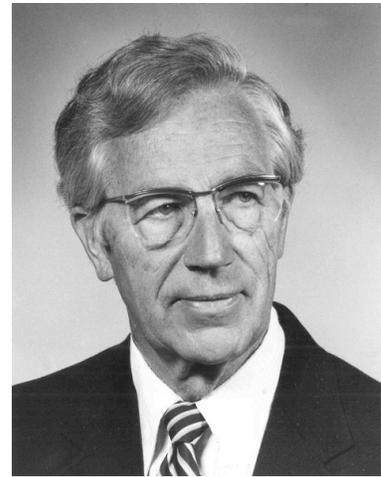


William B Smart, Deadeye

Hard-driving former Deseret News Editor Bill Smart, who stood up to Utah's power players, dies at 95.

A member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from his youth who at the time wasn't attending many meetings or socializing with LDS peers, Smart recalled a worship service while in Laramie, Wyoming. "I sat there and heard a voice behind me, a girl standing up to bear her testimony," he later recalled. "I looked around and I said to myself, 'That's the girl I'm going to marry!' Nobody believes that, but it's true." And love at first sight was how Bill met Donna Toland, of Star Valley, Wyoming.



They courted by mail as he left first for infantry training before being accepted into Officers Candidate School. He graduated as an infantry officer — and valedictorian — and married Donna, later citing the marriage for increased church activity the rest of his life.

As an officer, he was first assigned stateside, then to Okinawa, Japan, with the war ending as he was en route. He concluded his military obligations in Hawaii, but not before Donna joined him there.

After a brief stay in Star Valley, the Smarts returned to Portland, with Bill back at Reed College on the GI Bill, studying for two years to be a history professor while working at Portland's daily newspaper, The Oregonian. The first of their five children was born his senior year.

In 1948, Smart earned a fellowship to Harvard. At the same time, the Deseret News was expanding its news coverage and its staff. Elder Alfred E. Bowen, an LDS apostle and president of the Deseret News, spoke at stake conference in Portland, and George Scott, still the stake president, lined up Smart for an interview, which resulted in a job and relocation to Salt Lake City.

Starting first in sports, Smart later moved to the city desk as a reporter, still with an eye on returning to school. A call to the general board of the LDS Church's Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association resulted in him terminating his Harvard application and settling on a journalism career. He would serve on the MIA board for 15 years and later as bishop of the Federal Heights LDS Ward and on the church's Sunday School General Board.

In 1957, Smart became an editorial writer, soon the chief editorial writer and then the editorial page editor. He was named assistant general manager under O. Preston Robinson and then executive editor under E. Earl Hawkes in 1966, still maintaining the editorial page responsibilities with both assignments.

He traveled to Antarctica with the National Science Foundation in 1961, the only American among the first six journalists to go there. Other professional travels took him to South America and Europe, as well as to East Germany, Cuba and China. His 1978 travels to China resulted in an extensive series of newspaper reports and later a book.

Smart started and hosted the KUED series “Civic Dialogue,” a pioneer in political TV debates for the state. He prided himself as a conservationist and a preservationist, and he believed his involvement with the Salt Lake Council of Foreign Relations made his political leanings somewhat suspect to others. “I always felt myself pretty much middle of the road,” he later said, “but in the minds of a lot of people, I was branded as a liberal.”

Smart was named editor and general manager of the Deseret News in 1972, a position he held for 14 years. During much of that span, Wendell J. Ashton was the newspaper’s publisher, with two future LDS Church presidents — first Gordon B. Hinckley and then Thomas S. Monson — as presidents of the Deseret News Publishing Co.

Smart, who founded a prize-winning investigative team at the Deseret News, [earned the Clifford P. Cheney Service to Journalism Award](#) in 1987, an honor bestowed by the Utah Headliners Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

“Bill Smart was a consummate journalist who never compromised his principles and who was a great example for aspiring newspaper reporters,” said LaVarr Webb, a former Deseret News managing editor.

Webb recalled a time when as political editor he had written a column that had angered former Gov. Scott Matheson — “a person I greatly respected, despite my criticism of him,” he said. Matheson demanded a meeting with the paper’s top executives and Webb, bringing his chief of staff with him from Capitol Hill.

“I listened with trepidation as the state’s most powerful person outlined why he thought my column was unfair and one-sided and questioned whether I could be an objective reporter,” Webb said.

“Bill gently but firmly reminded the governor that the column was an opinion piece and fell within the realm of fair criticism of a public official. He defended my judgment and ability to both report objectively and write an opinion column.

“I left the meeting with a greater respect for Bill Smart,” Webb added, “and a renewed commitment to write and report fairly and accurately.” Another former managing editor, Richard D. Hall, called Smart “the quintessential newspaper editor” — both feared and loved by a staff that, like him and by following him, were striving for consistent journalistic excellence.

“Bill was hands-on,” Hall said. “He’d often jog to the office in the morning and, while still in his sweats, sit — often on the city editor’s desk — in the newsroom to ‘approve’ the direction of that day’s paper.

“And Bill was visionary,” Hall continued. “He cared about Salt Lake City and Utah — and ensured that Deseret News’ journalism accounted for the good of the community.

After retiring from the Deseret News, Smart was asked to continue by consulting as a senior editor. He also continued his international travels, wrote editorials for the Church News, became editor of This People magazine and authored or edited nine books, including “Words and Actions: An Autobiography,” published in late 2016.

“I guess I’d like to be remembered as being a good newspaper man,” he said in his oral history. “I think I was a good newspaper man. I think I built the Deseret News to a newspaper that gained real respect. I guess I would be remembered as the person who built the Deseret News into a paper of real quality. I hope that it will stay that way.”