

## Newspapers During Ratification

Approximately ninety newspapers were published at any one time. Most were weeklies but a few were published twice or even three times each week, and about half a dozen were dailies. Newspapers were published on every day of the week except on Sundays. Sometimes newspapers circulated across nearby borders into neighboring states. Thus, although New Jersey had only three newspapers published within its borders, many newspapers from Philadelphia and New York City circulated within New Jersey. The *Essex Journal*, published in Newburyport, Massachusetts, circulated in neighboring New Hampshire as its subtitle, the *New Hampshire Packet*, indicates.

Newspapers played a crucial role in the Revolutionary movement for independence from Great Britain and continued to be vital during the public debate over the ratification of the Constitution. About half a dozen newspaper printers opposed the Constitution and printed few pieces supporting the Constitution. About half a dozen newspaper printers adhered to a neutral publication policy that allowed both sides access to their newspapers. The remaining printers were Federalists and their newspapers printed a greater preponderance of Federalist material, sometimes almost to the exclusive of Antifederalist pieces. Many of these Federalist printers publicly proclaimed that their newspapers were “open to all Parties.” but others were not averse to restricting access to their newspapers. A couple printers announced that they would not print Antifederalist material unless the author left his name with the essay to be divulged by the printer if so requested. (The printers of the *Massachusetts Centinel* and the *Gazette of the State of Georgia* both announced this policy.) Antifederalists denounced this practice as an attack on free access to the press because they feared Federalist retribution against anyone writing against the Constitution in towns and cities that were staunchly Federalist.

Antifederalist printers were often criticized in their home communities. Threats and actual cancellation of subscriptions and advertising occurred. Alexander J. Dallas, printer of the *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, lost his job because his policy of publishing Antifederalist speeches from the Pennsylvania Convention caused Federalists to cancel their subscription. Edward Eveleth Powars found it necessary to move his *American Herald* from Boston to Worcester because of the declining subscribers. Thomas Greenleaf, the Antifederalist printer of the *New York Journal*, had his print shop (which occupied the first floor of his two-story home) attacked at midnight and his type strewn about or destroyed. The damage caused him to change from a daily to a weekly.

By 1787 American newspaper printers had created a primitive news service system. Assisted by the Confederation post office’s policy that allowed free postage for printers to exchange their newspapers, printers would copy news stories, political polemics, and short fillers from each others newspapers. Some popular items were reprinted twenty, thirty, or forty times throughout the country. Occasionally the reprinting newspaper cited its source, but far more commonly only citing a dateline (place and date) from whence the original piece first appeared.

In January 1788, Confederation Postmaster General Ebenezer Hazard announced two important changes in post office policy. After only a couple years, Hazard cancelled the annual contracts that stagecoach operators had obtained to deliver the mail, which included newspapers. Because the stagecoach operators raised their rates substantially for their dependable service, Hazard decided to return to the less expensive, but far less reliable post-riders who would carry the mail and newspapers in saddlebags on horseback. These post-riders were not above lightening their load by “losing” mail or selling newspapers at taverns and inns along their routes. Hazard also announced that newspapers would no longer be allowed postage-free circulation among printers. Antifederalists condemned both changes and accused Hazard of trying to restrain the circulation of their most important newspapers.

Following the customary practice of the time, partisan essayists usually used pseudonyms when submitting their works for publication. The ostensible purpose of this practice was to focus solely on the issues and to avoid personal vindictive. Often this practice did not succeed because some pseudonyms were intentionally recognizable and partisanship regularly appeared in the newspaper debate even if the authors' anonymity was retained.