

Providence Institution for Savings

Established 1819

A Mutual Savings Bank
where interest is allowed
from day of Deposit to
day of Withdrawal

MAIN OFFICE
86 South Main street

OLNEYVILLE BRANCH
1917-21 Westminster Street
Olneyville Square

EMPIRE-ABORN BRANCH
Between Westminster and Washington Sts.

Open all business days and Tuesday evenings
5 to 8:30. Olneyville Branch open
Saturday evenings also.

“The Old Stone Bank”

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EARLY PRINTING in PROVIDENCE

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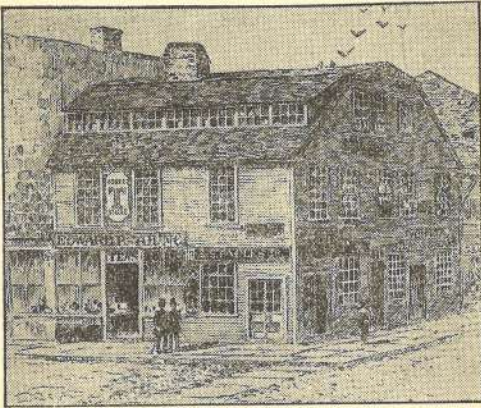


Presented by
“The Old Stone Bank”
Providence, R. I.

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Early Printing in Providence

AT THE time when plans for establishing a first printing shop in Providence were being mulled over, the foremost printer in all the colonies was Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia. In Newport his brother, James Franklin, had opened a printing office in 1727 and had started the *Newport Mercury* by 1758, but no one was doing any printing in Providence before 1763. In that year William Goddard began to put out the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, but abandoned the enterprise as a failure after two and a half years. He had done job printing too, of course, his very first pieces of work being a playbill and a handbill headed "Moro Castle Taken by Storm." Upon the failure of the newspaper he left Providence for a while, but was requested to return and start it again. He came back for a brief period and tried to establish things on a sound basis, figuring out that 800 subscribers would enable the paper to be a success. Subscriptions did not have to be paid in money. "Provisions, grain of any kind, tallow, wood, wool, and many other articles of country produce" were acceptable, in fact anything which the printer could use for the support of his family. Subscriptions were not forthcoming in sufficient number, however, and William Goddard again left to take up journalistic work in New York, Philadel-



The Abbott "Still" House, one of the early homes of the printing industry in Providence, once located at the corner of South Main and College Streets. Here the *Providence Gazette* was published from 1812 to 1825.

phia, and Baltimore. "Sarah Goddard & Son" resumed publication in 1766, but only when John Carter, a former apprentice of Benjamin Franklin, arrived in town the following year and took over the paper did it start on a new and long lease of life.

John Carter's shop (still standing) was on Goal Lane (now No. 21 Meeting Street) at the "Sign of Shakespeare's Head." He started in with the printing equipment left by William Goddard and then, just before the outbreak of the Revolution, tried to get new type from England. This type was confiscated by the royal custom house officials as soon as it arrived, and he had to content himself with the purchase of some of the second-hand equipment left by a John Waterman who had operated first a paper mill and then a printing shop in what is now Olneyville. Waterman had started his mill in 1764, and his printing shop in 1769, but his death within the next decade ended both enterprises. During his career he had printed one edition of the "New England Primer."

Carter bought the type and other like materials from Waterman's shop, but the latter's old presses went to Solomon Southwick, then publisher of the *Newport Mercury*, with the understanding that he should never become a competitor of John Carter. Southwick did not live up to the agreement, however, and come to Providence, opening a shop at Updike House, next door to Carter, and establishing a new paper called

the *American Journal and General Advertiser*. This act of treachery did not establish friendly relations between the two and only added to the struggle each had for an existence.

Though John Carter kept his publication going until 1814, when poor health forced him to retire, he never made a financial success of his venture and frequently had to insert paragraphs in his columns to stimulate payment from his subscribers. Some, it seems, went for fifteen and twenty years without paying. One paragraph is enough for illustration. It read as follows:

"The subscribers to this Gazette who engaged to make payments in grain, or other articles of provisions, and seem to have totally forgotten their contracts, are reminded that the Printer has a family of seventeen in number to provide for daily."

Printer's were extremely poorly off in consideration of the actual work they put into their publications. They were in their shops from daybreak to bedtime, laboring over everything from the editing to the actual typesetting. These were the master printers. Apprentices started in at the age of fourteen and worked for seven years, receiving as compensation instruction, board, and clothing. After their training they usually became journeymen printers, walking from town to town to take temporary jobs. In 1820, the *Manufacturer's and Farmer's Journal* paid flat wages of eight dollars

per week to men who worked from sunrise to sunset in summer and from as early as they could see to pick up type to nine o'clock at night in the winter. Albert Angell, working as a four year apprentice, earned \$30 the first year, \$40 the second, \$50 the third, and \$100 during the last.

Of course the early compositors had to set all type by hand, working on a piece-work basis. As late as 1840 it was possible for a compositor to earn only about \$10 per week at the rate of twenty cents for a thousand ems. Typesetters working at night by the light of two candles, one in the lower case "c" box and the other in the lower case "s" box, were considerably handicapped and could not set more than 400 or 500 ems an hour.

The first presses were operated by hand. Most of them had marble beds. Iron presses did not come into being until 1804. The same press was used for all kinds of work, from printing a book form to a flyer, and with such a hand press a printer could get about 200 to 250 impressions an hour. An Adams press was used in printing the *Providence Journal* back in 1836, a machine that could be run by steam but which took man-power for the wheel. In 1842, the Ruggles Patent Job Printing Engine was invented, and it was this press that has been the direct ancestor of the job press of the present. With it a printer could obtain 800 to 1000 impressions per hour. The next advance was a Hoe steam press with

a single cylinder. After that improvements took the form of a larger number of cylinders. Perfection of other details in presses came later.

Before rollers were used to ink forms, this process was accomplished with leather balls smeared with ink. Paper used was all rag in content and consequently of a very high grade, ordinary newspaper stock being of a quality equal to some of the finer book papers of today. Of course that is the one main reason why so many old newspapers have survived to the present without disintegrating. The same long life will not be a feature of the present news sheets, made of wood pulp.

While job printing made a useful filler and much of it was done by the early printers, most of these men were more prominently known by the newspapers they put out, and, in fact, the history of early printing and newspapers in Providence is almost synonymous. The attitude taken by printers in issuing their news sheets was far from that of the city editor of today. The former, with rare exception, did no reporting, but merely were content to collect and print such items as came to their hands through the mail or by way of gossip. They gave but small space to important events and ordinary little tragedies, such as the accidental death of a child, received no more than a line or two. One hundred and sixty-three words told the story of the burning of the schooner, "Gaspee," while the

battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill took up nine and six and one-half inches respectively of an ordinary news column. However the ordinary printer looked on his job as a public trust and served it accordingly. If he were an intelligent man, his editorial comment on various social and political problems, if sane and tempered, might make him famous throughout much of the country outside his own town and colony. This was true in the case of John Carter, although the high standards of his paper were greatly helped by the writings of Stephen Hopkins.

Bennett Wheeler, who started the *United States Chronicle* in 1784, was an exception in the matter of actually hunting for news for he did a little reporting. His paper was published at the west side of the town, and in 1796, he built a special building to house it at the corner of Westminster and Exchange Streets. It was the second building to be built specifically for a printing office. The first was erected in 1793, in Market Square, on the site of the National Bank of Commerce, and was used by Carter and Wilkinson. The third to be so built was the present *Providence Journal* building.

Market Square was the great printing center of the town in the early 1800's. In the old Abbott "Still" House the *Providence Gazette* was printed from 1812 to 1825. In 1827, the *Patriot Journal*, *Microcosm*, *Christian Telescope*, *Religious Messenger*,

Pawtucket Chronicle, *Anti-Universalist*, and *Rhode Island Register* were all being printed in Market Square in the old Granite Building, the Old Coffee House, and the Abbott "Still" House. These papers were practically all weeklies, for not until 1829, did three papers unite to form the first daily, *The Daily Advertiser*. The day following, the first issue of the *Providence Daily Journal* appeared.

These are but a few of the facts relating to early printers and printing in Providence for the complete story would fill a volume, but they may give some idea of the status of this branch of trade in colonial days.