

# No Man in Our Time Was So

By Mary-Elizabeth Lasher Myers

*(Editor's Note: On March 19, 1964, Brother George Starr Lasher (Alpha Gamma/Michigan '11) entered the Chapter Eternal. Then-National President, Howard R. Alter, Jr. (Omega/Pennsylvania State '41), in his column that introduced the Spring 1964 issue of The Rattle, published shortly after Lasher's death, opined that, "I cannot pay greater tribute to Brother Lasher than to say to all Theta Chis, there is no finer example for us of the ideals of our Fraternity than this life which we so recently mourn." Later that year, in his column that prefaced the Fall issue, Alter noted of Lasher that, "no one man in our time was so beloved and respected by the whole Fraternity.")*

*Lasher became Editor of The Rattle in November 1925, and served in that capacity for 39 years. He served on the Editorial Committee for the Theta Chi Manual, published in August 1926. In September 1928, at the 72nd Anniversary Convention, Lasher was elected for a one-year term to the Grand Chapter. He was reelected to a two-year term in 1929, and in the summer of 1931, at the 75th Anniversary Convention conducted at Norwich University, Lasher was elected National President. He was reelected in 1932, and served as National President for two more years, until the 78th Convention, held in Miami, Florida in late December 1934, at which time he was succeeded by Frederick W. Ladue.*

*Enroute to Miami, Lasher's automobile was struck by a truck driven by an intoxicated driver. Lasher was severely injured, as was his wife who succumbed to her injuries and died several hours after the accident, and their two daughters (Mary-Elizabeth, then-12, and Dorothy, then-6), both of whom escaped serious injury. Lasher fully recovered from the accident, continued to serve as Editor of The Rattle, and later served on the Editorial Committee for The Manual of Theta Chi Fraternity, published in November 1947.*

*In July 1963, Lasher suffered a stroke, which led then-Executive Secretary George W. Chapman to invite Lasher's daughter and accomplished journalist, Mary-Elizabeth, to pull together the next issue of The Rattle that her father had already begun. She did so, and was also Acting Editor for the subsequent Winter 1963 issue of the magazine.*

*Lasher underwent months of rehabilitation, during which the Grand Chapter presented its Appreciation Award to Mary-Elizabeth for her service to the Fraternity. Before year's end in 1963, Lasher determined that he could no longer continue as Editor of The Rattle, and stepped down after almost **four decades** in that capacity. The Grand Chapter selected alumnus Walter R. Collins (Delta Gamma/West Virginia Wesleyan College '56) to assume editorship of The Rattle, and made Lasher the magazine's Editor Emeritus, the first to hold Emeritus position in Theta Chi.*

*As work is now well underway by the committee that is planning for the 150th Anniversary of Theta Chi, to be held at Norwich University in June 2006, contact was made last Fall by a committee member with Mary-Elizabeth Lasher Myers (Ohio University '42) to ascertain if she had any materials that might be pertinent to that event, her father, The Rattle, and Theta Chi in general. That conversation led from one topic to another, including her indication that she is a regular reader of The Rattle, as one might expect from a former Acting Editor. Mary-Elizabeth was invited to write an article for this Spring 2005 issue about her father.*

*Needless to say, this has been a remarkably interesting writing and editorial process. The thoughts offered in this story contain a perspective that truly is unique to the writer herself, as a beloved member of the extended family of Theta Chi Fraternity. Indeed, it is 'A Daughter's View.'*



George Starr Lasher, about 1948, in his natural environment of newspapers.

# Beloved and Respected

**E**ver since I pledged Pi Beta Phi as an Ohio University freshman, I have been an active Greek, but my appreciation of “fraternity” began long before that, when I was born in 1922 to Elizabeth Siddons and George Starr Lasher.

By then, my father was a committed member of Theta Chi Fraternity and based in Ann Arbor on the University of Michigan faculty.

Today, the academic world would call Starr Lasher a non-traditional student.

Born in 1885 to Mary Ann Starr and Williard Alfred Lasher in the small town of Hickory Corners, Michigan, he was the youngest, by ten and twelve years, of three children. Only nine years old when his father died, Starr Lasher convinced his mother that he should contribute to the family resources, which his mother and siblings supported via a grocery store in Plainwell, Michigan.

She spotted a *Kalamazoo Gazette* ad seeking a Plainwell correspondent. He applied by mail and was employed as a “stringer”—meaning the news items he wrote were strung together and paid for by the inch.

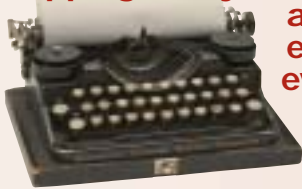
It was almost a year later that a rare friend with an automobile offered Starr a ride to Kalamazoo.

There, he identified and approached the Editor with his string, saying: “I’m Starr Lasher, and I’ve brought you my articles.”

The astounded Editor looked down at the boy in short pants and exclaimed: “My God! You’re Starr Lasher!” He didn’t know he had had hired a child, but he had the grace to keep him on the staff.

In time, Lasher bought the Plainwell weekly, and employed his sister as business manager. Always with a college degree in mind, he enrolled at the University of Michigan, meanwhile returning weekends to edit the paper.

**“... for many years the typewriter was still tapping away as I fell asleep each evening.”**



When Ohio University celebrated the 75th anniversary of the School of Journalism founded by George Starr Lasher in 1924, his eldest daughter, and her three daughters, were present. From left: Betsey Barnette Bruce, a St. Louis TV reporter; Melanie Anne Barnette Caldwell, then working in personnel; and, Kathleen Starr Barnette Watt, a teacher and embroider artist. On the occasion, Mary-Elizabeth, called Mary-Lib, having had a career in newspaper writing, editing, and public relations, received the L. J. Hortin Distinguished Alumna Award.

Although, at that time, he elected not to join a fraternity, he said years later that given another chance, he would have pledged a fraternity as a freshman.

In a way, he moved in that direction, and by the time he was a junior, he and his friends had rented a house, hired a cook, and called themselves the Eremites.

When the United States joined World War I, Starr Lasher was turned down by

the military, which discovered a spinal curvature problem. Consequently, Starr went into the Red Cross and then into the American Field Service, in which he organized educational programs for soldiers until they could be returned home.

Once back in the United States, he discovered that the Eremites had become Alpha Gamma Chapter of Theta Chi on June 21, 1919. Because a member was the Junior Class president, the chapter would be leading the Spring Prom.

He had learned from a Plainwell friend that her roommate at the American Academy of Dramatic Art was planning to visit her brother, a student at the University of Wisconsin. Thus, Starr invited Elizabeth Siddons to Ann Arbor for Prom Weekend.

En route back from France, he had a stopover in Washington, where he hoped to call on Elizabeth. She, however, was convalescing from the flu epidemic that killed 548,000 in the United States.

*(continued)*

## Cover Story

Thus, it was that when she stepped off the train in Ann Arbor, my parents-to-be saw each other for the first time.

A year later when they married April 12, 1920, having written each other every day, but been together a total of only fourteen days, the *Plainwell Gazette* reported it was “a case of love at first sight.”

Earlier, after graduation in 1911 and at work on a master's degree, Starr was hired by a northern Michigan high school to replace a teacher who had left suddenly to marry. He discovered that her neglected students lacked knowledge of grammar and informed them they would have to do a year's work in one semester. Reluctantly, they did. But later, one student, encountering Lasher at the University of Michigan, thanked him for that concentrated education.

He, in the meantime, had been enriching his own experience variously by teaching at Emporia State College, acting in a play in William Allen White's hometown (Starr remembered seeing Mary White riding her horse through town before she was killed when thrown from the animal), and teaching at the University of Chicago High School.

Work he did with teacher enrichment programs in the summer led him to discuss his idea for practical teacher training with Elmer B. Bryan, president of Colgate. When Bryan later became president of Ohio University in Athens, he invited Lasher to create a journalism program there.

Lashers' own experience had included, at age 18, covering the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair for several Michigan newspapers and working for two Grand Rapids, Michigan, newspapers — covering sports for one, and, the following year, theater for the other.

When he joined the Ohio University faculty, the only internships at United States universities were in medicine. The arrangement he made with Fred W. Bush, then-publisher of *The Athens Messenger*; they called “practical training.”

Upper class students, supervised by *Messenger* editing, advertising, and business staff, were so well prepared for post-college jobs that Ohio University graduates were hired by newspapers in the depth of the Great Depression. Today, of course, virtually every

academic discipline provides internships for undergraduates.

Meanwhile, Lasher continued an adjacent career in Theta Chi and the interfraternity world. His editing *The Rattle* was a part of my life from its beginning, and for many years the typewriter was still tapping away as I fell asleep each evening.

My own memories include Theta Chi's 75th anniversary at Norwich University in 1931, especially a picnic when my father became sick eating raw clams. A more attractive memory is of the charming Norwich community.

While my mother was alive, my parents always spent the Thanksgiving week in New York, where the National Interfraternity Conference met for many years. They shared a love of theater, and my father handled conference publicity for 15 years. Meanwhile, my sister, Dorothy, and I remained in Athens.

Editing *The Rattle* was his responsibility until his death in 1964. With guidance from him, I edited two issues of the magazine, for which he had no Assistant Editor. As a graduate of the Ohio University school he created and developed, I had been a reporter and columnist before my marriage and thus was well trained for the job.

Starr (he had been named G. Starr Lasher, and weary of explaining, he expanded the G to George, but if anyone called him “George” it was no one who knew him well) held other major Greek jobs, including Theta Chi's National Secretary and, for three years, National President.

It was the latter capacity that took the family to Florida in 1934, where on Christmas Eve, our car was struck by a drunken driver. The steering wheel save my father's life, but in that era of no seatbelts, my mother was thrown into the windshield and lived only a few hours.

Starr spent several weeks in a Daytona Beach hospital, to which friends drove me every day. Kept flat on his back, he dictated to me his



George Starr Lasher and daughter/author Mary-Elizabeth, in Miami recovering from the December 1934 automobile accident in which his wife killed.

responses to the many letters that came from Theta Chi, interfraternity, university, and other friends and strangers.

As ever by nature a man who took on responsibility, he had no interest in remarrying, but he lived a fulfilling life in many other ways for thirty more years. He wrote books related to his academic field and articles for several fraternal and professional magazines.

At Ohio University, he was given numerous titles, among them “Mr. Greek.” While still in Michigan, he initiated the now-national custom of Mothers Day, and at Ohio University, he fostered “Greek Week,” now prevalent on many campuses.

His favorite sport was ballroom dancing, and he was a popular chaperon because he kept his various dates on the dance floor, not sitting on the sideline. While I was in college, my own dates knew that they would be expected to trade dances with my father's guests.

All of the George Starr Lasher memorabilia in my files testify to a man whose fortune was in friendship, Fraternity, and career fulfillment. ■