

Lewis Grist gave Yorkville Enquirer

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its name, passed on heritage

Lewis M. Grist (1831-1903) was said to have printer's ink flowing through his veins. His love of newspapering was kindled at age 9 when his father bought some second-hand printing equipment.

The father, John E. Grist, had come from Spartanburg to Yorkville in 1833 to publish a newspaper he called *The Patriot*. The paper supported the Unionists, who were opposed to John C. Calhoun's doctrine of nullification. By 1835, the nullification controversy had faded, and Grist decided he wanted a less political newspaper.

John E. Grist, who had no pretense of being a writer, buried The



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Patriot and birthed a new paper he called *Journal of the Times*. He filled the *Journal's* pages with whatever he thought his readers might like. Most of it was clipped from newspapers with whom he exchanged. He printed little national news.

There were few subscribers, it being the custom of the time for

one person in a community to subscribe and then pass the paper around to his neighbors. Grist's *Journal of the Times* barely lasted two years.

It is not known what Grist did the next two years, but in 1840 he bought some old printing equipment and taught his 9-year-old son, Lewis, how to set type. Father and son put out the first issue of the *Yorkville Compiler* on June 1, 1840. That paper lasted three years.

In spite of failure after failure, a month later, Grist was putting out a five-column four-page paper called *The Farmer's Miscellany*.

Lewis Grist set type until 1851, when, at age 20, he purchased the paper from his father.

In 1855, Grist changed the name of the paper to *The Yorkville Enquirer*, the name still used. Lewis Grist was a natural newspaperman with good business sense. The reputation of the newspaper carried it far. By the outbreak of the Civil War, the *Yorkville Enquirer* had subscribers in every county in South Carolina and in every Southern state.

Lewis Grist enlisted in the Confederate Army on Aug. 20, 1861, and handed over the management of his paper to his aged father. Lewis rose to the rank of captain

and was wounded at Second Manassas. During the entire war, John E. Grist managed to get out the paper all but two weeks when he could not secure paper.

Lewis Grist came back in 1865 to a devastated land, but in spite of hard times managed to continue the paper and to grow. Grist never ceased pressing for better schools, but he took each of his five sons out of school when they were 13 in order to initiate them into the printer's world.

In November 1890, disaster struck when the printing plant went up in flames. Grist bought better equipment and reopened.

Grist's sons — George, Wood D., Oliver E., Albert M. and Reginald

— started at the bottom as "office devil," and each was given increasingly difficult responsibilities by the father. In 1895, all sons became partners. George and Reginald decided to take up other lines of work, but the other three stayed with the *Enquirer*.

Wood Davidson Grist served as editor for 35 years until his death in 1925. Then Albert M. Grist stepped forward to fill the editorial chair of his brother to finish out more than a century of newspapering by three generations of Grists.

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