

Debnam, Waldemar Eros ^[1]

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by James F. Harper, 1986

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Waldemar Eros Debnam, radio commentator, author, and [Raleigh](#) ^[2] city councilman, was born in Snow Hill, son of Joseph Eppe and Birdice Speight Debnam. For some time his father was a public school teacher and superintendent of schools in the Snow Hill area where in 1902 he started a weekly newspaper, *The Standard Laconic* ^[3]. After her husband's death, Birdice Speight Debnam took over *The Laconic* at the age of sixty-five and continued to publish it until she was eighty-two.

In 1915 Debnam entered Mars Hill preparatory school and in 1917 attended [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4]. At the university he was an active member of the Philanthropic Literary Society and the ROTC program. He returned to Snow Hill in 1918 and worked on *The Standard Laconic* until about 1922, afterward becoming a reporter for *The Danville Register*, *The Washington* ^[5] (D.C.) *Herald* ^[5], and *The Virginian-Pilot-Ledger Dispatch* ^[6] in Norfolk. While with *The Virginian-Pilot*, he had a radio program in Norfolk and Richmond with a series called "The Tales of Ole Virginia."

After leaving *The Virginian-Pilot*, Debnam started his own paper, *The Norfolk News Index*, which he operated for two years. Later he was employed by radio station WRVA in Richmond and in 1941 joined radio station WPTF in Raleigh. During [World War II](#) ^[7] he served as WPTF's Pacific correspondent. Before leaving the station, he wrote *Weep No More, My Lady* ^[8], an answer to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's criticisms of the South in the early 1950s. The book sold over 500,000 copies.

While living in Raleigh, Debnam was elected to the city council in 1953 and reelected in 1954. He resigned his seat in 1955 as increased sales of his latest booklet, *Then My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night!* ^[9], took more of his time. In 1956 he lost a close race with Harold Cooley for Fourth District congressman in the Democratic primary. In the same year Debnam entered television, joining the Greenville station WNCT-TV where he did a popular morning show; in 1963 he moved to WITN-TV in Washington, N.C. There he became vice-president in charge of news and public affairs, continuing in the post until his death at the age of seventy.

In 1924 Debnam married the former Stella Glass and they were the parents of William S. and Betty Glass Debnam. William S. Debnam is an orthodontist in Portsmouth, Va. Betty Debnam, now of Raleigh, is the editor of *The Minipage*, ^[10] a children's newspaper used by over three hundred larger papers throughout the country. Debnam was buried at Greenwood Cemetery, Greenville.

References:

Mrs. W. E. Debnam, interview, 18 Sept. 1977, Raleigh.

Raleigh News and Observer, 21 July 1955, 16 Feb. 1968.

[University of North Carolina student annual, *Yackety Yack*, 1917.](#) ^[11]

Additional Resources:

W. E. Debnam in WorldCat: https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3ADebnam%2C+W.+E.&qt=hot_author ^[12]

Waldemar E. Debnam Papers, 1854 [1922]-1967, East Carolina University:
<http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0426/> ^[13]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[23]

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