



Photo by Michael J. Bryant, San Jose Mercury-News
Frank F. Orr (1914-1985).

Frank Orr, editor of this newspaper since 1949, dead

Frank Fletcher Orr, 70, editor of the Register-Pajaronian for 36 years, died of cancer this morning in Watsonville Community Hospital. He had entered the hospital Monday.

Mr. Orr, whose fame as an editor spread far beyond the reaches of this community, had first been hospitalized Oct. 6. Upon his return home, his physical condition began to deteriorate, and he never returned to his desk.

(The state Legislature upon hearing news of his death today from state Sen. Henry Mello and Assemblyman Sam Farr, adjourned in his memory.)

During a half-century of newspapering, most of it in the Pajaro Valley, Mr. Orr had earned the admiration and respect of his fellow professionals throughout the nation.

Under his leadership, the Register-Pajaronian won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1956. Mr. Orr personally directed his staff's investigation into suspicious conduct in the district attorney's office, and wrote most of the stories that culminated in this newspaper winning the most coveted award in the profession. For that same series of articles, Mr. Orr's "small-town newspaper" also won the prestigious award for public service from Sigma Delta Chi, a society of professional journalists. It was the first time any newspaper had won both prizes in the same year.

But Mr. Orr's reputation did not rest on the accomplishments of a single year, however impressive they might have been. Throughout his editorship, he held himself and his staff to the highest standards. He was recognized as one of the finest editorial writers in the business, and his editorials won

several awards.

An intensely private man, Mr. Orr was more comfortable at his typewriter (later, computer terminal) than in the social whirl. Still, the door to his office was always open, and there were no secretaries or receptionists to buffer him from the people who read his newspaper.

His name was in the telephone book. If that meant midnight phone calls from distressed readers — and it often did — that was part of the job. He was a man of dignity without pretense. He was "Frank" to everybody in the office.

His devotion to the Pajaro Valley was such that he refused opportunities to become editor of larger publications, and even turned down an offer to become editorial director of the John P. Scripps Newspaper Group, to which this newspaper belongs, to remain here.

Mr. Orr had a military bearing, arising from his Army service in World War II. He joined the Army as buck private shortly after war broke out (he fudged by memorizing the eye chart, fearing that his weak vision would fail him otherwise). After completing basic training near Wilmington, N.C., he was selected for Officers Candidate School. Later in the war, as a captain, he was placed in charge of still-picture operations in the European Theater photo detachment.

He was proud of his military service and remained in the Army Reserve after the war, attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel. But he was contemptuous of the "super-patriots" who were so quick to condemn dissidents as "un-American."

Mr. Orr's grandfather, Godfrey M. Bockius, had settled in Watsonville in 1852, and farmed lands where the high school

now stands. The fact that Mr. Orr had roots here was a happy coincidence when he was transferred to Watsonville in 1938 following the purchase of this newspaper by the John P. Scripps Group. Mr. Orr had previously been a reporter for the Santa Paula Chronicle and a Santa Ana newspaper then owned by this group.

Mr. Orr was born in San Diego Nov. 1, 1914, to Frank C. and Priscilla Orr. The elder Mr. Orr ran a photography shop. The son attended San Diego schools and later Stanford University, graduating in 1935.

In 1941, Mr. Orr and Zoe Ann Hill of San Jose, whom he had met six years earlier while both were students at Stanford, were married. They moved into the home on East Beach Street which had been built by Mr. Bockius in 1868 (of redwood from trees near Corralitos) and which had been in the family ever since. Mr. and Mrs. Orr added to the house and restored the old part to its original splendor.

Following his return from Army service in 1946, Mr. Orr, now managing editor, was named editor, in January 1949, succeeding Fred Jenkins (later to become Watsonville's postmaster).

Mr. Orr was a registered Republican in the Earl Warren tradition, but as editor he was as likely to endorse a Democrat as a Republican for office. He was among the earliest of editors to condemn McCarthy and McCarthyism.

He was conservative in the old-fashioned sense: He believed in the virtues of honesty, thrift and respect for traditional values. Yet he fought for the underdog and dispossessed.

Mr. Orr served as Pulitzer Prize journalism juror in 1960, 1961 and 1962. He belonged to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, to the Press, Union League, and Commonwealth clubs of San Francisco, and the Rotary and Elks clubs of Watsonville.

In recent years, unbeknownst even to many of his acquaintances, he did volunteer work, helping the elderly and Hispanics with their federal income tax returns.

Mr. Orr would have completed 50 years in the newspaper business next Aug. 15.

He leaves his wife, Zoe Ann, a sister, Jean Elizabeth Griswold, of San Diego, and a niece and nephew, Priscilla and Frank Griswold.

Cremation will take place. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN
January 31, 1985