

The Foothills View

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BAD NEWS

"I wish it had been a lost child," I told a friend of this paper. We were talking about the controversy over Police Chief Ingram and the View's responsibility to cover his story. My remark implied that I wished the story had been good news, a happy ending of a lost child being found. But sometimes children remain lost; sometimes the news is bad.

Do newspapers create the bad news they cover? Do they lengthen a controversy by reporting it? Just as a reporter asks abrupt questions so newspapers should be called to account on these questions. Why is so much news bad?

Newspapers seldom create bad news (except when, as in the case of the Washington Star, they go broke) but they do cover it with an eagerness and space that is seldom given to, say, a Wednesday night church social. The fact is that reporters seek out bad news. Partly they build their careers on it, filing stories that by the scale of devastation demand front pages and editors' attention. Partly reporters seek out bad news as a confirmation of their professionalism, a commitment to tell the truth whether the truth is easy or hard.

A police reporter I know in a large city, a man who spends his nights staring at corpses through a pair of rimless spectacles, is an example of this latter professionalism. He told me a true story of another journalist, a war correspondent who for decades has been covering death and suffering. Once the correspondent was crossing a border into another country; the border guard looked down at the passport, then up at the correspondent; then remembered the articles he had written. "Oh, you're here," the guard said. "Things must be worse than I thought."

Oh, you're here. Things must be worse than I thought. This is music to the ears of good journalists, validation of their professionalism: that one is a pro reporter with an inside source that small bad news is about to become big bad news.

"I think news is inherently bad whatever it is," recently said Peter Arnette, 20 years a correspondent with Associated Press and a veteran reporter of Viet-nam and Iran. Arnette is not just cynical; what people think is news often is exclusively bad news.

The World's Most Boring Headline is a case in point. Years ago in Florida I and a British journalist had a running joke between us to think of a news headline that would win the contest of world's most boring. Leave it to the British to know boredom; he won hands down. The winning entry: SMALL EARTHQUAKE IN SOUTH AMERICA; NO ONE HURT. A disappointingly small disaster; to many people no news. How many readers of the Foothills View would read a story with such a headline? No news is good news, says the cliché; but to many readers no bad news is no news.

An editor balances good with bad by rejecting some of the worst. As an example of such editing, two weeks ago a salacious cartoon was thrown on roadsides in an unsigned attack on the police department. One reader wrote us about it:

"I am sure that such trash as the picture is very un-called for," wrote Vicki McSwain. "It humiliated me, and I was not in the picture. The next one could as easily be of me."

Right you are, Mrs. McSwain: or of me, or of a local minister, of doctor, or any reader of this paper. The cartoon is obscene libel, not an accusation, thrown out of a car by a driver afraid to sign a name. Therefore, although the View knew of the letter two weeks ago, it was not reported. It's trash, not news.

Two other letters in the mail show the range of news in the View, and our attempt to balance it. The first was from Rev. Paul Sorrells:

"You did a distinct service to the readers and to Beaver Dam Baptist Church," wrote Rev. Sorrells, thanking us for running a front-page picture of ground-breaking at Beaver Dam. It's our pleasure, Rev. Sorrells.

The second was from former police chief Bill Ingram. Ingram wrote after a front-page story ran in the View on his charges against town officials and on his job background. Ingram has some points:

"Your article in the View although very good may have left doubts among your readers as to my allegations," Ingram writes. He states that we held him to a word-for-word accuracy without applying that rigorous a standard to the mayor of police department. "The police of course would not admit to missing the calls but these allegations by this writer can be checked out easily by a good reporter."

There's some truth to that. Ingram was subjected to more rigorous reporting than other town officials, who might not have withstood it as well as Ingram. On the other hand, when accusations are made, the burden of proof is on the accuser; Ingram also was the subject of a largely sympathetic personal interview. We try to walk a fine line between skepticism and sympathy.

"Again, your article was fair," wrote Ingram, "And I think people will have a better understanding of the whole episode." Thank you, Mr. Ingram, just as sincerely as we thanked Rev. Sorrells. We'll take compliments and fairness any time we can get them--and fairness is the greatest compliment.

What do you think? Is reporting in the View balanced between good and bad news? Is it fair? Write Editor, Box 982, Boiling Springs 28017

What's News? Soybean Markets!

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"I looked up and I said 'the damn building's on fire.'"



THAT'S HOW DANNY HORNE AND TWO CO-WORKERS discovered the fire Aug. 18 at E. B. Hamrick Hall at the Gardner-Webb College Campus. Boiling Springs city and rural firemen put out the blaze which began on the top story of the northern end of the building.

"You can put damage in the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range" said Barry Hartis, G-W business manager, this Tuesday. No one was hurt. (see story below).

Built in 1925 as a memorial to casualties of World War I, E. B. Hamrick Hall is notable in Gardner-Webb's history -- and the history of suspicious fires. Twice in its 56 years the building has burned from fires of undetermined origin.

Fire Chief Don McSwain has not termed the blaze Aug. 18 arson, nor has he called in the county arson squad; but "we're not through with our investigation by any means," McSwain said.

McSwain questioned five juveniles about the fire, and when asked who was investigating the fire replied, "me and the police, mostly."

For the moment, McSwain, the College, and the insurance companies for the building are calling the fire of "undetermined origin." The phrase recalls another fire at the building 44 years ago.

Originally called Memorial hall, construction on the building began in spring, 1920. In 1925 the building was completed, and housed male students and offices for the Boiling Springs High School. In November, 1937, it burned.

"One night about two or three o'clock I was awakened to learn that the administrative building was on fire," wrote the late O. P. Hamrick in his history of the College. "My boys and I rushed down to see what we might rescue from my office in this building, but it was impossible to get much out."

The interior of the building was a total loss. Nor was the cause ever determined. "Like nearly all fires it was a mystery how it caught," wrote Hamrick.

Renovation began in 1940 and was completed in 1942. At a 1943 dedication the building was renamed for E. B. Hamrick, a Boiling Springs merchant who had given food, money and land to the College during the Depression years. Now the building is in the process of being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"My grandma was a student at the College when it burned the first time," said Butch Packard, a campus patrolman who guarded the entrance to the building Tuesday night after the fire. The smell of woodsmoke was still strong in the air. "I'm just here

to make sure nobody runs off with the building," said the burly Packard, smiling and spitting a drop of tobacco juice.

Three times in fifteen minutes Packard motioned to pass by cars of spectators who had come to look at the burned building. Forty four years after that college student had passed by a similar scene, her grandson stood in front of Hamrick Hall-again with burned walls cooling in the night air.



Interior of Hamrick Hall immediately after fire PHOTOS BY LEM LYNCH

Off critical list

Eastman Youth Upgraded At Charlotte Hospital

Doctors treating Scott Eastman, injured Aug. 21 in a one vehicle wreck that killed a passenger, upgraded his condition Monday from critical to stable. Eastman, 17, of Boiling Springs, reportedly suffered a fractured skull and chest injuries in the wreck that also killed Nancy Rose, 15, of Shelby.

"Scott talked with his parents Sunday," said a friend of the Eastman family who had been with the parents at Charlotte Memorial Hospital, where Eastman is a patient. The friend said he was told by doctors there that they are "Optimistic" for young Eastman's recovery, and that the doctors had told Eastman's parents of the change in their son's condition.

Eastman was upgraded from critical to unsatisfactory but stable condition at the respiratory intensive care unit at Charlotte Memorial.

Eastman was carried to Charlotte within two hours of the wreck last Friday when doctors at Cleveland Memorial determined the extent of his head injuries, said Capt. Julius Hoyle of the Boiling Springs Rescue

squad. "It took us 43 minutes," Hoyle said of the trip to Charlotte.

Both teenagers suffered head and chest injuries, reported Hoyle, when they were thrown from the vehicle. The pick-up truck Eastman had been driving apparently had rolled over both youths when Hoyle arrived at the scene. Miss Rose died shortly after arrival at Cleveland Memorial Hospital.

According to Highway Patrol reports, Eastman apparently lost control of his vehicle while passing; the pick-up truck then ran 30 feet up an embankment, and rolled over twice falling back to the road. The truck was totaled.

Eastman may be charged pending further investigation, according to the patrol. According to reports published Saturday, the wreck took place on Hamrick Road; in fact the accident occurred on Homestead Road.