

Carroll Yesteryears
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Old Newspapers Give Us a Sense of the Past By Mary Ann Ashcraft

You probably read a newspaper every day. Depending upon the paper, you get more local news or more national and world news—all very current. Reading old newspapers is a good way to explore political and social history, and many old papers are now available online or on microfilm.

Most early papers were weeklies, and they certainly weren't delivered to your mailbox or to your computer. News from abroad might take a month to reach America's shores. Even within the U.S., events occurring in San Francisco could take weeks before a report reached the East Coast until telegraph lines stretched across the country.

What is available today to tell us what Carroll Countians read in the past? If you were literate and could afford to buy a paper, the *Maryland Gazette*, published in Annapolis from the 18th century onward, provided access to colonial and foreign news, ship arrivals and departures, etc. The first effort at publishing a newspaper in what became Carroll County was Charles Sower's *Engine of Liberty and Uniontown Advertiser* that lasted from 1813 until 1816. Reading it now offers a glimpse into what was happening in the Uniontown area—someone was making “segars;” someone else was advertising property. The Historical Society of Carroll County sells a book of excerpts from that paper.

Between 1816 and 1832, there were a few more attempts to publish local newspapers before *The Carrolltonian and Baltimore and Frederick Advertiser* began in Westminster in 1833. It promoted the creation of Carroll County out of Baltimore and Frederick counties and stayed in business until 1855. Other Carroll communities published short-lived papers. In 1854-1855, New Windsor was the home of *The True American* that supported the American Party, also known as the “Know Nothing Party.” The Know Nothings had a political agenda similar to the alt-right of today.

Two newspapers began in Westminster in the 1855-1865 period which survived into the 20th century—*The American Sentinel* and *The Democratic Advocate*. These are valuable sources of Carroll County news although readers should realize that each paper had a political slant—the *Sentinel* was a Republican paper and the *Democratic Advocate* was just what the name implied. If you want to read these papers online, the *Democratic Advocate* is on the Library of Congress website and the *American Sentinel* is on the Maryland State Archives website.

Taneytown was the home of *The Carroll Record* that began publication in 1894 and lasted until 1977; Union Bridge published *The Pilot* from 1899 until 1972; Sykesville residents bought the *Sykesville Herald* or the *Herald-Messenger* between 1913 and 1979. These towns, as well as Manchester, Hampstead, and Mt. Airy, produced newspapers with various names for short periods in the 19th and/or 20th centuries.

The *Carroll County Times* began in 1911 as *The Times*, a weekly, and changed its name in 1956. It is now a daily owned by the Baltimore Sun Media Group. Issues from 1911 through 2015 are online on the Carroll County Public Library website.

Microfilm of some old papers is available in the library of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a library volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.



Image source: Historical Society of Carroll County

Image caption: The True American was a newspaper published for a short period in the 1850s in New Windsor. This is the paper's masthead and came from the only copy of the paper owned by the Historical Society.