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Murrow Historical Marker to be Dedicated

On October 14, in conjunction with the Edward R. Murrow Centennial Celebration, UNCG is proud to host the dedication of a highway marker in honor of Murrow’s birth site on Polecat Creek. For over 70 years, the North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program has drawn attention to important events, places, and people throughout the state with the familiar silver and black signs that dot the roadways. Every county in the state boasts at least one marker, and to date, there are over 1,400 statewide.

The Murrow sign is being placed at North Carolina Highway 62 at Randleman Road, one mile east of his birth site. The highway signs are the most visible evidence of the Historical Marker Program’s good work, but the program also maintains a website at www.ncmarkers.com that provides essays about each marker. In addition, the Guide to North Carolina Highway Historical Markers offers a comprehensive guide to the state’s signs and Tar Heel history. Sometimes referred to as “history on a stick,” the markers are an everyday reminder of the people who left their mark on North Carolina.

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Centennial Celebration: Guilford County Remembers Its Native Son

“Just once in a while let us exalt the importance of ideas and information.”

From RTNDA Keynote Address, October 15, 1958
Edward R. Murrow
A Life

Edward R. Murrow's reputation as one of America's most celebrated journalists endures today, more than 40 years after his death. Murrow brought to American radio listeners—and later television viewers—compelling stories that came alive through words and pictures; he described the horrors of war both on and off the battlefield; he challenged a powerful member of the U.S. Congress in the midst of the "Red Scare" of the 1950s; and, near the end of his life, he was called on by John F. Kennedy to lead the nation's effort to "tell America's story to the world."

Born in 1908 on Polecat Creek near Greensboro, North Carolina, Murrow was raised in a family of Quaker farmers. When he was a boy, the family moved to Washington state, where eventually he attended Washington State College, majoring in speech. He moved after graduation in 1930 to New York City to run the national office of the National Student Federation of America. In 1932, he became assistant director of the Institute for International Education, a nonprofit group that organized student conferences around the world. He married Janet Huntington Brewster in 1934 and they had one son.

CBS hired Murrow as director of "talks and education" in 1935, and two years later sent him to Europe to monitor the increasing tension on the European continent. As war loomed, Murrow saw the need to assemble a cadre of qualified reporters to cover the stories as they unfolded—a group forever known as "Murrow's Boys." When World War II broke out in 1939, Murrow and his "boys" were ready to report on this story of profound worldwide consequence.

The broadcasts Murrow made from the rooftops of London during the raging air battles would make his name and his voice well known back in America. Murrow brought journalism to new heights when he rode along with U.S. flyers on several bombing missions over Europe, risking his life to give American listeners a better sense of what the war was really like and how U.S. soldiers were fighting it. But it was from the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany that he painted his darkest picture, of the unspeakable horror of murder on an industrial scale: "There were two rows of bodies stacked up like cordwood. They were thin and very white... Some of the bodies were terribly bruised, though there seemed to be little flesh to bruise. Some had been shot through the head, but they bled but little. All except two were naked. I tried to count them as best as I could and arrived at the conclusion that all that was mortal of more than 500 men and boys lay there in two neat piles."

After the war, Murrow came back to the United States, working with Fred W. Friendly in his radio program, Hear It Now. In 1954, this program became the TV news and public affairs program See It Now. In one case Murrow used his program to highlight and dispute the U.S. Air Force's 1953 decision to dismiss from service an officer whose relatives were suspected of sympathies to Communist ideology or organizations. The Air Force would eventually reverse its decision. See It Now, of course, also was the vehicle for Murrow's greatest confrontation, where he challenged Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy. Another Murrow program, CBS Reports, aired "Harvest of Shame," a report critical of the treatment of migrant workers in the United States. These and other programs earned him several Emmys. After CBS, weary of controversy, cancelled See It Now, Murrow grew increasingly disillusioned with the medium. He continued at CBS until 1961, when President John F. Kennedy appointed him head of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). Since 1953, USIA, America, and libraries and information centers run by U.S. Embassies around the world. Murrow's goal was to make the agency more results-oriented, and he worked hard trying to reinvigorate USIA, secure adequate funding from Congress, and transform its officers into "persuaders" as well as dispensers of information. Murrow's tenure at the helm of USIA coincided with important events of the early 1960s: Soviet resumption of nuclear testing, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Kennedy assassination. Not long after Kennedy's death, Murrow, ill following cancer surgery, left USA. He died in New York, on April 27, 1965.

Edward R. Murrow Centennial Celebration: Guilford County Remembers Its Native Son
A series of programs co-sponsored by the University Libraries at UNCG and the Greensboro Historical Museum

All events are free and open to the public.

Tuesday, October 7
Edward R. Murrow and Joseph McCarthy, a See It Now documentary about the confrontation between the broadcaster and the Senator, with background and discussion led by Chuck Bolton, History Department.
7:00 p.m. Maple Room, Elliott University Center, UNCG campus.

Tuesday, October 14
Edward R. Murrow's Harvest of Shame, a CBS documentary about migrant farm workers, with background and discussion led by Nolo Martinez, Center for New North Carolinians.
7:00 p.m. Maple Room, Elliott University Center, UNCG campus.

Sunday, October 19
Good Night and Good Luck, a screening of the 2005 theatrical film directed by George Clooney.
2:30 p.m. Greensboro Historical Museum.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Web Sites
Edward R. Murrow on American Masters, PBS http://www.pbs.org/americanmasters/database/murrow_e.html

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