



The Student Record staff of 1897-88. Editor John J. Sullivan is seated in the top row, second from the left.

A CENTURY OF SAGEBRUSH

In 1893, in defiance of the regents, Nevada students started the campus newspaper.

By Guy Clifton

The University of Nevada was already 18 years old when a group of students asked the Board of Regents for permission to publish a campus newspaper. The request quickly denied by the regents, who called the group too immature to handle such an endeavor.

The students thought otherwise. On the night of October 1, 1893 they held a secret meeting in the top story of the mining building and voted unanimously to print a newspaper in defiance of the Regents.

The first issue was put together in the basement of the Congregational Church just before Sunday school class convened. The next day *The Student Record* appeared on campus. It was

October 19, 1893 and a newspaper was born.

The first editor of *The Student Record* was a minister's son, Charles Magill, who wrote in that introductory issue, "The *Record* will be independent in politics and reserves the right to criticize all parties and measures."

A century later, the journal, known as *Sagebrush* since 1910, carries on Magill's objective. It is one of the few independent student newspapers in the nation and the feisty attitude of its founders has become as much a tradition as the paper itself.

This has led to more than one scrape over the years. The paper has had conflicts with just about every group on

campus at one time or another. *Sagebrush*, relying on freedom of the press, usually came away unscathed but there have been some notable exceptions.

In 1902, George Springmeyer became the first editor to be removed from the position because of an editorial. That year a smallpox scare in Reno prompted university president J.E. Stubbs to impose a semi-quarantine. Students who lived on campus had to stay on campus, but those who lived off campus could come and go as they pleased.

Springmeyer, who lived in Lincoln Hall, led a rebellion of the dorm students who marched downtown in defiance of the order. He also lambasted

Stubbs in the pages of the *Record* for his handling of the events. Stubbs was so outraged he expelled his critic.

One of the most infamous incidents in *Sagebrush* history came in 1961 when editor Don O'Donnell was fired by the student senate for what it termed "incompetence." O'Donnell had written several scathing editorials, including one noting the decline of campus traditions, in which he blamed deans Sam Basta and Jerry Wulk and the student government. Student leaders fired O'Donnell for "a lack of cooperation with and respect for the board and inaccuracy of editorial material."

The *Sagebrush* staff had its own answer to the blatant censorship by the students. The issue of March 4, 1961 was printed blank except for the newspaper flag, standing heads and advertising. Marybeth Varcados, now managing editor of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, was appointed interim editor by the publications board. She has the distinction of having the shortest term as *Sagebrush* editor—one week.

"I didn't ever really take over as editor," she recalls. "We just all went down and put the paper out. Don was still around. We decided as a staff to print the blank edition. We were outraged that they would fire our editor."

In 1972, the *Sagebrush* gained national attention when editor Buddy Frank was temporarily suspended from school for printing an advertisement for a pornographic device.

"We were making an editorial statement, but it just hit terrible controversies," he says. "The state legislature was considering the budget of the university at the time and they were outraged."

The student government convened to fire Frank, but several lawyers representing Sigma Delta Chi and other freedom of the press advocates represented him and he was quickly reinstated as editor. As a result of the incident, Frank was invited to appear on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. Frank says, "They wanted to know how a state that has legalized prostitution could be so outraged over an advertisement."

Lost in the controversy was the fact that *Sagebrush* was named best newspaper that year by the Nevada State Press Association. Frank went on to become one of the top television news personalities in the state in his 11 years at Reno's KTVN. He is now Marketing Director for a Reno casino.

Many *Sagebrush* staffers continued in journalism and their names have

appeared in the pages of the most prominent publications in the country: *Time*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Life* and more.

Several have won the Pulitzer Prize, journalism's highest honor:

Ed Montgomery, who gained fame as the crime reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner*, was a *Sagebrush* staffer in 1934. His investigation into crooked Internal Revenue Service employees won him a Pulitzer in 1950. Montgomery also broke the Patty Hearst kidnapping story.

Ron Einstoss, who worked for *Sagebrush* in the early 1950s, won three

Lawrence, Mass. Her reporting on the Massachusetts prison furlough program, including focus on murderer Willie Horton (the ammunition of television commercials in the 1988 Dukakis-Bush presidential campaign) helped put an end to the program.

One of the most prominent *Sagebrush* staffers to continue in journalism is Frank McCulloch, who edited the paper in 1940-41. The Fernley boy is considered by many to be the best journalist the state has ever produced. As managing editor, he turned the *Los Angeles Times* into one of the best newspa-

PHOTOS FROM ARTEMISIA



1960 *Sagebrush* staff: (left to right) Don O'Donnell, city editor, Ron Moroni, art editor, Dick Morris, photographer, Warren Lerude, editor, Ed Allison, news editor, Dick Bath, assistant editor, Royce Feur, sports editor, Ed Martinez, star reporter.

Pulitzers for his work at the *Los Angeles Times*. One of those was for his coverage of the 1965 Watts riots.

Warren Lerude, *Sagebrush* editor in 1960 and now a Nevada journalism professor and published author, shared a Pulitzer in 1977. As then executive editor of the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, his editorial guns were aimed at brothel king Joe Conforte.

Howard Sheerin, a UN journalism grad in 1931, was the copy editor for the *Watsonville Register-Guard* when it won the Pulitzer for meritorious public service for exposing corruption in the prosecutor's office.

Suste Forrest, a *Sagebrush* reporter in 1982, shared a Pulitzer in 1988 while a reporter for the *Eagle-Tribune* in

pers in the world, introducing detailed series reporting and other sweeping changes.

His coverage of the Vietnam War for *Time* magazine, where he worked for 16 years, had him at odds with President Lyndon Johnson on more than one occasion. Johnson used his power to have several of McCulloch's stories killed, but McCulloch was a legend in the journalism profession. He became the head of *Time-Life* before going back to newspapers with the *Sacramento Bee*, McClatchy Newspapers and the *San Francisco Examiner*. He now lives in retirement in California's Napa Valley.

Other high-profile newspapermen include Paul Finch, a Korean War vet twice named Newsman of the Year by

the Associated Press, and worked for the New York Times Syndicate in Los Angeles; John Brackett, a Manhattan, Nev. native, former editor and publisher of the *Visalia Times-Delta*; Clarence Heckethorne, long-time sports editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*; Bryn Armstrong, long-time editor of the *Sun*; and George Frank, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*.

The *Sagebrush* was often a training ground for the Reno news bureaus. Joseph McDonald, Joe Jackson, Frank Sullivan, Ty Cobb, Rollan Melton, and Warren Lerude are just a few of the many that stayed on in Reno after *Sagebrush*.

The current staff at the *Reno Gazette-Journal* has several former *Sagebrushers* on the staff including Bruce Bledsoe, Steve Falcone, John Trent, Mark Nowlin, Mary Warejcka, Melton and Cobb.

Recent *Sagebrush* staffers are also making names for themselves in the newspaper business. Among them are Steve Ball of the *San Francisco Banner Daily Journal*; Kent Harper of the *Ely Daily News*; Geoff Schumacher of the *Las Vegas Sun*; Bryan Allison of the *Daily News* in Moscow, Idaho; Greg Bortolin and George McCabe of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*; Rick Hoover, Duke Rittenhouse and Dan Hinxman of the *Daily Sparks Tribune*; and Brett Pauly of the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

The advertising and public relations field has also drawn a number of *Sage-*

brush staffers. They include the late Jim Joyce of Las Vegas, who handled numerous political campaigns each year; Mark Curtis, Gene Evans and Gene McKenna, all well-known Reno ad men; and Tom Wixon, former editor and publisher of *The Record-Courier* in

Bush media advisor. He also served as U.S. Ambassador to Iceland. Rogich was one of the members of Ronald Reagan's Tuesday Team, which engineered his 1984 re-election.

The *Brush* was also a stepping stone in many other fields. Robert Hale



Mark Curtis (left) was a cub reporter in 1948-49 before assuming the reins of power in 1950-51.

Merriman, the *Sagebrush* business manager in 1931-32, led the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. His exploits are detailed in the book, "American Commander in Spain," written by Warren Lerude.

Fred Anderson, editor in 1927-28, earned a Rhodes Scholarship and went to Harvard Medical School before returning to Reno. He served on the Board of Regents for 22 years and was instrumental in the establishment of the Univer-

sity of Nevada School of Medicine. Gardnerville and now owner of his own advertising agency.

Sig Rogich, who edited the *Sagebrush* in 1965-66, has worked on the presidential campaigns of Ronald Reagan and George Bush and has served as a

sity of Nevada School of Medicine.

"Editing the *Sagebrush* got me a Rhodes Scholarship so I could go into medicine," says the 86-year-old Anderson, who lives in retirement in Reno. "It was a great help for me."



Dr. Fred Anderson, *Sagebrush* editor in 1927-28, signs his name to the editor's drawer. Looking on is James Hammond, editor '29-30 and Mike Sullivan '86-87.

A Drawer Full of History

An ancient desk drawer has been a part of *Sagebrush* history for more than half a century.

In 1937, *Sagebrush* editor John Carr signed his name in the bottom of his office desk drawer and wrote, "Make it a tradition." In the 56 years since, the editors have done just that.

The dozens of names in the old drawer mark the beginning of some of the brightest careers in journalism, a legacy of ink-stained wretches that would be hard to match at any college newspaper in the country.

The drawer became the motivation in 1986 for the first-ever *Sagebrush* editors' reunion, held during Homecoming week. Several pre-1937 editors including Ernest Inwood (1926-27), Fred Anderson (1927-28), James Hammond (1929-30) and Joe Jackson (1931-32) added their signatures to the drawer at the reunion.

Carr, who went on to a distinguished military career, and now lives in retirement in Reno, had completely forgotten about signing the drawer in the first place. He was surprised to learn that his request had been carried out for so many years.

"Well, I'll be," he said. "I had no idea."

The drawer is still in use in the *Sagebrush* office in the Jot Travis Student Union and this year's editor, Marcel Levy, will add his name before his term expires, continuing a *Sagebrush* tradition.

Anderson credits much of his success to Ernest Inwood, editor in 1926-27 for getting him to join the staff. Inwood, the senior surviving *Sagebrush* editor, went on to head the economics and business department at Nevada for many years. He now lives in retirement in Campbell, Calif.

Silas Ross edited the paper, then the *Student Record*, for three years, 1906-09. Ross was one of Reno's most prominent businessmen and a longtime member of the Board of Regents. Alan Bible, assistant editor in 1929, became a longtime U.S. Senator for Nevada. Ed Allison, sports editor in 1959, is a notable Washington, D.C. lobbyist.

Several former *Brush* staffers entered law. John R. Ross, editor in 1922-23, became a powerful Nevada judge.

Doug Buchanan, editor 1962-63, is a prominent attorney in Bishop; Hampton Young, editor 1966-67, is a Reno attorney; Mike Sloan, editor 1964, is one of the most powerful gaming attorneys in Las Vegas; and Sheila Caudle is a media lawyer in Los Angeles.

Sagebrush has served as a barometer of the times and attitudes of university students. When World War II broke out, editor Bryn Armstrong wrote an editorial that mirrored the patriotism of the times. "Once again we are at war," he wrote. "We are not fighting a war to make the world safe for democracy. We are fighting to make the world safe for those who will come after us. Almost overnight we have changed from carefree university students into men and women in whose veins flow the blood of generations of liberty-loving people. We hold dear to our hearts the heritage we are now privileged to fight for."

It was during those World War II years that women took over the *Sagebrush* while the men were at war. Melba Whitaker, Betty Mollignoni and Madeline Maestretti had stints as editors from 1943 to 1946 and the news didn't miss a beat. Much of the focus was on the war effort, and what students were doing to support the troops.

The newspaper was far different in the fall of 1969, as were the attitudes of the students. The Vietnam War was in full swing and even the conservative Nevada campus wanted the war brought to a speedy conclusion. The feeling was made clear in a 1969 editorial by editor Tom Wixon. It read in part: "Vietnam protesters have no intention of shutting up and watching the President embark upon a course of inaction. They are tired of waiting and being told we should be



Jack Fleming became editor by default, after Uncle Sam grabbed editor Bill Friel in 1942.



World War II gave women like Madeline Maestretti a rare opportunity to edit the normally male-dominated paper.

out in a few years. We want out and we want out now—not in 1972 or so."

Sagebrush didn't always offer answers to the problems of the day. The writers were students, often as confused as everyone else. *Sagebrush* did not always have a clear focus but it did offer entertaining reading for the students and a tremendous learning experience for burgeoning young journalists.

"It's where a lot of journalists get bitten by the bug," says Warren Lerude. "*Sagebrush* is a real testing ground for responsibility."

The next 100 years could be just as colorful. ■

Gary Clifton was *Sagebrush* editor in 1985-86. He lives in Sacramento and is editor of the California edition of *Fishing & Hunting News*.

Sagebrush Editors*

1893-94 Charles Magill; 1894-95 F. H. Saxton; 1895-96 O. T. Williams/J. L. M. Henry; 1896-97 G. R. Bliss; 1897-98 J. J. Sullivan; 1898-99 H. H. Dexter; 1899-1900 A. M. Smith

1900-01 F. A. Bonham; 1901-02 George Springmeyer; 1902-03 Bernard O'Hara/J. V. Comerford; 1903-04 J. V. Comerford; 1904-05 C. C. Smith/John S. Case/D. M. McDonald; 1905-06 D. M. McDonald/John P. Arnot; 1906-07 Silas E. Ross; 1907-08 Elmer A. Porter/S. L. Netherton/Silas E. Ross; 1908-09 Silas E. Ross; 1909-10 Silas E. Ross/August Holmes

1910-11 August Holmes/Lloyd B. Patrick; 1911-12 Chester M. Ogden; 1912-13 Robert P. Farrer; 1913-14 Robert P. Farrer; 1914-15 Louis J. Sommers; 1915-16 Bourke Healey; 1916-17 John Heard; 1917-18 Lyle Kimmel; 1918-19 George Hopkins; 1919-20 R. P. Bryan

1920-21 John R. Bryan; 1921-22 Leslie M. Bruce; 1922-23 John R. Ross; 1923-24 Paul Harwood; 1924-25 Walker G. Matheson; 1925-26 W. H. Buntin; 1926-27 Ernest L. Inwood; 1927-28 Fred M. Anderson; 1928-29 Allen R. Crawford; 1929-30 James Hammond

1930-31 Harvey Dondero; 1931-32 Joe Jackson; 1932-33 Kenneth F. Johnson; 1933-34 William F. McMenamin; 1934-25 Forrest M. Bibb; 1935-36 Frank Sullivan; 1936-37 John Carr; 1937-38 John Brackett; 1938-39 Don Kinkle; 1939-40 Clarence Heckethorn

1940-41 Frank McCulloch; 1941-42 Byrn Armstrong; 1942-43 Bill Friel/Jack Fleming; 1943-44 Jack Fleming/Melba Whitaker/Betty Mollignoni; 1944-45 Betty Mollignoni; 1945-46 Madeline Maestretti; 1946-47 Bill Henley/Lloyd Rogers; 1947-48 Gene Evans; 1948-49 Jonnie Milburn; 1949-50 Gene McKenna

1950-51 Mark Curtis; 1951-52 Frank Johnson/Joseph Abbott; 1952-53 Joseph Abbott; 1953-54 Rosemary Cochran/William Eaton; 1954-55 William Eaton/Paul Finch; 1955-56 Paul Finch/Ken Robbins; 1956-57 Bruce Bledsoe; 1957-58 Jim Joyce; 1958-59 Dewey Berscheid; 1959-60 Warren Lerude

1960-61 Donald O'Donnel/Marybeth Varcados/Don Graydon; 1961-62 Toddene Watkins; 1962-63 Doug Buchanan; 1963-64 Patricia Rogero; 1964-65 Mike Sloan/Linda Chambers; 1965-66 Sig Rogich; 1966-67 Hampton Young; 1967-68 George Frank; 1968-69 Tim Countis; 1969-70 Tom Wixon/Mike Cuno

1970-71 Sheila Caudle; 1971-72 Mike Graham; 1972-73 Buddy Frank; 1973-74 Kelsie Harder; 1974-75 Kelsie Harder; 1975-76 Bob Anderson; 1976-77 Gary Jesch/Bill Becker/Laura Hinton; 1977-78 Laura Hinton/Steve Falcone; 1978-79 Steve Martarano; 1979-80 Ruth Mills

1980-81 K. J. Evans, John Roll; 1981-82 Charles Morse, Jr.; 1982-83 Carol Zanetti; 1983-84 Lauren Belaustegui; 1984-85 Steve Ball; 1985-86 Guy Clifton; 1986-87 Mike Sullivan; 1987-88 Geoff Schumacher; 1988-89 Bryan Allison; 1989-90 Kristine Kaiser

1990-91 Dan Hinzman; 1991-92 Rachael Conlin; 1992-93 Marcell Levy

* The student newspaper was called *The Student Record* until the Fall of 1910.