

George F. Booth (1870-1955)

Evening Gazette, Sep-02-1955

Worcester, Mass., Friday, September 2, 1955

"THE PAPER T

George F. Booth, Publisher, Dies At Gloucester

Funeral Services Saturday At First Unitarian Church

George Francis Booth, Editor and Publisher of The Worcester Telegram and The Evening Gazette and president of radio station WTAG, died late Thursday afternoon at his Summer home, "Stonecrest," Bass Rocks, Gloucester.

He was born in Hartford, Conn., Nov. 11, 1870, the son of William Henry and Eliza (Jackson) Booth. On Nov. 18, 1896, he married Miss Minnie L. Welles of West Warren, who died Dec. 30, 1954.

Mr. Booth's children are his daughter, Doris (Mrs. E. Claire Butler) and sons Howard M. Booth and Robert W. Booth. Howard is General Manager of these newspapers and Robert is General Manager of WTAG.

Five Grandchildren

His grandchildren are Bruce A. Butler and Mrs. Paul V. Weinheimer (Suzanne Butler), children of Mrs. Butler; and Penelope, Brenda and George F. Booth 2d, children of Mr. and Mrs. Howard M. Booth.

Great grandchildren are Elizabeth Page Butler and Constance Welles Butler, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce A. Butler.

Mr. Booth also leaves three sisters, Mrs. Julia A. Spowart of Wallingford, Conn.; Miss Harriette Booth of Hartford, Conn.; and Mrs. Ada A. Dyson of Hampden, Conn.

Funeral Saturday

Funeral services for Mr. Booth will be held at noon Saturday at the First Unitarian Church, of which he was a member. Friends are invited, but the family has requested that they do not attend as delegations and that flowers be omitted.

Calling hours will be from 3 to 5 p. m. and from 7 to 9 p. m. today at Sessions Chapel, 71 Pleasant street.

Leading Figure

From the time he came to Worcester more than 56 years ago, Mr. Booth was a leading figure in the community—in its civic, social, political and business affairs. There were few important civic undertakings in the projection or execution of which he did not have an active part as a leader or adviser. In this connection he was always willing to take on large responsibilities. This was especially noteworthy in public fund-raising campaigns. He was credited with qualities that made for prompt and decisive action.

In politics his advice and counsel were not by any means limited to people of his own political persuasion.

Widespread Civic Activity

No worthwhile civic activity was too small to have his friendly attention, nor was any too large to profit by his know-how, his experience and his perception. This desire to help everything that contributed to the welfare of the community was reflected in the newspapers which he directed. He never abated his efforts to give editorial support and generous news space to countless enterprises undertaken by groups in all walks of life.

Reflections of the esteem in which he was held came to citations, honorary degrees from colleges, appointments to important commissions, trusteeships, pressure to run for public office, et cetera.



GEORGE FRANCIS BOOTH

Continued From Page One

Notwithstanding the heavy demands upon him as editor and publisher, he somehow found time and energy to cope with the wide range of public service tasks that his experience and ability attracted to him. His life was crowded with activities and interests which he was able to meet with zest and vigor.

Lifelong Newspaperman

George Booth was a newspaperman from his youth. The career which was to carry him to a position of influence and leadership among editors and publishers of this country, and bring him honors and responsibilities outside of the publishing field, began in Connecticut. A native of Hartford, he lived as

a young man in Norwich and New Haven, and a job with the Norwich Bulletin during school vacation convinced him that he should devote his life to journalism, instead of the law, which he had also been considering.

Having come to that decision, Mr. Booth gave himself to the task of learning every phase of newspaper work. Always an insatiable reader, especially in history and the classics of literature, he acquired the broad background which was to serve him so well through life. His wide reading was reflected in the frequent and apt quotations that enriched both his speech and writing.

While still in his twenties, George Booth had already filled many editorial and business positions on The New Haven Register, and had become its general manager.

Turn to MR. BOOTH Page Two

(continues)

Acquires The Evening Gazette

He came to Worcester in 1899, and for the more than half century since then his career has been almost a history of journalism in this community. As a member of a partnership which was later dissolved, he bought The Evening Gazette, then a daily of small and uncertain circulation, competing against The Telegram, The Spy and The Post. For some time he had been studying the newspaper situation here, and believed that the conservative Gazette, known to the trade as a "class paper," offered the kind of challenge he sought.

An unsigned paragraph in The Gazette, Oct. 12, 1899, was as follows:

"With yesterday's issue The Evening Gazette passed into the hands of a new company, which will, however, make no radical changes in the policy or the conduct of the paper. The new owners will endeavor to publish a high-class newspaper of the present conservative character of The Gazette, and respectfully ask the cordial cooperation of the people of Worcester in their undertaking."

George Booth, the editor and publisher, was then 29, facing stiff competition in a city new to him.

Yet The Gazette began to gain. The young editor sometimes had trouble convincing callers that he was actually in charge; it was not uncommon for them to ask him if they might see his father. But obstacles and embarrassments were overcome one by one. The paper, which traced itself back to the National Aegis, founded in 1801, and which had taken its present name in 1866, took on new vigor.

Wins Public Confidence

There were no changes in fundamental policy and political leanings, but readers soon discovered that The Gazette reported the news and commented on it, swayed by no other consideration than the welfare of Worcester and Worcester County.

Within a few years the paper had begun to prosper financially as well as professionally, and Mr. Booth was forced to move the mechanical plant and editorial offices from an unsuitable building on Main street, where the Slater building now stands, to Norwich and Mechanic streets.

Handling news desks, guiding advertising policies and methods, writing his own sprightly editorials, and instilling purpose and energy in every department, Mr. Booth had the satisfaction of watching The Gazette continue to grow.

Paper Grows Fast

By the end of the first World War, 20 years after he had come to Worcester, The Gazette had increased its circulation to 35,000, the largest in Worcester. (In 1899 it was officially only a little more than 2200.) Plant and staff expanded with circulation. The circulation by 1919 exceeded that of any evening newspaper in New England outside of Boston and Providence.

Then, in 1921, Mr. Booth sold The Gazette to The Telegram. Five years to the day from the time he sold The Gazette, he and Harry G. Stoddard purchased The Gazette, The Telegram and The Sunday Telegram. Mr. Booth was editor and publisher of the three papers from 1926 until his death.

George F. Booth

Evening Gazette

Sep-02-1955

Part 2 of 4

The combined circulation in 1926, when Mr. Booth and Mr. Stoddard purchased the papers, was 75,000. Within 25 years it had risen above 150,000. After the Worcester Evening Post suspended publication in 1938, The Telegram and Gazette purchased its name and mechanical equipment, and The Post's name was incorporated with that of The Gazette in the latter's masthead thereafter.

National Journalism

In addition to editing and publishing his newspapers in Worcester, Mr. Booth found time to serve his profession of journalism nationally. He was a charter member of the Associated Press upon the re-organization of that news service in 1900, and was active in its affairs for many years. He was elected to the AP's Board of Directors in 1941, and relinquished that honor in 1951. During his directorship he served on the AP's executive and other important committees and was chairman of the special committee for defense against the government in the historic anti-trust suit in 1942. For his service the AP honored him with a citation. He was an organizer and one time president of the New England Daily Newspaper Association.

Mr. Booth was one of the first newspaper publishers in America to recognize the significance of radio as a medium of public communication. When some other publishers and editors expressed alarm lest printing radio programs and radio news would encourage a powerful form of competition, the Worcester editor determined to treat radio as the news development it was.

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When The Telegram and Gazette acquired Radio Station WTAG, he applied to it the same philosophy of community service that distinguished his newspaper work. WTAG, taken over when radio was in its infancy, became an influential station and has maintained its leadership in Central New England.

Interest in Politics

It was intense concern for community well-being that led George Booth to an interest in politics that was, perhaps, second only to his interest in journalism. As a boy, the future editor had elbowed his way to the front seats at home town rallies to hear such eminent political orators as James G. Blaine and Thomas B. Reed. His interest in political affairs never flagged even in the days when The Gazette's publishing problems required his full attention. He believed politics to be the path to good government, and good government to be a primary concern of the newspaper editor.

Just as in the newspaper field Mr. Booth's counsel and help were frequently sought by publishers in other cities, so in politics and government his advice was sought almost daily.

Never Sought Political Office

Yet, although governors and mayors and members of Congress, both Republican and Democrats, confided in him and asked his advice, George Booth never sought paid political office or commission memberships for himself. Nor did he accept such office even when pressed to do so. He believed that political office would compromise a newspaperman's independence.

Attending his first Republican national convention in 1908, Mr. Booth was subsequently chosen as a delegate from Massachusetts to the conventions of 1924, 1932, 1936 and 1944. He was delegation chairman in 1932. In 1952 he was a Republican elector from Massachusetts, and chairman of the group which cast the state's electoral ballot for Eisenhower and Nixon.

Municipal Interests

His lifelong interest in good government expressed itself unceasingly in municipal affairs. Under the two-party system of the old city charter, he generally threw his support to Republican candidates. But there were occasions when he deliberately refrained from supporting any candidate.

Mr. Booth was one of the early champions of a new charter for Worcester, and shortly after World War II he espoused the cause which resulted in an overwhelming victory, in a 1947 referendum, for Plan E with proportional representation. Despite his long interest in party affairs, he was thoroughly convinced that party politics had outlived its usefulness in municipal government. Since Plan E was established in the city he had been identified with the staunchest believers in council-manager government, and had lent his voice also to the effort to make it available to more towns throughout the state.

Civic Tributes

The Worcester City Council, on March 15, 1950, adopted a resolution thanking him for his efforts on behalf of good government, praising the "stalwart and genial leadership" of the "dominant personality of our city."

George F. Booth

Evening Gazette

Sep-02-1955

Part 3 of 4

On March 30 of that same year, Mr. Booth received the first annual Isaiah Thomas Award, established by the Worcester Advertising Club as recognition of "distinguished community service."

On Oct. 4, 1951, Mr. Booth was surprised to find himself the subject of a testimonial by the Worcester Housing Authority at the dedication of the new Great Brook and Curtis public housing developments. The honor was conferred at a luncheon, with an address by Roman Catholic Bishop John J. Wright, and cited Mr. Booth as "a true first citizen," because of his support to the Authority in its programs for public housing development.

Throughout Mr. Booth's career there was an unceasing round of such civic services, going far beyond the responsibilities of newspaper editing and publishing.

Led Fight for Water Supply

For many years he led a fight for an adequate water supply in Worcester, arguing that the city's inevitable growth and its rising volume of industry and domestic water use made expansion imperative. From 1924 to 1926, he was one of three members of the Metropolitan Water Supply Investigation Commission, created to study future water needs of Greater Boston, with reference as well to Worcester and other cities affected. That commission not only recommended that Worcester develop its own water supply, but foresaw the

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time, a quarter century later, when the Metropolitan District Commission would have financial trouble making its own system financially sound. From his detailed knowledge of Worcester's water needs, he long favored increasing the city's water storage with the Quinapoxet dam, finally completed in 1953.

Service in Tornado

One of Mr. Booth's outstanding and most strenuous public services followed the tornado which devastated parts of Worcester and neighboring towns on June 9, 1953. Although under physician's orders at the time not to undertake extra exertions, Mr. Booth accepted appointment from Governor Herter as chairman of a three-member Central Massachusetts Disaster Relief Committee, Inc., which raised and distributed about two million dollars to assist tornado victims.

Service for Youth

From 1910 through 1926, he led a program to expand the city's playgrounds and park facilities, and served as chairman of the Playgrounds Commission and the combined Parks and Playgrounds Commissions for many years. He was first president of the Worcester Area Council of Boy Scouts, and served as president of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1920 through 1923.

Besides leading many separate campaigns for funds, he was one of the founders of the Community Chest and was one of its most energetic figures in every annual campaign. He was a trustee of numerous institutions and organizations, including Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester Academy and The Memorial Hospital. His memberships include a long list of clubs and associations, in Worcester, New York, Boston and Washington.

George F. Booth

Evening Gazette

Sep-02-1955

Part 4 of 4.

Mr. Booth's favorite outdoor recreations were fishing and golf. He and Mrs. Booth maintained a Summer home, "Stonecrest," at Bass Rocks, Gloucester.

As a public speaker Mr. Booth was in constant demand, but in late years had been forced to decline speaking engagements.

In recognition of his distinction as a newspaperman and of his public services, he had honorary degrees from Williams College, Clark University, Assumption College, Suffolk University of Boston, and Worcester Tech. Williams College named him Master of Arts in 1939; Tech made him an honorary Doctor of Engineering in 1940; Clark, Doctor of Civic Leadership in 1945; Suffolk, Doctor of Journalism in 1950, and Assumption, Doctor of Humane Letters, in 1954.

The Evening Gazette

Worcester Evening Post acquired Oct. 1, 1938

H. G. Stoddard, President; George F. Booth, Editor and Publisher

Sep-02-1955

The Gazette is an Independent Newspaper, Not a Political Organ, and Maintains What It Believes to Be the Rights of All the People All the Time.

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Page 6 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1955

George F. Booth

A LIGHT has gone out, and there are shadows of grief in many hearts across the nation. In his home city of Worcester, that sense of loss is very great and personal because of his unusual relationship with those in every walk of life.

During more than fifty years in his chosen profession, climbing from the bottom rung of the ladder to the top, he attained a standing of the highest order with his close associates and also with those nationally known in the field of journalism. He received high honors in many newspaper organizations.

His advice was often sought by great and small. Certainly no one in his profession stood higher in respect and admiration in the region of his principal activities—New England.

He was a statesman in the truest sense. His door was never closed to the many who sought his counsel and support on local, state, and national problems.

FRIENDLINESS and consideration marked his character, and yet he had the courage to take whatever position he believed right on controversial problems.

Beyond this field he gave of himself to every call for guidance and assistance, to every movement in our city for the benefit of its citizens. His interests covered every area of civic, religious, educational and philanthropic activity.

There will be an empty chair at many conferences seeking solutions to the problems in these fields, where he had been a real power, but without pride or arrogance.

But beyond all of this, his associates were always amazed at the time and the friendly, practical attention he paid to requests of every nature for assistance to individuals. Untold numbers will rise up to call him blessed.

With all these vital characteristics, he had an unusual spirit of friendliness. No difference of position restricted this outgoing spirit.

An unusual sense of humor and talent for repartee were his. In informal gatherings he was the spark plug, and reveled as much in the friendly jokes pointed at him as in those affecting others.

IN ALL the fields of activity affecting our city in this first half of the Twentieth Century, he was a leader. What a period this generation has been in development of every nature! The contributions of people like George F. Booth cannot be overestimated.

His passing is a great loss because of his contributions to every endeavor of importance to this community. No one has reached his position in knowledge of the people and institutions of our city. Sad it is that his busy life prevented an autobiography. What a story that would have been!

Beyond his business and professional accomplishments stands his personal relationship with so many. He gave of himself far beyond the call of duty.

A Christian gentleman, he certainly represented truly the man who "lived in the house by the side of the road, and was a friend of man."

H. G. Stoddard