

The Daniels Family

For more than a century, four generations of the family of Josephus Daniels, a Washington, N.C. ship's carpenter, were giants in North Carolina journalism, working principally owners, publishers and editors of Raleigh's The News & Observer.

The elder Daniels was killed in 1865 by a freak shelling of a vessel returning him to his home village. His wife, Mary Cleaves Seabrook Daniels, moved to Wilson where she raised five young sons, two of whom became journalists.

Charles Cleaves (1864-1951) and his brother, Josephus (1862-1951), launched the Kinston Free Press in 1882. Charles Cleaves edited it for three years and also worked on the Wilson Advance. Charles Cleaves earned a law degree, quit newspapering in the early 1890s and practiced law in New York for 35 years.

Meanwhile, Josephus worked on the Wilson paper, owned an interest in newspapers in Kinston and Rocky Mount, went to the University of North Carolina law school and ended up in Raleigh both as printer to the state government and editor of the State Chronicle.

Josephus Daniels purchased and then edited The News & Observer, which had been a rival of the Chronicle. For the next 50 years, he was the state's most notable editor and leading political figure. When not writing fiery editorials on yellow legal pads as the editorial conscience of the liberal wing of the state Democratic Party, he was Secretary of the Navy in the administration of Woodrow Wilson and ambassador to Mexico under Franklin D. Roosevelt. He wrote a multi-volume autobiography that is a virtual political history of the state during his era.

Three of Josephus's four sons spent their careers on the family newspaper, Frank as publisher, Jonathan as editor and Josephus as circulation director. Frank Daniels was an influential figure in newspaper industry organizations. Jonathan authored books of social commentary and history and was on the White House press staff briefly in 1944-45.

Frank Daniels Jr. succeeded to the publisher's mantle in 1971 and began a career that included important posts in industry organizations, such as chairman of the Associated Press, and, like his grandfather and father, president of the N.C. Press Association.

He became a major force in North Carolina art and culture through the philanthropic Daniels Foundation and was influential in the economic development of the Research Triangle as a member of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority.

His son, Frank Daniels III was editing the newspaper when Sacramento-based McClatchy Newspapers bought The News & Observer in 1995.

By Roy Parker Jr.
January 1998