

A VOICE RENEWED

THE BIRTH, DEATH & REBIRTH OF THE SCREAMING EAGLE



THE BALD EAGLE: LAQUERED PASTEL ON WOOD BY ROBERT TURNER (1985),
COMMISSIONED FOR THE NORTH COAST TIMES EAGLE BY LEE ANNE KELLY-JONES

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"The Eagle has landed!"

~U.S. ASTRONAUT MICHAEL COLLINS
(July 20, 1969)

The North Coast Times Eagle presents itself to the people of the North Oregon coast as an instrument through which their separate and collective voices, irrespective of creed, color, political bent, age (literal and figurative) may speak out in determination of their own future. If it is not to be the Times Eagle who shall perform this trust, then surely others will inevitably come forth. If it is to be the Times Eagle, then let the editorial staff of this newspaper take now and here a solemn vow to uphold its flag motto 'To Serve All People' and further to establish but one single editorial policy, to preserve, proclaim and protect the Truth.

~ROBERT STANLEY NEED
(NCTE, VOL. 1, NO. 1, MAY 13, 1971)

At the end of the Lewis & Clark Trail is the North Coast Times Eagle. Its biography is bicameral like the human brain and the modern calendar, divided into the early era of the Old Bird and the contemporary Born Again Bird raised from a three-year crypt (with various smaller deaths and resurrections), which celebrates its silver anniversary with this edition. A pioneer past of Conestoga wagons and a celestial future of starships straddle its double life.

The Times Eagle was reborn July 20, 1979, ten years to the day after a human spaceman took a small step from his spacebird and declared the sterile moonscape that surrounded him, "a magnificent desolation." The paper Eagle's first front-page bannerline verbatim a message flashed to the world from space when the moonlander Eagle struck the lunar surface: "The Eagle Has Landed." Beneath the banner an American Bald Eagle glared fiercely out at the world.

The Times Eagle reawakened into its own desolation, a planet swarming with billions of busy ambitious creatures who recklessly despoiled Gaia in dogged resolve to transform Terra into their own hubris. A few of the species impoverished the many yet strangled on the effluents of their affluence. Half of humanity was at least underfed. Millions killed each other or planned to. Little has changed a quarter of a century later at

the advent of a new millennium: the world far and near has proceeded with its usual human melodrama of wretchedness, poverty, squalor, ignorance, needless tragedy, injustice and wanton slaughter; and a few laughs. The mainframe of human life remains essentially as it has been for millennia despite influxes of a parallel virtual reality. The new century/millennium begins with a worldwide war of horror and terror that seems to target everybody against anybody, and vice-versa. As usual, truth is the first casualty.

Persistent efforts by government and powerful elites to control public dialogue, particularly in matters of political dogma and social behavior, have always been dangerous and usually the guise for arbitrary usurpation of the apparatus of communication. Realization of this led directly to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states clearly and simply that neither government nor anyone else has the right to deny or interfere with freedoms of speech, press or religion, or with public gatherings. (Article 1, Section 8 of Oregon's State Constitution is even more insistent: *No law shall be passed restraining the free expression of opinion, or restricting the right to speak, write, or print freely on any subject whatever; but every person shall be responsible for the abuse of this right.*)

The genesis of the Times Eagle, and every other independent newspaper in the USA, began on July 4, 1776 when the world's most famous press release was endorsed by a rebellious crowd that was in revolt against King, Crown & Mother Country. Two days earlier the breakaway republic's revolutionary Congress had unanimously voted to sever Atlantic America's 13 British ruled colonies from its European sovereign, a day James Madison and John Adams claimed would live in the fledgling nation's heart in perpetuity. Instead, the day the fervent Declaration of Independence was first made public is celebrated as the USA's birthday (this July 4 we are 228).

A cornerstone of the subsequent bloody revolution was that not only would Americans be independent as a newly formed nation but that each person was a citizen of a republic, which reflected a fear of the founders that both aristocracy and the masses provoked separate but equal problems. A free and unconstrained press was recognized as essential and for more than a century American journalism was robust if partisan, until 20th century journalism moved away from political feuding to promoting a corporate/industrial status quo under the rubric of "objectivity." The press itself became a huge corporate conglomerate of print, radio, television and Internet now called 'The Media'. The contrariety press was relegated to the fringes and has generally acted as the mouthpiece for radical and esoteric political (and neo-theocratic) causes: it is called the alternative media (lower case).

A few thousand low-profile publications constitute the alternative media in the USA (which includes 'zines') — and perhaps half as many independent listener sponsored radio stations such as KMUN-FM in Astoria and KBOO in Portland — and they operate on the cutting edge of political, environmental, cultural and ideological controversies providing fresh ideas and insights that mainstream megamedia, initially reluctant to jeopardize its profits by espousing change or radical concepts, later trumpet as their own when some of the ideas catch on. Without an independent press journalism is hardly more than an artfully deceptive method of misleading the public, of providing illusions and deceptions to thwart public response to the chicaneries and jingoism of the corporate/capitalist class which regards itself as the country's rightful aristocracy despite the admonition of history.

The independent press in the USA and all over the world provides an indispensable forum for the exchange, analysis, synthesis and arguments that are the basis of any culture or society. Their objectives are in microcosm the same as are debated everywhere on Earth: to assist in the eradication of sexism, racism, poverty and war, and to document the dooms and glooms, the perversities and horrors (rarely the triumphs) of our busy illtempered species. Occasionally a maverick, limited distribution publication can reach into the heart of the nation. I.F. Stone's Weekly, for example, profoundly influenced a generation opposed to racism and a vicious corrupt war, and was the archetype for numerous other journals.

Although it is as difficult to project as well as portray the cumulative history of a nation or a people through a single individual, it might be rational to attempt a history of media through a particular newspaper. In the case of the Times Eagle, the history it projects is a local and out at the edge projection of journalism that might seem paradoxical if not antithetical to mainstream media, which claims its history the center stage of American journalism.

The first issue of the original incarnation of the North Coast Times Eagle was published in Wheeler, Oregon on May 13, 1971. The original newspaper was a weekly that lived five years, from 1971 to 1976. It was a good newspaper, irreverent and raffishly honest with the courage of an Androcles among the lions, seldom cowed by power brought against it. Yet it perished wretchedly and in disgrace, terminally in debt and spiritually compromised. Its founder and first publisher, Robert Stanley Need, was a prickly dreamer who erratically battled for political and social justice. His successor was a charismatic crook who manipulated the paper's reputation for honesty and poverty to defraud staff and contributors.

After its death a former Times Eagle reporter, John MacCormack, wrote a long epitaph. He described the Times Eagle as a "renegade Oregon weekly that for nearly five years rained a fiery, strange synthesis of populist journalism and outrage on a 100 mile stretch of the North Coast from Astoria to Lincoln City. It was a paper that consumed 200 staff members in less than 300 issues, that championed the most arcane and libertarian of human endeavors, that would have been labeled 'Underground' had it not been so far from conventional that Underground was a title too wishy-washy to apply. It was a publication that strove to be so 'honest and independent' that it frightened away advertisers by the carload. It was a paper that lived a hand to mouth, day to day existence, that was waylaid at each turn by adversaries both real and imagined, that was fueled by an odd combination of heady idealism and skittish paranoia and that collapsed under the weight of its own pervasive ineptitude."

Any attempt to understand the history of the primal Times Eagle must begin with its founder, first publisher and editor, Robert Stanley Need, an orphan of French descent who trekked to the Oregon coast after service in the U.S. Air Force and the Vietnam War. His name was its own metaphor: his consummate need was to impress his own notions of right and wrong on the society that surrounded him. His purpose was to be a roaring mouse challenging the Philistine mainstream press that he considered false and cowardly. He wrote fervidly against lies and deceptions that most people accept or accommodate. For nearly five lean and stormy years he published a feisty, rashly eccentric newspaper patterned in style and design after the independent newspapers of the 19th century. He employed about 200 kindred and generally unpaid spirits who stayed as long as they could endure hunger and his Napoleonic nature. He and another Vietnam veteran started the Times Eagle in the spring of 1971, and almost immediately the newspaper was in hot water. Need began receiving threats to his health and his partner, pleading family considerations, withdrew from the paper.

Need published the Times Eagle until another friend he had asked for help betrayed him and forced him out. During those years he developed one of the best and most reputable newspapers in the country. The Times Eagle never made much money, never enough to pay the staff or the rent, and its readership never exceeded 5,000; but they lived all over the world. He took great risks. He was not afraid of being considered a traitor or a fool and he never played it safe. He was a raw independent who believed passionately in the First Amendment. He was assisted by a revolving staff, mostly young and idealistic, who virtually slaved under his caustic tyranny and left only when their brains burned out or their bodies craved nourishment. More than once he was left alone to get the newspaper off the press and out on the street by himself. Finally he too burned out and a year after he was ruthlessly shoved aside the old Eagle died.

He was an intense, erratic man whose psychological makeup was indistinguishable from his personal identification

CONSIDER US

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a 13 year old girl. I live in Portland. I read your newspaper, the North Coast Times Eagle.

I like your paper but I wish you could make a special column for the younger ones, something we would be interested in.

~TONI LINTON
(NCTE MARCH 1987)



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