

Bost, William Thomas ("Tom") ^[1]

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by A. M. Burns III, 1979

2 Jan. 1878–13 Sept. 1951

William Thomas ("Tom") Bost, long-time columnist for the *Greensboro Daily News* ^[2], "Boswell to the state government," and one of the most widely known political reporters in the state's history, was born on a farm at South River, eight miles north of Salisbury. He was one of eleven children of a *Confederate* ^[3] veteran who had ridden with Jeb Stuart. The South River community into which he was born had a public school term of only six weeks, but Bost and other community children attended a nine-month school term supported by the people of the local community, although Bost later recalled that the people of the community were "utterly moneyless." He passed entrance examinations (required because he did not have a high school diploma) and entered *The University of North Carolina* ^[4] in 1898, but he remained at the university only two and a half years.

On 1 Jan. 1901, Bost began his life's work by becoming a reporter on the *Salisbury Truth-Index* ^[5], a morning daily, at a salary of six dollars a week. Thirteen weeks later the paper folded, however, and Bost returned to the family farm. He reentered journalism on a part-time basis in 1904, working for the *Salisbury Post* ^[6]. In 1905 the *Charlotte Observer* ^[7] placed Bost at the head of its Salisbury bureau, and three years later he moved to Durham as a reporter for the *Durham Herald* ^[8]. In 1912 he moved to *Raleigh* ^[9] as city editor of the *News and Observer* ^[10], but he found the desk job too confining and, on 1 Sept. 1914, became Raleigh correspondent for the *Greensboro Daily News* ^[2], a position he held for thirty-seven years.

As a political reporter, Bost had few peers. His daily column "Among Us Tar Heels," a wide-ranging commentary, attracted and held a large audience. For thirty years he was recognized as the dean of capitol reporters; and with each biennial *General Assembly* ^[11] session, his stories on pending legislation and his characterizations of North Carolina politicians delighted many of his readers and rankled others. Possessed of a phenomenal memory and rich in the lore of North Caroliniana, Bost took few notes when he covered a story, yet he established a strong reputation for accuracy in his reporting.

A lifelong *Democrat* ^[12], Bost credited William Jennings Bryan and *Charles B. Aycock* ^[13] with giving him his political values. In later years he described himself as an ardent New Dealer and Fair Dealer. A lifelong *Episcopalian* ^[14], too—he nearly entered the ministry in 1899—Bost was an active lay reader and wrote a Sunday editorial around a religious theme for the *Daily News*. A perennial opponent of capital punishment, he witnessed more than 250 executions, covering them, he said, as a "religious duty," hoping to inspire sentiment against the death penalty.

A devoted family man, Bost married *Annie Kizer* ^[15] of Salisbury on 28 July 1908; they had two sons, W. T., Jr., and John Shipman. Mrs. Bost served for years as state commissioner of public welfare and was almost as widely known as her husband. Vigorous and active as a journalist into his seventy-third year, Bost died in *Raleigh* ^[9] at Rex Hospital following a brief illness and was buried at *Oakwood Cemetery* ^[16]. At his death, Tar Heel editorialists noted the end of an era in North Carolina journalism.

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