

On September 11, 1952, the newspapers of Washington will observe their own special Centennial.

One hundred years ago on September 11, 1852, the newspaper became an important factor in shaping the destiny of the state of Washington.

On that date James W. Wiley and Thornton F. McElroy published the initial issue of the Columbian, first newspaper to be printed north of the Columbia River. Its dateline read "Olympia, Puget Sound, Saturday, September 11, 1852". It gave no recognition to Oregon territory of which the area was then a part. It admitted the importance of religious and political discussion but it dedicated its influence solely to the settlement and development of the territory north of the Columbia. Its first demand was for independent territorial status.

There was historical significance even to the press on which this newspaper was printed. It was a hand-operated Ramage press designed and built by Adam Ramage, first of the nation's press builders, at Philadelphia about 1790. It may have been the first press constructed in this country. Certainly it was one of the first.

Until 1834 it was used to print the pronuncimientos of the Mexican government first at Mexico City and later at Monterey. In 1846 it was moved to San Francisco where in succession it printed the first issues of the Star and of the Alta California. On December 4, 1850, it printed the first issue of the Portland Oregonian. In the summer of 1852 it was brought to Olympia aboard the schooner Mary Taylor to launch the first newspaper in a new territory. After its service at Olympia it was destined to print the first newspaper in Seattle and in other Puget Sound cities. It is now a prize possession of the University of Washington Museum.

Puget Sound's first newspaper had its mechanical limitations. Type was laboriously set by hand from foundry cases. Type casting and line cuts were still beyond the inventor's horizon. Illustrations, and they were numerous, were hand cut wood blocks. Printing, too, was a slow process since each sheet must be fed by hand and every impression registered by manual pressure.

What the first newspaper lacked in mechanical equipment was compensated for in reader interest. Its first issue announced the appointment of authorized subscription agents at Whidbey's Island, Port Townsend, Steilacoom, Nisqually, Cowlitz Farms (Kelso-Longview), Chickeeles (Chehalis), New York (Seattle), New Dungeness and Oregon City. Its circulation territory extended to Victoria, B. C.,

where it had a large number of subscribers. The subscription price was \$5 per year for 52 issues. The Columbian was immediately an important factor in the promotion of industry and commerce. The first issue carried 42 advertisements covering shipping, manufacturing, retail trade and even personals. "Help Wanted" was a prominent heading for more than one ad. Wood block illustrations included a house, a tree, a cow, a ship, a shoe, a horse and a steam boat. Advertising rates were \$5 per square for three insertions with a square defined as anything less than 12 lines.

The Columbian declared its political neutrality in its first issue but this was short lived. The paper changed owners several times in its first year and its politics shifted from neutral to Whig to Democrat. Yet it never ceased its fight for territorial status for the area north of the Columbia. Ironically, James Wiley retired from the paper in March, 1853, after Washington Territory had been established but before news of the victory had reached Olympia. Both he and McElroy were to return to the Columbian before the close of 1853 when it changed its name to the Pioneer. In 1855 the Pioneer merged with Olympia's second newspaper, the Democrat.

One hundred years ago the press in what is now the State of Washington was a few cases of type, a somewhat antiquated hand press and two men who recognized the importance of exchange of information and ideas to the development of a great territory. Its news gathering facilities were the gleanings from the ships' dock, the occasional mail sack, the passing canoes. Its strength was its record of the events of every day living, the births and deaths, the comings and goings, the price of butter and shortage of flour. But its chronicles reached into the far crannies of the territory, Whidbey's Island, Port Townsend, Steilacoom, Nisqually, Cowlitz Farms, Chickeeles, New Dungeness, Oregon City and the New York that was to become Seattle. It fired the imagination of men and out of their labors grew a great state.

The press in this past century has grown many one hundred fold. Washington now has 24 daily newspapers, more than 150 weekly newspapers of general circulation and scores of foreign language and special publications. Daily newspaper circulation alone is near the million mark. News from the farthest reaches of the world speeds to these papers over wires and through the air within minutes after an event. So great has been the mechanical developments that words flow into electrical impulses to machine and to type almost as rapidly as the words can be spoken. So fast are the presses that a single issue of a metropolitan daily produced within a few hours would require months to stamp out on Adam Ramage's old press which brought the Columbian into existence.

The power of the press was demonstrated in Washington 100 years ago by the success of the Columbian in obtaining territorial recognition. Its continuing strength was rapidly shown in the ability of the Columbian and its successors to maintain Olympia as the territorial and state capitol. The importance of newspapers today to the continuing development of Washington is being demonstrated daily by such graphic illustrations as the "Tacoma Story" recording the paralyzing impact on business of the loss of its only daily newspaper when strike bound for four months.

Just as the history of Olympia is entwined with the history of the Columbian so is the history and growth of \_\_\_\_\_ entwined with the history of the \_\_\_\_\_. (Name of City) Copies of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Newspaper)

newspaper go beyond Whidbey's Island and Port Townsend to Honolulu and points west. They flow eastward to another New York and points between. But they draw their strength from the same eagerness and the necessity of man to exchange information and ideas in the interest of progress and development, and from their faithful record of the events of every day living, the births and deaths, the comings and goings, the price of butter and the shortage of flour.

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