

Tom Bost

Modern news coverage of North Carolina state government and politics could be said to have started with William Thomas “Tom” Bost (1878-1951), who became Raleigh correspondent for the Greensboro Daily News in 1914 and was still covering state government when he died in 1951 after a brief illness.

By the 1930s, Bost was already the “dean” of political reporters, referred to as the “Boswell of state government,” known by office holders and office seekers as a journalist who would be fair and accurate in his coverage of their activities.

Earlier political reporting had concentrated mostly on campaigns and speeches. Bost offered more. He wrote stories about budgets, policies and personalities in government. The General Assembly was his special love, and he set the standard for describing legislation and characterizing legislators.

Bost's reputation for fairness and thoroughness was remarkable. He was fair despite his strong political views. He was an ardent New Deal Democrat. He was thorough though seldom taking notes of the sort that journalists so assiduously collect. His peers marveled at the knowledge he carried in his head and the memory that allowed him to listen to speeches and interviews without taking a note, yet repeat what he heard without error.

Bost also set another standard as both reporter and commentator who could ably address any number of issues affecting North Carolina. His daily column, “Among Us Tar Heels,” addressed politics, history, social developments and anything else about North Carolina that struck his fancy.

Bost's strong religious beliefs made him a lifelong opponent of capital punishment. He attended more than 250 executions out of “religious duty,” trying through his writing of the gruesome details to inspire abolition of the gas chamber.

Born to poverty near Salisbury, Bost spent two years at the University of North Carolina and worked on newspapers in Salisbury, Charlotte and Durham before coming to Raleigh in 1912 to work as city editor for the News & Observer. The desk job didn't suit him, and he took the Greensboro job two years later.

Bost's wife, Annie Kissler Bost (1883-1961), came with him to

Raleigh. Earlier a school teacher and executive secretary of the State Federation of Women's Clubs, she was named commissioner of the state's public welfare system in 1930 and held the post until 1944.

By Roy Parker Jr.
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