

Newspapers: a Window to North Carolina's Past

by Chris Mulder and Denise Sigmon

"Many people like newspapers, but few preserve them; yet the most interesting reading imaginable is a file of old newspapers. It brings up the very age, with all its bustle and every day affairs, and marks its spirit more than the most laboured description of the historian."— from the *Wilson Advance*, reprinted in *The Daily Journal*, New Bern, Nov. 20, 1892.

As these words from over one hundred years ago suggest, our state's local newspapers provide not only a detailed account of our history, social life, and accomplishments but also capture the essence of our culture. Unfortunately, these rich resources of information about our past frequently are found crumbling on library shelves, in storage rooms of newspaper offices, or in attics and barns. The mission of the North Carolina Newspaper Project (NCNP) is to save our state's newspapers by identifying, cataloging, and preserving them. The State Library of North Carolina and the State Archives have joined forces to accomplish this mission. State Library staff travel throughout North Carolina to find newspapers, catalog them, and record location information. Archives staff microfilm the newspapers to preserve them for present and future use. The North Carolina Newspaper Project is part of a nationwide effort called the United States Newspaper Program. All fifty states participate in this program that the National Endowment for the Humanities partially funds and the Library of Congress coordinates.

NCNP staff have identified over 2,000 newspaper titles published in North Carolina, including the *North Carolina Gazette*, first published in New Bern in 1751. They have completed an inventory of North Carolina newspaper titles at the N.C. Division of Archives and History, UNC-Chapel Hill's North Carolina Collection, and Duke University's Perkins Library. NCNP staff currently are identifying additional newspapers throughout the state.

Search and Rescue

NCNP staff are now on a search and rescue mission in all of North Carolina's one hundred counties to locate old newspapers and save them from obscurity and deterioration. Counties with few microfilmed newspapers are being visited first. Project staff travel

to libraries, newspaper offices, museums, and local government agencies in each county. During their visits, NCNP staff examine original print newspapers as well as newspapers on microfilm. They inspect any print newspapers that are not available on microfilm to determine the condition of the paper and the completeness of the issues located. Staff also check newspaper titles on microfilm for completeness and condition as well as for location and quality of the master microfilm reels. Archives staff use this information as part of their selection criteria when establishing microfilming priorities for the project.

Preserving our state's newspapers would be impossible without the support of the people of North Carolina. The participation of librarians and newspaper publishers is particularly crucial to the success of the project. Librarians write articles for their area newspapers and contact local collectors. Newspaper publishers print press releases about NCNP and lend their collections for microfilming. These efforts help ensure the success of the project.

The public library in each county seat usually serves as the project's initial contact point. Before the NCNP staff arrive, notices in the local newspaper describe the project, list needed newspaper titles and issues, and announce the date and time when project staff will be at the public library. Citizens are encouraged to participate in the project by bringing needed newspapers to the library during that time. These efforts help to educate the people of the community about the project and the importance of preserving the state's history for the future. Each host library receives a table top display, project brochures, posters, and want lists. The want lists include newspaper titles and coverage dates needed for the county. Newspaper publishers, historical and genealogical organizations, and other libraries also receive copies of the brochures, posters, and want lists.

Field team staff had completed search and rescue operations in forty-six counties by the end of 1994. Some newspapers identified for preservation in those counties are awaiting transport to Raleigh until Archives staff are ready to microfilm them.

*La•gniappe (län-yap', län' yap') n. An extra or unexpected gift or benefit.
[Louisiana French]

Microfilming

Archives staff prepare the newspapers for microfilming by arranging them in chronological order, ironing wrinkled pages, and mending damaged sheets. They create master negative microfilm reels that are kept in a vault to protect them from damage. In addition to a master negative, they also create a master copy to use in reproducing reels for individuals and libraries wishing to purchase them. Information about the cost and content of this microfilm can be obtained from the Archives and Records Section, Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2807, or by calling the Correspondence Archivist at (919) 733-3952.

Microfilmed copies are also available for researchers in the Archives Search Room. The Search Room, located on the second floor of the Archives and History/State Library Building in Raleigh, is open Tuesday through Friday from 8:00 to 5:30 and on Saturday from 9:00 to 5:00.

How to Find Newspapers

Users may locate newspapers included in the North Carolina Newspaper Project through computerized searching on OCLC or in sources provided by the State Library on the Internet.

OCLC

Project staff catalog each newspaper title and provide location information in OCLC. This information indicates the issues owned by libraries and whether the newspapers are available on paper or microfilm. Inter-library loan (ILL) staff at libraries may search OCLC to determine locations for specific newspaper titles. After retrieving an OCLC record, ILL staff may request holdings under **ulncpu** (US Newspaper Program) or **ulncsa** (North Carolina Online Union Catalog). The OCLC symbol for the Division of Archives and History is **sa4**. NCNP staff are entering microfilm holdings into OCLC for the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill, Hunter Library at Western Carolina University, Joyner Library at East Carolina University, and many other libraries that have purchased newspapers on microfilm.

Internet

The State Library's Gopher and World-Wide Web (WWW) servers provide information about NCNP and the *Guide to Newspapers on Microfilm in the North Carolina State Archives*, an alphabetical listing by town of all newspapers microfilmed by the Archives. The WWW server also includes maps depicting projected completion dates for local fieldwork.

The host address for the Gopher server is hal.dcr.state.nc.us. From the State Library's top level menu select **North Carolina Resources**, then select **North Carolina Newspaper Project**. The URL (Uniform Resource Locator) for graphical browsers on the WorldWideWeb for the North Carolina Newspaper Project is <http://hal.dcr.state.nc.us/tss/newspape.htm>. The URL for the text-only version is <http://hal.dcr.state.nc.us/tss/newstext.htm>.

News Flash: Headlines from our Past and Insights for Today

One fascinating observation made by the NCNP staff in their work with old newspapers is that today's concerns are not that much different from those of the past. For example, one source from the last century illustrates that the national debt was just as much of a concern then as it is now. An article from 1867 states that, "A pretty fair estimate of the magnitude of the National debt may be formed when ... in the last statement, a clerical error occurred of some thirteen millions of dollars. When a clerk has room for making a trifling error like that, it may be assumed that the entire debt must be moderately large." In another example, our ancestors' hope for world peace is revealed. An editor writes an article in an 1855 paper about a "dynamite balloon," a new invention by Russell Thayer. He goes on to say that if "adopted and admitted to general use among the nations it will do more to put a period to wars than anything known."

Newspapers invite us into their pages for information, inspiration, education, and entertainment. From their pages we learn what people were wearing, what price they paid for a loaf of bread, what their leisure activities were, and how they reacted to the events of their time. Some of the unique and wonderful newspapers available on microfilm include *Live Giraffe*, *French Broad Hustler*, *Hornet's Nest*, *Wide Awake*, *Foolkiller*, *Naked Truth*, *Rasp*, and *We Know*. These old papers capture time and place and are a unique and wonderful resource for anyone. They provide a window on the past that informs, entertains, and enlightens all who read them. Perhaps even more important, the lessons learned and recorded in our state's newspapers provide perspectives and insights for today that are not preserved in any other source.

Additional Information

For additional information on NCNP, contact John Welch, Project Director and Assistant State Librarian, Phone: (919) 733-2570. If you have information about North Carolina newspapers, contact Chris Mulder, NCNP Fieldwork Coordinator, Phone: (919) 733-4488; Fax: (919) 733-1843; Internet E-mail address: cmulder@hal.dcr.state.nc.us. For assistance with the Gopher and WorldWideWeb servers, contact the North Carolina Network Information Center, State Library of North Carolina, Phone: (919) 733-3270; Fax: (919) 733-5679; E-mail address: slis.nic@ncdcr.dcr.state.nc.us.

