

James Piratsky chosen for newspaper hall of fame

James G. Piratsky, colorful and forthright editor and publisher of the Watsonville Evening Pajaronian in the first third of this century, has been entered in the California Newspaper Hall of Fame.

Announcement of the honor was made Friday at the annual winter conference of the California Press Assn. during a luncheon session at the Clift Hotel in San Francisco. It was made by Francis Cislini of Salinas, a member of the judging committee. He presented framed certificates, which included a picture of Piratsky, to The Register-Pajaronian and to Mrs. Ralph Lane (Joan Solari) of San Francisco. Mrs. Lane is a great-granddaughter of Piratsky.

J. Howard Sheerin, retired city editor of The Register-Pajaronian, accepted the certificate on behalf of the newspaper. He had known Piratsky in the first years of his own newspaper career.

Sheerin noted that he had first met Mr. Piratsky 49 years ago when he came to Watsonville as a "cub reporter." Piratsky had sold the Evening Pajaronian the year before to Fred. W. Atkinson, then editor and publisher also of the Watsonville Morning Register.

Piratsky had been blind during the last years of his ownership, but continued active in his newspaper's operation nevertheless. And until his death 20 years later in 1949, two months short of the age of 99, he continued his avid interest in events of his city and the world. The newspaper was read to him daily.

From the time he became a "printer's devil" in a San Francisco job shop to his purchase of the weekly Pajaronian in Watsonville in 1901, his career included jobs with San Francisco journals, including the forerunner of the San Francisco Chronicle, work with the Colusa Sun, a period as foreman of the A. L. Bancroft Printing Co. in San Francisco, and an interest in ownership of the Hollister Free Lance. In Hollister, he also became the San Benito County Clerk, Recorder and Auditor, the three-in-one office of that era. From Hollister, he came to Watsonville.

When Piratsky purchased the Pajaronian he acquired little more than a hand press and a case of type. But in 1903 he converted the



James Piratsky

newspaper to daily status and boasted a paid circulation of 600.

Sheerin pointed out that The Register-Pajaronian circulation today is 12,500. The newspaper today employs 100 persons, 26 of them in the news department. The newspaper soon will install equipment by which stories typed by reporters will go directly into print, and this coming summer will be receiving its news report and worldwide pictures by satellite.

These are tremendous changes since Piratsky's time, but he would have been an eager participant in such progress.

In accepting the certificate on behalf of the family, particularly her mother, Mrs. Alene Solari of Watsonville (Piratsky's granddaughter), Mrs. Lane recalled that as a youngster she had been one of those who read the newspaper to her great-grandfather. "Occasionally I'd be anxious to get going and would skip a story," she said. "Invariably that story would be one he would have heard something about on the radio and ask if it was not on the front page."

She introduced her husband, Ralph, a professor of sociology at University of San Francisco, and her brother, Joe Solari, also of San Francisco.

The California Newspaper Hall of Fame was established by the California Press Assn. in 1957. Piratsky's election placed his name among some prestigious figures in the history of California journalism. Among those previously named have been M. H. and Charles de Young founders of the San Francisco Chronicle, James McClatchy of the Bee papers, Henry Kuchel of the Anaheim Gazette, William Randolph Hearst of the Hearst papers, Col. Harrison Gray Otis of the Los Angeles Times, and Charles Albert Storke, Los Angeles Daily Herald and Santa Barbara News and Independent.

Others have been Fremont Older, San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Call, San Francisco Bulletin; Duncan McPherson, Santa Cruz Sentinel; Justus Craemer, San Rafael Independent Journal; Joseph R. Knowland, The Oakland Tribune; and Thomas M. Storke, Santa Barbara News Press.

Besides Cislini, who is a retired business manager of the Salinas Californian, the 1980 judging committee included Carroll W. Parcher, Glendale; George D. Murphy Jr., Mokelumne Hill; Gordon G. Hadley, Arcata Union and Richard Rico, publisher of the Vacaville Reporter.

Rico was named publisher of the year by the California Press Assn. "His own brilliant editorials and news stories, his use of his staff and widespread community influence have created positive action and made Vacaville and its surrounding area a better place in which to live."

The speaker for the luncheon meeting of the CPA conference was Professor Milton Friedman, an internationally known economist, and reportedly one of the economic advisors for President-elect Ronald Reagan. His subject was "Where Do We Go from Here?" Friedman said that the country is sound enough to survive any blunders in economic policy. It is the foreign affairs policy in which we are most vulnerable, he said. He added that the economic policies in effect in 1980 would still rule in 1981; that little progress could be expected until 1982.