

Journalism Milestones

—Arnold Cheyney

Henry Watterson

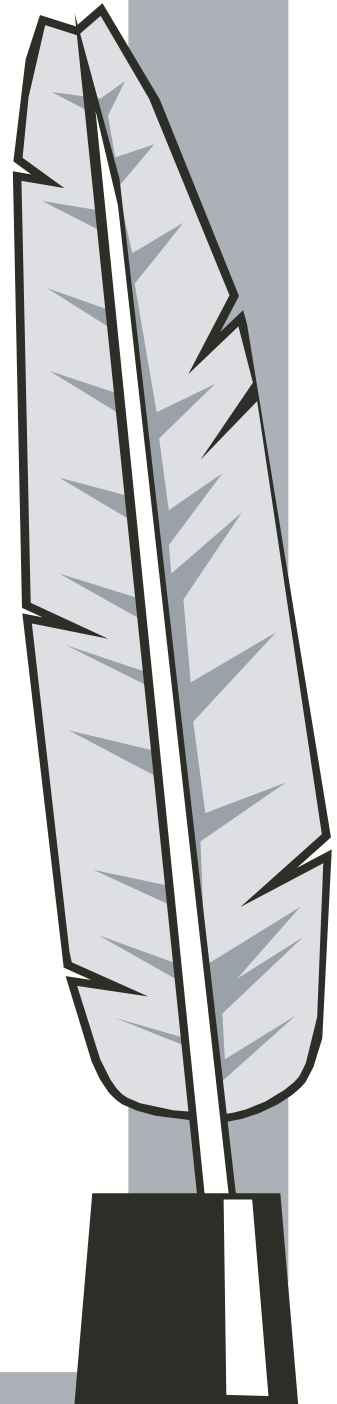
Henry Watterson was born on February 16, 1840 in Washington, D.C. His father Harvey, was a congressman from Tennessee in the House of Representatives. His Mother, Talitha, taught Henry to read and to play the piano. Tutors continued his education. Henry experienced vision difficulties because of a bout of scarlet fever that left his eyes weak.

As he grew up, Henry walked the halls of the Capitol listening to congressmen debate issues. When he was nine his father bought the Democrat-leaning Nashville Union newspaper in Tennessee. His father disapproved of slavery. Henry witnessed a slave named Isaac being beaten by his overseer. Harvey bought the slave for Henry who then gave Isaac his freedom.

From 1852 to 1856, Henry attended the Academy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia where he edited the school newspaper. Upon his return home at sixteen, his father gave him a printing press and he started his own one-page newspaper, the New Era. He covered weddings, funerals, and farm prices. Then he worked for a short time for the New York Tribune and later as a music critic for the New York Times. Later, he went to Washington as a writer for the Daily States. In 1861, Lawrence Gobright, the manager of the Associated Press in Washington, asked Henry to cover the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, the new President of the United States. He did.

Even though Henry had strong convictions against slavery and the secession of the southern states from the Union, he felt it was his duty as a Southerner to enlist in the Confederate army. Illness kept him from serving very long and he returned to Tennessee as associate editor of the Nashville Banner. The Union army then occupied the city and Henry and the other editors fled. He then became editor of the Chattanooga Rebel, a newspaper primarily for the Confederate army that was designed to boost the morale of troops and citizens.

Although Henry was small in stature-five feet tall and eighty pounds-he had a fine mind. In Chattanooga, Henry met Rebecca Ewing, who sang in a church choir. At



the end of the war they married. He was 25 and she was 21. He affectionately called her "Miss Rebecca," even into their later years together. She influenced him to be a church-goer.

In 1868, at 28 years of age, Henry became editor of the Louisville, Kentucky Courier-Journal and he remained in that position for fifty years. His editorials and appealing personality made him a favorite in Louisville. As a lecturer on the positive aspects of the South, he hoped to bring the nation closer together after the war.

Henry used the pen name "Marse Henry." "Marse" was the Southern expression for "Master." He was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1917 for his editorials. His autobiography was serialized in the Saturday Evening Post and published as two books in December 1919.

He died at age 80 in Ft. Myers, Florida, where he and his "Miss Rebecca" spent their winters.

Learning Activities

Language Arts

Write two reasons why you think Henry Watterson became a successful newspaper editor. Share with your classmates.

Henry wrote in his autobiography: "I have been something of a student of life: an observer of men and women and their affairs; an appraiser of their character, their conduct, and, on occasion, of their motives." How does "being a student of life" help you to become a better writer? Write your answer in 50 to 75 words. Read it aloud to your classmates.

Mathematics

How many years have passed since Henry Watterson was born?

Social Studies

"I cannot remember a time when I was not passionately opposed to slavery..." Henry wrote. Nevertheless, he joined the Confederate army. What reasons do you think he had for doing that? Discuss with classmates.

This activity addresses the following national learning standards:

Language Arts

#12 Students use spoken, visual and written language for ... learning, enjoyment, persuasion and the exchange of information. (National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association List of Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996.) Social Studies Strand I Culture. Strand X Civic ideals and practices. (Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, National Council for the Social Studies, 1999.)

