

## Collections of Distinction

### ***Massachusetts Newspaper Collections***

**Scope:** Since 1704, there has been a continuous history of newspaper publication in Massachusetts. The core of this collection consists of Massachusetts newspapers from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, with the earliest American newspaper in the Boston Public Library's collection dating from 1706. The newspaper collection is in multiple formats: bound and wrapped volumes, photographic reprints, microfilm, microfiche, micro-opaques, digital copies, and electronic databases. Roughly 35,000 bound volumes are housed at the City of Boston Archival Center. The Microtext Department has approximately 140,000 reels of microfilmed newspapers.

The collection is augmented by significant holdings of 19<sup>th</sup> - and early 20<sup>th</sup> -century American and European titles — many rare, some unique — representing the major business and cultural interests of our citizens. Examples include the *Diario Oficial* from Mexico City for 1844 to 1883, reflecting our trade with Latin America; the *Kölnische Zeitung*, 1899-1931, one of the leading German papers; and the *London Standard*, 1837-1899. There are also a number of papers from areas where our military forces were engaged.

#### **Criteria:**

**1. Uniqueness, rarity, and value:** The number of Massachusetts titles gathered into one collection at one institution is unique to the Boston Public Library.

Among the noteworthy items in the collection are:

- *Boston Newsletter*, Aug 16, 1706. This title was the first continuing paper in the United States. This is the earliest issue in our collection for paper copies of that title.
- The *Boston Herald*, Liberty Overseas Edition, Sept 13, 1943-Apr 1, 1946, only 23 cm tall (9 inches). This is a planographic reproduction, issued as a number of the *Boston Herald*, late city edition, for American servicemen overseas. It was a gift from the Jordan Marsh Company.
- [Boston] *Universal Yankee Nation*, Sept 27, 1841, 90 x 139 cm (36 x 55 inches), advertised as the largest newspaper in all creation.
- *The Gridiron*, [Boston and Chelsea] Oct 28, 1854, published by Daniel Pratt, "The Great American Traveler," notorious eccentric, whose chief delusion was that he had been elected to the presidency and was being kept out of office by a coalition of unscrupulous rivals. Cf. Dict. of Amer. biog. Pratt was a familiar figure to students at college campuses up and down the East Coast, lecturing at length on the topics that filled his troubled mind. In the *Dictionary of American Biography*, his occupation is given as "Vagrant."
- *The Guardian* [Boston], 1939-1955, African-American newspaper started by noted activist William Monroe Trotter.
- *The Mid-Town Journal*, [Boston], 1938-1966, known as the "South End scandal sheet".

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- *The Woman's Journal*, 1870-1897, published by Mary Livermore, Julia Ward Howe, and Lucy Stone, was a weekly newspaper devoted to the interests of women—to her educational, industrial, legal, and political equality, and especially to her right of suffrage.
- *Le Moniteur Universel*, from Paris, was the official gazette of the French government. The Library owns from 1789 through 1867 and owes its early holdings to a gift from Alexandre Vattemare, a founder of the Boston Public Library and early advocate of public lending libraries
- *Mercurius Publicus*, London, June 12-19, 1662, recounting the execution of Sir Henry Vane the Younger, former Governor of Massachusetts.
- *St. James Chronicle* [London], Oct. 8, 1765, with an account of the Stamp Act riots in Boston; Nov. 16, 1780, with an account of the capture and hanging of Major Andre.
- A collection of approximately 540 newspapers and magazines published in France in the post-liberation period from January 2 to April 13, 1945 (gift of Milton E. Lord, Librarian of the Boston Public Library).

**2. Pre-eminent among libraries and cultural institutions:** The Rare Books Department has one of the major collections of Early American Newspapers, as described in Clarence Brigham's *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*. The collection was also listed in Winifred Gregory's *American Newspapers, 1821-1936: A union list of files available in the United States and Canada*.

As the co-coordinating library for the Massachusetts Newspaper Project, the Library has created the largest newspaper collection in the world for Massachusetts titles. In 1986, under a planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Boston Public Library became the center for the Massachusetts Newspaper Project. More than 2,000 potential newspaper repositories were surveyed in order to create a statewide newspaper holdings database. Survey information was analyzed in order to plan for the first part of the program, the bibliographic implementation phase. More than 20,000 U.S. newspaper holdings were located across Massachusetts. Catalogers and support staff at the Boston Public Library cataloged and created local holdings records for well over 10,000 newspaper titles. Beginning with microfilm holdings at the Boston Public Library, cataloging included original copy and microfilm holdings for the following newspaper repositories in the state: the American Jewish Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum, Harvard University, Historic Deerfield Memorial Libraries, Houghton Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, Old Sturbridge Village, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the Worcester Public Library.

**3. Historical significance that reflects the long-term BPL commitment to the collection, buttressed by the past and current generosity of individuals:** The Boston Public Library has collected and preserved newspapers since its founding in 1852. The strength of this collection lies in the Library's preservation of ephemeral publications, often neglected by other research institutions. The philosophy behind the collection is that the use of a newspaper does not end

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with the date of its publication. Its meaning and significance increases with the passage of time. The BPL's early librarians believed that newspapers that were normally discarded the day they were published, could, if preserved, yield a myriad of information available in no other source. Newspaper acquisition continued as a high priority until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which marked a noticeable shift in the publishing industry, as news reporting responded to the digital age.

Newspapers are either bound or are wrapped and preserved in accessible storage at the City of Boston Archival Center. Boston newspapers are filmed by the library. As papers from other towns in the Commonwealth have been filmed, the Boston Public Library has acquired copies. These have been complemented and supplemented by electronic databases of Massachusetts newspapers.

**4. Central to the history of the City of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the communities therein:** Newspapers are the primary accounts of average citizens as well as of the elite. They contain the records of their births and deaths, social life, business transactions, entertainment, and views on world affairs. No other type of record covers the life of the city in such detail. Given their power, newspapers also act to restrict the abuses of government, for, as John Adams wrote in the Massachusetts Constitution, "The liberty of the press is essential to the security of the state."

Even a short list of editors of some of our papers will demonstrate how the state and the press are intertwined: Benjamin Franklin (Postmaster General, Signer of Declaration) – Publisher of the *New England Courant*; Curtis Guild (Gov. of Mass.) – Publisher of the [Boston] *Commercial Bulletin*; Hugh O'Brien (Mayor of Boston) – Publisher of the *Boston Shipping and Commercial*; John F. FitzGerald (Mayor of Boston) – Publisher of *The Republic*; Alexander Bullock (Gov. of Massachusetts) – [Worcester] Publisher of the *National Aegis*; William E. Barrett (Speaker of the Mass. House) – Editor of the *Boston Evening Record* and the *Boston Daily Advertiser*; Channing H. Cox (Gov. of Mass.) – Board of Directors of the *Boston Herald*; Richard Frothingham (Mayor of Charlestown) – Proprietor and Managing Editor of the *Boston Post*; Charles H. Taylor (Mass. State Rep.) – Publisher of the *Boston Globe*; Samuel Adams (Gov. of Mass.) – Propagandist in the *Boston Gazette*; Franklin Delano Roosevelt (President) – Editor of the *Harvard Crimson*.

**5. Resonates with communities of scholars and makes the BPL the destination for scholarship in a particular subject:** In Nicholson Baker's *Doublefold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (NY: Random House, 2001), the Boston Public Library is praised for continuing its newspaper collection efforts through the present and for taking "ownership of important sets of bound newspapers once owned by Harvard and other libraries in the region." Between 1990 and 2008, there were at least 92 published works that acknowledged the services of the Microtext Department, primarily for the newspaper collections. This number is greater when you include those who used the newspapers in the Rare Books Department.

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### **6. Universality of subject matter and furthers the purpose of the BPL by contributing to a**

**democratic education:** Above the doors to the Library is carved, "The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty." The press is one major element of that safeguard.

**Provenance:** The earliest portion of the Library's newspaper collection consisted of sets of the colonial and federalist newspapers and was meant to assist in the understanding and history of the founding of the Republic. Later, by exchange, gift, and purchase, this scope was expanded to major European and American cities. At least as early as 1865, the Library collected sets of newspapers focused on specific events, such as the assassination of President Lincoln. Throughout the 19th century, many of the major newspaper publishers in Boston presented the library with bound volumes of their titles. In the 1930s, the Library participated in the filming of the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Later the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Herald* presented us with microfilm copies of those papers.

**Access:** There is great digitization potential for this collection. The library has partnered with Readex and Access Newspaper Archives on several commercial products, as well as with a number of Massachusetts municipal libraries on grant projects within their own organizations. Several of the smaller-format newspapers, such as the *Boston Sheet Anchor*, *Gleason's Pictorial*, and the *Courier de Boston*, have been digitized by the Internet Archive.

The library has subscribed to or purchased approximately 27 electronic databases containing newspapers. The database publishers include Proquest, Newsbank/Readex, Gale, Access Newspaper Archives, and Ancestry:

- The Proquest historical newspapers include the *Boston Globe*, 1872-1980, and the *New York Times*, 1851-2003.
- Readex/Newsbank's *Early American Newspapers* includes the colonial and federalist newspapers back to the earliest times.
- The Gale newspaper databases include extensive collections of British newspapers and 19<sup>th</sup> -century American newspapers.

**Languages:** In addition to English, current subscriptions include papers published in Massachusetts in Armenian, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and French. Over the years, other Massachusetts papers, representing the diversity of our citizenry, have been published in Albanian, Latvian, Estonian, Finnish, Swedish, German, and Yiddish.

### **Related Collections:**

*Boston Herald-Traveler* photo-morgue

*Aldino Felicani Collection of Newspapers Relating to Sacco and Vanzetti*

*Anarchist and Radical Newspapers from the Il Fondo L'Adunata Collection*

Henry Scannell, Curator of Microtext

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*The Underground Press and Alternative Newspapers* microfilm collections

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**Special Note:** The early newspapers through 1820 are housed in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department. The Microtext and Newspaper Department has custody of the remaining bound volumes. Most of these are in storage at the City of Boston Archival Center (COBAC). The Microtext and Newspaper Department houses the extensive collection of microfilmed newspapers.