

# THE PALIMPSEST

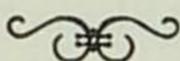
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## History of the Award

Many plaques and trophies adorn the office walls of various Iowa newspapers. The practice of recognizing outstanding achievement for editorial writing, typography, general excellence, news pictures, and other branches of the diverse newspaper field is not new. Iowa newspapers have been consistent winners in regional and national contests and vigorous competitors in the annual contests staged by the Iowa Press Association.

But of all these trophies, none is more highly prized than one which bears the following inscription: "Annual Master Editor-Publisher Award of the Iowa Press Association." By a vote of the Committee of Judges, this award is a recognition that the editor has worked hard, lived honorably, thought soundly, influenced unselfishly, and is entitled to the highest honor in his profession.

The plaque hangs in less than sixty newspaper offices, and nearly half of the men in whose honor it was bestowed have long since departed from this life. Among these latter are the three men who

were the first to receive the award: Harvey Ingham of the Des Moines *Register and Tribune*, Elmer E. Taylor, Sr. of the Traer *Star-Clipper*, and J. F. Grawe of the Waverly *Bremer County Independent*.

The custom of making the award started in 1932. The idea originated with Grant Caswell, then managing director of the Iowa Press Association and himself a winner of the award in 1934. The presentation, in 1951 in its 20th year, is one of the traditional "highlights" of the annual convention banquet of the Iowa Press Association.

The idea back of the award can be expressed in the words with which the late G. L. Caswell described it. In 1932 he wrote:

Since development of newspaper and press organization has brought the newspaper business to the point of a profession and since the schools of journalism have sought to set up standards of editorial and journalistic merit and the management of newspapers has become a science of business efficiency as well as of public progress, it seems to the donor of these awards that active editors and publishers should determine for their own time those who are entitled to the designation of Master Editor-Publisher; that this decision should not be left to posterity or arbitrary opinion. To follow this plan will be to honor their fellow editors and publishers and thus permit them during their lives to receive due recognition that they have worked hard, lived honorably, influenced unselfishly, with a sincere view to the betterment of their communities.

No story of the Master Editor-Publisher award

would be complete without a few special paragraphs about the man who originated it. A former state senator and a publisher from Denison, G. L. Caswell was employed by the Iowa Press Association as its managing director shortly after the Association was organized in 1915. He remained almost continuously with it in that capacity, until his retirement in December, 1937. It was the first time in history that the publishers of any state, alone and unaided, had set up an office and hired a man to run it for the sole purpose of helping them produce better newspapers. Other states have followed suit, and there are now thirty-three which have an active newspaper trade association with a paid managing director or executive secretary.

It can truthfully be said of Caswell, therefore, that his life's work was in the cause of producing better newspapers. He believed that a newspaper should be a vital force in its community. He also subscribed to the thought that without sound business practices it could not achieve that objective. A publisher who could not pay his rent, Caswell reasoned, was not in position to achieve anything, either for the good of his paper or for the good of the community which it served.

The selection of the phrase "Master Editor-Publisher," rather than "Master Editor" or "Master Publisher," was almost inevitable. An "editor," obviously, represents the constructive force which he desired in all newspapers; the "publish-

er," or owner of the invested capital, represents the economic solvency which he believed was a necessary attribute of any good newspaper. In setting up the personal attributes which he wanted in the winners of his award, Caswell chose these words: "to have worked hard, lived honorably, thought soundly, influenced unselfishly." Many newspaper people have one, or even several, of these characteristics; a *master* editor-publisher, Caswell thought, should have all four. And it might be well noted that in listing the various desired characteristics, he puts "hard work" first. Most publishers will agree that whatever else it takes in the newspaper business, hard work should certainly be ranked at the top.

Believing sincerely that while bouquets for the dead are fine, a few flowers for the living would not be amiss, Caswell personally donated the awards during the early years, until relieved of that cost at the insistence of the officers and directors of the Iowa Press Association. Recipients of the award are determined annually by a committee, usually of five, set up along lines prescribed by Caswell. He reasoned that it takes a publisher to recognize merit in a fellow-publisher; therefore a majority of the members of the annual committee are always active publishers. Permanent members are the heads of the schools of journalism at the State University of Iowa and Iowa State College. Professor Leslie G. Moeller of the University and

Professor Kenneth Marvin of the College are currently serving as the permanent members of the committee. They alternate annually as chairmen and in making the formal presentation.

Identity of the remaining members of the committee is never revealed; they are selected annually by the president of the Iowa Press Association. Frequently the committee includes men who have previously won the award and thus, being ineligible for consideration themselves, can view with reasonable detachment the qualities and qualifications of the men who are to join them in what is virtually an Iowa newspaper "hall of fame."

The presence of two semi-permanent members of the committee gives its work continuity from year to year. Nominations for the award are submitted by any publisher or any other person who may desire to do so; the committee may also make nominations. Through the Iowa Press Association's weekly bulletin, publishers are reminded annually of the impending meeting of the committee and that nominations may be sent either to Professor Marvin or Professor Moeller, or to the central office of the Iowa Press Association. There is no dearth of nominations.

Deliberations of the committee usually require several hours, even though most members are fairly familiar with the lives and activities of the publishers who have been nominated. The usual custom is for the committee members to study the

nominations at home, before the actual meeting. On a prescribed day the members will assemble in Des Moines from all over Iowa. The meeting proper begins with a luncheon; as soon as the dishes are cleared, they "have at it."

The author of this article, while usually present for the preliminaries as a representative of the Association, retires before the balloting begins, but he can assert truthfully that the committee scans its list of nominees as carefully as if they were hiring them. Among other things, they are interested in ascertaining how the "home town folks" regard the publisher who is being considered.

While no age limit is set on the winners, it can be observed that the awards usually go to the "older" men of the profession. As one committee member remarked one time, rather grimly, "Before a man gets this award, we ought to make sure that most of his mistakes are behind him!" However, age alone will not win the award, nor lack of age keep a publisher from being considered. Such men as James McCutcheon of the *Mount Vernon Hawkeye-Record* and Paul C. Smith of the *Lyon County Reporter* were in their early forties when they won the nod of the judges.

The committee may name three recipients each year, or fewer, as it chooses. Both daily and weekly editor-publishers are considered. More often than not, the committee names one daily and two weekly publishers, but this is not a "rule," and is

not invariably followed. Only once has the committee given more than three awards, and that was in 1934, when the committee named G. L. Caswell, founder of the award, to stand and receive a plaque, along with W. C. Jarnagin of the *Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune*, William P. Wortman of the *Malvern Leader*, and F. A. Moscrip of the *Marshalltown Times-Republican*.

When Duane E. Dewel of the *Kossuth County Advance* was named to receive one of the 1951 awards, it was the first time that a "father and son" had each won the plaque.

The high standing in which the award is held by those who receive it, and by those who may aspire to receive it, is a tribute to the good judgment of the committees which have made the selections through the years. Once the selections have been made, the names are carefully withheld from the recipient and all others until the evening of the annual banquet which climaxes the state convention of the Iowa Press Association. Meanwhile, between the time that the committee makes its selection and the date of the banquet, the Iowa Press Association's central office is quietly gathering pictures and biographical material, usually with the help and connivance of the wife or some member of the firm or family of each man designated.

It is a tribute to the ingenuity of the wives, that the recipients are almost invariably present for the banquet to receive the award in person. Most

Iowa publishers attend the annual banquet as a matter of course, but when the convention date conflicts with a fishing trip, or a business trip, as occasionally happens, it has sometimes been necessary to enlist the help of the whole family to get the new Master Editor-Publisher to the banquet without letting him suspect that it is to be his "day of days."

It is always a proud moment, not only for the recipient but for his family, his friends, and all members of the Association, when each newly named Master Editor-Publisher is asked to arise and come forward to receive the handsome plaque in the presence of his fellows.

The occasion this writer remembers best is the presentation as it was made at the annual banquet in April, 1948, when the names of Phil Hoffmann and C. S. Walling of the Oskaloosa *Daily Herald* were called, each to receive the award. Mr. Hoffmann and Mr. Walling had been associated together on the *Herald* for over sixty years — a long partnership that in itself is a record — and had brought that paper to a position of eminence in the Iowa newspaper field. The big, packed banquet hall at the Hotel Fort Des Moines has seldom heard a more spontaneous ovation than when these two fine old men arose and with steady steps, arm in arm, made their slow way to the platform.

DON REID