

From the left — for a decade

Resurrected North Coast Times Eagle turns 10

By DAVID HARLAN
Of The Daily Astorian

Maybe Spiro T. Agnew said it best.

When the former vice president — in a brief moment of relative lucidity during a 1970 speech in San Diego — branded some of the more outspoken voices among the dark forces of liberalism as “nattering nabobs of negativism,” he might as well have been referring to Michael McCusker by name.

“I wear the triple N with pride,” said McCusker, as he prepared to publish the 10th-anniversary issue of the North Coast Times Eagle, that eccentric combination of prose, poetry and liberal politics he has published and edited on something less than a shoestring for the past decade.

The monthly alternative newspaper was rekindled in its present form on July 20, 1979, following McCusker's return from a short stint as a Guam-based copy editor for the Pacific Daily News of Honolulu.

“This was a terrible newspaper,” he recalled. “They were very right wing. They revered the memory of Chiang Kai Shek.”

THURSDAY WAS ALSO the 20th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of the original Times Eagle in Wheeler, as well as humanity's first visit to the surface of the moon.

McCusker was 37 and had spent roughly 15 years in and out of the newspaper racket when he churned out his first issue of the Times Eagle.

“I put out the paper and then I went home, watched ‘Lou Grant’ and said, ‘Me and you, Lou,’ ” he remembered.

A decade later McCusker is still waiting on one more thrill: turning a profit.

“The NCTE has yet to break even on a single issue, a ten-year record which surely must be worth a category in Guinness,” he editorializes in the current issue of the Times Eagle.

The blame, McCusker says, lies largely with himself. Advertising sales — the lifeblood of any newspaper — are not one of his long suits, despite a small but loyal core of advertisers.

“A newspaper to me is accidentally a business,” he says. “I would really honestly rather wash dishes than sell ads.”

McCusker has washed his share of dishes during a decade of holding down a series of outside jobs to support his monthly publication habit.

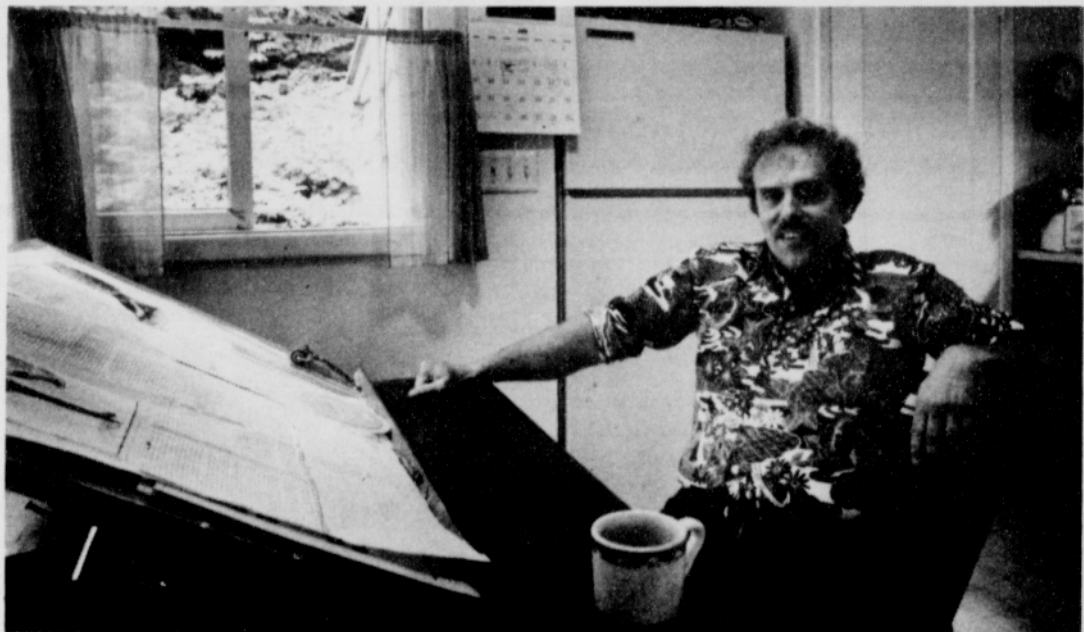
“Shooting one's mouth off does have its penalties and I guess washing dishes and hauling garbage is part of that,” he says.

“**BUT IT'S WHAT** I want to do,” he adds. “It just means a lot to me to put out a little rag where I can print my heresies under my by-line.”

The physical process involved with accomplishing that on a monthly basis is anything but modern.

Copy for the paper is set on a hulking and cantankerous 1952 IBM Executive, an ancient electric typewriter that can take anywhere from 15 minutes to a half hour to warm to a semi-operable state. The space bar sticks for several long seconds before delivering the desired result with a perfunctory clunk.

Warmth is a necessity when McCusker applies his fingers to the keyboard of the aged Executive.



The Daily Astorian—DAVID HARLAN

Michael McCusker publishes the North Coast Times Eagle out of his Astoria home.

“I have to have the temperature sub-tropical. It has to be at least 100 degrees for it to work,” McCusker claims.

The metal monster survived an April 25 fire that left McCusker out of doors and threatened to put an end to the Times Eagle before its 10th birthday.

McCusker is at least as resilient as the old IBM.

A Los Angeles native, he started his newspaper career “as the oldest copy boy in California” with the Independent Star News of Pasadena.

“**I STARTED THE** day Kennedy was killed,” McCusker recalls.

After a short and boring stint as sports editor of an area weekly, McCusker joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966 and headed for the far shores of Vietnam.

His year as combat correspondent earned him three writing awards and some indelible marks on his memory.

Those awards landed him a staff position with The Associated Press in Fargo, N.D., when he returned, a job he later lost because of his less than popular views on the war effort.

After short stints with several other news organizations and helping to found Vietnam Veterans Against the War, McCusker came to Oregon for the first time as part of the 1968 presidential campaign of Sen. Eugene McCarthy.

After he came back for a second look he went to work for the original North Coast Times Eagle in 1971, splitting his time between the newspaper and the more profitable pursuit of commercial albacore fishing.

Dissatisfied after the newspaper changed hands, McCusker was lured away to become a copy editor on Guam. The Times Eagle, meanwhile, quietly died.

WHEN THE JOB on Guam failed to live up to expectations, McCusker decided to return to Clatsop County and reincarnate the monthly publication.

Social injustice and environmental responsibility are recurring themes in McCusker's writings. Democracy and capitalism — two decidedly different concepts in his point of view — have become indistinguishable in modern American society, he argues. The



A 1952 IBM Executive is McCusker's vehicle for bringing the Times Eagle to its readers.

Democratic and Republican parties are too similar in their stands on too many issues to suit McCusker's tastes.

“You just can't make good choices unless you have choices,” he says.

Giving people alternative sources of information is what the Times Eagle is about, McCusker said.

“There are people who really disagree intensely with me but who realize and appreciate the First Amendment,” he says. “I know people who say they get the paper every month to find out what the commies are up to.”

Available at a number of local shops and restaurants, the Times Eagle serves as an important forum for many members of the North Coast community who have kept faith with the beliefs of their less settled pasts, McCusker believes. Many of the articles printed in the paper are written by its readers. Its readers are also the source of the poetry it prints.

See Times Eagle, Page 14

On the cover

Editor and publisher Michael McCusker displays the 10th-anniversary issue of the North Coast Times Eagle, festooned with the words “The Eagle Has Landed.” The photograph is by David Harlan.