A CENTURY OF SAGEBRUSH

In 1893, in defiance of the regents, Nevada students started the campus newspaper.

By Guy Clifton

The University of Nevada was already 18 years old when a group of students asked the Board of Regents for permission to publish a campus newspaper. The request quickly died at the hands of the regents, who called the group too immature to handle such an endeavor.

The students thought otherwise. On the night of October 1, 1893, they held a secret meeting in the basement of the main building and voted unanimously to print a newspaper in defiance of the regents.

The first issue was put together in the basement of the Congregational Church just before Sunday school class convened. The next day, The Student Record appeared on campus. It was October 19, 1893 and a newspaper was born.

The first editor of The Student Record was a minister’s son, Charles Magill, who wrote in that introductory issue, "The Record will be independent in politics and reservations of the right to criticise all parties and journals."

A century later, the journal, known as Sagebrush since 1910, carries on Magill’s objective. It is one of the few independent student newspapers in the nation and the fiery attitude of its founders has become an integral tradition on the campus itself.

This has led to more than one scapegoat over the years. The paper has had conflicts with just about every group on campus at one time or another. Sagebrush, relying on freedom of the press, usually came away unscathed but there have been some notable exceptions.

In 1932, George Springmeyer became the first editor to be removed from the position because of an editorial. That year a smallpox scare in Reno prompted university president J.E. Studin to impose a semi-quarantine. Students who lived on campus had to stay on campus, but those who lived off campus could come and go as they pleased.

Springmeyer, who lived in Lincoln Hall, led a rebellion of the dorm students who marched downtown in defiance of the order. He also lobbied
Stubbs in the pages of the Record for his handling of the events. Stubbs was so outraged he expelled his editor.

One of the most infamous incidents in Segerbrush history came in 1961 when editor Don O'Donnell was fired by the student senate for what it termed "incompetence." O'Donnell had written several scathing editorials, including one noting the decline of campus traditions, in which he blamed Dean Sam Dixie and Jerry Wells and the student government. Student leaders fired O'Donnell for "a lack of cooperation with and respect for the board and inaccuracy of editorial material."

The Segerbrush staff had its own answer to the blatant censorship by the students. The issue of March 4, 1961 was printed blank except for the newspaper's logo, standing heads and advertising. Maysbeth Varecon, now managing editor of the San Jose State Sentinel, was appointed interim editor by the publication board. She has the distinction of having the shortest term as Segerbrush editor—one week.

"I didn't even really take over as editor," she recalls. "We just all went down and put the paper out. Don was still around. We decided as a staff to print the blank edition. We were outraged that they would fire our editor."

In 1972, the Segerbrush gained national attention when editor Bobby Frank was temporarily suspended from school for printing an advertisement for a pornographic device.

"We were making an editorial statement, but it just hit terrible controversy," he says. "The state legislature was considering the budget of the university at the time and they were outraged."

The student government convened to get Frank, but several lawyers representing Sagerbrush Delta Chi and other freedom of the press advocates represented him and he was quickly reinstated as editor. As a result of the incident, Frank was invited to appear on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Frank says, "They wanted to know how a state that has legalized prostitution could be so outraged over an advertisement."

Lost in the controversy was the fact that Segerbrush was named best newspaper that year by the Nevada State Press Association. Frank went on to become one of the top television news personalities in the state in his 11 years at Reno's KTVN. He is now Marketing Director for a Reno casino.

Many Segerbrush staffers continued in journalism and their names have appeared in the pages of the most prominent publications in the country: Time, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Life and more.

Several have won the Pulitzer Prize, journalism's highest honor: Ed Montgomery, who gained fame as the crime reporter for the San Francisco Examiner, was a Segerbrush staffer in 1934. His investigation into crooked Internal Revenue Service employees won him a Pulitzer in 1950. Montgomery also broke the Pasty House's hijacking story.

Ron Ewens, who worked for Segerbrush in the early 1960s, won three Lawrence, Mass. Her reporting on the Massachusetts prison fur-buying program, including focus on murderer Willie Horton (the assassination of television commercialist in the 1988 Dukakis-Bush presidential campaign) helped put an end to the program.

One of the most prominent Segerbrush staffers to continue in journalism is Frank McCullough, who edited the paper in 1940-41. The Persky boy is considered by many to be the best journalist the state has ever produced. As managing editor, he turned the Los Angeles Times into one of the best newspapers in the world, introducing detailed series reporting and other sweeping changes.

His coverage of the Vietnam War for Time magazine, where he worked for 16 years, had him at odds with President Lyndon Johnson on more than one occasion. Johnson used his power to have several of McCullough's stories killed, but McCullough was a legend in the journalism profession. He became the head of Time-Life before going back to newspapers in the San Francisco Examiner. He now lives in retirement in California's Napa Valley.

Other high profile newspapermen include Paul Fauch, a Korean War vet twice named Newman of the Year by
A Drawer Full of History

An ancient desk drawer has been a part of Sagebrush history for more than a century.

In 1937, SAGE editor John Carr signed his name to the location of his office desk drawer and wrote, "Make it a tradition." In the past 50 years, the editors have done just that.

The drawer became the tradition in 1980 for the first-ever Sagebrush editors' reunion, held during Homecoming week. Several for 1937 editors, including Ernest Inwood (1926-27), Fred Anderson (1927-28), James Hammond (1939-40) and Joe Jackson (1939-40) added their signatures to the drawer at the reunion.

Carr, who went on to a distinguished military career, and now lives in retirement in Maine, had completely forgotten about signing the drawer in the first place. He was surprised to learn that his request had been carried out for so many years.

"Well, I'll be," he said. "I had no idea."

The drawer is still in use in the Sagebrush office in the Joe Trefethen Student Union and this year's editor, Lopez, will add his name before he term expires, continuing a Sagebrush tradition.
Anderson credits much of his success to Ernse Imwold, editor in 1929-27 for getting him to join the staff. Imwold, the winter surviving Sagebrush editor, went on to lead the economics and business department at Nevada for many years. He now lives in retirement in Campbell, Calif.

Silas Ross edited the paper, then the Student Record, for three years, 1906-09. Ross was one of Reno's most prominent businessmen and a long time member of the Board of Regents. Abil Beeg, assistant editor in 1929, became a long time U.S. Senator for Nevada. Ed Allison, sports editor in 1956, is a notable Washington, D.C. lobbyist.

Several former Brash staffers entered law. John R. Ross, editor in 1928-29, became a powerful Nevada judge. Doug Brashaw, editor 1962-65, is a prominent attorney in Bishop; Thomas Young, editor 1963-67, is a Reno attorney; Mike Shaw, editor 1964, is one of the most powerful gaming attorneys in Las Vegas; and Keith Cassileth is a media lawyer in Los Angeles.

Sagebrush has served as a mirror of the times and attitudes of university students. When World War II broke out, editor Byrn Armstrong wrote an editorial that mirrored the patriotism of the times. "Once again we are at war," he wrote. "We are not fighting a war to make the world safe for democracy. We are fighting to make the world safe for those who will come after us. Almost overnight we have changed from Room service university students into men and women in whose veins flow the blood of generations of liberty-loving people. We hold our doors to our heritage that we are now privileged to fight for."

It was during those World War II years that women took over the Sagebrush while the men were at war. Mollie Whitaker, Betty Moulton, and Madeline Marretti had suits as editors from 1943 to 1946 and the news didn't cease a bit. Much of the focus was on the war effort, and what students were doing to support the troops.

The newspaper was far different in the fall of 1929, as were the attitudes of the students. The Vietnam War was in full swing and even the conservative Nevada campus was aware the world brought about by the 1954 conclusion. The feeling was made clear in a 1960 editorial by editor Tony Wynn. It read in part: "Vietnam protesters have no intention of shutting up and watching the President embark upon a course of assination. They are tired of waiting and being told we should be out in a few years. We want it out and we want it now—out in 1970 or no."

Sagebrush didn't always offer answers to the problems of the day. The editors were students, often confused as everyone else. Sagebrush did not always have a clear focus but it did offer entertaining reading for the students and a tremendous learning experience for burgeoning young journalists.

"It's where a lot of journalism gets bitten by the bug," says Warren Lenardo. "Sagebrush is a real training ground for responsibility."

The next 100 years could be just as colorful. •

Jack Fleming became editor by default, after Uncle Tom's ghastly editing fiasco in 1962.

World War II gave women the opportunity to work in the normally male-dominated pages.

* The student newspaper was called The Student Record until the Fall of 1954.

SAGEBRUSH EDITORS

