

# Woman at the helm

## Mary McMenammon Marshall our first Woman Editor-In-Chief

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Mary McMenammon Marshall

The year is 1940. War rages in Europe. At home, classes begin early so the boys 'up the hill' can participate in reserve training. Some are enlisting but day-to-day campus life carries on... on Fridays, the Brunswickan is still eagerly awaited by the student population, and there is much news to write about, including the fact that the Brunswickan, Canada's oldest official student publication, has its first woman at the helm.

Mary McMenammon Marshall not only carries that distinction, but was also the first female editor-in-chief of any college newspaper in the entire country.

Yet today, she smiles modestly about the accomplishment.

"I remember Manzer (Bunker) and Colin (MacKay) talking me into it! Women's liberation had nothing to do with it," she explains. "You were going to get a job done and that's all there was to it."

Mrs. Marshall also feels that the war had little to do with her position. True, many of the boys were leaving, but she was going into her senior year and, as she describes herself, "I was always the willing horse, whether good, bad or indifferent!"

As the first female editor-in-chief, Mrs. Marshall says that because she was a woman she did not feel she had to excel in the position.

"I did not have to prove myself; I was accepted for myself. Women only have had to prove themselves in the 50's and 60's," she claims. "We all felt too fortunate to be able to be at university, that we wanted to give something of ourselves. Everyone was in the same boat. Money was short, and everyone was scraping by. We were a very fortunate class to even be there at all."

Despite her modesty, Mrs. Marshall's editorship did draw some national attention. Katie Broad, an editor at the Telegraph Journal in Saint John, expressed her enthusiasm over the appointment.

As well, Mrs. Marshall received a wire of congratulations from the Toronto Telegram.

"I was very excited about that," she reminisces. "In those days, you just didn't get a telegram very often."

As editor-in-chief of a weekly college paper, Mrs. Marshall was responsible for approximately 22 staff members in all. However, unlike today's staff which spends its hours, including production time, in the office, the staff of 1940-41 wrote its articles in long hand "anywhere they could find a spot to sit a piece of paper."

"Oh, we had an office across from the ladies room on the second floor of the Old Arts Building," she says, "which, I think, had an old typewriter from the 20's, but we did not use it that much. Our time was spent at the printer's, where we helped do everything from scratch."

The Brunswickan, in those days, was printed by McMurray's, a stationary shop on Queen Street where the former Metropolitan Store was located until very recently. And without the dedication of its resident printer, a Mr. Morrell, the Brunswickan would "never have been printed in a million years," she says.

For all the hours put into production, Mrs. Marshall does not feel the staff in her day was as closely knit as they have been in recent years. Or, at least it was not so much the paper itself that brought them together.

"You couldn't help but become involved because the campus was so small; you saw everybody everyday. You tried a bit of everything, the paper, drama, the debating club. It's hard to describe for people to understand because they have such a large campus today. Now individual groups like a residence or the Brunswickan bring people together. In my day, we were already closely knit because we were so small."

Mrs. Marshall admits it is hard to look back 45 years ago and remember details, but she estimates they probably put out about 350 issues of the paper each week.

One thing she is sure of, however, is that the Brunswickan was popular among the students.

'Scoop by snoop' was a gossip type column very popular on campus, she says.

"It was a fun thing. People contributed to it and, although the staff knew who 'scoop' was, the students didn't, although they accused a lot of people," she grins.

Mrs. Marshall feels they were, in many ways, covering "much the same type of stories" as today.

"We also put out some special editions, like the Co-ed edition, which was usually a color like pink or pale green. There was also the April Fool issue and a special one on the opening of the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium.

"During Co-ed week," she continues "the boys in the Beaverbrook Residence (the only one at that time) use to hang a sign from the building. I remember one said, 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.'"

Of all campus events covered by the paper, Mrs.

Marshall recalls one which actually occurred before her editorship.

"The King and Queen visited in the spring of 1939 and had lunch at the Lady Beaverbrook Residence. On the flag pole out front flew the Royal Standard.

"In September, the flag pole was taken down and put up at Lieutenant Governor Clark's residence on Waterloo Row, next to McNair's.

"Now the kids in the residence decided they would get it back and so, with John McNair keeping guard to make sure his father didn't wake up, they slipped out in the dead of the night, dug it up and set it in concrete in front of the residence. The next morning every boy was up to raise the flag. Lt. Gov. Clark was livid and demanded it back. The students were told to take it down with the help of the janitor, but when they did it broke."

One enterprising student, she says, sold numbered pieces of the flagpole for 25 cents each and a draw was made during the fall formal that year.

"The winner, I think, was Howie MacFarlane(d) who received a miniature version of the flagpole. All the money collected was donated to a fund to help buy a Spitfire. The sum was about \$500-\$600 which may seem inconsequential today, but that was a lot of money then."

Mrs. Marshall says that the Brunswickan was a member of Canadian University Press in her day, but aside from some different stories and columns it provided, the organization was "just there". We didn't go to any meetings or anything, in fact, at that time I'd never been to "Upper Canada."

On the national level, however, Mrs. Marshall says they felt, at the time, they were putting out a paper comparable to the small universities across the country.

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Mrs. Marshall is certain the Brunswickan will continue to flourish in years to come.

"Students still have the job every week and people are still cooperating. I don't think people change all that much, just situations.

"I don't see why the Brunswickan won't be around for a long time. It serves a useful purpose. Nothing can take the place of the newspaper on campus. It's like a small city and the newspaper is its means of communication. The radio, you might hear it and you might not, but the newspaper, you can always sit down quietly with a cup of tea or a beer, and there you are."