

Ward Bushee, 79, dies

Former editor of
R-P left mark on
paper, Watsonville

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

Ward H. Bushee Jr., retired editor of the Register-Pajaronian, died at his Aptos home early this morning after a brief struggle with cancer. He was 79.

Bushee spent all his 43 years as a newspaperman with John P. Scripps Newspapers and 38 of those years at the Register-Pajaronian, serving as managing editor for 33 years and as editor for five years.



Bushee

When Bushee came to the R-P in 1951 it had a circulation of some 7,000 and confined its primary coverage to Watsonville.

When he retired in 1989, he could look back on a career in which circulation had more than doubled and to a list of other accomplishments in which he had been instrumental: the extension of news coverage from Aptos on the north to Moss Landing and Prunedale on the south; the establishment of the weekly Green Sheet (now defunct) that concentrated its coverage on what used to be called "Midcounty," embracing Aptos, Capitola and Live Oak; the move, in 1970, from the old plant on East Lake Avenue downtown to the current location, and the subsequent transformation to offset printing presses and the ultimate computerization of the production of the newspaper; and, of course, the crowning achievement of his years leading the newsroom, the winning of the 1955 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

At the time, the R-P was the smallest daily newspaper ever to have won that most coveted of journalism awards.

But, as Bushee liked to point out, the "Pulitzer business," in which the newspaper exposed a cozy relationship between the district attorney and a Watsonville gambler, took up just a year of the 38 he spent at the newspaper. During those years, the newspaper was chronicling the profound changes occurring in the city and its agriculturally-rich environs as its population more than tripled.

"There are hundreds of reporters at newspapers all around the country who owe at least some of their success to the training they received from Ward Bushee," said Mike Wallace, who started as a reporter for Bushee and eventually became editor of the Register-Pajaronian. "If you started your career at the Pajaronian when he was

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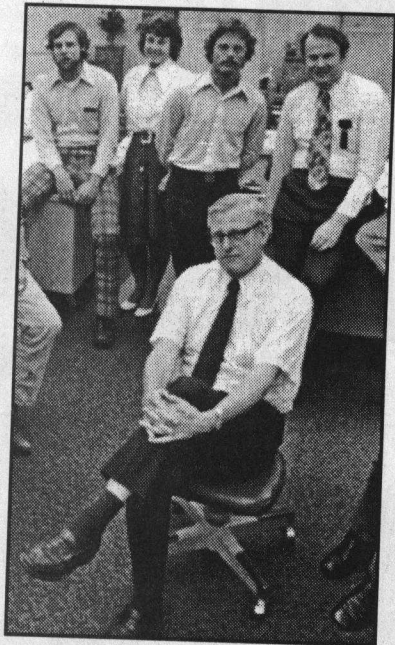
in charge, it was like going through journalism boot camp, but you came out the better for it."

When Bushee first came, Watsonville was still known as the "Apple City." When he retired, the apple orchards (and lettuce and other produce) had yielded to acreage and economic importance to strawberries and cut flowers.

Bushee was born in Holyoke, Mass., on Feb. 22, 1923. After graduating from Putney Prep School in Vermont he enrolled at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, where he majored in textile chemistry. (His father was in the textile business and had gone to North Carolina as part of the movement of the textile industry from New England to the South.) But World War II was on and Bushee entered the Navy's V-12 program, which sent him to Georgia Tech for training.

He graduated as an ensign, was assigned to a fleet tug and saw duty in the Aleutians, the central Pacific and at Okinawa, where the U.S. Navy suffered some its heaviest losses of the war.

When the war ended, he returned briefly to Massachusetts, but soon headed back to California, which had been his stateside "home" when he wasn't overseas. Not certain about a career, he ran



Register-Pajaronian file photo

Ward Bushee sits in the Register-Pajaronian newsroom in this undated file photo. Behind are staff members (from left to right) Bob Smith, Ed Vyeda and Dan Young. The woman is unidentified.

a sort of handyman's business and drove a cab in Carmel for awhile. But, having edited and written for campus publications in college, he decided to take a crack at the newspaper business. He applied for a job at the Redding Record-Searchlight

in 1946 and was hired as a reporter. He had found his calling.

And that's not all he found in Redding. When a congressional committee came to town as part of a tour of national parks and other federal projects, among its staff members was a Maryland girl, Regina (Gina) Gardiner. She caught reporter Bushee's eye and, he being a persuasive suitor, they were married in St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington D. C. on Jan. 31, 1948.

In 1951, Bushee accepted Editor Frank F. Orr's offer to become managing editor of the Register-Pajaronian, which, like the Redding paper, was part of the John P. Scripps Newspaper group. Bushee served as managing editor until Orr's death in 1984, when he was appointed Orr's successor.

"Like all great editors, Ward was curious and always wanted to be the first to know what was going on. If a reporter went out to get a story and didn't come up to tell Ward all about it immediately after coming back — that drove him nuts," said Wallace. "Ward was tough — you have to be in this business — but he was never mean and he always did his best to be fair. I think that virtually everyone who worked with him came away with an appreciation for the fundamental decency of the man."

After retirement, at age 66, Bush-

ee put his still abundant energies to work on the broad range of interests he had apart from his work. He continued to join a group of his friends on annual treks into the remote Sierras, the deserts of Nevada and Arizona, or wherever else their fancies might lead them. He loved to hike and challenged some of the most formidable trails in the Sierras and the Big Sur country.

He spent as much time as possible with his four grandchildren and not the least of his favorite activities was walking on the beach with his black Lab, Lulu.

Besides his wife, Gina, of the family home in Aptos, he leaves, in Cincinnati, Ohio, his son, Ward H. Bushee III, the editor and vice president of the Cincinnati Enquirer; his daughter-in-law, Claudia Bushee, and grandchildren Ward Gardiner Bushee and Mary Standish Bushee; and, in Campbell, his daughter, Elizabeth (Libby) Moussavi, his son-in-law, Houssein Moussavi, and his granddaughters, Regina Elizabeth and Sarah Gardiner Moussavi.

There will be a memorial mass and celebration of his life at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Capitola at a time to be announced. Mehl's Colonial Chapel is in charge of cremation and burial will be private.

Contributions are preferred to Hospice Caring Project of Santa Cruz County, P. O. Box 670, Aptos, CA 95003.