

SHOP TALK

ABOUT THE WASHINGTON POST



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1st Century Recounted

By Edward T. Folliard (As it appeared in Special Edition of The Washington Post, October 16, 1972)

One of the big stories in American journalism over the last half century has been the disappearance of so many newspapers, including dailies adjudged at one time to be great.

With this melancholy record in mind, it is refreshing to read an explanation of why a newspaper was born, even if we have to go back 95 years—back to Dec. 6, 1877. That was when The Washington Post first hit the streets.

Stilson Hutchins (1835-1912), the founder, announced his reasons for starting a newspaper in a city already notorious as a graveyard for newspapers.

"The publishers of The Post do not claim to have discovered an aching void. They are grounded in the faith that industry, sound principles, experience and a fair amount of capital will build up a newspaper property in a city which is not only a political capital and an intellectual center but the fairest and most attractive city on the continent..."

In the beginning, The Washington Post was small (four pages), but it was lively, combative and crowded with news and features. Hutchins and his editors and reporters proceeded in the belief, rather novel at the time, that a paper could publish the news without being dull.

Washington was far different in appearance than the world capital of today. Pennsylvania Avenue had a wooden sidewalk, and Dupont Circle was "out in the country." What is now the Federal Triangle, with its great array of government buildings, was known as "Hooker's Division," a notorious redlight district that was a legacy of the Civil War.



Post employees should recognize this famous lady—her picture is among those in the front window of The Post—Alice Roosevelt Longworth.

It was a time of change in which the United States was moving from the "Tragic Era" of postwar Reconstruction to what Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age." Queen Victoria was in the 40th year of her reign, and the British Empire looked as if it would flourish intact for a thousand years. Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, was President, although Stilson Hutchins insisted in The Post that he had no right to be, that his election was "a fraud." In the American Southwest, the Army was engaged in an exasperating hunt for Geronimo and his Apaches.

In those early days, reporters traveled about the city by hack, horsecar, bicycle and on foot—mostly on foot. Alexander Graham Bell had patented his "electrical speaking device" the year before The Post appeared, but it was not yet widely used. Neither was the typewriter. The reporters and editors wrote in longhand, and what they wrote was set in type by hand, letter by letter.

The daily circulation of Hutchins' paper, after a year, was 11,875—Not bad at the time.

Now, as The Washington Post nears its 100th anniversary and settles down in its new building on 15th Street, 80,000 copies are run off for the after-theater crowds and for out-of-town distribution. This is the one-star Capital Edition, a mere warm-up for the presses. Then comes the City Edition run, hundreds of thousands of copies that go mostly to homes of subscribers (including the White House), and which add up to the greatest newspaper circulation in the city's history.

The rise of The Washington Post to pre-eminence in the Capital was not a saga of unbroken triumphs and prosperity. Fortune is hardly ever that kind.

Stilson Hutchins gave The Post a momentum that continued for nearly a half century. Then in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the paper languished and the life almost went out of it. This was partly owing to the Great Depression of the Hoover Administration, but primarily it was a case of neglect and mismanagement on the part of Edward B. (Ned) McLean, known as a playboy publisher. Unable to pay its bills for newsprint, the paper went into receivership and on June 1, 1933, was put for auction.

Eugene Meyer, a California-born banker with a notable record of service in government, bought the stricken newspaper and revived it. He did more than that. Whereas McLean had looked upon The Washington Post as "a pedestal for power," Meyer dedicated it to the public service, saying: "The newspaper's duty is to its readers, and to the public at large, and not to the private interests of its owner."

It was a wreck that Meyer took over, but a distinguished wreck, a famous name in American journalism. In 1888 John Philip Sousa, leader of the United States Marine Band, composed "The Washington Post March," a stirring tune that became an international hit.

A few days after the warship Maine blew up in Havana harbor on April 3, 1898, The Post came out with page-one cartoon by Clifford K. Berryman (later the cartoonist of The Evening Star). Under the cartoon was the line: "If the row comes, remember the Maine." Thus was born the slogan and the battle cry of the Spanish-American War.

Some time after this, Lord Northcliff, the British publisher,



In the audience are D. C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy; Bernetta Washington, wife of the Mayor; and Adele Rogers, wife of the Secretary of State.

made an oft-quoted remark: "Of all the American newspapers I would prefer to own The Washington Post, because it reaches the breakfast tables of members of Congress."

Under Eugene Meyer's guidance, the ailing newspaper experienced a second spring, a dramatic upsurge in circulation and advertising. Nevertheless, he lost money on it, a lot of money, year after year. The answer to this seeming paradox was that there was not room enough in Washington for The Post and its rival in the morning field, the Times Herald; not room enough, that is, if either was to be strong and prosperous.

In the summer of 1948, Meyer and his wife, Agnes E. Meyer, transferred the voting stock of The Washington Post Co. to their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Philip L. Graham. The situation was now quiet different, for the Grahams were in no position to make up for heavy losses.

Graham, a Harvard-trained lawyer, was married to Katharine Meyer in 1940 and later served as an Air Corps intelligence officer in the Pacific theater in World War II. He joined The Post in 1946, soon becoming publisher. A tall, rangy fellow, who was "Phil" to nearly all staffers, he quickly showed that he had a flair for journalism.

Now, as co-owner with his wife, Graham set out to strengthen the economic base of the newspaper. He acquired radio and television stations, WTOP in Washington and WMBR (later WJXT) in Jacksonville, Fla., hoping that the profits from these would offset the Post's deficit. They did offset it, and then some. Meanwhile, the newspaper had outgrown its Gothic-Romanesque building at 1337 E St. NW, its home for 57 years, and Graham moved into a new \$6-million building at 1515 L St. NW.

The Grahams, backed by the Meyers, tried to buy the Times-Herald after Eleanor (Cissy) Patterson, its flamboyant owner, died in July 24, 1948. They failed; the seven Times-Herald executives



Official greetings . . . Katharine Graham welcomes Secretary of State William Rogers and D. C. Mayor Walter Washington.

to whom Cissy left the newspaper decided to sell it to Col. Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the Chicago Tribune.

A battle for survival was now on between The Post and the Times-Herald. Col. McCormick, it turned out, was not as formidable as some expected. The Times-Herald, which he changed into a Washington version of his Chicago Tribune, began losing circulation and advertising to The Post and eventually was running a deficit of something like a half million dollars a year.

Col. McCormick, in poor health and unhappy over the money he was losing on the Times-Herald, decided finally to sell it to The Washington Post. The sale was announced on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1954, and marked a turning point in the history of the newspaper.

Phil Graham always thought of The Washington Post as an "institution," and he had great hopes for it. He wanted to beef up the staff and to open up overseas bureaus. He wanted greater circulation so as to increase advertising and therefore income. He wanted to raise salaries and so hold and attract the best talent in journalism. But these goals, he knew, could be achieved only if the newspaper had a strong economic base and was a consistent money-maker.

Now, with the purchase of the "opposition," Graham was in a position to realize his hope. The circulation of the consolidated newspaper zoomed, and advertising grew apace. Bureaus were opened in London and Paris and a stringer was hired in Rome. A news service was set up by The Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times. Then Phil Graham's exciting, driving career ended with his death in the summer of 1963.

Katharine Graham, who shared her husband's dreams and had some of her own, took over. She was not without experience. After attending Vassar and the University of Chicago, she worked as a \$21-a-week reporter for the San Francisco News before joining the staff of The Post in 1939.

Under Mrs. Graham's banner as publisher, The Washington Post has grown in prestige and has otherwise flourished. Circulation has continued to rise, passing the magical figure of 500,000 daily in 1970, and increased advertising has followed. To the paper have come a number of stars with well-known bylines. Overseas bureaus, besides those in London and Paris, have been opened in Moscow, Tokyo, Saigon, Buenos Aires, and in a half dozen other far-flung cities.

Edward T. Folliard was White House correspondent for The Washington Post during six administrations and since retirement in 1966 has been writing the official history of the newspaper.

The Six Homes of The Washington Post

Excerpted from Article By Robert A. Alden in Special Edition of The Washington Post, October 16, 1972

The Washington Post was first located at 914 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. in a building formerly occupied by the defunct Washington Chronicle. By 1878 the fledgling newspaper had so expanded that it moved into new quarters at 330 Pennsylvania Avenue, the former home of the National Union, a newspaper that founder Hutchins absorbed that year.

As The Post continued to expand, Hutchins leased a lot at 10th and D Streets, N.W. where a handsome new building was completed in August 1880. A fire gutted that building in 1885, but the plant was rebuilt by 1886.

During the period that the so-called Hutchins building was being rebuilt, The Post was published from a four-story structure at 1105 E Street, N.W. and printed by the Evening Star. Samuel H. Kauffman, publisher of the

Evening Star had offered to put the Star's plant at the disposal of the homeless Post so that it could continue publication. The Post accepted the offer and expressed its 'deep and lasting obligation' to the Evening Star in an editorial. Although several enlargements were made to the building at 10th and D Streets, which was razed in 1966 for the new FBI building, The Post continued to expand beyond its facilities. Frank Hutton and Beriah Wilkins, who acquired the paper from Hutchins in 1889, obtained a vacant lot at 1449 E Street, N.W.

There they built the fourth home of The Washington Post that opened on October 23, 1893. The move of several blocks was made over a weekend and The Post missed a Sunday edition in the process. After John R. McLean acquired control of The Post, a wing was added in 1906 to the Gothic-Romanesque building on its east side at 1337 E Street. Two years after Meyer purchased The Post, another wing was added. That one replaced Gerstenberg's Bakery on the building's west side at 1341 E Street. The E Street Post building was razed for a parking lot in 1954.

The Post moved to 1515 L Street, N.W. in November 1950, in a building that was greatly expanded in 1960.

The Post still occupies the L Street building, which is attached to the 15th Street structure. The L Street building was dedicated in January 1951 with Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall giving the principal address."



For those who have forgotten how it used to look . . .

Suggestion Winners Earn \$700

Charles Boyd of Composing won \$50 for his suggestion regarding a modification of the symbols used in mark up.

Claud Burns of Credit and Collections received \$25 for suggesting the use of a form letter to advertisers to aid in identifying transient cash.

Richard Canavan of Engraving won \$25 for recommending the use of a stamp on kromolite ads which gives instructions to advertisers.

Lucille Carter of Advertising Art won \$50 for suggesting that smaller size layout sheets be printed.

Classified's **Ronny Cowan** received \$25 for suggesting a new classification be added to the advertising section for "Patio, Yard and Garage Sales."

Engineer **Stephen Dugan** won \$25 for his suggestion that special trucks be used by engineers in installing new lamps and fixtures.

Classified's **Elizabeth Finos** received \$25 for suggesting a new classification. She recommended that "Antiques" be changed to "Antiques & Collectibles."

Kenneth Gaddy of Composing won \$100 for designing a style sheet for Classified Advertising.

Howard Haines of Composing received \$25 for suggesting the installation of a light switch to call a machinist to paste-up when needed.

Composing's **William Montgomery** won \$200 for designing a test bench for the Linotron 505 and \$25 for suggesting the installation of remote start and reset switches on UTA unit of the Linotron. (Bill just won \$150 in October for another suggestion.)

William Osborne of Composing won \$50 for designing a TV Channels and Potomac organizer.

Electrician **Donald Peppi** received \$50 for his modifications of the chemical processor in Engraving.

Karen Pusey of Classified was given \$25 for suggesting a new classification, "Building Materials and Supplies."

(That's \$1300 won by employees in the last two months. Keep those suggestions coming! Forms are available in each department or in Employee Relations.)