



Madison County Genealogical Society



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Evolution of a Country Newspaper

January 1927 will be the fifty-third anniversary of the first newspaper published in Madison county. It was on that foundation that the Star-Mail has grown in continuous line to the present time. At a time when Madison county was very new and sparsely settled T. M. Blakely began the publication of the Madison County Review at the place that later became the city of Madison. Different editors helped to keep it going till it passed to other ownership and in December 1878 its name changed to Madison Chronicle. The Chronicle was published in Madison until 1921 when it was combined with the Star-Mail by Conley and Silletto under the name of the Star-Mail and Chronicle Combined.

Other newspaper attempts were made at different times. A small cyclone smeared the Chronicle office all over the surrounding territory in 1881 and the outlook was dark, but it lived. Editors and publishers changed but the ancestor of the Star-Mail lives on and on.

In 1889 J. B. Donovan appeared and started the Madison Reporter to fill what printers called a long felt want. He soon found that it wanted something itself and that was a place to earn its bread and it was moved to Newman Grove. Then in 1893 Donovan & Wright started a new paper and named it The Star. In 1902 Senator Allen started the Madison Mail. Of course there was but one result and that was that three papers could not live where only one could make a grub stake. Allen withdrew and Donovan united the Star-Mail and gave it the name of the Star and Mail. All this time the Chronicle was published. The two papers went on till 1921 when the progressive people of Madison tiring of a continued warfare and supporting two papers by giving the publishers credit for something to live on and making it compulsory to buy advertising space, by a great effort succeeded in having the papers united as had become the usual custom in other towns.

Thus it seems that the Star-Mail is the direct descendent of the first Madison county paper and some of the old equipment and files may still be found packed away in corners of the Star-Mail quarters.

It takes years to start and bring to a successful maturity any newspaper, whether in the country or city. It may be strengthened by uniting as the Star and Mail did and later by uniting with the Chronicle that had been remained from the Review during the seventies. It may have gained by accretion from other undertakings that failed but the failures were only tilling the soil for the more worth while newspaper.

A newspaper grows like a tree. It starts small and if it escapes the dangers that lie in wait for it after many years buffeting the storms that it must pass through, it become a more or less strong tree.

A somewhat irreverent story was once told of a boy who was seeking to widen his information by asking his father questions about the power of God. His questions were searching and father was troubled and inclined to seek safety by evasion. The boy wanted his father to substantiate reports he had heard that God could do anything and make anything. The father assured his son that he had

been correctly informed and that nothing was impossible to God. Can God make a two year old steer, father. Certainly my son he can. But father, could he make it in a minute. The answer like the first was an affirmative. But father, the boy persisted would the steer be two years old.

That is the idea people sometimes get about newspapers. They see a paper grow and grow but it takes years to plant its roots firmly and even then some storm may uproot it and destroy it. But they think if a tree has taken forty years to grow they can start a twig and make it overshadow the forty year old tree in one year. But would it be forty years old?

Fifty years ago a country newspaper could start with little effort and little equipment. The Star-Mail forbears was meagerly equipped. Soon after postal laws did not permit newspapers to be admitted to the mails till they showed a bona fide circulation of subscribers who had paid for the paper themselves. State laws defined a legal newspaper as one having 200 legitimate subscribers and only after it had been published 52 weeks. Nebraska laws now make it mandatory that before a newspaper can become a legal paper and publish official or legal notices it would have 300 bona fide paid up subscribers and have been published 52 weeks.

The U. S. Postal laws bear harder on newspapers at each time congress tampers with them. Since the last change four cents postage is exacted on a ten page Star-Mail and on a 16 page, eight cents. The same enclosure will go to England with a two cent stamp, the former rate holding good on international mails.

The evolution of the Star-Mail and its advancement has not been checked. It is stronger and never had a better year than the year 1926. More improvements have long been contemplated but have been held back because of unsettled local conditions. It may materialize and the drags on public advancement be ignored, and again the voice of prudence may restraint it. The signs in the economic world point toward a time when people engaged in business begin to take in sail and not assume too many new undertakings. The panics of 1873, of 1893, 1907 left warnings that were not heeded. The same marks our now visible on the world's sky.

Source: Madison Star-Mail, Thursday, January 6, 1927, page 1.

New Newspaper at Madison

Otto Metschke, proprietor of the Art Printery at Madison will start a new newspaper at Madison opening sometime next month. For sometime he has been issuing a monthly advertising sheet and according to reports has secured the backing of several Madison merchants who have put \$2,000 apiece into the new venture.

The new paper will be called the Madison News. Mr. Metschke has purchased the Allen building in the rear of the Madison County Building and Loan Association office and is remodeling it for the new plant.

About five years ago Frank Conley purchased the Star-Mail plant and shortly afterward it and the Madison Chronicle the other weekly newspaper published in Madison, were merged together forming one newspaper. Under the management of Mr. Conley the combined newspapers prospered and everything apparently ran smoothly. About three years ago he sold the plant to Dr. Cass G. Barns of Albion. Dr. Barns is a newspaper man of the old school. He is a brilliant editorial writer but being utterly fearless in the expression of his opinion has apparently been unable to harmonize with the divergent elements of the place and the reopening of another newspaper as the result.

Opinions differ as to the outcome of the new venture. Madison being a county seat town will no doubt be able to support two newspapers although it is doubtful if either one will prosper. Neither will be able to completely cover the field in their circulation and the result will be added expense to

Madison merchants in their advertising especially when conducting sales as it will be necessary to use both papers in order to have complete coverage.

Mr. Metschke is an experienced newspaper man having formerly operated a newspaper at Wisner.—Newman Grove Reporter.

The Reporter has not been fully advised. Dr. Barns is not a newspaper man of the old school but of the school of journalism and acting in harmony with journalism instead of working for a grub stake, with some one's collar around his neck. Conditions have not changed since Conley's time. There is a bolshevik element here but are far outnumbered by a higher class of people. Dr. Barns has not tried to harmonize the two elements. It would be just as easy to harmonize the Almighty with Satan. Editorial feed must be held high for the most of the people and it has been too high for the other class. Happily the new proposition can buy boiler plate brain food to feed his sheep.

After all, while there are signs of decadence in all country towns is it not a sign of a live community when some one has sand enough to start a fight. If Dr. Barns has been unable to harmonize one class what is there wrong in some one coming to their keep out opposition and it dont play rescue? It was wholly impossible to try to. Mr. Price should realize that another paper could start up in his town.

So far as covering the field is concerned, it is covered now thoroughly by the Star-Mail, with local papers in our different neighboring towns. The world is open to advertisers and the sky is the limit. The Star-Mail will not change its policy nor will any disciplinary measures tried by any one make as much difference to the ownership as to the employes. A lessening of support only means a lessening of jobs. As the income grows less the pay roll will keep pace with it.

Don't feel sorry for the Star-Mail and don't feel sorry for the merchants if they have to patronize two papers. If it hurts them they have only themselves to blame. In fact don't feel sorry for any one. It isn't half as bad as it looks and is only a sign that there is still live in Madison. If not now, there will be.

Source: Madison Star-Mail, Thursday, January 6, 1927, page 1.