

1971: Sentinel takes a look back at the early years

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sentinel is celebrating its 150th year in 2006 by reaching into our archives to republish some of the noteworthy stories out of the past. The first edition of the Sentinel in Santa Cruz was published on June 14, 1856, and the 150th anniversary was Wednesday. The following story, titled "Sentinel to begin 117th consecutive year of publication" was printed on June 13, 1971 and takes a look at the paper's early history.

By **BILL NEUBAUER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The Santa Cruz Sentinel on Monday begins its 117th consecutive year of publication.

For the past 107 years it has been owned by the McPherson family, and ranks second only to the Sacramento Bee as the

oldest family-owned continuously-published newspaper in California.

The State of California was only 4 years 9 months old when John McElroy, a Mexican War veteran with a big idea and a little Washington hand press, published the first Sentinel on the June 2, 1855, at the Cuartel in Monterey.

The first issue, 20 columns in all, featured on its front page the poem "Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allen Poe.

In a "Prospectus" on an inside page, McElroy wrote:

"The undersigned proposes to publish at Monterey a weekly newspaper; and in the enterprise feels that he must rely on the kindness and cooperation of the citizens of the county, who have long felt the necessity of a public organ. The press is here,

and the publisher will use his best endeavors to produce a creditable newspaper, and such as will warrant and deserve a liberal support; he feels that by this people, so often suffering from adventurers, promises and pretensions are mistrusted, for which reason he strikes out boldly and sink or swim, survive or perish, he will perform his part as faithfully as he can, and hopes to meet the reward of honest endeavor."

A year later, however, McElroy loaded his press aboard the schooner Queen of the West and sailed across Monterey Bay to seek bigger financial rewards in Santa Cruz.

On June 14, 1856, McElroy brought out the first issue of The Sentinel to be published in Santa Cruz, changing the paper's name from the Mon-

terey Sentinel to the Pacific Sentinel.

The first office was in a tiny cottage on lower Mission Street, opposite Vine Street. Subscription price for the Saturday weekly was \$5 per year, payable in advance.

The first issue featured a report on "The Pacific Railroad Explorations and Surveys," an attack on Nicaragua by Costa Rica, and a discussion of the Santa Cruz gold mines.

The United States was then composed of 31 states and California was the only state west of the Rockies. Slavery was the great issue of the age.

During McElroy's ownership, which ended in 1863, the Sentinel reported Abraham Lincoln's nomination and election, the Civil War and the admissions of

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Minnesota, Kansas, Oregon and West Virginia to statehood.

The growth of Santa Cruz as the county seat, aided and abetted by thriving lumber, lime and agricultural industries all around it, was also recorded in the old weeklies, including the historic shift of the business district from the Mission Plaza to its present location.

But McElroy left Santa Cruz in 1863, and the Sentinel had several owners until 1864, when an oxen teamster traded his Santa Cruz ranch for a half interest, then valued at \$900, in the newspaper.

The ex-teamster was Duncan McPherson. Although he had no previous experience in journalism, he was destined to win recognition as one of California's great conservative publishers. On Dec. 9, 1960, he was elected to the California Newspaper Hall of Fame.

Except for a three year tenure as owner and publisher of the San Mateo Gazette in Redwood City, McPherson remained with the Sentinel until his death in 1921.

Under McPherson's leadership The Sentinel became a daily newspaper on April 14, 1884. The paper reported the assassination of Lincoln, the end of the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era, the coming of railroads west, the invention of the telegraph, the arrival of electricity in Santa Cruz and the advent of the telephone era.

Locally, McPherson used his newspaper to battle for street railways and roads, insisting that adequate transportation was essential to community growth.

But perhaps his most impressive journalistic achievement was his battle to save the Big Basin redwoods and to have the area established as a state park.

McPherson opened the pages of The Sentinel to such noted conservationists as Andrew P. Hill and Josephine C. McCrackin, and from 1899 to 1902 he spoke and wrote to urge state purchase of the Big Basin area.

The battle was won in 1902 when Governor Gage signed a bill that created Big Basin Redwoods State Park, the mother of the state park system.

At the time of his death in 1921, McPherson had outlived 17 newspaper competitors. His financial success was attributed to fearless investments in new mechanical improvements. In the early days, for instance, he junked an efficient water-wheel for an electric motor to power the press. His crowning technical achievement was installation of a Linotype, a mechanical marvel that took the endless drudgery out of hand typesetting. The Sentinel's Linotype was almost the first installed in the state in a non-metropolitan newspaper plant. It was bought in 1896 for \$3700.

In 1921 The Sentinel passed into the hands of Duncan McPherson's son, Fred D. McPherson Sr., who was publisher until 1940.

The second McPherson to own The Sentinel was primarily a businessman, according to his son, Fred D. McPherson Jr., present owner.

"He was a good businessman," McPherson Jr. said. "This was a very good thing, for he kept the paper going. Our printing job shop was the money-maker, at that time. We had rough competition from other local newspapers. A.A. Taylor, of the Santa Cruz Surf, for example, was a wonderful editorial writer."

Under McPherson Sr. the daily circulation of The Sentinel began to climb, reaching the 2601 mark Dec. 13, 1926. In that year The Sentinel bought its fourth press, a Duplex flatbed, web perfecting press. Its afternoon competitor, the Santa Cruz Evening News, had a daily circulation of 2600.

During the post-World War I years, Sentinel reporters detailed the continued growth of the city and county, recorded some of the hijinks of the

Romeos and Flappers, the bootlegging operations of the Prohibition era and the coming of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Sentinel also vigorously pushed and publicized the first Miss Santa Cruz and Miss California pageants in 1924 and continued Duncan McPherson's battle for more and better roads.

McPherson Jr. succeeded his father as publisher after the latter's death in 1940, the first McPherson actually trained for newspaper work.

McPherson's first job under his grandfather Duncan in 1919 was as an office boy. He got \$9 weekly for a 54-hour work week. He received a degree in journalism from the University of Missouri, did further study at the University of California, then worked with Universal News Service in New York and as a feature editor of the old Brooklyn Daily Eagle.

McPherson took over just before the United States became involved in the fourth of the great wars The Sentinel has covered. In July of 1941, The Sentinel bought the Evening News, and although newsprint was soon rationed after Pearl Harbor, continued to publish both morning and evening newspaper until 1947, many of the issues containing only six pages.

In 1947 The Sentinel and the News were combined. The afternoon publications were continued on weekdays, the Saturday publication was dropped and the Sunday morning publication continued. A Duplex Standard Tubular press was installed in the old Church Street building in September of 1947, a press capable of printing 20,000 16-page papers per hour.

Under leadership of its third McPherson The Sentinel pushed for community improvements, ranging from Highway 17 to establishment of a University of California campus in Santa Cruz and creation of the Pacific Avenue Mall.

In January 1967 The Sentinel reached another milestone when it moved into its present building and installed an 80-page press.