

Bio & Character Sketch of

Tribune
Owner/Editor

Edwin Moss Watson

November 29, 1867 – November 30, 1937

Age in April, 1923: 56 Age at Death: 70



Age when picture was taken: (est) 60

Edwin Watson was born in Millersburg, a small town in Callaway County, Missouri, on November 29, 1867, the first son (and second child of six) of Dr. Berry Allen Watson (1833–1918), a general-practice physician, and Clara Ward (1842–1927), an author.

In 1872 the family moved from Millersburg to Columbia, a larger city in adjacent Boone County. Watson's primary and secondary education were at the Mission School and the Columbia Female Baptist Academy (the latter a predecessor of Stephens College), both in Columbia. He remained in Columbia for his higher education, earning an A.B. degree in 1890 from the University of Missouri, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

He began his career as a journalist while a young teenager, going to work in 1881 as a printer's devil on the *Columbia Herald*, where he moved through several jobs until 1890, when he became a reporter on the *St. Joseph Ballot* in St. Joseph, Missouri. After a year at the *Ballot*, he moved to Ft. Worth, Texas, where he worked as a reporter for two years on a predecessor to the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram.

In 1894 he interrupted his career in journalism to return to Columbia, where he entered law school, from which he graduated in 1897. That year he entered private law practice and was elected city attorney in Columbia. He resumed newspaper work after a year of law practice, working as editor of the *Jefferson City State Tribune* in Jefferson City, Missouri from 1899 to 1901 and as a reporter on the *St. Louis Star* and the *St. Louis Republic* in St. Louis, Missouri from 1901 to 1905. In 1905 he acquired the Columbia Daily Tribune in Columbia, Missouri and became its editor and publisher (calling himself "editor and proprietor"). He worked in that position until his death in 1937.

Watson voted the straight Democratic ticket and consistently supported the Democratic Party in his editorials. He also strongly opposed prohibition. He never drove a car, never married, and lived with and cared for his mother from his father's death until hers. He was known as "Col. Watson" although he never served in the military; he came by the title "more or less honestly," he said, when Guy B. Park, governor of Missouri from 1933 to 1937, named him an honorary colonel on his staff.

He fell ill on November 14, 1937, the day after he wrote his last editorial, and died at Boone County Hospital in Columbia on November 30, 1937, from a cerebral hemorrhage. He was buried at Columbia Cemetery.

Being cited for "his colorful editorials often calling for community improvements," he was inducted into the Missouri Press Association Hall of Fame in 2005.^[1]

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Character Sketch

Ed Watson – like James Scott – was close to his mother. He never had children of his own, and in fact, he never even married. He lived at home and took care of his mother for nearly all of his adult life. He paid his dues as a reporter, even became a lawyer as well and he put those legal skills to work as the City Attorney for a short while.

But it was “**his**” Columbia Daily Tribune that he really loved. He got the chance to run the show, choose the people he worked with, and use the power of the press as a megaphone for what he believed in and espoused.

And that was the case with the whole Almstedt rape matter. By late April he saw that there were not one but THREE negroes in jail – all charged with raping young girls in the community. This whole sexual assault thing was getting out of hand and Watson really felt that the community needed to set some examples that would deter other potential victimizers.

While his editorial called for “swift justice,” he was careful enough to follow it with “by the courts, of course.” But the rest of his editorial seeks to inflame passions and paint three accused-but-not-yet-convicted men as “brutes and super criminals” who should feel the “halter draw in vindication of the law.” Just as egregious is the terminology he, as editor, allowed to be used on the front page of that same edition by his city editor; “many men of sound judgement who do not believe in mob law are of the opinion that if it is positively proven that the negro is the man who committed the crime, that the taxpayers should be saved any costs that might accrue from a trial and that summary justice should be dealt to him.” To even use this kind of language in a front page news story is criminal. But Ed Watson thought it was OK. He was angry, he loved his town and he wanted to clean it up – even if that meant using some questionable tactics.

A week later, when Watson found out that Dr. Ellwood had called out the good citizens of Columbia, Ed Watson came to their rescue by publicly admonishing Ellwood and exposing his foibles. In the meantime, Watson did everything he could to keep Columbia’s reputation clean, even if that meant refusing to print news about Regina’s re-identification of Ollie Watson.