

The editors of *Spritsail* are pleased to present this article about *The Falmouth Enterprise*. We gratefully acknowledge the three generations of the Hough family who have been bringing us the news of Falmouth with skill, integrity and courage over many years. Their family newspaper is a community treasure. We honor the previous generations and we praise the current members: Jack, John, Margaret and Bill.

The Press of Time

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At the twilight of typewriters and hot lead, a small Cape Cod newspaper office was, for a son of the editor, a setting both clamorous and contemplative.

By John Hough Jr.

The printing press was a Goss model A duplex flatbed, built in 1946, and it ran with a rhythmic din that shook the building. The newspaper came out twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday; the press run began around one p.m. All afternoon the cogwheeled dinosaur would fill the air with its gnashing, pounding racket, dropping newspaper sections onto a waist-high tray. A straggling little line of two or three men would wait for them to accumulate, unable to talk for the noise. When the tray was full, they'd scoop an armful of sections and carry them to the makeup tables, where they would slip one section into another, assembling the day's newspaper.

Often on these cacophonous summer afternoons I would come out of the newsroom to help slip papers. My father encouraged this gesture. It's good for morale the way he put it. I was a self-confident college boy, working as a summer reporter in the late 1960s at *The Falmouth Enterprise*. Falmouth, Mass., was a town of about 15,000 spread over the southwest heel of Cape Cod. My father ran the newspaper. My grandfather owned it.



Harold W. Lawson keeps an eye on a press run on the Duplex web press that stood in what is now the newsroom at *The Enterprise* office on Depot Avenue.



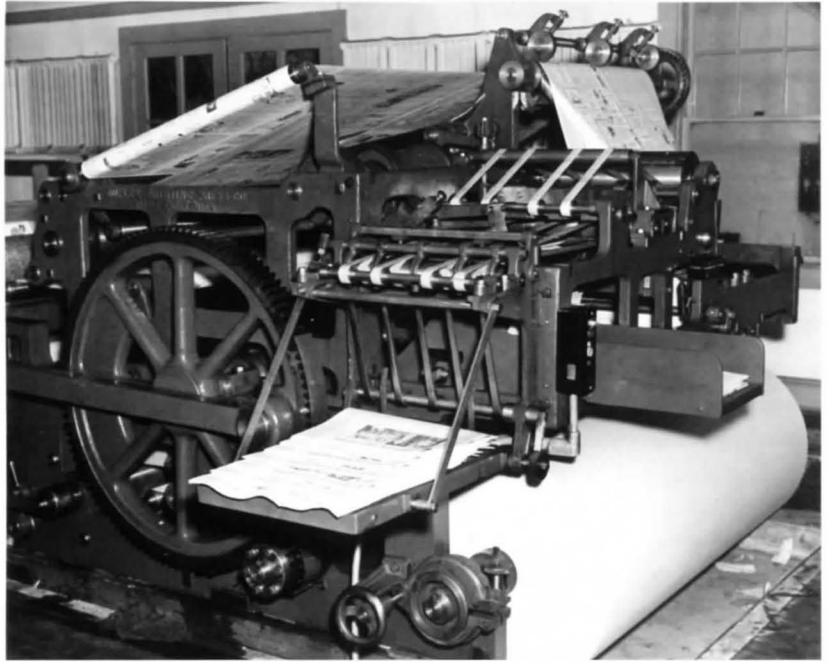
Linotype operators set reporter and ad copy into type for the next issue. Outside the windows are the railroad tracks and the edge of the woods leading up to Highfield Hall. In the foreground are banks of large type used in headlines.

The back shop of *The Enterprise* was a low dim cavern of a room with aisles running back between the makeup tables. The remaining space was crowded with machinery - the Duplex, three Linotype machines - that had begun to look antique in the new jet age. The hardwood floors were blackened with trampled ink. Walls, windowsills, doorknobs, and light switches were ink smudged. You could smell the ink's resinous tang and the more fragrant pungency of the lubricants that greased the press.

The men would nod me a greeting through the noise, and I'd wait my turn as the papers spilled onto the tray, falling at the rate of not quite one per second - as fast, say, as a blackjack dealer flipping cards. With a little practice you could slip papers at nearly the same speed, working to the rhythm of the press.

By one-thirty a little fleet of station wagons had gathered in the dirt lot beside the building. The drivers were mostly women, housewives picking up some extra money transporting *The Enterprise* to drugstores, markets, and motel lobbies. By two the delivery boys had appeared, sitting slumped atop the stone wall across the street, their bikes sprawled on the warping asphalt sidewalk.

The cars went out first. Frank Souza, the circulation manager, loaded them for the women. Wiry and hunched, he staggered down the side steps with papers stacked to his chin. When the last car had sped



The Goss Model A Duplex produced eight-page newspapers at the rate of 3,000 an hour. Its predecessor was a hand-fed Miehle that could only run four pages at a time.

away, Frank would wave to the boys across the street, and they'd pop down off the wall, grab their bikes, and come running. They'd fill their canvas bags, hoist them around their shoulders, and pedal away down the tunnel of shade beneath the overarching oaks, slow at first, then gaining speed toward Dyer's Gulf.

The press run ended sometime after four. The Duplex stopped gradually, like a locomotive decelerating. A last section would be squeezed out onto the tray in slow motion. There'd be a querulous snort, a concluding *whomp*, and then the purest silence I've ever known. The air seemed cleansed and sweetened by it. Now you could hear the flutey twitter of invisible birds, the mutter of a car, the trilling of a phone in the newsroom. The urgency evaporated, the hurry; there was nothing left to do but roll and wrap papers for the mail.

The guys began to kid each other, to laugh, talk baseball. Frank Souza tumbled the rolled-up papers into canvas mail sacks. He dragged the sacks down the steps to his paneled station wagon and headed for the post office, then home. The paper was out. The men in the back shop picked up their Thermoses and drifted out into the golden light, the lengthening shadows of five o'clock.

The newspaper office sat at the end of the street, across from the old railway depot. The depot was a bus station now, and between the rusting rails, which passed not many yards from *The Enterprise*, grew a bristling jungle of ragweed and baby oaks, spreading down from the woods on the other side. The building was one story, low and compact, dressed in chalk-white shingles and shutters of bright Irish green. You entered by the business office, with the newsroom on your right, pushing out toward the abandoned tracks.

The newsroom was sunny and spacious and smelled sweetly of liquid paste and newsprint. Maple desks butted up against each other front to front along the walls. In one corner was the graveyard file, in another a shelf of drawers containing precinct maps. From the back shop came the steely clatter of the Linotype machines. Typewriters clacked, phones rang, people came and went.

My desk was beside a front window, where I could look out at the green woods and whitewashed brick depot, at the buses groaning in and out every couple of hours, marked for Boston and New York.

Diagonally across the room sat my father. He was in his early 40s, a large man, not tall but heavy boned, with thick blunt hands that attacked the typewriter keys in furious rattling flurries, dashing off whole paragraphs, whole pages, in single bursts of thought. Then he'd sit awhile, studying what he'd written, brooding on it. He didn't say much in the office, only what was necessary. He seldom smiled and never, ever raised his voice.

My grandfather was even more reserved, but with him it was a flinty, peremptory reticence. You knew he was still the boss, though he came in half days and worked out of a little office that had been grafted onto the building, away from the noise and bustle.

My grandmother brought him to work. He never learned to drive, by choice. She would stop the car under the elm outside my window, and the old man



From the right are the author's father, John T. Hough, his grandparents, Clara S. and George A. Hough Jr., and Linotype operator Edwin Donnelly Jr.

would haul himself out and slam the door without speaking. He was taller than my father, egg bald, fleshy, with a pale-blue gaze that seemed fixed on some private distance the rest of us couldn't see. He came in with a leather briefcase under his arm, looking neither right nor left, speaking to no one as he trudged on back and disappeared into his modern little office.

I have only a rough idea what he did back there. He wrote some editorials, I know. He composed memos to my father, which he delivered himself, entering the newsroom with that purposeful unseeing trudge and handing the piece of copy paper wordlessly to my father, who accepted it with a short nod.

A sudden respectful silence fell when the old man came in. Typewriters ceased clattering. People swiveled in their chairs for a discreet look at him. My grandfather had made this newspaper what it was, and everyone knew it. He'd bought the paper in 1929 and brought it through the Depression, through the war years. He was a newspaperman of the old school – principled, thorough, fearless – and he'd shaped *The Enterprise* in his image, perhaps forever.

He never talked to me about my work at the paper, but I knew he was paying attention. I was his oldest grandchild and had a knack for the work, and he took it for granted, as he had with my father, that in due time I would take my permanent place at *The Enterprise*. In this he was to be bitterly disappointed.

But at the age of 20 and 21, there was no place else I wanted to be, nothing else I wanted to be doing. My day usually began with a visit to the police station,



Edwin J. Donnelly Jr. worked in the composing room of the *The Enterprise* for 47 years, putting Falmouth news into print. He died in 1987.

a small brick building set back from Main Street above a pond where swans glided. First, I'd shuffle through the accident reports, pink cards that were stashed in a cubbyhole behind the desk, and jot down anything that looked interesting. Then I'd go down the hall to Chief Ferreira's office. The door was usually open. It was a tiny room, plain, with framed citations on the wall and a view of Main Street in the near distance. The chief would motion me in, and I'd sit in the wooden armchair in front of his desk. He was a quite handsome man, still young, with thinning hair and jet-black eyebrows.

"Anything going on?" I'd say.

"Not really."

Sometimes the day captain, Lenny Martin, sat behind the chief's desk. Lenny was a tall square hulk, beetle browed and glowering. He was even more tight mouthed than the chief, but eventually I would pull the news from them. A raid on a noisy party, a fracas in a barroom, an escape from the house of correction. Once, a branch bank was robbed. A Puerto Rican woman from New York City was nearly beaten to death by her boyfriend.

I had other regular beats – the fire department, the fishing news, the men's softball league – as well as

the feast of stories that cropped up randomly, daily, and in infinite variety. A shark scare. An unassisted triple play in a Little League game. Rescues at sea. I interviewed a leathery old-timer who had flown a Sopwith Camel over Germany in the Great War, and a 12-year-old boy who had won the Soap Box Derby in Akron. I covered the antiwar demonstration in Woods Hole the day Vice President Humphrey visited the Marine Biological Laboratory, then tagged along with the vice president and his entourage of dignitaries, aides, and stone-faced Secret Service men.

There was a lot of sentiment in Falmouth against the Vietnam War especially in Woods Hole, with its marine laboratories and community of scientists. One evening my father sent me over there to an antiwar meeting in a parish hall presided over by Albert Szent-Györgyi, the Hungarian-born chemist and Nobel laureate. He was a tiny, vigorous old man, white haired and nut brown from the summer sun.

“Lyndon Johnson is a criminal,” he said. “He ought to be hanged.”

I put it at the top of my story, delighted to have such a rousing quotation. The next morning Szent-Györgyi came into the office, smiling awkwardly. He didn’t know who had written the story; bylines were rare in *The Enterprise* in those days. My father got up from his desk, big and solid beside the bent old man, and the two of them went outside. They sat in the scientist’s dented compact car, and Szent-Györgyi poured out a chagrined and heartfelt denial. My father listened in his grave, thoughtful way and said he’d print a retraction.

“Why?” I said.

“Sometimes,” my father said, “you can afford to break the rules.”

“I didn’t misquote him,” I said.

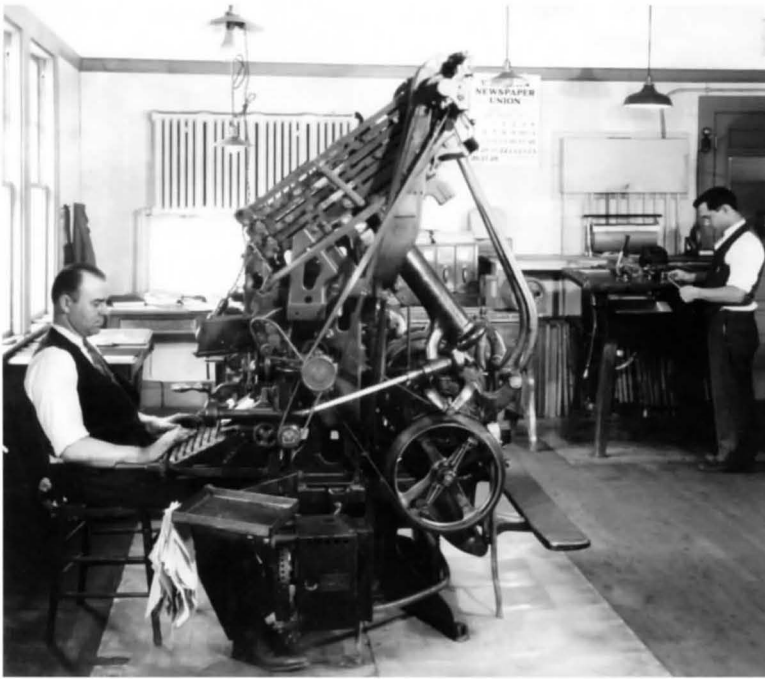
“I know that,” my father said, and that was the end of it.



By the late 1960s *The Enterprise* had three typesetting machines. One was equipped with TTS or teletypesetter.

I reviewed the musicals at the Cape Cod Melody Tent. The productions were professional and usually pretty good. *Camelot*, *Brigadoon*, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. I did have some problems with *The King and I*, especially the male lead, played by a Cuban-born actor named José Duval. “Mr. Duval,” I wrote, “appeared miscast. He looked more like an Italian welterweight than a Siamese king.”

The next day Duval himself strode into the newsroom, dressed in cream-white slacks and a pink silk shirt opened wide down his broad dark chest. He asked for me, and my father pointed without saying anything. Duval sat



A young Ed Donnelly works at the keyboard of *The Enterprise's* single Linotype machine in 1933, two years after the newspaper moved from Main Street to Depot Avenue. At right is Robert L. Kendall, who was back shop foreman and left to open Kendall Printing.

down beside my desk, wearing a scowl that struck me as menacing.

"What was you thinking of?" he said. The voice was deep, husky. He spoke with an accent, as he had in the play. A Cuban accent.

"It was a figure of speech," I said.

"Figure of *speech*? Cripes, kid. You don't do that. It's ethnic. It's racial."

"I didn't mean it that way," I said.

"Then why'd you write it?"

I knew why. I had thought it was clever and smacked of a certain gritty sophistication. But now I wondered if it had been worth it. I still wonder.

My father was veteran enough to take Duval's hurt feelings in stride. He could even smile about it afterward. "Reminds me," he said, "of the opera singer Guido Nazzo. A reviewer for the old *New York World*, I think it was, once wrote, 'Last night Guido Nazzo was nazzo guido.' Next day Mr. Nazzo came into the newspaper office armed with a gold-headed cane."

Often when it was quiet in the newsroom, my father would call me over to talk about stories I'd written or review my copy, which he saved in a bottom drawer. He would point out misused words, carelessness, and overwriting. He was a patient teacher, so long as I didn't make the same mistake twice, and stinting with his praise.

He sent me to the dictionary again and again, an old thick *Webster's Unabridged* with the musty smell of time in its pages. Be intimate with words, he said - their derivation, their connotation, their precise meaning. There was no imprecision in *The Enterprise*. "Driving under the influence," as the police always put it, was "drunken driving." "Inclement weather" was inexact; inclement how? "Virtually" as a qualifier was a lazy word, imprecise by definition.

Often he instructed me in memoranda that were as brief and unadorned as telegrams. He would hand these notes to me silently, with barely a glance, as he passed my desk, or leave them under the bail of my typewriter when I was out. "Look up 'shambles' in *Webster's*," he ordered, after I'd used the word to de-

scribe an insurance office ransacked by burglars. After I'd written my first theater review, I found this dictum in my typewriter: "Crowd in Fenway Park. Audience in a theater."

He sits forever in my memory at his desk by the sun-filled window. His arms are folded. His necktie is loosened, his sleeves are rolled, and there's an ink stain, an emphatic slash, near the bottom of his white shirt. He stares at the copy paper in his typewriter, unmoving, deep in thought. A full minute passes, then he brings up a sigh that is both resolute and weary, unfolds his big arms, and begins to type, spattering the page with words, good ones, the best newspaperman I've ever known.

By the early 1970s, the flatbed press was obsolete, and in 1975 *The Enterprise* went offset. The new press was a long, pea-green thing that could spew out 15,000 papers an hour. It ran with a windy, thoroughly modern whir.

The Linotype machines were loaded onto a truck and taken to a print museum in New Hampshire, instant artifacts. The Duplex wasn't as lucky. They broke it up with sledgehammers, like Luddites, and carried away the pieces. A year later, typewriters disappeared from the newsroom, giving way to the decorous, velvety tapping of computers.

My grandfather acceded to the new technology with some reluctance. Fiercely attached to what he knew and what had always worked for him, the old man took a while to see the writing on the wall. He died of a massive stroke in his pleasant kitchen in 1976, toppling over, as I always thought of it, with the

awesome finality of a giant oak. I don't blame him now for his bitterness at my refusal to follow in his and my father's footsteps. He was worried, was all. Frightened, even. He didn't know what would happen to *The Enterprise* if a Hough weren't there to take care of things.



Vivian Hodgkins checks perforated type for the teletypesetter.

My father was more philosophical. He knew you can't bend history to fit your expectations, and he figured *The Enterprise* would be cared for, one way or another. It has been: My sister and brother run it now.

My father is happily retired. "Don't romanticize the days of hot lead," he says. "It was hard work, and slow, and there were so many things that could go wrong." I know that, of course. But I was a part of it, if only briefly, at a time in my life when failure seemed out of the question. So I remember with a pang, very near to love, the clanking, grinding, snorting din of the old press, followed by that absolute silence, as sweet and pure as if God Himself had made it.

John Hough Jr., whose books include *A Peck of Salt*, *Two Car Funeral*, *The Guardian*, *Conduct of the Game* and *The Last Summer*, lives in West Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard.