

Beacon Lights Recollections

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I joined the *Beacon Lights* Staff sometime in 1993 while attending Calvin College in preparation for seminary. My memories of working with *Beacon Lights* include the monthly meetings with a staff who became life-long friends working through the routine, never-ending task of generating topics and encouraging writers. From time to time we also worked through questions about improving the overall appearance of the magazine, updating style, and solving issues relating to mailing or printing. I enjoyed the fellowship with staff and being able to serve the church in this way.

As I became more acquainted with all the work that went into getting an issue into the hands of our readers, and how much of that work was done by others outside of the monthly staff, I was especially intrigued by the fact that Jim Huizinga was printing every copy on a printing press in his basement. I enjoyed machines, and an old working printing press that was chinking out our *Beacon Lights* was something I just had to go and see. After an issue had been put together by the staff and proof-read by Bob Vermeer, a copy was printed out for Jim. Jim took the copy and set it on a little platform under a giant camera which took a negative image of the page on a gel plate. These plates were then placed in a tank in which an electric arc flashed between two carbon electrodes like a welding booth. The ultraviolet light hardened the gel where the lettering and pictures were on the plates. When the gel was hard, the soft gel was washed away and Jim assembled the plates on drums within the press. These would turn against an ink roller, and then roll on the pages as they passed. It was a huge, grand machine that filled half his basement. The press spewed the pages onto a rotating collating table where Jim's family members each took their station to gather the pages into the correct order and ready it for the stapling. I never actually got to see it all in operation, but I saw the equipment, and Jim explained it to me. I probably don't remember it all correctly, so you will have to talk to Jim if you want more accurate details.

Another huge job was maintaining the subscription list, printing off the labels, sticking all the labels on the magazine and sorting it for mailing. At least once, our volunteers (I believe at the time it was Bill and Fran Leep) were unable to do it for the month and the *Beacon Lights* staff met with some additional friends to get the job done. Once again I learned another dimension of the great amount of work that is involved with getting *Beacon Lights* out each month. From what I understand, the volunteers who did the mailing invited friends and looked forward to a monthly time of fellowship while doing this work. The longer I was involved with *Beacon Lights*, the more I could see how this publication had been a labor of love and dedication to the youth and young people of our churches, and it was exciting to be involved with young adults who were excited to see this work carried on into the future.

Within a year after taking up the role of editor, I moved to Wisconsin in 1996 to begin teaching at Faith Christian School. By now the internet had made it feasible to have a business meeting via Skype and manage the articles and minutes with email, so we thought we would give it a try keeping me on as editor while living in Wisconsin. Nothing can substitute for face-to-face meetings, and over the years as familiar staff members retired and new members joined, the meetings began to lose their effectiveness. In the meantime, Jeanine Van Baren and I were married, and she helped us consolidate two old and separate data bases (one with subscription information and other with address labels) into one up-to-date system.

As editor I also became the recipient of a set of *Beacon Lights* archives in boxes. Wow! What a treasure. Being a teacher eager to make good information available to students, and now living in the digital age of information, it seemed a top priority to me to get *Beacon Lights* scanned and available for anyone to read and research. *Beacon Lights* bought me a Scan Snap scanner. I carefully cut the pages loose of each old issue, and began scanning. Eventually the files were uploaded into a website and then we began running all the scans through text recognition software so the text could be searched. My wife and I solicited help for this from a number of different people, but the time and dedication needed for family and another move, this time to Iowa, eventually brought an end to our close involvement with this work with *Beacon Lights*.

I have hoped and prayed that someone with technical skill and organization would be able to bring the work of scanning and making the archives available online to completion, and

these prayers have been answered in the form of a new and developing website. It has all the scanned issues available, and they are adding the searchable text as it becomes available. In its current form, searching is limited, but with some organization and sharing of work with a Google spreadsheet, my sophomore English students in Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA were able to glean a wealth of information from the 1940s about the young people's conventions and write essays comparing them with conventions of today. This resource gave them a whole new perspective on our church history and the wonderful heritage of conventions. I have included some of their essays for publication. We live in a day with so many distractions, but if our parents and teachers work together to promote the reading of *Beacon Lights*, the *Standard Bearer*, and RFPA publications, God will bless those efforts. Now that we have a good resource for doing some research into *Beacon Lights*, teachers ought to put some work into preparing to use that resource in their classroom. It is a work in progress, and it is worth checking it out.

Beacon Lights has been a wonderful publication. The archives are a treasure chest for our young people to learn from, and they need to continue reading the current issues to keep a finger on the pulse of the life of their church to which they belong. They also need to contribute and continue to solicit writers who will give them an accurate picture of the life of the church, as well as the world around them. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to serve the body of Christ through *Beacon Lights*, and I am thankful to see that work carried on by energetic and spiritually minded young leaders. I am very excited about the future of *Beacon Lights* and the young people who are graduating and taking up their places in the body of Christ under the guidance of its light.

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