

**EDWARD R.
MURROW**
1908-1965

**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

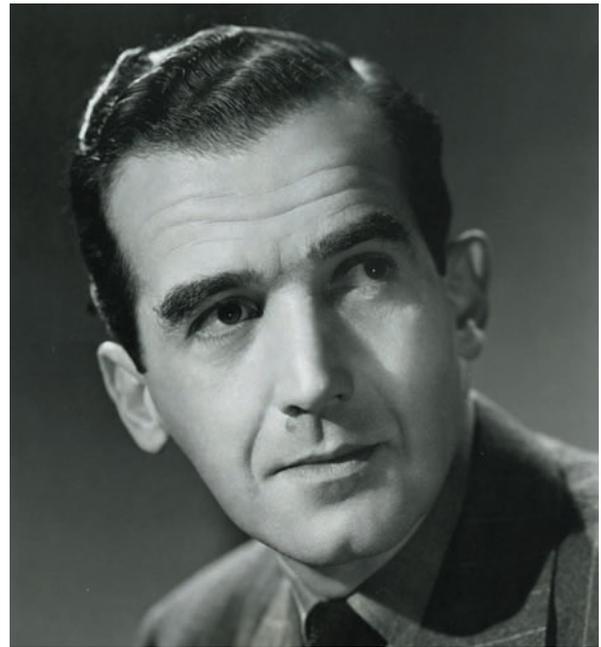
1930 to New York City to run the national office of the National Student Federation of America. In 1932, he became assistant director of the Institute for International Education, a nonprofit group that organized student conferences around the world. He married Janet Huntington Brewster in 1934 and they 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



E.R. Murrow (far left) with brothers Lacey and Dewey



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*



Roscoe and Ethel Murrow listening to their son's wartime broadcast,

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,

"We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine and remember that we are not descended from fearful men, not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes which were for the moment unpopular.... We can deny our heritage and our history, but we cannot escape responsibility for the result."

-from *See it Now*, March 9, 1954

waging the "war of ideas" against the Soviet Union, had been charged with "telling America's story to the world" through educational exchanges, books and publications, radio broadcasts through the *Voice of*

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 disseminators 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 USIA. He died in New York, on April 27, 1965.

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Web Sites

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http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/murrow_e.html
- Museum of Broadcast Communications, Edward R. Murrow
<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/MI/html/MI/murrowedwar/murrowedwar.htm>
- Washington State University Library's Murrow Photo Collection
<http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/holland/mascfinders/pc30.htm>

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

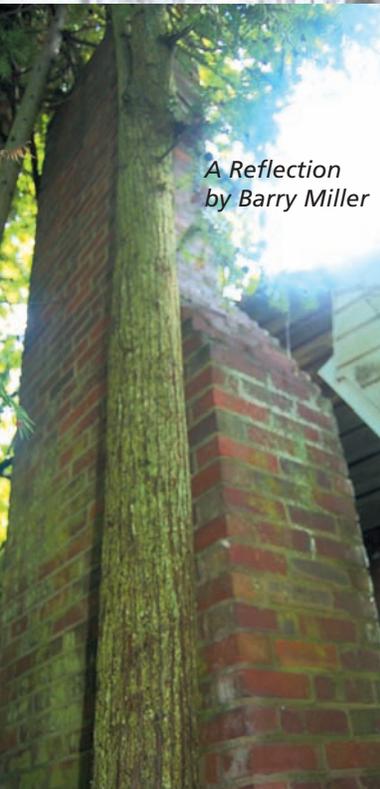
Edward R. Murrow's Harvest of Shame, a CBS documentary about migrant farm workers, with background and discussion led by Nolo Martinez, Center for New North Carolinians.
7:00 p.m. Maple Room, Elliott University Center, UNCG campus.

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.



One hundred years...



*A Reflection
by Barry Miller*

Photos of Edward R. Murrow homeplace by Jim Schlosser and Barry Miller. Photos of Edward R. Murrow as an infant and adult courtesy of Washington State University Library.

Much can happen in such a span of time. One hundred years ago, a loud cry rang out from within these walls. A baby was born in this house along the banks of Polecat Creek. A third son, destined to grow to manhood far away, and in manhood to leave his mark as one of his century's giants. His great voice is muffled now, but for those who remember, it rings out still, reporting amidst doom and destruction, demanding justice and fairness, standing bravely for what is right and good.



For broadcaster Edward R. Murrow was born in this house, a house inhabited by his ancestors for a century or more before he himself came into this world in the spring of 1908. A house left when he was but five years old, when he and his family moved to the still rugged Pacific Northwest, to begin to live and work in distant places.

More than twenty years ago, the old house burned. After two centuries of service and two decades of decay, its ruins now lie beneath vine and vegetation. From the road, in summer, one sees no evidence of greatness here, not even the ruins. Even nearby, few know what happened here, what manner of man was born here. The ravages of time are such that few know his name, fewer still know what he stood for, and the crumbling walls of the old house give no voice to the man. No sign marks his birthplace.

And so, before even the memory is lost, let us stop to recall the words of this man born along the banks of this small creek at a quiet crossroads in the Carolina countryside.

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.

Please join us at 7:00 p.m. in the Maple Room of the Elliott University Center on the UNCG campus for the dedication of the Murrow birth site marker.

