

LOCAL

From humble beginnings and a small investment, The Newport Daily News turns 175

Bethany Brunelle Newport Daily News

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NEWPORT — On the day before election day in 1846, a man from Norwich, Connecticut, and a Newport business man published the first edition of The Newport Daily News and, for 175 years, the paper has continued to keep people informed.

The first edition was four pages and published on May 4, 1846. The price was one cent per copy, or \$3 for a yearly subscription. It was believed by many in town to be a frivolous enterprise, but after publishing several editions, the paper always sold out.

The mission

Funded by George H. Norman for \$1,000, reporter, editor, publisher and printer Orin F. Jackson wrote in the first publication the newspaper's mission:

"It is our intention to furnish the inhabitants and visitants of this goodly town, and the public at large, with the perusal of a daily sheet, of moderate dimensions, and humble pretendings; but filled, as far as it may be, with reading matter of general interest and entertainment.

"Passing events will be faithfully chronicled; and also items of general intelligence which can have any bearing on the welfare of community and the prosperity of our citizens, will be carefully presented," he wrote. "Having thus summarily expressed our purpose and design, we cheerfully spread our canvass to the winds, and woo the favoring breeze."

That first day, 600 copies of The Newport Daily News were churned out on a small hand wheel press. During its first week, the paper published a morning and evening edition on four different days. It covered the election, the governor's inauguration and the legislature.

Since 1846, the paper has known six homes, including three moves within its first 33 years. The Daily News moved into the Swinburne Building at 207 Thames St. in 1879 and remained there for the next 51 years.

It then moved into 140 Thames St., currently the home to Brick Alley Pub restaurant, before trekking north to 101 Malbone Road in 1970. Two years ago, after it stopped printing the print product on site, the newspaper landed at 272 Valley Road in Middletown.

More: Plan revealed for sold former Newport Daily News site

The Daily News was an afternoon paper from 1861 to 2013, when it shifted to a morning publication.

New eras in Newport news

In 1918, the newspaper was sold to Edward Sherman, who continued publishing the newspaper until his death on June 15, 1934. By May 4, 1921 — the paper's 75th anniversary — the paper had grown to 12 pages and its circulation had increased from 3,500 in 1896, to a daily average of 6,500 and published frequent special editions.

Following his death, the paper was published by his two sons, Albert K. Sherman, and Edward A. "Ned" Sherman Jr., under the terms of his will, by the Edward A. Sherman Publishing Company and was eventually headed up by Albert K. "Buck" Sherman, who always knew he'd end up as the paper's publisher.

Gallery: The Daily News through the years

Albert K. 'Buck' Sherman was publisher for almost 50 years

Buck Sherman was the publisher for almost 50 years and said 95% of his days were good days.

"I loved it. I liked knowing everything before anybody else did, but I didn't wander down Main Street patting myself on the back saying, 'I'm the publisher, get out of my way.' And a lot of people liked that," he told The Daily News recently.

Throughout his years as a publisher, Sherman said he learned the importance of treating people fairly, not keeping secrets and being open, fair, honest and above board.

"Treat people like you like to be treated, and I hope I did that," he said.

In 2017, the Edward A. Sherman Publishing Co., was sold to GateHouse Media Inc. The sale included The Newport Daily News, The Independent, Newport Life Magazine, South County Life Magazine, Mercury and Sherman Publishing's commercial printing division.

In late 2018, lifelong Rhode Islander Will Richmond was hired as the new editor at The Newport Daily News, and in 2019, GateHouse Media Inc. merged with Gannett, the largest community news organization in the United States.

"It's given me the opportunity to really have a deeper interest in the stories that we report and the news that shapes the state, rather than sort of just watching it from the straight view as just a citizen," Richmond said of being an editor at a newspaper in his home state.

Having a local newspaper is important because there's so much that happens inside a community, and residents are always seeking out a trusted news source. Richmond said the news industry — and The Daily News specifically — is far different now than it was 175 years ago.

"We're much more than a newspaper. I like to tell people that we are a multi-media publication of which a newspaper is a part of it. And since the merger with Gannett, that's just continued to evolve, we continue to put a bigger focus on our subscribers both

digitally and in print and continue to increase our emphasis on our digital product, recognizing that's a significant part of what our future will be," he said.

Since the merger with Gannett, Richmond said the number of digital subscribers has grown consistently. The Newport Daily News, he said, is the most read news outlet in the area.

"That's where we want to be. We want to be the place people turn to, whether it's online or in print. We do everything we can to hold that status in the level of importance in how we manage the newsroom and continue to grow," he said.

"The continued mission of The Newport Daily News is to be the source of accurate, important information," Richmond added. "We want to be there to let the community know what's happening around them, whether that's news, entertainment, lifestyle-type articles. In the end, it's just being there for the community and providing them with the information that's important."

Since becoming editor, Richmond said he has learned the communities of Newport County view themselves as their own community, and even though Rhode Island is a small state, what happens locally matters a lot.

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