

Access to Vermont Newspapers

By Scott Andrew Bartley

Newspapers, despite being a major source of genealogical information, are often overlooked by researchers. This is primarily due to the difficulty involved with finding out what was published and whether copies still exist today. This issue is now being addressed from a national level to the benefit of genealogists and historians alike with a massive project called the [U.S. Newspaper Program](#). Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project's goal is to identify all newspapers ever published, microfilm all extant copies, and catalog them. The cataloged records are kept locally and uploaded to the national database maintained by the [Online Computer Library Center \(OCLC\)](#). OCLC is the most commonly used cataloging source for public and private libraries. Because this is a consortium project, the microfilms will be available to anyone at their local library through inter-library loan. The project includes all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Vermont was the last state to join, though as a small state, the project is already finished.

The "Vermont Newspapers Project" was a cooperative effort between the University of Vermont Libraries and the Vermont Department of Libraries – caretakers of the two largest collections of Vermont newspapers. Staff members working on the project searched public and academic libraries, historical societies, archives, publishers, and private collectors. Between 1994 and 2000 the effort led to the identification of 900 Vermont newspapers and the microfilming of 260,000 pages. The [Vermont Newspaper Project](#) website features a catalog of all known newspapers and a list of the 100 repositories in which the collections are kept. The catalog can be searched by repository, by alphabetical list of titles, or via a search engine that allows title, place, or Boolean keyword searches. The official repository for the microfilms created by the project is the Vermont State Law Library in Montpelier.

A newbie by settlement standards of the east coast, Vermont has an early history of printing. The oldest newspaper was the *Vermont Gazette*, published in Westminster from 1781 to 1783 by Alden, Spooner, & Green. Interestingly, the printing press used was the first one brought to the colonies from England in 1683. The oldest continuously published family-owned newspaper in the country is the *Rutland Herald*, covering the entire state since 1794. Newspaper publishing was centered in four locations: Bennington, Brattleboro, Rutland, and Burlington. Most towns in Vermont had their own local newspapers by 1830, which corresponds with the peak population of rural Vermont towns.

The 2000 census showed that Vermont's ethnic population made up only two percent of the total. In terms of their newspapers, however, the immigrant population was well represented over the past two centuries. The first French-Canadian newspaper published in all of New England was *La Révolution canadienne* from Burlington in 1838. *The North American* was founded in Swanton in 1839 and sold throughout the state. The lumber, marble, and granite industries attracted Italian, Slavic, Irish, Scottish, and Finnish immigrants to the state. By the turn of the twentieth century there were eight Italian-language newspapers being published in Vermont. A brief history of the early newspapers can be found in Clarence S. Brigham's two-volume *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers 1690-1820* (American Antiquarian Society, 1947) [Z6951.B86 - Call numbers in brackets for this volume and others to follow identify the location in the NEHGS library. If they list "+ loan," then members can borrow them from the NEHGS circulating library].

Before the advent of modern vital records laws in 1857, newspapers may have the only record of when and where a marriage or death took place. Obituaries (as opposed to death notices) were an invention of the late nineteenth century. Prominent citizens could receive detailed biographical write-ups that can help round out the story on your ancestor's life. Scanning local newspapers could reveal business enterprises or a local history event that included your family. Court and legal notices could uncover issues that explain why your ancestor was so hard to find. When a married couple separated (prior to legal divorce), the husband or wife (and sometimes both) would publish a notice of abandonment denying responsibility for the other's debts. Newspapers gathered news from all kinds of sources. There could be a story about a fiftieth anniversary event that listed all the relatives who came. Gossip columns often told who was visiting from out of town and if a local person went traveling. News items were commonly reprinted from other papers around the country. Local newspapers loved to print stories of native sons' exploits elsewhere.

Access is the main problem in using this valuable resource. The only online sources are for the modern period of

newspapers. The *Burlington Free Press* and the *Rutland Herald* are the two largest newspapers in the state. Middlebury College maintains an [online index](#) to these two newspapers that starts in 1984. The Ancestry.com paid service has the *Bennington Evening Banner* from 1955 to 1957 in fully searchable [text](#). Many current newspapers are online:

Barre. *The World* [website](#) has an archive of each weekly issue back to 2001, complete with obituaries and birth notices. There is no search engine.

Barre/Montpelier. *The Argus Times* [website](#) has obituaries, engagements/weddings/civil unions, and births, since 1999.

Bennington. *The Bennington Banner* [website](#) has the last fifteen days of the paper with obituaries archived back to August 2003.

Bradford. *Journal Opinion* [website](#) has the current issue with obituaries. There is no archive.

Brattleboro. *Brattleboro Reformer* [website](#) has the last fifteen days of the paper with obituaries archived back to August 2003.

Burlington. *The Burlington Free Press* [website](#) has an archive of the past week and an obituary archive of the past month.

Dover [West]. *The Deerfield Valley News* [website](#) has the current weekly edition only and no obituaries.

Killington. *The Mountain Times* [website](#) has the current weekly issue only and no obituaries.

Middlebury. *Addison County Independent* [website](#) has an obituary archive that appears to go back to at least 1999.

Morrisville. *The News & Citizen* [website](#) has an archive of the weekly issues back to February 2003 but does not have any obituaries.

Randolph. *The Herald of Randolph* [website](#) has the current issue with obituaries. There is an archive that appears to go back to at least 1999.

Rutland. *Rutland Herald* [website](#) archives all parts of its online newspaper since October 1999, including obituaries, engagements/weddings/civil unions, and births.

St. Albans. *Messenger* [website](#) has the main story archived for the previous month and obituary archives back to February 2001.

St. Johnsbury. *The Caledonian-Record* [website](#) has an archive for the entire contents back to 1997.

Stowe. *The Stowe Reporter* [website](#) has an archive back to 2001, though the obituaries seem to be for the current issue only.

Waitsfield. *The Valley Reporter* [website](#) has obituaries back to November 2001. There is no search engine.

White River Junction. *Valley News* [website](#) has the past week's main stories only.

Genealogists have started publishing their own guides to historical newspaper material. Abstracts of genealogical data in newspapers can be found in several genealogical journals and books [NEHGS call number for *Vermont Genealogy* is F48.V48.1996 + loan]:

Bellows Falls. "Genealogical Gleanings from the *Vermont Intelligencer and Bellows Falls Advertiser*, 1817" by Robert M. Murphy in *Vermont Genealogy*, 5 [2000]: 112-128, (Part Two) 157-171.

Bellows Falls. "Genealogical Gleanings from the *Vermont Intelligencer and Bellows Falls Advertiser*, 1818" by Robert M. Murphy in *Vermont Genealogy*, 6 [2001]: 97-119, 146-174.

Bennington. *Vermont Newspaper Abstracts, 1783-1816* by Marsha Hoffman Rising (Boston: NEHGS, 2001) [F48.R57] that focuses on Bennington papers.

Brattleboro. "Extracts from the *American Yeoman* Brattleboro, Vermont, 1817" by Joann H. Nichols in *Vermont*

Genealogy, 3 [1998]: 107-125, 163-183.

Burlington. *Index to the Burlington Free Press in the Billings Library, University of Vermont ... 1848 [to] 1870* in ten volumes (W.P.A., 1940-1942) [F59.B9.H57].

Danville. "Obituaries from 1813, the Year of the Epidemic From the *North Star*, Danville, Vermont" by Alice Eichholz in *Vermont Genealogy*, 6 [2001]: 120-121.

Middlebury. "Probate Notices in Middlebury Newspapers Part One (1802-1831)" by Lawrence Washington in *Vermont Genealogy*, 5 [2000]: 26-43, Part Two (1832-1847), 68-78, Part Three (1848-1859), 129-139.

Middlebury. "Vermont Deaths in Middlebury Newspapers Part One (1801-1806) by Lawrence Washington in *Vermont Genealogy*, 5 [2000]: 172-179, Part Two (1807-1810), 6 [2001]: 30-34, Part Three (1812-1813) [with Alice Eichholz], 122-132, Part Four (1814-1817), 175-180.

Richford. *Index to the Richford, Vt. Gazette and Journal-Gazette 1880-1957: Extracts of Canadian Genealogical Information* by Marlene Simmons (Pointe Claire, P.Q., 1994) [F59.R56.S56 + loan].

Rutland. *Extracts from the Rutland Weekly Herald* extracted by Dawn D. Hance, typed and indexed by Joann H. Nichols: 1800-1805 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 2002), 1806-1810 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 1999) [Note: Includes the *Vermont Courier*, 1808-1810] [F59.R9.E98], 1811-1815 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 1999) [F59.R9.E981], 1816-1820 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 1999) [F59.R9.E982], 1821-1825 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 2001), 1826-1830 (Rutland, Vt.: D. D. Hance, 2003).

St. Johnsbury. The *Vital Statistics from Saint Johnsbury Caledonian*, v. 3-10, by Anne Kendall Smith and Stuart E. Smith covers the period 1870 to 1905 [F57.C2.S65].

Any additions to these lists are always welcomed by the author. He may be reached at yourgenealogist@aol.com.