Belk, Henry [1]

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by George W. Troxler, 1979

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Henry Belk, newspaper editor and civic leader, was born in Monroe, the son of Robert Lee and Lula Rape Belk. Henry Belk was graduated from Monroe High School and received an A.B. degree from Trinity College [2] in 1923. While in high school Belk was a reporter for the Monroe *Journal*. As a student at Trinity he was director of the college news bureau (1920–23) and was the first to publicize the term "Blue Devils" as the nickname of the college football team. After graduation he served for two years as director of the news bureau and instructor in journalism and English at Wake Forest [3] College. In the academic year 1925–26 he lectured in journalism at New Rochelle College, New Rochelle, N.Y., while enrolled in the Columbia University [4] School of Journalism.

In 1923, Belk married Lucile Marie Bullard of Durham [5]. Their only child, Marie Belk Lipton, was fatally injured in an automobile accident on 28 Feb. 1950.

In 1926, Belk became editor and managing editor of the *Goldsboro News* [6]. When the *News* merged with the *Daily Argus* [7] in 1929 to form the *Goldsboro News-Argus*, he was managing editor, a position he held until 1955. He was editor from 1949 until his appointment as editor emeritus in August 1968. After retirement he continued to write a daily editorial column for the *News-Argus*, a weekly editorial for the *Greensboro Daily News*, and a signed column.

Congenital cataracts on both eyes had prevented Belk's entering school until he was nine. Operations undergone while he was in college helped vision in his left eye, but the right eye remained in poor condition. After diagnosis of a detached retina in his left eye in 1952, Belk underwent a series of operations. Brief success was followed by a heart attack and a second detached retina. By 1955 he was totally blind. With his wife's aid, he continued his editorial duties.

A Democrat [8], Belk wrote mildly worded editorials demanding greater responsiveness from local and state government. He candidly advocated mutual respect in matters of race and religion and actively supported civic responsibility. Many of his later columns were well-honed essays based on folk customs and personal reminiscences.

Widely respected by his fellow journalists, Belk was a member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors [9] and of the Associated Press Managing Editors. He was president of the Eastern North Carolina Press Association (1944), the North Carolina Press Association (1950–51), the Associated Press News Council (1953), and the North Carolina Associated Press (1950–51). Many young reporters who worked under him at the *News-Argus* advanced to rather prominent positions in journalism.

In 1960, Belk was appointed to the President's Committee for Employment of the Physically Handicapped[10]. He served as trustee of East Carolina University [11] from 1947 until his death and as chairman of the board in 1963–64. He was president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association [12] (1963–64) and served on the North Carolina Citizens Committee for Better Schools, the executive committee of the Carolina Tercentenary Committee, and the North Carolina Study Commission for Vocational Rehabilitation. He was a member of the Aycock Memorial Commission, and in 1959, following the opening of the restored Charles B. Aycock [13] birthplace in Wayne County [14], he presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Literary and Historical Association; in keeping with Aycock's program as governor (1901–5), the theme of the meeting was education, and Belk's paper, "A Ten Year Plan for North Carolina [15]," pleaded for greater public support of the public schools and the development of community and evening colleges. Belk was active in local affairs, president of the Goldsboro Rotary, and an honorary life member of the Jaycees. He was a deacon in the Madison Avenue Baptist Church, an influential layman in the Baptist State Convention, and a director of the *Biblical Recorder* [16], official newspaper of the convention.

Belk was the recipient of the Goldsboro Rotary Club's Honorary Citizenship Award in 1957, an award that had been presented only twice in forty years. In 1961 he received the Handicapped Man of the Year Award from the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. In 1966 a dormitory at East Carolina University was named for him. He was honored at a testimonial dinner in October 1968 at the Sir Walter Hotel in Raleigh.

Belk died in a Goldsboro rest home, following a year of failing health, and was buried in Willow Dale Cemetery, Goldsboro.

References:

Henry Belk, "A Ten Year Plan for North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 37 (1960).

North Carolina Collection (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), for newspaper clippings.

William S. Powell, ed., *North Carolina Lives* (1962).

Who's Who in America, 1970–71.

Who's Who in the South and Southwest, 1967–68.

Additional Resources:

Henry Belk in WorldCat: https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3ABelk%2C+Henry%2C&qt=hot_author [17]

Henry Belk, "son of Sweet Union", by Moses Rountree:https://www.worldcat.org/title/henry-belk-son-of-sweet-union/oclc/2401319 [18]

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