Newspapers Part 3: An Expanding Press Champions Economic and Social Progress [1]

Newspapers

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An Expanding Press Champions Economic and Social Progress

With the Civil War [5], predictably, most North Carolina newspapers suspended publication, as many editors and printers entered military service, printing supplies became increasingly scarce, and the economy worsened. Papers in Wilmington, Fayetteville, and Raleigh continued to appear sporadically. After the war, the state's larger papers resumed regular publication, as did weeklies in many small towns. As the postwar recovery took hold, additional newspapers were founded, several of them becoming the leading lights of North Carolina journalism throughout the twentieth century. The *Raleigh News and Observer* [6] (1865), *Wilmington Morning Star* [7] (1867), *Charlotte Observer* [8] (1869), *Asheville Citizen-Times* [9] (1870), *Statesville Record and Landmark* [10] (1874), *Raleigh Times* (1879), *Watauga Democrat* (1888), *Greensboro News and Record* [11] (1890), *Durham Herald-Sun* [12] (1894), and *Winston-Salem Journal* [13] (1897) all trace back to this period.

Changes in newspapers that had begun in northern cities during the war slowly began to take root in North Carolina and other southern states. Among these changes were the increased use of professional reporters to gather the news; the use of the telegraph [14] to speed news transmissions; the appearance of one-column, multiple-deck headlines on the front page; and more editorials and advertisements [15]. There were technological developments in the printing [16] process as well. In 1866 a paper-making technique that used wood pulp instead of rags was introduced in the United States. Linotype machines began to appear, along with cutting, folding, and collecting devices. There was some primitive photoengraving in the early 1870s, but sketch artists remained prevalent.

By 1873 journalism had acquired the status of a profession, represented by the founding of the North Carolina Press Association [17] in Goldsboro in May. Representatives from 28 newspapers were present at the "convention," which established a central depository for information about each paper's ownership and passed resolutions relating to subscription practices, editorial staff, advertising rates, and mechanical specifications. The organization's executive committee was instructed to research the character and reliability of advertising agencies, which were distrusted by most newspaper executives.

Some papers, such as the staunchly Democratic [18] *Fayetteville Eagle* (1868-75), published racist editorials during the 1890s and afterward. A white supremacy political movement at the time, along with rumors of race riots, made the issue of race a controversial but intriguing topic for newspaper readers. A lack of respect for, or outright animosity toward, Black people was a common failing of many editors, who were often reticent when it came to reporting on lynching [19]s or condemning lynch mobs. African American newspapers fought against racism and injustice whenever possible. The *Wilmington Daily Record* (1892-98), founded by Alexander L. Manly as the "Only Negro Daily in the World," supported progressive causes in Wilmington's Black community. Racial tensions forced the paper to cease publication and Manly to leave Wilmington shortly before the printing plant and offices were destroyed in the Wilmington coup of 1898 [20].

Despite their relative silence on race issues during this era, many editors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to promote social causes and uncover rampant political corruption, helping North Carolina to achieve a reputation as a progressive southern state. Some journalists began to call attention to environmental issues, such as the need for flood control legislation and protection of North Carolina's oyster [21] interests. Newspapers like the *Charlotte News* (1888)-for decades the largest and most successful afternoon daily in North Carolina-emerged as a strong liberal force, uncovering public fraud and corruption and pushing to improve local government.

One of the state's most influential journalistic crusaders was Josephus Daniels [22], the legendary editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, who turned that newspaper into arguably the most powerful political voice in North Carolina. After buying the paper in 1894, Daniels conducted a campaign to curb railroad power and make railroads [23] pay taxes like other corporations. He distrusted all "big business" and fought the "tobacco trust," advocating antitrust legislation, free coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, and the direct election of senators. Daniels was also an early supporter of women suffrage [24], workmen's compensation laws, and the regulation of child labor [25].

Daniels's reputation fares less well in the area of race relations, however. In the "white supremacy" campaign of 1898, the *News and Observer* warned readers of "Negro domination"; it later supported an amendment to the state constitution that

effectively disfranchised [26]most Black voters. (In 1944, while opposing southern efforts to write a white supremacy plank in the Democratic platform, he wrote that he was ashamed of his earlier racism.)

A progressive and competitive press helped the state move forward economically, politically, and socially during the twentieth century. With improved transportation came increased circulation and influence for many papers, especially large city dailies such as the *Charlotte Observer*, *Greensboro Daily News*, and *Raleigh News and Observer*. One of the important causes was the building and maintenance of quality roads and highways. Promoted by editors as early as 1911, the idea led to the formation of the State Highway Commission [27] in 1915, a year before passage of a Federal Highway Act. As a result of this movement, North Carolina ultimately became known as the "Good Roads State [28]." The *Elizabeth City Independent*, led by William O. Saunders, took on problems of racial hatred and the actions of the Ku Klux Klan [29]. Over the decades the press across the state spoke out on a variety of other issues, including educational reform, industrial development, internal improvements [30], conservation initiatives, civil rights [31], and improved race relations.

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