

All the News That is Fit to Print

In 1777, when Vermont declared its independence, only 20,000 people lived in the state. So perhaps it was not surprising that there was not even a printing press and not one single newspaper. Very few copies of any newspaper, even from other colonies, came to Vermont either. People got the news by **couriers**, who carried messages on foot or on horseback. Of course, the news was often weeks or months old by the time people heard it.

The first Vermont newspaper was started in 1781 in Westminster. It was called the *Vermont Gazette, or Green Mountain Post Boy*. You can see a copy of this early paper in the library of the Vermont Historical Society in Montpelier, where it is preserved. The date

on it is April 2, 1781.

The Revolutionary War between the American colonies and England had just ended. So the publishers of the *Vermont Gazette*, Judah Paddock Spooner and Timothy Green, picked a **motto** about freedom for their paper. The motto was:

*"Plain as Reeds, where streams of Freedom glide;
Firm as the Hills to stem Oppression's Tide."*

The second newspaper in Vermont was published in Bennington in 1783. It was the *Vermont Gazette or Freeman's Depository*. The pages were only 8" x 12" in size, not much bigger than *The Green Mountaineer*. *The Vermont Journal*, printed in Windsor by

Alden Spooner and George Hough, also in 1783, was Vermont's third newspaper.

It is interesting to look at old newspapers. Ask your librarian whether your library has a file of early papers for your town. If it does, ask to see some of them. You will find the print and the headlines very small compared to today. There may be very little news about what was happening in town – no school news, town meeting news, no stories about horse and buggy accidents. Most of the space was for accounts of what was happening around the world. Since people picked up town gossip by visiting every day at the general store, the editor did not want to waste time and space putting this news in the paper.

The Farmer's Library was a newspaper published in 1789 in Fair



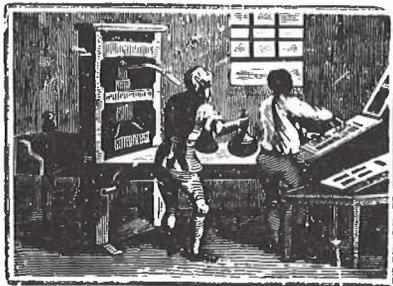
Haven, by Judah Spooner, for readers in Vermont and New York. The first column on the righthand side was called "Latest Foreign Intelligence." In it were short news items from Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France, and England. Nowhere could you find any news about what was going on in Fair Haven.

For us today the language seems difficult. It is certainly more polite and fancy than the simple language we are used to. Here is one story about a naval battle:

Italy

Venice, Dec. 15, 1789

The rest of the vessels surrendered to the French are about to sail for Alcona. Thus we are now absolutely without any naval force, and the vast stores which our **arsenal** contained being carried off, it is not in our power to create a new **marine**.



If you were writing this news story today, how would you do it? Pretend you are a newspaper editor. Can you tell it all in one sentence?

Later, though, stories about town affairs became an important part of news coverage. So did advertising. It is fun to look at the ads in old newspapers. They can tell you about what people did for a living, what they liked to wear, how much things cost, what they used in their kitchens and barns, and what kinds of books they read. The ads tell a little about everything from medicines to milk, shoes to shovels, hats to frying pans. Compare some of the advertisements printed here to ones you might find in Ver-

mont newspapers today. How are they different? In what ways are they the same?



By reading old newspapers you will feel that you know your town in a new way. You read a little in one paper, and a little in the next. And you will see that the people of long ago were very much like the people you know now. The men who fought in the American Revolution were the same kind as those who fought in World War II or Vietnam. The people who made decisions for the town were very much like the selectmen today. There were courageous and caring people, selfish and cruel people, rich and poor, just as there are now. All these people are a part of history.



VOCABULARY

courier - a messenger

motto - words or sentences that express a principle, a goal, or an ideal

oppression - unjust use of power

arsenal - a place for storing arms and ammunition

marine - the ships of a nation