



From Butler to Buffett: The Story Behind the Buffalo News

Murray B. Light

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In 1873, a twenty-three-year-old entrepreneur named Edward H. Butler arrived in Buffalo, New York, to found a newspaper eventually called the Buffalo Evening News. Under Butler's aegis the News became one of the most successful newspapers in America, growing along with the thriving city at the end of the Erie Canal, which was expanding rapidly as immigrants poured in and America urbanized. About a century later, in 1977, financial investor Warren E. Buffett, recognizing the value of the paper, bought the Buffalo Evening News, and to this day, despite competition from large media conglomerates, the Buffalo News (as it is now called) remains a successful independent publication.

There is no one better to tell the story of the News than Murray B. Light, who held senior editorial positions at the paper for over thirty years. Beginning with the founding of the newspaper by Butler, Light provides a wealth of historical information and many in-depth, behind-the-scenes profiles of key persons who influenced the course of the paper. Chief among these is founder Edward H. Butler, a dynamo of energy, whose enthusiasm, innovation, and high standards are still felt to this day. His son, Edward Butler Jr., also played an important role, extending the reach of the News into radio and television, as did his extraordinary wife, Kate Robinson Butler, who also served as publisher. Almost as influential as the senior Butler was Alfred H. Kirchofer, whose strong personality and work ethic, staunch Republican Party connections, and active involvement in the Buffalo community became legendary. Readers are offered a rare inside look at the strength of leadership, attention to detail, and accuracy in reporting that are consistently needed to maintain a dedicated subscriber base through such momentous events as the Three-Mile-Island nuclear disaster, the Attica prison riots, and the environmental dangers of Love Canal.

Regarding the current owner, Warren Buffett, Light has many interesting insights into his famous low-key, hands-off style of management. He assumed ownership of the News at a critical time, bolstering its financial strength while encouraging complete editorial independence. Light also devotes a chapter to current publisher Stanford Lipsey, a longtime associate of Buffett, highlighting his leadership in the wake of the bitter court dispute with the Courier Express.

Along the way Light offers interesting comments on newspaper trends and on many longtime and widely read reporters and columnists, such as Ray Hill, Bob Curran, Lee Coppola, Jeff Simon, Alan Pergament, Donn Esmonde, Janice Okun, Larry Felser, and many others, as well as Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonists Bruce Shanks and Tom Toles.

This detailed memoir of the persons and events that had a formative influence on a major independent regional newspaper will capture the attention of anyone interested in the history of one of America's great independent presses.

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Kyle Gill:

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