

## The Many Uses of Newspapers

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"If all the printed sources of history for a certain century or decade had to be destroyed save one, that which could be chosen with the greatest value to posterity would be a file of an important newspaper." Clarence S. Brigham, Former Head Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society

## Introduction

Newspapers have played an important role in American life since *Publick Occurrences* was first published by Benjamin Harris in Boston in 1690. They served many functions including providing a daily chronicle of events, serving as a political organ and promoting free speech. No other reference source is as comprehensive in its coverage of daily life or as wide in its scope of possible content. Newspapers also served as important historical sources, both primary and secondary, for scholars of all disciplines, librarians, teachers, students, and genealogists, to name only a few groups who have perused their content looking for relevant material to answer their research questions.

With increased digitization of historic newspapers, new opportunities have arisen to study and explore the content of these important sources. One special collections librarian has noted that digitization can make once neglected sources more prominent, and that "in hard copy, the material may have seemed obscure; when digitized it becomes a core resource."<sup>1</sup> Digitization of historic newspapers may lead to new and unexpected user groups and help redefine the ways traditional user groups have utilized them.

Individual parts of newspapers often make up important aspects of a variety of digital collections. Some digital collections use selected newspaper articles to explore historical themes, some have used newspaper photographs or cartoons to provide visual images of particular time periods, others have used advertisements to explore the material culture or economic patterns of a given time. This paper will present an overview of the many uses of newspapers, both in their digitized and traditional forms. In so doing, we hope to make a case for the importance of these sources and also examine the ways in which digitization will expand their use.

## Debate Over Use of Newspapers As Historical Material

Despite the vast amount of information they contain, newspapers were not always considered trustworthy sources of historical information. The former editor of the *Washington Post*, Philip Graham, once called newspapers the "first rough draft of history." He viewed journalism and consequently the writing of newspapers as an important task that contributed to the overall good of the community. Not all opinions regarding the importance of newspapers have been as positive. Normal Mailer once quipped that, "once a newspaper touches a story, the facts are lost forever." Leo Tolstoy was an even harsher critic who suggested that "all newspaper and journalistic activity is an intellectual brothel from which there is no retreat." A more positive view of newspapers was once offered by Arthur Miller who suggested that "a good newspaper, I suppose is a nation talking to itself." Debate regarding the validity and use of newspapers as scholarly sources follow many of these same themes: whether newspapers can be used to determine factual validity, if they are hopelessly biased and tainted, or if they can accurately represent public opinion.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter B. Hirtle. "The Impact of Digitization on Special Collections in Libraries", *Libraries & Culture*, 37, no. 3, (Winter 2002): 43.

One of the earliest proponents of using newspapers as historical sources was Thomas Donaldson, a Baltimore lawyer and engineer, who advocated their use as a historical tool during an 1845 speech in front of The Maryland Historical Society. He suggested that using newspapers makes writing history much more lively, for “how much more interesting is an account of any transactions from the mouth of one who has himself taken part in, or at least witnessed the scenes which he describes, than even the most elegant recital from the pen of one who has received the story at second hand.”<sup>2</sup> Donaldson asserted that newspapers are best used as primary rather than secondary sources, believing that all accounts were written first-hand.

The American historian James Ford Rhodes offered a more thorough defense of the importance of newspapers as historical sources in 1901. He argued that hidden within newspapers are important stories and perspectives not found in any other sources, and cites his own personal experience of finding an excellent personal narrative of the Whig Convention of 1852 in the *Boston Courier*, that provided details he did not find anywhere else.<sup>3</sup> Rhodes also suggested that newspapers can be a trustworthy source because “they are contemporary, and being written without knowledge of the end, cannot bolster any cause without making a plain showing of their intent.” He concluded that their most important use was in presenting “a graphic picture of society” through the use of their news stories, editorials and advertisements.

Rhodes also proposed that newspapers could be used to compile a chronological factual history, one area where many other scholars are doubtful, and argued that newspapers can be studied both as a reflection and creator of public opinion. He offered the historian one caveat in that the political orientation of each newspaper must be considered when determining the publication’s validity or bias. He nonetheless concluded that “the duty of the historian, is not to decide if the newspapers are as good as they ought to be, but to measure their influence on the present, and to recognize their importance, as an ample and contemporary record of the past.”<sup>4</sup> His advice still holds sound for those who wish to use historical newspapers to explore the past today.

Similar praise for newspapers as sources of history was offered by William Nelson at an annual meeting of the American Historical Association in 1908. He focused specifically on newspapers of the eighteenth century and enumerated a number of ways that they could be used. Nelson argued that scholars could trace the growth of revolutionary sentiment and political parties through the development of the editorial, the economic development of the colonies through the increase and changes in types of advertisements, and the social life of the colonies through a variety of other newspaper features. While Nelson noted that many scholars felt history could not be written from newspapers, he concluded his speech with the assertion that “I think it will appear that the historians who ignores that field will miss a great and invaluable mass of material.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1923, Lucy Maynard Salmon published *The Newspaper and the Historian*, a book that is considered by many to be the definitive work on newspapers as reference sources. Her purpose was to discover the limitations and advantages of using newspapers as historical materials, and in the course of its seven hundred pages she analyzed various components of newspapers, such as advertisements and editorials, and then examined how they might be used by historians. Salmon argued that newspapers couldn’t be used to reconstruct factual events but that historians could use

<sup>2</sup> William D. Hoyt, Jr. “Thomas Donaldson on the Materials of History—1846: An Early Advocate of Newspapers as Sources.” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 21, no. 1, (1945): 82. Retrieved from JSTOR.

<sup>3</sup> James Ford Rhodes. “Newspapers as Historical Sources.” in *Historical Essays*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> William Nelson. “The American Newspapers of the Eighteenth Century as Sources of History.” Annual Report of the American Historical Association. No. 1. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1909), 209-222.

them to “lend color and vivacity to the past” and to create a “graphic description of society.”<sup>6</sup> Salmon was also one of the first historians to suggest the study of advertisements as a source for social history.

There have also been more modern discussions regarding the reliability of newspapers as sources. In 1970, William Taft published a work entitled *Newspapers As Tools For Historians*. In this book he discussed the responsibilities of both the press and historians and ultimately concluded that while newspapers can be useful research tools, they should be used with caution. The influence of the time period in which this work was written in can be clearly seen, for Taft displays a great distrust of newspapers as sources due to coverage of the Vietnam War. Nonetheless Taft also corresponded with a number of historians in the writing of his book, and drew conclusions from their letters as to the best uses of newspapers.

Taft found that most historians believed that newspapers were not reliable sources for documenting facts, but that they were a more valuable tool when used in conjunction with other primary sources. When evaluating a newspaper as a potential evidentiary source, he argued that one must consider where newspapers get their news, the political orientation of a newspaper, and the importance of using multiple newspapers to establish different points of view.<sup>7</sup> In his book, he offered direct quotes from many historians as to why newspapers make useful source material. Perhaps the strongest endorsement he received was the statement “newspapers contain so many different types of material that no simple statement about their value is possible.”<sup>8</sup> Taft concluded that newspapers could be used for sources of documentary materials such as the text of speeches, results of press conferences and diplomatic notes, and for sources of public opinion through the study of editorials, letters to the editor, and syndicated materials.

Even more recently in 1993, journalism historian Jerry W. Knudson, wrote an article for the American Historical Association’s newsletter *Perspectives* discussing the fact that too many historians have neglected the usefulness of newspapers as historical sources. In contrast to Taft’s findings, he argues that too many historians view newspapers simply as sources of factual information. Knudson believes that newspapers have unfortunately been “shunned as historical sources by generations of historians.”<sup>9</sup> He suggests that newspapers may not only reflect public opinion but also that “the perception of events as filtered through the press may have changed the historical outcome.” Knudson ultimately concludes that for the historian trying to understand public opinion the newspaper serves as both a primary and secondary source.

Librarians as well as historians frequently recognized the importance of newspapers not just for historians but for other audiences as well. “Newspapers are not merely historical sources for academics,” argues British librarian David Stoker, “but have an equally important role in education and for all that are interested in the past. Of course any reasonably sophisticated reader knows that all newspapers are at times inaccurate or else select, interpret, and at times distort the events they report. Indeed some newspapers even today will print what amounts to little more than barefaced lies. They must therefore be used with care--yet this must apply to any historical source.”<sup>10</sup> Stoker offers strong support for the idea that newspapers are as important as any other treasured primary source material.

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<sup>6</sup> Lucy Maynard Salmon. *The Newspaper and the Historian*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1923.

<sup>7</sup> William H. Taft, *Newspapers as Tools for Historians*. (Columbia, Mo., Lucas Bros, 1970), 46-48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, “Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources.” *Perspectives*, 31, no. 7, (1993): 9.

<sup>10</sup> David Stoker, “Should newspaper preservation be a lottery?” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 31, no. 3, (1999): 132.

Librarians Shannon E. Martin and Kathleen Hansen have also written extensively on the importance of newspapers as reference sources. They believe that newspapers are important historical sources for they provide comprehensive reports of daily events of both local communities and the nation, authoritative records and official notices of government action and activity, organized chronicles of events that can be archived and used for historical reference, and capture the tenor and tone of their time.<sup>11</sup>

Strong support for newspapers as research sources has also been offered by Jon Vanden Heuvel, who published a major overview of archival newspaper collections in 1990. He argues that newspapers “yield not only the information printed in black and white, but if one reads between the lines, they tell about the underlying assumptions and values of a society that produces and reads them.”<sup>12</sup> Vanden Heuvel is one of many scholars who suggest that newspapers are an important source for the evaluation of public opinion or the public mood. He also illustrates various avenues of historical research that could be done using the press including ethnic press research, comparisons of regional and geographic presses, urban history and any number of topical research questions.

### **Current Uses of Newspapers by Historians & Social Scientists**

Although most scholars outside the fields of journalism history and communications do not rely exclusively on newspapers for their research materials, many different types of historical studies have used newspapers as a major form of primary source material. Some studies offer a close reading of a particular newspaper, looking for its coverage of a particular historical event. Others discuss how a particular historic event was covered by multiple newspapers in order to study regional and cultural differences in coverage. Some historians use newspapers to look at the opinions either of or about a particular ethnic, racial or regional community. Many historians use newspapers as a gauge or measure of public opinion at a particular time. Regardless of how they are used, many historians consider them to be invaluable sources. In a historic documents study, newspapers on microfilm were the microfilmed source requested most often by historians, particularly local and public historians.<sup>13</sup>

While some historians have used the entire newspaper as the basis for their research, others have used just one particular feature of the newspaper. The next section will provide an overview of the different ways in which historians and social scientists have used newspapers. The examples are by no means inclusive and are just a sample of the many scholarly works that have made major use of newspapers as a source.

### **Use of Newspaper Advertisements**

Lucy Maynard Salmon believed that newspaper advertisements could be used to study purchasing patterns, economic history, and social attitudes, among other things.<sup>14</sup> Salmon argued that by studying the advertisements from one store over a year you could learn not only about what was on sale but a graphic history of that business, the markets to and from which they shipped, the business methods they employed, and their relationship to their patrons. She also proposes that

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<sup>11</sup> Shannon E. Martin and Kathleen A. Hansen. *Newspapers of Record in a Digital Age: From Hot Type to Hot Link*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Jon Vanden Heuvel. *Untapped Sources: America's Newspaper Archives and Histories*. Prepared for the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Newspaper History Task Force. (New York: Gannett Foundation Media Center, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Ann D. Gordon. *Using the Nation's Documentary Heritage: The Report of the Historical Documents Study* (Washington, DC: National Historic Publications and Record Commission, 1992), p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Salmon, *ibid*.

broad geographic comparisons of business practices can be made by researching what was sold and advertised in different sections of the country, thus helping historians learn more about the material conditions of life. Other examples she gave included finding out information about labor strikes by tracing the number of ads placed by “strike breakers” and studying the number of employment ads for labor trends and shortages. William Nelson also offered a number of ways that advertisements could be used to find “abundant illustration of the economic and social life and progress in material affairs by the people”.<sup>15</sup> In his survey of eighteenth century newspapers, he contended that the changes in advertisements over a number of years illustrated such events as the improvements of roads through the demand for more carriages and a growing and profitable population through the growing need for housing materials and fine furnishings. He also suggests that these newspapers advertisements are one of the few places that the progress in colonial manufactures such as “mines, forges and furnaces” can be traced.

A number of scholars have used newspaper advertisements to explore economic history in ways similar to those recommended by Salmon and Nelson. One historian used advertisements from antebellum New York City newspapers to estimate the rental price of housing in New York, and how it was related to the cost of living and trends in urbanization. Robert Margo illustrates that newspapers contain a wealth of information that can be used as fundamental statistics for economic history such as changing prices of consumer goods and housing stock.<sup>16</sup> Another scholar developed a “tentative methodology” for creating databases of retail price data from newspaper advertisements. Peter Shergold found that Census data and other existing data series for urban grocery prices at the turn of the century were not sufficient, so he created a price series from “detailed grocery advertisements placed in the local newspapers by the cut-rate shops, chain stores and department stores.”<sup>17</sup> Although he concluded that his methodology would need some work, he felt that the data he obtained could serve as an important corrective to data series created by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Other historians have used information gleaned from newspaper advertisements to make arguments about the development of a particular industry, changes in buying patterns, or the development of business trends.

One interesting use of newspaper advertisements was Augusta Rohrbach’s exploration of the *Liberator’s* use of advertising as well as letters to the editor to draw conclusions about abolitionist ideology, American identity and the development of consumer culture in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Rohrbach conducts both a content and visual analysis of advertisements to support her conclusions. She explores the *Liberator’s* special use of italics, boldface and capital letters, arguing that Garrison used uppercase fonts and bold typeface and to emphasize certain points. Rohrbach also compares sample advertising pages of the *Liberator* and the *National Era*, a mainstream newspaper at the time, to illustrate the differences in style. Not only did the *Liberator* make greater use of blank space and varied typespace but Garrison also chose advertisers according to their views, and gave free space to patent medicines he had personally found useful.

Newspaper advertisements have also been used by scholars to help reconstruct what life might have been like in rural communities. An article published in *North Louisiana History* uses a variety of Louisiana newspapers from the nineteenth century to reconstruct daily life. They offer

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson, *ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A Margo. “The Rental Price of Housing in New York City, 1830-1860.” *Journal of Economic History*, 56, no. 3, (1996): 605-625.

<sup>17</sup> Peter R. Shergold. “Newspaper Advertisements as a Source of Retail Price Data: A Tentative Methodology.” *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 10, no. 1, (1976): 30.

<sup>18</sup> Augusta Rohrbach. ‘Truth Stronger and Stranger than Fiction’: Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator*.’ *American Literature*, 73, no. 4, (2001): 727-755.

examples from letters to the editor, slave notices, recipes, weather reports, the social pages, and particularly newspaper advertisements to draw conclusions about life in rural Natchitoches county in the antebellum period.<sup>19</sup> The authors use advertisements for parties, social revues and shows to illustrate the social life of the town. They also trace the development of industries within a town by analyzing how the advertising for goods and services changed over time. Business and classified advertisements also allowed them to develop a sense of what the community needed and purchased, helping them to establish the material conditions of life at the time. The authors conclude that “all of these notices, of one category or another, serve as a foundation of sorts, as to some of the activities in which Natchitoches residents were involved.”<sup>20</sup>

A similar type of study was done by Roger W. Rodgers. He surveyed newspaper advertisements from Northeastern Texas from 1842 to 1861 to reveal aspects of daily life including business patterns, the prevalence of patent medicines and the lack of public education. Rodgers suggests that “a general reading of advertisements provides a plain, straight-forward medium to view the culture, attitudes, and peculiarities of that time and place. The costs and methods of transportation, the nature of public notices and meetings, and the availability and costs of education are all easily available.”<sup>21</sup> Historian Jane Lamm Carroll also studied a variety of Minnesota newspapers from 1842 to 1858 and used both their editorials and advertisements to create a picture of daily life. She also explored how Minnesota newspaper editors used their papers to battle over issues such as abolition and statehood. One of her most humorous examples discussed how Minnesota newspaper editors attempted to encourage settlement in the state through “filling their columns with detailed descriptions of the region’s natural beauty, abundant resources, fertile soil and healthy climate.”<sup>22</sup> These studies are emblematic of a large number of studies done and published in local history journals, where small community newspapers are used to give a sense of what life was like during a particular period.

Some scholars study how gender relations or roles can be inferred from newspaper advertisements. One such study was done by Sarah Leavitt, who explored advertisements involving runaway wives in Providence, Rhode Island newspapers from 1790-1810. Male subscribers would place ads to repudiate their wives’ debts and women would sometimes respond to the ads to defend themselves. Leavitt used these advertisements to draw larger conclusions about marital relations and the opportunities available to women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She suggests that “an examination of these advertisements can tell us a great deal about marriage, and the lives of women” during this period.<sup>23</sup>

A related exploration of women’s issues through the study of newspaper advertisements was conducted by Andrea Tone. Tone studied late nineteenth century newspaper advertisements for information about contraceptives and birth control materials, in order to see if they changed or disappeared after the passage of the Comstock Law in 1873. Andrea Tone uses those advertisements in addition to other primary sources to establish that contraceptive use was more widely distributed than thought before and that it transcended economic boundaries in the late nineteenth century. She found that despite passage of the law, contraceptive products were still advertised. “Proprietors disguised their products through creative relabeling,” Tone argues, “Classified ads published in the medical, rubber and toilet goods sections of dailies and weeklies

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<sup>19</sup> Alice V. Scarborough. “Life in Early Natchitoches Parish As Seen Through Newspapers.” *North Louisiana History*, 30, No. 4, (1999): 123-141.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>21</sup> Roger W. Rodgers. “Candid Columns: Life As Revealed In Antebellum Newspaper Advertising In Northeast Texas.” *East Texas Historical Journal*, 38, no. 2, (2000): 40.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Lamm Carroll. “Good Times, eh? Minnesota’s Territorial Newspapers,” *Minnesota History*, 56, no. 4, (1998/9): 226.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Leavitt. “She Hath Left My Bed and Board: Runaway Wives in Rhode Island, 1790-1810.” *Rhode Island History*, 58, no. 3, (2000): 90.

indicate a flourishing contraceptive trade in the post-1873 United States. The hitch was that contraceptives were rarely advertised openly as “preventives.”<sup>24</sup>

Other types of advertisements from nineteenth century newspapers have also been used to determine information about the lives of slaves. One historian used advertisements for runaway slaves and newspaper notices to search for slave clothing data. She compiled data from a variety of Southern newspapers and demonstrated that there is almost no other source which contains this information.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars from other disciplines can also rely heavily on newspaper advertisements for source material. In the early 1990s, a sociologist conducted an analysis of advertisements drawn from a large sample of nineteenth century newspapers to explore the occupational pursuits open to women and how it changed over time.<sup>26</sup> Martin Schultz believes that newspapers are an excellent data source as “newspapers in the aggregate have the advantage of providing a long-term, continuous record that is not limited by city, state, or regional boundaries.”<sup>27</sup> He contrasted nineteenth century newspaper advertisements with those done in his earlier study of eighteenth century newspapers, to challenge the idea that women enjoyed a higher occupational status and freedom in early America that disappeared in the nineteenth century. Schultz contends that such a study of the occupational structure and how it changed helps sociologists explore changes in family structure and relations as well. An earlier study of newspaper ads conducted by this same author found that in the late seventeenth century, nearly half of all ads placed for women were in regard to domestic and personal service employment, and often the domestic role had been combined with commercial enterprises controlled by their husbands.<sup>28</sup>

Schultz admits that newspaper advertisements have some limitations, for they provide a better record of some occupations than others and also provide little background information about workers themselves. Thus newspaper advertisements would be only one potential source for a larger study. Nonetheless Schultz argues that his two studies of women’s occupational trends through newspaper advertisements helped him to better understand the economic opportunities historically available to women. Through a sophisticated sampling methodology and complicated coding analysis, Schultz found that although domestic and personal service advertisements remained statistically higher than all other positions, there were a striking number of advertisements seeking women to fill roles as professional teachers, artists, midwives and retailer as well as a significant decline in advertisements seeking women as wet nurses. By doing a systematic study of newspaper advertisements, Schultz was able to challenge some previously held tenets about women’s occupational roles and domestic ideology.

Other scholars have also used newspapers to challenge ideas about women’s social and occupational status. Lotta Vikstrom contends that nineteenth century Swedish newspapers complicate the picture typically constructed of working women from that time period. She suggests that “newspaper advertisements, announcements and police reports, for instance reveal the voices of the otherwise silent women workers and tell us about their urban context.”<sup>29</sup> By

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Tone. “Black Market Birth Control: Contraceptive Entrepreneurship and Criminality In The Gilded Age.” *Journal of American History*, 87, no. 2, (2000) : 442. Retrieved from <http://www.historycooperative.org>

<sup>25</sup> Patricia K. Hunt “Osnaburg Overalls, Calico Frocks, and Homespun Suits: the Use of 19th Century Georgia Newspaper Notices to Research Slave Clothing and Textiles.” *Clothing and Textile Research Journal*, 14, no. 3., (2000): 23-27.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Schultz. “Occupational Pursuits of Free American Women: An Analysis of Newspaper Ads, 1800-1849.” *Sociological Forum*, 7, no. 4, (1992): pp. 587-607.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 590.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Schultz and Herman Lantz. “Occupational Pursuits of Free Women in Early America.” *Sociological Forum*, 3, no. 1, (1988): 99-113.

<sup>29</sup> Lotta Vikstrom. “Different Sources, Different Answers: Aspects on Women’s Work in Sundsvall, Sweden, 1860-1893.” *Interchange*, 34, no. 2/3, (2003): 241.



using newspapers as a complementary source to parish registers, poll taxes and census, Vikstrom was able to offer more detailed portraits of the types of occupations available to women as well as information on the lives of a number of individual working class women.

As has been demonstrated, newspaper advertisements can be used by various scholars as forms of historical evidence. In addition, complicated methodologies must often be developed to create representative samples of newspaper advertisements for study since poring through microfilm or hard copies to gather sufficient numbers is time consuming. One advantage of digitization would be to make these advertisements keyword searchable, allowing researchers to find large numbers of advertisements more quickly. Keyword searching might also help researchers find advertisements that they might miss, although the limitations of OCR technology and some current search engines do not guarantee complete accuracy. The segmentation of advertisements as a separate category that could be searched and viewed could also save much time for scholars. Less time would be spent finding advertisements by reeling through microfilm and more would be spent analyzing the material. Scholars would likely also welcome the ability to print or email individual advertisements or page images and utilize the image viewing enhancements provided by digitization. By being able to save or email individual advertisements or create a personal digital folder, scholars would need to take fewer notes from microfilm or find later that they need to go back to the microfilm to check their citations.

### **Use of Newspaper Notices-Obituaries, Marriage and Birth Notices**

Salmon argued that studying these types of announcements allows one to trace changes in social conditions. In general, these features of the newspaper are most frequently used by genealogists researching their family heritage, but they can also be sources of useful information for other historians. David Kyvig, author of *Nearby History*, suggests that “newspaper obituaries can be very useful sources of information about the lives of individuals and, taken collectively, about patterns of association, social and religious practice, and other matters within a community.”<sup>30</sup>

Newspaper obituaries can also be used for social history, and a variety of scholars have used them, particularly in the history of medicine. One journalism historian discussed how obituaries could be used to explore changing cultural patterns in the nineteenth century. He chose obituaries because they were one of the first “informational items to be consistently published in early British and American papers,” and became standardized rapidly.<sup>31</sup> Frederic Endres suggests that systematically studying obituaries “may tell something about the cultural values of a given society, as well as something about the values and attitudes and vocational socialization of the editors who wrote and published the obituaries.”<sup>32</sup> To explore this thesis, he examined four Ohio weekly newspapers over a number of years in the early nineteenth century and coded obituary notices. He found that more obituaries were for men, particularly those who were socially prominent, and that obituaries for women clearly identified their marital status, defined them in terms of male relations, almost never included any educational or occupational information, and tended to describe them in stereotyped gender roles. Endres thus concluded that the ‘cultural values of the given societies and editors seem to be manifested in the obituaries.’<sup>33</sup>

Janice Hume made newspaper obituaries the subject of an entire book. She explores how obituaries represented American cultural values and how cultural changes throughout the

<sup>30</sup> David Kyvig and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past around You* (New York: Altamira Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>31</sup> Endres, Frederic F. “Frontier Obituaries as Cultural Reflectors: Toward ‘Operationalizing Carey’s Thesis.” *Journalism History*, 11 no. 3-4, (1984): 54.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

nineteenth and early twentieth century were reflected in obituaries. She analyzed obituaries from a number of American newspapers and examined changing attitudes about death and representations of class, race and gender. Although Hume admits obituaries may not be perfect historical sources she still offers a strong argument for their collective study. “Obituaries link published memories of individual lives with generational, or family memory and with American collective memory.” Hume further explains, “They add to the understanding of American journalistic history by showing how news practices associated with the rise of the mass press might have historically influenced death notices. Perhaps most importantly, they offer insight into American values.”<sup>34</sup> Although there have not been a great number of studies using this source, Hume illustrates their importance and offers potential uses.

### **Use of Newspaper Illustrations & Political Cartoons**

Salmon suggests that illustrations can be excellent sources of information as they have “comparative freedom from authority” and often allow more to be shown than can be written in the text. In one example, she offers her own insights gained from tracing the illustration of women over 20 to 30 years and concludes that while once “illustration did not represent women outside of the fashion magazine or ballroom...today it shows her engaged in every form of professional, business and industrial activity.”<sup>35</sup> Her example shows how illustrations can be used to study changing social and gender roles. Newspaper illustrations often show the social interests of a particular time, and a historian could trace the prevalence of a particular kind of illustration or how types of illustrations change over time.

Thomas Milton Kemnitz has offered a number of ways both opinion and joke cartoons could be used as historical sources. He suggests that while “cartoons are frequently fascinating, their value to historians lies in what they reveal about the societies that produced and circulated them.”<sup>36</sup> Kemnitz believes cartoons depict a great deal about attitudes and were likely to have been more influential on shaping public opinion than written material because “many more people grasp the point of the cartoon on the editorial page than read the editorials or signed columns.”<sup>37</sup> Historians can use cartoons to explore popular attitudes, rethink the significance of particular events, and explore how editors tried to sway public opinion. Kemnitz concludes that scholars using cartoons could study “the artists, the means by which they reach the public, their language and symbols, their relation to other means of communication, their intended function and their audience.”<sup>38</sup>

A number of scholars have studied political cartoons found in newspapers in order to explore how cartoons shape and influence public perceptions. Virginia M. Bouvier explores the relationship between U.S. political cartoons and the War of 1898. She asserts that cartoons are important because they can “help illuminate a wide range of historiographic issues by providing evidence of variations in regional interpretations of an event, challenging previous periodization schemes, and illustrating continuities and changes in historical representations.”<sup>39</sup> Bouvier monitored the nature and frequency of political cartoons that appeared in the *New York Herald* in 1898 and believes that this can help measure “how, when and if public attitudes changed over time, as well as the intensity of public sentiment over immediate issues.” Her study offers insights into the portrayal of Cubans and Americans through different images, and how these helped construct power

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<sup>34</sup> Hume, Janice. *Obituaries in American Culture*. (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Salmon, p. 472.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Milton Kemnitz. “The Cartoon as a Historical Source.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4, no. 1, (1973): 82.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Virginia M Bouvier. “Imperial Humor: U.S. Political Cartoons and the War of 1898.” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review*, (Winter 1999): 5.

relationships and national identities. She recommends that further studies should be done comparing these cartoons to those of other newspapers, particularly comparative studies between Latin American, Canadian and European newspapers. The digitization of these newspapers would make doing such comparisons quicker, and perhaps lead to further insight. This same methodology could also be transferred to a study of political cartoons on other historic events or subjects.

Other historians have made political cartoons, often largely drawn from newspapers, the primary focus of their research. Roger A. Fischer published a work entitled *Them Damned Pictures: Explorations in American Political Cartoon Art*, which explores different themes in cartoon art and how they reflected nineteenth century political thought and social prejudices.<sup>40</sup> Another historian focused exclusively on gathering a collection of newspaper cartoons published during the Civil War.<sup>41</sup> *Drawn and Quartered: the History of American Political Cartoons* is another work that examines political cartoons published in newspapers and other periodicals and how they related to the political and social climate. This book also traces the development of the medium from the nineteenth through the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup>

Another detailed study of newspaper cartoons in populist newspapers in the 1890s illustrated how they reflected the social and political beliefs of their subscribers. These newspapers were highly partisan and were intended as educational vehicles by their editors. The Populist Party papers made extensive use of boiler plate syndication services which included cartoons, so individual cartoons were seen in large numbers of papers. Worth Robert Miller also contends that “cartoons frequently can leave a more lasting impression than the written word. Likewise, they also can reveal the spirit of the times and even the underlying truth of a situation better than long-winded editorials.”<sup>43</sup> Other scholars have made the comic strip their source of study rather than the political cartoon. Sylvia Lambert and Stephen Israelstam explored comic strips appearing in daily newspapers before and during the Prohibition era to examine how alcohol was portrayed.<sup>44</sup>

### Use of Newspaper Editorials

Letters to the editor and editorial pages also provide rich source material. They are used not only to represent the views of newspaper editors but also to illustrate those of their readers. They are a means of exploring what issues were important during a time period and are often used by communication historians to measure levels of partisanship among various newspapers. A common use of newspaper editorials is to explore their coverage of a particular historic time period or event.

One scholar used Parson Brownlow’s editorials in his newspaper *The Knoxville Whig* to illustrate the complicated nature of Union loyalties and attachments in East Tennessee during the Civil War.<sup>45</sup> Another scholar studied the editorials in dozens of newspapers regarding two events: the 1836 anti-abolitionist riots against James G. Birney and the murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy in

<sup>40</sup> Roger A Fischer. *Them Damned Pictures: Explorations in American Political Cartoon Art*. (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Smith, Kristen M. *The Lines Are Drawn: Political Cartoons of The Civil War*. (Athens: Hill Street Press, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrop. *Drawn and quartered: the history of American political cartoons*. (Washington, D.C.: Elliott & Clark Pub., 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Robert Worth Miller. “Educating the Masses: Cartoons from The Populist Press of the 1890s.” *American Nineteenth Century History*, 4, no. 2, (2003): 105.

<sup>44</sup> Sylvia Lambert and Stephen Israelstam. “The Social History of Alcohol as Portrayed in the Comics up to the end of the Prohibition Era.” *Journal of Drug Issues*, 16, No. 4, (1986).

<sup>45</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie. “Contesting Secession: Parson Brownlow and the Rhetoric of Proslavery Unionism, 1860-1861.” *Civil War History*, XLVIII, no. 4, (2002): 294-312.

1837.<sup>46</sup> He used these editorials to study the links between political partisanship and news reporting as well as to study regional differences in opinion during the antebellum period.

Many historians have also used editorials and letters to the editor to explore themes of racism and sexism; particularly how different groups were portrayed and what type of language was used. One historian examined the editorials in a series of Tennessee newspapers in 1866 to discover how they were fomented violence against the African American community.<sup>47</sup> The author explores how newspaper editorials were instrumental in antagonizing the public through exaggeration and expressed hostility towards both freedmen and Radical Republicans. Another scholar studied the editorials of Marsh Murdock published in *The Wichita Eagle* during the 1870s and 1880s and letters written in response by local citizens to illustrate differing concepts of domestic ideology.<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Edwards shows how these materials illustrated social and cultural arguments over women's appropriate activities and sphere. While both temperance and suffrage advocates and Murdock employed versions of "domestic ideology" they were very different from one another. Edwards proposes that these letters and editorials "tell us a great deal about Americans' attitudes toward domesticity and marriage" during this time period.

Editorials of either one newspaper or multiple newspapers are also used to explore both press coverage and public opinion regarding particular historic events. In one study, a scholar traced the language and development of editorials in the *New York Times* regarding the "Indian Problem" from 1860 to 1900.<sup>49</sup> Another scholar traced the editorials of William Randolph Hearst and their effects on foreign policy.<sup>50</sup> There is also a large body of work done regarding the Civil War and newspaper editorials.

In his study of the Spanish American war using newspaper editorials, Piero Gleijeses discussed why it took so long to go to war and why strong opposition to the war did not prevail. He found that both the McKinley administration papers and Congressional documents provided little information about anti-war opinions. Gleijeses thus turned to newspapers and found that in his examination of over 41 American newspapers in the beginning months of 1898, he was able to find the only "coherent, well articulated and explicit explanation of the anti-war position."<sup>51</sup> Through an extensive reading of these newspaper editorials, Gleijeses was able to show that a strong anti-war feeling did exist, even if it did not prove to be persuasive.

### Use of Newspapers in Social History

Social historians use newspapers in a number of different ways. While some study the content of advertisements to learn about the material conditions of daily life, others use them to explore representations of gender or race. Some scholars conduct in-depth exploration of literary stories that are printed to find hidden voices of the oppressed. Other scholars study political and social discourse through computerized content analysis.

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Rutenbeck. "Partisan Press Coverage of Anti-Abolitionist Violence: A Study of Early Nineteenth Century "Viewsflow" *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 19, no. 1, (Spring 1995): 126-41

<sup>47</sup> Marcus Carriere. "An Irresponsible Press: Memphis Newspapers and the 1866 Riot." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, LX, no. 1, (Spring 2001): 2-15

<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Edwards. "Marsh Murdock and the 'Wily Women' of Wichita: Domesticity Disputed in the Gilded Age" *Kansas History*, 25, (Spring 2002): 2-13.

<sup>49</sup> Robert G. Hayes. *A Race at Bay: New York Times Editorials on "The Indian Problem." 1860-1900.* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Ian Mugridge. *The View from Xanadu: William Randolph Hearst and United States Foreign Policy.* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Piero Gleijeses. "1898: The Opposition to the Spanish-American War." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 35 (2003): 684.

One interesting example of an in-depth textual analysis was conducted by Edward E. Baptist. His analysis focused exclusively on just one story published in the antebellum newspaper, *The Tallahassee Star* of Florida, in 1841. Baptist argues that while antebellum newspapers and most other primary Southern sources are mediated through Southern elites, such documents, particularly newspapers, still allow us to hear the voices of common whites and slaves if you can “read against the grain” and understand the context.<sup>52</sup> He analyzes a single newspaper story which belittles the antics of a lower class white man named Snell, and uses it to explore attitudes of Southern newspaper editors, the influence of “poor white humor”, and ideas about masculinity in the antebellum South. Baptist contends that scholars have underutilized Southern newspaper writers, particularly those of antebellum newspapers. While these newspapers have been used extensively in local studies, Baptist also believes that “future historians of Southern ideology and culture” should consider using these them to find a wealth of information.<sup>53</sup> Baptist urges other historians to search for these kinds of stories in other antebellum newspapers. If more Southern newspapers from the antebellum period were digitized and more easily available for scholarly inquiry it is likely that these kinds of literary texts could be more easily isolated within newspapers.

Another scholar studied the rhetoric of black abolitionism by doing a content analysis of five black abolitionist newspapers in New York. This study done by Timothy Shortell utilized computerized content coding using SemioCode to generate frequencies and co-occurrences for a set of sixteen themes such as justice or liberty.<sup>54</sup> The paragraph was used as the coding unit and themes were “operationalized as sets of keywords.” Paragraphs were coded for tone, for basis, and for rhetoric by four trained readers. A sample of newspaper texts was drawn from each of the five newspapers using published collections and microfilm reels, and ultimately 257 paragraphs (36,000 words) of text were analyzed. A sample of paragraphs was also drawn from the *Working Man’s Advocate*, a nineteenth century New York labor newspaper as a point of comparison. After analyzing these texts, Shortell was able to show significant differences in the rhetoric used by different black abolitionist newspapers. Shortell had to randomly selected paragraphs for his analysis due to time constraints, so it would be interesting to see how his conclusions might have changed if he had been able to use fully digitized versions of these newspapers.

Other scholars have also studied the discourse of newspapers to explore other historical issues. Communications professor David Domke has considered how discourse in the press has affected race relations and how it has changed over time. He examined the racial ideologies and discourse of 14 mainstream newspapers regarding U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 1883 and 1896. Domke studied these newspapers first through textual analysis and then through a discourse analysis of over 142 selected editorials and articles. Domke concludes that “analysis, then, of how Black and White Americans were described, explained and positioned in language in the mainstream press likely provides insight into how racial ideologies were reinforced or challenged during the late nineteenth century.”<sup>55</sup>

A variety of work has been done by scholars who have used newspapers to explore how they both reflect and construct ideas about a variety of issues including crime, urbanization, and representations of race, class, gender and national identity. One interesting use of newspapers to study historical crime statistics was conducted by Douglas Eckberg, who used homicide accounts

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<sup>52</sup> Edward E. Baptist. “Accidental Ethnography in An Antebellum Southern Newspaper: Snell’s Homecoming Festival.” *Journal of American History*, 84, no. 4, (1998): 1356.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 1382.

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Shortell. “The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State.” *Social Science History*, 28, no. 1, (2004): 75-109.

<sup>55</sup> Domke, David. “The Press, Race Relations and Social Change.” *Journal Of Communication*, 51, (2001): 325.

from newspapers to match against county coroner records to try and calculate the exact number of murders that occurred between 1877 and 1878 in Charleston, South Carolina. He suggests that often the newspapers provided more information, even if they were lax about exact names, dates and place names.<sup>56</sup> In another interesting study, William D. Howden analyzed a series of feature stories done by the *New York Times* on New York City churches from 1874 to 1875. He argues that these stories illustrated upper class fears and concerns about immigration and urbanization in New York City.<sup>57</sup>

There are a growing number of studies that use newspapers to help recast perceptions about minority communities, particularly in the nineteenth century. Historian Haiming Liu used newspapers as a major source in his history of Chinese herbalists in late nineteenth century California. During this period many newspapers and health officials blamed Chinese immigrants for spreading disease. Despite this, Liu contends that many Chinese herbalists managed to establish successful practices that drew clients from a variety of racial backgrounds. Liu points to newspaper advertisements that herbalists placed in the local press, particularly ones that were used to actively solicit white clients. In addition, Liu also offers examples of letters written to newspapers by Chinese herbalists defending and promoting their profession.<sup>58</sup>

Urban historians have also used historic newspaper accounts to explore ideas about poverty, race, gender, and class and how the discourse of popular newspapers often constructed ideas that still affect our views of urban slums today. In his book, *The Imagined Slum*, A.J.C. Mayne studied newspaper accounts of three cities, Sydney, San Francisco and Birmingham, England.<sup>59</sup> He looked at the language of newspaper accounts and argues that they created the idea of a dangerous slum by reaffirming “bourgeoisie values” and that these accounts still color our understanding today. A similar study by Paul Reckner discussed how nineteenth century representations of the Five Points neighborhood in New York in newspapers and popular literature still define and constrain our historical memory of this area. He concludes that “newspaper stories and novels do more than simply inform “public” historical memories, however. The narratives these sources employ also impact journalists (as well as historians and researchers) as consumers of popular media in their own right.”<sup>60</sup> The author found that despite the fact that many of their archaeological findings contradicted some popular historical assumptions about the Five Points area, their efforts were met with opposition and even resulted in several critical newspaper columns. This study helps illustrate the importance of studying newspapers as to how they shape both public memory and the historical narratives we construct around particular places.

Yet another study that explored similar issues was conducted by Richardson Dilworth and Kathryn Trevenen. They explored the newspaper coverage of two municipal consolidations in the nineteenth century and how the language used to discuss these consolidations employed gendered and sexualized terms, particularly metaphors regarding marriage to support them.<sup>61</sup> The authors suggest that newspapers held a powerful influence over public opinion and the language that they used illustrated social anxieties about changing gender roles and the “dangers” of urban life.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Eckberg. “Stalking the Elusive Homicide: A Capture-Recapture Approach to the Estimation of Post-Reconstruction South Carolina Killings.” *Social Science History*, 25, no. 1, (2001): 68-91.

<sup>57</sup> William D. Howden. “Seeing Social Class in the Sermons of the *New York Times*.” *ATQ*, 14, no. 4, (2000): 313-330.

<sup>58</sup> Liu, Haiming. “The Resilience of Ethnic Culture: Chinese Herbalists in the American Medical Profession.” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 1, no.2, (1998): 183.

<sup>59</sup> A.J.C. Mayne. *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Reckner. “Remembering Gotham: Urban Legends, Public History and Representations of Poverty, Crime and Race in New York City.” *Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 6, no. 2, (2002): 97.

<sup>61</sup> Richardson Dilworth and Kathryn Trevenen. “When Cities Get Married: Constructing Urban Space through Gender, Sexuality and Municipal Consolidation.” *Urban Affairs Review*, 40, no. 2, (2004): 183-209.

While some scholars have used historic newspapers to discover the nature of nineteenth urban life, others have used them to track the number historical protest movements and collective actions such as strikes and civil protest. Sociologists David Schweingruber and Clark McPhail examined how data about collective actions in the past have been gathered from newspapers for decades by researchers. While they did believe that other sources should be consulted as well, they argued that newspapers offer “continuous records of collective action from which empirical data sets can be constructed.”<sup>62</sup> Similar research was conducted by sociologists Gregory Maney and Pamela E. Oliver, who explored a variety of sources including newspapers to investigate the thoroughness of their coverage of collective actions. They searched electronic newspaper archives and microfilm in order to develop strategies to find the largest number of events. While they found that neither format was ideal due to the difficulties of reading microfilm and selecting the right keywords, newspapers were still invaluable sources of information for their studies.<sup>63</sup>

### Use of Newspapers to Study the History of Science and Medicine

Historic newspapers of the nineteenth century provide a wealth of information to historians of science, medicine and technology. Many feature articles were written about contemporary scientific discoveries and newspapers were filled with advertisements for patent medicines. A study of these advertisements could reveal trends in pharmaceuticals as well as changes in medicinal practice. In addition, obituaries often listed information as to the cause of death, so trends in mortality and illness can often be explored. While some historians have used newspapers to try and establish factual or historical accounts of mortality and sickness, others have studied how newspaper accounts reflect popular perceptions of science and discovery. Sociological researchers have also commented on the usefulness of newspaper archives for gathering historical data on health inequalities. Two researchers used local newspaper archives to explore news about contamination, incidents of diseases, public housing issues and availability of medical care.<sup>64</sup>

One medical historian studied death and obituary reports published in newspapers along with a variety of other primary sources to explore the prevalence and rise of tuberculosis in early America. Scott D. Holmberg suggests that there are few primary sources to try to determine the incidence of diseases, but found that early American newspapers and gazettes on microfilm helped him find a variety of important information.<sup>65</sup> Other scholars have done similar studies where they used newspaper to obtain information about trends in mortality, illness and health care. In an article for *South Dakota History*, Paula M. Nelson used a variety of notices, advertisements, obituaries and features published in the small town newspaper of Canton, South Dakota in the late nineteenth century to explore the frequency of diseases, the types of medical care practices and mourning customs for the dead.<sup>66</sup> Nelson used newspapers to obtain factual information about the prevalence of disease and availability of treatment and to examine the opinions and attitudes of South Dakotans towards medical practice. In one broader study, historian Regina Morantz Sanchez used coverage of questionable surgical practices and

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<sup>62</sup> David Schweingruber and Clark McPhail. “A Method for Systematically Observing and Recording Collective Action.” *Sociological Methods & Research*, 27, no. 4, (1999): 454.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory M. Maney and Pamela E. Oliver. “Finding Collective Events: Sources, Searches, Timing.” *Sociological Methods & Research*, 30, no. 2, (2001): 131-169.

<sup>64</sup> Sara Mallinson, et. al. “Historical Data for Health Inequalities Research: A Research Note.” *Sociology*, 37, no. 4, (2003): 771-780.

<sup>65</sup> Scott D. Holmberg. “The Rise of Tuberculosis in America before 1820.” *The American Review of Respiratory Disease*, 142, no. 5, (1990): 1228-1232.

<sup>66</sup> Paula M. Nelson. “Medical Care and Mortality.” *South Dakota History*, 33, no. 3, (2003): 194-234.

manslaughter trials in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* to investigate both medical and urban history and the debate over women's public roles in the late nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

Other historians of science have used newspapers and the periodical press to investigate public or popular perceptions of science and scientific ideas. In a 1975 study Donald Zochert considered how a variety of different scientific disciplines were portrayed in three Wisconsin newspapers from 1837 to 1846.<sup>68</sup> He contends that although his study is limited to three newspapers, the news and feature exchange system that existed between newspapers at the time ensured that they were reflective of a broad public mindset or opinion. Zochert concludes that the evidence he drew from newspapers "demonstrates in both quantity and substance a vigorous sustained interest in science, in large measure this interest was sustained by the appeal of social utility and by the search for design and order."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, several researchers have examined popular perceptions of individual scientific disciplines in the press. An article by Paul Dennis analyzed 196 editorials regarding psychology published in the *New York Times* between 1904 and 1947.<sup>70</sup> He found that the importance accorded psychology waxed and waned over this time period. Although this paper relies exclusively on editorials from one paper it does illustrate how newspapers could be used to study both the development and opinion of a scientific discipline. The popular perception of scientific discovery and other categories of scientists could also be explored.

An earlier study of this same issue was conducted by Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. in an article for *American Psychologist*. He examined newspaper and periodical press coverage of APA meetings and psychological studies to explore the public's perception of psychology as a science.<sup>71</sup> He suggests that prior to World War One there was little newspaper coverage of psychology, and based his assertion on examination of newspaper indexes of that period. In a sample search for psychology on the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*<sup>72</sup> website, numerous references to psychology lectures and works were found starting in 1880. It would be interesting to see how another study of this same topic might change if access to digital newspapers and keyword searching could produce more material for analysis.

### Newspapers and Literary History

Newspapers from the late nineteenth century and late twentieth century often contained extensive literary sections that were filled with short stories, novellas, poems and other works by a variety of authors. They are often an untapped source for literary scholars according to Ronald Schuchard, an English professor at Emory University. In his speech at a 2001 conference entitled "Do We Want to Keep Our Newspapers", Schuchard suggested that many of his colleagues undervalue newspaper research and often fail to examine newspapers beyond the *New York* or *London Times*. He argues that "in the process of reading and scanning original copies of newspapers some of us have made the most important scholarly discoveries of our careers, often serendipitously."<sup>73</sup> Schuchard offers several powerful examples of the importance of newspaper research for literary scholars. While conducting research for his book *Eliot's Dark Angel*, he would often track down references from Eliot's letters to speeches he gave in small towns or

<sup>67</sup> Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez. *Conduct Unbecoming A Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn of the Century Brooklyn*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> David Zochert. "Science and the Common Man in Ante-Bellum America." *Isis*, 65, no. 4, (Dec 1974): 448-73.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>70</sup> Paul M. Dennis. "Psychology's Public Image in "Topics of the Times": Commentary from the Editorial Page of the New York Times between 1904 and 1947." *Journal of History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 38, no. 4, (2002): 371-392.

<sup>71</sup> Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. "Why Don't They Understand Us? A History of Psychology's Public Image." *American Psychologist*, 41, no. 9, (1986): 941-6.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/index.htm>

<sup>73</sup> Ronald Schuchard. "Why I Go To Colindale." Retrieved from <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Centre/Newspapers/schuch.htm>



public lectures in small local newspapers. He also found a verbatim transcription of an unknown Eliot lecture on George Herbert. "That wondrous newspaper page changes our view of Eliot's intellectual and poetic development in the 1930s," Schuchard explains, "and greatly enhances our comprehension of his great poem. It certainly transformed my book."

Schuchard also discussed the importance of historic newspapers to his colleagues who published *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*. Throughout his letters Yeats referred to plays he produced, theatre tours he attended, lectures and speeches he gave, articles and papers he read, and unknown people that he met. In order to efficiently annotate these letters, the editors traced all of these references and allusions in the newspaper record, even when they did not know to which newspaper Yeats sometimes referred. Through browsing these newspapers, the editors also found unknown Yeats letters to the editor, letters about him, and his involvement in newspaper debates, detailed coverage of his lectures and speeches, as well as drawings, caricatures and photographs of him. Schuchard sums up the importance of newspapers thusly:

More than any other resource, newspaper material provides the extraordinary detail, precision, illumination and clarity that we seek for the letters. In taking this information out of the newsprint record and into the scholarly record through the annotations, we are thereby able to effect revisions not only of biography and criticism, but of literary, cultural and political history. In short, with the newspapers of Colindale we have aimed to set a new standard of editorial scholarship. The thoroughness and accuracy of our scholarship depends upon the nature of the reading process, upon the browsing and searching of original newspapers.<sup>74</sup>

In these examples, Schuchard makes a powerful if inadvertent case for the digitization of such newspapers. Full text searching capability would likely make finding such important references a far less arduous affair. In addition, the ability to quickly browse through back issues of a newspaper in digital format would also assist in the serendipitous finding of previously unknown lectures and speeches.

### **Newspapers and Archaeologists**

Newspapers, according to one researcher, are often overlooked as a source of anthropological data, even though they give insight into local communities. In his study of several nineteenth century California newspapers, Richard Hitchcock points out that these newspapers provided frequent if negative coverage of different ethnic groups, information not often found in the major urban dailies. In addition to this kind of anthropological data, he also argues that archaeological information can be found in newspapers because articles often provide names, employment locations, and residential information such as building locations. "Newspapers provide accurate dates for local happenings," Hitchcock concludes, "they provide names, sometimes with interesting spellings. They provide spatial information through their coverage of fires, new construction, and other events. Perhaps their most interesting usage, however, derives from the researcher's admittance into the day to day life of the community."<sup>75</sup>

Other archaeologists have used historic newspapers for a variety of purposes. Stephen Mrozowski states that because newspapers were "a part of a growing system of communication between commercial centers in the colonies and in Europe, newspapers can provide the archaeologist with a rare glimpse into the world of international exchange."<sup>76</sup> He also proposes using newspaper

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Hitchcock. "Lead Type and Printer's Devils: Newspapers in Nineteenth-Century California" in *The Written and the Wrought: Complementary Sources in Historical Anthropology*, ed. Mary Ellin D'Agostino. Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers, 79, (Berkeley, CA: Kroeber Anthropological Society, 1995), 193.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen A. Mrozowski. "For Gentlemen of Capacity and Leisure: The Archaeology of Colonial Newspapers" in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, ed. Mary C. Beaudry. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 184.

advertisements to help establish dates for artifacts, such as through a catalog he created of ceramic descriptions from early colonial newspapers. “Ads provide the archaeologist with periods of availability that are community or area specific dating guides,” Mrozowski contends, “While not necessarily a substitute for mean manufacturing dates, these dates are more sensitive to local market availability.”<sup>77</sup> In addition, to establishing information about the material conditions of life Mrozowski also suggests using colonial newspapers to explore links between material culture and gender. Mrozowski ultimately concludes that newspapers are important documentary sources that “provide the essential link between material culture, its use, and the attitudes held in common about it. They may also allow us insights into the emic perspective of the participants in cultural systems we wish to understand.”<sup>78</sup>

Other archaeologists have used historic newspapers, particularly their advertisements in attempts to reconstruct the material culture of middle class life. Mary Praetzellis explains that “newspapers, particularly, advertisements provide an extremely valuable source of information on the local expressions of consumer trends. Advertisements give a more explicit indication of the local cost and availability of various classes of consumer goods.”<sup>79</sup> She shows that useful information such as prices of goods, range of goods available, the origin of manufacture or shipping, can also help to partially reconstruct trade networks. Praetzellis also offers the useful idea of tracing “the social maintenance of ethnic consciousness” by following the advertisements and notices placed by groups such as the German Social Club or the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

### **Geographers, Geologists & Newspapers**

Although a newspaper might not seem like a likely source of data for geographers, one scholar used them to explore the geographic and cultural factors behind the placement and creation of several small towns in Illinois in the nineteenth century. He based his study on the reports of local correspondents for three newspapers. “Throughout the late nineteenth century such correspondents regularly supplied newspapers with information about happenings in the surrounding countryside.” W.D. Walters Jr. explains, “Usually, these are just a series of one or two line accounts of local happenings. Individually they are of small importance, but collectively they provide a remarkable storehouse of information on social and economic history.”<sup>80</sup> Through these correspondents’ accounts regarding railroad development, local town and state legislative meetings, and newspaper advertisements, Walters was able to recreate how towns were laid out and developed.

Newspapers are frequently used as a source of data for historic seismology. R.M.W. Musson explains that newspapers from the eighteenth and nineteenth century are often the only source of data for historic earthquakes in Britain, and information regarding them can be gleaned from both personal accounts and general descriptions. While he admits that data gathered from newspapers cannot be used uncritically because “such reports were not compiled with scientific intent” he still concludes that they are an invaluable data source.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, two geologists made a systematic study of nineteenth century newspapers in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Eastern Tennessee in order to find reports of earthquakes. They found that by studying these newspapers

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Praetzellis. “What Happened to the Silent Majority: Research Strategies for Studying Dominant Group Material Cultural in Late Nineteenth Century California” in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, ed. Mary C. Beaudry. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 199.

<sup>80</sup> W.D. Walters, Jr. “Town-Making in Eastern McLean County: A Geographical Microstudy.” *Bulletin of the Illinois Geographical Society*. 40, no. 2, (1998): 20.

<sup>81</sup> R.M.W. Musson. “The Use of Newspaper Data in Historical Earthquake Studies.” *Disasters*. 10, no. 3, (1986): 217-223.

they discovered several hundred reports for felt earthquakes that had not previously been recorded. They conducted both a continuous search of issues of key newspapers and a specific search of particular dates for different newspapers once seismic events were identified. The authors argue that because “earthquakes and meteorite falls were in the class of natural phenomena that included weather events, and were generally of interest to the farming community. It should not be surprising, then, that newspapers from the 1800’s contained an abundant coverage of felt earthquakes.”<sup>82</sup> These researchers were able to use historic newspapers to challenge some preexisting conclusions about types of seismic activity in this area. Even more recently, an article by Monika Gisler has speculated that historic seismology could greatly benefit from more in-depth consideration of historical sources such as newspapers.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, newspapers are often used as sources of information for other types of historic natural disasters such as floods. In a report for the U.K. Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, researchers suggested that nineteenth century newspapers provide highly descriptive reports of floods including information on earlier floods and flood height. They suggest that “this information is often vital if a ranked flood series is to be produced and local newspapers can often be the primary source of information of floods that occurred during the 1800s and early 1900s.”<sup>84</sup> The authors also cite online historical newspapers such as the London Digital Times Archive as an important source that can make this important information easier to find and more accessible. A similar study in the United States revealed that historical newspapers are often the only source for historical flood data other than FEMA, arguing that “only in newspaper archives from cities and towns across the nation might one find more complete reporting of historical flood damage. Indeed, a newspaper archive could be the best source of information on flood damage in a particular locale.”<sup>85</sup>

### Historians Use of Digitized Newspapers

Although the uses of newspapers discussed here have primarily focused on historians using newspapers in either their traditional printed format or microfilm, there is a growing use by historians of electronic primary resources such as digital newspapers. Very little research has been done regarding the specific use of digital historic newspapers by historians, and it seems even less research has been done by historians using these tools. This does not necessarily indicate, however, that historians are necessarily reluctant to explore the use of digital primary source materials.

In a study done by Helen Tibbo regarding the sources most frequently used by historians, she found that historians ranked “newspapers as their most often used and most important source.” Tibbo also found that many historians wanted more digitized collections to be put online. She concludes that “significantly for libraries and archives and especially digitization and microfilming projects, many historians view newspapers contemporary to the events they are exploring as essential.”<sup>86</sup> Tibbo also notes that in her interviews with historians many commented that period newspapers were the only source of information for their work, and that microfilm

<sup>82</sup> L. Seeber and J.G. Armbruster. “The 1886-1899 Aftershocks of the Charleston, South Carolina Earthquake: A Widespread Burst of Seismicity.” *Journal of Geophysical Research*, 92 (B3), March 10, 1987: 2664.

<sup>83</sup> Monika Gisler. “Historical Seismology in Switzerland: Reflections on Issues and Insights.” *Environment and History*, 9, no. 2, (May 2003): 215-237.

<sup>84</sup> A.C. Bayliss and D.W. Reed. “The Use of Historical Data in Flood Frequency Estimation.” Report to MAFF. (March 2001): 8. Retrieved at [http://www.nwl.ac.uk/ih/feh/historical\\_floods\\_report.pdf](http://www.nwl.ac.uk/ih/feh/historical_floods_report.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Roger A. Pielke, Jr, et. al. “Flood Damage in the United States, 1926-2000: A Reanalysis of National Weather Service Estimates.” June 2002. Environmental and Societal Impacts Group. National Center for Atmospheric Research.

<sup>86</sup> Helen Tibbo. “Primarily History in America: How U.S. Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age.” *American Archivist*, 66, (Spring/Summer 2003): 19.

copies greatly aided their work. If microfilmed copies were of great assistance, it is logical to conclude that digital copies of newspapers could be an even further enhancement.

One historian made use of Accessible Archives digitized collection of nineteenth century African American newspapers to assess African American attitudes on the colonization of freed slaves.<sup>87</sup> This commercial digital collection includes full text of articles only, rather than a digital surrogate of the entire newspaper.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, Bankole correctly asserts that having these newspapers available online has allowed greater access and much better searchability. The digital format allows scholars to spend more time using material and less time finding it. By having access to a larger number of articles, she reformulated a number of her original questions and also discovered a stronger sense of agency among African Americans than she expected in the battle for and against colonization.

Many tools are so new that the ways in which they will be used is still being determined. One group of historians supported some of their arguments through the use of fifty or so nineteenth century newspapers at Ancestry.com. They did a keyword search for over 34 synonyms and antonyms of words such as lie, slander, and honesty for they wanted to study the use of certain words to examine the quality and type of reporting. “By using a search engine capable of searching across several hundred electronically scanned newspapers,” they explained, “We are able to explore a wide range of newspapers for particular words to see if their use rose or fell over the period.”<sup>89</sup> While this was just one part of their research study, this use of digitized newspapers helped support their conclusion that “the highly opinionated style of reporting that was common in the 1870s had become uncommon by the early twentieth century.” Although digital historical newspapers were just one of the research tools used, they were nonetheless an important part of the author’s research methodology and made their work much quicker.

Economic historians have also made use of digital historical newspapers. A recent study of historical wagering on presidential elections relied on an investigation of several thousand newspaper articles, more than half of which were found using Proquest Historical Newspapers. “The research in this paper has benefited substantially from a recent research innovation, the ability to search and access (via Proquest) machine readable editions of historical newspapers including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*,” the authors conclude, “Our prediction is these news search techniques will revolutionize the ability to access diffuse, qualitative information of phenomena such as election betting.”<sup>90</sup>

Another digital collection of historic newspapers that has been used by scholars and students is the “Hawaiian Language Newspapers” collection. This digital collection includes Native Hawaiian language papers from the nineteenth century, including many newspapers published by missionaries.<sup>91</sup> It is not currently searchable as OCR failed due to old and different fonts. The creators of the collection explain that these “newspapers are considered a standard for written Hawaiian which was nearly extinct a few years ago, but has reemerged as a language of daily use

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<sup>87</sup> Katherine Olukemi Bankole. “The Use of Electronic Information Technology in Historical Research on African Diaspora Studies and the Emigration to Liberia, 1827-1901.” *Liberian Studies Journal*, XXVII, no. 1, (2001).

<sup>88</sup> For more details, see [www.accessible.com](http://www.accessible.com)

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Gentzkow, Edward L. Glaeser, and Claudia Goldin. “The Rise of the Fourth Estate: How Newspapers Became Informative and Why It Mattered.” NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 10791, Released September 2004. Retrieved from <http://nber15.nber.org/papers/w10791.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Paul W. Rhode and Koleman S. Strumpf. “Historical Prediction Markets: Wagering on Presidential Elections.” Working Paper. UNC Chapel Hill, Department of Economics. Retrieved from [http://www.unc.edu/~cigar/papers/BettingPaper\\_10Nov2003\\_long2.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/~cigar/papers/BettingPaper_10Nov2003_long2.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> <http://libweb.hawaii.edu/newspapers.htm>

and scholarship.”<sup>92</sup> The website creators have received many emails from users of their website, and the digital newspaper collections are used in second year language classes. Students compare variations of famous stories, study chants and genealogies, look at advertisements and personal notices. Language teachers search for grammatical patterns and can examine ways the language has changed. The website creators believe that this resource has helped to revive Hawaiian language from extinction through its use by dedicated teachers and students, illustrating the importance of digitizing rare ethnic newspapers.

### Linguists Uses of Digitized Newspapers

Recently there have been several studies of how digitized historical newspaper might be used to further linguistic research. Barry Popik offers a succinct overview of various digital historical newspaper projects, and how they might be used to discover earlier citations of words and changes in regional language usage. He gives the example of how one of his colleagues used Proquest Historical Newspapers digital edition of the *New York Times* and found an earlier citation of the word jazz than previously discovered. Popik hopefully concludes that “the historical speech of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and all over the country will be instantly searchable.”<sup>93</sup> One important feature Popik found with the commercial newspaper projects such as “Newspaperarchive.com” is that they remain “small town” and contain so many little papers from different areas of the country that it has “become extremely helpful for the study of regional American English.” He also makes the important point that although these different digital newspaper collections are valuable tools, the lack of standardization, and the lack of a central search feature even for those projects made with the same software limits their usability

Another linguist conducted an experimental research study using the Infotrac Times Digital Archive and Proquest Historical Newspapers collection. Donald S. MacQueen searched on the integration of the word “million” versus “millions” into both British and American English using these two newspaper databases. He argues that despite some difficulties in developing a research methodology, the sheer magnitude of the number of words that can be searched makes these databases well worth using. One major difficulty MacQueen found was that the searching defaults are set up with historians in mind. “Historical Newspapers caters mainly to historians and other social scientists who are looking to find as many references as possible to a themes or keywords...” MacQueen explains “to maximize the number of hits for such users, the Proquest search engine automatically includes a plural look-up feature, conflating hits for the plural form of any singular word entered. This obviously presents an obstacle to linguists looking to distinguish inflected from bare forms.”<sup>94</sup> Despite these caveats, he concluded that these databases “offer invaluable information about language usage in American and British newspaper writing across a period that is not yet well covered by principled linguistic corpora”<sup>95</sup> and they offer great insight into understanding changing patterns of standard usage in English.

Historical newspaper corpora might also be used to measure linguistic evolution and diffusion over time. A recent article by Gregor Erbach suggests that the growing number of historical resources on the Internet, including historical newspaper corpora and archives can allow

<sup>92</sup> James Cartwright, et. al. “The Digital Landscape: The Hawaiian Newspapers and War Records and Trust Territory Image Repository of the University of Hawaii” *First Monday*, 5, no. 6., retrieved at [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5\\_6/cartwright](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5_6/cartwright)

<sup>93</sup> Barry Popik. “Digital Historical Newspapers: A Review of the Powerful New Research Tools.” *Journal of English Linguistics*, 32, no. 2, (2004): 115.

<sup>94</sup> Donald S. MacQueen. “Developing Methods for Very-Large-Scale Searches in Proquest Historical Newspapers Collection and Infotrac *The Times* Digital Archive: The Case of *Two Million* versus *Two Millions*” *Journal of English Linguistics*, 32, no. 2, (2004): 127.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

“unprecedented opportunities for studying language use within different linguistic and social communities.”<sup>96</sup>

The field of sociolinguistics could also make excellent use of digital newspapers, to track when certain terms came into usage and to explore changes in discourse. One scholar made an innovative use of both library catalogs, and a digital full text newspaper database to trace when the term “Holocaust” came into common usage and to trace the development of expressions used to describe the Japanese internment during World War Two.<sup>97</sup> While this study does not make use of a digitized historic newspaper, it does illustrate another important research use of newspapers, to study how word and term usage can be used to explore cultural norms and public discourse. As Deborah Schiffrin concludes, “sociolinguistics can contribute to our understanding of history by showing how language helps to develop and maintain a sense of the communal past.”

## Newspapers and The Public Library

### Access to Historic Newspapers

While historians are perhaps the largest community that uses historic newspapers, they also serve as important source materials for other groups of users as well. Perhaps the other greatest area where historic newspaper use is seen is in the public library environment. Librarians frequently refer to older newspapers as not only one of the most important reference sources but also as one of the most popular. Most public libraries collect multiple local newspapers, and maintain back files for research use. Newspaper morgues and electronic archives, two commonly cited sources for older newspapers, are frequently inaccessible or too expensive for public libraries, historical societies, and smaller colleges to maintain or acquire. The answer to this problem for many years has been for an individual institution to create a local vertical or clipping file of stories of interest. This has then created the problem of how to create an effective index to increase access to these materials. Digitization can solve many of the problems of access and indexing, and newspaper clippings files or indexes to local newspapers are often one of the first things a public library will put online in a local history collection.<sup>98</sup>

Public libraries have long faced the problem of providing effective access to older newspapers, and many have only been able to provide access to selected local newspapers and such major newspapers as *New York Times* that are easily available on microfilm. Occasionally libraries will maintain copies of newspapers in hard copy, but more frequently they will provide access to historic newspapers through microfilm. Microfilming newspapers, however, is not an effective means of providing subject or author access to the content of newspapers.

This problem of providing efficient access to the content of newspapers has been addressed by libraries and publishers through the creation of newspaper abstracts and indexes. *The New York Times* was the first newspaper with an index, and many scholars and librarians believe that this was what helped lead to the initial and continuing over-utilization of this newspaper as a historic source. While local libraries often try to create indexes for their hometown newspapers it can be an overwhelming and time consuming task. The importance of indexes to newspapers has long

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<sup>96</sup> Gregor Erbach. “Mapping, Measuring and Modeling the Diffusion of Linguistic Material on the Internet.” Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Emergence and Evolution of Linguistic Communication. Kanazawa. May 2004.

<sup>97</sup> Deborah Schiffrin. “Language, Experience and History: ‘What Happened’ in World War II.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 5, no. 3. (2001): 323-351.

<sup>98</sup> For an example of an excellent collection, please see the Santa Cruz Public Library Local history website <http://scplweb.santacruzpl.org/history/>.

been understood, and in fact one of the frequent tasks of the Works Progress Administration was to employ out of work professionals in the creation of local newspaper indices.

One article about such a particular at the Cleveland Public Library in 1936 described four hundred people abstracting every news story and local event in a Cleveland newspaper since 1819. The authors argued that “the digest is expected to be invaluable as a reference work since the volumes will contain what might correspond to a day to day history of Cleveland, they will be of permanent value to the historian.” They also suggested that the digest would be of use to business researchers for “it will offer a wealth of information concerning the background of industry” and that it would also contain material “for students of economics, sociology, political science and genealogy.”<sup>99</sup> This article demonstrates the belief that research access to newspapers is important to a wide variety of audiences.

Although newspaper digitization is still a fairly current phenomenon, librarians have long understood the potential benefits it could provide. At a 1995 IFLA conference, the advantages that digitization of newspapers could possibly bring was recognized by British librarian Geoffrey Smith. He aptly predicted that newspaper digitization would reduce space needs for storage, allow both remote access and multiple users to access the same materials at high speed, and finally, that keyword access could “unlock the riches of collection content.”<sup>100</sup>

### **Preservation of Historic Newspapers**

While easy access has been one major issue librarians have faced in creating collections of newspapers, another serious problem has been that of newspaper preservation. In order to aid in the preservation and finding of newspapers, the United States Newspaper Program (USNP) was established in the 1980s to catalog collections of newspapers throughout the United States and to preserve them on microfilm. The emphasis on microfilming newspapers started shortly after the Second World War and was ingrained by the 1970s and the start of the USNP according to Richard Cox, an archivist at the University of Pittsburgh.

The issue of microfilming and then discarding older newspapers became hotly debated both within and outside the library community after the publication of Nicholson Baker’s *Double Fold*, a highly charged accusation against libraries. Baker contended that librarians were actively destroying perfectly savable newspapers and foolishly relying on microfilm to preserve access to these important historical items.<sup>101</sup> While microfilm is still considered the standard preservation medium for newspapers, some librarians have challenged its efficacy. British librarian David Stoker suggests that using micrographic technology “when the rest of the world seems to be moving in the direction of the digital storage and transmission of texts” is not necessarily a cost-effective plan.<sup>102</sup> He does argue, however, that the preservation of historic newspapers is important due to the fact that many nineteenth century newspapers are deteriorating rapidly. “Newspapers were never intended by their producers to be a permanent means of storing textual information,” Stoker concludes, “and the recognition that they contain a mass of valuable information not available elsewhere, is only a comparatively recent phenomenon.”<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Birnbaum, Louis H. “Tracing a City’s History: In Cleveland the WPA Uses Old Newspaper Files to Index the Events of the Past.” *New York Times*, Sept 6, 1936. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>100</sup> Geoffrey Smith. “Access to Newspaper Collections and Content in a Time of Change.” IFLA General Conference Proceedings, August 20-25 1995. Retrieved from <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla61/61-smig.htm>.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of Baker’s arguments and newspaper preservation, please see Richard J. Cox “The Great Newspaper Caper: Backlash in the Digital Age” *First Monday*, 5, no. 12 (2000). Retrieved from [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5\\_12/cox/](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5_12/cox/).

<sup>102</sup> Stoker, *ibid*.

<sup>103</sup> Stoker, *ibid*.



Other commentators have also joined the debate on newspaper preservation. Film historian Stephen Bottomore recently lamented the destruction of historic newspapers. He argues that newspapers are important sources for film historians because they contain film reviews and biographies and “wider information about the social makeup of cinema audiences or the details of how a particular film was produced.”<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the most salient insight Bottomore offers is that microfilm fails to capture photographs, cartoons and other images with any type of visual quality. He cites a newspaper’s value as a “visual and aesthetic object” and convincingly suggests that microfilm will never be able to capture that quality. Bottomore also mourns the continuing loss of newspaper clippings files as libraries and newspapers have increasingly destroyed them in favor of digitization or microfilming. He contends that he found many articles in such files that he would never have found any other way because the articles were from papers that had never been indexed. Digitization could address this issue, although Bottomore suggests in his footnotes his belief that mass digitization of newspapers is an unlikely event.

The debate surrounding newspaper preservation has even extended outside of the library community. An article published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* warned of the deterioration of historic newspapers and challenged the idea that microfilming was an effective answer. The author argued not only that “many still long for the authenticity of a real, printed newspaper” but that “not only does microfilm fail to capture the wondrous texture and sensation of the printed page, it can be hard to read or have gaps.”<sup>105</sup> This article points out that many people wish to peruse an older newspaper simply to look at it and feel a sense of history. While some have suggested that digitization when done well can help to capture the feel of a newspaper far more effectively than microfilm, for many there will never be a replacement for the actual physical artifact. This love of older newspapers can be seen through the success of a number of companies that sell front pages or copies of older newspapers directly to the public.<sup>106</sup> There are also currently three commercial services that sell access to historic digitized newspapers through a monthly or yearly subscription.<sup>107</sup> Although the ultimate success of these commercial ventures remains to be seen, their very existence does indicate the large amount of public interest in older newspapers.

An entire convention was also recently devoted to the preservation of historic newspapers. In March of 2001, a conference called “Do We Want To Keep Our Newspapers” was held at the University of London. This conference, organized by the Institute of English Studies, the Institute of United States Studies and the Institute of Historical Research, brought together librarians, historians and other scholars to discuss why historic newspapers should be preserved and how best to do this.<sup>108</sup> This conference was largely inspired by Nicholson Baker's book and the British Library's discarding of major quantities of historic newspapers. In the opening session, David McKitterick helped set the tone with an impassioned plea for newspaper preservation:

It is worth reminding ourselves why research libraries collect newspapers in the first place. Just as with printed books, they are collected both to meet current demand and because it is believed that they will - some day if not immediately - be seen to be a part of contemporary culture, and therefore of local, national or international history. They may not be used immediately, and they may not be used for the reasons that may be anticipated at the time of acquisition. But they retain their contemporary resonance. To throw them away or otherwise discard them is to

<sup>104</sup> Stephen Bottomore. “The Destruction of Historic Newspapers, or: Was 35 mm Film Such a Great Invention After All?” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 24, no. 2, (2004): 296.

<sup>105</sup> Kevin Fagan. “Battling to Preserve Remnants of History Newspaper Archives Expensive and Complex.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Th. 11/2/2000. Retrieved online at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/11/02/MN111401.DTL>

<sup>106</sup> For example see <http://www.historicpages.com> and <http://www.rarenewspapers.com>

<sup>107</sup> Please see <http://www.paperofrecord.com>, <http://www.newspaperarchive.com> and <http://www.ancestry.com>

<sup>108</sup> For the full text of the various conference papers, please see <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Centre/Newspapers/newspapers.htm>.



imperial one means of understanding the past.<sup>109</sup>

Other speakers such as librarian Karen Wittenborg emphasized the point that while microfilm is not a perfect medium it has nonetheless provided important access to scholars who cannot afford to travel to original repositories. While she acknowledged that it was important to preserve the “experience of the newspaper artifact” she also urged caution in what she perceived as the rush to adopt digitization. “If we have not learned anything from our microfilming mistakes, we will waste enormous amounts of money and serve scholars poorly.” Wittenborg concludes, “The digitizing must be done well to be useful, and we must be able to ensure the preservation of electronic formats that may be even more ephemeral than newsprint.”<sup>110</sup>

Despite the extensive discussion at this conference of the importance of historic newspapers, McKitterick offers the somewhat surprising conclusion that almost no mention was made of the growth and advances occurring in newspaper digitization. “Clearly, researchers are benefiting enormously from such technical and digital advances,” McKitterick explains, “yet they still want, understandably, to be able to have recourse to the original documents and newspapers.”<sup>111</sup> Despite the fact that McKitterick suggests that researchers are benefiting from newspaper digitization, the adoption of digital resources for primary source research seems to be lagging behind the technology and content available.

While digitization may answer some of the problems of preservation, the changing nature of the newspaper and the newspaper archive as they move increasingly into digital formats has worried many librarians. The issue was recently discussed in the book *Newspapers of Record in A Digital Age*. In this publication, two library and information science professors discuss the changing nature of the newspaper in an online environment and the impact it may have on its use as a reference source. They fear that as newspapers increasingly move their content online with no plans to archive past issues, an important historical resource will be lost for generations to come.

### Uses of Newspapers in a Public Library

While there has been a great deal of work done on the use of newspapers by scholars such as historians, there have been surprisingly few studies on how older newspapers are used by the public library community. While there are many anecdotal statements of the importance of historic newspapers, there seem to have been few published user studies. The only study found in a review of the library literature that documented older newspaper use in an American public library was from 1989. A librarian at the public library in Albany tracked the use of newspapers in their collection. She found that the use of items from the retrospective collection (older than 20 years) was clearly tied to titles that were indexed such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* and to the timeframes covered by the indexes available.<sup>112</sup> Such use indicates that many people were unwilling to go through reels of microfilm unless they had a specific reference.

Although there have been seemingly no recent user studies of newspaper use in American public libraries, a number of studies have been conducted on historic newspaper use and newspaper digitization in libraries in the United Kingdom. A study was published in 2000 regarding the current status of newspaper digitization projects in public libraries.<sup>113</sup> Suzanne Mieczkowska

<sup>109</sup> David McKitterick. “Do We Want to Keep Our Newspapers.” <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Centre/Newspapers/mckitterick.htm>

<sup>110</sup> Karen Wittenborg. “A Librarian Looks at Preservation.” <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Centre/Newspapers/wittenborg.htm>

<sup>111</sup> David McKitterick. “Do We Want to Keep Our Newspapers?” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 35, no.3, (2003): 206.

<sup>112</sup> Nancy M Lenahan. “Use of Periodicals and Newspapers in a Mid-Sized Public Library.” *Serials Librarian*, 16, no. ¾, (1989).

<sup>113</sup> Suzanne Mieczkowska. “Investigating Newspaper Digitisation: Some Local Studies Perspectives.” *Newspaper Library News*, 29, (Winter 2000/2001). Retrieved online at <http://www.bl.uk/collections/nl29.html>.

found that only one such project existed and that it had been undertaken due to a fire that destroyed the library's clippings collection. She also did a survey of library users who used older newspapers. While most patrons wanted titles from the last 10 years, those patrons that did use older newspapers were most frequently searching for family or personal history information. The only other significant reason for use was access to non-property advertisements. One important finding Mieczkowska made was that over 70% of the users surveyed would have liked access to local papers over the Internet, indicating that people might use digitized newspapers collections.

Similar results were found through several NEWSPLAN surveys. NEWSPLAN is a project in the U.K. similar to the USNP that seeks to catalog and preserve as many newspapers as possible through preservation microfilming. NEWSPLAN Scotland did two surveys in 2002 and 2004 to study the use of historic newspapers on microfilm in Scottish Public Libraries.<sup>114</sup> They found that half of the users were reading titles less than 100 years old. Of those users who were seeking titles older than a hundred years, the major reasons for using the newspapers were family and local history. Users wanted to look at birth, marriage and death records. Other reasons for using the newspapers included weather reports, shipping records, information on soldiers, school board information, and gaining insight into the Scottish perspective on major historic events.

There is also little research literature on how the digitization of newspapers might change their public library usage, perhaps because most of the historical digital newspaper projects have been in existence less than two or three years. Nonetheless these sites are proving to be immensely popular. The Utah Digital Newspapers project has seen its number of daily visits almost triple in the course of the last year.<sup>115</sup> The creators of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* site found that their website received more usage than they ever imagined with an average of 60,000 visits per month.<sup>116</sup> They also found that the site's users were from different backgrounds. The most frequent reason for use was genealogical research, followed by historical research, academic and classroom use and general interest. They discovered that once the content was digitized it was used in a variety of other ways they did not expect. For example, a grant funded project to provide primary documents for K-12 students on Brooklyn has relied heavily on their website. The creators of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* ultimately hoped that their project would generate discussion about "the role of the public library in the digital world."

The ways in which public library patrons use historic newspapers are quite varied though several uses seem to prevail. Interest in local history and in genealogy are the two most frequently cited reasons for using older newspapers. This is not surprising as newspapers are frequently cited by both local historians and genealogists as important reference tools. David Kyvig who has written extensively on doing community history lists a variety of ways newspapers can be useful. "Careful newspaper research can pay rich rewards for the historian." Kyvig concludes "Detailed biographies may be found in the obituary columns. Business pages provide descriptions of new products, factories and business activities....Above all, the larger context in which matters of interest occurred should become more evident."<sup>117</sup>

## Genealogists and Newspapers

As indicated by the public library studies of newspapers, genealogists make extensive use of historic newspapers. Websites like Ancestry.com, Paper of Record and Newspaper Archive all

<sup>114</sup> For access to these surveys, please see "Newsplan Scotland Survey" <http://www.nls.uk/professional/newsplanscotland/survey.html>

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/unews/pdf/WebStats.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> Joy Holland and Susan Benz. "Unanticipated Outcomes." *Library Journal*, August 15, 2004. Accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>117</sup> Kyvig and Marty, pp 64-5.

seek to capitalize on this market. No academic studies have been done specifically regarding genealogists and the use of digital newspapers, but one useful study considered their general research habits.<sup>118</sup> Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson interviewed 10 genealogists, and discovered that they prefer informal sources such as leads from secondary sources and colleagues. The most important points of access for genealogists were names, dates, places, and subjects. In general, they learned that genealogists desire lists of names, name indexes, or search engines that retrieve by name. Genealogists also enumerated the difficulties they faced in distinguishing between different names, and explained that they often used city directories to clarify individual names. The next most important item for genealogists was the ability to do a geographic search to find out where someone lived. They frequently needed to consult maps or gazetteers to get town names, and wanted to be able to link current place names with former names so that they could use older names as search terms.

Genealogists make frequent use of newspapers to find obituaries as well as birth and marriage notices when tracing their family's history. On the Internet, there are a large number of guides regarding how to use newspapers for genealogical information, a testament to their popularity as a source.<sup>119</sup> In addition, there are a variety of articles that have been published, largely in genealogy periodicals, which provide insight into how genealogists make use of newspapers.

In an article published in 1980, Irene G. Sniffin observes that “newspapers in early days were the link to the outside world and now provide us with a good description of the community in its time.”<sup>120</sup> She gives detailed instructions on how to find newspaper indexes, pointing out that “without an index, it would remain a hidden, or more to the point, a buried treasure.” She also lists a number of useful types of information that can be used to find personal names such as judgments of the court and probate proceedings, both of which often give family relationships. Sniffin recommends looking for local post office lists of unclaimed letters to indicate if someone has moved away or to search advertisements of local businesses to try and determine an ancestor's occupation. In addition, she points to the fact that small town newspapers in early America also frequently listed travelers leaving for Europe, political committee members, and members of different parishes. She illustrates that there are many ways of finding names in newspaper. “Most importantly” Sniffin concludes, “by reading about the community in which he lived, there is the feel for the time and place of an ancestor. Thus biographical information can be obtained about ancestors even though they are not written into town and local histories.”<sup>121</sup>

Other professional genealogists have also published more recent articles on how to best use newspapers for genealogical research. The commercial magazine *Heritage Quest* is targeted at amateur genealogists and family historians, and it has published a number of recent articles about this topic. In one article Janet Elaine Smith gives an example of how she traced an ancestor through the newspapers and often found that the best information about their life was in brief articles about events such as wedding showers and a story about the death of child in a drowning. She suggests that “by following the newspaper accounts of her life we learn both who she is as well as a great deal of genealogical information.”<sup>122</sup> In another article by the same author, an example is given of how small details in an obituary can help lead to other information such as geographic details, family information, and other surprising tidbits.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps the most

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<sup>118</sup> Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson. “Where is the List with All the Names: Information Seeking Behavior of Genealogists.” *American Archivist*, 66, no. 1, (2003): 79-95.

<sup>119</sup> For example, please see <http://cyndislist.com/newspaper.htm>

<sup>120</sup> Irene G. Sniffin. “Newspapers as a Genealogical Source.” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 68, no. 3, (1980): 179.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>122</sup> Janet Elaine Smith. “Family History in the Newspaper”, *Heritage Quest*, (May-June 2002): 69.

<sup>123</sup> Janet Elaine Smith. “A Bit about the Obits.” *Heritage Quest*, (Jan-Feb 2002): 82-5.

interesting example of using newspapers provided in this magazine was an article by Kory L. Meyrink who argued that ethnic newspapers can provide a wealth of genealogical information about immigrants. Many people placed advertisements looking for lost family and friends and often these newspapers were the only place to find passenger lists, if no official list survived.<sup>124</sup>

Professional genealogist Sheila Benedict has also offered some salient advice as to how newspapers could be useful for research.<sup>125</sup> She argues that researchers should always read multiple days of a newspaper, to see if there were any corrections to previous information in the next day's newspaper. She also urges genealogists to use multiple newspapers. Benedict believes that newspapers are important sources, for they serve as "printed public memoirs of community events" and they often are the only records available. She concludes that to effectively use newspapers as a genealogical source, they must never be viewed in isolation from other sources.

Genealogists desire for older newspapers is reflected in the nature of public library's local history collections. In a survey of the literature on public libraries and digitization, it was found that one of the first items that many libraries digitized were indexes to obituaries or death notices published in local newspapers.<sup>126</sup> For example, the New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) and The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC) collaborated on an effort to upload the NOPL's Louisiana Biography & Obituary Index, a database of all the obituaries and death notices published in New Orleans newspapers from 1804 to 1972. As a result a variety of access points have been provided including a list of surnames and searching by last name, first name, and nickname.<sup>127</sup> Similarly the Utah Digital Newspapers project specifically allows users to search individual newspapers for names or keywords in these kinds of notices.<sup>128</sup> The commercial site Ancestry.com also supports proper name searching.<sup>129</sup> Another commercial site, Newspaperarchive.com, lists obituaries as their most frequently searched topic.<sup>130</sup>

The commercial sites listed above directly target their services to genealogists and family historians. Ancestry.com maintains message boards so people can help each other with research, and there is one dedicated to newspaper research.<sup>131</sup> The majority of questions are from people seeking help finding obituary information on a relative or information about murder cases and other crimes that have a personal connection. There were relatively few questions regarding particular historic events, other than famous crimes or tragedies.

One genealogist detailed his experiences with using historic newspapers at Ancestry.com and found it to be very helpful in finding information. James Petty found that in searching for an ancestor he found ten references, one to an obituary, several to articles about the man and several advertisements for his business. Petty suggests that genealogists need to go beyond their use of newspapers as a source for vital records only. He argues that "the newspaper was the extension of the neighborhood pub or quilting bee, where gossip of friends and foes, neighbors and family, and anyone who happened into sight or sound of the reporter was shared with anyone willing or able to read."<sup>132</sup> Genealogists should use and read newspapers to understand the community in which their ancestor lived, in order to paint a "true picture of who they were and how they lived."

<sup>124</sup> Kory L. Meyrink. "Newspaper Research Beyond Obituaries: Looking for Friends" *Heritage Quest*, (June 2004): 46-50

<sup>125</sup> Sheila Benedict. "Skillbuilding: Using Newspapers Effectively" *OnBoard*, 9, (September 2003): 20-22. Accessed online at <http://www.bcgcertification.org/skillbuilders/skbl039.html>

<sup>126</sup> For one example, please see Jeanne Holba Puacz, "Bringing Archives to Life on the Web: Vigo County Public Library" *Computers in Libraries*, 20, no. 2, (2000): 32-36.

<sup>127</sup> See <http://obits.gno.lib.la.us/nopl/obitindex.htm>

<sup>128</sup> See <http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/unews/pt.html>

<sup>129</sup> See <http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/periodicals/news/default.aspx>

<sup>130</sup> See <http://newspaperarchive.com/SearchTopTen.aspx>

<sup>131</sup> See [http://boards.ancestry.com/mbexec/board/an/topics.news\\_general](http://boards.ancestry.com/mbexec/board/an/topics.news_general)

<sup>132</sup> James W. Petty. "Getting the Big Picture of the Past through Newspapers." *Heritage Quest*, (July-August 2003): 39.

At times newspapers can be the most important source of genealogical information for a community. The daily lives of African Americans and other minority communities were often left out of mainstream newspapers. The director of a recently launched commercial project that plans to digitize the archives of 200 smaller historic black newspapers hopes to help address this issue. "Currently there are a very limited amount of resources to go to, to trace back African American families," Mark Channing explains, "One of the best ways is going to be these newspapers, because the focus of these papers has always been on community: the births, the deaths, the marriages and what not were heavily covered and that's one of the reasons that they have developed such a loyal following."<sup>133</sup>

Genealogists have also shown a great deal of interest being able to get access to digital images of documents and primary source materials. Public libraries have long been sources of local history and genealogy materials, and are increasingly digitizing their collections as a means of increasing access and preserving fragile materials. A case study was written about a public library in Wisconsin detailing their efforts to digitize their local history and genealogy collection and place them online. Materials included directories, maps, photographs and picture books. They mounted files as PDFs and HTML documents in order to make the process as simple as possible and easy for other libraries to imitate. Such digitization projects, these librarians believe, allow libraries to provide the "building blocks for historians of all stripes and training to satisfy a wide range of personal and professional information needs" as well as allowing libraries to be "repositories of the collective memories of their communities."<sup>134</sup>

There is a vast amount of library literature regarding the building of local history collections and one of the most frequently demanded items is newspaper indexes to articles, particularly obituaries. Many local libraries create newspaper clipping files to record all types of events and they are often the largest component of a local history collection. One North Carolina public library reported the frequent use of their newspaper clippings file by those searching for climactic reports which have been used in court and by both historians and novelists to help set the mood of a particular time.<sup>135</sup> Genealogists and local historians are unable to use local newspapers and clippings files effectively without some major access point.

The digitization of smaller newspapers would help eliminate some of these problems. By making digitized newspapers keyword searchable so that notices can be easily found, or by making obituaries or other notices a specific field that can be keyword searched, this material would not only be easier to find but it would also be easier to identify significant patterns, such as trends in mortality, or changes in the language of announcements that could be further analyzed to study demographic trends.

Digitization of small town newspapers offers a wealth of resources to the genealogist and the family historian. Local newspapers tend to focus specifically on one community and are often the best source for genealogical information. Many of the guides referenced above included extensive information on finding newspaper indexes and locating newspapers on microfilm. Digitization of newspapers would greatly aid genealogists unable to obtain rare microfilm copies of small town newspapers. By reading a local community's newspapers, many genealogists argue that they get a

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<sup>133</sup> Hays Goodman. "Companies Launch Historic Collaboration to Digitize Black Newspapers, Create Portal." *Newspapers & Technology*, [http://www.newsandtech.com/issues/2005/02-05/ot/02-05\\_blackpapers.htm](http://www.newsandtech.com/issues/2005/02-05/ot/02-05_blackpapers.htm).

<sup>134</sup> Don Litzer and Andy Barnett. "Local History in E-Books and on the Web: One Library's Experience as Example and Model." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 43, no. 3, (2003). Retrieved from Gale Expanded ASAP.

<sup>135</sup> Beverly Tetterton. "Unusual Requests for Local History Collections." *North Carolina Libraries*, 58, no. 1, (2000): 7-9.

better sense of the time and community in which their ancestor lived, often finding interesting tidbits of information along the way.

In summary, there are all types of materials found within newspapers that are important to genealogists. These include the following:

- Birth, marriage and death notices
- Memorials published on the anniversary of a death
- Engagement or wedding anniversary notices
- Social items such as notices of visitors from out of town or other community events with lists of participants
- News stories that identify events in which family members played roles
- Immigration records such as passenger lists for ships, or notices or advertisements posted by recent immigrants looking for family and friends
- Legal information such as reports of divorces, dissolutions of partnerships, tax lists, probate notices, land sales, and farms sales
- Military information such as news of enlistment, promotion, or casualty lists.
- Church information such as through the printing of parish lists.
- Advertisements
- Local government information including lists of who served on political committees

### **Use of Historic Newspapers by Educators**

While there has been little written regarding how teachers might use historic digital newspaper projects, most of the creators of different projects such as the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and the Utah Historic Newspapers Project have provided various anecdotal evidence such as grateful emails from teachers who have used their projects in a class. More research will likely be done as the projects mature and become better-known. Nonetheless, newspapers have been used by educators for years. Simply searching on the subject “newspapers in education” in the database Education Abstracts or ERIC produces a large number of results. The majority of these lesson plans and articles deal with teaching from current rather than historic newspapers to promote civic awareness, political knowledge, literacy or media understanding. Many newspaper publishers are heavily involved in this kind of “newspapers in education project” and will donate free copies of current newspapers to classroom teachers.<sup>136</sup>

In an article published in a 1980 issue of the *History Teacher*, a high school teacher created a comprehensive list of the ways historic newspapers could be used in the social studies classroom.<sup>137</sup> He used the microfilmed version of the *Virginia Gazette* from the eighteenth century and had students use it in class with guided exercises. This teacher also made the important point that before sending students to use historic newspapers they should have some knowledge about the general history of the time, the structure of the newspapers, and the language that might be used. Some of the many different subject areas he listed that could be studied include law & order, entertainment & sports, class distinctions, economic life, religious history, political life, geography and the history of science.

More recently, an article by librarian Walter Minkel in *School Library Journal* briefly discussed how historic newspaper databases were being used in the classroom.<sup>138</sup> His library subscribed to

<sup>136</sup> For an excellent guide to a number of online resources, please see <http://www.washingtontimes.com/education/guides/>.

<sup>137</sup> James B Schick. “Using the Microfilmed *Virginia Gazette* in Class” *The History Teacher*, 13, no. 2, (1980): 223-238.

<sup>138</sup> Walter Minkel. “Extra! Extra! Read All About the Past in Historic Newspaper Databases” *School Library Journal*, 48, no. 11, (2002): 56-7. Retrieved online from Gale Expanded ASAP

Proquest Historic Newspapers-*New York Times* and he found that it was used by teachers for various projects. The school's theatre department had students track changes over the decades in fashion ads, social studies classes scanned back issues for political cartoons, while another class tracked Holocaust coverage for 1938 to 1946. He believed that the biggest problem with the database was that the search interface actually offered too many choices. Minkel wanted easier browsing of individual dates, such as a student's birthday. The other major problem with digital newspapers was the prohibitive cost, highlighting the importance of having access to free resources.

Another educator explored the use of digital newspaper content by having his students use the Virginia Center for Digital History's "Geography of Slavery in Virginia", particularly their database of runaway slave advertisements compiled from newspapers.<sup>139</sup> Runaway slave advertisements have long been considered important documentary sources about the lives of slaves for they include information about clothing, personal appearance, as well as special trade skills. This database can be searched by gender, skill, and intent in running away-offering new ways of finding information in these advertisements quickly.<sup>140</sup> Students used the ads to compare regional differences in the ways slaves lived, draw information about slave clothing and dress, and also learned that many slaves possessed vocational skills. This teacher also provided advice for other teachers on how to select ads for study and suggested that they be used in combination with other primary sources. He concluded that "with all of this information in a single location on the Internet, students can ask their own research questions and search for answers across advertisements (and other classes of documents) in ways that would previously have been impossible."<sup>141</sup> By having access to actual primary source material, students were able to draw their own conclusions and engage with the past in a more meaningful way.

There are also a number of educational websites that provide advice to teachers on using historic newspapers in teaching. The well recognized website History Matters includes a "making sense of evidence" section that presents case studies of how scholars use and interpret different kinds of historical evidence. One guide is presented on "How to Analyze a Colonial Newspaper" where a full historical article is given to students to read, and then they can compare their thoughts with those of a professional historian in terms of the historical context and questions they should ask themselves as they read.<sup>142</sup> Another interesting example is a website created by the Illinois State Museum entitled "Clues to the Past—Newspaper Advertisements."<sup>143</sup> This website includes scanned newspaper advertisements from the 1840 *Alton Telegraph*, and includes a series of questions for students to answer about goods and employment. A similar example is an excellent educational guide on how to teach from abolitionist newspapers presented by the University of Texas at Austin.<sup>144</sup> This guide includes a number of recommended activities such as comparing mainstream and abolitionist press coverage of events, exploring justifications for slavery, and popular images of African Americans throughout history.

Ronald Zweig suggests that historic newspapers are an excellent resource for teaching history because they place events in historical context, describe them in easy accessible language, and offer a narrative free of scholarly and textbook interpretations. In addition, he points out that "the electronic edition makes a primary resource immediately available; the student can trace the

<sup>139</sup> Tom Costa and Brooke Doyle. "Runaway Slave Advertisements: Teaching From Primary Documents." *Social Education*, 68, no. 4, (2004): SS4-SS10. Retrieved online from Gale Expanded ASAP.

<sup>140</sup> See <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/explore.html>.

<sup>141</sup> Costa and Doyle, *ibid*.

<sup>142</sup> Please see <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/newspaper.htm#>.

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1800/clues/index.html>

<sup>144</sup> [http://utopia.utexas.edu/explore/team/Lesson\\_2.html](http://utopia.utexas.edu/explore/team/Lesson_2.html)

development of events in his or her own way, creating his or her own idiosyncratic linkages--and reaching his or her own conclusions."<sup>145</sup> The digitization of historic newspapers thus allows students to more actively participate in the learning process.

While there have been few specific studies on teaching and the use of historic digital newspapers, there is a great deal of literature about teaching and the use of electronic resources, particularly primary sources online. Many of the same conclusions about other primary source materials can also be supported for newspapers. History professor Mark Tebeau argues in an article for the *Journal of American History* that the increasing sophistication of primary sources online offers a new opportunity to refocus teaching efforts.<sup>146</sup> He praises the democratizing effect of this growth, making primary sources available not just to scholars in archives but downloadable at home and at school. As part of their assignments, Tebeau regularly has his students search for new primary sources online. He believes that all of this growth leads to a number of opportunities including making active learning part of the classroom by allowing for dynamic interpretations and constructions of the past. By making more resources available for teaching, teachers can expand beyond the textbook. Through interpreting primary source materials on their own and in groups, students are drawn into the processes of historical reasoning and critical thinking. Tebeau also suggests that the growing number of primary sources online allows for new partnerships between college professors and high school teachers for shared curriculum development. This type of collaboration offers challenges and opportunities for educators of all levels, and newspapers could be an excellent primary source around which to build a curriculum.

### **Uses of Newspapers in the Museum Community**

While many other communities view the newspaper as a historical or reference source, the museum community frequently makes use of newspapers as objects for visual displays and exhibits. Some museums are devoted to the examination of a particular newspaper while others have focused on the technological aspects of printing and production. Often museums use newspaper clippings as part of displays, to illustrate a particular topic or to add historical context to an exhibit.

Some newspapers have established museums that serve as a celebration of their own history. The Scott Trust, proprietor of the *Guardian Newspaper*, opened what has been called a "newseum" in 2002. It serves both as a museum display of the newspaper's history and an educational center.<sup>147</sup> Their main display includes shelves of bound newspapers and walls covered with memorable front pages. There is also a room used for temporary exhibitions and lectures that will serve as a venue to discuss the press and its freedoms. A reading room is also provided with an extensive back archive of the newspaper. One target group of visitors is children because the museum includes a schoolroom, where children are briefed on how to put a newspaper together, such as doing research, interviewing, writing and producing a newspaper. This museum's use of a newspaper is interesting for it combines a display of the newspaper as an object, with the idea of a newspaper as a reference source and an educational tool.

There is at least one other museum that is devoted entirely to one individual newspaper, the Stars and Stripes Museum/Library. They actively collect all materials related to this particular newspaper including back issues, personal letters of soldiers and editors, and other material

<sup>145</sup> Ronald W. Zweig. "Lessons from the Palestine Post Project" *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 13, no. 2, (1998): 94.

<sup>146</sup> Mark Tebeau. "Pursuing E-Opportunities in the History Classroom" *Journal of American History*, 89, no. 4, (2003). Retrieved online at <http://www.historycooperative.press.uiuc.edu/>

<sup>147</sup> Felicity Heywood. "The Newseum: The Newsroom Archive and Visitor Centre." *Museums Journal*, July, (2002): 41.



related to the newspaper. All of these materials are on display in the museum's Missouri location. A research archive has also been created as part of this museum.<sup>148</sup>

Smaller museums have also devoted part of their exhibit space to local newspapers. The Edmond Historical Society & Museum of Oklahoma maintains a permanent exhibit on *The Edmond Sun*, the local newspaper and oldest newspaper in Oklahoma.<sup>149</sup> Many smaller local museums and historical societies often use the town's newspaper archives when seeking clippings to add context to historical exhibits, such as illustrations of old buildings, prominent citizens or photographic vistas.

A few museums that make extensive use of newspapers for their exhibits are those museums that are devoted to printing technology, such as The MacKenzie Printery & Newspaper Museum in Ontario, Canada. This museum is devoted to studying the history of Canadian newspapers as well as the larger history of printing. It has presented various exhibits including a history of playing cards, posters, and one on the history of several Canadian newspapers. Part of their permanent exhibit includes original printing presses, a newspaper composition room, and a large number of historic newspapers.<sup>150</sup> Newspapers also play a prominent part of exhibits when visual artists made extensive use of them in their work. A recent exhibition by the Sackler Museum at Harvard displayed the newspaper clippings and photographs that Ben Shahn used as inspiration for some of his paintings.<sup>151</sup>

The largest museum devoted to newspapers is the International Newspaper Museum of the City of Aachen, Germany. This extensive museum holds a collection of over 160,000 historic newspapers, which serve as both a historic archive and exhibit objects. The website includes a gallery of front pages of various historic newspapers.<sup>152</sup> Their collection criteria include having at least one newspaper from every region of the world as well as collecting first, last and anniversary editions and newspapers with historic headlines. This museum is devoted to newspapers both as a historic source of information and as aesthetic artifacts. Special exhibits have included a study of how death is represented in newspapers, newspaper headlines following World War One, and a headline display of German American newspapers. Their permanent exhibit includes selected issues of newspapers that demonstrate how newspapers have changed over the last 400 years, with a particular focus on Germany.

Newspapers have also been used by museums to help further their understanding of the material culture of a particular time. In the 1980s, several Canadian museums worked together to create an index of nineteenth century newspaper advertisements to try and understand the realm of goods and services available at the time. This project then evolved into a broader indexing and subject treatment of newspaper advertisements and notices to try and help develop a broader understanding of material culture. The authors suggest that

Of the primary written/printed documents available for the study of material culture, newspapers provide a unique and continuous source of information about time and place. Then, as now, they serve a wide public and motivate the mechanisms of communication, commerce and to some extent, social regulation. In so doing, they provide a revealing glimpse of an otherwise inaccessible range of cultural nuances, including overall patterns of material and commercial exchange which indicate a scale of attributed value and available

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.starsandstripesmuseumlibrary.org/Default.html>

<sup>149</sup> Please see, [http://www.edmondhistory.org/exhi\\_news.html](http://www.edmondhistory.org/exhi_news.html).

<sup>150</sup> For more information, please see the website <http://www.mackenzieprintery.ca/index.shtml>.

<sup>151</sup> John R. Stomburg. "Ben Shahn's New York: The Photography of Modern Times: An Exhibition Review." *Winterthur Portfolio*, 35, no. 2/3, (2000): 189-203.

<sup>152</sup> Please see, <http://www.izm.de/english/>

resources.<sup>153</sup>

Newspaper advertisements are frequently cited as excellent sources for museum researchers seeking to understand the material culture of a time when designing an exhibit. For example, a teacher guide created by the Northern Illinois University Libraries suggests that teachers can use newspaper advertisements from the early 1800s in Illinois to show “new stock arriving in stores, describe homes for sale, and provide clues to trade patterns.”<sup>154</sup>

## Challenges and Opportunities of Newspaper Digitization

### Challenges of Newspaper Digitization

Historic newspapers are not an easy source to digitize; their heterogeneous nature complicates the process. Although there are a number of excellent digital newspaper projects that have made the entire newspaper page image available for viewing<sup>155</sup>, a variety of projects, both commercial and freely available have only digitized the text of major features and articles not the entire newspaper.<sup>156</sup> Professor Ronald Zweig who oversaw the digitization of the historic *Palestine Post* argues that this lessens the values of newspapers as historical sources:

Newspapers have always employed layout and typography to draw attention to specific information and to give emphasis to certain features of the news. The page on which the information appears, the position on the page, the size of the type, and the prominence of the headers associated with the article all convey information of importance both to the contemporary reader, and to the researcher in later years. Consequently, the digital conversion process must not only make the content of the newspaper accessible, but also preserve its visual form. Retrieved information must be presented in its physical, spatial context so that all information contained in the printed page be made available to the reader—both the text and its manifestation in newsprint.<sup>157</sup>

Being able to view the entire newspaper is particularly important for media historians and communications scholars who study the form of the newspaper, the placement of language, and the images used. In addition, by digitizing the entire page image, researchers have access to parts of the newspaper that have often been overlooked as important sources of information such as advertisements, obituaries, or the society pages.

In fact, researchers have often lamented that commercial full text newspaper archives do not provide access to the entire content of the newspaper, let alone page images. Two social science researchers commented that while they enjoyed the quick access and keyword searching provided by Lexis-Nexis, online keyword searches in any newspaper collection can lead to the problems of “false negatives” and “false positives.” In addition, keyword searching can be problematic in older newspaper collections because “the meaning of words changes over time and it is possible to conceive of keywords which would produce ‘false negatives’ in one era but ‘false positives’ in another era when a word becomes much more widely used.”<sup>158</sup>

<sup>153</sup> Claudia Haagen and Debra McNabb. “The Use of Primary Documents as Computerized Collection Records for the Study of Material Culture.” *Material History Bulletin*. 20, (1984): 60.

<sup>154</sup> Janice Tauer Wass. “Teaching History With Material Culture.” Retrieved from <http://www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/iht529802.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Please see the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online, <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/index.htm> or the Utah Digital Newspapers <http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/unews/>.

<sup>156</sup> Please see Accessible Archives, <http://www.accessible.com/about.htm>.

<sup>157</sup> Zweig, *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>158</sup> Keith Soothill and Chris Glover. “A Note on Computer Searches of Newspapers.” *Sociology*, 31, no. 3, (1997): 593.

These scholars also echoed Zweig's concern about losing not just graphics and pictures, but also the layout of text. They assert that the placement of a news story is crucial to some research studies in terms of assessing how much importance was given to a particular topic. They suggest that the relationship of the different features on the page can be significant for many researchers. Interestingly, they commented that while the use of microfilm was only one stage removed from "seeing, touching and smelling newspapers in the same way as readers experience newspapers," they also felt that "the use of computer searches means that no sensory experience is shared directly with the persons reading newspapers for even the written text looks different."<sup>159</sup> While these researchers were speaking of databases like Lexis-Nexis which provide access to newspaper stories removed entirely from the newspaper itself, many current digitization efforts are providing access to full page images. Digitization of an entire newspaper rather than selected articles is important for it ensures that the entire newspaper is available for viewing in its original context.

## Opportunities of Newspaper Digitization

### Providing Access to Smaller Local and Regional Newspapers

In the *Newspaper and the Historian*, Salmon suggested that smaller newspapers can be used to understand social and material conditions of local communities, and that a great deal can be learned by determining what information is not included. A good example of this is reflected in the work of one scholar who examined four Oregon newspapers from 1870 to the 1880s and demonstrated how they virtually excluded the Chinese community. None of the papers included this community in the listings of births, marriages, death, or society news. Chinese immigrants were described in subhuman or derogatory terms on the rare occasions they were mentioned.<sup>160</sup> By including smaller papers in digitization projects, libraries can expand the places scholars can look for primary source material and historical evidence. In fact, many of these sources have only begun to be mined for the information they contain.

Anthropology professor Richard Hitchcock has argued that since many small local papers maintained exchanges with other local newspapers and served as correspondents for major city dailies, they also helped to establish important communication networks in the nineteenth century. He concludes that "even the smallest incident might receive widespread circulation in the state, this fact must not be overlooked by the researcher who may well find material relating to their geographical area in the pages of other local papers or in the city dailies."<sup>161</sup> Hitchcock also advises that effective research with local newspapers also requires knowledge of the geographic area and of the national and world events that might have impacted the study area. This point reflects the fact that digitized geographic resources such as gazetteers and maps could be helpful tools when conducting newspaper research.

A study that surveyed how primary sources were being used and what was wanted by researchers offered similar conclusions. The author suggested that many scholars did not know what was available in smaller newspapers due to problems with getting them on microfilm, and explains that "researchers who rely on major metropolitan dailies may not appreciate the enormity of the problem for smaller cities and towns, yet much research with a local focus depends on the availability of newspapers."<sup>162</sup> For example, the editors of the papers of Frederick Douglass discovered that most of the texts of speeches he delivered in opposition to slavery appeared only

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 595.

<sup>160</sup> Herman Chiu. "Power of the Press: How Newspapers in Four Communities Erased Thousands of Chinese From Oregon History" *American Journalism*, 16, no. 1, (1999):

<sup>161</sup> Hitchcock, p. 190.

<sup>162</sup> Gordon, *ibid.*, 67.

in the newspapers of the towns that he toured. Recovering those texts required extensive travel and greater costs for the project. If these newspapers had been digitized, gathering his materials together would have been much easier and might even have facilitated the discovery of previously unidentified speeches.

### **Expanded Access & Reframing Research Possibilities**

Scholars who use newspapers have complained that their studies have been limited due to access to relevant newspapers. Several journalism historians tracing the evolution of the summary news lead and inverted pyramid story analyzed 20 newspapers from 1860 to 1910.<sup>163</sup> Their research study was specifically designed around the limits of microfilm. They studied every fifth year of a newspaper and then analyzed seven issues for each newspaper. They counted stories in each issue that used the summary news lead. The researchers noted that they had access to only those newspapers available in Los Angeles area libraries on microfilm, and suggested that since they could only use major newspapers a sufficient regional comparison would be difficult due to lack of available content.

Similar complaints have been offered by other scholars about the paucity of newspapers from certain regions of the country, particularly Southern newspapers. In an article comparing editorials regarding violence against abolitionists in Northern and Southern newspapers, Jeffrey Rutenbeck apologized for his seeming Northern bias and lamented the problems of locating newspapers for the given period, especially in Southern states.<sup>164</sup> Another scholar who studies political violence and strikes argues that one of the main problems in using newspapers to support his studies is that the collections available to him are insufficient. He contends that to do a sufficient study and ensure data reliability “systematic periodic comparisons across as many papers from different ideological and geographical positions as possible should be made.”<sup>165</sup> Digitization of newspapers would make it easier for papers to be searched more quickly and a researcher would not necessarily need to spend so much time creating a sampling methodology and thus could spend more time reading. One remaining issue is the inability to search across different collections of digital newspapers at the same time

If more papers were digitized, scholars would have easier access to more newspapers and could expand their regional perspective, and possibly do more thorough comparisons. Scholars could view historical digital newspapers online rather than having to travel to distant repositories to scroll through microfilm. Christopher Vaughan, a professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers has made several excellent points about the opportunities and challenges of newspaper digitization.<sup>166</sup> He points out that newspaper use in research is often based on availability, which privileges proximity and causes a “certain imbalanced cosmopolitanism.” In addition, the *New York Times* is greatly overrepresented in its use as a historical source not only due to the fact that it has an extensive index but also due to the problem of presentism. Researchers project this paper’s current importance into the past when there were actually other newspapers that served as the “papers of record” for the time. Selective newspaper digitization by major vendors such as Gale and Proquest threatens to make this problem worse he suggests, because they are only making available the past content of major national newspapers

<sup>163</sup> Marcus Errico, et. al. “The Evolution of the Summary News Lead” *Media History Monographs*, 1, no. 1, (1996). Retrieved online at <http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/mediahistory/mhmjour1-1.htm>

<sup>164</sup> Rutenbeck, *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Franzosi, Roberto. “The Press As A Source of Socio-Historical Data: Issues in the Methodology of Data Collection from Newspapers” *Historical Methods*, 20, no. 1, (1987): 8.

<sup>166</sup> Christopher Vaughn. “Expanding the Focus of Historical Inquiry through Newspaper Digitization” Abstract. Presented at DRH 2003. [http://arc.cs.odu.edu:8080/dp9/getrecord/oai\\_dc/harvester.pkp.ubc.ca/oai:harvester.pkp.ubc.ca:record/2916](http://arc.cs.odu.edu:8080/dp9/getrecord/oai_dc/harvester.pkp.ubc.ca/oai:harvester.pkp.ubc.ca:record/2916)

such as *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *London Times*. Librarian David Stoker offers a similar caveat, arguing that “where historians have consulted newspapers in a systematic way, it has tended to be restricted to those national titles such as the *Times*”<sup>167</sup>.

Vaughan rightly suggests that the digitization of smaller and older major papers such as the *New York Post* or the *Toronto Star* adds a second national perspective but still leads to the continuing domination of “cosmopolitan capitals.” He believes commercial resources like Newspaperarchive.com, a digitized archive of hundreds of smaller local newspapers, help to provide a “broader vision of the digital past.” Vaughn also contends that by increasing the number of available papers, “the contours of the digitally available past are shifting, with implications for potential patterns of evidentiary sourcing that are still developing.” In summation, Vaughn echoes many other scholars who contend that we are only beginning to discover the ways in which newspaper digitization will change newspaper use and historical scholarship.

### **Unlocking Newspaper Content: The Benefits of Computerized Searching?**

Perhaps the most important enhancement that digitization brings to newspaper researchers is the ability to do advanced searching, whether through keyword searching or the ability to limit searches to particular news categories. Ronald Zweig offers the caveat, however, that “searches of computerized newspapers usually return so many successful ‘hits’ for almost any search query that the researcher is once again confronted with the problem of sifting through unmanageably large quantities of data.”<sup>168</sup> He suggests that current advanced searching techniques such as keyword searching, proximity filters and Boolean operators are not very effective unless the page of newspaper text has been structured and segmented. While this type of segmenting is typically done with newspapers digitized by commercial software products such as Olive Software’s ActivePaper Archive and CONTENTdm, this feature is not typically available with smaller freely available newspaper collections. Some projects have used optical character recognition (OCR) and proprietary segmentation technology to make it possible to search not just the full text of the newspaper, but to restrict a search to just articles, advertisements or images. Other projects have simply used OCR technology to make the entire text of the newspaper searchable, without the ability to restrict searches to particular news objects. A number of projects have created digital facsimiles that only allow viewing of newspaper images as either PDFs or TIFF files without any searching capabilities. In order to realize their full potential, historical digital newspapers should support keyword searching of both the entire newspaper and individual news objects while also supporting the ability to browse the newspaper by date.

Zweig also suggests that natural language processing techniques could help improve newspaper searching such as “statistical sampling of the retrieved texts to suggest alternative search strategies”, an option for relevance sorting, the ability to integrate thesauri, and allowing users to make search improvements so that would “in turn allow the search engine to refine its strategy by a learning process.”<sup>169</sup> To date, it seems that none of the currently available newspaper digitization projects have implemented his suggestions.

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<sup>167</sup> Stoker, *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Zweig, p. 89.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

## **Conclusion**

Historic newspapers are used for a variety of purposes by a large number of different communities. The creation of digital historical newspaper collections will support a variety of research uses, and may even be used in new ways as digital collections mature and become better known. While many traditional research uses by genealogists and historians will likely continue, the creation of large historical newspaper collections available as searchable XML files might also lead to new research with more advanced computer science technologies such as data mining, topic detection and tracking, temporal detection of events and automatic summarization to name a few.