

WILLIAM F. SWITZLER

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Born in Kentucky, William F. Switzler became well known in Missouri's history for four decades in newspapers, for his legal career, political and educational activities and his devotion to improving education for all.

"The State press and the State

University are the powers with the people," Switzler wrote. "Each is an important factor of their freedom and prosperity, and of their future greatness and glory. Each is an educator — the Press directly — of those who now govern the country, the University primarily of those who will hereafter govern it." His words are as true today as they were a century ago.

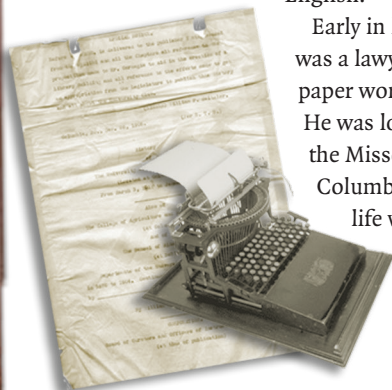
Switzler believed everyone deserved an education to make a success of their lives, making it possible to serve many community roles. Switzler was broadly trained and realized this need.

To him newspapers served as teachers for the people. In those early years not everyone could attend schools. Few even finished high school. Not many had books

Letter of Change to the History of the University of the State of Missouri by William F. Switzler

or magazines, but many had newspapers. Switzler wanted his newspaper stories to be accurate and written in proper English.

Early in his career Switzler was a lawyer but found newspaper work more exciting. He was long associated with the Missouri Statesman in Columbia and later in his life with other newspapers before returning "home" to Columbia.



Switzler considered the editing of a newspaper to be as much of a profession as practicing law or medicine. And for years he, like other editors, called for such a training center at the University of Missouri. And he was successful. One of the oldest buildings on the Columbia campus is Switzler Hall, named in his honor. Shortly after the School of Journalism was founded in 1908, classes were conducted in Switzler Hall.

In Switzler's time, doctors and lawyers learned their profession by working with established doctors and lawyers, following them about their duties, reading their books, and watching them in action. There were few schools they could attend. The same situation existed in journalism.

Switzler Hall on the Campus of The University of Missouri



Editors often participate in community affairs, and Switzler was typical. In addition to his concern for the advancement of the University of Missouri, he helped both Christian and Stephens colleges grow and helped Columbia gain its first public library.

Some editors get actively involved in politics as Switzler did. He was elected to the Missouri House three times; he ran for Congress several times but lost. In the House he called for books for prisoners to read. President Grover Cleveland named him chief of the Bureau of Statistics in Washington, and later Switzler wrote a book, "History of Statistics and Their Value."

Switzler became a historian. He wrote two books on the history of Missouri and in 1887 published his "History of Boone County," still in use today for references, serving an area he termed "The Athens of the West."

— Written by Dr. William H. Taft, Missouri Press Association Historian