

Sam Gilluly (1908–1984)

“Respected Journalist, Seeker and Keeper of Montana History”

Sam Gilluly inherited history, absorbed and lived it, recorded, interpreted, loved and preserved our heritage. Montanans of now and the future have been enriched by him—we are grateful indeed.

—Newspaper Editor Hal G. Stearns, 1984

Sam Gilluly was born in Billings, Montana, on April 25, 1908. Following in the footsteps of his father—a pioneering Montana newsman—Gilluly enrolled in the Journalism School at then-Montana State University in Missoula after graduating from Fergus County High School in 1925. Upon completing his bachelor’s degree in 1930, Gilluly married his classmate Esther Hart of Missoula. The couple had three children.



Following an initial stint as a reporter for the *Great Falls Tribune*, in 1932 Gilluly began a twenty-eight-year tenure as editor of the *Glasgow Courier*. As editor, he covered all aspects of the building of the Fort Peck Dam in the 1930s, and, in the 1950s, turned his ever-watchful eye to the construction of Glasgow Air Force Base. Recognized as one of Montana’s best weekly editors, Gilluly believed that a “vigorous editorial page was essential to a weekly [newspaper],” and consequently produced one or two opinion pieces for each edition of the *Courier* throughout his twenty-eight years in Glasgow.

In 1960, the Gillulys moved to Helena where Sam served first as publications editor for the Montana Chamber of Commerce, and later as Di-

rector of the Montana Historical Society. Shortly after retiring from the Society in 1974, however, Gilluly was lured back to work by the Montana Press Association (MPA), serving as executive director of that organization until 1979. During his time with the MPA his was a familiar face in the state capitol building where he championed Freedom of Information issues.

Throughout his career, whether in Glasgow or Helena,

Gilluly generously shared his love and knowledge of journalism and of Montana history. His last gift to the state was *The Press Gang*, a history of Montana newspapers that he began researching in 1979 after he retired for the second time. Gilluly dubbed the book “a true labor of love.” The MPA published it posthumously, “In honor of Sam Gilluly, who exemplified in life and now in memory the fine quality of people who comprise the ‘Press Gang.’” In 1990, in recognition of this lifetime of exemplary service, he was inducted into the University of Montana’s Journalism Hall of Fame. His memory continues to be honored with the Sam Gilluly Sweepstakes Award, presented annually to the daily Montana newspaper earning the highest number of points in the annual Better Newspapers Competition.