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The Fossil

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Wilson Hassell Shepherd, Sr.

by John Shepherd

Wilson Shepherd in 1935 high school yearbook.

IN DECEMBER 2018, my brother Hal was in the process of selling his large house and downsizing to a smaller home. During his preparation to move, he was going through the accumulations from more than forty years of marriage, when he came across what we call "the Wilson boxes." In one of the boxes, he found copies of THE FOSSIL dating back to 2008. Hal had reached out to Mr. Guy Miller about our dad's history of involvement with amateur publishing back in the 1930s. Mr. Miller responded with a note dated February 2, 2009, asking for information about Dad's involvement in science fiction (sci-fi) and publishing. Hal also became a member of The Fossils at this time. As keeper of the "Lovecraft letters," he asked me if I was interested in putting together an essay/article for publication in THE FOSSIL. Of course I said I would give it a go.

I started preparation by reading all of the back issues of THE FOSSIL. I discovered that Mr. Miller had passed away in 2012. I also learned that Mr. Kenneth Faig had become president of The Fossils in 2014. Interestingly enough, in our files I found a letter from Mr Faig to Hal dated February 17, 2006 *(see below, left)* where the two had corresponded about Dad. From this letter, with attachments, we learned far more about Dad then even we knew. Mr. Faig also asked us to share whatever information about Dad that we could.

Of course, we never responded to either gentleman back then. Life got in the way. Now that I am retired, I hope to rectify this by putting forth an account as best I can.

Wilson Hassell Shepherd was born September 7, 1917 to Moses Camack Shepherd and Martha Alabama Hassell in Oakman, Walker County, Alabama. He had a much older brother, Loris. Moses Camack (known as Cam) ran a successful mercantile store in Oakman, and his wife "Bama" was a homemaker. At that time, Oakman, with a population of around 300, was a rural community in a very isolated and poor county. Farming and coal mining were the primary occupations of the populace. Coming from this background, it is amazing what Wilson was able to achieve. It is mere speculation on my part as to how and why his imagination could flourish in this environment, but I believe he was blessed with exceptional teachers. These teachers must have provided the spark by providing books beyond the scope of the school's library. Also, Wilson did subscribe to the weekly sci-fi publications of the day, such as *Argosy*.

In time, he would marry the love of his life, my mother, Katherine Crane (a long-time educator) on November 20, 1941. They would go on to have three children: Hal (1947), Mary (1950), and John (1952), and as of 2019 nine grandchildren and sixteen great-grand-

February 17, 2006

Mr. Wilson H. Shepherd, Jr.
3 Winged Foot
Birmingham, AL 35242

Dear Mr. Shepherd:

I am pleased to enclose with my compliments photocopies of four magazines circulated by Wilson H. Shepherd (1917-1985) in the American Amateur Press Association (AAPA) in 1937-38. I've been working on a paper about Mr. Shepherd's early amateur publications. If you type "Shepherd Lovecraft Necronomicon" into any Internet search engine, you will get hundreds of hits on Mr. Shepherd's early publication A History of the Necronomicon (by H. P. Lovecraft), which is usually dated to 1938 but which I have found was circulated to the members of AAPA in November 1937. Mr. Shepherd also published at least three issues of The Rebel, an amateur science fiction magazine, and one issue of a semi-professional science fiction magazine (Fanciful Tales, 1936). Donald A. Wollheim, later publisher of DAW Books, was his editor for Fanciful Tales.

Writing in the column "Odds and Ends" in the final issue of The American Free-Press (dated January-February 1938), Mr. Shepherd provided a short description of himself, and stated his ambition of running a country newspaper. None of the sources I have consulted I have any account of Mr. Shepherd's life after 1938. I'm making the assumption that you are his son, and if I'm correct, I wonder if you would be willing to provide me with a short paragraph or two about Mr. Shepherd's life history. I'm planning to issue a paper about his early amateur press activities and would like to include some information about his later life history.

I would also like to include a photograph of Mr. Shepherd from the period (1934-38) when he was active as an amateur publisher. If you can reproduce such a photograph for me, I would be happy to send you two copies of my publication when issued. Please do not send any original materials.

Mr. Shepherd ran a spirited, if unsuccessful, campaign for the presidency of the American Amateur Press Association in 1937. I hope he reached some of his goals later in life. His 1936-37 correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft is in the H. P. Lovecraft Collection at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

Please keep the enclosed copies of The American Free-Press whether you choose to respond to this letter or not. If you already have originals, maybe there is a grandchild who would like to have them.

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth W. Faig, Jr.

Ken Faig's letter relating what he knew about Wilson H. Shepherd.

children. As a side note, none of his children shared his love of the printing or publishing business. However, all three shared a love of writing and reading. My daughter Sara, did go on to receive a degree in journalism at Auburn University.

Wilson was a graduate of Oakman High School in 1935, where among other things, he was vice president of his senior class, class historian, and a member of the annual staff, debating club, and Philomathean Society.

After his high school days, details for us were a bit sketchy from 1935 until his military induction in 1942. Since he was never one to talk too much about himself, we, his children, have often speculated what Dad must have been up to. Mr Faig's letter and attachments gave us a far more detailed account of the sci-fi days then we realized.

From my memory as a child, my grandparents' house in Oakman was an unremarkable one-story wood framed home with a covered front porch. Inside, there was a parlor, two bedrooms, a bath, and a kitchen. The backdoor led to a long and narrow back porch with a set of steps going down to the back. Since the house was built on a slope, the back steps were about a story high, and underneath was an enclosed dugout cellar. It was in this cellar, with dirt floors, that Wilson first set up his primitive press, and began his

Wilson Shepherd's AAPA Activity

By Dave Tribby

WILSON SHEPHERD helped establish the American Amateur Press Association in late 1936, as he was listed as charter member number 9. Lee Hawes' 1961 AAPA history lists him among the most active members, producing seven issues of three titles during the first year. The August 1937 *American Amateur Journalist* features his short story "Little Brown Dog" (see next page), as well as a letter to the editor. The 1937 yearbook list of journals includes his *American Free Press, History of the Necronomicon,* and *Rebel.*

At the end of 1937 he ran for president. As can be seen from the first page of his *AFP* (right), his main issue was no recruiting cooperation with other ajay groups. He also pledged to "devote up to 4 hours per day" to the group. He ran a positive campaign: "I ask for your votes on my own merit and ability, and not by tromping on the toes of my opponents."

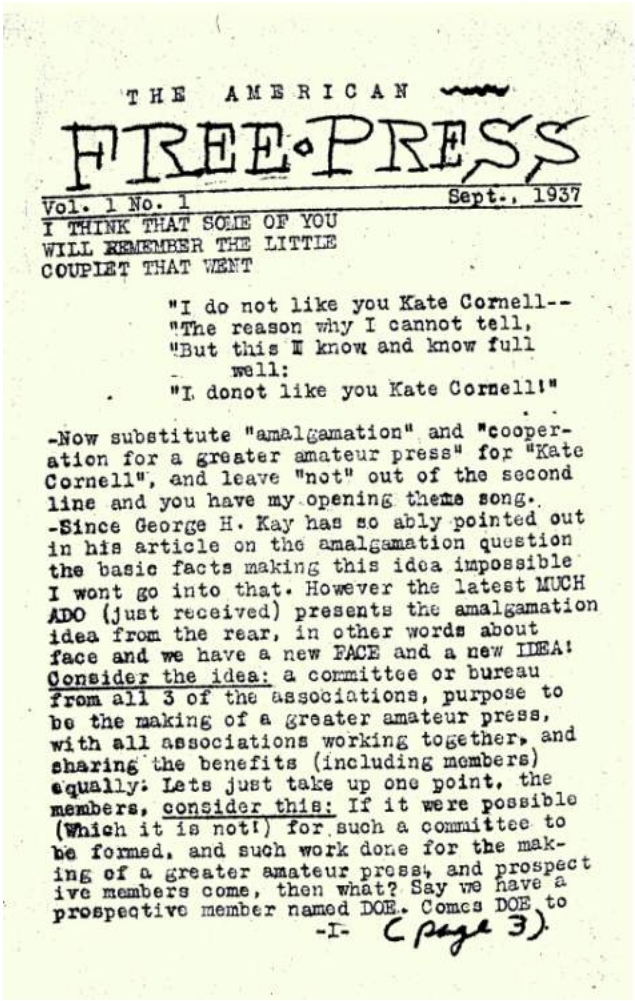
Incumbent president Robert Price, also opposed to amalgamation, ran a successful first term, so it wasn't surprising that he was re-elected with 46 votes, vs 16 for Wilson. In a post-election *AFP* Wilson vowed, "I'm going to keep right on plugging for the American about ten times harder this year than last. … The American loses nothing by returning an experienced, level headed, and entirely sensible man to the Presidential office."

Several months later Secretary George H. Kay resigned; to complete the term Price appointed Wilson, "one of the most willing workers for the association, and one of the most loyal." He was elected without opposition as 1st Vice President in the next election.

AAPA's list of 1938 publications includes his *AFP* and *The Literary Quarterly* (co-published with George H. Kay and Bayard Oxtoby). In 1939 his only title is *The Recruiter*. (A list of titles was not published for 1940.)

The June 1940 *AAJ* includes an article by him, but I didn't find any other reference until 1947 when he reinstated his membership, apparently for only a year or so.

The April 1936 letter from H.P. Lovecraft (see pp. 4-6) mentions that Wilson's paper carries "the NAPA device," but Wilson never belonged to that group. However, his *Phantagraph* co-publisher, Donald A. Wollheim of New York City, did join NAPA in spring 1936, a recruit of C.L. Detrick; he attended the 1938 NAPA convention, but seems to have dropped out soon after. Charter member no. 12 of AAPA, *Phantagraph* is attributed solely to him in the list of 1937 journals. Wollheim helped found Fantasy Amateur Press Association in 1937. He went on to become a noted science fiction writer, editor, and publisher. ◈



THE AMERICAN

FREE·PRESS

Vol. 1 No. 1 Sept., 1937

I THINK THAT SOME OF YOU WILL REMEMBER THE LITTLE COUPLET THAT WENT

"I do not like you Kate Cornell--
"The reason why I cannot tell,
"But this I know and know full well:
"I donot like you Kate Cornell!"

-Now substitute "amalgamation" and "cooperation for a greater amateur press" for "Kate Cornell", and leave "not" out of the second line and you have my opening theme song.
-Since George H. Kay has so ably pointed out in his article on the amalgamation question the basic facts making this idea impossible I wont go into that. However the latest MUCH ADO (just received) presents the amalgamation idea from the rear, in other words about face and we have a new FACE and a new IDEA: Consider the idea: a committee or bureau from all 3 of the associations, purpose to be the making of a greater amateur press, with all associations working together, and sharing the benefits (including members) equally: Lets just take up one point, the members, consider this: If it were possible (Which it is not!) for such a committee to be formed, and such work done for the making of a greater amateur press, and prospective members come, then what? Say we have a prospective member named DOE. Comes DOE to

-1- (Page 3)

publishing career. What type of press and equipment he was able to obtain we do not know. Here is what we know from Mr Faig:

- 1936-37: corresponded with H. P. Lovecraft. We have twelve letters from this time (on pp 4-5, see the first letter, dated April 29, 1936).
- 1936: published one issue of a sci-fi magazine called *Fanciful Tales.*
- 1937-38: published *The American Free Press.* This early newsletter was circulated to members of the American Amateur Press Association.
- 1937: ran for president of the American Amateur Press Association and lost.
- 1937 or 1938: published with permission *A History of the Necronomicon* by H. P. Lovecraft.

Wilson held various jobs from 1938 until his military induction on March 9, 1942. We do know that he was working at the DuPont munitions facility in Childersburg, Alabama, just prior to his induction. His military career seems to have been an interesting one. I have requested more detailed information concerning his time in the military but do not have that as of today. If there is interest, perhaps we can put together a follow-up piece on that period. What we do know about his time in the military are anecdotal, such as:

(continued on page 6)

1937 AAPA Short Story Laureate

The Little Brown Dog

by Wilson Shepherd

From the curb ambled a lean and lanky rack of bones, covered with tangled brown hair—a little brown dog. He sifted through the traffic like an expert and came to a stop in the center of the pavement to bite at a troublesome flea. . . .

The bus was big and painted yellow and black. Dual wheels drove it along with a swish, the muted mutter of its muffler gave notice of the power under the hood. The driver was feeling cocky; he had held his job through the depression, and now that times were getting better he had received a raise. His lips puckered in an off-key tune. The bus slowed for the intersection and then with a grind of gears and a roar it bore down on the main highway.

Startled out of the search for the flea the little brown dog looked up. Coming at him was a great thundering mass of black and yellow. With a startled yip he flung his starved length up, but too late. First the front and then the rear wheels rolled over him ... and the bus moved on to leave the little brown dog, bones shattered, to kick out his life in a splatter of blood.

From somewhere a ragged runt of a boy came running to stoop and gather the dog in his arms. Bystanders snickered, but he did not hear. Instead he walked, with a strange dignity for one so small, to where the bus had stopped at a station, and looked into the ugly grinning face of the driver. His voice came uneven and sob-choked but quiet:

"Damn you! You killed my dog."

And the bus driver's grin broke into a loud, braying laugh.

"Take that sack of bones and get out of here, kid. I got no time to fool with you."

"Gran'ma, that red-headed feller that drives the bus—he killed my dog."

The boy stood spraddle-legged, with the wad of brown hair that had been the dog held in his arms. He was crying unashamed now, and his dirty fingers patted the dead dog's head.

"Law', child, what more could you expect with the pup running all over the place. It was comin' sooner or later."

"But he coulda stopped. Or went around. He had the whole road. There wasn't no cause for him to run over—" and he gulped.

"Well, take it out and bury it; that's all you can do now."

A hole grubbed in the ground under a battered old cottonwood made the little brown dog a grave. And the thing was forgotten.

A year passed; again it was a sunny day in January. Unusually warm for the time. Again the big bus came rolling up to the intersection on its regular run. The ugly red-headed man was again in the driver's seat. He felt more cocky than ever for now he was manager of the division, and he had got there by rolling over everything that got in his way. He gave himself a mental pat on the back when he changed gears and rolled out on the main highway. He glanced up the road to be sure that nothing was coming.

There in the middle of the road right in front of him, was a big brown dog, lean and lank with great ridges of sinew on his flanks. As the bus started to swerve the big animal leaped—squarely over the hood. The driver goggled into the gaping bear-trap mouth and the red hate-filled eyes. He tried to scream, but couldn't. Then he turned loose the wheel and threw his arms over his face.

Crashing at full speed the great pile of iron that was the bus roared from the pavement, jumped the curb, and smashed into a brick wall. The driver left his seat like a rock from a sling. The windshield shattered like paper, and he sprawled on the ground, slashed to ribbons by the glass. Early arrivals heard him gasp as his life ebbed away.

"A big brown dog—right in front—jumped right at me."

The crowd closed around to stare and stammer. "Deader than a door nail." "Must have been drinking." "S' funny; he must have had the DTs, seeing dogs and things. There weren't no dog on the street. Naw, no dog at all."

A little tattered kid was the only one who happened to remember that the bus driver had met his death only a few steps—and just one year later—from where he had smashed the life from the little brown dog. ◈

The Lovecraft Letter

by Dave Tribby

I WROTE TO Karen Eberhart, a manuscripts processing archivist at Brown University, to ask if I needed Brown's permission to reproduce images of the letter they own. Her reply contained excellent news: All letters Lovecraft wrote are now in the public domain. Plus, high quality scans of the letter are available in the Brown Digital Repository. The letter is cited: Howard P. Lovecraft Collection, Ms. Lovecraft, Brown University Library, (Accession No. A56372).

All twelve Shepherd letters are transcribed in *H. P. Lovecraft: Letters to Robert Bloch and Others*, edited by David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi, New York: Hippocampus Press, 2015. When I wrote David Schultz about this article, he sent excerpts from the book, including this transcription:

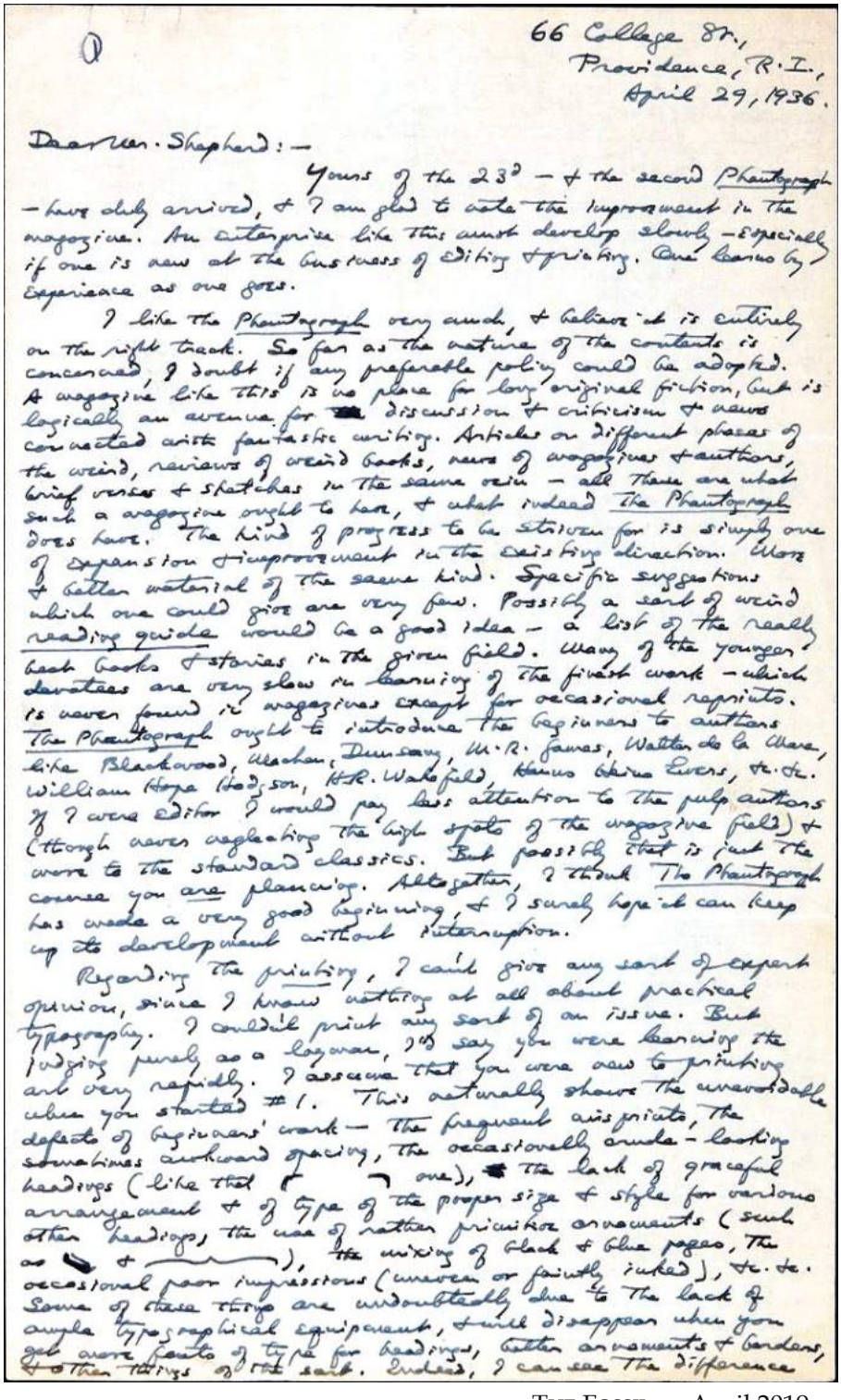
66 College St.,
Providence, R.I.,
April 29, 1936.

Dear Mr. Shepherd:—

Yours of the 23d—& the second Phantagraph—have duly arrived, & I am glad to note the improvement in the magazine. An enterprise like this must develop slowly—especially if one is new at the business of editing & printing. One learns by experience as one goes.

I like the Phantagraph very much, & believe it is entirely on the right track. So far as the nature of the contents is concerned, I doubt if any preferable policy could be adopted. A magazine like this is no place for long original fiction, but is logically an avenue for discussion & criticism & news connected with fantastic writing. Articles on different phases of the weird, reviews of weird books, news of magazines & authors, brief verses & sketches in the same vein—all of them are what such a magazine ought to have, & what indeed The Phantagraph does have. The kind of progress to be striven for is simply one of expansion & improvement in the existing direction. More & better material of the same kind. Specific suggestions which one could give are very few. Possibly a sort of weird reading guide would be a good idea—a list of the really best books & stories in the given field. Many of the younger devotees are very slow in learning of the finest work—which is never found in magazines except for occasional reprints. The Phantagraph ought to introduce the beginners to authors like Blackwood, Machen, Dunsany, M. R. James, Walter de la Mare, William Hope Hodgson, H. R. Wakefield, Hanns Heins Ewers, &c. &c. If I were editor I would pay less attention to the pulp authors (though never neglecting the high spots of the magazine field) & more to the standard classics. But possibly that is just the course you are planning. Altogether, I think The Phantagraph has made a very good beginning, & I surely hope it can keep up its development without interruption.

Regarding the printing, I can't give any sort of expert opinion, since I know nothing at all about practical typography. I couldn't print any sort of an issue. But judging purely as a layman, I'd say you were learning the art very rapidly. I assume that you were new to printing when you started #1. This naturally shows the unavoidable defects of beginner's work—the frequent misprints, the sometimes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awkward spacing, the occasionally crude-looking headings (like that ┌ ┐ one), the lack of graceful arrangement & of type of the proper size & style for various other headings, the use of rather primitive ornaments (such as &), the mixing of black & blue pages, the occasional poor impressions (uneven or faintly inked), &c. &c. Some of these things are undoubtedly due to the lack of ample typographical equipment, & will disappear when you get more fonts of type for headings, better ornaments & borders, & other things of the sort. Indeed, I can see the difference

[end of first page]

which the new heading type (of the right size, but not quite heavy enough to match the body type), & the increasing number of linoleum cuts by Rimel & Petaja, have made in the second issue. Possibly these young artists could design you some conventional ornaments of the right sort—borders for headings (something on this idea):

[see drawings in original]

(*the heading of the Lonsdell article is also very well arranged.)

or tailpieces of various kinds—roughly like this:

A tailpiece ought to be either a regular panel or something which tapers downward. The bracket work which you use is not quite the thing—& anyhow, ought to be the other side up—like this:

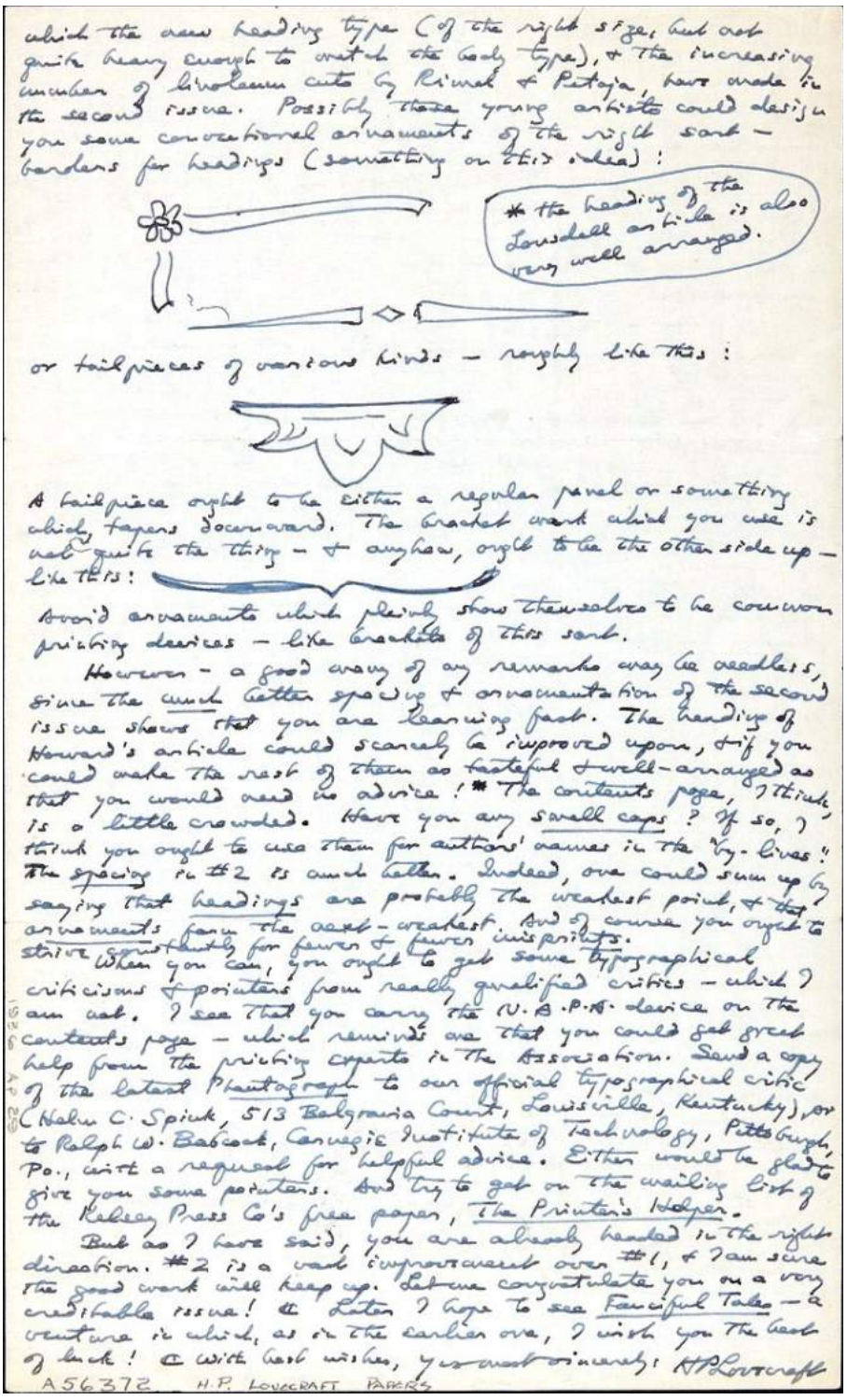
Avoid ornaments which plainly show themselves to be common printing devices—like brackets of this sort.

However—a good many of my remarks may be needless, since the much better spacing & ornamentation of the second issue shows that you are learning fast. The heading of Howard's article could scarcely be improved upon, & if you could make the rest of them as tasteful & well-arranged as that you would need no advice!* The contents page, I think, is a little crowded. Have you any small caps? If so, I think you ought to use them for authors' names in the "by-lines". The spacing of #2 is much better. Indeed, one could sum up by saying that headings are probably the weakest point, & that ornaments form the next-weakest. And of course you ought to strive constantly for fewer & fewer misprints.

When you can, you ought to get some typographical criticisms & pointers from really qualified critics—which I am not. I see that you carry the N.A.P.A. device on the contents page—which reminds me that you could get great help from the printing experts in the Association. Send a copy of the latest Phantagraph to our official typographical critic (Helm C. Spink, 513 Belgravia Court, Louisville, Kentucky), or to Ralph W. Babcock, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, Pa., with a request for helpful advice. Either would be glad to give you some pointers. And try to get on the mailing list of the Kelsey Press Co's free paper, The Printer's Helper.

But as I have said, you are already headed in the right direction. #2 is a vast improvement over #1, & I am sure the good work will keep up. Let me congratulate you on a very creditable issue! ¶ Later I hope to see Fanciful Tales—a venture in which, as in the earlier one, I wish you the best of luck! ¶ With best wishes,

Yrs most sincerely, H P Lovecraft



(continued from page 3)

- My mother always said that Wilson scored an IQ of 150 on his military tests. This may explain how he got plucked from the swamps of Ft. Polk, Louisiana, and transferred to Camp Beale, California, to work in Military Intelligence.
- While on the West coast, he was involved with an unusual exercise in which he and other personnel were dressed up as German soldiers and sent out among the population of a California town to see what the reaction among the home folks would be to a Nazi invasion.
- My mother traveled by train across country to visit him on more than one occasion. We have photos from her visits and it appears that they had an enjoyable time.

Dad was honorably discharged from the Army on January 4, 1946, with the rank of Technical Sergeant. After the war, Wilson and Mom started a family back in Oakman. Wilson went on to buy into a printing business (Commercial Press) in Jasper, Alabama. He ran this successful business from around 1954 to 1960. In 1960, he sold his business to the local publisher of *The Mountain Eagle,* who wanted to develop a commercial printing division. Wilson became foreman of this new enterprise.

After several years, things didn't work out as planned, so Wilson and family moved on. We moved to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1962. Wilson had various business interests through 1978, when he and my mom retired and moved to Montevallo, Alabama.

During the 1970s, Dad began the process of gathering up all of his existing Lovecraft material, with the intent of selling all. He contacted Mr. Ray H. Zorn who held his original letters from Lovecraft. Apparently, Dad had sent these original letters to Mr. Zorn in the late 1940s with the intent of publishing some kind of book in collaboration with Mr. Zorn. For whatever reason, probably due to pushback from Lovecraft's literary successor Arkham House, this project never materialized. Mr. Zorn returned the letters to him with the advice of their worth.

He eventually sold the letters to Dr. Dirk Mosig of Kearney, Nebraska, in 1978. So the letters we have are only copies. Dad's corresponding letters to Lovecraft can be located at Brown University's Lovecraft Collection.

Our records also show that Dad sold his original copy of Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* to Mr. Frank Halpern on May 6, 1978.

Even in retirement, Wilson continued to have a printing business. He purchased two presses, set them up in his basement, and was still doing jobs up until the day he died.

In 1980 I was working at Jim Walter Resources Bessie Mine near Birmingham, at this time in the outside shop on the midnight shift. One night I stopped by the supply house to have a cup of coffee and spend a few minutes with the guy who worked there as a clerk. As people are wont to do, we were discussing what we were up to. He told me his local sci-fi club was working on preparations for an upcoming convention in Birmingham. I happened to mention that my dad had once been interested in sci-fi/fantasy back in the day, and even corresponded with H. P. Lovecraft.

He looked at me in surprise and asked who my dad was. When I told him, he got real excited and said that his club had been searching for Wison for years, and lost track of him around 1975 or so. He said that Dad was considered one of the founding fathers of southern sci-fi fantasy (or as memory serves, something to that effect). Could they possibly meet him? I said that he was alive and living in Montevallo, but that I would have to check to see if he was interested.

After getting an OK from Dad, he said I could arrange a meeting, but I would have to be there. And so I set it up for a Saturday morning. We had coffee and visited with several members of the club at Dad's house. They invited him to the convention coming up soon, and he agreed to go if I would take him.

On the day of this convention, I drove my dad to a downtown Birmingham hotel where the convention was being held. We walked in, and from memory (very sketchy) I remember booths set up, some folks in costumes, and films being shown in various rooms. After chatting a while, we were invited up to a hospitality suite where, I guess we would mingle with the top dogs.

What I remember is that we drank a beer, stood around for maybe 30 minutes having a somewhat stilted conversation with a few of the folks, and then after a quick thanks we unceremoniously slipped away to go home.

While I don't remember the young man's name from work, nor his club's name, nor the name of the convention, I do remember what my dad had to say. As we were walking through the parking deck to my car, I asked him what he thought about all that. He said he only agreed to come because he thought I wanted him to. But, he said "That was a long time ago when I was a kid. Frankly, I don't give a s--- about that stuff anymore." That sums up pretty well how Dad felt about his early sci-fi self.

Not long after this, however, he handed over to me all the copies of his HPL correspondence. These sat in a safety deposit box for 25 years, until I turned them over to my son to be "keeper of the letters." I am including one of those letters for THE FOSSIL to include with this humble missive. ◈

Jack Swenson: Two-Time Fossil President

by Dave Tribby

JOHN GILBERT SWENSON was born November 28, 1926, the son of Gilbert Edward Swenson and Ruth Evelyn Newcomb. The family lived in Crookston, Minnesota, a city of about 6400 in the northwest part of the state, not far from Grand Forks, North Dakota. When Jack was 7 the family of five moved about 100 miles east and owned a farm near the village of Hines and town of Blackduck.

Jack Swenson

Young Jack enjoyed listening to the radio, and dreamed of becoming a foreign correspondent. He worked at the *Blackduck American* as a printers' helper and high school reporter. After graduation from Blackduck High School a year early, he worked as copy boy for the *Minneapolis Star-Journal*. In 1944 he moved to Fargo, N. D., where he became a radio announcer at WDAY.

When Jack turned 19, he went into the Navy and served at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center and the Naval Separation Center in Boston. In 1985 he wrote about a memorable experience:

> It was in Boston, forty years next April, that I typed the discharge papers for another sailor: William Patrick Hitler.
>
> A nephew of the other Hitler, this one served in the U.S. Navy. After his discharge, he changed his name and settled in New York City with his Irish-born mother.
>
> While typing the discharge papers, I for once had the presence of mind to do the right thing—call the press office. There were lengthy stories, and pictures, in all the Boston papers—the *Globe, Herald, Traveler*, and *American*. Hitler got his discharge, and I got a promotion to the PR office.

He and Mavis Smith, a fellow Blackduck graduate, were married in early 1945. They would have four children, Janet, Joanne, David, and Suzanne.

After discharge from the Navy, Jack and Mavis made their home in Fargo, where he worked at WDAY and KVNJ. In 1950 he became news director at KFYR in Bismarck, N. D., and in 1953 their first television news anchor. He recalled those early days in 2014:

> The early '50s were an exciting time, Our family was growing, television was new, coming to Bismarck in the fall of 1953, and with it came real change in the way we operated.
>
> I can remember our first TV newscast when the man handling the Telops accidentally mixed the racks, and while I was detailing the murder in Mexico of noted Communist Leon Trotsky, the audience was instead shown a photo of Francis Cardinal Spellman.

We covered a huge prairie fire in South Dakota and a short time later returned to Sturgis when NBC asked us to cover a prayer vigil the Northern Cheyenne were conducting hoping for an end to the Korean War. I got to meet Whistling Elk, the medicine man interpreting their visions.

Three of Jack Swenson's AAPA publications

In fact, a lot of folks we got to meet had visions, hopes, dreams and shared them with our listeners and viewers. Glad to have been a part.

From 1956 through 1958 the Swensons lived in Washington, D.C., while Jack was an aide to Congressman Otto Krueger. The family then returned to Bismarck where Jack became news director at KXMB-TV.

After a quarter century working as a reporter, editor, and broadcaster, in the fall of 1963 Jack was named executive director of the North Dakota Petroleum Council. In 1972 he was promoted to central region director for the American Petroleum Institute in Chicago. Finally, in 1975, he became executive vice president of the Rocky Mountain Oil & Gas Association in Denver, a position he held until retirement in May 1987. Jack and Mavis then moved to Custer, S. D.

In 2001, they moved back to Hines. He returned to part-time work at the *Blackduck American,* where he covered local stories and wrote a weekly column. They made one last move, to Bismarck in 2012, after Jack suffered a stroke, in order to be near their son. (They moved 23 times during their 70-year marriage.) Mavis died in 2015, only three days short of her 91st birthday.

Jack's introduction to the hobby of amateur journalism came via his interest in letterpress printing. In the 1950s he acquired a 3 x 5 Kelsey press and a few fonts of type. By 1975 he owned an 8 x 12 C&P and 200 cases of type. He joined the Amalgamated Printers' Association (member 256), although he dropped out "when that organization became bogged down in political sniping." He joined the American Amateur Press Association in December 1982 and began publishing *The Peripatetic Press*, usually four 4½ by 6 inch pages. At Christmastime he shared *The Herald*, a large-format paper reporting family news, which he had printed annually since 1963. In the 1990s he shifted from letterpress to computer-generated production. His last title, *Ephemera*, first appeared in 1997.

He won AAPA laureate awards in 1985, 1990, and 2010 for his writing. He served in several AAPA offices, including a two-year term as president in 1999-2001. He and Mavis hosted the 1996 convention. They also served as co-mailers in 2004-05.

Jack joined The Fossils in 1984. He was elected president in 1996 and again in 1997, then served on the board of trustees beginning in 2000. He became president once again in 2012 upon the death of Guy Miller, but had to resign in late 2013 due to ill health.

On December 12, 2018 he peacefully passed away. When the news spread, about a month later, several AAPA members shared their memories of him. Russell and Delores Miller recalled meeting him several times on their travels. "Always a lunch and a nice visit with them. We always looked forward to his Christmas newsletter. Think this is the first year it did not come to our mailbox." Greg McKelvey noted, "Always a gentleman, always positive and encouraging, Jack set by example, friendship and mentoring with his wonderful interpersonal and technical skills. In the mold of Lee Hawes, Fred Liddle, Gale Mueller, and Charles Bush, he made the AAPA fun while always nudging quality and style." ◈

1984-85 AAPA Prose Non-Fiction Laureate

Ross Higbee — a Remembrance

by Jack Swenson

I FIRST RECALL meeting Uncle Ross when I was not more than six or seven years old. It was before we moved up to the farm at Hines in northern Minnesota in 1934. Although it wasn't really true, everyone treated him somewhat as the "rich uncle," perhaps because he had a white-collar job and a regular one at that. In those depression years, anyone with a steady income was probably a rich uncle to someone.

Actually he was my great uncle, my grandmother's brother. There was another brother, Roy, who went to Canada and who I only remember meeting once. He was at Saskatoon where I believe he was the postmaster.

Roy used to send us books, I remember. To a boy who loved to read, (and who had made it once through the family bookcase including the old *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* with a story for children in each volume) the books from Uncle Ross were especially welcome. They were usually school texts or library references — he got them as samples when he became principal at John Marshall High in St. Paul. I still have several of them, along with several dozen volumes from his own library which were left to me when he died.

When I moved to Minneapolis in 1943 and began work for the *Star-Tribune*, I used to visit him and Aunt Sadie quite often. About a block from their Lincoln Avenue home was a drug store and a florist. Ritually, I would take him two Robert Penn panatelas, and her a small bouquet of flowers (I remember how much she especially liked tulips or daffodils). When the evening ended he would drive me to Snelling Avenue to catch a

streetcar home, and always would press a book into my hands before I left. The last time I visited him, sometime after Aunt Sadie had died, he gave me *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

Ross was well-educated, which made him a little suspect to some of the other relatives. He was very, very opinionated and hesitated not to deliver his views. Because Aunt Sadie was Catholic (and he as well in the later years), he tolerated Catholics but mistrusted Jews. He had many of the latter in his school (including author Max Schulman) but they were pupils — their parents were Jews!

So while in many ways he fit the stereotype of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant WASP, he was too gentle and too concerned to be cast from the common mold. The countless references in his intermittent diaries attest to this and to his special humaneness toward animals.

There was one trait which I noted over the years I knew him, and that was his changed attitude toward FDR and the New Deal. Bitter against it for years, his views did soften to the point where he credited Roosevelt with many accomplishments. His view that Roosevelt was responsible for our involvement in World War II did not change, though. It's unfortunate that his diaries made no more comment than they do about his views on the nation and its leaders.

Ross liked to reminisce. During our last visit, we sat for several hours talking about his life and the things he had done, places he had been, dreams he had had.

There was one story I think I will always remember. It happened at Big Falls, some fifty miles or so north of Bemidji.

In the early part of the century, Big Falls was a large logging community built near the falls of a river which furnished power for the sawmill there. Lumberjacks outnumbered the rest of the population, but Big Falls was also seeing roots put down by farmers and merchants. One of the latter was a tavern keeper, a "saloon man" with a very common name like Bill or Joe or Pete although I think it was Ben, which is what I will call him here. Ben had the only saloon in Big Falls at the time and was successful to the point that each Monday morning when he left for Bemidji to bank the past week's receipts he would tuck a pistol into his pocket before boarding the train.

Ben was a marked contrast to a poor farmer who lived just outside of Big Falls, struggling to do some wood cutting in the winter and farming in the summer. About all the two men had in common was the fact that each had a small daughter, both of whom were in the little one room school which opened when Ross came to Big Falls as the first teacher.

Ross couldn't exactly recall what prompted the ill-will between the two men but exist it did. There was a certain amount of snobbery involved, he believed, and the feeling on the part of Ben that anyone as poor as this other fellow had no business having a half-dozen kids which he couldn't support. And in school, Ben's pretty young daughter was instructed not to get too friendly with "those kids."

Ben's daughter was just six on the Monday morning she came into the bedroom where her father was dressing. She reached up onto the tall dresser for something, dislodged the pistol which went off and killed her instantly.

There was no preacher in Big Falls, and a tearful father persuaded Ross to read some sort of a service. It was, he recalled, one of the hardest things he ever did — and this at a time when he was barely twenty.

When school resumed the next day, Ben waited until the noon hour for Ross to come out. Quietly he asked Ross if there was anything the school needed which he could supply. Ross asked for a flag, a United States Flag, and the next week it came. The whole town turned out for the first flag-raising the next morning, but it was not the flag which caught Ross' eye. It was the farmer's children — each standing there in brand new clothes. Ben had shopped for more than the flag in Bemidji, and there stood six youngsters wearing the proof.

Ross could not resist when the first opportunity arose to ask Ben if he had bought the clothes, and why. Ross recalled that Ben's voice was very soft as they talked and that as Ben finished he added, "but I don't want their dad doing nothing for me."

"He already has," Ross told him. "Their father built the coffin in which your daughter was buried. He was just afraid to tell you."

There are many small farms around Big Falls today, most of them deserted, and no way of knowing where the one in this story was located, nor of what happened to those people.

The saloon, a rough-board structure, is also gone as are most of the things which existed at that time. The falls are still there, and part of the old sawmill structure across the dam.

We visited Big Falls once in the late 1950s and about the only vestige of the old days we found was a grizzled, scarred old man wearing 8-inch boots with his pants chopped off even with the boot-tops. My father-in-law told me later the man was a "river pig," a man who worked on the log booms in the days when timber was king around Big Falls, when lumberjacks hit the swamps to start work at daylight and drank a week's earnings on Saturday, and when a timid young man came there to be the first teacher in their new school.

From "Uncle Ross," privately published in a 1985 limited edition by The Peripatetic Press. ◈

President's Message

The Bundle

by Ken Faig, Jr.

SINCE THE 1930s, the bundle has been central to the operation of most amateur press associations, and others, such as the Amalgamated Printers' Association, whose members disclaim classification as amateur journalists.

In the days before the bundle, exchanges were the rule. Association membership did not entitle a member to more than the official organ. This left non-publishing members who lacked a journal to exchange at a disadvantage. In addition, some publishing members targeted their journals to a select few, with no intention of exchanging with the membership at large.

So, the bundle, upon its advent in the 1930s, was believed to be a big improvement. The bundle system ensured each member a copy of all "official" publications of the association. Some (like AAPA) even distributed their official organs through the bundle. Of course, "private" publications were possible, but the egalitarian aspect of the bundle system kept them to a minimum.

With the bundle came work. The major associations all opted for monthly bundles, and as association ranks swelled after mid-century, the workload of the bundle mailer increased. Of course, most of the associations still consisted of a relatively small corps of active members who published regularly. Even at their membership peaks, I doubt whether many association bundles ever regularly contained as many as fifty publications.

Most mainstream associations did not have an activity requirement for membership; dues payment sufficed. Some associations nuanced the lack of an activity requirement by requiring a stipulated level of activity to cast a ballot in association elections or to receive a laureate nomination. Some associations imposed activity requirements on their officers, but sometimes these requirements were more honored in breach than in reality.

From the first, lack of recognition and feedback has been a challenge confronting amateur journalism. From the very inception of the associations, periodic (typically annual) laureate awards were one of the solutions for the recognition problem. I am not aware that any of the mainstream associations ever awarded their laureates by membership vote. Most associations asked outside parties to serve as their judges. For example, a poet of some note might be asked to judge an association's poetry laureate competition.

However, there was the perception that a broader mechanism for recognition of members' journals was needed. In the early days of the exchanges, correspondence among amateur journalists flourished and provided a mechanism for feedback. But as membership grew, personal correspondence among amateur journalists waned. With the advent of the bundle system, some members began including comments on other publications—typically called "mailing comments" or "mc's"—in their journals. Particularly in the associations that grew up around the science fiction genre beginning in the 1930s, mc's became almost *de rigeur*; many amateur press association members in these genre-focused associations looked askance upon any bundle publications lacking mc's. In *The Unspeakable Thing*, Helen Wesson slyly called her mc column "Bundling With Helen," making reference to the old colonial custom of bundling affianced couples together in bed separated by blankets.

Some amateurs in the genre-based associations became adamant about the etiquette of mc's. These amateurs deemed the failure to notice their publications in another amateur's journal an outright snub. Full-blown feuds could develop. A genre-based association with ample mc's was deemed a healthy APA, while an association with negligible or paltry mc content was considered moribund. Most genre-based APAs did have an activity requirement, so that every member could be rated according to his or her mc etiquette.

Even before the advent of the internet, there were "trolls" out there in the mc universe. Some mc writers were known for their harsh or admonitory tone. I belonged to the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) between 1976 and 1991, and I can remember the reaction of one veteran member to the first number of my journal *Tekeli-Li*. I had used wider than normal line spacing to stretch my text to the required six pages, and this commentator let me know in no uncertain terms that cheating of that type was not allowed. Of course, other mc writers were known for the inanity of comments, like "nice zine, keep it up."

The tradition of mc's took hold in the mainstream associations as well, but never quite as pervasively as in the genre-focused associations. For one thing, there was a stronger editorial design tradition in mainstream amateur journalism, and sometimes mc's simply didn't fit the bill of an amateur editor's aspirations for his or her journal.

Some mainstream associations (for example, the Hoffman-Daas United faction of 1912-26) instituted both public and private critical bureaus. The public criticism was sometimes published in the official organ if space permitted. Eventually, some of the associations instituted the office of "official critic" (the title was not the same in all the associations) to address the need for feedback. I held this office in NAPA for a couple years beginning about 2001. Usually, criticisms prepared by the "official critic" appeared in the official organ.

Opinions as to the purpose of official criticism differed. I remember Harold Segal maintained that the proper work of the official critic was not ego-boosting but solid criticisms that would enable members to improve their writing and editing. Segal maintained that the critic's proper mission was not to notice all the association's publication, but to discuss only those who could most benefit from real criticism. Of course, as Elsa Gidlow, UAPA president in 1917-18, long ago noted, some amateur journalists hit their stride and are incapable of improvement, or benefitting from criticism, beyond that point.

As NAPA critic, I tried to steer a middle course. I made it my mission to say something, if possible complimentary, about each contribution to the bundle. I found the content of some journals genuinely interesting—Segal's own *Campane* and Jake Warner's *The Boxwooder* were good examples. Others were full of wonderful humor—Harold Shive's journals being my favorites in this category. But I tried to find in every journal something worthy of comment. I generally eschewed pointing out grammatical or stylistic flaws. Split infinitives, for example, have always been a pet peeve of mine, but I don't think I ever called out a bundle contributor for this defect. Besides, split infinitives have now apparently been recognized as part of proper usage.

Today, neither AAPA nor NAPA has an activity requirement. This allows so-called "deadwood"—"reader" or "collector" members who never contribute to the bundle. The advisability of imposing an activity requirement for basic membership has been debated over the years, but concerns over membership stability have led the major associations to abstain from imposing an activity requirement for basic membership. One can't summon much resentment over "reader" members who enjoy perusing the monthly mailing contents. "Collector" members are a tougher call—some were reputed never even to open their bundles. (There I go avoiding split infinitives again!) Of course, the worst kind of deadwood member from the viewpoint of association morale was the so-called "trasher" member who simply consigned his or her bundles to the trash upon receipt without even examining them. A "reader" member who eventually pitched his or her bundles after reading was looked upon with more understanding—most of us do after all have a limited amount of storage space and finding a home for unwanted bundles (e.g., nursing home, commuter rail line station) is not necessarily an easy endeavor.

Might an electronic bundle assembled from member-submitted PDFs offer a solution for some of the perceived activity and feedback problems? My vote would be to allow all to view bundle contents, but to allow only members to comment upon them. Perhaps activity points or credits might even be awarded for various levels of feedback—e.g., a visit or "like" might receive 10 activity points while a comment of 100 words or more might receive 50. Perhaps a standard-sized page of contribution might be worth 250 points. Perhaps 1,000 annual activity points would be the basic membership activity requirement in addition to payment of dues necessary to sustain host site costs. With the increasing difficulty of finding outside laureate judges, perhaps even the laureates could be awarded by membership vote. A laureateship nomination might garner 25 points for the nominator and a laureateship award 250 points for the recipient. An annual "points" competition for "most active member" might even become a morale-boosting feature. Of course, such a competition could be subject to abuse—e.g., a member who nominated every single publication or work for a laureate or a member who submitted the same 100-word comment for every bundle journal.

Sometimes the mailer can act as a censor. At the 2006 AAPA convention in Cleveland, I recall one presenter on the "zines" panel who complained that his contribution had been banned from the bundle for a single "cuss" word. An electronic bundle available for viewing by all on the internet might only intensify concern over publication content. Even an association which does not allow members under eighteen will probably not want to allow heavily pornographic material in its electronic bundle. Perhaps along with "like" and "nominate" buttons for each publication, members might also have access to an "inappropriate" button. The official editor (or bundle administrator) would be obligated to remove a member's contribution if fifty percent or more of the membership classified it as "inappropriate." Of course, censorship is never popular in a democracy, but I think associations are entitled to protect their membership—especially their juvenile membership, if any—against unwanted content.

Of course, one issue confronting any internet-based APA would be its governance. Why would the creators of an electronic APA invest the time and money necessary to establish such an APA, if the rules of governance would allow their ouster by simply majority vote within a year of the founding? One solution might be for an existing paper-based APA to "seed" such an electronic APA, retaining all governance authority for an initial period (e.g., five or ten years) until the electronic APA was ready to govern itself.

A more basic question is: why have a community at all? Why not just conduct a blog on a social media site and let those with similar interests "like" or "follow" your work? Part of the reason for maintaining the structure of an APA is the preservation of traditions—mc's, laureate nominations, the list goes on and on. There is certainly no reason why participants in an

electronic APA could not schedule periodic in-person get-togethers in order to form a more cohesive group. I gravitate toward AAPA's tradition of "social only" in-person meetings if only to simplify the meetings' structure and free more time for purely social activities.

One final thought: I can envision some readers of this message reacting with the injunction, "Faig forgets our noble tradition of letterpress printing." In actual fact, I have not forgotten our printers. I think that private hobby printing will likely persist for the foreseeable future. I don't see why private hobby printers should not continue to enjoy traditional bundles and traditional in-person meetings (is wayzgeese the plural or wayzgoose?) for many decades to come. Digitization is not about to drive Gutenberg's invention from the scene. Of course, I don't think that the internet need necessarily be foreign territory for traditional hobby letterpress printers. They already engage in online discussion groups, and even make digital images of their work available online.

It has long been debated whether amateur journalism is an educational institution by any reasonable definition. I don't think many would deny that much can be learned by participation in our hobby. At least, mainstream amateur journalism has never fallen into the error of fandom's FIAWOL—fandom is a way of life—philosophy. In the last analysis, amateur journalism is a hobby. (If it becomes money-generating, beyond meeting necessary expenses, it becomes a livelihood, or a "side hussle" as the Uber advertisements would have it.) For a hobby to thrive, it must be fun for the participants. Whatever structure amateur press associations adopt in the decades to come, meeting the "it must be fun" test will be critical for success. I think of all the good reading I had while I served as NAPA critic—of all the laughs I had from Harold Shive's publications. Yes, serving as critic was work. Without the critic's obligation, I might have resorted to skimming most of the bundle contents. But serving as critic was also fun—and that's what a hobby is all about.

Perhaps the bundle tradition will survive the transition to the electronic age. ◈

Editor's Corner

by Dave Tribby

THIS ISSUE IS so full that I only have this corner available for my message.

I appreciate the Shepherd family's taking time to put together Wilson's story. Thanks also to Brown University for making so much Lovecraft material available online, and to Hippocampus Press for providing the letter transcription. HPL had a reputation for taking time to mentor writers, printers, and publishers who asked for assistance. Even this single letter shows how he offered practical, detailed advice and encouragement without glossing over areas that needed improvement.

In the aftermath of preparing the lead article for this issue, John Shepherd became a Fossil; his brother, Hal, has been a member since 2009.

When David Schultz sent me excerpts from the Lovecraft letters book, he included all twelve letters to Wilson Shepherd. They provide a fascinating insight into HPL's thinking and character. *H. P. Lovecraft: Letters to Robert Bloch and Others* is available from Hippocampus Press for $25.

In related news, David mentioned that he visited the Library of Amateur Journalism at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in February for research on a current project. It was a productive day, but he will need to return for additional material.

Good news from Secretary-Treasurer Tom Parson: all 16 Fossil memberships and subscriptions that came due in January have been renewed. ◈

The Fossil

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