

Beatrice Cobb

Her name was Beatrice Cobb (1888-1959), but several generations of North Carolina journalists knew her as “Miss Bea” or simply “Bea.”

The daughter of the publisher of her hometown newspaper, the Morganton Herald, she started a typical early 19-century career for women by teaching school for four years.

But then she went home to work for the paper, and when her father died in 1916, the 28-year-old Bea took up her career as editor and publisher that would last until her death in 1959.

Attending an annual meeting of the North Carolina Press Association in 1922, she found herself chosen secretary of the organization by her male peers. She held that job until her death.

She made over the post into an unpaid nearly full-time activity. She recruited new members from among the state's editors and later, often, had a big say in choosing annual officers for the organization. She modernized the association's newsletter and turned it into a monthly publication. She organized winter meetings in Chapel Hill and summer meetings, usually at resort locations, that became obligatory gatherings for a large portion of the state's journalism family.

Part of Cobb's clout in journalism grew from her political clout. From 1934 until 1952, she served as a Democratic National Committee woman from North Carolina. Beginning in 1928, she attended a half-dozen Democratic National Conventions.

Cobb was influential in Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal as an advisor on allocations to federal agencies in the state. She was the only Southerner on a committee named by FDR to choose a successor to James A. Farley as Democratic National Chairman. As a political campaigner, she had worked with Farley who managed Roosevelt's first campaigns for the White House.

Her deep knowledge about the state's politics and political personalities and her affability made Cobb effective as both public official and editor.

Her newspaper was dedicated to widespread coverage of local affairs and regularly won NCPA awards for public service, reporting, photography, editorials and sports. She hired newsroom

editors and reporters who also took active roles in journalism organizations in the state and carried on the newspaper after her death.

The University of North Carolina recognized Bea Cobb's leadership in journalism and politics by awarding her an honorary doctorate in 1949.

By Roy Parker Jr.
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