

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Edward Price Bell

When 13-year-old Edward Price Bell applied for a reporter's job at the *Terre Haute Gazette* in 1882, he could barely spell.

Newspaper co-publisher Spencer F. Ball overlooked Bell's youth and obvious inexperience, hiring him on the spot and teaching him the ropes. Neither Ball nor Bell could have foreseen that the naive Parke County native would eventually become the first journalist ever nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Bell's older brother coaxed him to move from Racoon Township in Parke County to Terre Haute in 1878. That brother, William E. Bell, became the renowned surgeon who built Bell Apartments at 621 Popular St. Their parents, Addison (a Vigo County native) and Elizabeth (Price) Bell, moved to 629 Chestnut St. a few years later with the five other Bell children.

For five years, Bell was a reporter with the *Gazette*, the *Indianapolis Democrat* and the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*. In 1888 he accepted a friend's advice and founded *The Racoon Valley Independent*, a Rosedale weekly. The adviser was Eugene V. Debs. Before Bell sold the one-man operation a year later, he renamed it *The Rosedale Bee*.

In 1889 Bell helped Douglas Smith found the *Terre Haute Daily News*. He then returned to the *Gazette*, spent a year at the *Evansville Standard* and in 1893 enrolled at Hanover College. After a semester he shifted to Wabash College to be closer to home. Before graduation, he toured Europe with Terre Haute pal Will Smallwood and wed Crawfordsville native Mary Alice Mills.

Bell became editor of the *Terre Haute Express* in 1897 but was fired for refusing to endorse the publisher's political choices. The next year he won national acclaim as an investigative reporter for the *Chicago Record*. Victor Larson, who owned the *Record* as well as the *Chicago Daily News*, chose Bell to launch America's first foreign news service in 1900. As London bureau chief for 23 years, he cultivated global prestige for probing interviews with international leaders. Some were published in his 1926 book *World Chancelleries*.

Bell's behind-the-scenes influence on heads of state inspired *London Observer* editor-in-chief James L. Garvin and Japanese Foreign Minister Baron Kujuro Shidehara to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Both credited the Hoosier with bringing about the April-May 1930 London Naval Armaments summit between President Herbert Hoover, Shidehara and British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

Retiring from the *Daily News* in 1932, Bell continued to globetrot, publishing essays and interviews in *The Literary Digest*, an award-winning weekly; *Liberty Magazine*; *The Christian Science Monitor*; and *The New York Times*, while living at his residence in Evanston, Ill., and at Merrywood, his winter home in Pass Christian, Miss. During Bell's last international peace mission to China in 1938 he contracted deadly beriberi.

A frequent Terre Haute visitor, on Nov. 16, 1940, Bell became political editor for Terre Haute's weekly *Saturday Spectator*. He died Sept. 12, 1943, at Merrywood. His widow and three children — Edward Price Bell Jr., John Price Bell and Alice Bell Prindiville — survived him.



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