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The International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors

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Bob Bliss: A model of a country editor

By **Bob Estabrook**

There is a special fraternity among weekly newspaper editors. They share a bond in knowing what it is to be up all night getting the paper out when things go wrong, or to cover a fire at 3 a.m., camera in hand, or to sit through some interminable meeting because citizens need to be informed about what their elected officials are doing, and then to traipse back to the office, dog tired, to write about it all while it is still fresh.

Bob Bliss did every one of these things on *The Montgomery County News* and a great many more. He knew how to run a Linotype in the days of hot type, how to make up a page and lock it in the chase, and how to operate a flat-bed press; he also taught himself to handle the run on a rotary offset press. He delivered papers, worked in the bindery, sold advertising and composed graceful prose in a com-



Bob Bliss

prehensive news story, a sensitive obituary or a persuasive editorial.

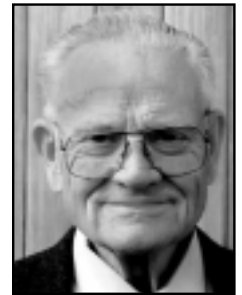
He seemed to me a model of what a conscientious country editor ought to be — hardworking and dedicated, but also compassionate, with a deep interest in people and devotion to his community. With a compelling interest in history, he was penetrating in his insights, liberal in his thinking and courageous in his judgments. Along with a delicious wit he had a prudent supply of journalistic skepticism. Not much monkey-business got by him.

I first met Bob at an ISWNE meeting at Pere Marquette State Park in 1974 and was immediately impressed with what an amiable and salty character he was. At later conferences at the Oregon campus of Northern Illinois

University **Mary Lou** and I saw a lot of him and **Pat**. We compared experiences over many a late glass and visited in each other's homes.

Bob was not shy about his Democratic politics and could be emphatic in his views, but he never thought that all virtue or evil resided in one party. After he handed over top responsibility for the paper to **Nancy** and **Richard**, he continued to write cogent editorials, and his column for many years offered a delightful combination of local reminiscences and sage comments about the foibles in Springfield and Washington. When physical disability made it impossible for him to type his column, he contrived to dictate his recollections of early days in Hillsboro.

Many deserved honors came to him during his long career in journalism. Some years ago it was my privilege to nominate him for ISWNE's Eugene Cervi Award. I can think of no one whose lifetime work was more representative of the of the ideals and values ISWNE seeks to memorialize.



Bob Estabrook

President's Report

By Nancy Slepicka
Montgomery County News,
Hillsboro, Ill.



Dad was amazing in so many ways

The following is what I said, slightly revised for this space, at our Celebration of the Life of Bob Bliss on May 2, following Dad's death on April 29. The service was held in the First Presbyterian Church of Hillsboro, where Dad was a member and, believe it or not, the Sunday school superintendent a long time ago.

One of his favorite stories, and he had many, was the Sunday morning he stood to lead The Lord's Prayer and couldn't remember how it started. Finally, Mrs. Rogers, one of the Sunday school teachers said, "Our Father..." "God bless Mrs. Rogers," Dad recalled, often.

That was one of the Bob stories told by my husband, Richard, my sister, Betsy, and our children for the memorial service. We laughed a lot and teared a little, as Dad would have wanted.

How can I describe a man who was my father ... my teacher ... my friend my boss ... my editor... and our kids' grandfather?

Well, I don't have to, because many of you knew him.

So I'll talk about being in a newspaper family and give one example of my admiration for Dad, Bob Bliss.

One of the early lessons of small town newspaper life is — there are no secrets. Mom learned this on the first day of her marriage. Dad liked to tell about the day they eloped, on Saturday, June 30, 1934. They had decided to get married and go to the Chicago World's Fair for their honeymoon.

Mom didn't tell her parents, **Andy** and **Agnes Weingand** — Dad didn't tell his folks, **Clint** and **Lucia Bliss**.

They drove to Paxton, Illinois, where they were married in the home of the Presbyterian

minister. Then they drove on to a hotel in downtown Chicago. The next morning, the new Mr. and Mrs. Bob Bliss came out of the hotel to go to the Fair, and on the sidewalk outside the hotel, they ran into someone from Hillsboro. Dad, the newspaperman, knew that word travels fast, so they went back into the hotel and he telephoned his father.

Announcement of their marriage appeared in that Monday's edition of *The Montgomery News*.

There are no secrets.

Betsy and I were raised knowing that if we ever crossed the line in the eyes of law enforcement, our names would appear in *The News* police report. The threat worked for me. My traffic record in Montgomery County is clean.

Being in a newspaper family also means that seven days a week you live and breathe the community — its proud moments, its disappointments and all the personal joys and tragedies. It can be exhausting.

Growing up and watching Dad and Mom, and seeing how much time and energy it takes to put out a good newspaper, I was convinced it was the last thing I wanted to do. But circumstances changed, and in 1971, Richard and I decided to give the paper a try when my Uncle Tom retired. It took us awhile to decide for sure, but now, 30 years later, we're apparently hooked.

Maintaining this Bliss family tradition, now in its 111th year, has brought me many rewards, but the greatest was the opportunity to work with Dad and learn — from the best.

Right now my most vivid memories of Dad are from the past two years, when he was what he never expected to be, an invalid, homebound and connected by tubes to an oxygen compressor that helped him breathe.

Although his body was weak, his eyesight poor, and his hand too shaky to write, Dad wanted — Dad needed — to continue writing for *The News*. So once a week, I went to their house with my laptop computer and sat close to Dad in his electric-lift recliner chair.

"Are you ready?" he'd ask. And then he dictated his column, a column that he had already composed in his head.

Dad started with lead sentences like:

"I have always enjoyed beating the averages, and I'm doing it again." (In this column Dad described how Social Security was a good investment for him because he'd lived so long.)

"Here I am, fast approaching the 87th anniversary of my natal day, and for the first time, I've learned about watermelon rind pickles."

"The wail of a steam whistle, once quite common in Hillsboro, is long gone."

"After having Minnie's shoes fitted, I fell in love with the blacksmith's shop."

And my favorite:

"It all happened because of Mom's endless search for relief from chronic constipation."

Dad spoke his column.

He spoke in well thought-out sentences.

He spoke in paragraphs.

When he was finished, he'd say, "That's enough," and it was.

His dictated columns were consistently about the same number of words, the right length to fill the space we needed to fill on that week's editorial page.

Dad was amazing in so many ways.

I'm glad some of you, his ISWNE friends, got to know him.

Bliss stood tall as a community journalist

By Phoebe Baker

When I met **Bob** and **Pat Bliss** probably a quarter century ago, they were proud that the next generation, the fourth, was seeing to the business while they were attending the annual conference at the Loredo Taft Campus of Northern Illinois University.

By then, age, or "too many birthdays" as he would say, had shortened his physical stature and dimmed his eyesight. But he still stood tall as a community journalist and a keen observer. He could see more clearly than many of us, though, as he used the magnifying glass around his neck to read.

The time arrived for the editorial page critique, the heart of the conference. Some of us were new to the conference so were unsure of what to expect on that sunny afternoon when we sprawled on the lawn with newspapers all about us. It was serious, it was intensive, it was concentrated learning on a summer afternoon.

And amidst all the ideas, criticism and praise, we enjoyed Bob's graceful humor that often emphasized a serious point. In fact that afternoon was the first time we talked to **Richard** and **Nancy** (nee Bliss) **Slepicka**. We did not meet her until years later.

On the ground beside Bob was a tape recorder. Occasionally, Bob would look down at the machine and say "Did you hear that, Nancy?" Or he

would ask someone to repeat a point and say "Richard, what do you think of that?" Whether the remark was critical or praising something on the editorial page, he wanted to share the learning with the next generation. Admittedly, he was especially pleased when the comment reflected his side of a gentle argument with his successors.

And now, Nancy, that next generation, is president of the ISWNE.

The folks of the ISWNE are great teachers. Bob enjoyed learning something new and I hope he realized how much he taught as well. He taught us that gentle wit and laughter can make a point even more clearly sometimes than angry criticism. His humor had a grace that clearly showed his affection for his fellow human beings.

Just as some of our great dramatists use humor to emphasize a point, Bob could wield his wit to provoke a chuckle or to make a serious point more acceptable. From



This photo of Bob and Pat Bliss was taken on June 30, 1984, at their 50th wedding anniversary.

Bob, I learned to use humor to teach.

In the late 1970s, a speaker scheduled for one evening never arrived so we created our own program talking about the politics of our many states. At the end of the interesting and rewarding evening, Bob told us we all had missed the most important issues in all our communities: dogs, parking and potholes. He showed us that some issues are important for all community newspapers, no matter what the geography, rural or urban, large or small.

Another lesson he taught us was the strength of always listening and speaking out. At the banquet in Brookings, S.D., when he received the Cervi Award, he spoke out. He told us about how he had learned about a new test for prostate cancer, the PSA, from a speaker at the conference in St. Louis.

He explained that he had had the test done and urged all the men in the room to do the same. He broke the silence that surrounds some men's health issues. Something that the rest of the nation is still learning to do.

Through the years, the Eugene Cervi Award has stood for the same thing, a lifetime devotion to excellence in community journalism, but the award has physically been represented in different



Bob and Pat with Albert and Marjorie Scardino at the 1982 ISWNE conference in Littleton, Colo.



Bob Bliss adjusts a portrait of his grandfather, C.W. Bliss, who bought The Montgomery News in 1892. This photo was taken by daughter Betsy in 1962.

ways. At one point, the honor included a Mack truck bulldog evocative, they tell me, of Cervi himself. One year, the award's physical presence was a plaque, and it included a misspelling!

Each year the recipient reflects Cervi's honor for the English language, his devotion to clear, accurate reporting and his belief that good journalism does, indeed, beget good government. And around these core criteria, each recipient is unique.

When Bob Bliss received the Eugene Cervi Award in 1993, he commented that the symbol of the award was particularly suited. It was a statue of a young newsboy.

Bob had started his career at the *Montgomery County News* as a paperboy at age 6, the third generation in his family to work for his community as a journalist. Community newspaper edi-

tors preserve the history of their communities week after week and for Hillsboro, it has been generation after generation.

The Cervi citation said of Bob: "He stands for excellence and responsibility in community journalism and carries out his role with wit and wisdom, relying on reasoning and persuasion to

stimulate action. Along with these attributes, his courage and even his wallet have often been put to the test."

Even before the Cervi, he had already been recognized as a leader in community journalism. He was president of the Illinois Press Association in 1955 and its Editor of the Year in 1971. He was named a Master Editor by the Southern Illinois Editorial Association, is part of the School of Journalism Hall of Fame at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and holds the Arthur Darwin Jenkins Award for Achievement in Journalism.

And he was a delightful storyteller. Pat may have heard his stories many times, but she smiled each time he told it again. One of my favorites was the story of the agreement they made when they decided to marry. Pat promised to change her political affiliation from Republican to Democrat and he promised to switch from the Methodist to the Presbyterian Church.

"That shows how smart she was. She knows what church I've attended, but I never could be certain of how she voted," he'd say with a smile.

We will smile when we remember Bob.



Bob Bliss and Dick McCord at the 1982 ISWNE conference in Littleton, Colo.

The weather may be unpredictable, but the conference will be enjoyable

By David Burke

YOU ARE about to experience a sense of déjà vu. It's simple: I am about to comment on the weather. But if you're coming to the Galway conference, and about 75 of you are, you'd better get used to it. Comments on the weather are as much a staple of the Irish conversational diet as potatoes are of the nutritional one.

The last time I wrote, I described being in the middle of what turned out to be six weeks of dry, sunny weather. That was thanks to a high pressure system that stayed put, rather than wandering off to the east as they normally do.

Ireland didn't know what to do with itself. The grass grew, the birds sang, and it was a wonderful spring for wildlife. There are more small birds in my garden than there have been for a long time, and the result is lots of birdsong — and a need to wash the car more often than usual. But the weather wheel has turned, and for the last month it's been mostly grey, overcast, and either damp or wet. The evidence is everywhere in straggling lawns that are too wet to mow.

Although this evening, as I type, the sun is setting in a clear sky. The bottom line is, you just cannot predict what the weather is going to be like for our conference. I thought of getting a stock of umbrellas for registration day — that would be a good way of making sure it won't rain. But I don't know if the budget will stand it, so we'll adopt the old fashioned fingers-crossed approach.

Not to worry: as I have already told you, rain or shine, this will be a fun conference. The numbers now booked stand around the 75 mark, as you'll see elsewhere in this newsletter, and there will be some people, including Irish editors, who will not be able to attend the entire conference but who will drop in on us. I'm not going to give you the full pro-

gramme, but it's well on the way to being finalised.

On the Wednesday afternoon, after registration, you'll hear from **Patrick O'Dwyer**, a sociologist who is also a small-town newsagent and bookseller. Pat will give an overview on the changes that have occurred in Ireland over the last two decades or so. He'll be followed by **Danny McCoy**, the spokesman for the foremost Irish research body, the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute).

There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion before we adjourn to the celebrated Kenny Bookshop and Art

Friday is an all-day tour of Connemara, and on Friday night we'll have a relaxing and informal evening.

Saturday is the editorial critique day, and by the time you read this you'll probably have received

your list of colleagues with whom to exchange newspapers. I'm hoping there will be an extra added bonus at the end of the editorial critique session, but it has not yet been confirmed. Another reason to keep your fingers crossed.

Saturday night is the traditional Golden Quill banquet, in the lovely surroundings of the university's Aula Maxima, built in the mid-19th century.

I have just been informed that a new direct coach service from Shannon to Galway is starting on June 5. The operators are Citylink, who run the Dublin Airport to Galway service. I do not have a timetable as yet, but it should be soon on their website, www.citylink.ie. I would guess the trip would be about two hours, and it should solve all our conference transport problems on this route.

I'll end with some of the FAQs from last month, but before that, a personal request. One of my ambitions is to visit every state in the Union. I've managed 20 so far, but have only recently started to collect the evidence — a shot glass with the name of the state. That means I need glasses from the following states: California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, Arkansas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Louisiana. If any of you have one to spare, please bring it along ... we'll settle up in Galway!



David Burke



Gallery in Galway's city centre, and after that we'll move on to the King's Head pub, just up the street, one of Galway's oldest buildings with a history that goes back to the execution of Charles I of England in 1649, and earlier.

On Thursday it's a mixed bag, but there will be items on Irish sports and a presentation from the only man to have run a marathon on all seven continents and at the North and South Poles. We'll also hear about newspapering in the North of Ireland, where editors must often walk a fine line between divided communities.

Thursday night you'll travel the 20 miles to my home town of Tuam, for an Irish stew supper and some traditional entertainment in the ancient synod hall of St. Mary's Cathedral.

FAQ's

- Electrical equipment such as shavers needs an adapter: we run 220-240 volts, with the British square three-pin plug. You can buy an adapter at any international airport.

- For travel from Dublin airport to Galway, there's a really handy coach service direct from the airport to the centre of Galway more or less on the hour. Check www.citylink.ie.

- If you want to spend time in Dublin and take a train, check www.irishrail.ie. If you're on a Mac, use OS 9. OS X will crash. You can also fly from Dublin to Galway in about 40 minutes: check www.sky-road.com.

- The international dialing code for Ireland is 353. The international access code from the U.S. and Canada is 011.

- If you need to leave an emergency number at home or at work, the conference centre at NUI, Galway is 011 353 91 750394. My office number is 011 353 93 24183, fax 011 353 93 24478, and my cell phone number is 011 353 86 2507 147.

- If you're dialing any of these numbers from within Ireland, drop the international codes and put a zero before the Irish code e.g. the *Tuam Herald* number within Ireland is 093 24183, fax 093 24478, and my cell phone is 086 2507 147.

78 have registered for Galway conference

Garrett and Nina Ray, Fort Collins, Colo.

Dennis, Mar'ce, and Ben Merrell, Edmonton, Alberta.

Carol O'Leary, Bob Whetstone, and Kris O'Leary, Medford (Wis.) *Star News*

Goodloe and Jean Sutton, Linden (Ala.) *Democrat Reporter*

Gary and Helen Sosniecki, Lebanon (Mo.) *Daily Record*

Marg and Ralph Hennigar, Lighthouse Publishing, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia

Nancy and Richard Slepicka, *The Montgomery County News*, Hillsboro, Ill.

Tom Wills, Robin Schechtman, and Linda Graham, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Brian Mazza, *The Mountaineer*, Rocky Mountain House, Alberta

Donna, Bill, and Deborah Remer, Armada, Mich.

Chad, Laurel, Brennan, and Grant Stebbins and Christine and Devri Brock, Carl Junction, Mo.

Chris Wood, *Door County Advocate* (Wis.), and **Judy Wood**

Clyde Wills, *Metropolis* (Ill.) *Planet*, and **Carolyn Wills**

Harry and Carol Hix, Norman, Okla.

Ellen Albanese (*Boston Globe* freelancer), and **Bill Landers**, Franklin, Mass.

Elliott Freireich, *West Valley* (Ariz.) *View*, **Marquita Porter, Rachael Freireich, and Marissa Freireich**, Litchfield Park, Ariz.

Don Smith, *Monticello* (Minn.) *Times*

Bill, Jan, and Kevin Haupt, Lodi, Wis.

Robert Trapp, *Rio Grande Sun*, Espanola, N.M., and **Belinda Martinez**

David and Sue Gordon, Altoona, Wis.

Tim, Mary, and Jeremy Waltner, *Freeman* (S.D.) *Courier*

Don and Debbie Brod, St. Charles, Ill.

Ray and Karen Laakaniemi, Kendallville, Ind.

Susan Belliveau, *The Record*, Springhill, Nova Scotia

Lloyd Call, *Messenger-Enterprise*, Manti, Utah, and **Catherine Call**

Scott Frank, *The Marysville* (Wash.) *Globe*, and **Angela Hamlin**

Bruce and Shirley Murray, *The Pictou Advocate*, Nova Scotia

Sandra George, Wisconsin Newspaper Association, and **Lloyd George**

Diane Everson, *The Edgerton* (Wis.) *Reporter*

Jim Painter, *West Valley* (Ariz.) *View*, and **Gail Painter**

Burt and Ursula Freireich, Litchfield Park, Ariz.

Dick McCord, Santa Fe, N.M.

Leslie O'Donnell, *Newport* (Ore.) *News-Times*, and **Michael O'Donnell**

Declan Varley, *The Galway Advertiser*, Ireland

Jim and Margaret Sawyer, Springfield, Mo.

Eugene McGee, *Longford Leader*, Ireland

Eddie Coffey, *Nationalist Group*, Carlow, Ireland

Things worth knowing about Galway 2003

By **Eugene McGee**
Editor, *The Longford Leader*

First the bad news ... you will not see any leprechauns when you visit Galway for the ISWNE gathering in July 2003. You may see the odd Irish person dressed remotely like the popular image of leprechauns and there will no scarcity of leprechaun figurines in the gift shops, but I'm afraid there are no live leprechauns in Galway or anywhere else in Ireland right now.

A simpleton's guide to the geography of Ireland is useful. Imagine the country as being the shape of a rectangle, which is about 300 miles from north to south and about 150 miles east to west. Galway is about halfway up the western seaboard, and exactly opposite on the other side of the rectangle is Dublin, the capital city. The border with Northern Ireland is about 100 miles north from Galway city so the locals are rarely too concerned with events in N.I., with Belfast being about 150 miles away. My own town, Longford, is situated halfway between Galway and Dublin.

Mention of distances reminds me of road signs should any of you decide to venture out in a hired automobile. Since Ireland joined the European Community (EC) many years ago, we have more or less changed from the old British measurement of miles to the EC kilometres. All the modern road signs in white and green have distances shown in kilometres (KM), and the quick calculation into miles is to divide the KM by three and multiply by two. So 30 KM is about 20 miles. However, there are still many older signs in use on smaller roadways that have the distances in miles. These are usually black lettering on a white background.

By the way, when you are at a gas sta-

tion be sure to ask for petrol, not gasoline. Most such stations are self-service. Irish weather is totally different to U.S. weather in that it is very unpredictable. We rarely get prolonged periods of rain downpours, but we make up for that by having rain at some stage on most days of the year, particularly in the west of Ireland of which Galway is the capital. The proximity to the Atlantic Ocean means that Galway is never short of rain usually in the form of a light drizzle. Everybody in Ireland starts a conversa-

Times, Irish Independent and Examiner, while all the local newspapers are published on Wednesday and Thursday each week.

Banks in Ireland close at 4 p.m. each day and are not open at all on Saturday or Sunday.

If you constantly see people walking about with one hand apparently covering their ear, don't panic. It is simply a mobile telephone user. Nearly everybody in Ireland now has a mobile, particularly young people. Text messaging is the big fad for them — where they send written messages to each other using a garbled form of the English language which would never see the light of day in any self-respecting community newspaper. Remarkably, Ireland was way ahead of the United States in using mobile phones over the past decade.

Cabs are called taxis in Galway and usually have clear signs on the roof. The main sports conversation in July will be about the two Irish games of Gaelic football and hurling, about which there will be a presentation at the conference.

There is a very famous horse racing meeting, "The Galway Races, which takes place in late July every year.

Normal tourist precautions regarding security apply in Galway too. The chances of personal assault etc. are practically nil, but pickpockets abound who can spot tourists from 500 paces as do street purveyors of all sorts of tourist wares, usually made in Honk Kong! Avoid — and instead visit one of many fine stores in Galway city, which is still quite small. A myriad of stores, large and small, can be visited in a short walking tour of the inner city.

Those who have time to do so should definitely try to travel out west of Galway city toward the Atlantic seaboard which has magnificent scenery and is the most westerly point in Europe, particularly the Aran Islands off the west coast.



tion with a comment about the weather such as: "It's a grand day, thank God" or "Nice soft day" meaning that it has been, is now or is about to rain.

The citizens of Galway are accustomed to tourists all the time and particularly American ones, so you should not have any problem with the language or the accents. English is the spoken language although areas west of Galway city have Gaelic-speaking communities called "The Gaeltacht."

Television in Ireland is extensive with four Irish stations, one of which is Gaelic speaking and usually all the British stations and Sky News are available via satellite dishes which are very obvious on the outside of many houses. The No. 1 station in Ireland is RTE 1, which is the national broadcasting service. The three main Irish daily papers are the *Irish*

ISWNEWS



A pitch for ISWNE board members

ISWNE's membership will elect a new board of directors at the Galway conference, and many members may be interested in serving although won't be able to travel to Ireland. If this is the case, forward your interest to **Brian Mazza** at editor@rmh-mountaineer.com or phone (403) 845-3334 (office). Names will be put forward as candidates for the board. Terms as directors are typically for three years, unless vacancies are created by resignation.

Members of the board are asked to attend two meetings per year, one at the annual conference and one set for mid-term, usually late January, in a spot of the board's choosing. Following Galway, it is fairly certain meetings over the next three years will be somewhere in continental North America.

Mazza and **David Burke's** terms expire this year. If **Donna Remer** is elected ISWNE president, someone would be elected to fill the last year of her term as a board member.

ISWNE members fare well in Canada

Frank McTighe, publisher and editor of *The Macleod Gazette* in Fort Macleod, Alberta, won three awards May 31 at the annual Canadian Community Newspapers Association convention in Vancouver. McTighe was first place for best feature photo, second place for best news story and third place for best spot news photo.

Paul MacNeill's *Eastern Graphic* in Montague, Prince Edward Island, won the best editorial page award in the 3,500 to 6,499 circulation category and finished third in the best all-round newspaper competition. **Peter Lesniak's** *Yukon News* in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, was second in the best all-round category.

Martha Perkins, editor of *The Haliburton County Echo* in Ontario, received first place for excellence in environmental writing. Lesniak was third. *The Haliburton County Echo* won first for best Christmas edition and best newspaper promotion, and Perkins picked up a second for best historical story. *The Echo* competed in the 4,000 to 12,499 circulation category.

Susan Lundy and **Mitchell Sherrin** from **Tony Richards' Gulf Islands Driftwood** in Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, won first place for outstanding reporter initiative. Richards won second place for best national editorial, while MacNeill took second for outstanding columnist. *The Gulf Islands Driftwood* claimed top honors for best newspaper promotion in the circulation up to 3,999 category.

Marg Hennigar's *Bridgewater* (Nova Scotia) *Bulletin* won first place for best house ad, second for best Christmas edition and third for best sports pages.

Wilcox receives doctorate from UNC

Carol Wilcox received her doctorate in mass communications May 18 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Wilcox and her husband, **Cary Stiff**, founded the *Clear Creek Courant* in Georgetown Colo., in 1973 and later moved it to Idaho Springs, Colo. They edited and published it for more than 26 years. At the end of that period, Wilcox went back to school and obtained a master's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin. She then received a Park Fellowship for further graduate study at North Carolina.

She's looking for a university teaching position but has discovered that, because of state budget cuts, there are few available. Anybody know of any?

Garred promoting open government

Frank Garred, former editor/publisher of the *Port Townsend Leader* (and a former president of ISWNE), is serving as interim executive director of the Washington Coalition for Open Government (www.washingtoncog.org).

The new statewide Coalition, formed in March 2002, creates and presents public forums on government access issues, as well as education programs for lawyers on Washington State's public records and open meetings laws. It also joins legal actions involving access challenges as an amicus, with legal briefs aimed at preserving and protecting the public's right to know.

Overduin to present two papers

Henry Overduin, head of the Department of Mass Communication at McNeese State University, had two research papers accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, Mo. The ethics division accepted "Eight Arguments for Philosophical Thinking in Journalism Ethics," and the civic journalism group accepted, "Civic Journalism and Objectivity: A Philosophical Resuscitation."

A second Doc Laak

Brian Laakaniemi, son of ISWNE sometimes columnist **Ray Laakaniemi**, was graduated from the Case Western University School of Medicine in Cleveland on May 18. The ceremonies took place a few blocks from the tragic shooting at Case earlier in the month.

Brian starts June 16 as a surgical intern at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Alex Haupt gets Naval appointment

Alex Haupt of Lodi, Wis., has accepted an appointment to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. He reports for “plebe summer” at the academy on July 1, and will be unable to attend the 2003 Galway conference.

Alex has attended each ISWNE conference since 1995. He is the son of **Jan** and **Bill Haupt**.

Seiler starts Bob Bliss scholarship fund

Al Seiler, the Pike County news correspondent for the *Jacksonville* (Ill.) *Journal-Courier*, has started a Bob Bliss Memorial Scholarship with his contribution of \$50. If ISWNE is able to raise \$400, an additional scholarship would be awarded for ISWNE’s 2004 conference at Pere Marquette State Park in Grafton, Ill.

Checks should be made payable to the ISWNE Foundation and mailed to **Chad Stebbins**, Missouri Southern State College, 3950 E. Newman Road, Joplin, MO 64801-1595. All contributions are tax-deductible.

SDNA honors ‘Courier’ with top awards

The Freeman Courier received 19 awards in the 2003 South Dakota Newspaper Association Better Newspaper Contest including the sweepstakes award and general excellence. Contest results were announced as the SDNA met for its 121st convention in Rapid City May 2-3.

The contest recognizes the best writing, photography and design in the weekly and daily newspapers in the state, divided into five circulation categories. *The Courier* was judged in the category of weeklies with circulations between 1,151 and 2,050.

The General Excellence Award is based on three random issues judged on all aspects of the paper. The Sweepstakes Award is based on the number of awards earned by the newspaper using a point system.

Larry Atkinson’s *Mobridge Tribune* was the General Excellence and Sweepstakes winner in the over 2,050 circulation category. The contest was judged by members of the Montana Newspaper Association.

Waltners active in community

After a three-month commitment to directing the 2003 Schmeckfest musical production of *Oliver!*, **Tim Waltner** is back on stage himself playing with the Schweitzer Toe-Tappers. The group that performs bluegrass, traditional, gospel and folk has a number of gigs lined up this summer.

Mary Waltner had a busy spring. She is the accompanist for the Freeman (S.D.) Area Children’s Choir that performed a spring concert in April and presented the musical *Pipi Longstockings* in May. She also provided the music for a wedding of a co-worker (she works at Freeman Community Hospital and Nursing Home) in May.

Jeremy Waltner is helping produce Freeman’s summer theater production of *The Foreigner* in August. He hopes to get the production team in place so he can audition for a role.

Gordon helps honor ethics pioneer

David Gordon, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, organized and took part in a panel discussion honoring **John Merrill**, at the Ethics Across the Professions conference at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg, in March.

Merrill, professor emeritus at the University of Missouri, led the way in focusing attention on journalism ethics as an academic subject. The panel included seven of Merrill’s co-authors, and focused on his half century of scholarly leadership in ethics, philosophy and international media.

‘Quill’ features small-town journalism in May issue

Quill, published by the Society of Professional Journalists, featured small-town journalism in its May cover story. The magazine’s coverage included stories on “Covering a community from within” and “Pinching pennies: Small papers find creative solutions in a slow economy,” plus a column titled “Small newsrooms don’t equate to small journalism” from *Quill* editor **Jeff Mohl**.

“Because small papers tend to operate under a unique set of circumstances, each paper finds its own niche in the community it covers,” Mohl wrote. “The practical often trumps the theoretical in these newsrooms, and the accepted journalism standards of large newsrooms are sometimes put on the shelf as these papers work to find the best role they can play in their communities.”

The article titled “Covering a community from within” debates whether news staffers can take active roles in the community, such as running a charity drive or serving on a board. One editor points out that getting too close to institutions and power brokers — no matter the size of the town — can be destructive to a reporter’s or organization’s reputation.

The New York Times revised its ethical guidelines earlier this year, including banning reporters from placing political bumper stickers on the family car, restricting leadership roles in community organizations, and requesting a review of what stocks reporters own. Most community editors think *The Times’* new guidelines go too far, but are always on the lookout for conflicts of interest that may harm their papers’ reputations.

The “Pinching pennies” article describes how the *Parsons* (Kan.) *Sun*, circulation 5,856, eliminated many of its news services, including the \$300-a-week Associated Press photo service, in response to an ailing local economy. The paper started running columns written by readers and bought two digital cameras for reporters to carry.

In Arkansas, the *Benton Courier* increased circulation from 6,450 to 7,322 by switching its publishing cycle from morning to evening. The paper also started a profitable new weekly in a town 12 miles away.

Back copies of the May issue can be ordered for \$5 plus \$2 shipping by calling 317-927-8000.

Our stories tell us who we are

By **Kim McCully**

Editor, *Aurora* (Mo.) *Advertiser*

While flipping through the pages of some old *Aurora Advertisers* for some historical documentation and story ideas, I literally lost myself in the yellowed, brittle pages published by those here long before us.

The heavy, bound volume creaked as I slid back the cardboard holding it together since it was damaged in a newspaper blaze in February 1981.

I carefully placed it on the floor by my desk and leaned over to read.

"Bob's Column," a feisty (and sometimes comical) review of all the things going on in and around *Aurora*, appeared in the upper left corner of the front page.

This newspaper was in **Bob Lowry's** family for over a century and Bob, who has been dead a few years now, served as an avid watchdog over his newspaper and the community it served for decades.

He was well-read. He was somewhat crusty. He was outspoken. He paid great attention to details. He loved *Aurora*.

His column started out by telling on some of the employees at the Bank Hotel, who had been scammed by the same man twice in the same week.

It seems the man appeared to a cashier and gave her a hard luck story and borrowed \$10 from her, giving her a gaudy, phony ring to hold as collateral.

Later that same week, the same man pulled the same trick on the Bank Hotel Manager, **Joe LeDue**.

Bob decided to do the Good Samaritan thing and just alert the whole town about the scam — and the questionable intelligence of the folks at the Bank Hotel.

"All hands have been alerted for a possible third appearance," his column read.

I had to chuckle.

I found many of the story lines hinging on the same topics we write about today:

- District Lions Governor visits local club
- Heavy traffic expected over holiday week-end
- *Aurora's* Kroger store will close
- Revival in progress at OSA

Those headlines were taken from the autumn pages of this same newspaper some 53 years ago — in the fall of 1950.

I had read an article in the May 2003 edition of *Publisher's Auxiliary* about a story that ran in a small newspaper in Escambia County, Alabama. Certain stories there had become urban legends and many readers swore they were true. Staffers decided to track down one such story and see if any kernels of truth existed there. Apparently, writers were in between covering the Little League games and the start of the football season. Readers kept prompting them to do a story about the infamous "snake in the dewberry patch" story.

"The story of the snake in the dewberry patch was told in coffee shops, at garden club gatherings, board meeting, Laundromats and churches," wrote **Ed Williams**, now a journalism professor in the Department of Communications and Journalism at Auburn University in Auburn, Ala.

Legend had it that once upon a time a man had driven by a car parked near a wooded area in the backroads of Alabama. He sees children inside the car and doesn't give it much of a thought. A little while later, he returns to the area and sees the children still inside the car. He stops this time and asks if they are alone.

They tell him their mother has gone dewberry picking and will surely be back soon. The man goes off in search of the woman in the direction of the dewberry patch. Within minutes, he discovers her body in a ditch. She's dead and she's reportedly clutching a rattlesnake in one hand. Her fate is ultimately attributed to a venomous snakebite.

As reporters continued to probe this horrible tale through sources involved in law enforcement, hospital work, emergency responding and even the funeral business, not one iota of information was ever substantiated. The newspaper wrote a story anyway, with the theme of the feature focusing on the fact that this urban legend imbedded in the Alabama culture simply wasn't true.

Several years later, Williams was flipping through some archived papers of another Alabama community and found another reported account of a snake in a dewberry patch story. He concluded that these types of stories are often repeated during the "dull, hot days of summer when there's not much

else to talk about."

He wrote about other myths and legends reported in community newspapers for the last century.

Stories abound about rattlesnakes and bears. Sometimes there have been sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects.

"Small-town newspapers have a role that is much different from the metropolitan dailies. Much of the news in a weekly newspaper would never appear in a daily paper — personals, community news, school menus, big fish, dead snakes and snake horror stories," Williams wrote.

"But weekly newspapers also have an obligation to report on the little things that might not make it in their metropolitan daily counterparts, the school menus, honor rolls, and community news. And even reporting on stories that didn't happen, like the one of the snake in the dewberry patch," he concluded.

In this area, there are lots of stories about howling panthers, mad dogs, outlaws, chicken thieves and strange ailments.

Archived newspapers tell about those joining the various war efforts or those who broke their arms on tropical vacations.

There's even a story in a September 27, 1953, issue of *The Aurora Advertiser* that talks about officials having to use stadium lights to start a daytime game in Cleveland, Ohio. The game featured the Cleveland Indians edging out Detroit 2-1 in 10 innings.

However, an accompanying photograph shows the need for those lights in the stadium as the sky is blackened with smoke from some massive Canadian forest fires. The event marked history as being the first time stadium lights had to be used for a daytime baseball game.

More than 6,000 people turned out for the 1953 Tri-County Fair and another photo showed a small child sitting with a 61-pound squash.

Storytelling is an important aspect of our culture here in the Ozarks. Some stories have to be told. Some stories need to be told more than once. Some stories document history. Other stories teach us lessons. Still, other stories make us laugh out loud. A few stories will make us cry. We must never stop telling them, though.

Our stories tell us who we are, where we've been and where we're headed.

Adjusting to the editorial 'we'

By **Tim Waltner**
 Publisher, *Freeman* (S.D.) *Courier*

It's nearly a year since we stopped the practice of signing the editorials that run weekly in the *Courier*.

And it still bugs some of our readers.

In fact, one loyal reader told us he's stopped reading them in protest.

It's inconsistent, he told us, that we require the authors of letters to the editor to sign their names, but the editorial can be anonymous.

"Anonymous" might be a bit of a stretch.

We thought we'd made our reasoning clear when we announced our change in policy.

We explained that over the past three years, news editor **Jeremy Waltner** has been writing a growing number of editorials — signed until July of last year. At that point it was about a 4/1 split — Tim/Jeremy.

But the writing process had evolved into a much more collaborative process. We read each others editorial drafts and offer suggestions, challenges to clarify, strengthen and refine the opinion.

The editorials in many newspapers — particularly larger papers — reflect the opinions and discussions of editorial boards. While in our case the board is small — essentially Jeremy and me — the process of reflection, discussion and consensus is the same.

Take last week's editorial on "Tree City." Independently, each of us had reached the same conclusion. We agreed that encouraging the city to pursue the con-

cept was a good thing and that we — the *Courier* — should endorse it.

We discussed the matter further and Jeremy agreed to write the first editorial draft. I read it and added several things he had not included, changed some of his language and rearranged the flow.

At that point, the writing was probably 60 percent Jeremy and 40 percent Tim. He edited my edited version a bit so the writing probably became 65 percent Jeremy and 35 percent Tim.

But, and this is the important part, the position was 100 percent Jeremy and 100 percent Tim.

I suppose we could have included those percentages as a signature — Jeremy (65) Waltner and Tim (35) Waltner — and do it for every editorial.

Or, we could follow a 50 percent rule; the truth is that for most of the editorials that appear in the *Courier*, we can probably tell you whether Jeremy or I was the primary author.

We (to be clear, that's the editorial we — Jeremy and Tim) don't think that should be the issue.

We believe our editorials are stronger as a collaborative effort that reflects a conclusion based on discussion and shared opinion. And we continue to believe that the views expressed in the editorial are far more important than who actually writes it.

But, if people are not reading them because of that, we obviously have a problem.

To make things a bit more clear, starting this week we're adding something to the editorial column. It's a statement that the editorials reflect the opinions of the

news editor and the publisher of the *Courier*. It will appear every week. If someone really wants a breakdown of how much to challenge Jeremy and how much to challenge Tim, call us and we'll try to give you the Jeremy/Tim writing percentages.

A final thought:

Some of you may wonder what if Jeremy and Tim don't agree; it does happen, believe me.

In the case of girls wrestling back in January, we printed our opposing positions in our columns — Jeremy's "Kaleidoscope" and my "Theoretically."

In other cases — Jeremy's tirade against President **George W. Bush** several weeks ago in which he referred to him as "Old W," for example, wasn't the editorial. Jeremy's name was at the bottom of his "Kaleidoscope" column, not Tim's. (Draw your own conclusions.)

As for editorials, we'll keep on writing them and it will continue to be a tandem effort.

And if we keep losing readers because it doesn't have either Jeremy's name or Tim's name, we'll reconsider our new, revised policy.

After all, "our exercise in opinion writing isn't accomplishing its goal if the only ones reading are the two people writing.



Tim Waltner

Catching up with a Greenslade Bursar

By **Roy Hancock**
1987 Greenslade Bursary recipient

Although it is now 16 years (doesn't time fly when you are enjoying yourself!) since I had the pleasure of attending the ISWNE conference in Santa Fe as a Greenslade Bursar, I do occasionally keep abreast of what is happening through your excellent website. I note from the headline of the May newsletter that past Greenslade Bursary recipients are to be invited to the Galway conference.

It is an event that I have had penciled in my diary for some time, but as I mentioned to **Dick McCord** (my Santa Fe host) some time ago, it is unlikely that I will be able to make it because of work pressures. I now write and edit a monthly magazine for the Welsh Assembly Government and the early part of July is the busiest time of the year for me as I have to take on considerable extra work due to the advent of the main agricultur-

al event of the year in Wales — the Royal Welsh Show. This includes writing a number of agricultural case studies for the Welsh Development Agency.

I had been really looking forward to visiting Galway and enjoying a pint or two of Guinness with some of your members who I had the pleasure of meeting either in New Mexico or when the conference came to London.

As I have spent a dozen or more vacations in the USA in the past 15 years, there's probably a better chance of me renewing some of these acquaintances when I travel across "the big pond!"

I am not entirely ruling out the possibility of me being able to come across to Galway, even it is only for a day or so, but in any event I would like to take this opportunity of wishing everyone a very successful conference and a most enjoyable stay amongst my "Celtic cousins."

If I do make it then I will be asking your members to mount a campaign in their publications to allow more Brits to

become permanent residents in the USA. I would love to spend much of my retirement in the Florida sunshine, but under the present rules no people from Britain — which, after all, is America's biggest ally — are allowed even into the annual entrance lottery. If I were from Iraq my name would at least go into the draw. Very best wishes to everyone.



Buy your own ISWNE cap

It's the rage all across the United States and Canada — the official ISWNE cap. Now you too can own one, for only \$12. Contact Bob Whetstone at carolo@dwave.net. Hurry, before it's too late!

ABOUT THE ISWNE

The International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors (ISWNE) was founded in 1955 at Southern Illinois University (SIU) by Howard R. Long, then chair of SIU's Department of Journalism at Carbondale, and Houston Waring, then editor of the *Littleton (Colo.) Independent*. ISWNE headquarters were at Northern Illinois University at Dekalb from 1976 to 1992, at South Dakota State University in Brookings from 1992 to 1999. Missouri Southern State College in Joplin became the headquarters in 1999.

ISWNE's purpose is to help those involved in the weekly press to improve standards of editorial writing and news reporting and to encourage strong, independent editorial voices. The society seeks to fulfill its purpose by holding annual conferences, presenting awards, issuing publications, and encouraging international exchanges. There are ISWNE members in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. There are subscribers to *Grassroots Editor*, the society's quarterly journal, in still more countries.

This publication will be made available in alternative formats upon request to Chad Stebbins 417-625-9736.

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