

Newspapers only the start of Harris' publishing career

In his salad days, when William Harris of Ellettsville was moving across state lines in support of his chain of newspapers, he thrived on the challenge of it. By the time he had reached the age of 50 in 1916, he began to see things in a different light.

There were two important events. The publishing of the magazine, *Our Boys and Girls*, was not a success. It was, in fact, a financial disaster. Thomas J. Scheiber, author of a master of arts thesis on the life of Harris, wrote that the newspaperman had lost \$12,000 on the magazine before he sold it to a Chicago publisher. Scheiber's research had also indicated that Harris had lost money in a limestone venture.

The thesis revealed some interesting sidelights on the Ellettsville publisher's character and outlook. Prior to the mid-1890s, Harris had



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

smoked at least 20 strong, black cigars a day and chewed tobacco as well. When a Terre Haute doctor told him his health was in jeopardy, Harris quit "cold turkey" and never smoked or chewed again.

Another facet of his character was his inner drive. His son, Henry, said that his father worked constantly, and added, "He didn't know what recreation was."

Even though he dissolved W.B. Harris and Son Company (the chain of newspapers), he was still in-

involved in publishing. In 1895, he changed the name of the (Ellettsville) *Citizen* to *Farm and Real Estate*. He was also doing a thriving job printing business out of his local shop and managing his farm on the outskirts of town.

One of his journalistic campaigns targeted the saloons in Ellettsville. Scheiber writes that Harris was largely responsible for the vote against the saloons in May of 1911.

Politically, Harris was a Republican and often found himself at odds with Oscar Cravens, publisher of a Bloomington newspaper. They frequently sniped at each other via the editorial columns of their respective publications.

In 1924, Harris was talked into running in the Republican primary for the state Legislature. There is evidence that he joined the Ku Klux

Klan in order to gain that group's support in the election. He defeated his Republican opponent by 53 votes.

In the fall election, he won again, by 365 votes. His platform sounds familiar — support of Indiana University, better public schools, fewer changes in public school textbooks, higher wages for workers, lower taxes and relief for farmers.

Apparently Harris liked representing Monroe County sufficiently to run again two years later, but in that interval he had renounced his connection to the Klan. He was defeated with other Republican candidates in a Democratic Party landslide.

Harris began publishing *Quarries and Mills*, a monthly trade magazine, in 1929. He cut it back to quarterly issues, but it floundered

financially and died in 1931.

In 1934, Harris began to suffer a series of health problems that included a fall, a major operation and a heart attack. Still, he was involved in the publishing of the *Farm* and continued to write editorials, at least.

Harris particularly disliked President Franklin Roosevelt and didn't hesitate to share his views with readers. One of those editorials is quoted in Scheiber. "If Roosevelt will quit piddling with fish ponds and brush dams and put the WPA to building bridges and over railway crossings, there will be less Sunday deaths and he will be doing something worthwhile."

With the death of the *Farm* in June of 1939, Harris lost his journalistic voice. He died in November of that year.