

RICHARD CHARLES STEELE

It was sometimes said that when Dick Steele entered a room, his smile came in first. He was among the most affable and sociable of individuals. A lifetime of achievement, principally in the newspaper world, lay behind that smile. His career was crowned by twenty-one successful years as publisher of the *Worcester Telegram* and the *Evening Gazette*, in the hometown of the American Antiquarian Society. He interwove that career with what amounted to a second: contributing his experience and talent to the enrichment of the social and cultural institutions of the community, including, notably, AAS.

As one who worked with him for more than forty years—closely for half that time—and eventually succeeded him as publisher of the Worcester newspapers, I was inescapably an intimate observer of his work life and his public life. He had a marvelous ability to make things look easy, even when they were very hard. As a boy in Marlboro and Southboro, Massachusetts, he had to battle his way up from what we then called—perhaps quaintly in today's realities—a broken home. He matured quickly. He earned his way to becoming an Eagle Scout. That achievement stuck to his bones. Very few of all the honors he gained in later life gave him greater pride.

After Commerce High School in Worcester and Bentley School of Accounting in Boston, he spent six years in accounting work. In 1943, George F. Booth, then editor, publisher, and part-owner of the *Telegram* and *Gazette*, hired him as controller. Richard C. Steele, with his friendly personality and razor-sharp business sense, quickly became a man on the move. He soon took on added business responsibilities and became general manager of the newspapers in 1955, at the age of thirty-eight. In that role, he led the company successfully through a long printers' strike. He was on his way to the top.

First, however, there was a detour to New York, where he spent fifteen months as vice-president and general manager of the

struggling New York *Herald Tribune*. In 1961, he was drawn back to Worcester by the owners of the *Telegram* and *Gazette* to become publisher. He spent the rest of his newspaper years there, as variously publisher, president, and ultimately chairman of the board. He was admired, respected, and regarded as a friend by three generations of *Telegram* and *Gazette* employees.

As publisher, he came close to nationally known newspaper leaders, and was elected to the board of the Associated Press, eventually becoming a member of the executive committee and first vice-chairman. He held positions in many newspaper organizations. He always denied that he was a journalist, but he was secretly delighted to be elected in 1982 to the Academy of New England Journalists. As a publisher, he was most supportive of his editors, even when that meant a rare difference with the newspapers' owners.

Although he was a traditional Republican in most respects, he struck up a friendship with Joseph P. Kennedy in the 1950s and viewed himself as somewhat of a counselor to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy in the 1960s, a relationship shattered by Chappaquiddick. Later, he developed a friendship with George Bush, then vice-president.

Dick became a member of the Antiquarian Society in 1972 and, typically, accepted leadership of the Newspaper Steering Committee only six months later. He led the successful effort to raise more than \$500,000 to preserve and enhance the usefulness of the Society's remarkable newspaper collection. He was a member of the Council of the Society for fifteen years and served as chairman of the Nominating Committee and a member of the Development Committee. He was particularly proud of the monograph he researched and wrote about the Society's founder, Isaiah Thomas. He enjoyed reading much of it to an invited audience at First Baptist Church, across the street from AAS headquarters. Later, the Advertising Club of Worcester honored him with its Isaiah Thomas Award, recognizing his extraordinary community service.

Dick led the fund-raising campaign to restore Mechanics Hall

in downtown Worcester to its 1857 glory, and he was a leader in many other organizations—the United Way, the New England Science Center, Mohegan Council, Boy Scouts of America, and more.

The last ten years of his life were sometimes less smooth than his friends wished. He was less active in the newspaper world—primarily a matter of choice but nevertheless a wrenching change. He retired in 1989, after forty-six years with only two newspaper companies. He was periodically sidelined by illness. His wife, Louise, had struggled for eighteen years with heart problems that limited their travel together. She died in 1990, six months before what would have been their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

In his later years, Dick divided his time between Worcester and Vero Beach, Florida. He golfed. But he was not one to spend all his time at play. In Vero Beach, he became active in an environmental committee, and he loved that. It kept him in touch with issues and with people; he relished the contact.

When his life ended on June 7, 1991, he was seventy-four. His achievements were many; he had nothing left to prove. Yet he retained his interest in newspapers, in current affairs, in the social and cultural life of Worcester, and in what was happening on every side. The last time I saw him, his smile was as winning as ever. He leaves three children—Barbara Steele-Herman of Carefree, Arizona, Virginia Felch of Oakland, California, and Nancy Ewell of Paros, Greece.

Robert C. Achorn

FRANCIS GUSTAF WALETT

Francis Gustaf Walett, a noted colonial historian and member of the Society since 1965, died October 26, 1991, in Stoughton, Massachusetts. Frank, as he was affectionately known to his friends, had a close relationship with the Society for three decades. At the height of the relationship, during the observance of

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