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Mary A. Hamilton. *Rising from the Wilderness: J. W. Gitt and His Legendary Newspaper: The Gazette and Daily of York, Pa.* York: York County Heritage Trust, 2007.

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Voice in the Wilderness: J. W. Gitt

Retired journalism professor Mary A. Hamilton ends her biography of Josiah W. Gitt and his newspaper with a four-page epilogue discussing the Pennsylvania editor's FBI and CIA files. In December 1986, the FBI released seventy-three of the eighty-one pages in the file it had opened on the small-city newspaper editor in 1949. The bureau concluded that Gitt was not a member of the Communist Party, as an anonymous Republican informant had alleged, but it continued to monitor him and his newspaper, *The Gazette and Daily* of York, Pa., for possible subversive activity. The CIA started a file in 1963 after receiving a memo from FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. The brief CIA file contained Hoover's memo and four other pages with no indication that Gitt was a Communist or posed a threat to the nation. Nonetheless, the FBI file had entries until 1972, two years after Gitt sold his newspaper and one year before his death in 1973 at the age of 89.

All the while, the editor and his wife, Elizabeth ("Betty"), were subjected to endless attacks and accusations of subversive activities. Local residents routinely characterized the two York newspapers as yellow and red–the red for Gitt's left-leaning *The Gazette and Daily* and yellow for the conservative afternoon *Dispatch*. Hamilton quotes a local pastor who said: "I feel that the Gitts were the most biased, pinko propagandists that there ever was" (p. xiv).

Biographer Hamilton demonstrates her fondness for her subject. She worked for *The Gazette and Daily* from 1963 to 1966 covering civil rights and local courts, schools, and politics. After receiving a doctorate from Michigan State in 1980, she taught at St. Bonaventure University from which she retired to her family's homestead in north central Pennsylvania. The postwar decade covered in the book had been the subject of her doctoral dissertation.

Despite her fondness, however, Hamilton finds contradictions and even some flaws in Gitt's character. An advocate of social justice, he clearly was not poor. He came from an established Hanover, Pennsylvania family and spent much time away from his newspaper. His grandfather and namesake had owned a dry-goods store and encouraged the younger Gitt to get an education.

At thirty-one, after becoming a lawyer, Gitt purchased his newspaper in hopes of supplementing his income. To his surprise, he took to journalism, dropped his law practice, ran his newspaper for fifty-five years, and developed a relationship through correspondence with nationally renowned liberal leaders, including physicist Albert Einstein, conservationist Gifford Pinchot, Progressive presidential candidate Henry Wallace, and journalists I.F. Stone and George Seldes–the latter often citing *The Gazette and Daily* as a model local newspaper.

Hamilton took her title from a biblical passage (Isaiah 40:3) and said the wilderness refers to both Gitt's lonely voice for social justice in his conservative region and the rolling Pennsylvania hills surrounding Gitt's hometown of Hanover and the newspaper's home of York. "He would rise above the wilderness of his own environment," she writes, "and create a newspaper that would stand out from the plethora of small town/city dailies mainly interested in reflecting the local power structure, with little commentary about national or international events" (p. 6).

Throughout the book, Hamilton provides ample evidence that the partisan press didn't end in the nineteenth century. Gitt began as a Democrat but flirted with third-party efforts, especially the Progressive Party when it ran Wallace for president in 1948. Like the Republicans and Democrats, the Progressives held their national convention in Philadelphia because it was the city most wired for television. Because of his proximity to Philadelphia, Gitt ran a special supplement celebrating the Progressive Party and its standard-bearer. In 1964, he refused to run

advertising for Republican candidate Barry Goldwater because of the candidate's advocacy of increasing American violence in Vietnam. As President Lyndon Johnson escalated the war, Gitt attacked him as well.

Gitt thought that education was important and that an educated person should think properly–that is, liberally. "A man or woman who has knowledge and is honest won't be anything but a liberal–a person who puts human rights above property rights," Gitt wrote. "Education, knowledge, and the milk of human kindness–they're the hope" (p. xv). Gitt fought for liberal causes, including the struggles to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons, to promote civil rights, and to encourage labor unions. As a progressive, the editor tried to live up to his own principles. He refused to advertise alcoholic beverages because his father, who died when Gitt was twelve, had problems with the drink. (Gitt thought his father was an alcoholic, but other family members disagree.) Gitt encouraged his employees to join unions, including the International Typographical Union and the Newspaper Guild, but he felt betrayed when negotiations became difficult, especially in the 1970s as he began thinking of selling the paper. Nonetheless, he often shared the profits when he had profits to share, and he offered a retirement plan that paid workers full salary after ending a career on his paper. He was a strong supporter of civil rights, but when his daughter married an African American man whom she met while working for the cause, a schism opened in the family. His wife cut off her relations with her daughter and grandchildren for many years, but Gitt continued to meet alone with them.

Hamilton's book highlights the career of an influential journalist–a liberal William Allen White–to the extent that the American Journalism Historians Association named it the outstanding media history book of 2007. Nevertheless, this reviewer would like to know more about Gitt's journalism than his golf game, genealogy and the love story within the family. Hamilton's emphasis on the family, however, helps us feel the pain of racial conflict at home, and she solidly roots her book in local history, a reflection of her publisher. Nonetheless, this reader would like to see how Gitt's journalism fit within the community for those issues without controversy. Reading between the lines, one could conclude that the paper was tediously political but Hamilton says that was not the case.

Hamilton notes that Gitt won awards for writing and newspaper design, but her book could benefit from a few more examples of Gitt's journalism and the newspaper's award-winning design, which included a daily contribution from local cartoonist Walt Partymiller. Her biography says she covered local stories so she should be able to tell more about the paper's roots in community news. She also establishes that Gitt was among the creators of an op-ed page (where he ran commentaries by leading Progressive columnists).

Hamilton highlights Gitt's courage in standing firm on principle–whether on environmental or civil rights causes or against the anticommunist hysteria of his community, despite financial losses he took for his principles. We can hope that she has whetted our appetite for more work on Gitt's career.

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