

# Biography of A 70-Year-Old Newspaper

It was a Charlotte Saturday afternoon in the old days — 14 shopping days before Christmas, Dec. 8, 1888.

Horses neighed and champed at the hitching rails, and the country people were in town spending cotton money. Cotton was selling for 9.8 cents a pound and Cleveland had just been "elected out of the White House."

Young Carey Dowd was driving through for a diploma at Wake Forest and the inventive wizard, Thomas Edison, was threatening to put print shops out of business with a talking newspaper called the phonograph.

Within a stone's throw of Independence Square, drawing the interest of the Saturday crowds, was a great groaning and straining and anxious confusion—the Charlotte News was aborning and about to emit its first zesty cry upon the streets—a zest and a cry which heralded these 70 unbroken years.

Wade Hampton Harris was the young editor and publisher and also reporter and business manager and subscription solicitor and bookkeeper. He was The News.

This first paper in 1888 blazoned proudly at the big masthead — "The Charlotte News," but it was a title that was to last for just three editions, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, for some unexplained reason, the paper came out as "The Daily News" and remained that way for years and years. It did, however, retain on the little mast-head inside the title, "The Charlotte News."

Editor Harris took the trouble not the space to explain the change. And Editor Dowd continued it for a long time with no further explanation.

## Baby Finds Favor

But a new newspaper had been born and it quickly found favor, not only among its readers, but among editors of journals across the state as well.

A "beautiful newspaper," said the Wilmington Record, the Durham Recorder, The Wilmington Messenger, The Statesville Landmark and The Raleigh News & Observer. What the News with enthusiastic commendations, as did many other newspapers.

In Charlotte, of course, the reception was best. Just two weeks after the first edition hit the streets of Charlotte The News led all other newspapers in city circulation. The subscription list is said to have reached 1,000, not had for a metropolis of just 10,000 population.

There was, in those early days, as is the case now, a lot for The News to talk about. Scheduled courts, train wrecks, a couple of killings, deaths and weddings, and a very sensational collision between a street car and a horse and buggy as they were all new-making events.

The News gave the cast of "Peck's Bad Boy" which was showing at the Opera House and it broke local newspaper news by its infancy by boldly announcing that in the future wedding announcements and death notices would be carried in The News free for nothing.

In the beginning, The News was a four-page, six-column sheet. Advertising covered half of the front page, with two highly regarded little ads always placed at the top front corners.

Routine news went under a standing, single-column headline, "Pipples." Big news, such as horse-and-buggy runaways, went to the top of the column. Really big news was displayed under a one-column, three-bank head taking nearly an inch of space.

It was to be many, many years before bold ribbon headlines made an appearance in The News or any other newspaper for that matter.

## Interest Quicken

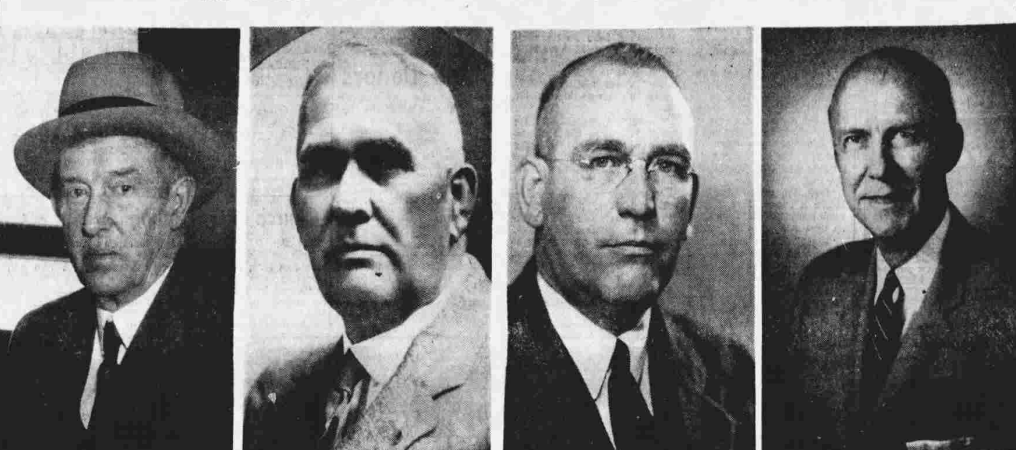
Charlotte News Editor Harris had his office near Independence Square, but the paper was printed by Hunt, a commercial printer whose plant was on Trade St. near College.

Copy was prepared in the editorial offices of The News and taken by a footman from back door to back door. One year or so the paper had prospered to the point of buying its own two racks of type and a hand-operated drum press.

The News was distributed by young boys who took the copies straight from the press.

Interest in The News, judging from numerous letters to the editor, became lively after its

## The Four Publishers Of The Charlotte News



WADE H. HARRIS 1888-1893

announcement that wedding and death notices would be published without charge. And when The News began taking quite a bold stand on controversial questions, a trait which has remained steadfast in interest, became even more lively.

Seventy years ago there was the matter of the railroads. One rather strong school of thought said in no uncertain terms the community would be better off without them. Their arguments, though not enough to stop the railroads, were enough to demand some consideration.

Editor Harris went to bat editorially for the railroads when the question arose whether a rail line to Lancaster, S. C., was needed. He demanded the line, through News editorials, saying it "and a dozen others if sufficient towns could be found to build to" should be laid.

It's easy to see now that he was right. But it took independence then to say so.

The News was a Southern paper, therefore Democratic.

But when the newspaper came to life the Democrats were ranking under the defeat of Cleveland and the restoration of the Democratic regime were being talked. The News became a part of those days.

A Washington correspondent, who remained unnamed, kept the newspaper's readership informed of activities in the national scene. When the Sherman Silver Purchase Bill came in for violent controversy, readers of The News got their very own edition of the bill.

The McKinley Tariff Bill was introduced, and the cotton growing segment of the public read even more rabidly than before.

When the Democratic Party began to build up for the campaign of 1892 The News became a vigorous supporter. No one knew that Cleveland's inauguration would signal the "Wall Street Crowd" to shake the nation with a "money panic" as a protest against Cleveland policy.

Four months after Cleveland's inauguration March 4, 1893, Cleveland was selling at a price from 4 to 5 cents a pound. One was able to get work, but no pay. Many of the businesses in the nation were paying their help in scrip, to be redeemed at stores in trade.

Farmers sold the cotton they grew in the same form of scrip, by taking cotton to the mill in scrip and exchanging it in the help for shoes and pants and shirts.

It was at this time that Carey Dowd, who had said that money did not come from the ground, but that money was made by the hand, bought The News on July 1, 1893. Carey Dowd paid Mr. Harris, the sum of \$5,000 and became editor and proprietor of The News.

His purchase of The News was not Mr. Dowd's first venture into another Charlotte newspaper. He was publishing The Observer when he transferred his interest to The News. That Observer suspended publication about the same time, although the name was later revived and applied to another Charlotte newspaper.

The News changed hands in the midst of the short-lived Cleveland Panic and the peculiarities of the financial time reflected in Mr. Dowd's cash book.

Three days after the purchase, Dowd took in a nickel—and Mr. Dowd, by 1910, had gone to \$500, and despite its tender age of 72 years, The News had

W. CAREY DOWD SR. 1893-1927

become one of the established newspapers in North Carolina. The 1910 census gave the town 3,014 people making Charlotte North Carolina's biggest city. The News, of course, kept pace as Publisher Dowd announced a great turnover in the present News site at 4th and Church Sts., a fine, three-story, fireproof, brick and concrete structure.

Another big year in the growth of The News was the year 1914. In Europe a war flared and with it came a break in the world's international conservatism. Nothing like the war had happened before and the old style, three-bank headline, just wouldn't fit the occasion. Streamers went across the top of the page.

As circulation climbed upward from 8,000 in 1914 and headed steadily toward 10,000 News personnel grew too, and the paper, as an institution, began to take its place as an important part of the community's economic life.

When the United States entered the European conflict in 1917, The News was well equipped with machinery. It had a building full of Linotype machines, job presses, a big then newspaper press and offices.

By 1926 things had begun to look up for Publisher Dowd. That year he bought the weekly Mecklenburg Times and the year afterwards The Charlotte Democrat publishing the semi-weekly Times-Democrat until 1924.

When the Spanish-American War came along in 1898 The News' circulation began to soar. By 1900 it had reached the high point of 3,065.

In 1899 James Edward Dowd was born and soon, no doubt, accompanied his older brother, Carey, to the newspaper shop. The Dowd brothers literally grew up with the newspaper.

An unfavorable happening made 1903 an important year in the struggling young journal. —The Charlotte Chronicle was organized as an afternoon paper to compete with The News, thus dividing the not-too-generous revenue.

The difficulty continued until 1914 when Publisher Dowd bought out his competitor and again had the afternoon daily field without competition.

By 1924 The News advanced one more step, putting on Sunday comic pages, first in black and white and then color. It was a normal newspaper procedure but one which made a big hit with the Charlotte public.

Charlotte was in the throes of its greatest population surge during the period from 1920 to 1930 and demands on the newspaper were heavy. The Queen City was destined to sweep from its 46,338 population in 1920 to its 82,685 of 1930.

This became, however, an extremely sad period in The News' history as the increasing illness and death of Mr. Dowd became a matter of grave concern.

Mr. Dowd had an unusual quality for drawing his associates to him in loyalty and hold-ings in friendly. Many of the members of the organization were his personal friends. Some of them had worked with him since the early days of the newspaper.

In September, 1927, he died, and the day in The News building was one of profound grief.

Community Booster

W. CAREY DOWD JR. 1927-1947

elsewhere. He became editor-in-chief of The News in 1932.

By 1937, The News had become a public-service institution with a strong desire for community improvement.

The same year Cameron Shipps, a News reporter, was sent out to tour the slums of Charlotte and describe in a series of articles, what he saw.

Stories by Shipps about tumble-down shacks and the general condition of the Blue Heaven and Brooklyn areas aroused the public.

City officials, spurred to action by the public, went to work to solve the problem. Mayor Ben Douglas ordered a city housing survey and the Housing Authority was set up the following year. In 1940, Piedmont Courts and Fairview Homes, both low-cost housing units, were under construction. By 1941 a standard housing ordinance was a part of Charlotte law.

As early as the 1890's a blanket of smoke hung over Charlotte, blackened buildings and even affected the taste of food. The News deplored the condition and so did its readers. In late 1940 the Charlotte Council passed a smoke-abatement ordinance and secured an engineer to carry out the program.

While all this was going on a friend of The News was spending a miserable time in a hospital at Morganton. Tom Jimison, lawyer, preacher and newspaperman, had committed himself to the State hospital for the insane.

Jimison became acquainted with all members of the staff, and with all the patients. In 1941 he was dismissed and immediately set about telling the story of the hospital — "Out of the Night of Morganton."

He told his story in 15 chapters, and they started people throughout the State talking bigger. As in the first year of the State's institution, State officials ordered a special investigation and Jimison's reports were corroborated. A program of reform followed.

Changing Face

The front page began to change during the late 1930's. Headlines declared that the Russians and Germans were getting along. Hitler, they said, was trying to take over Europe.

The Germans captured Poland with ease and opposing armies on the Western Front just set and glared at each other. "Hitler, hum! Nazis are bored by lame war," a News headline said.

Things in Europe got hotter, though, and the war news got bigger. As in the first year of the time variation between Europe and the United States again gave The News its first crack at war dispatches.

Tragic news came to The News from Mexico in 1941. W. J. Cash, associate editor with J. E. Dowd had written editorials for many months, died in the Mexican capital a month after he had arrived there on a Guggenheim Fellowship.

That same year a draft swept through The News office. Several young men went right out the door with it. Among them was a tall, skinny youth named Martin Hartweg.

While older hands around the city room remarked that they wouldn't have to lend so many cigarettes, Hartweg went to Ft. Bragg and his first taste of KP duty.

Hartweg became The News' Ft. Bragg correspondent, sending back columns entitled, "In The Army Now." Thousands of

THOMAS L. ROBINSON 1947—

new momentum to the growth and development of The News without altering the fundamental principles which have made it the great regional institution it is today.

Mr. Robinson said, "In stepping into this job I do so with the utmost humility and the knowledge that I have a big task before me. I am to carry on the high traditions set for The News by him (Mr. Dowd) and his exceptional staff."

A new era began, with Mr. Robinson getting acquainted, not only in Charlotte but also throughout the Carolinas.

Under Mr. Robinson's guiding hand The News continued to grow, passing the 60,000 mark in circulation, and the newspaper continued its policy of taking a deep interest in community affairs, however.

As the circulation continued upward toward 70,000 the headline type was "streamlined" to keep up with the times and The News list itself be heard on a hundred different topics of the day.

Look To Korea

Charlotte had but returned to peacetime normalcy when its attention was suddenly shifted in the direction of the Far East. North and South Korea were on the outs and the 38th Parallel took on new significance.

Some called the action on the tiny peninsula a "police action." But it developed into an all-out shooting war.

Readers sought, and found in The News, accurate and vivid accounts of what was going on in Korea.

At about the same time the Korean War came to a conclusion that left the North and South Koreans still glaring at each other over the invisible line of demarcation. The News was picking up an impressive share of awards for excellence in writing.

Editor C. A. McKnight brought home the first prize in 1950 when one of his editorials was judged the best in the state by the North Carolina Press Association. In 1951, Mr. McKnight swept the field as he won both first and second prizes.

Other editorial writers brought home more prizes.

In 1954 Associate Editor Vic Reimner won the first prize. Cecil Prince, who succeeded Mr. McKnight as editor of The News, won both first and second prizes for editorial writing during 1956 and Perry Morgan, associate editor, won third prize for one of his 1957 editorials.

Charles Kurall, now with the news department of CBS television in New York, won first and fourth place feature awards in 1958.

During the same period the women's staff dominated the list of winners in the North Carolina Press Women's contest.

Reporter Ann Sawyer won two awards in 1952, first in spot reporting and third in the inter-vew classification, and third in feature writing.

The News, however, was its winner more than State awards in 1955 Vic Reimner, former

NEWS ASSOCIATE EDITOR, WON THE \$1,000 HILLMAN FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING WORK IN JOURNALISM. MR. REIMNER RECEIVED THE AWARD IN NEW YORK FOR 11 EDITORIALS APPEARING IN THE NEWS DEALING WITH CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN LIBERTIES.

Mr. Kurall brought the biggest prize of all to The News in 1957 when he was named a 1955 winner of the Scripps-Howard Ernie Pyle Memorial Award.

Mr. Kurall's writing was judged as "most nearly exemplifying the style and craftsmanship of the great World War II reporter and human interest columnist."

Charlotte News photographers have also picked up their share of awards.

The Graflex Award, symbol of overall excellence in news photography, was won by The News three years in a row — 1955, 1956 and 1957.

News Photographer Jeff Hunter in 1956 was named Southern "Photographer of the Year." He was one of the winners of a contest through the years, have dominated the list of photography contest winners.

Complete Plant

The present News plant, filled with men and machines, is one of the most complete in the South. The large building, added to the original structure on the corner of 4th and Church, was designed especially for newspaper production.

In September of 1953 the Charlotte News was in a financial position to purchase the common stock held by 34 stockholders. This step enabled Mr. Robinson, who originally owned 30 per cent of the company to become virtually the sole owner of the newspaper except for a few shares held by the Board of Directors.

In the past 12 years Publisher Robinson has been very active in the civic, philanthropic, cultural and religious life of Charlotte. A fitting climax to his civic work was his election to the presidency of the Chamber of Commerce for the year 1958. He has previously served as second and first vice president of the Chamber.

During Mr. Robinson's administration of the Chamber, the program was expanded to include more industrial and governmental activities than ever before undertaken by the Charlotte Chamber. Under his leadership the total membership increased more than 30 per cent over the gains made the previous year.

Other Activities

Mr. Robinson has served as a director of the United Community Services, the local Red Cross Chapter, the Better Business Bureau, the Family and Children's Service, the Charlotte Rotary Club and many other organizations.

During the year 1956-57, Mr. Robinson served as president of the North Carolina Press Association, an organization composed of the daily and weekly newspapers of the state. He served from 1953 to 1956 as a member of the Board of Directors of the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association.

For six years, from 1952 to 1958, Mr. Robinson was president of the Harvard Club of Charlotte, an organization which has been active in providing financial aid to boys attending Harvard. He was elected a national director of the Harvard Alumni Association from 1953 to 1956.

Mr. Robinson initiated and led the effort to raise funds for the establishment of an athletic field at the new West Charlotte High School in 1953. This campaign was associated with Mr. Robinson's interest in the Queen City Football Classic which is played each year between the Second Ward and West Charlotte High Schools.

Before entering the field of journalism, Mr. Robinson gave serious consideration to becoming a Unitarian minister. His grandfather, the Rev. Dr. Henry White Bellows, was a leader in the Unitarian movement, the founder of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, forerunner of the American Red Cross. Mr. Robinson was one of the charter trustees of the Charlotte Unitarian Church.

Mrs. Robinson and B. S. Griffith, general manager, are both vice-presidents of The News. The Robinsons have three sons. Tom, Jr., age 18; Sam, 17, and Blake, 11.

It has been a long time since 1888 and The News has seen good times and hard times, but it was built from a solid foundation and has remained a solid fixture in the South Piedmont scheme of things, gaining in strength and prestige as it gains in years.

News associate editor, won the \$1,000 Hillman Foundation Award for outstanding work in journalism. Mr. Reimner received the award in New York for 11 editorials appearing in The News dealing with civil rights and human liberties.

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