OBITUARIES

Arthur Gelb dies at 90; former New York Times' managing editor

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Veteran editor Arthur Gelb, whose news sense, arts sensibility and journalistic vigor sculpted the New York Times for decades, died Tuesday in New York. He was 90.

Gelb died of complications of a stroke, his son Peter told the newspaper.

Arthur Gelb joined the Times as a copy boy in 1944 and rose to become its managing editor, retiring in 1989. Along the way, he was an influential arts writer, a metropolitan editor who oversaw a famous expose of police corruption and a newsroom leader who helped create the now-familiar Sports Monday, Science Times and other daily sections, the newspaper said.

"Arthur Gelb was a powerful part of the Times for decades," publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. said in a statement. "He brought great energy and insight to our journalism."

Just three days into his copy boy job, Gelb got his editors' OK for a news outlet of his own: a weekly publication about the internal life of the newspaper. He quickly got to know reporters and editors, and promotions followed.

When a B-25 bomber crashed into the Empire State Building in July 1945, Gelb reported from Bellevue Hospital. Nurses spoke openly with the young, inexperienced reporter and taught him "a journalistic virtue: naivete," he wrote later.

As an arts critic in the 1960s, he wrote about Woody Allen, Barbra Streisand, Lenny Bruce and others early in their careers. He was metropolitan editor from 1967 to 1977, leading coverage of a city wracked by anti-war protests, a municipal near-bankruptcy and police corruption. The paper's reporting on allegations raised by Officer Frank Serpico helped spur changes in the New York Police Department.

Gelb became deputy managing editor in 1977 and managing editor in 1986. After retiring, he served as president of the New York Times' charitable foundation.

He and his wife, Barbara Gelb, also became experts on Nobel Prize-winning playwright Eugene O'Neill, writing biographies and helping write a documentary about him.

Arthur Neal Gelb was born in New York on Feb. 3, 1924. His parents, immigrants from what is now Ukraine, ran a dress shop.

Besides his wife and his son Peter, who is general manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Gelb is survived by another son, Michael; four grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

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