



Frank Batten: The Untold Story of the Founder of the Weather Channel

Connie M. Sage

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Frank Batten Sr. (1927–2009) created the Weather Channel in 1982, despite mocking by colleagues in the media that around-the-clock weather broadcasts would be as exciting as watching paint dry. The network, and later its companion website, Weather.com, became the largest private weather company in the world and an American cultural icon.

Yet few have heard of Batten, a media pioneer whose Virginia newspaper was the only major daily to back school integration. At a time when American corporate greed was making headlines, without fanfare and limelight Batten built a media empire centered on honesty, integrity, and ethics.

Starting out in his uncle's newspaper business in Norfolk, Virginia, as a reporter and advertising salesman, he assumed leadership of the *Virginian-Pilot* and *Ledger-Star* at the age of twenty-seven and grew Landmark Communications into a media powerhouse. He championed racial equality, a position not often taken in Virginia during the 1950s. His flagship newspaper, the *Pilot*, was the only daily paper in Virginia to back court-ordered school desegregation. He created two billion-dollar businesses and gave away more than \$400 million to charity, nearly all of it to education. As chairman of the Associated Press from 1982 to 1987, he helped guide the news agency back on a sound financial footing.

Batten also faced a tremendous personal challenge that would have sidelined many: he lost his vocal cords to cancer two years before starting the Weather Channel.

This is the untold story of a man whose name few recognize, yet who helped change the face of the media in the twentieth century.

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