

History of NEWSpapers

When we think of news, we usually mean any *new* information that we have never received before, from any source, and in any format. Chatting with your neighbour may yield news; a picture of your newborn niece is news; radio announcements and weather reports qualify as news; even text messaging your parents supplies them with newsworthy updates.

But what if you hold a piece of information so astonishing, so breathtaking, that you absolutely must share it with everyone. Not just your family and neighbours, co-workers and friends, but the entire city, state, country... the world? How do you do that?

In pre-historic times, you might have painted a picture on a cavern wall to instruct future travelers of your discoveries. In China, 200 B.C. you might have made a simple letter and copied it many times for all of the government officials. In ancient Rome, you might have nailed your hand-written notes to the wall of the Forum.

It wouldn't be until the invention of the printing press in the mid 1400's that you could have broadcast your news beyond a very limited

geographic sphere and retain its accuracy. By the 1500's, the infrastructure of news delivery by way of a postal system was established. In the 1600's the doors to widespread communications were flung open as news was not only published by press, and delivered by horse, boat and foot, but it actually traveled the continents on a regularly recurring schedule.

All the ingredients needed for the modern newspaper were now in place. You'd have to wait until the 18th century before the general population could actually read what was printed on the paper. The fledgling newspaper industry doomed by illiteracy? Almost.

Why would you buy something that you couldn't read? Who could afford to spend any money on a weekly basis for news you could still get pieces of at the market, at the docks or in church?

A 1998 Thinkquest article explains, "In the early 1800's the development of continuous rolls of paper enhanced the original Gutenberg Press as did a steam powered press and a way to use iron instead of wood for building presses. This added efficiency of printing made the prices of printed goods more reasonable hence the term

'penny press'. This phrase originated when newspaperman Benjamin Day dropped the price of his New York Sun to a penny a copy in 1833. Historians have accredited the 'penny press' as the first true mass medium."

In an interview with one John Donner, for the Hamilton Evening Times, Wednesday, March 30, 1892, Donner recalls his life around 1834.

"Their boat that plied between Hamilton and Toronto stopped at Oakville then as it does now, and thus we got our daily news from Toronto and we had to pay \$6 a year for a four-page weekly paper."

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