

# George Stanley Turnbull (1882-1977)

By Eric Schucht

George Stanley Turnbull was a journalist, educator, and historian and one of the first professors at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication. He was an influential instructor who was well regarded by students due to his quiet manner, soft speaking voice and subtle sense of humor. He estimated he taught up to 5,000 students during his lifetime, including Oregon Governor Tom McCall, Judge Alfred T. Goodwin, and U.S. Senator Richard Neuberger. Charles Gratke, a former student of Turnbull and foreign editor at the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote in 1977 that Turnbull "has managed to make not only better craftsmen but better people of us all." He authored five books, including his crowning achievement, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, which documents the state's early journalism history.

Turnbull was born on December 5, 1882, in Newcastle upon Tyne, a city in northern England. At age ten, Turnbull immigrated to Washington State to live with his paternal grandparents. His first newspaper job was typesetting at the *Marysville Globe*. After graduating from high school, he was hired to proofread articles and edit telegraphs at the *Bellingham Reveille*. He was promoted to managing editor after a few years.

In 1905, Turnbull became a reporter at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and in 1915 earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Washington (UW). He went to work for *The Seattle Times* but left in 1917 to teach at the University of Oregon's (UO) School of Journalism, which had been established in 1916. He advised the *Oregon Daily Emerald* student paper and spent his summers writing for *The Oregonian* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In 1932, he earned his master's degree from UW.

From 1923 to 1939, Turnbull researched and worked on a book recounting ninety-two years of the state's journalism history, beginning with the *Oregon Spectator* in 1846. The project originated from his experience editing *Oregon Exchanges*, a publication written by UO journalism students for people working in the state's newspaper industry. In his book, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, Turnbull attempted to document every paper published in Oregon, with chapters divided by county. He also delved into notable figures in journalism, such as Abigail Scott Duniway and C.S. Jackson. He relied on first-person accounts from journalists, including Fred Lockley, and newspaper clippings. The 568-page book has a few inaccuracies and omissions, but it remains the most ambitious and comprehensive documentation on the history of Oregon journalism produced in the twentieth century. More than a decade after its publication in 1939, historian Frank Luther Mott, called *History of Oregon Newspapers* the best state history of journalism published in the United States.

In 1944, Turnbull became acting dean of UO's journalism school following the death of Eric W. Allen. He retired in 1948, then taught at Stanford University, the University of Nebraska, and the University of Florida. In 1951, he began working at the Albany Democrat-Herald under the title of associate editor. In 1955, Turnbull came back to UO for research and wrote four more books—two on journalist George Putnam, *Governors of Oregon* (1959), and a history of the UO School of Journalism itself, titled *Journalists in the Making*. He remained involved in the UO journalism program up through the 1970s and received the UO Distinguished Service Award in 1971.

Turnbull died on February 9, 1977, at a nursing home in Salem. His obituary in the *Oregon Journal* read, "Newspaper readers who may never have heard of George Turnbull will long remain indebted to him for his profound contribution to Oregon journalism." Sportswriter George Pasero, a former student of Turnbull, wrote the following about his death. "My greatest benefactor when I was aspiring to become a newspaperman died the other day. He was George Turnbull, long a professor in the University of Oregon's School of Journalism, later its dean... and greatly influential through many years of retirement." In 1998, Turnbull was posthumously inducted into the UO Journalism Hall of Achievement. The George S. Turnbull Center, UO's journalism campus in Portland, was named in his honor in 2005.

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