

Chesterton Tribune

Founded: 1882

Location: 109 Broadway, Chesterton (1882–1907); 193 South Calumet Road (1907–)

W. W. Mikels launched the *Chesterton Tribune* in October 1882 as a Greenback party weekly. The office of the weekly was located on the second floor of a building later used as a town hall and a bank. Mikels lasted only a few months before selling the paper to the Chesterton Tribune Company, a group of local businessmen headed by John Taylor—the same people who had induced Mikels to start a paper and who wanted it to continue for the good of the town. The group hired a Dr. Riley and a Professor Phares to edit the weekly, and they brought some success and stability to the new journal. The lack of advertising revenue forced Taylor to discontinue publication of the paper in late 1883 or early 1884. The Tribune Company sent representatives to Valparaiso, including Taylor and lawyer S. D. Watson, to offer Arthur J. Bowser control of the weekly for \$800, payable in installments at 8 percent interest. Bowser, an ambitious twenty-one-year-old reporter, agreed to the deal, immediately packing his wife and new baby in a wagon for the four-hour trip to Chesterton.

Bowser and Watson resumed publication of the *Tribune* on 2 April 1884 and aligned the journal with the Republican party. The partners also printed an edition of the paper for the town of Porter. By September, Watson grew weary of publishing a newspaper, gave his share in the enterprise to Bowser, and promptly left town. The Washington handpress that was used to print each edition limited the first issues of the paper to four-page sections. By the 1890s the journal was published every Saturday, had seven columns of print, and ran to eight pages in length. Each issue was packed with

serious news but also contained serials, religious material, and reports of social events, such as dinner visits and travels to distant cities, in the “about the country” column. In April 1896 the Chesterton and Porter editions of the *Tribune* were merged, and the combined journal was renamed the *Westchester Tribune* in hopes that the name change would reflect the townshipwide interest of the paper. Bowser was forced to change the title back to the *Chesterton Tribune* in November 1897, however, because the post office would not renew the postal permit with the new name.

Bowser actively participated in the community and was an ardent Republican. He was born in Valparaiso and graduated from the Northern Indiana Normal School (later renamed Valparaiso University). He became the reading clerk for the Indiana senate in 1899, served on the Porter County Council, and won election to the state senate, serving in 1907 and 1909. He belonged to several local social societies and led the fight for better roads, zoning regulations, and the consolidation of the towns of Porter and Chesterton. He also helped organize the city’s first permanent police force and its fire department and fought for higher wages for brickyard workers during the 1886 strike that nearly ruined the economy of the area.

The format of the weekly did not change much until the 1910s. Before America’s entry into the First World War the number of columns shrank by one, and the price rose from its 1884 price of \$1.50 a year to \$2.00 a year. Bold headlines alerted readers to the latest-breaking news, printed by the county’s first Linotype machine, purchased by the paper in 1907. Bowser’s health began to fail during the last year of World War I, and he leased the journal to John G. Graessle, the head printer of the *Tribune* since 1894. A little more than a year later, in December 1919, C. Galen Chaney took over for Graessle, who

was fulfilling the duties of county treasurer. Four years later Graessle acquired the *Tribune* from Bowser, and he continued to publish the weekly until his death in February 1928. Graessle's widow, Cora, sold the paper ten months later to Warren R. Canright. During the Graessle and Chaney era the paper continued to report on serious political and social news, hired a society editor to handle the personal reports, and moved the publication day to Thursdays. During the 1920s the paper's editors opposed the Ku Klux Klan and argued for various municipal reforms.

At the age of thirteen Canright started his newspaper career as a printer's devil at the *East Troy (Wis.) News*, a job that required keeping the printing area tidy and the fires for the presses hot. He attended Lawrence College, working his way through as a reporter for the *Appleton Daily Post* and as the editor of his college newspaper. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1917 he joined the United States Army. After World War I ended he worked as a Linotype operator for the *Chicago Tribune* and married Phyllis Post, an area schoolteacher. Three years after their marriage, the couple decided to buy a small-town newspaper, and the only one available in their price range was the *Chesterton Tribune*. Once in town, Canright, like his predecessors, became deeply involved in the community, becoming president of the park board, a member of the planning commission, president of the chamber of commerce, and an active member of both the Red Cross and the local Boy Scouts.

Almost immediately after Canright purchased the weekly the stock market crashed, and America descended into the Great Depression. Times were tough financially, and the publisher bartered for products when he needed to and had to cut the hours of full-time staff. Phyllis Canright worked as a messenger and ran errands so that

Warren could operate the presses. The price for a year's subscription remained at \$2.00, but the number of columns increased to seven. Serials continued to entertain readers as did cartoons and the large sports section, while a "Feeding the Family" column informed subscribers how to prepare both inexpensive and gourmet meals. During the early 1930s the paper's cartoons, and some of the editorials, expressed an approval of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Canright's personal beliefs, as expressed in the editor's column, dwelled mostly on local problems, though, and he shied away from national politics.

During World War II Canright sent a free copy of the *Tribune* to all Chesterton and Porter soldiers. The GIs who read the weekly kept up on who had visited whom and which neighbors had gotten married. They also read about Sunday sermons as well as other local and national items. Meanwhile, the folks back home kept up with the duty assignments of soldiers in the "With the Boys in Uniform" column.

When the war ended the weekly grew to sixteen pages and carried syndicated columnists. The Canrights purchased a newer Linotype machine in 1944 and an automatic job press a year later. The town of Porter continued to have its own page, a practice started after the merger of the two *Tribunes* forty years before.

During the 1950s the format of the weekly did not vary much from the past, but the machinery used to produce it did. In 1950 Canright purchased a new folder machine, and three years later he bought a seventy-five-year-old Miehle cylinder press to take the place of a Campbell press acquired in 1907. At the same time Canright remodeled the basement of the *Tribune* building to make it into a pressroom. In 1955 the company began using a Goss Duplex eight-page web-feed press that allowed the company to print

and fold four-to-eight-page sections in one operation; the press continued to be used until 1970. Near the end of the 1950s a Heidelberg Automatic Job Press replaced an older model bought in 1945. With all the new machinery in place the editors could wait longer to go to press, holding out for the latest news, and the process of printing an issue became easier for both the editors and the press operators.

In April 1961, in an era when many newspapers were either folding or shortening their publication schedules, the *Chesterton Tribune* changed from a weekly to a daily, a move so out of step with the times it garnered a mention by *Time* magazine. A new block-style article format graced the pages of the daily. The headlines were bolder and larger than in the past. As before, a mixture of local and national news greeted readers on page one, but local coverage dominated each issue. The price for a year's subscription increased to \$12, but the number of pages per issue decreased to four or six. Personal news—items such as visits made by out-of-town guests—disappeared from the paper, a casualty of the times. The basic format of the eight-column daily did not change significantly until the late 1970s.

Canright's sons, Warren H. and John E., joined their father in the business, taking over direct management of the firm in 1973 and inheriting it from Warren R. two years later. Both men had begun to work at the paper from an early age, Warren H. beginning at age ten and John starting at age eight. Both the Canright sons had graduated from Indiana University's Department of Journalism. In 1970 the *Tribune* switched to an offset printing process, the first paper in the county to do so. Six years later the brothers bought a new unit for the Goss Community Offset Press, which allowed the paper to publish as many as twelve pages in each section. The editors of the *Tribune* continued to

take strong stands on controversial subjects, including opposing the development of a nuclear power plant in the area in the early 1970s.

After 1976 each issue contained six columns of print space and ran from eight to fourteen pages. The excellent work of the paper's writers and editors was acknowledged during the 1980s by both the Hoosier Press Association and journalism's honorary fraternity. In 1981 John sold his interest in the family business to his brother and to his sister-in-law, Elizabeth. John opened his own public relations firm and in 1983 bought the *Portage Press*.

The *Chesterton Tribune* in the 1990s ran from eight to fourteen pages and was published six days a week. While it covered stories of local interest, national and international news was not neglected. In 1999 Warren H. and Elizabeth Canright published the Chesterton daily, and their oldest son, David, held the title of managing editor. The daily employed seventeen people and expected more than \$1 million in sales in the last year of the twentieth century.