

# **Sue O'Brien Papers: The Denver Newspaper War**

## **Mss.02628**

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	History Colorado. Stephen H. Hart Research Center
<b>Title</b>	Sue O'Brien Papers: The Denver Newspaper War
<b>Date</b>	1980-1998
<b>Extent</b>	0.75 Linear feet + 3 flat boxes
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Collection [Collection]</b>	.75 lf + 3 Flat Boxes
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The collection contains personal research of Denver journalist and editor Sue O'Brien and papers related to the <i>Denver Post</i>, beginning in 1980. Papers highlight the six editors <i>The Post</i> had from 1980-2004, articles and personal research about the Newspaper War with the <i>Rocky Mountain News</i>, and <i>The Post's</i> Centennial in 1992. Interviews with the editors highlight their missions during their time in office and Don Hunt's drug charges in the late 1980s.</p>

## Historical note

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Denver's newspaper *The Evening Post* lived a short life from 1892-1893. The Panic of 1893 hit the paper hard leading it to economic trouble. In order to resurrect the paper, Harry Tammen and Frederick Bonfils purchased it in 1895. Tammen and Bonfils came from business backgrounds but had no newspaper experience. In 1901, *The Evening Post* changed its name to *The Denver Post*, increasing circulation.

After Tammen and Bonfils' death, Bonfils' wife and daughter-Helen and May-became the principal owners of the paper. In hopes of changing the format of the paper away from society news, the Bonfilses hired Palmer Hoyt from the *Portland Oregonian* in 1946. After many years of success, advertising mogul Samuel Newhouse attempted to buy *The Post* in 1960. The Bonfils hired Don Seawell to help them keep ownership of the paper away from Newhouse. The case took 13 years to settle in court leaving the Bonfils as owners of the paper and the paper in financial loss. After Helen Bonfils' death in 1972, Seawell was named chair of the paper.

By 1980, *The Post* continued to lose money and Seawell sold the paper to Times Mirror. Times Mirror changed from evening to morning circulation boosting income. The boost from Times Mirror was not enough and in 1987 *The Post* was sold to Dean Singleton and MediaNews Group, Inc.

Soon after the purchase by Singleton and MediaNews Group, Inc., *The Denver Post* and archival, *The Rocky Mountain News*, became entangled in The Last Great American Newspaper War in 1987. The Newspaper War ended with *The Post* becoming the parent company of the *Rocky Mountain News*, forming the *Denver Newspaper Agency*.

Since 2006 the *Denver Newspaper Agency* has been reducing staff and in 2011, the paper was sold to John Paton of Journal Register Company.

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## Biographical note

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Sue O'Brien (1939-2003) was born in Waukon, Iowa. O'Brien attended Grinnell College where she edited the student newspaper. Her first significant radio reporting was for a Denver station from the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. By the 1970s, O'Brien was a leader in Denver radio and television news reporting. She was the first female television news director in Denver. She was Governor Richard Lamm's press secretary and Governor Roy Romer's campaign manager. She earned a Master's degree in Public Administration from the Kennedy School at Harvard University. She accepted a professorship in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder, also serving as associate dean and directing the master's program. She was one of the first to achieve tenure without either a Ph.D. or a tenure-track position. She left that position to become the

first woman editor of The Denver Post's editorial page. In 2010, O'Brien was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame.

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## Scope and Contents note

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*The Denver Post* began circulating in 1892 under the name *The Evening Post*. The new owners, Harry Tammen and Frederick Bonfils, changed the paper's name to *The Denver Post* in 1901. After Tammen and Bonfils passed away, Helen and May Bonfils took ownership of the paper until Helen's death in 1972, selling the paper to Donald Seawell. In hopes of boosting circulation the paper was sold to Times Mirror, Co. and then to MediaNews Group, Inc. In 1982 *The Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News* went to war ending with *The Post* becoming the parent company of *The Rocky Mountain News* and changing the name to the *Denver Evening News*. Through the years of changing ownership and losing customers *The Post* has been working on boosting circulation and modifying paper format.

The collection contains papers collected by Sue O'Brien and related to the *Denver Post*, beginning in 1980. Papers highlight the six editors *The Post* had from 1980-2004, articles and personal research about the Newspaper War with the *Rocky Mountain News*, and *The Post's* Centennial in 1992. Interviews with the editors highlight their missions during their time in office and Don Hunt's drug charges in the late 1980s.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

History Colorado. Stephen H. Hart Research Center

### Conditions Governing Access note

Open to researchers without restrictions.

### Provenance

This collection was donated by Sarah J. Hautizinger, daughter of Sue O'Brien on May 28, 2012.

### Processing Information note

Processed by Haley Suby, December 2014.

## Controlled Access Headings

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### Corporate Name(s)

- Denver post.
- Forbes.
- MediaNews Group .
- Rocky Mountain news.
- The Westword.
- The Westword.
- Times Mirror Company .

### Genre(s)

- Correspondence.
- Newspaper clippings.

### Personal Name(s)

- Guittar, Lee
- Howard, Michael Balfe
- O'Brien, Sue, 1939-2003
- Scholsberg, Richard, 1966-
- Seawell, Donald Ray, 1912-
- Singleton, Dean, 1951-

### Subject(s)

- Interviews.
- Journalism & Newspapers.
- Newspaper editors

## **Accession number**

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2012.55

## Collection Inventory

### Personal Research [1980]-1996 9.0 File folder(s)

FF1 Publications 1982, 1988, 1991

FF2 Typed Notes [1983, 1992], Undated

FF3 Handwritten Notes Undated

FF4 Handwritten Notes Undated

FF5 Proofs of Story June-July 1992, Undated

FF6 Denver Post Circulation & Newspaper Comparison [1984], Undated

FF7 Denver Post Corporate Sale Articles [1980-1987]

FF8 Denver Post Anniversary Notes Undated

### Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements note

3-1/2 inch floppy disk. Possibly made on a Macintosh.

FF9 Correspondence 1992, 1995, 1996



## Denver Post Editors &amp; Publishers

**Denver Post Editors & Publishers 1982-1992 8.0 File folder(s)**

FF10 Articles &amp; Interview 1987-1992, Undated

FF11 Michael Balfe Howard, Drug Bust 1984-1986

**Box** **Folder**

FF12 Michael Balfe Howard Binder 1982-1992

3

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FF13 Lee Guittar &amp; Will Jarrett 1992

FF14 Don Hunt 1992

FF15 Richard Scholsberg 1992

FF16 Donald Seawell 1992

FF17 Dean Singleton/Hickey 1992

FF18 Interview: Reorganization &amp; Selling of Post 1992

**Box** **Folder**

FF19 Denver Post People [1983-1990]

4

19

**Newspaper War 1985-1992 4.0 File folder(s)**

FF20 Westword April 1985, November 1988

**Centennial Publications**

FF21 Denver Post March 1986, Nov. 1986, May-Oct. 1987, Nov. 1988, Feb.-May 1990, May 1992

FF22 Rocky Mountain News May 1987, May 1988, Feb. 1989, May-Nov. 1990

FF23 Forbes Feb. 17, 1992

**Centennial Publications 1992, 1998 3.0 File folder(s)**

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
FF24 Section 2-5 August 9, 1992	4	24
FF25 Section 6, 8, "100 Years of memories" August 9, 1992	4	25
FF26 "10 Years of MeadiaNews Group, Inc. Ownership" and Denver Post: "Death: McVeigh receives ultimate penalty" March 1, 1998	4	26

**News Clippings 1980-[1997] 5.0 File folder(s)**

FF27 Westword 1984-1992

FF28 Denver Post 1987-1992, Undated

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
FF29 Denver Post Highlights 1980-[1989]	3	29
FF30 Denver Post Publications 1981-1990	5	30