In the years just before the Civil War, those businessmen establishing, and operating newspapers were beginning to feel their strength and their influence. The presence of a newspaper, whether one publishing for a large, urban environment or in smaller rural town, represented that community’s sense of stability. The newspaper served as a collective’s voice — expressing a cycle of partisan ideas, beliefs, points of pride, even outrage.

For New York’s community in the mid-nineteenth century, Frank Leslie’s Weekly had covered the 1856 presidential election, decried the harm to citizens from the sale of swill milk in 1858, and had breathlessly drawn attention to the murder of one of its citizens, wealthy dentist, Harvey Burdell. In November of 1859, it was covering the trial of John Brown for incitement of slaves to revolt, treason and murder.

Even more dominant in that community was The New York Herald. In 1860, The New York Herald had both a national as well as international readership. It had arguably the best-news gathering operation of its day and at the onset of the American Civil War, its reach of 77,000 subscribers was such that Herald reporters were frequently granted priority access to sources and to news-breaking events. More humble news publications found it hard to compete and would simply note at the head of particular columns, “From the Herald,” as indicative of the content’s reliability. The newspaper industry was entering its Golden Age.

TECHNOLOGIES

In the 20 years prior to the onset of the Civil War, two key technologies were introduced that most critically supported the successful economic expansion of newspapers in the United States. The earlier technology would be the telegraph, a near-instantaneous means of transmitting information rapidly across great distances. During the Mexican American War (1846-48), reporters and editors had relied upon the telegraph for communication of the news. Dispatches from Vera Cruz would be transferred to overland mail upon landing in Mobile, Alabama. Express riders strove to beat the regular mails by carrying the news from Mobile to the telegraph station in Richmond, Va. Operators working the wires would send the news stories to editors’ offices in New York and they would appear in the next day’s newspaper. The telegraph dramatically shortened the time lag between the point of origin of a newsworthy event and the newspaper office.

The second technology of importance had to do with enhancements to printing technology, which impacted the efficiency and speed with which the physical production process could be managed. Richard Hoe was a New York based inventor who, during the 1840’s, enhanced the efficiency of the steam-based printing press. He is credited with the invention and patenting of the rotary printing press, the innovation of placing type on a revolving cylinder and thereby permitting a more rapid production. The Philadelphia Public Ledger was the first paper to introduce Hoe’s press into their operation, the machine generating 8,000 single sided sheets in an hour. Hoe’s “lightning” press was recognized as a significant step forward in the Industrial Revolution. It would be in the wake of the Civil War that Hoe would introduce the web-perfecting press, the technological enhancement that would permit printing both sides of the news sheet simultaneously. Philadelphia-based William Bullock would further support Hoe’s efforts by developing the means of continuously feeding sheets of paper from rolls into Hoe’s press.
Even without a parade, the addition of a Hoe's printing press was considered sufficiently newsworthy for other newspapers to include in their pages. As early as 1850, the African-American newspaper, *The National Era*, noted that Hoe's company was building such a press for use by the *New York Sun* at a cost of nearly $21,000. ("A Mammoth Printing Press - Messrs. Hoe & Co. of New York," *The National Era*, July 25, 1850.)

Nearly a decade later, the news professionals of the *Vincennes Gazette* in Indiana would congratulate their colleagues at the Wabash Express on a similar acquisition. Just weeks before shots were fired at Fort Sumter, the announcement of a Hoe press at *The Charleston Mercury* was intended to be a reassurance to those at home that by virtue of being a customer of that newspaper, they would have the most rapid access to news available.

In February of 1861, the paper proudly announced that they had "attained an extensive circulation in many localities of the North, the West, and the Southwest, where a year ago it was comparatively but little known. As an instance of this, we may mention that we mail to a single town of Southern Illinois no less than fifty copies daily. To meet this heavy and constantly growing increase of circulation, we have been obliged to order from the establishment of R. Hoe & Co., of New York, a fast-Double Cylinder Press, of the latest and most improved model. Upon this press, this morning paper is printed. By its aid, we hope, for a time at least, to fill, satisfactorily, the orders of newsmen and subscribers. Our new machine -- the most rapid in use, we believe, between Richmond and New Orleans, throwing off upwards of FOUR THOUSAND SHEETS PER HOUR -- or about 85 a minute -- will enable us to give the readers of our tri weekly edition the very latest news by telegraph."

(Source: *The Charleston Mercury*, February 18, 1861.)

These technologies increased in importance as the divisions over the continued practice of slavery in the United States became increasingly combative.
Visual coverage in the November 12 issue of *Frank Leslie's Weekly* of John Brown’s trial in Jefferson County included individual portraits of all jurors as well as drawings of the prosecuting and defense attorneys. However, the greatest amount of space was given over to an artist’s rendering of the prisoner Brown being conveyed to the railroad station for transportation to his trial. The artist -- indicated as being on the spot in Charlestown and nearly 300 miles from New York City -- was characterized in the caption of the illustration as being a special artist. The artist would be expected to rapidly capture the likenesses of prominent individuals as well as provide larger scenic illustrations. The role was a training ground for such American artists as Winslow Homer and Thomas Nast.

Visuals might be sketched lightly and hastily on-site but the engravings that appeared in newspapers followed a more complex series of production steps. The special artist would mail a hastily constructed sketch to his editor. Depending upon the planned spatial requirement for the engraving, the editor might break up the artist’s general composition into smaller 1” or 2” squares and then (as an example) assign the more precise rendering of the tree trunk in the upper left-hand corner to a New York-based draftsman. Architectural impressions would be provided by a second draftsman while the more detailed figures in the foreground (lower right) would be handled by a third. This industrialized approach of allocating portions of an illustration to multiple artists was a particular innovation of Leslie’s approach to news publishing; in the interest of speedily creating woodblocks, specific squares would then be joined together in nut-and-bolt fashion before being added to the press. Individual artistic style of pen or pencil strokes would be minimized.

It is true that the third technology that was emerging during the Civil War -- photography -- was beginning to be added to news publications during this period. However, the visuals rendered by artists had one advantage in communicating events on the ground. A rapid sketch artist might quickly capture movements and similar action in an image of war.

Conversely, photography while pioneered in this context by Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner, was hampered by only being able to capture subjects that were motionless at the moment that the photograph was taken.

The business of publishing the newspaper then as now depended upon the swiftness with which events could be documented; it would soon be recognized that such visuals brought home more immediately the reality of war.

**THE ADVANCE OF GENERAL ROSENCRANZ’S [Rosecrans’s] DIVISION THROUGH THE FORESTS.**
(Source: *Frank Leslie’s Weekly*, August 31, 1861)

**CAMP SCENE. SHOWING WINTER HUTS AND CORDUROY ROADS.**
(Source: Brady Collection, National Archives and Records Administration, Identifier: 524642)
GATHERING AND DELIVERING THE NEWS IN TIMES OF WAR

While the printing and telecommunication technologies made publishing the news more efficient and manageable, once war was formally declared between the United States of America and the Confederate States of America, successful newspapermen would soon find that their activities and their output would be handled quite differently.

The initial disruption came in the breaking up of the telegraph regional systems that connected North and South. The most prominent entity, the American Telegraph Company, was over the course of six months broken into two smaller entities, one ostensibly managed from Richmond, Virginia and the other from Washington D.C.

However, once this divestiture had been finalized, Federal officials seized the American Telegraph office in Louisville -- a main office and trunk line used to handle and transmitting the bulk of all North-South telegraph traffic -- and took control of that activity. This tension surrounding such an important utility and information lifeline continued throughout the war, frequently affected by the whims of military personnel on either side of the conflict. President Lincoln’s Secretary of War, Edward Stanton, asked for and received sweeping powers to control the flow of information across the telegraph.

Where reporters could manage to send in their reports by telegraph, editors found that dispatches were frequently stopped and read by military censors stationed in a particular telegraph office. Such censors understood their role as assessing the sentiment and prospective impact of any reporting, slowing or completely halting dissemination to the public.

As with the aforementioned Secretary of War, not all censors were low-ranking personnel. Union Major General Ambrose Burnside issued his order 84 in June of 1863, condemning such copperhead newspapers as the Chicago Times and the New York World. The order suspended the publication of the Southern-sympathizing Times entirely and prohibited the circulation of the World in his department.

Southern newspapers -- even those like The Charleston Mercury with its new Hoe press - were hampered by Northern control of the communication lines. The Mercury’s reporting of the Battle of Gettysburg on July 2, 1863 consists largely of summarized accounts published by The New York Herald, the Washington Star and the Petersburg Express. The bias was evident to the anxious readership, with one Southern woman noting in her diary that she frequently beat the newspaper with her slipper, out of sheer frustration.

At the same time, Northern newspapers were experiencing greater profitability in their business. Circulation was up as was advertising. Accounts of battles and casualty lists were moved to the front page, with advertising being relegated to the rear. Businessmen broke with usual Sabbath observance by publishing editions on Sundays.

Yet again, reporters felt uncertain about the scope of the content that was getting through to their readers. The New York Herald in reporting on the Battle of Chickamauga on September 23, 1863 featured a byline for its reporter, W.F.G. Shanks, who noted:

“If my despatches of the 16th of September were received, a matter of which I now have serious doubts, you will already have known that on that day Rosecrans’ army had been concentrated on West Chickamauga creek, about ten or twelve miles northwest of Lafayette, Ga., the headquarters being at a large spring known to the inhabitants, but not to the mapmakers, by the name of “Crawfish Spring.” In that correspondence I attempted to describe that location and the position of the army, as well as to detail the incidents of the terrible march which had resulted in that concentration with such admirable and peaceful results. It is enough to state now that the concentration had been made, the enemy brought to a stand, and that he rested immediately in our front beyond the stream and in that same valley of Chickamauga creek. We held the rising ground west of the stream, while the enemy held the same kind of position east of it, and, with his left in a strong position at Gordon Mills, covering his line of retreat to Chattanooga, Rosecrans was not fearful of the result.”

To further enlighten the reader, the upper half of the front page of the Herald’s issue carried a detailed map of the scope of operations surrounding the three-day battle to retake the city.

By contrast, front page coverage by The Charleston Mercury of the same conflict carried no such image. At a greater distance (both in terms of geography as well as timeliness), The Weekly Vincennes Gazette covered the same conflict by including Extracts from Editorials in Rebel Newspapers on its front page, dated October 3.

As disconcerting as it was to those responsible for the work of covering battles and troop movements, reporters frequently found that they were not treated as objective observers by opposing troops. While most of the military generals were outraged by untimely revelations of troop movements and other activities, William Tecumseh Sherman was particularly harsh in his issuance of General Order 8 in 1862. That order read:

“No citizen, male or female, will be allowed to accompany it unless employed as part of a crew or as servants to the transports...any person whatever, whether in the service of the United States, or transports, found making reports for publication, which might reach the enemy, giving them information, aid, and comfort, will be arrested, and treated as spies.”
The Union reporters frequently leveled accusations of drunkenness and insanity at Sherman. His resulting animosity found relief in court-martialing a New York Herald reporter for violation of that order. Tom Knox, working for The Herald, had submitted a report of Sherman’s mishandling of the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, in the early days of the Vicksburg campaign. The report -- already in the military mail pouch, sealed and addressed to a private citizen -- was opened by a postal official, some say by Sherman’s order although Sherman denied that was the case. Knox was subsequently found not guilty by the court but there was significant tension. Mr. L.A. Hendrick, working for The New York Herald, wrote at length of his experience in being held as a prisoner of war for 90 days in the infamous prison, Castle Thunder, located in Richmond, Virginia.

“All prisoners are first taken to Libby prison. Here their names are registered, their persons searched, and assignments made to the prisons in which are confined those of like category. My comrade and myself were put through this preliminary process equally with the rest, saving the searching, which indignity we were graciously spared. In the reception and searching process alluded to I am constrained to say I saw none of the unfeeling cruelty and merciless degradation of prisoners according with the written accounts of chaplains, escaping prisoners and those released, which subsequently I had occasion to read. I shall speak more fully hereafter of the Libby. Meantime my confere and myself are conveyed to our assigned quarters.

CASTLE THUNDER.

Here we are at last, and a block only from the Libby. I dislike taking any one with me over the threshold of Castle Thunder and show the interior life there. I would ask any one before accompanying me to take first a full meal, and if there are any ladies, to take their smelling bottles, and all having aversion to insects generally classed as genus pediculus, to wear only such garments as they can afford afterwards to throw into the grate or river. And first let me describe the building. Originally, like the Libby, a tobacco warehouse, soon after the war began it was converted into a prison. Until about a year ago it was occupied exclusively by rebel soldiers, confined here to await trial on charges of breach of military discipline or to serve out sentences of ball and chain wearing already passed. Derelict rebel soldiers multiplying too rapidly, the bulk of them were removed to the penitentiary at Saulsbury, North Carolina, and thereupon the induction of Yankee prisoners began. For a long time, deserters from the Northern army were confined in this building, until Castle Lightning was appropriated to their sole occupancy.”

Hendrick’s lengthy account of his captivity seems to suggest that he was accorded slightly better treatment than others in the same Richmond prison; he specifically notes the harsher experience of those prisoners whose captivity kept them in ball-and-chain restraints in the room above him. “Having no fire in the room, they are compelled to keep moving to keep from freezing. Throwing the balls, weighing from twelve to thirty-two pounds each, on the floor in advance at each step, the thugging sound kept up a jar and a racket the reverse of agreeable.”

THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION

As accustomed as modern readers are to newspapers use of inch-tall headlines across the horizontal line of the page, the presentation of the facts of Lincoln’s assassination are strikingly different.

The front page of The New York Herald situates the most important story of the day in the utmost left-hand, vertical column. The headline is comprised of more than half-a-dozen statements of relevant facts:

“Assassination of President Lincoln
President Shot at Theatre Last Evening
Secretary Seward Daggered in His Bed but Not Mortally Wounded
Clarence and Frederick Seward Badly Hurt
Escape of the Assassins
Intense Excitement in Washington
Scene at the Deathbed of Mr. Lincoln
J. Wilkes Booth, the Actor, the Alleged Assassin of the President”

Only then is the official dispatch, composed by Secretary of War Stanton, provided to the paper’s readers in full text with complete sentences. It’s worth noting that it was this piece of work which has caused Stanton to be largely credited with what is known as the inverted pyramid of reporting, leading off with the most important information in the initial paragraph with information of diminishing importance presented lower in the news item. Stanton as Secretary of War had exerted significant control over the use of the telegraph in the interests of the military in a time of war and his “War Diary” entries on the pages of major Northern newspapers had provided terse but clear accounts of the specifics of war. His dispatch of April 15, 1865 conveyed particulars of the presidential assassination precisely but without sensationalism or melodrama.

POST WAR

During the Civil War, newspapers had become a daily necessity. As Oliver Wendell Holmes phrased it in an article for The Atlantic, “Everything else we can do without . . . Only bread and newspapers we must have.” For the next 90 years until the advent of television, newspapers would be the most effective (and profitable) means of keeping Americans informed about their world.
Accessible Archives Collections Used in Preparing This White Paper

Accessible Archives provides diverse primary source materials reflecting broad views across American history and culture have been assembled into comprehensive databases. The following collections were utilized in composing this white paper.

**African American Newspapers:**
This collection of African American newspapers contains a wealth of information about cultural life and history during the 19th and early 20th century and is rich with first-hand reports of the major events and issues of the day. The collection also provides a great number of early biographies, vital statistics, essays and editorials, poetry and prose, and advertisements all of which embody the African-American experience. These newspapers are included: The Christian Recorder, Weekly Advocate/The Colored American, Frederick Douglass’ Paper, Freedom’s Journal, The National Era, The North Star, Provincial Freeman, The Freedmen’s Record, and The Negro Business League Herald.

**Frank Leslie’s Weekly:**
Founded in 1855 as Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, and later changed to Frank Leslie’s Weekly, or Leslie’s Weekly, continued publication until 1922; it was an American illustrated literary and news publication, and one of several started by publisher and illustrator Frank Leslie. Frank Leslie’s Weekly followed a tested and proven formula of carefully combining elements of war, politics, art, science, travel and exploration, literature and the fine arts in each issue, enhanced with between 16 and 32 illustrations.

**The Civil War Collection, Part I: A Newspaper Perspective:**
A Newspaper Perspective contains major articles gleaned from over 2,500 issues of The New York Herald, The Charleston Mercury and the Richmond Enquirer, published between November 1, 1860 and April 15, 1865. Coverage begins with the events preceding the outbreak of war at Fort Sumter, continues through the surrender at Appomattox and concludes with the assassination and funeral of Abraham Lincoln..

**The Civil War Collection, Part IV: A Midwestern Perspective:**
Part IV of Accessible Archives’ Civil War Collection consists of seven newspapers published in Indiana between the years of 1855 and 1869 – News of the Day, The Old Post Union/The Vincennes Times, Stars & Stripes, Vincennes Courant, Vincennes Gazette, The Vincennes Times, and Vincennes Western Sun. These items provide pre-and post-Civil War information, in addition to coverage of the Civil War itself.

© 2019 Accessible Archives, Inc.

**Unlimited Priorities** is the exclusive sales and marketing agent for Accessible Archives:

Iris L. Hanney, President  
Unlimited Priorities LLC  
239-549-2384  
iris.hanney@unlimitedpriorities.com  
www.unlimitedpriorities.com

Robert Lester, Product Development  
Unlimited Priorities LLC  
203-527-3739  
robert.lester@unlimitedpriorities.com  
www.accessible-archives.com