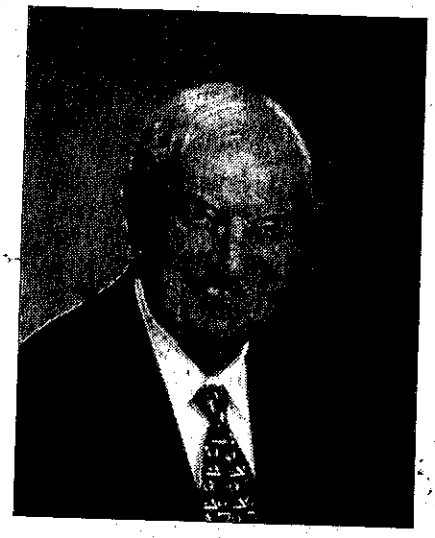
WAS NEWSPAPER CHIEF HERE SINCE 1974

Herald-Register publisher A.J. Pinder dies at 91



A.J. Pinder

The Grinnell Herald-Register rarely places an obituary on Page One; so rarely, in fact, that only one instance quickly comes to mind. L.B. Watt had been publisher of the Herald-Register for 30 years when he died in February of 1974. Al Pinder, then managing editor, chose to place Watt's obituary on the front page. Pinder died last Saturday, having been publisher since 1974, and we follow his choice here, placing on the front page the obituary of the man who served as publisher of this independent family-owned newspaper for the last 37 years.

Albert William Joseph Pinder, 91, the longtime publisher of The Grinnell Herald-Register and an advocate for the betterment of his adopted hometown, died Saturday, Dec. 31, at St. Francis Manor in Grinnell. Pinder died after a long illness, surrounded by his family and under the care of Grinnell Regional Hospice.

Visitation at the Smith Funeral Home in Grinnell will be from 4 to 8 p.m. Friday, Jan. 6, with the family present from 5 to 7. A celebration of life will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 7, in Herrick Chapel on the Grinnell College campus. Memorials may be made to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Grinnell. Inurnment at Hazelwood Cemetery will be held at a future date.

Pinder's life was characterized by his endless interest in good friends, good economic development and good relationships between people of all nations, work recognized by a wide array of awards and honors.

Pinder joined the staff of The Grinnell Herald-Register in 1949. He became publisher in 1974 upon the death of his wife Dorothy Pinder's father, L.B. Watt, publisher since 1944.

He was a longtime officer of the Iowa Newspaper Association, serving the organization as president among other roles. Among his most treasured honors were those granted by his peers in the Iowa Newspaper Association, who named him a master editor-publisher in 1975 and winner of the Distinguished Service Award in 1993.

"He is a friendly human power — outgoing, good-humored, informal, communicative, intellectually sophisticated but intensely interested in plain people and day-to-day events," wrote his longtime friend Glenn Leggett, former Grinnell College president. "He is widely traveled, widely read and widely interested and concerned, an ideal spokesman for the best and most substantial part of middle America."

Leggett's comments were recorded in Pinder's nomination for the National Newspaper Association's James O. Amos Award for community journalism, an award honoring those who have provided distinguished service and leadership to the community press and their communities, and bestowed on Pinder in 1999.

From the time he arrived in Grinnell, Pinder was active in civic affairs, most notably as a founding member and president for 16 years of Greater Grinnell Development Corporation, a private development group which spearheaded the development of the

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Industrial Park in southern Grinnell. In honor of his service, a street, Pinder Avenue, in south Grinnell is named after him.

Serving on the Board of Trustees of St. Francis Hospital in the early 1960s, Pinder joined with other community leaders working together to consolidate the town's two hospitals, St. Francis and Grinnell Community Hospital, into a single facility serving the entire community's medical needs. The effort was successful in bringing about the merger of the two hospitals into what is now Grinnell Regional Medical Center. Pinder served as one of the early presidents of the board of the new unified hospital.

He loved traveling and was an unfailing champion of the small-town virtues that he celebrated in his widely praised international-visitor program, a favorite project that brought around 500 visitors to Grinnell from all over the world through this small-town newspaperman's unique partnership with the United States Department of State. Those visitors returned to their homelands with a new, rich view of the depth and diversity of the United States and its small towns. The United States Information Agency presented him its distinguished service award in 1991 for his work with international visitors.

Pinder was born Feb. 21, 1920, in Pittsburgh, Pa., the son of two immigrant parents, Gisela Sophie Boca and Stanley Ludwig Pinder. He grew up in suburban Philadelphia and graduated from high school in Wallingford, Pa.

Pinder's father was killed in an industrial accident when he was very young, and he grew up as the son of an immigrant mother who worked to support her four children. As a youth, he worked in the textile mills of his small-town childhood, then chose to reject a full-ride scholarship to Swarthmore College so he could help support his mother and the other children. He worked in the accounting department of Westinghouse Corporation while attending evening classes at the Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

He served in the U.S. Army during World War II, including as an accountant in contract terminations in Chicago, Ill., from March 1944 to Aug. 1946. After his discharge, he remained in Chicago working for the Truax Traer Coal Company, and completing his Bachelor's degree at the night school of Northwestern University's College of Business.

He married Dorothy Jeanne Watt here on Feb. 19, 1949, and moved to Grinnell which became his community for the rest of his life.

Pinder drove a team of oxen pulling a conestoga wagon in Grinnell's centennial parade in 1954 as part of a celebration of the town's heritage. The event was captured in a photograph that brought endless amusement to his

children who could enjoy the son of the urban East sporting his Midwestern muttonchop sideburns. In the year of Grinnell's sesquicentennial, 2004, Al and Dorothy were honored for service to the community by being selected as grand marshals of the Fourth of July parade and the guests of honor at the Mayor's Gala that year. In 2011, they were jointly honored with a lifetime achievement award from the Chamber of Commerce.

He and his wife Dorothy were charter members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and were long-time members and supporters of the Grinnell Golf and Country Club, and he was a member for years of Fortnightly Club.

He was granted an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by Grinnell College in 1994. He was one of the original Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce ambassadors, and he twice served as co-chair with his wife, Dorothy Watt Pinder, of the Grinnell College town-gown fundraising drive. He was a board member for many years of Grinnell Federal Savings and Loan, now Lincoln Savings Bank, an institution instrumental in economic development in Grinnell.

Throughout his life Pinder traveled widely, including repeated visits to England where he became a fellow of the Wilton Park Center, a conference center inspired by Sir Winston Churchill to improve Britain's relationships with other nations. He was widely traveled in Europe, and enjoyed especially a trip to Prague with much of his family in 1992 to visit his daughter Martha, who was then working there, and to visit the village in northern Slovakia that had been home to his mother before she emigrated to the United States as a teenager.

Among Pinder's favorite pastimes were golf and post-golf festivities at the Grinnell Golf and Country Club and his deep and abiding interest in professional sports, which took him to baseball games including the All-Star Game as an honored guest for many years though never to a World Series for his beloved Chicago Cubs. He was also proficient at card games and tricks, including the classic Mr. Wizard, and the one that left a card sticking to his forehead as well as other crowd-pleasers, including "Memphis in June and Sweet Oleander." He folded origami swooses (flying birds) in venues across the globe, and his children carry on that tradition. He was able to whip all comers in the time-honored game of 7-5-3, including most recently during the Thanksgiving celebration in 2011.

The twinkle in his eye was a trademark, and to say he was known for his humor would be an understatement. Pinder adorned his life and that of everyone he met with the next story, the next joke and, most importantly, the next laugh. The stories of his stories are indeed legion.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy, of Grinnell; one son, Joe Pinder of Washington, D.C.; and four daughters, Peggy Elliott and her husband Doug, and Martha Pinder and her partner Royce Wolf, all of Grinnell; Jeanne Pinder of Pelham, N.Y.; and Anne Pinder of Madrid, Spain; two granddaughters, Juno and Phoebe Pinder of Pelham, N.Y.; and one sister, Mary Nunan of Ocean City, N.J. He was preceded in death by his parents; two brothers, Edward and Tom; and one son, Larry Pinder.

Bill Monroe, long-time head of the Iowa Newspaper Association, once wrote of Al Pinder, "In this era of the unfortunate homogenization of newspapers, Al retains the traits of the innovative, progressive individualist who sees life as an adventure-filled journey and feels an obligation to pay his fare by serving his fellow man in his profession, his community and his world."

Monroe titled his remarks penned on Pinder's passing: "Al Pinder always made us smile."

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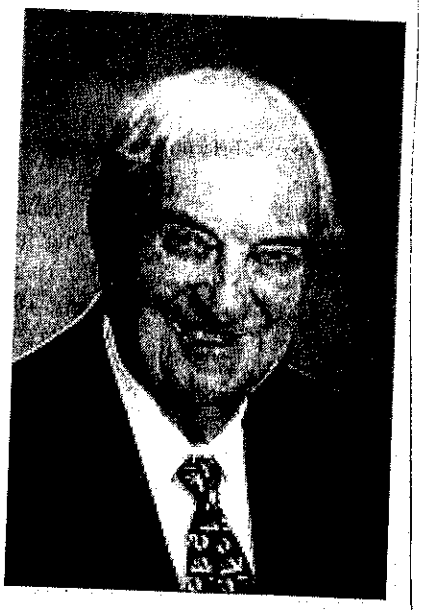

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