

Chessman was a courageous publisher

Obituaries are good reading. Every life story tells us something about the era from which the deceased came.

The obituary of Robert Chessman Jr., published here Sept. 9, omitted an important detail. Chessman was the grandson of Merle Chessman — publisher of this newspaper and its predecessor for 30 years. He was also the person for whom the Astoria-Megler ferry, the M.R. Chessman, was named.



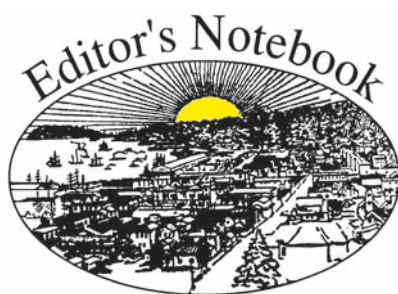
Steve Forrester

The deceased's father, Robert Chessman Sr., was also our newspaper's publisher for 12 years, ending in 1959.

Merle Chessman was my grandfather's business partner and journalistic colleague. I grew up knowing about the Chessmans, but never meeting them. I rode the M.R. Chessman. Being out on the mouth of the Columbia River on that vessel was quite a thrill for a kid from Eastern Oregon.

The Sept. 9 issue that carried Robert Chessman Jr.'s obituary also carried a historical item about his aunt, Peggy Chessman Lucas, who was Merle Chessman's daughter. Ten years ago, Lucas died at the age of 90. She had been the oldest living Regatta queen. Because of the Depression, the Regatta could not afford a tiara for Peggy, so they did a one-day rental. When Peggy returned for the 1998 Regatta, she was presented with a new tiara from Loop Jacobsen Jewelers.

Merle Chessman was a very important figure in Astoria's pre-World War II life. My appreciation of the man's dimensions have deepened since reading a draft of William Willingham's history of the Astorian and its sister newspapers and owning families.



To get through the worst of the Depression, the Astoria Daily Budget issued its own scrip, called Budget Beaver Pelts.

The Portland historian's chapter on the Great Depression conveys the extreme measures the Pendleton and Astoria papers took when small towns faced a liquidity crisis. "To get around the lack of cash when the banks closed, Merle Chessman adopted a novel approach," wrote Willingham. "The Astoria Budget issued its own scrip, known as the 'Budget Beaver Pelts.'" As Chessman explained, "It was just a temporary expedient but it worked out very well. We're getting some bills paid thereby which would be unpaid as yet. We issued 50 per cent of the payroll a week ago in scrip and 25 per cent today and also paid the carriers 50 per cent. In all we have issued about \$650 in scrip and it is returning to us at a lively pace. Practically all of the business houses accepted it at face and numbers of them gave back cash change. We do not expect to continue it." (Mar. 18, 1933, EO Archives).

Merle Chessman's brush with history was facing down the Astoria Ku Klux Klan, which ran an anti-Catholic campaign in the municipal election of 1922. The Klan pressured my grandfather in Pendleton to fire

Chessman. He did not accede to the Klan's appeal. Chessman's courage was noted in the eulogy delivered by the Rev. Philip B. Lewis, pastor of First Presbyterian Church. Said Lewis: "(Chessman) struck hard at the roots of intolerance and we were knit together as neighbors."

The Klan struggle is quite a story. Sandra Haarsager tells it well in *Eminent Astorians*.

In correspondence with Robert Chessman Jr., two years ago I realized he was unaware of that book. I am hoping that his children have it, so they know of their great grandfather's legacy.

In the early morning hours of Dec. 8, 1922, as the great Astoria fire raged, Chessman sprayed water on the roof of the newspaper's office in the 1100 block of Exchange Street. At some risk to his life, he stayed up there until ordered out of the fire zone.

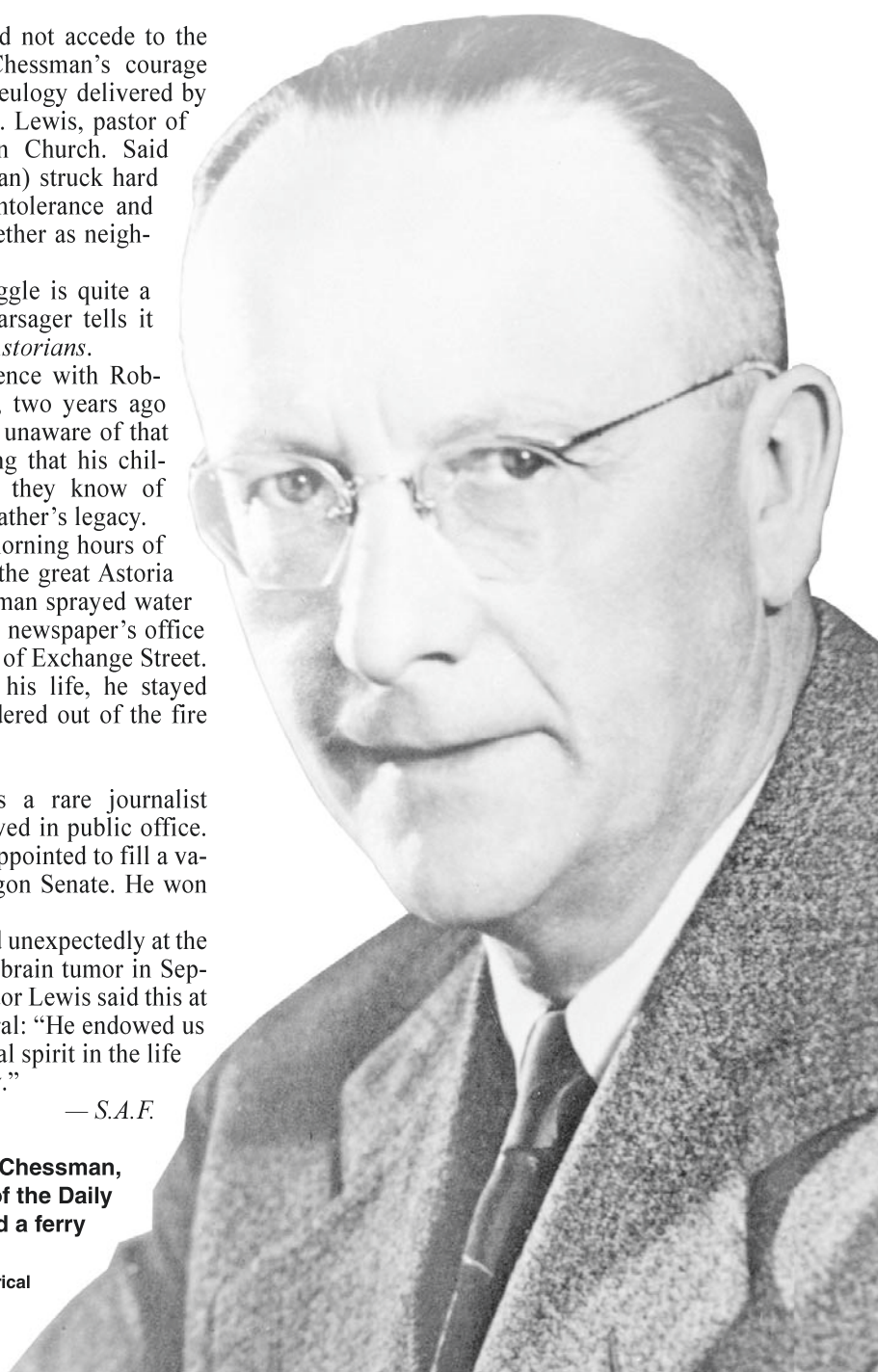
Chessman was a rare journalist who also served in public office. In 1942, he was appointed to fill a vacancy in the Oregon Senate. He won re-election.

Chessman died unexpectedly at the age of 60 from a brain tumor in September 1947. Pastor Lewis said this at Chessman's funeral: "He endowed us with a monumental spirit in the life of our community."

— S.A.F.

Portrait of Merle Chessman, who was editor of the Daily Astorian, and had a ferry named after him.

Clatsop County Historical Society/Donated by Steve Forrester



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

This house on the 1100th block of Grand Avenue was Merle Chessman's home.



When Astoria banks closed during the Great Depression, The Astoria Budget issued Budget Beaver Pelts, a scrip that was designed to increase liquidity in the local economy. Budget employees were paid in the scrip. Local businesses could use the scrip to buy advertising in the Budget.

At debate, Republicans talk the talk

By GAIL COLLINS

New York Times News Service

Our national attention span is ... short.

The Republican presidential primary debate on Wednesday was ... long.

Really, if you throw in the earlier loser debate, it was the longest ever.

The Lincoln-Douglas debates would go on for three hours. But that was back when in many towns, the most exciting public activity of the year was pole-raising.

Are people going to remember the shallow, sassy Donald Trump from the first half-hour? ("I wrote *The Art of the Deal*. I say not in a braggadocio's way I've made billions and billions of dollars.")

Or the middle-section Trump who clearly didn't have a clue about how to critique President Barack Obama's Syrian policy? ("Somehow he just doesn't have courage. There's something missing from our president.")

And then there was the completely, unbelievably irresponsible Trump of the finale who claimed he knew people whose daughter got autism from a vaccine shot. (This happened, he said, to "people that work for me just the other day.")

Remember when the vaccination



Gail Collins

issue destroyed Michele Bachmann's political career? One can only hope.

Of course everyone wanted to hear Jeb Bush take on the front-runner. Smackdown! Bush got his opportunity very early. Where would he go? Immigration? Taxes? Foreign affairs?

Bush accused Trump of giving him campaign donations in order to get casino gambling in Florida.

"Totally false," said Trump. "I promise if I wanted it, I would have gotten

it."

Do you think that's what Bush was practicing over the last couple of weeks? There were six or seven people on the stage who sounded more forceful than he did. A recent poll in Florida suggested that only 52 percent of Florida Republicans want their former governor to continue running for president. At times on Wednesday, that seemed like overenthusiasm.

Bush perked up a little in the middle, when he volunteered that he'd smoked marijuana in his youth. Then at the end, when he was asked what woman he'd like to see on the \$10 bill, he said ... Margaret Thatcher.

Nobody wanted to deal with the global warming issue. Virtually everybody made up a Planned Parenthood scenario that never existed. Ah, Republicans.

And in other activities, Carly Fiori-

na managed to yet again drop the name "my good friend ... Bibi Netanyahu."

Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin repeated his previous debate trick of vanishing entirely into the scenery. Walker's poll numbers are vanishing, too, and it appears his only playing card is to remind people that he fought against public-employee unions. Lately he's been desperately upping the anti-union ante so much that his next step would have to be demanding that federal employees be prohibited from talking with one another outside of work.

Marco Rubio — remember Marco Rubio? The senator who vanished all summer except the time he hit the kid in the head with a football? He definitely looked rested.

Ben Carson, at one point, appeared to be accusing Trump of socialism.

Chris Christie did pretty well. Too bad he's such a terrible governor. New Jersey would rather have another traffic crisis at the George Washington Bridge than vote again for Chris Christie.

What do you think it is about governors in this race? Florida is deeply unenthusiastic about Jeb Bush, Wisconsin seems to hate Scott Walker, and if Louisiana had a chance to get its hands on Bobby Jindal, God knows what would happen.

The debate went on for so long it was a wonder no one fainted. And think about the viewers who made it all the way from the first segment — the one where the CNN preview featured



Mark J. Terrill/AP Photo

Republican presidential candidate, businessman Donald Trump, left, and Jeb Bush slap hands near the finish of the CNN Republican presidential debate at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum on Wednesday in Simi Valley, Calif.

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a zipper at the bottom of the screen announcing, "PATAKI ARRIVES AT DEBATE HALL."

"The first four questions are about Donald Trump!" former Gov. George Pataki complained. Sen. Lindsey Graham repeatedly slid in the fact that his parents ran a bar and a poolroom. Graham insists he's really enjoying himself, although when someone keeps saying "I'm running because I think the world is falling apart," it's sort of a downer.

Former Sen. Rick Santorum and Jindal tried so hard to break through the barrier of national indifference they sounded like rabid otters.

Yes, some political junkies

watched Republicans debating for almost five hours Wednesday. This should be a message to the Democrats. Right now the party is engaged in a fight about whether its schedule of three debates in 2015 is too puny. There are a number of democratic nations in the world where you could easily overcome this argument by pointing out that the election is not until 2016.

But the American people are fine with more debates. Honest, there can be one every night as long as the American people are not actually forced to watch them. It could be a kind of endurance contest. Last person standing gets the nomination.



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