

New York Newspapers during Ratification

From September 1787 through July 1788, twelve newspapers and a monthly magazine were published in New York at one time or another. Seven newspapers and the magazine were printed in New York City, two newspapers in Albany, and one newspaper each in Hudson and Poughkeepsie. The twelfth newspaper was printed first in Lansingburgh, then in Albany, finally returning to Lansingburgh.

The seven newspapers printed in New York City included three dailies, three semiweeklies, and one weekly. The dailies were *The Daily Advertiser*; *The New-York Morning Post*, and *Daily Advertiser*; and *The New-York Journal*, and *Daily Patriotic Register*.

The oldest daily in New York City was William Morton's *New York Morning Post*. Originally established as a semiweekly by Morton and Samuel Horner in April 1783, it became a daily on 23 February 1785. (Horner died in January 1786, making Morton the sole owner.) The *Morning Post*, many issues of which are not extant, published both Federalist and Antifederalist pieces, many of them taken from out-of-state newspapers. Few original items appeared in the extant issues of the *Morning Post*. It seemed that this newspaper leaned slightly toward the Antifederalists.

The *Daily Advertiser*, founded by Francis Childs on 1 March 1785 with the assistance of Benjamin Franklin, was the first newspaper in the city to be established originally as a daily. The *Advertiser* published numerous Federalist essays, including the first fifty-one numbers of *The Federalist*. The *Advertiser's* motto, which was dropped with the issue of 17 October 1787, was: "The Noblest Motive is the Public Good." In January 1788 Childs, in response to "the very liberal and flattering Encouragement" he had received from his subscribers since beginning operation, went to Poughkeepsie, at "*considerable Expence*" in order to take shorthand notes of the legislature's proceedings and debates so that they could be printed in the *Advertiser*. Childs hoped that the continued encouragement of his subscribers would permit him to continue such "Useful and Important Information" every year (*Daily Advertiser*, 14 January 1788. Childs had published extensive accounts of the debates of the January–April 1787 session of the legislature.

Thomas Greenleaf's daily *New York Journal* was a staunchly Antifederalist newspaper. Greenleaf, manager of the *Journal* since September 1785, purchased the weekly newspaper in January 1787 from Eleazer Oswald of the Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*. Oswald had taken over the publication of the *Journal* in March 1785 from his mother-in-law Elizabeth Holt, the widow of former patriot printer John Holt who had established the paper. Since Oswald resided in Philadelphia, he hired Greenleaf to manage the paper for him.

Greenleaf's belief in the importance of newspapers was expressed succinctly in his motto and in a statement he made in May

1788. Greenleaf's motto, taken from James Thomson's *Liberty* (1735–36), reads: "Here TRUTH Unlicens'd reigns; and dares accost—e'en KINGS themselves, or RULERS of the FREE!" On 29 May Greenleaf printed this statement from a "a correspondent": "NEWSPAPERS are the GUARDIANS OF FREEDOM; by NEWSPAPERS only are ye made acquainted with the *rise* and *fall* of empires: and, of the Freedom or the Slavery of your own species."

During the meeting of the Constitutional Convention, Greenleaf supported the establishment of a strong central government, but in early September 1787 he began to print Antifederalist items. The *Journal*, published on Thursdays, became so biased, in the eyes of Federalists, that on 4 October Greenleaf defended his publication policy (I below). By 18 October the weekly *Journal* was so inundated with Antifederalist material that Greenleaf had to print an extra issue. The next week he noted that "want of room" caused him to postpone the publication of a piece signed "Timoleon," but he hoped that in a few weeks, as was "generally desired by his friends and customers," he would be able to publish his newspaper more often. In his next three issues, Greenleaf apologized that "want of room" prevented him from printing certain essays, although he published another extra issue on 1 November. Finally, on 15 November he announced that the *Journal* would become a daily because of "the solicitations of a respectable number of his present subscribers—and by means of the generous patronage of a few valued friends and the public...." He declared that in this time of "Crisis" people needed to be well informed about the new Constitution; he wanted to ensure that there would be "free discussion on that momentous topic." By publishing only once a week, Greenleaf claimed that he had "unavoidably neglected" half of the original essays that he had received. Although four other New York City newspapers published a total of sixteen separate issues a week during the fall of 1787, Greenleaf intimated that a "Free and Impartial discussion" of the Constitution depended upon the daily publication of the *Journal*. Greenleaf charged \$6.00 per annum for his new daily, the same price charged by the *Daily Advertiser*, which carried the largest number of advertisements of any New York City newspaper. However, since "the principal support of a Daily newspaper is derived from Advertisements," Greenleaf requested that "Gentlemen in the mercantile line, and all others who occasionally Advertise" place advertisements in the *Journal*.

Despite the reasonable cost of the paper, at the beginning of the new year Greenleaf, like other printers, had to call upon his subscribers to pay their arrears. He had been to "great expence" in printing the newspaper. Greenleaf continued to have financial problems because of the expense in publishing a daily newspaper and on 19 May 1788—the six-month anniversary of his daily newspaper—he requested that "those gentlemen who profess to be liberal supporters of 'the freedom of the press,' will afford him a proportion of their advertisements, for which they will be entitled to his unfeigned thanks." Greenleaf was plainly calling upon those who did not agree with him on political matters to help support the publication of his newspaper. New York City was overwhelmingly Federalist so that he needed the support of some Federalists.

The first issue of the daily *New-York Journal, and Daily Patriotic Register* appeared on 19 November 1787. Greenleaf noted that,

contrary to some insinuations, he was undertaking “the arduous task of a Daily Paper” from none “other than laudable motives.” He informed the other newspaper publishers that he would not use “dishonorable means” in competing with them, and he hoped that they would harbor “no idea of unfriendliness” toward him.

Despite Greenleaf’s conciliatory attitude, his relations with his fellow printers were sometimes tense. For example, Greenleaf and the printers of the *New York Morning Post* and *New York Packet* exchanged scurrilous satirical articles after the *Morning Post* printed a spurious advertisement on 7 January 1788, satirizing Greenleaf as “a Gay, volatile Anti-Federal Printer.” In March 1788 Greenleaf was criticized as an Antifederalist partisan for printing an item stating that Virginian Arthur Lee, a member of the Confederation Board of Treasury and an Antifederalist, had asserted that four-fifths of the people of Virginia opposed the Constitution. (See “Arthur Lee’s Report of Virginia Antifederalism,” 7 March 1788. And in early May 1788, Greenleaf and Francis Childs of the *Daily Advertiser* were involved in a bitter exchange over a *New York Journal* item of 29 April that incorrectly referred to the appointment of Thomas Wooldridge as the new British vice consul for the New England states. According to Greenleaf, he had been given the item by a gentleman just as he was completing the printing of the issue for the day. Therefore, Greenleaf printed only 20 or 30 newspapers containing that item that he “left solely at the disposal” of Wooldridge. When Greenleaf’s action was discovered, Greenleaf was forced to defend himself, but Childs dismissed his explanation as fraudulent. In turn, Greenleaf charged that Childs was trying to destroy his reputation and credit. Childs rejoined that Greenleaf’s had not adequately explained his behavior, and he reminded his readers of Greenleaf’s role in printing the item regarding Arthur Lee and Virginia Antifederalism. (See “Thomas Greenleaf Erroneously Reports the Appointment of a New British Vice Consul for the New England States,” 29 April–6 May 1788.

Greenleaf’s daily newspaper, however, did not entirely supplant his regular weekly issue. Greenleaf had announced on 15 November that his regular Thursday issue would continue with the title *The New-York Journal, and Weekly Register*, and that it would contain “the choicest pieces, and the fewest advertisements.” The price for the Thursday issue was \$2.00, the same that it had been before 15 November. The Thursday issue, which would have “a more *general Circulation in the Country*, than that of any other day in the Week,” did indeed have “the choicest pieces.”

After becoming a daily, the *New York Journal* probably equaled Eleazer Oswald’s Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer* in the quantity and quality of Antifederalist material that it published. The *Journal* printed several important serialized essays, such as “Cato” (7 nos.), “Brutus” (16 nos.), “Cincinnatus” (6 nos.), “A Countryman” (Hugh Hughes, 6 nos.), and “A Countryman” (De Witt Clinton, 5 nos.). The *Journal* also reprinted many out-of-state Antifederalist articles, e.g., seventeen of eighteen essays of “Centinel,” seven of eight numbers of “An Old Whig,” and all twelve installments of Luther Martin’s *Genuine Information*. (“Centinel” and “An Old Whig” first appeared in Philadelphia, and *Genuine Information* in Baltimore.)

However, to demonstrate that his newspaper was open to all parties, Greenleaf also published some original Federalist essays. Perhaps, the best examples of such an intent were his publication of numbers 23 to 39 of *The Federalist*, the most influential, voluminous, and prestigious Federalist publication, and the five scurrilous essays of “Examiner.” When he printed *The Federalist* 23, he inserted this prefatory statement: “Yesterday the manuscript copy of the subsequent was communicated to the Editor, with an assurance, that his press should be preferred, in future, for the first ushering into public view, the succeeding numbers. If the public are pleased to stigmatize the Editor as a partial printer, in the face of his reiterated assertions of ‘being influenced by none,’ what more can be said! This stigma he prefers, to that of slavish copiest; consequently, unless manuscripts are communicated, he will be constrained (however injudicious) still to crouch under the weighty charge of partiality.” For publishing some numbers of *The Federalist* and all of the “Examiner,” Greenleaf was criticized by some of his subscribers. “A Friend,” however, praised Greenleaf for having “a just idea of the freedom of the press” and condemned those who censured him. Another good example of Greenleaf’s impartiality was the reprinting of four of the five numbers of Connecticut Federalist Roger Sherman’s “Countryman” essays that had first been printed in New Haven.

At the beginning of the new year in 1788, Greenleaf expressed pride in his publication record, when he called upon his subscribers to pay their arrears. The rubbing off of “all Old Scores,” he wrote, would “give him new spirit, and enable him with greater perseverance to pursue the great objects of his vocation—to soar among the spirits of Brutus, Cato, Publius, Landholder, &c. to detect the *evil one* from amid (if there he be) and to place him upon the steep of a precipice, that he might tumble thence down headlong. Thus circumstanced, and being ever anxious to perform impossibilities, viz. to please every one, soliciting the continuation of public favors, &c. is the Editor ever devoted, &c. &c.”

Even though Greenleaf published daily, he still had problems printing all that he wanted. On 7 January 1788, he printed this statement: “The Editor’s Daily Receptacles for Communications, from his numerous and very attentive Correspondents, for the six ensuing Days, are so crowded, that he shall not have it in his Power to gratify them, all nor any one of them in particular, on either side of the Great Lake NEW-CONSTITUTION. He shall, however, STRIVE; some Bread and some Cheese, says the Epicure, relish best, and should a little Mustard and Vinegar, be intermixed, our Readers in general would not disapprove.”

Federalists bitterly attacked Greenleaf. Confederation Postmaster General Ebenezer Hazard—whom Greenleaf had accused of preventing Antifederalist newspapers from going through the mails—described Greenleaf as “brainless,” an “Echo” of Eleazer Oswald, and “a poor thick-sculled Creature” (Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, 5 March, 12 April, and 10 May 1788. “Anarchy” charged Greenleaf with having “talents of misrepresentation.” Dutchess County Election), while “Fed.” asserted that Greenleaf had “a little mind” and “a sterile brain” *New York Packet*, 25 July. In disgust, some people cancelled their subscriptions to the *Journal*. Finally, after the news of the New York Convention’s ratification of the Constitution arrived late on the night of 26 July 1788, a mob broke

into Greenleaf's shop and destroyed much of his type. Because of these losses, the last daily issue of the *Journal* appeared on 26 July. Publication resumed five days later as a weekly.

New York City's three semiweeklies were *The New-York Packet*; *The Independent Journal: or, The General Advertiser*; and *The New-York Museum*. The *New York Packet* and the *New York Museum* appeared on Tuesdays and Fridays, while the *Independent Journal* was published on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The *New York Packet* and the *Independent Journal* were both Federalist newspapers, with each of them printing all eighty-five numbers of *The Federalist*. The *New York Packet* was owned by Samuel and John Loudon, who were also printers to the state of New York. The motto of the *Packet* was "*Tros Tyriusque Nobis Nullo Discrimine Agetur. Virg.*" (I shall act impartially toward all, Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book I.). For more on Samuel Loudon, a strong supporter of American independence, who, despite hardships, kept his newspaper going during the Revolution,.

The *Independent Journal* was owned by J. M'Lean & Co. With the issue of 2 July 1788, Archibald M'Lean was admitted to the firm. In late September 1787 John M'Lean printed the four-page broadside of the Constitution that the Confederation Congress sent to the states for their ratification. In March and May 1788 J. and A. M'Lean also printed the two volumes of *The Federalist*. (At the same time that he was publishing the *Independent Journal*, John M'Lean also owned a Virginia newspaper, the *Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal*.) There are few extant issues of John Russell's *New York Museum*, the first issue of which appeared on 23 May 1788. Published on Tuesday and Friday, its motto was: "*Multum in Parvo*" (Much in little; a great deal in a small compass).

The only weekly printed in New York City in 1788 (before 26 July) was *The Impartial Gazetteer and Saturday Evening's Post* which was established in May 1788 by John Harrison and Stephen Purdy, Jr. It appeared on Saturday evenings at 5:00 p.m. In September 1788 it became *The New-York Weekly Museum*.

The state's only magazine—the monthly *The American Magazine. Containing a Miscellaneous Collection of Original and Other Valuable Essays, in Prose and Verse, and Calculated Both for Instruction and Amusement*—was published in New York City by Samuel Loudon, under the editorship of Connecticut native Noah Webster. Its motto was: "Science the guide, and truth the eternal goal." The first issue, that of December 1787, was advertised for sale on 1 January 1788; thereafter issues of the magazine would be advertised early in the month following the month that appeared on the title pages. Each issue was seventy-two pages and sold for a quarter dollar. Annual subscriptions cost \$2.50. Webster, one of the most prolific Federalist propagandists, had been in Philadelphia before he left for New York City in the Fall of 1787 to edit the magazine. Webster included some of his own writings in the magazine.

Albany had two newspapers—*The Albany Gazette* and *The Albany Journal: or, the Montgomery, Washington and Columbia Intelligencer*. The weekly *Gazette*, which was established in 1784 and appeared on Thursdays, was published by Charles R. Webster. By December 1788, more than 800 copies of *Albany Gazette* were printed each week; it circulated in the New York counties of Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Montgomery, and Washington and in Bennington, Vermont, and Berkshire County, Massachusetts, It was

also sent regularly to the principal towns from New Hampshire to Virginia (*Albany Gazette*, 26 December. The *Albany Journal* was published by Charles R. Webster and his twin brother George. The *Journal* was established as a semiweekly on 26 January 1788, although it became a weekly with the issue of 31 March 1788. As a semiweekly the *Journal* appeared on Mondays and Saturdays, and as a weekly it appeared on Mondays. The newspapers were Federalist, and they often shared articles. Albany Antifederalists sharply criticized the Websters. Especially Charles. A few days after the Websters established the *Journal*. Abraham G. Lansing wrote Abraham Yates, Jr., that “it is the sincere wish of our Friends that some Person would set himself down here and disconcert these White Livers by publishing an impartial paper.” Lansing hoped that Melancton Smith would prevail “on [Thomas] Greenleaf [of the *New York Journal*] to send one of his Journeymen to set up a printing office” in Albany. Aware of this strong opposition to them, the Websters reluctantly published a few Antifederalist items. Dissatisfied with the half-hearted actions of the Websters. Albany Antifederalists pressed harder to establish an impartial newspaper to be called the *Albany Register*, but with no assistance from Greenleaf and Antifederalist leaders in New York City, they abandoned their search by the end of March (John Lansing, Jr., et al. to Melancton Smith, 1 March; and Abraham G. Lansing to Abraham Yates, Jr., 2 March; and John Lansing, Jr., and Abraham G. Lansing to John Lamb, 23 March. The *Albany Register* was finally established in October 1788; it appeared on Mondays.

Printed in neighboring Lansingburgh, the weekly *Northern Centinel*, and *Lansingburgh Advertiser* published by Thomas Claxton and John Babcock on Tuesdays was a Federalist newspaper. Its motto was: “The Press is the Cradle of Science. The Nurse of Genius, and the Shield of Liberty.” “Dissatisfied with their situation” in Lansingburgh, Claxton and Babcock moved their newspaper to Albany in January 1788, and from 11 February to 11 April, they published on Mondays as the *Federal Herald*. Lansing described the newspaper as insignificant.). The paper was eventually returned to Lansingburgh, and, beginning with the issue of 28 April, it appeared on Mondays under the same name. Ezra Hickok. However, had replaced Claxton as Babcock’s partner. When Antifederalists criticized the *Northern Centinel* for not printing articles against the Constitution, the editors replied on 8 January 1788 that “in defence of their characters as printers ... that not an original observation in opposition to federal measures hath, yet been handed them for publication.—Their Press Is and Ever Hath Been Free.”

Ashbel Stoddard’s Federalist *The Hudson Weekly Gazette* printed both Federalist and Antifederalist material. The newspaper was established by Stoddard and Charles R. Webster in 1785 only two years after the town of Hudson was founded. (The rapidly growing town was incorporated as the state’s third city in 1787.) Stoddard and Webster, both natives of Connecticut, had been apprentices together on the Hartford *Connecticut Courant*. In 1786 Webster, who was also publishing the *Albany Gazette*, left the firm. The *Hudson Weekly Gazette* was printed on Thursdays until 15 April 1788 when it began to appear on Tuesdays. In April 1788 Stoddard, proud of his impartiality, informed his readers that “All pieces written with decency, whether federal or antifederal, will be inserted without distinction.” He refused to print an item signed “An Antifederalist” because “it contains nothing but private

invectives.” His newspaper would not be devoted “to scurrility from pecuniary motives.”

The Country Journal, and the Poughkeepsie Advertiser, another Federalist weekly, was owned by Nicholas Power. The *Country Journal* was printed on Wednesdays. On 16 January 1788 Power announced that the paper would be published on Tuesdays. On 11 March 1788 Power informed his customers that he would soon get new printing equipment and that he would probably “enlarge his paper to the size of the largest printed in the State.” The *Country Journal* published both Federalist and Antifederalist material. Its motto was: “In my Free Page let different Works reside;/Tho’ Party’s hostile Lines whose Works divide;/Party! Whose murdering Spirit I abhor More subtly cruel, and less brave than war.” (With the issue of 30 September 1788, Power changed the name to *The Country Journal, and Dutchess and Ulster County Farmer’s Register* and added the motto, “Venerate the Plough.”) The *Country Journal* was the only newspaper in America to print, in its entirety, the *Letters from the Federal Farmer to the Republican*, a major Antifederalist pamphlet.

Even though Power abhorred party spirit, he was accused by a correspondent of favoring “one particular party” over another. The correspondent threatened that “a considerable number of us” would cancel their subscriptions if Power did not print “what comes to hand from either party.” Power denied that he favored one party over another. Power was defended by an “Unprejudiced Person,” who stated that the printer had indeed been impartial because he published articles filled with invectives from both parties (*ibid.*, 8 July 1788), (For Power’s difficulties with a post rider who carried his newspaper, a not uncommon situation for printers, and for his resolution of the problem.

The *Albany Gazette*, *Northern Centinel* and *Hudson Weekly Gazette* each demonstrated their Federalist bias by reprinting in consecutive weeks at least the first ten numbers of *The Federalist*. Beginning on 9 January 1788, the *Country Journal* reprinted, at the instigation of Federalist James Kent, *The Federalist* 14–21 in consecutive weeks, almost entirely in supplementary issues.

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