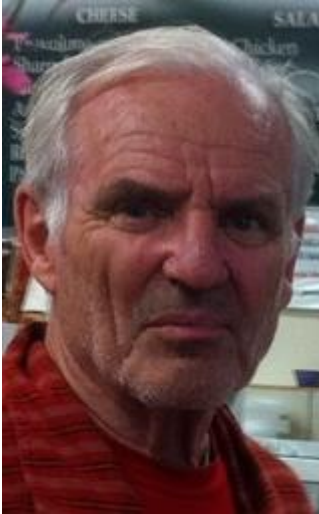


Half Staff – Peter Watson

November 25, 2012



Rockport, MA — Peter Watson, Editor, Gloucester Daily Times; General Manager, Essex County Newspapers, from 1970-2002, died (dammit) on November 24, 2012. He was 73 years old. Watson served as editor of the Times from 1970 to 1983 then as General Manager of Essex County Newspapers with continued oversight for the Times among his responsibilities, hiring and working with successive editors for the next two decades.

On his watch, the Gloucester Daily Times campaigned successfully for the restoration of the mayoral form of government and waterfront zoning. The Times at that time was a leading skeptic of development proposals, including the original plan to fill much of the harbor as part of the city's urban renewal program. The Times also stood up to the City Council in 1980 when in the heat of the Unification Church's arrival in Gloucester, a fearful City Council passed an anti-unification church resolution likening that church to the Jim Jones cult which had just committed mass suicide. A week later, after a Times editorial said, in effect, "we are better and we are stronger than that" and a public outcry, the Council retracted its vote.

During his tenure, the Times began accumulating a 35-foot wall of awards, many for being the New England Newspaper of the Year in its circulation category and for top investigative stories and many for Charles A. Lowe photos, who once won six first place awards in one year. He personally nailed the awards to the newsroom wall to "inspire and/or intimidate" the staff which would later work underneath them.

Building on the tradition begun by former owner Phillip S. Weld who in 1948 founded the Cape Ann Summer Sun and traditionally brought in college interns to edit it, Watson initiated with the University of New Hampshire a college internship program that brought decades of college interns to the paper. Many stayed on as full-timers. One has gone on to win a Pulitzer Prize and many employees throughout Essex County Newspapers came through this program. Other former Times staffers from Watson's era have become publishers, editors, and Supreme Court correspondents. Watson oversaw the Times publication of three books, "Portrait of Gloucester: Photos by Charles A. Lowe," and two storm books, "Storm Force: The 1978 Storm", and "Storming Ashore: the 1991 Storm.". Former Times reporters from Peter Anastas to Kevin Sullivan, including Kim Bartlett, Todd Balf, Kevin Baker, and Tony Mauro have published more than a dozen books.

Watson had a varied and long athletic life, all of it post-college and most of it playground. For 25 years, he quarterbacked the Sunday morning Evans field football game in Rockport every fall. He played pickup YMCA and league basketball even longer. A lifelong member of the Sandy Bay Yacht Club in Rockport, he raced sailboats, Firefly dinghies, in which he was once club champion, and Star Boats less successfully. He was, with his wife Pat, an avid skier, most often at Killington.

In his late forties, he took up running and 24 times ran the annual June Mount Washington Race, 4,650 feet up to the top of Mount Washington, New England's tallest peak. He was the founder of "Team

Gloucester,” a cohesive, if not formally constituted running club on Cape Ann, begun as a race team for the Mount Washington race, and won the Master’s Team competition in its inaugural 2003 outing. He was a regular at local races, Sunday morning Team Gloucester woods runs, and trail runs around New England in preparation for the annual Mount Washington conquest. He competed in more than a dozen Around the Cape Races on Labor Day.

Watson was born May 26, 1939 in Leominster, the second son of Mary E. and John R. Watson from whom he got his hometown and professional career. His mother, a junior high school Latin and Spanish teacher, had graduated from Emanuel College in 1924 where she had met a classmate, Anna Carroll, from Gloucester with whom she visited. Subsequently, she got a summer job at a Bass Avenue Ice Cream Shop, thus beginning a lifelong passion for Cape Ann. She married John Watson in 1934 in the old Saint Joachim’s Church of Rockport. In 1938, they built a summer cottage on Smith Road, first occupied in the summer of 1939. His father, Jack, worked as a reporter for thirty years until his 1952 death.

Peter Watson graduated from the University of Massachusetts in 1961 with a degree in Political Science. It was there that he met Patricia Ward, a classmate and Editorial Page Editor of the University’s daily newspaper, The Collegian. He wrote editorials for her and they were married in June 1964.

After graduating from college in 1961, he served six months in the active reserve of the U.S. Army before getting his first job in newspapers as an editor of several weeklies in the Worcester area. In 1963, he joined the Beverly Times as a reporter. After becoming an editor for the Times, he left the paper in 1969 to become an editor of the sailboat racing magazine “One Design Yachtsman”, out of Chicago. After covering the 1970 America’s Cup trials, he left the magazine to become the editor of the Gloucester Times. In 1982, he became the founding editor of the Beverly-Peabody Times, an experiment to merge two ECN newspapers. In 1983, the two papers were restored as separate publication and he became General Manager of ECN where, as chief operating officer, he shared overall operational responsibility for the newspapers with the Publisher.

In 1995, Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., ECN’s corporate parent, purchased the Salem Evening News and ECN merged with both the Beverly Times and the Peabody News. In a Dow Jones corporate retrenchment, ECN was sold in 2002 and Watson retired.

In an active retirement, Watson served as chair of the Rockport Town Government and By-Law Committee, a member and principal writer for the Task Force for the Preservation of Addison Gilbert Hospital, and an active advisor on the 2005 re-election campaign of Mayor John Bell.

He leaves his three sons, Seth Watson, a human resource professional with King County, Wash., Jared Watson, senior vice president of the Seattle Foundation, and Kareem Wilson, a senior at Dean College and counselor with the Cape Ann YMCA’s Camp Spindrift. His wife, Patricia, died in April 2006.

ARRANGEMENTS: A memorial celebration will be held at 3 p.m. on December 29, at the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport with a reception to follow at the Rockport Art Association.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to one of the many causes Peter supported, UNH Journalism Program c/o UNH Foundation, 9 Edgewood Road, Durham NH 03824; Teen and Camp Services at the Cape Ann YMCA, 71 Middle Street, Gloucester, MA 01930; and Legal Voice, 907 Pine Street, Suite 500, Seattle WA, 98101.

Arrangements by Burgess & Mackey Funeral Home, 201 Main Street, Rockport. For online condolences, please visit burgessandmackey.com

Former Times editor Peter Watson dies at 73

By Times Staff Gloucester Daily Times

ROCKPORT — Peter Watson, a longtime Cape Ann and North Shore newspaperman and former editor of the Gloucester Daily Times, died this weekend after a lengthy recovery battle following surgery for a brain tumor in 2011.

Watson, who was 73, passed away Saturday morning at the Kaplan Family Hospice House in Danvers, his sons, Jared and Seth, told the Times Sunday night. Watson had been able to remain at home until just a few days before he died, they said.

Watson, who began his career with Ottaway Newspapers as a reporter for the former Beverly Times in 1963, was best known locally as editor of the Gloucester Daily Times from 1970 through 1983.

He then stepped up to become general manager of the Essex County Newspapers, a post he held from 1983 until his retirement in 2002.

He also served in a number of community roles, including throughout his retirement, when he became head of the Rockport Democratic Committee and chaired Rockport's town Government/Bylaw Committee.

An avid sailor and runner — he was competing in a 2011 road race when he showed the first signs of his illness, Jared Watson said — Watson had also founded the youth sailing program at Rockport's Sandy Bay Yacht Club.

He was also a founding member of the Gloucester Running Club, leading that group on a number of expeditions to the annual run up Mount Washington in New Hampshire. And he worked with officials at the Cape Ann Museum to organize an extensive 2009 photo exhibit that featured the works of the late Charles Lowe, a newsroom colleague of Watson's throughout most of his tenure as Times editor.

Services were still pending as of Sunday night. For more on Peter Watson's passing and reflections from those who knew him, look to more coverage online at gloucestertimes.com later today, and look to Tuesday's print and online editions of the Gloucester Daily Times and gloucestertimes.com.

Watson recalled as classic newsman, friend

By Gail McCarthy, Staff Writer

Peter Watson, the former Gloucester Daily Times editor and lifelong newsman who died Saturday at 73, is being remembered as one who inspired a generation of journalists, not just through his newsroom

leadership, but also through friendships, many of which lasted a lifetime.

He nurtured hundreds of interns and reporters who passed through the doors of the Times and its parent Essex County Newspapers, and many of them even lived at his sprawling dark blue Victorian house on Granite Street in Rockport.

There, he and his late wife, Patricia, provided not just a house but a home, drawing the young writers into conversation or taking them for a swim in the nearby quarry. But whether at work or at play, his legacy lives on in the lives of writers across the country.

Watson served as editor of the Times from 1970 to 1983, although he remained involved throughout his career even after he moved up the executive ladder of the newspaper chain. He retired as general manager of Essex County Newspapers in 2002.

Watson was also known for his physical prowess; he ran up Mount Washington, and skied down its Tuckerman's Ravine after hiking up the mountain with his ski gear. He was an avid sailor and played quarterback for more than 15 years at Sunday morning football games at Evans Field.

In recent interviews with Watson and those he worked with, a story unfolds of a complicated man whose life was driven by giving the community the best a local newspaper could offer and supporting the public's right to know.

"The Gloucester Times and Watson launched many careers," said Lisa Miller, a Times intern in 1978 who now directs the journalism program at the University of New Hampshire. "For years, journalism interns from the University of New Hampshire worked for the Times. Pat and Peter treated us like family and helped us through the ups and downs of the internship. We were lucky to get to know Rockport and Gloucester through them. Many of us found our calling during the internship."

In an interview just a week before he died, Watson noted the path of former local writers, including one who earned a Pulitzer, and so many others who went on to work as editors, publishers and authors.

Barbara Carton, a longtime staff reporter at The Wall Street Journal, said most of what she learned about journalism was "Pure Peter." She noted that she grew up at a time when her father's notion of a career path for her was one of working as a receptionist at The Northern Trust Bank in her native Chicago, until a suitable husband turned up.

"Peter's notion was that after some training as the Rockport reporter, I should cover the waterfront — never mind that I was a Midwesterner and didn't know a dragger from a dogfish," Carton wrote in an email. "I would learn and I would have fun. I would interview guys in dive bars and in the fish plants; I would go to George's Bank. Peter dispensed much-needed advice, support and a ton of laughs."

Kevin Sullivan, senior correspondent at the Washington Post, worked as an intern at Peabody Times in 1981, and then as a staff writer at the Gloucester Times from 1982 to 1985, covering Rockport and the waterfront. He, along with his wife, Mary Jordan, won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting at the Post in a series about the Mexican criminal justice system.

'A real inspiration'

"Peter was a real inspiration to a whole generation of us who passed through the Gloucester Times,"

said Sullivan. “He was a mentor and a friend. He, more than anybody I’ve ever known, kind of put the fun in journalism. He had such infectious energy and he got us all to work incredibly hard and absolutely fall in love with this business. He had that kind of renegade spirit that is just really attractive in a leader and you wanted to follow that guy.”

“I have this enduring image of Peter driving around in that old blue convertible with his hair blowing in the wind — and just smiling,” Sullivan said in a telephone interview Monday. “He knew how to have fun but he worked hard and inspired you with his energy and image — and that’s a rare thing. I wouldn’t be where I am without Peter.”

Tony Mauro, who has covered the U.S. Supreme Court for 32 years, remembers well his first editor after he graduated from journalism school in 1972.

“He took a chance on me, a New York City kid who had never lived in New England or a small city. I was so lucky to have him as my editor; he was a great teacher and mentor, and accuracy, integrity and fairness were very important to him,” Mauro wrote in an email. “He strived to make the Gloucester Times indispensable for readers. ... Under Peter, we covered the waterfront, literally and figuratively.

“For many of us, working at the Times was our first and best newspaper job, and that is because of Peter,” wrote Mauro, 62, who worked at the Times from 1972 to 1976. He later worked for Gannett News Service and USA Today, and since 2000 for Legal Times and now for The National Law Journal. He has twice been named among the top 50 journalists in Washington, D.C. by the Washingtonian magazine.

Watson contacted a reporter about a week ago to share an “obit” he wrote knowing his death was imminent. He highlighted the dozens of awards earned by the Gloucester Times, where he cheerfully pounded nails into the wall to hang the awards, which eventually grew to 35 feet long.

In a draft obit he typed on paper back in 1980, he noted that from 1970 to 1978, the newspaper won more than 30 writing awards in the annual New England UPI contests, one which he personally took part in during the coverage of the 1978 blizzard that brought the Commonwealth to a standstill with 36 inches of snow and the loss of all hands aboard the pilot boat Can Do.

John Bell, a former mayor and city councilor, remembered the indefatigable newsman.

“Peter was a trusted friend who had a mad crush on Cape Ann and its wonderful population of ‘characters,’” Bell said Monday. “He single-handedly defeated terrible over-building of Gloucester in the late ’60s and early ’70s, when city councils ignored good urban planning. Peter was a very smart friend — and how about running up Mt. Washington when a lot of friends are playing bingo!”

Watson also was known for his top physical condition and Herculean achievements for a man in his 70s. Just 18 months ago, he ran up Mount Washington during the 52nd Run to the Clouds, an all-uphill 7.6 mile run to the summit of the highest peak in the Northeast.

Two months later, he confronted a diagnosis of brain cancer, but he underwent intense treatment, and it wasn’t long before he returned to running around town.

A lifelong newsman

He was born in Leominster to a mother who was a Latin teacher and a father who worked as reporter for 30 years at the Fitchburg Sentinel and previously the Worcester Telegram.

Watson graduated from University of Massachusetts in 1961 with a degree in political science. He served six months in the Army reserve before landing his first newspaper job as an editor of several weeklies in the Worcester area. But in 1963, he found a job as a daily reporter at the former Beverly Times. During a recent interview at his home, he recalled how one of his first assignments was to get local reaction to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

He left the paper in 1969 to work as editor for a sailboat racing magazine. After covering America's Cup trials in 1970, he took the job as editor of the Gloucester Daily Times. Even when he went on to larger executive roles, he remained close to the Cape Ann newspaper, always providing tips and story ideas to the reporters.

When he served as editor, some of the major investigations included a series by Kim Bartlett on the city's first major apartment complex, which led to the creation of an apartment zoning ordinance; a police brutality series in 1975 by John Christie which led to changes in police practices. He also provided editorial support for a new city charter that helped return Gloucester to a mayoral form of government.

Longtime journalist Jerry Ackerman of Gloucester met Watson in 1966 when he took the job as news editor at the former Beverly Times and Watson was the city hall reporter.

"Beyond his competence as a journalist and then a manager, Peter was deeply in love with Cape Ann — its beauty and its quiriness, its grittiness and proud isolation, its places and its people and its next-door-neighbor politics," said Ackerman. "His friendships ran deep."

Always on the run

Watson was competitive in the newsroom, football field, basketball court and on the running trail.

Bob Gillis, a fellow runner and local banker, called Watson the godfather of Team Gloucester, an informal running club founded about 15 years ago.

"He did so many things well," Gillis recalled. "I remember playing football with him. He was a great quarterback. He was a good basketball player with a good outside shot. He could do everything. He was a great friend to all of us and there was nothing better than a conversation with Peter Watson during a run through the woods — he was just a real interesting guy."

Watson nurtured a close bond with his two sons, Seth and Jared.

"We may have a small biological family, but we have a huge extended family with people all over the place because of how he opened up this house to so many young people," said 43-year-old Jared. "This house was just so much fun all the time."

In an interview yesterday at the family homestead, the two sons recalled the frequent water fights in the summer and the time his father pulled a hose up to the third floor to squirt water upon his foes down below. Other times, he would drop the water gun and fill water balloons which he would drop out the

top floor windows upon the unsuspecting opponents.

On another level, his sons talked about how they were influenced by how their father led by example; instead of using his authority in the workplace, he influenced those he oversaw by leading the way, said Seth.

“The person we saw was pretty much the person everyone else saw,” he said. “There was a consistent face that he presented to everybody.”

Watson also became a father figure to Kareem Wilson, now 21, who came into the Watson’s household as a seven-year-old boy. What started as a two-week summer stay turned into a lifelong bond. Wilson went on to serve as a camp counselor at the Cape Ann YMCA and is now a senior at Dean College.

“I grew up never knowing my father, never knowing any kind of positive male role model,” Wilson said in an email. “When Peter was brought into my life I didn’t think about what it felt like not to have a biological father or a positive male role model because he was all those things to me. He was a friend, a role model but most importantly, he was the father I never had.”

The family is planning a memorial service, although a date has not yet been set.