burned, our home dynamited? I could be dragged from our house with the frantic screams of my family ringing in my ears. I might suffer a brutal lashing by a band of masked hoodlums or even death if I dared to oppose them. Is it the time to stand up for principles even before I am fully aware of what this Klan proposes?³⁰

Convinced in his own mind and supported by his wife, Carter sat down at the used \$15 Royal typewriter he still owns to compose the first salvo in his crusade against the Klan. It was then typeset on an old Linotype, and printed on a sheet fed Whitlock printing press for his 1,500 subscribers. The editorial appeared on the front page as would all but one Klan editorial over the next two years. It was a conscious decision, Carter explained.³¹

I knew it would be read on the front page . . . and I made the decision to publish all future KKK editorials on the front page regardless of the length of the campaign. I had a feeling then that there was no quick fix. This would be a long, hard-fought struggle. Neither the Klan nor the newspaper would just roll over and play dead.³²

He admitted in his memoirs that it was "no great literary masterpiece," but he had a particular audience in mind, one that the Klan would prey on.³³ As he told his wife, Tabor City residents were "hard-working, fifth and sixth generation Americans . . . but many of the adults never saw the inside of a schoolhouse. Few of the rural farmers here got past grammar school and there [was] a racial tension that could play right into the hands of the Klan."³⁴ North Carolinians and other southerners had been taught in "high schools for generations in history" that the Klan was heroic.³⁵ Yankees descended from the North to prey on the defeated South, "took over the governments and taxed (southerners) beyond reasonable limits."³⁶ Carter found it "hard to counteract" that ingrained mindset and erroneous reading of history.³⁷

In Tabor City in the early 1950s, there were "no racial problems to speak of," Carter commented.³⁸ "The Negroes were poorer than most whites and there had always been some injustices," it being the rural South.³⁹ Nonetheless, "the little town remained peaceful and quiet. There was no clamor for change, no animosity, no confrontations," Carter recollected many years later.⁴⁰ Despite that, "the man on the street" sided with the Klan, Carter thought.⁴¹ Within a few months of that first motorcade, "unofficial estimates" put KKK membership in Columbus County, North Carolina, and Horry County, South Carolina, both in the *Tribune's* coverage area, at 5,000 (or more) out of a population of 75,000.⁴² "That meant that one out of every fifteen people I met on the street owned a robe and hood. It might also apply to those I sat next to in church."⁴³ Carter also anguished over the possibility that "people resent being told what to do by a newspaper."⁴⁴

Three houses in a nearby County were burned, presumably by the Klan. A pregnant black woman was severely beaten. A mechanic was hauled out of his bed in the middle of the night and "flogged," presumably because he had a drinking problem. Others received threatening letters warning them to change their behavior, "or else." A Jewish businessman, distraught by threats, closed his department store and left town with his family.⁴⁵ Others were enticed from their homes in the middle of the night on a pretext: a favorite ploy was to knock at the door and ask for assistance with a car breakdown.⁴⁶ The litany of outrages continued like a drumbeat. Carter is convinced many more attacks went unreported, especially by blacks, and others were delayed sometimes weeks while victims anguished over possible reprisals.⁴⁷

His readers did not believe him when he wrote that lawlessness would follow the Klan's organization. "You couldn't organize a gang of troublemakers and appease them by holding meetings and talking about the price of tobacco," Carter wrote ruefully decades later. "They would want to use those sheets and hoods for the bedevilment of others."⁴⁸ The KKK very soon began its mission of mayhem.

On January 15, 1951, Klansmen invaded the home of a black couple in rural Tabor City. As the husband escaped unseen through the back door, Klansmen pumped five shots into an attic where they thought he was hiding. They then dragged his wife outside, whipped her mercilessly, carved a cross into her scalp with a razor, and clubbed her with a butt of a rifle. All the time she begged for her life, while her daughter cowered nearby. The same evening, a disabled World War II veteran and his crippled uncle were severely beaten in their own home. Both incidents involved 40-50 Klansmen. No one was ever caught, no reason was ever given, though Carter suspected it involved judgments on their moral conduct. "An ominous silence crept over the community," Carter recalled, "the virus of fear was spreading."⁴⁹ Carter reported the beatings "vividly," hoping to convince the "so-called good people" of the true essence of the Klan. "Not even the pastor in the Tabor City Baptist Church, where I taught a Sunday school class, would publicly criticize the Klan floggings," Carter wrote, surmising that some Klansmen were parishioners.⁵⁰

Blacks felt they could not trust the police and local government officials — and with reason. The sheriff of Horry County was part of the organization, in Carter's estimation. Police departments in the area were suffused with Klan members.⁵¹ The threats and harassments built, one upon the other, to a crescendo that never seemed to resolve itself. Twice, on the street, Carter was approached by different men, much larger and stronger than him. They berated him and his newspapers, and made rude remarks about him and his family, trying to pick a fight. Wisely, Carter shrugged them off.⁵²

The Klan put pressure on Carter's advertisers. One of the largest, C.C. Sells, did abandon the *Tribune* for some time, staying away even after the whole controversy was over. None of the advertisers actually came out and admitted they were cutting back on their advertising because of intimidation, but Carter knew it was happening. Some would tell him they did not want an ad a particular week, one that Carter had been expecting. Grand Dragon Hamilton told Carter plainly in one of their two face-to-face meetings in the *Tribune* office that he would put him out of business by organizing a boycott. Support from home was vital here, too. Carter's wife Lucille told him, as she had before and would later: "Well, we came with nothing. Let's leave with nothing. Let's beat them."⁵³

In addition to its traditional racial and religious hatreds, the Klan cloaked itself in a false morality, Carter believed. This veneer of morality won the Klan converts and sympathizers. Stripped of its violence, the organization seemed to represent many American virtues. Threatening letters were sent to those the Klansmen believed fell short of their standards of morality and decency, all without proof, although with some evidence, Carter admitted. Men who cheated on their wives, unmarried couples who lived together, a man who would not allow his wife to attend the church of her choice, families who did not seem to be providing for their children properly, several individuals who spoke against the Church of Christ, a man who, habitually, found himself arrested for public drunkenness and who, therefore, did not seem to be supporting his family properly; all received warnings, threats, or visits from the Klan. Many law-abiding citizens, according to Carter, thought some of these goals, far from being deplorable, were in fact admirable. With his editorials, Carter tried to draw attention to the hypocrisy of their stands, and the vigilante nature of the justice they were meting out. Shacking up with somebody else's wife, or living together when

you're not married: at that time, that was about as sinful as you could get. And in the Klan came and flogged these people and beat them and told them if they ever turned notice of their flogging over to the sheriff, they'd be back... We knew that the Klan couldn't go in there and punish them into changing their lives. So, generally, those people were-abusing their wives and (were) alcoholics that couldn't look after their families, people who obviously deserved some kind of reprimands, some kind of punishment. Well, we fought them anyway just on the basis that if you don't go by the law, you don't even have a country. We're through if we don't go by the law.⁵⁴

The editorials

The Tabor City community learned immediately where Carter and the weekly *Tribune* stood, just four days after the Klan motorcade, in that first editorial headlined, "No Excuse for KKK."

In this democratic country, there's no place for an organization of the caliber of the Ku Klux Klan... Any organization that has to work outside the law is unfit for recognition in a country of free men. Saturday's episode, although without violence, is deplorable, a black eye to our area and an admission that our law enforcement is inadequate.

Sanctioning of their methods of operation is practically as bad as if you rode in their midst. It takes all the law-abiding people as a unit to discourage and combat a Ku Klux Klan that is totally without law. The Klan, despite its Americanism plea, is the personification of Fascism and Nazism. It is just such outside-the-law operations that lead to dictatorships through fear and insecurity.

The Klan bases its power on fear and hate of one's fellow man and not through love, understanding, and the principles upon which God would have us live together. We have some racial problems in this country. That cannot be denied. However, we do not have open warfare which we will have if the primitive methods of the KKK are applied... They are endeavoring to force their domination upon those whom they consider worth of punishment. It is not for a band of hoodlums to decide whether you or I need chastising.⁵⁵

Carter wrote that "punishment must be kept within the law; if that is not adequate then we . . . have the power to enlarge upon (those laws) should we deem the present ones inadequate."⁵⁶ Carter further noted that: The racial issue in the South has been overstressed. There is little tangible evidence of any struggle between races. There's no basis to a federal government forcing us to mingle together. A law of this nature would get no further than the record, and you know it would not and could not be enforced.⁵⁷

Given his later career, and his consistently articulated opinions, Carter was clearly speaking to his "back country" readers, mostly white, who were troubled by the rumblings over civil rights. In this sense, Carter's campaign against the KKK can be seen as part of the first threads in the rich tapestry of the Civil Rights movement that would soon engulf the South. Drawing on the intensity of his religious faith, Carter predicted: Any non-segregation that ever comes about in the South will have to be a natural movement, through many generations of people, through education and the practice of God's teaching.⁵⁸

God and ungodly. Segregation and non-segregation. Hate and love. Natural movement and federal government force. All terminology balanced in a ying and yang of racial relations, in an editorial that, on the surface, seems almost haphazardly and simply written, but which is, upon further investigation, seen to be richly textured, subtle, and imbued with religious fervor. Religious terminology can be seen also as an attempt by a very sophisticated writer who chooses to write in the homely language of a rural, "country weekly" as a way to connect with a populace that was, at the time, deeply and fervently religious, as well

as unsophisticated. His religious terms and imagery were touchstones and reassuring ones. His readers were deeply worried about the “mingling of the races” and some saw in the KKK a way to beat back, as the group did during Reconstruction, the racial tsunami that was threatening to batter their way of life to pieces.

This editorial was also important, not just because it was the first, but because it came immediately, at the earliest possible opportunity after the Klan’s appearance in Tabor City. This editorial defined the fight to come, put Carter and *The Tribune* forthrightly against the Klan. The religious and ethical aspect is evident; Carter clearly regarded this as a “crusade” — his word — and a religious imperative.⁵⁹ In at least half a dozen instances Carter knew of — and he believed there were many others unreported — Klansmen entered churches in the midst of worship services and walked up and down the aisles menacingly. The one arena where townfolk were gathered together once or twice a week presented an opportunity to those with the conviction, like Carter, to oppose the Klan on moral and religious grounds. The preaching the ministers failed to do had to be accomplished in Carter’s secular arena. Through intimidation or even agreement (at least one minister was eventually indicted for Klan activities), the churches fell silent while Carter did not.⁶⁰ To Carter, the Klan represented the power of Darkness (again, fascism and Nazism), and he was going to join the battle with Light, even if he was its sole defender. To oppose the Klan was righteous, Carter was convinced, and he was appalled that the Klan wrapped its efforts in bedsheets of faith.⁶¹ In his penultimate paragraph, Carter wrote: America was founded by persons seeking a country of religious freedom where they could worship God in their own way without fear. Would you have us to resort to a nation of people wishing there was another America to discover so we could leave this one?⁶²

And, finally, in a deeply-felt denouement, Carter returned to his bedrock values and the overarching them of his campaign. With the Klan’s frequent reference to Jesus, God, and religion, they are being highly sacrilegious because their very being is in contrast to God and the Bible. If you had the names of those persons appearing here Saturday night and if you had church attendance slips for those persons, it’s our opinion that not five percent of them entered any church of any denomination on Sunday morning.⁶³

From the instant that first issue with the anti-Klan editorial hit the street, Carter felt the pressure in Tabor City rising against him.⁶⁴ Business leaders, worried about the effect on their bottom line objected. One advertiser in *The Tribune* urged him to “pull in your horns” before “it’s too late.”⁶⁵ Another friend and businessman warned him that “they’ll beat you to a pulp or burn you out.”⁶⁶ His three closest friends and fishing buddies opposed his stance.⁶⁷ “It’s hard when your best friends don’t want to back you up,” he remarked.

The next morning, the Klan made its first “direct and ominous contact” with Carter, a note stuck under his car’s windshield wiper.⁶⁸ That “audacious” and “brazen” action, done while his family slept a few feet away, chilled the young editor: he could have had his “house set afire or blown . . . up” like one in Horry County a few weeks earlier that killed three people, a possible “Klan reprisal.”⁶⁹ Two other handwritten notes awaited him under the front door of his newspaper office. “More than ever I was fearful for my family’s safety. These vipers were certainly creating an atmosphere of fear . . . a virus,” he recalled in his memoirs.⁷⁰

On August 2, 1950, the second week of his crusade against the Klan, most of the bottom fourth of the front page was given over to an open letter from Carter to his readers about the week’s Ku Klux Klan activities. He squelched one rumor, started by a local boy, “a liar first class... (with a) chance of still becoming... a mediocre citizen,” claim-

ing that Carter was in fact the “headman” of the Klan.⁷¹ Another rumor suggested “many” blacks were talking of abandoning Tabor City in the wake of the Klan’s appearance. Carter exhorted them not to “let this band of hoodlums scare” them.⁷² Some farmers were fearful of bringing their tobacco to Tabor City to sell, and Carter tried to alleviate their concerns.

Another key feature of Carter’s *Tribune* during this period was instituted the next week: he began publishing letters to the editor on the Klan controversy, providing a forum for opposing views. The first one was from a “Klan friend at heart,” who wrote praising the clandestine organization as a “profit to the community and Nation” and criticizing it only for “getting too far behind with their work.”⁷³ The writer, John Hardee, disapproved of Carter’s editorials and open letter.⁷⁴ Carter’s tactic subliminally buttressed his campaign, confirming that the “other side” was so harmless it did not matter that it received publicity. With one notable exception, the letters to the editor, all virtually verbatim, were published on the traditional, inside editorial page.

In November, Carter responded in an editorial to a Klan tirade at one of their periodic evening cross-burning mass meetings. The great plumes of smoke and fire and sparks rising in the night sky as white horses pawed and trotted around the burning cross were macabre spectacles — and to Carter, pagan ones. Carter attended them, not in secret, but certainly inconspicuously, to take notes and observe. He was always accompanied by his brother-in-law and a printer and was, to the best of his knowledge, never recognized in the dark.

Disarmingly in the editorial, he ticked off the areas where the *Tribune* and the Klan agreed: that Communism in the U.S. should be “nipped in the bud,” that police in Horry County needed to be investigated, that he believed in the Constitution and the Bible, that Alger Hiss, a prominent state department official and New Dealer, accused of being a communist in the 1930s, was a traitor, and that the U.N. charter was “not all that it should be.”⁷⁵

Then, he enumerated where they parted ways. He denied that Klansmen, “on the whole,” were God-fearing and Christian — and this was something his readers were not hearing from the pulpits. He wrote that “no race should be condemned” as a group, but that individuals might be good or bad. The Klan had singled out Jews as Communists; Carter disagreed.

To say that a Jewish sect, composing 9,000,000 people in the United States, is communistic and evil, is condemning a block (sic) without regard to individuals. Perhaps there are (sic) a great number of these persons who are Communists. But the ratio of Communist Jews to the ratio of Communists of any other race is no greater.⁷⁶

He disputed that the newspapers were controlled. He denied that churches and schools were being led toward communism. In fact, he drew the parallel that the only other secret organization he knew, other than the Communist Party, was the KKK. “If the Ku Klux Klan is good and pure, if it is made up of good people, and if they do not work outside the law as stated at the meeting, then why doesn’t it charter its organization like all other groups and not hide its membership and carry on its activities in the dead of night in this mystic fashion?”⁷⁷ He concluded the editorial by urging any KKK member to write a letter to the editor, even offering to withhold the writer’s name if he or she so requested.⁷⁸ Carter was very adroit at the subtle and tricky art of audienceing long before it even had a name. He knew who its readers were, their prejudices, their limitations, and their “hot button” issues. He stayed just ahead of them, pulling them along at a pace that was just enough to move them ahead, but not too rapidly to destroy his credibility or have them balk. As counterpoint, he ran his front page editorial next to the banner story on the KKK meeting.

An anonymous KKK mimeographed broadside against Horry County Sheriff Ernest Sasser, intimating charges of embezzlement and graft, stirred Carter to a February 1951, editorial. Admitting he had “no complimentary remarks to make in regard” to the sheriff, Carter, showing the even-handed fairness that even his opponents would have to recognize, asked for proof.⁷⁹

Carter worried, in May 1951, that the subversive influence of the KKK was contributing to a breakdown in government. The KKK, he opined: Choosing not to voice their sentiments in open and truly American ways, this organization instead chooses to hide in the blackness of night. To carry on its cowardly deeds in a backhanded, illegal, crafty manner indicative of a big city in the days of prohibition.⁸⁰

He wondered why the KKK could not “shed their cloaks of secretness” and “carry their sentiments” to the polls in what has “long been the American way.”⁸¹ He claimed to have never known a church member, Mason, American Legion member, or a Rotarian who hid his affiliation. In a ringing final phrase, Carter asserted that the “disgruntled” Klan members were taking a “fanatical pride” in doing their vile work of subverting the American system.⁸²

It is among just such groups the eventual internal growth of antagonism toward our government and our way of life is springing up. It is through just such groups that freedom of every kind may perish and Americans could find themselves being ruled through fear.⁸³

All but one of the editorials, plus one “open letter” from the editor to readers, were on the front page. Except for a handful of stories, dozens of stories relating to Klan activities, cross-burnings, floggings, and indictments were also on the front page.

The atmosphere

In late January 1951, he received a worrisome telephone call from an anonymous doctor in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.⁸⁴ The caller claimed to have overheard a KKK official making arrangements with a gunman in Tampa, Florida for a mob-style “hit” on Carter.⁸⁵ Carter was told the hit man would know his whereabouts and had photographs of his house. Moments after he hung up, the night policeman in Tabor City called on Carter, relating a similar telephone call. A few days later, the man who rented a back room at the Carter home asked whether he was going to have some work done on the house, because he had seen someone in a car with out-of-state plates taking numerous photographs of the house.⁸⁶

Carter’s wife was terrified. The town board assigned a policeman to watch his house for a week. Carter was convinced the Klan never would have dared “kill me or any other editor who is fighting them,” because that would “bring down the newspapers everywhere.”⁸⁷ “It would have made a hell of a lot better story if I’d gotten killed,” Carter claimed.⁸⁸ Carter received more than 1,000 death threats over a three-year period, but still he kept at it.⁸⁹

I don’t know (why) I stuck with it other than the fact that I didn’t have anything and I was trying to make a living and one thing’s for sure, people were reading the damn paper. It was getting on people’s tables. I don’t know whether that’s way to get them to read it or not, but I sure had the readership.⁹⁰

Carter was convinced he was also protected from floggings and other physical abuse, simply because he had a newspaper.⁹¹ The *Tribune* was both his sword and his shield, and had a high profile that made it unwise to assault him. He also believed allowing letters to the editor helped defuse some of the Klansmen’s anger; they knew they could have their views publicized in the *Tribune* as well.⁹² He received considerable help and publicity from others in the journalism field. His

friend and former *Tar Heel* editor, Charles Kuralt, who later enjoyed great professional success and fame with CBS News, broadcast weekly from the area on the Klan for six months for a Charlotte radio station. Eventually, Jake Jenkins and the *News and Observer* of Raleigh “got on our bandwagon,” and ran stories on the resurgent Klan. Hodding Carter, the Mississippi journalist opposing the Klan, kept a loaded gun in every room of his house in case someone burst in. Horace Carter was never either that paranoid or prepared. “I had an automatic shotgun. And I told the sheriff about it, (and that) I’d leave some of them in the yard,” dead or wounded, if they had tried to break in.⁹³

Unraveling

In the fall of 1951, things began to unravel for the Invisible Empire. A common law husband and wife were dragged from their bed in the middle of the night near Tabor City in North Carolina and taken across the border into South Carolina where they were severely beaten. Kidnapping and transportation across state lines were the legal contexts the FBI needed to get involved.⁹⁴ Carter said that he did not “ever waver” from his opposition to the Klan and its rebirth, and would not have, but that “if it hadn’t been for J. Edgar Hoover, they (the Klan) would be in charge now.”⁹⁵ The FBI chief “sent about 32 FBI agents down here and said, ‘don’t come back till you’ve got them in jail.’”⁹⁶ The FBI eventually infiltrated the Klan, and finally indicted nearly three-dozen Klansmen in the first batch.⁹⁷ Within 30 days, both the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and South Carolina Law Enforcement charged others. “I think they saw (that) the tide had turned,” Carter said.⁹⁸

Authorities kept the assault against the common law couple secret for four months, until federal agents and the recently elected sheriff of Columbus County, Hugh Nance, arrested ten Klansmen for the crime. They were charged under the Lindberg Law, making their crime a capital offense, although the ultimate penalty was not sought. The arrest of those 10 men made national headlines; Hoover himself announced the arrests in the early morning hours. The floodgates were opened, and nearly two years of often solitary crusading were coming to an end. Amazingly, to Carter, ministers suddenly commenced preaching against the Klan, mayors began voicing opposition, and police chiefs lamented the wickedness of the organization. Carter accepted the turn of events with equanimity, and without editorial comment.

Sometimes it takes one or two “plain folks” to do the right thing in the midst of madness to effectuate change. For several years, the few Klan incidents that had been brought before a grand jury or a judge were dismissed for want of evidence or witnesses willing to testify. Then, in the swampland town of Nakina, twelve miles from Tabor City, along the Waccamaw River, farmer Dan Ward stood up to the Klan.⁹⁹ On Christmas Day, 1951, three neighbors, one armed, all KKK members, visited Ward and told him to get rid of one of his black sharecropping tenants, “if you want to live.”¹⁰⁰ Ward and his wife took the matter to authorities. Two other residents, who had been approached to assist in “running this nigger out of Nakina,” testified against the trio.¹⁰¹ They were convicted by a jury, and sentenced to two years on a road gang. Carter termed it a “turning point in the Klan movement,” because finally a “local court” dared to “oppose the vigilantes, something (he) had never expected to happen.”¹⁰²

Eventually, Imperial Wizard Hamilton, who had by 1952 promoted himself from Grand Dragon, would face indictment, trial, and conviction. By then, with 254 indictments in hand (yielding, ultimately, sixty-two convictions) and with its leadership crushed, indicted, or jailed, the Klan ceased to exist for all practical purposes in Horry and Columbus

counties. Many Klansmen turned state's evidence to save themselves. A federal judge, Don Gilliam, after examining the financial books, stated in open court that "I think (Hamilton) is more interested in the money he is making . . . than he is in the floggings." According to Carter, in his memoirs, Klan sympathizers realized "the KKK movement was a money game that enriched some of its leaders." Believing in the power of redemption, Carter testified on Hamilton's behalf at a parole hearing, and Hamilton was released early from his four-year sentence, and simply disappeared.¹⁰³

When the first indictments were announced, Carter put the credit where he felt it belonged: "Thank God, there is still law, courts and justice in Columbus County."¹⁰⁴

They have yet to be proven guilty. But they will have that opportunity, unlike those many persons brutally beaten by nightriders in Columbus during the several months that violence headlined the news from this area . . . Our biggest hope is that those individuals who have taken part in the other floggings also feel the strong arm of the law reaching out for them, wherever they are. We want to see each of them ferreted out from behind the mask of cowardness to face the world and pay for (their) crimes.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Sometimes a man and a time come together, serendipitously, perhaps, but perhaps there are other forces in the universe that propel them together. Horace Carter would call that force God. Good men and women, preachers and policemen, sat on their hands when evil came walking the streets of Tabor City. But Carter was fired with the liberalism of Frank Porter Graham and the "liberal" — all though he disdains that word, now, which he remarked upon with approbation then — education he received at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the missionary zeal of his Baptist background. And there was his mother, her quiet tolerance a counterweight to the pointed racism of his father. All Carter had was his pulpit, an old Whitlock handfed press, and the resolution that under other circumstances would have sent Carter to missionary work in China. Instead, he spread the gospel in southeastern North Carolina. "You sometimes wonder what hand God (has) in your future," Carter remarked. Would he do it again? "It's what every weekly editor would have done in the same circumstances."¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the final and supreme endorsement of his crusade came from the citizens of Tabor City, most of whom had kept their heads down and their opinions to themselves while Carter campaigned against the Klan. They overwhelmingly elected him mayor in the spring of 1953, scarcely six weeks after the *Tribune* won the Pulitzer. Carter had done his job newspaperman's job well, cajoling, berating, exhorting, and leading his small community through the crucible of the Klan challenge. That he had not destroyed his credibility and his support in the process was a significant accomplishment.

Past amidst the present

Horace Carter has outlived nearly everyone on either side of the Klan controversy. Hamilton disappeared after being released from prison after serving half of his four-year sentence. Carter's first wife died in 1982 of cancer. Willard Cole, with whom he shared the Pulitzer, died within a decade of his greatest triumph. Only two of the over 260 men indicted are still living in the area. One would admit to having been a Klansmen, Carter observed, but not the other.¹⁰⁷

The streets are paved now, but there are empty buildings, vacated factories sprinkled around Tabor City. At the edge of town, a ramshackle storefront flies the Confederate battle flag, while offering sou-

venirs to what tourists may happen upon the town. Appended to the crisply modern *Tabor City Tribune* building is a small, two-room Horace Carter museum dedicated to his career. Across the street is a large factory, matched by one next to the museum. From a nest egg of \$4,700 left from his service in the U.S. Navy, Carter's corporation has grown into the 25th largest private business in North Carolina, with 2001 revenues of \$150 million.¹⁰⁸

A rattly Chevrolet pick-up truck drives by, a large Confederate battle flag waving in the slipstream, an empty gun rack lashed to the rear window. The streets may be paved now, but the attitudes that gave the Klan fertile ground to till may still be a dusty road like Railroad Street leading to the bottom where the people of the southeast corner of North Carolina come face to face with the ghosts of a past they have yet to totally repudiate.

Notes

1. W. Horace Carter in telephone conversation with the author, 20 September 2002.
2. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
3. *Ibid.*, 10.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. *Ibid.*
10. He might have been dead in China. "Mao killed all the missionaries after he came to power," Carter recalled. Interview with W. Horace Carter, tape recording, 27 September 2002.
11. W. Horace Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 11 (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing Co., 1991).
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 13.
14. W. Horace Carter. Speech, Campbell University, Buies Creek, North Carolina. March 16, 2000.
15. David M. Chalmers. *Hooded Americanism: the History of the Ku Klux Klan*. 2, (New York and London: New Viewpoints, 1981).
16. *Ibid.*, 6
17. *Ibid.*, 7
18. Carter interview.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Carter interview.
21. W. Horace Carter, *Only in America: An Autobiography of a Weekly Newspaperman and Business Success*, 88 (Tabor City, North Carolina: Atlantic Publishing Co., 2001).
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 89.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 90.
27. Carter interview.
28. *Only in America*, 90-91.
29. Carter interview.

30. *Virus of Fear*, 17.
31. Carter interview.
32. *Virus of Fear*, 18.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 14-15.
35. Carter interview.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. *Virus of Fear*, 25.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Carter interview.
42. *Virus of Fear*, 20.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Carter interview.
46. Carter interview.
47. Ibid.
48. Carter, *Only in America*, 198.
49. Ibid., 198-199.
50. Carter interview.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Carter interview.
54. Carter interview.
55. *Tabor City Tribune*, July 26, 1950, 1.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid. Italics added.
59. Carter interview.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Carter interview.
65. Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 18.
66. Ibid., 19.
67. Carter interview.
68. Carter, *Virus of Fear*, 23.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. *Tabor City Tribune*, August 2, 1950, 1.
72. Ibid.
73. *Tabor City Tribune*, August 9, 1950, 1.
74. Ibid.
75. *Tabor City Tribune*, November 15, 1950, 1.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. *Tabor City Tribune*, February 7, 1951, 1.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Carter interview.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. W. Horace Carter. Speech, Campbell University, March 16, 2000.
90. Carter interview.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Carter interview.
94. Carter, *Only in America*, 278.
95. Carter interview.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Carter, *Only in America*, 270.
100. Ibid., 271.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
103. Carter interview.
104. *Tabor City Tribune*, February 20, 1952, 1.
105. Ibid.
106. Carter interview.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.

Thomas C. Terry could be considered a "grassroots editor" in his own right. He owned three weekly newspapers in Western Illinois and one TMC: the Geneseo Republic, Cambridge Chronicle, Orion Gazette, and The Shopper. He was appointed to the board of directors of the Illinois Press Association and was president in 2001. He sold his newspapers to Liberty Group Publishing in 2000 and retired in 2001.

He entered graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the same year and received his M.A. in the spring of 2003.

Backyard's best?

Nation's best weekly may be Jackson Hole, Wyo.

By Dr. George A. Gladney

Reflecting a sentiment still widespread in American journalism, journalism educator and press critic Ben Bagdikian once observed that most U.S. small dailies and weeklies are “the backyard of the trade, repositories for any piece of journalistic junk tossed over the fence, run as often by print-shop proprietors as by editors.”

Well, we'll have to excuse Bagdikian for a little hyperbole, but Bagdikian was writing about papers in the era of the 1950s and 1960s. Let's concede that there has been some improvement in the field since then. Still, the problem remains that when asked to name a consistently excellent weekly or small daily, most journalists draw a blank.

Now, however, the task of identifying a consistently outstanding weekly may be a little easier thanks to the merger late last year of two family-owned weeklies in northwest Wyoming that first attracted national attention a dozen years ago with a double-truck spread (“The Battle for Jackson Hole”) in the November 1990 *Washington Journalism Review* (now the *American Journalism Review*). The marriage of the *Jackson Hole News* and the *Jackson Hole Guide* into the *Jackson Hole News & Guide*, with a paid weekly distribution of close to 12,000, has created arguably the best weekly in the United States.

A look at the National Newspaper Association's annual Better Newspaper Contest from 1985 to 2001 shows that the *News* won more aggregate points (43) in the “General Excellence” category than any other weekly of any size. The *Guide*, with 27 points, was in third place, trailing *N'West Iowa Review* (Sheldon, Iowa), which had 35 points. The *News* won first place in general excellence seven times, the *Guide* four times. In a new “Best of the States” competition started in 2002 and aimed at bringing in papers that are not NNA members, the NNA invited the 50 state press associations to submit winners of their “General Excellence” category in state contests. In 2002, the *News* won first place in “Best of the States” category for non-dailies in the 6,000-9,999 bracket, and this September the new *News & Guide* won the same award in the 10,000-plus bracket for 2003.

In 1990, when the old WJR profiled the *News* and the *Guide*, it noted that both papers offered “stunning photography, state-of-the-art graphics, tough news reporting and sophisticated lifestyle coverage.” The article hinted that an important ingredient in the newspapers' success is the nature of the news coverage area, which features the posh

resort boomtown of Jackson, Wyoming, gateway to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks and the National Elk Refuge. Besides offering breathtakingly spectacular landscape, the area is home to many of the rich and famous (e.g., Harrison Ford and Gerry Spence) and powerful (e.g., Vice President Dick Cheney and World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn), and it is often torn by environmental issues heavy with national implications.

But probably more than anything else, the potent visual appeal of the *News* and the *Guide* has truly set them apart from other weeklies. Looking at winners in the NNA contest's visual appeal categories (best typography, best use of color and best use of photos) from 1988 to 2001, the *News* and the *Guide* were among the top five weeklies in aggregate points earned.

The *News*, too, has a knack for embarrassing contest organizers by showing up in the winners' circle more or less uninvited. In 1984, the *News* shocked newspaper photographers everywhere when it won the Best Use of Photographs Award in the prestigious Pictures of the Year competition run by the National Press Photographers Association and the University of Missouri School of Journalism. (The following year the contest organizers changed the rules, splitting competition into two circulation brackets so that giant metro dailies no longer had to compete with weeklies from the sticks.) Then in 1996, the *News* became the only weekly on the Society for Newspaper Design's list of the world's 22 best-designed newspapers. (The SND subsequently split judging categories into large newspapers and small [15,000 or less circulation], and in 2001 SND selected the *News* as one of the world's best-designed small newspapers.)

The *News & Guide* co-publisher Michael Sellett, a Northwestern graduate who started as a reporter at the *News* in 1972, buying the paper a year later, eschews claims of greatness for the merged paper. But if he bristles at anything, it's the suggestion that the *News & Guide* is a repository for journalistic junk.

George Gladney, managing editor of the Jackson Hole News from 1982 to 1986, is a journalism professor at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.



Top 'General Excellence' Winners, 1985-2001, National Newspaper Association Contest

1. *Jackson Hole News* (Jackson, Wyo.) 43 points
2. *N'West Iowa Review* (Sheldon, Iowa) 35
3. *Jackson Hole Guide* (Jackson, Wyo.) 27
4. *Peninsula Gateway* (Gig Harbor, Wash.) 19
5. *Kiel Tri-County Record* (Kiel, Wis.) 18

All weekly circulation categories included. First-place award=4 points; second place=3; third place=2; honorable mention=1.

Young journalists' attitudes toward their communities

By **Kim Landon**

It is by now old news that the pool of young reporters is shrinking as the average age of newsroom staffers approaches 40. At the same time, fewer young journalists say they plan to make journalism their only career. Various studies show that young reporters leave the field not only to earn high salaries elsewhere, but also to attain a lifestyle more compatible with their personal goals. Another reason several studies have noted for the declining number of young reporters is that they lack interest in the kind of news that newspapers traditionally carry. Young reporters feel that their interests are not represented in the newsroom nor in their newspapers' content. Young people, and not only those in journalism, tell researchers that they expect to have a "mobile lifestyle." Because of this, they have little interest in local government and often do not form connections to their communities. A nationwide survey of reporters in their first newspaper jobs indicates that they don't expect to stay at that job or in that community more than one or two years. Many report that, when hired, they did not expect it to be an important part of their job to get to know the local history and geography, nor to know the names of local leaders.

Not surprisingly, editors complain that their new hires come to the job with less knowledge of public affairs than their predecessors. "We no longer get the best and brightest. Far fewer youths are attracted to newspapers than at any time in the last ten to fifteen years," said one editor.¹ Editors want journalism students to know more about local government.² Some editors at larger papers complain that the younger reporters lack the kind of training and honing of their skills that small newspapers provide, but note that young applicants do not want to start in small markets.³

To address this, some larger newspapers have begun offering attractive internships and other incentives to local high school students or journalism majors who already have ties to the community in hopes that they will remain on their staffs longer. Newspapers in small communities often cannot afford such

programs, and are up against a national trend of young people leaving their small hometowns after attending college. Some who have departed daily newspapers to work for online companies blame the industry for waiting too long to address the salary issue. "I didn't go into journalism so I wouldn't be able to pay the rent," says one former print journalist. He noted that the industry has begun to raise salaries in the face of a declining workforce, but says small and medium sized newspapers — which traditionally have hired the youngest journalists — haven't joined the effort.⁴

Purpose of the study

In 1993, the Associated Press Managing Editors Journalism Education Committee surveyed newspaper managing editors as well as recent college graduates working in newsrooms. They asked each group to rank the topics journalism schools should emphasize in preparing future journalists. "Learning to listen to readers" ranked third on the editors' list, but was ranked fifth by the young journalists.⁵ The two groups also ranked other topics on the list differently. This and other studies, as well as firsthand experience counseling journalism graduates in their first newspaper jobs, exposed a gap between the graduates' expectations and that of their editors'. Could this lack of knowledge of each other's expectations be one of the unexplored reasons behind the declining interest in young people in entering the field of journalism, and of remaining in the field once there? This study suggests that this is so, and sets out to reveal that what young journalists experience in their first jobs is not what they expected, especially in regard to how much they will need to know about their communities and current events.

Literature review

Two sets of major nationwide studies of American journalists provide the basis for any discussion of trends within the profession. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) sponsors one. The 1988 ASNE study produced "The Changing Face of the Newsroom" in 1989, and in 1996 the study was repeated and expanded. Paul S. Voakes in "The Newspaper Journalists of the '90s"

reported the results.⁶ The second set of studies began in 1976 with the publication of *The News People* by John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski and William W. Bowman,⁷ and has been built upon by researchers David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, first in 1986 in their book *The American Journalist*,⁸ and again in 1996 with *The American Journalist* in the 1990s.⁹ Both report in their most recent studies that the average age of journalists is increasing. The Weaver and Wilhoit study, which was conducted in 1992, showed the median age for journalists had increased to 36 from 32.4 a decade earlier.¹⁰ They also found that those at the beginning of their journalism careers were more likely to leave the field than in previous studies.¹¹ Too little job autonomy and a general disillusionment with the field were predictors of younger journalists leaving.¹² The most recent ASNE study reported that the proportion of journalists under 30 has dropped since a decade before from 29 percent to 20 percent.¹³ The under-30s reported that they would like their jobs to provide more time for personal interests.¹⁴ Only 19 percent of them report that they expect they will be working at a newspaper in their 60s, and many say that they would very much like to eventually "live elsewhere."¹⁵ A study by the University of Georgia's James M. Cox Jr. Center of International Mass Communication Training and Research reported similar findings. Only 20 percent of the respondents in that 1999 survey reported that they planned to retire as journalists, down from 21 percent two years earlier.¹⁶ Given that there are fewer young people interested in making journalism a career, *Columbia Journalism Review* conducted a survey of editors in 1999 to find out how the shrinking pool of recruits compares to previous generations. Two thirds of the editors said they believe that the newcomers have less knowledge of public affairs than in the past, and more than half believe they have less writing talent and motivation. Editors complained that the younger generation of journalists does not understand government, nor do they have a historical perspective on the news.¹⁷ Other research reveals that journalism students list among their top reasons for being attracted to the field the opportunity to have an impact on society and

to have an impact on significant matters in a community. Perhaps a clue to their ultimate dissatisfaction, however, lies in their number one and two attractions: the creativity and excitement of the job.¹⁸ Voakes found that among the major complaints journalists have about their jobs are “dealing with insignificant matters and having little impact” and the “lack of opportunity to be creative.”¹⁹ The fact that once on the job this particular expectation is dashed might provide some important insight into why young people are disillusioned about a career in journalism. A study by the Cox Center of International Mass Communication at the University of Georgia found that four in 10 recent journalism graduates felt their jobs did not meet their expectations, and only one in four plans to stay with their current employer permanently. Only three in 10 want to remain in journalism permanently.²⁰

This problem hits hard at small newspapers, which are most likely to hire recent college graduates. A study of mobility rates at daily newspapers under 25,000 circulations found that the smaller papers had turnover rates of up to 43 percent. Most of those in this survey were under 30 and most respondents were in their first job. They revealed a paradox that has shown up in other studies — that while they find their current jobs satisfying, if given the chance to do it over, they would not go into newspaper work. And yet, the largest segment reports that the aspect they most like about their jobs is the opportunity to serve others, a very community based concept.²¹

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with a dozen editors and a dozen reporters holding their first newspaper jobs. After editors’ comments revealed that recent college graduates were rarely hired at larger newspapers, the study was narrowed to include only newspapers under 100,000 circulation. A pre-test questionnaire was drawn up from topics covered in these interviews and the questionnaire was administered to a non-random sample of 10 reporters holding their first newspaper jobs. This feedback was used to construct the final questionnaire of 24 questions. Two questionnaires were mailed to managing editors at 200 randomly selected dailies with instructions to give them to the two reporters most recently hired into their first newspaper jobs. (It should be noted that not every newspaper in the sample had two or even one reporter fitting that description.)

Results

Eighty-six questionnaires were returned, representing 64 newspapers, or 32 percent of

the selected newspapers and 22 percent of the surveys mailed to reporters. Most respondents (65%) were between 21 and 24, and nearly all (86%) were under 30. They were predominantly white (88%) and female (58%). In Voakes’ study, half the under-30 respondents were female and 85 percent were white.²²

Editors interviewed for this study indicated that in hiring reporters they looked for someone with knowledge of the community, or willingness to become part of the community. A significant segment of reporters responding to the questionnaire, however, did not expect community knowledge to be important to their job. Respondents were given a list of 20 activities that might be required of a reporter. They were asked to rank how important they expected each to be when they were hired. They were then asked to list which had proven to be more important than they expected. Only 26 percent thought that knowing about local history and geography would be very important, although 57 percent said they expected it to be somewhat important. There were 17 percent who did not think this knowledge would be at all important to their jobs or didn’t know how important it would be.

The respondents had a more accurate expectation regarding their need to know the names and titles of community leaders. There were 44 percent who expected this to be very important to their jobs, and 45 percent who expected it to be somewhat important. Again, however, there were 10 percent who didn’t think that knowing the names and titles of community leaders would be at all important to their jobs or didn’t know how important it would be.

Respondents also had a more realistic expectation of their need to know about current events, but considering that these are journalists, it is surprising that only slightly more than half of them (57%) thought this knowledge would be very important to their jobs, and again, that 7 percent thought it would not be important at all to know about current events.

When asked to list those items that had proven to be more important than they expected, however, respondents most frequently mentioned knowledge of local history and geography. Also frequently mentioned as being more important than expected were knowledge of community leaders’ names and titles, the need to explain government budgets to readers, and the need to explain complicated policy issues to readers. However, 71 percent did expect that their job would give them an opportunity to help people. And nearly as many (73%) expected to have meaningful and exciting encounters with the people they were writing about. However, 68 percent did not

expect that as reporters, they would influence public policy.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether young journalists’ unfulfilled expectations of their first newspaper jobs were contributing to their age group’s declining commitment to the field. It seems that this is the case, at least in terms of how much the younger hires expected they would need to know about their communities. It is also likely, given the results of Voakes’ study, that their expectations of having important assignments and creative work are also not being met. Coupled with an intention to move several times during their careers, and the lack of a desire to make journalism their sole careers, it is no wonder that for many young people, these disappointments cause their first job in journalism to be their last.

There is, however, an interesting paradox in that many young journalists do find that their expectations are met in regard to helping people and to having interesting and exciting encounters with the people they cover. Neither of these items appeared as responses in this study where respondents could list the aspects of the job that were less important than expected, or which contributed to their dissatisfaction. Written comments and follow-up interviews reveal that these are the aspects of the job that young journalists like best. One respondent said his job at a 60,000-circulation daily is better than he expected it to be. “I enjoy the impact my work has on the community that I cover. It sounds like PR, I know, but it’s true.” Said another of her job at a 4,000-circulation daily, “My writing makes a difference in people’s lives.” Another first-time reporter, this one working for a 15,000-circulation daily, said the job is better than she had expected to be, partly because of the opportunity to “cover positive community events.” Another young reporter expressed the excitement that drew many current journalists to their field: “As the government reporter, I really get to help shape the agenda in this town. I feel like I’m in tune with so many different groups and issues that really change this community. At 22, I’m spending time with some of the most powerful people in town and serving as a ‘watchdog’ over their activities. It’s scary and exciting at the same time.”

This study only begins to answer some of the questions about whether young reporters have accurate expectations of their newspaper jobs. It is clear that some of their expectations are incorrect or unrealistic. Perhaps another part of the problem is that the editors’ expectations are also unrealistic. A follow-up to this study is under way that asks editors many of

these same questions about what they expect young reporters to know. While those results are as yet unavailable, comments from editors participating in various workshops and studies indicate that their expectations might not be in line with what this generation of journalists has to offer. When fewer than 30 percent of adults under 25 can answer “yes” when asked if they read a newspaper “yesterday,”²³ editors may be setting too high a standard in regard to hiring young journalists with a great deal of community knowledge. However, given the responses reported here, editors might be wise to unleash the youngest staffers on stories that make a difference in people’s lives, and that allow the reporters to feel they have helped people and had an impact.

Recommendations

Awareness seems to be growing in the newspaper industry that if newspapers are going to attract and retain young reporters, there is going to have to be a change in the newsroom culture. As Rem Reider, editor of *American Journalism Review*, put it, “The notion that journalists can also have a life is gaining currency at American newspapers.”²⁴

Young people are willing to learn about their communities, but they aren’t necessarily willing to marry them. In this survey, 32 percent of the respondents said they planned to leave their current newspaper, and one can assume, move out of the community, within one year. Within two years, according to the responses, 67 percent of the young reporters plan to be gone from their current newspapers and community. The connection between these plans and the reporter’s anticipated need to learn about their communities has not been statistically proven but seems to have some obvious connections. As one respondent holding his first job at a 10,000-circulation daily said, “I think it would be great to be connected to this city, but I don’t want it to be to the point of eating, breathing and sleeping Oneida. I certainly don’t want to live there. I think it’s important to have contacts in the city, but that’s about it.”

Rather than complaining about young reporters’ lack of commitment to their communities, the American Society of Newspaper Editors has mounted a campaign to attract young people to community journalism. Its publication @small newspapers includes comments from various young reporters and

editors about what “fun” it is to work at a small newspaper, about the opportunity to have more say in the final product, about the chance to make a difference in the community. Several of them talk about how difficult they found it to make a difference when they worked at larger newspaper.²⁵ Others in the industry are recognizing that finding an answer to this problem can be reflected in the bottom line. It is expensive to repeatedly advertise for and train new recruits. Among the ideas that are being tried are providing paid internships, more flexible work schedules, opportunities for training, mentoring programs, and of course, higher salaries. It is unlikely that any one idea will be the one that makes a difference in keeping young reporters on board. What may be needed is that, rather than trying to make young journalists adapt to the newspaper community, newspapers might be better served if they expanded their community to include the ideas and abilities of the young.

1. Hickey, Neil. “Rating the Recruits” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 1999, p 39.
2. Gaddis, Wood, “Editors, educators agree on many key J-education issues,” *Journalism Educator*, July 1981, p. 26.
3. Hickey, Neil. “Rating the Recruits” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 1999, p 39.
4. Hood, Robert. “Why Low-Wage Newspapers Are Now Paying a Price,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 2000, p. 73
5. Presentation to the Administrators Workshop, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, December 1994, St. Petersburg, Fla.
6. Voakes, Paul S. “The Newspaper Journalists of the ‘90s,” *American Society of Newspaper Editors*, April 1997.
7. Johnstone, John W. C., Slawski, Edward J., Bowman, William W. *The News People: A sociological portrait of American journalists and their work*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1976.
8. Weaver, David H. and Wilhoit, G. Cleveland. *The American Journalist: A portrait of US news people and their work*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1986

9. Weaver, David H. and Wilhoit, G. Cleveland. *The American Journalist in the 1990s*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996.

10. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p.8.
11. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p. 113.
12. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p. 121.
13. Voakes, p.2,
14. Voakes, p.24.
15. Voakes, ibid.
16. Villano, Matt. “J-School grads enter a raging bull market,” *Editor & Publisher*, August 21, 1999, p. 14.
17. Hickey, Neil. “Rating the Recruits” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 1999, p 38.
18. Dodd, Julie E. and Tipton, Leonard. “Shifting Views of High School Students about Journalism Careers,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 13 & 14, No. 4 & 1, Fall 1992/Winter 1993. pp. 111-119.
19. Voakes, p.49.
20. Overby, Charles. “High Newsroom Turnover Hurts Credibility,” the *Freedom Forum News*, Vol. 5 No. 8., p. 3.
21. Sharp, Marty. “Turnover and Mobility at Small Daily Newspapers,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, Winter 1991, pp. 76-90.
22. Voakes, p. 6.
23. Maynard, Nancy. “The Age Factor: How Gray is Your Newsroom?” *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2000, p. 68.
24. Reider, Rem. “The New World Order,” *American Journalism Review*, September 2000, p.6.
25. Bengé, George, Ed @small newspapers, ASNE Small Newspapers Committee, Reston, Va. 12 pp.

Kim Landon is an associate professor of journalism at Utica College of Syracuse University in Utica, N.Y. This article was originally presented to the Newspapers & Community-Building Symposium VIII co-sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University and the National Newspaper Association Foundation in Portland, Ore., Sept. 12-13, 2002.

A look back at journalism over 70 years

By **Robert H. Estabrook**

Seventy years ago I was a junior in high school in Evanston, Illinois, and had been eking out a few dollars a week by publishing a mimeographed shopping news with a friend and delivering it door-to-door. During the 70 years since that early venture in journalism I have been privileged to learn the ropes on a country weekly in northern Michigan, edit a college daily, spend three years on *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* in Iowa and run an Army newspaper in Brazil prior to a 25-year career on *The Washington Post* as editorial writer, editor of the editorial page and foreign correspondent and finally participate in a love affair that has lasted 33 years with another country weekly in northwest Connecticut, *The Lakeville Journal*, the first 16 of them as editor and publisher.

As I look back after what to me has been a continually fascinating and rewarding experience, I am thrilled at the advances but dismayed at trends I see developing. In significant ways print journalism is better today than ever, but the outlook for continued or improved quality in the content is disheartening.

Consider some of the pluses. On the technological side, computers have vastly simplified the once-complicated task of setting type and assembling it on a page. Offset printing has immeasurably improved the physical appearance of newspapers. Digital photography has made decent four-color reproduction feasible. News agency reports that once were noisily printed out a line at a time on teletype machines now arrive instantaneously by satellite. Only major newspapers have been able to afford the capital investment for the most elaborate advances in technology, but even small community papers have benefited. At the low end of the scale the budding publisher with something to say but very little money can avail himself of desktop technology.

The preparation of journalists today is better than ever. Many graduate schools of journalism offer what is in effect applied political science in the reporting of local or national government, and also stress the need for a strong background in history and economics. Emphasis on understanding of constitutional law and journalistic ethics is all to the good.

The quality of much of the reporting has improved. Few experiences are more exhilarating than being able to break a good exclu-

sive story, mindful of William Randolph Hearst's caution (advice he did not always follow) to get the news first, but first get it right. Journalists today often ask more informed and better questions than their predecessors. Investigative reporters know better where to look and how to proceed. Often there is more follow-through. There is more reliance on scientific techniques. Reporting of science is vastly better, with specialized reporters often trained in its various fields. Usually there is a determined effort to get both sides, or all sides, of a story. There is more recognition of the need to be fair. We may lament the loss of some of the colorful aspects of personal journalism in the old days, but when we analyze it we find that much of it was outrageously one-sided. I applaud the effort to achieve balance in the news columns, with expressions of opinion restricted to editorials, columns, and analysis pieces.

Similarly, the pay of journalists has increased markedly. For too long the willingness of young journalists to work hard over long hours to gain experience was exploited with wages — it was a euphemism to call them salaries — that would not keep an office boy in paper clips. I remember reading comments of publishers in *Editor & Publisher* when the minimum wage and the wage-hour law came into force in the 1930s that they could not afford to pay the new 25-cent-an-hour minimum wage. Somehow most of them managed.

Initially the higher pay on the editorial side probably resulted from unionization and collective bargaining through the efforts of the American Newspaper Guild — or the fear of it. Later it simply grew out of competition for skilled workers. As the demand for reporters with advanced college training increased, qualified young people simply were not willing to work for what seemed to them starvation wages, especially when radio and television — and more recently the Web, not to mention corporate public relations — were offering much higher salaries. Add to this the lure of the Internet.

I was fortunate in usually earning what seemed to me a good salary, at least until I voluntarily took a substantial reduction because *The Lakeville Journal* could not afford more. But I am familiar with the situations of many others who left journalism for more financially rewarding, if not equally satisfying jobs, because they simply could not support a family on what they were making. This picture has

changed markedly, especially on city dailies.

Top editors and reporters make salaries today that would have qualified them as economic royalists in an earlier day. Columnists who also appear regularly on television or the lecture circuit are viewed as V.I.P.s in the Establishment and enjoy tremendous economic rewards. Some may be pretty far out of touch with the circumstances of the worker on the lower end of the economic scale who must hold two or three part-time jobs, or even with the plight of a middle business executive suddenly downsized out of what he had thought was a career position.

Not all these changes have been achieved without cost to the lore and romance of the profession. The smell of printing ink in a small, old-fashioned printing plant was evocative. Add the very different scorching smell of metal in a Linotype melting pot. Something colorful in an olfactory sense has been lost. Similarly the mental image of a copyreader with a green eyeshade carefully reading a typewritten sheet, or a similarly attired proofreader marking corrections on a galley proof, dies hard.

Whether the actual writing on newspapers has improved as much as the pay or technology is debatable. In my own experience a good deal of it is worse, not better. Probably this is a general result of changes of emphasis in elementary and secondary school curricula. There seems to be far less emphasis today on training in grammar and sentence construction as well as in spelling. Some aspiring journalists would be lost without the spell-check function on the computer, just as other students seem incapable of attempting elementary arithmetic in the supermarket without a calculator.

Reduced training in foreign languages has had lamentably predictable results. In many schools instruction in Latin has been abandoned and courses offered in modern languages are limited to a couple of years of Spanish or French. Much English vocabulary



Bob Estabrook

and structure derives from Latin, and exposure to Latin in middle school or high school is a huge help in learning to write effective English. Fluency in one or more modern languages is a basic tool for any journalist who aspires to deal with foreign affairs. Asian languages are increasingly important.

In some situations, too, young journalists fail to understand the importance of consulting and/or keeping alive the institutional memory of the newspaper (or broadcasting facility) on which they are working. With too many, history seems to have begun the day they arrived; they don't inquire or relate to what happened before they were on the scene. The result often is misunderstandings or other errors that could have been avoided.

More seriously on the minus side, along with the technical improvements and broader educational training, has come a maddening tendency on some once-serious papers to concentrate more on trivia and fluff, on entertainment rather than on hard news. Simultaneously, there has been a conscious effort on some papers, especially those owned by chains, to reduce the amount of foreign news. Whereas a generation or two ago almost every small daily tried to present at least a summary of important developments abroad, now even some regional dailies seem to shun such stories, either omitting them altogether or relegating them to obscure spots.

Most people nowadays get their immediate news from television or radio, but this often comes in 30-second snippets or sound bites. What used to be regarded as a strength of newspapers, world news and background presented in enough detail to give the reader a basic understanding of what was happening, has been broadly abandoned. Readers who do not augment their local or regional papers with a major paper like *The New York Times* or *The Christian Science Monitor* or *The Washington Post* often must depend on what network television and occasional documentaries provide.

Television and radio have brought many advantages in providing instantaneous visual and sound information about major happenings. Their performance during the crisis of September 11, 2001 was superb. Much the same thing can be said about the war in Iraq in 2003. Certainly the Defense Department's system of "embedding" reporters with military units was a vast improvement over its efforts to manage the news during the 1991 Gulf War — although whether this facilitated a comprehensive understanding of what was happening remains to be assessed. Yet except for the initial excitement, what is reported to viewers or listeners on a routine day is limited

to what the networks can cram into two or three minutes of radio summary or 22 minutes of TV time. Public radio and television sometimes provide honorable exceptions.

Meanwhile we are inundated with a kind of endless hype. Set aside the commercials that stress, if we are lucky, what new car offers which style advantages or, if we are not, what hemorrhoid remedy or incontinence pad is the most reliable. Beyond exhortations to buy these products, we are subjected to repeated newscasts on both radio and TV that inevitably have the effect of overstressing part of the news. Accidents and crime often are featured most prominently on the late TV news. Every few minutes or at least every hour the news must be "updated," even though there may be nothing new about it. Another angle must be stressed to make an oft-repeated item appear fresh.

The number of all-news stations in larger cities increases this pressure. If essentially the same news is repeated every few minutes over the course of 12 or 24 hours, it inevitably appears to have more significance than the original event may have warranted. Crises seem more dire and positions become over-hardened. In this way, the news is often distorted by frequency of repetition.

Crime news is a staple of many broadcasts, in part because it attracts attention, is relatively easy to gather and requires little independent investigation. Almost daily, media mergers and mega-mergers heighten the pressure for increased profits. One way to control expenses is to operate news departments on a shoestring and concentrate on repeating immediate happenings such as disasters, accidents and shootings.

In a major event such as the gun rampage in Littleton, a scandal such as the O.J. Simpson case or President Bill Clinton's involvement with Monica Lewinsky, or a frenzy such as that over the return of Élian González to Cuba, the hype increases geometrically. All restraints are lifted in the competition among TV, radio, and newspapers to devise the latest angle, sometimes to the virtual exclusion of other much more significant news. Herd journalism overtakes hard journalism.

The preoccupation with the sex lives of presidents and presidential candidates dates from the campaign of Senator Gary Hart of Colorado for the 1988 Democratic nomination. Although there were enough known extramarital liaisons in the Washington area when I worked there for them to be considered almost commonplace, I was genuinely surprised when I learned the extent of John F. Kennedy's philandering. It is interesting that

Benjamin Bradlee, a close friend of Kennedy who saw a lot of him socially, wrote in *A Good Life* that he too was surprised. I had heard tales of Kennedy's tomcatting, and Marquis Childs once told me that during a personally conducted private tour of the White House by Jacqueline Kennedy, as they passed one room she had remarked to him in effect: "That's where they say my husband meets his current mistress." But none of this came to public attention at the time.

Should it have? A different standard of journalistic values prevailed over many years. I don't suppose many reporters knew of Franklin D. Roosevelt's liaison with Lucy Mercer Rutherford, but even if they had, it is unlikely that anything would have been printed so long as the relationship was kept discreet. Roosevelt's sensitivity about photographs that showed his polio braces was generally respected. The unwritten rule was that such matters were regarded as private unless they intruded on public policy.

Thus, if a male member of Congress had a bottle problem, or was known to have a mistress, this was usually ignored unless he appeared drunk in a public place or flaunted his companion. Kennedy's escapades in private seemed to me primarily his business, with one conspicuous exception. One of his liaisons was with Judith Exner, who also was the mistress of the gangster Sam Giancana. Because the Kennedy administration had sought Giancana's help in a futile effort to get rid of Fidel Castro in Cuba, this connection could have had serious national security implications. Congress and the public needed to know about it.

Standards of judgment on community newspapers are usually less prurient or sensation-minded than on some big city papers or broadcast stations. We report the fortunes and misfortunes of our friends and neighbors, and we may be more sensitive to their feelings. I cannot conceive of a reporter with the crassness to ask a bereaved mother (as I read happened in New York City) how she felt when her son fell under a subway train. Would we report the sexual adventurism of a local public official? In most cases, I think, only if it interfered with his or her job performance or came to public notice in other ways.

But respect for privacy can be carried too far. A distressing swing of the pendulum has taken place in Washington and most states. Reaction against abuses carried out in secrecy by the Nixon administration led to new state and federal statutes improving citizen access to actions and records of governmental agencies. But in more recent years many of these guarantees have been curtailed in the name of

privacy. Autopsy records are no longer public in Connecticut, and it sometimes is next to impossible for reporters to ascertain why or how a person in the news died. I think this is wrong. Motor vehicle departments sell their address records to direct mail solicitors, but reporters seeking to verify data about licensed drivers may be denied the information. Refusal to furnish information about what is supposed to be a public record seems to me to deprive citizens of facts they have a fundamental right to know.

Police records likewise have become more difficult to obtain. The situation varies among states and localities, but today some police agencies regularly bar access to the blotter, or record of activities, irrespective of statutes declaring them to be public records. The argument is heard, sometimes even from new reporters themselves, that newspapers ought not to print the names of persons arrested because that invades their privacy, and in some minds arrest is viewed as synonymous with guilt.

A certain concern is warranted on this point, and it plainly behooves the press to remind readers that anyone arrested is legally innocent until proved guilty. Likewise there is a moral obligation on the part of newspapers to publicize the fact when a case is dismissed or an arrested person is found not guilty. The actual practice in this regard sometimes leaves a lot to be desired.

Yet to my mind the greater danger is in having no citizen check on police activities, and this danger has been vastly increased by the security precautions occasioned by world terrorism. An arrest that no one knows about is all too reminiscent of the secret arrests by totalitarian regimes. Publicity may embarrass the individual charged, but it also may alert someone else to come forward with evidence that clears him or her. Today's reporters have had no experience with the abuses of Watergate in 1972-1974, let alone Joe McCarthy a generation earlier or the horrors of the Hitler and Stalin eras in the 1930s and 1940s. Let us hope they never have to learn the hard way.

What worries me more than lack of respect for privacy or excessive concern with it is the fact that a growing percentage of the population simply does not read newspapers. Some mature adults have chosen to be entertained and to get whatever news they think they need through television, radio or now the Internet. An alarming number of young people have concluded that newspapers simply are not relevant to their lifestyle and have never developed the habit of reading to inform themselves about current events. They may do relatively

little reading of any kind.

There is a distressing correlation between falling newspaper circulation, weekly as well as daily, and the reduced percentage of qualified voters who take the trouble to register and actually cast their ballots. Whether this indicates a deliberate disconnect from society, or that newspapers have simply failed to pique their interest, is the subject of much press debate. If the papers want to attract young readers, though, they obviously are going to have to print news such readers think is important, be it more about Little League games, celebrities or whatever else they want. No single remedy emerges, but one important need is to avoid tedium in the coverage of community events. Local news does not have to be dull. Bright writing and imaginative display make for lively reading.

An awful blandness afflicts a growing number of papers, especially chain papers. Some are pretty to look at, but the lavish use of color makes many front pages seem alike. Often the emphasis is on essentially trivial news. The largest concern I have with chain ownership, though, is that in all too many instances the bottom line governs all news and editorial decisions.

Many involved in journalism are familiar with cutbacks during tough economic times. A paper that does not pay attention to the bottom line is unlikely to remain long in business. But when economies are achieved at the expense of editorial content, readers are the losers. Below a certain minimum staff the spirit of the newspaper suffers. There simply are not the people to prepare enterprise stories or to do investigative reporting.

When many newspapers, daily and weekly, had one or two principal owners, the owners usually were satisfied with a modest return that provided a decent living, not great riches. But the number of papers under such ownership dwindles every year. After a couple of generations of family ownership, there often are many heirs seeking an income from the paper. At this point sale to a chain may appear to offer the way for many claimants to get their money out. I have known several disappointed former owners who lamented that solemn promises by chain purchasers to maintain editorial quality were immediately repudiated with savage staff cuts.

Chains are not all alike. A few have tried to maintain and improve editorial quality. The crunch comes when they go public — that is to say, after they decide to raise more capital by listing themselves on the stock exchange. In many instances stockholders have demanded rising dividends each year, with the result that profit goals set for the individual papers

rise frequently. It is not uncommon for chains to demand 35 percent or greater annual returns on investment from individual papers.

Where a paper enjoys a monopoly or near-monopoly, it merely increases its advertising and/or circulation rates to produce the additional revenue. The Gannett chain, the country's largest, has been criticized for using highly unscrupulous tactics to put even small competitors out of business and thereby attain monopolies in its markets — after which advertising rates may zoom. When the market is highly competitive or is limited by size or other factors, the increased profit level demanded must come out of hard-to-achieve increased volume or economies at the paper. Hence the impulse not to fill editorial vacancies or to replace a well-paid reporter with a less qualified person.

Some chain papers count on extra dedication to make up for what is lacking in manpower or incentive pay. The real question comes when a newspaper is called upon to place its financial well-being on the line because of some challenge to the community it serves or to its own basic integrity. Will a hired publisher who answers to absentee executives, themselves answerable to directors who decree that nothing must interfere with profits — will a publisher in such circumstances risk his or her own job and opt to commit the necessary resources? Or will he or she, perhaps subconsciously, favor policies that avoid controversy? Will the publisher cave in on an important point of principle rather than risk a libel suit? An often-quoted editorial by William Allen White in the *Emporia (Kansas) Gazette* about media mogul Frank Munsey in 1925 gave pungency to concerns about absentee or tunnel-vision ownership. Munsey had been a chain newspaper and magazine publisher and the architect of many media mergers. Commenting on his death, White wrote: "Frank Munsey, the great publisher, is dead. Frank Munsey contributed to the journalism of his day the great talent of a meat packer, the morals of a money changer, and the manners of an undertaker. He and his kind have about succeeded in transforming a once noble profession into an eight percent security. May he rest in trust."

I think back to the precepts laid down by Eugene Meyer, the publisher of *The Washington Post*, in 1935: "The newspaper's duty is to its readers and to the public at large, and not to the private interests of its owners. In the pursuit of truth, the newspaper shall be prepared to make sacrifices of its material fortunes, if such course be necessary for the public good."

Nobility of character is not exclusively the

characteristic of any one person or group; it is as likely to exist among stockholders as, say, among editors or reporters who think they are acting in the public interest. But remoteness from the scene does influence the way in which a crisis is perceived. It is easier for a publisher whose own fortunes are involved to make a decision risking them in a good cause in the community or region than for a hired publisher to persuade absentee bosses and stockholders that such a risk is necessary in the larger corporate interest.

As more and more once-independent weeklies at the community level, like dailies in medium-sized and large cities, are acquired by chains headquartered elsewhere, will editorial enterprise be the loser in the end? Will the frequent complaint about health maintenance organizations — that the ultimate decisions are made by insurance companies rather than physicians — be paralleled in chain newspaper ownership? Will the decision on what expenditure is necessary to preserve editorial integrity be made by an absentee accountant rather than an editor or publisher on the scene? Also, what will happen to the various state and regional press associations if they lose substantial income when chains acquire ownership of a number of papers that

had been paying dues individually, and the chains insist on paying only one set of dues?

At one time I thought community papers, especially weeklies, were less likely than larger papers to have their individuality consumed in this process, if for no other reason than that relatively few of them are highly profitable “cash cows” of the sort sought by chains. Now I am not so sure. The pressure to achieve total market coverage, to eliminate present and potential competition, sometimes makes it advantageous for a chain to try to acquire all the other publications in an area. Relatively few community publications have the resources to withstand a determined takeover effort over the long haul. Fortunately, though, outside metropolitan areas there remains a substantial number of community weeklies on which it is still possible for enterprising and idealistic individuals and young couples willing to take on the risks to work into a satisfying journalistic niche.

It is perhaps fortunate that none of us can wholly foresee the future — for example, how the Internet and cyberspace will affect large daily newspapers and the television and radio networks as well as community newspapers and broadcasting stations. Thus we continue to adapt to needs as they develop. This much

seems relatively certain: A well-edited community newspaper that reports community happenings and presents them in interesting fashion; that provides a public record of events; that covers important issues with a depth that the electronic media seldom provide; that calls attention to community needs and failings while suggesting remedies; and that conveys a sense of humanity in a framework of moral values — such a paper stands a reasonably good chance of still being relevant for some generations to come.

I hope that it as well as its city cousins, print and electronic, will continue to attract young journalists who share a sense of mission about the importance of adequate information to the success of democratic government. With all its failings and imperfections, journalism still offers a cogent and exciting way to help save the world.

Bob Estabrook has been a member of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors since 1974. The foregoing is adapted from the final chapter of his book, Never Dull: From Washington Editor and Foreign Correspondent to Country Publisher.

grassroots editor



*A journal
for newspeople*

**Published by the
International Society
of Weekly Newspaper Editors**

**Institute of International Studies
Missouri Southern State University
3950 East Newman Road
Joplin, MO 64801-1595
(417) 625-9736
www.grassrootseditor.org**