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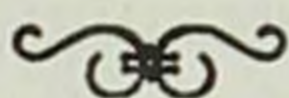
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VOL. XXXIV

ISSUED IN MARCH 1953

No. 3

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## Ralph Shannon

"If you're fond of ham and eggs, take Saturday night baths, follow the baseball scores, and belong to at least a dozen organizations, you are an American," wrote Ralph Shannon in the *Washington Evening Journal* of June 6, 1947. This description does not fall far short of Shannon's own personality, except that one can add a lot more to it by reading his daily editorials, his "Quips," and his "Purely Personal" column, which collectively afford a constant source of delight to readers of one of Iowa's leading small town dailies.

In analyzing Shannon's writings one gathers that he places great store in those pioneer qualities — enterprise, resourcefulness, integrity, courage, and self-reliance. He adores little children, has genuine compassion for the unfortunate, believes wholeheartedly in private enterprise and the American way of life, and detests the profligate squanderer. He loves nature and wild life, has a nodding acquaintance with gardening, and believes implicitly that men should strive to make



their home town the finest place in which to live this side of Heaven. It is the special responsibility of a newspaper editor to see that the latter objective is achieved in his community.

Throughout his life Shannon has worked hard — for himself, his community, his state, his profession, and indeed for all humanity. He hates war (he lost his son "Bob" in World War II) and he hopes and prays for peace. But he is not willing to truckle to dictators for peace at any price. He detests false friends — both at home and abroad. And yet, although possessing a well-balanced international outlook, Shannon is as Iowan as the tall corn that surrounds his community on every hand.

Born on a farm in Washington County on February 1, 1888, Shannon attended the public schools, enrolled in the old Washington Academy in 1906, studied at the University of Chicago during 1908-1909, and worked for a Texas colonization company before becoming permanently identified with the *Washington Journal* in 1913.

He previously (1906-1908) had worked for the *Morning Gazette* and the *Evening Journal*. His love for journalism, coupled with his dislike for traveling in his real estate work, led Shannon to welcome J. Orville Elder's telegram which brought him back to Washington on August 15, 1913, to be co-owner of the *Evening Journal*. Shannon had married Fannie Harwood of Wash-



ington in 1912, and the arrival of a brand new baby was no small factor in determining his future career.

Ralph Shannon believed that many of the simple events of childhood were important in shaping the future destiny of men. To properly record one such event, Shannon instituted his "Purely Personal" column on August 30, 1950. His column touched on the death of an old friend and neighbor, John Sullivan, who had given eleven-year-old Shannon his first job during corn-shucking at 75 cents a day, board and room included.

I never could understand how John Sullivan could afford to pay me 75 cents a day. He probably couldn't either. But I did manage to bring in from 30 to 40 bushels each day (my own estimate), and the kindly praise I got from my employer meant much more to me than the pay — 75 cents a day, however, wasn't to be sneezed at. I can still feel the weight of that silver money in my overalls pocket. It weighed heavily on my suspenders and gave me a sense of independence I haven't had since.

In all of these heavy negotiations my respect for John Sullivan was kept high. And it went even higher as I came to realize the kindly, tolerant attitude he had toward a skinny little kid who was probably more bother around the place than he was worth. He treated me as an equal, never as a boy. And in the long stretch of years since that time I have always remembered it. Funny thing how impressions linger. It isn't too important what you think of that small boy in your neighborhood. The big question is, what does HE think of you?

Shannon became advertising manager when he



joined the *Washington Journal* in 1913. He encouraged ads with a personal touch and they got good results. As long as Orville Elder lived he did the editing but the two men always worked close together. Shannon always considered Elder the finest man he ever knew — bar none.

Shannon's unusual grasp of advertising led the two men to start an advertising promotion service sold all over the nation. It has offices on the second floor of the *Journal* building. The almost fabulous capacity of Shannon was demonstrated when Elder died in 1940 and Shannon took over the editing. Few editors are more widely quoted in Iowa than Ralph Shannon, and few more widely enjoyed by their readers.

Ralph Shannon was a Sigma Nu at Chicago. His son Bill was a Sigma Nu at Missouri, while Bob was a Sigma Nu at the University of Iowa. His daughter, Virginia, is now Mrs. Robert West of Adel. Ralph Shannon has four grandchildren, all of whom he cheerfully admits have played their part in making him a wiser man.

Many professional honors have been won by Shannon. He was elected to membership in Sigma Delta Chi at the State University of Iowa in 1944. He received the "Excellent Writing" Award of the *Des Moines Register* in 1947. He was named Master-Editor by the Iowa Press Association in 1949. That same year the *Washington Evening Journal* received the Sigma Delta Chi's "Distin-



guished Achievement Award for Typographical Excellence." He has served on the board of the Inland Daily Press Association, was president of the Iowa Daily Press Association two years, and in 1953 was serving as president of the Iowa Press Association.

Such are the honors that have been heaped on Ralph Shannon. But his greatest satisfaction comes from his love of the old home town — Washington. And the citizens of Washington reciprocate his deep affection for the community. Local citizens have left over \$1,000,000 for parks, YMCA, a library, a colorama fountain, and a band shell. They raise \$25,000 annually for their Community Chest, and are now promoting a retirement home. Shannon, like Elder, has always said: "A good town will have a good newspaper. . . . A newspaper belongs to the town, and whoever happens to run it is a public servant."

Indeed Shannon himself typifies in large measure the unique spirit of the Washington community. The veteran newspaperman is a strong advocate of community unity. He is ever-willing to share in civic responsibilities, hold offices of trust, and lend his support to all worthy projects that have been introduced for the good of the community at large. And yet he is mild of manner, rather than loud and aggressive. In his quiet way, however, he gets far more done than the noisy fist-pounding editor who too frequently typi-



fies the average layman's concept of a newspaperman.

The people of Washington firmly believe that Shannon and the *Journal* have both served their community faithfully and with distinction. Little wonder that Ralph Shannon should love Washington — just as Washington loves its favorite editor.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN