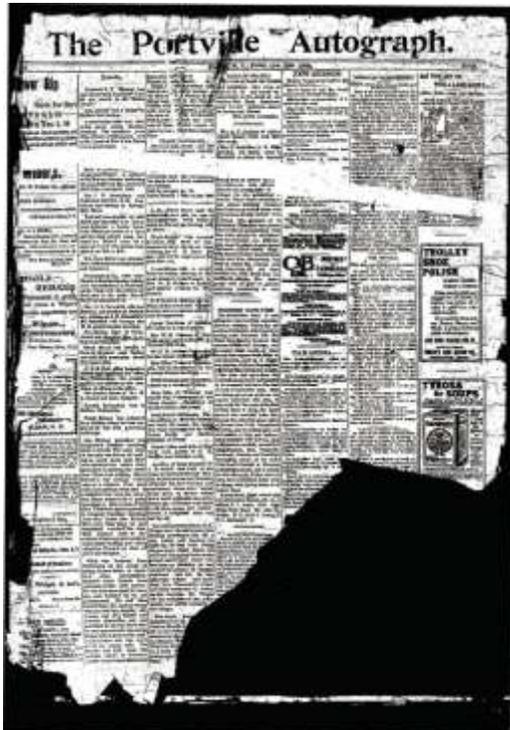


Yesterday's news: A look at Portville's collection of out-of-print newspapers

By CINDY WAGNER, Olean Times Herald

Feb 2, 2019 Updated Feb 3, 2019



The Portville Autograph 1901



The Portville Star 1956

PORTVILLE — While Portville residents may know there used to be a town newspaper, they may not know there were not one, not two, but five newspapers in the town.

“People didn’t have phones back then ... that’s how they got their news,” said Cindy Keeley, president of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society. “They loved to know the news.”

Obituaries, funerals and resident’s trips out of town were central to their focus. “I’ve been surprised when I’ve looked through copies for something, that there wasn’t anything on some really big events nationally,” Keeley continued. “Every year a local family would have a party

for their anniversary and every year the paper would cover it almost word for word from the year before.”

Jim Brunner of Geneseo noted every little town or village had their own newspaper. “Farmers basically are nosy,” laughed Brunner, when asked if the paper was more for town residents than those in the country. “They’d pick it up when they came to market.”

A collection of the last three newspapers — the Portville Autograph, Portville Review and Portville Star — has always been housed at the Portville Free Library.

“Libraries are what people used for a long time,” explains Kelly Norek, technical clerk at the library. “I enjoy them. I still like reading through them.”

The library is hesitant to remove the binded newspapers from the shelf due to their brittleness and prefers that people look at the digitized copies found on portvillehistory.org and nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

Years ago, local resident Ruth Cronin created an index of newspaper contents from 1901 to 1938. Since it was often the majority of the paper’s contents, the index features mostly items such as births, marriages, obituaries, social and church meetings, local events, accidents and other local items deemed newsworthy. A PDF version of the index is available at portvillehistory.org.

Jim Brunner, of Geneseo and a former Portville resident, remembers a newspaper being distributed from the Portville American Legion. When asked, Bob Fairbanks of Portville, laughed, saying he “was a kid growing up back then. ... They probably distributed it at the Colonial. I remember newspapers being there. I don’t ever remember it being delivered.”

An annual subscription to the Autograph was just 50 cents until 1908 and Fairbanks was correct - the papers were mailed to subscribers. A new ruling on postal rates went into effect in early 1908, so Fairchild changed the name to the Review, increased his paper from four to eight pages, and doubled the subscription rate to \$1. Subscribers could renew at the old rate until April 1,

1908, when the new ruling went into effect. The rates increased over the years but still remained relatively inexpensive.

PORTVILLE MIRROR

According to “An Early History of The Town of Portville, New York,” published in 1976 by Portville Historical Society and edited by Thomas and Ronda Shaner Pollock, “The Portville Mirror was established in the village of Portville in 1887 by B.D. Southwicke. It lasted but one year.”

Not much is known about B.D. Southwicke — no pictures or biographical data are readily available.

THE EDUCATOR

In 1889, W.H. Smith started The Educator, which reportedly had a circulation of 20,000 subscribers from around the country. Smith graduated from Ten Broeck Academy in 1880 and Cornell University in 1885. He was appointed principal of the Portville Union School later the same year he graduated from Cornell.

PORTVILLE AUTOGRAPH

There are many reports of the third newspaper, which is often referred to as the first newspaper — discounting the Mirror and the Educator — serving the residents of Portville.

According to tonyhistoricalnewspapers.org, the Portville Autograph was published from 1895 to 1908 and was published by Jas. W. Fairchild. However, Keeley said it was originally published by C.M. Cranston in the beginning.

In 1900, when the library’s copies start, “the owner and publisher was James W. Fairchild. His father, J. H. Fairchild owned a local mill for grinding flour, etc. called Fairchild Mill,” according to Keeley. Fairchild died in 1909, after changing the name to the Review the prior year.

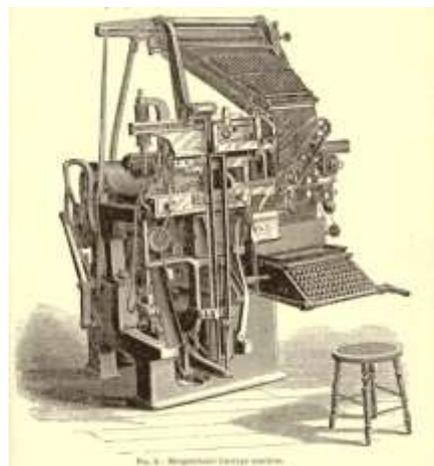
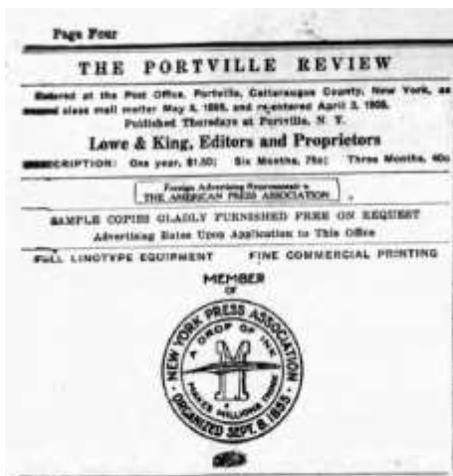
However, many articles written in the past by local residents proclaim the first paper was the Portville Star. Keeley explained that “in 1895, two newspapers started in Portville, the Portville Star and the Portville Autograph. ... The Star did not last more than a year.”

Harry C. Holcomb agreed, as he wrote in his essay, “Glimpses of Fifty Years 1880-1930”: “The Star was the first newspaper published in Portville and which died of what the doctors would call ‘malnutrition’ in a child.”

In Portville History, an article written in 1926 by Margaret Lamb published in the Jan. 19, 1966 edition of the Moneysaver, she writes, “The first Portville newspaper was printed June 5, 1895 and was called the Star. Rev. A. McDougald and J.E. Clark printed it in the attic of the meat market owned by Mr. McDougald’s father.”

“Fred Tarbell published the Portville Autograph for several years,” Holcomb wrote. “He employed two young ladies as compositors and I think the work was all done by hand. One of these girls was Caroline Keysaw, now Mrs. E. W. Johnson.”

“One of the printers that was used was called a linotype,” Keeley explained. “Molten lead was typed onto a metal tray line by line, then the ink was applied as the paper was fed through on rollers. The Portville Historical and Preservation Society acquired a similar printer from Charles Eshelman’s collection that they believe came from the school. It has a typewriter keyboard where the operator sits to input all the articles.



Later the Autograph was published by Jas. W. “Jimmy” Fairchild, who purchased the paper and continued it until his death.

PORTVILLE REVIEW

The Portville Review was first published in 1908, according to nyshistoricnewspapers.org, although an Early History of The Town of Portville, New York states it was first published in 1909.

The newspaper was published every Thursday and the publishers included Jas. W. Fairchild in 1908; Will T. in 1909; Morrison Bros. in 1915; J.C. Casner in 1916; Lowe & King in 1922; O.A. & E.L. Kahsnitz in 1928; and B.L. Eldridge in 1939.

Holcomb explains that “Will T. Keller later took over the paper and changed the name to the Portville Review. Later, a young man named Cranston of Little Genesee bought and managed the paper for a time.”

Later, Clarence and Clifford Morrison, brothers from Franklinville, became the owners and continued the publication until they disposed of it to J. G. Casner in 1916. Casner sold out to Lowe and King in Oct. 1922, who carried on the business until selling it in 1928 to “a Syracuse group associated with Roycroft. ... In 1929, the owners were Otto and Ethel Kahsnitz. They also bought the Eldred Eagle,” explained Keeley.

“I remember the Review,” Brunner said. “I left Portville in 1955 so I knew it late ’40s, early ’50s. ... It was owned by Mr. Scott.” Brunner remembers the newspaper being printed at what is now the location of Fyre and Ice on South Main Street.

“The woman who ran it, she lived in the village and knew everything going on,” said Joe McLarney, a long time Portville resident and official. “She lived on Temple Street.”

That woman was Bea Hatch Eldridge, who graduated from Portville in 1910. She became publisher and editor of the Portville Review in 1939 until 1958, when the paper was

discontinued, according to the Portville Historical and Preservation Society. Eldridge also published the Eldred (Pa.) Eagle and for 25 years was a correspondent for the Buffalo Evening News.

Eldridge came from a long line of like-minded people, according to Keeley. “She ran the paper longer than anybody - 13 years or more ... There was (family) interest in the newspaper, for writing,” she explained. “Her grandfather, Guy Lowrey served as Justice of the Peace for over 50 years. Eldridge was also the town historian for 37 years.

Bob Fairbanks remembers that Eldridge “published lots of stories and letters from soldiers in World War II. I think she sent copies to those in the war.”

She reportedly published the letters they wrote back to her, expressing gratitude for her thoughtfulness to send them the local news they were missing.

Eldridge was also known for her strident voice. Brunner remembers his time in the fifth grade, as does another Portville classmate. The fifth-grade classroom was on the second floor of the Colonial, which housed the post office, village offices, a restaurant and the fire department. They remember class being interrupted several times a day by Eldridge, whose voice often carried into the classroom from across the street.

The Review, at the end of its printing cost \$2.50 a year.

PORTVILLE STAR

“On Sept. 30, 1954, the owner of the Allegany Citizen started up Portville Star,” Keeley said, which would be the second iteration of the paper. Aloysius ‘Allie’ Mutschlechner, the new owner, was the son of Joseph Mutschlechner, who originally owned the Citizen.

The Star's Portville correspondent was Mertie Keller, sister of Will T. Keller, an owner of the defunct Portville Review.

Mertie Keller graduated from Portville in 1904. Among other places of employment, she was a correspondent for the Portville Review, the Olean Times Herald and the Allegany Citizen.

The Portville Star subscription was \$3 annually or 10 cents a copy and stopped publication in about Dec. 1969.