



Bennie Scarton Jr.

July 7, 1936 - January 1, 2017

Manassas journalist and photographer Bennie Scarton Jr., who celebrated his community in the long-running column, “It’s My Town,” died on January 1. He was 80.

His survivors include his wife, Ramona, whom he married the day after Christmas 57 years ago, and his two daughters, Tamara Scarton Morales, of Crofton, Md., and Kyra Scarton Newman of Glen Allen, Va. He is also survived by two sons-in-law, Paul Morales and Jon Newman, as well as four grandchildren: Matthew and Hannah Morales and Sarah and Zachary Newman.

Arriving in Manassas in 1959, Scarton joined the newspaper staff of The Journal Messenger, working principally first as a photographer and eventually moving up the editorial ranks. During his 52-year tenure at the afternoon daily, which had merged with the cross-county Potomac News to become the News & Messenger, he covered historical milestones – including the 100th and 150th commemoration of the Civil War and the First and Second Battles of Bull Run; reported on the city’s emergence from a sleepy small town and establishment of the Manassas Museum; took a stint as sports editor; and ended his tenure penning the weekly “It’s My Town” column.

That original 1961 Civil War reenactment almost brought a short end to his

career. “I nearly got my head blown off when I got too close to a firing cannon while getting pictures,” wrote Scarton, who was the only reporter onsite to cover both anniversary events. “Despite my too-late warning to keep away from the cannon firings, I got the picture I wanted. It took up nearly one-third of the front page on July 20, 1961.”

In an interview shortly before his 2012 retirement from the News & Messenger, Scarton recalled that his most memorable day on the job was covering the flooding of Hurricane Agnes in 1972. “I found a pilot to take me up, and I shot some memorable pictures of the flooded areas,” he said. “While we were in the air, the wind picked up. The pilot made several attempts to land but was repeatedly blown over the (Occoquan) River. On the fifth or sixth approach, he said, ‘Come hell or high water...’ We made a really rough landing, and I was ready to kiss the ground.”

His family would have laughed that no trip out of town was complete without a stop by the office – because that was his anchor point from which to head any direction – if it wasn’t true.

Unable to really stay retired, for the past four years, he worked as a reporter for The Manassas Observer, with his articles also appearing in its sister publications, including The Bull Run Observer. Scarton continued to work almost daily until late fall, never missing a deadline. In 2011, after suffering a broken ankle, knee and wrist after he took the brunt of a crash from a car that struck his vehicle primarily on the driver’s front quadrant, Scarton was motivated by the lure of his career to push through rehabilitation and get another front-page story published.

During his tenure, Scarton watched the transformation both of his community and his industry. In his first decades in the newspaper business, printing presses operated in the same building, wire ticker tapes spewed out of a

corner machine bringing in national headlines, newspaper pages were assembled and reviewed by hand, and film was developed and photographs were printed manually in his favorite hideaway in the building, the dark room. Evidence of the business came home with him daily, with his wife eventually giving up trying to get printer's ink out of his clothes or inky fingerprints off the doorframes.

Never missing a day of work for being sick, Scarton also never showed up at the office or an interview without being dressed in a shirt, tie and sports jacket – even on the most humid summer day. He noted that he could always walk the few blocks from home to work even in the worst weather, and “I also feel it's my obligation to show up for work. In the newspaper business, you have to,” he said.

Over the years, he watched as the small hamlet of Manassas, which in the 1960s required a long-distance telephone fare to call Washington, D.C., only 32 miles to the east, exploded into a major suburb, slowly, at first, after the opening of Interstate 66 and rapidly in the past 20 years. He wrote about large-scale development that transformed former farms into new neighborhoods, retail and other industry.

As his articles became a history of both the city and surrounding Prince William County, Scarton still found a few particular areas that always captured his interest. The preservation of the heart of Manassas, from its railroad origins to its small-town charm, was a favorite, and he was eager to report on such initiatives as The Harris Pavilion and expansion of City Hall. In his last decade, he spent much time writing stories about local businesses, helping to showcase their contributions and role in today's economy. And each August, he spent weeks at the Prince William County Fairgrounds covering homemaker awards, the Midway and the agricultural entries, which now come

less from his home county and more from still-agrarian counties. Of course, fair week wasn't all work: Each year, he made sure his grandchildren visited and spent time at the fair.

His family occasionally became part of his daily work. His eldest daughter, Tammy, was called into action for a Baby New Year photo, even though she was 8 months old at the time, and his youngest, Kyra, added to his deadline stress when she decided to arrive on a Wednesday – the production day for the then-weekly newspaper (and the advertising manager's wife went into labor at the same time). In preparing for the special multi-pound edition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Civil War, Scarton vowed not to shave until the newspaper went to bed. He recently recalled that "Ramona told me the beard or her had to go. Guess I made the right choice." The family also developed an off-the-record policy for dinner-table conversations.

The winner of countless Virginia Press Association awards over his nearly six-decade career, Scarton took a career highlight photo of an albino mouse that apparently had moved into a payphone at the local Laundromat. His image of the mouse peeking out from the change compartment was picked up by a national news wire service, leading to its publication in newspapers and other media across the country, including My Weekly Reader and LIFE magazine. This was decades before the current trend of memes that go viral.

In 2002, he was asked to serve as Grand Marshal of the Manassas Christmas Parade, riding in the designated convertible with Ramona. He had covered the parade every year since arriving in Manassas, and the Grand Marshal honor reflected his role in shaping the community.

The eldest child of a high-producing coal miner and his wife, Scarton was born on July 7, 1936 and spent his childhood in Bretz, W.Va., a three-block community in Preston County. Originally planning for a military career and

fulfilling his parents' wishes to stay away from the unsteady work and often risky mine conditions, Scarton enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after graduating from Masontown High School in 1954, spending a year in basic training before receiving a medical discharge for the reemergence of a childhood bout of rheumatic fever.

With his veteran benefits under the G.I. Bill, Scarton returned home and enrolled at West Virginia University, studying journalism with minors in political science and French (although he has never been able to speak a word of that language – a fact attributed to the time he spent instead napping in the library stacks and perfecting his table tennis slam shot at the Mountain Lair, WVU's student union). Scarton and his high school buddies took the daily 25-minute commute along curvy, mountainous roads in every weather condition, which allowed him to master driving on snow and parking on 45-degree slants, even if his family never trusted him completely on a open highway in the clearest conditions.

When Scarton failed to show up at the daily carpool meeting point at 5 p.m., his crew cruised over to Women's Hall South and honked the car horn, waiting for Scarton to finally scamper out of the dormitory after a visit to court Ramona Matlick, another Preston County native and WVU student. The two married in 1959.

During college summers, Scarton worked in Washington, D.C., as a federal government typist, where he mastered that skill and often boasted his rate was 185 words-per-minute – an impressive feat given that he was operating manual typewriters that required more dexterity and impact than modern keyboards. While he eventually transitioned to computers, he still pined for his original Royal typewriter.

He applied to The Journal Messenger after college and accepted the job

during the interview, then returned to Washington, D.C., and called to say he had changed his mind. Then-publisher Garry Willard insisted that Scarton take the job and became his mentor.

Scarton enjoyed traveling, and he and Ramona were known to venture off on a weekend day to check out antique markets and thrift stores. For nearly three decades, he collected Little Golden Books, a series of children's titles. His collection tops more than 4,000 volumes, including some early rare editions with original dust jackets. Scarton also participated in a fantasy football league, enjoyed listening to country music and occasionally tried his luck at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races.

Northern Virginia Community College hosted an exhibition of Scarton's travel photography at its Manassas Campus. The Manassas City Council also honored Scarton in 2012 for his 52 ½ years of service starting at The Journal Messenger.

On the road or at home, Scarton was always ready for an adventure, often heading out for another tour or experience after his family or traveling mates had settled in for the night – including checking out the late shows on the cruises he enjoyed in recent years with his wife or a late trip to the casino when traveling with family members. He earned his nickname while on a fishing trip with a handful of Manassas buddies, who often traveled to the Outer Banks when it was still a quiet seasonal destination that closed down after Labor Day. The men were out on the water when a storm brewed up; their boat couldn't get past the breakers so they called for back-up support. Scarton barely let the rescue vehicle pull up alongside before jumping for safety, earning the "Flying Squirrel" moniker that stayed with him for decades.

Scarton, who died of pancreatic cancer, has additional survivors, including his

sisters, Joan Hansen of Orlando, Fl., and Margaret Jones, and her husband, Ronald, of Springfield, Va., and his brother, Robert Scarton, and his wife, Carol, of Manassas Park. Survivors also include his wife's family, Gareth and Jo Matlick of Brooksville, Fl., Sharlene Gordon of Virginia Beach, B.K. and Mariann Matlick of Palmyra, Pa., and Kirby Matlick of Roanoke, Va. He is survived by 13 nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Bennie and Leona Scarton.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to support programming efforts at the Manassas Museum, 9101 Prince William St., Manassas, VA 20110.

The family will receive friends at Pierce Funeral Home and Cremation Services, 9609 Center Street, Manassas, VA 20110 on Friday, January 6, 2016 from 2-4 and 7-9 PM. Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at All Saints Catholic Church, 9300 Stonewall Road, Manassas, VA on Saturday, January 7, 2016 at 10:00 AM. Interment will be private.

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 6. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Pierce Funeral Home
9609 Center St.
Manassas, VA 20110
(703) 257-6028
pfh@piercefh.com
<https://www.piercefh.com>

Visitation

JAN 6. 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

Pierce Funeral Home
9609 Center St.
Manassas, VA 20110
(703) 257-6028
pfh@piercefh.com
<https://www.piercefh.com>

Tribute Wall

BS

“ *I never knew Bennie Jr. but his parents Leona and Bennie were my godparents.*

Bernadette Soccorsilong Morgantown, WV

Bernadette Soccorsilong - April 03, 2017 at 06:00 AM

HO

“ *"Deepest Sympathy to your family God's Word says, "He will swallow up death forever, and wipe away the tears from all faces " Isa. 25:8.....*

holland.... - February 21, 2017 at 09:47 AM

KL

“ *My deepest condolences for your loss. I was a young reporter when Bennie hired me in 1976 to work for the Journal Messenger, and I deeply appreciated his guidance. He had an amazing career and made significant contributions to the Manassas area community.*
Sincerely,
Kristy Liercke

Kristy Liercke - January 15, 2017 at 12:31 PM

JC

“ Bennie,
Will be missed by all who knew him. As a journalist he was part of our community in what we said and did.
No matter the event, he was there. He was always generous to those he interviewed and many of the student activities he covered ensured that young people got their moment of fame and recognition. Manassas and Prince William County has lost a part of us and one who cared about us.

Jerry Martin, OHS Coach - January 06, 2017 at 12:36 PM

MS

“ Marvin and I are so sorry to hear about your loss. Please accept our sincere condolences. Prayers for you and your family.

margaret stuck - January 06, 2017 at 12:06 PM

BM

“ Hi Ben this is BK and Mariann. We have been talking about all the family vacations we shared especially at the Outer Banks, Smoky Mountains and Branson. Not to forget Las Vegas and Hawaii! Also the many Mountaineer vs Hokie Football games and Holiday weekends spent together. I hope you are checking out the interesting places up there so you can show us around when we get there! In the meanwhile we are taking care of Ramona the best we can?? She is sometimes stubborn! Love all the memories and will always think of Mr. Manassas!

BK Matlick - January 06, 2017 at 10:04 AM

TG

“ *The JMU D-Wing Girls purchased the Basket of Memories for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..*



The JMU D-Wing Girls - January 05, 2017 at 06:54 PM

RJ

“ *Rest in Peace. Joan Hansen, Margie and Ron Jones purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..*



Rest in Peace. Joan Hansen, Margie and Ron Jones -
January 04, 2017 at 08:59 PM

JR

“ *Kyra and family,
I am sorry for your loss. I enjoyed reading his articles and columns in The Journal Messenger over the years, along with his great photos. He will be greatly missed in our community.
Wishing you and your family peace and comfort now and in the days ahead.*

Jeanette Alvey Reynolds - January 04, 2017 at 07:54 PM

JR

“ *Jo Ross lit a candle in memory of Bennie Scarton Jr.*



Jo Ross - January 04, 2017 at 02:08 PM

JR

“ *Bennie was by far one of favorite people I worked with at the News & Messenger. Always positive and professional and I am honored to have worked with him. My prayers and condolences to his family. Godspeed Bennie. You were a class act!* ”

Jo Ross - January 04, 2017 at 02:07 PM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..* ”



January 03, 2017 at 09:08 PM

RM

“ *I'm very sorry to hear of Bennie's passing, and send my deepest sympathy to his family. Bennie was a good man, and always supported local businesses like mine, and was a huge help to local non profits like SERVE. We will miss him and his contribution to "our town" RIP Bennie.* ”

Rob Heltzel, Heltzel Mortgage - January 03, 2017 at 01:51 PM

LC

“ *We are sorry for your loss. Sending prayers for the family. Bruce and Loretta Clarkson* ”

Loretta Clarkson - January 03, 2017 at 12:30 PM

KK

“ *Bennie was my mentor. Enjoyed working by his side during the 1968-1986 period before coming to NC 30 years ago to continue in the business until my retirement in October.*

*Kathi DeLay Keys
Asheboro NC*

Kathi Keys - January 03, 2017 at 11:34 AM

KN

Thanks for sharing your experiences. We've been thinking of you too.

Kyra Scarton Newman - January 03, 2017 at 04:10 PM

PL

Sorry for your loss. Stay strong...

Patty Davis Layton - January 04, 2017 at 07:08 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..*



January 03, 2017 at 11:29 AM

DR

“ *He is huge to Manassas and her memories. Thank you for all the great coverage.*

Diane Fontana Raycob - January 03, 2017 at 11:20 AM

F'

“ *Fellowsville High School Class of '57 purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..*



Fellowsville High School Class of '57 - January 03, 2017 at 10:42 AM



“ *Fruits and Blooms Basket was purchased for the family of Bennie Scarton Jr..*



January 03, 2017 at 10:24 AM

DJ

“ *Mrs. Scarton, Tammy, Kyra and family, I'm so sorry to hear of Mr. Scarton's passing. He was such a special person. I have fond memories of him during our Osbourn High School marching band days. All of you will be in my thoughts and prayers during this sad and difficult time.*

Dale (Potts) Jepson - January 03, 2017 at 06:44 AM

LC

“ *Fond memories of working with you and the crew of the Journal Messenger in the 70's, we were like family. I especially remember our Christmas dinners at Lake Jackson Restaurant. Bennie, you were a rock to our Community and will be greatly missed. Deepest sympathy to Ramona and your family and may your soul rest in peace.*

With Love, Louise Cullers, Manassas, Va

Louise Cullers - January 03, 2017 at 06:07 AM

KM

“ *4 files added to the album New Album Name*



Kirk Matlick - January 02, 2017 at 07:04 PM

KM

We'll miss you Uncle Bennie... love, Kirk & family

Kirk Matlick - January 02, 2017 at 07:06 PM

KY

Thanks for the photos.

Kyra - January 02, 2017 at 09:14 PM

MG

“ *Bennie was such an integral part of our community for so many years. He not only loved the work he was doing but also the communities he reported on. Our deepest sympathy to the Scarton family.*

Maury & Vera Gerson

Maury Gerson - January 02, 2017 at 05:18 PM

DG

“ *Not only have I personally lost a dear friend, the entire community lost when this soft-spoken and most humble man passed.*

Ramona, Kyra, Tammy, and other family members, all my thoughts are for you.

Don Goddard

###30###

Don Goddard - January 02, 2017 at 02:44 PM

DT

“ *My heartfelt condolences to the family of Mr. Bennie Scarton Jr.*

Debbie T.

Co-worker of Tammy Scarton Morales



Debbie Timmons - January 02, 2017 at 01:46 PM

DR

“ *Benny was a true fixture of Manassas. He was a good man and a friend of our family. He will be missed. RIP Benny.*

Dennis Reed - January 02, 2017 at 11:59 AM

BD

“ Our most heart felt sympathy to Benny's family, especially Ramona.

We remember Benny for his reporting over the years at the Prince William County FAIR & especially his write-up on the 50th Stonewall graduation (May 2016)

You are loved by my family (Bonnie & Tommy Pearson; Mary Griffith).

You are thought of by us ...

You are prayed for by Betty & Doug DICKERSON.

Betty (& Doug) Dickerson--Mary Griffith's daughter

Betty Dickerson - January 02, 2017 at 09:13 AM

JA

“ Proud to have known and worked (photographer) for Bernie back in the '80's. My condolences to the Scarton Family.....

Jay Bradshaw

Jay - January 02, 2017 at 09:06 AM

MJ

“ To Ramona and family

So sorry for your loss. However, celebrate the life of Bennie Scarton. He was a blessing to “His Town” the Manassas Community I will always treasure and never forget his support and pictures to honor 4-H members, as well as awesome pictures of my “Clover Hill” children and the historical buildings located there. His legacy of compassion, caring about his community of all people, will endure forever in the History of Manassas.

Rest in Peace dear friend

Mary Anna Johnson

Mary Anna Johnson - January 02, 2017 at 07:32 AM

LC

Deepest sympathy to the Scarton family. Benny was a great friend and co-worker and will be greatly missed.

Louise & Martin Cullers - January 03, 2017 at 06:19 AM

JF

My deepest sympathy to Ramona and the entire family. I will keep you in my prayers and thoughts as you get through these most difficult days. From experience I can tell that it is your family, extended family and your dear friends that will get you to the other side of this sad, hopeless time.

He will live on forever in your hearts and lives.

I had the pleasure of having Bennie write a story about me many years ago on the anniversary of my 30th year at PWH. I have also enjoyed Saturday morning coffee on occasion with Bennie and Ramona at Mae's house in Nokesville.

May he rest in peace as he keeps the stories going but just in another place. Much love, Joan Faist.

Joan Faist - January 03, 2017 at 07:12 PM