

Harry Thomas Foote, 96

PORTLAND -- Harry Thomas Foote, 96, died on Monday at his home in Portland. Foote, a newsman extraordinaire, spent 27 years at the Portland papers, and at age 51 in 1965, left to buy the then Westbrook American and South Portland-Cape Elizabeth Journal weeklies. Soon merging them into the American Journal, he ran that for another 37 years until retiring at age 86 in 2002, when he sold the paper. It continues in publication, and to his pride continues to get scoop stories regularly.

News was his life calling, his sacred work, and he loved it, and all the people, great and small, of the communities his paper covered. It showed, and they showed that love back. Doing newspaper work well, he believed and by his work proved, benefitted everyone, all society, even those who didn't want a particular story told. He was born on Oct. 3, 1915, in Woodlawn (now Aliquippa), Pa., the third of four sons of Ada May Maxted and Myron Tinkham Foote, and grew up in Lorain, Ohio. His father was a surveyor and insurance salesman, his mother a schoolteacher before marriage.

His boyhood home was a grand brick house across the street from a beach on Lake Erie, and he grew up swimming in and ice-skating on the lake.

Harry had news in his blood from his youngest years. He had a paper route, then started his reporting career with a Boy Scout news show on the local phone company's 'cable radio' station. When his best friend Dave Goldthorpe got a Scouting news column with one of Lorain's daily newspapers, Harry got hired for his own Scouting column at the other daily.

He graduated in the Lorain High School class of 1932B, then after a post-graduate year, something common in the near-jobless Depression, worked for a year at the weekly Wellington (Ohio) Enterprise. The owner-publisher Ernst Henes lent him his brand-new Buick and he learned to drive while interviewing area farmers for the annual Dairy Progress edition.

He chose to attend Bowdoin College in Maine, impressed with its record of writer graduates and especially its no-nonsense well-organized course catalog.

At Bowdoin he majored in English and was an editor of the school newspaper, the Orient, and worked as a college news stringer for a few big dailies. He was a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity.

Some holidays, he was among students who could not get home and were guests at the family table of college president Kenneth Sills and his wife Edith.

After graduation in 1938 he was hired as a reporter at the Guy Gannett Publishing Company's Kennebec Journal in Augusta. Proving his merit there, he soon moved to the staff of the Portland Evening Express-Press Herald. During his time in Portland, he met and dated a cute Portland librarian, Anne H. Blanchard.

When World War II broke out, he was accepted by the Navy's Japanese Language School, with an officer's commission to graduates. He trained at the University of Colorado's Boulder campus, along with fellow Bowdoin graduates Hank Dolan and

John Rich.

In 1943 after graduation and basic training he was commissioned a U.S. Marine and sent to the South Pacific, serving among other spots on New Britain, New Guinea, and in the invasions of Peleliu and Okinawa. As war wound down he spent some time in China accepting locomotives from the surrendered Japanese Army. He rose to the rank of Second Lieutenant.

He returned to Portland to his job as a reporter and, in 1947, married Anne Blanchard. Anne and Harry recently marked their 65th wedding anniversary, which pleased him greatly.

Living in Westbrook, Peaks Island, and Portland, they

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began a family, and he rose up the ranks at the Evening Express, to assistant city editor, then city editor, in charge of Portland news for the Express, Press Herald, and Sunday Telegram.

Finally returning to his weekly paper roots, Harry purchased the then 15-year-old Westbrook American and its new sister paper, the South Portland-Cape Elizabeth Journal, in 1965 from founder Roger Snow. In 1968 he merged the two papers, forming the regional American Journal. With diligent news efforts by Harry and a long string of excellent reporters and columnists, the paper began to thrive.

His already long work weeks then about doubled as he filled nearly all roles in the small enterprise, reporting, editing, selling and composing ads, laying out pages, taking the paper to the printer, managing staff. Wife Anne and by then four teenaged children pitched in as well.

A first growth spurt came with the opening of the Maine Mall, and a second in the 1980s, with several years in a row of near 20 per cent circulation increases.

The stories he wrote and those of his co-workers stood out. Often scoops, they were cleanly written, with snappy headlines and apt, smartly cropped photos and full of names and details. Easy to read, must-read writing was what he aimed for and what the paper usually provided to its readers.

For over 10 years he and his wife were owners and publishers of the Grange Herald, official newspaper of the Maine State Grange, and they poured many hours into editing and pleasant news gathering work for that publication as well.

He worked on into his late years, only retiring at age 86 on selling the paper in June 2002 to Lee Hews Cassler, and continued for a few years after that compiling a looking-back column, until a stroke and vision problems grounded him. The paper has continued to list him as Publisher Emeritus, a nice touch he appreciated.

Harry's life embodied a strong sense of public service. In the 1960s he helped establish Portland's first chapter of the NAACP. He also served as longtime Secretary for the local branch of the Council on Foreign Relations. In younger years Harry and

Anne were active members of the Appalachian Mountain Club, and he strongly supported environmental causes in his editorials.

Though he was no longer active, his health remained good until he recently began to fail, and his interest in news continued strong till the end. 'What's it say?' he would ask, if he heard someone rattling a newspaper while they read, or he would ask, 'Read me a headline.' The night before he died, he smiled on hearing the story of the Downeast Coast Guard crew who rescued a sea turtle tangled in pot warp.

He is survived by his wife Anne; son Thomas and daughter-in-law Anne Harwood, Bowdoinham, son Raymond, Portland, son Daniel and daughter-in-law Mikiyo, Seattle, Wash., and Tokyo, Japan, daughter Susan, Portland; and grandsons, Jeffrey Perry of Arlington, Va., and Kevin Perry of Charlotte, N.C. Also surviving are his wife's sister Sally and her husband Richard Vaughan of Buxton, sisters-in-law Charlotte Foote and Jeannette Foote; and many nieces and nephews.

Family and friends are invited for a time of visitation from 3-4 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 18, 2012, at Jones, Rich & Hutchins Funeral Home, 199 Woodford St., Portland, where sharing of memories will begin at 4 p.m.

Contributions may be made
in his memory to:

Bowdoin College
1400 College Station
Brunswick, Maine 04011

Published in Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram on Aug. 16, 2012.

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