

An Editor with a Poet's Soul Hears the Call of the Circus

By Maury Thompson

Queensbury, N.Y., native Steve Thurston, appointed managing editor of *The Post-Star* in nearby Glens Falls in mid-June, has already been on the job longer than Samuel John Banks, whose brief tenure as managing editor of *The Post-Star* in 1912 has almost been lost to history.

Banks' quick departure wasn't because of a lack of journalistic skill. He went on to success with other, larger newspapers such as *The Philadelphia Ledger*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

He simply found it difficult to concentrate on the demands of managing a newsroom when he had a poet's soul.

Banks explained it in his poem "Autumn," published Oct. 20, 1921, in *The Connecticut Western News* of Salisbury, Conn. Banks had been editor of that newspaper in 1909, before he came to Glens Falls, where he lived at 17 Harrison Ave.

"I wonder aimlessly about; I care not where I go. I only wish to satisfy the poet that's in me, and in my heart, I thank the Lord for poet's eyes to see."

In 1912, after several months on the editorial staff, Banks had been promoted to managing editor. He served for less than a month.

"In as much as the confining work did not agree with his health, Samuel J. Banks, who had been managing editor of *The Post-Star* since Dec. 1, yesterday voluntarily relinquished his position," *The Post-Star* reported on Dec. 20, 1912.

"Since his promotion, Mr. Banks had given the greatest satisfaction, especially in writing of editorials, and the publishers are sorry that he feels it is his duty to give up his position with *The Post-Star*."

Charles J. Banks, brother of Samuel, took over as managing editor, and continued in the position until Nov. 1, 1916.

Sam Banks evidently remained on good terms with *The Post-Star*, which occasionally published by-lined essays and poetry and reported frequently on his professional adventures.

His wanderlust found satisfaction in 1923, when the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus hired him as general press representative.

"Mr. Banks' many friends will doubtless be pleased to learn of his rise in fame in his chosen profession," *The Post-Star* reported on June 1, 1923.

Banks traveled the country in style aboard "Advance No. 1," the private rail car of "The Greatest Show on Earth" advance team.

“This vehicle, the first all-steel Pullman to be used in advance of a circus, is eighty feet in length over all and is the last word in modern car construction,” *The San Antonio Light* of Texas reported on Sept. 20, 1923. “It has its own dynamo generating electricity for brilliant lights and large fans, is equipped with water and bathing facilities ... (and) spacious state rooms and office for both Car Manager George Goodhart and Press Agent Sam J. Banks. In short, the car is a veritable club on wheels and makes an ideal home for the large crew of billposters, lithographers, and other workers.”

Banks had a diverse career, according to a July 6, 1940, article in *The Post-Star*, one of about a half-dozen updates the newspaper published over the years when Banks visited Glens Falls, often staying with good friend Frank Stowell, a longtime *Post-Star* reporter.

In addition to his newspaper and circus work, Banks wrote and published two books of poetry and a biography of naturalist John Burroughs.

He worked for a time as a special agent for the New York office of the U.S. Justice Department, and presented author talks at high schools and universities in 39 states and two Canadian provinces.

“In addition to the above, Mr. Banks has conducted tourists on world-wide trips and otherwise kept busy.” At one point, he even worked in theater.

Whatever the job, he must have had a stack of books waiting on the nightstand.

“We are told that great men are born, but I do not believe it. Men are made largely by what they read,” Banks wrote in a March 19, 1918, *Post-Star* column.

Banks was among several *Post-Star* reporters and editors who went on to national acclaim. No other circus types, to the best of our knowledge, but some other notable *Post-Star* alumni:

- Novelist William Kennedy, winner of the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for “Ironweed,” started his career as assistant sports editor of *The Post-Star* in the early 1950s.
- Ralph Knight was sports editor for seven years and managing editor for 14 before he left *The Post-Star* in 1944 to become an editor at the *Saturday Evening Post*. Knight also wrote two books, one about the famous duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, and a second titled “Learning to Talk to the World Beyond,” which dealt with the topic of psychic phenomena.
- Longtime *USA Today* columnist Craig Wilson began his career at *The Post-Star* in 1972, first as an obituary writer, and later covering the Washington County Board of Supervisors.
- Former *Post-Star* reporter Mike Kilian was news director of *The Cincinnati Enquirer* in 2018 when it published a riveting investigation into the local heroin epidemic that won the Pulitzer Prize for local reporting. He is now editor of the *Democrat and Chronicle* in Rochester and state editor of *USA Today's* papers in New York and Vermont.
- Former *Post-Star* sportswriter Tim Reynolds, an Indian Lake native, joined The Associated Press in 2002 and covers the Miami Heat and the NBA. He’s also covered the Miami Hurricanes football team, the Olympics, the Super Bowl, the World Series and the Stanley Cup Finals. He is

a voter for the Baseball Hall of Fame and a member of the Pro Basketball Writers Association and has reported from 10 countries.

- Another former *Post-Star* sportswriter, Mike Kane, covered sports in the Capital Region for more than four decades, with a focus on professional hockey and horse racing, and wrote popular books about both sports. He also has been an AHL correspondent for *The Hockey News* and a contributor to NBC Sports, *The New York Times*, the *New York Daily News*, *USA Today*, *BloodHorse* and *Daily Racing Form*, among others. He is a former chief communications officer for the National Racing Hall of Fame. For five years, he won the Red Smith Kentucky Derby Writing Contest. Recently he was honored with the National Turf Writers and Broadcasters' Walter Haight Award for career excellence in turf writing.
- Mark Mahoney, now editorial page editor at *The Daily Gazette* of Schenectady, won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing when he was editorial page editor at *The Post-Star* in 2009.
- Former *Post-Star* managing editor Gary Kebbel was deputy editor of USA Today.com and home page editor of Washingtonpost.com before joining the John S. and James K. Knight Foundation as journalism program director.
- Former *Post-Star* City Hall reporter John Sullivan won a George Polk Award for regional reporting in 1992 while working for *The Providence (R.I.) Journal-Bulletin* and was a member of a team of reporters there that won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting in 1993.
- Former *Post-Star* news editor Bob Bolerjack of Everett, Wash., was appointed by Gov. Chris Gregoire to the Everett Community College Board of Trustees. Bolerjack formerly served as Executive Director of Governmental Affairs for the City of Everett. He worked for *The Daily Herald* in Everett for 25 years as editorial page editor, sports editor and news editor.
- Former *Post-Star* reporter Ed Fitzpatrick is a *Boston Globe* staff writer covering Rhode Island. He worked for 16 years at the *Providence Journal* and taught journalism at Roger Williams University. He also has worked as a reporter at the *Hartford Courant* and the *Albany Times Union*, and he previously served as city editor at *The Saratogian*.
- Former *Post-Star* reporter Abigail Tucker is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Lion in the Living Room: How House Cats Tamed Us and Took Over the World*, named a Best Science Book of 2016 by *Library Journal* and *Forbes*, now translated into 13 languages. She is also a correspondent for *Smithsonian* magazine.
- The late *Post-Star* editor and columnist Don Metivier became editor and publisher of *Ski Racing Magazine*, published four books, and served as president of the Eastern Ski Writers Association and the U.S. Ski Writers Association.