

The Boston Chronicle, 1768

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Sigourney. She also learned that the poetess had never been apprised of this fact. In taking the matter over with some friends I was convinced that it was fitting that Mrs. Sigourney be informed, as it would doubtless be a matter of some interest to her. Accordingly a letter was written, by my mother I believe, to Mrs. Sigourney, acquainting her with the fact that a town away out in Iowa had been named in her honor. In due time a reply to the letter was received expressing Mrs. Sigourney's appreciation of the compliment which had been paid to her, and enclosing fifty dollars with which to defray the expense of printing slide trees about the little town.

Yours truly,

HENRY M. LEE

THE BOSTON CHRONICLE, 1768

Among the most precious files of old newspapers in the Historical Department is Volume I of the *Boston Chronicle*, extending from January 1, 1768, to December 26, of the same year. It is most interesting, showing the contrasts between newspapers then and now; and revealing much of the social and economic conditions of the people a century and a half ago.

Boston in 1768 was a city of 20,000 people. It had been sixty-four years since Boston had its first newspaper, the *Boston News Letter*. In 1768, the time of the founding of the *Chronicle*, the city had two other papers, the *News Letter* and the *Gazette*. The *Gazette*, especially, was the organ of the Whigs. Its office was the resort of the leading spirits of the day, Otis, the Adamses, the Warrens, and the Quineys. The *Chronicle* occupied a different position. Its publishers were Messrs. Mein and Fleming. They evidently took a very conservative position. It is charged that Mr. Mein greatly insulted the Whigs, ridiculing their vanity and Puritanism, endeavoring in that way to weaken the influence of their leaders with the masses. After a year or two Mein was practically driven from Boston, returning to England, from whence he had come five years before, and Fleming soon followed. They had been assisted by Joseph Green, a wit, and Samuel Waterhouse, an official in the customhouse. But in 1770, after a little over two years of precarious existence, the *Chronicle* passed into oblivion. The closing statement of its publishers says, "The Printers of the *Boston Chronicle* return thanks to the

gentlemen, who have so long favored them with their subscriptions, and now inform them that, as the *Chronicle*, in the present state of affairs, cannot be carried on, either for their entertainment or the emolument of the Printers, it will be discontinued for some time." Mr. Mein was taken good care of by the English government when he returned home, being indemnified for his financial losses in America and being given employment on a London newspaper.

When the *Chronicle* came before the public in Boston it is said to have created quite a sensation by its literary character and fine typographical appearance. In the bound volume in possession of the Historical Department of Iowa no numbers of the year 1768 are missing. A comprehensive index is appended. It bears as much the appearance of a magazine as of a newspaper. According to its own statement it contains "news, foreign and domestic, civil, ecclesiastical and military; being a complete account of all that hath happened, in the different quarters of the world, during the year 1768." A large claim! Further headings showing the contents are "Debates and speeches in parliament, courts of justice &c; Essays moral and entertaining; Histories, short and instructive; Extracts from books; Trials civil and criminal; Politics; Agriculture, discoveries &c; Improvements, experiments and cures; Original American pieces; Poetry."

The paper was issued each Monday. The newspaper man of today cannot conceive of the reason for that. It seems like a reversal of the right order of things. Each paper consisted of eight pages $8\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ inches, although occasionally a supplement of four pages was added. There are three columns to the page, each column $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, seventeen ems, while the present day newspaper column is thirteen ems. The type is of rather a heavy face, apparently brevier size, eight point, with considerable in nonpareil, six point. The long "s" is used, of course. There were no "extras" but three times during the year "extraordinary editions" of four pages each were issued, because of a foreign vessel arriving bringing foreign papers and foreign news.

The policy of newspaper making then was comparatively undeveloped. It would be intensely interesting if we could read the local news of Boston as it happened a century and a half ago. It would give us a mirror-like glimpse into their social condition and their life. But it seems the printer was the whole

thing. The day of the city reporter had not dawned. Neither had the editorial writer or the paragrapher yet arrived. The idea seemed to be that the people knew the news at home and that it was news from other parts of the world that they wanted and that it was the province of the paper to furnish.² Read the *Chronicle's* announcement:

"The *Boston Chronicle* Printed by Mein and Fleeming, at their printing office in Newberry Street, almost opposite the White Horse Tavern, where, and at the London Book Store north side of King Street, subscriptions at six shillings and eight pence lawful, per annum, to be paid at subscribing. Advertisements, articles and letters of intelligence, are gratefully received."

Notice how they solicit "articles and letters of intelligence." A careful examination of their columns leads one to think they wrote almost no original material, either news or editorial comment. If the publishers wrote any articles themselves they must have concealed that fact by writing over unknown signatures. The articles are either selected from some well-known author, or are news articles and notes from London papers, or are articles communicated by some one. They would publish a fable by an ancient writer but would not write up a local fire or a wedding or an obituary.

Notice in the announcement, the subscription price, "six shillings and eight pence." In New England at that time six shillings meant the same as a dollar, or one hundred and eight coppers, or pence.³ Their system of money was much confused, but the dollar was much more valuable then than now.

It will also be noticed in their announcement that their office is "almost opposite the White Horse Tavern." This is an interesting allusion to the fact that in those days it was the custom for business houses to have a distinctive sign in front, the sign not bearing any particular relation to the character of the business it advertised. Hence, the "White Horse" Tavern.

We observe by their announcement that the "six shillings and eight pence" is to be paid "on subscribing," kind of an archaic form of the "in advance" formula of today.

"Advertisements, articles and letters of intelligence are gratefully received." While the publishers state their subscription

²The same thing prevailed among early Iowa newspapers. But little local news found its way into their columns until near the time of the Civil War.

³See McMaster's "History of the People of the United States," Vol. I, p. 191.

price, they say nothing of their advertising rates, and there seems to be no allusion in their columns to income from advertising. It would appear that they chiefly relied on the subscription receipts for their income. The advertisements are a very interesting part of the paper. Usually much less than one of the eight pages of a paper is taken up with the "ads." They are never set more than one column wide, and are displayed but little. Usually a line or two at the head is displayed, and the remainder is set in nonpareil, giving the advertising page somewhat the appearance of the modern want ad. page. But the contents of the "ads" are illuminating.

Here is a list of bargains that doubtless delighted the eyes of the lady shoppers:

JUST IMPORTED

in the Captains Stevens and Jenkins from London and to be sold by

JANE EUSTIS⁴

at her shop, the north side of the town-house, Boston, a great variety of Flower'd and Stript Silks the most fashionable now wore in London from 46 s. to 3 l, 10 s. O. T. per yard. A large assortment of brown, blue, green and changeable Mantuas, from 48 s. to 50 s. O. T. per yard. Pink, green, browns and lead colored Ducaps. Brown and black Padusoyes. Pink and green English Damask. Black Apron Silk. Green, white, pink, crimson, scarlet, blue and black Pelongsattin. Best white and black haff Ell Sattin. 3-4ths black ditto, for cloaks. Brussels and Milliarret Laces, Leather mount, and other fans of all sorts. Italian Breast Flowers Brolios, in imitation of lutestrings. Patent wove Stays and Stay-Cloth. Irish Linens. Lawns, Cambricks and superfine scarlet Broadcloth. Silk, cotton, thread and worsted stockings. Silk Shoes and Clogs. Calimancoe ditto. Galoshoes. Women's white and black silk Gloves and Mitts. Silver Trimmings. Gold Coat Binding. Black and white Beaver Hatts for ladies and boys. Feathers for ditto. Silk and linen handkerchiefs. Calimancoes and Tammies. Stone shoe, Knee and girdle Buckles and Broaches. Stone and wax Necklaces and Earings. Tippetts and Turbans at the sterling cost with a variety of other articles too many to be enumerated in an advertisement.

⁴Edward Oxnard, a citizen of Boston, who remained loyal to the British government during the Revolution, was a voluntary exile in England from 1775 to 1785, and wrote a very interesting personal journal covering his doings in England during that time. It was published in the "New England Historical and Genealogical Register," Vol. XXVI. On page 120 we find this concerning Jane Eustis: "'* * * at Kensington it began to rain, and we sought shelter in the church. On examining the tomb stones in the church yard, I found the following erected to my worthy friend Mrs. Eustis: 'Here lyeth the body of Mrs. Jane Eustis, late of Boston, New England, who departed this life 21 Jan 1771, age 48 years. She was good.'" From this it appears she was buried at Kensington, near London, England. In Vol. XXXII of the same publication, page 223, they say of Mrs. Jane Eustis, mentioned in Oxnard's journal, "Her will, recorded in Boston, Vol. LXX, shows that she was a widow, a shop keeper."

Here is one showing another line of goods:

Just imported in the ship Thames, Captain Watt, from London, by

SAMUEL FRANKLIN⁵

at the sign of the Crown and Razor, South End, Boston:

Best razors, penknives, scissors, shears, shoe-knives, shoe tacks, stamp awl blades, teeth instruments, lancets, white and yellow swords, and sword belts, case-knives and forks, ink powder and sealing wax, files and rasps, horse fleams; hones and curling tongs; brass ink-pots, horn and ivory combs; white, yellow and steel shoe and knee buckles; gilt, lackered and plated coat and breast buttons, snuff boxes, and a few second-hand hats, &c. all very cheap.

N. B. Razors, penknives and scissors ground, scabbards made for swords and bayonets, caseknife and fork blades made in said shop.

They occasionally ran an estray notice in those days. Here is one:

STRAYED, from the Boston Common on Sunday the 3rd, ultimo [July 3] a small red and white spotted cow, about five years old, white hind legs, a large white spot between her horns and has but a small bag. Whoever will take up said cow and leave word with the printer hereof shall have a reward of one dollar.

This continued to be run occasionally in the editions until late in the fall and history fails to record, so far as we are able to find, whether the small spotted cow, with white hind legs and but a small bag, was ever found.

Here is another kind of an estray notice giving a glimpse of the seafaring life:

RUN AWAY

From the Ship George and James, Robert Montgomery, master, MALCOM MARTIN. Said Robert Montgomery pays no debts of his contracting, as he is a runaway.⁶

Another ad. calls to our attention the fact that even the northern colonies had slaves:

TO BE SOLD. A stout likely, well fed negro boy, about seventeen years of age, hath been five or six years at the cooper business. He has had the small pox. Enquire of Mein and Fleeming.

⁵This Samuel Franklin was born October 21, 1721, and was the son of a first cousin of Dr. Benjamin Franklin. See "New England Historical and Genealogical Register," Vol. XI, p. 17.

⁶This may be an example of the system of impressment of seamen, which was the cause of the war of 1812, or perhaps of the customs prevailing concerning apprentice and master.

There appear quite a number of liquor advertisements. As an example:

The subscriber gives notice that he has this day opened a
WINE CELLAR

next above the Bunch of Grapes, in King Street where he has to sell the best Old Sterling Mederia by the gross, dozen or single bottle, * * *

JOSEPH INGERSOLL.

Mr. Mein was a bookseller, as well as a printer, and imported quantities of books from England and also printed many, and occasionally a whole page of the *Chronicle* is taken up with advertisements of his books for sale. A list of them shows what the people read in those days, that is those who did read. These long lists contain very many Bibles, sermons, psalms, hymns, ancient classics, histories, travels, fables, and political works. It appears they had but little good fiction. The era of light and popular fiction had not arrived. There must have been an air of real soberness cast over those Puritanic times.

Although the publishers of the *Chronicle* were really Tories, yet a certain amount of the rising spirit of freedom is evidenced in its pages. Occasionally some account of meetings is given where protests were made against English encroachments. Resolutions of a meeting held Sept. 8, 1768, are published, wherein enquiry is made of the governor why three regiments of British soldiers are being sent to Boston, and protesting. The committee of the meeting included James Otis, Samuel Adams, Joseph Warren, and John Hancock. Then there are resolutions passed by meetings held in other portions of the colony requesting Boston not to precipitate the colony into a quarrel with England. One's greatest regret in reading these ancient pages is that the printers neglected to give us the local news. The resolutions of some of these political meetings come nearer to local news than anything else. Communications from everywhere are published. Through some of these letters a little local news crept in, seemingly unbeknown, to the editor. This morsel appears in a letter from Boston to London and communicated from there to the *Chronicle*:

Last Thursday evening, a countryman leading his horse from the Sign of the Lamb to Alexander Reid's shop on the opposite side of the street, had his saddle bags stole, in which were two pound of tea, two pound of indigo, two bibles, two Tunfur's music books and half a pound

of pepper. If any of the above articles are offered for sale it is hoped that they will be stopped, and information given to Alexander Reid, who will pay the necessary charges.

These meager glimpses of colonial life help to give us a little better view of conditions then. These fading pages of the *Boston Chronicle* come as a message from our ancestors of some six or more generations ago, and throw just a little more light on their struggles and in that they assume almost a sacred character.

BASE BALL

When we stated the other day that we were unacquainted with that kind of game which the boys call "base ball," we erred most grievously. Little did we know when we wrote that "base ball" is but another name for "two-cornered," or "three-cornered," or "four-cornered cat!" Guess we know that game! Guess we followed it as a profession for ten years of our juvenile existence! Guess we know how to knock a common yarn ball with a round bat clear over the top of a very small tree! Guess we know how to catch a ball with the best of 'em!

Don't know "old cat"? Come not at us with your "base ball" lingo, which a southern Buckeye doesn't understand. Come not at us with the barbarous designations borrowed from the literature of some bald-headed Dutchman, or wrested from the idiom of a crazy Saxon. Call things by their right names. Say "cat" to us and ten thousand glorious reminiscences will leap from the home of remembrance, and then gloriously in the twilight of our age. Say "cat" to us and dare us out on the green sward of this corporation and we'll fling aside this old pen, rush downstairs, and show the "base ball" clubs of this city that they are perfect kittens yet in the game of "old cat."

P. S. We are sadly mistaken. We confess after having examined the play at the depot grounds yesterday afternoon, that "base ball" is not "old cat" by a jug full. It is simply "town ball" with the variations. Sorry we made a mistake.—*Iowa State Register* May 30, 1866. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

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