

Man recalls toils in earlier age of journalism

By Rich Lewis
Sentinel Reporter

Today, The Sentinel has nine full-time reporters and several correspondents to uncover and write the news.

But in the 1920s and 30s, The Sentinel had only one reporter, a young man named Norman Eberly whose thirst for education would create unusual opportunities for a farm boy from Perry County.

"For most of the time I was with The Sentinel, I was the only newsman on the paper," he says. "Any news of a local character was developed by me."

Now 97, Eberly lives at Forest Park Health Center on Walnut Bottom Road in Carlisle. Many of his memories are dimmed by the weight of years, but his intelligence and wit shine through when he recalls the highlights of his long and varied career.

Eberly was born Jan. 27, 1898, on a tenant farm near Shermans Dale, the third of Charles and Eva Eberly's four sons.

He attended country schools through the eighth grade, and with financial help from his father and brothers, enrolled at Shippensburg Normal School, now Shippensburg University.

Armed with a teaching certificate, he became principal of an elementary school in Huntingdon County. When World War I erupted, Eberly found he could earn more money working in war-related industries.

He worked at an ammunition plant in Mt. Union and a steel mill in Harrisburg until he was drafted. The war ended while he was in boot camp and he returned home.

But Eberly had seen enough of the world to know what he wanted next.

"I soon realized that an education was



Wendy Longlade/The Sentinel

Norman Eberly, now 97, was the lone newsman reporting for The Sentinel during the 1920s and 30s.

the only way to advance," he says.

So he enrolled at Dickinson College, the first in his family to seek a college degree.

It was a struggle. He almost dropped out at least once for lack of funds. But he stuck with it, graduating in 1924. He studied English literature and mathematics, became a member of the Theta Chi fraternity and was a writer for The Dickinson-

ian, the school newspaper, which he edited in his senior year.

"That was my first real job in newspaper work," he notes. But far from his last.

Beginning in his senior year, Eberly wrote for The Sentinel and Harrisburg Patriot and was a local correspondent for newspapers in Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore. Md.

After Dickinson College, Eberly says, "I had it in my mind that I might want to be a lawyer." He enrolled at Dickinson School of Law, but says, "My finances were such that I couldn't continue."

For a period, Eberly worked full-time for both The Sentinel and The Patriot, earning about \$50 a week "which was pretty good for that time."

He later served as the Patriot's city editor, a reporter for what was the newly-established Harrisburg Evening News and as editor of The Sentinel. He was associated with the newspapers until 1944 when he left journalism to work for Penn State's Agricultural Extension Service.

In 1934, Eberly married Mary Keeney, a librarian and daughter of the Harrisburg city assessor, whom he met on a blind date at Wilson College. Mrs. Eberly died in 1990.

At The Sentinel today, a reporter's story is handled by several editors before it reaches the press.

In Eberly's day: "I wrote the story, edited my own copy, wrote the headline and to a large extent determined when and how that bit of news was handled after it left me and went through the linotype."

"I couldn't write the whole paper, but I was the only person at first to handle the whole local news operation," says Eberly.

Today, The Sentinel also gives credit to the reporter who writes a story by placing his name under the headline. But Eberly never had the pleasure of seeing his "by-line" in print.

Interviews Henry Ford

A highlight of his reporting career came in 1943, shortly before he left journalism. He managed to land an exclusive interview with Henry Ford, who was touring

the country in his private railroad car.

The famous industrialist was in town to have dinner with a colonel stationed at Carlisle Barracks. Eberly was a friend of the colonel and managed to learn the time and place of the dinner.

"There were other newspapermen interested in getting an interview, but I was the only reporter who was in on their after-dinner socializing," Eberly says.

In 1944, Eberly took a job with Penn State's Agricultural Extension Service writing and editing farm-related reports.

"I never tired of newspaper work, but this was just a better opportunity," he says of his move to State College.

He kept the job for 20 years, during which time he visited extension offices in all of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

Eberly's son, Joseph, who lives in New York, says his father "probably knew more county extension agents than anybody before or since."

After his retirement, Eberly did public relations work for the state Department of Agriculture until 1968. He spent another decade doing occasional farm writing for the Pennsylvania Grange.

While at State College, Eberly became an avid Penn State football fan, a passion that still burns.

"He remains one of Joe Paterno's strongest boosters," Joseph Eberly says. "His eyesight improves notably when a Penn State game appears on TV."

Eberly has two daughters and a son, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

His great-grandson, Alex, 3, who lives in Virginia, was in Carlisle earlier this month for a family picnic at Thornwald Park.

"Their 94-year age difference didn't bother either of them," Joseph Eberly says.