



The Chatham Historical Journal

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A Personal Look at *Newspapers in Chatham County*

Bob Wachs*

Newspapers – print journalism – is a numbers business. Despite the platitudes about the free press and Thomas Jefferson saying, “Tell the truth and trust the people, and Will Rogers saying, “The only thing I know is what I read in the papers,” and those kinds of remarks, there are two important sets of numbers that guide any kind of print journalism. The first set is the number of readers. Actually, not readers but rather the number of subscribers and/or newsstand sales. I don’t know what the statistics show (you know, statistics are wonderful things and we can use them to show anything), but for every newspaper that is subscribed to, there are something like 2.75 readers. So one set of numbers that’s important is the number of subscribers.

The other set of numbers that are important to the success of a newspaper – print journalism – is the number of advertisers. Never forget that print journalism is a business, and it’s got to make a profit. Those two sets of numbers are the reasons why there has never been a daily newspaper in Chatham County published from here. Every newspaper that has been in our county has been a weekly. And that’s w-e-e-k-l-y, not w-e-a-k-l-y, because through the years there have been some fine pieces of work that have come out of our local community in our newspapers. I am particularly (professionally speaking) proud of some work that the late Cassie Wasko and I did in the late 1980s, all the discussion about the low-level radioactive waste

*Bob Wachs grew up in Chatham County and followed two careers, journalism and the ministry. He continues to contribute a column, “Movin’ Around,” to the weekly *Chatham Record*. This article draws from his 2003 lecture in a series sponsored by the Chatham County Historical Association.

facility and all those things that were paramount issues to so many of us in so many ways. In that particular year, the *Chatham News* and the *Chatham Record* won first-place awards in news reporting, community service, and investigative reporting – a record that is almost unheard of. So, even though our newspapers have been weekly, I don’t think they’ve necessarily been weakly.

Another reason there’s never been a daily newspaper in Chatham County is because, to be honest, there’s not that much news in our county. Now, that’s the same kind of thing you can say for Raleigh, where the *News & Observer* is published, or Winston-Salem, where the *Journal-Sentinel* is published, or Wilmington, where the *Morning Star* is published. There is some local news for each community, but if you’ll notice tomorrow when you pick up your daily paper, you’ll find that a lot of the information in those papers will not be just about the town that bears the name of the paper. It will be state news and national news and international news. So, taken all together – not that many people, not that many advertisers, not that much local news – you have the formula for why there are no daily newspapers in our county and probably never will be. Our newspapers are community papers, always have been and, I think, probably always will be.

News and Community Newspapers

News is generally defined as those things which are unexpected. We expect airplanes to do what? To take off, to fly, and to land. We expect children to go to school and behave. It’s not news when they do. But it is news when the airplane doesn’t make it or the child brings a bomb to school. If something happens tomorrow morning, something spectacular, some news, there’s nothing that a local newspaper can do before next Wednesday. So the community newspaper looks for a different angle. There’s no daily news, but there is something behind the scenes, the news behind the

news, what made it happen, what it means, explore it more in depth. What's going on at the courthouse, or the courts, or the highway patrol, or your next-door-neighbor's been arrested for doing something he or she shouldn't do. The only time the papers would put national or international news in them is when they pertain to us.

At the same time, you've got to be sensitive. You live, you work, you play, you go to church, you go to school, you shop with the people who are in your stories. The journalism is part of the community, too.

Early Chatham Newspapers

You can read in the history book¹ the long list of papers that have been in our county through the years. The first one was in the 1830s or so, and the first one that was continuously published is still the *Chatham Record*, started in 1878. There was a paper in Siler City, the *Central Observer*, that started in 1888, the year after the town. It lasted just a few months. Why? Numbers. Not enough people; not enough readers; not enough advertisers. The *Chatham Record* was founded by H. A. London - General Lee's courier, with the orders at Appomattox and those kinds of things - and he was the editor from 1878 until 1918.

In 1903 there was a paper in Siler City called the *News-Enterprise*. A fellow by the name of W. A. Lawson was the editor. He also became editor of the *Siler City Grit*. I've never been able to find out if he was editor of both of those at the same time or not. He was a very versatile fellow if he did that. The *Siler City Grit* existed

from 1904 until 1924 and somehow the *Grit* either morphed into the *Chatham News* or stopped publication and the *Chatham News* began. There's a note in the history book that says the newspaper started publication in 1924 at the time the *Grit* was ceasing publication. In 1939 the

Chatham Record became a part of the Chatham News Publishing Company, and the *Liberty News* became part of that publishing company as well.

There have been some other papers, and some of these are in the book and some are not. In 1958 there was a publication called *Chatham Life*. Its office was on Hillsboro Street in Pittsboro. When I was a boy it was where Mrs. Harris had her alteration shop beside William Ray Arthurs clothing store. Ted Stone, who was pastor of Bell's Baptist Church in 1958, started that paper. It lasted a few months.

In the autumn months of 1971 some folks in Pittsboro became interested in having a paper of their own,² they said. At that time I was working for the *Chatham News* and *Chatham Record*. I was 23 years old, a veritable child. Lee Powell and Bob Gunn and James Boone, among others, decided that they "wanted a newspaper of our own."

They began to sell stock and approached me with the question, "Would you like to be the editor?" Well, you know, you're 23 years old and you're not real bright and you're wet behind the ears and it sounds wonderful; I said, "Okay." It didn't dawn on me that I was working for Mr. Resch at the time and that he probably wasn't going to like that. I guess I had the idea that I could do them both, like Mr. Lawson when he was at the *Grit* and the other paper.

Friends, starting a newspaper from scratch is a hard business. It ain't cheap. It's a lot of work. You gotta love it and decide you don't want to do anything else in your life. The first week we came out with the paper, I think I went about 48 hours without sleep. And I drafted my wife, and her folks, and . . . it was very hard. There was no profit right away, and investors were not interested in seeing their investment disappear. In time, it became expedient for me not to be there any longer, and Jeff and Linda Starkweather became co-editors. They did a lot of work; they covered a lot of material; they wrote a lot of stories; they did some coverage that had not been done. There were some interesting issues, but it was a very hard time. They were the editors for a while, and after they finally stepped out, Luther Broaddus

Chatham Record

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 1919

Business Opportunities

Carry your Chickens and Eggs to R. J. Moore, Bynum.

Lost, Silver Card Case, with monogram E.B.W. Finder return to Mrs. P. D. Woodall and receive reward. p

Manly Smith will have plenty fish Friday and Saturday and also court week. Take some for the family.

The Pittsboro Herald

Box 754, Hillsboro Street
Pittsboro, North Carolina 27312

Box 694, 125 West Beaver Street
Siler City, North Carolina

Telephone 542-4861 or 742-5631

EDITORIAL STAFF & MANAGERS
Jeffrey Starkweather
Linda Starkweather
Deborah Warren

SUBSCRIPTION RATES ONE YEAR

Inside County	\$4.50
Outside County	\$5.00
TWO YEARS	
Inside County	\$7.50
Outside County	\$8.50

2nd class postage
paid in Pittsboro, N.C.

First place, 1975

Community Service Award

The Siler City Grit

P. H. ELKINS, Editor

Entered at the post-office of Siler City as second-class matter.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One year	\$ 1.50
Eight months	1.00
Four months	.50

Payable in Advance.

REMINISCENCES.

Rev. W. H. H. Lawhon Writes in the
Moore County News.

became the last owner before publication stopped, in 1984.

E. A. R.

The Resch family came to Chatham County in 1939, and began the biggest chunk of community journalism and newspapers in our county since then. Mr. Ellis Archer Resch. Mr. E. A. Resch. E. A. R. His column was called "An E.A.R. to the Ground." He was born about 1904 in Glen Falls, New York, and his parents died soon afterward. He was taken in by an uncle, who was so strict that the boy ran away from home when he was twelve and wound up in Greenwich Village. As he walked through the streets trying to keep body and soul together, he saw a sign in the window of an art studio that said, "Boy Wanted." He opened the door, reached in and took up the sign, showed it to the artist and said, "I'm your boy." Well, the artist took a liking to him and put him to work cleaning the studio and running errands, and let him live in the studio. At about the age of eighteen he went to work at McCann Erickson Advertising Agency. He never went to college. I don't think he finished high school because years later when he took his wife on a trip to New York, he said to her, "I want to show you where I was educated," and took her to the New York Central Library. He read voraciously, just absorbed everything he could read.

He was working with a man who hated New York, who kept saying, "I've had it. I hate it here." And one day he said, "I'm going back to Greensboro," and Mr. Resch said, "You know, I believe I'll go with you." And he did. At age 20 he moved to Greensboro and went to work at the Winston-Salem *Journal-Sentinel*, selling advertising. He also went to work for the radio station WSJS for a while. He went to Atlanta but didn't like the big city, came back to Winston-Salem, and got married. By 1938 had gone to work in High Point as the editor of a furniture trade magazine, where he had met some folks from Siler City in the furniture business: F. J. Boling, Dr. Clyde Thomas, Wade Paschal. In 1939 the *Chatham News* was for sale, and these three men, with two others approached Mr. Resch saying, "Would you like to be a part of this newspaper? It's for sale; we want to buy it; we want a newspaper in our county, in our town." And he replied, "Yes, it's something I want to do; it's the culmination of a dream."

So in December of 1939 he came, first as general manager and very soon as editor. The newspaper reported that he said he wanted the paper to "render a constructive service to the community it serves." The investors never tried to run the paper; they were the investors, and they let Mr. Resch run it. And he did! He was the quintessential newspaperman, except that he didn't have a bottle in his drawer.

The five investors split five hundred shares of stock five ways – they each owned a hundred shares of stock. Within a few years, E. A. Resch had bought all the shares except the ones owned by Wade Paschal, who enjoyed the title of President of the Chatham News Publishing Company. His name and reputation were helpful to the company because during World War II times were tight. With the war going on, money was unavailable and Mr. Paschal's reputation helped the company secure loans for operating expenses and those kinds of things.

During the time Mr. Resch lived in the county he was very active in a number of things: the Rotary Club, the hospital, and other civic groups. He was chairman in the national Rotary organization and spent a lot of time in Chicago. At first the *Chatham News* office was in the basement of what was the old Moore's store. Later it moved to Raleigh Street, across from the Sidewalk Café (except that then it was called Will's Grill), right down from the bank between the main square and the railroad tracks.

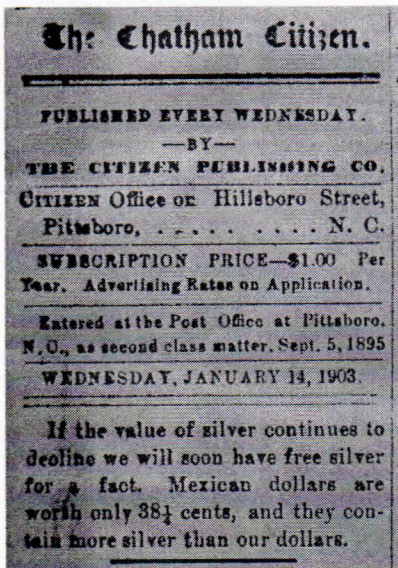
Chatham News used to be printed on Wednesday night. People would line up to get their paper. The legend is told that along about six or seven o'clock folks would start lining up – I mean you either went to church on Wednesday night or you went downtown to get your paper. One fellow used to love to come in the office and tell us, "I've been to the fast-food place and now I've come to get my paper. I'm going to go home and go to bed with nothing on my stomach and nothing on my mind." But he was there every week.

Hence the notion and the importance of community journalism. People would start calling the office at eight-thirty or nine in the morning and ask, "Is it out? Is it out?" Finally, one of our secretaries had someone make a flag that said, "Out," and hung it on the flagpole out front. Still use it; it's still there. I think that speaks to the significance and importance of the *Chatham News*.

After E. A. R.

In 1965 Mr. E. A. Resch had a heart attack. His son Alan had finished high school, finished UNC, and was working in South Carolina as a bureau chief for Associated Press. He came back to Siler City and went to work for his dad, and when Mr. Resch died in 1974, Alan purchased eighty percent of the stock, soon thereafter purchasing Mr. Paschal's shares. The company is still entirely family owned.

In the early days, the *Chatham Record* was a separate paper. Typically it would run six or eight pages. In the 1980s the papers were combined so that they could have more pages. (Remember the first thing I said about "numbers-driven." You gotta pay the bills; you



gotta pay the freight.) The company began to think of them as one paper, and ads were sold based on circulation lists from both papers so there would be enough revenue to cover production costs and salaries and to return a profit.

Through the years there have been a number of changes in our county, of us, changes of our institutions, of our outlooks and attitudes,

and of the characters who come through. And a lot of changes in our newspapers. There have been other papers, of course. Gene Galen has produced the *Chatham Journal*, and he has put it electronically out there for us, and it's there.

W. B. Morgan and Others

There have been a number of interesting people. Many of you will remember the late W. B. – Willie B. – Morgan, who for a long time was the editor of the *Chatham Record*. Mr. Morgan lived where the county economic development commission now has its office. Mr. Morgan walked to his office, which for a long time was in the building between Pete Chason's office and the old PetroMart where they're digging up the gas tanks. Mr. Morgan never drove a day in his life. He never had a driver's license. He would walk from his house to the *Record* office. For a long time while he was editor of the *Chatham Record* he was also the state editor of the *Durham Morning Herald*.³ In the forties and the fifties he would ride the bus from Pittsboro to Durham, do his work, turn in his copy. He carried an old manual machine (typewriter, I mean; it didn't have a case); it would make a good boat anchor today. He pounded out copy after copy. When he did the *Chatham Record* he would ride to Siler City from Pittsboro with the mailman, turn in his copy, wait for the paper to be printed, grab up a handful, and bring them back to Pittsboro. Mr. Morgan was the editor in the forties, the fifties, the sixties, and was still there when I went to work for the company the first time. Mr. Morgan was my immediate predecessor.

Many of you will know the late Doris Horton. Doris was a great journalist in her own right. She couldn't help but be – her father, Carl Goerch, entertained countless generations of North Carolinians. I can remember to this day riding in the back of my mother

and dad's car as we would come home from seeing Great Aunt Sally, listening to his program, "Carolina Chats." And of course, if you remember Doris you remember Cassie, Cassie Horton Wasko, who was a fixture with the papers until she went to work at our county's Council on Aging and died unexpectedly and far too young.

The Outlook for Community Newspapers

Well, a lot of changes happened and a lot is still going on. It's still an economics business, friends, a numbers business. Without the numbers it doesn't exist. As our society changes, as production costs go up to pay salaries and to buy paper and ink and all those things, there are going to continue to be changes. There are very, very few family newspapers left in the state or the nation. The *Sanford Herald* is still owned by the Horner family; the *Chatham News* is still owned by the Resch family; and the *Burlington Times-News* is still [2003] owned by the Boney family. But there aren't many left. I think you're going to see a lot of changes.

When I was managing editor and news editor at the *Chatham News*, people would ask me "How do you decide what goes in the paper?" I used to say, "Well, my motto is 'All the news that fits, we print.'" Some things got in and some things didn't. That's a part of the change. I don't think paper and ink will ever go out of style; there's something about the smell and feel of paper. There's something about the newspaper itself, its power, its knowledge, its information. And that will never go out of style; it will never be replaced by the flat monitor screen or a compact disk. Just try curling up with one of those and a cup of coffee on a cold day.

NOTES

1. *Chatham County 1771-1971*, by Wade H. Hadley, Doris G. Horton, and Nell C. Strowd, 1971.
2. *The Pittsboro Herald*, later *The Chatham Herald* and *The Chatham Herald-Tribune*.
3. Now the *Durham Herald-Sun*.
4. Illustrations from Chatham Historical Museum.

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