

Spencer Murphy

Spencer Murphy (1904-1964) was born into a first family of Salisbury, the son of Pete Murphy, a noted North Carolina political leader famous for his defense of free speech in the 1920s “Monkey Debate” in the General Assembly.

After a busy student career at the University, where he founded the Buccaneer, a campus humor magazine, Spencer Murphy came home to Salisbury to become a reporter for the afternoon Salisbury Post. From then until his death, he was a leading North Carolina journalist. He became editor of the Post in 1936 and executive editor in 1954.

Murphy's editorials were frequent winners of the North Carolina Press Association's first-place award for editorial writing and received national recognition from the Freedom Foundation. He wrote articles for the Saturday Evening Post and the Literary American. In 45, his newspaper was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, for a report on the plight of a widow and her children.

Murphy's perspective on such issues as racial justice and the plight of the poor were echoes of his father's progressive stands. Spencer Murphy was on the executive committee of the North Carolina Social Hygiene Society and a director of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. After World War II, he was an ardent internationalist, a board member of the North Carolina United World Federalists and president of the Citizens Committee for United Nations Reform.

Murphy was also deeply interested in furthering cultural causes. He was president of the North Carolina Symphony Society in the 1940s and a trustee of the North Carolina Library Association. He was also a trustee of North Carolina Central College in Durham, filling an unexpired term of his father's.

His death at 60 was unexpected. The Greensboro Daily News summed up Murphy's contribution: “As one of the ‘Young Turks’ of North Carolina journalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he did much to help re-orient the political and social thinking of North Carolinians. Through his years as columnist and editor, he established a reputation as an independent thinker.”

By Roy Parker Jr.
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