The Pennsylvania State University
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College of Communications

JOHN MCLEAN HARRINGTON'S

HANDWRITTEN NEWSPAPERS IN 1858

A Thesis in
Media Studies
by
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This thesis explores the story of North Carolinian John McLean Harrington, a journalist who before and during the Civil War handwrote up to a hundred copies of each issue of his own various newspapers. As cultural and military battle lines were drawn across the South, Harrington, while postmaster in Harnett County, wrote in longhand about everything from the plight of slaves to unrequited love, international relations, and technology. He became an outspoken dilettante journalist, a defender of press freedom, and one of the nation’s most productive longhand journalists. Since 1858 was the first year that Harrington handwrote his newspapers, this research focuses primarily on the publications published then. The research examines the content of The Young American and The Nation including the news and opinion along with the advertising. In addition, this research explores Harrington’s entertainment content including his humor, short stories and literary content such as his poetry and the poetry others submitted. When appropriate, the research speculates on the reasons for Harrington’s use of handwriting rather than the conventional printing press. For instance, he never explained in print the reasons he chose such as labor-intensive approach. The closest printing press was in Fayetteville, Pa., more than 20 miles to the South, and it may be that the difficulty of getting his handwritten copy to the printer was too difficult or it could be that the expense was just too great. Harrington’s newspapers are silent on this point and no other sources could be found to explain this novelty.
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Chapter 1

The Many Roles of John Mclean Harrington

In “The Overcoat,” a short story by Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), the main character, Akaky Akakievich, is a clerk who copies text for a living. Akakievich loves the job so much that he likes to spend his free time handwriting copies of texts, and he falls asleep giddy with the idea that in the morning he will begin his handwriting work afresh. At one point in the story, the narrator explains Akaky Akakievich’s love of handwriting: “It would be hard to find a man who so lived for his job. It would not be enough to say that he worked conscientiously—he worked with love. There, in his copying, he found an interesting, pleasant world for himself and his delight was reflected in his face. He had his favorites among the letters of the alphabet and, when he came to them, he would chuckle, wink and help them along with his lips so that they could almost be read on his face as they were formed by his pen.”¹ This account reminds me of John McLean Harrington, who also made a career of handwriting. Although Akakievich is a fictitious character, his devotion to handwriting reflects Harrington's real-life commitment as a nineteenth-century journalist.

Shortly before the Civil War, the son of an affluent Southern family began a journalism career unlike any in his community, his state, or perhaps even the nation. Journalist John McLean Harrington (1839–1887), also known as “John McL,” and “McL,” worked as a bookkeeper, surveyor, educator, sheriff,² and postmaster in a community located about thirty miles south of Raleigh, in Harnett County, North Carolina.³ This thesis explores Harrington's The Nation, a newspaper, and The Young American, a literary


² The Legislative Documents for Session 1858–59 lists James A. Harrington as sheriff. This document from 1859 refers to Harrington in a single, poster-like sheet, recorded as page one in the box of loose documents.

³ Harnett County is most notable for its native son, Paul Green (1894–1981), a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright who is famous for his outdoor symphonic dramas, particularly The Lost Colony, a production
journal that contained news. Both were handwritten in 1858. With the completion of the first trans-Atlantic telegraph cable in that year, the world felt united in a new way, and the occasion was greeted by bonfires, fireworks, and pageants on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, Victorians, overcome by sewage odors from the Thames, built massive sewers, a monumental public works project for the time. Meanwhile, Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas as the divided United States moved toward Civil War.

In 1858, Harrington’s *Nation* was stridently pro-Democratic and hinted at the nation’s collapse, but it also featured lighter fare such as jokes and marriage announcements. The handwritten newspaper included paid advertisements along with local, state, and national news, including some references to the growing uneasiness over the future of slavery. *The Young American*, with a circulation of one hundred subscribers, included news, quips, original fiction, poetry, and paid advertisements. This number is very high and it is unlikely that Harrington was able to handwrite that many copies. A more reasonable number is twenty issues of each periodical.

Harrington’s work reveals a reporter-publisher who embodied the concept of the personal journalist. He was committed to a partisan cause and willing to promote it without benefit of a movable-type printing press, although they were available as early as the mid-fifteenth century. The printing telegraph

from 1937 performed every summer in an outdoor theater at Fort Raleigh National Historic Site near Manteo, North Carolina.

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4 The July and September 1858 issues of The *Young American* are not available through the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, however, the documents are considered to have existed at one time. On page 280 of the December 1858 issue of The *Young American*, Harrington wrote that the 1858 collection of The *Young American*, 321 pages, would be bound in cloth and ready for pick-up on January 1, 1859 for $2.50. This notice suggests that the collection existed at one time, but this researcher could not locate one. See also Michael Ray Smith, *A Free Press in Freehand, The Spirit of American Blogging in the Handwritten Newspapers of John McLean Harrington 1858-1869* (Grand Rapids: Edenridge Press, 2011).


6 Malcolm Fowler, *They Passed This Way: A Personal Narrative of Harnett County History* (Lillington, NC: Harnett County Centennial, 1955), 151.
was also available at the time, but went unused by Harrington.\(^8\) In his career, Harrington edited seven handwritten publications over the course of eleven years. He suspended his work during a portion of the Civil War and missed reporting the last major campaigns fought in North Carolina’s Harnett and nearby Sampson counties. The Union and the Confederates fought their next-to-last battle on March 15 and 16, 1865, in Averasboro, about twenty miles from Harrington’s home. In that mission, General William J. Hardee’s Confederate Army fought to delay Union General William T. Sherman’s march north from Atlanta.\(^9\) The last battle of the Civil War, and the largest fought in North Carolina, took place just a few miles away in Bentonville, part of adjacent Johnson County, on March 19–21, 1865. Harrington did not publish during 1865, so he was unable to cover these major tactical offensives, but he resumed his handwritten publications with The Times.—a newspaper with an odd period in its name—which ran from October 17, 1867, to April 2, 1869. This thesis refers to his later journalistic work but does not cover it in-depth. I explore primarily Harrington’s publishing before the Civil War. Appendix A is a photograph of John McLean Harrington.

**Harrington: An iconoclast who use the handwritten press as his voice**

This research represents the first scholarly exploration into this collection. In the impoverished and somewhat backward South of the antebellum period, Harrington beat the system and left what may be the greatest collection of holographic newspapers in the United States. With 305 different issues of newspapers in his eleven years of editing, Harrington remains the editor with the largest output of extant handwritten periodicals, a rarity among the many exceptional people who have historically produced such newspapers. Furthermore, Harrington is worthy of study because of his unusual experiment in freehand

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\(^9\) Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 94.
publishing and because of the various aspects of his life and character evident in both his public and private lives. Harrington was:

- A courageous dilettante journalist who both learned from others and followed his own creative impulses and professional sensibilities.

Democrat. Republican. Personal journalist. Innovator. Harrington was a figure of intrigue, the kind of writer who was not trained formally in the news business but who successfully modeled the conventions of the day. Harrington fulfilled the aesthetic function of the press partly through storytelling. He reprinted articles from other periodicals and inserted his whimsical observations along the way. He did not pioneer any breakthroughs in the press, but his desire to publish by handwriting his work is so novel that it demands attention.

- An unsung figure who accomplished much while learning to navigate between his own public and private lives during socially, culturally, and politically complicated times.

No press association recognized Harrington, and his newspapers have never been on display as examples of journalistic excellence. Yet Harrington demonstrated a commitment to his craft that suggests what is most desired in the work of a journalist. He sifted the news and presented it in an arresting manner with commentary and humor. In a sense, he was ahead of his time by anticipating the fashion of a citizen journalist; he weighed in on the issues of the day because of an irresistible need to be heard. An amateur, Harrington wrote to delight himself first, then others. For this reason, Harrington could be described as the dilettante editor of Harnett County.

- A highly independent journalist who supported the free press using longhand writing.

Harrington exemplified the notion of a free press. He did not let the lack of a printing press keep him from publishing, but instead freely hand copied and distributed his publications partly as evidence of his

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10 The idea that journalism is a form of storytelling, goes back at least to the early nineteenth century work of one of America’s first sociologists, George Herbert Mead. See Michael Schudson, Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 89.
support for a vigorous free press. In the process, Harrington depended on no other vendors to make, circulate, or run his operation. He may be one of the nation’s earliest and best examples of the independent journalist, taking freedom to a new level with his commitment to a free press using freehand to launch and discontinue periodicals at will.

Though his work has not been widely recognized, Harrington was committed to the cause of a free press, even when it required the tedious work of writing by hand. In the pages that follow, I examine questions about the production and distribution of a handwritten newspaper in the political, social, and economic milieu of the rural South before and during the Civil War.

Though his work has not been widely recognized, Harrington was committed to the cause of a free press, even when it required the tedious work of writing by hand. In the pages that follow, I examine questions about the production and distribution of a handwritten newspaper in the political, social, and economic milieu of the rural South before and during the Civil War.

**Research problem**

Since 1858 was the first year that Harrington handwrote his newspapers, this research will focus primarily on the publications published then. The research will examine the content of *The Young American* and *The Nation* including the news and opinion along with the advertising. In addition, this research will explore Harrington’s entertainment content including his humor, short stories and literary content such as his poetry and the poetry others submitted. When appropriate, the research will speculate on the reasons for Harrington’s use of handwriting rather than the conventional printing press. For instance, he never explained in print the reasons he chose such as labor-intensive approach. The closest printing press was in Fayetteville, more than 20 miles to the South, and it may be that the difficulty of getting his handwritten copy to the printer was too difficult or it could be that the expense was just too great. Harrington’s newspapers are silent on this point and no other sources could be found to explain this novelty.
Methodology

To answer these questions, this researcher read all the surviving periodicals of Harrington for 1858, which included eight surviving issues of the original twelve issues of a literary newspaper called *The Young American* and the sixteen surviving issues of the original twenty-one issues of *The Nation*. The originals of Harrington’s newspapers are located at the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Perkins Library at Duke University and the Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The researcher made a number of trips to see and photograph the originals. In addition, the researcher relied on copies made from microfilm produced in 1998 by the state of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources microfilmed by the Division of Archives and History, Archives and Records Section, Raleigh, N.C. A close reading of the newspapers yielded the chapters that follow that explore Harrington’s work. The difficulty in reading the handwriting probably is the reason that no one has studied these newspapers to date.

This research will explore the idea of Media Ecology, which says that media and culture can be understood ecologically, with changes in news-disseminating technology altering the symbolic environment. In addition, the research will explore a type of handwriting style known as the Spencerian method. The research will explore Harrington’s work in terms of the culture within which he worked. His handwritten legacy will be used to better understand this novel journalist. In 1858, seventy-four newspapers were officially listed as circulating in North Carolina,\(^1\) not including Harrington’s handwritten newspapers. The Table summarizes the publications.

Table: Harrington’s Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Number Surviving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Young American</em></td>
<td>January 1858 to December 1858</td>
<td>Harrington and Buffalo Springs, N.C.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Nation</em></td>
<td>April 17, 1858 to September 8, 1858</td>
<td>Harrington, N.C.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Weekly Eagle</em></td>
<td>April 20, 1860</td>
<td>Harrington and Pine Forest, N.C.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Semi-Weekly News</em></td>
<td>July 20, 1860 to August 13, 1860</td>
<td>Harrington, N.C.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Advertising Sheet. Monthly.</em></td>
<td>February, March, April 1861</td>
<td>Harrington, N.C.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Weekly News</em></td>
<td>June 7, 1860 to March 2, 1864</td>
<td>Harrington, N.C.</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Times</em></td>
<td>October 17, 1867 to April 2, 1869</td>
<td>Harrington, N.C.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Dick Brown, “To Roll the Presses,” *Fayetteville Observer*, September 23, 1973, D1. According to Brown, Sion A. Harrington, John McLean Harrington’s younger brother, printed another handwritten newspaper called the *Weekly News* in 1869 and a photograph of the front page with a quotation from Henry Clay saying, “I would rather be right than to be President” appears beneath the nameplate on the February 2, 1869 issue, the year John McLean Harrington abandoned his handwritten newspapers. John McLean Harrington’s last known handwritten newspaper was the Friday, April 2, 1869, issue of *The Times*, Vol. 3, No. 13. In that issue, Harrington gave no indication that that issue would be his last but noted on page one a report on Congress would “be continued,” which suggests that he had planned to keep publishing, but did not.
Source: The John McLean Harrington publications are based on the originals from the Rare Books, Manuscripts and Special Collections Library of Perkins Library-Duke University, Durham, N.C. Microfilmed in 1998. While some of Harrington’s newspaper include odd punctuation, this research will use the title without the periods to avoid tiring the reader.
Chapter 2

Literature Review: Harrington’s life and handwritten newspapers

John McLean Harrington was born on November 2, 1839, one mile south of Mt. Pisgah Church, a Presbyterian congregation founded in 1834 in rural Harnett County, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{13} He died on April 3, 1887, at the age of forty-seven. He is buried in the Mt. Pisgah Presbyterian Church cemetery, 128 McArthur Road, Broadway, North Carolina, in western Harnett County. Still standing, his headstone is close to the road.

Harrington was the son of James Stephen (1806–1888) and Margaret McLean Harrington (1816–1884). James served as an elder of both the Barbecue Presbyterian Church and Mt. Pisgah Presbyterian Church,\textsuperscript{14} and as the Cumberland County member of the House of Commons from 1861 until 1865.\textsuperscript{15} He was also a member of the Harnett County finance committee from 1858 to 1865, and served in the House of Commons in 1866.\textsuperscript{16} In 1868, he served in the North Carolina State Senate. In addition, James was elected to the Harnett County Board of Commissioners for most of his adult life. Following in the steps of his father, Harrington would grow up to monitor politics and seek political appointments, though the manifestation of his civil service would best be seen in his handwritten periodicals.

\textsuperscript{13} Fowler, \textit{They Passed This Way}, 104.

\textsuperscript{14} Daisy Kelly Cox, \textit{Sion Harrington Family History Book} (Unpublished history owned by John Burton Cameron III, Broadway, NC, 1960), 7.


\textsuperscript{16} Cox, \textit{Sion Harrington Family History}, 7.
Born in a log house, Harrington was considered brilliant, a child prodigy who graduated from Pine Forest Academy, a private school that began in the 1840s and served as both a school and a meeting place for the Masonic lodge. He graduated at the age of twelve and went on to study at Archie Black’s Academy at Haywood near Moncure, North Carolina, in Chatham County. He may have also studied twenty miles south of his home in Fayetteville at Donaldson Academy. At the age of fifteen, Harrington became a teacher at Pine Forest, where he was paid $154 and five pairs of socks for a three-month term. At that time, public school teachers earned $15 to $30 per month. He also worked as a surveyor. In addition to writing fiction and prose, Harrington served as president of the Pine Forest Debating Society during 1869.

In 1857, Harrington worked as a bookkeeper for J. and D. G. Worth, merchants, and for naval store operators at Buffalo Springs, two miles east of Spout Springs. Buffalo Springs, now defunct, is sometimes listed as Pineview, located ten miles south of Broadway, North Carolina, a tiny town of about three hundred that still exists today. Harrington worked for T. C. and B. G. Worth, a turpentine-commissioned merchant headquartered in Wilmington, likely the same as the aforementioned Worth business. Harrington avoided military service during the Civil War because of his position as postmaster


18 Dick Brown, “To Roll the Presses,” D1; Cox, Sion Harrington Family History, 7; Fowler, They Passed this Way, 150.

19 Cameron, Sion Harrington Family History, 209.

20 As indicated by the handwritten minutes of that organization which were recorded in a notebook that is now part of the Rare Books, Manuscripts and Special Collections Library of Perkins Library–Duke University.


22 Cranford, John McLean Harrington, 2.
at his family's Harrington Post Office, the same wooden building where he lived and published. Harrington’s various roles prepared him to be a journalist who knew firsthand the hardships of life in the rural South. His work as a postmaster gave him ready access to newsy information whenever residents collected their mail. In addition, Harrington could monitor the content of periodicals in the U.S. Mail and glean information and ideas from them as he tried his own hand at journalistic prose.

Even if he had not been the postmaster (sometimes referred to as “sub-postmaster”), Harrington still might have avoided the draft because Confederate newspapers typically were allowed to have one editor who was exempt. Never married, Harrington was considered an attractive man. He dated many women and reportedly claimed that he “never succeeded in fooling one of them into the bonds of matrimony.” An active Mason, Harrington rose to the position of leader, or master, of his lodge, which met at the schoolhouse. While celebrated in his community, Harrington was not well known outside the county, and his popularity sagged when he did not leave home to serve in the Civil War in spite of friends who urged him to join the service. According to the Adjutant General’s Records of North Carolina, however, Harrington served in the Confederate home guard as 1st Lieutenant for Upper Little River District, Fifty-Second Regiment, North Carolina Militia in Harnett County. Harrington’s name is listed in the “Roster of Officers of the Militia of North Carolina,” which includes entries for 1861–1862 and 1864.

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23 Harrington’s uncle, William D. Harrington, served as first postmaster. Others included James Harrington, John McLean’s brother; Nannie McCormick Harrington, the wife of John McLean’s brother James; and Sion Harrington, John McLean’s brother. The post office remained in use until 1909, when Rural Free Delivery became available in Broadway, North Carolina. The last recorded owner of the building before it was razed was Rhett Denise Thomas, daughter of Ruby Harrington Denise, and a descendant of Nannie McCormick and James Harrington.

24 Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 152.


26 John McLean Harrington, “War Correspondence,” *The Weekly News.*, July 10, 1861, 2, no. 5, 2

the war, Harrington and his prominent father left the Democratic Party and joined the Republican Party, which did not endear either man to their community.

In a letter of September 3, 1866, William Woods Holden, North Carolina’s provisional governor under President Andrew Johnson, wrote a letter to James S. Harrington, John McLean’s father. Holden called for a meeting of loyal Union men in Raleigh.28 The letter said a convention was planned for September 20, 1866. Holden wrote, “Please spread this information among Union men as far as possible. Come yourself, and urge others to attend.” Then on June 30, 1865, Holden recommended John McLean Harrington for a presidential pardon despite his work as a Confederate official in the office of postmaster.29 In his letter to Johnson, the younger Harrington requested amnesty based on a May 28, 1865, presidential proclamation. Using the third-person, the younger Harrington wrote that he “had always been a consistent Union man and has never been in the military service of the Confederate states or voluntarily aided in the rebellion, that his acceptance of the position of sub-postmaster was in order to evade military service and petitioner asks that a special pardon may be granted to him and that he may be taking the oath of amnesty.”30 Five days later on June 27, 1865, he pledged his support to the Union of the United States of America with his signature. The document recorded Harrington as fair in complexion, with dark hair and hazel eyes, six feet tall, and twenty-five years old. Harrington solemnly swore in the


In the 1870s, Holden’s militia was decidedly sympathetic to the Republican party, which opposed the Ku Klux Klan. Harrington’s association with Holden suggests that Harrington was an active Republican during that period. Like Harrington, Holden was a journalist with political ambition. Holden was the first governor of North Carolina to appoint African Americans to governmental positions. In addition, he gained a reputation as supporting African-American political rights. When Holder died in 1892, his funeral procession in Raleigh included blacks and whites, a rare occurrence. Harrington’s connection to Holden suggests that Harrington was a moderate on the race issue.


29 Petitions for Pardon, 1865–1868, Civil War Collection, Military Collection of the North Carolina Division of Historical Resources, Raleigh, NC.

30 North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Office of Archives and History, Military Collection, Civil War Collection, Petitions for Pardon (1865–1868).
oath that he would “abide by and faithfully support all the laws and proclamations which have been made during the existing rebellion with reference to the emancipation of slaves.” Harrington did not record his profession as a postmaster, teacher, or publisher, but as a farmer.

By June 22, 1870, Adjutant General A. W. Fisher issued General Order No. 6, which reorganized the state militia using strong Unionists and prominent native sons, including Harrington. The order, published on July 6, 1870, in the *Weekly North Carolina Standard*, a Raleigh newspaper, listed “John McL. Harrington, Harnett,” as Brigadier General of the Thirteenth Brigade. This appointment firmly established Harrington as a Unionist.

Throughout his career as a journalist, Harrington probably left readers wondering about his real intentions, desires, and loyalties. At times Harrington told his reading audience that he would begin a new publication or continue an existing one, but then would do neither. He talked of a partner but never revealed the colleague’s identity—if he indeed had one. He discussed the evil of drinking but died an alcoholic. He served as a member of the Confederate militia only to swear an oath that he would always remain a loyal Unionist. Perhaps Harrington tended to do or say whatever was expedient or expected at the time. Maybe he was himself just conflicted in numerous ways.

**Harrington and Political Parties**

As a journalist with the heart of a dramatist, Harrington evoked the pathos that can be missed in the tedium that often dominates rural life. Consider a letter he wrote to President Andrew Johnson. He addressed his request for a pardon to “His Excellency, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States.” Harrington said he worked as a postmaster to evade military service, but at age twenty-six, he wrote Andrew Johnson that he was willing to support the Union. Already at age eighteen, Harrington had

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32 Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 152.
adopted the pose of a reformer who could be zealous for a cause even if he later seemed a bit unsure of his genuine convictions.

In a May 15, 1880 letter, Harrington wrote Gen. F. A. Walker, superintendent of the federal censuses of 1870 and 1880 and later the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In his letter, Harrington requested that he be allowed to work on the 1880 Census, as he had already served on the 1870 Census as the recorder for the Upper Little River District. Harrington stated that he was afraid that his status as a Republican caused him not to be approved for the post. In his May 15, 1880, letter to the Honorable F. A. Walker, Harrington, at age forty-one, stated, “I made application for this township (Upper Little River) in the Census for this year but being a Republican I am afraid Col. Stanford will not recommend me though Rep. [Daniel L.] Russell said he would do all he could for me.”

Harrington had been responsible for the county at the 1870 census. By 1880, Republicans held sway on the national level, but Democrat Thomas J. Jarvis occupied the North Carolina governor's mansion. By 1880, being a Republican was a liability rather than the asset it had been just after the Civil War, according to Sion Harrington, a historian and descendant of John McLean Harrington. During these later years, Harrington began to drink excessively and his mind deteriorated.


Publications of John McLean Harrington
The Young American, Harrington's first periodical, was a type of literary magazine that also contained news, short stories, and poems by Harrington and other authors from central North Carolina. The publication measured eight inches wide by ten inches long and consisted of a single column. Within four months, Harrington began another handwritten paper, The Nation, a weekly that focused on state and local news with a strident pro-Democrat slant. The Nation, typically four pages, was written on one sheet of paper, measuring eight inches wide and twenty-four inches long. It was penned on both sides of the paper and folded in the center to create a page eight inches wide and twelve inches long. The Weekly Eagle followed shortly after The Nation, and it focused on political news. Harrington’s other publications—The Semi-Weekly News, The Weekly News’ Advertising Sheet Monthly, The Weekly News and The Times—were published around the time of the Civil War. The Times was used to mildly criticize Harrington’s newly united country for too much government while also praising it as the best of all nations. Harrington’s newspapers demonstrated a variety of page sizes, and publication ranged from twice a week to monthly. He wrote The Nation in red ink on April 17, 1858, and blue ink with some red highlights on April 24, 1858. Sometimes he used lined paper, such as in the April 1, 1858, issue of The Young American. He also used unlined paper in the January 6, 1863, issue of the Weekly News. The Weekly News, which began as an eight-inch by ten-inch publication in January 1863, but became progressively smaller over time. It was six by seven inches by the issue dated September 2, 1863, and four by eight inches in size by the one dated January 24, 1864. Harrington’s publications contained articles on disparate topics ranging from recipes to news of the Civil War. In addition to The Nation and The Young American, in 1860 Harrington began publishing The Weekly Eagle, but he suspended this periodical when paper became scarce. Like his other newspapers, The Semi-Weekly News, Weekly News, The Weekly News’ Advertising Sheet Monthly, and The Times, all included traditional newspaper content. In the July 7, July 14, July 21, August 4, August 11, August 18, August 25, and September 1, 1858, issues of The Nation, Harrington wrote, “With pleasure or displeasures to friends or foes we sketch the world as it goes.” This slogan emphasized Harrington’s approach to recording life in his community. While untrained as a journalist, Harrington sensed the need to provide a snapshot of the highs and lows of his
neighbors’ activities, particularly the politics of the region. Handwriting is largely a bygone activity gaining attention only when it comes from the hand of a prominent figure. Nonetheless, handwritten correspondence suggests a level of intimacy not found in the uniformity of printed or even emailed letters. As with a person’s signature, the style and cast of handwriting create an effect unlike anything produced on a press. The message’s unique appearance adds to its meaning, a feature that cannot be accomplished with a printed message designed to look the same each time it is reproduced. The recipient of a personal letter enjoys this kind of unique message right down to the feel of the paper as it is unfolded. Harrington and other handwritten newspapers publishers expected to influence multiple readers, but Harrington provided a different, more handcrafted kind of multiple-message system that appealed visually as a modest work of art, tactilely as idiosyncratic surface impressions made by pen points, and aromatically as distinct smells created by handwriting rather than printing inks. As “news artists,” Harrington and other handwritten newspaper publishers probably maintained at the time the most personal form of journalistic communication. Like print journalists, they could be highly committed to informing readers and serving their communities—as well as to making a living. But their level of personal commitment to their work had to be enormously high since they also had to produce multiple copies by hand. For them, producing a newspaper was not primarily a matter of generating circulation or establishing political influence. They were personally vested in their labor as news artisans. They personally used a wide range of talents and resources to create particularly rich journalistic expression. Like other journalists but perhaps more passionately, they sought a means of creating “a semantic reality” rather than merely words on the page. Harrington and similar craft-persons personally connected with their communities and helped to forge a shared sense of identity, belonging, and responsibility for their shared public lives. Like handwritten letters, handwritten papers deepened the personal connection between writer and reader, thereby enhancing the semantic sense of collective life. Harrington personally created this shared semantic reality with his handwritten copying, an ancient approach to communicating with its roots in the noble vocation of manuscript writing carried on by ancient monks largely prior to the printing press. Perhaps writing even the news in longhand is something vocationally like the work of ancient monks who devoted their
lives to copying scripture for distribution. Copying news stories is not so directly religious, but it nevertheless requires a selfless devotion to handcrafting and disseminating words as “news” about and for a particular community’s semantic reality. This concept helped newspapers gain audiences as the nation hurled toward the Civil War. Historians differentiate between the stipulative and lexical definitions of “newspaper.” Stipulative, or working, definitions create a formal category as to what constitutes a newspaper. For example, scholars use such definitions to determine whether a periodical is truly a newspaper rather than a literary journal or an advertising sheet (such as a modern-day “shopper”). Stipulative definitions do not necessarily connect to the “vast range of past meanings previously associated with the terms to be defined, but are imposed by the authors or researchers using the terms.” In other words, stipulative definitions may not help people understand how others defined and used “newspapers” in a specific historical context. By contrast, a lexical definition—such as one of the many definitions often found in a list from a people’s own everyday dictionary—can more accurately define a newspaper in the way people of Harrington’s community would understand and apply the term in their own historic moment, “regardless of its present-day utility or application.” The historic record shows that Harrington papers were meant to be experienced as newspapers because their content and style were similar to those of the printed productions available during that period. Like prisoner-of-war newspapers and shipboard newspapers, Harrington papers were “real” newspapers though handwritten. They were not merely personal letters or just artistic expressions, but artistically personalized newspapers meant to be read as news. The handwritten press appeared in Rome in 59 B.C. when the Acta Diruna (Events of the Day) circulated. This daily handwritten news sheet reported political happenings, executions, even athletic contests. The handwritten press took many forms over the next two millennia. As late as 1566, a handwritten news sheet called a gazette was distributed in Venice. It wasn’t until 1665, nearly one hundred years later, that newspapers began being printed on a press in England. In colonial America, printing press technology could be found as early as 1690, when Boston bookseller Benjamin Harris printed the first and only copy of Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick. Boston is also home to one of the earliest handwritten American newspaper, The Boston News-Letter. John Campbell
handwrote the successful *Boston News-Letter* from 1700, when he became Boston’s postmaster, to 1704, when he had it printed to save production time. Although printing presses existed as early as the fifteenth century, handwritten newspapers persisted.\textsuperscript{44} With printing technology readily available, why anyone would handwrite a periodical? Often for expediency, such as when a press was not readily available or a journalist wanted to challenge the town’s printed newspapers.\textsuperscript{45} Handwritten newspapers sometimes simply preceded printed newspapers. In other instances, handwritten newspapers possessed a mystique that proved attractive, endured over the centuries, and even inspired printed imitations. In seventeenth-century England, the design of *Dawk’s News-Letter* of London was inspired by the handwritten newspapers of the day.\textsuperscript{46} In the same century, the editor of a handwritten newspaper was chosen to start a printed newspaper, *Oxford Gazette*, and later, the *London Gazette*. While 1842 marks the earliest handwritten newspapers identified in the American West, examples of handwritten newspapers can be found across the nation throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{47} A kind of handwritten newspaper is even published today in Channai, India. *The Musalman* is a daily newspaper handwritten before being produced on a printing press. The purpose of handwriting the text is more about keeping tradition alive than about economics. The Muslim-oriented newspaper uses the ancient art of Urdu calligraphy in expressing news stories, verse, and devotional content.\textsuperscript{48} This type of literary practice is not person-specific, but it is a highly personal in the sense of representing the semantic mode of a particular preindustrial tradition. In some cases, a handwritten artifact was one part of a more mechanized transition to a printed product. For instance, some newspapers were handwritten and then mimeographed. This was the case of *Neya Powagans*, a publication of Calgary, Alberta, started in the twentieth century and still produced in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{49} The approach is similar to the method used by *The Musalman*.

\textsuperscript{44} Roy Alden Atwood, “Handwritten Newspapers of the Canadian-America West, 1842–1910” (presentation, annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, History Division, Kansas City, MO, August 11–14, 1993), 1.
The Handwritten Press as Legitimate Newspapers

The handwritten paper is no less a newspaper than a printed one. It must and does serve communities in the ways that printed papers serve them.\(^50\) Records of handwritten newspapers in the United States include those from Iowa,\(^51\) Nevada,\(^52\) and other American territories.\(^53\) As of 1993, there was evidence of


\(^{50}\) Atwood, “Handwritten Newspapers of the Canadian-American West,” 27.


\(^{53}\) Bernard Rogan Ross, “Fur Trade Gossip Sheet,” *The Beaver: Magazine of the North* (Spring 1955); Robert Karolevitz, “Pen and Ink Newspapers of the Old West,” *Frontier Times* 44, no. 2 (Feb-March
118 handwritten periodicals in North America. A handwritten newspaper can be considered a newspaper by virtue of its content, style, frequency, and circulation—all of which Harrington’s publications demonstrated with his small, perhaps isolated, readership in rural North Carolina.

Numerous handwritten publications existed in the United States before Harrington’s. These included *The True Blue*, a publication read by inmates which even included an article on a ball to be held April 21, 1842, to celebrate the Battle of San Jacinto; the *Barometer*, California, 1849; *The Emigrant*, California, 1849; *The Petrel*, California, 1849; and *The Shark*, California, 1849. Between 1849 and 1851, passengers and sailors published five handwritten newspapers on ships out of Boston, New Orleans, and Sydney as they made their way to the gold fields in California.

Handwritten newspapers could be distributed in numerous ways. They were be posted in a public place such as a store or church, shared like chain letters, or read aloud to an audience. In most cases, handwritten newspapers were temporary and meant to be proofs for a printed edition. The available evidence suggests that most publishers produced no more than one or two handwritten copies of any given issue, so most of the papers were likely published by one or more of these methods. Harrington may be the major exception since his newspapers' circulations numbered up to one hundred, although the only copies that survived are in likely incomplete university library collections.

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54 Roy Alden Atwood, “Handwritten Prisoner-of-War Newspapers of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition and the War Between the States,” 1.

55 Atwood, “Shipboard News: Nineteenth Century Handwritten Periodicals at Sea,” 5. Atwood found that *Barometer*, *The Emigrant*, *Flying Fish*, *The Petrel* and *The Shark* were written onboard ships. He also found that passengers and crew onboard the H.M.S. Resolute off Alaska’s Barrow Strait published *The Illustrated Arctic News* handwritten newspaper between 1850 and 1851, and the crew of Sir William Edward Parry’s search for a Northwest Passage through the Canadian arctic archipelago in 1819–1820 published the *New (or North) Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle* handwritten newspaper.


57 Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 151.
Handwriting as a Necessity in Lieu of a Press

The typical reason for a handwritten newspaper, both in the United States and around the world, was that the journalist lived in a harsh environment or faced some other challenge, but was still committed to producing a newspaper. Handwritten newspapers could be found in Melbourne, Australia, in the nineteenth century. In fact, the first nine editions of The Melbourne Advertiser were handwritten beginning January 1, 1838. The newspaper was suspended until it obtained a license, and it resumed publication in February 1839 as the Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser.

In 1839, the Chinese handwrote newspapers using translated articles from foreign newspapers. The articles included opinion pieces by foreign journalists on the opium eradication campaign. In 1999, a set of these handwritten newspapers went on display in Nanjing, the capital of east China’s Jiangsu Province.

The West had more than its share of handwritten newspapers as well, most of which lasted only a few issues. As early as 1845, Charles Edward Pickett wrote a newspaper in longhand on foolscap and gained the distinction of establishing the first English newspaper in the Pacific Northwest, specifically Oregon. Pickett, of the famous Confederate charge at Gettysburg, was cousin to Charles Edward Pickett, a man known for his orating and philosophizing. Charles was involved in politics and wrote in the Flumgudgeon Gazette and Bumblebee Budget about the Oregon frontier using pen, ink, and foolscap. The newspaper’s name “implies persiflage.” Pickett produced twelve issues of the newspaper, sending one of each edition to President James K. Polk (1795–1849). The newspaper contained humorous accounts of the Provisional Government’s Legislative Committee, which Pickett characterized as a theater of tragedy, comedy, and


farce. Pickett also used his newspaper to feud with Dr. Elijah White, a subagent for the Native Americans west of the Rocky Mountains, and succeeded in having the man dismissed from office.

The content of the *Flumgudgeon Gazette and Bumblebee Budget* newspaper proved to be as unconventional as the practice of handwriting a newspaper. Its stated mission was to be “devoted to scratching and stinging the follies of the times.” Written by Pickett, who called himself Curltail Coon, the newspaper’s nameplate featured a raccoon saying, “Don’t stroke us backwards! There is enough villany [sic] going on to raise our bristles without that.”

At this time, as many as five handwritten newspapers were published in the frontier town of Washington, located in southeastern Iowa. Among them were the *Washington Shark*, the *Domestic Quarterly Review*, and the *Quarterly Visitor*. While handwritten, these newspapers included the same content as a machine-printed newspaper. In 1856, two years before Harrington began his papers, a handwritten newspaper circulated in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, about 140 miles from Harrington’s home.

In 1857, a handwritten Nevada newspaper called *The Scorpion* reported that it offered the news of the day. It came out monthly with amusing caricatures, and it was read by prospectors, opportunists, and adventurers. In Colorado, *The Rocky Mountain Gold Reporter and Mountain City Herald* handwritten newspaper began August 6, 1859, 104 days after the *Cherry Creek Pioneer* handwritten newspaper began in the Rocky Mountains. From 1857 to 1858, *The Hoilpum*, a handwritten newspaper in California, circulated among miners. In British Columbia, the *Emigrant Soldier’s Gazette and Cape Horn*...

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62 Atwood, “Handwritten Newspapers on the Iowa Frontier.”


64 Karolevitz, “Pen and Ink Newspapers,” 31.


Chronicle circulated as a handwritten newspaper aboard a ship for engineers enroute to Vancouver Island from England.

In the 1860s and ‘80s, handwritten newspapers circulated in Utah and might have been common in frontier settlements. These newspapers gave residents in extreme isolation a means of recreating the cultural world they have known. In other words, these papers, like their printed counterparts, helped readers locate themselves meaningfully in particular times and places.

The rise in handwritten newspapers in the western United States can be explained partly by the opening of the Pacific Coast frontier for miners, explorers, and settlers. Some newspapers circulated aboard ships as part of the Gold Rush, and by the 1850s at least two shipboard handwritten newspapers were circulating in the West. By the 1860s, handwritten newspapers tended to be linked to mining camps, military posts, or prisons and settlements in Utah and Alaska. The 1870s saw a surge in handwritten newspapers, many associated with the Mormon faith, but by the 1880s handwritten newspapers tended to focus on satire or be written for clubs and literary societies. Perhaps literary societies filled the void at that time that the mass media and the Internet fill for audiences today, facilitating entertainment and interaction with others beyond the family unit. In the late nineteenth century, handwritten community newspapers could still be found in California along with the literary and mining camp periodicals.

The early 1900s witnessed at least seven handwritten newspapers in the West, including two mining camp papers. Utah accounted for the most handwritten newspapers, perhaps because of the value that Mormons placed on literacy and education even during a period when their geographic isolation prevented them from gaining the regular use of printing presses and other technology. Handwritten Utah newspapers included the Manti Herald, which took strong editorial stands, including a call for the city to build a wall around Manti. In the 1800s, The Knowledge Seeker, Young Ladies’ Thoughts, and The Evening Star each kept the town of Hyrum, Utah, informed with up to ten pages of handwritten news. In

December of 1886, Kansas editor H.C. Banke told readers of his handwritten *The Redwing Carrier Pigeon* that because the paper had received disrespectful and personal contributions unsuited for publication the latest issue of the newspaper would be short of news.\(^{68}\)

**Handwritten Newspapers as Expressions of Shared Culture**

Printed newspapers of the Civil War period still generally published news that arrived in the mail or was picked up by word of mouth.\(^{69}\) Sources were slim and stories could not always be verified. According to standard journalism history, newspapers eventually developed through the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from a biased historical record of events published long after they occurred into a more balanced, timely source of objective, current news, both domestic and foreign. The publisher of the handwritten newspaper in the nineteenth century likely employed some of these developing professional conventions in order to claim “newspaper” status. Such a writer-publisher similarly exercised his or her editorial privilege to offer interpretative news and opinion, not just factual accounts. Eventually the more personalized or at least personally subjective “news” content would be relegated primarily to the opinion-editorial section of papers. The handwritten newspapers’ editorial lines in the Civil War period were not as clear as they might be in today’s mainstream press. But here again, history is not so clear-cut, particularly because it is not possible today to discern precisely how readers back then would have interpreted such distinctions between news and opinion.

Perhaps readers of handwritten papers have always assumed or expected greater editorial prerogatives than they would with printed papers—just as readers today might read bloggers differently than they view online newspaper reporters. As recently as 1954, Montreal’s Sid Stavitsky produced the handwritten *Clark Street Sun* for three cents and provided more opinion than news. That project grew into a charitable

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\(^{68}\) Karolevitz, “Pen and Ink Newspapers,” 63.

organization with an annual budget of nearly $6 million, making it one of the few handwritten publication ventures to make money.

In the twenty-first century, the handwriting of newspapers still occurs as a personalized combination of news and opinion. As late as 2004, an unemployed member of a daily newspaper in Baghdad resorted to penning a paper using scraps of paper he found on the pavement. For this desperate writer, the content was the focus. His handwritten articles addressed political issues, including the U.S. occupation, and the kinds of topics that could have been found in the typical Iraqi press. All in all, the writers of handwritten newspapers often used extraordinary means because they were extraordinary people living in extraordinary times. Harrington was both extraordinary and “eccentric”—which might explain some of his motivations. But it doesn't explain the specific form or content of his writing as a form of journalism rather than just literary expression.

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72 “Anthony Talks about Unusual NC Editor,” *Newsline, A publication of Campbell University Friends of the Library* (Buies Creek, NC) 11, no. 3 (November 2003): 1.
Chapter 3

Schools of Journalism History and Media Ecology

No single history of American journalism exists. In fact, historians disagree about how to interpret journalism history—just as they can disagree on what actually constitutes a newspaper. Just as journalists interpret events, historians interpret journalism.

Nevertheless, American journalism history can be organized roughly into three interpretive approaches or schools: ideological, professional, and cultural.\(^{73}\) The ideological approach assumes that historians write from their own ideological perspective in interpreting facts.\(^{74}\) For instance, some historians have emphasized “the unfolding advance of human liberty,” represented in the history of the free press unfettered by government or other external controls.

The professional approach to journalism history assumes that the more modern the journalism practices, the more likely they will be considered proper. This idea yields the development school, a historical approach that considers how the past journalistic developments contributed to modern journalism practices. The professional school views “the history of journalism as the continuing evolution of journalistic practices and standards.”\(^{75}\)

The final and most complicated approach to journalism history is the cultural perspective. The Cultural School of communication history interpretation assumes “that impersonal social forces should be the focus in historical investigations; media are linked to their environment and sociological forces, and economics and technology interrelate with media.”\(^{76}\) This perspective assumes that media are shaped by


\(^{75}\) Starrt and Sloan, *Historical Methods*, 29.

\(^{76}\) Smith, *The Jesus Newspaper*, 21.
the environment in which they operate and, in turn, shape the environment. Therefore, there is no single “journalism,” but rather various types of journalism practiced in particular times and places. Cultural historians have been most interested in sociological, economic, and technological factors. In Harrington’s case, as in the case of newspapers in general, the news product (the “news” and the “newspaper” are both products) both influences and is influenced by the culture within which journalists practice.

According to this cultural perspective, Harrington should not be considered in isolation as an individual who single-handedly played a major role in affecting all journalistic media, or who alone created the concept of news or the practice of handwriting news. His work is worthy for the way it both adopts and deviates from the period’s mainstream journalism while serving his own community particular artistic modes of expression. In short, Harrington worked within a particular culture and—for good or for bad, well or poorly—adapted journalism to his own time and place. Thus, it is critically important to consider Harrington’s work in his milieu and according to the journalistic practices and standards of the day rather than according to any ideological or professional assumptions that journalists and journalism historians might affirm in the twenty-first century.

The Cultural School provides a sensitive perspective from which to consider Harrington’s work in the context of the cultural milieu in which he worked. As American sociologist Robert Park suggested early in the twentieth century, journalism is “the outcome of a historic process in which many individuals participated without foreseeing what the ultimate product of their labors was to be. The newspaper, like the modern city, is not wholly a rational product. No one sought to make it just what it is. In spite of all the efforts of individual men and generations of men to control it and make it something after their own heart, it has continued to grow and change in its own incalculable ways.”

The cultural approach to journalism history, as used in this thesis, is founded on the premise that media such as a newspaper are

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part of their culture. Society’s values and practices shape the development of media,\(^\text{78}\) just as they did in the case of Harrington’s personal journalism.

In the tiny village of Buffalo Springs, North Carolina, the closest printed newspaper was in Fayetteville, at least twenty miles to the south of Harrington’s village. This vacuum helped Harrington gain an audience for his handwritten newspapers in a day when personal travel and cross-geographic communication were relatively slow by today’s standards. The presence of Harrington’s periodical provided advertisers with a more personal approach for getting their message to a local audience. In addition, it is unlikely that Fayetteville or Raleigh, nearly thirty miles to the north, would publish the western Harnett County news of weddings or obituaries, such as those found in Harrington’s *The Nation*, or the locally-produced literary content found in his *The Young American*. In order to create newspapers for his area, Harrington became a journalist, businessman, raconteur, poet, and graphic artist. He learned from other papers, but also adapted journalism to suit his own abilities and to address the apparent interests of his community.

**The Cultural Approach and Harrington’s Work**

The 1850s still retained some of the early American commitment to political self-determination. In January 1858, Harrington was eighteen years old. Like his young country (his *nation*), he valued independence. In addition, at a time of uncertainty about slavery, Harrington offered his personal insight on social reform and Democratic policies throughout the twenty-one issues of *The Nation*. Lacking a printing press, the aspiring writer was not to give up, but to take up his pen and wrestle with social reality as he perceived it in his day. He hoped to use his independent voice to advance social change.

In order to be taken seriously, however, Harrington very consciously modeled his newspaper after the mid-nineteenth century mainstream print media. Newspapers of his period tended to reinforce a particular

image of public life. Publishers used their pages to create a shared association with readers and often used letters to the editor and guest commentary to animate collective social life—a trend that can be seen especially in William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* during the 1830s. In addition, these mainstream newspapers often opted for firsthand accounts and facts, including the chronology of an event, the crowd size, and other information seemingly based on detached observation. The press of this period portrayed the world, at least in part, as it was presumed to be. To convince readers that a newspaper was a worthy reflection of community and public life, it had to appear somewhat objective.

Once Harrington’s coverage was seen as equivalent to the news of such legitimate printed papers, his own work would likely be viewed as legitimate as well. This approach is at least partly why Harrington adopted some of the news conventions of his day. His primary deviation from the norm was to handwrite his copy rather than produce it on a printing press. He was thereby able to provide news for a community that lacked its own local news voice. In this sense, he accomplished the feat by at least implicitly challenging the reigning technological approach. Indeed, Harrington succeeded without an office, without a staff, without a printing press schedule, and absent all the other accouterments ordinarily used in printing a mainstream newspaper. He personally circulated legitimate news without creating a newspaper institution.

In addition to looking like a printed news periodical, Harrington’s paper had to include news that reflected the existing public life of the community. Successful papers broadly reflected the shared norms of a community and helped contribute to a sense of affiliation and belonging. Some of the press of this period still offered allegiance to political parties. In fact, publishers often benefited from such

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allegiances through economic subsidies and a list of partisan subscribers. But newspapers still had to cover “the news” if they sought to be legitimate newspapers rather than just journals of comment and opinion.

Perhaps because of the manifest benefits of partisanship—after all, humans by nature prefer to have their values and beliefs confirmed rather than challenged—nonpartisan newspapers tended to read very much like the partisan ones.\footnote{Ryfe, “News, Culture and Public Life,” 65.} It was inevitably the case that newspapers tended to borrow stories and perspectives from each other as part of the common public culture. Nonpartisan newspapers and their readers tended to understand themselves in terms of partisanship even if they were not exclusively or overwhelmingly partisan. The times were politically charged. Whether a particular newspaper was politically driven or not, news in the nineteenth century expressed a particular partisan-like reality for any audience seeking a way to understand public life. In addition, it is likely that the cash-strapped Democratic Party of Harrington’s community could not help underwrite his newspaper regardless of his or any editor’s desire to advance the dominant political party. Harrington probably had to be partisan in the sense of affirming some of the dominant values of his community. How else would he attract readers? How else could he gain subscribers? How else could he entice readers to consider his more literary content such as his poetry and short stories? Subscription revenues gave Harrington an opportunity to address nonpolitical topics—a common newspaper practice in his day. Communities cared about more than politics, but political news was often a community’s most pressing interest, especially during the years leading up to and during the Civil War.

Harrington’s greatest benefit from his own overt partisanship was demonstrated in his ability to capture his community’s shared culture through the stories he selected and how he told them. In 1858, politics influenced discourse and was clearly understood as a natural and important part of life. Harrington as editor used his periodicals to advance not only his own values, but to express values that he
borrowed from other periodicals and people of his area. Harrington thereby drew a circle around the political and cultural reality that he wanted to represent as part of the region’s public life.

Like many publishers of his day, Harrington borrowed so heavily from the stock approach of others that his content suggests at least on the surface an unreflective repackaging of public life—with news that was little more than what one historians calls “a routine opportunity to reenact a basic vision of their common life.” But it is this very predictable quality of the news product that likely made Harrington’s work so comforting to his readers. He presented a publication that looked and read in every way like an ordinary newspaper except that it was handwritten. In this way, Harrington contributed to the shared culture, not first by challenging it, but by producing “newsy” cultural artifacts (newspapers) that were unconventionally produced by nevertheless seemed familiar, normal, and legitimate.

Harrington’s work presented the shared reality of his community, wherein he captured “contemporary reality by actually depicting peoples’ lives and behavior.”83 Harper’s editor Henry Mills Alden demanded that his writers present news as a human drama that nevertheless remained faithful to the facts. Although Harrington was the dilettante journalist of Harnett County, his work anticipated the idea of news that creatively explored themes and ideas suggested by journalistic facts.

One way that Harrington gained credibility was by including in his papers personal references to himself. This style of journalism, along with his handwritten approach, provides a peek into the transitional period of American press when partisan editors of the pre-Civil-War period gradually learned that taking sides could mean a loss of potential readers. In the later part of the nineteenth century, editors found that their newspapers could attract greater audiences if the content did not reveal an overtly partisan tone. Eventually a personal voice such as Harrington’s would have been restricted largely to the editorial page. But at the time his voice gave him credibility as a lifelong, known member of the community.

A final cultural impact on Harrington’s work can be seen in its reflection of the significance of the individual—especially the individual laborer—in the surrounding social and natural worlds. Surrounded

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83 Connery, Literary Aspects, 316.
by farmers and laborers who left their mark on the agricultural fields and pine forests of Harnett County, Harrington left his own mark via the newspapers he produced—including a uniquely personal style of presenting the news that suggested each person in the community made a singular contribution. His handwritten legacy could not be confused with the printed press in Raleigh or Fayetteville. Just as a portrait painter signs her art, Harrington provided his literal and figurative signature in every issue. Just as no two farmers were exactly alike, Harrington’s literary culture was geo-culturally distinctive. Just as farmers in the region could not afford to use expensive, mass-produced agricultural machinery, Harrington employed his own very personal labor to cultivate news and literary journalism.

Aside from Harrington’s obvious craftsmanship, his newspapers probably captured a deeper meaning within the social web of interaction. Rather than using new technologies of the telegraph, available as early as 1844, or the printing press, available since the sixteenth century, Harrington resorted to the oldest of literary technologies to tell his narratives. Harrington produced a unique copy for each reader-subscriber. No two copies were exactly the same, just as no two personal conversations are identical. The personalized handwritten messages that Harrington circulated thereby probably contained a richer social weave than the content found in a printed newspaper. His handwriting could not achieve the visual standardization characteristic of type, which depends overwhelmingly on the literary text rather than the visual expression involved in the making (i.e., writing vs. printing) of the text itself, but he succeeded in issuing a publication that in every way revealed that he wrote it.

The Cultural Approach Combined with Media Ecology

The field of media ecology provides a useful lens through which to look at social interactions. Media and culture can be understood ecologically, with changes in news-disseminating technology altering the symbolic environment. The symbolic environment is said to be socially constructed, a “sensory world of meanings that in turn shapes our perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behaviors.”


challenged the idea that content is key in studying media; he instead focused on the medium. The experience of reading a handwritten newspaper is far different from the experience of perusing a printed version—just as e-mail is different than Skype, or just as reading the New York Times or Wall Street Journal on a computer screen at the office is not the same as reading one of them in a broadsheet format at a coffee shop. And as McLuhan has observed, since each medium emphasizes different senses, the regular use of one over the other conditions an audiences to register some stimuli and ignore others.

In Harrington’s work, his rural society appreciated and was perhaps influenced by the tactile qualities of the handwritten periodical as opposed to the machine-printed periodicals that dominated the day. At first, the handwritten newspaper must have seemed a novelty for Harrington’s readers, but over time they doubtless became acclimated to it as a part of the background of their lives. For them, the handwritten press provided a substantive pause in the rush to modernity and the advance of the new American national order that included an upheaval in agriculture and the loss of slave labor. Harrington’s work could have provided his readers with a sense that the old order might continue and that the age of revolutionary or even evolutionary social change could be postponed.

The larger cultural and social norms of 1858 presaged the death of slave labor in America, a transition likely not appreciated by many Southerners at the time. Some in the society clung to the older tradition of the agriculture economy just as Harrington clung to an older version of disseminating news. Harrington’s methods were outdated by at least three centuries, but the act of handwriting newspapers was well within the cultural sensibilities of his community. The handwritten papers served as a metaphor for a community in denial. Many Tar Heels wanted to resist the coming tide of abolition and the economic change built on technologies such as textile mills, railroads, and telegraphs. In short, they were trying to resist modernity. Harrington shared the characteristics of his state’s primary early-nineteenth-century political leader, U.S. Senator Nathaniel Macon, who believed that if the people of the state were left alone they “would continue to raise boys and girls who would become men and women. These were the sorts of internal

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86 McLuhan, *Understanding Media.*
improvements he desired to see.” Harrington participated in this shared cultural vision that a bygone era could remain in existence by doing what one could without the curse and added expense of technology. Harrington may not have considered himself a Luddite, but his act of handwriting newspapers served as a symbolic indicator that the older ways are just as valuable, and perhaps even superior, to the newer ones. If nothing else, the old ways were more personal and more clearly tuned to local culture. This research will explore the content of Harrington’s newspapers in the context of his culture.

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Chapter 4

The Context of John Mclean Harrington’s Life and Publications

Between 1833 and the Civil War, the newspaper established itself as a true mass medium throughout the nation.\(^8\) Between 1835 and 1861, however, the presses of North Carolina were still few in number and produced lackluster editorial efforts. By 1851, forty-four newspapers were known to circulate, and by 1858 at least seventy-four existed.\(^9\) The editors of the period had mediocre journalistic contributions and spent as much time trying to collect from delinquent subscribers as they did publishing.\(^10\) Although periodical subscriptions were available from the earliest days of the United States, by 1828 they were sold primarily to a handful of men interested in government, politics, and business.\(^11\) In Harrington’s case, most of his subscriptions were $2 in advance per year. In comparison, the North Carolina Chronicle or Fayetteville Gazette cost $3 annually.\(^12\)

With North Carolina’s illiteracy rate at thirty percent, finding a reading public presented a challenge to editors.\(^13\) The growth of newspapers was painfully slow. By 1844 the editors tended toward partisanship, with the Whig party sponsoring twenty newspapers and the Democrats sponsoring seven. As the time of the Civil War approached, the Whig party newspapers were replaced by Democratic organs,


\(^{13}\) Norton, “Democratic Newspapers,” 345.
and by 1859 the number of Democratic newspapers had increased to eighteen. Between 1835 and 1860, the *Standard*, published in Raleigh, gained a reputation as the official Democratic party mouthpiece. In 1860, the *Standard’s* weekly circulation was more than 2,500 and its semiweekly circulation 400.94

Throughout the period leading to the Civil War, Raleigh was home to many failed newspapers, but the one that remained vibrant was the *Standard*, which began in late 1834 but took some time to get established.95 Thomas Loring of Massachusetts led the *Standard* and urged an ethical code among editors that included the use of respectful language among leaders in state politics.96 By 1843 Loring lost favor with Democrats, and William Woods Holden of Hillsboro (now Hillsborough), North Carolina, assumed control of the *Standard* in that year. When he died in 1892, his readers regarded him as one who, for his twenty-five years editing the *Standard*, could “kill or make alive” those involved in Tar Heel politics.97 By 1850 Holden had advanced the *Standard* from a weekly to a semi-weekly publication and used it to build up the Democratic Party. He considered himself a man of influence and once boasted that he, as an editor, had made the Democratic Party. Yet it was Holden who influenced Harrington and his father to join the ranks of the Unionists following the Civil War.

The decade before the Civil War included more of the same pedestrian reporting by the North Carolina press.98 The number of Northern periodicals far exceeded those in the South, and the Northern papers offered more timely news presented in a more arresting manner. While the newspapers in North Carolina increased from forty-five in 1850 to seventy by 1860, editors continued to complain that subscribers did not settle their accounts. A typical example of acceptable circulation figures in 1850 is


the *Standard* count of 1,500 subscribers. Sagging circulation and wayward subscribers took their toll. The *Rowan Whig and Western Advocate* of Salisbury said in an editorial dated May 26, 1854, “Printer’s accounts are said to resemble Faith, the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” It hoped that the publication’s “nearly one thousand of the best subscribers in the State, who are in arrears, will at once send us our dues.” Among the newspapers that adopted a “cash system” of paying in advance for a subscription was Raleigh’s *Standard*. Holden praised the cash system and claimed on July 23, 1856, an increase of “900 subscribers—almost 400 per month.”

In good times and bad, publishing in North Carolina before the Civil War remained a difficult vocation and forced editors to give away advertising in the hopes of signing up clients for long-term commitments. Holden once gave the Koh-i-poor chewing tobacco company free advertising and praised advertiser P.F. Pescud’s product “as the purest and finest article of the kine we have seen.” Holden had no such words for Northern advertising agents who placed notices for patent medicine but failed to pay for the service. He called them “vampires” who sucked the blood from the Southern press.

**The Press in North Carolina During and After the Civil War**

By 1860, the North enjoyed inexpensive newspapers and the burgeoning telegraph lines that ran along railroad tracks and helped to deliver news to a wider audience.\(^9^9\) By contrast, the South, including Harnett County, had fewer rail lines and hence fewer telegraph lines than the North. The rail and telegraph advantage helped the North move troops and information with greater ease than the South.

Throughout the nation, however, the press increasingly capitalized on the telegraph as a new way of understanding the process of newsgathering as well as the nature of news itself. No longer did all editors have to wait patiently for information to be delivered over the transom. News was becoming less “old news” than “new news”—the latest events and accompanying observations. Using speedier means of gathering and distributing information and opinion, editors redefined news. News ceased to be only

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“whatever accounts came to hand,” and increasingly came to be “what’s new.” This change caught on, and “Americans learned almost everything taking place outside their communities from newspapers.”

Moreover, this change contributed to a growing emphasis on selling news as a commodity rather than simply using news to distribute timely information or to advance partisan opinions. Editors might have political agendas, for instance, but they also had to support their work financially if they did not have other paying jobs, personal wealth, or patrons. As today, conflict as well as timeliness could attract readers and presumably subscribers and advertisers. Journalists had to be storytellers if they expected to attract audiences. They had to identify if not create some social conflict for the sake of publishing engaging stories. Perhaps this tendency is one reason why the various papers were not above borrowing and reprinting each other’s words in order to instigate or at least fuel existing regional friction. Press-fueled social conflict was probably reflected in the rhetoric of the fire-eaters—those extreme proponents of slavery who were “intent on protecting and promoting their region’s interests even if it meant sacrificing the Republic.”

In the South, the press, while the most important medium for disseminating news, rarely excelled at speedy or even comprehensive local and state coverage. Despite this shortcoming, the Southern press proved to be the medium of choice in the clamor for secession. As the debate over slavery grew more passionate, papers such as the Richmond Examiner, the Jackson Mississippian, and Atlanta Daily Intelligencer called for the South to declare its independence and secede from the United States. The Southern press shared a reason to be ideological rather than just commercial. A postal tradition that dated to the early 1700s meant newspapers could circulate postage-free through the mails, allowing areas as

100 Ratner and Teeter, Fanatics and Fire-Eaters, 75.


remote an sparsely populated as the Harrington community to enjoy periodicals. Known as the newspaper exchange, this practice helped newspapers include content from outlying areas, even internationally, which aided readers in their knowledge of current events and their sense of community identity. However, the nationalizing influence of the press was not enough to prevent states from taking sides in the Civil War.

Among the slave states that resisted this drive for secession was North Carolina. Nationally, the issue of slavery haunted Lincoln during his painful term as president. He gradually came to believe abolition was a military necessity essential to preserving the Union. In his effort to save the Union, Lincoln generated the Emancipation Proclamation, a challenge that enraged the Southern press. In rural North Carolina, Harrington had publicly rejected secession during the years before the war. His writing in 1858 was proslavery, but muted. Probably because slavery was a key part of life in his own community, Harrington joined others in criticizing “Black Republicans” and supporters of slave rights. Nevertheless, Harrington’s sentiment on this topic was mild compared to other topics he addressed and compared to other area writers. Holden’s Standard more stridently insisted that it would not submit to Black Republican rule. At the time, newspapers in the Piedmont region of North Carolina existed primarily for political reasons, including support of the Democrats. Harrington was partisan, too, but not exclusively or even primarily. Along with the new definition of news emerging in the urban North, Harrington was developing a broader notion of news even within his highly partisan, largely culture. Like others in the Piedmont, Harrington followed the trend of the day to include “locally written fiction either in serial or capsule form; selected and/or locally written poetry; humor, medicinal aids; books reviews; and essays on religion, agriculture, education, and temperance.” Editors, including Harrington, encouraged members of the community to contribute literary submissions. The journalistic

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trends of the 1850s included a chaotic layout without much effort to guide the reader from one item to another, and Harrington followed this convention as well.

The war itself confronted the Southern press with many unique and trying situations, particularly the chronic ink and paper shortages along with technological limitations.\textsuperscript{105} Among these challenges were “wartime scarcities and skyrocketing costs of paper and other printing materials, the increasing obsolescence of presses and typographical equipment.”\textsuperscript{106} These scarcities caused by the war “limited the effectiveness of the Confederate press and caused subscription rates to soar to heights undreamed of at the beginning of the war.” Production became such a problem that the South “could not produce nearly enough paper to meet even the section’s peacetime needs, and it was not possible to smuggle enough through the blockade or to accelerate domestic production sufficiently to meet the wartime demand for newsprint.” Harrington’s wartime work was hampered by lack of paper and other shortages.\textsuperscript{107}

During the Civil War, both the Northern and Southern presses struggled to publish, but the problems were particularly acute in the South. The North used military occupation to control information. Northern military officials confiscated most of the South’s resources, making it nearly impossible to successfully operate a newspaper. The Union “frequently used equipment taken from printing plants in the Confederate towns that they captured to print newspapers for the soldiers.”\textsuperscript{108}

Limited manpower for reporting and printing created another roadblock for the Southern press. Of the eight hundred or so printers “who made up the entire printing force of the Confederacy in 1863, at least seventy-five percent either had been or were in the army by June 1864.”\textsuperscript{109} Those left behind were often

\textsuperscript{105} Sloan and Startt, \textit{The Media in America}.


\textsuperscript{107} Fowler, \textit{They Passed This Way}, 115.

\textsuperscript{108} Carter, \textit{Their Words Were Bullets}, 26.

\textsuperscript{109} Andrews, \textit{The South Reports the Civil War}, 43.
untrained in the publishing and reporting roles they assumed. Of course, the lack of a printing press did not hinder the handwritten work of Harrington, but some paper shortages were unavoidable during the conflict.

The issue of slavery influenced all areas of life during the period from 1858 to 1869 while Harrington was handwriting his newspapers. Slavery affected legislation such as the Compromise of 1850, led by U.S. Senator Henry Clay. This legislation temporarily warded off sectional strife by admitting California as a free state and applying the policy of popular sovereignty to the land acquired from Mexico. Slavery also dominated the struggle over the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which allowed these territories to maintain the use of slaves; for all practical purposes, however, the law overturned the Missouri Compromise and created renewed national strife.

Slavery served as the central character in the most notorious novel of this period, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In 1852, the book sold 300,000 copies and rallied anti-slavery sentiment.110 By 1854, the antislavery movement became the centerpiece of the Republican Party and inspired many supporters, some who thought slavery hurt business and others who considered it immoral. In May 1856, New York abolitionist John Brown carried out a midnight execution of proslavery settlers in Kansas, shocking the nation. And in 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Missouri slave Dred Scott was property and therefore had no standing before the courts. The high court also ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional “because it was illegal for Congress to deprive an owner of property—in this case, a slave—without due process of law.”111

While slavery was the overriding issue during Harrington’s time, Southerners were not unanimous in their opinion of it. In particular, North Carolina differed from its Southern neighbors.112 About one third


of Virginia families owned slaves, and half of the families in South Carolina were slave owners, but only about one in four North Carolina families owned slaves. Yet even with a smaller proportion of slave-owning families, North Carolina still included a significant number of slaves. By 1850, the state contained 580,491 Caucasians and 288,548 slaves, and by 1860 the numbers had jumped to 661,563 Caucasians and 331,059 slaves, making the enslaved population a crucial part of the state’s economy.

The value of slaves for tax purposes (ad valorem) was among the top issues in North Carolina during the 1850s. North Carolina legislator and Whig Moses A. Bledsoe created an organization to fight the inequalities arising from what he considered to be the privileged position of slave property. The Whig party dissolved over the question of slavery, but during the anti-Jackson years the Whigs supported tariffs and a strong Congress. Slaveholders benefited most from railroads and other improvements, yet they contributed less than their fair share to reducing the public debt. It would be in the best interests of all to tax slaves as persons because it would reduce state debt. The Whigs kept the issue of taxation prominent, but North Carolina Governor John W. Ellis, elected in 1858 and re-elected in 1860, gained support with his idea that taxing a poor person’s oven, pots, and chickens was unfair, and he lobbied for exceptions. Since 1830, Andrew Jackson Democrats had resisted the idea of government interference in the lives of farmers; however, Whigs who opposed Jackson sought government assistance for projects such as road construction, sewage drainage, harbor and river dredging, and other internal improvements, which were desperately needed in rural North Carolina.


113 Kathleen Conway, North Carolina, Land of Contrasts (Atlanta, GA: Clairmont Press, 2009), 262.


By the time of the Civil War, most residents of Harnett County were poor farmers who grew corn, sweet potatoes, and peas.\textsuperscript{116} About 1,000 of the 1,600 men of military age enlisted in the Confederate Army.\textsuperscript{117} To keep the farms going, most families depended on slave labor. According to the 1860 Census, 8,069 people lived in the county, thirty percent of whom were “non-white.”

**The Harrington Family and Slaves**

The Harrington family was part of the more affluent tier of Harnett County society that depended on slave labor. According to the October 11, 1850, U.S. Census, John McLean Harrington, ten years old at the time, lived in a household with nine slaves.\textsuperscript{118} In 1860, when he was twenty, his family owned fourteen slaves and he owned ten. By 1870, when the War Between the States was over, Harrington and his family had only seven non-family members listed as part of their household.

The 1870 U.S. Census listed John’s father as sixty-three years old and noted that he was a farmer and former state senator. John’s mother, Margaret, was listed as fifty-four years old and described as “keeping house.”\textsuperscript{119} The listing indicated that thirty-year-old John McLean was an assistant U.S. marshal. Other listed household members included: James, age twenty-one, described as working on the farm; Sion, age nineteen; and David, age sixteen, noted as “Do” (which may be an abbreviation for a “domestic.”). The last entry for this family, written by John McLean Harrington as assistant marshal for the census, includes the name Louis, age eleven, mulatto; and Sarah, age eleven, black. Since this U.S. Census is post-Civil War, it’s impossible to know the role of the others in the Harrington household. (See Appendix D for the complete U.S. Census figures for the Harrington Household from 1850 to 1880).


A scribe for all seasons, Harrington is listed as the enumerator who collected the U.S. Census figure for Upper Little River Township of Harnett County. His ornate signature appears on the U.S. Census figures of July 9, 1870, and June 17, 1880. Harrington died before the next U.S. Census in 1890.120

**Harnett County During the Time of John McLean Harrington**

Harrington lived in the Piedmont section of North Carolina in Harnett County, established in 1855. This impoverished region is where Harrington published his papers. Buffalo Springs, located near the village of Harrington, “was a thriving little hamlet centering about the turpentine industry”121 In Harrington’s day. In addition to the harvesting of turpentine, barrel making proved to be one of the few profitable commercial industries in the Buffalo Springs and Harrington areas of Harnett County. Journalist Harrington referred to barrel-making in a display advertisement for 20,000 white oak staves on page two of his maiden issue of *The Young American* in January 1858. Buffalo Springs and the surrounding area had faded with the arrival of the Western, or Coalfield, Railroad, and the Salem Plank Road. The shaky economics of this period added to the instability of attracting and retaining a reading audience willing to pay to receive news—even crucial news about the financial health of the community.

**The Spencerian Style of Handwriting**

Handwriting, available since the fourth millennium BC, can be viewed “as one index of the history of thought.”122 In addition, when a writer pens a work based on a standard model of

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120 In addition to highlighting the presence of slaves, the census data provide another view of John McLean Harrington as a person who seeks political appointment and uses his pen to handwrite records. While the census data are only a list, they emphasize Harrington’s role in the community one who records information for the state.

121 Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 150.

handwriting such as the Spencerian model used by Harrington, the work can demonstrate the author’s individuality outside the harness of conformity.123 With these ideas in mind, Harrington’s work can be explored partly by examining the handwriting method that he employed, the one that was most common during his day. Harrington’s longhand suggests the style of penmanship developed by Platt Rogers Spencer (1800–1864), a New York public official who is credited with originating a style of cursive handwriting that is called “Spencerian.”124 The most enduring visible influence of Spencer’s script may be the Coca-Cola logo.125 The Spencerian writing style can still be found in the widely available Spencerian calligraphy kit as well.

Platt Rogers Spencer seemed destined to pioneer a writing revolution and one historian notes that even at an early age Spencer was “was crazy about handwriting but, in a family too poor to provide him with paper, he was forced to practice on leaves and bark, in the snow, and on the sandy beach of Lake Erie, where sometimes his obsessive script would stretch for a half a mile.” By 1857, he met President James Garfield when he served in the U.S. Congress, and both hit it off because they opposed slavery. Garfield praised Spencer for both his opposition to slavery and his script, which he called “the pride of our country and the model of our schools.” To say Spencer was obsessive about his handwriting doesn’t quite capture the utter devotion of his approach; he couldn’t look at a leaf or stone without thinking how to turn it into a letter of the


124 Janie Cravens, personal e-mail with Michael Smith, August 18, 2008. Cravens at the time was president of the International Association of Master Penmen, Engrossers and Teachers of Handwriting.

alphabet. He wanted his script to be rhythmic and comfortable, a reaction against the tedium of the copperplate style that dominated handwriting at the time. Spencer encouraged his adherents to practice six to twelve hours per day.

First published in 1848, the *Spencerian Key to Practical Penmanship* moved longhand writing from the simple goal of legibility to rapid movements of the hand and arm using an economy of motion that resulted in graceful letters and bold ovals of capital letters.\(^{126}\) For the half century “from before the Civil War to the end of the Victorian ear, the hegemony of Spencerian was a testament to an appreciation for beauty that lurked in the souls of Americans—an appreciation that was closely tied to upward striving: such an extravagant, impressive, high-class script, such an obvious love of the noble and beautiful—these were surely the mark of a gentleman or lady.”\(^{127}\)

Spencer noticed even as a ten-year-old boy that the most common forms in nature were the oval of the beach pebble and the angle of the waves, and both inspired him to create a form of handwriting.\(^{128}\) He taught whole-arm movement so that a penman could write for hours and not tire, Donaldson wrote. The use of fifty-two-degree slant and seven basic strokes helped writers achieve the greatest speed in handwriting.\(^{129}\) Spencer admired the signature of John Hancock on the “Declaration of Independence” and used it to develop a system of writing that dominated the

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public school system for almost one hundred years and influenced his five sons to continue the work after his death. A workbook on mastering the Spencerian method declares that writing is “a secondary power of speech, and they who cannot write are in part dumb.” The workbook adds, “Scrawls that cannot be read may be compared to talking that cannot be understood; and writing difficult to decipher, to stammering speech.”

Spencer apparently revolutionized handwriting education partly by linking handwriting with high morals and intelligence. No standardized way of writing script existed in the eighteenth century and styles were associated with specific occupations, a gender, or a social class. Spencer considered his approach to handwriting to be an art. His descendant, Henry Cable Spencer, noted the importance of well-formed handwriting: “He who loves nature and admires all that is truly beautiful, will find in the prosecution and study of this art, something to enlarge and develop the highest faculties of the mind—something to make him more interested in that which pertains to the welfare of those around him. Let, then, every one seek to gain a practical knowledge of this art, and as long as he lives will it be to him a source of pleasure, profit, and improvement.”

Spencer followed a long tradition that had begun as early as the seventeenth century, when penmanship self-instruction manuals could be purchased. The practice of penmanship often branched from mere instruction into study at a university or training for a life of commerce.

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131 Spencer, *Spencerian Key to Practical Penmanship*, 175–176. Spencer included an appendix, pages 158–176, on the “Origin and Progress of the Art of Writing, or Chirography.” On page 165, he traced penmanship to Mount Sinai through history until the early 1800s when, he explained, penmanship manuals before the Spencerian Key were little more than “copy-books, but do not aspire to the character of systematized works.” On page 13 of his manual, Spencer explained that to be successful in penmanship a writer must seek “a definite ideal.”

Handwriting was varied and included such diversities as roman style for females and an italic style for affluent men. The styles provided an added benefit by alerting the reader to the gender and status of the writer, which told him or her “the appropriate degree of authority to grant the handwritten word.” Women who used the printing press exposed themselves to “every buyer,” which was unseemly, “culturally tantamount to prostitution.” However, with time the idea of publication in print “was conceptualized as the way public discussion usually and ideally takes place and the mechanism whereby the public itself is constituted.”

Before Spencer, handwriting leaders included Benjamin Franklin, whose The American Instructor (1748) offered instruction known as copperplate, the style used to etch copper plates for engraving. Franklin founded the Academy of Philadelphia, later the University of Pennsylvania, with the stipulation that if a young man wished to be admitted, he must write a legible hand. By 1803, the metal nib pen supplanted the quill pen, making handwriting much more efficient. This innovation arrived just in time for the Spencerian revolution. Not until 1897 did the first successful fountain pen would appear.

In the twentieth century, however, Austen N. Palmer took over dominance in the handwriting field. Spencer’s loops and curls, which took time, waned in favor of Palmer’s more rapid and plain met

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133 Florey, Script and Scribble, 46.
Chapter 5

The News, Literature, and Advertisements of The Young American

Over the course of 1858, The Young American contained three sections: literary content, news content, and advertising content. Each section used cursive writing, which was about the size of a fourteen-point font. In many cases, the writing was ornate, but it would vary from time to time. The first issue ran twenty-eight pages, eight by twelve inches in size. Harrington employed a continuous numbering system from issue to issue—as is the case for many modern journals and nearly all scholarly journals. For example, the first issue of The Young American ended with page 30, while the second issue began with page 31.

Some issues looked better than others. For instance, the March issue was one of the most difficult to read because words were smeared and blotted. On page eighty-two, Harrington apologized for the poor quality, noting that neither the paper nor the ink was up to his desired standard. Harrington said on page eighty-three that if he could not acquire better supplies he would resort to publishing in red ink—which he often used in 1858.

Harrington used graphic elements sparingly. A rare use of a drawing occurred in a display advertisement, appearing in November on page 292 and in December on page 314, where Harrington pictured a mortar and pestle to promote James A. Smith, druggist and chemist in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Another graphic he occasionally included was a hand with a pointing finger—presumably used to call attention to some item on a page. In April of 1858, on page 122, he published a hand pointing to...

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134 Fowler, They Passed This Way, 150.

135 John McLean Harrington, “An apology,” The Young American, 1, no. 3, 82.
jokes such as this one: “Two well draped shoemakers being in company, were asked their profession by a very inquisitive personage. Says one of them, ‘I practice the heeling art.’ ‘And I,’ added the other ‘labor for the good of men’s soles.’” Harrington also used the pointed finger on page four of the April 24, 1858, issue of *The Nation*, also for a joke. It read: “A dreary joke, a coffin maker having apartments to let, posted his bill announcing the same for the coffin in his window, ‘Lodging for Single Gentleman.”

Harrington might have seen the pointed finger employed in display advertising in the *Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly*. A front-page advertisement on October 14, 1858, read, “Clothing! Clothing!! H. Graham.” That advertisement included a hand with an index finger pointing to the words “Garments Cut in the Latest Fashion.”

For his later publications, Harrington used an engraving to blot ink for the nameplates of his newspapers. For instance, *The Times* included a blotted nameplate most likely from a woodcut carving.

Of the two publications Harrington produced in 1858, one was primarily literary and included some news, while the other was a stridently partisan newspaper filled with local politics. The more literary *Young American* was the first of Harrington’s handwritten periodicals, and he used it to promote his more partisan *The Nation* by placing display advertisements in the April, May, August, and October issues. Harrington wrote in April that *The Nation* would be connected to *The Young American* “in a manner” and *The Nation* would “be strictly Democratic” in its politics.

Harrington placed his masthead and editorial policy about midway through the maiden issue of *The Young American*, on pages 14 and 15. He listed both Buffalo Springs, North Carolina, and Fayetteville, North Carolina, as his addresses. The masthead listed the cost per issue as twenty cents. He then listed the

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137 This periodical in Fayetteville, North Carolina, used periods at the end of the names: *Fayetteville Observer, Semi-Weekly*. The font for “Fayetteville Observer” used a kind of modified Rosewood Standard Regular font with shadows, and the font for “Semi-Weekly” used a font similar to Times New Roman boldface; both used capital letters. In 1817, the *Fayetteville Observer*, the state’s oldest continuous published newspaper, began, and Edward J. Hale edited it as a Whig party supporter from 1825 until 1865 (Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 376). Boyd lists the newspaper without the periods or the “Semi-Weekly.” in the name, and this practice is used in this research for simplicity in reading.
subscription price of two dollars in advance and offered an apology for the late delivery. Harrington added, “To tell you the truth, friends, we feel proud to look at our sheet. We think it is the best published in the old ‘Rip Van Winkle’ state\(^{138}\) and you owe all this to us. We intend to devote ourselves to the advancement of pure and sound literature from fiction to amusement and we do not intend to let any subject go unnoticed. Our paper will give a true and fair statement of the politics of the day, but will not for the present take sides with any particular party but we expect to exercise the rights of a Freeman and vote for whom we please, and that is the way I hope every true friend to American freedom will do and also subscribe to The Young American— (Editor).”\(^{139}\)

By June, Harrington praised his established publication, on page 164: “It has a good circulation through this state and a very fair circulation elsewhere.”\(^{140}\) In the August issue, Harrington again lauded his work, writing on page 224, “We cheerfully recommend the Young American to the ladies for the many fine selections of poetry and also original selections, and as a young gentleman’s magazine it can’t be excelled [last word unclear].”\(^{141}\)

On page 316 of the last issue of *The Young American* for 1858, Harrington penned, “It was just as we told you in the commencement we said we would put this volume through and sure enough we have done it.” He urged readers to renew their subscription to get “side-splitting jokes” in the January issue, which never materialized.\(^{142}\) Perhaps the joke was on the reader

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\(^{138}\) David L. Swain of Asheville, North Carolina, Whig party member and governor from 1832–1835, is reported to be the first person to compare North Carolina to Rip Van Winkle, a character from a Washington Irving short story. Winkle fell asleep for twenty years and awoke to find everything around him changed. Swain called for a fairer form of representation (Conway, *North Carolina, Land of Contrasts*, 222).

\(^{139}\) John McLean Harrington, “‘The Young American’ Editorial Statement,” *The Young American* (Buffalo Springs, NC), January 1858, 14–15.

\(^{140}\) John McLean Harrington, “Note,” *The Young American*, June, 1858, 1, no. 6, 164.

\(^{141}\) John McLean Harrington, “We cheerfully,” *The Young American*, August, 1858, 1, no. 8, 224.

\(^{142}\) John McLean Harrington, “We told you,” *The Young American*, December, 1858, 1, no. 12, 316.
Probably because *The Young American* often was more literary than newsy, it sometimes ran out of material. In June of the first year of publication, Harrington wrote on page 164, “Nothing to write.” He confessed, “How sad it is for a poor editor to sit pondering his brain in vain to see if he can’t find no item to interest his readers. That is the case with us just now. We have endeavored to find something that will interest our readers and if we have failed you will have to excuse us.”

On the next page, however, Harrington said his “devil”—presumably his apprentice or at least his assistant—offered his assistance on a slow news day. Harrington said his helper presented an off-rhyme verse about the lack of news. It read:

In vain you may look for an idea,

In vain you may simper and stew,

And after all it will turn out,

That you have nothing to write.

**News Content of The Young American**

Following the custom of the day even with the more literary papers, Harrington used news content from other newspapers to fill his periodical. Throughout the nation, weekly newspaper editors freely exchanged copies of their newspapers. On page twenty-six of *The Young American*’s first issue, Harrington praised the quality of *The Saturday Evening Post* and the *Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly*: “We could go on and on and enumerate more but will wait

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143 John McLean Harrington, “Note,” *The Young American*, June, 1858, 1, no. 6, 164.

144 Richard T. Stillson, *Golden Words: Communications and Information Dispersal in the California Gold Rush* (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2003), 44.
until next issue. Our thanks are [unclear] due to several of the Southern exchanges for sending in their paper in advance of our publication.\footnote{According to Cranford, Harrington wrote in The Nation, “The Saturday Evening Post is the best paper we have the pleasure of seeing” \textit{(John McLean Harrington, 7)}. Duke collection does not include the May 8, May 15, May 22, and July 28 issues of The Nation. Cranford’s reference to The Saturday Evening Post may be in one of those issues because this researcher could not find it in the surviving issues. However, on page 26 of the January 1858 issue of The Young American, Harrington wrote in the Literary Notices, “The Saturday Evening Post is one of the best papers we have had the pleasure of seeing in a long time.”}

The layout of Harrington’s newspaper was similar to other community newspapers in the mainstream press. In practice, \textit{The Young American} and \textit{The Nation} used the same vertical layout and small headlines popular with the Fayetteville newspaper and other newspapers of the period. In 1858, the \textit{Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly} circulated Wednesdays and Saturdays. It printed advertisements on the front page and short news articles from other newspapers on its inside pages, along with poetry and other light content. That publication used a six-column, four-page format. The \textit{Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly} included the kind of quips Harrington employed in his own periodicals.

Harrington and other editors of his day not only reprinted information from other publications but also keenly monitored others’ circulation successes or failures. Sometimes they did credit other publications, but perhaps competing papers were not credited for fear of publicizing competitors’ papers. The 1858 issues of the \textit{Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly} appears to never mentioned Harrington’s work.

The news pages of the recently launched \textit{The Young American} were dominated by foreign news, possibly because such news suggested a more cosmopolitan and less provincial focus for what today might be called upscale readers. One of the most extensively covered foreign news stories was the \textit{Leviathan}, a British steam ship that had been under construction since 1854 and was launched in September 1858 to much fanfare. Harrington mentioned the progress of the \textit{Leviathan} in each issue and noted its progress. The ship was beset with problems, not the least of which was launching it safely. Harrington wittily alluded to Job 41:1, asking on page 17, “Can’st thou draw out Leviathan with a
hook?"\\(^{146}\) Harrington answered himself, “So far the answer seems to be as made by English science, ‘We cannot over tame the artificial sea monster which our own hands have made.’” Harrington also noted that critics from Christian journals of the day were shocked that the British casually called the huge vessel “Leviathan” rather than its other name, “Great Eastern.” Harrington continued his comments on page eighteen by suggesting that the irreverence and conceit of the ship builders hurt the launching efforts. In subsequent issues throughout the year, Harrington continued to discuss the launching of the Leviathan.

The January issue included random world news about Lucknow, India, and insurgent fighting and unspecified improvements in Hamburg. That issue also offered an obituary of an editor of the Wilmington Herald on page eighteen and a line from Harrington saying the British government could supply a Bible to everyone in the world with the budget it spends on intoxicating liquor.\\(^{147}\) This comment may have carried some unconscious significance for Harrington, who likely died an alcoholic.\\(^{148}\)

In the February issue of The Young American, Harrington included a line about China on page forty-three, “Very little news is telegraphed now that will interest our readers.”\\(^{149}\) Local news was rare in The Young American, but page eighty-six of the March issue included a Harnett County obituary of a victim of scarlet fever.\\(^{150}\)

An editorial on page 115 of The Young American’s April issue told readers that Harrington would not support “any man who has his hands stained with the blood of his countryman for any office whatever.” Furthermore, Harrington said he would not be pleased to see W.W. Avery of Burke, once a delegate to the

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146 John McLean Harrington, “Leviathan,” The Young American, September 1858, 1, no. 9, 17.

147 John McLean Harrington, “How long,” The Young American, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 18.

148 Fowler, They Passed This Way, 152; Geneva Harrington Cameron, interview by Michael Ray Smith, October 20, 2006. Mrs. Cameron of Broadway, North Carolina, is a descendant of Harrington.

149 John McLean Harrington, “Died,” The Young American, March, 1858, 1, no. 3, 86.

150 John McLean Harrington, “China,” The Young American, February, 1858, 1, no. 2, 43.
Democratic convention in 1856, become governor. He wrote, “If Avery is governor, we aint satisfied, that’s all.”

In August on page 213, Harrington included the local political news that Democratic gubernatorial candidate Judge Ellis won the election, and he reported that the legislature would be more Democratic in the next session. In other quasi-local news, Harrington published the kind of poetic personal notice where suitors used only their initials to send love letters to unidentified recipients, including this one from “A.M.” on page 215:

A single trip? How light a thing,

To sway such magic art,

And bid each soft, remembrance spring,

Like blossoms in the heart!

The Literary Content of The Young American

Throughout 1858, Harrington published fiction and poetry along the model of the literary journals advocated by the region’s intelligentsia. In 1854, poet and novelist Mary Bayard Clarke called for an emphasis on poetry in her anthology of North Carolina poetry, Wood-notes, and also used the idea of Rip Van Winkle as part of her rationale. She wrote:

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151 Avery was acquitted of the murder of Samuel Flemming because a jury deemed Avery justified, in accordance with the Southern Code of Honor that allowed an individual to exact vengeance if publicly humiliated by a person of lower social background so as to be mentally anguished. See W. Conard Gass, “The Misfortune of a High Minded and Honorable Gentleman: W.W. Avery and the Southern Code of Honor,” North Carolina Historical Review 56 (1978 July): 278–297.

152 John McLean Harrington, “The Elections,” The Young American, August, 1858, 1, no. 8, 213.

153 John McLean Harrington, “A single trip,” The Young American, August, 1858, 1. no. 8, 215.
Come rouse you! ye poets of North Carolina,

My State is my theme and I seek not a finer,

I sing in its praise and I bid ye all follow,

Till we wake up the echoes of “Old Sleepy Hollow!”

Come show to his scorners “Old Rip” is awaking,

His sleep like a cloud of the morning is breaking;

That the years of his slumber, at last have gone by,

And the rainbow of promise illumines the sky.¹⁵⁴

In early issues of The Young American, Harrington derided the Leviathan shipbuilders for their hubris in calling the world’s largest ship by an Old Testament word. In the Old Testament book of Job, a leviathan was considered a crocodile-type creature. Although Harrington found this reference irreverent, he published a submission by “Elise,” a contributing writer, who praised the ship as a tribute to the triumph of engineering. Elise’s poem recognized that many seek fame, but few attain it. Harrington seemed to appreciate the individual’s need for recognition, particularly in the lonely work of publishing, but he denigrated work that challenged reverence for the divine, as in the case of referring to the largest ship of the day by a Bible appellation. Elise’s ship tribute, a poem, was consistent with the other poetry Harrington included in The Young American. It rhymed but offered little other literary creativity.

¹⁵⁴ This passage is from Volume II, page 13. The two-volume set, also known as Carolina Carols: A Collection of North Carolina Poetry, was published by Pomeroy publishers in Raleigh and included 182 poems by sixty authors and featured a story of ancient Palmyra and a poem about the Indian gallows. Harrington’s work is not part of the collection.
Although the Harrington’s published poetry “could not be considered of the highest caliber, it no doubt brought enjoyment to his readers, who seldom came in contact with the work of the Masters.”

As Harrington began his lyrical journal, he was working in a time when others shared his vision. For instance, Harrington used the bottom of page fifteen in his first issue of The Young American to note that North Carolina had shed its Rip Van Winkle lethargy, and he offered praise for the state’s “good coal” and its independence “of the other states in almost everything.” On page sixteen, Harrington also praised his first issue as “done up Brown,” a slang term that meant one was doing something well, as in preparing meat to a satisfying cooked color. He praised his work as “done pretty well.” Then he ended the page by reminding readers to pay their subscriptions.

As stated earlier, Harrington’s work came at the end of a two-decade period between 1840 and 1860 when literary periodicals hoped “to enlighten the public mind.” University publications such as the Chapel Hill Columbia Repository and the Literary Society’s University Magazine hoped to be literary forces to highlight academic and popular issues and to provoke readers to improve themselves. Harrington had these kinds of high ambitions, but The Young American lacked the collaborative effort, financial resources, or institutional support needed to make it an intellectual power. The first issue of The Young American established a multi-part organizational structure with a short story that ran twelve pages along with poetry, humorous fillers, and some news and display advertisements. Except for the obituary of a Wilmington, North Carolina editor, the only local content was the display advertisements filling the last four pages of the thirty-page publication. The periodical served local readers by using literary content to creatively address the underlying moral and cultural sensibilities of readers in that area.

155 Cranford, John McLean Harrington, 4.

156 John McLean Harrington, “Reader,” The Young American, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 16.

The Literary and Moral Content of The Young American

A short story dominated the first issue of The Young American in January 1858. Harrington said the incident was based on fact and called the episode “An Incident of the French Revolution.” The story concerned Countess de Villeneuve de La Floret and a French officer’s unrequited love. The officer, Pierre Duhem, vowed vengeance on the countess for her neglect of him. Duhem tortured her husband by hanging him on a barn while the soldier-citizens fired at his limbs to create a lingering death. Traumatized, the countess coped by imagining that her husband was on a business trip to Paris. The countess and her female assistant relocated outside of Paris to wait for the husband’s return. Frustrated with his delay, the countess went to Paris only to encounter the soldier-citizens ready to execute Duhem. Inexplicitly the countess pleaded for Duhem’s life, but the commanding officer executed Duhem for theft and murder anyway. Then, in a twist, the countess broke from her feigned madness, cried, “Avenged. Avenged!” and died. The melodramatic story took twelve handwritten pages to tell, and by sharing it in his paper, Harrington established himself as a fiction writer worthy of the day. The short story was remarkably sophisticated for an eighteen-year-old writer. It had plot surprises, a polished vocabulary, and a breezy style. Harrington used more adjectives than would be customary today, but he was clearly a man of letters.

That first fiction piece set the tone for The Young American and differentiated it from The Nation, which rallied support for the coming primaries of 1858. The Young American used the conventions employed by other literary journals, publishing both artistic pieces and news. It especially reflected the approach of the national Harper's Magazine. For instance, on page twelve of the January issue of The Young American, Harrington included a joke about a child who mourned his lost kitten, Netty, drowned

158 John McLean Harrington, “An Incident of the French Revolution,” The Young American, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 2.
by his mother. The mother wondered if the child was overreacting, as if he had lost his father, and the child reasoned that another father was easy to obtain but Netty was irreplaceable.

**Poetry, Fiction, and Other Light Content in *The Young American***

The poetry of *The Young America* used a traditional ABAB rhyme scheme, emphasized themes of fidelity and beauty, and highlighted earthy, rural topics. On page nineteen, Harrington included a poem by Finley Johnson about the sweetness of love; however, the best phrase followed that poem: “One line to fill this page.” On page twenty-one, Harrington included this line: “Ranged on the hills, harmonious daughters swell the mingled tones of the home and harp and shell.” Harrington repeated the line on page fifty-three of the second issue and randomly throughout the remaining issues. This lyrical line is followed in the January issue by a light-hearted poem decrying spitting on the floor: “They ought to live alone, far in some lovely moor, where the ladies could not see them, spitting on the floor.” The longest poem, “Hard Times,” was placed on pages twenty-four and twenty-five, lamenting the sad financial state of banks and merchants as well as the need for cash. It ended with these words:

“Hard Times! Hard Times! Was ever seen,  
Such hard times as hard as these?”

Times is the cry from morn ‘till night,  

In which each one agrees:  

A remedy I think I’ve found-  

Say how do you think ‘twill do  

Pull on your coat Roll up your sleeves,
and work these hard times through\textsuperscript{159}

The poetry and humor of \textit{The Young American} were a mixture of hope, joy, and lamentation in the midst of somber times. On page twenty-three, Harrington included an item titled “Humorous” and wrote, “A little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men.”\textsuperscript{160} Harrington also used a similar line in \textit{The Nation}. On page four, in the first column of the April 24, 1858, issue, Harrington changed a word, “A little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men.”\textsuperscript{161}

In the midst of the grim financial conditions for residents of Harnett County in 1858, Harrington provided some light reading fare that could be used with polite company. The short story from the French Revolution was just shocking enough to provoke reader outrage at the atrocities of another land, but the terror was too distant to be of immediate concern to area farmers. On page twenty-eight, Harrington included an item called “Conundrums” and asked, “What part of a ship is a man like who supports a family? A—The main stay.” Harrington proved to be an editor who provided content that was just witty enough for the average reader to find winsome.

Harrington began the February issue of \textit{The Young American} with this line: “No pent up ethic contracts our powers, for this boundless continent is ours.” Harrington used this tagline on the front page of subsequent issues. Following the Table of Contents in the February issue, an innovation from the first issue, Harrington repeated the slogan from the cover and added that the periodical was “devoted to the news of the day, sound literature, poetry, prose.” He added that it would be “Independent in all things; neutral in nothing.” He began Volume 1, Number 2 with the page numbering used for journals and listed the first article, “Rearing Boys,” beginning on page thirty-two. “Rearing Boys” was a moralistic tale about a mother who allowed her son, Charlie, to be unsupervised. Charlie became progressively more

\textsuperscript{159} John McLean Harrington, “Poetry,” \textit{The Young American}, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 24.

\textsuperscript{160} John McLean Harrington, “Humorous,” \textit{The Young American}, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 23.

\textsuperscript{161} John McLean Harrington, “Wit & Humor,” \textit{The Nation}, April 24, 1858, 1, no. 2, 4.
rebellious until he was convicted of stealing and the mother was taken to a lunatic asylum. Later in the publication, from pages fifty-five to fifty-seven, Harrington included a long poem by Park Benjamin called “Cincinnati S(wine)” extolling the virtues of hogs. In “The Hoosier’s Experience at Sea” on pages fifty-eight to sixty, an unknown poet described the travail of ship travel.

As a personal editor, Harrington retained his schoolmasterly role by warning others of vice. Although he did not suggest divine judgment for misbehavior, he used his fiction to highlight the American idea that uneducated people can still exercise good judgment and common sense. For instance, Harrington published a series of pieces by guest poets praising a virtuous woman, including “Lives” by Phil Henderson on page thirty-seven and a poem about the benefits of an honorable life by Dr. [Elisha] Mitchell (no first name printed) on page thirty-eight.¹⁶²

The novelty of The Young American’s May issue was the serialization of “The Bridal Feast,”¹⁶³ a poem continued in each issue until October. This elaborate poem may be Harrington’s best work. He told the story of newlyweds Gilbert and Rosaline, and Gilbert’s secret love, Amethysta. Harrington used images of light to cast the scene in shadows and mystery. He also had an unknown speaker repeat the cry, “Misery.” The July issue is unavailable and thus that episode of the poem is unknown, but the tone of the poem suggests that Gilbert’s secret love was expecting a child. The action indicates that Gilbert deceived her, betraying her affections. Contrite, Gilbert confessed his guilt, while the brother of Amethysta planned to avenge his sister. However, the sister begs for Gilbert’s life and the brother is content to curse Gilbert by magically aging him. Thereafter, Gilbert collapses either in exhaustion or death. The poem included forty-eight stanzas; about ten appeared in each issue. This poetry revealed Harrington’s own understanding of the conflicted man, misunderstood by most, but suffering for his misdeeds.


Harrington continued the May issue with his light-hearted poem “Bobbin Around,” on pages 142 through 144.\textsuperscript{164} He wrote of an unnamed woman who liked to go “bobbin around,” concluding the poem with a line marked “Moral.” He suggested that suitors should be cautious of women who go “bobbin around,” presumably acting carelessly. Nonetheless, the repeated phrase “bobbin around” creates a lively rhythm in the verse.

**Advertising in The Young American**

The first advertisement of the January issue appeared on page twenty-seven and informed readers that the business of J. Worth Hans “dissolved” and the new business would be known as J.D. Worth. The next two advertisements, also on page twenty-seven, included announcements for commission merchants in Philadelphia and Baltimore. The following page featured advertisements for Dibble & Bunce of Wilmington and J. & D. G. Worth in Buffalo Springs, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{165} The latter ad offered “five sacks of coffee, which we will sell cheap for cash.” The last page advertised for the Pine Forest Academy, where Harrington both studied and taught. “The second session of the institution commenced on the second Monday in January,” the advertisement read. “It is beautifully situated in Harnett County near Harrington P.O., in a society second to none in the state.” The final advertisements of the first issue were a help wanted notice for “a first-rate hand to work at turpentine” and another notice for J. & D. G. Worth.

The remaining issues of The Young American each ended with four pages of display advertisements similar to those in the first issue. In April, Harrington published a full-page display advertisement for a Philadelphia-based retailer promoting “silk shawls and fancy bonnets” along with riding hats, Panama hats, and others “in great variety.” Harrington published advertisements for vendors of naval stores, which sold turpentine and related products. While turpentine had a variety of uses, in the rural South through the 1940s, many families used it as a healing fluid for minor cuts. The oddest advertisement found in The Young American was printed on page twenty-nine of the first issue with the headline, “Look

\textsuperscript{164} John McLean Harrington, “Bobbin Around,” *The Young American*, May, 1858, 1, no. 5, 143.

\textsuperscript{165} John McLean Harrington, “Dibble & Bunce,” *The Young American*, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 28.
out.”\textsuperscript{166} It went on to say: “A Scoundrel named Elkins Jones has left our work but was in debt, the public are warned to keep a look out for the scoundrel as he will be apt to try some bad deals. If he thinks he can get in debt to them.” In a more litigious age, Harrington could have been charged with defamation unless he could prove the charges were true; however, the advertisement appeared only once and no other mention of Jones occurred in the 1858 issues of either \textit{The Young American} or \textit{The Nation}.

At eighteen years of age, Harrington lacked both literary and journalistic experience. Even his decision to publish such a potentially libelous advertisement could be excused. Nevertheless, Harrington did well with what he knew. Even as the dilettante journalist of Harnett County, Harrington was able to combine foreign news and locally grown “literature” that likely resonated with the cultural sensibilities of area readers. Even his more literary tales about human nature and the human condition were cast in term of the moral values of those living in the region where he grew up, studied, and planted his newspapers. In effect, his literary publication served a similar function to news of the day by helping readers locate themselves semantically in the culture of their own time and place.

\textsuperscript{166} John McLean Harrington, “Look out,” \textit{The Young American}, January, 1858, 1, no. 1, 29.
Chapter 6

The News, Advertisements, and the Silent Partner of The Nation

During 1858 in the midst of machine-press newspapers, John McLean Harrington handwrote his political periodicals, The Nation. At first he published on Saturdays but switched to Wednesdays in the June 23 issue, noting that readers wanted to get their news earlier in the week. The first issue of The Nation (Volume 1, Number 1, April 17, 1858), included a nameplate with the tagline “The majority must rule, the minority must submit,” the publication’s location (Buffalo Springs), and the editor’s name. Harrington employed a rustic form of calligraphy for the words “The Nation,” and used short line strokes extending from the letters for a bit of flourish. Despite the cursive letters, the handwriting is fairly uniform. The lines flowing off the name suggest movement and a hint of formality (See Appendix B for the transcription and Appendix C for photographs of the original).

The second issue of The Nation (Volume 1, Number 2, April 24, 1858) appears to be penned with more care than the first and includes a revised nameplate with wavy rules to separate the elements. The feathery quality of the type drawn on the first issue is missing but replaced with bold sweeping lines for the name, creating a shadow-like effect. The font looks like three wavy lines fanning out from the large letter N in the newspaper name, and a quarter-inch circle similar to a target. These additions appear to be artistic flourishes, an attempt at a visual element.  

167 The second issue of The Nation (Volume 1, Number 2, April 24, 1858) appears to be penned with more care than the first and includes a revised nameplate with wavy rules to separate the elements. The feathery-quality of the type drawn on the first issue is missing but replaced with bold sweeping lines for the name, creating a shadow-like effect. In an independent study project under the direction of the author at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina, during fall 2004, Campbell University undergraduate student Jay Berube described the font as three wavy lines fanning out from the large letter N in the newspaper name, and a quarter-inch circle similar to a target. These additions appear to be artistic flourishes, an attempt at a visual element.
By the seventh issue (Volume 1, Number 7, May 29, 1858), the nameplate included wavy lines that suggest heat rather than movement, but the detail from the earlier editions is missing. Harrington employed this style until Volume 1, Number 9, when he used outlines for the letters of the name and a double-rule line under it with the date in brackets in the upper left-hand corner, but resumed the name with the wavy lines on the inside of the newspaper. Among the consistencies of The Nation was the prominent placement of the advance subscription rate of two dollars and slogans such as “The majority must rule; the minority must submit.” This two-dollar subscription would be considered nearly fifty-five dollars in 2011.168

All in all, the name with the various embellishments was a way for Harrington to transcend the criticism to be expected when a news product was handwritten rather than produced by a press. The name design may have been Harrington’s way of suggesting that the newspaper, while handwritten, was nonetheless classy.

In keeping with the tradition of his day, Harrington did not make any of the letters bigger than the others, as is common in modern journalism where headline size varies with the importance of the topic. However, Harrington assisted the reader by using a single line to separate the articles. This convention still survives in twenty-first century print newspapers.

The size of The Nation was approximately eight inches wide and about twelve inches deep—about the size of a standard legal tablet today. Each of Harrington’s columns typically contained about thirty lines of script. Pages were not numbered and the sheets contained writing on both sides. Harrington corrected spelling and grammar by crossing out mistakes.

News Content of The Nation

Both The Young American and The Nation appear to have been inspired by the machine-printed Fayetteville Observer Semi-Weekly. The Fayetteville periodical, a four-page broadsheet paper, featured paid advertisements on the front page with news and opinion on the inside pages. The newspaper circulated Wednesdays and Saturdays. Like The Nation, it featured political opinion side by side with discussions of medical remedies. On June 10, 1858, the Fayetteville periodical included a news item on page two marked “A sharp sailor,” which repeated an account from the Louisville Journal describing a sailor who asked a Negro to drink liquor in a nearby shop. The sailor heard that the liquor was poisonous and wanted to test the warning. Once he discovered the liquor was not poisonous, the sailor ordered his own alcoholic beverage. The account provides insight into the way some Southern editors regarded the life of an African-American. This racial group was believed expendable—in this case valuable enough to work only as an assayer, a food-tester.169

In The Nation, Harrington expressed the prevailing political opinion of the South along with a commitment to majority rule. Each copy of the newspaper included a slogan behind the nameplate on the front page. On April 17, April 24, and May 1, the tagline appeared as “The majority must rule, the minority must submit.” By May 29, the tagline read “The voice of the people must be heard, The voice of the people is law,” which appeared in three more issues (June 5, 12, 23). In eight subsequent issues (July 7, 14, 21; August 4, 11, 18, 25; September 1), Harrington’s tagline read, “With pleasure or displeasures to friends or foes we sketch the world as it goes.” This final tagline emphasized editorial independence as well as broadly cultural rather than just political content. On the one hand, it seemed contrary to Harrington’s earliest stated mission to be a voice for Democrats. On the other hand, since the new tagline came late in the publication’s serialization it might simply have reflected Harrington’s shift from

politically-strident editorializing toward cultural content that would appeal to readers across the political spectrum.

In Harrington’s first article on page one of *The Nation* (April 17, 1858, Number 1), he offered “A word to our democratic Friends” and urged like-minded readers to participate in the primary elections. Harrington repeatedly called for “organization of the party” to ensure democracy and sought representatives who would work for state aid for Cumberland and Harnett counties. In addition, he called for completion of the rail route to the coalfields and beyond. But most of all, Harrington wanted his readers to elect strong Democrats. He included an aphorism on page two of the April 17, 1858, Number 2, issue to make his point: “The early bird catches the worm.”

The third and fourth pages of the April 17, 1858 edition mentioned Democratic meetings, and the April 24, 1858 issue mentioned nominating candidates for the next general assembly. Harrington used the fourth, last page to joke about a guest at a New York boarding house who could tell when a new cook was on duty by the color of the hair in the biscuits. Next he fired a political salvo, warning his readers that a “Yankee is proposing to print a paper called the *Gridiron*” and that “Politicians had better be on the alert or they may be ‘done up Brown.’”

The April 24, Number 2, issue included content on the front page lifted from the Raleigh *Standard* and criticizing Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, a newspaper that was started in 1841 and supported abolition. Over and over on the front page, Harrington disparaged Black Republicans, a derogatory term for the newly organized Republican Party or for anyone who supported rights for slaves. At the bottom right corner of the paper was an odd news brief, “A Glad Bottle and Cork factory has been started in California and the cork grows in Los Angeles County in that state.” As with the item on the *Gridiron* newspaper announcement, his line about a cork factory comes at the end of political commentary and may

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be Harrington’s way of offering some lighthearted content to offset the seriousness of his political pronouncements.

On page three of the April 24 issue, Harrington called for the election of Judge John W. Ellis of Rowan County for governor. As stated earlier, Ellis was elected and re-elected but died in office in 1861. On page three, Harrington wrote that Ellis was the best candidate, and he urged his readers to go to the polls and do their duty “like men.” In his May 1 issue, on page three, column two, Harrington provided a list of days when Ellis would be in the area campaigning for the seat of governor. The controversial news in this edition was the heated exchange between John Ellis and Duncan K. McRae, another candidate for governor. On page three, first column of the June 12 issue, Harrington reported a story that Ellis and his opponent criticized each other publicly in New Bern. The article reported Ellis’s observation that a win for his opponent would be a victory for the Black Republicans. According to the story, this comment led to name-calling, particularly the term “liar,” and the men fought a war of words. At the top of the second column on page three, Harrington wrote that after Ellis and McRae were physically separated they continued with their campaigning “as if nothing had happened.”

The first issue of The Nation included a front-page article reprinted from the Raleigh Standard that said the New York Tribune published the names of House and Senate members who voted for the proslavery Lecompton Constitution. Harrington praised Southerners who voted against the measure,

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172 John McLean Harrington, “Judge Ellis,” The Nation, April 24, 1858, 1, no. 3, 3.

173 John McLean Harrington, The canvas opened in earnest,” The Nation, June 12, 1858, 1, no. 9, 4.

174 As background, a bit of American history may be necessary to understand the report that Harrington featured on the front page, first column, of the May 1, 1858, issue. During this period, the U.S. Congress agreed to allow residents of the Kansas territory to decide the question of slavery in this new state and both the Free-Soil adherents and the proslavery supporters worked to win their side. On November 7, 1857, the proslavery party met and passed the Lecompton Constitution, guaranteeing the possession of all property with slaves; however, when the Lecompton Constitution was submitted to the voters in January 1858, the slaves-as-property idea was rejected, putting the Free-Soil Party in control of this territory. A compromise was proposed in August 1858, but it was defeated and slavery was finally defeated in a constitution adopted on July 27, 1858, and ratified in October 1858. Kansas was admitted to the union on January 29, 1861.
and apparently expected his readers to know the background of this proposal, as he did not provide much in the way of explanation or impact to his readers. In his May 1, Number 3, issue, Harrington repeated a news report from the *Easton Standard* about the slavery question in Kansas. On the front page, left column, Harrington reported that the Lecompton Constitution, while in trouble, would have to pass in order for Kansas to be accepted as a new state. On page two of the June 12, Number 9, issue, Harrington wrote, “Kansas has already cost the government, the lowest estimate, fifty million dollars,” but offered no further explanation.\(^{175}\)

In the June 5, Number 8, issue of *The Nation*, Harrington criticized McRae’s campaign for governor. Harrington challenged McRae’s identity as a Democrat. “His tongue may be slick enough talking about building railroads through this county, when this state gets her portion of the public lands, but there is no more chance of it than building a railroad to the moon. . . .” On page four of the June 12, Number 9, issue, Harrington declared that a McRae victory would be a triumph for the Black Republican party.

On page three of the August 4, Number 16, issue, Harrington published a note in the second column about John C. Williams’s intention to run for office.\(^{176}\) Harrington wrote that Williams “unequivocally, unmistakably and really he announced himself in beaming capitals ‘To the Freeman of Cumberland and Harnett.’ We haven’t got room for his card, Ed.”\(^{177}\) Harrington underlined the sentence, “We haven’t got room for his card,” and in the same column, he wrote that Williams’s defeat was sure and the candidate was duped into thinking he could win a political race. Clearly Harrington then opposed freeing slaves and candidates who might lobby for any kind of emancipation.

One of the novelties of *The Nation* was an extra edition Harrington published on Saturday, August 7, 1858. It was a six-inch column apparently issued at noon, reporting election results from Fayetteville for

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\(^{175}\) John McLean Harrington, “It is said,” *The Nation*, June 12, 1858, 1, no. 9, 2.


\(^{177}\) Harrington underlined the final sentence of these comments for emphasis.
the state House of Commons and identifying the winning candidate, [William M.] McKay, with 1,817 votes. Harrington promised that other results would be published in the next issue.

**General Content in The Nation**

At times, Harrington scolded his readers. At other times, he treated them as equals. On page three, of the June 23, 1858, issue of The Nation, Harrington reported that Stedman’s Magazine was going out of business because of a lack of patrons. At the end of that item, Harrington scolded: “Shame to you North Carolina!!!” Yet at other times the editor, in his role as publisher, showed that he considered the wishes of his readers. On page two, right-hand column of The Nation’s June 23, 1858, issue, Harrington demonstrated his public sensitivity and business savvy when he told his readers he would be changing the publication day from Saturday to Wednesday due to the popular request of his subscribers, noting that readers would get their newspaper sooner.

After the first issue of The Nation was circulated, Harrington began to include some of the more typical content found in community newspapers. In the April 24, Number 2, issue he included an announcement of a wedding and a market report. Coffee, for instance, was available at fifteen cents per pound in Buffalo Springs. On page three of the April 24 issue, Harrington praised other publications, including magazines in Boston and North Carolina. Harrington also offered a poetic weather report that metaphorically notes that The Nation, as well as the weather, has “burst into bloom.”

Harrington republished content from the April 27, 1858, issue of Easton Standard for his May 1, Number 3, issue. He reported the weather from the Easton Standard area and said that a snow squall in

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the Buffalo Springs community left between two and three inches of snow on the ground. In the May 1 issue, Harrington reported that the oldest inhabitant of his area, a person he did not identify, said the last time it snowed so hard was in 1847. Harrington reported that the snow and frost had killed the fruit.183

In the June 5, Number 8, issue, Harrington reported that a grizzly bear weighing two thousand pounds would be on exhibit in Raleigh. In the same column, Harrington reported on a Union County baby who was eleven months old and weighed sixty pounds.184

The July 7, Number 12, issue of The Nation reviewed the July Fourth festivities. Harrington wrote, “The Birthday of American Freedom, 82 years ago, old England trembled at the idea that the Rebel Colonies would be the powerful nation which it now is.” He continued, “We hope we will not live to see the day when it [the date of July 4th] will be otherwise, than one of reverence and praise.” The line suggests that Harrington suspected the tension between the North and South was aggravating the Union.185

In international news, Harrington frequently referred to the Atlantic Telegraph project. The Atlantic Telegraph Company was formed in 1856 to lay a commercial telegraph cable across the Atlantic Ocean. In the July 14 issue, Harrington reported that the Wilmington Journal found the telegraphic fleet hadn’t been seen. Harrington was not optimistic about the project and predicted it would end in failure. But despite Harrington’s gloomy prediction, history records that the p Advertising in The Nation

On page three of The Nation’s June 12, 1858 issue, Harrington explained his advertising rates. He charged four cents per line for the first line and two cents for each subsequent line insertion. He also sought agents to help him sell advertisements.186 From the first to the last issue, Harrington always

183 John McLean Harrington, “Snow Storm,” The Nation, April 24, 1858, 1, no. 3, 3.


186 John McLean Harrington, “The Nation,” The Nation, June 12, 1858, 1, no. 9, 3.
included paid advertising. The April 17, 1858, issue included the advertising rates on page four.\(^{187}\) This issue included advertising for a Buffalo Springs dry goods store, a commission merchant in Fayetteville, and an advertisement for *The Nation*, which claimed that the periodical will be a “first class journal,” printed weekly and containing “as much reading matter as most any of the papers of present-day.” Also, it would be “strictly Democratic.” This notice was repeated every issue.

In *The Nation’s* May 1, Number 3, issue, in the first column of page four, Harrington included a paid advertisement that told readers a dry goods store could no longer extend credit. “All those indebted to the firm of J. Worth,” said the paper, “are earnestly requested to come and close their accounts.”

By the May 29, Number 7, issue, Harrington was publishing paid advertising on the left and right columns of his front pages. He continued this format for most of the remaining issues. A reprinted article from the *Fayetteville Observer* invited readers to come see a good, long piece of the Atlantic cable. Four-inch pieces sold for fifty cents at Tiffany’s in New York. Harrington announced that he bought out the interest of the other parties in the paper and he would soon discontinue publication of *The Nation*. He offered to substitute it with *The New American* if subscribers wanted to replace their paper; however, no record of this later publication’s existence could be found. He may have meant to replace *The Nation* with *The Young American*, not having decided on the final name of his other publication.

The front page of the August 25, Number 19, issue of *The Nation* featured only display advertising with all of the news moved to the inside. In the next issue, news returned to the front page, but half the page was still filled with advertisements. And in the September 8 issue, the all-advertising front page returned.

**Cessation of The Nation**

Harrington hinted that publishing was a very difficult avocation. On the May 1, Number 3, issue, he reported that times were difficult for editors, and he repeated the story of a Pennsylvania editor who appealed to his readers for pork, tallow candles, whiskey, linen, beeswax, wool, and anything he might

On page three of the July 21, Number 14, issue, Harrington published a brief under the heading: “Wilmington Herald.” He wrote, “Cheer up friends of the Herald don’t give up to it yet—“Never say die while there is a shot in the locker” We will agree things look rather blue but always look on the bright side of things. We can’t see why it is that it can’t succeed. [Word unclear] this it is decided we hope to hear of its proving entirely successful—Ed.”

On page two of the August 18, Number 18, issue, Harrington wrote that The Nation was for sale. He repeated the message on the August 25, Number 19, issue. Therein Harrington splashed the sale across the first of two columns and wrote, “One of the parties desiring a change in business we offer the office of the Nation for sale with all its fixtures at a moderate price—To any person desiring such a situation we would respectfully request him to call and see our office books.”

Harrington repeated the notice of the sale on page two of the September 1, Number 20, issue with a modest change. He said he bought out the “other parties” and “I will discontinue the issue of the Nation but will send in its place, the Young American for the balance of the year.”

Although September 1 was to be the last issue, one more issue appeared. The last issue of The Nation was published September 8, 1848 and Harrington penned, “Now we state emphatically that this indeed will be the last our connections with the press will hereafter cease and friends of the Nation hope that they will be satisfied in the exchange as I know the senior partner Mr. Harrington will do all in his power to make the Young American what it ought to be. Hoping long life and pleasant associations to all I bid you adieu!! Editor Nation.”

188 John McLean Harrington, “Wit, Wisdom and Wind,” The Nation, May 1, 1858, 1, no. 3, 2.


191 John McLean Harrington, “To the patrons of the Nation,” The Nation, September 1, 1858, 1, no. 20, 2.

192 John McLean Harrington, “Closing Scenes,” The Nation, September 8, 1858, 1, no. 21, 2.
Harrington oddly listed advertising rates as if the newspaper would simply accept new advertisers for the old publication while commencing a new one. The dilettante journalist-publisher was nonplussed over the trifles of suspending a publication, and did so with little fanfare and apparently without a lot of forethought.

The Silent Partner

It is unknown if anyone assisted Harrington in copying the newspaper repeatedly for his circulation of up to one hundred. Harrington talked of a partner, but a careful reading of all the extant copies of The Nation suggests that he published alone. On page three of his first issue April 17, 1858 of The Nation, Harrington told his readers that he had enlisted the service of a “little Democrat to edit the paper” with the goal of keeping the content “straight forward.”

In the June 30, 1858, issue of The Nation, Harrington referred again to the availability of The Young American. At the top of column two on the right side of the page, Harrington said he would edit this publication. He also said The Young American was previously published by another person who became ill and turned it over to him. Harrington ended this explanation by writing, “In the meantime we would inform the subscribers of the Young American that we will attend to them as before.” Harrington assured these readers they would not be neglected even though the previous editor was leaving. The identity of the previous editor remains unclear—if there ever was one. Harrington penned that he as editor “will do his utmost to please all” readers. His third-person voice and the reference to the end of The Nation suggest that Harrington worked alone. Moreover, Sion A. Harrington, John’s younger brother, printed at least one known copy of a handwritten newspaper called the Weekly News on February 2, 1869, and The Leasure Hour, a monthly publication, in May and June 1869. Since he was younger,

193 John McLean Harrington, “Salutory,” The Nation, April 17, 1858, 1, no. 1, 3.

194 John McLean Harrington, “Our debut,” The Nation, June 30, 1858, 1, no. 11, 2.

195 The Leasure Hour. included a punctuation mark in its name and the creative use of the word “leisure.” It is part of the Southern Historical Collection at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
presumably shorter than John McLean, Sion Harrington may be the “little Democrat” whom Harrington referred to as his helper and partner.

Perhaps Harrington had no partner and this editorial sleight of hand was his way of avoiding criticism should a reader become upset. By suggesting an unidentified partner, Harrington would be able to deflect criticism and blame the “other” editor for the offensive content or for causing The Nation to suspend its publication. However, Harrington did advertise for an editor in his last issue of The Nation, a fact that further clouds the mystery.

In his September 1, 1858, issue of The Nation, Harrington told patrons of The Nation that he bought out his unidentified partner. He told readers that he planned to discontinue the publication and give his Nation subscribers The Young American instead. He wrote that patrons who would prefer a refund instead of The Young American subscription might still get the remaining subscription to The Nation. Harrington hoped to revive The Nation as a way to satisfy their subscriptions. The remainder of his September article told The Nation patrons that he would regretfully retire: “And if we have said anything that will maim the feelings of any man we will cheerfully make amends. We bow to our audience and retire for the present. Former Editor Nation.”

In the last issue of The Nation, published September 8, 1858, Harrington wrote: “We only printed half sheet this time thinking that a half loaf is better than no bread at all-Ed.” After the nameplate in the first column on the left side of the newspaper, he penned, “Closing scenes. In the last no. of The Nation we stated that that number would be the closing no. Such was not the fact however as this number will show but now we state emphatically that this indeed will be the last our connection with the press will hereafter cease and to my old patrons and friends of The Nation I hope that they will be satisfied in the exchange

196 John McLean Harrington, “To the patrons of the Nation,” The Nation, September 1, 1858, 1, no. 20, 2.

197 John McLean Harrington, “We only printed,” The Nation, September 8, 1858, 1, no. 21, 2.
as I know the senior partner Mr. Harrington will do all in his power to make *The Young American* what it ought to be, hoping long life and pleasant associations to all I bid you adieu!! Editor Nation.”

At eighteen years of age, Harrington lacked a mature knowledge of politics. At that age he was committed to the Democratic party and, no doubt, eager to impress party leaders with his zeal. His efforts amounted to cheerleading yet he contributed to his community by providing a political voice in print when no other voice was available in his remote hamlet. If nothing else, Harrington’s political work helped provide a sense of unity for his community by upholding the values shared by the farmers and others who lived nearby. This work helped in a small way for his rural community to gain a better sense of itself and feel more connected to the world at large.
Chapter 7

Harrington’s Other Newspapers

John McLean Harrington started and stopped seven publications in his eleven years as the dilettante journalist of Harnett County. By the end of 1858, he had suspended both The Nation and The Young American, at about the same time Daniel Emmett’s “I Wish I Was in Dixie’s Land” swept the nation and was adopted as the South’s unofficial anthem. The reasons he stopped and started publications is unclear. In many ways, the publications contained the same mix of news, literary content, commentary and advertising. He began his publishing at age 18 and his next periodical began when he was age 20. The time off between publications may have been a factor or the simmering regional conflict may have been an influence. Nonetheless, Harrington took up pen and paper and began another round of handwritten newspapers with The Weekly Eagle. Harrington did not publish in 1859, but he resumed his handwritten work with The Weekly Eagle published only once, on April 20, 1860. Harrington used Pine Forest, N.C., as his address. The area is nearly the same as Harrington, N.C., and Buffalo Springs, N.C. With turmoil simmering across the nation, Harrington filled this publication with light fare. On the front page, Harrington told the story of a death from tainted, canned strawberries. Harrington referred to the victim as a military man. “A United States soldier named Herzon died a short time since at Steilacoom, near Puget’s Sound [Washington] through eating strawberries which had been preserved in a tin can. It was found that this poison had formed through the acidity of the fruit coming in contact with the metal of which the can was composed, the effects when eaten being to ulcerate the stomach and finally to cause

Harrington published two other newspapers in 1860 including *The Semi-Weekly News*, which ran from July 20, 1860, to August 17, 1860, and the *Weekly News*, which ran from June 7, 1860, to March 2, 1864. The newspapers included references to politics, poetry, local election results, and other general content. The first issue of *The Weekly News* was published on June 7, 1860, and included a front-page appeal addressed to the “Democratic Union” and pleading for it not to secede. A few weeks later, on page three of the August 17, 1860, issue, Harrington told patrons of *The Semi-Weekly News* about political victories but spoke of going out of business on page two.

Harrington also informed readers that *The Semi-Weekly News* would stop publication because subscription support was scant; however, Harrington went on to say that he would continue *The Weekly News*. By the December 25, 1860, issue of *The Weekly News*, Harrington apologized for the hit-and-miss circulation. In an article titled, “To our old family and Friends,” he wrote, “We again make our appearance to our old friends after a long absence and we hope they may recognize their old friend again. Several changes have taken place since you have last seen a copy of the ‘News’ a Black Republican president has been elected in these United States which threatens to demolish this firm republic of the Constitution of Washington. Several states say they will not suffer or be ruled by a Black Republican man elected who is openly opposed to slavery. South Carolina has already seceded and it is expected that the Gulf States will soon follow. Secession is moving in NC but to what extent I am not able to say.” Lincoln was considered a radical abolitionist, referred to derisively as a Black Republican, and Southern Democrats especially opposed his inauguration. By January 1, 1861, the *Weekly News* reported on page two, “Another year has fled.” Harrington predicted

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that 1860 would be “remembered with the things that we passed and will only be remembered as a matter of history and maybe only with regret as the Union has been dissolved. South Carolina has spoken [word unclear] for herself, but let us hope for the best and when 1861 closes may peace and tranquility rest on this fair republic of ours. We will close this by wishing our readers a happy new year.”

On page two of the January 1, 1861, issue, Harrington reported that South Carolina’s Fort Moultrie was abandoned by U.S. troops who retreated to Fort Sumter. In the article titled, “Fort Moultrie,” Harrington wrote that the Palmetto flag, the state flag of South Carolina, waved at Fort Moultrie and at other buildings throughout the area.204 “We do not know what the result of this rash proceeding will be. We fear bad times are at hand,” Harrington opined, adding that Fort Moultrie was in trouble. Reprinting a report from Charleston from December 27, 1860, Harrington informed readers that “the building in which the soldiers of Fort Moultrie were quartered was burned last night and the guns of the Fort spiked.”

On page three of the same January 1, 1861, issue, Harrington reported more war news: “Major [Robert] Anderson stated that he evacuated Fort Moultrie in order to allay all discussions about that post, and at the same time strengthen his own position at Fort Sumter. Capt. [John L.] Foster with a small force remains at Fort Moultrie.205 Also [word unclear] several military companies have been ordered out and a collision is not improbable. The military of Charleston are ordered out to protect the magazines and arsenals in that vicinity [word unclear]. It is reported that several military corps are in route to Charleston from the interior. No further news from Charleston it has been believed that restrictions are placed on the telegraph.”206

In 1861, Harrington wrote the following on page two of The Weekly News: “Today being Christmas we were almost tempted not to issue any paper but fearing our friends might be disappointed we make our

204 John McLean Harrington, “Fort Moultrie,” The Nation, January 1, 1861, 1, no. 2, 2.
appearance and wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. We hope by next Christmas that all the political troubles may be over and our infant confederacy moving on as smooth as life.” Harrington also reported that he was resigned to the existence of the Confederacy.

_The Weekly News’ Advertising Sheet Monthly and The Weekly News_

In 1861, Harrington also published _The Weekly News’ Advertising Sheet Monthly_, of which only three issues survive. This very odd publication included a grand boast on page one of the February 1861 issue that it would be “sent to 20,000 merchants in the South the way we wish to make it pay is by advertisements. Any person advertising can name any persons he may wish it sent to to the no. of 100 or less.” No record of thousands of copies of this handwritten, four-page publication can be found.

In the January 1, 1862, issue of _The Weekly News_, Harrington led the front page with Civil War coverage of Port Royal reprinted from the _Charleston Mercury_. He wrote this report across two columns and continued it on page four at the top of the left of two columns:

The Charleston Mercury has the following account of a recent brush with the enemy in which a North Carolina battery was engaged. Gardner's Corner via Peastaligo Dec.

19. “About ½ past 1 o’clock yesterday afternoon one of the enemies gun boats passed by Port Royal Ferry. Our batteries opened fire upon her, striking her, three times. Upon meeting with this rather hot reception, she steamed rapidly past, and ran aground about three miles on the other side of the ferry. As soon as our troops became aware of the fix in which the yankees had got themselves, Sgt. M. Henry [name unclear] of Capt. Moon's field battery (from Wilmington, NC) was dispatched with a section of the battery to a

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208 Harrington included a period after the name on the nameplate as he did with so many of his periodicals.

209 The February, March, and April 1861 issues are part of the Rare Books, Manuscripts and Special Collections Library of Perkins Library–Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.
point just opposite to the shoal on which the gun boat ran aground. In the meantime, three flats crowded with the enemy's troops had moved from the opposite shore, under a sharp fire from one of their batteries directed against our troops on the main. At that point, our forces consisted of Capt. M. Henry [name unclear] Battery arrived just as the flats had come out about midway of the stream. He immediately opened fire upon them with tremendous effect. One of the flats was soon gaining and our fire created terrible havoc among the soldiers on the other two flats put back, night came on and ended the commotion [word unclear]. The enemy's lost among the men with flats must have been very heavy.²¹⁰

Although Harrington reprinted war reports in *The Weekly News* from another newspaper, the 1862 account agreed with historic accounts from today. By the end of 1862, Harrington reported on the front page the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The battle, fought December 11–15, was considered a decisive victory for the Confederate Army. Harrington ran the following account on the front page with the headline, “Fight at Fredericksburg.” Using the dateline, “Richmond, Dec. 13,” he reported, “On Thursday night the enemy under cover of artillery firing crossed the river and occupied the city. At daylight Friday morning the artillery opened with firing [and] reached as high as 10 per minute and continued all day under its cover the pontoon bridges were thrown across. The force landed said to be 50,000.”²¹¹ Harrington continued, “Many of the enemy were killed or wounded. The opposition to the passage could not have been determined since only [William] Barksdale's brigade opposed the enemy and no artillery on our part was used. Highlighting yesterday over in Burunds [word unclear] woods about 2 ½ miles this side of the town and was very heavy a [word unclear] against is expected to come off soon. *Enquirer.*”


Harrington continued his war news with the following: “There was desperate fighting in the streets of Fredericksburg on Thursday in which both sides suffered severely. The shelling commenced on Thursday morning and not fifty buildings of any value are standing. An Episcopal church and several other handsome public buildings were destroyed—no fighting on yesterday. *Examiner.*”

By the end of 1863, Harrington once again left his readers with a hopeful wish for the future in his December 23 issue. On page two, under a column marked “Christmas,” Harrington wrote, “Old Santa Claus will hardly be around [word unclear] to see the young people this year. Wish [word unclear] readers in tradition the compliments of the season, and hope by next year that peace will be restored to our once happy nation.”

By February 3, 1864, the front page of the *The Weekly News* reported that “the enemy” was on the move toward Fredericksburg and had retreated from the Cumberland Gap. Harrington noted that the governor of North Carolina was supplying clothing to the soldiers. In the last available issue of *The Weekly News* (March 2, 1864), he wrote on the front page that his newspaper was temporarily suspended. On page two, Harrington addressed his “patrons and friends”: “We are again compelled to suspend the publication of the ‘News’ for the present. We hope however that it will not be long before we are again to the breeze. We expect to issue a number occasionally.” The suspension was permanent.

*The Times*

The next publication Harrington released was *The Times*, on October 17, 1867, and he published one of his short stories on the front page. Under the label “Choice Literature,” Harrington published dark fiction suggestive of the work of Edgar Allen Poe in the 1830s. Harrington called the story “The Highland Herdsman.” The story is reprinted below using Harrington’s own line breaks. In this literary

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piece, Harrington explored the bad blood between the English and the Scots in the same fashion as Scottish writer Walter Scott’s 1827 short story, “The Two Drovers.” In his account, Harrington pits an Englishman against a Scotsman, but this approach may merely be a veiled reference to a people who speak the same language and share much in common yet who insist on fighting to the death—as was the case during the Civil War.

Harrington may have considered the Englishman to be a figure of the Union and the Scotsman to be a dignified, Southern gentleman minding his own business. A victim of an unprovoked attack, the Scotsman had to act as he did or he would have lost his hand, which was his means to work. Harrington knew the importance of a hand for doing one’s work, as he used his own hands to produce his publications. He may have considered a hand to be a metaphor for a laborer, suggesting that the loss of a hand cuts off a vital part of one’s ability to earn a living. The North’s attempts to cut off the laborers—the slaves—led to economic hardships in the South.

Harrington’s divided loyalties in the Civil War may be questionable in the light of his early claims about being a Democrat, but the short story provides some insight into Harrington’s understanding of justice. Following the war, Harrington held that he was never a Confederate sympathizer, an assertion making this short story all the more intriguing.

On December 19, 1867, Harrington penned another short story on the front page of The Times titled, “An Affecting Scene.” Harrington retold the tale of a romantic gesture by Richard Bennett, a man who died in battle. Harrington wrote, “Richard Bennett, when mortally wounded in one of Nelson’s great battles, had requested that a miniature [a small portrait], and a lock of his hair should be given to his sweetheart by Lt. P. [for Parsons] to his sweetheart Lusette in Scotland.” Harrington described the woman as beautiful but frail, and once she felt the lock of hair, “she pressed it to her lips and heart, and fell back. Her mother and I [the lieutenant] thought she had fainted; but the pure and innocent soul had returned to

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God—the God who gave it.” This short story likely reveals the sentimental side of Harrington, who mourned the losses of war.

By the beginning of 1868, Harrington once again offered optimistic sentiments for the coming year. On Thursday, January 8, 1868, Harrington reported in The Times that “the New Year has just dawned upon us and the year 1867 is numbered with the things that are passed and gone forever. Go old year with your joys your lairs and your sorrows let this be buried in the unforgotten past. And let us turn with joy to your successor, who may have much joy for us and whose Sorrows are at least, hidden from our view, only to be brought to light by the ceaseless revolutions [words unclear] of old Father Time.”

In the same issue, Harrington noted the dying words of notable people on the front page, and regularly recalled Sir Walter Scott’s dying words from September 21, 1832: “I feel as if I were myself again.” Apparently Harrington was thinking about the restoration of the Union and the hope that with impending peace would come a return to normalcy.

On Friday, December 25, 1868, Harrington jubilantly wrote a page-two column labeled “Christmas.” “Christmas is upon us again with all the fun and jollity of former times. We hope all will enjoy it and especially the young people who have looked forward to its approach with so much anxiety and we hope to be excused ourself from writing long articles on account of Christmas. We’re [word unclear] hoping all may enjoy it to the ultimate [word unclear] of their desires and second to their wish.”

Harrington ended his handwritten publications in 1869 with the last issues of The Times. In his January 1, 1869, issue, Harrington offered a New Year’s greeting, his customary short story, a joke, and hard news. He reported on page three a murder: “A most distressing homicide occurred in Moore County [a county adjacent to Harnett County] at Mrs. Elizabeth Wickens on Wednesday night last. It seems that Dennis Thomas (colored) had a wife who cooked for Mrs. Wickens. On the night in question he came into


the kitchen where his wife was and asked for supper; which was prepared for him immediately after he sat to the table he was shot in the head by an unknown assassin and instantly expired. Dennis was a very peaceable and good negro.”

Harrington offered no commentary on this incident, but taken in context, the news account hints at the uneasiness of the new social order in the South, where an African American could be summarily executed as he ate dinner. Nevertheless, since Harrington frequently reprinted crime reports from other periodicals, we do not know if this murder was reported to him by an unidentified local person or if it was a story that Harrington simply lifted from another periodical.

Harrington’s last issue of The Times, dated Friday, April 2, 1869, included a telling front-page account about slavery in another country. In “Abolition of Slavery in Cuba,” Harrington wrote, “The insurgents in Cuba have abolished slavery. This action will tend greatly to strengthen the Cuban cause at home and abroad. The substance of the abolition proclamation is as follows: Slavery brought to Cuba by Spanish domination ought to be extinguished with-in. The Central Assembly where for decree first, the abolition of slavery; second, opportunities in-disunifications; third, freedom to bear arms; fourth, freedom to have the rights and privileges of white men; fifth, all hatred of whatever color, are under the same obligations to the cause.” The article, compelling because of the United States’ recent brush with conflict over slavery, is of interest for the interrelated nature of slavery in Cuba and the United States.

In 1868, Cuban slaves produced 720,520 metric tons of sugar, which was more than forty percent of all the cane sugar in the world. Slavery on the island was formally abolished in late 1868 and early 1869, however, it took almost two decades to completely dissolve the institution. The abolition of slavery in the United States affected the slave trade in Cuba because the former was the island’s main trading

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partner. Before the War, some planters in the United States wanted Cuba to be annexed as a slave state. Others feared that the abolition of slavery in the United States might lead to a “disruption of the internal order of the Cuban slavery.” The delay in permanent abolition in Cuba was due to doubts about political reform. Officials in Cuba believed that as long as slavery existed “there will be no government established here in which they [slaves] can have a voice, that the island will continue to be governed by a repressive, censorious system, under pretext of preserving order.”

Harrington’s last publication in his output of 305 issues of newspaper and journals came full circle in establishing the editor’s written legacy. When Harrington started writing in 1858, the content of *The Young American* and *The Nation* revealed a journalist with a lyrical heartbeat and a quiver full of writing topics and techniques.

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223 Ibid., 38.
Chapter 8

Unanswered Questions on Harrington’s Handwritten Newspapers

Even the thought of handwriting 305 newspapers with multiple copies over an eleven-year period is staggering. Yet John McLean Harrington met that challenge, starting when he was age eighteen in 1858 and continuing until he turned thirty in 1869. His work provides a peek into an area that has been seldom researched, namely, the handwritten press. In the person of Harrington, history has an example of a writer who not only admired the art of handwritten publication, but who committed eleven years to its practice, likely the greatest single output of handwritten newspapers in the United States by anyone.

Unanswered questions

This research cannot answer a number of questions. For instance, why did Harrington handwrite his publications when a printing press was available in a nearby city.

Harrington went against the tide of his time by refusing to use a printing press and the added benefits that accrue from commercial printing. Unlike Benjamin H. Day, who pioneered his New York Sun newspaper in 1833 with one goal in mind—to show how well he could print using his printing press—Harrington had no use for a press. Day emphasized “plenty of advertising” and Harrington filled his publications with advertising, too. But unlike Day, Harrington did not engage in the commercial production of letterhead and calling cards.

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Harrington’s reasons for avoiding a printing press are unknown. We know that Harrington wrote to entertain himself as much as others—at least that’s what he said in print. In the Wednesday, May 14, 1862, issue of the *Weekly News*, Harrington noted on page two, “This will probably be the last paper issued for the present. If the document should happen to fall in the hands of anyone they must look on them in no other light than an idle pastime.” Although Harrington handwrote his work as personal amusement, he also apparently wanted to contribute to public discourse and to be remembered for it. His desire to contribute to society outweighed his need to resort to a printing press.

In his inaugural issue of *The Times*, Thursday, October 17, 1867, Harrington told readers that he wrote to entertain and inform others and to entertain himself. This straightforward declaration helped solidify his credibility. On page two of the October 17, 1867, issue, Harrington wrote, “We can promise nothing in the beginning of our enterprise, but will spare no pains to please. Our paper is intended for a repository of Pure Literature, Poetry and general news information and as a past time for myself to jot down my thoughts as they may come to the surface.” Again, Harrington, the personal editor, appears to be writing largely for his own amusement. His impulse to share his thoughts is the same spirit that drives bloggers of the twenty-first century. He wrote his newspapers as a letter for others, a letter for himself, and a letter for posterity, if for no other reason than to leave his scrawl mark as evidence of his existence.

Yet Harrington’s news manuscripts were more that a past times. They exist in a category that one historian calls “a primary means for many amateur journalists to stimulate public discourse in communities without printed newspapers or printing businesses.” This was the case with Harrington, the amateur journalist of Harnett County. He started and stopped publications as any dabbler would do, yet his handwritten work is the best example of a literal fingerprint any writer can leave as a personal legacy.

However, if a writer wants the world to know with certainty that he authors a publication, the best evidence is the personal touch of handwriting. Handwriting is among the most personal communication

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activities available, and the autograph is the most concise example. An autograph can refer to a document completely handwritten by its author or to the author’s signature alone. The key is that the document is not typeset or transcribed by another person. The value in the document is that the autograph can be compared to other handwritten documents by the same person to prove authenticity. Included in this notion of authenticity is the idea of the holograph, a term often used to refer to a handwritten last will and testament; however, the term also applies to a document written by the person whose signature it bears. To this day, signing a document is required to establish authenticity and verifiable provenance or origin of the document.

Each time Harrington penned a newspaper, he included his autograph as proprietor, thus establishing a holograph of his work. The signature and handwriting allow for comparisons, and each of Harrington’s handwritten newspapers provides more proof that Harrington was the author. Harrington may have had the weight of authenticity in mind with his holographs, or he may have yearned to leave behind a handwritten legacy.

Why did not he use a printing press? All we can do is speculate. The economic benefit of publishing without a press may have transcended Harrington’s need to sign his work. As stated earlier, Harrington may have opted not to use the movable-type press because of the added expense. Because he handwrote each copy, he controlled the waste and produced only enough copies for his subscription list.

We know that Harrington admired literary publications and he was an active participant in an intellectual wave that passed through North Carolina between 1840 and 1860 and led to the establishment of many literary journals. Most were associated with literary societies of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, but Harrington single-handedly created his own literary journal and newspaper without the benefit of a printing press.

Although a publisher of handwritten newspapers, Harrington anticipated the popular content of The Saturday Evening Post by developing both a literary publication and a political publication. Cyrus

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230 Harrington wrote in The Nation, “The Saturday Evening Post is the best paper we have the pleasure of seeing,” according to Jane Cranford in her WCKB radio script about John McLean Harrington, which is
Curtis began the modern *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1897 by purchasing a nearly defunct magazine. He soon discovered that middle-class men and women both enjoyed the general-interest content.\(^{231}\)

Harrington tried to make his reputation by publishing the same kind of general-interest content as *The Saturday Evening Post* in the years immediately before the Civil War, but not everyone considered his effort a success—at least in terms of “print” quality. An administrator at one historical collection of his works called them “crudely printed.”\(^{232}\) In 1958, a librarian suggested that the “sheets look as if they may be drafts prepared for publication, but no published copies have been found.” Indeed, no machine-printed copies have been found even though many handwritten copies exist.

We can speculate that Harrington saw his work as a cross between a private letter, which would be handwritten in 1858, and something like it meant to be read by the public. As a native of western Harnett County, Harrington possessed the best credential to speak for and to his readers: his lifelong connection to the community. His credibility in print depended on his personal reputation with his neighbors.\(^{233}\)

In addition, Harrington was a story-teller who knew enough about newspapers to include election results and other factual news, the “truth values of news,” but mostly he published enjoyable content with “consummatory value” that readers enjoyed and used to interpret their own lives. This content helped readers relate to their community through stories chosen to highlight what was important and valued in that community.

Whether “proper” newspapers or not, Harrington’s pre-war papers in 1858 covered a tumultuous period in which the editor reported the grim news of events from a Southern perspective, while giving his readers hope for the future. However, following the war, he wrote to President Andrew Johnson (1808–

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232 “John McLean Harrington Papers,” (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, February 1958), in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, accession number 3341, five items.

1875) insisting that he was a loyal Unionist throughout the conflict. Harrington also switched his political allegiance from the Democrats to Republicans. This dramatic outward change of partisan affiliation complicated the picture of the man who served his rural community as a postmaster, farmer, teacher, and writer. His handwritten publications remain holographs that establish his authenticity as the author, but the papers also raise questions about the true identity of Harrington and his genuine opinions.

Could it be that Harrington is an example of the transition in journalism? Again, all we can do is speculate. We can say that Harrington was a journalist who bridged the oral and literary traditions. He was the one of the last in a line of American journalists who crossed the gulf between these traditions, but he accomplished this feat without resorting to the use of a printing press. A pioneer media ecologist, he was aware of the current technologies of the day, the modes of information, and the codes of communication, but he chose to use handwriting to delight, inform, and persuade his audience, mainly because handwriting was readily available and, perhaps, a costly printing press was not at hand. Harrington probably appreciated the personal approach of handwriting newspapers as a means to comfort his audience in an uncomfortable time, but we cannot know for sure. While his experiments in holding off the printing press and the anti-slavery movement were doomed, Harrington succeeded in creating a rural enclave where the new and old coexisted uneasily. His handwritten work symbolized the disappearing older and to some extent deeply Southern ways of life. The raft that he and his community inhabited eventually capsized in the face of the bigger, faster, and more powerful industrial currents that overcame Harrington and the South.

As Neil Postman argues, “Technology giveth and technology taketh away.” Every “new technology sometimes creates more than it destroys. Sometimes, it destroys more than it creates. But it is never one-sided.” Postman contends that new technologies can alter the symbolic environment in which the world

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236 Neal Postman, “Informing Ourselves to Death” (paper presented at German Informatics Society, Stuttgart, Germany, October 11, 1990), http://w2.eff.org/Net_culture/Criticisms/informing_ourselves_to_death.paper (accessed December 8, 2008).
is socially constructed, particularly through the sensory world of meanings. If that is the case, the opposite could also be true. Harrington’s readers experienced the world through the medium of the handwritten text, and their perceptions were shaped by it. While Harrington, the writer, could be geographically separated from his readers, he maintained a residual sense of being one with his audience. Perhaps Harrington’s letter-writing style was an intermediate step between Marshall McLuhan’s Tribal Age, where the acoustic dominated, and the Age of Literacy, where the visual dominated. McLuhan argued that when oppressed people learned to read, they became independent thinkers. In addition, one may surmise that when oppressed people read handwritten newspapers, they experience the added bonus of feeling like they have received a personal message; the handwritten words read like a letter meant just for the reader and they work along the lines of a motivational message. Readers feel a kinship with the writer and are inspired to actively participate in their shared life. The handwritten message helps build solidarity in a geographical community that defines itself by what it shares in common—perhaps similar to the ways that online social networks do so today for people across geographic areas.

As a literary journalist, Harrington addressed in *The Young American* topics that showed that actions have consequences. His short story from January, “An incident of the French Revolution,” examined unbridled and unrequited love. “The Bridal Feast,” published from May to October of 1858 emphasized the deadly results of duplicitous love and betrayal. The January 1858 issue of *The Young American* included “Rearing Boys,” a narrative that scolded parents who did not restrain their children. The love poems throughout the year celebrated the romantic and idealized version of amorous love—a characteristic of the Victorian period. This kind of storytelling revealed both a romantic and a moralistic editor committed to maintaining the social order. Harrington the young bachelor valued the abstract and very Victorian ideals of noble love and heroic living. His later years, when he lived alone and struggled with alcoholism, are a tragic end to a writer of such early promise.

As a reporter, Harrington in *The Young American* was a passive journalist who included news from other periodicals and over-the-transom reports such as local obituaries, weddings, and news of political events.

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237 McLuhan, *Understanding Media.*
conventions. However, his editorials rarely concerned politics and focused instead on the hot weather in August or the benefits of reading his publication. This lack of overt ideology became a standard for publications that want to appeal to the greatest number of potential subscribers. Harrington seems pro-Confederate at the beginning of the Civil War, but claimed to be pro-Union following that conflict. It took resolve to maintain external clarity in the face of inner dissonance. Harrington displayed the fortitude of a rare well-educated man living in an isolated rural Southern community, who, nonetheless, successfully wrote one of the most unusual newspapers in North Carolina’s history.

Harrington’s work also reflects the internal struggle that existed in his community, where some confronted cognitive dissonance over slavery. The area in which Harrington lived was the part of Harnett County least suited for slavery. On what side did local people’s true allegiance lie in the war? What about Harrington’s innermost loyalties? Harrington’s true convictions regarding secession remain unknown. His later work suggests that he considered slavery wrong. But records show that Harrington and his family owned slaves. His clearest support for abolition was penned after the Civil War, when the slaves had already been freed. On the front page of The Times on April 2, 1869, he wrote that freedom for slaves in Cuba would strengthen both the island and the United States. Was Harrington parroting the prevailing White House policy, or was he revealing his innermost conviction? His amnesty request—which argued that he served as a sub-postmaster to evade Confederate military service—does little to mark him as a heroic figure. Publicizing one position and personally believing a different one is at best expedient and at worst hypocritical, and it casts a shadow on Harrington’s role as the inspirational cheerleader for a community battered by need and hungry for hope.

The ease of readability coincided with the kinds of topics Harrington covered, whether it was a farm market report, the cost of coffee, the types of merchandise area businesses advertised, news of Europe’s royalty, international conflict, or the fate of the Leviathan ship. These topics and his local news, humor, fiction, and poetry all reveal a writer who was sensitive to his community of people that did not travel far from home and who struggled for survival during the last grinding days of slavery. The stories and

\[238\] Harrington was not alone. Others also appeared to be sympathetic to the Confederacy during the Civil War but proclaimed sympathy for the Union following the war.
humor, tame by today’s standards, reveal not only the self-deprecating humor Southerners enjoyed, but also that life could always be worse. For example, Harrington’s quip about the coffin that could be rented as a room offered a touch of humor to the reader. The joke, however, takes a darker turn when the coffin becomes a frequent sight in a community that began the war impoverished and ended it in financial ruin.

The son of an elected official, Harrington likely understood the power of politics to influence a person’s life. He also understood the need to garner favor. His work in *The Nation* demonstrated that he cared about the social order, and he worked with missionary zeal to galvanize his readers to vote and work for Democrats. At age eighteen, he was too young to vote, yet he sensed the importance of politics—along with family and religion—in the life of the community. On page two of the June 12, 1858 issue of *The Nation*, Harrington reported on a revival in Maine that he said was “progressing with beneficial results.” Apparently he respected religion and its role in improving and maintaining the community. His political ambition may have found an outlet when Harrington became sheriff of Harnett County in 1865.239

Harrington portrayed a partisan world and encouraged political participation, but he gave the reader more. His short stories and poetry presented a fantasy world of words far removed from the mundane experiences of everyday life. Harrington used symbols, handwritten marks on a page, to transport his readers to New York, France, England, and beyond. Most readers could not afford a new bonnet and other luxuries, but they likely realized that this other world of consumption existed. Through Harrington’s publications, the reader could participate vicariously in the ever-expanding world of consumption, even though that reader may have had mixed feelings about the modern world.

Harrington’s hand-penned press was a kind of three-act performance. His first act was to establish himself as a committed Democrat who challenged the dominant approach used by the mainstream printed press. In the second act, he revealed a more literary voice and became less committed to his chosen

239 Records at State Library of North Carolina cannot confirm Harrington served as sheriff despite an election notice to that effect. According to the surviving records from the state, particularly the *Executive Legislative Documents Laid Before the General Assembly of North Carolina, Sessions* 1858–1859, 1860–1861, 1862–1863, 1863–1864, 1864–1865, 1868–1869, 1871–1872, 1873–1874, and 1887, Harrington was not listed as sheriff in Harnett County.
political party. The final act ended in a reversal; Harrington renounced his years as a Democrat and angled for patronage from the dominant, Republican party. Through the entire play, Harrington maintained his unique approach. His ambivalent politics aside, Harrington never gave up his status as an amateur journalist or a blossoming literary force in the region.

Harrington challenged the publishing conventions of his day, but his archaic approach did not usher in a new era. His work symbolizes the last flicker of the Southern flame of opposition to modernity. The bold protest of rebellion against the change represented by the North failed. Northern armies, backed up by modern capitalistic production, crushed the institution of slavery just as the better printing technologies crushed Harrington’s handwritten press. However, the uniformity of printed newspapers could never compete aesthetically with the singular works of art that Harrington handcrafted with their irregular letters and typographical novelties. Harrington produced individualized works during a day when standardization triumphed in everything from printed newspapers to mass-produced military uniforms. Like independent artists today, Harrington took on the newspaper establishment of his era and found himself marginalized. Although Harrington’s efforts were doomed, he, like Shakespeare’s Hotspur, mounted a valiant struggle. His was a “lost cause” of another type.

Harrington’s work provokes other questions.

What does the canvas of Harrington’s periodicals reveal about the writer and the world in which he wrote? Should his one-of-a-kind newspapers be displayed in an art collection as fine or folk art rather than in a collection reserved for old documents?

What about Harrington’s helper? Was his helper his younger brother, Sion? Did the younger Harrington handwrite at least three issues of his own newspapers because he yearned to follow the business model of a handwritten paper, because he wanted to perform a service to the community, because of sibling rivalry, or for some other reason? The mystery of Harrington’s helper and the mystery of the full year of The Young American and the partial year of The Nation are baffling. Why did Harrington only publish The Nation for a few issues but The Young American for the entire year? Harrington used his December 1858 issue of The Young American to predict a good 1859, yet he soon suspended publication of both periodicals, only to print one known copy of the Weekly Eagle on April 20,
1860, and then begin *The Weekly News* on June 7, 1860. He produced 182 issues of *The Weekly News*, which ran until March 2, 1864, only to stop it and begin *The Times*, which ran from October 17, 1867, until April 2, 1869.

Another unanswered question concerns why Harrington early on gave the appearance that he supported the Confederacy, particularly with respect to slavery. Did he suffer a genuine crisis of conscience, perhaps over time coming to the conclusion that the South was wrong and that the slaves deserved justice? Or did he admit his true feelings only after his career was threatened? Perhaps he discontinued his publishing because the community rejected his reversal of support or his appearance of subterfuge? If that is the case, did he abandon his calling as an editor to faithfully report the war and provide his personal perspective? By apparently feigning support for the Confederacy, did he unduly confuse, even hurt his readers? As the voice of the community, was Harrington a fraud? And does this issue of allegiance even matter, given that much of his content included entertainment such as his original short stories and poetry?

Despite these fascinating questions, Harrington championed an intensely community-minded press when no other press existed. No one could ask a journalist to take a more basic approach to getting the news circulated. He is a good example of the independent journalist, publishing the news despite his lack of the typical news-printing apparatus. With only a pen in hand, Harrington ultimately made his mark, not primarily as an editor-reporter, but as a unique and eccentric figure.
Appendix A:

Photograph of John McLean Harrington
Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Geneva Harrington Cameron
Appendix B: Photographs of *The Nation*, First Issue

Photograph of the front page of *The Nation*, first issue (Photograph by Michael Ray Smith).
A photograph of the second page of The Nation, the first issue (Photograph by Michael Ray Smith).
A photograph of the third page of *The Nation*, the first issue (Photograph by Michael Ray Smith).
Appendix C: Transcription of the first page of *The Nation*, the first issue

The Nation

The majority must rule; the minority must submit,

Vol 1 _____ Buffalo Springs April 17\textsuperscript{th} 1858, no 1~

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J. ML Harrington Ho.</th>
<th>$2 Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editor and Proprietor</td>
<td>in advance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A word to our democratic friends, the time fast approaching when the nominations should be made by the democracy of this and other counties of suitable persons a person by the party for both branches of the legislature, occupying the position that we do it becomes our duty to urge upon the members of the party in each captain’s district, the importance of holding primary meetings in order to appoint delegates to the county conventions so that satisfactory nominations may be made and that the party be thoroughly organized.

Our friends in Cumberland and Harnett should remember that the work of maj superior Mrs. Courtney Guillory for this county is drawing near and they should commence holding their district meetings at once, and send delegates to reflect their respective wishes.

It is not for us to dictate to the good people of this or any other county, who is the most suitable person or persons to represent their own province is to call their attention to the importance of thorough organizations of the party so as to insure specific. We care not what names you use so that they are good and true democrats, and men who will exert themselves in behalf of this section using their best endeavors to obtain state aid to enable Fayetteville, not only to continue the rail Road to the Coal...
Fields, but also extend it 100 miles beyond if necessary. We have men in the party who can and will carry out this project if they are elected. Let our friends in this and Harnett County see to it that such men are nominated. The Democracy of Moore, Robeson, Sampson and Bladen ought also to busy themselves and have county conventions for the purpose of making suitable nominations. Remember that it is by organizing in time that you will be most likely to succeed. Delay is dangerous and will probably bring about defeat. We hope the party in these counties will commence at once to hold Their district meetings.

Mr. McRae at Salisbury we learn from the Carolinian that this gentleman delivered his district plea at Salisbury on the 26th. The “Watchman” appears to have been highly delighted with it. The “Banner” speaks of it as A very ordinary affair in point of forcible argument, But says it was quite flowery. From what we can gather, the oratory was similar to those delivered by Mr. McRae in Fayetteville and other places.

A search for legislators, an old member of the Pennsylvania Legislature, who maintained his seat [scratched out word] and popularity for several years, always voted “no” said he, when asked his reason when a good law passes, no one looks for the yeas and nays on it. When a bad one does, they always do.

The early bird catches the worm.
Salutory

In commencing the labors of an editor, we would like to say to those who are always find flaws with what an Editor says, what we will not pretend to have everything in accordance with “theory,” [word unclear] but to all such we would say “view us not with a critic’s eye, but pay [word unclear] affections by,” with this first kind founds we hope you will understand. But as we were saying, we have got the voice of a little democrat to Edit this paper whose name we will suppress for a while. but allow him to say that he will endeavor to do the best he can to promote the cause of the democratic party. We intend to keep that thought forward. Let it please whom it may.

Or displease whom it may. we will stop for the present. We refrain from going to press early in the day to give the particulars of the meeting of the democracy of this district. The following delegates were appointed Monday in Maj. [word unclear] John Harrington and J. Cameron George McGaegon [word unclear]. On motion of David McCoarmick and [word unclear] by J. ML Harrington the Chairman was John. W. Cameron was added to the list of delegation on motion this meeting adjourned. We will give full particulars as soon as received.

A democratic meeting will be held at the store of J. M. [word unclear] on Saturday the 22th of April to send delegates to the county convention to nominate candidates for the general assembly.

Many Citizens

April 22, 1858
A Democratic Meeting
will be held at the store
of J & D. G. Worth’s on Saturday the 17th of April for
The purpose of sending delegates to the county convention to nominate candidates to represent us in
The next general assembly-April 2nd 1858

Many Citizens

Wit and Humor,
“A little nonsense now and then
is needed by the best of men.”

“The victory is not always with
the strong as the boy said,
When he killed the Skunk
with a brickbat.”
(Drawing of a pointing hand)
Domestically speaking of
new jobs, Boarding houses,
signs, you can tell when
they get a new cook by
the color of the hairs in
the Briscuit, doesticks (unclear)
has been ’round some.
A Yankee proposes to
Print a paper called the
“Gridiron.” Politicians
had better be on the alert,
or they may be “done up Brown.”

Rates of Advertising
4 cts. per line for the first and
2 cents per line for each subsequent
insertion, double column advertisement-8 cts for first and 4 cts.

J. & D. G. Worth
Owners [word unclear] to
J. Worth and Sons
Dealers in
Dry Goods Hats and [word unclear]
Book and Shoes
And Ready Made Clothing
Groceries etc.

Buffalo Springs, N.C.
April 1. # 1 t

Worth and Willey
General
Commission Merchants
Fayetteville
J. A. Worth #1t N.C. Jod [word unclear]
Atty

The Nation
This first-class Journal
will be printed hereafter weekly. It contains as
much reading matter as
most any of the papers of
the present day.
It will be strictly
democratic-
Terms $2 per year,
[word unclear]And upwards [word unclear]
J. ML. Harrington, Ho
Buffalo Springs, N.C.
## Appendix D: U.S. Census Figures of the Harrington Household: 1850–1880

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>John’s father, James Stephen</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s mother, Margaret</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John McLean</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s sister Ann</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother Thomas</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother James</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slaves owned by James Stephen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a male</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>John’s father, James Stephen</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s mother, Margaret</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John McLean</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s sister Ann</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, James Jr.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, Sion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, David</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother Thomas was not listed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“J.S.H., adm.” (this designation is unclear)</td>
<td>No age listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. McLean (this designation is unclear)</td>
<td>No age listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slaves owned by James Stephen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a male</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>a male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Name and Relationship</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>John’s father, James Stephen</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s mother, Margaret</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John McLean</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, James Jr.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s sister Ann, not listed, perhaps married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, Sion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, David</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louis, mulatto, no vocation listed</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah, black, no vocation listed</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Batt McDougald, farm hand</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charity McDougald, farm hand</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leglaph Blue, domestic servant (unclear spelling)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will Blue, mulatto</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lovey Brown, no vocation listed</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>John’s father, James Stephen</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s sister-in-law, Eliza McLean Harrington</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s mother, Margaret</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John McLean</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s brother, James Jr.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s nephew, David Jr.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William James Harrington, a servant</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John’s sister-in-law, Nannie</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table lists the household of James Stephen Harrington, father of John McLean Harrington, according to U.S. Census figures collected every decade from 1850–1880. It indicates the slaves that were part of the household or others who were considered part of the household.
Works Consulted

Harrington’s Newspapers


*The Nation.* April 17, 1858–September 8, 1858.

*The Times.* October 17, 1867–April 2, 1869.


*The Weekly Eagle.* April 20, 1860.

*The Young American.* January 1858–December 1858.
Other Sources: Articles


Petitions for Pardon (1865–1868). Military Collection, Civil War Collection. North Carolina Division of Historical Resources, Raleigh, NC.


Books


